

# HAMPSHIRE COUNTY

## West Virginia




is the state's oldest county and one of its most historic. From Native American artifacts, to military conflicts during the 18th and 19th centuries, Hampshire County's past is deeply rooted in major events of American history.


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*Editor's Note:* This is Part I of a two part story on Hampshire County and Romney. Part II will feature more history, old homes, activities and more scenic beauty from the area.





  
**ROMNEY**  
 Incorporated as a town, 1762. Owned and laid off as a town by Lord Fairfax. Named for one of the five English Channel ports. Not far away was Fort Pearsall, built, 1756, as Indian defense. Town changed military control 56 times, 1861-1865.

  
**"STONEWALL" JACKSON**  
 Jackson arrived here Jan. 13, 1862, after capturing Bath (Berkeley Springs). Leaving Gen. Loring, he returned to Winchester. Loring's protest caused Jackson to resign but he reconsidered and his Valley Campaign followed.

  
**ROMNEY IN 1861-1865**  
 Sitting astride the natural invasion route from the Shenandoah Valley to the Potomac and B. & O. Railroad, Romney was scourged by both armies. No great battles were fought here, but during the War the town changed hands 56 times.

The area to be known as Hampshire County was first inhabited by Native Americans. Archeological evidence suggests the earliest habitation along the South Branch of the Potomac River occurred circa 8,000 BCE and the latest settlements around 1600 CE, about the time of England's first colony in Jamestown, Virginia. As European trappers and settlers migrated into the area during the 1730s, most Native Americans had already moved westward; villages were found abandoned. Continued westward movement by settlers increased the county's population by the late 1700s. A reminder of the area's prehistoric past is Indian Mound Cemetery, located along U.S. Route 50 near Romney. The unexcavated Native American grave site is one of the largest remaining mounds in the eastern panhandle of West Virginia.

Facing Page: Bird's-eye view of the peaceful hamlet of Romney with an inset of the Courthouse dome.  
 Above: The stately Hampshire County Courthouse. Historic markers outside the courthouse share a brief history of the area.

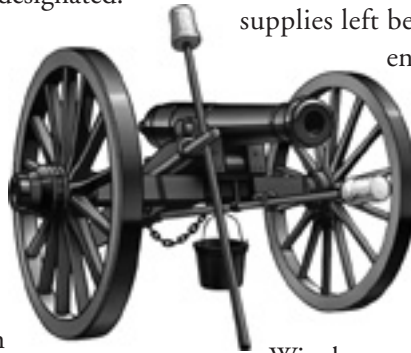
European military and political conflicts played a major role in the subsequent development of Hampshire County. During the midpoint of the 18th century, Great Britain and France struggled for control of colonial America and the Ohio River Valley in particular. Both sides sought the support of Native Americans in a conflict that became known as the French and Indian War (1754-1763). Hampshire County, Virginia, which had just formed in 1754 when war broke out in America, became a gateway for the English forces moving west. Simultaneously, the region became a battleground, when Indians allied with the French conducted raids on local settlements. Colonel George Washington, Commander of a Virginia Regiment who had previous experience in Hampshire County as a land surveyor, was given the responsibility of building a chain of forts to protect settlers. Defensive measures required time and raids could not be prevented, so many farmers abandoned their dwellings and moved from the area in search of more peaceful surroundings. The end of fighting brought prosperity to the county and allowed for the incorporation of Romney in 1762, the first town in the state to be so designated.

The end of one conflict sometimes sows the seeds for future wars. Such was the case following the Revolutionary War when Americans disagreed over the practice of slavery. Southerners argued that slavery was an institution peculiar to their culture and must be maintained. As time passed, disputes over slavery and other issues broke into armed conflict in 1861. As part of the state of Virginia, Hampshire County joined the Confederacy during the Civil War, a decision supported by most of its citizens. Civil War events created an interesting chapter in local history.

Maintaining operations of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad was a priority for Federal troops in the area. Brigadier General William Kelley, commander of Union troops in the District of Grafton which encompassed territory from Cumberland, Maryland, to Wheeling, West Virginia, was particularly concerned with Confederate raids at New Creek (Keyser) that disrupted Baltimore and Ohio rail shipments and damaged bridges. Most of the raids originated from the Romney area. To disrupt the raids and push Confederate soldiers from Romney, General Kelley decided to attack and occupy the town. The strategy proved to be successful, and Federal troops occupied Romney in October, 1861, causing many citizens to flee. Later events saw the convergence of famous Civil War personalities with the town of Romney.

Major General Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson was headquartered at Winchester, Virginia, at the time of Kelley’s advance on Romney. Jackson’s response was to move his troops from Winchester for the purpose of capturing the Union garrison at Romney which, in turn, would likely force Union General George McClellan to order troops from their Washington, DC position. General Jackson believed this strategy would enable Confederate forces to secure valuable resources in northwestern Virginia that were being blocked by McClellan’s men (located in Washington) and disrupt Federal transportation links.

Jackson began his Romney campaign with a force of about 8,500 men on New Year’s Day, 1862. Despite bitter weather, the Confederates managed to approach Romney 10 days later causing the Union troops, who greatly overestimated the number of men that Jackson commanded, to evacuate the town. Two companies of the Virginia 7th Cavalry entered the town on January 10th followed by more Confederate troops on January 14th. The Southern troops claimed 500 tents and other valuable supplies left behind by retreating Federal soldiers. Upon



entering Romney, General Jackson resided in a brick house located on the south side of Main Street that belonged to the White family. Today, Mr. White’s House, known as Liberty Hall, is identified by a historical marker indicating that it was General Jackson’s headquarters. After a brief stay in Romney, Jackson returned to Winchester, placing Brigadier General William Loring in command. The strained relationship between Loring and Jackson that surfaced during the Romney campaign directly led to the latter’s famous offer to resign his command.

Liberty Hall was built in 1858 by Robert White, a clerk of the court and primary Confederate organizer in Romney. Impending Union occupation of the town in 1861 caused Mr. White and his family to move to Richmond, Virginia, where he worked for the Treasury Department of the Confederate States of American. Liberty Hall was the name given to the house following the Civil War; the title was a reference to Company I, 4th Virginia Infantry Regiment that originated at Washington College in Lexington, Virginia. Liberty Hall Volunteer Militia fought and served as part of the famed Stonewall Jackson Brigade in the Shenandoah Valley. Since 1981, Liberty Hall has been the private residence of Royce Saville, a local attorney with historical ties to Hampshire County.



“I was interested in Civil War history, so the house appealed to me. When we purchased the house in 1981, a lot of work was necessary. All the repairs we did were in keeping with how it looked originally; we didn’t want to alter it. There were lots of photographs to consult and that helped us know how the house looked over the years; we only added a bathroom and a porch in the rear.”

Mr. Saville’s residence is not open to the public but can be observed from along Main Street. Across the street from Liberty Hall is another private residence associated with the Civil War known as Boxwood. It was at Boxwood that hospital facilities were established during the war and, according to local lore (that has never been authenticated by historical research), the site of ceremonies marking the changing of military control in the town. This was significant because according to information recorded in the preface to *The Devastating Hand of War, Romney West Virginia in the Civil War* by Richard Sauers, the generally accepted number of times the town changed hands, 56, is underestimated. Sauer’s believes the actual number of times



**Top:** Liberty Hall, General Jackson’s headquarters in Romney, is now the home of local attorney, Royce Saville. Although a private residence, photos of the dining room and hall are shown at right.

**Above left:** Last photo of General Jackson and below, his widow Mary Anna and their daughter, Julia.



### FORT PEARSALL 1754

**“Fort Pearsall was on or in view of this site.”  
Job Pearsall built a fort as protection against the  
indians in 1754 on Lot 16 granted by Fairfax in  
1749 containing 323 acres, including part of  
Indian Mound Cemetary.**

**On May 14, 1756 Gen. Washington assigned  
45 men and 5 officers, and later 94 soldiers to  
defend Pearsall’s fort during the French and  
Indian War.**



Confederate and Union troops exchanged control of the town is at least 60; however, the number of times Romney was actually occupied for an extended period of time by the opposing sides was less than 10.

Another written source of information on the Civil War in Hampshire County was published in 1994. *Hanging Rock rebel: Lt. John Blue’s War in the West and Shenandoah Valley* by Dan Oates was based on newspaper articles written in the Hampshire Review by Lt. John Blue. The articles summarized the exploits of Lt. Blue, including his daring escape as a prisoner of war from a house on Main Street in Romney. The John Blue Bridge that spans the South Branch near Romney is named in honor of the soldier.

During the Civil War, the Romney Classical Institute, now part of the West Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind, was a school under the direction of a Presbyterian minister who managed to successfully protect the building. Only the center section of the structure was present in 1861; both wings were added in the 1870s. Today, the campus encompasses 17 buildings and 70 acres of property, 180 full time students, and outreach programs for the deaf and blind throughout the state of West Virginia.

A log house on Main Street at Bolton, named after the Davis family, dates from the late 18th century. The Davis house, now



referred to as the History House, is open for a donation and displays Civil War artifacts from Romney residents. Another display of historical artifacts and changing exhibits may be found at Taggart Hall Civil War Museum which also serves as the Hampshire County Chamber of Commerce and Hampshire County Development Authority.

Romney is home to what is reported to be the first memorial dedicated (1867) to men who died for the Southern cause. There are 125 names of Hampshire County citizens engraved on the monument who died during the conflict. Nearby are 16 individual graves marked as “unknown” but are believed to be graves of Confederate soldiers. The Confederate monument is located in Indian Mound Cemetery.

Another more recent building that has significance to Romney is the Bottling Works. Originally built as a Coca Cola bottling facility, the building was acquired through the Loy Foundation in 1998 and converted to a multipurpose cultural events venue. The Bottling Works hosts musicians, wedding receptions, private celebrations, retirement parties, and a wide array of community events. Also residing in the Bottling Works is the Hampshire Convention and

**All are welcome; bring your instrument and chair and join in! Every Friday and Monday evening in fair weather there's toe tappin', strumin' and pickin' and some good old time fun right on Main Street. Musicians gather in front of Potomac Music, next to Sheetz Convenience Store.**

Visitors Bureau that provides update information on local happenings.

While Hampshire County and Romney are well known for historical events, visitors will find a variety of shopping, dining, and lodging services to meet their needs. Visitors will find that Hampshire County residents are mindful of their 19th century heritage, yet ready to make visitors feel welcome in the 21st century.

