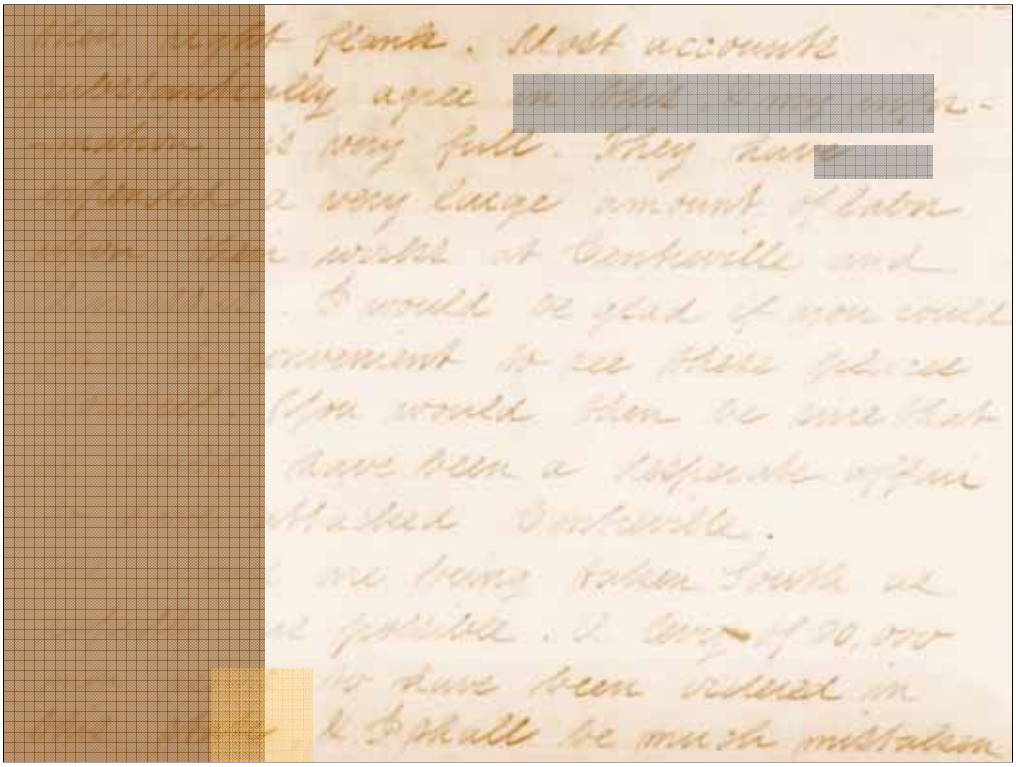


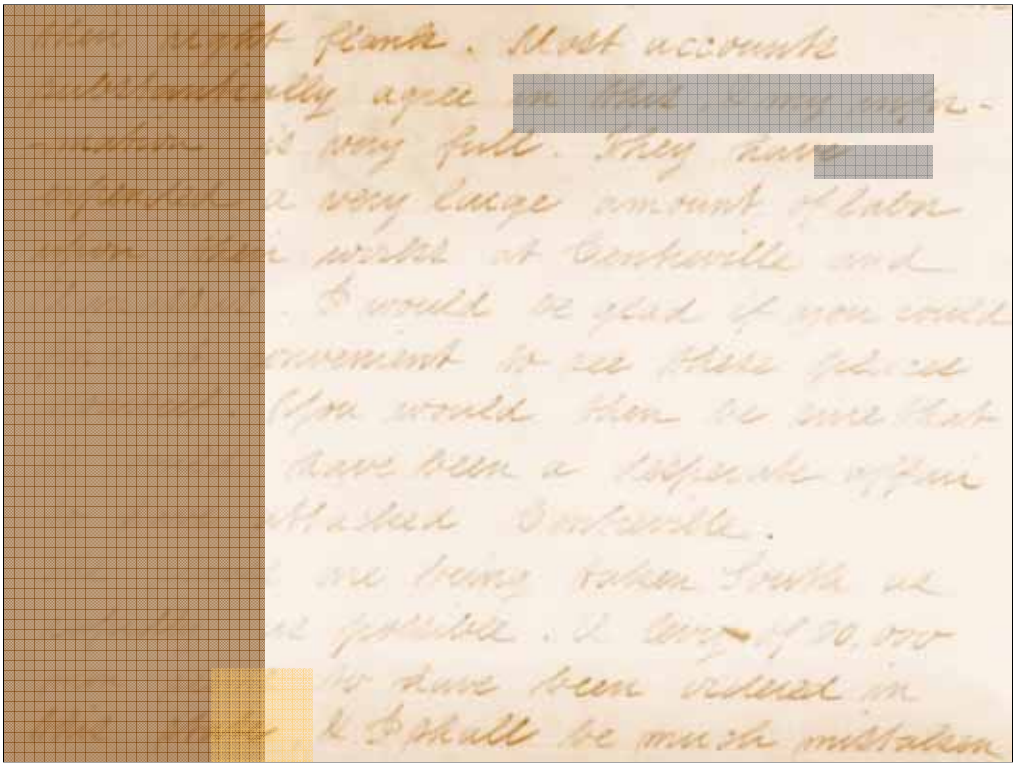
I’m going to take you back to the beginning of historic times for our area. The clock begins when someone actually writes something down. And for our area, that just wasn’t that long ago.

You could try to convince yourself that the history of our area began in 1649. I would like to drive home the point that each of us in the chain of title to our land had the same owner in 1649: it was the English monarchy.

Here is how it worked. In 1649, King Charles II granted to seven loyal Englishmen all the land between the Rappahannock and Potomac. It was called the Northern Neck Proprietary and was over 5 million acres.

The proprietors would grant the land usually to wealthy individuals, who in turn leased smaller parcels to tenant farmers.

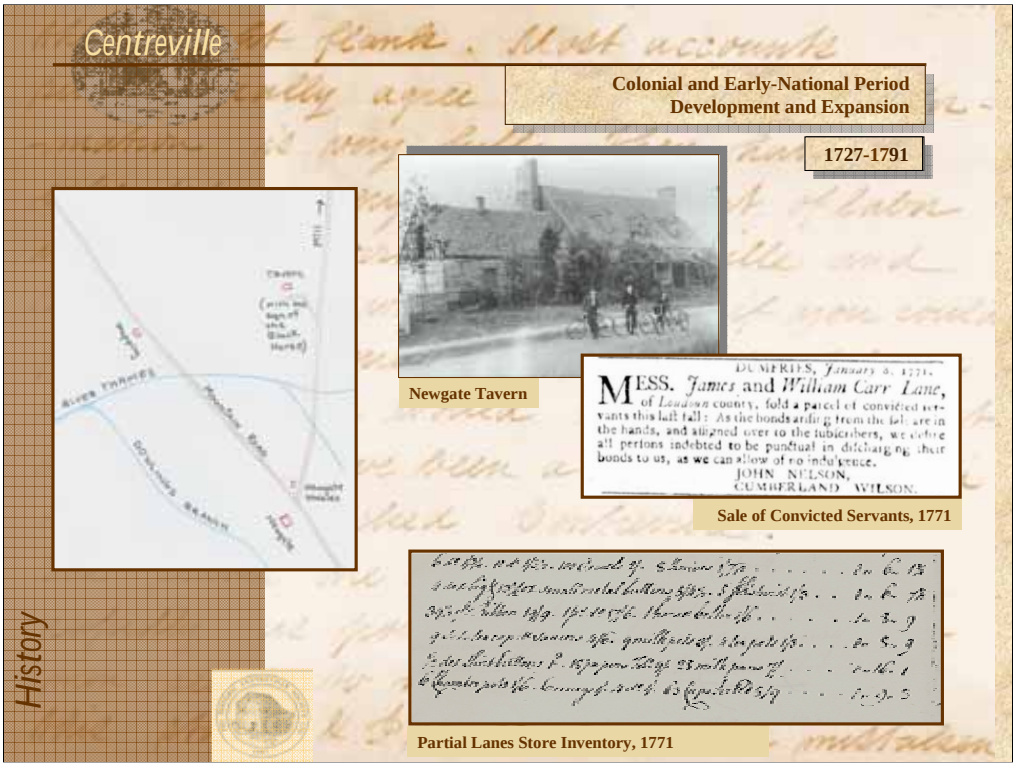
Over time, Thomas, Lord Culpepper, acquired five of the six remaining shares. His daughter married Thomas, the 5th Lord Fairfax and it was their son, Thomas, the 6th Lord Fairfax, who finally came to control all six shares of the proprietary in 1719.



And after all that, still nothing was being written specifically about our area. That wasn't until 1727 when Francis Awbrey was granted 700 acres from Lord Fairfax on Big Rocky Run.

Awbrey's Patent was sold and then acquired by Willoughby Newton, who also obtained grants in the Centreville area. Newton leased tracts, typically of 100-150 acres, to farmers such as William Remy, Thomas Brown, and William Grove. William Grove had been a transported convict.

The Mountain Road traveled through the land of Willoughby Newton, although originally it was only referred to as a "rolling path." Tobacco was likely grown in the area and rolled in hogsheads (large barrels) down the road to Occoquan.



Tobacco was a cash crop; its value was used to back notes. When a tobacco farmer with a large crop shipped to England, he often received goods back on the return voyage. What were they going to do with all of the goods?

Newton's daughter, Catherine, and her first husband solved that problem by opening up a store on the Mountain Road. The lot would become known as Wapping. It was later operated and owned by the Lane brothers, James and William Carr Lane, and known as Lane's Store. Some of the goods sold at the store included cloth, knives, buttons, ribbon, teacups, milk pans, and the necessary chamber pot.

About this time, the area became part of Loudoun County after its creation in 1757. It was ceded back to Fairfax in 1798.

William Carr Lane purchased a large tract of land from Newton's son, John in the early 1760s and built a tavern. It was well known as Newgate tavern…conveniently situated at a distance where travelers coming from the port towns would desire either a meal or an evening's rest. George Washington dined there on several occasions.

The Lane brothers were also in the business of selling transported convicts, as this advertisement attests. Perhaps this is why the tavern has the same name as the infamous London prison and Wapping, the slums around the prison.

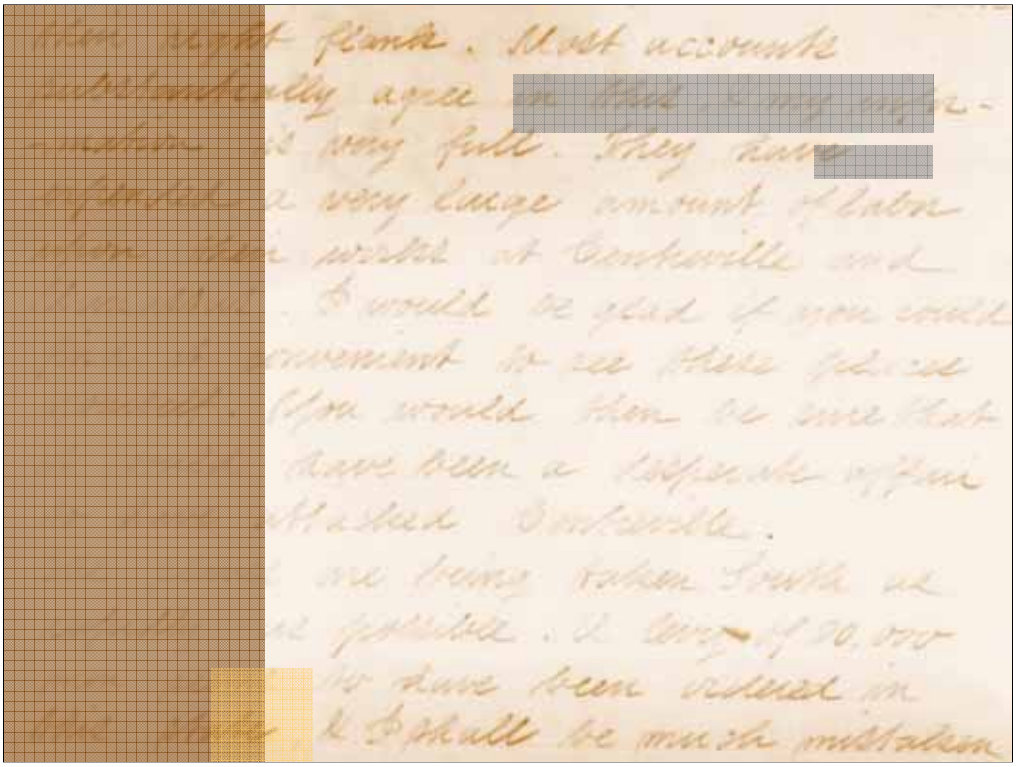
Grains were also a likely area crop. Newton constructed a grist mill on Big Rocky Run, very near where Cabell's mill is today.

A competing tavern was constructed by Joel Beach on the road that led from Newgate to the mill. It was advertised as being a house at the sign of a Black Horse. Beach did not permit gaming in his establishment, and offered a quiet orderly house at rates set to undercut Newgate tavern. This had the unhappy effect of irritating the proprietor of the Newgate tavern, Presley Carr Lane, who responded in the paper that Joel Beach, of Loudoun County, is a common liar and rascal.

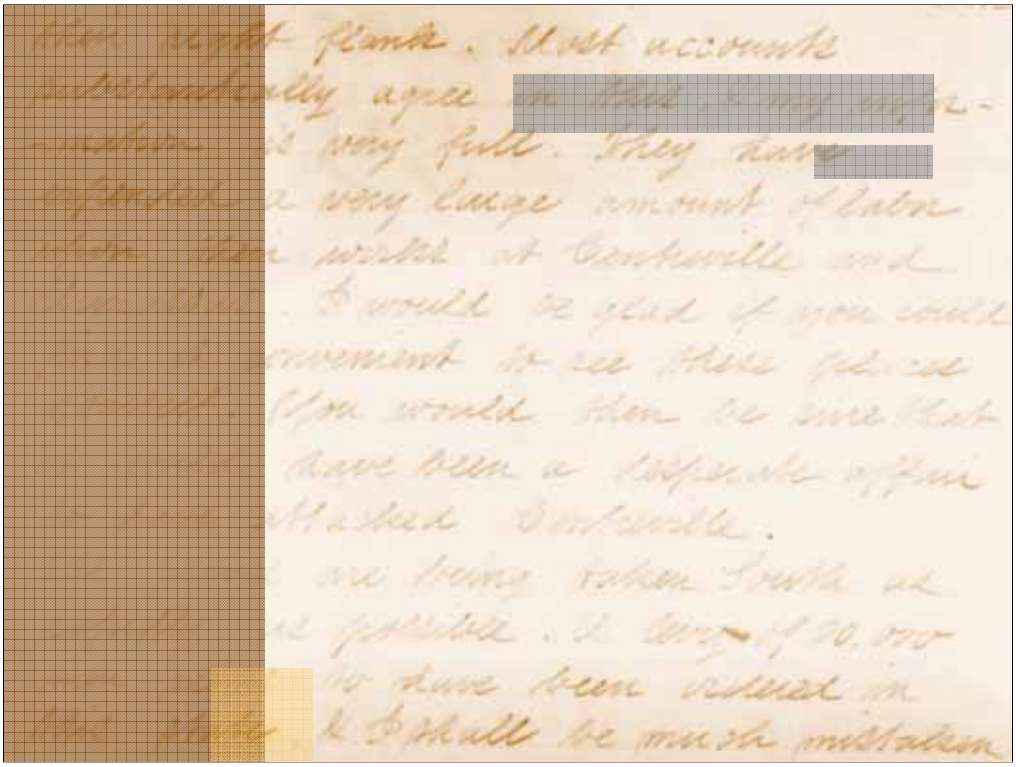
It was in 1785 that Beach acquired the six acres of land on which he built the tavern from his father-in-law, James Hardage Lane. Signing as witness to the deed was none other that George Mason, of Gunston Hall, and William Bernard Sears, who originally was Mason's indentured servant and carved all the beautiful woodwork at Gunston and Pohick Church. This was two years prior to Mason's attendance at the Constitutional Convention of 1787 where he struggled to push for a Bill of Rights.

After the Rev. War, James H. Lane was concerned about how his wife, Mary and their ten children would be supported after his death. Of course, since this was after independence, Lane owned land in the area outright. He conceived the idea of creating a manufacturing town. Beach may have been a tanner operating a tanyard in the area.

In 1790, after Lane's death, his wife, children, and a few prominent landowners petitioned the VA General Assembly for an Act to Establish a town. In the petition, its central location along many roadways and its healthful situation were touted as benefits. The Act was passed in 1792 creating Centerville.



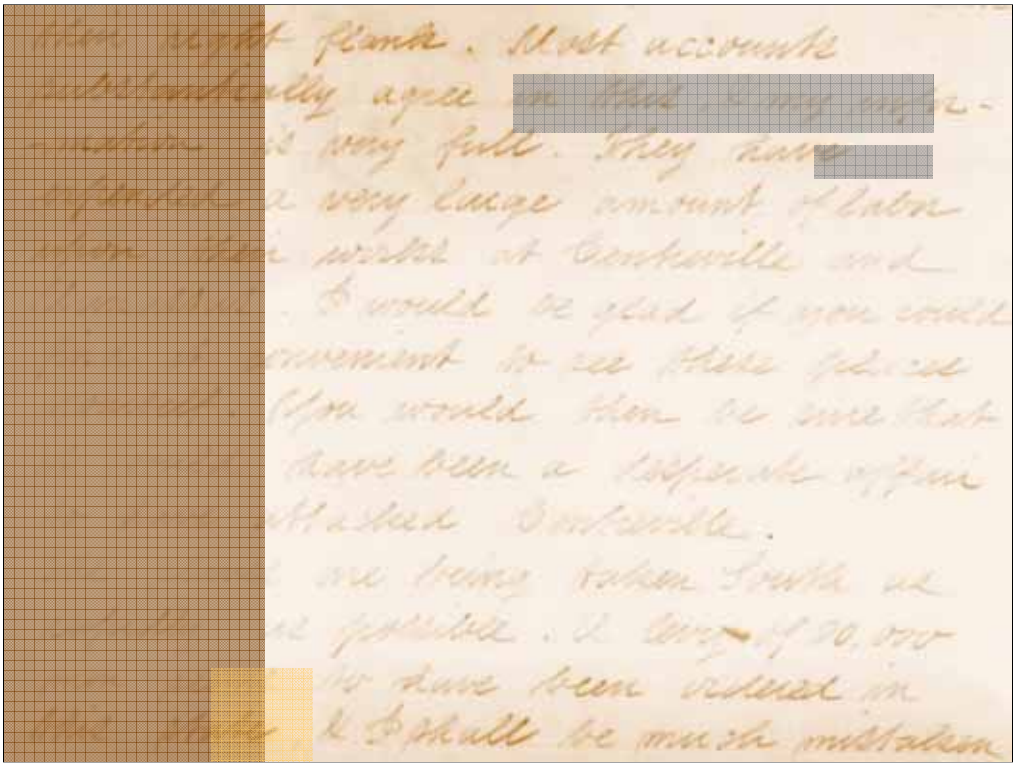
Hermon Boye's nine sheet map nicely illustrates the fact that Centreville was centrally located, with roads extending in all directions like spokes of a wheel.



The town was laid out in a gridiron plan, which is an ancient Greek land planning scheme.

The Mountain Road, at the time a turnpike road, became the 60’ wide main street. The other streets, such as Keene Street, now known as Mount Gilead Road, were 40’ wide.

Traces of Ralls Street are visible in the park.



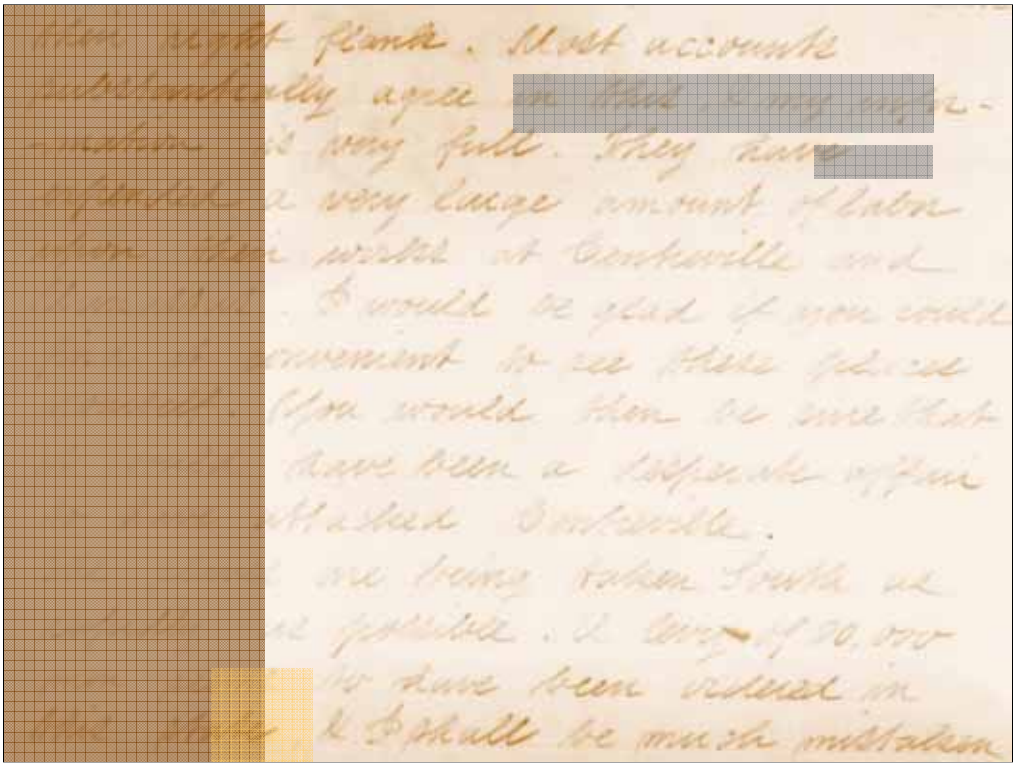
Many of the lots along Main Street were developed. This map depicts some of the known uses for the lots.

When the route for the Little River Turnpike was located north of the town, thus bypassing it, the citizens petitioned for the creation of the Fauquier and Alexandria Turnpike. This was an attempt to bring goods from Fauquier Courthouse, later known as Warrenton, to Alexandria…rather than Fredericksburg. The citizens of Centreville were in favor.

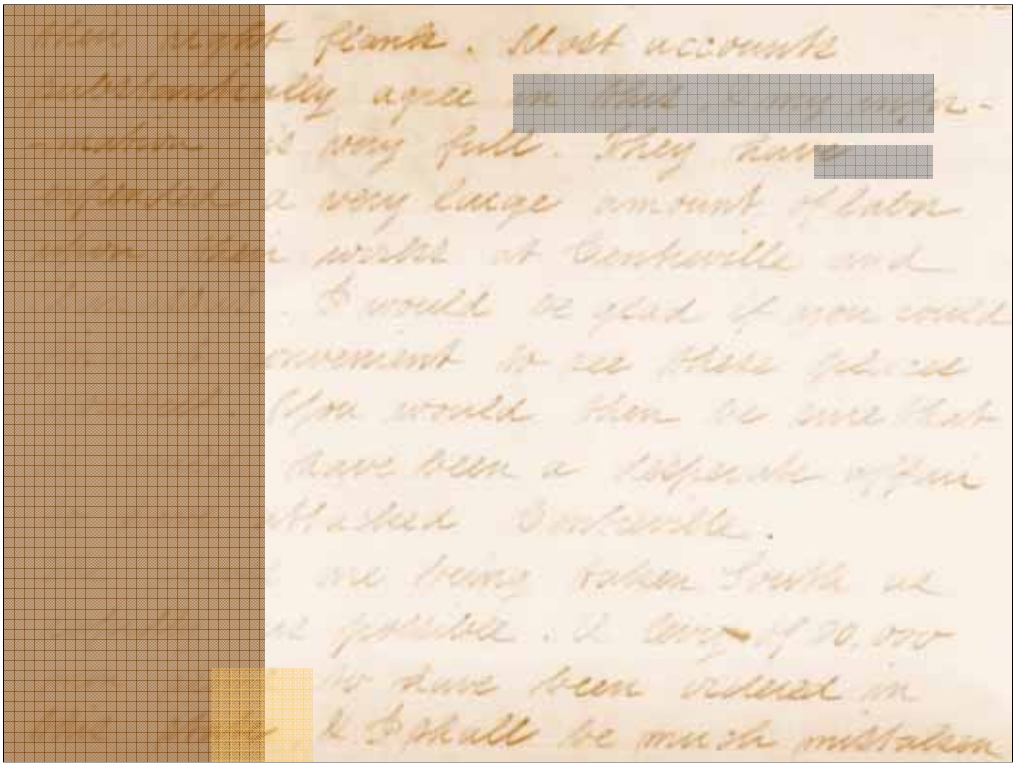
By 1815, the road was constructed through the town and Main Street was part of the turnpike road network.

The next five slides show photos of some of the town development.

Havener House, named after a longtime owner who rehabilitated the house, was constructed about the time the town was created.



The tanyards were sunk either in the late 18th century or in the first few years of the 1800s. Archaeology of a tan and currying house is depicted.



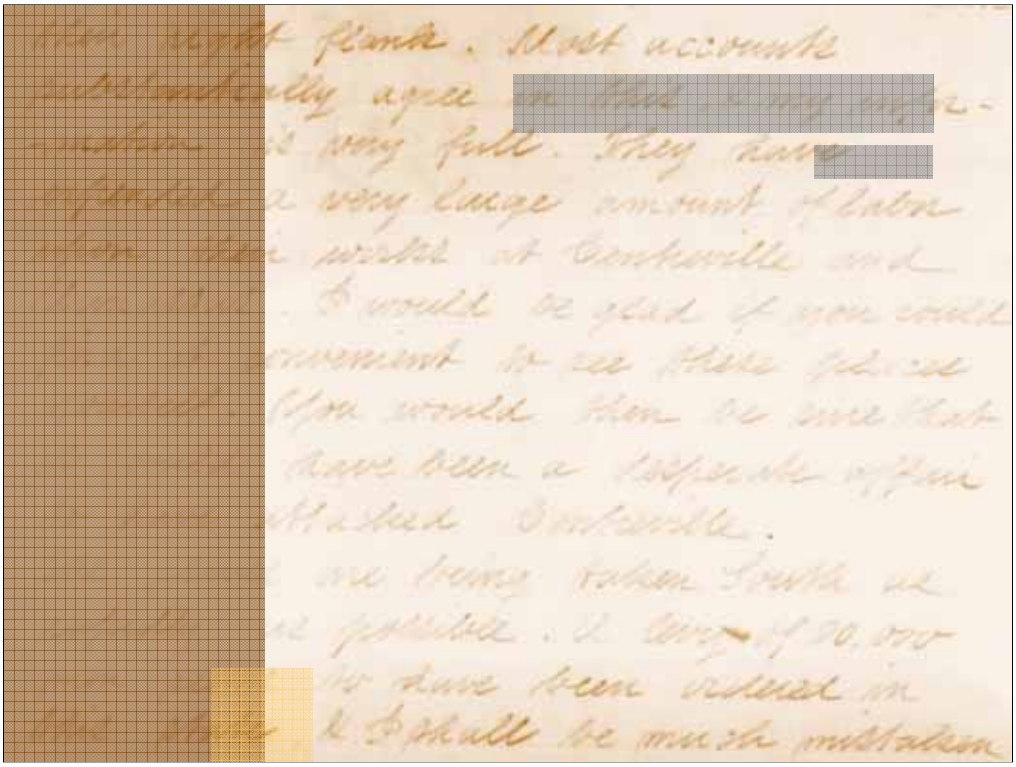
Harrison House, constructed about 1850, is named after the family who owned it for about 75 years, beginning in 1875. But after the war, it had been purchased by a wounded soldier with the unusual name of Spotsylvania County Spindle.

Royal Oaks was possibly constructed about 1807 by Edmond Denny. It was generally believed that the house was used by General Pope as his headquarters during the Civil War. The house was taken down and placed in storage in the early 1960s.

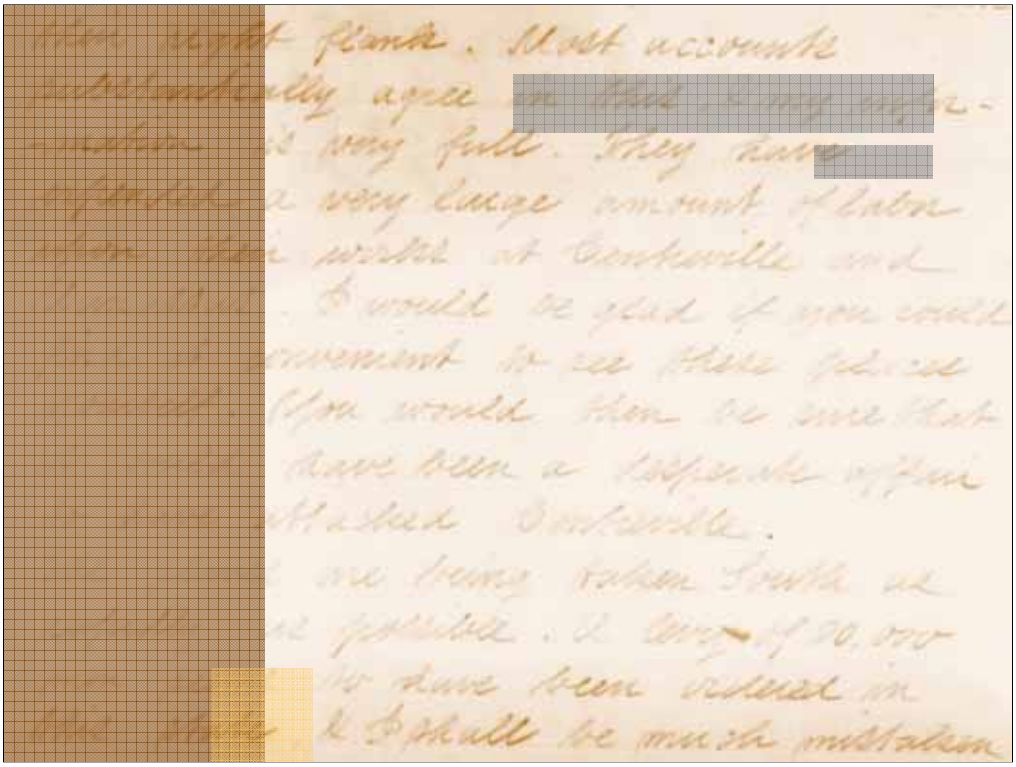
The old oak tree is one of the "Royal Oaks" and has a diameter of 48", which makes it likely over 200 years old. Local legend states that when one of the Royal Oak trees is cut, a member of the Triplett family dies. The family is related to an early owner.

Also, an insulator was attached to this tree, and local legend suggests that it was a telegraph insulator used by General Pope during the Civil War.

The stone wall at Royal Oaks was likely constructed in 1940 by Pinkney McWhorter, a local stonemason. He and Will Crouch built a significant number of stone structures in the Centreville area, including a great deal of stonework at EC Lawrence Park.



Constructed on one of the town lots and used during the Civil War as a headquarters, Four Chimneys became dilapidated, and eventually the materials were used in the construction of other buildings.



In May of 1861, voters went to the polls to vote for ratification or rejection of secession from the Union. Centreville voted 105 to zero in favor of secession, though not all from Centreville were in favor.

Located high on a ridge and at a crossroads, Centreville became strategically important. Beginning a month after secession, and throughout the war, both armies would construct fortifications.

Time and again, it was proven that the heights of Centreville were strategically significant during the sectional conflict of the Civil War. The ridge, on which Centreville is situated, held a strategic and commanding view of the panorama to the west. Approaches from the east were also within a viewshed visible from the ridge. Union Brigadier-General Irvin McDowell summed up the tremendous importance of holding the heights of Centreville:

For if he [the enemy] *should once obtain possession of this ridge, which overlooks all the country to the west of the foot of the spurs of the Blue Ridge, we should have been irretrievably cut off and destroyed.*

Following a skirmish at Blackburn's Ford, near where Route 28 crosses Bull Run towards Manassas, Union troops, who lost the skirmish, retreated to Centreville to treat wounded in the Stone Church, a hotel, and a large dwelling.

In July 1861, Union troops began enhancing and extending the Confederate Works at Centreville by adding three additional fortifications, two on the heights towards Bull Run and one on the road to Warrenton.

During the First Battle of Bull Run, Union wounded were brought to Centreville to be cared for in homes and churches. Following their loss, Union troops retreated from Centreville, using the fortifications to cover their retreat…leaving the town to the Confederates.

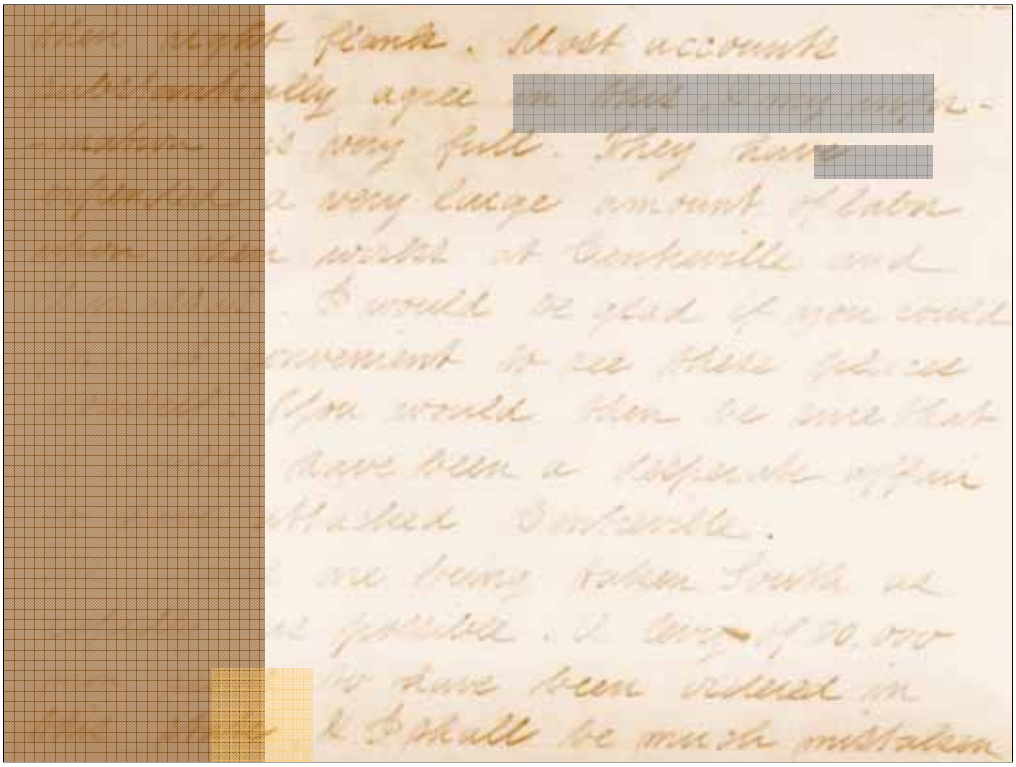
From October 1861 to March 1862, the town was further fortified and occupied as a winter encampment for 30,000 Confederates under General Joseph Johnston.

Centreville became a national and international focal point.

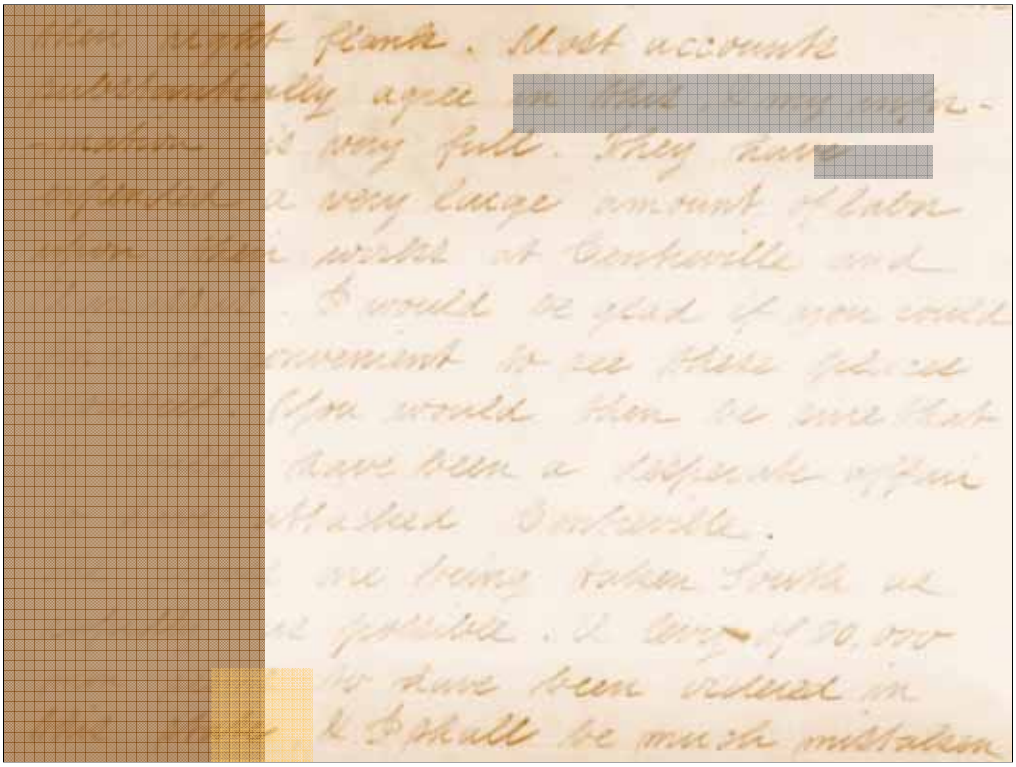
The Confederate Railroad was constructed from Manassas Junction to Centerville to bring supplies.

Many of the Civil War photos of Centreville were taken by Union photographers in March 1862.

Following the Second Battle of Bull Run, the Centreville fortifications were again used to cover the retreating Union army.

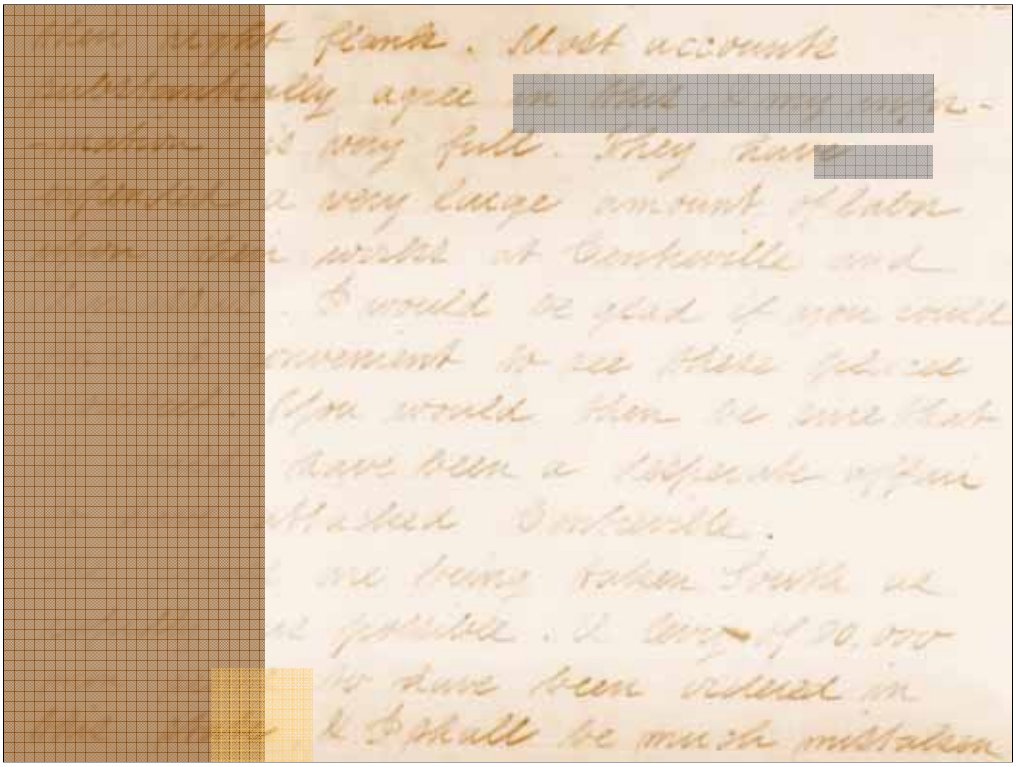


Confederate sketch map of fortifications in December 1861. Existing fortifications are shown.



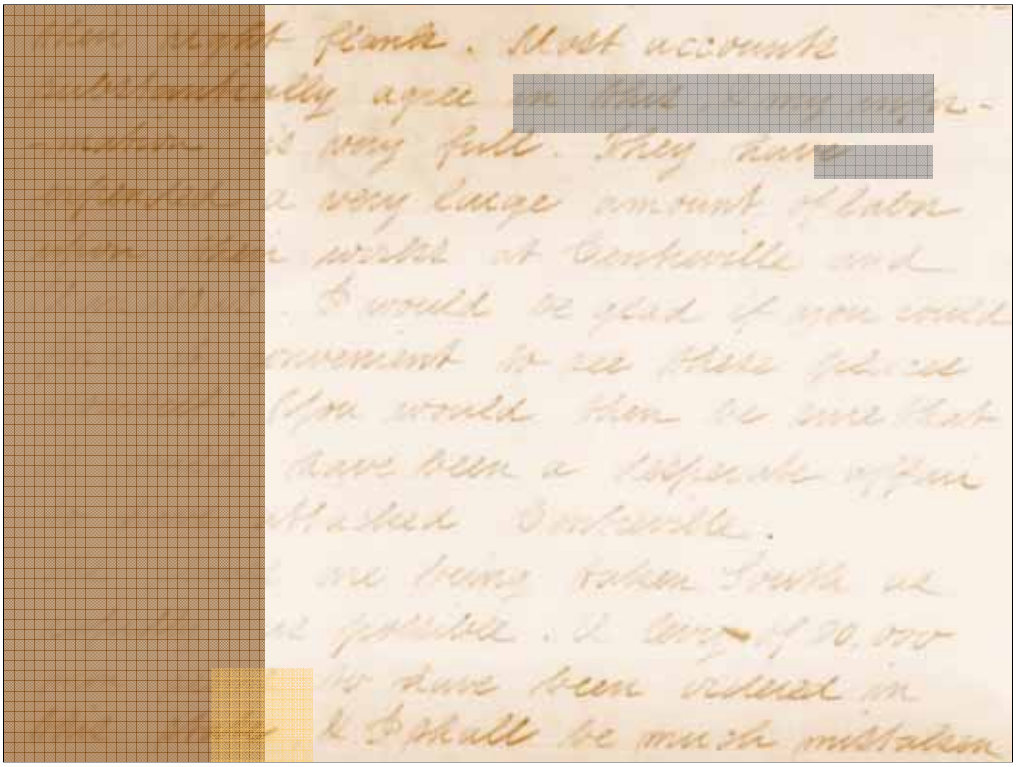
Centreville's modest recovery from the war was slow. The underlying advantage upon which the town achieved success was the central location of the town at the intersection of an extensive road network. The heavy traffic of war destroyed the roads.

Two Centreville churches, both used as hospitals during the war, were rebuilt. The Stone Church, reconstructed c. 1870, replaced the 1855 building. St. John's Episcopal Church was constructed c. 1867, on the site of the original 1851 church.



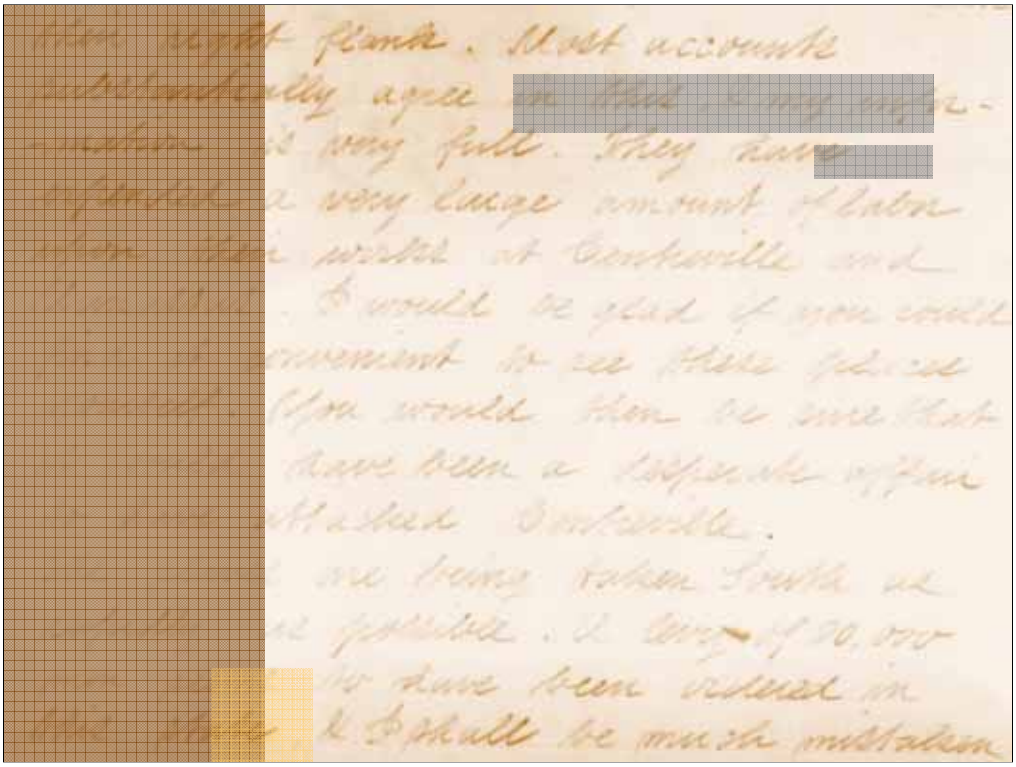
Craftsmen returned to Centreville after the war. S.C. Spindle, an injured Confederate soldier, was a harness-maker. He purchased what we call today the Harrison House.

In 1875, Thomas Harrison purchased the house, and likely built a blacksmith shop. Harrison alternately purchased whiskey and nails from the John DeBell store in December 1875. Perhaps it was a cold winter.



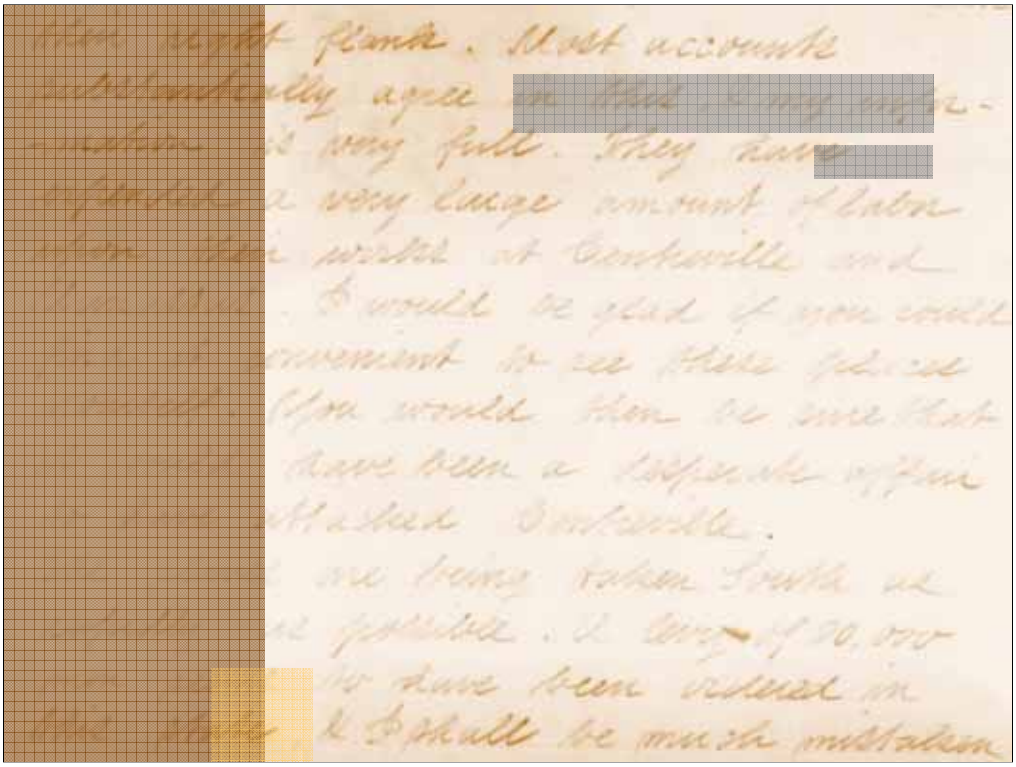
Many of the buildings shown in Civil War photos were taken down. The Utterback Store was built on the lot that had been Fewel Perry's tavern.

The store was a post office as well as a general merchandise store.



In 1897, Robert Utterback constructed a house. He did not own the store.

Prior to the war, a large portion of the lots and land was owned by Alexander Spotswood Grigsby. The war ruined him financially. It took over 23 years, from 1869 to 1892 for County Commissioners of the Court to sell off Grigsby's area real estate.



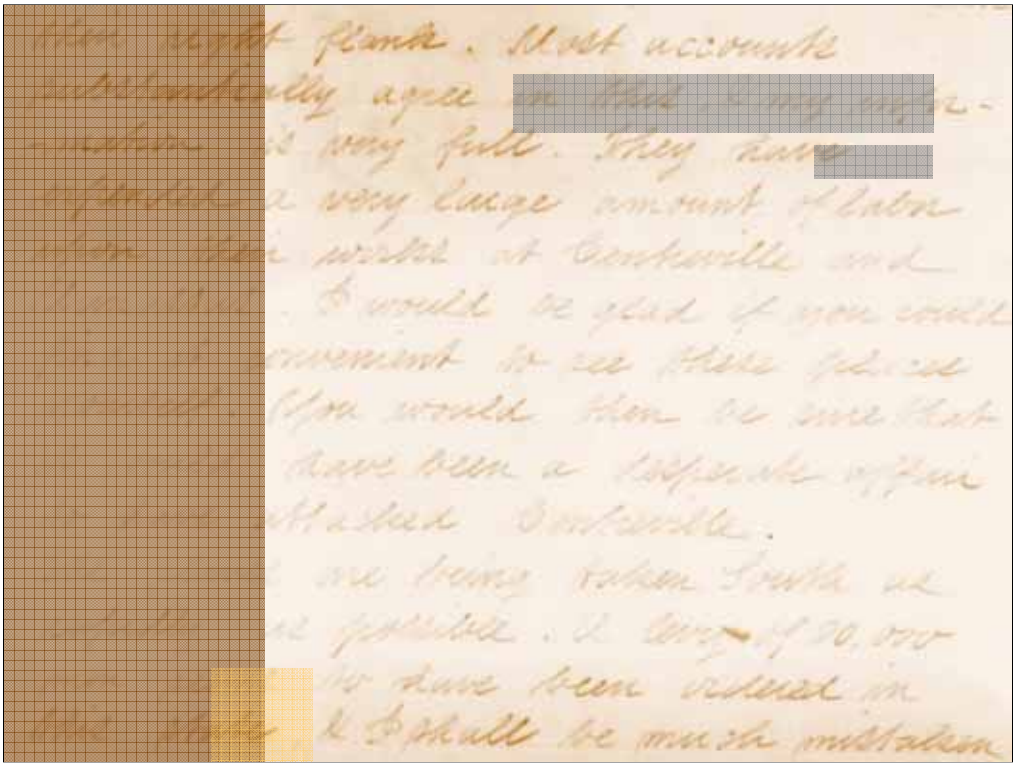
In 1916, travelers from Washington to Warrenton generally chose a 76-mile route via Leesburg, rather than attempt to navigate the poor roads around Centreville and Bull Run.

About this time there were also reports of a Dukes of Hazzard style money-making scheme. As a car would enter the town, a constable would “sallie forth” and carry the driver before a magistrate who would demand a five dollar bill for failure to honk your horn. There were no receipts issued.

Road improvements finally came to Centreville beginning in 1916 when the Washington and Fairfax Turnpike Company was created to grade and lay gravel. This gave a boost to the town.

1921 Rambler: *Old houses have fallen down, and have burned and blown down, and new houses, with fresh-painted sides and porches and gables, have been set up.*

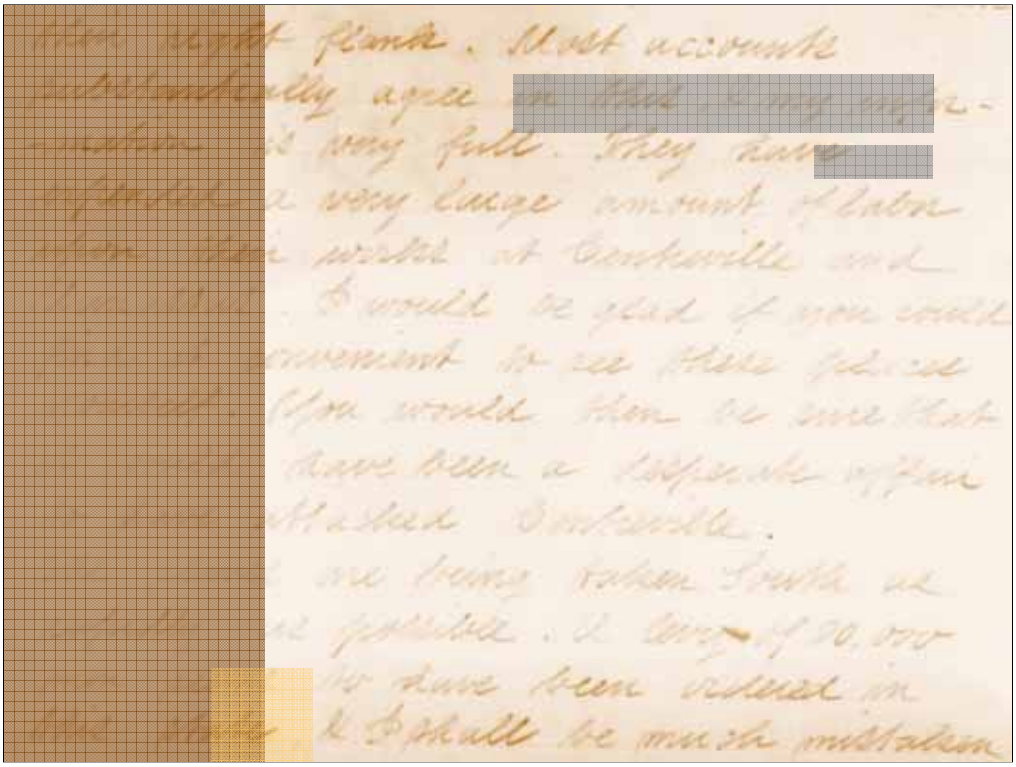
Enos Utterback owned Royal Oaks. In 1918 he built the existing Utterback house, and had it partially completed before he died of influenza during the influenza pandemic of 1918. The pandemic killed more people than WWI. Enos had just married Edith May Nichol two months prior.



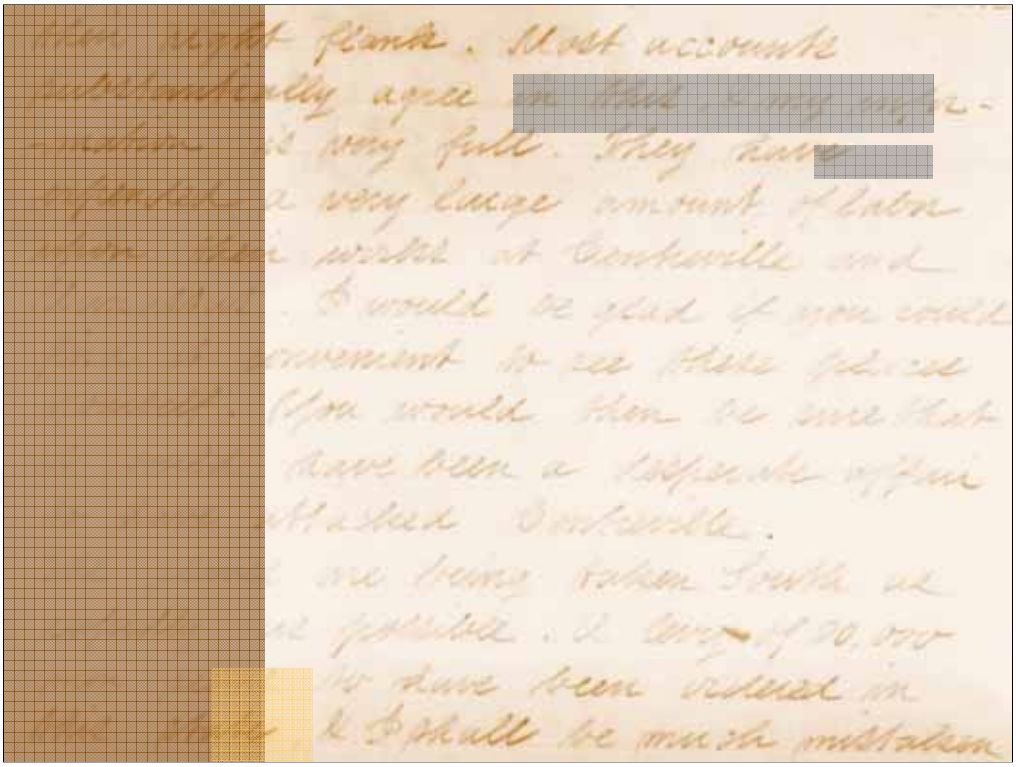
A groundswell of support arose in the early 1920s to create a transcontinental road to make an automobile trip from coast to coast a possibility at all times. The Lee Highway Association was formed, and named after Robert E. Lee, who worked after the Civil war to re-unite the country.

Portions of the Warrenton-Fairfax Turnpike were included in the Lee Highway trunk line, although a new section of road was constructed to eliminate the jog the route took through town.

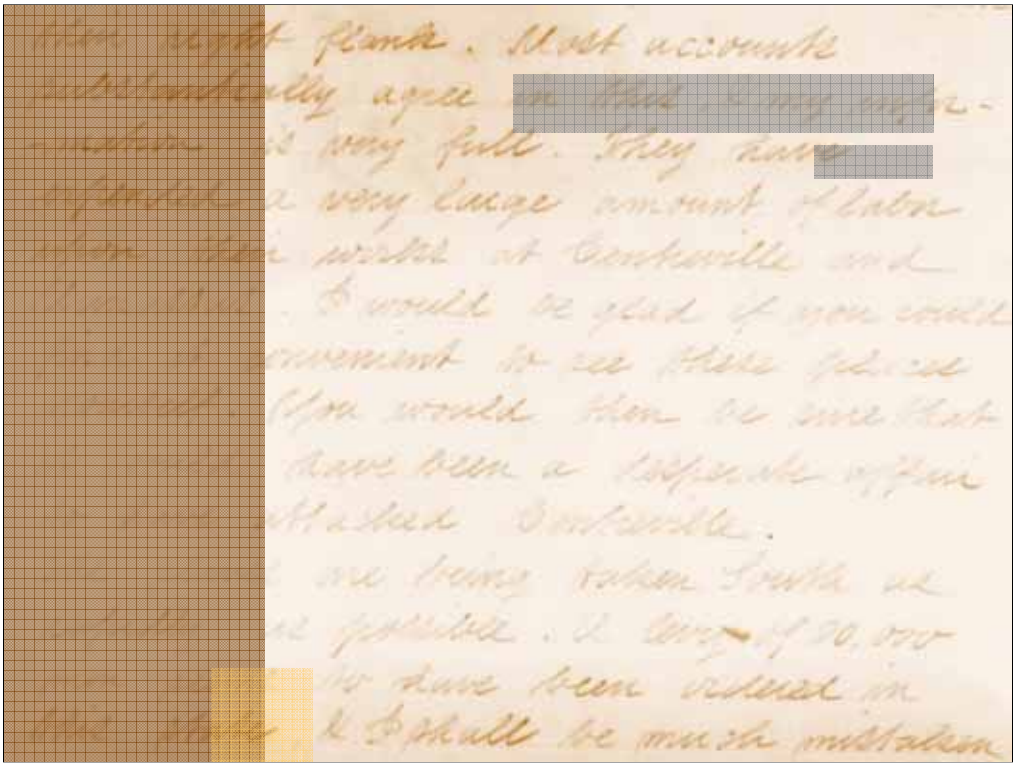
The section from Centreville to Fairfax opened in 1925 causing a big boon to Centreville as land values rose.



Businesses opened along Lee Highway. Irvin Payne opened a general merchandise store c. 1926.

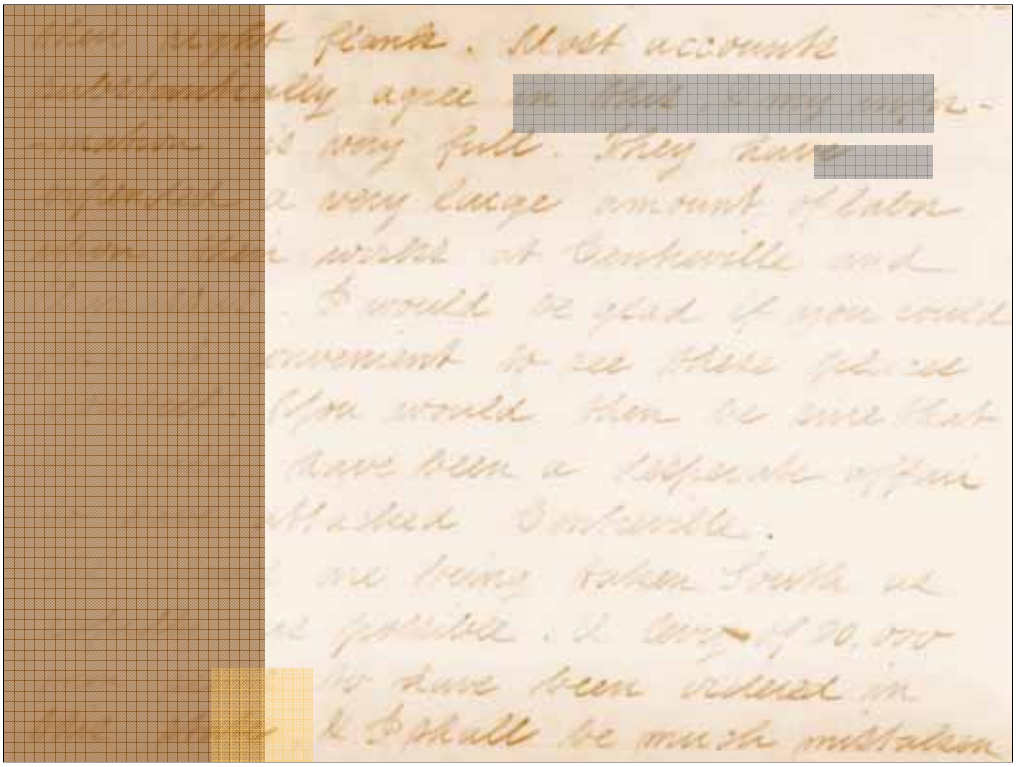


Roger Spindle constructed a Sears catalog house in 1934. He worked for the Postal Service in Washington and commuted down Lee Highway.

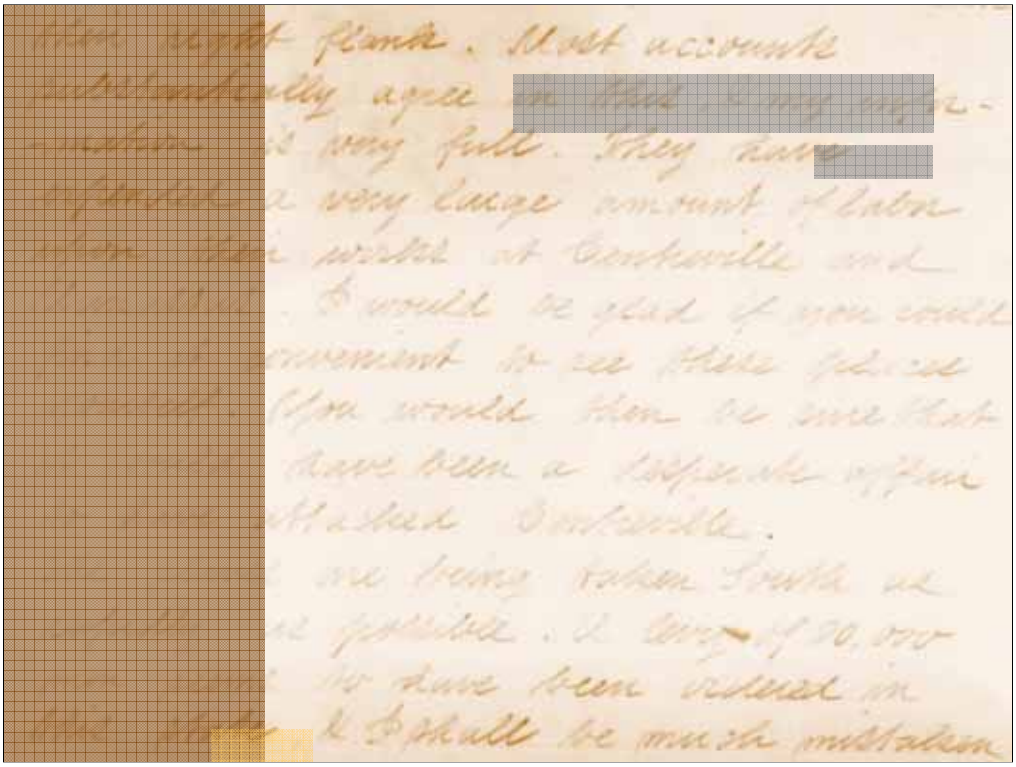


A filling station was constructed along Lee Highway. Originally a Texaco, it became a Shell station, which is why it was painted yellow.

It was constructed of stones taken from the Four Chimney House by Pinkney McWhorter and Will Crouch who used a Model A pickup truck to haul the stones to Lee Highway. The house was relocated in 1987 to the historic district.

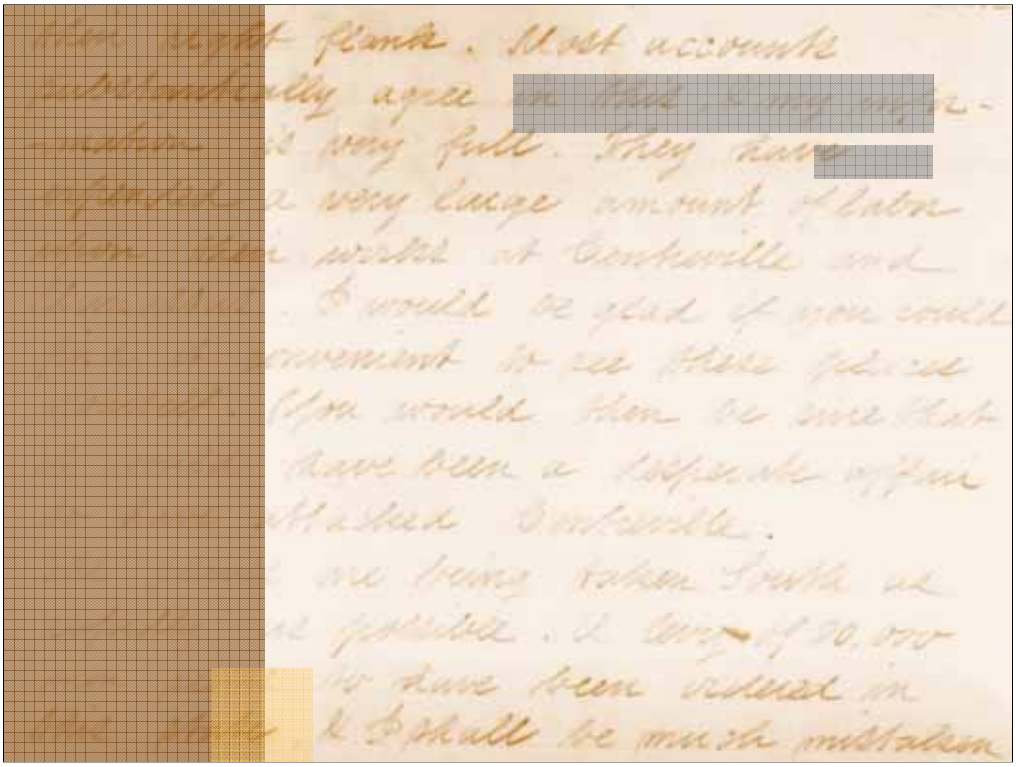


Payne’s Restaurant was constructed about 1949 to serve the both travelers and the local community, which was increasing in size due to suburbanization.

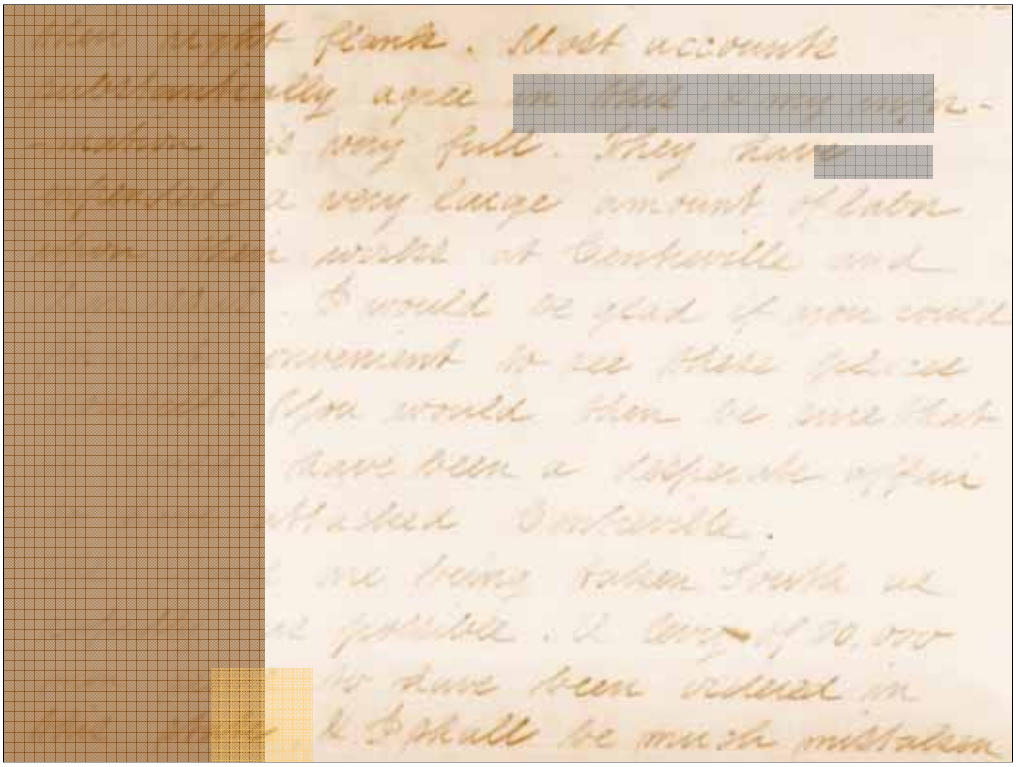


The earliest subdivisions discovered to date in the Centreville area were the Katherine T. Moore subdivision and Ratcliffe's subdivision. Both subdivisions have been redeveloped, though Ratcliffe's subdivision has a few of the original houses remaining. It is located north of Lee Highway across from the CVS.

Over time, area subdivisions continued to be developed. Most of the earlier subdivisions listed on this slide were constructed along Lee Highway.



The Centreville Farms subdivision was planned in 1946. It is near the existing historic district.



The aerial photos shown on this slide illustrate the changes in the landscape that occurred between 1954 and 2002. In 1954, the Centreville area had dairy farms surrounding scattered residential housing. In 2002, the old town area is surrounded by subdivision development.