

Brief History of Stephens City

Stephens City was chartered in 1758 and is the second oldest town in Shenandoah Valley. It was originally named Stephensburg after its founder, Lewis Stephens, who owned the 900 acres that made up the town. The first settlement there was shortly after 1732, when Peter Stephens, father of Lewis Stephens and one of the party that migrated from Pennsylvania with Joist Hite, built a house in the area.

Stephensburg, also called Newton when it was expanded northward, was renamed Stephens City in the late nineteenth century. According to local legend, Stephens City almost became the county seat but was beaten by Winchester after a bowl of toddy influenced the vote.

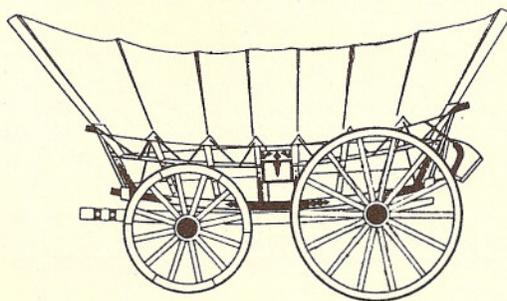
Since its beginnings, Stephens City has been a commercial and industrial center as well as a major crossroads. It is located along Rt. 11 (the Valley Pike) about eight miles south of Winchester. Route 277 was originally the road that ran to Alexandria, an extremely important passage to the east. Because of its location along Rt. 11 and Rt. 277, two very heavily traveled arteries through the Valley, the types of businesses that operated there were geared towards transportation. The wagon making trade was an important enterprise in Stephens City, which was known for its high-quality Newtown Wagons. At one point in the nineteenth century, there were about thirteen wagon maker shops and about the same number of blacksmiths. In addition, there were also potteries, several inns and taverns, a tannery, a silversmith, and a saddle and harness maker, just to name a few. When the railroad came through after the Civil War, this all but put an end to the wagon making business and the other related industries. Some new industries, including a lime plant, were opened in the twentieth century. There are several early churches and cemeteries in Stephens City. The oldest cemetery is located on Mulberry Street and contains the graves of the first settlers including the Stephens family. The Lutherans and Methodists began congregating in Stephens City as early as 1786. There were also several later Churches, including ones for the Afro-American community.

As a "Valley Pike Town", Stephens City is exceptional because it has changed little through time. The earliest dwellings were log cabins built close to the road so as to have gardens in the back. Although the widening of Route 11 has destroyed some buildings and others have been demolished and replaced with modern structures, for the most part Main Street Stephens city is amazingly intact.

The twentieth century has brought increased growth to Stephens City. The town got electrical service in 1915, a water system in 1941, and a sewer system in 1964. In 1937, there was a devastating fire in the area of town known as Mudville. In recent years, the area around Stephens City has experienced a boom of residential and commercial activity which will surely continue. The population of Stephens City itself has also increased dramatically, almost doubling in the past twenty years. Stephens City's strong, unspoiled historical character is a great asset, and will hopefully foster and support growth in a positive manner.

Walking Tour of Stephens City, VA *formerly* Newtown & Stephensburg

CHARTERED IN 1758

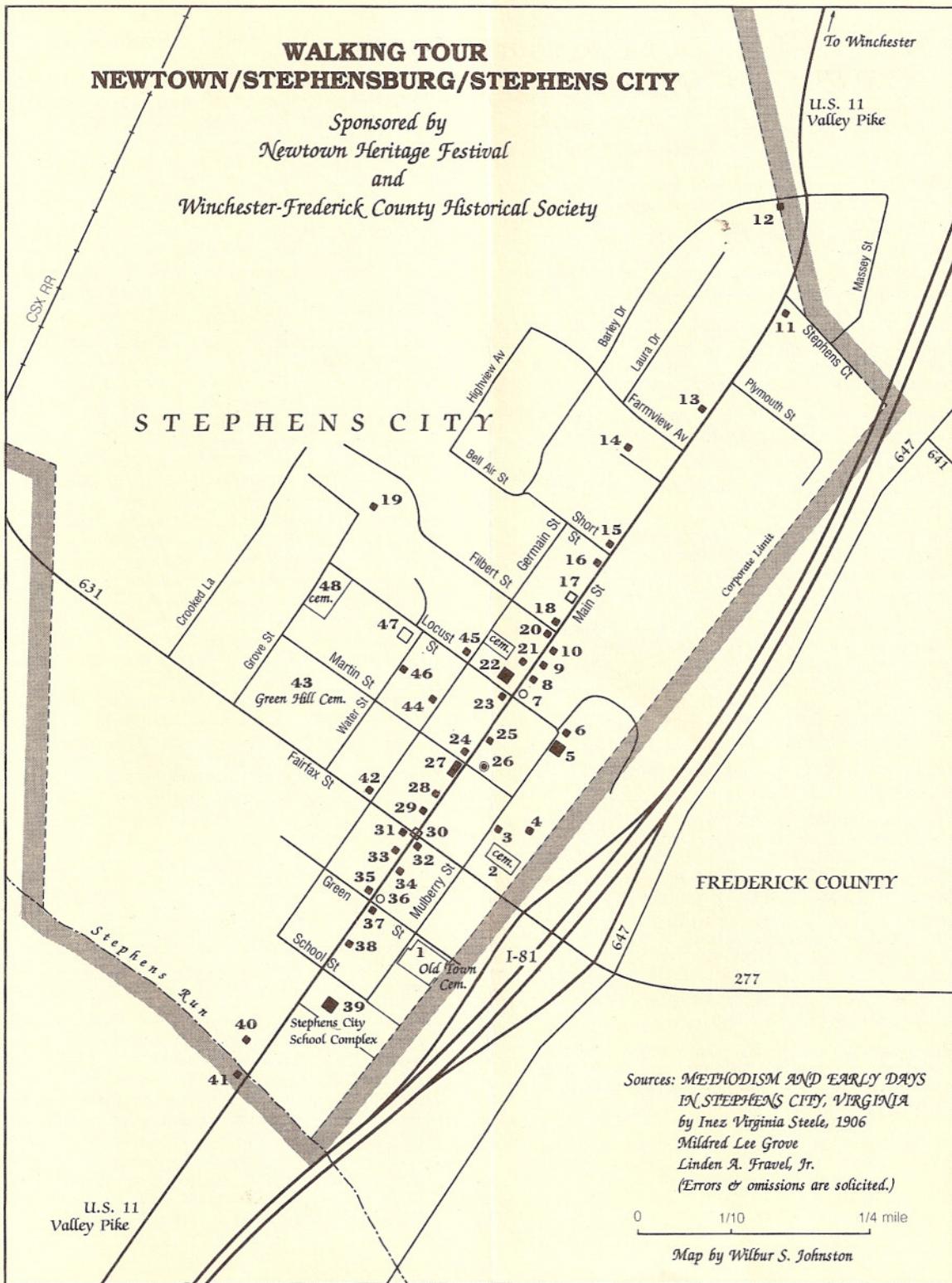


Map Key

1. (S.E. Corner - Mulberry & Green Street) - "**Old Town Cemetery**" and **East Academy** - deeded to trustees by Lewis Stephens, Jr. in 1799.
2. (South of 5374 Mulberry Street) - **Site of Lutheran and Reformed Church and Cemetery**. Lot was purchased in 1785 and a log church built on the site by 1786. Brick building erected 1812. Enlarged and rebuilt 1851 and 1880. Torn down 1906. Brick reused for the interior wall of present structure on corner.
3. (5374 Mulberry Street) **John Cryder (1737-1829) House**. Wagon maker, purchased lot in 1798.
4. (5354 Mulberry Street) **Dr. John W. Owens** - b. 1811 in North Wales. Immigrated in 1829. Began practice in Newtown in 1848. In 1885 owned six lots in area.
5. (5310 Mulberry Street) **Orrick Chapel** built prior to the Civil War and ministered by Robert Orrick ordained by the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Destroyed during Civil War. Rebuilt "near the original site" on land deeded in 1869.
6. (5300 Mulberry Street) **The Samsell House** built between 1785-1812). Bought by John Samsell in 1812. Remained in Samsell family until 1939.
7. (5296 Main Street - S.W. Corner of House) **Site of 1 of 3 Town Wells**. Also marks southern limit of the 1799 "Newtown Addition". Probable location of John Cryder, Sr. "hatter" - bought by him in 1790. Adjoining addition to the north was store of Frank Yeakle.
8. (5288 Main Street) **John Lemley** - Blacksmith and mason - purchased this lot 1812. Moved to Missouri 1841.
9. (5286 Main Street) **John Lemley Blacksmith Shop**. Rear addition added when converted to a residence. (5280 Main Street) addition to North owned by his brother Jacob - wagon maker/blacksmith.
10. (5260 Main Street) Thought to be the site of **John Pitman's Pottery**. Note chimney with glazed flemish Bond brick headers. John Pitman owned this lot from 1794 to 1834.
11. (5056 Main Street) **Dr. Wall's House** - circa 1840. Early war home of Dr. John Watkins Walls and wife Molly. His son, William, assisted Dr. Hunter McGuire in the amputation of Jackson's arm. Molly's war letters were published in 1989. N.W. Corner of the lot was next to the toll house.
12. (5015 Main Street) **Site of John Hite House** - Built in 1785 was said to be the first brick house west of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Torn down in 1982.
13. (5123 Main Street) Approximate site of the **first Methodist parsonage**. Burned by General Hunter's troops in 1864.
14. (5155 Main Street) **Ritenour House** - Built about 1800 by George Ritenour, "tanner". Bought by Dr. Thomas Miller in 1860. Remained in family for 72 years.
15. (5195 Main Street) Possible location of **Abraham Pifer**, wagon maker. Home of **Col. Chas. E. Shyrook** - Colonel of Militia, cabinetmaker, undertaker.
16. (5211 Main Street) **Locust Hill** - **Home of the Steele** family since 1847. A civil war diary was kept by 9 year old John M. and sister Sarah Elizabeth. It was published by the WFCHS.
17. (5231 Main Street) Lots of **John W. Grove (1791-1873)** & son **G. A. Grove** - Wagon makers. George commanded the Newtown Artillery until it disbanded in 1861.
18. (N.W. Corner of Main & Filbert) Site of **Peter Keeding House & Shop** - Wagon maker.
19. (5246 Grove Street) "**Bell Air**" **Home of Capt. John Bell Tilden (1761-1838)** - Veteran of the Revolutionary War, doctor, Methodist Minister, County Justice. House's chimney marked "1788".
20. (5259 Main Street) **McClun/Gibson House** - Wagon makers.
21. (5271 Main Street) Site of **First Methodist Church** built in 1789. Originally log, replaced with brick in 1827. Vandalized during the Civil War. Rebuilt in 1882. Torn down in 1913. The accompanying cemetery is in the rear of the present buildings.
22. (5291 Main Street - present Methodist Church) Site of **Capt. Joseph Long's Tavern** licensed in 1835 later McArtors Store. Used by local militia and magistrates as a "court of inquiry" and town trustees for meetings.
23. (5303 Main Street) Business of **Mort and Alf Dean** - Tinsmith and saddle and harness maker. Location of **Post Office** in early 1900's.
24. (5343 Main Street) **G. F. Mayers Store** built prior to 1900 it housed a cigar factory on the second floor and grocery and farm implement business on the first floor and later a Post Office. Probable site of **John Nolen** pottery in the 1820's.
25. (5336 Main Street) **Samuel Hulls Store**, later **L. A. Adams & McCarty's Stores**. To this building, Harry Gilmore nailed a letter advising General Hunter that he would shoot 41 Union prisoners if the town was burned.
26. (5342 Main Street) **Sycamore Lookout Tree** - Tradition says this tree was used as a signal station during the Civil War.

WALKING TOUR NEWTOWN/STEPHENSBURG/STEPHENS CITY

Sponsored by
Newtown Heritage Festival
and
Winchester-Frederick County Historical Society



Sources: *METHODISM AND EARLY DAYS
IN STEPHENS CITY, VIRGINIA*
by Inez Virginia Steele, 1906
Mildred Lee Grove
Linden A. Frawel, Jr.
(Errors & omissions are solicited.)

0 1/10 1/4 mile

Map by Wilbur S. Johnston

27. (5357 Main Street) **Wells-Allemong-Steele Store** - Conveyed in 1759 to "Valley Lawyer", Gabriel Jones. The store was operated from 1814 to the 1970's. A "counting room" was added in the 1830's that connected the log store to the brick residence to the South. Owned by the Steele family for over 120 years.
28. (5363 Main Street) **Bucher-Lemley House** - Two story log was bought by Jacob A. Bucher, harness and saddle maker, in 1838. It passed by inheritance to Wm. K. & John E. Lemley. The store to the north was built by the Lemleys and contained the "opera house" on the 2nd floor.
29. (5381 Main Street) **Wagon Maker, Thornton McLeod** - The property was purchased by William, father of Thornton in 1818. Thornton had his wagon making and blacksmith shop in the brick building and his residence in the two-story log house to the south (5287 Main Street).
30. (Intersection of Main and Fairfax Street) **The Market House** - Located in the center of the intersection was built of brick and stood till it was torn down in 1833 to make way for the Valley Turnpike.
31. (5405 Main Street) Site of **Taylor Store** Circa 1786 one of only two stone structures built in town. The North wall shows the progression of additions to the original one-story 30x37 building. Enlarged to its present condition in 1920 by merchant, **J. A. Henkle**. Formerly **Steele and Dinges** from 1880 to 1919.
32. (5408 Main Street) **The Newtown Tavern** - Erected by John M. Pitman in 1819 and sold to Henry Richards in 1821 and John Hamilton in 1858 and then to Zachariah Kerns. Used continuously as a tavern and hotel till 1908. Visited by Andrew Jackson and later quartered by Philip Sheidan in 1864.
33. (5415 Main Street) **Andrew Pitman** (1760-1838) Home and pottery - Two-story log house circa 1782. Probably the oldest surviving pottery in the Valley. Home to the Pitmans for 112 years it supported three generations of redware potters. An upstairs room still exhibits original stenciling on its walls. Also **site of 1 of 3 public wells**.
34. (5438 & 5420 Main Street) **Jacob Mytinger House** - Silversmith and Watch Maker - Lot first sold to George Cabbage in 1761. Sold to Daniel Benzent, "Merchant of Philadelphia" in 1767 then to Peter Op "inholder" in 1783. Henry Jackson held the deed from 1802-34 and J. Mytinger from 1834-40.
35. (5437 Main Street) **Site of Alexander Marks** (1792-1845) - Blacksmith - His son Samuel was a Captain in the Newtown Artillery. Later location of At Rust blacksmith shop.
36. (5444 Main Street - N.W. Corner) **Location of 1 of 3 town wells**.
37. (5460 Main Street) Site of **Col. Joseph Holmes Store**. Born in 1746 he was a prosperous merchant and Deputy Commissary General of Prisoners in the Revolution and County Sherriff in 1785. He hosted the Rev. Philip Vickers Fithian here from 23 May - 17 June 1775. Father of Hugh Holmes II and father-in-law of Edward McGuire and Dr. Daniel Conrad.
38. (5488 Main Street) **Glorious Church of God in Christ** Built by "the colored Baptist" in 1892.
39. (5516 Main Street) **Stephens City School Complex** - Large building was built in 1916 as a high school. Additional buildings added in 1927 and 1928 making it the largest consolidated school in the county.
40. (50" yards or more North of Stephens Run on the west side of the road") Approximate location of founder, **Peter Stephen's Log home**. (settled about 1732) and last known residence of Lewis Stephens, Sr.
41. (South side of Stephens Run on West side of Route 11) Site of **Nicewangers Toll House** - Burned during the Civil War.
42. (5393 Germain Street) Probable location of **John Keelers** wagon shop, circa. 1817.
43. (Fairfax Street - between Water and Grove Streets) **Green Hill Cemetery** - Chartered in 1874 when the Trustees of Newtown set aside three acres for a cemetery.
44. (5335 Germain Street) **James Lemley (1821-1899) Blacksmith Shop** - Son of blacksmith, John Lemley. House has changed very little since it was sketched by F. Staling circa 1857.
45. (5297 Germain Street) **Home of George Guard** - Blacksmith (1810-1884).
46. (5336 and 5340 Water Street) Site of **Bradford Spring and Ritenours Tanyard**.
47. (1033 Locust Street - present Town Hall) **Town Commons and West Academy** - Common pasture area and militia muster ground. In 1821 2.5 acres "known as the Academy Lot" was deeded to the trustees (including Samuel Kercheval) by Lewis and Mary Stephens. The brick academy in the N.E. corner was torn down by Federal troops. In 1775 the visiting Philip Fithian noted, "4:00 at Stephensburg. The village is full of people. Men busy mustering." "The drum beats and the inhabitants of this village muster each morning at 5:00."
48. (S.E. Corner of Locust and Grove Street) "**Colored Cemetery**" - On 8 April 1880 the town council deed .5 acres on the N.W. corner of the town common for use as a cemetery.