

# Historic Occoquan Self Guided Walking Tour



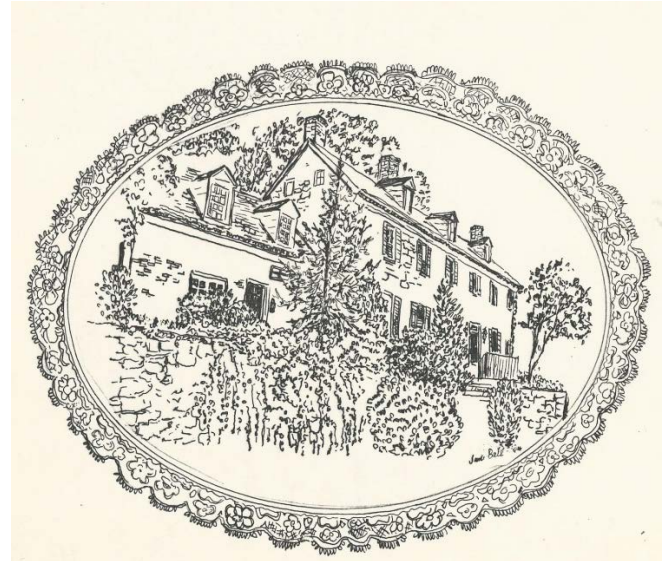
Occoquan Falls prior to the construction of Water Authority dams



Ice harvesting- Occoquan River



Early view of Occoquan from the far shore



Occoquan has been a town of merchants for over 250 years. As you walk west on Mill Street try to imagine what Occoquan was like in the 1700's. **THE NOISE IS THUNDEROUS!** From the riverside ahead you hear the roar of the mills (three water wheels and six sets of millstones going at the same time) and the swift flowing water that powers the mills. Smoke rises from the iron foundry upstream. Waggoners call to their teams trying to control them down the steep and craggy roads and huge ships are loading cargo.

Occoquan has enjoyed a very long history, from the Dogue Indians to Revolutionaries and Red Coats, Confederates and Yankees, and despite floods and fires, this vibrant town has survived.

Please enjoy our walking tour which covers the  
Historic District of Occoquan.

This Walking Tour is a combination of lore, fact and memories of Occoquan. As with all memories and lore there is room for debate... and as you know, lore grows with time. A most sincere thank you to those who came before us and preserved the history, recorded their memories, and shared their stories and photos. A special thanks to the first Director of Tourism in Prince William County, Bernadette Plunkett.

Compiled and written by LaVerne Carson (lavcarson@aol.com)  
© 2014

Distributed by the Business Guild of Occoquan

For more information on Occoquan  
[www.HistoricOccoquan.com](http://www.HistoricOccoquan.com)

---

## INTRODUCTION

Occoquan is derived from a Dogue Indian word meaning "at the end of the water". Captain John Smith found the "King's House" of the Dogues near here (about a mile downstream) in 1608. It was this river and its location, at the head of the tidewater, which made Occoquan a natural site for water-borne commerce. A tobacco warehouse was built as early as 1736 and an industrial complex began in 1750. Before the turn of the century, Occoquan had forges, water grist mills, tolling mills, a bake house, saw mills, storehouses and dwellings. By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Merchant's Mill earned the distinction of being the first automated grist mill in the country. By 1828, Occoquan had one of the first cotton mills in Virginia and

by 1835, several mercantile stores and various mechanics. Just prior to the Civil War, ship building began in Occoquan, specializing in schooners and long boats. In addition to products from the cotton and grist mills, there was a trade in cord wood, fish and river ice. Occoquan had built the first commercial ice storage house in the area. Railroad ties and large logs were shipped to several ports, including Philadelphia and New York. A mail stage route had been authorized through Occoquan back in 1805. During the Civil War, the Occoquan Post Office played a key role in passing letters and packages between the North & South. The dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century saw a town bustling with lumber and hardware stores, grocery stores, drug store, churches, school, jail, blacksmith, barber, undertaker, doctor, pharmacy and millinery. Occoquan became the social, as well as commercial center, for the area but a devastating fire destroyed much of the town in 1916. The river had silted and industry declined. With the opening of Route 1 in 1928, the town ceased to be the major north-south travel route. The railroad also bypassed the town and soon trucks began carrying cargo. Supermarkets began replacing small grocery stores. Then in 1972, the ravaging waters of Hurricane Agnes destroyed buildings, sidewalks, streets and the iron truss bridge that crossed the Occoquan River. Any one of these could have meant the demise of a small riverside town. But the townspeople, the merchants, and those interested in history repaired, rebuilt, restored....and created a unique town which now offers unhurried shopping and pleasant dining. Robert Lehto, former town council member and past president of Historic Occoquan, summed it up this way:

“With a history spanning a period almost as long as Virginia itself, Occoquan provides a unique mixture of pre-revolutionary, Victorian and modern aspects of life resulting in a living charm which no restoration or modern city can equal”.

## MILL STREET

**We will begin our tour at the Visitors Center walking west on Mill Street.**

### **200 MILL STREET - Visitors Center 1**

The Prince William County Tourist Information Center, dedicated in 1987, was originally the Occoquan Town Shed and was placed in the middle of Cooper’s Alley. It is thought that Cooper’s Alley was so named because a Cooper Shop (barrel maker) was once located in this area of Town.

### **125 MILL STREET – (Right Side) 2**

Built in 1990 and designed to look Victorian, this was the original site of the Occoquan Shipyards. During the 1800’s Occoquan had one of the largest shipyards on the Potomac. Sternwheelers, side wheelers and three-masted schooners were built in this area and launched in the Occoquan from the 1870’s through the early 1900’s. In 1896 the Corps of Engineers listed the arrival and departure (in Occoquan) of 808 barges and flatboats, 96 sail boats and 614 vessels with less than a ten foot draft.

### **201 MILL STREET – (Right Side) 3**

Built in 1977-78, with the top-side added in 1981 this was the site of the “upper dike” which was an effort to keep silt out of the river. Over \$95,000 was spent between 1874-1910 in this effort. While the improvements were only temporary they did extend Occoquan’s history as a shipping port.

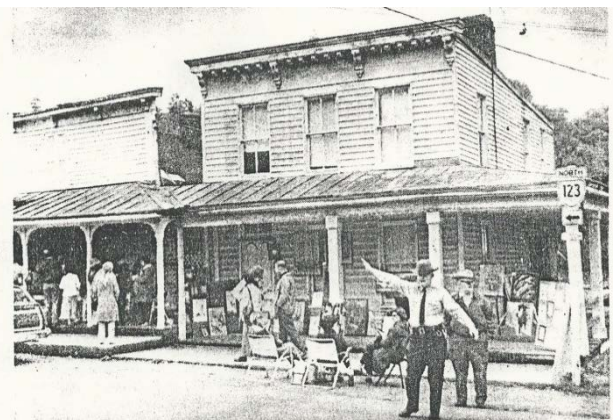
### **THE 1916 FIRE**

There were many references during this tour to the 1916 fire in Occoquan. The following is an account as published in a Washington Newspaper in August 1916.

“Between forty and fifty residents of Occoquan last night slept in the homes of friends or in the Odd Fellow’s Hall here as the result of a disastrous fire which swept away their homes and other property in the afternoon. The loss is between \$40,000 and \$50,000. The fire originated about 2:30 o’clock from an unknown cause in the rear part of the home of Mrs. J. Hood Weedon on Mill Street, the principal thoroughfare of this little town. By the time the flames were discovered by Mrs. Weedon, who had gone to the front porch of

her home a few minutes before, they had gained considerable headway. The cries of Mrs. Weedon were heard by neighbors and soon an alarm was sounding throughout the village calling for help. A bucket brigade was formed. Water was taken from nearby wells and also from Occoquan Creek, on which the town lies. The firefighters, however, were unable to do much good against the flames due to the wind. Although Mrs. Weedon’s home, formerly the Alton Hotel, was built of brick, it was soon a mass of ruins. With the outbreak of the fire, James Barbee, cashier of the Bank of Occoquan, which adjoined the hotel, placed all of the money and papers in the large vault, and then went to join the firefighters in their efforts to keep the fire from spreading to the bank building. Their efforts, however, were without avail, as the roof of the building was soon a mass of flames and in a few minutes the interior of the institution was wiped out. It was said the money and papers in the vault were believed safe. The fire spread northward, and soon the general merchandise store and dwelling of W.S. Lynn went up in smoke. About the time this building caught fire Ralph Whitaker, superintendent of the District Workhouse across the creek, heard of the fire and dispatched the chemical engine to the scene. For a time the volunteer firemen used the chemicals to advantage, but the wind shifted the flames toward the rear, and soon the dwelling and the Occoquan Methodist Episcopal Church were on fire. In connection with the sending of the fire apparatus to Occoquan Mr. Whitaker, with several guards, took seventy-five prisoners from the workhouse to the scene, and they worked diligently in carrying furniture, clothing and other property from threatened buildings. After the flames had destroyed the Lynn store and residence they burned through the residence of Oliver Underwood and then jumped across an alleyway and destroyed the home of Wade H. Hammill. Calls for help were telephoned to nearby towns, and an effort was made to reach Alexandria by telephone to ask that fire apparatus be sent. Communication, however, with that place could not be had, and a telephone message was sent to the Washington Star asking that the fire department of Alexandria be notified. It was on the message sent from The Star that the big motor fire engine of that town was dispatched to the scene. The run of fifteen miles over a road which is bad in spots was made in forty-three minutes.....It was but a short time later that the firemen succeeded in checking the fire in the northward spread. It was not until the church and several residences on Commerce Street had been burned down that the fire was actually under control. It was about 6 o’clock last evening before the danger of the flames spreading was passed”.

The fire in August 1916 destroyed about twenty seven houses, churches and stores.



Circa 1970- Occoquan Arts and Craft Show in full swing

### **301 COMMERCE STREET - (Right Side) 57**

The original structure, circa 1790, was constructed of hand hewn timber and wood pegs. Renovations have revealed old newspapers from the 19<sup>th</sup> century used as insulation in the attic. Shops now occupy this former residence.

### **302 COMMERCE STREET Private Residence (Left Side) 58**

Old-timers remembered buying home-made preserves for a penny when Captain Fred Woodyard operated a store in the front part of this 1907 brick-faced duplex. Woodyard’s wife, Lola, served as Occoquan’s Post Master from 1943 to 1964.

### **303 COMMERCE STREET – (Right Side) 59**

The Shanklin home with its pressed tin roof was built in 1880. Residents fled when the 1916 fire threatened the house and completely destroyed the Methodist Church next door, as well as the nearby jail.

### **304 COMMERCE STREET—Private Residence (Left Side) 60**

Typical of early river-town architecture, this house is long and narrow. Built circa 1860, hand forged square nails were found when the roof was raised. This is a private residence and not open to the public.

### **305 COMMERCE STREET — (Right Side) 61**

The Occoquan Methodist Church that once stood here was completely destroyed in the fire of 1916. The present structure was built in the 1950's.

### **306 COMMERCE STREET — (Left Side) 62**

Building from 1889 was once the home of Occoquan's Justice of the Peace.

### **307 COMMERCE STREET- (Right Side) 63**

As with 305 Commerce St., built in the 1950's, the 2 lots were the site of the Occoquan Methodist Church which was destroyed in the 1916 fire.

### **308 COMMERCE STREET — (Left Side) 64**

Lumber was brought in by horse and wagon and members of the newly organized Odd Fellows Crescent Lodge #33 volunteered their labor to build this hall in 1889. Assisted by paid ex-slaves, the hall was completed in six months at a cost of about \$900 (including the lot). It served as the town's civic center for years; a one-room school occupied the lower level until the two-room school was constructed next door. The lower hall, which had a stage, served as the first opera house and theatre in the area with one-night stands by entertainers on their way to Richmond.

### **309 COMMERCE STREET—Private Residence (Right Side) 65**

Built in the 1940's, this was and is a Private Residence, not open to the public. Before the 1916 fire, the Town Jail and stables were found on this lot.

### **310 COMMERCE STREET—Private Residence (Left Side) 66**

Built as a school in the early 1900's, the main floor had two rooms, "the little room" for grades one through four, and the "big room" for grades five through seven. For their physical exams, children lined up two by two and walked down to the Merchant Mill where each child was weighed on the feed scales. Text books were purchased from Janney's Store on Mill Street. The school board sold the building in 1929 and the porch was added by the new owner. It is now a Private Residence and not open to the public

### **312 COMMERCE STREET- Private Residence (Left Side) 67**

The original two rooms were built in the 1700's with several additions through the years. This is a Private Residence and not open to the public.



Mill Street prior to 1916 fire

### **MAMIE DAVIS PARK (Right Side) 4**

The park was named to honor Mamie Davis, lifelong resident of Occoquan who served as its mayor, clerk, treasurer and council member. Since the founding of Occoquan this area was a public wharf. One could buy a bushel of oysters for 50 cents. One could purchase passage from Washington D.C. or Alexandria to spend the day in Occoquan for 25 cents, round trip. Circuses and traveling shows set up in this area...it has been a gathering place since Occoquan's early years. Elder Smoot, recounting his memories of Occoquan in the early 1900's, said "The farmers and trades from as far away as the Blue Ridge Mountains would drive their six & eight horse covered wagons, loaded with apples, wheat, corn, brandy, and other products of their region. After disposing of their loads they would return home loaded with salt fish and other products picked up on the (Occoquan) docks".

### **202 MILL STREET—Occoquan Post Office 22125 (Left Side) 5**

The current Post Office was built in 1969. According to records, there was a post office in Occoquan as early as 1808.

### **204 MILL STREET — VFW Hall (Left Side) 6**

The barnlike construction of this building suggests its original use - lumber storage for Leary Lumber Company. When the lumber company outgrew the building, it became home to the OWL (Occoquan, Woodbridge, Lorton) Volunteer Fire Dept. In the early 1970's OWL moved to larger space in Woodbridge and the building became home to VFW Post 7916.

### **206 MILL STREET — (Left Side) 7**

At least seven families are known to have lived in this late 18<sup>th</sup> century house before it was renovated in the early 1970's for retail shops. It originally had an "old fashioned" porch across the front before the Williamsburg-type steps were added. During renovation, as the interior walls were removed, huge timbers, brick ballast and oyster shell mortar were discovered. A portion of this wall remains open (on the stairway) so visitors can see the materials used in early construction.

### **223-231 Mill Street Townhouses (Right Side) 8**

This area down thru Mamie Davis Park was part of the Public Wharf and in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, Prince William Marina. Since Mill Street was once U.S. Route 1, the only route between Washington and Richmond, there was heavy traffic through Occoquan which also included traveling shows and circuses which often set up at the Public Wharf.

### **301 MILL STREET — (Right Side) 9**

The central part of this building (circa 1750), with its rugged brick fireplace, is the surviving section of its history as an Inn, residence and restaurant. This building was badly damaged by Hurricane Agnes in 1972.

### **302 MILL STREET — (Left Side) 10**

The original part of this building was built in 1860, with additions made in 1867, 1927-32 and 1979-80. Once W.R. Selecman Dry Goods, Groceries, Liquors & General Merchandise, it then became Leary Lumber & Hardware which provided the town and surrounding areas with building supplies for many years. Circa 1971, it became Blackbeard's restaurant, specializing in seafood and their signature "hush puppies". After a devastating fire in the mid 1980's the interior of the building was refurbished and then became one of the finest Quilt Shops in No. Va. When you step inside, be sure to look up at the original 1860 tin ceiling and the red counter is original to Leary Hardware.

### **304 MILL STREET — (Left Side) 11**

Look at the two doors at the front of this shop and imagine how they served the "In & Out" traffic for post office patrons from the late 1920's until 1969 when the current post office was built at 202 Mill Street. The Occoquan Post Office played a significant role during the Civil War since main shipping points, such as Washington and Alexandria, were blockaded. Through an informal gentleman's agreement, packages and letters found their way north and south through Occoquan. One reference to this agreement is found in Dorothy Troth Muir's *In the Presence of a Lady* (the Story of Mount Vernon during the Civil War). She quotes from an August 1861 letter written by Sarah Tracy, secretary to the Regent of the Mount Vernon Ladies Assoc., which tells how a messenger brings her letters from the Occoquan Post Office and takes them there for her. Ms. Tracy put U.S. stamps on the letters and gave the messenger money to pay for "Southern Postage".

### **305 MILL STREET — (Right Side) 12**

This building was constructed in 1984. Previously on this site, in the early 1900's, was Ellicott Motor Company which sold gasoline, tires and other automobile services. In the early 1940's it was the birthplace of telephone service in this area. It started out in one room as Lorton Telephone Co., was bought out circa 1940's by Central Mutual, changed its name to Commonwealth in 1978 and was bought by Contel in 1972.

### **306 MILL STREET – (Left Side) 13**

It started here! The devastating fire that swept Occoquan August 1916. On this site originally was the Alton Hotel which had been a popular hotel for people who came to town to have their corn & wheat ground into flour, as well as for drummers, traveling salesmen and entertainers. It then became the home of Mrs. J. Hood Weeden – on this August day she was said to have been burning trash which was spread by gusty winds to adjoining buildings...the fire burned the big trees that formed an arch over Mill Street and spread as far as Commerce Street and across Ellicott Street to 402 Mill. Mr. Wayland built the current building and opened his grocery store in 1931. One can see his name proudly displayed on the front of his building. Later this building became Jennings Drug Store – the original fixtures of the drug store still line the walls of the existing shop.

### **307 MILL STREET – (Right Side) 14**

The original building dated to the early 1900's. A general store was located here from the 1940's until 1972 where fishing licenses and tackle were available, as well as boat rental at \$3.00 a day. The rear of the building, which consisted of 5 rooms and a bath, as well as a boat house, were washed away by Hurricane Agnes in 1972 and never rebuilt.

### **308 MILL STREET – (Left Side) 15**

The Bank of Occoquan opened here in 1900 and was one of the first banks in this area. The opening of a bank in Occoquan gave credibility to the Town's status as being financially important. The bank president lived upstairs. During the fire of 1916, the cashier put the money and papers in the vault and closed the bank to fight the fire. His actions saved the money and records. The building's history as a bank is still evident as the vault remains to this day. In 1910 the bank was operated by Elder Smoot and James Barbee was the cashier. Smoot always wore a swallow-tail coat and high hat and carried an umbrella and basket (the basket is said to have been usually empty).

### **309 MILL STREET – (Right Side) 16**

This building was built in the 1930's by R.S. Hall as a modern undertaking business and ambulance service. The original brick section survived Hurricane Agnes in 1972, while its additions were ripped off by the flood waters. Ravaging waters destroyed buildings, sidewalks, streets and the 1878 iron truss bridge that crossed the Occoquan River. After the flood many coffins were found floating down the river...all empty!

---

In 1930 Alice Maude Ewell wrote "One does not wonder that Washington artists love this place so well. I know of no other town in Virginia, Yorktown excepted, that beauty of situation can compare with Occoquan".

---

### **310 MILL STREET – (Left Side) 17**

The western frontier look of this 1977 building, with shops below and apartments above, adds to the diversity which is Occoquan.

### **311 MILL STREET – (Right Side) 18**

Constructed in the mid 1980's, this is a credit to the Town's Architectural Review Board as it fits in among buildings 200 years its senior.

## **COMMERCE STREET**

---

Joseph Martin writes the following in his *Gazetter* in 1835: "The town is regularly laid out, the streets generally cross each other at right angles. It contains about 50 dwelling houses, several mechanics, a cotton manufactory in complete operation.... An extensive manufacturing flour mill.....with appendages of grist, saw and plaster mills. A handsome and permanent bridge is erected across the river at this place.....the village is in flourishing condition and with confidence looks forward to further improvement."

---

### **126 COMMERCE STREET - (Left Side) 49**

Built in 2000, this building is reminiscent of the many general stores which once operated in Occoquan.

### **202 COMMERCE Street - (Left Side) 50**

Typical of houses built by local craftsmen in the 19<sup>th</sup> century this house was built in 1859 by John Turner who operated a store in part of the building. Some original shelves still remain. This also became the home of Mamie Davis for whom the park on Mill Street is named. Miss Mamie died in 1987, just a few weeks before her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday.

### **204 COMMERCE STREET – (left side) 51**

John Turner built this weatherboard house in 1875 for his daughter, Annie, who married James Newton Carter. Mamie Davis purchased it and kept it as a rental property. It came to be known as "The Teacherage" because so many teachers boarded here. The teachers loved "Miss Mamie" as she packed their lunches and for every holiday, she decorated the house, both indoors and out.

### **205 COMMERCE STREET – Private Residence(Right Side) 52**

Built circa 1920, this is a private residence and not open to the public.

### **206 COMMERCE STREET – (Left Side) 53**

Built between 1840-70, this building was originally a boarding house for Occoquan mill workers.

### **208 COMMERCE STREET – Private Residence (Left Side) 54**

Built in 1803 and restored in the 1960's, this house once served as a rooming house for young women brought from Canada to work in Occoquan's Cotton Factory which was located on the west end of Mill Street. The walk-in basement was the site of an Upholstery & Umbrella Repair shop. Now a private residence and not open to the public.

### **209 COMMERCE STREET—Private Residence (Right Side) 55**

Built in 1890 with subsequent additions, it is a private residence and not open to the public

### **210-214 COMMERCE STREET - (Left Side) 56**

This brick building was built in 1988. It was the site of the Slack Funeral Home (1920's & 30's). Undertaker Slack's hearse was a two-horse carriage (similar to a stagecoach) with black windows on both sides and was open from the back. Carl Eike, Jr., born in Occoquan/Woodbridge area, was quoted in 1979 describing his memories of Undertaker Slack "He had two old boney horses and a rickety old hearse, but I guess it made no difference to the dead person." Slack's wife was a milliner. One resident remembered that she carried the prettiest hats around with lots of ribbon and lace.

### **Cross over Union Street to continue on Commerce St.**

This is a good spot to look straight up Union Street. The extension of Union Street in the early 1900's became known as Tanyard Hill Road because of the leather tannery which was located at the top of the hill. Tanyard Hill Road is still the same narrow winding road it was centuries ago, minus the paving.

### **416 MILL STREET - (Left Side) 27**

This building was erected in 2000 on what were once the terraced lawns of Rockledge. Although relatively new, you can find old wood beams and a brick floor in the interior. The "bubble window" is handcrafted and copied from a picture.

### **STEEL STRUCTURE (Right Side) 28**

The steel structure to your right was for Dry Dock Boat Storage, operating from the 1960's thru the 1980's. Prior to 1916, an apartment house stood on this site and prior to that, the Country Mill operated here from 1757 – 1890.

### **ROCKLEDGE (Left Side) 29**

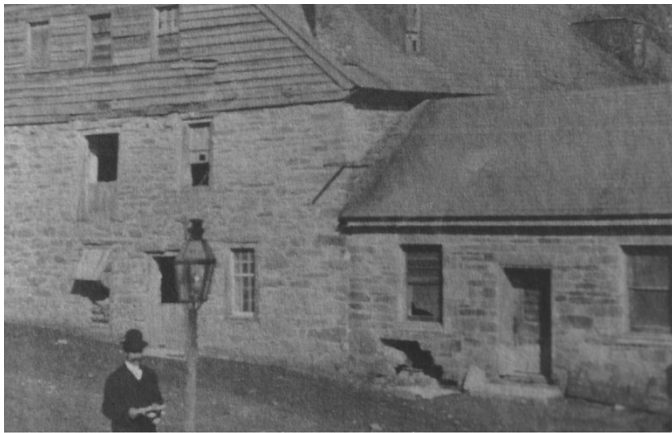
Continue walking east on Mill Street and look up on the hill.....Rockledge, the mansion on the hill, was built by industrialist John Ballendine who was a friend of George Mason of Gunston Hall and George Washington of Mt. Vernon (according to diaries of Washington). So it was no surprise that Ballendine procured the services of William Buckland, architect of Gunston Hall, to design and oversee the building of his home, Rockledge, in 1758. Rockledge is an 11 room house and is one room deep. Like Ballendine, the first owner of Rockledge, successive owners were entrepreneurs who sought to realize Occoquan's potential as an industrial and social center; Rockledge was gutted by fire in 1980 and later restored by the Houghtons, local builders. Rockledge is not open to the public.

**CARBIDE STORAGE (Left Side) 30**

This cement building was used to store carbide in the 1890's. Occoquan, as well as many towns, used carbide as fuel for its street lights. The iron gate is a recent addition.

**413 MILL STREET – Mill House Museum (Right Side) 31**

In 1755, industrialist John Ballendine acquired 230 acres on the Occoquan River with the purpose of erecting and operating a forge and a grist mill. The grist mill, built in 1759, became known as the Merchant's Mill because it was operated by merchants from Alexandria, Dumfries and other towns. Ballendine lost his industrial complex and home to creditors in 1765. Thomas Ellicott took over the operation and in the late 1790's installed an invention of Oliver Evans that made the Merchant's Mill the first automated grist mill in the country. George Washington sent his overseer, Tobias Lear, to inspect the mill with the idea of installing the invention in his grist mill at Mt. Vernon. In 1924 the Merchants Mill burned and only the miller's office survived the fire. It was converted into the Mill House Museum in 1969. Many pictures of the milling days, as well as local history and memorabilia, can be seen in the museum.



Ellicott's Merchant Mill for which Mill Street was named.

in 1938 in Occoquan. There were no fire departments in eastern Prince William County, or for that matter, between Alexandria and Fredericksburg. The first apparatus purchased was a 20 year-old 1918 American LaFrance Pumper. In 1958 the fire department moved from Occoquan to Woodbridge but to this day is still O.W.L.

**204 Washington Street (right side) 45**

This was a "corner grocery store" for 60 years. In 1914, Ogle Harris began making homemade ice cream to sell on weekends. On weekdays he worked at the wharf down the street. The ice cream business soon grew into a grocery store. According to Harris's son, Raymond, they would sell as much as 25 gallons of hand-cranked ice cream on a weekend. Harris bought sides of beef & lamb and cut them himself. Bushel baskets of produce brought by local farmers were lined up on the bench in front of the store. There were five stores operating in town, all amicably. They would refer customers to each other for merchandise they didn't have. This tradition prevails among shopkeepers today. Harris, whose father was a slave, became one of the most respected businessmen in town. He ran the store for 35 years and when he passed away in 1949, his sons took over and operated it until 1974.

**205 Washington St. - Private Residence (left side) 46**

This has been a private residence since it was built in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**206 Washington St.—Private Residence (right side) 47**

Ogle Harris was born in this house and it remains in the Harris family to this day. Old-timers remember a playhouse under the house. When someone new moved into town and couldn't find their children, they were told to look under the Harris home.

**209 WASHINGTON ST. Ebenezer Church (Left Side) 48**

Ebenezer Baptist Church was founded in 1883 by the Reverend Lewis Henry Bailey. He was a man of faith who was a slave until freed after the Civil War. He made his way from Texas to Alexandria to be reunited with his mother. He learned to read and write and answered the call to preach, often walking the long miles from Alexandria to Occoquan. The building is simple outside but inside it is bathed with the glow of the stained glass windows. Destroyed by fire in 1923, it was rebuilt within a year. This church nurtured the growth of Mount Olive Church in Woodbridge and the Zion Road Baptist Church in Burke, Va. As the congregation grew a larger church was built on Minnieville Rd. This Chapel remains an active part of Ebenezer Baptist Church for smaller services. The Occoquan River, with its many bounties for the Town, also served Ebenezer Baptist Church as a baptismal site in earlier days.



Rebuilding of Ebenezer Baptist Church 1923-24

**WASHINGTON STREET**

**202 Washington St. - (right side) 43**

An earlier residence stood here for three quarters of a century. This structure, built in 1989, was designed to be compatible with the surrounding architecture.

**203 Washington St. – (left side) 44**

The front of this building, facing Washington Street, is the original building. The back section was added in 1988-90. This was the original site of O.W.L. (Occoquan, Woodbridge, and Lorton) Volunteer Fire Department organized

**313 MILL STREET - (Right Side) 19**

Circa 1888, the bricks in the original portion of this building came from England as ballast for the ships loading at the Occoquan docks...look closely at the mortar – it’s ground oyster shell. The street level portion of this building housed Lynn’s General Store. The upper level, now Loft Gallery, was the home of the owner and his family. The first commercial ice storage house in the Washington area stood nearby along the river. River ice was harvested every winter and stored (stacked with straw between the blocks) for use in Occoquan, Washington D.C. and surrounding areas.

**314 MILL STREET – Occoquan Town Hall (Left Side) 20**

Built in 1920 as a Methodist Church, the stick-style trim, pointed arch windows and deep eaves of this building are reminiscent of past years when various congregations worshipped here. It served the Methodists, Baptists and Presbyterians before being acquired in 1963 to serve as the Occoquan Town Hall. The historic marker on the front lawn is a native blue granite boulder. Affixed to it is the official Virginia State plaque, dated August 1983, designating the original four block downtown area of Occoquan as a Virginia Historic Landmark District. In 1984, Occoquan was added to the National Register of Historic Places. The town is governed by a mayor and 5 council members elected every two years.

**402 MILL STREET – (Left Side) 21**

Note the mounting step between the street and the sidewalk – it was used in days gone by as an aid to mount horses or for ladies to step from their carriages. On this site in the 1800’s was a 22 room house/hospital belonging to Dr. John Powell – it was destroyed by the 1916 fire. The present house was built in 1919 and remained a private residence until the 1980’s. The Magnolia and the Red Maple on the corner of the lawn have been designated champion trees by Prince William County.

**403 MILL STREET – (Right Side) 22**

Formerly The Lyric Theatre, this was the only movie house in the area during the 1940’s; at that time 25 cents was the price of admission. People came from all over by car, rowboat and yacht to see the latest film. Note the door on the right side – this was the entrance to the projection room and to the balcony seats where the African-Americans sat (a sad reminder of segregation).

**405 MILL STREET – (Right Side) 23**

This building, circa 1920’s, was once one of five grocery stores in Occoquan.

**404 MILL STREET – (Left Side) 24**

Construction dates this building to the 1860’s. During renovation in the early 1970’s, a tin Civil War cup was found resting on the studding, left there during the original construction, sealed in the walls, untouched for nearly 100 years. No nails hold the grooved studding in place. This was once the Occoquan Drug Store which opened in 1908. It was owned then by Dr. Frank W. Hornbaker who was a medical doctor, pharmacist, movie house operator and he raised prized chickens. If you walk up the brick steps between the buildings, you’ll see where Dr. Hornbaker lived (above the pharmacy), now a café.

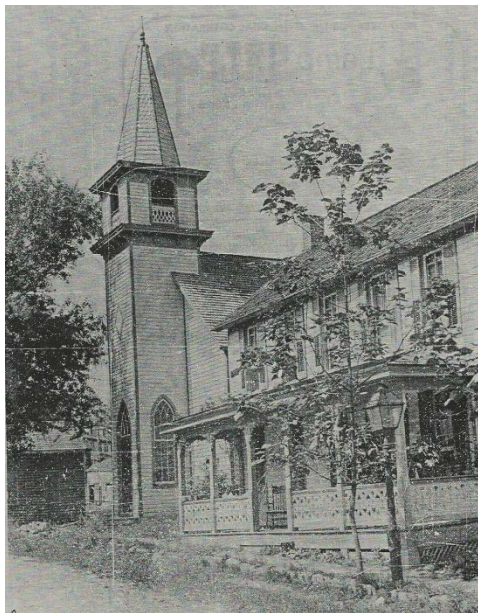
**406 MILL STREET – (Left Side) 25**

Could this have been one of the “log houses” that English novelist John Davis wrote about in his *Travels in America*, 1798-1802? This building was built circa 1750 and is the oldest building in Occoquan. Renovations in the early 1970’s uncovered massive logs that had been hand dressed for the basic house, and the stones in the foundation are the same as those used to build Rockledge. Mystery has surrounded this house for years. It is said that British spies were kept in the basement dungeon. Be sure to see the fireplace in the present shop - it is the original. Square headed hand forged nails hold the chestnut stairway in place. One report indicates that this building sold for \$400.00 in 1909.

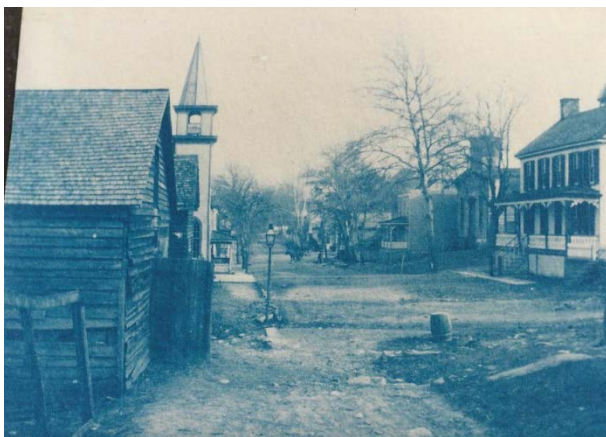
**408 MILL STREET – (Left Side) 26**

When you examine the 18<sup>th</sup> century dry stack stone work, you’ll be surprised to learn that this structure was built in 1988. Also in the style of the 1750’s is the Flemish bond brick.

Ebenezer Church Baptism- Occoquan River



Commerce Street before the 1916 fire



Commerce Street view from Ellicott Street circa 1890

## UNION STREET

---

John Davis, an Englishman touring the United States in 1803, wrote *Travels in America* and the following is an excerpt of his description of Occoquan: "On crossing a little bridge, I came within view of the settlement, which is romantic beyond conception. A beautiful river rolls its stream along mountains that rise abruptly from its bank, while on the opposite rocky shore, which appears to have been formed by a volcano, are seen two mills enveloped in foam and here and there a dwelling which has vast masses of stone for its foundation. The eye for some time is arrested by the uncommon scene; but it is soon relieved by a beautiful landscape that bounds the horizon. In a word, all the riches of nature are brought together in this spot, without confusion"

---



Destruction of the 1878 Pratt Truss Bridge by Hurricane Agnes in 1972.



Mill Street circa 1900

### 199 UNION STREET - (Left Side) 34

This country colonial was built in 1987. In earlier years, the town well was located in the courtyard behind this building. A maple tree, which was a landmark from 1765 to 1987, once stood on this patio; it had to be cut down for safety reasons.

### 199A UNION STREET – Courtyard (Left Side) 35

The small cottage, modeled after one in Williamsburg, was built in the 1960's.

### 201 UNION STREET- (Left Side) 36

Blue Arbor Café's space was once storage units for Lynn Electric Co. and was renovated for shops in 1976. During renovation bricks which pave the courtyard were brought here from the brick foundry at the Occoquan Workhouse.

### 201 UNION STREET - (Left Side) 37

This was built circa 1850's and renovated in the 1970's from a residence to commercial space. During renovation a sales slip dated 1856 from a Manassas Lumber Company was found.

### POPLAR ALLEY 38

And why Poplar Alley? At least two old-timers remember a stand of quick-growing trees (namely poplar trees) on Poplar Alley. They were destroyed by the fire of 1916 which swept from Mill to Commerce St. Poplar Alley was originally laid out "one wagon width wide" and its purpose was that of alleys....to provide rear access to buildings. In the day one would have found stables – lots of stables - and parking for carriages and wagons. You'll be happy to explore Poplar Alley with unique shops and cafes, some facing the alley while others are nestled between Poplar and Commerce Street.

### 203 UNION STREET - (Left Side) 39

The original structure was built in 1870 and many of the original architectural details were retained during renovations in the 1920's and again in 1970's. During the 1970's renovation, a set of ledgers dated 1870-1878 were found belonging to Dr. Malcolm, a veterinarian. This structure was originally a store, butcher shop and dwelling.

**As you walk the middle section of Union Street look to your right and left and note the houses facing each other. They were built by the same builder from the same set of plans, with minor alterations.**

### 204 UNION STREET (Right Side) 40

Built in 1870, this building was renovated in the 1950's and again in the 1980's. In the days of the stagecoach, the stage headquarters was just next door at the Hammill Hotel. The stagecoaches stopped at Union & Poplar Alley because of the then steep grade so as to allow passengers to safely dismount.

### 205 UNION STREET- (Left Side) 41

The original two-story section was built circa 1860. According to legend, Confederate General Wade Hampton who headquartered across the street at the Hammill Hotel during the Civil War escaped Federal troops by way of Ballywhack Creek which runs under this building and the entire length of Union Street and empties into the river. In the 1900's it was Tavener's Restaurant and Variety Store. Mrs. Tavener sold penny candy, "big cakes" for a nickel, extracts and flavorings.

## 206 UNION STREET (Right Side)

42

This building was once the Hammill Hotel built in 1804 by George Selecman. The Hammill Hotel was headquarters for stagecoach lines. Nathaniel Ellicott operated a stage line between Alexandria, Occoquan & Dumfries. By 1836, another stage line was being operated between Occoquan and Petersburg. Confederate General Wade Hampton headquartered here during the winter of 1863. During the severe housing shortage caused by World War II, the hotel was converted into the Beachwood Apartments. The upper levels remain apartments today.



Occoquan Inn 1972- Hurricane Agnes



Mill Street-Hurricane Agnes-1972



Civil War fight, as reported in Harper's Weekly 1862 "Fight at Occoquan, VA."

## FOOT BRIDGE (Right Side)

32

When leaving the Museum continue walking to your right and you will find the foot bridge crossing the Occoquan. This foot bridge marks the location of at least two earlier bridges. In 1795 Nathaniel Ellicott erected a wooden toll bridge. The tolls were "for each man crossing thereat, three cents, and for a horse the same; for every coach, wagon, chariot and driver, the same as for six horses; for every two wheeled carriage, the same as for two horses; for every hogshead of tobacco, the same as for one horse; for every head of cattle, the same as for one horse; for every sheep, hog, goat or lamb, one fifth part of the ferriage for one horse." Ellicott's bridge replaced John Hooe's ferry service across the Occoquan River. Yes, this is the Hooe family for which Hooe's Road is named (pronounced HOE, NOT WHO). In August 1805, the mail stage commenced running on this new route. The Gazetteer of Virginia refers to "a handsome and permanent bridge erected across the river at this place; over the bridge and through the town runs the great mail route from Washington to the South". The bridge was destroyed by fire during the Civil War. In 1878, the Prince William County Supervisors opened bonds to pay for the county's share of building a new bridge at this location. It was the only King Truss Bridge in the Washington area and was destroyed by Hurricane Agnes in 1972. A foot bridge replaced the King Truss Bridge and provides a beautiful view of the Town. The Va. Highway Dept. built a new vehicular bridge downstream in 1974.

John Davis, an Englishman touring the United States in 1803, wrote *Travels in America* and the following is an excerpt of his description of Occoquan.

"Yet no place can be more romantic than the view of Occoquan to a stranger, after crossing the rustic bridge, which has been constructed by the inhabitants across the stream. He contemplates the river urging its course along mountains that lose themselves among the clouds; he beholds vessels taking on board flour under the foam of the mills, and others deeply laden expanding their sails to the breeze; while every face wears contentment, every gale wafts health and echo from rocks multiplies the voices of the waggoners calling to their teams....On the north bank of the Occoquan is a pile of stones, which indicates that an Indian warrior is interred underneath. The Indians from the back settlements, in travelling to the northward, never fail to leave the main road and visit the grave of their departed hero. If a stone be thrown down, they religiously restore it to the pile, and sitting round the rude monument they meditate profoundly; catching perhaps, a local emotion from the place. A party of Indians, while I was at Occoquan, turned from the common road into the woods, to visit this grave on the bank of the river".

## COTTON FACTORY

33

As you walk from the foot bridge to the south side of Mill Street, about midway in the turn-a-round, look to your right. What is now part of Fairfax County Water Authority was in 1828 Occoquan's Cotton Factory. It was four stories high and operated 1,000 spindles. Annie McCracken was brought from Quebec at 16 years of age to train the girls who ran the spindles. The Cotton Mill was destroyed by Union sympathizers during the Civil War and the ruins were demolished in 1950. This area is closed to the public.



Ruins of Cotton Factory at Occoquan, VA. - Old Postcard