

Facts About the Blacksburg Community

Compiled by Leland B. Tate, 1946

Blacksburg, viewed as a community, is a combination of the town of Blacksburg and the surrounding countryside comprising the Blacksburg magisterial district.

It is located in the upland valleys and plateau region of Southwest Virginia and Montgomery County about 40 miles from Roanoke, 200 from Richmond, 270 from Washington, and 290 from Norfolk.

It has an area nearly 18 miles long and 8 miles wide, and contains 145 square miles of 92,800 acres, which is about one-third of Montgomery County. The area is drained by rivers flowing both eastward and westward, and therefore is on the divide between Atlantic streams and tributaries of the Mississippi. New River forms western boundary and branches of Roanoke and James Rivers tranverse the eastern borders.

Its elevation about sea level ranges from 1500 to 3000 feet and averages approximately 2000. The average is about 2200 feet for the town.

Its climate is relatively mild and humid. Records kept since 1875 show an average yearly temperature of 52 degrees, with no figure higher than 100. Rainfall has averaged 41 inches per year, and snowfall 22 inches.

The Blacksburg area was once the home of Indians but at the time of white settlements about 200 years ago was only a hunting ground for the red men who lived to the south and to the north.

Some of the early settlers were Scotch-Irish families with names such as Draper, Ingles, Buchanan, Brown, Preston, McDonald, Henderson, Rutledge, and Robinson; others were from German families with names such as Price, Harman, Harless, Kipps, Linkous and Broce. The Blacks came about 1780 and the Keisters about 1800.

Some of the early neighborhoods were Draper's Meadows, Price's Fork, Tom's Creek, and McDonald's Mill.

Draper's Meadow of 1748 just west of the present V. P. I. campus is considered by historians as one of the most important early settlements on westward flowing waters; and, as such is often called "The Jamestown of the West." The settlement consisted of separate farmsteads and a relatively small number of families who lived near each other and formed what we today would call a neighborhood. It was attacked by Indians in 1755, several persons were killed, most of the homes were destroyed, and

two women were captured by the Indians. One of these later escaped and the other was ransomed. In time the settlement was partially rebuilt and continued as one of several neighborhood settlements in this region prior to the establishment of the town of Blacksburg.

The town was not laid out until 1798--approximately 50 years after Draper's Meadow settlement. T. N. Conrad, an early president of V. P. I., in an article published in 1881 speaks of the town as "the burg of William Black" who gave the land for it. He says the first town houses were made of logs with one-story, no floors and no nails and that the Methodists were called to church by means of a large tin horn blown by Adam Croy. He says also that one of the early physicians was former Governor Floyd who lived in the old Preston house near the lake on the V. P. I. campus.

There are at least three important events in the development of the town of Blacksburg, The first was its establishment in 1798, the second was the establishment of the Olin and Preston Institute in 1854, and the third was the establishment of the Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College in 1872.

The history pertaining to the birth of the college is quite interesting. In 1862 Congress passed the so-called Morrill or Land Grant College Act giving the various states land from the public domain in the West, the proceeds from which could be used for the establishment of agricultural and mechanical colleges. While the Civil War was in progress, Virginia was outside the Union and consequently did not have a chance to accept the provisions of this bill until her return after the war. The Virginia General Assembly of 1872 decided it was time to act and make some use of the land script which entitled the state to 300,000 acres of the public domain. The script was sold at the rate of \$.95 per acre which brought in a total of \$285,000. One-third of this amount was given to Hampton Institute for Negro education and the other two-thirds was made available for the establishment of the new college at Blacksburg, provided the Olin and Preston Institute property could be used as a starter and Montgomery County citizens donate \$20,000 to the cause.

These requirements were met in 1872, a Board of Visitors was set up by the Governor and this Board proceeded to make arrangements for the opening of the college in October of that year. In July it met at the sulphur springs near Blacksburg and during this session purchased from Col. Robert Preston at \$85 per acre his farm of 250 acres and his home "Solitude," which still stands on the V. P. I. Campus. The Board also provided for a staff and employed a president, three professors and a secretary-treasurer. The latter was a sort of jack-of-all-trades. He was asked to be the librarian as well as secretary-treasurer to the Board and to the Faculty. This early history of V. P. I. is of particular importance because of the large influence which the college has had in the life of the community since 1872.

The Blacksburg community of today is a combination of town and country. This combined unit contains many local groupings or subdivisions called neighborhoods. Several of these are within the town itself and at least 25 are in the open-country areas of the Blacksburg district. Some of the neighborhoods are: Biter Hill, Blackwood, Cohee Road, Mt. Tabor, Pot-Liker Flats, and Snob Knob.

The total population of the community as of 1940 was 8,329. This was 39 percent of the county's population. The population of the town was 2,133 within corporate limits, and only one-fourth of the community's total. The entire population was rural, 69 percent nonfarm, and 94 percent white.

The service agencies are numerous in number, particularly the schools, churches, and grocery stores. For example, there are 16 public schools with a combined enrollment of about 1800 pupils, and ten town churches with a total of over 1700 members. There are many clubs, etc. that the community is actually top-heavy with organizations.

Blacksburg of recent years has been mainly a nonfarm type of community with a town center officially rural, but it is on the verge of having this town center transformed from a rural to an urban status. As a community, however, it will continue to be a combination of town and country highly flavored and influenced by the college which has been a large part of its life for 74 years.

<http://spec.lib.vt.edu/bicent/recoll/tatebbrg.htm>