

A HISTORY
of
Shenandoah County
VIRGINIA

By

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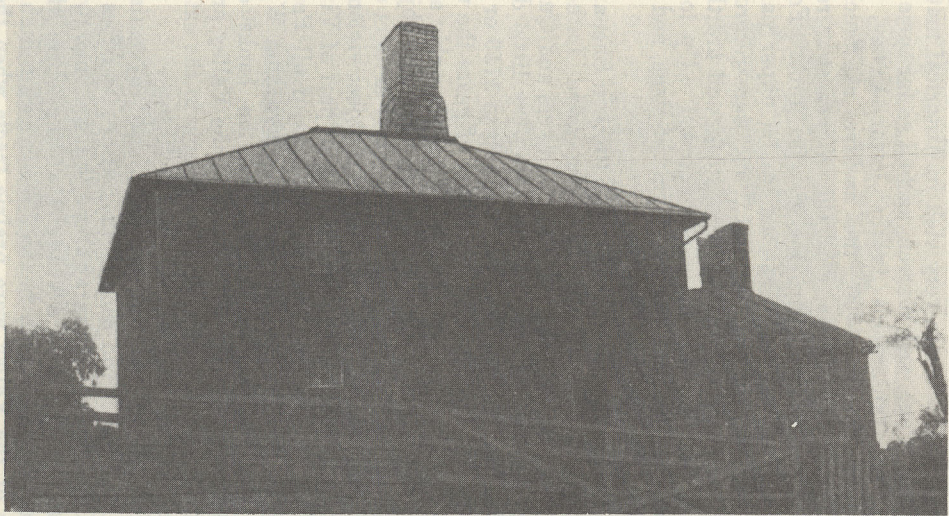
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A HISTORY OF ROCKINGHAM COUNTY, VIRGINIA, SCENIC AND HISTORICAL
GUIDE TO THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY, ART FOLIO OF THE
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"EGYPT" HOUSE, NEAR LURAY, VA. This ancient house of immense logs is perhaps the best preserved of the old fortified dwellings built in Page County when the Indian peril was very real. The original roof was very steep so that an Indian attempting to fire the house could not get a foothold. The $5\frac{1}{2}$ x15-foot chimney contains three fireplaces on the first floor, and under the house is a cellar-fort made fireproof by a heavy stone arched ceiling. There are six loopholes in the outer cellar walls, thru which to fire at the Indians. "Egypt" plantation was so named because its rich soil was compared to that of the river Nile.

Bottom and Meem's Bottom were also probably void of trees, as were numerous tracts of larger and smaller size here and there. The fires kindled annually by the Indians killed the tender sprouts of oak, pine, hickory, and other forest trees, and so the prairie tracts grew only grass and similar vegetation from year to year. After the whites came in and the prairie fires were checked, great forests grew up in many sections of the country.

The variety of wild animals that Kercheval names as roving denizens of the hills and valleys is remarkable. The buffalo, the elk, the deer, the bear, the panther, and the wolf were some of the larger ones; the wild-cat, the fox, the beaver, and the otter were also numerous. Bounties were early paid for wolf scalps, and later the killing of squirrels, crows, and other destructive animals and birds was occasionally encouraged by similar measures. Wild fowls, such as geese and ducks, abounded, and the streams were alive with fish. Fontaine, the historian of the Spotswood expedition, says: "I got some grasshoppers and fished; and another and I, we caught a dish of fish, some perch, and a fish they called chub. The others went a hunting, and killed deer and turkeys." Beaver skins soon became money; buckskin, carefully tanned, became popular for clothing; buffalo skins and bear skins, black and shaggy, made warm coats and bed covers; and coon skins were fashioned into picturesque caps for the woodsmen and hunters.

The pasturage was rich and abundant. One old settler told how he rode through the tall grass and tied it across the saddle in front of him. Many tracts which later became largely bare and barren were, at the time of the early settlements, covered with an abundant growth of grass and pea vines, affording excellent browsing for cattle, sheep, and swine. Consequently the pioneers found it profitable to raise many horses, cattle, and hogs, allowing them to run at large in the fields and forests. Tradition relates that one day in Winchester Lord Fairfax saw such a large drove of fine hogs that he hastened to inquire whence they came. "From the mountains west of here," was the reply. "Then," remarked his lordship, "whenever a new county is laid off in that direction it ought to be called Hampshire, after a county in England which is celebrated for its fine hogs."

In due time (1753) a county west of Winchester was laid off, and it was called Hampshire.

The houses of the settlers at first were mere huts of logs or brush, the cracks only partly closed with mud or bark. Now and then one lived for a season in a great hollow tree. As time passed and the clearings widened, larger and better houses of hewn logs were erected, and here and there was one of stone. The abundant ledges of limestone that crop out of the surface of the Valley in nearly every section afforded convenient and durable building material; consequently there are standing today in nearly every neighborhood one or two old stone houses, some of which were erected before the French and

Indian War. Others were built during the war or shortly following, and most of these were planned and furnished for defence. Nearly every one of them was built near or actually over a spring or a stream of water. They were provided with portholes, and some of them had under them cellars that were arched over with masonry and then covered with earth, so as to be fireproof. Above one of these vaulted cellars a house might have been burned and have fallen in ruins, and yet the occupants of the strong refuge beneath might still have been safe. In the Massanutten country are still preserved today no less than seven of these vaulted cellars. Most of the houses over them were built of stone, but one or two were of logs. It is probable that most of these houses were constructed shortly after the Rhodes massacre of 1764. On that occasion the dwelling house and other home buildings were burned.

The best known of these vaulted fort cellars is at the old Philip Long place, known as "Fort Long," which is located east of the river near Alma, in Page County, and is now owned by the Prices. Farther down the river, now on one side, now on the other, one comes to six others: "Locust Grove," the old home of Isaac Strickler, now owned by the Burners; the "White House," just below the Lee Highway bridge on the river; the Abram Strickler house, in that part of Massanutten known as "Egypt"; the Burner homestead, high on the east bank of the river; "Hope Farm," the old Roads place; and the old Stover house, just below the mouth of the Hawksbill. In Strickler's "Massanutten" are many details of surpassing interest regarding these old fort homes.

The old Sheets mill, on Narrow Passage Creek, is built up partly of stone and finished above with massive hewn logs. This ancient structure, it is said, was used as a place of refuge during the raids of Indian wars. It is located in a neighborhood that frequently suffered from attacks, due perhaps to the fact that it lies on or near one of the warrior paths that led across the Valley from northwest to southeast.