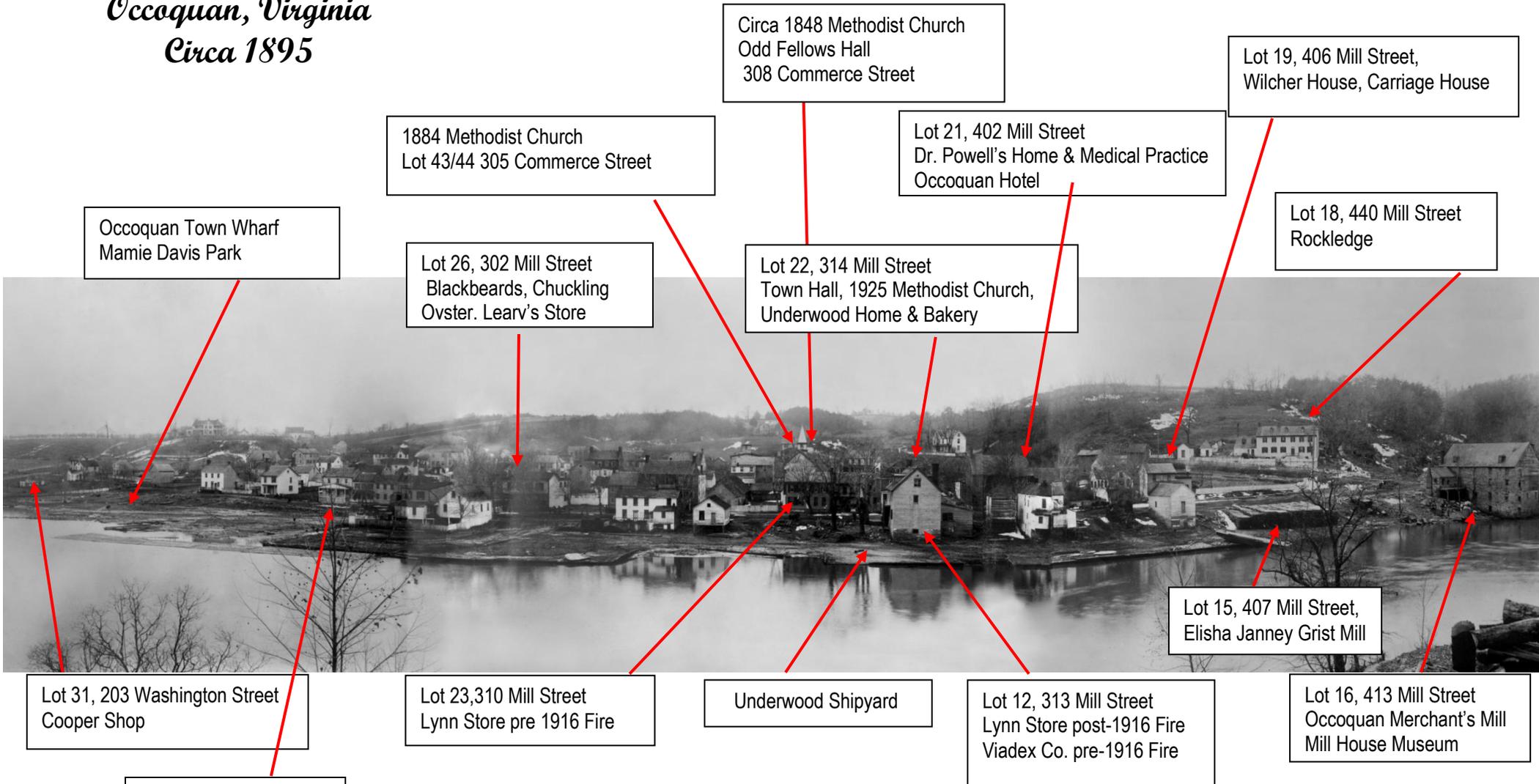


*Occoquan, Virginia  
Circa 1895*



Circa 1848 Methodist Church  
Odd Fellows Hall  
308 Commerce Street

Lot 19, 406 Mill Street,  
Wilcher House, Carriage House

1884 Methodist Church  
Lot 43/44 305 Commerce Street

Lot 21, 402 Mill Street  
Dr. Powell's Home & Medical Practice  
Occoquan Hotel

Occoquan Town Wharf  
Mamie Davis Park

Lot 18, 440 Mill Street  
Rockledge

Lot 26, 302 Mill Street  
Blackbeards, Chuckling  
Ovster. Lear's Store

Lot 22, 314 Mill Street  
Town Hall, 1925 Methodist Church,  
Underwood Home & Bakery

Lot 15, 407 Mill Street,  
Elisha Janney Grist Mill

Lot 31, 203 Washington Street  
Cooper Shop

Lot 23, 310 Mill Street  
Lynn Store pre 1916 Fire

Underwood Shipyard

Lot 12, 313 Mill Street  
Lynn Store post-1916 Fire  
Viadex Co. pre-1916 Fire

Lot 16, 413 Mill Street  
Occoquan Merchant's Mill  
Mill House Museum

Lot 28, 206 Mill Street  
Extended west to Union  
Street, the site includes  
3 townhouses.

*The Mill Racer  
Volume XII December Edition*

## Oral History Notes

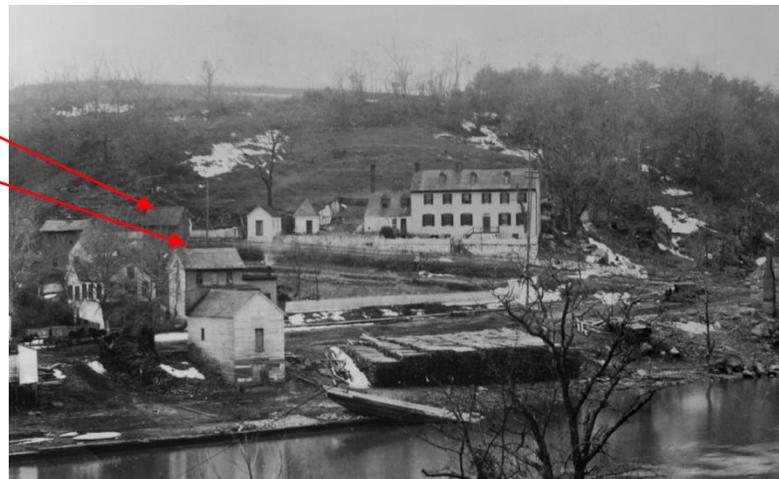
In the beginning of 2014 I included oral history notes in the winter newsletter from Fred & Edson Lynn, compiled by Martha Lynn. Recently I came across another file of oral history notes. Again they included Fred Lynn along with Mamie Davis, Mrs. Jessie Payne and Bine Cross. There is more description in these notes and some details not mentioned in the earlier group of notes. Any little notes in blue I added to help the reader locate some of the buildings and sites. I hope I'll get some feedback about the location of Carter's blacksmith shop and meat shop, and the Occoquan Bank. The townscape is included with several locations pointed out, and again the 1804 plat. *Dalores*

### Old Buildings in Occoquan Excerpt, Minutes of Gen. Membership Meeting January 27, 1970

The program consisted of reminiscences of Occoquan before the fire (1916) by Miss Mamie Davis and Mr. Fred Lynn.

Miss Mamie recalled the barges that would come two or three times a year from Philadelphia to take ties; the tunnel from Rockledge to the "carriage house" on the hill back of the Wilcher house (406 Mill Street), and the fact that she and other children of the village played in the two story brick carriage house. She remembered a cookie shop at Poplar Lane and Washington Street operated by the Smoots, who had come from Culpeper; the tannery on Tanyard Hill, as well as a store on that road and a pump on Mt. High Street as a source of water.

Carriage House?  
Wilcher House



Mr. Lynn remembered that the Work House was opened in 1910 (1908); that prisoners came to Woodbridge by train, were marched to Occoquan and then ferried across the Occoquan River to the present brick yard site (Occoquan Regional Park). He conducted an imaginary tour into the village, coming by wagon or carriage down Tanyard Hill, stopping first at the tubs (half-barrels) placed by the townspeople and supplied by a pipe from the hill to water thirsty horses. The first place of business entering the town was Carter's blacksmith shop, displaying the sign "I trust in the Lord; everybody else pays cash." Next door was the Occoquan Bank, then Carter's meat shop; Mrs. Slack's millinery Store (Lot 58). There was a shop where presently the Frame House is (Lot 39). (Note: Stage Door in 1979).

Across from the present Blackbeard's Inn (1979, Chuckling Oyster) (Lot 26) was the residence of the Carters; four families lived on Lot 26 in a type of townhouse. Where Hall's Funeral Home (309 Mill Street) is there was a 5&10 cent store. Lynn's store (Lot 23) was next to the present Town Hall. There was a ship yard on the street. Underwood's (Lot 22) had a brick oven to bake bread, with a long pole to pull loaves out. Where the present Lynn's store (313 Mill Street) is located was the Viadex Co., which manufactured direction-

finding devices in the days before there were road maps and route signs along the highways. Next to that was Boyce's Oyster House, where there was always an oyster boat tied up. Dr. Powell had a 22-room home (Lot 21) where Jessie Payne lives now; people would come to him for treatment and he would keep them until well, maintaining their horses in his own livery stable. Next to him was the home of the Hammills (Lots 19 & 20), relatives of those who ran the Hammill hotel (Lot 40) around the corner. Smoots ran a jewelry store where the bank is (308 Mill Street).

There would be wagons lined up stretching clear out of town, loaded with railroad ties and logs and grain, to be put on waiting ships. There was the "country mill" next to the bridge, where people would bring enough wheat to be ground into a barrel of flour, the miller would take part of the middlings for his labor, and then the flour would be carried back home on the wagon it came in. The original Janney Mill was where the old apartment house was. The Ellicott mill was 5 stories high. Water came down by a race almost to the present Wilcher House and then across the road to turn the mill wheels. Three-masted schooners would come in loaded with grain, have it milled and put into barrels which were loaded back on to the ships. Where the water pumping station is there used to be iron foundries, as well as a cotton mill (1828) which was destroyed in the Civil War (1862).

Everything that has ever happened to the town the river has been responsible for. The railroad was the first cause of loss of business because there was no more water traffic. A lot of cord wood was always piled up on the Fairfax side for loading on longboats, to be taken to Washington. Most of the ships that came in were three-masted, with no motor; would be poled in if the wind would not move them. The wharves used to be lined with fishing boats and people would come from Leesburg, Orange, Warrenton, etc., to carry home a wagon load of herring for salting. "We children would clean them for 10 cents a hundred." The ferry landing on the Fairfax side was where Wallace Lynn's house now stands. The Hammill burial ground was where the brick yard is, but some of the graves have been moved. Whatever we do, we must protect the river.

Miss Mamie 1/31/1979

Old Lyric Theater (403 Mill Street)

This was formerly the site of the Ledman Building, with a store on the first floor and apartments upstairs; destroyed by the fire on August 26, 1916 (per Edson Lynn's recollections to Nellie Curtis in April 1971)

Miss Mamie's House, 202 Commerce Street-Lot 62. She thinks this was built about 1858; her father bought it from "Aunt Ruth" in 1898. The living room was originally 2 rooms (old partition mark can still be seen in the ceiling) with 2 small rooms on the second floor. What is now her dining room was a store. The back living room and porch were later add-ons.

#### **Notes from conversation with Mrs. Jessie Payne of Occoquan, March 27, 1979**

201 Union Street (Lot 27) The house was built in 1918 using prison labor for rental by Mr. & Mrs. Harry Slack. (Mr. Slack was an undertaker in Occoquan, operating from a small building opening on what is now known as Poplar Alley., his home being nearby (Lot 58). This house adjoined property of Mrs. Betty (Tillman) Carter which Jessie and her husband Elmer E. Payne bought from Mrs. Carter's stepson Harry Carter after Mrs. Carter died. The Carter house had been on the corner of Mill & Union, so with the Slack house

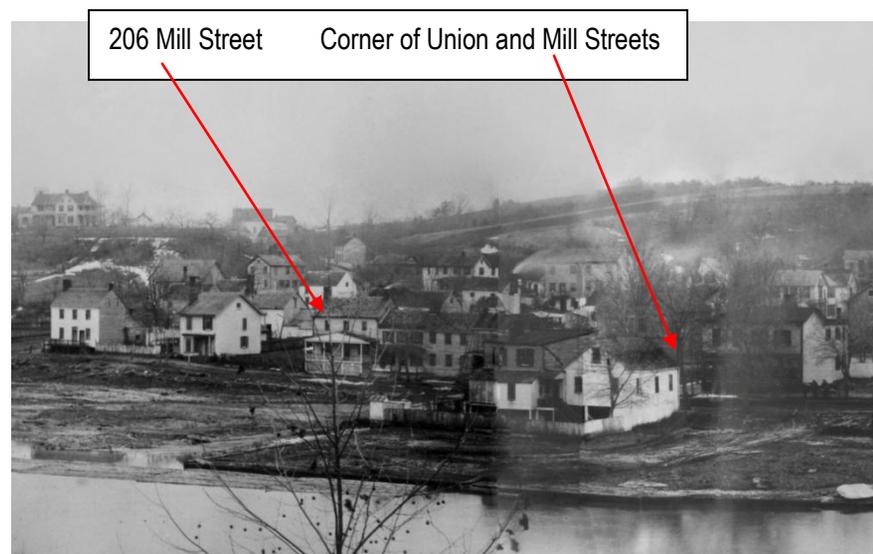
and the Carter property they owned land all the way to the corner of Mill and Union; plus a piece of land the Paynes bought from R.S. Hall to straighten up the lot. Mr. Payne built a number of edifices on the lot, which are now occupied as various shops (Riverfront General, Mountain Valley Handicrafts and others). As she remembers, there had been a barbershop on Union Street about where "Village Americana" now stands (201 Union) before Slacks had the present building erected in 1918. Jessie Payne sold 201 Union to Myron & Donald Lynn when she bought her present home. (The Slack home was on corner of Union and Commerce, built over the creek (Ballywhack) (foundation stone still there; house was torn down some years ago; Mrs. Harry (Martha) Slack had a millinery shop in her house at that location) (Lot 58).

206 Mill Street (Lot 29), now known as Waterfront Antiques (former Petellat house) Walter Carter was the original owner of this house but Jessie Payne does not know when it was built. Mrs. Gertie Slack had a shack on a piece of property along Mill Street which Howard Petellat bought. (See notes on talk with Mrs. Cross)

Notes from Bine Cross: Between 206 Mill Street and the corner of Union and Mill, and facing on Mill, there were three narrow, tall houses. Bine lived in the first one for awhile with her Aunt (on the corner, owned by Tilman Carter, whose wife was called Miss Betty- their daughter was Bernice Carter, then Mrs. Bob Insko, now Mrs. Robert Brenner (he is brother to Jessie (Mrs. Elmer E.) Payne.

Walter, Tilman and Harry Carter were brothers-Dickie Carter is son of Harry.

203 Union Street (Lot 39), Colchester Shoppe. Mrs. Payne does not know when this house was built, probably before 1900. Dr. Malcom lived here during WWI, and practiced veterinary medicine before he moved to the prison complex. Dr. Malcolm's wife was Ada Carter, daughter of Giles Carter who had operated a store and butcher shop on the first floor before the Malcolm's moved into the house; Duty, George and Elmer Cross and their parents lived upstairs over the store and butcher shop. Giles Carter had owned this building, then moved to a house where Pearl Lacey's yard is now, on Union above Commerce. Giles Carter also owned the Mooney house (304 Commerce).



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## Looking Forward

So much time is spent looking back through the years here at the museum that sometimes we need to not only look forward, but not dwell on the minor bumps on our daily road. If there hadn't been visionaries like John Ballendine and Nathaniel Ellicott, who hit plenty of speed bumps, Occoquan might not be the town it is today. Ballendine created Occoquan by purchasing 20 acres of land and building the first mill, a large iron furnace, and the house we know as Rockledge. If he didn't have vision and determination, he may have turned and ran when a local resident, George Washington, threatened to sue him over a misunderstanding of an iron purchase.

Ellicott in 1797, with his own money, built a bridge in Occoquan and a road leading people to his river crossing. We may never have had a river crossing in town had Ellicott not competed with the Mason bridge at the Colchester to Woodbridge crossing which was built in the same year.

As 2014 ends, we can look forward to 2015 and the creation of a beautiful park at the west end of Mill Street. There has been noise, dust, dirt, truck traffic and the accompanying irritations associated with a project this size. The end product will be more than worth those day to day bumps in the road! A waterfront park to enjoy the scenic beauty of the Occoquan River is something most of us never dreamed of. We will have a beautiful walk along the riverfront to watch the herons and eagles fly overhead, a place to enjoy a relaxing picnic and a site for quiet moments to reflect during a busy day.

Occoquan residents, business owners and visitors to this beautiful riverfront town will have so much to enjoy, the beauty of a scenic riverfront, delightful restaurants, unique shopping, and a rich history of people with vision who strive toward a future of prosperity for their town.

The three pictures on the left are from November 11, 2014 as the old pipe bridge is being removed. The view of the river is open up to the dams.



## Secret Garden Café

Dine at the Secret Garden Café on Fridays, January 2 or February 6

10% of sales will be donated to the Occoquan Historical Society.

Fridays 9a.m-10p.m. Reservations accepted. See you there!

404 Mill Street, Occoquan, VA 22125

703-494-2848

thesgcafe@yahoo.com



### Mill House Museum & Occoquan Historical Society

Museum daily 11 a.m. - 4p.m

PO Box 65, 413 Mill Street, Occoquan, VA 22125

703-491-7525

[www.occoquanhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.occoquanhistoricalsociety.org)

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