



A Walking Tour of ATOKA

Historic Rector's Crossroads, Virginia

1. Rector's Crossroads. This tiny crossroads village you see is named for the Rector family, whose prominent stone home still sits here at the intersection. The village was renamed "Atoka" to avoid confusion with nearby Rectortown in 1893. When the Civil War broke in 1861, this intersection was one of the busiest in the region—and it still is. During the Civil War, Confederate guerilla cavalry leader John Singleton Mosby used this crossroads as his most frequent "rendezvous" point for his



rangers before their daring raids against the invading Union armies. Raids attacked Union wagon trains, communications, railroads, columns, and cavalry outposts to tie up federal troops in Northern Virginia, a sort of "psychological war-fare" on the Union war effort. The men would gather just south of the crossroads on Rt. 713 (Atoka Road, opposite the store) in a one-room stone schoolhouse that still stands in a wood on the east side of the road; meanwhile, pickets would guard this intersection. Mosby

chose this location because it had a springhouse, blacksmith, store, and gave easy access to multiple points in Fauquier, Loudoun, Clarke, and Fairfax counties. The Ashby's Gap Turnpike ran west out of the village toward Winchester, heading over the 4-arched Goose Creek Bridge (1803) which can still be visited one mile west of the village. [Take Rt. 50 west to Lemmon's Bottom Rd.; the old bridge is parallel to modern Rt. 50 but 200 yards north.] You can still see portions of this early toll road running east to Middleburg along the stone fence that exits the village. From there, the turnpike went to the mill village of Aldie, to Fairfax Courthouse, and on to the Potomac River port of Alexandria. Going uphill from the store, is the road south to Rectortown (a railroad village), Salem (now renamed Marshall), Warrenton, and ultimately, Fredericksburg, another port. To the west side of the store, the turnpike ran north to the village of Unison, on to Snickersville (now Bluemont), and over Snicker's Gap into the Shenandoah Valley (where Rt. 7 crosses today). Nearly half of Mosby's raids left from this village, sometimes with as many as 250-400 men heading in multiple directions on multiple raids. The village consequently

occurred on Sunday morning, June 21st. Union General Pleasanton's Union cavalry was pushing west on the Ashby's Gap Turnpike trying to ascertain the location of Robert E. Lee's Confederate Army of Northern Virginia ten days before Gettysburg and was being slowed by Confederate General J.E.B. Stuart's cavalry. On this ridge, Angus Brown's 1st South Carolina Cavalry made a fierce stand as Union cavalry and artillery attacked from the direction of Middleburg.

8. The Back Yard of the Stone Rector House.

On that Sunday June 21, 1863, federal infantry charged through this yard after overcoming Angus Brown's resistance on the ridge just to the east. The famed 20th Maine Infantry—who would make a stand on Little Round Top eleven days later—was one of the units who came through. **The next night—June 22-23—**General J.E.B. Stuart set up his headquarters in this same lovely yard. Stuart was asleep early on the morning of June 23rd when a courier arrived in the rain with General Lee's orders to follow the Army of Northern Virginia north (ultimately, to Gettysburg). The order allowed wide latitude to Stuart in terms of timing and route. Based on scouting by Colonel John S. Mosby, Stuart headed well east to get around the Union armies before crossing the Potomac, and arrived critically late during the Battle of Gettysburg. Mosby defended Stuart's route until his dying day.



9. Victorian Home Set Back from the Road Beside the Rector House.

This spacious home was built by storekeeper Clarence Rector in 1893.

10. The Field across from the Store.



In this field, June 21, 1863, Angus Brown's 1st South Carolina Cavalry made another stand, having fallen back from the ridge to the east where the Virginia Civil War Trails sign now stands. Brown was buying time for General J.E.B. Stuart's cavalry and horse artillery to get across the four-arch stone turnpike bridge over Goose Creek just to the northwest. Finally dislodged by a combined federal infantry and cavalry attack, the small band fell back and galloped across Goose Creek bridge with Union guns raking his columns. The Confederate horse artillery had successfully taken a commanding position on the ridge on the bridge's west side with the time Brown had bought. A hearty fight ensued.

To visit to this picturesque ancient bridge, drive 1 mile west on Rte. 50 to Lemmon's Bottom Road on the right. A sign explains the bridge action.

saw a huge number of federal cavalrymen come through looking for Colonel Mosby—or being chased back through by the Rangers!

2. The Caleb Rector House. Built in 1801, this stone house that still dominates Rector's Crossroads was the home of farmers Caleb and Mary



Ann Rector in 1861. Eight slaves in two slave houses lived at this farm. The Rector's son Caleb, Jr. joined the local cavalry company in 1861, the Dulany Troop, raised by Richard Henry Dulany, the owner of nearby Welbourne. It became a part of the 6th Virginia Cavalry. Caleb Jr. was captured

at Yellow Tavern, six miles north of Richmond, within feet of where General J.E.B. Stuart was killed in the same fight, May 12, 1864. Caleb Jr. died in Point Lookout POW Camp in Maryland. For the Rectors, the arrival of the Gray Ghost, John Singleton Mosby, changed things at Rector's Crossroads. With orders to run a "special operations" unit using selected Confederate cavalrymen housed in willing local "safe houses," Mosby's men often "rendezvoused" at this central crossroads. It was in the Rector's parlor (the east/left front room) that Mosby formalized his operation, creating Company A of the 43rd Virginia Cavalry on June 10, 1863, and choosing four young proven officers, Captain James William Foster, and Lieutenants William Hunter, Tom Turner, and George Whitescarver, to be elected by the rest of the men (Mosby wasn't a great believer in *electing* officers). Within 24 hours, Whitescarver was dead in a raid against Seneca Mills, Maryland. Willie Foster was captured in a Middleburg barbershop by a Union cavalry dragnet the day after that.

3. The Store Across the Street. During the Civil War, today's current 1892 store had an earlier counterpart in the same location. It was built in 1851 by David Denham. Intermittently, a post office was run out of the store. It was obviously an attraction during a Mosby Ranger rendezvous. After the War, many an evening the ex-Rangers gathered to tell their tales—and that continued with the current 1892 store as the Rangers aged. Today, the store sells sandwiches, pizza, and cold drinks.



4. An Ancient Virginia House to the Left of the Store. Built in 1801, the Angus Brown House is *log* beneath its skin, common in these parts. It

saw many a Union cavalryman ride by in search of Mosby. It now houses preservation-minded non-profits.

5. Beside and Behind the Store—the Blacksmith. To the right of the store



today is a white clapboard structure that was built in 1927 as a gas station; it now houses offices. On this location at the time of the Civil War was the gas station's predecessor, a blacksmith shop. Reputedly run by Hamilton Davis with help from his one slave, the Rangers used this shop

before a rendezvous to have their horses shod and ready for the likely two-day ride of a "raid." It was one of the reasons Mosby often selected Rector's Crossroads for a rendezvous. While the shop is gone, *behind* the current store still stands the blacksmith's simple four-room house. A classic piece of antebellum Virginia architecture, it can be seen by stepping a few feet down the lane to the left of the store. Please respect the homeowner's privacy.

6. East (to the right) of the Store is Still Rector's Springhouse. This

simple stone springhouse was originally at grade with the turnpike, and the modern Route 50 that bypasses the village was not there. It belonged to Caleb Rector across the street, and was quite standard for a Virginia farmhouse. Here the Rangers watered their horses before embarking on raids. It was used before the famed March 1863 Fairfax Courthouse Raid.



7. East Along the Turnpike—A Virginia Civil War Trails sign.

Across Atoka Road from the springhouse you will see a small parking lot and above it a Virginia Civil War Trails sign. It tells of a piece of the huge June, 1863 cavalry battle of Aldie-Middleburg-Upperville that

