

Loudoun in the Great War

Exploring World War I Loudoun

-A Virginia Walking & Driving Tour-



Doughboys show their military pride to Virginia's Governor Westmoreland Davis of Loudoun, 1918.

WESTMORELAND DAVIS MEMORIAL FOUNDATION COLLECTION



**A Mosby Heritage Area Association
World War I Centennial Publication**

WWW.MOSBYHERITAGEAREA.ORG

Loudoun in the Great War

Exploring World War I Loudoun

*Conceived, researched, photographed, and written by
Mosby Heritage Area Historian Emeritus **Richard T. Gillespie.***

© 2017 Mosby Heritage Area Association

In 1917, Northern Virginia's Loudoun County had just begun to emerge from the shadow of the Civil War that had devastated it a half-century earlier. It was still a rural county of some 21,000 souls, but now was plunging into a second agricultural revolution, with the latest technology being employed to raise cattle, horses, and grain. Dotted across the landscape were small towns including Leesburg, the county seat, with a population of just over 1,500, and railroad towns of the Southern Railroad including Purcellville with over 500, Round Hill with over 350, Hamilton with under 300, and a smattering of still-extant 18th-century villages including Waterford, Hillsboro, Middleburg, and Bluemont.

When the Great War began in August of 1914, the Allies were quickly drawn to Loudoun because of its stock of fine horses. Indeed, even here in the famed Virginia Hunt Country that had attracted the Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Washington elite at the turn-of-the-century, the price of horses—and grain we grew—rapidly skyrocketed. In between assessing the merits of speakers on women's suffrage, voting in Virginia prohibition, upping the ante with segregation, hearing the latest religious speakers at Purcellville's summer Bush Meeting and African-Americans of note at the September Emancipation Association celebration, residents were keenly aware of the horror of the enormous, long-feared Great War across the Atlantic. Indeed, we saw it in news reels—that was enough. As farms prospered with Virginia-born President Woodrow Wilson in the White House, there was little taste for becoming engaged in this war.

In early 1917, with Germany's declaration of total submarine warfare (even on neutrals like America) and the breaking news of the intercepted Zimmermann Telegram just weeks later (in which Germany encouraged Mexico to join the war by invading us!), minds changed rapidly. When war was declared on April 6th, Loudoun would do its part.

This walking tour uses Loudoun's county seat, Leesburg, and western Loudoun's Purcellville, a smaller, rural, agri-business town, to look at the First World War's impact on everyday Virginians. It will also bring you to the home of Virginia's wartime Governor, Westmoreland Davis.

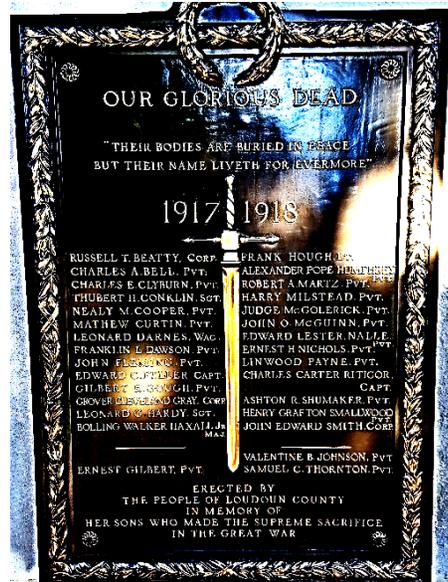
PART ONE: Leesburg, a walking tour, 1917-18.

1. Loudoun County Courthouse and World War I Memorial.

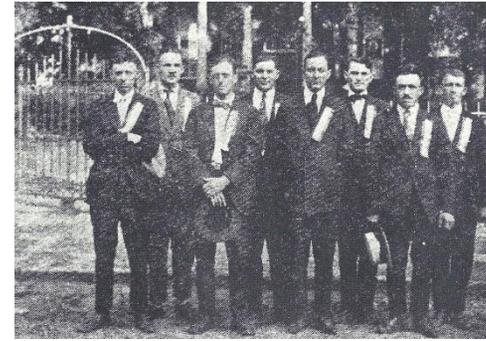


During America's participation in the First World War, it was on the lawn of the 1894 courthouse building that draftees—591 of them between August 1917 and November 1918—mustered in. It is fitting that on the south (East Market Street) side of the courthouse

sits a memorial to Loudoun's World War I dead. Nineteen were lost from combat or training injury, another twelve from illness including the Spanish influenza epidemic of 1918. Examining the plaque, you will notice the name of Oatlands-born Mountain Gap School educated Charles Riticour, a company captain felled in the August 1918 Second Battle of the Marne. A chemical engineer graduated from Washington & Lee, he was ironically felled by the shrapnel and gas from a new type of chemical German shell. Hamilton-born U.S. Marine officer Edward C. Fuller was killed in combat at the famous Marine battlefield at Belleau Wood in June 1918. Three names who are below the others are the proud African-American soldiers from Loudoun who served and fell in the "Great War." World War I veterans posed on this courthouse lawn in 1922. The photos, too, were segregated.



Directions to this first site: Loudoun's courthouse sits in the middle of Leesburg at the historic main intersection—at King (Business Rt. 15) and Market (Business Rt. 7) Streets—on the northeast corner. Loudoun's Loudoun World War Memorial sits to the right (south) of the 1894 courthouse with the memorials of several other wars. Sit and ponder for a bit as you read the names.



2. The World War I Draftee Photo site at the courthouse iron gates. It became the habit of the *Loudoun Times*, the brand new (1916) Loudoun newspaper at 6 West Market Street to have the latest batch of World War draftees pose in front of the

courthouse fence facing North King Street before they were marched to the Southern Railroad Depot on the south east edge of town. The newspaper offered the local boys going to France a free subscription to the paper in return for a letter from "Over There" telling of what they were seeing. These were printed weekly, and helped those on the home front understand the War. Lt. Charles Riticour of the village of Oatlands wrote home in July 1918 hinting at the nature of things:

"I have just received an order this afternoon to go back with some more officers to the front lines in a few days for another week. I am not crazy about going this time as the first time for it is not new and besides it is far from fun. Someday I will tell you all about the war over here."

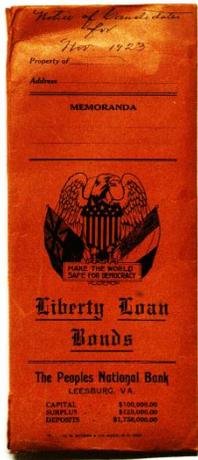
Just before this was printed, Riticour was fatally wounded.

Directions: In front of the courthouse, step down below the 1908 statue of the Confederate soldier through the main turnstile gate, then take a few steps left towards the stoplight. Stand in front of the iron fence, looking towards the street. You will be posed correctly, facing the newspaper office. Photo courtesy LOUDOUN TIMES-MIRROR.

3. People's National Bank, where you could buy Liberty Bonds with your savings. The People's National Bank had been built in 1885, led by Civil War cavalry hero Elijah V. White. In 1905, it was expanded and virtually rebuilt. This was the largest of Loudoun's five



banks in 1917-18. As a member of the new Federal Reserve System begun in 1914, People's sold bonds for the Liberty Loan drives, which, together with less expensive War Savings and Thrift Stamps, funded two-thirds of the U.S.



participation in the war. Increased taxes funded most of the rest. Patriotic Loudouners purchased well more than their share—1,123 citizens purchased War Bonds like the one shown here from People's Bank, urged

on by newspaper advertisements and local rallies.

Directions: From your posing place on North King Street, look across to the handsome, Victorian, flag-bedecked Lightfoot Restaurant, People's National Bank in 1917-18.

4. The Southern Railway Station, where Loudoun's draftees boarded the train for training at Camp Lee.



On induction day, after meeting at the courthouse and posing for their picture, inductees were marched

down South Church Street to the Southern Railroad Depot. They would entrain for Alexandria, then switch trains to head south to Camp Lee



(below) near Petersburg, Virginia where over 23,000 Virginians, West Virginians, and Pennsylvanians trained to become combat-ready members of the vaunted 80th Blue Ridge Division



before being shipped to France in June 1918. Some landed at St. Nazaire, others at Brest, France. Traffic to the station ended at the end of May, 1951. Ultimately, it was moved several blocks to become a restaurant at "Market Station" in the mid-1980s.

Directions: Turn left, walk to the stoplight, and cross over East Market Street. Once across, turn left, and head up East Market Street opposite the courthouse past the Post Office to South Church Street. This quiet lane was used by draftees to walk down to the train station. At East Loudoun Street, turn left, crossing it at the next intersection onto South Harrison Street. There is a parking lot for Market Station at the intersection; at its back, now converted to a restaurant, is the telltale yellow and green of the Southern Railroad Station, now moved one block north.

6. Site of the Old Opera House.



In this fine Victorian meeting hall, torn down in 1955 to make way for a new department store as part of urban renewal, residents watched silent films with World War I newsreels and heard speakers push Liberty Bonds—or even a possible women's right to vote amendment.

Directions: Recross East Loudoun Street, and turn left to head up the hill towards the stop light at South King Street. At the near right corner of the intersection as you wait for the light is a modern brick building housing an antique store. Here stood the Leesburg Opera House.

7. The Loudoun Museum.

The Loudoun Museum is a good place to get oriented to Leesburg and Loudoun's past, including the First World War. Artifacts from the war are on display. In 1917-18, it was an African-American restaurant, the Dew Drop Inn, where the Great War was discussed. The brick building to the rear was an Odd Fellows Hall, one of American's largest fraternal organizations.



Fellows Hall, one of American's largest fraternal organizations.

Directions: Continue across the King Street intersection on Loudoun Street one block to Wirt Street. At the intersection sits the Loudoun Museum, with entrance around to the east side.

8. Old First Mount Olive Baptist Church.

Once Leesburg's first African-American School (built 1866-67), this became a Baptist Church in 1884. At the time of World War I, it also had a Masonic Hall upstairs. Here the World War was followed intensely, and parishioners tended to volunteer war work as at all local churches. Leesburg also had two other black churches in 1917-18, both still standing. This congregation moved to a larger church on W. Loudoun Street.

Directions: Continue on West Loudoun Street one more block, turning right onto Liberty Street. Old First Mt. Olive Baptist Church is at No. 14 on your right.



9. Thomas Balch Library of History and Genealogy.

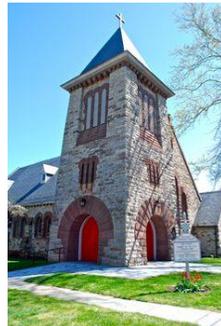
With an amazing array of local history resources including World War I era newspapers, this is the key place to conduct your research. The library was built in 1922.

Directions: Continue on Liberty Street to West Market Street. Cross and turn left onto West Market to the library at 208.



10. St. James Episcopal Church, Leesburg's most prominent and affluent in 1917-18.

Leesburg had five white and three black churches in 1917-18. This 1895 Episcopal Church replaced a simpler brick church that once sat east of the courthouse on Church Street. At the time of the World War, this was the wealthiest white church and claimed many prominent local parishioners. Here as at other area churches, the prayers for "our boys over there" and weekday work to gather bandages, socks, and packages, made the church a center of wartime activity.



Episcopalians naturally sympathized with Great Britain, the mother of their Church, who entered the World War at the outbreak to reverse Germany's invasion of Belgium.

Directions: Reverse direction on West Market Street, heading east toward the courthouse 1 1/2 blocks to Wirt Street. Turn left, and go one block on Wirt to West Cornwall Street. At the far right corner of this intersection sits the stone St. James Episcopal Church.

9. Leesburg Training School.

In 1917-18 Leesburg was a segregated town—businesses, churches, schools and even neighborhoods were all thus impacted. This 1884 clapboard building was Loudoun's only secondary school for African-Americans. It was not a "high school", but a "training school." Those with more talent headed south and boarded at Miss Jennie Dean's Manassas Industrial School. Graduates of this Training School fought in the First World War. As you walked here, you passed the new white high school at Wirt and North Streets built in 1925 to replace an earlier, brick structure on the site. Here, this simple wooden training school would have to suffice with electricity and a one-story addition added after the War until a modern black high school was built in response to African-American protests in 1939-40.



Directions: Continue on Wirt Street two long blocks to Union Street. At this intersection, sitting behind a single-story flat-roofed brick building, sits the two-story white Leesburg Training School.



10. **Union Cemetery.** Loudoun's largest cemetery had opened just before the Civil War as the Union of Churches (white) Cemetery. A black cemetery, Mt. Zion, was built one block west after the Civil War. A number of World War I dead along with those who fought and returned are buried and marked here.

Directions: The gate to Union Cemetery is to the left of the school.

Return to your vehicle for the next part of this tour.

PART TWO: Morven Park, home of Virginia's Wartime Governor, Westmoreland Davis.



11. **Morven Park.** Morven Park is not a *park*—it is one of Loudoun's largest hunt country estates. Begun in the late 18th century, it was massively enlarged by Thomas Swann, Jr., President of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad and the Mayor of Baltimore in the 1850s as his

weekend-summer estate, which the locals nicknamed "Swann's Castle". The grounds had been landscaped with the counsel of Frederick Law Olmstead. When purchased by New York financial lawyer Westmoreland Davis in 1903 to celebrate his Virginia roots and participate in hunt country sports, it still was a handsome estate. He flourished here.



Living at Leesburg, Davis became concerned with farmer issues common to the Progressive way of thinking, and successfully ran for Governor of Virginia in 1917, defeating two other candidates, one the machine favorite. Thus in February 1918, Davis became Governor in the tenth month of



America's participation in the World War and moved to Richmond to govern. Davis worked to put Virginia on a full war footing, promoted bond-buying and patriotism (he flew in a biplane and took a submarine voyage in the James River!), spent time with the soldiers, and supported his wife in being the model wartime citizen. Virginia



First Lady Marguerite Davis nursed, packed ammunition at the new Seven Pines Ammunition Depot near Richmond, and visited soldiers. They took weekend and summer holidays at Morven Park. The material culture of Morven Park rings of the World War I period, and features artifacts both from the War and Davis' governorship. He was one of Virginia's most successful Progressive reform leaders in the Wilson mold. Marguerite Davis (seen here in her nurse's uniform) modeled the activist "new" woman. In addition to the mansion and handsome 1000-acre grounds, the Museum of Hounds & Hunting and the Winmill Carriage Museum are here. It is a key Virginia World War I site.

PHOTOS OF THE DAVISES COURTESY OF WESTMORELAND DAVID MEMORIAL FOUNDATION

Directions: From West Market Street and the downtown parking garage, head a short distance west to Wirt Street at the Exxon filling station. Take Wirt Street two blocks to North Street, turn left, and continue as North wraps around the old high school to become Old Waterford Road. The marble gate into Morven Park sits on the right past the Rust Library and Morven Park Equine Veterinary Center—about a half mile from North Street.

PART THREE: Purcellville Walking Tour, 1917-18.

Directions: Go back out to Old Waterford Road, turning left and going a few hundred yards to Fairview Street NW. Take this out to West Market Street where there is a stoplight. Turn right, and then take the exit ramp onto Route 7 West. Take this 9 miles to the Route 287 Purcellville/Lovettsville exit. At the end of the exit, turn left onto Route 287 and go to the first stoplight at Hirst Road. Turn right and follow Hirst Road three blocks to Rt. 690, Hillsboro Road. Turn left and motor in to Purcellville, being cautious of the low speed limit. At the top of the hill you will see a yellow and green railroad station at left, and just beyond, a parking lot between 21st and 23rd Streets. Begin your tour at the train station.

12. **The Purcellville Southern Railroad Station.** In World War I America, rail was the primary mode of land-based transportation. Leesburg and small towns like Purcellville were all connected to



larger hubs. In 1917-18, this station served a network known as the Southern Railroad, with its distinctive yellow and green station. Later known as the Washington & Old Dominion, this railroad connected Purcellville to Leesburg, and east to both Washington and

the port city of Alexandria. Purcellville, a small agri-business center with a population of just over 500 souls, could serve the shopping needs of the farm families in the area, yet for more distinctive shopping, citizens took the train to Leesburg or to the “department stores” of Washington, D.C. The railroad was newly electrified in 1912, replacing steam. The station sat next to both the electric plant which once sat on the other side of the tracks (now the W & OD bike trail) and provided power to the towns of Purcellville, Hamilton, and Round Hill along the tracks as well as the villages of Hillsboro to the north and Lincoln to the south. [Rural areas just weren’t served with the luxury of electricity until just before or after the Second World War.] This ca. 1903-04 station served passengers and freight.

Those drafted for the World War from the Purcellville area came to this station to catch the milk train to Leesburg for mustering in at the courthouse. You can still visit the white waiting room, but the “colored” waiting room was lost in a 1990s modification of the building. Before they were drafted, young men had loved to stand around this station waiting for a possible gig unloading a freight car for pocket change to use up at the drug store which stood at the end of Depot (21st) Street. Cigarettes (Camels, Lucky Strikes, or Chesterfields), candy, or Coca-colas were the rage at the time of the World War. The mailman with his wagon—still—also waited here, received mail as many as six times a day. The wagon sagged.

13. **The Smith and Hirst Mill (now Magnolia’s Restaurant).**

This grist mill was built in 1905 by John R. Smith and John T. Hirst, partners, to replace an earlier mill destroyed by fire. Luckily, they survived the Great Purcellville Fire of November 1914 that damaged much of the downtown section—it may have

been by the tin-cladding then on the yellow building. By the World



War, the mill was electrified, and did a variety of grain milling in an area still known for its grain and the cattle and horses that often consumed it. Grain was also stored here in the grain elevator (that’s why the building is so tall) waiting for the prices to be right at the Georgetown end of the railroad. The railroad station reported these when they came in on the telegraph. The fact that American had “Wheatless Wednesdays” during World War I as part of the U.S. Food Administration’s effort to voluntarily ration certainly indicates just how important the wheat from a mill like this one was to America and its Allies during wartime. It must have been difficult with miles of wheat around! The sons of both Smith and Hirst were called up to fight in France. The mill continued to grind as Loudoun Valley Milling until 1992.

Directions: Now Magnolia’s Restaurant (where you can see the innards of the mill), the yellow Smith and Hirst Mill still sits next to the railroad station and its long-ago telegraph.

14. **Purcellville Motor Car Company at Steele’s Garage.**



This vintage 1874 building opened to sell farm machinery and wagons—often Studebaker wagons—but in 1913 began to sell Model T mass-produced Fords. By 1917-18, Loudoun County had entered the motoring age; it had been ten years since the first

tracks of an early automobile fire were saved in awe in the dust for a week. Beginning in 1915, Buicks were sold here. While almost all area farms were plowed by teams of horses during World War I just like American artillery in France, change was rapidly coming.

Directions: Both the station and mill sit along Depot Street as people in 1917-18 would have called it, now called 21st Street. As you head away from these buildings toward Main Street, the first building on the right in white is the garage, now an antique mall. It is one of the town’s older buildings, erected in 1874.

15. **Nichol's Hardware Store and Hampton's Livery Stable.**

Brand new during the World War, Nichols & Warner Hardware



had just opened in December 1914, four months after the opening shots of the war. This store once had two competitors, but its vast array of wares has allowed it survive as a legend. Farmers delivering milk to the nearby train station frequented this store first thing in the

morning so they opened quite early. If you'd like to see what a store from the era of World War I looks like, go inside.

Note: A part of Nichols' is a tall, gray clapboard building that was a livery stable built in 1908. Here travelers or "drummers" (travelling salesmen) arriving by train could still rent a horse and buggy. You'll likely see the center arch for wagons and



buggies, replaced now with a wall. Most of the local boys that became America's World War I soldiers—"Doughboys"—had likely snuck into the livery stable as boys or young men for a smoke, their first taste of whiskey, or to play cards with the staff. [God willing, their mothers did not know of this.] A changing time of cars, trains, and horses, boys would be boys, and proud of it!

Directions: Nichol's Hardware is right next to the gray livery stable which is right next to the white Buick garage.



16. **Hampton's Hall (also known as the White Palace).**

Built in 1908 by Nick Hampton (he also owned the livery stable!), Hampton's Hall, the palatial if ugly building was meant to be the town hall as well as first floor commercial space. The Town

Council met here. The second door you come to walking up from Nichols' led into the Purcellville Post Office. Here is the place you received your draft notice. [Death notices from the Secretary

of War to families on the home front were delivered by hand from the train station, where there was a telegraph.] During the World War, movies were shown upstairs in Hampton's Hall, just as they were at Leesburg's Opera House. Newsreels showed the War, and pitched Liberty Bonds. Public meetings to coordinate the various phases of the War's home effort were held in the upstairs hall.

Directions: The cream building with the locally-made ugly cement balls on the roofline sits on the right at Depot and Main Streets.

17. **The John R. Smith House.**

This prominent Main Street home belonged to one of the most successful men in Purcellville, John R. Smith, partner in the Smith & Hirst Mill next to the train station. During World War I, both the sons of John Smith and John



Hirst were called to serve in France. Corporal John Edward Smith who grew up in this house did not return; a telegraph received from the train station notified Mr. and Mrs. Smith of the loss of their beloved son. He is remembered on the memorial in Leesburg. John had been best childhood chums with the neighbor boy across Main Street—Terry Hirst, his father's partner's son, who also went and served in the Army during World War I as a lieutenant.

Directions: Turn left on to Main Street, head east past three shops and the imposing tomb-like building on your left (now a heating oil company) that once housed the new-in-1915 Purcellville National Bank that sold Liberty Bonds, to the next brick house at left.

18. **The Asa Moore Janney House.**

This typical prosperous merchant's home belonged to Asa Moore Janney, Sr. Janney ran a men's and boys' clothing store up town on Depot Street—Home Run Clothing, a few doors down from Nichols' Hardware. Janney had married a German-American, Blandina Ellen Lutz, and although Janney was a descendant of the first Quaker settlers of Loudoun in the 1730s, Mrs. Janney was held in some suspicion by some locals during the war due to anti-German sentiment. Nationwide, American went into "anti-Hun" mania. Janney's young son Asa Moore, Jr. remembered:



People simply knew that German spies were coming out of every knot-hole . . . Old Mrs. Snyder at Round Hill was so hungry for someone to talk to in her native tongue that she visited Mom one afternoon for a long chat. I had no more sense than to report that the two ladies had been talking in German, and word got

around so fast that the speed of light was outclassed . . . Several boys patriotically decided I ought to be beat up for being half German, and for a couple of weeks there it was nip and tuck whether I'd get home from the movies without a black eye . . .

Son Asa Moore Janney, Jr., a later storekeeper himself as well as renowned local historian, also remembered with a twinkle in his eye that there was this anti-German poem on the outhouse door up at the lumber yard on Depot Street:

Here's to the Kaiser, the son of a b-----,
I hope he'll have always the seven-year itch.
May his thumbs be hammered with a heavy trip-hammer
Till his nostrils will whistle the Star Spangled Banner.

Directions: Continue east on East Main Street, crossing Hirst and 18th Streets to the home at the far left corner of North 18th and East Main Streets. In 1917-18, this was the home of Asa Moore Janney.



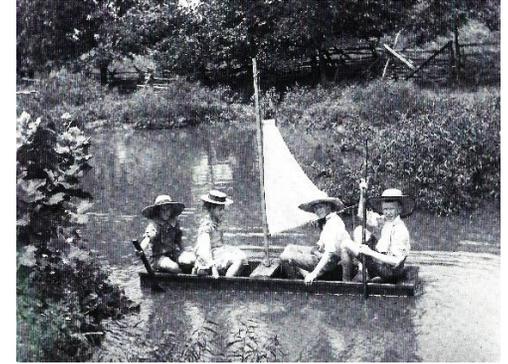
19. John T. Hirst House.

John Hirst was the co-owner of the Smith and Hirst Mill next to the train station, and was one of the most prominent men in town. His home faced East Main Street opposite that of his partner, where today sits a low brick

building built in 1957 as a Safeway supermarket. The home had a clay tennis court. The Hirst home was moved on rollers south-easterly in December 1956 to make way for the new enterprise, such that it now sits roughly behind the Purcellville Library where its white paint, Victorian porch, and blue roof make it easy to spot.

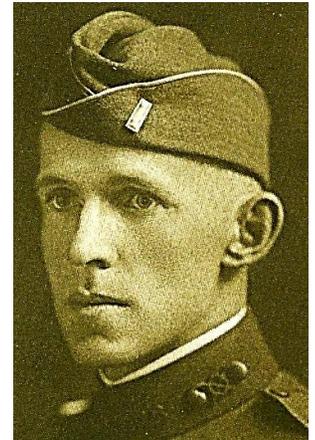
Son J.T. "Terry" Hirst went over to France as an officer, facing the machine gun bullets and the gas, and returned as a 1st Lieutenant.

He lived in this house for most of the rest of his life. Main Street neighbor John Smith was likely envious when they were boys, for Terry Hirst had his own sailing barge on which he took friends—and even little *girl* friends—for leisurely cruises on the



North Fork of Catoctin Creek north of the railroad tracks. That's young Terry looking rather dapper in the stern of the boat above.

To the right is Lt. Terry. Hirst, in his World War I uniform, every inch the all-American warrior. While Hirst came home and ultimately ran a large lumber-hardware concern in Leesburg (J.T. Hirst & Co.) and served in local government, his childhood friend took the "high road" and was a war casualty, never returning alive. Hirst knew how lucky he was; he returned that good fortune to Loudoun by years of service. Decades later, he became a county leader who made a difference,



helping to make the handsome next-door Purcellville Library the first racially integrated library in Virginia in 1957. Lt. Hirst's uniform and kit are on display in the Loudoun Museum.

Directions: Cross Main Street to the stone Purcellville Library, heading down South 18th Street to the library's parking lot on the right. You'll see the handsome 1880s white house with the blue roof that belonged to the Hirsts just over the parking lot fence.

HIRST PHOTOS COURTESY OF JANE HIRST BOGLE.

You can return to your automobile at this juncture. You will come to Hatcher Avenue at the stoplight at East Main, and can take this down to the old railroad bed, turning left (west) to follow the current W & OD bike trail to the railroad station and parking lot. There is good historical signage along the way.