



In Gordonsville, History — and Historically Good Fried Chicken

During Garden Week, the town opens up for visitors (just beware of ghosts)

By *Mary Hintermann and Phil Audibert*

One of America's most haunted places? The "Chicken Leg Center of the Universe"? A destination restaurant town? A great place to live? The "Luckiest Point in Virginia"?

No matter how you think of Gordonsville, this quintessential town is enjoying a renaissance. And you can enjoy that renaissance for yourself by exploring private homes and gardens, meeting regional artisans and

tasting a bit of history on April 26. That's the date for Historic Garden Week's "A Walking Tour of Gordonsville," sponsored by the Dolley Madison Garden Club.

Located in the midst of rolling hunt country — but less than 20 miles from Charlottesville — Gordonsville is a draw for both visitors and families seeking a small town lifestyle.

"What you see in Gordonsville today is an outgrowth of our crossroads location, historic land use, and some very generous

benefactors," explains Mayor Bob Coiner, a sixth-generation resident. "The large tobacco plantations surrounding Gordon's Tavern in the 1700's (now the site of a traffic circle) have become vineyards, historical sites, equitation centers and large farms."

The Barbour family was most likely the first known Europeans to settle here. "They settled just five miles west of town and used their influence to bring the railroad through Gordonsville," Coiner says.

Today, the land where the Barbour family

PHOTOS BY AUDIBERTPHOTO

settled is the home of Barbourville Vineyard, the first of many vineyards surrounding Gordonsville. Considered by many as the premiere Virginia vineyard, the winery attracts 75,000 visitors annually. Library 1821, a new sit-down tasting room featuring vertical flights and older vintages, opens in April. Its restaurant, Palladio, serves excellent Italian fare.

Located nine miles north of town, James Madison's Montpelier draws 125,000 visitors a year, many of whom travel through Gordonsville just as they did in the fourth President's day. Montpelier will offer \$2 off mansion tour tickets to Garden Week ticket holders on April 26.

"Mrs. Marion duPont Scott considered Gordonsville her home," says Coiner. When she died (she is buried in the town's cemetery), in accordance with her wishes, her heirs bequeathed Montpelier to the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

A beautiful example of late 19th century revival architecture, Christ Episcopal Church will be open during the garden tour. It will host demonstrations by organist Tom May and the Kenwood Players brass ensemble, landscape painter Fred Nichols, iconographer Mary Beth Wells and fearless floral arranger Anne Vanderwarker the day of the tour.

The Exchange Hotel in town has completed extensive renovations and is now



CHICKEN LADIES, THEN AND NOW: During Garden Week, residents will once again dish out tasty fried chicken to visitors, just as they did to rail passengers early in the Twentieth Century.



open for tours. At various times in history it was a tavern, private home, Civil War hospital, quarantine facility, Freedmen's Bureau office, railroad hotel and boarding house. An excellent example of local vernacular non-Jeffersonian architecture, it is believed to be a hotbed of paranormal activity. Based on thousands of recorded electronic voice phenomena (EVP), as well as pictures and videos, The Exchange Hotel has been named by A&E's History Channel as the 15th-most haunted place in America.

REVIVING THE CHICKEN TRADITION

Once known as the "Chicken Leg Center of the Universe," Gordonsville became famous in the post-Civil War era for fried chicken served to railroad passengers by enterprising local families. In homage to this tasty tradition, The Exchange Hotel will host a tasty Gordonsville tradition during the garden tour – fried chicken! Made with the original recipe, fried chicken box lunches may be pre-ordered and picked up at the Exchange Hotel on April 26. Hotel grounds will be set for picnicking. All lunches must be pre-ordered and paid for at the time the order is placed (\$12.00 including tax). Order your box lunch by calling the Exchange Hotel at 540-832-2944. The last day to place an order is April 11, 2014.

THE EXCHANGE HOTEL: After extensive renovations, the town landmark is now open for tours. It also is known for visitors of the paranormal sort.





POMME: A French country restaurant in the Virginia countryside.

Touring this exceptional museum will be free for Garden Week ticket holders.



“Even if you go way back in time and count the Barbours, the Madisons and the duPonts, you can’t talk about Gordonsville benefactors without talking about the Guptons and the Mannings,” says Coiner. “Both families have invested in the fabric of Gordonsville renovating commercial and residential properties, creating jobs and attracting new business to our town.”

Coiner adds, “The whole family has become involved: they’ve revitalized our Main Street, renovated historic homes, created a sister-city relationship with Thoré-la-Rochette, France, opened Pebble Hill [a home and fashion accessories shop], and recruited several additional businesses to Gordonsville.”

One of the most popular businesses attracted by the Guptons is Pomme, a warm and inviting recreation of a French country restaurant. Maitre Cuisinier de France Chef Gerard Gasparini and his son Guillaume, who is certified by the Court of Master Sommeliers, have created one of the finest French restaurants in Virginia. Pomme’s success has sparked two new ventures: Pomme 2 Go, a gourmet take-out shop opening in April, and Bivio at Spring Creek, Pomme’s new sister restaurant, located just 15 miles south of town. Bivio opens this June.

Just down the street from Pomme, Culinary Institute of America graduate Craig Hartmann has opened the wildly popular BBQ Exchange, home of true southern bar-

beque. The restaurant has a growing online marketplace and is expanding its acclaimed catering business with an additional kitchen and tasting studio.



A walking tour is particularly appropriate for Gordonsville. The families opening their homes and gardens to Garden Week visitors share similar stories of what brought them here. The Koneskis came in 1981 as first-time homeowners.

“The good schools, quiet streets, wonderful neighbors, and easy walking distance to the grocery, pharmacy, public library, school, and church made Gordonsville a good choice for us,” says Scotty Koneski.

The Parrishs of Thistle Hill work in nearby Charlottesville. “It’s just a charming place to live. We love old houses, old trees, history, and the charm of a village,” says Gail Parrish.

And the van Grolls, both retired University of Virginia faculty, recall that, “Pam stabled her horse nearby and discovered the O’Dell’s coffee shop building was for sale. We purchased it and converted the space into a home. We can walk to the post office, Town Hall, library, and shopping. And we have wonderful neighbors.”

Just last year, the town celebrated its bicentennial. Looking to the future, the town embarks this spring on a \$1.8 million Main Street enhancement project scheduled for completion in 2015. This project is likely to see more success than the 1898 enhancement project proposed by the Gordon Land Company. The company claimed it would make

GARDEN WEEK IN GORDONSVILLE

Advance tickets for a “Walking Tour of Gordonsville,” are \$25 and may be purchased on line at www.vagardenweek.org or in person until 12 noon on Friday, April 25, at several town retailers. They may also be purchased by mail through April 14 by sending a check payable to DMGC with a stamped, self-addressed legal sized envelope to: Mary Beth Wells, P.O. Box 1017; Orange, VA 22960. Tickets are available at each location on the tour for \$30. No single site admissions. Children 6-12 half price; children 5 and under are free of charge. Visit www.dolleymadisongardenclub.org for more information.

GARDEN WEEK DINING DEALS

- Pomme has created a special \$25 prix fixe menu. Reservations are recommended: 540-832-0130
- BBQ Exchange will offer a 10% discount on meals for all Historic Garden Week ticket holders on April 26.

Gordonsville into “The Luckiest Point in Virginia,” turning this small crossroads town into a grand city (with the help of a few new investors). Within two years, the only thing left of that ill-fated scheme was the slogan. Yet 114 years later, thanks to the dedication of generations of local residents, the generosity of key benefactors, and the gift of a great location, Gordonsville has turned itself into “The Luckiest Point in Virginia.”

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Mary Hinterman is a farm wife, volunteer for the Piedmont Regional Dental Clinic, and a member of the Dolley Madison Garden Club.



Phil Audibert has been writing feature stories and shooting photographs for Piedmont area publications since he was 16 years old. For

several years now, he and his wife, Susie, have followed and photographed mounted fox hunters on foot. Currently they are producing historical video documentaries, the most recent being ‘Gordonsville, A Strong Fabric.’ They invite you to visit them at their web site: www.AudibertPhoto.com