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# Charles Town Walking Tour

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Today Charles Town, West Virginia is a picturesque collection of homes, churches and public buildings. It is one of a handful of towns in West Virginia with a Preserve America designation. Charlestown, Virginia was founded in 1786 on land owned by Charles Washington, youngest brother of the first President of the United States. This part of Virginia would become West Virginia in 1863. Charlestown was renamed Charles Town in 1912.

A young George Washington had surveyed the land here 38 years earlier and liked it so much that he urged Lawrence Washington, his older half-brother and the owner of Mount Vernon, to purchase land along Bullskin Run in what was then Frederick County, Virginia. In 1750, the 18-year-old George Washington invested his earnings as a surveyor by purchasing 550 acres of farmland along the Bullskin, just two miles southwest of Charles Town. Washington later enlarged his holdings to around 1500 acres.

Charles Washington signed the "Westmoreland Resolution" in 1766 and as a colonel in the Virginia Militia. When Charles Washington laid out Charlestown in 1786, he did two things which have stood the test of time. Main Street was named Washington for the family and the cross streets – George, Samuel, Mildred, Charles and Lawrence – were named for family members. Charles also specified in his will that the four corner lots at the intersection of George and Washington Streets would be used for public buildings if Charlestown became the county seat and the courthouse, county jail, market house, and offices for the court were constructed on the corner lots. Happy Retreat, Charles' home, still stands in Charles Town and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Other Washington family homes located in the immediate vicinity of Charles Town include Beall-Air, Claymont Court, Harewood, Blakeley, and Cedar Lawn.

Abolitionist John Brown's raid on the Federal arsenal and armory at Harpers Ferry on October 16, 1859, stunned the nation and thrust Charlestown into the national limelight.

The raid, the trials of the raiders and their executions are among the events that precipitated the American Civil War. Brown was held prisoner in the county jail in Charles Town (present site of the U.S. Post Office). He was tried in the Jefferson County Courthouse on charges of murder, treason, and conspiracy to incite slaves to rebel. John Brown was executed by hanging on December 2, 1859, in a field four blocks south of the courthouse.

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## Surveyed by Washington Torn by Civil War

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The Civil War was catastrophic to Charles Town. Once the conflict began and Virginia joined the Confederacy, the community stood solidly by the southern cause. For the next four years, even when no actual fighting was taking place, the economic, social and political life of the community was dominated by the overshadowing presence of war.

During the war, Charles Town was the scene of many battles and skirmishes. On May 28, 1862, Charles Town was in the middle of General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson's Shenandoah Valley Campaign. Confederate troops, under General Charles S. Winder, met an equal force of Union soldiers at Charles Town and routed them.

On October 18, 1863, Confederates led by General John Imboden moved to dislodge the 9th Maryland Infantry Regiment garrisoned at Charles Town and commanded by Colonel Benjamin Simpson. Imboden succeeded in capturing several hundred Union soldiers. The artillery barrage during the fight destroyed many buildings in Charles Town including the courthouse and the county jail.

Hunter's Hill, the home of Andrew Hunter, John Brown's prosecutor, was burned to the ground on orders from his cousin, Union General David Hunter. Other buildings in the area were damaged when General Philip Sheridan opened his Shenandoah Valley Campaign in August, 1864 against Confederate General Jubal Early.

Two hundred years of history define Charles Town as we see it today. A walk along its storied streets is a step back in time.



## Jefferson County Courthouse



**1** The original courthouse was built in 1803 and rebuilt in 1837 when county business outgrew the original building. Although court records had been moved to safety at the start of the Civil War, the courthouse was destroyed in 1863 by a Confederate artillery barrage. Consequently, the county court met in Shepherdstown from 1865-1871.

The courthouse also witnessed the trial of William Blizzard in 1922. Blizzard, the alleged leader of striking coal miners, was charged with treason and murder for engaging in warfare with the state and federal troops in Mingo and Logan Counties. The trials of Blizzard and John Brown are two of the only three treason trials held in the United States prior to World War II.

## Hunter House

**2** Now the offices of the Jefferson County Commission, this Federal-style building was constructed about 1810. It was once the residence of Andrew Hunter, prosecutor in the John Brown trial. The turret was added in the late 19th century by owner William Corel.



## First Free Black School



**3** On this site in 1867 the first Free Black School in Jefferson County was established in the home of Achilles Dixon, a blacksmith. The commemorative plaque was placed here in 1997 by the Page-Jackson Alumni Association.

## Tatte-Fairfax-Muse House



**1** An excellent example of late Georgian architecture, the main block of the house was constructed about 1800 on a lot owned by Magnus Tate II, a prominent Jefferson County attorney and legislator. In 1803 the property was leased by Fer-

dinando Fairfax, great-nephew of both George Washington and Thomas Lord Fairfax and one of the country's first justices of the peace.

## Charles Town Library & Museum

**1** Jefferson County was at the crossroads of the Civil War. Learn how the war impacted the lives of our residents as both armies struggled to maintain control of this strategic location. The museum's outstanding display of Civil War small arms ammunition complements many other artifacts that help to tell the story of four years of strife.



## Presbyterian Church



**1** A classic example of Greek revival architecture, this church was built in 1851 on land given by John Stephenson. Having served as a hospital both for Union and Confederate troops, it was the only church in town not damaged by the Civil War. The steeple was added in 1907.

## Presbyterian Manse

**1** Built in 1854 as a residence for the Presbyterian minister, this house still serves that purpose. Soon after the manse was built, a fair was held to help pay for the construction. Records state that the large sum of \$700 was raised.



## Mason-Gibson House

**8** This brick Georgian house was built about 1900 by Braxton Gibson as his family's home. Mrs. Gibson left the house to her nieces in 1929. They later donated it to Zion Episcopal Church.



## Flagg House



**9** The Flagg House, named for the postmaster who lived here in 1989, was built in 1798 for Samuel Washington, son of Charles. John Young, a carpenter who settled in Charles Town in 1796, built this house and others in the Charles Town area.

## Stribling House



**10** Dr. Taliaferro Stribling commissioned construction of this house in 1836. When Thomas Rutherford purchased it in 1858, he paid \$800 for the two-story brick structure and the adjacent lots that comprise the block between Church and Seminary Streets.

During the Civil War, Union General Philip Sheridan occupied the house as his headquarters. It was here that Gen. Ulysses S. Grant and Gen. Sheridan met to plan the 1864 Shenandoah Valley Campaign.

## Zion Episcopal Church



**III** There have been three Episcopal churches on this site. The first two were built in 1818 and 1846. The second church burned two years after it was completed. The present church was completed in 1851.

During the Civil War Federal troops quartered here desecrated the church almost beyond recognition by dismantling it and destroying the pews.

The cemetery may hold the largest number of Washington family descendants in the United States - more than 70 - including some twenty who were born at Mount Vernon. Some graves were moved here from St. George's Chapel graveyard.

Other notables buried here include Edmund Randolph (Edmund was a great-great-grandson of Thomas Jefferson and great-grandson of Edmund Randolph, the first Secretary of State of the United States) and his wife, Julia Paca Kennedy; Colonel R. Preston Chew, chief of the Stuart Horse Artillery of the Confederate Army, and his wife Louisa Fontaine Washington; and Dr. Paca Kennedy, a professor of Greek at Virginia Theological Seminary.

The stone-and-brick wall that surrounds the property is believed to have been built under the supervision of John Yates Beall, an engineer who studied at the University of Virginia. Beall enlisted in the Confederate Army and was wounded while part of Colonel Turner Ashby's cavalry. He then joined the Confederate Navy and raided war materials shipped on on the Chesapeake Bay, where he was captured and exchanged. In 1864, he went to Canada to aid in the effort to further disrupt the shipping of war materials destined for Federal troops. He was captured, tried by a military commission, and convicted as a spy. In spite of pleas made directly to President Lincoln and Gen. John A. Dix, commander of the military court, that his life be spared, Beall was hanged on February 18, 1865. He is buried in Zion cemetery.

## Wilson House



**12** This Victorian Gothic house, designed and built by J.C. Holmes, was completed in 1876. It was the home of William L. Wilson (1833-1900). While serving as president of West Virginia University from 1882-83, Wilson accepted a nomination for U.S. Congress from the second district of West Virginia. He won the election by ten votes. Appointed U.S. Postmaster General in 1894, he introduced rural-free delivery of mail in Jefferson County, first in the country.

## Gibson-Todd House



**15** This property, now the site of a brick Victorian built in 1892 by Col. John Thomas Gibson, encompasses the site of John Brown's execution. On December 2, 1859, the wagon carrying Brown and the procession that followed moved down George Street to the gallows in a field on the Rebecca Hunter Farm. (The gallows stood at a spot just north of this house). Nearly 800 troops under the command of Col. Gibson were posted to keep order. Among them was a detachment from the Corps of Cadets from the Virginia Military Institute, commanded by William Gilham, a faculty member. Major Thomas Jackson, who during the Civil War earned the nickname "Stonewall," commanded the cadet artillery.

## McCurdy-Wysong House



**14** This fine example of Victorian architecture was built by John Watson McCurdy about 1868-70. For 120 years, the house remained in the builder's family.

## Riddle-Murphy Hunter House

**15** Constructed about 1858 by Andrew Hunter, this house was on the farm where John Brown was hanged in 1859. Although martial law prevented the general public from witnessing the hanging, some residents viewed the execution from this house.



## Woodford Lawn House



**16** This large brick residence once stood on Massachusetts Avenue in Washington, D.C. James Mason, Jr. learned that it was slated for demolition and arranged for his client, the B & O Railroad, to transport the dismantled house to Charles Town, rose-colored brick by rose-colored brick, in 1890.

## Brown-Shugart House

**17** This spacious Victorian home was commissioned by Forrest Washington Brown for his bride Emma Beverly Tucker in 1885. It was built by local architect Julius C. Holmes who also expanded the home in 1890 by adding his and hers bathrooms, two more bedrooms, a study, a formal foyer and a ballroom. The home was purchased from the Browns by Leland and Mildred Shugart in the 1940s, who became hosts to the celebrated Charles Town New Years Eve parties.





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| <b>1</b> Jefferson County Courthouse<br>100 East Washington Street     | <b>10</b> Stribling House<br>417 East Washington Street         |
| <b>2</b> Hunter House<br>124 East Washington Street                    | <b>11</b> Zion Episcopal Church<br>301 East Congress Street     |
| <b>3</b> First Free Black School<br>Corner of Samuel & Liberty Streets | <b>12</b> Wilson House<br>309 South Mildred Street              |
| <b>4</b> Tatté-Fairfax-Muse House<br>201 East Washington Street        | <b>13</b> Gibson Todd House<br>515 South Samuel Street          |
| <b>5</b> Charles Town Library & Museum<br>200 East Washington Street   | <b>14</b> McCurdy Wysong House<br>502 South Samuel Street       |
| <b>6</b> Presbyterian Church<br>220 East Washington Street             | <b>15</b> Riddle-Murphy Hunter House<br>534 South Samuel Street |
| <b>7</b> Presbyterian Manse<br>222 East Washington Street              | <b>16</b> Woodford Lawn House<br>619 South Samuel Street        |
| <b>8</b> Mason Gibson House<br>221 East Washington Street              | <b>17</b> Brown Shugart House<br>633 South Samuel Street        |
| <b>9</b> Flagg House<br>323 East Washington Street                     |   |



## Brown House



**15** Next door to the Brown-Shugart House stands this stately 1873 house constructed by Thomas Brown. The formal gardens feature English boxwoods from Mount Vernon. During the construction of the stone wall around the property, many Civil War

relics, including a bayonet, a belt buckle, a knife, and Indian arrowheads were placed in the wall.

## Happy Retreat



**10** Charles Washington (1738-1799) was only a 14-year-old when his brother Lawrence died and left this land in his will to Charles. In 1780, Charles brought his family from Fredericksburg, Virginia and built a house that he called Happy Retreat. Construction of the house began with the building of two wings connected by a breezeway.

Charles wanted to build a larger middle section, but may not have had the financial resources to do so. After his death, his son sold the house.

In 1873, the house was bought by Judge Isaac Douglass, who built the center, three-story portion of the house and renamed the house Mordington after his ancestral home in Scotland. In 1945, a new owner, R.J. Funkhouser, restored the name Happy Retreat.

Friends of Happy Retreat is a local organization currently working to purchase this property and develop it for public use.

## Page Jackson Room



**20** Located in the offices of the Jefferson County Board of Education, this room is dedicated to the preservation of the history of Black education in Jefferson County (open during regular office hours).

## Chew House

**21** Of early 19th century construction, this was the home of Col. Roger Preston Chew, commander of Stuart's Horse Artillery. Chew served with distinction under Confederate Generals Turner Ashby and J.E.B. Stuart. He married Louisa Fountaine Washington, whose family was the last Washington Family to live in Mount Vernon. The house was remodeled and a tower was added by Col. Chew in the late 1890s.



## Bishop House



**22** This handsome house was constructed in 1896 by Dr. Jonathan Peale Bishop. His son, John Peale Bishop, a well-known author and poet, grew up here. His friend, F. Scott Fitzgerald, visited here on many occasions.

## Washington House Inn



**23** Built in 1899, this house was owned until 1939 by Washington family members descended from Samuel and John Augustine Washington, both full brothers of George Washington, first President of the United States.

## John Locke House

**24** An African-American Masonic and Odd Fellows Lodge for over a century, this is one of Charles Town's oldest stone buildings. It was built about 1795 by John Locke on lot number 9, land he purchased from Charles Washington on April 11, 1791 for £5. The S-shaped iron escutcheons that are connected through the building brace the walls.

A plaque outside the building honors Charles Town resident Major Martin R. Delany, first African American officer in the U.S. Army.



## Second Free Black School



**25** Built in 1874, this one-story brick building still stands today. It is located next to the Zion Baptist Church. The school's first teacher, Littleton L. Page, served for 40 years.

## Thomas Griggs House



**26** Thomas Griggs bought from Charles Washington lot number 19 on June 22, 1788 for £12. The oldest part of the home is made of logs and brick. Iron rings in the basement indicate that horses may have been hidden here during the Civil War.

## Charles Washington Law Office

**27** This brick building attached to the house was used by Charles Washington as his in-town office. Charles Washington conducted business transactions and it is purported that the Town Elders met here planning the city's future. Later the structure was used as slave quarters. For nearly a century, the Griggs House and Washington Office were used by the H. Vernon Sheetz family for their Greenhouse & Floral business.



## Episcopal Lecture Room



**28** Built between 1833 and 1839, a brick cross in the stonework above the front door indicates its original use as a church. During the John Brown trial, John Wilkes Booth entertained townspeople with dramatic readings in this building.

## Tiffin House



**20** Completed in 1787 for the Tiffin family, this is the oldest house built within the original boundaries of Charles Town. Dr. Edward Tiffin, born in 1766 in Carlisle, England, came to Charles Town in 1784 with his parents and helped in the building of the house. He graduated from the University of Pennsylvania where he studied medicine. He returned to Charles Town to open his practice.

In 1798 he left for Ohio with other pioneer settlers, including his brother-in-law, Thomas Worthington. Tiffin used a letter of introduction from George Washington to become acquainted with Territorial Governor Arthur St. Clair. There he became active in local politics. When Ohio was admitted to the Union in 1803, he was elected its first governor. He served two terms. Thomas Worthington was elected the first state senator from Ohio, having lobbied Washington to allow Ohio statehood. Worthington also served as Ohio Governor, beginning in 1816.

The Tiffin House has undergone many changes. Its log construction faced with brick. The building was enlarged with the addition of a wing at the rear. It has many interior amenities of the period, including fine Georgian mantels and a spiral staircase with a mahogany rail.

## Old Opera House



**26** Commissioned by a Washington family descendent, Mrs. Ann Gibson Packette, the Opera House was built in 1910. The first show was presented on February 11, 1911, a comedy with "home talent." The proceeds of the show went to the Daughters of the Confederacy for the benefit of indigent Confederate veterans. The theater has an orchestra pit, a curved balcony, and seats 330 people. One of only a dozen of its kind left in the United States, the Old Opera House offers community theater productions. 304-725-4420

## Charles Washington Hall



**51** First a marketplace and meeting hall, Charles Washington Hall burned during the Civil War following an explosion of ammunition stored there. The present building was built in 1874 and served briefly as the Jefferson County Seat.

## Old Jefferson County Jail



**52** Built in 1919, it is one of the last buildings standing that has a Mullet design. During the second treason trial in West Virginia in 1922, coal miners from the Blizzard trial were housed in the Old Jefferson County Jail while awaiting trial.

## Charles Washington Grave Site



**53** Charles Washington was the youngest brother of United States President George Washington. Washington arrived in present day Jefferson County between April and October of 1780 and founded the City of Charles Town. Charles died sometime between July and September, 1799, only a short while before the death of his brother George.

## Charles Town Visitors Center



**54** For additional information on the City of Charles Town and its history, please visit the Charles Town Visitors Center. Travel information and local art exhibits are available for viewing Wednesday through Sunday. Contact the Charles Town Visitors Center by calling 304-728-3939.

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## About the walking tour

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Charles Town is easy to tour on foot. With this brochure, comfortable shoes, and a desire to step back in history, you can locate many of its significant structures in about an hour and a half. Even though the two farthest points on the walking tour are 11 blocks apart, some visitors choose to drive to some of the sites.

Space has limited the brochure to only 34 sites, but as you go along the sidewalks of Charles Town, you will see that there are scores of historic properties worthy of note, especially the residences along the older streets of George and Samuel.

To learn more about local history, stop in at the Jefferson County Museum, located on the ground floor of the Old Charles Town Library at 200 East Washington Street, or phone 304-725-8628. The Jefferson County Museum is home to several thousand artifacts, including early documents related to the Washington Family. Of special interest are the original letter from George Washington to Colonel Burgess Ball in September 1799, and the wagon that carried John Brown to his execution. The Civil War is represented through such items as Second National Flag presented to Stuart's Horse Artillery and other mementoes belonging to Colonel Roger P. Chew, C.S.A., a resident of Charles Town. The museum is the number 5 site on this brochure's map.

\* Please note that only the Jefferson County Museum, the Charles Town Visitors Center and properties that are government or commercial establishments are open to the public.



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## The History of Charles Town

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In 1780 Charles Washington, George Washington's youngest brother, left his home in Fredericksburg, Virginia, and moved to the Lower Shenandoah Valley. Charles had inherited land in what was then Berkeley County, Virginia, from his older half-brother Lawrence. Upon arrival he began construction of his home, Happy Retreat, located on a rise overlooking Everts Marsh.

In 1786 Charles petitioned the Virginia General Assembly for permission to incorporate a town. The petition was granted and Charlestown, Virginia was founded. In addition to naming the corporation for himself, Charles memorialized the Washington family by the naming of town's streets. The main street, running east to west is named Washington Street. Cross streets are named for family members with the Town Square named in honor of brother George, the streets to the east named for his brother Samuel and wife Mildred, and the streets to the west named for himself and his brother Lawrence. In a show of patriotism the streets parallel to Washington are named Congress and Liberty.

At the time of Charles' death in September 1799, Charlestown was still located in Berkeley County. In his will, Charles indicated that should Berkeley County be divided and Charlestown named county seat of a new county, he desired that the town lots on the town square formed by George and Washington Streets be used for public buildings.

Jefferson County was formed from Berkeley in 1801 and Charlestown became the new county seat. As the executor of his father's estate, Samuel Washington acceded to his father's wishes and deeded the Town Square to be used for public buildings.

In 1803 the Jefferson County Courthouse became the first public building to occupy the Town Square. This smaller brick structure was replaced by a larger courthouse in 1836. The 1836 courthouse was the setting for the trials of abolitionist John Brown and six of his followers. In October 1863, during the Civil War, the courthouse was heavily damaged by artillery fire rendering it unusable. Following the War the county seat was temporarily located in Shepherdstown. In 1871 the county seat returned to Charlestown and the courthouse was rebuilt.

The Jefferson County jail was the second public building to occupy the Town Square. Completed in 1806, perhaps its most famous occupants were abolitionist John Brown and six of his raiders. The seven men were housed in the Jefferson County jail from the time of their capture in October 1859 until they were executed.

During the Civil War, the jail was destroyed and was rebuilt in 1873 after the county seat returned to Charlestown. That building was torn down in 1919 and the jail was moved to the southeast corner of George and Liberty Streets. In 1920 the United States Post Office was constructed on the former jail site and has been there ever since.

Circa 1806 a structure was built at the northwest corner of the Town Square. The first floor was used as a market space and its second floor had an auditorium as well as meeting rooms. Like many places in Charlestown, the market house was completely destroyed during the Civil War. It was initially replaced by a number of frame buildings. Town fathers decided to construct a more permanent building and in 1874 Charles Washington Hall was built. Since then the Hall has been home to the United States Post Office and a number of restaurants and businesses.

The southeast corner of Town Square was initially the location of a one-story building known as "Lawyer's Row." Lawyers practicing before the Jefferson County court occupied these offices. "Lawyer's Row" was also home to Thompson's Shaving Parlor. In 1908 the building was demolished and replaced by the Farmers and Merchants Deposit Bank. The Bank of Charles Town purchased the property and moved there in the 1930's. Today the building houses the offices of the City of Charles Town.

Through the years Town Square has reflected the many changes which have occurred in Charles Town. Whatever the challenge the town and its citizens have shown great resiliency and remain today a strong and vibrant community.

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## Special Thanks

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The City of Charles Town would like to thank those whose time and research made this project a reality.

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The Charles Town Historic Landmarks Commission meets the second Monday of every month at 7:30 pm. Commission meetings are open to the public anyone who has an interest in the preservation of our areas historic landmarks. Please visit [www.charlestownwv.us](http://www.charlestownwv.us) for more information on the Historic Landmarks Commission and for past meeting minutes and agendas.