

Driving Tour: Greenwood-Afton Rural Historic District



Overview of the Greenwood-Afton Rural Historic District

The Greenwood-Afton Rural Historic District in Albemarle County, Virginia contains some of the most picturesque landscape in central Virginia. Set in the shadows of the Blue Ridge Mountains, the National Register of Historic Places historic district features rolling hills, farmland, woodlands, and scenic views within an approximately 16,300-acre area. The area was home to some of the earliest settlers to this region of Virginia. The area was settled in the early-to mid-eighteenth century by Scots-Irish and German settlers as the fertile soils of the region were perfect for farming. Much of the agriculture centered around tobacco and continued to do so into the twentieth century. Up until Emancipation, the tobacco was harvested by slaves on larger farms.

The development of industry and commerce coincided with the agricultural production of the Greenwood-Afton area. Most of the early industry centered on the rivers and included flour and grist mills. Sawmills and distilleries as well as brick manufacturers and tanneries provided services to the communities throughout the Greenwood-Afton area. Orchards, particularly apples, and vineyards provided crop diversification beginning in the later decades of the nineteenth century after wheat and tobacco production waned.

Today the Greenwood-Afton Rural Historic District still relies on orchards and vineyards as part of the local agricultural economy as well as heritage and outdoor recreational tourism.

Villages of the Greenwood-Afton Rural Historic District

Afton Village

Afton, a mid-nineteenth century village located at the base of the Blue Ridge Mountains, was established around 1853. The village began as a staging area for the construction of the Blue Ridge Tunnel, part of the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad, which opened in 1858. The surviving **Afton Depot**, formerly used for freight and passenger service, is now utilized for law offices. Historically, the village also contained several commercial buildings, a church (**Afton Chapel**), and post office in addition to a number of dwellings. In the 19th century, the village became a resort destination. To accommodate travelers, inns were built including Afton House (destroyed by fire) and to the north on Afton Mountain, the **Blue Ridge Terrace Inn**.

Greenwood/Greenwood Country Store

Greenwood, like Afton, was established during the construction of the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad line through the Blue Ridge Mountains. The completion of the Greenwood Tunnel and arrival of the railroad in the 1850s provided the means for the town's growth. During the latter half of the 19th century Greenwood's commercial area included a hotel, blacksmith, private boarding school, and H. R. Boswell's store and sassafras mill. The original store burned in 1939 and was replaced by the current Greenwood Country Store that you can visit today.

New Town

Beginning in the early 1870s freed African Americans began to own land and establish communities in Albemarle County. New Town developed along New Town Road near the railroad and west of the community of

Greenwood. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, New Town, the largest of the African American communities in the county, was a cohesive enclave. Residents had their own gardens as well as raised their own livestock. Brown's Grocery was also a staple of the community, although one former resident recalls they only bought coffee and sugar at the store. The community also encompassed a school (**Greenwood Rosenwald School**) and the **Mount Zion Baptist Church**.

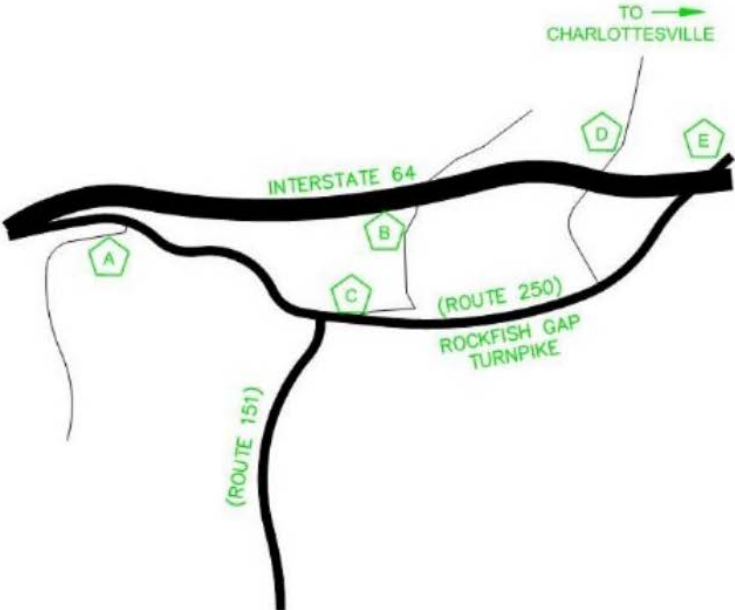
Free Town

Free Town, established by freed slaves after the Civil War, is the smaller of the two main African American communities within the Greenwood-Afton Rural Historic District (**see New Town**). The community is located directly east of **Yancey Mills** and comprises approximately eight residences constructed during the early twentieth century. The community historically did not include commercial, religious or educational buildings and relied upon services located in Yancey Mills or possibly nearby Hillsboro.

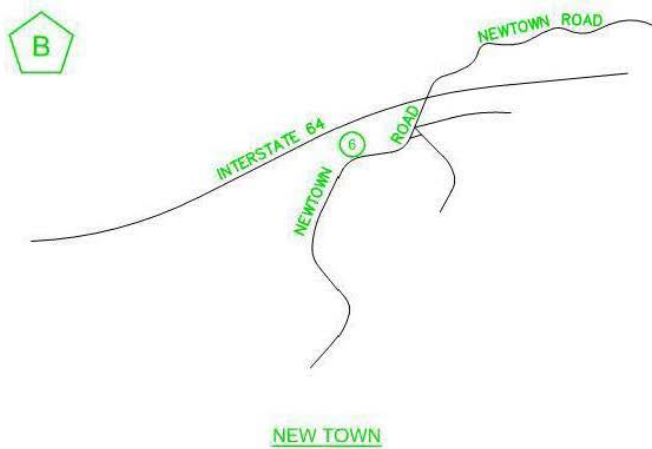
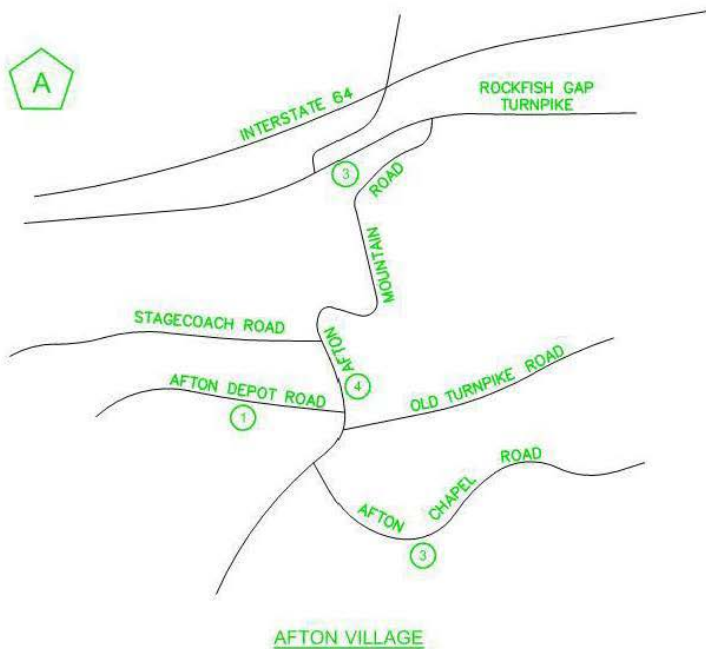
Yancey Mills/Hillsboro

The village of Yancey Mills was historically known as Hillsboro. The original village, named after Charles Yancey, was located approximately one mile to the west. The small community contained several commercial buildings including a mill and tannery as well as a distillery and a post office. The post office was relocated in the late 19th century to Hillsboro. With the construction of the Rivanna and Rockfish Gap Turnpike (US Route 250) in the early 19th century, the village of Yancey Mills/Hillsboro grew and had a florist, corn mill, wood dealer, and four general stores. In the early 20th century, Yancey Mills was described as a quiet village with several dwellings, a store, an inn, and a church. Around 1910, a Masonic Lodge was built directly across the street from the **Hillsboro Baptist Church**. Today Yancey Mills comprises a number of 19th and early 20th century dwellings.

Tour Overview

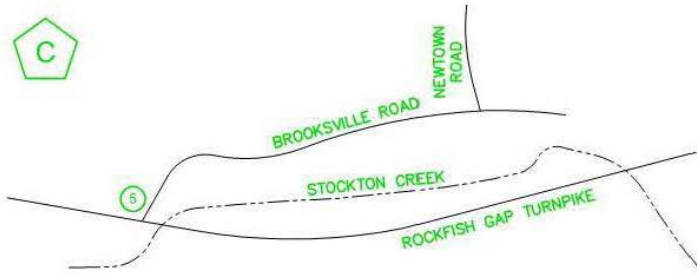


Tour Maps

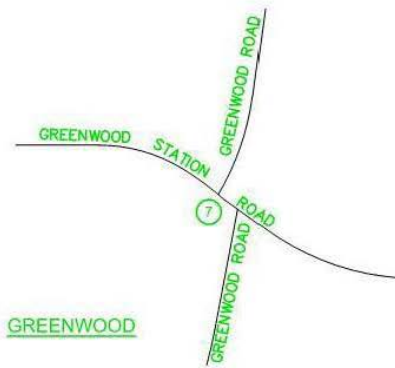


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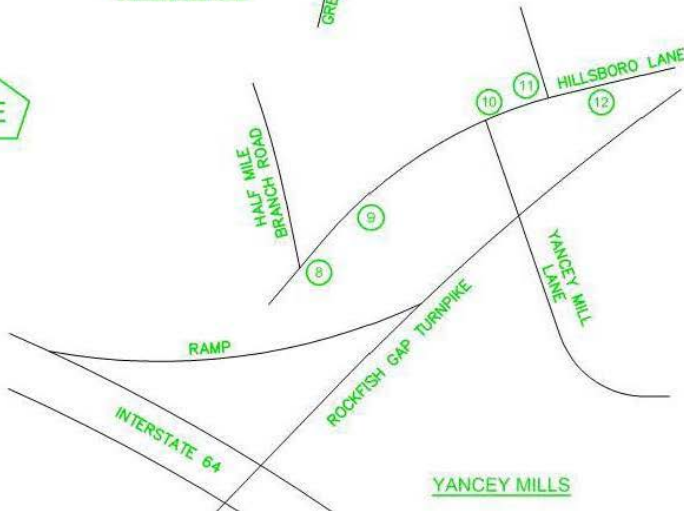
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1. Afton Depot



The Afton Depot, constructed around 1920 (current building), was a stop along the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad's freight line. The train depot also served passenger service trains for tourist coming to the area.

Tourists who stayed at Afton House, a four story, summer resort (demolished in 1963 after a fire) originally built in 1869 by James R. Goodloe, had a short jaunt from the depot. The depot is no longer in service and has been converted to office space.

Train service to the Shenandoah Valley was made possible by the engineering efforts of Claudius Crozet. Crozet planned four tunnels through the Blue Ridge Mountains. The Blue Ridge Tunnel, approximately a mile from the Afton Depot, was an engineering feat for its time of its completion in 1858. The tunnel, with a length of over 4,270 feet, was built by Irish immigrants and slave labor. Crews started digging at each end and met in the middle. Since the project predated the use of dynamite, crews dug out the mountain, one foot each day on each end, with hand tools and black powder. The tunnel was in operation until 1944, when larger freight trains necessitated the construction of the larger, adjacent tunnel. Renamed the Crozet Tunnel after its engineer, the tunnel is currently undergoing restoration efforts and is not open to the public.

2. Blue Ridge Terrace Inn



The Blue Ridge Terrace Inn, constructed around 1927, commanded stunning views of the Rockfish Valley. The Inn was originally built and owned by the Landes family. The Inn, which served the tourist trade in

the early to mid-20th century, featured amenities such as an artesian well, ten rooms, interior baths, an apartment, and a cottage, as well as a full-service dining room and sandwich room. The grounds were beautifully laid out with boxwoods and large flower gardens. A staff of 17 waitresses and cooks, mainly local, served daily breakfast, lunch and dinner to the Inn's visitors. In the 1930s, shortly after the inn opened, meals cost 50 cents for breakfast or lunch and 75 cents for dinner. Mr. Landes, who managed the inn, expected politeness from his staff towards the Inn's visitors as well as the visitors' respect towards the staff. Legend has it he was not beyond extricating rude customers from the premises. Several famous people visited the Inn including movie stars, Robert Taylor and Lash Larue. The inn ceased operation in 1963 and was converted into **private apartments** and still functions in that capacity today.

3. Afton Chapel



The Afton Chapel constructed in 1898, is a non-denominational church which still serves the Afton community today. The small Gothic Revival chapel is set in an idyllic landscape surrounded by

trees, which are particularly spectacular in the autumn.

The chapel itself is typical of rural churches constructed during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Churches not only served as places of worship in rural areas but were also important social gathering places. The church as you see it today has changed little in appearance and still retains its pointed arch windows and characteristic bell tower. The small enclosed entry is a later addition.

Nearby the **Afton Chapel** and **Afton Depot** is the **Blue Ridge Tunnel Trail**, which starts at the end of Afton Depot Lane. Parking is available at the trail head. The trail is less than two miles round trip and offers visitors a chance to view the eastern entrance to the Blue Ridge Tunnel.

4. Haven Houses



The George “Harold” Haven House and Garage and Bennie Haven House are located in the Village of Afton along Afton Mountain Road. George Harold Haven was born in 1897 in Hebron, North Dakota, a

predominantly German community. When George was 13 years old, he and his family relocated to Greenwood, Virginia.

The Haven brothers resided in houses next door to each other which were built around 1870. Between the houses was a commercial building which originally functioned as either a livery stable or blacksmith shop. In 1920, George Haven and his brother Bennie opened a garage in the old building. Business was brisk and in 1938, they demolished the shop/livery and built a new garage. The brothers were in business for over 60 years. **The dwellings continue to function as private residences.**

5. Brooksville Tavern



The Brooksville Tavern, located along Rockfish Gap Turnpike, was built around 1824. Nineteenth century outbuildings associated with the tavern include a detached brick kitchen and a smoke/meat

house. During the Civil War, Union General Phillip Sheridan stayed at the tavern. Several outbuildings were burned during attacks as part of the battles which took place in the Shenandoah Valley during the war. Later, during the construction of the Blue Ridge Tunnel, Claudius Crozet also kept a room at the tavern (see **Afton Depot**). **The tavern is currently a private residence.**

6. (Greenwood's) Rosenwald School



Rosenwald schools, established through a program created in 1913 by Julius Rosenwald, President of Sears, Roebuck and Company, provided funds for African American schools

in the south. At the time, the program set up by Rosenwald was the largest endeavor in order to provide opportunities for better education of rural African American students up until 1932, when the program was concluded. During the 19 years the program was active, Rosenwald's program funded the construction of over 4,900 schools in 15 states. In Virginia alone, 332 schools were constructed, including Greenwood's School. **Greenwood's Rosenwald School**, built circa 1925 in the community of New Town, followed the configuration of established designs for Rosenwald schools, which included large banks of windows. Although Virginia's Rosenwald schools no longer function as active schools, many have been preserved with Greenwood's school exhibiting little change from its original construction.

7. Greenwood Post Office



The Greenwood Post Office, originally constructed as a garage around 1940, by 1965 had been converted to Greenwood's post office. Although a rather unassuming building, the design for the post office

conversion was created by Stanislaw Makielski, a prominent Charlottesville architect. Makielski was born to Polish parents in Indiana and graduated in 1922 from the University of Virginia. His notoriety came initially as the University's first professor of the architecture school and later for his designs for a number of buildings on the campus of UVA including the Cafeteria (1943), the Medical Center Records Storage Building (1956), and the Electrical Engineering Laboratories (1968)

8. Yancey Tavern



The Yancey Tavern, according to local history, the resource served as a tavern for travelers along the Staunton and James River Turnpike. In the 17th through the early 19th centuries, taverns

were often located along major thoroughfares as a way stop for weary travelers. Yancey's Tavern is thought to have been constructed around 1830, likely by a member of the Yancey family. The frame house retains its large exterior end 19th century brick chimneys common to its era of construction; however, the front porch is a later remodeling effort. **The tavern is now a private residence.**

9. Dutch Gardens Motor Court



The Dutch Gardens Motor Court has the distinction of one of Albemarle County's earliest motor courts. Built around 1920, by a

Dutchman, hence the name, the motel is a reflection of the increase in tourism for villages not served by the railroad. During the early 20th century, with the increased availability of automobiles, people came to take in the scenic beauty of the Shenandoah Valley and Blue Ridge Mountains. To serve the tourists to the area, the complex was constructed with a larger building adjacent to the road, which functioned as the restaurant and office, with several tourist cabins to the rear of the main building. The motel remained in operation until World War II, when the owner returned to Holland. **The buildings are now private residences.**

10. F. W. Yancey House



The F. W. Yancey House is one of one of the oldest houses in Yancey Mills/Hillsboro. The oldest section, built around 1850, is the one-and-a-half-story section, which is constructed of log. The two-story

frame section was added sometime between 1890 and 1900. Local historical accounts suggest the dwelling once operated as a tavern or possibly a lodging house. Most recently the building served as offices for the **Hillsboro Baptist Church**.

Other notable houses in Yancey Mills are located along US Route 250 and include the c. 1870 R. A. Yancey House and the c. 1830 Apperson-Bowell House (altered in the late nineteenth to early twentieth century).

11. Hillsboro Baptist Church



The Hillsboro Baptist Church was built in 1905 in the Gothic Revival style. The style was made popular in the mid-nineteenth century with the publication of Alexander Jackson Davis' *Rural*

Residences in 1837 and through pattern books *Cottage Residences* and *The Architecture of Country Houses* in 1842 and 1850, respectively, by Andrew Jackson Downing. Although the Gothic Revival style faded in popularity for domestic buildings, the style continued as an appropriate form for ecclesiastical buildings into the twentieth century. The present Gothic Revival church replaced a mid-nineteenth century log church, which was destroyed by fire, and is one of the few early twentieth century churches in Albemarle County constructed of brick. The church building as you see it today is a mixture of historic and modern features. The L-shape plan, Gothic pointed arch windows, and bell tower are original early twentieth century features, while the porch and two-story school annex are modern additions.

12. Green Teapot Inn



The Green Teapot Inn, a historic inn, dates to around 1850. The earliest constructed portion of the building, which originally served as a tavern, is the central brick section. The tavern was extended in

the early twentieth century during the ownership of Mrs. Attwood Smith and Miss Dorothy Earp who added the frame wings. The tavern was converted to a more sophisticated inn and was renamed the 'Sign of the Green Teapot'. The Italianate inn featured a lovely mansard-roofed porch with balustrade and a bracketed cornice. During the early twentieth century, the inn played host to a range of international visitors, including silent film star Theda Bara, who came to the Yancey Mill's area for its scenic beauty and relaxing atmosphere. The inn has been altered since the early twentieth century and is **now a private residence**.

13. Calf Mountain



The Greenwood-Afton Rural Historic District is known of its scenic beauty. Located within the district is a portion of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Part of Shenandoah National Park, **Calf Mountain**, offers

scenic views and tranquil woodlands. Located just outside the village of Greenwood, the Calf Mountain Trail is a family friendly 2.7-mile hike with wildflowers during the spring and summer months.

According to local history, Calf Mountain got its name accidentally. In the 1840s, as the Fisher family cleared some of the land on the mountain for livestock grazing and crops, a pattern developed into the shape of a calf. According to local resident Wade Fisher, his family had no idea they had created the design until later. The name stuck and today the mountain is affectionately known as 'the calf.'

14. Bear Den Mountain



Bear Den Mountain, also part of the Blue Ridge Mountains, features a similar level of hiking as the **Calf Mountain Trail**. The 1.2-mile trail is also located outside the village of Greenwood and features scenic

vistas, plentiful wildflowers, and woodlands. It is also known for its birding opportunities.

As other points of interest, the Bear Den Mountain trail parallels a portion of the Appalachian Trail. The Skyline Drive is also nearby and features several scenic overlooks in this area including Calf Mountain Overlook, Beagles Gap Overlook, and McCormick Gap Overlook.

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Thank you!

We hope you enjoyed your tour of the Greenwood-Afton Rural Historic District. The tour provided just a glimpse into the scenic landscapes and the history of this National Register listed rural district. We hope that you will continue your exploration of the area and take advantage of the many activities and sites that this area of Albemarle County has to offer.



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