Washington County, Virginia in the American Civil War

The American Civil War of 1861-1865 resulted from long-standing conflicts between the North and the South regarding a number of issues. Initially, Virginians favored the preservation of the Union. The United States had largely been created by Virginians such as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and George Mason. To deal with the situation, the legislature called for a convention in February, 1861 to decide what action the Old Dominion should take. In the election for the delegates, approximately 80% of the voters in the state favored Union. In Washington County, the Unionist candidates, John A. Campbell and Robert E. Grant received 72% of the vote while the secessionists, William Y. C. White and John B. Floyd, had 28%. Thus, Campbell and Grant attended the convention. Sixty-nine percent of the voters also favored a ballot on whether they should accept the decision of the convention.

After Lincoln called for troops from Virginia in April, opinion in the convention changed and it voted to join the other slave states. When the vote to approve or disapprove the actions of the convention was taken in May, 99% of the voters in Washington County favored secession.

Some time after John Brown's attempt to start a slave rebellion in 1859, W.W. Blackford formed the Washington Mounted Rifles, the first Civil War unit in the county. After secession, many Washington County men rushed to join volunteer units such as the 37th and 48th Infantry Regiments. Blackford reported that the "men were boiling with excitement and afraid that the war would be over before they got to the firing line." People on both sides believed the war would consist of a single battle.

Most of the soldiers from Washington County served in the Army of Northern Virginia under Generals Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson and Robert E. Lee in the worst fighting in the war. They suffered greatly and many were killed, wounded, or died of disease.

Washington County Military Units

Soldiers from Washington County served in the following units:

- 1st Virginia Calvary (Co. D. Washington Mounted Rifles)
- 2nd Regiment, Kentucky Cavalry
- 3rd Battalion, Kentucky Mounted Rifles (Co. F)
- 4th Kentucky Cavalry, Morgan's Brigade
- 6th Regiment, Kentucky Cavalry (Co. K)
- 8th Regiment, Virginia Cavalry (Co. D)
- 9th Regiment, Kentucky Cavalry (Co. K)
- 11th Regiment, Virginia Infantry
- 13th Battalion Reserve (Cos. C, E, F, & I)
- 16th Regiment, Virginia Cavalry
- 21st Regiment, Virginia Cavalry (Cos. C 2nd & F)
- 22nd Regiment, Virginia Cavalry (Cos. A, C, & E)
- 23rd Regiment, Virginia Cavalry
- 26th Virginia Infantry (Co. I)
- 29th Regiment, Virginia Infantry
- 30th Battalion, Virginia Sharpshooters (Co. E)
- 33rd Regiment, Virginia Infantry
- 34th Virginia Cavalry (Co. G)
- 37th Regiment, Virginia Infantry (Cos. A, B, F, H, & K)
- 45th Virginia Infantry
- 48th Regiment, Virginia Infantry (Cos. B, E, F, G, & I)
- 50th Regiment, Virginia Infantry (Co. G)
- 51st Regiment, Virginia Infantry (Co. I)
- 63rd Regiment, Virginia Cavalry (Cos. A, B, E, F, & I)
- Barr's Battery, Army of Northern Virginia
- Jeffrey's Battery, Army of Tennessee
- Richmond Howitzers
- VMI Cadets
- Confederate States Navy

Southwest Virginia Militia, Reserve, & Home Guard Units

In addition, men who were unable to serve because of their physical conditions, age, or professions served in reserve units, the home guard, the county militia, and the militia of the town of Abingdon.

- Washington County Home Guard
- Washington County Militia
- 6th Battalion, VA Reserve (Cos. C, E, F, & I)
- 70th Regiment Militia
- 115th Regiment Militia
- 164th Regiment Militia
- Company I (2nd), 4th Regiment, Virginia State Line (Cavalry)
- Company A, Tuttle's Battalion, Detailed Nitre Men
- Town of Abingdon Second Class Militia Infantry Company

Military Departments encompassing Washington County

The Confederate Army was organized into military departments. The boundaries and names of these departments changed occasionally.

Washington County lay in the following departments during the war:

- 8 May 1861–25 Nov. 1862: Department of Southwestern Virginia
- 25 Nov. 1862–27 Sept. 1864: Trans-Allegheny Department
- 17 Jan. 1863: District of Abingdon, transferred from Department of Southwestern Virginia to Department of East Tennessee
- 5 Sept. 1863: Extreme Southwest Virginia, transferred from Dept. of East Tennessee to Trans-Allegheny Department
- 19 Mar. 1864: Trans-Allegheny Dept. expanded to include Salvisa, Va.
- 27 Sept. 1864–19 April 1865: Dept. of East Tennessee and West Virginia

Military Department Commanders

Department of Southwestern Virginia

- John Echols: 16 Oct. 1862–19 Nov. 1862
- John Stuart Williams: 19 Nov. 1862–21 Nov. 1862

Trans-Allegheny Department

- John Stuart Williams: 21 Nov. 1862–10 Dec. 1862
- Samuel Jones: 10 Dec. 1862–23 Feb. 1864
- John C. Breckinridge: 25 Feb. 1864–23 May 1864
- William E. "Gumtree" Jones: 25 May 1864–31 May 1864
- George B. Crittenden: 31 May 1864–22 Jun. 1864
- John C. Breckinridge: 17 Sep. 1864–27 Sep. 1864

Department of East Tennessee and West Virginia

- John Echols: 29 Mar. 1865–19 Apr. 1865

Confederate Generals with Connections to Washington County, Virginia

General Joseph Eggleston Johnston (1807–1891) lived in Abingdon from age four (1811) until leaving to attend West Point in 1825. As a brigadier general, he was the highest ranking officer to resign from the U.S. Army at the outbreak of the Civil War. Following the First Battle of Manassas, Johnston became one of the first full generals in the Confederate Army.

Brigadier General William E. "Gumtree" Jones (1824–1864) Born in Glade Spring, Virginia and graduated from Emory & Henry College before enrolling at West Point in 1844. Jones was killed in the Battle of Piedmont and is interred in the Old Glade Presbyterian Cemetery.

Brigadier General John Smith Preston (1809–1881) Born in Abingdon and lived in the town for his first twenty-one years. From 1863, he served as the superintendent of the Bureau of Conscription in Richmond.
Brigadier General William Young Conn Humes (1830–1893) Born in Abingdon. He graduated from VMI in 1851, second in a class of 29 cadets. Following graduation, he was a teacher in Abingdon and married another Abingdon resident. He commanded a cavalry brigade in the Civil War.

Brigadier General John Buchanan Floyd (1806–1863) Moved to Abingdon in 1839; served as Virginia governor from 1849 to 1852. He was appointed Secretary of War by U. S. President James Buchanan in 1857, but was dismissed because of his southern sympathies. He then received a commission in the Confederate Army but after his defeat at Fort Donelson, Confederate President Jefferson Davis fired him. He then received a commission as a general in Virginia troops and was active in the area, but he died in 1863 and is buried in Stinking Spring Cemetery in Abingdon.

Brigadier General Gilbert Simrall Moon (1824–1908) Born in Abingdon, but left when still a teenager. He served in the Virginia House of Delegates 1852–1854. At the outbreak of the Civil War, he commanded a brigade of Virginia militia. In 1862, he resigned his commission and held various positions in the Shenandoah County Virginia government for the remainder of the war. Moon served in the Virginia State Senate 1871–1875.

Other Generals Who Attended Emory & Henry College
- Major General Henry DeLamar Clay (1837–1890)
- Brigadier General James Bryan Gordon (1832–1864)
- Brigadier General John Creed Moore (1824–1910)
- Major General James Ewell Brown "Jeb" Stuart (1833–1864)
- Brigadier General William Feimster Tucker (1827–1881)

The Gray Ghost
Colonel John Singleton Mosby (1833–1916) One of the most colorful commanders during the war and a resident of Washington County, obtained fame as a partisan leader. He was a lawyer in Bristol when the war began. Mosby joined a local cavalry unit raised by "Grumble" Jones and left Abingdon with the unit for Richmond and, eventually, to fight in the First Battle of Manassas. Later he was given leadership of his own band of Partisan Rangers by his commander, "Jeb" Stuart. Known as the Gray Ghost because of his elusive hit and run tactics, he evaded capture in Northern Virginia. After the war he supported President U. S. Grant and served as U. S. Consul to Hong Kong from 1878 to 1885. Mosby later served as an assistant attorney at the Department of Justice in Washington, DC from 1904 until 1910.

The War Reaches Washington County
Actual warfare did not take place in the county until 1863 when two incursions by Federal troops into the county from East Tennessee caused great alarm with many men enlisting in the Confederate Army. At the beginning of the war, however, the citizens of the county were divided in their thoughts, some supporting the Union and others the Confederacy. The county was neutral, but some of the citizens were active in both sides. In the spring of 1864, the First Battle of Saltville took place when Federal troops led by Gen. Stephen C. Burbridge, attempted to take the Salt Works but were repelled.

The war in Washington County ended in December, 1864 when Gen. George Stoneman led an invasion from East Tennessee and burned important buildings in Bristol, Abingdon, and Glade Spring and destroyed much of the Salt Works in the Second Battle of Saltville. During his raid into Southwest Virginia, Stoneman destroyed the supply and railroad depots, took huge amounts of military supplies, and captured 897 officers and enlisted men, 2,000 horses, and 1,000 miles along with many other items.

During Stoneman's invasion, Federal troops burned the jail, the train depot, the court house, military barracks, and other structures in Abingdon. The clerk of court, John G. Keeger, managed to save many of the county records. At Glade Spring the Federal force took two trains along with the railroad employees, although one of them escaped to tell about the event.
14. The William King House
106 Court Street (Built 1803)
William King, a wealthy merchant and one of the owners of the saltworks in Salville, came from Ireland. When he built this house he called "Grace Hill," it was the first brick house in Abingdon. That same year, King also endowed the Abingdon Male Academy, which continually operated until 1904.

15. Washington County Courthouse
169 E. Main Street (Built 1868)
Although built after the Civil War, this courthouse sits on "Courthouse Hill," the same property on which three previous courthouses were located, and replaced the 1850 building burned by Union troops in 1864. The original courthouse was a one-story log structure, only 20 ft. square, completed in 1779. A second courthouse was built on the site in 1812, eventually replaced by the third in 1850. In a plaza to the left of the courthouse is the Confederate Soldier Monument and a memorial honoring Confederate generals from the county. The Soldier Monument was erected in the street at the intersection of Court and Main Streets, where the local soldiers had gathered to go to the Civil War. The monument was moved to the plaza in 1936 due to it being a danger to automobiles.

16. Colonel James White House
171 E. Main Street (Built 1819)
Built by the richest man in Washington County, who owned hundreds of slaves in several states. The original structure was burned in 1828. The restoration and to the right were added in 1828. The structure was damaged by the 1864 courthouse fire and restored after the war.

17. Andrew Russell House
165 E. Main Street (Built 1792)
The western, older part of the house was used as headquarters of the Confederate Military Department of Southwest Virginia. The eastern section was added in 1876. Mr. Russell served in the county clerk's office for many years and was a supporter of better schools.

18. Gen. Francis Preston Law Office
159 E. Main Street (Built 1815)
The front portion of the house has the original law office in the attic. Preston was a lawyer, a member of the Senate of Virginia and a Brigadier General in the War of 1812.

19. The Rohr House/Marcella
133 E. Main Street (Built 1845)
This brick townhouse was built as a residence by the Reverend Phillip Rohr. Through the years, it has been a home, a millinery shop, a physician's office, and the Town Library. In 1925, it was purchased and restored as a home by David and Marcella Burke.

20. Valentine Baugh House
129 E. Main Street (Built 1798)
Valentine Baugh was a clock maker, silversmith, and gunsmith. The western portion of this house is a log building dating to 1798. An addition and west wing were added to the log house in 1807. Mr. Baugh's granddaughter, Miss Minnie Baugh, built an apartment building adjacent to the west side in 1891 and practiced as a druggist for several years.

21. Samuel A. Preston House
115 E. Main Street (Built 1857)
Samuel Alexander Preston (1827-1891) was born in Ireland and moved to Abingdon, becoming a merchant.

22. Thomas P. Hoofnagle House
111 W. Main Street (Built 1851)
Hoofnagle bought the property in 1847 and built this house in 1851. He had a general store and a lumberyard and in 1855 he taught a "male school" in the basement of "Temperance Hall" (today's Barter Theatre #24).

23. William Rodefer House
123 W. Main Street (Built 1857)
In 1846, William Rodefer was in the Washington County militia. He was a carpenter and joined and built this house after his former home (at the site of the Preston House #21) burned in 1856. It is a Federal style house with a classically symmetrical facade.

24. Barter Theatre
127 W. Main Street (Built 1833)
Originally constructed as the Sinking Spring Presbyterian Church in 1832 and later owned by the Sons of Temperance. Lectures, meetings, and theatrical productions frequented the facility. In 1855, a male school met in the basement.

25. Sinking Spring Cemetery
Russell Road at E. Valley Street
Established as the burial ground for members of the Sinking Spring Presbyterian Church, which was established in 1773. The congregation purchased land from Dr. Thomas Walker in 1788. Rev. Charles Cumnings, they built a log church house and laid out the cemetery on 11 acres. Henry Creswell, killed in an Indian raid in July 1776, was the first person buried here. Rev. Cumnings’ Cabin, at right, was built about 1774 three miles north of town but later moved to the cemetery to preserve it. Rev. Cumnings and his wife are buried in the cemetery. The burial mound, at right, was, for a few days in 1864, the first resting place of Confederate General John Hunt Morgan. This cemetery is the final resting place of two Virginia governors: David Campbell and John B. Floyd. A third governor of Virginia, Wyndham Robertson, lived in Abingdon, but only his wife and children are buried here. At least 30 soldiers are buried in the "Unknown Confederate Dead" section, the first of whom was killed in an 1861 troop train wreck just west of the town.

26. Section Master’s House
301 Front Street SW (Built 1854)
Constructed by the Virginia & Tennessee Railroad, this house is just across the tracks from the Historical Society. The structure to the left in the photo is a pedestrian bridge over the tracks.

27. William Fields House
302 Front Street SW (Built 1860)
William Fields built this brick house opposite the Depot on the south side of the railroad line. He died in 1862.

28. The Depot Hotel
308 Front Street SW (Built 1859)
Fields built this frame house after he bought the lot in 1857. It is likely the Central Hotel, "a House of Entertainment for horse drivers in particular" in 1859.

Sites beyond walking distance from downtown Abingdon

29. Retirement and the Muster Grounds
702 Colonial Road (Built c. 1813)
Retirement is the second oldest office building in Abingdon. The original structure was built by Captain Robert Craig and was completed by 1813. Captain Craig named the house "Retirement" because he was "... withdrawing from active life." On Sept. 24, 1780, the Overmountain Men militia under the leadership of Col. William Campbell mustered on these grounds and from here departed to South Carolina for the Battle of King’s Mountain.

A later owner and grandson of a King Mountain veteran, Judge Samuel Vance Fullerson, built an eastern addition in 1857. Judge Fullerson was commissioned Lt. Colonel of the 37th Virginia Infantry under Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson. In 1861, Fullerson drilled his troops for several weeks before they departed by train for Manassas, Virginia. He was later killed at the battle of Gaines Mill and the property was transferred to his wife and sister. Union forces set up camp at the Muster Grounds on their way to destroy the salt mills in Saltville, Virginia. Fullerson's sister, Catherine, was to be wed to Floyd B. Hurt on December 14, 1864, the same evening that the Union troops encamped on the ground. The wedding feast was consumed by the troops before they departed for Saltville. One of the Federal officers, a former resident of Abingdon, stayed behind and burned down the County Courthouse (+15) before being shot and killed by Confederate cavalry troopers who witnessed the action.

30. Ackland
809 E. Main Street (Built 1859)
This home was built by James C. Greenway. During the summer of 1864, General John Hunt Morgan used this home as his headquarters while in command of the Department of Southwest Virginia & East Tennessee.
A Walking Tour of Historic Abingdon Sites
with Emphasis on the Civil War

1. Fields-Penn House
2. The Martha Hotel & Spa
3. The Barter Stage II
4. Judge John A. Campbell House
5. Andrew Gibson House
6. Dunn's Hotel/The Virginia House
7. The Tavern
8. The Washington House
10. James K. Gibson House
11. Adam Hickman/Cave House
12. Dr. William H. Pitts House
13. The Bank/Preston House
14. The William King House
15. Washington County Courthouse
16. Colonel James White House
17. Andrew Russell House
18. Gen. Francis Preston Law Office
19. The Rohr House/Marcella
20. Valentine-Baug House
21. Samuel A. Preston House
22. Thomas P. Hoofnagle House
23. William Rodefer House
24. Barter Theatre
25. Sinking Spring Cemetery
26. Section Master's House
27. William Fields House
28. The Depot Hotel
29. Retirement and the Muster Grounds
30. Ackland

Just Beyond Downtown Abingdon

Map of historic sites in Abingdon, Virginia, with landmarks and streets labeled.