

TRAVEL WITH ME TO HISTORIC CENTREVILLE, VA: MY HOMETOWN

Sudha G. Rajput

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My goal of this write-up is to preserve and cherish the heritage of this historic town of Centreville, located in the western corner of Fairfax county, within Virginia, where I have lived for 28 years. The aim is to introduce family and friends to the historic houses, churches, plantations, battle hills, trenches and hideouts that were instrumental in shaping the character of the United States, given Centreville's strategic role during the American Civil War.

The American Civil War was Centreville's most dramatic period, when Centreville was occupied by both the Union Army and the Confederate Army, and when the battles of the First and Second Manassas were fought on its doorstep. Relics from early English settlers and Civil War are still present in Centreville. Come and explore with me the links to the past under the soil of Centreville!

Challenge of preserving Centreville's historic sites: Preserving Centreville's historical sites poses the challenge of finding the right balance between the need to preserve history and the development responsibility needed to make room for new residents who want to make Centerville their home and send their kids to this community's schools. Preservation needs to be accomplished in the context of compatibility with urban development and safety of the historical structures. The enthusiasm to embrace development and technology has put great pressure on the historic sites of Centreville. But the need to create a visually identifiable historic district and encourage tourists to notice and visit the district cannot be overstated.

Centreville Chronology:

Centreville is 300 yrs. old – recorded history of Centreville dates from 1st half of 18th century when settlement began – several names of current roads bear reference to names of towns in England.

1768 - The name "Newgate" was established when a tavern was constructed. The settlers in the area came from Westmoreland County area and from Maryland.

1792 – With post-Revolutionary economic enthusiasm, residents petitioned for name change, the Virginia Assembly authorized this village of Newgate, a town status and the name was changed to Centerville (later spelled Centreville), given its central location.

1861 – Similar to most precincts in Fairfax County, in May 1861 Centreville voters unanimously voted for secession from the United States, earlier Virginia had seceded from the Union. By June town was occupied by Confederate troops as Centreville became the focal point for the war in Virginia, Confederate Gen. Johnston brought his force of 40,000 men to Centreville to set up winter camps, Centreville became an army camp.

Strategic importance: Position of Centreville was key in its role in the Civil War, it was close to the turnpike and railroad systems; located on high plateau; and proximity to Richmond and Washington, D.C.

1940 – Manassas National Battlefield Park was established which brought tourists from all over the country, to this part of the country.

1960 – The neighboring town of Chantilly was one of several large colonial plantations, part of the nearby community of Willard was demolished in 1960 to make room for the Dulles Int'l Airport. Sometimes later, the area began to be transformed from a post-Civil War farming community to the D.C. suburban town.

1984 – Centreville Historic District (Old Town Centreville) was established as part of Fairfax County's mandate to preserve the country's historic and architectural landmarks.

2003 – National Air and Space Museum was opened in the neighboring area, which has brought more tourism to this area.

Trivia

- ❖ **Centreville is located** 20 miles west of Washington, D.C., and occupies an area of 13 sq. miles, with a population of 71,000 (21,000 households).
- ❖ **First Battle Victory:** First Battle of Bull Run/Manassas – was first major battle of American Civil War and it was a Confederate victory.
- ❖ **Early carpools:** Teachers rode to their schools every day in horse/buggy (students carpooled in horse-drawn buggies).
- ❖ **Internal Displacement:** Many local families were displaced by the war, as they fled their homes in Centreville.
- ❖ **Centerville Day:** Instituted in early 1900s, it is an annual celebration held in September.
- ❖ **Sports:** Wildcats is Centreville High School's Football Team.

Rajput Residence



About the House: The brick-front corner house, in the Willoughby Woods, with 2500 square feet living area, was built in 1990 with colonial architecture. It was sold by the builder, to Rajputs, through an auction in 1992, Rajputs moved to the property in September 1992. Since the initial occupancy, Rajputs have made several extensions and upgrades to the house, including a 2-level 400 sq. feet wooden deck, a finished basement that contains a gym, an entertainment room, and a utility room. The original kitchen was upgraded with blue-marble granite fixtures and tile flooring. All rooms are routinely painted with bright bold colors that give the rooms a warm glow. Rajput children have grown up in the house and have benefited from Centreville’s excellent school system.

PART I

CENTREVILLE SITES

1	Centreville Historic District (Old Town Centreville)	‘Historic District’ contains: (1) Mount Gilead House (2) St. John’s Episcopal Church (3) Harrison House (4) Havner House (5) Centreville Historic Park (6) Old Stone Church	Architecture: (1) Mt. Gilead House -Potomac river (2) Church - Gothic-revival
2	COX Farms	40-acre farm features rural life, hay rides and Fall festivals	
3	Manassas Battlefield Park, Stone Bridge, Stone House - Registered in the National Register of Historic Places	Place of significant battles of the Civil War	
4	National Air and Space Museum – 2003	Houses the DISCOVERY space shuttle and first airplane of Wright brothers (Kitty Hawk Flyer)	Design: Tennessee marble exterior
5	Old Stone Church: Rt. 28/29		Architecture: Gothic revival
5	Ox Hill Battlefield near Chantilly	Site of Battle of Chantilly	
7	Sully Historic Plantation -Registered in the National Register of Historic Places	Built in 1794 during Federal period, park events reenact reconstruction of colonial life	Architecture: Georgian
8	Stuart Mosby Civil War Cavalry Museum	Houses the Confederate army memorabilia	
9	Walney (Ellanor C. Lawrence Park)	A 678 acres estate, constructed in 1768, owner Lewis Machen named it Walney	

		after a small island near Lancashire, England	
	<u>OTHER Nearby PLACES:</u>		
	Bull Run Post Office Road (its nearby area), Bull Run Regional Park	Contains the Bull Run Winery	
	Chua Van Hanh (Buddhist monastery)	Bull Run Dr. Centreville	

Centreville Historic District (Old Town Centreville)

In September 1984, the Historic Commission of Fairfax County, established the Centreville Historic District, to promote the role of the district in the state’s and in the nation’s history. Centreville Historic District is the complex consisting of **six structures** clustered around a rectangular area (**Route 28/29**) formed by Braddock Rd., and Mount Gilead Rd. These structures are: (1) **Harrison House** (2) **Havener House** (3) **Old Stone Church** (4) **Mount Gilead** (5) **St. John’s Episcopal Church**; and (6) **Centreville Historic Park** –a 14-acre area covering 300 years of County history with Civil War fortifications. On the grounds of Mount Gilead are remains of trenches and fortifications constructed during the Civil War.

27th Annual Centreville Day (October 19, 2019)





Cox Farms:



In 1972 Herndon high school sweethearts Eric Cox and Gina Richard, at age 18, purchased 116 acres of land on Braddock Rd in Centreville, moving to the farm house in 1979. The farm provides the visitors a taste of rural life. Schools soon began to take classes out to the farm for pumpkins and hayrides. In 1983 Cox farms held its first Fall Festival. The business is now a popular fall attraction, with thousands of visitors attending the Fall Festival and the haunted corn maze (Fields of Fear). Eric and Gina’s son Lucas, was my daughter’s classmate at Centreville High School. The Coxes still live at the farm and have raised their 3 kids and 4 grandkids are also growing up on the farm.

Harrison House



Built ca 1859, services for St. John’s Episcopal Church were conducted here during the Civil War when the church was used as a hospital.

Directions: Corner of Braddock and Mount Gilead Rd.

Havener House:

During Civil War, it was used as an aid station and often as the Centreville Post Office. **Directions:** Across Braddock Rd. from Centreville Methodist Church.



Manassas National Battlefield Park, Stone Bridge, Stone House:

National Register of Historic Places



Battlefield Park: The site of two major battles (First and Second Battle of Manassas/Bull Run of the American Civil War. In July 1861, two armies clashed on the fields overlooking Bull Run. In August 1862, Union and Confederate armies converged again on the plains of Manassas. The Confederates won a solid victory bringing them to the height of their power. **Stone Bridge:** Originally built of native sandstone in 1825, the turnpike bridge over Bull Run was an important landmark in the Civil War battles at Manassas. Its ability to carry traffic across the steep stream gave the Stone Bridge a key role in the Civil War. The original bridge was destroyed when Confederate forces evacuated N. Virginia in 1862. In 1884, a new bridge, similar in design was built. Modern day Rt. 29 crosses the Bull Run on a bridge built in late 1960s. **Stone House:** Built ca 1849 as a stop on the Fauquier and Alexandria, it achieved its significance when it served as a hospital during the First and Second Battles. National Park Service (Manassas National Battlefield Park authorities) provide tours and hosts programs during the year. **Stonewall Jackson statue** – A monument to Confederate Gen. Thomas ‘Stonewall’ Jackson. **Directions** 6511 Sudley Rd, 2.9 miles west of Centreville on Rt. 29. Stone Bridge is on right past the quarry and down the road is the Stone House.

Mount Gilead:



Built ca. 1785 – one of the earliest houses in Fairfax county, the house takes up one-third of the Centreville Historic District. **Directions:** Rt 28/29.

National Air and Space Museum



Opened in 2003, the two locations of the National Air and Space Museum (D.C. and Chantilly) attract millions of visitors to Centreville. The Chantilly location houses the Space shuttle **Discovery**, the centerpiece of the museum, along with replica of the first airplane flown by the Wright brothers (the Kitty Hawk Flyer).

Old Stone Church: Centreville Methodist Church



Church of the Ascension – Anglican Catholic

Originally built in 1855, was used as a hospital during the first and second battles of Manassas. The original structure was destroyed in the second battle. Rebuilt in 1870, the first section of the present stone church is similar to the original structure. A stone addition to the church was completed in 1945.

Directions; 13941 Braddock Rd, Centreville.

Ox Hill Battlefield Park Chantilly (Battle of Chantilly)

In 1862, 1,500 soldiers and 2 generals died on this hill, as they fought over terrain of 500 acres, fighting the **Battle of Chantilly**. To east of Centreville lies this Ox Hill Battlefield park on **Monument Drive**, so named as the monument to this battle. Only 5 acres have been set aside to remember the fighting that day which the Union army called the Battle of Chantilly. Directions: Monument Drive, across from Fairfax Towne Center shopping plaza.

Stuart Mosby Civil War Cavalry Museum



The museum is named for both General J.E.B Stuart and Col John Singleton Mosby and houses wartime memorabilia.

**St. John's Episcopal Church
(near Mt. Gilead)**



St. John's Church

Land was gifted in 1849 and consecrated in 1854. One-story **Gothic revival-style building** with **arched windows** and entrance. A parish hall, built in 1954, adjoins the church, w/cemetery in churchyard. The **fencing around the property evokes the Civil War connections**. The church was burned in 1863 and was used as a war time hospital and campground up to that time.

**Sully Plantation (Sully
Historic Site): *National
Register of Historic
Places***

Sully Historic Plantation

1799 Home of Richard Bland Lee



Built in 1794, during the *Federal period* by Richard Bland Lee (Northern VA's first Congressman and **Robert E Lee's, uncle (Robert E. Lee was confederate general in Civil War)** originally much larger than 65 acres of plantation – (**Georgian architecture**). Includes original outbuildings, representative slave quarter and gardens. Guided tours highlight the early 19th century life of Lee family, tenant farmers and enslaved African Americans. Park events mirror the life of the federal period. Slaves worked both inside/outside the home. Lee inherited 29 slaves from his father in 1787, slaves included blacksmith, farmers, cooks, cleaners. Kitchen and laundry were outside the main house which the slaves attended to.

Imp: several parts of the plantation were demolished in 1960 to make room for **Dulles Airport**. Directions: **3650 Historic Sully Way, Chantilly, (5 miles from Centerville).**

**Walney (Ellanor C. Lawrence
Park) with Cabell's Mill:**



Constructed in 1768 by Thomas Brown, a prominent Virginia farmer. Eventually it was sold in 1844 to Lewis Machen who named it **Walney after a small island near Lancashire, England** where his family had lived. It was purchased in 1935 by Ellanor Lawrence as part of the 678 acres estate which included **Cabell's Mill** (operated as a mill until 1916). Visitors can see a meat plank house on the property which the family used to smoke the meats. The park is a haven for nature hikes with over 4 miles of trails. **Directions:** 5040 Walney Road, Chantilly.

Willoughby Newton boundary stone: in Sully Government Center.

The 1727 Willoughby Newton boundary stone is the oldest written record in Fairfax County, on loan in the Centreville Regional Library for appreciation and enlightenment of Centreville citizens.

[Winery at Bull Run \(within Centreville\)](#) 15950 Lee Hwy, Centreville



OTHER PLACES:

[Bull Run Post Office Road:](#) one of the few places in Centreville that has retained its rural character in the present day, w/horse farms, small Fairfax County park, Southwestern Youth Assoc sports park, surrounded by woods.

[Chua Van Hanh \(Buddhist monastery\):](#) 7605 Bull Run Dr, Centreville, VA 20121-2504



[Fairfax Courthouse:](#) Confederate general **Beauregard** used the Fairfax Courthouse as his HQ.

Part II

History of Centreville and its role in America's Civil War

Centreville's roots trace to a tiny village called Newgate. In 1740, Willoughby Newton had acquired 6,400 acres of land which he later leased to farmers. Newgate Tavern was the place where convict labor was sold

(named after the Newgate Prison in England). Given the bad connotation of the prison, the locals protested for a name change, and Virginia General Assembly renamed the area Centreville in 1792. In the post-civil war period, much of the farmland of Centreville disappeared as it became a community of town houses and schools, yet the area retains its rich history shaped by the American Civil War.

Civil war devastated Centreville as both armies occupied the area given its strategic location. Traces of pre-civil war are still present in Centreville, for instance, 'Mount Gilead Home' on Braddock Rd. is a reminder of how Centreville was once occupied by 40,000 confederate troops, where General Johnston had set up his HQ, a short walk from the Four Chimney House. Down the road from Mt. Gilead is the Old Stone Church that housed a Methodist Episcopal congregation during the war. After the 1st and 2nd battle of Manassas, church became a makeshift hospital for the wounded soldiers. Battle of Manassas had attracted both armies to Centreville due to its high terrain and easy access to roads leading to Richmond and Washington. Once a sleepy town only known for its Newgate prison and slave rental became a scene of destruction and devastation. It continues to bear those wounds and scars.

However, with the invention of the automobile and the enterprising spirit of the people, when people began putting up new gas stations and shops, new life began pouring into this city in the 1960s. New families have replaced the ones that had fled after the Civil War. The addition of the Dulles International airport was a symbol of the many changes to come to once a farmland and later a war-torn community, the arrival of the airport added the many hotels and extended stay residences. In 1958, President Eisenhower selected the site for the airport and President J.F. Kennedy dedicated the airport in 1962. The developments continued in 2003, Centerville was chosen as a prime place to open the second National Air and Space Museum. The area has grown since the 1980s with more jobs coming into the Fairfax county.

I am hopeful that the growth will continue in Centerville as the job growth over the next ten years is predicted to be 36.7%, higher than the US average of 33.5% and the Sales Tax Rate for Centreville remains at 6.0% lower than the US average of 7.3%. Additionally, Centreville is blessed to be home to some of the most iconic of the national treasures, such as Manassas National Battlefield Park, National Air and Space Museum and Sully Plantation that feature reenactments of what life was like centuries ago.

Part III:

Lesson on America's Civil War

Why the American Civil War (1861-1865):

(McPherson, n.d.) 1/

The American Civil War is the central event in America's history, a defining time for this country's people. While the American Revolution 1776-1783 created the United States, the Civil War determined what kind of nation it would be. The war resolved two questions left unresolved by the revolution: whether the United States

was to be a confederation of sovereign states or an indivisible nation with a sovereign national government; and whether this nation, born of a declaration that all men were created with an equal right to liberty, would continue to exist as the largest slaveholding country in the world.

Northern victory in the war preserved the United States as one nation and ended the institution of slavery that had divided the country from its beginning. This achievement came at the cost of 625,000 lives. The American Civil War was the largest and most destructive conflict in the Western world between the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 and the onset of World War I in 1914.

The Civil War began because of uncompromising differences between the free and slave states over the power of the national government to prohibit slavery in the territories that had not yet become states. When Abraham Lincoln won election in 1860 as the first Republican president on a platform pledging to keep slavery out of the territories, seven slave states in the deep South (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Texas) seceded and formed a new nation, the Confederate States of America. The incoming Lincoln administration^{2/} and most of the Northern people refused to recognize the legitimacy of secession. They feared that it would discredit democracy and create a fatal precedent that would eventually fragment the United States into several small countries.

The event that triggered the war came at Fort Sumter in Charleston Bay (S. Carolina) in April 1861. Claiming this fort as their own, the Confederate army opened fire on the federal barracks forcing them to lower the American flag in surrender. Lincoln called out the militia to suppress this "insurrection." Four more slave states seceded and joined the Confederacy. By the end of 1861 nearly a million-armed men confronted each other along a line stretching 1200 miles from Virginia to Missouri. Several battles had already taken place near Manassas Junction in Virginia, in the mountains of western Virginia where Union victories paved the way for creation of the new state of West Virginia, at Wilson's Creek in Missouri, at Cape Hatteras in North Carolina, and at Port Royal in South Carolina where the Union navy established a base for a blockade to shut off the Confederacy's access to the outside world.

The real fighting began in 1862. Large-scale battles like Shiloh in Tennessee, Gaines' Mill, Second Manassas, Fredericksburg in Virginia, and Antietam in Maryland foreshadowed even bigger battles in subsequent years, from Gettysburg in Pennsylvania to Vicksburg on the Mississippi to Chickamauga and Atlanta in Georgia. By 1864 the original Northern goal of a limited war to restore the Union had given way to a new strategy of *total war* to destroy the Old South and its basic institution of slavery and to give the restored Union a *new birth of freedom*, as President Lincoln put it in his address at Gettysburg to dedicate a cemetery for Union soldiers killed in the battle there.

For three long years, 1862 -1865, Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia staved off invasions and attacks by the Union Army of the Potomac commanded by a series of ineffective generals until Ulysses S. Grant came to Virginia from the Western theater to become general in chief of all Union armies in 1864. After bloody battles at Spotsylvania, Cold Harbor, and Petersburg, Grant finally brought Lee to bay at Appomattox in April 1865. In meantime, Union armies and river fleets in the theater of war comprising the slave states west of the Appalachian Mountain chain won a long series of victories over Confederate armies. In 1864-1865 General William Sherman led his army deep into the Confederate heartland of Georgia and South Carolina, destroying their economic infrastructure while General George Thomas virtually destroyed the Confederacy's Army of Tennessee at the battle of Nashville.

By the spring of 1865 all the principal Confederate armies surrendered, and when Union cavalry captured the fleeing Confederate President Jefferson Finis Davis^{6/} (not Thomas Jefferson who was the US's 3rd pd) in Georgia in May 1865, resistance collapsed and the war ended. The long, painful process of rebuilding a united nation free of slavery began thereon.

footnotes:

1/ Dr. James McPherson

2/ James Buchanan was Pd before Lincoln. Andrew Johnson Lincoln's VP became the pd after Lincoln's assassination in 1865.

3/ **Earthwork**: large artificial bank of soil, used as fortification.

4) **Federal period**: The nation's early years, 1790 -1830, generally define the Federal period. During this time, a keen sense of **nationalism** arose, and gov leaders such as **Thomas Jefferson looked to the classical ages of Greece and Rome for inspiration in forging an identity for the new American Republic.**

5) **John Singleton Mosby**: Confederate attorney - Confederate army cavalry battalion commander in the American Civil War.

6) **Jefferson Finis Davis** (not Thomas Jefferson) – Pd of Confederate States 1861 -1865. As member of Democratic Party, represented Mississippi in the Senate before Civil War.

References:

Lopez, Mary Stachyra. Images of America - Centreville and Chantilly (book gift from Sura Rajput, Christmas 2019).