

Visiting Memorable Places In Rockbridge County with Nannie Jordan

“After leaving Lexington in 1897 I always longed to go back – was there every few months and always insisted that I felt the thrill of Virginia as soon as it was touched by the wheels of the train.”

Nannie Jordan



THE LITTLE TOWN of Lexington lies in a beautiful valley between two mountain ranges, the Blue Ridge and the Alleghenies. It dates back into the early 1700s. The streets were merely muddy roads in my childhood, with stepping stones at the end of each block. To cross, it was necessary to walk the whole block. There were indifferent side walks, lighted with oil lamps on posts – no gas or electricity – at twilight a man would go around and light these lamps – at dawn he would put them out.



The Nannie Jordan House in a 2013 computer-aided re-creation by Col. Edwin L. Dooley of Virginia Military Institute.

Being a College town and the people desiring to make it an educational center, there were no factories or other industrial institutions.

Remote from all traffic except a little canal boat and a stage line over the Goshen Pass, travel was difficult and in winter, very dangerous. A trip to Richmond took three days – to North Carolina by stage, with frequent relays of horses, one week.

LANDMARKS

The Old Jordan Home

I cannot say by whom it was built but my Father bought it from the Preston estate and it dates back to Lexington's earliest days – perhaps as early as 1736.

Previous to my Father's possession of it the MoDowells owned it – then the Taylors – and Caruthers.

My Mother and Father made it their home in the early 1800s and all of their children were born there – and later, several of their grand children. It is known now as “32 N. Main St.”

Goshen Pass

The Goshen Pass was practically a one-way road – only small vehicles



Nannie Jordan, 1876.
Photograph by Michael Miley.

could pass each other. [When] two stages met, one bound for Lexington, the other for Goshen, the Goshen stage was, of course, on the right-hand. All the passengers and the drivers attached ropes to the [Lexington-bound] stage and climbed the cliff while the two horses left attached on the left-side slowly drew [the Goshen-bound stage] past the other on the two wheels that were on the road and the other wheels hanging free over the precipice.

Wilson's Springs

A twenty-minute drive from Lexington brings us to "Wilson's Springs" – an old established resort for the "élite" of our little town. This place is just at the entrance of the Goshen Pass – at the foot of the [Hogback] mountain – a sulphur spring with ice-cold water and bathing in a beautiful shaded creek. A big frame hotel was originally owned and operated by Mrs. Wilson – hence its name. The guests, when called by a big bell to dinners sat on long backless benches at wooden and clothless tables. It was said that all the vegetables were cooked together in one big pot – but Oh! so good! There was a spacious lawn with rude little cabins backing against the green mountains. In these, for many many years, were "Us Virginians" who sought and found there a sweet, free, Bohemian life – dancing at night on a wooden platform, and fishing and bathing in the day. These conditions still exist.

A walk into the Goshen Pass where the laurel and wild flowers made, and still make, a living wall of beauty on the left that would keep Wallace Nutting too busy to think of other fields to copy, a frightful precipice on the right – snakes and lizards to jump over – and then another dipper of Sulphur water – and a ravenous appetite for that "pot-pourri" dinner, and a scramble for the wooden benches.

When September came and we must "go back to school" and say Good-bye – we were sorry, but many

close friendships had been made and many sweet memories to carry through nine months of grind, until the laurels should bloom again.

Beechen Brook

About a quarter of a mile North of Lexington is a chapel called "Beechenbrook." The money for building this chapel was given by Mrs. Margaret Preston from the proceeds of her book, "Silverwood." This book was written by candle light during the Civil War. Prof. Alex Nelson was said to be the hero of Silverwood.

A beautiful poem which she felt to be her finest was lost, because being blind, she discovered too late that her pencil was without lead. Mrs. Preston was a close relative of Gen. Stonewall Jackson. Two more of her poems were "Arlington" and "Stonewall Jackson's Grave." For many years the girls of Lexington taught an afternoon Sunday school at Beechenbrook.

The Old Covered Bridge

Just beyond Beechenbrook at "East Lexington" is the old covered bridge, that we were always happy when

crossing because we were "going places," Goshen or somewhere else – or coming home which was best of all, for at all times "Home, sweet home" is the place to come – whether the heart beats with joy, or the eyes are dim with tears – home is best. A beautiful new bridge has been built for traffic and the old one, being unsafe and seemingly passing away like so many who have crossed it, is "Super annuated." It has become the property of the A.P.V.A. [Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities] at the nominal price of \$1.00 and they hope to prolong its life. It is one of the sweetest memories of "the smiles and tears of other years." [The bridge, supposedly beyond repair, was demolished soon after.]

Clifton

This is just beyond the old covered bridge at East Lexington. The Alexanders owned it and lived there – Mr. and Mrs. Archie Alexander, Miss Mary, Miss Betty and Mr. John Alexander. There was a sister who married Dr. Lacey, and after they died a son, John Alexander Lacey, lived at Clifton until he was

*The old covered bridge
across the Maury River
at East Lexington.*



grown. He was a friend of Libbie's, my sister, and I remember the lovely strings of cherries he would bring her, and stand on the corner below our house, too embarrassed to come and offer them to her. He married Lib Myers, became a Judge and lived in Washington.

Subsequent to the Alexanders, Col. Johnston occupied Clifton, then Maj. Finley Houston, whose daughter Mrs. Harlow now occupies it.

Col Alto

This was the home of Gov. McDowell. Miss Sallie, his oldest daughter, was twice married – her second husband was Dr. Miller, a presbyterian minister, and, for a while, our pastor. He had two children, Margaret and Allie, and Mrs. Miller was afterward the mother of Susie and Lizzie who now live, I think, in New York. Miss Sallie's marriage to Dr. Miller was an unusual one for those early days. My mother often spoke of a beautiful centre piece on the bride's table, made of candied sections of oranges, in the form of a pyramid, from Pizzini of Richmond. Col Alto has since been occupied by Col. Massie, Judge Lee, and now by Mrs. Mason, a daughter of Harry Tucker.

The Big Stone House [Blandome]

This was just beyond the spring, on the top of the hill, opposite Washington and Lee University. It belonged, when I was a child, to "Uncle Fuller" [Jacob Fuller]. He and "Aunt Rachel" owned it and lived there

until reverses following the Civil War forced him to sell, and it passed into the hands of Judge John Randolph Tucker, who was then a member of Congress.

They christened it "Blandome." I have often been questioned as to the builder and early occupancy of this house – but can only remember the Taylors and Caruthers as connected with it, previous to Mr. Jacob Fuller's ownership.

At one time it was vacant for quite a while, and superstitious people imagined it was haunted. Lights were seen moving through it at late hours. This was investigated and traced to a set of gamblers.

This place now belongs to Harry Walker, a colored man, who has a meat house and grocery on Main St.

The Old Blue Hotel

It was never "blue" that anybody can remember. . . .

New Alsace

Mr. and Mrs. Weiss came to our county from their home in Alsace-Lorraine. They bought a farm near Lexington and planted a large vineyard and fruit trees. For want of other entertainment the W. & L. boys found it a pleasant drive with their "Sweethearts," for grapes etc. and sometimes, wine. The Weisses were well liked and kindly received by the people of Lexington. According to their customs in the "old country," the pigs, ducks, geese, and chickens had free access to the "living room."

They lost their only son by a tragic circumstance, and finally returned to their old home across the waters. This place now belongs to and is being beautified by Mr. and Mrs. Cabell Tutwiler.

Old Homes

Many of the houses on Main St. date back to the first settlers – and are now occupied by members of the third and fourth generation. On opposite sides of Main St. near the Court House are two large brick houses. The Dold house on the East side – and on the West, the Baker house. Two sisters were the occupants and a rivalry existed between them. A veranda on one inspired a veranda on the other – a fench window was matched by a finer one – and so those houses were the most beautiful ones on Main St. for many years. Very few of the descendants of the Baker house are now living and it is owned by Lucie and Margaret Withrow and occupied by them. Henry Dold owns and lives in the other. He is the son of Mr. Calvin Dold. And Dr. William Dold of Astoria Long Island is Dr. Samuel Dold's son.

NANNIE JORDAN

Nannie Jordan, born in Lexington in 1856, was a much-loved teacher and "a woman of happy and pleasant personality and strong character, deeply religious," as the Lexington Gazette said when she died in 1942. Along the way, she wrote a delicious memoir she called "Smiles and Tears of Other Years," consisting of stories, usually amusing and always vividly told, that shine a fascinating light on our town and its wondrous people. These stories are taken directly from that manuscript.