

**History of the Beverley's Ford Road Area**  
**Rappahannock River**

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## **Elkwood Plantation**

### **Beverley's Ford, and Beverley's Ford Road**

### **Beverley's Road Bridge**

In 1719, Robert Beverley (d. 1800), of “Blandfield, “ Essex County, patented the 13,000-acre Elkwood Tract, which comprises the current Civil War Preservation Trust property, Culpeper Regional Airport, the industrial airpark, and adjacent lands.<sup>1</sup> Robert's eldest son, William Beverley (1763-1823) emerged as an active planter on the tract, assisted by his younger brother, Munford Beverley (1779-1820). William and Munford built a plantation home on the property, “Elkwood,” and also erected a large water mill (Beverley's Mill)<sup>2</sup> on the powerful little stream, Ruffin's Run.<sup>3</sup>

Prior to the consolidation of the Elkwood Tract<sup>4</sup> by the Beverley family, an old road *already* existed coming from “Potesville,”<sup>5</sup> located on the Carolina Road that headed northwest to the Rappahannock, after it crossed Ruffin's

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<sup>1</sup> The Elkwood tract comprised a “Crown Grant,” conveyed to Robert Beverley by Lt. Gov. Alexander Spotswood. See, among other sources, John McGill, *The Beverley Family of Virginia* (Columbia, SC, 1956).

<sup>2</sup> The mill was a 30' by 40' three-story stone/wood structure, and no longer stands. Its deep millrace is evident on Ruffin's Run, just west of Beverley's Ford Road.

<sup>3</sup> The precise location of the original “Elkwood” home is unknown, but it was almost certainly located upon the same “footprint” as the home later built by Richard Hooper Cunningham, soon to be described.

<sup>4</sup> The name “Elkwood” called attention to the unique red deer who inhabited the property at the time—so red in color that locals called them “elk.” It is reported these colorful red deer roamed Elkwood until early this century. An early name of the Hazel River was “Elk River.” The current “village” of Elkwood takes its name from the Elkwood Tract.

<sup>5</sup> Potesville was situated at the intersection of the Old Carolina Road and the road later known as Beverley's Ford Road. Mostly then inhabited by a tavern and a blacksmith shop, no trace remains today.

Run.<sup>6</sup> This early byway, probably a former Indian hunting path, soon became known as Beverley's Ford Road.

It is a matter of historic distinction that the *first bridge to be built in Culpeper County across the Rappahannock was erected at Beverley's Ford*. In 1796, "150 Culpeper citizens"—undoubtedly led by the Beverley family—petitioned the Virginia General Assembly for a toll bridge at Beverley's Ford. In advancing their petition, the citizens noted, "when the waters are out, great Numbers of Waggon's are prevented from fording the river." The bridge advocates also contended that *Beverley's Ford Road was the "main road" between Culpeper and all points north, including Washington, D.C.*

In 1798, "Beverley's Road Bridge" was erected upon approval by the General Assembly, and thus was completed the first Culpeper bridge to breach the Rappahannock. Toll rates were "five cents for man or horse, 30 cents for four-wheel vehicles, 10 cents for two-wheel vehicles." This bridge stood until 1810, when a flood swept it away. The bridge was never rebuilt, but the ford continued to support agricultural and milling activity, except, of course, during periods of high water.

## **Elkwood Sold, and Re-sold**

### **Richard Hoope Cunningham era**

Munford Beverley inherited the Elkwood Tract from his father, and in 1805, Munford sold the land to a Fredericksburg jurist, Daniel Grinnan. Judge Grinnan soon built Presqu' Isle (1810), just across the Hazel River. In 1833, Judge Grinnan sold 1500 acres of the Elkwood tract south of the Hazel to Richard Hoope Cunningham, a Richmond native.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> This ancient road—one of Culpeper's oldest—facilitated commercial activity, as in 1744, there was a small bridge across Ruffin's Run.

<sup>7</sup> It is a personal theory that Beverley's Road Bridge was never rebuilt simply because the influential Beverley family had sold the property (1805) and the new Elkwood Tract landowner, Judge Grinnan, built Presqu' Isle north of the Hazel. This home was accessed by a private bridge he built across the Hazel used to approach his home from the "Great Fork." (The Great Fork is that portion of Culpeper located between the Hazel, Rappahannock and the Rapidan. The "Little Fork" is that portion of Culpeper situated between the Hazel and the upper Rappahannock, locally called the Hedgeman River).

Richard Hoope Cunningham (RHC) was born on January 9, 1799 at “Howard’s Neck” in Goochland County to Edward Cunningham and Elizabeth Hoope Cunningham. (RHC’s middle name honored his mother’s maiden name.)<sup>8</sup> As a young man, RHC married Virginia Heth—of the famous Richmond Heth family.<sup>9</sup>

Arriving in eastern Culpeper County in 1833, the thirty-four year-old RHC and his beloved wife, “Aunt Jenny,” took possession of a portion of the Elkwood Tract situated along the Hazel and Rappahannock Rivers. RHC also purchased “Beverley’s Mill” which he quite appropriately renamed “Cunningham’s Mill.” But RHC’s preferences aside, his own name never stuck with the locals (or anybody else) simply because most maps had already adopted the usage of Beverley’s Mill, Beverley’s Ford, and Beverley’s Ford Road.<sup>10</sup>

RHC soon began construction—or restoration/enlargement of the original Beverley home— of “Elkwood,” which was situated in the center of a mile-long ridge that courses in a northeast-southwest direction.<sup>11</sup> He situated his “square white home with green shutters,”<sup>12</sup> so it would directly face the Blue Ridge Mountains hovering above Culpeper County twenty-five miles west.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Cunningham Family Papers, Mss1C9175a130, Virginia Historical Society. Our RHC is not to be confused with his nephew, Lt. Col. Richard Hoope Cunningham (son of Dr. John Atkinson Cunningham) who was killed at Cedar Mountain, August 9, 1862 while leading the 21<sup>st</sup> Virginia Infantry Regiment.

<sup>9</sup> An excellent history of the Heth family can be found in *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, July 1934, pp. 273-282.

<sup>10</sup> Almost without exception, all military maps and reports, Yankee and Confederate, utilized “Beverly’s Ford,” and “Beverly’s Ford Road”—absent the second “e”—when detailing these features. The writer retains every map created (Colonial era and Civil War) of the Beverley’s Ford area, and they are available upon request.

<sup>11</sup> RHC’s home was one of three major “river mansions” located in the immediate vicinity, Just across the Hazel from Elkwood was “Presqu’ Isle.” During the war, the home belonged to the Langdon Major family. (Some of the Majors would ride with John Mosby.) Also nearby—west of Elkwood—was “Yew Hills,” the antebellum home of Dr. Daniel S. Green. (Dr. Green was a pre-war naval surgeon.) Only Presqu’ Isle, the oldest of the three river mansions, still stands.

<sup>12</sup> A wonderfully detailed description of Elkwood was recorded by a pre-war visitor and is set forth in Letitia M. Burwell, *A Girl’s Life in Virginia Before the War*, New York, 1895, pp. 147-154.

<sup>13</sup> The northern terminus of this ridge drops off precipitously into the Hazel River and the south end rises abruptly into a mound-like knoll and then rapidly descends to Ruffin’s Run. In prior writings, the writer has termed this uniform ridge as “Cunningham’s Ridge”

After seeing to it that his home and adjacent farm buildings were under construction, RHC shifted his attention to clearing fields and planting crops, mostly corn and wheat. He also had a grain mill to operate and RHC promoted new business by entering into commercial relationships with Culpeper and Fauquier County farmers, as well as other Rappahannock and Hazel River mills.<sup>14</sup>

Now that Richard Hoope Cunningham had constructed a home for his wife, he turned to his neighborhood's spiritual needs. With the closest Episcopal Church located in southern Fauquier, across the Rappahannock—which could not be reached in periods of high water—RHC donated two acres to build a church on his property. The new church site was located at the intersection of the Jeffersonton Pike and Green's Mill Road, about two hundred yards west of Beverley's Ford Road.

St. James Church was completed in 1840, with funds endowed by RHC and other nearby landowners. The congregation of St. James grew from 15 members in 1843 to 27 in 1848. Slaves attended the same service as their owners, sitting in the gallery above.<sup>15</sup>

Now that he had his farm and mill operation up and running, and a nearby church built by virtue of his generous largesse, RHC soon prospered. He then advertised statewide for the purpose of retaining a farm manager to direct his expanding operations.

## **Cunningham Farm Overseer**

It is not presently known from where John Wiltshire hailed when he arrived in Culpeper but it is a fact that in 1840 he and his wife arrived at Elkwood Plantation. Either just before he arrived or shortly thereafter, a fine home

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and the southern knoll he has called, "Buford's Knoll"—named after Gen. John Buford who utilized this knoll as a command position on June 9, 1863.

<sup>14</sup> See "Elkwood Account Book" of Richard Cunningham, Alderman Library, University of Virginia. This book contains fascinating details of a bi-county (Culpeper and Fauquier) bartering economy existing among many mills (Beverley's; Kelly's; Wheatley's; Wellford's, etc.), as well as between local farmers.

<sup>15</sup> For a history of St. James Church, see *The History and Archeology of St. James Church, Brandy Station, Virginia*, Clark B. Hall, et al. The brick church was taken down during the war by the 6<sup>th</sup> United States Cavalry—pulled apart to construct winter huts.

was built to accommodate the Wiltshires. This latter house is about a half mile from the Cunningham manor home, and unlike RHC's and Virginia's ridge-top home, the "overseer's house" (as it came to be known) is situated on a low piece of ground adjacent to Ruffin's Run. The house faced open grounds rising to the north, with its rear to Ruffin's.<sup>16</sup>

## Civil War

As the Civil War began, the first military force to cross the Rappahannock at Beverley's Ford was General Joseph Johnston's Confederate army in March 1862. At the invitation of RHC, General Dick Ewell moved his headquarters into Elkwood, as RHC was already in the process of moving his wife and some possessions back to Richmond.<sup>17</sup>

As it turned out, RHC's decision to vacate Elkwood proved especially prudent as his beautiful plantation home situated high on a ridge above Beverley's Ford and just west of Beverley's Ford Road, was soon destroyed.<sup>18</sup>

It is a fact that Culpeper County witnessed (i.e., suffered) the genesis and termination of several major military campaigns during the Civil War, the majority of which utilized Beverley's Ford and Beverley's Ford Road to shift huge army components, representing both sides, Blue and Gray.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> This house—a witness to major battles in 1862 and 1863— still stands on the Brandy Station Battlefield and has been gallantly restored (at considerable cost) by the Civil War Preservation Trust.

<sup>17</sup> *The History of Elkwood Farm, Brandy Station, Virginia*, is set forth (fully) in a paper prepared for the Civil War Preservation Trust by Clark B. Hall. It is available upon request of the author. Included in this paper are several wartime descriptions of Elkwood.

<sup>18</sup> The writer has obtained *Southern Claims Commission* documents from the National Archives containing affidavits filed by Cunningham overseer John Wiltshire. These documents are most helpful in describing local conditions existing in the Elkwood area during the war. John Wiltshire proved himself to be incredibly shrewd and untrustworthy to RHC. Wiltshire also became a Yankee informer. His complex story, as best it can be determined, is set forth in Hall, "The History of Elkwood..." John Wiltshire stayed on the farm until June 9, 1863, when he moved to a nearby farm, Lochinvar.

<sup>19</sup> The following "battle descriptions" are taken from the *Official Records*, as well as accounts (diaries; letters; news clips, etc.) in possession of this writer. The primary source material is available upon request.

General John Pope's 45,000-man "Army of Virginia"—packing personal orders from Abraham Lincoln—filed across the Rappahannock at Beverley's Ford and other river crossings in July 1862, the first of many Union invading forces to wreak havoc and destruction on Culpeper County. Immediately attracting Robert E. Lee's attention, Pope's Culpeper attackers soon received a blunt rebuttal as Stonewall Jackson defeated Pope at the battle of Cedar Mountain in early August.

Following his defeat, Pope fell back to the eastern plains of Culpeper along both sides of Beverley's Ford Road. Jackson was subsequently dispatched to sweep around Pope's right. General Pope hastily departed Culpeper in mid-August via Beverley's Ford, but sharp fighting broke out at Beverley's Ford and within the Little Fork as the Yankees tried unsuccessfully to impede General Jackson. This aggressive R.E. Lee offensive movement through Culpeper kicked off the 2<sup>nd</sup> Manassas Campaign.<sup>20</sup>

Following the Antietam Campaign, Confederate troops again marched in October via Beverley's Ford into Culpeper County with the notion of spending the winter "among friendly Culpeper maidens." Arriving Rebel soldiers noted most of the fences were down, crops obliterated, timber disappearing, animals scarce and many homes, churches and businesses shell-ridden and burned out—most ravages courtesy of a vindictive John Pope. But the Confederates did not winter in Culpeper as Lee instead shifted his army east where the Fredericksburg Campaign was soon underway.

## **Battle of Brandy Station**

In early June 1863, Lee began shifting the bulk of the Army of Northern Virginia into Culpeper County. Big-time plans were in the offing.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Two extant artillery pits undoubtedly constructed by Longstreet's "Washington Artillery," remain today on the CWPT property atop Buford's Knoll. For details regarding this particular action, see Hall, *The History...of St. James Church...*

<sup>21</sup>For descriptions of the Battle of Brandy Station, see Clark. B. Hall, *The Civil War Battlefield Guide*, 1990, Frances Kennedy, ed.; Hall, "America's largest Cavalry Battle," *Civil War Times Illustrated*, June, 1990; Hall, "Buford at Brandy Station," *Civil War*, July-August, 1990; Hall, "Lee Steals a March..." *Blue and Gray*, Spring, 2004.

Learning of the ominous presence of Rebel cavalry in Culpeper, General Hooker ordered his cavalry corps to “disperse and destroy” the Confederate cavalry on June 9, 1863. Kicking off at 4:30 A.M. on June 9, 1863, as Federal cavalry charged across Beverley’s Ford, the ensuing Battle of Brandy Station—the largest cavalry action of the war—witnessed 20,000 troops engaged in deadly collision as they fought the largest cavalry battle of the war. The fighting soon resulted in heavy casualties, both east and west of Beverley’s Ford Road.

As Federal attackers poured across Beverley’s Ford, they were amazed to find Rebel cavalymen in heavy force just south of the Rappahannock. Equally astonished at the Union assault, Southerners counterattacked down the ford road from their camp at the Mary Gee House, east of Beverley’s Ford Road, near its intersection with St. James Church Road. Savage fighting broke out on both sides of the ford road as troops clashed murderously. Soon, the sheer momentum of the intrepid Union attack thrust the Rebels back on *both* sides of the ford road.

Quickly securing a defensive position on the Gee House/St. James Church Ridge, the Confederates established a stout line, extending their right flank a mile east from the Gee House. The highest point on the entire Rebel line was the front yard of the Gee House itself, and a four-gun battery took advantage of this lofty position to pour deadly cannon fire into attackers charging across the plateau beneath the Gee House. A Rebel cavalry brigade took position upon the Gee House Ridge, which gently descended eastward, terminating at Hubbard’s Run.

The Union 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division and an infantry regiment took lodgment east of the ford road, 700 yards north of the Gee House Ridge. The Federal commander extended his left flank two miles to the Rappahannock, so as to “preserve communications toward the river.” Union attackers attempted to seize the Gee House Ridge but were thrown back by Southern firepower.

As the Rebels counterattacked east of the ford road, thousands of men grappled in the fields north of the Gee House. Falling back, Union officers realized it was impossible to seize the Gee House Ridge. Arriving at the Gee House, Jeb Stuart expressed pleasure his men stymied the Yankee attack.

The Rebels could have indeed held the formidable Gee House Ridge all day, but a separate attack at Fleetwood Hill in their rear rendered the position



untenable. As the Confederates abandoned the St. James/Gee House Ridge and raced back to Fleetwood, the Union commander snatched the Gee House as his headquarters. The hard-hitting battle continued throughout the long, deadly day and at battle's end, Federal cavalry re-crossed the river, reluctantly yielding the bloody field over to their enemy.

*Note:*

*It is a fact that the Culpeper Regional Airport and the Industrial Airpark were built directly atop an important phase of the Battle of Brandy Station. The Gee House site and ridge presently overlooks airport infrastructure and the once dominant ridge floats off into a sea of commercial activity. It is a hard fact that the terminal, hangars, apron and runways are situated precisely on top of ground where young Americans fought and died in droves.*

At the conclusion of the bloody day, the Federals withdrew over Beverley's Ford, leaving many of their wounded and dead behind, the latter covered by shallow graves. This hotly-contested cavalry action—resulting in serious losses for both sides—not only marks the distinction of being the largest mounted action of the entire war, but Brandy Station also inaugurated the momentous Pennsylvania Campaign, the war's most consequential military undertaking. *And it is a fact not often recalled that the Battle of Gettysburg had its beginnings at Beverley's Ford—and played out its opening actions on Beverley's Ford Road.*

## **Fall, 1863 Campaigns**

After Gettysburg, in late July, Lee's dispirited but unbroken command returned once again to their oft-used Culpeper camps, again with many re-crossing at Beverley's Ford. The emboldened Federal cavalry attacked across the Rappahannock on August 1, which prompted General Lee to transfer his infantry behind the Rapidan, while leaving Stuart's cavalry at Brandy Station as a covering force.

In mid-September, the Union cavalry slashed down the ford road toward Jeb Stuart's division as heavy fighting broke out at Brandy and rapidly careened south through the streets of Culpeper Court House. Afterwards, Jeb Stuart withdrew to join Lee in Orange County, and Maj. Gen. George Meade's Federal army pounded into Culpeper.

The next campaign to take place in Culpeper occurred in October 1863 when Lee slipped across the Robinson River, deigning to turn Meade's right in Culpeper. Stuart's cavalry led the way as a wild, vicious fight developed in front of Auburn and on Fleetwood Hill. With the Blue cavalry covering the Union retreat, General Meade pulled back over the Rappahannock at Beverley's Ford (and other crossings), and the subsequent Bristoe Station Campaign resulted in a stout Rebel defeat.

With Lee's strong affinity for Culpeper repeatedly signaled by his redundant pattern of continually regrouping in the strategically significant county, while simultaneously defending the Rappahannock line, Lee's army again returned to the county in late October, with many re-crossing at Beverley's Ford. Lee implemented a defensive alignment along the river centered near Rappahannock Station (Remington).

On November 7, the Army of the Potomac aggressively rushed the Southerners, resulting in the fierce Battle of Rappahannock Station—concluding in a third successive defeat for the Rebels, with Lee losing more than 1500 men.

On November 8, General Lee established a battle line straight through Culpeper's center with Lee's right at Pony Mountain, his center lodged east of the Court House and his left anchored near Chestnut Forks (Catalpa). Lee boldly offered battle to Meade—who had crossed the Rappahannock, with the Union right flank affixed at Beverley's Ford—but the latter did not take the bait.

General Lee then withdrew his army over the Rapidan, departing Culpeper County—for the last time in his life. Meade's army then once again took sole custody of Culpeper County—lock, stock and barrel.

## Winter Encampment of the Army of the Potomac

On Thanksgiving Day, 1863, General Meade peremptorily traversed the lower Rapidan wherein he initiated the Mine Run Campaign. Upon observing the staunch Rebel defenses hovering formidably above Mine Run in Orange County, Meade prudently chose not to attack and instead pulled back into Culpeper in early December when he ordered his army into winter encampment.

So now for more than five ravaging months, the emaciated, battle-weary citizens of Culpeper County were occupied by a foreign army consisting of 120,000 troops. The invaders seized most homes, businesses and churches and many structures were ripped down for firewood and hut-building material.

The 20-000-man 6<sup>th</sup> Corps, Army of the Potomac, commanded by Maj. Gen. John Sedgwick, occupied the ground that incorporates the present CWPT property and the “Culpeper Regional Airport.” The 6th Corps controlled Beverley’s Ford and the ford road, and their hut sites were spread throughout the “Elkwood Tract.” Several Matthew Brady photographs in possession of this writer depict this massive 6<sup>th</sup> Corp winter encampment site.<sup>22</sup>

## Post-War

Two developers, in succession, attempted to create commercial ventures—one an office park, and the other a racetrack—on the site of the historic Elkwood Tract west of Beverley’s Ford Road. Both developers, in succession, succumbed to bankruptcy, and today that land west of Beverley’s Ford Road is owned by the Civil War Preservation Trust, the nation’s largest and most successful Civil War battlefield preservation organization.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> For a comprehensive description of the Army of the Potomac’s winter encampment in 1863-1864, see Clark B. Hall, “Season of Change,” *Blue and Gray Magazine*, April 1991.

<sup>23</sup> The writer previously served as a board member/secretary of the Association of the Preservation of Civil War Sites, Inc., a forerunner of the esteemed Civil War Preservation Trust. He is also a founding board member of the Brandy Station Foundation.

