



CELEBRATING 20 YEARS

ROCKFISH VALLEY FOUNDATION

Founded August 2005

THE HISTORY OF THE VALLEY
AND ITS PRESERVATION

WELCOME TO NELSON COUNTY

EARLY INHABITANTS

Native Americans have inhabited the land that is now Nelson County since the Archaic Period (8000 BCE-1000 BCE). Archaeologists have found indigenous settlements and campsites from this time period throughout Nelson, suggesting a highly mobile way of life.

During the Woodland period (1000 BCE-European contact), Native Americans began shifting from a hunter-gatherer lifestyle to one that included intensive gathering and the tending of edible plants, allowing for a more stable and continuous food supply in one place.

Maize agriculture was adopted around 1000 CE, leading to permanent settlements along large rivers, especially the James. John Smith noted this pattern in his 1607 map of Virginia's Native Americans.



John Smith's Map of Virginia, 1607, Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

THE MONACAN NATION



Image courtesy of the Monacan Indian Nation.

In the late Woodland and early historic era, Nelson County was occupied by the Monacan Nation. By 1600, about 15,000 Monacans lived in the area north and west of the James River.

They established trade networks with other Native American nations, extending as far as the Great Lakes. The Monacans traded soapstone and mica, but their most important trade good was copper, which was abundant in the region. Copper could be used for decoration, jewelry, and tools; its versatility made it valuable.



Image courtesy of John White Watercolor via the Monacan Indian Nation.

The Monacans planted corns, beans, squash, and pumpkins. They also lived on wildlife and plants native to the region, including deer, bears, fish, nuts, seeds, and fruits.

Monacans resided in villages surrounded by protective walls in oval-shaped pole and thatch houses known as Wigwams. They also built temporary buildings in small hunting towns.

1634

Monacan
Nation

1728

Henrico
County

1744

Goochland
County

1761

Albemarle
County

1807

Amherst
County

Nelson
County

EXPLORERS AND SETTLERS

In the early 1730s, John Findlay traveled up the James River to explore what is now known as Findlay's Mountain. During the same period, Allen Tye arrived in the region from the Shenandoah Valley to explore and name the Tye River.

Dr. William Cabell and James Wood are the first recorded settlers in Nelson, settling near the James River and in Rockfish Valley respectively. Dr. Cabell's settlement became Warminster, the first patent in Nelson, which served as an important commercial center west of Richmond. Wood was a Scots-Irish who received a land grant from the King of England. Other Scots-Irish followed him into the Rockfish Valley and the surrounding mountainous areas, typically entering north from the Shenandoah Valley like Wood.

By the American Revolution, there were around 2000 residents in Amherst County (which included present-day Nelson), half of which were slaves.

CIVIL WAR INVOLVEMENT

Stonewall Jackson's troops were nicknamed "foot cavalry" for the speed at which they moved across the Blue Ridge Mountains.

The Blue Ridge Tunnel, located in Rockfish Gap, served as a key point during the Civil War. Confederates led by General Stonewall Jackson used the tunnel and surrounding mountain paths to move soldiers and supplies between the Shenandoah Valley and the Piedmont.

Nelson County also raised at least two Confederate Artillery units in addition to the men who enlisted in Company F of the 49th Virginia Infantry Regiment. Nelson Light Artillery No. 1 was organized in September 1861. The unit fought in the Potomac District before being transferred further south to South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. They fought at Coosawhatchie, which is where Robert E. Lee had his headquarters while fortifying coastal defenses in 1861 and 1862.

The Appalachian Trail crosses Nelson County along paths used by both armies during the Civil War.

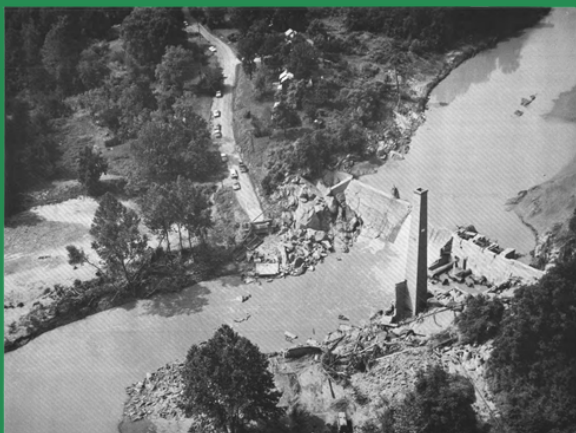
Later in the war, the company participated in the Wilderness Campaign, the Siege of Petersburg, and surrendered at Appomattox. Nelson Light Artillery No. 2 was stationed near Petersburg, was active on the Richmond and Petersburg lines, and surrendered at Appomattox.

Despite no active battles in Nelson, citizens of the county felt the effects of the war. In addition to joining the Confederate Army, local farmsteads became temporary headquarters, supply depots, and field hospitals throughout the war. As troops moved across the country, armies destroyed roads and bridges and seized food and livestock. Families also faced scarcity as basic necessities like sugar, salt, and coffee became unavailable or unaffordable. Following the end of the war, the military tribunals were held in the Nelson County courthouse.

HURRICANE CAMILLE



On the night of August 19, 1969, the remnants of Hurricane Camille unexpectedly intensified as they crossed Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains. Over 27 inches of rain fell in eight hours, mostly overnight, causing catastrophic flooding and landslides across Nelson County. The storm caught residents by surprise, with no effective warning system in place and communications completely wiped out.



The storm killed 114 people and left 37 missing in Nelson, with the official number of lives lost at 124. More than 100 bridges and 900 buildings were swept away, and only one highway remained usable. Massive amounts of water surged down valleys, turning small creeks into raging rivers and triggering nearly 4,000 landslides across Nelson's steep terrain. In some places, debris piled up 30–50 feet deep. Damages in Virginia totaled over \$116 million, with the brunt of the destruction concentrated in Nelson County.

Hurricane Camille remains the deadliest natural disaster in Virginia's history, and its devastation contributed to the establishment of FEMA, transforming how disaster response is handled in the United States.



THE ROCKFISH VALLEY FOUNDATION

Nature is the teacher. Environment is the subject. We are all the students.

OUR HISTORY

Peter and Betsy Agelasto moved to Nelson County in 1978, purchasing the historic Elk Hill property from the Ewing family. They continued the cattle and hay operation began by the earlier families. In 1982, the Agelastos planted a vineyard with Chardonnay and Riesling grapes. The grapes were processed at Mountain Cove Vineyards and sold under the Elk Hill Vineyard label throughout Virginia. The vineyard was discontinued in 1998, but hay production and cattle raising has continued into the present.

In 1999, while attending a Rockfish Valley community meeting about local watersheds, Peter and others were inspired to create the Friends of the Rockfish Watershed organization to assist the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) in their project to restore damage done to streams from their construction along Route 29 throughout Nelson. In 2005, to protect the lands and watershed from development, Peter put the Elk Hill land into Conservation Easements with the Virginia Outdoors Foundation.

While attending a Thomas Jefferson Planning District meeting, Peter met Chris Gensic, who was a senior planner for the district. Together, Chris and Peter developed the idea of public trails along the river and through the fields of the Elk Hill property. The trails were laid out in the summer of 2005 and Peter and Betsy founded the Rockfish Valley Foundation (RVF) soon after. RVF opened the Natural History Center in 2012 in affiliation with the Virginia Museum of Natural History, and upgraded Spruce Creek Park in 2016, both of which have developed immensely over the years.

Now, the trails, park, and Natural History Center are enjoyed by many every day. What originally began as a personal commitment to caring for the land has since grown into a thriving community resource, protecting the valley's natural beauty and helping people connect with its environment and history.

VISION AND MISSION

Peter and Betsy Agelasto created the Rockfish Valley Foundation to **know and celebrate** Nelson, and help others see and love it as much as they do. The Foundation seeks to enhance the quality of life and celebrate the people, land, and history of the Rockfish Valley.

Our mission is to **highlight and advocate for the natural, historical, ecological, and agricultural resources** of the Rockfish Valley and Nelson County. We aim to enrich the experiences of our community by supporting conservation, recreation, preservation, and environmental education.

We are anchored by three major goals: to **serve, share, and sustain**. We **serve** and engage our community through volunteerism. We **share** resources and education, making them freely available for the community. We remain fiscally viable and ensure **sustainability** into the future.

RVF PROGRAMS

KITE FESTIVAL

The first RVF Kite Festival was held in April 2009 and continued annually until 2019. The Kite Festival was a community-wide event that served to bring people of all ages together. It featured food vendors, kite demonstrations, competitions by professional kite flyers, and kite-flying lessons for children.

ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY

The Rockfish Valley Foundation's Environmental Literacy Project (EnLit) brings informative, engaging environmental education to visitors of Spruce Creek Park and the Rockfish Valley Trail System. Through Jefferson-Madison Regional Library StoryWalks and EnLit's educational modules, visitors gain awareness of environmental science via stories about water, rocks, plants, and animals. These experiences foster a deeper connection with nature and inspire curiosity and care for the natural world. In 2021, EnLit expanded beyond signage, exhibits, and limited school programs to include interactive trail content, online modules, and exhibits in the Natural History Museum—making environmental learning accessible anytime, anywhere.



NATURALLY NELSON DAY

Naturally Nelson Day was first held in 2016 for Nelson County Schools in cooperation with the Environmental Science Academy at Western Albemarle High School. This event kickstarted additional programs with Nelson County Schools including creating a children's nature trail and native plant walk and a Naturally Nelson Exhibit. In 2019, Naturally Nelson was hosted as a two-day interactive education program for fourth and fifth grade students in Nelson.



ROCKFISH RANGERS

The Rockfish Ranger program was created in January 2014 as a way to get more children involved in the natural environment and RVF programming. Anyone can become a Rockfish Ranger by participating in events, walking the trails, or visiting the Natural History Center. Completing these tasks earned a Rockfish Ranger wristband and an induction into the Ranger Wall as an official Rockfish Ranger. Over 250 children were inducted in 2014. The program was refreshed in 2020 and joined by the Geo Discovery Kit in 2025.



OLD WINTERGREEN DAY

The first Old Wintergreen Day was hosted in 2016 and continued through 2023. The festival was designed for both children and adults to learn about the history and culture of Nelson County through living history exhibits with costumed craftsmen and old-time music and activities such as basketweaving, rug making, soapstone carving, and quilting. Local community partners were also involved with the Rockfish Wildlife Sanctuary presenting on local wildlife at the Children's Nature Walk Trail, the Monacan Nation displaying their crafts and history, and Wintergreen Fire and Rescue sharing about the critical work that they do for the Nelson community.



PRESERVING THE ROCKFISH VALLEY: ACTION FOR LAND, WATER, AND HERITAGE

STREAM RESTORATION AND PRESERVATION

In the 1990s, the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) caused damage to streams during a project on Route 29 in Nelson County. The federal government required them to learn how to mitigate the waterway destruction during construction. A VDOT employee attended the 1999 Rockfish Valley community meeting about local watersheds and met the founders of the Friends of Rockfish Watershed. The Friends of Rockfish Watershed, which merged with RVF, worked with VDOT to teach contractors how to protect waterways.

VDOT then partnered with RVF to restore the South Fork of the Rockfish. They added rock and waterfall “structures” that absorb the water’s energy, decreasing its velocity and reducing erosion.

A major storm in 2018 damaged the earlier restoration. VDOT designed a Corrective Action Plan to make repairs and fix previous mistakes, including alleviating invasive plant damage from Hurricane Camille and the first stream restoration initiative.



UNCOVERING THE PAST

In 2007, the old Wintergreen Country Store—now home to RVF’s Natural History Center—was added to the National Register of Historic Resources. The property includes the archeological site of the Original Wintergreen Community, which gave the area its name, and includes the remnants of a historic grain mill and whiskey stills.

In the 1980s, the site was identified as significant by the Virginia Archeology Society and studied in 2014 by Rivanna Archeology. In 2015, over 100 students from the UVA Madison House cleared underbrush from the site, preparing it for future excavation.



Courtesy of David Edwards (DHR), 2024.

PROTECTING THE VALLEY FROM THE ACP

“We’re gonna put a stop sign on Dominion’s pipeline.” -Friends of Nelson

On May 23, 2014 Dominion Energy informed landowners along the proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline (ACP) route of their intent to conduct surveys on their properties. Friends of Nelson, quickly organized to fight the pipeline, joined by many other groups. Peter Agelasto and RVF played a key role, as the proposed route threatened registered historic resources and districts, landmarks, and floodplains central to the Foundation. Throughout the six year fight, neighbors rallied and protests were held. **On July 5, 2020, Dominion and Duke Energy announced the cancellation of the entire Atlantic Coast Pipeline.**

One of RVF’s most impactful efforts was creating a document that compiled the ACP’s potential effects on the Rockfish Valley. Working with Sarah Ellis Collins, RVF gathered information on the area’s historical and ecological significance to present to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). RVF also prepared a list of resource documents that contained data essential for any environmental, cultural, or historical impact study of Nelson County.

The ACP would have devastated the region’s natural, cultural, and historic landscape. The South Rockfish Rural Historic District as well as 106 other historic properties would have been negatively impacted. The Elk Hill Baptist Church, a historic African American church, stood just 50 feet from the proposed pipeline corridor. A proposed route also cut through the Wintergreen Community Archeological Site and threatened RVF’s headquarters and Natural History Center at the old Wintergreen Country Store. The economic benefits of the pipeline did not match the long-term value of tourism and the local economy, which would have suffered from its construction.

The geology of the Rockfish Valley would have been impacted by the ACP’s construction. It would likely have caused destabilization along the mountain, increasing landslide risk. The Rockfish River Watershed would also have been impacted by numerous crossings and increased sedimentation from the construction process.

NO PIPELINE

HURRICANE CAMILLE

arrived in Virginia on the night of August 19, 1969. Nelson County received the brunt of the storm with over 27 inches of rainfall in just eight hours. Flash flooding and rain-induced landslides on the Tye and Rockfish River watersheds caused major disaster. The rains, floods, and landslides accompanying the storm's passage marked **the worst natural disaster to ever occur in Virginia.**

STORM DYNAMICS

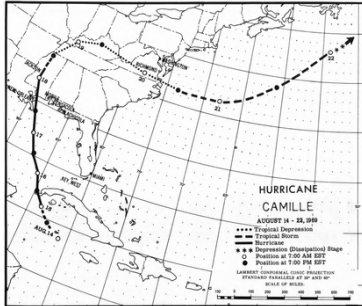
On August 19, Hurricane Camille seemed to pose little threat to Virginia. Forecasts showed it heading toward Kentucky and beyond, with no major flooding reported, easing concerns.

But the storm's remnants collided with a maritime-tropical air mass and a backdoor cold front, steering it into central Virginia. Warm tropical air met cooler air from the front, feeding rapid storm growth.

Crossing the Blue Ridge Mountains, the moist air was forced upward by steep ridges, cooling and condensing into torrential rain. With limited radar coverage in western and central Virginia, forecasters had little warning.

Only one call reached the Weather Bureau; no other authorities were alerted. The problem was compounded by the fact that communications were damaged as the storm progressed, making it impossible for communities to warn others of what was coming.

Floods and landslides struck in the night, trapping people in their homes.



Courtesy of the US Department of the Interior Geological Survey, 1970.

RECORD FLOODING AND LANDSLIDES

Nearly everyone in Nelson County lived near a creek, and as the rainfall became heavier overnight, flash-flooding surprised residents in rural communities.

Most bridges over the Piney, Rockfish, and Tye Rivers were destroyed or heavily damaged. According to a Geological Survey conducted by the US Department of the Interior, the flooding was more intense than any previously measured event.



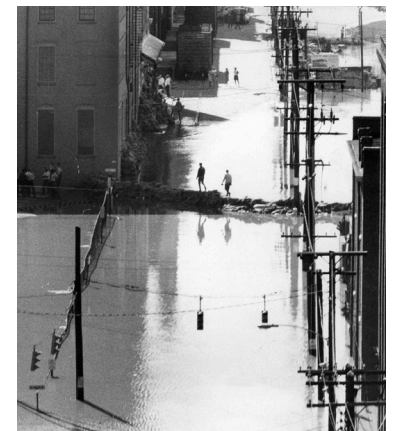
Courtesy of the Library of Virginia, 2012.

At the Tye River, near Lovings-ton, the amount of water flowing was eight times higher than anything recorded before. The force of the river was so powerful, that it forced the James River's tide upstream for miles from where the two met. The Rockfish River rose 27 feet. In addition to flooding, thousands of landslides occurred on the eastern slopes of the Blue Ridge, funneling rain, mud, and debris down the mountains damaging everything in their path. Water, boulders, and uprooted trees destroyed houses, bridges, and roads.

RESPONSE AND AFTERMATH

The storm wiped out roads, bridges, phones, radio, and electricity. Lightning set fires that firetrucks were unable to reach. Rescue squads were helpless until helicopters arrived. Rescue and recovery involved 2,293 volunteers providing over 23,000 hours of service. Experts estimate that Hurricane Camille dumped over 630 million tons of water over Nelson County.

The American Red Cross reported 3,765 families suffering losses. Agricultural damage was immense, including loss of crops, topsoil, orchards, livestock, and equipment. The estimated total damage was over \$116 million across public and private property, agriculture, and infrastructure. 114 people lost their lives during the event and 37 remained missing. The official number of lives lost in Nelson County is 124, roughly 1% of its 12,000 residents.



Courtesy of Encyclopedia Virginia, 2020.

The lightning was fierce, it lit it up like daylight."
-Iris Harris

Hawes Edward Ewing and Elva Louise Hines Ewing, descendants of Wintergreen's founding Coleman family, lost their lives in the storm. The Hurricane Camille memorial trailhead is found at the site of their house's ruins.

"The water, it wasn't a rain, it was like a downspout. Like being in a waterfall it was raining that hard."
- Milton Harris

THE LEGACY OF ELK HILL

Preservation and Transformation of the Land

PRE-1700

The Monacan Nation occupied the land that is now Nelson County. The natives originally lived as a mobile society, living off wildlife and plants native to the region. They natives eventually farmed the land and grew crops such as maize, beans, and squash. They also mined soapstone, mica, and copper, which they traded with other nations.

1749

Members of the Reid family moved south from Pennsylvania into the Rockfish Valley and purchased the land that is now known as Elk Hill.

During their ownership, the Reids built a house, smokehouse, and double corn crib barn, indicating a working relationship with the land. They cleared the land and likely practiced **subsistence farming** to meet the private needs of the family.



1730

Early explorers, John Findley and Allen Tye, arrived in the area followed by Dr. William Cabell and James Wood who are the first recorded settlers of the Rockfish Valley and James River.



1805

The Coleman family purchased the Elk Hill land from the Reids to expand their tobacco operation. In addition to tobacco, they also likely grew grain and are believed to have run a grist mill, Reid Corn Mill.

They constructed the oldest parts of the house structure that is still standing today. They also built the tobacco prizery and press, which was used to pack and ship tobacco. The family also owned enslaved persons, using their labor to run the plantation and complete housework.



1819

The Panic of 1819 began, a three-year long market crash that slowed tobacco and grain production in the South.

The Coleman family recorded only 11 enslaved persons at this time, indicating a lapse in tobacco production on the plantation.

1862

Elk Hill continued to grow, with the number of enslaved persons on the plantation increasing to 125 in the 1860 Census.

The Colemans expanded their plantation further in the 1860s by planting 10,000 Albemarle Pippin apple trees.

Farmers tended to practice traditional intensification, running permanent fields of less risky crops. On Elk Hill, these crops were tobacco and apples.

1950

The Ewings, descendants of the Coleman family, cleared the dying apple trees from the land and began utilizing the farm to grow hay and raise cattle.

1840

The tobacco and grain markets exploded increasing demand. Production recovered in Nelson, suggested by an increase in enslaved persons owned by the Colemans.

In the 1840 Census, the Coleman family had 78 enslaved persons and ran a major farm operation. Although predominately producing tobacco, they also grew wheat, corn, and oats. The Coleman family also continued to run a grist mill. Elk Hill had livestock including horses, cattle, and swine. Elk Hill was one of the more prosperous plantations in Nelson County.

1900

Following the Civil War, tobacco production declined in Nelson County due to the loss of enslaved labor, which had previously supported the crop's labor-intensive demands.

This shift also affected apple farming, as rising competition and changing labor dynamics made it harder to maintain profitability.

1978

The Agelasto family purchased Elk Hill from the Ewing/ Coleman family and continued the cattle and hay operation.



2005

The Agelastos put the Elk Hill land into Conservation Easements with the Virginia Outdoors Foundation to protect the land and watershed from development.

Initial public trails laid out along the fields and rivers of the property and the **Rockfish Valley Foundation** was established in August.



1982

Following the trend of the area, the Agelastos planted a vineyard with Chardonnay and Riesling grapes.

The grapes were processed at Mountain Cove Vineyards and sold under the Elk Hill Vineyard label throughout Virginia.

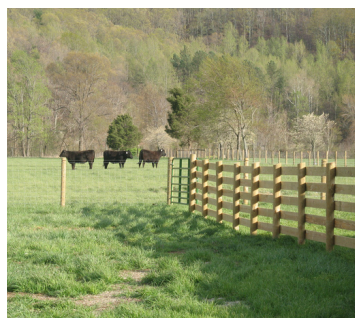
The vineyard was discontinued in 1998, but hay production and cattle raising continued into the present.

2006

The Rockfish River trail system and birding trails developed.

2007

Part of Elk Hill land was put under Rockfish Valley Farm LLC and development began as a model farm.



2020

RVF Environmental Literacy (EnLit) program introduced to bring informative and engaging environmental education content to visitors of the foundation's trails and natural history center.



2011

The Rockfish Valley Foundation opened its headquarters in the Old Wintergreen Country Store.

2012

The **Natural History Center** opened as an affiliate of the Virginia Museum of Natural History.

Spruce Creek Park developed and trails improved.

2013

RVF Education Committee organized to educate children and adults about the ecological and cultural history of Nelson County.

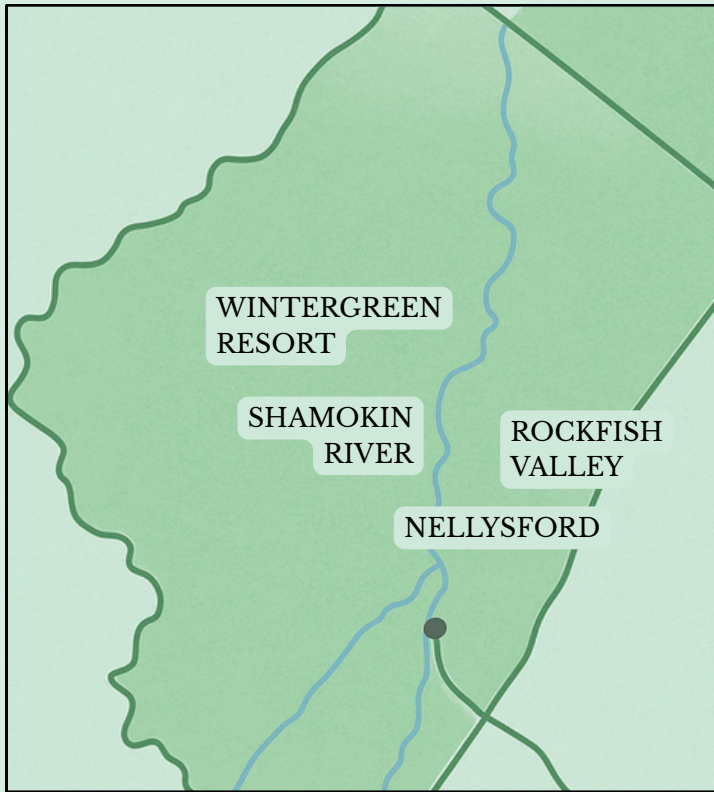


2025

EnLit Learning Pavilion constructed on trail route as area for immersive education.



NAMING NELSON



ROCKFISH VALLEY

The Rockfish Valley was named for the Rockfish that swam in the rivers and streams in the area until dams were constructed on the James River.

NELLYSFORD

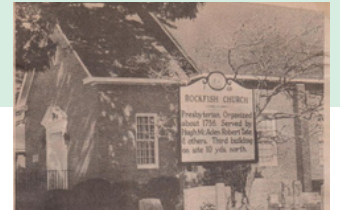
The area now known as Nellysford was once the site of a natural ford across the South Fork of the Rockfish River—a shallow crossing where people and animals could safely wade through the water. Local tradition offers two versions of how Nellysford got its name. One attributes it to a woman named Nelly who drowned while attempting to cross the river. The other says it was not a woman, but a horse named Nelly.

NELSON COUNTY

Nelson County was named for Thomas Nelson Jr. when it was established in 1807. Thomas Nelson was the third Governor of Virginia and one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence.

SHAMOKIN RIVER

The stream flowing down from Wintergreen Resort into the valley was known as the Shamokin River as late as 1794, which was a Monacan name meaning “where horns, or antlers, are plenty.” The river has since been renamed Stoney Creek, but Shamokin is still fitting as the area remains abundant with wildlife.



Courtesy of Rockfish Presbyterian Church.

TUCKAHOES AND COHEES

The earliest settlers in the region that is now Nelson County were known as Tuckahoes. Tobacco shaped the Tuckahoe way of life; it created a rigid social hierarchy, brought wealth, and pushed them to expand west in search of new plantation land. The wealthiest Tuckahoes were Anglican and dominated the churches and politics. Colonial laws supported Anglican authority and taxes went to the church. As the tobacco industry grew, Tuckahoe planters moved westward up the James River and into the Blue Ridge Mountains, claiming tracts of the best land in the frontier that eventually became Nelson County.

Settlement in the Shenandoah Valley occurred in the early 1700s when settlers began to sell pieces of their undeveloped land at lower prices and in greater supply than those charged in Pennsylvania. The Scots-Irish Cohees had been immigrating to Pennsylvania, but many moved south at the prospect of cheap land. While the Cohees shared the English language, Christian faith, and social hierarchy with the Tuckahoes, they had important differences. They were Presbyterian, not Anglican, and their economic structure, values, and customs differed. Their primary crop was hemp, not tobacco, which was less labor intensive and required fewer enslaved people. Instead, they relied on help from family and neighbors. In 1734, they crossed through the gaps in the Blue Ridge into the area that is now Nelson. By 1745, the town of Rockfish arose near Rockfish Gap, with nearly 45 families residing on farms.

In the late 17th century, a law was passed that granted “liberty of conscience” to all subjects of the king, allowing the Quakers to establish meeting houses to practice their religion. This set a precedent for the construction of meeting houses for dissenters of the Anglican faith elsewhere.

When the Cohees began settling in the Shenandoah Valley, the Tuckahoes had hoped to convert the Scots-Irish to the Anglican faith. However, the Presbyterian Cohees were given land to establish the Rockfish Meeting House, a place for Presbyterian services and community. They called it a “meeting house,” rather than a church, to conform with the Anglican laws. They agreed to pay tithes, or taxes, to the Anglican Church as long as they did not have to attend the services.

The Meeting House was built in 1740 and rebuilt twice over the years. In the 1860s, they built a new brick church on the original site of the churchyard. The church is still standing in the same location, now called the Rockfish Valley Presbyterian Church.

THE MEETING HOUSE

THE OLDEST STANDING TOBACCO PRESS IN VIRGINIA

One of the oldest tobacco prizeuries in the United States is found on the Elk Hill property. According to Colonial Williamsburg, the Elk Hill prizery was built between 1790 and 1810. The Reid family sold the property to the Coleman family in 1805, so it is theorized that the prizery was built around that time.

THE PRIZERY PROCESS

After the tobacco plants were fully matured, they were cut and hung on sticks to dry. Once dry and cured, the leaves were stripped and tied in bundles. These bundles, or hands, were then taken to the prizery to be packed in bulk along the walls of the building. Here, they underwent a fermentation process that allowed tobacco juice to form on the body of the leaves, allowing them to be pressed into hogsheads which were large wooden barrels. This packing process was called prizing, hence the building was called the prizery.

Rows of bundles of tobacco leaves were placed into the barrel and tramped down by an enslaved person who stood inside the hogshead to press as much into it as possible. The prizery at Elk Hill has an intact hogshead and iron screw, which replaced the original wooden screw likely around the 1850s. The screw was used to pack the tobacco leaves down into the hogshead after it was filled to ensure that the leaves were pressed evenly and tighter than could be done by hand. This process was repeated until no more tobacco would fit. The hogshead was then taken to market for sale.

Prizing tobacco and the use of the tobacco barn fell into gradual disuse in the 1830s when loose tobacco began to be marketed. After the Civil War, the railroad contributed to the rising popularity of loose tobacco and the prizing process was virtually eliminated. However, when the Coleman family began raising apple trees, they used the prizery to pack the apples in crates that could be carried to market. The building was also used during the Agelasto's winery operation. Despite its original purpose fading with the decline of tobacco production in Nelson, the Elk Hill prize has remained a working part of the land—adapting from tobacco to apples to wine, and standing today as a tangible symbol of Virginia's agricultural history.



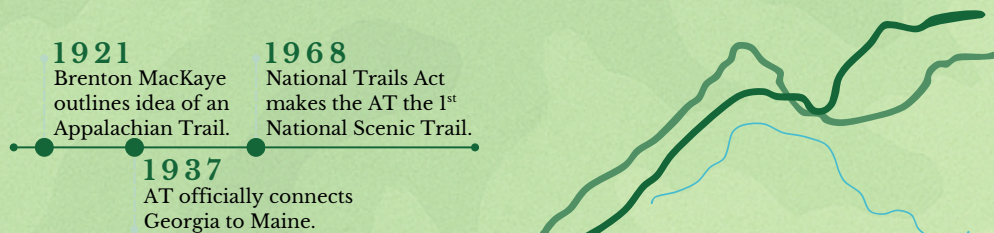
ELK HILL IN THE CIVIL WAR

Dolly Ewing, one of Arthur Ewing's daughters, remembers stories told by her family. She recalled that during the Civil War, several hundred soldiers belonging to the Army of General John Cabell Breckenridge camped for winter on the Elk Hill estate just half a mile from the main house. During that winter, General Breckenridge made several visits to see his men and was entertained by Dr. Coleman on each occasion as the two men were friends.

TIES TO THE MOUNTAIN: THEN AND NOW

The Blue Ridge Mountains have always shaped life in Nelson County. Native American settlements and camp sites in both the valleys and uplands suggest regular movement across the mountains. Early colonizers followed mountain paths and river valleys to settle the land. Today, those same mountains continue to guide how people explore, learn from, and connect with the region.

APPALACHIAN TRAIL

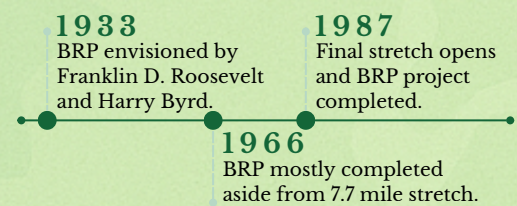


In Nelson County, hikers on the Appalachian Trail cross the Tye River, climb the Three Ridges mountain, and follow some of the same routes once used by settlers and Civil War soldiers. The AT connects Nelson to a national community of hikers and conservationists.

ROCKFISH VALLEY FOUNDATION

In the valley, RVF built a trail system along the South Rockfish River that connect visitors to historic and ecological sites. The trails are designed to help people experience the land that has been lived on for centuries. Educational sites along the trails highlight the area's natural and cultural heritage, making them a resource for children, families, and those curious about the valley's history.

BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY



The Blue Ridge Parkway begins at Mile 0 in Rockfish Gap, where it meets Skyline Drive. In Nelson County, it winds along the mountain ridge, offering views of the Rockfish Valley. In 2010, the Rockfish Valley Foundation partnered with the Friends of the Blue Ridge Parkway to celebrate the Parkway's 75th anniversary.

WINTERGREEN RESORT

Wintergreen Resort opened in 1975, and over the years, it has grown into a four-season resort featuring over 30 miles of hiking trails. These trails offer visitors a fun way to experience the mountain up close. Wintergreen's trail system highlights how Nelson County continues to balance recreation with preservation.

The Blue Ridge Mountains have always been a part of Nelson County. Settlers crossed the gaps in search of farmland hundreds of years ago, following similar paths that families hike today. The mountains remain constant, shaping how people move, gather, and grow as a living part of Nelson's past, present, and future.

CELEBRATING OUR SUPPORTERS

This booklet was created in celebration of the Rockfish Valley Foundation's 20th anniversary, honoring two decades of preservation, education, and community engagement. We are deeply grateful to everyone whose dedication and support have made this milestone possible.

We extend our sincere thanks to Jordanna Silverman, our 2025 summer intern who created the booklet and other supporting materials for the RVF 20th Anniversary Celebrations. We are especially appreciative of the Nelson County Historical Society for granting access to archives and resources, and to the Monacan Nation Museum for the generous loans of materials for the Natural History Center, which are also featured here. Our thanks extend to the Virginia Museum of Natural History for their affiliation and continued support of the RVF Natural History Center, as well as to the Virginia Department of Transportation, the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, and the United States Department of the Interior for the studies and documents that informed this work.

We thank James Madison University and the College of William & Mary for their contributions in presenting the geology of the Rockfish Valley fault area, and are particularly grateful for the continued support of Chuck Bailey and his students at William & Mary, whose efforts help bring geological knowledge and resources to the Rockfish Valley community.

Above all, we are deeply grateful to Peter and Betsy Agelasto, founders of the Rockfish Valley Foundation in 2005, whose vision and dedication to the valley's preservation have made all of this possible.

We also wish to recognize the countless volunteers, past and present board members, donors, and friends of the Foundation whose steadfast commitment has sustained our work over the years. Your passion for protecting the Rockfish Valley has been the foundation's greatest strength.

As we celebrate our history, we look forward to the decades ahead—continuing to protect, share, and celebrate this remarkable place for generations to come.

Rockfish Valley Foundation Board of Trustees

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CELEBRATING 20 YEARS

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RVF is funded by volunteers, donations, and grants. To help us maintain our park, trails, and natural history center, and education programs, please visit rockfishvalley.org/donations.