

A Brief Industrial History of Stuarts Draft

In 1837, Stuarts Draft took its name from the Stuart family, as well as from the large hollow sweeping down from the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Thomas Stuart received a grant of 353 acres in 1749, and Robert Stuart ran a chopping mill in Stuarts Draft which was one of the first industries in the area. In those early years, this area was full of opportunities for agriculture and industry, just as it is today. Stuarts Draft has seen many new and diverse companies emerge from the surrounding corn fields. This economic growth, coupled with an important population growth, is an ongoing process that will certainly continue in the years to come.

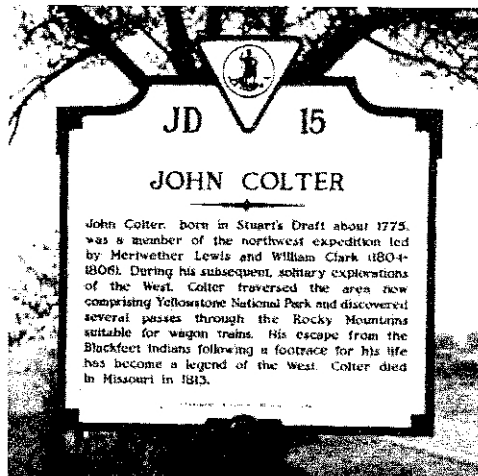
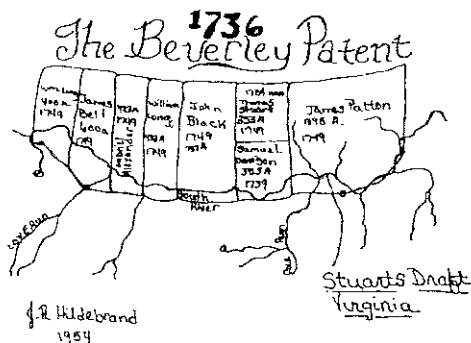
Some names of the early settlers in the area included Alexander, Cohron, Kindig, Van Lear, Wilson, and McChesney. These names still appear on mailboxes in the area today, showing how current generations have embraced their ancestors' decision to live in the Draft.

Transportation has been a key to the success of Stuarts Draft. In the 1850's, the Howardsville Turnpike came through Stuarts Draft. Over this stock-owned road traveled agricultural products and pig iron from Augusta County to Howardsville, located on the James River. From Howardsville, the products were sent to Richmond by river barges. Today, Stuarts Draft's accessibility to modern transportation is still one of its greatest assets. Located near the intersection of I-81 and I-64, Stuarts Draft is but hours away from major economic centers such as Northern Virginia and Tidewater.

The first train came through Stuarts Draft in the 1880's with the Stuarts Draft Railroad Station being built in 1891. This station was torn down in 1975. Around the railroad station, businesses developed, including Stuarts Draft Mill in 1893, Cohron's Store, a chair factory, a barrel factory, and the George S. Etter Funeral Home in 1905. People's Bank opened in 1906. The businesses began to grow and paved the way for today's industrial development.

Among the early entrepreneurs in Stuarts Draft was the railroad employees' physician, Dr. William Baldwin Dodge. He soon became not only the community doctor but also a businessman. On Main Street, he built Dodge's Inn which served railroad passengers, providing lodging as well as a packed lunch for the next day's train travel. The Inn was torn down in 1987. Dr. Dodge also developed Mountain Lake, today's Shenandoah Acres.

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History (continued)

The Fishersville, Barterbrook and Stuarts Draft Telephone Company was organized in 1895 with the first phones ready for use in May, 1897. Two mail delivery routes were established in 1904 serving 1,200 people. In 1906, Stuarts Draft became the first county school to go to a nine month term. The Citizens Educational League raised money to enlarge the school, add a library, purchase an organ and build a playground.

The era of modern industrial growth in Stuarts Draft began in 1964 when the J. K. Porter (NIBCO, Inc.) plant opened. This was followed by Hollister, Mastic Corporation (Alcoa) and P. T. Components (now Rexnord) in the 1970's. In 1982, Hershey Chocolate Company opened a new plant, and McKee Baking Company began production at its new Stuarts Draft plant in early 1990. A visitor to Stuarts Draft can see these imposing plants with cattle grazing in a nearby field, testifying to the compatibility of industry and agriculture.

As Stuarts Draft enters the 90's, the population is approaching 11,000, and the number of businesses is over 130. The future holds many possibilities for this once small rural community.

Industry continues to view Stuarts Draft as an ideal location. The area has a rail service and easy access to a high quality work force with a strong work ethic. In return, industry has brought jobs and strength to the economy and a commitment to protect the environment, preserving and enhancing the quality of life for current residents and future generations.