What you should know about

Fauquier History

Vint Hill Farms Station

The Vint Hill section of Fauquier County is located about 10 miles northeast of Warrenton. It was once a country estate owned by Andrew Low. He was of European decent and he built a home at Vint Hill in 1860, raising sheep and cattle. The land remained in the family until 1911 when Mitchell Harrison, the former owner of the Franklin Sugar Refining Company of Franklin, purchased the property. During his ownership several buildings were added, including the slate roof barn complex that remains today. He also enlarged Andrew Low’s original home into his Manor House, a structure known today as the Inn at Vint Hill.

During the Civil War this was the site of many Union and Confederate troop encampments and skirmishes. No major battles were fought there. One of the skirmishes involved elements of Mosby’s Rangers and Union troops under the command of Maj. General David Gregg, whose troops patrolled Fauquier looking for “guerillas and bushwhackers”. Mosby had acquired a mountain rifle (howitzer) from Jeb Stuart to use to disrupt Union supply trains and other operations. Mosby used the weapon to destroy a Union train near Catlet to the surprise of the Union troops. One of Mosby’s men, Sam Chapman, had some knowledge of howitzers and was named the gunner. Mosby’s men fought to the finish to protect this weapon in a skirmish at Grapewood, a community at the southern edge of Vint Hill station. In this skirmish, there was no ammunition for the weapon and it was abandoned and captured by the Union forces. Sam Chapman was wounded in what was described “as a very hot affair but a small one” with several Union and Confederate troops killed and wounded. Mosby’s men were very active in the Vint Hill area, hence today there is a well known local road named Mosby’s Lane.

In 1942, Mr. Harrison sold the property, consisting of about 720 acres, to the U.S. Army for $127,500. The Army needed a site near the Arlington Hall Station in Northern Virginia to set up a station to intercept World War II enemy communications. The 2nd Signal Brigade troops established “Monitor Station #1” in the barn complex at Vint Hill. It is said that the technology and concepts developed at Vint Hill Farms Station became a model for other similar field stations around the world. They also trained intercept radio technicians, cryptanalysts, and other radio operators at Vint Hill for other such Stations. The facility employed more than 2,000 military and civilian employees.

These activities at Vint Hill continued for about 32 years, into the Cold War era. When, in 1974, the military down-sized, the role of the facility changed. It became more of an intelligence and electronic warfare support facility specializing in research and development, logistics, and acquisitions. As such it operated under the Army Security Agency (later known as the Intelligence and Security Command) until 1997. At that time, with the Cold War over, the base was closed as part of the Base Realignment and Closure actions designed to save money and close property deemed no longer needed by the military.

The Vint Hill Economic Development Agency was established by the Governor of Virginia in the mid-1990's for the orderly privatization of the property to civilian use. As a result there has been and continues to be considerable residential, commercial and community development in Vint Hill. Developers have built many new homes and additional projects are being planned. Other existing structures are being converted into housing, some low cost. The Federal Aviation Administration has built a major air control center in the area. A shopping strip mall will open by about 2005 and many other commercial businesses are operating in the area with more to follow. Other special applications include the use of the base club (formally the home of the early owners), which is now the Inn at Vint Hill, for special events such as parties, wedding receptions, etc. A Town Center and an event and conference center are also planned. Base recreational facilities such as the gymnasium, and many sporting fields are now part of the Fauquier County Parks and Recreation authority. The Fauquier Community Theater group, which had been using the old base movie theater for its performances, has purchased a base warehouse which will be converted into a new and larger theater with expanded facilities for auditions, theatrical training, and rehearsals. Growth in the Vint Hill area is expected to be dynamic as the early years of the 21st century progress.

Additional information on Vint Hill Farms along with many pictures are part of a display in the War Room of the Old Jail Museum in Warrenton, Virginia.

Prepared by the Fauquier Historical Society