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### A History of the Origin and Growth of Sandston Virginia

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*Nauman*

A HISTORY OF THE ORIGIN  
AND GROWTH OF SANDSTON VIRGINIA

\* \* \*

Submitted as a partial fulfillment of the  
Requirements for a major in the Department of History.

\* \* \*

Professor:  
Dr. R. C. Mc Danel

Paul E. Nauman  
University of  
Richmond 1938

existence. The task was made much easier, too, due to the fact that I lived in the village for the ten years from 1922 to 1932. The kindness and helpfulness of the following people have been of great value to me in the preparation of this work: my father and mother, Messrs. J. B. Bourne, R. C. Hawkins, J. D. Clarke, Rev. G. H. Lawrence, Rev. C. A. Mc Girt, Rev. S. S. Spathéy, Mrs. R. C. Hawkins, and <sup>Ms</sup> Mrs. R. D. Finley.

Paul E. Nauman

Sever  
Nat'l

Nine Mile  
Road



School



Williamsburg  
Road  
U. S. Rt. 60



Original  
Confederate  
Fortification



Golf Course



AIRVIEW OF SANDSTON, VIRGINIA

Three and one-half miles east of the Richmond city limits, on U. S. Route 60, lies the village of Sandston. Perhaps more people are better acquainted with the names of Seven Pines and Fair Oaks, which are only one-half mile distant to the east and north, for these names are preserved in all histories of the Civil War. Yet today, Seven Pines and Fair Oaks are mere names in history books, while Sandston is a small but closely united community with schools, churches, a library, post-office, Lodge and other civic enterprises. This small village while occupying the same ground over which the great Seven Days Battle of the Civil War was fought, owes its origin to a later and greater war-----the World War.

When, in 1917, the United States entered the World War on the side of the Allies, the Congress found it necessary to pass various measures in order to speed up production of War supplies and to provide for the housing of employees engaged in such production. Just such an act was that passed on May 16, 1918 entitled "An Act To Authorize The President To Provide Housing For War Needs".<sup>1</sup> The Work of providing this housing was delegated to the Department of Labor and it was under the authority of this Department that the United States Housing Corporation was organized.<sup>2</sup>

Acting in accordance with the U. S. statute, this corporation

1. Henrico County Deed Book, 216B, 186

2. Ibid.

then proceeded to buy, among other lands, the territory (about 570 acres) upon which the village of Sandston now lies, and a street car line connecting Richmond and this property.<sup>3</sup> The purpose of this purchase was to provide housing for the employees who worked in the powder-bag loading plant about one-half mile south of the present site of Sandston.<sup>4</sup> The plant was connected, then, with the Southern Railroad at Fair Oaks by a spur line which ran across the property purchased by the government.<sup>5</sup>

On the 9th of July, 1918 the Congress of the United States passed an act which gave the President the right to dispose of all lands, plants, factories, etc., used in the production of war supplies and acquired since April 6, 1917.<sup>6</sup> The property at Sandston was offered for sale under the provisions of this act, but two years passed before a purchaser was found. The Richmond Times Dispatch carried the following notice on its front page the 31st of July, 1920:

Oliver J. Sands, President of the Richmond Fairfield Railway Corporation announced last night that contract for the purchase of the Seven Pines electric line and the village

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3. Henrico County Deed Book, 216 B, 186.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid., 221

(Sandston) at Seven Pines has been executed... Because the company (The United States Housing Corp.) refused to sell the railway without selling the village, a group of houses over 200 in number constructed during the World War by the Government at Seven Pines for the housing of workers, the citizens were compelled to purchase this property also. Although not authentic, price paid for the property is said to be \$160,000.<sup>7</sup>

The deal was consummated and modern Sandston was on its way. The price paid for the 570 acres of ground and the street car line together, however, was \$191,174.50.<sup>8</sup>

The company set to work at once, remodelling and renovating the houses constructed in haste by the government to supply its war needs. The village already had its own power plant and water supply built by the government.<sup>9</sup> Streets and alleys were laid out and those already in existence were improved. The founding fathers hit upon the happy plan of using the names of Civil War heroes for the names of their streets. Those streets running east and west were named for heroes of the Union Army, while those running north and south were named for the heroes of the Confederacy. Thus we have such names as Confederate Avenue and Federal Street, McClellan Street and Kemper

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7. Richmond Times Dispatch, July 31, 1920.

8. Henrico County Deed Book, 216 B, 232.

9. Letter from Mr. Oliver J. Sands to the author.

Court, Berry Street and Raines Avenue.

When the Richmond Fairfield Railway Company took over Sandston from the Government in 1921, there were 230 bungalows on the land. They were all architecturally of the same style, 6 rooms and a bath.<sup>11</sup> In 1922 when my family moved to Sandston, I do not recall that the beauty of the place impressed me deeply. The small frame houses were covered on the outside with tarpaper and there was little planting to blend the houses with the landscape. On the inside the dining room, living room and three bedrooms were all alike; the floors were of soft wood, the walls of tongue-grooved wainscoting five feet from the floor and plaster board from there to the ceiling. Each was equipped with a screened front porch and set in a lot of about 60 ft. by 100 ft. They were typical of the houses put up by the government to provide housing in an emergency and were never intended to be durable, life-time dwellings of great beauty. The problem of housing in and about Richmond was very acute during the years

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1920 to 1922, so it is not surprising that by 1923 all

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10. Conversation with Mr. J. B. Bourne.

11. ----- Sandston Virginia. (1923)

12. Letter from Mr. Oliver J. Sands to the author.



of the houses erected by the Government had been sold, and were occupied, and the corporation was offering 50<sup>13</sup> more houses for sale which they had built themselves.

During the first three years of Sandston's existence the problem of schooling was most acute, and the fact that the grade-school which serves that part of the county is today located in Sandston is a tribute to the industry of those early inhabitants who made it possible. The high school for Fairfield district is today, and has been since its building, the Highland Springs High School. Sandston children of high school age have always attended this school which is one of the largest and best county schools in the state of Virginia. However, the grade school situation was not so settled. The county maintained prior to 1923 a school building at Seven Pines for teaching through the first seven grades. That children were able to learn, and teachers able to teach, under conditions that existed in this school is a marvel of 20th century aptitude and a monument to their ingenuity. The building was of frame construction one and one-half stories high. Actually there was only one room, but with the folding doors in the center closed, it was

13.----- Sandston Virginia. (1923)

considered two rooms. In winter heat was provided by wood stoves in the center of the room.

The good people of Sandston were quite unhappy over these conditions, as well they might be, and a move was soon underway to provide Sandston with a school of its own.<sup>14</sup> Among the buildings inherited by the Richmond Fairfield Railway Company was a large frame building which had served during the war as a men's cafeteria.<sup>15</sup> This building was quite substantial and in a short time it was reconditioned into a twelve room schoolhouse. An advertisement of 1923 says: "Sandston has a twelve room schoolhouse, modern in every respect with a large assembly hall and five acres of land:....."<sup>16</sup> In 1923 the building was offered to the county to replace the school at Seven Pines but due to the opposition of the citizens of that community the offer was rejected. Rebuffed in their attempt to get the county school moved to Sandston the citizens went ahead on their own. When the school session opened in the Fall of 1923, the Sandston school opened too. Several professional teachers from outside the locality were hired while several ladies of Sandston volunteered their services

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14. Conversation with Mr. R. C. Hawkins. (Mr. Hawkins was President of the Sandston Civic Association in 1922.)

15. Ibid.

16. -----Sandston Virginia. (1923)

and taught for a very small remuneration.<sup>17</sup> The ridiculous situation of operating two schools within a mile of each other in a sparsely settled community was bound to fail and in 1924 the county school board capitulated; the Seven Pines school<sup>18</sup> was abandoned and the Sandston school became the Henrico County school of Fairfield<sup>18</sup> district.

I have made no previous mention of the fact that the village was not always known as Sandston. Originally it was known as Fairfield village, probably because it lay in Fairfield district of Henrico County. Prior to 1923 mail delivery had been of the rural or R. F. D. type. In that year it occurred to the citizens of the community that a post-office would be of some value. Upon application to the Postal authorities, however, they found that they could not have a Fairfield Post Office as one was already in existence elsewhere<sup>19</sup> in Virginia. Nothing daunted, the civic association called a mass meeting of the citizenry and by popular vote chose the name of Sandston for their village

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17. Conversation with Mr. R. C. Hawkins.

18. Henrico County School Records.

19. Conversation with Mr. R. C. Hawkins.

in honor of the President of the Richmond Fairfield Railway Corporation and prime mover of the enterprise,  
 20  
 Mr. Oliver J. Sands. This met the requirements of the postal authorities and a post office was allotted to Sandston.

The religious side of life in Sandston was not neglected. The first inhabitants found it difficult to worship as they had formerly been accustomed. Originally there was but one church located in the village--a Methodist church of ancient vintage. Those who did not choose to worship with the Methodists, either travelled the four miles over gravel roads to Richmond of a Sunday morning, or attended no church service at all. The old Methodist church of Sandston was a most unsatisfactory place of worship. It was a one story frame building heated in winter by a battered wood stove and lighted at night by oil lamps  
 21  
 placed about the walls. Built in 1890 it had, by 1924, seen its better days and was fast falling into  
 22  
 ruin.

In 1922 a community Sunday School was organized under the supervision of Mr. R. C. Hawkins.  
 23

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20. Letter from Mr. Oliver J. Sands to the author.

21. Letter from Mr. J. D. Clarke to the author.

22. Ibid.

23. "History of the Sandston Presbyterian Church", in the Minutes of East Hanover Presbytery.

This Sunday School was composed of worshippers of several denominations; Presbyterians, Baptists, Episcopalians and in 1924 the Methodists abandoned their church and joined forces. <sup>24</sup> Gradually, one denomination at a time withdrew and built their own church until by September, 1926 there were four separate denominational churches in Sandston. The Episcopal Church was the first church built in Sandston, being completed in the spring of 1924. <sup>25</sup> It was a small reconstructed cottage located at the corner of Federal Street and Nagle Avenue, opposite the school building, and having a charter membership of only fifteen members. <sup>26</sup> The Methodists were next to build their church. Opening exercises were held in the new and modern church building on the 2nd of August, 1925. <sup>27</sup> Almost one year later the Presbyterians built their beautiful church on the corner of Confederate Avenue and Union Street. <sup>28</sup> At that time the Pastor was the Rev. Charles A. McGirt who has served in that capacity continuously since January, 1924. The Baptists, last of the four

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24. Letter from Mr. J. D. Clarke to the author.

25. Conversation with Mr. J. B. Shaw.

26. Ibid.

27. The Sandston Citizen, August 7, 1925.

28. "History of the Sandston Presbyterian Church", in the Minutes of East Hanover Presbytery.

denominations in the village to organize, did so on the 26th of September, 1926. With a charter membership of only 32 they continued to hold meetings in the school building until October, 1931 when their church building on Pickett Street was completed.<sup>29</sup>

Thus the little village of Sandston grew steadily. In Sandston a spirit of neighborliness, democracy and friendly cooperation reigned. There was no foolish social scale to hinder progress, and to promote false pride. There was no great variety in the economic scale. Most of the inhabitants were wage-earners, working in the city of Richmond, for Sandston had no industries of its own. There were carpenters, plumbers, automobile salesmen, barbers, service station operators, insurance salesmen, printers and railroad men. All the<sup>children</sup> went to the same school. I do not recall in my ten year stay but one family which sent their children to a private school, and this family was Catholic and did so on religious grounds.

The best indication of the cooperativeness of the villagers is evidenced by the Civic Association;

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29. Letter from the Rev. G. H. Lawrence to the author.

that group which did such splendid work in locating a county school in Sandston. This has been to the present day the only instrument through which the people could express their opinion. Sandston has never been incorporated, thus the only government is county government which cannot always be expected to look out for the welfare of this small section of the county. The Civic Association formulates the opinion of the community and has upon several occasions petitioned the county authorities for changes which, in the majority of cases, have been granted.

The Sandston library is a fine example of the spirit of democracy and neighborliness that rules the village. Under the auspices of the Sandston Woman's Club, a movement to establish a library in the community was begun in February, 1923. The library was located in the Woman's Club room of the public school and had on its shelves originally 157 books. For the first year Mrs. J. B. Bourne served gratuitously as librarian. In two and one-half years

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30. The Sandston Citizen, November 6, 1925

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

the number of books had been increased from 157 to 792, and had outgrown the small room in which the books were shelved.<sup>33</sup> Mr. Oliver J. Sands, in whose honor the village of Sandston was named, came to the rescue in the spring of 1925. He purchased a house and lot in the center of the village, fitted it properly for a library and donated it to the community.<sup>34</sup> The new library was opened on the 24th of November, 1925 with Mrs. R. D. Finley, who had served since February, 1924, as librarian.<sup>35</sup> This library has been in continuous service since that date.

Progress in the development of Sandston in the first five years was steady. It might be well, here, to picture Sandston as it appeared at the close of 1925. It was connected then with Richmond by a street car line operating cars which left Sandston every 40 minutes, and everything considered,<sup>36</sup> gave fairly accurate service. The Williamsburg highway passing through Sandston had been concreted through Sandston in 1924.<sup>37</sup> The population of the community in 1925 was about 800.<sup>38</sup> All of

33. The Sandston Citizen, November 6, 1925.

34. The Sandston Citizen, April 17, 1925.

35. The Sandston Citizen, November 6, 1925.

36. -----Sandston Virginia. (1923)

37. The Sandston Citizen, March 6, 1925.

38. Ibid.



the houses in the original development purchased from the  
 39  
 government were occupied and the enterprising home-owners  
 had vastly improved their dwellings. There was hardly a  
 house which had not been attractively shingled, or boarded  
 and painted. The ugly ducklings had been transformed.

Each was surrounded by grassy lawns and the edges softened  
 by convenient planting. The streets were in good condition  
 and in the older development there were street lights on

40  
 every corner. The houses which were on the land pur-  
 chased from the government lay on the south side of the  
 Williamsburg highway. By the close of 1925 ten two-story  
 houses on North Confederate Avenue had been built and

were offered for sale at prices ranging from \$5,300 to  
 41

\$6,500. A new development of bungalows on Federal Street  
 42

had also begun. Both of these developments lay north of  
 43

the Williamsburg road. The public grade school had just  
 completed its first year under county supervision. There

were 177 students enrolled with five teachers for the  
 44

seven grades. The Civic Association, with Mr. Luther

G. Musk as president, was a going concern in 1925.

39. -----Sandston Virginia. (1923)

40. The Sandston Citizen, March 6, 1925.

41. The Sandston Citizen, May 29, 1925.

42. The Sandston Citizen, July 3, 1925.

43. Ibid.

44. Henrico County School Records.

Meetings were held monthly and accomplishments were quite  
noticeable.<sup>45</sup> Two churches were built by the close of 1925,  
and a third church building was completed during 1926.  
A fourth-class post office was in operation,<sup>46</sup> a public  
library, three stores and a service station. There was  
morning and evening delivery of the two leading Richmond  
papers and daily ice and milk delivery.<sup>47</sup> The year, 1925,  
saw the only newspaper printed in Sandston in circulation.  
This was a weekly, four-sheet edition entitled "The Sandston  
Citizen", its editor, founder, and moving spirit being  
Mr. Joseph B. Shaw. Unfortunately, due to lack of support  
from subscriptions and advertising, the publication was  
abandoned after the issue of January 1, 1926.<sup>48</sup>

The year, 1925, definitely marks the close of the  
first era in Sandston's history. It was a period of  
pioneering for those early inhabitants. They created a  
clean, comfortable, pleasing community out of a group of  
condemned government shacks. From 1925 to the present day  
Sandston has moved forward consistently. Its progress has  
been orderly and peaceful, preserving the good created by  
those earlier inhabitants and making changes where changes

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45. The Sandston Citizen, July 17, 1925.

46. The Sandston Citizen, October 16, 1925.

47. -----Sandston Virginia. (1923)

48. The Sandston Citizen, January 1, 1926.

need be made.

A most remarkable service in Sandston has been that of the Fire department. Through March 1935 not a single residence in Sandston had been destroyed by fire.<sup>49</sup> The first protection from fire was in the form of a volunteer fire department.<sup>50</sup> There were then several hundred feet of fire hose, several chemical extinguishers<sup>51</sup> and fire hydrants scattered throughout the village. Divine-Providence must have guided the community through those first days. With houses built of wood entirely, inadequate fire fighting mechanism, and an unskilled fire department it is little short of a miracle that several houses were not burned to the ground. On more than one occasion buildings did catch fire, but not one got out of control of the crude fire fighting forces. I remember quite distinctly that I was in the third grade of the Sandston school when that structure caught fire on the 31st of March, 1925. Miraculously, however, the blaze was soon extinguished and the damage amounted to only \$250.<sup>52</sup>

For some years now the village has been equipped

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49. Richmond Times Dispatch, March 4, 1935.

50. The Sandston Citizen, March 6, 1925.

51. Ibid.

52. The Sandston Citizen, April 3, 1925.

with an experienced fire department which serves that entire end of the county. In March 1935 they laid claim to two fire engines and were justly proud of the fact that not a single home belonging to a subscriber had been lost. 53

Telephone service has always (since 1923) been known to Sandston. Prior to 1929 the village phones had been connected with the Richmond exchange. In that year the telephone company located a dial exchange in Sandston which now serves that entire section of the county. Thus telephoning throughout the Fairfield district is based upon a flat rate, but calls to Richmond demand a toll charge.

In September 1937 a crisis arose over the local school situation. The fine modern school building of 1923 had fallen into disrepair. Panes were smashed, the grass was high in the school playground and conditions were generally quite unsatisfactory. The county school board was hesitant about making repairs to the building as the plans for a new Sandston school building had been drawn and were ready to turn over to the architect. 54 When the citizens threatened to keep their children out of the school until conditions were rectified, the school board capitulated

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53. Richmond Times Dispatch, March 4, 1925.

54. Richmond Times Dispatch, September 8, 1937.

55

and the crisis passed.

The new school building which will replace the old will stand on the same grounds as the old. It will be modern in every respect. Unlike the old it will be built of brick, and contain 12 classrooms and an auditorium. The plans have been completed and work will start as soon as a contractor's bid can be accepted. <sup>56</sup>

During the present school session there are 294 pupils enrolled in the seven grades of Sandston school with eleven teachers to teach them. <sup>57</sup> There are 54 graduates of Sandston school attending the Highland Springs High School. <sup>58</sup> Several students who attended Sandston school in its early days have graduated from college and quite a few others are in attendance at college.

Probably the best barometer of the progress of Sandston can be found in its churches. Springing from a small community Sunday School in 1922 there are now four large and thriving churches in the village. They are: <sup>59</sup>

Corinth Methodist Church - 150 members  
Reverend H. M. Elam, pastor

- 
55. Richmond Times Dispatch, September 8, 1937.  
56. Conversation with Mr. G. J. Oliver, superintendent of the Henrico County Schools.  
57. Henrico County School Records.  
58. Records of the Highland Springs High School.  
59. Letter from Mr. J. D. Clarke.

60

Sandston Presbyterian Church - 168 members  
 Reverend Charles A. McGirt, pastor

Sandston Baptist Church  
 Reverend G. H. Lawrence, pastor<sup>61</sup>

Church of Our Saviour (Episcopalian)- 132 members<sup>62</sup>  
 Reverend S. S. Spathey, pastor

The village of Sandston has shown remarkable progress and presents today one of the finest residential suburbs around the city of Richmond. Streets are well paved and lighted, there are churches, schools, a library, stores, service stations, telephones, electricity, good water, morning and evening newspapers, and transportation. Sandston has come a long way since 1920, as much by the diligence and cooperation of its citizens as by the smiling face of good fortune. From a jumble of dilapidated war built shacks in 1920, a modern and attractive village has arisen; a village where democracy is the keynote and cooperativeness a virtue.

63

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60. "History of the Sandston Presbyterian Church", in the Minutes of the East Hanover Presbytery.  
 61. Letter from the Reverend G. H. Lawrence.  
 62. Conversation with Reverend S. S. Spathey.  
 63. In 1934 the old street car line was abandoned in favor of a bus line which is operated by the Richmond Fairfield Railway Corporation.



TYPICAL RESIDENCES OF MODERN SANDSTON

None of the houses pictured above were on the land purchased from the  
Government in 1920.

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3. \_\_\_\_\_, Sandston Virginia., Cussons May & Co. Inc., Richmond Va., 1923. (a small 15 page pamphlet published by the Richmond Fairfield Railway Co. for advertising purposes.)
4. Henrico County Deed Book, 216 B. (located in the Henrico County Court House.)
5. Henrico County School Records. (located in the Henrico County Public School office of the County Court House in Richmond Va. The author was aided materially here by mrs. Pearl A. Ridgeway, clerk of the County Public School office.)
6. Highland Springs High School Records. (located in the Principals office of the Highland Springs High School. Mrs. J. N. Bonnet, Principal of the school was of great help here.)
7. Letter from mr. Oliver J. Sands to the author. (mr. Sands is President of the Richmond Fairfield Railway Co.)
8. Letter from the Rev. G. H. Lawrence to the author. (Rev. Lawrence is Pastor of the Sandston Baptist Church.)
9. Letter from mr. J. D. Clarke to the author. (mr. Clarke is Secretary of the Corinth Methodist Church of Sandston.)



10. Minutes of the East Hanover Presbytery. (a page of this publication containing the history of the Sandston Presbyterian Church was sent to the author by the Rev. Chas. A. McGirt, Pastor of the Sandston Presbyterian Church.)
11. Conversations with the following people aided materially in the preparation of this paper: mr. J. B. Bourne, an official of the Richmond Fairfield Railway Co., residing in Sandston; mr. R. C. Hawkins, former President of the Sandston Civic Association and one of the first residents of Sandston; Rev. S. S. Spathy, Pastor of the Church of Our Saviour, Sandston, who supplied most of the information regarding the history of his Church; mr. George J. Oliver Superintendent of the Henrico County Public Schools.

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Several attempts were made by the author to obtain the minutes of the meetings of the Sandston Civic Association. These minutes would have been a great aid in the preparation of this work, but unfortunately, they could not be obtained.