

# *When Citizens Plan and Act*

HAROLD L. GROGAN

Many important developments in a Virginia county are results of citizen planning and action. Harold L. Grogan<sup>1</sup> is executive secretary of the Washington County Development Association, Abingdon, Virginia.

CITIZEN INTEREST in the progress of this rural county resulted in 1944 in the formation of the Washington County Development Association. A non-profit, non-stock corporation, it was pledged to develop agricultural, industrial and other resources and to promote the educational, recreational and cultural life of the county.

This citizens group was conceived not only to prepare sound plans for community development, but also to put into action the results of planning. Uppermost in the thoughts of its founders were these ideas: progress could be made only through planning, with determination to realize these plans through action.

In these early plans, the group readily recognized that there were educational needs that should be met, and that among all the rich resources of the county, its people were the greatest and came first. This analysis showed that cooperative efforts of all the people were necessary and that these should be centered in an organization charged with this responsibility. This hopeful search for a "better life" took place "while the flames of war blazed around the world."

<sup>1</sup> Professionally, the writer is a forester, having received his bachelor's degree from the University of Georgia School of Forestry in 1934.

The vision, study, planning and informed action of the people through the machinery of the county association have resulted in many achievements. Yet these results only point the way towards greater opportunity.

## **'Tourist Information' Classes**

Educational processes have been recognized as important tools. The first adult classes held comprised a "tourist information" school in how better to serve the traveler. This school was for operators of hotels, restaurants, service stations, antique shops and similar businesses. This was followed by waitress training and courses in retailing. The tourist information classes were developed and conducted with the aid of the distributive education division of the State Board of Education, and are now used as a model for a state-wide tourist-attracting movement.

Other adult classes included supervision and human relations, so there has been training on all levels—from top management through the part-time employees. In the succeeding three years, others were held, and now the local high school has expanded its offerings to include courses in distributive education, so that each youngster may have training in how better to serve his fellow man. An instructor is

also available to teach expanded adult classes. This has linked the public school system more closely to the life of the community.

The association joined the State Department of Education and the Barter Theatre in sponsoring a summer festival of arts and crafts. This is now an annual event, drawing thousands to our Virginia Highlands community "to get at the experience of the arts." The fourth mid-August event is now being planned. This festival is a story in itself, and serves to indicate how dormant resources may be evaluated and developed. University of Virginia and State Department of Education summer workshop groups have been brought into the region, and these attest the sound educational basis upon which the event is founded.

In its third summer, the festival was expanded. To the exhibits and forums previously held were added workshops in drama, creative writing, weaving and furniture restoration. Historic homes were opened so that visitors might gain an understanding of the cultural inheritance of their community, which extends back beyond the American Revolution.

### Historic Crossroad

Other devices have been used successfully to bring the traveler to us, or merely to halt those passing through our county, since two heavily traveled tourist highways cross here—U. S. 11, from Montreal, Canada to New Orleans and U. S. 19, from Erie, Pennsylvania, on the Great Lakes to Tampa, Florida. This is historically a "cross-

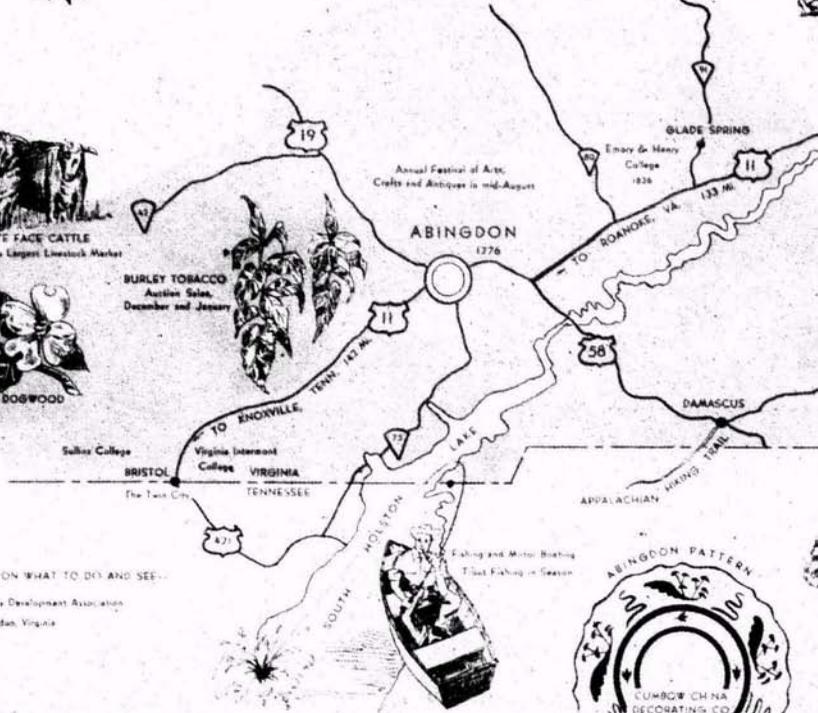


*Courtesy, Virginia State Chamber of Commerce*

*A creative writing workshop studies poetry during the Virginia festival held annually in August.*



# WELCOME TO Virginia Highlands



FOR INFORMATION ON WHAT TO DO AND SEE...  
Washington County Development Association  
Abingdon, Virginia



Design used for place mats and stationery by the Washington County Development Association.

roads," for here converged two principal Indian trails of North America, a fact which may account for Daniel Boone's later presence in this county.

Attractive leaflets have been distributed, inviting tourists to vacation here. These 30,000 leaflets have told the outside world of the fine climate, scenic and historic attractions. Travelers passing through have noticed the 25,000 attractive place mats which are being used by local restaurants. These mats portray what to do and to see in this area. They give information about White Top Mountain, second highest in Virginia (with Mt. Rogers, the tallest close by, but inaccessible), hunting and fishing in season, boating and fishing on newly-created South Holston TVA Dam, and visits to crafts centers and to such historic homes as "Acklin" which served as headquarters for the daring Confederate cavalryman, General John H. Morgan, better known as "Morgan the Raider."

Activities of the association have been the subject of numerous magazine articles. Two issues of the New Dominion Series, published by the Extension Division of the University of Virginia, have been devoted to the Washington County Development Association. This series links an experimental approach to the democratic living being tried effectively in a community. Five years elapsed between the two issues dealing with Washington County. Publication of the second number in April 1951 resulted in the appearance of several editorials in the daily press.

### County Resources Studied

Data compiled by the county and reports issued by the Development Asso-

ciation have been used extensively by the schools. At this time when so much is heard about freedom, and about the responsibility of the individual, both of which are basic in our democracy, a section of one report issued was titled, "The ABC's of County Government." This has proved invaluable to teachers in presenting facts on the machinery of county government. Good government like many other things, should be based on knowledge and should start at home.

Other studies have well served the people of the county. Teachers workshops on county resources have used these reports. Not content with a mere "book knowledge" of the county's assets, school groups visit industries, historic homes and buildings, as well as the expanded and remodeled community-centered Johnston Memorial Hospital. Leaders of the community attribute



*Courtesy, Leroy Niskanen*

*Program cover design for the Virginia Highlands Festival of Arts and Crafts.*

this million-dollar plant directly to the realization which resulted in the association's formation, and which showed that where there is a will, a way can be found—if the people are really in there pitching!

Maximum recreational development has been a constant goal of the Development Association. Now pending are two recommendations by that committee. To insure public access to the South Holston Lake, it has been suggested that the State Highway Department utilize and develop as a wayside park some odd tracts of land lying between the highway and lakeshore, and that a large 20-acre boundary be made into a county park. Otherwise, a newly created resource will be excluded from use by the public. Through its initiative and enterprise this same recreation committee has outlined a plan for the Virginia State Department of Game and Inland Fisheries which will lessen problems created by the lake crossing into Tennessee. A reciprocal recognition of fishing licenses between the two states has been suggested, to obviate needless difficulties to fishermen, both resident and non-resident.

### **Beyond County Borders**

The Washington County Development Association has an official position in planning. Its executive committee, by action of the Washington County Board of Supervisors, is the county planning commission. Policies and affairs of the WCDA are directed by a 27-member Board of Directors, which includes the executive committee. The association's office and other services are maintained through membership, which is open to anyone in the county.

The association's committees have been concerned with problems not confined within its geographical borders. For example, much work has been looking towards the establishment of a teaching center of the University of Virginia in the Southwest part of the State to bring the University to the people. This is now an accomplished fact, although the center, as now established, is not in the county. It is near enough, however, so that Washington County can reap its share of benefits and services.

Individual projects may and have been completed, but the over-all program is never completed. County needs and wants constantly change with time, and to deal with these changes a continuous program is required. Through constant coordination, the part each committee of the association plays in the total program is integrated into the whole. This integration results in a program that is both continuous and comprehensive.

There remain many problems. In the educational field, for example, facilities have not kept pace with the times. A plan for combining the several high schools in the county has been officially adopted, following a study that was initiated at the request of the Development Association. Although improvements in the present school plants now under way are made in accordance with this plan, the big job of reducing by one-third the number of county high schools is still ahead. A solution is nearer, however, for the people have come to have faith in their ability, through cooperative action, to mould and to build better schools—and a better community.

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