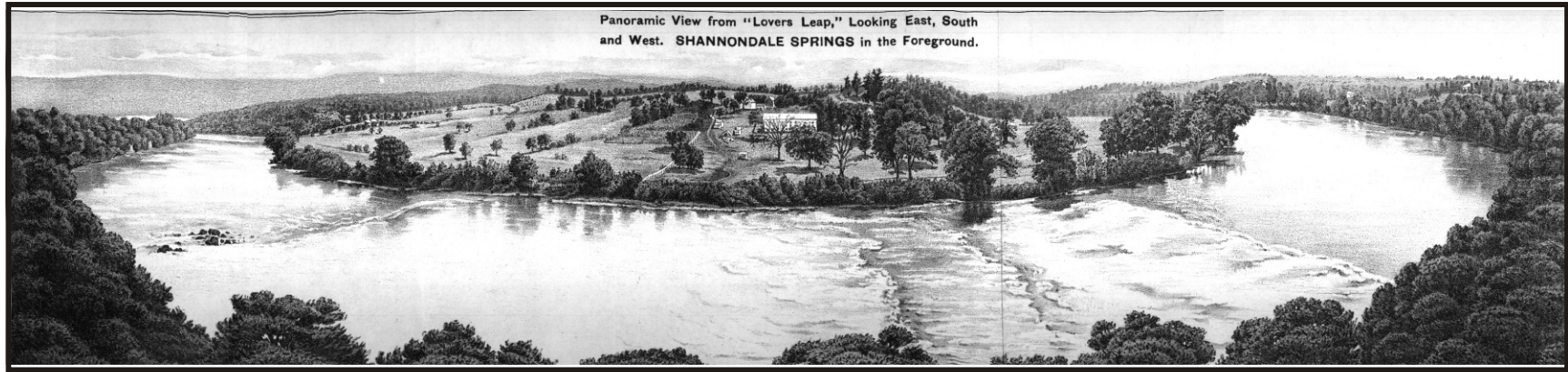


History of Shannondale Springs



William D. Theriault

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Cover: Panoramic view from "Lovers Leap" Looking East, South, and West. Shannondale Springs in the foreground. From [Getzendanner, H.C.]. *Shannondale Springs*. Washington, DC: W.F. Roberts Co., ca. 1905.

Preface

A version of this study first appeared in *West Virginia History*, vol. 57 (1998). The following version has been updated to include additional illustrations and selections of primary source materials.

The current study builds upon the previous studies of T.T. Perry ("Shannondale," an address given to the Jefferson County Historical Society, August 9, 1940) and Susan E. Winter ("A Short History of Shannondale Springs," January 23, 1983). The former work, an undocumented lecture, provides tantalizing references to sources in the author's private collection. Thus far many of the references have not been authenticated. The second work provides an extensive record of the property ownership of the entire Shannondale estate as well as an analysis of the newspaper sources available to the author.

William D. Theriault, 2009

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SHANNONDALE SPRINGS

The Shannondale Springs resort, located in Jefferson County, West Virginia, was one of the many 19th century enterprises developed ostensibly to profit from the curative powers of mineral springs. Like its competitors, Shannondale owed its patronage as much to its image and atmosphere as to the efficacy of its waters. Its fate depended as much on the owners' economic and political savvy as on the staff's ability to stamp out a stray spark or sidestep the inevitable floods. This study explores the ownership, construction, and renovation of Shannondale Springs and the factors contributing to its growth, decline, and demise.

The site now known as Shannondale Springs is part of a much larger parcel of land acquired by Colonel John Colville on May 17, 1739. Acting as Lord Fairfax's Agent, William Fairfax gave his ex-partner Colville a patent to the 29,000-acre tract called "Shannandale." The property was "situated partly in Loudoun and partly in Berkeley county aforesaid lying upon the Blue ridge and short hill mountains and in the valley between them and bounded on the west and north sides by the Shannondoah and the Potomack rivers ..." In contemporary terms, Shannondale stretched along the Shenandoah River from Castleman's Ferry in Clarke County, Virginia, to Harper's Ferry in Jefferson County, West Virginia. Colville transferred the property to William Fairfax by deeds of lease and release dated January 22 and 23, 1740.¹

William Fairfax conveyed the whole estate to George Fairfax by deed of gift on October 20, 1754. George in turn bequeathed the property and other substantial holdings to his nephew Ferdinando Fairfax in 1787. Use of the property was subject to the life estate of George's wife, Sarah.²

THE SPRINGS UNDER FERDINANDO FAIRFAX

Ferdinando Fairfax (1769-1820), the third son of Reverend Bryan Fairfax, was just eighteen years old when he inherited the 29,000-acre Shannondale tract as well as Piedmont plantation and the Belvoir estate in Fairfax County. Both his uncle and father were good friends of George Washington, who had stood godfather to Ferdinando.³ Ownership of these properties placed Fairfax in the company of other large local landowners and entrepreneurs such as John Semple and Henry Lee. Like Semple and Lee, Fairfax was eager to develop the industrial potential of his property, erecting mills and utilizing the timber and iron resources at his disposal. Unfortunately, he too appears to have been short of the capital needed to realize his dreams and was plagued by debt during the last years of his life.

Ferdinando Fairfax was the first owner who attempted to develop the potential of the Shannondale tract, which contained tillable land, iron ore, timber, and water power suitable for industrial use, in addition to the mineral springs. Details of Fairfax's use of the property before 1800 are sketchy, although he did erect a residence on it called "Shannon Hall" across the Shenandoah River from the Springs. A fire burned through part of the property shortly before May 1793, although its precise location and the extent of the damage are not known. Possibly to pay his debts or raise capital for his industrial enterprises, Fairfax had signed a bond for the property over to William Byrd Paige in December 30, 1799, for \$55,542.32. Fairfax made a payment on the mortgage to Paige for \$6,542.32 on April 1, 1800. Payments were due annually, and the full amount was to be repaid by September 1, 1809.⁴

The Springs or other natural resources at Shannondale were probably not developed for public use until at least 1820. Although maps by Charles Varle (1809) and John Wood (1820) both record Fairfax's residence, neither one shows a ferry or any structure on Horse Shoe Bend (the name first given to the area). (See Figure 1.) Varle's *Topographical Description of Frederick, Jefferson, and Berkeley Counties* is also silent on Shannondale Springs while mentioning Berkeley Springs and other local resources.⁵

Fairfax's activities from the time that he inherited the Shannondale tract until his death in 1820 are important to the history of the smaller Shannondale Springs property because they may help to date the Bath/Spring House still standing at the Springs and determine the function of other sites in the area.

By the start of the new century, Fairfax was one of the richest and most prosperous residents of the area. He was one of the original trustees of the Charlestown Academy (1797), the largest slaveholder in the area, and one of the original members of the Jefferson County Court in 1801. He owned or leased several properties in Charlestown, was a justice of the peace during this period, and played a major role in the design and construction of the original jail in Charlestown (1802) and the Market House (1806).⁶

His attempts to develop the commercial potential of his property appear to have begun in earnest by 1808, when he gave notice of his intent to apply to Jefferson County February Court to establish a ferry across the Shenandoah River from his land to the public road opposite Shannon Hill.⁷ The Shannondale Ferry was probably established in Spring 1809. Since the road to the ferry landing went past the springs, there is no doubt that this resource was well known, at least locally, by this period.

By 1809, he had extracted iron ore samples from five sites on his property and sent them to several ironmasters for conversion into bar iron and thence to James Stubblefield at the Harpers Ferry Armory to determine their suitability in the manufacture of firearms. These activities suggest that Fairfax did not have his own furnace or forge at Shannondale at this time. Nevertheless, he appears to have been moving in this direction, for between 1809 and 1811 he purchased the furnace bellows, various pieces of equipment, and available cast and wrought iron of the defunct Keeptyrst Furnace from the Armory.⁸

In 1811, Fairfax sold a 1395.5 acre segment of the Shannondale tract to the U.S. Government. The land was on the east side of the Shenandoah River, beginning at a point below Harpers Ferry and running up the river. The following year, he advertised for an individual to build a flour warehouse on the Potomac River just below Harpers Ferry and very near Digg's Island, and mortgaged part of his Piedmont estate in Loudoun County to Elijah Chamberlain. In 1813 he purchased the 196-acre farm in present day Harpers Ferry that included the Lee-Longworth House. The land was leased by the U.S. Government. The same year Fairfax mortgaged his Shannon Hill tract to Charles Gibbs.⁹

All of these events point to Fairfax's attempts to find a market for his own goods (certainly iron ore and possibly wheat or flour) at Harper's Ferry. Lacking the capital to finance an iron furnace at Shannondale, Fairfax advertised for partners in a 1815 prospectus published in Washington, D.C. In his *Description of Ferdinando Fairfax's Shannondale Iron Estate, with A Plan of a Company for Improving the Same*, he describes the existing improvements on the whole tract, noting:

The Valley run has been thought adequate to carry a saw-mill with a single flutter-wheel, which I have accordingly erected upon it, preparatory to other works... In the present state of the works of the Potomac Company, the river Shenandoah is navigable for flour-boats, and other boats, from Harper's Ferry (at its mouth) through the whole extent of this property, and many miles above, a great part of the year... The small tenements upon the whole tract offered to the company, are so interspersed, as to serve rather to protect from fire, &c. than to destroy in future the wood-land. Some are rented for lives, some for terms of years, all under very strict covenants; but the leases of the most important are already in my hands, for the good of the company.¹⁰



Figure 1. Portion of Varle's 1809 map, showing Hammond's Ferry (about a mile down river from the later Shannondale Ferry). The mineral springs are not marked, but are located directly across the river from the Fairfax estate.

Thus, with the exception of a saw mill and some scattered tenant farms, Fairfax's property, including the Springs, seems to have undergone relatively little development by 1815. His efforts to find financial backing for the Shannondale Iron Estate found little support.

By 1814, Fairfax's financial empire was unravelling. In that year, the administrators for William B. Page, deceased, initiated a chancery suit against him. Under the terms of the settlement, issued in 1816, Fairfax was obliged to auction his 10,000-acre Iron Mine tract to settle his debt.¹¹ The land was purchased by William Herbert, Jr. In April 1817, Fairfax was involved in another chancery suit, this time with George Reynolds,¹² and in September of the same year his Short Hill tract in Loudoun County went on sale to repay the mortgage issued in 1812.¹³

In the context of all the previously mentioned financial activities, Ferdinando Fairfax "of the city of Washington" sold Thomas Griggs, Jr., and Benjamin Beeler an undivided two-thirds of the land containing Shannondale Springs in November 1819. The property was described as being "opposite the Shannon Hill tract, containing by estimation about sixty acres more or less and being commonly called the Horse Shoe Tract..." Of the undivided two-thirds owned by Beeler and Griggs, Beeler was to have two-thirds. (In other words, when the sale was concluded Fairfax owned 3/9ths, Beeler, 4/9ths, and Griggs 2/9ths.) On July 1 of the following year, Fairfax sold Griggs his remaining one-third interest in the Horse Shoe Tract in order to secure payment for a debt of \$2,850 owed John Hopkins, Jr., of Winchester. Ferdinando Fairfax, age 52, died at his residence in Fairfax County, Virginia, on September 24, 1820.¹⁴

THE BIRTH OF SHANNONDALE SPRINGS RESORT

The foregoing discussion provides strong evidence that Shannondale Springs was not used for commercial purposes until after Beeler and Griggs acquired two-thirds interest in the property in November 1819. John S. Gallaher, a life-long resident of the area and later part owner of the resort noted in 1838 that "The Shannondale Springs first attracted public attention in the Fall of 1819.... The late Dr. De Butts analyzed the Shannondale water in 1821."¹⁵

Houses were definitely erected on the site by Beeler before July 1821. No work could have been done at the property until the spring of 1820, and there are indications that facilities were available by the summer of that year. First, Thomas Deakin of Harper's Ferry advertised in the *Farmers Repository* for June 21, 1820, that "he intends keeping neat and substantial hack for hire at Harpers Ferry for accommodation of persons visiting Shannondale Springs." Furthermore, Rosalie Stier Calvert reported visiting the Springs about the 15th of July 1820. Noting the efficacy of the waters, she lamented, "I would have liked to drink them for a whole week, but all the houses were full. We would have had to go back the same day except for the courtesy of a gentleman who had dined at our home several years ago and who gave up his room to us. However, it was so uncomfortable that we only stayed for two days."¹⁶ Thus the opening of the Shannondale Springs resort can be pinpointed with some confidence to the summer of 1820.¹⁷

An undated painting of the Springs may document this phase of its construction. Entitled "A view of the Shannondale Springs and the Horse Shoe bend on the Shenandoah River," the scene depicts a man, woman, and baby sitting on a hill on the north side of the Shenandoah River (possibly at Shannon Hill). Behind them, on the south side of the river lies a U-shaped collection of one and two-story buildings. No hotel is visible. In the lower right portion of the picture, the road leading to the ferry is shown as well as a structure on the riverbank and a boat crossing the river.¹⁸

During the construction of the “houses” at Shannondale Springs, Beeler had become indebted to William Clark, John Griggs, and Thomas Griggs, Jr., in the sum of \$1,590.40. To repay this debt, he mortgaged his interest in the property to Samuel W. Lackland and James Stephenson. The transaction included Beeler’s 4/9ths share in the 60-acre parcel, the ferry, and the mineral waters and full possession of the houses already erected by Beeler.¹⁹ In August 1821, Lackland and Stephenson sold their newly purchased 4/9th share in Shannondale Springs to James L. Ranson.²⁰ Almost immediately, Ranson sold three of his four 1/9th shares to Thomas Brown, Samuel W. Lackland, and Thomas Griggs, Jr.²¹ At the same time, the four men entered into an agreement under which:

... the rent of the boarding establishment already erected for the next season shall be in proportion to the improvements for which each party has paid, To wit, said Griggs shall receive rent in proportion to the buildings heretofore erected by himself and for one fourth part of the improvements which were erected by Benjamin Beeler said Griggs having purchased one fourth part of Beeler’s interest in said property and that the said Lackland, Brown & Ranson shall each receive rent in proportion to his proportion to the improvements erected by said Beeler, to wit, each one fourth.... The rents and profits of the ferry and any buildings which may be attached to it shall always be received in proportion to the interest of each party therein, as first stated, and all the profits arising from the sale of water or other money for the use of it, and all baths and bath houses, shall also be in proportion to the shares of the said parties their heirs or assigns.... The parties herein further agree that John W. Page Esqr. of Fredk. County who holds the other [illegible] of said property shall at his option become a party to this agreement...²²

This agreement indicates that the “boarding house” (i.e., hotel) was erected in the summer of 1821 by Thomas Griggs, Jr., along with several other structures (baths or bath houses) which augmented the houses constructed by Beeler the previous year. This sequence of events is substantiated by Samuel Kercheval (1835), who noted that “A company of gentlemen in its neighborhood joined and purchased the site, and forthwith erected a large brick boarding house, and ten or twelve small buildings for the accommodation of visitors.”²³

To summarize ownership of the property in 1821, the 66+ acre tract containing the ferry, “houses,” “boarding house,” “baths and bath houses,” was owned by James L. Ranson (1/9th), Thomas Brown (1/9th), Samuel W. Lackland (1/9th), and Thomas Griggs, Jr. (6/9ths). Thomas Griggs, Jr., also owned 1/3rd of the adjacent 125-acre parcel. The remaining 2/3rds of the larger tract was owned by James Milton, a relative of Benjamin Beeler, who transferred his ownership of the property to Robert Milton in 1825.²⁴

According to one contemporary source, James Monroe and his cabinet used Shannondale Springs as their summer White House (until 1825). Such presidential patronage may account for the resort’s initial success. After getting off to a good start in the early 1820’s, the Springs appears to have fallen upon hard times, lasting perhaps until the late 1830’s. Until the arrival of the railroads and the C & O Canal, access to the resort from Washington, Richmond, or Baltimore would have been difficult. The reputation of the resort also appears to have suffered during this period. Kercheval noted that, when it first opened, “A few extraordinary cures were effected by the use of the water, of obstinate scorbutic complaints, and it suddenly acquired a high reputation.” Writing in 1838, John S. Gallaher observed that, “After passing through various vicissitudes, and encountering many prejudices, as well as no small share of obloquy, the most impartial, as also competent judges, have at length stamped upon these waters that character to which they were early entitled, and which gives them a just claim to rank with the most celebrated mineral waters of this country.” Another writer recalled that “The few bilious cases that occurred here in the summer of 1822, — a season well remembered of general bilious sickness throughout the country, — has unfortunately but unfairly been remembered to have occurred here, when forgotten as having happened at other places.” Another visitor to the Springs writing in 1838 believed that disagreements among the original owners had led to the resort’s being only partially completed and that the original buildings deteriorated to the point where no guests could be accommodated.²⁵

The layout of the early resort was well documented by the pen of Charles Burton about 1831.²⁶ (See Figures 2 and 3.)



Figure 2. "Shannondale Springs, Virginia." Drawing by C. Burton, New York, engraved and printed by Fenner, Sears & Co. Published: London, September 1, 1831, by I.T. Hinton & Simpkin & Marsh.

Burton's illustration shows the hotel as a two-story red-roofed, white structure with an additional basement and a porch spanning the entire first floor. The first and second floors show eight rectangular windows evenly spaced across the front; the basement level reveals eight evenly spaced square windows. Ten single-story structures form a rough semicircle around the hotel. A barn-like structure and a two-story house lie close behind the cottages on the southeast. Far in the distance to the southwest, two other buildings can be seen near the edge of the woods. Near the river's edge, to the northwest of the hotel, two small buildings are located near the Shannondale Ferry. The latter structures may include the ferryman's house (known to be located there in 1848 and 1852) and another building associated with the ferry operation. Up hill from these structures, several people can be seen lounging in the shade of a tree, possibly at the site of one of the springs.

An undated pencil sketch of Shannondale Springs (probably from the 1840's) presents an additional view of the resort from across the river (Figure 4). At the far upper left is the cliff later known as Lover's Leap; a cabin appears on the lower left. Several boats and bathers are in the river between the near riverbank and the ferry landing. Two structures appear on the far side at the ferry landing. Six cottages are visible near the hotel. A farmhouse and barn is shown up hill. At the crest of the hill is a long, narrow building, possible the bowling alley.

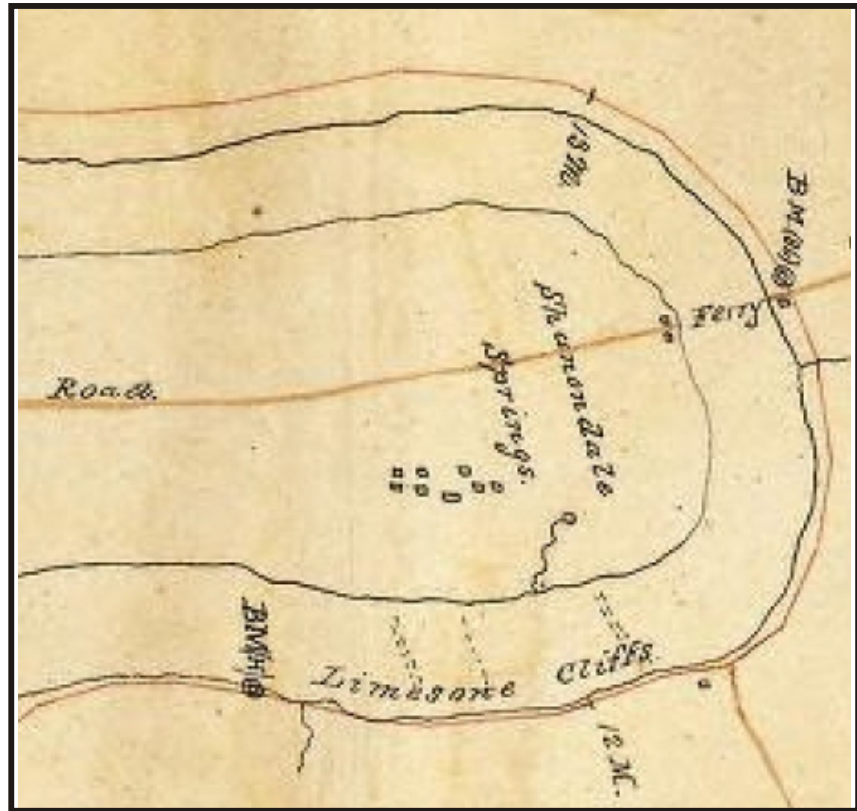


Figure 3. Portion of an 1832 map, showing the Shannondale Springs resort. The map has been turned so that its orientation matches that of Burton's illustration. If the "Road" shown is accurate for the time, it had to make a steep climb from the ferry to the crest of the hill behind the hotel. It must have been soon replaced by one that followed the riverbank.



Figure 4. Undated (1840's?) pencil sketch of Shannondale Springs from across the river. Photograph by W. Theriault from original drawing. Courtesy of the Jefferson County Museum

Shares of the resort property were frequently bought and sold throughout the first half of the 1830's, perhaps reflecting economic hardship, cholera epidemics, or speculation based on the arrival of the railroads.²⁷ The C & O Canal reached Harpers Ferry in 1833, the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad in 1834, and the Winchester & Potomac Railroad in 1835. Extolling the virtues of the Springs, John S. Gallaher, owner of Charlestown's *Free Press*, noted in 1835 that:

Shannondale Springs ... can be reached in less than a day by travellers from Baltimore. They may start from that city at 5 in the morning, dine at Harpers-Ferry at 1, and be here by 3. They can then ride out, in one hour more, to the Springs, or, (which would be far preferable by-the-by,) they can defer riding out till the cool of the morning, and, in the meantime, rest themselves at some of our hotels, where they will be regaled with delicacies not surpassed by the rich tables of Hussey himself. On the other hand, the citizens of the District have ready access to this watering place, by way of the Little River Turnpike, which crosses the river a few miles above, and by the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal. From the west, too, is ready access by means of stages, two lines of which run daily from Winchester to this place and Harpers-Ferry.²⁸

Shannondale Springs was now accessible to the wealthy and influential from Baltimore, Washington, and Richmond and the improvements in transportation were opening up new markets for the area's natural resources. The heyday of Shannondale Springs was about to begin.

THE HEYDAY OF THE SPRINGS

During the early 1830's, Samuel W. Lackland gained control of most of the Shannondale Springs property. On September 1, 1837, he and his wife sold their 8/9ths interest in the 66 ½ acre Shannondale Springs tract and the entire 121-acre tract adjoining it to a new group of investors. The group included Andrew Kennedy, Joseph T. Daugherty, Robert T. Brown, George W. Hammond, William Yates, John S. Gallaher, William Crow, John B.H. Fulton, and Charles G. Stewart.²⁹ This group, plus James L. Ranson, comprised the ownership of the Shannondale Springs Company when it was incorporated in March 1838 by the Virginia General Assembly. The men had their share of power, influence, and financing. To finance the purchase of the property from Lackland, each member of the group placed his 40 shares in the company in trust to Richard Parker. A loan of \$5,000 for improvements was obtained from the Charlestown branch of the Valley Bank, whose president was their long-standing associate, Thomas Griggs, Jr.³⁰

The birth of the Shannondale Springs Corporation in 1838 takes on additional significance when we recognize that the incorporators were members of Virginia's Whig party who had been working for more than a decade to have the legislature fund internal improvements projects such as railroads, highways, and canals. One of the former owners, Thomas Griggs, Jr., had served in the House of Delegates in 1835.³¹ John S. Gallaher, in particular, was an important force in the success of the resort. Gallaher had fought for internal improvements from his seat in the Virginia House of Delegates and from his position as editor or investor in several Whig newspapers in Virginia. As the fame of Shannondale Springs grew during the next 20 years, it would become more than a resort for the wealthy. It would become a Whig enclave with strong ties to Baltimore, Washington, and Richmond.

The hotel, under its new ownership, reopened on June 10, 1838. Isaac. N. Carter was hired as proprietor of the hotel, and a writer noted that the "company are erecting bath houses where persons can be provided with warm or cold baths, for which purpose they can use either the mineral waters, or the river water, as may be preferred." Gallaher lost no time in promoting the virtues of his new investment. In 1838, his Charlestown newspaper, the *Free Press*, published a prospectus entitled *Shannondale: the Quality and Character of the Waters and Their Effects upon Various Diseases*.³²

Gallaher's prospectus includes the following description of the resort by a Professor Hall of Maryland:

How can invalids of the Monument City, get to these Springs? Nothing in the world is easier. Step into an elegant car on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, early in the morning, and you will be transported to Harpers-Ferry before 2 o'clock, 82 miles. Here you will have leisure to breathe and to take a bird's-eye view of those beauties and sublimities of nature, so graphically described by the pen of the philosophic Jefferson. By this time, you will be summoned into the dining-room, where you will find as sumptuous a repast, and as good attendance, as you will meet with at Barnum's or at Page's. After dinner, you get into the cars of the Winchester and Potomac Railroad Company, and in three quarters of an hour will reach Charlestown, ten miles. Here, a good Stage will be found in waiting, with a most obliging and careful driver. In this vehicle you proceed to the Ferry, by which you cross the Shenandoah, and are bro't on to the broadest part of the horse-shoe. Moving along the margin of the winding river, your ears are now greeted, for the first time, by its never ceasing murmurs, occasioned by the passage of the flood over the numberless rocks which oppose its progress. A few yards from the path, you see the health-giving fountain, whose waters incessantly bubble up from the waters beneath, and are surrounded by a circular block of sandstone. In three minutes more you alight at your lodgings. The whole journey is performed in a single day, and with very little fatigue.

As you descend towards the Ferry, you see on the Northern side of the hill, and near its base, a long two-story brick edifice, made snow white by lime, and back of it, farther up the hill, a dozen or more small dwellings, mostly of wood, and now in good repair. Back of these, and withdrawn a few rods from them, stand two one-story brick lodgments, separated each into four small convenient apartments. These are the best private rooms belonging to the concern, and are preferred by those who love

and seek retirement. The upper stories of the long edifice are divided into twenty-five lodging rooms. The dining room, in the first story, is 80 feet long and 30 wide. In this spacious apartment, the light-footed nymphs and joy-seeking swains often mingle in the giddy dance. The buildings are neatly finished. Comfort is consulted.³³

A visitor to the hotel in 1848 provided further details of the landscape. Describing the panoramic view from the hill in back of the hotel, he noted, “To the right, the waving and sloping ground is devoted to agricultural purposes, and exhibits an appearance of great fertility and productiveness. To the left of the main building [are] gravelled walks, bordered by trees...”³⁴ (See Figure 5 for a contemporary view.)

Outlining the regimen at the Springs, Professor Hall asserted that “no mineral water of this country, possessing the same constituent parts, is a more active purgative, when freely taken, than the Shannondale; being, in general, equal in power to most of the neutral salts; or, on the contrary, more bland in its operation, when used with moderation; acting as gently as the mildest aperient, without giving rise to griping or flatulence, or



Figure 5. Illustration of Shannondale Springs from Henry Howe's *Historical Collections of Virginia*, 1845.

that feeling of debility so often occasioned by ordinary cathartics.” He observed that “morning is considered the most suitable — drinking it at the springs if practicable.... It may also be taken at night by those who are desirous to secure its full effect on the bowels.” As to other treatments,

... the warm bath will serve as a very important auxiliary to the water.... It is generally believed to be a much safer remedy than the cold bath, and more particularly applicable to persons of weak and irritable constitutions, who could not bear the shock produced by cold bathing, in consequence of their not possessing sufficient vigour of circulation to bring about the proper re-action.... The necessary change of scene that takes place in visiting watering places, the exercise of the body, the abstraction of the mind from the cares attendant on business, the interruption of a uniform train of thought and attention, all certainly co-operate with the beneficial effects of the waters.³⁵

George Watterson, visiting the Springs a decade later, provides further detail on the process of taking the waters:

The principal Spring is surrounded by magnificent elms and other ornamental trees, under the shade of which are placed seats for the accommodation of those who wish to drink its water. An old colored woman seated near the Spring, from morning to night, employs herself in dipping up the water for visitors, and whose compensation is regulated by the charity of those who avail themselves of her voluntary aid. She may be the genius of the fountain, but she is far from being its nymph...³⁶

But what if a guest demanded amusement rather than treatment?

Are you a pedestrian? You have an agreeable promenade of a mile on the banks of a stream about as wide, but not so deep, as the Thames at London, but far more beautiful. Are you an angler? The home of the perch, the sucker and the eel, is the Shenandoah; — a boat and fishing apparatus are prepared, and a colored man ever ready to attend you. Are you fond of hunting? Four or five fowling pieces are now standing in one of the rooms for your use. Do you like excursions on the water? A skiff is at hand — you can go down the river in it to Harpers-Ferry in the evening, and row back in the morning. Are you a mineralogist or geologist? Gratifying ambulations may be made for examining the structure of rocks, and the collecting of specimens. “I have not strength,” you may say, “to perform these excursions.” Then you can sit in your apartments, and amuse yourself in looking at the long rafts of lumber which are continually passing, and boats freighted with flour, some destined to the city of power, but more for the city of shot towers, and steamboats, and fine hotels. Backgammon, checker and puzzle boards, are at your call. Do you wish for the society of well educated gentlemen and ladies? No where in this country, or perhaps in the world, do you meet with better informed or more polished people, than very many of those who reside within the compass of six miles around Shannondale.³⁷

Another visitor to the resort in the summer of 1838 observed that, for visitors wishing to bathe in the river, “A convenient floating house has been erected for gentlemen, from which the bather descends by a flight of steps into the water, where he finds, besides an agreeable temperature of the water, a firm sandy bottom, and of different depths to accommodate his wishes. — The proprietors are about to erect a similar establishment for ladies, which will be hailed by them with great satisfaction.”³⁸

Under Gallaher’s direction, the *Virginia Free Press* became an important vehicle for advertising the virtues of Shannondale Springs. During the next 20 years, its pages contained numerous testimonials to the curative powers of its waters and descriptions of the events attended by local society and visiting dignitaries.

Gallaher’s articles and the property transactions of the period also reveal that the owners of Shannondale Springs were developing the local tourist industry by acquiring property near the intersection of highways and the newly built railroads and by forming business alliances with hotel owners in Charles Town and Harpers Ferry. Shortly after the Shannondale Springs Hotel opened under the management of I. N. Carter, a recent guest wrote to the *Free Press* noting,

I was a sojourner for a few days at Carter's hospitable hotel [Charles Town], when I was invited to take a jaunt for the Springs. In an hour from my setting off in a fine stage, driven by a careful driver, passing in that time through a beautiful and cultivated country — through fine wheat fields bending to the breeze, the hopes of the farmer — thro' noble primeval forests that overshadowed the road, we arrived at the River which sweeps around this most beautiful spot, and early as the season is, we found our same host, Carter, in proper person, to administer to our wants. He tendered to us all manner of tempting beverages, besides the valuable water of the fountain; but it is that and not of his wines that I would speak. Attractive as all the comforts and luxuries of a well kept house may be, it is the water — that is the charm of Shannondale.³⁹

Thus Isaac Carter, owner of the Carter Hotel in Charles Town, was actively recruiting guests for the Shannondale Springs hotel he managed.

Other persons associated with the Springs were also busy forging alliances. In August 1839, Henry Berry sold the Shannondale Springs Corporation two parcels of land near the intersection of the Charlestown to Martinsburg road (now Route 9) and the Winchester and Potomac Railroad (present day Kerneysville, West Virginia). Berry, who had served in the Virginia House of Delegates with Thomas Griggs, Jr., and John S. Gallaher, had acquired the property in 1834, before the railroad had reached Harpers Ferry. By November 1841, T. A. Milton and Company, former investors in the Shannondale Springs property, had leased the U.S. Hotel at Harpers Ferry. One of the company had been the hotel keeper at Shannondale Springs for several years. The new proprietor of the U.S. Hotel was Capt. Joseph F. Abell, who was in charge of this establishment in 1845. A *Free Press* article for 1847 identifies Capt. John J. Abell as the proprietor of the Shannondale Springs Hotel and Capt. M. Thompson as bartender at both establishments. The writer for the *Free Press* notes that guests arriving at Harpers Ferry on the B & O Railroad will probably want to enjoy a delicious meal at the local hotel, then board a Winchester & Potomac train for Charles Town, where they can take a carriage to the Springs.⁴⁰ These alliances suggest that businessmen in Jefferson County were aggressively building local tourism as an industry.

LIFE AT THE SPRINGS

Visitors to Shannondale Springs during the 1840's and 1850's included invalids taking the waters, artists seeking inspiration, and members of the social and political elite who renewed old friendships and forged new alliances. One New York columnist, characterizing the difference between Shannondale and its Northern competitors, noted,

... there is an entire absence of that codfish aristocracy, and those sets of would-be exclusives, of whom we have been so much in connection with Northern watering places; none of your Simkinses, or Timkinses, or such people whose pedigree runs full tilt into a grocery or soap factory; but we have unassuming people — F.F.V's, if you please — whose history runs back to the ancient cavaliers, who, with Lord Fairfax and the Washingtons, first crossed over the Ridge before the Revolution.⁴¹

Residents of the surrounding counties, many of them friends and associates of the owners, mingled with the guests for a fortnight, a day, or an evening, returning regularly for concerts, dress balls, July Fourth fireworks, and ring tournaments — good natured jousting matches in which local knights vied for the honor of crowning their lady.

One of these tournaments was captured by the pen of a guest in July 1848:

The sound of many feet and the murmur of voices rose through the vale. The crowd gathered from all points to witness the expected pageant. The rush of vehicles and horses was so great that they had to be left upon the opposite side of the river, and gentlemen and ladies were borne over in the large ferry boat as thick as they could stand, and walked thence to the Hotel. It was truly an exciting and strange sight, to see them stretching in hurried and confused step across the lawn.

At 10 o'clock the knights gave in their names to the Herald, and 18 brave and daring champions were registered. They were then ordered to prepare themselves and horses for the tournament. At 11 o'clock, the crowds gathered beneath the umbrageous and majestic elms that over hang the fountains, where they had a near and far view of the scene. The bugle then sounded and the knights, all mounted, rode in front of the assembled throng under the direction of the Herald, Dr. G[erard]. F. Mason. Dressed in peculiar and picturesque costumes, with their tall lances glittering in the sun-beams, they presented an imposing and brilliant spectacle. The President of the day, the Hon. Henry Bedinger, addressed them in such eloquent tones and elevated and inspired sentiments, that the dullest bosom was roused to the highest daring and the true spirit of ancient chivalry was revived.

The privilege of selecting the fairest from the lovely array, and crowning her the Queen of Beauty, was to be the deed of victory, and there was not one among them would not have scaled a fortress for so rich a boon. The speech of Mr. Bedinger was most appropriate and beautiful, and I regret that I cannot give it here. When he had concluded, the knights repaired to the place of starting. — Then began the most splendid contention that eye ever witnessed. It is impossible to give a detailed account of it but the horses, catching the spirit of the rider, flew like the wind, and their flashing eyes and foaming mouths betrayed the high excitement. One after another dashed away ... [illegible]

Mr. K. [the victor] ... was then requested to name the first maid of honor and selected one of the belles of Jefferson, Miss Rebecca Mr. Moore then named for second maid of honor, Miss Fitzhugh of Stafford, and ... Washington for third maid of honor the fair and graceful Miss Martin of Kentucky. After the selection [concluded], the company repaired to the Hotel, where a most sumptuous feast was spread. There with the flow of Champagne and the exchange of consumed the afternoon.... Every one then retired to their rooms to prepare for the Fancy Ball....

At about half past 8 o'clock, the spacious ball room was thronged with spectators awaiting the entrance of the Queen, her champion and cortege and attendants; and in truth it was a noble train worthy to be waited for. At the sound of music the folding doors at the upper end of the room were suddenly opened, and the Queen and her champion, richly dressed, in fancy costumes — the same wreath seeming to catch freshness from the [contact of] resting upon her lily brow — appeared, followed by the knights and maids of honor, and a long train of attendants, all fancifully attired. They proceeded to the far end of the room, and took their stand, where the crowd made their obeisance. Then the Queen and her champion and her three knights and maids of honor formed and danced a cotillion, and the ball was opened for the evening. I have been to many balls and have seen much in this way, but I never saw any one so bright and beautiful as this. Many whose experiences, perhaps, is greater than my own, concurred with me in opinion. The many characters that were taken, it is impossible to describe. They represented every nation, and flitted before you in such rapid succession that it was impossible to identify them. A few, however, were very conspicuous. Mr. L.[awrence] W. W[ashing]ton, as the English hunter of the 15th century, was superb; he filled the character to very life. Mr. J[ohn]. W. K[enne]dy, in the court dress of Lewis 14th looked remarkably striking and handsome....⁴²

Scenes like this were repeated frequently during this period, with Southern ladies and gentlemen re-enacting Sir Walter Scott's tales of medieval chivalry while they were waited on by Negro servants in livery.

Although every evening at the Springs was not filled with such splendor, dances were held almost nightly. Mary J. Windle, who stayed at the Springs in July 1851, described the music from the ballroom as drawing guests from their cottages on the summer evening, "and the variety of costumes and colors in constant motion formed a gay piece of human Mosaic. The hum of soft voices filled the spacious room when we entered, and bright eyes flashed in the brilliant light..." Describing the dresses of the ladies in some detail, she focuses on "miss C. A belle from Philadelphia, [who] whirled off the festivities of the evening as a partner of a young Virginian, nephew of the Secretary of War...." and "a tall, fair, fine looking girl, attired in white... Miss W., grand niece of the immortal Washington."

She is amused by their preoccupation with the waltz, "No evening is complete without it; and to surpass all competition in dancing, the Polka is glory enough for our belles." The writer regarded this dance as "a most monotonous amusement," noting "An increasing circuit of the vacant space — a wreathing of arms and clasping of waists — and the only variation we were able to discover was an increase in speed, which renders the movements of the parties more conspicuous.... There must have been [illegible line] at once, passing round and round with a perseverance and solemnity perfectly astonishing, when it is remembered that many of the individuals thus engaged are delicate, fragile looking creatures, who certainly do not appear able to endure the fatigue."⁴³

Promoted as a "Fashionable Watering Place," praised by Henry Howe as "easier of access from the Atlantic cities, than any others in Virginia," Shannondale Springs drew high recommendations from the travel critics of its day. Henry Moorman, writing of its pleasures just two years before the hotel burned, noted that "The accommodations at Shannondale are not extensive, perhaps adapted to 140 to 150 persons, but it is admittedly a very delightful place."⁴⁴ China used during this period at the Springs, and possibly at other local restaurants and hotels, featured C. Burton's 1831 illustration of the Shannondale Springs Hotel (Figure 6).

One writer of the period further advanced the Springs' reputation when she stayed there in July and August of 1850. Mrs. Emma D.E.N. Southworth, one of the best known "female novelists" of her time, spent part of the summer there with her son Richmond and daughter Charlotte. Fleeing the oppressive heat of Washington, D.C., she joined other members of society leaving the sweltering cities and those who believed that the Springs' iron-laden waters would protect them against the cholera epidemic that was sweeping the area. A writer to the *Virginia Free Press* in 1875 nostalgically recalled that, at the resort's bowling saloon, he "had the pleasure of rolling with the distinguished authoress, Mrs. Southworth ... where, surrounded by so much of the romantic and beautiful, she no doubt received no little inspiration for her interesting novels."⁴⁵

It was here that she penned her novel *Shannondale*, a romantic tale with a convoluted plot, set at the estate of the fictitious Lord Summerfield. The novel has virtually nothing to do with its namesake, although it was used as an historical reference by one misguided newspaperman in the mid-1920's. Southworth's novel appears to be the origin of the myth about "Lover's Leap," a cliff overhanging the Shenandoah River across from the Springs. According to the novelist's rendition, a beautiful Indian princess threw herself into the river after being wooed and spurned by

one of the white gentlemen staying at the Summerfield estate.⁴⁶ The story has been used frequently to promote the hotel since the novel's publication. (See Figures 7 and 8 and Appendix B.)

Whatever the failings that the novel Shannondale might have, there was something romantic and special about this place that drew people to it again and again. As a correspondent from the New York *Herald* wrote about his visit to the Springs, "We feel completely cut off, shut out, or rather shut in, from the busy, delving, money making world which we have left behind."⁴⁷



Figure 6. Plate used at Shannondale Springs which incorporates Burton's 1831 illustration. Photograph by W. Theriault, courtesy of the Jefferson County Museum.



Figure 7. Mrs. E.D.E.N. Southworth stayed at Shannondale Springs with her children in the summer of 1850. From the *National Cyclopedia of American Biography*, Vol. 1.

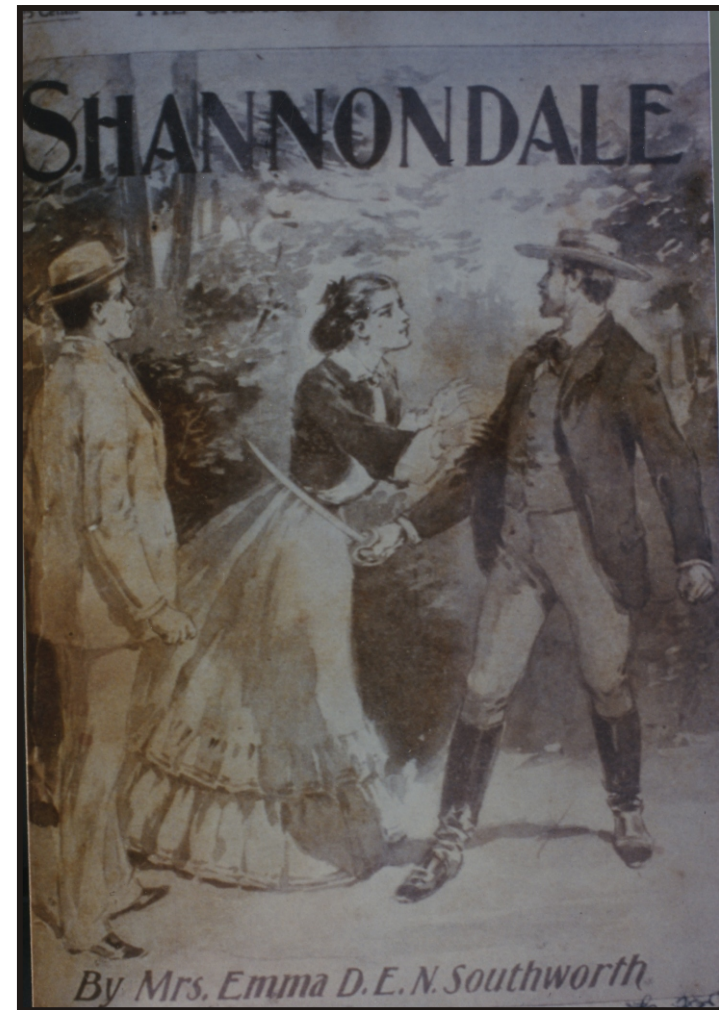


Figure 8. Cover from Southworth's novel, which she wrote during her stay at Shannondale Springs. Courtesy of the Jefferson County Museum.

THE END OF AN ERA

Throughout the 1840's and 1850's, resort continued to be owned by the group of Whigs who had formed the Shannondale Springs Corporation in 1838. During the 1840's, at least, it appeared to prosper, and beginning about 1847 the hotel came under the management of John J. Abell. He is described by one correspondent to the *Virginia Free Press* as "a gentleman of the most urbane manners, and assisted by that old Virginia gentleman, Capt. Thompson, gives an additional attraction to the place." Abell seems to have been careful in the use of the hotel's resources, suspending all credit to guests in 1848 and hiring out slaves used as domestic servants when they were not needed at the hotel.⁴⁸ Despite the Shannondale Springs' popularity, it is unlikely that the hotel was expanded during this period. Henry Howe's depiction of an enlarged hotel in his *Historical Collections of Virginia* (1845) probably reflects the improvements made in 1838.⁴⁹

The Abells' associations with the U.S. Hotel in Harpers Ferry and the Shannondale Springs Hotel appear to have ended in 1848, with James B. Wager leasing the former establishment and Capt. M. Thompson overseeing Capt. Abell's interests during his "absence."⁵⁰ The Springs' biggest promoter, John S. Gallaher, accepted an appointment from President Taylor in October 1849 to be third Auditor of the Treasury and presumably moved his residence to Washington, D.C. By May 1850, an advertisement in the *Spirit of Jefferson* noted that the Shannondale Springs Hotel has been leased by Hall, Osburn & Co. and was undergoing thorough repairs. The following season, the proprietors promised that all was in a state of readiness for the June 10th opening and added that "They have procured the best Band of music, and most capable servants that can be found without regard to price." According to one newspaper correspondent, the music was provided by

a band of colored musicians, and their favorite air is — "Carry me back to ole Virginny" which they play almost every day at dinner time; and sometimes in the evening, when the sun is sinking behind the western mountains, they give us a variety of Virginia melodies, with the variations, the favorite of which, among the ladies, appears to be — "Why don't you stop dat knocking at da door?"⁵¹

President Fillmore, Mr. Stewart, Secretary of War Charles Magill Conrad, and Postmaster General Nathan K. Hall visited Shannondale Springs in August 1851. The President first stopped at Harpers Ferry to inspect the Armory, then took a special train to Charles Town and a carriage to the Springs. He attended a ball given in his honor, stayed overnight at Shannondale, and then proceeded to Winchester.⁵²

In 1852, when S. Howell Brown had completed his first detailed map of Jefferson County, he showed 11 buildings arranged around the hotel to the north and west, a bowling green to the northwest, and three mineral springs to the southwest of the hotel, between it and the river (Figure 9). The road to the ferry is shown on the north side of the river; a building is indicated at the ferry crossing; and the road from the ferry continues along the south bank of the river, passing in front of the hotel. Henry Howe's 1845 illustration of Shannondale Springs, depicting an expanded hotel, was included as an illustration on the map.⁵³

As late as 1854, the Springs seems to have done doing well. An article of the period notes, "The Proprietor has made every arrangement possible, to accommodate all who may favor him with their custom, and we have never seen Shannondale presenting more attractions to the votary of pleasure, or the invalid seeking health. His estimable lady and her assistants, spare no pains or exertions to provide every delicacy that can be furnished, which insures a table that no Watering place of the country can excel. — The Bar is still under the management of Mr. John W. Gallaher, who can't be beat, and if you don't get your moneys' worth, he will make it up in a good song or a rich anecdote." The writer reports that festivities included fireworks and a ball well attended by visitors from neighboring counties.⁵⁴

If success of Shannondale Springs was tied to the patronage of prominent Whigs, the election of Democrat Franklin Pierce may have been the harbinger of hard times. After Pierce's inauguration, John S. Gallaher and other Fillmore supporters lost their appointments. In April 1855, corporation president Samuel W. Lackland advertised that the Springs was for rent. A month later Lackland advertised that the furniture and 140 acres attached to the Springs were for sale. Lackland's attempts to find a buyer appear to have been unsuccessful.⁵⁵

With John S. Gallaher's continued absence in Washington, the *Virginia Free Press's* promotion of the hotel and reportage of its events dwindled. In March of 1858, a fire from a burning chimney progressed so rapidly that efforts to save the hotel were fruitless. Although the *Free Press* reported that "The entire buildings ... all now lie a mass of smoldering ruin," the damage seems to have been limited to the hotel and a few adjacent structures. The reporter hoped "that the Springs and lands attached, in all about one hundred and ninety-six acres, may fall into the hands of capitalists, who will erect spacious accommodations, and the gaiety of former years be also inaugurated."⁵⁶

Before the hotel was rebuilt, the nation would experience the devastation of the Civil War and Jefferson County would endure the miseries of Reconstruction and its incorporation into the state of West Virginia. An era had ended at Shannondale Springs and its rebirth would be left for another generation to accomplish.

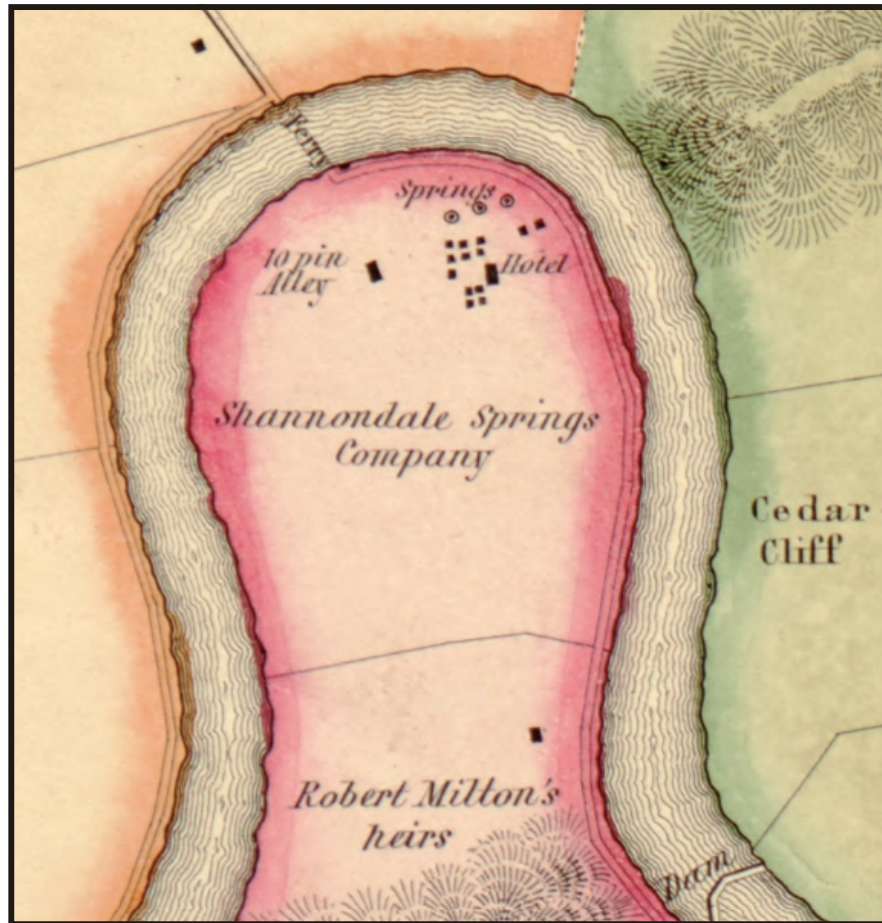


Figure 9. Portion of S. Howell Brown's 1852 map of Jefferson County, showing the Shannondale Springs resort

TRANSITION

The report of Shannondale Springs' death had been greatly exaggerated. In September 1859, a writer for the *Free Press* noted that the property was now on the market, observing that,

Although the main building was burned some two years ago, the walls are in a fair condition to admit of improvement at comparatively little expense, whilst there are 15 cabins on the Lawns attached. There are two brick cabins, with 8 rooms, all having chimneys, 13 frame, besides Bath Houses, Dairy, Stabling, Ice House, Corn House, etc., etc....

The Lawn occupies about 16 acres, which is in fine sod — a rich garden is also attached. As an evidence of the productiveness of the farm, upon which there is also a tenement, &c., we will state that the farm is now under a rent of \$462 per annum.... Hundreds of people even now resort there for pleasure and the benefit of the water, although there are no accommodations offered.

It can now be purchased for about \$10,000, not the fourth of its value, because it is owned in part by the heirs of some of its original proprietors....⁵⁷

Perhaps the hotel would have been restored to its earlier genteel ambiance had a buyer been found at the time. But less than ten miles away, John Brown and his men were gathering at the Kennedy Farm in preparation for his raid on Harpers Ferry. Col. Lawrence Washington, who had attended the costume ball at the Springs dressed “as the English hunter of the 15th century,” had already been identified by one of John Brown’s party as a slaveholder and potential hostage. Andrew Kennedy, one of the members of the Shannondale Springs Corporation, would soon be the prosecuting attorney in the trial of the conspirators. Richard Parker, who had handled some of the financial affairs of the Corporation, would become the presiding judge in the case.

Little information about Shannondale Springs is available for the war years. The area was frequented by Confederate raider John Singleton Mosby and his men and by Federal cavalry responsible for destroying Mosby’s disruptive operations.⁵⁸

By 1867, Shannondale Springs was once again in use, the Shannondale Circuit of the Methodist Episcopal South holding its First Quarterly Meeting there. Religious services, church meetings, and church picnics were frequently held at the Springs during the summer months even though the hotel was no longer standing. Many attendees to these meetings stayed over night, presumably in the remaining cabins or in tents erected for the occasion. Other private groups on pleasure excursions came to picnic for the day. The *Spirit of Jefferson* noted that the place had become popular with the “votaries of the terpsichorean art.” The *Free Press*, observing that some of the cabins were being renovated that summer, stated that Shannondale Springs “is now an attractive resort for Pic-Nic and Fishing parties.”⁵⁹

That summer the new proprietors (Samuel Hill, M.D. Wilson, Jr., S.H. Wilson, and J.W. Milton) attempted to revive the elegant festivities that had been held at the Springs in its ante-bellum days. They advertised a “Grand Pic Nic and Barbecue” to be held on August 22. Persons interested in dancing were assured the services of the best musicians in the state would be procured and “a good floor would be prepared” so that attendees could dance under the stars. Although the ring tournaments were gone for the present, various earlier participants calling themselves the “Knight of Shannondale” represented the Springs at tournaments both near and far.⁶⁰

In May 1868, the property was advertised for sale. Commenting on recent attempts to revitalize the Springs, one writer observed, “the war itself prevented the company from rebuilding. There are now but two [John S. Gallaher and William Crow] of the original proprietors living, and they are too old to commence the work of renovation. The heirs of others are numerous and prefer selling.” The Alexandria, Loudoun, and Hampshire Railroad was planned to come within a mile of the Springs, providing additional access. The property was still on the market in 1870. In October of that year, the flood that devastated Harpers Ferry and many of the industries along the Shenandoah River also took its toll on Shannondale