

# State agrees: Town's historic district is a landmark

By Lisa Daniel  
Daily Staff Reporter

The state Historic Resources Board on Wednesday placed Mt. Jackson's historic district on the Virginia Landmarks Register and nominated it for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places.

"There wasn't any question of their approving it," board spokesman Margaret T. Peters said. "They were very supportive of it as an important historic resource in the valley."

Mt. Jackson was a small railroad and mill town that served as a Confederate hospital center and prospered as a transportation hub during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, according to a report by David A. Edwards, an architectural historian with the Department of Historic Resources.

The district, which contains the majority of the town's commercial and residential buildings, assumed much of its current appearance by 1940, the report says. Most of the buildings are Victorian styles from the turn of the century, but include an unusual representation of a "moderne-style-inspired" fire station built in 1936 and an art deco theater built in 1938, it says.

The town began as the village of Mount Pleasant after Benjamin Allen bought 400 acres in 1739 for a grist mill he operated on Mill Creek, the report says. Several other businesses followed, including a hemp mill, carding mill, sawmill and a cabinet shop.

On Jan. 27, 1826, the General Assembly established Mt. Jackson as a town, naming it after Gen. Andrew Jackson who was soon to become the seventh president. In 1835, a newspaper reported that the town included eight houses, a Presbyterian church, a school, a mercantile store, a tavern, a tanyard, a smith shop and a boot factory.

U.S. Route 11 was finished by 1840 and the first passenger train pulled into town on March 2, 1859. The two were used extensively during the Civil War — the road as the main artery for Confederate and Union troops and the train as transportation to several hospitals established in buildings in the town, the report says.



Union Church in Mt. Jackson, one of the places in the historic district which helped the town get named to the Virginia Landmarks Register and be nominated for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places.

Daily staff photo by Rich Cooley

The Union Church, built in 1825 by Reuben Moore as a nondenominational church, was one such hospital. A recent restoration of the church on Main Street uncovered what is believed to be names of wounded soldiers and their regiments written on its interior walls.

In the 1880s, the northern end of the town grew as

the commercial center. The Shenandoah Farmers Milling Co., including a flour, corn and plaster mill, a pattern house, a machine shop and a foundry, located on the north bank of Mill Creek, the report says. Three hotels built near the depot were used by traveling salesmen, known as drummers, and visitors to the Orkney Springs resort.

The town's most prominent resident of the time was Joseph I. Triplett (1845-1939), a doctor, orchardist, mayor and founder of the milling company and the Mt. Jackson National Bank. He built the first hydroelectric power plant in the Shenandoah Valley and donated land and money for what was then Triplett

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High and Vocational School.

Other prominent residents were Joseph S. Pennybacker and William Sigler, who opened a woolen factory in 1848; Franklin Wissler, who planted the town's first commercial apple orchard in 1892; and milling company owner S.P. Lonas, whose house, which stands at the corner of Main Street and Orkney Drive, was the town's "most flamboyant example of the Queen Anne style," according to the report.

Ms. Peters said the board was most interested in the town's varied

architectural and lack of intrusion of new buildings.

She said the registers are "looked upon as an educational tool for local governments to realize that they have something important that is worth saving."

Inclusion on the national register also may lead to tax benefits for people interested in refurbishing historic buildings, she said.