Lovettsville and the German Settlement to the Civil War Era

Northern Loudoun was always different from the rest of the county. First settled in the 1730s by German settlers originating in the Rhineland/Palatinate before coming to fast-filling Pennsylvania, they hopped over the Potomac from Maryland as early as 1731. They brought with them their industrious German folkways applied to raising livestock and growing grain and fodder crops, as well as their German Reformed and Lutheran faiths. Their stolid, unpretentious farms were family farms of 100-200 acres. Generally, they eschewed the use of slaves. Germans settled the Catoctin Valley south toward Waterford and west over Short Hill to Between-the-Hills, comprising two of Loudoun's fifteen precincts. By the 1830s, there were four villages: Lovettsville, the largest; Taylorstown to the east; Morrisonville to the south; and Neersville to the west over Short Hill.

The 1850s brought cross-Potomac bridges connecting them by the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal and the Baltimore & 0hito Railroad to the cities of the outer world. Prosperity grew.

But in 1859 the issue of slavery came to their door with John Brown's Raid at nearby Harpers Ferry. Intending a massive slave run-off, the raid was crushed by local militia and U.S. Marines but it led to a subsequent panic and unease in the region. In 1861 with the beginning of the Civil War, Virginia chose to join the Southern Confederacy, subsequent to a vote by the people in May. By a 325 to 46 majority, Lovettsville voted overwhelmingly NO to secession. Thus the Unionist stronghold's unhappy ordeal during the Civil War began.

Civil War Trails and Lovettsville: a Partnership Marking Local History

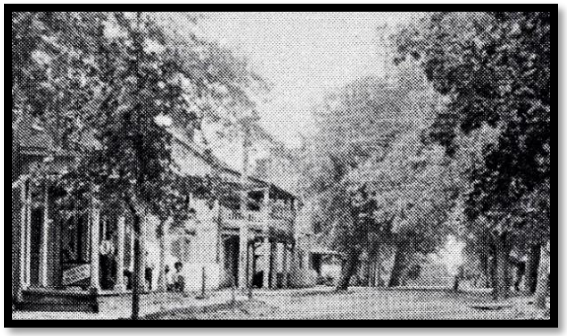
Civil War Trails is a system of more than 1,500 illustrated wayside markers in seven states, educating communities and visitors alike of lesser-known Civil War occurrences that helped to shape the critical fabric of the war. Beginning in 1994 in Virginia, the system has evolved to be an important historic preservation tool by telling a graphic story about the historic landscape, thus establishing its importance in the mind of the viewer.

The Town of Lovettsville, originally incorporated in 1836, is a Virginia community of just under 3,000 residents, proud of its historic character and modern amenities. Committed to preserving its unique sense of place, the Planning Commission and Town Council have fully embraced this walking tour, funding the newest Civil War Trails sign and formally adopting all three sites.

The Lovettsville Historical Society, established in 1976, helps to preserve the region's historic legacy through its museum on East Pennsylvania Avenue and by regular lectures, classes, and special programs. The Society began updating two earlier Civil War Trails signs in 2024 and added a third, creating this 3-sign chronological walking tour of the Lovettsville National Register District.

PHOTOS ON COVER: ***Top*—late 19th century downtown Lovettsville. *Bottom*—Union army pontoon bridges over the Potomac at Berlin crossing over to Virginia, taking their army to Lovettsville.**

Lovettsville *and the* Civil War



A Civil War Trails Circuit Walking Tour in Lovettsville's National Register Historic District

♠

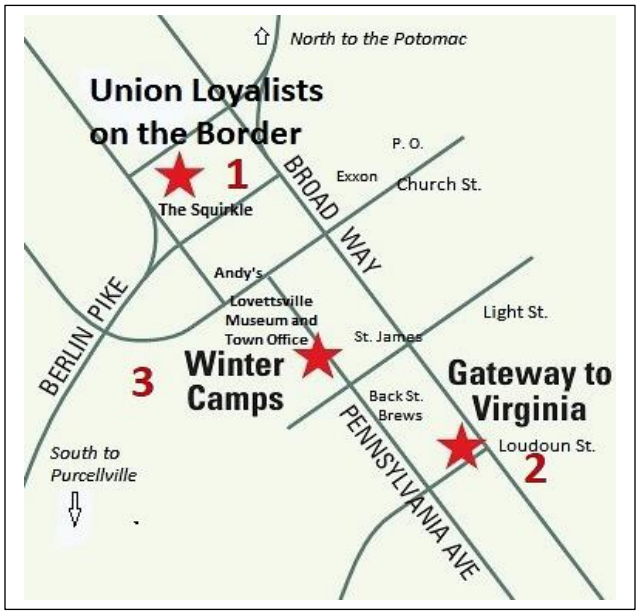
"It costs something to be a UNION MAN in Rebeldom . . ."

The Lovettsville National Register Historic District

In 2012 the Town of Lovettsville successfully filed a nomination to be placed on the National Register of Historic Places maintained by the Department of the Interior, a district encompassing the historic 90-acre core of the town which you will be walking during your circuit. Included are 111 properties featuring 181 "contributing resources." The historic district shows buildings close to the street in traditional German style, buildings from the antebellum era, and many from the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Seeking the National Register Historic District status does not place restrictions on property owners, but rather seeks to recognize the historical underpinnings of Loudoun's old German village and its architecture to help build public appreciation for what the Town of Lovettsville has. It stems from the belief that people won't appreciate what they don't understand and they won't care for what they don't appreciate.

As you walk from the first Civil War Trails sign placed on the modern "Squirkle" to the second in the historic district, you will encounter Victorian architecture typical of Virginia towns. But you will also encounter the distinctly simpler plain German houses sitting *right* on the street, some log beneath the skin, and even two-front-door houses— the *zweitürhaus* Indicative of our heritage.



Your Half-mile Circuit Tour Walk in the National Register Historic District

Sign No. 1—*At the southwest end of the Squirkle, near the Veterans' Memorial.*

"Union Loyalists on the Border"

At our first Civil War Trails Sign we explore Lovettsville's unique position as one of the few Unionist precincts in Loudoun County—from its stance in Secession Ordinance voting in 1861, to the destruction of the bridges connecting it to the similarly Unionist Maryland that cut off escape routes, and ultimately to some residents taking up arms for the Union cause.

Sign No. 2—*From the Squirkle, walk towards the 7-Eleven/Exxon to E. Broad Way, the town's main street. Turn right onto E. Broad Way and walk three blocks to S. Loudoun St. The sign is at the intersection.*

"Gateway to Virginia"

This was the main intersection of the town, where a hotel, stores, and other buildings stood. Standing here, a left turn onto E. Broad Way would take you north along the Berlin Turnpike to the Potomac River.. A right turn onto today's S. Loudoun St. would lead you south on the Berlin Turnpike toward Purcellville—deeper into Confederate Virginia. Consecutive invasions by the Union Army across the Potomac River inevitably led to this main intersection. This sign tells of the town's experience as Unionists welcoming invading Union soldiers to their Confederate state.

Sign No. 3—*Head south on S. Loudoun St. to the first cross street, turning right onto E. Pennsylvania Ave., a narrow street passing federal and zweitürhaus historic structures. Go 1½ blocks to Sign No. 3 at the Town Office which will be on your left.*

"Winter Camps"

In the winter of 1865, the German Settlement experienced a longer-term occupation. To protect Harpers Ferry and the critical Baltimore & Ohio Railroad just across the Potomac River from Confederate guerillas and bandit attacks, a full Union cavalry brigade set up camps in a semi-circle around Lovettsville. Federal forces established a hospital in the Presbyterian church that once stood just behind the Town Hall, where its small graveyard can still be visited today. At this sign, you will learn more about the Union occupation that Lovettsville experienced.

From the graveyard behind Town Hall, end by taking the entry/exit lane out to the Squirkle.