



The

# Lodger

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NEWSLETTER FOR RESIDENTS AND FRIENDS OF THE LODGE AT OLD TRAIL

## My Boyhood Adventure

By Col. John W. Clayborne, USMC (Ret.)

I spent the first 17 years of my life in the small town of Maben in the southern tip of West Virginia, and almost ended it there.

While still teenagers, a friend and I once engaged in the strongly forbidden sport of hopping “coal drags” (small moving trains of coal-laden gondola cars). Having indulged in too much homemade beer, neither of us was fit for such activity. We hastily debarked as the train approached a bridge. Unable to control my momentum, I fell head foremost into the creek below. According to my friend, my head hit a cross tie and I was unconscious when I hit the water. He managed to drag me out of the water and onto the creek bank.

The first thing I can recall is awaking in the hospital and seeing a neighbor man standing at the foot of my bed. My only injury was a severe concussion that kept me hospitalized for several days.



Before my accident I had decided to join the Marines to honor a friend, William Robinette, who had been killed in action on Guam shortly before my accident. The memory of my friend sustained me throughout my years of service.

## Superfund Site Update

Thirty-three years ago a violent explosion filled the air with toxic chemicals, destroying a chemical plant and burning to death four plant workers (*The Lodger, Issue 10*). Just south of Greenwood and less than three miles from where The Lodge now stands, the Greenwood Chemical Company was an accident waiting to happen.



Numerous safety hazards did not sufficiently alarm inspection officials until the day when a spark from inferior electrical equipment was believed to have caused the devastation. In the aftermath, the U.S. Environmental  
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## RESIDENT FOCUS

“We finally discovered that we had one thing in common: the love of horses,” says Bill Eckerson about his wife Betty. Bill joked that horses were the single biggest attraction they have had for one another throughout their 72 years of marriage. They are accomplished equestrians, but they also have an enviable track record of supporting one another throughout Bill’s military and professional career, Betty’s pursuit of decorative art and cooking, and the upbringing of their four children. The Eckersons moved from Massachusetts to The Lodge in May 2015.

Bill met Betty who was the blind date of one of his friends at a weekend social at Colgate University in upstate New York where he was a student. Bill eventually married his friend’s blind date and his friend married the girl Bill was dating. None of that would have occurred, says Bill, if a rain storm had not canceled the ski meet he was scheduled to attend that weekend as a member of Colgate’s ski team.

Bill had enrolled at Colgate as a geology major when the news of December 7, 1941 convinced him and fellow fraternity brothers to enlist in the U.S. Marine Corps. To his surprise, his first tour of duty was to remain at Colgate to earn his degree in geology. Upon graduation and achieving the rank of 2nd Lt, he was assigned to the Rifle Company of the 5th Marine Division and sent to the Pacific Theater of operations.

His military experience included surviving serious shrapnel injuries from an exploding Japanese hand grenade on the island of Iwo Jima.

All the while, Betty kept in touch with her letters of hope and prayers for the safety of her future husband. They married in 1946, one month after his discharge and return from the Pacific.

As a member  
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## Resident Focus (cont'd)

of the Marine Reserves, Bill was called up for duty during the Korean War, after which he resigned his commission as a Marine Corps Captain.

Betty was attending Skidmore College in northern New York state when she met Bill. She graduated with a degree in textiles and clothing. Her education in the clothing field included interning in New York City at the former Franklin Simon department store and at Lord and Taylor, now the country's oldest department store. She was employed at Macy's in the women's clothing department when the iconic store's only location was at Herald Square in New York City.

Betty recalls moving their residence over 20 times during their first 30 years of marriage to keep up with Bill's assignments with New England Telephone and AT&T. He retired in the 1970s after 35 years with the companies. They ended up living in Boxford, Massachusetts where the four acres they owned played host to two riding horses and the others they boarded for schools during their summer breaks.

Betty was born and spent her youth in Jersey City, New Jersey, but learned of her love for horses and riding at an early age at a family-run boarding house where she and her parents vacationed in summer. She says she was also "very involved with horses at Skidmore." Her grandfather was a Cavalry officer in World War I.

Bill's interest in horses and riding began at an early age on the family dairy farm outside Pittsfield, Massachusetts, his hometown. His father resorted to farm work when his leather goods business failed due to the Great Depression.

A gifted artist, Betty cultivated an interest in early American decorative art and produces paintings on metal and wood using paints and gold leaf in the motif of art from the 1700s and 1800s period. Each of her decorated boxes and trays takes years to complete. Her status won her the position of trustee of the Historical Society of Early American Decoration, a group of practicing artists dedicated to the perpetuation of the unique skills of early American artists.

With the help of a daughter and granddaughter, Betty authored a 138-page book of favorite recipes she calls "Betty's Bests," which she printed for her family and friends.

Betty at the age of 60 enrolled at Endicott College in Beverly, Massachusetts to take architectural courses. The training enabled her to design a house that she and Bill lived in and develop house plan blueprints for others that showed

every detail including the plumbing and electrical wiring.

The Eckerson's son Bruce lives in West Virginia, and their daughters Kimberly, Andrea, and Elizabeth live in Idaho, Massachusetts, and Free Union, Virginia, respectively. They have eight grandchildren and six great grandchildren.

We congratulate Bill and Betty on their outstanding accomplishments and exceptional record of togetherness. We are lucky to have the company of this most amiable couple.



*Clockwise from top left, wedding day in 1946; Captain Eckerson at Camp Lejeune in 1950; Bill's autographed military memento of the flag raising on Iwo Jima he watched from the volcano's foot; Betty's flower garden at The Lodge that includes transplants from Massachusetts; and Bill and Betty on horseback.*

**Superfund Update (cont'd)** Protection Agency designated it a Superfund site and initiated the cleanup of unimaginable contamination. Cleanup continues to this day, and no one really knows when it will be completed.

Hundreds of leaking toxic-chemical drums and tons of contaminated soil were removed from where the plant stood, but contaminated groundwater remains despite 18 years of pumping to stem the spread into surrounding areas. Pumping all of the water that the 11 onsite extraction wells can yield continues 24/7.

The water is run through an onsite treatment plant to remove the contaminants before being discharged into a neighboring creek. The resulting contaminated sludge is periodically removed with vacuum-trucks and

transported to an offsite facility for disposal.

The 18 million gallons of water pumped in one year is enough to fill over 400 seven-foot deep swimming pools.

The pumping formed an underground cone of groundwater depression that prevents the contaminants from migrating outside the immediate area of the former plant. Testing of nearby private wells is continuing to show positive results.

The just completed fifth Five-Year Review by EPA determined that the pumping "remedy" is serving its intended purpose, while another study later this year will look at whether the system can be optimized and made more efficient.

The entire cost of operation and maintenance was mandatorily transferred to the state of Virginia after the first 10 years of pumping at over \$400,000 annually.

More rigid rules of inspection and compliance might have prevented this tragedy, but we have our environmental protectors to thank for avoiding the contamination of a larger region that would have probably been ruled unfit for human habitation.

### The Lodger

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of The Lodge at Old Trail.

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# Cold-Storage Building Keeps Evolving

*Uniformed drivers in 18 refrigerated trucks drove one frozen food order to Pittsburgh from the Morton plant in the former Crozet Cold Storage building during the 1950s.*



*Courtesy Secrets of the Blue Ridge by Phil James*

For many of us, Morton is a name synonymous with the frozen dinners that used to be in the freezer bin of nearly every grocery store in America. For old-time Crozetians, Morton brings back fond memories of a legendary employer. At one time Albemarle County's largest business with over 1,600 workers working three-shift days, Morton Frozen Foods occupied and expanded the Crozet Cold Storage building on Three Notch'd Road that was originally built in 1929 for the preservation of the area's surplus apple crop. Morton and Crozet's frozen food industry no longer exist, but the nearly 100-year old seemingly indestructible reinforced-concrete building continues to house successor businesses.

The Crozet Cold Storage building was the second of its kind in Crozet. Several years earlier, William Fitzhugh Carter opened an ice and apple storage plant down the road in the center of Crozet (*The Lodger, Issue 17*). With the decline of orchards after the 1930s, both storage facilities were shut down and laid dormant for years. The Carter building was later remodeled and continues in use for senior housing. Morton, a newcomer to the frozen

food industry and outgrowing its Louisville, Kentucky space, ended its search in 1954 for larger quarters by purchasing the Crozet Cold Storage building.

Founded as Morton Packing Company, the business began in 1938 as a producer of a canned chicken and noodle concoction sold in glass jars, the brainchild of a young entrepreneur named Harold M. Morton. Housed at its outset in an abandoned Louisville church basement, the small business sold its product from the back end of a passenger vehicle. Sales of the low-coupon rationed product rocketed during World War II, sending the booming business into a larger building in Louisville.

By this time, Morton had parted from the business due to his allergy of, all things, chickens, and after the war the company would have gone out of business selling just chicken and noodles if not for the visionary George Egger.

Experienced in the food business, Egger worked as a consultant for the Morton company and became its President.

He persuaded the company to go into the fledgling frozen food business making pot pies, an idea offered to him by former Secretary of State and UVA alumnus Edward Stettinius, and business surged. With anxious investors willing to finance expansion of the company, Egger bought the refrigeration-ready storage building in Crozet and another facility in Iowa. The company was renamed Morton Frozen Foods and began manufacturing frozen desserts as well.



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## Cold Storage Building (cont'd)

Local historian Phil James reports that the company's fleet of tractor-trailers became one of the largest in America. They were used to deliver the frozen products nationwide and to haul raw materials back to the plant. The fleet of 35 trucks traveled more than five million miles annually.

Larger companies noted Morton's profitability, making it a prime takeover target. First it became a unit of Continental Baking Company, then Del Monte, R.J. Reynolds, and Nabisco, and finally Conagra Frozen Foods in 1986. With so many competing frozen food brands, the Morton brand ceased to exist when Conagra closed its Crozet operation in 2000 and sold the property to Charlottesville real estate magnate and Dave Mathews Band manager, Coran Capshaw.

The property is now shared by Music Today at one end and the Starr Hill Brewery at the other. Music Today is an e-commerce firm owned by Capshaw with 300,000 sq ft of space devoted to a call center and the warehousing of merchandise for a number of musical artists. Starr Hill brews all of its craft beers in the old building where it also has a tasting room and conducts brewery tours.

*Bringing the name Morton back into use by the frozen food industry of today is the goal of Sean Heuvel, great grandson of the man who helped Morton establish his business and the grandson of a long-time Morton executive. He and former Morton employees and their descendants are attempting to re-introduce the public to the history of Morton through social media and print and online articles. They maintain the Morton Frozen Food Facebook page and have already exceeded the goal of 1,000 "friend" followers.*

*Starr Hill Brewery got its name from the Charlottesville neighborhood where it began making beer in 1999 before moving to the cold storage building in 2005. Centered on 6th Street N.W., the Starr Hill neighborhood is located on the hill between UVA and downtown bordered by Preston Avenue and West Main Street. A historically integrated community, Starr Hill was home to many educated and wealthy black individuals, "stars" of the community as it were, although it is unknown why the extra "r" was added. The brewery was on Main Street across from the current Amtrak station in the building where the defunct Blue Ridge Brewing Company had opened in 1987, Virginia's first pub-brewery and one of the first on the east coast. Blue Ridge Brewing was owned and operated by grandchildren of writer William Faulkner.*



(Top) Offices of Music Today in additions to the original cold storage building in background, and (above) the Starr Hill Brewery.

Starr Hill founder Mark Thompson told the *Nelson County Times* that the 12-inch thick insulation in the old building freezer space is far thicker than he could afford to build now. "They just don't build buildings like this anymore," he stated. Moreover, he says the building has more water infrastructure than he has ever seen before. Sufficient water is essential since it takes five to six gallons of water to make one gallon of beer. Starr Hill was founded in 1999 in the Charlottesville neighborhood of Starr Hill.

The robust Crozet apple industry is a thing of the past, but the building that was so much a part of that era continues to play a vital role in the economy of western Albemarle.

## Election Day is On The Way

Local voters will choose on November 6 who they want to elect as U.S. Senator for the next six years and which candidate will represent the 5th Congressional District during the next two years. Incumbent Tim Kane (D), Corey Stewart (R), and Matt Waters (L) are on the ballot for Senator, and Denver Riggleman (R) and Leslie Cockburn (D) are vying for the Congressional seat.



The ballot also includes two proposed Virginia Constitution amendments that require voter approval before they can be adopted. Each of the amendments requires a yes or no vote. The amendments were certified for inclusion on the ballot by the Virginia General Assembly in both of two required consecutive sessions of the legislature.

A "yes" vote on constitutional amendment question No. 1 removes the current requirement that a surviving spouse of a disabled veteran cannot continue receiving property tax exemptions if they change their residence. A "yes" vote will allow spouses to change residence without losing the tax exemption. A "no" vote would leave in place the loss of the tax exemption by spouses who move their place of residence. The votes by the Virginia Senate and House of Delegates in both 2017 and 2018 were unanimously in favor of the amendment.

A "yes" vote on constitutional amendment No. 2 would authorize local governments to grant partial tax exemptions on real property subject to flooding if sufficient improvements have been made to mitigate flooding impact. A "no" vote would oppose this amendment. The Virginia Senate approved the measure by a vote of 38-2 in 2017 and 36-4 in 2018. The House of Delegates voted 59-37 for approval in 2017 and 89-8 in 2018. All of the dissenters were Republicans.

To receive an absentee ballot, an application form must be filed with the Albemarle County Registrar. The form can be requested by calling the Registrar office at 434-972-4173. Application forms must be received by the Registrar by mail no later than 5 p.m. on Tuesday, October 30.