

Springfield-Then and Now

By Jack Lewis Hiller

Did you know that there are 85 places in 35 states named Springfield? Or so says Dan Tilque in "Common Place names" published in "Word Ways: The Journal of Recreational Linguistics," (Morristown, N.J.). Fairfax County has had its share of Springfields--at least two in the 18th century disappeared. In 1742 the area around Tyson's Corner where the first Fairfax Courthouse was built was known as Springfield; and George Mason's friend and neighbor on Mason Neck, Martin Cockburn, named his farm Springfield. But the place we call Springfield today had its roots in the 19th century.



Springfield Station served as the Springfield Post Office from Approximately 1919 to 1953. It stood on the north side of the tracks directly across from the present VRE Backlick Station. The building was demolished in 1963.

The name "Springfield" originated with Henry Daingerfield who, in January 1851, acquired 920 acres in the vicinity of where Backlick Road crosses the Southern Railroad tracks. This land today is partially occupied by Shirley Industrial Park and the intersection between Routes 95, 395 and the Beltway. He named his land "Springfield Farm." Daingerfield, a prominent Alexandria businessman and land speculator, was a director of the newly organized (1848) Orange and Alexandria Railroad. In July 1851 the railroad laid track across his recently acquired land. To service his farm, Daingerfield put a station depot on the south side of the track east of Backlick Road--approximately where the Virginia Railway Express commuter station now stands.

Henry Daingerfield influenced place-names in several locations. He was a "Commissioner" who promoted the creation of a canal between Alexandria and Georgetown in 1830. The canal was dug through his land. An area between Alexandria and Reagan National Airport, close to where the canal passed, is still known as Daingerfield Island. A short road near Union Station in Alexandria bears his name, as does a road in Prince Georges County, Maryland, near Poplar Hill, also known as His Lordships Kindness, where Daingerfield died in 1866.

In 1865, the year before Daingerfield's death, the Springfield train station was sold to Timothy Murphy, a recent immigrant from Ireland. The following year Murphy was named Postmaster of the Springfield post office--a position he held until 1868 when the post office was moved to Annandale. Murphy probably replaced the original station with a house shortly after. A new post office at the Springfield site, but named "Corbett" after the landowner at the time, was created in 1907. The name reverted back to Springfield in 1910.

After Daingerfield's death the farm was divided between his wife, Eliza Johnson Daingerfield, and her son, Henry (II). The "dower" or widow's portion that went to Eliza lay north of the dower line, now Industrial Road, to Edsall Road. Henry (II) received land south of the dower line to about the location of Essex Street. The land

extended east to approximately the modern location of Frontier Drive. Henry (II) and his wife, Virginia, added to their portion a number of acres west of the tract. He built a house just south of the dower line and north of the railroad in 1893, but he died before living there. Today the Guiffre Distributing Company occupies that space.

Eventually, William Worth Smith from Fauquier County acquired a large portion of the land around the railroad tracks, now owned by the Southern Railroad. Smith ensconced his family on the land-his daughter and her husband got the old Daingerfield house. In 1909, two years after the post office returned to the Springfield location, Jennie L. Smith, probably William Worth's sister-in-law, became the postmistress. William Worth's daughter, Eugenia Smith Brookfield, became postmistress when her aunt retired in 1919. She served until 1949.

The Springfield Post Office, originally in a small frame building built around 1919 on the north side of the track, was moved to a shopping center at Old Keene Mill and Backlick Roads in 1953. In 1958, the current post office was moved to a new building at Brookfield Plaza. The railroad station was demolished in 1963.

When the corridor for the newly proposed Shirley Highway was identified running right through what once had been Daingerfield's farm, Vernon Lynch, a pig farmer from Annandale, bought land on both sides of the right-of-way. He created Springvale, the oldest Springfield subdivision in 1947. That same year Edward R. Carr acquired 3,600 acres, some of it from Lynch, and built Lynbrook and Yates Village south of the Southern railway tracks. Mass production building techniques enabled Bernard Steinberg and Carl Hengen to build 1,200 homes in Crestwood that was also once Daingerfield property. By 1958 over 15,000 people were living in approximately 4,000 homes in a place called Springfield.

Today the unincorporated Springfield has spread far beyond Henry Daingerfield's farm and includes more than 50,000 people in residential subdivisions with schools, churches, shopping centers, malls and connecting roads. What began as a private railroad station on a remote rural farm over 150 years ago became a post office that provided a name for a post World War II suburban community that grew and thrived because of entrepreneurial energy, Shirley highway, mass produced automobiles and affordable housing made possible by the Federal Housing Authority.

Daingerfield would probably have been very pleased.

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