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REAL ESTATE

## All Aboard! We're Heading for the Mountains

BY DONNA EVERS

The railroad was the only way to travel distances in 1900, when the Washington and Old Dominion Railroad ran all the way from Georgetown to Bluemont, Virginia, a resort town at the foot of the Appalachian Mountains. From the train station in the little town, horses and buggies would take visitors up the mountain to hotels, guesthouses and taverns — what we now call bed-and-breakfasts — which were sprinkled along the high mountain road. Elevations of 1,000 to 1,500 feet guaranteed Washingtonians an escape from the sweltering heat of the city.

When the train first came to Bluemont, the town had the less glamorous name of Snickersville, named after its founder, Mr. Snickers. Townsfolk decided to change the name to Bluemont to evoke a vision of misty mountains and cool breezes — and so it did.

Today, the area isn't much different from what it was at the turn of the last century. Guesthouses on the mountain are starting to spring up again. Foxglove Retreat is on Blue Ridge Mountain Road. Greenspring, on Raven Rocks Road, is a rambling guesthouse with an original log-cabin wing from the 1700s. In addition, Twin Oaks Tavern, a B&B that operated from 1910 to the 1950s, is now a vineyard and a winery (of which this writer is the proprietor).



A vintage photograph of the Southern R. R. Station in Bluemont, Virginia.

This mountain-ridge area, running parallel to the storied Appalachian Trail, is so unique that in 2009 it was added to the National Register of Historic Places as the Bear's Den Rural Historic District.

Alongside the turn-of-the-century guesthouses were private homes built from native stone. These served as mountain retreats and summer homes for people from the city. Among

these was Supreme Court Justice James Clark McReynolds. McReynolds built Solitude, a rambling stone-and-wood-frame hunting lodge where he and his friends could escape the pressures of the city and the high offices they held. Renovated since Judge McReynolds's day, Solitude is now on the market at \$825,000.

Johannesburg, a huge and stately stone home with a 180-degree view of the Shenandoah

Valley, was built in 1897 by Washingtonian Frank G. Carpenter, a noted author and world traveler. Lanmeath Lodge, a romantic and whimsical home built in the 1930s, was patterned after a Welsh retreat a local couple saw while on their honeymoon. Hohenheim, currently owned by Georgetown University, is an impressive house built by a Georgetown resident in the style of a Russian dacha. One of the many diplomatic guests who visited Hohenheim was Cardinal Pacelli, who later became Pope Pius XII.

Now, more than a hundred years later, the mountain still has an aura of the past. The railroad is gone and automobiles have taken its place, but the cool breezes remain, along with an abundance of deer, bear, wild turkeys, red-tailed hawks and American eagles. The historic Appalachian Trail weaves its way along the rocky mountain top with stunning views of the Shenandoah River and Valley. And the eclectic stone homes perched on the hills above offer the same mystique of escape and romance that drew visitors from Washington so long ago.

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