

# The Middlebrook-Brownsburg Corridor:

## *A Survey of Cultural and Natural Resources*

### **Introduction**

The Middlebrook-Brownsburg Corridor is a priceless example of the rural landscape of the Valley of Virginia. Winding its way through historic and pastoral southern Augusta and northern Rockbridge counties, Route 252 (alternately known as the Staunton-Lexington Turnpike and the Middlebrook-Brownsburg Turnpike) has served as an important corridor between Staunton and Lexington for more than 175 years. The villages and crossroads that grew up along Route 252 provided local markets and necessary services to farmers living in the surrounding countryside. Today, the descendants of many of those early farmers and newcomers live in the area, tending to one of the most beautiful and well-conserved farming regions of the Commonwealth.

Route 252 is more than a scenic road through the past. The families who live on the farms and in the communities along this byway face many of the same issues foremost in the minds of their more urbanized neighbors—how to plan for a future that includes population growth and increased demand on resources, yet allows for the conservation of the rural character and agricultural way of life that have defined this area since the mid 1700s.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study showcases and describes the many outstanding natural and cultural features of this unspoiled area. Its purpose is to both raise awareness of these resources among residents and government officials and to encourage locally initiated land conservation efforts. The goal is to provide information that can be used in making public and private land use decisions. It is hoped that the timing

of this compilation will enable the region to protect its uniqueness as it faces development pressures.

## The Project Area

The study area, referred to as the “Middlebrook-Brownsburg Corridor,” lies in southern Augusta and northern Rockbridge counties. The general boundaries for the area include Arbor Hill on the north, Route 11 on the east, Rockbridge Baths on the south, and Little North Mountain on the west. Characterized by long parallel ridges and intervening valleys, the study area is part of the Valley of Virginia. The northernmost portion of the study area lies in the upper Shenandoah Valley, while the southern portion is in the James River basin. The major transportation route is the north-south Route 252 (the former Middlebrook-Brownsburg Turnpike).

The specific boundaries for the project area are determined by watersheds. Within the Middlebrook-Brownsburg Corridor is the watershed divide between the upper Shenandoah River and the upper James River basins. The three major watersheds in the project area are the upper Middle River in the Shenandoah basin and Hays Creek and upper Maury River in the James River basin. These watersheds are the basis on which much of the information for this report was gathered.

## Study Components

This study is presented in three parts: I. Cultural Resources; II. Natural Resources; and III. Conservation Options.

- \* *Cultural Resources* include archaeological sites, historic structures, and local history. Information sources include residents and scholars, architectural surveys of the two counties, local histories, and other library and government records.
- \* *Natural Resources* include water, geology and soils, forests, and wildlife. Information was gathered from natural resource professionals from local, state, and federal agencies as well as from published materials.
- \* *The Conservation Options* section describes a number of conservation tools that can be applied in the Middlebrook-Brownsburg Corridor, as well as current local land use policies.