

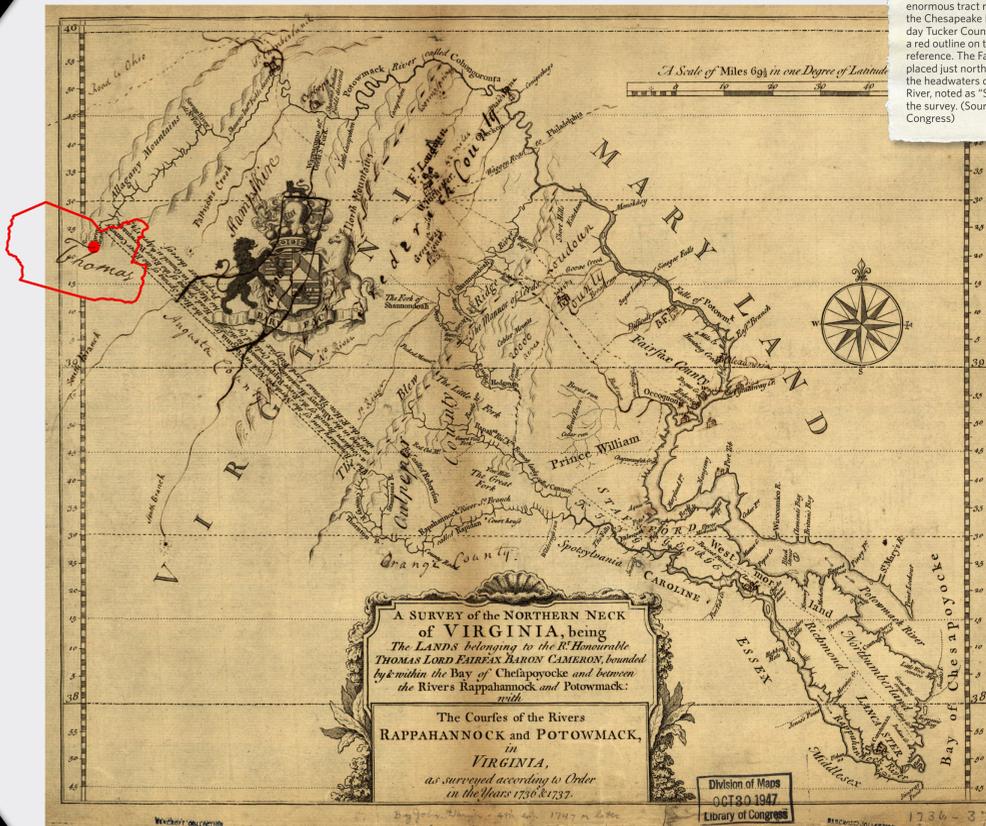
A "HOWLING WILDERNESS"

THOMAS, WEST VIRGINIA

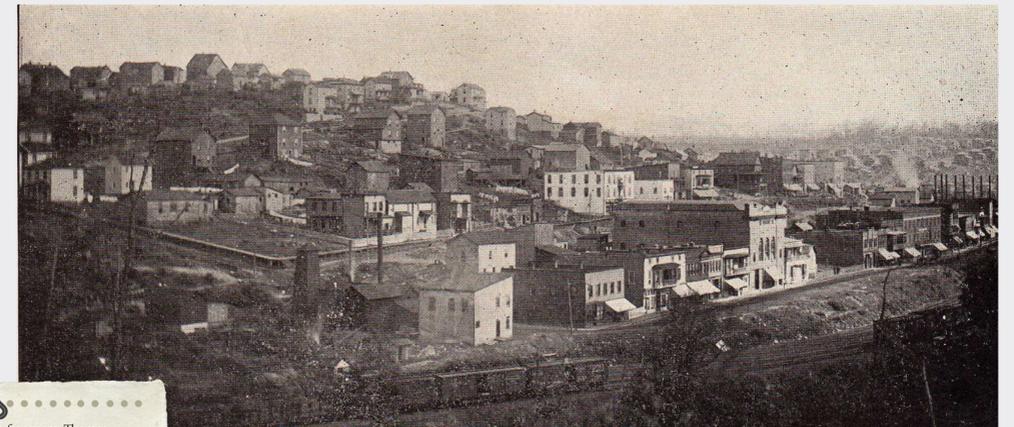
Early Settlement and Development of Thomas

THE THOMAS National Register Historic District is considered significant under Criterion A for its association with the settlement and development of Thomas and of Tucker County. Though remote, the area has been of interest to explorers for hundreds of years. It was Lord Fairfax who first put Tucker County on the map – literally – in 1736, when he sent a team of surveyors to map the boundaries of his vast land holdings in what is now the Eastern Panhandle of West Virginia and Northern Virginia. These men were some of the first Europeans to ever explore these remote mountains. In 1746, the Fairfax Stone was placed at the headwaters of the Potomac River to mark a corner of Lord Fairfax's land, only three miles from what would become Thomas. A young George Washington returned to survey the land again in 1746, but due to the difficult terrain and harsh weather, it was another 134 years until permanent settlers decided to make Thomas their home.

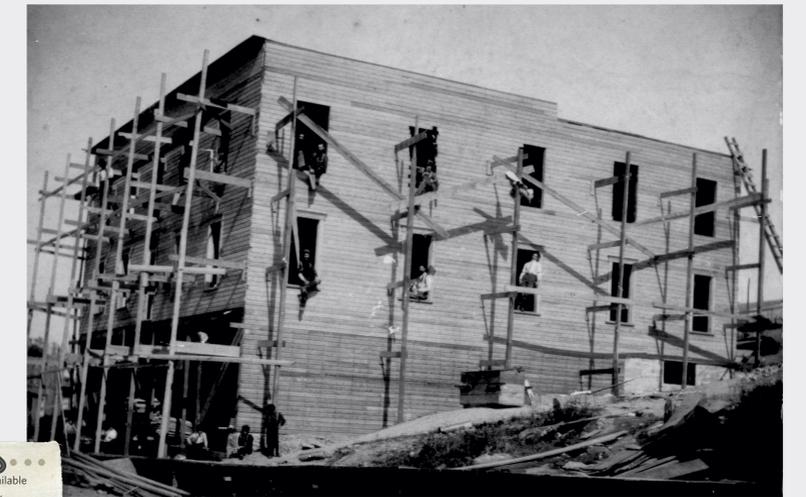
Jacob C. Pase arrived from Pennsylvania with his family in the fall of 1880 and built a home on Rose Hill. In the next few years, more families followed, including Daniel Miller, David Arnold and John William Bonnifield. These men certainly must have had strong wills and constitutions; T. Nutter, in his 1906 history of the town of Thomas, dramatically notes that in the early 1880s, "Thomas was surrounded by a howling wilderness of pine and laurel, and wild beasts could be seen and killed from the very house doors." The first buildings were the quintessential cabins of mountain settlers, built from the most abundant resource available: trees. The small community was known as Fairfax in its early years, but thanks to that profusion of trees and an unseen wealth of coal buried below, big changes were in store for the little town, the least of which was a new name.



The original survey for Lord Fairfax's land outlines an enormous tract reaching from the Chesapeake Bay to modern day Tucker County, shown with a red outline on this image for reference. The Fairfax Stone was placed just north of Thomas at the headwaters of the Potomac River, noted as "Spring Head" on the survey. (Source: Library of Congress)



In just a few years, Thomas grew from a few homesteads to a town of hundreds, spurred by the arrival of the railroad and the coal industry. As seen in this 1906 bird's-eye view, the Thomas Commercial Historic District offered housing, shopping, entertainment and any other amenity a resident could desire. (Source: Thomas, WV 1906 by T. Nutter, Courtesy Miners and Merchants Bank.)



With the increased in available labor, tools and materials, buildings quickly evolved from the log cabins of the pioneers to multi-story structures with varied purposes. Here, workmen pose in the unfinished windows of the Tap Room, Tour No. 25. This structure was built after the fire of 1901 destroyed nearly every building in the commercial district. (Courtesy Russell L. Cooper)

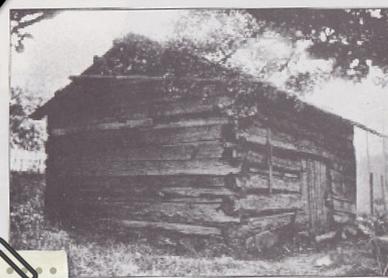


image: Source: Thomas History 1906 by T. Nutter, Courtesy Miners and Merchants Bank

THE FIRST HOUSE BUILT IN THOMAS



The quick growth of Thomas meant that many buildings were initially constructed as quickly as possible out of readily-available wood. In November 1901, a fire consumed 83 buildings in just a few hours, forever altering the appearance of the Thomas Commercial Historic District. Property owners rebuilt using primarily brick to guard against another such tragedy, and the Thomas Fire Department was formed to be better prepared. Here, fire chief Slim Fansler leads the department in a parade. (Courtesy Wilburn Fansler)

