

17. Site of West Fork Primitive Baptist Church
on right opposite 2219 Floyd Hwy S



West Fork Primitive Baptist Church dates back to 1803. In 1847 a larger building was erected on the same site as the original log church. It was heated by two stone fireplaces (*chimneys still visible from 221*), with the pulpit placed in the center. There were separate entrances for women and men. Five generations of Slushers attended this church, beginning with Jacob.

[36°52'31.28"N 80°22'33.91"W]

18. Wildwood Service Station
2600 Floyd Hwy S

In the early 1930s John T. & Lelia Akers Harmon built a home on unpaved 221. Next they added **Wildwood Service Station** (now *Midway Grocery & Oil Company*), built with wide white chinking between red logs to match the house. Its roof extended forward over three Esso gas pumps. The business eventually included a motel consisting of ten matching cabins, two of which remain.

[36°52'14.07"N 80°23'12.12"W]

19. Weddle Cemetery
beside Harman Farm Center 2894 Floyd Hwy S

Some imprecisely aligned graves in the **Weddle Cemetery** show evidence of difficult burials, whether from the early 1800s when this was a grove of chestnut trees or during the Civil War when a diphtheria epidemic took many lives. Anna Maria Eiler Weddle, widow of settler Benjamin Weddle, is buried here. Another stone notes Benjamin was buried on Bent Mountain in 1807.

[36°51'59.29"N 80°24'03.24"W]

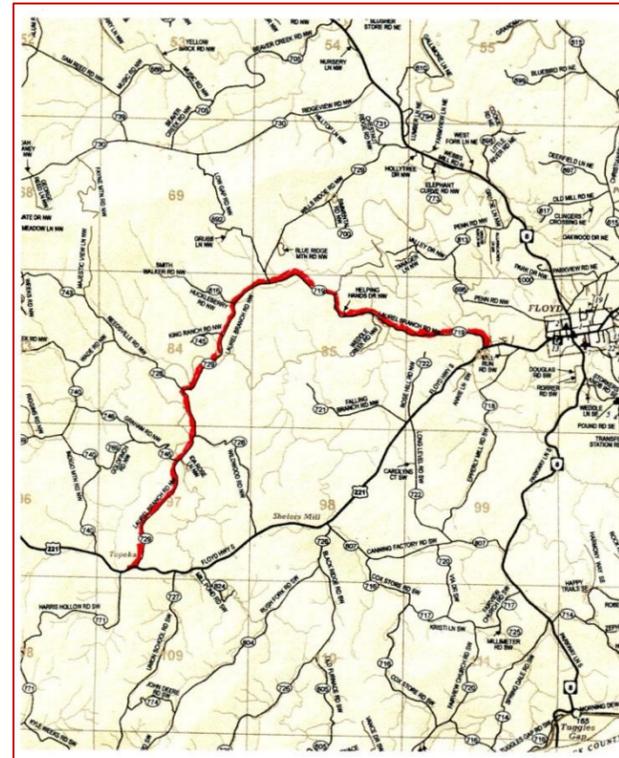
20. Elijah & Susannah Hylton Plantation
3834 Floyd Hwy S beside Indigo Mountain Rd

Elijah & Susannah Hylton were among the very earliest settlers, moving here in 1772. Of English descent, Elijah first built a small cabin near the Old Hylton Burying Ground, now known as the **Old Topeco Cemetery**. Later he built a double-pen log house about a mile west of the current Topeco Church "bordering on the Pike." This house was torn down after 1938 by Elijah's great-grandson Elder **A. N. "Abie" Hylton** who had built a home closer to the highway. Four of **Eli jah Hylton's** grandchildren married children of **Christopher Slusher, Sr.** Son Archelaus Hylton and grandson Elijah W. Hylton also reared their families on this plantation.



[36°52'10.86"N 80°25'41.92"W]

Laurel Branch Road in Floyd County, Virginia is a scenic 7.38 mile route forming a loop with Floyd Highway S/221 between the Town of Floyd and Willis. This tour begins at the Topeco Church of the Brethren, explores all of Laurel Branch Road plus roughly 5 miles of Floyd Highway South before returning to our starting point. Along the way, sites on many side roads add to the narrative. We hope this tour will encourage you to explore the history of other roads in Floyd County.



Dial **(540) 585-3070** to access the taped narrative accompanying this tour via **OnCell**. Select "**Laurel Branch Road Tour**" from the available choices and follow the instructions.

*While in Floyd, stop by the **Ridgemont** at 217 N Locust Street, which was Floyd's first hospital and is now home to the Floyd County Historical Society. Our museum is open Thursdays and Fridays from noon to 4 p.m. and Saturdays from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. through December.*

A project of **Janet Slusher Keith** with **Alice P. Slusher**
presented by

THE FLOYD COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.



TRACING OUR ROOTS

A TOUR OF LAUREL BRANCH ROAD

"...It isn't going to be too many years, there's not going to be anybody around that knows anything about a lot of these things." ~ Luther Bowman 1993

These few miles of road pass through centuries of history. Christopher Slusher, Sr., was among Revolutionary War veterans receiving patents for land in the early 1800s. The Hylton and Weddle families settled here even earlier. As they cleared new ground and built barns and mills to support their families, they also worked together to strengthen the religious and social ties that created the Topeco and Laurel Branch communities. These ties were tested during the Civil War with men away fighting or deserting a cause not theirs; families left struggling to keep their farms going while facing shortages, raids, epidemics, and even General Stoneman's Union army marching past their homes and camping in their meadows in April 1865.

1. Topeco Church of the Brethren; Topeco Cemetery
3460 Floyd Hwy S

This third structure built for the Topeco Church of the Brethren dates to 1951. The church's Heritage Room displays history of the Weddle and Hylton descendants who have been worshipping together for over 200 years. The church cemetery replaced the Old Hylton Burial Ground, now referred to as the Old Topeco Cemetery.

[36°52'01.95"N 80°24'56.58"W]

2. Site of Benjamin & Anna Eiler Weddle home
3820 Laurel Branch Rd



Among the earliest German-American settlers, Benjamin Weddle and family built this 1790 log cabin on his 1600+ acre farm bordering Elijah Hylton's. The first Brethren Love Feast and communion service was held around 1800 at the Weddle cabin which was beside the surviving cottonwood tree.

[36°52'32.86"N 80°24'43.62"W]

3. Site of Solomon & Elizabeth Harman Mill
stop at bridge looking upstream

The **Harman Mill** was on the left bank of West Fork of Little River. Remains of the dam abutment are visible on the right bank. Solomon bought this property from Jacob Goodykoontz in 1809. The gristmill continued in use until destroyed by a 1943 flash flood. **Solomon & Elizabeth Slusher** (*d/o Christopher Slusher, Sr.*) **Harman's** log home, circa 1810, stood across this road from the mill.



Upstream on the Furnace Creek tributary of West Fork, **Cara Simmons m. Catherine Slusher** (*d/o Christopher Slusher, Sr.*) and built his gristmill in 1833, also on land purchased from Jacob Goodykoontz.

[36°53'10.18"N 80°24'22.84"W]

4. Goodykoontz Plantation
3071 Laurel Branch Rd NW

By 1806, Jacob Goodykoontz owned over 1050 acres on West Fork of Little River. **George Goodykoontz II's** family built this two-story frame home in 1841. The earlier home had been surrounded by a high stockade where family legend says, "the last Indian seen in this section was shot from the cliff in front of the house." In the 1860s, this location served as a central Confederate supply station and headquarters for outfitting companies of soldiers. The front door carries both the imprint where an attacker hit it with the butt of his gun, and the hole from a minie ball fired through the two-inch thick wood.

A two-story log house with attic, stone chimney, and stone-walled cellar served as slave quarters. The "**Old Dugspur Road**" came down the hollow, crossed the current road and followed the driveway past the home to the ridge beyond West Fork. Evidence also remains of the Goodykoontz tan yard.

Family members are buried in the **Goodykoontz Cemetery** along with Solomon & Elizabeth Harman, Jacob S. & Sophia Harman, David & Nancy Slusher, and others of the Phlegar, Boone, Simmons, and Graham lines.

[36°53'33.57"N 80°24.13.33"W]

5. Thad & Sara Palmer home
on the right past the intersection with Reedsville Rd

In 1857, Thaddeus Palmer was bought by Washington Goodykoontz to serve as his house slave. After the Civil War, he and wife Sara Stewart Palmer were "given 40 acres adjoining the Goodykoontz homeplace," where they raised 13 children. Thad had four more children by a second wife. Beyond the house, several graves in the **Thad Palmer Cemetery** are simply marked with rocks.

[36°54'02.26"N 80°24'09.80"W]



6. Farm of Christopher, Sr., & Eva Hancock Slusher,
2402 Laurel Branch Road NW

Possibly the oldest house with continuous occupancy in Floyd County, this is the home built by the German-American settler and Revolutionary War veteran Christopher Slusher, Sr., circa 1810. Christopher and his wife Eva Hancock Slusher had twelve children; eight raised their families on farms in the county. He was a cabinetmaker, farmer and charter member of Zion Lutheran Church.



Now housed in Winston-Salem NC at the **Museum of Southern Decorative Arts**, this corner cupboard, “a masterpiece of Virginia cabinet making” is attributed to Christopher.

After Christopher’s death in 1845, his grandson, **Jacob S. Harman** and wife **Sophia Weddle Harman** (*grd/o Benjamin Weddle*) enlarged the home. Jacob S. (*first s/o Solomon*) was postmaster of **Willis Ridge/Will's Ridge Post Office**, located in the general store he owned here with partner Asa L. Howard. He also owned a legal whiskey & brandy distillery and was listed in the 1850 Census as owning 8500 acres of land.

[36°54'26.77"N 80°23'45.35"W]

7. Falcon Post Office; S. D. Bond’s Store
2183 Laurel Branch Rd

Falcon Post Office was on this site until 1903. Texas Snead Lester (*m. Callahill Lester*) served as its first post-mistress. The **store** was built in 1902 by Julius



Dickerson. S. D. Bond purchased it in 1918 from Charley Hylton and built additions including a full second story. Bond's Store “had everything a farm person could possibly want” and was a community center until the death of S.D.’s son Graydon in 1965.

[36°54'48.60"N 80°23'44.09"W]

8. Laurel Branch Church of the Brethren
1867 Laurel Branch Rd

Elder Jeremiah Slusher (*s/o Jacob s/o Christopher, Sr.*) led services for Dunkard (German Baptist) worshippers in the **Slusher School** building. After concerns arose regarding separation of church and state, services were held in a nearby grove or in members’ homes. In 1902 Daniel & Orlena (*Weddle grd/o Christopher, Sr., & grd/o Benjamin Weddle*) Bowman deeded the land for what is now **Laurel Branch Church of the Brethren**.

[36°55'08.46"N 80°23'27.19"W]

9. Farm of David & Nancy Cox Slusher
from Wills Ridge Rd to Slusher Grant Lane

Adding to David’s approx. 400 acres, Christopher, Sr., deeded the 180 acres here to his son **David** in 1837. When David died three years later, he left to his wife Nancy Cox Slusher “her dower in the lands of her late husband...her home place including the mansion house where she now resides.”

Fanny Slusher (*gr grd/o David*) Jones and husband Flemon Jones built the home at the intersection where Slusher Grant Lane meets Laurel Branch Rd. The **Jones Brickyard** was developed in 1935. Allen Altizer built the dome shaped kiln and clay from the hill down from the **Slusher-Jones Cemetery** was used to make the brick. Operations ceased after the cave in of the kiln dome.

[36°55'15.50"N 80°22'41.91"W]

10. Farm of Jacob & Telithe Hylton Slusher
from Slusher Grant Lane to bridge @ Weddle Creek Road



Jacob & Telithe (*d/o John Bryant s/o Elijah Hylton*) are among the Slushers and Faynes buried in the **Jacob Slusher Cemetery** on the hill between their first and last home places. The home they lived in until about 1836 still stands, as



does the timber framed barn Jacob built around 1846. Jacob and Telithe built a second home close to a good spring and down the hill from the barn. This home had four fireplaces, including a five-foot wide one in the kitchen.

George Lester (*gr gs/o Jacob*) and Callie Weeks Slusher were living in the home when it burned in 1936. They then built the existing two-story frame house, using the original house site for their vegetable garden.

In 1840, Jacob Slusher gave land for and built a “house for school teaching” (*in the hollow behind 1189 Laurel Branch Rd*). **Slusher School** continued operation until 1919 when students transferred to the new, two-room **Laurel Branch School** (*intersection of Laurel Branch and Wills Ridge roads*).

[36°54'55.01"N 80°22'04.01"W]

11. “S” Farm; Site of Charles & Lucy Turman home
837 Laurel Branch Rd

The land Jacob Slusher was deeded from Christopher, Sr., continues on the other side of the West Fork bridge. Jacob’s son **Perry and his wife Mary Wood Slusher** inherited the nucleus of the “**S**” **Farm**. That land passed



to George William Slusher, to Freeman Slusher, Sr., to F. M. Slusher, Jr., / Janet Slusher Keith and now to Kevin Keith; seven generations have tended this

Virginia Century Farm.

In addition to the 1949 home and dairy barn Arnton Snead built for **Freeman, Sr., and Ruth Gardner Slusher**, on this land are two home sites for **George William & Clementine Corn Slusher** and the **Oliver Perry Slusher Cemetery**. Across a little branch is the site of **Burwell and Mary Ann Slusher** (*d/o Christopher, Sr.*) Hylton’s first log cabin.

The **Charles & Lucy Hylton Turman** log house stood on a little rise beside the Freeman Slusher, Sr., home. Charles married Lucy Hylton (*d/o Elijah*). Charles Turman served in the Revolutionary War and was a farmer and miller whose **mill** (later Marion Slusher’s, then Callahill Lester’s) was located on West Fork over a half mile upstream from his home. Charles & Lucy’s son **Elijah m. Barbara Slusher** (*d/o Christopher, Sr., who deeded them 200 acres “on the Miry Fork of Greasey Creek”*). **Marion Slusher** (*s/o Jacob*) & **Lucy Turman** (*d/o Matthew s/o Charles*) built their home (*194 Weddle Creek Rd*) diagonally across West Fork.

[36°54'47.08"N 80°21'44.19"W]

12. Dodd/Bishop Plantation
231 Laurel Branch Rd

Benjamin & Mary Prosize Dodd settled near the stream that became known as Dodd’s Creek/South Fork of Little River. Theirs was one of the finest early farms in the county extending from Dodd's Creek to the Turman land on West Fork and was bordered on either side by Jacob Helms' and Christopher Slusher, Sr.'s land. The Dodd home, a “beautiful colonial...with tall white pillars supporting the porch,” was located on a high ridge above what is now Slaughter’s Supermarket. Slave quarters and a separate kitchen survived a late 1920s fire that destroyed the main house. Their daughter **Elizabeth** married **Asa Bishop** and had nine children; son **Burdine’s** family also lived here. **Asa Bishop’s** double-crib barn dates to 1854 with hewn “carrying logs” mortised into 50’ long purlins. On the ridge across from the barn is the **Old Dodd Burying Ground**. The Dodds are buried here along with Bishops, neighbors, and slaves.

[36°54'40.73"N 80°19'11.34"W]

13. Jacob & Eliza Smith Helms home, Rose Hill
463 Rose Hill Rd

Wealthy landowner Jacob Helms was the area’s largest slaveholder prior to 1831. He represented Montgomery Co. in the Virginia Legislature when the bill forming Floyd Co. was passed into law on January 15, 1831. Jacob then lobbied unsuccessfully to locate the county seat at Falling Branch. Among others buried across the road in the **Col. Jacob Helms Cemetery** are Asa L. & Ellen Helms (*d/o Jacob*) Howard, along with Smiths, Cannadays, Lancasters and Nesters.



[36°54'04.56"N 80°21'18.32"W]

14. “The Falls” at Falling Branch
through fields behind 311 Falling Branch Rd

The area’s “miniature Niagara Waterfalls” on Falling Branch, a tributary of West Fork, was a popular destination well into the 20th century. School and church groups met here for picnics, Easter services and other activities. The Falls were reached by going through the property of **Monroe** (*s/o Cara & Catherine Slusher Simmons*) and **Lydia Dickerson Simmons** on Dugspur Road. Their home was among the first to use electricity generated by water flowing over wooden wheels here.



In a field behind the Monroe Simmons home is the **Finney Cemetery**. The Falls and surrounding property were once owned by "**Preacher Joe**" **Finney** who had been born into slavery in Henry County.

The nucleus of the **Falling Branch United Methodist Church** building was **Bethel Church**, which was moved from the “Goodykoontz farm on the Dugspur Road” onto this land donated by Charles & Elizabeth Howard in 1891.

[36°53'32.04"N 80°21'18.07"W]

15. Falling Branch School Buildings
1503 Floyd Hwy S

The home of Henry B. & Maude Shelor was created from the second **Falling Branch School**, a two-room structure with a bell tower above a front cloakroom. Later, the school building was used by the Floyd Grange and other groups. The original one-room **Falling Branch School** house was moved 1/8 mile to its current location.



[36°53'13.78"N 80°21'39.97"W]

16. Jim & Louisa Shelor home; Amos Post Office
1992 Floyd Hwy S

This homeplace grew from two cabins. In 1855 **James Floyd "Jim" Shelor** bought the Ben Howell land and moved an old 2-room cabin here to use along with an existing slave cabin he kept as his kitchen. He and **Louisa Jefferson Shelor** later added onto the cabin. Daughter Ella Shelor operated the **Amos Post Office** out of the home. Son **George & Laura Jenkins Shelor** bought the Williams farm (*2055 Floyd Hwy S*) and raised 11 sons and one daughter there. George also owned two saw mills, a flour mill and a machine/ blacksmith shop. He moved the old Falling Branch School using his traction steam engine.

Huff Cannery, *at the intersection with Canning Factory Rd*, was a major employer during WWII under owner S.D. Huff of Roanoke. Carl Shelor (*s/o George*) signed up area families to grow produce; neighborhood women found their first public employment processing the kraut, tomatoes & beans for which the cannery was noted.

[36°52'39.29"N 80°22'15.91"W]