



**HISTORY FROM ABOVE VIDEO SCRIPT (ORIGINAL)**

Historical Wharf District and Sears House  
Staunton, VA

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Located along the still active rail line, you'll find the Historical Wharf Area in downtown Staunton, Virginia. Likely gaining its namesake for the collection of now exquisitely preserved warehouses and commercial buildings, the wharf is a standing reminder of the importances of the railway in the growth of Staunton and many cities like it in the second half of the 19th century. (*National Park Services*)

Before being replaced with brick and stone structures, the Wharfs warehouses and places of trade were made mostly of wood. During the Civil War the buildings served as a military post, supply depot, training and hospital center. Despite the war, the city flourished and the population actually grew. (*National Park Services*)

Two additional landmarks found among the architecture in the Wharf is the bungalow styled C & O Train Station built in 1902, designed by architect, Thomas Jasper Collins. The train station once served as the passenger and freight terminal before later housing restaurants and banquet halls. (*Visit Staunton - HSF*)

Adjacent to the train station sits the American Hotel. The greek revival hotel was built by the railroad in 1855, (*Visit Staunton - HSF*) serving as a major railway break between Washington and Cincinnati, the American Hotel was a convenient location for passengers seeking food and rest. (*National Park Services*) One prominent guest of the hotel came during 1869 when President and Mrs. Ulysses S. Grant stopped for the night. The famed general who led the Union Army to victory, defeating the Southern confederate Army, bringing an end to the American Civil War, made a stop in Staunton during his term as president where he emerged from the balcony to be serenaded by the Stonewall Brigade Community Band.

The Wharf's history isn't free from disaster. Once filled with baled hay, wool, fertilizers, and seed, The Wharf caught fire in 1901 destroying 3 of its buildings. This wouldn't be the only time a blaze turned the wharf into smoldering rubble. The Wharf would experience the destructive power of fire once again in 1911 sparked by a gasoline stove that brought most of the block to ruin, then nearly three decades later in 1940, the wharf caught fire once more. (*Culbertson*)

On the eastern edge of the historical Wharf District, one building rises prominently above all others.. Built in 1892, The White Star Mills building stands along the rightful name, Mill Street. White Star Mills was once the Shenandoah Valley's largest Flour Mill. It operated successfully until 1963 when the Washington Milling Company purchased the company for its branding rights, ending the mill's 71 years of operation.

Connecting downtown and the neighborhood of Sears Hill above, the iron Sears Hill footbridge offers a unique vantage point over the wharf district. Although the Iron bridge dates back to 1905 (*Frazier Associates*) wooden pedestrian bridges built by the C & O Railway date back to 1888. (WVHS 3) The bridge once served as an important connector for the residents of the Sears Hill Neighborhood to the historical downtown. After nearly 100 years of service, the Sears Hill Bridge was in disrepair and was condemned due to the costly price tag of rehabilitating it for

safe use. The local community wasn't satisfied with that decision and with the support of local residents, businesses, and historical preservation groups, funds were raised to save the bridge and put it back into safe, proud service over the railway, connecting once again downtown and Sears Hill, becoming a popular stop for tourists and locals alike. (*Frazier Associates*)

High Above the Wharf, you'll find the 1 ½ story, Sears House. Built in 1860, the private home is listed on the National Register of Historic places. One of its most notable owners was Educator, Barnas Sears who lived in the home from 1867 - 1880. During the reconstruction era, Sears relocated to Staunton where he served as General Agent of the Peabody Education Fund. (*Washington Post Archives*) The Peabody Education Fund, founded by financier George Peabody, was a multi-million dollar fund used to promote African American education and the establishment and growth of public schools for African Americans and poor white southerners. (*US Embassy*). Sears chose Staunton for its proximity to the Railroad to meet his extensive travels needs. During his time as a General Agent, he helped improve sentiment for education in the South and helped remove hostility towards black education. His efforts were a continuation of George Peabody's goal for the investment and encouragement of primary education, rather than merely providing college education for the sons of gentlemen. (*William 260 - 274*) Barnas Sears lived in the Sears House until just before his death in 1880.

Despite it's uncertain fate during the early 20th century, the historic Wharf district, and the historical home atop Sears Hills stands today as a reminder of the important role the railroad played in establishing Staunton's place in Virginia and American History.

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