

The Land and Its History: Learning Tree Farms, Farquier County, Delaplane/Hume, Virginia

The land where our camp will gather has a long and layered history. We invite you to arrive with awareness of those who came before us.

First Peoples

For thousands of years, Indigenous peoples lived, hunted, and traveled through the diverse the forests of oak, hickory, tulip poplar, and pine, and along the rivers and meadows alive with deer, fox, bear, birds, and countless smaller creatures. The tribes of this region included the [Pamunkey](#), [Manahoac](#), [Monacan](#), [Doeg](#), and other Siouan and Algonquian speaking tribes.

Colonial Settlement

In the 1600s and 1700s, this land was part of the vast Northern Neck Proprietary granted by the English Crown. Settlers cleared forests for farms, often in conflict with Indigenous communities. By the 1700s, colonization, disease, warfare, and displacement forced most Native people from the region. Agriculture and plantations at the time relied heavily on the labor of enslaved African and Indigenous people.

Mont Blanc Estate and Enslavement

In 1820, Chief Justice John Marshall gifted this land, then known as the Mont Blanc Estate (1820-1894), to his son, John Marshall Jr. The Marshall family owned it for much of the 19th century. Enslaved people, including families like that of Robin Spurlock and his daughter [Agnes Spurlock](#), lived and labored here. Agnes was born into slavery, relocated as a dowry gift, and later endured the hardships of sharecropping after emancipation. Her story, preserved through documents and oral history, gives us a glance into the many lives, families, deaths and labors known and unknown that shaped this land.

Civil War and Aftermath

During the Civil War, both Union and Confederate troops moved through Fauquier County. The area saw raids, skirmishes, and disruption to families and farms. In the aftermath of the Civil War, historic [Thoroughfare](#) became a prominent community of free-born and formerly enslaved African Americans, and families of indigenous descent. There are ongoing community efforts and legal actions to preserve and ensure access to several cemeteries in this historic community.

20th Century to Present

In the 1920s, the property became Cobbler Mountain Farms, a cattle and hunting preserve owned by the Tyssowski family. In 1995, David and Mary Collins became the loving stewards of this land, renaming it Learning Tree Farms. In the early 2000s they hosted and ran Adventures in Learning, a free day outdoor education program, serving 40,000 children of all ages. Today, under the care of Mary Collins, the land is a wildlife refuge, welcoming hikers and gatherings such as our camp.

Why This History Matters for Us

When we gather here, we step into a place that holds deep memories—of Indigenous stewardship, of displacement and enslavement, of farming families, of war, and of children learning in nature. We are humbled by what we know, and even more so, by what we do not know. By remembering and honoring this known and unknown history, we open ourselves to a more respectful, compassionate and healing relationship with the land and with one another.