

HISTORIC LEXINGTON

FOUNDATION

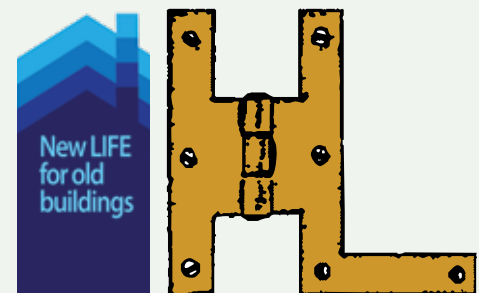
Summer 2018

Newsletter



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From the President's Desk

Dear Members and Friends of HLF,

Thanks to you, our loyal supporters, HLF will continue to preserve, advocate for, and educate about the historic places that matter to all of us.

In this Newsletter we thank and recognize our donors. Just as the places we preserve have stories to tell about the people who lived, worked, worshipped, and learned in them, the people who support HLF have their own stories—the woman who gave \$10 and apologized because she could not give more; the couple who remembered HLF in their will; the woman who gave in memory of her grandmother; the woman who gave in honor of her grandchildren. Each gift matters; each gift makes a difference, and we at HLF are grateful to each and every donor.

All of us are stewards of this place, embarked upon a partnership to nurture and sustain it. Historic places are a reflection of who we are. They provide context, giving us a sense of our culture and character.

Over the last year, HLF's advocacy of historic places has involved the private sector and all levels of government. We have advocated for Historic Tax Credits (HTC) that provide owners of historic buildings with an incentive to invest in rehabilitating their properties. We are bringing the need for the preservation of our historic cemeteries to the attention of individuals and our local government.

Our recent education efforts have included screening *Rosenwald* at Lylburn Downing School, three talks during May's Preservation Month, a day-long workshop on cemetery preservation, the creation of a walking tour guide of Stonewall Jackson Memorial Cemetery, and remarks about the Palmer School at our annual meeting held at the 1903 schoolhouse.

In the year ahead, HLF will continue its advocacy for the preservation of cemeteries. And in Preservation Month 2019, we will turn our attention to the historic barns that dot Rockbridge County's landscape.

We invite your involvement in these and other issues of preservation concern. Together we will support these places that matter to us, that tell our stories.

Sincerely,
Suzanne Barksdale Rice

Cover images: Taken by Don Hasfurther.

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Documenting and Preserving Historic Rockbridge Barns

In the Winter 2018 HLF newsletter, we wrote that historic barns often fall victim to demolition by neglect or intentional demolition, often to make way for a new structure. Preservation Virginia recognized this fact when it recently named Historic Barns in the Shenandoah Valley to its 2018 Most Endangered List. In the listing, the statewide organization wrote, "Old barns are a striking symbol of rural landscapes throughout the Commonwealth. They particularly symbolize the Shenandoah Valley's historic rural agricultural landscape along the I-81 corridor, which is being lost at an alarming rate to economic shifts and development pressures."

On its savingplaces.org website, the National Trust for Historic Preservation has a page entitled "10 Ways to Save a Barn." Among the ways are:

- Learn about the structure's significance
- Gauge community support
- Conduct barn surveys and seek historic designation

HLF thinks this is good advice and intends to make historic barn preservation a focus in 2019, including in May's National Preservation Month.

In this undertaking, HLF hopes to enlist the support of other organizations in Rockbridge County. Many have already been undertaking activities to draw attention to our historic barns.

The Rockbridge Camera Club has identified barns through photography. In collaboration with the Brownsburg Museum, the Camera Club has documented more than 50 major agricultural structures in the Brownsburg area. "The Barns of Brownsburg" could serve as a model for many other historic communities in the county.

Some of the potential barn projects that HLF has discussed within its Board of Directors are 1) an exhibit of paintings by local artists interpreting an historic barn or barns; 2) collaboration with Rockbridge Historical Society to prepare an exhibit on historic barns, both extant and lost barns; 3) a visit to and tour of a barn to examine architectural elements, and 4) further efforts to encourage individuals and organizations to document historic barns in their communities.

Please let us know your thoughts on the subject and how you would like to get involved.

The antebellum barn at Hickory Hill reveals the anatomy of an historic Rockbridge barn.





HLF Focuses Community Attention on Historic Cemetery Conservation

As noted in its Winter 2018 Newsletter, HLF has made the conservation of the area's historic cemeteries a priority. Thanks to gifts from interested donors, HLF established a cemetery fund and contracted with a cemetery conservator to undertake preservation plans for Lexington's two historic cemeteries, Stonewall Jackson Memorial and Evergreen Cemetery. Wellman Conservation LLC visited Lexington in late February and presented both plans to HLF in April. The plans include a conservation condition survey of selected visible gravestones, treatment recommendations and costs for those gravestones, and a summary of other conditions in the cemeteries, including fencing, landscaping, and other infrastructure.

Howard Wellman identified 46 gravestones in Stonewall Jackson Memorial Cemetery as requiring priority treatment and others with lesser needs. Treatment estimates ranged from \$500 to \$3,000. The one gravestone with the highest cost estimate is that of Annie Baxter (1801–70). The marble, table gravestone was broken several years ago when a limb from the nearby oak tree fell on it. Wellman described the structure as "collapse, major

damage" and noted that the foundation was "loose or settling 5–10 degrees." He also noted that the gravestone, which had been pulled off its original foundation and onto another grave, was "missing two legs." Repair and reassemble was estimated at \$3,000. Since preparation of the preservation plan, additional pieces of marble have broken from the gravestone.

Baxter was the daughter of Col. William Fleming and the wife of George A. Baxter, longtime minister of Lexington Presbyterian Church and the rector of Liberty Hall/Washington Academy following the resignation of William Graham in 1796. Rev. Baxter would serve as president of by then Washington College until he left in 1829 for Union Theological Seminary in Farmville. Annie Baxter returned to Lexington upon her husband's death. Her four daughters were all school teachers in Lexington.

More typical of the gravestone needs in Stonewall Jackson Memorial Cemetery is that of Nancy Darst, who was buried in the cemetery upon her death in 1835. She was the wife of noted builder Samuel Darst, who partnered with John Jordan to erect some of Lexington's finest homes in the 1820s. The grave marker is

Howard Wellman works on a preservation plan for Lexington's Evergreen Cemetery.



Gravestone of Nancy Darst.



a sandstone tablet, typical of older stones in the cemetery. Wellman noted that there are fine cracks in the body and that the structure is leaning more than 10 percent. It is “earthfast” on the bottom foot of the stone, meaning that it needs to be reset at an estimated cost of \$500. Deferred maintenance on a stone with a significant lean, of which there are many in the cemetery, can lead to breakage.

The historic African-American Evergreen Cemetery was established nearly 90 years after Stonewall Jackson Memorial Cemetery and has far fewer gravestones. While in relatively good overall condition, the preservation plan prepared by Wellman contains 47 individual gravestones in need of treatment. Many are loose on their base and leaning, while several have slipped off their foundation. The stone of Mary and Harry Thomas is off its base and resting on a tree stump. One of the older stones in the cemetery, that of Harrison Greenlea (1853–98), has a major break, as does a foundation stone. Recommended treatment costs for those individually listed gravestones range from \$500 to \$1,500.

Additionally, HLF published a walking tour guide to Stonewall Jackson Memorial Cemetery. Featuring 45 graves and family plots, the brochure tells the story of the development of Lexington and Rockbridge County from the early settlers and those who fought for the new country’s independence and through other military conflicts, including the American Civil War and beyond. The guide focuses on religious leaders and educators, the architects and builders who shaped Lexington in the 20th century, those who made Lexington the center of the area’s commerce and industry, and military leaders from the country’s beginning through the US involvement in two world wars. The brochure is available in the HLF office and at the Lexington-Rockbridge Visitor Center, as well as for downloading on the HLF website.

For May’s National Preservation Month commemoration, HLF continued the theme of better understanding cemeteries as an important step in conserving these historic sites. Alison Bell, Washington and Lee University associate professor of anthropology, gave a presentation on preserving the cemeteries of our military veterans. Dan Pezzoni, local architectural historian and Landmark Preservation Associates executive, spoke on understanding cemeteries by the forms and materials of grave markers. HLF also collaborated with the Visitor Center to give the public guided tours of Stonewall Jackson Memorial Cemetery. HLF Executive Director Don Hasfurther conducted a tour of that cemetery in June for the Newcomers Club.

Additionally, HLF sponsored a full-day cemetery workshop in the Brady Chapel of Lexington Presbyterian Church. Among the topics presented by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources were cemetery archaeology, cemetery and burial law, and cemetery conservation. Participants in the program also visited Stonewall Jackson Memorial Cemetery for discussions concerning stone conservation, photography, and cemetery iconography.

Gravestone of Annie Baxter.



Gravestone of the Thomases on top of the stump.



Participants in HLF-sponsored cemetery workshop visit Stonewall Jackson Memorial Cemetery.





2018 Annual Meeting Showcases Historic Rockbridge Schools

Historic Lexington Foundation held its annual meeting April 14 at the c. 1903 Palmer School, now the Palmer Community Center. The meeting provided a forum for a discussion of the importance of preserving and presenting the area's historic schools and HLF's role in this undertaking.

Dr. Horace Douty, minister at nearby Oxford Presbyterian Church and a historian of the community around Oxford and Palmer, spoke on early education in the area of the Palmer School, including the c. 1823 Hamilton School that served as both school and church. He also spoke of the key role played in the community by individuals such as Sydney Saville and the Reverend Thomas Mowbray.



Buena Vista Colored School.



Will and Tommy Harris prepare the Hamilton Schoolhouse for a stone foundation.

HLF Executive Director Don Hasfurther continued the school theme. The Palmer School closed its doors in 1956. Unlike many other older schools throughout the country that were torn down after the last school bell rang, the local community made sure that would not be Palmer's fate. In 1997, the community, led by Nelson Hall, began the task of the building's renovation, revitalization, and reuse.

Hasfurther stated that another important structure, the Hamilton field school, is undergoing restoration. He noted that Will and Tommy Harris are undertaking preparations for the construction of a stone foundation. Hasfurther noted that HLF is giving \$10,000 through its Lyle-Simpson Preservation Fund for the project, specifically for a new roof.

Work is also underway in Buena Vista by the Buena Vista Colored School Historical Society toward the rehabilitation of that historic school. In 2017, HLF presented the historical society with a gift of \$2,000. That money has now been used for the construction of porches to the school's two entrances.

Hasfurther reminded the audience that in 2017 HLF organized a public event in the c. 1927 Lylburn Downing School. It was an opportunity for many to visit for the first time the historic school that now serves as school board offices and a community-meeting place. Attendees then went next door to the middle school of the same name for a showing of a film on Julius Rosenwald. With the urging of Booker T. Washington, Rosenwald provided funding for hundreds of schools throughout the South for African-American children. Lylburn Downing was the recipient of some of those funds.



First day of class at Lylburn Downing, 1946. Courtesy of W&L Special Collections.

Thanks To Our Contributors

With deep gratitude for all who have given so generously in support of the work of HLF, we acknowledge these gifts received from August 2017–July 2018.

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We strive for accuracy in our acknowledgments. Please share corrections with us.

HLF Programs Recognize Our Historic Assets & Encourage Preservation



HLF President Suzanne Rice and Secretary Dee Joyce-Hayes present Skip Ravenhorst and Seth Goodhart with the Founders' Award for Beechenbrook Chapel at Jordan's Point.



Suzanne Rice and Dee Joyce-Hayes present Founders' Award to Cliff DeVito and Chris Walker for their restoration of Forest Oaks near Natural Bridge.



Skip Ravenhorst, HLF board member and co-owner of Beechenbrook Chapel, and Suzanne Rice display the chapel's historic marker.



HLF dedicates Jordan's Point National Register of Historic Places marker. (Kneeling: Don Hasfurther, Suzanne Rice, Jim Busch, Standing: Peter Grover, Beverly Tucker, Todd Hamric, Dan Pezzoni, Gene Sullivan.)

