

HISTORIC LEXINGTON

FOUNDATION

Winter 2018

Newsletter

HLF Focuses On Historic
Cemetery Conservation
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From the President's Desk

Dear Friends,

Not too long ago I was shopping in Lexington's historic downtown. Along the way, I chatted with people I know, greeted people I don't know, and gave directions to tourists. As I walked, I admired the handsome cityscape, and mentally thanked the intrepid HLF founders who 50 years ago preserved Lexington's 19th century downtown. In the midst of my musings, I spied a parked car with a bumper sticker sporting the HLF logo—the logo that depicts an ancient HL door hinge. The bumper sticker reads: "Lexington's future hinges on a past well-preserved."

Aha, I thought. In HLF's work, we find the past, present, and future inextricably interwoven. This place tells our stories and foretells our future. It is not locked in time, but is both vibrant and in constant renewal. Pioneer preservationist William J. Murtagh noted: "...At its best, preservation engages the past in a conversation with the present over a mutual concern for the future."

These places in Rockbridge County and the cities of Lexington and Buena Vista reflect our past. They provide memories, continuity, and a sense of belonging. And yet, these treasured places are a *living* part of our community life. Real people live and work here today and will tomorrow. With proper conservation, these places will continue to impact people, bring people together, and enhance people's lives for years to come.

As we go forward in this new year, we must make a commitment to tell the full, nuanced story of all our people. We must strive for an equitable and sustainable community. And we must affirm—and teach our children—that preservation is socially conscious, economically viable, and environmentally responsible, both now and tomorrow.

Here's to cherishing our past and embracing our future.

Sincerely,
Suzanne Barksdale Rice



The HL door hinge is of English origin and was used extensively on doors in Colonial homes. Stronger than a simple H hinge, the HL hinge is useful for supporting the weight of a wooden door.

Cover image: Stonewall Jackson Memorial Cemetery, taken December 2017 by Don Hasfurther

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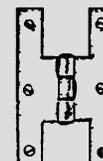
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HLF Makes Conservation of Area's Historic Cemeteries a 2018 Priority

In our Summer 2017 Newsletter, we wrote about the generous bequest from the estate of Charles F. and Marjorie H. Phillips and noted that the HLF board had decided to use part of the bequest for the conservation of Lexington's two historic cemeteries. In addition to serving as Lexington's mayor, Chuck was president of HLF in the late 1990s. HLF thought the conservation of Stonewall Jackson Memorial Cemetery and Evergreen Cemetery would be a worthy use of the Phillipses' generosity.

HLF received positive feedback for our decision to focus on cemetery conservation. In our 2017 year-end annual appeal,

donors had the opportunity to contribute to a cemetery fund to be used for cemetery conservation in Lexington and elsewhere in Rockbridge County. Again, the response has been very positive, and donors are significantly adding to the fund that began with the Phillipses' bequest.

This January, we contracted with Wellman Conservation LLC to undertake preservation plans for the two Lexington cemeteries. Howard Wellman, who was one of several individuals recommended by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR), is expected to begin work in February. His past work has included conservation activities at Monticello and the historic Congressional Cemetery in Washington DC.

Wellman is to document and prioritize the conservation needs of the two Lexington cemeteries. Gravestones of "high priority" will be documented with digital photography and will be identified with conservation condition notes, treatment priority recommendations, treatment proposals, and treatment cost estimates. Conservation will be a long-term effort and will require considerable financing. As such, we will continue to solicit donations to the cemetery fund.

Additionally, HLF is working with DHR to sponsor a cemetery workshop in Lexington to help guide stewards of historic cemeteries, genealogists, archaeologists, and others with their cemetery activities. The workshop is scheduled for Saturday, May 12 in the Lexington Presbyterian Church's Brady Chapel with a site visit to Stonewall Jackson Cemetery. Seating will be limited and there will be a cost to attend. If you are interested in attending, please contact HLF. More information will be available on our website.

The workshop will be part of our National Preservation Month activities focused on historic cemeteries. Notification of additional events will be forthcoming and on our website.

Evergreen African-American Cemetery in Glasgow



*Stonewall Jackson Memorial Cemetery.
Photo courtesy of Harry Hamilton.*



Falling Spring Presbyterian Church Cemetery





Determined Advocacy Preserves the Federal Historic Tax Credit

Enacted during the Reagan Administration, the federal Historic Tax Credit (HTC) program has served as an important incentive for the rehabilitation of historic properties in towns and cities throughout the country. Since the inception of the program, 22 structures have been rehabilitated in Lexington using the federal credits. Thus, historic preservation organizations such as HLF reacted with alarm when learning last fall of efforts within Congress to remove the program from tax legislation then under consideration.

Despite efforts from Rep. Bob Goodlatte and other Congressmen, the bill reported out of the House Ways and Means Committee and approved by the full House of Representatives had removed the HTC provisions. After significant debate, the Senate ultimately approved language retaining the 20 percent credit for historic rehabilitation costs. The bill that came out of the House-Senate Conference Committee and approved by both branches of Congress retains the program.

The effort to save the HTC was coordinated by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, which pointed out that in addition to

spurring employment and economic growth, the HTC returns more to the Treasury than it costs—\$1.20–1.25 in tax revenue for every dollar invested. Preservation Virginia played a similarly critical role at the state level, mobilizing local governments, opinion makers, and preservation organizations, such as HLF, to make the case to the Congress for retention of HTC.

Historic Lexington Foundation made its first advocacy effort by way of letters sent to Virginia Congressman Bob Goodlatte and Ways and Means Committee Chairman Kevin Brady in early November prior to the Ways and Committee vote. Communications were also made to Virginia Senators Warner and Kaine prior to the Senate deliberation on the tax legislation. The letter to Goodlatte is included in this article.

President Reagan was a major proponent of the HTC. In 2003, the program was used in the rehabilitation of Lexington's historic State Theatre. And perhaps appropriately so, as the theater was the site of the premiere of the movie *Brother Rat*, filmed in part at the Virginia Military Institute and starring Ronald Reagan.

Dear Representative Goodlatte:

On behalf of Historic Lexington Foundation, I am writing to thank you for your continued support of the federal historic tax credit program and urge you to do everything possible to see that the program is not eliminated in Congressional deliberations over reform of the U.S. tax code.

As you know, the tax credit program has played a critical role in the revitalization of small towns and cities such as Lexington, Virginia, and in significant job and tax revenue creation. During Fiscal Year 2016, it is estimated that the program resulted in \$6.5 billion in rehabilitation investment and in the creation of 109,000 jobs.

The impact in Lexington since the establishment of the historic rehabilitation tax credit program under President Ronald Reagan has been dramatic. You may be aware of some of these success stories. In 2012 following a disastrous fire, the owners of the historic Southern Inn decided to rehabilitate the restaurant's interior in major part because of the tax credit program. During the same period, new owners of what had long been Washington and Lee University's rarely used Troubadour Theatre, used the program to rehabilitate the structure into what is now the tax generating Encore Salon.

Earlier historic tax credit rehabilitation successes have included the National Wholesale Building, an unrestored industrial structure, which is now apartments, and the Koonen Building on W. Washington Street, which is now the offices of the investment management firm Edward Jones.

Perhaps most noteworthy of rehabilitation tax credit successes is that of Lexington's State Theatre. Fifteen years ago, the theater's owner, R/C Theatre, was closing theaters throughout the Maryland/Virginia area. In large part due to the tax credit program, the theater group undertook a major rehabilitation of the State Theatre. Today, it is an important draw to bring people downtown.

Undoubtedly many communities throughout Virginia have similar stories. With the continuation of the federal historic tax credit program, we are confident that many more historic structures will undergo rehabilitation, thereby creating jobs and revenues in Virginia.

Sincerely,
Suzanne Barksdale Rice
President

Lexington Submits New Historic District National Register Nomination

The first U.S. historic district was established in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1931, predating the U.S. federal government designation by more than three decades. Not until passage of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, which established the National Register of Historic Places, was there a process for federal designation of historic districts.

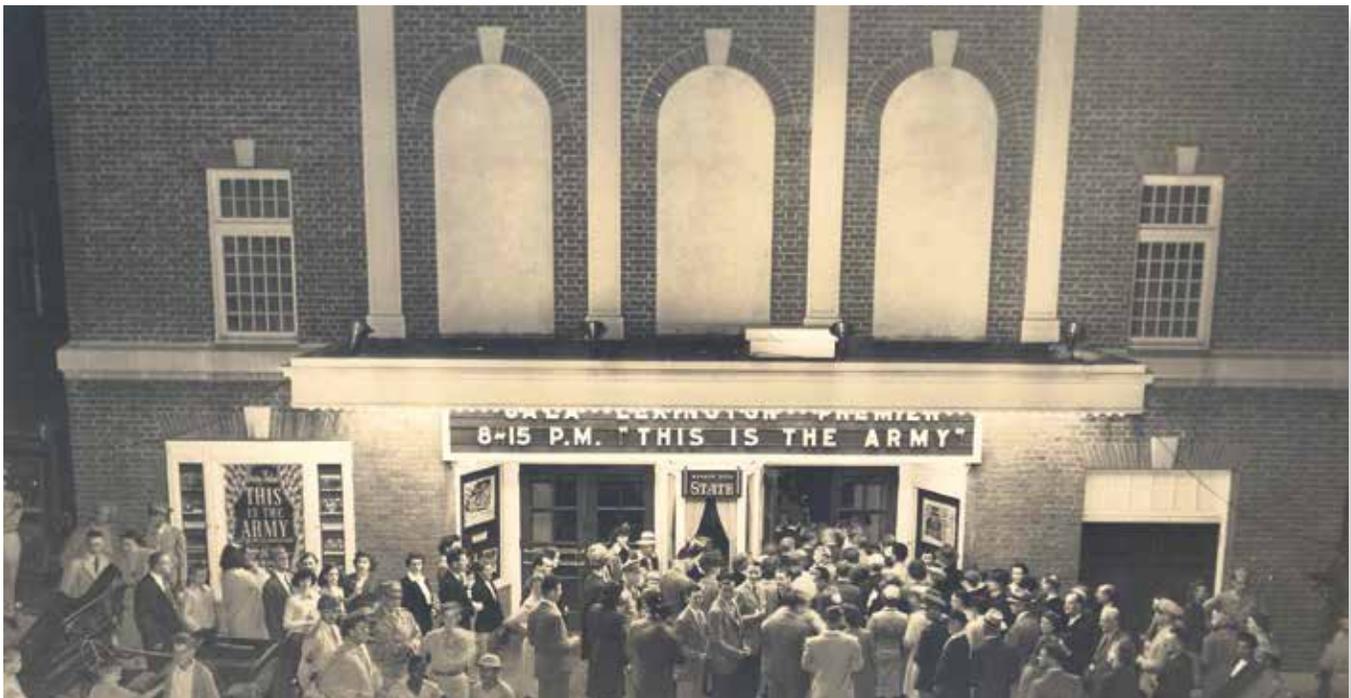
An early such historic district, the Lexington Historic District received designation in 1971. The boundaries include the historic downtown and some surrounding residential areas, Washington and Lee University, and the Virginia Military Institute. The nomination process was rather simple at that time, and of the six-page Lexington nomination, only three specifically described the physical appearance and significance of the areas to be included in the district. For example, the description of Washington and Lee's Colonnade states merely that "traditional qualities of W&L student life can be seen in Washington Hall, the central red brick block and white stuccoed portico begun by John Jordan in 1823...."

National Register nominations include designation of buildings, objects, and structures contributing to the historic integrity of the historic district. There is no such listing of "contributing structures" in the Lexington nomination. Important buildings such as the Old Jail, the Jacob Ruff House, and the Willson-Walker House,

for example, did not even receive mention in the nomination. Fifty years or older is generally recognized as the age that would qualify as providing contributing value to the historic district. In 1971, in the case of Lexington, this meant buildings constructed no later than 1921. This is important as "contributing structures" at the time of the designation qualify for the Historic Tax Credit (HTC) program described on page 4 of this newsletter.

In addition to wanting a more thorough and updated documentation of Lexington's historic resources, HLF was an early proponent of a new National Register nomination as a means of making more buildings eligible for HTCs. City officials agreed and applied for and received matching funds from the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR) for an updated historic district building survey. This was accomplished in 2016. The City, DHR, and HLF are now funding a new historic district nomination, the first draft of which was scheduled for delivery in late January.

Once the nomination is completed and approved by the National Park Service, HLF hopes a discussion will begin about expanding the historic district. Expansion potentially could include additional structures along S. Main Street and nearby Massie Street in the Green Hill neighborhood. Expansion would require agreement by a substantial number of property owners in these neighborhoods.



A "contributing structure" in the National Register Historic District, the State Theatre is seen here in the 1943 Lexington premiere of "This Is the Army" starring Ronald Reagan. Courtesy of W&L Special Collections.



Preserving the Historic Barns of Rockbridge County

Last fall, the HLF board began internal discussions about how to focus public attention on the historic barns of Rockbridge County. Barns are often on the Most Endangered List of historic preservation organizations. Changing farming practices together with the complexities and costs of maintaining these unique structures have contributed to their loss nationwide.

The HLF discussion took on a greater sense of urgency in the fall when a local family contacted HLF and invited the organization to tour an historic barn that they intended to sell for its lumber. The barn had some issues that many older barns do, but it otherwise was in fairly stable condition. A visit to the property provided HLF an opportunity to document the structure with some photography.



Hickory Hill barn interior



Barn near Fairfield

Since then, HLF has had some preliminary discussions with the Rockbridge Historical Society on means to draw attention to barns as historic assets. Among the thoughts on the table are a tour and architectural presentation at an area barn and a joint public exhibit using photographs, paintings, and text to illustrate the threat to area barns and the need for their preservation.

At the most recent joint meeting, RHS President Steve Beck asked a very interesting question. "Do we want to undertake an inventory of historic barns in the county?" After agreeing that this would be a huge undertaking, there was general agreement that this is something we should consider. And also that it would require a lot of volunteer effort.

There have been some surveys of historic Rockbridge structures, including barns, done in the past, including one undertaken by the local branch of APVA in the 1990s. While never intended as an inventory of barns, HLF's *The Architecture of Historic Rockbridge* does have some barn documentation with photographs by the book's author, Dan Pezzoni. Some of those photos are included in this article.

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

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

If this is something that might be of interest to the reader of the article, please contact HLF and/or RHS to let us know of your interest.



Buffalo Forge horse barn

HLF Annual Meeting Takes Place April 14 at Palmer School Community Center

The 2018 HLF Annual Meeting will be held Saturday, April 14, at the historic Palmer School on Blue Grass Trail just south of Oxford Presbyterian Church. In addition to the introduction of new board members, the presentation of 2018 Founders' Awards, and a discussion of HLF's plans for the coming year, the meeting site will provide an opportunity to approach the development of the public school system in Rockbridge County.

Since becoming a membership organization, HLF has used its annual meeting to introduce its members and other supporters to historic sites in Lexington, Buena Vista, and Rockbridge County. Annual meetings have been held at c. 1910 and 1950 Sigma Nu National Headquarters in Lexington, the c. 1831 Paxton House in Buena Vista, c. 1814 Mt. Pleasant at Buffalo Forge, and c. 1859 New Providence Presbyterian Church near Brownsburg. Each site had a different story to tell, including the development of Presbyterianism in the Valley of Virginia, Greek-Revival and neo-Georgian architecture, and early industry in Rockbridge.

The Palmer School has its own story regarding the development of schools in the South Buffalo section of the county. The oldest nearby school is the c. 1823 Hamilton School. In addition to field schools, private academies were a primary source of education in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Among them were the c. 1808 Ann Smith Academy in Lexington, the c. 1850 Brownsburg Academy, and the c. 1903 Palmer Academy. With the advent of public education, private academies were largely closed or reorganized as public schools.

As noted in HLF's *The Architecture of Historic Rockbridge*, the two-story Palmer Academy, which served children in the upper Buffalo Creek Valley, resulted from a sophisticated funding campaign that included a stock offering, testimonials from Washington and Lee University educators, and the donation of money, labor, and materials from local citizens. Largely for financial reasons, the school's board decided that Palmer could better serve the community as a public school. In 1906, it became the Palmer High School and Graded School.



Palmer School Group of Boys 1907 by Miller



Palmer School Group of Girls 1907 by Miller

This is not the first time that HLF has focused some of its efforts on historic schools. In 2017, HLF provided a \$2,000 grant for restoration work on the c. 1915 and 1926 Buena Vista Colored School. Later that year, HLF co-sponsored a showing of a film at Lexington's c. 1927 Lylburn Downing School on Julius Rosenwald and his efforts to fund the construction of African-American schools through the American South. HLF also awarded the Hamilton School Trustees \$10,000 for a new roof on the c. 1823 Hamilton field school. Work on that project is to begin in the spring of 2018.

*Palmer School
2018*



2017 Remembered in Photos



Larry Wiese (far left), Beverly Tucker, and Suzanne Rice present Brownsburg Museum Founders' Award to Dick Barnes, representing the museum, April 2017.



May Preservation Month tour of Falling Spring Presbyterian historic cemetery and grave of John Grigsby.



May Preservation Month Sacred Places Tour: Rev. Horace Douty discusses history of Oxford Presbyterian Church.



HLF Secretary Dee Joyce-Hayes greets visitors to HLF booth at the Rockbridge Community Festival, August 2017.



Lylburn Downing graduates visit memorabilia room at Lylburn Downing during Rosenwald Screening, September 2017.

Save The Date:



HLF Annual Meeting
Saturday, April 14, 2018
at the Palmer School
Community Center



Beverly Tucker and Rosa Wiggins at Rosenwald Screening September 2017.