

HISTORIC LEXINGTON

FOUNDATION

Winter 2021

Newsletter



HLF acquires Reid-White-Philbin House

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From the President's Desk

Transitions

The beginning of a new year is typically a time for transitions—the holidays and the old year are over; the promise of a new year is fresh. And, while we continue in this era of COVID-19, there is the hint of a promise of some sense of a return to normalcy.

We recently have lost some friends of HLF, including former board member Rosa Wiggins; Sue Van Leer, wife of former board member Ted Van Leer; and Ted DeLaney for whom our Evergreen Cemetery Fund is named. All three were supporters of HLF and various other causes and charities in our community. We mourn their loss and honor their memory by our continuing preservation work.

This is my first message as president of Historic Lexington Foundation. The history of HLF is intertwined with the history of Kappa Alpha Order, for which I serve as executive director. As many know, HLF was started in response to KA's attempted purchase and planned demolition of a historic home in the late 1960s for its new Lexington headquarters (KA was founded in Lexington but was headquartered in Atlanta at that time). Much has changed since then in Lexington. As the current executive director for KA, I am proud of my involvement in leadership for both KA and HLF. I learned the importance of preservation from my predecessor at KA, Dick Barnes, whose reputation for preservation is well-known. And KA, with its national headquarters now firmly rooted in Lexington, has been involved in two historic preservation projects, the historic Rockbridge County Jail and Mulberry Hill, our current national headquarters.

With the new year, I also want to recognize five retiring board members: Dee Joyce-Hayes, Bob Keefe, Suzanne Rice, Gene Sullivan, and Beverly Tucker. While all have made significant contributions to the future and success of HLF, Beverly Tucker deserves special recognition. She served two terms as president at two different times, and during her latest, she secured the two largest gifts in the foundation's history. First was a significant cash gift followed by a substantial estate gift from Margaret Davis. Second, right at the end of her term, HLF secured the gift of the Reid-White-Philbin House from an anonymous donor (more on this to come). These gifts will dramatically further our preservation mission in Lexington and beyond. I am grateful to these women and men who may have ended their service to the board but remain engaged on behalf of HLF.

Using part of the Margaret Davis gift, HLF was able to complete substantial repair and preservation work on the Henry Street Church in downtown Lexington. This was just the type of project Margaret Davis would have wanted, saving an old building that serves a continuing mission and purpose in our community.

As you can see, there is much good news. We have some new officers and new faces on the board who will help HLF in its continuing efforts, and we continue to be focused on preserving the places and structures that make our home special. Whether it is work in our historic cemeteries, documenting area slave dwellings, maintaining our easements, and supporting façade grants, HLF is also grateful for you, our donors, who make preservation possible in our community. Thank you for your continuing support. I look forward to keeping you informed of our progress.

Sincerely yours,
Larry Stanton Wiese
President

*Cover image of Reid-White-Philbin House
by Skip Ravenhorst*

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HLF Acquires Historic Reid-White-Philbin House

HLF has returned to its origins with the acquisition of a home now known as the Reid-White-Philbin House. The modern preservation movement in Lexington had its start on Lee Avenue with the threatened demolition of c. 1824 Beaumont (Barclay House). Citizen concern led to the organization of Historic Lexington Foundation in 1966. HLF would purchase threatened properties, stabilize the structures, and then sell them to buyers committed to the restoration of the properties. Before selling, HLF placed easements on the properties to ensure their preservation in perpetuity. These included the Alexander-Withrow House, the McCampbell Inn, and the Jacob Ruff House, all located on North Main Street.

One of four classical homes built between 1821 and 1824 on Lee Avenue, the Reid-White-Philbin House now has a Nelson Street address resulting from the construction of the United States Post Office on Lee Avenue. The late Federal-style home has a one-story front porch, perfectly scaled to the two-story brick façade. An addition was constructed in 1847 and is an integral part of the structure's integrity. The house was purchased in 1975 by Brigadier General Tobias Philbin, hence today it is referred to as the Reid-White-Philbin House.

As noted in *The Architecture of Historic Lexington*, Samuel McDowell Reid (1790–1869) was a prosperous lawyer and landowner who followed his father, Andrew, as clerk of the County Court. Andrew Reid was owner of c. 1801 Mulberry Hill, now the headquarters of the Kappa Alpha Order. Samuel also held membership in the building committees for several of Lexington's most prominent structures. He prepared the designs for his own house on what is today known as Lee Avenue. He also served as a Trustee of Washington College for half a century until his death, during which time he played a role in recruiting Robert E. Lee for the school's presidency. Lee spent his first days in Lexington in Reid's home.

The home is on the National Register of Historic Places. The nomination is on the website of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources. There one can learn more about Reid and his house, including the earlier 18th century stone house that is connected to Reid's home and the antebellum brick dependency that once served as a slave quarter.

While HLF purchased the previously mentioned structures on North Main, acquisition of the Reid-White-Philbin House was in the form of a gift by Reid House LLC. The Virginia limited liability company gifted the property to HLF knowing that the organization would maintain the house, and should it decide to sell the house, it would be to a buyer committed to the same. HLF now has an ad hoc committee in place that will determine the preservation needs of the house and ultimately its disposition.



HLF Executive Director Don Hasfurther points out architectural details to HLF board members Joan Harden and Charles Rappold.



HLF board members Catherine Harcus, Jane Brooke, Su Minor, and Mary Newman tour the Reid-White-Philbin House.



Planned Giving Supports HLF's Preservation Efforts

HLF is grateful to those whose planned giving has helped the organization further its mission of preserving historic properties in Rockbridge County and the cities of Lexington and Buena Vista. Those whose giving has helped HLF in the past include the late Chuck Philips, Herbert Preston, James Aldwin Hight, and Bob Johnson. HLF strives to use these gifts for specific purposes. For example, Johnson's gift established the Robert Johnson Façade Grant program to provide financial incentives to historic property owners in downtown Lexington to maintain the facades of those structures.

No other gift has had a greater impact on HLF's preservation work than that of the late Margaret Cole Davis. Her generosity has allowed HLF to conduct major preservation work on the Gospel Way Church of God in Christ on Henry Street in Lexington. The building was constructed in 1873 as St. Patrick's Catholic Church largely from monies of John Sheridan whose home was on North Randolph and Livery Stables on North Main.

To honor Ms. Davis, HLF published a small booklet in 2020 entitled *A Celebration of the Life of and Legacy of Margaret Cole Davis*. The introduction reads, "Upon and Before her death in June 2019, Margaret Davis left several wondrous unrestricted gifts to Historic Lexington Foundation in support of its overall purpose: to preserve and protect the historically important buildings of Rockbridge and to educate present and future generations about their architectural, cultural, economic, and social significance."



Carroll Painting crew paints steeple roof of Henry Street church.



Carroll Painting crew begins the work of painting the main roof of the Henry Street church.



Welsh Construction workers remove the gutters and replace fascia board in preparation for the installation of new gutters.

HLF Expresses Concern over Washington & Lee University's Plans for the McLaughlin Triangle

Historic Lexington Foundation has expressed its concerns over the fate of the buildings in the triangle fronting McLaughlin, West Nelson, and Glasgow Streets. Washington and Lee now owns all but the blue-colored house on the corner of McLaughlin and Nelson. They are currently rental properties, with the exception of the yellow board and batten house on McLaughlin Street that is empty and deteriorating.

HLF voiced its concerns in written testimony presented to the City Council for a November meeting to address the draft of the City's Comprehensive Plan 20240 (CP2040). In the statement, then HLF President Beverly Tucker expressed concerns over a land-use provision in the plan pertaining to the McLaughlin Triangle.

W&L had acquired the buildings over a period of many years, ostensibly to ensure their maintenance due to their close proximity to the university's campus. While Washington and Lee University's current master plan does not specifically address the homes on the triangle, HLF's testimony noted that the draft Comprehensive Plan states that the design and condition of the houses do not meet the university's expressed desire for accessibility and energy efficiency.

The second paragraph in the land-use statement goes on to state that any redevelopment of the triangle should be in line with the scale and architecture of adjacent homes. At the City Council meeting, the university's architect defended the language. Testimony provided by HLF and the Rockbridge Area Conservation

Council asked City Council to remove the paragraph from the draft Comprehensive Plan. As noted in the HLF testimony, retention of the second paragraph potentially serves as an encouragement for Washington and Lee to demolish the buildings and puts pressure on the City to acquiesce to future university master plan language with regard to redevelopment of the McLaughlin Triangle.

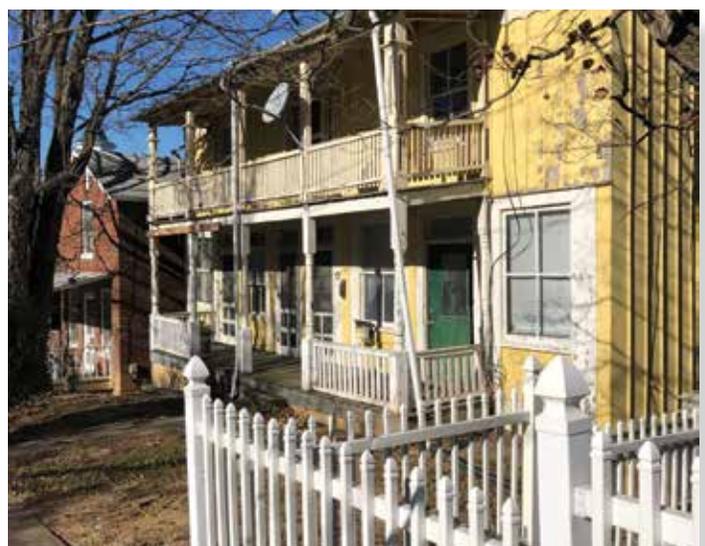
Despite these concerns, City Council voted to retain the language. Since then, a group called the Lexington Neighborhood Association has circulated a petition online opposing demolition of homes around the triangle and asking the City not to approve rezoning or special use exemptions of any kind that would allow this to occur. HLF, for its part, hopes to engage the university in a dialogue regarding its plans for the McLaughlin Triangle.



McLaughlin Triangle houses on West Nelson Street.



McLaughlin Triangle house on McLaughlin Street.



McLaughlin Triangle house on McLaughlin Street.



Historic Lexington Foundation Encourages Area Residents to Visit Brownsburg Museum Exhibit

HLF has developed a close working relationship with the town of Brownsburg and, in particular, with the Brownsburg Museum. The following article was provided to HLF by the museum.

The Brownsburg Museum will stay open though the winter for the first time since it was founded 10 years ago. By controlling the number of visitors at one time in the small 2-room museum, we can offer a safe escape from your home office or school room to a charming visit back in time when there were five country stores in Brownsburg.

The front room explains the rise and fall of country stores. The first permanent country store opened in Staunton in 1748. By the mid-1800s there were more than 2,500 country stores in Virginia. They were a connection to the outside world. They sold sugar from the West Indies, coffee from Brazil, bolts of cloth from Europe, and wine from Madeira.

Through the slamming screen door into the back room is the replicated country store. Children visiting marvel at the variety of things for sale in a small place: buttons, saws, brooms, produce, eggs, and milk. There is no plastic. Everything was recycled and reused. And, if you didn't have the money, you didn't have to pay! Between 2/3 and 3/4 of all sales were on credit. One woman told the story of her mother who made cheese, and bartered eggs and milk too. Often at the checkout, the country store owner owed them money!

Besides selling everything under the sun, the store was a post office and pharmacy. What might have been recommended during the pandemic lockdown in October of 1918 when churches, schools, and all public places were closed? If burning formaldehyde candles didn't help, how about "Hites Pain Cure, Good for Man and Beast"? You could rub it on your skin or drink it. It contained camphor, herbs, turpentine, and was 65% alcohol. One visitor asked if he could sample a sip!

Free private tours are available by appointment. Call Julie Fox at 774-279-9742.



University of Virginia Professor Visits Brownsburg Home of His Enslaved Ancestor

The Brownsburg area of Rockbridge County is home to numerous standing slave dwellings. Historic Lexington Foundation and the Brownsburg Museum began an effort in 2019 to document these structures. While the structures are still standing, little is known about the enslaved individuals that lived in these dwellings. A visit by University of Virginia Associate Professor of Engineering David Green to one of the slave dwellings on December 11 helped put a face to the brick and mortar.

Professor Green and his wife, Karen Sleezer, joined Brownsburg residents and museum affiliates Paul Hahn, Karen Parker, and Isabelle Chewning and HLF Executive Director Don Hasfurther

for a visit to the old McChesney farm just south of Brownsburg. The property owner, Mary Kay, led the group on a tour, including the brick slave dwelling and an adjacent historic log structure. The slave dwelling was the home of Green's enslaved ancestor on his paternal grandmother's side of the family.

During an interview conducted by WDBJ-7 reporter Bruce Young, Professor Green explained that his father had had a profound impact on his life and his interest in his family's genealogy. He stated that his great-great-great-great grandmother, Anne Redd, was a slave who lived at the McChesney farm. Anne Redd was enslaved by Robert McChesney, who gifted her to his daughter Anne McChesney McBride. Her husband, Isaiah McBride, assumed ownership.

During the interview, Professor Green discussed the institution of slavery and the fact that from a generational standpoint it was not all that long ago. Slavery is something that "people really have to get into to understand where we have been if we're to going to optimize where we're to go in the future," Green told Young during the interview.

Following the visit to the McChesney farm, Paul Hahn took David Green to view the slave dwelling at Verdant Acres, north of Brownsburg. HLF has given the owners a Lyle-Simpson Preservation Grant for a new roof for the structure. That two-room brick structure is similar to the one at the McChesney farm. The visit concluded with a visit to the Asbury Methodist Church Cemetery where Marie Redd (1841–1925) is buried.



Historic log structure next to brick slave quarters at McChesney farm.



Bruce Young films Mary Kay as she discusses the structures on the McChesney farm with Prof. David Green and his wife Karen Sleezer.



Mary Kay, David Green and Don Hasfurther at the old McChesney farm.

Just Arrived! The latest historic marker to commemorate Lexington's history

The first person to occupy the 1848 manse was William Spottswood White. The house sits on what is now known as White Street. Born in Hanover County, Dr. White graduated from Hampden-Sydney College and Union Theological Seminary and held a D.D. degree from Princeton. Prior to coming to Lexington to assume the ministerial responsibilities at Lexington Presbyterian, he served as chaplain at the University of Virginia.

He would be the minister to the devout Virginia Military Institute professor Major Thomas Jackson. The two became close friends, and Jackson probably was a frequent visitor in Dr. White's home. White's son, Hugh White, attended Jackson's Sunday school class and would later serve in 4th Virginia of the "Stonewall Brigade." Jackson and Dr. White exchanged letters until Jackson's death following the Battle at Chancellorsville. One of the most difficult letters Jackson had to write was to inform White of the death of Captain White, killed at Second Manassas. Father and son are buried in the family plot at nearby Oak Grove Cemetery, formerly Stonewall Jackson Memorial Cemetery, not far from Jackson's grave and monument.

HLF's hope is that more owners of homes in Lexington's historic residential districts will invest in a historic marker, thus enabling HLF to have a critical mass of markers so as to create a walking tour brochure of homes with the markers. This would help pedestrians learn more about Lexington's rich history.



Rosa Wiggins

1930–2021

Former Board Member and Dear HLF Friend.



In Memory of Theodore "Ted" DeLaney

One can honor Ted DeLaney by contributions to HLF with direction to the Ted DeLaney Cemetery Fund. All proceeds go to restoration of gravestones in Lexington's Evergreen Cemetery.

