

Newsletter

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Grace Episcopal Church
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From the President's Desk

Happy 2022! As we move forward into the new year, I hope this newsletter finds you and your family in good health, both physically and mentally, as our nation and localities continue to struggle against the COVID-19 pandemic. While COVID has certainly slowed the activities of the Historic Lexington Foundation, we carry on our work to preserve and study the aspects of Lexington and Rockbridge County that make it such a special place in which to live and work.

HLF persists in its support of our cemeteries, though that work has slowed a bit. Through the research and generous support of HLF Past President Reed Belden, we plan to recognize perhaps the oldest settlement in Rockbridge County, Timber Grove, near Timber Ridge. The Timber Ridge Presbyterian Church will host our Annual Meeting on April 2, when we will hear from Reed on his research. We also continue our focus on preserving and learning about the historic dwellings of enslaved people in the county with a May 7 visit to several such buildings in Brownsburg. As we note in this newsletter, we recently funded a grant to Grace Episcopal Church to replace original artistic stencils to help complete the renovation of this historic and important church in Lexington. We hope to be able to announce the purchase and future restoration of the Reid-White-Philbin House later this spring.

With a new year, we welcome new board members, Byron Faidley and Dee Joyce-Hayes (a returning board member). Both will enhance the board's interest and expertise in our ongoing work to fulfill our mission. With new board members, we also bid farewell to retiring board members, Buddy Atkins and Jim Busch. We thank them for their service.

As a final note, as always, I want to thank the board and our members and donors who have generously and graciously supported our mission with their time and treasure. With your help, we will continue our important work to preserve the history and fabric of our community. And, while we are so appreciative of your current support, I do hope you will consider making a future investment in the efforts of HLF by making a legacy gift from your estate. Such gifts, most recently from the Estate of Margaret Davis, can prove transformational.

We have plans for events, in person, this spring and summer, and I hope to see you there!

Larry Stanton Wiese
President

Cover image courtesy of Keith Gibson.

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Rediscovery and Renewal at Grace Episcopal Church

In 2021, the 1883 Grace Episcopal Church in Lexington underwent a major renovation. The work was performed by Kjellstrom + Lee with the guidance of the church's Liturgical Architecture Committee. The process was complicated and involved the procurement of Tennessee marble for the extended altar and chancel, the importation of encaustic tile from England, and the purchase of New Holland church furniture. The crown in the project was the purchase and installation of a new Casavant Frères organ from Canada's premier pipe organ manufacturer.

While minor in comparison to the totality of this work, HLF did play a role by providing funding for the re-creation of the original 1880s stenciling that had once adorned the walls of the church's interior. As noted in the church's summary of this work, the rediscovery of extensive decorative border polychrome painting during ongoing repairs and redesign of the nave and chancel and the organ installation was an exciting development at the church. The repairs to the plaster and repainting disclosed extensive areas of the original decorative finishes.

The church refers to this as the "rediscovery" because the striking color patterns were revealed 25 years earlier in 1996 during plaster repair and painting of the nave. The artwork dates back over 140 years to the construction of the church in 1883.

The vestry hired Matthew J. Mosca, the nation's leading historic paint conservator, to examine the decorative stenciling and make recommendations for its restoration or replication. Following recommendations in the report, the base wall color

was returned to a warm earth tone, replacing the existing off-white. In addition to creating a harmonious relationship with the wainscot, plaster wall, and ceiling vault, the new color became a vital step for the repainting of the decorative polychrome borders.

Decorative stencil painting is an ancient form of religious ornamentation. It is a labor-intensive process requiring planning and skill and, in the case of Grace Episcopal, six layers of paint. The work was undertaken and completed along the chancel wall on either side of the magnificent stained-glass window dedicated to Robert E. Lee and his wife, Mary Custis Lee.



Following renovation, stenciling appears near the new Casavant Frères organ. Image courtesy of Keith Gibson.



A paint conservator replicates the 1883 decorative stenciling.



The Reverend Tuck Bowerfind, Rector Grace Episcopal Church, Elizabeth Boetsch, HLF board Vice President, and Buster Lewis of the Liturgical Architecture Committee, admire the re-created stenciling along the chancel wall.



Putting a Human Face to Slavery in Rockbridge County

Each May for National Preservation Month, HLF conducts a series of events that the organization thinks will be of interest to and educational for our community. Regrettably, in 2021 HLF had to cancel its May events due to COVID-19. Building on those earlier plans, the organization will sponsor an exceptional series of events in 2022. The events focus on the institution of slavery and the need to preserve the history and the built environment associated with slavery in Rockbridge County.

Enslaved people worked in the industries in the area known today as Jordan's Point, participated in the construction of some of the area's finest antebellum homes, labored in the fields in support of the area's agricultural economy, and operated the furnaces and forges in places like Buffalo Forge. That is documented, but less is known about those enslaved individuals and their families. HLF hopes this May's events will provide insights into some of these humans and to the places they worked and where they lived.

Preservation Month events begin on May 7 with **STILL STANDING: Brownsburg's Slave Houses**, an opportunity for the public to visit five sites in the Brownsburg area with extant former slave houses. In 2020, HLF worked with Virginia Humanities and the organization "Saving Slave Places" to document these structures. In cooperation with the owners of these properties and in partnership with the Brownsburg Museum, HLF is pleased to open the slave houses to visitors on Saturday, May 7 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Each site will have docents who will speak to visitors on the architecture of the slave houses and the people who resided there. Among the participants, we expect to have one or more descendants of the people enslaved in these places. Participants

are invited to visit the Brownsburg Museum to sign in and pick up brochures with instructions for driving to the sites. The tour is free.

On May 14 at 2 p.m. at the First Baptist Church in Lexington, HLF is pleased to host a public presentation by Lucia (Cinder) Stanton entitled **From the Little Mountain: The Enslaved Families of Monticello and Beyond**. Ms. Stanton will draw on the results of a thirty-year oral history project to shed light on life in the cabins and workshops of Thomas Jefferson's Monticello. Her talk will explore the ways the enslaved men, women, and children survived and resisted the harsh realities of slavery. The "Getting Word" oral history project, which she directed, revealed the remarkable strength of family bonds in the face of these realities. How did Monticello's enslaved families maintain those bonds and, at the same time, hold on to hopes of freedom, two goals often incompatible under the institution of slavery? These issues will be illustrated by members of the well-known Hemings family, descendants of Sally Hemings, some of whom have lived in Lexington over the last two centuries.

Ms. Stanton retired in 2012 as Shannon Senior Historian at Monticello, where she worked for over 30 years. She is the author of *Those Who Labor for My Happiness: Slavery at Thomas Jefferson's Monticello*, a collection of essays on Jefferson the slaveholder and plantation manager, the enslaved families of Monticello, and some of their descendants. From 1993, she directed "Getting Word," a continuing research and oral history project that seeks to learn about Monticello's African-American families through interviews with their descendants—over 200 to date.

On May 28, Charles Dew, author of the acclaimed book, *Bond of Iron: Master and Slave at Buffalo Forge*, will speak at 2 p.m. at Falling



Brick slave house and period log house stand on the old McChesney farm, one of the sites on the May 7 tour. (Photo courtesy of Isabelle Chewning)



Castle Carberry, now known as Verdant Acres Farm, slave quarters will be open on May 7.



Buffalo Forge slave dwellings can be visited following Charles Dew's presentation on May 28.



HLF board member Joan Harden stands in front of Mt. Pleasant at Buffalo Forge.

Spring Presbyterian Church, south of Lexington on Falling Spring Road off Rt. 11. Following his presentation, Dr. Dew has agreed to a book signing of *Bond of Iron*. Participants will then have an opportunity to visit nearby Buffalo Forge, thanks to the property's owners.

Dr. Dew, as the title of his book describes, will speak about the masters and slaves at Buffalo Forge. William Weaver and Daniel and Emma Brady, all from Pennsylvania, are one side of the story, and the slave families the other. As in *Bond of Iron*, Dr. Dew looks at the enslaved families who worked in iron-making and farming operations for Weaver and Brady, and the individual workers, including Sam Williams and Garland Thompson.

A native of St. Petersburg, Florida, Dr. Dew is Ephraim Williams Professor of American History, Emeritus, at Williams College. He has a PhD from Johns Hopkins University with a concentration in the American South, the Civil War, and Reconstruction. He studied there under the noted historian C. Vann Woodward. In 1970–1971, he was a Visiting Associate Professor at the University of Virginia. His most recent book is *The Making of a Racist: A Southerner Reflects on Family, History, and the Slave Trade*.



The slave house at Whitehall can be viewed on May 7 during STILL STANDING: Brownsburg Slave Houses.



The slave kitchen at Mulberry Grove can be experienced during the May 7 event.



Mulberry Row, which runs for 1,000 feet alongside the main house at Monticello, was the center of slavery and plantation life at the home of Thomas Jefferson, who owned more than 600 slaves. (Photo by Stephen Barling)

PRESERVATION MONTH EVENTS

May 7, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.—STILL STANDING: Brownsburg's Slave Houses

May 14, 2 p.m.—From the Little Mountain: The Enslaved Families of Monticello and Beyond

May 28, 2 p.m.—Charles Dew Presentation and Book Signing



The Gift that Keeps on Giving: The Robert S. Johnson Façade Improvement Fund Continues to Make a Difference

In the nearly ten years since its establishment, the Robert S. Johnson Fund has assisted in some 15 façade improvements in Lexington's historic commercial district. The fund was created with an initial \$20,000 bequest left to HLF by the late Washington and Lee University professor Bob Johnson. After it learned of the bequest, HLF contacted Jon Ellestad, Lexington's City Manager, to see if the City would match the Johnson bequest in order to establish a fund to assist property and business owners. City officials readily agreed.

Since its establishment, grant funding has made an important difference in the appearance of the downtown. A grant helped in the restoration of metal handrails on steps and balconies and exterior shutters on the Alexander-Withrow House. Another grant assisted in the repair and repainting of the steeple on First Baptist Church. Grant funding assisted the Rockbridge Historical Society in the repainting of the exterior woodwork on the Campbell House, and helped the owner of the nearby c. 1790 stone building "The Castle" make important façade improvements.

The latest grant has gone to Lexington Real Estate Connection, at 31 South Main Street, for façade improvements to the historic c. 1845 Norgrove Building in which it is located. In the 1910s–1920s, large display windows with transoms and recessed entries were installed in the building's two storefronts. Sometime in the late 20th century, the display windows and transom at

#31 were ripped out and a more contemporary design featuring V-groove vertical wood planks above, smaller display windows below, and flanking "pilasters," were installed. The design was incompatible with the Greek Revival character of the Norgrove Building.

After investigating the existing storefront in 2021, realtor Leslie Giles and the building owner found that the original transom windows had been removed; so rather than completely replacing the storefront, they decided to remove or overlay non-historic woodwork to create a compatible new storefront. After gaining the approval of the Lexington Architectural Review Board and the concurrence of the HLF Façade Grant committee, work began in December.

The "pilasters" were removed, exposing wide brick piers and the stone foundation. Workmen extended the paneled frieze beneath the storefront cornice the full length of the building and prepped previously painted, damaged brickwork for repainting. Then the workmen repainted the brick piers, storefront elements, frieze, and storefront cornice to highlight the architecturally significant features. As noted by Giles, "The Norgrove Building is one of the most important buildings of Lexington's historic streetscape, and I've wanted to 'fix' the incompatible storefront for a long time." Due to the large expense involved, she further noted that the HLF Façade Improvement Grant made the effort possible.



A workman paints brick piers at 31 South Main, thus highlighting architectural features.

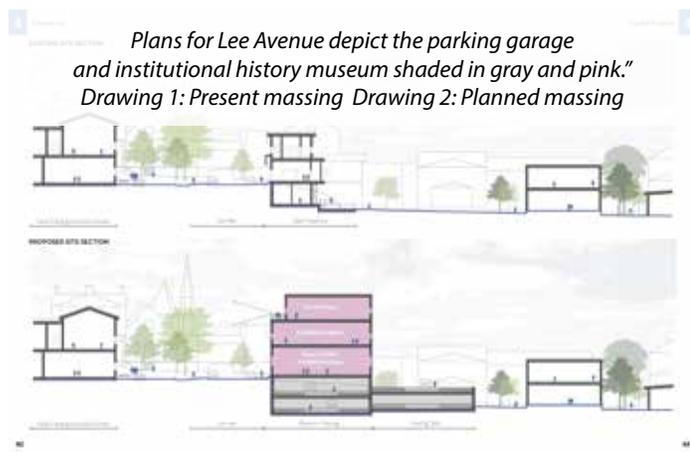


Johnson Fund grant provides façade improvements to Greek Revival c. 1845 Norgrove Building.

Washington and Lee University Applies to Rezone McLaughlin Triangle and Lee Avenue

Washington and Lee University has applied to the City of Lexington for rezoning of university-owned properties, including ones on Lee Avenue and within the McLaughlin Triangle bounded by McLaughlin Street, Nelson Street, and Glasgow Street. The application is to be heard during a meeting of the Lexington Planning Commission on February 24, at 5 p.m. at the Lylburn Downing Middle School located at 302 Diamond Street.

As part of its Master Plan, W&L intends to demolish the Casa Hispanica and the Chavis House on Lee Avenue and use those sites, together with an empty lot to the south, to build a multi-level parking garage and an institutional history museum. The new construction will be significantly taller than the W&L-owned Mattingly House at the corner of Lee and West Washington Street and the privately owned building that houses the Blue Sky Bakery at the corner of Lee and West Nelson Street. HLF has expressed concerns about the proposed buildings' massing and their impact on the viewshed and traffic along Lee Avenue to Grace Episcopal Church.



If approved, the rezoning request will remove all height, lot coverage, and setback restrictions on the designated parcels and, as noted by the Rockbridge Area Conservation Council, will impact traffic volume and patterns. Across Lee Avenue from Mattingly House and the planned parking deck, the Master Plan calls for the demolition of the Early Fielding building facing West Washington and next to Evans Dining Hall to make way for an

Admission and Financial Center. While the plan drawing shows a buffer of trees at sidewalk's edge along Lee Avenue, the new building is depicted as coming near the sidewalk's edge.



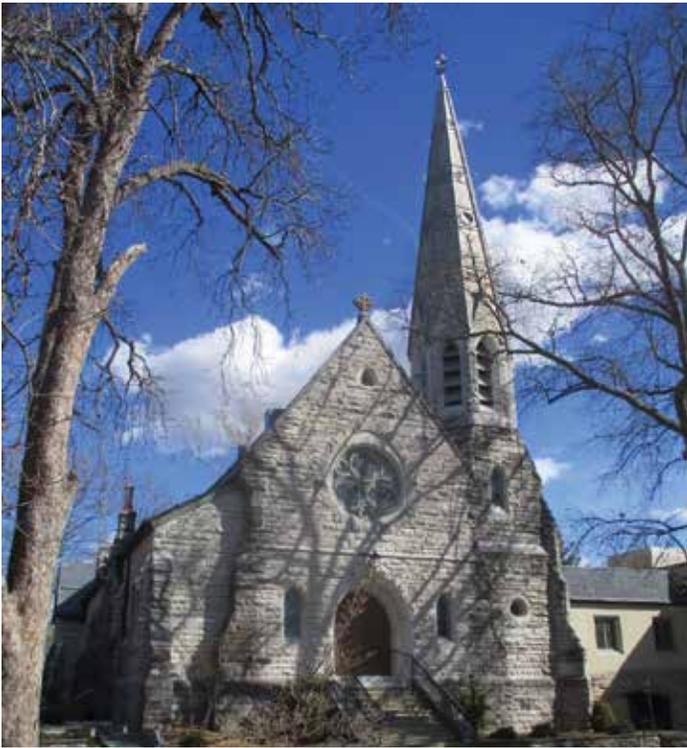
The Master Plan also calls for the renovation or replacement of the existing houses within the McLaughlin Triangle. The one "conceptional" option for renovation calls for the gut renovations of those houses with additions connecting the houses. With respect to this option, the Master Plan states that by doing so the history and character of the houses along Nelson Street will be maintained. HLF takes exception to this statement.

For many years, representatives of HLF have expressed concerns that the McLaughlin Triangle houses were not being maintained. In November 2020, HLF expressed its concern to Lexington's City Council regarding that section of the City's Comprehensive Plan draft dealing with the land use within the McLaughlin Triangle. HLF was concerned with the provision that the design and condition of those houses do not meet the needs of the university and that any development would be in line with the scale and architecture of the area.

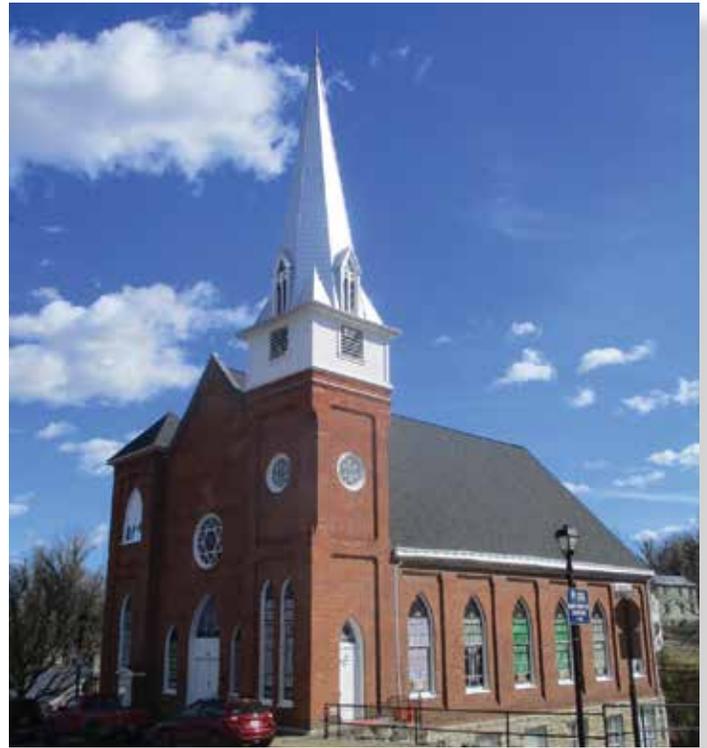
The McLaughlin Triangle is one of three sites examined in the Master Plan for upper class housing. The other two are located on the north campus area. HLF urges W&L to focus on those two sites and renovate the McLaughlin Triangle for other uses such as faculty housing.

Honoring Lexington's Historic Churches

HLF historic markers recognize structures of historic and architectural significance.



1883 Grace Episcopal Church.



1896 First Baptist Church.



Rev. Tucker Bowerfind and Elizabeth Boetsch display HLF historic marker for Grace Episcopal Church.



Pastor McKinley Williams stands in front of the First Baptist Church HLF historic marker.