

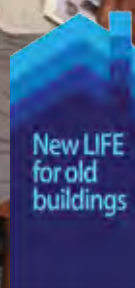
HISTORIC LEXINGTON
FOUNDATION

winter 2013

Newsletter

A Dialogue With Diamond Hill

page 3



2012
Annual
Report
Issue



From the President's Desk

Dear Friends,

This has been a busy, fast-moving year for Historic Lexington Foundation. As I grow older, the clock seems to be running faster, and it always startles me to write December on a check. This year has been no exception—but let me tell you a bit about what HLF accomplished in 2012.

One of the more important accomplishments was the preservation and sale of the Holmes House on Fuller Street. We had literally saved the house from demolition by the city due to its derelict condition. Thanks to the dedicated and skilled work of contractor Mike Martin, we stabilized the building and cleaned the inside of a wide variety of stuff ranging from broken flooring to large deposits of bat droppings. This past summer we sold the house to Charles Jacob from Maryland, who chose to establish his home in Lexington. He has put a lot of effort into the continuing rehabilitation, while preserving the exterior charm of its 1870's origin.

This summer, we dedicated a memorial to Pam Simpson commemorating her contributions to Lexington and Rockbridge County. The granite monument was sculpted by local sculptor John Mason and is on the east side of Hopkins Green. There was a large turnout for the dedication, with good press coverage.

We have had quite a turnover on the Board this year due to relocations or illnesses. We were able to recruit four terrific replacements, Mary Stuart Gilliam, Matt Paxton, George Brooke, and Arthur Bartenstein. Mary Stuart and Matt bring long histories with HLF. At the end of 2012, we will be losing Alec Wilder and Rick Bruno, whose contributions to HLF have been huge.

We have made an effort to work more closely with the other local history-focused organizations, Rockbridge Historical Society, and Preservation Virginia. HLF trustees Beverly Tucker and Laura Lembas largely put together an exhibit on Lexington's Diamond Hill community. The exhibit was on display at the Historical Society's Campbell House from May through December. It documented the individuals and institutions in the Diamond Hill and Green Hill communities from the mid-19th century to the present.

Beginning January first, HLF will have a new President. Skip Ravenhorst will be assuming the role of President. Both Beverly Tucker and I will remain on the executive committee. Please wish Skip well. I thank you for the privilege of being your President this year.

Sincerely,

Paul Miller
President
HLF Board of Trustees

(cover photo courtesy of Jonathan Schwab of The News-Gazette)

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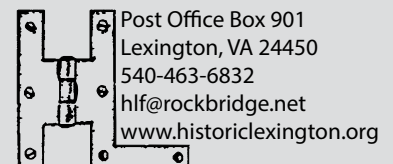
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HLF Recognizes the Contributions of Lexington's African American Community

What began in 2011 as an HLF oral history program led by HLF trustee Beverly Tucker, developed into an ambitious 2012 effort focused on the historically African American community of Diamond Hill and Green Hill. The oral histories became the basis of an exhibit at the Rockbridge Historical Society's Campbell House entitled "A Dialogue with Diamond Hill." Tucker and fellow trustee Laura Lembas were the principal architects of the exhibit. Co-sponsor Rockbridge Historical Society noted that it was one of the best-attended exhibits in recent memory at the Campbell House. The picture on the cover of the newsletter is of families in Lexington for the annual August reunion of the Cedar Hill Baptist Church. The families, which came from as far away as Tennessee and Ohio, took time to visit the exhibit.

With the guidance of current and former residents of Diamond Hill and Green Hill, HLF also published in 2012 a walking tour brochure of Lexington's African American community. HLF executive director Don Hasfurther authored the brochure's text and Emilie Davis of Mariner Media provided the design assistance. As noted in the brochure, "Diamond Hill is the story of people. It is the story of African-Americans, such as William Hayden Holmes. Harry Lee Walker, John B. Thompson, and Zach and Arlena Franklin. It is also the story of European-Americans like Irish immigrant and Civil War veteran John Sheridan, who lived on Diamond Hill and helped in its development." The brochure is available in the Lexington-Rockbridge Visitor Center.

Perhaps the most exciting development to come from the oral histories is a book to be published in early 2013 based on the oral history interviews. *The House on Fuller Street—Recollections of Lexington's African American Community* is authored by Dr. Tucker. Sponsored by HLF, the book should be available this summer. Please contact HLF for additional details.



WALKING TOUR OF THE DIAMOND HILL & GREEN HILL COMMUNITY

Lexington, Va



Cover top left to right: Patrick Payne, VMI cook in the 1890s, courtesy of VMI Archives; Blandome; marching band on N. Main Street; Lylburn Downing School

Walking Tour Map

Diamond Hill & Green Hill Community



Note: Locations 16 and 18 are located outside the area covered by the general map. Some patrons may choose to drive to the address listed in lieu of walking.

Generously sponsored by:



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MAKING SENSE OF INVESTING

- ★ 105 N. Randolph Street
- ★ 112 N. Randolph Street
- ★ 201 N. Randolph Street
- ★ 207 N. Randolph Street
- ★ 214 Massie Street
- ★ 205 Fuller Street
- ★ 12 Fuller Street
- ★ 300 E. Washington Street
- ★ 9 Tucker Street
- ★ 101 Tucker Street
- ★ 109 Henry Street
- ★ 103 N. Main Street
- ★ 29-33 N. Main Street
- ★ 23 N. Main Street
- ★ 30 N. Main Street
- ★ 118 S. Randolph Street
- ★ 300 Diamond Street
- ★ 321 N. Main Street

Walking Tour Locations

1. 105 N. Randolph Street The original two over two brick structure with basement kitchen was built in 1849 by Diego Evans, a free black businessman, and his wife. They would sell the house and emigrate to Liberia, a nation founded by freed U.S. slaves in 1847, where they planned to start an import-export business. Instead, like so many of their compatriots, they died of disease.

2. 112 N. Randolph Street Irish immigrant and Civil War veteran John Sheridan purchased the property and made it his home in 1887. That same year, the Sheridan Livery Stable was completed on N. Main Street. The Randolph Street property subsequently had many owners and served as the site of numerous businesses. In 1970, J.B. Lewis, Jr. purchased the property and operated it as a funeral parlor.

3. 201 N. Randolph Street The 1893 "Sheridan House" was designed by William G. McDowell, architect of the 1897 Rockbridge Courthouse, as well as many prominent residences in Lexington. Located on the highest point on Randolph Street, the house was occupied by John Sheridan until his death in 1929.

4. 207 N. Randolph Street The home was purchased in 1893 by William Price. Born in 1869, Price would serve as butler to Curtis Lee, son of Robert E. Lee. His daughters, Martha, Laura, and Frances, all became educators. Frances Price Ragsdale taught at the Buena Vista Colored School from 1935 to 1957.

5. 214 Massie Street One of the more unique buildings in the community, the ground floor is of stone construction, while the upper floor is frame. It was the home of Dr. Alfred W. Pleasants, Sr. and Dr. Alfred W. Pleasants, Jr. who graduated from Leonard Medical School of Shaw University in Raleigh and Meharry Medical College in Nashville, respectively.

6. 205 Fuller Street Hayden and Rebecca Holmes moved to Lexington from Amherst County following the Civil War. They purchased a small structure on Fuller Street in 1876 and expanded it significantly over the next two decades. Hayden Holmes was a Trustee of the First Baptist Church and a professional cook and waiter. The home was purchased and partially restored in 2010 by Historic Lexington Foundation to prevent its demolition.

7. 12 Fuller Street The substantial early 20th century building was home to John B. Thompson and his family. Thompson was an entrepreneur and a leader in Lexington's African-American community. Among his entrepreneurial activities, he was a caterer, who together with his wife, would cater Fancy Dress and other parties at Washington and Lee University. He used his earnings to acquire a great deal of real estate in Lexington, including Thompson's Knoll.

8. 300 E. Washington Street Designed by architect Isaac E.A. Rose, the Ruffner School was built in 1892 for the education of Lexington's white children. The black children of Diamond Hill and Green Hill would have to walk beyond the community to the "Lexington Colored Graded School" on S. Randolph Street next to the Randolph Street Methodist Church. The Ruffner building now serves as Lexington City Hall.

9. 9 Tucker Street Built in 1897, the home was owned by Zach and Arlene Franklin and operated as the Franklin Colored Tourist Home by the couple. The home was a place where African-American visitors to Lexington could find housing during the period of segregation. It operated as a tourist home until Mrs. Franklin's death in 1952.

10. 101 Tucker Street* Jacob Fuller, a classical scholar and librarian at Washington College, built an imposing Federal home in the late 1820s at the top of Henry Street (then Locust Street). John Randolph Tucker, a founder of the Washington and Lee Law School, acquired the property in 1872, remodeled it in the Italianate style, and named it Blandome. The property was acquired in 1917 by Harry Lee Walker, a prominent black businessman. His daughter, Mrs. C. M. Wood, acquired the house from her father. The Wood family played an important role in the founding of the Lylburn Downing School.

11. 109 Henry Street With the construction of the railroad following the Civil War, the area's Irish immigrant population grew. In 1873, St. Patrick's Parish was formed in Lexington. The same year, construction began on the parish church at 109 Henry Street. Irish immigrant John Sheridan played a major role in the establishment of the parish and construction of St. Patrick's Church.

12. 103 N. Main Street* The present First Baptist Church building was completed in 1896. The Negro membership of the Lexington Baptist Church (now Manly Memorial) requested and received letters of dismission in 1867 in order to found the Lexington African Baptist Church. For 25 years, worship services were held in a frame building on a lot adjacent to the present building. One of the first financial contributions to build the 1896 church came from Lylburn Downing, Lexington-born African-American minister at Roanoke's First Avenue Presbyterian Church.

13. 29-33 N. Main Street The Sheridan Livery Stable was completed in 1887 for John Sheridan. Sheridan had the responsibility for carrying the mail and operating the stagecoach line between Lexington, Staunton, and Hot Springs. In 1919, the building became the Rockbridge Steam Laundry Corporation.

14. 23 N. Main Street The John Ruff House was built in 1811 and served as the Ruff family residence and hat factory for the next 70 years. In 1883, Lexington Lodge No. 2461, G.U.D. of Odd Fellows, established residence in the building. The Grand United Order was the African-American Odd Fellows organization founded in 1843, whereas the Independent Order of Odd Fellows was the white counterpart.

15. 30 N. Main Street The Willson-Walker House was built in 1820 as the residence of Captain William Willson, local merchant, postmaster, and treasurer of Washington College. In 1911, Harry Lee Walker acquired the property and turned the ground floor into his butcher shop, while the family lived above. He would subsequently purchase Blandome (see 101 Tucker Street) and move his family to Tucker Street.

16. 118 S. Randolph Street In 1864, the black and white members of the Randolph Street Methodist Church separated. The white congregation built a new church, while the black congregation retained the frame church building on Randolph Street. The congregation tore down this building in 1892 and replaced it with the present brick structure. Andrew Carnegie donated half of the cost of the church's pipe organ.

17. 300 Diamond Street* Now a community center, the school was dedicated on September 11, 1927 in honor of the African-American minister Lylburn Downing. Downing was born in 1862 in Lexington in the household of Governor James McDowell. The school served Lexington's black students grade 1 through 10 until 1944, when it added grades 11 and 12. It was only then that black students in Lexington could graduate from high school without having to leave Lexington.

18. 321 N. Main Street In 1927, Progressive Lodge No. 266 of the Knights of Pythias purchased this property and built the current structure. The African-American Knights of Pythias was a secret society founded in Richmond in 1864 and dedicated to the principles of Friendship, Benevolence, and Charity. After the lodge failed to make payments during the beginning of the Great Depression, the building was purchased at auction by Knights of Pythias Trustee John B. Thompson. It continued to operate as the Knights of Pythias and was a major center of the African-American community. Members of the Count Basie Orchestra are said to have jammed there during one Fancy Dress performance. Following John Thompson's death, the property was sold in 1977 to American Legion Post 291.

**Listed on the National Register of Historic Places*

HLF and City of Lexington to Inaugurate Façade Improvement Grant Program in 2013

In late 2012, HLF and the City of Lexington agreed on the terms for the establishment of a façade grant program to serve as an incentive for property owners with buildings in the downtown historic commercial district to accomplish needed façade repairs. The funding mechanism is the Robert S. Johnson Fund named in memory of the late W&L Professor of Mathematics Robert S. Johnson, whose bequest to HLF is being used to fund the first year of the program. HLF and the City have each agreed to provide \$10,000 for the program's first year.

Unlike the last HLF façade grant program, which funded primarily business signs and awnings, the new fund will provide grants for the maintenance and preservation of facades. Examples of work eligible for grants include mortar re-pointing, window repair, repainting of exterior elements, chimney repair and flashing, exterior shutter repair or replication, and cornice repair. Grant priority will be given to projects emphasizing proper preservation techniques and materials, e.g., window repair rather than replacement, proper mortar type for historic brick re-pointing, etc.

The pictures on this page are illustrative of the sort of maintenance and preservation projects that might be eligible for grants. For purpose of the grant program, façade is defined as exterior wall surfaces, and, as such, the backside of buildings are covered by the program.

Grants may constitute as much as one-quarter of the project cost with a cap of \$2,000 per grant. Projects at a \$8,000 or higher level are eligible for grants up to but not exceeding \$2,000. Grant applications will be avail at HLF and the Office of Building Planning and Zoning at 300 E. Washington Street.

Additionally, CornerStone Bank is establishing a low-interest loan program to help fund larger projects. Such projects might include roof repair or replacement and HVAC upgrades to assist in the removal of window air-conditioning units.



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A list of those whose gifts were received during the year-end 2011 Annual Campaign

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Financial reports for current and previous fiscal years are available for inspection at the HLF office. If you would like to review these or any other organizational documents, please call or email us to make an appointment.

2012 Remembered in Photos



- (top left) HLF Trustee Bruce Macdonald presents John Adamson with Founders Award for restoration work on the Old Rockbridge County Jail. The event took place at historic Thorn Hill.
- (top right) Dedication of Pamela Simpson Memorial at Hopkins Green. From left to right in back—Reed Belden, Peter Simpson, Laura Simpson, John Mason (sculptor), Paul Miller, Don Hasfurther, Bob Lera (deputy mayor). In front on either side of sculpture are Pam's grandchildren Helen and Henry.
- (left) Lylburn Downing Middle School 8th grade students visit Diamond Hill exhibit at Campbell House. (Claudia Schwab photo)
- (below) The Rockbridge Committee for the establishment of a Lewis & Clark Eastern Legacy Trail comprised of HLF, Rockbridge Historical Society, Preservation Virginia, Rockbridge Area Conservation Council, and others interested in the National Park Service initiative. (Jonathan Schwab photo)



SAVE The Date! ►

Times and locations TBA

April 12 (evening) HLF Annual Meeting and Founders Awards at historic Mulberry Hill in Lexington

May's National Preservation Month Activities

May 1 (evening) Presentation on the area's Gothic Revival Architecture by Architectural Historian Dan Pezzoni

May 4 (afternoon) Tour of area's Gothic cottage style homes

May 11 (afternoon) Tour and lecture at Beechenbrook Chapel