

THE ORIGINS OF HISTORIC LEXINGTON FOUNDATION

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WITH THE RECENT ENACTMENT of a historic zoning ordinance, historic preservation can be said to have come of age in Lexington. Individual preservation projects still face plenty of hurdles, but there now seems to be a growing acceptance here of the idea that preserving the community's architectural heritage is good for economic as well as aesthetic reasons.

An organized movement for preservation here began with the reactivation of the Rockbridge Branch of the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities in March 1964.

An APVA branch had been active here as early as the 1890s when efforts were made to preserve [the ruins of] Old Monmouth Church¹ and again in the 1930s when it was concerned primarily with the unsuccessful effort to save the old covered bridge at East Lexington.² Also doomed to failure were efforts to save the Blue Hotel and several other distinctive local architectural landmarks.

But in the middle 1960s the climate for preservation was better. Scarcely anyone in Virginia was unfamiliar with the Williamsburg restorations and many had been greatly impressed by the architectural gems successfully preserved in Savannah, Charleston, Georgetown and Old Salem.

A spark that helped rekindle the APVA here was a fairly innocent-looking announcement in the local newspaper February 5, 1964, that Kappa Alpha national fraternity had purchased the Barclay property on

Originally entitled "Preservation Profile" and presented to the Fortnightly Club in February 1972. Mr. Paxton, a founder of Historic Lexington Foundation, is the former publisher and editor of *The Lexington News-Gazette*. Valedictorian of his graduating class at Washington and Lee in 1949, he earned a graduate degree from the Columbia School of Journalism.

Lee Avenue and would move its national headquarters to Lexington.* The fraternity planned to raze the house on the property and erect a “classical-style” office building on the site.

Prime movers in the APVA revival were Mrs. B. McCluer Gilliam and Miss Louise Moore and the initial meeting in March 1964 with APVA officials from Richmond was held at Miss Moore’s house.

Because the two prime movers were reticent about presiding at meetings, they prevailed on the writer to accept the title of “director” of the local branch and as co-secretaries they were the main-springs of the organization.³

A letter was sent out and the chapter soon had more than 100 members. The letter listed four purposes of the group:

1. “To encourage restoration and preservation of buildings reflecting the history and architecture of Rockbridge County
2. “To make a thorough study of those buildings which should be preserved and to complete a survey which has been undertaken by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.
3. “To encourage public interest in and appreciation of the fine old buildings of the town and county.
4. “To arouse public concern for the appearance of our town”

The letter noted several buildings “which deserve our immediate concern,” including the Barclay House and the Alexander-Withrow House.

Initial chapter board members, in addition to the three mentioned above, were Mrs. J. P. Alexander, Mrs. E. V. Brush, N. D. Chapman, Col. Donald B. Clayton Jr., Mrs. Cole Davis, Miss Mary M. Galt, Weir R. Goodwin, Mrs. A. L. Lancaster, Mrs. John Locher, Mrs. Hunter McClung, Dr. Robert Munger, Miss Mary Monroe Penick and Mrs. Paul Welles.⁴

The local chapter immediately began a survey of buildings and completed the research necessary to have them entered in the Historic American Buildings Survey, of the Department of the Interior, which is housed in the Library of Congress.⁵ The quality of this work, directed by Mrs. Gilliam, was praised by preservation officials.

* From Atlanta

The Barclay House on Lee Avenue, known as Beaumont. Its threatened demolition in the mid-1960s led to creation of the Rockbridge area’s modern preservation movement. Photo courtesy of Sally Mann.



Later, arrangements were made through the APVA to have a photographic specialist from the National Park Service photograph a number of noteworthy buildings in the area for the Library of Congress files.⁶

Measured drawings of some of these same buildings were subsequently done under the auspices of the Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission and the University of Virginia School of Architecture.⁷

The APVA compiled a walking tour folder in which architecturally interesting buildings were noted. This tour has been a popular feature at the local chamber of commerce office.

But the real nuts and bolts of preservation is the saving of buildings from destruction.

The APVA’s fight to save the Barclay House was a dramatic story with a happy ending.

On the day the newspaper announced the purchase by Kappa Alpha, Colonel Clayton, an organizer of the APVA, wrote Henry J. Foresman, a member of the KA National Executive Council, enclosing sketch plans for remodeling the property. Colonel Clayton, who had lived for a time in the Barclay House, said that aside from sentimental or historical considerations he believed remodeling the existing building “would result in substantial savings for the Council.”⁸

Several months later, on June 11, Paul Speake, a Birmingham, Ala., architect and Tom Paulson of Richmond, Calif., members of the KA Council, made a visit to Lexington, and Colonel Clayton, who had known Mr. Speake in Birmingham, conducted the visitors through the Barclay House.

The visit was followed up by a letter from the APVA to Mr. Speake which noted that one of the reasons for the formation of the APVA chapter was “an interest in preserving the Barclay House which occupies a strategic position on what is probably the town’s finest street.”

The letter continued, “We feel also that KA has a wonderful opportunity here to set an example which can in the future be pointed to by those interested in preserving the attractive flavor of this old town.”⁹

Bad news came back July 22 in a letter from Speake saying that it had been the Executive Council’s decision at its recent meeting that it would “not be practical for us to restore or convert” the existing building. “From our standpoint there are many reasons why a 100-year-old non-fireproof residence does not meet our requirements.”¹⁰

A letter from the APVA to Mr. Speake on July 31 expressed “keen disappointment” and suggested that Kappa Alpha Order had “placed itself in the position of having quite a public relations job to do in Lexington.”¹¹

Meanwhile, other options for the fraternity were being explored. Mr. Foresman had inquired about the availability of Col Alto, but an inquiry from the APVA had brought a definite reply from Washington and Lee University President Fred C. Cole that the University was not interested in selling that property. The APVA director mentioned to Mr. Foresman that if any alternate proposal could be developed for a site, “I believe we have a buyer who wants to restore the Barclay property.”¹²

Bishop Lloyd Craighill, a member of Alpha Chapter of KA, wrote Mr. Speake urging that at least the facade of the Barclay House be restored.¹³ A poem by former Lexingtonian Laura Burks Alnutt expressing sadness over the destruction of the house was published in *The News-Gazette* editorial columns on Aug. 12.¹⁴

In a letter Aug. 24 to the APVA Mr. Speake wrote, “It is distressing to find ourselves most unintentionally giving offense to you and others in Lexington. My personal wish is that someone might come forward with an offer to buy the place for preservation.” But he hastened to add that he had no authority to offer it for sale.¹⁵

The APVA replied (on August 28): “Those of us who would like to see the house preserved are making every effort in a quiet way to find another equally suitable site” for KA.¹⁶

Both sides in the conflict appeared exhausted and the correspondence ceased until another innocent-looking publication rallied the forces of the preservationists.

The local newspaper published, on Jan. 13, 1965, an architect’s sketch of the low profile structure which was to be the KA national headquarters. The picture caption said ground breaking exercises were planned for Aug. 27 during the national fraternity’s 100th anniversary convention.¹⁷

Correspondence resumed, and William E. Forester, executive secretary of Kappa Alpha Order wrote on Feb. 8 inviting the director of the local APVA chapter and two other Lexington citizens of his choosing to meet with the KA Executive Council in Washington for lunch on Saturday, March 6. The time from 12:30 to 3:00 was to be reserved for discussion with the Lexington delegation.¹⁸

The APVA delegation, consisting of the director and Royster Lyle, presented the case for preservation to the full Kappa Alpha Council.

The fraternity was urged to come here and set up its offices for the time being in the Barclay House, spending the minimum to adapt it to their needs.

They were invited to get their feet on the ground in Lexington, bring the delegates to their 100th anniversary convention here and show them “that charming old house and get their reaction to it; to get some people who are really specialists in restoration to go over the place and see if you have something there really worth salvaging.”

It was pointed out that since the national fraternity also owned the Reid-White House*, it actually controlled the finest block of houses in Lexington. All four houses on the west side of the block, it was noted, “forming a harmonious unit, were here on the scene at the time of your founding. They formed a center of social life in the town and undoubtedly many interesting historical associations could be found to relate them to your founding.”

Throwing up a challenge to the fraternity officials, the local spokesmen declared that “Sigma Nu in coming to Lexington had only a rock . . . and a yellow rose bush,” but they had “fully capitalized on these meager historical resources.”

* Now known as the Reid-White-Philbin House



The Reid-White House, another of the historic residences on Lee Avenue. Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Getting maybe a bit carried away as he warmed to his subject, the APVA director suggested that there was the possibility of getting the City Council to name the block where the KA properties were located Kappa Alpha Square in gratitude for a landmark restoration project.¹⁹

Mr. Lyle told the Council about a report on tourism being prepared for the local chamber of commerce by Thomas G. McCaskey, vice president of Colonial Williamsburg. The comment on the Barclay House in the McCaskey report was strong, too strong to be quoted verbatim to the fraternity council.

The travel expert had urged the chamber to “take a firm stand on the destruction of a beautiful old house on Lee Street by the Kappa Alpha Fraternity. The west side of this street, filled with stately homes, set well back on wide green lawns, is one of the jewels of Lexington. Every civic-minded person in the area should be enlisted to demand that the national headquarters of KA either use a conforming structure or build elsewhere. It is a disgrace, if not an affront to the pride of Lexington to allow the planned desecration to proceed,” he wrote.²⁰

On the basis of the discussion in Washington, the APVA group was sufficiently encouraged to write the National Trust for Historic Preservation asking for names of persons who could do an architectural study of the Barclay House and inquiring whether the National Trust could do anything to make such a study financially attractive to the fraternity officials.²¹

The official action of the KA Council in Washington was soon reported to the local APVA group by Richard Feller, a dominant member of the council and treasurer of the fraternity’s housing corporation.

In a letter dated March 19 he wrote that:

There would be no demolition of the Barclay House before the Council’s meeting in June.

The fraternity would be willing to consider an offer to purchase the property for the full cost they had invested in it.

Until June, their willingness to consider any such offer was predicated upon the availability of an “equally desirable” alternate site in Lexington.²²

However, in a personal letter a few days later to the APVA director, Mr. Feller made his position clear, when he wrote, “If you and those in Lexington who share your views about our headquarters persist in forcing us to study a use of the present Barclay House, then I fear it may be the ultimate straw that breaks the camel’s back . . . I frankly feel that the chances are now just 50-50 that Kappa Alpha will ever erect a headquarters site in Lexington.

“I would hope you will choose to mold opinion so that we can proceed unimpeded on our chosen present course of action.”²³

In similar vein he wrote Mr. Lyle, who had offered to assist the fraternity with its public relations efforts, “the greatest public relations assistance you could offer KA today would be to influence opinion to let us proceed as planned on the Barclay site. Without this I fear the whole project may be in jeopardy.”²⁴

The APVA advised Mr. Feller March 26 that the fraternity might want to take another look at a site that had been previously rejected. The property referred to was a tract owned by the late Dr. Howard Mitchell across Rt. 60 from Liberty Hall, where, it had been announced, W&L was studying the possibility of developing a companion college campus.²⁵

A quick reply came back from Mr. Feller, “We would not give any consideration to another site unless we had a bona fide offer for purchase of the Barclay property.”²⁶

Unwilling to give up the idea that KA might be induced to restore the Barclay House, the APVA branch had been advised by the National Trust that help might be obtained from J. Everette Fauber of Lynchburg, Virginia, Preservation Officer for the American Institute of Architects.

Mr. Fauber graciously offered his help. He visited Lexington as the guest of Col. and Mrs. B. McCluer Gilliam, inspected the Barclay property and prepared, at no cost to the APVA, a proposal, with sketches, for adaptation of the property for the national headquarters of Kappa Alpha.

The Fauber report was received the first week in May²⁷ and the same week two other big salvos were fired in the preservation battle.

General Lemuel Shepherd had been conducted on a tour of the Barclay property by James R. Gilliam and B. McCluer Gilliam, both KAs. The former Marine Corps commandant, who was also honorary chairman of the campaign for the new KA national headquarters, wrote fraternity officials in early May, “I am fully in accord with protests being voiced by the citizens of Lexington.”²⁸

And that same week Robert R. Garvey Jr., executive director of the National Trust, wrote Dr. John Nowell, KA president, advising him that the four houses on Lee Avenue had been accepted for inclusion at the Library of Congress in the Historic American Buildings Survey.²⁹

Mr. Feller’s response to Mr. Fauber’s plans were that “they are not satisfactory to me personally.

“There are two reasons why I do not accept and doubt that I ever will be able to accept his proposals,” he wrote.

“First . . . we are interested in a strictly utilitarian office . . . in a one floor structure.

“Secondly, as a builder no one can possibly tell me that it is not considerably more expensive to remodel, renovate or restore an old property than it is to start from the ground and build a new one.

“I am certain we could never raise the money to restore an old property. Furthermore, I personally am completely opposed to it.”³⁰ There matters stood.

There was no groundbreaking ceremony at the centennial convention in August of that year.

It was then that Col. and Mrs. C. C. Tutwiler came forward on Sept. 10 with their offer to purchase the Barclay property.³¹ The KA council decided to go ahead and sell the property even though they had not found another site in Lexington to their liking.

Consummation of the sale was reported in the local newspaper March 23, 1966. In announcing the sale a spokesman for the fraternity said it would ensure the preservation and restoration of the 130-year-old residence. The Tutwilers announced that they had retained Mr. Fauber as architect for the restoration.³²

Subsequently Kappa Alpha purchased the Mitchell property, but fraternities have fallen upon lean years and the headquarters project has never materialized.*

Even before the sale of the Barclay House it was announced that the APVA board was advising its membership in late 1965 of its concern about the future of the Alexander-Withrow House.³³

Long tied up in an unsettled estate, this strategic and unique building at the corner of Main and Washington was deteriorating from neglect.

It was felt that a new approach was needed to assure its preservation. The local APVA discussed the possibility of forming a non-profit foundation to purchase the Alexander-Withrow House, as attorneys had indicated it would be sold when the estate was settled.

The actual organization of Historic Lexington Foundation was initiated by the local Chamber of Commerce after the completion of the tourist study by McCaskey. As a member of the chamber board, Mr. Lyle proposed its formation, and he was appointed chairman of the organization committee. Other members named to serve with him were R. P. Rodes and Dabney Carver.³⁴

The Committee obtained copies of the charter and bylaws of Historic Richmond Foundation as models.³⁵

The APVA branch was the nurturing group for the new foundation, in spite of the fact that the state APVA was opposed to the idea. It had been determined that local branches of the APVA could not own property outright, but that all APVA property was owned by the state organization with the various properties being managed by the local branches. The local APVA board did not feel that this policy gave them

* In 1986, Kappa Alpha did move its headquarters to Lexington, initially occupying space in the former county jail but moving in 2004 to Mulberry Hill, a 200-year-old, late Georgian-style mansion at the west edge of town, abutting the Washington and Lee campus.

the flexibility needed in dealing with the situation presented by the Alexander-Withrow House.

At a meeting of the local APVA board May 4, 1966, it was determined that Historic Lexington Foundation should be an organization to acquire property and that the APVA would continue to promote research and arouse interest in buildings of historical and architectural importance.³⁶

A charter for the foundation was drafted by M. W. Paxton Sr., and on Sept. 26, 1966, the State Corporation Commission issued a charter to Historic Lexington Foundation. The incorporators listed were D. B. Clayton Jr., Royster Lyle Jr. and Carrington C. Tutwiler Jr.

The purposes of the charitable, non-profit organization were listed in the charter as:

“To acquire and preserve houses, buildings, monuments, sites and objects in and around the City of Lexington that are connected with or illustrative of the history and culture of Lexington and Rockbridge County; to encourage and assist others to do likewise; to receive gifts for such purposes; to sell, mortgage, lease or transfer the property of the corporation, and, in general to be an educational institution to educate the people of Lexington and elsewhere in knowledge and understanding of history, architecture, and culture.”³⁷

At the organizational meeting of the foundation, held Oct. 10, 1966, Colonel Clayton was elected president, Mr. Lyle vice president and Miss Louise Moore secretary-treasurer. Other directors named in the charter to serve for the first year of the corporation were Col. C. C. Tutwiler, Mrs. B. McCluer Gilliam, Frank J. Gilliam and M. W. Paxton Jr.³⁸

Others subsequently added to the board were Mrs. M. D. Campbell Jr., who succeeded Miss Moore as secretary, Miss Mary Monroe Penick, Mrs. William W. Old and Col. Kenneth Purdie.

At one of the board's first meetings the group put itself on record favoring historic zoning of a specific area in Lexington. The group began discussion of the need for a historic zoning ordinance which it was later to shepherd through to final implementation by City Council.³⁹

In the spring of 1967 the foundation announced the formation of a 21-member advisory board.⁴⁰ The enthusiasm of that group was indicated by comments in some of the letters of acceptance.

Wrote Martin P. Burks of Roanoke, general counsel of the N&W Railroad, “Lexington is an old and continuing love of mine”; Frank McCarthy replied from Hollywood, “congratulations on this forward step”; Thomas McCaskey wrote from Williamsburg, “creation of this organization is very welcome news . . . it will be my privilege to work with you”; former Gov. Price Daniel of Texas noted, “my family and I have a strong attachment to Lexington”; and Mrs. John Bocoock of Richmond, a leading preservationist, observed, “if . . . people I admire there founded a Society for the Prevention of Fleas on Our Dogs, I would want to be a part of it . . . Thank you for preserving every brick and stone.”⁴¹

Following the publication that year of a brochure and its distribution to a list of persons believed to be interested in preservation, the foundation reported at the end of 1967 that it had received contributions totaling \$5,363. Support for the foundation was almost evenly divided between 61 contributors from the Lexington area and 55 contributors from other places.⁴²

At the board meeting in February 1968, the foundation decided to zero in on the block on Main Street between Washington and Henry Streets and on the old block of Washington Street. A particular eye was being kept on the Alexander-Withrow House, still deeply enmeshed in legal red tape.⁴³

The first of three successful fall heritage house tours was held by the foundation on Oct. 12, 1968 with 650 people visiting nine old houses in the town and county. The venture, spearheaded by a committee including Miss Louise Moore, Mrs. B. M. Gilliam, Miss M. M. Penick and Mrs. W. W. Old, netted \$1,800 and focused considerable public attention on the foundation.⁴⁴

At its annual meeting in January 1969, the foundation could report total resources of about \$15,000, including \$2,000 in pledges.⁴⁵

The first word of a break in the long hang-up in the sale of the Alexander-Withrow House, came in March of that year when Henry J. Foresman, court-appointed commissioner, told foundation officials that he hoped to get the circuit court to agree to sell the property at an early date, provided agreement could be obtained from a Bedford lawyer representing some of the many heirs.⁴⁶ Not the least of the problems with the settlement of the estate had been the fact that a previously appointed commissioner had been sent up for embezzlement.



The Alexander-Withrow House at the northwest corner of Washington and Main Streets, after restoration. Note the distinctive diamond-shaped brick pattern. Photo courtesy of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources.

Judge Paul A. Holstein disqualified himself from handling the matter and Judge Glynn R. Phillips of Dickinson County was appointed to hear the case. HLF submitted a bid of \$26,000 for the Withrow property, which included the Alexander-Withrow House and the adjoining Emily Shop building. At the judge's request for a breakdown, the foundation offered bids of \$18,000 for the house and \$8,000 for the shop.⁴⁷

However, after private offers had been solicited, the judge changed the ground rules and, over the objection of the foundation, decreed that the sale should be made by sealed bids, to be received by December 5, 1969.

Colonel Clayton, who with the foundation's attorney, Paul Penick, was handling the negotiations for the foundation, was directed by the HLF board to use his discretion on buying the Emily Shop, but to make an all-out effort to purchase the Alexander-Withrow House, as this historic building was considered the keystone of the foundation's whole program.⁴⁸

Suspense mounted as the long-awaited date of the sale drew near. Colonel Clayton presented the foundation's position to the judge and urged him to go back to the original plan of selling the property at private auction, or, if he felt he must proceed with sealed bids, to allow all interested parties to submit additional bids after the sealed bids were opened.⁴⁹

December 5 arrived and the foundation had the thrill of bidding on its first piece of property at the \$18,000 figure originally proposed.

Mr. and Mrs. Roland Fifer, who operate the Emily Shop, submitted the high bid of \$9,200 for the building their shop occupies.

The foundation did not push up the bidding on that property but, nonetheless, attained its objectives by negotiating with the Fifers for deed restrictions on their property. They agreed to keep their building architecturally essentially as it now stands. The east wall of the building fronting on the courtyard of the Alexander-Withrow House is to remain unchanged, with no paint or signs to be applied to it.⁵⁰

The foundation negotiated loans of \$14,687.50 from the United Virginia Bank/Rockbridge and \$2,100 from the Rockbridge Historical Society to finance the purchase, retaining its savings certificates as working capital for the restoration of the exterior of the Alexander-Withrow House.⁵¹

At the foundation board meeting celebrating the purchase, it was agreed that as the method of handling this first property would be subject to close scrutiny and would influence future support from the public, the services of a competent architectural adviser should be obtained at once.⁵²

Thomas W. S. Craven of the Charlottesville architectural firm of Johnson, Craven and Gibson was called in. He visited the property on a bitterly cold January day and proposed that restoration work be done in three phases.

The first included cleaning the premises, repairing the roof, exterior woodwork and windows, repointing chimneys and masonry walls, painting exterior woodwork and replacement of the existing high board fence.

In the second phase he proposed that work be done to improve the appearance of the porch and the ground floor. The final phase would be restoration of the interior.

At its annual meeting Jan. 27, 1970, the board voted to retain Mr. Craven and to obtain the services of W. W. Coffey & Son, a general contractor who had done considerable restoration work in the area.⁵³

At this meeting the board also set a course similar to that of Richmond and Savannah preservationists. It began discussion of listing the property for sale with deed restrictions to assure its preservation, so that a revolving fund could be started for further restoration projects.

Colonel Clayton, who had guided the foundation through the critical period culminating in purchase of the Alexander-Withrow House, was succeeded as president by Mrs. B. McCluer Gilliam.

The new president initiated regular monthly board meetings and placed each board member in charge of one aspect of the foundation's program.

At the next meeting Mr. Lyle presented a diagram of the block of Main between Washington and Henry showing the status of each building — namely, sympathetic owner, building in danger, property for sale. It indicated the priority which the foundation might give to acquiring each property. This report was a key factor in giving direction to the group's efforts.⁵⁴

In March 1970, Colonel Tutwiler, chairman for finance, outlined plans for a fund campaign with a goal of \$25,000. One hundred solicitors and other interested persons were to be invited to a kickoff dinner in Moody Hall at Virginia Military Institute in May. It was decided that donors of \$1,000 or more should be designated "Friends of Lexington" and that their names were to be listed on a plaque.

Work on the Alexander-Withrow House was progressing well and the board decided to proceed with phase two, which would complete the exterior restoration of the building and, it was felt, make it a more salable commodity. Plans were to be provided by Craven.⁵⁵

On May 6 Colonel Tutwiler reported that the campaign was off to an excellent start with more than \$18,000 given or pledged. A report on, June 12 showed the drive well over its goal with gifts in excess of \$30,000.⁵⁶

That summer, as work neared completion on its first property, the foundation turned its attention to the Central Hotel, a key building on Main Street and one in precarious condition. In September the Alexander-Withrow House was listed for sale with the local real estate board and in October John W. Brown, who was, incidentally a tenant of the foundation's with his Family Shoe Store in the Alexander-Withrow House, agreed to give HLF an option to purchase the Central Hotel when an existing option expired in November.⁵⁷

On Nov. 20 Mrs. Gilliam announced receipt of a \$500 grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation to help pay for architectural services on the Alexander-Withrow House.

It was also reported at that time that the Sheltered Workshop was a possible tenant for the unoccupied C & O Railway station. Officials of the railroad had indicated early that year that they might like to deed the Lexington station to the foundation. This building had been of interest to HLF after several preservation authorities had visited Lexington and expressed enthusiasm about it as an architectural landmark.⁵⁸ The station ultimately went to W&L but the foundation remains interested in its preservation.

The final HLF board meeting of 1970 brought a report from Colonel Clayton that he had signed a six-month option giving the foundation the opportunity to buy the Central Hotel for \$22,000.⁵⁹

A position paper presented by Colonel Tutwiler concluded that purchase of the old hotel was feasible, but expenditure of funds for its restoration did not appear justifiable until the Alexander-Withrow House was sold.⁶⁰

Early the next year the foundation was busy preparing deed restrictions to apply to the sale of the Alexander-Withrow House. Samples had been obtained from Savannah, Charleston and Winston-Salem and were being studied by Professor Lewis LaRue of the W&L law school.⁶¹

A hearing was coming up April 1 on a comprehensive revision of the city's zoning code. The foundation board decided not to push for inclusion of a historic zone at that time, but to submit a letter calling for implementation of historic zoning at an early date thereafter. This tactic proved wise, for the zoning revision became a center of hot controversy.⁶²

Events moved swiftly in the next several months.



Central Hotel.
Photo courtesy of Sally Mann.

On April 4 Mrs. Gilliam announced to the board that the foundation had received the first Mary Mason Anderson Williams Award from the APVA for outstanding preservation work. It carried a cash prize of \$250. Also at that meeting Colonel Clayton reported that local builder Carlson Thomas had offered to buy the Alexander-Withrow House at the price the foundation was asking. He was authorized to act as agent for the sale.⁶³

The next week he was able to report to the board that the property had been sold for \$45,000, which enabled the foundation to recover its full investment. Meanwhile, the city tax assessor had been alert to the increase in tax base caused by the foundation's improvements, and had raised the assessment on the property. Mr. Thomas agreed to the deed restrictions proposed by the foundation, with a few minor revisions.⁶⁴ The major restriction provided that no alteration could be made to the external appearance of the building without the written approval of Historic Lexington Foundation.⁶⁵

The next month the foundation board voted, on Mr. Lyle's motion, to exercise its option to purchase the Central Hotel. Mr. Craven had been retained as consulting architect on the building and had given his opinion that the hotel was worth preserving.⁶⁶ But the foundation was able to obtain insurance only at a very high premium until certain repair work could be done on the wiring and stove hood in the Central Lunch, on the ground floor of the building.⁶⁷

On June 16 Mr. Lyle submitted to the board a 28-page study embodying exhaustive research on the history of the Central Hotel property.⁶⁸ Through an ingenious procedure he was able to estimate very accurately the date of construction of the middle portion of the building, which is the oldest part.

The title to the property was traced back to its original purchase from the town trustees in 1786. The tax records in the court house showed that shortly after the property was bought in 1809 by John McCampbell and his wife from Andrew Reid, the taxes on it increased. It was sold again several years later and there was another jump in taxes in 1816.

There remained the question 'of whether the oldest part of the present structure dates from 1809, 1816 or some subsequent date.

Examining old insurance records at the Virginia State Library, Mr. Lyle found a policy dated 1812 in the name of John McCampbell's heirs. It described the location of McCampbell's house and gave its measurements. The interior measurements of the middle portion of the Central Hotel were checked and were found to conform exactly with those of the 1812 insurance policy. So the date of the building can be placed very close to McCampbell's tax hike in 1809.⁶⁹

Restoration of the hotel was started, but the debris and filth in the upper floors were so bad that Mr. Coffey's men would not work there until the exterminators were brought in.

Repair of the roof was the major job, as it had been virtually destroyed by a fire half a dozen years before. Until that repair was done it was thought best not to remove mattresses and other debris in the building which soaked up the rain and prevented its leaking through to the occupied ground floor.

Below the roof the building was found to be remarkably sound. Mr. Craven had recommended retention of the double verandas on the rear and north sides of the structure. They had been added about 1910 when the building became a hotel. A number of excrescences on the rear verandas had to be removed as well as an ugly little stucco addition on the north end. Removal of this was accomplished through the cooperation of James E. Burch, owner of the Central Lunch.

Mr. Craven presented on June 24 a three-phase plan for restoration work.

Phase one was to include cleanup and basic repairs. An old brick kitchen building behind the hotel was found by Craven to be beyond repair and was removed.

Phase two was to include improvements to the front to restore it more nearly to its original appearance and the development of a landscaped parking lot on the foundation's property behind the hotel. A plan later submitted by Craven provided for parking for 15 cars.

The third phase of work was to be development of the interior of the building.⁷⁰

As work began on the Central Hotel, the owners of an old building across the street were defacing their property by replacing the double-hung wood windows with metal windows which didn't even fit the brick openings.

The foundation realized anew that its work could be fully effective only if backed up by historic zoning.

On July 9 Mr. Lyle distributed to the board copies of a "historic area" zoning proposal prepared by a committee of the City Planning Commission, of which he is a member.⁷¹ This ordinance was adopted by City Council Oct. 21 after a public hearing at which no opposition was expressed. Its major provision is that proposals to alter the exteriors of buildings in an area within the original corporate limits of the town must be submitted to the City Planning Commission which must issue a "certificate of appropriateness" before work can proceed.⁷²

Though greatly encouraged by this milestone legislation, the foundation still faces the major test of finding a suitable buyer for the Central Hotel property so that it can once again put its revolving fund to work.

NOTES

1. *Rockbridge County News*, Oct. 31, 1935.
2. Mrs. Susan P. Lee to Mrs. George W. Bagby, June 21, 1899, papers of Rockbridge branch, APVA (hereafter referred to as APVA papers).
3. Mrs. John W. Riely to M. W. Paxton Jr., March 20, 1964, APVA papers.
4. Paxton to prospective APVA members, April 17, 1964, APVA papers.
5. Report of Mrs. B. M. Gilliam at annual APVA meeting, March 24, 1965, APVA papers.
6. Royster Lyle, Memo to APVA Members, Feb. 14, 1969, APVA papers.
7. Lyle, Memo to APVA Members, June 19, 1970, APVA papers.
8. D. B. Clayton Jr. to Henry J. Foresman, Feb. 5, 1964, Barclay House file, APVA papers.
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