

# HISTORIC LEXINGTON FOUNDATION

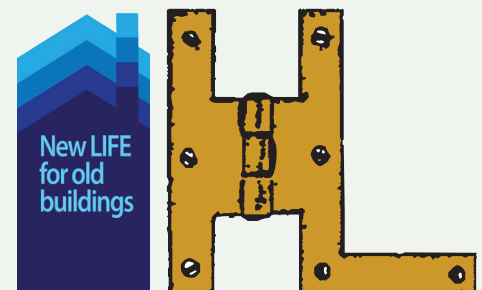
Spring 2025

# Newsletter



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# From the President's Desk

Dear Members and Friends of HLF,

As seasons change and we thaw out from a frosty winter, I always reflect how fortunate we are to live in Lexington and Rockbridge County. It is a special place. What makes it special are the people, the institutions and the historic buildings and spaces. The Historic Lexington Foundation works to preserve those buildings and spaces that help to make our community special. And our mission continues. While this has been covered significantly in local media, our community is saddened and distressed by plans by the Virginia Military Institute (VMI) to demolish two lovely homes on post to make way for what can only be described as an outsized building lacking the character and history for that portion of our town. For several reasons and despite pleas from us and city leaders, we have not been able to save those homes. This underscores the need for HLF and the need for our members and other citizens to engage on these issues. As has been said, special places don't just happen, and they don't stay special unless they are protected and preserved.

If you are an avid reader of this newsletter, you may recognize that I served in this capacity previously. I am honored to serve again this year. I want to thank our retiring president, Dee Joyce-Hayes, and our retiring vice-president, Susan Minor, for their leadership and service. I also want to recognize and thank our retiring board member Scott Centorino.

We are on the cusp of Preservation Month. Those events are detailed herein. We also recognize our donors who make our continuing work possible. Thank you so much for supporting HLF and our important work. In this newsletter, we also discuss the HLF Historic Marker Program. We hope others will take advantage of adding this recognition to your special place. The board is at work to engage in some new projects; news about those will be forthcoming.

Please enjoy this spring season and take a moment to reflect on what makes our area special and how you can help contribute to preserving it for future generations.

Larry Stanton Wiese  
President

*Cover images: Caroline Alexander at the Caroline Cottage, Trudie Wells Kirkland and her sister, Karen Anne Neff, at the Gertrude Thornhill Wright house.*

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# HLF Historical Markers Program Update

**H**LF's historic marker program commemorates the historical heritage of our community and recognizes structures of historic and architectural significance in Rockbridge County, Virginia. Building types covered by the program include private residences, commercial properties, stables, mills, theaters, schools, churches, and municipal buildings. Generally, a structure must be at least 50 years old. The three most recent of these custom-made markers are the Caroline Cottage, the Gertrude Thornhill Wright house, and the Lauderdale Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church.

Caroline Cottage at 403 Jackson Avenue was built in 1907 in the Queen Anne cottage style by Lennox B. and Amelia Ryerson Turnbull. This style, which arrived in the United States from England in the 19th century, was noted for its asymmetrical façade, with porches, turrets, or towers. The colorful cottage is owned by Brian Alexander and his wife, Caroline, who facilitated the restoration and preservation of the house in 2018. The home is named in honor of Mrs. Alexander's efforts to preserve this Queen Anne cottage.

In 1923 the Lexington Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church was organized and the Reverend David T. Lauderdale was appointed to lead the church. In April 1927, its first services were held in the new church building located at 300 South Main Street. Rev. Lauderdale was installed as the congregation's first pastor. Seven years later, the church was renamed Lauderdale Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church to honor the church's

founder and his many years of service. Since 2010, the Rev. Ben Dowling has been the minister. An HLF marker was recently installed at the church's front entrance.

Gertrude Thornhill Wright and her husband, William W. Wright, were the owners of the R. S. Anderson Company in Lexington. In 1930, Mrs. Wright became the sole proprietor of the store at age 41 following the untimely death of her husband. During that time, she drew up plans for what she called "the apartment house" at 501 Jackson Avenue as a red brick classic American Four Square with a large white columned porch similar to other residences in the neighborhood. The apartments have been occupied over the past 87 years, and because Mrs. Wright's son-in-law, First Lieutenant William E. Wells, Jr., was a World War II pilot shot down in Germany in April 1945, the building was a Gold Star Home. It is currently owned by Mrs. Wright's granddaughter, Trudie Wells Kirkland, and there is still a large gold star on the front door.

If you would like to honor your home and celebrate our community's rich architectural history by ordering a historic marker, please contact Historic Lexington Foundation at (540) 463-6832 or [hlf@rockbridge.net](mailto:hlf@rockbridge.net) for an application. The hope is that a sufficient number of home owners in Lexington's historic residential districts will invest in purchasing a historic marker so that a digital walking tour of these historic places can be created to provide pedestrians the opportunity to learn about Lexington's rich history.



*Lauderdale A.R. Presbyterian Church marker.*



*Valerie Thomas with her Henry A. White home, which will be featured on the Historic Garden Week tour.*



# Preservation Month 2025: Save the Dates

We are excited to announce the upcoming calendar of local events and programs in celebration of Preservation Month this May!



## **Saturday, May 3: Garden Club of Virginia's Historic Garden Week's Tour of Lexington Home and Gardens**

The Blue Ridge Garden Club serves as local host for this year's tour, featuring five distinctive and beautifully restored historic homes and gardens. You won't want to miss 107 Lee Avenue, The Old Rectory (begun c. 1824 for Charles Dorman); 114 Lee Avenue (c. 1924 Federal Revival); 116 Lee Avenue, The Keep (c. 1890–1891, designed by architect William G. McDowell for Henry Alexander White, professor of history at Washington and Lee University); 305 South Jefferson Street (c. 1904 Colonial Revival reimagined in 2020); and 309 South Jefferson Street, the White-Davidson-Badgett House (c. 1854 Greek Revival raised cottage). All five properties are included within the Lexington Historic District, which was listed on the National Register of Historic Places and the Virginia Landmarks Register in the 1970s. Several of the homes have HLF historical markers as well. Tour headquarters is the Lexington Visitor's Center, at 106 E. Washington Street. For additional information and advance tickets, see the Historic Garden Week website at <https://gcvirginia.org/historic-garden-week/tickets/>



## **Sunday, May 4, 2 PM, at Lyburn Downing Middle School, "The 1976 Bikecentennial in Rockbridge: 500+ Years of History along Rte. 76"**

Join the Rockbridge Historical Society, VA250, and the Bike 76 VA project on Sunday, May 4, 2:00 PM (Lyburn Downing Middle School) to commemorate regional and state histories of the 1976 bicentennial, the Transamerican "Bikecentennial Route 76" that ran through 50 miles of our county, and the centuries' long sweep of Rockbridge, Virginia, and American histories that can be seen in new light, wheeling down local roads. Virginia Tech History Professor Tom Ewing will discuss new historical, recreational, and preservation initiatives building on these paths: including his new 30-episode podcast, which includes three trail segments centered on Natural Bridge, Irish Creek, and the Blue Ridge Parkway. After the slideshow, and other memories shared by area riders and residents, a "bike rodeo" for all ages will offer free opportunities for tuneups, bike safety information, and conversational exchanges of cycling routes. For more information: [Director@RockbridgeHistory.org](mailto:Director@RockbridgeHistory.org).





**Sunday, May 18, 2 PM, at Kendal, Historic Lexington Foundation's Preservation Month Program with Dan Pezzoni, "Wrapt in Deep Mystery: Native American Ritual Stone Construction in Rockbridge County"**

Join HLF as we welcome architectural historian Dan Pezzoni of Lexington's Landmark Preservation Associates to present recent findings about local, likely indigenous, stoneworks that he's been documenting and researching over the past several years. Virginia is home to thousands of ritual stone structures built by Native American peoples in centuries past. This well-illustrated presentation will focus on structure locales in Rockbridge County and environs, including Cole Mountain, North Mountain Gap, Petites Gap, and House Mountain. Pezzoni will explain how the piles, cairns, effigies, linear structures, and other architectural forms differ from utilitarian historic-period structures like field clearing piles. Some of the structures are representational, which relates them to the allied medium of rock art. The presentation also proposes interpretations of the structures consistent with what is known about Southeastern native cultures and beliefs through ethnography and comparison to other forms of material culture. As a reporter with the *Rockbridge County News* remarked in 1893 about the stone mound that once stood in North Mountain Gap, the structures have "always been wrapt in deep mystery." Free and open to the public.

*Image: A Native American ritual stone structure in Rockbridge County.*



**Saturday, May 24, 2 PM, at Manly Memorial Baptist Church, Historic Lexington Foundation's Preservation Month Program with Taylor Cole of Conservation Partners, "Conservation of Historic Properties in Virginia"**

Rounding out Preservation Month, we look forward to learning more about conservation easements and other open-space and agricultural conservation opportunities in our area. Our speaker is Taylor Cole, who will share recollections of growing up in Lexington, of its residents, and of its historic buildings as they were in the 1950s and 1960s. He'll also discuss historic homes and properties protected by conservation easements around Virginia; and describe the fundamentals and benefits of donating conservation easements and gifts of land. The program will conclude with a question-and-answer session as time permits. Free and open to the public.





## Ashbury Church

The Asbury Church in Brownsburg is pleased to report excellent progress on the old church following a major structural beam issue (11 feet of the main beam were subject to termite damage). Due to a generous grant from HLF and the dedication of a talented team of volunteers, we've been able to fix the main beam issue as well as redo all interior framing including upgrading all infrastructure. We've nearly finished electrical and plumbing rough-in work, and we expect it to be completed early to midsummer. The importance of this project is profound. The original church was opened in 1869, and we're pleased that this historical African American rural church and congregation will soon have a building which has been re-built for generations to come. This is much more than a church, but rather an important and respectful legacy project that transcends a building. It preserves our past and present for congregants now and in the years to come. It's also a centerpiece of our Historical Village of Brownsburg. Our motto: Standing Strong!



## Library Sign

New signage at the Rockbridge Regional Library on Main Street in downtown Lexington is a recent gift from HLF to the community. The previous large monument-type sign was installed in the 1980s. HLF's gift assisted the library with the purchase of 2 smaller, yet more visible pole-mounted signs.



### WAYS TO GIVE:

- Online – [historiclexington.org/donate](http://historiclexington.org/donate)
- By phone – (540) 463-6832
- By mail – Post Office Box 901, Lexington VA 24450
- In person – our office is in the historic Lexington Train Station at 224 McLaughlin Street
- Donations from your IRA – contact your tax advisor for more information
- Stock Donations
- Matching Gifts – if your employer has a matching gifts program, your gift could be worth twice as much or more!
- Planned Giving – ensure Historic Lexington's future by making a planned gift through your estate



# Thanks To Our Contributors

We extend our sincere gratitude to all who sustain the work of HLF. We recognize these donors whose gifts were received from January 1, 2024 – December 31, 2024.

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We strive for accuracy in our acknowledgments. Please share corrections with us.



Photo credit: Conrad Matiuk

HLF remembers Fred Kirchner who proudly described his work on the c. 1883 Train Station, which is now the location of our headquarters, to HLF members last year.

## In Memoriam: W. Fred Kirchner, AIA (d. March 11, 2025)

Longtime local resident and architect, Fred Kirchner, died March 11th. Fred was a graduate of Virginia Tech's Architecture program, who with his wife Jeannie (who sadly died before him in October of 2024) established a home and design practice, Kirchner & Associates, in Lexington. They also immersed themselves in community life. Among his many activities and leadership roles, Fred was one of the charter board members of the Rockbridge Area Free Clinic (predecessor to the Rockbridge Area Health Center), served several terms on the city's Architectural Review Board, and was a member of the city's Threshold Housing Commission. Fred's practice included commercial properties and fine residential homes throughout Lexington and the region over many years. Notably he was architect for Kappa Alpha Order's restoration of the Old Jail on Courthouse Square, and for Washington & Lee University's rehabilitation of the Lexington Train Station into offices after it was relocated to 224 McLaughlin Street 21 years ago. One of Fred's most recent and visible design projects was the inspired "Communion of Saints" ornamental wrought iron fence, now installed at Good Shepherd Evangelical Lutheran Church at 617 South Main Street. A celebration of life service will be held at a later time.



Thank you to everyone who participated in the 9th Annual Festival of Trees at Natural Bridge State Park in 2024! Historic Lexington Foundation's tree this time around was beautifully decorated, thanks to the creative talents of Merrie Gayle McNemar and Nan Wolf. We received over 500 votes via donations of food or dollar gifts, generating incredible support for several community groups and garnering our tree a place in the "Top 6" category! The Friends of Natural Bridge State Park, organizer of the Festival of Trees, recently shared the following results with us and other sponsors: "With your support, we collected 1,853 pounds of food for the Natural Bridge/Glasgow Food Pantry and 4,543 items donated to Project Horizon, and \$1,059.00 was raised to support Rockbridge Connect and Nourish (CAN)." Above and beyond: special thanks to HLF donor, Dr. Paul Dende of Gettysburg, PA, who drove his pickup truck to Lexington with boxes of food to contribute to the HLF tree.