

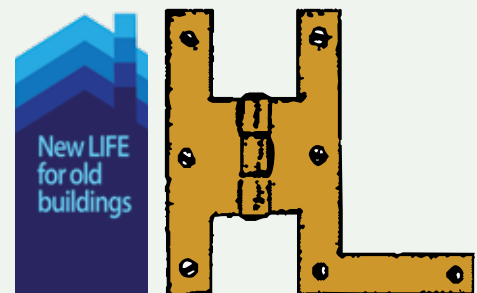
Newsletter

Palmer Community Center
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From the President's Desk

Dear Members and Friends of HLF:

HLF began 2024 by awarding two grants: first to the Clover Boutique, at its new location on Nelson Street in Lexington's historic district, to help pay for painting the shop's front; and second to the Palmer Community Center to help repair wood and paint the exterior of that historic 1902 structure, built in 1902 as the Palmer School—the first public grade school in southwest Rockbridge County. Both buildings now look fresh and bright with their new facelifts. HLF's primary mission is to help preserve historic structures, and it is the generosity of our donors and benefactors that makes grants like these possible.

In January, HLF welcomed five new Board members: Tom Camden, Dennis Cross, Leslie Giles, Michael Perry, and Nancy Sullivan. We are so pleased to benefit from their experience and enthusiasm and plan to put them right to work! At the same time, we are sad to lose outgoing Board members, Jane Brooke, Russ Harlow, and Will Moore, whose years of service and dedication to HLF's mission are greatly appreciated. Margaret Samdahl also left the Board, but she remains now, of course, as our Executive Director.

Preservation Month, May 2024, will feature structures from the 1930s and the late-18th century, illustrating the wide span of HLF's preservation focus. Please join us on Saturday, May 4, for a presentation about, and walk around, Thunder BRidge, built originally as a CCC camp and later used as a juvenile detention center. This property is being preserved and redeveloped as an arts center and camping grounds. Saturday, May 25, we invite you to a program about the site of the Steward's House, c. 1793, at Liberty Hall, by Washington and Lee's research archaeologist, Don Gaylord.

As always, HLF is grateful not only for your support but also for your ideas and suggestions for projects as we continue our mission to promote and assist in preserving the rich architectural and historic resources that we are blessed to have throughout our area.

Dee Joyce-Hayes
President

Cover image courtesy of
Margaret Samdahl.

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The Continuing Gift of the Lyle-Simpson Preservation Fund: The Palmer Community Center

Historic Lexington Foundation's first Lyle-Simpson Preservation grant of 2024 was awarded to the Palmer Community Center for restoration and painting of the exterior of the building. Our mission is to preserve, interpret, and present the historical heritage and fabric of Rockbridge County, Virginia. These goals were met with the Palmer Center, which is a simple wood frame building in the Buffalo Valley. This simple structure houses an interesting history of rural Rockbridge County. Even its foundation has a history. The cornerstone, with a box full of documents, was dedicated in 1903 with a Masonic ceremony by members of Lexington's Mountain City Masonic Lodge. The interior walls are filled with photos of its past documenting its role in the education of children for whom "distance and poor roads prevented" them from attending Lexington's city schools.

The building was constructed to be a school. A charter was written and submitted to Judge S. H. Letcher of Rockbridge County, and with its approval, the school was founded in 1902. Originally named the Palmer Academy, it opened in 1903, and its purpose was to offer a high-quality secondary education for the children in southwest Rockbridge County. In 1906, the school became the Palmer High School and Graded School, the first of its kind in the county. It remained a school until the Rockbridge

County School Board determined it was no longer needed for that purpose.

In 1957, the former schoolhouse became the Palmer Community Center. HLF's grant serves to continue public support of the Palmer Center. In 1997, when the building needed repairs and restoration, the Palmer Restoration Project was formed. Students from Washington and Lee and VMI joined local residents and organizations to help with the work. The Effinger Ruritan Club joined the effort by creating an endowment fund. In recent years, the property is well known for the Ruritan Club's Ice Cream Supper that takes place each year in August. The Palmer Center continues to serve the community in other ways. Weddings, family reunions, and meetings take place at the Center which is located at 1230 Blue Grass Trail in a lovely rural setting approximately twenty minutes from Lexington. Historic Lexington Foundation is honored to join those who have supported and cared for this historic site.

For more details concerning the history of the Palmer Center, complimentary copies of *Palmer, The First Hundred Years in the Buffalo Community*, edited by Clinton L. Anderson, are available at the Historic Lexington Foundation's office—15 S. Jefferson Street—or at the Palmer Center.



1911 photo. Photo Credit: Washington and Lee University's Special Collections and Archives



Lighted flag. Photo Credit: Lynda Miller



Preservation Month Events

May 4, 2024, 2–4 p.m.

Thunder BRidge

1425 Arnolds Valley Road, Natural Bridge Station, VA 24579

2 p.m. presentation by owners James and Karen Pannabecker, followed by a tour of the grounds.

Thunder BRidge, located about 18 miles from Lexington, was named by its owners to reflect its location in the Blue Ridge, the Thunder Ridge overlooking the property, and to reference its time as a Civilian Conservation Corps camp. The facility was originally a CCC camp in the 1930s and housed the men who worked on a voluntary government work relief program during the Great Depression. The CCC was created by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in his New Deal legislation, and its environmental work included creating trails, planting trees, and building shelters in parks.

The CCC camp at Thunder BRidge is considered one of the most intact in existence. At the end of the CCC era, the facility

became a federal reformatory. It was repurposed as a juvenile reformatory in 1964, becoming the Natural Bridge Juvenile Corrections Facility. At the forefront of prison reform, the young men learned skills to enable them to return to society trained in trades. The facility closed in 2009 and remained vacant. The Pannabeckers purchased the 99-acre site and are restoring the original structures. Their goal is to create a community arts and culture center and campground. Six former CCC buildings have become artist studios with more buildings being renovated for future writers, dancers, and event space. Cottages and cabins, along with primitive campsite areas, are available for rent. The property is adjacent to the National Forest with trails and pastures awaiting the arrival of visitors.

Join HLF for its May 4, 2–4 p.m., Preservation Month lecture and walk at this amazing site. This event is open to HLF members, donors, and friends.

Photos courtesy of Thunder BRidge.



A cabin in the woods at Thunder BRidge.



Housing from the CCC camp is being restored and renovated.



An aerial view of the 99-acre Thunder BRidge grounds.



A well preserved CCC era fireplace.

May 25, 2024, 10 a.m.–12 noon
Liberty Hall Academy's The Steward's House
Washington and Lee University, West Denny Circle,
Lexington, VA 24450
10 a.m. lecture by Don Gaylord, W&L Research
Archaeologist and Instructor of Anthropology,
followed by a tour of the site.

Join HLF for its Preservation Month, May 25th event at Washington and Lee University. The Liberty Hall's Academy House ruins and the restoration site of the Steward's House are located on West Denny Circle, off Route 60 West. Don Gaylord's talk will be followed by a walk to the Liberty Hall ruins and the recently restored lower level of the Steward's House.

Last year the restoration work began on Structure Nine, the Liberty Hall Academy's circa 1793 Steward's House. Lexington's John and Jesse Friedrich, who own New Dimension Masonry and specialize in historic brick restoration, have been working with Washington and Lee's archaeologist, Don Gaylord, to restore the original foundation and lower-level walls. The site will have multiple purposes including use as an open-air classroom. The history of the original campus, the location of its buildings, and the story of the recent excavation will be given by Don Gaylord.

This event is open to HLF members, donors, and friends. Comfortable walking shoes are recommended. For a handout of the Liberty Hall history, updates on the location of the 10 a.m. lecture, and for parking, please email HLF by May 15, 2024 at hlf@rockbridge.net.



Don Gaylord, Washington and Lee's research archeologist, with HLF board member Merrie Gayle McNemar at the Steward's House. Photo Credit: HLF



The Liberty Hall Steward's House foundations with the Academy House ruins in the background. Photo Credit: HLF



The c. 1793 Liberty Hall Academy House ruins. Photo Credit: HLF



Matt, Jessie, and John of New Dimension Masonry LLC at the Steward's House. Photo Credit: Don Gaylord



Spring Events

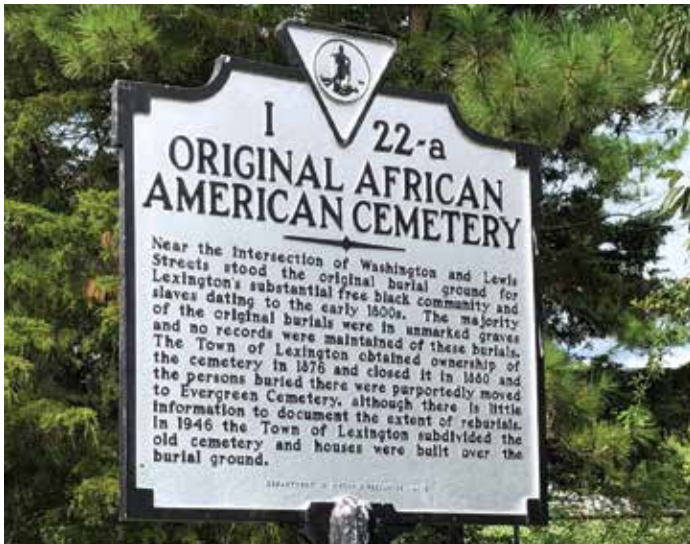
Upcoming Ribbon Cuttings:

- The Evergreen Cemetery's new panel is a gift of HLF to the City of Lexington.
- The Original African American Cemetery Highway Marker will be relocated next to Evergreen Cemetery.
- The Green Book Highway Marker will be placed on Washington Street by the Lexington-Rockbridge Visitor Center. A gift from HLF, this marker continues research into our city's Black history.

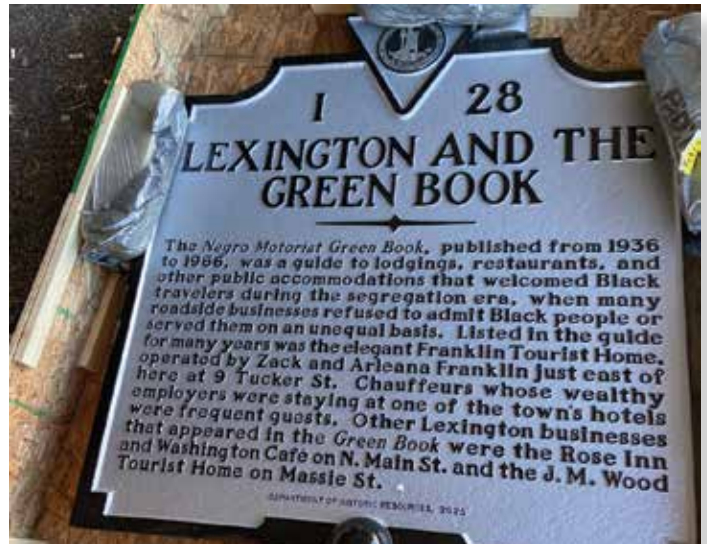
At press time, the dates for these events were not determined; please check our HLF website for updates.



Evergreen Cemetery panel. Photo Credit: HLF



Original African American Cemetery highway marker. Photo Credit: HLF



Green Book Marker. Photo Credit: Patrick Madigan

A Message from HLF

Our community would be different today without the work of Historic Lexington Foundation for the past half century. HLF is efficiently managed and mission driven. Its accomplishments depend on the passion of volunteers and the generosity of supporters through annual contributions, special gifts, and legacy gifts through an estate. We are grateful for what we can accomplish together.

Dennis W. Cross
Board Member and Chair of the Development Committee

Donate to HLF



HistoricLexington.org/donate

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We extend our sincere gratitude to all who sustain the work of HLF. We recognize these donors whose gifts were received from January 1, 2023 – December 31, 2023.

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

The mission of Historic Lexington Foundation is to preserve, interpret, and present the historical heritage and fabric of Rockbridge County, Virginia.

HLF Newsletter Updates in the Works!

Four Issues per Year

We are committed to continually improving communications with friends and supporters, and we are excited to share that we are doubling our publication schedule—from two to four issues annually! That means we'll be able to share *more* feature articles, *more* preservation updates, and *more* great photos of our historic communities and the people who are preserving them.

Sending Issues Electronically

As part of ongoing efforts to use resources wisely and effectively, we plan to reduce the number of paper copies of the newsletter that we print and mail, even while doubling the number of issues published.

The next issue, Summer 2024, will be offered electronically. To receive a copy, please provide your email address to us at hlf@rockbridge.net.

We are committed to protecting your privacy and will never sell or share your contact information.

If you prefer to receive a printed version of the *HLF Newsletter* via regular mail, let us know!

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