

Newsletter

Ribbon Cuttings
page 6



INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- > Remembering Mary Stuart Gilliam
- > 2024 Preservation Month Events
- > Future Events
- > HLF at Work in the County



We've Moved!

HLF Office relocated to the Omicron
Delta Kappa's Lexington Train Station,
224 McLaughlin Street, August 1st, 2024.



From the President's Desk

Dear HLF Members and Friends:

A lot has happened over the few months since our last HLF newsletter, some of it sad, but most of it happy and exciting.

As noted in an article in this newsletter, with the death of Mary Stuart Gilliam, HLF lost a founder, a loyal supporter, and a mentor to many. Just before we went to press, we were also saddened to learn of the loss of another long-time member and true friend to HLF—Reed Belden. Over the years Reed, a former HLF president, was generous with his financial support, his time, and his advocacy on behalf of historic preservation. Just last year, Reed researched, sponsored, and paid for the erection of the new Virginia Highway Marker for the historic but nearly forgotten Timber Grove settlement. We will truly miss him.

I must offer a *mea culpa* for failing to include Harry Shannon's name among those HLF Board members whose terms ended in December 2023. In addition to his Board service, Harry also chaired the Development Committee, where he energized and challenged HLF in planning for our future. Our sincere thanks to you, Harry!

We are all really excited about the move of HLF's headquarters into the "old train station," where we will be sharing space with Omicron Delta Kappa. We will have bright new space, with room to hold our Board meetings, and plenty of parking. The new location is particularly meaningful to us since it was HLF's own Pam Simpson who originally saved the building from destruction.

Kudos to another of HLF's stalwart members, Bob Keefe, whose newly published book, *Rockbridge in 733 Vignettes*, is beautifully illustrated and quite entertaining. Bob has contributed so much to HLF over the years, including the design and production of HLF's book, *The Architecture of Historic Rockbridge* in 2015. He makes us proud!

We have some entertaining events coming up that you won't want to miss. On Thursday, August 22, at 7:00 p.m., at the Manley Memorial Baptist Church, HLF is hosting a presentation about the "611." Also known as the "Queen of Steam," the 611 is the only surviving example of the old Norfolk and Western's streamlined steam locomotives and is the one that powered the passenger excursions from Goshen through the George Washington and Jefferson National Forest last fall. Then, on Sunday, September 29, HLF will hold its Annual Meeting. We purposely moved this meeting from the spring to the fall to give us time to organize a special program honoring several of our original founders. We will provide you with more details when the plans for this meeting are finalized. Meanwhile, be sure to mark your calendars for both events because we really hope to see you there.

Warm regards,

Dee Joyce-Hayes
President

*Cover image: Ribbon Cutting of
Evergreen Cemetery's new Information
Panel. Courtesy of Bruce Macdonald.*

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Remembering Mary Stuart Gilliam

We are saddened to report that Mary Stuart Gilliam, a co-founder and supporter of Historic Lexington Foundation, recently died—capping a long and fruitful life of 98 years. We remember her with great fondness. Mary Stuart was a woman of great taste, judgment, and vision. While she grew up in Richmond, she moved to Lexington in 1950 upon her marriage to Bates McCluer (Mac) Gilliam, a professor at the Virginia Military Institute. Mary Stuart and Mac adopted Lexington as their home for more than 70 years; and she was one of those rare visionaries willing to accept a role in establishing and leading our local preservation and conservation activities.

From early days, she worked to conserve special places in nature, as well as the places in the built environment where history happened. After raising their children in Lexington, Mary Stuart and Mac moved to a historic home on the banks of Hays Creek in Rockbridge Baths. In 1964 the newly founded George C. Marshall Foundation established the Marshall Library and Museum at VMI

and hired Mary Stuart as the assistant to the foundation librarian. Two years later, Mary Stuart co-founded the Historic Lexington Foundation, along with C. C. Tutwiler, Royster Lyle, Louise Moore, Gillie Campbell, Matthew W. Paxton, Jr., and Donald Clayton. In the 1970s she was appointed by two Virginia governors to terms on the Commission of Outdoor Recreation and became active with the award-winning Roots and Shoots Garden program at Waddell Elementary School. In 2010 she was awarded the de Lacy Gray Medal for Conservation. So, it is preservation of history in fact and in form, and focused on nature, for which she will be remembered in the community. Others might select her delicious caramel cupcakes, cheese tarts, and lace cookies as her claims to fame.

Mary Stuart, by most recollections, was a “Grand Lady” of great Southern charm and elegance. Appropriately, it was reported that all her poppies, peonies, and roses were in peak bloom on the day she died.



Mary Stuart Gilliam



Preservation Month Events

Preservation Month, May 4: Arts flourish in the shadow of the Blue Ridge Mountains

One hundred acres in the shadow of the Blue Ridge Mountains are being revitalized, and given new life and new purpose, thanks to the imagination and fortitude of a bold couple, James and Karen Pannabecker.

The property is named Thunder BRidge, and the Pannabeckers' dream of providing a "deep woods" experience, camping, hiking, and creativity, is being boldly realized. The couple lives just a few miles to the north and conceived of Thunder BRidge only four years ago, when they first viewed it in 2020. What they discovered was exciting open space, with some 32 buildings backed by open grassy fields and bordered by deep woods that contained winding trails and a few old roadbeds. They also saw reality: some buildings were in good repair, but many were badly deteriorated. Their condition was not too surprising, since the campus is approaching a century of use: the earliest structures were built in the 1930s.

To kick off a busy Preservation Month, on May 4 Historic Lexington Foundation, joined by many visitors from Lexington and the Natural Bridge area, co-hosted an open house and reception at Thunder BRidge. We met in the former dining hall—it was a chilly day but a wood fire burning softly in an original fireplace kept us comfortable. The Pannabeckers told us stories of how it all came to be—their early dream realized. In addition,

HLF Preservation Committee chair Tom Contos described the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) mission and history, and projected current and historical images of the site, the buildings, and the people who lived and worked there.

In the early 1930s the property was developed as a CCC camp to house men who worked on a voluntary government work relief program during the Great Depression. The original CCC development includes four surviving barracks buildings and several supporting dwellings. The architecture is simple and utilitarian, because it was meant to be temporary. However, it remains perhaps the best remaining intact example of a CCC camp. In 1945 the camp became a federal reformatory, and in 1964 the Commonwealth of Virginia leased the property for the Natural Bridge Juvenile Correctional Center (NBJCC), also known as Thunder Ridge High School. NBJCC was a minimum-security facility at the forefront of prison reform, providing GED preparatory education and work skills training in brick masonry, auto mechanics, building maintenance, and woodworking. Various workshops on the property served as the settings for re-training programs, and the old CCC barracks served as dormitories. In the 1970s, residents also constructed two rustic log cabins on site. The property was the first racially integrated correction facility in Virginia, and for a time portions of it were home to Camp New Hope, a Big Brothers/Big Sisters annual summer camp. After the correctional facility closed in 2009, the buildings were shuttered and remained unused for several years until the state decided to sell it.



*A Civilian Conservation Corps made fireplace.
(photo courtesy of Bruce Macdonald)*



ThunderBRidge. (photo courtesy of James & Karen Pannabecker)

But, happily, things have changed! The Pannabeckers purchased the property in 2021, renaming the campus “Thunder BRidge.” The new name has historical significance, reflecting the property’s rich history and geographical location in the Blue Ridge Mountains. The CCC men called their weekly newspaper *The BRidge*, and the correctional facility school was known as Thunder Ridge High School.

The Pannabeckers’ most arresting, most visionary idea is to open Thunder BRidge as an Arts and Culture Center. Nine former CCC buildings have already become inexpensive, expansive art studios (12 artists and counting!), with other buildings being renovated for future writers, dancers, and as event spaces. Today, the property holds much promise: the large gymnasium could become a concert and special events venue, as well as being returned to use as a sports facility. An eight-acre pasture is an ideal setting for an open-air music festival. The property also includes two ballfields and an obstacle course. The 1970s log cabins serve as vacation rental lodgings, and additional areas may be reserved for “rough” camping.

James acknowledged that their Arnold’s Valley neighbors were generous with advice and seemed approving of their projects to reclaim the site. Karen revealed that their vision was wide and deep, with much potential for a music festival, art workshops, modern dance, and other dramatic performances—even poetry readings. It is hard to tell what ideas will come to be, and which ones have the greatest potential, but one thing was certain. Creativity and her busy sister, Imagination, was—and is—in residence in the shadow of the Blue Ridge Mountain range.

Thunder BRidge is located in Rockbridge County at 1425 Arnolds Valley Road. For additional information, see their website at <https://thunderbridge.my.canva.site/>.

**Preservation Month, May 25:
Don Gaylord’s Program on the Foundation at Liberty Hall**

On a sunny Saturday morning at 10 a.m., Historic Lexington Foundation closed out National Preservation Month with a well-attended public talk and interpretive tour of the Foundation at Liberty Hall. Professor Don Gaylord, research archaeologist and anthropology instructor at Washington and Lee University, opened the two-part program with his talk on the history and restoration of the Foundation, which dates from 1793. He then guided attendees to the recently restored archaeological site, located on a sloping wooded site near the Liberty Hall Ruins. The Foundation was originally constructed of roughly dressed fieldstones and defined the “walkout basement” level of a structure occupied by the Liberty Hall Academy steward. In this space, the steward’s household prepared and served meals for students attending the Academy; archives indicate typical meals would have been bread with coffee for breakfast, and a hearty meat stew for dinner. After 1803, the property was sold and incorporated into a larger plantation; based on archaeological evidence, the steward’s house was converted to a blacksmith shop and forge, and was also used for laundry and seamstress work. An enslaved blacksmith named John Anderson taught children to read and write on the plantation and likely ran a schoolhouse out of the forge. Restoration of the Foundation, utilizing 18th century techniques, was undertaken in 2023 by John and Jesse Friedrichs of Lexington-based New Dimension Masonry.



The Foundation, site of the Steward’s House, Washington and Lee University. (photo courtesy of Leslie Giles)



Don Gaylor’s presentation took place at the Covered Pavilion at Washington and Lee University. (photo courtesy of Leslie Giles)



Marking History in Lexington

On Thursday, April 18, HLF took part in the unveiling of three historical markers commemorating our community's rich and diverse heritage. Starting off the morning's events was a ribbon-cutting ceremony at the Lexington Visitor Center at 106 East Washington Street. There, HLF was joined by representatives of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, the City of Lexington, the Rockbridge Historical Society, the Chamber of Commerce, and a large contingent of the public to unveil the "Lexington and the Green Book" marker. Under development by HLF since 2022, the new Virginia Historical Marker was researched and written by HLF volunteer Charles Rappold and approved by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources in 2023. The marker introduces residents and visitors to *The Negro Motorist Green Book*, a guide published by Victor Hugo Green that featured several Lexington sites over the decades that it was produced. The "Green Book" was an important resource for African American travelers in need of lodging, restaurants, gas stations, and other businesses during the period of segregation.

Attendees then made their way to the recently relocated "Original African American Cemetery" marker, which had been situated along the Route 11 Bypass. It was unveiled at a new location adjacent to the Evergreen Cemetery, 108 Evergreen Place. In the cemetery attendees viewed the new Panel of Notable Leaders which was dedicated. Event organizers and officials shared original research and resources related to the growth of Lexington's two Black cemeteries during the 19th and 20th centuries and reflected on how the process of memorialization continues to evolve at present.

HLF is honored to help shine a spotlight on these and other treasured historical assets in the community.



The City of Lexington and Historic Lexington Foundation would like to invite members of the public to the **Marker Dedication & Ribbon Cutting** for the **Evergreen Cemetery & Green Book Historic Markers & the Evergreen Cemetery Panel**

THURSDAY, APRIL 18, 2024 AT 11:00 A.M.

The ceremony will begin at the Lexington Visitor's center (106 E. Washington Street) and then conclude at Evergreen Cemetery.



SAVE THESE DATES!!! UPCOMING HLF PROGRAMS AND SPECIAL EVENTS

August 22, 2024 at 7 p.m.

Program on the Norfolk & Western 611 Train, with Will Harris, Darryl Woodson, and Mary Woodson. At Manly Memorial Baptist Church, 202 South Main Street in downtown Lexington.

September 29, 2024 at 3 p.m.

HLF Annual Meeting. At Lexington Presbyterian Church's Dunlap Auditorium. Entrance is located on Randolph Street.



HLF At Work in the County

It's been a busy season of grant giving with three projects receiving HLF funds. All have recently been completed.

The c. 1823 Hamilton School received a Lyle-Simpson grant to stabilize the structure. Thanks to Mez Welch and his crew from Rockbridge Timber Frames for installing a large beam to support the building. Now the school is ready for restoration work which was started a few years ago by other groups.

Fairfield Cemetery, c. 1851, received a matching grant from HLF

for gravestone restoration work. This is a community cemetery, and its board had fundraisers to contribute to the project. Thank you to Richard and Becky Clemmer for their help.

Falling Spring Presbyterian Church Cemetery, c. late 1700s, received a grant which was supported by many dedicated gifts for the cemetery.

Thank you to Hamric Memorials for their work on these cemeteries.



HLF's Preservation Committee visits the Hamilton School.



HLF's Preservation Committee met with Becky and Richard Clemmer at the c.1851 Fairfield Cemetery.



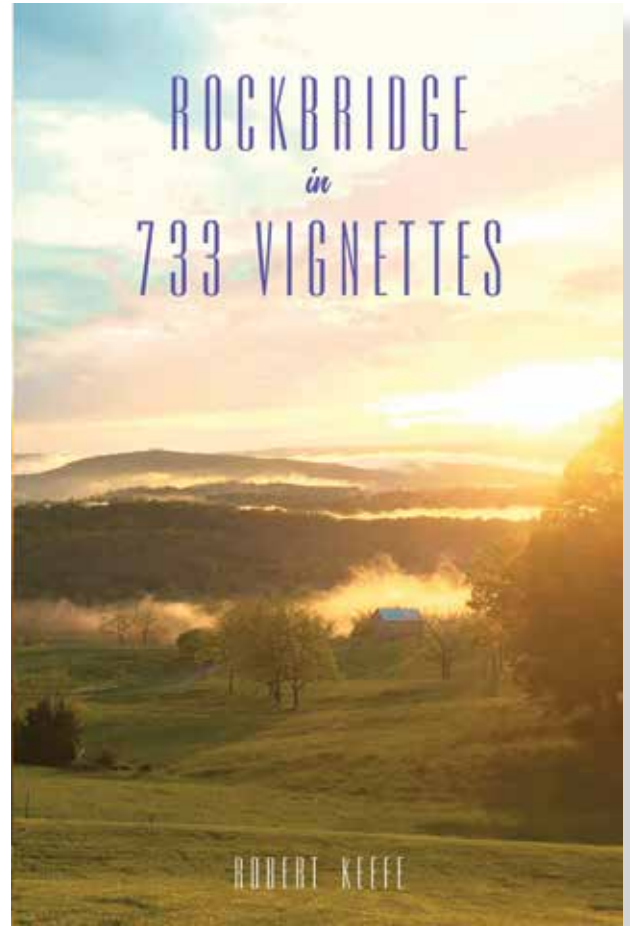
Restored gravestone by Hamric Memorials at the Falling Spring Presbyterian Church's cemetery.



A restored gravestone by Hamric Memorials at the Fairfield Cemetery.



Ribbon Cutting of the Green Book Historic Marker which was donated by HLF. Marilyn Alexander, Lexington's Vice Mayor, Dee Joyce-Hayes, President of HLF, and LaToya Gray-Sparks, Outreach Coordinator, Department of Historic Resources.



Congratulations to HLF member Bob Keefe for his recently published book.



The Yellow House on McLaughlin Street was the last structure of Lexington's "Railroad Square" remaining in place. Historian Pam Simpson speculated that it served as housing for the railroad crews. It was demolished in the summer of 2024.

Donate to HLF



HistoricLexington.org/donate

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