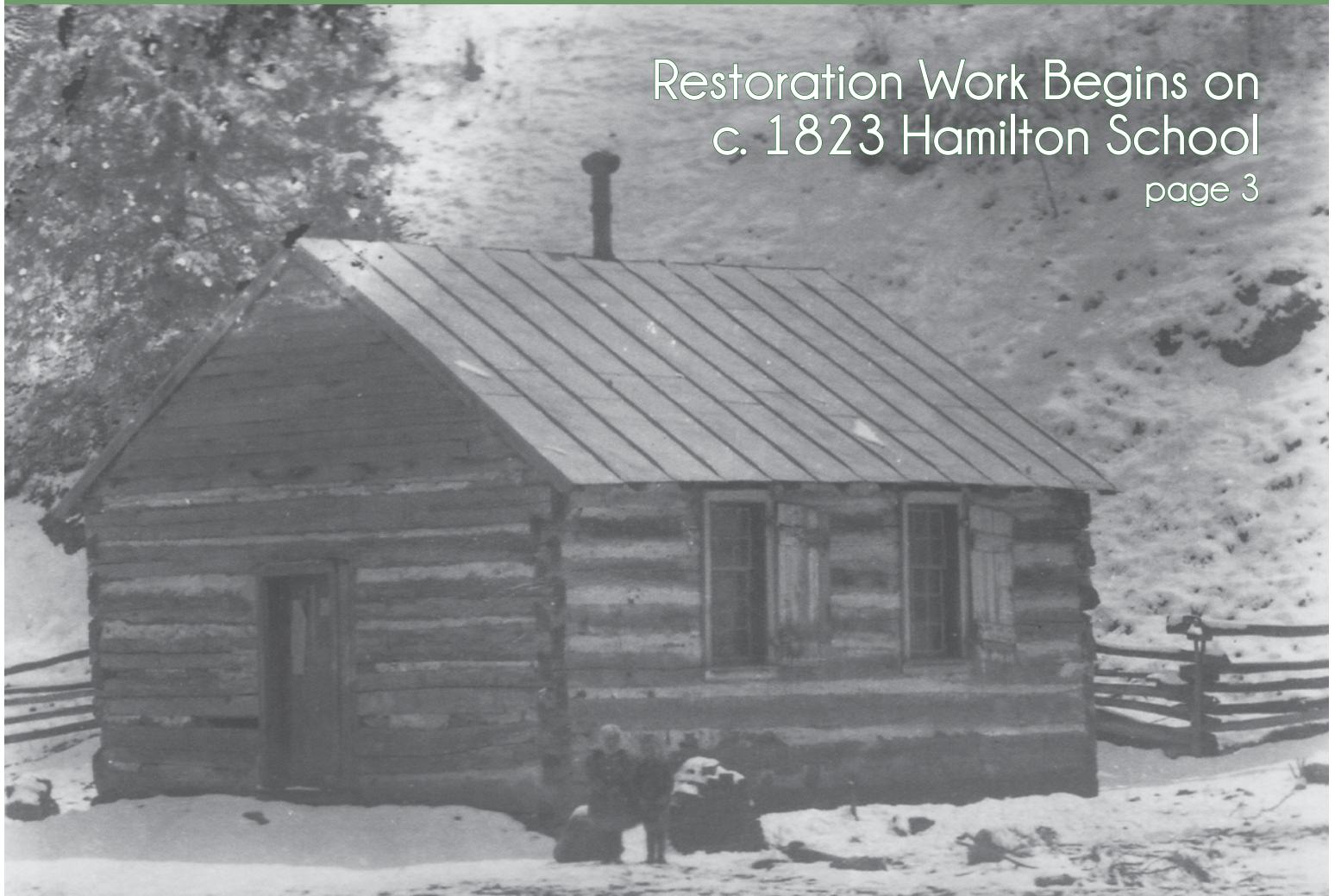


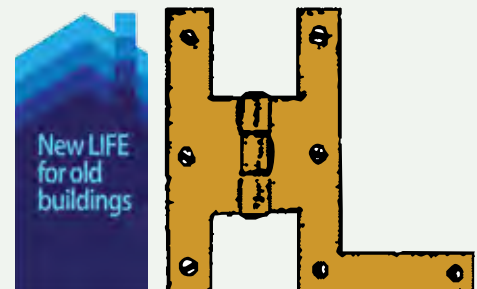
Newsletter



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From the President's Desk

Dear Friends of HLF,

Thank you for your involvement and support of our joint venture to preserve, interpret, and present the historic heritage of Rockbridge County.

In assuming the presidency of HLF, I am mindful that I, and all of us, owe a debt of gratitude to the pioneers of Lexington and Rockbridge County's preservation movement. In this newsletter, we pay tribute to Chuck Phillips, Benny Lewis, Carlson Thomas, and Grant Griswold, who played pivotal roles in preserving Lexington's historic downtown. And we acknowledge and thank each of you for your role in stewardship of our built environment.

I am pleased to report that Historic Lexington Foundation is now 51 years old and going strong, as you will see in this issue. In 2014 when I first joined the board, I was humbled to serve alongside Mary Stuart Gilliam and Matt Paxton, two steadfast founders of HLF, who had returned to the board for yet another tour of duty. I am honored now to take the presidential gavel from my immediate predecessors, Beverly Tucker and Skip Ravenhorst.

Folks in Rockbridge County are said to be either "come heres" or "from heres." I qualify as a "from here" since I was born in Stonewall Jackson's house and grew up here, taking my first steps on its old brick sidewalks, using its campuses as my playgrounds, and learning in its stately school buildings. And now I'm a "come back here," returning five years ago to find Lexington more handsome, more vibrant, and more varied than it was all those years ago. I'm also learning that the work to maintain these treasures is ongoing and that the county beyond Lexington has gems worth preserving, as well. Most of all, I understand that whether you are a come here or a from here, everyone who cherishes this place has a role in sustaining it.

Surely we owe much to those who went before—and to those who will come after us.

Thank you for **being** here.

Sincerely,
Suzanne Barksdale Rice

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Cover image: 1909 photograph of the Hamilton School taken by James T. Miller. Miller taught at the school for 20 years. Courtesy of Ellen Campbell.

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Lyle-Simpson Preservation Fund Grant Assists in the Restoration of the c. 1823 Hamilton Schoolhouse

The c. 1823 Hamilton School, a one-room log structure that once served as both church and school in the South Buffalo community of Rockbridge County, is about to go through a significant restoration, thanks in part to a grant from Historic Lexington Foundation, but more importantly with the support of a community that understands the structure's importance in the history of the county. The grant is the first provided through the newly established Lyle-Simpson Preservation Fund.

Writing in 1956, Presbyterian minister and genealogist George West Diehl told the story of the Hamilton "Clan" and Hamilton's School. In the preface, he noted that the school is the last of the "old field schools" in this part of Virginia, if not in all of Virginia. Today, the Hamilton School is on the National Register of Historic Places. In that nomination, architectural historian Mike Pulice wrote, "Considering the extreme rarity of schoolhouses of this vintage and level of integrity, the Hamilton Schoolhouse is exceptionally worthy of recognition and preservation." HLF concurs.

The idea for a Lyle-Simpson preservation grant for the school first came up in the fall of 2016 in a conversation between realtor Janie Harris and HLF Executive Director Don Hasfurther. Thus began a series of meetings with the trustees that are stewards of the school and with the community and interested parties.

In the spring of 2017, a meeting was held at the schoolhouse that included trustees, HLF, the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, and craftsmen with skills in restoration and prepared to donate labor and materials to the project.

Prior to the advent of public education in Virginia, field schools built by and under the complete control of the community were the means by which rural children received an education. In this instance, Robert Hamilton, whose father was one of the early settlers in the South Buffalo area, conveyed one acre of land to two trustees for a building to be used as a house of worship and a school. As noted in the National Register nomination, when the public school system became mandatory in 1870, the school became part of the Virginia education system, and from that time until it closed in 1928, it was an elementary school with one teacher for all seven grades. In 1928, area children moved to the nearby Palmer School.

What makes the project particularly worthy of HLF preservation funding, notes Don Hasfurther, is that so many individuals have come forward to donate their time and, in some instances, material. They include local builders and craftsmen Will Harris, Grigg Mullen, Pete Davis, and Tommy Harris. Hamilton School Trustee Steve Richards also expressed his gratitude to these individuals and to HLF for its financial support.



Interior of the Hamilton Schoolhouse



Hamilton Schoolhouse

HLF Salutes Carlson Thomas, J. B. “Benny” Lewis, and Grant Griswold

Lexington and HLF lost three stalwarts in recent months: developer Carlson Thomas, longtime Vice Mayor J. B. “Benny” Lewis, and Grant Griswold. We would like to take a moment to remember them.

In 1971, Thomas acquired the historic Alexander-Withrow House from HLF, our first substantial downtown preservation success, proving that our strategy and ambitions were realistic. Lewis played a vital role in navigating the political and financial rapids associated with the redevelopment, also in the 1970s, of Lexington’s historic downtown, transforming it from an undistinguished, utility-pole-strewn center to the stunning village it is today.

HLF adopted a resolution commemorating those two early supporters, noting, in part: “Carlson Thomas said yes . . . He would buy the Alexander-Withrow House, the dilapidated wreck at the top of West Washington Street that Historic Lexington Foundation had acquired with hope in our hearts, and then saved from its only recent occupants, the pigeons. Yes, he would pay full price. And yes, he would accept the easements we sought to assure its future preservation. . . . Carlson Thomas primed HLF’s pump, financially and psychologically. . . .”

Lewis, the resolution says, was “a canny businessman among numerous other gifts,” and balanced voters’ demands for important but pedestrian neighborhood improvements and services with the downtown project “because both were exactly what Lexington needed. . . . Without Benny, some version of our downtown renaissance might have happened eventually, but not then and certainly not nearly as effectively.”



1930s photograph of Willson-Walker House with its white columns.

HLF learned only this July of the passing of Grant Griswold. When Grant and Jo Griswold purchased the White Column Inn on North Main Street in 1983, they contacted HLF for advice regarding the restoration of the building. The c. 1820 structure, now called the Willson-Walker House, was originally the residence of Captain William Willson, a local merchant, postmaster, and treasurer of Washington College (1803–1840). The building was purchased in 1911 by Lexington businessman Harry Walker.

HLF responded to the Griswold request by supplying information on the historic structure and advice for securing historic rehabilitation tax credits. During the restoration of the interior, they uncovered some original Federal-style woodwork that had been hidden under modern walling. For many years, Jo Griswold operated the Willson-Walker Restaurant in the historic building.



1960s photo of Alexander-Withrow House with utility poles along W. Washington and N. Main Streets.

Phillips Family Bequest Helps Conserve Lexington's Historic Cemeteries

Historic Lexington Foundation has received a generous bequest from a charitable trust established by Charles F. Phillips Jr., a former HLF president and longtime mayor of Lexington, and Marjorie Hancock Phillips. Prof. Phillips died in 2012 and Mrs. Phillips in 2016.

Chuck Phillips taught economics at Washington and Lee for 44 years until retiring in 2003. He was mayor from 1971 until 1988 and guided the revitalization of the city's downtown, spurred substantially by HLF, which included burying utility lines and rehabilitating historic but rundown buildings.

Marge Phillips taught music and was active in music and arts programs in Lexington, particularly at Lexington Presbyterian Church, where she was director of youth choirs for 26 years. The Phillipses founded Lexington's first newspaper recycling program in order to benefit the high school's band.

In addition to teaching, Prof. Phillips was a leading consultant to utility and natural resource companies. The author of *The Regulation of Public Utilities: Theory and Practice*, which went into three editions, he was also president of the international economics honor society, Omicron Delta Epsilon, for three terms. He was president of the Historic Lexington Foundation board of directors in 1998 and 1999.

As Historic Lexington Foundation has done with other recent bequests, HLF intends to devote some of the bequest to projects promoting local preservation needs, in this case the conservation of Lexington's two historic cemeteries, Stonewall Jackson Memorial Cemetery and Evergreen Cemetery. Historic

cemeteries require constant attention. The two that are owned and maintained by the City of Lexington are no different. With City approval, HLF anticipates funding a preservation plan for the cemeteries and perhaps a workshop that might be open to stewards of historic cemeteries throughout Rockbridge County.

Leave a lasting legacy—make your own planned gift to HLF.



*HLF President Chuck Phillips and former HLF director Cynthia Coleman observe a 1999 event as Sally Mann, Pam Simpson, and Royster Lyle sign copies of *The Architecture of Historic Lexington*.*



Department of Historic Resources official Kate Ridgway (right) discusses Lexington cemetery conservation needs with HLF Preservation Committee Co-chairs Jim Busch and Dee Joyce-Hayes.



Historic Evergreen Cemetery

A Focus On Early 20th Century African American Education in Buena Vista and Lexington

c. 1914 and 1926 Buena Vista Colored School Undergoes Restoration

An editorial in a May edition of the *News-Gazette* drew public attention to the efforts of the Buena Vista Colored School Historical Society to restore the National Register-listed school. The paper noted that the Buena Vista City Council had committed funds to the project and urged others to do the same. The HLF Board heeded the call and in July approved a \$2,000 grant to the Historical Society. According to the chair of the Historical Society's Restoration Committee, Danta Thompson, the HLF funding will go to rebuilding the two porches on the school.

The school's history is one of the Buena Vista African American community's determination to have their children receive an education. After the original frame schoolhouse burned, a two-room, one-story brick school, grades 1–8, was constructed in 1914. According to Francis Lynn, author of the National Register nomination, after a new school for the city's white children was opened in 1924, friends of the Colored School began an effort to expand the school. In 1925, they petitioned the school board for an addition to the 1914 structure. The school board accepted a bid of \$800 with condition that the city's "Negroes" raise half of that amount.

Only with the construction of Lylburn Downing in Lexington in 1927 could African American students in Buena Vista attend high school without having to leave the county. And then, most had to take the early morning train to Lexington and back in the evening. Irma Thompson recounts the journey in Beverly Tucker's book *The House on Fuller Street*. Even at that time, African American students had to leave the county to get a high school degree. The Buena Vista Colored School closed in 1957.



Elizabeth Boetsch, Beverly Tucker, and Jim Busch tour the Buena Vista Colored School with Danta Thompson.

September 26 Program on Rosenwald Schools to be Held at Lylburn Downing

As was the case of the Buena Vista Colored School, the establishment of Lylburn Downing in Lexington is a case study of an African American community's determination to see that their children received an education. The congregations of First Baptist Church and Randolph Street Methodist Church were principal forces in the community's effort to petition the city to establish a new school to replace the Colored School on S. Randolph Street. Lylburn Downing opened on Diamond Street in 1927. Of the \$34,000 it cost to build the school, \$1,500 of the monies for the construction came from the Rosenwald Fund.

As such, it is appropriate that Lylburn Downing is to be the site of a screening this fall of a new film entitled *Rosenwald*. Born in Springfield, Illinois, Julius Rosenwald was a Jewish philanthropist who made his fortune co-founding Sears & Roebuck in Chicago. Inspired by Booker T. Washington, Rosenwald spent his fortune to help pay for some 5,500 schools in the South for African American children. In the 1920s and 30s, the Rosenwald Fund provided challenge grants to communities for the building of African American schools.

Rosenwald is not just a story about Julius Rosenwald, but most importantly about the thousands of African American students who went on to make a tremendous positive impact on their communities and at the state and national level. These include diplomat Ralph Bunche, photographer Gordon Parks, artists Romare Bearden and Jacob Lawrence, author Ralph Ellison, and Marian Anderson who sang on the National Mall after being denied the stage at DAR Constitution Hall. Generations of African American students inside and outside of Lexington received their education at the c. 1927 Lylburn Downing School.

Elizabeth Kostelny and Will Glasco of Preservation Virginia first brought the idea of showing the film in Lexington to HLF in late June. The HLF board enthusiastically accepted the opportunity to partner with Preservation Virginia. Since then, the Rockbridge Historical Society agreed to join as a sponsor. The Superintendent of Lexington City Schools, Scott Jefferies, and the Principal of Lylburn Downing Middle School, Jason White, gladly offered space for the showing of the film the evening of **September 26**. A pre-screening reception will be held at **5:30 p.m.** at the historic school building, now community center, at **300 Diamond Street**. The film will be shown at **7:00 p.m.** in the **Lylburn Downing Middle School** next door at 302 Diamond Street. This is a **free** event.

Thanks To Our Contributors

We are deeply grateful to those who have given generously to sustain the work of HLF and acknowledge these gifts received from June 2016–July 2017.

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

2017 Captured in Photos



Larry Wiese (far left), Beverly Tucker, and Suzanne Rice present Brownsburg Museum Founders' Award to Dick Barnes, representing the museum.



HLF President Suzanne Rice and Vice President Jim Busch present Founders' Award to Will and Janie Harris for rehabilitation of the c. 1846 Evans House.



May Preservation Month Sacred Places Tour: Rev. Ken Chorle greets visitors to Falling Spring Presbyterian Church.



May Preservation Month Sacred Places Tour: Rev. Horace Douty discusses history of Oxford Presbyterian Church.



Historic Marker Program: Miller's House Museum at Jordan's Point.



Historic Marker Program: Jim Busch, Suzanne Rice, and Jane Ellington at the Michael Miley House.



Rockbridge County High School drama students perform "The Complete Works of Shakespeare (Abridged)" at Hopkins Green. HLF deeded Hopkins Green to the City in 2003 for use as a city park.



July—Final touches on 15 W. Washington Street. Recipient of HLF façade grant.