

The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



Virginia Conference Historical Society to Host the Southeastern Jurisdiction Historical Society Annual Meeting

By Jack Martin

Mark your calendars for an outstanding event coming this summer. The annual meeting of the Southeastern Jurisdiction Historical Society will take place in Williamsburg from July 17-20, 2018, hosted by the Virginia Conference Historical Society (VCHS).

A steering committee of the VCHS, chaired by the Rev. Myrtle Hatcher, has been planning this event for more than a year. The theme is “Religious Liberty in the Historic Advance of Virginia Methodism.” Lectures and tours will present an overview of the advance of Methodism

from colonial times to the present, including a celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Uniting Conference of 1968, which brought the Evangelical United Brethren Church, the Central Jurisdiction and the Methodist Church into a

union known as The United Methodist Church. A highlight of that evening will be a vocal concert featuring a quartet from *The Brethren*, a professional men’s chorus from northern Virginia.

An outstanding group of lecturers and panelists will tell the story of the church’s growth over the course of nearly 250 years, with emphasis on the colonial period, the Shenandoah Valley, the Chesapeake Islands and the union which formed the UMC. There will be tours of Colonial Williamsburg and Historic Jamestowne, and encounters with historical interpreters, designed to help experience an earlier era.

Williamsburg from July 17-20, 2018

Various books, brochures and displays will be on view at Williamsburg UMC, where the lectures and banquets will take place, providing in-depth look at the work of the Conference Historical Society in its effort to preserve and interpret our Wesleyan heritage within the Commonwealth. Three bishops will provide leadership during the event, including the anniversary banquet and the closing service of Holy Communion.

It has been nearly 20 years since Virginians hosted this SEJ meeting. Certainly, the hope is to be able to provide an experience that will be long remembered. Bishop Sharma D. Lewis is preparing several short videos for the event that will provide welcome and insight to Virginia United Methodism.

Williamsburg Church has made its facility available, along with its caterer, who will prepare all the evening meals and special banquets. This church is ideally situated for this gathering, with its proximity to the restored area and ample lodging.

A full agenda and registration materials can be found by visiting vaumc.org/SEJHistoricalSociety2018. The Center for Clergy Excellence is offering one Continuing Education Unit (CEU) for those who attend all the lectures, panels and tours. It is hoped that many clergy and laity from the Virginia Conference will register for this rare event that will celebrate in various ways God’s blessings on “the people called Methodist” over the centuries in Virginia. ☞

– The Rev. Dr. John (Jack) T. Martin Jr. is president of the Virginia Conference Historical Society.

Photos for this feature were made available by Jack Martin.



VIRGINIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Old Brunswick Circuit Foundation— The Cradle of Methodism

By Carol Corker and
Jim Mott

The old Brunswick Circuit—the first Methodist circuit in Virginia and one of the oldest in America—was created as the Petersburg Circuit in 1773 and renamed Brunswick the following year. The Rev. Edward Dromgoole wrote in a letter that, at that time, Virginia had “but one Circuit, which extended from Chesterfield County... to the north of Petersburg, to the south of Tar-River in North Carolina, including many counties, making several hundred miles to ride once around.”

The Brunswick Circuit hosted major revivals in 1775-1776, a time in which the colony’s Methodist population almost doubled. This enthusiasm and growth of Methodism in the Brunswick Circuit greatly outpaced the rest of the nation; therefore, the region is considered by many to be “the cradle of Methodism.”

A group of enthusiastic historians bonded to preserve early vestiges of Methodist history centered on the Brunswick Circuit resulting in the formation of the Old Brunswick Circuit Foundation (OBCF) in 2004.

Now to fulfill its goal of heritage education through historical preservation and interpretation, The Old Brunswick Circuit Foundation owns or manages three historic sites within the boundaries of the original circuit: Ebenezer Academy, the Rev. Edward Dromgoole house and the original Randolph-Macon College and the Boydton Institute.

Ebenezer Academy

Ebenezer Academy was established between 1783-1793 and was the first Methodist school in America. The school building no longer stands; the site is a quiet commemorative interpretive park. The school building outline is marked by the foundation stones with a memorial obelisk at its center. Plans are to provide more extensive

interpretive signage. Further research is desired on former students, the building appearance, and additional information on the Ebenezer Greys, a local infantry unit of the Confederate Army. The OBCF maintains the property and keeps on-site informational brochures. Ebenezer Academy Park, located off U.S. Route 1 in Warfield is open to visitors from 9 a.m. to dusk.

Rev. Edward Dromgoole House

The home of early Methodist circuit rider the Rev. Edward Dromgoole was a center of activity for the spread of the Method-

(Con’t. on next page: “BRUNSWICK.”)



The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



("BRUNSWICK," cont. from pg. 13.)



ism and the gospel when the nation was young and the Brunswick Circuit of Virginia and North Carolina was frontier.

Edward Dromgoole (1751-1835) had emigrated from Ireland to America in 1770 and had been converted from Catholicism to Methodism. While preaching on the Brunswick Circuit, Dromgoole met, converted and married Rebecca Walton, daughter of a wealthy planter. As a wedding present, Rebecca was given 200 acres of land in southern Brunswick County on which they built "Canaan" their home and the home of their family for generations. Dromgoole rode the circuit until 1784 and then ministered locally. Dromgoole was devoted to the cause of freedom. During the Revolutionary War, Dromgoole read the Declaration of Independence from the courthouse steps in Halifax, North Carolina for the benefit of those who

could not read.

The Dromgoole home was frequently visited by American Bishop Francis Asbury. It was at Canaan that Bishop Asbury, the Rev. Peter Pelham and Dromgoole met to organize Ebenezer Academy. The house was also the birthplace and home of Edward's youngest son, George Coke Dromgoole, who served in the Virginia House of Delegates and Senate and in the US Congress for nine years where he was serving at the time of his death in 1843.

In 2008, in order to preserve this architectural and historical but deteriorating gem, the Foundation purchased the Rev. Dromgoole house and 16 acres. The long-term goal is to preserve and restore the house, which retains much of its original interior woodwork, and to add a structure for meetings and retreats in this quiet, natural setting. The house will serve as the focal point and visitors will be able to watch progress as the house slowly undergoes restoration.

Since acquisition the house has been "mothballed" with building wrap and the perennially wet basement problems abated with drainage improvements. In 2017 the partially rotten sill was repaired and the house was leveled and secured until sufficient

funds can be procured to proceed with foundation repair. This second stage that will include repair to the stone foundation around the entire house, chimney repair, and re-pointing may cost as much as \$60,000.

In September 2017 eminent architectural historian Carl Lounsbury visited the Dromgoole House, providing expert opinion to date the house construction (last quarter of the 18th century) and identifying architectural significance that will contribute to the planned application for the National Register of Historic Places. The site, located in Valentines, Va., is open by appointment only.

Original Randolph-Macon College

Randolph-Macon College was chartered by the Virginia General Assembly in 1830 in Boydton, Virginia. This is the original site of the oldest Methodist-affiliated college, still operating in the United States. It opened on October 9, 1832; however, in 1868, largely due to economic difficulties caused by the Civil War, the college was moved to Ashland, where it operates today. Subsequently, the vacated buildings were used by a northern faith-based organization as a school to educate recently emancipated slaves and

VIRGINIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

their families. Under the name of the Boydton Academy and Bible Institute, the site continued to educate African Americans into the 20th century—generating accomplished educators, missionaries and ministers, many of whom became influential in the Civil Rights Movement.

In November 1794, while working to establish Cokesbury College, Bishop Asbury expressed the following strong opinion that schools should be religious in nature:

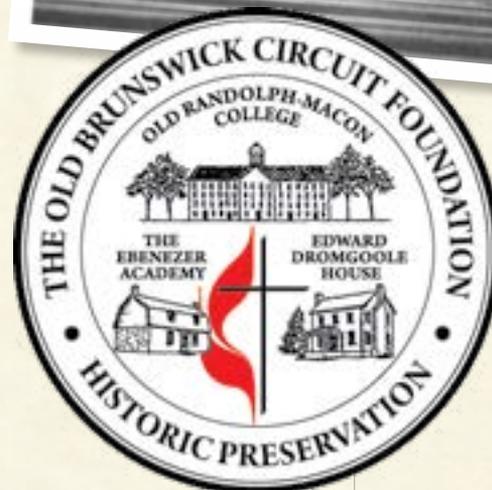
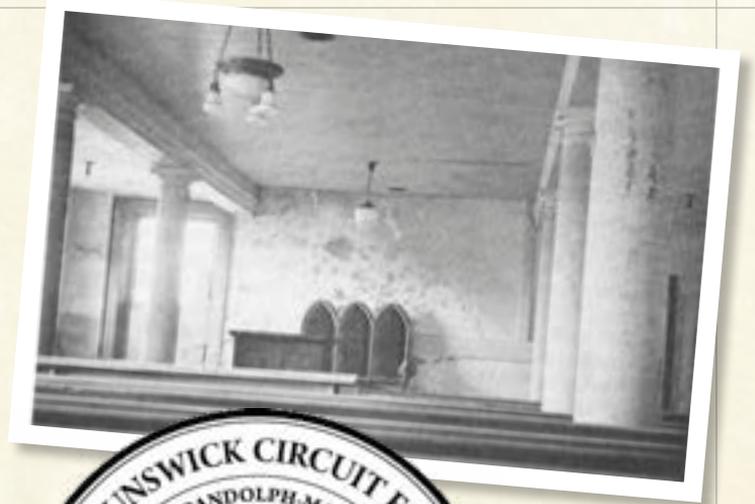
“If we cannot have a Christian school, (that is a school under Christian discipline and pious teachers) we will have none.”

However, having learned the dangers of and fought against state-endorsed religions, the Virginia General Assembly would only charter Randolph-Macon College under the agreement that it would not be an educational facility with a religious focus. Ironically, the Boydton Institute, by being a Bible school which educated generations of ministers and missionaries, fulfilled Bishop Asbury’s dream of a religious school.

Having purchased the Randolph-Macon and Boydton Institute property in 2017, the Old Brunswick Circuit Foundation envisions developing the site as an historic park and tourist attraction along Route 58 near Boydton. While

the stabilized walls of the Randolph-Macon and Boydton Institute will be the main exterior attraction, the nearby Helensha Cottage that was built as the headmaster’s cottage for the Boydton Institute, will serve as a complimentary interior space. It will provide a combination small interpretive museum, workspace and living quarters for site caretakers or visiting speakers and advisors. Every attempt will be made to use the development of this site as a learning laboratory to engage a diverse population of students—from educational facilities as well as from the community—in every aspect of the preservation process.

To date, the OBCF has made initial contacts to utilize the college site and structures as a learning laboratory. A number of cooperative endeavors are in the works with several schools including Mecklenburg County Public Schools, Randolph College, Southside Virginia Community College, and Mary Washington University, as well as HistoriCorps, an organization that restores historic properties as a building classroom. Due to the fragile state of the old college walls, efforts were made to record the remains using drone aerial photography. Additionally, as a class project, students in the Historic



Preservation program at Mary Washington are using digital software to make a 3-D rendering of the main Randolph-Macon College building as it appeared in the 1830s. A preliminary engineering report with cost estimates was prepared by Lysaght Engineering. It identified three options for preserving the remaining walls. “Clean-up” work days are planned for early 2018. An R-MC “Greek Week” clean-up is planned to clear underbrush and debris from the cottage and yard. 🍷

– Carol Corker is the secretary for the Old Brunswick Circuit Foundation (OBCF). Jim Mott is the president of the OBCF.



The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



Historic Site Serves Exciting Role as Learning Laboratory

By Ann Keeling

While the Old Brunswick Circuit Foundation (OBCF) works to preserve the original Randolph-Macon College and Boydton Institute in Mecklenburg County, they have stumbled upon another constructive role that this historical site can play—that of a learning laboratory.

(below) The historic Helensha Cottage on the grounds of the original Randolph-Macon College.



It started during efforts to create digital, visual three-dimensional depictions of the main college building. The OBCF reached out to various institutions that had the equipment and expertise to help them accomplish such a feat. Not only did they find an experienced drone operator, Mr. James O'Neill, who used his sophisticated drone equipment to provide aerial videos of the building in its current state, but they also were fortunate to connect with Dr. Michael Spencer.

Spencer is the head of the Department of Historic Preservation at Mary Washington University in Fredericksburg. He recommended that the OBCF use software called *Google Sketch-Up* to create animated renditions of the college based on architectural measurements. Using this opportunity as a class exercise, Spencer volunteered to have his class also create a digital three-dimensional tour of how the main Randolph-Macon College building appeared in the 1830s.

Shortly thereafter, Mr. Travis C. McDonald, director of Architectural Restoration at Thomas Jefferson's Poplar Forest, brought students who were in Poplar Forest's Architectural History and Restoration Field School on a field trip to the Randolph-Macon and Boydton Institute campus. Dr. K. Edward Lay, an architect and expert

on Jeffersonian architecture, as well as Mr. David Clauss, a senior restoration craftsman at Poplar Forest, were also in attendance. Together participants inspected the college walls and were also invited by the private owner to visit the nearby home that was the residence of this college's early presidents. The visiting experts shared their expertise concerning the architectural elements of these buildings with the students as well as the members of the OBCF.

Having experienced such enthusiastic responses in 2017, the OBCF has reached out to a number of schools and organizations to seek additional partnerships. Several projects are currently in the planning stages for implementation in 2018.

HistoriCorps is a non-profit organization that provides volunteers of all skill levels with a hands-on experience preserving historic structures. Volunteers work with HistoriCorps' field staff to learn preservation skills and put those skills to work saving historic places that have fallen into disrepair. In return, many of the volunteers earn certifications for these newly acquired skills.

Coordination is underway with HistoriCorps to work with the Southside Virginia Community College and the Mecklenburg

VIRGINIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

County High School to help with the renovation of the Helensha Cottage. The Helensha Cottage is another historic building on the grounds of the original Randolph-Macon College. It was built for and named in honor of the wife of the first principal of the Boydton Institute, Helen Sharpe, who served as matron of the school for about 30 years. The Helensha Cottage is important to the overall history and preservation of the site. The OBCF envisions using it as a combination small museum, work space and caretaker's living space. Accordingly it will support the preservation and historical interpretation of the main college building as well as the Helensha Cottage itself.

Several departments from the Randolph-Macon College in Ashland have also responded enthusiastically about partnering with the OBCF's preservation efforts. Their McGraw-Page Library has agreed to be the official archival repository for information gathered on the history of this Boydton Campus. As their community service project during Greek Week, sorority and fraternity members will be arriving in Boydton in the spring to help clean up the grounds around the college walls and the cottage. There is even the possibility that students from their Department of

Environmental Studies will observe --and if they want they can participate in--the removal of the honey bees that have taken up residence and built their hives in the walls of the Helensha Cottage.

Randolph College in Lynchburg also saw the grounds OBCF's historical sites as a teaching resource. They have recently established a new major in Museum and Cultural Studies. In support of this new program, they are exploring how they can partner with the OBCF by helping with content development and graphic design for promotional material, interpretive signage and museum displays needed at the cottage and college.

Randolph College's Department of Environmental Studies and Physics views the Boydton campus as a completely different kind of opportunity. They

want to partner with OBCF so that their students can survey the grounds with their department's ground penetrating radar (GPR). While surveying the grounds, students will get hands-on experience using this equipment and at the same time assist the OBCF in their search for underground evidence of historical features such as cisterns or privies. These types of details have the potential of adding to the knowledge of the bygone, day-to-day life on this campus.

The eagerness of all these institutions to partner with the Old Brunswick Circuit Foundation is both productive and encouraging. It demonstrates that historical preservation sites can serve as exciting learning laboratories for students who are passionate about studying a variety of topics. All of those who

participate are preserving history and promoting awareness of the sites while also increasing their knowledge and improving their skills sets. 

– Ann Keeling is a trustee of the Conference Historical Society.

(below) Dr. Michael Spencer and his Historic Preservation class at the University of Mary Washington.



The United Methodist connection in VIRGINIA



The Future of Conference Archives

By Stephanie Davis and Jack Martin

The Virginia Conference Archives, located in the United Methodist Center in Glen Allen, is an important repository for conference records, church histories, local church closing records, books, historical documents and paraphernalia germane to the Virginia United Methodist heritage and predecessor denominations. Part-time archivist Stephanie Davis meticulously maintains the permanent collection and

receives new materials for cataloguing or disposal.

A large part of Davis' job is encouraging and assisting churches to preserve their records, compiling local church histories and celebrating their heritage. When churches close, she accepts their valuable records and stores them for future use. Davis also accepts, when possible, gifts of books, records, papers, pictures and objects that help to tell the story of Methodism in Virginia.

Davis searches for baptismal records and researches many other topics. For example, when churches celebrate anniversaries or homecomings, she helps provide lists of ministers, with their dates of service and pictures.

Any person is invited to visit the archives to use its resources.

A growing demand

The recent closure of the Blackstone Assembly Center brought a significant amount of material into the archives, significantly straining the capacity of the facility. Digitization is one way of preserving this growing amount of material with efforts under way to procure state-of-the-art equipment to do so, but it is costly and resources are limited.

While the archives has computerized information programs and a move-

DID YOU KNOW?

Each local church can write its own history and place a copy in the Archives. The conference archivist can also assist local churches in setting up a history committee, a history room or in writing their church's history.

Contact the conference archivist at 804-521-1132 or stephaniedavis@vaumc.org for office hours and assistance with research questions.

able shelving system that provides easy access to storage, Davis reports that more space is needed to adequately carry forward the work, and that new equipment is needed, including a new computer. One of the important aspects of her position is assisting those who do historical research. Up-to-date equipment is essential for this work. Through the generous contribution of a Conference Historical Society trustee, a new scanner was purchased last year.

One of the more significant efforts of the Virginia Conference Historical Soci-



VIRGINIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

HERITAGE publication in 45th year

ety (VCHS) is the preservation and promotion of the Patti Russell Endowment, which helps to support the salary of archivist. Russell served the conference for many years as volunteer archivist.

Looking to the future, the VCHS hopes contributors will be generous in helping to grow the endowment in this age of expanding technology where faster retrieval and much greater capacity are needed, even as the historical society is working with Davis to find new ways to care for materials within the confines of the present archives, while looking for additional space. 🍷

—Stephanie Davis in the conference archivist at the conference center located in Glen Allen. The Rev. Dr. John (Jack) T. Martin Jr. is president of the Virginia Conference Historical Society.

The *HERITAGE* is a bi-annual scholarly bulletin published by the Virginia Conference Historical Society. Each issue presents: two or more well-researched and documented articles about the people, places and events of Virginia United Methodist history; recent history-making events and efforts to preserve United Methodist history; updates from conference archivist Stephanie Davis; and the Rev. Raymond Wrenn's Notes from the Ethelbert Drake Society.

To produce *HERITAGE*, a dedicated, all-volunteer publications committee meets twice yearly to discuss the upcoming issue and to plan for future ones. All articles are composed by writers who are passionate about Virginia United Methodist history and who are knowledgeable in their subjects. Authors are compensated with free issues of the publication in which their article appears.

The *HERITAGE* team is always searching for good stories and welcomes all queries and manuscripts concerning Virginia United Methodist history. You can reach editor Myra Lindsey at heritage@vaumc.org.

HERITAGE is available in print and online editions. A one-year subscription (two

issues) costs \$10 for the print edition, \$7 for the online version; \$12 for both. Issues are available in mid-May and mid-November. To subscribe, visit vaumc.org/heritage. 🍷

