

NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Of The Old Brunswick Circuit Foundation

Community outreach is a key part of historic preservation. It serves to educate the public thereby increasing awareness of the significance of historic places and the benefits of preserving them. It builds a sense of ownership by creating a sense of responsibility and ownership among community members, who can become advocates for historic preservation. Community outreach can improve social and economic outcomes because preservation can create jobs, generate income, and improve quality of life. Lastly, community engagement connects people to places. Preservation organizations can partner with local schools, universities, and community groups to connect people of all ages and backgrounds to historic sites and to each other.

Knowing this, The Old Brunswick Circuit Foundation (TOBCF) engaged in a number of successful community outreach activities in 2024. We also continued our ongoing “brick and mortar” projects and applied for other grants-- all of which further our preservation goals.

We are very appreciative of the people and organizations who have reached out and partnered with us to preserve our common historical and cultural heritage. Thanks to our board members who have given presentations, organized tours of our sites, promoted our work at memorial celebrations and rolled up their sleeves in other activities that promote the remarkable legacy that our organization shares with others.

Sincerely,
James H. Mott, Jr., TOBCF President.

FRAGILE CHIMNEY SLOWS GRANT PROGRESS

The historic Dromgoole House is in Brunswick County near Valentines, Virginia and is over two hundred years old. It is owned and under preservation by TOBCF. The Dromgoole House -- called Canaan-- is historically significant as the home of the circuit rider, Rev. Edward Dromgoole, Sr., one of the earliest 18th century Methodist itinerant ministers in America.

In 2021 TOBCF was awarded a grant that we have come to refer to simply as the “Hurricane Grant.” This grant was funded in part by the Emergency Supplemental Historic Fund (ESHFP). The National Park Service Department of the Interior administers this grant in partnership with the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (VDHR). As part of the implementation of this grant, in 2023 TOBCF solicited general contractors through a request for proposals (RFP) for the construction needed to stabilize the foundation and chimneys of this historic building.

There were several ways this work could be done with the cost varying depending on the approach. Costs increased substantially from the time the application was made for the grant because of the reduction in the availability of labor and materials brought on by the COVID pandemic and because the required construction turned out to be more complicated than originally thought. However, one bid was eventually successfully obtained after which numerous meetings took place between this contractor, the architect and engineer, TOBCF and others to determine the most efficient and cost-effective way to do the work.

Through all these meetings the west chimney of the Dromgoole house repeatedly came up in discussions as being one of the most problematic construction elements. Although to the casual observer the exterior of this chimney looked relatively strong, there were indications that it was crumbling on the inside-- making it very fragile. For the purpose of historic preservation, the preference was to take it down to the top of the shoulders and repair and rebuild it in place. From a structural and safety standpoint, the preference was to take it completely down; photographing, numbering and inventorying the bricks for use in a later matching rebuild. In his proposal the general contractor opted to take the chimney completely down. However, when the project went for review by the VDHR, it failed review predominantly for this reason. They concluded that such an action did not fall within the U.S. Department of the Interior's standards of historic preservation. For this reason, the job was put out for bid again through another RFP.



Dromgoole House's challenging west chimney

On this second RFP the scope of work was reduced to limit the rising cost of the project. The work described in this RFP focused primarily on the rebuilding and/or repair of the foundation of the house to include the foundation of both the north and south porches and the one-room wing. TOBCF sponsored a second site visit for interested contractors after which a historic brick and stone mason, Mr. Clint Hobbs of Old World Masonry Restoration of Chesterfield, VA, submitted a proposal for this work. As before, his proposal was sent for review by VDHR and this time, it passed as written. Shortly thereafter the TOBCF board approved the signing of the notice of award and contract for the job. The work to restore the foundation began in December of 2024 and weather permitting, Mr. Hobbs predicts the job will be completed in Spring of 2025.

UNVEILING OF HISTORIC HIGHWAY MARKER: EBENEZER ACADEMY MEMORIAL PARK

The Old Brunswick Circuit Foundation gathered at the Ebenezer Academy Memorial in Brunswick County, Virginia, on March 16, 2024 to celebrate the installation of a new and updated highway marker #S-58 on Route 1 (Boydton Plank Road) in Warfield, Virginia.



*Unveiling the Virginia Historic Highway Marker:
Photo courtesy of Dixie Daniel*

It was a gorgeous day. Present at the ceremony were Jim Mott, TOBCF President and board members Ann Keeling, and Betty Ann and Bobby Spiers. Special guests at the event included Dixie Daniel, Tourism Coordinator for Brunswick County; Jennifer Loux, coordinator for VDHR's Virginia Highway Markers Program and her son, Nathaniel Ely; and Ms. Loux's husband Professor Melvin Ely.

Professor Ely writes and teaches about the history of African Americans and of the South at the College of William and Mary. His recent book, *Israel on the Appomattox: A Southern Experiment in Black Freedom from the 1790s Through the Civil War*, tells the story of free African Americans in one Virginia county and their relations with whites and enslaved blacks.

After the ceremony, participants sat in the open air at the Ebenezer Academy Memorial Park Monument to enjoy picnic-style lunches while enjoying an invigorating conversation about local history and sharing stories of their genealogical and historical research adventures.

TOBCF later posted the event on their Facebook page. This triggered a kind and informative response from John Manson whose family had lived near this school for several generations. His response included photos, a sketch of the school done by his mother and other family information pertinent to this historical site. Thanks to Betty Ann Spiers who --with her husband Bobby as her "copilot"--organized this wonderful event.

HOSTING TOURS:

METHODIST DIGNITARY VISITS FROM ENGLAND: THE GLOBAL AMBASSADOR OF METHODIST HERITAGE SITES

In October 2024 Mr. David Worthington made the trip from his work in Bristol, UK. to the United States as part of a month-long tour of United Methodist Heritage Sites and history organizations in the US.

Mr. Worthington serves as the Global Ambassador of Methodist Heritage Sites for the United Methodist Church (UMC). He is responsible for preserving and promoting the significance of Methodist Heritage sites in the US, the UK and worldwide. Through his work, he raises awareness of the significance of the Methodist story to advance the mission of the UMC and highlight the important role their General Commission on Archives and History plays in "helping us understand the past to envision the future."

On behalf of TOBCF, Betty Ann and Bobby Spiers arranged for and had the privilege of escorting David on a tour of historical sites in the Brunswick Circuit: the first Methodist circuit in Virginia and the oldest continuing circuit in American Methodism.



Below -left to right: Jim Mott, Betty Ann Spiers, Tom King, Bobby Spiers, and David Worthington

Above: Canaan, the home of Rev. Edward Dromgoole, Sr

The excursion began at Canaan, home of Rev. Edward Dromgoole, Sr., with historian and preservationist Tom King, being the first tour guide of the day. After exploring the house, Mr. Worthington expressed appreciation for the work that TOBCF was undertaking on this property. He stated that he saw the Dromgoole house as the flagship property for TOBCF and recommended that it be given priority in our preservation planning.

All photos of tour participants are courtesy of TOBCF board members Betty Ann and Bobby Spiers.

Next, historian and board member Walter Beales provided lunch for the group at the fellowship hall of the Boydton Methodist Church. This was followed by a side tour of the historic Washington Tavern located next door to the church.



Shown above, this small building dates from 1822 and is now used as the church's parish house.

With Walter Beales as our second tour guide the next stop was to explore the ruins of the Randolph Macon College and Boydton Institute's main campus building and the Helensha Cottage.



Below -left to right: Visiting Mr. Worthington, board members Marc Thompson, Walter Beales, & Bobby Spiers

Above: Main campus building of the original Randolph-Macon College in Boydton, VA

Located in the shadow of the main brick building, the Helensha Cottage (below) was the home of the longstanding headmistress of the Boydton Institute. The Boydton Institute was a school for African Americans that opened on the abandoned Randolph Macon College campus after that college relocated to Ashland, VA.



We were pleased to show Mr. Worthington that TOBCF had recently successfully restored the foundation of this historic building. This was a major preservation step toward ultimately repurposing this historic building into a space for community interaction and for the historical interpretation of this remarkable Boydton campus.

Next the group headed to Warfield, VA to showcase TOBCF's third historical site: the Ebenezer Academy Memorial Park. On this site remain the ruins of the foundation of what is thought to be the first Methodist school in America.



Left to right: David Worthington, Jim Mott, Ann Keeling, Bobby Spiers

Experienced in promoting historical sites throughout the world, Mr. Worthington provided us with much valued advice. He suggested that everyone involved with TOBCF should be immediately ready with the same well-rehearsed and unambiguous "elevator pitch" to quickly explain to others our historical preservation work. He went on to clarify that this message should be sufficiently brief such that it can be said in 30 seconds to a minute. It should resonate enough in the minds of both the speaker and listener such that it "needs to sit in your head and your heart". He said once TOBCF has developed this strong message it will be the right time "to get your Methodist connections engaged."

The last stop of the tour was at Sappony Church in McKenney, Dinwiddie County, VA. Although this is not one of TOBCF historical sites, this church is significant primarily for its association with Devereux Jarratt--its rector from the 1760s until his death in 1801.

Right: Sappony Church



Left to right: Board members Mike Browder, Ann Keeling, Bobby and Betty Ann Spiers with guest David Worthington.

An ardent supporter of the American Revolution, Jarratt was also a renowned proponent of the Methodist movement within the Anglican/Episcopal church. When Jarratt died his funeral was conducted at the church by Francis Asbury, the pioneering Methodist circuit rider. Devereux's remains and those of his wife lie buried beneath the Sappony Church.

Visiting this church made for a perfect close to a long day which had successfully allowed our visitor to trace the earliest movement of Methodism in the Brunswick Circuit, the area of Virginia often referred to as "the Cradle of Methodism."

TOUR FOR DESCENDANT OF EDWARD DROMGOOLE

On March 7, 2024, advisory member Tom King graciously hosted a visit from Dr. Larry Heath and his wife Jeanette to the Dromgoole house. Dr. Heath is a direct descendant of Edward Dromgoole, Sr. His uncle and aunt were Vivian Dromgoole "Drum" Heath and Lou Allie Heath. Drum was the person who placed the Dromgoole grave memorial at Canaan in the 1970s. Dr. Heath was very appreciative of Tom's willingness to give them a tour especially on such quick notice.

SETTING UP DISPLAYS:

AT 2024 VIRGINIA UNITED METHODIST CONFERENCE

On June 19-21, 2024 board member Ann Keeling set up an informational display at the Virginia United Methodist Annual Conference in the Hampton Roads Convention Center, Hampton, VA. The display included four new tri-fold display boards with photos and short biographies of scholars and staff who studied and worked at the Boydton Institute (1879-1935). This was an impactful school for African Americans that opened in the abandoned Boydton campus of Randolph-Macon College after that school relocated to Ashland, Virginia.



New addition to TOBCF's historical display at the 2024 Virginia United Methodist Annual Conference

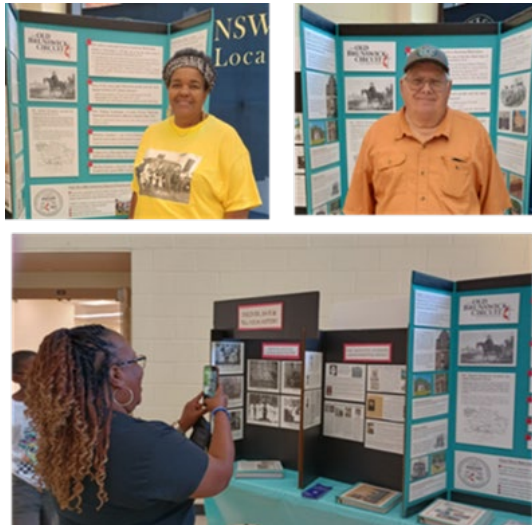
AT BRUNSWICK COUNTY FAMILY FUN DAY

TOBCF was invited by Michelle Clary, a member of the Lawrenceville Town Council, to set up TOBCF's historical display at the Brunswick County Family Fun Day on Sept. 21, 2024. This event took place at the Brunswick County Conference Center in Lawrenceville, Virginia.



Photo & flyer courtesy of. Michelle Clary

As a result of this display, TOBCF had a chance to network with people from the local community. This included among others, the town's mayor, LaWanda Tatum; members of the Clary family whose grandmother had lived in the Dromgoole house; Deborah Hanson, a historian researching the Rosenwald schools in Southside Virginia; James Grimstead, Director at the James Solomon Russell/Saint Paul's College Museum and Archives; Polly Cole, VCU Massey Cancer Center award winning community health educator; and representatives from both the Brunswick County Museum and the Brunswick County Library.



Visitors to TOBCF Family Fun Day Display

GIVING PRESENTATIONS

Board members Ann Keeling and Betty Ann Spiers gave presentations on the work of TOBCF at two Virginia Methodist Churches in 2024.

AT CENTENARY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Ann lives in Portsmouth, Virginia. Rev. John Cole is the pastor of the Centenary United Methodist Church which is located "just around the corner" from her house. He invited her to speak about the work of TOBCF at their Wednesday evening fellowship dinner on October 16, 2024. Everyone enjoyed the delicious home-cooked meal and afterwards listened attentively to Ann's presentation. While most attendees were familiar with the fact that Francis Asbury preached at Monumental Methodist Church in Portsmouth, they were less familiar with the Old Brunswick Circuit and Asbury's connection to the Edward Dromgoole House and the Ebenezer Academy. From them, Ann learned more about the history of Methodism in Portsmouth while sharing PowerPoint photos and information about TOBCF's historic sites in Mecklenburg and Brunswick County, VA.

AT REVELLE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Betty Ann, a member of the History and Archives Committee at Reville United Methodist Church in Richmond, was invited to talk on November 5, 2024 to their church's Lucy Blanton Circle about the work of TOBCF. She gave each attendee a copy of the Fact Sheet that TOBCF sends out in their press releases and used it to guide her presentation. She discussed the mission of TOBCF and gave some background on the history of the early Methodist circuit riders in Virginia and North Carolina. She pointed out that the first Methodist circuit in Virginia over which these early circuit riders traveled was called the Brunswick Circuit and it was from that circuit TOBCF drew its name. Using a poster with photographs, she illustrated and described the three historic sites that TOBCF strives to preserve: Canaan (the Dromgoole House), Ebenezer Academy, and the original campus of both Randolph-Macon College and Boydton Institute. Her talk included information about the grants applied for and the need for matching funds. The Circle members were very interested and shared stories of their family connections to some of the old Methodist chapels in Virginia.

This type of presentation helps us inform modern-day Methodists of their history and heritage. Connections are then made which add to that history. William Warren Sweet, in *Virginia Methodism: A History*, had this to say: "State and regional history has at least a two-fold significance. It often throws new light on important events which might otherwise be obscured, and not infrequently, rescues from oblivion leaders whose lives and labors have more than a regional significance." That is certainly the Old Brunswick Circuit Foundation's belief.

CELEBRATING SHARED HISTORY:

BOYDTON METHODIST CHURCH & RANDOLPH-MACON COLLEGE

Bells have been ringing and voices raised in song as members of the Randolph-Macon Chamber Singers and Concert Choir performed at the 200-year anniversary celebrations of the Boydton Methodist Church in Boydton, VA.

Three times in 2024 talented students and staff from Randolph-Macon College (RMC) have made the two-hour drive from Ashland to Boydton. They made this trip because of a special history shared between this College and this little but vibrant Methodist church.

Randolph-Macon College was founded in 1830 with its original campus being built on the outskirts of Boydton. It relocated to Ashland in 1868. For the 36 years that the college operated in Boydton, the local Methodist congregation worshipped in the college chapel. This makes the Boydton Methodist Church the original campus church for Randolph-Macon College.

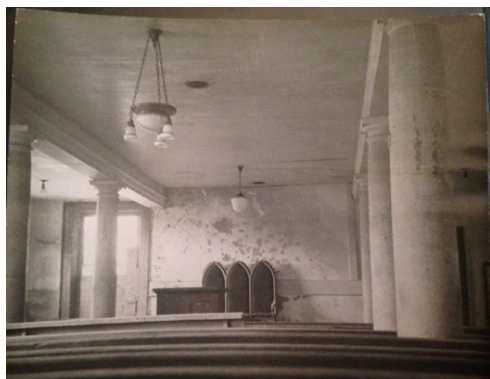


Photo Courtesy of Dr. & Mrs. W.A. Shelton Sr.

Pictured above is the interior of this chapel. It was located on the first and second floor on the north side of the central section of the main campus building. This building is one of several that TOBCF is striving to preserve.

Walter Beales is one of the leaders in the Boydton Methodist Church and one of the board members of TOBCF. In conjunction with a number of hardworking church members, he has coordinated events with members of the Randolph-Macon College staff to strengthen the partnership between these two institutions. This provides an on-site opportunity for the students to learn more about their college's heritage.

The Randolph-Macon Chamber Singers and Concert Choir led by choir director, Antonio Hunt, gave a free concert on April 12 in honor of the Boydton Methodist Church's bicentennial celebration. This was followed by

a reception where everyone had the opportunity to interact with the performers and choral director.



*RMC Choir at the Boydton Methodist Church
Photo courtesy of the Boydton Methodist Church*

On September 22, 2024, in celebration of Higher Education Sunday, Rev. Kendra Grimes, RMC Chaplain and her talented RMC pre-ministerial students led the worship sermon at the Boydton Methodist Church. Afterwards they all had fun ringing the church bell which was the original bell that had hung in the cupola of the main Boydton RMC campus building. This was followed by the students taking a tour of their college's original campus.



*RMC chaplain & pre-ministerial students ringing the church bell
Photos Courtesy of Randolph-Macon College*



The Randolph-Macon Chamber Singers returned on Oct 6, 2024 to perform as part of a special worship service fully dedicated to this bicentennial event.

TOBCF has enjoyed this interaction between the Randolph-Macon College students and staff and looks forward to continuing to share knowledge of past history while also strengthening present-day bonds through these meaningful activities.

PARTNERING WITH DAR

{DAUGHTERS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION}

Board members Cathie Abernathy, Diane Daniel and Betty Ann Spiers tapped into the synergy created by TOBCF partnering with another organization which also strives to educate about and preserve American history: the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR). Diane and Cathie are members of the William Taylor chapter of this organization operating in Lunenburg County.

The DAR has a program for its members called “Service to America.” Members keep track of hours spent doing any activities for charitable organizations or any of a wide range of activities that help people and promote patriotism. Chapters compete for recognition for having the most hours.

Under this “Service to America” program Diane and Cathie took on the project of cleaning the Dromgoole family tombstone. This memorial is in a family cemetery which is located immediately inside the wood line on the southeast corner of TOBCF’s Dromgoole property. It was installed there in the 1970s by Vivian Dromgoole “Drum” Heath and Lou Allie Heath who are direct descendants of Rev. Edward Dromgoole, Sr.

Diane was able to get instructions and identify the right material to use from the DAR website, since care of cemeteries is one of their major projects. She donated the funds to purchase these supplies. TOBCF’s president, Jim Mott, joined in the work by using his weed eater to clear the vegetative overgrowth around the monument so that Cathie and Diane could more easily do this job.

The cleaning of this monument stone had to be done gradually. Diane and Cathie made five different trips to the site to complete this project. Their persistence paid off. They earned points for their DAR chapter’s Service to America Project and the beautiful results of their labor can be seen in the before and after photos to the right. This work shows respect for the Dromgoole family while also exemplifying one of the many tasks to which TOBCF must be attentive as they continue historic preservation of this site.

Board member Betty Ann Spiers also spoke at the meeting of her Chancellor Wythe chapter of the DAR in Richmond, VA about the work of TOBCF. Subsequently they agreed to sponsor future DAR grant applications that we submit promoting American history. This is one of the many ways that we can partner with other organizations for the benefit of all.



Photos courtesy of Diane Daniel and Cathie Abernathy

IN REMEMBRANCE:

NATHANIEL "NAT" PALMER NEBLETT

Nathaniel ("Nat") Palmer Neblett whose unwavering passion for Brunswick County and its history helped lead preservation work that still continues today, died on March 5, 2024.



He was employed as an architect with various firms in Virginia from 1964 through 1974 and worked for the National Trust for Historic Preservation in Washington, D.C. from 1974 to 1980. He ended his career in the field of historic restoration as a private consultant while simultaneously earning a master's degree in planning from the University of Virginia in 1985.

Upon retirement from active practice in 1997, he moved back to Lawrenceville, VA where he applied his skill and knowledge as an advocate for historic preservation throughout Brunswick County.

Along with another native of Brunswick County, Bill Lafoon, and with the joint sponsorship of the Town of Lawrenceville and the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Nat Neblett undertook an architectural survey of the Town of Lawrenceville in 1997-1999. That survey provided the basis for the nomination of the Lawrenceville Historic District for listing on the Virginia Landmark Register and the National Register of Historic Places.

In 2005 while serving as president of the Brunswick County Historical Society, the Brunswick County Board of Supervisors appointed Nat to be on the Fort Christanna Site Planning Committee. He served as the chairperson of that committee that worked for nine years overseeing every facet of the Fort Christanna Historic Site formation.

Nat was a true gentleman who as a board member brought his expertise and understanding to the work of TOBCF. He was faithful in attendance and a wellspring of ideas on how we could improve our work, often citing his work with Fort Christanna regarding effective ways and means of successful preservation and the steps toward acquisition of official recognition. Nat was a champion of the ideas we have held dear in TOBCF, especially the importance not only of preservation, but of interpretation. We shall miss his knowledge, kindness, and encouragement.

CHERISHING OUR ROOTS--LITERALLY THROUGH HISTORIC LANDSCAPING

In landscaping, an allée, or an avenue, is traditionally a straight walkway or passage lined on both sides with trees or tall shrubs that are usually of the same species. For example, the photo below illustrates the allée at Virginia's Berkley Plantation.



Photo courtesy of "The Knight who says Ni @ the Knight who says Ni" posted on TripAdvisor

When TOBCF bought Canaan, the home of Edward Dromgoole, Sr., the house and grounds were covered with vegetative overgrowth as seen in the photo below.



Photo courtesy of Thelma Crowder

Wisteria had taken over everything including what were at first thought to be mostly crepe myrtles trees in front of the house. However, on closer inspection some of these trees turned out to be boxwood—albeit very much overgrown and very lanky.

Fortunately, the following description of the boxwood allée at the Dromgoole house was provided in the August 15, 1929 issue of the *Richmond Christian Advocate*:

Ancient boxwoods form an avenue up to the old road and on the sides beautiful crepe myrtle were blooming in their glory. Far up the road between the boxwoods the door of the old home called to the rider and the hospitable household offered food and rest and, better still, comfort and sympathy to the weary traveler.

Equally informative was the photograph below from the June 21, 1934 issue of that same Virginia Conference newspaper captioned with "View of the Dromgoole home between the boxwood."



Although having been left unattended for so long, the mere existence of these boxwood provided us with valuable information about their original placement. They were so overgrown that little could be done to restore their typical shape, so TOBCF pruned them down as shown in the photo below in hopes of possibly reviving some of them.



Remains of original boxwood allée: Photo courtesy of Carol Corker

Thanks to her foresight combined with her "green thumb," advisory member Carol Corker and her husband Tom were able to take cuttings from these historic boxwood and root them. These rootings have successfully grown to the point that they recently had to re-pot them.



Boxwood ready for repotting: Photo courtesy of Carol Corker

TOBCF hopes to eventually re-establish the boxwood allée in the landscaping of this historic home starting with these plants derived from the yard's original boxwood.

The plant in the foreground of the 1934 photo seen on the right from the *Richmond Christian Advocate* may possibly be a clue as to another plant once grown on this property. This plant appears to be a castor bean plant like the one shown in the image below.



Castor Bean Plant: Photo Courtesy of Sherwood Taylor of Sherwood Seed Co.

Castor Bean plants' popularity expanded during the 18th century, and they were commonly grown in early 19th century gardens. Historical records show that Thomas Jefferson had castor beans planted in his garden at Monticello in 1811. The plants were used by Jefferson as both a barrier to the garden and to deter rodents.

This is the kind of information that must be scrutinized and researched further as one of the early steps toward establishing an appropriate historical landscape at the Edward Dromgoole house. TOBCF invites qualified organizations, the staff and students at colleges and universities or other individuals who are especially knowledgeable in cultural and archaeological landscaping to partner with TOBCF in this exciting discovery process.

GRANT APPLICATION:

VA 250 PRESERVATION FUNDS

Betty Ann Spiers also applied this fall for a grant from the Virginia 250 Preservation Fund. This one-time grant was sponsored by the Virginia Department of Historic Resources and funded by the Virginia General Assembly. The primary purpose of this grant was to encourage the preparation of historic sites and museums of any era for the semiquincentennial celebration in 2026 of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

The goal of this application was to obtain funds for TOBCF to be used for the improvement of the access road into the Dromgoole House property. This will make it easier for visitors to get to the property and view the house. This improvement would also allow heavy machinery to access the site to facilitate future restoration work on the property's historic buildings.

Betty Ann and her husband Bobby consulted with Jamie Barker of J. A. Barker Construction, Inc. in South Hill to provide an estimate for culvert maintenance, grading, graveling where needed, clearing of the entrance from Route 46, and creation of a small parking lot on the property. Funds over the estimated amount will provide for periodic mowing and maintenance of the site. TOBCF applied for \$15,000 which required a matching fund of \$5,000 which was obtained through a grant from the

Virginia United Methodist Conference Historical Society. The application process was completed in hopes of receiving a total grant amount of \$20,000 for this road improvement project. Award notification was expected at the end of December 2024.

A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words

History That Builds Connections & Community



*Photo courtesy of Boydton Methodist Church
Newsletter prepared by Ann T. Keeling
on behalf of The Old Brunswick Circuit Foundation*