



THE OLD BRUNSWICK CIRCUIT FOUNDATION

2018 Annual Newsletter

The Old Brunswick Circuit Foundation (TOBCF) seeks to preserve and interpret key sites along the 18th and 19th century Methodist Brunswick Circuit to share its legacy of faith, history, and education with the public. TOBCF emphasizes this diverse local heritage through utilizing these sites as learning laboratories and cultural facilities for education and social interaction.

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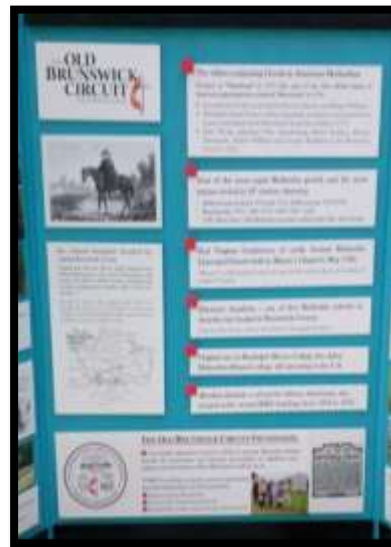
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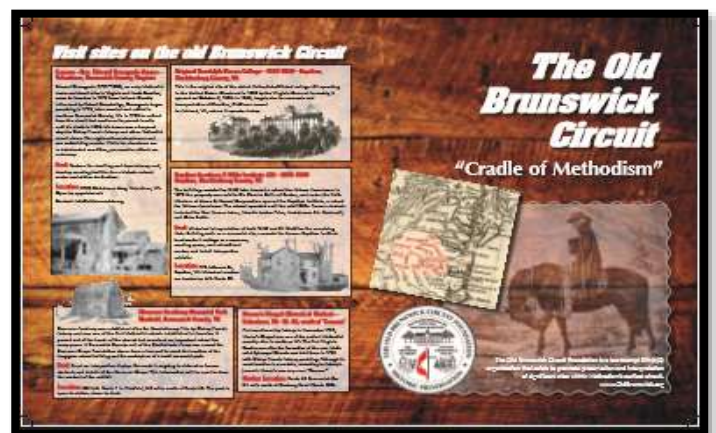
Pathway YouthBuild
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EBENEZER ACADEMY



Close-up of TOBCF display

exhibit to showcase our historical sites. This **exhibit** displayed historical highlights and artifacts, and identified work that has been done by our participating partners. This was one way for us to reach the predominantly Methodist audience of 130 people who attended and who



Newly developed 11 by 17 bi-fold brochure

Publicity in 2018--"Getting the Word Out"

The Annual Meeting of the Southeastern Jurisdiction Historical Society (S.E.J.H.S) of the United Methodist Church took place in Williamsburg on July 17-20, 2018. TOBCF took that opportunity to set up an



Display table at meeting of S.E.J.H.S.

were especially interested in our shared history. Simultaneously with developing the content for this--our first "pilot" exhibit, board member and secretary, Carol Corker, produced two **professional-level brochures** that we can now use as hand-outs at other promotional and

fundraising events, face-to-face funds solicitations, and in our applications for grants.

Another way we reached out to the Methodist audience this March was by **publishing a “mini-feature” in the Virginia United Methodist Advocate Magazine**. This series of articles featured TOBCF’s historical sites, highlighting their 2017 preservation activities and our newly formed working partnerships.

To reach even a larger audience, a TOBCF board member, Lisa Jordan, published information about our Randolph-Macon and Boydton Institute site on the CLIO site. This educational website and mobile application is built by scholars for public benefit. Each entry includes a concise summary and useful information about a historical site and guides the public to thousands of historical and cultural sites throughout the United States. Search for our sites on: <https://www.theclio.com/web/>.

To raise a greater awareness of the time-urgency of our preservation work, Jordan was also responsible for the inclusion of our Boydton site on **Virginia’s 2018 list of Most Endangered Historical Places**. Look for us at: <https://preservationvirginia.org/our-work/most-endangered-historic-places/>.

The Dromgoole House—On Solid Footing



In 2017 the Old Brunswick Circuit Foundation (TOBCF) took a significant step toward stabilizing the Rev. Edward Dromgoole House. “Brick and mortar” expenditures were directed to leveling the floors and securing the sill. This was done in anticipation of the future next step of rebuilding its stone foundation and repairing the chimneys.

Also the 20th century ceiling and sheetrock that had been installed in two first-floor rooms were removed to further reveal the late 18th century construction. This reconstruction work was carried out by Tom King and



Mike Woolfolk of Historic House Preservation.

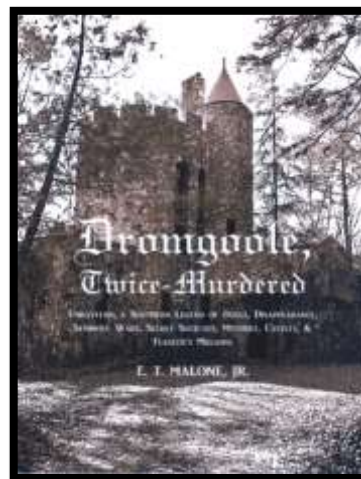
Indeed the age of the dwelling was confirmed this year by professional dendrochronological testing that was facilitated by the removal of the drop ceiling. In June of 2018 Michael Worthington of Oxford Tree-Ring Laboratories took several core samples from the house frame.

The analysis concluded that the “building was constructed from timbers felled in the summer of 1796, summer of 1797, the winter of 1797/8 and the winter of 1798/9.” This information is supported by research done this past year in the Brunswick County Clerk’s Office into the property acquisitions by Edward Dromgoole. This investigation revealed that Dromgoole did not construct this home on the property gifted to his wife by her father as commonly assumed—that property was sold in 1799 to Ira Ellis. It is more likely the 330 acres property purchased from Benjamin King (DB 16/364). Research into the history of this property—its acquisition, building construction and its occupants continues.

Second Printing--Highlights TOBCF’s Work

The book *Dromgoole, Twice-Murdered* written by E. T. Malone, Jr., of Warrenton, N. C., about the legend surrounding the disappearance in 1833 of Peter Pelham Dromgoole was released in late 2017, sold out quickly and is going into a second printing. Peter, a grandson of

the Rev. Edward Dromgoole, grew up at Canaan and entered the University of North Carolina in 1833. After young Dromgoole vanished from UNC without explanation, a story arose that he had been killed in a duel with another student over the affections of a young lady. This inspired the creation of a secret society at the university—“The Order



of the Gimghoal.” In his book, Malone has traced the three threads of the story--the folklore, the literary influences, and the real detective story of what actually became of Peter Dromgoole. One chapter in the book describes TOBCF efforts to restore the Dromgoole house as a shrine to early Methodism. Other chapters contain much material about the Dromgoole family. The book has also been successful in generating interest in the Dromgoole family and the house.

<http://www.malonesmaps.com/>.

Handcrafted Pens Created & Donated

Other activities in support of the Dromgoole house restoration included the donation of handcrafted pens. These pens were turned from heart pine taken from the house during the sill repair. Although no longer solid enough for construction purposes, the aesthetic qualities of this wood were perfect for creating these impressive “one-of-a kind” pens. Only thirty pens are available and they will be used as thank you gifts for donations of \$200 and above.

Randolph Macon College/ Boydton Institute



TOBCF realized that before we could address the Randolph Macon/ Boydton Institute buildings themselves, there was some important “groundwork” that we needed to do. The most important task was the writing of our *Strategic Plan*. This is an important document for two main reasons. First, a strategic plan serves as an overall roadmap for any organization as it strives to accomplish its ultimate goals. Secondly, it is a required document we will need when making application for grants that can help us fund portions of our preservation projects. In 2018 we not only wrote our *Strategic Plan* but also an accompanying *Descriptive Context*. This Descriptive Context augmented the Strategic plan with historical background information which described and emphasized the many historical significances of our sites.

Talk on Boydton Institute--Well Attended

In February, **Dr. Alphine Jefferson**, professor of history at Randolph Macon College gave a talk at the Ashland Public Library on the history of Boydton’s Randolph

Macon College and Boydton Institute. This was one of several opportunities that we capitalized upon to generate public awareness of our projects. It also was a wonderful way to network with others who gave us their support as well as new ideas and approaches to the work that we need to do. We were greatly encouraged that Dr. Jefferson’s talk –in spite of being a rainy night-- was attended by about seventy-five enthusiastic people, many of whom were graduates or staff from Randolph-Macon College in Ashland.

Grounds Clean-up: Scheduling Challenge Leads to Environmental Success

One of our goals for 2018 was to clear the grounds around the main Randolph-Macon building and the Helensha Cottage. As part of Greek Week at Randolph-Macon College in Ashland, a large group of sorority and fraternity members were excited about coming to Boydton in May to help with removing the vegetation overgrowth. Regretfully they hit a scheduling snag and at the last minute it was canceled. Fortunately, a Randolph-Macon graduate heard of the cancellation and made a generous contribution of \$2,500 to help us accomplish the same task. This generated a flow of dialogue about the better ways to deal with the continuous invasion of overgrowth -especially around the ruins of the main Randolph Macon College building. One proposed solution of “bush-hogging” accompanied with a spraying of herbicides was delayed by two colonies of thousands of very industrious honeybees who took up residence in the first-floor ceiling of the Helensha Cottage. A spokesperson from the Mecklenburg County Beekeepers Association said he had never seen such an immense hive. Representatives from the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services have reported a 30%



Mr. and Mrs. Kenly Cifers inspect removed bees & hives.

loss of honey bee hives per year and urge Virginians to help restore the honey bee populations. Because spraying with herbicides can be detrimental to colonies of honeybees, TOBCF was helped by four beekeepers to

remove two colonies of bees from the cottage. The beekeepers were **Mr. and Mrs. Kenly Cifers from Amelia, VA and Marty Bowlin**, and Marty Champion from Skipwith, VA. These beekeepers estimated that the hives were over five years old. These hives ended up yielding 18 gallons of honey and combs for the beekeepers. The bees that were removed have been relocated to their new hives and so far are doing well. The beekeepers named the queen bee that was successfully relocated with the hive, *Queen Helen*, in honor of Helen Sharpe, the first headmistress of the Boydton Institute. We hope to be following these bees to see how their future stories unfold. We are working to either reschedule the Greek Week Clean-up or fund an alternate way to accomplish this.



Marty Bowlin suctioning bees from wall of Helensha Cottage

Finding Abandoned Utilities

Other research done this year by a member of TOBCF served a more “grounded” purpose. A utility document was located that mapped out the sewage drain field for the Helensha Cottage that had been repaired in 1965. This information was sent to Dominion Energy Company who, in the coming year, plans to install underground power lines on the perimeter of the Randolph Macon/Boydton Institute property. Locating the drainage field will also be useful during renovation of the cottage. The electric service to the Cottage located in the garage marked for demolition was found to be “hot.” TOBCF is working with an electrician and Dominion Power to relocate the power to a temporary service box while the house undergoes renovation.

Our Partners Using Ground Penetrating Radar

While preserving our historical sites that often embodies so much of the identity of the local community, we strive to use every step in the preservation process as a learning laboratory. We encourage and offer up hands-on experiences to as many diverse groups as possible, whereby they can develop career skills or simply further their passions and interests. These groups become our partners-in-learning as exemplified by our recent work with Randolph College.

In February 2018, **Jessy Spencer and Allison Brooks**, two students from the 2018 graduating class of Randolph College in Lynchburg, Virginia came to Boydton. They conducted archaeological research using ground penetrating radar (GPR) on the property around our Randolph-Macon College and Boydton Institute site.



Dr. Sojka, Jessy Spencer & Allison Brooks surveying the Boydton property with GPR.

They were searching for evidence of water works, utilities, or other hidden underground features. They were accompanied by Randolph College’s physics and environmental studies professor, **Dr. Sarah Sojka**, and history professors **Dr. Gerry Sherayko** and **Dr. John d’Entremont**—all of whom enjoyed tours of the Helensha Cottage and walking the grounds of the Randolph Macon/Boydton Institute building.

Initial processing of the GPR data has successfully revealed the location of an underground structure which presently we think to be a cistern. We are appreciative of all the work and research this department at Randolph College has done for us and are eager to see what happens next as together we continue further underground exploration on this historical site.

Young Partners Help at Helensha College

The Helensha Cottage was built for Helen Sharpe, wife of the first principal of the Boydton Institute. She served as headmistress of the school for over 30 years. This Cottage literally is in the shadow of the remaining walls



Helensha Cottage with the main building of the Randolph Macon College and Boydton Institute in the background

of the main Randolph Macon College campus building. TOBCF envisions using this two-story clapboard house as an interior interpretive space and accommodation for visiting guests and staff working to promote and preserve the remains of what can be safely saved of the main brick building and its history. Toward that end, the following partnerships have been formed with initial

letters of understanding drawn up to work on renovation of the cottage.

Pathways YouthBuild is a youth leadership development and career readiness program. It focuses on leadership development, placement (job and post-secondary education), academia (H.S Diploma and GED), vocational education (health care, construction, and logistics) and mentoring for youth in Petersburg, VA and the surrounding areas. These youths, who are disconnected from school and/or work, range in age from 17-24. TOBCF partnered with this organization



and brought some of these youth to Boydton on two different days to clean out the back space of the Helensha Cottage. Inside the house, they tore up and discarded the musty 1980s carpeting that was holding moisture against the hardwood floors. In the back kitchen space, they cut out badly deteriorated sections of the wooden floor and foundation in preparation for its replacement. And, most recently they removed the first few rows of clapboard around the foundation of the



house so that the condition of the sills and supporting timbers could be evaluated. This group is scheduled to return to do more cleanups, demolish a 1960s brick garage addition and to reconstruct an exterior wall of the cottage to its original 1890's appearance.

HistoriCorps is a Denver-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit, with the mission of saving and sustaining historic places for public benefit through partnerships that foster public involvement, volunteer, student and youth engagement and public education and training. The Old Brunswick Circuit Foundation has coordinated with HistoriCorps, Southside Virginia Community College and the Mecklenburg Public School System in an attempt to

build a partnership. The goal of this partnership is for HistoriCorps to provide construction guidance, training and certification to students from the community college and local high schools who will learn vocational skills as a result of participating in the renovation of the Helensha Cottage. Startup of this project hit a funding snag when **our application for a grant from the Titmus Foundation was rejected.** Nevertheless, we are hoping that lessons learned from that application submission will serve us well in future grant applications. Once again a board member of TOBCF offered up a **generous matching funds challenge** to the other board members. As a result, our board members had pledged a **total of \$24,500 in donations** to be used toward the first phase of this partnership project.

Initial grant seeking contacts have been made with **Dominion Energy Charitable Foundation** and this potential funding source will be developed further in 2019. This foundation offers community vitality grants and staff volunteer opportunities toward their goals of fostering an appreciation of diversity, revitalizing neighborhoods and ensuring a vibrant community life through support of cultural endeavors.

State & National Historical Site Designation

Based on information submitted by TOBCF, our Randolph Macon/Boydton Institute historical site has been preliminarily approved for receiving the designation of a State Historical Site and a National Historical Site. However, we have been encouraged to extend our goal to seeking the designation of a Historical District which would include not only the property owned by TOBCF but also parcels owned by nearby property owners that were part of the original college campus. Extensive research was done on these surrounding properties in support of the realization of a historic district. To further this nomination process

Mary Ruffin Hanbury, consulting architectural historian, presented a proposal on behalf of the William and Mary Center for Archaeological Research. She offered to perform a reconnaissance level survey and draft a National Register nomination for the Randolph Macon College and Boydton Institute Historic District (058-0231) at a cost of \$12,500. The proposal has not been acted on by TOBCF and a funding source has not yet been identified.

**Presentation by Ms. Faithe Norrell:
Granddaughter of Boydton Institute's Principal**



Ms. Faithe Norrell Speaks at Annual Meeting

In 2018 **Ms. Faithe Norrell** graciously accepted an invitation from TOBCF to speak at their November meeting. Among several other family connections to persons of historical significance including Maggie Walker—first female financier in the United States—and Frederick Douglass—abolitionist, Ms. Norrell is the granddaughter of Dr. Charles S. Morris, the first African American president of the Boydton Institute. Her grandparents, Dr. and Mrs. Charles Morris, and her mother lived in the Helensha Cottage while he was employed there between 1919 and 1923. Her mother, also named Faith, almost died of pneumonia as a child while they were living in Boydton. Ms. Norrell spoke on all of this—giving us a first-hand perspective and fuller appreciation of the life of Dr. Morris and his family. Furthermore she provided insight into the African American struggle for higher education. It was inspiring to hear of the achievements of her family in spite of “Jim Crowe”.

Ebenezer Academy Memorial Park

Owned by the Virginia Conference United Methodist Historical Society, the park is interpreted and maintained by TOBCF primarily through the efforts of Board members Reverend Larry House and Bill Olson. Flyers are replaced periodically which is an indication that the property is visited. The signage is showing wear and will need to be replaced in the near term. The site is a place of quiet reflection.



Hot-Off-the-Press Update-More Good Press

With inputs from three of our board members, Tom King, Carol Corker, and E.B. Malone Jr., the *Lake Gaston Gazette-Observer* featured an article by Lea Beazley in their Fall 2018 *Lake Life Magazine*. This five page article details the history of the Dromgoole house and our progress in preserving what they titled a “Historic Gem in Valentines, VA”. This magazine has 17,500 readers who reside in Mecklenburg and Brunswick counties in Virginia and Warren, Northampton, and Halifax counties in North Carolina. You can read the article at:

https://view.flipdocs.com/?ID=10003598_503023#1

The Old Brunswick Circuit Foundation

(TOBCF) is a tax-exempt 501 (c) (3) organization. Our three historical sites are a visual representation of the interwoven history of the 200 year development of religion and education in America. While saving these historical buildings, we strive to use every step in the preservation process as a learning laboratory--providing hands-on experiences that convey a sense of wonder and intimacy for the past, that advances participants' employment opportunities and that ignites their passions and interests.

Visit us on Facebook at:

<https://www.facebook.com/OBCFVA/>

To support the preservation efforts of the Foundation, **tax deductible donations** may be sent and made payable to:

*The Old Brunswick Circuit Foundation
P.O. Box 385,
Lawrenceville, Virginia 23868-0385;*