

FACT SHEET

The Old Brunswick Circuit Foundation

P. O. Box 385, Lawrenceville, VA 23868-0385

<http://vaumc.org.oldbrunswickcircuit>

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

MISSION: While seeking to preserve and interpret key historical sites along the 18th and 19th century Methodist Brunswick Circuit, the Old Brunswick Circuit Foundation (TOBCF) shares its legacy of faith, history, and education with the public. TOBCF emphasizes this diverse local heritage by using these sites as learning laboratories and cultural facilities for educational and social interaction.

HISTORY: The Methodists became one of the fastest growing churches in post-Revolutionary America. Key to the Methodist success was a dedicated contingent of itinerant preachers, or circuit riders. In this era, most Americans lived on widely scattered farms or remote villages. These ministers would travel by horseback over hundreds of miles, called a circuit, to provide preaching and sacraments to these rural as well as urban communities. One such circuit was the Brunswick Circuit. Organized in 1774, it is likely the singular, continuous preaching circuit in America. Since more than half of the Methodists in America in the 18th century lived within this circuit, historians call it the "cradle of Methodism in the South."

THE OLD BRUNSWICK CIRCUIT FOUNDATION is a 501(3)c tax-exempt non-profit organization. It was chartered on January 23, 2004 under the organizational umbrella of the existing **Virginia Conference Historical Society**. In 2012 the foundation applied for and received individual status as a charitable corporation from the SCC and the IRS granted it tax exempt status retroactive to the corporation's founding. The goal of this organization is "to identify, preserve and interpret sites" on this original Brunswick Circuit.

PRESERVING THREE HISTORICAL SITES:

TOBCF works to maintain and preserve the following three historic properties in southern Virginia. These sites are not only significant to the history of Methodism and of the original Brunswick Circuit but they also exemplify the interwoven history of the development of religion and education in America from pre-revolutionary up to the Civil Rights Movement.

1. **Canaan—the Dromgoole House** (Valentines, VA) was built between 1796 and 1799. It is the only surviving home in Virginia of an 18th century Methodist circuit rider, The Rev. Edward Dromgoole Sr. It was in this home that Dromgoole hosted class meetings and worship services. This house also served as an important hospitality stop for Methodist preachers, most notably, Francis Asbury, one of the two first Methodist Bishops in American. The Dromgoole House was later the home of Edward's son, **George C. Dromgoole**, an early 19th century U.S. Congressman. In 2008 TOBCF negotiated the purchase of 16 acres of the Edward Dromgoole property in Brunswick County containing the original plantation house which they are currently restoring.



Dromgoole House: Left: ca. 1960 (Photo by Carstair Bracey)

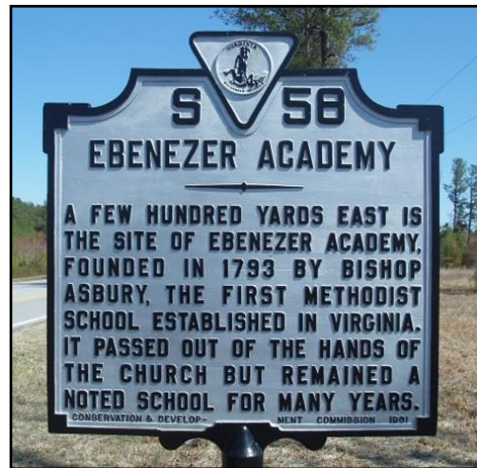


Right: Covered in a protective wrap in 2009, Chimney braced in 2019

2. **Ebenezer Academy Memorial Park** (Warfield, VA) is the site of the first Methodist school in Virginia and probably in the United States and was the forerunner of Randolph-Macon College. It is believed this school began in 1784 and was incorporated in 1796. Bishop Asbury first mentioned it in his journal in 1794. This memorial site retains the foundation stones of the school. In 2004 TOBCF took over its management from the Virginia Conference Historical Society and improved the grounds.



Ebenezer Academy Memorial Park



Virginia Historic Highway Marker S- 58

3. The **original campus of Randolph-Macon College** (Boydton, VA) is the oldest Methodist-affiliated college still operating in the United States based on its charter date of 1830. After this college relocated to Ashland, the abandoned campus was purchased and opened as **the Boydton Institute**, (1879-1940) a school for African Americans. The Boydton Institute educated scholars that went on to be influential professionals and leaders. One of the most notable was the **Rev. Vernon Johns** considered by many to be the *Father of the Civil Rights movement*.



Main Campus Building for both the Randolph Macon College and the Boydton Institute



Helensha Cottage

In 2009 TOBCF purchased 12.5 acres of the original campus which contains the four-story brick remains of the schools' main building. Sitting on the outskirts of the small town of Boydton, this immense brick structure has been described as "one of Virginia's most dramatic ruins". In the shadow of these ruins is a wooden framed building referred to as the Helensha Cottage which is also historically significant. This structure was built about 1890 as the residence of **Mrs. Helen B. Sharpe**, wife of the first principal of the Boydton institute and its long-standing headmistress. The cottage was named in honor of her thirty years of dedicated service.

To support the preservation efforts of this foundation, tax-deductible donations payable to The Old Brunswick Circuit Foundation may be mailed to P. O. Box 385, Lawrenceville, VA 23868-0385; or made on Facebook at PayPal@OBCFVA.