

Preservation Piedmont

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**Newsletter
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preservationpiedmont

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Board Members

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- Susan Spengler, *President*
- Emma Earnst, *Vice President*
- Michael DeMonaco, *Secretary*
- Ellen Wagner, *Treasurer*
- Jean Hiatt
- Genevieve Keller
- Laura Knott
- Martin Quarles
- Tom Raney
- Judy Rasmussen
- Mary Joy Scala

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- Bill Emory
- Ben Ford
- Margaret Maliszewski
- Scott Meacham
- Justin Sarafin
- Ross Stevens
- Christophe Vorlet

When Conjecture Becomes History

So when does a ‘conjectural restoration’ become historic? In my career while restoring ante-bellum historic house museums, I have had to measure and document the existing architectural fabric, do the research, and then ponder the best way to reconstruct a missing feature. If it’s removing a 20th century bathroom and related plumbing fixtures to take it back to the original second floor ‘trunk room’ or ‘nursery’, then the original framing, nail holes, and flooring will often provide the location of the door, the baseboard height, and possibly other finishes. Door and window trim is replicated to what is elsewhere in the immediate environs, and missing hardware is duplicated from extant examples. Sometimes cuts in the framing might suggest recessed cleats or supports for shelving. It takes a bit of sleuthing, thinking, and sometimes common sense to put all of the pieces back together.

In a more challenging restoration, for example the 1977 Restoration of the Stonewall Jackson House in Lexington, VA, historic etchings, antique photos, Mrs. Jackson’s household inventory, and even a Civil War-era photo from a neighboring steeple, aided preservation architect Milton L. Grigg FAIA to transform the original house’s shell (that had evolved into Lexington’s early 20th century ‘Stonewall Hospital’) back to the appearance of Jackson’s home at the time he left Lexington to fight for the South. It was an excellent historic reconstruction that in all manners was based on hard visual and written evidence.

Yet an earlier project in which Grigg was involved was at Colonial Williamsburg. Grigg’s early employer, Perry, Shaw & Hepburn of Boston, was in charge of the massive reconstruction of a colonial capital. The architects virtually worked with fragments of buildings, and in the case of the Capitol and the Governor’s Palace, all they had were engraved copperplate images discovered in 1929 at the Bodleian Library at Oxford University in England. Using extant Colonial period details as their guide, the architects and builders re-created a community based on research, documentation, and the restrained use of period forms and details. That was in the late 1920s/early 1930s. And today, even the ‘modern’ shops in the Merchant Square area and those Williamsburg ‘conjectural restorations’ and reconstructions are now considered ‘historic’.

Closer to home at Monticello in 1964, Grigg was given the commission to ‘restore’ the Wine Cellar in the lower area of the house. That task was given to Henry J. Browne AIA, a draftsman at the time. All that was left of the original wine cellar were the dumbwaiter shafts and a damp brick floor and walls. Hank Browne tells me that the room had been unused for many years, and bricks from the floor had been taken away whenever original bricks had been needed elsewhere. No Jefferson notes on the original cellar had been found. So, the restoration was undertaken in a thoughtful method in looking at the remaining evidence, and reviewing similar cellars of the period. Within a year of its completion, an outside scholar presented a report describing the type of wine bottle that Jefferson ‘might’ have preferred. And, within the last several years, the Wine Cellar has undergone yet another ‘restoration’ based on new documents found of Jefferson’s wine storage principles, and consumption. Had this recent documentation not been found, the fifty-one year old Grigg/Browne design would still be there, and could today be considered historic in itself, albeit an ‘historic conjectural restoration’ in an historic landmark.

Guest columnist - W. Douglas Gilpin, Jr. FAIA - Architect

Document Before Demolish: Closer to Home

While most of 2014 was a fairly quiet year for the documentation team, 2015 is shaping up to be much busier. To date, the team has received six demolition notices, completed four documentations, is in the process of scheduling another one, and it's not even summer yet. All of the structures have been modest, late 1800s or early to mid-1900s houses. A few have been houses that were so structurally unsafe they were almost beyond saving but many have suffered from another affliction: being a small, older house on a sizeable lot inside the Charlottesville city limits.

One particularly memorable house with a very unusual layout was in the Belmont neighborhood. The City of Charlottesville tax assessor reported that the 3-bedroom, 1-bath house was built in 1925, but a demolition team that salvaged usable historic materials from the house reported evidence of a much older building, constructed of logs atop the stout, native greenstone foundation walls. The greenstone was likely acquired from a quarry located just down the hill from the house above Moore's Creek. The evidence indicated that the original log structure had burned, and it appeared that the foundation was retained and a wood-framed house was constructed on the same foundation. The bedrooms and bathroom of the newer house were located on the main floor and the kitchen was in the basement. The basement was only under one-half of the house. Exposed wall joists and the remains of a well about ten feet from the basement door suggest this was the original layout. Even though by the time we documented this house it was in disrepair and demolition was imminent, at least a record of it will survive in our Document Before Demolish archives on deposit at UVa Special Collections.



Unique house in Belmont prior to demolition.



Traditional 2-over-2 house in Fifeville prior to demolition.

It's a harsh reality but preservationists must remember that not every building can or should be saved no matter how much those involved really do want to preserve it. This charming little house in Fifeville is a perfect example of that dilemma. A standard 2-room over 2-room side-hall layout with multiple additions, this circa 1900 house must have once been a lovely home. Years of neglect had taken their toll. The severest damage was the result of a roof leak that made the kitchen addition on the back of this house so unstable the documentation team did their best to document that room without entering it. In the basement, the foundation was even less promising. Multiple pillars holding up the house had shifted over time, some barely touching the floors they were supposed to be supporting. Toward the back of the house, part of the foundation wall was bulging outward.

It is worth saving? If you have infinite time and money, you could, but most of us don't have a ready supply of both. Nor did the current owner, Latitude 38, which recently acquired the house. It was a difficult decision but they ultimately decided the house could not be saved. They allowed the Document Before Demolish team full access to the house to complete the documentation but they didn't stop there. They have insisted the demolition be carried out in such a way that allows any reusable parts of the house to be salvaged. They plan to use some of the salvaged material in the house that will replace this one.

Allowing a structure to be documented means a record of it will exist for future house-hunters to find. Salvaging any reusable materials ensures some part of the demolished structure will continue to be part of the built environment for future generations to enjoy.

-Susan Spengler

Update on the Preservation Tax Credits

The 2015 General Assembly Session adjourned Sine Die on February 27, 2015. This was a short session, which began on January 14, 2015 and ran for 45 days. While it was a short session, it was a successful session for the preservation community. Preservation Piedmont worked to support Preservation Virginia's many legislative advocacy efforts, including protecting conservation funding and essential tax credits, such as the Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit, and supporting legislation that expands funding to historical sites.

The Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit came under significant pressure during the 2015 General Assembly Session. Both House Bill ("HB") 2109 and 2167 proposed to phase out the Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit. Specifically, HB 2109 called for the elimination of 10 credits and exemptions, including the historic rehabilitation tax credit, effective January 1, 2017. While HB 2109 called for the expiration of all tax credits without a current expiration date, including the historic rehabilitation tax credit, on January 1, 2025, unless the legislature expressly extends those credits. Through Preservation Piedmont and Preservation Virginia's advocacy efforts, HB 2109 was tabled in subcommittee and HB 2167 was amended in subcommittee to remove the Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit from the bill. HB 2167 went on to be left in full committee, effectively defeating the bill this year.

Another essential preservation program that came under pressure this past session was the Land Preservation Tax Credit program. This program was targeted as a potential source of savings and legislation was passed that does limit the program. HB 1828 and Senate Bill ("SB") 1019 lowered the aggregate cap on credits available to \$75 million and limited the amount of tax credits which can be claimed by individuals in any one year. However, compared to more draconian efforts being advanced in the General Assembly, the legislation that passed was the best available compromise to avoid deeper cuts to a valuable program.

Finally, two measures that Preservation Piedmont and Preservation Virginia supported this session passed and have been approved by the Governor and will go into effect July 1, 2015: HB 2193, patroned by Delegate James Edmunds, expanded the types of battlefields eligible to receive grants from the Virginia Battlefield Preservation Fund to Revolutionary War and War of 1812 historic battlefields. SB 1306, patroned by the retiring Senator John Watkins, authorizes the Director of the Department of Historic Resources and the Board of Historic Resources to acquire and administer Virginia battlefield properties, including properties listed in certain official reports on the battlefields of the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, and the Civil War. Prior to passage of this bill, the Director and the Board were only authorized to acquire designated historic landmarks.

The General Assembly reconvened for "veto session" on April 15, 2015. However, changes in areas that Preservation Piedmont and Preservation Virginia advocated for this session are unlikely. This successful session could not be possible without the passionate efforts of preservation supporters and the collaboration of preservation groups like Preservation Piedmont and Preservation Virginia.

-James Hunter on behalf of Preservation Virginia

May is Preservation Month

Mark your calendars! This year we will celebrate preservation with a series of events throughout the month of May. Please watch our Facebook page, check the website, or check your email for more information on the exciting events we are planning throughout the month. We will wrap up the month on Saturday, May 30, with a members-only tour of some of Marshall Wells' most significant works.

2014 Annual Meeting & Party

Preservation Piedmont's 2014 Annual Meeting was held on November 15, 2014, as a part of the Piedmont Area Preservation Alliance's (PAPA's) "Annual Gathering of the Historic Preservation Community," held at UVA's Miller Center of Public Affairs in the historic Faulkner House. The event began with a social hour, including guided tours of the building, a historic homestead built in 1855-1856 as one of the four "hotels," or dining halls, at UVA. The event was sponsored by the Miller Center, the Virginia Department of Transportation, and Preservation Piedmont.

After the tours, Congressman L. F. Payne introduced his long-time friend and the event's guest of honor, Governor Gerald L. Baliles. In 1987, Governor Baliles revitalized the historic preservation movement in Virginia by establishing the Governor's Commission to Study Historic Preservation. Governor Baliles emphasized that preservation is not mere reverence for the past, but is a tool for managing change and enlivening the future.

Following Governor Baliles' talk, Preservation Piedmont board member, Genevieve Keller, spoke about "Why Landscapes Matter" and emphasized the importance of preserving historic landscapes as well as structures. Gennie, an architectural historian and preservation planner, is a native of Charlottesville and founding co-principal of Land and Community Associates, a practice engaged in historic preservation, landscape architecture, and collaborative planning for distinct cultural communities.

During the Preservation Piedmont Annual Meeting, outgoing board members Amanda Burbage, Laurie Fear, and Emilie Johnson were thanked for their years of service and returning board members, Jean Hiatt and Mary Joy Scala were welcomed. New officers were voted on and approved: as president, Susan Spengler; as vice-president, Emma Earnst; as secretary, Michael DeMonaco; and as treasurer, Ellen Wagner.

The board then presented two awards. The 2014 Preservation Award was given to Julie Coiner for the sensitive renovation of the J.S. Young Company Building at 1102 Carlton Avenue. The 2014 Martha Gleason Award was presented to Lynn Rainville for her recent book, *Hidden History: African American Cemeteries in Central Virginia*, published in 2014.

-Laura Knott

*We gratefully acknowledge Laura Knott's
service as President for 2014.*

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Membership Application/Renewal Form

Preservation Piedmont is a non-profit corporation that is dedicated to protecting historic structures, sites, landscapes, and neighborhoods, as well as rural areas and open spaces. We do this in order to create an appreciation for the historic resources of the Central Virginia Piedmont region. Based in Charlottesville, we also serve Albemarle and bordering counties.

- Student \$15 x ____ Individual \$35 x ____
 Sponsor \$100 Patron \$300
 I would like to receive my newsletter by *email only*

If you would like to initiate or renew a membership, please enclose payment and make checks payable to:

Preservation Piedmont
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Preservation Piedmont also has an email list to serve our members and quickly update preservationists throughout the region about important preservation issues. If you are interested in signing up, please include an email address below.

I want to volunteer!

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Phone/Email: _____