



Unison Preservation Society

NEWSLETTER

Working to Protect and Preserve our Historic Village and Countryside

VOL. 11 • NO. 2 • 2024

• FALL •

UNISON, VIRGINIA

*Live auction at Unison Heritage Day.
Photo by Dara Bailey*

Founding of the Unison Preservation Society



Saturday, November 2, was a bright, sunny day as nearly 250 people gathered outside and inside the Unison Store for this year's Heritage Day. Paul Hodge, who for 30 years lived with his wife, Avis, in Unison, kicked off the day with a speech on how the Unison Preservation Society (UPS) was founded in the late 1990s and the role that the late Mayo Brown played in UPS accomplishments. These have been critical not only in helping preserve our rural countryside but also in preserving the Unison Village and its Store. Reviewing the photos of Unison neighbors having a good time at this year's Heritage Day (see page 3), it seemed appropriate to reprint Paul's speech recounting how the Unison Store was saved and Mayo's role in its rescue. Paul not only was the founder of UPS but also served for years as its President.

"In the mid-1990s, there were two celebrities in Unison. One was an old Golden Retriever named Fret who walked the roads around here, wagging his tail nonstop and greeting everyone. Among his many endearing habits, Fret would lie down in the middle of the road bringing traffic to a halt—Unison's version of traffic calming 30 years ago.

The other icon was Mayo Brown, who died this past summer at age 100. Mayo walked village roads almost daily for decades, his last years with a cane. Nothing slowed and stopped traffic like Mayo, not even Fret. Mayo was one of the best known, friendliest residents in one of the oldest villages in Loudoun County.



Paul Hodge delivers his speech on the Store front at Unison Heritage Day. Photos by Dara Bailey



May Brown attending the 2016 Unison Heritage Day. Photo by Dara Bailey.

Motorists, horseback riders, bicyclists, and pedestrians stopped to talk to Mayo.

But in the late 1990s, Mayo wasn't just walking around the neighborhood. He was on a mission: to save the Unison Store, one of this county's last 19th Century stores, which was due to be sold at a public auction on the Leesburg Court House steps. As the sale approached, many came to visit the store, among them country music singers Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings and their friend actor Robert Duval, who lived down the road.

I didn't see these out-of-town celebrities that day, but I saw our local celebrity, Mayo, almost every day because he stopped at our house in the village. "Mayo's here," my wife Avis would call out. His daily greeting was invariably the same: "Paul, you're a newspaper reporter. You've got to do something to save the Unison Store." Mayo, Avis and I would take glasses of wine and sit by our small pool and the pasture fence. Horses and steers kept an eye on us. "Mayo is right," said Avis. "You've got to help."

So, Mayo and I began calling wealthy Middleburg neighbors, most of whom Mayo knew. No one was interested in buying the store. So, I proposed two steps that are generally considered crucial in historic preservation.

Step 1: Create a nonprofit organization:

I drove to the nearby Atoka Preservation Society, which kindly gave me their bylaws to copy. I did; almost word for word. I then filed Internal Revenue Service forms to create a Unison Preservation Society just like Atoka's, a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit.

I created a UPS board of directors and asked Mayo to be its first president. As a reporter, I started writing regular neigh-

borhood newsletters, dropping them off at every house within a mile of Unison. Almost from the moment UPS filed as a nonprofit, and the newsletters went out, we began getting tax deductible gifts as permitted by the IRS. Final IRS approval took almost a year, until 2001. By then we'd already raised nearly \$10,000.

Step 2: Get on state and national historic registers:

Among other things that I covered as a reporter for *The Washington Post* was the National Park Service, which runs the National Register of Historic Places. Why go on state and national historic registers? Because every city, town, building or place that goes on them may be eligible for lucrative state and federal restoration tax credits. It's one reason more than 100,000 places are now on the National Register. For this we needed an architectural historian.

And suddenly, lo and behold, not one but several angels appeared:

Mayo was certainly **Angel #1**, but **Maral Kalbian** was **Angel #2**. One of Virginia's best architectural historians, Maral lived just over the Blue Ridge. She was instrumental in not only getting the store put on state and national registers, but the whole village of Unison with its two dozen historic buildings.

Miraculously, Angel #3 appears out of the blue:

Coe Eldredge, and his wife, Maria, who live in an historic house a couple miles from Unison. Coe agreed to buy the store when it came up at the public auction and to restore it. He knew that state/federal tax incentives awaited those who do good

historic preservation deeds. On the appointed day, Mayo and I stood on either side of Coe, to support him. Angel #3 did not waver. Coe outbid two developers who had plans to raze the store and build spec houses on the site.

The Little Nonprofit That Could:

UPS was putting the village and store on Virginia and National Registers. We'd just done what Mayo Brown had walked the village for over two years hoping to accomplish: save the Unison Store. The village of Unison went on Virginia and National Registers in 2002 and 2003. Coe almost immediately began restoring the store to Park Service "Gold Standards" of restoration.

But we weren't done. Our new UPS bylaws said we were founded to help preserve the store and the historic countryside. UPS soon:

- Blocked a proposed 28-house subdivision with controversial "alternative septic systems," just down the road from the store. The land is now under conservation easement. **And --**
- Joined forces with the National Park Service to create a 4,000-acre Battlefield Historic District, commemorating the Civil War Battle of Unison in 1862.

The Park Service and other federal agencies were so excited about creating the nation's newest Civil War battlefield they gave UPS more grants to double the battlefield's size to 8,000 acres. We did. It went on the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register in 2011.

Unison resident **Mitch Diamond** did much of the initial research on the Civil War battlefield, thus becoming the village's **Angel #4**.

The Unison historic soap opera was almost over when Coe Eldredge (#3) announced he needed to sell the Unison Store to do other area projects. **Dr. Betsee Parker**, philanthropist and owner of nearby historic Huntlands, came forward. She became **Unison Angel #5** when she bought the store from Coe in 2013 and donated it to UPS as the Unison Village Community Center.

Thanks to all UPS board members, neighbors and supporters like you here today, and to our angels, who dropped in to help preserve the Unison Store, the village of Unison and its huge, historic Civil War Battlefield." ■



• UNISON • HERITAGE DAY

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 2024

Lunch provided by Monk's BBQ
Fresh oysters provided by Joe "the Oyster Man" Tippett
Beer provided by Lost Barrel | Wine provided by Middleburg Tennis
Bluegrass music provided by Willow Branch
Homemade Desserts provided by Unison United Methodist Church
Special Appearances by Piedmont Foxhounds and Philomont Volunteer Fire Dept.



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How to Support the Unison Preservation Society (UPS):

UPS depends upon contributions from people living in our community who want to preserve our historic village and the countryside surrounding it. Since the UPS is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) corporation registered in Virginia, all contributions are tax deductible. Contributions should be made to the Unison Preservation Society and sent to the post office box listed above.

Ideas for Newsletter Articles:

We are particularly interested in gathering material about Unison for future UPS newsletters. If you have ideas for newsletter stories, please e-mail us at unisonnewsletter22@gmail.com



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Another Insect Invasion Is Here

By Howard Lewis

In 2020, the UPS newsletter ran an article on the Spotted Lantern Fly (SFL). At the time, SFLs hadn't been spotted (no pun intended) in Unison, but this year they have been spotted all over the area. The SLF is an invasive insect from Asia and it has been around for a very long time. Documents from 12th

Century China describe it in detail. It has no natural native enemies in this country.

In contrast to the emerald ash bore, which devastated the ash trees in the Unison area over the last decade, the SLF has a much larger menu that it likes to choose

from for its meals—walnuts, maples, oaks, pines, sycamores, cherries, almonds, peaches—the list goes on and on. What's so bad about the SFL? A healthy plant has a plumbing system that draws food and water up from the soil to nourish the parts of the plant above ground while sending nutrients down to its roots below ground. The SFL basically screws up this plumbing system—sucking nutrients from the plant and excreting sugar water (poop) that destroys the understory below. This either kills the plant outright or severely weakens it.

What should we all be doing about this?

First, learn how to identify the SLF, which develops in four stages. In the first three stages the nymphs are wingless with black with white spots its body and legs. In the fourth stage the adults develop bright red patches. For more information on identifying the SLF, go to the Virginia Cooperative Extension website, ext.vt.edu.

Second, between now and next May, people should check everything around their yards—trees, rocks, cars, lawn furniture—for SFL egg masses (see photo). If you find an egg mass, scrape it into a plastic bag that contains alcohol or a hand sanitizer and dispose of it. In short, right now is the season to

destroy, or at least reduce, the number of SFLs we'll be seeing next year.

Next May, when SFL egg masses that haven't been destroyed start to hatch, there are a number of additional measures, ranging from traps to insecticide sprays, that homeowners can take to fight back. An

excellent source for more information about these measures is Cornell University's website for Integrated Pest Management, cals.cornell.edu/new-york-state-integrated-pest-management.

Finally, get rid of the Alien- thus trees—the so-called Trees of Heaven. The SLFs favor not

only feeding on these invasive trees but also laying their eggs on them in the fall. An excellent source for how to deal with Alien- thus trees, along with numerous other invasive plants, is the Blue Ridge Prism website, blueridgeprism.org.

Efforts around Unison to destroy SFLs not only will help our neighborhood, but also a number of commercial orchards in Virginia that are being hard hit by this insect. ■

Author's Note: Our newsletter's graphic designer, Dara Bailey, suggested that I write this article. This was sort of a last-minute assignment. So, I tried to see if I could take an easy way out and get a Chatbot AI to do the work. Who would know, right? But I was disappointed in the results and wrote the article myself. So, at least for now, the UPS newsletter is still being produced by humans!



Spotted Lantern Fly egg masses in various stages.

Having a Ball!

During their annual visit by the Piedmond Foxhounds on Heritage Day, one of the hounds found a tennis ball in a neighbor's yard. This hound couldn't contain himself. And with pure joy, he decided it was playtime!

Photo by Dara Bailey



Would You Like to Stay Informed?

If you would like to learn more about what the Unison Preservation Society is doing for you, please make sure you are on our mail and email lists so you don't miss any important announcements and special events in and around Unison. Contact us at events@unisonpreservation.org. We would love to hear from you!