



Unison Preservation Society

NEWSLETTER

Working to Protect and Preserve our Historic Countryside

Photo by Dara Bailey

ISSUE THREE • 2019

• FALL •

UNISON, VIRGINIA

Heritage Day: Food, Music, Art and Lots of Fun for the Kids

Unison loves our kids, and Heritage Day on November 2 is paying a lot more attention to them this year, our 16th annual event.

Aside from the always popular visit of the Piedmont Hounds, and the delicious homemade desserts that always amp up the young ones, this year we are providing an AWESOME obstacle course that should keep the offspring occupied for hours.

Everyone 12 and under is admitted free so we hope to see whole families join in the fun from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.

Also new this year is our Art Show sale and Antiques silent auction. For three days prior to Heritage Day—beginning on Wednesday, October 30—the Unison Store and Community Center will be home to the Unison Artists' Art Show and Sale.

Works of your favorite local artists, including Joan Gardiner, Laura Hopkins, Cathy Zimmerman, Barbara Sharpe, Sharon Clinton, Caroline Helmly and Dale Bright, will be on display every day at the store and available to purchase.

On Heritage Day itself, our traditional silent auction will include antiques, heirlooms and other items donated by your neighbors and friends. The silent auction will join the art show in the store's main room for a lovely combination of Unison Art and Antiques.

There will be a Friday evening reception for guests of the artists as well as Heritage

Day sponsors of \$250, \$500, \$1000 or more. Art will be for sale and, as a perk of sponsorship, attendees can view the auction items in advance of Saturday's hectic day.

Another perk of sponsorship are tickets to Heritage Day itself: 2 tickets at the \$250 sponsorship level; 4 at the \$500 level and 8 at the \$1000 level.

Of course, just showing up at Saturday's Heritage Day is a great perk. There are the scrumptious all-you-can-eat oysters and barbeque, wine and beer, live bluegrass music and the aforementioned homemade desserts.

Tickets are \$35 in advance, \$40 at the door. Request tickets, donations and sponsorships at www.unisonva.org or by mail at P.O. Box 606, Middleburg, VA 20118. Your name will be on a list at the door on Friday and/or Saturday. We hope to see you there!



Catch up with neighbors and friends and enjoy bluegrass music by Willow Grass. Photos Michael Zuckerman.



Hang out with the Piedmont Hounds.



What's at the Other End of Bloomfield Road?

By Howard Lewis

About three miles down Bloomfield Road from Unison is, of course, the village of Bloomfield, which has its own unique and interesting history. The Unison Preservation Society's (UPS) newsletter has never done an article on Bloomfield so it seemed the time had come to correct this oversight. Given the number of very good local historians living in western Loudoun, it can be something of an intimidating task to write about any history of this area, especially since there is often disagreement as to how, when, and where various events took place.

Take, for example, the story behind John Mosby's famous "Greenback Raid." In October 1864, Mosby and 75 Mosby Rangers derailed and robbed a train in West Virginia carrying \$172,000 in payroll for Union troops in the Shenandoah Valley. In 1864, Mosby's Rangers were one of only two Confederate ranger groups still permitted to operate under the Partisan Ranger Act, which allowed them to keep captured non-military items, e.g., the \$172,000.

So, on the evening after the raid, Mosby and his men rode into Bloomfield and split up the loot. That seems to be an historical fact, but exactly where this happened in Bloomfield seems less certain. According to at least one Ranger, this occurred at the old Ebenezer Church, but other accounts just mention an open field and Mosby himself never mentions the Church as the place where the \$172,000 was divided up.

Regardless of where this happened, it had a big impact on the local economy. In an article in the *Times-Mirror*, well-known local historian, Eugene Scheel, wrote that the money "each of [Mosby's] men received kept Southwestern Loudoun's economy going for at least a year, and you rarely saw a Confederate dollar anymore

in Bloomfield." Mosby himself, however, did not take a cut of the loot. So, his men presented him with the gift of a horse, Croquette, purchased from the Oatlands Plantation.

Bloomfield was established by the Virginia General Assembly in 1816, forty-eight years before Mosby and his Rangers gave it such a sharp economic boost. It was put on the map, so to speak, a year later, in 1817, with the appointment of the village's first postmaster. The most commonly mentioned origin for the village's name is that it came from the fields of wild flowers blooming all over the area.

By the 1880s, Bloomfield had five stores and a population of around 80 people. In the decades following its official establishment, it clearly had become a community crossroads with a blacksmith and wheelwright shop, wagon maker, general store, millinery and even a hotel in a building still standing today. The village also had a physician from the mid-1880s until 1906.

Bloomfield, in short, was the quintessential 19th century rural village whose location was determined basically by how far people could conveniently walk or ride. But times were changing. After the Civil War, the railroads were beginning to knit the country together and the automobile was just over the horizon. Rural crossroads such as Bloomfield were becoming less relevant to meeting the everyday needs of their local communities.

Also, the Panic of 1893 appears to have hit Bloomfield very hard. In *Loudoun Discovered*, Eugene Scheel finds that "not one Bloomfield business appears in the directories of the following year." The general store in Bloomfield, however, seems to have gone through several reincarnations over the next 106 years. Known as the Freeman Store, it survived a lot of ups

and downs, including the paving of Airmont Road in 1959 when most of the old building, where it was located, was taken down. It also had a small zoo in the back. The store operated until 2000 when it closed its doors after the death of Frances Freeman Oliver. It is now a pottery studio owned and operated by her granddaughter, Amy Oliver.

Life-long resident of Howardsville, Thomas Reid, recalls that the Freeman Store always did a booming business on Sundays. Fauquier County, in contrast to Loudoun, was "dry." So, every Sunday would see a steady stream of cars from Fauquier to the Freeman Store where beer could be purchased. "Every Sunday, it was a regular cloud of dust from traffic on our dirt road," Reid remembers.

Besides selling beer on Sunday, there was another reason for the store's popularity. Local historian, Kevin Grisby in his book, *Howardsville: The Journey of an African-American Community in Loudoun County Virginia*, writes that in the Freeman Store "blacks didn't have to wait for whites to be served first...Freeman treated you the way you wanted to be treated." That wasn't always the case at the general store in Unison, according to Grisby.

Churches played a big part in the life of Bloomfield's residents both before and after the American Revolution. Actually, before the Revolution, Bloomfield's churches were called "meeting houses" since officially only the Anglicans had "churches." Bloomfield's historic Baptist churches, as well as a cemetery, are located about a mile and a half north of the village on Airmont Road—the old Ebenezer Church, built sometime in the mid-18th century and the new Ebenezer Church, built roughly 100 years later.

The existence of these two churches side-by-side reflects a split in the Baptist congregation in 1834. The history of this split, which involved disagreements over Sunday School, the use of musical instruments in worship, missionary work and Bible Societies, is well beyond the scope of this article. Services in the old, stone church building seem to have ended in the early 1900s and in the new church by 1941. A ten-yearlong renovation of the buildings and property started in 1971. Today, both churches and the cemetery are owned and maintained by a private company.

The other church in Bloomfield—the



The old Ebenezer Church (left), built circa 1750, and the new Ebenezer Church (right), built circa 1850, standing within a few feet of each other reflects a split in the Baptist congregation in Bloomfield in 1834. Photos Michael Zuckerman.



The Johnston Chapel, built in 1857, was decommissioned in mid-20th century and became a threshing barn, but is now being restored. Photo by J. Covington Motion.

Johnston Chapel—is just north of the intersection of Bloomfield and Airmont Roads on Old Chapel Farm. It was built as a Methodist Chapel in 1857 and decommissioned in the mid-20th century to become a threshing barn for orchard grass production. Much of the architectural features were removed including the choir loft, windows and center chandelier. The wood floor was replaced with cement. The original wall paintings remain, however. They are by well-known artist, Lucien Powell, whose work hangs in the National Gallery and Corcoran Gallery in Washington DC. The chapel is now undergoing a long-term renovation.

The proverbial one-room schoolhouse was another feature of Bloomfield. Classes were first held in the old Ebenezer Church building and moved to the basement of the New Church in the 1850s. Eventually a separate schoolhouse was built in the village, but in 1916 the schools in Unison and Bloomfield were combined in a large, two-story building roughly halfway between the two villages on Bloomfield Road. (See article on Unison-Bloomfield school in spring 2017 UPS newsletter and the detailed 20-page history of the school by local resident, Flora Hillman, on UPS website at www.unisonva.org.)

There is more than a little irony in the fact that Bloomfield has evolved from a vital community crossroads in the 19th century to a 25 MPH zone on Airmont Road in the 21st century. And very few drivers on their way to other places come close to observing this 25 MPH zone, which, except of course for the people living there, is probably more of an annoyance than anything else. But this is a critical time to slow down, literally and figuratively, and take a look at the history of these crossroads communities and decide how they are going to fit into the future of Loudoun County. The accompanying article by UPS President, Tara Connell, explains why. ■

County Waffles over Unison Historic Status

By Tara Connell

One of the biggest surprises to emerge from the debate over the Loudoun's Comprehensive Plan last Spring and Summer—as least as far as Unison was concerned—was county staff's ruling that the 280-year-old Village of Unison is not a village and not historic.

And it was that decision—despite all tradition and even a Board of Supervisor's resolution to fix the problem—that has thrust Unison into the center of a debate that will have critical importance to all of Loudoun's rural residents outside of towns, particularly the citizens of small crossroads villages.

Why is it so important? Because answering the question: “what is a rural historic village?” will define how much say residents of the rural countryside will have in what their neighborhoods will look like.

It could mean whether or not they will have to live next door to a McMansion or a winery; whether or not there will be a paved road outside their door; whether or not there will be a cluster development around the corner. And that's just a few of the examples.

Boiling it down, the Comprehensive Plan gives residents of the Historic Rural Villages on a list devised by the staff much more say in their surroundings than residents who live in areas not on the list.

The Plan calls for the county staff to “Work with Rural Historic Villages to develop community plans that will support their community goals and address issues related to land use and zoning; economic development, and historic resources.”

Also, “zoning regulations, design standards and guidelines are to be reviewed and revised to be compatible with the buildings and streets in Rural Historic Villages.”

Rural residents outside villages and towns get only this: The county will “Evaluate and revise zoning regulations and design standards to improve the design of subdivisions and clustered residential development by incorporating natural features and buffering from roadways.”

Yikes. Get me to the Villages!

Currently, the 12 villages on the list are:

Aldie, Bluemont, Bowmantown, Lincoln, Loudoun Heights, Lucketts, Neersville, Paeonian Springs, Philomont, St. Louis, Taylorstown, Waterford.

Why? According to the staff, Unison is not on the list because in 2001 or 2002, the village was not given boundaries when lines were drawn on the General Plan's zoning map. Phyllis Randall, chair of the County Board of Supervisors, was particularly miffed that most of the villages that weren't “mapped,” she said, were historic African-

The Zoning Battle

Act II in the battle over the county's Comprehensive Plan is not about the Plan at all, but about the county's zoning code.

Much of the new Plan, which was adopted by the Board of Supervisors on June 20, 2019, is at odds with the current zoning code and the multiple other ordinances county staff uses to enforce the planning, zoning, transportation and development life in Loudoun.

So the staff won approval on Sept. 19 of a million dollar overhaul of the Zoning Ordinance, in which it will be “revised and/or replaced to maintain consistency between the County's visionary and regulatory planning documents.”

In other words, all the fighting over the high-minded language about preserving the rural West and holding the line against development will be meaningless without zoning code revisions that match the sentiments expressed in the plan.

The consultant-assisted code revision efforts will be the first major update of the Zoning Ordinance since 2003. The update is amusingly being called the Zoning Ordinance Overhaul, or ZOO.

Needless to say, everybody with an interest in preservation, zoning, real estate or development wants a part of the action at the ZOO. Groups as disparate as Dominion Power and the Heritage Commission, the Airports Authority and the Coalition of Loudoun Towns, are interested parties in the revision efforts.

The Loudoun Coalition, an organization of 40-plus county non-profits, has a team working on recommendations for the ZOO. Unison Preservation Society is a member of the Coalition and the Loudoun Historic Village Association (LHVA). Both groups are working with the Zoning Committee to ensure that specific issues such as the prevention of inappropriate cluster subdivisions in rural communities and proper enforcement of zoning violations are written into the new code.



Unison Preservation Society Newsletter

Published by

The Unison Preservation Society
P.O. Box 606
Middleburg, VA 20118
www.unisonva.org

Board of Directors

Tara Connell - *President*
Caroline Helmly - *Secretary*
Michael O'Donnell - *Treasurer*

Tim Bates
Harry Bigley
Steven Chase
Mitch Diamond
Susan Ferster
Hurst Groves
Douglas Kemmerer
Tobin McGregor
Gordon McKinley
Ryan Michels
David Slosman
Jamie Steve

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 unisonpreservsoc@unisonva.org.



Follow Us!

Newsletter Design:

Dara Bailey Design • Bluemont, VA
darabaileydesign@gmail.com

Unison Preservation Society
P.O. Box 606
Middleburg, VA 20118

Non-Profit
Organization
U.S. Postage Paid
Mr. Print
Purcellville, VA
20132

American communities such as Willisville, Conklin and Howardsville.

At a meeting of the Board of Supervisors on June 1, a motion driven by the Unison Preservation Society and the Loudoun Historic Village Association was passed 9-0 calling for Unison, Willisville and Howardsville to be given proper boundaries and put back on the list of historic villages.

Instead of just adding the three villages to the list at the time, however, county staff balked, complaining they didn't have time to map them right away. But they agreed to add the villages to this sentence of an "Actions" section of the Rural Historic Villages portion of the Comprehensive Plan:

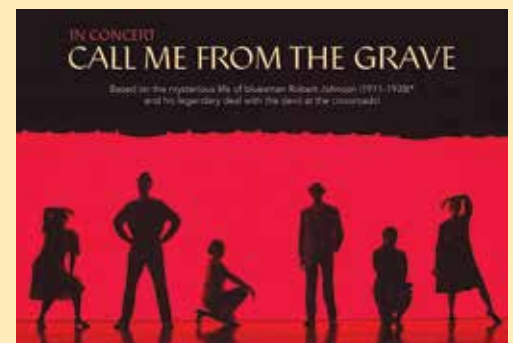
"Develop criteria to evaluate existing Rural Historic Villages and other historic crossroads communities such as Airmont, Bloomfield, Howardsville, Morrisonville, Unison, and Willisville, to determine if their current designation is warranted, define and/or redefine community boundaries as necessary, and amend the Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinance as appropriate."

In other words, the county would study whether Unison, Willisville and the other villages would qualify to be included on the list. Bo Machayo, chief of staff for Phyllis Randall, chair of the County Board of Supervisors, said the Loudoun Historic Villages Alliance is helping to develop the criteria for inclusion on the list.

What's New in Willisville?

The historic Village of Willisville was named to Virginia's National Register of Historic Places this September after a year-plus long effort by members of the community—led by Carol Lee—and the Mosby Heritage Area Association. Next up: The federal register in early 2020. Willisville was founded in 1868 by formerly enslaved African Americans who bought land at the intersection of what are now Welbourne and Willisville roads. If named to the federal register, the Mosby group says: "Willisville is one of the best preserved villages of its kind. These African-American communities represent an integral part of Virginia's history and Willisville would be among the first in the Commonwealth to receive National Register designation."

Help Preserve the Austin Grove Church



To benefit the preservation of the Austin Grove Church, one of the oldest African American churches in Loudoun County, students from Yale University will perform a new musical, *Call Me from the Grave*, based on the mysterious life of legendary bluesman, Robert Johnson. Three performances at the Austin Grove Church in Bluemont, VA on October 26-27. More info and purchase tickets at austin-grove.ticketleap.com. Limited tickets available. Only 100 seats per performance.

Which is good news, because Unison is a member of the LHVA and UPS Board Member Mitch Diamond is working with the Villages group to develop the criteria.

Said Diamond: "Settlers began living in Unison around 1740. It was officially declared a village by an act of the Virginia Legislature in 1812. It appears prominently on the Yardley Taylor map of Loudoun County in 1854. It is mentioned in official dispatches during the Civil War. It is noted as a village in the "Comprehensive Description of Loudoun County" published in 1908 and it appears clearly as a village on the Virginia State Road Atlas in 1996. The U.S. National Park Service placed the village of Unison on the National Register of Historic Places in 2002. The Loudoun Supervisors and staff visited Unison three years ago in their tour of rural Loudoun. Yet when Loudoun published its new Comprehensive Plan this year, Unison had vanished as a village. It is incomprehensible—but we will get it fixed." ■