



Unison Preservation Society **NEWSLETTER** *Working to Protect and Preserve our Historic Countryside*

Issue One

Spring • Summer 2013

Unison, Virginia

Unison Gets a Community Center

In a celebration Sunday, April 21, at the historic Unison Store, local preservationist Dr. Betsee Parker handed the keys to the store to the Unison Preservation Society to make the restored building a community and history center and the land beside it a Village Green.

Dr. Parker's \$400,000 purchase of the store and gift to the nonprofit society permanently preserves the 19th Century structure, one of the few remaining country store buildings in Loudoun County. And it gives rural southwestern Loudoun a public meeting place and history center in one of the oldest settlements in Loudoun, dating to the early 1730s.

With a Dixieland band playing, more than 100 area residents gathered to celebrate and toast Dr. Parker and the nonprofit society, which Dr. Parker called "a fierce" organization that had fought off a major housing subdivision on the edge of the historic district.

UPS President Harry Bigley thanked Dr. Parker for her generous gift and her many preservation efforts in western Loudoun. The UPS Board of Directors joined her on the store porch to applaud her. The Board expanded last month to help manage the new community center and its programs and to tap the expertise of additional area residents.

The society is now working with the

Loudoun County Design Cabinet and Loudoun County Department of Economic Development to hold another Unison Charrette, this one to focus on the historic store building and Village Green and their future use as a community/history center. The Design Cabinet, which brings together expert planners, architects and engineers, and invites the public to participate, did a charrette study and report in May of last year on the new Unison Battlefield Historic District. It also did a charrette in 2010 on the historic village itself. Both the vil-

lage and the 8,000-acre battlefield are on the National Register of Historic Places and the Virginia Landmarks Register.

Dr. Parker, who restored and put under easement her historic Huntland estate a mile from Unison, told the crowd she had visited Unison and its country store many times before it closed in the 1990s, when it was still selling hot dogs and hamburgers. Living at Welbourne at the time, Dr. Parker said she would take a break from writing sermons and would come over and sit on the store porch with her terrier, sharing a chocolate bar. An Episcopal minister with a PhD in theology, she said she knew then



Photo courtesy of MB Photography.

Members of the Unison Preservation Society Board of Directors thank Dr. Betsee Parker for her generous gift to the organization, and her many preservation efforts throughout western Loudoun County.



Left: Local residents gather in front of the old Unison store for the dedication ceremony. Above: A Dixieland band plays on the front porch. Below: Dr. Betsee Parker addresses the crowd as she speaks about the importance of historic preservation.

Photos courtesy of MB Photography.

that if there was something she could do to preserve the store in the future she would do it.

Neighbors are supporting Dr. Parker's gift by creating a store endowment. More than \$60,000 already has been pledged, toward a goal of at least \$100,000, to assure the future of the historic 1870s building. (See page 4 for how to contribute).

Following the gift of the store, the Preservation Society unanimously approved hiring Maria Eldredge and the Eldredge family property management firm, to manage the store for a year. This will provide stability, President Bigley said, and continue the many public uses of the store that Maria Eldredge has launched in the past two years, including yoga classes, art workshops and shows and a local farmers' market, with fresh vegetables and locally raised lamb, beef and other meats.

Local builder Coe Eldredge, with support from UPS, bought the derelict store a decade ago and restored it using restoration tax credit programs of the National Park Service and the Virginia Department of Historic Resources. Since the restoration, the Eldredges have regularly opened the store and its grounds to community use. UPS holds its annual fall festival, Unison Heritage Day, at the

store. This year's festival will be held on Saturday, Oct. 26. Last fall's Unison Day featured two days of Civil War reenactments in and around the village, commemorating the 150th anniversary of the 1862 Battle of Unison.

One of the five early 18th Century Quaker settlements in Loudoun (including Waterford, Hillsboro, Lincoln and Taylorstown), Unison today is hailed as one of the best preserved historic villages in Virginia. The store is in the center of the Unison Village Historic District and Unison Battlefield Historic District, and is also at the center of the county's Beaverdam Creek Historic Roadways District, the only one of its kind in the nation. The area has more historic dirt

roads than any place in Virginia, and more than half of the region is under conservation easement.

Unison also is home to the kennels of the Piedmont Hunt, the oldest fox-hunting club in the nation, which has had a long association with Unison and Dr. Parker's historic Huntland estate. The Unison Farmers Hunt joined its hounds with Piedmont's 100 years ago, after area fox hunters met around the pot-bellied stove in the Unison Store. The hounds moved to Huntland's kennels, considered the largest and finest in the nation at that time. Dr. Parker restored the kennels and celebrated their 100th anniversary in 2011. ■



Unison at the Center of Conservation Easement in Loudoun County

Over the past 15 years, an increasing amount of land throughout Virginia has been protected using conservation easements, which are voluntary agreements that limit future development of a property. Easements protect scenic views, historic areas, open spaces and agricultural resources.

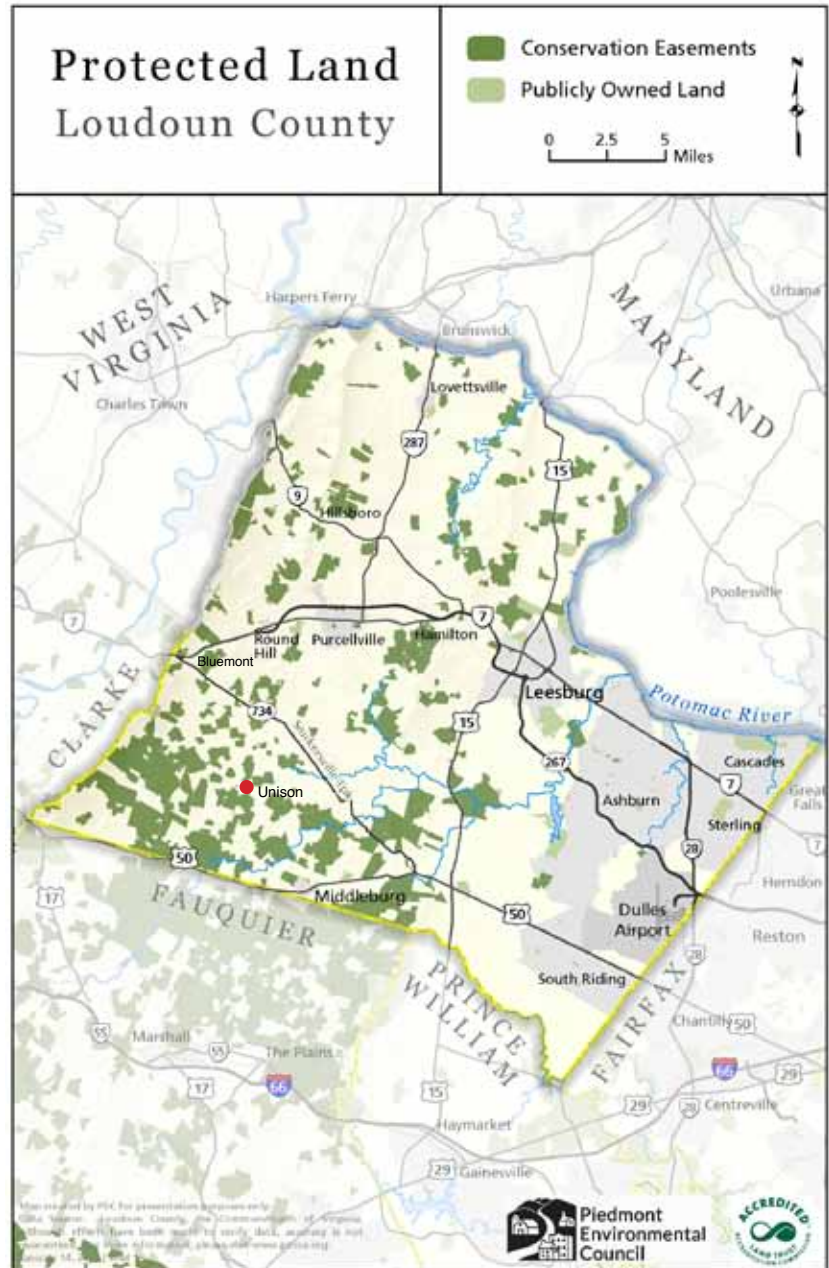
Landowners in Loudoun County have been at the forefront of this conservation movement, as nearly 51,000 acres of land has been protected by conservation easements. This represents 15.3 percent of the 520 square miles that make up the county.

The map accompanying this article shows the location of conservation easements, which are marked in dark green, that protect natural, historic, and scenic resources throughout Loudoun County.

Look at the southwest corner of this map—the pie shaped wedge running roughly from Gilberts Corner to Bluemont and then along the Loudoun County boundary lines on the south and west—and compare the amount of green in this area to the rest of the county. Impressive. The green highlights that this area—slowly but surely—is becoming one of the most well preserved rural landscapes in the nation. And a closer look at the map reveals that Unison is sitting right in the center of this landscape.

This southwest corner of Loudoun is part of the larger Blue Ridge electoral district. A recent review done by county staff shows that over the last 30 years less than five percent of the 167 applications to build housing subdivisions in the Blue Ridge district have been in the southwest corner of the district. This is a testament to most landowners' deep appreciation of the land and rural way of life. But, the large block of green surrounding Unison also reflects the fact that many landowners have turned their appreciation into action—using conservation easements to ensure that the rural land—and way of life—they value will be here in the future.

The Virginia Outdoors Foundation (VOF) holds the majority of the conservation easements in Loudoun. Other organizations, including the Piedmont Environmental Council (PEC) and the Land Trust of Virginia (LTV), also accept conservation



easements. To find out more about conserving your land and the generous tax incentives associated with a conservation easement, contact PEC's Mike Kane at (703) 371-4373 or mikane@pecva.org, LTV's Don Owen at (540) 687-8441 or don@landtrustva.org, or VOF's Kristin Ford (540) 347-7727 or kford@vofonline.org. Of course, you can always start by talking to one of your Unison neighbors who already has their land in easement. ■

Did You Know? Slightly over 15 percent of Loudoun County is in conservation easement. This amounts to 51,000 acres and approximately 23,500 of these acres—46 percent—are in the southwest corner of Loudoun—one of the highest concentrations of easements in the entire country.

Unison Preservation Society Newsletter

Published by

The Unison

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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. This includes not only stories, photographs, family histories and diaries of long past Unison residents but also what is happening in today's Unison. If you have ideas for newsletter stories, please e-mail us at unisonpreservsoc@unisonva.org.

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The Unison Lost Dog List

At some point, almost everyone in Unison has either lost a pet or found one on their property. There are a lot of steps people should take to help out in these situations, including calls to all the local shelters and putting up posters, but if you live in the Unison area one of the most effective actions to take is to contact Unison resident, Caroline Nash Helmly, via e-mail at cnashlaw@gmail.com and ask her to send out a notice to the Unison Lost Dog List. The UPS Newsletter asked Caroline to tell us more about the list.

UPS: First of all, the list isn't only for lost dogs, right?

Caroline: While lost dogs account for most of the notices I send out, I have used it for horses, cattle (once for an entire herd of cattle), cats, goats, rabbits, and a potbelly pig. For any pet or animal that is lost, we send out a notice to the neighborhood. This is not a dog-only list.

UPS: How big is the list?

Caroline: I have about 63 names on it now, including hunt kennels, Middleburg Humane Foundation and names well beyond the immediate area around Unison. I should hasten to add that I keep the e-mail addresses private so that the list doesn't become a happy hunting grounds for people sending out all sorts of unwanted e-mails. I have tried to be careful not to use the list for any purpose except to help lost (and sometimes abandoned) animals.

Right: Caroline Nash Helmly with her dog Tetley.



UPS: Someone gets home from work and finds that their dog, horse, or pig is missing. Or they find a lost dog, horse, or pig in the front yard. What should they do to activate the list?

Caroline: Send me an e-mail at cnashlaw@gmail.com that I can forward on to everyone on the list. Describe the lost animal, where it was last seen, and provide phone numbers where you can be reached. If you have a photo I can attach to the notice that always helps.

UPS: Do you want more names on the list?

Caroline: Yes. If you want to be on the list, send me your e-mail address. In Unison, it takes a village to find a lost dog or pet. The more people we have; the more effective the list will be. It is all about neighbors helping neighbors. ■

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