



# Unison Preservation Society NEWSLETTER

*Working to Protect and Preserve our Historic Countryside*

Issue Three

Winter • 2013

Unison, Virginia

## Unison Heritage Day: *A celebration of the village, neighbors, and our history*

By Harry Bigley, President, Unison Preservation Society

Unison Heritage Day went off without a hitch October 26 under sunny skies and warm temperatures—a great day for a couple hundred people to get together in the neighborhood. The emphasis for this year's Heritage Day was a celebration of our community and the success we have had in 2013 in our continuing efforts to preserve it, beginning with the incredibly generous donation of the Old Unison Store by Dr. Betsee Parker to the Unison Preservation Society (UPS) as a community center for the village and the surrounding countryside.

That alone would be cause for celebration, but we also should be pleased that a lot of land around us continues to be put into conservation easement; that the county has agreed to work on protecting our rural roads and bridges; and that we continue to have neighbors who keep their land open for everyone to ride through, walk around with their dogs, and simply enjoy the beautiful area in which we live.

There will be challenges ahead of us this coming year, including protecting and developing the store into a robust center for the community and maintaining a watchful eye on development. But sometimes it is just nice to pause

and celebrate what we've accomplished, to have a good time listening to bluegrass music, eating oysters and good barbecue, and talking to all the different people who live around Unison. That's what this year's Heritage Day was all about and as President of UPS that is the emphasis I want to continue in coming years.

We also raised much-needed funds for UPS in ticket sales as well as from the live and silent auctions. In fact, both auctions produced record totals. Nearly 125 items sold in the silent auction ranging from a haircut at The Grooming Room in Middleburg to a sleigh ride with tea over the back roads and fields around Unison. Items in the live auction included a one-week stay in an apartment in Paris (France not Virginia); dinner for six at the Unison Store/Community Center; a guided fly-fishing trip in Harrisonburg; and much more.

The icing on the cake for the day was a presentation by State Delegate Randy Minchew of a Joint Resolution agreed to by the Virginia House and Senate recognizing the work of the UPS in creating the Unison Battlefield Historic



**Above:** Harry Bigley with State Delegate Randy Minchew (left) and UPS Board Member Mitch Diamond (right), display the Virginia Legislature's Commendation of Unison for its efforts to establish the Unison Battlefield Historic District.

*Photo courtesy of Steve Chase.*

District. The Resolution commended the UPS and its "citizen-leaders" for "rekindling the historical appreciation of the November 1862 Battle of Unison and preserving the scenic and historical vistas of the Unison community for future generations." One of our leaders in this effort was Mitch Diamond, who also was recognized this year by the Mosby Heritage Area Association for his outstanding work on the battlefield. He was one of four people to win the Association's 2013 Heritage Hero Award. ■

# Unison's United Methodist Church Plays an Historic and Central Role in Village Life While Need for Repairs Grows

By Mitch Diamond

Methodists began meeting formally in the Quaker village of Unison in the late 1700s, about 50 years after the village was first settled. Their growing numbers were spurred by the repeal of tax laws supporting the established Church of England and a wave of evangelism sweeping the new country. After meeting for several years in a private house, they built their first chapel here in 1785, four years before George Washington became President.

That 1785 chapel, known as the Old Bethesda Church, was a commodious building of rough-hewn oak logs and poplar boards about 300 yards east of the current building. Men and women, blacks and whites, all worshiped in the same building, but sat separately as was the custom. The early names associated with that chapel are familiar today in Loudoun County—Gallaher, Beavers, Plaster, Seaton, Brown, Taylor and Lovetts.

The land on which

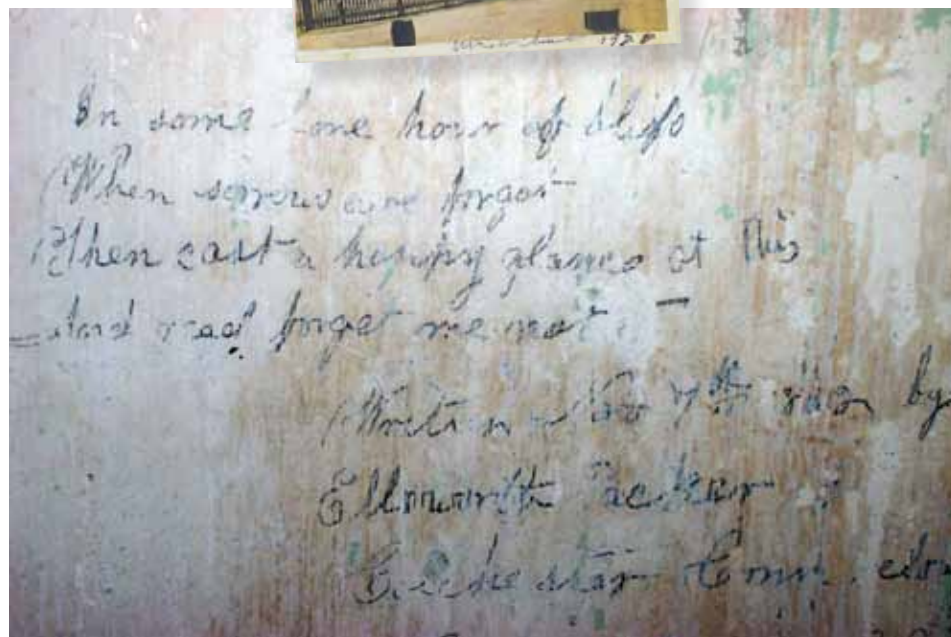


the church and a cemetery stood was sold in 1924.

In 1832, using slave labor, the Unison Methodists built a new, large brick building under the direction of William Benton, President Monroe's business manager. Benton was a well-known brick mason who also built Oak Hill, Monroe's home, and other Loudoun County buildings.

That building, now with a 1955 addition, is still in use today.

On November 2, 1862, a Sunday morning, the Civil War swirled around the Church as infantry and cavalry of the Federal Army of the Potomac clashed with J.E.B. Stuart's Confederate forces in the streets of Unison. Shells from both sides



exploded all around the fleeing worshippers. As the large Federal Army continued its march southward, they took over the church as a hospital. When the Methodists returned they found the pews stained with blood and the loft covered in graffiti from the soldiers recovering there. Some graffiti can still be seen today.

The Church congregation is smaller these days, and many members are elderly, but it remains a vital part of our community. Worship is still held in the church every Sunday, led by the Rev. Robert Schoeman. Many events—including the traditional church suppers—are held there and desserts for Unison Heritage Day are provided. The Church building is the site of lectures and community meetings as well.

But the old Church building, the most prominent building in Unison, now is in serious need of repairs. The Unison Preservation Society has partnered with the Church to help address this over the years—contributing to repairs to the roof and belfry and helping to secure grants to pay for preservation of the Civil War graffiti, and for a professional assessment of the Church's structural condition. Most recently UPS pledged additional funds for some of the structural work recommended by that assessment. UPS and the Church trustees continue to try to locate other sources of funding for the repair and preservation of this beautiful and critical part of our old village.

We hope that local citizens and organizations will join us and help this congregation gather the funds needed to allow this historic and important Church to continue to serve this community for many years to come.

To contribute to this effort please contact Pam Nalls, Chair, Unison UMC Administrative Board at [unisonumc@yahoo.com](mailto:unisonumc@yahoo.com).

To view more photos of the church and get information on its history, dinner events, services, etc., please visit their website at [www.unisonchurch.org](http://www.unisonchurch.org). ■

**Top:** The Unison United Methodist Church as it stands today. **Above Left:** An old photo of the church circa 1920. **Below Left:** A soldier's note on the wall in the loft can still be seen today.

Photos courtesy of Mitch Diamond.



# Horses and the Neighborhood By Howard Lewis

*The first article below is based on a short history of the Unison Farmer's Hunt, which fellow UPS Director, Doug Kemmerer, brought to my attention. I had to read this history several times before it hit me that this particular hunt actually was made up of farmers—the people who worked the land on which they lived (and hunted). It truly was a Farmer's Hunt. I thought that was a pretty neat glimpse into Unison's past from 1910-1925 and something worth writing about.*

*The second article focuses on the present—a neighborhood group called the Foggy Bottom Ladies Equestrian Society (the FaBuLs). I will confess that I have a weak spot for the FaBuLs. The first year we moved to our farm on Bloomfield Road, a tin of Christmas cookies showed up on our front porch in December with a note saying that the Foggy Bottom Ladies Equestrian Society appreciated us letting them ride through our property. The cookies have kept coming every year since. So, I decided to interview one of the founders of the group, Jane Sutermeister, to learn more about the FaBuLs.*



## Unison Farmer's Hunt

A history of the Unison Farmer's Hunt written by a long ago Unison resident, Charles S. Monroe, offers an intriguing glimpse into what life was like in Unison 100 years ago. Not surprisingly, horses were a central feature of the community, but it was saddles that apparently put Unison on the map in those days. "The thing that really made Unison famous," according to Mr. Monroe, "was the Osburn Saddlery," which was owned by Charlie Osburn who ran the saddlery as well as the post office out of a two room building in Unison. "If you were a horseman and did not own an Osburn saddle," according to Mr. Monroe, "you were not accepted."

While draft horses were used for the heavy work on the surrounding farms, which averaged about 200 acres, the favorite horse in the Unison area was a "general utility" horse. "This animal," Mr. Monroe writes, "was smaller than a draft horse...more agile and had greater stamina. Occasionally, when farmers were working the fields they would unhitch the team and take the general utility horse and join the hunt." At some point, these general utility horses were bred with stallions from the Army's Remount Station in Front Royal to produce a half-breed that became popular with many riders in the Unison Farmer's Hunt.

The Unison Farmer's Hunt was organized in the old Unison Store as a means of settling the debate over who had the

best horse in the area. Mr. Monroe explains: "The ultimate of all equestrian activities and the place to settle many of the arguments seemed to be the hunt. There was no hunt club near Unison at the time. There were not horse trailers to transport horses to and from the hunt. To walk a horse many miles to the hunt and then, after the hunt, to walk him many more miles home, took all day and part of the night." The hunt was open to "every person who could ride (and owned an Osburn Saddle)..."

Apparently, almost every hunt produced "a good run" as well as a few amusing incidents. On one hunt, one member of the field was smoking a pipe, which, when the Gone Away signal was given, he stuffed into his riding jacket pocket as he galloped off across the fields. Smoke was soon billowing out behind him. Unaware of his impending doom, the huntsman "rode gallantly on" until "he was finally overtaken and told he was on fire." The huntsman acknowledged that he knew he "was getting warm but did not know he was on fire."

On another occasion, one of the younger members of the field did not return home after the hunt. A general alarm was sounded and a search party formed with many of the older Unison residents fearing the worst and the younger ones more amused than alarmed about their lost colleague. The

younger residents were right. The lost rider had drunk too much, fallen off his horse and was found sitting beside the road singing, "We won't get home until the morning."

Part of the early history of the Unison Farmer's Hunt was centered on the New Lisbon Farm, which is now Huntlands. Eventually, the Farmer's Hunt merged with the Piedmont Fox Hounds, which still hunts in the Unison area and is the oldest hunt in the United States. ■

## Foggy Bottom Ladies Equestrian Society: The FaBuLs

*Jane Sutermeister, along with Kim Yager, organized the Foggy Bottom Ladies Equestrian Society—the FaBuLs—in 2004. The UPS Newsletter asked Jane to fill us in on the group.*

**UPS:** *Do you have to live on Foggy Bottom Road to be part of the FaBuLs?*

**Jane:** No, we have had people from all over Bloomfield, Unison, and Bluemont riding with us. Our group fluctuates as people move in and out of the area. We generally have around 15 active members. I have lived here since 2000 and was shown some trails by neighbors, but didn't have a dedicated trail buddy like Kim. So, we decided to organize a neighborhood group.

## Unison Preservation Society Newsletter

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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.

### **Board of Directors**

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### *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](mailto:unisonpreservsoc@unisonva.org).

### *Newsletter Design:*

Dara Bailey • Bluemont, VA  
[darabaileydesign@gmail.com](mailto:darabaileydesign@gmail.com)

**UPS:** *How do you help new riders moving into the area?*

**Jane:** Kim and I usually take new people out together for safety since we don't know how the new person rides or if they have a calm horse. After we show someone a few of the trails in the area, we tell them whom to contact to get permission to ride across various farms, which is really important. We are very active in welcoming new folks to our area and finding out not only if they want to ride with us but also if we can ride on their property.

**UPS:** *How do you organize rides and where do you go?*

**Jane:** It is pretty informal. Folks call around until they find at least one member to ride out with, which starts the ball rolling as others join up. When the weather is good, I'd say we ride two to four times a week. Our trail rides vary in distance and time. The farthest the FaBuLs have ever ridden was over the mountains to the Shenandoah River. Our usual rides last a couple of hours.

**UPS:** *You put a lot of emphasis on getting permission to ride across other people's land.*

**Jane:** You bet we do. It is common sense. We ride on trails that we help maintain for various hunts and we ride on farms where we have permission to do so. If you don't have that permission, you shouldn't be crossing other people's land. Neighborhood riding groups help make sure that we all stay good neighbors. That's an important function we play.



**Above:** *The FaBuLs get set to ride on neighborhood trails.*

**UPS:** *Do you coordinate with other riding groups around here?*

**Jane:** Yes! For example, we ride with Pamela Smith of Serene Acres and some of her borders.

**UPS:** *How should someone contact you to join the FaBuLs?*

**Jane:** Call me at (540) 554-2272, or Kim Yager at (540) 554-4955. All you have to do to join is come ride.

**UPS:** *Finally, how did the tradition of Christmas cookies start?*

**Jane:** We wanted to do something to show our appreciation to the landowners. So, Kim came up with the idea to have each member bake five to six dozen cookies and bring them to a central location, usually her house or mine, where we have lunch and fill up three dozen or so tins with the wonderful variety of cookies our members have baked. We then divide up into small groups and deliver them all over the Unison-Bloomfield-Bluemont area. Kim made up a label with our name—FaBuLs—so people know whom the cookies are from. ■

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