



# Unison Preservation Society NEWSLETTER

*Working to Protect and Preserve our Historic Countryside*

Photo courtesy of Paul Harris of Oakhillstudio.org.

Issue Two

Fall 2013

Unison, Virginia

## New Ideas for the Old Store By Tara Connell

Unison residents joined with the Loudoun County Design Cabinet August 9 to brainstorm ways for The Unison Store building and grounds to become a user-friendly community center that is more handicapped accessible and yet retains the building's historical authenticity.

Dr. Betsee Parker bought and donated the Store to the Unison Preservation Society (UPS) this spring with the condition that the facility be used as a community center.

The Design Cabinet is a team of volunteer building and landscape architects and engineers working under the auspices of the County's Department of Economic Development. The Cabinet's format of choice is the Charette, a collaboration between experts and stakeholders to solve design problems.

Kim Hart, a member of the UPS board and an advocate of the process, said: "The Charrette format has the advantage of bringing residents together with experts who can develop the smartest solutions for specific problems. Residents always know best what their community needs, and experts can turn those dreams into design reality. The process is transparent, saves money, and invariably results in great looking projects that people like and will use."

The Unison Charette tackled three issues: installation of a handicap ramp and a second door in the public space; landscaping changes for a more usable exterior space and village green; and redesign of the interior to create more meeting space.

The morning-long session saw multiple ideas developed by members of the Cabinet and about 20 residents. Next steps include a review of the ideas by the Unison Preservation Society Board and the entire community. Open meetings will be held when all the materials have been sorted out.

Meanwhile, the UPS's store committee



**Above:** Kim Hart addresses Unison residents with ideas for The Unison Store building. Photo by Harry Bigley.

has voted to recommend hiring an architect to work on the suggested plans and develop cost estimates for the renovations. Fundraising will follow. ■

## Unison Heritage Day Saturday, October 26

Save the date and please join us for this year's Unison Heritage Day on Saturday, October 26, from 1:00 to 5:00 in the afternoon.

As always Heritage Day will be held on the grounds of the historic Unison Store property in the center of the village. Come and enjoy the sounds of featured bluegrass group Willow Branch,



Photo by Flora Hillman.

place your bid in the silent or live auctions, or simply enjoy Virginia barbecue, Chesapeake Bay oysters, and wonderful deserts from the Unison Methodist Church. Invite your friends and family and come celebrate the village and countryside in which we live. Tickets \$30.00 per person. There will be plenty of parking available!

# A Young Georgetown Student's Death in 1862 Battle of Unison

By Mitch Diamond

*It is easy to focus on the major historic and strategic forces at play in the Battle of Unison, which we commemorate each fall at Heritage Day. Confederate General JEB Stuart, his artilleryist Major John Pelham, and about nine hundred troopers and gunners were trying to slow the advance of General George McClellan and the giant Federal Army of the Potomac as they came into Virginia in pursuit of General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. They succeeded, Lee escaped, and immediately after the battle President Lincoln relieved General McClellan of his command.*

But the broad brush of history should not obscure the fact that real people fought and died here during that fall. One of these unfortunate souls was Christopher Ireland Dorsey Costigan, known to his family as "Cosh". Last year, on the 150th anniversary of the Battle of Unison, Cosh's relatives came to Unison from Maryland, where they still live, to visit the place he fought and died and to tell us his story.

Cosh was born September 5, 1840 at Summerseat Plantation in Oakville, Maryland. In the Spring of 1861, he left Georgetown College with several of his comrades, crossed into Virginia and joined the Confederate Army. He became a member of Stuart's famous horse artillery and participated in 27 battles and skirmishes. On October 31, 1862, he crossed the Blue Ridge with Stuart and Pelham, passed through Bluemont, and arrived the next morning with his fellow soldiers in Philomont to confront the Federal advance.



**Above:** The battle flag for Stuart's Horse Artillery unit which Cpl. Costigan belonged to; Valley Light Horse Cavalry members demonstrate the fierce battle on horseback. Cavalry photo courtesy of Paul Harris of Oakhillstudio.org.



**Right:** A painting of Major John Pelham, the legendary leader of Stuart's Horse Artillery.

Excerpts from a letter to Cosh's father from his Sergeant, Stirling Murray, describe what happened:

Dear Sir,

*My apology for writing to you shall be the desire I have to speak of the last few remaining days of one, whom before all others I most loved and esteemed among the many gentle and true spirits I have had the pleasure to serve with in the army . . .*

*We passed over the Blue Ridge Mountains at Snickers Gap . . . The advance of McClellan had already crossed the Potomac and it would be our duty to harass and check their progress . . . Early the next morning . . . we had scarcely gone a mile beyond the town of Union (Unison) before we were again upon the enemy . . . the fight immediately opened . . . we were ordered to the front . . . the only approach to which was an open field where we would be pitilessly exposed to fire . . . I had just reached the limber at which your son and another man named Phillips were posted when a shell exploded directly beneath it . . . I took Cosh in my arms and carried him as far as I was able . . . William Haxton . . . soon came to my aid and helped to bear him to a house nearby where the surgeons were . . . At this place (in Unison) I was forced to leave, never to see him more . . . We learned from the surgeon left behind the particulars of his last moments . . .*

*There was a genial warmth of soul about this boy that attracted every heart . . . those who knew him well . . . could appreciate the brilliant qualities of his mind and heart . . . mourn him, comfortless to find his counterpart . . . I have the honor to be yours sincerely to command.*

Stirling Murray

**Above:** Artillery Reenactment was held at Taproot Farm where the original Battle of Unison took place in 1862. This was part of the 2012 Heritage Day festivities, and in comemeration of the 150th anniversary of the battle. Photo courtesy of Paul Harris of Oakhillstudio.org.

In Unison, Cosh was taken to the Confederate hospital (Bonnycastle) and his nurse, local resident Mary Plaster, describes what happened in these sections of her letter to Cosh's sister Katherine:

*Dear Madam,*

*Believe me it is with feelings of the deepest sympathy that I undertake to give you an account (imperfect I fear it will be) of your dear brother's short stay with us . . . I regret very much that it was not in my powers to be with him . . . more . . . The Yankee army was passing a whole week . . . committing havoc and destruction as they passed. . . . Your dear brother was wounded on Saturday evening the 1st day of November and was brought to our house around dark. His limb was not amputated until Sunday morning after which he seemed to become weaker and weaker. . . He expressed great pleasure at seeing me, said it was such an unusual thing got a soldier to meet with a lady . . . He talked a great deal about his home and his family . . . and wished they could be with him. He was perfectly aware of his situation and talked of death with a great deal of composure . . . sent his love to all at home with the message that he died like a man . . . The night before he died . . . your brother wished for some mush and milk (he was very fond of it) . . . I took it in, but the poor fellow only took two or three mouthfuls . . . The next day he was too low to disturb and about noon he breathed his last. . . . I am very sorry there is nothing here that belonged to him that I might send to you. I do not know what became of it . . . If I could have saved him I would have gone to any lengths, but his wound was a fatal one, and I reckon no earthly power could have saved him . . . Remember me kindly to your mother and sisters and tender to them my deepest sympathies .*

*Sincerely, your friend, Mary E. Plaster*

Sylvester Costigan, Cosh's father, traveled to Virginia to recover his body. He returned Cosh home to Summerseat and he was buried behind their home in the family cemetery. ■



**Above:** An old drawing of "Unison" (Unison) by a Federal Officer - Lt. Louis Henry Carpenter, 6th U.S. Cavalry - passing through during the battle in 1862. The artist is of some renown, later commanding the 6th U.S. Colored Cavalry Regiment, rising to Brigadier General, and winning a Medal of Honor for his exploits in the Indian Wars.

## Bonnycastle Today



The picture above is of present day Bonnycastle, which served as a Confederate field hospital during the 1862 Battle of Unison. Cosh was carried here after being wounded and it was here where he died (see letter from Mary Plaster on this page). Bonnycastle is located on Unison Road and today is home to Bob and Kerry Dale. As described below, the house has changed in the last 150 years, but its unique architectural style has been preserved and would undoubtedly still look very familiar to the soldiers who marched by it in 1862.

The two-story, five-bay, random-rubble stone, Greek Revival-style dwelling features paired semi-exterior-end stone chimneys on each gable end and a raised stone basement. The house, constructed by John Keene, was originally plastered on the exterior and scored to resemble finished stone blocks.

The house also originally had a very shallow-pitched gable roof, typical of the Greek Revival style, which was raised in the 1990s to a more standard pitch. The front of the house is dominated by a two-story, full-height, three-bay portico with giant Tuscan columns, broad pilasters, and a modillioned cornice. A small balustrated balcony supported by consoles projects from the second floor under the portico.

The house appears on the 1853 Yardley Taylor Map and is identified as belonging to "J. Keen," perhaps indicating it was under construction at that time because the Loudoun County Land Tax records indicate the house was completed in 1855, as it was first assessed the following year for a value of \$4,000. John Keen was the son of George Keen, an extensive landowner who lived in what is now known as "Far Away Farm", which is near Unison on what was then called "the Unison to Bloomfield" road, now known as Bloomfield Road. George himself owned land stretching the entire length of the road from Bloomfield to Unison.

The property also features a nice collection of late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century farm outbuildings including a board-and-batten bank barn on a stone foundation. ■

**Unison Preservation  
Society Newsletter**

Published by

The Unison

Preservation Society

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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](mailto:unisonpreservsoc@unisonva.org).

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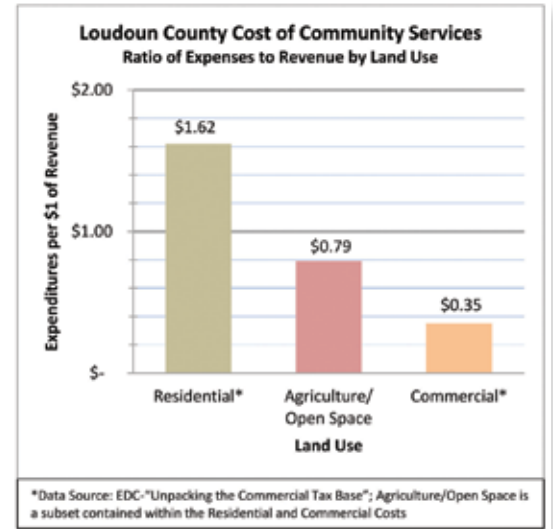
# Farmland and Open Space Is Good for Loudoun County's Budget

By Mike Kane, *Piedmont Environmental Council*

The Loudoun County Rural Economic Development Council (REDC) recently completed a Net Cost of Community Services (NCOCS) report that found that County government revenue generated from farmland and open space exceeded the County's cost of providing services to these rural lands and residents.

The REDC report is a companion to "Unpacking the Commercial Tax Base", another County report that examined the cost of providing County services to residential and commercial land uses. Taken together, the two studies highlight the starkly different fiscal realities that the County faces when providing services to different land uses. As the accompanying chart shows, for every \$1 that Loudoun collects in revenue from residential land uses, it spends \$1.62 providing services to residential uses. Conversely, for every \$1 in revenue that Loudoun collects from farmland and open space, the cost of providing services to these areas is just \$.79.

To obtain these figures, the REDC estimated that land classified as farmland, open space, and forest lands in the County's Rural and Transition policy areas generated in FY 2011 about \$14 million in revenue and \$11 million in expenditures for the County government. The single largest expenditure was for educating children from rural areas.



The REDC report indicates that Loudoun's farmland and open space is good for Loudoun's fiscal health. Yet, the report is limited to the fiscal impact on county government and does not consider the economic benefits of agriculture, tourism, equestrian activities, and other enterprises that rely on the recreational, cultural, scenic, and environmental amenities of Loudoun's rural lands. Future analysis is needed to more fully characterize these much larger economic benefits of Loudoun's rural economy.

For more information about the report, go to [www.loudoun.gov](http://www.loudoun.gov) and search "REDC Cost of Community Services". ■

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