



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

Photo by Dara Bailey

ISSUE TWO • 2018

• FALL •

UNISON, VIRGINIA

Come Celebrate our 15th Annual Heritage Day

Dear Neighbors and Friends of Unison:

Welcome to Fall and your invitation to Unison Heritage Day, our community's annual celebration of its founding in the 1700s.

Heritage Day this year is Saturday, November 3. The festivities begin around noon and will run until about 5:00 p.m., although we all know people linger. It's hard to leave a good time and good friends.

Planning for this one—our 15th—began several months ago. And even though it looks like it should come easily, Heritage Day actually has lots of parts and pieces that need to come together to make it the tradition it's become: The pumpkins and straw bales; the yummy desserts and BBQ; the drinks tent and auctions. The music.

But mostly, in addition to being our best and happiest party, it is the most significant fundraiser for the Unison Preservation Society (UPS), so it is important to get it just right.

This year it is taking two former presidents of UPS to make it happen, Harry Bigley and Steve Chase. So I need to pause for a second and talk about that.

Steve surrendered the president's gavel this Spring after three years of managing UPS through the changes and challenges that came with ownership of the Unison Store coupled with Unison's and Loudoun's ongoing preservation issues.

We owe him a huge thank you for handling all of that, while also holding down a demanding full-time job. He did an amazing job.

And I only accepted the presidency, by the way, on the condition that Harry and Steve, make Heritage Day happen. They were already on it and are creating one of the best.

If you haven't been to a Heritage Day before, here is what to expect: the usual acclaimed homemade desserts from the Unison Methodist Church ladies and fabulous Chesapeake Bay oysters from the Oyster Man, which are widely heralded as the absolute best. There also will be beer from the Barnhouse Brewery and great BBQ from Monk's.

Throughout the day you will have a chance to visit with your friends, stroll about the village that has changed so little over the years and let your kids pet the Piedmont Hounds or play games on the village green. There is a reason we are called the Unison Preservation Society.

Willow Branch bluegrass band will be playing all afternoon, when we don't interrupt them for the annual live auction of 4 or 5 great items such as the popular fly-fishing trip. Inside the store will be the art show and silent auction, featuring local artists.

Tickets at the door are \$30 and children under 10 are free. You also can purchase tickets in advance or make donations to the Unison Preservation Society online at www.unisonva.org.

I hope to see you, your neighbors and friends there on November 3.

*Tara Connell, President
 Unison Preservation Society*



Photos by M.J. Zuckerman

A Humble Petition to Establish Our Village

By Howard Lewis

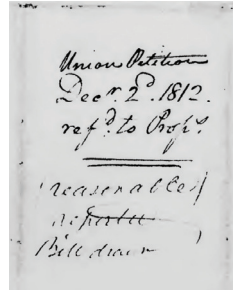
In 1812, the same year as war was breaking out between the United States and Great Britain, a group of fifty or so citizens living in and around the present-day village of Unison submitted a “humble petition” to the Virginia General Assembly asking it to pass “an Act establishing a town by the name of Union”. The next year, the General Assembly complied with this request and the village of Union was officially established. At some point along the line, this humble 1812 petition was lost to history. It was rediscovered this year by Unison resident, Mitch Diamond, as he was looking through various historical documents on-line.

With Unison preparing to hold its 15th annual Heritage Day celebration, it seemed appropriate to publish this long-lost

petition in its original handwritten form. (Since the handwriting can be difficult to make out in places, we have provided a “translation” at the bottom of this page.)

A couple of interesting points jump out of this document.

First, in two places, an alternative name for the village was written down and then crossed out, with Union written above the crossed out name. The alternative name was almost certainly Greenville. You can just make out the “ile” at the end of the word being crossed out. Prior to 1813 the village was frequently referred to in various documents as Greenville or Butterland. The name Union, incidentally, only lasted from



Second, the first signature on the petition is William Galliher, who was instrumental in founding the First Methodist Church in Unison probably in the early 1780s. The

Methodist Church’s founders were straight-laced individuals who were reportedly upset with the gambling, drinking, cockfighting, and horse racing of some Unison Quakers. This may explain the last sentence in the petition’s first paragraph about the need “to preserve order and prevent the prevalence of those vices and immoralities

here, which so frequently—too frequently, alas! for the welfare of our beloved country disgrace such villages.” (See *The Rowdy Quakers of Unison* in the 2015 Spring/Summer UPS newsletter for more on this subject.)

If the motive behind the 1812 petition was to bring some law and order to the place, it apparently wasn’t completely successful because five years later the village sent yet another petition to the General Assembly asking that fines be levied against persons of poor character who raced their horses up and down the roads around the village. ■

1813 to 1829 when the village underwent yet another name change—becoming Unison. Another Virginia village, named Union, had been established earlier and the postal system required the name change to Unison.

TO THE HONOURABLE THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA
THE MEMORIAL AND HUMBLE PETITION OF THE
UNDERSIGNED INHABITANTS OF THE VILLAGE AND VICINITY
OF UNION (word crossed out) IN LOUDOUN COUNTY RESPECTFULLY REPRESENTS;

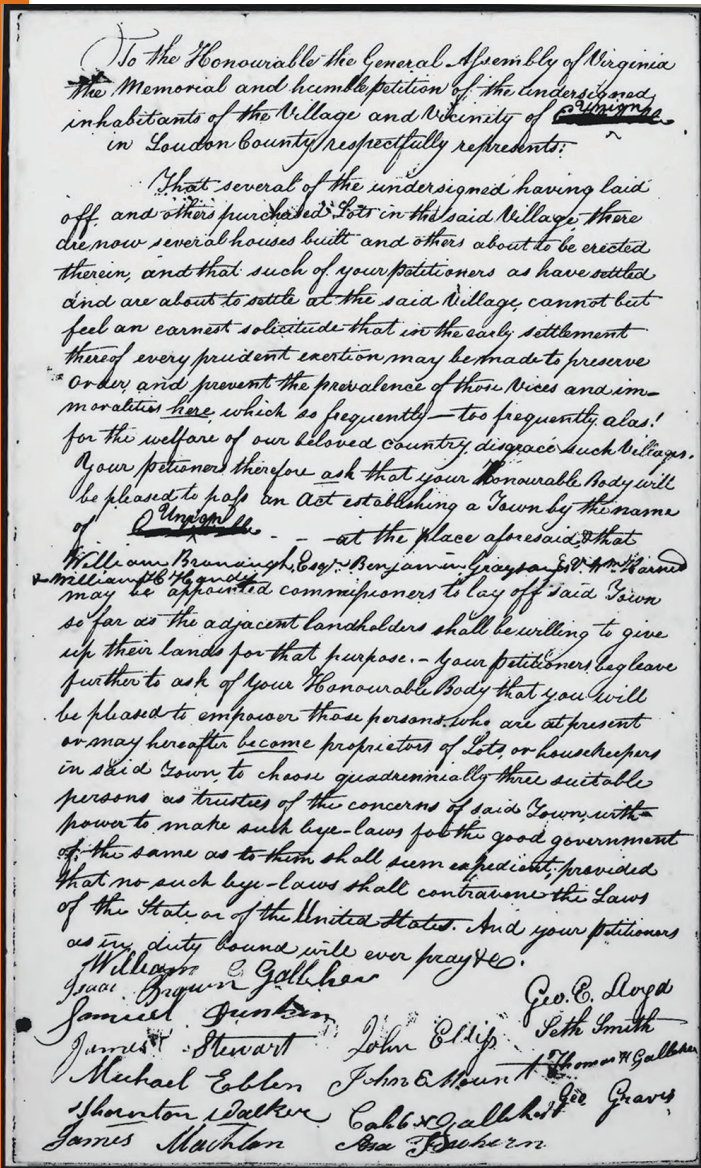
That several of the undersigned having laid off and others purchased Lots in the said Village, there are now several houses built and others about to be erected therein, and that such of your petitioners as have settled and are about to settle at the said Village, cannot but feel an earnest solicitude that in the early settlement thereof every prudent exertion may be made to preserve order and prevent the prevalence of those vices and immoralities here, which so frequently—too frequently, alas! for the welfare of our beloved country disgrace such villages.

Your petitioners therefore ask that your honourable body will be pleased to pass an Act establishing a town by the name of Union (word crossed out) - - - at the place aforesaid, that William Branaugh, Esq, Benjamin Grayson, Esq. (several other names that I cannot make out) be appointed commissioners to lay off said Town so far as the adjacent landowners shall be willing to give up their lands for that purpose.

Your petitioners beg leave further to ask of your Honourable Body that you will be pleased to empower those persons who are at present in said Town to choose quadrennially three suitable persons as trustees of the concerns of said Town, with power to make such bye-laws for the good government of the same as to them shall seem expedient, provided that no such bye-laws shall contravene the Laws of the State, or of the United States.

And your petitioners as in duty bound will ever pray

Followed by the signatures of more than fifty persons (all not shown)
Dated, Dec 2, 1812



Willisville's Historic Next Step

By Tara Connell



"This is believed to be Henson Willis' house," said Carol Lee, gesturing toward a lovely off-white, stucco home up ahead on Welbourne Road in the tiny hamlet of Willisville.

Ms. Lee is giving a tour of the Village, as she and other residents call it, after being asked: "What exactly is Willisville?"

It was a fairly odd question, given that Willisville has been around for almost 150 years. But both Ms. Lee and Dulany Morison of the Mosby Heritage Area Association conceded it is pretty central to what they are trying to do: Get Willisville named to the National Register of Historic Places.

They agreed because Willisville is many things: a living, breathing community; a historical site; a state of mind.

So there she is, in the September rain, walking along Welbourne Road on which all of Willisville exists, giving another tour: Carol Lee, whose family has been in the Village for 83 years and who has become Willisville's historian and the driving force behind the National Register application.

It is just one of many tours Ms. Lee will give before the application process ends with a plaque in the Village stating that Willisville is an official, federal historical site. In fact, there would be another tour the next day with the Virginia Department of Historic Resources people and a professional historian hired by the Village and the Mosby organization.

And even though the plaque likely will be the only tangible benefit of being named to the National Register, the act of being elevated to the list is of enormous significance. Here's what the Mosby

Heritage Area (MHAA) organization says about the effort:

"Founded c. 1868 by freedmen, 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."

The Mosby group got involved when it realized how little had been done to preserve and maintain the freedmen's villages in the area, Morison said. A 2004 report by the Board of Supervisors called the "Loudoun County African-American Historic Architectural Resources Survey" put Willisville among seven historically critical freedmen's villages in the county.



TOP LEFT: The Henson Willis' house. TOP RIGHT: The old store. CENTER: The Methodist Church. BOTTOM: Adolphus Hampton and his wife Mary Florence Jackson Hampton were residents of the village.

Morison, who is co-chair of the preservation committee of the MHAA, said he was asked to spearhead the effort because of his ties to the Willisville community.

But why focus on Willisville?

Willisville was founded after the Civil War by formerly enslaved African-Americans who built houses on land they bought from their one-time owners' plantations (Catesby and Crednal) along what is now Welbourne Road.

Among the former owners of the plantations were the Carters, Seaton and Dulany. And yes, Dulany Morison is a descendant of Col. Richard Henry Dulany who owned Welbourne and Old Welbourne and founded the Upperville Colt & Horse Show at which many current and former residents of Willisville work.

Tradition has it that the first to buy land in what is now Willisville was Henson Willis and his wife Lucinda who bought three acres with a cabin in November 1874 from the Seaton family who owned Catesby. Driving west on Welbourne Road, it is on the left side across from the Methodist Church.

Down the street, at the meeting of Wel-





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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 unisonpreservsoc@unisonva.org.



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bourne, Willisville and Millville roads, is the site of the one-room, 1868 schoolhouse built to educate the children of people who had been enslaved. It was rebuilt in 1921 after it burned down and is now a home.

So after the Civil War, around this intersection, the school for African American children and Willis' property, a village of people referred to as freedmen began to grow and took on the Willisville name, presumably after its first property owner. Eventually there was a store, and the Methodist church.

In addition to Willis' house, there is a cemetery and several other houses built by the newly freed men and women. Many of the 16 or 17 homes are still standing and still lived in.

The village is very much like it was in the years between 1868 and the turn of the 20th century. Hence its significance and candidacy for the National Register.

But the buildings don't scream historic site even though some are more than 140 years old. And there are no signs that say you are entering or leaving Willisville. You may not even know you are in a village unless you live there.

So the question "What is Willisville?" becomes about state of mind as much as history.

It was the way of life in Willisville that got Ms. Lee interested in researching its history, rather than the buildings, she said. And it's this way of life that draws people to The Village, keeps them coming back and keeps families connected for generations.

Willisville somehow avoided the worst of the violence of post-war Reconstruction and Jim Crow, according to Ms. Lee. "That didn't happen here," she said. "Hearing my mother talk about it... People could buy seeds, have chickens. Find work My grandfather worked at Welbourne and Catesby."

Ms. Lee's mother is Ann Lee, who came to Willisville as a child 83 years ago. Ann Lee was described as part of his family by Dulany Morison and as a reason he got involved in the project.

Roots in Willisville run deep throughout the area. Some people living in The Village today can

trace their families back generations. The Howards, for instance, are known throughout the area for their stone masonry. There are descendants of the original settlers living elsewhere in Loudoun: the Hamptons, Gaskins, Evans and Hacklys among others.

Carol Lee, like many residents, left when she married but gradually made her way back and built a home next to her mother. She now works for Seasoned to Taste, a catering business well known in the area.

Willisville is "quiet. It doesn't have many bad points, except the dirt road being dusty," she said, smiling. "It's very personal... To be in an area where everybody seems to get along."

Well, not always quiet. Last month, the Lee home was the scene of party thrown in honor of Willisville's past. The reunion brought back hundreds of people, families and friends from Willisville, to celebrate their ties to the community and to win support for the National Register effort.

Last August, another effort to win support raised more than \$15,000. "The Path Through Willisville with Carol Lee" gospel concert was held at Buchanan Hall and sponsored by the Mosby Heritage Area Association.

With that money, the historian was hired to survey the homes and buildings in Willisville, collect historical documents and make the final application to the National Park Service which oversees the National Register. Any leftover money will be used for a Willisville sign, and any other expenses that come up relative to chronicling the history of the Village, Ms. Lee said.

The next big step in the National Register process is a meeting with all the residents to talk it through and get their buy-in. At least 50 percent of the current residents have to approve the final application. Once that is done and the application is submitted, the wait begins.

But for Willisville, just getting to this point means the wait is over. ■

If you're interested in supporting this effort, go to www.mosbyheritagearea.org.