

SUMMER 2023

FOCUS ON

# PRESERVATION

*Market Square, Roanoke, Va.*



**ROANOKE VALLEY PRESERVATION FOUNDATION**

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*Please send RVPF Newsletter submissions to  
Whitney Leeson, [wleeson@roanoke.edu](mailto:wleeson@roanoke.edu).*

# Persinger Cemetery Sign Unveiled

The RVPF and Roanoke Committee of the National Society of Colonial Dames celebrated National Preservation Month with the unveiling of the Persinger Cemetery sign on May 23rd. The interpretive sign tells the story of John Persinger who, along with his three sons Jacob, William and James, settled in Southwest Roanoke and operated a grist mill on the banks of the Roanoke River in the early 1800s. The vast land they farmed, with the assistance of enslaved labor, today comprises the neighborhoods of Norwich, Greater Raleigh Court, Grandin Court, and Greater Deyerly.

Located on Edgewood Road and Memorial Avenue in Norwich, the cemetery dates to the mid-19th century and contains the graves of several members of the Persinger family, including two Confederate soldiers. Partial funding for the sign was provided by a grant from the Virginia Society of the Colonial Dames. The unveiling celebration concluded with the announcement of the RVPF 2023 List of Endangered Sites.



Photo Credit: Lynsey Crantz-Allie

## *Poplar Forest and Anne Spencer House*

The Salem Museum and the Roanoke Valley Preservation Foundation present a day trip to tour two notable historic homes, Thomas Jefferson's Poplar Forest and the Anne Spencer House and Garden Museum in Lynchburg. The trip is scheduled for **Friday, September 29**, departing from the Salem Museum promptly at 8:30 am and returning to the Salem Museum by 5 pm.

**Tickets are \$89 for adults and \$79 for seniors 65+.** The fee includes motor coach transportation, host, all entrance fees, tours and lunch at The Neighbor's Place Restaurant (choices available to accommodate dietary restrictions). Space is limited and will fill up soon, so early reservations are recommended. **To register, call 540-389-6760 or email frances@salemmuseum.org.** Then, mail your check made out to the Salem Museum to 801 E Main St, Salem, VA 24153, or call with your credit card. Payment is non-refundable but substitutions are allowed.

The morning stop will be to Thomas Jefferson's Poplar Forest, Jefferson's personal retreat that many consider his most perfectly executed architectural work. One of the only two homes Jefferson designed for his personal use, the villa at Poplar Forest became his private sanctuary after he retired from the presidency and public service. A visit to Poplar Forest offers a unique opportunity to observe a "live" archaeological dig and historic restoration in progress, as efforts to reveal and restore Thomas Jefferson's vision for his personal retreat continue.



Photo Credit: Jayda Justus



Photo Credit: Jody Arneson

In the afternoon, the tour will continue to the Anne Spencer House and Garden Museum in Lynchburg. Anne Spencer was an accomplished poet of the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s. Edward and Anne Spencer lived in this two-story residence for 72 years and in that time welcomed many remarkable visitors including W.E.B. DuBois, Langston Hughes, and Martin Luther King, Jr. The house is an outstanding preserved example of architecture, interior design, African American culture, and twentieth century home life beautifully shaped by fascinating personalities and circumstances.

# WICKETS & WINE

## *Raising Funds for Mountain View*

June 3 turned out to be a beautiful day for our first Wickets and Wine Event at Mountain View (Fishburn Mansion). More than 80 people from croquet players and antique car owners to sponsors and volunteers enjoyed an afternoon of conviviality and friendly competition.

Six croquet courts were laid out on the lawn of the mansion, with tents and chairs for guests to enjoy their box lunches, wine, and sodas while basking in the “back in times” atmosphere. Some participants came in period costume which added a festive flair to the event. The antique cars were parked in the curved driveway under the portico, including a Ford that once belonged to President Roosevelt.

The event culminated with the presentation of a check from the Katherine Nelson Fishburn Foundation to the City of Roanoke.



Photo Credit: Evie Slone

# SPONSORS FOR WICKETS & WINE

Wickets & Wine was our first fundraiser for the Friends of Mountain View 501c3 and we are very pleased with its success. We are grateful to the board members of both the Roanoke Valley Preservation Foundation and the Friends of Mountain View as well as staff from Roanoke City Parks and Recreation who worked diligently planning and executing the event. The Parks and Recreation Department also provided all the croquet sets and boxed lunches for attendees. The event was only made possible with the generous support of many sponsors. Please review the list of sponsors below and when you have the opportunity thank them for supporting our fundraising efforts.

Photo Credit: Judy Harrison

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The Friends of Mountain View, Inc. was formed to promote awareness and advocacy for Mountain View and to provide visionary leadership in coordinating restoration and preservation of this historic property. The organization can receive gifts, grants, and contributions for restoring and maintaining Mountain View. We work in partnership with the City of Roanoke and the Department of Parks and Recreation. The organization is registered with the IRS as a 501c (3) nonprofit, tax-exempt, charitable foundation.

To **make a donation** to Friends of Mountain View, Inc. go to: [www.friendsofmountainview.org](http://www.friendsofmountainview.org)

# FUN AT WICKETS & WINE

Photo Credit: Lynsey Crantz-Allie



# Letter to Roanoke City Council

RE: Evans House/Washington Park Caretaker's House

Dear Mayor Lea and Members of City Council,

As the mission of the Roanoke Valley Preservation Foundation is to promote awareness and stewardship of historic resources in the Roanoke Valley, we want to express our significant concerns about the proposed demolition of the historic Evans House / Caretaker's House in Washington Park. We request that the City explore every option possible to retain this historic house while also making the necessary improvements to the park.

The Washington Park Caretaker's House is one of the oldest surviving structures in Roanoke City. Jeremiah Whitten built the two-story, brick structure on land first associated with a mill established by Mark Evans in the mid-18th century and later operated as a dairy by Peyton Terry in the late 19th century. Following the sale of the property to the City by the Charles Lukens family in 1922, the land became a public park for the black community during the Jim Crow era of segregation. During this time, the brick house served for approximately 50 years as the Washington Park Caretaker's House. With attractions such as Dreamland and the Royal Gardens, the park was a gathering place for Black people throughout southwest Virginia during this time of segregated public spaces as they came to swim, dance, picnic, and play recreational sports or watch National Negro League baseball games. Locally, the park gave Black youth in the neighborhood a place to hang out with their friends and the caretakers, who lived in the house and took care of the park, also served as mentors to them. The house is both architecturally and historically significant as rare surviving tangible evidence of the lives of Roanoke's earliest settlers, as well as the vibrant black community of Roanoke during the years of legalized and de facto segregation. It should not be lost to demolition or neglect.

The RVPF first listed the Evans House in Washington Park on the annual Endangered Sites list in 1999. We called attention again to the continued neglect and deteriorating condition of the house by listing it as "eminently endangered" in 2010, 2019 and 2023. Board members contacted the former City Manager numerous times about protecting the building and also helped connect a local restoration contractor with the City staff to discuss stabilization and much-needed repairs.



Photo Credit: Whitney Leeson



If plans move forward to lease the circa 1830 Blackwell House/Caretaker’s Cottage at Fishburn Park - which the RVPF supports provided provisions are made for its preservation - then the house at Washington Park will be the last of the four historic structures that were once part of the City park system, as both Buena Vista and Villa Heights have been sold to private owners.

The City has the opportunity now to do the right thing with the Evans House, particularly in a neighborhood and community that has been treated so poorly in the past and deserves reinvestment. With thoughtful planning and continued, sufficient investment Washington Park can become a premier city park that will support the local community of Northeast and Northwest Roanoke, as well as attract people from the larger city and region. We encourage the city to find a comprehensive solution to the former landfill conditions and develop an appropriate and well-deserved park master plan for this neighborhood. Continued “band-aids” for environmental conditions and piecemeal location of recreational facilities will not adequately address community needs. In addition, an updated master plan for Washington Park should include the entire history - from the earliest days as a large farm to the years during segregation when it served as a gathering place for Black people throughout the region.

Please know that the RVPF supports continued improvements to Washington Park and understands the need for a new swimming pool; however, we request that the City include the preservation of the Evans House/Caretaker’s House as part of the overall plan for the park. We recognize the schedule and budget challenges associated with the pool construction and, if possible, do not want to impede that progress. To this end, we recommend that the City immediately explore alternative site scenarios or other locations within the park for the new pool that will not require the demolition of the historic house. The RVPF is committed to working with the City and Friends of Washington Park to identify grant funding to assist with the stabilization and renovation of the Evans House for adaptive reuse to support current and future park and community activities. As with so many of Roanoke’s historic resources, the Evans House should be seen as a valuable asset that enriches the future while serving as a tangible reminder of our rich and collective history.

Sincerely,

Alison Blanton  
Advocacy Committee  
Roanoke Valley Preservation Foundation



Photo Credit: Whitney Leeson

# Downtown Redevelopment Tour

## For the 2023 Virginia American Planning Association Meeting

On Tuesday July 18, Alison Blanton and Whitney Leeson helped lead a tour geared toward looking at how the City of Roanoke has and continues to evolve for members of the Virginia American Planning Association. The tour focused on redevelopment along Jefferson Street, from Radford University Carilion in the Innovation Corridor, down to Liberty Trust. The tour discussed past and ongoing economic development projects such as Elmwood Park, the Patrick Henry, and RAMP or Regional Accelerator & Mentoring Program. Participants also had the opportunity to meet with the developers of Mast General Store and Heir apartments, Fire Station No. 1, and The Liberty Trust to see the results of their dedication to reviving downtown Roanoke.

Other tour guides included Marc Nelson, Director of Economic Development for the City of Roanoke, Parviz Moosavie, Historic Preservation Planner and Architectural Review Board Agent for the City of Roanoke, and Katharine Gray, Land Use and Urban Design Planner for the City of Roanoke. Two additional board members, Kate Kronau of Hill Studio and Mike Kennedy of Balzer & Associates, spoke to the group about their work on the The Liberty Trust project.



Photo Credit: Whitney Leeson

# History of The Liberty Trust

By Nelson Harris

The Liberty Trust building has an endearing place in Roanoke's history. When completed in 1910, it was described in a newspaper headline as "A Temple of Finance." The French Renaissance architectural influence of the main entrance and the Beaux Arts design of the main banking hall made it a signature structure of modern, multi-story design and innovation in Roanoke during that era. Improvements in fireproofing and the invention of the electric elevator made possible its height and physical prominence. The seven-story property was a symbol of Roanoke's prosperity and progress.

Designed by John Kevan Peebles, deemed the "Dean of Virginia architects" during the early part of the last century, Peebles was in high demand as a designer and schooled in classical and Renaissance architecture. Based in Norfolk, Peebles served on the architectural committee for the restoration of Virginia's State Capitol in 1902 and the board of design for the Jamestown Exposition in 1907, and chaired the architectural



committee of the University of Virginia for several years. His Virginia commissions included the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond, the Bank of Commerce in Norfolk, and the Hotel Elliott in Suffolk.

The Liberty Trust building was originally erected to house First National Bank, the first financial institution to be founded in Roanoke, which facilitated the commercial transactions of the Shenandoah Valley Railroad forerunner of the Norfolk & Western Railway. First National opened in its new home the day after Christmas in 1910. The *Roanoke Times*' front-page the following day declared "First National's Noble Building" and reported with poetic flourish "the great columns of marble, the copper and brass and tiling, the splendid steel vault glittering behind its polished bars, and the lofty ceiling...and through the big swinging doors thronged the visitors." Another local newspaper described the "Banking House" as an ornament to the city and state."

Photo Credit: Whitney Leeson

In 1926, the bank merged with the National Exchange Bank and became First National Exchange Bank. That year the building was sold to the Liberty Trust Company which initially occupied the first floor. Liberty Trust remained headquartered at 101 South Jefferson Street for twenty years before it merged with The Colonial American National Bank and relocated. In the years that followed, the Liberty Trust building served as home to a variety of financial institutions including People's Federal Savings and Loan. Having served as a commercial structure for over a century, the Liberty Trust property is still considered to be one of the best-appointed Edwardian era bank buildings in Virginia.

Today, Roanoke's "Temple of Finance" remains in a remarkable state of preservation from its Roman Ionic columned entrance to the Doric columns of the main hall derived from the Temple of Apollo at Delos. These along with bronze main doors, the granite exterior with carved rosettes, and balustrade roof carry visitors and guests back to a bygone era while simultaneously beckoning them to enjoy the best of contemporary hospitality as The Liberty Trust Hotel.



Photo Credit: Whitney Leeson

# Bellmont

By Michael J. Pulice

*In early September 2022, Mike Pulice, Whitney Leeson, and Whitney Feldmann went out to Old Monterey Golf course to check on the state of Belmont. The house is in deplorable condition and the cemetery is also overgrown and difficult to access. Mike served on the Roanoke Valley Preservation Foundation's board for many years and continues to work with the Foundation's various action committees. Following you will find his report on the log structure and photographs from our site visit.*

Located in northeast Roanoke, on the north side of Tinker Creek, the old log house is surrounded so closely by the greens and fairways of Old Monterey Golf Course, which dates from 1965, that it is essentially a feature of the course. Col. Fleming's grave is also on the golf course property.

Bellmont Plantation was established by Col. William Fleming (b. 1729) near the Great Wagon Road crossing of Tinker Creek. Born in Scotland and educated as a surgeon in Edinburgh, Fleming emigrated to Virginia and served with George Washington in the French and Indian War. In 1774, Fleming raised the Botetourt Regiment which he commanded at the Battle of Point Pleasant on the Ohio River. He was seriously wounded in that engagement, which opened the Ohio frontier for settlement, but survived. He represented Botetourt, Washington, and Montgomery counties in the Virginia Senate from 1777 to 1779 and served as Virginia's acting chief executive for two weeks in 1781, following Tarleton's raid on Charlottesville. Finally, he represented Botetourt County at the state convention in which in June 1788, in which the Federal Constitution was ratified. Fleming conveyed his 2,000-acre estate to his sons William and John. John inherited the western portion where the golf course is now located. William assumed the eastern part and built a 1 ½-story log house, known as Billy's Cabin, one half-mile east of the house at Belmont. Billy's Cabin was built around 1820 and stood until 2018, when the City of Roanoke demolished it.



Burial place of Col. William Fleming and Nancy Christian Fleming.



Photo Credit: Whitney Leeson

The southward-facing 1 ½-story house is composed of two contemporaneous 1.5-story log pens of equal size joined under one roof but separated by a formerly open breezeway or dogtrot that is enclosed with frame walls in the front and back, and which contains a shared staircase. The V-notched, hewn hardwood logs rest on a stone rubble foundation that encloses a partial cellar. In total, the house measures 34 feet in length, not including the two brick exterior end chimneys. The building is in terrible condition owing to decades of total neglect. Breaches in the roofing and flashing have caused extensive damage, particularly to the rear (north) wall and ceiling/floors of the west pen, but also to the front wall/ceiling of the east pen. In addition, a large vertical crack has opened in the exterior face of the east chimney.

Although survivals are now rarely encountered, log dogtrot houses were historically common throughout western Virginia and elsewhere. Belmont is a significant, largely unaltered example, but increasing deterioration will soon lead to its total demise.

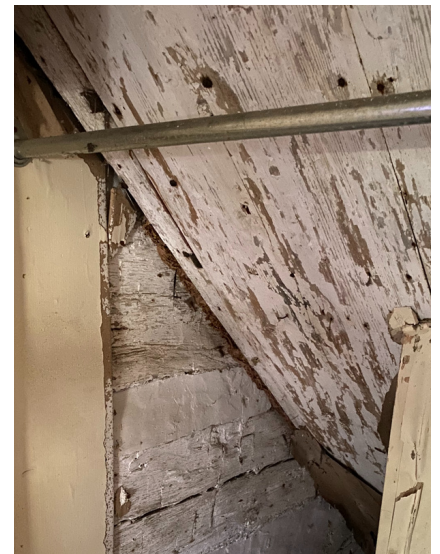
Long referred to as Belmont, the house does indeed stand on the former Belmont Plantation owned by Col. Fleming, but is simply not old enough to have been built for Col. Fleming, who died in 1795. Architectural clues, including the chimneys' Flemish-bond brick masonry and stepped shoulders, the conspicuous lack of wrought nails throughout the house (the earliest nails in the house are machine-cut nails) and hand-planed-and-beaded floor joists, indicate the house was built in the 1820s or 1830s. The similarities of the two log pens and the two chimneys suggests they were all built at roughly the same time. The logs of the front wall, sheltered by the porch, are whitewashed but otherwise exposed, revealing exceptionally smooth hewing and neat joinery with tight-fitting notches. The actual location of Fleming's 18th-century house on the property has not been identified.



Photo Credit: Whitney Leeson

Photo Credit: Whitney Leeson







# *Defining and Dating Historic Log Buildings in Southwest Virginia*

Michael J. Pulice

*Following is a revised and abridged version of Mike Pulice's article on log structures in southwestern Virginia that first appeared in the Historical Society of Western Virginia Journal in 2011. He has kindly included an updated bibliography for our readers who are interested in log cabins like Bellmont.*

Virginia is home to some of the nation's earliest and purest forms of log buildings, since the technology was likely introduced first to the mid-Atlantic states, primarily Pennsylvania and Maryland, by Germanic immigrants in the 17th century. As huge waves of Scots-Irish immigrants also arrived, beginning about 1717, they quickly embraced log construction because it was well suited to the frontier; thus it spread with the flow of mainly Scots-Irish and German migration to the south and southwest via the Great Valley of Virginia. Enslaved people eventually became adept at building with logs and often built their own homes. The first log buildings in Virginia might not have been erected until the western lands began to be opened for settlement around 1730, since the English colonists, who arrived earlier, favored post-and-beam and/or masonry construction. It appears unlikely that any log buildings from the first half of the 18th century survive in Virginia, and verified examples built before the 19th century are extremely rare.

Log buildings were by far the most prevalent building type in southwestern Virginia before the Civil War. Logs were used to build every type of building, from houses to agricultural buildings, churches, stores, schools, mills, and even public buildings like courthouses. Domestic outbuildings built of logs, such as smokehouses, springhouses, and granaries, were also very common. Large barns became common in southwestern Virginia only after about 1830, but the vast majority of them were built of hewn logs until well after the Civil War. Countless log barns survived intact until the decline of small-scale agriculture in Virginia during the late 20th century, when many were left vacant and neglected. Undoubtedly, agricultural structures, followed by domestic outbuildings, stand the greatest threats today.

Log buildings are relics of the bygone era of truly vernacular building construction. They represent a simple, but historically important form of construction, a product of once-common knowledge that has become obsolete, and many are lost annually to development or decay. They are emblematic of the settlement and early growth of the United States, and iconic reminders of the independent spirit of the pioneers.

The author has researched log construction for many years and has documented countless log buildings, forming the basis of this article. In order to promote awareness and appreciation, as well as heighten understanding among readers, the major variations and common nomenclature for log structures and their components, as well as some important aspects to consider, are briefly discussed below.

## Hewn Logs

This article focuses on early, **hewn**-log construction, as opposed to **round**-log construction, which was rare before the 20th century. Though round logs came into use in Southside tobacco barns in the late 19th century, most early tobacco barns, and virtually all other types of barns employed hewn logs. Hewing consisted of removing sufficient wood to create a relatively flat surface. For the vast majority of buildings, logs were hewn on both sides; but were not worked on the top or bottom, leaving rounded surfaces, often with bark still attached. However, the bottom and top logs within a structure, referred to as the **sill** and **top plate**,

respectively, are often hewn square. In some cases, outbuildings such as meat houses and granaries situated close to a house were carefully built of dovetail-notched logs hewn square. Squared logs fit tightly together, eliminating the need for **chinking** and **daubing** between them. [Fig. 1.]

The tools commonly used in hewing include a typical **felling axe** and a **foot adze**. In many cases, especially before the early 19th century, a **broad axe** was also used. Vertical notches were cut at intervals along the sides of a log with felling axe, and the bulk of the wood between the notches was removed with an axe such as a broad axe, then the log was finished with a foot adze. The adze removed smaller amounts of wood, and in the hands of a skilled worker, would leave a flat and fairly smooth finish, although a few inconspicuous adze marks are usually visible.

### Log Pens

A log pen may be defined as a single, four-walled unit of logs notched together at the corners. Individual pens were usually connected indirectly, joined together using different methods and materials other than logs in order to enlarge a building. The manner in which two or more pens are physically connected, as well as their orientations and spatial relationships to each other, are chief defining features. Even if the logs are obscured by exterior cladding, individual pens can usually be discerned.

Examples of two or more log pens actually notched together are not unheard of, but which seem to have been quite rare. Also uncommon are examples of two pens built years apart being abutted and connected together, such as the Yeatts House in Pittsylvania County [Fig. 2.], and the Howbert House in Roanoke County, demolished in 1999. [Fig. 3.] Inside, the rooms were connected by walk-through openings.

### Common Log House Configurations

**Single-pens** are the most common log houses. They can be 1-story, 1 ½-stories, or two full stories in height. A 1 ½-story house has 3 or 4 logs above the level of the upper floor— where the floor joists are notched into the outer wall and are visible from the exterior. A person cannot stand at full height upstairs except away from the eaves, near the center of the room. Virtually all single-pen houses have (or had) an exterior chimney on one end of the building, or a chimney on both ends if the pen is divided into two rooms. Two-story pens usually have fireplaces on both floors; 1 ½-story examples sometimes do as well.

**Dogtrot** log structures consist of two pens built separately with an open breezeway between them, all joined under one roof. They were once very common and may not yet be terribly rare, but they are hard to discover because the breezeway, called a dogtrot, has almost always been framed-in and covered with weatherboards or some such cladding. Dogtrot houses have two chimneys—one at each exterior end. [Fig. 4.]

**Saddlebag** houses are similar to dogtrots, and were probably even more common. Instead of an open breezeway between them, two log pens are built on each side of a single, typically massive chimney with fireplaces in both sides; as if the pens were draped over the chimney like a saddlebag over a saddle. This arrangement saved the labor of building another chimney and allowed for windows in the end walls of both pens. If there are fireplaces in both sides of the chimney, it stands to reason that both pens were built as a single cohesive design. [Fig. 5a and 5b.]

### Corner Notching

The types of corner notches employed in log pens varied between builders and perhaps cultural groups early on, and some were certainly favored in limited geographical areas. However, notches are generally not indicative of any specific time period. In most areas of southwestern Virginia, the **V-notch** is predominant among survivals built throughout the late 18th and 19th centuries. [Figs. 2, 4, 6b, 8a.] It is a relatively simple notch to cut with hatchet and chisel, and is recognizable by the inverted V shape.

The second most common corner notch in southwestern Virginia, the half-dovetail, was the overwhelming first choice of builders in some limited geographic areas. [Fig. 1.] The half-dovetail was a simplified version of the full-dovetail, which is used in a wide variety of woodwork types, especially furniture. The full dovetail might have been more common in the 18th century than it was later, but it does not follow that surviving full-dovetail-notched buildings are necessarily older than those with other types of notching.

**Square** notching is much less common throughout Virginia. Although conventionally thought to have been popularized much later, it became common in the Piedmont region that includes Bedford, Franklin, Henry and Pittsylvania counties by the early 19th century. More a lap joint than a true notch, the logs are usually pegged together through the notches, traditionally with a piece of black locust called a **trunnel**.

### Chinking and Daubing

Although today the word **chinking** is to mean any material that fills the voids between logs, chinking consisted of sawn or split pieces of wood, or sometimes stones, wedged between two logs. [Figs 6a and 6b.] It served as filler and backing for daubing, which was mud, often mixed with a binder such as livestock hair and/or a quantity of slaked (hydrated) lime. Because the chinking was tightly wedged into place, it added to overall structural stability and reduced movement and vibration, filled cavities that would invite pests, and of course, helped insulate the building interior. A heavy coat of whitewash, made with lime, was usually applied to the outer surface of the daubing as a protectant and consolidant.

### Log House Interiors

Most log pens were not divided into separate rooms, but many did have either a log or board partition creating two rooms, perhaps on each floor. Virtually all had an accessible attic space for sleeping or storage. Whitewash, made with slaked lime, was the most typical wall and ceiling treatment in modest log houses, even after the Civil War. It was applied directly to the exposed logs. Many log and frame houses built before 1850 had vertical, beaded boards on the walls and ceilings. Throughout the 19th century, larger, higher-status log houses were more likely to have plaster walls and ceilings, especially those built later.

Many log houses originally had exterior ladders or stairs to the second floor, since floor space inside was an issue, but then had a stair installed later. There are two common types of stairs found inside log houses, both of which required minimal floor space. The hybrid "ladder-stair" was commonly found in modest log houses built before the Civil War. The corner stair, usually enclosed or "boxed in" by a wall with a door, was the most common type found in log houses. [Figs. 7a and 7b.]

### Preferred Tree Species for Log Buildings

In Southwest and Southside Virginia, like many other places, the overwhelmingly preferred species used in log construction was white oak, prized for its strength, decay resistance, relatively light weight and availability. Other commonly used trees include yellow-poplar and southern yellow pine. Old growth pine and poplar trees grew straight and tall with few limbs, and were sufficiently decay resistant and strong; thus, logs of these species can still be found in good condition in early buildings. Red oak, other oak species, and American chestnut logs appear to have been seldom used, however, chestnut was very often employed for chinking and roof shingles.

### Dating Clues

In most any type of historic structure, nails (and other metal fasteners) and saw marks are strongly relied upon for help in determining the date of construction. For example, structures in which **rosehead** or other hand-wrought iron nails are predominant were likely built prior to circa 1815. A predominance of machine-cut iron nails (with square heads) together with the absence of round-headed **wire** nails probably indicates

construction between 1815 and 1895. Small pieces of wood were sawn by hand, or after about 1800, by water-powered sawmill with a straight, vertical blade. Radial saw marks generally indicate a post-1840 date. Very often, however, original nails and saw marks are not found in log structures because nails and saws were not needed to build them. If the original floors have been replaced, nail dating may not be an option. Saw marks may not exist, since floor joists and roof rafters could be hewn rather than sawn, or like floorboards, planed, leaving no saw marks. Most large, heavy, wood members were hewn, rather than sawn, through the 1850s. Nevertheless, other potentially helpful dating clues may still exist, including the presence of hand-planed interior features, such as floor joists and interior wall boards, which often have beaded edges created with a beading plane. [Fig. 8.] Hand planing left a smooth, but slightly uneven surface that is usually visible with angled lighting and detectable by hand. Hand-planing quickly fell out of favor when the steam-powered machine plane became common in the 1840s. About the same time, lath (nailed strips of wood onto which plaster is applied) became much cheaper due to the increasing presence of steam powered, portable mill saws. Before the 1840s most lath was split, or **riven** into pieces by hand, and is easily differentiated from sawn lath.

#### *Dendrochronology (tree-ring dating)*

Log buildings, especially when their original architectural features and finishes have been removed or replaced, can be very difficult to date with reasonable accuracy. **Dendrochronology** (**dendro** for short), is the only available absolute dating tool for log structures. The sampling procedure, requiring the extraction of a minimum number of either core samples or entire cross sections of logs, may not impair structural strength, but can impact the appearance of logs and the character of a building.

Dendrochronology was developed by foresters as a method for studying annual growing seasons according to tree species. It involves the precise measuring of intervals between growth rings and comparing the measurements with those from other logs and trees. The tree-ring chronologies used for comparison comes from decades of data collected by forest ecologists, climatologists, and others, now compiled in the International Tree Ring Data Bank. By pinpointing not only the year, but the season in which a tree was felled, the method can provide accurate construction dates of buildings.

At times, dendro can be worthwhile for research purposes, but the practice should be discouraged for intact, standing structures; especially if intended for the mere purposes of satisfying one's curiosity. Use of the dating clues described above might obviate the need for dendro. Sampling strategies and scientific rigor are very important to accurate dating and should not be taken lightly. Moreover, given the hardness of centuries-old logs, the work tends to be difficult and painfully laborious. Each sample must include the outer layer of wood—just beneath the bark—and must include a minimum of 80 growth rings.

#### *The Decline of Log Construction*

In much of western Virginia, building with logs remained the most common form of construction until the 1850s or 60s. By then, mill-sawn lumber had become widely available and more affordable; yet hewn log construction continued in rural areas until around the turn of the 20th century, and early 21st-century examples of traditional hewn-log house construction have been documented. During the interim, however, the quality of log craftsmanship declined gradually. Log homes came to be viewed as rustic or backward, and owners surely felt stigmatized to some degree. They were then more likely to clad their homes with exterior siding so they would not be conspicuous among new houses built with sawmill lumber. As a sacrificial envelope, wood siding proved effective in protecting and preserving many log houses to this day. Nevertheless, the number of survivals has diminished alarmingly in the past several decades.

### Threats Against Log Building Preservation

People have forgotten how to repair, or even maintain log buildings. Poor maintenance leads to drainage issues and decay from the ground up, and damaged logs are difficult to replace. Examples of well-constructed log houses in ruinous condition are easily spotted in southwestern Virginia, to say nothing of the thousands of deteriorating log tobacco barns across Southside.

Where neglect and deterioration have not destroyed log buildings, there are other foes to be reckoned with, one of which, ironically, is "restoration." Often it is better described as **adaptive re-use**, in which little regard is given to historical accuracy. Because of the difficulty of replacing damaged logs, attempts to restore log buildings very often involve disassembly and reassembly of the entire structure, which is not a task for novices, nor a bonafide form of preservation. On the contrary, such a project is normally fraught with unforeseen pitfalls that require good skills and innovative solutions. Once log buildings are "restored" in this way, their historic value is inevitably compromised.

Another aggressive adversary of log building preservation is the business of salvaging of logs for resale, often in the lucrative form of sawn, specialty lumber. Owners of highly visible, vacant or under-utilized log buildings are frequently approached by profiteers scouting for such finds. Log barns are often targeted for their thousands of board feet with few instances of nails. In many cases, owners have few alternatives and are unaware of their building's intrinsic value.



Fig.1\_Pullice.jpg



Fig.2\_Pullice.jpg



Fig.3\_Pullice.jpg



Fig.4\_Pullice.jpg



Fig.5a\_Pullice.jpg



Fig.5b\_Pullice.jpg



Fig.6a\_Pullice.jpg



Fig.6b\_Pullice.jpg



Fig.7a\_Pullice.ipa



Fig.7b\_Pullice.ipa



Fig.8\_Pullice.ipa

### Photo Captions

[All photos by the author, 2005-2009, except where noted.]

Fig. 1. This striking smokehouse in Pulaski County has half-dovetail-notched logs that are beautifully hewn on four sides to fit tightly together, eliminating the need for chinking and daubing. Similar examples with sawn, rather than hewn logs, are referred to as **plank** buildings.

Fig 2. The Yeatts House in Pittsylvania County consists of two one-story log pens, built circa 1818 and circa 1830, simply abutted to each other, with a walk-through passage inside — a rare configuration.

Fig. 3. The Howbert House, a substantial, two-story structure demolished in 1999, stood near the intersection of Salem Turnpike and Peters Creek Road in Roanoke. The smaller, V-notched pen (left) was added to the larger, full-dovetail-notched pen using two 8" x 8" corner posts abutted to the original structure. The front and rear-wall logs of the added pen were then mortised into the corner posts. Photo credit: Anne Beckett.

Fig. 4. Ivy Cliff servant quarters (ca. 1840-50) in Bedford County, provide a good example of a one-story, **dogtrot house** with square-notched logs.

Fig. 5a and 5b. The Stein House in Botetourt County (ca. 1825-1830), photographed prior to, and during disassembly. The house was removed to an unknown location in the county. It was an excellent example of a two-story, V-notched, **saddlebag house**. Note the fireplace in the exposed side of the chimney.

Fig. 6a and 6b. Two-story log houses, both built between 1830 and 1850, with wood chinking in the left (Craig County) example, and cobblestone chinking in the right (Scott County) example. The daubing has weathered away.

Figs. 7a and 7b. A ladder stair in a circa 1840 house, Botetourt County (left), and a boxed-in corner stair in Pittsylvania County (right).

Fig. 8. Hand-planed, beaded floorboards, nailed to hand-planed, beaded joists; which suggest a pre-1840 construction date.

Mike Pulice is a Radford University and Virginia Tech graduate and has served as architectural historian with the Department of Historic Resources' Western Regional Office since 2001. He started his career as an archaeologist working mostly in the private sector and since has become known for his deep interest not only in building design, but also construction methods and materials. Mike is well-versed in historic masonry and traditional building techniques such as log construction and timber framing and is often called upon to provide assessments of building construction dates or guidance toward repair, rehabilitation, or restoration. In 2011 the Historical Society of Western Virginia's Kegley Publications published Mike's groundbreaking book, a study of the Deyerle family brickmasons' work in the Roanoke Valley during the 19th century, in which the author using a unique methodology to identify the builders of specific buildings.

In collaboration with the DHR Richmond office, Mike also administers the National Register of Historic Places program in Southwest Virginia.

# Upcoming Events

## *Pints for Preservation Fundraiser*

ROANOKE VALLEY PRESERVATION FOUNDATION  
& SPARK ROANOKE

# Save THE Date

**PRINTS FOR PRESERVATION  
PUB CRAWL**

**SAT | SEPT 30 | 2-5 PM**  
**2023**

JOIN US FOR A PUB CRAWL AND A FUN 1970S  
HISTORY-THEMED SCAVENGER HUNT FEATURING  
QUESTIONS ABOUT PEOPLE AND PLACES  
IMPORTANT TO ROANOKE'S PAST!

Registration available on  
Eventbrite starting  
Sept. 1st




## Upcoming Events

*Summer Preservation Pub Talk*

# PRESERVATION PUB TALK

Doug Blount  
Assistant County Administrator

THE PAST AND FUTURE  
OF EXPLORE PARK



AUGUST 20, 2023 | 4-5 PM

*Twin Creeks Brewpub at Explore Park*

**ROANOKE VALLEY PRESERVATION FOUNDATION**



## Upcoming Events

### *Fall Preservation Pub Talk*

# PRESERVATION PUB TALK

Mason Adams  
Freelance Writer



## THE CHANGING SKYLINE OF DOWNTOWN ROANOKE

OCTOBER 11, 2023 | 5:30-6:30 PM

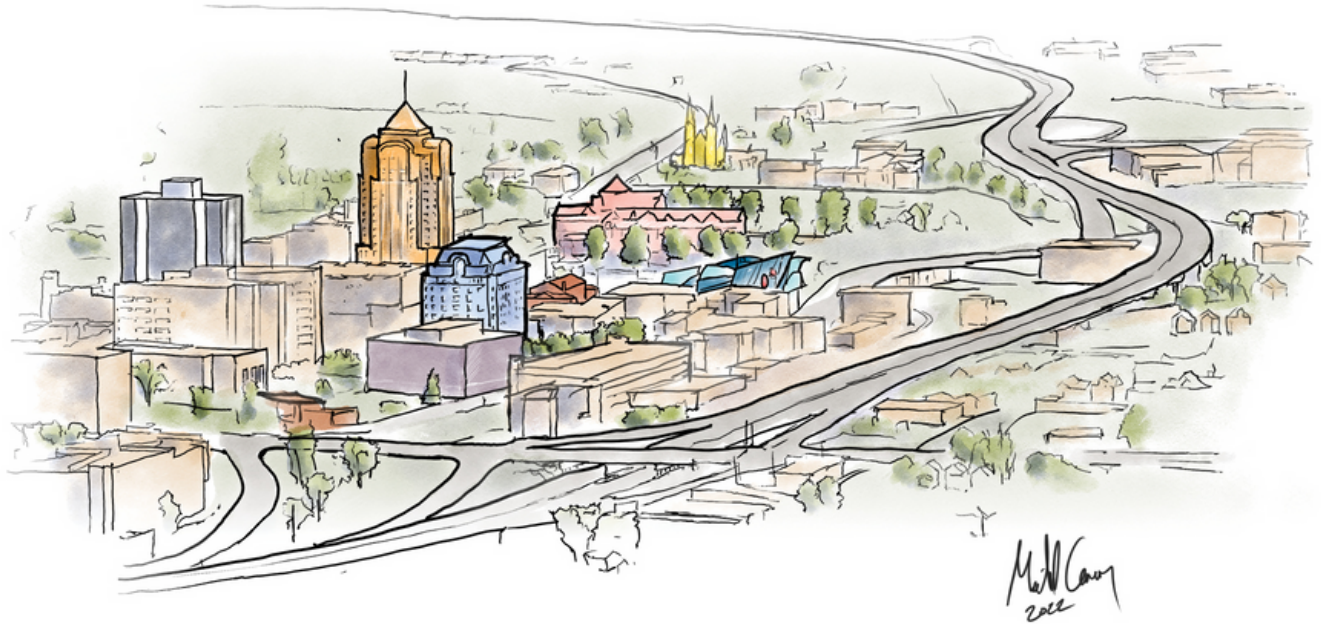
*The Vault at Liberty Trust*

101 S. Jefferson Street, Roanoke

**ROANOKE VALLEY PRESERVATION FOUNDATION**

# Downtown Roanoke Prints

Signed Prints by Michael Lawson Are Now Available



## Looking for a gift?

Michael Lawson, architect with Burns & McDonnell and member of the 2022 Pints for Preservation Committee, has produced a print of our city's skyline for a RVPF fundraiser.

All posters are printed on high-quality paper and are suitable for framing. The posters come in three sizes (16" x 12", 24" x 18", and 28" x 21"). Michael has signed and numbered all posters and there are a limited number available in each size.

**To purchase a poster contact [wleeson@roanoke.edu](mailto:wleeson@roanoke.edu).**

16" x 12" sells for \$15.00

24" x 18" sells for \$20.00

28" x 21" sells for \$25.00

Mailing fee is \$2.50.



Photo Credit: Breanna Latondre

# Historic Roanoke Cards

## Featuring Five Unique Photographs

Support RVPF and buy several packs of cards to give to colleagues, family, and friends. Each pack of cards features five images of historic Roanoke landmarks courtesy of Roanoke Public Libraries, The Virginia Room. They are: **Campbell Avenue, Burrell Memorial Hospital, Hotel Roanoke Fire, Mountain View, and Jefferson Street.**

To purchase cards please contact [wleeson@roanoke.edu](mailto:wleeson@roanoke.edu).

One Pack of Cards sells for \$12.00

Two Packs of Cards sells for \$20.00

Three Packs of Cards sells for \$25.00

Mailing fee is \$2.50.



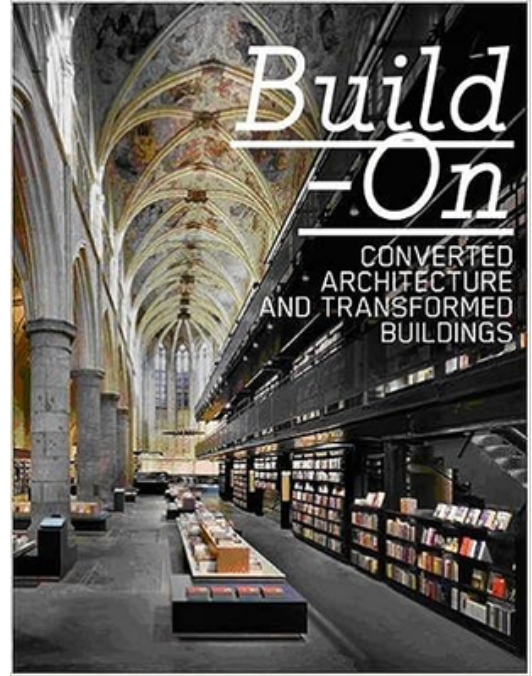
Photo Credit: Whitney Leeson and Roanoke Public Libraries, The Virginia Room

# Historic Preservation Reads

## Thinking about Adaptive Reuse

### **Build-On: Converted Architecture and Transformed Buildings** (2009) by **Lukas Feireiss and Robert Klanten**

Exceptional architectural transformations that bring new life and function to existing structures. In most parts of the world, developed areas are predominantly shaped by existent houses, buildings, and constructions. One of the biggest challenges architects face today is creatively bringing new life and function to these existing structures. The transition from the industrial age to our current information society consequently demands and fosters phenomenal possibilities to redefine these old structures. *Build-On* examines architecture in flux between tradition and transformation. The book presents exceptional examples of large-scale radical renovations and adaptations of industrial wasteland, bunkers, abandoned churches, forsaken rural centers and obsolete underground systems as well as creative transformations of smaller building units in the urban and rural context. These overlooked architectural sites are reborn as inhabitable residences, working spas, and more.



### **Old Buildings, New Forms: New Directions in Architectural Transformations** (2013) by **Françoise Bollack** with a foreword from **Kenneth Frampton**

Working with historic structures is both more environmentally sustainable and cost effective than new architecture and construction. Françoise Bollack argues these projects also offer architects some of the best design possibilities and provides the reader with 28 examples from around the world of great design incorporating both the old and new. Faced with the prospect of the gradual degradation of the buildings that are our architectural heritage, designers need to reconsider their focus on the heroic model of practice, with its emphasis on idiosyncratic form-making and new construction. Instead, they should look to “the creative possibilities of preservation,” says Françoise Bollack. Pursuing these possibilities while celebrating modernity and producing conceptually powerful work is the focus of her book *Old Buildings, New Forms*. In it, Bollack posits that, “an old building is not an obstacle but rather a foundation for continued action.”



# Have You Heard About Our Plaque Program?

## ***Bringing "History to the Streets"***

Historic homes and buildings in the Roanoke Valley can now be recognized under a Historic Plaque Program administered by RVPF. The program not only brings 'history to the street' for those passing by your home or building, but also brands them as desirable locations for potential home buyers, tenants, and business owners to live, work, and/or invest in. Installing a plaque on your home or building helps others understand its historical significance in our community. Several sites already have plaques including Fire Station No. 1, the Virginia Museum of Transportation (Norfolk & Western Freight Station), the Municipal Building, owners of historic homes, and most recently, Restoration LLC in commemoration of their recent restoration of historic Villa Heights located in NW Roanoke.

Plaques are 10" x 7" cast bronze ovals with brown pebbled backgrounds forged by Paul W. Zimmerman Foundries (responsible for casting most National Register of Historic Places plaques across the country). The cost per plaque is \$375 and includes research for the text to be used on the plaque (the building's historic name, brief description, and construction date), the plaque's production, shipping, regulatory approvals from the city, and installation.

***For additional information, visit <http://www.roanokepreservation.org/historic-plaque-program/> or email [wleeson@roanoke.edu](mailto:wleeson@roanoke.edu)***

*"It has been said that, at it's best, preservation engages the past in a conversation with the present over a mutual concern for the future."*

William Murtagh

First "keeper" of the National Register of Historic Places



The Roanoke Valley Preservation Foundation (RVPF) is a 501c3 nonprofit organization established in 1988 to preserve the historic, natural, and cultural resources of the Roanoke Valley (City of Roanoke, City of Salem, Town of Vinton, Roanoke County, Botetourt County, and Franklin County, Virginia). It was founded as - and continues to be - a grassroots, volunteer-driven organization. Since its inception, the RVPF has been active in a variety of preservation efforts. Consistent involvement and advocacy has resulted in increased public awareness and successful preservation projects. Although the Foundation's focus is on the past, its major accomplishments are the result of planning for the future.

## "THE FUTURE" OF PRESERVATION

**We partner with community groups to bring promote local history - Gainsboro History Walk**

**We advocate for preservation of important buildings - The Claytor Clinic (currently on the Endangered Sites List)**

**We give tours of Roanoke to share local history and preservation**

**We partner with RideSolutions for History By Bike Tours - Vinton Tweed Ride**

**We install plaques on historic buildings - formerly endangered. Villa Heights has been saved and renovated**

**We create and install community signs to commemorate and celebrate local history - Evans Mill & Crystal Spring**



P.O. Box 1366, Roanoke, VA 24007  
[www.roanokepreservation.org](http://www.roanokepreservation.org)

### **Roanoke Valley Preservation Foundation Board of Directors**

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