On April 16, the Charlottesville Board of Architectural Review approved a controversial partial demolition of the last remaining early twentieth-century warehouse on West Main Street. The decision, which allows the owners, the First Baptist Church, to proceed with expansion plans on this property, raised concerns among preservationists that the board had ignored its own guidelines and staff recommendations in response to emotional appeals by church members.

The proposed development initially called for total demolition of the 87-year old Priority Press building at 624 West Main Street, historically known as the Holsinger-Thomas Warehouse, to provide space for a new gymnasium adjacent to the church. Rufus W. Holsinger, a prominent photographer and resident of Charlottesville, constructed the brick building in 1915. The warehouse boasted open ground floor bays and a spur connection to the C&O Railroad. Standard Produce Company, a long-time Charlottesville business still in operation, was the first recorded tenant of the warehouse, occupying the building on West Main for more than twenty-five years. C.R. Thomas, president of the company, purchased the warehouse a few years after Holsinger’s death. Thomas owned the building from 1935 to 1975. Although the structure lacks interior integrity, the streetscape façades remain remarkably close to original condition, a status that earned the building a “contributing” grade within the West Main Street Architectural Design Control District in 1997.

The prospective loss of this structure galvanized local preservationists. Preservation Piedmont President Ashlin Smith and I presented evidence of the building’s significance to the Board of Architectural Review and the overflow crowd at the four-hour public meeting, noting in particular the gradual erosion of historic fabric along West Main Street in the face of contemporary development. RBGC Architects, the local firm commissioned to design the new gymnasium, persuaded the church to modify its original plans and incorporate the front third of the three-story warehouse into the new building. Preservationists have criticized the practice of erecting a new building behind a portion of an older structure as “façadism”. The compromise plan was presented to the BAR at the eleventh hour in an effort to avoid an unfavorable ruling and subsequent appeal to City Council.

The First Baptist Church presented its case as “bricks

See Holsinger on page 2.
Holsinger continued

v. people”, warning that rejection of the demolition plan might force the church to leave its historic West Main Street location. The church has occupied its building, next to the warehouse, since 1883. Board members were clearly moved by the testimony of dozens of church congregants, who cited the work of the church in the community and the critical need for more space. Pointing to the board’s rules regarding demolition requests, Chairwoman Joan Fenton said, “When I look at my heart and at myself, I believe there is a morality that takes precedence over what this document says to me.”

After lengthy debate, the Board voted 6-1 in favor of the church’s modified demolition plan, permitting removal of the rear two-thirds of the warehouse. Lynn Heetderks, Executive Director of the Albemarle County Historical Society, cast the sole nay vote. “I would remind the public that the name of this board is the Board of Architectural Review. It is not the board of cultural review, it’s not the board of social review. That’s City Council’s job.” University of Virginia architecture professor Kenneth Schwartz, who voted for the partial demolition, warned his fellow board members that he feared the decision “may come back to haunt us.” Schwartz resigned from the board several hours after the meeting ended. The remaining members of the BAR are now outlining new methods to address future requests of this type.

Lost in the fray were approvals on the same evening to demolish two other West Main structures. Merchants Tire and Peyton Pontiac – twentieth-century buildings of a later vintage that are not included under the current historic context of the West Main Architectural Design Control District – will soon be gone.

Development along West Main and nearby streets is entering a new phase. Many of the latest projects center around the sensitive renovation of small-scale historic structures. In a recent C-Ville article, city councilor Maurice Cox referred optimistically to current Main Street building trends as “more diverse and dynamic . . . where smaller development sparks happen all throughout the corridor.” The side-by-side renewals of the old MacGregor Motors building, now the upscale Main Street Market, and an old filling station, now a restaurant with outdoor patio, may be good signs for the future preservation of this neighborhood.

2002 a Busy Year for Preservationists
Ashlin Smith

In the ten year history of Preservation Piedmont the organization has never been interested in more preservation issues than at present. This newsletter informs readers about some of our recent activities. Each article is written by a member directly involved with an effort to protect an historic resource. In Charlottesville it’s Jefferson School, Maplewood Cemetery and the Holsinger-Thomas Warehouse; in Orange County it’s the Madison-Barbour Rural Historic District.

Blue Ridge Sanatorium

The future of the old Blue Ridge Sanatorium site in Albemarle County, owned by the UVA Real Estate Foundation is also of great concern to Preservation Piedmont. However, instead of writing an article about it we recommend for now that our readers visit the current exhibit at the Albemarle County Historical Society. Presented by the Community History Workshop of the University of Virginia’s School of Architecture, the exhibit explores the history, architecture and role of the tuberculosis sanatorium from its founding to the present. The exhibit is on view through July 15. More information can be found at www.faculty.virginia.edu/blueridgesanatorium/.

Also recommended is The Blue Ridge Tuberculosis Guidebook by Monica Shenouda. Its publication was one of the student projects from Professor Daniel Bluestone’s workshop. This very attractive and informative guidebook can be ordered by contacting Monica at mas5ms@virginia.edu.
Maplewood Cemetery Documented
Lois McKenzie

Under the dedicated guidance of Sue Weber, and with the help of a group of concerned volunteers, the first phase of documenting the condition of Maplewood Cemetery has been completed. The location of, condition of, and inscription on each marker have been noted and recorded. The data are now being entered in a data base by Sue Weber, who also has designed a web site where photographs of the conditions and typical problems can be viewed and current information can be obtained (http://members.aol.com/SueW601/concern.html). Much work remains to be completed, however.

To this end, the group is organizing a brown bag lunch meeting to be held the fourth Monday of every month at noon at the Albemarle County Historical Society. The first meeting will be Monday, June 24. The group hopes to encourage preservation and protection of Maplewood Cemetery (and other city cemeteries), and to encourage historic research of the cemetery and those interred there. The group will alert the community of any further cemetery deterioration, hoping citizens will voice their concerns to city officials, especially the City Manager and the members of the Board of Architectural Review (BAR) and the City Council. Anyone who might be able to provide information on individuals buried at Maplewood Cemetery is urged to contact Sue Weber (SueW601@aol.com or 977-5179) or Lois McKenzie (lcmck@cstone.net or 979-1973), and to attend the brown bag meetings on the fourth Monday of every month.

The group hopes to pursue historic designation for the city’s cemeteries. A public hearing was held in October 2001, and the BAR and the city planning commission recommended such a designation. Charlottesville City Council did not agree to support local historic district designation of Maplewood, but did agree to support its nomination to the Virginia Landmarks Register and National Register of Historic Places.

Also on the group’s agenda is the return of a caretaker to Maplewood. The caretaker was moved to other Parks Department duties in 1998 as a cost-cutting measure. As a result, Maplewood does not receive regular shrub trimming, weed and vine control, or trash/litter removal. There is no regular presence to address the problems of vandalism and other inappropriate activities, or to assist researchers, genealogists, or families find grave markers.

On a positive note, the group has succeeded in halting contract mowing by large machines that inflicted severe damage to many of the grave markers. As of April 2002, the grass is being mowed by Parks Department personnel who use standard walk-behind mowers. Repair of damaged stones still remains an issue, however. The six-foot tall marker of Elizabeth Magruder, damaged by Parks Department personnel while they were attempting to remove a tree, has yet to be repaired and reinstalled. The stone was damaged in September 2001!

Maplewood Sketches

Julia Magruder (1854-1907)

Julia Magruder, a nineteenth-century author of novels, short stories and essays, was born in Charlottesville on September 14, 1854. When Julia was eighteen years old, she won $300 in a literary contest sponsored by the Baltimore Sun, where her winning story was published serially. She wrote about twenty novels including Across the Chasm, Princess Sonia, and A Beautiful Alien. Sue Weber’s Maplewood Cemetery web site includes a link to an online copy of Princess Sonia, as published in The Century, with illustrations by Charles Dana Gibson.

According to the Dictionary of American Biography, Julia Magruder’s novels “generally used one of two plot patterns: that of a hero and heroine who overcome fragile barriers to matrimony, or that of a heroine who marries the wrong man and after his death or disappearance joins her true love.” The Dictionary further notes that Magruder’s novels and short stories “were directed at a feminine reader” and her articles “discuss such topics as the changing social position of woman and child-labor questions.”

Julia Magruder died June 9, 1907 and was buried in Maplewood Cemetery, beside the graves of her mother and father, Sarah and Allen B. Magruder. Julia’s grave stone has been broken and repaired, but according to the recent inventory, cracks and open spaces are developing where the stone meets its base. The headstone of Julia’s father has been lost. Elizabeth Magruder, whose six-foot-tall marker was badly damaged last year during a tree removal, was Julia’s grandmother.

In future newsletters we will include sketches of other interesting people buried in Maplewood and Oakwood Cemeteries. The portrait of Julia Magruder is from Literar Workers of the South (1895), by Anna Leach, courtesy of the Electronic Text Center at the University of Virginia Library.
On-Going Efforts to Save the Jefferson School
Liz Sargent

Since Mary Hill Caperton’s winter 2001 newsletter update, there is much positive news to report regarding the Jefferson School. The hard work and advocacy of local citizens convinced Charlottesville’s City Council to postpone selling the Jefferson School to a developer, leaving the door open for greater public involvement in determining the future for this local landmark. Many members of Preservation Piedmont have been at the forefront of the public awareness campaign on behalf of the Jefferson School, but there is still much work to be done.

Preservation Piedmont’s involvement in this issue began when Julie Gronlund and Gennie Keller collaborated to prepare the documentation necessary to list the Jefferson School on the National Register of Historic Places. After completing this work, however, they found both the former and current owners of the building — Charlottesville’s School Board and City Council — unwilling to sign the nomination lest it limit the building’s development potential. Without the owner’s signature, a property cannot be listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Several times, Preservation Piedmont members spoke before City Council to recommend that they sign the nomination. The pleas appeared to fall on deaf ears as the city moved forward with issuing a Request for Proposal.

In early January 2002, a group of concerned Charlottesville citizens met to discuss how to save the Jefferson School. Over 80 people attended the impromptu meeting. Dubbing themselves the “Citizens for Jefferson School” the group, which included numerous Preservation Piedmont members, agreed that they would join together to preserve the school as a home for community education and lifelong learning. This show of strength appears to have swayed City Council, who soon thereafter postponed their plans to issue the Request for Proposal.

In March, Citizens for Jefferson School began to lobby City Council to take a proactive stance on the future of the building. They recommended that council form a community-based advisory council to look at alternative uses (and creative funding sources) for the building. City Council agreed to form a task force comprised of community representatives from various city neighborhoods, professions, and organizations with the interest and ability to contribute to this process. City Council named the task force on May 20. Preservation Piedmont members who will sit on the task force include Nancy O’Brien, Jacky Taylor, and Bitsy Waters.

In late April, Liz Sargent and Jacky Taylor, who sit on the Citizens for Jefferson School historic preservation and grant committees, prepared and submitted a grant application to the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities to conduct an architectural and oral history documentation project for the Jefferson School. The application, which builds upon interest expressed by the community, Citizens for Jefferson School and Preservation Piedmont members, as well as the past success of the Ridge Street oral history project, requests funds enabling Preservation Piedmont to:

- Document the building’s architecture
- Conduct historic research
- Conduct oral histories with alumni, former teachers, and others using questions developed through architectural documentation and historical research
- Prepare a publication highlighting the stories of the interviewees, the architectural qualities of the building, and its National Register-level historic significance
- Hold a conference to share the experience of the oral history project and to discuss the role of oral history in community history documentation
- Present a video documentary of the project

Work on many of these tasks has already begun, and we have just learned that we will receive the grant. There are many avenues for involvement. I urge anyone who is interested in supporting this project to call me at 296-2564, or contact me by email at easocu@ntelos.net. The potential for the Charlottesville community to effect change is great, and there is ample opportunity for interested individuals to add their time, energy, and enthusiasm to this important preservation effort.

Welcome to New Members

Preservation Piedmont welcomes new members Carter and Patti Cooke of Louisa County, Catherine St John Robb of Batesville, and Gervas S. Taylor Jr. of Charlottesville.
Orange County Courthouse
Loggia Restoration

The Orange County Courthouse in mid-May. With the loggia reopened, the building already looks more graceful despite all the scaffolding. Preservation Piedmont was one of the donors to the loggia restoration fund.

Board of Directors 2002
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Preservation Piedmont Newsletter

Membership Form

Preservation Piedmont is a non-profit corporation dedicated to protecting old buildings, sites and neighborhoods, as well as traditional routes and open spaces. We do this in order to create an appreciation for the historic resources of the region. Based in Charlottesville, we also serve the County of Albemarle and bordering counties.

Name: ________________________________
Street: ______________________________
City, State, Zip: _______________________
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___ Student $5
___ Individual $10
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Please make dues payable to Preservation Piedmont and mail to

Preservation Piedmont
P.O. Box 2803
Charlottesville, VA 22902

We Need Your Support! Please Join Today!
Thank You!

NOTE: If the number by your address is not ‘02 or later, then it is time to renew your membership. (*=Life Membership.)
Friends Fight to Preserve Barboursville

Bryan Wright

On April 9 the Orange County Board of Supervisors voted to approve a special use permit that would allow the mining of a site near Barboursville. The site, owned by the Darnell family, is under option to General Shale, LLC, a subsidiary of the Austria-based Wienerberger Group. General Shale is a brick manufacturer, and the company proposes to mine 89 acres of the 139-acre Barboursville parcel to obtain additional raw material for use at an existing brick plant in Somerset.

A community organization, Friends of Barboursville, Inc., and 37 other individually-named complainants have filed suit against General Shale, Orange County and the Darnell family. The suit asks that the Board’s decision be reversed and that General Shale be enjoined from mining the Barboursville site. The suit makes ten charges, including violations of the county’s zoning laws and federal civil rights violations.

Unlike General Shale’s Somerset operation, the Barboursville site is surrounded by homes. In their original proposal, General Shale planned to mine within 70 feet of the nearest family’s doorstep. In approving the permit, the Board of Supervisors added an additional 75 feet between the mine and these houses.

About 25 residences lie within 1000 feet of the proposed site. The area to be mined lies closest to the community of Careytown, a freetown settled by slaves freed after the Civil War, and still owned by descendants of those slaves.

At peak production, the company estimates that 16,200 dump truck loads of material per year would be carried from Barboursville to Somerset. Trucks leaving the mine would travel a winding, narrow residential street and cross two railroad tracks before entering Route 20, the major tourist corridor between Montpelier and the Barboursville area’s wineries.

One of these wineries, Horton Cellars, lies within 1000 feet of the mine site. Representatives of both Horton Cellars and Barboursville Winery have spoken strongly against the proposed mine, which could have a devastating effect on the area’s thriving tourism economy.

Barboursville lies at the southern end of the Madison-Barbour Rural Historic District, which the National Register calls “one of Virginia’s most intact cultural landscapes.” The proposed mine site is surrounded by Burlington, the Brownland, and many of the District’s other contributing properties.

Friends of Barboursville is currently raising funds to cover the legal expenses associated with the lawsuit. Through donations, a highly successful yard and bake sale, and other activities they have made a good start in collecting the money they need. The group maintains a web site with extensive information about the mining issue at www.b-ville.net.