Stone Highway Markers To Be Surveyed

Ann Miller

A Virginia law of 1738 required all crossroads to be marked by posts of directions. Such signs were commonly made of wood, and have not survived. But by the early 1800s, a number of roads in Virginia featured a more permanent form of marker: directional signs made of stone. The practice continued until the early 20th century, when standardized highway signs began to appear. Surviving 19th century stone markers are irregular, roughly carved, and anywhere from 18 inches to 4 feet tall. Some look like simple tombstones, and often the lettering is worn or partly destroyed. Misspelling or abbreviation of words is common.

Stone highway markers come in two general categories: road stones (or sign rocks), and milestones. Sign rocks, as their name implies, actually bear a short message, usually the directions and mileage to a certain place. Milestones are often smaller, and often have only a numeral carved into them to indicate the distance from (or to) a certain point. In popular usage, though, the names are sometimes interchangeable.

Although a few early stone highway markers still survive; many more have been destroyed by vandals or by individuals who did not recognize their significance. Others have been removed from their original sites by people seeking building stones, souvenirs, or interesting landscape features for their property. Some well-meaning individuals have argued that moving a marker “saves” it from perceived threats. However, removing a marker from its original location not only takes the marker out of its historic context (and often the original location is lost forever), but it also destroys what may be the only surviving evidence of earlier transportation networks. Such actions, like moving an historic house, should only be undertaken as a last resort, when all other preservation/protection options have been unsuccessful. It should also be noted that any stones on state highway right-of-way should be preserved in place.

The stone highway markers pictured here are located in Fluvanna County. The milestone, located in the state right-of-way by the side of Rt. 15 just outside of Palmyra, is only 18 inches tall (the fountain pen in the image shows the scale); it stands about a mile south of the courthouse, and has the numeral “1” carved in it. At least one similar stone is also still in place farther south along Rt. 15. The other marker pictured here is of the “road stone” or “sign rock” variety. It now stands on private property beside an old abandoned road trace. This marker is 3 feet tall; its inscriptions, although somewhat worn, are still legible. On the front is “Right to Scottsville Left to 7 Isle Mills” and on the reverse is “J.H.C. / O.R. / 1828” (John Hartwell Cocke / Overseer of the Road / 1828).
Markers continued

are under VDOT’s administration and that moving them, if deemed necessary, is at VDOT’s discretion. The current VDOT practice is to leave such stones in place unless their sites are actively threatened. In the case of a threatened site, when it is not possible to retain the stone in its original position, VDOT cultural resource staff will document the stone and its original position; the stone will then be moved and reset as close as possible to the original location, and in the same relationship as it originally had to the highway right-of-way.

The Virginia Transportation Research Council (VTRC), located in Charlottesville, is undertaking a statewide cultural resource survey of Virginia’s surviving stone highway markers. In addition to markers in the public right-of-way, markers on private property will be surveyed (if the landowners are willing) for comparative purposes. Information from this survey will be used to assess the historic significance of, and to protect, these early stone road markers. If you know the location of any stone highways markers, please contact VTRC historian (and Preservation Piedmont board member) Ann Miller at VTRC, 530 Edgemont Road, Charlottesville, VA 22903; by phone at 804-293-1955; or e-mail at milleral@vdot.state.us

Nelson County Historic Home Tour

The Nelson County Historical Society will feature homes along “The Old Thorofare” this year, on Saturday, May 19. The society promotes interest in education and research leading to the preservation of artifacts, documents, written records and buildings relating to the history of Nelson County.

The Old Thorofare is Route 151 following the base of the Blue Ridge Mountains on their eastern side and connecting with Route 250 to the north and Route 29 to the south. Five homes will be open for tours from 10 a.m. until 5 p.m.

Riverside is the oldest; the original frame dwelling was probably built as early as 1813 with subsequent additions made in 1860 and 1900. The twelve room house still has its original cross and bible doors, carved mantels, wainscoting and staircases. Outbuildings still standing include a unique ice house which has a round brick pit 18 feet deep. The Cat Rock House, named for Cat Rock Mountain, was also built in three stages. The oldest part was a one-over-one log house, believed to have been a servant’s dwelling. It was left intact as new additions were built.

Two early twentieth-century houses will be on the tour. Four Gables is a large four-over-four house with old pine floors and mantels. The rooms are filled with period furniture and linens. The oldest part of The Higginbotham-Bendle House has been preserved through the century while extensive additions have been made. Architectural details within the house as well as the great trees without speak well of its age.

Mountain View Christmas Tree Farm is known for its use of new technology and its antique furnishings. Solar panels in the roof actively supply hot water and large windows supply passive solar energy to help heat the house. The interior is enhanced with old furniture and art objects from the U.S., Europe and the Orient.

The Jonesboro Baptist Church grew out of a late eighteenth-century interdenominational church comprised of Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians and Dunkards. Its places of worship have been many through the centuries, but the present site has been home to the Baptists since 1861. The third building, including the 1914 era seats, is preserved as a part of the present building. A limited number of box lunches will be available for $5.00 each in the social hall on the day of the tour.

For more information and directions, call the Nelson County Department of Tourism at 804-263-5239. Block tickets for $10.00 may be bought in advance or on the day of the tour and a limited number of tickets for individual homes will be available. A new book by Dr. Catherine Seaman entitled Along the Old Thoroughfare will also be available.

Welcome to New Members

Preservation Piedmont welcomes new members Michael Bednar, Preston Coiner, and Nancy C. Essig, all of Charlottesville. We also welcome the Thomas Jefferson Foundation and the Nelson County Historical Society as non-profit organization members.
Historic Garden Week in Virginia
Green Springs National Historic Landmark District
Louisa County ~ April 21, 2001

John Farmer

Preservation Piedmont members Julia Shandri and Henry Taylor are among the landowners in the Green Springs National Historic Landmark District who will open their homes and gardens for public viewing during Historic Garden Week in Virginia. Four historic houses and two churches in Louisa County will welcome the public on Saturday, April 21, 2001, from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. The Dolley Madison Garden Club of Orange sponsors the event.

The six properties listed below are open for the first time for Garden Week. This event will be an excellent opportunity to visit the Green Springs Historic District and see some outstanding examples of rural preservation. The National Park Service has this to say about the area: “Located on 14,000 acres, Green Springs National Historic Landmark District is in the western piedmont of central Virginia. It is a natural basin….which has sustained grassland farming for over 270 years. On this land, man has built homes and dependencies which represent a continuum of rural Virginia vernacular architecture, respectful of location and scene, preserved virtually unaltered in its original context, where the land has been enhanced rather than despoiled by the presence of man.”

Westend
Completed in 1849, Westend is a two-story, center-block house with Tuscan columns and one-story wings with hipped roofs. The east wing is an orangery. The west wing was altered in 1900 and converted for other uses. Four original outbuildings and a farm office complete the centerpiece of this working farm that has been in the same family for several generations. Mr. Henry Taylor Jr. is the owner.

Belle Meade
This classical revival house was built in 1857 and recently restored by the current owners. Outbuildings include an original barn and the chicken coop with its two-room core moved from a nearby farm to serve as a tenant house. Architectural elements are used creatively in a garden setting designed by the owners, Julia Shandri and Gregory Czura.

Boswell’s Tavern
Built in 1735, Boswell’s Tavern is said to be one of the most complete colonial ordinaries in Virginia. A clapboard wood frame structure, the Tavern retains its original two-feet wide paneling, small staircase, mantels and wainscoting. Among its early customers were the Marquis de Lafayette, Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison. Now serving as a private residence, the building is owned and occupied by Mrs. Beth Farley.

Ionia
Ionia was built in 1770. This pre-Revolutionary two-room, one and a half story frame house has been little altered despite the presence of three 19th century additions. Much of the original woodwork, flooring, hardware and glass remain intact today. Outbuildings include a smokehouse, creamery, spinning house, carriage house and slave quarters. Mr. and Mrs. Robert McIntire own and farm the property.

St. John’s Chapel
This Gothic revival chapel was built in 1888 and continues to serve the people of Green Springs. It is a painted, wood frame structure with steeply pitched gable roof and triangular dormers. The natural wood interior is heated by wood stoves and illuminated with candles and natural light from the dormers and from the arched window openings. The Rev. Julie Norton from Grace Episcopal Church in Cismont conducts services.

Berea Baptist Church
The current building was completed in 1857 for its congregation dating to 1795. The church is a brick building, illustrative of the transition from Classical Revival to Gothic ecclesiastical architecture, with lancet arched windows and a neoclassical portico. The original church benches are still in use and the original communion service is on display. Two stained glass memorial windows installed in the early 20th century have been identified as Tiffany windows. The Rev. Robert G. Lloyd serves as pastor.

The information contained in this article is presented courtesy of the National Park Service and The Dolley Madison Garden Club. For additional information and directions, call Mrs. John Y. Faulconer in Orange, VA at (540) 672-2961, or Mrs. H.B. Sedwick, III, at (540) 672-1520.
Dunlora Archaeological Survey

There is a small parcel, less than 6 acres, at Dunlora, just east of Rio Road, for which rezoning is sought. The area is historic and the Planning Commission has asked the developer to have a Phase I Archaeological Survey conducted. The area is strongly connected to the Dabney and Carr families, who originally owned serveral thousand acres in and around Dunlora. There is strong evidence that some of Jefferson’s slaves worked at Dunlora and were eventually moved there after Jefferson’s death. The Thomas Jefferson slave connection may date as early as 1800. The Free State area, adjacent to Dunlora, is significant regardless of any Jefferson connection, because it was one of only two free black antebellum communities in the county.

Developer Frank Stoner agreed to pay for a Phase I survey. In a Phase I survey, an archaeologist shovel tests small (1’ x 1’) units to systematically identify any cultural resources underground. The archaeologist then makes a report, including recommendations, to the developer, the Planning Commission, and the Virginia Department of Historic Resources. Phase I would be significant for the small parcel and for the larger area, including Free State, Dunlora, and Belvedere.

A Phase I archaeological survey would help identify the eighteenth-century landscape and reveal many more remnants of the nineteenth-century landscape. Jillian Galle, Project Manager of the Digital Archaeological Archive of Chesapeake Slavery, noted a number of important features of the Free State landscape:

“a [nineteenth-century] cemetery that contains both marked and unmarked graves. Oral tradition indicates that it contains the bodies of those enslaved at Dunlora and later free blacks that lived in the area. The one Free State family descended from Dunlora Slaves currently owns the cemetery.”

“Other features of the historic landscape are a substantial stone-lined cellar hole as well as several other cellar-like depressions scattered throughout Free State. More evident are a few standing stone chimneystacks as well as turn-of-the-nineteenth-century houses. A brother and sister who were born in Free State, and who have lived there off and on for over 60 years, remember that slave dwellings were being used as housing well into the 1940s. There are some intriguing landscape features as well, such as terracing and a large oak tree that is at least 200 years old that suggest the presence of house sites.”

“The presence of a road named “Critta Lane” is an intriguing piece of information in Free State that suggests a possible link between Free State inhabitants and Monticello. Jefferson owned an enslaved woman named Critta who appears to have worked for Jefferson family members that lived off of Monticello Mountain. It is highly probable that Samuel Carr purchased or received some of Jefferson’s slaves upon Jefferson’s death. It may be the case that Critta ended up at Dunlora and in the Free State area.” (January 24, 2001 letter to the Albemarle County Planning Commission)

Request for Aid in Organizing an Oral History Project for the Dunlora Area

Corinne Carr Nettleton, a descendant of the Carr family that owned Bentivar, spoke to Preservation Piedmont board members in February to request help in organizing an oral history project of the area around Dunlora. She said that the extended Carr family, who had a reunion last summer, forms a nationwide nucleus of concern for and interest in the area. Bob Vernon, who conducted a similar study for Milton, has developed a topographical plat of the area showing the original property boundaries. The 5-acre plat may contain a cemetery. Nearby there is a Bowles Family periwinkle graveyard, where Critta Lane, Sallie Hemings’ sister, may be buried. Conversations with area residents indicate that there may also be twentieth-century archaeological sites in the area.

Ridge Street Oral History to Go On-line

Audio tapes from the Ridge Street Oral History Project are being reviewed for inclusion on the web site Race and Place: An African American Community in the Jim Crow South (http://www.vcdh.virginia.edu/afam/raceandplace/index.html). According to the web site, “Race and Place is an archive about the racial segregation laws... from the late 1880s until the mid-twentieth century. The focus of the collection is the town of Charlottesville in Virginia. The archive contains photos, letters, two regional census[es] and a flash map of the town of Charlottesville.”

The web site is a collaborative project of the Virginia Center for Digital History and the Carter G. Woodson Institute for African and Afro-American Studies at the University of Virginia.
From the President

Mary Hill Caperton

A group of people started meeting in the early 1990s over bag lunches to share our concerns about the changing landscape of the Piedmont. Two old buildings on West Main Street had disappeared almost overnight. The developer tore down the houses without a demolition permit and received a minimal fine of a few thousand dollars. Kay Slaughter, who was on city council at the time, urged us to raise our collective voices to prevent such an occurrence in the future.

By 1993, we had a name, a board, and thanks to Lois McKenzie’s hard work, adopted bylaws. Our first big project, with many volunteer interviewers, was the publication of the Ridge Street Oral History. Since that time, Preservation Piedmont has been involved in preservation efforts throughout the area. We now have over 50 members.

Our board meetings are open and are held at 5:30 p.m. the second Thursday of the month. This spring we are meeting at 611 Preston Place, which is my home. Please give me a call if you would like to attend a meeting and I’ll give you directions. The minutes of the board meetings as well as an occasional “heads up” are now being made available via email. Contact Clara Colby (clara@virginia.edu) to get on the email list. We want you to feel you are a part of Preservation Piedmont. If you would like to serve on a committee, please let a board member know or if you just want to receive our newsletter that’s fine too. Please look on your address label to see if your dues are up to date.

Membership Application

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. Although based in Charlottesville, the organization also serves the County of Albemarle and bordering counties.

Name: __________________________

Street: __________________________

City, State, Zip: __________________

Phone: __________________________

Email: __________________________

___ Student $5
___ Individual $10
___ Family $20
___ Patron $100
___ Life $300

___ Non-Profit Organization $25
___ Business $50
___ Business Patron $300

___ New Member
___ Membership Renewal

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 ‘01 or later, then it is time to renew your membership. (*=Life Membership.)
Jefferson School Meetings

The Charlottesville Department of Economic Development sponsored a Jefferson School use workshop on February 26, from 7 to 9 p.m. in the school auditorium. Neighborhood residents, the business community and other interested citizens were invited to discuss the future use of the building and site.

The meeting was well attended and the majority of ideas expressed were related to continued use of the school as an educational center, including a preschool. Many stressed the need to keep Jefferson School as an architectural landmark of the black community and reminder of the old Vinegar Hill neighborhood.

Financing the renovation of Jefferson School with or without state and federal tax incentives was also discussed, and the suggestion of a public/private partnership may be explored by the city and developers in order to take advantage of incentives available only to the private sector.

A follow-up meeting will be held at Jefferson School on April 25, from 7 to 9 p.m. Three development schemes for the site will be presented. They will include different ways of providing for a preschool there: 1) in a new structure, 2) in the old school building, and 3) in a new structure attached to the present building.

“Restore, Renew, Rediscover Your Historic Neighborhood Schools!”

Preservation Week 2001, May 13-19

In a message on the National Trust web site, Trust president Richard Moe asks us “to do all we can to keep these community icons alive as functional components of our education system. If your school is endangered, fight to save it. If it’s still in use or has been saved, celebrate it.” He points out that, “With parents and educators clamoring for smaller, community-oriented schools, it makes no sense to sacrifice sound historic buildings for the sake of huge, impersonal new facilities in locations accessible only by car, too remote to have any meaningful connection to the community where the students live.”

In keeping with the Preservation Week 2001 theme, Preservation Piedmont will hold a general meeting in May at the Jefferson School. We plan to provide tours of the building, and give our members an opportunity to meet some of the alumni/ae of the Jefferson School, and others from the surrounding neighborhood who treasure the school as an important icon of their community. The meeting is tentatively scheduled for the morning of May 12. We will send out invitations as soon as the arrangements are finalized.