

Report of The Old Brunswick Circuit Foundation – 2016-17

Over the past year, the Old Brunswick Circuit Foundation has been engaged in developing conceptual plans for two of the properties entrusted its care. The first is the old Randolph-Macon College/Boydton Institute site in Boydton. Through the generous gifts of certain OBCF Board members, we have been able to fully pay off the debt on the property, providing the opportunity to consider how best to move the project forward through fund-raising, clearing away debris, preserving certain portions of the remaining walls of the main campus building (which served as a dormitory, classrooms, and administrative offices), plus restoring an adjacent house. Our leadership team for this project is in the process of developing a conceptual plan for the utilization of the physical property and considering how best to interpret the significant history of both the original site of R-MC, which is the oldest Methodist College in America, and the Boydton Institute, which later occupied these same facilities, serving African American students for half a century in the years following the Civil War. These two schools had a significant impact on the education of whites and blacks for over 100 critical years in our history, providing leaders in many fields, including higher education and the civil rights movement.

The second project is “Canaan”, the name given by the Rev. Edward Dromgoole to his home, which served as a meeting place for early Methodists, including Bishop Francis Asbury, for many years. In June, 2016 the Board of Supervisors of Brunswick County approved our “concept” for a retreat center and gave us a conditional permit to move forward with a plan to develop a rustic campground and assembly building that would accommodate about forty people for educational purposes. A leadership team for this project is in place. Steps are being taken to shore up the foundation of the home and to prevent further deterioration. An archeological dig was conducted by the College of William and Mary, assisting in the identification of structures on the site and the recovery of artifacts. One such structure is a “spinning house”, which with restoration could become a museum and visitor orientation center.

We are grateful for the progress being made by the OBCF, but are much in need of help from United Methodists across the Conference. Financial gifts, on-site volunteers, and researchers are welcome to join in these efforts to preserve these vital aspects of the origins of Methodism in Virginia.

Jim Mott, President: Old Brunswick Circuit Foundation