

Book in the Works

President Bob Bluford is putting the finishing touches on a historical novel recounting the life of Samuel Davies. It is titled *Living on the Borders of Eternity* and is now in final proof form. We hope to finish the editing process this September and send it off to the printer this fall for Christmas delivery.

804. 730. 3630

We're on the Web!

See us at:
www.historicpolegreen.org

Polegreen Church Hosts Kieffer Family Reunion

Earlier this summer over thirty members of a family who lost five ancestors in the June 1864 campaign of Cold Harbor spent the weekend in Richmond. A highlight of their visit was on Sunday, June 6, when the Kieffer family held a worship service on the site of the Polegreen Church, which burned on June 1, 1864, close to the same time their ancestors met their demise. Captain Luther Kieffer and his two sons, William and Theodore, were farmers from New York serving in the 14th New York Heavy Artillery. This regiment had been turned into an infantry unit because of the desperate need for troops to replace the casualties of Spotsylvania and the Wilderness Campaign. On June 2, they were engaged in the bitter fighting near Totopotomoy Creek and Bethesda Church. Two other family members, George and Abner Rouse, were wounded and captured at the battle and died in prisons.

The Kieffer family also donated to the National Park Service an original piece of sculpture entitled "Cain and Abel" in memory of their slain relatives. Artists William T. Kieffer, Jr. and his wife, Ann Feeley, created the bronze sculpture. In the words of Mr. Kieffer, "the statue, based on an allegorical scene... the death of a father and sons... venerates both Union and Confederate war dead, known and unknown, and emphasizes the futility of war as a means of settling conflict." It is located at the Tredegar Visitor Center of the Richmond National Battlefield Park.

Though the Polegreen Foundation's primary mission is to preserve the legacy of the colonial dissenters who worshipped on that site, we are ever mindful of the rich history that occurred in lower Hanover County and we will continue to be good stewards of all the events that shaped this region.

Mark Your Calendars

In partnership with the Virginia Historical Society, Polegreen Foundation is pleased to sponsor a lecture by one of the world's foremost scholars of colonial Virginia. Rhys Isaac, professor emeritus at Latrobe University in Melbourne, Australia, will review the impact of *religious* revolution in Virginia on November 11 at noon at the Historical Society on the Boulevard in Richmond. Don't miss this rare opportunity. Dr. Isaac will also be signing copies of his new book *Landon Carter's Uneasy Kingdom: Rebellion and Revolution on a Virginia Plantation*, due out this fall. Call 804.358.4901 for more information.

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The News from Historic Polegreen Church Foundation

Preserving Virginia's contributions to America's religious freedom

Meeting the Presbyterian Nation

Well, the recent meeting of the 216th Presbyterian General Assembly may not have been the rowdiest meeting ever hosted by the Richmond region but it was one of the most important. Members of the denomination converged from all over the nation last June. Most were not aware of Virginia's landmark contributions to the freedom of religion in America. Enter Historic Polegreen Church Foundation! During the last week of June, the Foundation came into contact with commissioners and their families in a variety of ways, spreading the word about Davies and his flock:

❖ Over 170 persons visited the site on two occasions. Early birds arrived at the site at 8:00 a.m. on Wednesday, 30 June to attend a special service, enjoy breakfast and participate in a tour highlighting the contributions of the Polegreen congregation and the Presbyterian faith in challenging



Polegreen Church was once again filled with the Presbyterian faithful as attendees of the General Assembly meeting in Richmond made the pilgrimage to Hanover County.



Project Director Mark Howell shares the story of Polegreen in the Richmond Convention Center.

the traditions of a state-sponsored church. The Reverend Mr. Davies himself also made an appearance. The tour was repeated the next afternoon.

❖ The Foundation hosted a booth at the convention center and met several hundred meeting attendees, showing the Colonial Williamsburg video *Gospel of Liberty* (funded in part by the Foundation) and distributing a newly-produced brochure.

❖ Since many local Presbyterians are unfamiliar with their regional heritage, the Foundation sponsored the break room set up for volunteers who helped run the show.

The enthusiasm displayed that week for our story and aspirations reaffirmed the importance of our mission, not only for Presbyterians but for all Americans. Though our story is a local one, it resonates nationally.

Samuel Morris' Reading House

By 1740 Virginia was ready for a religious transformation, due largely to a spiritual vacuum that had been developing for decades when religious expression was largely in the control of the government-sponsored Anglican Church. Virginians discontented with the Church discovered that their plight was not hopeless when British evangelist George Whitefield toured the colonies in 1739, preaching a new message of hope and redemption.

In Hanover County, a brick mason named Samuel Morris began absenting himself and his family from St. Paul's parish church. His was not a noisy protest nor one designed to create schism. He simply stayed at home with his family on Sundays and read the Bible and religious tracts that he could find. Soon he was joined by neighbors and he quickly discovered that his parlor could not contain them all.

Letter From the President

Excitement about our efforts at Polegreen continues to grow and that is in no little part due to the interest and support of those who are already members of our organization. Added to that is the evident interest of an ever enlarging number of people who have become aware of what we are doing.

The activity leading up to and continuing through the recent meeting of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) symbolizes a major step forward for all of us. The responses of the commissioners, their families and visitors from far and wide have been greatly rewarding. Many had known little or nothing of the struggle for religious freedom endured by their spiritual forefathers and mothers here in colonial Virginia.

Our next steps are to begin spreading the story to those in the Richmond region who have not yet heard this important story, as well as to introduce a national audience to our aspirations. We have taken on an important project and what has been accomplished during these past fifteen years is a near miracle, yet there is still much to do. Be a partner with us and share the satisfaction.

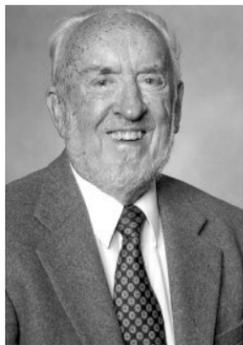
Sincerely,
Bob Bluford, Jr., President

In the meantime, Morris was summoned into the Hanover County court to give account for his absence from church. He paid his fine, returned home and promptly continued his new practice. Again and again he was summoned to the court to explain himself. Exasperated, the judges ordered him to Williamsburg to explain his behavior. He appeared before Governor William Gooch and his council along with three others around 1742 or 1743. After hearing them, Gooch granted them permission to build reading houses— basically small one-room buildings— where they could gather and carry out their limited activities according to the Act of Toleration passed in Virginia in 1699. Morris erected his house at what was to become the Polegreen Church site. William "One-Eyed" Robinson preached there July 6, 1743, the first Presbyterian minister to preach in central Virginia. Within ten years, Polegreen Church was erected.



The site of the reading house was discovered during archaeology conducted in the early 1990s.

When the small building disappeared is unknown but it was gone by 1862. In June a symbolic wooden door frame was erected over the original foundation helping to further develop and foster an understanding of the site. Here President Bob Bluford discusses the beginnings of the congregation with visitors from the Presbyterian General Assembly.



Funding the Future

Our sincere thanks to our generous supporters for their gifts and encouragement this past year. The following individuals and organizations have made gifts to the Foundation over the past year as of 16 July 2004.

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