

# The News from Historic Polegreen Church Foundation

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## Preserving Virginia's contributions to America's religious freedom

### Why Preserve Polegreen?

At last count, there are well over 10,000 historic sites dotting America's countryside. New sites pop up every month as old homes become impractical to maintain as residences and communities become sensitive to the need to preserve their heritage. As a result, worthwhile endeavors are constantly scrambling for smaller and smaller slices of the funding pie. Throw in other important charitable activities that communities support and it quickly becomes apparent that we must be very discerning as to what—and how—we preserve the past.

So why preserve Polegreen? In short: historical memory.

*Personal* memory often fails. Each of us brings our own life experiences and habits of mind to interpreting the past. So we often fall prey to biased accounts and become combative with those whose views of the past are at odds with our own. Religion and race relations—two key elements of the Polegreen story—top the list as historical topics that bred contention.

But there is a discipline to history that can lead us away from these dead-end approaches to the past that polarize segments of society. This discipline asks that we immerse ourselves in *all* the evidence from the past. It asks that we critically and empathetically weigh all sides of an event and get beyond what

happened to what these events *mean*. History organizations—good ones—have the public's trust that they will research and interpret the past in such a way as to allow a thoughtful consideration of what came before and how it has gotten us to where we now are.

The Polegreen Church Site, as are all historic sites, is one chapter in a very large story that charts our evolution as a nation. Ours is a story that documents what happens when a group of ordinary citizens seek to improve their lives. Working within the system, these particular Virginians took on the Established Church in the mid-eighteenth century,

recruited the Reverend Samuel Davies of Pennsylvania to be their leader and successfully challenged a status quo that had grown complacent over the years and was no longer providing for the spiritual needs of the community.

Effective history organizations have gone beyond the old dictum of "preserving and collecting" to a new mandate of "presenting and connecting." What makes our story so significant is its resonance with issues we face in the world today. The struggles of the early dissenters and their search for a better way to live their lives has a significant impact on the freedoms we enjoy today. Polegreen is well positioned to preserve this important chapter in our history like

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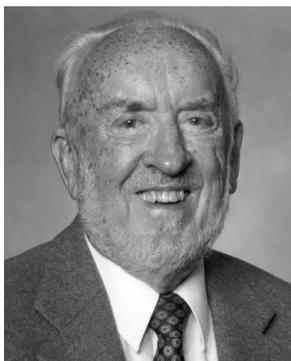
few others. It is a story fraught with drama, passion and relevance. This is not the stuff of dry facts and boring fables; it is an exciting tale of ordinary men and women doing something revolutionary . . . before it became fashionable to be Revolutionary!

History organizations like Polegreen have the opportunity to take the lead in connecting persons' personal pasts with the broader public pasts of their particular locality. Specifically, Polegreen is able to document a new force in civilization: the role of the

common man (and woman) in determining his or her own fate. We have the site and a wealth of information related directly to it to draw upon.

The preservation of the Polegreen site is but a means to an end; the true value of the site is that the struggles of persons long since gone can continue to help us shape our personal and national destinies. Not bad for a small little organization. But oh-so-important in meeting the challenges of the world we live in.

## Letter From the President



Increasingly over the past year the Board of Directors of our Foundation has felt the need to define more precisely our mission, our message, and the manner in which we go about our work. As the year 2004 was coming to a close a commitment was made by all members of the board to dedicate what time and energy was necessary to struggle with the subjects above. For me personally it has been deeply gratifying to experience the enthusiasm and commitment that has expressed itself in many Saturday morning meetings devoted to the task.

I can readily identify at least two factors that motivate and energize the members of our Board to give as much of their time and effort to doing what we have set out to accomplish. The first is an increasing belief that all that is represented and symbolized by the historic site on Rural Point Road in Hanover County is of great importance to every American. The book I wrote over a period of ten years has as its sub-title, "The Story of Samuel Davies and the Struggle for Religious Toleration in Colonial Virginia." There is a great message in that sentence and our Board believes that our mission is to make as clear and exciting as possible what that means.

The second motivating force among us is a sense of responsibility and obligation to the many of you who read this newsletter for your support and encouragement. That facet of our work has prompted the Board and me personally to document what has been taking place over the past twenty years in particular to protect, establish and enhance the precious site on and from which such amazing things occurred in the mid-eighteenth century.

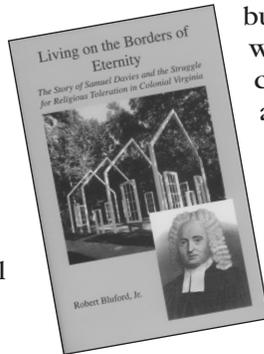
Project Director Mark Howell has made significant contributions to our effort and continues to do so. We will be searching for someone who will work with us part time initially to concentrate on the administrative details that will make us a first-class Foundation.

Please continue your financial support of Polegreen, and we covet your prayers in all that we do.

Sincerely,  
Robert Bluford, Jr.

## New Novel Recounts Life of Davies

Historic Polegreen Press has just published a book recounting the life of the Reverend Samuel Davies. Written by the President of the Historic Polegreen Church Foundation, Bob Bluford, Jr., the biography is a meticulously researched account of the adversities colonial dissenters overcame to practice their faith and Davies' leadership in challenging the traditional authority of the Church of England. Book critic John Dalles writes that "Samuel Davies' life reads like a historical novel, complete with romance, disease and disaster, with love and laughter complete with conflict with authorities both secular and religious."



The title, *Living on the Borders of Eternity*, was taken from the words Samuel Davies employed to describe his feelings of mortality. Despite being burdened by tuberculosis, Davies went on to found seven congregations in central Virginia and confound the best minds of the Church of England who were determined to prevent the "dissenters" from establishing a foothold in their parishes.

The hard-backed book is \$24.95 (plus \$1.25 VA sales tax). Mail your check made out to Historic Polegreen Press to:

Historic Polegreen Press  
Post Office Box 2111  
Mechanicsville, VA 23116



## Polegreen Memorial Architect wins Distinction

We were pleased to learn that Carlton Abbott, the man who designed the frame memorial on the Polegreen Church site, has won the Award for Preservation from the Virginia Society of the American Institute of Architects. The award is bestowed on an individual who has contributed significantly to the cause of preservation in the state. Our project was one element of the documentation used by the judges to determine Abbott's qualifications.

Congratulations, Carlton!

## Funding the Future

Our sincere thanks to you, our generous supporters, for your gifts and encouragement this past year. The following individuals and organizations have made gifts to the Foundation over the past year as of 20 March 2005.

### Samuel Davies Society - \$500+

[*"\*" connotes a Leadership Circle contribution of \$1,000+*]

- \*A-1 Asphalt Paving
- \*Frank & Diane Atkinson
- \*B. C. Wood Products
- \*Robert Bailie
- \*Richard and Juanita Beadles
- \*Bob & June Bluford, Jr.
- \*Harry Bluford
- Robert Bluford, III
- \*Ms. Carolyn Borders
- William Cooper and Steven Cooper
- \*County of Hanover
- \*Cox-Johnston Fund at the Richmond Community Foundation
- \*Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church
- Frances B. Mack and Jane Mack
- Martha D. Newell
- \*Harry Warthen

### Polegreen Church Society - \$250-\$499

- Sidney Beasley, IV
- David & Barbara Camper
- City Wide Decorators, Inc.

- Dr. James L. & Mary Will Mays
- Dr. C. Jan Swearingen
- Rick & Kathy Wagoner, Jr.

### Samuel Morris Society - \$100-\$249

- Maurice Bell
- Jean C. Christian
- T. Talley Crump
- Grace & Helen Cibula
- Becky Cooley
- Reverend William H. & Judy Dent, Jr.
- Reverend John E. & Ruth Ensign
- Evening Circle @ Gregory Memorial Presbyterian Church
- Finn Vang Jensen
- Gwyn Keil
- John & Paula Krebs, Jr.
- Albert & Harriet Laube
- Edward and Jane List
- Wilma Kemp Madden
- The family of Margaret Peek Marks, in memory of their mother
- John D. & Jo H. Mitchell
- Frank Neagle and Molly Massie
- Martha Oden

- Reverend James A. & Mary Payne
- Richard & Mary Lee Peroe
- W. Taylor & Helen Reveley, III
- Reverend R. Jackson and Phyllis Sadler
- William E. Staples & M. Jan Glover

### Sustaining Contributor – Up to \$100

- Lorraine R. Abernathy
- Thelma Allen
- Dr. Franklyn H. & Molly Ashby, Jr.
- William B. Correll
- Rev. Thomas Coye
- Otis G. and Lee Farrar, Jr.
- Ginter Park Presbyterian Church
- Frederick A. & Lyn L. Hodnett, Jr.
- Alan B. Kinker & Judy K. Bailey-Kinker
- John E. & Rilla Krebs, Sr.
- Catherine Fontaine Laurence
- Stuart & Linda Ludeke
- Howard H. & Lois Mercer
- Otho & Geneva Mitterer
- Barbara D. Mucklow

- Dr. William & Martha Ann Phipps
- David Pultz
- Ralph H. & Lillian R. Rhudy
- Paul & Jane Rider
- Dr. James H. & Elizabeth Smylie
- Lena Mae Spencer
- Robert & Dorothy Spicer
- John & Joanne Stevenson
- Robert F. & Jane B. Strohm
- Harold & Jean Teal
- Dr. Glenn C. & Dottie Thomason
- William E. & Sally B. Thompson
- A. Roy Tilley
- Don & Doris Tobias
- Martha Wagoner
- Dr. Hal & Jill Wallof
- James & Elizabeth M. Waring
- Elizabeth Wheeler
- Porter G. White
- Charles P. Wilson
- Allen Wimett

*The Foundation has made every effort to recognize and record all gifts accurately. If we have made an error in reporting your contribution, please contact us at 804.730.3630 and we will correct it immediately.*

## COMING EVENTS:

You tell us!!

What are you interested in

learning about?

Give us a call and

let us know what

topic or experience

you are interested

in and we'll

explore the

possibilities!

**804.730.3630**

## Spring Program: Serving the Enslaved

Had the Reverend Samuel Davies done nothing more than plant the seeds of religious dissent in colonial Virginia, his legacy would have been secure. But his influence goes beyond that accomplishment; Davies was moved by the plight of Virginia's enslaved population and was a leader in the effort to educate them.

On Wednesday, May 18 at 7:00 at Mechanicsville Presbyterian Church on Atlee Road, Historic Polegreen Church Foundation will host a panel discussion on Davies' role in educating the colony's enslaved persons at a time when such a mission was, to say the least, frowned upon. Dr. Jeffrey Richards, chair of American Studies at Old Dominion University and Ms. Rosemarie McAphee of Colonial Williamsburg will team up to explain the role of the religious revival now known as the Great Awakening in slaves' lives and how Davies rode that crest to challenge the existing practices of the day.



*Bibles, prayer books and religious tracts were printed in England by various benevolent societies and sent to America for distribution to the unchurched.*

Dr. Richards is author of the article "Samuel Davies and the Transatlantic Campaign for Slave Literacy in Virginia," that was recently published in the Virginia Historical Society's Virginia Magazine of History and Biography. Ms. McAphee is the primary training specialist for African-American history at Colonial Williamsburg and has over 20 years of experience in researching and presenting the role of African-Americans in colonial American history.

Refreshments will be served after the program.

Call 804.730.3630 for more information or visit us at [www.historicpolegreen.org](http://www.historicpolegreen.org).

### Directions to Mechanicsville Presbyterian Church:

*From East Richmond:* Take US360 North to Mechanicsville. Turn left at the Windmill onto Mechanicsville Turnpike Road and proceed to the second traffic light. Turn left onto Atlee Road. Church is 1/4 mile on the left.

*From Points West:* Take I295 South to Exit 37B. Stay on access road and veer right up to first traffic light. Turn right onto Atlee Road. Church is 1/4 mile on the left.

**May 18: Serving the Enslaved (see article)**

**June 8: Pilot school program for Hanover County (more in our next newsletter)**

Historic Polegreen Church Foundation  
Post Office Box 2111  
Mechanicsville, Virginia 23116

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