

Historic Staunton Foundation 40th Anniversary Celebration
Remarks of David J. Brown
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Sunday, January 22, 2012

Thank you, Deneen. It is great to return to Staunton and to help celebrate the 40th anniversary of Historic Staunton Foundation

Anniversaries are great times to **reflect, celebrate, and resolve**. I'd like to do all three with you this afternoon.

Let's begin with some reflection. I've always enjoyed the movie ***It's a Wonderful Life*** – for the dramatic (some might say cheesy) way it showed the impact people have on others and on their community. The movie, for those who don't know it, is the story of one George Bailey who grew up in Bedford Falls, through no fault of his own has a run on his bank, and ends up contemplating suicide on Christmas Eve. Only the intervention of his guardian angel stops him.

And while I'm no **Clarence Odbody**, the guardian angel who showed Jimmy Stewart's **George Bailey** the transformation of Bedford Falls to Pottersville as if George had never lived, I would like for all of us to reflect on how Staunton might have developed if HSF were **not** formed 40 years ago.

Let's begin down at the **Wharf – where generations of visitors initially saw Staunton as they stepped off a train.**

The first thing you would notice is that **there isn't any Wharf...**for the buildings that make up that unique historic district were **demolished in the 1970s for a four lane thoroughfare through Staunton.**

Yes, the Virginia Department of Transportation thought it was important to allow drivers coming in from the west along Middlebrook Avenue to be able to drive uninterrupted so they could get to...Richmond Avenue and Commerce Road...without having to slow down for a pesky little thing like a town.

Of course, you wouldn't see the **farmers market** either, because that highway runs through the landscaped Johnson Street parking area that was among the first streetscape improvements supported by HSF.

The reality is that one of the first things a **band of volunteers called Historic Staunton Foundation** did as an organization was **fight the state's wrong-headed transportation plan....**and today the shops, restaurants, coffee and wine stores that make the Wharf such a nice place to linger are ours to enjoy because of the foresight of HSF.

But while we're pretending to look around the Wharf without the benefit of the work of HSF, I guess I should mention that the **train station is gone as well.**

If it hadn't been taken out by the thoroughfare, it faced other threats through the years. You may not remember, but **back in the 1980s there was a fire in the baggage room** set by some homeless men looking to stay warm. Without HSF, there was **no push to keep the beautiful T.J. Collins-designed station** and so the city quickly had it demolished so it wouldn't be a hazard. I bet you really enjoy that small doublewide that serves as the Amtrak station today.

Oh, and **does anyone remember that T.J. Collins fellow** anyway? He once designed or remodeled over 200 buildings in Staunton, but more than half are now demolished and his archives were thrown in the dump when the office closed.

Of course, the reality is that Historic Staunton worked hard to save the train station after that fire. A decade of work with the city staff paid off, when building inspector **Bill Botkin** and the city's fire chief gave preservationists enough time to find a solution without calling for a quick demolition.

And while Historic Staunton was fighting with the railroad's real estate division to try and find a way to acquire the building, **Lee Cochran – that force of nature – mentioned that she sat on a board with the chairman of CSX** which owned the station. Just like that, we had leap-frogged the bureaucrats in real estate and were working out a deal to keep that gem of the Wharf Historic District.

And T.J. Collins? His legacy is alive and well, and HSF has the archives of his drawings that remain living and breathing documents in the work to shape Staunton's future.

Yes, just like the transformation of Bedford Falls to Pottersville, the **Wharf would be a very different place** without Historic Staunton Foundation.

So, as Clarence Odbody, I want to take you to **downtown Staunton** to look at Beverley Street over the past 40 years without Historic Staunton.

The **four blocks between Lewis and Market streets look pretty shabby** – just like hundreds of downtowns in small communities throughout the country that **decided to forget about people and turn their towns over to cars.**

There are **only about two-thirds of the buildings left** – because shop owners could buy the building next door and tear them down to create parking for their business. There was no organization – or historic district zoning ordinance – to stop them.

And we **love our CVS drugstore that sits where the Marquis Building once sat**, don't we? You remember the Marquis Building don't you: the Romanesque Revival beauty on the corner of Beverley and Augusta where T.J. Collins had his office? In the early 21st century, giant drugstore

chains began building suburban-style drugstores – with suburban style parking lots – on the “corner of Main and Main” in towns across America. There was no more prominent corner in Staunton, so CVS purchased the historic building and a few surrounding ones as well, tore them down, and put their drugstore smack in the middle of town.

Without HSF, **there is no coherent streetscape design** and the building owners continue in their attempts to capture the newest fad in hopes of revitalizing their fading businesses.

I could reflect like this for hours. **Staunton’s historic districts wouldn’t be valuable places to live or own property** without the work of HSF. The city would have less tax revenue, as seen in a 1996 study that demonstrated that buildings in every one of Staunton’s historic districts appreciated at a faster rate of growth – sometimes very substantially – when compared with similar properties outside the historic districts.

And what was most interesting about that analysis was the breadth of housing stock that was affected, dispelling the myth that historic houses are only mansions for the rich. Staunton’s historic districts – supported by 40 years of work by Historic Staunton Foundation – not only provide quality housing for people of more modest means, but reward them with faster rates of appreciation as well.

But I want to end my reflection by talking about **Staunton’s spirit**. Without HSF, the community would **feel** very different.

I know – from personal experience – **that HSF gave us a place where old and new came together**...where natives welcomed and embraced newcomers and their ideas and where new citizens learned about the traditions of the town. HSF provided the context where everyone now thinks about historic buildings, neighborhoods, and landscapes as tools for the future of the city.

Staunton without HSF may not be as bad as Bedford Falls’ transformation to Pottersville without George Bailey...but I think Staunton would be much worse than the wonderful community we know and love today.

Now, **let’s celebrate!**

This is going to be personal...as each of our celebrations of the work of HSF should be.

I want to **celebrate the four presidents** I worked under in the 1980s when I was at Historic Staunton Foundation.

Tom Bell welcomed me to Staunton, taught me how to pronounce the city’s name like a native, and introduced me to countless numbers of the leading citizens in town. He was an amazing leader who helped HSF move from the transformational founding directors – Bill and Kathy Frazier – to the sustained excellence that’s been the hallmark of the organization. He gave me

my first chance at running an organization...and the fact that I'm in charge of a staff of over 200 in the Preservation Division of the National Trust for Historic Preservation can be traced back to Tom and the board's willingness to bring in someone from outside Virginia to direct HSF.

Doug Roller was both my boss as president – and later my employee, as the FIP Coordinator – at HSF. He had an abiding love for architecture and for this city which translated into doing whatever it took. Doug and his wife Tidge remain close friends and Doug is godfather to my daughter Claire.

The late **Bob Holsinger** served – if my memory is correct – two terms as president while I was in Staunton. Bob supported staff in ways that I still admire and try to emulate. Like clockwork, I could count on my phone ringing at 8:15 every morning, with Bob on the other end to check our temperature and to make sure he knew what he could do to support HSF. I miss Bob and his old-fashioned sense of civic duty dearly.

And finally, one of the toughest things I've ever had to do was give **Mary Timberlake** my resignation and tell her I was taking a job leading the Preservation Alliance of Virginia – a group that had no money and no office, but only the promise of making preservation more prominent throughout the Commonwealth. Among the many things we did as a team, Mary and I painted one of the offices in the HSF building on South Augusta Street together to get it ready for a new tenant, because that's what you did when you had more volunteer hours than money.

And there are so many others to celebrate:

Lee, George, Emily and Stuart Cochran. They have been consistently generous with gifts, in the Board leadership provided by Emily and Stuart, and in the opening of the Stuart House for special tours and events. I use to love to go on tours that Justice Cochran gave at the Stuart House because he had this funny story he told. He pointed to a portrait of an ancestor on the wall and told a tour group that this particular ancestor held a judicial position in colonial Virginia that was very similar to his current position as a Justice on Virginia's Supreme Court. One of the members of the tour group – obviously unimpressed – said in a loud whisper, "Well the family hasn't advanced very much in five generations, have they?" That willingness to not take oneself too seriously has made the family both beloved and admired for generations.

Frank and GiGi Pancake. I want to know how little Staunton, Virginia, attracted so many people you could describe as a "force of nature." Frank certainly fell in that category. His leadership was amazing when he was active, and HSF's Endangered Properties fund was renamed in the family's honor as the Pancake Preservation Fund. Frank and GiGi were key to so much of the success of the early years of HSF.

Doris and Jake Smith were instrumental in so many things in Staunton...and that was true in their support of HSF – especially when the organization needed funding to take a major step forward. I was fortunate, when I moved to town, to find a significant contribution from the Smith's in the HSF bank account for the purchase and restoration of our first office building.

We used it to buy and restore 120 South Augusta Street in the Wharf – which was a project only HSF would tackle. The Smith's were instrumental in the Smith Center, of course, and I know that Jake and Bill Frazier had a wonderful relationship that has had impacts in so many ways throughout the community.

HSF has had a number of funders – or people willing to help raise funds – through the years. **Barbara Hunter Grant** never looked for recognition, but only wanted to see her support go to an organization that she saw as being transformational in her hometown. **Janet Ferguson was on the HSF Board when I was here, and she and Gray** have stepped up with support and advice at key times in the life of the organization.

One of the great things about HSF is that everyone can contribute in ways that best fits their personal situation. **Edwina Goodloe** was such a force for ensuring that Historic Staunton became integrated with the leadership of the community in the early days. **Linda Hanna** – another board member from my time – has always been a key link to the merchants along Beverley Street. **Henley and Mary Carter, Liz McCue** – who served as my first assistant director, **Karen Hudson, Eleanor Patrick, Ann McPherson, Roller and Jeri Shipplett, Arch Sproul**...the list could go on and on and I'm only embarrassed because I know I've left out so many who have contributed so much.

I want to end my personal celebration with two couples:

Wick and Betty Vellines to my mind have always exemplified the **fun** in historic preservation. Betty is, of course, the very serious current president of Historic Staunton Foundation and is doing a magnificent job. But I like to remember Wick and Betty sitting around a table down at the Oaks – with Margaret and Fletcher Collins and other friends – telling tales and enjoying life to the fullest. It is what living in community is all about and HSF is nothing if it isn't a community.

Finally, we all wouldn't be here tonight if it weren't for **Bill and Kathy Frazier**. I don't know if you realize how lucky you are as a community to have landed someone like Bill early in his preservation career, who had a special blend of professional knowledge, tenacity, love for place, and vision to see what this little sleepy Shenandoah Valley town could be. Then he had the amazing good sense to hire – and then marry – Kathy, who brings such a wonderful design sense to this community as she has done to Main Streets all across the country.

I have to admit that when I came to Staunton to follow Bill and Kathy, **I was scared**. They were living legends then...and they hadn't even established Frazier Associates, undertaken the signage and streetscape improvements that we now take for granted, and helped create the Smith Center. There have been several of us who have been privileged to serve as Executive Directors of Historic Staunton Foundation, but there's been only one first family of HSF: Bill and Kathy, we celebrate all you have done for this wonderful community.

So we've reflected and celebrated. I think anniversaries are also times to look ahead and **resolve** to make a brighter future.

It is important to remember that **preservation isn't something that's "finished."** Staunton is a living, breathing community that faces hundreds of decisions each year that will affect the future.

You can make those decisions in a vacuum – and **end up like "Anyplace U.S.A."** Or Staunton can build on the incredible 40-year work of Historic Staunton Foundation and **determine to keep your heritage, your buildings, your community unique and at the forefront of plans for the years ahead.**

When I spoke with Logan Ward, who wrote the wonderful story about Staunton in the most recent issue of *Preservation* magazine, I told him that I thought **preservation in Staunton succeeded because of three key elements:**

First, HSF has had an **amazing blend of professional and volunteer leadership** that works well together and looks for the good in the community first.

Second, the **ethic of preservation has been integrated throughout the community as a whole** – and especially in city government. This is a place where a consultant can come to work – like **Bill Hamilton did more than 20 years ago** – fall in love with the place, and become an integral part of the preservation effort through his post in economic development.

Finally, **Staunton recognizes the value that everyone brings to the conversation about preservation.** This isn't some attempt to "keep things as they are" – which is how preservation is perceived in some communities – but rather new ideas and traditions are blended in a way that points to a rich future for all.

These elements have contributed to Staunton's success, but they aren't automatic and they can deteriorate unless we nurture them. **I want to end with some thoughts about each of these three elements.**

Professionals are important to the growth of historic preservation, but all of us in the preservation movement can find even more success with greater engagement of a broader set of volunteers.

We just completed market research at the National Trust that I find both astounding and encouraging. The Trust has just under 150,000 members, but our market research found there are **15 million Americans** who share our values as preservationists. That's 7% of the population of America – an astounding number if preservation organizations today can begin to reach those individuals.

We call these individuals “Local Preservationists” because they are already taking actions that you and I would describe as preservation-based. Our research shows they aren’t members of the National Trust...and chances are that most of them here in Staunton aren’t members of Historic Staunton Foundation either. Who are these people? Their...

- Average age is 35
- 61% are male
- 33% are non-white
- 60% have < 4-year degree
- 19% make > \$100,000/yr
- They are likely to volunteer and fundraise, and
- They are active in social media

Preservation may not be their number 1 cause...in fact, it is likely to be their #4 or #5 cause. But we have the opportunity to reach them, give them meaningful work to do in saving historic places, and move preservation up to their top cause. If we do, we can become a mighty force for the future of this country.

Next, how do we continue to engage the city, county, and state governments in protecting Staunton’s future?

Government officials, commentators, planners, architects, and others are focused more than ever on how we build and maintain cities and towns that provide jobs and opportunities for our citizens, safe schools for our children, places to meet together in community, while lessening our impact on the environment. In other words – economically and environmentally sustainable communities.

Often, when politicians talk about economic sustainability, they focus on big ticket items or on new, out of state investments. **But we have found here in Staunton that it is the incremental work that brings more sustained growth** – and that’s where preservation can play such an important role.

The Center for Urban Policy Research at Rutgers University released the first independent study of the economic impacts of preservation, and **they found that investment in historic rehabilitation produces significantly better economic impact in terms of jobs, income, and state-and-local taxes than a similar amount of investment in new construction**, building highways, machinery manufacturing, or agriculture.

That’s an amazing fact. Rehabbing old buildings has more impact on the economy than the same size investment in the construction of new buildings. There’s more “bang for the buck” in rehabilitation than in laying miles of asphalt for new highways.

Rutgers found that historic rehabilitation **creates tens of thousands of local, high-paying, high-skilled jobs** every year all across the country. As an added benefit, the **vast majority of the investment stays in the local community**.

And to wrap up the argument for preservation as sustainability, the National Trust is releasing an independent study on Tuesday that will show it can take up **to 80 years** for a new energy efficient building to overcome, through efficient operations, the climate change impacts created by its construction. In other words, keeping and rehabbing what we have is more environmentally sustainable.

Historic Staunton’s job is to keep making the case – year in and year out – for preservation as the sustainable future for the people of this community.

Finally, Staunton has done a better job than most in bringing together different groups to consider the future of the community. But we can always do better.

In a very real way, the preservation movement is keeping the American story alive, in all its richness and diversity. We all share a piece of that story. Yet too many people don’t know or understand what it means to protect it. They see preservation as something removed from their daily lives or not reflective of their cultural heritage. Or they get shut out by the sometimes complicated and expensive process of securing protection for a historic building or landscape.

Preservation is often seen as “the movement of no” — what you can’t do. We need to make preservation more accessible — or a “movement of yes” — if we want to continue to grow and succeed.

Historic Staunton Foundation has so much of which to be proud over the past 40 years. That’s a testament to the work that all of you, and people like you, have done to get us to the point where we are today.

Our challenge is to continue to grow the preservation ethic here in Staunton. Let’s ensure that all elements of the community are engaged in our work.

One of my great joys in life was the 15 years that Candice and I lived in this wonderful community. Our children were born while we lived in Staunton, and we have many lifelong friends that we cherish deeply.

At a key point in *It’s a Wonderful Life*, Clarence says to George Bailey, ***“Strange, isn’t it? Each man’s life touches so many other lives. When he isn’t around he leaves an awful hole, doesn’t he?”***

Staunton would have an awful hole without the 40-year life of Historic Staunton Foundation. Thanks for what you have done – and what you will do in the future – to make Staunton a better place in which to live. Good night.