Preservation Toolkit Presented at State and National Level

In September, Lynn Rainville and Bob Carter, director of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources community services division, presented the Preservation Toolkit website at two conferences: the Department of Environmental Quality meeting at Montpelier (“Sustainability Begins with Historic Preservation”) and the annual Preservation Virginia meeting in Hampton (“Using the Online Preservation Toolkit”).

In November, the DHR director Kathleen Kilpatrick and Carter will present the toolkit to a national audience at the annual National Trust for Historic Preservation Conference in Austin (“Online Toolkit Guides Homeowners in Making Repairs and Saving Money”). They will be joined by John Leeke of Historic Homeworks, who wrote the "how to preserve" essays on the website’s Interactive History House feature.

www.tusculum.sbc.edu/toolkit

Sweet Briar’s Homecoming Addresses Local Plantation History

Part of the Tusculum Institute’s mission is to promote local history. This year Rainville was invited to speak on African-American heritage at Sweet Briar during the Founders’ Day Convocation, which opens Homecoming weekend. In her talk, Rainville discussed the slave burial ground on campus and the contributions of these individuals to the success of the Sweet Briar Plantation.

A day later she gave a lecture at the SBC Boathouse to a packed audience that included descendants of the enslaved community who took the surname Fletcher after Emancipation.

Above: Dr. Rainville lectures on African-American heritage at the SBC Boathouse.

http://www.sbc.edu/news/items/10071
Sweet Briar Slave Cemetery Rededicated; new interpretive sign installed

During Sweet Briar’s 2010 Homecoming, the student group Unity worked with College chaplain Adam White to design a ceremony to recognize the contributions of the enslaved individuals who are interred in the Plantation burial ground. The students read poems and a Psalm, and Chaplain White offered the prayer of dedication. In the photo on the left, the newly erected sign stands in the lower right-hand corner. The sign includes a map of the 61 burial sites and photos of some of the associated head and footstones found within the cemetery. The graphic also depicts an historic photo which illustrates the remainders of a ring of trees that once surrounded the cemetery. Descendants of the Fletcher Family attended the rededication (see the article below).

Fletcher Descendants Hold Family Reunion at Sweet Briar for Second Time

In mid-August the Fletcher family celebrated their second biennial family reunion at Sweet Briar College. During the reunion, Rainville presented the results of her 2008 research which demonstrated that a Fletcher descendant, Lavinia, was given to Indiana Fletcher Williams in 1860 as part of the settlement of her father Elijah Fletcher’s estate. In the probated inventory, Lavinia was accompanied by her eldest son, Nelson (born in 1856).

At the time Lavinia was the wife of an enslaved man, James, whom she married in 1855. After Emancipation their family grew and one of their sons, Patrick Henry Fletcher (1865-1944), established roots in Amherst. His descendants are pictured in this photograph taken during the 2010 rededication ceremony at the Sweet Briar Plantation burial ground. The new sign discussed in the article above is show at the far right, while an earlier commemorative plaque is on the left. The latter reads: "Sacred Resting Place of Unknown Founders Who Labored to Build What has become Sweet Briar College. We are in their Debt."

Sweet Briar president Jo Ellen Parker welcomed the family to campus in August and was pleased to receive an initial $1,000 contribution from the family to establish the Lavinia and James Fletcher Fund for the Preservation of African-American Heritage at Sweet Briar College.

“I’ve accepted many gifts on behalf of Sweet Briar, and this is a particularly meaningful one to me personally,” President Parker said. “A family whose relationship with Sweet Briar originated in slavery has offered its support and encouragement to our efforts to better understand the history of the College. That is remarkable indeed.”
**Tusculum Director Receives Digital History Grant from the NEH**

In spring 2010 Rainville was awarded a grant of $24,963 by the National Endowment for the Humanities to develop a model for researching African-American families from antebellum to post-bellum times.

The project, titled “African-American Families Database: Community Formation in Albemarle County, Virginia, 1850-1880,” has two primary goals. The first is to allow historians and researchers to track the formation and growth of African-American communities. The second is to help African Americans find their ancestors.

Rainville will collaborate with about three dozen local historians, the Central Virginia History Researchers, whose members have diverse skills and decades of experience researching Virginia county history. One outcome Rainville hopes to realize from the project is a process to streamline this type of research and provide guidelines for researchers in any community tracing slave families.

The grant was awarded under the NEH’s Digital Humanities Start-up Program. It also has been designated a “We the People” project, an NEH initiative that supports projects related to the teaching, study and understanding of American history and culture. Visit the project website at www.centralvirginiahistory.org

**Learning on the Land at a Historic College Campus**

Every year the Sweet Briar Outdoor Program sponsors a half-day of "Learning on the Land" events for incoming first year students. These tours include geocaching, nature observations, and a guide to sustainability on the Sweet Briar campus. For the past seven years Rainville has led students on a tour of Sweet Briar’s historic features, including its 20th-century campus architecture, its 19th-century plantation and slave cabin, and the antebellum slave cemetery.

Several professors chose to introduce students to the plantation cemetery (two of the groups are seen in the photo to the left). All of the annual tours emphasize the diverse experiences that students can have on Sweet Briar’s scenic 3,000-plus acres.

**Update on Reconstruction**

We are working toward raising $3 million to reconstruct Tusculum on the Sweet Briar campus. At right is an artist’s interpretation of the building at its new site.

If you are interested in helping us reconstruct Tusculum or in supporting our ongoing programming efforts, please contact Heidi Hansen McCrory, vice president of alumnae and development, P.O. Box 1057, Sweet Briar College, Sweet Briar, VA 24595. E-mail her at hmccrory@sbc.edu or call (434) 381-6164.

**About Tusculum Institute**

Tusculum Institute is an historic preservation resource center on the campus of Sweet Briar College providing education and outreach to students, faculty, and the wider community and region. Using the rich historic and intellectual resources of the College and working in partnership with the Department of Historic Resources and other agencies, the Institute supports the preservation of the region’s historic assets in a context of environmental stewardship and promotes the use of Virginia’s historic legacy as a learning resource. The Institute is working with a range of academic disciplines to deepen our understanding of Virginia’s historic places.