



Architects and engineers study the historic courthouse as part of preservation efforts. Photo by Tricia Johnson.



Archival photograph of the historic courthouse in the 1920s.

Over \$300,000 approved to restore historic courthouse

PRESS RELEASE

The Fluvanna Historical Society working in collaboration with the county of Fluvanna, has advanced one of the largest awards for historic preservation in its history: the approval of a state budget amendment providing \$310,000 towards the restoration of the county's historic 1830 courthouse. The General Assembly-passed budget now heads to Gov. Glenn Youngkin.

A truly collaborative effort, the funding effort was led by society board member, Kathleen Kilpatrick, a local resident and a longtime, now retired, director of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, with help from David Blount, director of legislative services for the Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission. The amendment was sponsored and shepherded through the assembly by Del. Lee Ware, who currently represents a portion of Fluvanna. Said Del. Ware, "Historic preservation has always been a priority of mine, not least because of my studies and long years of teaching history. To have gained approval of a budget amendment to help inaugurate preservation of the original Fluvanna County courthouse is, for me, one of the signal achievements of the 2023 General Assembly."

Fluvanna Historical Society president Marvin Moss, noted that, "the historical society played a key role two years ago in ensuring that the courthouse, a Fluvanna landmark and symbol of the county's identity, will be restored using time-tested preservation methods. We encouraged the county, a great steward of the courthouse for nearly 200 years, to contract for an Historical Structures Report (HSR), which not only provided information on the needs of the building but also how to address them and maintain the structure for the future."

The county Board of Supervisors agreed to move forward with undertaking the HSR and approved funding to match the society's contributions for the cost of the

report. Once the report was completed, the Board of Supervisors enthusiastically approved moving forward with the restoration and appropriated \$452,673 in the FY24 budget for that purpose. Previously, the Board had approved \$260,130 (FY18 – FY21) for urgent repairs and the HSR. Kilpatrick, a proponent of the development and use of an HSR, along with historical society board members, volunteered to research and write key sections of the report in order to reduce costs and to allow the architects and technical experts to focus on field investigations and analysis. Kilpatrick authored a compelling case for the architectural and historical significance of the courthouse, with society board member Benjamin Ford of Rivanna Archaeological Services providing historic background information, documenting the development and changes to the courthouse over time, with invaluable assistance from society Director Tricia Johnson.

The report firmly established what had long been held as true – that the courthouse is not only a local treasure but also a first order state and nationally important historic resource. "It is impossible to exaggerate what an influential courthouse Fluvanna has; it is part of the work conceived and championed by Thomas Jefferson to return to Classical architecture and thereby give form, expression and identity to public architecture for the young American republic. It is singularly important because it is the first of the Virginia courthouses to use the Greek order, setting a new example for courthouses to follow here in Virginia and across the nation," notes Kilpatrick.

The courthouse was designed by Fluvanna's General John Hartwell Cocke of Upper Breemo, a self-taught architect, friend, and protégée of the much older Thomas Jefferson, who, with Jefferson, was a founder of the University of Virginia. As an early example of fruitful partnership, Fluvanna County authorized and funded

the courthouse construction, while Methodist minister, entrepreneur, and builder Walker Timberlake worked with Cocke to build it in accordance with Cocke's design and direction, on land donated by Timberlake for a county courthouse.

Construction of the courthouse was made possible by the labor of the enslaved of Breemo; Ford's and Johnson's research critically documented the foundational contributions of these craftsmen, and even uncovered the names of some of them. Two current members of the society's Board of Directors, Joe Creasy and Horace Scruggs, are direct descendants of enslaved families from Breemo. "This courthouse truly belongs to the entire community," said Mozell Booker, Chair of the Fluvanna County Board of Supervisors, "It is very fortunate that we have been able to identify the enslaved people who had the skills to construct this building. It is time that we give credit to these craftsmen, and that we acknowledge and respect their contributions."

"These collaborations are important," said County Administrator Eric Dahl, "and Fluvanna is thankful for its relationship with the historical society and apprecia-

tive of the allocation from the General Assembly thanks to Del. Lee Ware, who we will surely miss with his shift to a new district."

As a result of redistricting following the 2020 census, Del. Ware will no longer represent Fluvanna. "It has been a privilege and a distinct personal pleasure to work with Fluvanna officials and citizens during the past decade. As I turn my attentions southward to a new legislative district, I will retain fond memories of my times in Fluvanna. I extend my warmest good wishes to everyone who will carry on with restoration of the Historic Courthouse," Delegate Ware noted.

Calvin Hickman, Fluvanna County director of public works, and an enthusiastic restoration contractor in his previous occupation, noted how these new funds will, "allow us to move forward smartly with addressing the needs of our courthouse. We are eager," he added, "to accelerate our work, now that phase one funds are in place."

The society's members and its many friends and supporters have over the years raised significant funds to support Fluvanna County, including the restoration of the Pleasant Grove House and its summer kitchen, and the design and construction of the Fluvanna Farm Heritage Museum. Their continuing efforts to raise funds to support the courthouse restoration is a significant new step in that partnership.

Fluvanna's historic courthouse. Photo by Tricia Johnson.





Making art history

Artists at Brema. Photos by Melissa Hill.

BY RUTHANN CARR
CORRESPONDENT

Several local artists gathered at the former Brema Slave Chapel to create a portrait of Fluvanna native Joe Creasy. His fourth great grandfather was enslaved by the John Hartwell Cocke family whose descendants still own Brema Plantation.

The Saturday (Feb. 18) session was the first of what artist Linda Staiger hopes will be a monthly event at different sites throughout Fluvanna.

Creasy's 28 years of Army service was evident as he sat regally still for two hours. He did get two, brief breaks but didn't seem to need them.

Creasy said he was unaware his ancestors toiled for Cocke until Andi Cumbo told him.

Cumbo wrote the book "The Slaves Have Names: Ancestors of my home."

Cumbo's father managed the tree nursery near the plantation and while she was a teenager, Cumbo walked the historic grounds. "Andi's slave story is where I learned about my connection (to Brema)," Creasy said. "Ben Creasy was enslaved in Brema and his grave is there in the Brema slave cemetery."

The artists working on Creasy's portrait ranged from established, professional artists to a high school student. They worked in oils, pastels, charcoal, digital drawings, Adobe LightRoom and PhotoShop.

Malcomb Walls is a Fluvanna High School Senior who hopes to study film at either James Madison University or Virginia Commonwealth University.

Walls takes computer graphics at FHS.

He found out about Saturday's session from his teacher, Amanda Clements.

The student took a picture of Creasy, uploaded it to his computer and edited it throughout the session.

Artist Eboni Brice used the Procreate program on her iPad to sketch Creasy.

Tom Tartaglino, a well-known professional Fluvanna artist who works in oils, took part.

"...I enjoy getting together with my fellow artists and painting from a model. In art school it is called life drawing," Tartaglino said. "It helps an artist because the human figure is the ultimate in nature, which helps the artist in all their pursuits. It is the best practice for an artist."

VCU Adjunct Art Professor Clinton Helms made charcoal and pastel studies of Creasy.

Clinton said the experience inspired him "to get into the studio and work on two, 11 x 14 inch oil studies of Mr. Creasy from one of the images I took of him and one from the last piece I started in pastels."

Susan Edginton loved the setting.

"I was amazed as I sat in the beautiful Brema Slave Chapel with its original wood floors and natural light coming through the wavy glass windows,"

she said. "How fortunate I was to be able to draw one of the descendants of slaves from this area. What a wonderful model he was as he sat there posed for us to paint."

Melissa Hill is a local photographer who documented the sessions.

Hill said her love of history is what prompted her to take part in Saturday's event.

"Today's experience was historic to me," Hill said. "I had the opportunity to enter the building where my ancestors once worshipped. I'm always so appreciative for my ancestors because without them there would be no me. I'm living a life that they only dreamed of and it's because of them. I don't want their prayers, their sufferings, their struggles and their perseverance to be in vain."

The former slave chapel was moved from its spot on Brema Plantation to its present location on Brema Bluff Road. It now serves as the parish house for Grace Episcopal Church.

Portrait artist and new Fluvanna resident Joe Gastrock made sketches to work in oil later.

"For me as a portrait artist, it is about capturing a moment in time. Art elevates. Art stirs emotion and imagination," Gastrock said.

He also appreciated the opportunity to connect with his new community.

Staiger said the idea of portrait sessions came about when she, Fluvanna Historical

Society Director Tricia Johnson, and artist Susan Lang, talked about celebrating the community contributions by Fluvanna African-Americans past and present.

"We felt that images of African-Americans generated from within and by the community, would be helpful to enhance the human connections." Staiger said. "A portrait session is a wonderful opportunity for artists of all mediums to have a living person to use as an inspiration and model."

Staiger said artists of all levels are welcome at the sessions.

"If there are beginning artists who attend, some instruction would be available, and at the least, there are likely to be experienced artists working so young and aspiring artists can see process and ask questions," she said.

If you want to know about future sessions, email Staiger at staiger.studio@gmail.com

"For me as a portrait artist, it is about capturing a moment in time. Art elevates. Art stirs emotion and imagination,"
Gastrock said.



Joe Creasy takes a look at Tom Tartaglino's painting.



Parents decry “offensive” books at School Board meeting

BY HEATHER MICHON
CORRESPONDENT

This is the list of books in the FCHS catalog currently being reviewed by the school as possibly containing inappropriate material. Superintendent Peter Gretz said in an email that these books will be evaluated by a committee, and that “during the review process, these books will be pulled from circulation.”

- *All Boys Aren’t Blue* by George M. Johnson
- *All the Things We Do in the Dark* by Sandra Mitchell
- *America the Novel* by ER Frank
- *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison
- *Damsel* by Elana K Arnold
- *Dime* by ER Frank
- *Looking for Alaska* by John Green
- *Milk and Honey* by Rupi Kaur
- *Me Earl and the Dying Girl* by Jesse Andrews
- *More Happy than Not* by Adam Silvera
- *The Nowhere Girls* by Amy Reed
- *Out of Darkness* by Ashely Hope Perez
- *PUSH* by Sapphire (REMOVED IN 2022)
- *Shine* by Lauren Myracle
- *Sold* by Patricia McCormick
- *Something Like Normal* by Trish Doller
- *The Sun and Her Flowers* by Rupi Kaur (NEVER IN CIRCULATION)
- *Tilt* by Ellen Hopkins (MARKED AS LOST)
- *Tricks* by Ellen Hopkins
- *TTFN* by Lauren Myracle
- *Water for Elephants* by Sara Gruen
- *What Girls are Made of* by Elena K Arnold
- *The You I’ve Never Known* by Ellen Hopkins

Several Fluvanna County residents stepped up to the podium during the School Board meeting on Wednesday night (Oct. 9) to call out – and occasionally read explicit passages from – books they think do not belong in the Fluvanna County High School library.

Brittany Gray, who is currently running to unseat incumbent Palmyra representative James Kelley, said she and others had found 19 books in FCHS library that contained “offensive” content.

“We don’t need these books in our schools. We need to be focused on learning. We need to be focused on education. You cannot tell me these books in any way, shape, or form, are helping our children.” Describing herself as a domestic violence survivor, she said, “I was reading those books and I’m shaking because they were so triggering.”

“You guys should be ashamed of yourself,” said Fork Union resident Kat Campbell. “It’s not about micromanaging, but if your librarian cannot keep content like this out of our children’s school, then there is a significant problem in the staff of the library.”

From excerpts read during the public comment period, two of the titles appear to be “All Boys Aren’t Blue,” a memoir by journalist George M. Johnson about growing up Black and queer, and the free-verse novel “Tilt” by Ellen Hopkins. There was also a comment that likely referred to the 1996 novel “Push” by Sapphire.

Superintendent Peter Gretz reported on Monday that “All Boys Aren’t Blue” was added to the FCHS collection in 2021 has never been checked out; “Tilt” has been marked as “lost” and hasn’t circulated since 2016; “Push” was removed from circulation in 2022.

The American Library Association reports that Virginia has seen a record number of attempts to remove or ban titles in both public and school libraries in 2023. According to its figures, a total of 356 individual titles had been challenged between Jan. 1 and Aug. 31 – more than double the number challenged in all of 2022. This process has been spurred in

part by nationwide groups like Moms for Liberty, which curate lengthy lists of books they feel are inappropriate for children. Many of these titles focus on topics like race, gender identity, and sexuality.

It was not entirely clear what action the speakers wanted the School Board to take in the matter. Fluvanna County Public Schools already has a review process where parents or others can challenge material, and decisions made through this review process can be appealed to the superintendent or the School Board.

Gary Davis, who is running against Danny Reed for the open Fork Union seat, said on his campaign Facebook page that he believed this was “a coordinated political attack led by candidates” during the last School Board meeting before the election on Nov. 7.

“This isn’t surprising given its October of an election year,” said Kelley on his campaign page, “but it’s disappointing to see our school board meeting used for political gain.”

“I’ve met five of the six librarians in our schools, and I can honestly say they want what’s best for our students, and they have NO agenda!” Davis wrote. “Talk to them about the books rather than attacking them publicly.”

Gray wrote over the weekend that “despite what you may have heard through the community, I did not demand for books to be banned.”

But she maintained that some material, like the passages read aloud at the meeting, shouldn’t be available to minors. “Sadly, we do not all agree on this. Sadly, there are many authors who specifically target and attempt to groom minors.”

The Virginia Association of School Librarians also opposes the censorship or removal of library books, although they agree that schools can adopt policies and procedures to review challenged materials. “However, no person or group has the right to make choices for other children and every child should have access to books they may want to read,” they argue in their position statement on censorship in Virginia schools.