

## TO LEARN MORE . . .

To learn more about the schism that split Presbyterianism in the mid eighteenth century, we recommend *A Brief History of the Presbyterians* by James H. Smylie, Geneva Press, Louisville, KY, 1996.

Historic Polegreen Press continues to offer the novelized biography of Samuel Davies, *Living on the Borders of Eternity* for \$24.95. Checks can be made out to the publisher and mailed to Post Office Box 2111, Mechanicsville, VA 23116.

## Polegreen Founder Recognized for Leadership . . . Again

The Commonwealth of Virginia presented Bob Bluford, Jr., with a resolution of appreciation during Virginia Preservation Day ceremonies on 31 January. The presentation was the final event at the Awards Ceremony hosted annually by APVA Preservation Virginia. House Joint Resolution Number 410, presented by Delegate Frank Hargrove, Sr., of the 55th District, recognizes Bob's commitment to the preservation of Virginia's history and reads, in part,

"WHEREAS, since 1989, Dr. Bluford has devoted a great deal of time to Hanover County to preserve, enhance, and interpret the site of the struggle for religious toleration in Virginia, known as the Historic Polegreen Church Foundation . . . RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly acknowledge with great appreciation the contributions of the Reverend Dr. Robert Bluford, Jr., . . . for his notable efforts to preserve and protect the historic heritage of the Commonwealth."

True to form, Bob commented that "nothing of this magnitude can be accomplished by a single individual. Many should be included in a recognition of this sort."

Historic Polegreen Church Foundation thanks the Commonwealth for recognizing what we've known for years, that Bob's tireless energy has preserved a piece of American history that will be of benefit to all Americans for many years to come.



*Delegate Frank Hargrove presents the resolution to Bob Bluford, Jr.*

Historic Polegreen Church Foundation  
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## *The News from* Historic Polegreen Church Foundation

### Inside:

- News of our spring program *Defending the Establishment*
- What are “Old Lights” and “New Lights?”
- A letter from the President
- A list of our generous supporters in 2005
- Yet *another* honor for Bob

### *Preserving Virginia’s contributions to America’s religious freedom*

#### Defending the Establishment

*... it seems not improper to inform You [the Governor of the colony] that the revd Messrs Davies and Todd have lately been guilty of what I think Intrusions upon me, in having preached each of them a Sermon at a Tavern in my Parish ... what Ruin & Decay in the Families of many well meaning but deluded People, what Confusion & Disorder, what Disaffection in the People ... together with many other unhappy Effects, have usually attended the Ministry of Itinerants & Enthusiasts in the Colony.*

Anglican Minister James Maury

This spring Historic Polegreen Church Foundation takes the Establishment at its word ... literally! On Sunday, 30 April, from 2:30-3:30 we will explore a war of words that pitted Anglican priests against the Reverend Samuel Davies during the 1740s and 50s. The priests, representatives of the state-sanctioned Church of England, were extremely protective of their parishes and were particularly wary of dissenting preachers taking up residence in their backyards. These ministers—and the Reverend Patrick Henry of St. Paul’s Parish in Hanover County was one of the most virulent—worked closely with local justices and sheriffs to curtail the activities of these “invaders.” They were also certain to keep their superiors informed of the goings-on of Presbyterians, Quakers and Baptists in a lobbying campaign they hoped would give the ruling Governor’s Council the ammunition they needed to curtail dissenting ministries. In their minds, the stability of the colony’s very social fabric hung in the balance!

Drawing on the actual letters written by these priests, the Polegreen Foundation will recreate the mood of a time when the world was fundamentally changing, an age when time-honored religious authority and

traditions were being challenged as never before. But fear not: the Reverend Mr. Davies will also have his day in court!

John Hamant, who created the role of the Reverend Henry—nemesis of Samuel Davies—at a Polegreen program a couple of years ago, is back to lend his baritone voice to a dramatic reading of a number of these intriguing letters. Colonial Williamsburg historian Linda Rowe and Al Zambone, a graduate student at the University of Oxford, will share their insights and understanding of these tumultuous times.

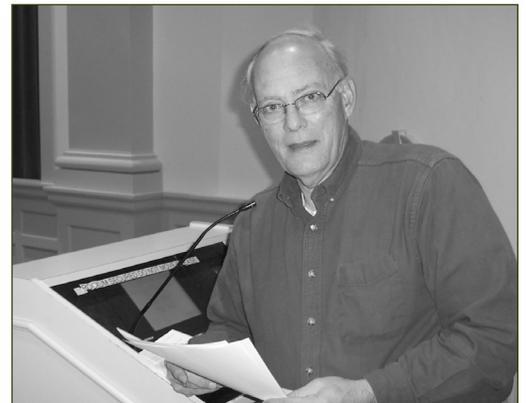
The program is being graciously hosted at Watts Chapel by Union Theological Seminary and Presbyterian School of Christian Education at 3401 Brook Road in the Ginter Park neighborhood of Richmond. A reception will follow, weather permitting. Call 261.3837 or visit [www.historicpolegreen.org](http://www.historicpolegreen.org) for more information and directions.

Come *bear* history brought back to life.

**Remember: “Defending the Establishment”**

**30 April, 2:30-3:30 at**

**Watts Chapel on the UTS Campus**



*John Hamant will breathe new life into old letters.*

## Dissension from Within

So much of the Polegreen Church story hinges on the tension that existed between the established Church of England—bastion of orthodoxy and tradition—and the interloping Presbyterian dissenters. But the Polegreen story begins with tensions within its own fold. When Governor Gooch issued his 1747 proclamation against “all Itinerant Preachers, whether New-Light Presbyterians, Moravians, or Methodists,” he was aiming his campaign against a new breed of dissenters who were insisting on the necessity of spiritual conversion or “new birth” and doing so as free spirits, ranging about the country preaching to whomever came to listen and then carrying the Word to the next community. A schism occurred amongst the Presbyterian faithful in 1741 that split the sect between the traditionalists and these revivalists who were riding the crest of the Great

Awakening (and causing more than a little apprehension among all traditionalists, no matter what their specific faith!). Lines were drawn between worshippers clinging to old traditions and worshippers embracing new avenues. No matter whether the suffix was “side,” or “light,” each side’s theology was clearly defined as either “old” or “new.” New Light Gilbert Tennant set the tone for an animosity that would exist for almost 20 years when he preached about his Old Light colleagues as

*Pharisee-Teachers, having no Experience of a special Work of the Holy Ghost, upon their own Souls are therefore neither inclined to, nor fitted for Discoursing . . . upon such important Subjects. . . . No! They carelessly offer a common Mess to their People . . .*

*(con't., page 3)*



*Last fall president Bob Bluford, Jr., donned waistcoat and breeches to portray bricklayer Samuel Morris, the man who began the dissenting congregation that would ultimately invite Samuel Davies to be its minister.*

## Letter From the President

The experience of working on a project of great significance to the Church universal and that has meaning to all citizens of the world is rare and exciting. This is no overstatement in light of the ongoing political dialogue in our own country as to the role of religion in our national life. Neither is the message of the Hanover dissenters unrelated. At Polegreen we are not only acknowledging the extremely important role of our ancestors two and a half centuries ago, we are also committed to making known and relevant the ongoing significance of their efforts.

While I personally tried to do something to preserve Polegreen as early as 1977, nothing much took place until 1989 when at the final meeting of the Hanover Presbytery that body took title of the three-and-a-half-acre parcel where Polegreen Church once stood. A committee was also named to study the situation and advise the presbytery how to proceed. A year later the presbytery acted to create the Historic Polegreen Church Foundation, a separate non-profit corporation.

Our first objective was recommended by our architect Carlton Abbott of Williamsburg: protect the site from urban sprawl encroachment. An eight-house subdivision already existed next to the site; other lands surrounding the area were ripe for development. We have slowly been acquiring these lands and in the past month we have taken title to 65 more acres of land. Polegreen now owns over 100 acres in the church’s “viewshed.”

We are now in a position to focus our resources on fulfilling our mission to teach and interpret the struggle for religious liberty that began at Polegreen.

To support these efforts we have increased the size of our Board of Directors, a fine group of people we will introduce you to in our next newsletter. The support of friends like you assures us that we, with God’s help, will reach our goal. We sincerely hope you are experiencing the excitement and satisfaction that we are.

Gratefully, Robert Bluford, Jr.

This did not sit well with the Old Side.

Separate synods were established. The Old Side synod of Philadelphia was effectively populating the valley of Virginia while the New Side synod of New York—in which the Rev. Samuel Davies was educated—was hard at work answering calls for ministers in Hanover and points south. The relationship was so strained that the Old Side Synod wrote to Gooch in 1741 that

*These persons never belonged to our body but are missionaries sent out by some who by reason of their divisive and uncharitable doctrines and practices were ... excluded from our Synod.*

The Old Sides were quick to point out that they were in no way associated with the “enthusiasts” who were accused of whipping the people to “heights of religious Phrenzy” as they prowled the countryside. It was into

this friction that Davies answered his call to minister in Virginia. (What a daunting first calling!) That Davies was able to defend the validity of his ministry in the teeth of not only the Church of England but temperamental Old Lights is a testimony not only to his faith but his political acumen as well.

There is so much more to the story than this brief article can address but, hopefully, we have introduced you to the cracks that were appearing in the religious realm of the Virginia countryside, cracks that were to continue to widen until the whole of British America began to break apart in the 1770s.

The doctrinal tensions that run through [insert virtually any Protestant denomination here] today are not dissimilar to the upheavals that were occurring in colonial Virginia. Perhaps we can take some solace in the fact that from the debates and divisiveness

of the eighteenth century came a distinct American society that has weathered—and continues to weather—differences that ultimately make us stronger.



*Gilbert Tennant later regretted the polemical nature of his famous 1740 sermon, “The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry.” Photo courtesy of the Presbyterian Historical Society, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (Philadelphia, PA)*

## Contributors Set Record

2005 was a record-setting year for Polegreen in terms of annual giving. For 2005 and up to March 2006 over \$18,000 was contributed in unrestricted donations. Many thanks to everyone for their support!

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