

Historical Society of Western Virginia

2021-2022
Journal



In this issue:

- 4 | A Tribute to
George Kegley
- 6 | WWI Comes to a
SW Virginia Family
- 19 | The Preston Papers:
How the Past
Changed My Future

And more...

Vol. 24 | No. 2

Historical Society of Western Virginia

Amor montium nos movet

(For the love of mountains inspires us)

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The Journal, Vol. 24, No. 2, chronicles the history of the Commonwealth west of the Blue Ridge. It is published by the Historical Society of Western Virginia, P.O. Box 1904, Roanoke, Va. 24008. The price for additional copies is \$10. The Society welcomes unsolicited material but submissions cannot be returned and the Society cannot be responsible for damage or loss. Comments or questions about the Journal can be directed to the Publications Committee at info@vahistorymuseum.org or to 540-982-5465.

This edition of the journal in honor of George Kegley is sponsored by a generous contribution from John and Matilda Bradshaw and the Kegley Publications Fund. Your contributions are welcome also.

Gone, But Not Forgotten: *Rediscovering the History of New London, Virginia*

by Jacqueline Hale

A convenience store and a trailer company sit on opposite ends of Alum Springs Road in Campbell County, Virginia. Along the road, driveways branch toward rows of mobile homes, apartment buildings, and colonial revival houses. However, interspersed between these contemporary features sit seven structures that hint this area holds something more than a common, backcountry Virginia road just off U.S. Route 460.

Although they are boarded up, burnt or renovated, these structures and their lots each share a part in the intricate history of the former town of New London, Virginia. On this land, the town grew in prominence almost as quickly as it later fell into obscurity; played its part in the American Revolution even at the outskirts of its colony; drew health-seeking guests to a mineral springs resort; became home to a freedman who worked as a baker and his rural African American church; and held onto its rich history, even as it transformed into a simple residential street for a hundred years.

Now, this story is coming back to life through the work of Friends of New London and the Liberty University History Department as they rediscover the town's revolution, revival and resilience.

Founding (1754-1760)

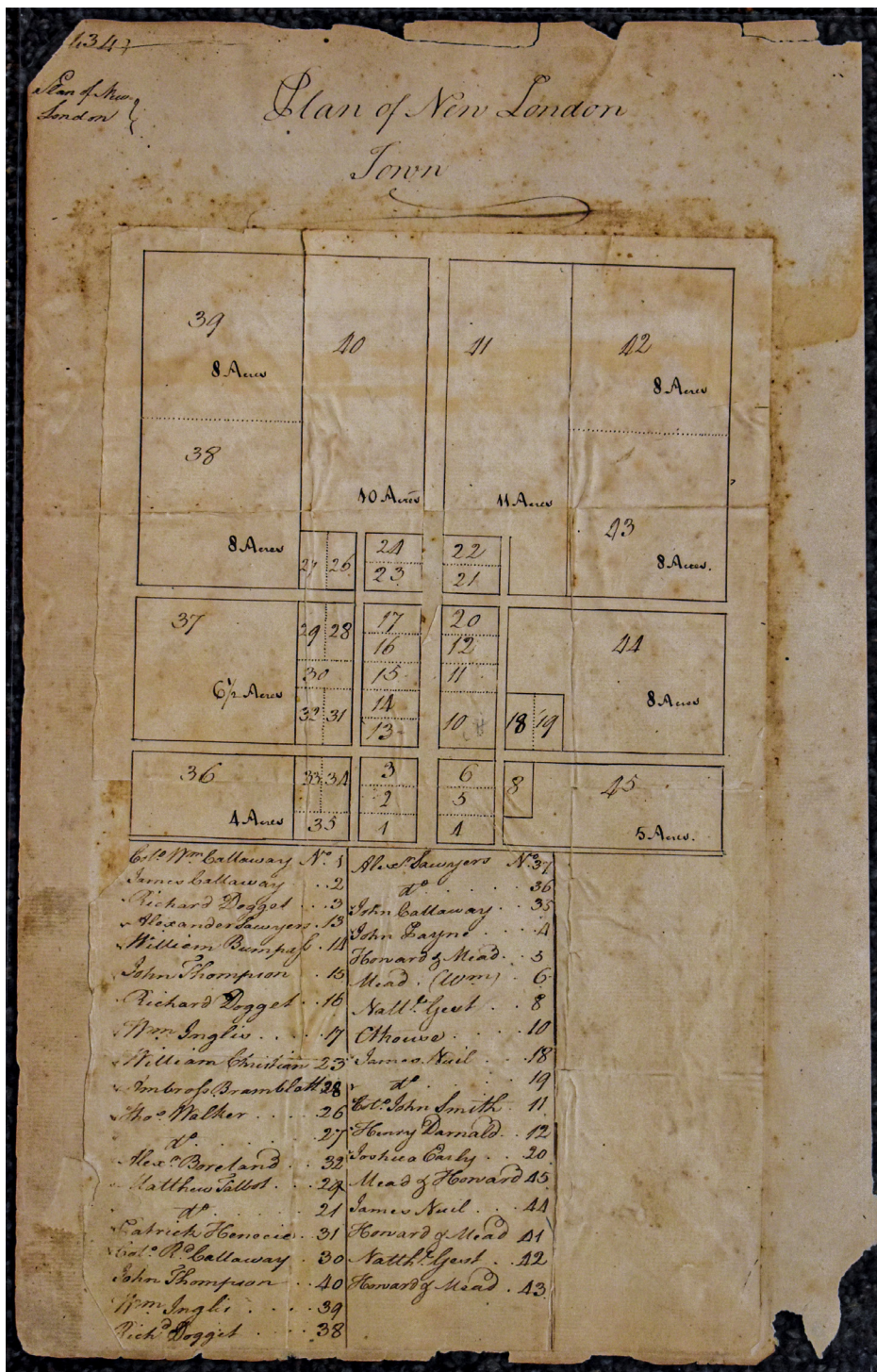
"By Bedford Court-house in one week, 'tis said, & I believe, truly said, near 300 Persons, Inhabitants of this Colony, past, on their way to Carolina."

— Letter of Rev. James Maury to Philip Ludwell,
on the Defence of the Frontiers of Virginia, 1756 (1)

Long before a paved and residential Alum Springs Road wound through this section of Virginia, wealthy landowner and patriot Col. William Callaway owned this parcel of land among his 17,000 acres. Down a hill, Callaway, who would later serve as a colonel in the French and Indian War and a member in the House of Burgesses, owned a mill on the Buffalo Creek.(2)

Across the mountains, the southbound Great Wagon Road and westbound Wilderness Road journeyed toward more unsettled lands. These roads and the appeal of new lands drew people to the young

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Original town plat

colony of Virginia, which then stretched along the current southern border from the seacoast to the Mississippi River and through present day Michigan and Minnesota. During the 1750s, Virginia's population increased by 100,000 people, making it the most populous colony to declare independence in 1776. In response, the Virginia General Assembly created 32 new counties between 1700 and 1760. One of these counties was Bedford, formed out of Lunenburg County in 1753 and named after the Secretary of State of Great Britain John Russell, the fourth Duke of Bedford.

Here, in the Piedmont region of Virginia, William Callaway heard of Bedford's proposed es-

tablishment. Seeing that his land lay along the road near the geographic center of the county and that a nearby town would draw business to the mill and increase his land value, Callaway donated 100 acres for the establishment of a county seat. With approval from the court in 1754, Callaway erected a timber jail and courthouse at the modern-day intersection of Alum Springs Road and Town Fork Road, and the court met for the first time in November.(3)

Soon, this courthouse was the center of a great bustle. Court days drew visitors from all over Bedford County, and with the people came the lure of business opportunities in the previously rural landscape. Town trustees divide the land into half-acre lots, twice as long as wide, and put them on sale through a blind subscription. These lots were drawn at court in May 1758 and 28 individuals bought 33 lots.(4) Already this small town was on its way to becoming the colonial hotspot of court and commerce that Callaway had foreseen, with a name that captured his vision: New London.

Colonial and Revolutionary Era (1760-1781)

“New London, where we arrived at ten in the morning, is an infant town, but already pretty considerable, for there are at least seventy or eighty houses. There is likewise a military magazine established here, and several workshops for repairing arms. Its situation, in the middle of the woods, far distant from the seat of war, as well as commerce, does not require it should be fortified, but nature has prepared everything to make it a strong place.”

— *François-Jean de Chastellux in “Travels in North America in the years 1780, 1781, and 1782”*

The colonial age of New London is defined by revolution. The explosion of the town was revolutionary — little had ever been built on this land, and it surely had never seen the life and commerce of 1700s Europe. Revolution was also on the tongues of these new inhabitants, whether in ardent support or hidden disdain. With a focus on three colonial-period locations — Mead’s Tavern, John Hook’s store, and the arsenal — what is revealed is a colonial town with diverse characters, ardent patriotism, and an uncanny ability to grow and prosper even on the edge of the wild unknown of the frontier.

Mead’s Tavern

In 1761, William Mead and his business partner Benjamin Howard, one of the original trustees of New London, bought lot 6 in its prime location directly across the street from the courthouse. Mead, a fun-loving and business-oriented man, moved to Bedford County from Bucks County, Pennsylvania, in 1754. His son, Methodist preacher Stith Mead, remembered his father as a man of antics and a lover of dancing, activities of which Stith did not approve. But Mead was a well-known builder, landowner, soldier, patriot, gentleman and businessman who owned a grist and sawmill, distillery, and plantation not far from where his tavern drew frequent visitors in New London.(5)

Mead’s eye for business drew him to New London. The second half of the 18th century was a time of great prosperity for this 100-acre commercial entrepot. A new and much larger courthouse was built in 1766.(6) Visible in the distance from New London, the Appalachian Mountains marked the edge of the frontier that drew so many through town to restock on their way west. Likely with the idea of offering travelers a final meal and drink before heading west, in 1763, Mead constructed a two-story,



Mead's Tavern

L-shaped tavern, running 30 feet and 3 inches on the front and 28 feet and 8 inches on its east side. Remembering his father's usual antics, Stith Mead wrote that Mead stood on his head on the roof of his two-story house in New London, likely Mead's Tavern and probably in a topping-out celebration of completing the building.(7)

Mead's partner Howard described the tavern as "a very magnificent house," a descriptive pertaining to the tavern's characteristics more common of a Tidewater region build, and even there it was rare to find the two stories that Mead's boasted.(8) The tavern's English bond brick foundation was an elite and high-style building practice of the age.(9) The grand two-story structure had a porch that was, at some point, covered in beaded or molded weatherboard siding topped with a wooden shingled roof, and sandwiched between two chimneys smoking on opposite ends.(10)

Mead and Howard did not live at nor run the tavern, both busy with other business ventures. They rented the tavern to Robert Hairston and/or Richard Turner who were both licensed to run a tavern "at Mead's House" in 1764.(11) Inside their tavern, backcountry Virginia life met, mingled, played, ate, drank, fought and changed. The center of activity was the bustling dining room, possibly paneled with vertical wooden boards and a green, beaded trim, or plaster and lath.(12) Workers rushed in with food and drink that was prepared and stored in the kitchen and other outbuildings behind the tavern. The courthouse sat clearly visible through the east windows and was surely the center of conversation on many court recesses and the focus of entertainment during especially dramatic cases. As the tavern guests drank and ate, they likely played cards and other games, smoked pipes, and shared local drama and news. Mead's strong patriotism likely fed into the conversation and activity at his tavern. Mead served in the French and Indian War under George Washington and with the Continental Army for three years,(13) and, just down the road at the arsenal, soldiers were making and storing weapons and ammu-

niton for the revolution.

With all this activity, the hubbub of the tavern reflected the energy of the colonies, making Mead's bustling tavern, full of travelers heading west, court attendees and locals, a center of New London life in its colonial prime.

John Hook's Store

This bustle in Mead's Tavern was reflective of the busyness of the town at large. William Callaway's vision of a frontier town was being realized and, in 1761, he subdivided a portion of his land bordering the west of town into six half-acre lots for sale.⁽¹⁴⁾ On this land, just down the street from Mead's Tavern, the soon-to-be prominent, well-documented merchant, loyalist and supposedly mean-spirited John Hook was beginning his own career in New London.

Long before Hook would become a wealthy merchant, he was a boy in Scotland and the son of a small-scale and impoverished soap manufacturer who heard of new land and opportunity in the New World.⁽¹⁵⁾ Overseas, American consumerism was taking shape. Those colonists heading west still desired the goods of the Old World, providing a perfect opportunity for merchants to establish prolific stores along the frontier stocked with goods imported from a parent company partner in Europe and funded by exporting tobacco grown in the new-found open fields. Hearing of such fortune, many Scottish families were sending their children to the colonies to work in this business of commerce and one day retire in Scotland in comfort.

Hook's father, Henry, held this dream for his six children. He had little money, but good connections to the Donald family, a mercantile family who owned around nine retail stores. Educated, enterprising, and able in mathematics, Hook was accepted as an apprentice shopkeeper and clerk with the Donald family in Chesapeake.⁽¹⁶⁾ At the age of 13, he boarded a ship in Scotland and arrived in America in 1758. In his early years, Hook swept the store, restocked shelves and worked with customers. Within five years he moved up the ladder to storekeeper in Warwick, Virginia, receiving free room and board and \$40 per year.⁽¹⁷⁾ But his first few years in America did not bring the immediate wealth earlier Scottish migrants had returned home with and that the ambitious Hook had imagined for himself. Quickly, Hook's abrasive and driven personality began to shine through as the young merchant grumbled in letters to his family of his desire to leave Virginia.⁽¹⁸⁾

Finally, in 1766, with the £500 he convinced William and James Donald to lend him, Hook left to open his own store in New London.⁽¹⁹⁾ This young town was a great location for a young merchant – business was steady with the courthouse traffic and westward travelers, the town was far enough from Richmond to draw its own customers, and there was ample open land where tobacco farmers worked. On the other hand, the town's prosperity would mean competition for Hook. William Callaway and his son James opened the first store in New London on lot 1.

Ronald Cowan, operating under the same Donald family, opened a store in town a few years after Hook's arrival. With tough competition, these merchant personalities clashed as they fought for customers and tobacco bids. Hook complained of Cowan's incessant flattery towards customers and letters reveal Hook's grumpy and disliked personality.⁽²⁰⁾ But through it all, Hook grew in wealth and land. He made loyal connections with locals and tobacco sellers, and he began acquiring his own land in and around New London. In letters, Hook revealed his ambition to own many of his own stores in frontier Virginia.⁽²¹⁾

John Hook's frustration with the Donald family came to head when they sent James Donald to co-run the store with Hook after he was promised that he would remain in sole charge of the store he had labored to establish. Hook, always the independent and for a long time feeling trodden by Donald fam-

ily members, ended the partnership in 1771.(22) After a difficult search for a new partner which almost ended with Hook returning to Scotland, he partnered with David Ross, of David Ross & Company, one of the wealthiest men in Virginia.(23) Hook was finally free of the overshadowing constraints of the Donald family and, on two acres of the land newly subdivided by William Callaway, Hook began construction on his own store in August 1771. His plans reveal a 20-by-40-foot store with a 40-square-foot sales room, and what appears to be a counting room, storage room and storekeeper's apartment.(24) A year later, Hook also built a house for him and his wife, Elizabeth Smith Hook. The house was designed to impress: a comfortable, two-story home, running 28 by 30 feet, with a corner fireplace heating the two rooms on the first floor and an à la mode, side passage entrance separated from the warmed living rooms.(25)

From his newly constructed 40-square-foot sales room, Hook sold almost 250 different types of items in 1771, showing a flourishing material life in backcountry Virginia. Rum, buttons, linens, hats, handkerchiefs, thread, hose, sugar and gunpowder made up the most transactions. Items of more particular use also found their way from his shelves into colonial Virginia homes, including fashionable riding hats, medicinal elixir and joiners' rulers, and he frequently filled specialized orders for high-paying customers.(26) William Mead, then a leading and well-off community member, had a clock custom ordered from well-known clockmaker John Barr in Port Glasgow, Scotland.(27)

These shelves of Hook's store reveal a New London customer base with some expendable income, willing to buy items like hats they could have made themselves and items of high quality that hardly fit in with the harsh frontier landscape. John Hook, with his prosperous store and shelves full of goods, created a small pocket of the Old Country even on the edge of the new frontier.

Many of these items, 70 percent in 1771, were sold on credit, evidence of a major customer base of planters who would have to wait for the next season to pay back for the goods.(28) This system of credit also meant much of the town was in debt to Hook, and his gruff personality. In Bedford County alone, Hook filed 73 prosecutions against people in debt to him from 1772 through 1774, including against William Mead and other prominent men.(29) At the same time, talk of revolution would also come through the doors of Hook's store. But as locals excitedly chattered about war, John Hook was seeing the effects of restricted shipping lanes with Europe, and he started speaking out against the revolution. His already difficult reputation coupled with a loyalty to his home country was a sympathy that had little room in a town full of revolutionaries who owed him money. In June 1777, William Mead led a mob to Hook's house, threatened to burn his structures, and tar and feather him, and demanded he sign papers pledging his allegiance to their cause. Most of the 14-member mob owed Hook money.(30)

Despite Hook's success as a merchant, these loyalist sympathies would become his infamy. At the end of the war, Hook sued Revolutionary War Army Commissary John Venable who commandeered two of Hook's steers to support the troops during the war. Venable arrived at court with Patrick Henry as his lawyer, and over the next few hours, Henry humiliated Hook in what became known as his "Beef Speech." Henry encapsulated and humored the audience with the tale of patriotic sacrifice and the shouts of victory then resounding throughout the country in contrast to Hook's cry: "What notes of discord are these that disturb the general joy ... they are the notes of John Hook, hoarsely brawling through the American camp, beef, beef, beef!"(31) John Hook won one penny in damages.(32)

New London Arsenal

The location of New London, and this patriotic spirit of its people, brought yet another key to the blossoming of this town. The birth of New London in 1754 coincided with the beginning of the French and Indian War, bringing a heightened tension between the Native Americans and the colonists who conflicted along the frontier. In and around the town, native groups robbed settlers who retaliated with their

own harassment, leading to deadly skirmishes. The citizens of Bedford even petitioned for the ability to “be at liberty to kill and destroy” the Cherokees, a desire denied by the House of Burgesses to keep from more violence.(33) New London, situated on a plateau, provided protection against the Native Americans and home to a militia. The land to the west of town likely served as the county militia’s muster ground as they protected inhabitants and those passing through.

As talk of revolution mounted throughout the colonies in the 1770s, the residents of New London boasted ardent patriotism. James Callaway, son of William Callaway, followed in his father’s footsteps as a proponent of independence, veteran of the French and Indian War, and leading political figure, serving in the House of Burgesses and on the Bedford County Patriotic Committee of 1774. Callaway also had an industrial business sense, opening the Washington Iron Works in 1779, the first iron furnace south of the James River, and operating the lead mines in Wythe County that were key to ammunition production during the war.(34)

As the war progressed, the Continental Congress, through the Department of the Commissary General of Military Stores, established multiple arsenals in the north. Then, in the summer of 1780, as the war brought the armies further south, the need for a southern arsenal became apparent. Captain Nathaniel Irish, chosen to carry out this role, was sent to Westham, Virginia, to establish the arsenal. But the location was too close to nearby fighting, and the arsenal needed to be relocated.(35)

Callaway’s combined credentials of patriotism and industrial expertise likely spurred on the decision to establish the continental arsenal on his property in New London. Within the year, military activity overtook his land to the west of town. Several armorers were employed at New London to produce ammunition, manufacturing bayonets and other weapons, and repair guns.(36) Weapon and supply storages filled vacated buildings Callaway rented to the Continental Congress. Prisoners of war, captured by General Nathaniel Green and George Rogers Clark and many deserters, marched through town.(37)

The ammunition, weapons and supplies made and stored at the arsenal gave the patriotic New London locals a lot to celebrate. The arsenal’s weaponry and ammunition were key to General Nathaniel Green’s southern campaign against Earl Charles Cornwallis in the Carolinas that successfully secured the colony’s backcountry.(38) Commissioner General of Military Stores Major John Pryor wrote to Col. Davies on June 13, 1781, “that at Bedford is of the first importance, as the operations of General Greene entirely depend upon its supplies.”(39) As one of only five continental arsenals, the importance of the New London arsenal also meant that, even at a distance from the main battlefields of the war, New London became a target. Cornwallis was aware of the key role the New London arsenal played for Greene’s campaign. In July 1781, Cornwallis ordered Lt. Col. Banastre Tarleton to take a group of infantry and cavalry and “do everything in your power to destroy the supplies destined for the rebel army.”(40) However, Tarleton never arrived, instead heading south to battle Greene’s troops. New London would soon have the final word: Three months later, over 4,000 muskets and other weapons seized from Cornwallis at the defeat at Yorktown that ended the war would be included in the number of weapons stored at New London.(41)

Decline (1781-1850)

“This town seems to be in a declining state. A number of handsome & comfortable houses are tenantless; and there seem to be but a few inhabitants. It was some years ago a very thriving place.”

— *John Howell Briggs, traveler to New London, 1804* (42)

The decline of New London began the same way the town started: the creation of a new county. In 1781, the Virginia General Assembly separated Bedford County to create Campbell County. New London would no longer be in Bedford County, but instead on the very outskirts of Campbell, and the county seat moved to Liberty, later renamed Bedford. Although the courthouse served as a district court for a short time, New London would never again see the influx of courthouse visitors.

The second cause for the town's decline came at the end of the Revolutionary War. Victory fulfilled the locals' long-awaited desires for freedom, but victory also brought a decrease in work at the arsenal.⁽⁴³⁾ Though it continued to produce some weaponry and supplied the suppression of the Whiskey Rebellion in the 1790s, the end of the war marked the beginning of its obsolescence. Through the rest of the 1780s and early '90s, guns lay unrepaired, and gunpowder sat unused. In 1793, Secretary of War Henry Knox called for the establishment of federal arsenals, and he sent a letter to President Washington referring to New London as "a poor location," and only chosen because of "the casual circumstances of the War for Independence."⁽⁴⁴⁾ In 1794, Congress passed an act to create federal arsenals,⁽⁴⁵⁾ choosing Springfield, Massachusetts, and later Harper's Ferry, Virginia, where the Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers flowed, as the new locations.

Four years later, relocation began, overseen by New London Superintendent Joseph Perkins who, along with 15 armorers and most of the stores and operations, made the 200-mile journey to Harper's Ferry, a town on its way to becoming a 19th century industrial center. The arsenal buildings in New London continued to be used for storage until at least 1812, when a small store of musket barrels, a cannon, gun parts, ammunition and tools remained.⁽⁴⁶⁾ On June 6, 1812, Thomas Jefferson wrote to James Madison: "I have taken the liberty of drawing the attention of the Secretary at War to a small depot of military stores at N. London... I really thought Gen. Dearborne had removed them to Lynchburg, undoubtedly a safer and more convenient deposit."⁽⁴⁷⁾ With those words, shortly thereafter, the arsenal likely ceased all function.

Businesses suffered as New London entered this new period of decline. However, decline had already come during the war to one section of New London's population: The loyalists. This patriotic mindset of New London incited many British and Scottish merchants to leave town during the war. Hook held on to the end of the war, but, as the revolution came to a close, Hook began buying land in present day Franklin County, built a plantation, and in 1784 he left New London and moved to Hales Ford where he remained the rest of his life.⁽⁴⁸⁾

This period of decline following the revolution was not friendly to even ardently patriotic business owners, especially with the growth of a new ferry town along the James River called Lynchburg. Much of the land around New London returned to James Callaway, including the land William had subdivided to the west of town in 1761. Robert Goggins' two-story wooden tavern, another old tavern, two store houses, a lumber house and a kitchen stood on the property in 1805.⁽⁴⁹⁾ After James Callaway's death in 1809, the land passed through a series of owners with little to say on improvements or function.

Some businesses, taverns, and stores survived or found new life in town. William Mead moved to Augusta, Georgia, in 1784, where he, as the ever-aware businessman, presumably saw better opportunities.⁽⁵⁰⁾ Under different owners, his tavern continued to operate until the building took on a new identify. The rooms where guests used to eat, drink and play transformed into classrooms when, in 1811, Ann (Nancy) Ball Miller and her son Samuel Thomas Miller opened the Roland Academy, a female boarding school, in the former tavern. In the early 1800s, a back porch was added, giving much needed space for the up to 40 girls who came from prominent families to study there. The school closed in 1821 when Samuel Miller became principal at New London Academy, and he later started his own school.⁽⁵¹⁾ This theme of education also helped keep New London alive just down the road. New London Academy, still operating today as a public elementary school, was founded in 1795 one mile from the courthouse. The school was admired even by Thomas Jefferson, who, in 1818, ensured his nephew Francis Eppes



Student-led tour inside Mead's Tavern

attended the well-renowned school.

Mead's Tavern would pass through various hands and functions through the remainder of the 19th century. Occasionally it saw updates in paint colors, new Greek Revival mantels, and even a west wing addition, but also, in 1890, the building was described as "out of repair... it is not desirable as a home and place of residence, it is hard to find a tenant for it, and when rented it has only brought about \$75.00 a year."⁽⁵²⁾ The Rev. Bennett W. Moseley, pastor of the New London Presbyterian Church and principal of New London Academy, bought the tavern in 1872. In 1892, H.B. Zernow, a pastor at New London Academy Church, turned the building into a parsonage. In 1897, the building became a doctor's office under Nicholas Kabler and his father, Thaddeus Kabler, before he built his own office across the street.⁽⁵³⁾

Decline did not lead to desolation, but in its colonial days and revolutionary excitement, New London had seen its best days. This land that William Callaway transformed into a place of commerce, was slowing down, and beginning to sink into its background of backcountry Virginia.

Revival (1850-1902)

"The buildings belonging to the Spring are located here, and when the improvements now in progress shall have been completed, there will be but few points more inviting to those who seek the health-giving breezes of the mountains."

— 1867 Promotional pamphlet

New London would not — could not — stay in a state of decline forever. The 19th century was a time of revival. Just like William Callaway some 80 years before, Peregrine Echols saw promise in this land, but with a far different business venture in mind: selling the water from a local mineral spring. Through the mid- to late 19th century, this land was home to a resort hotel that once again brought enough new visitors through this rural town — enough visitors, even, to change the town's name, reflecting this new founder's vision: Bedford Springs.

The Bedford Alum Springs Hotel

The revival of New London began when Ralph Smith sold his property, which included the land to the west that William Callaway had subdivided along the once bustling main street and where John Hook's store used to draw customers and remnants of the continental arsenal still stood, to Peregrine Echols in 1833. On this land, Echols ran a tavern and, in 1850, he recorded working as a hotel manager, owned \$5,000 in real estate, and lived with his wife Sarah and three children.(54)

In the 1850s, a mineral springs craze was gaining traction across antebellum America as people sought out the "water cure." They vacationed away from the cities to grand resorts, looking to bathe in or, in the soon-to-be case of New London, drink mineral spring water said to have healing properties for anything from indigestion to malaria. Capitalizing on this new fad, Echols began to commercially bottle, ship and sell water from a local alum spring that bubbled at the foot of the hill just west of New London. The water, reportedly, worked. As early as 1853, doctors, like Dr. Robert F. Page of Campbell Court-house (Rustburg), reported the successful use of the water in their practices. Seeing this new attention, Echols marketed his property as a resort for those seeking healing from the water. In 1854, Archibald D. Worsham wrote of his son's recovery following a month at the resort. In the late 1850s, Dr. John R. Steptoe spent two seasons there working with guests seeking healing.(55)

New London began to transform back into a destination, a spot on the map. By the end of the decade, the resort included the main hotel building and a row of new, two-story, white frame buildings, and Echols had named the property Bedford Alum Spring and multiplied his real estate value by ten times, to \$50,000.(56)

Business fluctuated through the Civil War, but new improvements in the early post-war era were destroyed in an 1871 stove pipe fire that burned down the kitchen and recently updated hotel.(57) Despite the fire and Peregrine Echols' death in 1870, the 1870s brought more promise to the property. Echols' family carried on the business, and, about five years after the fire, the land was busy with local architects, carpenters and plasterers beginning construction on a hotel and its buildings that would far outdo the original.

Through the rest of the 19th century, the hub of activity was a magnificent, two-story hotel standing in the center of the property and facing the old town's main street. The building could accommodate some 250 guests inside its parlor, dining room, ball room and many bedrooms. Two rows of two-story cottages with covered porches ran down the front lawn toward the street. A fountain flowed as the centerpiece to the yard. An 1885 promotional pamphlet gives more detail:

The buildings were specially constructed for the comfort of summer visitors. The rooms are large — ceiling from 11 to 13 feet high; large glass doors, with outside blinds, extending from floor to near the ceiling. The doors open upon broad covered verandas front and rear, thus securing perfect ventilation. Within the last three or four years, the front lawn has perfectly set in grass, the trees have grown to be of large size, and afford ample, and, in some portions, very dense shade. The walks are thickly interspersed with



Bedford Alum Springs Hotel

large evergreens. The rear lawn is a beautiful grass plot, containing more than one hundred summer apple, peach, and other fruit trees in full bearing. The walkway to the spring is a very dense and almost a perfect arch of shade.(58)

The hotel, its springs, and heavy marketing had people flocking to the town just like they had in colonial times, but now for a different purpose. Bedford Springs, as the town was now called, attracted people from across the East Coast and those of many levels of 19th century society, including the upper-class, freedmen, and the enslaved with their slaveholders. “Restores debilitated systems to health,” wrote T.C. Mercer, M.D., of Indiana. “Charming upon the skin — makes the complexion fresh, smooth and blooming,” wrote Miss Revenal of South Carolina.(59)

But, with these new resort improvements, it was not just the water drawing people to the hotel. The resort also became a place of leisure and activity. In the distance, the majestic Peaks of Otter that once stood as the symbol of the frontier that brought travelers through New London in its colonial age now were a draw of beauty. Guests wandered through the gardens or walked down a brick path lined with stone under the thick branches of Osage orange trees to the spring, treading on land once walked by colonial patriots. They played ten pin or croquet while a band’s live music swept through the yard. At night, visitors went to the old arsenal building, now serving as a dance hall, for a night of music and dancing. On Aug. 20, 1880, the resort hosted a grand ball. The next month it hosted a masquerade with “trees bordering the wide, close-cropped lawn . . . adorned with parti-colored lanterns,” “tapers twinkling from the hotel windows,” and a “spacious ball room.”(60)

Much of the building, improvements, and continued operations through the late 19th century were done under John R. Maben. He first got involved in the hotel in 1877, became the proprietor of “Maben’s Hotel” by 1880 and, in 1888, gained full ownership of the hotel. By the turn of the century, Maben had, according to a report of the time, “made the Springs a popular resort, particularly for invalids in the far South. Many Lynchburgers also patronized the place and spent many weeks of the summer there.”(61)

Religion

The revival brought by the hotel was not the only one that came through New London in the 1800s. New London had also long become a place of another type of revival: religious.

The Second Great Awakening from 1790 to 1840 brought religious revival across the young country and even to backcountry towns like New London. Methodism was gaining new legs and converts, including the son of William Mead, Stith Mead. After his conversion in 1789, Mead felt God's call to become a circuit-riding preacher.⁽⁶²⁾ This Methodist movement brought church to the people by preaching in open-air tents, connecting to the congregation with music, and riding horseback to the next location to lead another group in worship. During this time, Stith Mead became close friends with Lorenzo Dow, a preacher known for his scraggy appearance and eccentric but effective evangelism, who preached to more people than any other in his time. In 1804, Dow brought his famed preaching style to revivals in New London and Lynchburg, the same year Mead founded the first Methodist church in Lynchburg.⁽⁶³⁾ Throughout the next 40 years, a Methodist congregation in New London began to grow and organize. In 1850, the New London Methodist Church was built as part of the Bedford Alum Springs circuit and became home to many circuit-riding ministers.⁽⁶⁴⁾

Even before this church was built and Peregrine Echols began to transform his land into a flourishing resort, an African American religious community was coming together down the street to worship. Historians are learning more about the African American presence in Bedford and Campbell counties and Lynchburg, and they were present in New London from its earliest history. In 1756, Hampton and Sambo, enslaved men belonging to John Payne, were charged with poisoning Ann Payne. Hampton was sentenced to hanging and quartering, with his remains strung up at the crossroads in front of the courthouse. Sambo's left hand was burned, and he received 31 lashes.⁽⁶⁵⁾ Enslaved residents of the Poplar Forest plantation purchased goods from New London merchants.⁽⁶⁶⁾ William Mead owned enslaved men who worked on his plantation, and the enslaved likely worked at Mead's Tavern and the Bedford Alum Springs Hotel. In 1817, Samuel Miller's belongings included "a negro woman named Sency and her child named Henry," "one negro woman slave Ary and her child Henry," and "one negro boy Henry."⁽⁶⁷⁾ The 1900 federal census listed John Maben's black servants: Martha Walker (b. 1873), Lottie Johnson (b. 1875), Matilda Andrews (b. 1854), Hellin Ray (b. 1882), and George Pannel (b. 1881) and a child, Howard Walker.⁽⁶⁸⁾ The African American cemetery near New London has hundreds of unidentified graves, marked only by rocks at the head and feet of the deceased. During the Great Awakenings, Christianity spread rapidly through the African American communities, drawn in by the hope of spiritual and physical freedom. Although some slaves were allowed to attend segregated church services with white pastors, many snuck out, even with the threat of punishment, to secret brush arbor churches where they could freely combine Christian worship with their African culture. This likely paints the picture of the African American religious life in New London that welcomed Andrew Holt when he moved to New London by 1822. Holt grew up enslaved in Kentucky until his owner, Thomas Holt, freed him in 1807.⁽⁶⁹⁾ Despite this difficult status as a freedman in antebellum Virginia, Holt probably maintained some standing in town because he was a baker. By 1840, Holt had acquired over 40 acres of land, including original town lots 17, 23, 24, 26 and 27.⁽⁷⁰⁾

Holt played an important role in the African American religious life of New London. In 1842 and 1851, Holt was charged with holding an unlawful meeting of African Americans, likely a church service, at his home on lot 17.⁽⁷¹⁾ In response, Holt donated a portion of lot 17 for the creation of The New London African American Methodist Church in 1851.⁽⁷²⁾ This congregation, though run by an all-white board, brought revival to the local African American community as a safe space to worship freely, an uncommon scene in rural, antebellum, Virginia. Even after Holt passed away in the mid-1850s, the church



African American Church

continued to be a space for African American worship until it closed in 1990.⁽⁷³⁾ At his death, Holt was still a man of immense resilience. At some time, Holt purchased his enslaved sons Dennis and Burwell from Thomas Steptoe. In his 1851 will, Holt wrote: “my two colourd (sic) boys Dennis and Burwell... shall immediately upon my death, be emancipated and set free by my executors.”⁽⁷⁴⁾

Residential (1902-2005)

With the resort still drawing visitors, New London, then Bedford Springs, entered the 20th century in high spirits, but the turn of the century brought decline again, this time transforming the town into its current form: a residential street.

On Feb. 6, 1902, another fire burned down the Bedford Alum Springs Hotel and two cottages. This land, and this town, had passed the height of its revival in the mineral waters and play of resort guests relaxing in the summer breeze. John Maben died around 1900. In 1906 Jessie Maben sold the property to the John M. Echols Company, and, in 1907 the property’s building value was zero.⁽⁷⁵⁾ For the next 10 years, a few buildings may have occupied the property, but they were hardly worth noting in any official records.

With tax records missing between 1911-1919, the next phase of the hotel property’s life remains unclear. It seems that around 1920-1921, Michael Eichelbaum, a Jewish peddler and junk dealer who immigrated to Lynchburg from Poland in the late 1880s, built a new hotel on the Bedford Alum Springs tract.⁽⁷⁶⁾ In his architecture and his guest list, Eichelbaum, the uncle of the Warner Brothers of motion

pictures, brought back something of the resort's original glamour. The large first floor rooms were made for entertainment and a wide upstairs hallway and rooms housed guests that it is said included movie actress Tallulah Bankhead and other film stars.(77)

The return of the resort brought some liveliness to the town. Willis Washington Driskill's general store, which he built across the street from the hotel property around 1897, surely appreciated the business. The building housed the Bedford Springs post office until 1911, a barroom, and the store that sold thread, boots, overalls, sugar, coffee, horse feed and more to locals and those who still passed through until the store closed in the 1930s.(78)

Sometime in the 1930s, and still under the ownership of the Eichelbaum family, the hotel and its land took on its next stage of life as a residence. Katherine Haas Eichelbaum, the daughter-in-law of Michael Eichelbaum, bought the property in 1934 and began to make improvements that transformed the hotel into a Colonial Revival-styled residence. Outside she added a front porch with columns,(79) and inside, textured wood wallboard, rounded-arched archways, a remodeled kitchen, bathroom updates upstairs, and other changes rounded out the initial conversion into a residence.(80) Joan and Bill Menge added their own touches to their new home when they bought the property from the Eichelbaums in 1977. The Menges remodeled the bathroom, had a swimming pool installed in the backyard, and transformed the room on the east side of the home into a study with a coffered ceiling, beautiful woodwork, and good acoustics for Bill to play his trumpet.(81)

Down the road, Mead's Tavern also embraced a new identity as a private residence. William Abbott lived at and worked from the former tavern, running his Aetna insurance agency out of the west wing until he sold the building in 1950,(82) and the building remained in private hands into the 21st century. The former tavern dining rooms became living rooms, and a rear kitchen, new Colonial Revival décor, and the reduction of the front porch completed its modern transformation. The old tavern structure underneath became hardly distinguishable.(83)

House, apartment and mobile home construction in the early 2000s made the transition of Alum Springs Road into a residential street complete. This native footpath turned bustling main street was now a nearly nondescript, 21st century section of rural Virginia, just off U.S. Route 460.

Resilience

By the early 2000s, seven historic structures remained: Mead's Tavern, the Bedford Alum Springs Hotel, W.W. Driskill's Store, the Holt-Ashwell House, Kabler's doctor's office, a 1930s reconstruction of the African American Methodist Church, and the New London Methodist Church North. The structures, and the town itself, had remained resilient, although there was little in the way of a comprehensive record of its history.

The lack of a detailed history, however, did not mean New London was not somewhere in the record. While Randy Lichtenberger, archaeologist and director of cultural resources at Hurt & Proffitt, was studying Thomas Jefferson's records at Poplar Forest in the early 2000s, he noticed the frequent mention of "New London," where Jefferson often took the 5-mile trip into town and purchased oxen from Hook's store. With the original town plat in hand, Lichtenberger decided to find the 100 acres William Callaway had long ago donated for the county seat. The search took time – no other historians had attempted to locate the town boundaries – but Lichtenberger was able to match the acreage up to a piece of land east of where Turkey Foot Road met with Alum Springs Road.

The town, Lichtenberger soon found out, was hardly forgotten. Its memory remained in the oral stories of locals whose family roots in the area stretched back generations. Because New London was originally in Bedford County but transitioned to the edge of Campbell 30 years later, the town did not fit neatly into either county's history. Instead, as he talked with locals and people at the Bedford Museum

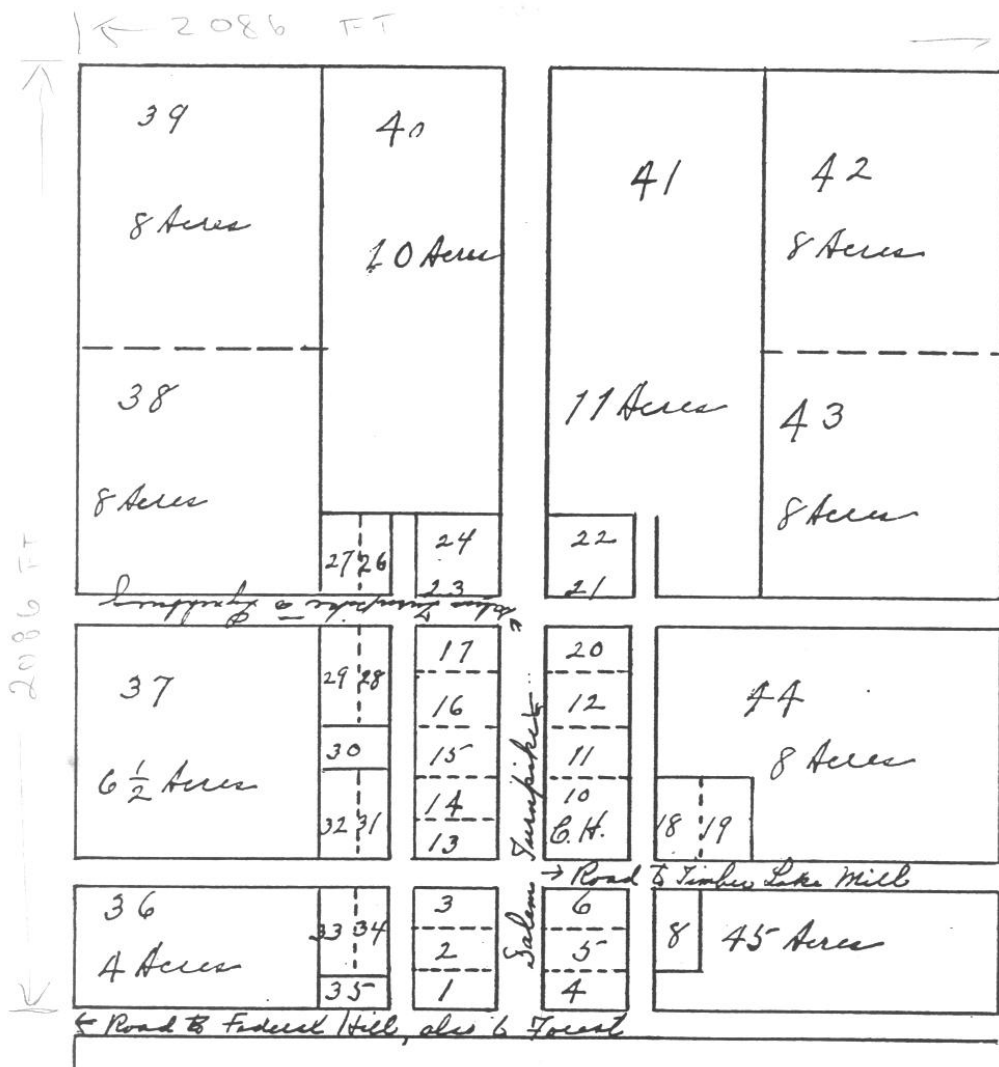
and Campbell County Historical Society, he found a living treasure trove of people and anecdotes connected to almost every period of the town's history. Between 2000 and 2001, Lichtenberger conducted a preliminary archaeological survey of six lots, and he discovered a whole 18th century record in the artifacts buried just below ground. However, although it lived in memory and underground, the history of New London was in imminent danger of being erased. Even as Lichtenberger was conducting this survey, three new houses were constructed in New London, destroying any archaeological evidence on the lots. In 2003, Lichtenberger and a small group of interested locals began meeting on a regular basis, and in 2005 they incorporated officers and founded the Friends of New London museum with the goals of raising awareness about New London history.

With the birth of the nonprofit in 2005, New London's structures, and their stories, began a new life and new history as a place of learning and preservation. Since the founding of Friends of New London, the land once trodden by revolutionaries, westward explorers, resort guests and churchgoers has seen new activity and new people drawn to town by speakers, reenactments, fundraisers, and events like a historic play about John Hook and the annual New London Day. The nonprofit has also been instrumental in researching the town and its people and preserving the remaining history of New London. In 2012, Friends of New London acquired Mead's Tavern out of private hands, which it sold to Liberty University in 2015. In 2017, Friends of New London stepped in to save the African American Methodist Church from demolition. Following a fire at the Holt-Ashwell house the same year, the owners donated the home to the organization. Dr. Kabler's office and the W.W. Driskill store remain in private hands. The continued preservation of the New London Methodist Church North, where Friends of New London has its offices, and the restoration of the African American church remain in the future.

Liberty University

Friends of New London played a key role in encouraging Liberty University's involvement in the New London Projects. In 2015, Friends of New London reached out to Liberty to see if the university would be interested in purchasing Mead's Tavern. After a tour of the old tavern, school administration immediately saw the immense opportunities in historic preservation the structure could provide history students, and the university purchased the tavern. That fall, Liberty began offering public history courses taught by Donna Donald, and students have been involved in every step going forward.

Since Liberty's purchase, the tavern and its grounds have once again seen a great bustle, though this time made by college students, professors, archaeologists and architects. Liberty commissioned a preliminary information form (PIF) for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places in 2015. The PIF was sent back with a request for more information, which catalyzed Liberty to learn more about this historic structure it now owned, which brought about an inundation of work and discoveries. Hurt & Proffitt, led by Randy Lichtenberger, completed the first archaeology survey at Mead's Tavern from October 2015 to April 2016. In 2017 and 2018, historic architect Barry Rakes and architectural historian Daniel Pezzoni began studying the architectural development of the tavern and peeling back the non-historic layers in the northwest room to reveal early finishes and structure.⁽⁸⁴⁾ The architectural investigation in the basement revealed clues of a former corner fireplace, giving cause for an archaeological excavation of the basement from February to July 2018. This investigation led to concern about the stability of the original foundation and English brick bond wall that stood above it on the front of the house. In early 2019, archaeologists excavated beneath the front porch. By 2020, they had collected enough information to resubmit the PIF for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places, which was approved in December 2020 (at this writing, nomination was expected to be passed in Fall 2021). Mead's Tavern's next era of history is now in the works. Liberty is in the process of contracting the restoration of the basement and a preservation plan for the entire site. Public history classes will continue to use the



NAMES OF PURCHASERS OF LOTS IN NEW LONDON.

	Lot		Lot
Col. Wm. Callaway	1	Richard Dagget	38
James Callaway	2	Alexander Sawyers	37
Richard Dagget	3	Do.....	36
Alexander Sawyers	13	John Callaway	35
William Bumpass	14	John Payne	4
John Thompson	15	Howard & Mead	5
Richard Dagget	16	William Mead	6
William Ingles	17	Nattl. Gest	8
William Christian	23	Ct. House	10
Ambrose Bramblitt	28	James Nuil	18
Thomas Walker	26	Do.....	19
Do.	27	Col. John Smith	11
Alexander Boreland	32	Henry Darnald	12
Matthew Talbot	29	Joshua Early	20
Do.	21	Mead & Howard	45
Patrick Henecie	31	James Nuil	44
Col. Richard Callaway	40	Howard & Mead	41
John Thompson	40	Nattl. Gest	42
William Ingles	39	Howard & Mead	43

site as an interactive classroom and for research projects to learn more about 18th century tavern life in New London.

As work was underway at the tavern in 2018, down the road, Liberty acquired the Bedford Alum Springs Hotel property from private owners. This site has also seen a new phase of activity on its grounds. In 2019, Liberty commissioned a preliminary architectural and historic study of the building, and Hurt & Proffitt began a two-year archaeological survey of the property. In 2021, Cabell Crowther, landscape architect and historic landscape specialist, completed a landscape survey and inventory of the property. The next era of the hotel property's history remains unknown, but Liberty has plans for further excavation.

Recent Research and Discoveries

With each of these investigations and their reports, the history of New London was not only unraveled in court documents, uncovered in archaeological surveys, and analyzed in architectural figures, but it was also shared with the public, researched by students, and documented for the future. Their results reveal large parts and small pieces of the town's enduring history.

Mead's Tavern has been the location of many rich discoveries that share details about the tavern itself and the town. During the first archaeological survey, archaeologists found over 5,600 artifacts and several cultural features.⁽⁸⁵⁾ The findings themselves begin to tell the 18th century story of a tavern. Where outbuildings likely once stood, high concentrations of wrought and cut nails and ceramics remained beneath the soil, particularly to the immediate west and south of the tavern.⁽⁸⁶⁾ A possible pile of stone foundation rubble and a potential structural post hole could be what remains from the tavern's kitchen.⁽⁸⁷⁾ Pipe fragments found near the building are ghosts of the tavern-goers chatting and passing around a Kaolin pipe on the back porch.⁽⁸⁸⁾

The results of the 2018 Mead's Tavern archaeological excavation gave a new interpretation of the basement as a potential living space, likely for free or enslaved laborers or slaves of travelers passing through.⁽⁸⁹⁾ Of the over 13,000 artifacts in the basement's dirt floor, many were domestic in nature: pins, buttons, pipe stem fragments, animal bones and teeth, ceramics and bottle glass.⁽⁹⁰⁾ On the east wall of the house, brick from the original end chimney remained intact, though covered partially by the c. 1805 central chimney and other later features. This chimney not only stretched up into the dining rooms above, but an 8-foot hearth also opened into the basement, warming and drying this living space.⁽⁹¹⁾ Located 10 feet from the hearth, small square-shaped indentations show where the basement's inhabitants likely sat by the fire.⁽⁹²⁾

Archaeologists uncovered 24,000 artifacts from the 2019 porch excavation. These findings revealed something of the demographic who came and went through Mead's Tavern's front porch. Several large cents dating from the 1790s to 1803 perhaps fell out of the pockets of those coming to buy a drink or meal.⁽⁹³⁾ A c. 1796 U.S. military button connects the property to the arsenal down the street where a regiment was likely stationed in the late 1790s despite the arsenal's diminishing presence in New London. Brass gun part fragments, gun flints and a brass bayonet scabbard hook confirm that revolutionary soldiers frequented Mead's Tavern.⁽⁹⁴⁾ Gaming pieces made from pearlware dinner pieces, stone cubes, decorated smoking pipe fragments, and a stone marble were numbered among the Delftware, Westwald, creamware, pearlware and refined red stoneware ceramics tavern guests ate from as they played.⁽⁹⁵⁾

The Daniel Pezzoni and Barry Rakes 2017 and 2018 Historic Structures Report gave a rich history of the building and its owners from their archival work as well as a detailed analysis of the tavern's architectural changes. Although the structure had become, in appearance, a contemporary home fitted

with a kitchen, wallpaper and modern wallboard and trim, its tavern origins endured beneath the surface. After removing the non-historic walls in the northwest room, Pezzoni and Rakes discovered that the tavern displayed its own history in its structure. Remnants from plaster and lath reveal this finishing style covered the tavern walls at least twice. Partway up the wall, horizontal nailers remained that were used to hold the floor-to-ceiling vertical boards that covered the early tavern walls.(96) Hand-hewn beams, wrought nails and green paint on a door jamb also remain from early in the tavern's history. Throughout the wall, likely original beaded trim and baseboards have found new life as stud reinforcements.(97) Four small notches imply a passthrough where workers may have passed food and drink from a preparation area into the dining room.(98) In the northeast room, underneath the current staircase, the wall remains unfinished, indicating a similar original stair location.(99) The early 19th century Georgian mantel remains from the structure's days as the Roland Academy.(100)

The Bedford Alum Springs Hotel property also reveals its own history in its structures and, particularly, underground. Daniel Pezzoni's historic and architectural report traces back the chain of title from the property's colonial days to 20th century residency, detailing the vast colonial history on the property, particularly as the location of John Hook's store and the arsenal. His work also helped uncover information about the property's hotel period from advertising pamphlets and testimonials. Pezzoni's architectural analysis of the still-standing early 1900s hotel has provided insight in the more modern use of the building, particularly the design changes in its transformation from hotel to residency. Students have contributed to this research as well, with student papers on the use of advertising to market the springs and the Jewish history of the Eichelbaum family following a student discovery of mezuzahs on the upstairs doorways during a public history class.

While the artifacts from the two-year archaeology survey on the property are still being processed, they have certainly revealed a rich 18th and 19th century history on the property. The features discovered during the survey have also been immense in their historic value. Archaeologists uncovered a set of brick steps leading to a basement in the northwest corner of the property, leading them to believe the steps could be from the old arsenal building. Near the front of the property, a test unit opened onto a colonial cellar believed to be the basement of John Hook's store. Across the property, remnants of the stone lined brick path that led to the spring remain, as well as, according to the 2021 landscape survey, the Osage orange trees lining the path in the southwest corner of the property heading down the hill towards the spring. The landscape survey also identified a large magnolia tree as the oldest on the property. Two archaeology field classes through Liberty, one in March 2020 and the second in May 2021, have allowed students to be a part of this work as well.

While Mead's Tavern and the Bedford Alum Springs Hotel have been the central focus of recent research, information and understanding of many of the other sites and notable figures in town has also grown. The W.W. Driskill store was restored to its 1930s appearance and maintains many original features. John Hook is one of the most well-documented merchants of his time. He began keeping copies of all his letters in 1763, and 64 boxes of his documents remain at Duke University. Students helped in a 2018 investigation report on the Holt-Ashwell House and a recent student research project dove into the African American Methodist Church's history and its place in the story of African American religious life. Recent research seems to indicate connection between Andrew Holt's property and the original town lot owned by the presumed husband of Mary Draper Ingles, the woman who gained fame for escaping from Shawnee Native American captors in 1755.

Much more has been discovered and much more remains to be discovered. Much more will be discovered because of the efforts of the people who have seen the value in this small part of Virginia, just like William Callaway, Peregrine Echols and many others.

New London is a crossroads of history. The land holds the stories of loyalist and rebel feuds, the revolutionary arsenal, merchant bickering, and tavern laughter. Even after a period of decline, a new

history formed a crossroad over the old. The land was trodden no longer by hardened militia but dainty ladies and gentlemen walking under Osage orange trees, the path they walked on lying over the land where John Hook's store used to bustle with shoppers. Even the profiles of the people who lived here tell a story of crossroads: patriotic leaders like William Mead, slaves who lived in tavern basements, common folk who shopped at John Hook's or W.W. Driskill's stores or ran a doctor's office, the freedman Andrew Holt who donated land to build an African American church, the circuit-riding preachers sharing the gospel with backcountry folk. This town is not the story of one century, time, person or event, but the combined overlaying of each one.

Driving down Alum Springs Road, few clues give an inkling of the location's history. The Bedford Alum Springs Hotel, still with a grandeur, is hidden behind bushes and trees making it barely visible from the road. Mead's Tavern, with the recent porch excavation, has a tarp across the front and many recent additions. 21st century life has made a new, and far less historic, crossroads on this location with motor cars and mobile homes, but this new period in the town's life has also brought knowledgeable historians and intrigued students to discover and add new history to this land. This is a new crossroads that stretches into the unknown but exciting future.

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