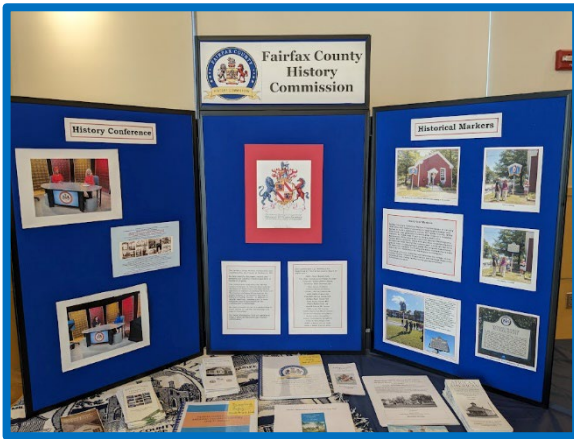


## Fairfax County History Conference, 2022

### WE Are Fairfax County – Part II,

“Early Immigrant Groups of Fairfax County – Sowing the Seeds of Today’s Fairfax County”

Saturday, November 5, 2022; Stacy C. Sherwood Community Center, City of Fairfax, Virginia



2022 was the first year since the COVID pandemic that History Commission offered its day-long 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference in person vs. virtually. Offered as a hybrid conference – with the excellent assistance from Fairfax County Cable Channel 16. While not attaining it’s normal average for over fifteen years of 110 – 120 attendees, we were pleased with an attendance of some 70 people and untold “at home” watchers who enjoyed a day filled with excellent speakers – and excellent food! The 2022 theme reflected Fairfax County’s rich mix of citizens – specifically those arriving in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century: our Irish, Jewish, German, Quaker and Italian citizens.

Welcome and introductory comments were shared by **Lynne Garvey-Hodge** who invoked Emma Lazarus’s famous words posted on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty on New York’s Liberty Island, “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses...send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,” and added, “Those words fit the ancestors of everyone here!” Lynne thanked the Committee that had spent nearly a year planning and executing the conference. She then went on to introduce the **City of Fairfax, Virginia’s Mayor, The Honorable David Meyer**. David warmly welcomed everyone to the conference and added how proud he was that the City and the Sherwood Community Center in particular, had become “home” to the conference for many years and that he was proud to share the place and time with all present on the day. **Chairperson of the Fairfax County History Commission, Cheryl-Anne Repetti** also welcomed the guests and thanked the committee and Lynne.

**U.S. Representative Gerry Connolly** whose grandfather had immigrated from Ireland, reminded the attendees that unfortunately immigrants have all too often been treated poorly by those Americans already in this land. Such behavior has sadly become “hostile to immigrants who sounded different and worshipped differently. It continues to infuse our debate about immigration today.” he shared. In terms of those we now call “the dreamers” (children without lawful immigration status) he declared, “We Should be welcoming them.” **The Chairman of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, Jeff McKay** shared that he had also been raised with an Irish heritage. He stated, “True historians know our job is to tell the complete history, knowing there is bias in any story. We can remind ourselves that we can do better and improve each day.”



At left: Chairman Jeff McKay, Debbie Robison, Congressman Gerry Connolly. At right: Congressman Gerry Connolly, Ean Eschenburg, Mike Salmon, and Chairman Jeff McKay

Both Congressman Connolly and Chairman Jeff McKay then presented the annual History Commission Awards to the following individuals for their fine work:

- \* Debbie Robison, **Lifetime Achievement Award**
- \* Mike Salmon and Ean Eschenburg, the **Mayo Stuntz Award**
- \* Akbur Asuri, Steve Cheuko, Brian Do, Fernando Galarza, Roman Patrick, and Samuel Pitch – George Mason University Capstone IT Engineers and creators of the African American History Inventory Database - **Distinguished Service Awards**. All awardees' names and Award information appeared in the United States Congressional Record for November 3, 2022.



Congressman Gerry Connolly, members of the GMU IT Capstone Team, Commissioners Mary Lipsey and Barbara Naef



**Commissioner Esther McCullough** presented on “The Earliest African- American Churches & their Communities in Fairfax. She noted that in the early to mid and later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the African American population base found their community in the churches they attended. It is important to remember it was not until the mid-late 1960’s that integrated schools and even places of worship were common in Fairfax County and the City of Fairfax. Ms. McCullough is a member of one of Fairfax County’s earliest Baptist churches, First Baptist in Vienna, Virginia. A trio of African American workers founded the First Baptist Church of Vienna in 1867 after purchasing its original plot of land on Lawyers Road from former Union Army Major Orrin T. Hine. According to the Town of Vienna’s website, Hine settled in Vienna in 1866, a year after the end of the Civil War. As enslaved people in the south (which includes Virginia) it was illegal to teach an enslaved person to read and write. Laws prohibited the enslaved from congregating, so they took to quietly and secretly holding “bush meetings” – gatherings in fields of brush, where it was difficult to see their gatherings from afar. The “Church”

is still a vibrant part of Fairfax County for many African Americans including Mount Pleasant in Falls Church and Chantilly Baptist Church in Chantilly, Virginia today.

**Dr. Martha Claire Catlin** is an author and currently the historian for the Alexandria Quaker Meeting House at Woodlawn. In her presentation, “The Woodlawn Quaker Anti-Slavery Colony” she shared that the 19<sup>th</sup> century Alexandria and Mount Vernon-area Quakers in 1846 purchased a 2,000 acre tract of land in order to create what came to be called “demonstration” farms at the Woodlawn estate (originally owned by President George Washington). The intent was to provide examples of successfully run farms without the use of enslaved persons. “The Religious Society of

Friends” is today still the “home of seekers of freedom, equality and the blessings of a free society.”

The nearby Germana Foundation’s Director of Archaeology is **Dr. Eric Larsen**. He spoke on the history of the now lost to time, Germana Colony. Many of the earliest Fairfax County German settlers found refuge in the far south and western part of our county area. Germana was an 18<sup>th</sup> century German settlement near present-day Fredericksburg. The colony was settled in two waves, first in 1714 and then in 1717. One of the early settlers from the 1714 wave was a Hermann Otterbach (Utterbach), whose descendants eventually moved into the far western areas of today’s Fairfax County. A large Utterbach family grave stone can still be seen in the City of Fairfax cemetery and it is a common name throughout the United States. Virginia Lieutenant Governor Alexander Spotswood encouraged German immigration by advertising in Germany for miners to move to Virginia where he had begun to establish an iron mining industry. The name "Germana," selected by Lt. Governor Alexander Spotswood, reflected both the German immigrants who sailed across the Atlantic to Virginia and the British Queen, Anne, who was in power at the time of the first settlement at Germana. Though Queen Anne died only months after the Germans arrived, her name continues to be a part of names within our geographic area. Spotswood created a colony of German indentured servant immigrants to farm his land and to operate ironworks. r. Larsen shared how later people moved to the area for economic purposes to support Germana. Germana was the seat of Spotsylvania County from 1720 to 1732. Spotswood erected a palatial home that was eventually known as the “Enchanted Castle”. Germans eventually moved away from Germantown but he continued the ironworks with slave labor. In his later years he served as Deputy Postmaster General for the Colonies. Current archaeological work is being done on the land, revealing the remains of the Spotswood Mansion, “The Enchanted Castle”. Today The Germana Foundation maintains a research library, a memorial garden, and plans interpretive walking trails to various historic and archaeological sites. In addition, the Foundation publishes history and genealogical books, a newsletter and offers educational programs at an Annual Historical Conference/Reunion to the community.

**Shawn and Susan Dilles** have recently published an Arcadia book, “The Jewish Community of Northern Virginia.” In her presentation, “Early Jewish Immigration to Fairfax County”, Susan Dilles provided an interesting overview of the Jewish community that has resided in Northern Virginia for over 175 years. In the 1850’s, Jewish community activities began in earnest with the establishment of the Hebrew Benevolent Society. The first synagogue--Beth El Hebrew Congregation in Alexandria was founded in 1859 on Alexandria’s King Street above a store. As the community grew, it included waves of Jewish immigrants from Germany and later Eastern Europe. Since the colonial days the country has experienced four major waves of Jewish immigration, people from eastern and central Europe as well as the Soviet Union. These people were most often fleeing violence, intolerance and antisemitism. The growth and newer arrivals reflected a wider range of Jewish practices. The newer arrivals settled in towns across the area, establishing livelihoods in



Shawn & Susan Dilles, authors of “The Jewish Community of Northern Virginia” with Commissioner Jordan Tannenbaum

Arlington, Herndon, Fredericksburg, Warrenton, Leesburg, and other locations. Many Jewish immigrants founded successful retail enterprises such as Rosenthal Chevrolet, Garfinkles, Hechingers, Giant Food Stores, Hechts as well as the highly successful Vienna Inn. Robert E. Simon founded Reston and Charles Smith (son of Russian immigrants) founded Crystal City. The growth of the federal government and construction of the Pentagon in the 1940s brought new jobs and families to the area, and the Jewish community grew along with it. Since World War II, Northern Virginia has changed from a largely rural area to a bustling integrated extension of Washington, DC. From a base of 68, 000 Jewish citizens in 2003 to over 120,00 today, there are 26 active Jewish congregations across Northern Virginia,

**John Murphy**, the Charter President, Fr. Corby Division of the Ancient Order of the Hibernians located at St. Mary of Sorrows Roman Catholic church in Fairfax Station, member of the Fairfax Station Railroad Museum and a retired attorney, spoke on “Fairfax County’s Earliest Irish Citizens.” Mr. Murphy is the grandson of Irish immigrants and has studied for years, the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries’ Irish immigration. Generally speaking, there were two groups of Irish immigrants, the native Gaelic or Irish people native to the island of Ireland and the Scots Irish.

Wars, famine and harsh treatment by the British drove them from their homeland. Some came as indentured servants and what they knew about American was better than the hell they had left behind, according to Mr. Murphy. Early on many worked the railroads, others worked in menial, low paying jobs and in the 1840's the more established citizenry considered the Irish and Catholics to be "subhuman". Many shops and places of business carried signs that read "Irish Need Not Apply". As with so many other immigrant communities, the church became the center of the community. Alexandria's St. Mary's was founded in 1795 and is the oldest Roman Catholic church in Virginia. In 1858 Irish leaders laid the cornerstone for Fairfax Station's St. Mary of Sorrows as a mission church. After the Civil War's 1862 Battle of Second Manassas, the church was a field hospital where the infamous Clara Barton nursed and cared for the wounded. The Irish can now be found in any variety of industries and professions throughout the county and the United States. Mr. Murphy pointed out that the Irish have worked hard to look past their earlier treatment in this land and have moved on with hard work into local and national political participation, community service, the military and as teachers/educators and legal professionals.

Finally two professors, **Dr. Martha Pallante** and **Dr. Donna DiBlasio, Youngstown University** shared research done for their presentation, "Looking beyond the 'Big Apple': Investigating the Immigrant Experience in Understudied Communities." Their focus was on the Italian immigrant of Fairfax County and the United States. Their assimilation, as with other immigrant groups was not always easy, and discrimination did occur, but Italian Americans ultimately prospered, making a mark not only as steelworkers but also as shopkeepers, grocers, restauranteurs, tradesmen, educators, doctors, lawyers, legislators, and mayors. Again, their immigration experience centered largely around the community church, workplace dynamics, their ethnic celebrations and worship. Preparation for weddings has been historically detail-oriented, time-intensive and attendance at same has been large, joyous and celebratory. Many Italians have gone on to successful careers in law, medicine and the arts. In the Washington, DC area, Italian craftsmen helped carve and sculpt the stone and marble of White stone with which the Capitol, White House, Supreme Court and the monuments to Washington, Lincoln, and Jefferson were built.

Successful traditions from prior Conferences included the history book "Drop and Swap" table, (where attendees can leave a book and take a book), the sharing of family recipes and the annual History Trivia Quiz was back – with carefully selected prizes such as Italian pasta, German chocolates, and books written by the authors in attendance. Food for the day reflected the different immigrant groups including Lox & Bagels (Main Street Bagel Bakery in Fairfax), sandwiches from the German Gourmet, the Auld Shebeen in the City of Fairfax provided Shepherd's Pie & vegetables, Jason's Deli (breakfast beverages/cookies and Irish Shortbread (Country Kitchen). Tables were decorated with flag bouquet centerpieces representing the different ethnic groups in the conference for the day. Around the perimeter of the Conference room, were over 15 Exhibitors and authors from a variety of different local history groups. Plans are currently underway for the third conference in this series, "**WE Are Fairfax County Part III– A County of Nations**", scheduled for November 4, 2023, also at the Sherwood Community Center.



At the Conference, Commissioners Mannarino, Mehdi, Tannenbaum, Naef, and Lyons. Former Commissioner Mike Irwin mans the registration table.

Lynne Garvey-Hodge, Committee Chairperson + Committee Members: Esther McCullough, Anne Barnes, Sallie Lyons, Jordan Tannenbaum, Elizabeth Crowell, Mike Irwin, Naomi Zeavin, Phyllis Walker Ford, David Meyer, Sue Kovach Shuman, Cheryl Repetti; Subhi Medhi, Conference photographer.