

# Historic ST. LUKE'S

Volume 2 | Spring 2018

*Virginia's Oldest Church*

## Unearthing Buried History: The Bridger Connection

Historic St. Luke's has embarked upon its first major archaeological research project to unearth the hidden history of its 17th-century founding – and its founder. The project focuses on Colonel Joseph Bridger, the church's principal benefactor, whose partial remains are located under the chancel of Virginia's Oldest Church.

Bridger's partial remains were exhumed in 2007 as part of a Smithsonian study. Historians and archaeologists have projected that the answers to the missing remains, and the answers to many heretofore unanswered questions about the origins of both Bridger and the church he founded, can be found nearby at Whitmarsh, Bridger's plantation.

With generous grant support from foundations and corporations, individual donors, Board Members, and members of the Bridger Family Association, Historic St. Luke's Restoration is finding a way to tell this story. The subject property has been acquired by descendants of Joseph Bridger and has been made available, without charge, to Historic St. Luke's Restoration for a complete archaeological study.

### BRIDGER AND WHITEMARSH

Joseph Bridger set foot on this land only about 45 years after Jamestown's settlement. Here the young English royalist grew in wealth and stature to become the largest land owner south of the James River, Co-Governor of the Virginia Colony, a member of the Virginia Counsel to King Charles II, and the principal benefactor for the construction and completion of what is now known as Historic St. Luke's Church, the oldest church in Virginia.

Bridger's plantation, Whitmarsh, was the largest home south of the James River and the second largest domicile in 17th-century Virginia.

Just as Jamestown has yielded vast numbers of artifacts helping archaeologists and anthropologists piece together the earliest history of communal life in the colony, so the first complete dig at Whitmarsh promises to reveal what life was like at a unique location where an agrarian enterprise and commerce were conducted in the shadow of a 21-room English manor house.

Parts of the foundation of the Bridger mansion still exist, along with a cemetery. They and the surrounding grounds promise to yield a treasure trove of artifacts and insight into how one of the most powerful families of 17th-century Virginia lived, prospered, and died.

This three-year Whitmarsh archaeological survey is being conducted by Alain Outlaw, principal archaeologist with Archaeological & Cultural Solutions, Inc. of Williamsburg, and member of the history faculty at Christopher Newport University (CNU). The project seeks to recover the missing partial Bridger remains, the architectural plan of his home, the layout of his plantation, and the artifactual evidence of his wealth.

The first year of work is underway, and as field crew and laboratory assistants, Outlaw's CNU students are gaining practical hands-on experience as well as contributing toward the objectives of the project.

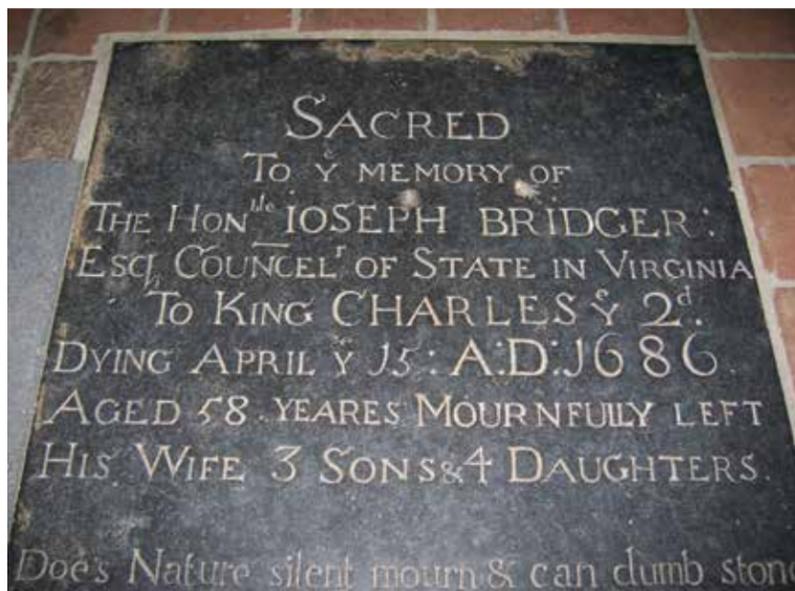
### SYNERGY: HISTORY, ARCHAEOLOGY, ACADEMIA

"CNU has a long history of synergy with Virginia's Oldest Church from public history internships to staff recruitment," said Historic St. Luke's Executive Director Todd Ballance. "This partnership is yet another example of how public history, archaeology, and public universities come together to diffuse knowledge."

"This project offers the very rare opportunity to explore the world of Joseph Bridger, a major figure in late 17th-century Virginia society," said Outlaw. "His role in this region and in the shaping of the St. Luke's Church community has been overlooked, and so we are striving to ensure that his legacy is now recognized."

"This collaboration among ACS, CNU, and the Bridger Family Association will help Historic St. Luke's gain further insight into the life and times of the church building's chief patron," added Ballance. "We are proud to be part of documenting the Bridger legacy, and we hope that our combined efforts – history, archaeology, and academia – will produce enough worthy artifacts to complement exhibitions at Historic St. Luke's for years to come."

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*Bridger ledger stone in the chancel of St. Luke's Church.*



*Left: Archaeologists attribute this wine seal of the Bridger Coat of Arms to Colonel Joseph Bridger. Originally discovered at Whitmarsh, this 17th-century wine seal would have been located on the shoulder of a wine bottle to identify the owner.*

*Right: This wine seal suggests ownership by Hester Pitt Bridger, wife of Joseph Bridger. In the 17th century, it was extraordinarily rare for a woman to have her own wine seal.*

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## THE BRIDGER FAMILY ASSOCIATION

Formed in 2007, The Bridger Family Association was created by descendants of Joseph Bridger to honor their ancestor, said Jean Tomes, who has led the group since its formation.

Following Joseph Bridger's exhumation, the Bridger Family Associates, including Historic St. Luke's President-Elect William Hodsden, held a memorial service at Historic St. Luke's on the anniversary of their ancestor's 1686 death. The service included a reading from a 17th-century Bible that is now part of Historic St. Luke's collection. Over 230 Bridger descendants and guests gathered for the service, according to Tomes, both inside and outside the church.

Joseph Bridger's partial remains were reinterred at St. Luke's in 2014. Later that year, 79 Bridger Family Associates made a pilgrimage to Slimbridge, England, where Joseph Bridger was born and where his grandfather was vicar of the village church.

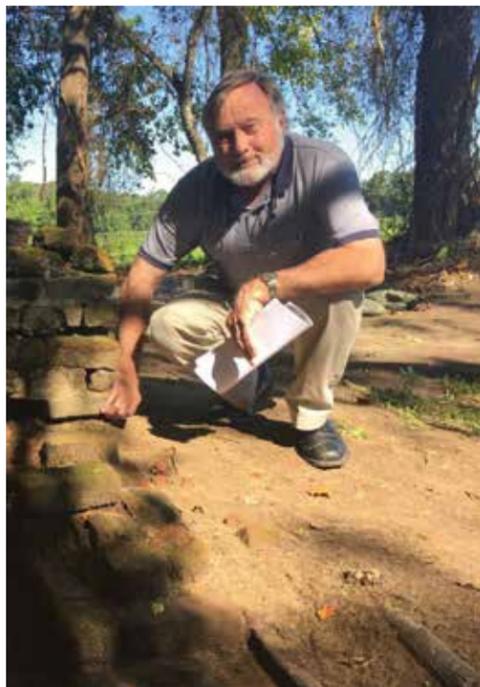


*Bridger Family Associates visiting Whitemarsh in May 2017.*

*Left to right:  
Ray Smith, Orlando, FL;  
Bridger Eglin, Baton Rouge, LA;  
Lynn Kirk Rose, Suffolk, VA;  
Dick Bridgers, York, SC;  
Jim Bridges, Austin, TX.*

*ACS Principal Archaeologist Alain C. Outlaw, former Commissioner of Archaeology for the Commonwealth of Virginia, is known for his expertise in the seventeenth century. Outlaw brings to the project over 46 years of professional experience as well as his 19 years with the History Department at Christopher Newport University, in Newport News, VA, where his archaeological laboratory is located.*

*In 2007, Outlaw directed the careful recovery of the partial Bridger remains in the chancel of Historic St. Luke's and their reburial in 2014 following their exhibition in "Written in Bone" at the Smithsonian Institution. In 2010, Outlaw conducted a detailed inventory survey of the archaeological resources at the Whitemarsh property and in 2011 found a cemetery there.*



*ACS Principal Archaeologist Alain Outlaw and the CNU Field School at Whitemarsh.*

# ST. LUKE'S TOWER SOCIETY

"Our goal is to build a core of generous supporters for annual operations so that this great American icon remains a vibrant learning center and community asset," said Tower Society Chair Dana Dickens. Historic St. Luke's Restoration has welcomed 30 Tower Society Charter Members, representing more than \$50,000 in leadership gifts to the 2017-2018 Historic St. Luke's Annual Fund.

## Tower Society Charter Members\*

### Old Brick Church

*(\$5,000 or more)*

Hon. and Mrs. Robert Edwards  
Howard W. and Katherine L. Gwaltney Foundation  
Ms. Barbara Lindley  
Mr. Ray Smith

### Chancel Circle

*(\$2,500 or more)*

Mr. and Mrs. Cecil W. Gwaltney, Jr.  
Mr. and Mrs. William T. Hodsden  
Mr. and Mrs. Dwight Schaubach  
Mr. and Mrs. Wayne Willis

### Newport Parish

*(\$1,000 or more)*

Anonymous  
Mr. Michael Bakwin  
Carolyn and Richard Barry  
Mr. and Mrs. Todd J. Ballance  
Mr. and Mrs. Charles Broadwater  
Andrea and Bobby Clontz  
Hon. and Mrs. Rodham T. Delk  
Mr. and Mrs. E. Dana Dickens III  
Episcopal Diocese of Southern Virginia  
Mr. and Mrs. James Everett III  
Ms. Priscilla Guthrie  
Mr. and Mrs. W. Atwill Gwaltney  
Mr. and Mrs. Richard J. Holland, Jr.  
Ms. Mary Jo Jordan and Dr. William Bandy  
Mr. and Mrs. Gerald E. LaBoone  
Mr. Joseph Luter IV  
Mr. and Mrs. Charles Modlin  
Mr. and Mrs. Charles S. Norwood, Jr.  
Mr. and Mrs. Charles B. Pond III  
Charles H. and Lynn K. Rose  
Mr. Gary and Dr. Gayle Terwilliger  
TowneBank

*\*As of 4/15/18*

*For more information on the Tower Society, contact  
Todd Ballance at 757-357-3367  
tballance@historicstlukes.org.  
To make a gift online, <http://historicstlukes.org/donate>.*

# CALENDAR OF UPCOMING EVENTS

## Book Launch and Signing: Hamilton: An American Biography

Saturday, April 21, 1 pm-2 pm

Biographer Tony Williams traces the events and values that enabled Alexander Hamilton, dispossessed orphan, to rise to Revolutionary War hero and Founding Father. Williams documents a life uniquely shaped by America and who, in turn, contributed to the creation of the American regime of liberty and self-government. Tickets are \$15 per person. Seating is limited, so advance purchase is recommended. Light refreshments will be provided.

## Cemetery Preservation Workshop

Saturday, April 28, 11 am-2 pm

Join us for these hands-on workshops where volunteers will learn techniques for cleaning historic gravestones based on industry best practices. Lunch and the necessary tools for the workshop will be provided. Spots are limited. Please email [rpopp@historicstlukes.org](mailto:rpopp@historicstlukes.org) to reserve your space. Note: The April 28 workshop has a waiting list.

## Cemetery Open House

Sunday, April 29, 2 pm-5 pm

Historic St. Luke's Restoration is hosting its first-ever Cemetery Open House for the general public to learn about the different options available for eternal resting places. Tour the Ancient Cemetery, Columbarium, Memorial Park, and historic church building. Contact Sales Manager Fred Hodges at [fhodges@historicstlukes.org](mailto:fhodges@historicstlukes.org)

## Jews in Colonial Virginia and Beyond

Sunday, May 6, 1 pm-2 pm

Historian Allison Gunn will discuss the earliest known Jewish presence in the Hampton Roads area and highlight Southern Jews in the American Colonial Period. Gunn will focus on Jewish migration to the New World and the economic and cultural factors that influenced their movements and shaped their experience. Tickets are \$15 per person. Seating is limited, so advance purchase is recommended. Light refreshments will be provided.

## Cemetery Preservation Workshop

Saturday, June 9, 11 am-2 pm

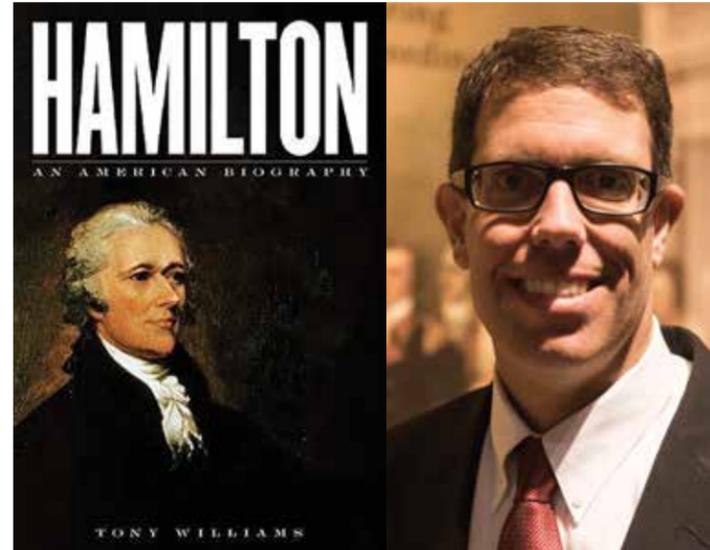
Join us for these hands-on workshops where volunteers will learn techniques for cleaning historic gravestones based on industry best practices. Lunch and the necessary tools for the workshop will be provided. Spots are limited. Please email [rpopp@historicstlukes.org](mailto:rpopp@historicstlukes.org) to reserve your space.

## Religion and the American Revolution

Saturday, June 30, 1 pm-2 pm

Public Historian John Ericson's presentation deals with the role of religion in the Revolution with a focus on how clergy entered into the political sphere, and how many patriots and loyalists interpreted the conflict through the lens of their religious faith. Tickets are \$15 per person. Seating is limited, so advance purchase is recommended. Light refreshments will be provided.

Contact Education Coordinator Rachel Popp at [rpopp@historicstlukes.org](mailto:rpopp@historicstlukes.org) with questions regarding events. Tickets to the events are available on the website at [www.historicstlukes.org](http://www.historicstlukes.org).





# THE PERFECT HISTORIC WEDDING

Historic St. Luke's Church has been the perfect intimate wedding venue since the 17th century. Historic St. Luke's welcomes all denominations and ceremonies and is available for rentals seven days a week.

For information about weddings and special events at Historic St. Luke's, contact Sales Manager Fred Hodges at 757-357-3367. [fhodges@historicstlukes.org](mailto:fhodges@historicstlukes.org)



## VIRGINIA'S OLDEST OPEN CEMETERY

Nestled on the edge of beautiful Isle of Wight County, Historic St. Luke's is Virginia's oldest open cemetery.

The sacred grounds, dominated by the Old Brick Church, capture the peace and calm of colonial gardens rich with nostalgia. Memorials and markers commemorate the legacies of centuries of Virginians who lie in a place of historic significance.

Historic St. Luke's Restoration will host its first-ever Cemetery Open House on April 29, 2018, between 2 pm and 5 pm for the general public to learn about the different options available for eternal resting places.

For information about cemeteries and burials at Historic St. Luke's, contact Sales Manager Fred Hodges at 757-357-3367. [fhodges@historicstlukes.org](mailto:fhodges@historicstlukes.org)

*Historic*  
**ST. LUKE'S CHURCH**  
14477 Benn's Church Blvd. Smithfield, VA 23430 757-357-3367 [www.historicstlukes.org](http://www.historicstlukes.org)

**CEMETERY OPEN HOUSE**  
*Become Part of History*

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*Sunday, April 29th*  
**2 p.m. - 5 p.m.**

*Free and open to the public. Enjoy light refreshments as we tell you more about the different options available for eternal resting places here at Historic St. Luke's. Tour our Ancient Cemetery, Columbarium, St. Luke's Memorial Park, and historic church building. Become part of our history by joining the Historic St. Luke's Family.*

# TODD TALK



In our last newsletter, I wrote that “Historic St. Luke’s Church is an ancient edifice with contemporary relevance.” Is that true? Our staff, volunteers, and Board certainly believe so. But how?

Its relevance resides in the stories of our shared past which bring us together and enrich our lives. Our stage for these stories happens to be Virginia’s Oldest Brick Church.

Our story began with America’s origins. Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries in Anglo-America there were episodes of discontent with the established church. These “dissenters” set the stage for what would become part of our national identity. To rebel and question authority

is to be American. The evolution to become modern Americans (which continues) is a fascinating and vital part of American discourse.

This country is great. Our history is complicated. We enjoy celebrating the lives of the Americans who preserved this national symbol of religious freedom and why it remains important to scores of folks.

In the upcoming months, stay tuned for more stories of why this place matters so much to so many people. We are exploring and gathering these stories. If you have photos and stories to share with us, please contact us. We would love to feature your stories on our tours, exhibits, or perhaps even film your story for our YouTube Channel. We have a lot in store for 2018, and we look forward to welcoming your return visit.

*Todd Ballance, Historic St. Luke’s Restoration’s Executive Director, welcomes conversations about Historic St. Luke’s past, present, and future. He can be reached at 757-357-3367. [tballance@historicstlukes.org](mailto:tballance@historicstlukes.org)*

## EMBRACING ST. LUKE’S CORPORATE HISTORY

Haylee Lewis, an intern at Historic St. Luke’s, is a senior at Christopher Newport University where she is a Classical Studies major with a double minor in History and Leadership Studies.

Haylee’s primary focus at Historic St. Luke’s is archiving the organization’s corporate records from the 1950s through 1970s that were saved from a 2005 fire. Her enthusiasm has inspired her to conduct further research into the church’s 1950s renovation and restoration.

Haylee also serves as Assistant Events and Conferences Coordinator at CNU and is a dedicated brother of Alpha Phi Omega.



## A NEW DAY

Historic St. Luke’s board members, donors, and staff members gathered in March 2018 at the Chrysler Museum of Art in Norfolk to hear Museum Conservator Mark Lewis talk about Historic St. Luke’s Henry Mason Day portrait, currently being restored and conserved by Mr. Lewis.

Henry Mason Day served as Historic St. Luke’s Restoration’s first president and chaired the 1950s campaign that restored the church building and created a fund for its ongoing preservation and maintenance.

Restoration and conservation of the Day portrait has been made possible by a generous grant from the Nancy Sayles Day Foundation.



# A Note From The Past

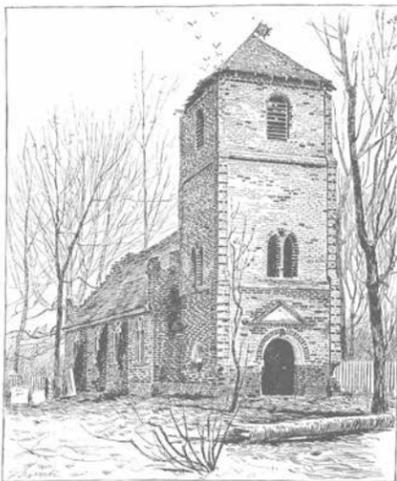
In 1954, members of the Historic St. Luke's Restoration committee appeared on the television show "Strike It Rich" to appeal to a wide audience for donations. In response, Historic St. Luke's received letters like this one from Mary Hunter, with 10 cents taped to her letter.

**"I'm sending 10 cents to help repair the church. My name is Mary Brinn Hunter. I am 9 years old. I live at 325 Charles St., Henderson, N.C. I go to The Church of The Holy Innocents, Henderson, N.C. I heard about the church on the T.V."**



## Historic ST LUKE'S *Virginia's Oldest Church*

14477 Benn's Church Boulevard  
Smithfield, VA 23430



ST. LUKE'S CHURCH, NEAR SMITHFIELD, VA.

*Built in the 17th century and once known as "Old Brick Church," Historic St. Luke's is characterized as representative of Artisan Mannerism, blending many influences into a builder-focused rather than an architect-focused structure.*

Visit us Monday through Saturday, 9:30 am to 5 pm, and Sunday, 1 pm to 5 pm, between February 1 and December 31. Learn more at [www.historicstlukes.org](http://www.historicstlukes.org), email us at [contact@historicstlukes.org](mailto:contact@historicstlukes.org), or call 757-357-3367.

## It Takes a Village...

We are happy to shine a spotlight on four volunteers whose gifts of time and energy contribute generously to Historic St. Luke's preservation and education mission.

**Ray Blaum** is undertaking an inventory of all gravesites in the Memorial Park Cemetery. He has logged over 1,000 volunteer hours in the last year, verifying ownership and digitizing information on approximately 6,000 lots, burial sites, and headstones. It will take at least another year of concentrated effort to complete the project. "It's a labor of love," he said.

**Betty Delk** is exploring Historic St. Luke's wedding records to document the history of marriages at Virginia's Oldest Church. Her husband's parents, Rodham and Evelyn Campbell Delk, were married at the church in 1943 and renewed their vows there in 1983. "Because of its history and spirit," said Betty, "I can't imagine a more special setting for a wedding."

**Priscilla Guthrie** is Historic St. Luke's volunteer researcher. Before the days of computerized records, 20th-century life was documented on onion-skin carbon copies. According to Priscilla, it's something of a treasure hunt, but the discovery of a heart-warming note enclosing \$2 for the church's restoration "truly makes the hours of reading and documenting well worthwhile and sends me home with a smile."

**Barbara Lindley** became involved with Historic St. Luke's when her daughter was married there in 2000. She soon became a volunteer at events. Barbara helps to decorate the church on holidays and supports projects for which she sees a need, like new doors to the Gift Shop and new signage. "I volunteer to make a difference," she said. "I do it from the heart."

