

History of the Historic Staunton River Foundation's Friendship Garden

In December 2005, the Foundation received a most unexpected gift from Mr. Carson L. Jones, Jr. and Virginia Jones Lieberman: three Lots of property in Downtown Randolph. The Deed of Gift included Lots 68, 70, Block 5, and Lot 69. This Triangular land was perfectly situated at the intersection of Mulberry Hill Road, Roanoke Station Road, and River Road; all of which convene in downtown. From 2005, the Foundation began plans for a way to beautify the area and promote its mission. The next year, Mr. David W. Newcombe coordinated a donation of a period Southern Railway Pushcart from the Piedmont Division of Norfolk Southern Railway (Greensboro, North Carolina) and he personally restored it and proudly installed it to several railroad ties embedded into the ground of the Foundation's new property.

In 2013, three flag poles were donated to the Foundation by Mr. Walter "Tee" Welch and Mrs. Lucille Welch. A Flag Raising Ceremony and Dedication was planned for the 2014 Annual Meeting. Mr. "Tee" Welch and Mr. David W. Newcombe met at the property, dug three large holes, poured concrete, and set the three donated poles into the Foundation's ground. In September 2014, a large crowd of over 60 Foundation volunteers, trustees, and supporters assembled to commemorate the raising of the United States Flag, the Commonwealth of Virginia Flag, and the Confederate Flag. The Pledge of Allegiance, the Salute to the Virginia and Confederate Flags were recited, along with the unified singing of the National Anthem, Carry Me Back to Ole Virginny, and Dixie.

Plans to expand the Foundation Triangular Track of land continued to grow. Several plants, bulbs, and flowering shrubs were planted to adorn the property. In the Spring of 2018, Mrs. Susan Pennington, Vice-President, donated a variety of blooming bulbs such as crocus. During the 2018 Annual Meeting, Mr. Alex Johnson, Past-President presided over the Christening of a "Memorial Garden" amongst the flag poles and the Southern Railway Pushcart. Two Mulberry Trees were planted in honor of Mulberry Hill and two Dogwood trees (the State tree and flower of the Commonwealth). In 2019, the idea of honoring volunteers, past presidents, donors, and memorializing family, friends, and ancestors culminated together with the thought of creating a terrace at the base of the flag poles with engraved bricks. The name

Friendship Garden was born, and Mr. Jason Holcomb of Chattanooga Monument Company in Tennessee was commissioned to engrave a piece of Georgia granite to honor the new namesake. Ms. Janet Johnson, Past-President researched and found Polar Engraving, US-based brick engraving company specializing in fundraising for nonprofits and churches. The idea continued to grow with plans to promote and sell personalized bricks to the public and to unveil the Brick Terrace during the 2020 Annual Meeting.

However, that was not the case, the Corona Virus Pandemic created major setbacks for the Foundation. The cancellation of major events damaged attendance and decreased operating funds. Together, Mr. J. Shane Newcombe, Past-President and Past-President Johnson created a way to promote and sell the engraved bricks to the public using the Foundation's website and online store. A major email and marketing campaign was launched with a goal of selling 64 engraved bricks in honor of and in commemoration of the year of the Battle of Staunton River Bridge, 1864. By the Summer of 2020 a brick order was compiled and sent off to the engravers. Throughout the Fall, Past-President Johnson received several pallets of engraved bricks at her home. The plan to unveil the bricks at the 2020 Annual Meeting was again cancelled due to the pandemic. The Board continued to promote the sale of bricks and by December 2020 more than 64 bricks had been sold and the goal had been achieved.

By May of 2021, 82 had been purchased by individuals and families to memorialize ancestors that fought at the Bridge or loved one, to honor birthdays and anniversaries, and to commemorate events and life achievements. In the Summer of 2021, additional trees and mulch were donated by Mr. Stanley Foster, Trustee and Mrs. Darlene Foster, President added to the Friendship Garden along with a picnic table, assembled by the Halifax County Public Schools Shop Class under the instruction of Mr. Warren Penick. An outdoor bench was also added as memoriam to longtime Foundation friend and supporter Mr. Dorval Price of Greensburg, Kentucky. For the 2021 Annual Meeting, an Unveiling and Dedication Ceremony will be held on September 11.