

Bethesda Meeting House Newsletter

July 2025



It's summertime at the Bethesda Meeting House site where activity here has been heating up. Find a spot in the shade and let's look at what's been happening lately at the "church that named Bethesda."

First though, you have a treat waiting for you if you haven't seen our 3-minute video celebrating our first year at the Meeting House, featuring visitors and volunteers from all over the Bethesda community. This tribute was put together by Lisa Kaufman, daughter of Bethesda Historical Society president Wendy Kaufman (that's Wendy above painting the Meeting House sign).



Remember that at the start of this video, when Meeting House Foundation President Hank Levine opens the door of the church in December 2023, this was the first time any of us saw its interior. We didn't have access to the building until after completion of the sale. The inside of the adjoining parsonage was in pretty rough shape, so we were bracing for the same with the church.

Spoiler alert! If you have visited the site, you know that the church interior is beautiful, well preserved and a real gem.

[Link to the video here](#). Note that it has a musical soundtrack, so you may want to turn the volume down if you're in the library.



Also, watch in the video for our special visitor, Connie Morella, shown here with local developer and long-time Meeting House volunteer Bob Eisinger. Morella, like hundreds, if not thousands, of local residents, had driven by the church many times over the years without ever visiting the site. This was her first time! For those new to Bethesda, Connie was Bethesda's moderate Republican Congresswoman in the 1980s.

May 31st was our most exciting day at the Meeting House site!

We hosted our first event, a private memorial service for a nearby Bethesda family. This day provided a tantalizing glimpse into what the Meeting House site might eventually become: a special place of beauty, serenity, and history where Bethesda residents can gather to observe and celebrate important moments in their lives and in the life of their community.

Larry Curran and Judy Kay Woods-Curran were married in the Bethesda Meeting House in 1994 when the Church was also a venue for weddings. Sadly, Judy passed away recently at age 78. When Larry discovered that we're working to restore the church, he asked if his family could hold their memorial for Judy where they were married. He didn't know how many people would come, but it could be a lot, he cautioned.





Of course, we said yes. Our Buildings and Grounds volunteer chief, Dave Chase, along with volunteers Tyler and Christina (more about these two later) and others swept, vacuumed, cleaned, and polished the church interior to get the place ready.

On the day of the event, a thunderstorm cleared the area just in time for the arrival of about one hundred guests! Many more than expected, but we managed to park 36 cars onsite. Every pew was filled, the church's re-tuned piano helped provide music, and the event was live-streamed on Facebook from the church balcony.

Larry wrote us later that “having friends, family, and neighbors come together to celebrate Judy’s life in such a familiar and intimate setting, where Judy and I began our lives together 31 years ago, brought a profound sense of peace and comfort to all of us. The warmth of the Bethesda Meeting House, its historic charm and the kindness of everyone present helped honor Judy’s memory in the most beautiful way.”

What a wonderful place the Meeting House could become for the community!

So, what is the future of the Meeting House?

Honestly, we don’t know yet, so we’re open to ideas. This April, three of us on the Foundation’s board updated the business community at the Greater Bethesda Chamber of Commerce on the status of the site and solicited their ideas about how best to maintain the property as a community asset.



If you would like to weigh in on the future of the Bethesda Meeting House, email us at BethesdaHistory@gmail.com

On with the work

Meanwhile, we're proceeding with the long (and expensive) work of saving, stabilizing, and restoring the two buildings.



For perspective, consider that about 40 years ago William Adams (left), the pastor of the Baptist Church that occupied the site for its last 70 years, tried to raise \$535,000 (that's \$1.3 million in today's money) to pay for a long list of needed repairs and maintenance.

The appeal failed. His notoriety as an outspoken opponent of racial diversity in the County probably didn't help. Instead, we've inherited generations of neglect. Sigh.

With support from our local legislators Marc Korman, Sarah Wolek, and Sara Love, the State of Maryland awarded us a grant of \$150,000. Much of that paid for an expensive but necessary Historic Structure Report (HSR), a detailed record and analysis of an historic property that helps ensure its preservation or appropriate use by detailing its history, condition, and significance. It's usually required by government agencies that oversee the preservation of historic buildings.

We received this report finally in May after a long delay. "The good news is that the buildings, particularly the Meeting House, are structurally sound and in relatively good shape," says Hank Levine. The craftsmen who built this church 175 years ago were very skilled.

"The less good news is that the work required to restore them and make them usable is going to be both time-consuming and very expensive. We've made a start and the HSR is an important step in figuring out what to do."

Also in May, Montgomery County awarded us a \$112,000 two-year grant. For the best ways to use these funds, we're discussing a possible partnership with Preservation Maryland, a leading nonprofit organization that helps communities throughout the state preserve historical properties.

Update on repairs

If you've visited the church, you've seen its beautiful Sandwich glass windows which date back to the mid-19th century. Unfortunately, some were in danger of crumbling. Through the generosity of local benefactor Knight Kiplinger, emergency repair and restoration of three of these windows is underway. He's also now agreed to underwrite needed work on three more of these windows. Many thanks, Knight!

And the decaying bay window at the back of the parsonage, which was letting water leak into the building, has now been rebuilt, making the parsonage with its new roof and repaired chimneys finally water-tight.

Volunteer Spotlight



Volunteers have been instrumental in the revitalization of the Meeting House site ever since we took over ownership. Among the youngest and most energetic are Tyler and Christina, a North Bethesda couple who first visited the Bethesda Meeting House on a whim during an open house day.

“We love the idea of restoring the Meeting House and cemetery to its former glory,” they say. Tyler is a film editor for HBO and Christina works for the cloud computing company Cloudforce at National Harbor.

The couple have been helping us clean the church property and adjacent cemetery, they direct new volunteers, such as the Eagle Scouts who come to pitch in, and they’re a regular part of our efforts to restore monuments in the cemetery. The two were a big help at the May memorial service, directing traffic and assisting many of the guests. Thank you, Christina and Tyler!

Join us

Every second Sunday of each month is open house at the Meeting House site. Come walk the property, tour the buildings, and if you’re game, bring your garden gloves and tools to help us with landscaping. Maybe you’ll fall in love with the site like Tyler and Christina did!

And if you have memories and photographs of the Meeting House, please share them with us! And share this newsletter with others who might be interested. Past newsletters [can be found here](#).

If you’re not on our mailing list, send us a note at BethesdaHistory@gmail.com

Donations are welcome at: bethesdahistoricalsociety.org/donate-page/

The Bethesda Historical Society, a 501(c)(3) organization started in 2019, formed the Bethesda Meeting House Foundation, also a 501(c)(3), to assume ownership of the Bethesda Meeting House. The Bethesda Historical Society’s website and this newsletter are edited by the Society’s and the Foundation’s Vice President, David Schardt.