

# Bacon Race was first Baptist church in county, residents learn at history talk

By ROSE MURPHY  
Observer staff

Bacon Race Church on Davis Ford Road dates from 1774 and was the first Baptist Church in Prince William County, Darlene Hunter told her audience of about

35 people May 10 in McCoart Government Center. She is a certified genealogist who specializes in Northern Virginia and Prince William County. Historic Prince William sponsored her talk.

Over the years, three

churches occupied the site: Occoquan Meeting House, Bacon Race Church and Oak Grove Church. Elder David Thomas led the first church. The churches were Old School or Primitive Baptist congregations.

Dates for the second church are uncertain. The third church, built about 1836, collapsed from a snowstorm on Christmas Eve, 1987.

"This was a sad end to 200 years of history," Hunter asserted.

Elder William M. Smoot led the last church. Smoot, known as an authoritarian leader, died without children in 1938, and is buried in the church cemetery.

Hunter explained Smoot advised that no one should preach in his church until he came back. She noted the church stopped with his death and had no minister after 1940.

The speaker said that Bacon Race Cemetery is "serene and well-kept" and a "fitting memorial to more than 200 years."

One audience member reported his grandmother had told him Smoot was "fire and brimstone" and "ornery." He said his great-grandfather and grandfather are buried there and that he hopes to be buried there, also.

Bacon Race Church was used as a hospital and storehouse by Confederate forces

led by Col. Wade Hampton in 1861-1862. He called the site Camp Griffin. During the Civil War, times were hard for the church, with both Union and Confederate forces marching past.

Bill Olson, head of Historic Prince William, said May 14 there are Confederate veterans buried in the church's cemetery, but that his is not sure if they were part of Mosby's Rangers. He added, "Mosby's Rangers were not regular army. They were free-lancers and took targets of opportunity. They were very successful," he opined.

Olson said he, too, hopes to be buried in Bacon Race Cemetery. He added

William Fairfax donated the original four acres for the church.

## Cemetery marker ceremony June 9

On June 9, the William Grayson Chapter, Sons of the American Revolution, will put a bronze marker for William Fairfax who donated the original four acres for the church at 2 p.m. in ceremonies at the cemetery.

Chapter members will be dressed in period costumes, and a bugler from the Third Army Band, the President's own, will take part.



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