

Perseverance, luck pay off in Haymarket

By KARI PUGH
 Manassas Bureau

HAYMARKET — Things just seem to work out for Sarah Turner and her newly formed town historical commission.

When she created the committee in June, Turner wrote to the British Embassy in search of documents, histories, names of descendants or, at the very least, a portrait of the tavern owner who created the small, western Prince William town in the 1700s.

The British Embassy wrote back,

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**Sarah Turner
 historic commission**

saying it could not help her.

Then, Town Clerk Dorothy Keller said she knew a woman who might have a portrait of William Skinker, the man who owned Red House tavern at

the crossroads of two major central Virginia thoroughfares, which happened to meet where Haymarket now stands.

"It's so funny how things are sort of working out for us," Turner said.

Turner said she called the woman with the portrait, went to her house immediately after the call and bought the painting.

"It is beautiful," she said. "He was a very handsome man."

Turner then remembered that when she was young, she knew a Skinker

who lived in The Plains.

She began asking around about him, if he was still alive, but no one knew of him, she said.

One afternoon Turner was talking to an insurance salesman about insuring the painting of Skinker. She asked if he knew of any descendants. The man told her that someone named William Skinker worked at a bank in Warrenton.

Turner contacted him and he turned out to be a direct descendant of the town's founder, she said.

Skinker rode in Saturday's Haymarket Day parade down Washington Street.

The original Skinker laid out a plan for Haymarket that included 140 lots on 13 streets. Things haven't changed much since then.

Prior to the town's incorporation, Skinker's tavern was a stopover for travelers heading across central Virginia and old Carolina Road.

The historical commission, created to preserve the historical integrity of the town, now has its own office in the Town Hall, dark blue coffee cups with the commission's name printed in white lettering and a focus.

Looking into the future, the commission has planned a museum and archives, as well as a Valentine's Day Dance and other old-fashioned activities.

"The dance will be for old times sake," Turner said. "All the old people will hobble out for it."

The museum, for which the town has picked a site it refuses to reveal, will contain the portrait of Skinker, as well as items from Turner's collection and other town residents' memorabilia.

Some of the responsibilities of the committee will be to verify historical dates and facts.

Famous Virginians Thomas Jefferson and George Washington visited the town. Jefferson, who is credited with naming Skinker's tavern "Red House," said the town was so well designed, it would never need to be planned again, Turner said.



Potomac News file photo

Haymarket Historical Commission Chairwoman Sarah Turner stands in front of the Haymarket Town Hall.