



Bob Bluford, left, traces the history of the Historic Polegreen Church Foundation as Foundation Treasurer Dave Fuller looks on.



Visitors to Historic Polegreen Church walk the timeline of religious liberty, which begins in the early years of Christianity. (H-P photos by Greg Glassner)

Polegreen Church dedicates walk, marker

By GREG GLASSNER
H-P Editor

From the discovery of its foundation by archaeologists, the site of historic Polegreen Church has come a long way toward becoming the focal point in the history of religious liberty in Virginia.

Last Saturday, a historic highway marker was unveiled and a ribbon was cut, opening up the site's historical timeline, a walk of religious freedom.

Historic Polegreen Church Foundation President Bob Bluford, who began the quest more than two decades ago, said there have been several instances in the past 18 years when "information came to the surface at just the right time."

One example he gave was a set of 1862 drawings of the original Polegreen Church that were discovered in 1978 by descendants of a U.S. Army Engineer, Lt. Thomas Ferrell, who was sent to map parts of Hanover County by Union Gen. George McClellan.

"Ferrell was a good engineer and a good artist," Bluford noted.

Three sketches of the church before it burned to the ground during a later Civil War battle were in Ferrell's papers, but the sketches did not indicate where it was located.

In 1991, a descendant of Ferrell living in Virginia Beach read a story about Bluford and the Polegreen Church Foundation and contacted him.

The sketches are the basis of the unique structural steel monument to the church that is familiar to those passing the site off Rural Point Road.

Visitors will now share in an even more meaningful experience by taking a walk through the history of religious liberty in Western

civilization. Stones placed along the brick walkway are etched with significant dates, starting with the Roman Emperor Constantine and ending with the Virginia Bill of Rights in 1786.

The Hanover Presbytery, which was founded at Polegreen Church in 1755 and the Rev. Samuel Davies, who a young Patrick Henry heard preaching there, were significant, not only for their opposition to the official state religion, the Church of England, but for their influence on the American Revolution.

"Nobody had ever kicked the Church out of the Government before," noted Dr. Brent Tarter of the Library of Virginia. "In Virginia, they severed the relationship between the government and the church to make the way for religious freedom.

"The struggle for religious liberty in Virginia was simultaneous with the struggle for independence. If either of them had failed, the other would not have succeeded.

"The timeline charts the ups and downs in the struggle for religious liberty in Western Civilization. The timeline is the footnote to Polegreen Church.

"Polegreen is a very special place," Tarter said.

To date, the Historic Polegreen

Foundation has preserved 110 acres of land around the historic site.

Del. Chris Peace (R-Mechanicville) serves as Executive Director of the foundation.

More information can be found at www.historicpolegreen.com



Bluford and others cut the ribbon, opening the Timeline of the History of Religious Freedom, a significant addition to the Polegreen experience.

1858-2008

Town of Ashland

150 Years