



Unison Preservation Society NEWSLETTER

Working to Protect and Preserve our Historic Countryside

Photo by Dara Bailey

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• SPRING •

UNISON, VIRGINIA

Next is the series of Unison artists: Hopkins brings Unison Alive in Imagined Landscapes

By Tara Connell

Laura Hopkins is a Unison Artist... and never has that description been more accurate. She built a house in Unison, began painting here, and does landscapes here.

But to say Laura Hopkins is merely a Unison Artist—that is, an artist of this place and time—may be entirely missing the point of Laura Hopkins and her art.

Laura is a dervish of energy, creativity, skill, intelligence, observation and imagination that is sweeping around, over and through Unison and making this place something altogether new and different in her art. Her Unison is reinvented in paintings through a remarkably calm, emotional, atmospheric style of landscape art called **Tonalism**.

It is her passion and obsession. And it began almost casually with an invitation to a still life class at the Unison store in September, 2014.

Laura's friend Maria Eldridge (of Unison) made the invitation and supplied some equipment, and the teacher, Becky Parrish, helped by drawing outlines of the still life for Laura to fill in with oil paint.

"I really took to it," Laura said in something of an understatement. People were surprised she had never painted before,

she said. The dive she took was deep because she really needed it.

"My youngest son was a senior in high school and (Laura's husband) Tom's sister Patty was very ill. Two very important people in my life I was used to taking care

of were not going to be around for me to take care of, so painting was a life saver for me," Laura said. "It was a good distraction."

That distraction nearly seven years later has resulted in prize-winning art, invitations to the best local shows and galleries, and places of honor for her art on walls all around Unison. She's become a recognized landscape artist with a famous mentor and a dedicated following.

Hard to believe—unless you know Laura and how she "goes hard"—as she describes it—at things she loves.



Laura Hopkins creates beautiful landscape paintings in her Unison home studio. *Photo by Tara Connell*

Laura Hopkins grew up loving horses in Connecticut. She studied animal science at the University of Connecticut, but left it all behind when she met Tom, who was in the Army ROTC program. She just shrugs and laughs at herself: When he went on active duty as a first lieutenant in the Army Signal Corps: “I embraced the whole Army lifestyle.”

During his 24-year stint, they mostly moved back and forth between North Carolina and Virginia. While Tom was jumping out of airplanes, Laura raised three kids and got a Master’s degree in technical communications, eventually working from home as a contractor in software development.

Not seeing the artist? Well, at least you can see the “going hard” at things. The enormous energy she applies now to her art had been used before, for school, family, work. *Continued on page 4.*

Unison Updates

Solar Arrays: A Hot Topic

A very large solar farm could be coming to a field near you, and right now there is no county policy to stop it or regulate it. That reality became apparent recently when Unison resident Mitch Diamond received a “generous offer” to put one on his Unison farm. His offer precipitated a study of the issue at the Loudoun County Preservation and Conservation Coalition and a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors that they ban the arrays until an official policy is formulated and written into the Zoning Ordinance. The BOS debated the issue April 20 and asked staff to come up with a policy. As Mitch said: “If we want them, they should be sited where they can do good without causing harm—like on marginal soils, on commercial rooftops, over parking areas and on brownfields.” By the way, Mitch said no to the offer.

St. Louis’ MOJAX Development

Developer Jack Andrews’s bulldozers were back in St. Louis after the Board of Supervisors last month dropped its \$2.7 million offer to buy his land and give him property in Aldie to develop. The Aldie property also is back on the market. Board Chair Phyllis Randall then met with St. Louis residents to vow that Andrews will have to strictly meet all criteria in his permit requests as his 30-home MOJAX development moves forward. She also backed an effort to revise the zoning in St. Louis to restrict multi-home developments. In question: Will that be too late to stop MOJAX. Meanwhile, the St. Louis citizen’s group continues its lawsuit against what it calls lax enforcement by the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality at the MOJAX site.

Rescuing a House Finch

By Howard Lewis

The last UPS newsletter included a story about the growing incidences of all sorts of diseases being found in wild birds and the importance of cleaning bird feeders to help combat this problem. One of the most common of the diseases being found, especially in House Finch, was an eye disease called *Mycoplasmal conjunctivitis*.

On the week that the last newsletter was arriving in mailboxes around the Unison neighborhood, my wife found a female House Finch sitting on the gravel path to one of our horse pastures. The bird could hardly fly and sat on the ground moving its head back and forth as if it were trying to orient itself and figure out what on earth was going on.

Looking at the bird closely, it was obvious the one of its eyes was crusted over and infected. It was late in the afternoon, but we call up the Blue Ridge Wildlife Center (BWRC) in Boyce and they told us to bring the bird over right away, which we did.

Long story short, BWRC treated the House Finch, kept it for 21 days to make sure the infection was gone and then released it back on our farm. The accompanying pictures tell the story. They aren’t stock photos. These are photos of the actual bird we found and released.

Some readers may be asking: All this for a single House Finch? That’s a question I asked myself, especially since House Finches, while native birds, are native to the western parts of the US and not to our area where, to some extent, they are competing with native Purple Finches.

Basically we had three options that afternoon when we found the bird:

- Let nature take its course and leave the bird where we found it. This would have been the worst option because it would have left a diseased bird in place that could have infected others in the area.
- Kill the bird and put it out of its misery. Many wildlife rescues would have euthanized the bird because of the long period of time required to decrease the chances of becoming a carrier. I didn’t feel like killing a bird that afternoon so we went with option #3.
- Drive 20-minutes to the BRWC. The next day after we had dropped the bird off, the BRWC’s veterinarian, Dr. Jenifer Riley, explained the protocol they followed to make sure the bird was safe to release back into the wild. The bird’s eye had cleared up within days of being treated but it still remained at the BRWC for three weeks.

A recent email from the Cornell University’s Project FeederWatch highlighted research work being done on the eye disease that our bird had. Essentially, House Finch, which saw a drastic population drop when the disease first hit, are in a something of an arms race. Research suggests that their immune systems have evolved defenses to the disease only to have the disease mutate to evade these defenses. Right now, there apparently is a standoff in this arms race, which may account for why the House Finch population has stabilized recently.

So, there’s a healthy female House Finch flying around someplace on our farm who almost certainly is blissfully unaware that she’s part of a larger struggle between immunity and disease. ■



From left to right: This picture taken at BRWC when House Finch arrived shows seriously infected eye; After a few days of treatment the patient’s eye is clearly getting better, which happens in about 90% of the cases such as this one; In a happy ending, the House Finch is released back where it was found—standard practice for this type of rescue work. Photos by Dr. Jen Riley, Blue Ridge Wildlife Center

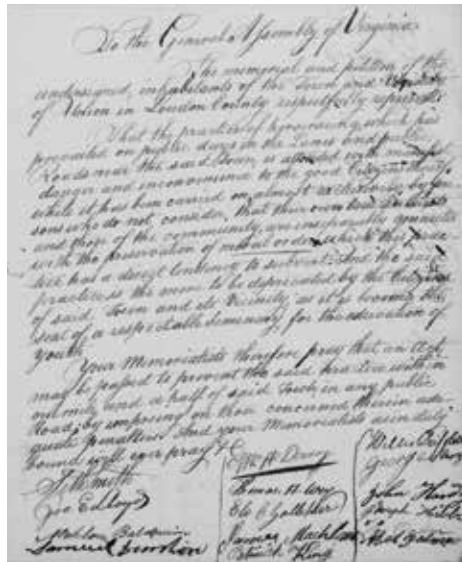
Virginia General Assembly Squelches Effort to Ban Horse Racing in Unison

By Howard Lewis

The Virginia General Assembly did indeed squelch an effort to ban horse racing in Unison...204 years ago in 1817. Twenty-nine residents of the village signed a petition asking the General Assembly to ban horse racing on “public days” within a mile and a half of the village. The General Assembly turned the petition down. Why is not known. A copy of the handwritten petition (right) along with a “translation” of the somewhat illegible handwriting (below). In terms of Unison’s history, several things of interest jump out from the document.

First, while citing the “manifest danger and inconvenience” of horse racing in the village, the petitioners clearly felt that more was at stake here—namely, the “moral order” of the village. The phrase is actually underlined in the petition. Reading between the lines, this concern for the village’s “moral order” was most likely coming from conservative Methodists who saw horse racing as one of the numerous vices of Unison’s Quakers (the other vices being gambling, drinking and cockfighting). See *The Rowdy Quakers of Unison* in the 2015 Spring/Summer UPS newsletter and *A Humble Petition to Establish Our Village* in the Fall 2018 UPS newsletter for more on this subject.

Second, the petition notes that horse



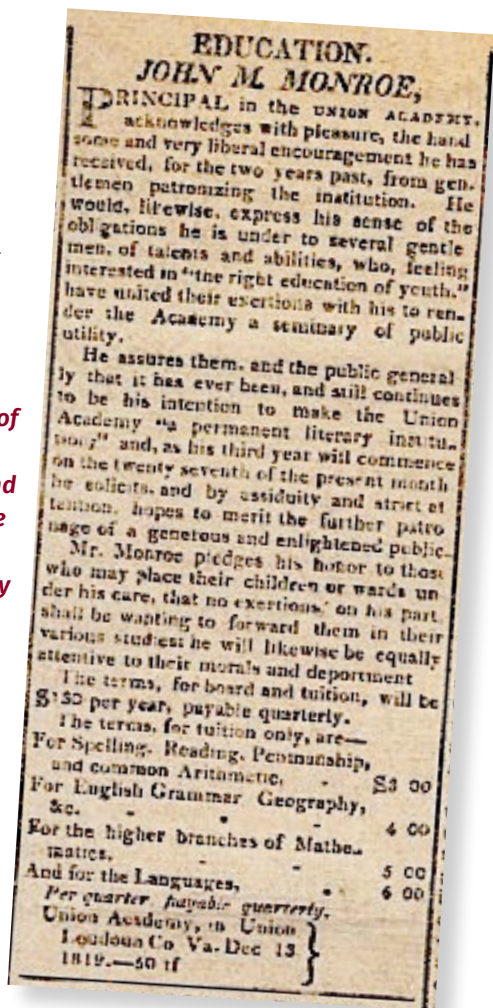
A larger copy of the petition is on display at the Unison Store Community Center.

racing “is the more to be deprecated by the Citizens of said town and its Vicinity, as it is become the seat of a respectable Seminary for the education of youth.” The “respectable Seminary” was founded in 1817 by John Monroe, who is probably the author of the petition since his signature on the document. Monroe was a cousin of President James Monroe. Two other signatories on the petition were Henry and Michael Plaster. Both the Monroe and Plaster families still live in this area.

A 1819 newspaper advertisement (below) provides a little more detail about the “respectable Seminary” known as the Union Academy.¹ In the advertisement, Monroe “pledges his honor to those who may place their children or wards under his care, that no exertions on his part shall be wanting to forward them in various studies; he will likewise be equally attentive to their morals and deportment.” Board and tuition were \$180 per year, but for tutoring only fees per quarter ranged from \$3 for spelling, reading, penmanship and common arithmetic to \$5 for higher branches of mathematics and \$6 for languages.

Not surprisingly, horse racing doesn’t seem to have been offered. ■

1. In 1829, the village name was changed from Unio to Unison because another Virginia village, named Unio, had claimed the name earlier and the US postal system required the name be changed and the village switched to Unison.



TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA

The memorial and petition of the undersigned inhabitants of the town and vicinity of Unio in Loudoun County respectfully represent:

That the practice of horseracing which has prevailed on public days in the Lanes and public Roads near the said town, is attended with manifest danger and inconvenience to the good Citizens thereof, while it has been carried out, almost exclusively, by persons who do not consider that their own true interests and those of the community are inseparably connected with the preservation of moral order which this practice has a direct tendency to subvert: And the said practice is the more to be deprecated by the Citizens of said town and its Vicinity, as it is become the seat of a respectable Seminary for the education of youth.

Your Memorialists therefore pray that an Act may be passed to prevent the said practice within one mile and a half of said Town, in any public Road, by imposing on those concerned therein adequate penalties.

And your Memorialists as in duty bound will ever pray

(Followed by 29 signatures of families in and around Unio (Unio))



Unison Preservation Society Newsletter

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How to Support the Unison Preservation Society (UPS):

UPS depends upon contributions from people living in our community who want to preserve our historic village and the countryside surrounding it. Since the UPS is a not-for-profit 501 (c) (3) corporation registered in Virginia, all contributions are tax deductible. Contributions should be made to the Unison Preservation Society and sent to the post office box listed above.

Ideas for Newsletter Articles:

We are particularly interested in gathering material about Unison for future UPS newsletters. If you have ideas for newsletter stories, please e-mail us at unisonpreservsoc@unisonva.org.



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Unison Artist continued

While she was running an army-life household on the move, raising kids and getting an advanced degree, she also was gardening and studying antique roses. That interest evolved into a Farm Market, vegetable-selling business as she and Tom moved to Unison and built their dream house on a hill outside the Village.

To the Farm Market business soon was added a baking business. She began delivering restaurant quality scones and other sweets to Common Grounds in Middleburg. Yes, those scones were hers.

“Gardening and baking,” Laura said, chuckling again. Interests that derived from the needs of hosting and entertaining as an Army spouse, had become full-time passions. “I get obsessed with doing things really well. If I’m going to do something, I go really hard. I find out as much as I can. I get a little obsessive about it.”

But the turn was coming and art class had arrived. After a year and a half of basics with Becky Parrish (“She would tell me just what I needed to know at just the right time.”), Laura got interested in landscapes and was drawn to Tonalism after she saw renowned landscape artist Dennis Sheehan do a demonstration on You Tube.

Now in “going hard” mode, she began traveling twice a month to New Hampshire to study with Sheehan, whom she calls a mentor and whose art has a prominent place on the “inspiration wall” in her third-floor studio.

Tonalism landscapes use muted, misty dark colors such as greens, purples, blues and grays to convey a sense of movement and emotion and “the mystery of place,” according to descriptions by the American Tonalist Society and Wikipedia. The art is described as the “elegiac poetry of landscape.”

The movement began in the late 1880s, died off with the rise of Impressionism, then revived in the 1970s and 1980s and is currently doing quite well. Laura noted the style seems to thrive during chaotic times, when people need solace. “They could look at these moving, emotional paintings and feel better.”

Laura’s art often rises from her imagination, mingled with actual locations around Unison or parts of New England, sometimes the coast of Connecticut. To the Tonalists classic earth tones, Laura adds russets and gold. “Most of my work is set in autumn, winter and early spring.”



A Country Day, Remembered won First Place in the recent Artists of Middleburg exhibit *Reset, Refresh, Restart*.

Photo by Tara Connell

“What I strive for is to give people, the viewers of the painting, their own place. You have to decide what you are seeing. My hope is that viewers have a feeling of recognition, a feeling of coming home.”

As she puts it, the landscape of Unison figures in everything she does, “but I don’t spell it out for them. I spend a lot of time softening, suggesting, even obliterating things to allow the viewer a chance to engage and find meaning in the painting.”

Even so, her current goal is to improve her drawing skills so she can better portray structures more accurately and quickly capture a scene on location: “Because these spaces are vanishing” as development comes to western Loudoun.

So, this person with all this passion and imagination and intelligence will keep “going hard” at this enterprise. There is an upcoming painting and drawing workshop in Connecticut in June, three local art shows in May, more classes (at least one for drawing) and time outside her studio just looking and sketching.

And, if you are in her house during the early evening when most of us are settling down and ending our day, stand back. You are likely to see Laura running from the east side of the house to the west, checking out the light in the fields around her house.

“The East side is often more interesting than the West,” she says. “I love twilight and autumn.” This is her passion, her obsession and her art. ■

In May alone, Laura Hopkins’ work has been featured in Art at the Mill, Art in the Burg and Art of the Piedmont. She also will be featured in the fall editions of Art in the Burg and Art in the Mill, and she plans to exhibit at the Waterford Fair and at Unison’s Heritage Day art show in November, which she has said yes to helping run.