

Site yields historical clues

The Elk Run Church excavation site in Fauquier County is the topic of a lecture at 3 p.m. Sunday, March 16, at the John Barton Payne Building, 2 Courthouse Square, Old Town Warrenton.

This is the third lecture in a year-long series on American history sponsored by the library and the newly formed Fauquier Heritage Institute. The lectures are free.

Col. Edward Dandar, chairman of the Elk Run Church Site Preservation Committee, and Dr. John Eddins, the project's archaeologist, will present the program.

Settlers first arrived in the Elk Run area around 1715. The site is significant because it was the first brick Anglican Church established in what was the county's frontier area in the early to mid-1700s. The Elk Run settlement and church served as a government administrative and jumping off point for the further expansion of what is now Fauquier County.

The first rector of the Elk Run church was the Rev. James Keith, a native of Scotland, who served there from the 1740s until 1751. Keith's grandson was Chief Justice John Marshall, whose birthplace is nearby.

The church began, as a wooden structure in the 1740s and was later rebuilt in brick with a 4-footwide stone foundation in the form of a Greek cross.

The church congregation declined after the Revolutionary War and was abandoned in the early 1800s and the building was abandoned. The site was overgrown until recently, and the church's foundation and artifacts were hidden from view for about 200 years. Archaeological excavations in 2000 confirmed the church's exact location, its Greek cross foundation structure and its approximate size.

Dandar has been the chairman of the Elk Run Church Site Preservation Committee since 1999. He is a retired colonel in the Active Army Reserve with 30 years service and is a veteran of the Vietnam War, Panama's Just Cause Operation, Desert Storm, and the 1991 Provide Comfort humanitarian operation in northern Iraq. He retired as a senior civilian military intelligence officer with nearly 40 years with the Department of Army.

Eddins is a program analyst in the Office of Federal Agency Programs at the Advisory Council

on Historic Preservation. He has served as an ACHP liaison to the U.S. Army at its environmental center, worked at the Carnegie Museum of Natural History in Pittsburgh, Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, and at several private consulting firms engaged in cultural resource management. He has conducted archaeological investigations at prehistoric sites and at rural, urban, military, and industrial historic sites.

Fauquier Heritage Institute was created to promote the study and love of American history. To that end, the institute is presenting lectures monthly throughout 2008.

The lectures will be presented by experienced speakers and historians and will include such topics as The French and Indian War, Project Apollo to the moon, the Revolutionary War, Warrenton's war-time hospital sites, slave records in Fauquier County, Kelly's Ford, and gold mining.

The Fauquier Heritage Institute encourages anyone who is interested in volunteering to contact Paula Johnson, (540) 341-7019, or Jackie Lee, (540) 347-0607.