

# of Preservation Historic Winchester, Inc.



Spring 2011

Taylor Hotel Edition

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## SPOT BLIGHT AND THE TAYLOR HOTEL: WHAT FATE AWAITS THE LANDMARK?

Since the catastrophic collapse in 2007, the Taylor Hotel has been the subject of the largest and most publicized spot blight abatement efforts since the program's inception in Winchester. Blighted properties are nothing new, but the Commonwealth of Virginia authorized spot blight abatement programs in 1994. These programs empower a locality to take a more proactive approach to dealing with problem properties.

A blight determination need not be a demolition sentence. Spot blight programs are flexible enough to accommodate and encourage rehabilitation instead of demolition. Richmond has used its program to encourage owners of dilapidated properties to sell the buildings to a developer for rehabilitation. Lynchburg, too, has concentrated its blight program into rehabilitation of older houses through Community Development Block Grants (CDBG).

To date, most cases of spot blight in Winchester have enjoyed high rates of owner compliance, resulting in rehabilitation. The Taylor Hotel has proven to be a different behemoth altogether due to the scale, financing, and concerns facing its historical importance of the project. There is no question that the property could or should remain indefinitely in its current state. The potential danger to citizens in the downtown is simply too great, and the perception of decay in the heart of the business district of Old Town dampens the appeal of the walking mall. The building must be dealt with, but the question remains: How?

The deadline for an owner-formulated plan of action is drawing to a close. Although plans had been formulated and approved by the BAR previously for the rehabilitation of the Taylor and its conversion to apartments and first floor retail space, the project stalled in fall of 2009. The reports of 2010 brought increasingly troublesome news of "no response" or "no plan" or "no funding" for the Taylor project. In April 2010, a glimmer of hope shone through when Brian Wishneff & Associates announced they would be investigating the Taylor's rehabilitation. The project appeared on the right track once more, until the spot blight deadline approached without a plan in place.

PHW has been in communication with city staff and leaders as well as Wishneff & Associates to explore options so that the core of the Taylor Hotel facing the Loudoun Street pedestrian mall survives the spot blight remediation. While Wishneff has been examining how to make the Taylor project feasible and the city appears willing to assist his rehabilitation efforts, no concrete plan has been formulated. If Wishneff cannot put for a feasible plan in the near future, it is almost certain the city will act to correct the blight.

Spot blight correction undertaken by the city up to this point has meant demolition of the building. Following the city's involvement with the Blind Faith building, another spot blight property, it appears Winchester is poised to try a new approach. The propitious news that CDBG funds could be used for the Taylor Hotel in conjunction with Wishneff's rehabilitation program was announced in mid-March 2011. The funds could be used to start the cleanup and stabilization process. Ominously, the complete demolition of the property could still occur. The use of CDBG funds does not guarantee the rehabilitation of the core of the Taylor Hotel.

It is time that we support the city's willingness to aid this project and prove the citizens of Winchester believe rehabilitation, not demolition, is the right course for the Taylor. Read on to find out why and how you should help. ♦

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## THE TAYLOR HOTEL: AT THE CROSSROADS OF PROSPERITY

BY KAREN CLAY

One of Winchester's most astute business men is known today by his most visible enterprise, the Taylor Hotel. Bushrod Taylor was focused on developing his own fortune and, as a consequence, spurred along the economic growth of the City of Winchester.

The site of the Taylor Hotel at 127 North Loudoun Street has been the location of a public house prior to the American Revolution. A log tavern built in 1755 was run by Major Edward McGuire. In 1830 Bushrod Taylor purchased the tavern/hotel along with the stables located behind the building on Braddock Street. Taylor maintained the thriving business until October 21, 1846 when a fire destroyed the log tavern. Taylor rebuilt the hotel into a grand three story structure with columned balconies on the second and third floors, noted by F. Morton as "90 by 130 feet, containing 70 rooms and does an immense business" (The Story of Winchester in Virginia, p.112).

Location was everything to the success of the Taylor Hotel. What was known as the road to Romney in the 1800s is now Amherst Street in Winchester. Amherst Street ended at Braddock Street, as it does today, but it then led to Taylor Lane where the hotel stables were located. When the travelers from western Virginia and beyond reached Winchester with their furs to trade, the road ended with the Taylor Hotel.

The prominent location of the Taylor Hotel on Loudoun Street, formerly Main Street, placed it within reach of travelers on the Valley Turnpike as well. On March 3, 1834, the Valley Turnpike Company was incorporated with Bushrod Taylor as its first president. Taylor's vested interest in the transportation routes through Winchester was closely tied to the success of his business. Under Taylor's leadership the Valley Pike reached Harrisonburg.

In 1921 the Taylor Hotel became a mixed use structure housing The Colonial Theater upstairs and McCrory's Five and Ten Cent Store at street level. After the theater closed in 1939, all seating was removed and the upstairs was used as storage for the McCrory's Store. McCrory's closed in 1993 followed by another dollar store and a call center until the early 2000s. In the fall of 2007, heavy rains caused portions of the roof to collapse into what once was the theater portion.

The Taylor Hotel's existence is not only significant to the historic district and the streetscape of downtown Winchester, but also is a tangible connection to one of the city's entrepreneurs and our history. Winchester faced a similar situation when the Kurtz Building was slated for demolition. Today the Kurtz contributes economically to the life of our city and visibly represents our history. The Taylor Hotel has the potential to do the same. ♦

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## THE HISTORY OF AN OLD BUILDING, REVISITED

Imagine this: a building in the heart of the historic district needs extensive rehabilitation. Although it is a prominent building with a rich and varied history, it is said to be architecturally drab and too hideous to be left in such a visible area. It would cost too much to repair it, and even if someone did, there would be no use for the building after its completion. Sound familiar? Maybe not.

Such a scenario played to out in Suffolk. Tim Thornton, editor of the Winchester Star in 1987, related the history of the Nansemond County Clerk's Office. In 1974, Nansemond County merged with Suffolk. By the mid-1980s, Suffolk retained only two buildings which had housed the former county's government. One was the Clerk's Office, sited in a prominent location on Main Street. Unfortunately, that location was centered in the midst of a development project.

The Clerk's Office was more than just any old place – it was an embodiment of Nansemond County and a tangible reminder of a rapidly-fading history. Although preservationists rallied around the Clerk's Office, having done their own studies to prove its architectural significance and the cost effectiveness of rehabilitation, it came too late. The building was demolished, but the development project never materialized. The lot remains vacant.

The activism, support, and funding for the Nansemond Clerk's Office came too late. Will this be the same fate of the Taylor Hotel? Without the physical reminder of the Taylor and its massive presence downtown, it can be hard to remember Loudoun Street

– Main Street – was a transportation hub and the heart of commerce and travel. Bushrod Taylor and his contributions to Winchester are fading away without the presence of the hotel at the heart of his empire. ♦



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## STREETSCAPE SNAPSHOTS: THE TAYLOR'S FAÇADE THROUGH TIME

The impact on the streetscape from architectural changes can be a difficult concept to understand without visual aids. Aesthetics are not the only consideration in evaluating streetscape alterations. Along with aesthetics, there is a story and sense of accumulated history that goes hand in hand with the individual objects along a road. Trees cannot mature overnight, streets do not pave themselves, houses do not spring up fully formed from the earth. All of these items must have come from somewhere.

When a preservationist says "streetscape," the term is aesthetically driven, but it is also historically driven. A preservationist can see a structure, weigh it on its own merits and also how that

structure contributes (or not) to the story the street tells. We experience a streetscape when we perceive a neighborhood is attractive or repulsive, if the sidewalks are matching brick or modern concrete, or if the houses are from the same era or spread out over years of development.

With these thoughts in mind, watch how the Taylor evolves in these wide angle images of the downtown. We trust viewers will understand that the photographs have been altered to provide a consistent vantage point for all the historic — and potentially future—streetscapes.



**Figure 1. The Taylor, c. 1870**

The historic Taylor is shown here with the complete three-story Greek Revival porch. Note the stairs circling up to the entrance: the original first floor of the hotel was above street level. Look, also, at a now-lost building beside the Potomac Bead Co. That building once provided a "stairstep effect" so that the Taylor did not overwhelm the smaller adjacent buildings. (Historic photo courtesy Stewart Bell Archives)



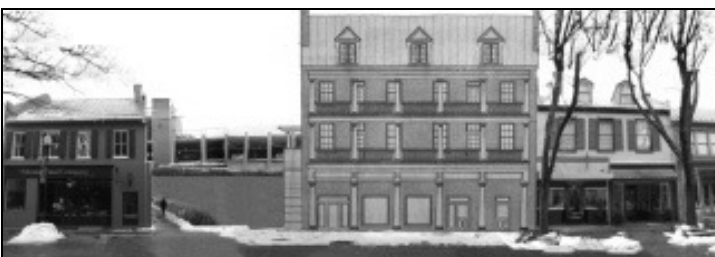
**Figure 2. The Taylor, c. 1990**

Over 100 years, the original porch was removed in stages, the interior retooled to put the first floor at street level, a one-story addition erected, and a Colonial Revival style replacement awning was constructed across the entire façade to mimic the original columns of the lost balcony. The building appeared thus c. 1980-2007. (Photo of the Taylor by Rick Foster, Winchester Star 2005)



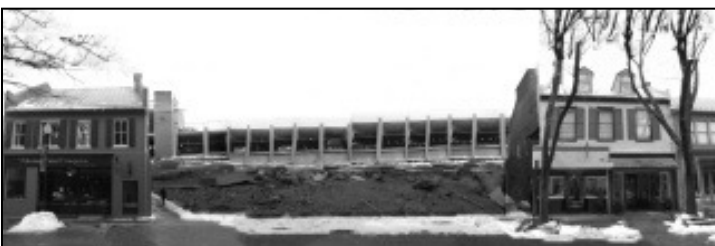
**Figure 3. The Taylor, 2011**

Today, the building shows the wear and tear from the roof collapse and subsequent stabilization efforts. The Colonial Revival awning has been removed, the windows are open, and bracing has been strung along the façade. Stucco has chipped off the brick, and a construction fence has been constructed to keep out pedestrians. While dilapidated, the building still anchors the mall and provides a sense of continuity along the street.



**Figure 4. The Taylor's Future: Rehabilitation**

The rehabilitation option proposes to retain the historic portion of the Taylor, recreating the three-story porch. This drawing, from R. Hunter Hurt, proposes a six-column porch (instead of the original 7), razing the modern one-story addition for a plaza, and adding dormers to the roof. The Wisheff option would most likely retain the one-story addition and omit the dormers, restoring the façade more closely to its appearance in 1870. Although the loss of the modern addition leaves an obvious hole, it is preferable to . . .



**Figure 5. The Taylor's Future: Demolition**

If demolished, the downtown will be left with an empty lot of approximately 16,600 sq. ft., opening the view to the Braddock Street Parking Garage. This option will leave a gaping wound in the rhythm of the streetscape. The exposed wall of the Warsaw Gallery will leave no doubt that there once was a building there. As there are no firm plans as to what would go into the space, the empty lot could persist indefinitely, disrupting the harmony of that block of the downtown for years to come. (See *History of an Old Building, Revisited*, page 2.) ♦

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# WHY IS THE TAYLOR WORTH SAVING?

BY MARK LORE

Why is the Taylor worth saving? First, it is a key feature of the streetscape of downtown Winchester. And second, because it embodies a main stream of the city's history. The threat to the Taylor Hotel is not just to the building itself. It concerns this community's soul – its very self image and identity as a community.

From the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, this Loudoun Street site was a refuge for travelers. Prior to the Revolutionary War, it first accommodated one of Winchester's earliest hostelries, the McGuire Hotel. When that building was destroyed by fire, its owner, Bushrod Taylor, constructed the core of the building we see today, what Garland Quarles describes as "an impressive building, three stories high, with balconies on the second and third floors." The facility represented a new building type in the Valley that, in the words of historian Ann McCleary, marked "the growing sophistication and thriving economy of these turnpike towns in the early to mid-nineteenth century..." It accompanied the incorporation of the Valley Turnpike Company in 1834 and macadamizing of the Valley Pike later in the decade. Bushrod Taylor was the Valley Turnpike Company's first president as well as the head of a widespread net of stage lines.

Bushrod Taylor's hotel and the accompanying infrastructure that he did so much to create set Winchester on its prosperous path as a key transportation and trading hub in western Virginia, a role it serves to this day. Yes, the Taylor served as a headquarters and hospital during the Civil War, but its underlying importance is as an earlier vestige of what Winchester was to become. Its loss from the city's streetscape would tear an irreparable hole in the city's history and in future generations' understanding of how and why Winchester developed as it did. Heritage visitors will have one

less reason to come to our downtown; many will choose to tour, to shop, and to dine elsewhere.

But, some might argue, demolition of the Taylor could free the site for new development with attendant benefits for the city. This seems unlikely. Current liens on the property, added to what is likely to be a very high cost demolition, will likely discourage any developer. More likely, we will wind up with an open gap on North Loudoun Street for the foreseeable future. We will have traded an essential part of our history for an empty lot.

Recuperation of at least the central core of the Taylor Hotel is a major challenge. But it would be a tragedy to consign its fate to a spot blight program that was never intended for such large, significant, historic properties. Other nearby communities have met even larger challenges – witness Staunton's transformation of the old Western State Hospital. Winchester itself has had a fine record in the past of saving important structures such as the Kurtz building and the George Washington Hotel through the imaginative use of tax credits and private/public initiative. The Taylor can – and must – be saved. It is time for our community's political and economic leadership to engage even more fully on how (not whether) this can be done. ♦



*The Taylor Hotel, looking south on Loudoun Street. Image from the Stewart Bell Archives.*

Check each item that you are willing to volunteer your time and return to **PHW, 530 Amherst St. Winchester, VA 22601**

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## Holiday House Tour

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## WHAT CAN I DO?

The Taylor needs your support to show there is a conviction in Winchester that the former hotel is worth saving. Together, preservationists, historians, Civil War enthusiasts, and the old town community can plead a multifaceted and compelling case for the Taylor Hotel's retention in our streetscape, not just our textbooks.

### Contact the Winchester City Council members, Mayor, and City Manager:

Mayor Elizabeth Minor Address 695 Woodland Avenue Phone 540-662-2279 Work Address 422 National Avenue Work Phone 540-662-2173	Work Address 1463 New Hope Road Cross Junction, VA 22625 Work Phone 540-888-3456 ext 1259	Phone 540-535-1741 Email <a href="mailto:jtag1964@verizon.net">jtag1964@verizon.net</a>
Council President Jeffrey Buettner First Ward Address 331 N. Braddock Phone 540-722-0411 Work Address 1908 S. Loudoun St. Work Phone 540-667-3211 Email <a href="mailto:tdiva@ntelos.net">tdiva@ntelos.net</a>	Art H. Major Third Ward Address 1411 Greystone Terrace Phone 540-667-4458 Work Address 550 N. Cameron Street, Suite 100 Work Phone 540-667-3130 Email <a href="mailto:art@gearclean.com">art@gearclean.com</a>	Les Veach First Ward Address 441 Glen Lea Court Phone 540-667-0718 Work Address 47 W. Jubal Early Drive Work Phone 540-667-9900 email <a href="mailto:Les@VeachInsurance.com">Les@VeachInsurance.com</a>
Evan H. Clark Second Ward Address 529 Battle Avenue Phone 540-303-2917 Email <a href="mailto:evanclark1@yahoo.com">evanclark1@yahoo.com</a>	Milt McInturff Third Ward Address 1408 Valley Avenue Phone 540-667-0041 Work Address 1408 Valley Avenue Work Phone 540-667-5415 Email <a href="mailto:miltm McInturff@hotmail.com">miltm McInturff@hotmail.com</a>	John A. Willingham Fourth Ward Address 925 Meadow Court Phone 540-662-3695 Work Phone 540-931-4655 Email <a href="mailto:johnwillingham1@gmail.com">johnwillingham1@gmail.com</a>
John Hill Second Ward Address 509 South Street Phone 540-722-0931	John Tagnesi Fourth Ward Address 917 Meadow Court	City Manager Jim O'Connor 15 North Cameron St. Winchester, VA. 22601 Main Phone Number 540-667-1815 Fax Number 540-722-3618 Email <a href="mailto:citymanager@ci.winchester.va.us">citymanager@ci.winchester.va.us</a>

### Write letters to the editors of:

#### The Winchester Star:

Letters should be no more than 200 words. Longer submissions up to 500 words should be sent as open forums. Submissions can be e-mailed to [aconnor@winchesterstar.com](mailto:aconnor@winchesterstar.com) or mailed to:

The Editorial Page  
2 N. Kent St.  
Winchester VA 22601

All submissions should include name, address, and telephone number (for our contact purposes). Submissions are subject to editing. One submission per writer per 30 days.

#### Northern Virginia Daily:

Letters to the editor must not exceed 350 words, must be signed and include the writer's complete address and telephone number. The phone number, which is for verification, will not be published. Letters should be sent to:

152 N. Holliday St.  
Strasburg, VA 22657

Letters may also be e-mailed to [jhoran@shentel.net](mailto:jhoran@shentel.net) or [jhoran@nvdaily.com](mailto:jhoran@nvdaily.com), or be submitted online at <http://www.nvdaily.com/opinion/2006/08/submit.php/>.

### Comment on the Community Development Block Grant proposal for the Taylor (until April 12, 2011):

Martha Shickle  
NSVRC, Attn. Community Development  
103 E. 6th Street,  
Front Royal, Virginia 22630

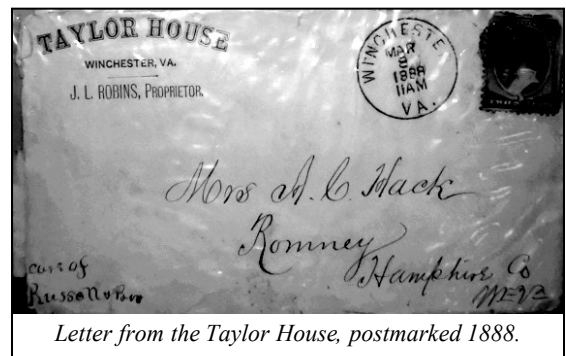
### Network with other friends of the Taylor at Facebook:

#### Preservation of Historic Winchester's Page:

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Preservation-of-Historic-Winchester/192253390799111>

#### Save the Taylor Group:

<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=153455404712459> ♦



Letter from the Taylor House, postmarked 1888.

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NEWS

Taylor Hotel Edition

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**WHO WAS BUSHROD TAYLOR?**

Bushrod Taylor is best known as the proprietor of the Taylor Hotel. However, he was not originally a hotelier, nor was he initially involved with commercial transportation. His parents, John and Sarah McKinnon Taylor, were Virginians who had relocated to Kentucky. Bushrod, born in Kentucky, remained there until he was about 18. At that time, he joined his oldest brother William and sister Harriot Ware in Clarke County, Virginia. Bushrod worked the farmland, tannery, and gristmill for three years on land rented from the Wares near Snicker’s Ferry.

He met Elizabeth (Betsey) Milton through his brother William, who had married Harriot Milton, Betsey’s oldest sister. Betsey was known as charming young lady with ample energy and a mischievous streak. The two were married at Betsey’s family home at Milton Valley, Clarke County, on November 13, 1817. Bushrod refurbished the cottage into a cozy home for Betsey. Although the couple did not have children of their own, they became the guardians for the orphaned children of the extended family. Around 1825, Bushrod moved to Aldridge, closer to Milton Valley, and worked tirelessly for three years turning a neglected estate into a productive farm.

Bushrod purchased the former McGuire House in 1830. Initially, he had no intention of leaving the house at Aldridge, driving to Winchester to oversee the hotel. His frequent commute proved a macadamized road through the Valley would be both beneficial

and profitable. Seeing the perfect route passing through Winchester, Bushrod uprooted his family from Aldridge to the hotel to pursue his vision of a road. Despite requests at the state and national levels for assistance with the enterprise, he was only granted a charter allowing the road to become a private enterprise. Undaunted, he rose to the task, personally overseeing the construction.

After the completion of the turnpike, Bushrod returned to his first calling – agriculture. He purchased another neglected property, Aspen Hill in Winchester, near the site of the old hospital on Stewart Street. The house was restored, orchards replanted, and stables built. He died on July 14, 1847 at the young age of 54 following a two-month battle with a “carbuncle on the foot.”

Harriot Milton Hammond, biographer and one of the many children raised by Bushrod and Betsey Taylor, recalled his life with respect. He was active, generous to the less fortunate, liberal with education, a pioneer with foresight beyond his contemporaries. But he was not a saint, as he was combative, imperious, stubbornly tenacious and unwilling to compromise. In the end, he turned his competitive nature to work for the prosperity not only for himself but for the community he called home. ♦

*Find the full biography of Betsey Taylor, Aunt Bet, by Harriet Milton Hammond at the Handley Regional Library.*

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Join today by completing this form and returning it to PHW, 530 Amherst St., Winchester, VA 22601.



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