

Francis the Axe Man 1980

Jack Jeffers

I made a special trip from my home in the Shenandoah Valley to Hampden-Sydney to photograph an old childhood friend for the Atkinson Museum at Hampden-Sydney College.

Francis Randolph had a way of talking to himself as he walked the country roads almost daily, and you could hear him coming for a quarter of a mile. He became the neighborhood attraction in his own natural sort of way. You see, he always carried this big axe slung over his shoulder and the blade glistened in the sunlight. The local movie theater in Farmville (it was called the Lee) used to run westerns and horror films on Saturday afternoons, and at our ages it was easy to let our minds run wild after one of those Frankenstein or Dracula flicks. Of course, we learned that he carried the axe to chop wood for neighbors in return for a meal. Later he substituted a stick to ward off dogs on his walks.

I was riding my old single-speed Sears bike the five miles to home one afternoon about sundown after a real thriller when I ran up on Francis on the back Hampden-Sydney road. He was looking up into the sky and chanting in his normal fashion, axe over his shoulder. I can remember swinging as far to the other side of the road as the ditch would allow, putting as much distance between him and me as possible. On occasion, in later years, Dad would hire Francis to do some yard work for us. That was when I got to know him a little better. I overcame my fear of his axe and replaced it with awe at how swiftly and efficiently he used it to dismantle a tree or clump of brush. He never wasted a lick.

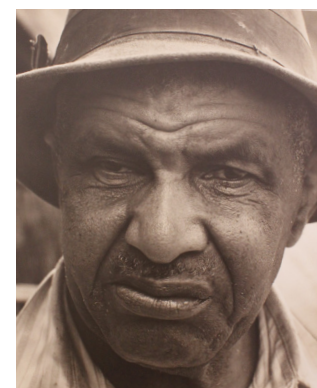
During the summer of 1980, when I was still seriously involved in my Appalachian documentary, I made a special trip to Prince Edward County to photograph Francis. An administrator from Hampden-Sydney College called and informed me that Francis was still alive and well, and that the College would like to have a framed portrait of him to place in its museum. I was still living in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia at the time and realized this might well be the last opportunity I'd have to make a photograph of this local character.

It was one of the most stressful sessions I have ever had because I think that even after all the years have passed, and my growth in understanding, I was still a bit apprehensive about facing this man head on with a camera. He did not have his axe over his shoulder on this occasion, and I detected genuine warmth radiating from within. I left feeling much better about an old neighborhood acquaintance from the past. Francis further supported my belief that we all have our own ways of connecting with the cosmos.

Francis Randolph died on Friday, January 17, 1997. He suffered from no acute illness at the time; he was 83 years old. *The Record of Hampden-Sydney College* (Winter-Spring 1997) further reports that despite some efforts of some students to test Randolph's mental acuity, one alumnus (Class of 1935) expressed that view the Hampden-Sydney's permanent resident usually got the better of them, whether they knew it or not. Occasionally some upperclassmen would suggest to freshmen that they offer Francis a nickel and a dime in different hands to see which he picked. He always

chose the nickel, and the students would then give him both coins. They assumed that he did not know the value of the coins, just selecting the larger one. I asked Francis about his choices one time, and he said, "I pick the nickel because if I picked the dime, they'd quit."

He was such a fixture that he seemed almost eternal; not so long ago, an alumnus came to visit his son, at the time a student at the College. Looking out the window, the father said, "That man looks just like someone who used to walk around here when I was a student, Francis the Axe Man we called him." With a smile the son replied, "Dad, that *is* Francis the Axe Man." And so it was.



Francis, Jack Jeffers, 1980, paper, photosensitive, 13.25 in by 10.5 inches, collection of the Longwood Center for the Visual Arts, gift of the artist, 1996.52.36. Copyright Jack Jeffers. Photograph by Longwood Center for the Visual Arts staff. Image courtesy Longwood Center for the Visual Arts.

MUSEUM

THE ESTHER THOMAS ATKINSON
OF HAMPDEN-SYDNEY COLLEGE

AUGUST 2017

Finding Old College: A Geophysical Search for the Original Hampden-Sydney College Buildings

Charles E. Pearson

On Friday, April 2, 1790, a group of seven men, Trustees of Hampden-Sydney College, met on the campus to discuss the affairs of the school. The Reverend Archibald McRobert, a Presbyterian minister, was appointed chairman of the meeting. The other Trustees at this meeting were William Cowan, a prominent Lunenburg County attorney and a county justice; Joseph Moore, a Prince Edward County resident; Joel Watkins, of Charlotte County, a county justice and sheriff; Abraham Bedford Venable, a Prince Edward County attorney, member of the United States House of Representatives, United States Senator, and the first president of the Bank of Virginia; and his brother Samuel Woodson Venable, prominent Prince Edward County businessman and a county justice. The seventh trustee was the great orator and attorney Patrick Henry. Every single one of these men, except for the Reverend Mr. McRobert, served as members of the Virginia House of Delegates, and most fought in the Revolutionary War. Patrick Henry, of course, also served in the House of Burgesses and was several times Governor of Virginia. It is hard to imagine that a more distinguished group of men met anywhere in our country in that era to discuss the affairs of a college.

At the time of this meeting, 227 years ago, Hampden-Sydney College consisted of a cluster of buildings close to what is now College Road near the main entrance to the College. These structures included the College president's house and its detached kitchen; the imposing three-story brick classroom building known as the "College"; the library building; the Steward's house, often called the Steward's Hall because students were fed there; and a building known as College Hall or Common Hall, a structure

that was completed in 1789 for classes, student orations, demonstrations, and the like. In addition to those principal buildings, there were a number of other structures located adjacent to or behind them. These included kitchens, smoke houses, outhouses or privies, barns, stables, and possibly ice houses and spring houses. There also was one building privately constructed as student housing in 1775 or 1776 because the College had insufficient accommodations for students during its first several years of existence.

Several of these buildings were constructed in 1775-1776 at the very beginning of Hampden-Sydney, and all were apparently standing when the seven Trustees met in the spring of 1790. By the 1820s, construction at Hampden-Sydney had begun to shift to the south, and by the 1840s almost all of the original College buildings had been dismantled or demolished, and today not a single eighteenth-century structure from the original campus exists. The general area where these earliest buildings once stood is now known as "Old College"; however, the exact placement of any of the original College buildings is unknown. What does seem to be accurate is that all of the principal College buildings were located in the narrow strip of land immediately north of Hampden House and between the Alphabet Dorms and present-day College Road, known in the eighteenth century as Hudson's Road.

We do have a few descriptions of the buildings that stood at Hampden-Sydney in the eighteenth century, and our best depiction of those buildings is a model developed by Dr. Richard McClintock and on display in the Atkinson Museum. Dr. McClintock based his model on a few first-hand accounts made by College students and alumni, on descriptions

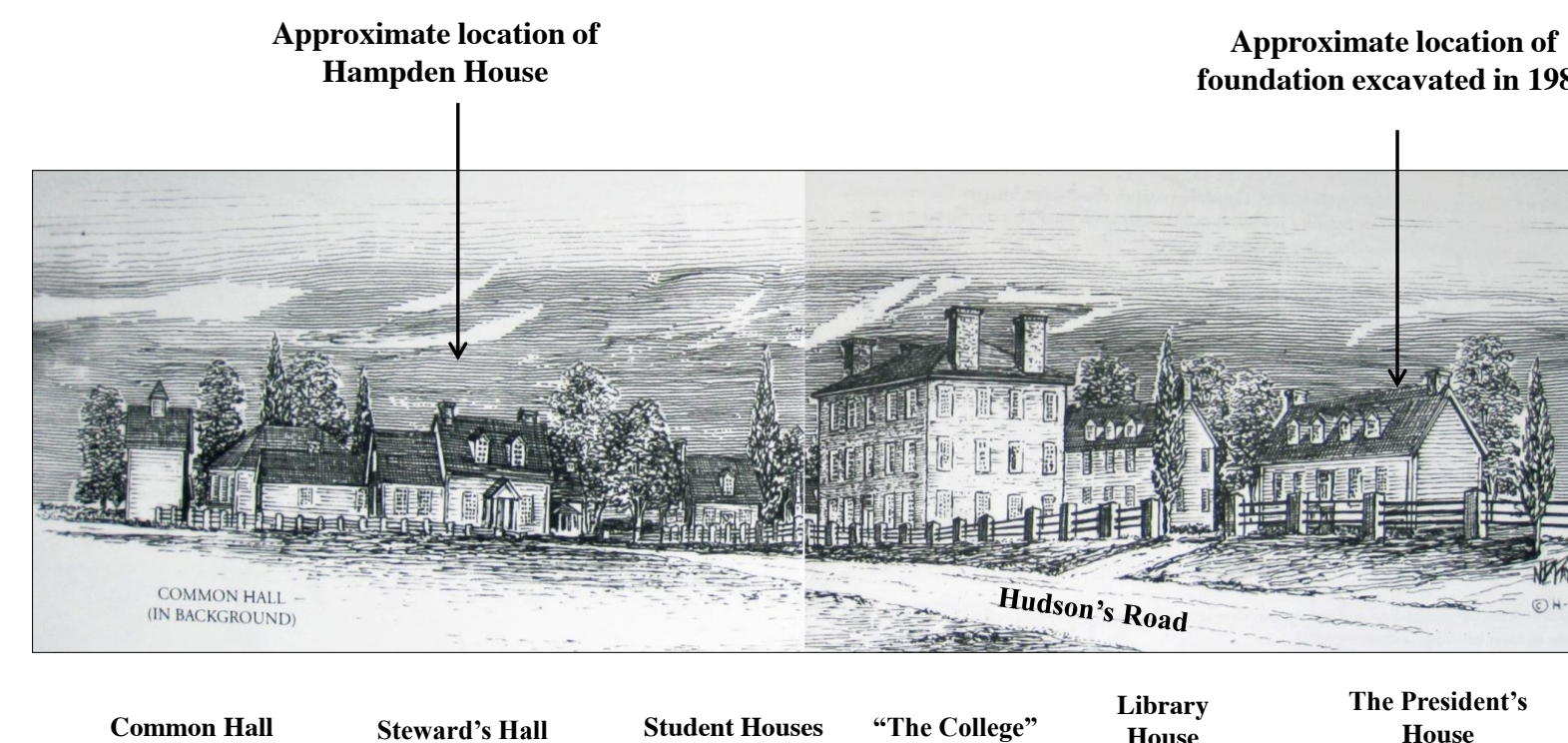
of College buildings found in the early notes of College Trustees, and in a handful of other documents.

The accompanying figure provides an artist's depiction of the College as it existed in the eighteenth century. The view in this illustration is looking toward Hampden House from near the front of the entrance to the Ty Cobb baseball field. As you came into the main entrance of the College, the first building on the right was the President's house; the next major building was the brick "College" itself, and then came Steward's Hall followed by the Common Hall, at what was then the southern end of the campus.

Those original Hampden-Sydney buildings represented some of the earliest academic structures erected in the entire United States. They were buildings where Hampden-Sydney faculty and students lived, taught, and studied for the first fifty years of the College's existence. They are the buildings where a young William Henry Harrison attended class and where Patrick Henry met with other trustees to discuss the business of the College. The historical importance of the early College buildings is embodied in their association with one of the oldest colleges in the United States and their association with numerous prominent men.

The 240-year history of Hampden-Sydney College is one of the most important elements in the school's identity, and this history is one factor that distinguishes Hampden-Sydney and sets it apart from so many other schools. This history is expressed in many ways, ranging from the long and distinguished list of the school's graduates and faculty to the remaining historic buildings standing on the campus today. These buildings (all of which post-date the original

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



HOW TO HELP THE MUSEUM

Financial donations to the Atkinson Museum are welcome and help fund our special projects and exhibits which are planned to complement the course offerings of Hampden-Sydney College and serve our students. To make a monetary donation, please mail your check to the Atkinson Museum, Box 745, Hampden-Sydney College, 23943. Please be sure to write Atkinson Museum in the memo line of your check. You may also submit a donation online at www.hsc.edu/Making-A-Gift.html. You may specify that your gift be used by the Museum. All gifts to the College are tax-deductible. For donations of items, we are looking for Hampden-Sydney personal items from former students, faculty, and staff that depict the close relationship and influence the school has had on the people associated with it. Whether the item is a letter to home from a 1920s student on College life or an early version of the Tiger mascot costume, we appreciate the chance to share these special items with our students and alumni.

Personalized Bricks

Creating Tribute

REMEMBER! You can purchase inscribed memorial bricks to be placed in the Museum's front walk. They are an ideal way to recognize graduates, loved ones, beloved teachers, or classmates—even (as one of our students did) to propose.

To request a brick order form, call the Museum at (434) 223-6134, or download one from www.hsc.edu/Museum/Personalized-Brick.html

IN HONOR OF
Katie A. T. ATKINSON

FINDING OLD COLLEGE, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

buildings once standing at Old College) and the landscape and the physical layout of the College provide a unique “sense of place,” and they constitute a visible reflection of the school’s history. Because of that reflection, there has been some effort over the years to maintain the historic buildings in order to retain that sense of place that is unique to Hampden-Sydney. The historical importance of the College buildings and landscape is reflected by the fact that the campus has been listed in the National Register of Historic Places, a listing that recognizes our nation’s most significant cultural properties.

All visible aspects of the original College buildings are gone, but the existence of buried remains of the eighteenth-century buildings was confirmed in 1981, when Dr. Jim Jordan of Longwood University and his students unearthed the brick foundation of what is believed to be the detached kitchen associated with the original College President’s home. That foundation is located in the grove of trees between College Road and the Alphabet Dorms, exactly where Dr. McClintock’s model of the original campus indicates it would be.

Because they are now buried and invisible, the archaeological remains of the early College have been almost entirely ignored over the years, and little effort has been made to either study or preserve them or to take them into account during campus planning, construction, or maintenance efforts. Despite this neglect, the now-buried archaeological remains of the College, like its visible and standing historic structures, are significant and represent important elements in the long and unique history of the school.

Today, across the nation, there is a growing appreciation of the cultural properties on college campuses, and many institutions have developed plans directed at recording, rehabilitating, and preserving buildings and landscapes, as well as archaeological remains that are significant to a school’s history. Given the long history of Hampden-Sydney College, I believe it is imperative that the same effort be made to identify, and, to the extent possible, preserve the archaeological evidence related to the earliest history of the school before it is lost.

In this light, in 2016, at the urging of Angela Way, Director of the Atkinson Museum, I developed a proposal to conduct what is known as a “geophysical survey” to locate and identify now-buried archaeological remains, such as building foundations, wells, privies, ice houses, trash pits, and the like in the Old College area. This identification will serve as a first step in the development of a management plan for those buried resources to insure they are not damaged or entirely destroyed by future development and construction. The survey will

provide a non-intrusive and non-destructive technique for assessing the type and extent of buried archaeological features associated with the earliest years of Hampden-Sydney College. We have been very fortunate that our proposal has received funding from the S. Mason and Lula Cole Charitable Trust and the Hampden-Sydney College Department of History, and we intend to conduct the survey during Fall Semester 2017.

The geophysical survey will utilize two remote-sensing instruments: a magnetometer gradiometer and ground-penetrating radar (GPR). Both of these are commonly used in archaeological research today. Individually, each has the ability to delineate a range of buried features and objects that can guide future investigations, as well as to identify resources as part of a management plan to prevent their future damage or destruction.

The magnetometer gradiometer measures the magnetic field strength at a specific location on the surface of the earth. Over a small area and in homogeneous soils, the magnetic field is expected to be uniform. However, a variety of types of objects and features produce deviations, or “anomalies,” in the background magnetic field that can be detected with a magnetometer gradiometer. Archaeological objects that can produce magnetic anomalies include brick foundations, fireplaces, furnaces, hearths, and walls composed of magnetically-anomalous rocks such as basalt. Pits and ditches can often be detected because their fill differs from the surrounding soil. Other magnetically visible targets are materials containing ferrous or iron oxides, such as nails, hinges, locks, and other iron architectural fittings. Modern ferrous objects, such as buried pipes and wires, power lines and surface trash, also produce deviations in the magnetic field, and these often have to be filtered out to see anomalies of archaeological interest.

Ground-penetrating radar (GPR) operates by sending an electromagnetic wave pulse into the ground that reflects off of buried materials with contrasting electrical properties. This process relies on the electrical conductivity and magnetic permeability of the materials. When a radar wave bounces off of a subsurface reflector, the total travel time is recorded in nanoseconds and is visibly portrayed on a monitor and digitally recorded. This time is directly proportional to the depth of that target. GPR has been used to detect a variety of types of buried archaeological features, including pits, wells, trenches, hearths, brick and stone foundations, kilns, metal objects, burials, tombs, and tunnels.

A variety of practical matters have to be considered when designing and implementing a geophysical survey. Among the most important

is that the area selected for survey must be sufficiently accessible to permit adequate coverage by the instruments used. Today much of the area where the Old College buildings once stood is covered by lawn with scattered trees and is perfectly amenable to geophysical survey. Immediately north of Hampden House is an asphalt parking lot that might inhibit survey of that specific area. However, ground penetrating radar can often “see” through asphalt and successfully record objects buried beneath it. We are hopeful this will be the case because it appears that a portion of the original brick “College” building lies beneath the parking lot.

In recent years, several buildings, including Crawley Forum, the Alphabet Dorms, and the Police Station have been erected in the area of Old College. It is possible that construction of these buildings damaged or destroyed some buried features; however, it appears that the new buildings are located just west of where the principal College structures stood. Thus, most of the area of the original eighteenth-century Hampden-Sydney campus seems to have been minimally disturbed, meaning there is a high probability that buried features associated with these buildings still exist, as was found to be the case for the kitchen foundation excavated in 1981.

When Patrick Henry and his fellow Trustees met at Hampden-Sydney in the spring of 1790, it is very unlikely they considered the potential historical importance of the buildings at the school. They did, however, have faith in the College itself, and this faith and their confidence and vision helped establish the foundation that has permitted Hampden-Sydney College to educate young men for 240 years. The buried remains of the early College buildings will not impact the present and future educational mission of the College. However, their discovery will provide physical evidence of life during the earliest years of the school, giving the present generation of students, alumni, faculty, and staff a tangible affinity with that past. Additionally, the discovery and identification of these early remains are considered an important first step in their future study or preservation.

We are very optimistic that this geophysical survey will locate buried features associated with Old College. One aspect of the survey will be to involve College students as much as possible, through a one-hour course within the History Department. This course will give students an opportunity to learn about the early history of their school and expose them to the basic aspects of geophysical survey it relates to archaeological and historical research, expanding their understanding of the diverse ways of studying history.

Mrs. P.T. Atkinson’s Cultural Legacy

Paul T. Atkinson with contributions by Rev. Peter T. Atkinson

“Now, Tulane, these kids need to know the value of money!” I can remember Grandmom saying in one of my earliest memories of visiting my grandparents at Hampden-Sydney College. We would always arrive late at night, having to trek from the Eastern Shore, and we were used to waking up the next day after our late night arrival to find all my grandfather’s hidden pennies. We’d take the money and head to the College Shop to buy treats. When she learned of his activities, she put an end to it immediately because money was not to be simply found growing on trees (or hidden under chairs or on stairs) and carelessly wasted on treats, but to be earned through constant effort and carefully saved.

You see, she was not a child of the Great Depression, but an adult of it. She, not the children, was the one who would go out hunting on the campus with a 410 gauge, single shot, to bring home a squirrel to feed her family. She needed to become a teacher of lessons, so the children of the Depression could become the Greatest Generation, and anything they might’ve missed, she wanted to hammer home to her grandchildren. The lesson wasn’t lost on me, and it went beyond the pennies that don’t fall from heaven. When I was fifteen, a little after Grandad had passed away, I was hired by the College for a summer job to paint the dorms, decks, and steps, and do any other job the Buildings and Grounds superintendent needed to have done. I lived with Grandmom, and she also hired me to paint their two-story wooden frame house down in Black Bottom as a second job. She paid me \$215 for a job that took the entire summer, a sum which even in those simpler days seemed hopelessly unjust, especially to a home-sick, tired kid, who was packing to head home. I packed and was ready to leave, and as we were standing on the porch, with me feeling restless and underpaid, Grandmom looked up at the porch ceiling—somehow I had missed it—and, of course, she made me paint it before I could leave. Attached to the value of money was the value of fulfilling a promise and finishing a job once it was started.

It’s been well documented that once the College lost Mr. P.T., my grandmom, Ms. P.T. (as she became universally known), was hired as hostess of the Parents and Friends Lounge in Venable Hall. Her amazing memory and “people skills” were two of her greatest assets, as she shared and listened to stories while

welcoming alumni, families, and friends. During these endless conversations, Grandmom’s love of collecting things, especially things connected with the college’s history, grew into a passion. Don’t forget, she was conditioned by her life to never throw anything away. She found that many shared her enthusiasm and were willing to donate items, knowing they would be kept, appreciated, and preserved. By 1968 the word of Ms. P.T.’s venture quickly, and not so quietly, spread among more than three generations of alumni and friends who wanted to support her “project.” So out of storage from every corner of the state of Virginia and even beyond, historical H-SC items headed back addressed to Grandmom. She obtained permission to house her collection in a closet in the basement of the science building, then Bagby Hall. As the project flourished, she began to realize all the new duties she inherited: founder, curator, fundraiser, financier, collector, director, preserver, secretary, and visionary. In other words, as the idea grew, she was responsible for all aspects of it.

Over the next few years as the collection grew, Grandmom would display many artifacts in the Parents and Friends Lounge on special college dates and events. During these years, my visits to see her were dominated by hours of discussion about her collection, and it was clear to me that this project had filled her life with a purpose as nothing else could have. Fortunately for her, a board was formed in 1970 to help guide and support her as the founder and curator, and to recommend actions and seek approvals from the H-SC president for the museum’s projects and new possibilities.

Growth and change have been the new museum’s signature since those early days, both during and after my grandmother’s life. Moving to the newly available campus post office building in 1976 gave her the first location for a more permanent display of the collection and for eventually defining that collection as a museum. In 1982 the fourteen-year-long collection of donated H-SC artifacts and the building that housed it became the Esther Thomas Atkinson Museum of Hampden-Sydney College. About eleven years later (1993), buoyed by many donations and much support from the College, an addition that doubled the building’s size was completed. The next year was Grandmom’s last as she died on Sunday—Mother’s Day and H-SC graduation day—less than two

months before her 100th birthday on July 4th. Who among us who attended her funeral can ever forget the total darkness that fell over the campus because of a total eclipse as the service began, followed by sunshine and hope as the funeral ended? She was a spark of joy, love, and hope. She was a people person and expert conversationalist with a memory beyond all reason. She would work tirelessly regardless of the task, and when the work was done, she never cared who got the credit. The fruits of her labor had finally achieved her dream—that the museum would be a living, enduring embodiment of the story of Hampden-Sydney College preserved for the alumni, the students, and all interested visitors to the College.

To me the museum reminds me of the woman who taught me the value of hard work and the importance of giving your all until a job is finished. Many of the artifacts she collected through the years were like those long-ago hidden pennies: they didn’t have much value until they were collected and saved, and it took her sense of value to bring them together. She also never stopped right until the end, she lived and worked, and her life was made full by what she accomplished. And that is the great thing about doing what you love: not only is your own life made full, but what you do fills the lives of others. I didn’t know that as I muttered under my breath while I painted those last few strokes to finish the porch ceiling, but I know it now, and I learned it by the seed she planted in me then, and in the example she made for me to follow all the rest of her life.

Today the Esther Thomas Atkinson Museum thrives under its curator Ms. Angie Way and the Museum Board led by Dr. Wayne Tucker. Last year the board created the Esther Thomas Atkinson Museum award to recognize an H-SC alumnus who has dedicated himself to the fields of History, Literature, or the Fine Arts and, therefore, has planted seeds of life around him as she did. Grandmom, Ms. P.T., knew this, knew the importance of memory and the importance of the stories that could (and would) be told only through tangible artifacts themselves. Thus the marriage between the Arts and the Museum was born. Please join us when we come each year at the Annual Alumni Reunion of 2016 (his 50th) for a moment to testify to the power of art itself and to recognize the uniquely human contributions of members of the H-SC community.

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At the 2017 Museum Alumni Reception, Dean Anita Garland (center) welcomes alumna Dr. Theodore "Ted" P. Chambers (right) and Gloria Chambers (left)



Museum Vice-Chairman Paul Tulane Atkinson III (right) presents the Esther Thomas Atkinson Cultural Achievement Award to alumna Conley Edwards '67 (second from right), former State Archivist for Virginia. Edwards is the second recipient of the award. Last year's award went to artist Louis Briel '66.

IMO= In Memory of
IHO= In Honor of