

# The Briar Wire

THE SWEET BRIAR COLLEGE ALUMNAE NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 7, ISSUE 1 | JANUARY 2021

## My fellow alumnae and friends,

**Happy New Year!** What a blessing that we have turned the corner into the new year and the promise that it brings of new opportunities. No matter where we are around America and abroad, the feeling of being able to truly live in healthy and safe conditions is getting closer with each day. I also hope your holidays were glorious despite our contained circumstances. The ability to rest and recharge and enjoy the glory of the season prepares us for the months ahead. Living each day, no matter what, is a true blessing. I hope as we enter the new year that we will all look for moments of joy in 2021.

At the College, President Meredith Woo and the faculty and staff are keeping the promise to educate our amazing students in-person by preparing the campus for the students to return on January 11th. We are making sure that every building, classroom and dining space has been thoroughly prepared to be a safe and healthy environment to usher in another exciting semester.

During early December, we celebrated Sweet Briar with our alumnae across America and abroad through our virtual Sweet Briar Days. To date, five lectures were attended by hundreds of alumnae soaking in the lectures of our distinguished professors from topics of sustainability to faculty and student research on the political climate. Our Sweet Briar Days give us a chance to be together virtually and usher in lifelong learning as an important component of our alumnae engagement going forward. Please see page 5 for information about Sweet Briar Days in early January. We will also be planning additional Alumnae College opportunities in the summer and are exploring how we can eventually reinvigorate travel as a part of our alumnae experience.

Recently, with open houses and virtual admissions events, we talked with prospective students about the fact that Sweet Briar offers a lifetime learning platform for our alumnae to continue their education. It is one of our resolutions to continue to communicate the excitement of our Sweet Briar experience to students



so they will have the opportunity to be part of this community and have a transformational experience. Our other resolutions are to:

1. Recruit a student: [sbc.edu/admissions/continue-your-sweet-briar-legacy](https://sbc.edu/admissions/continue-your-sweet-briar-legacy)
2. Continue to share the Sweet Briar story: [sbc.edu/alumnae/share-sweet-briar](https://sbc.edu/alumnae/share-sweet-briar)
3. Give time, talent and treasure back to our alma mater: [sbc.edu/alumnae/support-sweet-briar](https://sbc.edu/alumnae/support-sweet-briar)

As we enter the new year, please know that your engagement and dedication to the mission of Sweet Briar College help us to keep ringing the bells here on campus. We toast to you and Sweet Briar's future in 2021.

With gratitude,

Mary Pope M. Hutson '83

Vice President for Alumnae Relations, Development and Communications



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## Op-Ed: The Taming of the Pandemic: Are Women Better at This?

By Meredith Woo, President of Sweet  
Briar College

*Originally printed in the Roanoke  
Times, Dec. 6, 2020*

One week before Thanksgiving, the students at Sweet Briar College departed from their dormitories, as smoothly as they had arrived nearly four months ago. Sweet Briar had been the first college in the commonwealth to announce that it would be open for in-person instruction in the fall. It was also the first to start the semester and the first to end it – in the nick of time as the pandemic's spikes were spreading nationally. At the time, no student tested positive for COVID-19.

It has often been noted that the countries led by women leaders have managed the pandemic better than those led by men. From Denmark, Finland and Iceland to New Zealand, Germany and Taiwan, female prime ministers and presidents acted with great alacrity in the face of COVID-19. Prime Minister Katrín Jakobsdóttir of Iceland immediately provided free testing for all and an extensive tracking system. President Tsai Ing-wen of Taiwan signed and acted on 124 measures to protect her country. Sanna Marin of Finland and Jacinda Ardern of New Zealand quickly communicated the important protocols via social media, and above all, they listened.

Angela Merkle, an East German who cut her political teeth in the chaotic days of reunification, spoke of her extensive mitigation measures in personal terms. "... [F]or someone like me, for whom freedom of travel and movement were hard-won rights, such restrictions can only be justified when they are absolutely necessary ... they should not be enacted lightly...." She then enunciated the democratic principles that guided her actions: transparency, expert communication, and the dignity of individual life.

It is not coincidental that the same principles were at work at Sweet Briar, a women's college with the leadership of women at the core of its education. Working closely with our



health partner, Centra Health, and the Virginia Department of Health, we determined that the key to managing the pandemic was behavioral. Over the summer, the students planned for a cell-like structure on their return, led by "COVID Captains." As most of the club "traditions" and student events are led by students, so would the enforcement of safety.

Sweet Briar had advantages. We could offer every student "a room of her own," to borrow from Virginia Woolf who emphasized the importance of space and autonomy for intellectual creativity. We had the buildings and the acreage to allow social distancing – and the dedication of the staff to fit out learning and living space into a plexiglass wonderland. Even so, it was the students who made it work, and often with humor.

I did not know that a typical pool noodle is 6 feet long, until during the student orientation I saw "COVID Captains" walking around with pool noodles attached to their backpacks, using them to measure safe distancing. They were there at the First-Year Convocation, held outside on the campus's picturesque dell, with the same pool noodles waving from their backs, like peacock feathers.

The students also demanded equity and accountability. Noting the inconsistency that our temperature check policy by front gate guards applied to students and outside guests but not faculty or staff, they argued the





employees posed the same, if not greater, risks, due to their exposure to family members and neighbors. They were of course right, and we changed the policy to apply temperature checks to all.

The seniors also took the lead. In social events and dances that were physically distanced to a fault, their rallying cry was, "Don't ruin my senior year!" They were particularly vigilant to guide the underclass women, as the last thing students wanted was to be sent back home.

This is not the first time that women showed their leadership during a pandemic at the national and grassroots levels. In the influenza pandemic of a century ago, women at Sweet Briar took care to protect themselves in the face of the debilitating incapacity and unwillingness of the Woodrow Wilson administration to properly acknowledge the outbreak, let alone manage it. The women at Sweet Briar went into lockdown with well-defined protocols to look after each other. In a pandemic that claimed 675,000 lives in the United States, mostly adults in their 20s and 30s, not a single life was lost at Sweet Briar.

Pope Francis, noting that women presidents and prime ministers have acted more quickly and decisively and with empathy, said "...the perspective women bring is what the world needs at this time." This is also the leadership we need in the post-pandemic future. ■



*Cece Mahan '19 and her aunt, Tricia Dolph Fallon '84*

## REFER A STUDENT!

You can personally refer prospective students to the Admissions Office through a referral form found on both the Admissions and Alumnae pages of our website. This is an easy way to volunteer as there is no time commitment or follow-up required. Visit [sbc.edu/admissions/refer-a-student](https://sbc.edu/admissions/refer-a-student) to make your first referral today!



## NRCS helps Sweet Briar rediscover its roots in agriculture

By Barbara Bowen  
Virginia State Public Affairs Specialist, NRCS

If you teach a young woman about sustainable agriculture, she will become a more informed consumer. If you immerse her in an agrarian lifestyle with hands-on learning experiences, she just might change the world. At least that's the idea behind an innovative approach to learning at Sweet Briar College.

While this might seem like an odd move for a women's college, Sweet Briar is actually returning to its farming roots. President Meredith Woo surveyed the rolling hills that were once part of a working dairy and charted a path that would honor the college's past while opening new academic and income opportunities for future generations of Sweet Briar women.

"The percentage of females working as primary agricultural operators is still relatively low," said Woo. "As a women's college with a farm, we are uniquely positioned to encourage young women to explore this option as a viable career path with good economic potential and opportunities for personal growth."

The College is not only re-establishing agricultural operations on former working lands but is actively engaged in bringing these activities into the classroom. Professor Lisa Powell, director of the College's Center for Human and Environmental Sustainability, is strategically integrating agriculture into the students' daily lives through core courses like Sustainable Systems, which teaches the young women about the vital connections between the environment, cultures and economies. The farm's proximity to the dining hall, dorms and academic buildings also ensures an immersive experience.

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) was a part of the Sweet Briar story when the land was a working dairy. In fact, Farmville Civil Engineering Technician Dennis Thompson worked with the farm as a Soil Conservation Service\* employee. The agency became involved in the farm's rebirth when administrators approached then State Conservationist Jack Bricker about their vision for revitalizing their land.

Rustburg District Conservationist Don Yancey helped them develop a conservation plan in 2019 to support



a variety of new operations that included greenhouse vegetable production and an apiary as well as vineyards, orchards, livestock and poultry. The NRCS support team included Thompson and his wife Bonnie, a now-retired grazing specialist, former Private Lands Biologist Lorien Koontz, State Resource Conservationist Chad Wentz and Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations Kilby Majette.

Their plan primarily focuses on establishing pollinator and wildlife habitat, composting manure and plant waste materials, enhancing nutrient management and establishing a grazing system for future livestock operations. The school already has established 12.3 acres of pollinator habitat and treated more than 55 acres for invasive species control with financial assistance from the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

As a big proponent of the team approach to conservation, NRCS welcomed the opportunity to collaborate with Virginia Department of Forestry and the Virginia Forestry and Wildlife Group to actively manage Sweet Briar's vast woodland resources. Sweet Briar already had a longstanding relationship with both entities and NRCS consulted with the Group's Principal Wildlife Biologist Brian Morse to help develop the college's wildlife plan.

NRCS State Biologist Jeff Jones is part of the agency team planning and designing shallow wildlife wetland areas (vernal pools) to be installed on the property. Recommended activities like tree/shrub and pine





savanna establishment will also improve wildlife habitat.

Next steps include installing the necessary infrastructure to support potential future rotational grazing (watering system and fencing) on multiple tracts. Fields that once produced hay, corn and small grains are now planted in warm-season grasses and some will be converted to cool-season grasses to improve forage quality and variety.

"While the original plans for livestock development on campus have been put on hold, the Sweet Briar team will continue to install additional wildlife practices as part of their EQIP contract," said Yancey. "Some of the ongoing land management activities will help improve fields for that next step and we will continue to explore opportunities to work with them on other stewardship projects."

As one of the largest employers in the county, the small college with an enrollment of about 350 students is already making a sizable impact on their community. The ongoing expansion of their current agricultural enterprise will not only support an integrated multi-disciplinary educational program but also foster economic development in the region.

The 26,000-square-foot greenhouse currently supplies fresh vegetables for the campus population and local food banks and may soon expand operations with a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) operation. Honey collected from a 20-hive apiary is sold in the book shop and the 21 acres of vineyards will some day supply grapes for the state's wine industry. USDA grant programs may offer a means to expand the outdoor classroom moving forward.

"NRCS is proud and honored to partner with Sweet Briar College in preserving the school's farming heritage and preparing future leaders in the field of agriculture," said Virginia State Conservationist Edwin Martinez Martinez, Ph.D. "We look forward to playing a part in their ongoing success story as the school grows its campus operation to support more environmentally sustainable food systems."

\*Original name of NRCS

## Sweet Briar's Podcast: Sweet Stories in the Dell



Looking for something new to listen to? Sweet Briar's podcast is available on the Apple Podcast app or your preferred podcast app. Just search "Sweet Briar College" and download all the latest episodes! From alumnae stories to our

women's leadership core curriculum, hear some of the most interesting stories and updates about Sweet Briar.

## Join us for our Virtual Sweet Briar Days!

This year, Sweet Briar Days are going virtual! See the schedule below to join our faculty and staff for lectures on a variety of topics. Scan the QR code to the right using the camera on your smartphone or tablet to visit our website, where you can register for upcoming lectures or view recordings of previous lectures.



### Tuesday, December 29, 2020, 7 p.m. (Eastern)

Jodi Canfield Ph.D., Director of Athletics  
Hannah Lott, Assistant Director of Athletics and  
Head Field Hockey Coach

*The Legacy and Evolution of Sweet Briar Athletics*

### Tuesday, January 5, 2021, 2 p.m. (Eastern)

Dr. Jeffrey E. Key,  
Division Head of Social Sciences and Humanities  
*Foreign Policy Challenges for the Biden Administration*

### Wednesday, January 6, 2021

7:00 p.m. (Eastern)

Shawn O'Connor, Visiting Assistant Professor of Visual  
Arts in Studio Arts, Acting Director of  
Galleries and Museum  
*Ceramics: Alternative Firing*

### Thursday, January 7, 2021, 7 p.m. (Eastern)

Teresa Garrett, Vice President of Academic Affairs and  
Dean of the College  
*Reflections of a Dean During a Pandemic*

### Friday, January 8, 2021, 2 p.m. (Eastern)

Dr. Lynn Rainville, Director of Institutional History and  
Museums at Washington & Lee University  
Former Dean of Sweet Briar College and Former  
Director of Tusculum Institute  
*Sweet Briar Founders: Two Centuries of African  
American Families*

### Saturday, January 9, 2021

2:00 p.m. (Eastern)

Dr. August Hardy, Assistant Professor of Economics  
Social Sciences and Humanities  
*Dare to Believe in Markets: Trust Among Criminals*



## Historic Preservation Task Force meets to discuss conservation of Sweet Briar's historic buildings

Thanks to the dedication and commitment of several key alumnae, Sweet Briar is implementing a strategic initiative to conserve the College's buildings and the land on which it sits.

These alumnae, with backgrounds in historic preservation ranging from Governors' homes to paper conservation, have contributed their time and talent to advise Sweet Briar on next steps in preserving our history. Alumnae members of the task force include Cynnie Ottaway '57, Kathleen Kilpatrick '74, Ann Stuart Kling '75, Sally Old Kitchin '76, and Charlotte Bonini '92. Through professional and volunteer experience, these alumnae are providing invaluable expertise to the College.

On Dec. 9, the Task Force convened via Zoom for and received an update on the efforts conducted so far by Sweet Briar in consultation with Mesick Cohen Wilson Baker (MCWB), an architecture firm out of Albany, New York with offices in Williamsburg, Va. The firm has conducted drone photography of our buildings on the National Register of Historic Places to conduct a historic structures assessment. The first phase of the assessment addressed both the conditions of our buildings as well as providing us with a sense of the work to be done. This work will bring these buildings back to their status as architecturally significant and a destination for students of Ralph Adams Cram's architecture.

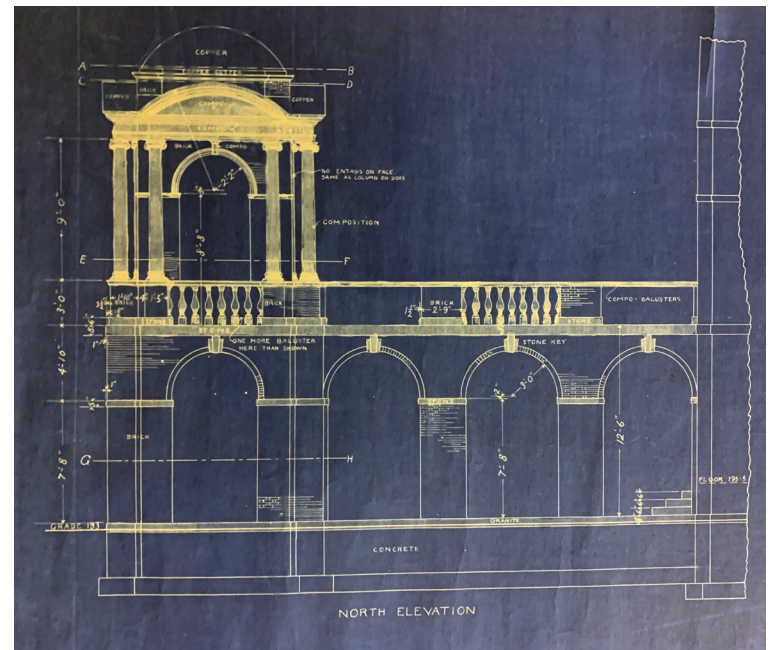
The first phase of the historic structures assessment was conducted primarily through interior and exterior drone photography. In addition to assessing the buildings themselves, the firm also assessed the impacts of vegetation on our buildings. Unfortunately, in some cases, the roots of trees and shrubbery has done some damage. During winter break, the College rectified these concerns and also addressed gutters and downspouts on all residence halls.

The first phase also involved an assessment of the College's collection of Cram's original drawings as well as site drawings, mechanical drawings, and drawings from renovations over the years. While exploring the storage areas of Physical Plant, Eric Kuchar, project manager for MCWB, uncovered a storage cabinet full of such drawings. Eric and his team moved the cabinet and all drawings related to Sweet Briar's buildings and infrastructure into a secure, climate-controlled environment and began scanning these drawings so they can use them in their work. In the spring of 2021, MCWB will bring a paper conservator to campus to design a tactical plan to scan and preserve these invaluable pieces of Sweet Briar history.

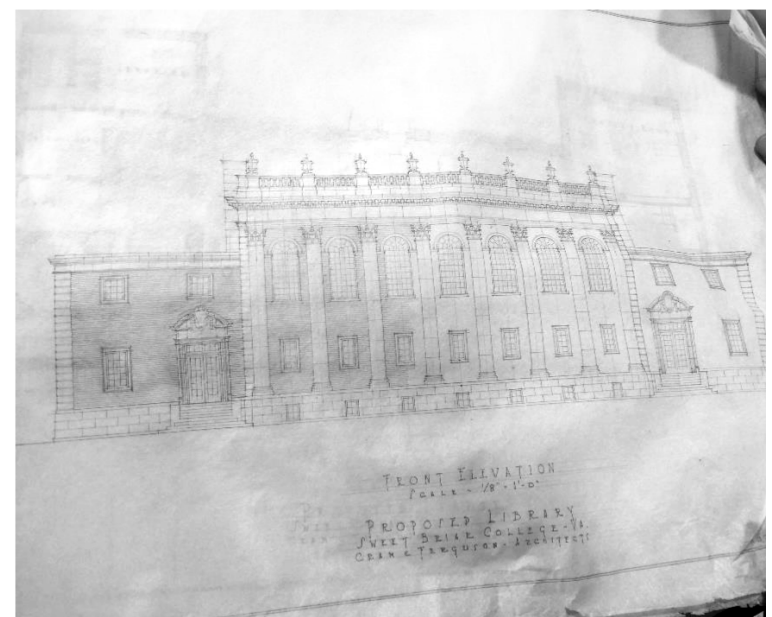
The second phase of the historic structures assessment looks further into Sweet Briar's future in

an attempt to find alternative sources of energy to replace our "state of the art" steam plant. While the steam plant was at the cutting edge at the time of its installation in 1938, it has aged beyond its use. The College is exploring alternative energy sources and is considering geothermal sources on campus as a potential solution.

If you are interested in supporting historic preservation at Sweet Briar, please contact Claire Dennison Griffith '80, Senior Director of Alumnae Relations and Development, at 434-381-6131 or [cgriffith@sbcc.edu](mailto:cgriffith@sbcc.edu).



*An original blue print of the bell tower.*



*A site plan for Sweet Briar's library, drawn by Cram & Ferguson Architects in the early days of planning for the College.*



## Sweet Briar competes in the 2020 IHSA Inaugural Online Horse Show

Congratulations to Sweet Briar Riding and our IHSA team for their numerous wins and placings, including the Hunter Seat Team Champion, at the 2020 IHSA Inaugural Online Horse Show! Competitors submitted videos of their rides for the judges to watch. Visit Sweet Briar's Facebook page ([facebook.com/sweetbriar.college](https://facebook.com/sweetbriar.college)) to see our results and watch some of the rides!

### Chloe Kerschl '22

1st place

Open Equitation over Fences and Reserve High Point Rider

### Kaitlin Duecker '21

1st place

Open Equitation on the Flat

### Madeline Rucker '23

1st place

Introductory Equitation on the Flat

### Shannon Huth '23

2nd place

Intermediate Equitation over Fences



### Ella Leichty '22

2nd place

Limit Equitation over Fences

### Emily Simmons '24

2nd place

Limit Equitation on the Flat

### Caroline Waters '22

6th place

Intermediate Equitation on the Flat

### Sita Moses '23

Competed in Novice Equitation on the Flat

## Planned Giving: What's your 2021 resolution?

While we're already into 2021, the year 2020 truly showed us the strength of Sweet Briar women. We are so grateful for the support our alumnae and community displayed by reaching out to ask how they could help our students in this moment. Thank you, and know that Sweet Briar is a place you can always call home.

As we prepare for another year here at Sweet Briar, our resolution is to empower every student so that she can lead us into the future. If you're still looking for a resolution, we want to help you complete one while supporting your own future: writing a legal will.

Estate planning may not be the resolution you had in mind for 2021, but it's an easy way to get peace of mind for the year to come and protect your loved ones. It is also central to the Sweet Briar story — the College was founded based on wishes in Indiana Fletcher Williams' will, where she instructed that a women's college be built to expand access and opportunities for

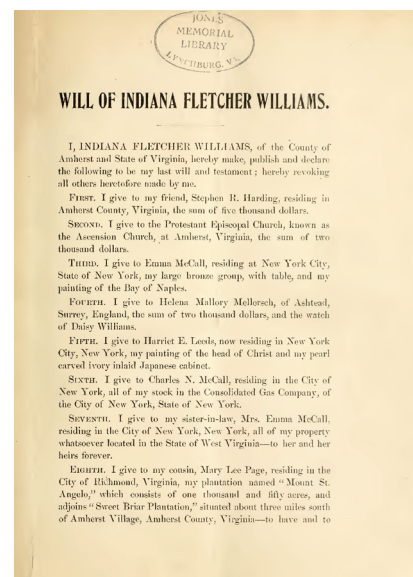
women in memory of her daughter, Maria Georgiana "Daisy" Williams.

This resource, which is free to alumnae and supporters of Sweet Briar, makes it easy to write your legal will, plan for your future, and create an optional legacy gift to support future generations of Sweet Briar women — just as Indiana Fletcher Williams did.

Here's to a healthy, happy, and bright year ahead. Thank you, as always, for supporting Sweet Briar.

Please contact Claire Griffith at [cgriffith@sbc.edu](mailto:cgriffith@sbc.edu), 434-381-6131 with any questions or for additional information visit our website at [sbclgacy.org](https://sbclgacy.org).

***This information is provided for educational purposes. It is not intended as legal advice. Please consult your own advisors who alone are aware of your individual situation and thus in the best position to provide an individual analysis and help you accomplish the best result.***



*Scan the QR code to the right using the camera on your smartphone or tablet to get started on writing your legal will.*



**SWEET  
BRIAR  
COLLEGE**

Alumnae Relations and  
Development  
P.O. Box 1057  
Sweet Briar, VA 24595

**RECRUIT A STUDENT**

Know a young woman who may be  
interested in Sweet Briar? Visit  
[sbc.edu/admissions/refer-a-student](http://sbc.edu/admissions/refer-a-student)  
so she can receive our  
admissions materials!



Whether you come to Sweet Briar or Sweet Briar comes to you (virtually)...

# Reunion is on!

May 27-30, 2021

Visit [sbc.edu/reunion](http://sbc.edu/reunion) for tentative schedules, updates,  
and registration beginning February 1!