

SANDSCREST

A Sense of Place, A Sense of Past

by Nora Edinger

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Sandscrest Conference & Retreat Center

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Chapter 6

The Sandscrest Conference & Retreat Center Era: AD 1952-present

At the beginning of this history, it was mentioned that the story of how 300 or so acres of the Ohio Valley came to be an Episcopal retreat center called Sandscrest could be described as a set of nesting dolls.

It is true that each new era was shaped by the previous one. For example, the lifeways of ancient and more-recent Native American tribes launched the location of trails and subsequent roads that were used by frontier settlers of European descent.

In turn, the McColloch family – who claimed ownership of what is now Sandscrest from 1770 until 1920 – set perimeters of field, pasture and the overall farm. They built the home and barn that still stand and are the core of today’s conference operations.



Thus, industrialist Harry Sands – the electrical engineer who brought the farm into the modern era and later donated it to the Episcopal Diocese of West Virginia -- is the editor rather than the author of how the property appears and works to this day.

Indeed, the land itself remains largely as it has existed for millennia. Table Rock is still standing just one ridge away. Short Creek is still flowing along the property line. While people and buildings have come and gone, the farm appears not much differently as it has for more than 250 years. Yet Sandscrest has still another, outermost layer that continues to form.

This section is the story of that layer – the story of Sandscrest Conference & Retreat Center.

The Sands Bequest

Harry and Helen Sands, who purchased the McColloch's Fair View Farm in 1920, died within months of each other in 1952. The octogenarian couple had no children. They chose to bequeath their beloved Sandscrest to two institutions that were near to Harry Sands' heart. (He is pictured below in his later years, sitting with an unidentified family member on the front porch that he added to the McColloch home.)



About 300 acres that comprised of their home and the active portion of the farm went to the Episcopal Diocese of West Virginia. This became the Sandscrest Conference & Retreat Center. Another large parcel of land that was mostly wooded – and is on the other side of GC&P Road – was given to the Boy Scouts of America. This property continues to operate as the Sandscrest Scout Reservation.

At first, the Diocese was uncertain how to use its property, according to an undated history done by Wheeling resident Karen Grisell, a frequent Sandscrest guest. The possibility of turning the main house into a retirement home (presumably for Episcopal priests and church members) was considered. Soon, however, it was settled that the property would become a retreat center.

Toward that end, there were some major developments. In 1958, Sandcrest Foundation, Inc. – whose chair would always be the sitting Diocese Bishop -- was created to manage the property and an endowment that helps fund the center ministry and other charitable enterprises in the region.

Also, the large building adjacent to the main house that the Sands built as a high-tech chicken operation and used, later, as garage, chauffeur apartment and entertainment space was turned into the nine-room guest house and chapel that remain today.



The Mary Frank Jackson Era

Aside from the remodeling and organizational tweaks, the transition from Sandscrest Farm to Sandscrest Conference & Retreat Center was a gradual one, according to Susan Griffith Sampson. She is the daughter of Joseph Griffith, a longtime farm worker for Harry Sands who continued until farming operations ceased in 1962.

Except for a brief employment and residency at a horse farm in Ohio, Joseph Griffith also remained on site after that point, continuing to rent what had been his tenant home from initial Sandscrest Director Mary Frank Jackson. He was later employed by Sandscrest's second director, Nan

Haddad, from 1970-1992 as groundskeeper. His wife, Myrtle Griffith, became housekeeper and cook during that time period. The Griffith daughters and, later, a granddaughter waitressed for center luncheons and dinners. Thus, the Griffith family saw the entire transition from farm to conference center.

Jackson, the first director, was likely hired in 1958. She also lived on the property – in the suite just left of the top of the stairs in the main house, according to Griffith Sampson.

A widow, Jackson had previously lived in Lewisburg on a farm with her husband. There is no information as to how she came to Sandscrest, but her obituary indicates she did have previous administrative experience with the Works Progress Administration, a New Deal project created during the Great Depression. She was also a member of the Wheeling Garden Club.

Artifacts from Jackson's tenure were discovered in early 2025. They were inside an old desk and included coins, stamps and a dog tax certificate for her Dalmatian. They are pictured above.

A photo of Jackson from the Wheeling *Intelligencer* archives appears on the next page. This article shares a bit of her intent as a director, as well.



SANDSCREST RETREAT AND ADMINISTRATOR—Mrs. C. A. Jackson, administrator of Sandscrest Foundation, stands before the mansion house of the conference and retreat center. (Photo by Joanou)

Sandscrest Retreat Open To Other Denominational Groups

By GEORGE JOANOU

Sandscrest, a name familiar to Episcopalian clergymen, is now opened to church related groups from other denominations.

Sandscrest is a conference and retreat center on a beautiful estate and 288 acre farm seven miles north-east of Wheeling. It was given to the Diocese of West Virginia.

Harry S. Sands through Security Trust of Wheeling by Harry S. and Helen Turner Sands. It is operated as a conference and retreat center by Sandscrest Foundation, of which the Bishop of West Virginia is president.

Sandscrest is the only known estate that is strictly utilized as a conference and retreat center in the local area.

Tracing a portion of the history of Sandscrest, Harry S. Sands was born in Fairmont and educated at Cornell University. He came to Wheeling as a young electrical engineer, and later acquired wide business interests.

He married Helen Turner of Baltimore, Md. The Sands family came from the Isle of Wight to Maryland in 1771. They were members of the Church of England. Later, they were active in the early history of the Episcopal Church and have always been identified with its interests.

Harry and Helen Sands had no children. The chief interest of their life together was their church. St. Luke's. They often expressed the wish that their beautiful and beloved home might eventually be used in some way for the benefit of the clergy and lay people of the Church.

Ever mindful of this wish, Sandscrest Foundation has planned the conference and retreat center to be a place of spiritual rest and refreshment.

Accommodations consist of 15 twin-bedrooms, most of them with hot and cold running water with adequate bath and toilet facilities. Modern heating makes all rooms comfortable in winter.

There is a small chapel which is pleasing and comfortable. It is fully equipped for services including Holy Communion.

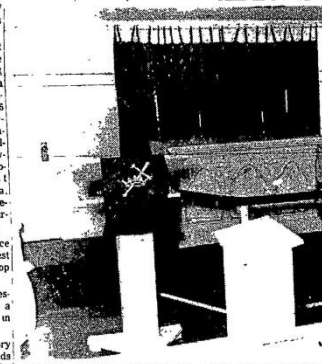
Sandscrest has been active for the past five years. Foundation president is the Right Rev. Wilbur C. Campbell, Episcopalian Bishop of the state, at Charleston.

A. C. Spurr, is vice president. George G. Bailey, secretary; and Robert Lee Boyd, treasurer, all of Wheeling.

Members of the board for Sandscrest Foundation include Darnie President Theodore H. John Waterhouse, John Fairbairn, Thursday told the Assoson George Weaver Jr., the Rev. W. Carroll Thorn and Mrs. A. Single. Mrs. C. A. Jackson, of Lewisburg, is Sandscrest's administrator.

Clergy families have been using the farm located amid the rolling hills for short vacations and stopovers. Episcopalian from Mounds-universities," he said

calling CR 7-3022, or through the office of the Diocese of West Virginia, 1666-A Virginia St., Charles, by ideal for drawing apart.



CHAPEL AT SANDSCREST—One of the unique attractions of the Sandscrest conference and retreat center is the small comfortable chapel adjacent to the mansion house. It is fully equipped for services, including Holy Communion. (Photo by Joanou)

ville, Wheeling, Wellsburg, and other parts of the local area, have been using Sandscrest for meetings and luncheons since 40 persons can be accommodated for day reservations, according to Mrs. Jackson.

The rush season for Sandscrest," says Mrs. Jackson, "is no real slack time of the year. Sandscrest is closed the month of February," she adds.

"The meals here are Southern style," comments Mrs. Jackson, "and the mansion and grounds are ideal for adult groups. The farm is entirely removed from night and sound."

"The conference and retreat center is no way institutionalized," she adds.

The foundation operates without any assessment to Episcopalian on an income from the Sands, Estate through Security Trust Co.

The facilities of Sandscrest are available now to any group recommended by a clergyman of the Episcopal Church.

Any group desiring information or reservations at Sandscrest can contact Mrs. Jackson directly by

Notre Dame Holds Enrollment Line

CLEVELAND (UPI) — Notre Dame President Theodore Hesburgh Thursday told the Assoson of American Colleges that his school would hold the line on enrollment for the coming decade.

Father Hesburgh said Notre Dame's undergraduate rolls will stay at the present 5,000, but the graduate school will grow slightly to 1,000.

"We don't want to be the best, just the best, of the Catholic annual 'Smoker' will be formulated at this meeting

adds Mrs. Jackson. "The accommodations are inviting and comfortable without being too luxurious. The quiet beauty of the surrounding fields, of hills and valleys, and nature's peace seem to caress you with God's love and serenity. The quiet simple chapel reminds you constantly of God's real presence."

This is Sandscrest.

One GOD'S OWN DECLARATION THE RESULTS OF Scripture—Ezekiel 20:1-3; Dan John

By N. SPEER JONES FROM LAST WEEK'S general session of the Ten Commandments in their historical setting, we move this week to a specific study of the "first and greatest" of these Commandments.

It is so natural for us today to think of God as the one and only God that it is hard to imagine a worship of several deities at once. Yet for many years in the world's history, this polytheism was far more prevalent than monotheism, the worship of one God.

In the Greek era philosophers began to think in terms of a single Moving Spirit or First Cause, but the concept was not held among the common people. Certain Eastern sects devoted themselves to worship of

"No one can serve two gods, for one and love the other one and despise the other." mon.—Matthew 6:24.

single god, but this deity was often the sun or some other false god. About the time of Christ many Romans did taken honor age to the ancient gods, men while embracing wholeheartedly one of these monotheistic sects, such as Mithraism. It was a Persian-originated religion which worshipped a single god of light and truth, often represented by the sun. For time Christianity almost seemed destined to lose out to such sects.

In this context it is easier to understand the importance of the First Commandment; it forbids not only the polytheism prevalent at the time, but also forbids atheism—the denials of any God. Based on copyrighted material from National Council of Churches of Christ. Distributed by:

Griffith Sampson recalled a more personal view as to how Jackson operated the property.

In one way, it was a farm home with what functioned as an extended family. Jackson shared the property as living space with the Griffiths and some other workers. For the Griffith children, Jackson functioned in a grandmotherly role. It was she who had a swing set installed in the yard of their tenant house. Later, she committed to doing the flower arrangements for Griffith Sampson's wedding, which was scheduled to occur on site.

On another level, Jackson soon had to deal with a formal house whose fine furniture was largely auctioned off at the same time full-scale farming ceased. Griffith Sampson said the Diocese wanted the house to function as a bare-bones conference center.

Pared-down bedroom furnishings were still used for overnight stays. But, on the first floor, most of the Sands' furniture was replaced by folding chairs and collapsible tables that could be easily rearranged to suit various events.

On the next page is a copy of the 1961 auction advertisement from the *Wheeling News Register* that offered farm, work and household items.

84 Auction Sales

DISPERSAL

Holstein Cattle — Hay — Grain
Sandscrest Foundation, Inc
SATURDAY, OCT 7, 1961
12 00 o Clock Sharp

At the Sandscrest Foundation, Inc., three miles north of Oglebay Park, eight miles west of West Liberty College; 1 1/2 miles north of Route 88 on G C and P Road Ohio Co W Va Follow sale arrows from Route 40 or 88 to the farm.

CATTLE

52 head registered and grade Holstein cattle, Ormsby and Carnation breeding 50 years continuous breed of Holsteins by the late H. P. Sands and the Foundation 30-day test, T. B. Accredited and Bangs Certified, 17 registered animals, balance purebred 25 cows all recently fresh springers or fall freshening, 6 first-calf heifer springers 6 heifers of breeding age six yearling heifers six heifer calves DHIA records, pedigree at sale ring.

HAY & GRAIN

1 700 bales first-cutting hay, 1 600 bales second-cutting hay, 500 bales third-cutting hay, 500 bales mixed hay, 200 bales straw, 300 bu oats, 200 bu barley, 100 tons grass silage in 3 silos, 10 acres corn on stalk in 4 lots, Colby 150-bu power spreader, all milking equipment.

Sale of all farm machinery will be held Saturday April 7 1962 — 9 30 A M

TERMS — CASH

LUNCH SERVED BY
SHORT CREEK
METHODIST CHURCH

SANDSCREST
FOUNDATION, INC.

R D 1 Wheeling, W. Va.
David H. Williams, Manager and
Auctioneer, Hickory, Pa. Phone,
ELG n 6-2235

“She did well with what she had,” Griffith Sampson said of Jackson, who was still employed as director when she died of pneumonia in the hospital in 1968. “Nan (Haddad) made it comfy.”

The Nan Haddad Era

Nan Haddad became Sandscrest’s second and longest-serving director in the summer of 1968, according to her daughter, Katie Haddad Crosbie. Haddad’s 29-year tenure lasted until her own death in 1997.

Haddad Crosbie said her mother was known to then Bishop Wilburn Campbell of the Episcopal Diocese of West Virginia as he had attended social events at their family home in Buffalo, NY during Lenten speaking engagements at St. Paul’s Cathedral there. Haddad’s husband was Canon Sacrist on the cathedral staff. But, following her husband’s death, Haddad and the couple’s youngest son, Earl, had relocated to Florida.

When the same Bishop ran across Haddad -- who was in the area to attend daughter Haddad Crosbie's graduation from Bethany College -- wheels were set in motion that brought Haddad to Sandscrest to replace the recently deceased Jackson.

"She literally moved to Sandscrest two weeks later," Haddad Crosbie said. "The change was good for her. She did not like living in Florida."

Haddad brought her own furniture to the accoutrement-starved main house and moved into what had been the Sands' suite, now the Bishop's Suite. She had a sitting room, bedroom and bathroom. Earl, her teenaged son, moved into a large, finished space in the attic. Later, his older brother, N. Mitchell, would temporarily share that space after returning home from service in the Vietnam War.

"When she moved in, there was the dining room table, the Sands' big sofa in the hallway under Helen Sands' portrait and there was plastic wicker furniture. It was hideous," Haddad Crosbie recalled. "And, there was a ghost in the house -- Clarence."

Clarence Currence was a previous farm manager who lived in the house for a time after the Sands' deaths in 1952.

There was little time to worry about the actual cause of the creaks that plagued a house whose core was built in 1847, however. Sandscrest was busy and the property was in dire need of extensive refurnishing in order to keep all those guests fed and housed.

On the visitor side, two decades' worth of guest books from Haddad's era are in the Sandscrest archive. They reveal heavy use by church groups from the Northern Panhandle, other parts of West Virginia, the Pittsburgh area and southeast Ohio. In addition to Episcopalians, there were representatives from Lutheran, Presbyterian, United Methodist, Church of Christ and Roman Catholic churches.

A sampling of specific guests' names include: Peterkin, Benner, Zimmerman, Welsh, Van Dyne, Mosslander, Dayton, Selby, Teagarden, Lazear, Farley, Hineman, Richey, Snyder, Gabriel, Palmer, Earnest, Cauliffe, Wood and Harpfer.



As busy as the guest load was, Haddad Crosbie said her mother was also scrambling for furnishings.

The massive rug that remains in the dining room (pictured at left) was purchased from a door-to-door peddler. Its red once popped against the walls' then Wedgewood-blue color, she noted. The dining table near the front of the house was purchased for \$40 at an estate sale. The larger table in this photo and the buffet to the left were the Sands' own. They are two of three pieces known to date back to their family.

A friend of Haddad's associated with the Sandscrest Scout Reservation worked for Stone & Thomas in downtown Wheeling, Haddad Crosbie said. He kept

Haddad aware of sales so she could buy bedding and the occasional piece of furniture when it was on deep discount.

"Sandscrest had a very low budget," Haddad Crosbie explained of such maneuverings.

She noted that her mother used her own silver – which served 36 – for events. Haddad stored the bigger pieces in a safe that was once tucked into Harry Sands' elevator, which was no longer functional because of foundation shifting.

Haddad Crosbie and her husband, who lived in the nearby Woodsdale neighborhood, sometimes volunteered their service. For one donor-focused event – which Haddad worried would be understaffed -- the couple launched a surprise.

“My husband and I just appeared as the French maid and English butler to serve drinks and hors d’oeuvres at the cocktail hour and dinner and disappeared without ever breaking character.”

Myrtle Griffith, who lived on site, and, later, chefs Rocco Basil and Dave Henderson did the cooking for such dinners and other meals. The menu was a set one, with three basic dishes assigned to specific days of the week, Haddad Crosbie noted.

While chicken divan and meatloaf were also offered, she said the classic Sandscrest meal of that era was beef tenderloin, a roasted potato dish, green beans with onions and bacon, and baked Alaska. Haddad herself made the sauce and the meringue for the latter.

“My mother wanted good dining,” Haddad Crosbie said. “I can’t say it was fine dining, because it wasn’t exotic. But it was elegant food presented elegantly.”

That gift for presentation carried over into administrative and financial affairs, Haddad Crosbie said.

“My mother had a sofa, a love seat, in the farmers office. When there was a conference on, she would sit in the farmers office and knit. That was so she could keep track of people.” The blue rug now in the living room – a gift from a Cleveland-based relative of the Sands – was then in the farmers office, as was a small television.

In Haddad’s early tenure, during annual canonical exams for seminary students that were conducted at the house, that supervision got more personal, she added. Haddad would sit in the kitchen at a Formica table.

“The young people would come out of the exams and needed to decompress. She would sit there with them, which is how she wound up knowing pretty much all the priests in the region.

“She was kind of a force,” Haddad Crosbie continued. “She knew what (Sandscrest’s) mission was. She treated it with great respect and she expected everyone else to.”

That included the Sandscrest board of trustees and even the bankers who operated the endowment, both groups of which she noted were frequently entertained. “She had connections ... It didn’t take her long to make sure Sandscrest always came out in the black and it hadn’t been before that.”

That multi-level commitment and on-site residence created a personal relationship to the house, Haddad said. The Haddad family celebrated holidays in the main house as the center was closed to the public at those times. Haddad knitted ornaments for a Christmas tree displayed in the sunroom.

For Earl, Haddad's younger son, Sandscrest was just home. He said he thoroughly explored the property – likely in similar fashion to the earliest of the McCollochs. He camped on back acreage, knew where the ruins of at least one early tenant house were located and rediscovered farm roads that had been covered over by multiflora rose in just the few years since active farming stopped.

As Haddad aged, she was afflicted with a genetic balance disorder, emphysema and a broken hip. Eventually, her emphysema required that Haddad remain in her suite. But, with the Bishop's permission, she stayed on until her own death in 1997.

"She was ruling from her bed," Haddad Crosbie said. Sandy Bachman, an innkeeper who served Sandscrest for an unparalleled more than 40 years before retiring in late 2022, became her legs.

Below, Haddad (with white hair) is pictured with her children and grandchildren at Sandscrest. Haddad Crosbie, the primary source for the Haddad-era text is seated at the right in the right photo. Interestingly, Mitch Haddad, the little boy in the photo on the left and son of the late N. Mitchell, now operates the popular Later Alligator restaurant in Wheeling's Centre Market with his mother, Susan Haddad, who founded that eatery.



The Sarah Lydick Era

Following the three-decade tenure of Nan Haddad, Sandscrest went through a season of mission drift. A handful of short-term directors came and went. Yet, a notable point of stability during this time was Sarah Lydick, who served from 2005 to 2018.

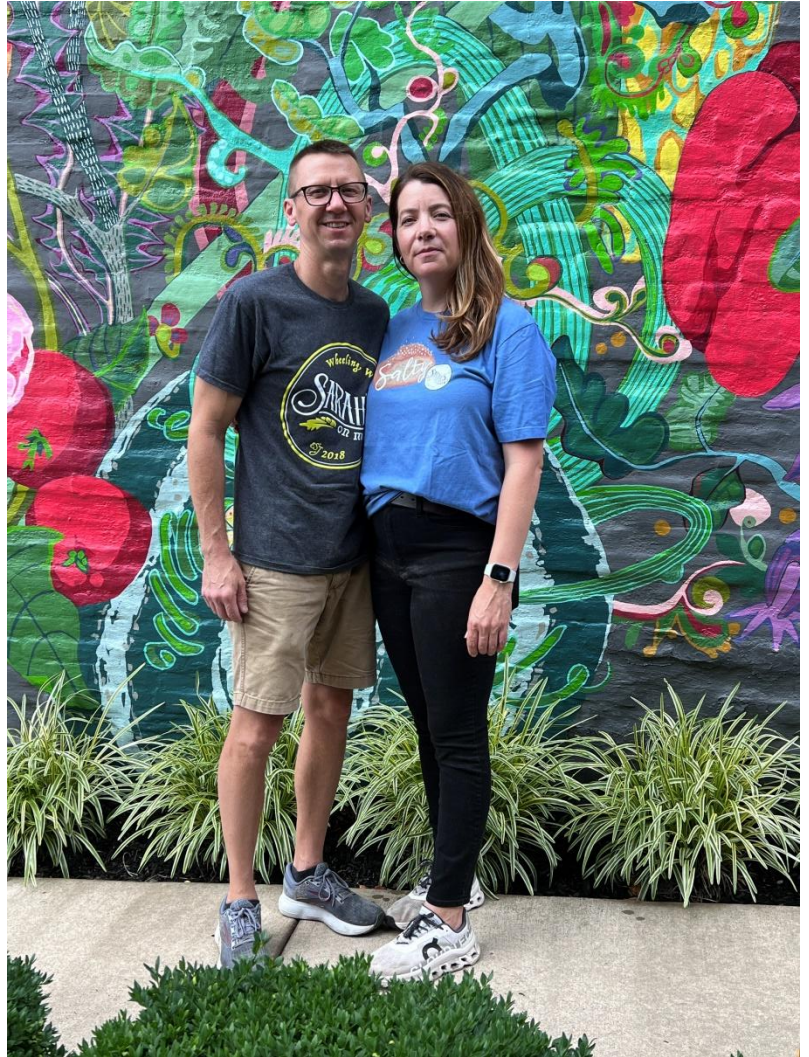
Lydick is a chef who trained in both Paris and at a California restaurant called French Laundry with Chef Thomas Keller. She served Sandscrest as both director and cook. This dual role was about necessity as well as convenience. The Bishop of that time wanted Sandscrest to support itself on event revenue.

“The place was rocking just so she could meet payroll,” according to Patty Lydick, both Sarah Lydick’s mother-in-law and a 20-year member of Sandscrest’s innkeeping staff, now retired.

Sandscrest had already been hosting Wednesday night dinners and weddings – including Lydick’s own just prior to her directorship. But, the pace and magnitude of such events increased.

Whatever the challenges of the time, Lydick forged her own Sandscrest legacy and family connection to the property. She and husband Rod Lydick lived on site in one of two remaining tenant houses from the Sands’ era. Rod Lydick assisted with the cooking required for events that soared into the hundreds of guests. Patty Lydick, long-term innkeeper, and Sandra (Sandy) Bachman were tapped to both serve the large parties and keep the facility clean.

Lydick has fond memories of Bachman, who died in 2023, just a few months following her retirement.



“Sandy Bachman was an integral part of many directors’ success,” Lydick said. “She was the one that passed on all the valuable information you needed to know about the place and the people involved ... I know she was basically running the place when Nan got sick and eventually passed away. She gave her whole life to Sandscrest.”

It was Lydick who brought fine dining to Sandscrest. It was here that she perfected some of the dishes and techniques she would go on to use at her own celebrated restaurant, Sarah’s on Main, in downtown Wheeling. Indeed, it was at Sandscrest where she and Rod perfected their iconic salty bread. This baguette has been voted the best bread in West Virginia by *Food & Wine Magazine* and is still in the salad-course rotation at Sandscrest.

Rod and Sarah Lydick are pictured on the previous page, in front of a mural in the garden area at Sarah’s on Main.

The Cheryl Ryan Harshman Era

When Lydick left Sandscrest in 2018 to start Sarah’s on Main, the center again went through a couple of directors who served during the final stages of mission drift.

In 2019, at a foundation board meeting, Sandscrest’s future was under deep and pensive discussion. Things were not going well. Board member Cheryl Ryan Harshman, a regional artist who was set to retire from her work as head librarian at West Liberty University, made what she considered a joking reflection on the ongoing troubles.

“I could do it,” she said.

The board and Bishop instantly took her up on what they chose to perceive as an offer. Later in 2019, she was on the job. But, not for long. COVID-19 struck a few months later, shutting Sandscrest down to public visitation for more than a year.

“It was frustrating,” Ryan Harshman recalled of what felt like a false start. “But, the Diocese and a new stream of revenue from oil and gas wells located on adjacent properties carried us through.

“What could have been an ending turned into a time to push a reset button.”

During the COVID shutdown and thereafter, Ryan Harshman embarked on an ambitious campaign to address long-deferred maintenance, bring administrative practices into the modern era and beautify the facility.

Among the changes:

- The entire facility was rewired and plumbing continues to be methodically redone. This includes a full restoration of the sunroom that came after a plumbing failure on Christmas Day 2024.
- Attic dormers were replaced.
- The living room was replastered.
- A “fire-proof house” constructed by the Sands was torn down as it had fallen prey to black mold.
- Aging furniture was replaced with a mix of new and vintage items – an ongoing effort.
- The attic and basement were cleared of decades’ worth of accumulated stuff.
- Art, area rugs, curtains, phone-charging outlets, fresh paint and decorative door numbers went into every guest room.
- Electric light and flooring stable enough to handle crowds were added to the barn.
- High-quality, weather-resistant furniture was added to porch and patio.
- Fields were leased to area farmers to prevent them from growing over.
- A Facebook account with *Prayerful Pause* reels done by the Rev. Nancy Woodworth-Hill was introduced. As was a new website that automatically links interested guests with monthly newsletters and event information.
- Attention has been paid to the property’s history – including the writing of this online book, the ongoing restoration of a wall map that shows the layout of the farm during the early Sands era, and the ongoing preservation of archival photographs and small documents.



As COVID lifted, Ryan Harshman began a staffing overhaul, as well. She brought on Chris Villamagna, a talented home cook, to head up the kitchen and serve as assistant director. Adam Helt joined longer-term groundskeeper Gary Garrison in tackling the multitude of repairs needed to restore the buildings and grounds to full functionality.

In 2023 -- as long-term innkeepers Sandra Bachman and Patty Lydick had either recently retired or were imminently to do so -- Kelly McCoy and Nora Edinger joined the staff.

(In the 2022 picture above are, left to right, Patty Lydick, Cheryl Ryan Harshman, Chris Villamagna and the late Sandy Bachman.)

“We’re newish as a group,” Ryan Harshman said of today’s staff. “But, we’re not really doing anything new. Sandscrest is still serving as a ministry. It’s a place to retreat, refresh and rejoice – just like it has been since 1958.”

Another notable change during Ryan Harshman’s tenure, however, is the type of events Sandscrest



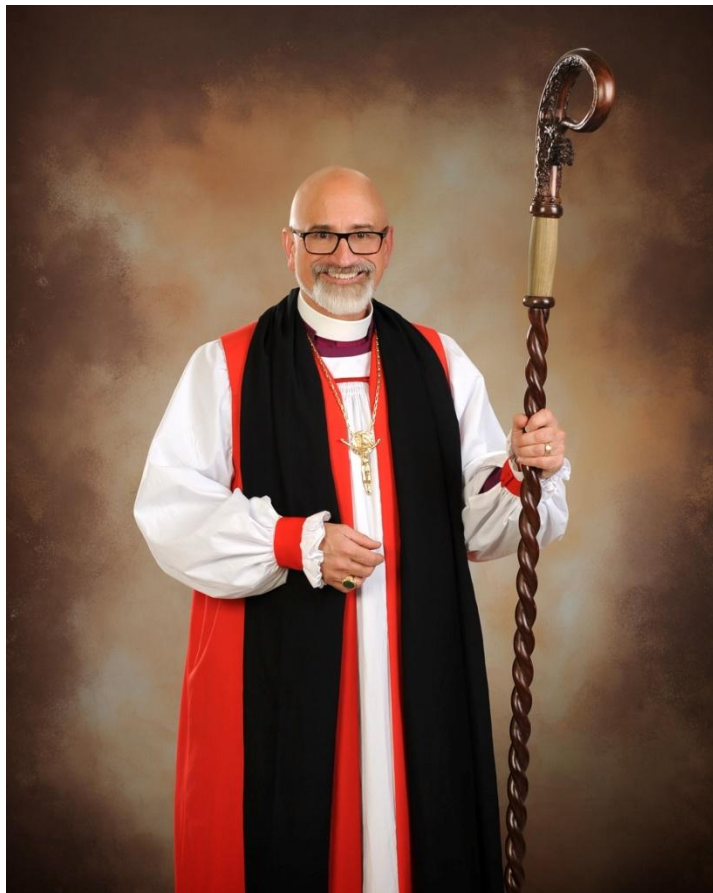
offers. She is the director who brought in high tea as a public event. Once a month, the staff does a multi-tiered tea with five savories, five sweets, and clotted cream and jam with scones.

Ryan Harshman's deep art connections have also linked Sandscrest with a variety of artists, many of them from Pittsburgh, who stay for multi-night retreats. The combinations of guests that results can be interesting, she noted. At one event in late 2024, for example, two dozen artists from the Wheeling area and Europe met for a special dinner in one part of the main house while an Episcopal silent retreat was going on elsewhere in the facility.

"It's lovely when it all comes together," Ryan Harshman said. "People need Sandscrest moments in their lives in the same way Jesus needed to retreat to the mountains or to the home of a good friend. It's hospitality that approaches elegance, yes. But it's also ministry."

Future Vision

Nearly 70 years into its life as a conference and retreat center, Sandscrest is now poised to move into a future that will include both upgrades and expansion. The following vision statement is shared from the Right Rev. Matthew Cowden, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of West Virginia:



The Episcopal Diocese of West Virginia is blessed to have three great ministries -- like jewels in our crown -- that have been gifted to us through God's grace. These sacred places have been lovingly maintained through a combination of programmatic engagement, endowments and grant funding.

Peterkin Camp & Conference Center: Wilderness and Wonder -- *In the Eastern Panhandle, nestled in 1,000 acres of pristine Appalachian wilderness, lies the Peterkin Camp & Conference Center. This cherished property is home to a vibrant series of programs -- especially summer camps for children, youth, and young adults. Originally a hunting camp developed by Wheeling businessmen, Peterkin is now a rustic sanctuary, complete with trout streams and a rich diversity of flora and fauna.*

Highland Educational Project: Outreach in the Mountains -- To the south, in McDowell County -- one of the most economically challenged regions in the nation -- the Highland Educational Project stands as a beacon of hope. This mission and outreach center supports local communities through educational initiatives, service and Christian fellowship.

Sandscrest Conference & Retreat Center: A Sacred Place for Retreat and Renewal – Sandscrest, in the Northern Panhandle, is a very different but equally essential part of our Diocesan ministry. It is a place set apart for retreats and for hearing the still, small voice of God.

Unlike Peterkin's rustic charm, Sandscrest is an elegant, historic estate centered around an 1847 mansion. Once developed by yet another Wheeling businessman, the property offers a unique kind of spiritual nourishment. Sometimes people ask how Sandscrest is a form of ministry. I respond that it's a "thin place" -- where the veil between heaven and earth becomes translucent.

There's something about turning onto the driveway, where the road curves and suddenly only the sky is visible. There's something about the elegant, delicious meals, the thoughtful hospitality of our staff, and the stillness of the porch at sunset -- looking out over hayfields and mountain ridges. That's ministry.

Sandscrest is a place of restoration for clergy and laypeople alike. Many of our guests are ministers who pour themselves out in service for their congregations. Many others are artists and, quite often, caregivers in need of spiritual renewal. Here, they find peace.

Sandscrest is a place to **re-create**, to **educate** and to **celebrate**.

Because of the vital role these three properties play in the life of the Diocese, a **Capital Campaign** is now underway.

At **Peterkin**, the Diocese is seeking \$10 million for necessary upgrades, some of which are tied to a conservation easement that will ensure that this beautiful, life-giving land remains undeveloped and preserved for generations to come.

Preparatory work is also in progress at **Sandscrest**. Architects -- in collaboration with the Bishop, director and board -- have designed a plan to secure the property's structural integrity, support expansion, and ensure long-term financial sustainability.

Planned upgrades include refreshing existing facilities, enhancing the barn (the largest meeting space on-site) and developing new guest accommodations.

In the first stage, the Diocese is seeking \$1 million for enhancements that will allow the hosting of up to 350 guests on campus for meals and events, the creation of accessible bathrooms connected to the historic mansion, and ADA accessibility to other parts of the house and campus. Plans for an outdoor pavilion and a new chapel are also included in the vision.

Later stages include expanded guest accommodations for families and individual retreatants.

Sandscrest is a blessing to both the Diocese and to the wider Ohio Valley community. This capital campaign is part of our call to steward this sacred space in a way that extends its blessings far into the future -- as far as the Lord allows us.

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Sources:

Interviews with or statements from: Katie Haddad Crosbie and Earl Haddad (daughter and son of Nan Haddad, longtime director of Sandscrest Conference & Retreat Center); Sarah Lydick (former Sandscrest director and cook), Patty Lydick (former Sandscrest innkeeper), Cheryl Ryan Harshman (current Sandscrest director); and the Right Rev. Matthew Cowden (Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of West Virginia)

An undated history of Sandscrest done by Karen Grisell, a frequent guest at Sandscrest

An interview of and a memoir presentation prepared for a 2024 Sands family reunion done by Susan Griffith Sampson (daughter of longtime farm worker Joseph Griffith)

Guest books and various newspaper clippings from the Sandscrest archive

Archival newspaper clippings from the Wheeling Intelligencer and the Wheeling News Register discovered by Erin Rothenbuehler, a Sandscrest board member and director of the Bellaire Public Library