

# Strasburg Heritage Association



Strasburg, Virginia  
www.strasburgvaheritage.org

## SHA Quarterly Meeting

*A Walk in Riverview Cemetery*

*Barbara Adamson, President*

We're very pleased to invite you for a walk in Riverview Cemetery to be led by Eva Mae Pifer, Cemetery historian extraordinaire. The walk will be held Sunday, October 3 at 3:00 PM. Mrs. Pifer has been the Cemetery administrator for thirty-two years and knows more of its history than anyone in our community. She will focus on WWII Veterans during our walk. We know that time won't allow us to visit the grave sites of all of our WWII Veterans, so we hope to provide a complete listing for you of all those veterans who are buried at Riverview.

Meet at the Cemetery's tool shed. We'll serve light refreshments. Rain date is Sunday, Oct. 10. Remember to wear comfortable shoes! The public is welcome.

## Fall Litter Pick-Up

We have scheduled our fall litter pick-up on Rt. 11 south for Saturday, Oct. 2. Meet at the Old Mill parking lot at 8:00 AM. Remember gloves and sturdy shoes. And thank you!

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### SHA Board of Directors 2010

Barbara Adamson, President

Judy Troxell, Vice-President; Wendy Pieper, Secretary; Richard Seelbach, Treasurer  
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## ***President's Letter***

***Barbara Adamson***

Despite the extremely hot day, a record crowd attended and thoroughly enjoyed the Garden Tour at the Sharpe and High Gardens in June. There must have been more than 150 people in attendance! Many, many thanks to our hosts, Mike Marcheterre and Craig Morris and to their helpers who welcomed us, educated us and kept us hydrated.

I regret to say that this year we will not be having a Holiday Homes Tour. We've been very lucky over the years to have wonderful hosts who've welcomed us into their homes but it's become more and more difficult to pull it together. We definitely plan to have a tour in December 2011 during the 250<sup>th</sup> celebration but will take a break in 2010. We'll make 2011 a special occasion!

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## ***Historic Justice Oak Will Soon Give Way To Progress***

From NVD November 27, 1963 by B.W. Harris

With every step of progress comes a certain sadness. As the men and machines go chewing their way across the countryside unrolling the twin strips of concrete that will be called Interstate Route 81 some cherished parts of other years must give way.

Near the Old Stone Shop north of Strasburg on Route 11 stands a giant and venerable oak tree that can claim at least two hundred summers. The engineers and surveyors have scheduled the new highway giant to cross Route 11 at the point where the tree stands. Soon they will come with the machines and one more landmark will be wiped off the face of time.

Before the tree has to go it seemed fitting to try to find out some of the scenes it has watched over in its two centuries. The land on which the tree stands belonged to Stickleys since the early days of white settlement in the Valley. The first Stickley came very soon after Jost Hite and his little band of followers. No one knows whether the tree was deliberately planted or was one of the many which sprang from fallen acorns.

Sometime between 1820 and 1830 the tree achieved a measure of fame and was given a name by local residents. Although at that time the horrors of the Indian wars were almost over Indians were still commonly seen in the Valley. One day as Squire David Stickley was returning to his home a short distance west of the tree he chanced on an Indian man who was cruelly beating his wife with a whip. The Squire was outraged at the action and being a man of courage he charged upon the Indian and took the whip from him.

The next day, according to the tale which has passed down from generation to generation in the Stickley family, a small band of the Indian tribe came to visit Squire David about the beating. They apparently

knew that he was the local magistrate, for it is said they came to ask him to preside at a sort of trial for the brave who had been beating his squaw.

Apparently the Squire agreed and the party moved to the shade of the tree, which even then had its full growth, to hold their court. The trial was held, the Indian found guilty and the Squire decreed the punishment, which was to be 39 lashes from the same whip that had been used on the woman.

The legend continues that the Indian pleaded to be killed rather than have to suffer the humiliation of what he considered more properly a punishment for women. He was not granted his wish though and the lashes were administered in front of the company. It was this episode that gave the tree its name, Justice Oak.

For some reason the whip remained in the possession of the Stickley family and until a year or two ago was readily brought forth to give credence to the often told tale.

In its many years of standing guard by the Valley Pike the tree has seen much other activity. When turkeys first came to be an important part of the agriculture they were walked to market in Alexandria and Baltimore. Naturally they were walked down the main road. At night the drivers halted and made camp while the turkeys settled to roost in the trees. This oak on the Stickley property was a favorite overnight stopping place for the men taking their turkeys to market. Many turkeys spent the night on its branches before trucks were built to haul them.

If the oak could talk it could tell much about the Civil War as first one side then the other swirled up and down the "Long Grey Trail" under its branches. Since the tree stands scarcely a mile from the battle of Cedar Creek most likely the spreading branches gave shade and shelter indiscriminately to boys in blue or grey. Maybe some Johnny Reb or Yank climbed far up to the top to scout the enemy's position as the two sides prepared to do battle on October 19, 1864.

## **Strasburg's 250<sup>th</sup> Birthday**

The 2-5-0 Committee has been busy planning many events and activities for the celebration of Strasburg's 250<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2011. SHA's three quarterly meetings will be a part of these events.

- Sunday, February 27, 2011 – Local historian and author Daniel Bly will make a presentation about Strasburg's Founding Families. The program is planned to be held at the Fire Hall and will be followed by the dedication of the 250<sup>th</sup> monument to be placed in front of Town Hall next to the flag pole. Time of the program and dedication to be determined.
- Saturday, June 25, 2011 – Strasburg pottery will be the focus of this day! We're working with the Strasburg Museum to plan a day of exhibits, lectures and, we hope, pottery making demonstrations at the Museum. Time will be approximately 10:00 am to 3:00 pm. Raindate is Sunday, June 26. More details later.
- Sunday, September 11, 2011 – Family History Share Fair. We held a similar event in 2007 which was very popular. We hope that many more families will choose to share their family histories and photos. Please encourage your family and friends to work up a display – doesn't have to be fancy. More details to follow.

SHA is also sponsoring the reprint of “The Story of Strasburg” which was first published in 1961 on the occasion of Strasburg’s 200<sup>th</sup> Birthday. Hard to believe it’s been 50 years ago! This slim volume includes a wonderful history of the town written by Virginia H. Cadden and a series of historic pieces written by a variety of people. The pieces were a part of the Bicentennial Edition of the Northern Virginia Daily.

Another great idea that has come about with planning for the 250<sup>th</sup> is the use of two of the windows at the Arthur, Allamong and Brown Law Offices for displays by our many local volunteer organizations and other groups. SHA has agreed to coordinate the use of the windows. We’re very pleased with the enthusiastic response we’re getting and look forward to this opportunity to highlight the long history of our strong volunteer community. —Barbara Adamson

## ***A Bit of Folk History—The Day the School Burned***

By Kathy Kehoe

It was the last day of school 1968. It was the day I would graduate from 7<sup>th</sup> grade from the Strasburg Elementary School. I was thirteen years old and next year I would attend Strasburg High School, where grades 8<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> were taught. This was a special day for me and my classmates, most of who had attended school with me since first grade. I had no way of knowing that this day would also be a memorable and historic day for the rest of the town of Strasburg.

Girls had to wear white dresses for the graduation ceremony. At that time, it was difficult for my mother to get to Winchester to shop, so she took me to Riddleberger’s Department Store on King Street. There we found a beautiful white dress on sale. It was more fancy than I needed, satin and lace with a big white bow in the back, but the only white dress they had in my size. I loved that dress.

That morning I carried my white dress into my classroom on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor and laid it across my desk. The girls would change later before the ceremony--for now, I was wearing my patrolman’s white belt sash. No one was in the classrooms yet as the students gathered on the playground and sidewalks after getting off the buses and it was long before the first bell. As I started out of the room to report for duty on the playground, the fire alarm sounded. Instinctively, as I’d been taught, I closed all the big windows in the classroom and shut the door behind me. “How odd” I remember thinking, “why is there a fire drill on the last day of school before school starts?” I thought maybe it was a malfunction, or a kids prank because it was the last day. But when I went down the stairs and out the front doors, I saw the smoke rolling out of the other side of the building. The buses were pulling up to let the kids off, the drivers weren’t opening the doors to let them out, and the kids faces were plastered against the glass watching the smoke in disbelief. Other kids were already on the playground and these were the children the patrolmen focused on as the word came with our instructions.

There were two large buildings on the school campus in those days, joined in the back middle by an addition of a gym and auditorium with a cafeteria on the ground floor facing the back of the building. The original building, on the right, was built to accommodate grades 1 through 12. Later this 2<sup>nd</sup> building, on the left, was built for the high school. My mother had graduated from this school in 1949, just eighteen years before. Later the building would become a middle school until Signal Knob Middle was built.

After being empty for many years, the Mennonite Church bought and restored the building and it is again filled with students and is used for religious services. The brick building housing the lower grades is gone, except for the stone foundation above the intact basement.

On this day in 1968, the landscape of the school would be forever changed. The word was sent around to the patrolmen that the fire was real, that it was no drill. The black smoke rolling out of the building was evidence enough of that and I remember the younger children staring wide eyed at seeing their classrooms burn. We patrolmen, 12 and 13 years old, were told to herd the children across the street to the playground and take them all the way to the back fence. Then we had to make the kids face the fence with their backs to the fire trucks and the sight of the fire, because, as someone said, they were afraid the “boiler would explode.” I wasn’t sure what a boiler was or why it would explode, but walked behind the small crowd of kids telling them to turn around as if I was a drill sergeant. One can imagine that these kids did not want to face the fence. This was almost cruel, to tell them they couldn’t watch the excitement, to see this very startling event unfold. The kids did as they were told though, and faced the chain link fence, craning their necks backward to see. I remember explaining to them why they had to do that. I stood guard over the kids, watching a teacher at the edge of the playground, waiting for instructions. Thankfully, after a few minutes, word came that we could let the kids turn around. The boys jumped in a half circle, eager to see what was going on. Some of the younger girls were crying. I comforted them by pointing out how the fire department was there and they were putting the fire out. The fireman would save the school. Could they see the water shooting up, putting out the fire? I asked. Watching the fireman at work seemed to ease their minds. Ironically, I had experienced a fire at my own house just a few months before. I knew first hand how fire and smoke could damage, how it melted the clocks on the walls, how everything you still owned would smell of smoke. On that day too, I followed all the safety rules I had learned in school, getting my grandfather out of the house, then running to my aunt’s house so she could call the fire department. The number one rule: get out of the building, then call for help.

As word got out all over town, parents were arriving at the school. The population of the town was about 2000 and in those days when the fire alarm went off, people made a point of finding out where the fire was. They yelled across the street with the news, made phone calls, walked closer to the site to watch. This was no ordinary fire and news traveled fast. Many of the mothers did not have jobs outside the home or they worked in the town so they went to the school as soon as they heard the news. My uncle Leon “Bud” Fultz left his job at the drugstore, picked up my mother and drove to the school. Once they knew my cousin and I were safe, Uncle Bud went back to work and I walked home later after my patrolman duties were done.

Seventh grade graduation ceremonies were postponed for a few days. Even though I’d closed the windows and door, enough smoke from the other building got in my classroom that my dress held the odor of smoke. Dry cleaning was expensive and because of the delicate material of the dress, it had to be sent to Woodstock for cleaning and would not have been back in time to wear to the graduation. So we opted to wear it as it was. Smoke had permeated the auditorium and held in the stage curtains, the metal chairs, the walls and floor. But I proudly walked up the steps in front of the stage, the big white bow on my back, the unforgettable scent of smoke in my nostrils, in my beautiful new dress to accept my certificate.

So that’s my story. Now your turn. The SHA would love to hear more stories about the day of the school fire. Send comments to [kathyckehoe@gmail.com](mailto:kathyckehoe@gmail.com) or call Kathy at 465-4185 to share your stories in the next newsletter.



Strasburg School  
1954-1955  
Strasburg, Virginia

# Strasburg Heritage Association

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Strasburg, VA 22657

[www.strasburgvaheritage.org](http://www.strasburgvaheritage.org)

## **Membership Application & Renewal**

**(Members 2010 dues are now due.)**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

MEMBERSHIP: \_\_\_\_\_ Cost is \$20.00

Additional Donation: \_\_\_\_\_

TOTAL ENCLOSED: \_\_\_\_\_

Please mail completed form to:

Strasburg Heritage Association

PO Box 525

Strasburg, VA 22657

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