

Strasburg Heritage Association



Volume 12 Issue 3

Strasburg, Virginia

2012

www.strasburgvaheritage.org

SHA Quarterly Meeting *Strasburg's Sabbatarians and Sandy Hook*

Join us on Sunday, Oct. 7 on Sandy Hook at the site of the home of one of Strasburg's more unusual early citizens, Sabbatarian Samuel Eckerling. Historian, author and Strasburg native Daniel Bly will discuss the importance to Strasburg area history of the Sabbatarian religious sect's settlement on Sandy Hook in the 1750s and will focus on some of the individual characters among them. Mrs. Wanda Sager has graciously agreed to allow us to meet at the Eckerling site near her home on Sandy Hook Rd. Nick Racey will also be there to offer his insights into the location of some original settlement activity. Directions: from town proceed across the river, pass Signal Knob Middle School and go up the hill, make the hard right turn to remain on Sandy Hook Rd. and go to the end of the road. The program will be held from 2-4PM; rain or shine. The public is welcome and refreshments will be served.

Childhood Playthings from the Past ***December 9th Program***

On December 9th Mrs. Laura Ellen Wade will present a program on childhood playthings— antique dolls and toys. There will be a brief Powerpoint presentation overview of the late Mrs. Virginia H. Beeler's doll and toy collection. Included in this collection are childhood playthings which local people had given to Mrs. Beeler over the years. In addition, a small gathering of her dolls and toys will be on display as well.

From her research in the local newspaper archives of the Strasburg News, Mrs. Laura Ellen Wade will also be sharing advertisements from area stores which sold dolls and toys from 1920-1950's, including their original prices!

Any person who has a doll or toy they wish to share, along with any special story or memory, especially if it

was purchased locally, is invited to bring it for display. Does anyone have a doll or toy purchased from Rosen's Department Store or a Tastee Freeze doll? If you have a childhood picture to go with your plaything, please bring that to display as well. We would like to photograph the child's picture and their plaything for future programs as part of our preservation of local history. Childhood playthings are a part of our cultural history.

The program will be held Sunday, Dec. 9 from 2:00-4:00PM at St. Paul Lutheran Church. The public is welcome and refreshments will be served. Please spread the word about what will be a wonderful Show'nTell!

President's Letter

Barbara Adamson

Hello, Everyone. As many of you know we had an enormously successful program in June, with Richard Kleese's excellent presentation and walking tour of Bank's Fort. The day also included our hosting a Civil War 150 Legacy Project scanning day by Library of VA staff. We kept them busy all day! They did over 300 scans and also photographed, rather than scanned, the Strasburg Museum's original CW hospital record. We thank everyone who participated by bringing their valuable materials for documentation and to make them available for researchers. Our congratulations to Marcy McCann and those who planned the Everything Old Is New Again tour on July 28. SHA provided financial support for the tour and Linda Williams and Sue Foster were a great help in scheduling some of the volunteers who assisted at the different locations. Marcy reports that this effort to promote working and living in downtown Strasburg will be bigger and better next year. It's hard to believe that it has been 10 years since SHA erected our Historic District signs in town. Some of them needed replacement, which we accomplished this summer. Our thanks to Conly Crabill who generously installed the signs for us.

Old Queen St. Cemetery

We finally feel like we're going to make some progress on improvements at the old graveyard located at the west end of Queen St. With Gloria Stickley's help, we've made arrangements to have Ken Lutz's tree service do extensive tree trimming and tree stump removal this fall. Several of us, including Dee Keister's grandson, Ian and a friend, have helped with the difficult task of cutting ivy vines (not removing at present, just cutting). Soil samples have been done so that we know how to properly lime and reseed throughout the cemetery. Have begun to spray weeds and poison oak growing on the fence line. We also want to put rustic fencing along the back of the lot. The town has agreed to help us with labor needs as we go along, and we thank them for their regular mowing and weed-eating as well as some tree trimming that was done this summer.

Note: Until 1965, Strasburg schools were not integrated. This summer a reunion was held of students who attended African-American schools Sunset Hill and the earlier Queen Street School. The following is a history of these two schools written by alumna Marquetta Mitchell who shared this history at the reunion.

A Little Folk History Queen Street-Sunset Hill Schools 1875-1965

by

Marquetta Mitchell

This is written especially for "Our Children".

A long time ago, almost one hundred and forty years ago on a cold winter day on January 19, 1875, Captain John Grabill made a visit to a very special school. Being the superintendent of schools in Shenandoah County, he had very important jobs to do. One of his jobs was to visit the students and teachers in all of the schools. On this cold and wintry day, he visited the Queen Street elementary school. Many say that he probably visited the school riding on his horse. Queen Street school was on the West End of Queen Street. Some people called the street "Pig Tail Alley" because many of the little girls who went to school there wore beautiful pigtails. It was likely a one room school house with grades one through seven like so many of the schools at that time.

The Queen Street School was a special place. It was the first and only school for black children in Strasburg at the time. During that time, white children and black children were not allowed to go to school together. The Queen Street School was so special that some black families traveled a long way to move to Strasburg so that their children could go to school there. There weren't many schools for black children in those days but most black families believed that going to school and getting an education was very, very important. So they worked hard to get their children to school.

Fifty-four years after Captain Grabill's visit, on October 28 in 1929, there were many sad people in Strasburg. Queen Street School burned down. We don't know what happened but thank goodness, a special group of black people called the "Elks" invited the black children and their teachers to their meeting hall to have classes until the new school was built. It was very important to all of the parents that their children get a very good education, so building the new school started right away! Sunset Hill School, a one room school house for grades one through seven, was built on a very high hill on what is now C Street today. It was a great place to bring your sled to go sleigh riding for recess in the winter or building snow caves and ramps. When there was no snow, students played hopscotch, marbles, football, jump rope, baseball and other games during recess. There was one recess in the morning and one in the afternoon. Because most of the students lived nearby, they walked to and from school every day and sometimes home for lunch. The toilets and water fountain were built outside. A big pot bellied stove heated the one room schoolhouse. Often, some of the students had to get up early to go to school to start the fire in the stove. Many of the school supplies that were used were thrown away from other schools; even simple supplies like chalk. There was a large blackboard with the teacher's desk in front of it. In front of the teacher's desk were very straight rows of desks and chairs for all of the students. School was started with prayer, the Pledge of Allegiance and "Lift every voice and sing". Sometimes, students would sing a special song called "The Hokie Pokie" which was a good warm up song on a cold winter day because students could dance to the "Hokie Pokie" song too! In the 1960s, probably about thir-

caves and ramps. When there was no snow, students played hopscotch, marbles, football, jump rope, baseball and other games during recess. There was one recess in the morning and one in the afternoon. Because most of the students lived nearby, they walked to and from school every day and sometimes home for lunch. The toilets and water fountain were built outside. A big pot bellied stove heated the one room schoolhouse. Often, some of the students had to get up early to go to school to start the fire in the stove. Many of the school supplies that were used were thrown away from other schools, even simple supplies like chalk. There was a large blackboard with the teacher's desk in front of it. In front of the teacher's desk were very straight rows of desks and chairs for all of the students. School was started with prayer, the Pledge of Allegiance and "Lift every voice and sing". Sometimes, students would sing a special song called "The Hokie Pokie" which was a good warm up song on a cold winter day because students could dance to the "Hokie Pokie" song too! In the 1960s, probably about thirty years after Sunset Hill School was built, another classroom was added and students were so happy that the bathrooms and water fountain were moved inside! Students didn't have to worry anymore about the water fountain freezing up on the outside in the wintertime or going to the bathroom outside when it was cold!

Most of the teachers at Queen Street and Sunset Hill Schools came from other places in Virginia or other states. During the school year the teachers, who were black, lived with black families and attended the churches and activities in the black community of Strasburg. During the summer breaks and some holidays, they usually went back to their own homes. It was a real honor to the special students who were invited to go home with one of the teachers to visit with their family. Until the 1960s, one teacher had to teach all of the grades. Sometimes the teachers would ask some of the students to help. Students learned how to teach other students as early as in elementary school. It was important that students behaved very well in school because if they didn't, they knew that when they got home, that they were in trouble if they did not behave or were disrespectful in school. Most times, if a student misbehaved in school, the parents knew about it before they got home. The parents and the teachers talked very often about how the children were doing in school and worked together to make sure that the children were getting a good education

Some of the teachers that taught were (we are not sure of the order): George Washington Witherall from Strasburg. He taught at Queen Street from 1917 to 1918; Estell Scott Brown Witherall from Charlottesville, Va. at Sunset Hill School; Mary Rebecca Fletcher taught at Sunset Hill; Miss Arta taught at Sunset Hill; Alease Witherall Garrison from Strasburg taught at Sunset Hill; Dora Payne from Ranson, W.Va. taught at Sunset Hill school; Dora Payne from Ranson, W. Va. Taught at Sunset Hill School; Susie Nickens from Strasburg taught at Sunset Hill School; Ms. Vivian Truesdale from North Carolina taught at Sunset Hill School; Mrs. Rosa Lee Brimmage taught at Sunset Hill School and George Heller from Roanoke, Va. taught at Sunset Hill School. These teachers traveled far and worked very hard to make sure the students received a good education.

Almost eighty years after Mr. John Grabill visited Queen Street School a very important law was passed that said that black children and white children could begin to go to school together (Brown vs. Board of Education in 1954). Eleven years after this law was passed, Sunset Hill School was closed (in 1965) and black children and white children in Strasburg began to go to school together.

The story of Queen Street-Sunset Hill Schools is a very special story to remember. These schools are good examples of how parents, teachers, members of the community worked even harder, no matter the circumstances to help student get a good education so that they would learn to do their best to take care of themselves, their families and the communities where they live. These are some of the most important things that we all learn to do in life.

The following references were used: 1) Shenandoah County Historical Society "Reflections-Early Schools of Shenandoah County." Woodstock, Va. 1995; 2) The Shenandoah County Retired Teachers Association "Echos of Shenandoah" Stephens City, Va. 1977; 3) C. Douglas Cooley "Strasburg Community Memories" Stephens City, Va. 1999

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It was a hot summer day at the Strasburg Town Park when former students of the Sunset Hill School, members of the Town Council, board members of the Strasburg Heritage Association, special guests Stanley Dellinger and Glenn Proctor, and others gathered to talk about Sunset School and the integration to the Strasburg Elementary and High schools. Marquetta Mitchell spoke and read from the history (reprinted here) that she authored. Marquetta remembered when Sunset Hill school was closed in 1965. She left Douglas High in Winchester, the only high school that Strasburg black students could attend at that time, to attend Strasburg High. She remembers feeling apprehensive because of the recent turmoil when Warren County integrated and the violence and protests in the nightly news. Marquetta attributes much of the easier transition at Strasburg to two people. One was Stanley Dellinger, who was Principal of Strasburg High School at that time, because Mr. Dellinger kept the media out of the schools. The other person was Coach Glenn Proctor, who checked on her frequently to reassure her and to ask if everything was ok. Others at the reunion remembered how Coach Proctor treated all his players equally. There were two schools in their athletic district who would not allow Strasburg's black teammates to play on their fields at "away" games. Coach Proctor soon managed to change that, so the district teams that Strasburg played no longer included those two schools. Ray Alsberry, a past student of Sunset Hill and Strasburg High, remembered how he played in an integrated band called "The Sinners of Soul" at the Saturday night teen dances. Here too, under the watchful eye of chaperone Marie Williams, we made progress in social justice in a way that only small towns could do. —Kathy Kehoe

Fall Litter Pick-Up

Our fall litter pick-up on Rt. 11 south of Strasburg will be held Saturday, Oct. 13. Meet at the Old Mill parking lot at 8:00AM. Remember to bring gloves and wear sturdy shoes. If rain threatens call Barbara at 465-5570 to confirm. Please come help out – many hands will make for quick work!

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