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Strasburg, Virginia

NEWSLETTER

strasburgvaheritage.org

## President's Message

### *Tim Taylor*

We hope everyone is doing well and staying healthy. As we continue to navigate life during this pandemic, we are forced to postpone and alter events as needed to keep ourselves and everyone safe. We were forced to again postpone our Program Meeting for September. The program we have scheduled is on the recently approved Sunset Hill School Roadway Marker. We look forward to hearing Marquetta Mitchell's presentation on the history of the Queen Street and Sunset Hill schools before Strasburg schools were integrated.

We are unable to have our traditional Ghost Tour at the end of October due to the pandemic, but we have created a Walking Ghost Tour on-demand using a phone app. So, the tour goes on and we are excited to offer this opportunity! More information on the tour can be found in this newsletter.

Sadly, I have to share that we lost one of our board members, Marie Spence, who passed away recently. Marie served on our board for many years. She knew so much about the history of the Strasburg community and enjoyed sharing it. Marie was always willing to lend a helping hand for our events when she was able. Below is a picture of Marie helping with one of our Ghost Tours. She will be truly missed.

On behalf of the SHA Board and our entire membership, we want to wish everyone good health and blessings.



# Strasburg Ghost Walking Tour

Our Tour this Year is available on-demand using a free app during the month of October!

To walk the tour, download the izi.TRAVEL app on your cell phone. Then scan the QR Code or search in the app for "Strasburg VA Heritage Association Ghost Tour #1." A map will appear with the tour route. As you get close to each of the ten destinations, the information will appear on your phone. Please do not enter the homes! You can listen and/or read the story along with viewing images. There are a couple of videos as well.



To just view the tour, go to the izi.TRAVEL website, click on the LISTEN button on the web page, and search for "Strasburg VA Heritage Association Ghost Tour #1."

Hear about tales of objects being moved without explanation, sightings of apparitions, and learn about the history and beautiful architecture of our haunted homes! Enjoy walking through Strasburg's Historic District and viewing decorated homes for the Halloween season. The only thing you have to be afraid of is the fun you will be missing if you do not take this tour! Answer quiz questions at each stop! Thank you to Mrs. White's students from Strasburg High School that shared their theatrical talents to help tell the stories!

Event sponsored by: Strasburg Heritage Association  
Visit: [www.strasburgvaheritage.org](http://www.strasburgvaheritage.org) for more information  
and give a donation to help support our efforts!

## A Little Folk History

### Strasburg Harvey Girls

By

Kathy Kehoe

There is an old movie that is shown on TV every so often called "The Harvey Girls" starring Judy Garland. When I was growing up in Strasburg, that was all I knew about the women who went out west for jobs working in the famous and highly reputable restaurants along the Santa Fe railroad. The movie came out in 1947, which was about the same time several Strasburg women were working there. It wasn't until a trip out West in the Spring of 2016 that I saw a Harvey Girl Museum and found a book in the Grand Canyon gift shop called, "The Harvey Girls: Women Who Opened the West" by Lesley Poling-Kempes. This led to a conversation with



Harvey Girls in their uniforms, Jo Richard Bickle 2nd from right

Ginny Bickle Hamrick, a descendant of the Richard family, who has chronicled the Richard and Bickle oral history passed down through the family. Peggy Artz Pappas, another Richard descendant, compiled the Richard family genealogy "Richard Family Tree" in 1981. Ginny's grandmother Mabel "Bobbie" Richard, mother Jo Richard Bickle and Aunt Gene Richard Hupp had spent time working at the Bright Angel Lodge, a Fred Harvey establishment at the Grand Canyon. Patti Byrnes, daughter of Gene Richard Hupp, shared her childhood memories when she and her mother were in Arizona. Elizabeth Hupp Richard, whose nickname was "Booba", was another Strasburg girl who spent some time at the Grand Canyon. Her daughter Anita Richard and granddaughter Kelsie Mast recorded their Aunt Jo Bickle a few years before she passed away. Jo talked about her life and how she met her husband while working as a Harvey Girl. Jo also mentions another Harvey Girl, Peggy Rickard May, who was a sister to Truman Rickard. Truman managed the Western Auto in Strasburg for many years. The women who worked as Harvey Girls are gone now, but they had passed down a few stories in the family. The Richard and Bickle family histories are so detailed that it is no easy task separating the family history from the memories of the Harvey Girls. Poling-Kempes' book details how a businessman named Fred Harvey made a deal with the Santa Fe railroad to provide eating establishments along the old Santa Fe Trail as the tracks were laid. Fred Harvey provided a safe, clean place for passengers to stop for a meal, and the railroad brought in all the supplies, including good water and ice. In 1883, he "advertised in midwestern and eastern newspapers and women's magazines for 'young women 18 to 30 years of age, of good character, attractive and intelligent' to go west to work." (Poling-Kempes). The restaurants and the waitresses soon established excellent reputations. In 1902, the Santa Fe offered train service to the Grand Canyon and in 1905, the Canyon was placed under the protection of the U.S. Forest Service and became a national park in 1919. By the time our Strasburg women began work at the Grand Canyon, the Harvey House rules had relaxed but the excellent reputation remained.

During World War II, hundreds of soldiers were fed at Harvey Houses when the troop trains stopped for meals. Kempes-Poling describes how "During the Second World War, Harvey Girls were, in the best and most exhausting sense of the phrase, part of the war effort. They were the front line of the home front."

In writing the stories passed down through the family, Ginny tells us: "With the passage of the Homestead Act of 1909 allowing 640 acres and five years to occupy and improve", her great grandparents became homesteaders in Colorado. One of their six children, Mabel "Bobbie" Clark, left the sod house and lived in California with an older sister. There, Ginny writes, "When she was 15 she was seeing one boy too much, so (her sister) Evelyn sent her back to Brush, Colorado to live with her dad." Her father had turned the sod house and homestead into a successful ranch. There Bobbie met a Strasburg boy at a barn dance.



Written on back of picture: "Mabel & friend in Buffalo Wallow" circa 1914

That Strasburg boy was Harry "Jake" Richard. He was one of eleven children from the prominent B. F. Richard family of Del Ray Farm. Jake's brother Charles Henry had migrated to Brush, Colorado in 1907 and, according to the Richard Family Tree, established his own cattle ranch. Jake left Strasburg to work on his brother's ranch in Colorado and met his future wife at a barn dance. Jake and Bobbie were married in 1915.



Back of picture written: J.H. Richard and wife, Mabel Richard, nee Clark, taken Aug. 15/15. 1915 Brush Colorado



Jo Richard, Harvey Girl, circa 1946

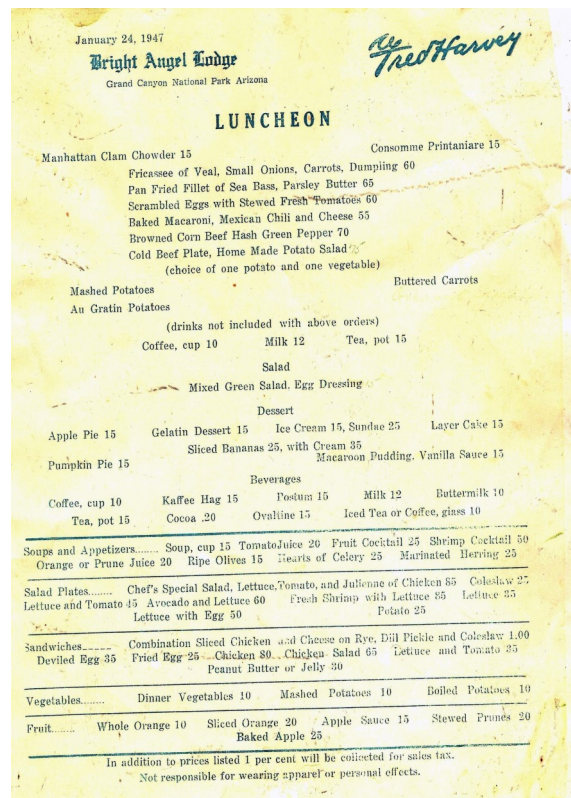
Bobbie had 4 children between 1916 and 1928. When she was in her forties, after her children were grown, Bobbie left Strasburg. She needed a job and the Grand Canyon was a beautiful place to live and work. Her granddaughter Patti Byrnes remembers the energy it took to be a Harvey Girl. "Everything was metal and marble, great big trays that were heavy. Nothing was plastic in those days. I could barely see my grandmother when she was carrying a big tray. Even then, as young as I was, I realized how hard she worked."

Poling-Kempes describes the Harvey waitress uniforms: "Harvey must have been acutely aware of the opportunity for public criticism of single women away from home, and so he dressed the Harvey Girls in outfits befitting a nun: plain, starched, black-and-white skirts, bibs, and aprons; and high-collared shirts, with black shoes, black stockings, and hairnets." In leather bound photo albums, Ginny shared pictures of her mother in her Harvey Girl Uniform.

Ginny Bickle Hamrick, passing down the family history, tells us that her grandmother, "GranBobbie" also worked at the Phantom Ranch, which was 5000 feet below the rim near Phantom Creek. The only way to get to Phantom Ranch was to take a mule down into the canyon where they would spend the night in a cabin. Bobbie's granddaughter Patti Byrnes remembers that she took a trail ride on the mules when she was a child. She went with her GranBobbie all the way to the bottom of the Grand Canyon and back. "Funny thing about that," said Patti, "the mules were so fat, you couldn't see the trail because of their fat round bellies, all you could see was the rim." Patti remembers that on her grandmother's last trip back to Strasburg, she brought two wild burros. Patti says that "we had those burros at our place, (Hupp Homestead on Massanutten Street) and when they first arrived, people would call us and ask, 'What is that NOISE WE HEAR?'. They were cute

little burros, with big fat round bellies." It was a new and unusual sound in Strasburg. Patti said, "Our telephone line was lit up, people asking, 'What's that noise, Frank?' To this day, my sister Abby (Hupp Bright) and I can imitate them." Their names were Jack and Annabelle. "They had a baby who was born during an eclipse, so that was his name." Likely Eclipse was born during the eclipse of 1963. Ginny tells us that Bobbie spent a total of 22 years working at the Grand Canyon. When she was 69, she returned to Strasburg to live with her daughter Jo's family, until her death at age 83. She is buried, along with Jo and Gene, at River-view Cemetery near the house where she raised her children.

Jo Richard Bickle had her own story about the "old wild west" having been part of the Roy Rogers Rodeo. Clay Hockman, a radio announcer from Clary, introduced her to Roy Rogers. When Jo left the show, she joined her mother at the Grand Canyon where she too worked as a Harvey Girl. When the war ended J.C. "Bud" Bickle and some of his buddies took the train to California. "One of the stops was Williams, Arizona with a side trip to the Grand Canyon," writes daughter Ginny. "Daddy and two of his buddies decided to join the Park Service at the Canyon as a guide." And that's how he met a Harvey Girl from Strasburg, Virginia. Bud walked into the Bright Angel Lodge and saw a young woman busy writing a letter. He stopped to ask her if she dunked her doughnuts. A popular song in 1945 was "When You Dunk a Donut, Don't It Make It Nice" by a dance band called the "Six Jumping Jacks". "When you dunk that donut, don't it make it nice?; Dunking donuts is a lot of fun; Some folks say that its wrong, but I know they lie; for when they're alone, they dunk on the sly;" Perhaps Bud was gauging Jo's sense of adventure, or her sense of humor, or just wanted to know her better. But that pick up line began a conversation between Jo Richard and Jewell "Bud" Bickle that evolved into a long lasting marriage. It may be coincidence, but the Harvey Girl movie came out in theaters the same year Jo and Bud were married at the Grand Canyon.



Their daughter Ginny recalls how her parents returned to the Grand Canyon for reunions for many years after, where they would have picnics and campfires reminiscent of when they were dating. They would stay at the Bright Angel Lodge and go on tours with old friends. Ginny writes that, when her parents were dating: "they got together whenever they weren't working. Built a fire, daddy or mom played the guitar and they sang mostly western songs." They were singing songs made popular by Jimmy Rodgers and Bob Wills. Mike Kehoe remembers while working for Bud one summer that Bud sang a song called "T is for Texas" while he hammered. Ginny remembers her dad singing that song; she said "he could yodel better than Jimmy Rodgers too. Daddy played and sang Western Swing and told Will Rogers jokes."

Jo's sister Gene Richard, was named after her mother's favorite author, Gene Stratton-Porter, whose given name was Geneva so Bobbie spelled it with a "G". Bobbie had read Stratton-Porter's best-selling novels and articles in women's magazines such as *McCall's* and *Good-housekeeping*. Gene arrived at the Grand Canyon to see her mother and sister with her little toddler Patti from New York. The family story is that Patti learned to walk on the train trip and she "walked from New York to Colorado" by walking up and down the aisle of the train. Jo recalled that Gene's friend, Elizabeth Hupp, nicknamed "Booba", traveled from Strasburg to help Gene with Patti. Ginny writes that during her visit in Arizona, "Mom and Booba decided to swim across a lake that was a lot larger than they had any idea, due to the way distance can fool you out west. They almost didn't make it." Jo said that "Booba stayed until Clark (Jo's brother) showed up and we know how that turned out. That was fate!" In Ginny's writing: "Clark Richard was back stateside and decided to go to the Grand Canyon as his mother and two sisters were there. Clark and Booba began dating and married in 1946." According to Jo's oral history account, Booba didn't work as a Harvey Girl but she found adventure and love there just the same.

In the recordings Anita and Kelsie made, Jo mentions another Strasburg girl, Peggy Rickard, who also worked at the Bright Angel Lodge. "I have pictures of Mom and Peggy Rickard branding cattle" Ginny said. I was unable to contact any of Peggy's family, but I did find the obituary of Peggy Lee May from the Northern Virginia Daily newspaper. Peggy married and moved away from Strasburg, but she must have told many stories to her family about her time at the Canyon. Her obituary in 2016 describes: "After graduating high school in 1944, Peggy found the allure of the American West compelling. She found employment at the Grand Canyon's Bright Angel Lodge, and cherished always her memories as a Harvey Girl."

So that's how women from a small town in Virginia found their way "Out West" to find jobs, love, marriage, fun and/or adventure. Their story is better than the 1947 movie. These small town but adventurous women from the East had interesting stories to pass down to their grandchildren. We can't help but wonder: How much of it was fate? Was it pre-destination? Or just a string of coincidences, with one thing leading to another? If Bobbie hadn't gone to Colorado when she did, if Jake hadn't left Strasburg, if Bud hadn't stopped in Arizona after WWII ended and decided to stay and work there, if a song about Dunking Your Donut hadn't been written.....well, maybe just simple twists of fate. But it all ended up in wonderful family stories of small town women seeking their destiny.



Harvey Girls at the Grand Canyon: Daughter Jo Richard Bickle, mother Bobbie Richard and daughter Gene Richard Hupp. Circa 1946



Jo Richard Bickle at the Grand Canyon, while attending Reunion



The recipe for "Cowboy Beans" was what they cooked over a campfire. "Mom and Daddy enjoyed the Ole Timers Reunions and enjoyed being back at the Canyon. You really did feel like family when you worked for Fred Harvey," writes Ginny.

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### Compiled for attendees of the Ole Timers Reunions and the Grand Canyon Society.

*Contributed by Ginny Hamrick from her mother's kitchen*

**Guitar Picker's Meatloaf** - \*John Bradley: guide, trail guide, boss man, dean of the Mule College. (John Bradley was a co-worker of daddy, good friend of mom and granbobbie. — Ginny Hamrick)

**Dinky Mule Stew** - House mother for Harvey Girls (Colter Hall)

**Rowe Well Coffee Shop Menu - 1941:**

**SPECIAL DINNER**

- Chilled tomato Juice or Soup
- Salad
- Top Sirloin Steak
- Fried Chicken
- Potatoes Vegetables
- Southern Style Hot Biscuits
- Dessert
- Coffee Tea
- \$1.00

**COWBOY BEANS** - (I remember mom said they fixed these at guitar/singing campfires on days off)

- 2 lbs. ground beef                      1/4 tsp salt                      1 tsp natural seasoning (seasalt)
- 1 cup diced onions                      1/8 tsp pepper                      1 tsp chili powder

*BROWN and blend all of above ingredients together*

*ADD below ingredients together:*

- Med. size can tomato sauce                      1/2-3/4 cup diced celery                      2 lg. cans Pork & Beans
- 2 tbl ketchup                      Salsa (any kind - if desired, suite to taste)

**COOK 30-40 minutes.** Let set 15 minutes for flavors to blend and cool down a little

**Phantom French Cherry Torte** - (Granbobbie ran Phantom Ranch for two yrs. Had to re-learn baking bread - dough rises differently when you are below sea level)

**North Rim Rolls** - El Tovar, elevation 8,000-8,800 ft.

**Banana Bread** - no adjustment needed for high altitude

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**To Our Readers:** *If you have memories to add to folk histories, please contact Kathy Kehoe by email-[strasburgheritage@gmail.com](mailto:strasburgheritage@gmail.com), calling 540-465-4185 or contacting any SHA Board Member.*

*Editor's Note: In honor our Strasburg Post Office, built and dedicated in 1936, the SHA is reprinting a story about the mural in the post office titled "Apple Orchard". Barbara Adamson wrote this for our Spring 2005 newsletter.*

## An Artist's View of the Valley

Barbara Adamson



Most of us are familiar with the beautiful mural located on the west wall of the Strasburg Post Office. Titled "Apple Orchard", it is a view of the Shenandoah Valley during apple harvest. The painting was inspired by views of mountains, rolling hills, and the Shenandoah River and depicts workers hauling and sorting fruit, illustrating a typical Valley Scene.

According to information posted below the mural, this work resulted from a 1930's Works Progress Administration (WPA) effort to "secure murals and sculpture of distinguished quality appropriate to the embellishment of Federal Buildings."

Artist Sarah Blakeslee painted the mural after winning a design competition and being awarded the commission. According to correspondence between Blakeslee and her husband, Francis Speight, she visited Strasburg several times in 1937 to study the area landscape, sketch orchards and hills, and prepare studies of apple trees. She roomed with Ms. Lucy Linn at her home at 425 Stover Avenue. The painting was completed in December, 1937, and Blakeslee returned in April, 1938, to supervise installation of the mural. A newspaper article from that time noted that she added a few finishing touches to the painting after it was mounted on the wall of the post office. She indicated in a letter to her husband that she felt local people were pleased with her work.

In 1990, Blakeslee traveled back to Strasburg and, in an interview by the Northern Virginia Daily, remarked that "I really owe a lot to Mr. (R.S.) Wright (Strasburg postmaster from 1934-1949). He was a most cooperative and wonderful gentleman." During the interview, Blakeslee said that Mr. Wright insisted that she use his car while she stayed in the area. Blakeslee's mother visited the area in September, 1938, to see her daughter's work. She sent her daughter postcards of the Strasburg Post Office and a "bird's eye view of the town" and wrote, "Your mural is worth driving to see. Mr. Wright sends his regards."

Blakeslee had studied and exhibited at the Corcoran College of Art and Design and at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. She met and married Francis Speight at the Pennsylvania Academy, where he was one of her art teachers. She continued to work and exhibit under her maiden name. After her husband's retirement, the couple moved to Greenville, N.C., Francis Speight's native state, where they taught, painted, and became influential regional artists. Blakeslee in particular was a very popular portrait painter. Sarah Blakeslee Speight died January 12, 2005, one day before her 93rd birthday.

Other post office buildings in our area, including Berryville, Harrisonburg, and Luray, also have their own works of art by other artists. Many thanks to Maurice C. York, the author of *A Privilege to Paint*, " a biography of Francis and Sarah Blakeslee Speight, who generously shared notes from the Speights' correspondence and newspaper clippings for this article. How fortunate we are to have an original work of art that was commissioned for us being publicly displayed and showing a view of the Valley more than 65 years ago!



## Some Little Folk Stories: Strasburg Post Office



**Mary Mauck Cottrill** worked for the Strasburg Post Office for many years. One of her favorite memories was the day the Elvis Stamp came out: In 1993 the "Legends of American Music" stamps were being released throughout the year by the U.S. Postal Service. The first one released was Elvis Presley on January 8, 1993, Elvis' birthday. The price of each stamp was 29 cents. We knew there was going to be a mad rush at the counter as soon as the window was opened that morning. All stamp collectors, as well as Elvis fans, would want to be there to purchase this collectible stamp. The Post Office also issues what is known as a "First Day of Issue" envelope with the stamp preprinted on the envelope and collectors want to purchase this and have this issuing date postmark applied to that envelope. We were ready! We had Elvis music playing in the background. I was dressed in 50's attire with a poodle skirt, little crew neck sweater, bobby socks and saddle shoes. Oh, did I mention I had a pony tail with a big bow? I was in the lobby greeting customers. My job that day was going the extra fun mile. I had a stamp pad and postal stamps like "Return to Sender" and "Address Unknown", titles and phrases from Elvis' popular song. There was much excitement, fun and laughter that day celebrating our legend, Elvis Presley. Since then, there has also been a new forever stamp release in 2015 featuring "Music Icons". Elvis Presley's stamp issue date was Aug. 12th, the date of his death.

**Karen Bailey Wisecarver** I always enjoyed looking at this mural each time I went in. I don't remember the postmaster's name in the 60s, but I remember he always smiled and said hello.

**Deborah Huntsberger Winkler** I remember the huge set of stairs going up into the building , I think I was about 8 , and as most young children do I was jumping on the steps , I fell hit my knee on the step and had a huge goose egg pop up , I was scared to go up the steps after that.

**Sheryl Pifer** I remember walking to the post office with my grandmother! It always felt like a museum, had a particular smell (maybe ink) and was always cool in the summer! It still has the same smell and coolness today

**Patricia Byrnes** It seemed palatial to me and I loved the smell, the marble, and the brass mailboxes and mail slots.

**Kathy Kehoe** In 1964, applications for a social security card were stacked on a table in the lobby of the post office. I thought it would be a neat thing to have, so I stood at the table filling in all the information using a pen on a chain. I got my social security card in the mail when I was ten years old. The letter that came with the card said to keep it in my purse, so I did. And it was old by the time I had my first job. In those days, people didn't apply for a social security number until they applied for a job.

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

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MEMBERSHIP \_\_\_\_\_ Cost is \$20.00 annually

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*If this is a gift subscription, add your name and contact info here.*

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