

## ***2024 Holiday Homes Tour December 14th 10 a.m.—4 p.m.***

This year the Strasburg Heritage Association semi-annual Homes Tour will feature 6 properties. Four are new to the tour. Three of the homes are in Strasburg. The Dosh House (1778) on East Washington Street is one of the oldest structures in Strasburg. The rear wing is an example of the German style “flurkuchenhaus” with two rooms flanking a central chimney. The Johnson Home (ca 1922) on Queen Street is a beautiful example of a Craftsman style home featuring glowing oak woodwork throughout. The Schillinger Home (1868) on High Street is a lovely Victorian where you will see many art pieces from Russia and other objects collected by the family.

Three homes are on Deer Rapids, 15 minutes south of town. The Piefer Home (1997) offers beautiful views of the Shenandoah River from its many large windows and interesting art pieces inside and in the gardens. Just next to the Piefer Home is the cozy Stratton/Stup Cabin, built in 1975, where cider and cookies will be served. Parking for both homes is in front of the Cabin. Just down the road and built in 1792, the Stratton/Stup Home is a traditional two-up, two-down center hall brick structure that retains the charm of homes of that era. Two wings, built in 1972, bracket the original house. A large collection of colorful Majolica china is on display in several rooms. Ample parking is available in front of this venue.

Tickets are \$10 and will go on sale at Sager Realty, Clementine Vintage on King Street and at the Strasburg Visitors' Center located at Hupp's Hill just north of town on the Old Valley Pike. The tickets will go on sale Thanksgiving weekend. For more information, a map, photos, and complete descriptions of the homes visit [www.strasburgvaheritage.org](http://www.strasburgvaheritage.org).

# President's Message

*Tim Taylor*

Greetings from the Strasburg Heritage Association! We are in the holiday season which means counting our blessings, attending special events, and finding that perfect gift for our loved ones! When it comes to perfect gifts, I suggest you consider paying for a SHA membership for a friend or family member! It makes a great stocking stuffer! Membership is only \$20 a year. It helps support the publication of this newsletter, Strasburg High School scholarships, advertisements, and monetary support to projects that help maintain and support our historical community heritage. Information on how to join our organization is in this newsletter and on our website.

Our Holiday Homes Tour is scheduled for Saturday, December 14th. We have great destinations on this year's tour, so I hope you take the time to enjoy this opportunity and get in the holiday spirit. A big "thank you" to the property owners for being part of this year's tour. More information can be found in this newsletter and on our website.

If you have not visited our website recently, please take the time to check out all of the historical videos, recordings of past programs, and podcasts. They are enjoyable and educational. You can learn much about our Strasburg community through time, including our people, places, events, and businesses. Also, there is a link to contact us to ask questions and share your stories and historical knowledge!

Have a safe, enjoyable, and relaxing holiday season.

Sincerely - Tim Taylor - SHA President and the SHA Board

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## A Little Bit of Folk History

### *The Folklore Corner*

by

Larry Vance

***Folklore is a part of our heritage. As has been noted many times, many a legend is born at the Thanksgiving Day dinner table and the village tavern. Quite often the lore is not written down, but transmitted orally. I'd like to share a bit of folklore told in my family.***

### **Did you know...**

Signal Knob, elevation 2,106 feet, earned its name during the Civil War when it was used as a signal station particularly by the Confederate Army. There is archeological evidence that primitive man also ascended Signal Knob perhaps over 5,000 years ago.

Public schools began in Shenandoah County in 1870 with the first school located in Woodstock. By 1880, Strasburg had two schools and within the Strasburg area schools were located in Coal Mine, Lebanon Church and Locust Grove.

Peter Stover is credited with establishing Strasburg in 1761. Yet, his burial site remains an unanswered question. Popular speculation says he is buried in an unmarked grave at the west end of Queen Street. (*See more in the Queen Street Cemetery Folk History*)

The North Fork of the Shenandoah River runs in a northerly direction. Ever wonder why? Entering Woodstock from the north the elevation is 834 feet. The elevation of Strasburg at the railroad under pass is 577 feet, a difference of 257 feet. Water takes the path of least resistance.

## D-Day Omaha Beach Exhibit

We hope that many of you had a chance to visit the D-Day Omaha Beach exhibit that was held at the Woodstock Armory during the month of October. It was hosted by the Shenandoah County Historical Society with the support of the Regulus Group and participation of Tradition Studios, Narrow Passage Chapter DAR, and many Living History individuals. We were especially pleased that Jay Neal came to help out with the school groups that visited. Jay did a wonderful job sharing the story of his father, Paul J. Neal, Sr.'s participation on D-Day at Omaha Beach, as he did when he spoke to SHA at our meeting earlier in 2024. Jay also shared information about two other Shenandoah county heroes from that day, Fred Hepner and Edward Gearing. The exhibit was a wonderful success!

## New News About Old News.....



In 1948, Donnie Holsinger worked for Crystal Cab, which he said was located on King Street in the building beside what is now The Doggery. Fourteen year old Donnie used to answer the phone for the cab and shine shoes for 25 cents. Cab drivers were Coy France and Dick Brown. The man on the left is believed to be Coy France in his cab driver uniform. According to a photo in Holsingers Strasburg Service Center (originally Stickley's Esso) the man at the rear of the car is Keith Wymer and the man behind him is Jay Beeler. The photo on the right was thought to be Linden Stickley in the folk history on Stickleys Esso (Newsletter Winter 2024) but could be the same man in the photo with the cab, so therefore is probably Jay Beeler.



## Board of Directors

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# A Little Folk History The Old Graveyard

by  
Kathy Kehoe

Our town's oldest burial ground at the west end of quiet Queen Street is a peaceful place with a story to tell. The headstones hold familiar names of our earliest citizens. The cemetery has no formal name but is referred to most often as "The Old Graveyard; Strasburg's Oldest Public Cemetery". Strasburg native Charles Crabill, a volunteer caretaker of the cemetery for many years, created a sign at the original entrance. Written records of gravestone inscriptions call the cemetery "Queen Street Cemetery", "Old Strasburg Cemetery" and "Community Cemetery."

The oldest known tombstone is that of Obadiah Samuel Funk who died in 1779. It is believed that many earlier graves had wooden markers that have long since deteriorated, the names and dates once carved into the wood lost. Obadiah's grave is marked with a heavy limestone tombstone, but by 2008, the engraved information on his stone was fading. Before the stone became illegible, the Strasburg Heritage Association erected a marker beside his stone, protected by a plexiglass covering, with legible wording of what is inscribed on his tombstone: "A monument to the pious memory of Brother Obadiah Samuel Funk of the Christian Order of Ephrata; died Dec. 7, 1779; aged 60 years 9 months"; Dedicated by the Strasburg Heritage Association 2008." The Strasburg Museum also contributed to the marker. After 16 years, the letters on the original gravestone have weathered and faded even more. Nearby shrubbery has grown so thick and close to the graves that the bushes and vines will eventually cover the stones if they are not cut back. SHA president Tim Taylor said Obadiah Funk, "was one of the community's earliest businessmen and a leader of the early Sabbatarian settlers. Around 1742, Funk built a grist mill near the confluence of Town Run and the Shenandoah River. The mill became a shelter for many passing through. Strasburg was not officially established, meaning that many came to know the community as Funktown".



The website "Find a Grave" lists "Mount Zion United Methodist Church Cemetery" with a subtitle beneath: "Also known as Old Strasburg Cemetery". This is incorrect. Though located side by side, these are two separate cemeteries. One is the resting place of the founders of our town, the white settlers of German descent; the other is the once segregated graveyard of the town's African-American population, which is maintained by Mt. Zion church. There are a number of misconceptions of the two cemeteries. The public cemetery was established sometime in the 1700s; the church wasn't erected until 1871; so likely the first burial in the church cemetery would have been after 1870. In E. E. Keister's book, "Strasburg, Virginia and the Keister Family, (page 314), in 1835 there existed "a wagon manufacturing shop where Mt. Zion church now stands".

There is a question of who owns the cemetery and who has the obligation and responsibility of maintaining it. The church has always maintained and cared for the final resting place of their congregation and community and they continue to have burials there. According to a 1982 article in the Shenandoah Valley Herald newspaper, the last burial in the "Old Graveyard", was in 1971. A barbed wire fence that separated the two cemeteries no longer exists, though it is easy to see where the fence once stood to mark the boundaries. In 2008, SHA Board member Barbara Adamson talked with Liz Alsberry, a member of the Mt. Zion church, who said that the church owned and maintained the property of the church and the church cemetery, but not the older public cemetery. She said the town mowed "occasionally" but the old cemetery was not kept up very





well since 1996 when Mr. Crabill passed away. The church was concerned then, as now, about the large trees on the public cemetery property that hang over the roof of the church. SHA board member Dee Keister remembers “years ago spending time with other SHA members, led by Barbara, working in the cemetery pulling ivy from the trees, trimming the grass and cleaning the grave markers. My young grandson, Ian, came with me to help. It was a good day and a good experience for Ian.” In addition to losing wooden markers, there is a local oral story describing how at one time the person who mowed the cemetery picked up small unmarked stones that were placed at random in the grass. They then tossed these stones into a pile, not realizing the stones had been placed there to mark old gravesites.

According to the church history, written in 1926 by Harold Thompson in recognition of the church 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the church was erected in 1871. The African American residents of Strasburg were not allowed to congregate until slavery was abolished, so it was several years after the Civil War before services were held publicly. Then, as Mr. Thompson writes, a church building was brought from Fishers Hill on roller logs, pulled by horse or mule on Rt.

11 to West Queen Street where it still stands. According to the church history, church member Charles H. Thompson bought the land from Hugh Dever & wife to build a house for his mother, but she moved away so he sold the property to the church trustees. Harold Thompson listed the first trustees as: Philip Witherall, Obed Byrd, Joseph L. Nickens, Reuben Brown, and Silas H. Thompson. This would have been about 80 years after the first known grave in the old cemetery. It is not known if graves were on this property before the church was erected, but clearly there were after that.

There is an interesting mystery about the identity of a man who died on a passenger train in 1918. (See SHA newsletter Winter 2018, Stover Funeral Home) In 2018, then Director Stanley Morehead related the oral history passed down from Stover Funeral Home directors, of a man who, over a hundred years ago, was traveling from Chicago to North Carolina. When the train stopped at the depot in Strasburg, (Now the Strasburg Museum) the man had passed away. Mr. Stover was asked to bring the body to the funeral home. The man is remembered as a salesman because his baggage included an oak desk he was delivering to North Carolina. Speculation is that since this was around 1918, the man may have died from the flu epidemic, which could cause death in a matter of days in otherwise healthy people. This was before flu vaccines or antibiotics existed. Mr. Stover kept the desk for payment, did the embalming, provided a coffin and gave him a proper burial, which I had previously assumed was in Riverview Cemetery. They never found a family member to notify and no one ever claimed the body, despite Mr. Stover placing ads in North Carolina and Chicago newspapers. The desk, which contains no clue to the man’s identity, remained upstairs at the funeral Home until recently, when Director Marty White donated it to the Strasburg Museum. The Herald newspaper reporter Keith Stickley wrote: “Near the entrance, a small unengraved limestone monument marks a simple burial, one which bears no name.” Stickley describes it as the “final resting place” of a “traveling salesman” who died in Strasburg, “years ago”. Charlie Crabill said he placed the monument there, “just so we’d know where it was.” In 1918, it could be that the mysterious passenger was buried in the old cemetery, where a grave would likely have been provided without cost, or would have been less expensive than a plot at Riverview. My great-grandfather Arch Williams bought a family plot in 1918 in Riverview for fifty dollars when his daughter died. It is unknown if plots were sold in the old cemetery or how much

might have been charged. A search for a simple stone" near the original entrance turned up nothing. However, the now rusted wrought iron gates are half covered in bushes and vines. It is likely the stone, if it still exists, is hidden beneath the foliage. The hope is that the cemetery will be properly landscaped in the near future and perhaps that simple stone will be found.

Even as the engravings on the tombstones fade, several listings of tombstone inscriptions for area cemeteries are preserved in the archives at the Strasburg Community Library. Frances Wilkins Jordan visited area cemeteries in 1964-65 and recorded the words she read on the tombstones. Her research can be found on index cards in the library reference room. Jordan saw that some gravestones were already becoming illegible in the 60's and by writing down each inscription, she saved important information of the families of our area. She titled it, "Old Strasburg". Duane L. Borden's books are other good sources of information listing tombstone inscriptions in Shenandoah County and surrounding areas. His book, "Tombstone Inscriptions of Strasburg and Vicinity, Shenandoah County, Virginia" was copyrighted in 1982 and is also kept in the reference room of the Strasburg Community Library. Strasburg resident Martha Baker Jones, who researched local cemeteries and collected information on the town's oldest cemetery, expressed concern that the stones that were readable when Borden and Jordan were transcribing are not nearly as legible as they were then. As the years go by and the natural elements wear down the inscriptions, the cemetery history is being lost. Area resident Calvin Sonnor also included this information on his website: [csonner.net](http://csonner.net)., with a full list of the tombstone inscriptions in the old graveyard and as well as Riverview Cemetery.

One of the tombstones in the cemetery is that of a Civil War soldier. Jordan lists it as: "Old Strasburg; Grave 104; Spenger/Philip A./ Son of Joseph S. Spenger/ 1827 – 1913/At Rest/ Served in Trans-Mississippi/ Department C.S.A./ Surrendered at Shreveport, La." Historian Mike Kehoe researched his name and discovered more about his service. Spenger joined the Co. E, 5th Missouri Cavalry, Col. Gordon's regiment, in 1862-63. He was a POW, paroled and surrendered at Shreveport, Louisiana. Another inscription from Jordan's index cards reads: "Old



Strasburg: Grave#45/In Memory of Amanda/ Wife of John S. Hupp/ Daughter of Jos. Bowman of Ky/Born May 2, 1833 – died Sept 7th 1851" (She was only 18 years old.) and another is the grave of a soldier who fought in the War of 1812. "Old Strasburg: Grave #35: Lt. Col. Phillip Spengler; 6th Va Militia, War 1812". In "The American Lineages of the Veach and Stover Families, Compiled by Robert Spangler Veach, 1913, Veach writes that the burial site of Strasburg founder Peter Stover is unknown. "Peter's will was probated September 10, 1799, and he evidently died in this year, far advanced in age." His daughter, according to the recorded engravings, is buried at the Queen Street cemetery. Her gravemarker reads: "In memory of Regina Stover, wife of Col. Phillip Spengler and daughter of Peter Stover Founder of the town of Strasburg; Born 1763- died 1814. This stone is placed here by her granddaughter Sarah N. Spengler."

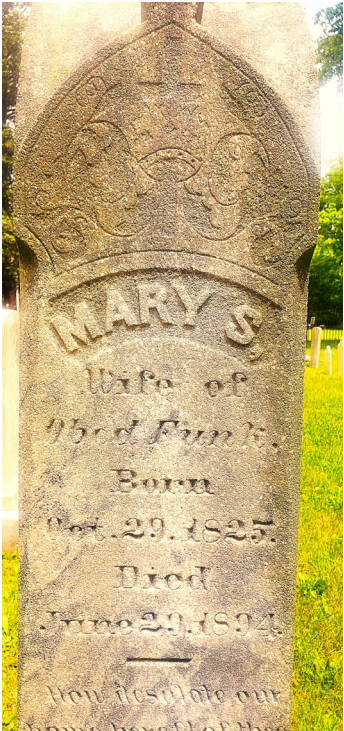
E. E. Keister, in his book, agrees that Peter Stover's burial site is not known; (Pg 367, Strasburg, Virginia and The Keister Family; by E. E. Keister, Shenandoah Publishing House, 1972); but Mr. Keister wrote that Stover is likely buried in the Lutheran Church graveyard, on West Washington Street or in the "Community cemetery on the west end of Queen Street". He goes on to say that in 1929, the Stover Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy erected a monument in memory of the founder of Strasburg, at Riverview Cemetery, "though it is not commonly believed that he was buried there."



Charles Crabill grew up across the street from the cemetery. As a child, he helped his grandfather maintain the cemetery and as an adult, he continued to volunteer his time and energy to the cemetery. In 1982, Keith Stickley interviewed Charlie Crabill. The newspaper included a photo of Charlie standing in front of the wrought iron gate beside the sign, on the other side of the cemetery. The gate was large enough for a hearse to drive through, but today, there is no evidence that a driveway ever existed from the street. Today, visitors to the public cemetery walk in by the church driveway. Charlie told the Herald that his mother, great grandmother, great grandfather and three brothers and sisters who died in infancy, are buried in the cemetery. "I grew up," said Kitty Jean Morris Miller, "in the Queen Street/Holliday Street neighborhood. I can still see



Mister Charles Crabill tending to the grounds. He was a neighbor across the street and as a gift of love, he took care of that cemetery for many years." said Kitty Jean Morris Miller. Many area residents have relatives buried in the old cemetery. Familiar names include Crabill, Funk, Stover, Hupp and Spengler. The Herald article mentions that Charlie kept the gate oiled as well as faithfully keeping the grass mowed all summer. Shrubs and vines cover one edge of the gate and an old sign hanging inside the branches is barely visible. Until the foliage is removed, the full text is not readable but it appears to be: "Please do not lean on stones. These stones are very old and could cause accidents." According to the Valley Herald article, Charlie Crabill also made and erected the "The Old Graveyard" sign. Charlie's son Ralph Crabill recalls that he and his sons also mowed the old cemetery. He remembers when his father brought home cuttings from boxwoods and planted them in the cemetery. "When I was about ten years old, my job was to haul water across the street to the cemetery in my red coaster wagon to water the boxwood cuttings." said Ralph. "I did that until I was old enough to be hooked to a rotary push mower, then I mowed." Ralph said that his father "put his heart and soul into that cemetery."



In a recent interview by Ryan Fitzmaurice in the Northern Virginia Daily newspaper about the cemetery, (7-24-24) Tim Taylor states: "Very few places in Strasburg allow a person to travel so far back in time. It's worth preserving." Taylor, who is president of the Strasburg Heritage Association goes on to say, "We see this location as giving us the opportunity to tell stories. Every time I look at a graveyard, I think of all the stories that lie there," Taylor said. "It's an opportunity to make the public aware that it's there. I think it's great that people can go there and pay their respects, and I'm glad the town is interested in helping to preserve it."



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



PO Box 525  
 Strasburg, VA 22657

## Strasburg Heritage Association

Strasburgheritage@gmail.com  
 www.strasburgvaheritage.org

**Annual dues are due in February; if you are not sure if you have paid your dues, please email us.**

### Membership Application

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

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

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

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

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

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