

Strasburg Heritage Association

Volume 5, Issue 2

Spring, 2005

Strasburg, Virginia



Test Your Knowledge of Strasburg's Heritage!

by Babs Melton

1. When was Strasburg chartered?
2. What was the nickname given to the neighborhood children's wading area located at today's Southern States Coop?
3. What did the Strasburg Textile Mill produce during World War II?
4. Who was Kline Stadium named for?
5. How far is Woodstock from Strasburg via the North Fork?

If you didn't know the answers to these questions, you might want to reacquaint yourself with the Historic Strasburg Walking Tour!

SHA is proud to announce that months of hard work have finally come to fruition! After many years of service, Strasburg's ten badly weathered walking tour signs have been refurbished with new materials, additional information, and maps and illustrations. The massive project tapped several funding sources and involved several key partners for their production.

Sarah Mauck spearheaded the project, holding work sessions developing signage text, shopping out production rates, and applying for the SVBF grant. John Adamson, Richard Kleese, and Shenandoah Valley Battlefields Foundation (SVBF) staff members provided invaluable help in researching and writing signage text. But no report could be complete without acknowledging that the current effort is built upon the original walking tour developed by Virginia Hinkins Cadden.

Next, SHA turned its attention to the walking tour brochure. The committee of Barbara Adamson (chairwoman), Babs Melton (editor), John Adamson, and Judy Troxell developed a new, larger brochure keyed to and supplementing the markers. Harold Updyke graciously provided the committee a lot of information through a telephone interview. Barbara and Judy immensely enjoyed their driving tours with Doug Cooley and Ann Keller, who regaled them with stories of years gone by as they drove past our heritage structures. SHA is also indebted to Jim Carter, who "field tested" the tour by walking the trail and reading the marker and brochure information to determine the time (1 to ½ hours) and distance (1.6 miles) that is involved in someone completing the walking trail.

In this way, the committee uncovered lots of information. After putting as much as possible onto the four-page brochure, the committee concluded that our next task will probably be to write a booklet for the walking tour! But, containing more snippets of information, a map to the ten markers, and the locations of other historic sites off the trail proper, the new brochure is easy to read and makes an excellent walking companion.

Three walking tour signs were funded by a SVBF grant as part of the Civil War Trails network, which has expanded beyond Virginia into West Virginia, the Carolinas, and Maryland. Strasburg already had two CW Trails markers at Hupp's Hill and Stickley's Farm, but the addition of these three new ones should pull more heritage tourists into the heart of our community. SHA supports Heritage Tourism as a clean industry that builds our tax revenues while putting no resident population pressures on town services.

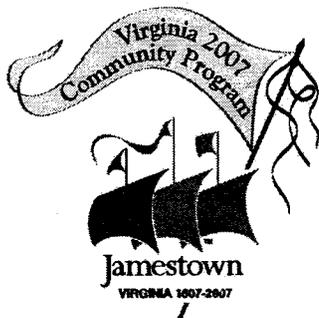
This endeavor was truly a community-wide project. The Strasburg Rotary Cash Bash paid for the remaining seven markers while the Strasburg Tourism Committee funded the brochures.

The Civil War Trails signs will be dedicated 11 AM, Saturday, May 21 (during Mayfest), at the Presbyterian Church. Secretary John Marsh will give the keynote address.

After the ceremony, interpreters dressed in clothing from several historical periods, including buckskinned Native Americans, civilian colonials, fully accoutred Civil War soldiers, and even 1920's flappers, will lead walking tours to the remaining signs. Turn of the century newsboys will distribute a special edition of *The Northern Virginia Daily* along the tour route. Thanks to Diane Smith for coordinating these living historians.

Clearly, the SHA project has become a town-wide celebration of our unique heritage. The SHA applied for, and received, recognition for our town in the Virginia 2007 Community Program, which designates applicants as vital parts of Virginia's 400-year history. To qualify, SHA president Babs Melton submitted a brief history of Strasburg, details regarding our dedication of the updated walking tour signs, 40 digital pictures of historic structures, and evidence of community wide participation in the endeavor. The materials will be included on Virginia's web site and in printed media spotlighting 2007 anniversary events.

At the town council meeting May 10, Melton presented Mayor Tim Chrisman and the Council a certificate signed by Governor Warner commending Strasburg's contributions to the Virginia 2007 Community program.



By the way, the answers to the quiz are:

- (1) 1761; (2) Frogtown; (3) silk parachutes;
- (4) Freddy Kline; (5) 51 miles

An Artist's View of the Valley

by 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 Mrs. 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 *The 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!

New Brass Plaques to Designate Heritage Homes

by Carla Wallen

SHA and Equestrian Forge have painstakingly developed a prototype brass plaque for designating heritage homes in Strasburg. SHA members will be able to examine the prototype at the general membership meeting June 12.

You Are Cordially Invited
to
Strasburg Heritage Association's

Summer Membership Meeting
and
Covered Dish Supper

Sunday, June 12, 2005
4-6 PM

at The Strasburg Museum

Diann Jacox
National Park Service at Cedar Creek
will speak on
The Battlefield: Past, Present, and Future

Historic Homes Inventory Needs Your Help!

by Mike Whittle

With the arrival of Spring, the Historic Homes Inventory Committee has once again been able to get outdoors and walk the streets of Strasburg. In an effort originally begun by Doug Cooley, committee members John Adamson and Mike Whittle have been looking at the old homes in the Historic District to identify their estimated date of construction. SHA plans to establish a Historic Building Inventory of the Town. We have listed homes on High, Queen, Washington, Holliday, Fort, and Sharpe Streets, but many more streets need to be completed, hopefully in the next couple of months.

If you are interested in helping with this important project or have information about an old home in Strasburg, please contact Mike Whittle at 465-3453.

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STRASBURG HERITAGE ASSOCIATION
P.O. Box 525
Strasburg, Virginia 22657

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Name _____

Address _____

Telephone number _____

E-mail address _____

Membership: \$20

Patron (donation) _____

Total Enclosed _____

Please mail completed form to: Strasburg Heritage Association
P.O. Box 525
Strasburg, Virginia 22657