

Strasburg Heritage Association



Volume 6, Issue 2

Spring, 2006

Strasburg, Virginia

The President's Message

By Mike Whittle

I'm honored to serve as the President of Strasburg Heritage Association this year and am looking forward to the many events that are planned. SHA will have a table at this month's Mayfest; we will have the heritage homes brass plaque on display as well as applications, newsletters, and walking tour brochures. I hope you will all be able to stop by and visit at this great event.

The rest of the year is filled with events as well. During June and September, SHA will have general membership meetings. The following article newsletter gives more information about the June meeting; at the September meeting, Dennis Hupp will give a walking tour on the history of Strasburg churches.

We have several other projects going as well. We are working with VDOT to be involved in the Adopt-A-Highway program. SHA is planning this year's Holiday Heritage Homes Tour.

I would like to thank everybody for their hard work and dedication to Strasburg and SHA. I would like to pass on a special note of appreciation to Babs Melton for serving as president for the last two years. She did an outstanding job and we are happy to see her continue to serve on the Board. Thank you, Babs!

SHA Slates Membership Meeting

By Martha Jones

The Strasburg Heritage Association Summer Membership meeting is slated for Sunday, June 11 from 4:00 to 6:00 PM at Vesper Hall, which is located on the left on US Rt. 55 West just before the I-81 exchange.

The guest speaker will be Daniel Bly, who will speak on German settlers' influence on Valley culture. Daniel grew up in the Fishers Hill area and attended public school in Strasburg. After advanced education, he became a history professor at Bridgewater College. A noted historian and genealogist, Bly is well known for his three-volume *From the Rhine to the Shenandoah*, in which he traces local families from their roots in Germany to their arrival in the Great Valley of Virginia.

A Reminder -

Membership Dues are Past Due

If you have not yet paid your annual membership dues, which are due each February, please remit them as soon as possible so that SHA can continue its vital work preserving Strasburg's rich heritage.

If you have already paid, thanks!

Tunnel Workmen Meet In Heart of Old Massanutten

*After Eighteen Months Battle
With Unusually Hard Stone,
Workmen Blow Down Last Dividing Wall
and Connect Two Sections of Tunnel
at 6:15 O'clock Wednesday Evening*

Reprinted from the *Strasburg News*,
Thursday, December 20, 1923

At last the miners working in the two sections of the Strasburg Tunnel through Massanutten mountain have met, and all Strasburg is jubilant. A huge dynamite blast set off near the northern entrance to the tunnel shortly after six O'clock last evening, which caused windows to rattle in many buildings in town, proclaimed the news to the citizens of Strasburg that the last of the obstructing wall separating the two sections of the tunnel had been blown down, and the enlarged water supply project for the town was virtually completed. For several weeks past, the workmen have been expecting to meet almost any hour, and consequently the citizens have been in a tense expectant mood for some time past. Some were predicting that the two sets of workmen would miss each other and that Strasburg might have two tunnels or at least have difficulty in connecting the two sections; but so accurate were the figures of the engineer, N. Wilson Davis, and so well did the contractors, Brady Brothers, carry on under the mountain that the two sections were not as much as one foot out of line. The side walls leveled up almost perfectly and floor of the tunnel was less than a foot off, the northern side being slightly high, a defect easily remedied.

Shortly after the news was carried to town by the signal blast, plans were set in motion to fittingly celebrate the completion of the difficult task. The streets were soon filled with people shaking hands and greeting each other, all jolly and happy at the good news. Fire works soon lighted the heavens, guns and dynamite charges boomed, whistles were tied

down and there was a rush to the stores for tin horns and noise-makers of all kinds. It was a general celebration that lasted for about an hour. Mayor Heater mounted on the Citizen's Fire Company truck with a huge American flag and the big fire fighting machine went clanging through the streets proclaiming the news to those who did not realize what the big noise was all about.

The completion of the tunnel came after a delay of almost one year. Work was started on the project in August 1922, and it was thought that the work would be completed by Christmas, or certainly by early spring of this year. However, the stone in the mountain was so hard and so much more time was necessary to complete the work than was at first estimated.

Tunnel Gigantic Task

The tunnel floor is exactly 334 feet from the top of the mountain and the tunnel is 1664 feet long, approximately 1625 feet of which is through solid rock of an unusually hard nature. This rock is known as crystallized quartz, and is so hard that both the manufacturers of the Sullivan and Cleveland drills sent specialists here to make an investigation to determine why so many repair parts were needed for their machines. Both companies stated that nowhere in America were their drills being used on stone as hard. Geologists measure the degree of hardness and softness of minerals by points. The diamond is the hardest known substance being give 10 points. Steel comes second with 9 points and the crystallized quartz, which is the backbone of old Massanutten mountain, after careful analysis by specialists has been given 8-1/2 points, which is almost as hard as steel.

Ordinary limestone is 4 points, so that it can be easily understood why so much steel was consumed why the drills and why the drilling was so slow and difficult. In the neighborhood of 3000 pounds, or one and one-half tons of steel has been consumed in the process of drilling and sharpening during the eighteen months of operation, and two railroad

cars of dynamite, cost approximately \$4000 have been used. The section of the tunnel air, poor lights, in mud and dust, and worst of all dealing with stone which tested the drills manufactured by some of the best manufacturers in America, we begin to realize the magnitude of the task, especially since the operations were conducted in an isolated mountain section, into which all materials had to be hauled over almost impassable roads. This stone is not only hard but is also very tough and can hardly be broken with a sledge hammer. It will cut glass and has some of the properties of flint in that fire flies at the slightest stroke of steel, although it is not brittle like flint. Now that the tunnel is completed, it will be best for the town that the stone is hard for there is no need for bracing anywhere and there will never have to be any expense for that worked from the south, or Little fort Valley side, is the longer, being 975 feet, and is so straight that one can stand at the point where the last blast was put off and see daylight at the entrance. The north section is 689 feet long and it was in this section that the hardest stone was encountered. An average steel bit will ordinarily drill about 20 feet in limestone, but in our tunnel each bit drilled an average of but four inches. In much of the stone one bit would do but one inch before it had to be resharpened, and many 18-inch holes required from 15 to 20 pieces of steel. The tunnel is approximately 5 feet wide by 6 feet high, and about 2,500 tons of stone were hauled out of the tunnel, much of which was used in building the impounding reservoir dam in Little Fort Valley. This in addition to 9,000 yards of dirt removed from the basin of the huge reservoir. When one considers that the tunnel is about as long as the distance between the depot in East Strasburg to the Peoples National Bank, that the actual work was limited to two men in each section at a time and these men working under the worst conditions, poor purpose.

Charles Johnson and William Walters Win Bonus

Brady Brothers, the contractors, had offered a bonus of \$10 to the men who broke through the obstructing partition. Charles Johnson of the Fort and William Walters of

Front Royal won this bonus. They were working in the north section, and were drilling a hole for a shot when suddenly their drill punched through and they thought at first that the bit had broken. The previous shot had left only a thin wall of only about one foot in the center, and when this shot was fired it did not shake down a single piece of stone on the opposite side nor was there any unusual indication that the wall was so thin. For weeks past the drills could be heard from one side to the other, even when the dividing was 180 feet thick, so solid was the partition. During a large part of the time four shifts were worked, a night and day shift on each side of the mountain. Counting the blacksmith and mockers, a force of from fifteen to twenty men were at work most of the time, not counting the extra men who were working on the reservoir.

Already 12,000,000 Gallons Water in New Reservoir

The reservoir is now completed and will hold something over 20,000,000 gallons. There is now a supply of approximately 12,000,000 gallons in the reservoir, which would last Strasburg about three months, if all sources of supplies were cut off. Then there is now from 25,000 to 30,000 gallons of water running out of the tunnel daily, which can also be run into the system, if need be. The tunnel will be cleaned out and completed by this time tomorrow when the men, who are practically worn out from long hours during the past several weeks of expectancy, will be given a holiday until after the Christmas season. The pipe through the tunnel will then be laid and the new system connected with the old. This can be done in about a week after the first of the year, and then all industries and water users, including the railroad companies, will be allowed to use all the water they want. This will greatly increase the financial income for the town in the course of a few months, and the new system should then automatically pay for itself. The exact cost of the new project is not at this time definitely known, the Finance Committee of the Town Council will shortly

make a report giving an itemized statement of all expenses. The tunnel and new reservoir will probably cost between \$50,000 and \$60,000 and at such a low figure will be cheap as dirt to the town. The tunnel will be open for inspection during the holidays and the citizens of the town, who in reality own the property, are invited to go over on the mountain and inspect the entire project.

Planning for Real Celebration

Mayor Heater is now planning a real celebration as soon as the work is entirely completed. This celebration will likely include fire works, a parade, and public speaking by a number of invited guests. Representatives of the State Health Department, the newly organized Shenandoah Valley boosters organization, delegations from Winchester, Harrisonburg, and other Valley towns will be invited to take part in the program, and the celebration will be one of the biggest, if not the biggest, event of its kind ever put off in Strasburg.

Have a Right to Be Proud

Every citizen of Strasburg and community has a just right to be proud of the achievement, as it undoubtedly marks a turning point in the history of the town. No town can grow to any great extent without plenty of water and electric power. Strasburg since the advent of the Northern Virginia Power Company and the completion of our new water system will have both, and there will now be inducements aplenty to offer outside interests to locate here. We are just in time to take advantage of the opportunity offered by the movement to advertise and boost the Valley, and every good citizen should pull together to this end. Hurrah for Strasburg!

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Classified Ad

Strasburg Heritage Association needs a **Membership Committee Chairperson**. No prior experience needed. On the job training available. Simple duties: send out dues reminders just once a year and then (hopefully) rake in money for the organization! Opportunity to meet interesting people and to fondle cold hard cash! If interested, tell any board member.

Congratulations!

Congratulations to new Strasburg town council members elected May 2, 2006: former SHA president Sarah Mauck; current SHA president Mike Whittle; and longtime SHA treasurer Don LeVine. SHA is proud of you!

Thank You!

SHA says many, many thanks to Louis Painted Pony for sharing his insight into American Indian culture during our February general membership meeting. Dressed in traditional Mescalero Apache attire, Pony and his wife Mary provided a very colorful program! Molding his talk around questions from the audience, Pony gave those lucky enough to be in attendance a riveting look at Native American lifeways.

SHA will have a **Mayfest** table in front of Bygones, thanks to owner/SHA member Richard Seelbach.

A sample of the historical plaque, applications, newsletters, and walking tour brochures will be available.

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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