



Strasburg Heritage Association

Volume 12 Issue 2

Strasburg, Virginia

Spring 2012

Annual Meeting and Program SHA Quarterly Meeting Bank's Fort and Jackson's Valley Campaign Saturday, June 2 10:00AM 193 W. Washington St. Strasburg

We are hosting a very special program during this time of commemoration of the 150th Anniversary of the Civil War on Saturday, June 2 at 10:00am at St. Paul Lutheran Church. Our own Strasburg historian, researcher and author, Richard Kleese will present a program about the creation of Bank's Fort in Strasburg, its role during Stonewall Jackson's 1862 Valley Campaign and the impact of the events of the campaign on the town of Strasburg. While discussion of Jackson's Valley Campaign is a common occurrence, information about Bank's Fort and what happened in town during this time is not something often discussed. This will be a great opportunity to learn from an excellent lecturer and researcher about the story. Following Richard's lecture, he will lead us up the hill to the site of Bank's Fort for an on-the-spot discussion and a view that will tell you the reason for the fort's location. The walk is up a very steep hill and transportation will be available.

Civil War 150 Legacy Project

Also, on the same day, we're hosting a **Civil War 150 Legacy Project** day, a project of the VA Sesquicentennial Commission and the Library of Virginia, at which Library of VA staff will be present to scan original Civil War materials to add to the LOV archives and website to preserve those materials for future generations. Suitable materials include daybooks/ledgers, diaries, letters, manuscript maps, passes/discharges, handbills, reminiscences, claims, sketches, photographs and pension papers. Materials must be originals, not copies, and must be presented by the owner. They are interested in materials that focus on the 1859-1867 period, including Reconstruction, and cover social, political, military, business and religious life during that time. If you or anyone you know has such materials we hope you will consider adding them to this important archive and encourage others to do so. The LOV staff prefers to set up appointments for scanning in order to prevent long waits. They will be at St. Paul Lutheran Church from 10am-4pm on June 2. Please call 465-5570 to arrange an appointment or if you have questions. You may also visit www.VirginiaCivilWar.org/legacy for information.

President's Letter

Barbara Adamson

Hello Everyone. A good crowd enjoyed Andy Thayer's Shenandoah River trip presentation at our annual meeting in February. His beautiful photos were a welcome sight in the middle of winter! Many thanks to Andy for sharing his adventure with us. I want to welcome new board member Laura Ellen Wade to the SHA board. Laura Ellen is very knowledgeable about local history and, with her husband Bill, enjoys collecting. I also want to thank Mary Hitchings, who decided not to stand for re-election, for serving on the board this past year. And thank you as well to all of our board members for serving.

We had yet another successful litter pick-up on the Valley Pike on March 31. Generally the weather gods smile at us on these days and this one was no exception. Thanks to Ginger Aliotti, Bill Foster, Sue Foster, Linda Williams, Donna Bollhoefer and Ed Bollhoefer we picked up our usual dozen or more bags of trash along with a couple of car parts from along the road. We appreciate the promptness of the town in taking away the trash bags. That makes the litter pick-up much easier for us.

The SHA Board has decided not to have a Holiday Homes Tour in 2012. For quite a while we've discussed whether to make the tour an every other year event and finally reached the conclusion that that was best. As we've written here before, it's become increasingly difficult to find homes to be on the tour, and planning it for every other year gives us more flexibility.

Gloria Stickley and I thank the Strasburg town crew for their clean-up in the Old Queen St. cemetery early this spring. There was a great deal of tree debris to be removed, shrub pruning to be done and they also took away some old barbed wire fencing. We've met with Joe Lehen, area forester, who's given us good advice about tree pruning and doing some fertilizing and re-seeding of grass. A lot of work remains to be done including, we hope, the installation of some new fencing in portions of the cemetery.

A Little Folk History

By *Kathy Kehoe*



Koo Koo News was a children's newspaper in Strasburg from 1983 to 1998. Most of that time it was created at the Strasburg Community Library taught, facilitated and coordinated by three amazing Strasburg women: Editor Leigh Henry, Peggy Simon and Maggie Maloney. Perhaps the Koo Koo News can best be described by two reporters. Jana Vitols wrote that "Because of Leigh, committed volunteers, and many folks in the Strasburg Community, young and old, *Koo Koo News*, has grown up.....The circulation has increased from its original printing of 36 issues to a current 4,000." Jana adds that "Leigh has been a constant spoke which has kept the presses churning and I am grateful to her and Koo Koo News, which has given us all the opportunity to, "Let Loose Our Creative Juice." Jesse Lefkowitz writes in the last issue June 6, 1998, that he was six years old when the paper was "reincarnated" (1989) after several years of inactivity. "My life as an artist/writer/reporter for the *Koo Koo News* has taken me many places over the years..... I've been to the courtroom in Woodstock, met Jeff MacNelly, the political cartoonist.....I've traversed the halls of Juds, tubed down the Shenandoah, and spent an afternoon with Mr. Platt, Strasburg's oldest citizen, just to name a few of my adventures with the *News*." Jesse, a 2001 graduate of Strasburg High School, graduated from the Rhode Island School of Design and is now an award winning freelance illustrator for The New York Times and Rolling Stone magazine.

By the February 2, 1992 issue, a statement included: "The Koo Koo News is the product of Koo Koo News Foundation, a non-profit organization dedicated to education. (No matter how young or old you are.)" Also described in this issue: "The Koo Koo News is put together by the volunteers at Strasburg Community Library who want to encourage children (no matter what age,) to use creativity, imagination and the sense of fun to learn about each other, their neighbors, and the natural world around them; using drawing, photography and language to communicate with OTHER people and THEIR neighbors." Koo Koo News in 1991 won an American Institute of Graphic Arts Award: "Kids Stuff! Communicating with Children" and was published in Graphics USA magazine; received a Certificate of Appreciation from the Strasburg Chamber of Commerce in 1993; and won a \$1,000 Marion Park Lewis Foundation for the Arts award administered by the Shenandoah Arts Council in 1997. In 2001, Editor-in-Chief Leigh Henry contributed the remaining funds of the Koo Koo News, of \$1,666.00, for the addition to the Strasburg Community Library. Sometimes the comments have no byline, such as "The Koo Koo News can only regret the spelling of Wednesday." In the "Local Hero" column, townspeople were interviewed by Koo Koo staff: Julia Redmon interviewed her grandmother Julia Campbell: Julia: "Granny, what is the worst thing you ever did?" Granny: "I skated on thin ice and fell in." "Sarah Gibson went to the post office to ask some questions, because after all, we at the the Koo Koo News do a lot of mailing." Sarah: What do you do with letters that can't be delivered and have no return address?; Brenda Himelright: They are sent to the Dead Letter Office. Sarah: Is there anything ever mailed that is alive?; Brenda: Yes. We handle baby chicks and bees through the mail." Valerie Adolphson interviewed "Glenna" a waitress at the Hi Neighbor Restaurant: Her best experience at the restaurant is "when people remember me the next time they are in." In an article entitled "The History of Strasburg and Wishes for It's Future" by Katy Bennett, Bridget Kehoe, Jessica Racey, Jamie Matthews and Laura Drummonds: Koo Koo reporters walked around town to interview local business people, "armed with a clipboard, paper, pens, press cards, coats, and even a camera, the five of us ventured out into the cold. Artz's Hardware loomed ahead." They interviewed "neighbor and long time citizen of Strasburg Sam Artz..... who had noticed all the major new things like roads, bridges, and our new town hall. When we asked him what he wanted to see in the future, he replied that he liked Strasburg the way it is and does not want to see a lot of changes." The reporters also entered the First Virginia Bank and interviewed Kristi Ritenour, who noticed changes in town such as the new drive-through window, but would like in the future for Strasburg to remain a small town. Sometimes they interviewed each other. Reporter Casey Kenyon wrote about Elinor "Ellie" Brim's love of candy that coated her tongue with color. "You can never tell what color her mouth is going to be." Katy Kehoe wrote about how her pet chicken she raised from a chick bit her on the lip. Koo Koo participated in and reported on Strasburg parades, did book reviews

Author Bridget Keyhoe will be 7 years old on May 20th and she's already written 3 books. Katy Can't Walk, Katy My Sister, and Katy the Baby. Bridget likes to write about Katy because she loves her and because she's so adorable. It takes Bridget about 8 minutes to write a book.

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and wrote "books" within the newspaper, and created their own ads. Often the issues had themes. In the "Magic" issue this advertisement was created: "If you don't brush your teeth, they will disappear—like magic." --Dr. Gerometta

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The following was written by Strasburg native Dr. Daniel Downey, Professor of Analytical, Nuclear & Environmental Chemistry at James Madison University. Dan included much of this story in his excellent presentation about Strasburg's iconic Signal Knob given at the Strasburg Museum's Annual Banquet in 2012

The Signal Knob Mural in First Bank

*By
Dr. Daniel Downey*

Upon entering the lobby of First Bank (1) in Strasburg Virginia through the large monumental portico with Greek ionic columns that faces King Street, a 1920s vintage bank vault and its magnificent door immediately come into view. Overhead hangs several chandeliers and to the right paintings of several prominent past bank executives (2) silently watch over the transactions of each day. The marble floors reflect the light off the wooden panels of the teller counter and provide a truly aesthetically pleasing image for the patrons. These features alone would make the bank lobby one of the finer in the Shenandoah Valley, but the large oil painting (Figure 1) that adorns the left wall (west) completes the visual treat. Painted directly on the plaster surface, the scene depicted is of the northern end of the Massanutten Mountain as viewed from Matin Hill on the southern end of Strasburg. Toward the left is the northern terminus of the mountain that has been known as "Signal Knob" since the War Between the States due to its extensive use as a Confederate Station of observation and communication. Since then Signal Knob has served as a site for an airway beacon and television broadcast transmitter station. Midway along the mural the Meneka Peak (3), which is on the second ridge east of the foreground mountain, is properly displayed. Other features include the Spengler Mill (4), the old Strasburg High School (5), a small section of the Valley Pike with wooden guard posts, the river bottom farm fields of Sandy Hook and the tree-lined North Fork of the Shenandoah River. The scene depicts late springtime with trees leafed out and plowed fields awaiting the summer planting. In the lower right corner of the painting, the artist recorded the following: Robt. Carlyle Barritt AVAS 60. This limited information did not satisfy curiosity as to either the identity of the artist or the reasons for this painting being in the bank lobby. Unfortunately current employees of First Bank were youths (or not yet born) when the painting had been made and no record was found in the bank. But with some internet searching, a few phone calls AND some conversations with local folks (6) who had been associated with the bank in the 1960s, the story of the painting was uncovered.

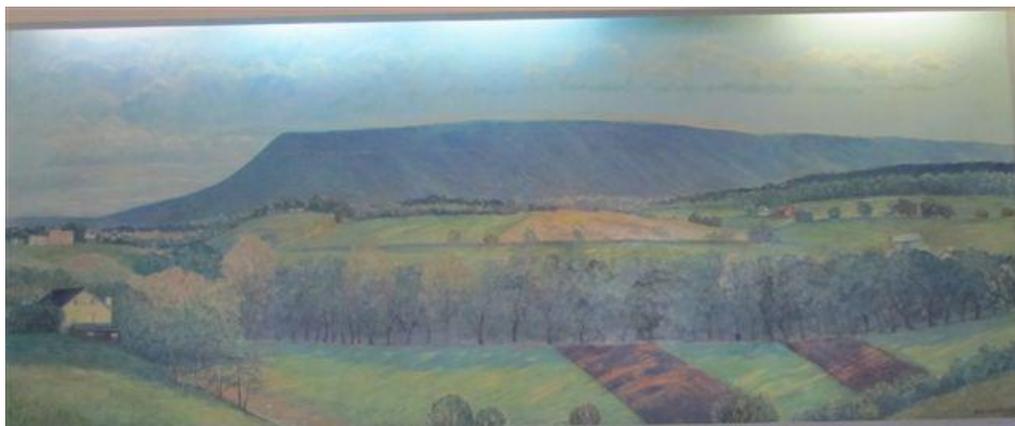


Figure 1: The Signal Knob Mural in First Bank,

When Harold Lindamood (7) of Lebanon Church Virginia was first married he and his wife, Janet, rented an apartment above the garage at Spengler Hall on Matin Hill. They lived there for six years. Each day as he left for work at the bank, Signal Knob was prominently in his view with the sun rising behind it from the east. In time, Mr. Lindamood developed a special affection for the scene and suggested that the view be painted as part of the bank lobby remodeling of 1960. A well known artist of the time, Robert Carlyle Barritt was retained for the job of creating a mural to grace the west wall of the lobby. Barritt was from Pennsylvania, where he had spent much of his life. According to his granddaughter, Winifred Barritt Walsh (8), Barritt was born June 23, 1895 in the hard coal mining country of northeast Pennsylvania. He was educated at Bellefonte Academy, and used his talent in art for the war effort while serving in World War I as a surgery artist for the Medical Corps. Following his military experience he attended the New York School of Fine Arts where he met another budding artist and his future wife, Sinclaire Westbrook, who was from Danville, VA. After schooling in New York and Philadelphia, where Barritt studied with artists Norman Rockwell and R. Sloan Bredin, the couple married in 1920. The Barritts raised their family in a large home along the banks of the Susquehanna River in West Pittston, Pennsylvania. The artist made his living by working in his father's store by day and painting by night. He became a skilled "Pennsylvania Impressionist" of landscapes and portraits. He taught art classes and was a principal in several artist's organizations. Sinclaire did not care for the cold northern winters of Pennsylvania and never stopped "pining" for her native Virginia. So in 1957, Barritt and his family moved to Charlottesville VA. It was three years following this move that he painted the mural in First Bank. As far as could be determined, there are no written records of the mural painting except for the following article and black and white photograph that appeared in the Northern Virginia Daily (9) (Figure 2) on September 9, 1960 with caption as follows:

THE BEAUTY OF SIGNAL KNOB has been captured in a 24 x 10 foot mural painting on the wall of the First National Bank of Strasburg, completed last week. The painting is by Robert Carlyle Barritt of Charlottesville, Virginia. Mr. Barritt is well known for his work on landscapes and portraits having won a number of awards at public showings. The painting was done during weekends over a one month period. It is the largest genuine mural in this area and shows a panoramic view of a historic and scenic section of Massanutten Mountain. It was difficult for the photographer to reproduce even a part of the beauty of the colors in a black and white photo.—(Daily Staff Photo).

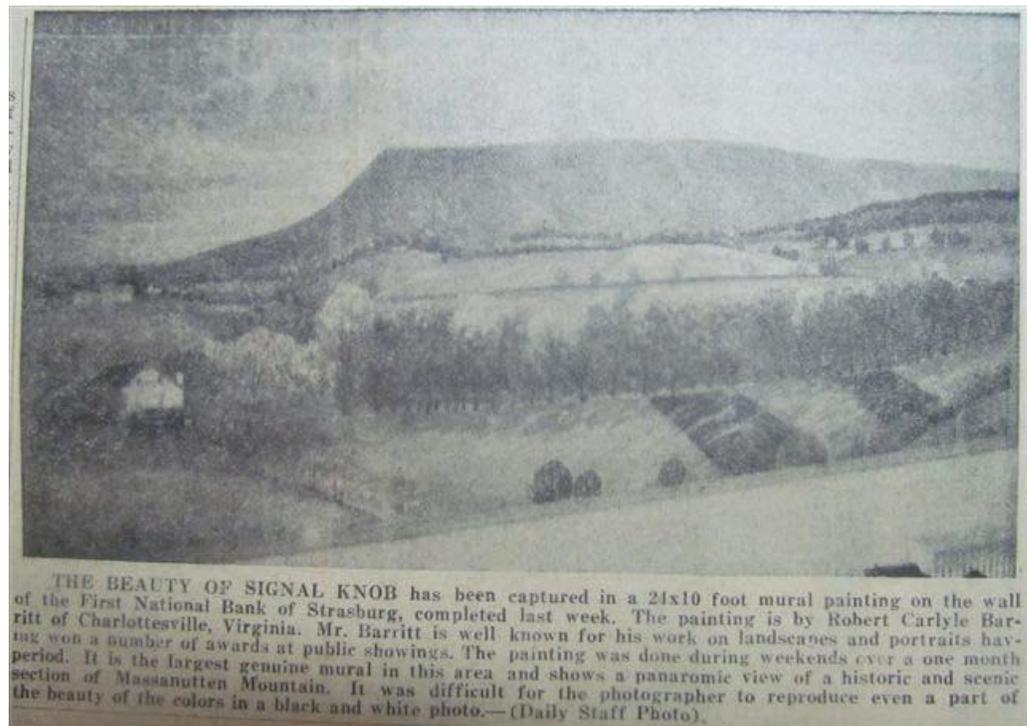


Figure 2: Mural photo published in the Northern Virginia Daily

The report that the painting was done on weekends in the space of just one month indicates that the artist was both fast and proficient in his work. The acronym "AVAS" in the lower right corner (Figure 3) represent the initials of the American Veteran Artists' Society, an organization that was founded by Barritt. The artist also abbreviated his first name (with a period) and went by his middle name. Barritt (Figure 4) continued to live a long and productive life in Charlottesville until 1975 when he moved to Lexington VA to reside with his elder son's family due to the infirmities of age. He died February 7, 1979 and is buried in the Stonewall Jackson cemetery beside his wife and near other family members.



Figure 3: Artist's credit in lower right hand corner of the Signal Knob Mural

A cursory examination of the mural in First Bank of Strasburg reveals that the painting is in fairly good condition for being more than a half century old. The varnish on oil paintings yellows with age from air oxidation and photochemical decomposition due to ultraviolet light. The pigments in a painting can be degraded or color shifted by visible light. This painting seems to have fared well as it is not exposed to direct sunlight. In addition, the bank lobby has a fairly stable temperature and humidity level which should aid longevity. There are four long fluorescent lights positioned behind a false ceiling above the mural to illuminate the upper region of the artwork. These type lamps do emit a small amount of UV light and may contribute to degradation of the painting over the long term, but this may be an acceptable condition to achieve illumination enhancement for viewing. Of greater consequence is that the changing of these bulbs requires a ladder be placed against the painting. Over the years, a distinct line that may be attributed to the ladder contact has developed along the mountain. This damage is sometimes misinterpreted by visitors as the "Skyline Drive," which is actually on the Blue Ridge Mountain, ten miles east. Close inspection reveals some cracks and blemishes that will eventually chip away and leave holes in the painting. Although the painting is in fairly good shape at this time, a proactive strategy for preservation and refurbishment at this time may aid in preventing severe deterioration and expense for the bank at some future date.

In summary, the First Bank mural of Signal Knob is a unique piece of art by an important artist for which the bank should be proud. Patrons viewing the painting experience a feeling of the permanence and strength of the mountain, which is exactly the message that this type of business wants to convey to its customers. The tellers who work at the bank face the painting all day long and stories of storms that appear on the mountain⁽¹⁰⁾ have developed apparently due to lighting effects. Some people have seen subliminal messages in the clouds over the mountain but Winnie Walsh says that her "poppy" was never inclined to put such things in his artwork. Nevertheless, the painting (in keeping with the American Impressionist style) displays an accurate representation of the mountain range ⁽¹¹⁾ as viewed from the road at Matin Hill, the same image that Harold Lindamood viewed as he left for work each morning. ⁽¹²⁾



Figure 4: The artist – Robt. Carlyle Barritt

Endnotes:

¹ Formerly called First National Bank, the bank began business operations in 1929.

² Howard W. "Pop" Ellifrits, Mavin Loving and Jack Crawford.

³ The origin of the name Meneka is uncertain at this writing; it may mean "Cherokee Girl."

⁴ Spengler Mill was built in 1797 by Capt. Anthony Spengler. Unlike most mills in the Strasburg area, this mill survived "The Burning" period during the War because Union troops used it to grind grain for their own use.

⁵ One of the two school buildings burned down in 1968. It was serving as an elementary school at the time.

⁶ Pat Clem, Ray Loving, John G. "Sean" Cadden and Gloria Stickley

⁷ Harold Lindamood: 2/16/1933 – 1/11/1982. Buried: Lebanon Church (Someone You Knew, 1997); Executive Vice President, First National Bank.

⁸ Most of the information provided here about the artist was obtained from conversations and correspondence with Winnie Barritt Walsh in March, April and May 2011.

⁹ The local newspaper that serves Strasburg and the Northern Shenandoah Valley.

¹⁰ Bank folklore reported by Teresa Orndorff and Debbie Bly

¹¹ The artist omitted the airway beacon tower that was present at the time the painting was done (1960).

¹² This essay was prepared as part of an ongoing project of the Science and Social Significance of Signal Knob and Massanutten Mountain being conducted by Daniel M. Downey, Ph.D. The "science" is atmospheric studies involving acid deposition and visibility. The "social significance" is the importance of the terrain in local history.

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