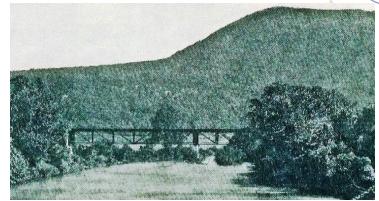


Strasburg Heritage Association



Volume 15

Summer 2015

Issue 2

Strasburg, Virginia

NEWSLETTER

strasburgvaheritage.org

SHA Quarterly Meeting **Ready-Cut Houses – Sears Modern Homes**

Sunday, June 14 2pm-4pm

St. Paul Lutheran Church 193 W. Washington St. Strasburg

Join us for a presentation by Architectural Historian James Massey as he presents a power point program about houses offered by Sears & Roebuck from 1908-1940. Offering an affordable way of home construction, these mail-order homes were shipped to buyers ready to construct and were chosen to suit individual tastes and budgets. You may be surprised at examples Jim shows us of homes in our area.

Free admission. Public invited. Refreshments.

2015 Strasburg Holiday Heritage Homes Tour

By Joan Williams

Ever pass by some of our lovely old homes in Strasburg and wonder when it was built, who owned the property and what's the history of the home? Well, you're in luck. This coming December you'll have the opportunity to satisfy your curiosity.

The 2015 Holiday Homes Tour will be held Saturday, December 12th. The listing of homes is still under wrap but our next newsletter will provide you detailed information on our homes open for tour. If you would like to help with any aspect of this special presentation or would enjoy being a docent please contact Joan Williams 465-2953 or Wendy Pieper 465-9562. We look forward to having you join us for this enjoyable and educational event. Now, jump up and mark your calendar!



FISHER'S HILL PICNIC PLANNED FOR AUGUST 1

In 2004 SHA partnered with other Shenandoah County organizations to sponsor a Civil War Veteran's Reunion Commemorative Picnic at the Fisher's Hill Battlefield. This year we are again joining with others to commemorate these picnics which were held during the late 19th Century and until the last veterans were gone around 1930. The picnics were enormously popular and at the height of their popularity drew 8,000-12,000 visitors by train and horse drawn power. They were attended by both Confederate and Union veterans and attracted thousands of local folks as well.

The picnic will be held on Saturday, August 1 from 4pm-8pm at the Fisher's Hill Battlefield site, 1864 Battlefield Rd. The schedule will include battlefield walking tours at 4:30 & 5:30, a continuous shuttle bus taking visitors to the old picnic grounds, live Civil War era music by the Shenandoah Valley Minstrels, historical displays, a program featuring readings from original Civil War documents and a keynote address by Judge Dennis Hupp. There will be food for purchase by the Powhatan Ruritan Club; your own picnic food is also allowed. Limited seating available, blankets/lawn chairs welcome. There is no admission fee.

To date our sponsors include: Shenandoah County Sesquicentennial Committee, Shenandoah Valley Battlefields Foundation, Strasburg Heritage Association, Shenandoah County Historical Society, Hupps Hill Civil War Park, Strasburg Museum, National Park Service, Cedar Creek Battlefield Foundation, Shenandoah County Tourism, Town of Strasburg, Shentel, City National Bank, BB&T, First Bank, and Laughlin Auctions.

A Little Folk History The Hometown Restaurant

By
Kathy Kehoe

Tommy and Marguerite Hart opened a small restaurant on King Street in Strasburg in 1949 called the Hometown Restaurant. Two things stand out about the Hometown. The first was Tommy, who always had a kind word, good conversation and a home-style cooked meal. "I always saw him in his white chef coat, an apron tied around his waist and his white chef hat on his head," said Icelie Jameson Nelson. The other significant thing about the Hometown were the two murals on the wall, dominating the small room.

I was eleven years old the day my mother Patsy Rutz, and her cousin Peggy Williams Tucker took me to pick up my brand new glasses. We went into the Hometown for a Coke when we got back to Strasburg. When Tommy came over to our booth to say hello, Mom told him that I was so excited about being able to see better that I'd read every sign from Woodstock to Strasburg. He grinned and said, "I hope they are rose-colored glasses." I took my glasses off my face and held them up to inspect them, telling him no, they were brown. He smiled and explained to me that rose-colored glasses meant you were looking at the world in a positive happy way. And I was certainly doing that, as happy as I was seeing the world so clearly. That's how I remember Tommy Hart. Friendly, likeable and kind--looking at the world through rose-colored glasses.

Tommy's oldest son, James Frank Hart, told me that the murals were painted by Bobby Bamber, whose parents are remembered operating Bambers Furniture Store in Strasburg. Jimmy Frank says that Bobby painted them "inside of a day" and they were there on the day the restaurant opened. Bobby joined the Navy shortly after that and left Strasburg. I could only find a few people who remembered the murals. One of the murals was a cowboy scene with a cowboy and a large saguaro cactus. "The cowboy had a big hat and was bow-legged" remembers Mike Kehoe. The other pictured the railroad bridge, a canoe and the Shenandoah River. If I could go back in time, I would take a picture of those murals. The murals had almost a sepia tone; though I'm sure they originally had vivid colors. Painted in 1949, it is likely that by the sixties, the murals were covered in nicotine from all the years of cigarette smoke. No one could remember for sure, but it is believed the murals were painted over after Tommy closed his business in 1974.

His son James "Jimmy" Frank Hart, recalled how his father worked several places before opening his own restaurant. He worked for George Pappas in his restaurant in Berryville and at the Old Mill in Strasburg. He and Marguerite also had a restaurant in Front Royal called the Royal Café located on Royal Avenue, for two years before opening the Hometown in June of 1949. He worked in Baltimore for Bethlehem-Fairfield Shipyard Steel, during World War II, building Liberty ships. Jimmy Frank remembers staying with his father in Baltimore in an apartment that overlooked the shipyard. Liberty



Tommy and Marguerite Hart

"Ships," Jimmy Frank tells us, "were designed for one way, were real cheap, and made for cargo and some personnel. It took two to three days to build a Liberty Ship for the war."

Icelee Jamerson Nelson remembers that the waitresses always wore uniforms, aprons and hairnets and good "nurses shoes." Icelee and her family lived upstairs over the restaurant for nearly twenty years. Her mother Jean Wills Jamerson worked for Tommy. In the sixties, Icelee and I and the neighborhood kids played hopscotch and double-dutch jump rope on the sidewalk outside the Hometown. Icelee reminisced that "When he wasn't busy, Tommy would come out on the sidewalk and watch me and my siblings play hopscotch and skateboards, and hide and go seek. We loved when Tommy would come out and talk and laugh with us". I remember her grandparents, Tilly and Roland Hottle, sitting on the upstairs front porch. Her grandfather liked to sit on the stoop. "People would walk by and stop and chat with him." remembered Icelee. "That was when everybody would stop and talk to everybody, and everybody knew everybody" said Icelee. "People used to talk because we lived on main street in an apartment, but my siblings and I couldn't have lived in a better place. We were very happy living there."

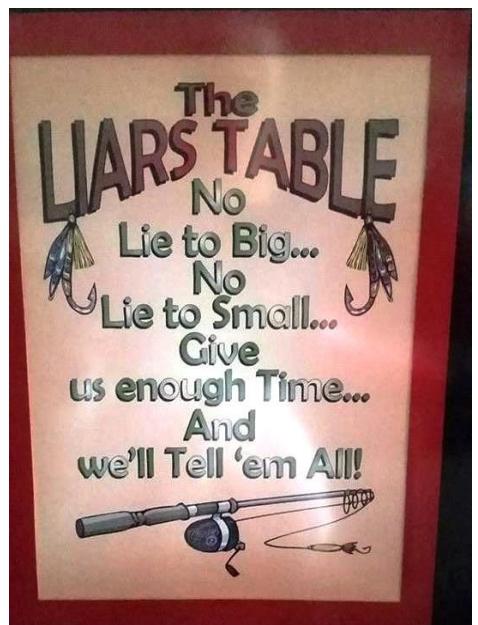
When Icelee's mother Jean worked for the Hometown she made \$25.00 for a 40 hour week. If business was slow, Tommy would sometimes pay her in free food for the family. There was a door in the hallway near the stairs that entered into the restaurant kitchen and Jean never had to go outside in bad weather to get to work. Icelee remembers the long counter lined with stools and the beer cooler where sometimes people would sit while using the pay phone on the wall. The bathrooms, she remembers, had dark mahogany doors and wood-work with glass doorknobs. 45 rpm records from Fake's Music played on the jukebox, remembers Icelee , including popular ballads like "Big Bad John" by Jimmy Dean and "Harper Valley PTA" by Jeannie C. Riley and songs like "Funny Face" by Donna Fargo. It cost a dime to play a record on the jukebox, or three songs for a quarter. "When stragglers would come in, people who were passing through, and they were hungry, but had no money to pay, Tommy never turned anybody down." remembers Icelee. "He'd sit them down to eat, and then give them a bag with a sandwich and a soda to take with them. He was a very caring man."

James Frank Hart remembers many of the people who worked at the Hometown Restaurant. The first Hometown waitress was Lisa Frye, 1949-51. Jacie McFarland 1950-52, left to be airline stewardess. Frank Byrd, "he was a bird", remembers Jimmy Frank, was from Winchester. He worked in the summertime, but wintered in Winter Haven FL. Byrd cooked, and cleaned and kept the frig stocked. "He liked to drink," remembers Jimmy Frank, "was a WWII veteran and was a heck of a good guy." He didn't come back in the summer of 1956 and

heard from again. Another "clean up man" and dishwasher was Korean War veteran Jerry Strother. Donnie Smith also worked in cleaning up. Ralph Kress, was a "heck of a good cook". He was from Front Royal and in 1952 joined the Air Force said Jimmy Frank. Mrs. Fahnestock cleaned on Sundays when the restaurant was closed. Dorothy Polk was a waitress in 1954 and 55. Mary Morris, a Strasburg high school student, quit her job at the Hometown when she married. Edna Heishman Shipwash worked for the Hometown starting in 1952, for a while living upstairs in the apartment with her son Ron Heishman, making pies, and waitressing. Desma Baker Layman, was a waitress in 1953 or 54. Jimmy Frank also remembers when Jean Wills Jameson was an employee. Icelee worked there also when she was fifteen.

I remember his last waitress, other than Mrs. Hart, was me. In 1974 I was a newly married part-time student at Lord Fairfax Community College. When I asked Tommy for a job he told me to come in the next day. With no waitress experience, I showed up in a white uniform and apron I bought from a friend. Tommy patiently trained me and soon I was bringing food and beer to a lunch crowd. My only difficult customers were four local boys I knew who were working construction and came into the Hometown to eat lunch. These small town boys I'd known all my life were naturally compelled to tease the new waitress. When I set the long neck beer bottles they'd ordered in front of them, they made a big show of trading beers, making me think I'd gotten their order wrong. They continued their joke for several days. I just laughed and put all four bottles in the middle of the table. Tommy retired in the fall of 1974, six weeks after I started. That was over forty years ago, but I still remind myself to look at life through rose-colored glasses, just like Tommy had told me all those years earlier.

Jimmy Frank also worked at the Hometown and helped his father, but he decided he did not want to go into the restaurant business. He left in 1956, retired from the Navy in 1974 and attended Lord Fairfax Community College. He still lives in Shenandoah County near Woodstock. Tommy and Marguerite's son Joe lived in Strasburg until his untimely death in 2014. Joe's wife Annie and their children and grandchildren still live in Strasburg. The Hometown later had several different owners, most of them under the name Hi Neighbor Restaurant. Jimmy and Dixie Troxell had a successful business there for many years. The most recent owner, Sam Mumper, told me about the "Liars Table" so dubbed by Jimmy Ferguson, for its many discussions on politics, sports or just plain old gossip. "This is an ongoing table throughout the day" said Sam. Customers "walked in with us each morning before we were officially open. The customers at the big round "Liar's Table" would rotate throughout the day. Jimmy made the sign that reads: "No lie to big, no lie to small, give us enough time and we'll tell them all." The building that housed the Hometown Restaurant and the Hi Neighbor Restaurant is empty now and will be sold at auction in June. The Liar's Table has been inherited by the new Queen Street Diner and its legacy will live on. And the days of Tommy Hart will always be remembered as the end of an era.



A Little More Folk History

The Hometown Restaurant

By Sarah Kehoe Mauck

When Sharon Pangle Ferguson worked at the Hi Neighbor Restaurant I often said it was the only place in town where you could get a good meal and a good joke at the same time! But way before it was the friendly Hi Neighbor it had been the Hometown Restaurant.

Memories have faded as I've gotten older, but I recall in particular one evening at the Hometown Restaurant in 1965. My dad was Town Manager and sometimes when I had after-school activities (like Girl Scout meetings at the Lutheran Church) I'd go to his office (the Town Office and Police Dept. were in the Firehouse then) and wait til he got off work to ride home. I was 11 years old and walking the 3 miles home by myself wasn't considered safe.

There were times when Daddy had to stay late—really really late to my pre-teen way of thinking! On one of those late evenings—probably Council Meeting—he told me to "walk down to the 'Hometown' and ask Tommy to fix me something to eat and he'd take care of it later." I was hungry, but I was shy, yes, very self-conscious and very bashful. I couldn't go there by myself. But hunger won out and I walked to the restaurant at supper time and asked for Mr. Hart.

This was the era of the blue law when you couldn't buy alcohol on Sunday and many Mom and Pop restaurants serving beer were called "beer joints." (Funny, now we consider them quaint Pubs!) There I stood in the narrow room with no windows, ashtrays on every table and on the long, low counter (where it still is today!) and a couple men drinking beer (probably Schlitz) from short little glasses and the smell of fried food all around. Tommy Hart came out from the kitchen and welcomed me, showed me to a booth and helped me feel comfortable. He fixed me a meal and served it himself. He chatted and he laughed. He treated me like I was a regular customer...little ol' me. It was nice to know at that age, in that era that I mattered. He was a pleasant man, a jolly fellow. I doubt he ever met a stranger.

Hey, that was **Tommy Hart**: the guy who served a hearty meal in the heart of our town at his Hometown Restaurant!

Strasburg Heritage Association

PO Box 525

Strasburg, VA 22657

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Membership Application & Renewal

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MEMBERSHIP: Cost is \$20.00

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