



Volume 22

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Issue 2

Strasburg, Virginia

NEWSLETTER

strasburgvaheritage.org

SHA Program

*The Amazing Life of Abraham Bowman*

*by*

Researcher Gabe Neville

**Sunday, June 5th at 2 pm**

**St. Paul Lutheran Church Fellowship Hall.**

193 W. Washington Street, Strasburg

Abraham Bowman was a grandson of Jost Hite, an early explorer of Kentucky, a colonel in the Continental Army, and a prosperous western pioneer. Researcher Gabe Neville will tell how the sometimes terrifying experiences of Bowman's youth in Strasburg shaped him into a Continental officer and an elder statesman who defended Henry Clay and welcomed the Marquis de Lafayette to Kentucky in 1825.

The public is invited.

Join us for fellowship and refreshment

## President's Message

### *Tim Taylor*

We hope everyone is doing well. We want to thank all of our members for their gracious donations and membership renewals for this year. If you need to pay your dues or wish to join our organization, information can be found in this newsletter on how to do both. Your generosity is much appreciated and will help us to continue offering services to the greater Strasburg community.

We awarded \$500 scholarships to four graduating students of Strasburg High School. They were Nathan Cadle, Sebastian Keefe, David Storey and Bethany Pearsall. Thanks to Joan Williams for working with the administration at Strasburg High School on awarding these scholarships.

We have been busy attending events not only in the Strasburg community, but in the county as well as we help celebrate Shenandoah County's 250th! We will be participating in additional events the remainder of 2022. You can see other upcoming 250th events by going to their website - [sc250.org](http://sc250.org).

We are looking forward to our next program which will be on June 5th at 2 pm. Gabe Neville will present on the amazing life of Abraham Bowman. More information about this program is in this newsletter.

Please take the time to visit our website to check out our archived newsletters and to listen to stories and interviews being shared on our podcast channel. Links to these resources can be found in this newsletter.

Have a safe, enjoyable, and relaxing summer.

Sincerely - Tim Taylor - SHA President and the SHA Board

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### **CHECK OUT OUR PODCAST CHANNEL**

Our latest podcast episode is from our 2003 Fall Newsletter entitled, *Strasburg Town Team Baseball*, written by Doug Cooley.

Podcast Episode - Strasburg Town Team Baseball - <https://anchor.fm/strasburgvaheritage>

Listen to stories and interviews about people, places and historical times!

The podcast link: <https://anchor.fm/strasburgvaheritage>

**Oh! The stories you'll hear!**

**[www.strasburgvaheritage.org](http://www.strasburgvaheritage.org)**

# Shenandoah County 250th Commemoration Update

By Barbara Adamson, 250 Commemoration Committee Member

## Shenandoah County 250th Festival

In celebration of the Shenandoah County 250 th Commemoration, we hope you can attend the 250th Festival to be held on Saturday, Sept. 10, 2022 at 11523 Back Rd. Toms Brook, VA at the beautiful Hottel-Keller Homestead/Shenandoah Germanic Heritage Museum. The festival is to be held from 11am-5pm and will include historic craft exhibits and demonstrations, farm equipment, military encampments, local non-profits, vendors, food, music, children’s activities and more. Free and open to the public. Rain date Sunday, Sept. 11, 2022.

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Our plaque program hopes to increase awareness of, and pride in, buildings important to the history of Strasburg and Davis District. Obtaining a plaque is purely voluntary. Real estate taxes will not increase, nor will any limitations be placed on the property. There are neither restrictions nor covenants associated with obtaining a plaque.

The building must be at least 60 years old. Thus, in 2022 for example, the structure must have been built no later than 1962. What matters is the year the original house was built. Additions do not affect eligibility. The building must be within Strasburg or Davis District.

The beautiful bronze plaque is made by the Erie Landmark Company in Columbia, Pennsylvania, and it usually takes a month from the time an application is received until the plaque arrives. Although the cost is approximately \$200, including shipping, the applicant pays \$120, and the Strasburg Heritage Association pays the remainder. Information on how to apply can be found on our website, [www.strasburgvaheritage.org](http://www.strasburgvaheritage.org).

### Board of Directors 2022

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## A Little Centenarian Folk History Loretta "Tillie" Rutz Stickles Campbell

By  
Kathy Kehoe

*Time has made a change since my childhood days  
Many of my friends have gone away  
Some I never more in this life will see  
Time has made a change in me.*



These are the words Tillie sang at her one hundred and first birthday party. Members of her family joined in for the old gospel song, "Time Has Made a Change in Me".

One of eleven children, she was born Loretta Rutz on October 30<sup>th</sup> 1920 to Harry Houston Rutz Sr. and Bertha Drummonds Rutz. Her mother told her, she remembers, "you were born on pay day". She knows she was born on a Saturday because her mother often recited the lines from a poem to her: "Saturdays child works hard for a living." The family lived in a company house on Funk Street because her father worked for Southern Railroad as a car inspector. Because little Loretta was always busy "doing something" the men who worked the railroad with her father gave her a nickname "from the funny papers" said Loretta. "Tillie the Toiler" was a newspaper comic strip that ran from 1921 to 1959. Just about everybody in Tillie's family had a nickname and Tillie was the name bestowed on her.

Loretta "Tillie" grew up singing with her family. The first time she sang in public she was four years old. "Daddy knew men in the Pantheon Club" said Tillie, "and Daddy took us to one of their meetings ovetop Brillo's store" on King Street. Tillie remembers how she and her brother John and her sister Lena "Mutt" stood in the front of the meeting to sing. "I could not get my mouth to open up and sing," she said. But when the men started tossing coins to her, "I started singing and I never stopped singing after that," laughed Tillie. On Saturday nights when her father's friends would come over to play cards, the kids would bother them and make noise until the men would give them money to go away so they could play cards in peace. But on most Saturday nights, the whole neighborhood would get together. "When we were little bitty kids everybody on our street would get together on Saturdays and Sundays and play music in everybody's houses. Daddy played harmonica and juice harp" (also called a jaw harp). She recalls her father singing the song, "Get Along Home Cindy".

"We'd roll back the rug and dance in the parlor. We'd have a banjo, fiddle, two guitars and a mandolin." remembered Tillie. Tillie loved to dance. She remembers her mother telling her, "I don't know how you keep from getting your feet tangled up." Tillie and her siblings also sang at the Strand Theatre and she and her brother Freddy entered talent shows. The Strand was the first movie theater in town and is now the Box Office Brewery. "They'd have shows for Abraham Lincoln's birthday and other holidays" said Tillie. Tillie remembers that Nellie Weston played the piano for the Rutz family when they sang. Nellie also played piano for the silent films. "If you couldn't read you were in trouble", said Tillie.

"One of my aunts took up tickets there so sometimes we kids would get in free. Old Man Crump worked for Mr. Dalke—he ran the projector and would put up posters all over town"

advertising movies and country music shows. Tillie said "I never knew his first name".

Tillie sang with her siblings on the radio from age 12 through her teenage years. They were called "The Rutz Family" band. They sang for Harrisonburg WSVA, Mt. Jackson WSIG, and a radio station in Cumberland Maryland. During the Great Depression, they were called to audition in Chicago for Illinois WLS-AM, for one of the first country music radio programs: The National Barn Dance. They didn't have transportation to go that far and her father had to work. They were also called to audition in Bristol but were unable to go; The Carter Family lived near Bristol and became famous as a bluegrass band after their recording session. But The Rutz Family continued to sing for local radio stations and had a following in the Strasburg area. Tillie said they always ended a show with a hymn. One of her favorites is "The Old Rugged Cross".

For many years, singing and playing music was "the only way to make a little money in those days." said Tillie. They'd sing for family reunions and pass the hat and people would give what they could. Once during the Great Depression in the 1930s, they played for an event at Southern States and when they went later for the promised pay, they gave them white flour instead of money.

The Rutz kids found time to play in the neighborhood. Her brothers John and Jim were sneaking out of the house to use the side track to ride the hand car. By pushing the ends like a seesaw, the boys could roll the hand car on the tracks. Someone turned them in, said Tillie, "but they didn't get in too much trouble, they just couldn't do it anymore." Tillie remembers that the rent was \$5.00 a month. She also remembers Mrs. Finch, who "lived in a yellow house there, who took on boarders. She always gave us kids money for the carnival."

Once they sang for a railroad convention and because her father worked for Southern Railroad, "they introduced daddy and mother in the audience and mother was embarrassed to stand up in front of all those people."

They sang at the American Legion one Christmas. Frank Hillyard, who was then the commander of the Strasburg American Legion, was so impressed with their performance, he told her "You made my night!", a compliment Tillie still remembers.

The Rutz children also went "Belsnickeling" at Christmas time. Belsnickeling originated in Germany and was brought to this country by the German immigrants who settled in Strasburg. It was tradition for the children to dress up in costumes and visit their neighbors, who had to guess who they were. The Leake family "were always ready for us" Tillie remembers. They had a large "fancy" house, with tables beautifully set with pretty dishes and lots of food and desserts. Tillie recalls how Mr. Leake enjoyed the children's music so much, he asked her father if he could adopt Tillie. Her father said no, "I have a lot of kids, but I'm not giving any of them away."



The Rutz Family: Back row L to R: Lena, Pete, Harry, Tillie, father Harry, John. Front row: L to R . Eva, Fred, Dorothy, Jack, Claude, mother Bertha. (her brother Jim not shown)

She was 16 years old in 1936, and that was when she married Norval Stickles Sr. "but everybody called him "Wimp" (another family nickname). In 1943 her husband was drafted into the Army and sent overseas to fight in WWII. "At first they only took young men into the army, but then they started taking men with children."

Tillie was left to care for their four children: Norval "Pig", Tom, Paul "Salty", and Eleanor "June". She was expecting her 5th child when he left. Michael was born "and never left the hospital. He was only two weeks old when he died." said Tillie. She had to tell Norval in a letter. Because mail to the soldiers was so slow, Norval got a letter about Michael's death before he got the news he had been born. Somehow both parents kept going, Norval fighting a war, and Tillie taking care of the home and children.

"He got there just in time for the Battle of the Bulge and when the war ended he was in Czechoslovakia." When he got home, he told Tillie, "You think Germany is bad, you don't want to get tangled up with the Russians". She remembers his words now when she watches the nightly news and sees what is happening in Ukraine. The letters she and Norval wrote to each other were blacked out in many places—that was to keep information like locations of the army from getting to the enemy. All correspondence was censored by our government. She remembers it took a couple months to get the first check from the Army, but then she got a check every month until he came home.

Tillie was struggling with rationing, and taking care of the children and the household, but she knew "everybody was in the same boat". She remembers when "Fred Maphis, president of the bank, walked here to see if I needed anything." Everything was rationed, said Tillie, and you could only buy as much as your coupon said you could. That included sugar, meat, even shoes. Gasoline was also rationed, but they didn't have a car so they didn't need to buy gas. She used her ration stamps to buy shoes but her daughter June outgrew her one pair of shoes before more ration stamps were available. Tillie was walking down the street one day wondering how she would get June a new pair of shoes, when she looked down and saw a ration book. She picked it up and there was a ration stamp for shoes. "I waited a week" she said, "to see if anybody would claim it. And when nobody did, all my children had shoes to wear."

The war ended and her husband came home in September 1945. A year later her 6<sup>th</sup> child, Richard "Goozer" was born. The family started singing again. The Rutz Family sang in West Virginia, for March of Dimes events, other civic organizations, and family reunions. Her nephew Greg Rutz remembers some of the songs: "That Silver Haired Daddy of Mine", and "Tie Me to Your Apron Strings Again."

Tillie was widowed in 1962 when Norval Stickles passed away. In her late forties, she married Pete Campbell and had her last child, Petie, who still lives with her. Her son Tom Stickles, a retired schoolteacher, lives in Maryland.

Tillie's deepest sorrows have been losing five of her seven children. She lost baby Michael when she was 26. She was 66 when Richard died in a motorcycle accident; 74 when daughter June passed away; 77 when they she lost her son Paul "Salty", and 91 when her son Norval Jr. "Pig" died.

She's lived a hundred and one years, acquired five names, lost five of her children, and was widowed twice. Like the song, time has made a change in her.....

*Time has made a change in the old home place  
Time has made a change in each smiling face  
And I know my friends can plainly see  
That time has made a change in me.*

In recent years, Tillie and her brother Fred Rutz often went to the elementary school to talk to the kids about music and to sing and play for them. Her granddaughter Wendy Andrews, who lives with and helps Tillie care for the house and her son Petie, goes with them. About four years ago when Tillie and Fred spoke about the Roy Rogers show, (circa 1930s and 40s) one little boy was "really excited" said Wendy. He raised his hand and proudly declared, "We ate there last night!" referring to the restaurant chain that carries the Roy Rogers name. The school talks have included WWII and the Civil War veterans picnics in Fishers Hill. Sometimes Tillie joined her brother Fred when he played at the local Community Dinners. "Freddy" was a well-known musician who passed away last year. Fred was her last living sibling. Tillie's nephew Greg Rutz and her niece "Cookie" Shrum both sang with Tillie at her birthday party. Cookie still does Tillie's hair in her salon in Woodstock. "Greg writes me a poem for my birthday every year." said Tillie. The last one, "My Aunt Loretta", is framed in her living room. A line in Greg's poem:

*"Now that I'm older, I'm glad I was there, for the music and stories she told;  
And I sure wouldn't trade those bright summer days, for all of the silver and gold."*

Whenever Tillie and family have played music in recent years, Wendy dubbed them "The Pouts Hill Pickers". Fred, Tillie, grandson Richard Stickles, and granddaughter Brenda's husband Al James are some of the family members who get together and play in the house or, in the summer, on the carport. As the lyrics go, time has made a change.....

*When I reach my home in that land somewhere  
With my friends who wait to meet me over there  
Free from pain and care I'll forever be  
Since time has made a change in me*

Greg Rutz's poem ends with words remembering those who have passed on.

*"I know in my heart, they are waiting in Heaven, with all of their family and friends;  
and some day we'll join them with arms open wide, to sing the old songs again."*

"If I die tomorrow, I can say I've had a good life", said Tillie. "Lots of good things happened, lots of bad things happened but I got through it all."

Another traditional bluegrass song the Rutz family played was "Will the Circle be Unbroken", a song that fits the Rutz family. "There's a better home awaitin' in the sky, Lord, in the sky."



Back row L—R: Joe Neff. John Rutz. Thomas Stickles. Bottom row L to R. Tillie, Tank, Pete Rutz, Fred Rutz



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# 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: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

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

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

TOTAL ENCLOSED: \_\_\_\_\_

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