

# Strasburg Heritage Association



Volume 14

Issue 1

Strasburg, Virginia

NEWSLETTER

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

## *Annual Meeting and Program*

### **Historical Archeology and Sheridan's 1864 Valley Campaign**

Join us for Dr. Clarence Geier's presentation, Historical Archeology and Sheridan's 1864 Valley Campaign, an illustrated discussion of how historical archeology contributes to battlefield interpretation. Dr. Geier and his JMU students have uncovered vast amounts of information from their work in the Valley. He will use studies from Fishers Hill to Cedar Creek as examples of the importance of Civil War archeology, how to do it and what it reveals. Though retired from JMU Dr. Geier continues to teach and do field research, with a current interest in military sites.

Our program and a brief meeting will be held on

*Sunday, Feb. 16, 2014*

*2-4pm*

*St. Paul Lutheran Church*

*193 W. Washington St. Strasburg.*

Hosted by Strasburg Heritage Association.

Free, public invited.

Join us for fellowship and refreshments.

## President’s Letter

Barbara Adamson

What a winter! It started early and seems not to have let up at all. Let’s hope it ends early. Many thanks to everyone who has helped make this past year a success. We appreciate John Adamson’s two presentations, “A Rooftop View of Strasburg, 1906” and “Strasburg Virginia Gunsmiths”, both enjoyable, informative and well-attended. Joan Knight presented a wonderful program, “Shenandoah Valley Quilts”, which included beautiful local quilts brought for Joan to assess and the audience to enjoy. Our Valley Pike litter pick-up crew came through in the spring and fall. The Old Queen Street Cemetery received a facelift with the installation of split-rail fencing along the back property line. Our thanks to Ralph Stickley, Carroll Estep, Mike Marcheterre and Craig Morris for this successful project. And as always many thanks to SHA board members for their contributions especially treasurer Sue Foster, secretary Wendy Pieper, newsletter editor Kathy Kehoe, web manager Bill Foster. Linda Williams, Polly Wilson and Dee Keister are always there to help when asked and Laura Ellen Wade is terrific with program planning. And special thanks to Joan Williams and former board member Maggie Maloney for co-chairing the 2013 Homes Tour. They did a great job.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Spring 2014 Valley Pike Clean-Up

We’ve scheduled our semi-annual clean-up on the Valley Pike for Saturday, April 26. Meet at 8am at the Old Mill parking lot. We sure could use more help with this project, so please come out and bring a friend. We finish by 10am. Remember to wear sturdy shoes and bring gloves. If in doubt due to weather forecast, call 465-5570 for an update.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Upcoming Events

**Tuesday, March 11** – 7pm – **History of Religion in the Shenandoah Valley** – Author & historian Katharine Brown of Staunton will present a history of religious denominations and their presence in our area in the late 1700s. St. Paul’s Heritage Ctr. 106 S. High St. Edinburg. Hosted by Shenandoah County Historical Society.

**Saturday, March 22** – 9am-5pm – **Symphony of Stitches** – “Weddings Through the Ages: Gowns to Gifts”. Reservations for full or half-day. Lunch available. Go to [www.edinburgmill.com](http://www.edinburgmill.com). Call 984-9309. St. Paul’s Heritage Ctr. 106 S. High St. Edinburg.

**Saturday, April 12** – 11am-3pm – **Shenandoah County Heritage Day** – Some featured areas this year: Orkney Springs, Bird Haven, Hudson’s Crossroads, Jerome, Alum Springs. Some families featured: Baker, Barb, Delawder, Dellinger, Lamma, Mumaw, Lindamood. At Virginia House, Shrine Mont Conference Ctr., Orkney Springs. Go to [www.shenandoahcountyhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.shenandoahcountyhistoricalsociety.org). Call 459-7377.

Save the Date – Sunday, June 26. Bill Wade will present a power point program about Shenandoah County artists from the past. Details later.

# 2013 Strasburg Holiday Heritage Homes Tour

by Joan Williams

This past December 14th was a special day for The Strasburg Heritage Association. It was our 11th Holiday Heritage Homes Tour. Five unique properties were on tour that exemplified the diversification of our Strasburg heritage homes. Once again we give our homeowners, Denise Jane, Mike Marcheterre, Craig Morris, Alice Muellerweiss, Caroline Stalnaker, Strasburg Presbyterian Church, and Kevin Watson our heartfelt thanks and gratitude for lovingly decorating their homes and graciously opening them for all to enjoy.

This fundraiser is truly a community event. As they say, "It takes a village". This year it included our homeowners & their families, our tour committee members and sixty docents, all of whom gave their time, energy and efforts to make this event a success.

The cold and snowy weather played havoc with our ticket sales, but those hardy folks who purchased tickets and toured our homes were delighted at what they saw. A common refrain from them was that they were so pleased we had made the decision to continue with the tour, in spite of the weather. They also commented about the variety of properties on tour and how great it was to have the opportunity to see them. We saw people with smiling faces all over town enjoying themselves. Honestly, the weather warmed a bit during the day and the fluffy, gentle "Hollywood" snow got everyone into the Christmas spirit.

We look forward to presenting our 12th Holiday Heritage Homes Tour during December 2015. Hopefully some of you will consider showcasing your home for our event. For those of us who have had our homes on tour, it is a pleasant and rewarding experience. And it speaks volumes about our Strasburg pride in preserving and sharing with others our lovely homes.

The proceeds from our tour provide the Heritage Association with funds to continue our work. This includes documenting our town's history, partially funding house plaques identifying a home or building as historic, free-to-the-public educational and historical presentations, and to maintain the historical preservation of our community in a variety of ways.

The Heritage Association and the tour committee members consisting of Barbara Adamson, Sue Foster, Maggie Maloney and Joan Williams thank you for your support, and we look forward to your continued efforts in supporting our mission.

\*\*\*\*\*

## In Memory

Caroline Stalnaker who shared her Mt. Pleasant B&B for the 2014 Homes Tour passed away on Jan. 27th. We remember her at this time for sharing her historic home with us and for the very interesting and delightful person she was.



# A Little Folk History

By George Hoffman

## The Elementary School Fire in Strasburg, 1968

I remember very distinctly many of the events of that last day of school in 1968. The whole school was buzzing with activity. The seventh-graders were going to be graduating that day, and most of us sixth-graders were green with envy that next school year, they would be going to the high school.

Some of us sixth-graders, however, on this last day of school were not dwelling on the envy. You see, on this day, we were being entrusted with the responsibility of being safety patrolmen! We had been in training for some time, and today, we were giving the seventh-grader patrolmen a break, on this, their graduation day. We had been given our white webbed patrolmen belts and our shiny silver patrolmen badges, and we were going to be **IN CHARGE**.

I went to school early that day, so as to have some extra time to 'patrol the halls' before school started. Yep. I walked to school that day in my sparkling white webbed belt (Mom had bleached it!), with the badge placed just adjacent to my heart over my left chest. And ever the budding photographer, I also had my trusty little camera hanging from a long strap around my neck. I had planned to take some photos of graduation, of some of my friends, and just some candid shots of the last day of school for posterity. I stashed my lunchbox in my home room and headed for my assigned post, in the 'old part' of the school, the older part of the building on the right side.

I went inside and up to the first floor. The hallways were big with classrooms around the perimeter. The floors were warped and worn from years of being trampled by students, but they were always shiny. The whole building had a funny smell. It was kind of like lemon floor wax and old gasoline mixed together. I always figured that was because down in the bowels of the building...down the basement steps, past the gray-painted restrooms, down the other stairs, past the film room, was a large concrete space that used to be a school bus garage. But I digress. I went on up the stairs to the second floor. I stood there in the big hall, I'm sure with my hands on my sparkling white patrolman belt, and surveyed the surroundings. Students passing by on the way to classrooms; a teacher or two chatting; general scurrying. And I was in charge!

I hadn't been up there long when a student came running out of one of the classrooms on my left, yelling to one of the teachers who was on "hall duty".

"**FIRE!** There's a fire in here!" she yelled and ran into Miss Stickley's arms. In one swift motion, Miss Stickley put her aside, and charged into the room, those 'old lady' shoes of hers making a really loud noise as each foot deliberately hit the floor. Now Miss Stickley was one of my favorite teachers, and in that moment, I thought, well, she's not going to put up with that nonsense, which, I assumed it must be. Just as quickly, Miss Stickley reappeared at the doorway, actively pushing two students in front of her. Her face was very serious as she pushed them toward the front of the building, instructing them to get out. She continued on across the hall and pulled the fire alarm on the adjacent wall. The alarm sounded. I'm sure I froze for a short time. Miss Stickley began hollering, "**EVERYBODY OUT!! OUT OF THE BUILDING!**"

Oh, **NO**, I thought....I need to get out of here! Then it hit me! I was **IN CHARGE!** I was a **SAFETY PATROLMAN!** I had been trained to react in situations like this! I also thought about my dad and several family friends and neighbors, all of whom were volunteer firemen in this town, and thought about what they would do. This was my chance!

I sprang into action! Across the hall toward the back of the building I flew. I ran into the first classroom in the back yelling, "There's a fire In the classroom over here! Get out of the building fast! Go to the playground across the street!" I continued making my way around to

the classrooms. I went in each one, alerted everyone to the danger, and told them to get out right away, using the stairs on the left side. Each time I went back into the hall, I glanced back toward the stairs to make sure they were doing what they were supposed to do. I was smelling smoke now. As I reached one classroom, I remember the kids were filing out of the room before I got there...they had obviously heard all the yelling already. Following them was one of the teachers, pushing them and instructing them to go down the stairs. She suddenly grabbed me too, and began to push me with the rest of the students. I twisted away from her, telling her I had another classroom to check. She kept moving toward the stairs, but was yelling at me to come with them right now. I yelled back over the now very loud noises of squeals and screams and echoing footsteps of so many people that I would be right behind her. When I reached the last classroom, it was empty, so I did just turn and run toward the stairs, and actually caught up with the teacher who had tried to take me down with her. She fussed at me all the way down the stairs!

When I reached the first floor, I started to cross the hallway again to check the classrooms but this time, I was caught by another teacher who, herself hustled me right down the last set of steps and out the front door. In the sunlight in the front of the school, I squinted and looked across the schoolyard at the many children who were already on the playground across the street, and the ones who were still running in that direction. I looked back over my shoulder at the building and black smoke was billowing out the windows.

MY CAMERA! I have my camera, I thought! I need to take some pictures! I turned around and began taking pictures, but I was quickly grabbed and made to get across the street where it was 'safe'. Some of the teachers were trying to calm some of the very young students. I remember there was crying and still some screaming and just general chaos, but one of the teachers asked if we could help keep the children there on the playground and together in their lines.

The fire trucks soon came, and some familiar firemen rolled out and began to battle the fire. Big ladders, lots of fire hose, and a LOT of activity was going on across the street. Some buses were coming in to help deliver children to their homes. Parents were starting to arrive, scared to death, I'm sure, that their children may be trapped in the fire at the school.

It's funny the kinds of things that linger in your memories, but I remember one little girl had on green tights, even on that fairly hot June day, and poor thing...she just wet herself standing there in line with her classmates. She was so frightened, and then so embarrassed, and we just tried to help her get calmed down for a while. I also remember comforting one little girl who was crying so pitifully because she'd left her bubble gum in her desk.

After some of this, my memory is a little fuzzy, but I do remember hanging out there at school that day until the fire had been put out. I remember talking to one of my neighbors who was one of the firemen fighting the fire about how bad it had been. I remember fire trucks from at least three different fire companies who had come to help fight the fire. I remember walking around the back of the building and looking up through a window at the sky where the roof had once been. I remember snapping a few pictures with my camera, still a little disbelieving that this had all really happened. I remember wondering, even asking a few adults, where were we going to go to school next year.

When I look back, in those days before disaster drills, and school policemen, and cell phones, I am now amazed at the orderliness of the evacuation of that building, and the calm way the teachers and administrators dealt with getting the children safely back home or with parents. It's definitely one of those "those were the days" memories!—

—Editor's Note: Thank you to George Hoffman for sharing his story and photo. He is a life long resident of Strasburg with a strong interest in local history.



## A Little Folk History

### The Day the School Burned

By Kathy Kehoe

It was Friday, June 7<sup>th</sup> 1968 in a small town in Virginia. It was the last day of school at Strasburg Elementary. The school consisted of two separate buildings joined in the middle by the school gymnasium/cafeteria (built in 1951). The oldest part of the school was built in 1921 for all grades, then the 2nd building was added to serve as the high school. When the new high school was built in 1960 on Ram Drive, grades 6 and 7 moved into the old high school classrooms. Grade five classrooms were in the gym part of the building. It was the oldest building, to the right of the gymnasium, with classrooms for grades one through four that burned that day.

It was also the day of the 7<sup>th</sup> grade graduation ceremonies to celebrate our last year at the elementary school. Because I was a patrolman, I brought my white graduation dress into my upstairs 7<sup>th</sup> grade classroom so I could change before the ceremony. It was 8:00 a.m. when the fire alarm went off. "How odd" I thought, "to have a fire drill on the last day of school before school even started." I instinctively went to the large windows, open on this summer day, and closed them just as we did for every fire drill since first grade. The other building was in plain sight as I closed each window but I saw no smoke or fire then. Any early arriving students would be on the playground at 8 a.m. but I automatically scanned the room before closing the door. By the time I went down the steps to the outside, I could see there was a real fire. I had my patrol belt on and was instructed to take the students to the playground and keep them there.

The front page headline of the Northern Virginia Daily the next day read "Fire Wrecks Section of Strasburg School." Dated Saturday, June 8, 1968, the article reported: "The fire was discovered when a youth opened a closet door in Mrs. Dixie Wilson's first floor room. Chief Mowery explained that in his opinion the fire had been smoldering for several hours and that when the door was opened oxygen ignited the flames. The fire was not centered in the closet, it was explained, but fresh air carried through a vent to the burning areas."

"The school alarm was turned in by Mrs. Virginia Beeler and Miss Virginia Cooper called the fire department. The children were immediately evacuated by the safety patrol. The student unit, under the direction of Henry Utz, drew much praise from the public for its swift action."

Needless to say, the students who were there will never forget the day the school burned. The 7<sup>th</sup> grade students recently had their 40<sup>th</sup> high school reunion and shared some of their memories.

Darla Coverstone Polhemus told us that "We were supposed to graduate that day, and when our bus arrived, they told us to stay on it. We waited on the bus for a couple of hours it seemed, and were then returned home." The busses arriving after the school was evacuated had to remain on the bus until the drivers had instructions to take the kids back home. Sherry Vance Baughman remembers that her sister Donna alerted the teacher about the fire after their first grade brother Dale told his sister the closet was on fire. There are rumors that a student started the fire, but the official report in the newspaper was that it had been smoldering. Mary Campbell Redmon, home from college, remembers standing on the upstairs back porch of her house on Queen Street and seeing the teachers bringing out their files. Roxie Rush remembers she was walking to school, saw smoke and ran to the sewing factory on King Street (Tommy Simmons') where her mother worked. Mrs. Rush and her coworkers could see the smoke from outside the factory. Meanwhile, seventh graders John Williford and Walter Tewalt, both patrolmen, ran to the fire hall to tell the fire company, then ran back to the school to see what they could do. By this time we on the playground watched the smoke

rolling out of the windows of the older part of the school-house, saw the fire trucks arrive and the hoses shooting water toward the school. "I went to my mother's work that day", said 6th grader Linda Holsinger Lambert. Her mother worked at Aileen which was then near Borden Lumber Company. "Isn't it amazing how everyone was allowed to go wherever they wanted?" My mother, Patsy Cameron Combs Rutz, came to the school from her job at the Virginia Restaurant and my Uncle Tommy Cameron came from his Exxon Service Station to see about his 7<sup>th</sup> grader Vicky Cameron McDonald. Seventh grader Robin Brown Hottle wrote a letter to the Northern Virginia Daily a few days later about what a good job the Strasburg Fire Department did. From the NVD: "Strasburg Elementary school Principal James Racey said last night that due to the fire Seventh Grade graduation exercises will be held Monday at 9:30 a.m. in the school auditorium." I remember my white dress smelled of smoke when I went up the steps to accept my certificate from Mr. Racey.

\*\*\*\*\*

### The Strand Theater

Strasburg's first movie theater was called The Strand. It was built before 1921, located on King Street and was where many people saw their first picture show. High school graduations were held there, as well as school plays and variety shows that included tap dancing. The first movies shown there were silent films. It was a hub of activity. Shirley Maxwell and Jim Massey are researching the building, now owned by Byron Brill, and are looking for information, especially photos. Jim believes the building was originally brick. If you know of any photos of the Strand, please let us know.

### Yoo Hoo! Dues are due in February!

We hope you will continue your support of SHA by renewing your membership. Our annual membership fee of \$20 is due in February and is much appreciated. Help us continue to support historic preservation in Strasburg, offer interesting programs and an informative newsletter. Thank you!



## SHA Board of Directors 2014

\*\*\*

**Barbara Adamson**

**President**

**Judy Troxell**

**Vice-President**

**Sue Foster**

**Treasurer**

**Wendy Pieper**

**Secretary**

**Kathy Kehoe**

**Newsletter Editor**

\*\*\*

**Bill Foster**

**Dennis Hupp**

**Dee Keister**

**Marie Spence**

**Tim Taylor**

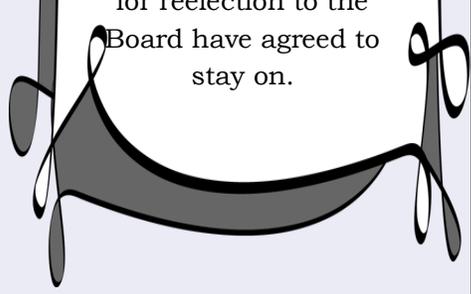
**Laura Ellen Wade**

**Joan Williams**

**Linda Williams**

**Polly Wilson**

Nominating Committee reports that all those up for reelection to the Board have agreed to stay on.



# Strasburg Heritage Association

PO Box 525

Strasburg, VA 22657

## Strasburg Heritage Association

PO Box 525

Strasburg, VA 22657

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

### Membership Application & Re- newal

(Members 2014 dues are now due.

Name:

---

Address:

---

Telephone:

---

Email address:

---

MEMBERSHIP: Cost is \$20.00

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