

# Strasburg Heritage Association



S T R A S B U R G , V I R G I N I A

## **SHA Community Meeting** *Walk Fishers Hill Battlefield with Richard Kleese* *Sunday, September 27th* 4:00 – 6:00 p.m.

Don't miss this opportunity to walk the Fishers Hill Battlefield with local historian and author Richard Kleese on Sunday, September 27 at 4:00 PM. Author of Shenandoah County in the Civil War: The Turbulent Years, Richard is an expert on what happened at Fishers Hill on Sept. 22, 1864 and will share the story of that battle at our fall community meeting. We meet at the Battlefield site on Battlefield Rd. Here's your chance to bone-up on local Civil War history in preparation for the Sesquicentennial that begins in 2011. In case of rain, the program will be at Bill & Martha Erbach's Mill at Fishers Hill. If, on the day of the meeting, you're not sure where we'll be, call Barbara Adamson at 465-5570. Join us for fellowship, refreshments and a great tour.

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## **Strasburg Holiday Heritage Homes Tour 2009**

Homes Tour Committee members Maggie Maloney, Wendy Pieper, Judy Troxell, Joan Williams, Carol Haycock and Barbara Adamson are hard at work finalizing the list of homes to be on this year's tour, to be held Saturday, Dec. 12 from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm. As always, we are working closely with the Massanutten Garden Club to make this popular holiday event a success. We'll be calling on many of our faithful volunteers to help out. If you have not been involved before, please consider doing so. Your help would be welcomed. Please call Barbara Adamson at 465-5570 (or any other committee member) if you would like to be part of what will be a very enjoyable day.

## The Miller Bible: A Sacred Treasure

### By Marie Spence

The year was 1764. The George Miller (MUELLER) family had a farmstead located approximately 3 miles northwest of the settlement known as Strasburg in the Virginia Colony. A man identified as a Mr. Abraham Mitchell had a grudge against George Miller and plotted murderous revenge on the Miller family. (Source: John Wayland's book, HISTORY OF SHENANDOAH COUNTY.)

Mitchell, accompanied by approximately 9 native warriors, surprised the Millers, who were spreading flax in a meadow near their log cabin, and attacked. Mr. and Mrs. Miller and two of their children were trapped in the open field with few weapons and no possibility of escape.

One of the Miller children, a young girl, was ill and had been resting in the cabin. She heard screams and gunfire and viewed what was happening. She jumped out of a narrow window in the rear of the cabin and fled cross country for several miles to the holding of the Paul Bowman family where she sought help. Only 17 year old Abraham Bowman was at home when the Miller daughter reached what is now known as Harmony Hall, near Cedar Creek.

Seizing his weapons, Abraham rode rapidly to the Miller farm where he encountered Thomas Newell, another young settler in the area, who, having heard multiple gunshots and screams, had arrived armed to see what was happening. The two young men found the two Miller adults and the two children slain, lying on blood-saturated ground in the field.

Bowman, Newell, and additional local men newly arrived at the scene went to the Miller cabin and discovered a partially burned Bible lying on the door sill, with the mutilated body of a cat atop its open pages (according to what Mr. Newell later related to noted Valley historian Samuel Kercheval in a book written in 1833.)

Visual evidence left behind indicated that the attackers had left the killing field and entered the cabin, perhaps to seek plunder and destroy anyone hiding inside. The family cat had been seized, mutilated, and then placed on the open Miller family Bible. This Bible, a German folio edition dating from 1739, was then set ablaze. The blood of the family feline as well as the compression caused by the animal's weight prevented major damage to the book by smothering the fire.

Bowman, Newell, and other local men pursued the attackers and were eventually able to rescue young Rachel Dellinger, although her infant son, who had been ripped from the arms of her murdered husband, John Dellinger, was brained to death on a tree trunk. Mrs. Dellinger had been abducted in an earlier local raid near what is the area now known as Spengler Hall, just west of Strasburg.

The surviving Miller daughter lived into adulthood and had children of her own. The Miller Family Bible passed from generation to generation within the family.

In the autumn of 1969, according to the October 18, 1969 issue of the Winchester Star, Mr. John Miller of Strasburg presented guardianship of the historic Bible to Mr. Harold Lindamood, Executive Vice-President of the First National Bank of Strasburg (now the First Bank of Strasburg) for preservation and safekeeping. John Miller had inherited the Bible from Mr. Levi Miller, a second cousin, who had possessed it for many decades. John Wayland, in his TWENTY FIVE CHAPTERS ON THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY (1915), noted that he had actually seen and held this Bible which was a "treasured possession of Mr. Levi Miller, a descendent of George Miller's son who had been away from home at the time of the massacre."

Every year since 1972, this sacred treasure and historic Bible has been on display at the Strasburg Museum from May through October. Please come and see this storied piece of Strasburg's early history from almost two and a half centuries ago.

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## A Folk History of the Virginia Restaurant

Kathy Kehoe

"It was the place to be." says Strasburg native Larry Allamong about the local teenage hangout and family restaurant on the corner of Holliday and King. "Right on the corner, right in the middle of town." The Virginia Restaurant was the Brill family business from the 1930's until the 1970's. Many a memory was made at this center of the town's social life, where "everybody knew your name" as described by another Strasburg native, Belinda Pappas Palmer. Sue Foster remembers "It was a wonderful hangout and meeting place for teenagers" It was where teenagers flocked before and after high school football and basketball games, before and after school, and on Saturday nights; and where families would come for the famous turkey and dressing Sunday dinners after church. And everybody came for Buggy's famous ketchup, a homemade version of sweet ketchup unique to the Restaurant.



Ask any Strasburg native what they remember about the Virginia Restaurant, and the stories flow like....well, like ketchup. Ketchup that flowed easily from red plastic bottles onto freshly sliced French fries and real beef hamburgers. Long time employee Liz Richards has the recipe, and makes a batch every so often. This writer can attest that it really does taste like the sweet ketchup of my youth. Liz attributes the origin to an employee known as Mrs. Sager, who added corn starch and sugar. They would make the ketchup 2 or 3 times a week

and after a few days it would ferment and the tops would pop off if it wasn't used fast enough. Liz also remembers "kids getting into catsup fights" in the restaurant. Huge tubs of potatoes would be peeled and sliced every day and fried in vats of lard, then served with Buggy's ketchup. Buggy's son Byron Brill told me that they always made a pot of beans, twenty pies a day and a 30 pound turkey on Sunday. They got all fresh meat from Brill's Grocery down the street and had their own key in case they needed something when the store was closed. Jane Richard remembers eating her French fries with "homemade gravy". It was fifteen cents for a plate full of fries and 5 or 10 cents for a coke served in a classic shaped glass with Coca-Cola emblazoned on the side in red letters.

The Brill family consisted of Clarence, better known as Buggy and his brothers Pearly and Obadiah (called Obie) and Obie's wife Louise. Louise had the nickname of Skillet, because, as Larry Allamong tells us, "whenever there was a ruckus or fight in the restaurant, Skillet would come out with a large cast iron skillet and run everybody off." Buggy's son Byron relates that his father got the nickname Buggy because as a boy in the first part of the 1900's, he had a cowlick that resembled the shape of a buggy whip in the stand of the wagon. Bryon's job in the family business was to empty the trash for the seven days a week that the business was open. The Brills worked hard to maintain a good family restaurant while making their customers feel comfortable. Each generation of Strasburg's teenagers thought of it as their own and often taxed the patience of the Brills' as they worked. Buggy especially is remembered as having a watchful eye over the crowd. John "Toad" Painter remembers him as a "hard working, good, Christian man, who put up with a lot." His many acts of kindness often went unnoticed. Waitress Patsy Cameron Rutz remembers how in the 60's, men "down on their luck" would come in and ask for food. Usually carrying a backpack, and probably walking and hitchhiking along their way, they would ask for something to eat and Buggy would instruct the waitresses to give them a bowl of soup and a glass of ice water at no charge. Patsy doesn't remember him ever turning anyone away. During this writer's teenage years, we had nicknames for other waitresses. Zora Robinson was serenaded "Here's to You Mrs. Robinson" whenever the song by Simon and Garfunkel played on the jukebox; Sadie, who maneuvered between the booths in what we called "old ladies health shoes", (black laced up shoes with a high arch) was adorned with the nickname "Sexy Sadie" after The Beatles song. The juke box, Belinda Pappas remembers, was a "big Wurlitzer jukebox that Harry Fake kept supplied with the most current 45 RPM singles--it cost a dime to play one, with three for a quarter."

Liz Richards worked often in the kitchen with Obie, who would tell her stories about the early days in the restaurant. During The Great Depression, Liz remembers they "opened with whatever they had, hot dogs or whatever." The Restaurant was among many local businesses that accepted scrip, which were legal promissory notes printed by the Northern Virginia Daily and approved by the U.S. Treasury Dept. The Daily employees were paid with scrip, who then used it in local businesses which helped keep the small town's economy going. "Then the war started and everything got going again." said Liz. There was a time when the restaurant would close for a few hours each night to clean so they could reopen by 5 a.m. The American Viscose fac-

tory workers would "come in off the graveyard shift", riding the company bus home from Front Royal after working all night. They would order "Graveyard Stew"--hot milk, salt and pepper, a little butter and crackers." Another story from the thirties was one handed down in the Allamong family. Larry's father, Jim Allamong Sr., played Prince Charming when he rode a horse into the Virginia Restaurant, picked up a girl he was dating at the time and they rode off together through the front doors.

The Virginia Restaurant booths were legendary. Tall backed oak with coat rack poles extended atop, they could hold six to eight teenagers at a time. The black marble tops were often shiny wet from the washrag as the booths were filled immediately when emptied. If you dropped anything under the table, you would marvel at the pounds of chewed gum stuck to the bottom. Johnny "Toad" Painter has a theory that because kids weren't allowed to chew gum in school, they would pop in the gum as the 3:30 bell rang. "The walk from the high school to the Virginia Restaurant was only three blocks, time enough to deplete the gum's sugar. Thus it was inevitable that the multitudes would clear their mouths in anticipation of a Cherry Coke and French Fries by transferring their gum to the heaping mound on the table's underside. By heaping I mean a near continuous layer, four or five wads thick."

Every booth had its own graffiti. Larry remembers his mother's name, JoAnn Barrow, was carved in one booth. Some years later his initials appeared in another booth, alongside the initials B.P. Belinda Pappas Palmer says neither she nor Larry carved the initials, but she believes a friend did it to tease her when they were high school sweethearts. Alan Samuels had an uncle, Samuel Wolfson, whose name was carved into a booth.

There was a large table in the front of the Restaurant placed at the large window that looked out on the street where you could always see some one standing on the corner or a carload of teenagers circling the block. "After football or basketball games everyone would be there waiting for the Rams players to show up. The Front table was for them." says Sue Foster.



Larry remembers how one could sit at the front table and loiter all Sunday morning, drinking cokes and talking, but when noon approached, Buggy would ask you to leave so he could use the table for the Sunday dinner crowd, who would be coming after church. The tall metal scales that sat near the front door gave you your weight for a penny, and a phrase would pop up in a little window that told your "fortune." The words, "your wate and fate" were printed on the side.

John Painter remembers how "Detection by Buggy of unacceptable behavior resulted in swift and certain application of the ultimate punishment, being banned from the Virginia Restaurant.

While this may not seem like a big deal to you now, consider for a moment the effect in a small town, with only one meeting place for the tight knit cliques of teenagers. Consider being excluded from the plans of your buddies, or wondering who is sitting next to the girl that you are secretly sweet on this week. Banishment could be for a week, a month, or, for dangerous or threatening behavior, forever." Larry Allamong, who admits to being banned from the front a few times, was allowed to come and sit in the friendly atmosphere of the kitchen, where he delighted in getting fresh hot food right away, getting larger portions and having the pleasure of conversation with Pearly. Alan Samuels, whose parents owned and operated Joe Wolfson Clothing Store, said his parents preferred also to eat in the kitchen and visit with Obie and Louise.

And then there were those Halloween nights when the booths were packed with kids. Obie told Liz that at different times over the years, there had been a chicken, possum and a goat put in the back door on Halloween nights. The animals would run down the aisles between the booths with laughing kids yelling them on. Sue Foster remembers that "One Halloween someone released pigeons inside the restaurant. Buggy Brill was angry which was unusual, he was a very patient man." Brenda Kenney Stensney remembers when a boy "from Woodstock put a duck in the back door, all you could see was Buggy running down behind the bar to the back door." One Halloween, the back opened and ten chickens were put in. Larry said he was there that night, and the chickens were running under the tables, strutting down the aisles, flapping into the booths and cackling all over the place. After the guys collapsed laughing, they helped catch the chickens, which was more fun than the greased pig contest at the county fair.

Belinda remembers "The afternoon JFK was shot the restaurant was full, but many people didn't even get cokes. For the half hour or so I was there, I don't think one person spoke. Some of us cried, but it was very silent. I still remember that absolute stillness."

Buggy asked Liz to come back and cook the last meal before the Restaurant closed. She made the traditional Sunday turkey dinner with dressing, mashed potatoes and gravy, served on a sectioned dinner plate.

"When I recall the innocence, the simplicity of our lives then, the feeling of potential excitement, and the camaraderie--it was a place "Where everybody knows your name"--I'd give a lot for one more afternoon in the Virginia Restaurant." writes Belinda Pappas.

And John "Toad" Painter reflects: "In a lot of ways, the Virginia Restaurant defined my childhood and early years, as it also did for my generation from Strasburg Va. When it closed, it confirmed in most of us that we were not children any longer, and as the Bible says, it was time to set aside childish things. May the sweet memories shared by we, the members of the Virginia Restaurant Alumni, bring to us and to all, smiles and comfort, forever."



## **Honor Your Home – with a historic building plaque**

Though several dozen historic homes, churches and commercial buildings in the Strasburg area already have our beautiful bronze plaques, recognizing the building's value to the past and future of Strasburg, SHA believes that many more need to be so honored. Wendy Pieper and Judy Troxell have agreed to chair the Plaque Committee in a renewed effort to get more recognition for our historic buildings, especially with the town's 250<sup>th</sup> birthday coming up in 2011. An application for purchasing a plaque is included with this newsletter. Please consider acquiring one for your house or other building, if they qualify, or pass the application along to someone whom you know loves their old house (or other building). Call Wendy (465-9512) or Judy (465-4747) if you have any questions.

## **Fall Adopt a Highway Litter Pick-Up**

Our spring litter pick-up on Rt. 11 south was successful, but the Valley Pike only looked clean for a little while. It needs help again! We'll meet at the Old Mill Restaurant parking lot on Saturday, Oct. 3 at 8:00 AM for our fall pick-up. Remember, many hands make light work. Wear sturdy shoes and bring gloves. Hope to see you there.

## **SHA Board of Directors 2009**

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**STRASBURG HERITAGE ASSOCIATION**

P O Box 525

Strasburg, VA 22657

**MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION**

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Membership: \_\_\_\_\_ Cost is \$20.00

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Please mail completed form to:

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P O Box 525

Strasburg, VA 22657