



Strasburg Heritage Association

Volume 13 Issue 2

Strasburg, Virginia

Spring 2013

www.strasburgvaheritage.org

SHA June Program Strasburg Virginia Gunsmiths

Please join us on Sunday, June 9 at 2:00PM at St. Paul Lutheran Church for a program about a most important and interesting part of our county and country's early history.

The American longrifle is an icon of our country's early history and culture. Longrifle collector, John Admson will present his thoughts on the development, manufacture and use of the longrifle with special emphasis on rifles made in Strasburg Virginia. Join us for a rare opportunity to see and feel Strasburg longrifles from both John's personal collection and from long time local collector John Reiley.

John will give a brief history of rifle making in the Strasburg area using high quality photographs to show the art, form and function of some of the best local rifles. He will share details about local longrifle makers including where and when rifles were made in Shenandoah County and nearby areas. If you have never had the opportunity to look closely at the beautiful hand work of the Valley's early rifle makers, you are in for a treat.

As always, the public is welcome to attend and refreshments will be served.

Sunday, June 9th

St. Paul Lutheran Church from 2-4PM

It is free to the public and refreshments will be served

Plaque Committee

Plaque Committee Chairwoman Wendy Pieper has found a new forge to produce our historic building plaques. The forge previously doing this work had closed and we were without a reliable source for quite some time. We hope that you will consider purchasing a plaque (\$120) for your historic building or recommend a purchase to someone you know. These bronze plaques actually cost \$180, with SHA subsidizing each one to make them more affordable. This is a great way to recognize the many historic structures in and around Strasburg. If you would like more information about the plaques you may call Wendy at 465-9512. Her email is srsmart@shentel.net if you'd like to request information or an application. Or you can download an application from the SHA website, www.strasburgvaheritage.org.

2013 Holiday Homes Tour

By Joan Williams

Yes, oh yes, there will be a Homes Tour this year!
Mark your calendar for Saturday, December 14th.

Our Fall newsletter will provide more detailed information but we can tell you this. Our event will be a walking tour conveniently located around the High Street area with a big surprise a short drive down Route 11.

If you would like to help with the tour, please contact co-chairwomen
Joan Williams (465-2953) or Maggie Maloney (465-5147).

We look forward to seeing you there. Go mark your calendar right now!

Old Queen St. Cemetery



No sooner had winter disappeared and spring really sprung, than members of the Strasburg Guards, SCV constructed the split-rail fence at the old cemetery! It looks great at the back of the graveyard, especially with the lovely landscaping on the property beyond, the home of Mike Marcheterre and Craig Morris. Many, many thanks to Ralph Stickley and Carroll Estep who built the fence in record time. The SCV's interest in the cemetery goes back generations. A number of Strasburg's Civil War Veterans are buried there and the SCV group has installed attractive markers in their memory. Members of the town staff have also mowed the area and it looks great. Our thanks to them. We hope you'll take a walk through the cemetery and enjoy the new fence and pleasant surroundings!

#####

Spring Litter Pick-Up On the Valley Pike

Many thanks to Ginger Aliotti, Sue Foster, Linda Williams, Tim Taylor and Barbara Adamson for getting out there and picking up trash on the Valley Pike south of town May 4. The weather was just right and, as always, there was plenty of work to be done. That section of the road looks especially good for now with it's newly paved surface.

#####

The SHA welcomes new board member **Joan Williams** to their ranks. We're putting her to work right away as co-chair of this years Homes Tour. Joan has been a member of the SHA and volunteered her time with the homes tour for a number of years. She and her husband Tom Parker have shared their home on the Homes Tour. Joan coordinates the Duck Race for Mayfest and is a past-president of the Massanutten Garden Club. Since Tom's recent retirement they've taken advantage of their freedom and travel a lot!

A Look at Shenandoah County Taxable Personal Property in 1815 by Barbara Adamson

The Shenandoah Room at the Shenandoah County Library in Edinburg is an excellent source of local family history. Among the many resources are Shenandoah County Personal Property Tax Records, on microfilm. These are handwritten documents that give you an idea of our forebears wealth, or lack thereof, in early days. The categories listed as subject to taxation asked basically the same thing each year, usually naming slaves, horses, and carriages as taxable property, though there was some variation. However, the year 1815 was particularly interesting. The list of taxable possessions was much broader that year and gives us insight into what was considered of value at that time.

There were two Commissioners of the Revenue in 1815; John Gatewood and Joseph Strickler. Gatewood's tax lists will be used here and, as with many handwritten documents, they can be difficult to read. The categories were:

- *Date of Receiving Lists from Individuals.
- *Persons Names Chargeable with the tax.
- *White males over 16 years old.
- *Slaves over 9 and under 12 years old.
- *Slaves over 12 and under 16 years.
- *Slaves over 16 years.
- *Horses mares mules colts.
- *Number of stud horses.
- *Rate of covering mares (I think this means how often a stud horse was used for breeding).
- *Number of head of cattle.
- *2 Wheeled carriages.
- *Phaeton and stage wagons.
- *4 Wheeled carriages.
- *Mills.
- *Forges.
- *Watches gilt or silver (also some illegible word).
- *Watches single case gold.
- *Watches double case gold.
- *Houses in the country over (dollar value illegible).
- *Clocks works of wood without a case.
- *Clocks works of wood within a case.
- *Clocks principally of metal.
- *Clocks of value over (illegible).
- *Ice Houses for private use.
- *Furniture in part mahogany – (Lots of illegible words but included) Bureau secretary or bookcase, Chest of drawers with wardrobe, Dining table, Bedstead, Sideboard without doors or drawers, Tea or card table in whole or part of mahogany, or sideboard with doors or drawers, settle or sofa, chairs, window curtains, venetian blinds.
- *There was no title for this category but it included Portraits, Pictures, Prints, mirror or looking glass, Piano forte, Harpischord, Organ or Harp.
- *Bureau Secretary or Bookcase, Chest of Drawers, Wardrobe or Clothes Press of any other wood than mahogany.
- *There was no title for this category but it included Urn, coffee or teapot, candlestick, epergne, decanter, bowl, goblet, wash basin, salver, tankard, cup and many words that were illegible.

Also the writer did not use commas, which adds to the difficulty of reading. But I think we get the idea that Shenandoah County chose to tax many personal possessions in 1815 that they hadn't before. I was unable to find a reference to the tax rate. Whatever it was, most people owed very little money. From looking through the lists, it's evident that most people had very little of value other than horses and cattle, and many seemed to possess a watch or clock of some sort.

SHA Board of Directors 2013

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

A Little Folk History The News Stand

by
Kathy Kehoe



As a child, there was a place that I loved to go that filled my imagination. Rows of shelves that held books and magazines, comic books, newspapersyou could find just about anything you wanted at the Strasburg News Stand. I could choose between Casper the Friendly Ghost or Stumbo the Giant, or Superman. I wanted to be Lois Lane, Girl Reporter when I grew up. Later I bought MAD Magazine and National Lampoon magazine. Jo Williams remembers how much she "loved that place--my allowance got spent there on 45 vinyl records and Archie comic books! I would stand and look at the newest 45s and try to decide which one to get, then go home and play it 100 times until I learned the words to the song." "We used to go there every Sunday after Sunday School," said Brenda Kenney Stensney, "Daddy would give us a nickel or dime and we would buy penny candy." Katy Kehoe said she used to go there to buy candy before going to the library for Koo Koo News. "It was a treat when I was a kid to go in there." said Beth Rudolph, "I remember my brother always got a new Matchbox car."

The Strasburg News Stand holds a special place the history of our small town.

Joe Pifer started the news stand business in 1942, moving and expanding in several locations on King Street. He married Eva Mae Artz in 1971 and together they ran the business until 1992. The News Stand was a thriving business in our little town and the Pifers were an important part of the community. It was where you went before or after school, or after Sunday School, or church. And throughout the sixties, it was open until 9p.m. Eva Mae Pifer remembers that she and Joe were up at 4 a.m. to open at 5:00 every morning. If something happened that they overslept, the town police would come by the house to check on them. Eva Mae recalls that when he was a kid, our current police chief Tim Sutherly often stopped at the News Stand on his way to and from school. When it snowed, the Pifers would walk to the News Stand from their home and sometimes policemen Buck Ramey or Paul Neal would stop to pick them up and drive them to work. It seemed like the light at the News Stand was always on. People would put on their boots and walk to the News Stand when the weather was bad. When it snowed, the store would often sell out of jigsaw puzzles and paint by number kits. Newspapers like the Washington Post came in by a bus that stopped in front of Vaughn's Drug Store. The Northern Virginia Daily was published across the parking lot from the back door, and many Strasburg kids had their first jobs as a paper boy. Merille Long was a News Stand paperboy in the late 60s and he remembers how "We were paid on an average of \$8.35 per week and started at 4: 45 a.m. Rain, Sleet ,Snow..... Just like the mailman. We even had trouble with dogs!" The first thing the paperboys had to do was roll their papers and place rubber bands around them. As they worked before daylight, Merille remembers how Mr. Pifer would always kid around with them.

Dot O'Donnell worked in the News Stand from the forties until she retired in the 1980s. In 1998 she told me how she trained the paperboys and always instructed them not to gossip, no matter what they saw in the wee hours of the morning as they passed the front porches. "It was still Saturday night," said Dot with a grin, when they delivered the Washington Post. Dot remembered, as a lot of us do, how kids would go to the News Stand to buy classic comics, illustrated comic books with the stories like Moby Dick, to read for their book reports for school. "I worked there when Dorothy O'Donnell was there, in my junior and senior years of high school." said Robin Brown Hottle. Other employees were Margaret Funkhouser and Mary Crabill.

Holidays were especially busy for the Pifers. Eva Mae used to create custom made Easter

Baskets. People would bring in their Easter baskets as it was customary for children to use the same basket each year so that the Easter Bunny could fill it. The parent would choose the candy for the basket from the shelves and Eva Mae would cover the finished basket with cellophane. Some years she filled as many as 300 Easter baskets. The Easter Bunny came each year and posed for pictures with the children. And Santa Claus did the same in December. In the Fall, extra toys arrived at the News Stand and townspeople used their layaway plan for Christmas. Eva Mae remembers how they ordered the toys for Christmas in the Spring. One year a salesman from New York came into the store and wanted to sell Joe a Cabbage Patch doll. The salesman said "it's gonna be something". Joe said, 'that's the ugliest doll I've ever seen.'



The salesman asked how many cases they wanted, but Joe only ordered 20 dolls. He told Eva Mae, 'that's the dumbest thing I've ever seen, you know they aren't going to sell.' In October, people came into the Newsstand and started asking for the Cabbage Patch dolls, and by Thanksgiving, all the dolls were on layaway. Joe couldn't find any more Cabbage Patch dolls anywhere and people were still asking for them "When the salesman said 'I'm telling you this is a hot item', we thought he'd lost his mind." said Eva Mae, laughing. But we wished we'd ordered more when we found out they really were a "hot item."

The Pifers sold greeting cards, toys, school supplies, party supplies, gifts, candles, napkins, and matchbox cars in cases, which are now collector's items. In addition to paperback novels and some hardbound books, their magazines included gardening, golf and car magazines, Sports Illustrated and even Playboy. When the first issue of Playgirl came out in 1974, they sold those too. You could also get ice cream from the red pop cooler and every March they filled the front windows with kites that sold within a few weeks. Model cars, battle-ships and airplanes were also a big hit and young boys would hang the airplanes in their rooms.

Peggy Simon remembers "toys from ceiling to floor. The Best! I have such great memories of my first days in Strasburg. We moved here in 74, fresh from the city, didn't know a soul. My daughter Erica was a baby and I'd put her in a baby sling and we'd walk to the Virginia Restaurant.....coolest place ever!and then we'd go to the Newsstand."

Eva Mae said cigarettes were 25 cents a pack. One day the wholesale distributor from Irvin Candy Company came in with tobacco supplies. A plug of tobacco had gone up in price. Joe would now have to sell it for a dollar a plug. He said, "We'll never be able to sell it for a dollar—we might as well take it out." So Joe thought about it, and then decided to charge 96 cents and "we'll pay the tax" he said, so he wouldn't have to charge a dollar. "Joe never wanted to overcharge anybody for anything." said Eva Mae. Jack Bauserman of Bauserman Transfer would ask Joe to order a box of cigars and he'd buy the whole box. Eva Mae still has some of the yellow cardboard cigar boxes she uses for keepsakes and remembers when the News Stand sold the empty boxes. Long after the cigar makers changed their packaging, customers still asked to buy the empty boxes.

Joe and Eva Mae Pifer retired in 1992 and sold the business Joe had started fifty years earlier. They will always be remembered as a couple involved with their community, who interacted with the people of Strasburg, and whose welcoming light was on early in the morning in all seasons, through all kinds of weather. The News Stand was where you went to satisfy your hobby, your sweet tooth, or your intellectual curiosity. It was where you could go when you took a walk after supper to buy notebook paper for school the next day. It was our bookstore, our candy store, and our hobby store, where we knew the staff by their first name and they knew ours.



--In Memory of Joseph Edwin Pifer, Jr.—
September 14, 1918—May 1, 2013

Strasburg Heritage Association
PO Box 525
Strasburg, VA 22657
www.strasburgvaheritage.org