

Strasburg Heritage Association



Volume 6, Issue 2

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Strasburg, Virginia

Special Issue – **Historic Strasburg Churches**

The history of each historic Strasburg church has been recorded by church members over the years and compiled in several historical accounts. These include: *The Story of Strasburg* by Virginia Hinkins Cadden; stpaulstrasburg.com; *My Strasburg*,” by C. Douglas Cooley; *Strasburg United Methodist Church*, compiled and written by the Committee on History and Records; *Mt. Zion Methodist Church History*, by P. T. Thompson; *The Strasburg News Articles from 1917*, compiled by Calvin Sonner; *Strasburg Presbyterian Church History*, by Marie Spence; and the *Strasburg Christian Church* histories by Omar F. and Rev. John Pirkey and the Rev. David C. Derby.

Doug Cooley wrote in his autobiography that after retirement “...we decided since we had relatives and good friends in each one of the Strasburg churches that we would attend each of them once each month. Recently I attended a prayer breakfast for men from all of these churches. For the first time that I can remember, the ministers from each of the churches were there.... While chatting with them, I remarked that there might be a problem for them making a decision on who would conduct my funeral. I suggested that they match for it or play odd man out. They finally concluded that maybe each one might say a word or two if there was anything worthwhile to say. I am sure it will be a brief service.”

I think most town citizens will agree that author and Strasburg native Doug Cooley’s personal history, so intertwined with Strasburg history, will never be brief.

-Kathy Kehoe

In this newsletter, two carefully researched articles profile historic Strasburg churches. As Kathy Kehoe remarks at the outset of *Strasburg’s Historic Churches*: “the history of our town is intertwined with the history of our churches.” Virginia Cadden’s *The Story of Strasburg* makes a similar observation: “The history of Strasburg’s churches is, in an important way, the history of the town itself.” These two articles, coupled with Dennis Hupp’s September 17 walking tour, will provide important insights into the spiritual, architectural, and cultural heritage of our town. Enjoy.

-Babs Melton

President's Message

By Mike Whittle

Strasburg Heritage Association has been involved in many wonderful events during the spring and summer of 2006. .

- We had a great turnout at the Spring Membership Meeting. Daniel Bly gave a wonderful history on German influence in the Valley
- At Mayfest, the SHA booth provided materials about Strasburg heritage
- We had our first cleanup along the Valley Pike south of Strasburg as part of the Adopt-a-Highway program
- We continue to sell the Historic Building Plaques
- This month, we will have a historic district churches tour
- Preparation for the December Homes Tour is in full swing

I would like to thank all the members of SHA who have contributed to these events and who continue to give their time to help preserve the Strasburg Heritage. Thank you!

Historic Churches Tour

Dennis Hupp will lead a walking tour of several historic Strasburg churches on Sunday, September 17, 2006.

The tour will begin and end at the Strasburg Christian Church at 165 High Street. We will gather at 4:00 PM and walk to the Mount Zion Methodist Church on 339 W. Queen Street, then to St. Paul's Lutheran Church and the Strasburg United Methodist Church at 193 and 114 W. Washington Street, respectively. Then we will proceed to Strasburg Presbyterian Church on Holliday Street and return to the Christian Church for refreshments.

Oral History Project Provides Accounts of Strasburg Life

by Tim Taylor

The Oral History Project has been tirelessly working to preserve the memories of some of Strasburg's senior residents, as well as stories passed down in their families about community life in yesteryear. The committee has spent months conducting the interviews and then transcribing and archiving them so that paper and electronic copies are available for posterity.

But now the committee is ready to make these interviews available for viewing at the Strasburg Community Library. By means of a TV and DVD player, visitors to the library will be able see and hear four-to-ten-minute segments of a dozen or so interviews; as some of the interviews last hours in their entirety, these excerpts were made to highlight particularly interesting stories.

But to facilitate this lasting legacy to our town, the committee is asking for someone to donate a table suitable for the TV and DVD player. If you wish to donate a sturdy table, please contact chairperson Tim Taylor or any member of the SHA board.

Although the Oral History Project has achieved this milestone in its work, more interviews will be added to our repository of knowledge about Strasburg's past; this great step forward is more of a beginning than an end for the project.

Holiday Homes Tour Slated

The annual SHA Strasburg Holiday Heritage Homes tour has become a Strasburg tradition. The 2006 tour is slated for Saturday, December 2 from 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM.

This year's tour includes the Smith home on Holliday Street, the Johnson home on Crawford Street, the Orndorff and Adamson homes on Sandy Hook Road, and the Christian Church parsonage on High Street.

The success of the annual homes tour rests on its volunteer efforts. Be part of it! Call Carol Haycock at 465-1953 if you'd like to volunteer in any capacity.

Strasburg's Historic Churches

By Kathy Kehoe

The history of our town is intertwined with the history of our churches. Her German settlers brought their faith with them to the Shenandoah Valley and for many years listened to the word of God from itinerant preachers who traveled by horseback to preach in homes and town commons. Many of these "saddleback preachers" kept journals of their travels. Henry Melchior Muhlenberg noted in his journal in 1765 that the settlers were restoring their congregations after the hostile Indian attacks.

There were five early Strasburg churches that the people organized into congregations during the 1700's. Often the first community building erected by the pioneers was a church. John Caspar Stoeber, Jr., the first German minister based in Virginia, made seven trips through the Valley between 1734 and 1742. His first recorded baptism on the Shenandoah River was in 1735.

In 1769, the Lutherans built the first church of roughhewn logs. The Presbyterians congregated as early as 1793, building a church in 1826. The Mt. Zion Methodists built their church in 1871 on Queen Street and the Washington Street Methodists in 1876. The Christian Church members, who had joined with the Oranda Christian Church after organizing in 1808, built their own church on High Street in 1872.

According to St. Paul Lutheran Church history, in 1768 the Lutheran congregation purchased their lot from Peter Stover, the founder of Strasburg. The log church faced Washington Street and had a balcony on three sides and a pipe organ from Germany. The church at first had no heat because members of the church felt it a sin to be prideful of modern luxuries and thought that the cold would keep members from napping during services.

In 1840, St. Paul sold a church farm and used the money to build a new church, which was dedicated in 1844. This new building was almost destroyed during the Civil War, when its interior was gutted by Union troops. It was used as a hospital, arsenal and stable, the windows were shot out, and the pews made into coffins. Lutherans held services at the town's Presbyterian Church until they could repair their church. The minutes of May 12, 1867 read that the church was "torn to pieces and defaced by the fiendish hand of the Union Army."

In its federal claim, the church sought as reimbursement \$25 per month rent in addition to the expenses of repairing the church from the vandalism of October 1864. The building committee reported the total cost as \$1,441.15, which was used for renovations in 1867. The United States provided restitution to the church in the early 1900s after the trustees brought suit in the Court of Claims and provided documentation of the damage done by federal troops.

The present **Presbyterian** Church building, erected in 1826, also suffered damage during the Civil War when it was used as a hospital. As early as 1794, Rev. William Williamson, a Scotch man by birth, preached at Stoverstown (Strasburg) to the organized Presbyterians. The Presbyterian Church was called the English Church because it was the first congregation to hear sermons in English instead of German. During the War, soldiers used the pews for coffins and for firewood.

In 1910-1912, the Federal government gave money to the Church for its losses, and the congregation built a monument to honor the Civil War soldiers. Two stories handed down through generations of church members and town citizens involve the occupation of soldiers in Strasburg. During the Civil War, "Aunt Mil Pollard," who lived on the corner of Queen and Holiday streets, had what people called a "town farm." Somehow Aunt Mil still had chickens and cows that weren't eaten or killed. She was described as an older lady with an "immaculate bun, who wore a long blue dress." After the battles of Fishers Hill and Cedar Creek, when the soldiers lay in the church "hospital", she took two buckets of fresh cow's milk twice a day to the soldiers. On one Sunday morning during the 1920's, a stranger came to the church for services and asked the minister if he could say a few words. He thanked the church and people of Strasburg for saving his life when he was a wounded soldier taken to the church and nursed back to health.

In Strasburg, **Methodists** first organized as early as 1779, using the Lutheran and Presbyterian churches and the old grammar schoolhouse for services. The Strasburg Methodists purchased land in 1835 from Adam and Catherine Keister for \$55.00, but did not build until 1876. The first church was described by a member as heated by two coal stoves at each end of the church.

At a church conference, John Crider, the sexton, said that if "Mr. G. H. Hupp, who owns the

stone quarry, will give us the stone, I'll quarry them". Dr. G. A. Brown said, "I'll have the foundation laid", which he did at his own expense. The church was completed in 1875. H.S. Sonner, grandfather of Hugh Sonner, contributed heavy timbers and lumber. The *Strasburg News* described: "An interesting fact is related in connection with these early services of the church. Not being provided with a bell, the sexton announced the hour of services by blowing a large horn as a signal for the congregation to assemble."

Doug Cooley's "My Strasburg—The Beginning & Ending of my Life There" describes a typical Sunday when he was growing up in the Methodist church. "I was baptized when I was twelve years old and took the vows of membership at the same time. From that time, I attended church four times each Sunday, which included Sunday school, morning worship service, Epworth League for the youth in the evenings, and finally the evening worship service. I followed this schedule until I left Strasburg in 1942."

"Mt. Zion CME Church members first bought the land and then bought a building in Fishers Hill and brought it to Strasburg 'on rollers' and placed it on a foundation on Queen Street." At Stop #7 of the Strasburg Walking Tour, the sign further states "local African-Americans were not permitted to congregate until after the Civil War. Directly behind the church is Mt. Zion Cemetery and to the left of the church (behind the iron fence) is the Old Community Cemetery. It has the oldest recorded grave in town, that of Brother Obadiah (Samuel) Funk, a leader of the early Sabbatarian settlers in this area."

In 1926, Mt. Zion celebrated their 55th anniversary. Mr. P.T. Thompson, a member of the church, researched the church history and wrote it down in his own hand. He wrote that "but from the very fact that our people were unable to keep a record is impossible for us writing this little sketch of history to give to you dates that would be considered authentic of the vast number of colored people who were here and assisted in the building of this church in one or more ways."

It wasn't until after the war that the people were free to congregate and organize and to preserve the history of their own church. Mr. Thompson credits Lucy Walker of Middletown and

Frances Thompson of Strasburg with giving their personal oral history of the church. He writes that immediately after the Civil War, regular meetings began in the old schoolhouse on High Street. The author's father, Charles H. Thompson, who was going to build a house for his mother, had purchased the lot from Hugh Dever. As it turned out, his mother went to live in Mississippi, so he sold the lot to the trustees of the church. The church was remodeled in 1885 and a small "recess" was built, the exterior logs were covered with siding, the interior with plaster, and a bell tower added.

In 1907, the younger members wanted to tear down the old building and elders refused, opting instead to add new windows, doors and floors, new roof and newer siding to cover the logs. In the 1920s a new vestibule and bell tower were added onto the front part of the building. Mr. Thompson posed a riddle: "What is new on both ends and old in the middle? Answer: Mt. Zion Methodist Episcopal Church, Strasburg."

Meetings of the **Christian** Church congregation were held in Strasburg as early as 1808 in the homes of members in and around Strasburg. In the 1820's the members built a church in rural Oranda, which was a central location for most of the members. In 1856, eleven members met to organize a congregation in the town of Strasburg; they were: John Pirkey, Mary Pirkey, Noah Funk, Obed Funk, Mary Funk, William Robirson, John Strosnider, Elizabeth Strosnider, Sarah Ridenour, Phil Thompson and Israel Baker. Worship then was usually held in the local school but sometimes in the Presbyterian Church.

The congregation grew steadily until 1861, but was prevented from regular meetings during the War Between the States. In 1872 the present site of the Church was purchased for \$225.00 and a building erected at a cost of \$3,000.00. One of their ministers was Rev. Arthur Wake, who served the congregation from 1925 to 1941 and refused pay during the Great Depression. In 1941, another minister was called to the military; Rev. Kenneth Ball served as chaplain during World War II. Rev. David C. Derby was minister for over thirty years, ending in 1997.

Strasburg history was truly intertwined with the rich history of our churches.

The Story of Strasburg: Her Churches, Schools, and the Civil War

by Virginia Hinkins Cadden

The history of Strasburg's churches is, in an important way, the history of the town itself. Here was an early center of German Lutheran and Reformed peoples and here a settlement church was erected even before township was a reality. In 1769, the Lutherans built a new church of rough-hewn logs and appointed it with a pipe organ purchased in Germany and hauled from Baltimore by wagon – a magnificent gesture.

The Presbyterian congregation is the next oldest, the minister beginning with just three members of that faith in the entire county. Six years later, in 1830, the original part of the present church was dedicated.

The Disciples of Christ and the Methodists each dedicated brick churches in 1872 and 1876 respectively, the congregations having been active many years previously. All of these buildings have been rebuilt, or enlarged and improved repeatedly.

The first school in town was the Lutheran parochial school on Queen Street at the site of the Mount Zion Methodist Church. Peter Stover, founder of the town, helped collect monies for its maintenance, and his son, Christian, and gave the major portion of the ground at the grammar school now used.

"Academy Hall," at 201 High Street, was a school on part of that plot until about 1870, when portions of the original land, including this house, were sold to provide funds for a new academy. The building then erected stood about on the site of the present gymnasium and was the center of social life in the town for about fifty years.

The structure was divided into classrooms below but the upstairs was a large hall for school and community meetings, political rallies, concerts and home talent plays. Outside, the playground was separated into two sections by a high fence, one side for the boys and one for the girls.

In 1805, Joseph Stover gave land opposite the Presbyterian Church, at 101 High Street, to be used as both school and church. It is likely that the Society of Liberal Christians introduced instruction in English in this log cabin. A letter dated 1858 at "Spengler Hall" asks that a teacher be sent to the family capable of teaching Latin, French and music, at a salary of \$200 a year.

Toward the end of the century there was a private school run by the Misses Farrar at 105 Alton Place, and another elementary one of Mrs. Mary Allen's at 311 Lee Street, and in the early 1900's the homes at 201 and 203 South Massanutten were joined into one building which was the Hopkins Institute where students prepared for college. However, there was not yet a public high school when today's senior citizens were teenagers, the state being debt ridden and recovering from the economic devastation of the Civil War.

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For Strasburg, this war held the immediacy of troops on the doorstep. It started promptly with Stonewall Jackson's triumphs and flared in bitterness with Phil Sheridan as the Confederacy died. On its 100th anniversary, the town was newly at war, though slave holdings were insignificant and the economy was patterned after its Pennsylvania forefathers. The townspeople were wholeheartedly Virginians and contributed out of proportion to possible gain.

The Lutheran congregation had, by this time, erected a brick building that was used as a hospital, arsenal, and stable. The windows were shot out and the pews made into coffins. The Presbyterian Church served as a Federal hospital.

At "Stickley House," the brick home on Cedar Creek north of town, the kitchen table was used for surgery, as the lawn lay full of wounded and dying. Federal Generals Shields and Banks occupied the columned Hupp home at 410 Massanutten Street. "Spengler Hall" at the south end of town off Route 11, was made headquarters for northern General Williams;

later, General Early pitched his tents in the front yard. "Spengler House," the large brick building at Massanutten and King Streets, played host to members of the passing armies as they marched the Valley Pike.

One of the strangest sights coming through Strasburg's streets was Stonewall Jackson with his captured steam engines – four in May 1861, and the next month, "fourteen locomotives and tenders, and a large number of cars." Jackson had them trundled down the Pike by teams of horses after fitting their wheels with broad tires. Once there, the trains were put on the rails leading to Front Royal and southward, since Strasburg had now become the fountainhead of rail traffic for the Confederacy in the Shenandoah Valley.

During the spring of 1862, Strasburg was in the midst of constant troop movements, as Jackson spent 42 days in the county, marching 16,000 men in and out of town at least six times. In November, he passed through with a force of 40,000 that included the 10th Virginia Volunteer Infantry, which included a company from Strasburg. In May, Federal General Banks constructed earthworks on top of Fort Hill, near the present water tower. Jackson's scouts watched the workers from Signal Knob and, before guns could be mounted, his flank movement forced Banks into hasty evacuation. It carried so far that Washington was threatened. Jackson's success almost caught him in a trap at Strasburg as enemy troops moved in from east and west in a pincers movement to cut him off from the south. Strasburg heard the dragging feet of men who had marched 42 miles from Charles town that day as Stonewall made a last minute escape down the Valley Pike.

In 1863, along with other trenches and earthworks, the men constructed *abattis* (felled trees, with the trunks secured inwards, and the branches sharpened and pointed toward the enemy) on Hupp's Hill.

But the most devastating warfare around the town was in 1864. Federal General Sheridan and 40,000 men were ordered to clean out and lay waste to the Shenandoah Valley, which was so close to the federal capital.

Confederate General Early, with 20,000 men, was on the defensive and outflanked at the Battle of Fishers Hill, one of the five engagements on Fishers Hill during the war. The enemy under Sheridan again occupied the earthworks on Fort Hill and this time mounted their cannon, preparing to fire hot shot to burn the houses in his front. This was not done, but his overall policy left the population near starvation as 100 mill, 2,000 barns, and 15,000 farm animals were destroyed during October in the surrounding valley. The "Old Mill" at the southern border of town survived the blaze having been quickly extinguished and the miller subsequently required to work for the Federals on command. In this way, the granary of the Confederacy was emptied, and the destroyer boasted that even a crow would have to carry a knapsack of provisions to cross the valley.

Not long after "the Burning," Sheridan settled his army in a large area around "Belle Grove." General Early moved as close as Fishers Hill and sent men to observe the camps from signal Knob. The next morning before daylight, the Confederates struck in five places. One prong of the attack came up between the Southern Railroad Bridge on Front Royal Road and the end of the mountain, swinging on the enemy from the east; the cavalry went up the back road, on the west, and the artillery galloped through Strasburg to Cedar Creek. Another thrust came from near "Mt. Pleasant," just southeast of the intersection of I-81 and Route 11.

The enemy was caught by surprise as the men moved without light on the wooded paths, and without canteens and swords to rattle. For a few hours that morning the Federals were routed and sent pell mell toward Winchester. But Sheridan rallied his men and in the evening Early's troops were driven back through Strasburg in confusion and with heavy losses. This Battle of Cedar Creek was on October 19, 1864, and marked the climax of the fighting for Strasburg, though Early continued to harass Sheridan in the Valley until the last weeks of the War.

STRASBURG HERITAGE ASSOCIATION

P. O. Box 525, Strasburg, VA 22657
(540) 465-5570

HISTORY BUILDING PLAQUE PROGRAM

INTRODUCTION:

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.

ELIGIBILITY:

The building must be at least 60 years old.

- Thus, in 2005, the structure must have been built no later than 1945. In 2006, this becomes 1946.
- What matters is the year the original house was built. Additions do not affect eligibility.

The building must be within Strasburg or Davis District.

PLAQUE COST: \$120.00

APPLICATION PROCESS:

The application should be filled out as completely as possible. Please make your check payable to Strasburg Heritage Association and mail it, along with the completed application, to Strasburg Heritage Association, P. O. Box 525, Strasburg, VA 22657.

Once the Association ensures the application is complete and the building is eligible, your plaque will be ordered. Delivery, which includes hardware for mounting the plaque, should take approximately 4 - 6 weeks.

RECOGNITION:

The Strasburg Town Council or Shenandoah Board of Supervisors will be asked to recognize the building as important to the culture and history of Strasburg or Davis District. This is purely an honorific statement, with no legal status or financial implications.

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HISTORIC BUILDING PLAQUE APPLICATION

The goal of the Historic Building Plaque program is to obtain insight into people, places and events that make up our Strasburg and Davis District history. Informal stories and anecdotes about previous owners and uses, as well as important or funny events associated with the building, are encouraged. Even strange or (allegedly) ghostly incidents are acceptable! Recollections of any sort that involve the building are what the program is about.

Photographs, drawings, plats or any other graphical material would be interesting (originals will be copied and returned). For those ambitious, a documented history of the building derived from the deed books in the Shenandoah County Court House (Woodstock) would be great. Just let us know if you need assistance in your research. Please fill in the following:

Building's Present Owner _____

Mailing Address _____

Phone No. _____ Email _____

Street Address of Historic Building _____

Previous Owners, if known _____

Date Built _____ (must be associated with some record). If the date is not known exactly, an estimate is acceptable. Sources might be:

Deed Book _____ Page No. _____

Will Book _____ Page No. _____

Tax Record _____ Page No. _____

Date engraved or marked in woodwork or masonry _____

and the location of the marking in the building _____

Other sources (e.g., Grandfather Joel recalls the house being built in 1912) _____

Plaque Mounting (please check): Front mounted _____ OR Rear mounted _____

Please use extra sheet(s) for any stories, anecdotes, etc., about the building. It is hoped these will be the basis of a booklet on Historic Strasburg and Davis District.

Historical Society Addresses Two County Preservation Issues

By Barbara Adamson

The Shenandoah County Historical Society is very concerned about two current historic preservation issues in Shenandoah County. Several articles in local newspapers have examined the deteriorating condition of the County Farm, a situation so serious that residents were evacuated from the 1839 historic house. The County Farm, or Alms House, has been the home of our community's poor and destitute for over 200 years. The citizens of Shenandoah County own this unique historic structure and its preservation is the responsibility of our elected officials.

We are also concerned about proposals to move the local Courts out of our historic 18th and 19th century Courthouse to the north end of Woodstock. We believe that the Courts should remain downtown and that the old Courthouse can be renovated and expanded in such a way that its preservation will be assured without compromising the Court Square space surrounding it.

The Historical Society hopes that you will contact your local representative on the Board of Supervisors (this is Dr. Conrad Helsley if you live in Strasburg/Davis District) and urge him to support action that will preserve both of these historic and irreplaceable treasures.

Battlefield Lantern Tours

To celebrate the anniversary of the Battle of Hupp's Hill (a.k.a. The Battle of Stickley's Farm, The Battle of Stickley's Shop), Hupp's Hill Battlefield Park will offer lantern tours on Saturday, October 14, from 7:00 to 9:00 PM. Living Historians in period clothing will present post-battle scenarios of Civil War life in their infantry, artillery, and civilian encampments. A donation of \$5.00 is requested for battlefield preservation.

Cave Week Activities Slated

The Virginia Cave Board works to preserve, and educate her citizenry about the importance of, cave ecosystems, which are a precious, non-renewable water resource. Increasing development pressures on Virginia's 3000+ documented caves has made this mission statement increasingly crucial. Strasburg's own Crystal Caverns has been adversely affected by dynamiting involved in building new subdivisions.

Virginia Governor Tim Kaine recently appointed past SHA president Babs Melton to serve on the Virginia Cave Board for a term running through July 2010. Melton feels that active participation in Cave Board education programs is an excellent way to bring attention to the development issues. As the Cave Board sponsors an annual Cave Week celebration to highlight Virginia's cave and karst topography, Crystal Caverns, in partnership with the Front Royal Grotto (caving club), will present several programs during the week of October 8-15. Throughout the week, displays and literature on caves' fragile ecosystems, bats, local geology, and karst topography will be on exhibit at the caverns.

On Saturday, October 14, at 10:00 AM, Leslie Sturges, the director of Bat World Sanctuary, will present "Breakfast with Bats," an hour-long multi-media program featuring live bats and showcasing the natural history of the often-misunderstood mammals. As Bat World Sanctuary receives no state or federal support and is staffed by volunteers only, Crystal Caverns will "pass the hat" for contributions after the program.

Afternoon programs will include lantern tours of Crystal Caverns, a talk by Bob Denton on the use of caves during the Civil War, and a talk by a member of DCR Karst Project on groundwater issues.

At 10:00 AM on Sunday, October 15, Boy Scout merit badge counselor Babs Melton will offer a geology badge program. Pre-registration is required (540-465-5884).

Strasburg Heritage Association
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Membership Application

Name _____

Address _____

Telephone Number _____

E-mail Address _____

Membership: \$20

Patron (donation) \$ _____

Total Enclosed \$ _____

Please mail completed form and payment to above address