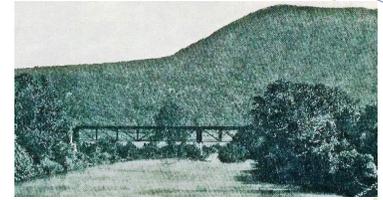


# Strasburg Heritage Association



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NEWSLETTER

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## A VISIT TO THE 1772 STONER-KELLER MILL AT FISHER'S HILL

Join us on a visit to the historic Stoner-Keller Mill on Tumbling Run at Fisher's Hill. Built in 1772, the limestone mill has had many owners. Bill and Martha Erbach, owners since 1974, have invited us to enjoy this wonderful and very historic building. We will tour the mill, learn about its history, and see what the Erbachs have done to make the mill a comfortable and usable building in 2016. Bill will tell us about the recent work he's done to rebuild the mill dam and get the mill wheel turning again.

**Sunday, September 11, 2016**

**2-4pm**

**2900 Battlefield Rd. Fisher's Hill, VA**

*Free and open to the public*

*Light refreshments*

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### HOLIDAY GREETINGS – POSTCARDS & GREETING CARDS

Since this is a year without a SHA Homes Tour, we will host a December program meeting with a holiday theme. Winchester author Charles Thorne will present a program about holiday greeting cards. The earliest greeting cards were postcards, which will be the primary focus of his presentation. Mr. Thorne will include greetings for several major holidays in addition to the Christmas Season.

The program will be held Sunday, December 11 from 2-4pm  
at St. Paul Lutheran Church Fellowship Hall in Strasburg.

As always, the public is invited.

Join us for fellowship and refreshments.

## Ghost/Graveyard Tours

- Saturday, Oct. 29 from 6 - 9 p.m. The last tour will leave at 8:30 p.m.
  - Begin at the Strasburg Community Library
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- The family-friendly event will be a walking tour of the historic cemeteries of St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Queen Street, and the Mt. Zion United Methodist.
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- The tours will leave every 15 minutes from the Strasburg Community Library and last approximately one hour. Tours will include stories about graves of prominent citizens, the history of the churches and cemeteries and more.
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- Presale tickets are \$3 and available at the Town Office or \$5 day of the event. Children 5 and under are free. Children 13 and under must be accompanied by an adult.
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- A special bus tour accessible for those with disabilities, courtesy of Greenfield Senior Living, will be held at 3 p.m. starting from the BB&T parking lot. Preregistration for the bus tour is required by **Oct. 22** at **540-465-9501**.

### Strasburg Downtown Revitalization Project

For many months the town of Strasburg has been working on economic development with the grant-based Strasburg Downtown Revitalization Project. SHA has participated as part of the Management Team because of the historic nature of our downtown area. We're pleased that the Façade Improvement portion of the project will soon see results. Four property owners have submitted applications to participate in this matching grant program and several more will be included in the next grant cycle. We hope to see work begun in the near future.

### **SHA Board of Directors**

2016

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# A Little Folk History Kellers Mill, Fishers Hill

By  
Kathy Kehoe



*William "Poss" Baker talking about the Keller Mill at Ritenour Grocery.*

In the early 1980s, as a resident of the little community of Fishers Hill, I had a keen interest in the folk history. I interviewed several of my neighbors who were lifelong residents. Ray "Doc" Ritenour Sr., of Ritenour's Grocery, Maynard Baker, who lived his entire life surrounded by relatives, and Charles Linwood "Lindy" Miller, whose mother grew up in the Keller homestead in the brick house beside Kellers Mill. On a recent Saturday morning, I visited with William "Poss" Baker and Kitty Ritenour at Doc's Store, reminiscing on the folk history of this sleepy little community that was once a buzz of activity. Poss turned 90 years old this August, but he can still remember his childhood as part of the Keller family. He sat in a chair in the corner beside the old post office boxes recalling that the Keller mill was a "hammer mill" where his grandfather would grind hay, corn and corncobs as filler. The bagged feed would then be taken to stores in Linden and "this side of the fish hatchery" to sell as feed for their farm animals.

The brick house beside the mill was the Keller homeplace. Silas Keller ran Keller's Store across the road where you could buy everything from shoe buttons and long john underwear to groceries and nails. On up the hill towards the church was the home of Lindy, his wife Rosie and his mother Ruth Keller Miller. Past their house was the Cooper Shop, where Maynard Baker worked making barrels that would be packed with apples. The barrels, made of wood from local sawmills, were used to send the apples around the corner to the Depot to be shipped out for sale. On the other side of the road from the Keller house was the first house built in Fishers Hill in 1775 where Maynard lived his entire life.

Ricky Rinker, the grandson of Fishers Hill resident Guy Funkhouser, wrote a research paper on Fishers Hill in the 1970s. His research included the personal papers of Rev. Ronald David, and of Fred Painter, both formerly of Fishers Hill, and from the Deed book of Shenandoah County.

Maynard, Lindy and his mother Ruth, described how the Mill supplied power to the Mill, the church and their houses, before its neighboring town of Strasburg had electric power. Ricky's research concluded that Kellers Mill supplied the electric power until 1920, when a dam was constructed on the other side of the railroad bridge and the Fishers Mill, located closer to Rt. 11, then supplied the power. After a flood in 1936 destroyed that dam, Fishers Hill residents bought their electricity from a larger power company. Poss remembers when the mill wheel was turning. He said the "lights this side of the crik were cheaper than the lights on the other side--those who lived on the other side of the crik had to pay more." In 1940 his family moved to the other side

of the creek and they didn't have electricity there because it was "too high. It cost a dollar a month more, which was a lot in those days" said Poss.

Silas Keller did all the wiring, though in later years, he was referred to as "One Wire Willy" because generally there was one fuse and one continuous wire connecting to light switches and a few power outlets. Maynard told me he was 11 years old when Fishers Hill got electricity and that it "was real pretty" and they didn't mind that the wires were all strung on the outside of the walls. But they never had electricity on Sundays, for John Keller thought it sinful. He would only turn the power on if there was a church function Sunday night, but, recalls Maynard Baker, "you had to hurry home from church 'cause Grandpap would go directly to the mill to turn off the lights!"

Because they had power to the Keller homestead beside the mill, they were able to pump water into the house. Both lifelong residents Lindy Miller and Maynard Baker told me the Keller homeplace had the first bathroom in Fishers Hill. It was installed for their Aunt Grace who was sick with tuberculosis. A room was built on one end of the upstairs porch where a large claw foot tub was installed. The rest of the porch was screened in and his aunt frequently slept there in order to get as much fresh air as possible. The family story was that the water for the bathroom came from the creek, so when the creek was muddy, so was the water that came out of the faucets.

Ricky Rinker researched the deed books and found that William Stoner built the first house in Fishers Hill in 1775, and built the Mill "sometime between 1775 and 1777". At that time, Fishers Hill was called Stony Lick. A "lick" was a place where deer and other animals would come for salt deposits. The creek, Tumbling Run, was then called Falling Creek. William Stoner left the mill to his son Abe Stoner "with the condition that he take care of his brother John, who Mr. Silas Keller (native of Fishers Hill, now deceased) says was blind. If he didn't, he was to forfeit \$2,000 immediately to John. Abe continued in the mill and in 1844 built the large brick house next to it." (Note: the brick house is the Keller Homeplace now owned by Bill and Martha Erbach). Ricky's paper goes on that, according to George Keller, "John was very good at making things and made paddles used in the mill to stomp flour into barrels and he made other things useful to the operation." (from the personal papers of Rev. Ronald David). According to Ricky's research, in 1880, the mill was owned by William Pifer, George Copp and John Funk and Pifer sold his one half interest to John Keller. John also bought the brick house and eleven acres of ground surrounding it for \$2,200. (from the Deed Book G of Shenandoah County).

Ricky quotes from the personal papers of Fred Painter that the mill was set on fire by Union General Philip Sheridan's troops in 1864 but an officer arrived and made the soldiers extinguish the fire. "Local legend also has it that about 100 bushels of wheat had been secretly hidden in a bin under a work bench from the armies."

Doc Ritenour told me that at one time, the Mill also housed the local post office after it was moved from the depot in 1911. Then the post office went to Kellers Store across the road until 1949, when Silas Keller retired. That's when Doc was made Post Master and it was relocated to Ritenour's Grocery.

Ricky adds that in 1881, John Keller traded two mules for George Copp's one fourth share of the mill. He then put in turbine water wheels in place of the over-shot wheel and then in 1892, he replaced the grind stones with rollers. It was thought at that time that roller milled flour made a lighter bread. By the 1960s, the health food movement caused many consumers to prefer stone ground flour as they believed stone ground flour made a healthier and tastier bread.



Ricky writes that when John Keller died in 1927, his sons George and Charles inherited the mill while son Silas Keller inherited Keller's Store across the road. The Mill made its last flour in the 1940s when the Pure Food Law made it unprofitable but the mill continued to sell grain and other feed for animals. It closed in 1966.

In 1985, when Ray "Doc" Ritenour Sr. was 61 years old, we were talking about Fishers Hill history and he explained his opinion on why Fishers Hill remained a rural area when the neighboring town of Strasburg grew. "Practically everybody that lived in Fishers Hill was related because they wouldn't sell any land to non-relatives. There's been more land transferred in Fishers Hill in the last 20 years than there has been the last 100."

Martha and Bill Erbach now own and live in the Keller homeplace. They are not related to the Stoners or the Kellers or their descendants, but they have lovingly restored the house and the mill. Honoring the history of their beloved home, they have the mill wheel turning again. It turns steadily through time, a tribute to the first settlers of Fishers Hill, to the souls of a family rich in history, to the friends and neighbors of today.



*Photo by Sharon Bly Ferguson, Tumbling Run and Kellers Mill, Fishers Hill, 2016*

# Strasburg Heritage Association

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