



Volume 21

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Strasburg, Virginia

NEWSLETTER

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

## President's Message

### *Tim Taylor*

The fall season is here and with it comes many festivals and events to celebrate the season. For the Strasburg Heritage Association, it means time for another Ghost Tour. More information on the ghost tour can be found in this newsletter. It is a "Living Ghost" Tour where we hear prominent people from our past share their stories on how they added to the Strasburg community's rich history. We will be working with students from Strasburg High School to assist with the ghost tour as we have in the past. It is great to work with the students and share our community's past.

Sadly, we recently lost an SHA past board member, Gloria Stickley, who passed away earlier this month. Her passing was not only a loss for our organization, but for the Strasburg Museum where she spent twelve years as museum president, as well as the entire Strasburg community as a whole. Gloria was passionate about our local history. She was involved in so many projects that helped share stories about the people and places in our community. SHA has worked on many projects with the Strasburg Museum thanks to Gloria's leadership. She will be missed dearly, but we were blessed to have her in our lives.

Please take the time to visit our website to check out our archived newsletters and to listen to stories and interviews being shared on our podcast channel including Judge Platt's fond reminiscences, given at the recent Vintage in the Valley Festival, of the time his family owned The Silk Mill. Links to these resources can be found in this newsletter.

Have a safe, enjoyable, and relaxing fall season.

Sincerely - Tim Taylor - SHA President

## Day of Caring The Old Queen Street Cemetery

*Barbara Adamson*

SHA was very fortunate to have been a recipient of the United Way's Day of Caring on Sept. 15, 2021, with First Bank partnering with United Way for the Day of Caring. With the excellent organization of Strasburg Town Council member, Christie Monahan, and First Bank employee, Kathleen Shannon, a team of bank employees and SHA board members (Tim Taylor, Joan Williams, Carla Wallen and Barbara Adamson) did a great job cleaning 85 grave markers in the Queen St. Cemetery.

From the start Christie and Kathleen were adamant that we use the proper cleaning products and procedures to safely bring new life to the historic tombstones. We consulted the Cemetery Conservators United Standards website to find the appropriate way to proceed and learned a lot from their videos. We were advised to use a biological solution called D2 which is a biocide and continues to eliminate harmful algae even after the cleaning. Another approved product is Orvus, a gentle cleaner often used on livestock or old textiles! The website and video emphasized the importance of using soft bristle brushes for scrubbing. And to use lots and lots of water. Wetting the stones and frequent rinsing were said to be paramount to cleaning yet helping protect the stones from damage from the cleaning process.

We thank the cemetery's next door neighbors, Craig Morris and Michael Marcheterre, for helping us out by providing a water source. We used a lot! We also thank Pat Corley and Gloria Floyd, of the Mt. Zion United Methodist Church, the cemetery's other next door neighbor, for allowing us to use their facilities.

Thank you to First Bank and United Way for choosing this as your project this year and inviting SHA to participate. We also thank the Town of Strasburg maintenance department for mowing the graveyard. SHA plans to make a commitment towards long term maintenance needs of this, the oldest cemetery in town. The oldest marked burial is from 1779. We're confident that many unmarked graves are earlier since Strasburg was chartered in 1761, including the possibility that the town's founder, Peter Stover, may be buried here.

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### **CHECK OUT OUR NEW PODCAST CHANNEL**

**Listen to stories and interviews about people, places and  
historical times!**

**The podcast link:**

**<https://anchor.fm/strasburgvaheritage>**

**Oh! The stories you'll hear!**

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

## A Little Long Ago Folk History Gone but Not Forgotten

By  
Kathy Kehoe

*Editor's Note: The following is a story about past research on local cemeteries: Strasburg's Riverview and the Queen Street Cemetery where early settlers were buried. First Bank employees, town council members and some of the SHA board spent a day there cleaning tombstones as part of the United Way Day of Caring. Note that Frances Wilkins Jordan's index card recorded research had been moved from the Strasburg Community Library to the Shenandoah County Library. Reprinted from our Winter 2008 newsletter which can be found on our website.*

**"Alas! How sad to part with thee, Friend of my better days, None knew thee but to love thee."**

These words were Rebecca Kern's epitaph, engraved on her stone in the Kern family cemetery. We know from the recorded data of Frances Wilkins Jordan that Rebecca died in 1877 and was "Aged 75 years, 2 months and 24 days." Jordan, the wife of Strasburg dentist Dr. Walker Jordan, visited area cemeteries in 1964-65, recording the engraved inscriptions of gravestones. Her research can be found on index cards that are now archived in the Strasburg Community Library reference room. (Editor's Note: moved to the Shenandoah County Library archives). Jordan describes the small family cemetery as "located about three miles north of Strasburg on Rt. 81--near the Roy Downey property. It is to the left of Rt. 81." The story of Rebecca is told in the words on the stones. Rueben & Rebecca June Hockman had a son buried in Kern Cemetery in 1863 whose name was William Martin Hockman. This information is found on William's headstone, along with the fact that his mother Rebecca, evidently widowed by Rueben, later married Henry Kern. There are four boxes of Mrs. Jordan's work covering many family and community cemeteries in Shenandoah County. She lists the tombstone inscriptions of familiar names such as Bowman, Hockman, Hottel and Keller as well as many other families. Jordan saw that some gravestones were already becoming illegible in the 60's and by writing down each inscription, she saved important information of the families of our area. Duane L. Borden's books are other good sources of information listing tombstone inscriptions in Shenandoah County and surrounding areas. His book, "Tombstone Inscriptions of Strasburg and Vicinity, Shenandoah County, Virginia" was copyrighted in 1982 and is also kept in the reference room of the Strasburg Community Library. In his forward, Borden describes his reasons for gathering the information. "This compilation is being published as another tool for family historians, genealogists, and others, who have a sincere interest in their ancestors, and a deep respect for the memory of our deceased and their final resting places, as it is all too common for individuals to forget their ancestors, and the memory dulls with each succeeding generation. Each year many family bibles and other family records are destroyed by fire and water, and inexorable elements and forces each year obliterates many tombstone inscriptions." Strasburg resident Martha Baker Jones, who has been researching local cemeteries and collecting information on the town's oldest cemetery, expresses concern that the stones that were readable when Borden and Jordan were transcribing are not nearly as legible as they were then. As the years go by and the natural elements wear down the inscriptions, the cemetery history is being lost. There are other little known plots that Jordan listed, old family cemeteries such as the one on the "late Jesse Funk property." Jordan describes it as unmarked and believes that "Stovers and Findleys are probably buried there." She adds that "There is an Indian graveyard on the same property and is straight back from the home of Frances Hoover." This site is now a rural subdivision.

She also lists a private cemetery on the "Boyd Stickley property ..... commonly called "The Indian Graveyard" where there are no tombstones. Sandy Hook Elementary School now stands next to this site. Jordan believes these graves to be "those of Sonners and Robinsons." When Mrs. Jordan did her research in 1965 and 1966 she noted that information was already missing or illegible. Calvin Sonner has included this information on his website: [csonner.net](http://csonner.net). He lists 96 cemeteries, inscriptions and some history, including 5000

names in Strasburg's Riverview Cemetery. Borden collected information in eight volumes, from many of the same areas as Jordan, including Strasburg's oldest public cemetery where town Civil War veterans are buried. Borden lists what he believes is the oldest grave in the east section of the cemetery on Queen Street as that of Samuel Funk, who died in 1779. Emanuel Crabill, a Confederate captain, was also buried here in 1880. Jordan copied the words on Catherine Hupp's headstone: "Our mother; Catherine; Wife of George F. Hupp; and daughter of Philip Spangler; Born March 16th 1794; Died Jan. 31, 1875; Aged 80 yrs 10 mos and 15 days; Married 61 yrs 1 mo and 9 days; He Giveth His Beloved Sleep." Another stone bears the name of Amanda Hupp who died in 1833 and describes her as the wife of John S. Hupp and the daughter of Joseph Bowman "of Ky." We know from our local folk history that Major Joseph Bowman was born at Harmony Hall (Bowman's Fort) in 1752, and was a famous Revolutionary War hero. Wikipedia Encyclopedia lists Major Bowman as "second-in-command during George Rogers Clark's famous campaign" when they seized the British-controlled town of Vincennes. Our cemeteries are important, not just to those who feel connected to the deceased, but to genealogists and historians. Each cemetery tells its own story. As more people are opting for cremation, cemeteries remain a historical record as markers are still erected in memory or to mark a buried urn. These engraved stones are often placed in family plots beside the graves of parents and grandparents. Traditionally, people were buried near where they had lived their lives and generally a person's preferences for burial were similar to what their family believed. Custom and personal choices of religion often determined decisions about burial long before a person passed on. In Western Kentucky, there is a small stone marker with my mother-in-law's name on it. She is not buried there because she was cremated in 1997, her ashes scattered in the three rivers that defined her life. But for history's sake, because we are a family of historians and preservationists, and so that family members and genealogists in years to come can find information on her life, the marker is placed beside her parents' graves to mark the date of her birth and death, in a little family cemetery just down the road from where she grew up.

I can remember walking through Riverview Cemetery as a little girl, holding my mother's hand, as we approached the family headstones. I remember reaching out to trace my finger across the deeply engraved words. I could read my grandparent's names and trace my finger across the numbers. Beside their double stone stood another with the names of my great-grandparents. The line of tombstones told a story about my family, of when and where they had lived and died. The flowers we left on the grave were a symbol, a sign, that this person was remembered. My deceased relatives had walked through this cemetery themselves, teaching their children to pay their respects to their ancestors. I remember standing with the words at eye level, in my Easter bonnet, not quite understanding why my grandmother was "there" and not at home in our kitchen where she belonged. Today, I walked through Riverview Cemetery again, finding names familiar to my childhood. There was "Charles H. Spiggle, M.D.; 1900-1973." It was Dr. Spiggle who diagnosed my childhood diseases, including the German measles and chicken pox, and who patched up my finger the day I tore it open with an old nail while playing. I came across the name "Walter Lawrence Tate; W04 U.S. Marine Corp.; WWII; Korea; June 12, 1907; Oct. 28, 1985." Reading his marker brought back memories of many happy hours in their historical home at the foot of Fishers Hill when I was growing up and his daughter Sharon was my best friend. Cemeteries can spark many memories. But we as a community are losing the information in our graveyards. Whether we believe the spirits of our ancestors linger near their graves, the monuments of our dead are a significant and important part of our history. White stones are turning black with lichen and engravings are wearing away as a result of acid rain. The words are hard to read or not readable at all. Some stones are fallen over in the grass and are broken. If we want to preserve the headstones, we must learn how to clean and repair them and organize a volunteer effort to preserve the stones for future generations. The Old Cemeteries Society is dedicated to researching, preserving and encouraging the appreciation of cemeteries. Their members catalogue, clean and restore, computerize burial records, combat vandalism, conduct historical research and give walking history tours. Gravehunter.net describes how to



clean tombstones and stresses the importance of not using harsh chemicals, recommending a soft bristle brush and water. "It is very important to understand that acids are very damaging to marble and limestone ..... for almost all stone, including polished granite. Many people have totally lost the polished face of a fine granite marker by conscientiously scrubbing with household bleaches." Gravehunter recommends a mild detergent, or a diluted solution of ammonia--1 part ammonia to 3 parts water, or a photographic solution named Triton X. Two websites, saving graves.org and paintedhills.org warn against using shaving cream to clean a tombstone because even though it cleans well, it causes the stone to deteriorate, with long term affects similar to acid rain. (Note: There are newer recommendations for cleaning since 2008; See Day of Caring on page two of this newsletter.)

Our ancestors believed that cemeteries would always be highly respected and expected that their descendants would follow tradition and tend family graves. They believed that their tombstone was strong, and their epitaph clear and engraved deeply into the stone. They had faith that someone would repair and restore and lovingly and dutifully tend their gravestones, believing the stone would always be righted, the letters kept readable. Tradition was that hallowed ground would never be neglected or untended and when the years had passed and a descendant walked through the cemetery, they would be able to read the names and trace their family history back many generations. The headstones would stand as a marker, a testimony to life. Someday another little girl would trace the engraved letters in the stone, trace the numbers of years gone by and of people she could only imagine.

***To Our Readers: If you have memories to add to folk histories, please contact Kathy Kehoe by emailing [strasburgheritage@gmail.com](mailto:strasburgheritage@gmail.com), calling 540-465-4185 or contacting any SHA Board Member.***

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### **Board of Directors 2021**

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## Fishers Hill Ladies Project

*Dedication of Historical Highway Marker  
Sunday, October 3, 2021 at the Strasburg Town Square*  
*In case of bad weather, we will meet in the council chambers of the town hall.*

What started out as an "accidental" discovery has blossomed into a three year project leading to the writing of a book, dedication of a historical highway marker, and, hopefully, placement of memorial markers at the graves of three ladies who had almost been lost in time. Cheryl Lyon was researching the history of a couple of Fishers Hill landmarks when she "happened" upon Bertha von Hillern, Maria a'Becket, and Emma Howard Wight.

The text of the approved highway marker summarizes the lives of these ladies and our mission to preserve their existence, accomplishments, and stories. They were ahead of their time in the roles that women were expected to play in that era. These creative and talented women were role models and mentors.

### Highway Marker Creative Women of Fishers Hill

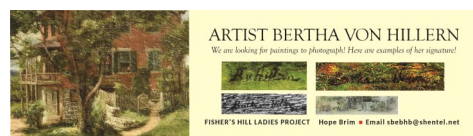
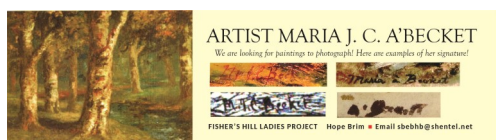
Three women who achieved national prominence for their creative endeavors, but were later largely forgotten, lived near Fishers Hill during the 1880s. Landscape painter Bertha Von Hillern (ca. 1857-1939), once renowned as a competitive endurance walker, shared a studio 1.5 miles northwest of here with painter Maria J. C. a' Becket (1839-1904). The women, influenced by the French Barbizon Movement, drew inspiration from the rugged forests of this area, exhibited their works at elite galleries and World's Fairs, and mentored one another. Emma Howard Wight (ca. 1863-1935) arrived here late in the 1880s and became a prolific author of novels, short stories, plays, radio dramas, and photoplays.

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One goal that our group will continue as we conclude this project is to locate works of art and writings by these three women. We have bookmarks available depicting samples of their artwork and signatures. None may exist in the Valley: but, who knows---some may be found stored in a seldom used closet or hanging on someone's wall.

It has been an honor to rediscover these women who we have come to regard as our friends: Maria, Bertha, and Emma. No longer lost/no longer forgotten!!

Visit our FB page at Forgotten Journeys: The Fisher's Hill Ladies Project at [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)  
--Hope Henry Brim

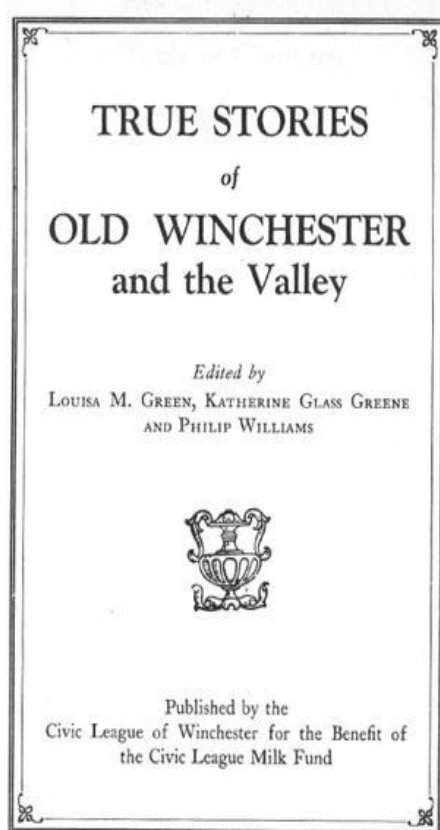


The Ladies of Fishers Hill Bookmarks.

Check the art in your home to see if it has one of these signatures, you could have an a'Becket or a Von Hillern.

This is the story of a world-class athlete and artist, a renowned painter, and a famous author, playwright and activist and their lives and connection to the tiny hamlet of Fisher's Hill, Virginia. This is the story of Bertha von Hillern, Maria J.C. a'Beckett, and Emma Howard Wight.

—Forgotton Journeys: The Fishers Hill Ladies Project Facebook page.



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TRUE STORIES OF OLD WINCHESTER

## A HAUNTED HOUSE

The square red brick house, about two miles from Fishers Hill Station, known as the Barbe Farm House, has many historical associations. During the Civil War the battle of Fishers Hill was fought within a stone's throw of it and many skirmishes took place in its vicinity. It was frequently used as a hospital for the wounded soldiers of both armies. Soon after the close of the Civil War the farm house and vicinity acquired an uncanny reputation. It was said to be haunted. Miss Bertha von Hillern now of Winchester and a fellow artist Miss Maria a Becket of Boston had for several years a summer studio at the farm house. These artists, both women of intelligence, claim to have seen strange things and heard strange sounds while spending their summers at the farm house. Near the farm house, on the road to Fishers Hill, is a wooded hill known as the "Red Hill" because of the color of the soil. Seated upon the porch of the farm house in the evenings, Miss von Hillern and Miss a Becket have frequently heard a sound like the tramping of marching men over Red Hill. Sometimes, in walking over the hill, the artists found this sound so pronounced as to convey the impression that troops were actually bearing down upon them.

The Barbe Farm House was built by Abram Barbe some years before the Civil War and is now occupied by the family of one of his sons.

EMMA HOWARD WIGHT



## *An accidental discovery, the Great Depression, a pandemic, and Emma Howard Wight's ghost story...*

Sometimes we find things when we're not even looking. Last year, while stuck at home and scrounging through a stack of musty old books, was found the classic "True Stories of Old Winchester and the Valley." This was a book published by the Winchester Civic League in 1931. Published specifically to benefit the "Children's Milk Fund." This was a time of trouble in the valley. A time of depression and need. A hard time on all, but those that were able, stepped up with what they could to help.

One of these contributing volunteers was none other than author, playwright, and journalist Emma Howard Wight, whom we'd been diligently researching. For this book, Emma gave what she had, her story, her words, her writing skill. A story of her time with Bertha von Hillern and the ghosts of Fisher's Hill.

Note: When this book was picked up, it opened to Emma's page.

—Forgotton Journeys: The Fishers Hill Ladies Project Facebook Page



## Going for the Goal: Athlete to Artist

Bertha von Hillern's goal was focused and singular. That she was the best in her sport of Pedestrianism was a symptom of her drive. In a few short years, Pedestrianism allowed Bertha to "retire" and follow her true passion in art. Bertha had amassed a small fortune from her sport, not enough to be truly wealthy, but enough to make her next leap. A leap into the world of art.

The people she would learn from, both as a champion pedestrienne, and as a budding artist, would follow her the remainder of her life. Especially the doctors who studied her abilities, and her first tutor, Dr. William T. Rimmer. Known as an illustrator, sculptor and painter, Dr. Rimmer would become Bertha's first instructor of painting.

Dr. Rimmer was another soul in a profession seeking a means to an end. A Boston physician, with a passion for art, Rimmer's 1877 book on art anatomy illustrations was considered the most comprehensive published at that time. Rimmer abandoned his medical practice when he followed his passion and started a successful art school. Under Dr. Rimmer's tutelage, Bertha undoubtedly picked up painting styles and his medical knowledge that would help her and Maria a'Becket aid the destitute seeking help around Fisher's Hill and the Shenandoah Valley.

Bertha would go on to further study under Dr. Rimmer's friend and famous American artist William Morris Hunt. Learning from the best of her time while developing a style all her own along the way. —Forgotten Journeys: The Fishers Hill Ladies Project Facebook Page

## Berth von Hillern and Maria a'Becket: The "Doctors" of Fisher's Hill

Busy as their own works were, Bertha and Maria made time to devote to helping others. Particularly the local poor who had nowhere else to go. Then as now, physicians in rural communities were rare and expensive. Bertha and Maria helped fill this gap for those in need.

From her pharmacist father and travels, Maria had a knowledge of medicines. From her athleticism and proponent of healthy living and exercise, Bertha had a knowledge of human physiology. Bertha herself also having been the subject of intense physical and cardio study.

*"Sunday is the day upon which they come to be doctored. They come, sometimes, long distances on foot, say from five to twelve miles, and fill the broad hall and portico of the farm-house. Miss Becket and Miss Von Hillern have both a hearty, healthful way of looking at their poor people's diseases and troubles, and their influence for doing them good and for helping them seems unbounded. Everybody knows them for miles around, and are called the "doctors," the "painters," or the "ladies," and are loved and greatly respected."* -Staunton Spectator, December 17, 1884

*"She is quite the doctress of the place, and the people come to her from far and near, often after physicians have ceased to do them any good. One morning I went down on the porch where she was engaged with a 'patient.' There was a great big red-headed fellow witting meek as a lamb, while Miss Von Hillern looking like a midget beside him, stood holding his big brown hand while she counted his pulse. He had come twenty miles that morning. In a little while she took his departure, his bottles of medicine tucked carefully away in a capacious pocket, after sheepishly presenting her the most enormous apple I have ever seen. She never thinks of her own comfort when she can minister to the comfort of others."* - Emma Howard Wight, recounting her time with Bertha von Hillern at Fisher's Hill to a reporter from the Chicago Illinois Inter Ocean Newspaper, July 13, 1890.

—Forgotten Journeys: The Fishers Hill Ladies Project Facebook Page



# Strasburg Ghost Walking Tours



**COME SEE "LIVING GHOSTS"  
FROM OUR PAST SHARE  
THEIR STORIES!**



**Saturday, October 30, 2021**

**6:00-8:00 pm**

**Beginning at the Strasburg Square Market Pavilion (216 E. King St.)**

~Walking Tours leaving every 15 minutes, with groups of up to 15 people. Tour takes ~1 hour

Note: Last tour leaves at 8:00 pm

No Pre-sale Tickets this Year

**Tickets \$5.00 each on site, beginning at 5:30pm**

**(children under age 5 free, 13 & under must be accompanied by adult)**

**First tour starts at 6 pm with the last one leaving at 8 pm**

Come and hear our "living ghosts" from our past share the stories from our historic past. Hear the ghost of Peter Stover share about establishing the town of Strasburg, learn from the ghost of Samuel Eckerlin about his commercial impact on Strasburg, and listen to the ghost of Amanda Hupp as she tells about Strasburg's oldest public cemetery. There are many more "living ghosts" that will be sharing their stories! Enjoy walking through Strasburg's Historic District and viewing decorated homes/businesses for the Halloween season. This is a family friendly event so we hope to see all ages joining us for this entertaining and educational event. Come out to support the Strasburg Heritage Association as we continue to preserve and share the history of the Strasburg community! The only thing you have to be afraid of is the fun you will be missing if you do not attend!

**Visit: [www.strasburgvaheritage.org](http://www.strasburgvaheritage.org) or call 540-325-4397 for more information!**

***Rain or Shine Event***



PO Box 525

Strasburg, VA 22657

## Strasburg Heritage Association

Strasburgheritage@gmail.com

www.strasburgvaheritage.org

**Annual dues are due in February; if you are not sure if you have paid your dues, please email us.**

### **Membership Application**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

MEMBERSHIP \_\_\_\_\_ Cost is \$20.00 annually

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

TOTAL ENCLOSED: \_\_\_\_\_

**If this is a gift subscription, add your name and contact info here.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Please Mail Completed Form to:

Strasburg Heritage Association

PO Box 525

Strasburg, VA 22657