

# Strasburg Heritage Association



Volume 14

Issue 2

Strasburg, Virginia

NEWSLETTER

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

Rev. Bill Wade

## *SHA Summer Program*

### **Historic Shenandoah County Artists**

#### *A Look At Some Local Artists*

#### *From the 19<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*

Join us as Strasburg local art collector, the **Rev. Bill Wade**, shows us the works of Shenandoah County artists from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries. Using a power point presentation we will be able to enjoy the art of *Carl Brown, John Copp, Ed Ambrose, Billy Landis, Martha Louise Evans, Roy Updyke, Benjamin West Clinedinst, Virginia Bailes and more*. Bill will tell us where some of their work may be viewed by the public in local museums and other places in the county. He also encourages anyone who has a personal story about any of the artists, or other works to share, to participate in the program.

***Sunday, June 29, 2014 2 to 4 p.m.***

St. Paul Lutheran Church Fellowship Hall

193 W. Washington St Strasburg

Free, public invited. Join us for fellowship and refreshments

## President's Letter

*Barbara Adamson , SHA President*

Plaque Committee chair Wendy Pieper has reported satisfaction with the historic building plaque that has come from the new forge she found. Please consider ordering a plaque for your property if it meets the guidelines or recommending to someone you know that they do so. The plaques spotlight our wonderful historical buildings which we think deserve to be preserved and treasured. They are what make Strasburg the charming small town that it is.

Many thanks to those who helped with our semi-annual litter pick-up on Rt. 11. Donna and Ed Bollhoefer, Dennis Hupp, Tim Taylor, Linda Williams and myself worked to make the road look good and it still looks pretty clean in mid-June!

The Old Queen St. cemetery looks very nice this year. The fence erected in the back is attractive and the Strasburg town crew keeps it mowed. The SHA board has pretty much declared the project finished though we've discussed a desire to map the location of individual graves to make the list of people buried there more useful. A list of those buried is available but with so many missing headstones it's difficult to know where the burials are located. Anyone interested in knowing the names of those buried there, or if you think you may have family members there, the listing is available in cemetery records in the Shenandoah Room at the library in Edinburg and in the reference room at the Strasburg Community library. In the records, the listing is under Mt. Zion United Methodist Church Cemetery, which is cemetery number 243.

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## *150 Years Ago...On This Day Battlefield Tour*

### *The Battle of Fisher's Hill*

1864 was a pivotal year of the Civil War and a year of violence and destruction in the Shenandoah Valley and Shenandoah County.

Join us on **Monday, September 22 from 4-6 p.m.**

as historian and author **Richard Kleese** takes us on a walking tour of the battlefield.

We'll be there on the day it happened and at the time of day it happened, 150 years later.

Richard is an engaging speaker who is a master at setting the scene and sharing his vast knowledge of the action.

Meet at the Fisher's Hill Battlefield parking lot (additional parking will be available).

*The public is invited. Free. Refreshments will be served.*

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*Editor's Note: Another great folk history by Strasburg native George Hoffman from the heart of our Town. —Kathy Kehoe*

## A Little Folk History

By George Hoffman



### *Mabel Miller's Flags*

There they stand each spring, like silent purple spectators, both watching the constant parade of passersby, and representing the town of Strasburg in all their purple glory! Everyone notices Mrs. Mabel Miller's beautiful purple irises. They command one's attention, standing tall and in such large numbers at the top of that beautiful gray limestone wall on North Massanutten Street. If you say to anyone who's been in this town for a long time, "Have you seen Mrs. Mabel's irises?" they know immediately about whom and what you are talking! I love that about small town living!

Flags, as my grandmother and mother always called them, or more commonly, irises, have a rich and varied history. According to research, they come in every color of the spectrum, except for true red. The iris is the state flower of Tennessee. They were the inspiration for the 'fleur de lis' that the King of France chose to be a part of France's emblem. That same emblem today also represents the city of New Orleans. The iris flower in general has come to symbolize eloquence. In different parts of the world, the different colors of iris symbolize different things. Yellow, for instance, symbolizes passion, while white stands for purity; and blue symbolizes faith and hope. The purple iris is symbolic of wisdom. I believe Mrs. Miller was very wise. After all, the flowerbeds she planted and tended have such longevity, and have taken such an important place in our respective minds and lives.

Mrs. Mabel Miller was very familiar to me because she and my grandmother and a few other nice ladies all worked in the elementary school cafeteria here in Strasburg where I grew up. If my memory is correct, I believe Mrs. Miller was the boss! But a great lady she was, and she always had a pleasant smile on her face.

This year, when Mrs. Miller's purple irises appeared, they started a flurry of conversation in the social media world of Facebook. My wife, Ruth and I slipped out one evening, her driving, and me ready to jump out of the car with my phone to try and snap a few pictures of the purple beauties before it was too dark. I managed to get the pictures and uploaded them to Facebook right away. They seemed to evoke all sorts of memories and stories among many of us Strasburg old-timers. It was such a great time of

sharing. So many of us not only recalled every spring's iris display atop Mrs. Miller's stone wall, but we recalled our own iris stories from years past, and we were all talking!

So, here are some of the memories and thoughts that were shared. If you grew up here in Strasburg, you may actually identify with some of these memories!

From Barbara Paquin: *"They're such beautiful reminders of a sweetheart of a lady. Thank you, Mrs. Miller, for all you did for school children. Lest we forget . . . I remember she cooked for us in the school cafeteria; I associate Mrs. Miller's smile with those wonderful homemade rolls. Oh, and Daddy said once that she used to give him her homemade wine at Christmas."*

From Joanne Wolfe: *"Memories, Beautiful memories! I remember these when I lived on Massanutten Street back in the sixties. The aroma of these irises was everlasting....I always knew that spring had arrived when Mrs. Mabel Miller's irises bloomed. If my memory serves me right, these were the only flowers on Massanutten Street, north of King Street that bloomed that early in the spring. Once I saw the long stemmed buds, I watched daily (on my walks to The Northern Virginia Daily with my daily community news for the paper) for them to erupt into beautiful orchid- like blooms. The aroma from the blossoms perfumed the area when one passed by. These are wonderful memories."*

From Vega Ziemer: *"Irises always make me think of my mom who loved them. We had a nice patch in our yard and across the street. These are beautiful."*

From Hope Brim: *"Everyone had 'flags' when we were growing up; not as many, in my opinion, today; Mrs. Miller's display is central for many to view."*

From Winona Jenkins: *"I miss Ms. Mabel! What a wonderful lady!"*

From Marcy McCann: *"They always remind me of my mother because she loved purple and irises."*

From Lloydine Morgan: *"My grandmother had a green thumb. She had a fabulous yard filled with all kinds of perennials - the variety of irises were my favorite."*

From Kitty Miller: *"All of the years that I worked I traveled the Old Valley Pike north toward Winchester. Each trip I drove by Mrs. Mabel Sparks Miller's home en route....going and coming. Even on Mondays and the dreariest days of May (or late April) there was this beautiful harbinger of SPRING as I travelled by the stone retaining wall on the corner of North Massanutten and Washington Streets - Mrs. Miller's 'flags' as the 'oldsters' always called those gorgeous purple irises. I wonder if her mother, Mrs. Julia Sparks, planted them? I wonder if Mabel planted them? It was a joy to see those ladies out there trimming the sharp sword like leaves back after bloom time....allowing the remaining fan to feed the rhizome allowing for next years buds to develop new roots and shoots. It has been a joy to see Mabel's offspring lovingly continue to tend the 'flag garden' to perpetuate those gorgeous flowers. One of Strasburg's true landmarks."*

And finally, from my own memory storehouse, my iris memories:

*"I hesitate a little to say this, but irises, and SMELLING irises, always reminds me of my dead relatives, and the many MANY times my mom gathered irises, lilacs, peonies, and any other flowers that were blooming at the time in our yard, and put them on newspapers spread in the trunk or the back of her big station wagon, along with vases, coffee cans, string, scissors, and such. We would then head out to the various cemeteries where grandmothers, grandfathers, uncles, aunts, and cousins were buried, to place these flowers on their graves. I wonder how many people still do things like that."*



A day or two after I took these pictures, I showed them to my mother, Gertrude Hoffman, who lived most of her 89 years in Strasburg, but who now lives nearby in a nursing home. Mom's short-term memory is dwindling, but her long-term memory often amazes us, and that evening, she remembered exactly where the flowers in those pictures were, and to whom they belonged. We talked about Mrs. Miller, my grandmother, and the other cafeteria ladies. We talked about Kitty's mention of Mrs. Julia Sparks, Mrs. Miller's mother, and mom agreed that Mrs. Sparks may have been the one who planted the originals. We talked about our many visits to the cemeteries over the years. We talked and talked. We remembered and we shared. It was one of the really good days.

So, Mrs. Miller, to borrow a simple lyric from a 1938 song most often associated with the great Bob Hope, thanks for the memory! We thank you so much! I wonder if you ever thought what an impact your purple blooms would have on your little town, and for so many years. I wonder if you ever realized your smiling face and kind, gentle spirit would have such a positive influence on so many. I wonder if your family will keep your legacy alive...if the next owners of that house will recognize the important history and the attachment of those flowers to the community.

My wife Ruth and I came down Washington Street a few days ago by Mrs. Miller's house. I was on the passenger side of the car. When I looked over, expecting to see Mrs. Miller's purple flags drying up and fading, instead I saw them completely replaced by new yellow irises, fresh and beautiful! Yellow irises, you remember, symbolize passion.

A passion for beautiful things, I'm guessing. What a great plan, Mrs. Miller! You planted the later-blooming yellow iris bulbs to extend the showy display in those same beds!

Genius, I thought!  
Thanks again, Mrs. Miller! Thanks again!



## SHA Board of Directors 2014

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# Strasburg Heritage Association

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## Membership Application & Renewal

(Members 2014 dues are now due.)

Name: 

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Address:

Telephone:

Email address:

MEMBERSHIP: 

Cost is \$20.00

Additional Donation: