

Volume 26

SUMMER 2026

Issue 2

Strasburg, Virginia

NEWSLETTER

strasburgvaheritage.org

## **President's Letter**

### ***Tim Taylor***

We hope everyone is doing well. We want to thank all of our members for their continued support via their membership dues. Your generosity is much appreciated and will help us to continue offering services to the greater Strasburg community. If you have not yet paid your dues, feel free to mail them in at any time. Of course, donations are always welcome.

We have been busy. We just awarded a \$1000 scholarship to Rayna Mrizek, a graduating student from Strasburg High School. We attended the Shenandoah County Heritage Days and Mayfest. We enjoy sharing what the Strasburg Heritage Association offers, networking with new and old friends, and sharing stories of our local history during these events. Additionally, we are already preparing for our popular Holiday Homes Tour. If you would like to showcase your home this year, please reach out to me or any board member.

I hope you are enjoying our nation's 250th birthday celebrations! There are many more to come, with the main celebration being held in Woodstock on Saturday, June 20. More information can be found in this newsletter.

Please take time to visit our website to check out our archived newsletters, historical videos, archived program recordings, and audio podcasts. If you have any history you wish to share of our community, please reach out!

Have a safe, enjoyable, and relaxing summer.

Sincerely - Tim Taylor - SHA President and the SHA Board



# Strasburg Museum

440 East King Street  
Strasburg, Virginia 22657  
[www.strasburgmuseum.org](http://www.strasburgmuseum.org)



**Open May-October on Friday, Saturday & Sundays from 10AM-4PM**  
**Model Train runs every Saturday if staff is available**

**Free Admission on the days BELOW to adults • Children are free every day**

## UPCOMING EVENTS!

June 20TH — 10am to 5pm: Shenandoah County Celebrates 1776, Downtown Woodstock.

July 11th — 10am to 4pm: Pottery Day: Heritage/History/Traditions associated with this early thriving business of Strasburg

Aug. 15th — 10am to 2pm: The Strasburg Pickers/Antique Roadshow: Identification and unofficial appraisals of items brought in by the public.

Sept. 12th — 10am to 4pm: Children's Day: This has become a Museum tradition.

Oct. 24th — 10:30am: Mike Kehoe report on Revolutionary War prison in Winchester where Hessian and British prisoners of war were held.

The thing that often surprises people about the Strasburg Museum is how much diverse history is there to discover. The building itself has a diverse past, originally built as a steam-powered pottery factory before it became a railroad depot.

The two story building has a wide, open center area, ringed by two floors of exhibits. Various large collections of historic pottery are on display, along with authentic exhibits representing various periods of Shenandoah Valley life.

Several old rail cars are parked at the train platform, along with a replica steam engine that was built for a 2011 event held to commemorate Stonewall Jackson's legendary Great Train Raid of 1861. All of that, and a model train that is set up in one of the rail cars, depicting the town of Strasburg during the 1930s.

—from the Shenandoah County Historical Society website

## Hupp's Hill Museum at the Strasburg Visitor and Information Center

The Hupp family was one of the early groups of Shenandoah Valley settlers. The hill overlooking what is now Strasburg had been part of a huge land tract they purchased from Thomas Lord Fairfax. The caverns had been of particular interest as they served as a form of natural refrigerator. What became known as Hupp's Hill later became a military hotspot during the Civil War, and several battlefield earthworks are still plainly visible. The location of Hupp's Hill along the Old Valley Pike, now U.S. Route 11, eventually led to it becoming a tourist attraction. Today, the museum and visitor center continues to attract visitors, many of whom like the authenticity of the historic items on display. They also like to walk the lovely hilltop grounds, enjoying the scenic views. It's a small, intimate place, complete with items for sale by local artisans, as well as a working beehive.

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### \*\*\*\*\* A Legend from a Local Storyteller: *Larry Allamong* \*\*\*\*\*

When Larry Allamong and his friend Thomas Wilson were about 14 years old, they often went off on adventures. Tommy's father used to drive the two teenage boys to Buzzard Roost in Ft. Valley where they'd hike up the mountain to catch snakes. They caught them live and sold them to the Snake and Monkey Farm in Mt. Jackson--\$20.00 for a rattlesnake and \$5.00 for a copperhead. Larry remembers that was good money. "You could buy a lot of comic books for that kind of money, they were only ten cents a piece. We were living high on the hog".

The venom from the snakes was used to make medicine: antidotes for snake bites. So the boys had to catch and sell them live. They made sticks from tree branches, stapling a piece of leather on the end to make a loop to grab the snakes. Larry made his stick from an old broom handle. "You had to grab them 2 or 3 inches behind their head so they can't move." said Larry. Then they put the live snake in a pillowcase and tied it with a piece of leather. While inside the pillowcase, the snakes were quiet and still and not dangerous.

One day after their hike, they were resting, waiting for Thomas' father to pick them up, the bag of snakes beside them. They heard cars pull up and park. A group of Boy Scouts from Falls Church got out, ready to go on a hike. The scout master was interested in what the boys had in the bag. Thinking this was a good teaching moment for the scouts, the scout master asked if they could see the snakes, saying "They've never seen a rattlesnake before". Without fanfare, Thomas dumped the bag out on the ground and the snakes started crawling around, going in all directions and startling the Scouts, who scattered to get away from the snakes. "They might be still running as far as I know", said Larry. By the time their ride got there, Larry and Thomas had used their sticks to recatch their loot and had them safely back in the bag. Eighty-year-old Larry still chuckles when he tells this fond boyhood memory from 1960.

### **Board of Directors 2026**

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## A Little Folk History

### Lightning in the Quarry:

# The Powhatan Lime Disaster of 1926

By  
*George Hoffman*

I have heard the story of my grandfather's death in the Powhatan Lime Company quarry all my life.

Like many family stories, it was passed down from generation to generation—part tragedy, part cautionary tale, and part explanation for how a single event changed the course of an entire family's future. A few years ago, I obtained copies of newspaper accounts describing the accident



that killed him. Reading those reports somehow made the story more personal and more real, while also sparking my curiosity about the other men who died that day.

That curiosity deepened during a casual conversation in our adult Sunday school class. I was once again recounting the story of how my grandfather, George Franklin Hoffman, was killed in a quarry accident near Strasburg in 1926. I explained how his death forced my father—then only thirteen years old and the youngest son still living at home—to leave school and go to work to help support his widowed mother.

My friend Willie Mitchell looked at me with surprise and said, “My great-grandfather was killed in that same accident.”

That revelation launched a long conversation and ultimately inspired me to learn more about what was one of the deadliest industrial accidents in Strasburg's history.

The five men who lost their lives as a result of the disaster were George Franklin Hoffman (often incorrectly listed as “Huffman” in newspaper accounts), J. C. “Jack” Raynor, Hunter Boyd, Cecil Alonzo Rinker, and Ashby Mitchell. Nearly a century later, their deaths continue to echo through the Shenandoah Valley, where many of their descendants still live.

## **Powhatan Lime Company and Quarry Life**

The Powhatan Lime Company of Strasburg was established around 1902 to quarry what was known as New Market limestone. Deposited roughly 460 million years ago in shallow tidal environments, this high-

calcium limestone became an important raw material for Portland cement, agricultural lime, and construction aggregate.

The quarry was ideally situated along Powhatan Road near Strasburg Junction, southwest of town. Its proximity to both the limestone deposits and the railroad allowed products to be shipped efficiently to markets throughout the country.

By 1918, according to the Strasburg News, Powhatan Lime Company was one of five lime-producing operations in the Strasburg area. Together, these plants employed more than 250 workers and generated a monthly payroll that would equal approximately \$235,000 in today's dollars. Lime production was one of the economic foundations of the community.

It was also dangerous work. Workers routinely faced hazards from blasting operations, falling rock, heavy machinery, and the intense heat of the kilns. Nationally, quarry accidents claimed dozens of lives every year and injured thousands more. The Strasburg area was no exception, although many accidents undoubtedly went unrecorded except in local newspapers and family memories.

## A Stormy July Afternoon

For years, family lore held that an old charge left in the quarry wall had somehow become involved in the explosion that killed my grandfather. The newspaper accounts largely confirmed that story, though the details proved even more remarkable than I had imagined.

According to the reports, approximately fourteen years before the accident, a series of large blasting charges had been placed in the quarry's south wall in preparation for removing a substantial section of rock. About twelve holes were drilled and loaded. Only three of the charges were successfully detonated.

Repeated efforts to ignite the remaining charges failed. Workers eventually concluded that moisture had rendered the explosives harmless, and the project was abandoned. The undetonated charges remained buried within the quarry wall for years.

The previous autumn, one of the old charges unexpectedly exploded, causing little damage. The incident was soon forgotten.

That would prove to be a tragic mistake.

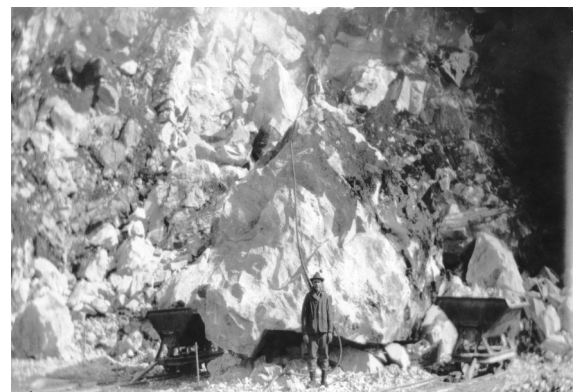
On the afternoon of Thursday, July 22, 1926, a storm moved across the Strasburg area. Workers were preparing to leave the quarry and seek shelter from the approaching rain.

At approximately three o'clock, a bolt of lightning struck.

The lightning apparently detonated one or more of the long-forgotten charges embedded in the south wall.

As the Strasburg News reported:

"The dynamite was exploded immediately after the bolt struck, and the men in the quarry below had no chance to escape the falling rocks as they hurtled down the face of the quarry."



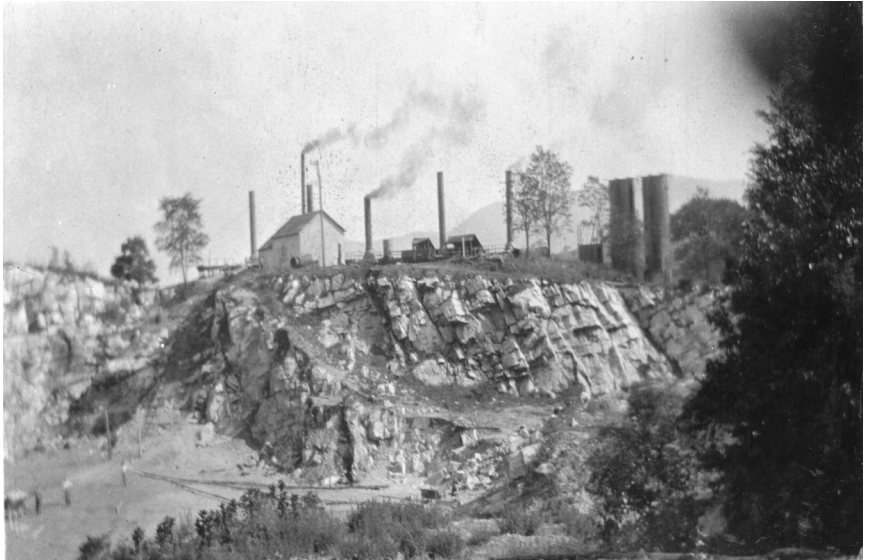
Survivors described a blinding flash followed by a deafening crash. Tons of rock and debris rained down upon the men working below.

Three workers were killed instantly.

George Franklin Hoffman, Jack Raynor, and Hunter Boyd were caught directly in the path of the falling stone. Newspaper accounts reported that they were “literally torn to pieces.”

Reading those words nearly a century later remains sobering.

One aspect of the newspaper coverage particularly struck me. The articles identified some victims as “white” and others as “colored,” reflecting the language of the era. Yet despite the racial distinctions common in 1926 reporting, the accounts described all of the victims with equal dignity and respect. These men worked side by side in one of the Valley's most dangerous industries, and one cannot help but imagine the camaraderie they must have shared.



## The Rescue Effort and Additional Casualties

The bodies of George Hoffman, Jack Raynor, and Hunter Boyd remained covered at the scene while authorities awaited a coroner's inquest. Meanwhile, attention turned to the injured men who had survived the initial blast.

Among the most seriously injured were Cecil Alonzo Rinker and Ashby Mitchell. Though both men were still alive, their injuries were grave. They were carried to a building near the company office while local physicians were summoned. A request was sent to Winchester Memorial Hospital for ambulances to transport the wounded.

Several other workers were also injured, though their wounds were believed to be less severe.

Sadly, word arrived later that evening that Cecil Rinker had succumbed to his injuries at approximately six o'clock.

One particularly poignant passage in the original newspaper account caught my attention:

"One very sad feature of this horrible tragedy is the fact that the father and brother of Mr. Huffman, one of the men who were killed, also met their deaths by disasters in lime quarries, while his mother was burned to death."

I had long known the story of my great-grandmother's death after her clothing caught fire while she was burning leaves. However, I had never heard that both my great-grandfather and a great-uncle had reportedly been killed in quarry accidents. Like so many discoveries that emerge from historical research, that revelation has opened yet another avenue for investigation.

## The Community Responds

The July 26 edition of the Strasburg News provided additional details about the accident and its aftermath. At that time, Ashby Mitchell remained hospitalized in serious condition. He had suffered a fractured skull, a severe back injury, and numerous other injuries. Despite the severity of his condition, physicians initially expressed cautious optimism, reporting that he might recover unless his condition suddenly worsened.

Another injured worker, K. Olin Strosnider, son of Lonas Strosnider, had been unhooking a horse elsewhere in the quarry when he was struck in the chest by flying rock. He suffered broken ribs and a punctured lung but was released from the hospital later that same evening.

The newspaper also revealed more details about what had happened in the moments immediately before the explosion.

As the storm intensified, several workers sought shelter inside the quarry pump house, located directly across from the south wall. Cecil Rinker was reportedly standing in the doorway when the explosion occurred. Massive rocks blasted through the structure, striking him with devastating force.

Others injured inside the pump house included Omer Kremer, Lester Strosnider, P. A. Spinnard, and Tom Mayberry.

Remarkably, several men escaped injury altogether despite being inside the building. Those listed by the newspaper included Calvin Vance, Kenner Mitchell, Arthur Balls, Sid Elliott, and Gus Hill.

The pump house itself was described as completely demolished.

Also destroyed was a small dwelling occupied by Ashby Mitchell while working in the area. Located approximately two hundred yards from the blast site near the railroad tracks, the structure was reduced to rubble.

News of the disaster spread quickly throughout Strasburg and the surrounding communities. Hundreds of residents reportedly traveled to the quarry to witness the aftermath.

According to newspaper accounts, many were astonished by the force of the explosion. Huge quantities of rock and earth had been thrown across nearby fields and roads. One enormous boulder landed directly on the railroad tracks, bending a rail into what was described as a right angle.

## Remembering George Franklin Hoffman

The July 26 article also included obituary notices for the deceased workers. While each man's life deserves remembrance, I hope readers will indulge me in sharing the obituary of my grandfather, George Franklin Hoffman, exactly as it appeared in the newspaper.

*“George Franklin Huffman (sic) was born at Middletown, in Frederick County on September 2, 1878, a son of the late Mr. and Mrs James Huffman of that place. Four members of Mr. Huffman’s family had previously met tragic deaths. His father, James Huffman, was killed in a quarry accident near Strasburg Junction, his brother, the late Roy Huffman, was also killed in a similar accident at the Palmer Lime plant in Oranda, his mother was burned to death while burning leaves at her home in Middletown, and his twin brother choked to death in infancy.*

*Mr. Huffman was married to Miss Anna Boyer, who survives him, and they moved to Strasburg shortly after their marriage. He also leaves to mourn his loss four sons, James, Guy, and Vergil Huffman (Virgil Hoffman), and Charles Hinkins, who was adopted by Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Hinkins some years before the former’s death. One sister, Mrs. Nellie Marker of Hayworth, Illinois also survives.*

*Mr. Huffman was a member of the Middletown Methodist Church although he attended the Christian Church here. He was a kindly man, popular among all his associates, and was well known in fraternal circles, being a member of the local chapter of Jr. O. U. A. M. (Junior Order of United American Mechanics)*

*Mrs. Huffman was prostrated by the news of her husband’s sudden death, and has since been under the care of a physician. She is reported to have rested easily last night and her friends hope that time will deaden the pain caused by the death of husband and father.*

*Funeral services were held on Sunday afternoon at two o’clock from the Christian Church, with one of the largest congregations ever to attend a funeral here crowding the church, and many were unable to gain entrance. Rev. Arthur Wake conducted the service, assisted by Rev. R.M. Wheeler. Interment was in Riverview Cemetery.*

*Members of the Junior Order attended the services in a body, marching on foot in the funeral procession.”*

The obituary offers a fascinating glimpse not only into my grandfather's life but also into the language, customs, and social values of the period. The account of his funeral is particularly striking. The newspaper reported that one of the largest congregations ever assembled for a Strasburg funeral crowded into the Christian Church, while members of the Junior Order of United American Mechanics marched on foot in the funeral procession.

Nearly a century later, those details help us understand the respect and affection the community held for him.

## The Fifth Victim

The tragedy was not yet over.

The August 2 edition of the Strasburg News carried the headline:

"FIFTH BLAST VICTIM PASSED AWAY FRIDAY"

After fighting for his life for more than a week, Ashby Mitchell died in Winchester Memorial Hospital on July 30, 1926.

The newspaper reported that his condition had long been considered nearly hopeless, yet he "clung to life with a most tenacious grip" until the end.

It is difficult not to reflect on what those final days must have been like. Modern medicine was still decades away from many of the treatments we now take for granted. Given the severity of his injuries, his final week was almost certainly a painful ordeal.

Mr. Mitchell's son was at his bedside when he passed away and later accompanied his remains back to the family home near Limeton.

Ashby Mitchell was sixty-five years old and had worked for Powhatan Lime Company for several years. His funeral was held at the Limeton Colored Baptist Church and was reportedly attended by a large gathering of friends and neighbors from both the Front Royal and Strasburg communities. His death brought the final toll of the disaster to five.

## Echoes Across Generations

Nearly a century has passed since lightning struck the south wall of the Powhatan Lime Company quarry, yet the echoes of that day still remain in the Shenandoah Valley.

What began for me as a family story about my grandfather's death became a larger story about the men who worked in the quarries, the families they left behind, and the connections that still bind us together generations later.

The names Hoffman, Mitchell, Raynor, Rinker, Boyd, Kremer, Strosnider, Mayberry, and many others are woven into the history of our communities. In many cases, their descendants still live here today.

Perhaps that is one of the most fascinating aspects of local history. The past is never quite as distant as it seems.

I hope to hear from other descendants who may have family memories, photographs, or stories connected to the 1926 explosion. By sharing those memories, we can help ensure that the lives of these men—and the sacrifices they made while helping build our community—are not forgotten.





PO Box 525  
 Strasburg, VA 22657

## Strasburg Heritage Association

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

### MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

New  Renewal

SHA Membership dues are \$20 per year for an individual, couple, or household. Lifetime membership dues are \$150.

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Questions? Contact Tim Taylor (President) or Ruth Hoffman (Treasurer) at [strasburgheritage@gmail.com](mailto:strasburgheritage@gmail.com).