

Volume 21

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Strasburg, Virginia

NEWSLETTER

strasburgvaheritage.org

President's Message

Tim Taylor

I hope 2021 is going well for everyone because I know 2020 was a year most would like to forget. We are still facing serious challenges due to the impact of COVID as this new year begins, but we continue to provide services to our community. This past year we have shared our newsletters with our membership and thanks to Kathy Kehoe's leadership, our archived newsletters are now available on our website. Thanks to our webmaster, Bill Foster, for his assistance. We were able to provide two \$500 college scholarships to Strasburg High School seniors. We provided monetary support for community meals at St. Paul Lutheran Church. We provided a donation to assist with the purchase of the Sunset Hill School historical marker which was installed in November. Whenever someone purchases a historical building plaque, we pay a portion of the cost. Our traditional ghost tour we have every odd year was converted to an on-demand tour using the izi.travel app/website. The tour is available year round with information on how to access it on our website. Finally, we have started a Podcast Channel where one can go to listen to folk histories, interviews, and information about community events.

Our Annual Membership Meeting will be held on Sunday, February 28 at 2:00 pm virtually. During this meeting, we will act on our slate of Board Members and our Officers. We need at least 10% of our membership to constitute a quorum, so I hope you can join us. I want to thank Nick Racey for his service on our Board as he will be leaving us when his term expires this February. Nick is very knowledgeable about our local history and community and he will be missed. It is nice to know that we can still reach out to him as needed to support our organization. The Nominating Committee's Proposed Slate of Board Members and Officers are listed in this newsletter. We will not have a formal program during this virtual meeting, but we will take the time to highlight our website where you can access resources, information, and our new podcast channel. Information on how to join the meeting virtually is shared in this newsletter.

Like other non-profits, the Strasburg Heritage Association has been impacted financially due to the pandemic. As mentioned earlier, we were unable to have our traditional ghost tour at the end of October last year. We have decided not to have our Holiday Homes Tour this current year due to the unknowns and the year long planning that is involved with this event. So, not being able to have these two primary fundraising events will impact what we are able to provide to the community. We ask everyone to renew their membership by paying their annual dues of \$20 and please consider giving a donation as well. We appreciate any financial support you can provide.

We look forward to another exciting year of sharing the Strasburg Community's culture, heritage, and history. We hope to see you virtually on February 28th at 2:00 pm.

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING FEBRUARY 28, 2021 2:00 p.m.

This meeting is virtual and can be accessed by using the link:

<https://meet.google.com/ddd-cvnx-srt>

Hope you can join us for this important meeting where we conduct our annual business of approving Board members and officers.

Proposed Slate for a Two-Year Board Term (2021 - 2023)**Incumbent Board Members**

Laura Ellen Wade

Kathy Kehoe

Joan Williams

Tim Taylor

Proposed Slate of Officers for a One-Year Term (2021 - 2022)

Tim Taylor - President

Laura Ellen Wade - Vice President

Barbara Adamson - Secretary

JoAnn Guay - Treasurer

New Nominees

Mary Mauck Cottrill graduated from Strasburg High School in 1972. She has made her home in or around Strasburg almost all of her life except for a couple of years in Texas. There she transitioned from Western Union to the U.S. Postal Service, transferring back to Strasburg in 1979. Most of you probably know her from her work at the Strasburg Post Office until her retirement from there in 2003. Around town, she was very active in the United Church of Christ at Fishers Hill for many years. For the last several years, she has been with the Strasburg United Methodist Church, where she and her late husband, Wayne, volunteered much of their time. Several years ago she was a Master Gardener. She is still an active gardener, also involved in genealogy, describing herself as a "perpetual student." Mary loves studying local history. She has contributed to some of the folk histories and is interested in sharing her memories in the future. She is the mother of Andrea Lam Lutz and grandmother of Taylor Enke. She also has step grandchildren and her "adopted grandchildren". Mary currently lives on a hill at Lebanon Church with her three cats, wonderful views of Little North Mountain and Signal Knob Mountain, and wonderful neighbors.. Mary is a welcome addition to our board.

Mary Campbell Redmon was born and raised in Strasburg, graduated from Strasburg High School, received an English Literature degree from Lynchburg College, an Early Childhood Education degree from JMU, and a Masters in Reading from Shenandoah University. Her husband of 45 years, Rick, is a former Strasburg Town Council Member. They have two daughters, Julia who works at the US Department of Education and lives in Reston, and Virginia an eighth grade science teacher in Norfolk. Mary is a retired Shenandoah County teacher who during her 36 year career taught first and third grades, and was a Reading Specialist. She has volunteered in various capacities at the Strasburg Library over the years. The Redmon home on High Street was once on the Heritage Home Tour, and she has served as a homes tour docent, as well as a guide and a spirit on the SHA Ghost Tour. We are happy to welcome Mary to serve on the SHA Board.

Richard E. Cooley is a Strasburg native who is best known for his photography in the Northern Virginia Daily. Rich has been employed by the Daily for almost forty years. He has won numerous awards for his photography and has presented his work not only for the Strasburg Heritage Association, but for the Strasburg Museum Annual Dinner Meeting. Rich is well known and respected throughout the area. He has a lot of knowledge of local history and his photography skills along with his community connections will be a great addition to our board.

A Little Folk History *The School Bus to Sunset Hill*

by

Kathy Kehoe

"When I got on that bus, it was the hallmark part of the day for me."

In a small town, it's all about the kids and the school. Neighborhoods tend to center around the schoolhouse where the community gathers for social functions--where the children go to see each other and families go to meet teachers, coaches and other parents. In the 1960s the population of Strasburg was around 2000. We had two schools then. One was the elementary school for grades 1 through 7, the building where my mother had attended both elementary and high school, and the other was the new high school that was built in 1959, not long before I started first grade. But until 1964, there was also another school in our hometown. It was a one room elementary school (later two rooms) where one teacher taught all grades 1 through 7. This was the segregated school for children of color. They were not allowed to attend the public schools that were for all the other kids. And if they wanted to attend high school they had to travel to Winchester where the area African-



American children attended. (Douglas High School) A lot of townspeople never entered Sunset Hill School, many never thought about it, or talked about it or even knew about it. But it was the center of life for many families of color. Some of us may not remember that Sunset Hill School is part of our town history but together, our citizens, the Strasburg Museum, the Strasburg Heritage Association and The Queen Street/Sunset Hill School Alumni, have begun to preserve and share that history. Students who transferred from Sunset Hill to Strasburg Elementary and High Schools are now over sixty. As a white 4th grader taking everything in stride, all I remember is that the kids from Sunset Hill were just new kids. Maybe in my nine year old mind, I thought of them as just having been going to some other school, like the Fort Valley kids or other rural schools. On that first day of 4th grade, the teacher had assigned us seats, in alphabetical order. I was a "C" so I found my name in the front and sat down. When the bell rang, the teacher said to some kids in the back to come forward to their seats and when I turned around, there were three new kids in the back. They were "A's" and "C's" so alphabetically, their desks were up front. It was years before I realized or thought about what those new kids were feeling on that very important day, facing a new, different and much bigger school than they had ever known. I think though, that when children go to school together, they form bonds that can't be forged otherwise. We were all just kids growing up in the same small town, only until now we were separated. We didn't quite realize then that we were history in the making. When Sunset Hill School closed, those students were educated in different halls and different classrooms along with all of Strasburg's children. But that two room schoolhouse of their childhood remained in their hearts.

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It was a hot summer day at the Strasburg Town Park when former students of the Sunset Hill School, members of the Town Council, board members of the Strasburg Heritage Association, special guests Stanley Dellinger and Glenn Proctor, and others gathered to talk about Sunset School and the integration to the Strasburg Elementary and High schools. Marquetta Mitchell spoke and read from the history (reprinted here) that she authored.

Marquetta remembered she started 8th grade at Strasburg High School. (note: edited from 2012). She remembers feeling apprehensive because of the recent turmoil when Warren County integrated and the violence and protests that were in the nightly news. Marquetta attributes much of the easier transition at Strasburg to two people. One was Stanley Dellinger, who was Principal of Strasburg High School at that time, because Mr. Dellinger kept the media out of the schools. The other person was Coach Glenn Proctor, who checked on her frequently to reassure her and to ask if everything was ok. Others at the reunion remembered how Coach Proctor treated all his players equally. There were two schools in their athletic district who would not allow Strasburg's black teammates to play on their fields at "away" games. Coach Proctor soon managed to change that, so the district teams that Strasburg played no longer included those two schools. Ray Alsberry, a past student of Sunset Hill and Strasburg High, remembered how he played in an integrated band called "The Sinners of Soul" at the Saturday night teen dances. Here too, under the watchful eye of chaperone Marie Williams, we made progress in social justice in a way that only small towns could do. — Kathy Kehoe

Excerpts from Marquetta's "Queen Street-Sunset Hill Schools 1875-1965.

This is written especially for 'Our Children':

"A long time ago, almost one hundred and forty years ago on a cold winter day on January 19, 1875, Captain John Grabill made a visit to a very special school..... The Queen Street School was a special place. It was the first and only school for black children in Strasburg at the time. During that time, white children and black children were not allowed to go to school together. The Queen Street School was so special that some black families traveled a long way to move to Strasburg so that their children could go to school there. There weren't many schools for black children in those days but most black families believed that going to school and getting an education was very, very important. So they worked hard to get their children to school." "...on October 28 in 1929, there were many sad people in Strasburg. Queen Street School burned down. We don't know what happened but thank goodness, a special group of black people called the "Elks" invited the black children and their teachers to their meeting hall to have classes until the new school was built. It was very important to all of the parents that their children get a very good education, so building the new school started right away! Sunset Hill School, a one room school house for grades one through seven, was built on a very high hill on what is now C Street today. It was a great place to bring your sled to go sleigh riding for recess in the winter or building snow caves and ramps. When there was no snow, students played hopscotch, marbles, football, jump rope, baseball and other games during recess. There was one recess in the morning and one in the afternoon. Because most of the students lived nearby, they walked to and from school every day and sometimes home for lunch. The toilets and water fountain were built outside. A big pot-bellied stove heated the one room schoolhouse. Often, some of the students had to get up early to go to school to start the fire in the stove. Many of the school supplies that were used were thrown away from other schools; even simple supplies like chalk. There was a large black-board with the teacher's desk in front of it. In front of the teacher's desk were very straight rows of desks and chairs for all of the students. School was started with prayer, the Pledge of Allegiance and "Lift every voice and sing". Sometimes, students would sing a special song called "The Hokie Pokie" which was a good warm up song on a cold winter day because students could dance to the "Hokie Pokie" song too! In the 1960s, probably about thirty years after Sunset Hill School was built, another classroom was added and students were so happy that the bathrooms and water fountain were moved inside! Students didn't have to worry anymore about the water fountain freezing up on the outside in the wintertime or going to the bathroom outside when it was cold!"

"Most of the teachers at Queen Street and Sunset Hill Schools came from other places in Virginia or other states. During the school year the teachers, who were black, lived with black families and attended the churches and activities in the black community of Strasburg. During the summer breaks and some holidays, they usually went back to their own homes. It was a real honor for the special students who were invited to go home with one of the teachers to visit with their family. Until the 1960s, one teacher had to teach all of the grades. Sometimes the teachers would ask some of the students to help. Students learned how to teach other students as early as in elementary school. It was important that students behaved very well in school because if they didn't, they knew that when they got home, that they were in trouble if they did not behave or were disrespectful in school. Most times, if a student misbehaved in school, the parents knew about it before they got home. The parents and the teachers talked very often about how the children were doing in school and worked together to make sure that the children were getting a good education."

"Almost eighty years after Mr. John Grabill visited Queen Street School a very important law was passed that said that black children and white children could begin to go to school together (Brown vs. Board of Education in 1954). Eleven years after this law was passed, Sunset Hill School was closed in 1965 and black children and white children in Strasburg began to go to school together.



The story of Queen Street-Sunset Hill Schools is a very special story to remember. These schools are good examples of how parents, teachers, members of the community worked even harder, no matter the circumstances to help student get a good education so that they would learn to do their best to take care of themselves, their families and the communities where they live. These are some of the most important things that we all learn to do in life."

Marquetta tells us in another speech in November 2020, that "The First African American living exhibit for Strasburg and surrounding area is at the Strasburg Museum. The exhibit is named a "living exhibit" because of the lack of information about the African-American Schools as we continue to search for new information to add to the history that we have researched and documented already. As uncomfortable as it was for many of us, Strasburg began to acknowledge and embrace the history of African-Americans in segregated Strasburg." The Strasburg Museum has been closed due to the pandemic, and is closed for the winter months, but when it opens again, this exhibit is ready to view. Marquetta tells us that "When Sunset Hill Elementary School was finally closed in 1965, its history was barely recognized as having existed. In October 2008, the Strasburg Museum board approached Marquetta Mitchell to help the Museum begin to exhibit African-American History from Strasburg. There was no African-American history in the museum at that time and tourists were curious." Museum board members Marie Spence and Gloria Stickley worked with Marquetta to display the exhibit. "At that point," said Marquetta, "Willie and I began to form a group of alumni to resurrect the rich history and to "Tell the story" that was long lost. (Marquetta is referring to her husband Wilbert Mitchell, an alumni and also the first black male that attended Strasburg High School.) The rest is history

For more than 12 years, The Queen Street Sunset Hill Alumni has partnered with the Strasburg community to resurrect this history and to "Tell the Story"

Another project our community has been working on is a historic sign for the Sunset Hill School. From Marquette's November speech: "During the 2018-2019 School year our Strasburg Middle School students pursued a landmark project for the Sunset Hill Elementary School. An application was proposed for a landmark designation to the Department of Historic Resources! On June 18, 2020, the Department approved the marker. On November 26, 2019, The Queen Street Sunset Hill School Alumni finalized and sent an application to Propose Placement of a New Virginia Historical Highway Marker for Strasburg, Virginia; Shenandoah County. The marker was proposed to be placed in front of Sunset Hill Elementary School. While Queen Street School and Sunset Hill School existed, Strasburg African-American families fought for better facilities as the schools' physical buildings and educational resources were substandard, inadequate and often described as deplorable. As Virginia was considered a massive resistant state, Shenandoah County considered building another "colored school" in 1962 after Brown vs Board of Education outlawed segregation in 1954." But integration was accomplished at the beginning of the 1964-65 school year when all of Strasburg's children attended the same public schools.



A dedication ceremony for the historic sign was postponed because of the COVID-19 pandemic, but on a beautiful fall day in November of 2020, in Strasburg's Market Square, Marquette again led an outdoor program, this time celebrating that designation. The crowd gathered on the grass at the Strasburg Market Square was asked to wear a mask (only two people were seen in the crowd not wearing masks) and to maintain social distancing as the covid-19 pandemic was still spreading.



Marquette spoke of "Acknowledging the Truth....Telling the Truth...Telling the Story and then...Embracing the truth.....can be very hard...". Marquette said, "Because, as my grandmother used to say....'Sometimes the truth can be good, bad, ugly or indifferent.' But when we do talk the truth, somehow, it begins to clear the air so that we can begin to risk having conversations; so that we can begin to embrace our differences; and so that we may just begin to recognize

more of what we just might have in common. The story that we tell is a very hard story to share. It includes tears of sadness, anger and tears of joy, but we are able to tell the story only with the help of God. We realize that we have gathered strength to tell the story because we have come this far only by faith.....leaning on the Lord. We hope that this dedication and the telling of 'The Story' has encouraged all of us to embrace the story and begin to call it 'Our Story', because all of us here today now own a piece of 'The Story'."



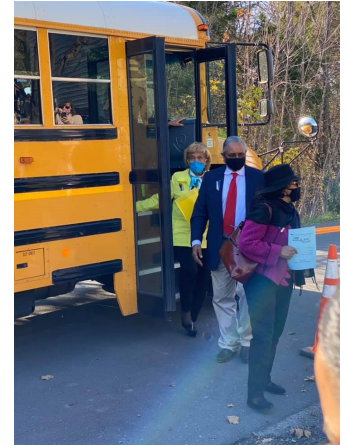
During the program on November 14th, 2020, former students of Sunset Hill School were introduced. Alumni and Pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church in Millwood, Rev. Carter Alsberry led the opening prayer. Rev. Alsberry graduated 7th grade from Sunset Hill and in 1960, he graduated from the Douglas High School in Winchester. He remembers how he and Frank Allen Jackson would clean up Sunset Hill after class. "We were a close knit group" he recalls.

Rochella Strother was also a Sunset Hill student. All nine of her siblings went to Sunset Hill for the first 7 years. "We came home for lunch every day since we lived so close to the school on Sunset Hill. The older boys would come to school early to make the fires. Sometimes it would still be cold when we got there in the winter." Rochella and Sunset Hill student Elizabeth Alsberry can be heard on the Strasburg Heritage Association website (www.strasburgvaheritage.org) talking about Sunset Hill: "From Sunset Hill to Douglas High (Segregation in Education with Mrs. Elizabeth Alsberry and Mrs. Rochella Strother)". Rochella describes how "we drank water from the same dipper" from the water bucket. If you misbehaved, she tells us, "I never had to do it" but one of their teachers would punish misbehavior by making the student move the water from a bucket to an empty bucket with a teaspoon. Rochella has fond memories of Sunset Hill, "it was like one big family, we were all in the same room". Back then, Strasburg had a May Day parade and all the girls would wear white dresses. "All the schools participated" said Rochella. Sunset Hill School was the last entry of the parade, walking behind the bicycles and the horses. "It always stuck out in my mind as very unpleasant" said Rochella, "Even if the horses had an accident, we had to walk behind them and that was embarrassing. But as for now, it's no way I would change my color for a million dollars--with the heritage--and a lot of people ask me this one question--'Do you hate people for it?' and I told them, 'We don't have time to hate anybody for anything, we were just trying to get a good education to make a good life for ourselves'." In the same video, Elizabeth Alsberry remarks that the older boys had to go early to build the fire and the boys had to bring the coal in and "keep the fire going during the day". They alternated their 7th grade graduations between the two African-American churches in town: the Methodist and Baptist. "If you misbehaved, you had your hand spanked. When we had to have chalk, the older boys would have to go to the high school and get chalk and it wasn't a box of chalk, you got a couple pieces of chalk that was left over. Never new books, usually books with backs off".

Strasburg native Hope Henry Brim wrote on the Sunset Hill Facebook page after attending the Dedication that "I was so honored, humbled, and happy to attend the ceremony dedicating the historical highway marker for the Sunset Hill Segregated School.... what a historical "documentation" for future generations!! My life was changed in the fifth grade (integration) in 1964---friendships and experiences with my African-American schoolmates have enriched and continue to enrich my life. These people I would never have known!!"



During the November dedication program, Marquetta spoke about how Shenandoah County did not provide bus transportation to Sunset Hill. All students walked to school. There was one school bus provided to take the high school students to Winchester to the Douglas High School. That bus picked up in Woodstock and Strasburg and returned students to their homes after class. But there was never a bus ride from their homes to their elementary school. County school superintendent Mark Johnston also spoke at the program. He point-

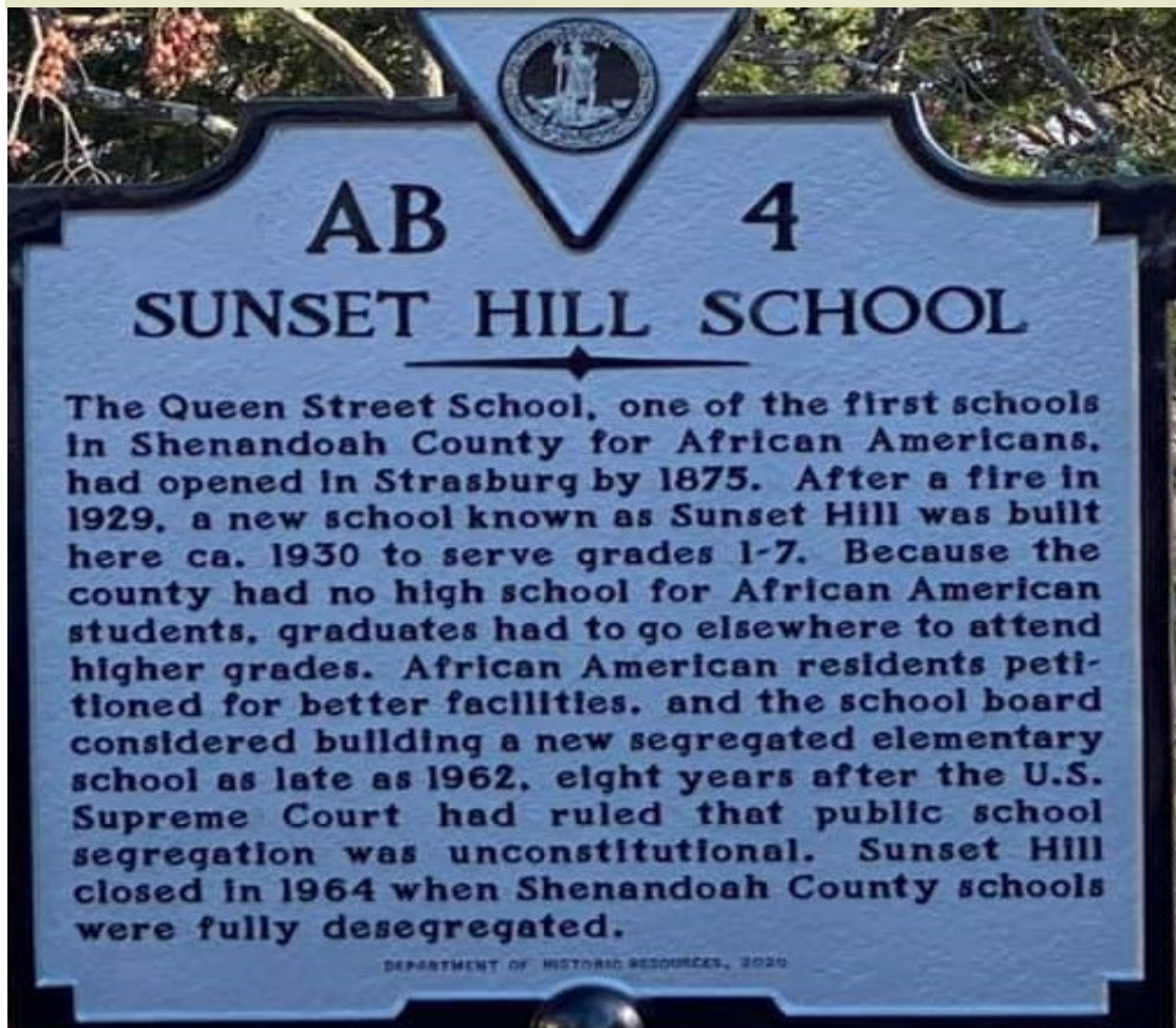


ed out the yellow school bus in the town office parking lot, waiting to take the alumni, now all in their 60s, 70s or 80s, for the first time ever, to Sunset Hill Elementary School. At the end of a program on that beautiful fall day during a pandemic, the "students" wore their masks onto that yellow county school bus, to attend the unveiling of the historic sign placed in front of their childhood school of long ago. The rest of us stood on the sidewalks and waved and cheered as the bus pulled out of the town office and headed towards Branch Street. Rochella put her window down to wave at Barbara Adamson and me. We were all touched. Marquetta said she was in tears on that bus too. "Those who weren't showing their tears, I could feel their tears" she said. "People were loving each other and understanding each other and people shed tears."

Marquetta went on to say, "When I got on that bus, it was the hallmark part of the day for me. That's when I knew we'd all gotten together to accomplish what we needed to accomplish. It was a Godly day for Strasburg,"



Field Trip to the Caverns



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

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

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