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Strasburg Heritage

a publication of the *Strasburg Heritage Society*



Home Profile

From the Heritage Society Collection

Fountain for Man and Beast

Then and Now Photos

A Message from the Editor



Welcome to the first issue of *Strasburg Heritage* magazine! This new publication is produced by the Strasburg Heritage Society *for the residents of Strasburg*. In producing this magazine, the Heritage Society aspires to promote a sense of community and pride in our town. The articles featured here aim to help our neighbors to know and appreciate the story of the place in which we live.

There are many families who have lived in Strasburg for generations. These families probably already know much of the story. My family is not one of them. We moved here in 2012 when my job search brought me to the area. I could see that Strasburg was a pretty town, but I didn't really know much about it.

After living in modern houses for all of our lives, my wife and I took a chance and bought a house on East Main St., which had been built of logs around 1797 (the logs are hidden behind siding now). Of course, we had many questions about the history of our home. With the help of our new neighbors, we began to piece together some of the story. Our neighbors also introduced us to the Heritage Society.

Since its inception in 1972, the Strasburg Heritage Society has worked to preserve and interpret the rich history of our town. The Society has built an archive containing photographs, furniture,

artifacts, documents and other historic items of Strasburg. The Society is actively working to restore three historic properties on Decatur Street, with a vision to provide spaces to display its collections and to interact with the community.

While work is proceeding on these initiatives, the membership is anxious to reach out to the community now. With this magazine, we hope to share the Society's resources, knowledge and enthusiasm.

So, for example, in each issue, you will find a regular feature called "From the Collection." In that column, we'll provide glimpses of interesting items from the Society's archives.

You may have heard that the Heritage Society presents free monthly lectures on local history. But if you're like me, life can get in the way of attending. When I do go, I'm always surprised by the things that I learn! For example, a

recent lecture told the story of the fountain that once occupied the intersection of Main and Decatur Streets. Town resident Fred Lauzus researched the fountain's history and presented a fascinating and entertaining lecture. For those who missed it, he has captured the essentials of this lecture in an article appearing in this issue.

We'll also be bringing stories from the past, inside looks at some historic homes, surprising history, and special interest stories.

Initially, the magazine will be published twice a year. The Heritage Society will provide it free of charge to all households in Strasburg Borough. Additional copies will be offered for sale in stores around town. Please click the "contact" link at: **strasburgheritagesociety.org** to let us know how you like the magazine, and let us know what else you would like to see.

Enjoy!

Joe Deevy



From the Collection

by Tom Lainhoff



Portrait of Mary Rowe Groff

The photograph at top left is a portrait of Mary Rowe Groff (1888-1965). For her portrait, she has selected a fashionable cape and gloves, and she has chosen to use a favored “Windsor” chair as a prop.

When the photograph was taken, the chair was already well over 100 years old. It was made locally in the late 18th century. This chair was a treasured heirloom that was passed down through the Groff family, finally to Mary’s nephew John.

John was a long-time member of the Strasburg Heritage Society who lived on a farm a few miles east of the borough. John was predeceased by his wife Jean, and had no children. After the death of his mother, Serena, he shared the farm with a multitude of cats. In his will, he bequeathed a number of items to the Society, including this fine Windsor chair.

The Windsor chair form originated in England. They first appeared in the American colonies in Philadelphia, in 1730. As the design was introduced and reproduced in other regions, local craftsmen developed their own distinct style variations.

The Society’s chair can be dated to the period of 1775 to 1785¹. It is called a “sack-back” type, as defined by its bent bow back. The chair displays features that were favored by 18th century Lancaster County craftsmen of German descent. For example, the seat is wider and has a different shape than a contemporary Philadelphia chair. The construction of the carved “knuckles” at the front of the arms is also distinctive.



The ornate lathe-turned components such as legs, stretchers, and arm supports display characteristics of ladderback chairs made by Pennsylvania German craftsmen. Scored lines incised around the lathe-turned components provide an appealing decorative element.

The seat of a Windsor chair was the key to the chair’s strength and lightness. The legs and back were fitted into holes in the seat, and the slender components were assembled in a way that did not rely on glue or nails.

Construction methods and strength demanded that different species of wood were used for the seat, the legs, and the back. Windsor chairs were typically painted to produce a unified coloring; green was the traditional color. Traces of the original green paint remain on the Groff chair, although most of the paint is gone.

The Heritage Society is working to restore the Shroy House on S. Decatur St. The Groff chair will be displayed there, as is fitting, since the house and the chair date from the same period.



Sack-back Windsor armchair, Lancaster County region, 1775-85. Gift of the Estate of John Groff

¹ For a virtually identical chair see Fig. 3-61 in *American Windsor Chairs* by Nancy Goyne Evans, Hudson Hills Press, New York, 1996. ¶



Strasburg Home Profile



313 Miller Street

photos of restoration by Joe Hunt
photos of finished home by Joe Deevy

So much of the Strasburg's appeal comes from its historic homes. The design of the houses conveys the realities of life and the tastes of the time when they were built. The details of their construction exhibit the workmanship and labor invested to craft them. And we can recall or imagine the many family stories that played out within their walls over the years.

But the seasons, delayed maintenance, modifications, and decay all take their toll, so how did so many historic homes manage to survive in Strasburg? A group of three men made a significant contribution. In 2004, Tony D'Alessandro, George Desmond, and Harold Wiker decided to take action. They formed a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization called Strasburg Restoration & Preservation, Inc. (SR&P). Tony explains "We didn't see the town turning around without at least a nucleus of houses that would attract people who would love them and become part of the town. And so that was the whole motivating thing."

As a non-profit, SR&P was able to obtain grants to help fund their work. They also invested their own money, with the hope of recovering it at the end of each project. From approximately 2003 through 2010, they were able to restore six homes.

Tony describes SR&P's approach to restorations as "in the spirit of." He explains, "We weren't going to be hand hewing anything. But the idea was to save as much of the original fabric as we could, and make [the houses] livable and useful to people."

After completing their first three houses, the next opportunity was quick to arise. The house and barn at 313 Miller St. had slid into disrepair. The owners, realizing that the necessary renovations were beyond their means, looked to the Preservation Trust of Lancaster Co. for help. The trust in turn, referred them to SR&P, who successfully negotiated to purchase the property.

The house had been built in the late 18th or early 19th century as a 1½ story typical German log home, with a large central fireplace. In the 1840s, the house was enlarged to 2 stories by literally raising the original roof. The walls were extended upward by framing new walls on top of the existing logs. The central fire-place was removed, replaced by interior chimneys on the east and west end walls.



above: 313 Miller St. house, prior to restoration work
below: Peeling away the stucco on the west side of the house



above: The barn, prior to restoration
below: "barn raising" – rebuilding the foundation



By the time SR&P acquired the house, many original features had been obscured. The exterior was covered by stucco. The interior floor plan had been

changed over the years, so it was not possible to discern the original layout. The front half of the 1st floor was one big room, with linoleum flooring and sheet paneling on the walls.

Fortunately, as the work began and the layers were peeled away, many original features were found, intact. For example, removing the stucco revealed features from the 1840s including the clapboard siding and windows still adorned with their original trim. A newer external chimney on the east wall was removed, revealing a window that had been covered. Removing paneling from an interior wall exposed a doorway between rooms. The trim surrounding this doorway became the model for restoring trim throughout the house to an authentic style.

Some original features had gone missing, and were replaced. A photo from around 1940 provided the detail needed to recreate the shutters and roof over-hang on the gable ends. Other features, like the room layout, were reinvented in a way that created a comfortable living space, consistent with the period feel.



While work proceeded on the house, the barn restoration was underway simultaneously. Originally a tobacco barn, it had been enlarged in the early 20th century, probably using material from an older barn on the property. The addition was poorly constructed, and had deteriorated beyond salvage. So the addition was removed, returning the barn to its original configuration. The barn's foundation had also deteriorated badly, so the entire barn was lifted, and a new foundation was built beneath it.

The restoration project was completed at the end of 2006, just

as real estate prices began to slide into what became the housing market crash. The property remained on the market until it was spotted by Ed and Lorena Jones in 2011.

Ed explains, "We really liked the house the first time we drove by. When we finally made an appointment to see the inside of the house, we were very surprised to find it was exactly what we wanted: the look of a charming old home but with a new kitchen, new bath-rooms, all new plumbing and electrical systems. The wash house and the large barn were also a big draw for me personally. Strasburg is such a quaint and friendly town and we have so many great neighbors. We are so lucky to be living here. SR&P did a super job on this property."

The Jones's restored house appears on the front cover of this issue. They have decorated the home beautifully, as the photos show. *Strasburg Heritage* magazine thanks Ed and Lorena for opening their house for this article, and also thanks Tony D'Alessandro for providing the history of the property and the details of the restoration.





The Fountain in Center Square

Fred Lauzus

Many Strasburg residents have heard about or have seen pictures of a fountain that once stood in center square. While many have known of its existence, most haven't given it much thought beyond that.

In the late 19th century, waterborne diseases like cholera and dysentery were still common and community leaders were tasked with securing safe water sources. In 1898, Strasburg Borough's water system was created to meet this need. Many public drinking fountains were set up by temperance societies as an alternative to beer. In 1899, the Strasburg chapter of the Women's Christian Temperance Union discussed placing a drinking fountain at the square to be paid for by subscription. In early 1900, they submitted their proposal to the town council, and in a special meeting it was unanimously approved.



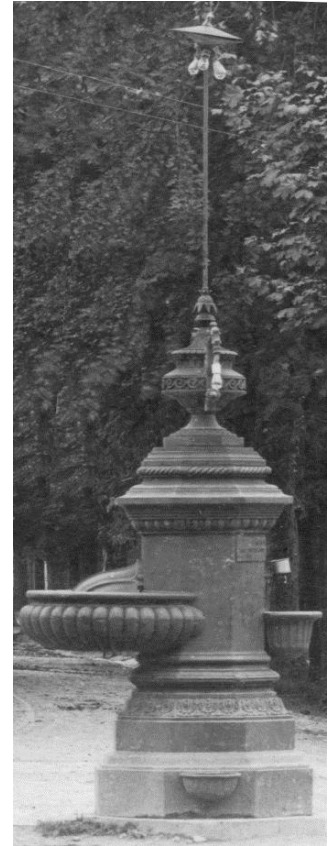
The fountain was dedicated on June 29th of 1900. A platform was erected for the dedication on the southeast corner of the square. There was great fanfare and celebration with speeches given, poetry reading, music and singing.

The fountain was made of cast iron weighing 2,500 pounds and rested on a limestone slab located in the middle of the intersection of Decatur and Main Streets. It was topped by a lamp and came to a total height of 13 feet. It is estimated the fountain cost approximately \$700, which equals about \$20,000 today.

The type of fountain was known as a "man and beast" fountain. There was a basin on the west face for humans, which was fed by a spigot. In some photo's a cup can be seen hanging on the spigot. A dedication plate was located above the spigot that read: "Erected by the efforts of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union". A larger basin was located on the east face of the fountain for horses, and a smaller basin at the bottom of the north face for dogs. The water level of the horse basin was regulated by a float valve. The dog basin was filled by the overflow from the other basins.

The fountain incorporated many decorative features and was topped by an ornate capped urn from which some of Strasburg's first electric lights were suspended.

In 1902, the trolley line was extended through the square. The tracks were laid in a curve around the south of the fountain.



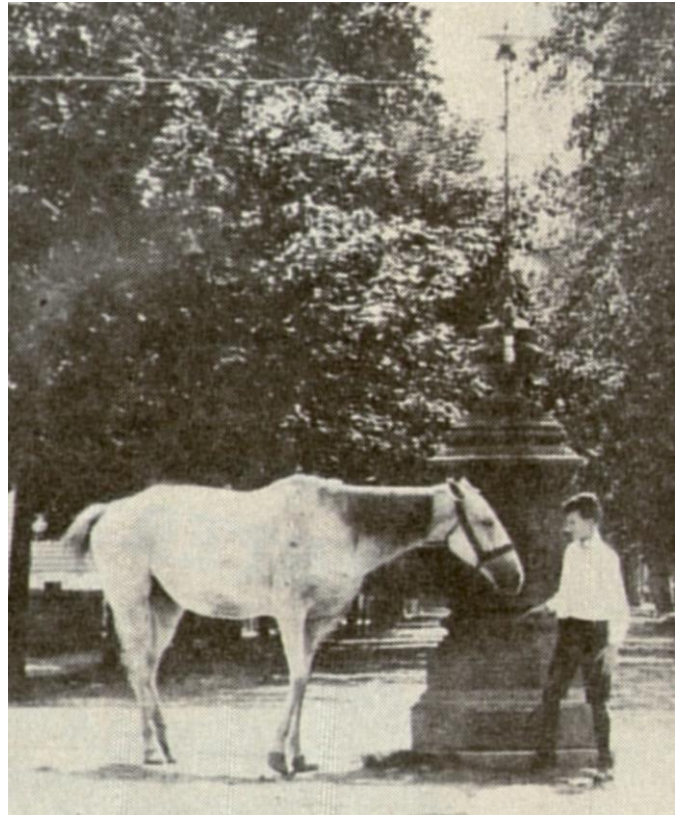


It is estimated that between September 1919 and September 1920 the fountain was damaged in a collision with a vehicle, after which it was no longer in service as a fountain.

In 1922 the trolley tracks were in the process of being re-laid through Strasburg. It was decided that the fountain be removed so that the track could be laid straight through the Square to improve the general flow of traffic.



In the base of the fountain was found a zinc box containing the subscription books and other data. Chester Ranck and his father Enos hauled the fountain away. It is believed the fountain's final resting place is in the former Ranck's quarry, which was then being used as a dump.



The fountain occupied center square for over 22 years. It was prominent in many photographs of the period and featured in many postcards. It served the community by providing safe water to any traveler, man and beast, passing through the square. It stood witness to the advent of running water, the trolley, electric light and the automobile. It was decorated for special occasions. It stood by while our troops left to fight in the Great War and it was there to greet them when they returned.

What was once viewed as a thing of beauty and an asset to the community was later viewed only as a hazard to navigation.



The fountain, after being greeted with great fanfare, was unceremoniously removed and hauled away to destinations unknown.




Then and Now

These photos were taken on East Main St., looking to the west, toward Decatur St. The top photo shows a work crew building tracks for the trolley line through town in 1902. Today, 117 years later, the dirt road and trolley tracks have been replaced by blacktop. The trolley has been replaced by automobiles. But the horse and buggy are still a familiar sight!

Notice that the house in the foreground on the left was covered by wood clapboard siding in 1902. In recent years, the siding has been removed, revealing the house's log construction. Today, you can see how that house looked in the 18th century, another 117 years *before* the trolley came to town!



E Main St 1902



If you're interested in connecting with your neighbors, building friendships, learning about our town, and helping to preserve its history, you might want to check out the Heritage Society. Even if "dusty old history" is not your thing, there's a lot to do and learn!

The Society always needs people to help put on the Holiday Home Tour, Garden Tour, and other events. We sorely need help in expanding the Society's on-line presence. There is a need to organize & catalog the Society's archives to make them accessible. We need help to restore and maintain the properties on Decatur Street. And, if you have writing or publishing talent, I encourage you to contribute to this magazine! If you're not a writer, but would like to contribute, contact us, and somebody will help to get your article published!

If any of this catches your interest and you want to learn more, please contact the Society through the website at:
strasburgheritagesociety.org.