

Spring/Summer 2021

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Strasburg Heritage

Journal of the Strasburg Heritage Society



Ford Model A
Ranck House

Massasoit Hall
John L. Shroy Song

A message from the Editor

Joe Deery



I have to say that I'm pretty excited about this issue. A lot of friendly people have helped me and I've been surprised by what I've learned.

Massasoit Hall has always been a bit mysterious to me, and when I started researching it, I didn't know what I would find. It was like opening a dusty old chest in an attic, that hadn't been touched in ages. Inside there were fascinating layers to discover, reaching back through generations. As a center of social activity, Massasoit Hall's history tells much about the things that bound this tight-knit community together.

The stories about Massasoit Hall were too numerous to fit in one issue of this magazine, so consider this installment to be an introduction. You can look forward to additional stories about it in the future.

I wish I could have been there in the 1850s to see the genesis of the idea to build Massasoit Hall. Somehow, conversations about social and intellectual development solidified into the real action needed to raise a substantial sum of

money, construct the building, and operate it. This was not the action of government or a church—it was true civic engagement. That didn't happen in most towns, but Strasburg was blessed with forward thinking people who conversed and worked together for the common good.

In learning about the Ranck house and family, I quickly came to realize that Milton Ranck also placed great value on civic engagement. Throughout his entire life, he made himself available to work for the betterment of Strasburg.

No doubt, the work of the Massasoit Hall founders and of Mr. Ranck underpin the hospitable community that we still enjoy today. I hope that their stories can help us begin to "connect the dots" to see how civic engagement leads to lasting results. Perhaps their stories will help inspire a new era of community involvement.

In this issue, a piece called "From the Community" fills in for our regular "From the Collection" column, and showcases the amazing car owned by John Deckman. John was inspired to share his story after reading in the Fall/Winter issue about the J. M. Hagans car dealership, where his car was originally sold in 1930! We are always interested to hear from readers, many of whom have long family histories in Strasburg. If you have something to share, be sure to contact us through strasburgheritagesociety.org!

A collage of four photographs showing the exterior and interior of the Shear Fade Barber Shop. The top-left photo shows the storefront with a woman standing in the doorway. The top-right photo shows a woman holding large blue scissors. The bottom-left photo shows the interior with barber chairs and a counter. The bottom-right photo shows the storefront at night.

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From the Community: **Permanent Resident: 1930 Ford Model A**

by Joshua Stauffer

Tucked away in a garage on North Decatur Street is a car that has, amazingly, lived its entire 90+ year life in Strasburg. John L. Ranck† purchased this 1930 Ford Model A coupe new from the J. M. Hagans & Son dealership, located on Center Square in the old “Washington House” building. In 1957, Mr. Ranck sold the car to then 15 year old John Deckman, who has now owned it for 64 years. This very car was once a common sight around town. Today, when it occasionally roams the familiar streets of Strasburg, it authentically brings a bygone era back to life.

John Deckman’s well-preserved car provides a glimpse of a ubiquitous and economical automotive design from the early years of the Great Depression. The Model A was the successor to Ford’s very famous and very successful Model T. The Model T was manufactured from 1908 to 1927 and sold 15 million units over that span. By the late 1920’s however, Ford was facing strong competition from other manufacturers and Henry Ford’s son Edsel began advocating for change. After considerable foot-dragging, Henry realized the merit of his son’s counsel, and they began the process of transitioning their focus to the Model A. By the end of 1927 the new model was finally unveiled to much public interest.

The Model A featured numerous changes from the Model T including a more sculpted body, increased horsepower, an electric starter, and mechanically activated drum brakes. The Model A also came in a variety of colors, which is notable because the Model T, for much of its production, was only available in one color: black. It came in a variety of body styles, from the basic standard coupe to the larger, more luxurious Fordor Town Sedan. Prices for



the A ranged from \$400 to \$1200 depending on the body style and trim level. More than 4.8 million Model A cars were produced from 1928 to 1931, before being succeeded by the Model B and Model 18

Deckman’s Model A is a very nice example of the 1930 45B standard coupe, which Ford listed for \$495. Inside, it has one small bench seat, to accommodate two adults. Ford provided a jack and tools, which were stored under the seat. Two more adults can ride outside in the rear rumble seat. The car is powered by a “flathead” 4-cylinder engine producing 40 horsepower, and has a three-speed manual transmission. Standard lighting included only one tail/brake light, and the Model A did not come equipped with turn signals. Instead the driver had to use hand gestures to indicate directional changes.

When talking to an automotive enthusiast about a car, you are sure to hear them pick out design details that identify the year, trim level, or other peculiarities that make it unique. During the four years that Ford produced the Model A, they introduced small design changes that could easily go unnoticed by the average observer. To the trained eye, these details can be used to date the car. Features of John’s car that date it to the early months of 1930 include the tall radiator and surrounding brightly-polished “shell”, the headlight lenses, and the instrument cluster on the dash.

† John L. Ranck was apparently not related to the Ranck family that lived in the home on East Main Street that is featured in this issue.

Living at 4 North Jackson Street, young John Deckman was familiar with the car owned by his neighbor John Ranck, four doors away at house number 12. Deckman remembers seeing Mr. Ranck driving the Ford around town. Ranck was always accompanied by his white dog "Button," who rode on the small shelf at the back of the seat, with his body filling the rear window. Deckman purchased the car from Mr. Ranck for \$25.00. Many memories from his young adult years are connected to the car.

John Deckman took his driver's test in the Model A and drove it regularly to the then new Lampeter-Strasburg High School. It is easy to envision him driving the car east on Village Road after school in the spring of 1958 or 1959. Maybe he had a friend in the passenger seat and another in the open air rumble seat in the rear, as they crossed the Pequea Creek on their way to Strasburg. As they traveled the stretch of road from the Pequea towards Herr Mill on the corner, cool, dense air would have rushed by them filled with the saturated floral-green scents of the season.

With the good, sometimes comes the bad, and some of Deckman's



*A young John Deckman with his Ford Model A, in the N. Decatur St. driveway
(Photo provided by John Deckman)*

earliest automotive misadventures are associated with the car as well. He remembers as a young driver running off Hartman Bridge Road and into a ditch, with his mother in the passenger seat. Fortunately neither was hurt and Mom did not revoke his driving privileges.

A couple of years later, Deckman was returning to his home from Wertz's Service Station on Main Street, which, at that time, was the local hangout for car enthusiasts. Approaching his home on North Decatur Street, John used a hand signal to indicate that he was about to turn right into his driveway.

Unfortunately, the driver in the following car was confused by the hand signals, thinking that John was indicating a left turn. The driver attempted to pass the Model A on the right, and rammed its passenger side, pushing it off the road and causing considerable damage. This particular incident may have been a sign of things to come as the design of the A aged and newer drivers were increasingly unsure how to relate to it on the road.

The times were a-changin' in the 1960's and eventually the Model A was relegated to a corner of Deckman's garage on North Decatur St. Automotive design was making contemporary cars larger and faster than ever before, and Deckman began to feel out of place driving the car in the changing environment. Other drivers, with places to be and people to see, did not appreciate slower speeds of the older vehicle, and he felt it was viewed as a nuisance when on the road. He himself moved on to driving other vehicles regularly, but kept his first car safely tucked away over the next couple decades.

Deckman continued to work periodically on the car, and eventually completed a restoration that was faithful to the car's original build. John completed much of the work himself, but also received help from friends like Gene

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Renninger, Jim Keller, and Ora Landis. He remembers traveling to the Ford Motor plant in New Jersey to pick up a replacement engine after cracking the block with an over-tightened bolt. John had body damage repaired, and the car was repainted in its original colors; that paint job remains today. The white pinstripe accents are identical to the original design. The only notable departure from the original build are the white sidewall tires, which originally would have been black.

John Deckman has moved to a new home, but it is just a few minutes walk to his previous home on North Decatur, where his son Michael now lives. Michael keeps the Model A in the garage where it has spent much of its life. Having travelled 78,000 miles, the car is now having an easy retirement, brought out occasionally for drives. John especially enjoys driving it in Strasburg's Memorial Day parade and other similar special events. He says that today, unlike in the 60's, the car is treated with much fascination and respect on the road. Most people who come across the car very much enjoy seeing it out and about.

The Model A feels most comfortable cruising at around 32-35 miles per hour, Deckman says. In this he points out that it is perfect for "putting" around Strasburg and its environs. This, to me, is an interesting observation. Much of Strasburg was laid out and built before the automotive era. It grew up during a time when transportation happened at a slower speed

and distances were scaled more to the horse, and to the human. The Model A was in a sense built to that scale, intended to match the environment of its day. When driven in a small, slow-paced setting like Strasburg, it fits like a glove.

This Ford Model A is a unique window into Strasburg's past, having

been originally purchased here, and then driven here for more than 90 years. The Deckmans have much to be proud of in this car. It is wonderful that John had the foresight to hold on to the A and also had the creativity to restore it, turning it into a meaningful heirloom for today.



photos by Joe Deevey

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MASSASOIT HALL

text and color photos (except where noted) by Joe Deery

Massasoit Hall. If any building in Strasburg can be considered iconic, this is it. With its unique patterned brick façade and white cupola topped with four finials, this edifice has stood literally and figuratively at the center of Strasburg affairs since 1856. But ask a current Strasburg resident to tell you what they know about the building and you get little more than fragments.

Researching its history brought one surprise after another. The story that emerged helps to explain the strong sense of community that has long been—and remains today—part of Strasburg’s character. A tour of the rarely-seen interior brought the eye-opening realization of the degree to which this building retains its original “fabric.” Most of the building’s original elements are still there, witnesses to more than 150 years of public and private use.

The Independent Order of Odd Fellows (I.O.O.F.), a fraternal organization, has made a home in Massasoit Hall ever since its construction, and has owned it for more than 100 years. During that time, the members have retained a sense of the Hall’s value and history. They have performed the maintenance that has kept the building sound. They have found uses that have provided revenue for their mission and for the building’s upkeep. But in all of that time, they have protected and preserved the essential historical elements and layout. Strasburg is fortunate to have had the Odd Fellows as stewards of Massasoit Hall, and owes them a debt of gratitude. And now for the story...

Historical Overview

The conception and construction of Massasoit Hall were driven by a civic enthusiasm that can be hard to imagine today. In the mid 1800s, Strasburg was blessed with a multitude of clever and energetic individuals who shared a drive to constantly improve their town. Perhaps their energy reflected a feeling that was present throughout the young and growing country. In January 1856, a group of men met at the Public House of Henry Bear (the Washington House) to form an organization to build a town hall. B. B. Gonder, Sr., was elected president, and officers were John Herr, George Linville, Dr. Samuel Keneagy, and H. H. Breneman. On April 22, the Massasoit Hall Association was incorporated with thirty-one members.

Construction of the new town hall would be funded privately, not by any government agency. One hundred

twenty shares of stock were issued at fifty dollars per share, providing \$6000 of capital. Land adjacent to the Washington House was purchased from the hotel’s owners, Henry and Mary Ann Bear.

The first story of the new building would be eleven feet high, with street-level spaces for businesses. The second story would contain a large auditorium fifteen feet tall, featuring tall windows and a stage. To provide a completely unobstructed space, free of supporting columns, the auditorium ceiling (the floor of the third story) was supported by iron rods hung from the roof trusses above. The third story was ten feet tall. It would become home for the I.O.O.F., with additional rental spaces. The façade would reflect the emerging appetite for ornamentation at the dawn of the Victorian period, with dramatic decorative recesses in the brickwork, crowned by a distinctive square wooden cupola.

On August 9, 1856, a large crowd attended a ceremony for the laying of the cornerstone for Massasoit Hall. An eloquent address was given by the president of Franklin & Marshall College, Professor E. V. Gerhart.

The construction site would have been a beehive of activity as workers hurried to complete the work by the end of the year. Absent the din of powered machinery, there would instead have been the creaking, rumbling, and stomping hooves from a procession of heavily loaded wagons arriving with bricks, timbers, and every other needed material. Imagine the shouts as bricks and mortar were hoisted by rope and creaking pulley to bricklayers working from wooden scaffolds. Carpenters hoisting and fitting timbers for the interior floors, roof, and cupola structures would add their own voices, along with the rhythmic sounds of saws and hammers. Roofers placing slate shingles would add a chorus, with the sounds of their hammers ringing high over the town. Eventually, the large dramas would be replaced by quieter work as plasterers, joiners, and painters civilized the new building.



In less than four months, the Hall was completed, and it opened by early December with a well-attended “Citizen’s Ball.” Newspapers noted the event with congratulations to the citizens of Strasburg on their completion of the “fine and important improvement to that thriving borough.” For years, it would remain the largest indoor public space for miles around.

Joseph M. Potts was a lifetime member of the Odd Fellows. His father had been a founding member of the I.O.O.F. Strasburg Lodge. In March of 1889, Potts, a former owner of the Washington House, purchased the Hall from the Massasoit Hall Association. He held its deed for twenty-eight years, and finally sold it to the I.O.O.F in April of 1917, less than a month before his passing. The building has been in the care of the Odd Fellows ever since.

From the time that it was opened until after World War II, Massasoit Hall was the scene for countless social events. In the early days, the winter months brought a series of regular “Lyceum” meetings featuring lectures and debates, providing education and enrichment for adults. The Hall hosted entertainment events such as balls, concerts, dances, stage productions, and lectures. Some events became annual traditions, including the observance of Decoration Day (later Memorial Day), the Commencement exercises for the Strasburg High School, and Christmas festivals produced over the years by various groups.

The Hall was especially important to the Strasburg School. Students presented dramatic and musical performances and competed in spelling bees. The basketball teams practiced and competed there against teams from surrounding schools. Alumni returned there for annual reunion banquets.

A host of clubs and church groups, and professional organizations held their meetings, socials, and fundraisers in Massasoit Hall. Political parties maintained offices there, and sometimes held boisterous political rallies.

The first floor spaces have always been used as business spaces, hosting restaurants, saloons, and a wide variety of shops. But public use of the Massasoit Hall auditorium came to an end at the start of 1948 when Tidy Products opened a sewing factory there, producing children’s snowsuits. Tidy Products halted its operations in Strasburg in 1979. Finishing Touch custom picture framing has operated a store and utilized the second floor auditorium as a workshop since 1985.

The Strasburg Borough maintained offices in Massasoit Hall, and held Council meetings there for many years. In the late 1980s, Council investigated the possibility of purchasing



the building from the Odd Fellows. After deliberation, Council took the position that preservation of Massasoit Hall should not be a municipal undertaking, but the work of a foundation formed for that purpose. Interest from the Historic Preservation Trust did not lead to action. The Borough subsequently moved its offices to the present location on Precision Avenue in the early 1990s.

For now, the Odd Fellows plan to continue to look after Massasoit Hall as they have done for more than a century. Hopefully, this article will allow more people to appreciate our town’s centerpiece.

The Odd Fellows

The Odd Fellows organization has its origins in England in the 1700s. There were no social “safety nets” back then, so illness or death could be devastating to a family. The Odd Fellows took it upon themselves to help, adopting a command to “visit the sick, relieve the distressed, bury the dead and educate the orphan.” Some people considered this concern for others to be “odd,” but the fraternal order embraced that name to become the “Independent Order of Odd Fellows.”

The American Odd Fellows began in Baltimore, MD in 1819. The Strasburg Lodge, No. 361, was organized in 1849. I.O.O.F. was the first fraternal organization in the U.S. to include women when it formed the “Rebekah Degree” in 1851. By the late 1800s, the Odd Fellows had become the largest fraternal organization in the U.S.

While they do not align with any one religion, the Odd Fellows hold

belief in God as a central guiding tenet. They have defined a structure of three “degrees” of achievement for personal growth. They continue to use symbols and to practice rituals from long ago. The degrees, symbols, and rituals are all intended to “elevate and improve the character of mankind.”



The three-link chain has been an enduring symbol of the Odd Fellows. The links represent the core values of friendship, love, and truth. Through the years, the Odd Fellows have always focused on charitable work, striving to make the world a better place.

For the Strasburg Lodge, a good bit of time is spent maintaining their building, but beyond that, they donate to the library, playground, and scholarship fund for high school seniors. Rental income covers their charitable contributions in addition to the building maintenance. They try to do what they can to help anybody who asks.

Why is it called “Massasoit Hall”?

Massasoit is the name popularly remembered for the Native American Wampanoag leader named Ousamequin, who formed an alliance with the English Pilgrims after their landing in 1620. Pilgrim William Bradford’s account of the first Thanksgiving came to define the American conception of that occasion for many years. The discussions in Strasburg that led the choice of the name “Massasoit” seem to be lost to history, but it’s possible to speculate on why that choice fit the times.

The portrayal of Native Americans as “noble savages” had gotten traction in the 19th century, especially pertaining to eastern tribes. In this romantic conception, Indians were conceived as “independent beings of stately bearing, brave but honorable warriors and beautiful princesses, gifted orators, and creatures of innocence and simplicity living from the bounty of nature.” Alongside this concept, it was clear that the Native populations were vanishing. The confluence of “vanishing” and “noble” became a strong theme in the depiction of Native Americans. Americans longed to inherit the noble qualities that were so valued.

Into this setting appeared the long-lost manuscripts of William Bradford. During the American Revolution, his works had been left in Boston’s Old South Meeting House. The British occupied the building during the war, and the manuscripts were lost. They were found again in 1854 in the library of the Bishop of London and were published shortly before Massasoit Hall was conceived.

Several members of the Association were well read, and likely would have been aware of the appearance of Bradford’s writings. They likely viewed Massasoit as an inspirational figure representing noble American values, and felt his name worthy.

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Lyceum



For the young United States, the 19th century prior to the Civil War was a time of intense social change. Systems of education were much less developed than they are today, and many people had received a very limited education. Nonetheless, people were thirsty for knowledge about the world, and were striving to improve society. The Lyceum Movement offered a new approach to adult education. In Lyceums, ordinary people would gather to share their self-acquired knowledge.



The movement got started when Josiah Holbrook published an article in the *American Journal of Education*, where he presented a plan to create "Associations of Adults for Mutual Education." In 1826, he organized the first Lyceum society in Millbury, Massachusetts. The name Lyceum derived from the ancient Greek name for the public meeting space where Aristotle taught.

The Lyceum Movement caught on, and by the mid 1830s, an estimated 3000 Lyceums were operating throughout the country. Lancaster County had Lyceum societies in many towns, including Strasburg. Creating a home for the Lyceum seems to have been a key objective for the Massasoit Hall Association. Commencing with the Hall's opening, a weekly Lyceum program was held each year during the winter months, ending in April.

The evolution of the Strasburg Lyceum was typical of others around the country. Eventually, the societies began to welcome professional lecturers, and high profile speakers made the rounds through the Lyceum circuit. Topics were intended to elevate the mind and heart, and centered on science, literature, and morality. Political topics were avoided at first, but the dialog around topics such as establishment of public schools, temperance, women's rights, and abolition became intertwined with political thought and action. Strasburg's long-standing interest in public education was probably reinforced in the Lyceum, which gave a platform to its advocates and helped to bolster public support.

Details of the early Lyceum meetings in Massasoit Hall are scarce. However, topics at a Lyceum convention held in Paradise in 1856 involved themes of patriotism, freedom, slavery, morality, enlightenment, and song. In the 1870s, the meetings began to receive more newspaper coverage, perhaps because they often featured interesting debates.

At a meeting in 1872, seven years after the Civil War, the debate topic was whether amnesty should be granted to Confederates. The side favoring amnesty seemed to prevail,

arguing that those who had faced their opposition on the battlefield came away feeling that no good could come from fostering enmity. Some of the old debate issues still sound pertinent. How well could we discuss these topics today?

- 1883: *Are the late political changes the cause of the present financial depression?*
- 1883: *Should the United States establish a National System of Education?*
- 1904: *Are labor organizations a greater menace to the public welfare than trusts?*
- 1905: *Is present immigration detrimental to the best interest of the country?*
- 1905: *Should the United States have the largest military force in the world?*

The Strasburg Lyceum also explored topics in the rapidly-advancing realm of science. In 1882, a popular Lyceum event drew more than 400 people. Eight members of the Natural Science and Microscopical Society of Lancaster set up their microscopes, and for three and a half hours, the crowd pressed eagerly around the instruments. Only six years prior, scientists had first shown that microorganisms could cause disease. In the late 1800s, the vast diversity of the microbial world was being discovered. Imagine the excitement in the Hall as this unseen world was revealed for the first time!

By 1915, an estimated 12,000 Lyceums were operating throughout the U.S., but by the 1920s, their character had drifted from the original ideals. They evolved toward musical and theatrical entertainment. Strasburg's experience was similar. In spring of 1921, the Lyceum was still well aligned with its traditional intent, with subjects including "Selected readings," "What is Darwinism?," "What are bacteria?," "Does dew fall?," "What is meant by cloture?" Two years later in 1923, four spring events were considerably less intellectual: three musical performances by small touring groups, and a lecture by a travelling "humorist." The Strasburg Lyceum seems to have dissolved soon thereafter.

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Massasoit Hall has had some close calls over the years. We're lucky that it's still standing!

In 1919, C. J. Groff was the night watchman at the Strasburg National Bank, which still stands on the southeast corner of the square. Around 4 o'clock in the morning on a Sunday night in December, he looked out of the bank's front window and noticed a flickering light in a basement window of Massasoit Hall. Realizing it was a fire, he grabbed the telephone and notified the operator, then he ran into the street and fired four shots to signal for help. A crowd soon gathered, and some were able to enter the rear of the building. They found a fire burning in the I.O.O.F. social room, and were able to quickly extinguish it. It was thought that the fire was caused by a carelessly thrown cigarette that had landed in a wooden box. Mr. Groff's alertness and quick action saved the building.

A year later, on a windy afternoon in November, a fire was discovered in a frame building that stood at the rear of Massasoit Hall. By the time the firefighting apparatus arrived, the fire had spread to the nearby barn of druggist Dr. Weaver, which stood to the east of the Hall and behind Weaver's Drug Store at 13 East Main St. Horrified neighbors watched as it then spread to Dr. Weaver's house, and threatened the Washington House. After a strenuous battle, the firefighters were finally able to bring the blaze under control.

In the end, the fire had completely consumed the building behind the Hall. Dr. Weaver's barn was a total loss as well, as was everything inside of it, including a large seven-passenger touring car. Dr. Weaver's house had suffered heavy damage to the roof and interior furnishings. The brick Massasoit Hall suffered only water damage, estimated at between three and four thousand dollars, although the repair expenses were covered by insurance.

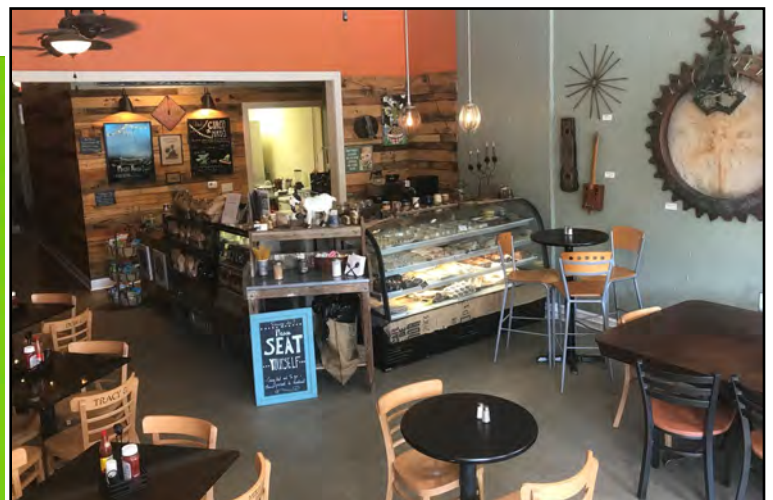
The third serious fire came in 1937. Magdalena Deckman operated a taproom in the first floor of Massasoit Hall, and lived in an apartment to the rear. She awoke around 1:00 in the morning to the smell of smoke and found the apartment rear exit blocked by flames! She called to her neighbor Dallas Hagans, who summoned the fire department, as Deckman searched for a way to escape. She tried to escape by the front door of the taproom, but it was locked! Her son had bolted the door on the outside when he left for his nighttime job in Lancaster. The key to open the door was at the rear of the apartment beyond the fire.

She was trapped! At last, she was saved when a firefighter arrived and broke the front door open, allowing her to step out to safety.

An electrical fault was suspected as the cause of this fire. The damage was confined to the apartment living room, with the furniture a total loss, but once again, the building was saved.

Many readers will remember the last time that flames threatened Massasoit Hall. The much-loved coffee shop Java Junction was closed on a Sunday afternoon in October 2018 when a fire was discovered in its kitchen. Worried onlookers watched the heavy smoke billow as firefighting equipment arrived. The fire was soon brought under control by the quick action of the Strasburg and surrounding fire companies. The kitchen was ruined and the café badly damaged. The two other businesses in the building suffered some smoke damage too, but there were no injuries or damage to the building structure. Java Junction was unable to reopen the coffee shop afterward, but continues as an online business.

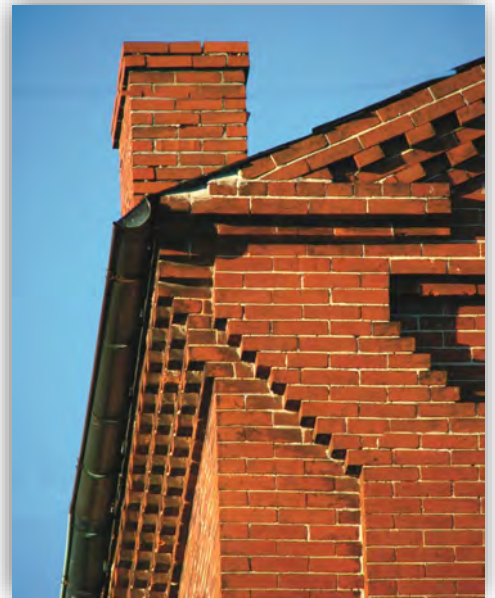
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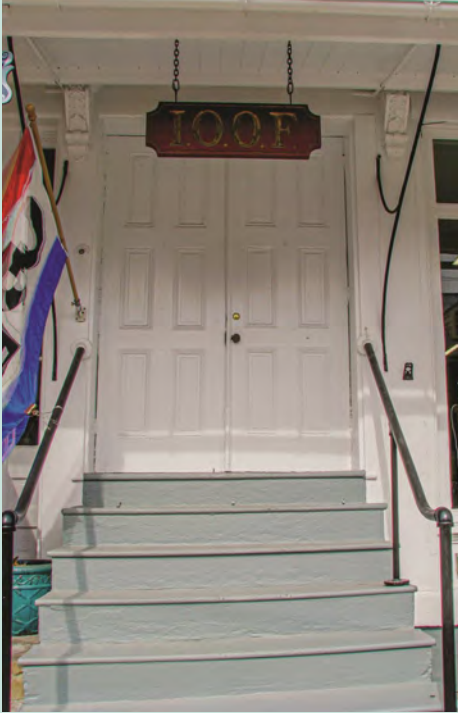
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Massasoit Hall—As It Is Today



On any business day, you can set foot in Massasoit Hall by patronizing the shops at street level. But the rest of the building is normally off limits for visitors. Come along on a tour, and discover what's hidden inside our town's landmark building!

Like those who attended the first "Citizen's Ball" in 1856, you begin by climbing the steps to the white-painted double entry doors. You step inside, and an old wooden staircase flanked by white bead board beckons you to climb. The stairs rise to a landing, you turn about, and another flight brings you to the second floor. You can take a moment to look out of a tall window at the scene below on Main Street. The stairs continue upward, but instead of following them, you open the wooden door to your right to enter the auditorium.

For the last 36 years, the auditorium has been the workshop of Mike McEachern, proprietor of the Finishing Touch East custom picture framing shop. It's a surprisingly extensive operation, with many work surfaces and storage cabinets, a large variety of

materials on hand, and many works in progress. It easily fills the room, but it's not what you're here to see – you should be looking at the building.

The floor plan is a simple rectangle, although walls forming the stair well protrude into the end of the room. Tall double-hung windows suit the fifteen foot high ceiling, and natural light streams in from windows on both sides of the room. The walls are trying to hold onto a peeling coat of paint that probably predates the Second World War. The walls have a light grey-green "verdigris" color, while the original woodwork – bead board wainscot, window casings and sashes, and doors – wears a muted teal. In some places, long use has so worn the paint that the wood beneath has been exposed.

The flooring, laid in diagonal strips, appears to be of maple. In some places it is blackened with a coating of grime, but in other places it is

surprisingly clear, with a warm patina. Thankfully, the years as a sewing factory seem not to have inflicted heavy damage. Originally, a stage would have squatted at the north end of the room, opposite the entrance. Now its former location is apparent only as the place where the diagonal flooring strips end.

An array of electrical conduits and hanging florescent lights clutter the view overhead. They would have been necessary for the sewing factory and continue to serve the framing shop. But perhaps a more jarring impression is made by three large square wooden posts placed along the center of the room, propping up the ceiling. Originally, the auditorium would have been completely unobstructed, with the ceiling supported by iron rods hanging from roof trusses in the attic. The Odd Fellows had the posts installed for safety, to relieve the load on the structure above. Aesthetics were not a priority.





outline of stage



Next, return to the stairs and climb to the third floor. On arriving, you notice the Estey upright piano, purchased by the Odd Fellows in 1919. Much of this level is taken up by the Odd Fellows' original meeting room.



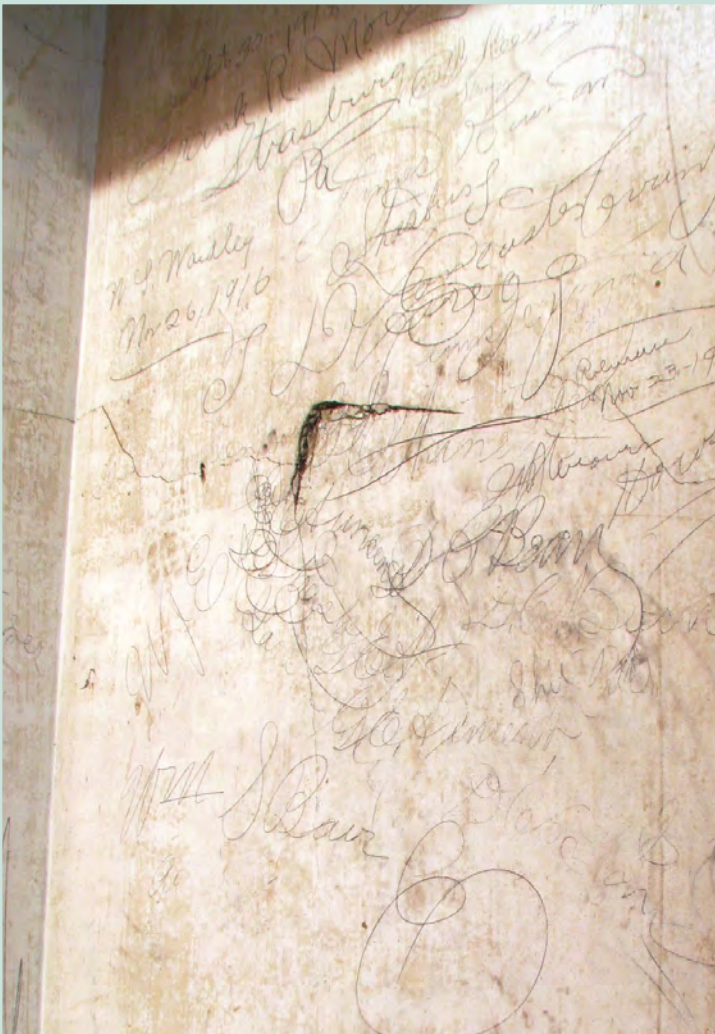
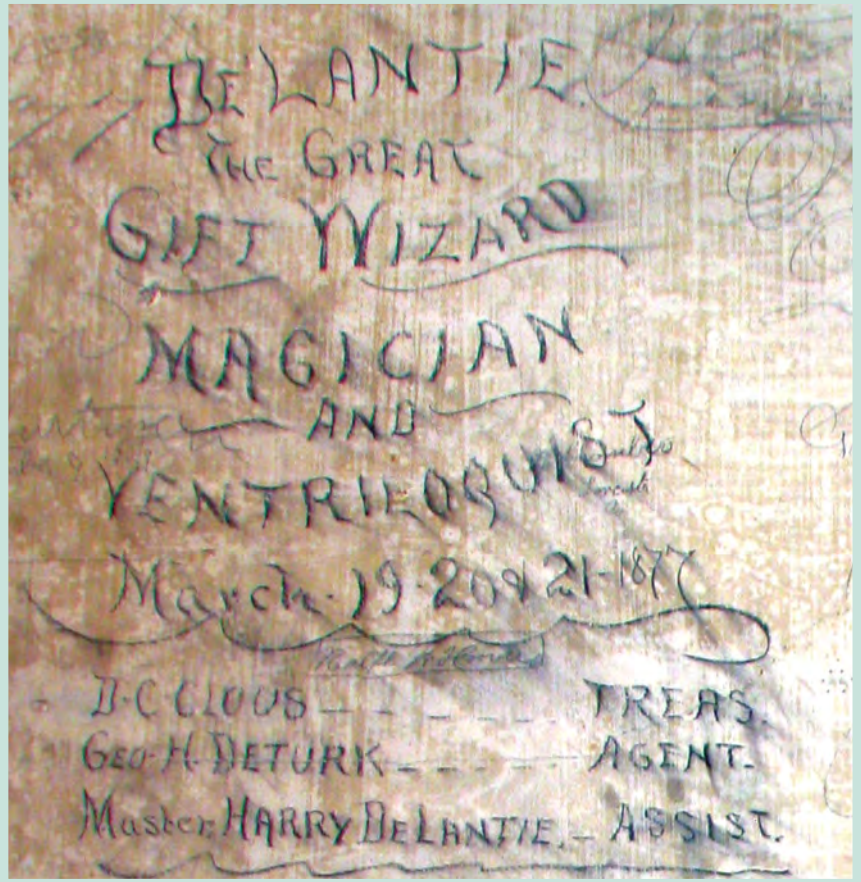
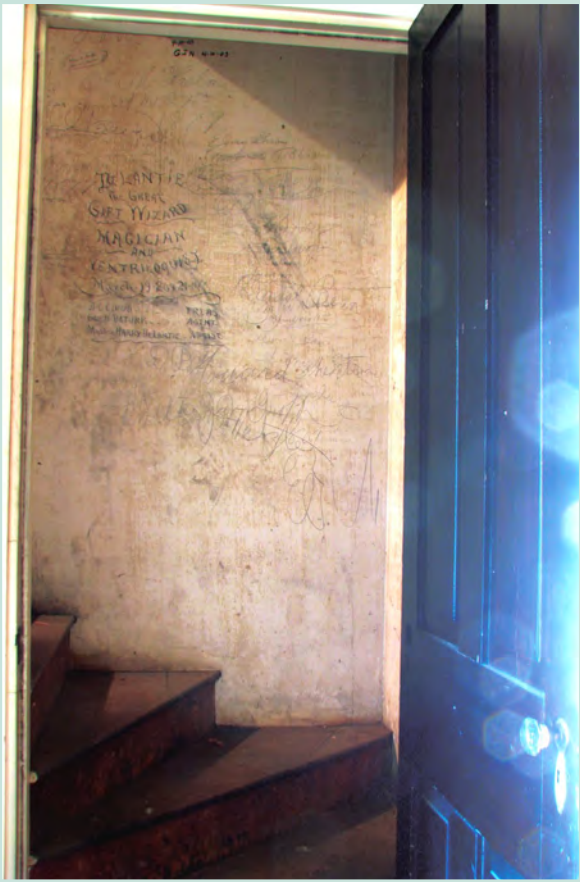
In days gone by, you would only have been permitted to enter only after giving the secret password, as an eye peered through the peep hole in the meeting room door!

Inside the room, vertical rods drop from the ceiling to support the floor. Each rod is paired with a more recently-added companion wooden post. Rows of folding wooden theater-style seats would have been installed around the perimeter of the room for Odd Fellows members. The seating has been removed and is stored in the adjacent room.

Climbing more stairs takes you to the attic, where large timbers shoulder the weight of the slate roof above and the auditorium ceiling below. Two columns that once flanked the stage in the auditorium have been stored in the otherwise empty attic.



Having come this far, who would miss the opportunity to climb the rest of the way to the cupola on the roof? Opening the door for this final climb, you might pause – not for fear of heights, but because of the fascinating signatures that appear before you on the white plaster walls of the “winder” staircase! Throughout the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries, many stair climbers have taken a moment to add their signature and a date to the walls surrounding the stairs. “DeLantie The Great Gift Wizard, Magician, And Ventriloquist, March 19, 20, & 21, 1877” executed his autograph with elaborate font, flourishes, and not a trace of humility, and wins the prize for style!



Climbing the final distance, you finally reach your perch above Massasoit Hall, and are rewarded with a panorama of all of the familiar places below in Strasburg. Perhaps it was the exhilarating view that inspired previous sightseers to commemorate the experience by leaving their signatures along the stairway on their way back down.



In April of 1905, as the paint was still drying on the newly built Gonder Mansion on West Main Street, construction of another new house was commencing on East Main Street. Twenty-eight year old Strasburg native Milton H. Ranck and twenty-one year old Mary Hess of New Danville were engaged to be married, and this new house would become their first home together. There was no time to lose; an October wedding was planned. Digging of the cellar began the same week that sale of the property was finalized.

Ranck had purchased the undeveloped tract of three acres from Fannie Eberman for \$2700. With a small frontage on East Main Street, the picturesque property opened to the south into a broad meadow containing a natural spring. The southern edge of the property met the Book family farm.

By 1905, the ornate and eclectic look of the Victorian-style homes of the of the previous century was on its way out. The Rancks chose to build their house in the newly fashionable Tudor Revival style. The archetype for the style came from 16th century England, but the American version substituted brick or wood framing for the traditional construction using heavy timbers with stucco infill between them. The Tudor Revival homes were characterized by steeply pitched roofs, groupings of tall casement windows divided into many panes, prominent chimneys, and an arched front door or arch over the door. The Ranck's house is a beautifully executed example that includes all of these elements. In addition, a second



floor balcony provides a focal point for the façade, while the end gables feature wooden shingles in a dramatic fan pattern.

The front door, sheltered under a graceful arch, welcomes the visitor into a large foyer. The foyer provides ample space to prepare for an outing, to drop parcels when returning home, and for hellos and goodbyes. But by opening pocket doors, it can also serve as an extension to the adjoining living room, making an expansive space for family or social gatherings.

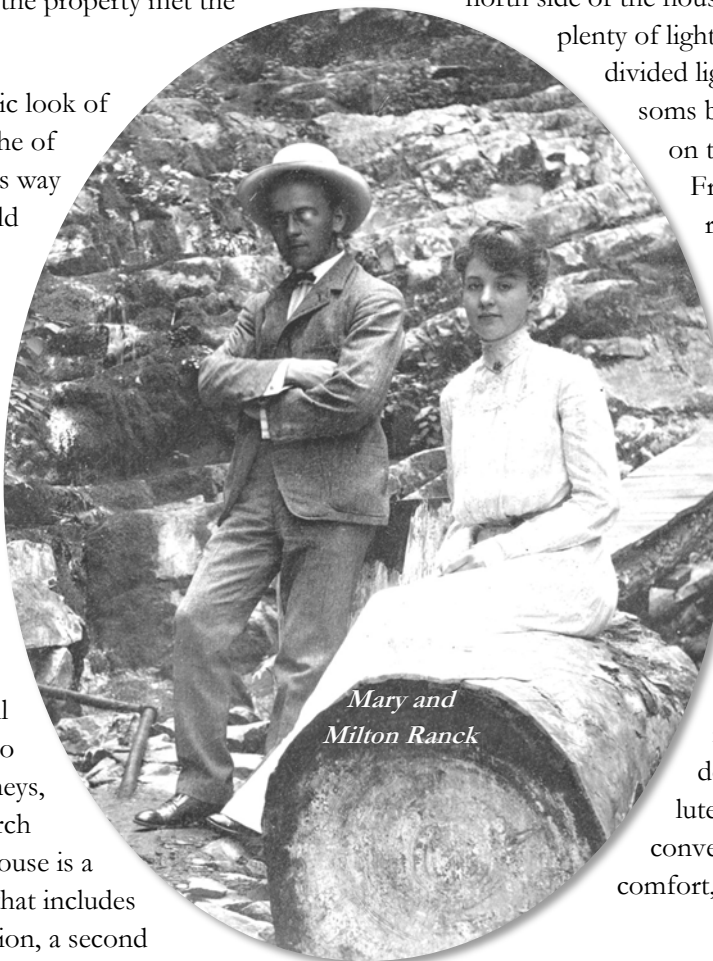
The living room is thoughtfully designed, with a fireplace flanked by built-in cabinets as a focal point. The leaded glass doors on the cabinets suggest an inspiration from the contemporaneous Arts & Crafts style.

Although the living room is on the shaded north side of the house facing Main Street, there is plenty of light. On either side of the fireplace, divided light glass doors with glass transoms bring in light from the sunroom on the east side of the house.

French doors leading to the dining room make the most of the southern sunshine that floods in through ample windows at the back of the house.

The dining room features a built in corner cupboard. The many windows, fitted with interior shutters, provide a beautiful view of the landscape as it slopes away from the back of the house.

Overall, the interior presents a refined and tailored look. It no doubt was appreciated as absolutely up to date in its time, and still conveys a sense of style, quality, comfort, and a simple beauty.



Mary and Milton Ranck



Text and color photos by Joe Deery, except where noted.

above: The living room. Notice the leaded glass doors on the built-in cabinets, and the glass doors that admit light from the sunroom.

right: The dining room. The French doors on the left open to the living room. Windows are fitted with interior shutters.

below: The foyer. Pocket doors open to connect the space to the living room. Floors throughout the house are wood. Notice the built-in bench by the stairs.



The Strasburg Heritage Society thanks LaJune Ranck for opening her home so that we could present this article. We hope that our readers appreciate this glimpse of her special house. Remember that the home and property are private, and are not open for public viewing.

Please respect the Ranck family's privacy.



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Milton Ranck’s lifelong occupation was buying and selling tobacco. He graduated from Strasburg High school in 1896, and from Wade Business College two years later, then launched into a long career in the tobacco business. In a 1959 interview, he described how he got his start: “My father bought a home in Strasburg and, in order to keep a view of the front from the house, bought the land across the road. There was a tobacco warehouse on the land, and I began to buy tobacco to fill it. Milton purchased that warehouse from his father in 1906.

Today, the old warehouse is an antique store, situated in the wedge of land at the juncture of Gap Road (Rt. 741) and Georgetown Road. Period newspaper articles refer to the building as a “stemmery,” indicating that some processing was done there. News coverage of the County Fair in 1912 reported that Ranck was offering for sale cigars from his own factory, with varieties named the “Thomas Day,” “Magic Beauty,” and “De Koven.”



Original sign, owned by the Ranck family



Tobacco basket



1912 advertisement

Milton Ranck was an important figure in the Lancaster County tobacco industry. He stayed in tune with changing conditions within the industry, and was sympathetic to the challenges faced by farmers. He was a founding member of the Lancaster Leaf Tobacco Board of Trade, which was organized in 1900, and was its president for several years. He was also active in the National Cigar Leaf Association, holding various positions of leadership. From around 1907, he operated from Lancaster City, and commuted to his office on North Prince Street daily for more than 60 years.

Milton Ranck demonstrated the traits needed for success in business: perceptiveness, focus, a strong work ethic, and consideration for the needs of others. But another key ingredient was the groundwork that was laid and the example that was shown by previous generations of his family. The Ranck family were Mennonite farmers. Milton's great grandmother, Annie (Stuck) Ranck, raised her family after being widowed at a young age. She was described as "a woman of very superior attainments and great force of character." Her son, Jacob Ranck, went on to conduct his own farm, where his singular focus on his objectives allowed him "to succeed where many men would have failed." He was attentive to friends and family, and was able to gift each of his children a farm of their own.

One of Jacob's sons was Jacob Lehman Ranck, Milton's father. Jacob L. attended public schools while working on the family farm. At age twenty-three, he married Hettie Herr, and they took over the farm which his father had provided, developing it into one of the best in the county. Three of their children lived to adulthood: Milton, Etta, and Anna. Following the example of his father, he managed to give a farm to each of the children. The farm of Jacob L., at 370 Fairview Road, is still operated today by family members descended from Etta.

Jacob L. became a stockholder and director of the Strasburg National Bank. Always valuing education, he served for many years on the school board. In 1898, two years after Milton had graduated from high school, he stopped farming, and moved to a new home at 202 Georgetown Road.

During his formative years on the farm, Milton attended public schools, graduating from Strasburg High School in 1896. He also learned much from his father's example. The lessons of farm life would have given him an intimate understanding of the challenges facing the tobacco grower. Milton's own children would benefit from the values that he had adopted: the importance of education, and of investing for future generations.

Milton and Mary started their family in 1907 when son J. Richard was born. Brother John Milton followed in 1909, and sister Mary Virginia was born in 1911. All three attended fine private schools. Richard and John spent their high school years at Exeter Academy in New Hampshire, a four year boarding school. Richard went on to attend the University of Pennsylvania Wharton Business School. John attended Princeton University, and then received a law degree from the University of Pennsylvania. Mary attended the Shippen School, a private school for girls in Lancaster, and afterward attended Vassar College in New York. None of them received a farm, although in 1934, while John was finishing his law degree, Milton sold the farm that his father had given him, likely to help cover the costs of education.

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The Rancks were always generous in sharing their property, for the benefit of the family and in support of favorite causes. One long-running tradition, the July 4th celebration in the meadow, was started in 1906, the year after the house was built. With few exceptions, the family has gathered for this cherished annual event ever since.

A novel addition to the back yard appeared in 1911 when the Rancks built a tennis court, reflecting their fondness for group activities and physical fitness. The court has seen much use over the years, and remains in good condition today.

Swimming pools were almost unheard of in the 1920s. The practice of using chlorine to sterilize water was not yet fully developed, and there were no filtration systems available for residential pools. Pools had to be regularly drained and the entire volume of water replaced to keep them sanitary. But Milton and Mary had a novel idea: use the natural spring in the meadow as a source to constantly replenish an in-ground pool with fresh water. Their three teenage children must have been thrilled when, in 1923, their parents built one of the first in-ground pools in Lancaster county, in their back yard! The 20 by 40 foot pool had concrete walls and a sand bottom, with a maximum depth of 7½ feet. Sometime later, the bottom was replaced with concrete sloping from 3 to 6 feet. The flow of fresh spring water ensured a cool water temperature even on the hottest summer day.

Cleaning the pool was an annual spring ritual, since it would become dirty with debris that accumulated in the fall and winter. The job required the pool to be drained and scrubbed with brooms and brushes before being refilled.



Naturally the pool was popular with the neighborhood children, but anybody who wanted to join in the swimming fun was required to help with the spring cleaning!



These vintage pool photos come from the family photo albums



View of the back yard; barn on the right, tennis court beyond driveway.

The Rancks were very active in the Strasburg Presbyterian Church. Milton was always involved in the Sunday school program, teaching children and teaching teachers as well. Every year, the Rancks hosted a lovely picnic in the meadow for the church. It was a perfect place for the event, with swimming and plenty of room to play in the sun or rest in the shade.

One of Milton's hopes was that his children or grandchildren would build homes on his property. He got his wish in 1938 when his son John Milton and his new bride built a house in the southeast corner of the property, along Book Lane. John Milton married Jean Howle, of Torquay, England. She designed their new house in the style of an English cottage. They raised four sons there: John, Michael (Mick), Geoffrey, and David.

John Milton had a successful law practice which included service as Lancaster County district attorney, Strasburg Borough solicitor, and president of the Lancaster Bar Association. His son Mick later followed him in practicing law. Like his father, he served as D.A. and as Borough solicitor. After his son John's successful battle with polio at age 7, John Milton devoted thousands of hours to the Easter Seal Society, to support their work with children with disabilities.

The three generations shared and enjoyed the property together. Both Mary and Jean loved flowers. Mary tended a large rose garden, while Jean cultivated a diverse rock garden behind her house. The tennis court and pool were in active use through the warm months. In the winter, the yard sloping toward the meadow made a fine sledding hill.

The upstairs space of the old barn was adopted by the boys as a clubhouse. It was a cool rustic space with exposed trusses built of heavy timbers, and was furnished for entertaining. It even had a piano!

July 4th had always been a happy time for the Rancks, but in 1961 it was a mournful day, as Mary passed away at age 78. Former neighbors still remember her as a sweet woman. Again in 1970, July 4th brought shock and grief when grandson David died in a car accident just outside of Strasburg, as he was returning home from school. He too is remembered fondly as a kind and gentle soul.

At age 91, Milton Ranck was still leading church study groups and golfing three times a week. He continued to get up every morning to go to his office in Lancaster. There, in 1968, he collapsed suddenly and died. He had led a full life.

For a few years after Milton's passing, the house on Main Street was rented. Geoffrey and his wife Lois moved in in 1974, and lived there until brother Mick and his wife LaJune moved in in 1979. On their watch, the property remained a dynamic and welcoming place. They raised their children, David and Anna, there and continued the family tradition of civic involvement. The community lost a joyful soul when Mick passed away in 2018. The Strasburg Heritage Society is very grateful to LaJune for sharing her home and the family's history, so that we could present the story of the family and their home.

This article would be incomplete without a mention of Milton Ranck's civic work. Here is a partial listing of his contributions:

- *Founding member of the Rotary Club of Lancaster, later serving as its president.*
- *Executive committee of the Free Highways Association, which worked to remove tolls from the Lincoln Highway and other roads.*
- *Lancaster Recruiting Committee of the National War Work Council of the Y.M.C.A. during World War I. This group recruited local men to serve in Europe in civilian support roles.*
- *50 years as the Lancaster County chairman of the U.S. Savings Bond program. During World War I, the committee sold \$60 million in bonds, and then another \$100 million during World War II.*
- *Director of the Lancaster Chamber of Commerce.*
- *Executive committee of the Presbyterian Homes, Nennville*
- *Member of the Lancaster County Historical Society.*
- *Served Strasburg on borough council for fifty-one years, 1910 to 1961. On his retirement, he explained "I think that every man who lives in a community has a duty to serve it in some way."*

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strasburgheritagesociety.org/shs-journals.

The magazine content is created by volunteers. If you would like to help by doing research, artwork, writing, or advertising sales, or to leave comments and suggestions, please contact us at:

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Words and Music by
JOHN L. SHROY



There's a quaint lit - tle town on a hill far a - way, Whose tree shad - ed



streets I in fan - cy sur - vey, The days are all sun - shine, the nights cool and still, In that



lit - tle old town on the hill. In the lit - tle old town on the hill,



The lit - tle old town on the hill, My soul in fond mem - o - ry



clings to it still, To the lit - tle old town on the hill.

2. There the scenes that I knew in my boy-hood's glad hours,
The lawns were abloom with the fairest of flow'rs,
And gay Robin Red-breast sang out with a will
In that little old town on the hill.
3. Nearby is a creek where we skated and swam,
And boated along from the bridge to the dam,
Shy "catties" and "sunnies" we landed with skill,
By the creek near the town on the hill.
4. Some changes have come since the years long ago,
But the trees are still green and the creeks calmly flow,
The bumble-bees hum and the chimney birds trill,
In that little old town on the hill.
5. I have gazed on the Alps and have sailed down the Rhine,
Some friendships high-prized among others are mine,
But my heart will go back to the old friendships still,
And the scenes 'round the town on the hill.

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Milton H. Ranck (standing) with his children: (left to right) Richard, Mary, and John Milton