Fall/Winter 2022

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Journal of the Strasburg Heritage Society

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A message from the Editor

Joe Deevy

Once again, our cover is graced by beautiful original artwork that helps to turn back the clock on a familiar Strasburg building. Artist Brenda Blank, of Lancaster, depicts the Old Methodist Meeting House at 126-128 South Decatur Street, as it might have appeared in its early years. Her rendering is informed by our knowledge of the building's history and subtle evidence still visible in its construction details. In this issue, you can read the fascinating history of this building as it was used and re-purposed over the years. The building is currently owned by the Strasburg Heritage Society.

With the Straburg Heritage Society's golden anniversary year starting to wind down, I feel a sense of appreciation. After the stress and restrictions brought on by the COVID pandemic, we really came back strong to celebrate our 50th year. We had more events this year than ever. We hosted the Garden Tour in June, the Community Night / Heritage Fest anniversary celebration in October, and will host the Holiday Home Tour in December. The Shroy House restoration project has made significant headway, with the completion of extensive masonry reconstruction of fireplaces and foundation, and further progress on the house interior. On top of that, we managed a full schedule of excellent monthly presentations for a live audience, and produced two issues of this publication. These great accomplishments and others were the work of a small core group of members who understand the value of preserving, sharing, and celebrating Strasburg's history.

Over our fifty years, many people have been motivated to keep our Heritage Society going. So on behalf of the Strasburg Heritage Society, I would like to extend our appreciation to the founders, to the many donors who have given to support our efforts, and to the members who have worked to keep our town's history alive and visible. Lancaster County is full of interesting towns and villages, but Strasburg's uniqueness stands out. I don't think it would be the same without the Heritage Society.

As we move forward, we face a serious challenge to find new members and to increase member engagement. Watch our website and Facebook for event schedules, then try one of our monthly member meetings. We have some fascinating programs planned. And while you're there, don't hesitate to talk to us to share your ideas and opinions. We value your insights, your creativity, and your skills. If you appreciate that the Heritage Society helps to make Strasburg a special place, please join us and help us to make a strong start on our next 50 years!

Maybe you've noticed that the cover price for this publication has been increased to $3. It will still be distributed free of charge to Heritage Society members and all households in the 17579 zip code. The cover price increase is a relatively painless way for us to help keep prices down for our advertisers. Please support our valued advertisers!

Strasburg Heritage magazine is produced by the Strasburg Heritage Society. It is published semiannually, and is distributed free of charge to Heritage Society members and to all households within the 17579 zip code. Subscriptions are available by request. The subscription cost of the magazine plus postage is $10 per year (two issues).

Electronic (.pdf) copies of the magazine are posted at:

strasburgheritagesociety.org/shs-journals.

Lists of references used in writing the articles in this issue can be found in the online electronic (.pdf) copy of the magazine.

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Favorite Son John L. Shroy

Strasburg's Educator-Poet

Written by Joe Deevy

How would you like people to remember you? A simple and realistic aspiration might be to be remembered as a thoughtful and caring person; a good friend. It would be nice if people found you to be clever, inquisitive, creative, humorous, or fun. You could have made an impression as an ambitious person, or as a hard worker. Maybe you put your talents to good use to make lasting contributions in your field. Or perhaps best of all, people might remember that you made a difference in their lives.

All of these accolades have been used by family, friends, students, and biographers to describe Strasburg native John L. Shroy. Early in life, John adopted an outlook that embodied a positive attitude, a joyous curiosity and fascination with the world, and a drive to share that spark with others. He held dear to his heart those people and places that steered him toward those values: his mother, a teacher, the town of Strasburg, and Millersville State Normal School. Eventually, he would reflect on these formative relationships and experiences through his poetry. We are fortunate to have his reflections about Strasburg, to help us visualize a bygone time, and to capture a little Strasburg spirit!

Around 1840, Samuel Shroy and Elizabeth (Eliza) Bunting were married. They lived in Strasburg, where Sam was a plasterer by trade. He also farmed various plots to supplement the family's income as children began to arrive. A daughter, Emma, arrived in 1841, followed by a son John F. in 1844. More siblings continued to arrive, and by the time of the census of 1860, there were eight. That census listed son John F. Shroy as a plasterer, still living with his parents.

In April of 1861, America's terrible Civil War commenced when the Confederate army attacked Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina. In response, the new President Abraham Lincoln issued a proclamation, calling on the state militias to provide troops to counter the rebellion. The peaceful little town of Strasburg was not spared from the growing strife. On August 19, a young John F. Shroy, at 17 years of age, volunteered and became part of the 79th Pennsylvania Infantry, Company 9.

The 79th Regiment was made up almost entirely of volunteers from Lancaster County, with 10% hailing from Washington County. In October, the new recruits of the 79th left Lancaster by train and headed west. They spent most of the war in Kentucky and Tennessee. The 79th saw action in the bloody battle at Perryville, Kentucky, in October of 1862, then chased the Confederates southward. After celebrating Christmas in Nashville, Tennessee, John broke camp with his comrades on December 26, to head toward Murfreesboro.

There, at the Battle of Stones River, they found a miserable introduction to trench warfare, slogging in a cold wet morass with no fire or cover for warmth, little food, and a constant threat from sharpshooters. The

battle lurched along for four days until, fearing Union reinforcements and the swelling Stones River, the Confederates finally retreated. On January 3, 1863, in one of the last actions of the battle, a group including John Shroy embarked on a mission to clear the area of sharpshooters. As they closed in on the enemy, a sniper's bullet found John. The location of his final resting place on the battlefield is lost to history.

After the heartbreak of losing John, Eliza Shroy still had to endure her second son Lodowick's tour of duty in the Union Army. Thankfully, he returned home, to live out his life in Strasburg. After the war, the Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R.) was organized as a Union veteran's association. The Strasburg local G.A.R. Post was named for Captain J. N. Neff, another war casualty. Eliza loved and was loved by her "adopted" sons from the G.A.R., enlivening their Post meetings with her well-appreciated meals, support, and friendship. She was even known to sing for them.

A year after John F. Shroy's passing, Eliza found herself expecting another child. In 1864, a son was born, six years junior to his youngest sister, Laura. Sam and Eliza named their new baby boy in honor of his eldest brother and the leader of the cause for which he had given his life. The baby was named John Lincoln Shroy. Four years later, in 1868, the family moved into the small brick house at 122 South Decatur Street.

By his own telling, young John's childhood was a magical time, fueled by the energy and wonder of boyhood and a level of freedom that might be hard to imagine today, but moderated by loving guidance from his mother. In the poetry that he wrote as an adult, he told of cherished memories of his boyish adventures, longings, and frustrations (school!). He often reflected on the lessons gleaned from those youthful experiences and how they guided him later in life. His reminiscences give us an innocent view of life in old Strasburg, when everybody was familiar and the natural world was close at hand.

John captures his childhood demeanor in his poem "*Just a Boy:*"

I'm just passin' through them there barbarous days,
When a boy is a savage–my sister she says,
An' my mother she frowns an' heaves long heavy sighs
An' scolds in the day an' at evening she cries.

While his exuberance might have tested Eliza's patience, John was always secure in her love for him. Years later, memories came flooding back when he encountered a small boy intently focused on eating a special treat: a large slice of buttered bread, sprinkled with sugar. When the boy told John "This is a piece of sugared bread, that mother gave for bein' good!" he recalled having had that same experience himself. In the poem "*Sugared Bread*," he wrote:

I too had felt that thrill of joy
For oft misjudged by some, I knew
That mother understood her boy
And all of his temptations too.

John relished his memories of the freedoms of childhood, like the liberation that he felt literally and figuratively when the coming of spring let him loosen his laces and cast his shoes aside. From his poem "*Running Barefoot*"…

What fun it was, in early spring,
When days were warm and mild,
And birds came back and everything
Just sunned itself and smiled.
To sit down by the old pump trough,
When mother wasn't near,
And sneak our shoes and stockings off;
But then came half a fear
That we might see a frown o'erspread,
Her ever kindly face,
'Till smilingly she shook her head,
And then departed every dread,
And joy usurped its place.

John's wistful poems about his early memories give us a glimpse of life in Strasburg, through a child's eyes, nearly 150 years ago. His verse helps to illuminate the changes that time has brought, and gives us a glimpse of life in 19th century Strasburg.

Some of the places that he mentions are still familiar today. In "*Down by Old Pequea,*" he describes his fishing expeditions to the Pequea Creek. *"I go right down Decatur street, … and hurry by … the fellows at the store, who wish me every kind of luck…"* We would recognize the store today as the Strasburg Creamery. Some other places that he mentions are nearly unrecognizable today. John would fish the Pequea Creek at Hartman's bridge. This old covered bridge is long gone. Now a concrete and steel span stands in its place, carrying Route 896 traffic over the Pequea near "The Amish Village" tourist attraction. But the scene that John recalled, as he waited in suspense for a nibble on his line, was:

Beneath the big old elm trees,
Where the coolest breezes play…
All nature seemed to talk with me,
Down there by old Pequea.

Of course, the big events made big impressions on the little boy. The Strasburg Band's parade performances were well remembered, and probably helped to inspire John's musical pursuits later in life. Of the band, he wrote:

Oh how those fellows marched about on every holiday;
The "Square" was filled with music sweet, the streets with bright array.

Perhaps they made some discords,–perhaps the side-horns blew
About three times as strong and loud as they, by right, should do
Perhaps the cymbals didn't clang exactly with the bass,
Perhaps the "B-flats" missed some notes and tooted out of place.
But what cared we when we were boys?–to our uncultured breast,
"The Girl I Left Behind Me" was as good as Sousa's best.

The circus' arrival in town was certainly another big event. John published a photo along with his poem *"The Old Country Circus."* The photo shows "the Clown" with his patient assistant "Mr. Donkey" performing on West Main Street. Here's how John described the scene:

Mr. Donkey wandered in, the clown he wished to ride him,
But spite of ev'ry way he tried, he couldn't get astride him.
And then the way that old clown sang, and acted funny too!
He'd talk about his happy past when his "old hat was new."
He'd say such very funny things–we'd laugh until we were sore,
And when we tried to rest our cheeks, he'd go on telling more.

A town emergency like a fire would have left a child wide-eyed. Before the days of powered firefighting machinery, everybody in town had to pitch in. John remembers:

The blacksmith left his anvil and the baker left his bread;
The merchant left his counter and the seamstress left her thread;
The barber left his customer all lathered up with soap;

Hartman's Bridge

The Strasburg Band

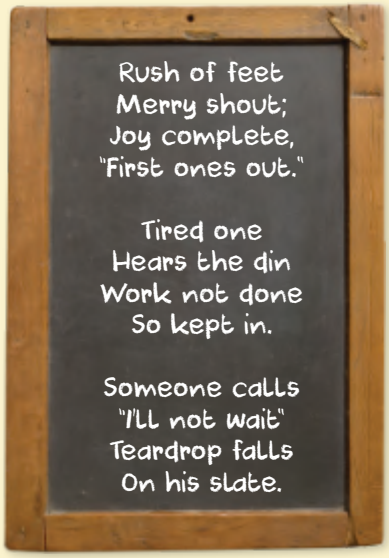
The Clown & Mr. Donkey, West Main St. at the "Square"

The loafer stirred himself for once and grabbed the engine rope;
The doctor left his patient, and, in her half-swept room,
The housewife, frightened 'most to death, forgot to leave her broom.
The big and little, old and young, the rich, the poor, the lame,
Went hustling, bustling, calling, toward the rising smoke and flame.

People would drag the only available firefighting apparatus to the scene: two hand-pumped pieces named "Hope" and "Perseverance." How did that work?

Our little "Hope"–how shall I praise the work she tried to do?–
We filled her full, put her in place–then high the water flew.
But "Perseverance"–poor old "Perse"–perhaps misunderstood,
For when he came to doing work, he wasn't any good.
He was supposed to draw, himself, the water from the well,
He'd do it just a little while, then get a balky spell,
In spite of everything they'd do, or how they'd bump and shout,
The good old fashioned "bucket line" would put the fire out.

The Strasburg Public School, which stood in the southwest corner of West Franklin and South Fulton Streets, was the place were John spent much of his childhood, apparently to the dismay of his young spirit. With all of the exciting daily adventures and dramas in a boy's life, it's easy to see why many of John's poems about school had to do with getting *out* of it! A piece named *"I Gotto Go to School"* expressed his chagrin at the prospect, while *"Institoot Week,"* was about the thrill of having a week off, when the school closed for the annual teachers' in-service meetings called the "Teachers' Institute." Here's another example called *"School and Life,"* about the burden of school responsibilities. It's shown written in chalk on a slate. These were regular "school supplies" that all children carried, before paper and pencils became the norm.



Indeed, he eventually came to appreciate the academic and life lessons that he absorbed during his school days. Many of his poems reflect on the lesson learned. For example, the poem on the slate continues…

Life's a school;,
Teacher's strict.,
Wish and rule
Oft conflict..
Time we've lost,
We must gain;
And the cost:
You remain.
Pleasure calls,
"I'll not wait."
Teardrop falls
On Life's slate.

By the age of 14, John's attitude toward school had changed. But life dictated that it was time that he learn a trade. His schooling became intermittent as he began to miss days to apprentice with his father as a plasterer. He was deeply discouraged when he was taken out of school to work, before he had even been able to complete his high school entrance examinations.

Amanda Landes was a teacher at the Strasburg School, and recognizing something special in John, she took up his cause. She advocated for him to attend high school and, happily for John, she was successful. Miss Landes became one of the most important people in John's life, as an advocate, teacher, mentor, and ultimately, a dear friend. Regarding Miss Landes, John's second wife Letitia Shroy wrote, "The educational help which she gave him became so interwoven with his after life, that the strands are not easily followed. Certain it is that he considered her a mountain above the plain and he cherished her memory during all the years that followed." The feeling was apparently mutual, as Miss Landes' photo album, now archived at Millersville University, contains numerous photos of John.

John completed his high school education at Strasburg and graduated in a class of eight in May of 1882. For the next chapter of his life, he would begin studies at Millersville State Normal School, where his friend, Miss Landes had become a member of the faculty.

Strasburg Public School, from the Amanda Landes archive at Millersville University

Amanda Landes, from the Amanda Landes archive at Millersville University

After completing high school, John had to work for a while to earn money for the next step in his education. He pursued the family trade working as a plasterer for two years. Those living in Strasburg homes built in the mid 1880s might be literally surrounded by his work. Finally, he was able to take the step toward what would be his life's work. He began classes at Millersville State Normal School in 1884. The term "Normal school" referred to schools that focused on training new teachers. Established in 1855, Millersville State Normal School (M.S.N.S) was the first in Pennsylvania, and was widely known and highly respected. The school offered three courses of study: The Elementary, Scientific, and Classical Courses; John enrolled in the Elementary Course. He would continue at Millersville for five years, all the while balancing the demands of his education with work that was necessary to pay his way. During the summer he would return to plastering.

John loved his life at Millersville, and made the most of it. Somewhere along the way, he found time to follow the inspiration that he found watching the old Strasburg Band, and became not only a musician but director of the Normal School Band. His mentor, Miss Landes, was active in the Women's Christian Temperance Union at

1886, 20 years old

1887, 21 years old

1888, 22 years old

Millersville, advancing the agendas of prohibition and women's rights, and John embraced these causes.

His later poems tell of some of the pleasures of the time, like ice cream and deserts at the "Normal Confectionery," better known as "Andy's." Another pleasure that was forbidden (and therefore best), was know as "snapping."

The Normal School was keen to guard its reputation by protecting the reputations of its students, so the rules regarding interaction between the genders were strict. The regulations were laid out in the annual course catalogs. For 1887, the catalog prescribed:

1889, 23 years old

> "No prolonged conversation between the sexes must take place … except in the performance of school duties; and no conversation between them will be permitted elsewhere."

> "No student shall correspond, meet, walk, or ride with any one of the opposite sex, except in the case of necessity, and then only with the permission of the Principal."

Violation of these regulations garnered "demerits" at the discretion of the faculty. Of course, this restraint was too much to ask, so students resorted to stealthy signals such as snapping their fingers to communicate. The term "Snapping" emerged to indicate any furtive meeting or communication. John Shroy wrote about "Snapping Down Shenk's Lane" in Millersville:

They never planned the meetings, yet
'Twas always strange, I know,
That certain lads and lasses met
And walked together slow.
'Twas always just below the turn,
That these conversed with those,
For there 'twas easy to adjourn
If any danger rose;
For, posted on the corner fence,
From which he viewed the way,
With an untold benevolence,
And whistle loud and gay,
There sat a friend, who by a vote,
Was drilled upon the matter,
That when he gave a certain note
They knew 'twas time to scatter.

John might have been seen "snapping" with Edith Knight, another student in the Elementary course. She had enrolled at Millersville a year before John in 1883. John graduated form the Elementary program in 1887, as did Edith in 1888. Immediately upon graduation John found work as a teacher at a school house in Blue Ball, Pennsylvania. He also re-enrolled at Millersville in the Scientific course, and somehow managed to continue his studies. On top of that, he taught algebra in the Normal Training Department to pay his way. He graduated at the top of his class in 1890. Shortly afterward, in 1891, John and Edith were married.

John's teaching career blossomed with astounding speed. He arrived at a time when public schools were starting to gain a firm footing, and cities and towns were building their first large schools. There was a need for somebody who could do the pioneering work of organizing these new schools and setting up a curriculum or "course of study." John must have done well during his year at the little Blue Ball school. For his next job, while still working through Millersville's Scientific course, he was hired in 1888 as principal of New Holland Borough School. After his graduation from Millersville, he moved on to Port Clinton, where he brought order to a disorganized school, establishing a course of study. The superintendent there considered him to be one of the best teachers in the county.

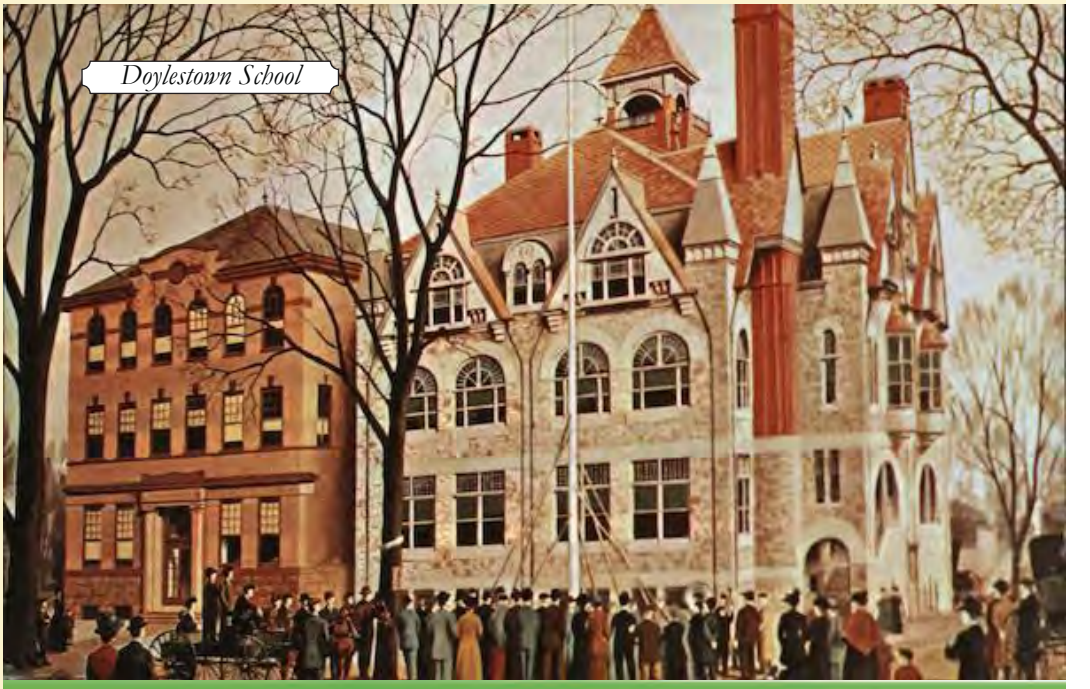
The following year, 1891, he became principal of the Borough Schools of Doylestown, and moved there with his new bride. The large school had been built only a year prior, and was still struggling. After only a day of teaching, he realized that changes were needed and put in place a new comprehensive curriculum.

The innovation that John showed at Doylestown became a signature of his approach. He had heard of J. H. Thiry's new work on a School Savings Bank for children, and went to work to implement the concept at Doylestown. It was an instant hit with children. On the first day of the bank's operation, with teachers serving as bankers, 115 children deposited their pennies, averaging 33¢ each. With transactions tracked on individual deposit cards, at one point John was able to count $5000 in total deposits. The children saved for important purchases; some bought watches, some saved for vacations, and some used their savings to help their families. John recalled one boy tearfully withdrawing $3 at Christmas to purchase "flour and potatoes," because his father was out of work.

"Visitors Day" was another innovation that was popular with students and parents alike. He invited parents of the students to visit the school during a normal school day. Students became ushers to take the guests to any room that they wished to see. The first event drew only 25 timid visitors, but the popularity of the event continued to grow. This kind of effort to connect the school to the community became a hallmark of John's career in education.

Patriotic education was another priority for John Shroy; he considered it a necessary part of citizenship development. For this reason, he incorporated patriotic services in the opening exercises every Monday. He wanted to make American history more tangible for his students, so in 1894 he instituted an annual field trip to Valley Forge, for what he termed "realizing history."

At that time, the significance of Valley Forge was only dimly recognized. After the Revolution, not much had happened there



Doylestown School

until the a commemoration of the encampment's centennial in 1878. Interest gradually increased, and in 1893, Valley Forge became Pennsylvania's first state park. Then the activity stopped. No money was allocated to acquire land, to research history, or to preserve sites. This was the state of affairs when Mr. Shroy began to take his class there.

John took the children to a site that he found to be personally moving. It was a grave, identified only by a stone in which had been carved the initials JW and the date 1778. Out of respect, the local farmer had taken care to plow around this solitary marked grave. But the outlines of other graves could still be made out on the slope surrounding it. Perhaps the scene brought to John's mind his own namesake brother, whom he had never met, resting in an anonymous grave somewhere in Tennessee.

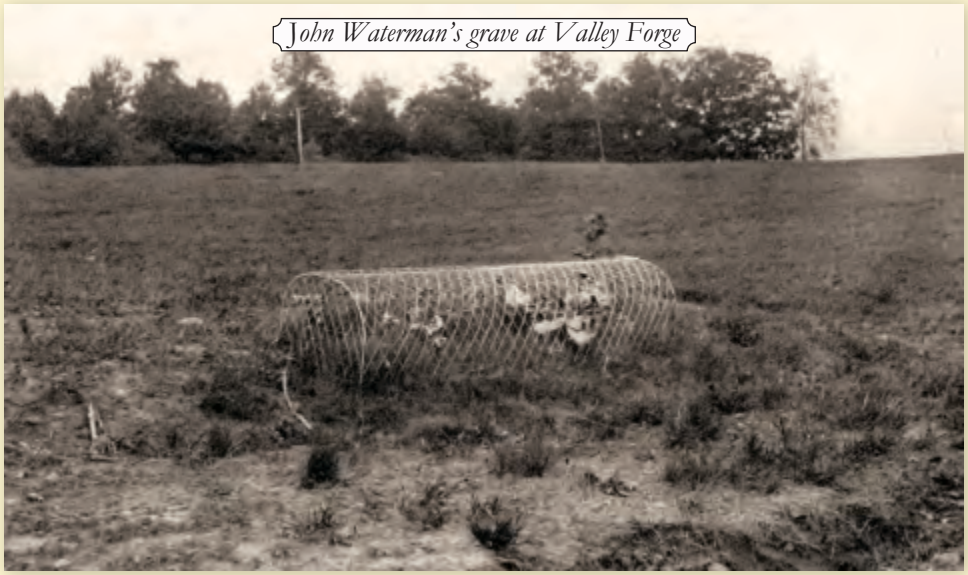
The occupant of this grave at Valley Forge had been identified as John Waterman, of Rhode Island. To deter the souvenir hunters, who had begun chipping pieces from the headstone, somebody had built a cage over the site. John was moved to write the following poem:

By rudely chiseled river stone
I know that thou art resting here.
Thy grave with grasses overgrown
(Grim hostage of that dreadful year)
Remains alone to mark a spot
Too soon forgot.

The farmer plows and sows and reaps
Around thy narrow earthly home.
All heedless of the host that sleeps
Beneath the canopy of loam
Around this sacred, hallowed spot,
Too soon forgot.

A captain thou, and well I know
Thou hadst a kindly, thoughtful heart;
For 'midst their hunger, cold and woe,
I see thy men, as teardrops start,
Engrave thy name upon this stone,
So sad and lone.

Perhaps as thou wert lowered here,
Our Washington stood sadly by;
Perhaps there stole a startled tear
From out his grief reluctant eye
That tear alone would grace this spot
So soon forgot.



John Waterman's grave at Valley Forge

Oh mighty nation, how cans't thou,
Of this thy son, so thoughtless be?
No granite can too rich endow
A place so dear to Liberty.
I tread with holy awe this spot,
Hast thou forgot?

George S. Hotchkiss was a student at Doylestown during John Shroy's tenure, and in 1931, he remembered his Principal in this way:

"I recall Mr. Shroy's keen interest in boys, his close friendship for my father, his deep interest in community affairs generally, … his rather crude but much enjoyed gym in what was then the attic of the school building, and an infectious chuckle that pleased me more than his facial expression … the chuckle is best remembered. I remember him as a teacher of extraordinary ability and patience… As a man he was extremely versatile and brought to the school and community something new in spirit that was as refreshing as rain. Mr. Shroy will always, I believe, stand in my memory as one of the cleanest and most inspiring influences of my life."

In 1895, John took a job as Superintendent of the schools of Cheltenham Township, at the northern edge of Philadelphia. He and Edith relocated to the town of Ashbourne, near Elkins Park. During the previous December, Edith had been ill, suffering from rheumatism. It's not clear whether that illness lingered, but on May 16, she passed away at the age of 28.

The long ago, now lost to view,
The time of love and song,
When days were all of life we knew,
With nights a minute long.
We dreamed of things we meant to do–
Has life proved dreaming wrong?

This is the final verse of John's poem titled "The Olden Time," published in the Saturday Evening Post in July of 1900. In the late 1890s, he began to publish his poetry. In addition to the "Post", his work appeared in magazines including Era Magazine and Lippincott's Magazine and newspapers including The Home and Weekly News of Strasburg, the Evening Bulletin and the Public Ledger of Philadelphia and many others.

John's poetry shows him to be a keen observer of nature, other people, and himself. Beyond the observations lie thoughtful reflections to distill the insights that the works reveal. Perhaps the process helped him to find balance in his life. His familiar Strasburg was always a place where he could find inspiration and renewal.

In August of 1895, after Edith's passing, before the start of the school year, and probably before dawn, John mounted his bicycle in Ashbourne and headed for Strasburg. He pedaled until he arrived at the old home that night.

The newspapers made note of that impressive feat of athleticism. Once there, John stayed for several weeks.

These summer visits with his mother in the old family home became his indispensable habit. In "Loafing 'Round Awhile," he wrote of returning home…

[When] I'm weary of the bustle,
Sights and odors,noise and hustle
Of the city,–I just like to

John Shroy with his bicycle,"Listening to birds"

Pack some things and quickly strike to
Where I feel again the joy,

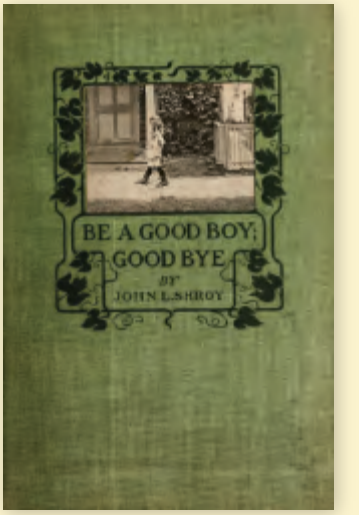
John and his mother in Strasburg

That I felt when but a boy;
With a some one sitting near me,
Whose kind words and presence cheer me;–
There I sit right down and smile,
As I loaf around awhile.

John didn't just loaf when he visited; he indulged other interests too. He composed music, including church hymns, a lullaby, and in 1908, a lovely little Strasburg anthem titled "The Little Old Town On the Hill" (featured in the Spring-Summer edition of *Strasburg Heritage*).

With his scientific interests still alive and well, he cultivated an interest in photography that was both technical and artistic. In the summer of 1899, he developed a homemade "pinhole camera." After experimenting to work out the design, he built a working camera for less than 10¢, using a wooden box from Chandler's Drug Store, a piece of tin, and some black paint. For "film," he coated glass plates with a photo-sensitive chemical emulsion. He photographed himself, his home, Massasoit Hall, and Mine Hill, and developed and printed the photos himself. On seeing the impressive results, the editor of "The Home" newspaper asked for an article about the project, and it appeared in an August 1899 issue.

In 1906, John published a compilation of his poetry in a book titled "Be A Good Boy, Goodbye,"† with an opening page inscribed "Lovingly Dedicated to Mother." The book shared its title with the first poem, and recalled the words that his mother said as she sent him off to school as a child. In those words he felt her caring guidance, and learned a life lesson which is captured at the end of the poem:



Mistakes you will make, for each of us errs,
But, brother, just honestly try
To accomplish your best. In whatever occurs,
"Be a good boy; good-bye!"

† Available online at Library of Congress (loc.gov), item number 24010677

Strasburg would never be the same for John after March of 1909, when his mother Eliza Shroy passed away. His father had died in 1893, so now, when he visited the Strasburg house, it was empty. John took over ownership of the house, and continued to spend summers there. He busied himself by planting a peach and apple orchard, grafting many of the trees himself, to propagate the desired qualities. On one apple tree, he successfully grafted five different varieties.

In his professional life, "Professor Shroy" certainly strove to accomplish his best. He remained at his post as superintendent in Cheltenham Township for two years, and the progress there was obvious, due to his outreach to the parents. He established a school newspaper in which he explained the mysteries and challenges of school operation. When he introduced parents' meetings, he believed himself to be the first in the country to do so. Engaging the whole community in school work was a high priority.

In 1897, he became Supervising Principal of the Whitehall School in Philadelphia, with 485 pupils. The entrenched administration resisted the idea of a close relationship between home and school, but John persisted. He was focused on convincing parents of the benefits of education, and when he departed Whitehall in 1908, the enrollment had more than doubled to 972. The results spoke for themselves, and soon, parents' meetings had spread to all of the schools in the city. Likewise, his school newspapers and Valley Forge trips caught on throughout the city.

While at Whitehall, John furthered his own education, earning a PhD at the University of Pennsylvania, with a major in pedagogy, more simply described as "how to teach." He also enriched himself through travel, visiting England, France, Switzerland, the Rhine Country, and Belgium in 1902. He also managed to see the United States on trips to the west coast and to Florida.

The growth at Whitehall eventually necessitated a larger school building. The new Henry Wadsworth Longfellow School was dedicated in 1908. But John was needed elsewhere. That year, he became Supervising Principal at the new Frances E. Willard school. Two years later, he saw what he considered to be a special opportunity, and in 1911, he became principal of the John Marshall elementary school. He appreciated the work that his predecessors had invested in developing a school that was highly valued and well supported by the community. The school was also among the most modern and beautiful in the city.

At Marshall, John continued the practice of providing a supervised playground after school, so that the children would have a safe place to play. At Whitehall, he had supervised the playground himself for years, until finally a playground teacher was approved. Now at Marshall, a supportive community funded new playground equipment, which John used as powerful motivator for the students. As a disciplinarian, his philosophy was to shape students by using as many do's as don'ts. So he was happy that he was frequently able to say "go and play."

In 1915, Principal Shroy was advanced to become Superintendent of his district (Philadelphia District 7 of 10). His ap-

preciative colleagues presented him with a grandfather's clock with his name and theirs engraved on the pendulum. A year later, he was moved to District 4, which encompassed the northeastern section of the city.

On December 22, 1915, Letitia Starkweather and John Shroy were wed. They had met at the John Marshall School, while Letitia was a teacher and John was Supervising Principal. They lived at 1133 Fillmore Street in the Frankford neighborhood of Philadelphia. Their wedding was a small ceremony in the parsonage of the nearby Bethlehem Presbyterian Church. John had joined that congregation in 1897 and immediately became central to activities involving the young people. In 1903 he became a ruling elder in the church, and continued in this role until his death.

John Shroy passed away on January 13, 1920 in a hospital in Frankford. He had been suffering from acute pneumonia, and underwent a surgical procedure, but did not survive. His funeral was held at the Presbyterian Church in Frankford, and then his body was returned to his boyhood home and interred at Strasburg Cemetery. John was so loved by the people of his adopted home of Frankford that they commissioned a bronze plaque, which was placed in the John Marshall School to honor him.

A few years earlier, reflecting on his mother's death, John had summarized his own life this way:

> *"Time's fingers have fashioned the grief into a golden chain that has lifted me upward as I have moved onward. I have now been teaching more than twenty years and so much do I love the work that I would not exchange it for any other. I do not know the misery of struggling after evanescent bubbles that are beyond me. I am content in the sense that I do not let ambition drag me uphill. I walk, view the scenery, say "How'd'y" to those I meet and I am therefore happy."*

To John's comments, Letitia Shroy added:

> *"Mr. Shroy was unlike many travelers along the road of life, intent only upon the destination, taking no joy in the road they travel. Being happy and making happiness for others was one great purpose of his life."*

We in Strasburg are fortunate to have counted John Shroy as one of our own.

Early Owners of the Shroy House

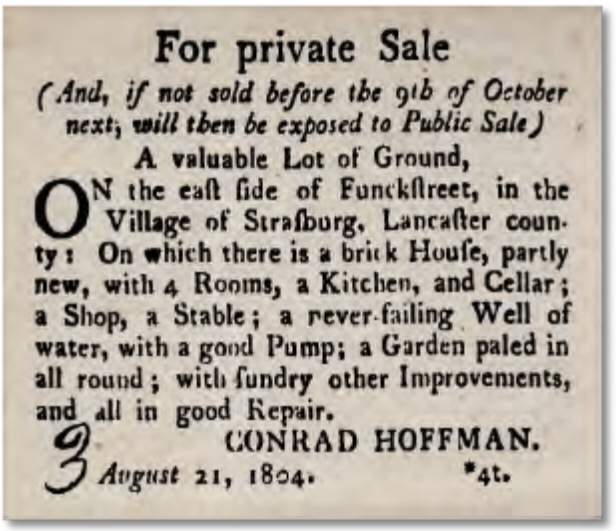
By Tom Lainhoff

The Shroy House, 122 South Decatur Street, was acquired by the Strasburg Heritage Society in 1977 to serve as its headquarters, museum, and as Strasburg's first Public Library. It is named for the Shroy family, who owned it from 1868 to 1977. It was the house where John L. Shroy was raised and to which he returned throughout his life. The Heritage Society is currently restoring the building but the public is encouraged to visit it when it is open.

The first owner, and most likely the builder of the Shroy House, was John Funck, who purchased the land upon which the house is built from the heirs of John Miller in two parcels in the early 1780s. Funck has been recognized as a man of many talents. He was a farmer, miller, innkeeper, artist, and inventor. He was also a prolific builder, or more appropriately, developer in 18th century Strasburg. In addition to the Shroy House, he can be credited with the construction of four substantial brick buildings on center square, as well as the division and sale of building lots on East Main Street to Center Square and down South Decatur Street to the Township line.

Col. Robert Weaver, in his book *Chains of Titles for Some Early Land Owners of the Strasburg Village Area*, makes the intriguing suggestion that the Shroy House might be the "small house at the end of the line" that Funck included in his notebook. This notebook first came to light in 1985 when The Historic Preservation Trust of Lancaster County published *Our Present Past*.

On March 1, 1796, John Hinds, brickmaker, mortgaged a roughly ½ acre lot to Jacob Eshelman, Sr., both of Strasburg Township. The mortgage refers to "a brick house now erected on said lot" and a "Meeting House lot" adjoining the property to the south. On March 4, 1794, John and Anna Funck sold the brick house and lot to John Hinds. Like all but one of the early deeds for this property, this deed was never filed with the county Recorder of Deeds. Fortunately, as noted by Col. Weaver, a record of the sale was recited in a later deed. The mortgage is important in that it establishes that the house was already standing when Hinds purchased the lot. Additionally, it included the first reference to the lot where the first Methodist church would be erected. For unknown reasons, the sale of this property to the Methodists did not occur and on November 4, 1795, this lot was also sold to John Hinds. It remained as part of the Shroy House lot for the next twelve years until it finally was sold to the Methodists, who built a meeting house on the lot in 1807.



For private Sale

(And, if not sold before the 9th of October next, will then be exposed to Public Sale)

A valuable Lot of Ground,

ON the east side of Funckstreet, in the Village of Strasburg, Lancaster county: On which there is a brick House, partly new, with 4 Rooms, a Kitchen, and Cellar; a Shop, a Stable; a never-failing Well of water, with a good Pump; a Garden paled in all round; with sundry other Improvements, and all in good Repair.

CONRAD HOFFMAN.

August 21, 1804. *4t.

On November 3, 1796, after owning the brick house for less than two years, Hinds sold the house to Daniel Beam. On the 30th of that same month John Hinds paid off the mortgage on the brick house and lot and disappears from local records. Four months later, on March 21, 1797, Daniel Beam sold the property to Conrad Hoffman, a cooper.

Conrad and Catherine Hoffman were the first owners of the house to stay for more than a few years, but by 1804 they were ready to move on. On August 21 of that year the advertisement below appeared in the *Lancaster Intelligencer*.

Apparently, the house failed to sell either privately or at auction because on April 19, 1805, the Hoffmans sold the brick house and lots to George Hoffman, storekeeper for £220-10s. Just over one year later George Hoffman sold the house to John Funck. The following year Funck sold the Shroy house to George A. Etter, a weaver, who would stay there until his death in 1811.

Several things about this chain-of-title stand out, the first being the frequency with which the property changed hands: six times in thirteen years. Secondly, for those of you who are wondering how it could take more than forty years to figure out when the Shroy House was built and by whom, we should note that five of the six deeds transferring the property from 1794 to 1807 were never recorded. Lastly, the 1806 sale ad not only paints a clear picture of the property more than two hundred years ago but conclusively dates the construction of the addition on the north end of the house. We knew that the addition was built before 1815 because a federal tax levied in that year included the dimensions of every building standing at that time; the tax assessment data for the Heirs of George Etter, who still owned the property in 1815, match those of the Shroy House with the addition. Moreover, the 1793 brick house, as built, consisted of a kitchen, two rooms, and a cellar. The 1804 sale ad describes it as "a brick house**, partly new, with 4 rooms**, a kitchen and cellar." The c.1804 addition had two rooms.

Meeting House of the Methodist Faith

by Joe Deevy

Walking along Strasburg's South Decatur Street, it would be easy to overlook the small brick building on the east side of the street, with its front porch perched right against the sidewalk. A date plaque between the two front doors informs passersby of the 1807 construction date. Owned by the Strasburg Heritage Society and enclosing two dwellings numbered 126 & 128, the building's unassuming appearance belies its fascinating history. On this small stage, scenes from important stories in America's social development played out, in miniature. The building was an unassuming backdrop where people pursued spiritual fulfillment, social progress, and companionship.

When William Penn founded his American colony, "freedom of conscience" was foremost in his mind. Throughout the 1700s, people flocked to Pennsylvania to escape religious persecution and to worship in their own ways. Once they arrived though, "keeping the faith" could be a challenge. It could be hard for a church to minister to the spiritual needs of people living in remote homesteads and widely dispersed villages, facing daily struggles just to build a home and survive.

During the same period, in England, an Anglican priest named John Wesley was hard at work. As a thoughtful and formally trained theologian, he felt a calling to kindle a Christian revival. He believed that he should bring a message of salvation to as many people as possible, so he framed a pragmatic approach to achieve this goal, dispensing with many traditional norms. Wesley began to take his preaching outside of church buildings, instead preaching in fields, homes, or anywhere that listeners would gather. Defying convention didn't come easily, and he described his trepidation, "having been all my life till very lately so tenacious of every point relating to decency and order, that I should have thought the saving of souls almost a sin if it had not been done in a church." Pushing further, he started to travel extensively on horseback to spread the holy word. The newly awakened faithful would need sustenance between his visits, so he began to approve local preachers for local ministry, even though they were not ordained by the Anglican Church. Eventually, an organization emerged with regional "circuits" of societies that were served by periodic visits by an itinerant cleric. Within societies, members supported each other in small groups called "classes," with further support from local preachers. A system of quarterly meetings and annual conferences bound it all together.

This approach was a perfect fit for the new frontier in America. In 1769, the first two itinerant preachers were sent to the colonies, and by 1773 there were ten. Among them was Francis Asbury, who was to become known as a great pioneer of Methodism in America. Methodist "circuit rider" preachers soon reached Pennsylvania's Lancaster County.

Martin and Eve Boehm (pronounced "Beam") were Mennonites who farmed land in present day Pequea Township, on the southwest edge of Willow Street. When, in 1756, Martin was chosen by lot to serve as

minister in his church, he doubted his abilities. But after having undergone a moment of profound spiritual assurance, he set about sharing his experience, preaching throughout Lancaster County and beyond. In spirit and in his evangelical style, there was something in common with the Methodist movement. As early as 1775, the Boehms welcomed itinerant Methodist preachers into their home, where a class was formed for the local worshipers. Eve became one of the first to join. With Martin occupied by preaching, he and Eve sold the farm to their son Jacob. In 1791, Jacob sold a small lot of less than an acre for the nominal sum of five pounds, for construction of Lancaster County's first Methodist church, Boehm's Chapel. The chapel remains in use today.

During the American Revolution, the English Methodists were no longer welcome. All returned to England except for Asbury, who sympathized with the colonists' desire for freedom. After the war, in 1784, John Wesley sent Thomas Coke to join Asbury. In Baltimore, they formally organized the Methodist Episcopal Church of America, and Asbury was ordained a bishop.

Methodism had reached Strasburg by 1791. Strasburg was part of the "Chester Circuit," which was then served by a persuasive man named Joseph Cromwell. Bishop Asbury had commented that "He is the only man I have heard in America with whose speaking I am never tired." In September 1791, Asbury himself preached in Strasburg "in a respectable tavern," perhaps that of John Funck, which stood on the southeast corner of today's Main and Decatur Streets. Afterward, Asbury wrote in his journal "I have faith to believe we shall have a house of worship and that the Lord will have a people in this place." He visited again the following year.

Strasburg brothers John and Simon Miller were early members who gave character and standing to Methodism in Strasburg by their example. Younger brother Simon became an itinerant preacher in 1791, preaching in German vernacular, but he died only four years later. His wife Barbara married another Methodist preacher named Thomas Ware. John Miller frequently gave lodging to traveling preachers. Two young preachers passed away in John's home, at the ages of only 28 and 30.

Life was hard for the Methodist "circuit riders," and many of them died at a young age. Bishop Asbury's journal records some of the difficulty of travel during his visit to Strasburg in July of 1799: "…we were at New Holland and after five o'clock in the afternoon we rode with Thomas Ware toward Strasburg, night came on and left us two miles from the place, in the woods, in darkling shades, a new-cut road and stumpy paths; we came in about nine o'clock in the evening having rode twelve miles [in *4 hours!*]. Thank the Lord for whole bones."

At the foundation of Methodist life were small prayer and support groups called classes. Classes generally met in private households, and it was there that believers likely experienced many of the highs and lows of their spiritual journey. Women and people working in servitude often had their first encounter with a Methodist preachers at the door of the home, and appreciated the opportunity to pursue their faith in that private space. As such, meeting houses were not initially essential, but as the community grew, so did the desire for a House of Worship. The House would serve as a kind of scaffold to support the wider network of surrounding classes.

By 1796, a "Strasburg circuit" had been formed out of the previous Chester and Lancaster circuit. The Strasburg circuit would have encompassed classes in many surrounding villages and small communities (see *From the Collection*). At this time, 302 church members were recorded on the Strasburg circuit, of whom 150 were of African and 152 of European descent. By 1804, the circuit had grown to 728 members and 140 probationers.

The desire for a proper Meeting House in Strasburg was growing, and finally in 1807, the congregation purchased a small triangular piece of land on the south end of South Decatur Street, from innkeeper John Funck and his wife Ann. Seventy-five pounds in gold and silver coin was tendered. The Methodists listed three trustees: Jacob Beam (Jacob had changed the spelling of his name from Boehm to Beam), Rudolph Keagy, and John Feleky. The deed specified that the trustees were to erect and build a House of Worship on the tiny 1/8 acre plot.

Interestingly, in describing the boundaries of the plot, the deed references a point "six feet to the north of the Meeting House." In the 1896 work *Centennial History of the Strasburg M.E. Church*, author Jacob Hildebrand wrote that this referred to a small preexisting one-story building which had been used as a place of worship. The same idea was reiterated in Edward Bowman Esbenshade's 1949 work, *My American Ancestors and their Descendants*. He asserts that the Methodists used this earlier building before the land was transferred to them.

The painting by Brenda Blank on the cover of this issue depicts the new meeting house as it might have originally appeared. It was a plain but neat style. The horse and small carriage in the painting might suggest a visit from an itinerant preacher. Entering the House, a visitor would have found a simple interior. Opposite the door, there was no altar, only a raised platform about a foot high. Seating consisted of simple benches with no backs. A wood stove provided warmth. Tin sconces were placed around the room to hold candles or tallow dips for light.

Methodist Sabbath meetings were known for lengthy but powerful and moving sermons, hymn singing, and an enthusiastic, sometimes emotional participation by the faithful. If the congregation was particularly moved, a service could last many hours, even into the night. In the evening, the dim candlelight might have added to a mystical mood, but someone would have been kept busy trimming all of the candle wicks!

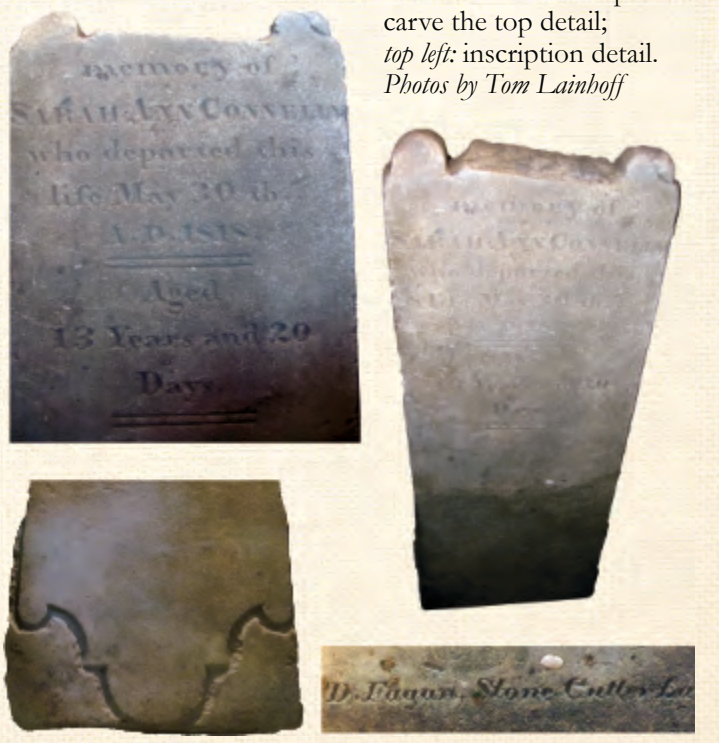
Bishop Asbury returned to Strasburg and preached in the new meeting house on the afternoon of August 17, 1811, and returned again in, 1812. The following spring, he made his last visit to Strasburg, preaching on April 16, 1813. He was 67 years old at that time, and died three years later.

Asbury was not a vain man, and did not seek to have his image recorded. He had only three portraits painted during his life, and one was done during his last visit to Strasburg. John Funck, who had sold the land on which the Meeting House was built, was a man of many talents. One talent was as a portrait painter. Funck chose a poplar board on which to paint his portrait of the Bishop. Jacob Beam's younger brother, Henry Boehm, was a preacher who had spent five years traveling with Bishop Asbury. He attested that the painting was a very striking and correct likeness. The painting remained in Strasburg for many years in the care of Mrs. Sarah Steacy Atmore. Local legend has it that the portrait eventually went to Mrs. Black, who lived at 48 East Main St. When she took her stove pipe down for the summer, it is said that she would use Asbury's portrait to cover the hole. A visitor noticed the painting, and recommended that Mrs. Black donate it to the American University in Washington D. C.

A burial ground was established behind the Meeting House. No grave markers remain in place. In the 1930s, a survey of cemeteries found at least sixteen grave stones piled at the edge of the old burial ground. The oldest one, dated 1811, was that of Barbara Nissley Beam, wife of Jacob Beam. Jacob, who died in 1836 at age 80, was buried there too. In his will, Jacob noted, "At an earlier period in my life it had pleased the author of my being to invest me with a considerably large worldly estate." He used his wealth to help his church, serving as a trustee for the establishment of Boehm's Chapel (1791), and for the Meeting Houses at Soudersburg (1803) and Strasburg (1807). The 1816 grave stone for Strasburg trustee Rudolph Keagy was also among those documented in the 1930s. There seems to be no trace of trustee John Feleky. The documented grave markers encompassed people of all ages. The youngest person buried at the meeting house was six month old Elizabeth Keagey. Jacob Beam was the oldest person known to be buried there.

What became of the grave markers? Contrary to modern sensibilities, many or all of them were taken for other uses, perhaps to pave walkways, or to line cisterns. Two were found in the barn behind the "Shroy House," two doors north of the Meeting House. These are now in the care of the Strasburg Heritage Society. One of them, shown below, was for Sarah Ann Connelly, who died in 1818, 20 days after her 13th birthday. The other was for John S. Warren, age 18, who died in 1831.

Top right: entire grave marker for Sarah Ann Connelly; *Bottom right:* stone cutter's name; *Bottom left:* the stone's bottom shows an abandoned attempt to carve the top detail; *top left:* inscription detail. *Photos by Tom Lainhoff*



Strasburg's Methodist congregation grew during the 1830, and by 1836, the old Meeting House was no longer able to accommodate all of the people. Meetings were held in David Rohrer's School House, situated on West Main St., nearly opposite the location of today's Wesley United Methodist Church. In 1839, the decision was made to build a new church, and one was erected on West Main St. This short-lived building was replaced by the present beautiful church at 34 West Main St. in 1894.

In 1841, the old Meeting House was sold to the United Brethren in Christ congregation. This denomination had grown from the work of Martin Boehm together with Phillip William Otterbein. The United Brethren continued to meet there for forty years, but in 1881, they were forced to sell it to relieve debt. The little building was purchased by the the Independent Order of Good Templars (I.O.G.T.) for $1400. They would call it "Temperance Hall."

There have always been people who struggle at times with various kinds of dependencies. In the 19th century, alcohol abuse had become a frequent disruptor of lives. At that time, the understanding of alcoholism was not well developed, and there were precious few avenues to seek help or support for the problem. Yet the costs in terms of family suffering, poverty, violence, and health were clear. The cause of "temperance," defined as abstinence from alcoholic drink, was seen by many as a necessity for social and political progress. As early as 1840, temperance organizations had been formed, but their experience was that many of those whom they had helped subsequently suffered a relapse.

The I.O.G.T. was founded in Ithaca, New York in 1852 and experienced a phenomenal growth. I.O.G.T combined temperance with fraternalism. Fraternal organizations were ubiquitous at the time, but the I.O.G.T.'s progressive stance on equality for women and people of color set it apart. It used ritual and promoted education and training of its members so that they could advance through a series of "degrees." In theory and largely in practice, anyone could advance in the organization, regardless of gender, race, or creed. The Good Templars were much more successful than their predecessors in avoiding relapses. Their platform was unique in its focus on persuasion and rehabilitation. They welcomed as members people who where struggling to give up alcohol, and their meetings provided ritual and companionship.

On Christmas Eve, 1881, the charter application was filed for Lodge number 1,339 of the Independent Order of Good Templars of Strasburg Borough. The charter provided that in case of dissolution, the Hall would be given to the trustees of Strasburg's Presbyterian and Methodist Churches.

The new owners immediately set about making sweeping renovations to the old Meeting House, including changes to the facade and lengthening of the building with an addition on the rear. They were proud of the result, described in the following report in *The Semi Weekly New Era* newspaper:

> **The hall of Strasburg Lodge, dedicated during the convention, is a handsome edifice. The lodge purchased the disused United Brethren church, enlarging its heighth and depth. The entrance opens into a vestibule, flanked on either side by ante chambers, each one opening into the main room, a hall almost a square, with a seating capacity of several hundred. The ceiling of the hall is painted in panels, the side walls in a drab color with floral border. An arched panel with a crimson field adorns the wall in the rear of the Chief Templar's pedestal. On the background of the panel are grouped the emblems of the order—the cross, heart and anchor, typical of faith, hope and charity. At the other end of the room is a corresponding panel with a blue field, in which rests a circle, within it the clasped hands, typical of the circle of unity—"The union of hands signifying the union of heart." The floor is covered with woollen matting. Small opera chairs, three rows deep, are ranged about the room.**

Newspaper accounts show that meetings included operational minutiae, debates about political actions and internal issues, presentations and musical performances. They even had a band, with uniforms featuring "a small torch" in each player's cap, enabling the band members to read their music while marching at night!

The reporting also shows that women really were involved in running the organization, often occupying more than half of the official positions. This was an important opportunity for many women, for whom work in the home had previously been their only option. In the I.O.G.T., they could participate in running an

organization, debate and vote on resolutions, practice presenting before an audience, and hear a wide range of perspectives. One talk, delivered at a Good Templars meeting in May of 1888, foreshadowed the next development. The talk was entitled "Why should women take an active part in temperance work?"

Temperance Hall

The Women's Christian Temperance Union, or W.C.T.U. was organized in 1873, and like the I.O.G.T., it grew quickly. The W.C.T.U. had a wider agenda. Under the leadership of Frances Willard, W.C.T.U. adopted a "do-everything policy" that included temperance, women's suffrage, married women's property rights, and labor issues. The W.C.T.U. benefited from the education that women had accrued through their work in the I.O.G.T.; they were, in effect, ready-made leaders.

Nationally, there was a trend of women defecting from I.O.G.T. to join the W.C.T.U., and this seems to have been true in Strasburg as well. In 1887, five of seven elected positions in I.O.G.T. were held by women. In 1891, only one of the seven was a woman. At the same time, W.C.T.U. had become active in the area. As a case in point, Amanda Landes (*see the John L. Shroy article*) had been a chaplain in the early I.O.G.T. in 1882, but by 1884 was already speaking on behalf of the W.C.T.U. in Massasoit Hall.

By 1894, Strasburg's Civil War Union veterans association, called the Captain Neff post of the Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R.), had joined the I.O.G.T. in occupying Temperance Hall. Together, they accomplished a renovation, repainting the interior. The last lectures reported under the auspices of the Good Templars were in August of 1894. The name Temperance Hall stayed with the building for a few more years until it took the name of a new organization in 1897.

In retrospect, the nationwide temperance movement in which Strasburg participated had mixed results. Surely there were people who benefited from assistance in their struggles with alcohol. The movement also unexpectedly helped to foster advances in women's rights. The 18th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which established a prohibition of alcohol, was ratified in 1919, but was ultimately repealed in 1933. The temperance cause has not regained a strong following since.

The next chapter for the old Meeting House began in February of 1897, when the Young Men's Christian Association (Y.M.C.A.) organized in Strasburg and moved in. The Presbyterian and Methodist Churches remained as trustees, and the building became known as "Y.M.C.A. Hall." The Hall provided a communal space for men to gather. The Y.M.C.A. held Sunday afternoon meetings, to which "the male public" were invited. These meetings featured local and visiting speakers, as well as singing.

During the "Y.M.C.A. period," the Hall served as a convenient community space, attracting some smaller activities that might have otherwise been held in Massasoit Hall. People might have been glad to avoid the stairs of Massasoit Hall! The Y.M.C.A. Hall hosted the Lyceum, spelling bees, fundraisers for the church's Ladies' Aid Society, waffle suppers, wedding anniversaries, Halloween parties, masquerades, dinners, and other social events. The Dunkard Brethren Church held Sunday services there occasionally. In 1909, a temporary organization met there to establish telephone service in Strasburg.

Eventually, the church trustees found it necessary to sell the old Hall. It was sold at auction in March of 1922 to Mr. L. T. Sweigart. The churches split the proceeds; the share for the Presbyterian Church was $351. Mr. Sweigart divided the building and added full length dormers on both sides of the roof to create two dwelling houses. In 1929, he sold the two units to his sons Ira and Isaac. The building passed to Ralph and Eunice (Sweigart) Mitchell in 1975, and in 2002, Elam Esh purchased it from the Ralph Mitchell estate.

Y.M.C.A. Hall, with table set for an occasion

In 2003, The Strasburg Heritage Society purchased the old Meeting House from Mr. Esh. The Society intends to complete a historic restoration of the building and use it to support the Society's activities. Then it will once again serve the people of Strasburg.

From the collection:

Methodist Church Record Book of the Strasburg Circuit, 1838

by Joe Deevy
with valuable help from
Dolores S. Myers

From its very beginning in the United States, the Methodist Church relied on "circuit riders" to do the work of the church: spreading Jesus' message of salvation, providing spiritual support for the faithful, and uniting the widely dispersed church. The circuit riders were men of deep faith and commitment. They worked tirelessly, traveling remarkable distances while enduring many hardships. They traveled light, relying on the generosity of people that they encountered for food and shelter. They carried the bare minimum of necessities in saddle bags. This book is one of the things that would have been found in the saddlebag.

A "circuit" was a collection of locations that had established Methodist congregations consisting of one or more "Classes." The rider would visit each place on the circuit in sequence. He would stay perhaps just a day or two at each one, to preach and minister to the people's needs. His sermons brought fresh ideas that helped energize the local congregations. He might administer sacraments. He could advise the local Class leaders who would guide the local congregation during his absence, and he could help with decisions. Then he would be off to the next stop.

The Circuit Record Book was used to keep track of the workings of each Class along the way. It would list the members and details of their status. It would list the Class leaders and other people with assigned roles. It could contain records of marriages and baptisms, of new members, and any important church matters.

The book in the Strasburg Heritage Society's collection is from the "Strasburg Circuit." The circuit name was somewhat arbitrary, perhaps named for Strasburg because it had the largest congregation on the circuit. This record book was started in 1838, the last year that the Old Meeting House on South Decatur Street was in use by the Methodists; they built a new larger church on West Main Street in 1839. The record book contains entries through 1859.

The story of how this book came to be in the Society's collection illustrates the reason for its rarity. Since these books were used over a widespread territory, there was no telling where they might end up after they fell out of use. This one ended up with the Bender family of Strasburg. Ella Bender married Howard Johnston, and they lived at 26 West Main Street. After Howard's passing in 1981, this book was sold at auction. It was purchased by an antique dealer. Some time later, Larry and Pauline Shurr were shopping in an antique store in Upper Marlboro, Maryland, when they found the book. They purchased it for $50 and then donated it to the Strasburg Heritage Society. Against all odds, this book found its way back to Strasburg, to a home where its importance and rarity are appreciated, and where it can serve as an important tool for historical research.

Circuit rider on a hill, overlooking a small town. Image from the General Commission on Archives and History for the United Methodist Church, Drew University.

The record book is so valuable for historical research because it's a "primary source." That means that it's an original work; a first hand record made by the people who were present when it was written. Unlike a newspaper, biography, or history book, the information in this book hasn't been edited, interpreted, or restated. The authenticity of the information in the book is certain. It can provide hard evidence for people researching the history of their family, the Methodist church, or Strasburg.

While this book is fragile, it's in good condition and its cursive script is relatively easy to read. It starts with the membership record for Strasburg in 1838. At that time, the congre-

gation in Strasburg was large and growing. The record shows that there were 99 members, divided into four classes. The image at top right shows two pages concerning the second and largest Class, led by John Steacy. His wife Sarah's name appears below his. The Steacys were owners of the Sandstone House (see the Fall-Winter 2021 edition of this Journal). Class two was the largest, with 35 members. 33 are listed on the left side, and two more are shown on the right. Those are marked with the word "Col." Elsewhere in the book, this word is fully spelled out, as "Coloured." The two African-American women named are Ellen Morrison and Julia Peters. Ms. Peters was apparently a new member, still on "probation," as indicated by the letter "P" by her name. These records can be particularly valuable to African-Americans researching their history, since mentions of Black people in historical records are few and far between.

The second image at right shows marriage records from 1858. It shows that people came to Strasburg from Paradise, Lancaster, Georgetown, and Quarryville to be married. On July 5, John Werntz and Mary Diffinbach, of Strasburg, were married "At his house."

The bottom image at right shows two pages of notes form the 1840 quarterly meeting in Strasburg. On the left, it shows the people who held various positions in the Church. On the right, we can see the names of the ten villages that composed the Strasburg Circuit in 1858. The congregation sizes are also show, with separate listings for "White" (389) and "Coloured" (13).

A variety of other details of Church business appear, including: infant baptism records; Sabbath school enrollments, notes about new and relocated members, lists of who had subscribed to a church journal, and documentation of the sale of the Meeting House in New Holland in 1845. The Class lists, which give all of the member names, include many familiar family names from the Strasburg area. Future careful study of this window into the past will surely reveal interesting insights about the Methodist Church and families of Strasburg.

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Temperance Hall, right foreground, Shroy home immediately beyond

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