



The Mill Racer

Winter, 2017

A Publication of the
Occoquan Historical Society



Get Out of Town!

Early in 2017 we were presented with a donation from Leah Samuels. Her grandmother, Hannah Thompson, was one of the ladies who quilted our bicentennial wall hanging, and has several donated items in the museum.

Leah brought us in several items which included a receipt book from Mt. Pleasant Farm, whose location includes the present Marumscio Plaza site in neighboring Woodbridge. The farm belonging to Leah's grandparents specialized in Jersey dairy cattle. On this page in the upper corners are photos of the farm. On the left is the site with the original farm house. That farm house was replaced by a stone house, pictured above in 1937. If you zoom into the picture on the upper right you can see the stone house.

On the right is a 1922 photo that has been in our collection since the 1970's. Corbin and Mary Thompson owned the farm before Hannah and her husband Egbert purchased it. Mary and her friends, including Occoquan residents Mrs. Douglas Janney and Mrs. C. L. Starkweather, are sitting in front of the original farm house porch.



Group of women gathered at the home of Mrs. Corbin Thompson of Woodbridge (1922).
Front row: Left to right
Mary Thompson, Mrs. Curtis Backus, Lois Barnard Thurman, Mrs. Fred R. Hynson, Mrs. Douglas Janney, Mrs. C. L. Starkweather

Back Row: Miss Rachel Perkins, Mrs. Louise Perkins, Mrs. Fuchs, Mrs. Katharine Barnard, Mrs. Barnard

Nancy Thompson, Hannah's daughter grew up on the Mt. Pleasant Farm. Nancy attended the Occoquan District High School in the 1930's. Nancy's daughter, Leah Samuels, also donated several awards her mother received during high school. Leah's donation included a copy of a poem her mother wrote that shows the love Nancy had for her alma mater.

Occoquan

*Nancy Thompson
Occoquan District High School
Circa 1936*

*Far above the Occoquan's waters,
nestled on the green.*

*There stands the red brick
school house, the old school
we love so well.*

*O endless hours of happiness,
Ever in my mind doth dwell.*

*The gym we love that rocks with mirth.
The football sailing across the turf.
The class rooms bright with
pictures full.*

*Old Occoquan we all love thee.
O see the banners on the wall.*

We boast our glory before them all.

A copy of the poem, the school certificates and Leah's own Occoquan Elementary year books are on loan to Occoquan Elementary for the year. 2017 is the school's 90th anniversary. When the school opened it housed all twelve grades.



From the Farm

The northeast corner of the Mill House showcases items used in earlier days on the farm. The first time I cleaned the museum I remember thinking that never in my imagination did I see a day that I would be vacuuming barbed wire! My interest in the barbed wire ended each time I ventured into that NE corner and survived the journey without being decorated in barbed wire.

My interest has peaked after a visit from James R. Newman, author of *The Point Of It All: Understanding the Designs and Variations in Antique Barbed Fencing*. The book was published in 2016 and Jim mentions a visit to the Mill House and our "Buckthorn" barbed wire, patented by Thomas V. Allis in 1881 and pictured to the right. This section of wire was donated in 1984.



Our coil of barbed wire shown to the right is the "Crandal Zigzag" patented in 1879 by Edward M. Crandal. This piece was donated by Frank Gregory in 1972. Our museum catalog information says this wire came from a farm in western Pennsylvania.



Jim told me these barbed wire designs are associated with sheep farms. The wire was designed so it wouldn't grip the sheep's wool if it brushed up against it.

Jim's book is available through Amazon.com and describes over 2000 antique barbed wires. Jim's visit helped fill in some of the gaps in our collection information!

May 30, 1977

Remembering two fallen comrades

At this time each year, we stop to remember those men who fought and died for their country over the past 200 years. Veterans Organizations all over the United States will hold a memorial service and stop to say silent prayers for our departed comrades in arms. The Veterans of Foreign Wars dedicate their Post Homes and meeting places in honor of their fallen comrades.

But, have you ever wondered who the Posts are named for? In the case of Woodbridge's Post 7916, located in the sleepy town of Occoquan, it was named for two veterans, Hawkins and Reeve.

After World War II was beginning to fade into history, a group of veterans in the Woodbridge, Occoquan and Lorton area gathered to form what is now VFW Post 7916. The official date of mustering in the Post was June 25, 1946, with a local veteran, Mac McGuire as the first commander.

The name chosen for this Post was Hawkins-Reeve after two young men who lost their lives serving their country. Hawkins, born in Maryland, March 21, 1922, moved with his parents to Woodbridge at the age of 6. Hawkins' father was the caretaker for the Rippon Lodge.

Claggett Hartwood Hawkins attended the Occoquan School, still in use on Old Occoquan Road. After graduation from Occoquan School in 1939, he worked at the People's National Bank in Manassas and was employed there until accepted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation for training as an agent.

Claggett Hawkins was employed at the FBI when World War II broke out in 1941, but since he was in training, he was exempt from military service. However, Hawkins and four of his close friends decided to join in the defense of their country, and joined the Naval Reserves.

Hawkins was assigned to preflight training as a pilot and received his initial training in

Lynchburg. On completion of the preflight, Claggett went on to Pensacola, Fla., and received his wings and commission as a Lt. (JG) in the Naval Reserves.

After spending a short furlough with his parents and younger brother Ellis in Woodbridge, Claggett was transferred to the West Coast of California where he joined Composite Squadron 91. He went aboard the jeep carrier Long Island in San Diego and sailed for the Far East.

At Pearl Harbor, the squadron changed carriers and went aboard the U.S.S. Kitikuan Bay. From Pearl Harbor, the ship sailed toward the fighting in the Pacific. It was while Claggett Hawkins was on a routine patrol flying a General Motors TBM-3 that he was killed. Claggett returned to his carrier and made two landing attempts, both times being given the "wave-off" signal by the landing signal officer.

On the third pass, Claggett's plane seemed to sink low off the fantail and the landing signal officer again gave the "wave-off" signal, but as Claggett applied power to the engine to go around for another attempt, his plane rolled, inverted and crashed into the sea.

His gunner, an air-crewman named Szpont, escaped from the inverted aircraft and made several attempts to get Claggett out of the wreck but to no avail. The carrier continued on, and the rescue was attempted by an escort cruiser. The aircraft sank within minutes and Claggett never managed to get out. It was believed that Claggett had died instantly in the crash. The date was December 6, 1944, his age, 22.

The other local man to whom the Post is dedicated was born in Lorton, where the MIMSCO Steel Yard is today. Born of an English father and a Virginia mother, Charles Douglas Reeve was raised in the Lorton area and schooled on the same location at the present Lorton Elementary School next to Shirley Highway. Reeve was born Sept. 18,

1918, and after high school attended the Strayer Business College.

Doug Reeve was employed by the Washington Gas Light Company when the war began. In the spring of 1942, he left home to join the U.S. Army Air Corps and was sent to Tullahoma, Tenn., for flight training.

After receiving his commission, Doug was transferred to South Carolina, where he trained in and flew medium bombers. His last furlough was with his parents at their Lorton home during Christmas of 1943. Soon after, Doug left for the West Coast of California and went overseas.

Stationed in the South Pacific, Doug and his co-pilot, Joe Cox, were enroute as passengers, with another pilot and crew chief to an airfield in New Guinea to recover a downed North American B-35 Mitchell bomber, and were flying in extremely bad weather.

The pilot of their aircraft, a Douglas A-20, became disorientated and found himself flying in a valley with clouds hiding the tops of the mountains. Unfortunately, they found themselves in a blind canyon with no escape and the pilot pulled up sharply to miss the mountain top and crashed.

The pilot was killed instantly and Reeve and the co-pilot were burned and injured, but their injuries did not appear to be serious. The crew chief miraculously escaped with minor cuts and bruises. The co-pilot, Joe Cox, dazed and burned, managed to walk down the mountain and was found by some natives who gave him first aid.

Through hand signals, he managed to tell the natives of the crash and after resting a search party was sent out to locate the crash scene. As darkness began to overtake the search party, the natives became concerned for their own safety and turned back leaving Joe Cox alone to continue on. Cox's main concern was

that he knew Reeve was injured and needed help and comfort through the night.

Cox found Reeve just as darkness overtook the jungle and made him as comfortable as possible and looked over his injuries. There didn't appear to be much wrong with Reeve except for a cut on his leg, but he appeared to be in great pain.

It was impossible for Cox to start a fire since the area they were in was swampy, and the co-pilot had been wet several times crossing streams going down the mountain and his matches were wet and useless. Doug Reeve and Joe Cox huddled together all during the long night and by dawn, Doug appeared to be resting comfortably. However, just as morning broke through the trees, Reeve appeared to go into spasms and threw up his arms and tried to speak. Then he lay still. The co-pilot Cox tried to lay his badly burned hands on Reeve's heart to see if he was okay, but the feeling in his hands were gone. He placed his face close to Reeve's mouth and there was no breath. Reeve had died. The time, October 12, 1944. Age 26.

Reeve's body was brought down from the mountains in a blind canyon with no escape and taken back to the military cemetery in New Guinea where it remained until 1948, when it was shipped home and interred at Arlington National Cemetery.

Reeve's only child, Douglas, lives in Spotsylvania County and teaches school in Suitland, Md. His parents, Charles and Mary Reeve, are living in Alexandria.

Clyde W. Gillespie
Past Post Commander

VFW Post 7916 Occoquan, Virginia We Need Your Help!

Commander Chuck Wilson, VFW Post 7916, recently sent us a copy of an article written in 1977 detailing the history of our local VFW. The article was a wonderful discovery, found in storage by Vice Commander Turk Maggi.

The article details the story of two young men Claggett Hawkins and Douglas Reeve, who sacrificed their lives for us during WWII. On June 25, 1946 the VFW Post was mustered in as Hawkins-Reeve in their honor with Mac McGuire as the first Commander.

Commander Walter J McGuire was a WWI veteran who retired after 24 years in the Army. Commander McGuire's obituary states during WWI he solely captured a German machinegun nest, was awarded the Purple Heart and France's Croix de Guerre Medal (Cross of War created in 1915).

VFW Post 7916 is working to fill in some of the gaps in their history. If you or if you know of anyone who might have newspaper articles, newsletters or oral history related to Post 7916 you can forward them to Commander Wilson at: cdrpost7916@vfwwebmail.com Connect with them also through their web page and Facebook page listed below. www.vfwpost7916.org www.facebook.com/vfwpost7916 You can also contact Dolores at bytheterrapinpond@yahoo.com Thank you!



VFW Post 7916 located at 204 Mill Street
The physical structure was originally the first
OWL Fire Department, shown above.

Heroine

Definition from Merriam-Webster.com: a woman admired or idealized for her courage, outstanding achievements, or noble qualities.

Do you know of someone in Occoquan who fits that definition? I do! However I will only speak of those who have since left us.

Recently a visitor to the museum asked me to write about some of the women who were important to Occoquan history. Quickly the names of Mamie Davis, Rosemary Selecman and Saluka Toliver came to mind. I have written about them in the past but they are interesting enough to reflect on again.

There are other women who may not stand as prominently in our memories but in their own ways helped shape our history. The first person that came to mind was Margaret Harmon Selecman. She and her husband Henry emigrated from Germany. Henry was hired to manage John Ballendine's Occoquan iron furnace and foundry which opened in 1755. Margaret and Henry established Rolling Farm on the Occoquan River west of town. What strength it must have taken to travel to the English Colonies, speaking a foreign tongue, a new bride with no family or friends to rely on. Their children and generations following have featured prominently in Occoquan history. Margaret was courageous.

Thinking of the iron industry brought to mind some women we rarely think of. Presley Thornton's estate inventoried 69 slave men, women and children living in Occoquan at his death in 1771.¹ The majority of these residents remain nameless. What courage these women had, never knowing if they would be cruelly separated from children or life's companions. Sold at the whim of an owner, beaten or worse, leased like an object. These women were the most courageous.

Moving ahead to the Civil War years, what courage it took to live from day to day never knowing if Confederate or Union soldiers had taken up residence or would raid through town. It was reported in the Local News² on November 26th, 1862, several people were arrested in Occoquan. Included among them was John Underwood's mother, Hugh Hammill, Henry Smoot, Samuel Troth and one other unnamed lady. Their combined crime was a salute to the Federal troops that appeared on the north bank of the Occoquan. We may never know who the unnamed woman was but John Underwood's mother, Ann, would have been 58 years old. Ann ran a bakery on her property to help support her family and she raised a child, John, who was a noted abolitionist. Ann was courageous and noble.

Hannah Thompson, already mentioned in this newsletter, didn't reside in town but contributed her talent and lovingly donated to our collection a delicate baby gown, quaint hat pins and a lovely old doll. Hannah's image is among several of the ladies that worked on the quilt.

A November 27, 1974 article from the Potomac News recounted Hannah's then recent trip to Australia to attend the international meeting of the *Associated Country Women of the World*. The ACWW, still in existence, works to reduce poverty among rural women through self-help programs. Hannah was 78 when she traveled to Australia and was 80 years young when she worked on the Occoquan quilt. Hannah had outstanding achievements in her life.



The bicentennial quilt would not have been crafted without the efforts of Milly Lehto. Milly ran the Country Shop at 302 Mill St in

¹ Kamoie, Laura Crogan, *Neabsco and Occoquan: The Tayloe Family Iron Plantations, 1730-1830*, Prince William VA, Prince William Historical Commission, 2003, pg. 30

² Local News was a paper established after the Federal government closed the Alexandria Gazette offices.

1976. Here she taught quilting classes, sharing her talent with many aspiring quilters and helped organize the 29 women who created the quilt.

Millie was called several times by the Reagan White House to evaluate quilted gift items according to a November 29, 1984 Washington Post article. She was unofficially known as "Quilt Consultant to the White House" and was invited during the bicentennial to be one of the artisans to display her wares in front of the U.S. Capitol during the July 4, 1976 celebration. These were outstanding achievements for Millie.



Group effort

Making the Historic Occoquan quilt was a large group effort. Some of the women who stitched Occoquan in bright colors are, front row, left to right, Nellie Greene, Billie Davis, Evelyn Lynn and Hannah Thompson; back row, left to right, Nellie Curtis, Sophie Donlin, Nancy Mooney, Doris Greene and Milly Lehto. Not pictured are Celia Lynn, Letty Lynn, Martha

Lynn, Mardell Fisher, Mary Anne Phelps, Hazel Peyton, Pat Northcutt, Linda Gray, Marilyn McCann, Jean Naszinger, Jean Randolph, Bobbi Franklin, Myrtle Jennings, Alice McGuire, Sally Souder, Louise Lincoln, Shirley Sullivan, Brenda Sonner and Peg Williams. Mazie Fleming, another of the stitchers, is deceased.

So what do we know about the three ladies first mentioned at the beginning of this article?

Saluka Toliver was one of store keeper, Ogle Harris' children. Born on December 8, 1900 she lived until October 25, 2001. The following resolution passed by the Virginia Legislature on January 9, 2002, best tells us of Saluka's life.

House Joint Resolution No. 52

Whereas, Saluka Beatrice Toliver, the Town of Occoquan's oldest resident, died on October 25, 2001, at the age of 100; and

Whereas, born in Occoquan in 1900, Saluka Toliver was baptized in the Occoquan River in 1914 and was a member of the historic Ebenezer Baptist Church for 87 years; and

Whereas, Saluka Toliver served the Ebenezer Baptist Church as a deaconess, Sunday school teacher and superintendent, and was a member of the Women's Club, the Senior and Inspirational Choirs and the Missionary Society; and

Whereas, Saluka Toliver, served as chairman of the trustee board, as Youth Club coordinator, and as Building Fund coordinator, and became trustee emeritus in 1984; and

Whereas, on November 3, 1990, Saluka Toliver was granted the title "Mother of Ebenezer Baptist Church" by Pastor Lundy; and

Whereas, a witness to the entire 20th century, Saluka Toliver was a valued resource for historians, college students, and town council members who were eager to learn the history from a first-hand source; and

Whereas, in 1996, Saluka Toliver was made an honorary member of Historic Occoquan, and on December 8, 2000, her 100th birthday, Occoquan proclaimed "Saluka Toliver Day" and gave her the keys to the town; now, therefore be it

Resolved by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, that the General Assembly note with great sadness the passing of one of Occoquan's finest citizens and most important resources, Saluka Beatrice Toliver; and, be it

Resolved further, that the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the family of Saluka Beatrice Toliver as an expression of the General Assembly's respect for her memory.

Saluka is an example of courage, outstanding achievements, and noble qualities.

Pictured below: the Harris sisters; Madeline Bell, Artie Harris and Saluka Toliver



Have you sat in the Gazebo in Mamie Davis Park and wondered who Mamie was? Below is a selection from the *Notes on the Life of Mamie Lynn Davis*, written by June Randolph for a previous newsletter.

Mamie Lynn Davis, daughter of William A. Davis and Frances Keys Davis was born on March 14, 1887.

Miss Mamie worked for the Southern Railway Company in Washington D.C. and retired in 1968 after working there 51 years.

After the death of her parents Mamie continued to operate her mother's boarding house in the family home at 202 Commerce Street. Prince William County teachers became her main boarders and the home became known as the "Teacherage". She was always interested in young people and in education. She was given a life membership in the local PTA.

In addition to running the boarding house and commuting to her job in D.C., she was a charter member of the Ladies Auxiliary to the Occoquan, Woodbridge and Lorton Fire Department (OWL) and also belonged to other community organizations.

Beginning in the 1930's she served the Town government variously as Town Clerk, Councilwoman and Treasurer. She was elected Mayor in 1959 and as such she sat as judge in cases brought by the Town Sergeant. For 50 years she served in one capacity or another for the Town of Occoquan.

She died a few weeks before her 100th birthday, leaving to the Town \$100,000 to be used for the Town Hall and park. In appreciation for all she had done for the community, Town officials named the first public park in Occoquan for her. Mamie had outstanding achievements and noble qualities.

Above: Mamie on June 3, 1916, at the access to the iron truss bridge on the north side of the Occoquan River.



Rosemary Selecman, pictured on the right is best remembered for her efforts in changing the designation of the Occoquan to a river from creek. Rosemary, driving up the Shirley Highway (prior to I-95) on her way to work in Washington D.C., noted that when the bridge over the Occoquan was completed as part of the Shirley Highway project the signs that



were put in place said Occoquan Creek. Rosemary felt it was an insult to all the families who for generations had lived and worked on the river. After a three year campaign that began in April 1968, the Board on Geographic names of the U.S. Department of the Interior

approved the use of the name Occoquan River. It seems C.D. Choat, a cartographer, in 1910, mistakenly labeled on a map the word creek rather than river. Previous to that the title river had been used for the Occoquan.

Besides the U.S. Board of Geographic Names Rosemary had correspondence with the Commonwealth of Virginia, the counties adjacent to Prince William, the Washington Star and anyone who could possibly help in her efforts to right this mistake.

On July 14, 1971, Rosemary received a letter from Commissioner Douglas B. Fugate, Commonwealth of Virginia, Department of Highways, notifying her that instructions were issued to change all signs on the river crossings from Occoquan Creek to Occoquan River.

Rosemary can be admired for her outstanding achievements.

The number of women not mentioned on these pages that contributed heroically to the development of our community is beyond count. What of all the women who immigrated to this land and planted roots for their families? The ladies that had to survive the raids and turmoil during the Civil War, they can't be forgotten. Remember the ladies that toiled to restore the town after fire and floods. The women, who have served the town in capacities from council member to mayor, remember them. We must thank the ladies who worked so hard to form our historical society and open the doors of our Mill House Museum, almost 50 years ago.

If anyone has a special story to share about someone who has made a memorable contribution to Occoquan send the story to Dolores at: bytheterrapinpond@yahoo.com

At The Mill House

Yes, before we know it spring will be here! We need volunteers. As the weather improves the activities that we would like to participate in that are sponsored by Town and the merchants will arise. Our staff is hard pressed to fulfill all these needs. Please contact us at the Mill House. We need your time and talent. Many of these events are related to children's activities. Thank you!

Stop at the museum and see us. We love sharing your Occoquan history. Enjoy our new video display. The newest slide show includes the pictures from the 1972 flood that was a result of hurricane Agnes.

Mill House Museum
PO Box 65, 413 Mill Street, Occoquan, VA 22125
www.occoquanhistoricalsociety.org
703-491-7525
Open Sunday through Saturday 11-4

