

OHS QUARTERLY

OCOQUAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY (OHS)

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- The Year Occoquan Lost 1,368 People
- Thank You to Our Sponsors
- OHS/Museum First Quarter Report
- Occoquan by the Numbers
- Art Raffle Winners

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THE YEAR OCOQUAN LOST 1,368 PEOPLE

If you scan the historical population figures for the town of Occoquan, say on an easily-accessible internet site like Wikipedia, something interesting might catch your eye. Until its noticeable growth over the last two decades, from 1860 to 1990 the town's population waxed and waned between a little more than two hundred people to over three hundred — with one exception.

That exception occurred in 1970, when according to the U.S. Decennial Census the population jumped from 301 in 1960 to 975, a growth rate of 223.9%. Although not easily found online, this population

figure continued to increase until it reached 1,609 during the ensuing years. Then, suddenly, in 1980 the number of town residents plummeted to 241, a figure far more consistent with historical norms.

What could explain such dramatic changes in the town's population? Those with some familiarity with Occoquan might reasonably conclude that the town grew dramatically and then after the devastation wrought by Hurricane Agnes in 1972 (and a subsequent storm a few years later) people chose to leave the flood-prone community. The truth, however, is far less dra-

matic — the Census Bureau simply made a mistake.

According to a *Washington Post* article by Mike Sager from January 26, 1983, a member of the count complaint unit at the Census Bureau explained that the trouble for Occoquan started in 1970 when "some residential units, apparently a considerable number," were included as part of the town. Ms. Ann Liddle of the Census Bureau explained that the Bureau could not be exactly sure what happened. Perhaps, she speculated, it was a map error.

(story continued on page 3)

THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS!

Our end of the calendar year fundraising and membership drive was a great success thanks to the generosity of the community. We appreciate everyone who took the time to support OHS by joining or signing up as a sponsor. In this issue of the *OHS Quarterly* we want to thank our exceptionally generous Diamond and Gold Sponsors, a number of whom also signed up to be lifetime members of OHS.

Diamond Sponsors (\$1,000+)

VFW Post 7916



Letty Lynn
Rick and Lee Fitzgerald

Gold Sponsors (\$100+)

Jeanne Marie Bebo
Michael Lochner
Sandra Sierdzinska
Michael Ostergard
Jennifer Shown

If you are interested in supporting OHS by becoming a member or a sponsor, please go to our web site, whose address you can find on page 3 for more information.

OHS / MUSEUM SECOND QUARTER REPORT

Unfortunately, the Occoquan Mill House Museum has been closed for much of January due to weather and planned interior improvements. If you are brave enough, however, to continue walking up Mill Street and past the museum this month, you will notice some “outdoor” winter exhibits that are up that you can appreciate even when the museum is closed.

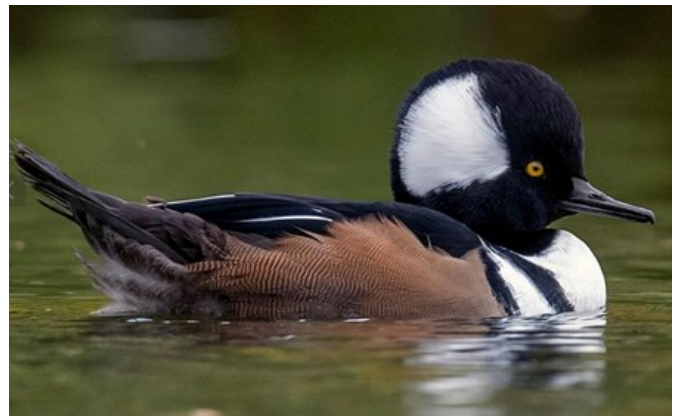
The first is our snow stick, which shows the totals from historic snowstorms (like the one pictured in the upper right from February 11, 1983) that have affected our area since modern-record-keeping began. The red lines nearest to the ground show (and date) the highest one-day, two-day, and three-day snow totals. Blue lines on the upper part of the stick show the five winters that had the highest overall season totals. At the very bottom you will see the green arrow that shows how much we’ve gotten so far this year. As I write these words, this year so far we are just above average.

The exhibit also features pictures of D.C. and Occoquan during these historic storms. If you have any pictures from these storms that were taken in historic Occoquan that you would like to share, please email them to mill-housemuseum@gmail.com, and they may be featured in a future winter exhibit.



We also have pictures and information on things to see outside in Occoquan during the winter. While at first glance the whole world might be seen as nothing but empty, white, brown and gray, there are birds, trees, and signs of mammals that are much easier to see in the winter than in any other season. Because some birds migrate for the winter, there are ducks and other waterfowl that can be found on the Occoquan River only in the winter! The duck in the picture to the right (called a Hooded Merganser) is a winter visitor spotted in the river behind the museum just two weeks ago.

We will open the museum again on weekends that are warm enough during January and will reopen six days a week (11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.), beginning in February.



As some of you may be
Hope to see you them!

In the meantime, looking back on the fall months of 2024 (October through December), the Occoquan Mill House Museum welcomed more than 3,850 visitors coming from as close as right here in town to as far away as countries on the other side of the world. These visitors donated more than \$1,000 during the time

they spent at the museum and made nearly \$1,300 worth of purchases from us! Remember that the profits from all sales go directly back into the operation and support of the museum.

Thank you so very much for your support over all of 2024; we look forward to hosting you in the coming year. — Z. Vitter

THE YEAR OCCOQUAN LOST 1,368 PEOPLE (CONT'D)

Regardless, the bureau discovered and corrected the error during the 1980 count.

The population drop was no small matter for the town. Then, as now, the state provided financial support to localities on the basis of population. Occoquan allegedly did not learn of the counting errors until September 1982 when the annual police grant shrank from \$3,500 to \$500, to be followed by drops in the amounts received from other revenue-sharing arrangements. According to the town council minutes for Septem-

ber 14, 1982, Mayor Don Lynn reported "that town funds from Revenue Sharing and the Police grant had been slashed by approximately 83% because the 1980 Census reported only 240 people as opposed to 1609 people in 1978." Continuing, he noted that "the town has as many problems as if it did have 1609 people."

Town leaders were frustrated that the revenue drop had occurred so suddenly without any time to prepare. "Our budget is shot," Mayor Lynn exclaimed to the *Washington Post*, which noted that the "once affluent town government stands to lose

more than \$24,000, almost half its annual budget."

To address the issue town leaders rented out the upstairs of the town hall to a gift shop and moved town business to the basement. It also planned a craft show for the spring and sought state relief through the late Senator Charles Colgan, who informed them the prospects were bleak.

The mayor argued that the state and federal governments were wrong, and sought a recount, which turned up one additional person, bringing the town's total population to 241.

No doubt the Census Bureau found it hard to believe that the leaders of a town of 241 people actually thought their town had as many as 1,609 residents. Consequently, when the town requested further recounts the Bureau demurred unless the town was willing to foot the bill.

While Occoquan's population has grown significantly over the last three decades, it has yet to reach 1,609. As of the most recent annual count it stood at a bit above 1,000 residents, all firmly within town boundaries. -E. Porta

OCCOQUAN BY THE NUMBERS

// United States / Virginia / Occoquan town, Virginia



Populations and People

Total Population

1,035

P1 | 2020 Decennial Census



Employment

Employment Rate

78.1%

DP03 | 2023 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates



Families and Living Arrangements

Total Households

552

DP02 | 2023 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates



Income and Poverty

Median Household Income

\$142,083

S1901 | 2023 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates



Housing

Total Housing Units

573

H1 | 2020 Decennial Census



Race and Ethnicity

Hispanic or Latino (of any race)

114

P9 | 2020 Decennial Census



Education

Bachelor's Degree or Higher

56.0%

S1501 | 2023 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates



Health

Without Health Care Coverage

8.3%

S2701 | 2023 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

ART RAFFLE WINNERS

Congratulations and thank you to our Art Raffle winners, Richard and Deborah Rohloff! OHS president Bob Love donated a signed print from local artist, photographer, puzzle-maker, and Air Force Veteran, Kevin Poorman, as the prize for a fundraising raffle OHS began months ago. Mr. Poorman's puzzles and art work are available at several shops in Northern Virginia, including Puzzle Palooza and the Art A La Carte Gallery in Occoquan, The Old Town Shop in Alexandria, The Virginia

Store in Fredericksburg, and a number of historic sites including George Mason's plantation at Gunston Hall, Tudor Place in Georgetown, and the Fairfax City Museum.

We appreciate everyone who participated in the raffle to support the Occoquan Historical Society and hope you will consider participating in future such events.

In the meantime, congratulations and thank you Richard and Deborah (at right with OHS president Bob Love).



MILL HOUSE MUSEUM

413 Mill Street,
PO Box 65
Occoquan, VA 22125

Free Admission

Open Thursday thru Tuesday
11:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

millhousemuseum@gmail.com
www.occoquanhistoricalsociety.org

Occoquan Historical Society

The Occoquan Historical Society (OHS) is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization founded in 1969 and dedicated to telling the story of the town of Occoquan, Virginia.

OHS operates the Mill House Museum, an historic structure containing an eclectic collection of documents, photographs, and other artifacts related to the town's history. Over 400 items are catalogued and many of these are on permanent display. Admission to the museum is free Thursday through Tuesday weekly from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. We hope you will consider dropping by.