

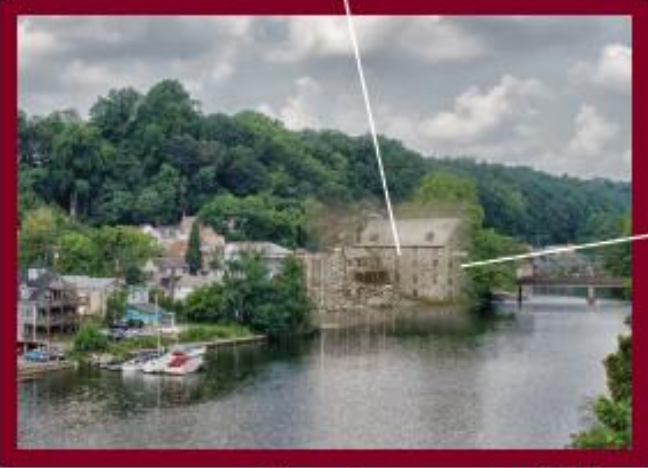
# HISTORIC OCCOQUAN

## The Mill House Museum, Yesterday and Today

The Occoquan Merchants Mill was purchased in 1788 by Lighthorse Harry Lee, father of Robert E. Lee. By 1791 it had been rebuilt by Thomas Ellicott using the patented design of Ellicott's cousin, Oliver Evans. Letters dated that year indicated that George Washington had shown interest in the automated design for his own mill. The Occoquan Mill was eventually sold to Nathaniel Ellicott, brother of Thomas Ellicott. Insurance purchased



in 1796 by Nathaniel Ellicott documented the mill as being 45 feet wide and 75 feet long from the street to the river. The mill was then sold to the Janney family, who owned it for more than 100 years. The miller's office, which was adjacent to the mill, is the only building left of the original mill structures and is now the home of the Mill House Museum. The photographs below show the relationship in size and placement of the mill and museum structure on the riverbank.



Pictures of Occoquan and the mill dating from the late 19th century show the miller's office which is the building we now use as the Mill House Museum.

19th century mill office and today the Mill House Museum



Given in memory of Walter D. Bailey, Historian and Educator, by his family

### Historical Marker Dedication

On June 8, 2013, at 5 p.m. the Occoquan Historical Society will dedicate a historical marker in the memory of Walter D. Bailey.

Walter was a long time Occoquan resident, Prince William County history teacher, local historian and dedicated volunteer. Our new marker donated by Walter's family depicts the location of the old merchant's grist mill in relationship to the Mill House Museum which had been the miller's office for the automated mill. Please join us on June 8 on the sidewalk adjacent to the museum to dedicate this marker in memory of Walter Bailey, a truly distinguished person in Occoquan history!

### *The Mill Racer*

*A Publication of the  
Occoquan Historical Society  
Volume X Spring & Summer 2013*

### Notice of the Occoquan Historical Society Annual Meeting

Our annual membership meeting will be held at 6:30p.m., Thursday June 13, 2013 at the Occoquan Town Hall located at 314 Mill Street. We will continue the tradition of a pot-luck dinner so bring your favorite dish to share. Annual business will include the election of candidates to the Board of Directors. The nominating committee's recommendation for the Board of Directors open positions are; Rose Destefano, Dolores Elder, Bobbie Frank, Shara Kundu, Earnie Porta and June Randolph. Please join us on June 13<sup>th</sup>.



## Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail

The Mill House Museum is now a stamping station on the *Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail*. Visitors on the trail can stop at the Mill House to receive their National Park Service stamp. Our local trail segment is part of the National Trail System that runs from the mouth of the Potomac River to the Allegheny Highlands. Brochures for the main trail and our local Southern Fairfax and Prince William Counties segment can be picked up at the Mill House Museum daily from 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Visit the NPS web site for more detailed information. [www.nps.gov/pohe](http://www.nps.gov/pohe)

Occoquan resident John Ballendine, builder and owner of Rockledge Mansion, the entrepreneur of our first grist and saw mills, iron foundry, forge and commercial bakery offers us a key connection to the history of the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail.

Ballendine, who sold George Washington iron from his Occoquan furnace for the building of Fort Loudon in 1758 and lumber from his saw mill for Mount Vernon that same year, would again be connected to Washington through business with the development of a canal system on the Potomac River.

Ballendine with his own funds had managed to build a canal at Seneca Falls on the Potomac to further his mill and foundry operations on the upper Potomac River. He had begun these operations after selling his Occoquan holdings to John Semple in 1762. A canal system on the Potomac River was an idea embraced by many businessmen of the time. Transportation of goods down the Potomac would be a cheaper and more efficient method than the longer and more arduous land routes. After meeting with

the Governors of Virginia and Maryland in May of 1772 Ballendine received their support and funding to travel to Great Britain to study their system of canals and locks. By 1774 Ballendine had returned home with engineers and skilled workers from Great Britain. A Board of Trustees was appointed by the major investors to oversee the work on this Potomac canal, one of whom was George Washington. In 1775 Ballendine withdrew from the Potomac project to concentrate on a canal and his iron furnace on the James River outside of Richmond. The Potomac River canal project lay dormant during the Revolutionary War.

After the Revolutionary War the Potomac Company was formed with George Washington as its first president. The Potomac Company failed however and the charter was ceded to the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal Company in 1828. The C&O Canal, 184.5 miles long, was in operation from 1831-1924.

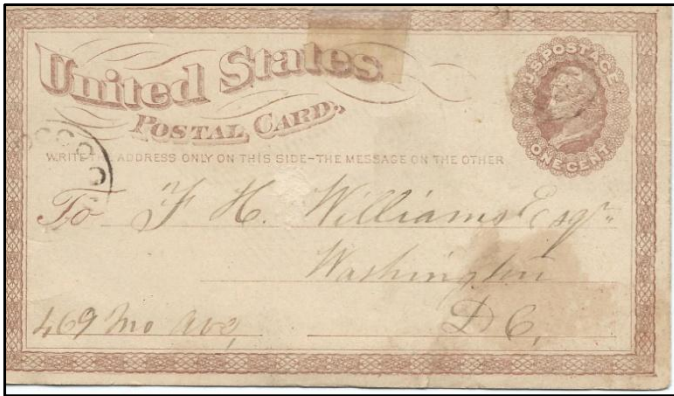
Occoquan was where in 1755 John Ballendine began his enterprises which would extend to many holdings on the upper Potomac River and connect us in history to the Potomac Heritage Scenic Trail in 2013. *Dolores*

### April 20, 2013 Occoquan Town Gala

Once again we thank the Gala Girls for all the hard work and time involved with the wonderful Gala they produced to benefit the Occoquan Historical Society. The 2013 Gala was staged at the Bistro L' Hermitage. Pictured below left to right are Gala Girls; Marge Shafer, Susan Lee-Merrow, Julie Marshall, Betty Dean, Kim Deal, Kristen Gleason, Barb Porta and Jen Berta. Enjoy all the Gala photos at; [www.2013occoquangala.shutterfly.com](http://www.2013occoquangala.shutterfly.com)



## 1873 Hugh Hammill Post Card



Recently an 1873 postcard sent from the Occoquan Post Office and signed by Hugh Hammill was discovered while sorting through the Mill House Museum collection. The text on the card reads;

*Occoquan Va.,  
Dec 22, 1873*

*Dear Sir,*

*I received your Postal Card on Saturday. I can not tell you the exact amount. I think it is \$1000. I will look over the receipts in a week or two & let you know. Hopefully this will be satisfactory until then.*

*Yours Respectfully, H. Hammill*

The card was addressed to;

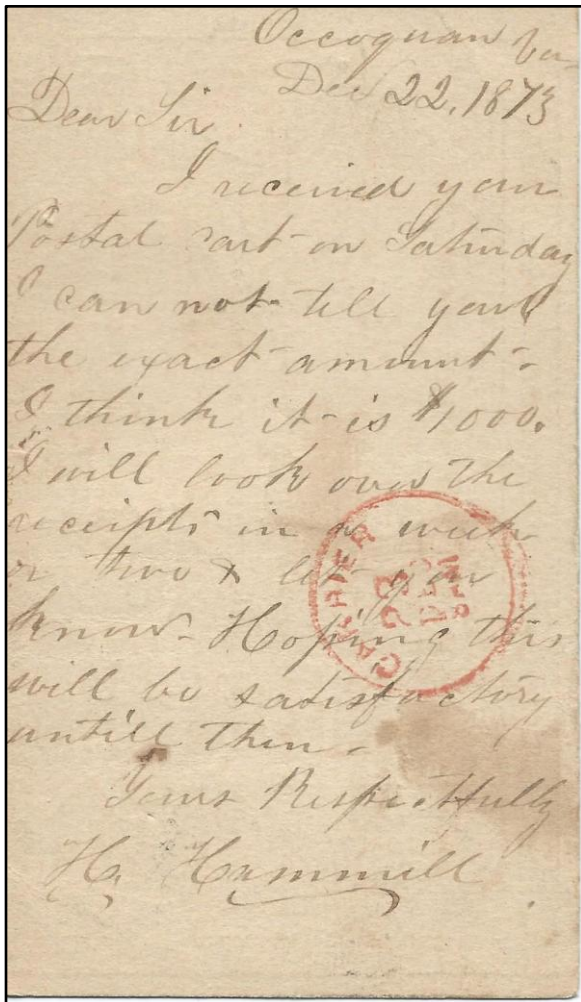
*F. H. Williams Esquire  
469 Mo Ave. Washington DC.*

This postcard was mailed from Occoquan on December 22, 1873 postmarked Occoquan VA and stamped received by carrier on December 23. It was sent to F.H. Williams at 469 MO Ave., Washington D.C. Williams was listed as a clerk in the 1870 census and living on the property of a Joseph Caldwell, an auctioneer.

Hugh Hammill was an important businessman. Among his ventures were shipping, lumber and a hotel in Occoquan. The property at 206 Union Street that we refer to as the Hammill Hotel was operated as the Commercial Hotel by Hugh's son Edward in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Business must have connected Hammill and Williams and the mention of receipts.

The US Post Office department issued its first postal card on May 12, 1873 in Springfield Massachusetts. Congress at first delayed approval of the postcard worried about the privacy of messages.

The postcard was a low cost form of communication. Other than a short time during WWI when the cost rose to 2¢ cents it was issued at and remained 1¢ until January 1, 1952. 31 million cards were sold between May 12 and September 30, 1873 according to the Postmaster General's report. *Dolores*



## Occoquan Historical Society Lecture Series

Thursday March 14, our first lecture of the series was held at Occoquan Town Hall. The topic was *Occoquan and the Civil War*. Speaker Mark Trbovich, President of the *Bull Run Civil War Round Table* and the *Prince William Historic Preservation Foundation* brought history to life with his slide presentation and recounting of the December 1862 raids led by CSA Generals Wade Hampton and Jeb Stuart.



Above left; Mark Trbovich at the Occoquan Town Hall on March 14.

The second in our lecture series was given on Thursday May 9, in the lovely garden terrace of The *Secret Garden Café* located at 404 Mill Street. Kathleen Pablo spoke on the *Turning Point Memorial* that will be built at the Occoquan Regional Park in tribute to the 70 Suffragists who were imprisoned at the Occoquan Workhouse in 1917. The prison property once included the Occoquan Regional Park land. Kathleen, an engaging speaker, offered us some wonderful background on the work and sacrifices made by these ladies so that the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment would pass allowing women the right to vote, which they had been denied for so long. Please visit the web site; [www.suffragistmemorial.org](http://www.suffragistmemorial.org) to see the work Kathleen and many others are doing, learn some fascinating history of the suffragist movement and consider donating to the *Turning Point Memorial* fund.



Above right: Kathleen Pablo at the Secret Garden Café on May 9.

### Upcoming Events:

**OHS's 2013  
Bi-Monthly Lecture Series  
Thursday, July 11, 2013  
Location: TBA  
6:30 p.m.**

### **Guest Speakers:**

**Chris Sperling and Megan B. Veness  
Topic: The Excavations at Old Colchester**

**Please remember to pay your annual dues of \$20. Pay on line or by check made out to the Occoquan Historical Society. Thank you to those who have already paid!**

Mill House Museum  
PO Box 65, 413 Mill Street  
Occoquan Virginia  
22125

[www.occoquanhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.occoquanhistoricalsociety.org)

703-491-7525





*The Mill Racer*  
*A Publication of The Occoquan Historical Society*  
*Volume X Summer Edition*

**Annual Meeting Rescheduled**

**The Occoquan Historical Society's Annual Meeting has been rescheduled for Thursday, August 8, at 6 p.m. We will be meeting at the Occoquan Town Hall located at 314 Mill Street. Since immediately following the meeting is our scheduled lecture we will forgo the usual potluck dinner.**

At 6:30 we will welcome speakers Chris Sperling and Megan B. Veness who will lecture on the excavations at Old Colchester.

**Thank you to all those who have paid their dues.** If you have not paid, a check for the \$20 membership fee, made to the Occoquan Historical Society can be mailed to; PO Box 65 Occoquan, VA 22125.

Or visit our web site and take advantage of the *Pay Pal* option.



### 5' 8" or 6' 10"

I used a current picture of the Mill House Museum that Boyd Alexander took for us and superimposed a photo predating the 1924 mill fire. The earlier photo shows some men of the town standing in front of the miller's office door.\* The same door that brought people into the Occoquan Merchant's Mill office when the mill was in operation brings people into the Mill House Museum today. The museum door frame is marked inside with yellow tape and a height warning sign but we still have to tell people 5'8" and taller to duck or they'll hit their head.

Why is our door frame so short? Where people so much smaller when the mill office was built? No, those men in the picture aren't shorter than the average man today. What has happened is the street and sidewalks have been raised over the years. As street improvements have been made and sidewalks introduced it has shortened the distance from the original street level to the bottom of our doorway. So what was probably a clearance of 6'10" has been shortened to 5'8".

So if you are a petite person like me, you may ignore this message. If not, don't forget to duck! ☺ *Dolores*



Original street level above.

14" of improvements below



\*The mill and the miller's office both had a Dutch door. The men could possibly be in front of either door. Visually the doors appear to be of the same height.



The picture above shows Stewart Christiano demonstrating the milling process to some young children and their parents. Our first milling demonstration in front of the Mill House Museum was on Sunday July 8 and we will have two more on August 4<sup>th</sup> and September 8<sup>th</sup> from 12p.m.-2 p.m. Come down and see us try your hand at milling!



### Workhouse Summer Art Party

On June 22 Dolores Elder and Stewart Christiano represented the Mill House Museum at the *Workhouse Summer Art Party* in Lorton. Several historical sites formed a history corner for children and adults to enjoy activities at. Mount Vernon, Gunston Hall, Manassas Museum, Fairfax Station Railroad Museum and representatives from the Turning Point Suffragist memorial were on hand.

The Mill House had an informative display on wheat and milling along with handouts and seeds to take home to plant. Plus the opportunity to be a miller for the day!

Above top: Stewart Christiano in front of the Mill House exhibit at the Workhouse on June 22  
Below: A young man grinding wheat.

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Occoquan's 1976 Bicentennial Quilt



*The Mill Racer*  
A Publication of The Occoquan Historical Society  
Volume XI Holiday Edition



On the east wall of the Mill House Museum hangs a quilt, a work of art created by 29 women from Occoquan and the surrounding Woodbridge area. The quilt was an idea conceived by Millie Lehto, the proprietor of a quilt shop in town. The quilt depicts a total of 29 homes and businesses in Occoquan plus the logo for the historical society to celebrate our country's bicentennial in 1976.

The quilt took 15 months to complete. Before the quilt found its home in the museum it was entered in the annual stitchery show at Woodlawn Plantation in Fairfax County and the Prince William County Fair. The Occoquan quilt was awarded a first place at both events! The quilt also traveled to Washington D.C. in 1978 to be exhibited at the National Quilting Association show.

The quilt tells us a story about Occoquan. The first square in row two stitched by Letty Lynn shows the Prince William Marina. The marina left Occoquan several years ago and is now the site of Gaslight Landing townhomes. The center block of the quilt was stitched by Nellie Curtis with the logo of *Historic Occoquan Inc.* The name and logo have since changed and we are now *The Occoquan Historical Society*. 302 Mill Street shown in row four, stitched by Mardell Fisher was Blackbeard's Inn back in 1976 and is now home to the Golden Goose.

These are only a few of the stories the quilt tells. It also gives us an opportunity to look closer at these talented ladies. Below is a chart that gives the street address, the business or home located at that site in 1976, the current business or family home, and the name of the seamstress (in some cases more than one) that created each block. Those names jump out as leaders in the Occoquan Historical Society and the community.

Milly Lehto ran the Country Shop at 302 Mill St. Here she taught quilting classes, sharing her talent with many aspiring quilters. 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.

June Randolph stitched the Bailey family home quilt block in the first column of row three. June was our first president of the historical society in 1969 and continues to serve on our Board of Directors 44 years later! June has held every office for the Town of Occoquan from mayor to police chief.

Sophie Donlin was the Occoquan post mistress for many years and one of the original historical society members. When Sophie lived in Occoquan she painted wood replicas of the Mill House for sale at the museum. People still ask for Sophie's hand-painted items.

One name that I have been drawn to since working here at the Mill House since last May was Hannah Thompson. In our collection we have a delicate baby gown, quaint hat pins, a lovely old doll and Hannah's image among several of the ladies that worked on the quilt. Luck prevailed when into the museum one day walked Leah Samuels, a granddaughter of Hannah. Leah sent us a photo of Hannah when she was 26. Leah also included a November 27, 1974 article from the Potomac News. The article 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 would be 80 years young when she worked on the Occoquan quilt.

Hannah and her husband Egbert ran a dairy farm in the area, just east of Occoquan where Marumsco Plaza is on Route 1. The train would pick up milk daily to take into Washington D.C. (family members ran the Thompson dairy based in Washington D.C.). Another item in the museum connected to Hannah is a milk bottle from the Thompson dairy

On your wanderings through Occoquan stop in and take a good look at our beautiful bicentennial quilt. Ask about some of the items we have in the museum that may have belonged to these ladies or their families. Most importantly we can thank them for their contributions in organizing our historical society in 1969 and the Mill House Museum in 1970! *Dolores Elder*

<p><b>202 Commerce St</b> Mamie Davis Home <i>Coffee House of Occoquan</i></p> <p><i>Celia Lynn</i></p>	<p><b>206 Washington St.</b> Bell Family Home</p> <p><i>Mardell Fisher</i></p>	<p><b>209 Washington St.</b> Ebenezer Baptist Church</p> <p><i>Doris Greene</i></p>	<p><b>204 Washington St.</b> Ogle Harris Store <i>Attic Treasures</i></p> <p><i>Mary Anne Phelps</i></p>	<p><b>Mamie Davis Park</b></p> <p><i>Mazie Fleming</i></p>
<p><b>201-207 Mil Street</b> Prince William Marina <i>Gaslight Landing</i></p> <p><i>Letty Lynn</i></p>	<p><b>202&amp;204 Mill St</b> Post Office &amp; VFW</p> <p><i>Jean Nafzinger</i></p>	<p><b>206 Mill St</b> Waterfront Antiques <i>Details of Occoquan</i></p> <p><i>Marilyn McCann</i></p>	<p><b>201 Union St</b> Village Americana <i>Riverside Coffee</i></p> <p><i>Linda Gray</i></p>	<p><b>203 Union St</b> Colchester Shop <i>Village Americana</i></p> <p><i>Hazel Peyton &amp; Pat Northcutt</i></p>
<p><b>305 Union St</b> Bailey Family Home</p> <p><i>June Randolph</i></p>	<p><b>205 Union St</b> Back Stage Union St Guitar</p> <p><i>Hannah Thompson</i></p>	<p><b>Historic Occoquan</b> Occoquan Historical Society <i>Nellie Curtis</i></p>	<p><b>206 Union St</b> Beechwood Apts. Lil Bit of Posh</p> <p><i>Evelyn Lynn</i></p>	<p><b>308 Commerce St.</b> <b>Odd Fellows Hall</b></p> <p><i>Bobbi Franklin</i></p>
<p><b>304-306 Commerce</b> Mooney, McGuire, Souder Families <i>Private Residence</i></p> <p><i>Milly Lehto &amp; Nancy Mooney</i></p>	<p><b>310 Commerce St</b> Old Occoquan Elem. <i>Private Residence</i></p> <p><i>Billie Davis</i></p>	<p><b>302 Mill St</b> Blackbeard's Inn <i>Golden Goose</i></p> <p><i>Mardell Fisher</i></p>	<p><b>304 Mill St.</b> Children's Gallery <i>Spiral Creations</i></p> <p><i>Sophie Donlin</i></p>	<p><b>306-308 Mill St.</b> Jerry's Rings &amp; Things &amp; Bank of VA <i>Jerry's Occoquan Jewelers &amp; Personally Yours</i></p> <p><i>Myrtle Jennings</i></p>
<p><b>314 Mill St.</b> Occoquan Town Hall</p> <p><i>Louise Lincoln &amp; Mardell Fisher</i></p>	<p><b>402 Mill St.</b> Jessie Payne Home <i>Colonial Books</i></p> <p><i>June Randolph &amp; Shirley Sullivan</i></p>	<p><b>404 &amp; 406 Mill St.</b> Country Kitchen Gaslight Antiques <i>Tastefully Yours</i> <i>Hawthorne House</i> <i>Secret Garden Cafe</i></p> <p><i>Mardell Fisher</i></p>	<p><b>408 Mill St</b> Rockledge</p> <p><i>Brenda Sonner</i></p>	<p><b>403&amp;405 Mill St.</b> Knittery, Suni's Unique Nothin's</p> <p><i>Polka Dot Divas</i> <i>Sugar Buzz</i></p> <p><i>Peg Williams</i></p>
<p><b>301 Mill St</b> Occoquan Inn</p> <p><i>Mardell Fisher</i></p>	<p><b>307&amp;309 Mill St</b> Ebashe Country Shop</p> <p><i>Sophie Donlin</i></p>	<p><b>305 Mill</b> Crab House <i>Patriot Scuba</i></p> <p><i>Marilyn McCann</i></p>	<p><b>Vulcan Quarry</b> (Fairfax County)</p> <p><i>Marilyn McCann</i></p>	<p><b>313&amp;317 Mill</b> Lynn's Store <i>Elements LaBella</i></p> <p><i>Martha Lynn</i></p>



## 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.



Above; From an article that appeared on page 3 in the March 28, 1980 Potomac News.

Left front row: Hannah Thompson at age 26 with her two small children.

Right: Hannah at age 84



## Scouting in the Community



Pictured on the left is **Brownie Troop 1766** from the Lake Ridge area. The Troop visited the Mill House on Saturday, December 7, as part of their



work for the, *Celebrating Community* Badge. The girls enjoyed the milling DVD, our Children's Discovery Table shown below left, and learning how children may have spent their day in an earlier time!



**Jason Nash from BSA Troop 1367** chose the Mill House Museum for his Eagle project. Jason has shown his leadership abilities in getting his project developed and implemented. In May Jason visited the Mill House to see if there was a project we would be interested in receiving help with. Our exterior railings and windows were in need of TLC and Jason agreed to take the work on. The project work was accepted by Jason's scout advisor and he then presented the necessary paper work to the Occoquan Architectural Review Board for approval.

The work has been performed by the scouts from Troop 1367 under Jason's guidance. The boys have painted the railing, all the iron work around the windows and door, glazed and painted the windows and refinished our sales and donation case inside the Mill House. Their labor intensive work is greatly appreciated by the museum staff and the Board of the Occoquan Historical Society. Local residents and our museum visitors benefit from the fresh new look!

# Troop 1367 at work!



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We are sad to say that on November 28, 2013 we lost one of our members, Hazel V. Hall.



The Mill House Museum is free and open daily from 11 a.m. – 4p.m. (Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Years)  
PO Box 65, 413 Mill Street, Occoquan, VA 22125  
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[www.occoquanhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.occoquanhistoricalsociety.org)