

Mill House Monthly

December, 2017

A Publication of the Occoquan Historical Society

December 8, 1831

Following are excerpts from the 1831 sale of a parcel of land in Occoquan from members of the Janney family to a group of Alexandria gentleman. Shown in red, that piece of land as described, is half of lot 55 on the 1804 plat and the site of a Presbyterian Church at that early date. Later this structure would be described as a Methodist Church in deeds.

...This indenture made this 8th day of December in the year 1831 between Joseph Janney Junior, John H. Janney and Margaret T. Janney his wife of the

Town of Alexandria in the District of Columbia of the one part and William C. Walton, Robert Jamison, Aaron D. Harmon and Edward A. May of said town and district of the other part.

Beginning at a point on the South side of Commerce Street at the distance of 120 feet from Union Street: thence down Commerce Street thirty feet, thence with a line parallel to Union Street fifty feet, thence with a line parallel to Commerce Street thirty feet, and thence with a line parallel to Union Street fifty feet to the beginning being the same lot on which is erected the Presbyterian Meeting House;....Church once located at 308 Commerce Street.



So what did four men from Alexandria want with a lot next to a Presbyterian Church in Occoquan? William C. Walton, the first name listed on the deed as purchasing the property was a Pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church in Alexandria Virginia. Following are excerpts from the "Memoir of William C. Walton, late Pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church in Alexandria, D.C. and of the Free Church in Hartford, Conn.", written in 1837, Joshua N. Danforth and found on archive.org.

Page 173: March 1828...

A new convert to the faith moved with his family to Occoquan and started a Sunday school in his home. Within a few weeks enough people were so that a congregation was formed.

Page 197: November 25, 1829...William C. Walton wrote from Alexandria a letter to his nephew. ...However before I left home, brother R. and Mr. returned from Occoquan, a village sixteen miles from here, where brother M. resides, and gave me such an account of the state of things at that place, that when I got to Baltimore and saw Mr. L. there, I concluded to return and visit Occoquan. I believe it was of the Lord. I found a number of people anxious to hear, and somewhat concerned about their spiritual condition. They crowded our meetings, and at the close of the last, which was last Sabbath, I proposed that all who were determined immediately to seek salvation, should express that

determination by going down upon their knees. Instantly there was a sinking to the floor all around to the number of twenty-five or thirty persons! Since that time I understand that six or seven have obtained a hope; others have been laughed out of their concern. But still the work is going on, and, I hop', will go on; though it meets with violent opposition. A minister there, by a little imprudence, might soon bring himself something like the fate of Stephen. Brother M. has a Sabbath School there of upwards of forty scholars. In this school the excitement commenced.....

The brother thus useful at Occoquan, the place of his abode, was once an infidel, and through the agency of Walton was snatched from the grasp of the enemy, and by the Spirit of the Lord transformed into a brave soldier of the cross...

Page 204: January, 1830.... Walton visited Occoquan, preached to the little church, addressed them on the subject of temperance, and **purchased a lot for the use of the Sabbath School, and public worship.**

Page 209: September 6, 1830.... yesterday according to appointment, I went to Occoquan, and last night preached in our new building for the first time. It was full, and the people were very attentive, some wept.....I feel a sort of parental fondness for the building. I exceedingly rejoice in the accomplishment of such an object. The Lord has built the home, and therefore we have not labored in vain."

Page 210: September, 1830..... Rev. Walton held a series of meetings at his favorite Occoquan, taking with him, as assistants in the work, a number of his church members, and worshipping in the woods, because no house could contain the people.

From the history of the Old Presbyterian Meeting House in Alexandria, VA, we learn that Rev. Dr. Elias Harrison was ordained in 1817 and served the community until 1863. According to the Meeting House history, during his years of service he was instrumental in organizing several new congregations, one being in Occoquan. Many accounts are given of Harrison as a tireless abolitionist, working to fight slavery even after Alexandria was once restored to Virginia in 1847, where it was illegal to even utter against slavery. In 1818 the Presbyterian Church declared that slavery was a sin and it was the duty of all Christians to work for the abolishment of slavery.

Reverends Harrison and Walton must have crossed paths with their work in the Presbyterian community. This early Presbyterian Church community in Occoquan along with the Quaker presence helps set the stage for Occoquan being a core of abolitionists prior to the Civil War and the staging of the Lincoln Liberty Pole in 1860. The 55 votes Abraham Lincoln received from the Occoquan district were his only votes in Prince William County in the 1860 election. The strong influence of men like Reverends Walton and Harrison helped form a base for the freedom of all people. Local residents John Underwood and Samuel M Janney both faced trials for their stance against slavery. Providence thankfully brought these people to Occoquan to stand for what was right.

Notes: From 1801-1846 Alexandria was part of the District of Columbia and called Alexandria County.

Our Mill House Museum Docents

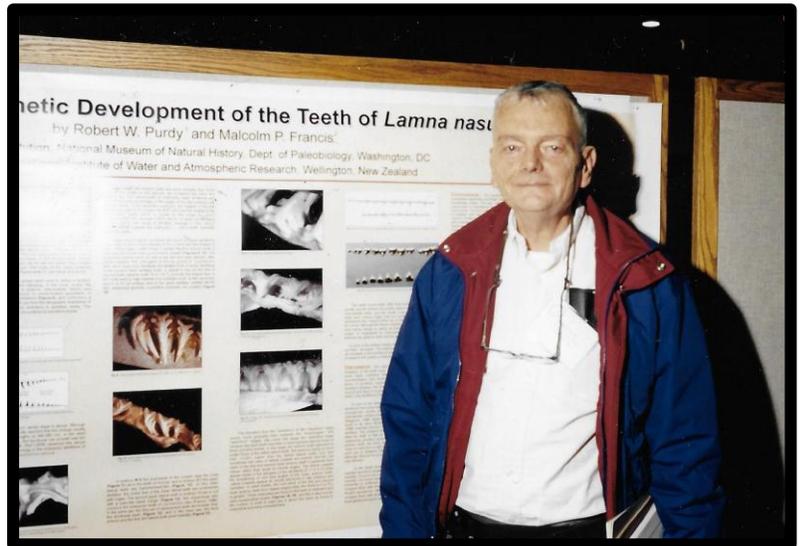
It's that time of year to reflect on what we have accomplished over the past 12 months. At the Mill House our accomplishments are in a big part the result of the staff who shared their love of Occoquan history with our visitors.



That love of history and the many different avenues it represents is a theme that follows our museum interpreters when they walk out of the doorway at 413 Mill Street. Following are short descriptions of what we spend our "free" time on.

Anna Marie McCloskey shared this with us. *As the "Matriarch" of a large family...I enjoy the togetherness and special doings all year long. I also love to paint in oils that I give away to family and friends. I recently sold 5 paintings through a designer which was a big surprise. My life is a simple one that I share with my sweet shelter dog "Daisy".* On the left is Anna Marie, back row, fourth from the left, along with her family. Anna Marie rotates days at the museum but can be found on some Tuesdays, Wednesdays and whenever we give her a call!

On the right is Robert (Bob) W. Purdy posing next to a poster detailing the development and variations in mackerel shark teeth at the meeting of the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology in Bozeman, MT, October 4, 2001. A longer version of this study was published in a peer reviewed journal about five years later. It was cited as the first paper to trace the development of shark teeth from embryo to adult. Bob is retired from the Smithsonian and is a fossil fish specialist. Bob can usually be found at the Mill House on Wednesday unless he is out on a dig!





On Tuesdays, look for Joe Neville on duty at the museum. You might also find him on the road at Spring Training in Fort Myers, Florida, as in the picture on the left. Research relating to German Americans and the outbreak of World War I occupies much of his time. Joe's research has resulted in the delivery of several papers at the annual symposia of the Society for German-American Studies.



Crystal Alavez, on the far right, is standing with a friend on a bridge over the site of the Boston Tea Party. Crystal told us; *I love visiting historical sites, but it's even more fun with friends. Above all, I love spending time with friends and family. Whether it's hiking or watching a movie.* Crystal came to us as a volunteer, generously donating her talents. Crystal can be counted on to help out at special events and fill in at the museum as her time allows.

Saturday usually finds Rhonda Williams at the Mill House where she enjoys meeting our visitors and sharing our Occoquan history. A historian through and through she is the keeper of her family's genealogy and a member of the DAR. Gunston Hall, the home of George Mason, is lucky to have Rhonda as a house interpreter several days a week. Spare time is not in her vocabulary but tending her garden and particularly herbs adds some relaxation to her busy week.

Dace Krastkalns told us; *I love to travel. I have been to Europe and Canada several times and have visited 40 out of the 50 states (even Hawaii and Alaska). When traveling I make a point of finding historic houses, museums and places of interest to explore. I enjoy cooking and have taken gourmet classes in Charleston, New Hampshire, Georgia, New Mexico and of course Virginia. As a die hard "foodie" I have a collection of over 600 cookbooks. I also enjoy reading both fiction and nonfiction. Books take me to places I would never be able to visit. As Cicero said - "A room without books is like a body without a soul."* We start our week with Sunday and Dace at the museum.



Dolores Elder enjoys traveling to historic sites such as Louisbourg, Nova Scotia and the light house on the left. Historic research, reading, crafts, baking, early morning walks, family, friends and her favorite roll as Grammy are all great ways to spend the day. Stop in at the museum on Monday, Thursday or Friday to say hi.

Meadow Cemetery/occoquan Burial Ground

Leading BSA troop 1396 as part of his Eagle project, Jordan Blake and his fellow scouts cleared the area of Meadow Cemetery/occoquan Burial Ground on Saturday, November 25. The scouts constructed a beautiful handrail along the steps that were built during a previous Eagle project. The land was cleared and debris removed from the cemetery site. Below are a few photos from the Meadow Cemetery. Thank you Jordan and BSA 1396!



Historical Marker Restoration

The Occoquan Historical Society is assisting the Town of Occoquan with a historical marker restoration program. Attached with the newsletter is a letter written by our OHS Board president, Marge Shaffer. One person has stepped forward to “adopt” for restoration the marker that stands in front of Town Hall.

This is a wonderful way to help preserve our history and beautify the town at the same time. Think of joining with neighbors, friends or within a civic group to adopt one of the markers. Details are included in Marge’s letter. Thank you!

As we end 2017 thank you to everyone who has supported us in spirit, with donations to our collection and of course financially. We wouldn’t be here without all of you! *Dolores*

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

www.occoquanhistoricalsociety.org

703-491-7525

Open Sunday through Saturday 11-4

