

# October 2015 Monthly News

## OWL Commemorative

Lisa Thomas, the great-niece of Carl Eike, donated to the Mill House Carl's OWL Fire Department commemorative set of glassware from their 1988 50th anniversary. Carl Eike, a local resident, wrote a series of articles for the now defunct Potomac News. These history based stories are in a book published by the Prince William County Historic Commission, "Yes Virginia, There is a Carl Eike."



The OWL (Occoquan, Woodbridge, Lorton) Fire Department was organized on September 16, 1938 and its charter was granted in 1940. Occoquan resident Fred Lynn was the first OWL Fire Chief. The first Fire Station was located in a small building on Mill Street and in 1946 the station moved to a larger structure, the old Leary lumber supply building at 204 Mill Street (pictured above). That building is now the home of VFW Post 7916. In 1958 the OWL station moved to a new facility on Route 1 in Woodbridge.



Left: One of nine commemorative mugs in the set that includes a pitcher.

## Occoquan Streetscape

A beautiful streetscape art work composed of 15 historic Occoquan photos was unveiled on Thursday, September 17. The project was the result of a partnership between the Occoquan River Communities, the Town of Occoquan and the Occoquan Historical Society.

The streetscape is adjacent to the sidewalk on the north side of the 400 block of Mill Street.

Below is a short history on each of the photos as you walk west to east along the streetscape.

### The Merchants' Mill Site

The automated grist mill was adjacent to the west side of the Mill House Museum located at 413 Mill Street. The property was purchased in 1788 at auction by "Light Horse" Harry Lee. Lee used the automated milling design patented by Oliver Evans to build this four story, 45' wide and 75' long structure. The mill burnt in 1924 from a fire originating from the electric company's generator housed in the old 1755 era country mill. The local fire department was not chartered until 1940.



### Rockledge Mansion

Built with local Occoquan granite, circa 1757, Rockledge has survived fire and structural damage. Occoquan Iron Works owner, John Ballendine, employed William Buckland to design his family home. Buckland had arrived in Virginia as an indentured servant to the Mason family, brought here to complete the work at Gunston Hall. The old stone house exterior survives in its eighteenth century appearance. The mansion has been



owned by only 7 families in its almost 260 year history!

### Commerce Street

This photo looks east from the corner of Commerce and Ellicott Streets. The steeple of the



Methodist Episcopal Church is on the left. The church was destroyed in the August 25, 1916 Occoquan fire. The home on the right at 312 Commerce Street still survives. The old dirt streets made travel difficult and river transportation was utilized whenever possible.

### Bank of Occoquan

Looking north on Union Street towards the Occoquan River. The Bank of Occoquan sign hangs on the west side of the street.



The Bank's Mill Street location was adjacent to the Weedon home, where the 1916 fire originated in an oil burning stove and burned the bank structure along with many homes and businesses. The Union Street location may have been temporary after the fire destruction.

### The Underwood House

314 Mill Street was destroyed in the 1916 fire. John Underwood, a noted abolitionist



resided here. Underwood was arrested in 1857 for speaking out against slavery and found guilty at trial in Brentsville. In an 1862 raid led by CSA General Wade Hampton, Underwood was taken prisoner and branded a traitor to the Confederacy. Released in a trade the next year, Underwood was called to Washington to be debriefed by Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln requested the Secretary of War to find a position for Underwood. Underwood was twice named a U.S. Marshall.

### Burdette's Eatery and the Ellicott Motor Company

These two Occoquan businesses stood just west of the Virginia Grill and Occoquan Inn on Mill Street. The photo taken in the late 1920's to early 1930's show a typical day in Occoquan.



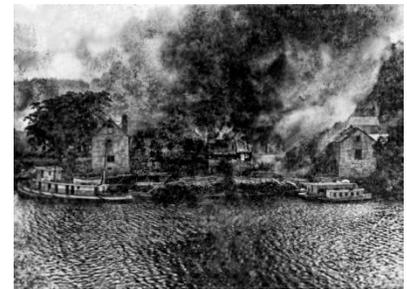
### Local Residents

This photo taken in front of 404-406 Mill Street shows the time of change from horse and buggy deliveries to gasoline powered vehicles. The Tyson Janney Store on the opposite side of the street was destroyed in the 1916 fire.



### Fire of 1916

The August 25, 1916 fire started in a wood stove at the J. Hood Weedon home on Mill Street. The



fire quickly spread to the adjacent bank and other businesses along Mill Street, The fire spread south to Commerce Street burning the Methodist Episcopal Church. In all, the fire caused an estimated \$50,000 in damages. With no local fire department, bucket brigades battled the fire until the Alexandria Fire Department could respond to the call.

### In Front of the Mill House

The Mill House located at 413 Mill Street was built as an office and store room for the 1789 grist mill. No doubt a great gathering place to share the news of the day and wait for a load of wheat to be ground and sifted for flour.



## Shad Bake

Shad bakes were popular arenas for political gatherings. The old 1828 cotton mill property just above the Occoquan town bridge provided access to the river for fresh caught shad to roast on wood planks while discussing upcoming elections and topics of the day.



## Lyric Theater

The Lyric was located at 403 Mill Street. The two story theater was segregated by floors. The first floor for whites and the second floor seating area designated for black movie goers turned out to be the best seats! 50 cents bought a ticket to the movie "Four Feathers" in 1929. A steal as ticket prices were \$2 in NYC! The movie starred William Powell, Richard Arlen, Fay Wray, Clive Brook and Noah Berry. Or maybe take in "Tarzan Triumphs" with Johnny Weissmuller in July 1943. Call phone # 21 for information.



## Mill Street

Looking east down Mill Street in the 1950's. 406 Mill Street is the first building on the right. The Alexandria Dairy truck on the left is delivering milk at the local residences. Life was peaceful on a summer day, good to ride bikes, row a boat, and maybe drop a fishing line in the river to bring home dinner.



## Baptisms in the Occoquan River

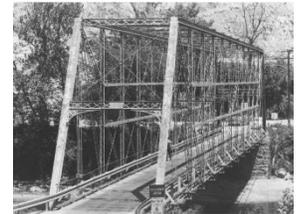


Reverend Lewis Bailey founded the Ebenezer Church in Occoquan. A former slave,

the Reverend Bailey would walk from Alexandria to hold services in Occoquan. According to the church history the cornerstone for the first Ebenezer Church was laid on the first Sunday in May, 1883. The largest group baptism in the Occoquan was also on the first Sunday of May, 1914. Forty people joined the church that day!

## Pratt Truss Bridge

The iron truss bridge built in 1878 was destroyed in 1972 from the remnants of hurricane Agnes.



Located at the west end of Mill Street this has been the site of the bridge crossing since Nathaniel Ellicott's wooden bridge in 1795. Built to carry horses and wagons, this 1878 bridge was a one lane auto bridge in 1972. Oh, the traffic jams coming to town, honk your horn and hope the person at the other end knew how to take turns!

## Ogle Harris and Sons Store

Located at 204 Washington Street, Ogle Harris opened his business around 1915 and was



known as a kind and generous soul. He loved to hand churn strawberry ice cream according to his daughter Saluka Toliver. Local children knew where to find a cold grape Nehi soda! Ogle and his sons, Arthur and Norman, would allow local residents to charge their groceries until they could afford to pay. No computers in those days, his accounts were kept in a spiral notebook.

**Note:** A few photographs used in the above descriptions may vary slightly from the Streetscape graphics. The display is beautiful and should be enjoyed during a stroll down Mill Street!

## Town Hall Display Case



The next time you walk into the Occoquan Town Hall, notice the new exhibit in the glass wall case. The Minton soup tureen and ladle, originally belonging to Mamie Davis and part of the set donated by the McMaster family, is on display for everyone to enjoy.

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Mill House Museum  
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