

The Miller Massacre at Strasburg

The emigration of large numbers of German speaking people from Pennsylvania into the Shenandoah Valley began in the first half of the 18th Century. It was encouraged by the Virginia Colony because these settlers acted as a buffer between the English colonists on the eastern side of the Blue Ridge Mountains and Native Americans, who were increasingly unhappy with the presence of Europeans in their territory. Indian raids, murder and kidnapping against the settlers began in the 1750s and continued well into the 1760s, even though the French & Indian War, a result of the tensions between the colonists and the Indians and their allies, the French, had ended in 1763. John Wayland, in his book, *A History of Shenandoah County*, tells us about a raid that took place near Strasburg in 1764, probably in July.

A group of eight Indians and one white man attacked and killed John Dellinger and kidnapped his wife Rachel and her baby at their home on the western edge of Strasburg. They then went to the George Miller homestead about three miles north of the town. There Miller, his wife and two of his children were in a nearby field spreading flax. Their murder by the raiders was witnessed by a young daughter, at home sick in bed, who saw the attack through a window, escaped and ran for help. She ran east towards Cedar Creek, first to the Stickley homestead, then to George Bowman's home. Abraham Bowman, a son of George Bowman, quickly rode his horse to the Miller place. He was joined there by Thomas Newell, a neighbor who had heard the attack and ran the mile from his home to the Millers. There they found the dead and dying victims and saw that the attackers had tried to set fire to the Miller house by placing a burning coal in the family Bible. The raiders had also killed the family's cat and set it on top of the smoldering Bible, but apparently the weight of the animal extinguished the fire.

The Indians were followed and overtaken on South Branch Mountain in present day West Virginia. One of the attackers was killed and Rachel Dellinger was rescued and returned home. Her baby had been murdered near the Capon River.

Today, the Miller family Bible, with its partially burned pages, is on display at the Strasburg Museum. The Dellinger homestead, no longer standing, was near where Spengler Hall is today. The George Miller homestead, north of Strasburg, has long since disappeared. The stone Bowman house, known as Fort Bowman and as Harmony Hall, still stands on Cedar Creek. It is owned by Belle Grove, Inc. and will be preserved as an important part of the history of Shenandoah County and the Valley.

This moment from the past was presented by the Shenandoah County Historical Society.