Historian gives talk on Fredericksburg

Michael L. Strauss is writing a history of the village in northern Lebanon

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Ever hear of the town of Nassau in Lebanon County? Or Newton? Stumpstown might be the more familiar local name for the same village, now known officially as Fredericksburg.

Nassau is the name of the town that appears on maps from the late 1700s, according to author Michael L. Strauss, who is writing a history of the village in northern Lebanon.

"Fredericksburg was a substantial community and has a rich history," Strauss said.

Strauss gave a 90-minute talk of the history of the community, its businesses and organizations during a meeting of the Lebanon Valley Genealogical Society at the Lebanon County Historical Society.

Strauss, who has never lived in the village himself, has been working on the history about 20 years.

"I got into genealogy when I was about 12 years old, and I was fascinated with family history," he said. "When I started doing my family history, I discovered that most of my family members came from the town, so I had an immediate draw to the community."

Over the years, relatives gave him old photos of the town.

"I noticed this connection not just with the people but with

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Fredericksburg historian Michael Strauss looks at photos held by Ira Rudy of Fredericksburg in the auditorium of the Lebanon County Historical Society on Sunday.

items related to the town, and then people started to tell me stories," he said.

In 1761, Frederick Stump laid out the town, which then took his name — Stumpstown. When the first post office was established in the town, Stumpstown became the official name. In 1843, it was changed at the request of the residents who petitioned the state Legislature to change the name to Fredericksburg, he said.

As part of his presentation, Strauss showed the audience a unique early map of the town that showed railroad tracks.

"There were three individual attempts to bring a railroad into Fredericksburg. They even graded the land in hopes that the railroad would come through, but it never happened," Strauss said. "They put the prospective railroad on the map, and then it never happened."

Around 1910, he said, there was an effort to bring a trolley line from Jonestown to Fredericksburg. That, too, never materialized, he said.

With a combination of old town maps and photos, Strauss gave a history of the businesses — about seven clothing factories, including one owned by a New York

firm, between 1884 and 1968, several cigar factories, grocery stores and four hotels, among others.

Fredericksburg also is known for its most prosperous one-time resident, James Lick, who provided the money to build the famous Lick Observatory in California. But Strauss pointed out others from the town who became famous, including Lucius Robinson, a teacher who taught briefly at a school in the town and later became the 26th governor of New York, serving from 1877 to 1879.

Strauss' book isn't the first history of the village. Ezra Grumbine wrote a history of the community in 1909.

"It was a broad brush stroke history. It wasn't anything substantial and it really only covered to that year. It has been 100 years since that first attempt at a history. Fredericksburg is long overdue," Strauss said.

Strauss said he hopes to have his history completed by the end of this year.

Strauss was born in Hershey, raised in Lebanon and also lived in Mt. Gretna. Currently, he lives in Virginia. He is a professional Accredited Genealogist for the Eastern States Region with the International Commission of Accredited Professional Genealogists and a national genealogical lecturer.

Strauss has created a website devoted to the community's history at www.fredpah.com.

The site includes early maps, old and rare photos, and histories of the community's businesses and organizations. He invites residents with information about the town, including old photos, to contact him through the website.