

Pepin County Historical Society
OLD COURTHOUSE MUSEUM
Washington Square
315 W. Madison St.
Durand, WI 54736



THE COLUMNS

Newsletter of the Pepin County Historical Society

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Affiliate of the Wisconsin Historical Society

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Find us on the Internet!
www.oldpepincountycourthouse.org

2021 MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL NOTICE

Please take time **right now** to fill out the box below and return with your check to:

Pepin County Historical Society
315 W. Madison St.
Durand, WI 54736

2021 MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL NOTICE

NAME _____
STREET _____
CITY _____
STATE/ZIP _____

MEMBERSHIPS:

- ___ \$8 Individual
- ___ \$12 Family
- ___ \$25 Friends of Museum
- ___ \$25 Business/Professional
- ___ \$50 Contributing
- ___ \$100 Sponsor
- ___ \$1000 Lifetime

And, here's my extra donation of \$ _____

NOTICE TO RENEW

your PCHS membership for 2021. Please **TAKE TIME RIGHT NOW** to fill out the form at left and send it in today. Your continued interest and support of PCHS helps make our mission to “preserve the history and traditions of Pepin County” possible. Our challenge is to make history exciting and available to everyone. We are doing it because of **you!**

GREETINGS! from your PCHS President –

This year continues to be challenging and stressful with many events postponed or canceled. But due to the efforts of our great staff and volunteers we kept our building open to the public for the 2020 summer season. Understandably our visitor numbers were down this year, but those who did visit the museum received extra attention from staff and never suffered that feeling of being overcrowded.

Despite all the disruption due to Covid, the PCHS board did manage to have a couple socially-distanced meetings. The biggest news is our long time Treasurer Galen Radle stepped away from his duties after decades of dedicated service. [On behalf of the PCHS board and members, I want to give a great big **THANK YOU!!!** to Galen. You are a great community servant and a wonderful person!]

Fellow board member Tom Garnevicus will step in as the new Treasurer; and, the board appointed Matt Sam to fill in the remainder of Galen's term. Thank you, Tom; and, welcome, Matt.

The memorial bricks purchased last spring by members and friends of the museum have finally been laid in place at the foot of the bell tower. We have also now illuminated the tower to show it off better during the evening. Another smaller order for engraved bricks has been made and will be laid as weather permits after we get them.

Also, be sure to take notice of the brand new handrail on the front steps. Durand Welding designed and installed the handrail with help from board member Dick Schlosser. It's a much needed assist for some of us and it looks great.

Many thanks to our summer manager Mike Shoup for all his work with cleaning and organizing the office and indexing our history files. This index identifies each file and lists the items that can be found inside. And, it's available on our website thanks to the efforts of new board member Matt Sam.

Thank you again to all who helped in any way at the Museum. Without you we would not exist.

God Bless you all ...
- Kim Wagenbach, PCHS President

These Covidian Times

The Covid-19 pandemic has already become a significant part of history and has firmly implanted itself in our memories as a life-changing event. This pandemic has impacted the museum as well and will affect how we present history to the public in the future. We have been using computers and the Internet to reach a larger audience and will be moving toward more “virtual” museum experiences.

These Covidian Times may be disruptive and stressful now, but they could also include the spark of serendipity and bring with them positive cultural and social changes that actually make our life experience better. The challenge for us now at the museum is to recognize opportunity when it knocks and to research and develop new means and methods to educate and engage the public.

We have made a serious effort during this past year to upgrade our presence on the Internet. A complete re-design of our website (located at www.oldpepincountycourthouse.org) and re-birth of our Facebook page has allowed us to give you more Pepin County history than ever before – more written history, more photos, more research opportunities. Credit for these improvements must be directed to summer manager Mike Shoup and to new PCHS board member Matt Sam for the technical work on this project. We are exploring development of virtual tours of the museum, video storytelling and PowerPoint presentations of people, places and events all accessible from our website.

For decades now, we have repeated our annual calendar with a few minor variations: annual member meeting, three newsletters, membership drive, three educational events and, maybe, an extra open house, bell tower dedication or fundraiser thrown in. All the public education events were cancelled during 2020 and we can only dream about when we'll resume them. For now, though, we will have to ride this Covid bus to the end of its line and then re-assess the immediate future and attempt to get ourselves back to a new normal.

SOCIETY & MUSEUM NEWS

Several dozen engraved memorial bricks were installed by PCHS member Joe Lieftring at the base of the Black School bell tower now located on Washington Square. Most of the bricks had been removed more than a year ago from their initial home in Arkansaw where the bell tower first stood in front of the former Durand-Arkansaw Elementary School.

Long-time volunteer, Judy Schwellenbach, recently gave notice of her "retirement." Judy has moved to the Twin Cities to be nearer to family. Her love of history and for the museum are evident in her many years of showing up to help with whatever cleaning project, school group or public event we needed help with. Another faithful long-term helper, Joyce Haigh, will be equally difficult to replace. Between them, these wonderful ladies accumulated nearly a half-century of volunteer service to the Old Courthouse Museum.

With the cancellation of all our events and large group tours this year, we didn't need to call for help as much. But Covid did not slow down nor diminish the time and attention given to the Museum by Jean Kannel (and husband Don). Over the years Jean has consistently been our most dedicated board member, janitor, exhibit designer, story compiler, and just plain "Jean-of-All-Tasks." Jean's interest and energy have played a big part in the success of our excellent museum.

The Old Courthouse Museum is **open anytime by appointment!** Call 715-672-5423 to set up a time.

Historic Sites in Pepin County

- 1885 Circus Poster – City of Durand
- Old Courthouse Museum and 1895 Jail – Durand
- Murals on Madison - Durand
- Arkansaw Creek Park – Village of Arkansaw
- Little Plum School House – Town of Frankfort
- Little House Wayside - Town of Pepin
- Laura Ingalls Wilder Museum – Village of Pepin
- Pepin Depot Museum – Village of Pepin
- Stockholm Museum – Village of Stockholm

"THE COLUMNS" is published three times a year by the Pepin County Historical Society.
Editor: Terry J. Mesch

Memorials Received

FOR:	FROM:
Wilbert A. "Bill" Weiss	Joe/Christie Lieftring
Virginia Kallstrom	Katherine Holden
Patricia Sabelko	Joe/Christie Lieftring
Gwelda Glaus	Joe/Christie Lieftring
Bill Dorwin	Lee Grippen
Members Durand High School	
Class of 1961:	
Don "Andy" Anderson, Chuck Polzer	
Brenda (Hooker) Fedie, Jim Swain,	Lee Grippen
Bill Dorwin.	
Class of '60: Marilyn (Radle) Hayden	

Bequeathment Received

Readers will recall a tribute to Bernard Brantner in the last edition of *The Columns*, a testimonial to Bernard's contributions to the Museum and PCHS. His giving continues even to now ... we recently received an unexpected, generous bequeathment which Bernard had instructed his family to make to the Museum after he was gone. Thank you, Bernard. You are with us always.

Galen Radle's "Retirement" from PCHS

Galen Radle's decades of service to PCHS is just one example of his commitment and contribution to his community. He provides us with a wonderful role-model for what "service to others" really means. His pleasant demeanor, honesty and common sense are hallmarks of the human being he is. Add to that a great sense of humor and he helped make meetings, dinners, games and any other events he participated in fun and productive.

His commitment to his community is evident whether he was racing up and down the basketball court with his whistle, tending to customers at the bank, crunching budget numbers for school districts, weighing issues of the Senior Council, managing finances for the Historical Society, or being the ever-cheerful greeter at another Jack Harmon Chicken Dinner. We haven't even mentioned his commitment to family, friends, church and so much more. We are all richer for knowing this humble and loving man. Thank you, Galen, for what you do and who you are!

Pepin County Historical Society

Officers: President: Kim Wagenbach
Vice-Pres: Dick Schlosser
Secretary: Lois Laehn
Treasurer: Tom Garnevicus
Directors: Rita Conlin, John Solie, Jean Kannel,
Jane Jafferi, Matt Sam

"Better to be Worn Out Than Thrown Out"

At a recent meeting the PCHS Board of Directors were discussing what should be done with the old scrap books gathering dust in the back of a storage closet. Some of the scrapbooks are more than a century old and pretty ragged looking. A few are in "okay" condition, but rarely are any moved from their closet. When someone suggested an option of taking them to the recycling center, most members shifted uncomfortably and raised their objections to getting rid of the books. One member said, "They're really interesting and people would enjoy looking at them." Then this question was asked, "Wouldn't it be better if they were worn out rather than thrown out?" All agreed it would be better. This has led to the challenge of getting these old books into the hands of the public. Staff and volunteers are now developing a place to display the scrapbooks and provide a spot for visitors to look through them.

These scrapbooks are the products of numerous people who once lived in Pepin County. However, one person of note, Charles G. Branch, has provided us with more than a dozen. Most of the Branch scrapbooks are collections of newspaper clippings of local history including obituaries, wedding announcements, important events, etc. Some are just random collections of national and world events, personalities and history.

As fate goes, a descendant of Charles Branch recently dropped off a box of photos, artifacts, memorabilia and more scrapbooks. We now have a much fuller picture (photographs and narrative) of who this man is.



Charles G. Branch in his letter carrier's uniform circa 1905. Branch moved to Durand in 1902 and was hired as a letter carrier in 1903 for the newly created Route 2 of the U.S. Postal Service Rural Free Delivery system. He held that position for more than three decades and for many of those years he wrote a weekly column entitled "R.F.D. No. 2" for the *Pepin County Courier* and later the *Courier-Wedge* published in Durand. His column was a mix of gossip, actual news, reminiscences and other stories about the people and places along his mail route.

Charles G. Branch was born in Grant county, Wisconsin, May 2, 1867, the youngest of the three children of Dr. Lyman Thomas and Agnes (Walker) Branch. He moved to Durand in 1902 and was soon hired as mail carrier of Route No. 2 from Durand, Pepin County, which was established Nov. 2, 1903.



Modes of transportation in 1904 when Charles began his letter carrier job (left) and three decades later near the end of his carrier career.

A biographical sketch in the *History of Buffalo and Pepin Counties* published in 1919 says of Charles: "To some men such a position would mean simply the performance of a monotonous round of duties day-by-day and year-by-year, with no opportunity for intellectual improvement, but Mr. Branch is one who knows how to make the most of his environment."

Besides writing his weekly column "R.F.D.No.2", Charles compiled a history of the Bear Creek Valley (whereabouts unknown) and many volumes of scrapbooks. He served as treasurer of the town of Durand and took an interest in the progress and prosperity of the community. In politics he was an independent. A member of the Methodist Episcopal church, he was local preacher and Sunday school teacher of the church in Durand. Charles was first married to Eliza M. Austin, daughter of Joseph J. and Clarissa H. Austin, of Durand, Wis. and had two children of this union. Eliza died July 31, 1907. Charles then married Eliza May Ayer on Nov. 30, 1911, at Crawford, Colo. He was a member of the International Order of Odd Fellows, the local Camp of Woodmen, and the Fraternal Reserve Association.

Charles moved to California in the mid-1940s and died in San Bernardino County in 1955.



Charles and second wife Eliza May Ayer married in 1911 and had one child.