

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

Vol. XXIX, No. 2

Affiliate of the Wisconsin Historical Society

July, 2015

Find us on the Internet!  
[www.oldpepincountycourthouse.org](http://www.oldpepincountycourthouse.org)

**Pass this newsletter on  
to a friend & encourage  
him/her to join PCHS!**

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 \$ \_\_\_\_\_



What's the robin got to do with Pepin County? See the story inside to find out just how close a relationship our local history has to the naming of the Wisconsin state bird.

GREETINGS! from the president's desk! Summer is here and another busy season at the Old Courthouse Museum is underway. First, I want to welcome our new summer intern, Sean Szydel, who will be learning many duties in museum management throughout the summer. Stop in to say hello and welcome him to Durand.

We have such a gem of a museum that tells so many interesting stories; and, it only keeps getting better each year. We've had the addition of a great new display about Helen Parkhurst and period lighting installed in the upstairs courtroom during the past couple years. We couldn't do these things without the dedicated hard work of our volunteers and board of directors. But most of all, we couldn't do it without you, our supportive members. Your continued financial support through your dues, purchases, memorials and donations have been instrumental in our growth. Thank you!

The board and staff decided earlier this summer to cancel our summer picnic. Besides the business of logistics and planning, we all agreed that, if you members are like us, we could all use one less thing to do during our busy summer. We're still planning on our regular autumn education event in October, so watch for details.

We are lucky to have several great local history museums here in Pepin County. The Laura Ingalls Wilder/Pepin Area Museum in Pepin has a new addition and facelift that is very impressive. The Stockholm Museum in Stockholm provides glimpses into its past. And, of course, our own Old Courthouse Museum and Jail holds hundreds of stories about our interesting past.

Consider taking a youngster or two to a museum or, better yet, tell them a story about yourself or about an important event you remember. Older folks also love to go to museums where they can reminisce and share stories, but some of them may not be able to get out by themselves. So, take someone to a local history museum; it is our own little "Storyland" and it's easy to share. Visit the Old Courthouse during regular hours or just call 715-672-5423 to set a time and day for you. God bless you all.

- Kim Wagenbach, PCHS President

## **FIRE IN THE ATTIC!!**

The most serious threat to the existence of the Old Pepin County Courthouse occurred in October 1931, when a defective chimney flue caused a fire in the attic of the building. The following account in the Courier-Wedge tells the story:

### **COURT HOUSE DAMAGED BY FIRE:**

*Blaze Monday Forenoon Caused Considerable  
Commotion*

*- Offices Flooded With Water*

*Shortly before 10:30 Monday forenoon the fire alarm was sounded and it was learned that there was a fire at the court house. A large crowd of spectators was soon on the scene.*

*The Durand fire department responded quickly as usual and were soon battling the blaze. The fire seems to have resulted from a defective flue as the blaze was worst near the flue at the south end of the building next to the railroad. It required long ladders to reach the blaze which was located high up in the gable. It was not long after a window was taken out in the gable and a hose inserted until the blaze was under control. The garret was filled with flame and smoke nearly the full length of the building, the blaze breaking through the [court] room in places but with two streams of water playing on the roof the fire did not last long.*

*The court room and offices below were not damaged much [by fire] as it looked as though they might be for a while. The offices of County Judge W.B. Newcomb, County Agent C.C. Gilman, County Clerk W.P. Unser and County Treasurer C.V. Hewitt were damaged considerably by water. In the office of Mr. Gilman considerable plaster fell from the ceiling and more may fall later in the office rooms and also in the court room upstairs.*

*When the fire was raging most nearly all the furniture and books were removed from the office rooms. In the afternoon the furniture and books were returned to their respective offices.*

*The loss was in the neighborhood of \$2500 which was covered by insurance.*

This story and many others are included in the soon to be completed *History of the Old Pepin County Courthouse & Jail on Washington Square* by Terry Mesch, Director of the Old Courthouse Museum.

## SOCIETY & MUSEUM NEWS

PCHS members at their Annual Meeting in April unanimously reelected Galen Radle, Kim Wagenbach and Roberta Stuart to serve another three years on the board of directors. Then the fifty or so in attendance were treated to a "spell binding" presentation by paranormal researcher, Chad Lewis, of Eau Claire.

Dozens of visitors and artists crowded the building during the Go Paint Outdoor Art Festival in May. The Old Courthouse Museum has hosted the event for the past three years. PCHS cosponsored the event with the local arts organization, Imagination Nation.

### Unique Gift Ideas from PCHS

Dime Novel Desperadoes - The Notorious Maxwell Brothers, by John Hallwas, 2008, published by University of Illinois Press; winner - "Best Biography from the Midwest" by the Society of Midland Authors, \$25.00

Brothers in Blood, by Les Kruger, 2008 - \$20.00

Durand 1881, compiled by Vera Slabey, published by PCHS, 1987 - \$3.00 or FREE with any other purchase

Steamboat Navigation on the Chippewa River, by Peter A. Adler, published by PCHS, 2004 - \$10.00

Mary Plummer Clemenceau - Sweetheart of Pepin County, by Vern Pinkowski, published by PCHS, 1997 - \$10.00

Helen Parkhurst - Educator, by Vern Pinkowski, published by PCHS, 1999 - \$10.00

Elizabeth Clarke Hardy - Wife, Writer, Farmer, Poet and Editor, by Vern Pinkowski, published by PCHS, 2001 - \$10.00

A Pathway to Pepin County's Stone Age People, by Vern Pinkowski, published by PCHS, 2003 - \$10.00

A Vanished Community - The Waubeek Saw Mill Settlement, by Vern Pinkowski, published by PCHS, 2004 - \$10.00

Phil Scheckel - The Man & The River He Loved, by Don Rahman, published by PCHS, 2006 - \$10.00

The Sea Wing Disaster; Tragedy on Lake Pepin, by Frederick Johnson, published by Goodhue Co. Hist. Soc., 2014 - \$25.00

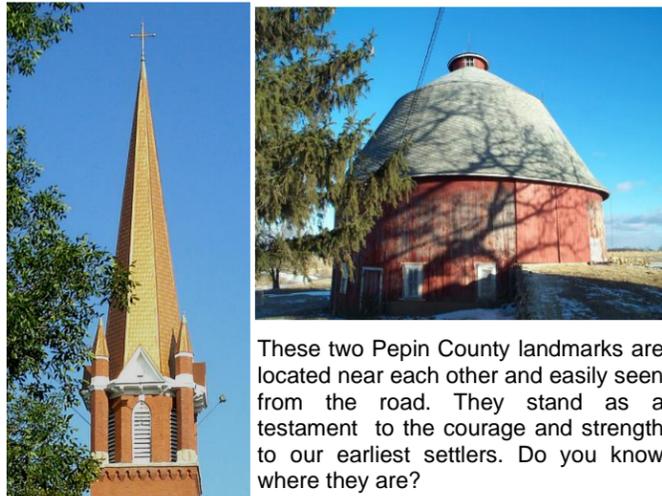
Missy Sippy River Saloon, by Audrey Biesterveld, 2005- \$10.00

Only in Eau Galle, by Audrey Biesterveld, 2014 - \$10.00

A Twisted Pig's Tale, by Vern Pinkowski, 2008 - \$5.00

25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary T-Shirts - sizes s-m-l-xl, \$5.00

Your purchase will help support the PCHS mission of "preserving the history and traditions of Pepin County."



These two Pepin County landmarks are located near each other and easily seen from the road. They stand as a testament to the courage and strength to our earliest settlers. Do you know where they are?

### Memorials Received:

For:	From:
Rosemary Carlisle	Judy Schwellenbach
Theone Rustad Kees	Lee Grippen
Jerry Thompson	Lynn/Kelly Coulson

### Museum Operations Intern Hired

Sean Szydel, of Altoona, Wis., has been hired to provide staffing during extended summer hours at the museum. Some of his responsibilities/duties include improving the museum's website, cataloguing photographs, enhancing existing displays, greeting guests, conducting tours, etc.

Szydel recently graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire with an undergraduate degree in Public History and a minor in Library Science. Szydel brings previous internship experience at the University of Wisconsin-Stout Area Research Center during the fall 2014 semester and more recently at the Chippewa Valley Museum in Eau Claire for his Library Science Practicum during the spring of this year.

He is a native of Enumclaw, WA but has lived in Altoona, Wisconsin for the last twenty years of his life. Szydel believes the internship will be beneficial in his future career when applying for museum or public library jobs. The internship will add to his resume and relates well to his career goals.

He will continue his education with the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Master of Library and Information Studies Program in fall 2015 with a concentration in Archival Studies. After obtaining his master's degree, Szydel's career goal is to become an archivist at a museum or university setting.

### Pepin County Historical Society

Officers: President: Kim Wagenbach  
Vice-Pres.: Lynn Coulson  
Secretary: Roberta Stuart  
Treasurer: Galen Radle  
Directors: Rita Conlin, John Solie, Lois Laehn,  
Jean Kannel, Dick Schlosser

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

### Civil War Musket Now on Display

The musket believed to have been carried by early Pepin County settler, Charles Richardson, during the Civil War is now on display in the museum. The musket, complete with bayonet, joins numerous other Civil War era artifacts including a drum carried by John Ganoe, a wooden canteen, and a powder horn.

The gun has been in the Richardson family ever since the Civil War and is on conditional loan to the museum.

Charles Richardson was born January 15, 1844 in Bedfordshire, England. Charles was eight years old when his father passed away. He then migrated to the United States in 1857 with his mother and two sisters.

At seventeen, he enlisted into Company G, Sixteenth Volunteer Infantry Regiment at Eau Claire, Wisconsin. He mustered in as a private on January 31, 1862 at Camp Randall in Madison and mustered out at the rank of sergeant on July 2, 1865.

The Sixteenth Regiment accompanied General William Tecumseh Sherman on his famous "March to the Sea". Charles, by then promoted to color sergeant, carried the Stars and Stripes all through the march and, according to the *Courier-Wedge*, at the close of the war "...delivered up the flag torn, blood stained and with twenty-six bullet holes in it."

After the war, Charles moved back to Wisconsin and married Mary Carrington on November 22, 1866. They settled on the west side of Dead Lake Prairie and farmed there for the next forty-seven years. In 1913, he retired from farm life and moved to Pepin. He was a member of the Ben Allen Post No. 127 G.A.R. of Arkansaw. Charles Richardson passed away on August 19<sup>th</sup>, 1934 at the age of 90.

### State Bird's Close Tie to Pepin County

Belle Bowman was born Fannie Belle Barber on July 18, 1865 in the Town of Frankfort, Pepin County, Wisconsin. She was born to pioneer settlers, Henry Walter and Cecilia Dickson Barber, who lived on Dead Lake Prairie.

From an early age, Belle knew she wanted to be a teacher. She taught in rural Pepin County for eleven years, then in the city schools of Durand for four years. She married N. Walter Bowman on November 2, 1896.

Belle was dedicated to advancing the social, cultural, and other interests of the community. She was a long time member of the Durand Women's Club and was district president of the Wisconsin Federation of Women's Clubs (WFWC) in 1921.

During the spring and winter of 1926, the WFWC conducted a survey of public school children to select the state bird. Belle was chair of the Conservation Committee for the WFWC and directed the state-wide survey of school children.

The robin received twice as many votes as any other bird. Twenty-three years later in June 1949, the Wisconsin State Legislature approved the robin as the state bird.

Belle did not get to witness the event; she passed away on April 29, 1944.

The Old Courthouse Museum also has a near complete collection of the *War of the Rebellion* [better known as the *Civil War*, but also called the *War of Northern Aggression*.]

**Shown below:** Charles Richardson's gun with bayonet, which he carried during the Civil War; Civil War era spy glass & binoculars; drum used by John Ganoe during his service in the Civil War (upper right).

