



THE COLUMNS

Newsletter of the Pepin County Historical Society

Vol. XXXIII, No. 3

Affiliate of the Wisconsin Historical Society

September, 2019

GREETINGS! from your PCHS President -

First, here's a message I encourage you to share with someone you know with the hope of inspiring our young people: "We need your help! Please step up to either volunteer for or become an active member of one of our many great community service organizations."

Thank you to all the 60+ people who attended the dedication of the Bell Tower during the Night at the Museum event in July. Poetry readings by Pepin County writers were recited by Terry Mesch at the event. Some of the poems were written by Durand poet, Arnie Humphrey.

We are again going to offer bricks for sale that can be engraved with the name of a teacher, mentor, coach, counselor or anyone who was important to you. The bricks will be placed at the bell tower site with our existing bricks. (see inside for details)

I would like to thank Mike Shoup for his time spent as summer manager of the museum again this season. Besides being the "face" of the museum, giving tours and dealing with day-to-day activities, Mike has now catalogued our history files in the office. This will make future research much easier.

Our Autumn Education Event will be held on October 19 at DHS at 2:00 pm. Deb Fisher will be speaking about the history of Little Plum School and researching the history of a one-room country school in Pepin County.

Recently my wife and I took a day trip to Genoa, Wisconsin to visit the fish hatchery and the new Great River Road Interpretive Center. Inside we were impressed with the different aquariums and the variety of displays about the Black Hawk War, mussel harvesting, button manufacturing and other local and natural history. It was an amazing place; and we even got to watch the workers tagging young lake sturgeon before they were released into the lakes and rivers.

Please take time to visit your local museum where ever it may be; it is a priceless gem awaiting discovery.

God Bless...

- Kim Wagenbach, PCHS President

PCHS Autumn Education Event

Saturday, October 19 – 2pm

DAM/HS Cafeteria, Durand, Wis.

"Little Plum Place, A Journey in Preserving History"

presented by

Debra Fisher and Rick Riggins

PCHS is pleased to sponsor "Little Plum Place, A Journey in Preserving History" at its Autumn Education Event starting at 2pm on Saturday, October 19 in the Durand-Arkansaw Middle/High School Cafeteria in Durand, Wis. This event is free admission and is open to the public.

Debra Fisher and Rick Riggins will provide a lively presentation about their restoration of the former Little Plum School in the Town of Frankfort, Pepin County and the long road to discovering its history. The couple purchased the Little Plum Lutheran Church (LPLC) and the former school, which stands on an adjoining lot, in December, 2017. The few remaining members of the LPLC congregation decided to close the church earlier that year.

Debra and Rick spent the first 6 months of 2018 renovating the church into suitable living quarters, and then turned their focus to the restoration of the old one-room schoolhouse. Besides providing the physical labor and materials to take the school back to what it would have looked like in its heyday in the early 1900s, Debra began to look into details of the school's history.

"I don't know if I will ever be truly done, present day life and history are so intertwined," Debra mused. "There will always be one more question to answer." Her research answered many of her questions; which she will share with her audience during the presentation.

Fisher grew up on a dairy farm in Pepin County and graduated from Arkansaw High School in 1979. Following college, marriage and starting a family, Debra moved back to Pepin County in 1985 and started The Artistic Dance Academy. In 1995, the Fisher family moved to Arizona where she eventually landed a job as the Technical Director and Manager of the Performing Arts Center at Northland Pioneer College in Snowflake, Arizona. From 2014-2018, she was Technical Director and Theatre Designer for The Red Skelton Performing Arts Center at Vincennes University, in Vincennes Indiana, where she met Rick Riggins.

Rick grew up on a small farm near Odon, Indiana. He recently retired after 27 years as a logistics coordinator for a bridge building and steel hauling company in Vincennes. He is an avid reader and stage actor. "We always talked about how great it would be to live in an old school or a church," Rick said, "then Little Plum popped up on an internet search in November of 2017. We are excited to share the story about Little Plum Place with others."

SOCIETY & MUSEUM NEWS

A crowd of 60-70 people attended the dedication of the bell tower of the former Big Arkansaw School at its new location on Washington Square in Durand during July. Since then, the tower's exterior has been repaired and repainted. Still to be done is placement of several dozen engraved memorial bricks around the new concrete base of the tower. PCHS member Joe Lieftring has volunteered to lay the bricks later this fall. Meanwhile, the PCHS Board has decided to conduct a fund-raising effort by recalling our previous "Buy-a-Brick" campaign. (see pg.3).

The board received an estimate for installation of ceiling fans in all the display rooms and the upstairs courtroom, jury room and judge's chamber, and, new track lighting in the courtroom to better light the Gleason Gallery on the back wall. The estimate exceeded \$10,000, which caused the Board to put the project on hold for now.

Installation of a new handrail on the front steps is being discussed. No handrails currently exist; but the building's rear entrance has a ramp and is accessible. However, Board members agree many of our visitors don't need a ramp but would appreciate the assist of a railing up and down the front steps. PCHS is working with Durand Welding to have a new railing made and installed.

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

Memorial Received

Catherine (Schlosser) Baier (1921-2017) was honored by a generous memorial donation presented to PCHS by her daughter, Patty Malloy. Catherine was a long-time member and supporter of PCHS and the museum. She donated two valuable artifacts, a portable Singer sewing machine in a wooden case and a reusable canvas mailing case. Catherine lived and worked in Washington, D.C. from 1944-46. Her apartment building had no laundry facilities and laundromats didn't exist; so, she used the case to mail her laundry back-&-forth to her mother in Durand. This unusual case can be seen in the Railroad Room at the Old Courthouse Museum.

Museum Notes

One of the largest remaining elm trees in Durand recently died and was removed from Washington Square this summer. The tree stood on property now owned by Weiss Realty and was removed by Justin Anderson. Museum staff approached Anderson to see if he would cut a thin cross-sectional slab as an artifact for the Old Courthouse Museum. An initial count of annual growth rings of the tree showed it to be about 120 years old, which means it was planted soon after the old Pepin County Jail and Sheriff's House were constructed in 1895. The slab will possibly be used in a new hands-on display of natural history and part of a historical timeline of events in Durand and Pepin County. For now, though, it's drying on the front porch, so visitors have the opportunity to count the rings for themselves.

Another display we've been working on is devoted to "Ronald Reagan's girlfriend," Marjorie Goss, a native of Durand who became a Hollywood movie actress known as Christine Larson. She caught the eye of several big-name actors, but Reagan's in particular. Marjorie, aka Christine, is Pepin County's biggest big-screen Hollywood connection. Of course, author Laura Ingalls Wilder, brought us some attention on the small-screen with her "Little House."

Pepin County Historical Society

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

BUY - A – BRICK

Help pave the way to historical preservation!

When PCHS initiated its first “Buy-a-Brick” fund-raiser many years ago, the proceeds from the sale of engraved memorial bricks helped to cover the costs of removing and transporting the bell tower from the then still standing former Big Arkansaw one-room school. The tower was then restored board-by-board by PCHS member, Bernard Brantner, and later installed on a new concrete pedestal in front of the Arkansaw Elementary School (AES) in Arkansaw. The memorial bricks were laid along either side of the sidewalk leading to the tower.

This year PCHS had to move the tower and bricks after AES was closed and sold by the school district. The removal and relocation mission has been accomplished at a significant cost. The PCHS Board is committed to historical restoration and preservation and would like to continue this important work.

You’re invited to help us by making a donation or by purchasing a brick. An **engraved memorial brick** around the base of the bell tower will **honor** the person of your choice: a **teacher, mentor, coach, counselor, parent or other role-model** who has been important in your life. The **cost** of your brick is **\$50** and proceeds will assist PCHS with **future** preservation projects.

New brochures are being designed and developed and will be sent to all PCHS members in a separate mailing, so watch for it in your mailbox.

What’s in a Name?

The Village of Pepin, the Town of Pepin and Pepin County were all named after Lake Pepin, a broadening of the Mississippi River along the county’s southwestern border. The lake itself was likely named for one the Pepin families from the early French settlement of Trois-Rivières in Quebec, Canada. Records from the late 1600s mention Guillaume dit Tranchemontagne and his sons Pierre and Jean Pepin du Chardonnets, one or both of whom may have accompanied Daniel Greysolon, the Sieur du Lhut, from Montreal, to what is now Duluth, Minnesota, in 1679. Exactly when the lake was first named Pepin is not known, but the name was used as early as 1700, making it one of the oldest recorded place names in Wisconsin. The name was used on a 1755 map by English cartographer John Mitchell and in the mid-1760s when Jonathan Carver wrote in his journal, “Arrived at Lake Pepin called by some Lake St. Anthony.”

The Making of Pepin County

(In 1858, the Wisconsin Legislature was accustomed to creating new, smaller counties from larger ones. When Dunn County (of which Pepin was then a part) was created from Chippewa County in 1854, it took just 13 days to complete. But, in 1858, when the petition to create Pepin County was presented, some members of the state assembly had serious reservations about it, and the process slowed way down. Eventually, the assemblymen in the minority on the Assembly Town & County Organization Committee demanded their opinion be printed in the *Journal of the Assembly*. The following appears on pages 514-515 of that 1858 *Journal*. Their objections were ignored and Pepin County was created, but it took nearly 6 weeks, 3x longer than Dunn County.)

MINORITY REPORT:

The committee on town and county organization, to whom was referred No. 26 S, a bill providing for the division of Dunn county, have considered the same; but the undersigned, not being able to agree with a majority in the propriety or justice of a division of Dunn County must dissent therefrom. To justify the position taken by them, without more extended communication, state the following:

1st. That in the division of old and the establishing of new counties. regard should be had to the present and also the future effects that necessarily follow such act. In the matter of convenience of the people, and the amount of taxation to be imposed for the support of county government; taxation should never be made a burden upon any people when it can be avoided. The less area a county has, the more heavily falls taxation upon the inhabitants thereof. No one can fail to see the fact, that the new county proposed to be organized out of a part of Dunn county will be so small, that in a few years taxation must be oppressive.

2d. The shape or form of the new county is such as necessarily, at first look, must strike every one of the impropriety of a division; an eye upon the map will speak a loud language.

3d. If the convenience of the inhabitants be considered, and division follows as a consequence, it will be seen that a new county should also be established from the north half of Dunn county. Those who inhabit the northern part of the county have much farther to go to the county seat, and therefor greater reason to complain on this score than the inhabitants of Pepin and its vicinity. By the proposed division the equilibrium of justice and convenience is not maintained but destroyed.

4th. The people in majority are opposed to the division, so far as can be ascertained from the petitions for and remonstrances against division.

The undersigned recommend that the bill in question be indefinitely postponed.

A. D. CORNWELL A. W. VAN WIE

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Find us on the Internet!
www.oldpepincountycourthouse.org

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

NAME _____
STREET _____
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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 \$ _____



The former Little Plum School in Pepin County has been restored to its early 1900s condition and is an exceptionally well-preserved example of a typical one-room country school. Hear and see more at PCHS Autumn Education Event.