

A Forest of Fame By Brian Bigler

The name Mount Vernon has its roots in American history, but it turns out that many of the trees that once lined the town's park had historic roots from all over the world.

In 1851 George Britts and his nephew Joel Britts bought the first plot of land in what would become Mount Vernon, named so because the Britts were originally from Mount Vernon, Va. The Britts set about plotting a village and built the first sawmill. J.T. Berger was in charge of surveying the new town, which included streets and uniform blocks that could be developed on either side of the Sugar River.

The Britts were familiar with the way villages were designed out East and included in their platting a town square, or "Public Ground." The town square would eventually serve as a place for community gatherings and events such as band concerts, Fourth of July celebrations, picnics, baseball games and even circus visits. It is this same public place that would become the stage for the creation of a most unusual dream – a "Forest of Fame."

By 1900 the Britts' dream of a central square had become choked with summertime weeds, had occasional sheep and cattle grazing on it and finally became a



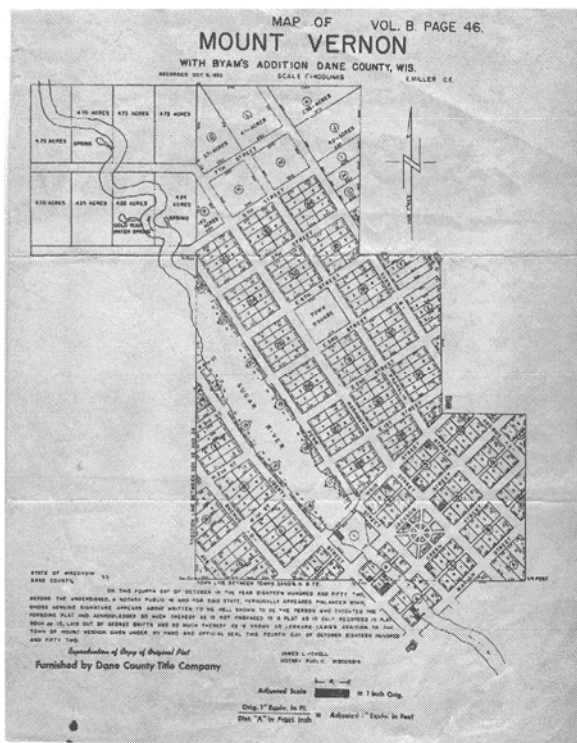
Planting of Forest of Fame tree, 1926. John S. Donald in center of back row.

playground, as the schoolhouse was located just across the street. In 1900, the community's citizens petitioned the State of Wisconsin to grant them permission to plant shade trees on the playground. Because of this request the State Park Board suggested that an incorporated group be formed. This incorporation became finalized on April 5, 1920 as the Mount Vernon Park Association. The association renamed the park, which had become known as Britts Park, to Mount Vernon Park.

John S. Donald, who grew up on a nearby farm and became involved in local and state politics, had an early love affair with trees. It was a trip to the historic Mount Vernon that set things in motion for Donald's dream for the Wisconsin village.

While visiting George Washington's Virginia home, Mount Vernon, Donald strolled the grounds where he noticed walnuts that had fallen. He pocketed two of the nuts, but was caught by a guard who told him not to take them. When Donald explained that he wanted to take them home to Mount Vernon, Wis., and plant them he was escorted to the grounds keeper who agreed to their removal.

The nuts did not grow, but this did not discourage Donald, who instead arranged to have a half dozen elms transported from Washington's home. On Arbor Day, May 6, 1916 a large group, accompanied with an impressive service, planted the elms in the village's park.



Original plat map of Mount Vernon.

Continued on page 2

The Mount Horeb Area Historical Society

This ceremonial act sparked an idea by Donald to create a park that would contain trees from the homes and birthplaces of former United States presidents, famous generals of the world, pioneers and people associated with religion, science, music, agriculture and commerce.

Two years later, elms from the birthplace of Abraham Lincoln were added to the park. In 1919 a spruce tree from General Pershing's A.E.F. Headquarters in Chaumont, France was planted and the Forest of Fame began to grow.

More trees took root, some with connections to the birthplaces and homes of some great names in state history, such as Wisconsin governors Lucius Fairchild, Jeremiah Rusk, William D. Hoard, Leonard Farwell, Cadwallader Washburn, William Taylor and Sen. Robert M. La Follette. Some had connections to world or U.S. history, including Ulysses S. Grant, Rutherford B. Hayes, William McKinley, Joan of Arc, Theodore Roosevelt, Thomas Jefferson and Daniel Webster. There were also trees honoring Robin Hood's Sherwood Forest, Napoleon, Woodrow Wilson, Henry Clay, Robert E. Lee, Luther Burbank, J. Sterling Morton, Francis Willard, Ethan Allen, Eben Rexford, Stephen A. Babcock, Buffalo Bill, Paul Harris, Charles Lindbergh and, in 1937, a tree honoring John S. Donald.

A tree added in 1940 was dedicated to liberty. Trees were set out in categories and each planting event involved dignitaries, speeches, poetry readings and song. Each tree was marked with a wooden sign set on steel posts. Some signs included additional information or famous words of the honored individual.

John Donald's involvement with the project was aided by his membership in Rotary International and the Wisconsin branch of Friends of Our Native Landscape. Donald had been president of Friends of Our Native Landscape from its founding in 1921 to his death in 1933. These groups aided in providing funding for the transportation and acquisition of the park's trees. Donald's involvement in state politics and his service during World War I provided the connections needed to secure some of the more unusual tree additions. Tree species included oaks, elms, spruce, maples, catalpa, dogwood, willows and more.

Not all were pleased with the park becoming home to a forest of trees. Baseball had long been the supreme sport of the tiny village. Already in 1906 Mount Vernon had a famous baseball team known as the Mount Vernon Red Valley team. By March 1937 the boys had become quite put out by the forest closing in on

their ball diamond. "Famous Trees Get in Base Ball's Way" read an article in the Detroit News. "The Robin Hood oak and trees honoring President Grant and Buffalo Bill are beautiful in site and sentiment – but they have no place in the outfield of the ballpark. The village base ball team refuses to be crowded out of its share of the park," the article declared.

It wasn't just the complaints by the baseball team that cooled the enthusiasm for the tree project; Donald's death in 1933 was also a big factor. Over time the wooden markers identifying each tree's significance deteriorated and became the victims of vandalism. In addition road salts poisoned the stately trees. Insect infestation, including the Dutch elm disease that wreaked havoc over Mount Vernon's elm-lined streets, and storms took their tolls on the famous trees.

Over time, the Forest of Fame Park became mainly a place to enjoy tug-of-war matches, baseball games, family reunions and picnics. In 1966 a purple ash honoring Waterloo nurseryman W.G. McKay was planted with limited ceremony. In 1992 interest in the park's former glory days as a living memorial was sparked once again. On May 4, 1992 several Rotary clubs banded together to plant another tree honoring Paul Harris, the founder of Rotary International. The trees that Harris had a hand in planting in 1933 had perished alongside the others.

Since this last endeavor to rejuvenate interest, however, the park once again waits in sleepy exile from those days of celebration and tree dedication. The only visible marker is made of concrete and rests far from its original location. The millstone from the old Mount Vernon Mill, located in the park, has been cracked and heaved by harsh winters and the remaining trees, many now new transplants, remain a mystery in their origins.



Gathering at the Mount Vernon Park about 1900.

The Mount Horeb Area Historical Society



Left - General John J. Pershing, and letter signed and dated, May 28, 1919 discussing the shipment of spruce trees, one of which was located in the Mount Vernon Forest of Fame.



General Pershing Spruce planting, 1925.

GENERAL OF THE ARMIES
WASHINGTON

April 28, 1924.

Mr. John S. Donald,
The University of Wisconsin
College of Agriculture,
Madison, Wisconsin.

My dear Mr. Donald:

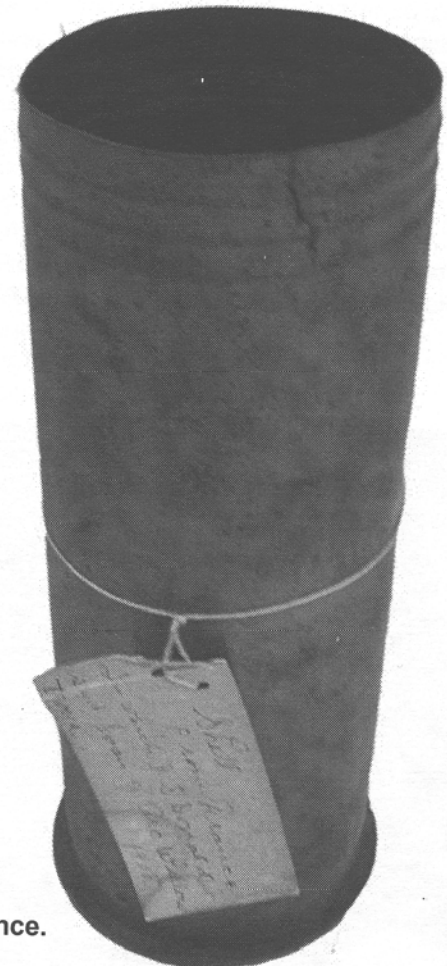
Thank you very much for your note of April 26th, with reference to the trees taken from the grounds of the chateau occupied by me at Chaumont, France. I was greatly interested to learn of the disposition of those already planted, and of the plans made for the planting of the two remaining. It is a matter of regret to me that I shall be unable to be present.

Please accept for yourself and extend to all concerned my very best wishes for the success of the occasion. It is my hope that these trees may have a vigorous growth, and that in the years to come they may recall to this and to the new generation the immortal deeds of those patriotic young Americans who so unselfishly served their country in the World War.

Yours very sincerely,
John J. Pershing

—BENEFIT DANCE—
For The
FOREST OF FAME PARK
Mt. Vernon, Wisconsin
Saturday, December 10, 1935
Music by Sammy Eggum
and Orchestra
CLUB 18 — MT. HOREB
Tickets 75c, tax inc.

Left - ticket for concert benefit, featuring the Sammy Eggum Band



Right: French shell casing used in 1918 as a container to ship willow cuttings back to Wisconsin from the birthplace of Joan of Arc in France.

Adopt an Artifact

Dave Boyden of Boyden Financial of Mt. Horeb has a passion for vintage snowmobiles. When Dave discovered a 1970 Ski-Doo resided in the museum's collections, he more or less adopted it. Several years ago Dave and his son Mike took on the initial cleaning of the machine, and this winter has furthered his interest with the restoration of the machine's skis. The skis will be professionally restored and their paint painstakingly replicated by Pokerville Ironworks of Blue Mounds. Dave plans to tend to other small details of restoration such as locating and installing the original trim that once surrounded the snowmobile's windshield.

Dave has also added to the snowmobile's history with a recent discovery of its story in an old newspaper article that Dave received from Fred Johnson, formerly of Mt. Horeb. The machine was the grand prize at the second annual snowmobile derby held in Mt. Horeb in 1971. Milo and Dorothy Bergum of rural Mt. Horeb gifted the snowmobile to the museum.

There are other such objects in the museum's holdings awaiting benefactors like Dave. The following items are waiting for adoption: a 1920s bicycle, a 1930s bicycle, a secretary desk made by Aslak O. Lie, a collection of Schoenhut circus toys. Five items in the Donald family collections also need restoration: a horse-drawn buggy, a pie cooling cabinet, a dresser mirror and two rocking chairs.

If you have interest in adopting any of these items contact Laurie Boyden at 608-437-6486 or 437-8901.

An Unusual Challenge

With the clock ticking away the final days and months that the Historical Society had left to pay off its loan for Phase I of the Southwestern Dane County Heritage Center to the Village of Mount Horeb, the board was notified of a generous and unusual offer. A donor, who wished to remain anonymous, graciously offered \$10,000 to the Society with the stipulation that it be matched dollar to dollar. The mystery donor set in motion a challenge grant campaign that proved to be both beneficial and timely. Once the challenge donation was made public, additional offerings poured in. The matching donations were as touching and encouraging as the original mystery gift.

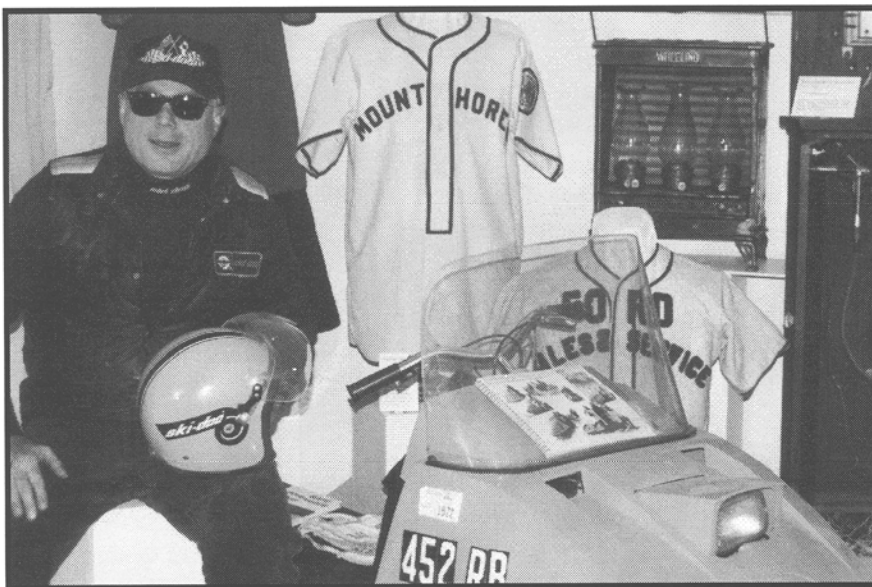
We can't thank our mystery donor enough. We also give great praise to our many matching donors. Without this challenge we most likely would not have made our Jan. 11 deadline for the loan repayment. We can also proudly say that the Mount Horeb Area Historical Society now owns a prime piece of real estate and has finished Phase I. We are excited that we are on our way in Phase II with the development of plans for the construction of the new Southwestern Dane County Heritage Center.

Although it will be hard work, the Board of Directors is committed to making Phase II and the actual building of the Heritage Center as smooth as the land acquisition in Phase I. A list of challenge grant donors are on page 6 of this newsletter. Thank you to all for your generous gifts.

Grant Boosts Building Fund

Phase II, the actual construction of the Southwestern Dane County Heritage Center, was given a jumpstart with a grant of \$7,500 from the Mt. Horeb Community Foundation. This generous boost will get us on our way to having plans developed for the interior spaces of the center. The Community Foundation has been a wonderful funding resource for the Historical Society, one that has allowed us to continue to grow and to accomplish many projects that would otherwise have been canceled. We pass along our gratitude and thanks.

Dave Boyden with the museum's 1970 Ski-Doo.



CHALLENGE GRANT DONORS

October 5 Through December 31, 2009

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Donald Woodburn, Katharine Woodburn, Kristina
Davenport Woodburn)**
James Woodburn, Sr.
Jimmy and Stina Woodburn
Audrey M. Zander

Thanks To All !

The Mount Horeb Area Historical Society

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January 2009 - December 31, 2009

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Holiday decorations, downtown Mt. Horeb, 1984.
Photo by Judy Kleinert.



Donations Wish List

Please contact the Mount Horeb Area Historical Society if you have any of the following items to contribute:

Mount Horeb and/or Mount Vernon Telephone Directories 1900-1930s & 1965-1984

Mt. Horeb High School Yearbooks 1986-2010

Quilts (and their stories) from southwestern Dane County

Uniforms, stories and letters from southwestern Dane County veterans who served our country in the Vietnam, Persian Gulf and Iraq Wars

Also: a gently used vacuum cleaner and a new photocopier

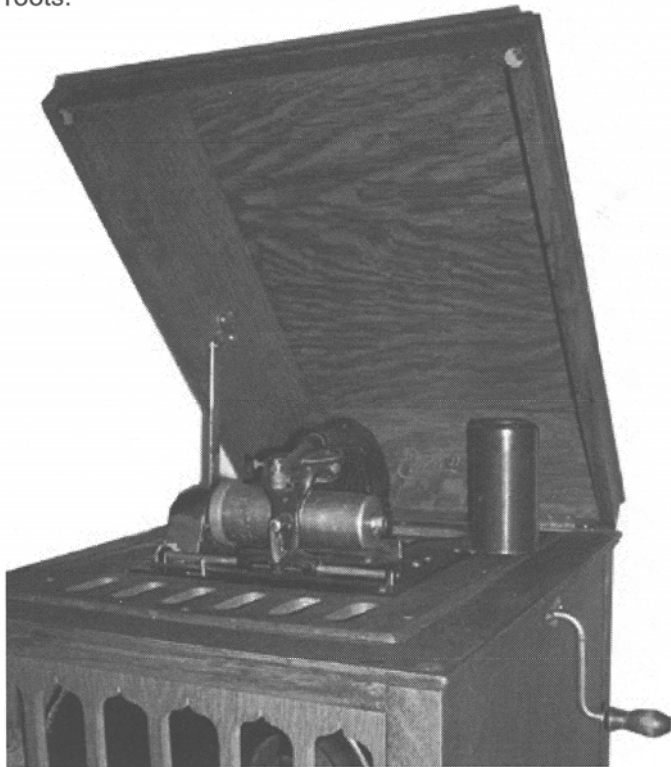
Communication Curios

Among the many artifacts that were added to the museum's holdings in 2009 are two communication devices of note.

Wayne and Mary Sutter of rural Mt. Horeb gifted an Edison cylinder record player. The machine, along with 24 records, was found in the Sutter's farmhouse attic when the couple moved to 3533 Hwy JG in 1962. The farm that Wayne and Mary purchased had originally belonged to Joseph Dolahanty.

By 1900 area farmers were enjoying the rise in agricultural prices and the increased production of milk aided with inventions like the silo and improvements in machinery and milk handling equipment. This newfound income allowed an isolated farmer like Joseph Dolahanty to acquire a talking machine and to bring musical entertainment into the family's rural parlor. Within another 30 years the Dolahanty family would also enjoy the introduction of radio, bringing the outside world even closer. Rural electrification also would bring enormous change to the farm's operation.

This artifact also tells us more than the usual modern change that it represents. Amongst its 24 records, including such popular tunes as "For Me & My Gal," "Silver Bells" and "Beautiful Ohio," are tunes like "My Wild Irish Rose" and "Mrs. Clancy's Boarding House," attesting to the Dolahanty family's interest in their Irish roots.



A television set that once drew curious crowds to a North Washington Street home is also now part of the museum's collection.

Mildred Kelly and her husband, Vernon, retired from their rural Mt. Horeb farm in October and they gifted a 1949 – 1951 Spartan television with an unusual history to the museum. Before 1951, Mildred's father, Leo Sutter, had operated, along with Herman Sutter, the Sun Ray Gas Company at 303 W. Front St. in Mt. Horeb, where they also sold electric appliances. In 1951, Leo partnered with Gunnar Larson and opened Majestic Sales in the former Parkway Theater building at 202 W. Main St. At their new location the partners also sold furniture.

Mildred said the Spartan Television Company gave her family a television set as a promotional tool to inspire sales. The Sutters installed the set in the living room of their home at 101 N. Washington St. in Mt. Horeb. When news of the novel item spread in the community people flocked to the Sutter home to watch, which, at times, became somewhat overwhelming to the family. Mildred remembers being asked by her grade school teacher to give a school report on what it was like to own a television set.

Today we can only marvel at the impact that a new invention like the Spartan television made in the Sutter family's life, or for that matter to the residents of southwestern Dane County. Longtime hardware store owner Otto Gilbertson once recalled that television viewing ended the annual Fall Frolic in the early 1950s, when people remained home to watch their favorite shows. The installation of a television at the Mount Horeb Hardware Company at 100 E. Main St. also created a stir similar to Mildred's recollections, when local residents flocked to the store to view its display model.



CONTRIBUTIONS TO BUILDING FUND

January 2009 - December 31, 2009

Jan and Scott Beat
Beverly Briggs
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Michael J. Cahill and Nancy Thorne
Florian and Margaret Chollet,
in memory of Velma Schurch
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John and Marietta Gribb
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David C. Hoffman, Robert and Alice Wirth, Robert and
Nancy Woodburn, Audrey Zander

CONTRIBUTIONS TO GENERAL FUND

January 2009 - December 31, 2009

Lonna Arneson
Donna Bigler
David Boyden, repair of storefront
Jane Burns
Henry F. Eckel
Betty Kalbacken
R. D. Nelson
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Olson's of Mt. Horeb, Inc.
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Max and Betty Rosenbaum,
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Staff of the Wolf's Crossing Elementary School,
Aurora, IL,
in memory of Wallace Keller
West Blue Mounds Women of the ELCA
Ellen W. Wright

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Beth Elver
Donald and Kathleen Gordon
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Dennis and Joan Thomson

**A Society Membership
Makes A
Wonderful Gift!**

See Friends Form on Page 11

2009 MEMORIAL AND HONOR CONTRIBUTIONS

In Memory of Neva Jeanne Bell
by Le Roy Collins

In Memory of Doris Erickson
by Don and Gertie Henderson

In Memory of Ruby Field
by Mary Lou Underwood, Le Roy Collins

In Memory of Fern Frame
by Max and Betty Rosenbaum

In Memory of Stanley Halverson
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In Memory of Jackie Thomas Harper
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In Memory of Patricia Hitchcock
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In Memory of Faith Hrubresky
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In Memory of Richard E. Jerdee
by Donna Read

In Memory of Walter and Violet Kahl
by Francis and Sharon Collins, Le Roy Collins

In Memory of Wallace Keller
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In Memory of Leona Kobe
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In Memory of Peter Lehner
by Neal and Joan Fargo, Steven and Pamela Hagel, Mary Lehner, Carol Plenge, Pete and Carol Riphahn, Olive Thomson, Friends and Family

In Memory of Margaret Merklein
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In Memory of Thea Odegaard
by Mary Lou Underwood

In Memory of Tressa Riley
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In Memory of Elizabeth Ringenberg
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In Memory of Walter Schmid
by Le Roy Collins

In Memory of Marjorie Schulenberg
by Max and Betty Rosenbaum

In Memory of Velma Schurch
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In Memory of Margaret Severson
by Mt. Horeb High School Class of 1941

In Memory of Betty L. Smith
by Don and Gertie Henderson

In Memory of Mrs. Al Stillwell
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In Memory of Milford Thompson
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In Memory of John Thomson
by Don and Gertie Henderson, June Underwood

In Memory of Wesly Topper
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In Memory of Lee Vogel
by Don and Gertie Henderson, Guy and Martha Martin, Max and Betty Rosenbaum, Gary and Connie Jo Zwettler

In Memory of Delmar Zweifel
by Don and Gertie Henderson

SOCIETY HONORS

In Honor of 90th Birthday of Delma Stugard Baker
by Alice Natvig, Marty Richardson Family, Delma Stugard Baker

In Honor of 50th Wedding Anniversary of John and Marietta Gribb
by Brian Bigler, Ken Scott, Rick and Marlyn Grinde, Mary Johnson, Rick and Diane Pladziejewicz, Vern and Betty Drape, Dorothy Kielton

In Honor of Aldro Johnson
by Olive Thomson

In Honor of 50th Wedding Anniversary of Jack and Louise Riphahn
by Peter and Carol Riphahn

Thanks To All !

Book Will Honor Two Milestones

The year 2011 is a milestone year for two great reasons: Dane County will turn 175 years old and Mt. Horeb will celebrate its 150th anniversary. To celebrate these two important anniversaries the Mt. Horeb Area Historical Society will publish a limited-edition book "Mt. Horeb Area Then and Now: Celebrating Mt. Horeb's 150th, Dane County's 175th." The coffee table book will be a pictorial history of southwestern Dane County, but with a twist; the photos won't all be old.

The book committee will tap into the rich holdings of the Society's more than 20,000 archival images of area towns, natural wonders, people and their activities in southwestern Dane County. The committee will then narrow images to represent a range of dates and locations that best tell the area's history pictorially and chronologically. Once this process is done, contemporary photographers will be asked to shoot the same view, or setting, as it appears in 2010 – 2011. These two views will be set side by side in the book to give the viewer a thought-provoking study of the changes.

The Mt. Horeb area's agricultural basis was the lifeblood of the development of not only Mt. Horeb, but of all other activities that took place in the settlement of southwestern Dane County. There were circumstances that made Mt. Horeb the largest village in the area and that caused the other villages to remain small cross-road settlements. These stories will be told in the captions that will accompany each photo.

The photos will range from 1870 to the present. The book will feature farms, businesses, institutions and people at work and play. Local high school sports teams will be asked to pose in the same manner as their 1920s counterparts. Farmers in 2010 will stand proudly by their large combines alongside a 1904 threshing crew. Mt. Horeb street scenes of the 1930s will reveal their stark new developments, while contemporary views will be shaded with mature trees and filled lots. Children in 1890 enjoy a wooden wheeled coaster wagon while a contemporary youth shows his skateboarding prowess. These are just some of the possibilities for subjects in this unique way of relaying local history.

The book committee will hold its first meeting on Saturday, Jan. 23, at 9:30 a.m. in the Historical Society boardroom on the third floor of the Mt. Horeb Municipal Building, 138 E. Main St. Anyone wishing to be a part of this history-making adventure should contact Brian Bigler at 608-437-7776, or just show up at the meeting.

Museum Musings by Laurie Boyden

Approaching a new year always gives us a moment to reflect on the past year and I am happy to report that it was a good year. The positive steps toward a recovering economy continue to give us hope that we can go forward in presenting and preserving the history of southwestern Dane County for generations to come.

Of course, the museum can boast about its successes only after noting the enormous contribution of time that our volunteers give us each month. In appreciation, we held our annual volunteer get together in the late afternoon on Dec. 18 at the museum. The majority of volunteers along with Board members and curators were able to brave the weather to enjoy a festive buffet of goodies and punch. If you were unable to attend, please contact Laurie to pick up your special gift of appreciation.

Reflecting on our successes, the total for museum visitors and tour guests for the 2009 season (May – December) was 3,020 which is an increase of 20% over the previous year. The positive effects of this increase can be reflected in the donations and also the 33% increase in gift shop sales over 2008. Our successful "Nights at the Museum" event allowed us to reflect on the support we receive from our community and we continue to reflect on present and future projects that maintain the integrity of our mission.

When reflecting on plans for the new year, remember to include a visit to the museum which will reopen on May 7, 2010. If volunteering is in your plans, look for information in our next newsletter on signing up for the 2010 season or contact Laurie anytime at 437-8901. The Archives will continue to be open the 2nd and 4th Wednesday of the month throughout the year.



Doug and Gail Dahlk, as Bob and Belle LaFollette during "Nights at the Museum" event. Story on page 12 of this newsletter.

The Mount Horeb Area Historical Society

Generations of Memories

Our members continue to support the Historical Society in so many ways and one of them is by renewing their membership at the beginning of each year. As a member, you receive our newsletters that keep you updated on the Society's events and progress along with historical information, articles and photos of southwestern Dane County's past. We have included in this newsletter an additional membership coupon that can be passed along to an interested family or friend. If needed, make copies of this page for more coupons. Your support can spark the interest of a new generation waiting to know more about the past.



For Family & Friends
The Mt. Horeb Area Historical Society

New Membership

E-Mail

Society Membership Levels Individual \$15.00 Household \$25.00 Individual Lifetime Membership \$250.00

Benefactor \$500.00 Building Fund Donation _____

Mail to:
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138 East Main St.
Mt. Horeb, WI 53572

All contributions to the Society are tax deductible.



Generations Of Memories
The Mt. Horeb Area Historical Society

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Mt. Horeb Area Historical Society Board Of Directors

Brian J. Bigler – President
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Curators:

Marlyn Grinde
Lee J. Underwood
Donna Read
Marietta Gribb – Costume, Textiles, Dolls

Operations:

Laurie Boyden - Museum Director/Coordinator
Jane Burns - Newsletter Editor
Tim White - Newsletter & Website Editor

Archives Hours:

2nd & 4th Wednesday each month 12:30 – 3:00
3rd floor of the Municipal Building
138 E. Main St. Mt. Horeb WI
608-437-6486

People from the Past Visit at Halloween

On Oct. 29 – 30 area residents were treated to a real-life slice of popular culture with the Historical Society's Nights at the Museum. Twenty-nine people gave their acting debuts as they brought characters from the area's past to life at the museum. Comments from the many visitors were very positive prompting the possibility of a repeat performance next year.

The following individuals and businesses made the event successful: Connie Jo Zwettler, Martha Martin, Alan Colvin, Donna Read, Shirley Martin, Darlene Nowak, Gary Zwettler, Beth Elver, John Gribb, Brad Brookins, Ken Scott, Brian Bigler, Marietta Gribb, Doug Dahlk, Gail Dahlk, Pete Riphahn, Lee Underwood, David Ewing, Rose Klir, Siri Martin, Lidia Martin, Shianna Schmit Colvin, David Boyden, Laurie Boyden, Tim White, Mark Rooney, Glen Hook, Gus Quade, Jane Burns, Miller and Sons Grocery, Marlyn Grinde, Doug Nesheim, Laurel Grindle, Village of Mt. Horeb, Daniel and Mark Witte and the Mount Horeb Mail.

F. Y. I. Your membership expiration date is printed on the mailing label of this newsletter. Please check to see if you are up to date through Jan. 2011 or beyond. If not, your membership is due. We appreciate your renewal and don't want you to miss a single issue of our newsletter or any important information about Historical Society events.