

The World Is Still a Stage for the Work of Mt. Horeb Native Fred Alley

For nearly a decade, the musical theater hit "The Spitfire Grill" has warmed audiences with a story about life in small-town Wisconsin, and it's a story that in some ways got its start right here in Mt. Horeb.

The play has been produced more than 350 times since its off-Broadway debut in 2001, and serves as an enduring legacy for a Mt. Horeb native whose short professional life left a wealth of work that continues to entertain audiences throughout Wisconsin and beyond.

Fred Alley, a 1981 graduate of Mt. Horeb High School, was half of the creative team that brought "Spitfire Grill" to the stage, and other quirky works of his remain popular – "Guys on Ice," "Lumberjacks in Love" and "The Bachelors." In them all, there's humor, beautiful music and a love of Wisconsin and small-town ways of life.

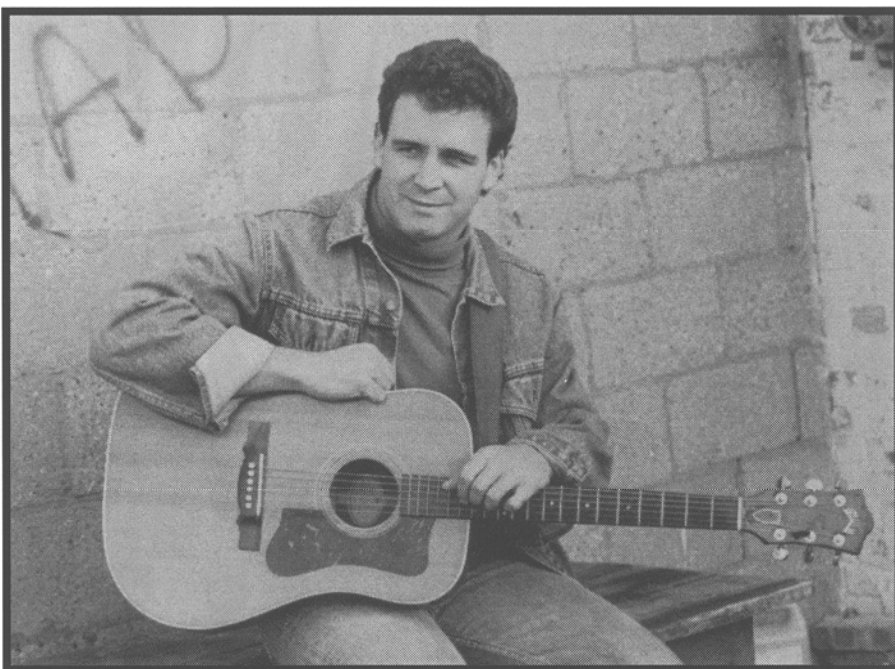
The collection of works would be a fine testament to any creative artist's talent, but Alley was just getting started. He died in 2001 at the age of 38 while jogging near his home in Door County.

"It's terribly tragic that Fred died so young," said Jeffrey Herbst, who worked professionally with Alley and was also a Mt. Horeb friend since childhood. "He created a lot, but I think he still had his best stuff in him. I can only imagine what Fred would have continued to do in the last 10 years."

Alley was co-founder of the popular American Folklore Theatre in Door County, where tourists have enjoyed family-friendly fare in a wooded setting under the stars. Alley wrote the lyrics, along with James Kaplan's music, for many of AFT's most popular shows. Some headed south to be performed inside at the Milwaukee Repertory Theater and remain in production at other venues. Many were directed by Herbst.

It seemed a perfectly logical path for a young man who proudly listed his lead performance as Rip Van Winkle in the fifth grade at Mount Horeb Elementary School in 1974 as his first theatrical credit.

Alley was active in music and theater from a young age – he took part in "Song of Norway," was a member of the concert choir, performed in children's theater and



Fred Alley circa 1988. (MHAHS subject file)

was in "Fiddler on the Roof" and "Camelot." He also wrote for the school paper.

Writing, singing and performing remained Alley's life away from Mt. Horeb. CDs of his work are still available at the American Folklore Theatre's website, www.folkloretheatre.com. Available for purchase are Alley performing his own songs, "It Would Be Enough for Me," a Christmas collection called "Door Christmas," a tribute to Alley of his songs performed by his friends and colleagues, "Beneath the Northern Sky" and the soundtrack to the popular "Guys on Ice."

Available elsewhere is the soundtrack to "The Spitfire Grill," which was bringing Alley to national prominence at the time of his death.

It was in the 1996 film of the same name that Alley and his collaborator, James Valq, found inspiration. The story of a young woman who moves to a small town after being released from prison serves as a rebirth for her and the small community she has chosen for her home.

The film was set in Maine, but for the stage, Alley moved it to southwest Wisconsin. In what is a tip of the hat to the town where Alley grew up, there is even a character with the last name of "Sutter."

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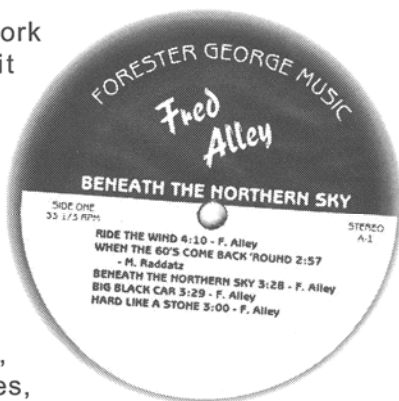
A program for "Guys on Ice," which was co-written by Fred Alley and produced at the American Folklore Theatre.

"It could have been Mt. Horeb, really," Herbst said of the musical's setting. "He liked to write to characters he could identify with and for him, the closest thing to home was home."

"The Spitfire Grill" won the prestigious Richard Rodgers Production Award for 2001, an award judged by the legendary Stephen Sondheim ("Sweeney Todd," "Into the Woods") and was worth \$100,000 to its creators with a plan for it to open off-Broadway in the fall.

Alley died just weeks before a "workshop" version of "The Spitfire Grill" opened. The production then moved off-Broadway for the fall season, where it opened just four days before the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. The New York theater scene all but shut down in the weeks and months that followed, and the show's stay in New York was short-lived. It wasn't, however, without many kind words said of it.

The critic for New York magazine named it one of the best musicals that year, saying it had "the heart and soul that your 'Producers' and 'Full Montys' cannot begin to approach. What even in normal times would be a joy is, in these troubled ones, sheer nourishment."



Above - Fred Alley recorded "Beneath the Northern Sky" in 1987, featuring his music. In 2002, his friends and colleagues at American Folklore Theatre performed a tribute to him and his music with the same title. (Archives object 2001.99.12)

Others must agree; the musical is a popular choice for school, community and regional theater groups. Herbst said it was a likely beginning of what would have been national attention for his friend.

"I can't look at it as anything but a tragic ending, a life cut too short," Herbst said. "But there is a lot to celebrate about his work. He left a pretty strong mark."

Sesquicentennial Celebration at the Library

Local history will now be available with the ease of a mouse click, with a new website that will be unveiled at a Sesquicentennial celebration Jan. 29 at the Mount Horeb Public Library.

In the past year, library staff members have been scanning and formatting local memoirs, church histories and other historic information. The new website will be a resource for those interested in genealogy and other historic topics.

At the 1 p.m. reception, library staff will present an informational session about the website. Coffee and refreshments will be provided.

For more information, contact Jessica at 437-5021 or Jessica.williams@mounthorebwi.info.



Winter scene, Mt. Horeb, (MHAHS subject file)

The Mount Horeb Area Historical Society

2011 Will Be an Exciting Year !

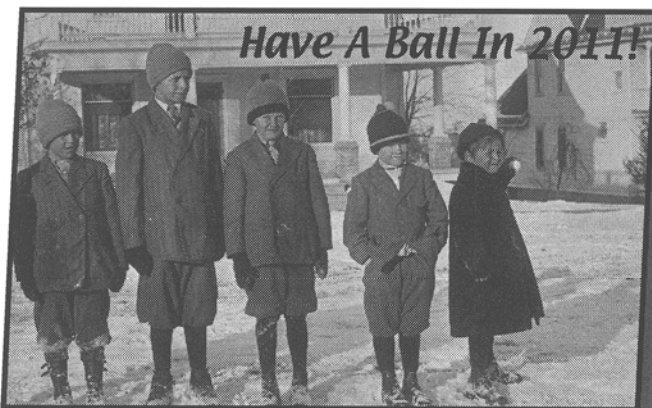


There are several milestones that the Mt. Horeb Area Historical Society and Museum will celebrate this year. Through exhibits, entertaining programs, newsletter articles and a new history book we will celebrate and explore the 150th anniversary of Mt. Horeb, 175th anniversary of Dane County, 40th anniversary of the founding of the Mt. Horeb Art Fair and the 150th anniversary of the beginning of the American Civil War.

Exhibits scheduled to open at the Museum in mid-April 2011 are "Stories in Stitches: The Quilts of Southwestern Dane County" and "Ethnicity and Civil War," with a planned gala premiere also planned for mid-April.

Our new history book, "Mt. Horeb Area Then & Now: Celebrating Mt. Horeb's 150th, Southwestern Dane County's 175th," is also scheduled to be released in mid-April.

Watch for entertaining articles in Past Times that will look at how Mt. Horeb celebrated two past anniversaries, its 100th in 1961 and its 125th in 1986. We will further look at the founding of Mt. Horeb's annual art fair and its growth from a small corner downtown lot to a street-long event. And, of course, there will be features on Mt. Horeb and Dane County historical happenings past and present throughout the year.



CONTRIBUTIONS TO GENERAL FUND

January 2010 – December 31, 2010

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Forest and Doris Johnson

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Museum Musings
by Laurie Boyden

Our last day open for the museum was Dec. 19 for this year and we will be re-opening May 6, 2011. We had a wonderful day for the volunteer appreciation get together on Dec. 8. Treats were aplenty and everyone had an enjoyable time. If you were unable to make it, please give us a call so that we can get your appreciation gift to you. Our next newsletter will have the volunteer sign-up information for the upcoming season.

There will be some changes made to the exhibits during the winter interim starting with the removal of the current Centennial Gallery exhibit "Your Treasures, Your History 1975-2005." Installation of the new quilt exhibit and Civil War case exhibit will begin soon. Artifacts and quilts from the museum collections are currently being selected and historical information/stories about them have begun to be written. Both exhibits will have a special opening sometime in April prior to the museum opening in May. The date has not been finalized yet but be assured that you will receive notification sometime in early spring.



Gilbertson Hardware Store, winter of 1960. Now home to the Mt. Horeb Area Museum. (MHAHS photograph file)

**CONTRIBUTIONS TO
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January 2010 – December 31, 2010

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Audrey M. Zander
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(in memory of Chuck Himself)

Thanks To All

Mt. Horeb's First Historical Society Part one in our 2011 series

On the eve of Mt. Horeb's year-long Sesquicentennial we would be remiss if we did not mention the village's first group of historians. Already in 1955 stories started appearing in the Mt. Horeb Mail announcing Nora Evans' new history of the Methodist Church Centennial and requesting participation in Mt. Horeb's forthcoming Centennial in 1961.

"Now is the time for all good people to come to the aid of the committee who is endeavoring to gather and compile material to be used in the writing of the history of our town and this area," declared the Mail's editor. Committee members were Nora Evans, Vera Babcock, Betty Sebenthal, Gus Baxter, Harold Fosshage, Ralph Fosshage, Issac Gesme, Agnes Green, Harold Nygard and Leonard Peterson.

Nora Evans, the daughter of local physician N.C. Evans, was a natural for the committee as she had long collected the village's history in writings and photographs and aided in seeing the development of its publication through to completion. When the book came out in 1961 it was dedicated to Nora and in a special ceremony she received a gold cover edition.

On Oct. 25, 1956, well before Mt. Horeb's historic birthday, a special Centennial Preview Night was held at the Mt. Horeb High School. This year also corresponded with the coming of the railroad to Mt. Horeb 75 years earlier in 1881. More than 400 people attended the event that featured opening speeches by Forest Johnson, who was president of the Chamber of Commerce, and Fred H. Hanneman, village president. Vernon Anderson was master of ceremonies and Mt. Horeb's drum and bugle corps participated.

Other highlights were a skit called "This Is Your History," which featured scenery painted by resident artist Byron Jorns. An old-time orchestra, the Sad Sacks from South

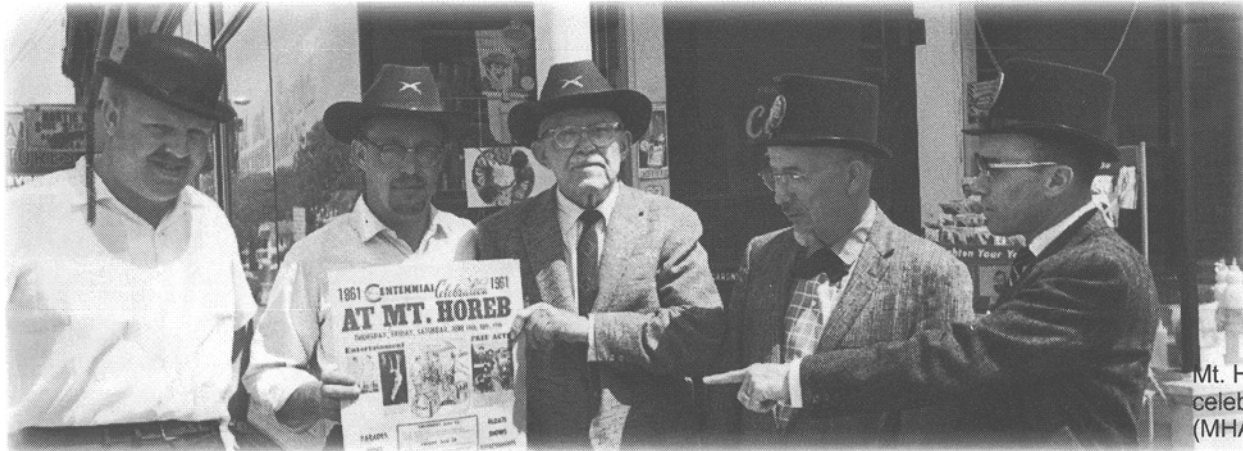
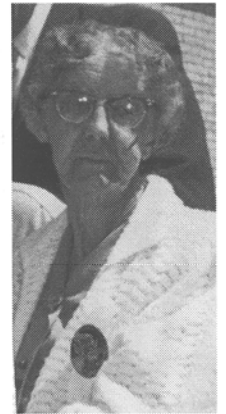
of Sauk City provided the music for post-program dancing, which followed a puppet show under the direction of Mrs. M.M. Darrow and the Girl Scouts. Like the making of all history Mt. Horeb's Centennial quickly came and went with its 1961 written history its only lasting legacy – or was it?

Jump forward to 1983 and the remodeling of the Mt. Horeb Municipal Building. In preparation of the building's work, village employees summoned Historical Society volunteers to pick up crates with the organization's name on them discovered in the building's basement. However, these volunteers knew that they had stored nothing in the building's lower level. The mystery was soon solved – it was the forward-thinking 1955 group that had left a legacy for future historians. The crates contained a treasure trove of items that would have been lost to history.

Some of the Society's most important archival treasures were housed in these time capsules. They contained the letters of William Kjellman, the owner of the first automobile in Mt. Horeb and possibly Wisconsin, the original telegram sent by Congressman H.B. Dahle announcing the 1899 arrival of President William McKinley, numerous one-of-a-kind photos and materials pertaining to the planning of Mt. Horeb's 100th birthday party.

The numerous photos collected by Nora Evans, with some dating back to 1875, were the important nucleus of the more than 25,000 images housed by the Society in its archives today.

Right - Nora Evans, Mt. Horeb's original historian. (MHAHS subject file)



Mt. Horeb's Centennial celebration, 1961. (MHAHS subject file)

2010 MEMORIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

In Memory of Edna Aavang

by Le Roy Collins

In Memory of Helen Locke Brager

by Anita J. Gurda, Betty J. Smith

In Memory of Beverly Buechner

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In Memory of Otto and Irene Gilbertson

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**In Memory of
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by Don and Gertie Henderson

The Mount Horeb Area Historical Society

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In Memory of Elizabeth Brown Stiller

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In Memory of Ida Swenson

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In Memory of Haleyem Thorpe

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In Memory of Orene Vasen

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In Memory of Ralph Wille

by Doug and Janet Nesheim

In Memory of Kenneth Williamson

by Mt. Horeb Class of 1946

In Memory of Gladys Wilson

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In Memory of Nancy Winner

by Don and Gertie Henderson, Guy and Connie Jo Zwettler

In Memory of Werner Zwald

by Sam and Shirley Martin, Mt. Horeb High School Class of 1946, Chet and Lee Underwood

2010 HONOR CONTRIBUTION

In Honor of Jo Ann Six Plesko,

recipient of top "Individual Philanthropist" award from the Association of Fundraising Professionals

by Phyllis Bennet, Hazel Herman, Sandra Roth

Thanks To All

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Artifact Donors Jan. – Dec. 31, 2010

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Beverly Brager
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Items Sought for Archives and Collections

We are seeking the following items for the archives, collections and future exhibits:

- Mt. Horeb High School annuals from 1924, 1959 and all years after 1986,
- Quilts (and their stories) made by, or used by, individuals in southwestern Dane County,
- Civil War stories, letters, papers, photos and artifacts created by, or used by, individuals of southwestern Dane County,
- Photos and artworks containing images of local natural wonders: rock formations, prairies, caves, etc.,
- Objects and materials relating to local music, musicians, musical groups, bands and music in the schools,
- Objects, works, biographies or other materials associated with local artists, writers, musicians, actors, sports figures,
- Objects and related materials that tell the stories of local sports and recreational activities.



The Folk Craft Festival was held along Main Street Mount Horeb in Fall 1983. This photo was taken in front of Her Closet women's apparel shop. Marly Van Camp is at the quilt frame. (MHAHS Judy Kleinert photograph file)

The Mount Horeb Area Historical Society

Book Moving Forward Regardless of Setback

On Nov. 29 Historical Society treasurer Darlene Nowak received a disappointing phone call from the director of the Dane County Cultural Affairs Commission letting the society know that we had been denied a recent application for funding. The Board of Directors was banking on the grant to help complete the forthcoming book "Mt. Horeb Area Then & Now: Celebrating Mt. Horeb's 150th, Southwestern Dane County's 175th," with both anniversaries occurring in 2011.

"With a title like that," said Historical Society President Brian Bigler, "we thought we were a sure fit."

Money from the county level has been difficult to receive in recent years, Bigler added, with so many organizations vying for an ever-decreasing pool of funds. In this grant cycle alone the total requests for monies was twice that available.

Because of this news the Historical Society extended its book sponsorship campaign through the end of January 2011.

"We're not going to let this dampen our spirits," Bigler said. "The book is going to be the best local history publication that area residents have ever seen."

The book sponsorship program allows individuals and businesses to place on a special sponsorship page a one-line entry in the publication for a gift of \$100 per entry. The sponsorship can be to a loved one, a business name, in honor of someone or just you. For example: "In honor of Mr. and Mrs. John Jones, from their children" or "In memory of my parents, Mr. and Mrs. John Jones, from Tom Jones."

"We are all very lucky in this area that forward-thinking individuals started the Mt. Horeb Community Foundation," Bigler said. "Their recent generous grant has allowed us the positive attitude to move forward on this project. Also, the book sponsorships to date have totaled \$4,350, and we are very grateful. However, we are still about \$6,900 short of the more than \$20,000 price tag of the project."

The book will include more than 100 pages of side-by-side photos, one from the past next to one from the present. Most views, from the Society's archives, have never before been seen by the general public. Numerous current shots are artfully rendered and in color. An overview of local history from pre-settlement to the present is featured. Founding dates and brief histories of each area township and small village are included, along with the incorporated Village of Mt. Horeb.

Bigler said if all goes well with emergency fundraising, the book will be out in early 2011, in time for Mt. Horeb's year-long celebration.

Sponsorships can be sent to the Mt. Horeb Area Historical Society, 138 E. Main St., Mt. Horeb, WI 53572. Or call the Historical Society office on Mondays and Wednesdays at (608) 437-6486 for a sponsorship form. When sending in your sponsorship please print clearly your name and the names of those you are honoring. You may also purchase more than one entry.

Below - Seven-year old Jessica Puksich was "working" with the National Guard's 229th Engineer Combat Support Equipment Company when it graded Waltz Park in 1989. Jessica is the daughter of former Village Administrator Michael Puksich. (MHAHS Judy Kleinert photograph file)



Museum Objects Reach a Larger Audience

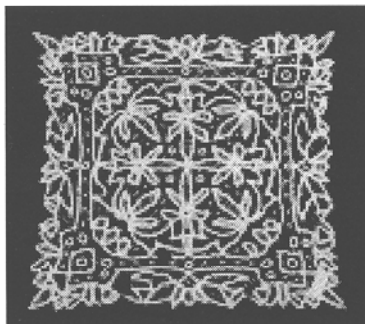
Numerous objects created by area residents from the Mt. Horeb Area Historical Society's museum collections went on display at the James Watrous Gallery of the Overture Center in Madison on Dec. 17. These artifacts will remain on exhibit until Feb. 6, 2011.

"Handmade Meaning: The Value of Craft in Victorian and Contemporary Culture" is a collaboration between the Watrous Gallery, the UW-Madison Department of Art History and the Wisconsin Decorative Arts Database. The exhibit explores the relationship between rarely seen Victorian fancywork – hand-painted china, hair wreaths and fine embroidery – from museums across the state, objects made by people active in the current do-it-yourself movement and work by contemporary artists who use craft processes and materials.

Since its beginnings the Mt. Horeb Area Historical Society has sought out, for inclusion in its collections, objects of everyday life that have personal meaning, things of handmade quality or of a folk nature made in southwestern Dane County. In recent years these vast collections have drawn the attention of scholars, professors and students locally and internationally, including University of Wisconsin-Madison faculty. This exhibit, in part, is a result of this attention.

Local objects in the exhibit were created in the late 19th and early 20th centuries by Hazel Hanneman, a painter of china; Ida Arneson Nace, a maker of fine detailed Battenburg lace; Anne Marie Kittleson Dahle, who made fine lace; Ragnhild Skarthum Goli, maker of fine needlework; Leona Offerdahl, who made penny rugs; and Anne Barton Rue, needle worker.

For many women in the Victorian era, fancywork meant more than crafting beautiful objects or decorating the home. It also offered important opportunities for self-expression, self-reliance and community building. In this sense, Victorian women's pursuits were not all that different from those involved in today's do-it-yourself movement. This is why exhibit organizers have chosen to show the works of contemporary artists and craftspeople alongside their Victorian counterparts allowing for a thought-provoking juxtaposition.



Left - Battenburg lace doily, Ida Arneson Nace, Town of Vermont, Dane County, probably late 19th or early 20th century.

'Handmade Meaning' Special Event

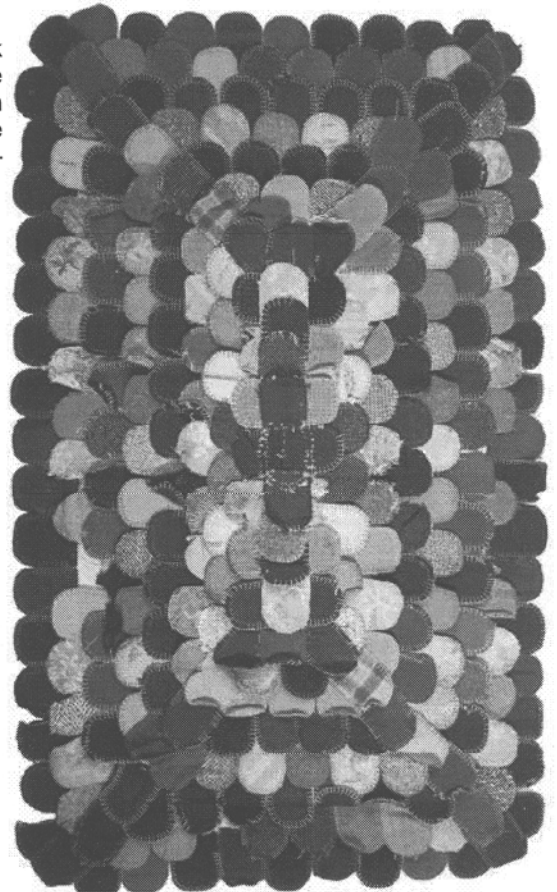
On Feb. 6, the final day of the Watrous Gallery exhibit, there will be a reception and discussion at the Wisconsin Historical Museum on Capitol Square. A tour of the exhibit begins at 12:30, followed by a discussion and reception.

Emily Pfothauer will discuss the Wisconsin Decorative Arts Database (where 73 objects from the MHAHS Museum collections are featured), its role in "Handmade Meaning" and in the sharing of crafters' stories. She will moderate "History Through Women's Hands," which will highlight two of the many groups of artifacts included in the exhibition.

Lyn Korenic of the UW-Madison Art Library and Mount Horeb Area Historical Society President Brian Bigler will discuss the tools, methods and china-painted ceramics of Hazel Hanneman, a Mt. Horeb resident and student at the Art Institute of Chicago. Nancy Mihlo, an assistant professor of art history and American Indian studies at UW-Madison, will discuss a group of lace doilies made by Wisconsin Oneida women.

Following the discussion, join us for food, beverages and a chance to meet others with an interest in local history preservation. Contact the Watrous Gallery at 608-265-2500 for more information.

Right - Patchwork rug used by the Offerdahl family, Town of Springdale, Dane County, ca. 1920-1940.



The Mount Horeb Area Historical Society

Generations of Memories

The new year is here and what a special year it is! The celebration of Mt. Horeb's 150th anniversary and Dane County's 175th will be happening throughout the year. We would like you to keep up-to-date on all the historic events and activities by once again renewing your membership to the Mt. Horeb Area Historical Society. Your renewal will ensure that you continue receiving the Mt. Horeb Past Times Newsletter with all the information for the year in addition to fascinating articles and photos of the area's history. Your membership renewal form can be found at the bottom of this page. Please fill it out and send it along with your payment. We have included an additional membership form for your convenience to pass on to an interested family member or friend.

F. Y. I. Your membership expiration date is printed on the mailing label on the back page of this newsletter. Please check to see if you are up to date through January 12 or beyond. If not, your membership is due. We are grateful for your continued support of the Society.



Generations Of Memories
The Mt. Horeb Area Historical Society

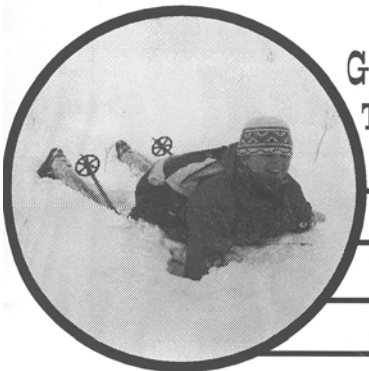
New Membership Renewal Membership

E-Mail

Society Membership Levels Individual \$15.00 Household \$25.00 *Individual lifetime membership \$250.00*
 Benefactor \$500.00 Building Fund Donation _____

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

All contributions to the Society are tax-deductible.



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Mt. Horeb Area Historical Society
Board of Directors

Brian J. Bigler – President
Tony Zalucha – Acting Vice President
Connie Jo Zwettler – Secretary
Darlene Nowak – Treasurer
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Ruth Haglund
Shirley Martin
Doug Nesheim
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Marlyn Grinde
Lee J. Underwood
Donna Read
Marietta Gribb – Costume, Textiles, Dolls

Operations:

Laurie Boyden - Museum Director /Coordinator
Tim White - Newsletter and 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



Rural Mt. Vernon, (MHAHS subject file)

Membership Dues to increase in 2012

At a recent meeting of the Board of Directors of the Mt. Horeb Area Historical Society, the Board recommended that membership dues be increased by 2012. The increases will be decided sometime this year and will be voted on at the annual meeting in October. Dues help fund the printing and mailing of the newsletter, event notification mailings and general day-to-day operations at the museum and archives. As costs continue to rise, we must make an adjustment periodically to keep up with economic trends. It means a great deal to us to have your support and to know that we all share a common interest in the preservation of the history of southwestern Dane County.

Thank You

In this year-end and year-beginning edition of Past Times we present our many donors and contributors for 2010. It is with your past and present generosity that we proudly begin our 36th year as the Mt. Horeb Area Historical Society.