



## Magic Seeds



By Arlo Paust

We all know the basic needs for life: food, water, air, and shelter. As our modern world progresses, these simple things have been commodified in various ways. Many of us have difficulty in seeing it any other way. Our ancestors, however, knew the basics required some labor, but could otherwise be free; seeds do not need money to grow. In respect for nature's gifts, the Driftless Historium will soon be home to a seed bank, so visitors can borrow, save, and share seeds without a dollar exchanged. We can help keep heirloom seeds where they belong: in our gardens and on our tables, and hopefully, capture the stories related to the history of these seeds.

In truth, we have very little knowledge of the seed saving and vegetable growing of the Mount Horeb area. It was likely considered such a basic process that few felt it was worth recording. The art of saving seeds has become something of a novelty, but it was once commonplace. Vegetable seeds were jealously guarded and saved as familial or neighborly heirlooms that had been perfected by intelligent selection. We were a culture of collective generational knowledge based on awareness and observation of plants' interactions with elements of nature. True wealth was measured by the health of your family, and that had much to do with the maintenance of one's farm and garden.

There is a pattern of gardens being abandoned during times of prosperity, but returned to in times of need. In the 1920s, our country became enmeshed in a bustling economy with a more than 50% urban population and new processed foods. However, the wealth of the decade was not sustainable and led us



Above: Baker family garden in the 1940s, Town of Springdale.  
Left: Northrup, King and Co. seed packages, 1941



Introducing

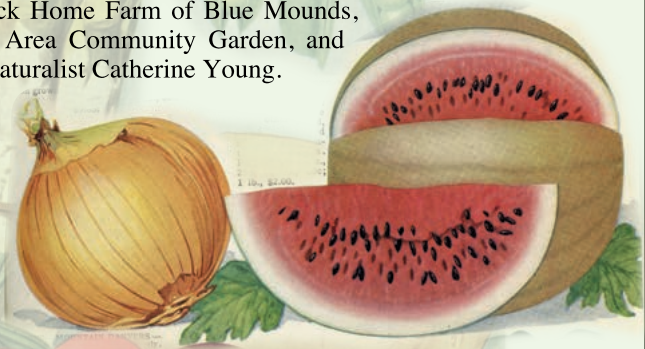
### DRIFTLESS SEED PROJECT

For at least 12,000 years, humans have been saving seeds. However much of that knowledge and diversity is being lost as we become more and more distant from the food we eat, and where and how it grows. In an effort to bridge this gap, the Mount Horeb Area Historical Society is excited to debut the Driftless Seed Project. This community partner program will educate about horticulture, seed collecting and sustainable practices, and identify and share locally cultivated seeds and their stories from the Driftless area of Southwest Wisconsin. This new education and historic preservation initiative is a collaboration between MHAHS, Back Home Farm of Blue Mounds, Mount Horeb Area Community Garden, and educator and naturalist Catherine Young.

MHAHS will launch the Project's Seed Library at the Driftless Historium this spring to distribute free

seeds specifically chosen to be compatible with our local environment. In addition, the Driftless Seed Project partner team is planning educational events and activities for both adults and families. Interested in learning more? Want to join our Seedy Team?

Email: [mthorebhistory@mhtc.net](mailto:mthorebhistory@mhtc.net) or call: 608-437-6486.



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## Volunteer Spotlight: Meet Scott & Wendy Zahler

*Get to know the people, generous of time and talent, who make it possible for MHAHS to accomplish so much – we can do big things for our small town because of THEM!*

Scott and Wendy Zahler are members of our vital Building & Grounds Committee. This husband and wife team are what you might call the Driftless Historium's "reluctant heroes." Like their business, Premier Building Solutions (who, in full disclosure, were contracted by MHAHS to oversee the Driftless Historium building project and renovation), Scott and Wendy are knowledgeable, efficient and no-nonsense: just the type of people we want overseeing our building and all its complex parts—that most valuable of all our assets, as it is what shelters the history of Southwest Dane County.

In fact, we got to know Scott and Wendy during the fast-moving and sometimes stressful building project process. As the project neared its end, we began a not-so-subtle pressure campaign to keep them around. Who could be more perfect to help us watch over this beautiful new facility than the people who literally saw it built from the foundation up? Luckily for us, they caved to our needling persuasions.

To add even more credibility to their MHAHS resume, Scott and Wendy

are about as local as you can get! They are both hometown kids with family farm roots. Scott grew up on the Zahler Farm on Zahler Drive in the Town of Springdale. His grandparents, Ken and Viola Zahler, managed the property from the 1950s through their retirement in 1981. On his mother's side, Scott's Grandma Norma was originally from England and met his Grandpa Kenneth Moyer during WWII. Norma came over on the Queen Mary ship to the Moyer homestead in the Town of Blue Mounds where she and Ken farmed until 1978 before "moving to town." Wendy grew

up on a farm in Daleyville; her father Nolan Sies hails from Forward and mother Sherry is a Mount Vernon native.

We are sincerely thankful to have Scott and Wendy on board. From their construction and facilities management expertise, to their local sensibilities and commitment to community, they are a Volunteer Dream Team!



*We asked Scott and Wendy to summarize their roles and background at MHAHS, via the following questions:*

**Write your own "job description" of what you do here at the Society.**

W: I am the Chair of the Building & Grounds Committee. I prepare the meeting agenda, coordinate any follow-up and forward meeting notes to the Committee. Most importantly, I keep everyone on task.

S: I am part of the Building & Grounds Committee, which oversees the maintenance and repairs of the Historium.

**How long have you volunteered for the Society?**

W: 3 years; S: Since 2017.

**What is your favorite part of volunteering?**

W: Learning a bit more about the in's and out's of the operations of the museum from a maintenance

perspective.

S: Working with Committee Members to brainstorm and remedy any issues.

**Who or what got you interested?**

W: Scott is on the Committee, he volunteered me.

S: I am part owner of Premier Building Solutions, who was the General Contractor for the Historium remodeling and addition

project. [Director] Destinee asked me to participate on this newly formed Committee as I have insight into the building components and design.

**Tell us about your family.**

W: We have 2 children, 2 dogs and 3 sweet grandbabies (all boys!) who keep us on our toes!



**Top: Scott and Wendy, 2021.  
Left: The Zahler Family Farm.  
Scott's grandparents, Kenneth and Norma Moyer (his British war bride)**

**Center: Scott and Wendy, their first Christmas together. (Ahh!)**

**Wendy, showing an early affinity for multi-tasking that she still excels at today.**

## Local Historic Properties

By Jackie Sale, Mount Horeb Landmarks Foundation

**R**eflecting the mission of the Mount Horeb Landmarks Foundation, President Jackie Sale is contributing a series of articles about local properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Since its inception, the main focus of the Landmarks Foundation, an all volunteer 501c3 nonprofit, has been the restoration and maintenance of the District #1 Old Schoolhouse (110 N 2nd St, Mt Horeb). But part of the organization's mission is to promote historic preservation.

**I**n the heart of Mount Horeb's business district, the Hoff Department Store was a cornerstone of the village's shopping district for 97 years. Hoff's had everything. There were fashions, shoes, toys, housewares, and even, at one point, groceries. There were fabrics—lots of fabrics—and men's overalls and fine dress suits. The huge retail sales area on the main floor had creaky wood floors, a tin ceiling, hanging light fixtures and a wide stairway leading to the basement which also had lots of merchandise. One memorable feature was the overhead cable system that carried cash and checks from each checkout location to a central cashier. The cashier put change in the carriage and pulled a rope that sent the carriage flying back to each checkout.

The Hoff Department Store, now known as Hoff Mall, takes up much of the village block at 101-103 East Main Street. In 1989 it was individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places and it still retains its historic integrity. The once wide-open retail space has been extensively remodeled and adaptively reused by the Gallina Companies with smaller commercial spaces, apartments, and offices, but it has significant exterior and some interior features that make it an excellent example of a modern commercial building style of the early 20th century. The original storefront is intact with its large windows and prism glass transoms.

In 1887, after clerking at another retail business, Norwegian immigrant Andrew Hoff and his brother-in-law, Adolph Elver, bought the retail business that was then located at the present site of the Hoff Department Store on the corner of First and Main. This building was originally owned by George Burrows and formerly located in the area then known as the "Corners," the first Mount Horeb business district at the intersection of Military Road, now Highway 18, and Highways 78 and 92. With the coming of the railroad in 1881, the business district shifted westward to be closer to the railroad depot; then owners Lewis H. Moulton and Howard G. Elliot relocated the store to the corner of Main and First Streets.



Above: The Hoff Department Store, ca. 1980, showing a series of window displays.

Below: interior of the Hoff store at Christmas time, 1967



In 1908 the Andrew Hoff Company incorporated with Andrew Hoff as president, his brother James Hoff as Treasurer, and John B. "J. B." Johnson as Vice President and Secretary. Mount Horeb was booming with 45 new businesses starting between 1900 and 1916. Presumably to maintain his position as the largest retailer in western Dane County, Hoff decided to expand and built a new store—the one still standing today. In 1916, Andrew Hoff engaged a little-known Madison architect, Martin Schneider, to design the new building in the broad front commercial style. By choosing this style, Hoff was instrumental in helping Mount Horeb shake off its rural

appearance. The new image was also aided by the new water pumping station, water mains, sewage plant and a paved Main Street.

Hoff's biggest local competitor was the Dahle Brothers Department Store at the corner of Main and South Second Streets, which Hoff's bought out in 1929. Except for stores in Madison, there were none other in western Dane County and beyond that could boast the size and selection of the A. Hoff Company. For local shoppers there were the familiar friendly faces of the clerks, as well as the greeting of Lyle Johnson, son of J. B. Johnson, who joined the business in 1934. Later, after taking over ownership, Lyle Johnson and his wife, Hazel, managed the store until it closed. The Johnsons were also active in community and business activities. The retail dominance of Hoff's continued up to the late 1970s when the highway system to Madison improved and there was a large retail boom on the west side of Madison. The Hoff's store closed in 1984.



## A Note from the Director

**F**orward— Wisconsin's venerable state motto—seems particularly relevant these days.

When uncertainty is the rule, we must look forward, we must plan ahead. Some sort of normal will return, and the Mount Horeb Area Historical Society will be here—ready to welcome you back!

The name of the game is flexibility.

For instance, we are thinking through the logistics and procedures that will allow us to re-open the museum doors to the public while minimizing risk to our guests, volunteers and staff. In the meantime, we'll keep our Tours by Appointment in place to remain accessible and offer our Members and visitors a safer outing.

We are also collaborating to produce a father-son poetry and art show that will serve as a poignant re-launch of our previously well-trafficked and multi-use Community Education Room. (Sorry; we're keeping the names under our hat for now!) Simultaneously, we'll continue to seek regional artists whose talent we can share and promote in our COVID-inspired, outdoor-accessible Walk-up Gallery.

Just be patient with us! Our planning and calendar will, without a doubt, be ...squishy. We'll do our best to communicate the latest developments with you, from re-opening updates, to hours of operations and event information. And, if in doubt, call us at 608-437-6486!

The doors might be closed, but we're in here; facing Forward.

Thank you for your support and understanding.

Be well, History Friends!

Destinee Udelhoven



**M**HAHS hosts Portland, Oregon-based educator and author Britte Rasmussen Marsh for "Trolls: A Retrospective." This free webinar series is a four-part, exploration of the cultural and folk history of trolls through time.

**COMING SOON: Part 3: 1960s to Modern Day**  
**Tuesday, March 16 @ 6:30pm**

In Mount Horeb, trolls are a quirky—and profitable—distillation of our Norwegian heritage. But, as out-of-towners ask while purchasing their souvenirs, what's REALLY the deal with the trolls?

Marsh tackles this from a global perspective through her extensive and ongoing research. She tracks how trolls are woven throughout the recorded histories of Scandinavia, from the Vikings of Old Norse, to the conquests of St. Olav. Trolls, Marsh contends, are amongst us. And always have been. Some are fearsome, others comforting. They are ugly, beautiful, in the woods, in the towns, in the home and—sometimes—in us. Our collective reimagining and reinterpreting of the troll continues to this day.

All four installments are free, but registration is required. To sign up, email [mthorebhistory@mhtc.net](mailto:mthorebhistory@mhtc.net) or call 608-437-6486. Need to catch up? Recordings of the first two installments are available by request.

## Tours! by Appointment

**L**ooking for a reduced-risk outing? The Driftless Historium is offering Tours by Appointment!

Ever had an ENTIRE museum to yourself? Book a self-guided tour by appointment. Starting at just \$25; Members and their guests FREE! Book your tour TODAY!

Each booking is private, with only museum staff or volunteer support on hand to assist visitors and supervise the collection and facility. Limited group sizes, required face coverings and increased cleaning protocol offer even more peace of mind. Behind-the-scenes peeks at collections storage and the archives included.

Thursday time slots are reserved for Members, with the general public encouraged to consider a Friday, Saturday or Sunday scheduled visit. To view available tour appointments, or to make your reservation, visit [www.mthorebhistory.org](http://www.mthorebhistory.org) and search "book your tour" or call 608-437-6486.

# What's in a Name? : "Stewart Park" By Jackie Sale



**T**he Dane County park on the north side of Mount Horeb with its picturesque lake was not always called Stewart Park. That name came much later in the lake's history as a recreational area.

Initially, and very informally, the blockage of Moen Creek formed a small swimming hole. Then in 1912, Mount Horeb residents formed the Lake Park Association with the goal of creating a community park. Within five days, the Association raised \$10,000 from 54 individuals: enough money to purchase 50 acres, build an access road, and construct a concrete dam to create a six-acre lake. Huge 4th of July celebrations were held at the park with baseball, water carnivals, boat races, swimming contests and log rolling competitions. In winter, there was ice skating and the Lake Association had an ice harvesting business. In 1913, a ski jump measuring 60 feet high and 160 feet long was built; the newly formed ski club planned to host ski jumping competitions that "would put Mount Horeb on the map" and enable competitors to set world records. The following year, the first professional ski jump competition at Lake Park hosted 23 competitors with 1,500 spectators, many of whom came by a special-service train from Madison. These tournaments were held at Lake Park for three consecutive years. But there were troubles, presumably some of them financial. The biggest downfall of the park came when the dam was washed away during a 14-hour rainstorm in September 1915. Finally, in 1918 Lake Park was sold at auction to Dr. J. E. Brager, a local physician, for \$5,500.

There was not much reported public use of the property for 16 years. In 1934, as part of the New Deal economic recovery program, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) set up a temporary camp on park land that provided housing, work assignments and pay to 200 WWI veterans. With the arrival of

the CCC in town, there was renewed interest in rebuilding the park's dam. The following summer, a more permanent CCC camp was set up on the south side of Mount Horeb. J. B. Johnson of Hoff's Store wrote an article in the newspaper to say that, with the government's help, it would make sense to reestablish the lake: "An attractive recreation park is a decided advantage to any town."

Frank Stewart entered the scene in 1935 and eventually, in 1941, the park was renamed in his honor. Stewart was, at that time, the Dane County Board Chairman. He lived in the Verona area and was a persistent supporter of western Dane County and public parks and noted that Madison had many public parks but rural areas had none. After a County Parks Commission report identified desirable sites for a park, Lake Park was purchased by the county for \$2,800 in 1935 making it the first Dane County park. The Village of Mount Horeb donated \$1,000 to the county to help defray costs, and the American Legion, which had an option on the property, agreed to the sale.

The National Park Service agreed that the CCC could be involved in the work at the park with a correspondence describing the park as "one of the most beautiful spots they have seen in the state." But work on the project was delayed and many had given up hope before September 1939 when 21 men were assigned to the park project. In 1942, as work on Stewart Park was near completion, the Capital Times reported that the park "may become famed as the Sun Valley of Dane County."

The County Board had seen fit to honor Frank Stewart by naming the park after him, but not without him first questioning whether the parks commission had asked the people of Mount Horeb for their choice of a name. Supervisors agreed that all the people of the county had paid for the park and declared that Stewart, as board chairman for 13 years, had guided the affairs of the county in its most trying times during the Great Depression and WWII.

Frank Stewart, born in 1882, was principal of a Verona grade school and a railroad mail clerk. In 1911, Stewart and his father-in-law, Adrian Richardson, bought the general store of J.B. Donkle in Verona, and so began another of Stewart's connections to Mount Horeb's history. William Miller purchased an interest in the business in 1916 and the store became known as Stewart and Miller.

Stewart sold his share of the business to Keith Miller in 1950; the name became Miller and Sons in 1958, a branch of which opened in Mount Horeb in 2009. Frank Stewart, champion of parks and longtime County Board chair, died in 1956 at age 74 and is buried in Verona Cemetery.

Special thanks to Larry Kruckman and Friends of Stewart Park!



Above: Aerial view of Stewart Park  
Below: Frank Stewart with his wife in an automobile.



# Mount Horeb Area Historical Society

*continued from cover...* into the Great



Depression. Vegetables prevailed and gardens were further promoted by the government during World War II. They gave us hope and resilience against the enemy forces. After the war, the economy boomed and many gardens were abandoned again as the nation advanced toward the burgeoning American dream of mass production and economy of scale. The suppression of small-scale agriculture had a real turning point when farmers were famously encouraged by the United States' Secretary of Agriculture, Earl "Rusty" Butz, to "get big or get out" in 1973. Many followed

suit. This led to a largely monoculture farming environment, leaving us dependent upon larger scale markets. Little thought was given to the reality that without our food gardens, we are left uncultured and nutritionally impoverished.

The Driftless Area, with its distinct geographic features, has a history of diverse plant species. American Indians made use of the many native plants, but they had been mostly forced west of the Mississippi by the time nearly all European settlers arrived. As a result, new settlers had little understanding of the extant flora. Dating back to Colonial Williamsburg, emigrants were not familiar or satisfied with American specimens and brought their own seeds with them. These imported plant species further emphasized colonization. Grasses brought to the East Coast, meant to be pasturing fodder for livestock, are said to have been so invasive that they reached the middle of the continent before the European settlers did.



The vegetables kept in gardens varied between immigrant groups as food is often near the root of cultural identities. In the Mount Horeb area, 19th century vegetable gardens were known to include cabbage, rhubarb, rutabaga, peas, carrots, salsify, corn, melons, collards, beans, turnips, chives, thyme, pumpkins, squash, beets, watermelons, and potatoes. Larger scale crops included wheat, rye, barley, oats, corn, buckwheat, and sorghum. Native berries were transplanted from the woods and brought nearer to homes.

It wasn't until the mid 1800s that purchasing garden seeds became common practice. It was the utopian communities of the people known as Shakers that first created this industry. Always productive and thoughtful, it is no wonder they were the first to do so. It was an astoundingly successful venture and the idea was quickly copied by



numerous seed companies that sprouted up. People still continued to save garden seeds for a time, but the practice slowly dwindled until almost all seeds were purchased. By the 20th century seed catalogs, for both vegetables and flowers, with large distribution areas, had become common. When a seed shortage came as a result of World War I Victory Gardens in 1917, the US Department of Agriculture found it necessary to create publications to re-teach the public how to save their seeds.

In Ben Logan's memoirs of a Driftless Area 1930s

childhood, *The Land Remembers*, he has a chapter titled "The Magic Seeds." This title evokes exactly what seeds are to many of us: "magic." There have been many tales over the centuries that cater to this thought—"Jack and the Beanstalk" comes to mind. Logan writes, "Each seed joined the earth, entered into some mysterious partnership with soil, water, air, and sun and began to grow and become part of the living land." He also describes the process of saving seeds in their corn fields. His father would walk down the rows in the fall looking for the best specimens, picking them until he had more than enough for the next year's crop. They would be placed in a special drying rack and in the spring, a few kernels from each ear would be placed in a damp cloth. If they failed to germinate after a few days, they were given to the livestock. This was in the days before hybrid varieties were popular, a product that rendered seed saving less predictable. Hybrid corn gave better yields and the stalks stood up better in the wind, but the "rich variety of colors was gone from the cornfields" according to Logan. There had been many

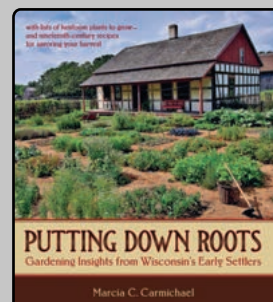
## 2021 Book of the Year

**"Putting Down Roots: Gardening Insights from WI's Early Settlers"**  
by Marcia C. Carmichael

Retail \$24.95

Member Price \$16.20 (35% discount!)

2021's Book of the Year reveals how culture and history can be passed from one generation to the next through the food we eat, the vegetables and fruits we plant and harvest, and the fragrant flowers and herbs that enliven our gardens. #seedsarelife



## Mark Your Calendars!

**March 20: Seed Starting Kit Pick-up & How-to @ Grundahl Park Shelter.**

**Supported in part by funding from the Rotary Club of Mt. Horeb**



**More info coming soon; watch website and Facebook.**

different corn varieties including white Silver King, bright yellow Golden Glow, and the multi-colored varieties known as Calico or Indian. "Gone too, was the surprise of finding a throwback, a bright red ear among the yellow or white." It was said that if somebody found a red ear at a "husking bee," it meant somebody owed them a kiss.

When Mount Horeb began holding its annual "Harvest Festival" celebrations in 1921, part of the festivities were contests for the best agricultural specimens, including vegetables, fruits, and field crops. Prizes included various products or services donated by local businesses. These best specimens were all created through individuals working with their crops to discover better yields, which would then give them more money for their farms. Locals who did well in the competitions then had a quality testimonial for selling their seeds to neighbors. One Mount Horeb seed corn contestant, Sam Waage of Town of York, Green County, went on to win the sweepstakes for his Silver King corn at the International Grain and Hay Exposition in Chicago in 1925, a much lauded feat.

Seeds are not exclusive to food crops. Many of our invasive species today were imported here, by seed, for the medicinal values of plants. Herbs brought and grown by immigrants included comfrey, bouncing bet, burdock, catnip, chicory, coltsfoot, costmary, couch grass, curled dock, dandelion, daylily, elecampane, feverfew, ground ivy, heal-all, hollyhock, hound's tongue, mugwort, mullein, plantain, Queen Anne's lace (carrot), sorrel, sour dock, tansy, and yarrow. Cultivating plants for medicinal value or dyes fell out of favor in the 19th century as patent medicines and purchased fabrics had become widely accessible. However, some of these hardy plants have thrived and are considered invasive pests to prairie restoration enthusiasts and lawncare adherents. Maybe we should realize they aren't going away and can be quite useful... and pretty. I will always love the look and smell of a lawn with tiny little purple flowers and diverse leaves throughout, with an occasional tall shimmering yellow dandelion. The prairie restorers, on the other hand, dislike these foreign plants for the reason of wanting to heal the land's natural ecosystems.

When talking about prairies, one cannot help but think of one of the most notable figures in Prairie Restoration history, Joyce Powers. A Town of Perry resident, Joyce was a pioneering figure

and the first to have a business specifically for selling prairie seeds. These were considered "weeds" to local farmers, so this seemed strange to many when she began her business in 1974. She named her company "Prairie Ridge Nursery" and was successful in selling seeds throughout the Great Lakes region. She curated seed mixtures, taking into consideration sun and moisture exposure and soil types, emphasizing that every planting improves with time. Powers expanded into land restoration and post-construction stormwater management consultation services before selling the business in 2005. Many prairie restorations

continue throughout the region, largely through the inspiration of Joyce's desire to replant her own land into a prairie and restore its health.

**PRAIRIE RIDGE NURSERY**



**Opposite page: This cover of Jacques' Northern Corn Growers Guide, ca. 1940s, shows a corn-fed child wallowing in a mountain of perfect corn.**

**This page: Joyce Powers observing a compass plant, and her Prairie Ridge Nursery's promotional design featuring native prairie plants.**

If the pandemic has taught us anything, it's that keeping it local is important. Our homes, our farms, and our villages are vital especially when we are unable to travel and our long distance food sources become unreliable. People turned to their gardens once again and we saw shortages of classic food preservation supplies such as freezers and canning jars and lids. Interest grew in how cultivating vegetables provide value added commodities with the possibilities of fermentation and canning.

Consider partaking in the Driftless Seed Project. We are excited to learn and document the family histories of local seeds and plants. Anything you know about your seeds, even if you think it is insignificant, will add to our understanding of the area's history. Saving seeds is a huge step towards building a relationship with your food and restoring the health of ourselves and our planet. It's also fun! Plants are cool, wholesome, magically real, and can help us to connect to our ancestors and our home. ●



# 2020 Dues Paying Members



The Board of Directors, staff and volunteers send a heartfelt **THANK YOU** to our Members.

**TOGETHER WE CAN DO SO MUCH MORE!**

**Not a Member or need to renew?**

**What are you waiting for?**

**Learn more about Membership benefits at [www.mthorebhistory.org/memberships.html](http://www.mthorebhistory.org/memberships.html) or call (608) 437-6486.**

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# 2021

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**Our Member family is growing —  
but there's still empty seats at the table!**

**Won't you join us?  
We can do more with YOU at our side!**

**Help Us Meet Our 2021 Goal  
of 50 New Members!**

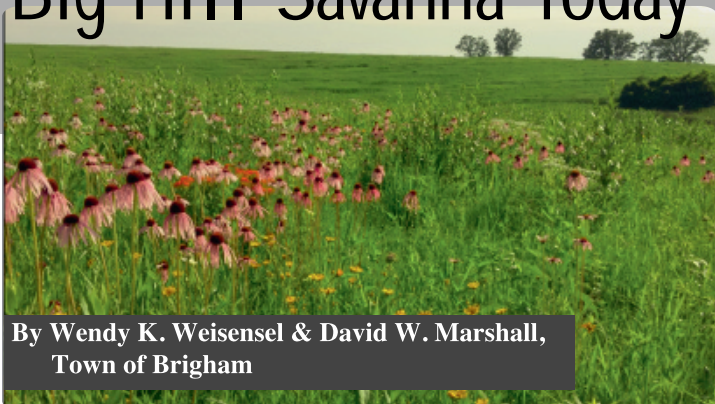
**Send friends and family our way,  
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It comes with a subscription to the Past Times!**

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# Big Hill Savanna Today Brings Back the Look of the Past



By Wendy K. Weisensel & David W. Marshall,  
Town of Brigham

A grassy ridgetop running about a mile west from Daleyville in Dane County's Town of Perry into Iowa County once was known to local families as Big Hill.

The ridgetop provides stellar views to the north of the iconic local landmark, Blue Mounds. Big Hill reaches Gordon Creek and parallels today's Clay Hill Road, which was re-routed in the mid 1950s.

Before then, Old Clay Hill Road actually crossed Big Hill on the former Grimstvedt farm, which was established in 1850 and includes a famous round barn. The old road connected nearby farms and cheese factories with Daleyville. According to the informative local publication, *The Historic Perry Norwegian Settlement* (1994), in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries:

"The Clay Hill Road used to run up a very steep hill called Big Hill. Model T Fords would have to turn around and back up the hill so gas could flow to the engine. There were wild lupines and johnny-jump-ups growing on the side of the road."

Gordon Creek historically flowed along the north side of a rocky cliff that abuts Big Hill about a mile and a half from Daleyville. The creek and cliff created a rare cool and moist habitat favoring a pine relict that escaped periodic prairie fires and still stands today. Pine relicts are globally rare and listed as imperiled habitats.

Following the 1985 Federal Farm Bill, much of Big Hill ridge was converted from cropland to grassland. Today the ridge more closely resembles the oak savanna habitat and ecological features that predated European settlement. Oak savannas are an endangered ecosystem that depend on periodic fire to maintain their character and native flora and fauna. Many degraded oak savannas like Big Hill remain in this area and are being brought back to life.

Twenty-five years of conservation work on our portion of Big Hill, part of the old Grimstvedt farm on the uphill, south side of Clay Hill Road, has turned the former

cropland and shrub-choked oak savanna back into a haven for native grassland birds, including bobolinks, grasshopper and Henslow's sparrows, dickcissels, red-headed woodpeckers and, in the winter, short-eared owls. Butterflies, bees and other insects critical to pollination and nature's food chain are responding well. Many native plants that have clung to life here over the decades or been re-introduced are thriving.

Big Hill now is located within a regionally Important Bird Area known as Military Ridge – York Prairie. This parcel is one of three focus areas targeted for grassland bird conservation in the Southwest Grassland and Stream Conservation Area, a major Wisconsin conservation project aimed at protecting functioning grasslands, savannas and streams within the working farmlands of the Driftless region.



While vehicles no longer have to be backed up Big Hill to reach its top, a fast hike can definitely cause huffing and puffing. To recognize and capture Big Hill's cultural history and ecological importance, we have proposed officially naming the site "Big Hill Savanna" to the Wisconsin Geographic Names Council.

In the meantime, many of the flowers, grasses, insects and animals that live here now are the same species local settlers and Native Americans before them might recognize. These days, a patch of one of the native oak savanna plants, the colorfully-named bastard toadflax (*Comandra umbellata*), has quadrupled in size right where Old Clay Hill Road once traversed the property. This restored landscape is ushering Big Hill into a new chapter of history while still celebrating its past.



Top: Prairie on Big Hill  
Above: 1937 aerial map showing the current and historic routes of Clay Hill Road  
Left: The Knudt O. & Mari Grimstvedt family at their farm, ca. 1880.



# Collections Spotlight: A Penchant for Pressed Flora

By Brian Bigler

Throughout the centuries, floral specimens harvested in the wild or from the home garden have been collected, pressed, and preserved. Victorians took this practice to new heights in the mid-19th century. Pressing flowers and listing their botanical information on preprinted forms became one of the most popular pastimes practiced by middle and upper class women alike. There was a skyrocketing interest in all things natural history, with parlors filled with bouquets of peacock feathers, shadow boxes of flowers fashioned from seeds, rocks, seashells, bird's eggs and walls covered in botanical print papers.

Women, in particular, found the art of identifying and collecting plant species to be a respectable way of examining the natural world, improving their scientific knowledge and preserving the beauty around them, as well as a Christian road to God. They took great pride in creating and showing off their hand selected herbariums. Some took simple routes by pressing a few specimens in the pages of family bibles while others created study collections either on their own or as inspirations for school projects.



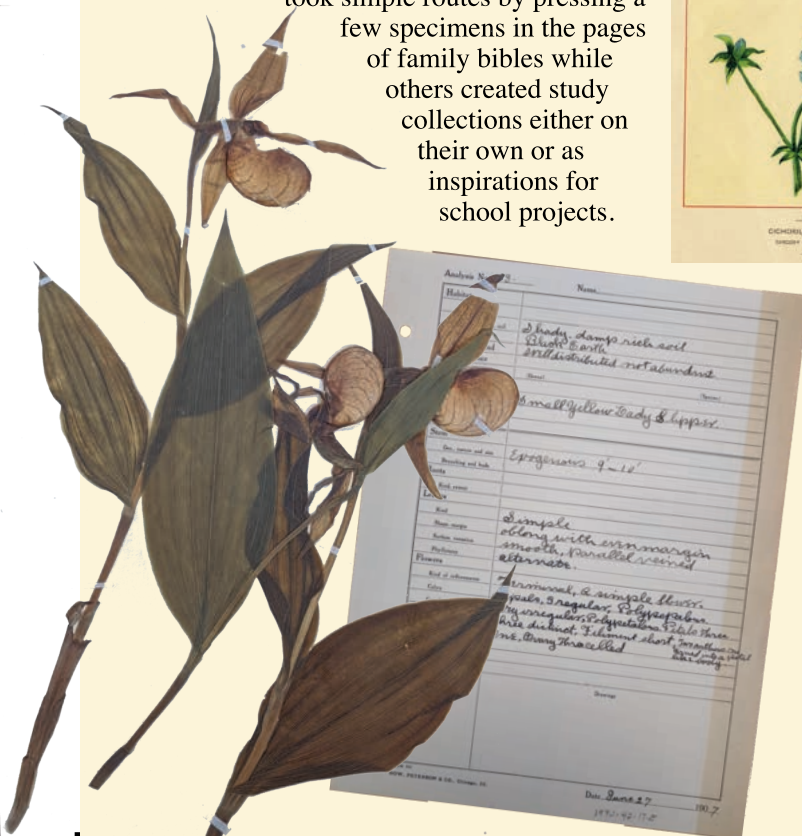
The Mount Horeb Area Historical Society has two such collections. The first is a small plant study created in 1896 by a young man, Lewis Eggum, probably as part of a class he was taking. The workbook contains botanical information and pressed specimens of at least ten plants he collected during April and May of that year, including skunk cabbage, shooting star, and trillium. The Eggum farm was just southeast of Mount Horeb's Old Town.

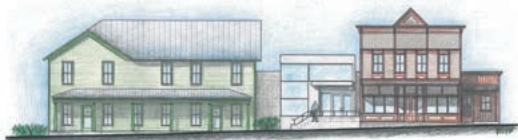
The Barbers came to America in 1847, first settling in the Town of Berry and later settling in Black Earth sometime around 1865. Original settlers Thomas and Rachel Barber had five children. Their son David and his wife Martha had four girls, Florence, Lelia, Nettie, and Gertrude, fondly known locally as the Barber sisters. It is these sisters that were the creators of the museum's collection. The last of the girls died in 1989 and an auction of their household belongings was held where Robert and Joan Pekowsky of Mount Horeb purchased the collection, later donating it to the Historical Society.

There are 44 individual plants represented in their collection. Several of these species are considered rare today such as the two varieties of Lady Slipper orchids that they carefully stuffed with cotton and mounted on cardstock. A beautifully illustrated botanical identification book, *Wild Flowers of America*, published in 1894 by G.H. Buek & Company accompanies the collection.

The Barbers did not just focus on the hills and valleys surrounding Black Earth, but also gleaned samples from their family garden. Notes on these plants say "English Sweet Currant – England," and "English Crocus from Great Grandfather's home, England" leaving a legacy of what cuttings and bulbs the family most certainly carried with them when they came to America. The Crocus is the fall blooming type where its stamens were used for Saffron, a spice favored in Welsh and Cornish baking and cooking. Other common garden plants in their collection are bleeding heart, strawberry, and lily of the valley.

The sisters' meticulously filled out their preprinted forms describing locations, soils, habitat and genus of the specimens. In doing so they left behind a well-rounded document of the types of plants that were growing in the area's prairies and woodlands at the end of the 19th century.





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## MHHS Art Show 2021

**T**he Driftless  
Historium is  
proud to again  
host the annual Mount  
Horeb High School  
Art Show.

A selection of works  
in a variety of  
mediums, all by  
Mount Horeb High  
School students, are  
viewable daily  
Saturday, February 27  
through Wednesday,

April 7 in the Historium's Walk-up Gallery. This show is open to any high school student; they do not have to be involved in an art class or club.

The Driftless Historium Walk-up Gallery takes advantage of the 1886 Gilbertson Hardware Store's large plate glass storefront display windows to provide an awning-sheltered, outdoor venue for safer art appreciation. Art seekers can view the Gallery's exhibits at any time of the day or night.

A companion virtual gallery is also available;  
visit [http://www.mthorebhistory.org/mhhs\\_art\\_show\\_2021.html](http://www.mthorebhistory.org/mhhs_art_show_2021.html).

For more information, call 608-437-6486 or email [mthorebhistory@mhtc.net](mailto:mthorebhistory@mhtc.net)

