

## ETHNIC ENCLAVES

### EUROPEAN SETTLEMENT PATTERNS OF THE MOUNT HOREB AREA

By Arlo Paust

The United States of America has often been called a “melting pot” of cultures, but before these cultures “melted” together, people tended to settle amongst those they were familiar and felt comfortable. Emigration was a big transition and finding like-minded people in a “new land” would have been immensely cherished.

As part of the Driftless Historium’s permanent exhibit: *Life and Change at the Edge of the Driftless*, the research committee studied the diverse stories of 19th century emigration to the Mount Horeb Area. It was planned to show a color-coded map of the ethnic enclaves that developed in our area, but the results were not able to be shown—until now!

Using the oldest known plat map for Dane County, dating to 1861, and comparing it to the US census records for 1860 and 1870, I was able to create the first of two ethnic enclave maps (see following page). The census data for these years provided each person’s

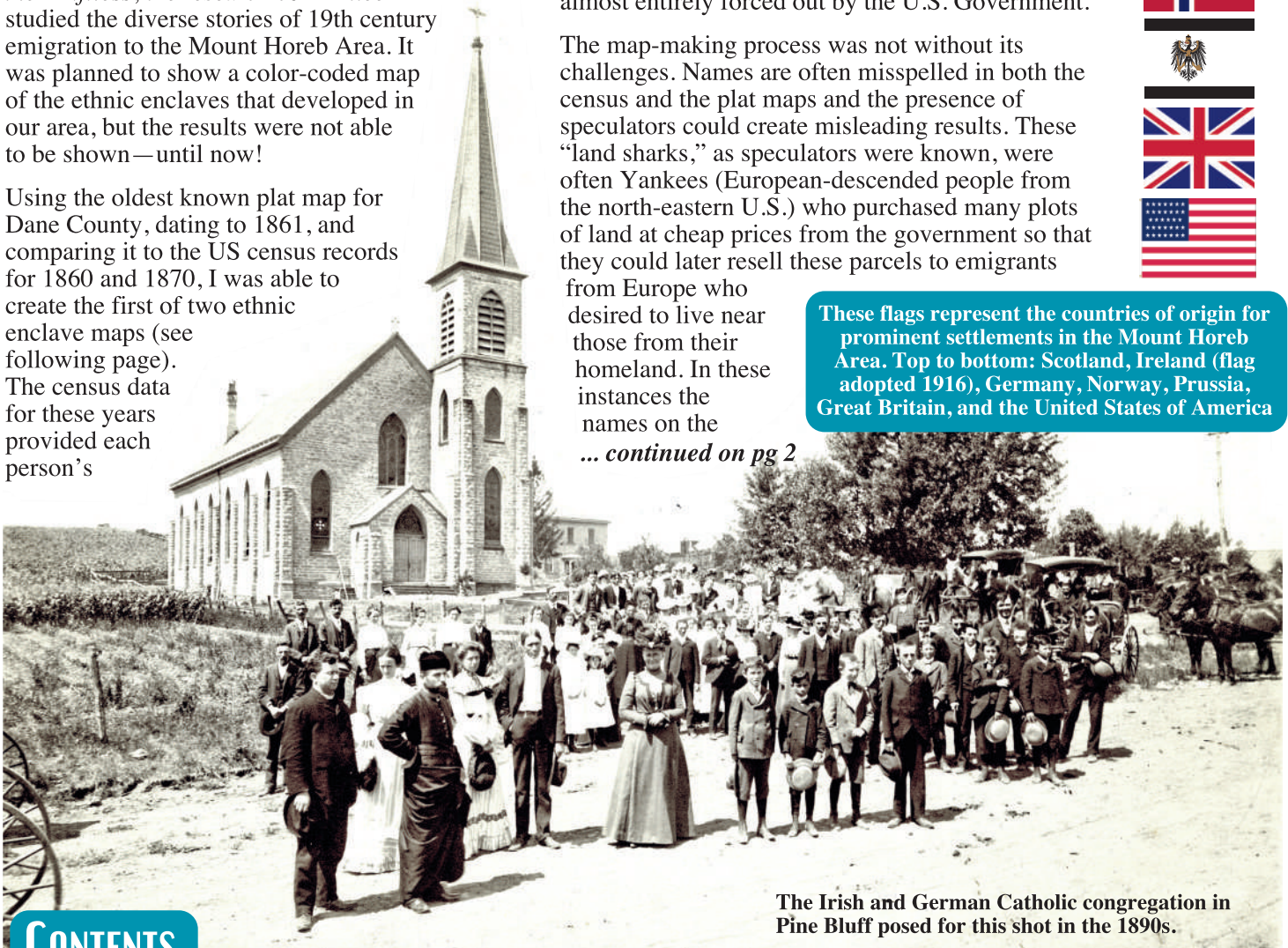
country or state of origin. In our area, land owners were overwhelmingly Norwegian, followed by German, Irish, Scottish, English or Welsh, Eastern American, and even a few from Southern States. The resulting map is based upon land ownership data. There were some renters also, but it is hard to pinpoint their location based on census records. Anyway, at this time, most residents were also land owners. It should be mentioned that American Indian populations had lived in this area for centuries before any substantial European-American settlement in this area, but they had been almost entirely forced out by the U.S. Government.

The map-making process was not without its challenges. Names are often misspelled in both the census and the plat maps and the presence of speculators could create misleading results. These “land sharks,” as speculators were known, were often Yankees (European-descended people from the north-eastern U.S.) who purchased many plots of land at cheap prices from the government so that they could later resell these parcels to emigrants from Europe who desired to live near those from their homeland. In these instances the names on the

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These flags represent the countries of origin for prominent settlements in the Mount Horeb Area. Top to bottom: Scotland, Ireland (flag adopted 1916), Germany, Norway, Prussia, Great Britain, and the United States of America



The Irish and German Catholic congregation in Pine Bluff posed for this shot in the 1890s.

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## Mount Horeb Area Historical Society

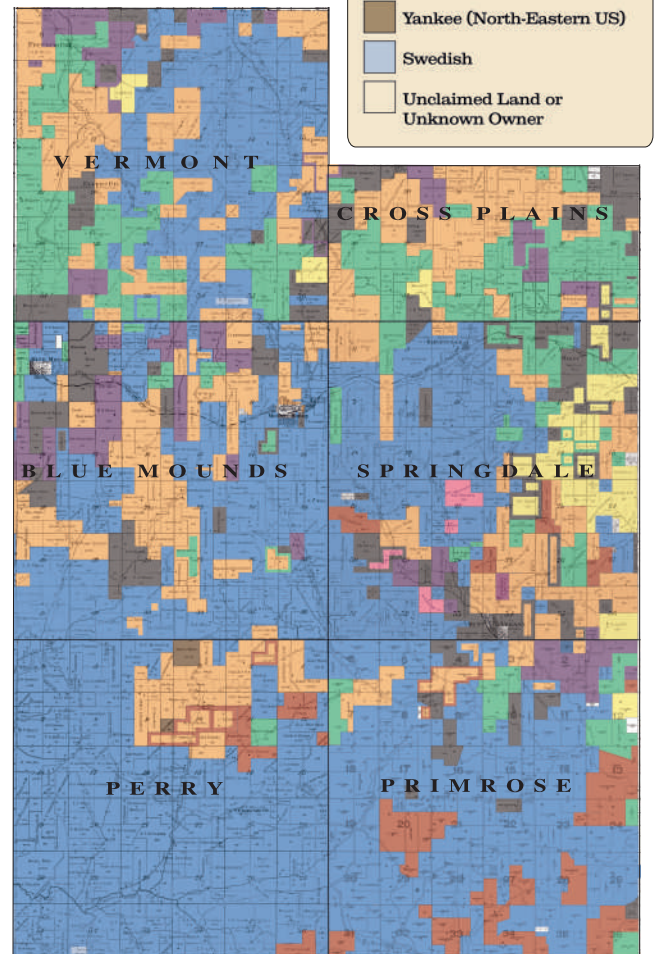
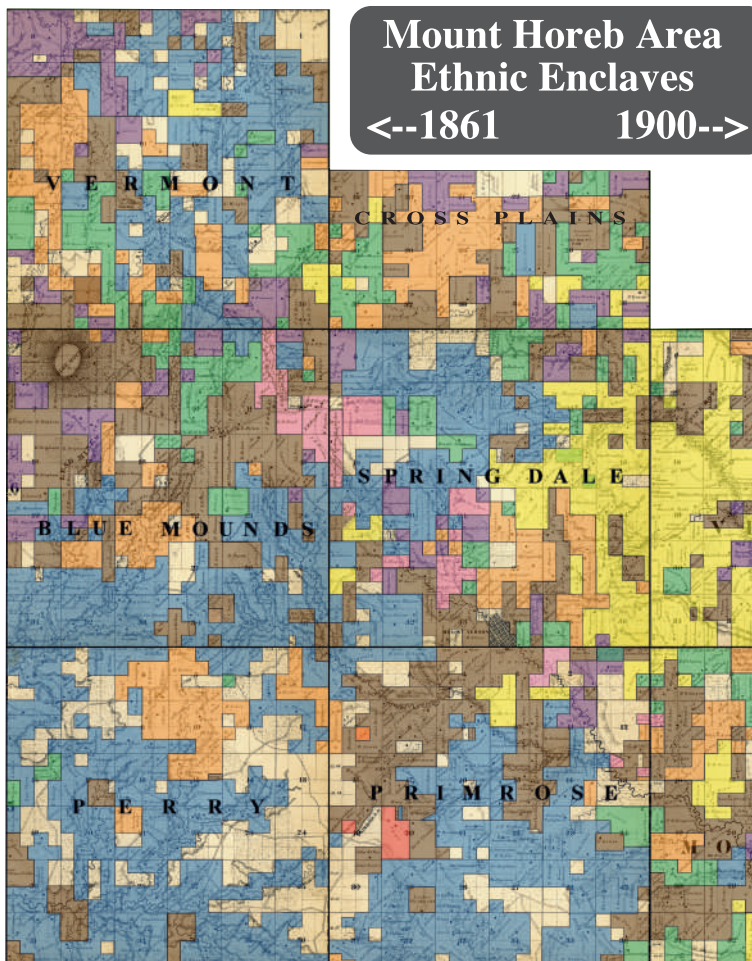
*continued from cover...* plat map were often never residents of the township, but instead resided in nearby cities or even in other states. If their name was common, it is very hard to tell who they were exactly. Another complication came with the Norwegians: they sometimes had multiple last names depending upon whether they used their patronymic or farm names from Norway.

To show the density of the ethnic enclaves, I found it informative to also create a map for the same area in 1900. In 1861, there was some land, particularly in Perry township, that had yet to be purchased by anybody, probably due to its hilly, rugged nature that most speculators thought unprofitable. It was not long before it was almost entirely snatched up by Norwegians, and a few Germans, increasing the concentration of their clustered neighborhoods. For the 1900 map, I used colored borders to represent mixed ethnicities of individual plats where the wife was from a different ethnicity than the husband. These instances were not the norm and had been even rarer back in 1861.

By comparing the two maps, it becomes clear that the Norwegians quickly increased their presence in the Mount Horeb area by 1900. The Norwegian Blue Mounds Settlement, as it is historically known, had clusters to the north of Mount Horeb with the Vermont congregation, to

the east with Springdale Lutheran, and to the south and southeast with Blue Mounds, Perry, and Primrose congregations. By this time, there were a total of nine separate Norwegian Lutheran congregations within our area, with several more just beyond our borders. It is no wonder that Mount Horeb's village population (largely made up of former nearby rural residents) was of 75% Norwegian descent at the 1900 census. Daleyville, Klevenville, and Forward were primarily Norwegian communities and Mount Horeb formed its own Norwegian Lutheran congregation in 1887.

Germans had four prominent, but smaller, settlements. Three had their own congregations: Catholics in Perry, Lutherans in Blue Mounds, and Evangelical Methodists in Springdale. The fourth settlement shared a Catholic church with the Irish in Pine Bluff and Riley to form a larger congregation. This was a big step towards becoming an American melting pot as religion often reinforces the us vs. them mentality. Even so, the Irish and German congregants still segregated themselves ... *continued on pg 6*





## 2021 Student Spotlight

# FIGURING IT OUT THROUGH ART



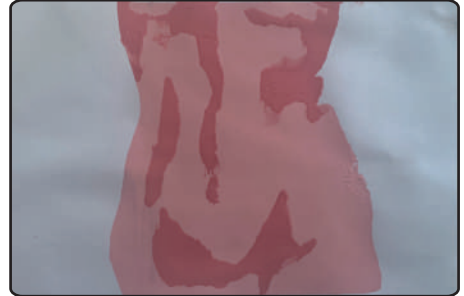
The 2nd Annual "Student Spotlight" art show went up Thursday, July 01, featuring the work of Mount Horeb High School incoming Senior Adelaide Arrigoni. Arrigoni's installation, entitled "Protecting Bodies," will

be on display in the Historium's Walk-up Gallery through Sunday, August 15. The Walk-up Gallery provides an awning-sheltered, accessible, outdoor venue for art appreciation that is available for 24/7 viewing.

The pieces in "Protecting Bodies," Arrigoni explains, are influenced by forces both external and internal. With a worldwide pandemic keeping many students homebound and isolated from their peers, while American society simultaneously faced an overwhelming assortment of social reckonings, Mount Horeb-based Arrigoni relied on the creative process as a calming center: "It serves as a way for me to process what is going on in the world around me and in my own head. It feels good to explore my ideas and consciousness."

Arrigoni's favorite medium is printmaking, and she plans to pursue this craft as an entrepreneur after high school.

The Driftless Historium's "Student Spotlight" initiative celebrates the talent of area youth. This program, developed in partnership with MHHS art educators Anna King and Dana Showers, provides an opportunity for young artists to gain experience producing and promoting a public art installation in a professional setting. Arrigoni was selected by committee from a pool of student applicants.



## DRIFTLESS SEED PROJECT HOSTS GARDEN GIVE-AWAY



On Saturday, March 20, with spring sunshine warming the winter-weary ground, the Driftless Seed Project (DSP), a new community partnership, distributed 40 free seed starting kits at Mount Horeb's Grundahl Park to a grateful mix of green-thumbers and COVID-inspired gardening newbies.

As pictured above, volunteer Lynn Messinger provided a short tutorial to a socially-distanced and masked crowd,



Left: Kellie Aquino picked up a few seed saving kits.

noting an upcoming seed-saving workshop (details TBA) to help with the next step on their sustainable gardening adventure.

The Driftless Seed Project is a partner program of Back Home Farm, Mount Horeb Area Community Garden, MHAHS and Naturalist Catherine Young, with start-up funding generously provided by the Rotary Club of Mount Horeb. DSP seeks to

educate about seed collecting and environmentally-friendly horticulture, and identify and share locally cultivated seeds and their stories. Visit the MHAHS website and search "Driftless Seed Project" for the latest updates, or call 608-437-6486.

# WHAT'S IN A NAME? : "MOUNT VERNON"

By Jackie Sale

It was 175 years ago that the first pioneer family built a cabin by the "Big Spring" and settled in what is now Mount Vernon on the Springdale and Primrose Township line. As the community celebrates its anniversary this year, curious minds may like to know how the settlement got its name. Nestled between two hills on the meandering Mount Vernon Creek (a branch of the Sugar River), Mount Vernon certainly was not named for its elevation.

It was the George Patchin family who traveled by wagon from Ohio and settled by the creek in 1846. The next year, Virginian Joel Britts settled in the Town of Primrose and purchased 200 acres of land, including the area of present-day Mount Vernon. Within a couple years, Joel sold most of that property to his nephew, George Britts. George built a sawmill, platted the settlement and named it after Mount Vernon, Virginia, in his home state. It has been noted that the reason for the naming may be that Mount Vernon is the same distance from the Wisconsin State Capitol in Madison as George Washington's Mount Vernon is from the nation's Capitol Building. Also, the river flowing through the peaceful valley may have reminded him of the Washington estate landscape along the Potomac River.

Other families followed and, by 1852, there were 12 families living at the settlement as well as the Hotel De Allen with its saloon and stable. That year, Dr. Philander Byam and two of his brothers bought much of George Britts' platted land, adding adjoining property to the community that they had purchased (thus the name of the map illustrated here: Map of Mount Vernon with Byam's Addition). Eventually, the Byam family was thrown out of town because of their dishonest marketing and deceptive land sale practices. They sold worthless "patent rights" to local farmers and sold village lots for exorbitant prices to buyers in New York State using false sales materials. In one example, they showed a picture of Mount Vernon as a large settlement and a steamboat on the Sugar River, which is actually rarely over 20 feet wide. In 1859, a group of about 70 residents went to the



Above: The "Bird's Eye View" of the village shows the expanse of the mill pond. Main Street is at the far right. The Zwingli church was not yet constructed, ca. 1910

Byam residence to request his attendance at a meeting. When he declined, the group held a trial with the verdict being that the Byams were given 24 hours to leave or stay and be hanged. The Byams left town and moved to Madison the next morning. One of the brothers did return for a load of hay, but he was apprehended on top of the Mill Hill and the wagon and hay were set on fire.

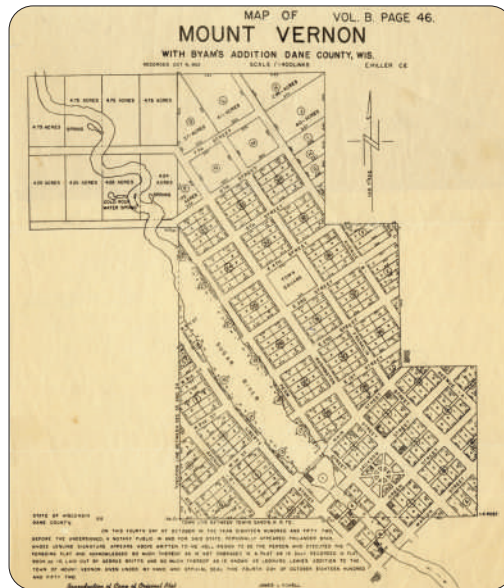
By 1880, the village had over 100 residents and local businesses included two hotels with saloons,

a leather goods and tanning shop, a general store, a shoe shop, a blacksmith shop, and a slaughterhouse. One of the hotels and the grist mill were owned by John Jones who later married Ellen Sweet Donald in 1884.

The early plat of Mount Vernon that was drawn up by George Britts and expanded by Dr. P. Byam had more than thirty town blocks with streets bearing the names of revolutionary heroes such as Franklin, Washington, and Jackson. In the 1880s, the railway took a northern route through Verona, Riley, Klevenville, Mount Horeb, and Blue Mounds, bypassing Mount Vernon. The hopes that many had for the community were dashed and most of the 30 blocks were never developed.

But even without the railroad, a vibrant, cohesive community developed along the West Branch of the Sugar River and became an important resource for the wider farming community. Mount Vernon has supported a range of businesses and organizations, including two churches, a schoolhouse, a newspaper, a telephone company, a fire department, restaurants, a cheese factory, hotels, general stores, blacksmiths, a carriagemaker, shoe shops, carpenters, taverns, barber shops, and automobile garages. Recreation has always been an important part of the community, including a cornet band that began in 1891, a dance hall that hosted local and traveling bands, long-standing baseball and softball teams with tournaments held at the unique Forest of Fame started by John S. Donald, championship tug-of-war and euchre teams, and, of course, nearby Donald County Park.

Happy 175th Anniversary, Mount Vernon!





# IN THEIR WORDS: THE MOUNT HOREB AREA DAIRY & CHEESEMAKING ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

**M**ember, Volunteer and longtime supporter Mary Spaay approached us last fall with an offer we couldn't refuse: Think of a project that's been on the back burner that you would love to see move forward—and she would contribute \$1,000 to get it done.

After some thought, we landed upon an effort to seek and capture memories of the local dairy and cheesemaking industry. From milk cows, to cheese factories to processing plants, dairy, it seems, has been a common thread in the Mount Horeb area for a long time.

Mary generously approved the project, and we were off to the races! We hired Historian Jane Considine to head up the project, and asked her to summarize the experience:

"When MHAHS asked me if I would be interested in conducting these interviews, I recognized that it was a topic I would enjoy pursuing: I relish digging into history, especially local history. I had the privilege of talking to people who were part of the great tradition of milk and cheese production in the Mount Horeb area. The number of cheese factories has dwindled dramatically in the past 40-50 years, and the days of door-to-door milk delivery are gone. But as I discovered, the memories are still fresh, the stories entertaining, and the details still clear to those who got up early to ride with the milkman, milk the cows and take milk in cans to the cheese factory, respond to changes in the market, discover the flavor of cultured butter, or dip fresh curds from the cheese vat.

- Brian Durtschi has vivid memories of riding in the delivery truck with his father, Walter Durtschi, at a time of day when his junior high school classmates were still sleeping. He recalled lugging cases of milk in glass bottles, and the thrill of getting a frosted doughnut from a baker at a downtown restaurant when he delivered milk, and his trepidation as a 16-year-old when he drove the milk truck into Milwaukee for repair.

- George Stauffer learned from both his father and grandfather as they conducted business first in Hungary, then Switzerland and finally in Wisconsin. The family owned a large processed cheese packaging facility confiscated during the communist takeover of Hungary. They were able to re-establish a business in Switzerland, and later emigrated to the Mount Horeb area, and eventually Stauffer and Sons provided packaged cheese wedges to the airlines, had a mail order business, and sold products to other distributors who had stores in shopping malls.

- Willi Lehner was a young boy helping out at Ryser Brothers Cheese in Mount Horeb where his father was the cheesemaker.



Cheese factories like the Daffodil factory, pictured above, were an integral part of Mount Horeb area communities.

As a young man he had opportunity to spend time in Switzerland with relatives and it was there that he experienced the taste of butter made from fresh, raw milk. For several years Willi made cultured cream butter, but as his career evolved, he focused on his Bleu Mont Bandaged Cheddar and Grana. The American Cheese Society awarded prestigious Best in Show ribbons to both products in 2013.

- Gelaine Roberts' husband Bill was the last cheesemaker at the Barber factory on Hwy F where Hilda Oimoen and her late husband Lester sold their milk. Her son Dave recalls using cheese scraps for fish bait, and her daughter Lana remembers walking to the factory to pick up a jar of cream and that whey from the cheesemaking process came back to the farm to feed to the pigs. Hilda's memories go back to the 1940s when her family used horse and wagon to deliver milk to the factory where she grew up near Larsonville. Diane Richard Hefty is a cheesemaker's daughter and she remembers watching as the cheese was hoisted out of the vat, and lining up with her sisters to get a sample of the final product when it was cored for testing. They all recollect the era when milk cans were replaced by bulk trucks, signaling the day when many small cheese factories closed as farmers expanded their herds and began shipping milk to AMPI."

The recorded interviews, complete with helpful summaries and full transcripts, will be shared with all participants, added to the MHAHS archives, and made accessible to the general public.

The first-hand stories of our community are a finite resource that, once lost, can never be recaptured. Be like Mary! Consider contributing towards an oral history project.

Call 608-437-6486 or email [mthorebhistory@mhtc.net](mailto:mthorebhistory@mhtc.net) to learn more.



## Mount Horeb Area Historical Society



*continued from pg 2...* to opposite sides of the church aisle for many years. An Irish settlement in the Town of Vermont formed an additional congregation—St. James Catholic. A Catholic congregation within the village of Mount Horeb was formed in 1894.

A Scottish settlement, known as “Scots Lane,” has a remnant in the Oak Hill cemetery at Hwys J and G where there is a “Pioneer Scottish Settlement” historic marker. The neighborhood was very concentrated in 1861, but the community had begun to dissipate by 1900. They had their own Presbyterian church congregation.



Yankees had been first to establish houses of worship in the area. While some Yankees remained, many had continued their westward journeys by the 1900 census. Those from the southern United States were equally transient. Only a couple southern families were in the Mount Horeb area in 1861, but one southerner, Jonathan T. Dryden will be forever remembered in Mount Horeb as the oldest burial in the cemetery (1850), his body being adjacent to the roundabout at the intersection of Springdale and North 8th

Streets. His family moved to Iowa and Illinois after his death. Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian churches in village centers such as Mount Vernon, Blue Mounds, and Mount Horeb were largely attended by these European-Americans from the eastern U.S.

Some may wonder why the Swiss are so under represented on the map. The Swiss settlement, in 1861, was still very concentrated to New Glarus and had not yet expanded much into Dane County. There were many Swiss citizens in the area by 1900, but most of these were cheese factory operators and so did not own their land and are not represented on the map. The 1900 map does show a significant Swiss increase,





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- Shop and give!

### YOUR DONATION MATTERS!

**I**n our last complete fiscal year (Oct 2019 to Sept 2020), 74% of our income was generated via public donations and Membership fees. (Admissions, gift shop sales, rental income from the museum apartment and project grants round out our revenue streams.)



Watch your mail for a 2020 donor roster, intended to better spotlight our financial supporters. For 46 years, their generosity has carried us—and the history of the Mount Horeb area—forward. We think they deserve a little limelight, don't you?

primarily in Primrose township, just north of New Glarus.

While people of particular ethnicities usually stuck to their religious affiliations for generations, country schools, cheese factory cooperatives, political affiliations, and modes of commerce did not adhere to ethnic boundaries. These factors, along with increased transportation and specific governmental encouragement in the 20th century (particularly during and after World War I), helped meld these groups together. However, hints of these enclaves still exist today! The resulting cultural heritage of Mount Horeb has a significant and unique Norwegian lefse, troll, and rosemaled enthusiasm.

With funding, we hope to complete a deeper study, focusing on the specific neighborhoods and parishes of Norway and Germany and how their emigration correlated to the settlement of valleys and congregations in the Mount Horeb area. ●



Ladies' Aids were some of the most active and unifying organizations within ethnic communities. Opposite, Top Left: Norwegian women called their organization a "Kvindeforening." These women were members of the Perry Lutheran Church in Daleyville, 1890s.

Opposite, Top Right: Scottish Presbyterian women pose for a Ladies' Aid event at a member's home, 1890s.

Opposite, Bottom: The congregation of East Blue Mounds Norwegian Lutheran held a dinner for the 1876 dedication of their church.

This page: The West Blue Mounds Norwegian Lutheran congregation's Kvindeforening at the Jacob & Gunhild Tollund residence ca. 1910. Men and children also partook in events hosted by the group.

## 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.



Above: John Jones, William Sweet, Ellen Sweet Donald Jones, and their parrot, Captain Polly, in front of the Donald home, 1890s.

Below: The Donald farm, ca. 1948.

**A**s the 175th Anniversary of Mount Vernon is being celebrated this year, it is appropriate to look at a nearby local property's long history in the Town of Springdale. The Donald Farmstead (named for the four generations of the Donald family that lived there) at 1972 State Highway 92, just two miles north of Mount Vernon, was added to the National Register of Historic Properties in 1984. The honor was given to the historic farm because it was a largely-intact example of an early farmstead in southern Wisconsin and also for its connection to John Sweet Donald who was important in Wisconsin's Progressive era politics and education.

Thanks to a detailed history written by Brian Bigler, we know that the story of the Donald farm begins in Scotland with the Rev. James Donald born in 1790 to a devoutly religious family who were members of the Presbyterian Church. James pursued a career in ministry, but his journey to be an ordained parish minister became a life-long struggle. He was licensed to preach by the Presbytery in 1823, but he could not find a church in which to minister. In 1827 he set sail for New Brunswick, British America, to become a circuit riding preacher. Eventually he accepted calls in New York, but found it difficult to support his family on the meager preacher's salary. In 1855 he made the bold move to relocate to the seven-year-old frontier state of Wisconsin when called to serve two local Presbyterian Churches. One of the congregations was in the Scottish immigrant community along the border of Verona and Springdale townships. The other was a Town of Blue Mounds congregation that had constructed a church as early as 1848 at a spot that later grew into the Village of Mount Horeb. Then 65 years old, the Reverend arrived in Springdale in a covered wagon and purchased land halfway between the two churches. Although there is no record of him being a farmer before that time, having the farm gave him the ability to grow crops and raise livestock to provide for his family and earn extra income.



The Donald farm started with 80 acres of land and a log house. In 1857 they began construction of a new home, the one existing today on the National Registry, which is a two-story hipped cottage reminiscent of those found in the East. The youngest of James' three sons, John, remained on the farm and drove his father to congregational affairs and Sunday services, acting as his father's primary caregiver. Another son, William Donald, is believed to be Mount Vernon's first resident doctor. The Rev. James died in

1866 and became the first of four Donald generations to be buried in the Mount Horeb Union Cemetery.

After his father's death, John married the neighbor girl, Ellen Sweet, but they only enjoyed six months of marriage when John was stricken with typhoid fever and died at age 26. The young widow, Ellen Sweet Donald, gave birth to their son, John Sweet Donald, in 1869, and he grew up on the farm and attended the nearby Malone School. Ellen Sweet Donald eventually married Mount Vernon Mill owner John Jones and with proceeds from the sale of the mill he purchased both the adjoining McCord farm and the farm of his father-in-law, William Sweet.

Once he came of age, John Sweet Donald left the farm to attend college in Valparaiso, Indiana, and Chicago to earn the degree of Doctor of Dental Surgery. With the death of his step-father John Jones in 1898, he returned to Springdale with his bride Vona DeCrow to take up farming. In the following years they had a daughter, Delma, and two babies that did not survive. John served as assessor to the Town of Springdale and as the Town Chairman from 1899 to 1902. He then ran for ... *continued on pg 10*



## COLLECTIONS: MOUNT VERNON ARTIFACTS TELL STORIES

By Brian Bigler

The 175th anniversary of Mount Vernon allows us to reflect on the importance of collecting when it comes to retelling a community's history. Since at least 1977, numerous historical materials relating to Mount Vernon's storied past have been archived at the Mount Horeb Area Historical Society. Although the following are just a sampling, these objects have big stories to tell about this small Midwestern hamlet.

Did you know that Mount Vernon once had its own town band? The uniform (right) used by Herman Hankel, a member of the group, are in the museum's holdings along with Hankel's horn and the director's baton, both currently on display in the permanent exhibit. The band played at all major community events including Fourth of July festivities held at the Big Spring as evidenced by an 1890 archival photograph (above right).

One of the village's more colorful characters was a Swedish immigrant named Charles J. Agrelius who had a hobby of stealing horses and reselling them, despite being the son of a Methodist preacher. He served several terms in the state prison at Waupun where he crafted at least one very fine cane made of strips of leather wrapped around a steel shaft (a portion of this cane is pictured below, bottom right). Mount Vernon historian Mable Davis donated his handy work to the Historical Society along with numerous other village mementos.

Mount Vernon had its own independent telephone company as early as 1904 and its switchboard, telephones, and phone directories dating back to its beginnings are in the Society's museum and archive. In 1968 the company was purchased by Telephone & Data Systems (TDS). Mount Vernon area farmer and Congressman, John S. Donald successfully created legislation to keep large monopolies from putting small companies like Mount



Vernon out of business. Appropriately, the phone used in the Donald farm home also resides in the museum's holdings.

On May 7, 1878 tragedy hit the village. A group of school



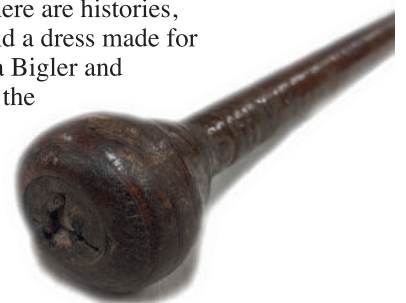
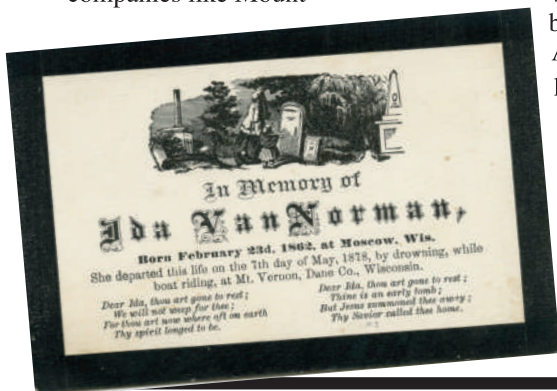
children decided to play hooky and take a ride in a dilapidated boat on the mill pond. Two of the children, Ida Van Norman and Alex Osborne lost their lives that day. Representing the Victorian idea of mourning, Ida's black-bordered memorial card (below, left) resides in the archives.

Mount Vernon's history includes four places of worship: the German Evangelical Methodist and Scotch Presbyterian Churches located on Highway G and the Baptist and Zwingli Churches located in the village. Numerous photos and artifacts from all of these congregations are in the collections. Of note is a pew from the Baptist church that has a rather uncomfortable folding seat at one end designed, most likely, for a fidgeting child.

Two of the more unusual pieces from Mount Vernon's past are quite heavy. One is the massive mill stone from the gristmill, currently on display in the permanent exhibit. The other is a sandstone block inscribed with "Ulysses S. Grant", the last remaining tangible piece from the Mount Vernon Forest of Fame. Both of these items are recent donations from the village's Park Board whose members are busy planning for this year's event.

Also in the collections are items from all four of Mount Vernon's anniversary celebrations starting with the 1946 event. When Harland and Nona Erfurth moved to Mount Horeb in recent years they offered an original hand-made wooden covered history book created for the village's centennial. This special object is now 75 years old. There are histories, broadsides, photos, buttons and a dress made for the 1971 celebration by Leona Bigler and memorabilia and photos from the 1996 event. Materials created for this year's event will soon join their counterparts.

We congratulate Mt. Vernon on their long history!





## VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: MEET KARLA OTT



*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!*

**K**arla Ott is the Total Package Volunteer that everyone wants on their team. She is an experienced and sought-after attorney with her own practice

(Ott Law Office), a passion for her community, and a nearly obscene range of competencies—from her famous pie crust

witchery, to her green thumbs (and fingers and hands) that maintain garden spaces from one end of the Village to the other.

Somehow, in between all that, she even managed to raise three intelligent and accomplished human beings!

Her one weakness, perhaps, is an inability to say “no,” as evidenced by her volunteer resume that includes, in no particular order: Perry Evangelical Lutheran Church, Mount Horeb Area Education Foundation, Gators Swim Team, Children’s Community School, Gonstead Clinic, Mount Horeb Area Chamber of Commerce, Friends of the Mount Horeb Public Library, Mount Horeb Library Board of Trustees and, her absolute favorite and most fulfilling of all-time [superlatives added by author] the Mount Horeb Area Historical Society.

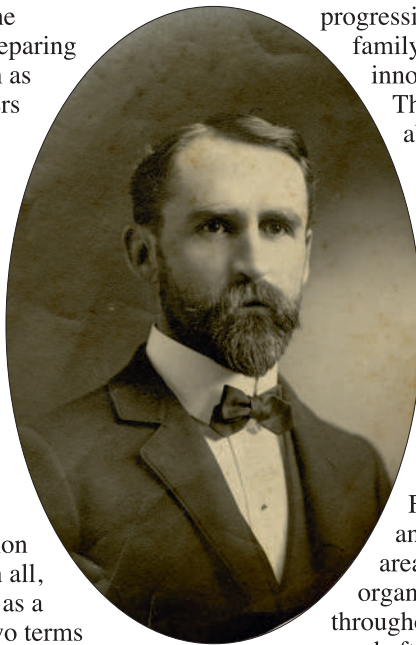
Karla was recruited by MHAHS during the fundraising campaign for the Driftless Historium museum-building project. She was

*continued from pg 8...* State Assembly on the Republican ticket in 1902, and won. As he was preparing to enter politics, a local newspaper referred to him as “one of the wealthiest and most progressive farmers of the county.” This was at the rise of the Progressive Wing of the Party; local Progressive Congressman Robert M. LaFollette had just started a term as Governor of Wisconsin a year earlier. The first bill John introduced in the Legislature passed. That bill resisted monopolies by prohibiting the big telephone companies from cutting rates to put smaller independents, like the Mount Vernon Telephone Co., of which he was then the secretary, out of business. Other bills he supported included those creating the Railroad Commission, workman’s compensation, grain inspection, and primary elections. His most important contribution was the introduction of the Good Roads Bill that created a highway commission to build and maintain the state highway system. In all, John held elective office for fifteen years, serving as a State Senator from 1908 until he was elected to two terms as Secretary of State from 1913 to 1917.

Even while involved in politics, John Sweet Donald (pictured) was an active and innovative farmer. He raised purebred cattle, Berkshire hogs, and Percheron horses that won prizes at state and local fairs and many of his experimental farm practices became standard practice.

With the entry of the United States into World War I, John became chairman of the Dane County Council of Defense. Although he had announced his candidacy for Congress, he withdrew and went to France with the YMCA. When he returned home he joined the University of Wisconsin faculty in the College of Agriculture as a farm management expert, advocating for the treatment of farming as a business.

John Donald was active in many organizations concerned with human welfare, improving farm life, the natural environment, and



progressive farming. The list is long for the entire family showing their respect for education, innovation, and service to community.

The John Donald family moved to Madison about 1914, but as early as 1908 Donald had turned over some of the daily farm operation to the Albert Kobbervig family that lived at the farm until 1928. Some other managers had been the Hodgson family, Wilbert Zurbuchen, Eric Lien, Bob Haak, John Ryan, Charles Ryman and Rick Hagen.

After John Sweet Donald’s death in 1934, John’s wife, Vona, and their daughter, Delma, were active in overseeing the operations of their three Vernon Valley Farms, which includes the Donald Farmstead. Delma had grown up on the farm and her love of the history and beauty of the area was obvious as she assisted many local organizations physically and financially throughout her life. The Donald Park friends group emerged after Delma’s family contributed some of their farmland to Dane County for a park. This initial gift sparked the acquisition of additional land that grew into the 480-acre Donald Park. Delma Donald Woodburn passed away in 2001 at the age of 102.

Delma Donald Woodburn’s sons, James and Robert, were active in the management of the family corporation, but now a new chapter in the Donald Farmstead history is being written. The farm was recently purchased by the owners of downtown Mount Horeb’s Brix Cider, Matt and Marie Raboin, who have made the farmstead their family home. Matt has started some apple trees to use for cider at Brix and Marie, a grazing specialist, has Shropshire sheep. Both Matt and Marie attended graduate school at UW Madison where John Donald once taught in the Ag school. The Raboins plan to honor the Donald legacy by carrying on the tradition of progressive agriculture on this unique family farm. ●



## Mount Horeb Area Historical Society

integral in forging the connections and support that resulted in the Driftless Historium research center and museum, and she has stuck around to make sure this new community asset remains relevant, engaging and sustainable.

Augmenting Karla's many accomplishments, her background is decidedly Wisconsin. She grew up on a dairy farm outside Lancaster in Grant County, graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and enjoys indulging in the occasional

fried cheese curd.

We are grateful that Karla can eke out some space in her busy life for the Mount Horeb Area Historical Society—and we find ourselves torn between



wishing her some true peace and relaxation... and asking her to be on one more Committee. She can always say "no".... right??

*We asked Karla to summarize her roles and background at MHAHS, via the following questions:*

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

Hmmm. Jill of all trades [true], master of none [not so true]. Secretary for Board of Directors, fundraising, writing, editing, baking, pruning, decorating, procuring unusual items with no budget (14-foot artificial tree, anyone?), and volunteering during events.

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

Since early on in the fundraising campaign for the new building

### What is your favorite part of volunteering?

Seeing good things happen in this delightful place and hearing how surprised people are that our village has such a wonderful resource.

### Who or what got you interested?

I was asked to join the fundraising committee for the new building and I never left.



### Tell us about your family.

I am married to Jeremy Kessenich, a very recently retired high school math teacher. My first husband, Jerry, died in 2003 after a

long battle with cancer. I have three children who all graduated from Mount Horeb High School: Alina, a bioinformatics scientist who lives in Middleton with her partner Sean and her cat Lyra; Austen, an operating systems engineer for Microsoft lives in Redmond, Washington with his wife Monica Thompson and their cats, Rivet, Big O, and Margo; Alle Venturini, a registered nurse, lives in Grafton with her husband Michael and their dogs Huey and Hudson. I also have two younger brothers: Taryl who lives outside of Belleville with his wife Tammy and 2 daughters, and Allan who lives in Verona with his wife Amy and their two cats. My mom lives in Prairie du Chien.



**Opposite: Upbeat and vivacious from the beginning, Baby Karla Bishell hams it up.**

**Left: Karla added MHHS math teacher Jeremy Kessenich to her crew in 2006. Shown here in a wedding snapshot, L to R: daughter Alina, dad Darwin, Karla, daughter Alle, Jeremy, mom Margaret and son Austen.**

**Above right: Karla's 1986 commencement with her cousin Jackie.**

**Karla embraced farm life—and Snoopy the Piglet—with open arms.**

**Below: Karla takes a quick break from directing Art Fair traffic to strike a pose with Mt Horeb's Jorgen the Troll.**



### Tell us about your education and vocational background.

I grew up on a small dairy farm in Grant County near Beetown (Flora Fountain, technically), graduated from Lancaster High School in 1982, received my undergraduate degrees in Political Science and Behavioral Science and Law in 1986 from UW-Madison and my law degree in 1989 from UW-Madison. I am a sole practitioner attorney with a non-litigation general practice.

I laugh when I remember back in high school (when Lancaster and Mount Horeb were in the same conference and there was no bypass) that we always dreaded sports and solo and ensemble events because it took "all day" to get to Mount Horeb on a bus.

### Why is the Mount Horeb area the best place on earth?

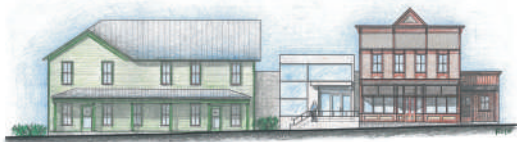
It's a vibrant community. We have art, shopping, food options, health care, and terrific municipal services, with easy access to Madison, all set in a beautiful region filled with prairies, steep hills, deep ravines, lakes, and streams.





100 South Second Street  
Mount Horeb, WI 53572  
mthorebhistory.org  
(608) 437-6486

Mount Horeb Area Historical Society



## Mount Horeb Area Historical Society

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Check website for latest  
information on events and  
hours of operation.

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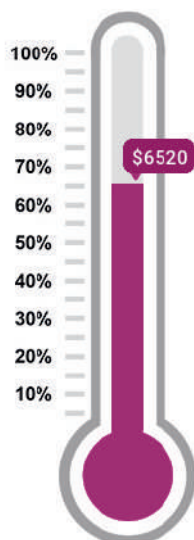
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## VOLUNTEERS OFFER \$10K REOPENING CHALLENGE

We're baaaaaack! After 431 days behind COVID-closed doors, the Driftless Historium reopened on Friday, May 21, 2021. We are pleased to once again contribute to and enhance Mount Horeb's downtown experience for visitors from near and far.

Goal: \$10000



We are excited, but proceeding with care and caution. Museum hours are limited and public health precautions are in place (if ever-evolving), as our vital volunteer corps transitions back to front desk duty.

To celebrate the Driftless Historium's recent reopening, two long-serving Historium volunteers presented the Mount Horeb Area Historical Society with a challenge: they will match donations made May 15 to August 15, 2021, dollar for dollar, up to \$10,000.

These volunteers, who requested anonymity in characteristic selfless fashion, have contributed hundreds of hours of service to the Historical Society. Their energy and efforts were crucial to Driftless Historium's debut just four years ago — and now they are asking their friends and neighbors to help us regain our momentum.



As of July 4, generous folks like you have contributed \$6,520. With our August 15 deadline looming, can you help us reach our goal?

Contributions can be dropped off at the museum front desk during open hours, mailed to "MHAHS, 100 S 2nd St, Mt Horeb, WI 52572," or securely donated online at [www.mthorebhistory.org](http://www.mthorebhistory.org) (search "\$10K Challenge").

For the latest museum hours, or to learn more about the Reopening Challenge, call 608-437-6486 or email [mthorebhistory@mhtc.net](mailto:mthorebhistory@mhtc.net). See you soon!