

# KEWAUNEE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY HISTORICAL NOTES



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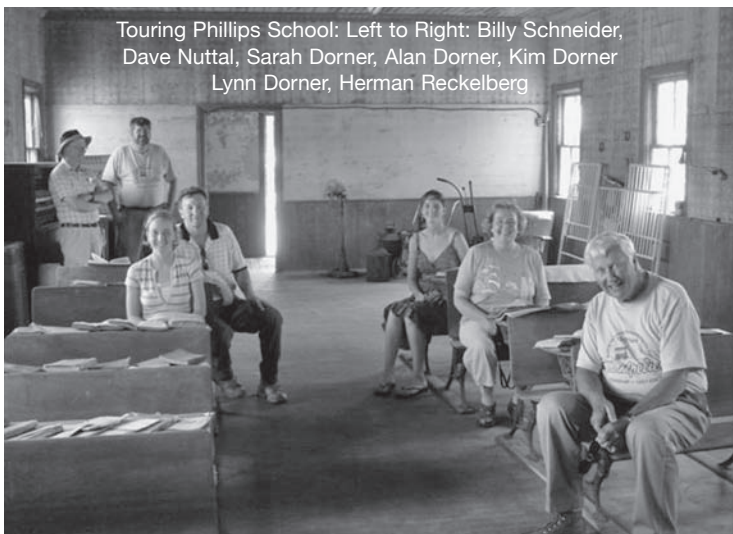
**Winner of the Governor's Archives Award 2005**

## MONTPELIER CELEBRATES 150 YEARS

By Jill Dopke, Roxanne & Mary Reckelberg

Montpelier celebrated 150 years on July 7th and 8th. Though the weather was verry hot and muggy, events were well attended. They included a parade, a "threshers' meal" of metwurst, sauerkraut, potato salad, rye bread, and a slice of Krohn's cheese at Janda's Bar and Grill along with Ray Rollin's Polka Band and the Czech Choraliers. At the Montpelier Community Center there was a local history, antique, and farm machinery display, speakers, and the Hruska Polka Band. St. Paul's Church in Ellisville hosted a cemetery walk. Crowned King for the event was Ryan Mleziva, son of Lori and Leon. Crowned Queen was Johanna Steffel, daughter of James and Debra.

There was also an opportunity to visit **Phillips**



Touring Phillips School: Left to Right: Billy Schneider, Dave Nuttal, Sarah Dornier, Alan Dornier, Kim Dornier Lynn Dornier, Herman Reckelberg

**School** located at the junction of AB and Hill Rd. The first reference to Phillips School, believed to have been a log structure, was a school meeting that was held there in 1868. About 1876 it was sold to Frank Quade for \$3.05 and the current school was erected with an addition in 1891. School officials voted to close the school in 1951 due to fewer children and the bigger burden on taxpayers. Mrs. Gertrude Wright taught the last year and was paid \$2,160.

On Sunday there was a **Cemetery Walk at St. Paul's Church in Ellisville** organized by Judy Srnka, Jean Zeitler, and Mary Reckelberg. The morning before the walk I had the opportunity to talk with one of my

neighbors, Dana Gruetzmacher. Tears formed in his eyes as he spoke of his great uncle, Albert Gruetzmacher (1853-1905), and how proud he was to have been asked to share his family's

story. As his voice wavered, I knew this was a special moment I wanted to share with Judy, Jean, Mary and all the people who helped make the cemetery walk a success. Other participants included Grandson Tom Duescher for Richard Duescher Sr. (1880-1960), Rev. E.A. Batiansila for Pastor Martin Hasz (1871-1929), Great Granddaughter Darlene (Ihlenfeld) Boeder for Karl/Charles Ihlenfeld (1856-1930), Grandson Roger Krohn for Charles Krohn (1874-1946), Great, Great Grandson Kenneth Duescher for Heinrich Prahl (1823-1915), and Jean and Grandson Martin Zeitler for John Zeitler III (1863-1938).

**Montpelier Sesquicentennial Committee Members** spent months planning this very successful event and included Roxy, Mary, Adolph, and Paul Reckelberg,

Marion and H a r v e y Mleziva, Joan L e d v i n a , Wayne Nejedlo, Paul Janda, and Todd Cherny. Providing a lunch at the Community Center was the Pilsen Sky-lighters 4-H Club while Tammy Aissen collected local antiques for display. Of the 500 Sesquicentennial books published, less than a 100 remain. Montpelier Celebration photos courtesy of Roxy Reckelberg and Lois Siegmund.



Dana Gruetzmacher; St. Paul's Cemetery Walk



Orville Duescher an attendee of the 1957 Montpelier Celebration with Tammy Aissen.

## KUNIGUNDE BARGMANN; A WOMAN TO BE REMEMBERED

By Jill Dopke

I came across the name of Kunigunde Bargmann while reading a speech that George Richard, first president of the KCHS, gave in 1969. In it, he mentions Kunigunde Bargmann as one of the "First Ladies" of Kewaunee in the early days of the 1850's and 60's – when Kewaunee was the frontier and a wilderness of trees ready to be harvested.

What intrigued me was how he described her. It was as if he had known her personally. *"Then there is Mrs. Kunigunde Bargmann who made patent medicine, was a midwife and always carried a black silk parasol. She had about her the aroma of the 18th century, for she had three husbands and believed that marriage was not for love, but for business reasons."*

Somehow the memory of Kunigunde, who she was and what she did, had lived on in Kewaunee for years - maybe because doctors were scarce in her day. Back then, doctors might come to town for a few weeks or just stop over for a few days then move on. It might be quite a while until another doctor happened by so people who practiced medicine and midwifery were valuable citizens. They lived in the community full time, and they could always be counted on to help in time of need.

Kunigunde was an intelligent woman and an entrepreneur for she made and sold her own medicine. She probably knew much about herbs and medicinal plants used in healing. As for assisting women in birth, women in those days faced birth not with joy and ecstasy, but with fear of death. In those days too, men were not usually a part of the drama of birth. Kunigunde was a woman helping another woman. Her social skills were probably as important in this task as were her birthing skills.

The fact that she believed marriage was not for love, but for business reasons gives further insight into Kunigunde's character. I sense she was an independent and strong woman physically and emotionally, a woman who spoke her mind, and a woman who didn't hesitate to do the right thing regardless of what other people might think. You could place your life in Kunigunde's hands with confidence and with ease.

Kunigunde was born in Germany in 1818 and died in Kewaunee in 1883. Her obituary is brief. "She came to this country 26 years ago, was always found a true and faithful friend, always ready and willing to lend a helping hand, was buried from the Lutheran Church, and a large number of sympathizing friends followed the remains to the final resting place." Her full name was Kunigunde Johanna Henriette Maria (Lippert), Grueder, Struensee, Bargmann.

Like the lumber barons, the bankers, the blacksmiths, and the millers, people like Kunigunde should always be remembered. And now all I can think of is. . . I would like to have known



Artwork by Dona Fischer

Kunigunde and walked with her beneath her *black silk parasol*.

## "ALIVE WITH SPIRITS"

By Bruce Vandervest

It is not only a historic site; it is a prehistoric site going back many thousands of years. And yet it has been used as a sacred burial ground for Native Americans as late as the 1930's.

The sacred site and burial ground is located in southern Kewaunee County, WI. Most of the points of interest are on a 40 acre area of land. However, the total site encompasses over 200 acres of land that is owned by five different property owners.

To the untrained eye, the lovely wooded area appears to be a mixed forest with stone piles and mounds of earth dispersed throughout it. That is, until one comes upon "the wall". Why would anyone build a wall 100 ft. long by 4 ft. wide by 4 ft. high that is made of huge boulders in the middle of the woods? As of now, no one knows!

Then there is the "Viking ship". Besides the Native American influence in the site there appears to be a definite Viking presence to the place. The "ship" of stone is the correct length and width to hold a Viking ship under the limestone blanket that covers it.

Effigy mounds abound at the site. There are life-size dirt mounds of buffalo, snakes, martens, bears and others. The limestone effigy mounds are unique because they are made of stone and they are life-size of prehistoric animals. Mastodon, short faced bear, and even a whale are present.

Native Americans representing six different tribes have affirmed the sacredness of the site to them. Near the many graves, perhaps thousands, are stones with mystic significance. There is a sacred rock that is said to have healing powers, a ceremonial pit, and an eternal fireplace for the "keepers of the fire" to always furnish a ready flame, and a rare medicine wheel used in sacred Native American rites.

Pottawatomie, Winnebago (Ho-Chunk) and Menominee at one time lived near the site and buried their dead there. Before historic time other unknown tribes used the site probably starting shortly after the end of the last ice age. Through the use of the Ho-Chunk ground-penetrating radar we know for sure that there are people buried there. Looking directly into a grave the radar shows the remains of the dead. Some people were buried sitting



Bruce Vandervest and  
Cody at the Sacred Rock



up, the sign of a chief forever keeping watch for his people.

A famous, historic Revolutionary War and War of 1812 hero is buried there, a man who knew George Washington – the Pottawatomie Chief War Thunder. At the request of the Native Americans I will not disclose the exact location of his and his family's graves.

There is further interest in the "Stone Igloo", the south "Stone Fort", marker trees, and the flowing spring.

In all likelihood there are caves present in the limestone beneath the site. Hopefully the entrance to the caves will be found in the near future. Speculation has it that the secrets of the site could be unlocked by whatever may be in those caves.

Archaeologists, an archaeology surveyor, a geologist, an archaeology magazine publisher, and the Native Americans agree that this is a very special site.

*This article above also appeared in Ancient American: Archaeology of the Americas Before Columbus, Volume 12, No. 74, Colfax, Wisconsin*

## FREE THINKERS CEMETERY REVISITED

By Jerry Abitz

In a recent conversation with Olga Sanderson of Green Bay and a former director, I learned that her grandfather, Friedrich Schmidt, had contributed \$500 towards the construction of a wooden chapel at this cemetery in the Town of Pierce. This allowed services to be held in inclement weather or during the winter months. I had assumed that it was only Bohemians who were involved in this movement, but apparently it cut across ethnic lines. Schmidt is buried in this cemetery

Nancy Grothman, of Madison, but a native of this area, supplied us with a photo of this building back in 1998. If anyone else has a photo or information about this group please contact us.

## WILLIAM H. TIMLIN: SUPREME COURT JUSTICE

By Jerry Abitz

While researching a previous article that appeared in the last issue, I ran across a commencement address delivered by John E. Cashman at the 1937 Kewaunee High School graduation. He was extolling the virtues of being a "self-made man" and was using William Timlin as an example.

Timlin was born in the Town of Mequon in Ozaukee County to an immigrant Irish family on May 28, 1852. Financial conditions were very hash with mortgage interests at 20%. Every family was self-sufficient and the local economy was based on the barter system.

Reading Timlin's dictated autobiography on file at the Wisconsin Historical Society is like following the "Perils of Pauline" going from one disastrous situation to another. It includes the loss of his father's two farms (one in Ozaukee County and another in the Town of Morrison in Brown County) because of economic conditions, his mother's death when he was nine, the farming out of his siblings to relatives, his father's disappearance never to be seen again, and becoming self-sufficient at age 13. What education he does receive is in the one-room schoolhouses during the winter months.

He bounced around to jobs in the lumber camps and shingle mills in Lower Michigan, became a teamster in Upper Michigan, and worked in a tobacco warehouse in New Orleans until malaria ended that career. He tried his hand in gold mining in the Black Hills of South Dakota but returned empty-handed to the Town of Montpelier in Kewaunee County where his uncle, Pat McConville resided.

He was driven to make a success of his life. He attended Green Bay Business College, learned foreign languages, surveying, and became a schoolteacher. He studied stenography and became the official stenographer for the circuit court in Kewaunee in 1877.

While holding this position he began to read law under the supervision of two lawyers in Manitowoc. In the summer of 1878 he was admitted to the bar and formed a partnership with George E. Sedgewick. Eventually he bought his partner out and formed a new one with Francis E. Mansceau. He was elected Kewaunee County Superintendent of Schools for a two-year term in 1879.

Success led him to move to Green Bay. He married Celia L. Arpin, the daughter of Charles Arpin and Adeline (Gagnon) of Kewaunee on June 5, 1880. Together they had four children: William H. who married Gertrude Kacerovsky, Adah, Cecil Alfred, and Kathleen Adeline.

His law practice prospered allowing him to make the move to Milwaukee in 1886. His success as a lawyer there continued allowing him to make the Grand Tour of Europe in the spring of 1891. His reputation as a

successful and resourceful trial lawyer made him a promising candidate for the Wisconsin Supreme Court. He was elected to this position in April 1906 and held it until his death on August 21, 1916. The cause of



The 1893 William Timlin House located in the Marquette Historic District at 205 Dorelle Street in Kewaunee. It is now owned by Joe Sheehan

his death was cancer. In his autobiography he mentions having cataracts and also cancer surgery without anesthesia. Ouch!

At his funeral he was memorialized as a great jurist. Even today there is an annual award given out by the University of Wisconsin Law School in his honor and his portrait hangs in the Supreme Court Chamber in Madison. All I can say is with his early childhood and checkered career, could anyone have predicted his final career? To my knowledge he is the only person with ties to Kewaunee County to have served on the Wisconsin Supreme Court.

### **NELLIE DEBAKER:**

#### **A WOMAN WITH THE “RIGHT STUFF”**

By Jill Dopke

In the later half of the 20th century women began to move into mainstream military positions, and Nellie DeBaker was on the forefront of this movement. From an early age, she had admired her father, and as a child listened to his many stories of military service. She decided that some day she would follow in his footsteps, and in 1967, at the age of 24, she enlisted in the Navy serving stateside until 1969. Nellie is originally from Adams County, but in 1971 moved with her husband, Don, to the Tonet area.

Nellie was not the first woman to serve in the military. Women have served since the Revolutionary War as nurses and spies. They even donned men's clothing and passed as men until wounded or killed. Today women have taken on many new roles in the military serving beside men. They have flown aircraft, planned strategies, been wounded, become prisoners of war and astronauts, and . . . they have died serving our country. Nellie is proud to have served in the military, and feels her training gave her the “right stuff” - teamwork, patience, discipline, and confidence.

Since leaving the Navy in 1969, Nellie has been active in several Veterans' Organizations including the American Legion, the Navy Club, Vietnam Veterans of American, and others, and held numerous offices. Her office walls are lined from the floor to the ceiling with notebooks, reports, documents, research, newsletters, and numerous plaques and awards, and she has been asked to speak for various events.

As historian at the Luxemburg American Legion Post 262, she researched and wrote the history which included 2 books – a scrapbook and narrative of 936 pages. She says, “This is my way to give back to my country, and to keep people aware of the veterans and why they go to war. In my day it was because of the threat of Communism. Today, it is to fight Terrorism.”

“It has been difficult at times,” Nellie said, “to get leadership roles in previously all male Veteran's



Organizations. Men's attitudes towards women in the military have not always kept pace with the times, and women continue to struggle for leadership roles. Some try harder while some eventually give up.” Nellie does not give up.

Nellie continues to be active in the Carlton American Legion Post and is campaigning for Department Sergeant of Arms this year in the Wisconsin American Legion. The KCHS would like to thank Nellie for her service to her country, her tireless efforts in expanding the role of women veterans, and wish her continued success.

The KCHS would also like to thank those serving now in the military all over the world and Veterans who through the years have served proudly and with honor.

### **COMMERCIAL HISTORY OF ALGOMA**

By Virginia Johnson

During the winter of 2002, George Miller suggested to Virginia Feld Johnson, Hans Nell and Ken Wolske that they do a commercial history of what is now downtown Algoma.

Four and one half years and 450 pages later, the trio published *The History of Commercial Development in Algoma, Wisconsin*.

Using records from the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Sanborn Fire Maps, tax records at Algoma City Hall and tax and land records at Kewaunee County Court House, obituaries, real-estate transfers, and articles and ads from the *Ahnapee Record*, *Ahnapee Press*, *Algoma Record Herald*, *Kewaunee Star*, *Kewaunee Enterprise* and Door County papers, photos from Kewaunee County Historical Society and from private collections, and interviews of a number of present and former Algoma residents, the authors put together a chronological history.

Prior to his death in 2003, Harold Heidmann had been working on the downtown buildings with the years of construction on their facades. Dorothy Holub Heidmann shared her husband's work and it is a part of the effort.

Filled with maps, history, photos, ads and tidbits of genealogical history, the book raises questions and offers surprises. Algoma's buildings reflect those who lived and worked here. Algoma, which has never had a major fire, is a historic treasure.

The book, which sells for \$29.95, can be purchased from Door to Door Books, 516 2nd Street, Algoma Public Library, at Kewaunee County Historical Society Research Center, 219 Steele Street, or from the authors. Proceeds will be donated to KCHS Research Center and to Algoma Public Library.

### **NEOMA MICHALSKI 1931-2007**

This former KCHS director, community activist, perennial volunteer, and personal friend was recently laid to rest after struggling with lung cancer. At her wake and funeral over 850 people turned out. The family had asked for donations which will be dedicated to establishment of a library in the Luxemburg area. A sizable amount of money has been donated and

contributions are still coming in. A committee, *The Friends of the Future Luxemburg Library* has been formed to explore how this can be accomplished.

## NEWS FROM THE KCHS RESEARCH CENTER

By Virginia Johnson

**We Have Moved Again** The KCHS Research Center has moved to 219 Steele St. Many will remember this location as the old Kohlbeck Clothing store. The move took place in August. After a short closure to get organized, the center is again open on Thursday and Friday afternoons.

A grand opening reception took place on Saturday, October 13, as KCHS celebrated sports history during Wisconsin Archives Week. Kewaunee County athletes, including high school and non-school sports, cheerleaders, pep band members and coaches were recognized.

**Technology** Rapid advancements in technology make preserving old files, whether typed on typewriters, on cassettes, Beta or VHS tapes or 8 or 16 mm film, increasingly important. Reel-to-reel tape recorders gave rise to 8 track tapes, then cassettes and now CDs and DVDs. Digital cameras have replaced the old Beta and VHS camcorders. As old family pictures, such as Polaroid's and early colored photos deteriorate, there needs to be a way to save them.

Updating to new formats gets time consuming and expensive, as the old equipment is no longer available. KCHS is constantly updating, which is something we need to think about for our personal collections as well.

**Let's Get Acquainted** was a weekly *Algoma Record-Herald* column highlighting county residents from 1942-1947. The late Harold Heidmann retyped and laminated the 487 interviews about 30 years ago. In an effort to further preserve the collection, former Algoma library director Ann Schmitz began computerizing the articles. Ken Wolske picked up the job a year ago and began OCRing (a computer program that reads print and formats it so it can be changed) the columns.

Changes in technology since the 1940's were readily apparent. The OCR program had trouble reading the old type. The shine from the laminate created more problems and made for a tedious job. Ken persisted and all the columns have been redone and are in bound volumes at the Research Center and at Algoma Public Library. The disk is in our safe deposit box.

Columns are as written 60 years ago without further editing. Changes in grammatical and writing style become apparent as one reads the interviews, which are in alphabetical rather than chronological order.

**Photos** KCHS has over 22,000 photos scanned primarily by Carl Braun, George Miller and Norm Paul. Hard copies, for perusal and for sale, are available at the Research Center. The photos are also archived on disks in the safe deposit box.

Videotapes George Miller and Audrey Krautkramer, with cameraman Merle Colburn, have video interviewed over 70 county residents. All these videotapes have been put on DVD. Tom Duescher has been converting

old 8 mm and 16 mm film to DVD and residents have been adding narration. Judy Srnka converted Olga Sanderson's 1960's reel-to-reel taped interviews to cassette. Jerry Abitz had them converted to CDs.

The *Let's Get Acquainted* index appears on the KCHS website. Individual articles can be ordered from the Research Center for \$1.50 each plus a self addressed stamped envelope. The website lists the audio and video interviews, which are also for sale.

**Donations** Recent donations to the Research Center include telephone wire from Frank Schmidt, a new table and chair set from Wes Cox, beautiful easels from Ken Wolske, shelf brackets from Virginia Haske, industrial mops from the Algoma Mop factory, and a new "Research Center" sign by Jag Haegele. Donations in the category of \$100 to \$199 were received from John Wilterding and Wes Cox. The Research Center appreciates very much these donations and would like to thank these people for their generous gifts.

If we have missed a donation for the Research Center, please let Virginia Johnson or Jill Dopke know. We apologize for any reporting mishaps, and will print more donations and names in the next newsletter.

## VOLUNTEER DINNER

By Jerry Abitz

On Saturday evening, September 22nd, the KCHS sponsored a dinner to honor the many volunteers which service this organization. Directors and their guest were also invited.

The speaker was Robert Paulson from St. Paul, MN representing the German-Bohemian Society, a group interested in preserving the customs of this unique group. Jill Dopke had reported on this group in our last newsletter. Paulson and Joel Blahnik of Door County, entertained us with musical selections typical of this group. Blahnik is also of this ethnic group.

Five individuals were honored for their service to the KCHS. They were:

Virginia Haske, the mayor of Algoma; Ken Wolske, a volunteer at our research center; Hans Nell, who also volunteers there, Roger Ruhlin, a professional photographer who assisted us in a brochure



Recipients of Volunteer Awards were Tom Duescher, Ken Wolski, and Roger Ruhlin. Missing were Virginia Haske and Hans Nell

development; and Tom Duescher, our web site manger.

## NEWS FROM THE KCHS MUSEUM

By Jill Dopke

The summer of 2007 was a busy season for the

museum. There were 312 adults and 69 children that toured the museum along with three groups – a bicycle group, 20 children from Holy Rosary Day Care, and a group of four moms and children as part of their summer activity. Shirley S. Abrahamson, Chief Justice of the Wisconsin Supreme Court, was also a visitor.

Virginia Kustka, museum coordinator, and Darlene Muellner, museum curator, would like to thank the many volunteers. Their time is much appreciated. They were invited to the Volunteer Dinner held on September 22nd.

The volunteers included Ed Aude, Adeline Bauer, Joe Blazei, Floy Born, Delva Bouril, Esther Burke, Ann Clark, Helen Clinton, Jill Dopke, Judy Draeger, Phyllis Doperalski, Dorothy Holub-Heidmann, Mildred Ihlenfeldt, De Vorah Kenney, Virginia Kustka, Nancy Kratz, Shirley LePow, Sandi Lothar, Judy Naples, Millie Rabas, Joe & Evelyn Raisleger, Marilyn Schleis, Judy Srnka, Jim Steffel, Dorothy Stangel, Sandi VanLieshout, and Pat Wierer.

### YEAR-END FUND DRIVE

By Jerry Abitz

The year 2007 is rapidly drawing to a close. It is approaching that time of year when people begin to think about income tax deductions for those of you who itemize. Consider giving to the KCHS. We can guarantee that no executive will pocket a large percentage of your donation since we have no paid staff. Everything donated will be put to good use. I think few nonprofit organizations can make that claim.

A decision to go to an eight-page newsletter and next year to go to four times a year publication was made in good faith. We have been getting requests to do this for some time. Until Jill Dopke, with her talents, became a director, the newsletter was mainly a one-person operation which I inherited when the late Steve Kander died. There just was not enough time to do the research, to assemble the document, to preside over the KCHS, and lead a normal life.

But—the extra pages and the extra issues have put pressures on our finances. The result is a gradual draw down on our nest egg. To help defray some of the extra cost of publication, I personally have pledged to cover some of this. Moving again to a larger facility has made the volunteers happy and has given us additional space and more exposure to the public, but there were moving costs and other incidentals. We have a very dedicated staff of volunteers who are the backbone of this organization. We hope to continue in business for a long time and also keep our workers happy.

While we do operate a museum in a county-owned building, that does not mean that we are supported by Kewaunee County. They do maintain the exterior of the building, cover that facility with insurance, and pay the utilities. In return we operate the museum seven days a week during the summer season, thus relieving the county of a contractual arrangement entered into with the Decker Estate early in the 20th Century.

The KCHS works hard to document the history of this area. The Research Center continues to grow, an expanded newsletter is being printed more often, unique

and wonderful treasures of Kewaunee County's past are displayed at our local museum, and the KCHS is involved in many local and historical events within the community. Your KCHS focuses on the people, places, and events that have and continue to make our county great, and our hope is to be able to carry on with this mission.

### AG HERITAGE DAYS

By Jerry Abitz

Every September Agricultural Heritage & Resources (AHR) has been sponsoring *Ag Heritage Days*. It spotlights the tools and equipment used by our fathers and grandfathers on their farms. Vintage tractors, stationery engines, and steam engines were on display. Demonstrations were given on shingle making, threshing, sawing lumber, etc.



Marilyn Schleis staffing the booth while visitors are viewing our photo books

The Homemakers group had their wood-fired kitchen stoves set up. They prepared and served breakfast and dinner using these stoves both days. Additional food stands were serving as well.

As in all the other years, the KCHS had a display. This year we had a continuous showing of a number of videos produced by the KCHS. The latest tape is an interview by Audrey Krautkramer of Doug Zillmer, a prominent local collector of vintage farm machinery. Approximately \$400 worth of publications were sold.

Volunteers who set up the display and staffed the booth were Joe Blazei, Marilyn Schleis, Judy Srnka, and myself.

### CEMETERY WALK

By Jerry Abitz

On Sunday, July 1st St. John's Lutheran Church of rural Algoma sponsored a walk at their cemetery. It was the 140th anniversary of the founding of this congregation. The reenactors were: Mark Teske as Albert Teske; Glen Smith as Herman Holtz; Brian Berg as Frank L. Neuzil; Kenneth Breitlow as Herman Gottlieb Breitlow; Eric Wians as Pastor E.A. Wians; Robert Lohrey as Fred E. Mueller; John Zeitler as his great grandfather Helmut Krueger; Alan Dettmann as Johann Dettmann; and Paul Schmidt as Rev. Ralph Danielsen. Judy Srnka, a KCHS director, and Mark Teske organized this event.

### NORTHEASTERN CONVENTION

By Jerry Abitz

Every year the Wisconsin Council for Local History, (WCLH), sponsors conventions of the local societies covering the entire state. There are at least 350 of these local groups and the number keeps growing.

On September 15th about fifty representatives from



President, Tom Schuller, receiving a certificate from Betty Havlik of the WCLH

our area convened at the Farm Market Kitchen in Algoma. It was a time to share ideas, problems and their solutions, and to socialize.

Representatives from the Wisconsin Historical Society were on hand to share their ideas

and to make us aware of what is happening on the state scene regarding collections, legislation, etc.

The noontime meal was prepared from scratch by our own Julie Bloor, the KCHS secretary. It was based upon locally produced products. Door prizes included two bottles of wine;



Julie Bloor, KCHS secretary, preparing the meal for the convention attendees.

two books, *Images of America - Kewaunee County and Odd Wisconsin*; and a CD, *The Old Foghorn*.

Tours of the Von Stiehl Winery, the KCHS Research Center, the Jail Museum, and a tour of

Kewaunee's Duvall House were offered to the delegates.

Door prizes were provided by Algoma's Von Stiehl Winery, KCHS Director Jill Dopke, Kewaunee's Lighthouse Gift Shop, and the KCHS.

### PATRICK DEWANE PRESENTS: "THE MUSHROOM PICKER"

By Jill Dopke

Patrick Dewane entertained a capacity crowd at St. Lawrence Church in Stangelville Friday, September 14th with his performance of "The Mushroom Picker". As Patrick explained, the title is a metaphor for the belief in the irrepressible goodness of life, even under horrific circumstances. The most precious mushroom, the morel, grows best after a forest fire. Over 70 million people were killed in WW II. Yet life goes on, and still is beautiful.

The story is based on the writings of his grandfather, Lt. Col. Matt Konop, during WW II. It is a personal story for Patrick. He grew up with a war hero and then became fascinated by how much he didn't know about him. Reading his grandfather's diary, stored away in a cardboard box for years, inspired him.

It was 1945 and Czechoslovakia had been under Nazi control for six long years. Allied Forces planned an attack along a broad front to liberate Czechoslovakia, and Lt. Col. Matt Konop was to lead an advance party of 500 men . . . because he spoke the language. He had no idea this mission would change his life forever and bring him full circle – back to his roots.



Col. Matt Konop in WW II

Lt. Col. Matt Konop ventured into Czechoslovakia alone, with just his driver, leaving the advance party in Germany. He happened on a meeting of the Czech Resistance in a small village and was invited in. When he entered the room and spoke to them in their own language, the Czechs were overjoyed. Here was an American officer and. . . "He speaks our language"! They hoisted Matt on their shoulders and paraded him through the streets. They even put up banners that said "One of Our Own Liberates Us".

In a newspaper interview shortly after he returned to the states Matt said, "They were so appreciative of us Americans; they gave us tremendous ovations with no emotional reservations. They virtually kissed the ground we walked on. And they offered us the best they had – bits of bread dabbled with lard, beer, and the use of their own bedrooms while they slept on the floor." Eighty years earlier Matt's grandparents had left Czechoslovakia in search of a new land and a better life and now, Matt was in the land of his grandparents. That night he was invited to sleep in the castle of a local prince – something his ancestors would never have dreamed of.

Matt was surprised and a bit embarrassed by all this attention, but became eager to learn more of his ancestral home. He wandered the streets of some of the villages taking in the sights and seeing how the Czechs lived. In Mrakov he entered St. Lawrence Catholic Church and what did he see but the same painting that graced the church he grew up in. The exact same painting and two others had been sent to St. Lawrence Catholic Church in Stangelville from Czechoslovakia. The area Lt. Col. Matt Konop liberated included the city of Plzen and the villages of Domazlicev and Markov - places where his grandparents had come from and where most of the Bohemians in Stangelville had come



Patrick Dewane with a Czech painting inside St. Lawrence Church in Stangelville

from.

Czechoslovakia remembers Lt. Col. Matt Konop. A Czech writer, Jan Vrba, published "The White Week" about the liberation of Czechoslovakia with Matt Konop's picture included. When the Communists took power in 1948, they destroyed all copies of the book and purged any mention of the Americans' role in liberating Czechoslovakia, but since becoming the Czech Republic in 1989, the book has been reprinted. A museum now exists in Plzen commemorating the liberation by the Americans, and a picture of Lt. Col. Matt Konop being carried on the shoulders of the citizens is in this museum. In Domazlicev a plaque commemorating the liberation is in place in the town square. It was removed when the Communists took power, but has since been returned.

The war changed Matt Konop and he became more involved in his heritage. He returned to Czechoslovakia in 1979 when it was still under Communist rule but died in 1983 before it became free again in 1989.

Patrick spoke with pride of his Bohemian heritage and eloquently of his grandfather saying, "The Czechs believed he liberated them; I believe they liberated him; and I know that telling his story has liberated me."

### 2007 FUND DRIVE

The following individuals have contributed since our last newsletter. It represents money received as of Monday, October 9th. We thank you for your generosity.

Please let us know if our records are in error.

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#### Visit our facilities

**Kewaunee County Museum**  
 Courthouse Square • Kewaunee, WI 54216  
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 Memorial Day - Labor Day  
 Off-season by appointment  
 (920) 388-7176 or 388-0117

**Kewaunee County Research Center**  
 219 Steele Street • Algoma, WI 54201  
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 Thursday & Friday  
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 (920) 487-2516

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