

Historical Perspectives

A Semi-annual Journal of the
German American Museum,
Library and Family History Center



Wiest Mill near Fort Atkinson, Iowa

Issue # 14

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German American Museum, Library and Family History Center

Mission Statement

**Preserve the Past
Celebrate the Presence
Embrace the Future**

About Historical Perspectives

**With the publication of Historical Perspectives,
Historische Betrachtungen, we are focusing on many disciplines.
including the arts, humanities, history,
literature, and the social and physical sciences.**

German American Museum Exhibit Theme Areas

**Geographic features of the landscape
Indigenous Peoples: removal policies and tribal revival
Europeans coming to Iowa
Role of religion and the clergy in the community
Importance of education and the teaching nuns
Development of farming and industrial arts
Evolution of family social life
Sports: baseball, basketball, and softball
National defense service and economic change
Preserving and celebrating cultural heritages**

St. Lucas Historical Society
German American Museum, Library and Family History Center

Dear friends of the Museum:

The past few months have been quite busy with the arrival of display cases for additional military artifacts and uniforms. The Fayette County Community Foundation gave the Father Aloysius Schmitt American Legion Post 691 a grant to build these display cases for military uniforms and artifacts.

We held a board meeting in September to address: Oktoberfest, Christmas Reflections, roof restoration possibilities, financial update, historic signage, and donations management,

The Max Kade Institute of the University of Wisconsin Madison loaned its premier exhibit of "Germans in Wisconsin " to our museum for exhibit this past Summer and Autumn. This outstanding exhibit portrays the rich history of Germans in Wisconsin. Four years ago, we hosted the University of Iowa exhibit on "Germans in Iowa".

As you sort through your family valuables, please consider sharing a copy of any trans-Atlantic correspondence with German relatives from over the past 160 years to the Museum. These letters would be a valuable contribution to understanding family ties across the many decades.

This Journal issue contains articles on the history of the Wiest Mill, Harmony Cave, the Reicks and Heying family history, and the tradition of family hog butchering. We hope you find these articles of interest. Let us know of historic topics for future issues.

Have a pleasant and productive Winter season.

Sincerely,

Clair Blong

212 East Main Street, P.O. Box 195, St. Lucas, Iowa 52166

Contributors to Issue # 14

Clair Blong	Fort Atkinson, Iowa
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Rebecca Conrad	Iowa City, Iowa
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Clyde Cremer	Pueblo, Colorado
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Elsie Reicks Swehla	Spillville, Iowa
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The Historic Wiest Mill

By Rebecca Conrad

Description

The Wiest Mill sits on a 5.15-acre parcel located approximately one mile north-northeast of the Town of Fort Atkinson in Winneshiek County. The Turkey River flows through the parcel in a north south direction, and the mill complex, comprising the mill building and ten associated structures, is situated on the east side of the river on a gently sloping site. A limestone bluff rims the site on the northeast and east, graduating to an embankment. This natural feature likely marks an older course of the Turkey River.

A grass-covered dirt lane provides access to the mill from the south. East of the mill and across the lane, a flight of concrete steps climbs the embankment, providing access to a late-nineteenth-century house on top of the bluff. This house once served as the miller's residence. A privy (possibly a storage building) and a garage are located, respectively, west, and southwest of the house. (See Figs. 5, 6)

The primary mill building is of heavy wood frame construction and measures approximately 40 x 50 feet, sited on an east-west axis running perpendicular to the Turkey River. The sawn posts and beams, at least on the basement level, are said to be native white pine, and are joined by mortise and tenon. The basement story, constructed of limestone rubble, possibly obtained from the outcropping onsite, also serves as the foundation for the upper three stories. A one-story addition extends from the north elevation. Both the original building and the north addition have medium-pitched gable roofs with shallow eaves and standing-seam metal coverings.

West Elevation

The mill's west elevation faces the Turkey River. Together with the low-head dam, this elevation presents the picturesque view most often depicted in historic photographs. Here, the limestone rubble basement level is fully exposed, creating a distinct contrast with the clapboard siding on the three upper stories. Just below the juncture of the basement and main levels, two square windows and a smaller opening, all boarded over, are asymmetrically spaced along the rubble wall. On the upper three stories, 6/6 wood sash windows are symmetrically arranged. All are in various stages of deterioration.

South Elevation

On the south side, the basement level reveals how the mill is built into the slope of the site. Three small window openings are asymmetrically arranged on the southwest half of the basement wall. Wood sash 6/6 windows are symmetrically arranged on each of the next two levels. Small windows or window openings, now covered up, are tucked up under the eave.

East Elevation

The east elevation is the public side of the mill. Here, the limestone basement level is not visible because the main level is at grade. Two doors provide access to the interior of the original building. Asymmetrically arranged from left to right are a four-panel wood single door surmounted by a transom window, a 6/6 wood sash window, a four-panel double door (the main entrance), and a small shed-roofed anteroom immediately to the right of the double door. The anteroom is a roughly constructed later addition. What appears to be a covered basement entrance is located beneath the wood sash window, and a poured concrete landing extends all the way from the basement entrance to the north end of the wall. The upper levels are nearly devoid of architectural features except for one 6/6 wood sash window tucked under the gable peak.



Model of Wwiest Mill by Ralph Steinlage, May 2022

A one-story, gable-roofed addition measuring approximately 50 x 20 feet extends from the original building on the north elevation. A shed-roofed extension, roughly fabricated, has been superimposed over a portion of the addition to create an overhang sheltering the two entrance doors which open from the raised concrete landing. This partially enclosed area, covered with metal sheathing, functioned as a loading dock. A postcard view dated 1909 (Fig. 3) depicts a shed-roofed addition in this location indicating that the extant addition was constructed sometime after that date.

North Elevation

The north elevation of the original mill building probably was identical to the south elevation although a portion has been modified to accommodate the north addition. On the west side of the north addition, a limestone rubble basement/foundation wall Ts from the original mill building; this wall supports about half of the north addition and may mark the extent of a previous addition that is visible in the 1909 photograph. Vertical boards screen the substructure on the north half of the west side as well as on the north side.

Interior

The interior of the mill building proper has two floors above the basement level, and all three floors are open plan (see Fig. 8). On the basement level, the mill race runs parallel to the west wall. Also on this level, the mortise-and-tenon framework is intact. The first floor contains the station where sales were transacted, including a standing desk and safe, scales, hand trucks, hand tools, and various other equipment. The second floor contains milling machines, blowers, pulleys, belts, and line shafts. The north addition contains newer grinding machines and scales. An open stairway from the basement to the first, then second level is located on the north side. Feed sacks, sign boards, and other notices are attached to various walls on the first floor, along with a calendar showing the month of November 1984, when the mill closed. All of these provide evidence to document the operations of Wiest Mill.

Associated Structures

The most prominent of the associated structures that make up the mill complex is a two-story side-gabled storage building measuring 72 x 24 feet which sits north-northeast of the mill building near the limestone bluff. The building is covered by a standing seam metal roof and supported by a concrete foundation. The exterior walls are clad with board-and-batten siding, although many of the battens are gone. Wood sash windows are arranged asymmetrically along the lower level of the south façade. Two Dutch doors also are located along this elevation. Two other openings have been cut into the wall, one below a row of windows on the lower level and another on the upper level; neither has any covering. The entire structure is in deteriorated condition.

A small gable-roofed, wood frame pump house is located east-northeast of the mill building. It is covered by a standing seam metal roof and supported by a concrete foundation. The exterior walls are clad with board-and-batten. Its door is missing, but a rusting pump remains inside.

Four round concrete foundations are present in the mill complex. These pads were poured to support prefabricated steel grain bins, which are visible in various undated photographs as well as photos accompanying the 1983 Iowa Site Inventory Form.¹ These pads probably postdate 1939, when Butler Manufacturing Company began producing round steel bins in abundance and may have been poured at different times.² Two of the concrete pads are located between the mill building and the storage building. The third is located adjacent to the northwest corner of the mill building on top of the infilled mill race. The fourth is located adjacent to the southeast corner of the mill building.

The original hydraulic system is not operable but is still discernible. A low-head dam across the Turkey River pooled water that was diverted to a mill race which flowed to a flume located at the northwest corner of the mill building, where the water plunged down to spin turbines located in the basement level. Spent water flowed back to the river through a tail race located at the southwest corner of the building.

According to a 1940 inventory of mills in Winneshiek County, the original dam was “a long [sic] and rock dam and ten feet high.” This could mean either that it was a long rock dam or, if “long” is a misspelling, that it was of log and rock construction. Both would be consistent with mid-nineteenth-century dam construction methods. In any case, it was replaced in 1908 “but through defects in the footing it sank [sic]” and was replaced with a concrete dam in 1910. At that time the dam was 200 feet long and 12 feet high.³

Arthur Wiest maintained the dam at least through the mid-1960s.⁴ The dam is now mostly collapsed, and the mill race has been filled in with dirt, although the race beneath the building is intact. The tail race is still visible as a shallow ditch. A concrete spillway constructed on the east bank of the river is extant but substantially broken.

East of the mill building, a flight of concrete steps has been built into the embankment. These steps provide access to the miller’s residence, which is located atop the bluff east of the mill complex.

The miller’s residence comprises three extant buildings: a house, a privy or small storage shed, and a two-vehicle garage. The house is a much-altered, two-story Folk Victorian with an intersecting gable roof and two intersecting gable dormers on the south-facing façade. Its date of construction is listed as 1900 on the Winneshiek County Assessor’s property record, which is a reasonable guess for a house type that was built across the United States between 1870 and 1910.⁵ The house proper is T-shaped, measuring 32 feet along the south façade and 47 feet along the south-north axis. A one-story enclosed porch stretches across about three-fourths of the south façade. The gabled roof of the house and the hipped porch roof are both covered with standing seam metal.

Exterior walls have been re-clad with aluminum siding, and a veneer of faux stone has been applied to the south façade above the foundation. Windows throughout appear to be replacements. Located west of the house is what appears to be a wood frame privy but may be a small storage building. It sits on a high concrete foundation and the walls are clad with plain boards. A door on the east side provides access. Its gable roof is covered with asphalt shingles. A wood frame garage measuring 24 x 24 feet is located southwest of the house. Its pyramidal roof is covered with standing seam metal, and the exterior walls are clad with metal siding. Two modern overhead doors provide vehicle access on the east side.

The associated buildings and structures of the mill complex have not been dated, although the original dam, mill race, and tail race would have been constructed at the same time as the original mill building. Because this was an industrial site, outbuildings would have been constructed as needed. Undated historic photographs in fact depict the presence of other outbuildings that are no longer extant. The foundations of at least some of these buildings may still be present.

Statement of Significance

Wiest Mill is a good example of the small country mills that served local markets from 1840-1872, a subtype defined by Lowell Soike in his 1989 Multiple Property Document, *Flour Milling and Related Buildings and Structures in Iowa*.⁶ Under National Register Criterion A it is significant at the local level as a water-powered flour and feed mill associated with the wheat growing district in Iowa as it was constituted between 1850 and 1875.

The mill complex also reflects changes in commercial milling operations as Iowa's agricultural economy evolved through the mid-twentieth century. As set forth in the registration requirements articulated in *Flour Milling . . . in Iowa* for Criterion C, the property is significant because it possesses the architectural characteristics of a particular building type associated with commercial milling in rural Iowa in the mid-nineteenth century. The mill and its associated buildings and structures are potentially significant as a historic district that might contain as many as thirteen contributing properties, including:

mill building; dam (partially collapsed); millrace (buried; top course of limestone partially traces the outline); tailrace (now a shallow ditch); storage building; pump house; round concrete pads (4); concrete steps in the embankment; miller's residence; and privy/storage building

The following evaluation pertains to the mill building only. Future evaluations should cover the entire complex as well as the miller's residence.

Criterion A

Under Criterion A, Wiest Mill is associated with the wheat district of Iowa between 1850 and 1875, which then comprised several counties in northeast Iowa where the rugged terrain and numerous rivers created the conditions for producing abundant water power. The mill also reveals the changing character of merchant milling in Iowa from the late 1850s to its expiration in the mid-1980s.

According to the 1882 History of Winneshiek and Allamakee Counties, “In 1857 a grist mill was commenced on the site where the Ames Mill now stands.”⁷ This date is consistent with deed records showing that a Caroline Newington purchased the east half of the southeast quarter (80 acres) of Section 5 in Washington Township for \$960 in 1856 and sold the same parcel in 1861 for \$4,500 to George W. P. Bowman.⁸ The significant increase in sale price between these two dates strongly suggests that substantial improvements had been made during the intervening five years. Whether the mill was used in 1857, however, is questionable because the 1882 county history also tells us that

The mill was completed in November [1857] but owing to some miscalculation of the architect in laying out the foundation, when the water was let through the floom [sic] it undermined the wall, and rent the mill in twain, precipitating a portion of it into the Turkey River. The mill was reconstructed shortly afterward.⁹

It is unknown how long the period “shortly afterward” lasted, but necessity would have prompted work as quickly as possible and 1858 is, therefore, a reasonable guess. At the time, this mill was one of many being constructed in northeast Iowa as wheat production shifted from eastern to northeastern Iowa during the 1850s and 1860s.¹⁰

Ownership changed hands a number of times during the 1860s, with Edward Hurlbut purchasing the mill in 1867. By then, the surrounding parcel had been halved to 40 acres, the southeast quarter of the southeast quarter of Section 5. ¹¹ Hurlbut’s ownership was brief because in early 1868 the mill caught fire, destroying its contents before the blaze was brought under control.¹² The news report does not indicate whether the building was completely destroyed, but instead frames the loss in these terms:

When discovered the mill was all ablaze inside, and all the property saved was a horse, cow, &c, from a stable underneath the mill. The mill proper being locked, nothing was saved from it.¹³

Presumably, the “stable underneath” was the basement level, which is where the frame construction reveals mortise-and-tenon joinery, suggesting that the basement level may have been left intact. Deed records further suggest that the mill was rebuilt within a year or so. In early 1869, Hurlbert [note the change in spelling] sold his property to Jessie Ames and sons, John and Adelbert, and a fourth person identified as C. S. Hurlbert, for the sum of \$100.

About eighteen months later, in September 1870, Adelbert Ames became sole owner for a purchase price of \$2,075.¹⁴ These changes in landownership are supplemented with information from an inventory of industrial sites in Winneshiek County, which states that the mill “was built in 1872 by A. Ames, who was military governor of Mississippi during the war [Civil War], and Benj. F. Butler, of Massachusetts They conducted the mill for eight years, Gen. Ames having the management.”¹⁵

However, while Ames held the deed, he could not have been either the builder or manager because he was physically located in Mississippi or Washington, D.C., during those years. In 1868 Congress appointed him provisional governor of Mississippi, which position he held until a new body of elected state officials took office in February 1870. The state legislature then appointed Ames to serve in the U. S. Senate.

For the next four years he was in Washington, D.C., where he met and married Blanche Butler, the daughter of Civil War general Benjamin F. Butler. Ames returned to Mississippi after winning election to the office of governor in 1873, and he served in that capacity until resigning in March 1876. Ames then moved to Northfield, Minnesota, where he is said to have joined his father and brother in the flour milling business.¹⁶

Thus, while Adelbert Ames was invested in the mill, he most certainly was not operating it. It seems more likely that he, or the Ames family, possibly with Benjamin F. Butler as a silent partner, financed rebuilding the mill, which thereafter was called Ames Mill. Moreover, the eight-year period of management under the Ames name probably began in 1870, not 1872 as stated in the Industrial Review of Winneshiek County, because the subsequent transfer of ownership came in 1878. In other words, deed records strongly suggest 1870 as the probable year the mill was rebuilt and resumed operations.

While the extent of damage to the original mill building and the actual date of its reconstruction remain a bit shrouded, the 1874 plat map of Washington Township clearly depicts Ames Mill situated on the east side of the Turkey River and in relation to the Town of Fort Atkinson (Fig. 1). As depicted on this plat map, the dam created a sizable mill pond that spread out over land owned by Lorenze (aka Lawrence) Glass, who purchased the Ames Mill parcel in 1878.¹⁷ Glass and his son Charles first operated the mill under the name of St. Cloud Flouring Mills, but the 1886 township plat map identifies it as the Fort Atkinson Roller Mill (Fig. 2), signifying that Glass had adopted the newer roller mill technology by that date.

Two accounts, one published in 1882, the other in 1892, provide a glimpse of the mill’s operations during this decade. The 1882 county history states that “the mills [sic] are fitted for merchant work . . . with five run of burrs, bran dusters, purifiers and all the latest improvements and machinery necessary for patent process mills, use four Huston water wheels, and have fine water power; capacity 150 barrels per day.”¹⁸ Ten years later, the 1892 Industrial Review of Winneshiek County reported that,

The capacity of this mill is 75 barrels of flour per day, and it is one of the best frame mills in the State. The floors are three inches thick, consisting of a double floor with intervening space filled with cement, and throughout the entire structure the same idea of stability and durability prevails. The special brands of flour made by this mill are Diamond Dust, White Loaf and Gilt Edge. They also manufacture rye and buckwheat flour, cornmeal, and feed.¹⁹

In 1891, Charles and Philip Glass sold the mill to Anthony and George Bernatz. At this time, the mill property was further reduced in size. ²⁰ The Bernatz Brothers owned several mills in northeast Iowa, including Evergreen Mill located directly east of Fort Atkinson in Section 9 of Washington Township (see Fig. 1).²¹ After a fire destroyed Evergreen Mill in about 1890, the Bernatz Brothers purchased the mill in Section 5 and transferred operations, including the name, to this site.²² Two years later they sold the mill to George Wiest and moved their business to Decorah. ²³

Three generations of the Wiest family owned and operated the mill from 1893 to 1984. For nine decades the mill was known as both Wiest Mill and Evergreen Mill. George Wiest operated it until 1920 when his sons Henry and John took over. Upon George's death in 1928, Henry and John inherited the property. They continued to operate the mill until the early 1960s, when Arthur Wiest, Henry's son, took over management and then became sole owner in 1964. Arthur, with the help of his sons Wayne and Ron operated the mill until late 1984, shortly before he retired. A year later, the property was sold to Fort Mill Associates, a trade name for members of the Sharp family, with mill equipment and furnishings in situ. ²⁴

George Wiest brought plenty of experience to the business, having learned the milling trade as a teenager in Germany, his native country. After he came to the United States in 1882, he worked in mills in Ohio, Indiana, Wisconsin, and Minnesota before moving to Fort Atkinson in 1893. By the mid-1920s, the mill was producing whole wheat, graham, rye, and buckwheat flours under the brand names of "Best Patent" and "Purity," which served the local market. The mill also ground feed for livestock and chickens and, on a custom basis, ground local farmers' wheat. George and his sons also operated Wiest Feed Store in the town of Fort Atkinson.²⁵ A 1940 inventory of mills in Winneshiek County provides an update on the operating equipment, stating that the mill, first had four Houston wheels, later had four Leffel wheels and four run of buhrs. [Presumably this statement references the original millstones.] It is now equipped with four double rollers, 2 wheels, one 47 H.P. the other 80 H.P. The capacity of the mill [is] 25 barrels of flour a day.²⁶

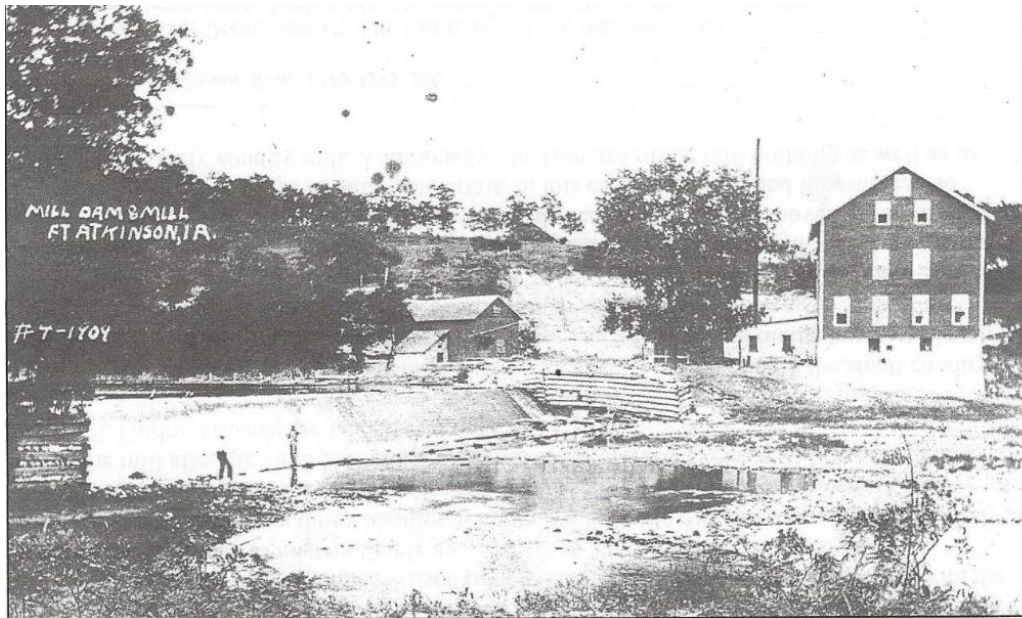


Figure 3. Wiest Dam and Mill, postcard view, 1909.

By the 1940s, most of Iowa's remaining mills had switched to electric or gasoline engines. The Turkey River, however, still powered Wiest Mill's two turbines, although a diesel generator supplied back up power when the water level fell below the lip of the dam.²⁷ At that time, Wiest Mill was one of four mills in Winneshiek County still in operation, the other three being Bernatz Brothers' Mill in Decorah, Spillville Mill in Spillville, and the Turkey River Valley Roller Mills, also in Spillville.²⁸

As the mill approached its 100th anniversary in 1957, a newspaper article written by a member of the Wiest family indicates that the mill was still powered primarily by water and producing feed, but flour production is said to have stopped in 1935. The mill produced "15 to 20 tons of feed a day," with "swine and poultry feeds compos[ing] the bulk of their sales." Feed was distributed through their own store in Fort Atkinson as well as "five dealers located in New Hampton, Spillville, Decorah, Little Turkey and Jackson Junction." ²⁹

Wiest Mill's transition from flour-and-feed production to feed production only reflects the decline of flour milling in Iowa between 1880 and 1940. Whereas 685 flour mills were operating in Iowa in 1880, the number had dropped to 276 in 1905. By 1940, only sixty flour mills were left.³⁰

The fact that Wiest Mill had a customer base extending beyond the local community undoubtedly helped it survive until 1984. The dam is said to have given out in 1966, at which time the mill switched to electric power.³¹ Presumably the mill race was filled in at about the same time.

Criterion C

Wiest Mill possesses the distinctive architectural characteristics of the small country mill that catered to local markets in Iowa in the mid-nineteenth century. It also reflects the technological transition from burr to roller mill grinding between 1872 and 1910. Additionally, the mill complex illustrates the functional relationship between the mill, the hydraulic system for producing power, and the structures for storing grain, although the integrity of these associated structures has been compromised and should be evaluated further.

Who built Wiest Mill is something of a mystery. Numerous accounts reiterate cryptic information published in Alexander's 1882 History of Winneshiek and Allamakee Counties, which states that,

Finkle and Clark were the builders, and they received a certain portion of the town-plat for building the mill, getting a warranty deed for the same. Mr. McMillan, a resident of Fort Atkinson, who resided, previous to 1857, in Canada, and an acquaintance of Finkle, was induced by Finkle to accompany him to the United States, and aid in the construction of the mill, with promises of a fair remuneration.³²

Of the three men whose last names are mentioned in this account, only one of them, George A. Clark, appears in land ownership records for the mill parcel. Clark purchased the land legally described as the east half of the southeast quarter of Section 5 from the United States government in February 1851.³³

Clark then sold this 80-acre parcel to Thomas S. Wilson in 1853, who, in turn, sold it to Caroline Newington, who held title to the property when the mill is said to have been constructed.³⁴ Neither Wilson nor Newington is mentioned in connection with the mill, and the identities of misters Finkle and McMillan have not yet been discovered. Genealogical research may throw additional light on this perplexing question, but it is unlikely that the builder will ever be known for certain. Similarly, we do not know for certain who rebuilt the mill after the 1868 fire, although deeds show that Jessie Ames and his sons, along with C. S. Hurlbert owned the land at that time.

In any case, Wiest Mill possesses the architectural elements associated with the small country mill building type in Iowa. It is of heavy wood frame construction, and on the basement level, at least, the mortise-and-tenon method of construction is still evident. Close inspection of the interior will be necessary to determine how much of the mill was rebuilt after the 1868 fire, but the framing is nonetheless typical of this building type during the 1850s and 1860s. Its massing reflects the height needed to accommodate the machinery that lifted and moved grain through the milling process.

The use of native materials, in this case white pine and limestone, also marks it as an early country mill. Additionally, the contents of the mill building as well as its associated structures reveal changes in milling technology and the role of milling in the agricultural economy well into the twentieth century.

Nine other mills representing the small country mill building type in Iowa are currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places.³⁵ Collectively, they and the Wiest Mill represent a small fraction of the hundreds of country mills that were once integral to Iowa's rural economy.

Integrity

The mill building has been unused since 1984, although most if not all the equipment and furnishings present at that time are still inside. The building possesses good integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, setting, and feeling, but its deteriorating physical condition could become a threat unless stabilization measures are taken soon. The mill remains at its original location. Its original design, materials, and workmanship remain substantially unchanged except for additions to the north and east sides, which are themselves important as a record of changes in commercial milling technology and operations.

Likewise, the associated structures of the mill complex also provide evidence to trace the evolution of commercial milling in a rural setting. While the mill building is still structurally sound, the associated structures are more fragile. The mill race has been infilled, but surface remains provide evidence of its location. The mill dam has collapsed, but it can still provide evidence of design and materials. The storage building is in seriously deteriorated condition, but it can provide good evidence of design, materials, and workmanship. The pumphouse has good integrity and is in fair condition. Four round concrete pads mark the location of grain bins, probably erected sometime after Butler Manufacturing Company began large-scale production of round steel bins in the late 1930s.

The late-nineteenth-century house on the bluff which once functioned as the miller's residence has been substantially altered. However, further research should be conducted to determine its historic integrity as well as a likely date of construction. The house and the mill complex contribute to the rural setting and overall feel of this historic property.

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Endnotes:

1 “Wiest Mill,” Iowa Site Inventory Form, #96-00035, prepared by Frank Hunter, 1983.

2 Butler Manufacturing website: <https://www.butlermetalbuilding.com/about-us.html>.

3 “Evergreen Mill” in N. L. Moe, “The Mills and Power Sites of Winneshiek County,” unpublished manuscript, 1940, Decorah Public Library.

4 “Historic mill notes 150 years as a landmark, this year,” Decorah Journal, August 2, 2007.

5 Virginia Savage McAlester, A Field Guide to American Houses (New York: Knopf, 2015), 397-408.

6 Lowell J. Soike, Flour Milling and Related Buildings and Structures in Iowa, National Register of Historic Places MPD, 1989, E14-17

7 W. E. Alexander, History of Winneshiek and Allamakee Counties (Sioux City: Western Publishing Co., 1882), 318.

8 Winneshiek County Deeds, Book C-503, July 28, 1856, and Book I-250, July 9, 1861.

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10 Soike, Flour Milling and Related Buildings and Structures in Iowa, E 3-4.

11 Winneshiek County Deeds, Book R-132, October 22, 1867, Book P-130, June 20, 1867.

12 “Fort Atkinson Mill Burned,” Decorah Republican, February 21, 1868.

13 Ibid.

14 Winneshiek County Deeds, Book S-173, February 25, 1869, Book U-208, September 29, 1870.

15 Industrial Review of Winneshiek County (Dubuque: Interstate Publishing Co., 1882), 47.

16 “Adelbert Ames,” Wikipedia, accessed October 9, 2021

17 Winneshiek County Deeds, 30-540, August 17, 1878.

- 18 Alexander, 588.
- 19 Industrial Review of Winneshiek County, 47.
- 20 Winneshiek County Deeds, 42-460, July 14, 1891.
- 21 Alexander, 560.
- 22 Obituary for Anthony Bernatz, American Miller 42 (December 1, 1914): 1031.
- 23 Winneshiek County Deeds, 57-12, July 15, 1893. In 1890, Anthony and George Bernatz purchased the Painter Mill in Decorah. The Painter-Bernatz Mill, also known as the Old Stone Mill, is now part of Vesterheim NorwegianAmerican Museum.
- 24 History of Fort Atkinson, Iowa, 1840-1995 (Fort Atkinson: Historical Centennial Book Committee, 1995), 199- 200, 233; Winneshiek County Probate Records, 73-155, Estate #3604, George Wiest; Winneshiek County Deeds, 242-202, September 20, 1961, 267-510, January 29, 1964, 368-442, September 25, 1986.
- 25 “Evergreen Mill at Ft. Atkinson Enjoys Big Run,” Decorah Journal, March 18, 1925.
- 26 “Evergreen Mill,” in Moe, “The Mills and Power Sites of Winneshiek County.”
- 27 “Old Man River Still Turning Mill Machinery,” Decorah Journal, March 27, 1941.
- 28 Jacob A. Swisher, Iowa: Land of Many Mills (Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1940), 271.
- 29 Mrs. Clarence Wiest, “Fort Mill Celebrates 100th Anniversary,” Decorah Journal, August 8, 1957; see also “Historic Mill Notes 150 Years as a Landmark, This Year,” Decorah Journal, “Lifestyles” section, August 2, 2007.
- 30 Soike, Flour Milling, E-13; Swisher estimated only 40 surviving mills in 1940, see Iowa: Land of Many Mills, 225.
- 31 History of Fort Atkinson, Iowa, 1840-1995, 200.
- 32 Alexander, 318.
- 33 Winneshiek County Deeds, Book OE-126, Certificate #53259, February 5, 1861.
- 34 Winneshiek County Deeds, Book A-638, November 21, 1853; Book C-503, July 28, 1856.
- 35 They are: in Clayton County, Valley Mill (c. 1853) and Motor Mill (1864), in Howard County, Lime Springs Mill (1857), in Jackson County, Seneca Williams’ Oakland Mills (1867), in Jasper County, Lynnville Mill (1848), in Lee County, Primrose Mill (1871), in Muscatine County, Pine Creek Mill (c. 1850), in Winneshiek County, Old Stone Mill (1849) and in Worth County, Rhodes Mill (1868).



Wiest Mill, Fort Atkinson, February 2023.

The “Wisconsin German Experience” Exhibit

The German American Museum, Library and Family History Center in St. Lucas hosted the new traveling exhibit entitled: “**Neighbors Past and Present: The Wisconsin German Experience.**” The exhibit was on display from 4th of July weekend through early December 2022.

This special exhibit was created by the Max Kade Institute of German American Studies at the University of Wisconsin Madison. The “**Wisconsin German Experience**” exhibit draws from images and resources in the University of Wisconsin's Max Kade Institute Library and Archives. The exhibit has toured in Madison, Milwaukee, and other cities and towns in Wisconsin.

What did the 14 large scroll panels include? The exhibit covers German migration and settlement in Wisconsin, questions of ethnicity and identity in newly forged communities, and the cohesiveness of these communities over the decades, especially in times of economic crisis or war. The specific panel topics follow: the new home; 100 years of immigration; language; published in German; beliefs; Amish and Mennonites; education; traditions; music, theater, and visual arts; rural life and economy; urban life and economy; civic and political engagement; in times of war, and local is global.

Antje Petty, associate director of the Max Kade Institute, says “This exhibit has been a challenge to limit complex topics to only fourteen exhibit panels with about 400 words each. Some critical issues, events, and people are mentioned only in passing, others had to be omitted entirely.”

“Four years ago, we were fortunate to have the University of Iowa exhibit entitled “**Germans in Iowa**” exhibit at the Museum. This exhibit allowed us to learn about the tremendous influence of Germans in the neighboring state of Wisconsin.” stated Clair Blong with the St. Lucas Historical Society.

Carl Most, a longtime member of the Society, stated “This exhibit was a fantastic opportunity to learn and understand how the German immigrants and their descendants influenced the political, economic, and cultural life of Wisconsin, the Midwest and the Nation.”



**Viewers of the Wisconsin German Experience at
Christmas Reflections, 4 December 2022**

Spiritual Testament of Pope Benedict XVI

By Catholic News Agency

The Vatican on Saturday evening published the Spiritual Testament of Benedict XVI, written on Aug. 29, 2006, one year and four months into his pontificate. Each pope writes a spiritual testament to be made public only after his death. Below is CNA's translation of the full testament from Italian:

My spiritual testament

If in this late hour of my life I look back at the decades I have been through, first I see how many reasons I must give thanks. First and foremost, I thank God himself, the giver of every good gift, who gave me life and guided me through various confusing times; always picking me up whenever I began to slip and always giving me again the light of his face. In retrospect I see and understand that even the dark and tiring stretches of this journey were for my salvation and that it was in them that He guided me well.

I thank my parents, who gave me life in a difficult time and who, at the cost of great sacrifice, with their love prepared for me a magnificent abode that, like clear light, illuminates all my days to this day. My father's lucid faith taught us children to believe, and as a signpost it has always been steadfast during all my scientific acquisitions; the profound devotion and great goodness of my mother represent a legacy for which I can never give thanks enough. My sister has assisted me for decades selflessly and with affectionate care; my brother, with the lucidity of his judgments, his vigorous resolve and serenity of heart, has always paved the way for me; without this constant preceding and accompanying me I could not have found the right path.

From my heart I thank God for the many friends, men, and women, whom He has always placed at my side; for the collaborators in all the stages of my journey; for the teachers and students He has given me. I gratefully entrust them all to His goodness. And I want to thank the Lord for my beautiful homeland in the foothills of the Bavarian Alps, in which I have always seen the splendor of the Creator Himself shining through. I thank the people of my homeland because in them I have been able again and again to experience the beauty of faith. I pray that our land remains a land of faith, and I beg you, dear countrymen: Do not let yourselves be turned away from the faith. And finally, I thank God for all the beauty I have been able to experience at all the phases of my journey, especially, however, in Rome and in Italy, which has become my second homeland.

To all those whom I have wronged in any way, I heartily ask for forgiveness.

What I said before to my countrymen, I now say to all those in the Church who have been entrusted to my service: Stand firm in the faith! Do not let yourselves be confused! It often seems that science — the natural sciences on the one hand and historical research (especially exegesis of Sacred Scripture) on the other — can offer irrefutable results at odds with the Catholic faith. I have experienced the transformations of the natural sciences since long ago and have been able to see how, on the contrary, apparent certainties against the faith have vanished,

proving to be not science, but philosophical interpretations only apparently pertaining to science; just as, on the other hand, it is in dialogue with the natural sciences that faith, too, has learned to better understand the limit of the scope of its claims, and thus its specificity. It is now sixty years that I have been accompanying the journey of Theology, particularly of the Biblical Sciences, and with the succession of different generations I have seen theses that seemed unshakable collapse, proving to be mere hypotheses: the liberal generation (Harnack, Jülicher etc.), the existentialist generation (Bultmann etc.), the Marxist generation. I saw and see how out of the tangle of assumptions the reasonableness of faith emerged and emerges again. Jesus Christ is truly the way, the truth, and the life — and the Church, with all its insufficiencies, is truly His body.

Finally, I humbly ask: Pray for me, so that the Lord, despite all my sins and insufficiencies, welcomes me into the eternal dwellings. To all those entrusted to me, day by day, my heartfelt prayer goes out.



Former Pope Benedict XVI from Bavaria, Germany

Niagara Cave – Or the Tale of the Three Little Pigs

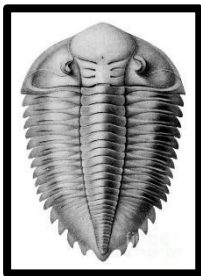
By Clyde Cremer
Edited by Kellie Cremer

Once upon a time there were three little pigs who lost their way...

In 1924, a farmer near Harmony, Minnesota, determined that he was three piglets short in his pigsty. There was a nearby sinkhole on John Kennedy's (no relation to the president) farm, which served the purpose of dumping his trash, including worn-out farm equipment. Kennedy enlisted the help of Clifford Booth and his two young nephews, Howard and Don Elliott, to descend into the sinkhole and see if the pigs had fallen into the abyss. They tied a rope to a tree near the opening and disappeared into the unknown. On a rock ledge some 50 feet into the bowels of the earth, they spotted the wayward pigs. During their short sojourn into the darkness, Clifford and the boys heard the sound of rushing water coming from a wider portion of the cavern. Before they could explore further, they, with the pigs in tow, were pulled up from the sinkhole, now known as Niagara Cave.

The history of Niagara Cave goes back much further than the trespass by some errant piglets and erstwhile spelunkers. In fact, its geologic past goes back some 450 million years to the Ordovician Period - the second oldest period of the Paleozoic Era. This is when a shallow, warm sea covered the area, including a large swath of what is now the middle of the United States. This shallow sea allowed for the deposits of the remains of shellfish and other creatures of the era, plus minerals, washed into the sedimentary layers. In time (lots of time), this layer solidified into a hard formation of limestone. Above this layer of limestone, deposits of shale and, finally, clay can be found. Per the Niagara Cave website (niagaracave.com), "limestone produces a unique geology known as *karst topography*. Common features of karst regions are sinkholes, springs, disappearing streams, bluffs, and cave systems."

Mixed into this now-subterranean formation of limestone are the shells and imprints of sea creatures long since extinct. Some fossils observed in the cave include trilobites, gastropods, cephalopods, baculites, and ammonites. One can only wonder what other remains lay hidden deep in the limestone of the region.



Trilobite



Ammonites



Cephalopods

The limestone in this area is mainly composed of calcium-carbonate, which is a fairly soft sedimentary rock and thus has a low resistance to the forces of nature. These forces of nature



Al pointing out a fossil, 1947.

begin with rain, which contains dissolved carbon dioxide, resulting in a weak carbonic acid which dissolves the limestone. In time, a crack or fissure opens and rain water drains through the strata, powered by gravity. This is an extremely slow process in terms of the human time scale, but inexorably the crack opens into a cavern. Now a second process comes to the fore due to this mineral-laden solution. Water drips from the ceiling and it slowly forms stalactites from the ceiling and stalagmites on the floor of the cavern. It is estimated that it takes 100 years to form one inch of these mineral formations. Nature is not in a hurry as geologic processes work on a different time scale than do human species that consider 100 years as old. In 1938, J. Harlen Bretz, from the University of Chicago, completed a scientific study of Niagara Cave and published his findings in the *Journal of Geology*.

Questions of interest: Where does the water come from that feeds the Niagara Cave waterfall? It does not come from some aquifer deep within the limestone strata, but from a very common source - rainfall! It may only take 20 minutes after a heavy rain commences that the volume of the waterfall increases. Where does that water go? According to the current owner, Mark Bishop, a dye test has shown that the water ends up in the Upper Iowa River. Does the water also disappear into other large caverns with more geologic wonders? Bishop reports that he previously donned a wetsuit and went into the large crack where the water from the waterfall disappears. He found only a small crevice he could not enter. Is the water safe to drink? It is definitely not recommended due to the heavy use of agrochemicals in the watershed. The water has been tested and backs up this assertion.



Leo TeKippe, Joe Flynn, Al Cremer

In 1932, some eight years after the great piglet rescue, Al Cremer, Leo TeKippe, and Joe Flynn, all residents of the Decorah, Iowa, area came onto the scene. These three men were friends who would explore some of the area's sinkholes to see what wonders they might observe beneath the farm and field above. It didn't take long for them to realize, by a weak flashlight beam, that this sinkhole wasn't like the others they had explored. They were immediately impressed by the high ceilings, geologic formations, and fossils from hundreds of millions of years ago. In May 1947, *Feature Magazine* published by the St. Paul

Sunday Pioneer Press, featured a very well-written article about Niagara Cave and the experiences of Al, Leo, and Joe.

The following is an excerpt from the article by Staff Writer Earl Chapin:

They were amazed! Far below the softly-contoured surface of Fillmore County they found a new world, an incredible labyrinth, a vast subterranean temple, it seemed, built of cyclopean limestone blocks with domes reaching 90 feet from floor to peak of vaulting. Here indeed, there had been giants under the earth. Their treating footsteps could still be heard in the stream which ran from the base of a 60-foot waterfall, under a ledge, to seek new levels to carve. From the ceilings of the passageways hung stalactites. A cross-section of one reveals concurrent rings, but unlike the annular rings of trees these mark cyclic changes of climate, for it takes a hundred years to form a cubic inch of cave onyx.



These three spelunkers then left the cave for a quick meal at the edge of the cave entrance. The cave was filled with heavy deposits of packed clay, shale, and soil from the sunlit world above, not to mention the obsolete farm equipment deposits from the farmer who owned the land. This subterranean exploration was not an easy task as they had to travel around and over this debris from long ago. These men were likely the first to wander the cave extensively in modern times.

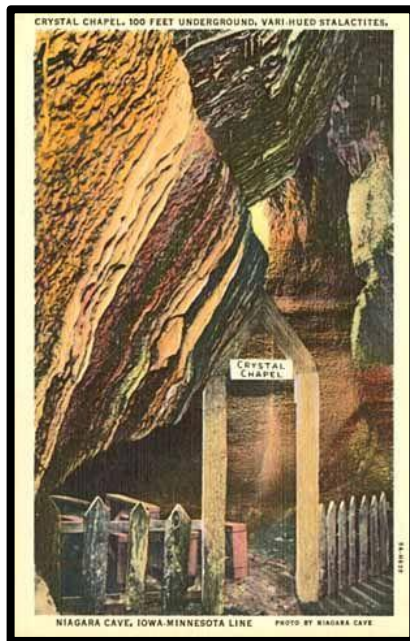
After discovering Niagara Cave, it did not take long for these men from Decorah to come up with a business plan. The first step was to obtain the land so that permanent improvements and construction could begin. The best that the three businessmen were able to obtain was a long-term lease. After the entrance was widened, the excavation could begin. This was undertaken not by electric driven belt conveyors but rather by shovel, pick wheelbarrow, and back-breaking work. This writer's father, Vic Cremer, was one of these laborers who told about the drudgery of working in the cave. Huge amounts of clay and other detritus had to be moved from deep within the cave to the field above. Periodically the workers relied on chemistry to make the drudgery easier - by employing dynamite. This would loosen the clay and sediment that had been collecting for hundreds, if not thousands, of years.

The danger with dynamite is that it does not always lie with the initial blast, but with the fumes lingering in an enclosed area like a cave with little ventilation. This can result in "dynamite fever." On July 10, 1937, it was reported in the *Minneapolis Tribune* that an inquisitive individual by the name of Carl Schjoll, formally of Minneapolis, had entered the cave before the dynamite fumes had dissipated from a recent planned explosion. He passed out and several men pulled him up with a rope. Efforts to revive him by a doctor from the Mayo Clinic and the Harmony Fire Department failed. He was pronounced dead one hour after his body was taken from the cave. He was 38 years old and was a star track and football athlete at the University of Minnesota.

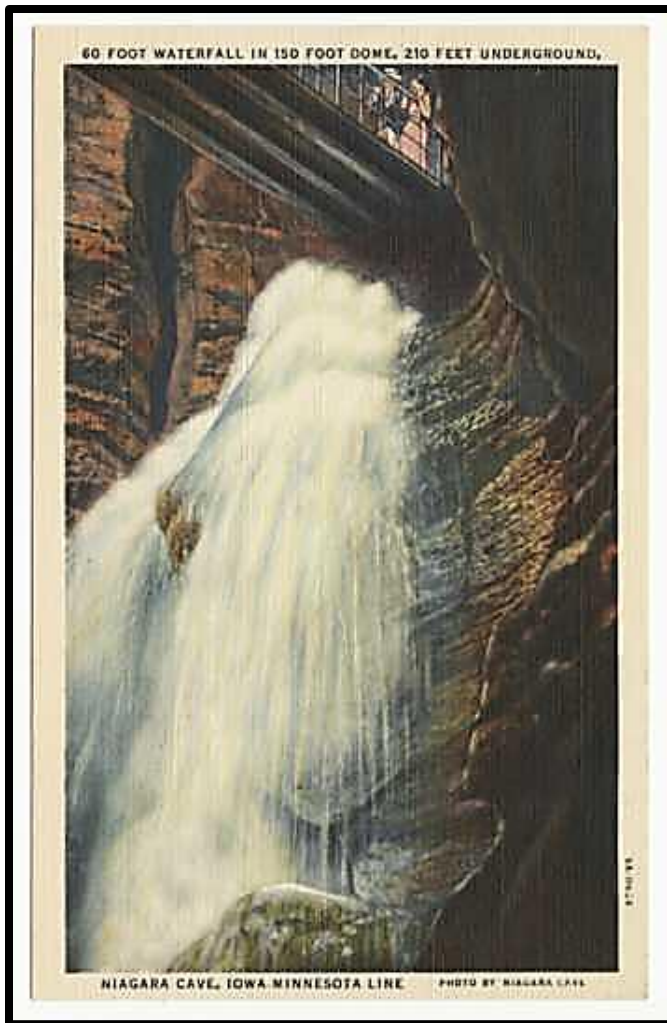
During the excavation of the cave's various passages, Al Foss, Lester Foss, Hugo Hauer, and Jack Lawler came upon the paltry remains of an unknown animal. The remains consisted of two thigh bones and a rib bone about three feet long. The bones were very fragile and were carefully transported to Luther College in Decorah, Iowa. They were examined by a Dr. W.L. Strunk who deemed that they were the bones of a prehistoric bear. This may have been a prehistoric bear or a black bear of the present era. We do not know how much scientific endeavor was spent on this find. It was a cave bear as it died in a cave, though not a real "cave bear" from eons ago as they were only found in Europe, not North America. This bear probably thought the cave would be a good place to hibernate and then was unable to exit this dungeon of the unwary.



The first entrance lodge to Niagara Cave, 1940.



In 1934, Niagara Cave opened for business, even though it still needed further excavation and improvements. To facilitate entry into the cave, steps were cut and a stairway was built which greatly increased its appeal to the general public. In 1935, the caverns of Niagara Cave had doubled since the early excavations. One must remember that in mid-1930, the country was not out of the Great Depression as the United States was still the "sleeping giant" and had not yet become a booming wartime economy. This early startup of a tourist attraction had to be a touch-and-go business. The tours were still conducted using flashlights as electric lights were not installed until July 1937. In 1935, the wedding chapel (left) was opened for young couples ready to "tie the knot." They say that love is blind and certainly getting married in the semi-darkness added to the reality of this statement. Since those first marriages, some 400 weddings have taken place in this subterranean grotto.



A 1941 newspaper article wrote of a visit to the cave by none other than Al Capone and his wife! They drove up in a LaSalle Cadillac with Illinois license plates and signed the registration book as Mr. and Mrs. Al Capone. It is doubtful that Capone truly visited the cave as he was diagnosed with syphilis in prison in 1932 and, by the time he was paroled in 1939, he was confused and barely coherent due to syphilis spreading to his brain and was also likely not traveling due to his disease. He withdrew to his mansion in Florida in 1940 before his death seven years later.

Along with the captivating Al Capone story, improvements and marketing aided in the public's acceptance of Niagara Cave as an attraction. The same year Al Capone was said to have visited the cave with his wife, the dark clouds of war descended across America. Gasoline was rationed (mainly to save rubber on vehicle tires), spending slowed as consumer goods dried up, and men and women went off to war. Al Cremer served the nation as a civilian and worked on the ALCAN Highway through Canada and Alaska. Jack Lawler

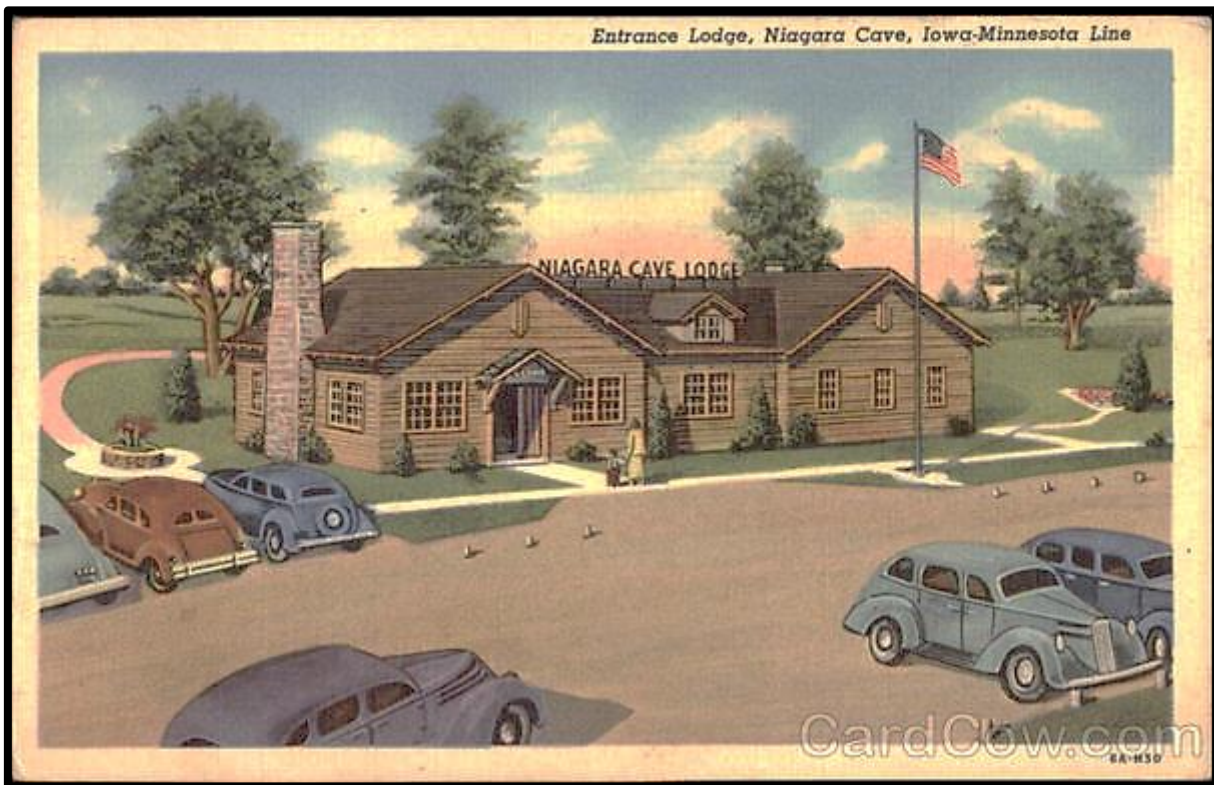
(mentioned earlier) was drafted into the Army Air Corps and served on a B-26 Marauder (known as the "Widowmaker") and died when the engines failed south of the Fiji Islands and his plane was devoured in rough seas. At one time, a concrete bridge at the park at Niagara Cave was scrawled with his artwork in the wet concrete.

After the end of World War II in 1945, work once again resumed and began making the Niagara Cave more attractive to the public. The owners now had more money to spend after four years of austerity. Over time, a lodge/visitor's center was added and then a residence. Improvements, such as steps, railings, and concrete walkways, were added along the route through the cave. The park also expanded, including a snack bar. Lastly, a slogan was incorporated into the new marketing plan: "Where Nature Smiles for Most of Two Miles."

The Niagara Cave enterprise was sold by Rose Hauer Cremer (Al Cremer's widow) to Ron and Nancy Vikre and then it was purchased by its present owners, Mark and Jennifer Bishop, in 1995. In 2014, a miniature golf course was added to the property. A huge leap into the 21st century occurred in 2015 when Niagara Cave became the first cave in the United States powered by solar energy! In 2016, *USA Today* ranked Niagara Cave as the "second-best" cave in the country. Today, between 25,000 to 30,000 people per year visit the underground stream, 60-foot

waterfall, the stalactite room, wishing well, and view the many fossils embedded in the cave walls. The inclusion of a beautiful picnic area rounds out a delightful day trip for the family. There are some 10,000 sinkholes in Fillmore County, but none of them are as amazing as Niagara Cave! It is located south of Harmony, 2.5 miles on Minnesota 139, then two miles west on Fillmore County 30.

And the three little pigs lived happily ever after...though probably not!



- Thanks to Mark Bishop for his help in clarifying many facts regarding the geology and history of southeastern Minnesota and the Niagara Cave.
- Appreciation to my brother, John Cremer, for saving many newspaper articles and other items about Niagara Cave for posterity and this article.
- For more information on visiting Niagara Cave, go to niagaracave.com, call 507-886-6606, or e-mail niagaracave@gmail.com.

Reminiscing about the Reicks and Heying Families

By Elsie Reicks Swehla

Theodore Reicks was born in 1814 and died January 23, 1891. His wife, Franziska Woehler, was born in 1831 and died in 1873. Both originated from St. Petersburg, Prussia, Germany and came to America and settled in the St. Lucas area. They are buried in St. Luke Cemetery in St. Lucas, Iowa.

In this picture is the Reicks home in Darup, Germany. Darup is located in the region of North Rhine-Westphalia. This Lander has its capital as Duesseldorf that is approximately 54 miles away from Darup (as the crow flies). Darup is in the government administrative area of Munster.



Old Reicks Stone Farmhouse in Darup, North Rhine Westphalia, Germany,

Henry Reicks, their son was born August 6, 1862, and died on May 7, 1941, where he was born and buried in St. Lucas. Henry married Catherine Schmitt. Catherine was an aunt of Father Al Schmitt who died at Pearl harbor on December 7, 1941.

Henry and Catherine Reicks settled on a farm southwest of St. Lucas. On August 1, 1890, they had a son Victor. Eight other children followed. The siblings of Victor were: Mary (spouse Nick Kuennen), Margaret (spouse Charles ?), Elizabeth (spouse Al Huber), Anna (spouse Anton Hackman), Frances (spouse Carl Kuennen), Julia (spouse Frank Muterthies), and two brothers, Clement and James Reicks.

Catherine Reicks and Mary Kuennen (daughter) died of tuberculosis at an early age. They are buried at the St. Luke Cemetery in St. Lucas. Mary left a family of five orphans since their dad Nick had died a few years earlier. The children were William, Clement, Joseph, Roman and Margaret Ott.

Victor's mother died in 1902. Victor was 12 years old. Henry was gone a lot during the harvest season. Henry ran a threshing crew in 2 neighborhoods. Some of the older girls ran a store in St. Lucas and the boys ran the farm and tried to help the young Kuennen family.

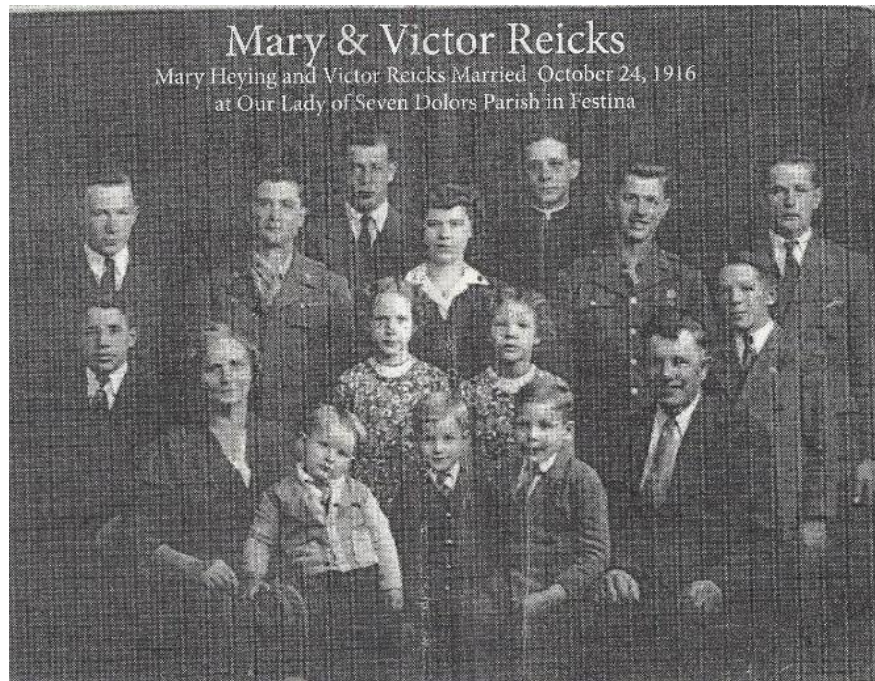
Victor courted a Festina girl, Mary Heying. Victor drove to Festina on his motorcycle with a special sidecar. They were married October 24, 1916, at Our lady of seven Sorrows church in Festina. They settled on a 100-acre farm southwest of St. Lucas.



The original farmstead was farmed by Henry's son, James, or Jake, and Eleanor Reicks. Henry lived with them until his death in 1941. Victor had a knack for moving buildings, so he moved the house from the Henry Schmitt farm, where Father al Schmitt was born, to St. Lucas. They added a kitchen and in 1917 Father Leander Reicks was born there on the farm.

Victor and Mary had 15 children. One son, Joseph, died in infancy. The children were: Leander, Norbert, Neal, Lucille (Kruse), Eugene, Alex, Francis, Ardwin, Jerome, Marian (Retterath), Elsie (Swehla), Donald, Harry and Roy Reicks.

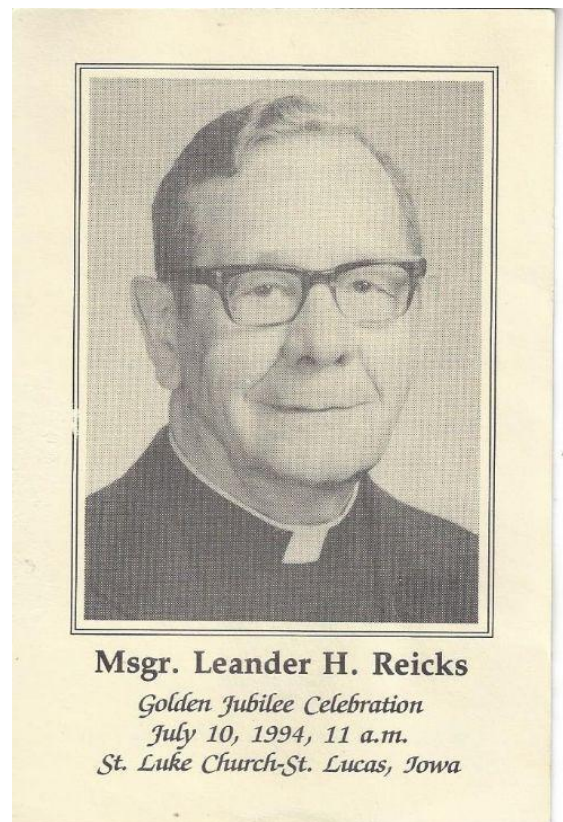
**Victor Reicks and Mary Heying
Wedding Photo, October 24, 1916**



Victor and Mary Reicks Family, 1940s

Leander went to St. Luke's School for ten years and then finished 2 years of high school in Amarillo, Texas where he acquired the nickname, Tex. He worked on the college farm under the direction of Father Steinlage to help with his tuition expenses. Later Leander transferred to Loras College and then went to St. Bernard's Seminary in Dubuque.

At the German American Museum there is a large display of his collection of farm artifacts, cars, books and personal items.



Msgr. Leander H. Reicks July 10, 1994

During World War II Norbert was drafted into the Army and served in the European Theater of Operations, mostly in England, France, Belgium and Germany. His military service will be a story in a future issue.

Five decades later in 1992, Norbert Reicks and 7 siblings visited the Riecks family in Billerbeck, Germany and the Heying (Hejnk) family in Alstatte, in Northwestern Germany. After landing in Amsterdam, the closest airport to Billerbeck, we toured most of Germany. We were guests at the home of Josef and Ludgar Reicks. Heing Reicks served as our photographer, and we visited his farm also.



Welcome Reicks Family, Alstatte, Germany, 1992.



**Norbert Reicks shaking with Herman Heijnk (Heying)
in Alstatte, Germany, 1992. They were adversaries during World War II, 1941-1945.**



Ludgar Reicks new home, 1992.

We also met with the Heying family and had lunch at the Herman Heying home where the two former adversaries greeted each other with a big hug. Herman lives on the original Heying farm that grampa John Heying migrated from in the 18??. We were impressed by the beauty of the countryside, the land of our forefathers.

On this 1992 trip to Germany, we also traveled to other parts of Europe. We found great hospitality not only in Germany but also in the Czech Republic. Dan and Elsie (Reicks) Swehla with their daughters, Audrey and Terri, went to visit the Swehla in Albrechtice in 1993.

Vladimir Jurca and his wife Mary were our host family. John Swehla had been an exchange student with them while he was studying at Iowa State University. Vladimir invited us to come. He was a professor at Prague University.

In January 1981, we visited with the Swehla family after their land was returned to them in a cooperative arrangement. During the Communist period the land was placed into a collective farm with state ownership.

Below is a picture of us on the Charles Bridge overlooking the Vltava River in Prague. After we left Prague, we visited Nelahozeves, the birthplace of Anton Dvorak.



On Charles Bridge in Prague. Dan and Elsie with daughters Terri and Audrey, 1993.

We also visited the memorial for the destroyed town of Lidice. Lidice citizens were murdered, and the town destroyed by the Nazis during World War II as revenge for the death of the Nazi administrator of Czech lands. It was never rebuilt and stands as a memorial to the death and destruction caused by the Nazi ideology.



Lidice Town Memorial in 1993

The inscription on the memorial reads: On the 10 of June 1942 the ancient Village of Lidice near Kladno, whose population had always lived a quiet and peace-loving life was the witness and the scene of a crime which has no analogy in the history of the civilized world.

In a period of the greatest fascist tyranny which this country experienced after the assassination of R. Heydrich, Lidice was burned to the ground, the men being murdered and the women and children dragged off to concentration camps.

A few years earlier we visited Germany when our daughter, Mary Swehla Clapp, was stationed with the U.S. military in . We visited many historic places in Munich and the surrounding area where Mark Spitz won his Olympic gold medals.

We were speechless when we saw the concentration camp at Dachau and the ovens at its crematorium. Silently we read the inscription on top of the high fence surrounding it which read: "Arbeit muh ein frie", that is, "Work makes you free".

In 1859 John Heijnk (Heying, the Americanized name) was born in Alsttate, Germany, to Johannes Herman Heijnk and came to America in 1876 at the age of 17. It was the custom in Germany for the eldest son to receive the farm. Consequently, his brother Herman stayed there and farmed, and his brothers John and Bernard came to America.

John settled near Festina and married Gertrude Gehling and together had 5 children: John Baptist who remained single; Bernard who later served in World War I and died as the result of the Spanish flu which run rampant thru the troops; Henry who married Elizabeth Holthaus and farmed near Alta vista, Iowa, and Elizabeth (Heying) Gesing.

In 1894 when the men in the family had gone to church and on their return from church Elizabeth came running from the house and cried “Mama’s dead.” It was a possible heart attack.

After this tragedy John was helped by Gertrude’s niece Elizabeth Bodensteiner. Later John married Elizabeth and they had 10 children.



John Heying and Elizabeth Bodensteiner Wedding, 1894.



John Heying and Elizabeth Bodensteiner Family 1922.

Front row: Freda (Florian Buchheit, Larry Heying (State Senator), John and Elizabeth, Al Heying, Anna (John) Bohr. Back row: Henry Heying, Elizabeth (Joseph), Gesing, Bernard Heying, Margaret (Felix) Moellers, John B. Heying, Mary (Victor) Reicks, Peter Heying, Ida (Frank) Elasbernd, Joseph Heying, and Hildegard (William) Bohr.

John and Gertrude and Elizabeth were blessed with 118 grandchildren and 508 great grandchildren. John never went back to Germany but he corresponded with his brother Herman during the war years and sent them many donations when possible.

In November 1935 after his second wife Elizabeth died. John Heying was grief stricken in losing her. In January 1936 John passed away. The doctor diagnosed his illness as a broken heart. The weather had turned horrible with blizzard conditions in late January. His daughter Mary Reicks had given birth to her 3rd daughter, Elsie, and was unable to attend the funeral in Festina.

In the process of funeral arrangements made through Dessels in West Union, it was decided to take a sled pulled by 2 horses to West Union to retrieve the body. On the journey back to Festina, they encountered a great snow drift that caused Grampa John to take leave of his casket and fly into a snow drift. The quite-astonished driver set to work and retrieved the casket, put Grampa John back in the casket and continued the journey to Festina where he accompanied the deceased until the funeral the next day.

We all agreed Grandpa loved the ride.

German American Student Exchange Program Marks Its 40th Anniversary

Twenty-four high school students from Gymnasium Uberlingen, Baden-Wurttemberg, Germany, completed their three weeks exchange visit at North Fayette Valley High School last week. Uberlingen is located on the shores of Lake Constance. They were involved in the regular high school academic program and very memorable field trips such as Dubuque and Galena, Illinois.

In addition, the German students provided a Volksfest on Sunday evening, October 30, 2022, at North Valley HS in West Union, for all the students and parents who have participated in the exchange program over the years. The program allowed the German students to demonstrate their many musical and vocal talents. Their final song, 99 Luftballons, was an appeal for peace among nations, so very poignant as war rages in Eastern Europe between Russia and Ukraine.

Ute Kramer and Sabina Rosebrock, the accompanying German faculty, highlighted the critical value of this program in broadening the student's perspective on America. Hans-Jurgen Borde and Aaron Bicknese, former faculty coordinators of this language exchange program, spoke eloquently of its lifetime value to the students. They also noted that the German language program at North Fayette HS was cut over a decade ago but tireless efforts by faculty and administrators led to its adaptation into a very successful and thriving cultural exchange program.

Borde and Bicknese, in remarks at the German American Museum, Library and Family History Center in St. Lucas, on Wednesday, November 2, 2022, highlighted the key leadership role of Wilhelmina Kuennen in the initiation and development of this student exchange program to increase awareness and understanding between Germany and America. Wilhelmina was motivated by the destruction she witnessed during World War II in Germany.

Borde and Bicknese observed that it is quite rare for an exchange program to last this many decades. It's a great tribute to the German and American teachers' commitment and dedication to the program. Mel Bodensteiner, with the German American Museum, affirmed the need to create a Museum exhibit highlighting Wilhelmina's contribution to the German American student exchange program.

Borde and Bicknese studied the German American Museum exhibits and especially enjoyed the exhibit entitled: "The German Experience in Wisconsin." This traveling exhibit from the Max Kade Institute of the University of Wisconsin in Madison, Wisconsin, remained in the Museum through Christmas Reflections on December 3rd and 4th.



**Borde Viewing the Wisconsin German Experience
at the German American Museum**

Family Hog Butchering: Keeping the Tradition Alive

By Clair Blong

Two generations ago, butchering hogs in the late Autumn was an annual traditional farm family event. Today this butchering is done by local meat lockers or on the factory scale in large processing plants.

To help increase public awareness of this family tradition, Cecilia Rokusek, the president of the National Czech and Slovak Museum and Heritage Center in Cedar Rapids asked the Czech Heritage Partnership in Protivin, Iowa, to demonstrate this traditional hog butchering event.

In order to share the event with a broader audience the event was professionally filmed for viewing on Iowa Public Television next year. That film is now being edited.



Cecelia Rokusek and film crew, November 20, 2021.

On a cold November 20, 2021, Saturday morning, staunch heritage folks gathered on the century old Zajicek family farm NW of Protivin, Iowa. As we waited for everyone to arrive, Jim Zajicek told of learning the Czech language from his parents and grandparents.

Jim encountered the difficulties of learning English at school in Protivin. Jim said it was a hard time to keep up with classes and also deal with the peer pressure. Even up into the 1950s, Czech was the spoken language in many of the farm homes in the area.

Cecilia Rokusek of the Nation Czech and Slovak Museum, told of a similar experience growing up in her family home in Tabor, South Dakota. Cecilia said, “Mostly Czech was spoken in our home.”



**Jim Zajicek, Bernie Pecinovsky and Cecilia Rokusek
On Zajicek Family Farm, Protivin, Iowa**

Around eleven Ken Zaiicek and Bernie Pecinovsky, the butchers with the freshly slaughtered pig, arrived in an old but sturdy pickup. Ken and Bernie are life-long friends. They attended Rudolphium Grade and High School as classmates and still hunt deer together every year.

Cecelia introduced the film crew to everyone and asked the folks to speak Czech in explaining their work as this fil will be viewed by audiences in the Czech Republic.

The butchers then tackled the carcass in the back of the pickup. Ken and Bernie organized a team to lift the hog off the pickup bed onto the traditional wooden and metal gurney to carry it into the cream house of the barn.



Jim Zajicek and traditional hog hair removal scraper.

Once inside they carefully skinned the animal. Jim Zajicek explained another traditional method is scalding the skin with steaming hot water and then scrap off all the hair.

Once the skin was removed Ken and Bernie proceeded to cut open the hog, remove the organs, the stomach and the intestines. Bernie stopped to explain that every organ and the intestines would be used for some purpose.

Cecelia, fascinated with the butchering process, asked them to elucidate various food delicacies that come from each organ, the intestines and the head.



Bernie Pecinovsky opening the hog.

This stage of butchering generated a lively discussion, excitement and laughter among all participants as they recalled how this annual hog butchering event unfolded on their farm.

Ken Ehler described the many similarities in this Czech meat processing with his German family's hog butchering tradition near Calmar. Ken especially liked the schweinekopfsulze.

Finally, Bernie and Ken used a power saw to cut the hanging carcass in halves and let it hang in the cold air to dry, stiffen and drain out for a couple of days. Then the carcass will be cut into specific pieces for further processing like making sausage, pork chops, pork roasts, hams and, of course, bacon.



Ken sawed the hog into halves.

As the participants recalled the flavors and tastes of each of these meats, it stirred enthusiastic recollections from childhood that increased our appetite for the awaiting Czech lunch and drinks in the farmhouse.

With these pleasant thoughts of tasty meats and home-made dishes by our mothers and grandmothers, and the cold wind on our backs, we hurried to the old Zajicek family farmhouse.

Once inside we were treated to the immense warmth generated by a large wood stove that appeared to be on the verge of melting everything near it: wet gloves, our hands, and the tea pot. We struggled with freezing hands to shed layers of clothes and absorb the warmth of the kitchen.

Meanwhile in the kitchen Loise Zajicek was busy preparing a wide assortment of delicious Czech cold cuts, breads and traditional noodle soup to die for. The tlacenka (slices of the jellied pig's head meat along with onion and crackers) was especially tasty.

Cecelia led the hearty gaggle of thawing folks in a toast: first to the Zajicek family for hosting this heritage event, second to all the participants for sharing their insights into this dying tradition, and finally to the film crew for their diligent efforts to capture the details and the many

comments on the butchering process. The tasty luncheon was accompanied by Czech Becherovka (from Karlovy Vary), several Czech pivo (beers) and liquors that warmed our hearts and souls.

This demonstration of traditional family butchering highlighted the need for everyone to work together to prepare foods and meats for the coming winter and the tremendous comrade and bonding of families and their neighbors. Everyone left this event with warm hearts about their family heritages and a real sense of the brotherhood of all mankind that the Josef Lada painting evokes.



Josef Lada Painting. Josef Lada Calendar, February 2017

On learning of this recent demonstration of traditional hog butchering, James Jirak of the Little Turkey area shared “When they butchered a hog they would shoot it, cut the throat to bleed out the animal and use the blood for making blood wurst.

They would hang the hog up by its hind legs, gut it out and use a rope pulley system to lift and lower the hog in a barrel of hot water. Then they would scrape all the bristle hair off the animal.”

Barbara Riha Jirak said, “When they cut up the hog, they saved everything but the squeal. The brains were removed, rinsed in cold water and fried right away and eaten as a delicacy with crackers. The heart and tongue were either pickled, fried, or made into a head cheese.

The meat was scraped off the knuckles and used in soup.” Barbara noted that “Most of the meat was cut up and canned. Hams were hung up and smoked. The liver was usually eaten soon after butchering.”



James and Barbara Jirak, 2022

James said his dad, Edward Jirak, Sr. and he enjoyed butchering usually late in September and again in February. James said “It has been a long time since he did any butchering but he would still be able to do it.” Barb said the women did the canning and made lard out of the fat. The kids loved the cracklings.

Janet Jirak Bodensteiner, their daughter, remembers “We would have bowls of barley and spices on the table and the women would mix these with the pig meat and then grind these into sausage links. We then inserted the meat mixture into cleaned and rinsed intestine linings. These would hang for several days in the smoke house.” Janet has the recipes of these meat dishes and sausages.



Janet Jirak Bodensteiner



Cottonwood on a Winter Night, 5 February 2023.

Christmas Reflections Returns

(A Retrospect)

Christmas Reflections will be held on Saturday, December 4th, from 11:00 AM to 4:00 PM at the German American Museum, Library and Family History Center in St. Lucas. This year the nourishment consists of three all-time favorites: chicken dumpling (spätzle) soup, harvest squash with sausage and rice, and chili soup with Hawaiian dinner rolls, Christmas cookies with hot apple cider, bottled water and coffee. This is a free will donation food event. The 1891 Financial Life (formerly the National Catholic Society of Foresters) is supporting the event.

Let's get over those COVID blues and see what's new at the Museum. Come see the recent donated Hummel collection, the German 1860s antique baby grand piano, the awesome Christmas displays in the attic, and the 12 new display cases, many already populated with special theme exhibits.

A traditional St. Nicholas will be greeting the children in the attic. St. Nicholas wants to share a holiday goodies gift bag with each child who climbs the stairs into the attic. According to the St. Nicolas Center Website: "The true story of Santa Claus begins with Nicholas, who was born during the third century in the village of Patara in Asia Minor. At the time the area was Greek and is now on the southern coast of Turkey. His wealthy parents, who raised him to be a devout Christian, died in an epidemic while Nicholas was still young.

Obedying Jesus' words to "sell what you own and give the money to the poor," Nicholas used his whole inheritance to assist the needy, the sick, and the suffering. He dedicated his life to serving God and was made Bishop of Myra while still a young man. Bishop Nicholas became known throughout the land for his generosity to those in need, his love for children, and his concern for sailors and ships."

The Museum will also be open on Sunday, December 5th from 11:00 AM to 4:00 PM. Refreshments include hot apple cider, coffee and Christmas cookies. Local artist, Dolores Buchheit and Marissa Goerend Krivachek, will be displaying selected paintings and pottery pieces respectively. Bring your children and grandchildren and enjoy the afternoon exploring the four levels of the Museum.



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St. Lucas Historical Society
German American Museum, Library and Family History Center

German American Museum in Desperate Need of a New Roof

In May 2022, the Museum roof sprung a major leak during a heavy storm. This storm resulted in a major section of the ceiling crashing down in the kitchen. For several years we have been dealing with serious leaks that have destroyed ceiling and wall areas in second floor museum rooms.

It is paramount that we replace the deteriorating roof of three layers of materials: one layer of rotting wood shingles and two layers of decaying asphalt shingles that fly away during summer storms.

In October, the Society board decided to seek bids from contractors for replacement of the roof system. We need to raise a significant amount of money (nearly \$90,000) to address this long festering issue. Our goal is a long-term solution to protect this historic structure that celebrates the cultural heritage of the community and this area.

In early November a generous supporter donated \$5,000 to begin this campaign for the Museum roof replacement. To date we have raised over \$10,000. Many more generous donations are necessary to secure funding to complete this job. Please consider this worthy cause in your yearend giving. We are also applying for grants to assist with this effort.

Over the past decade we were very successful in getting support for the window restoration project and for the installation of air conditioning and new heating systems on all three levels of the building. Now it is time for the roof replacement.

Your generous support of the German American Museum has made it an outstanding cultural resource for the entire region. This roof restoration is the key project to secure the long-term viability of the museum structure.

Your generosity can make a significant difference in preserving this historic building and the beautiful museum. Many thanks for your kind generosity.

Happy Christmas season and a very good New Year to you and yours.

The Society Board

212 East Main Street, P.O. Box 295, St. Lucas, Iowa 52166