



HISTORICAL NOTES

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FRONTIER SALOON TRAGEDY

By Jill Dopke and Larry Mahlik

It was a tragic chain of events at the Mleziva Saloon and Dance Hall in the Town of Montpelier on opening night Sunday, Sept. 29, 1884, that led to the death of one John Roppel. The *Ahnapee Record* newspaper and court records provide details of Roppel's death that fateful night.

As was common in those days, young men who had worked hard all day on thrashing crews looked forward to visiting the local saloons and dance halls in the evening, and John W. Mleziva had planned a dance for opening night at his saloon. Many of his relatives, neighbors, and friends were there, including Wenzel Mleziva (John W. Mleziva's brother), Albert Wessely (John W. Mleziva's brother-in-law) who was tending bar, John Mleziva, Joseph Cizler, and Mathias Kust. John W. Mleziva and these five young men were the original defendants in the John Roppel murder case, but eventually charges were dismissed for all except Wenzel Mleziva who then went to trial.

Others from Montpelier in attendance at the dance and testifying for the state included John E. Nejedlo and Hugh McConville. From nearby Brown County were William Roppel (John Roppel's brother), James

Kehoe, Gustav Conrad, and John O'Brien from the Town of Eaton, John Murphy from the Town of Rockland, and Michael Buckley from the Town of Morrison.

Testimony from John Murphy indicated that, during the evening, there was "considerable drinking" going on, and Michael Buckley and John Roppel had wrestled a bit after playfully knocking each other's hats off which caused a disturbance. A few men jumped in and threw Roppel to the floor.

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This photo of the Mleziva Saloon and Dance Hall, located on Cty. F across from the St. Wenceslaus Cemetery about two miles east of Ellisville, was taken about 1908. In the foreground are John W. Mleziva and his two daughters, Mary L. and Anna. The building was torn down some years ago and no longer exists.

John and his wife, Anna (Wochos), owned and operated the saloon and farm in the town of Montpelier until his death in 1915. Then his son, Joseph and his wife, Elizabeth (Jicha), took over and operated the business for a few years but gave it up to go into farming full time. In 1942, Joe was elected to the Wisconsin State Assembly where he served for four terms (8 years).

Photo courtesy of Larry Mahlik.

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FRONTIER SALOON TRAGEDY

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Roppel got up, turned around, and struck Joe Cizler. Words were exchanged but a temporary peace was achieved, although it would last only a few hours.

The night wore on, and another incident occurred where John Roppel allegedly kicked an accordion around the floor and was asked to pay for his drink. More words were exchanged between Roppel and John W. Mleziva and Albert Wessely, and there are references to Roppel threatening to give "them two a thrashing."

Around midnight, Gustav Conrad asked John Roppel to go home with him. Roppel replied, "No, I won't go home until I give that saloon keeper a thrashing." He then went up to the bar, took a drink, and got into a quarrel with Albert Wessely. Roppel grabbed a beer off the bar and threw it on the floor which prompted Anna, John W. Mleziva's wife, to ask Roppel to leave. He answered her with, "If you don't keep away from me, I will slap you," and pushed her away. Following this incident, Albert Wessely, Wenzel Mleziva, and the other four defendants went into another room.

Back in the bar Gustav said to John Roppel, "We had better go home. Them fellows are getting ready; they are going to give you a thrashing." Roppel replied, "No, we won't go home." John Murphy testified that he heard Roppel declare that he "could fight any two of them."

About 3:00 a. m. Monday morning the six defendants had apparently had enough. The dance was over and most of the people had gone home. John Roppel, standing in the center of the dance floor, challenged John W. Mleziva to come out from behind the bar. At that moment, the six defendants emerged from a side door armed with hoes, shovels and spades. They quickly closed in on Roppel and, amidst the fray, Wenzel Mleziva struck him on the side of the head with a board that had a nail in it. Roppel fell to the floor and lay there unconscious. Almost immediately Wenzel chased William Roppel outside with a stick locking the door behind him. During Defense Attorney Timlin's summation, it was indicated that Wenzel Mleziva was not aware of the nail in the board.

Roppel lay on the floor for an hour until Gustav Conrad and John O'Brien tended to him, his head and face dripping with blood. Gustav and John immediately noticed a nail in his head, and Gustav told



On the left is Wenzel Mleziva (1863-1931), and on the right is John W. Mleziva (1857-1915). Photo courtesy of Larry Mahlik.

John to pull it out. It measured about 1½ inches long with no head and slightly bent. They then carried Roppel to another room and laid him down to rest.

When John Roppel regained consciousness later that morning, he walked a mile and a half to John Nejedlo's home in Pilsen with his brother William, John O'Brien and Gustav Conrad. John Nejedlo owned a saloon and a farm in Pilsen, and Roppel worked with the thrashing crew there. John Nejedlo testified: "During his stay at my house, he complained of pain in his shoulders. He did not appear to be suffering pain from the wound in his head. That was what he said. He did not do any work during that day and a half that he was at my house."

John Nejedlo's testimony continued as he related a conversation with John Roppel. He commented to Roppel, "I guess you got in a tight place." "Yes," Roppel replied, "I guess I was to blame for that. I hadn't ought to act as I did." Nejedlo offered to take Roppel home, but he did not want to go home. He said he thought he would be all right the next day.

On Tuesday afternoon, William Roppel brought his brother home with a horse and wagon. Two doctors from Green Bay were called, but John Roppel died on Thursday evening, Oct. 2, 1884. He was buried in Irish Eaton Cemetery in the Town of Eaton in Brown County.

Incidents involving drinking were not that uncommon on the frontier. Though most did not end in death, there were fights, there were quarrels and threats, there was unruly rowdy behavior, and there were injuries. On Oct. 20, 1885, the jury acquitted Wenzel Mleziva which brings this frontier saloon tragedy to an end, or does it? Today drinking continues to take lives when people choose to drive after drinking.

NEWS FROM THE MUSEUM

by Jerry Abitz

CUSTER'S LAST STAND

As long as I have been involved with the KCHS, I have been intrigued with a large 3-D wood-carving located in the Jail Museum. *Custer's Last Stand* was an artist's rendition of what may have happened in that distant battlefield in southern Montana back in 1876. The carving was done at the Svoboda Church Furniture Co. here in Kewaunee; One of their well-known carvers, Robert Pettscheider, was involved with producing this work of art. One can take a mirror and scan the faces of those figures whose backs are turned to see the facial features! One has to ask why was this subject chosen for such a large carving? Were there local ties to the subject? Why would someone spend so much time doing such meticulous work without a reason? No one seemed to have a plausible explanation. However, a recent interview with Richard Kohrt, the last surviving grandson of Joseph Svoboda, finally solved this mystery.

Custer's Last Stand started with an original sketch by Joseph Svoboda from the famous painting on display in the St. Louis headquarters of Anheuser-Busch, the brewery producing Budweiser beer. (They had commissioned artist Edgar S. Paxton to do the painting. Cheap copies were reproduced and were on display in saloons featuring their beer.) Svoboda was an old friend of one of the owners who asked for a carving of the painting for their lobby office. From his sketch, Svoboda created a full-sized drawing. He and Pettscheider then replicated it in the carving.

After the work was completed, Svoboda was told that Anheuser-Busch

did not want the carving. During the time it took to do the project and unknown to Svoboda, his friend in St. Louis had died. Unfortunately, nobody else in the company knew about the handshake deal between Busch and Svoboda. So the carving went on display in Svoboda's office and became an example of their high quality workmanship and was used to promote future sales.

The carving at one time was loaned to a Texas museum mounting a special display. Afterwards this display went on tour of museums in other southern and western states.

Custer's Last Stand was in Joseph Svoboda's estate and was already in the museum on loan to the KCHS. In 1989 Dick Kohrt asked his cousins to turn over ownership of this and other carvings to KCHS. A family member, a lawyer, recommended giving ownership to a non-profit organization to settle the estate.

For several years these works of art were part of a special display dedicated to the memory of Joseph Svoboda in their shop with the large grandfather clock at the top of the hill on Wisconsin Hwy. 42. Upon the sale of the business to a new owner, the display was moved to the Jail Museum with several other carvings also on display in the Kewaunee County Courthouse. Without a doubt, it is the premier display in our museum.



Wood carving — *Custer's Last Stand*. Photo by Roger Ruhlin.



Newly-developed Blahnik Heritage Park, and sign at park entrance (inset). Photos by Mary Bohman.

BLAHNIK HERITAGE PARK

By Mary Bohman

Blahniks have lived in the Town of Ahnapee since 1855 when George and Katharine (Blaha) Blahnik arrived here from Bohemia with their five sons.

Wenzel, a grandson of George and Katharine, farmed in Ahnapee, along with his wife, Dorothy. Wenzel and Dorothy owned 23 acres of property along the Ahnapee River. When Wenzel died, he willed the land to his daughter and son-in-law, Evelyn and Paul Brookhyser, of Newport, Oregon. The Brookhyseres decided to donate the property to the county to be used as a park.

It's a prime spot, located between the Ahnapee River and the Ahnapee Trail. The nature trails leading through the woods to the river provide easy access to fishing and pic-

HELP! — Anyone knowing about the trunk and Czech book left behind at the Algoma Library, please call Virginia at the Research Center (920-487-2516). The donor's name got separated from the trunk.

nicking as well as cross-country skiing, bird watching, dog training, canoeing, and science education. The area also welcomes snowmobilers, horseback riders, and bicyclists.

Blahnik Heritage Park is the result of many hours of planning and work by area volunteers including but not limited to the Blahnik Heritage Park Volunteer Advisory Group, Friends of the Ahnapee State Trail, Ahnapee River Watershed Alliance, Kewaunee Co. Garden Club, the Kewaunee Co. Promotion and Recreation Committee, Kewaunee County Finance and Public Property Committee, and the Kewaunee County/UW-Extension Development Educator and Educator Assistant. Grants were applied for and received.

The park was dedicated Sept. 23, 2008, but it is still a work in progress. Blahnik Heritage Park is located about three miles north of Algoma off Hwy. 42, one-half mile west on Washington Road.

Winter Local History Series

Friday afternoons

at the Research Center

Jan. 23 and 30

Feb. 6, 13, 20 and 27

Barbara Chisholm role-plays her great-grandmother as she tells about Belgian immigration and the Peshtigo fire, **Ray Selner** talks about Bohemian immigration and Stangelville, while **Jerry Abitz** presents the Germans. **Don Honnef** portrays G. W. Elliot whose four sons were in the Civil War, **Tom Schuller** tells stories of Kewaunee County, and **Virginia Johnson** becomes Edith Haucke who tells about the scams, political intrigue, violence and unrequited love in the early days.

Further announcements coming in newspapers and on the radio.

**NEWS FROM
THE RESEARCH CENTER**

2005 WINNER — GOVERNOR'S ARCHIVES AWARD

by Virginia Johnson

In Memoriam

KCHS lost its good friends, Northwestern University Prof. C.R. Kannerwurf and Patricia Sharpe, former director of Chicago's Hull House, on Aug. 26 and Sept. 12, 2008. C.R. suffered an aneurysm as they were preparing to come north last Memorial Day weekend; Pat had been battling a blood disorder for nearly two years.

The Kannerwurfs contributed significantly to the history of Kewaunee County through their research on the county's post offices. We are indebted to them for their support with a letter of recognition and nomination that resulted in KCHS winning the 2005 Governor's Award for Archival Achievement, and we also appreciated their financial support. C.R. and Pat were true friends, and those of us at the Research Center miss them.

Although illness delayed the publication of the Kannerwurf's book about post offices in Kewaunee County, it will be compiled.

FUNDRAISER

Sales receipts from Denny's Super Valu (Algoma) help KCHS. Denny's donates 1% of the receipt total to the organization chosen by the customer. The receipt slots can be found to the right of the door; KCHS is listed in the far right hand column.

Funds from this program are earmarked for the barn survey project, spearheaded by Lori Birr.

WANTED — The Research Center needs plat books and county directories from all years, and Kewaunee Co. telephone books printed before 1990.

They can be dropped off at the Center (219 Steel Street, Algoma), OR you may call (920-487-2516) — your message will be returned within a week.

**ANNUAL MEETING NOTICE
and
PRESENTATION of
EARLY HISTORY
OF CARLTON TOWN**

You're invited to the 2009 KCHS annual meeting at the **Carlton Town Hall on Sat., April 25**. The meeting will highlight the history of Carlton Town by Jill Dopke, and will include a display and power point presentation of photos of early businesses, people, and scenes of Carlton Town. A new booklet on the **Early History of Carlton Town** also will be available. Julie Bloor, chef and KCHS board director, will prepare a lunch for attendees following the presentation.

The KCHS would like to also include in the display any historical items and/or photos that residents may have. If you would like to add a historical item or photo of an early business, school, church, saloon, cheese factory, saw or grist mill, hotel, blacksmith shop, farm, event, family, or scene of the countryside in Carlton Town, please contact Jill Dopke (920-388-2830). Of particular interest are photos of businesses and farms that no longer exist or have changed over the years, and pioneer settlers.

- . 10:00 a.m.— Display open
- . 11:00 a.m. — KCHS Meeting
- . 11:30 a.m. — Early History of Carlton Town
Free lunch immediately following

Remnants of Dean's Pier in Carlton Town

The settlement of Dean's Pier was located in Section 7E on the lakeshore, and was a thriving port town in the late 1800s. Known by many names: Dean, Dean's Store, Dean's Mill, The Dean Settlement, Carlton, Carlton Store, Carlton Pier, Forest Hill, and Forest View, at one time it had a mill, a post office, a store, a hotel, a dance hall, a blacksmith shop, a church and cemetery, a tannery, the first cheese factory built in Kewaunee County (1872), and a pier. Carlton never had a saloon. It was probably the only "dry" community in Kewaunee County.

The original pier was built by Elisha Dean in 1855. It burned in 1864 but was rebuilt. The settlement passed into history in the early 1900s. The only evidence today that it existed at all are these pilings along the lakeshore (photo center) and the cemetery on a hillside nearby. Photo by Jill Dopke.



FINDING YOUR FAMILY IN KEWAUNEE COUNTY

By Jerry Abitz

A number of people who visit our Research Center in Algoma are interested in researching their family history. Some of them travel a long distance to do so. To ensure success one should come prepared. Do not expect anyone to do the research for you unless you have hired someone to assist you. We can help by pointing you in the right direction. Our volunteers can assist you, but there may be others seeking their help when you are present.

What is it that you want to find? Bring along your family tree as you have developed it so far. Any notes that you have gathered should be included. Come prepared with anything that may have a bearing on your family. Check out the websites of places you intend to visit to find their location, what type of records they have, and their business hours.

About ten years ago I got a query from a lady in distant Williamsburg, VA. Mary Beth was interested in her mother's family genealogy involving the names *Zahoric and Skarvan*. Her great-great-grandparents were raised in Stangelville. Both are buried in the St. Lawrence Cemetery. Her query at that time revolved around what kinds of information are available and where are these depositories located? I responded to her query.



Mary Beth Dalton.
Photo by Jerry Abitz.

Mary Beth Dalton never had a chance to make that research trip. But we did become pen pals and I put her on the newsletter list. A number of years passed and we kept in touch. Finally, last July, she and her husband came to our area to do that research. And because she came well prepared, Mary

Beth accomplished a lot in her short visit.

Before you schedule a visit, check out our website, www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~wikchs to see what we have. There are also links to other websites of interest to genealogists. For anyone doing their family history in Kewaunee County, there are a number of other area repositories to consider visiting:

1. **Kewaunee Co. Admin. Center** (Algoma) — Birth, marriage and death records as well as land and probate records;
2. **Individual Protestant churches** (area) — Their individual church records on site.

3. **Green Bay Diocese office** (Green Bay) — All Catholic records for the area;
4. **Area Research Center** (Cofrin Library, UWGB) — Naturalization records on file;
5. **Brown County Central Library** (Green Bay) — All U.S. Census records for Wisconsin and the Wisconsin pre-1907 vital records;
6. **Kewaunee Library** (Algoma) — Cemetery readings of tombstones within the county (also see KCHS website);
7. **KCHS Research Center** (219 Steele St., Algoma) — Some family histories, possible photos, other files; and
8. **Algoma and Kewaunee Libraries** — Microfilms of county newspapers on file.

Access to the Internet has made research much easier; there are also software programs as well as websites which can simplify the task. One no longer has to spend hours examining microfilm until your eyes glaze over and you stagger out of the library seeking daylight. Neither do you have to schedule genealogical trips to the Wisconsin Historical Society's microfilm room in Madison. *Ancestry.com* has passenger lists, census records, indexed newspapers, lists of others searching your name, and so much more. It is a subscription service, but most public libraries have it available for their patrons.

Mary Beth and her husband Garland Dalton met with success while they were here. An e-mail thanked me for helping in her search. She was grateful for the assistance of Ray Selner as they toured the Stangelville area and St. Lawrence Church. She found the tombstones of her ancestors and visited the location of their farm. When they returned home, they donated to our collection an antique toothpick holder with a picture of St. Lawrence Church on the exterior; it had been in their family for generations.

THE DUVALL MOUND

By Bruce Vandervest

Last spring I had the privilege of walking on a possible Indian mound located in the town of Red River. When I first saw the mound, I was uncertain what it really was. Was it glacial till or was it of human manufacture?

A friend I work with had informed me of a possible archaeological find in the Duvall swamp. He said that his uncle owned 40 acres that contained what was known as the "Indian Trail." He also said that, before

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THE DUVALL MOUND

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the swamp, there seems to be an Indian marker tree in the clearing that points the way to a probable Indian mound. His uncle does not want the location disclosed. A marker tree is a purposely deformed tree that is used as a trail marker, like a modern sign post. Trails, water sources, burial places, villages, and sacred sites can be located by these trees.

In April, four of us (Jill Dopke, my friend from work and his uncle, and I), drove over to see the site. We proceeded down a dead end road and then onto a farm lane that led into the Duvall swamp. The site was as my friend had described. A marker tree showed the way to the mound. After crossing the power line right of way, we approached the mound at the edge of the swamp. We walked the mound, studying it intently. It ran in a north-south direction and was crescent-shaped. I estimate it was about 8' high, 15' wide, and about 25' long. There were areas of disturbed earth at one end where someone had dug into it for fill. The disturbed area exhibited orange-yellow sand with a few small stones. On top of the mound were two areas where 3' diameter holes appear to have been dug and filled in with a darker soil. At the north end of the mound was an area about 6' x 6' that was evidently dug out at one time. A fox had made his home near the middle of the mound. My friend said there was at least one other mound deeper in the swamp.

Were these mounds trails through the swamp made by Indians to traverse the land or track animals? I don't know, but it's possible. Were the 3' diameter holes used as earthen food storage pits like the ones I saw at Black Earth in Carlton Town? This also could be true. Or, was the mound a burial mound? Similar mounds have been found in Upper Michigan built at the edge of an ancient lake that is now a swamp. Bones found in the mounds were evidence they were used as burial mounds.

Since water levels have fluctuated throughout history, this mound in Town of Red River could have been built at the edge of an ancient lake, now the Duvall swamp. I do not have answers to these questions at this time, but I do plan to return and study these possibilities further.



Duvall Mound as it looked in the fall of 2008. Photo by Jill Dopke.

Friends of the Kewaunee County Historical Society

YOUR DONATIONS KEEP OUR DOORS OPEN.

As a nonprofit organization, recognized by the Internal Revenue Service, any money donated to the KCHS during the calendar year of 2008 may be used as a tax deduction to the amount the law allows. The following have given since the last newsletter was published through Dec. 31, 2008. We thank you sincerely for your expressions of support and your gifts of money.

Without you, our friends, we could not exist.

NOTE: If you have made a contribution and your name has not been included, please contact the editor.

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