



HISTORICAL NOTES

VOLUME XXI, No. 1

APRIL 2009

www.rootsweb.com/~wikchs

DR. JULIUS BELLIN — FROM FARM TO OPERATING ROOM

by Jerry Abitz



Julius J. Bellin, M.D. (1870-1928), founder of Bellin Hospital. Photo courtesy of <http://www.bcon.edu/drbellin.html>.

Those of us living in Northeastern Wisconsin—and, in particular, Kewaunee County—are very familiar with Bellin Hospital in Green Bay. Both of my children were born at this institution. How many of you realize that the founder, Julius J. Bellin, was born and raised here in our county in the Town of Lincoln?

Both of his parents, Isadore and Philomena Bellin, were born in Belgium and immigrated to this country in 1856 and 1857, respectively. They were part of the great Belgian migration to Northeastern Brown County, Northern Kewaunee County, and Southern Door County. Although they married here, there are no records of their marriage in the Kewaunee County Courthouse.

Jules/Julius was born to this farm couple in 1870 in the Town of Lincoln. Their house is still inhabited and is located on Pheasant Road in the Lincoln area. Census records from 1880 show he had four siblings—Joseph, Mary, Rosilia, and Katherine.

He was educated in Kewaunee County schools. Bellin was enrolled at Oshkosh Normal School (now UW-Oshkosh) and Northern Indiana Normal School. He taught school for several years to put away a nest egg that would enable him to enter the Iowa State Medical College at Keokuk, Iowa. He graduated in 1896, and had been trained in both surgery and dentistry. That seems like a strange combination but, remember, this was the nineteenth century.

He practiced both medicine and dentistry in Greenleaf for two years, and then moved to nearby Wrightstown. In 1898, he married Lulu Vieux, a descendant of Charles de Langlade, who was very influential in early Green Bay. Eventually they had a son named Percival. He was stricken with meningitis at an early age and was an invalid the remainder of his life. The 1920 census records show that the family employed a nurse for him. Bellin made provisions for his care in his will.

In 1902, Bellin ran for a position in the Wisconsin Assembly representing Brown County's 2nd District. He was unsuccessful in his bid.

He moved to greener territory in Green Bay in 1904. The home he purchased on South Monroe Avenue is today's Astor House Bed and Breakfast. Built in 1888, he remodeled it to his

liking. Here he lived until his death. Supposedly he still haunts this house... According to a website about famous Wisconsin ghosts, Dr. Bellin can be seen in the parlor sitting in his favorite easy chair in the early mornings, right before dawn.

In 1907, he purchased a 15-bed house located at 112 North Adams Street from a retiring physician, and invited two deaconesses to staff the house. It was incorporated the following year as the General Hospital. Later that same year, he

If you wish to receive notification that the most recent issue of the KCHS newsletter is available online, send your request to gabitz@centurytel.net with your name and email address.



The Bellin homestead, on Pheasant Road in the Lincoln area, as it looks today. Built prior to 1870 with more recent additions and changes in window openings, it appears the house was originally square. Photo by Jerry Abitz.

moved to a larger house at the corner of Lawe Street and Webster Avenue. In 1909, he invited the Methodist Episcopal Church to back this endeavor, which they accepted. They took over the management and the day-to-day operations; it was renamed the Deaconess Sanitarium. With growth, it became the Wisconsin Deaconess Hospital. Continued growth resulted in the construction of a new building in 1916 on this site; over his objections, it was named Bellin Hospital. It was the first non-Catholic hospital in Green Bay. Although Bellin had been raised Catholic, he had converted to Methodism, the faith of his wife.

Medical practices were very much different in those days. When Dr. Bellin came to Green Bay, there were already two hospitals located within a stone's throw of each other; one was St. Vincent's (where the operating room was controlled by Drs. J. R. Minahan and Robert Minahan, brothers who had connections to the Casco area and Kewaunee, respectively, and the other was St. Mary's. It was a cutthroat business where doctors engaged in stealing patients and bribery. Not having access to an operating room could be the death knell of one's practice. The standards in Green Bay for medicine were lax, the profession here had a bad reputation, and there was a poor academic environment. Having one's own hospital was a guarantee of success.

Outside the medical field there was a need for rental space for medical and dental professionals. In 1915, Dr. Bellin, along with Dr. Richard C. Buchanan, had the seven-story Bellin-Buchanan Build-

ing constructed in downtown Green Bay to satisfy this need. There seemed to be competition with the Minahans who earlier had the Minahan Building constructed for the same purpose on the opposite side of Walnut Street. This new building was also taller. In 1924, Bellin, after buying out his partner, added an eighth- and ninth-story penthouse. When it was built, it was considered the first small-town skyscraper north of Milwaukee.

Dr. Bellin died in 1928 of heart problems and other complications. For a farm boy, one has to conclude he was extremely successful. But one has to wonder, what impelled him, the product of an immigrant farm home, to such an honored place in society? What factor was there in this Belgian ethnic environment that produced five additional doctors?

NEWS FROM THE RESEARCH CENTER

2005 WINNER — GOVERNOR'S ARCHIVES AWARD

by Virginia Johnson



Barb Chisholm explains the purpose of her bonnet and apron as she role-plays her great-grandmother, Mrs. Desire Engelbert, who told about her about immigrating from Belgium and surviving the great Peshigo Fire. Barb's demonstration was part of the six-week Local History Series held this past winter. Photo by Virginia Johnson.

THE PELISHEK BLACKSMITH SHOP

by Al Briggs

For many years I have been fascinated with blacksmith shops. I recall as a boy going to the local blacksmith in Lamartine (Fond du Lac County) with my father to have the plow shears sharpened. The smell of the coal forge and the miracles it produced seemed to hold me in its grip. Even today after working in a blacksmith shop, the sounds and smells still draw me. My retirement hobby holds a fascination I cannot resist.

So it was a delight to discover a shop in its original state, though no longer operating, in the almost forgotten community of Zavis in Carlton Town. At one time, it was a small but thriving village on the East Twin River with a post office (1878-1879), a water-powered grist mill, a sawmill, a church, a lime kiln, a blacksmith shop, several residences, and possibly a small general store. Little remains today except for a few homes, St. Peter's Lutheran Church, and the now-closed blacksmith shop.

Ben Pelishek was my gracious host while reminiscing about the days when his father, Ben, and grandfather, Wenzel, ran a thriving business there.

The shop is two-story frame building. Most of the original hand-cut shingles that protected the interior from the elements are still in place on the exterior walls. Built in an L-shape, the first and older back portion was a carpentry or cooper shop. The section reaching out toward the road contained the blacksmith shop. Ben said his father remodeled the



Although non-operational when discovered, the Pelishek blacksmith shop still is in good condition. Photo by Jill Dopke.

front wall a number of years ago changing the face somewhat.

Inside the back section is where the wagons and buggies were constructed. Blacksmiths had to be good wood workers as well as good iron workers since most repairs and new vehicles involved the use of both iron and wood.

The interior front section of the building still contains two very significant pieces – the forge and the workbench. The forge is cast concrete poured in place and appears to be still in good working condition. The workbench stretches along the north wall, but missing are most of the small tools and tongs one might have found there once.

The anvil, the real centerpiece of any working blacksmith shop, appears to be British made. In the dim light available to me, though, I could not read the name of the maker. Its weight marking, 1-2-9, was readable, proving British ancestry. Converting those numbers from the British hundredweight to American pounds tells me it weighs 177 pounds. If you want to know more about how I arrived at that figure, I will be happy to give you a math lesson when you see me.

There is a trapdoor in the ceiling where, after a wagon was assembled, it was pulled up to the second floor; there, away from the dust and smoke of the forge fire, the finishing touches of paint, lettering, and striping were applied. In a short time, a neighbor could drive off proudly in his new vehicle.



Ray Selner presented Stangelville and the Bohemian history of Kewaunee County during the Winter Local History Series. The popular powerpoint program drew people from as far away as Manitowoc, Green Bay, Seymour, Oconto and Suring. Photo by Virginia Johnson.



Interested in learning how?
See page 4 for info...

DESTINATION...? Northeast Wisconsin

by Jerry Abitz

Wisconsin became a state in 1848 after following the conditions outlined in the Northwest Ordinance. It was the last entire state carved out of the Northwest Territory.

Huge waves of immigrants left their native countries because of the chance to own land, to escape tyranny, religious persecution and serfdom, to avoid serving in the military, and some came for the adventure. Wisconsin produced brochures in various languages to recruit these people to settle in our state.

Once they arrived in New York, Baltimore, other East Coast ports, or New Orleans, there were three main routes they could have taken. Each represented a change in transportation methods based upon the time period.

New York seemed to be the port of choice early in the nineteenth century. In the 1820s, steamboats had been developed. In upstate New York the



Erie Canal map. Source at <http://commons.wikimedia.org>.

Erie Canal was completed in 1825, which connected Albany on the Hudson River with Buffalo on Lake Erie. One could dock in New York, board a steamboat for Albany, transfer to a canal boat bound for Buffalo, and the final stage was a ship on the Great Lakes to port cities on Lake Michigan. My maternal great grandparents got off the ship in Manitowoc. Many got off in Milwaukee where they sought jobs to replenish their nest egg and/or to acclimate themselves to the ways business was conducted in America and to scout out where good land was available.

By 1850 trains connected Albany to Buffalo. It took an average of eleven days on the canal boats versus 29 hours by train. By the same year, trains connected New York to Chicago and, by 1862, they connected Chicago to Green Bay. If one had the money, the train was the faster method of traveling.

The port of Baltimore saw a lot of their immigrant traffic siphoned off by New York because of the Erie Canal. That served as the impetus to build a railroad connecting Baltimore to the Midwest. The result was the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad. This railroad negotiated an agreement with a prominent steamship line in Germany whereby immigrants could buy a combined ticket to Chicago or St. Louis. That tipped the advantage back to Baltimore late in the nineteenth century. My paternal grandparents were part of this wave in 1881. They purchased tickets on a steamship from Bremen, Germany, to Baltimore where the ships docked at Locust Point, just to the west of Fort McHenry of the "Star Spangled Banner" fame. They were processed here, and then boarded a B&O train to Chicago; in Chicago they caught another train north to this area. Their destination was Northeastern Wisconsin where a brother was already located.

A third route, not as well used in this region, followed the Mississippi River to Prairie du Chien

(Continued on page 5)

BLACKSMITHING TRAINING SCHOOL

Al Briggs, Instructor

The Ag Heritage Farm will hold a training school this spring to introduce people to the craft of blacksmithing. The purpose is twofold – to demonstrate the craft to students and visitors at the new blacksmith shop at the Ag Heritage Farm as well as to prepare people to enjoy this fascinating hobby.

The course will include shop safety, tools and their use, and some history and background information about the importance of iron in the development of our society. This is a hands-on event, and students will be able to take home what they have made.

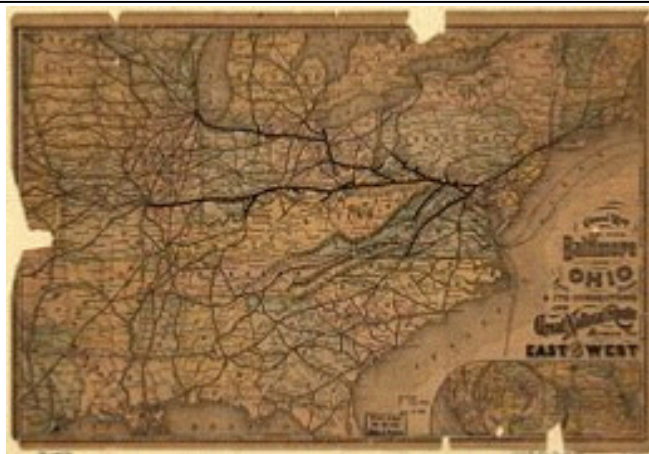
To enroll or for more information, please contact Al Briggs (920-487-3884). Classes will be scheduled after the middle of April; there will be a small fee to cover materials. Classes must be small, so the sooner you register, the sooner your training can begin.



(Continued from page 4)

where immigrants then traveled up the Wisconsin River to Portage where they transferred to the Fox River leading them to Green Bay. Their point of embarkation was the port of New Orleans. While reading the history of the Wayside School in the Town of Carlton, this route was mentioned. Some of the early settlers came to New Orleans, but found the humidity unbearable; they came to the Town of Carlton.

There were other ways of getting to Northeastern Wisconsin. Some may have arrived via Canada where they docked in Quebec on the St. Lawrence River, then traveled through Ontario and entered the United States via Detroit. Another way, of course, would be over land. If you had ancestors that first settled on or near the East Coast, these settlers were mobile. As their children desired land, they found themselves having to move farther westward as good farmland became scarce in their home areas. This leapfrog pattern kept repeating itself. For some, land beyond the horizon always seemed better than where they were presently living.



1876 map of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad routes.
Map source at <http://commons.wikimedia.org>.

MUSKY TALES

by Jill Dopke

The muskellunge (“musky”) has always presented a challenge to anglers. It’s a big fish. It’s a fighter, and landing one safely can be quite a challenge. It takes skill, strength, stamina, and patience. The following three early accounts of “man vs. musky” from the *Kewaunee Enterprise* read like military battles, but catching a musky or any kind of fish was crucial in those early days. Often it provided the next meal for the early settlers.

The Musky Hero

William H. Bach recalls a musky catch in the 1870s from the Kewaunee River by his cousin, John Dishmaker. “Kewaunee was but a country hamlet—a cluster of cheap cabins with a few more imposing structures for business purposes, on the banks of a stream, and supplied water sufficient to form a boom ground for the sawmills. The river was principally a swamp containing a limited number of fish and an unlimited number of water snakes. John caught one of the largest, a muskellunge, weighing, if my memory serves me right, about 27 pounds. It nearly pulled him off the boom, but he managed to grasp a pile and one of the boom men dispatched the fish with a mallet. Of course he was the hero of the hour.”

I wondered, ... Who was the hero? The man who held on to the pile? Or the man with the mallet?

The Musky Skirmish

An 1888 account tells of a muskellunge “captured” by M. Brumlic on the Kewaunee River. It weighed 21 pounds and measured about four feet in length.

(Continued on page 6)

~ ~ REMINDER ~ ~
Saturday, April 25
Public is invited.

What

Annual meeting of the Kewaunee County Historical Society plus presentation of the early history of Carlton Town.

Where

Carlton Town Hall
(corner of Townhall Road and Cty. Hwy. G)

When

10:00 a.m. – Display open; book for sale—
Early History of Carlton Town
11:00 a.m. – KCHS annual meeting
11:30 a.m. – Presentation*

*A light lunch will be offered following
the presentation. No cost.

JAMES PIERCE – PATRIOT, CONVICT, PIONEER AND TOWN FOUNDER

by Jill Dopke

Organized in 1857, the Town of Pierce in Kewaunee County was named after an early settler, James Pierce. He must have been a highly respected man to have been accorded this honor by his neighbors and friends. So, who was he? Where did he come from?

James was born in New York State on Aug. 19, 1817; though he died at the early age of 46, his life was full of adventure. As a young man he was drawn into the Canadian Rebellion of 1837-1838 (also called the Patriot War), a short and unsuccessful uprising in Upper (Ontario) and Lower (Quebec) Canada against British rule that drew in Northern New Yorkers sympathetic to the cause.

Misguided but brave, James volunteered; he was captured at the Battle of the Windmill in November of 1838, tried and convicted of “piratical invasion,” and sentenced to death by hanging along with many of his fellow patriots. While waiting in jail at old Fort Henry in Kingston, Ontario, for his turn as the hangings began, the patriots had begun digging a tunnel to escape. Whether James took part in the tunnel digging is unknown, but he probably did. His very life hung in the balance! Public outcry against the hangings and appeals for mercy, though, soon brought the hangings to an end, and the remaining patriots were pardoned and sentenced to life in prison in Van Dieman’s Land (Tasmania)

MUSKY TALES

(Continued from page 5)

It further states, “The fish was a monster and had to be shot twice before he could be hauled into the boat.”

This leaves me to wonder, ... Did people really take guns with them fishing in those days?

Raising the Musky

An 1899 article states that J. E. Hall, accompanied by Henry Hardtke, “raised” a muskellunge weighing 30 pounds from the Kewaunee River. I thought about this a bit and wondered, ... Didn’t people *catch* musky?

And now I am wondering, ... Are there still musky in the Kewaunee River?



Battle of the Windmill - near Prescott, Upper Canada, Nov. 13, 1838

An engraved representation of the Battle of the Windmill. Photo courtesy of the Library and Archives of Canada.

Penal Colony off the coast of Australia. The 92 patriot convicts from the United States that were sent to Tasmania were the first U.S. citizens imprisoned overseas and the first political prisoners.

James spent four months, twelve days at sea aboard the “H.M.S. Buffalo” before arriving at Hobart Town, Tasmania, in 1840 where he and his fellow patriots were escorted through the streets to prison. Food in the penal colony was unappetizing, uniforms inadequate in the winter, and barracks were flea- and lice-infested. All new convicts began their time by breaking and hauling quarry stone to build roads. After two years, convicts could apply for a “ticket of leave” which allowed them to look for other work on the island. James was issued this “ticket of leave” in 1842 which he most certainly would have used to earn money for passage home if he were ever pardoned. Early accounts say he escaped, but I can find no records of an escape attempt by James.

In 1845, James and his fellow patriots were pardoned, and he somehow found passage back to New York. In the 1850, census of Oneida County, New York, in the Town of Marshall, he is listed as a farmer and, on April 5 of that year, he married Fidelia Pierce. She was barely 16 years old, and James was 33. Their son, Edward, was born in 1851 in New York. Soon after, the Pierce family moved west settling in the wilderness of Kewaunee County. In 1856, they purchased 160 acres where the County Poor Farm was located in Pierce Town, and began farming. At that time there were no roads, just Indian trails, and there were only two other families living within the present bounds of Pierce—Henry Borgman, and Abraham Blazier (a hunter and trapper) with his five sons.

Early accounts (written by historian George Wing) describe James as “tall [6’1”], bearded, genial

(Continued on page 7)

(Continued from page 6)

and a fluent talker.” He represented Pierce Town on its county board, was a juror, and a member of the first Agricultural Society. He applied for a post office that went into service on April 4, 1861, by the name of Rushford; he was its first postmaster. No records can be found as to the exact location of the Rushford Post Office, but since an Indian trail (used by Indians and settlers alike) ran through a corner of James’ land, it was probably in his home, a common site for early post offices.

James died Feb. 1, 1863, of smallpox, and the Rushford Post Office was discontinued shortly thereafter. His obituary in the *Kewaunee Enterprise* states, “[James] was a man, generous and kind, to his fellows, especially those in distress, and will be very much missed by a large circle of friends.” James’ wife and son followed him to the grave within months. There are no records, but they most likely died of smallpox as well.

The graves of James and his family are unmarked. Kewaunee historian George Wing states that

the Pierce family is buried on a little knoll to the right of the road going to Algoma on the present Cmejla farm. Mrs. Elvina (Arthur) Cmejla said in 1989) that “only stories handed down” point to a possible burial place of the Pierce family west of the original buildings on the Cmejla farm (which no longer exist) near the old County Poor Farm.

I walked the land to look for any evidence of where graves might be located, but logging, farming, and time have dramatically changed the landscape. All we will probably ever know is that James and his family are at rest in Pierce Town.

Note: If you're interested in learning more about the Canadian Rebellion (Patriot War) and the Battle of the Windmill, I recommend the book *Guns Across the River* by Donald E. Graves, or Shirley Farone’s website: <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~twigs2000/index.html>.

Friends of the Kewaunee County Historical Society

YOUR DONATIONS KEEP OUR DOORS OPEN.

It’s that time of year for those of you who are able to help us continue our mission. If only we could eliminate the word “County” from our official name, it would then dispel the notion that we are county-supported. We are strictly a volunteer organization – dedicated to collecting artifacts, documents, memorabilia, etc., related to Kewaunee County. This newsletter is published to inform you, our readers, of what is happening within the organization and also to print articles that provide facts and information about our past. An envelope is provided for your donations. (We apologize for not catching the error on the last set of envelopes.)

DONORS

(through April 10, 2009)

Benefactor (\$100+)

Jerry & Althea Abitz
Mary Bohman
Ray Michalski

Patron (\$50-\$99)

Jon Willterding

Family (\$25-\$49)

Paul Kendall
Ron & Tere Fassbender
Jim & Joyce Lampereur
Charlene Ritchey

Individual (\$10-\$24)

Edward E. Bisely

Ed Clabots
Rosemary Glaser
Mary Beth Dalton
Wil & Bev Kleinschmidt
A. J. Luedtke
Dennis Merritt
Dale Swoboda
Robert Schaefer

Bernard Schlafke
Donna Urban
Evoyne Yunk

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

WISH LIST

For those of you who have supported us in the past, we say, “Thank you.” For those of you who need to know how your donation dollars would be spent, the items listed on the next page are some of the things we need at the present time (cost approx.):

Continued on page 8

Friends of the Kewaunee County Historical Society

(Continued from page 7)

| | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| postage stamps | computer labels (\$13/750) | printer cartridges (\$60/set) |
| general office supplies | plastic sheet protectors (\$15/200) | archival clothing boxes |
| copy paper (\$6/ream) | photo paper (\$25/50) | (\$60/box) |
| envelopes (\$9/500) | archival document boxes (\$30+) | copy machine toner (\$100 ea) |
| mailing seals (\$11/480) | mulch for planting beds (\$50) | new museum door (\$130) |

If you are limited on funds but live in the area, perhaps you can become a volunteer. We need volunteers to staff the museum for four-hour shifts; call Virginia Kostka, our museum coordinator (920-388-3091). The museum needs to improve the lighting in the exhibit cabinets; if you are an electrician or have experience along those lines, you could volunteer to do the wiring. If you have writing skills, you could write an article for the newsletter; we could help you edit it for publication. Suggesting possible topics to your editors also would be a great service; contact Jill Dopke (920-399-2830) or Jerry Abitz (920-866-2719) if you wish to discuss your ideas.

Virginia Johnson has a need for volunteers at our Research Center in Algoma. She has materials that need organizing on the Kewaunee Hospital, Kewaunee's Holy Rosary Church, and the Albrecht file (which includes information on the Kewaunee Bohemian Sokol). There is also a need for typists willing to type stand-alone documents into the computer. If you can help in any capacity, call the Research Center (920-487-2516) during our office hours on either Thursday or Friday afternoons.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

| | |
|----------------------|--------------|
| Jerry Abitz, V Pres | 920-866-2719 |
| Joe Blazei, Treas | 920-388-3038 |
| Julie Bloor, Sec | 920-487-2348 |
| Carl Braun, Emer Dir | 920-487-9813 |
| Al Briggs | 920-487-3884 |
| Jill Dopke | 920-388-2830 |
| Dona Fischer | 920-487-3484 |
| Bevan Laird | 920-388-2519 |
| Don Honnef | 920-388-3904 |
| Darlene Muellner | 920-388-0117 |
| George Miller | 920-487-2373 |
| Mary Reckelberg | 920-845-2465 |
| Marilyn Schlies | 920-388-4303 |
| Tom Schuller, Pres | 920-388-3858 |
| Judy Srnka | 920-487-5728 |
| Larry Swoboda | 920-845-2181 |

Virginia Johnson, Center Mngr
Ruth Wawirka, Emerita Dir

KCHS

Historical Notes

| | |
|--------------|-------------------|
| Editor | Jerry Abitz |
| Co-editor | Jill Dopke |
| Prod. editor | Susan K. Slikkers |

VISIT OUR FACILITIES...

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Kewaunee County Historical Society
Jerry Abitz, Editor
N9307 Abitz Lane
Luxemburg WI 54217-9628
gabitz@centurytel.net

Kewaunee County Museum
Courthouse Square
Kewaunee WI 54216
Daily — 12:00 noon - 4 p.m.
Off-season by appt.
920-388-7176 or 920-388-0117

Kewaunee County Research Center
219 Steele Street
Algoma WI 54201
Thursdays & Fridays — 12:00 noon - 4 p.m.
Other days by appt.
920-487-2516

