

HISTORICAL NOTES

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U.S.S. Pueblo

by Jerry Abitz

It is hard to believe that a famous ship was launched at the Kewaunee Shipyards (now Kewaunee Fabrications) back in 1944. Considering the distance from the Atlantic Coast, it causes one to wonder, why in Kewaunee? But the Great Lakes are connected to the world's oceans via the St. Lawrence River or the New York Barge Canal-Hudson River, and while the size of the locks constricts what can be built, build they did during World War II.

What is now known as the U.S.S. Pueblo was initially launched as a supply ship built to carry material to the various ports during the latter stages of World War II. I have been aware of this for a long time, but it was lost in the cobwebs clouding my mind. While sorting artifacts recently to reorganize our KCHS storage facility (a local bank basement), President Tom Schuller and I ran across a series of photos of ships that had been launched here during WWII, one of which was a picture of this supply ship.

It brought back many memories, foremost of which was a reunion of my Air Force unit which had been assigned in those days to the National Security Agency, a hush-hush government agency, located in suburban Washington, D.C., during the Korean War. Our reunion was held in the 1990s near Fort Meade, Maryland, located between Baltimore and Washington, D.C. Imagine my surprise to find a cryptographic museum on the grounds open to the public! During the four years I worked there, whenever our agency was in the news, *The Washington Post* revealed, "It was rumored that the NSA worked on ciphers and codes." No one was supposed to have any idea what went on at

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



U.S.S. Pueblo — Fitting out the U.S. Army cargo vessel FP-334 at the Kewaunee Shipbuilding & Engineering Corp. shipyard, Kewaunee, Wisconsin (circa July 1944), which was later renamed FS-344. Transferred to the Navy in 1966, she became U.S.S. Pueblo (AGER-2). *Photo courtesy of Kewaunee Shipbuilding Corp.*, 1968. U.S. Naval Historical Center photograph. URL: <u>http://www.history.navy.mil/photos/sh-us-cs/army-sh/usash-ag/fp344.htm</u>

this agency. How times had changed!

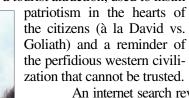
Featured prominently in this museum was the story of the U.S.S. Pueblo, the spy ship captured by the North Koreans in 1968 off the coast of that communist country (details of which had just been declassified), confirming that it indeed was equipped with sophisticated equipment, allowing them to gather electronic information offshore in international waters. Right up until that point, our government had insisted it was not a spy ship.

U.S.S. Pueblo (cont. from page 1)

At the end of World War II, this supply ship, the U.S. Army cargo ship FP-344, had been mothballed as a surplus vessel on the West Coast. As the Cold War began to heat up in 1966, it was brought back into service and renamed the U.S.S. Pueblo, after that city in Colorado. It was then converted to a research ship, packed with listening devices to intercept any wireless communications. It sailed to the Far East where it was captured on Jan. 23, 1968, while collecting electronic data. Although our government maintained the ship was in international waters, the North Korean government insisted it was within their territorial limits and never returned the ship.

In the course of this conflict, two persons were killed; 82 seamen were taken captive, beaten and starved, and held for 11 months under pretty harsh conditions. The ship's captain, Lloyd M. Bucher, finally signed a confession when his crew members were threatened with execution; all were then taken to the DMZ border with South Korea and released on Dec. 23, 1968.

The U.S.S. Pueblo was on display for three decades in two different east coast ports, but then secretly sailed to the west coast of North Korea and upriver to its capital, Pyongyang. Still there today, it serves as a tourist attraction, used to instill





U.S.S. Pueblo — Preparations are underway for its christening, prior to its launch on April 16, 1944. *Photo courtesy of KCHS photo collection.*

An internet search revealed some controversy surrounding this event. Seven months earlier, the U.S.S. Liberty, a much larger spy ship, was captured in the Mediterranean Sea by Israel, resulting in a loss of 34 lives; its captain, William L. McGonagle, received the Congressional Medal of Honor for his heroic efforts to save his ship. Commander Bucher of the Pueblo led his crew through 11 months of resistance during their captivity; his reward was a recommendation for courts martial. However, this recommendation was dropped when the public got wind of it.

Author's note: If you wish to learn more, search for "U.S.S. Pueblo" on the internet.

RAY MICHALSKI: KCHS BENEFACTOR

U.S.S. Pueblo (2004) — Serving as a tourist attraction, guided tours are available as the captured ship sits out-

side North Korea's capital, Pyongyang. Photo courtesy

of Wikipedia.com; source: KFA.

by Jerry Abitz

Every organization needs a friend like Ray Michalski — someone who believes in what the organization is doing and is willing to extend funds in helping it to accomplish its goal(s). Being centered in a small county where there are no organizations giving out grant money, having such a friend who has repeatedly made sizable amounts donations is crucial to our survival.

Neighbors in the Luxemburg area are very much aware of this gentleman. A retired farmer and community activist from way back, his accomplishments are many. In 1962, he was the Kewaunee County Farmer of the Year, the president of the Holstein Breeders Association, and appointed to the Kewaunee County Fair Association, serving as its president for 30 years. For 20 years he was an advisor to the Kewaunee County Young Farmers; his involvement with the 4-H organization was of 25-year duration. At one time, Michalski was president of the Luxemburg Chamber of Commerce; he was also appointed to the Board of Directors of NorthBrook County Club, and served as its president.

A native of the Pine Grove area in neighboring Brown County, he came to Luxemburg via Bay Settlement and the New Franken area. Marriage in 1953 brought him to Luxemburg when he married his late wife, Neoma Seidl. When asked why he was so generous to the KCHS, his response was it was his way of honoring the memory of his wife — as a director of the KCHS for many years, she had worked so diligently on many projects.



Do you love the smell of wood smoke from a campfire? I used to..., until the fire. Now, every time I smell smoke, it reminds me of January's devastating fire at the Union State Bank in downtown Kewaunee. Let me give you some background as to how it all started.

As I was leaving work at Kewaunee Fabrications that fateful Monday night, I heard sirens coming from the Kewaunee Fire Station. I stopped at the guardhouse to ask if the guard knew where the fire was; he said it was from "some bank on Ellis Street." I'm thinking, "Bank on Ellis Street! That's where we have our stuff stored! It's in the basement! I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS IS HAPPENING!!!!"

I rushed out of the parking lot, tore down the highway towards downtown, and circled around the back of the bank. At that time, it looked like it was a chimney fire, only there wasn't a fireplace in THAT building! For some reason, I'm thinking electrical; unfortunately, I was right.

According to the state fire marshal, the fire started in the bank's computer room, located next to our storage area in the same basement; the cause was an old unused wall heater that somehow shorted out and started the dividing wall on fire. That led to the electronics melting down, and then the whole place went up in smoke... *literally*!

There was a lot of smoke and water damage to the artifacts stored there, an area the KCHS has used for at least 30 years. Hindsight is a wonderful thing. If we had stored everything in plastic bins, we would not have had all the resultant damage. But, as the restoration people said to me, "You can't foresee a fire."

The clean-up phase was overwhelming! Directors Al Briggs, Don Honnef, and I took out eight truckloads of damaged goods and put them either in the museum or a storage facility that the society rented. All items had some degree of water damage, and all had a smoky smell to them that will linger for months, possibly years, to come. We are now in the process of determining what is salvageable. Our curator, Darlene Muellner, and her clean-up crew are wiping soot from the framed drawings, photos, etc., and other items. But, regrettably, we are losing history due to the brittleness of dried-out paper artifacts.

We are photographing our losses and hoping some of them are either duplicates or backed-up at other facilities across the state. Director Don Honnef has offered us storage space in one of his buildings, and we will gladly accept his offer. This time everything *WILL* be stored in plastic bins!

ANNUAL MEETING NOTICE Saturday, April 10, at 10:00 a.m.

You're invited to the 2010 KCHS annual meeting on Sat., April 10, at 10:00 a.m., at the West Kewaunee Town Hall (located on the west edge of town on County Road C, across the road from CJ's Supper Club).

Following the same format as last year, we'll assemble at 10:00 a.m. to view displays about West Kewaunee Town. A short business meeting will be held, followed by a PowerPoint[®] presentation focusing on historic photos of the Town of West Kewaunee by Don Honnef, town resident and KCHS director. A light lunch will be prepared by Julie Bloor, chef and KCHS secretary.

. 10:00 a.m.— <u>Displays</u> open

. 11:00 a.m. — <u>Annual KCHS meeting</u>

. 11:30 a.m. — <u>Town of West Kewaunee</u> presentation <u>Free lunch</u> immediately following

RAY MICHALSKI (cont. from page 2)

One that I remember vividly was the 1998 Tombstone Readings. KCHS undertook efforts to update an earlier project of visiting every cemetery in the county to record the information found on the tombstones. From these readings, a database was compiled as an aid for visiting genealogists. Neoma visited the Green Bay Catholic Diocese office where she copied death records for Kewaunee County churches to add to this database. It was tedious work, and of considerable duration.

Another project dear to his wife's heart was the establishment of a community library; not yet a reality, it continues to be one of Ray's goals. Ray is very proud of her also for being a member of the first graduating class at UWGB. When the two of them met, she was working in Milwaukee for the Catholic Welfare Bureau having completed three years at the University of Wisconsin—

Madison. With their marriage came the arrival of five children. But, with his insistence and assistance, she returned to school to finish that unfinished degree.

Michalski was honored last September at the annual KCHS Volunteer Dinner. Then, at our post-Christmas potluck dinner, he came bearing another check. We would like to honor him for his continuing generosity.



Ray Michalski. *Photo by Jerry Abitz.*

Mission of the Good Shepherd

by PattySue Powell

I love a good mystery, and historical ones are my favorite. Looking to solve a puzzle about an old Kewaunee County church, I found myself absorbed in the fascinating, albeit varying, story of Bishop Joseph Rene Vilatte who was born in France, educated in Europe and Canada, and lived in Namur, Belgium, for a time. Considered the father of the Old Catholic Church Movement in America, he came to the United States with his mentor, Father Charles Chinquy, in 1883. There were many in this country who, with the 1870 ruling of "papal infallibility," wished to adhere to the beliefs and practices of the Catholic (universal) Church that had been passed down from generations before.

Until 1885, the largely Belgian, Walloonspeaking settlers in northeast Wisconsin had been quite neglected in this respect. As a result, they were susceptible to swindlers and crooks, some of whom posed as men-of-the-cloth looking to line their own pockets. There are many sad accounts of people being refused last rites and stories of mothers having to bury their own children because they could not pay when no legitimate priest of any faith would expect to be paid for such things. The nearest Catholic churches were in Bay Settlement and Rosiere, both too far to travel by wagon or foot at a time when there were no consistently passable roads. Even then, the mass was in Latin. Between the mistrust and the language barrier, these families were missing a very important part of their lives — a faith to which they could relate and a priest who could speak to them in their own language.

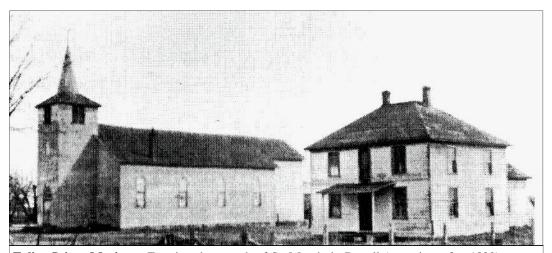
In response to this, Father Chinquy sent Vilatte from Green Bay to Little Sturgeon in 1885. There, the Louis and Melanie Robillard family donated a log cabin to use for a church; he called it, "Mission of the Good Shepherd." The cabin



Bishop Joseph Rene Vilatte (1907). Photo courtesy of Christian Catholic Church of Canada, http://www.ccrcc.ca.

was described as very poor, indeed. The altar was an old kitchen door supported by some scrap wood and covered with thin white muslin cloth; the other half of the cabin was used for his home, where he slept on hay and pieces of old carpet and lived mostly on bread and cheese through those first few winters. Slowly he began to gain the trust of both the people and Episcopal Bishop Henry Hobart Brown. (The Roman Catholic Norbertine Fathers were not sent to Green Bay until 1893 after hearing of Vilatte's accomplishments.)

He began traveling to preach in places like Chicago, New York, and Boston to raise money toward building a real church for this congregation. While in New York, a woman named Mrs. Chauncey Waterbury, of Brooklyn, donated land about three miles south of the log cabin church as a memorial for her husband. In 1888, the Church of the Precious Blood was built at the crossroads of County Roads N and C in Gardner Township,



Eglise Sainte Marie — Exterior photograph of St. Mary's in Duvall (sometime after 1890). *Photo courtesy of Christian Catholic Church of Canada*, <u>http://www.ccrcc.ca</u>.

Brussels. He used a portion of the money he raised to publish missals and catechism materials in French so the people could read and teach their children the faith of their ancestors.

In 1890, he went on to start St. Mary's (Eglise Ste. Marie) Old Catholic Church in Duvall (where he was (cont. on page 5)

elected Bishop) and St. Louis Old Catholic Church in Green Bay. He provided ministry to many families during this time — some 235 at Duvall, 240 at Gardner. Along with surrounding areas and the Frenchspeaking, Menominee Indians, there were more than 700 faithful in this part of northeast Wisconsin appreciative of his presence. He was consecrated Bishop in the Old Catholic Church of America in 1892.

In 1893, he opened St. Joseph Old Catholic Church in Walhain (Luxemburg) which burned down in 1905 and was never rebuilt. Some of the family names of the St. Joseph parish were: John and Leonie (Noel) DeGreve; Peter and Julia (Roberts) DeMoullin;

Emil and Eloise (Jeanson) Engebos; Frank and Alicia (DeGreve) Ferron; Alex and Josephine Reince; Jerome and Mathilda (Sampoux) Reince; Adolph and Louise (Thumas) Swille; and John and Adele (Engebos) Tebon. After the fire, these families were served at Duvall where, today, the St. Mary cemetery is all that is left of the parish. Some of these names still exist in the area, perhaps with slight changes in spelling.

Joseph Rene Vilatte continued to serve as both bishop and community organizer of religion until his unexpected death in 1929. Widely conflicting accounts of his life make it difficult to wholly agree with either of the two estimations of his character some judge him harshly as a church imposter, while others focus on the work he accomplished and the many people whose lives he touched. He is buried at Versailles, France, with the full honor and dignity of a consecrated Bishop of the Old Catholic Church of America.

Today, Church of the Precious Blood in Gardner is the only one of the old Belgian mission churches still standing. It is owned by and remains a missionary outreach of the Episcopal Diocese of Fond-du-Lac, which carefully preserves its Anglo-Catholic heritage. No contractors have been hired



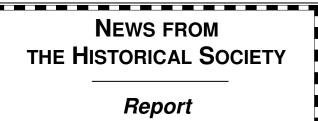
Church of the Precious Blood (2009) — The only old Belgian church still standing, located in Gardner Township, Brussels, Wisconsin. *Photo courtesy of Episcopal Diocese of Fond-du-Lac, www.episcopalfonddulac.org*.

in its delicate restoration; instead, generous neighbors, friends, and volunteers lovingly care for the building. And although the barn and rectory that once occupied the site are gone, the cemetery is devotedly maintained. Today the parish is served by Father Robert D. Hoppe from St. Agnesby-the-Lake Episcopal Church in Algoma.



Author's note: Special thanks to Bishop Serge Theriault for his assistance and permission to use these photos. Listed below are some of the resources used in this article.

- · Abitz, Jerry. Pers. comm.
- · Anson, Peter. Bishops at Large. 2006. ISBN: 0977146197.
- Theriault, Serge A. Msgr. Joseph Rene Vilatte. 1997. ISBN: 1933993251.
- · Episcopal Diocese of Fond-du-Lac, www.episcopalfondulac.org.
- · Christian Catholic Church of Canada, <u>www.ccrcc.ca</u>.
- Old Catholic Communion of North America, <u>www.occna.org</u>.
- · American Catholic Church, www.americancatholicchurch.net.
- Wisconsin's French Connections. A student project by Leah Kemp. <u>http://uwgb.edu/wisfrench/library/history/oldcatholic.htm.</u>
- Old Catholic History, <u>www.oldcatholichistory.org</u>.
- Scribd, <u>www.scribd.com/doc/2447672/Vilatte-Heritage</u>.



from the Trenches

by Jerry Abitz

NEWEST DIRECTOR — Jim Steffel has rejoined the KCHS board as of last month. He served on the board for a number of years back in the 1990s, but then left because of increased demands of his job. However, he kept contact with the KCHS by working as a volun-



Jim Steffel — Newest KCHS director comes back for more. *Photo supplied by Jim Steffel.*

teer at the Jail Museum.

Some of you are aware that we erected 29 historical markers around the county. Steffel was the original chair of this committee. One of the original groups of signs was placed at his farmstead on County Road F in Montpelier, a National Register site. We're hopeful that he'll share more about his farmstead in a future issue.

KCHS WEBSITE — Part of the fallout from the resignations of Jill Dopke and Virginia Johnson was the loss of our volunteer webmaster, Tom Duescher. He did a lot for the KCHS, and his services will be sadly missed.

A decision has been made to hire someone to do the job. In this day and age, a website is a must and it must be maintained. No one on our board is prepared to assume responsibility nor has the know-how to accomplish this. John Gales (Green Bay) has been approached, and is in the early stages of meeting with a committee composed of Jerry Abitz, Bevan Laird, Darlene Muellner, and Jim Steffel. As it looks now, we will be start-



THIS ISSUE'S GUEST AUTHORS...

Tom Schuller (see page 3)—Currently president of the Kewaunee County Historical Society, Tom is a self-proclaimed information junkie — he's been collecting stories about Kewaunee County since he was first asked to join the Society. He and his wife, Bonnie, live in a restored Victorian home built in 1890 which is surrounded by over 3,000 plants. ing from scratch. We ask for your patience until the new site appears. Our goal is that it will be more userfriendly, and that photos and publications can be both marketed and purchased online.

For those of you who have opted for the electronic version of our quarterly newsletter, we will continue to send you an email containing the latest issue.

HISTORIC LECTURES — During the month of February, four lectures were given on successive Saturdays at the KCHS History Center. A light lunch was served to those who attended. Cletus Bellin of the Rosiere area spoke on the history of the Walloons and their music, which he demonstrated a capella. He does have a marvelous singing voice.

President Tom Schuller spoke about a day at the Kewaunee Shipyards (now Kewaunee Fabrications) during WWII. He was privy to inside information since his father-in-law was the superintendent of the entire shipyard. Dressed for work à la 1944, Schuller showed historic photos that included the outdoor assembly line that produced a ship a day.

Al Briggs presented a talk on blacksmithing that included a history of this craft as well as a display of an interesting array of tools of the trade. He also asked atten-

dees to mark on a map any known sites of former blacksmith shops to help him pursue the local history of this age-old trade. His professional career was that of a Methodist minister. After retiring, he became a blacksmith and spent years at Heritage Hill in the Green Bay area; he now demonstrates his trade at the Heritge Farm, located south of Kewaunee.

Jerry Abitz spoke on the history of Kewaunee County churches. His



Historic Lectures — Al Briggs making a presentation on the history of blacksmithing. *Photo by Jerry Abitz.*

presentation dealt mainly with the oddities and disputes brought about by change; such changes could be triggered by the burning of a building and the placement of the new church, or it could be a schism such as the birth of the Old Catholic Church and how it arose with in the county.

Abitz is still searching for the location of a mission to St. Joseph in the Walhain area in the Town of Luxemburg. The church burned after the turn of the 20th century in 1905. (*An article about this mission appears in this issue on pgs. 4-5*).

NEWS FROM THE MUSEUM The Jail Museum: 40 Years Old by Jerry Abitz

Founded in the early 1920s, the Kewaunee County Historical Society initiated a flurry of activity which produced the monument honoring Father Marquette's landing here in 1672. Although other projects may have been contemplated, we will never know because records are missing. Contact with the Office for Local History, a division of the Wisconsin Historical Society, a few years ago produced the names of the founding officers and board members plus newspaper clippings of the aforementioned monument dedication. The group then went into a period of inactivity. The late Helen Kuehl and Olga Sanderson both said that it was nearly impossible to get the president to call a meeting. Consequently, what we do know about the KCHS dates from approximately 1969.

At that time the county was being forced to build a new jail to replace the original jail and sheriff's quarters built in 1872; several jailbreaks had highlighted the building's inadequacies. Its replacement was the Safety Building on the southwest corner of Courthouse Square. Once the original building was vacated, the County Board was ready to demolish it, but some on this governing board felt otherwise. My own representative from Red River Town, the late Jule Moureaux, was one of those.

Several active citizens spearheaded a petition drive to save the building; George Gregor of Luxemburg, Leo O'Konski of Algoma, and Al Harlow of Kewaunee, all deceased, took it upon themselves to get the necessary signatures to force a referendum. While it was not a binding one, the County Board decided to schedule it on the ballot. The citizens voted to save the building rather than raze it.

Around 1911, the County Board had accepted documents and artifacts from Edward Decker upon his death; he had been prominent in the organization of Kewaunee County, the founder of Casco, the organizer of a number of banks, responsible for bringing the railroad to the area, and a local entrepreneur. He had stipulated that these gifts were to be on display at the county seat, and a special room was reserved in the courthouse for this purpose. However, as the county grew in population and in agencies, the room was appropriated for office space. The Decker Collection was subsequently relegated to the vault. In 1969, the County Board proposed that the historical society be assigned the collection and suggested that this could be the basis for a museum. Accepting this responsibility, the KCHS reorganized. In preparation, cabinets were acquired, artifacts labeled, and decisions made as to what should be displayed and where. A wall between the kitchen and dining room was removed to create a larger display space, and two rooms were kept with period furnishings — the downstairs living room and an upstairs bedroom.

People within the community donated time and additional artifacts to be displayed in this building. Individuals who worked diligently to get it ready as a museum included Olga Bruemmer, Al Harlow, Jane Jirtle, George and Edith Richard, and Olga Sanderson; Harlow and his wife, Lou, became the co-curators. Volunteers had to be found to staff the place for weekends during the summer season. They sought advice from an anthropologist, Diane Man (Illinois), and other experts, and worked diligently to open for the influx of tourists. With the efforts of all, the Jail Museum opened for business for the tourist season of 1970.

A stop at the Jail Museum became popular with the tourists, especially those taking the car ferries from Kewaunee to Frankfurt and Ludington, Michigan. Besides taking boxcars of goods heading to the East Coast, they also took walk-on passengers and carloads of tourists. Required to register at least an hour before sailing, they had time to kill. Thus, the KCHS had a built-in audience in many of them looking for something to do while waiting to board the ferry.

Since that early start, the collection has grown. As older generations have passed on, KCHS has become the recipient of items of local historical significance which we, in turn, will share with future generations.



The Jail Museum (1980s). *Photo courtesy of the KCHS photo collection.*

Jerry Abitz, Editor **KEWAUNEE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

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