



HISTORICAL NOTES

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CASCO JUNCTION... ONLY A MEMORY

by Jerry Abitz

It was a beautiful fall day, typical for a sunny day late in September. A phone call from a friend, Nick Salentine, had brought me to this location. We had parked the car at the newly-established Harold Reckelberg Park.

"What is there to see in this lonely spot?" I wondered. What was it Nick wanted me to see? Wooded vegetation surrounded the area just as it encompassed the abandoned railroad bed now recreational trail. Here the space was much wider. When I posed the question, I learned there once was a set of tracks for switching, a scale for weighing, and two turntables located here, although Nick wasn't certain about a train station. Research later revealed there were actually two stations here — the first was struck by lightning and replaced; the second razed in the 1940s, apparently when passenger service was abandoned.

We walked about quarter of a mile northwesterly to a poured concrete building whose roof and supporting rafters had rotted away; inside, on the dirt floor, was the capped well, originally used to supply water for the steam locomotives.

My mind began to work overtime. Why was all of this located in this improbable place? Did someone envision this to grow into a village? Kewaunee County has a number of these crossroad communities. The

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founders had high hopes, but reality didn't match those expectations. Try as I might, I could not visualize any commercial activity. Not too far away was Scarboro with its general store, cheese factory, saloon, and mill with its millpond. Also not far away, towards Luxemburg, was the site of a French



Casco Junction rail stop (circa 1900). Photo courtesy of KCHS photo collection.



Nick Salentine looking through the doorway to the abandoned well (lower foreground). Photo by Jerry Abitz.

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Casco Junction *(cont. from page 1)*

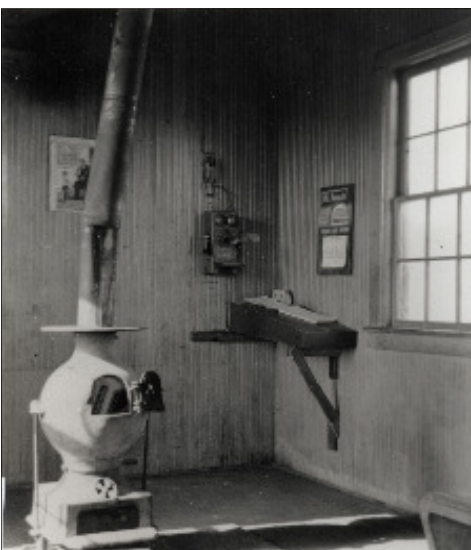
Catholic church. Both of these places had post offices where people picked up their mail in the days before rural free delivery.

That day's visit made me curious. Soon thereafter, I was at the KCHS History Center scanning the several photos I found of the area in the KCHS collection. On one of the shelves was a book I had donated to the Center; that and a book that Salentine had revealed a lot more than I expected. I googled "Casco Junction" on the internet and, much to my surprise, came up with another photo of several derailed boxcars and a sketch (not to scale) of the area.

The Green Bay & Western Railroad, connecting Green Bay and Winona, MN, wanted a line running to Lake Michigan. They also wanted a connection to the eastern seaboard that didn't rely on the congested rail yards of Chicago, which would give them leverage to transport grain/flour from the northern Great Plains more cheaply. So, in 1890, the Kewaunee, Green Bay & Western was built between those two places with stops in New Franken, Luxemburg, and Clyde (at the base of today's Clyde Hill Road) to serve the Slovan area. At the Kewaunee terminal was a fleet of ferries with the ability to transport railroad cars across Lake Michigan to connecting railroads.

Once this happened, Edward Decker, a prominent politician and entrepreneur from Casco, found the necessary backers the following year to build the Ahnapee & Western which serviced Casco, Ahnapee (today's Algoma), Forestville, Maplewood, and Sturgeon Bay, and the connecting point to the outside world was Casco Junction. Since passenger service was essential in the days of poor roads and horse-and-buggy travel, one took the train for any long distance. Joe Blazei, our treasurer, told me that his grandfather traveled to see a sister before WWI in Wilson, MI, near Menominee. The roundtrip fare was \$3.00 from Clyde!!

I found references about the frustration of passengers and the inadequate facilities at Casco Junction. The nearby Four Seasons Maple Sugar Camp, now owned by Mike and Bonnie Schanhofer, had been built by the Minahan brothers — one had been the town doctor in Casco and a friend of Decker while the other had been a lawyer in Kewaunee before he became a doctor in Green Bay; a third brother, also a doctor, went down on the Titanic in 1912. The Minahans had plans to open a resort with hiking trails through these woods (nearby is the Scarboro Creek, a good trout stream), but their success was predicated upon its proximity to the train connection a half-mile away.*



The ever-present potbelly stove found in all train stations, including Casco Junction (circa 1900). Photo courtesy of KCHS photo collection.



Transferring from the Green Bay & Western to the Ahnapee & Western at Casco Junction (circa 1900). Photo courtesy of KCHS photo collection.

This region is an area where two glaciers met, rich in gravel and sand deposits, between the Lake Michigan lobe and the Green Bay lobe of the glaciers which covered most of Wisconsin in the last Ice Age. Casco Junction was the source of gravel and fill for the railroad beds as well as along the nearby Kewaunee River when a high bridge was replaced; a spur also ran to the August Zimmer farm where additional gravel was removed. The removal of gravel for fill resulted in a gravel pit which then filled with ground and surface water to become a pond.

A subsequent visit to Casco Junction made it easier to imagine it as an important link in this now defunct railroad — the system with the connecting ferries serviced this area for almost 100 years, although the ferry was lured away by Manitowoc, where it still operates today. The only evidence of this railroad's existence is the railbed now known as the Ahnapee Trail, the abandoned station in Kewaunee, and a short spur line from Green Bay to Luxemburg to service a feed mill.

**Editor's Note — Watch for more about the Four Seasons Maple Sugar Camp and its history in a future issue of the Historical Notes.*

A TRAGEDY UNFOLDS: THE SINKING OF THE *S.S. EMERALD*

by Joe Blazei

November 18, 1886, was a terrifying day for the people in the city of Kewaunee where several hundred Kewauneeans stood helplessly on the shore of Lake Michigan watching a tragedy unfold. Two disastrous shipwrecks took place offshore when two coal-laden schooner-barges*, the *Florence Dickinson* and the *Emerald*, ran ashore as they were being towed by the steam-propelled *Chief Justice Field* which resulted in the loss of eight of the 13 shipmates on board. A strong gale from the east and the pounding surf of Lake Michigan had caused the ship, *Emerald*, to be washed up onto the rocks near the Kewaunee shoreline, the crew left to the mercy of the powerful waves. The drowning of the shipmates in plain sight of the crowd who lined the shoreline was terrifying. Although horrified, those who witnessed this disaster were utterly powerless to offer assistance.

All that November day, a drizzling rain prevailed and the wind blew a perfect gale from the east, causing the lake to roll at a terrific rate. The *Chief Justice Field* had left Toledo, Ohio, bound for Manitowoc and Milwaukee towing four barges — the *Florence Dickinson*, the *Emerald*, the *Lillie May*, and the *George Bissel*. The *Dickinson* and the *Lillie May* were headed for Manitowoc, while the other two were bound for Milwaukee; the storm struck while they were in the vicinity of the Sturgeon Bay ship canal.

The last barge, the *Florence Dickinson*, sprung a leak and soon parted her towline. The crew was immediately put to work on the pumps, but the depth of the water aboard kept increasing at the rate of four inches per hour. Meanwhile, the *Chief Justice Field* continued en route with the three remaining barges under tow.

The *Florence Dickinson*, bereft of its means of propulsion, raised its foresail halfway up the mast. As it reached the Kewaunee area, it was lagging one mile behind the others and headed on a trajectory towards the beach. As it approached the North Pier, the vessel struck a rock and the waves caused the barge to break up. A comparatively strong boat (128 feet in length, 27-foot beam, and 12-foot hold), it had been built in Saginaw, Michigan, in 1866.

The *Emerald* broke its towline at the South Pier and washed up on the rocks at the Kilbourn Street Pier. At 128-foot long with a beam of 32 feet and a 10-foot hold, and carrying a cargo of 500 tons of coal, it was caught on a large rock 800 feet offshore in eight feet of water. Unlike its companion, the *Dickinson*, it did not



The anchor of the *Emerald* on display outside the Chamber of Commerce building in Kewaunee. Photo by Jerry Abitz.

break up in the pounding surf. However, when the crew tried to escape the barge, none survived.

The two remaining barges lost their towline as well but navigated further out into Lake Michigan until the storm was over; the *Chief Justice Field* managed to make it into the Manitowoc harbor safely. After the storm had passed, it returned to Kewaunee to pick up the *Lillie May* and the *George Bissel*, both at anchor near the harbor; they were safely towed to the Manitowoc.

There was no Coast Guard life-saving station in Kewaunee at the time. After the loss of these lives, an appeal was made to the U.S. government resulting in such a station being built on the north entrance of the harbor. It began operation on July 1, 1894. Although decommissioned, the building is still there today.

Eventually the *Emerald* was raised and taken to Saginaw where it was rebuilt and served another 15 years on the Great Lakes. Years later, the anchor and chain were found while dredging the harbor area. Thanks to the late Henry Baumeister, a prominent Kewaunee businessman and historian, a monument was erected on the lake-shore; it told the story, and the anchor and chain were on display for many years. However, it recently was moved to a spot outside the Chamber of Commerce Building on North Main Street where it stands today.

Today I walk these beaches to satisfy my physician's advice to keep my replacement hip working. Long-lasting mementos of this disaster are the clusters of coal I still find on the sandy shore 124 years later.

**In the early days of steam-powered ships, older sailing vessels were converted to barges pulled by steam-powered vessels. If cut loose, they could still make use of their sails for propulsion. The obvious advantage of using these outmoded vessels was the amount of cargo that could be moved by one steam-powered boat moving at a faster rate.*

A NIGHT WITH HENRY SCHMILING

by Thomas Schuller

On Wednesday, Dec. 12, 2007, Thomas Schuller, president of the Kewaunee County Historical Society did a portrayal of Henry Schmiling at the Von Stiehl Winery in Algoma. Henry was the former brewmaster and owner when it was still the Ahnapee Brewery; today, it houses the Von Stiehl Winery.

I was born in 1845 in Pomerania to Karl (Charles) and Dorothea Schmiling. Pomerania was a province of Prussia located on the southern edge of the Baltic Sea. My parents were serfs working a small plot of land for the local land baron. He took most of the crops that my parents produced, leaving little for us to live on. We had a horse to work the land, a cow for milk, chickens for eggs and, perhaps, a pig to be fattened up for meat for the long winter. There was little hope for the future for our family. However, serfdom had recently been abolished, and our family was free to leave. Father had heard about America with its cheap land and unlimited opportunity; he believed life there would be better than in Europe.

In 1857, when I was 12 years old, our family left for America. The trip across the Atlantic was long and tedious; we were confined to steerage, below deck, with very little space and no privacy. People got seasick, especially when storms raged; the food was monotonous and of poor quality. Some people aboard the ship died and were buried at sea.

After six weeks of sailing, we arrived in New York Harbor. We were processed at Castle Garden, a



Henry and Rosa (Kessner) Schmiling (circa 1880s). Photo courtesy of Len and Judy Hill (Plover, WI).

reception center, to protect us from all the scams trying to rid us of what little money we had. With very little money, we stayed in New York where Father earned enough money to book passage on a steamboat up the Hudson River to Albany; once there, we boarded a canal boat headed to Buffalo at the end of Lake Erie where we boarded yet another ship and sailed through the Great Lakes until we came to Wisconsin — Milwaukee was our destination.

On our arrival, Father hired out to earn money to purchase property and also to acclimate the family to this strange new land. My two older sisters and I were old enough to pick up some work to help support the family. It was here that I was exposed to the brewing business, a field of endeavor I eventually pursued. Dad finally bought a piece of land in Kewaunee County, near the small village of Ahnapee. Why Kewaunee County was chosen, I'll never know. Having grown over the years, that village took on a new name and is now known as Algoma.

The Civil War broke out when I was 16. In 1864, local recruiters were forming a regiment to fight for the Union cause, the Ahnapee Volunteers, Co. E of the 14th Wisconsin Regiment; I enlisted that February and served until October, 1865. While serving, I was engaged in the siege of Atlanta and Sherman's March to the Sea.

After returning from the war, I eventually married a local girl, Rosa Kessner. Together we raised four children, two sons, Otto and Clarence, and two daughters, Metta and Emma. A fifth child was born but soon died as a result of the diphtheria epidemic that swept through this area in the late 1800s. My father was killed in a wagon accident a year after the youngest child was born.

I went to work for the Ahnapee Brewery where I eventually took over its operation. By 1879, I no longer leased the property but was the owner and brewmaster. My beer was so popular that it was no longer feasible to haul the kegs of beer by wagon to all our customers in Door County. I bought a boat, and named it, *Whiskey*

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Thomas Schuller, president of the KCHS, impersonating Henry Schmiling. Photo by Jerry Abitz.

Henry Schmiling *(Cont. from page 4)*

Pete; this greatly aided in the deliveries to our far-flung customers throughout the Door Peninsula.

By 1885, the situation at the brewery had changed, and Charles Skala became the brewmaster and owner. In that same year, a hop blight ruined the local crop. Due to the shortage of locally-grown hops, the brewery was closed. By November, the property had been sold and would sit vacant for some time.

At this time, I made a career change. Because of my experience working on my father's farm, I was asked by the Kewaunee County Board to take over as the superintendent of the County's Poor Farm, a haven for poor, destitute citizens. This position I held for 14 years, leaving it only because I grew too old to carry out my duties. I then moved back to Algoma, and was elected street superintendent until my retirement.

I lived until the ripe old age of 80, and was among the last of my Civil War companions to survive. If you'd like, you can visit my gravesite in Algoma's Evergreen Cemetery.

Editor's note — Henry was born on May 4, 1845, in Pomerania and died on July 10, 1925. His siblings Caroline, 21; Johanna, 19; Elwine Henry, 11; and Albert, 6, along with their parents boarded the ship, *Reinhard*, on September 1, 1857. He enlisted February 27, 1864, and was mustered out on October 9, 1865. He married Rosa Kessner on July 20, 1867, in Forestville. The Poor Farm was located south of Alaska on Highway 42 where Grace Lutheran Church is now located. *Thanks to Len and Judy Hill of Plover, WI, who supplied this information.*



Originally built to manufacture beer and now on the National Register of Historic Places, this Algoma building is now the Von Stiehl Winery, run by a descendent of Henry Schmiling. The Captain's Walk Winery (downtown Green Bay) is operated by the same family. *Photo by Jerry Abitz.*

WINTER HISTORY SERIES Saturday afternoons at the History Center in February!!

In past winters, we have had various speakers scheduled to provide public programs about area history people, places, and/or events; this year will be no exception — they'll be held on Saturday afternoons in February, beginning at 1:00 p.m.

February 5 – Kewaunee County Trivia
by Tom Schuller

February 12 - Unwritten Church Histories
by Jerry Abitz

February 19 - Belgian Wayside Chapels
by Cletus Bellin

February 26 – Belgian Research
by Tammy Etienne Zekany

Watch the *Kewaunee County News*
in late January for more
information about this series.

NEWS FROM THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

**Report
from the Trenches**
by Jerry Abitz

Museum — This season was much improved over a year ago. Virginia Kostka did an amazing job of scheduling volunteers to keep the Museum open at the appointed times. Joe Blazei, our treasurer, indicated that attendance and admission fees were greater than the previous summer. We celebrated the 40th anniversary of the founding of the Jail Museum at the close of the 2010 season.

Halloween at the Jail Museum — SOS of Green Bay conducted a public investigation about paranormal activities. It was their second investigation here after being encouraged by what they had found earlier. They came with their video cameras and sound equipment. Twenty people were in attendance. Some reported “interesting” experiences. However, to date, there has been no formal report.

Newest Director — Gloria Peterson became a member of the Board of Directors in early 2010, and should have

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Report from the Trenches (Cont. from page 5)

been spotlighted sooner; however, conflicting schedules precluded the interview.

Gloria Schreder Peterson was born in Green Bay. At the age of two, her parents purchased a 40-acre farm in the Town of Montpelier. She attended school at the Phillips and LaFollette Schools, both one-room schools, and graduated from Kewaunee High School.



In 1964, she married Earl Peterson at St. John's in Krok. Together they have three girls and a boy, each with children of their own. Her hobbies are genealogy, knitting sweaters, and helping the children whenever she can. She now lives in Algoma, where she can be seen riding her bike. Earlier in the year, she volunteered (*and we eagerly accepted*) to take over the management of the KCHS History Center. So you'll know she's at work when you see a bicycle parked out in front of 219 Steele Street.

"Gloria's enthusiastic presence at the History Center, as well as her support and dedication to the KCHS, is much appreciated by all" was reported by one of the volunteers at the Center.

History Center — Under Gloria Peterson's management, the Center has been open three days a week (12:30-3:30 p.m.) on Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays, and other times by appointment. There seems to be a steady stream of patrons during open hours. Joe Blazei, Carl Braun, Almira Havenhill and Bevan Laird have been assisting in staffing the Center during business hours.

Deb Anderson of the Area Research Center at UWGB's Cofrin Library has been contacted, and will be evaluating and advising us on our facility.

Recently, Mike Purcell has been a regular visitor to the Center since his move to Algoma upon retiring. He has been researching his historic home which has an intriguing past. He's originally from New Buffalo in Lower Michigan, located in an area called Michiana. It is that common area adjoining the Michigan-Indiana border. He has well-honed computer skills, and has volunteered to help out at the Center.

Newsletter — A publication committee, consisting of four volunteers, has been established. Their purpose is to oversee the quarterly newsletter in order to establish continuity should my age affect my ability to continue. They will advise, assist, help in the research, and evaluate this operation. The committee consists of the following individuals: Joe Blazei, Julie Bloor, Mike Purcell, and Gloria Peterson.

Website — A major disappointment for us is that our proposed new website has not materialized. The individual we engaged to get us off the ground apparently got bogged down at work and could not find the time to proceed. So, regrettably, it's back to square one.

Artifact Storage — For many years, we used the basement of the Union State Bank in downtown Kewaunee to store artifacts not on display. After all, what can be safer than a bank building? But misfortune overtook us when an electrical fire started one night. Smoke damage and water accumulation in the basement used to extinguish the fire took its toll. Since then, we've used several temporary sites to store artifacts; however, we now have a storeroom located in the Fire Station, offered to us by the City of Kewaunee.

Belgian Wayside Chapels — Cletus Bellin asked for financial assistance from the KCHS to help save 31 wayside chapels, a unique feature found only in this part of the U.S. Since these chapels are found in the tri-county area around Dyckesville, the KCHS Board, while agreeing to help, advised that both Brown County and Door County Historical Societies be contacted to assist. That has happened, and they have agreed to help.

Additionally, he has been spearheading a project to erect signage at each of these chapels. A consortium of the three historical societies will be working out the details. When complete, each site will have a sign that identifies each chapel, and a brochure will be printed with a map showing all the locations. This should be of interest to anyone, residents and visitors alike, who would like to tour them.

Our secretary, Julie Bloor, has contacted Jag Signs of Algoma for estimated prices and possible designs. Bellin has published the list and established the possible wording on each sign. It would be a natural adjunct for the Belgian-American Farm Historical District just over the line in Southern Door County. Preliminary costs per sign would be approximately \$250 installed.

Annual Meeting — As part of our plan to go out to the local towns for our annual meetings, the 2011 meeting will take place on Saturday, May 7, in the Town of Red River. Tentatively, it is scheduled to be held in the St. Louis

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GO GREEN!! HELP KCHS SAVE \$\$\$!! GO GREEN!!

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It's easy to sign up! Just email your request to Susan (skslik@centurytel.net); you'll receive the next issue in your Inbox.

GO GREEN!! HELP KCHS SAVE \$\$\$!! GO GREEN!!

Report from the Trenches (cont. from page 5)

School building, south of the church, at N8726 County Line Road in Dyckesville. There will be a powerpoint presentation, including any photos we have in our collection.

There will be a short business meeting followed by a light lunch, courtesy of the KCHS.

Book Publications — Clyde Guth is close to publishing the combined histories of Kewaunee County cheese factories. I can appreciate what Clyde has accomplished; trying to collect histories of 60-some factories is not an easy job — tracking down information and organizing the sheer volume of stuff takes an untold amount of time.

Virginia Johnson also has published a book on the post offices in the county before the days of rural free delivery. I attended a recent presentation at the Algoma City Hall, and had a chance to see the pre-publication document. It is available at various locations within the county for \$24.99.

In anticipation of future publication, **Joyce Lampereur** has been working diligently trying to chronicle the history of the Belgians that settled in this tri-county area.

Ray Selner recently has published his long-awaited book. He has translated many documents from the original Czech language with an assist from Rev. Milton M. Suess of St. Mary's Parish in Luxemburg. Much of the

work is the writings of Father Ciprin who was working with the various Czech parishes in the 19th century; also included is a lot of church history. It retails for \$25, and can be obtained at the History Center in Algoma.

In Memoriam

Recently two of our directors lost their spouses. Our curator, **Darlene Muellner**, lost her husband, Kurt, after 54 years of marriage. He was a Chicago-area native who served in the U. S. Navy Air Corps during the Korean War. He and his wife retired, and moved to Kewaunee. He served on the Kewaunee City Council, opened the Ships Wheel Gallery and Nautical Museum in downtown Kewaunee, and was instrumental in organizing the Kewaunee Business Association.

Marilyn Schleis lost her husband, Milton, after 55 years of marriage. He was a life-long resident of Kewaunee County except for his stint in the U.S. Navy. He had been employed at Kewaunee Engineering for many years, and enjoyed working in his woods.

Friends of the Kewaunee County Historical Society

~~ Year-End Donations ~~

We sincerely thank you for your generous outpouring of funds to keep us operating, although our expression of words seem more than inadequate. In recognition of your contribution(s), you should have received a personal thank you note from our treasurer, Joe Blazei.. As always, these donations can be used as deductions on your income taxes since we are a 501(3)(c) non-profit organization.

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