



HISTORICAL NOTES

VOLUME XXIV, No. 2

APRIL 2012

MEMORIES OF BOHEMIA

by Virginia Kostka

The dreary war years and rationing had come to a successful end; the Great Depression was only a memory as people looked to the future with optimism — 1946 was an exciting time. All able-bodied young men had been drafted into the military while the people back home were united in their support. Men and women worked in industry to build the equipment needed for the military. On the home front were the scrap drives while children bought savings stamps in school used toward the purchase of an E Bond. But, now, the war had been won, rationing had ended, and one could again think about buying cars and major home appliances. Our fighting men were now back home or enrolled in college under the GI bill.

Now was the time for fun! Mrs. Olga (D. B.) Dana and Mrs. Martha (John) Proctor wanted to celebrate the rich Bohemian heritage of the Kewaunee area. Both came to interview my grandmother, Louisa Kepl, an emigrant from Bohemia (the Czech Republic today) for ideas. Using the Fine Arts Club, a group that had experience in producing several local revues, a lot of local talent and tremendous participation from all parts of the community, *Memories of Bohemia* ("Vzpominky Na Cechy") became a reality.

The play, written and directed by Mrs. Proctor, was about earlier emigrants reminiscing about weddings in Bohemia. Mrs. Dana, sole underwriter, was the producer and facilitator, making sure the costumes were authentic. Gordon Thoreson and Orlo Christensen wrote

the music for the original songs, as did Mrs. Proctor. Dorothy LaPlant

was the choreographer; Louis Blahnik's Brass Band provided the music; Horace Lamb was in charge of properties; Mrs. C. F. Cherney was the performance accompanist; and Faye and Mabel Temby took care of publicity and tickets.

If you wish to receive the *Historical Notes* in color and online, send your request to sksluk@centurytel.net with your name and email address.



Top photo: Judge Aaron G. Murphy, the matchmaker, with book and pencil, is busy arranging a match for Marianka (Mrs. Gertie (William) Wright) in *Memories of Bohemia*, staged in 1946 by the Fine Arts Club of Kewaunee. Seated, left to right, are: Frank Blahnik, Gordon D. Thoreson, Louis P. Kasal, William "Bill" F. Sladky. *Bottom photo:* A bracelet gift she received for her wedding is being shown by the bride, Mrs. Dorothy (G. D.) Thoreson. Admiring the gift are (seated, left to right): Mrs. Pat Selner, Mrs. Ruth (Harvey) Ostrand, Dolores Dvorak, Mrs. Marie (Palmer) LaPlante; (back row) Gloria Kasal, Norbert Robillard, Pat Selner, Ann Shrovnal. Photos taken in November 1946 at the time of the original production; supplied by Virginia Kostka.

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Memories of Bohemia (cont. from page 1)

The storyline was that the Matchmaker (Judge A. G. Murphy) arranged a marriage between the girl (Mrs. Dorothy Thoreson) and the boy (John Bultman). The innkeeper, who was also mother of the bride (Mrs. Louisa Kepl, my grandmother), wanted a bride for her son (Orlo Christensen). Meanwhile, Gordon Thoreson (Kewaunee School principal) and Bill Sladky (county coroner) wanted to marry the barmaid (Mrs. Gertie Wright).

Members of the bridal party were Mr. and Mrs. Pat Selner, Dolores Dvorak, Mrs. Marie LaPlante, Robert Rider, Robert Classon, and Norbert Robillard. The Thoreson children (Karen and Paul) plus their great grandfather (B. J. Cmejla) also appeared. Others involved in the revue were Norman Leyse (of Leyse Aluminum); Mrs. Doris Grady; members of the Blahnik Brass Band (Louis Blahnik, Milos Walecka, Emil Albrecht, Birdie Blahnik, Jos. Houdek, Jos. Ramesh, Jos. Ripley, and John Pelnar). The teenage Baruska dancers were Ann Shrovnal, Mary Dana, Gloria Kasal, Maxine Lichterman, Patsy Naser, Urith Naser, Nada Proctor, LuEtta Pelnar, Nona Smithwick, and Virginia Kepl (*that's me!*)

It was total community commitment — the authentic costumes required a lot of hands to get it all done. The production was staged at the Kewaunee High School auditorium in November 1946 and January 1947. The troupe played to sellout performances, which required additional performances — Manitowoc, Wausau, at the Kewaunee County Fair, and twice at the Wisconsin State Fair where they were written up in *The Milwaukee Journal*. These later performances included additional songs and other performers.

Being part of the Baruska Dancers was an amazing experience. It was good, knowing our dance so well we could enjoy doing it without being nervous as well as seeing how the audience reacted. It was also fun to watch the changes with each rehearsal and performance as people thought of new things to do. The cast members were people of all ages. I could watch my grandmother as the mother of the bride!

Most of the performers are now gone but, for all of our lives, those of us still here will never ever forget this experience. The entire community was involved like it never had been before, nor ever since.



Dancers in *Memories of Bohemia*, some decades ago (L to R): Nona Smithwick, Nada Proctor, Urith Naser (partially hidden), Mary Dana, Gloria Kasal, Ann Shrovnal, LuEtta Pelnar, Maxine Lichterman, Patsy Naser, and Virginia Kepl. Photo by Dr. Dishmaker (November 1946); supplied by Virginia Kostka.



Left photo: Dress rehearsal is watched closely by Mrs. First name? (John) Cmejla Proctor (L), author of the play and a director, and Mrs. D. B. Dana, with whom the idea of the play originated and who supervised the costumes and stage settings. The dances were directed by Mrs. John LaPlant, the former Dorothy Leyse. Right photo: The marriage blessing is given by the mother, Mrs. Louisa Kepl, to the groom, John Bultman, and the bride, Mrs. Dorothy Thoreson. Looking on are the Count and Countess Novotny, Norman Leyse and Mrs. E. P. "Doris" Grady. Photos taken in November 1946 at the time of the original production; supplied by Virginia Kostka.

Author's note — In later years, a new group of Baruska Dancers were organized. Kewaunee's own ChamberMaids, male musicians dressed as ladies, grew from a skit in the original production of *Memories in Bohemia*.



Traditional barn and silo on the Gigot Farm (Lincoln, WI).
Photo by Jerry Abitz.

THE CHANGING FACE OF AGRICULTURE

by Jerry Abitz

Most of us have this visual stereotype of a typical Wisconsin farm with its red barn and silo reaching for the skies. But even as one drives on the side roads of Kewaunee County, those iconic buildings are rapidly disappearing. Many that are still intact appear neglected and are doomed. We talk about saving them but, unfortunately, the reality is one must find a reuse for these buildings in order to preserve them. As difficult as that is to swallow, it's the bottom line.

Think how much different the landscape of our area would be today if the failure of the wheat crops of the 1870s had not happened. There would be no need for barns other than for storage of machinery. A simple shed would suffice. Can you visualize what our county would look like? But the crop failure led to the development of the dairy industry, brought here by settlers from upstate New York. Kewaunee County was in the forefront of this industry. As many as 65 cheese factories once dotted our landscape. Today there is only one, but it is hard to imagine the impact back then of Krohn's (now known as Agritur)¹ and its complexity of operation.

The original cheese factories were seasonal in nature, serving subsistent farmers. Country roads were not plowed in winter, so how does one get milk to the factory? Can one support a family without a source of income? The only solution available was for any male in the family to seek winter employment elsewhere, such as in the logging camps of Northern Wisconsin or Upper Michigan, as my own father did. The paper mills, lining the banks of the Fox and Wisconsin Rivers, were hiring as well. That left Ma and the kids on the farm to eke out an existence. Cows were bred to calve in spring when the men were back home so, during the winter, the cows would go dry. Very little milk was available and what was produced could be hand-churned into butter, a less perishable product. The

(cont. on page 4)

CARL BRAUN (1924-2012)

by Jerry Abitz

The late George Miller, who was one of our directors, first introduced Carl Braun to the KCHS. He knew that Carl was actively pursuing the genealogy of his various families, and even had traveled to Germany where he had found relatives. Miller believed Carl possessed experience we could harness, a definite asset. As a result, Carl was nominated and elected to the board of directors in 2001.

Carl was a workhorse. In my mind's eye, he is still sitting in front of the computer working on various projects — scanning photos and establishing databases of births, marriages, and deaths. Genealogists find databases useful in seeking information to establish their family trees. If I ever needed access to the History Center, I knew I could drive to Algoma and find Carl there, working away on his projects. He attended all meetings while he was a board member. Even after he retired from the board, he would be in attendance.

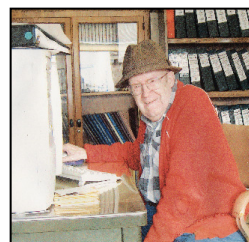
Carl was born on May 13, 1924, in Green Bay, where he lived until age 7. His family moved to the town of Ahnapee, where his father had purchased a farm. After graduating from Algoma High School, he worked for U.S. Plywood. Not happy at that job, Carl moved to the West Coast for a short time, and then to Milwaukee, where he spent the rest of his working career at the J.C. Penny distribution center, located just off the U.S. 45/I-894 freeway in the western suburbs. He never married.

In a recent interview of his niece, Shirley Rockendorf, who lives in Sturgeon Bay, she revealed that Carl was the favorite uncle of all of his nieces and nephews. Whenever they paid him a visit, he would take them for outings to the Milwaukee County Zoo.

Afflicted with cancer, Carl passed away on January 9, and was interred in a cemetery in nearby Forestville, near his childhood home. The Kewaunee County Historical Society will miss him, both as a friend and for his personal work ethic.



Carl Braun. Photo obtained at <http://www.legacy.com/greenbaypressgazette/obituaries/obituary.aspx?n=carl-braun&pid=155420524&fhid=14310>.



Carl Braun, sitting right where we had come to expect him — working on the computer at the History Center. Photo from the KCHS photo collection.

Changing Face of Agriculture

(cont. from page 3)

nutrition of the cows was neglected, and they got along on what was given them. In some cases, they were fed straw.

But the arrival of that round cylindrical tower we know as a silo changed that equation. They were promoted by the University of Wisconsin Extension Department as well as the people at *Hoard's Dairyman*,² published in Fort Atkinson. While Wisconsin was never considered part of the corn belt at that time because of the short growing season, a farmer could plant corn, harvest the stalk rather than the ears of corn, and turn it into palatable and nutritious feed for cattle called "silage."

This made feasible the idea of having cows calve any time of the year to provide a steady flow of milk, making cheese factories a year-round operation. Experiments at UW-Madison on their agricultural campus resulted in discoveries of nutrients that also could be fed to the cattle. Stephen Babcock developed the butterfat test which allowed a means of paying the farmer based on the butterfat content of his milk rather than the quantity of milk produced, thus eliminating any addition of water to the milk to which some resorted to get a fatter milk check.

Short courses³ for farmers came into being on the Madison campus to acquaint them with the best practices of dairy farming. Experimental farms run by the University developed various strains of crops best suited for our area, and experimented with lime and fertilizer applications. Counties hired agents to help the farmer improve their production methods. It turned cheese — a farm product which, in the early days, was no better than axle grease — into a profitable and much sought-after product. Thus an industry came into being that turned Wisconsin into America's Dairyland.

If you think our farms will remain static into the future, think again. In the Green Bay [WI] paper last September, I read about robotic-controlled tractors that can plow a field without a human in control. What's next? Can you envision robotic milking machines — cows being milked without the single touch of a human



Dairy Dreams, located in the Rosiere area, is an example of a mega-farm. Photo by Jerry Abitz.

hand? If industry can produce autos that can navigate for themselves, why not?

¹Krohn's is the popular name for Kewaunee County's only remaining cheese factory, located near Stangleville on County Road AB.

²Begun in 1885, *Hoard's Dairyman* was the influential magazine of the dairy industry, circulated nationwide. It was and still is being published 20 times a year at Fort Atkinson where one can visit their museum.

³Special classes offered in winter at UW-Madison's agricultural campus for farmers and cheesemakers.




On April 16, 1852, Kewaunee County came into being when Governor Leonard G. Farewell signed the legislative act. Territory was taken from a much larger Door County. But, like Door County, our county is bounded on two sides by Lake Michigan and the waters of Green Bay. The shoreline of the later is a total of three miles.

Since there were neither elected officers nor a courthouse at the time, Kewaunee was attached to Manitowoc County for judicial purposes. There were initially three towns: Wolf River, Sandy Bay, and Kewaunee with a total combined population of 1,109.

There were no official county acts until Nov. 11, 1855, when five additional towns were formed: Fredericktown (Franklin), Montpelier, Coryville, Casco, and Red River. Sandy Bay was renamed Carlton. (Luxemburg did not come into being until at least two decades later. Land was taken from the westernmost part of Casco. Casco, in turn, took a great chunk of land from Pierce). One of the first legislative acts was to approve a bounty of \$3.00 for killing a wolf.



THIS ISSUE'S GUEST AUTHORS...

 **Virginia Kostka** (see pages 1-2) — A lifelong resident of Kewaunee, Virginia loves telling stories and is proud to be sharing her memories of "that terrific community of people" by writing "Memories of Bohemia" for the *Historical Notes*.

Retired from banking, she's presently serving on the City Council and as the KCHS volunteer coordinator for the Kewaunee County Jail Museum. If you would like to contact her, her email address is: vkostka@charter.net.



GENEALOGY AT THE HISTORY CENTER

by Jerry Abitz

Many of the patrons of the History Center are people interested in doing their family tree. Having done my own, I have walked cemeteries in Minnesota, Washington, Kansas, and Nebraska as well as many in Wisconsin, and have visited the two largest genealogical libraries in the United States (in Salt Lake City and Ft. Wayne, Indiana). Often these trips have been a disappointment. I once spent an eight-hour day pouring over microfilms in Utah; I had great hopes, but came up empty-handed.

Knowing what resources are available in a community is a great help, especially if one travels a great distance. Being able to communicate with someone in advance can help to make the trip more productive.

The KCHS History Center has a number of collections (*see list in this article*) to help people find their roots here in Kewaunee County. In addition, our organization has placed microfilms of all the back issues of *The Algoma Record-Herald*, *The Luxemburg News*, and *The Kewaunee Enterprise* in either the Algoma or the Kewaunee Library.

In the 1990s, KCHS board members walked all of the known cemeteries and recorded the inscriptions found on the tombstones. The late Jim Linak created a massive database that is on the website, <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~wikchs>. The late Neoma Michalski and I spent countless hours collecting information from the Green Bay Catholic Diocese that was included because many of the oldest grave markers were no longer in place. In one cemetery, I felt that as many as one-fourth were unmarked.

In our History Center (at 219 Steele Street in Algoma), we have these aids to help you:

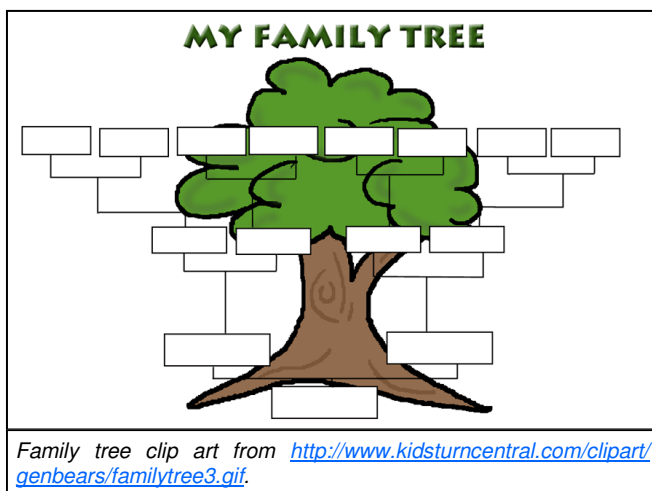
- 1) More than 50 family trees given to us by residents that you may be able to tie into;
- 2) Plat maps of the county going back to 1876 plus one for Montpelier in the 1850s showing who held property within these boundaries;
- 3) Searchable databases of births, marriages, and deaths;
- 4) Personal scrapbooks that are indexed;
- 5) A copy of an 1880s book that contains family histories (At the time, families in Northeast Wisconsin could pay to have their information included in this volume.);
- 6) Some, but not all, high school annuals;
- 7) Filing cabinets of information gleaned from multiple sources, organized by subject and personal names;
- 8) Tens of thousands of photos organized around where they were taken;
- 9) Negatives of photos taken by Von Studio of Kewaunee;
- 10) Photos from the Heidmann Collection published in *The Algoma Record-Herald*;
- 11) Church histories, some of which also include all recorded baptisms, marriages and funerals;
- 12) Sanborn Fire Maps, showing locations of buildings in Algoma and Kewaunee that you may have connections to; and
- 13) Finally, there are probably other resources I may have forgotten to list or do not even know about!

Ultimately, the goal of the KCHS is to establish a new, searchable website that would enable researchers from distant places to easily obtain information. However, getting to that point is not without its hurdles and, no surprise to anyone, involves money.

We are here to serve you. Our volunteers are willing to help you in any way that we can. If you'd like us to do some research for you, our standard fee is \$15/hour. We are open Thursday and Friday afternoons (12:30-4:00p), and other times by appointment. Feel free to call (920-487-2516) or send us an email (kchistory219@yahoo.com).



Arletta Bertrand, KCHS treasurer, at the History Center, standing in front of the collection of family trees. Photo by Jerry Abitz.



Family tree clip art from <http://www.kidsturncentral.com/clipart/genbears/familytree3.gif>.

NEWS FROM THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Report from the Trenches

CORRECTION — The correct email address for the Kewaunee County History Center is kchistory219@yahoo.com. One of the staff members will respond during regular hours. If you're working on your genealogy project and time isn't exactly critical, feel free to submit your questions or ask the staff to do some research for you (standard research fee is \$15/hr.). Email is also a great way to make an appointment.

KCHS ANNUAL MEETING — The Kewaunee County Historical Society Annual Meeting will be held on Saturday, May 5, at the Franklin Town Hall in Stangelville (across the road from Karnop's Meats on County Road AB). This year's guest speaker is Ray Selner, a local expert on Bohemian migration to this area. There will be historic photos on display as well.

The meeting will convene at 10:30a, with lunch immediately following at 11:30a. The free luncheon will feature kolaches, a Bohemian dish, prepared by KCHS secretary and former chef, Julie Bloor.

KEWAUNEE JAIL MUSEUM (613 Dodge Street in Kewaunee) — opens Memorial Day weekend, and will be open daily from 12:00n to 4:00p through Labor Day. Open other times by appointment. Group tours available.

On display, you'll find artifacts from the Decker Collection, uniforms, early medical equipment, children's toys, band instruments, hand tools, a camera collection, and other collectibles. The Jail Museum has two period rooms, plus we have carved figures representing Father Marquette's landing in Kewaunee in 1674 and carvings from

Our apologies — Nellie De Baker's name was inadvertently omitted in the list of volunteers for Ag Heritage Days (see January 2012 issue). We want to extend our apologies to both her and other volunteers whom we may have overlooked by mistake. Our volunteer network is vital to the ongoing operation of KCHS, and we are so grateful for every gift of time and talent they share with us.

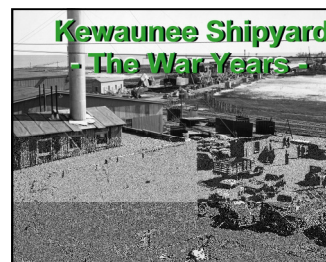
the Svoboda Company of which "Custer's Last Stand" is a premier piece. Additionally, our photo displays change each season. So plan to come often!

For more information, call 920-388-0117 or send an email to kchistory219@yahoo.com.

CHEESE FACTORY BOOK — Glennie Wilding-White reports that the book should be ready in time for Father's Day, June 17. Make plans now to purchase a copy!

DVDs FOR SALE!

KCHS now has three DVDs for sale — Kewaunee Shipyards—The Wars Years (WWII), produced by Dan Ninedorf; Ahrensburg Youth Symphony Orchestra, and the Veteran's Day 2011 Celebration at the Hamacek Building. A great value at \$6 each, they are available at the Kewaunee County History Center in Algoma, Kale's on Ellis Street in downtown Kewaunee, or the home of Gerald/Arletta Bertrand, 1106 Colle Street in Luxemburg (phone: 920-845-2972).



GIFTS TO THE HISTORY CENTER — Recently the History Center received donations of a slide projector with a carousel, a small microwave oven, and a small refrigerator. Cold water and sodas are now available for 50 cents.

LUXEMBURG RUMMAGE SALE — The KCHS will be participating in the Luxemburg Rummage Sale on Friday and Saturday, May 18-19, from 8:00a-5:00p. Arletta Bertrand is registered for our group at her address, 1106 Colle Street, phone: 920-845-2972. We will accept donations to include in the rummage sale but, please, no clothing or Christmas items. We will be selling our DVDs plus books that we have for sale.

ST. JOSEPH CEMETARY WALK — To celebrate the 100th anniversary of St. Joseph Catholic Church in Pilsen, there will be a cemetery walk on Sunday, June 24. Mass with the bishop is scheduled for 9:30a, followed by polka music and food (until 2:00p) and the cemetery walk (11:00a to 1:00p).

NOTE: They are still looking for stories from family members of people buried at the cemetery that would be good to present. Interested storytellers and presenters will get assistance from KCHS with the two- to four-minute presentations and costumes. If interested, contact Jim Stefel at jims@prophitmarketing.com or 920-845-5848.

MATT TLACHAC, author of *The History of the Belgian Settlements in Door, Kewaunee and Brown Counties*, has donated a large box of scrapbooks, newspaper

Report from the Trenches *(cont. from page 6)*

clippings and some handwritten histories of local townships and historical information on farming. The box contains local as well as statewide information and genealogy on the Matthias Tlachac family.

For specific questions about donations, contact either Gloria Peterson at the History Center or Darlene Muellner at the Museum.

WINTER SPEAKERS — Four speakers were scheduled to speak for our annual winter history series at the History Center in Algoma during February. Unfortunately, Julie Bloor was unable to do so due to illness in the family.

Our first speaker, Judy Snrka, spoke on "Men in the Civil War — Causes of Death" (Feb. 4). Mark Teske spoke on "Economic Growth and Women's Participation" on Feb. 11. During his presentation, Gerald Bertrand, the husband of our treasurer, Arletta Bertrand, set up a display of his gun collection. KCHS President Tom Schuller spoke on the subject of emigration (Feb. 25).



Gerald Bertrand. Photo by Gloria Peterson.



2012 Winter History Series speakers, left to right: Judy Snrka, Mark Teske, and Tom Schuller. Photos by Gloria Peterson.

FUND DRIVE — We certainly appreciate those of you who donate the funds that keep our doors open. While we do have a nest egg from funds that people have left us when their estates were settled, your ongoing donations are used for reoccurring costs such as rent, utilities, printing, and supplies. We are grateful for what you have done for us in the past. However, this is a new year with new expenses, so we have included a self-addressed envelope for those of you who appreciate what we do.

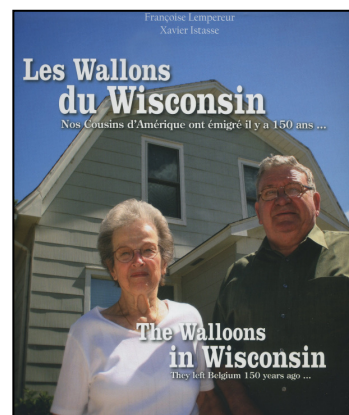
To save us money, if you wish to be removed from our mailings, please contact Arletta Bertrand (*address follows*). Likewise, if you know you are going to be moving to a new address, please let us know so we

can avoid the 50¢ charge from the Post Office. If the recipient has moved to an assisted living residence or nursing home and no longer is interested, please do the same. Arletta can be contacted by email at artie2003@netzero.com, phone 920-845-2972, address: 1106 Colle Street, Luxemburg WI 54217, or you may use the enclosed donation envelope.

THE WALLOONS OF WISCONSIN

Recently two Belgium natives visited the area for a book signing at NorthBrook Country Club in Luxemburg and at Susie's in Lincoln. Francoise Lempereur and Xavier Istasse wrote *The Walloons of Wisconsin*, a 211-page, hardcover book. It is profusely illustrated with colored photos of scenes and people from this area. It contains four pages (four columns per page) of Walloon surnames that originated in Belgium; the text is in both English and French. It also includes a dvd and sells for \$40. If you are a member of the Belgian-American Club or the Namur Belgian Heritage Foundation, the price is \$35.

I purchased a copy for the KCHS History Center, and had it signed by the authors. If your ancestors were Walloons, this is a "must have" book! The book is for sale through Myra Tlachac in Luxemburg (920-845-2440), at the Belgian Bar in Namur, and the Belgian-American Club, headquartered in Namur.



NOTE TO READERS —

THANK YOU FOR YOUR INTEREST!! January's lead article, "When Things Go Wrong," about Leo and Ed Salkowski and their filling station in Kewaunee, generated several leads, which are being pieced together to form a follow-up story.

*Check out the July 2012 issue
to learn more!!*

Friends of the Kewaunee County Historical Society

~~ 2012 Donations ~~

We thank all of you for your continuing support of the Society. In recognition of your contribution(s), you should have received a personal thank you note from us. Since we are a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, these donations can be used as deductions on your income taxes.

Note: The listing below is based upon donations received December 1, 2011 - February 21, 2012.

If your gift was received at a later date and not listed, it will be acknowledged in the next issue. If your name is not listed and you gave, please contact our treasurer, Arletta Bertrand (920-845-2972).

~~ **If you have a change of address, please notify Arletta Bertrand as soon as possible.** ~~

By mail: 1106 Colle Street, Luxemburg WI 54217

By phone: 920-845-2972 ~~ By email: artie2003@netzero.com

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KCHS

Historical Notes

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VISIT OUR FACILITIES...

KEWAUNEE COUNTY JAIL MUSEUM

Courthouse Square at 613 Dodge Street
Kewaunee WI 54216
Phone: 920-388-0117

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Summer (through Labor Day) —

Open daily, 12:00-4:00 p.m.

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