



HISTORICAL NOTES

VOLUME XXV, No. 1

JANUARY 2013

REMEMBERING DR. KERSCHER, A TRUE COUNTRY FAMILY DOCTOR

by Arletta Bertrand

Jerry Abitz' front page story, "A Tale of Two Places" on Euren (see October 2012 issue, Volume XXIV, No. 4), got me to thinking about when I grew up there. And you can't think of Euren without mentioning the one person who lived there that has touched more lives than anyone else — Dr. Edward J. Kerscher.

Just like so many other babies, I, too, was delivered by Dr. Kerscher. My parents lived less than a mile from his office, although I was born while my mother was at my Grandmother Deprey's house on County Road K.

When the polio epidemic happened in the 1950s, Dad stopped with me and my siblings, Karen, Vernalda and Ron, along with our neighbors, Wayne and Bernard LaCrosse, to get our polio shots. No one wanted to be first, so Dad pushed all six of us in at once, and said, "*Bend over and pull down your pants.*" (From my perspective, I was sure the doctor probably used the *same* needle for all six of us!¹) By time for the required third shot in the series, we stopped at his office on the way home from school with our bikes. Whenever you visited his office, you had to walk to his chair for he did not come to you. I always prayed, "Please let him give me the little pink pills, not the shot," but that didn't always work.

Dr. Kerscher was born on February 19, 1885, in the Town of Lincoln, in the little village known as Euren. His parents, Edward and Frances (Widman) Kerscher, emigrated from Bavaria. The young Kerscher, along with his two brothers and one sister (Mike, Tony and Mary), attended LaFayette Grade School, the same school I attended for seven years.

Dr. Louis Halloin, who took him along while making his rounds, was a significant influence in Edward's life. By the age of 14, he could set broken bones under the supervision of the older doctor. He attended Oshkosh Normal School² and, at the age of 22, came back to Euren to teach in the same school he first attended. After a few years of teaching, however, he had saved enough money to enroll at Marquette University School of Medicine, where he worked at various jobs to support himself while a student there.

After graduating from medical school in 1914, he returned to his hometown to set up practice. One month later he married his childhood sweetheart, Helen Bottkol.³ Edward's first year was rough one — he would wait around until noon, hoping someone would need his help. Afternoons he went fishing in the nearby creek to catch trout for their meals. Money was scarce, so he was often paid with food. If he was needed, Helen would hang a sheet in the window to let him know. They had two children — Edward III and Helen (Mrs. Harold LeFeve).

At that time, a doctor's success was measured by the number of babies delivered. Unfortunately, after beginning his practice in 1914, the first baby he delivered died. In the years that followed, each birth was carefully recorded in his files with the name and date,

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Dr. Edward J. Kerscher during an office visit with Jule Ferron, a Red River farmer (1975). Photo courtesy of the KCHS photo collection.

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

DR. KERSCHER *(cont. from page 1)*

along with the parents' names and the country from which they came.

In those days, doctors made about 10 house calls to every one office visit. I remember lying sick on the couch and Dr. Kerscher making a house call. During the early years, he made those visits with a horse and buggy; in winter, a sleigh. He kept five horses to make sure he always had a fresh one ready to go.

He boarded a hired man, Hugh Stade, to accompany him on house calls. There were times when he had to drive 20 or 30 miles in the middle of the night by the light of a lantern to deliver a baby. Alone in the dark hours of the night, it was his duty to make decisions that meant life or eternity to those entrusted to his care. When the automobile became available, he used a Model T Ford, equipped with sleigh runners on the front for use in the winter. (Perhaps the first snowmobile in the county?) He commented once that he went through eleven Ford cars. In later years, you could always recognize him as he drove past you in his Cadillac or Lincoln.

Dr. Kerscher could speak English, German, and Belgian, languages necessary to communicate with his patients. It also came in handy when he traveled to Europe four times while traveling with his second cousin, Regina Raach, who was born in Europe.

His office was in his self-designed house with living quarters upstairs. The office included a waiting room with hard benches, a big rolltop desk (being young, that desk seemed *huge* to me!), and a small room for medicines located just off the main room. In his basement was a large room used for x-rays. He was known to comment that he never wrote a prescription; he dispensed his own medications. One New Year's Eve, he heard a knock. Thinking it was someone who needed help, he opened the door to let them in. Facing him were two men with a gun, looking for drugs. Although they could not find any hard drugs (narcotics), they did steal \$200 from the safe that was open.

June 18, 1950, was one of the biggest days of his career — a committee of old friends and associates arranged a "Dr. E. J. Kerscher Day,"⁴ marking 36 years of service to the community. Hundreds of people from Kewaunee, Door and Brown Counties came to honor him. It all started with a Thanksgiving Mass at St. Peter's Church (in Lincoln). (I will always remember him sitting in church where he had a reserved seat behind the last row of pews where he could easily be located in case of an emergency.) After mass, there was a parade from the Kerscher home to the church grounds. Marching bands set the pace for several floats, cars of dignitaries, and the doctor's first horse-drawn buggy. After the parade, a dinner was served in the church hall. It was like a county fair, with booths of food and games, most notable of which was the Dr. Kerscher Baby Booth where over 1,000 people signed the Dr. Kerscher Baby Register! By this time, he had delivered 4,244 babies! Mrs. John (Lillian LuMaye) Derenne was present, the doctor's first delivery (still living). Just that morning, the day of the event, he had delivered another baby! The day ended with a dance at the Ernest Thiry Pavilion.

The only surgery he ever preformed was removing tonsils, although he did admit to pulling his mother's teeth because a dentist would charge her and he did not. He was even said to having provided pairs of glasses to patients.

Dr. Kerscher saw patients seven days a week but, in later years, he took off Sunday afternoons to spend time with his family at his cottage in Dyckesville. His wife, Helen, passed away in 1953, at the age of 62.⁵ Thereafter, his companion, housekeeper, chauffeur, and friend for over 20 years was his cousin, Regina. Before he stopped making house calls, she drove him around the countryside. Mark Pinchart, son of a neighbor who lived across the road (and stills lives in Euren), also said his mother, Emily ((Kinnard) Pinchart), worked as the doctor's housekeeper until one day the doctor heard a thump in the kitchen and found Emily dead of a heart attack. Mark was also called on to go with him on house calls in the middle of snowstorms. Once, while following a snowplow to deliver a baby, they finally arrived, only to learn it was false labor.

When he was 91 years old, he wrote that the Flu Epidemic of 1918 was the worst he ever witnessed, and the mortality, the highest, watching three people die in one day while standing at their bedsides. People would get sick and, in three or four days, they were dead.⁶ There was nothing he could do. During his lifetime, there were epidemics

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Surrounded by a crowd of well-wishers, Dr. Kerscher greeting Mrs. John (Lillian LuMaye) Derenne on Dr. E. J. Kerscher Day, June 18, 1950. Photo courtesy of the KCHS photo collection.

SVOBODA ALTARS REVISITED — ARSON AT KLONDIKE

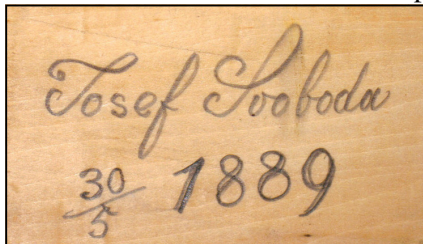
by Jerry Abitz

Just how does an arson case in Klondike, a crossroads community in Oconto County, have any connection to Kewaunee County? Please read on...

The former St. Wenceslaus Catholic Church building was the target of an arsonist on March 19, 2012.¹ Inside was a Joseph Svoboda altar, dated 1889 and signed by the creator of this ornate altar (see photo below). Originally, however, this work of art was housed inside a church just north of Pilsen in our county located on County Road F, just a short distance east of County Road V. The church cemetery remains at this location.

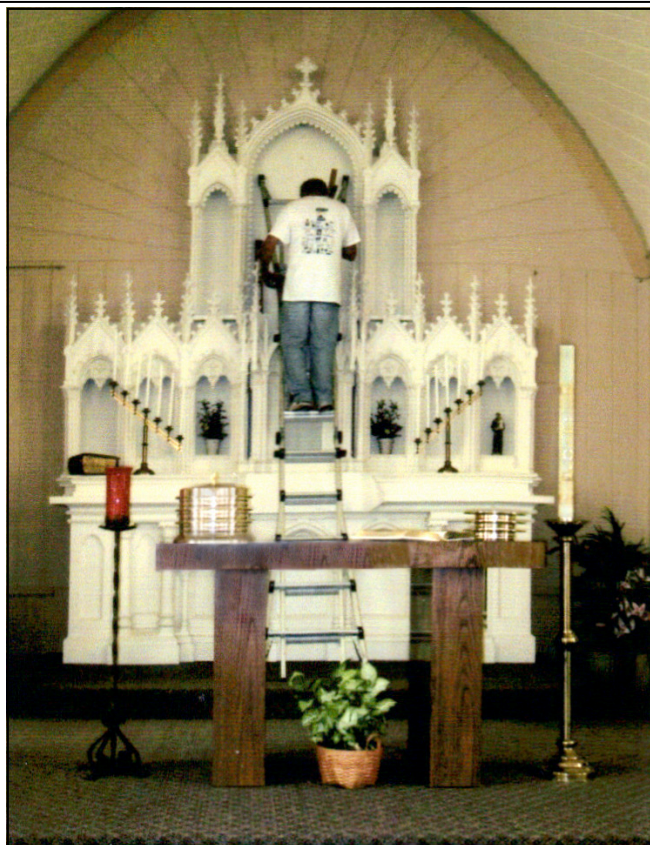
Since there were three small Catholic churches in this area, all of which claimed to have been sanctioned by the Green Bay Diocese, Bishop Joseph John Fox notified all three — St. Wenceslas on County Road V, St. Mary's in Pilsen and St. Anna's south a bit at Cherneyville — that they were to take steps to consolidate and build a new church for this combined congregation or risk losing their priests. St. Wenceslaus and St. Mary's did consolidate to form St. Joseph's² while St. Anna's joined the Episcopal Diocese, which closed years later because of dwindling attendance.

Sometime after the closing in 1912 of St. Wenceslaus Catholic Church and the opening of a church with the same name in Klondike in 1915, the altar from the former was transferred and installed in the church in Klondike. Some modifications were made to the altar when it was moved.³ From 1915 to 2005, St. Wenceslaus Catholic Church faithfully served its parishioners in the Klondike area (consolidation with St. Anne's in Coleman took place in 1995). Eventually, however, the building was decommissioned (2005), and subsequently sold and operated as the New Wine Fellowship.



Signature of Josef Svoboda, creator of this historic altar. *Photo courtesy of Kate Radke.*

In June 2010, the building was purchased by a new group.⁴ These owners were approached by a nondenominational pastor wanting to start



New owner, Brian Schaut, installs the cross, readying the altar for the new congregation, the Klondike Community Church (2010). *Photo courtesy of Kate Radke.*

a new church. On August 7 of that same year, the doors were opened to the Klondike Community Church which welcomed individuals from all denominations to come and worship together. Since the fire, this group has worshipped in an outside pavilion and, more recently, the refinished basement while reconstruction of the damaged interior takes place.

The altar was disassembled and taken to Green Bay to be restored by Jim Delwiche of Delwiche Custom Furniture and Interiors (3627 Eaton Road, Bellevue). Delwiche employed Degraeve Media-blasting Paint LLC to clean up the outer surface which enabled Delwiche to fully assess the damage and allowing him, hopefully, repair the original altar. Unfortunately, the Svoboda altar was damaged to such an extent that it cannot be completely restored; those parts most heavily damaged will have to be replicated. This unique blending of new and original efforts will allow the preservation — and continued appreciation — of this work of art and its history.

Delwiche has reviewed the Svoboda blueprints located at the Jail Museum in Kewaunee but, unfortunately, they are from the 1920s. Other plans were sold at the auction when Svoboda Industries

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SVOBODA ALTAR

(cont. from page 3)

closed down. If you are aware of any plans or additional information that would be helpful to this project, please contact KCHS President Tom Schuller.⁵ Although only an estimate, Delwiche believes the altar will be completed sometime in May.

While what happened in Klondike was truly a tragedy, the owners will move forward with restoring its facilities and facing the future with a rehabilitated building and a replicated historic altar.

¹This criminal act was reported in the local media in the summer of 2012. At the time of this writing, a man has been arrested and may be responsible for multiple cases of arson in the area west of Coleman.

²We have in our collection at the History Center in Algoma a photo of St. Joseph's being built alongside of the then existing St. Mary's Church.


³According to Jim Delwiche, the Green Bay artisan hired to replicate this altar, the end-pieces were somewhat modified in the 1915 installation. Nail hole alignments and pencil markings don't match up.

⁴The new owners are Brian and Theresa Schaut and Donald G. and Jennifer Holtger. (Information from the church bulletin, provided by Kate Radke of Wausau.)


⁵Tom Schuller can be contacted by phone (920-388-3858) or via email (gandolf00@hotmail.com).



THIS ISSUE'S AUTHORS...

 **Jerry Abitz** (see pages 3 and 4) — Jerry has been working with and for the KCHS since 1973, serving as its newsletter editor since 1996. Married to Althea since 1956 and living along the shoreline of the bay, he enjoys writing about historical topics, and takes time to dabble in landscaping; he's a gardener, a voracious reader, and loves the outdoors. Equipped with a very curious and active mind, he's taught 45 classes for Learning in Retirement at UWGB, and is still going. If you'd like to contact him, send an email to gabitz@centurytel.net.



 **Arletta Bertrand** (see page 1) — Born in the Town of Lincoln (Kewaunee County), Arletta always has been interested in history and has invested hours in their family genealogy. She's the KCHS treasurer, active in the Luxemburg Legion Auxiliary, serves other organizations in a number of capacities, and volunteers at the History Center in Algoma. If you'd like to contact her, send an email to ARLETTABertrand@gmail.com.



LARY SWOBODA (1939-2012)

by Jerry Abitz



I first met Lary 54 years ago. He was my student while I was teaching at Luxemburg Union High School. Compared to his contemporaries, Lary stood out as a scholar. During his high school career, he excelled in forensics and public speaking, for which he won awards. Scholastically, he was at the head of his graduating class.

Our relationship continued after graduation when Lary entered the seminary in Oneida, his subsequent enrollment at UW-Milwaukee, and as an employee of the newly-formed Luxemburg-Casco Schools where Lary was a teacher. My wife and I attended his marriage to Jan (Hendricks) in Green Bay.

There were frequent visits and phone conversations between us while he represented our district in the Wisconsin State Assembly. While most of these were social in nature, some of them were seeking my advice during his political career. He modeled himself after his mentor, the late Senator William Proxmire. It meant frequent appearances in the district to keep his finger on the pulse of its citizens. He faced many difficult situations in dealing with problems of his constituency, some of which he shared with me. I respected his judgment because he acted on his conscience and did not always adhere to the party line, although that did not endear him to the powers that be.

I, personally, can thank him for it was he, when consulted about an opening on the Wisconsin Historic Preservation Review Board, the group that decides what qualifies for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, nominated me. For me, that recommendation resulted in a 6-1/2-year crash course in local history that I found fascinating. It also led to a much closer relationship with the Wisconsin Historical Society that most never experience.

It was after his retirement and return to his birthplace (Luxemburg) that he became a director for the KCHS. He also was an advocate for a library in his hometown, a dream still waiting to happen.

The Kewaunee County Historical Society has lost an advocate as well as a friend.

REMEMBERING DR. KERSCHER

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of measles, small pox, and scarlet fever; he himself contracted scarlet fever.

After serving his community as a physician for over 65 years, Dr. Kerscher finally retired at the age of 93, after delivering 5,115 babies! At one time it was speculated that out of every three babies born in Kewaunee County, one was a Dr. Kerscher Baby! Published articles reveal he actually delivered babies from three generations for one family, the last being a boy — his last delivery. Dr. Kerscher was 88 years old.

He was not only a doctor; he served for 40 years on the board of the Community State Bank of Algoma. He retired as a director on the bank board not long before his death.

Dr. Kerscher lived to the age of 96; he passed away on March 28, 1981. He had dedicated his life to medicine and his patients, and was the last of a vanishing breed called “An Old Country Doctor.”⁷

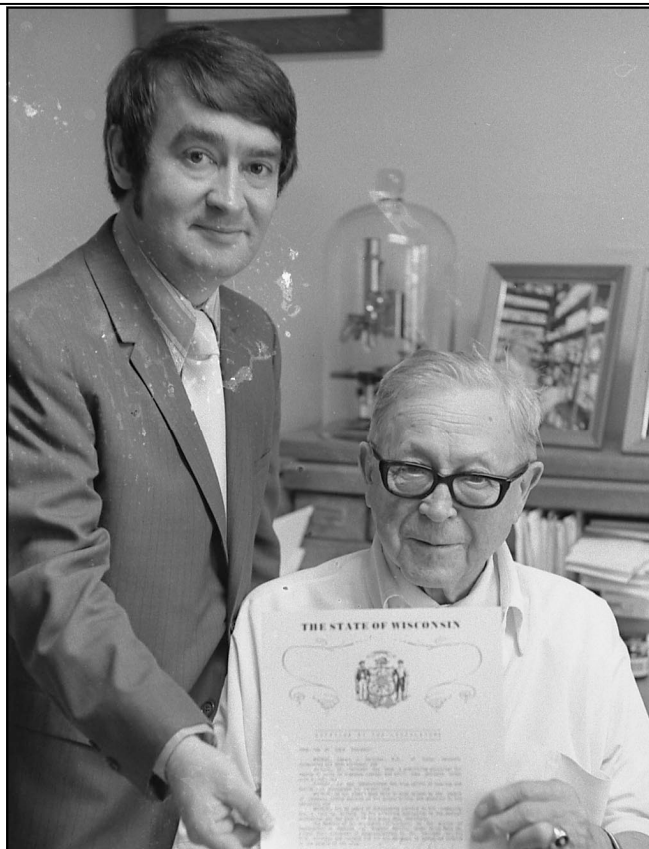
Borrowing a quote from Judge Aaron G. Murphy on Dr. Kerscher Day, “*The life of a country doctor is far from a life of ease and comfort. As an institution of the American way of life, our country doctors are gradually fading from the picture.*”⁸

Born in the Town of Lincoln, he was buried there. Between his birth and death, he touched almost every family in Kewaunee County, although his influence and the impact of his life was felt well beyond those borders. Before he died, he made a bonfire of \$75,000-worth of unpaid patient bills. He was quoted as saying, “*I don't want to die with anyone feeling they owe me a cent.*”⁹

His house still exists in the little village of Euren¹⁰ and was continually occupied by family until after his son's death. Purchased in 2010, his home is now owned by Tom and Sue Stuckenburg.

Author's notes — Some of Dr. Kerscher's medical instruments can be seen on display at the Kewaunee County Historical Society Jail Museum, located in Kewaunee.

Information for this article was obtained from the *Green Bay Press-Gazette*, *Algoma Record-Herald*, and “An Old Country Doctor,” an article written by Helen Kerscher LeFevé, the doctor's daughter.



On his 89th birthday (Oct. 23, 1974), Lary Swoboda (left) is presenting Dr. Kerscher with a Certificate of Commendation, issued by members of the Wisconsin Legislature for his 60 years of service in Kewaunee County. The certificate cited his “true spirit of healing and healthcare throughout his career, and high esteem in which he is held in his community, and the outstanding service to his community and his unfailing dedication to the Medical Profession.” *Photo courtesy of the KCHS photo collection.*

³Her grandfather, Michael Bottkol, founded the community of Euren and named it after his birthplace, now a part of Trier on the Luxembourg-Germany border in Europe.

⁴At 65, he was thinking about retirement. Instead, he served the community another 27 years after this celebration.

⁵Helen (Bottkol) Kerscher, 1882-1953, is buried in the St. Peter's Cemetery in Lincoln. Dr. Kerscher is also buried there, alongside his wife.

⁶The global mortality from the flu pandemic of 1918-1919 has been most recently estimated at 30-50 million people, among them 675,000 Americans. (http://www.flu.gov/pandemic/history/1918/the_pandemic/index.html. Accessed November 29, 2012).

⁷“An Old Country Doctor” is the title of an article written by Helen Kerscher LeFevé, on file at the KCHS History Center, Algoma.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰The KCHS placed one of its heritage signs on this property to mark this building as his home and, thereby, honoring the memory of Dr. Kerscher.

¹Purely a child's speculation at facing the promise of a needle! Prior to disposable needles and syringes, autoclaves were used to sterilize medical equipment and instruments, allowing for reuse. The autoclave was invented in 1879 by Charles Chamberland from France, and first used in medicine in 1885 by Ernest von Bergmann, a German physician.

²Now known as University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh.

NEWS FROM THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Report from the Trenches

NEW KCHS DIRECTOR —

Tim Ledvina, owner/baker of Don's Bakery located in the Village of Luxemburg, is KCHS' newest director. His interests include collecting Kewaunee County tokens, postcards, and memorabilia from the past. *"Since early, I have been exposed to local history. As a small boy, I have heard stories from Flora (Hoppe) Ledvina of the wars and commerce in Luxemburg. I also have helped my father trace our family roots."*



New KCHS director Tim Ledvina. Photo by Arletta Bertrand.

YOUNGEST VOLUNTEER —

Danae Srnka is KCHS' youngest volunteer, the daughter of Duane and Jackie Srnka and granddaughter of our Treasurer Arletta Bertrand. She attends Lux-Casco Middle School and, last summer, helped document and file the 9,000+ pictures we received from Von's Studio in Kewaunee.

So volunteer! Open up a whole new world for yourself!! We are always looking for new (and more!) volunteers to help. If you would be interested in volunteering at the Jail Museum, call Darlene Muellner (920-388-0117). If you would like to volunteer at the Algoma History Center, call Gloria Peterson (920-487-2862) or at the Center (920-487-2516) on Thursdays or Fridays between 12:30n and 4:00p.



Youngest volunteer Danae Srnka. Photo by Arletta Bertrand.

VOLUNTEER LUNCHEON

— Our annual Volunteer Luncheon was held on Oct. 20, 2012, at Grace Lutheran Church in Kewaunee. A very nice group attended; a potluck meal, prepared by the KCHS Board of Directors, was served, and door prizes were given away.

About 75 guests were present as we honored our volunteer of the year, Mildred Ihlenfeldt. Our oldest volunteer, Mildred is 95 years young and has been



2012 honoree was oldest volunteer Mildred Ihlenfeldt. Photo by Arletta Bertrand.

volunteering her time at the Kewaunee Jail Museum for the past close to 30 years, she thinks, and still enjoys doing it. She used to walk to the museum, although now her daughter brings her to volunteer. She enjoys visiting with the people who come in. We thank her for her time and dedication.

We would like to thank all our volunteers who donate their time and energy to helping us. Without them, it would not be possible to keep our Jail Museum and History Center open.

Our featured speaker was Mary Gaye Rank, adjunct faculty member at Northeast Wisconsin Technical College's Hillcrest Artisan Center in Kewaunee. She featured Quilt Class project displays. Mary spoke on the classes that are offered and how they are revitalizing the past with quilt-making by introducing it to younger people that never had access to it before. After a local resident donated a long-arm sewing machine to NWTC for making quilts, quilting became an instant hit! (Since then, a second machine has been purchased.) Mary said students at the Hillcrest Quilting Program have completed seven quilts since January that were donated to local service agencies for raffles, such as the Algoma Long-term Care Center, Aging Resources, Kewaunee Care Center and Family Services.



Guest speaker Mary Gaye Rank at Annual Volunteer Luncheon. Photo by Arletta Bertrand.

A JOURNEY THROUGH THE KEWAUNEE COUNTY HISTORY CENTER — Take a little trip through the Kewaunee County History Center in Algoma, located at 219 Steele Street. Below are some of the things you'll find when you visit:

Let's start with the Photo Section — Spend some time browsing through our many photograph books, featuring photos taken by Harold Heidman when he worked for the *Algoma Record-Herald*, then move on to photograph books featuring all the villages and towns in Kewaunee County. We also have photograph books dedicated to Veterans, Ships and Harbors, Schools, and Churches. You can see what the Kermis was like through photos, the Big Freeze in the Harbor of Algoma, what farming was like in the early years, and also how the villages have changed throughout the years. These photos will bring back a lot of history and memories of the past. (All copies of the photos are available for the price of \$3 each.)

Visit us on Thursdays and Fridays, 12:30-4:00p.



Tom Schuller in front of the KCHS veterans' display in Hamachek Hall (see next page). Photo by Jerry Abitz.

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

Our next newsletter will feature a journey through another area of our History Center.

IMPORTANT NOTE TO READERS — We are looking for more volunteers so we can extend our hours to cover more days.

VETERANS' DAY AT KEWAUNEE — The annual event was held at Hamachek Hall in Kewaunee on Saturday, Sept. 15. A display was mounted by Tom Schuller and was monitored by him and Nellie De Baker. It was a day highlighting veterans and their service to our country as well as information about services available to veterans in Kewaunee County. Food was served and a band performed.

HERITAGE FARM OKTOBERFEST — The KCHS was again invited to put on a display at the Heritage Farm, located south of Kewaunee on State Road 42 on Saturday, Oct. 27, for its annual Oktoberfest. Tom Schuller and Jerry Abitz were involved in setting up and supervising the display. Tom brought things from the KCHS collection; Richard Dörner supplied a military stein from his large collection along with a translation of the German



Tom Schuller hosting the KCHS booth at Oktoberfest at the Heritage Farm in October. Photo by Jerry Abitz.

inscriptions on its exterior. Attendees could watch a DVD, running continuously on a viewer, and peruse various books from a personal collection on display.

The origin of this annual celebration started with the wedding of a local prince on Oct. 12, 1810, to which the citizens of Munich (Germany) were invited to participate. This has evolved into a gigantic celebration in Munich, which hosts six million visitors annually. Today, any place where many of the inhabitants are of German origin will probably have their own version of Oktoberfest.

Our apologies — In the October 2012 issue (Volume XXIV, No. 4), there was a misspelling in the caption of the photo that accompanied the Pilsen Cemetery Walk segment of the "Report from the Trenches" article. Sherry Steffel was portraying her great-grandmother, Anna Witkova Halada (Witkova spelled with a "t," not an "l").

"Limekilns; Revisited" of the same issue — It was incorrectly stated that the limekiln found just west of Ellisville on County Road F was located on the Rentmeester property; the author unknowingly walked over an unmarked property line onto acreage actually owned by Randy Gruetzmacher.

Friends of the Kewaunee County Historical Society

~~ 2012 Donations ~~

While **County** is part of our official name, contrary to what some believe, we are not county-supported. We are a nonprofit, 501(c)3 organization, so your contributions can be used as a tax deduction when filing your return. We have no financial backers to support us. What assets we have are from **your** donations and monies inherited from several estates. It is your generosity that allows us to do what we do — collect and preserve the unique history of this county. We do this as a public service and do it gladly. No one on our staff is paid, but running an office requires expenditures for equipment, rent, utilities, supplies, and internet service. If you value what we are doing, we welcome your donations no matter how big or small. The end of the year is approaching, and some are still looking for those tax deductions. It is not too late to consider the KCHS.

Note: The listing below is based upon donations received August 27-November 19, 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 (see info below).

~~ 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: ARLETTABertrand@gmail.com

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KCHS

Historical Notes

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