



# *HISTORICAL NOTES*

VOLUME XXVI, No. 1

JANUARY 2014

## **CASCO — ONE MAN'S DREAM**

by Arletta Bertrand

When Edward Decker arrived, in 1856, in Kewaunee County from Casco, Maine (northeast of Portland), he had a vision — and plans — for building a prosperous town. Located in the center of the county, he founded the Village of Casco, naming it after the place of his birth.

Decker, 29, came up the Fox River by boat from Oshkosh to Green Bay and walked to Casco. He slept in the woods that first night; his first meal was a couple of squirrels he shot for breakfast. After seeing all the forests in the area, he put in a claim for all the land he could get. (He had previously operated a mill in partnership with timber baron Philetus Sawyer (1845-1851)). At one time, his holdings consisted of over 10,000 acres.

Casco became a lively place after his arrival, and all of it had Decker's brand. He decided to live in Casco and built himself a grand home referred to as the "White House," a show place of things collected during his travels. In later years, the home was made into apartments and then, in the spring of 1960, was destroyed by fire.

In 1864, Mr. Decker's goal was to bring the railroad to Casco. Decker was hurt in a buggy accident in 1868, injuring his hand so extensively it required amputation. But even being handicapped never stopped his dreams. By 1892, he was extending the railroad to Algoma and Sturgeon Bay.

Casco once had the longest bridge in Kewaunee County — the 420-foot Wodsedalek Bridge, although most probably will remember it better as the viaduct on Hwy. 54 on the eastern fringes of Casco. It was dismantled when the railroad tracks were removed in 1979, due to the discontinuation of the railroad coming to Casco.

Decker brought a number of businesses into Casco, one being the Casco Toy Factory (later renamed Casco Novelty Company), located near the railroad tracks, east of Casco along the road to Algoma (*see photo on next page*). In 1901, Decker persuaded E.A. Cannon to build his factory in Casco. The structure was 40 x 80 feet and two stories high. The factory employed 35 to 40 men. The toys were interchangeable blocks, fitting into each other to make any number of items or designs — cars, carts, trains, doll furniture and sleighs. Prices ranged from 20 cents to one dollar.

A postcard from 1907, that can be seen at the KCHS History Center in Kewaunee, showed several businesses including Casco Meat Market, the Spitzer

(cont. on page 2)



The home of Edward Decker on Main Street in Casco. It was a show place of things collected from his travels. Many people enjoyed his hospitality. In later years, it was made into apartments. In the spring of 1962, it was destroyed by fire. The U.S. Post Office occupies the site. Photo courtesy of KCHS photo collection.

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## CASCO — ONE MAN'S DREAM

(cont. from page 1)

Blacksmith Shop, and the Sinkler Tavern and Hotel, plus a print shop, wagon shop, and telephone exchange.

By 1915, Casco was a bustling town, but tragedy arrived in a fire that wiped out the business district of Casco. The fire was first discovered in the Defnet Hotel; an inadequate water supply was blamed for the extent of the fire's destruction, along with strong winds. While the fire was still going, James Sinkler rescued a barrel of liquor from his burning building and served refreshments to the crowds and firemen in the street.

All that remained of the business district were a store, a livery barn and a garage. But the people of Casco were not to be defeated. One week later, a hotel, blacksmith shop and telephone connections destroyed in the fire were re-established.

One of the buildings constructed was known as the "brick block;" it housed the Casco Post Office, the Bank of Casco and the railroad depot. The building was originally constructed to print a national magazine, although those plans never came to be. In later years, as many may remember, it housed the Hanmann Milling Co., later destroyed by fire in 1993. That piece of property remains vacant still today. (The Hanmann Milling Co., now operating at 106 Main Street, moved into an existing building that once housed the Lake-to-Lake dairy plant.)

In 1900, Mr. Decker donated land to build a church, known today as Holy Trinity Church. The original church still stands after being redecorated many times. Another building that remains is the Casco Park Inn, an eating establishment, which today houses the popular Moxi's Supper Club.

You cannot have a town without one of the most important businesses — the funeral home. The first one in Casco was built in 1904 by J.J. Wiesner, located on Church Street by the railroad tracks. In 1910, the business moved to the present site at the intersection of Wiesner and Main Streets, adding a furniture store. Now known as Wiesner & Massart, four generations have kept the business viable for over 100 years.

The schools completed the Village of Casco. While Casco's school history dates back to the 1850s, when the Casco public school opened in 1915, it was a combined graded and high school. In 1939, the original two-story schoolhouse was built; it later became a middle school after the school district consolidated with Luxemburg in 1967, moving the high school to Luxemburg.

At the age of 75, Decker was a director on the boards of banks in Kewaunee, Casco, Luxemburg, Sturgeon Bay, Two Rivers, Green Bay, Brillion and Chicago; he also managed the Ahnapee & Western Railroad, owned two newspapers (in Algoma and Green Bay) as well as *National Magazine*.

Edward Decker loved the Village of Casco — it was his pride and joy. On July 11, 1911, at the age of 84, he died at his home in Casco. None of his four wives were at his funeral; each preceded him in death as did three of his six children.

Casco, through one man's dream, had it all — businesses, hotels, bars and trains, and, through the passing of time, has lost most of it, leaving only a shadow of Edward Decker's great plans.



The toy factory in Casco, built by Edward Decker. Photo courtesy of KCHS photo collection.

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**Author's note** — Research for the above article came from files at the Kewaunee County Historical Society's History Center in Kewaunee. Much of the information is from articles published in local newspapers which contain no indication of author, sometimes without a date. Newspapers: *Algoma Record-Herald* (although an incomplete list, these are dates known: August 31, 1967; June 2, 1993; April 28, 1994) and *Kewaunee Star*.

# 40 YEARS AND COUNTING...

by Jerry Abitz

How did I ever become associated with the local historical society? I moved here from Appleton in 1956 for a teaching job. As an outsider, I had no knowledge of the community's history. However, history has always fascinated me.

In 1973, I was an elementary teacher in Green Bay. Needing something to spice up my bulletin boards for a unit, I approached a friend, then a director of the Kewaunee County Historical Society, to see if I could borrow some of the early historic photos they were collecting.

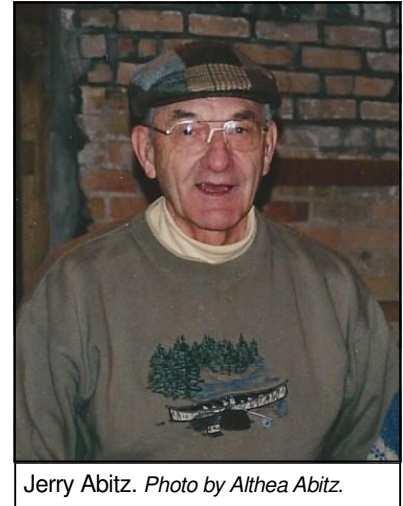
After the unit was completed, I returned those photos to my friend, Pearl Fletcher, of Casco. She casually asked if I might be interested in replacing her on the KCHS board. I thought, "Why not? It will be a good way to get to know the history of my adopted home." So I answered in the affirmative. Within the week, I received a formal invitation and became a board member.

My first board meeting was an eye-opener. I could sense there was some sort of tension. Subsequent meetings revealed there were two factions with opposing views. I, the ever-optimistic guy that I am, was surprised. I called the ex-president, trying to reconcile the two sides. With no resolution, I rapidly became disillusioned. I wrote a letter of resignation and carried it to subsequent meetings, but never submitted it, hoping things would stabilize. Eventually, the tension subsided and the group moved on. After 18 months, I tore up the letter.

During my second year, I was elected vice-president. Since the organization had very little money, we dealt primarily with the operation of the Jail Museum during the summer tourist season. Our annual meeting that year was held in Dyckesville. In the absence of our president (who arrived late), I presided. Then I was elected president! Did I want this additional responsibility? (I was already president of the Luxemburg-Casco School Board, president of CESA-9<sup>1</sup>, Sunday School superintendent, and a Sunday School teacher at my church.) Apparently, I did, because I accepted!

Things continued at an almost even keel. A representative of the Wisconsin Historical Society approached the Kewaunee County Board and asked

for permission to transfer the Decker Collection<sup>2</sup> to Madison in order to organize and catalog it, thus making it available to researchers. Once accomplished, the collection could be housed either at their headquarters in Madison or at the newly-formed



Jerry Abitz. Photo by Althea Abitz.

Area Research Center at UW—Green Bay<sup>3</sup> where the collection would be under controlled climatic conditions as well as close supervision of library workers to avoid pilfering. When this news perked down to our organization, the tension surfaced again. Meanwhile, this heritage was deteriorating while under cots in the jail cells in the Museum and in the county vault.

I attended meetings of the County Board's Properties Committees to see if there were any workable solutions to this stand-off. One prominent member said to me in private, "Jerry! You're very naive! Once the State Historical Society gets their hands on the Decker Collection, they will pilfer the important documents. Look at the problem we had in getting back the George Washington document<sup>4</sup> that we loaned to them from the Decker Collection. We had to get a court order to force Madison to return that document." The stalemate lasted a number of years.

Eventually a resolution was passed by the KCHS board whereby we were to transfer that part of the Decker Collection stored in the Museum's jail cells to a locked room within the Kewaunee Library. Within 24 hours, five board members resigned under protest, two of which also served as our co-curators. Now what? I envisioned myself spending many hours away from my Dyckesville home to keep the Museum open that summer.

Within a week, I received a phone call from Catherine Hanrahan, a retired school librarian residing in Kewaunee, who offered her services. She was a godsend! She possessed the organizational skills to keep the Museum open and also came up with at least two outstanding displays that are, still today, inside once-vacant jail cells. The remaining board members united behind her and, gratefully, all ten-

(cont. on page 4)

## 40 YEARS AND COUNTING...

(cont. from page 3)

sions ceased. From that point, we moved forward and never looked back.

And, yes, we finally resolved the Decker Collection dilemma. Those historical records are safely housed at the Area Research Center in the Cofrin Library at UW—Green Bay.

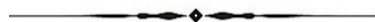
During this 40-year period as a KCHS director, I came in contact with many outstanding board members and volunteers, far too numerous to mention. Some got us on a financial footing we never had; another got us started on our huge photo collection; others took over the design and installation of our heritage signs while yet another got us started in videotaping of various citizens. The publication of a newsletter and the establishment of the History Center came from individual suggestions or initiatives.

This organization has grown and matured. From a small beginning running a seasonal museum, we expanded to issuing a newsletter, opening a research/history center to house our collections and make them available for public research. In 2005, our Research Center received the Governor's Archives Award. We erected 29 historical signs, scattered around the county; published books and brochures;


collected information on Kewaunee County churches, schools and cheese factories; hosted area society conventions; cooperated with Agricultural History and Resources in its projects; and displayed artifacts at the annual Madison conventions, sponsored by the Wisconsin Historical Society.

As a result of our activities, I, personally, have served on the Wisconsin Council for Local History and was part of a special committee in getting legislation passed that resulted in the formation of the School Services Bureau within the Wisconsin Historical Society. This bureau has written textbooks and provided services to all Wisconsin schools to support their teaching of Wisconsin history. Thanks to my former student Lary Swoboda who nominated me, because of my connection to the KCHS, for membership on the Wisconsin Historical Preservation Review Board<sup>5</sup> where I served for six-and-a-half years.


How can 40 years pass so quickly? I guess it was because we were so busy enjoying what we were doing. Looking back, I believe we have ensured this organization will be around for a long, long time! It goes without saying that I am very proud to have been part of that!



### THIS ISSUE'S AUTHORS...

 **Jerry Abitz** (see page 3) — 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](mailto:gabitz@centurytel.net).



 **Aretta Bertrand** (see pages 1 and 5) — Born in the Town of Lincoln (Kewaunee County), Aretta 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 Kewaunee History Center. If you'd like to contact her, send an email to [aretta.bertrand@gmail.com](mailto:aretta.bertrand@gmail.com).



<sup>1</sup>An educational agency of the state, headquartered in Green Bay, that offered services to small area school districts.

<sup>2</sup>The generally-accepted "Father of Kewaunee County," Edward Decker of Casco bequeathed artifacts from his numerous travels, books, memorabilia and business papers to the county shortly before his death in the second decade of the twentieth century. It was to be displayed in the Courthouse in perpetuity.

<sup>3</sup>Located on the 7<sup>th</sup> floor of the Cofrin Library at UW—Green Bay campus

<sup>4</sup>An original document that Edward Decker had apparently purchased, discovered in his collection along with a John Jay letter written while he presided over the Second Continental Congress in the 1780s before our Constitution was written and accepted by the thirteen American colonies.

<sup>5</sup>The group that reviews nominations and determines what is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

## WAR WAS HELL ON THE HOME FRONT TOO

By Arletta Bertrand

When World War I broke out, every state was asked by the Government's Selective Service Act to set up a draft system for service in the military. As soon as the draft became a certainty, the Government appointed a Draft Board for each county. All together, 3,283 Kewaunee County men registered for the draft; of this number, 414 were actually inducted into the service. Because of the high number of draftees, to speed up the applications, questionnaires were sent out to men between the ages of 21 to 30, and committees were set up in each town to help them fill out the questionnaires.

Next came time for the average citizen to help — help raising money for the war effort. In Kewaunee County, over 350 “unsung heroes” struggled to carry out a series of drives and campaigns during the war, one of which was the sale of Liberty Bonds. The first and second Liberty Bond sales were not popular because people were not urged to buy the bonds and did not understand their purpose. A quota had been set by the government, but neither the first nor second campaign met the desired number. The third and fourth campaigns produced better results because people in the County supported the war, and each person was urged to buy a number of bonds; the amount they were asked to purchase was determined from the assessed valuation of each person's property. The total quota set by the government was \$1,816,950. The total amount raised was \$2,281,200, far exceeding the goal.

The government also sponsored a War Savings Stamp Campaign. Kewaunee County sold 41,056 stamps, bringing in a total of \$174,161, although this was only 61 percent of its quota. In all the campaigns, the County received praise from the District and Federal Directors for the spirit exhibited by both the workers and the people.

It was in September of 1917 that the government



A military helmet, medals and other items from World War I on display at the History Center. Photo by Arletta Bertrand.

realized the importance of conserving coal and petroleum on the home front in order to have adequate supplies to transport men, supplies and food for the war. It had a big impact

on the average person's everyday life. Later that fall, the supply of coal was so scarce that dealers could only sell 250 pounds of coal at a time to each consumer, which brought on the use of more wood for heat. The slogan to conserve coal was “Sift your ashes and save that shovelful for

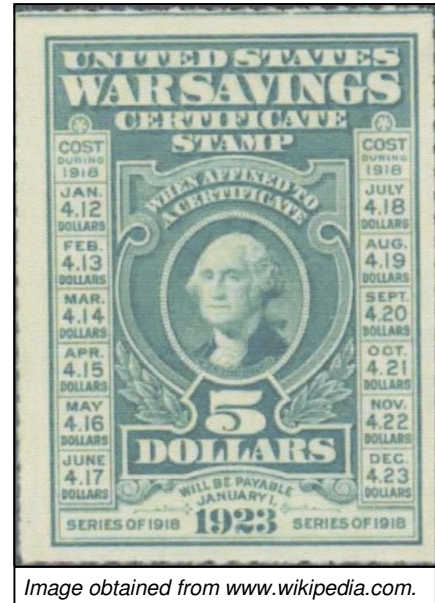


Image obtained from [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com).

Uncle Sam!” Through the collective efforts of all, Kewaunee County made it through the winter.

A number of scheduled campaigns were implemented to conserve fuel, including “Lightless Nights” — on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays, all lights of a display or business nature were prohibited. “Gasless Sundays” meant no driving on Sundays. If unnecessary driving was observed, you could have your driver's license taken away. “Blue Monday” was implemented where all places of business were closed on Mondays.

The slogan “Food will win the war” brought on the sacrifice of “Meatless Tuesdays” and “Wheatless Wednesdays.” To curb the excessive use of wheat flour, the government decreed that wheat flour had to be bought on a fifty-fifty basis. That meant the customer had to purchase an equal amount of some substitute (e.g., potato flour, cornmeal, oatmeal, barley flour, corn starch, corn flour, rice, or soybean flour). Sugar was the next food put on the restricted list. In order to keep an account of sugar sales, stores actually had to keep a record of the sugar sales. The signing of the Armistice did not relieve the food situation. For a long time after, sugar bowls were missing from the tables in hotels and eating houses. Sugar substitutes were sold and used until the spring of 1919.

By their sacrifice and pulling together, the people of Kewaunee County did their share to help win the war.

### References —

All information for this article was obtained from *Kewaunee County Honor Roll and War History, World War 1917-1919*; compiled and edited by Harry H. Heidmann and Lester C. Heidmann; printed and published by the Algoma Printing Company, Algoma Wis. 1920.

## NEWS FROM THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

### Report from the Trenches

#### MUSEUM REPORT

— Although the Jail Museum is closed for the season, the artifacts are there year around. As part of the recent holiday program in Kewaunee, the building was open to visitors. Probably the premier artifact is a wooden carving of “Custer's Last Stand” located in the upstairs hallway. Apparently when the Museum was being organized in 1969, it was donated to the KCHS by the Jos. Svoboda Co. There are other Svoboda Co. carvings (donated later) that are on display either at the Museum or the History Center.

This particular carving was done by Robert Petscheider, a skilled employee of the aforementioned company. It was based on a painting commissioned by the Anheuser-Busch Brewery of St. Louis. Posters based upon this painting were distributed to taverns serving their beer as part of a promotional campaign. This carving was commissioned on a handshake but, when it was to be delivered to St. Louis, the person there making this deal had passed away. The brewery would not accept it, so this carving remained in Kewaunee.



Photo by Roger R. Ruhlin.

#### VOLUNTEER LUNCHEON

— The 2013 Volunteer Luncheon was held on Saturday, Oct. 19, at the KCHS History Center. Very well attended, we hosted over 65 volunteers and their guests. Our Volunteer of the Year was Richard Dorner, the new History Center coordinator. We would like to thank Richard for all the hours he has spent organizing the Center after our recent move in May. The second award was presented to Virginia Kostka, the retiring museum coordinator. We would like to thank Virginia for her many years of volunteer service, making sure the Museum was open every day of the tourist season. Our speaker for the afternoon was John Griffith; his presentation was on “Great Lakes Car Ferries.” Lunch was served by the Board of



Directors. Photos by Arletta Bertrand.

**DVDs FOR SALE** — (1) John Griffith's presentation at the 2013 Volunteers Luncheon about the Great Lakes Car Ferries, and (2) Tom Schuller's presentation on Kewaunee Ships of War. Both are available for \$10 each at

the Kewaunee History Center. If you would like one (or both) mailed, add \$2 extra for mailing cost.

#### SPECIAL FIRST-TIME VISITOR TO THE HISTORY CENTER

— A special visitor came into the KCHS History Center on Thursday, Sept. 5. William Kuehl from Kewaunee stopped in to visit with us on his 103<sup>rd</sup> birthday! We were very honored to host him — it was his first visit with us. He spent about an hour looking at our displays.



Photo by Arletta Bertrand.

**COMPUTER UPDATE** — We would like to thank the following people and business for their donations to our computer fund: The Oconomowoc Area Foundation's Richard R. and Karen Bertrand Charitable Fund for a \$2,000 grant, as well as support from the Bank Of Luxemburg, Baylake Bank, Union State Bank and Kewaunee Fabrication. Because of their generous donations, we were able to purchase two new computers, monitors, keyboards, scanners and printers.



Richard and Karen Bertrand.  
Photo supplied.

Wow! This is great! We really appreciate their generosity.

**THE WINTER LECTURE SERIES** — The annual KCHS Winter Lecture Series is happening during the month of February. This year's speakers and topics are:

- Feb. 1 — Immigration Experience by Jerry Abitz
- Feb. 8 — Women in the Military by Nellie DeBaker
- Feb. 15 — The Old Story Teller by Tom Schuller
- Feb. 22 — Germany and Bohemia by Richard Dorner

The presentations will be held at the Kewaunee County History Center at 217 Ellis Street, Kewaunee, on the above Saturday afternoons at 1:30p. Refreshments provided.

#### HISTORY CENTER OPENS ADDITIONAL DAY!

— Thanks to our two new volunteers, Betty Marcks and Vern Martin, we have expanded the number of days that the History Center is open. The new schedule is Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays from 10:00a to 4:00p. When the weather is inclement, we advise calling (920-388-0369) to make sure we are open.

#### OUTREACH TO OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

— Tom Schuller and Jerry Abitz staffed a display at the Agriculture Heritage and Resource's Oktoberfest at the historic Heritage Farm, south of Kewaunee. Abitz also gave a presentation at the Howard-Suamico Historical Society's meeting on the KCHS Jail Museum as well as a two-hour lecture for Door County's Learning in Retirement program on “The Immigrant Experience.” Al Briggs gave a presentation on blacksmithing; Bevan Laird talked about the KCHS History Center, while

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

Nellie DeBaker was coordinator for a number of classes for this same group. Every third Thursday of the month, Abitz gives an informal presentation to those in the county-sponsored adult daycare, Journeys Group, housed at St. John's Lutheran Church in Luxemburg.

**WHS CONVENTION/WORKSHOP IN WISCONSIN RAPIDS** — Julie Bloor, Mary Reckelberg, Judy Srnka, and Jerry and Althea Abitz attended this event held at the Hotel Mead on October 12-13. Workshops were held on various topics of interest to members of local historical societies as well as those interested in historic preservation. It was a chance to find answers, learn about changes and new technologies, recharge one's batteries, meet members from other societies, and view various displays. A tour of the area's cranberry marshes was offered that Mary and Judy attended on Saturday afternoon. Next year, this event will be held at Elkhart Lake at the Osthof Resort.

**NEW AT THE KEWAUNEE HISTORY CENTER** — A military uniform and two belts were donated to the Kewaunee History Center by James Linzmeier, the son-in-law of Theophile "Phil" Bader. The son of Mr. and Mrs. Jos. Bader from the Town of Red River, Phil served in WWI, entering the service on May 29, 1918, with Co. G. 18<sup>th</sup> Inf. 1<sup>st</sup> Div. Service in France and Germany, and was discharged at Camp Grant. This uniform and photos of WWI can be seen at the History Center. (Note — Photos and info from *Kewaunee County Honor Roll*



and War History, World War 1917-1919; compiled and edited by Harold Heidmann; published in 1920 by the Algoma Printing Company, Algoma, Wis.) Photos by Arletta Bertrand.

**Other new acquisitions —**

- Recently received are three large aerial views (circa 1940) — two picture the harbor and city of Kewaunee (focus on Courthouse Square; *see below*), and the third is a view of Algoma. These are "on loan" from the Joski Family of Kewaunee. The photos of Kewaunee are the welcoming scene as you walk into the new History Center in Kewaunee.

- Chief Kah-Que-Dos' (or Ke-toose's) life story from May 27, 1922, is now part of the Native American Book in the KCHS collection, based primarily on Geo. Wings' writings. This [life story] paper was prepared by the original Kewaunee County Historical Society; Geo. D. Wing was one of the principle attendees at this historic occasion.

- Two copies of the 1920 Bank of Luxemburg Stockholders and Directors landscape photos with identifications — one was from the Bank of Luxemburg, the other a framed copy from Ervin Stahl.

The Center continues to accept new "old" items to enrich our collection about the local history of Kewaunee County. If anyone has materials they would like to consider donating, call the Center (920-388-0369) on Wednesdays, Thursdays or Fridays, or you can stop in with the item(s). Our volunteers will be glad to help you. We prefer identified items and materials, especially photographs. However, photographs without identification really are not useful to us.

*Thank you  
for your support  
of the KCHS  
History Center*



**Friends of the Kewaunee County Historical Society**

**~~ 2013 Donations ~~**

With winter upon us, please consider making a contribution to the Kewaunee County Historical Society. Moving to a new [for us] and larger location has added overhead expenses, including a higher heating bill. Our volunteers put in many hours to keep the History Center and the Museum open as do those involved with researching and writing for the newsletter. We do these things because we feel it's worthwhile. We hope you feel the same. In every way, it's your support that ensures our future.

**Note:** The listing below is based upon donations received through November 30, 2013. 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). As a 501(c)(3) organization, all donations are tax-deductible.

~~ **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:** [arletta.bertrand@gmail.com](mailto:arletta.bertrand@gmail.com)

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### KCHS Historical Notes

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Courthouse Square at 613 Dodge Street  
Kewaunee WI 54216  
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**September - May by appointment.**

**Summer (Memorial Day through Labor Day) —**

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

#### KEWAUNEE COUNTY HISTORY CENTER

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Phone: 920-388-0369

Email: [kchistory219@yahoo.com](mailto:kchistory219@yahoo.com)

**Open Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays —**

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**Other days/times by appointment only.**

If inclement weather, please call ahead.

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