



Princeton WI Historical Society Newsletter

630-632 West Water Street, PO Box 71 Princeton, Wisconsin 54968

December 2020

Vol. 2020, No. 4



Merry Christmas

Plans for the New Year



Looking Back

Every year is worth preserving in the historical record, but 2020 has been a really landmark year. Here are some of our accomplishments:

We collected pandemic-related stories and artifacts from local residents to preserve for the future, and showed you how Princeton residents dealt with epidemics in 1902.

We helped Joan Petruske Guckenberger research her new book on the Canadian Club.

We made major progress on building the new Folklore museum, including the floors, walls, ceiling, electrical, plumbing, document archives, and computer archives.

We revived our newsletter, created a web page (hosted by the public library's website) and joined Facebook, gaining many new followers.

Provided the pandemic allows us, we have big ideas for 2021. All events are subject to change.

Saturday May 1st: Stone House Museum Opens

Take a tour of Princeton's history. Every room tells a story! Open Saturdays from 10am to 3pm through Aug. 21st. Admission free, donations welcome.

Saturday July 17th, 10am-2pm:

Grand Opening of the new Folklore Museum!

Presentations, refreshments, ribbon cutting, museum tours and more. See our fabulous new exhibits!

Saturday August 28th: Cemetery Walking Tours at 1:30 and 4pm with the City of Princeton.

At 6pm, join us for "Suds, Speakeasies, and Scawflaws!" Try an authentic 1920s drink and listen to local author Gavin Schmitt's presentation on the crime, gangsters, and bootlegging of the Roaring 20s in Wisconsin. Food available for purchase. Location, cost to be determined.

Saturdays in October, 7-11pm: Experience thrills, chills, and scares in our haunted museum! Small groups leave every 20 minutes. Waiting guests will hear short presentations about real-life horror in Princeton. Admission is \$10 for adults (18+), \$5 for kids under 18.

Saturday November 27th: Christmas in Princeton

Come on down to our museum open house, or have a meal at our food booth at the craft fair!

Museum Progress: In Living Color

"A historian has many duties. Allow me to remind you of two which are important. The first is not to slander; the second is not to bore." - Voltaire

Everyone can agree that history is important. However, this basic understanding does not help people appreciate it. Many people (too many) see the preservation of history as a dull pursuit best left to old men in stately universities. Moreover, history itself is often reduced to a list of names and dates, a collection of dim photos and dusty objects under glass. With this kind of image, it is no wonder that most young people aren't interested in history. And of course, this results in that famous consequence: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." Rescuing ourselves from this fate takes creativity and daring. It means making history an immersive experience that touches people personally. It has to be made more than an academic subject— people must feel that history is a river in which we all swim. Our passing through it may or may not alter its course, but to look up from the water immediately around us and see the river's broad sweep and curve is an act of discovery that moves the soul.

All this is to explain why the Princeton Historical Society's new Folklore Museum is now beginning to add a feature that some might consider superfluous decoration: a large mural. Preliminary work is well underway, with local artist Mary Lind preparing surfaces and painting backgrounds. "Oh, that's nice," is probably the most enthusiastic response that can be expected from this announcement. *But this is so much more than a mural.*



There will, of course, be stunning scenes painted by renowned artist Robin Wallenfang. Locally well-known works of hers grace the interior of Ford's Gathering in Princeton, Bellisimo's in Berlin, the Berlin and Ripon libraries, the Green Lake Conference Center, the "God Bless America House" on highway 23, and of course Wallenfang's in Green Lake. With Robin's 30+ years of experience in creating grand and gorgeous designs filled with light, this project will certainly be awe-inspiring. However, calling this project a mural would be a little like calling the White House an office building.



Art by Robin Wallenfang

Aside from the glowing illustrations, this "mural" will contain motion-activated sound effects, mounted artifacts, and interactive elements that carry you through a journey of the senses. It will be, as Historical Society Vice President Vicki Wielgosh says, "the heart and the foundation of the museum." And what will this display depict? A river, of course. The Fox River, which has played such a key role in our history, but also river of time, showing the changes we have come through, sweeping us along in its wake. For anyone who does not already have an appreciation of history, this project will help them gain an understanding of how past events, past lives, have shaped our present and will continue to shape our future. It will entertain and delight young people while also touching the spirits of older generations.

Artist Robin Wallenfang is generously donating much of her time, but because of its ambitious scope, the project will still cost several thousand dollars. The Historical Society is seeking donations towards the creation of this centerpiece. If you would like to contribute, please send checks to the Princeton Historical Society, PO Box 71, Princeton WI 54968.



Historical Society Board of Directors Elections to Be Held By Mail



Each year at our annual public meeting, our paid members elect two people to the Board of Directors. This year, the pandemic has made it unwise to meet, so voting will be conducted by mail and email. Fortunately, the voting this year is fairly uncomplicated. Unfortunately, this is due to the loss of two of our most valued board members. President Marjorie Mlodzik and Jan Manweiler are retiring from the Board (although not from the Historical Society). Their many contributions to our Historical Society will not go unremembered (look for an article in our next newsletter). Longtime Historical Society members Joe Wyse and Jim Frasier propose to fill the two vacancies, making this election an uncontested swap, unless anyone else wishes to step up and fill a role. Once elected, board members have an election amongst themselves to fill officer positions.

Please Vote for Historical Society Board of Director Candidates

Send in your votes by January 4th:

By mail to P.O. Box 71, Princeton WI 54968

Via email at princetonhistsociety@gmail.com

Vote for TWO Board Members:



Jim Frasier



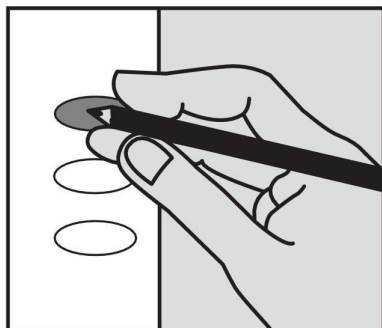
Joe Wyse



Write In Candidate: _____



Write In Candidate: _____



If you email your ballot,
don't worry about the
bubbles— just send us the
names of the people you
are voting for.



Send a Smile With a Card



Louise Molter, a new support of ours, has handcrafted dozens of gorgeous greeting cards with the help of Elizabeth Ladwig. The cards feature vintage photos from Princeton history, and are appropriate for all occasions. Most cards contain a paragraph about the featured picture. Some, like the one above, are specially made for Christmas. If you would like to purchase a card, please contact Elizabeth Ladwig at 920-229-9436. The price is \$3 per card. All proceeds benefit the Historical Society.



Christmas has always been a big deal in Princeton! This undated photo of Christmas trees on Water Street was taken on the west end of the street, facing east. In the upper left of the picture, you can see the red stone bank building (now River Bank Dry Goods).

This is one of several scenes available on our beautifully handcrafted greeting cards.

VFW Pledges Yearly Donation

In years past, Princeton's VFW Post 10452 has been a generous donor. Now they have pledged to make their donations an annual event. We can't thank them enough for their support!



Roger Wolff, representing the Princeton VFW, presents a donation to the Princeton Historical Society (Vice President Vicki Wielgosh accepting).

Donations like this have enabled the historical society to put the finishing touches on the new Folklore museum Phase One construction and keep doing important work to save and share Princeton's heritage.

The Black Bridge's Birthday

The main span of Princeton's "Black Bridge" was built in 1901, making 2021 its 120th birthday.

This railroad bridge was originally built as a swing bridge, meaning the entire bridge would pivot on its central support and instead of connecting the two banks, both ends would hang over the river.

This allowed steamboats and other large vessels to pass through. Today of course the bridge doesn't move, the tracks were removed, and most of the structure in the middle of the river is gone.

Unfortunately, much of the bridge's beauty is gone too, covered by graffiti and litter. If anyone is interested in helping to organize a spring cleanup of the bridge and trail, please email Historical Society Secretary Laura at director@princetonpublib.org.



Bartel's New Book Battles "Fake News"

Mark Twain once said, "The very ink with which history is written is merely fluid prejudice." Local author Roger Bartel might agree with that, but he would also probably insist that the famous author's real name is, in fact, Samuel Clemens.

Bartel abhors untruths, and pursues historical accuracy with untiring zeal. On his website, princetonhistory.com, he calls the City of Princeton's Historical Walking Tour "riddled with mistakes," and says that more than half of the plaques on historical buildings in Princeton's downtown "include factual and 'historic' errors." Although a lifetime member of our organization, he has not always supported our efforts. He wrote, "The Princeton Historical Society has been telling an undocumented tall tale of its building's origin for years..." Ouch. Bartel insists that he's not trying to be mean. His long journalistic career has simply made him into a stickler for facts.

Part of the problem lies in Princeton's wealth of history. So much has happened here that stories tend to get muddled or exaggerated. One example Roger Bartel gives on his blog is this: Herman E. Megow has often been described as Princeton's first cigar store owner and first barber. However, Megow actually purchased his cigar store from someone else in town, who had purchased it from someone else previously. He was not the first barber either—a Mr. A. Parker preceded him by at least five years.

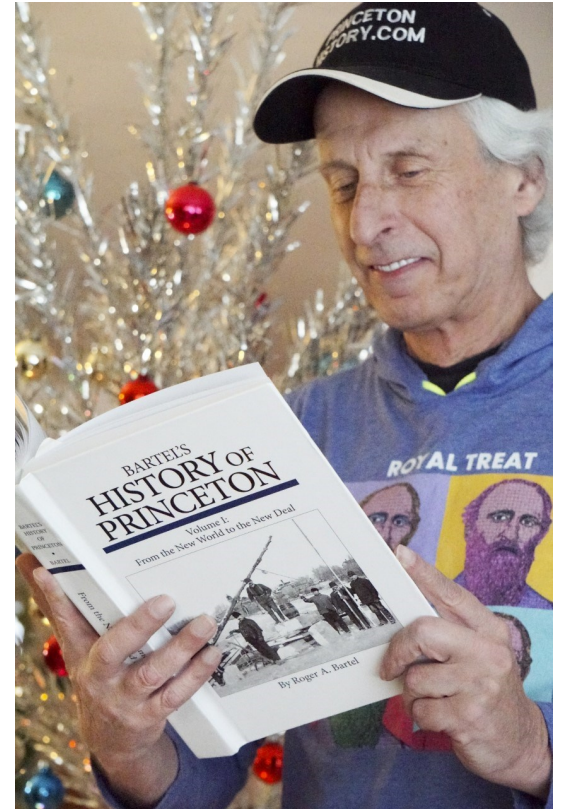


Photo contributed by Roger Bartel

These "false firsts" might have begun as oral stories from well-meaning tale-spinners, or might have begun with an inaccurate column in the Princeton Times-Republic in 1948. In any case, Elaine Reetz repeated the Megow stories in her book "The Trail of the Serpent," written with Robert Gard and published in 1973. Other errors from this book were repeated in "Quas Qui," 1973. Then the untruths were repeated again in Reetz's follow-up book, "Come Back in Time," published 1982.

These errors are understandable. Megow was a very early, and very important, settler of Princeton. What's more, unlike other barbers and cigar store owners, he stuck around. History is often written by, and about, the people who stay in one place and do the most for their community. Nor can we blame those who have relied on previously published books—even if one is aware of a possible error, it's difficult to access the original source documents and double check information.

Not to worry! Surely we can now rely on Roger Bartel's new book, "Bartel's History of Princeton Volume I."

Mr. Bartel cautions that the book is neither a pretty "coffee table book" nor a humanistic collection of stories, and as a result may be a little dry:

"I am nervous the book is not what people expect, and I don't want anyone to feel they were misled. I am often drawn to this quote from area historian Elaine Reetz, who passed away in 2003: 'While dates and times are important in a chronological history of any community or city, it is the nostalgic memories that most people enjoy reading.' My book is the former not the latter. It is a chronological history based on news stories – "dates and times" – from the Princeton Republic from 1867 to 1937, so if you are not interested in facts, this is not the book for you."

Available starting December 18th, Volume 1 covers Princeton history up until 1939. The hardcover, 536 page book will be for sale at two Water Street shops in Princeton, Short Street Market and Daiseye. The price is \$30. Mr. Bartel is offering free delivery to any Princeton Historical Society member within the 54968 zip code area. You can contact him at roger.bartel@gmail.com. He plans on writing Volume II in 2022.



Cold Treats, Warm Hearts

We recently received a nice donation from "The Ice Bowl" at 725 W Main Street in Princeton. The ice cream shop and restaurant regularly donates cash to local civic organizations with their "piggy bank" program, and have given to many groups already, including the Princeton Fire Department, Neshkoro and Green Lake food pantries, and Princeton's American Legion and VFW. Thank you to owners Keith and Elizabeth Barzyk !

The couple opened The Ice Bowl on Labor Day Week-end this year. Their ice cream selection includes some deliciously funny flavors like "Exhausted Parent" (bourbon, espresso and chocolate chunks) and "This \$&@! Just Got Serious" (caramel, sea salt fudge, cashews).

While The Ice Bowl will be closed for the winter, in the spring they will reopen, and they hope to offer kayaking and tubing rentals. The Green Bay Packers themed building was formerly "All in Good Taste."

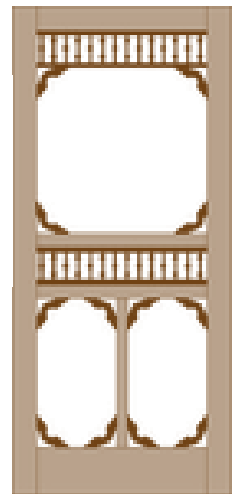


Can You Help? Items Wanted

Our historical society and museum building are maintained entirely by donations. As such, we have a very limited budget. You could help us a great deal by donating any of the following items. It's the season of giving— can you spare any of these?

Donation Requests

- Tool box and tools for every day maintenance and repairs
- Six old wooden screen doors
- A pot belly wood stove
- Pre-1950s food containers, including flour and sugar sacks, packages, boxes, tins, etc
- Skeleton Keys
- Large leaded glass lamp shade, 18" in diameter or more, for a special display
- Clear plastic sign holders for signage and documents
- Sturdy yard signs for our programs and fundraising efforts
- Acid-free, archival quality photo albums and artifact boxes
- 100% cotton rags/material for cleaning
- Armless swivel office chairs
- An old hay mow ladder for our farm exhibit



Contact Us!

Have a question about local history,
genealogy, or our organization?
Interested in donating? Want a topic featured in
the next newsletter? Please email or write to:

princetonhistsociety@gmail.com

630 West Water Street

PO Box 71

Princeton, Wisconsin 54968

Don't Forget to "Like" Us on Facebook!



Princeton WI Historical Society



**DON'T FORGET TO
PAY YOUR 2021
MEMBERSHIP
DUES**

Volunteers Wanted

Please call Chris at 708-425-0921 or Vicki at 920-291-5434 for more information on volunteering.

Our museum and historical society is entirely run on donations. This year is an especially difficult one, as we are unable to do our usual fundraisers because of the virus shutdowns. Please consider sending even \$5.00. Address below. Thank you!

Become / Remain a Historical Society Member!

- ___ \$2 Annual Student Membership (high school and lower grades)
- ___ \$10 Annual Individual Membership
- ___ \$15 Annual Family Membership (parents + children under age 18)
- ___ \$100 Lifetime Individual Membership
- ___ \$250 Lifetime Family Membership
- ___ \$500 Charter Membership
- ___ \$1,000 Donor Membership
- ___ \$5,000 Patron Membership
- ___ \$10,000 Founder Membership

**I am interested in helping with
(please check one or more):**

- ☐ Computer Entry
- ☐ Special Events
- ☐ Building Construction
- ☐ Giving Tours at the Museum
- ☐ Staffing Our Fleamarket Booth
- ☐ Fundraising

Name: _____

Street Address: _____ Apt. # _____

City, State _____ ZIP: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Cut out this form and send in your membership today! Make checks payable to the Princeton, WI Historical Society, and send them to PO Box 71, Princeton, WI 54968. All donations are tax deductible. Thank you!