



Princeton WI Historical Society Newsletter

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

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The 1888 Witch Trial

One hundred and thirty three years ago, strange things began to happen in the home of William Roberts, a Princeton farmer. Strange writing appeared on the walls, food went missing, and blood spots appeared on freshly washed sheets. One night Mr. Robert's pocket watch vanished from his bedside table and appeared in a downstairs cupboard. Mrs. Roberts found her dishes and kitchen utensils moved to the corn crib, under the wagon shed, or missing entirely. One day, a pail of water was seemingly transported from the table to the top of the house.

Mr. Robert's brother Edward was visiting with his wife and witnessed similar incidents in the home—lunch disappeared from the dining table, food went missing from the cupboards, and Mr. Robert's watch vanished again, this time from inside his pocket.

The final straw happened in March of 1888. Mr. Roberts was driving his two children to school in a sleigh. On the way, he offered a ride to a neighbor, Mrs. Albrecht. That night his children Anna (15) and John (12) came home deeply upset. When they had opened their dinner pails at noon, they found all their food "wound with human hair," and had to throw it away.

Mr. Roberts decided that Mrs. Albrecht was the cause of all the family troubles, and publicly accused her of being a witch. He warned her several times to stop tormenting his household, to no avail. As the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel reported,

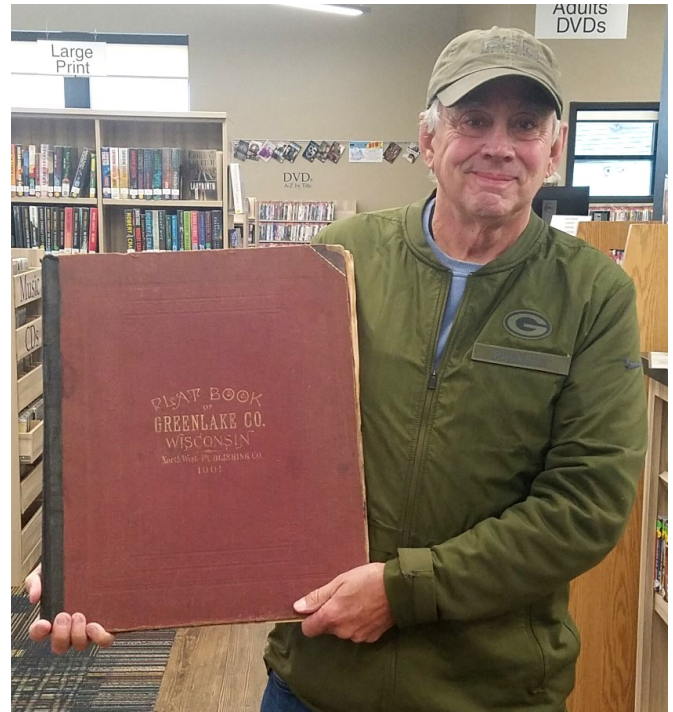
"The manifestations did not stop and so the other day he took his shotgun and started out to kill Mrs. Albrecht. He told his intentions to some of the neighbor and they induced him to postpone the murder. He insisted that her death alone could dispel the evil charm and vowed before an awe-stricken throng that he would speedily become her executioner, saying that even were it his own father, who had so possessed his family and premises, he would annihilate him. It became necessary that Mr. Roberts be placed in custody before he harmed the supposed witch, and he was therefore arrested..."



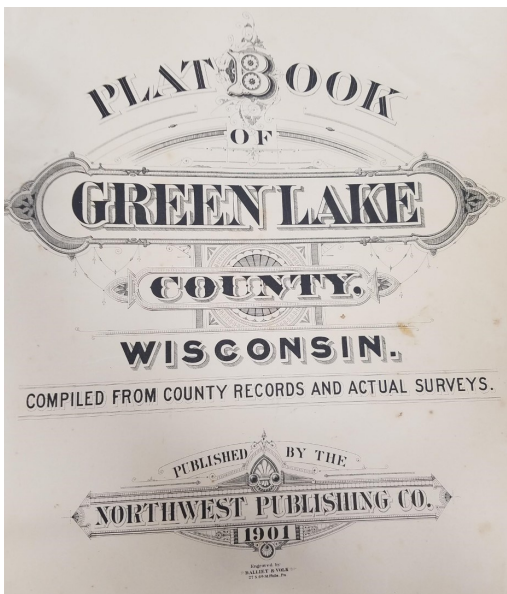
The case was brought before Squire McConnell, a judge in Green Lake (then Dartford). The trial was so sensational that people arrived from all as far away as Chicago to watch the trial. Judge McConnell had each member of the Roberts family testify, and it gradually came out that the children had created the entire hoax. It was Anna and John who had moved things around the house, stolen food, and left ink scrawls and blood for their parents to find. Their motive? The family had considered moving out of the country and into Princeton. Mrs. Roberts, however, didn't want to. The children were hoping to frighten her into changing her mind. The case was dismissed, although Mr. Roberts was only convinced of Mrs. Albrecht's innocence when Bob Schilling of Milwaukee had her jump over a broomstick twice, a feat which, he declared, no witch could accomplish without flying away. No record of the children's punishment exists, but Mrs. Albrecht was reported to have moved away soon after.

Mapping the Past

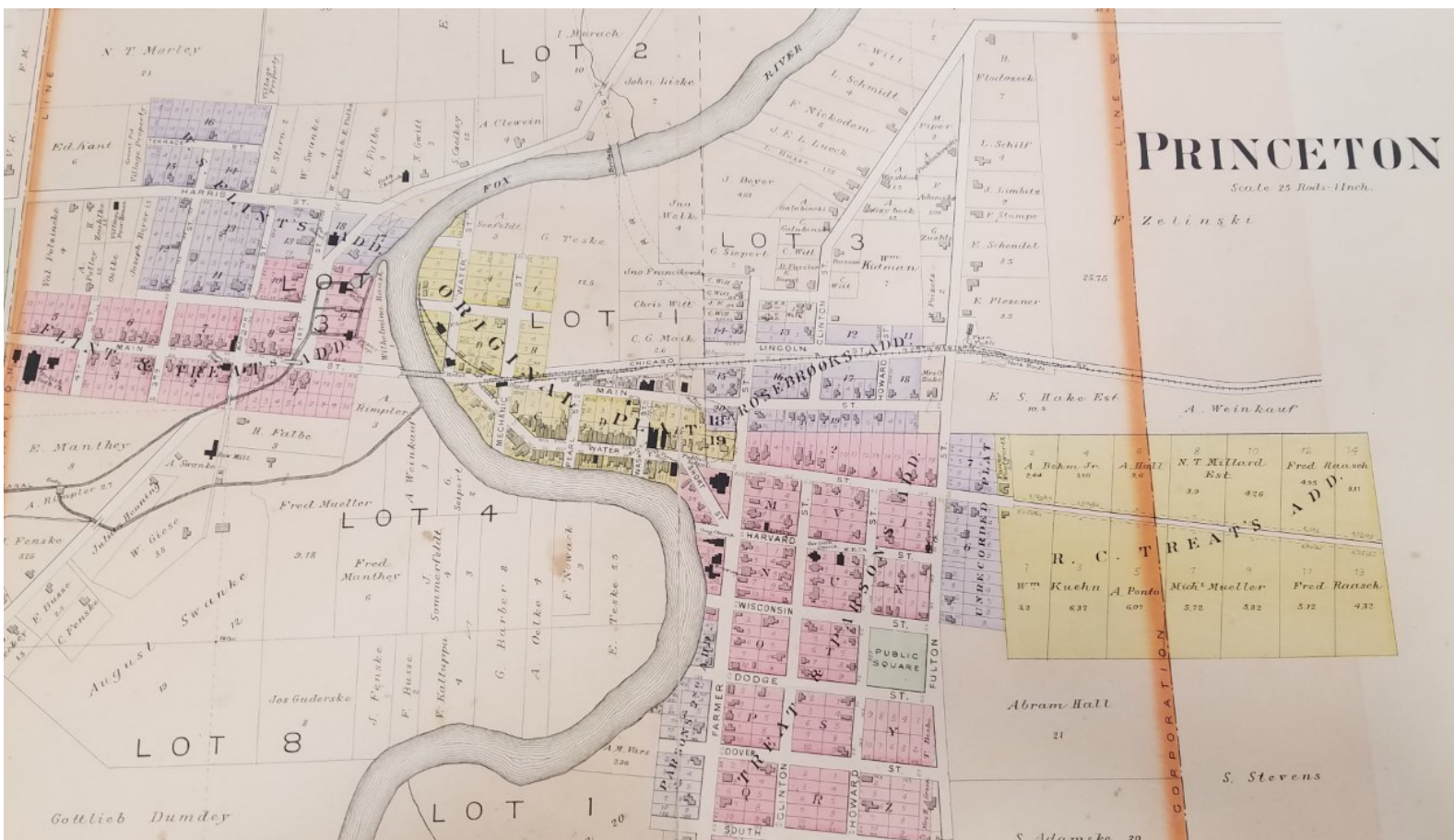
On October 1st, Ron Klatt from Neenah donated a beautiful Green Lake County plat map book from 1901 to the Princeton Historical Society. Mr. Klatt buys these rare and beautiful treasures from antique malls and private collectors and then donates them to local historical societies so that the records can be preserved in a place where the public can research them. Were it not for his efforts, the pages of the book would probably have been ripped out and sold individually as art pieces to private homes. Thankfully, through significant cost to himself, Mr. Klatt has preserved the book intact for generations to come.



These early maps show a booming City of Princeton, four times the size of Green Lake (then called Dartford). There are over a dozen schools marked on the map in the Princeton area, most of which would have been grade schools. The high school building is located in what is now the downtown's triangle parking lot. Black shaded buildings indicate places of importance, such as the cooper shop (barrel making), the grist mill (for grinding grain into flour), grain elevator, brewery, livery (providing stables and horses for rent), wagon shop, creamery, train depot, hotels, and churches. A Village Poor House is even marked on the south side of west Harris Street. A poor house was a kind of orphanage, but for adults as well as children. People who were desperately poor, or were elderly but had no family to take care of them, were sent here to live. Residents were usually required to work as much as they were able to under the watchful eye of a caretaker. It was considered shameful to end up in the poorhouse, but some people had no other option. Poor houses were taxpayer funded, like our welfare system today. Some were well-run, but some were not.



Where there is space on the map, each lot is inscribed with the name of its owner. The smaller lots in each block are labeled with a number, and these would have corresponded to a list that stated the owner and type of structure. Unfortunately, we don't have those lists. We do have other lists-- at the end of the book is the Patrons' Directory, a list of all the local people who contributed towards the creation and printing of the plat book. Familiar names there include Wyse, Luedke, Wicks, and Reetz, plus an H.K. Priest, listed as "Proprietor of the American House." The maps in the book are not only informative, they are works of art. Careful calligraphy, beautifully designed headers, and hand-colored blocks and boundaries create a visual feast.



Microfilm Comes Home

The newspapers The Princeton Times-Republic and its predecessor, the Princeton Star, document the history of Princeton and Green Lake all the way back to the year 1867. The original copies were transcribed onto microfilm many years ago, a project funded by the Princeton Historical Society and completed with the help of the WI State Historical Society. However, since Princeton did not have room in its museum or library to store the microfilm or a reader at the time, the records were deposited at the Caestecker (Green Lake) library. Now they have been returned, and efforts are underway to digitize the collection. Digitization would make the newspapers easily searchable by name or key word, and able to be hosted on the internet anyone to read. The Princeton Library, Princeton Historical Society, and Caestecker library have all pledged to assist with this expensive and time-consuming project. Once completed, it will be of huge benefit to local genealogists, historians, and researchers.



In the 1960s, microfilm was “the wave of the future” and it was thought that this technology would eventually replace books and newspapers.

The Doctor is In

Doctor Drill's office equipment has been moved into the museum after lots of effort! The dentist's tools and even some of his false teeth are still in the drawers. The antique X-ray machine and other equipment were bought in 1924 for \$1,481.95. Dr. Joseph Drill practiced in Princeton for 50 years— 1924 to 1974. His office was located at 522 W. Water Street in Princeton, where the Shiloh boutique was until recently. Many people remember him appearing on the TV show "What's My Line," but this is a local myth— the show was actually "The Name is the Same." (Both shows aired around the same time and had a similar cast.)



To help keep patients as still as possible before effective painkillers were commonly used, this chair is heavily weighted. It took four strong Amish men to place it in the new museum.



Can You Help? Museum Donations Wanted

Did you have a garage sale this year, and are not sure what to do with some of the leftovers? Are you moving, downsizing, or decluttering?

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. We don't want to appear greedy, but at the same time, we know there are folks out there that are looking to donate things, and it never hurts to ask.

Thank you!

Donation Requests

- Pre-1950s food containers, including flour and sugar sacks, packages, boxes, tins, etc
- Skeleton Keys
- Mannequins or dress forms for use in displaying historic clothing
- 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



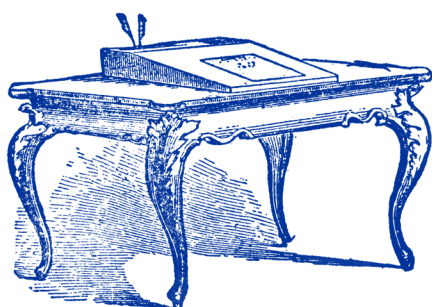
Office Help Wanted

Chris Frasier and Mary Swed have been working very hard on cataloging historical photos and needs someone to help her. It can be an interesting job, seeing all the old photographs and documents.

If you live in or near Princeton and have basic computer skills, we need you!

If you would like to help, please call Chris:

708-425-0921.



Help Us Keep the Lights On

Because of the virus/shutdown, we cannot hold our normal fundraisers, and we are nowhere near where we need to be financially.

Can you help us? Becoming a member or sending us a small donation would help us tremendously.

Donations go towards basic utilities at our buildings and to finish the new museum. We are preserving community history, including one-of-a-kind artifacts, records, and photographs.

If you can, please send checks to:

Princeton Historical Society, P.O. Box 71,
Princeton WI 54968. **Thank you!**

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!



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.

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!