

Mineral Point HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Dedicated to Preserving the Unique History of Mineral Point

The Orchard Returns to Orchard Lawn

By Peter Pfothenhauer

This spring, after an absence of 75 years, the orchard began its return to Orchard Lawn. As one of the final steps of grounds restoration, the first three of a planned 21 apple trees were planted on the south lawn, site of the original orchard.

The orchard at Orchard Lawn began its long existence in the spring of 1869. On April 28 of that year Joseph Gundry placed an order with noted horticulturist F. K. Phoenix of the Bloomington Nursery and Garden, McLean County, Illinois. The order included 32 standard apple trees, at a total cost of eight dollars. Planning started earlier. Mr. Gundry's journal for 1867 records the suggestion of the Wisconsin Horticultural Society for 20 different varieties of apple trees appropriate for the harsh climate.

Mr. Gundry continued to add to the orchard as late as 1887: his journal notes "Apr 22, 1887; Planted trees in Orchard & Farm to day." A photograph (at top right) from 1904, shows family members posing in "Our Orchard." The trees in the picture are mature but robust. By the 1930s, photographs show the orchard in decline.

From among the varieties suggested by the Horticultural Society in the 1860s, three trees will be planted each year until the planned restoration is complete. Bill Engelman of Sandstone Nursery in Mineral Point will be locating the specimens and tending them until ready for transplanting.

The restoration is part of Phase II of the house and grounds restoration project, made possible by a grant from the Jeffris Foundation. ●



Three young apple trees signal the return of the orchard to Orchard Lawn. This spring MPHS member and local nurseryman, Bill Engelman, assisted the grounds committee in siting and planting the trees on the south lawn of Orchard Lawn, site of the original Gundry orchard.

Of Red Dogs and Blue Bellies

By Nancy Pfothenauer



Above: One of the “blue belly” notes recently donated by MPHS member John Metcalf. Note the badger at the bottom of the bill.

A big thank you goes out to John Metcalf, an MPHS member who enhances our collections from time to time with interesting items he comes across. John’s latest gifts are several bank notes from the Bank of Mineral Point, from 1838, 1839, and 1840.

The Bank of Mineral Point was one of hundreds of local banks that proliferated throughout the country following President Andrew Jackson’s “hard money” policies and his veto of the re-charter of the Second Bank of the United States, in 1832.

According to the *History of Iowa County, 1881*, (HIC), the Territorial Council in December of 1836 granted a charter to establish a bank at Mineral Point with capital stock limited to \$200,000. William S. Hamilton, J. F. O’Neill, and M. M. Strong, were three of the initial commissioners who were to control the bank’s interests until stock was sold and an election could be held.

Even though the initial charter limited to five the number of shares that could be sold to any one individual, James D. Doty soon became the major stockholder, buying up nearly all of the stock, at the nominal rate of 20 per cent on each share.

The principal business of the bank was to serve as a clearing house for local smelters who bought lead from



Above: You can tell it’s a blue belly because written across the face is the note “Payable 31 December, 1840”, more than a year after the holder was supposed to be able to redeem it.

the miners and drew orders on the Mineral Point bank in exchange for drafts on Eastern banks, where the lead was sold.

Soon after the bank was chartered, Samuel B. Knapp and Porter Brace came to town, probably as representatives for Doty, and took charge. Almost the first thing they did was to issue “post bills,” which were endorsed across the face with red ink, to be paid two or three months after date. Although this innovation was not specifically mentioned in the charter, it was not expressly forbidden, so the businessmen and miners, with a little grumbling, accepted the situation, and contented themselves by dubbing the bills “red dogs.” Less than a year later, Knapp began to issue post bills endorsed with blue ink, to be paid six months after date. From the HIC: “No sooner did the public get hold of them, than a perfect storm of indignation was launched at the wily banker by his proposed dupes, who saw through the fraud at a glance, and refused to accept them, in most instances. These bills were familiarly called “blue bellies.”

The local notes were supposed to be exchanged “on demand” for specie, that is, notes on other banks that were backed by actual silver or gold reserves. Forcing Mineral Pointers to delay this meant that, in the meantime, the notes could be used

locally, but only to the extent that people trusted that they would eventually be able to collect real money for them. As trust in the local bank waned, the value of the notes plummeted, with the result that miners and others were paid in what was essentially worthless paper.

Again from the HIC: "Public meetings were held, and the bank proceedings denounced by the speakers in the strong language of those days. At one of the meetings, M. M. Strong made a bitter speech against Mr. Knapp, and, in the evening, after his return home, he was waited upon by that gentleman, who informed him that he had called to demand satisfaction (at the same time drawing a couple of pistols), and that they could then and there settle the difficulty, according to "the code," in the dark. To this Mr. Strong demurred, stating that he did not care to kill him, and much less did he care to be shot himself; but if, after mature deliberation, he should decide that they must fight a duel, why, well and good, providing suitable and gentlemanly preparations could be made. To this Mr. Knapp agreed and withdrew, and that was the last of the duel."

"The bank continued to operate until the general dissatisfaction became so great that an official examination into the affairs of the institution began to be mooted. When Messrs. Knapp and Brace heard of this, they quietly "folded their tents," locked up the bank "and stole away."

"The following day, when it was discovered that the birds had flown, a party of eight, led by I. P. Tramel, Deputy Sheriff, started for Galena in pursuit of the fugitives, whom they captured at that point. Mr. Knapp had nothing when taken, except his traveling-bag and two volumes of Dickens' novels; the latter he presented to Mr. Welch, who was then editing a paper at Galena. Something about the circumstance attracted the attention of some of Knapp's captors, and they demanded the books, when lo ! what should they discover,

pasted within the fly-leaves of the books, but the notes and bills of exchange which represented the assets of the bank, a sum not less than \$50,000."

"Delighted with the success of their expedition, the party returned to the Point, having the absconding parties in charge. Soon after their arrival, a public meeting was held, and Pascal Beckett, J. F. Dunn and W.

H. Banks were appointed Bank Receivers. A short time subsequent to this, after the affairs of the institution had been overhauled, Mr. Banks was deputized to go East and collect on the sureties. In the end, Banks turned out to be the greatest rogue, and, by his conduct, very aptly illustrated the aphorism of "There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip," for he never returned, nor was he heard from, and, up to date, the "red dogs" and "blue bellies," if there are any in existence, remain unredeemed."

"The effect of the bank failure and eventual loss of the funds proved a serious set-back to the community at large, for a time, and afflicted a good many very severely. However, within a brief time, business was restored to its wonted vigor, and the matter of the loss of \$50,000 or \$75,000 was soon forgotten. The bank was opened in a log building on the public square, and, in 1839, was transferred to a stone structure erected for the purpose, which stood where the Episcopal schoolhouse now stands."

In spite of the assertion that the loss was "soon forgotten", the following letter, printed in the Mineral Point Democrat on May 2, 1845, shows that bitterness toward the principal parties lingered:

Mr. Britt: It would have been acceptable to many of the citizens of Iowa county, had you, in your notice last week of the arrival of his ex-excellency, J. D. Doty, at Mineral Point, stating that his appearance among us was compulsory, and by virtue of an attachment issued to compel his attendance as a witness; a mere subpoena having been found deficient to effect that object.

It has been a matter of surprise to some of our citizens, who have suffered not a little from the banking and financial maneuvers of his ex-excellency, that you should have announced his arrival among us in terms usually employed on the occasion of a visit by some conspicuous and deserving personage; while others, who are perfectly conversant with his history, think that it was inserted for the same reasons that the movements of the noted Rathban form an item of the news of the day.

Would there be any impropriety, now that his ex-excellency is upon the ground where he performed some of his financial and banking feats, to wait upon him by committee, and ascertain from him how much specie there was in the Bank of Mineral Point when he put it into operation in the fall of 1837, and when his own receipts showed there had been about ninety thousand dollars in GOLD paid in on account of stock?

J. P. Sheldon
Willow Springs, April 29, 1845 ●



Top center: Moses Strong was challenged to a duel by Samuel B. Knapp after Strong made a "bitter speech" against the banker at a public meeting where the bank's practices were strongly denounced. Bottom: Knapp came to Strong's home, Stronghold on Fountain Street, drew pistols and demanded satisfaction, then and there Strong demurred.

Quonset Huts

Although the unmistakable rounded shape of the Quonset hut seems a quintessential American design, it was actually invented by the British. Their Nissen hut was copied and then modified by the Navy and produced at Quonset Point, Rhode Island, during World War II. The huts were popular because they made maximal use of space with a minimal amount of material. After several design changes, the Navy came up with a structure that used 3½ tons of steel, occupied 270-325 cubic feet of shipping space, could be shipped anywhere in the world, and erected quickly with a minimal number of construction workers.

According to a Navy history website, more than 153,000 Quonset huts were produced and used during the War. After peace was declared, many were sold as government surplus for civilian use. Because of their efficient use of material and low cost, many more were manufactured in the late '40s and '50s for a wide variety of uses, including as residences.

Not everyone was enamored of the huts, however. An editorial writer in a Madison newspaper in 1949 said he was "shocked by the architectural monstrosities of quonset huts that spot the campuses like black beetles devouring fields once lush with grass. If an observer is offended by the sight of these huts, the good Lord alone knows the reactions of families forced to live in these abominations." Presumably, the University of Wisconsin found the huts to be a quick and low cost solution to housing the massive numbers of students who enrolled on the GI bill.

Although the wave of constructing new Quonset huts seems to have passed, many are still in place serving a variety of uses, including the big one in Mineral Point, at the Five Points corner, which is now part of the Shake Rag Alley complex and will do duty as classrooms. ●



Not war surplus, the Quonset hut at Five Points was purpose-built in 1948 for John Boyd, at a cost of \$8,000. A year later, construction of Highway 23 was in full swing on two sides of the building. Photo courtesy of the Mineral Point Library Archive.



John Boyd built the Quonset hut at 411 Commerce St. to house his J. I. Case farm equipment dealership. The sign on the building says "Boyd Motors"; two gas pumps are visible in the front.



In 1970 the building housed Point Outlet, selling used furniture and appliances, new carpets, and antiques. The gas pumps have been removed.



The location of NAPA Auto parts for many years, the Quonset hut was sold earlier this year to Shake Rag Alley and will be renovated and used by the arts school for classrooms.

Another One Comes Back

This time it's the George Cobb house, on Cothren street, that shed its "improvements" and now looks like its original self. Local restorationist Lowry White used two photos from the MPHS collection to bring the front porch back to its intended configuration. White and crew also cleaned the brick and repaired the ornate trim (much of which was still intact) among other things. The house was built about 1855 for George Cobb who came to Mineral Point in 1843. He was a successful merchant in the grocery and provision business before becoming the manager of the Mineral Point Railroad in 1855, as it was being planned and built. ●



Back row, 1 to r: Laura Pulford Cobb, wife of George Cobb, builder of the Cobb house; Clara Cobb Spensley, daughter of Laura and George; Eunice Maria Parsons Cobb, George's mother; front row: granddaughters Ruth Antoinette Spensley, daughter of Clara and Calvert Spensley and Daisy (Marguerite) Cobb Wilcox. Daisy grew up to marry a man named Price and their son was the famous movie actor, Vincent Price.



Above: The Cobb house in 1970. Left: The Cobb house about 1880. Right: The Cobb house in 2013.

More Pieces Fall Into Place

The restoration of Orchard Lawn is sometimes compared to a jigsaw puzzle, a very large, three dimensional jig saw puzzle; we find a little piece here, a little piece there and painstakingly fit them together to form a mosaic of this place in a previous time.

Gundry family members Joan and Sally Young come to Mineral Point every summer; this year they brought with them a few more pieces of puzzle. One piece is an interesting object seen in an old photograph; a covered dish made of heavy milk glass. In the photo it is perched on the mantelpiece of the master bedroom. Joan spotted the piece when she was looking through photos of Orchard Lawn and realized that it was one of the family heirlooms that had come down to her. She is very pleased to return it to its place on the mantel.

Joan and Sally also brought several other Gundry family pieces: gold rimmed stemware for the dining room table display. The set includes water glasses, wine glasses, and brandy glasses and the gold rims reflect perfectly the gold rims of the dinnerware used in the display. All pieces sit on a linen tablecloth that has "Sarah Gundry" stitched along one corner.

Joan also donated several silver salt cellars, both shakers and bowls complete with their tiny silver spoons and a master salt with cobalt blue glass liner.

Joan is the granddaughter of Olive Gundry, who was one of the grandchildren of Joseph and Sarah Gundry; Sally is Joan's daughter. ●



Top left: Gundry descendant Joan Young recognized one of her family heirlooms in a photograph of a bedroom at Orchard Lawn. Top right: MPHS President Matt Ostergrat, Sally Young, and Joan Young returned the dish to its place on the mantel. Bottom left: the heirloom is a covered dish made of heavy milk glass. Bottom right: Joan also donated additional family heirlooms, including a set of gold rimmed stemware that will enhance the dining table display.

News from Orchard Lawn

by Ainsley Anderson, Manager

With wedding season in full swing I thought it would be interesting to share some of the trends that we're seeing at Orchard Lawn this season. I find it interesting, as I attend our weddings, and as I help our future brides and grooms plan their events, that vintage accents are quite popular. For instance, a couple from Chicago who were wed at Orchard Lawn in June worked with a company out of Madison called 'A La Crate. This company rents everything from vintage dishes to furniture. This couple also used vintage handkerchiefs as their place cards, the bride wore a vintage dress for the wedding, and they accented the grounds of Orchard Lawn with vintage items that brought both their own personalities to their celebration, while also providing a nod to the past.



Other weddings this season have been accented with vintage/antique vases on the tables, rustic window frames, antique furniture brought in specifically for the event - the possibilities are seemingly endless. As I think back to my own wedding five years ago I reflect on how much simpler life would have been if I had access to sites like Pinterest, which provide a wealth of online references and a place to "pin" one's ideas, making planning as easy as a click of the mouse.

I'm seeing a strong trend of "diy" weddings as well. From brides who have bouquet-making parties with their bridesmaids the evening prior to the wedding, to couples who hunt out and hand-pick their unique favors, to couples creating their own invitations - couples are making their weddings more personal, less-formal, and they are having fun with them.

It's really an honor to be a part of these events, watching our couples make Orchard Lawn a part of their memories, utilizing our grounds creatively, with events that step outside the traditional. We're very fortunate that Orchard Lawn is such a unique setting and that it's becoming more and more appealing to couples in the region. ●



Left: Recently a wedding party hung vintage handkerchiefs on a clothesline stretched between two old porch posts; marked on the kerchiefs were the guests' name and table number. Right: The same party used vintage items to enhance their table settings. Photos courtesy of Urban Anchor Photography.



The Lovely Gardens



Orchard Lawn looked lush and lovely in June when it was one of the stops on the annual Garden Tour hosted by Shake Rag Alley. The gardens are well watered and kept in peak condition by volunteers who take on the watering chores one week at a time. Thanks to the following for their help with this important task: Kandy Keuler and Dick Josh, Mike Christensen, Jenny and Tom Wirsbinsky, Bev and Jim Harris, Steve Falconer, Lauren Powers, Julia Marr, and Brian and Diane Stuart. ●



Keeping It Clean

A big thank you to MPHS member Linda Braun who donated hours of her time to make sure Orchard Lawn was clean and sparkling for the summer season. Linda says "It took quite a long time to complete the whole house but it was really pleasurable. When you're in the house, you can feel the history all around you. It is truly an awesome place." Linda and her husband Greg live near Orchard Lawn and also own the John Toay house on Fifth street which they run as a bed and breakfast inn. ●





Notes from the President

By Matt Ostergrant, President, Mineral Point Historical Society

Better Than Anywhere

While making a trip to Arkansas to visit family this summer, I was reminded how special the cityscape of Mineral Point remains. Driving through a good portion of Iowa and straight down the middle of Missouri, we passed through quite a few cities and towns that, while not as old as Mineral Point, at least date to around the post-Civil War era of railroad construction. Almost all still possess some examples of their earliest architecture. But decades of boom and bust economic cycles, the rise of the do-it-yourself movement and its huge home centers filled with remodeling products along with the growth of retail chains have created a homogenized landscape, not just in the Midwest, but throughout America. With every trip to Arkansas, or for that matter any of our other destinations, it becomes more of a challenge to not only find the architectural survivors of a community's beginnings but also to figure out where we are. The retail chains, restaurants and motels and new residential neighborhoods possess appearances and building materials that repeat every few miles until, without the aid of a map or a "Welcome to _____" sign, we could be anywhere.

The identity of our rural landscapes also dims with the loss of vernacular architecture – the designs and materials of which help to tell us where we are. Barns are being stripped of their weathered, old-growth siding at an alarming rate leaving their timber bones exposed to collapse and eventual rot (hopefully, the timbers are salvaged). Those farm structures that are still useful are given new sheet metal skins over their roofs and walls. Many solid original farmhouses are being replaced by new suburban-style houses. Our rural landscapes join with the urban landscapes in the accelerated march of homogenization and standardization.

Now I know that none of this is new. The materials and remodeling styles change over the decades – yesterday's asbestos siding shingles and asphalt "Insulbrick" are today's vinyl siding and "culverized" (an Ostergrant term) metal roofing. And I know firsthand that money is tight, that maintaining a building demands constant attention and resources and that anything that promises to minimize or alleviate maintenance is well worth considering. But we need to be careful in doing our homework on materials and maintenance/repair methods for our historic architecture so that we don't repeat costly work too soon down the road, ruin the original, honest features of our architectural legacy or, worse, jeopardize the structural integrity of our buildings. Much like the "sudden" realization that our two year old niece in our wedding now has a two year old herself, we don't see the subtle changes performed to our built environment until they're done. Mineral Point is not immune to the influences transforming our buildings so we need to be vigilant to protect our treasures.

Because of the passion and commitment of historic property owners, we're fortunate that our city has retained so much of its identity, its image and its unique heritage of 186 years while most of the rest of the country continues marching toward "anywhere." You know you're in Mineral Point, Wisconsin when you come here and see the visual richness of our 19th century architecture and delight in the diversity of its stone, brick and wood construction, which is why so many folks come from near and far to experience our unique environment and enjoy our hospitality. And spend good money to travel here, shop here, eat here and stay here. It's crucial for our community's sustainability that we remain good stewards of our heritage and continue to keep Mineral Point "better than anywhere." ●

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Mineral Point Historical Society Membership Form

January 1, 2013 to December 31, 2013

All members receive the newsletter and free tours of Orchard Lawn.

Please check one:

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Mineral Point HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Dedicated to Preserving the Unique History of Mineral Point

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Mark Your Calendars Jammin' On the Porch

On the lawn at Orchard Lawn. Bring your own chairs or blankets. Bring a picnic. Bring your family. Concerts start at 6:00 p.m. and go till done.

Friday, September 13
Dealin'

The Orchard Lawn Tour Season continues through September 29.

MPHS members receive a free tour. Come for a visit and enjoy the beautifully restored house.

Change Service Requested

www.mineralpointhistory.org



Summertime! Enjoyed by generations of swimmers, the Mineral Point pool was a WPA project, started in 1935 and completed in 1937. This photo from the MPHS collection is undated but is probably from the 1940s.