

Mineral Point HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Dedicated to Preserving the Unique History of Mineral Point

Mineral Pointers Share Stories and Photos in 2013 Lyceum Series

By Nancy Pfothenauer

Mineral Pointers Remember: Commerce Street, the second Lyceum of the season, was a hit as Mike Gratz and Larry Weitzel teamed up to share stories of their fathers' businesses on Commerce Street. Mike's dad, Clarence Gratz, owned the Farmers Store and Larry's dad managed the Mineral Point Lumberyard. Bob Knudson of Knudson Electric was in the audience and added some details of his own as did others who were there.

Larry talked about the lumberyard and how most of the building materials came to town by train on cars that then had to be unloaded by hand. Coal in a variety of grades, shapes, and sizes also came in by rail. Larry mentioned the time the post office ordered 56 tons of coal which was unloaded from the railroad cars, taken up High Street by truck, and unloaded into the basement of the post office. The truck dumped the coal onto a short elevator, but it wasn't long enough to reach the back of the bin so Larry and Mike were called on to shovel it back. A very short time later the post office switched their heating system from a coal burning furnace to a gas powered one and all 56 tons of coal in the basement had to be shoveled out. Larry and Mike were the prime movers on that project, too. Larry says they got \$1.75

an hour for moving the coal in and \$10 an hour for shoveling it out. Plus Clarence Gratz took them out for dinner at the golf club afterwards.

Many thanks to United Methodist Church for hosting the Lyceum and to Lucille May for organizing it.

The last Lyceum of the season was the annual photo show at the Opera House. This year's program was all about the Houses of Mineral Point. Nancy Pfothenauer showed pictures from the MPHS collections, comparing images from the 1880s with photos from the 1970s. She explained some of the detective work done by her and Matt and Denise Ostergrant that included comparing the birdseye map of Mineral Point with modern Iowa county tax maps and tax records to enable the identification of some of the previously unidentified images in the earlier collection. She also showed images of several houses that are still mysteries and many in the audience went home with a sheet of photos to try their own hand at being a history detective.

The ever popular Lyceum series will continue next year in January, February and March. If you have a great idea for a topic, let us know. ●



The scale on the street in front of the lumberyard office was well known by many daring young drivers who liked to drive over it at imprudent speeds.

Through the River and Over the Hills

By James Harris

“It is very seldom in the rush of this day and generation as we ride in automobiles that we take time to think of the methods of transportation used by the sturdy travelers of the early days when this part of the country was yet undeveloped,” reflected M.P. Rindlaub, a pioneer Platteville observer.

There was an especially “intimate society and commercial relationship” existing between Galena and Mineral Point “before the whistle of the locomotive ever echoed among the hills of the two cities.” The river at Galena was the nearest port of commerce for Mineral Point in the early days. Smelted ore was loaded on carts pulled by slow moving teams of from four to twelve oxen and dragged over the forty mile trail to Galena for shipping. Returning teams carried provisions to the mining camps and small settlements along the way. Three or four coaches with six horse teams carried passengers and mail over the roadway each day.

Strange M. Palmer recorded his journey from Galena to Mineral Point in 1836 when, “at a time, just emerging from the difficulties incident to an Indian war, the country was comparatively new, sparsely settled and but partially explored, with few improvements in the shape of public roads, houses of entertainment or facilities for traveling.” Palmer left Galena with several companions crammed into a small lumber wagon equipped with a tattered tarp for protection from the weather. He described the first leg of the journey to Elk Grove as “a hard road to travel” as the road was cut up by the ore wagons and rendered almost impassable.

Every few miles along the dusty and well-traveled way there were inns, taverns and rest stops “where refreshments were served to man and beasts,” and where teamsters or stages might stop when night overtook them. The first station out of Galena was the Four Mile House kept by a man named Waffler. Next in order was the Eight Mile House at the state line managed by William Curry. Within a few miles was the old Stone Hotel at Hazel Green where miners spent their evenings swapping tall tales with the proprietor, Jim Edwards.

Then along the road was the Twelve Mile House run by a man named Brown. Perhaps the greatest landmark along the way was the old Western Hotel at the site of present day Cuba City, managed by the Davis brothers. Reportedly Lt. Jefferson Davis, and later, U.S. Grant were guests of the establishment.

Proceeding north there was the Sod Grocery kept by Lukey, “a favorite haunt in early times, where any number of quarrels were settled with such weapons as beer bottles and garden rakes.” A bit farther on was Whitham’s Junction House at the present location of Elmo, managed by Emmanuel Whitman, which was the transfer point for passengers bound for Platteville and Lancaster.

Palmer’s first stopping point was at Elk Grove where a subterranean stream had been discovered about twelve feet below the surface. John D. Martin’s tavern was located there. Early lodging was also available at the Prairie House near Bashford. At the site of Old Belmont was Jane Rablin’s tavern, which also served as a miner’s boarding house and hotel. Palmer recalled Belmont as “an embryo city” where “most extravagant plans and speculations” were indulged in anticipation of all that the Territorial Legislature would bring.

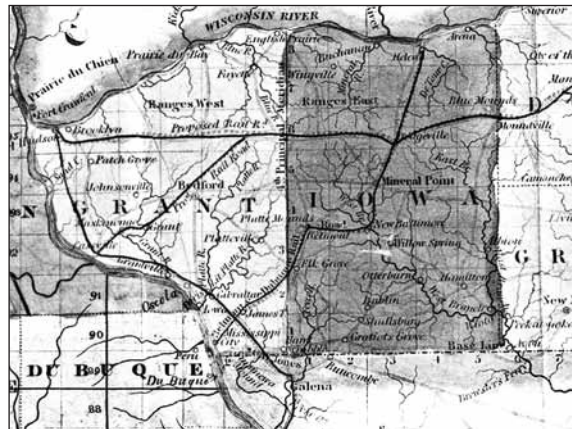
From Belmont the road passed through the hills “in precisely the condition that nature left it, without the least attempt at improvement ... being in some places nearer a perpendicular than any other road I have ever seen traveled.” The weary traveler would pass Cottage Inn, where Nathan Olmstead was host for more than sixty years, and Sam Warren’s (Warner’s) where “Aunt Pop” regaled the pilgrim with “refreshments both solid and liquid.”

As Palmer and companions made their way down to the valley of the Peckatonica, “the horses after sliding for a considerable distance on their haunches, started off at full speed, and, “suddenly leaving the road in a tangent landed in the very bed of the creek.” After such an adventure an early traveler would no doubt be delighted to reach the final stopping place before Mineral Point. This was John Graber’s “while too near Mineral Point to deal in solid foods, yet handled considerable of the wet goods.”

Palmer at last reached “Shake Rag” a “most humble, unpretending village,” where respite awaited at the friendly cabins of Uncle Ab Nichols and there was always room for one more.

The route described roughly followed State Highway 80 north from the state line to State Highway 81, then easterly to County Trunk Highway X, then northerly to Belmont, then northerly along U.S. Highway 151 to Mineral Point. ●

Sources: Palmer, Strange M. *Western Wisconsin in 1836*, Vol. VI, Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin 1872. Rindlaub, M.P. *Coaches and Road Inns*, Mineral Point Room Archives. *Galena Gazette*, March 1, 1894. Wisconsin Dept. Transportation website; Wisconsin Highways website; Wisconsin State Historical Society website.



A map drawn by William R. Smith in 1836 shows the settlements then in place between Galena and Mineral Point. The railroad lines depicted were ideas that never came to fruition.

Finding the Story of Your House

By Nancy Pfothenauer

All houses have stories, some happy, some sad, some known, some not. If you're curious about what your house would tell you, if only it would talk, with a little time online and in the library you might be able to uncover some of its tales.

Find the names, birth-dates, birthplaces, and occupations of former residents of your house in federal census records. Some years include year of immigration, whether the house was owned or rented, if the person was married more than once and if they could read and write. 1930 notes if there is a radio in the home!

The 1920, 1930, and 1940 records list a house's street name and number making it relatively easy to find the family who lived in your house during those decades. All census records from 1850 onward list the names of all persons in a household but you need to do a little extra digging to determine exactly where that household was located: 1880 and 1910 list the name of the street but not the address; 1850, 1860, 1870 and 1900 list neither.

No 1890 records are available as most were destroyed in a fire at the Commerce Department in Washington, DC in 1921; only 6,000 of the almost 63 million paper records survived, none of which record Wisconsin households.

Find complete census records through 1940 on Ancestry.com, if you're a member; or an almost complete set (1930 is not yet available) for free on Heritage Quest, if your local library is a member of BadgerLink.

If your house is in Mineral Point, once you know the names of its former residents, the Mineral Point Library Archive is your next stop. The Archive has family histories, obituaries, marriage records, newspapers on microfilm, scrapbooks, and newspaper clippings, all of which may have information about people who lived in your house.

Go to the Wisconsin Historical Society website at www.wisconsinhistory.org and search on the names you've turned up. You may find information in the Genealogy Index, the County Histories section, the Dictionary of Wisconsin History, or any number of other records available through the WHS site.

Google is another important tool and, if you have online access at home, can be used any time of day or night. "Google" the names of people you've found in the census records but be careful as Internet searches can turn up as much false information as true.

Also be careful of accepting the research of others as fact; too often overly enthusiastic researchers make assumptions about things that should be considered clues, not facts. It is a good idea to actually see at least two original sources for any piece of information

FileMaker Pro - [Photo Collection 13-3-7]

File Edit View Insert Format Records Scripts Window Help

78 332 / 3382 Found (Unsorted) Show All New Record Delete Record

Records

Layout: MP Archive Page View As: Preview

COLL'N GPNC Number 1.310 Chart Block #

COMMUNITY Mineral Point

STREET NAME Church St

STREET No. 625

Bldg/ Location

FAMILY NAME Spensley

Photo Date

TPN 251-0551

Plat Strong's Add'n

Lot 05

Block 18

Ward 1

AHJ No. 56094

Date Built 1900

PHOTO LOCALE

Residence

Store/ Shop

Bldg Interior

Bldg Exterior

Hotel

Church

School

Garden

Scenery

PEOPLE/ ANIMALS

Man/ Men

Woman/ Wome

Child(ren)

Family

Twins

Photographer?

Dog(s)

Horse(s)

Cow(s)

Misc Keywords

Stone Bldg

Town View

Street Scene

Farm Scene

Mining

RR

Caves/ Rocks

Rivers/ Lakes

Hunting/ Fishing

Picnics

Parades

Tornado Pix

Photo Show Poss

NOTES

625 Church street, James Spensley house;
AHJ: 1905-1915: James Spensley,
1925: Thomas Tonkin;
1880 Special Assessment of the City of Mineral Point lists John Geib as owner of Lots 1, 2, 5 and 6, Block 18, Strong's add; value: \$450

This is one of the records in the computerized inventory of the Mineral Point Historical Society photo collections. The inventory can be used at the Mineral Point Library Archive and contains more than 3,300 records. Images of houses in the database may have information that will help you build the story of your own home. The inventory is a work in progress and is updated periodically.

before you consider it a fact; scanned versions of many original sources can be viewed online.

Of course, seeing what your house used to look like is as interesting as finding out about who used to live there. Again, if it's a Mineral Point house, there may be pictures of it in the Mineral Point Historical Society photo collections or in the Archive. The Archive has an extensive collection of original photographs, loose and in albums, and is also host to a computerized inventory of more than 3,300 images in the MPHS collections, which can be searched by street address, tax parcel number (TPN), or lot and block number. ●

If you catch the research "bug" and would like to know more about researching your house or any other building or a particular person, Nancy Pfothenauer will present a workshop on research and writing about your research at the Southwest Wisconsin Book Festival in Mineral Point on September 14. For more information and to pre-register go to www.swwibookfestival.com.

Neither Snow, Nor Rain, Nor Heat, Nor Gloom of Night

By James Harris

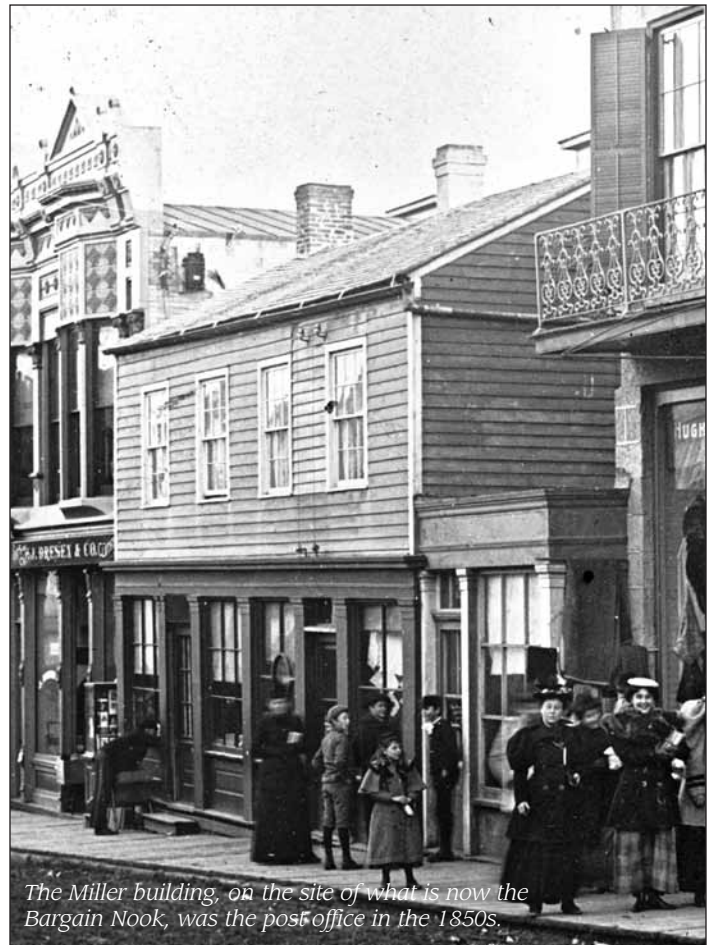
One of my early memories is of the daily trip with my father to the post office in his old Army jeep. As Dad chatted and joked with such local personages as Mayor Benjamin J. Bollerud or Harry Nohr, I wandered about, fascinated by the many tiny window boxes, imposing wood paneling, curious spittoons and the hearty bustle of the office. Some 60 years later I still enjoy the daily trip to the post office, sometimes in anticipation of a note from a loved one, sometimes in dread of a creditor's bill, but always with a sense of place and community.

So, amidst current concerns of possible changes to our mail system due to decreasing volume and revenue, perhaps it is important to reflect upon the many years of delivery of the written word enjoyed by citizens of Mineral Point.

One hundred years ago, in February, 1913, Congress authorized the construction of a federal post office building in Mineral Point. Mail service to the city in one form or another has been in existence since at least June 4, 1826, when the first post office in the mining region was established at Fever River (Galena). That initial service was "semi-monthly and very irregular at that." Fortunatus Berry, a Blackhawk War veteran and early Iowa County supervisor, built a post office in his tavern at Berry Hill south of Gratiot in 1834. Berry made frequent trips to the court house in Mineral Point. (Of note: It was at Berry's residence that William Caffee shot and killed Samuel Southwick). About that same time John D. Ansley established a post office in his store at the foot of Fountain Street at Commerce Street.

In August, 1836, William T. Henry was appointed postmaster and the post office was relocated to a log house situated near Jerusalem Spring. In 1840 Henry was succeeded by J. T. Lathrop, landlord of the old Franklin House, where the post office was then kept. Following the inauguration of President James K. Polk in 1845, Henry Plowman, editor of the *Miners Free Press*, became postmaster and the office was kept in a private dwelling at the corner of Chestnut Street and Jail Alley. From 1849 to 1853 the post office was located in a

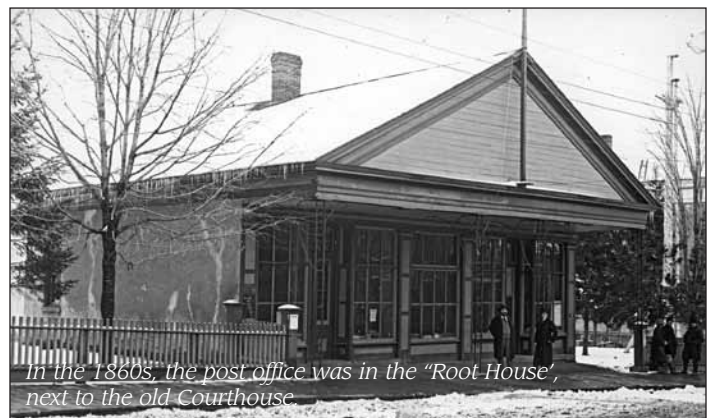
book store on High Street at Lot 49, Vliet's Survey in the 200 block of High street, about where Johnston's Gallery is today. From 1853 to 1861 the office was maintained on the south side of High street, in the Miller building at Lot 47, Vliet's Survey. For a time the office was located in "the old root house", later the law and banking firm of Henry & Smith on the public square. The "root house" was previously used as



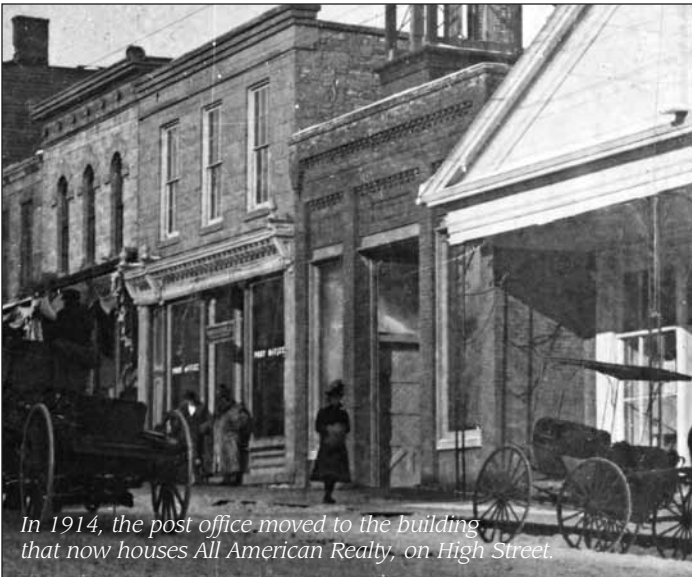
The Miller building, on the site of what is now the Bargain Nook, was the post office in the 1850s.



Drawing by S. F. Rodolf of the 1840 Post Office, next to the Franklin House on High Street.



In the 1860s, the post office was in the "Root House", next to the old Courthouse.



In 1914, the post office moved to the building that now houses All American Realty, on High Street.



In 1925 the "new" post office was built, on almost the same site as the one in 1840.



The interior of one of the early post offices, probably the one at 147 High Street.



All mail was sorted by hand and delivered twice a day.

county offices and was next to the old courthouse. In 1914 the Hendra building at 147 High Street, became the location for mail service. Finally, in April, 1925, the current federal post office building was completed.

In 1913 the government entered the business of transmitting merchandise through the mail. The parcel post system was initiated and the country was divided into 35,000 zones, each 30 miles square. Parcel post rates were determined by the distance from the center of a zone and the weight of the package. Special stamps were required. Mineral Point was

designated the center of one of the zones. Reception of the new system was mixed. The February 6, 1913 edition of the *Iowa County Democrat* declared: "The parcel post is as important to the public as are the telegraph and the telephone... If the wife of farmer Jones desires a frying pan she does not have to harness Dobbin and drive to the store – all she has to do is drop a postal in the mail, and – presto!- in a day or two the frying pan is delivered at her door with only a few cents cost for transportation." Indeed, G. Varkin, Mineral Point's "Reliable Clothier" advertised in the *Democrat* urging patrons to send in their measurements and a description of the desired product and "It will be sent to you without delay by parcel post, the modern quick delivery method."

Not all were thrilled with the notion of the parcel post. Express companies railed against a perceived intrusion by the government into private enterprise, and joined to lower their rates below the schedule established for the parcel post system. Some individuals were also skeptical. As one observer opined in the June, 1913 issue of *The Mineral Point Tribune*: "Perhaps it is just as well that the parcel post has a number of needless kinks in it. If it had been simple and easy in the first place, the post office might have been swamped with the rush of business." Another contributor stated: "If the new law should be amended with an eye solely to public convenience instead of public bewilderment the parcel post would strike a mighty blow at the high cost of living."

Other postal innovations instituted for the convenience of Mineral Point patrons include: 1919 – door to door mail delivery (by Howard Tyrer and Romaine Healy), 1920 – street letter boxes placed throughout the city, 1920 – free city mail delivery, 1952 – mobile post office bus service.

"Neither snow, nor rain, nor heat, nor gloom of night stays these courageous couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds." True to the carrier's motto first uttered by Herodotus, many local couriers have rendered long and faithful service to the public. To name just a few: Ellsworth Harris – 47 years (1911-1958), Howard Tyrer – 43 years (1919-1962), Lynn Terrill (1924-1965). ●

Sources: *The Mineral Point Tribune*; *The Iowa County Democrat*; *History of Iowa County*, Western Historical Company, Chicago 188; "Post Office"; *Wisconsin Historical Society excerpt from the National Archives*; *Mineral Point Public Library archives "Post Office" folder*

News from Orchard Lawn

by Ainsley Anderson, Manager

Spring has sprung at Orchard Lawn! The snow gave way to grass which gets greener and greener every day. We're prepping for our 2013 tour season, which starts Friday, May 24th.



We have added several new team members, including three tour guides and three event staff. It takes a lot of work to get Orchard Lawn whipped into shape in time for our busy season.

Such a big house, so many nooks and crannies to dust. We're grateful to Linda Braun for her willingness to prepare Orchard Lawn for the tour and wedding season.

When was the last time you took a tour at Orchard Lawn? Have you seen the completed portions of the first phase of our restoration? If it's been a while, please come and take a look! Our tours are Friday, Saturday, and Sunday from 1 p.m. - 5 p.m.

If we have a wedding on a Saturday we are closed for tours. We can also arrange special tours with a few days' notice. If you are interested in a special tour please call Ainsley Anderson at 608.334.1064.

We are also building our list of preferred vendors for weddings. An exciting new addition to this list is Brocach from Madison. Brocach is well-known in Madison for their two Irish Pub locations, but their catering business is really taking off and we are looking forward to working with them in the future.

And, don't forget - Jammin' on the Porch is the 2nd Friday of the month, June-September. Please check the Mineral Point Historical Society website (www.mineralpointhistory.org) for details about the performers. ●

High School Students Clean Up at Orchard Lawn

Spring clean up at Orchard Lawn got a big boost in April during the Mineral Point Schools' Community Service Day. Thirteen high school students descended on the grounds at nine o'clock on a Wednesday morning and, under the direction of head football coach Andy Palzkill, attacked fallen branches, dead leaves, and other unwanted souvenirs of winter with rakes and enthusiasm. Five hours later, the formal garden in front of the house had not a weed left in it, the sticks had been kicked to the curb, the driveway raked, and the grounds were ready for another summer. Many thanks to Mr. Palzkill and his crew: Lance Deutsch, Jacob Edge, Kyle White, Gabe Palzkill, Lee Stevenson, Tyler Curtis, Levi Zimmerman, Brock Vogel, Christian Czudec, Brody Johnson, Grant Horst, Jake Riley, and Tannler Ames. ●

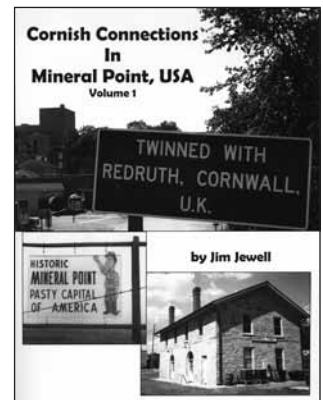
Good Reads!

"*Cornish Connections in Mineral Point, USA, Volume 1*", by Jim Jewell, is sort of like a pasty: an entire meal in one package, and a satisfying one, at that.

Jim, an official Cornish Bard and a long-time scholar of Lead Region history, has written several books, all of them interesting and all of them pleasant, but this one, his latest, might well prove to be his most widely read. Jim starts with the familiar tale of the Cornish coming to work in the mines in the 1830s but he tells the story with a difference. He tells it like it isn't a story that is over and done with, but a prelude to the stories that are happening right here and right now, which he also tells you, in a most charming and readable style. Jim also emphasizes the connections between this most Cornish corner of America and Cornwall, of which there are many.

The book is chock full of great anecdotes, some gleaned from old newspapers, some told to the author personally, but all of them well worth reading.

The book is available at Foundry Books, on Commerce street, or through the author's website: www.cornishminer.com. ●



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Not valid for any special events requiring advanced registration.
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LH/HP

Use this coupon for a discount on a tour of Pendarvis or any of the other Wisconsin Historical Society sites. And remember, visitors come from all parts of the country to experience the history we have in our own backyard!



Notes from the President

By Matt Ostergrant, President, Mineral Point Historical Society

Renewal and Rescue

Now that spring has belatedly arrived, a well-worn wildflower guide accompanies Denise and me on country drives. It belonged to my grandparents and accompanied them some fifty years ago on their country drives around our hometown of Dixon, Illinois, and was given to us early in our marriage. On the page devoted to the Yellow Lady's Slipper Orchid, the description ends, "...young ladies on a picnic gaily took home an armload of glistening golden wild orchids. Woods were cut and pastured. The rich leaf mold washed away. The lady's slippers decreased in numbers... but still in rare spots in Illinois a few remain and blossom in May."

Inserted on this page is a yellowed clipping from the *Rockford Morning Star* newspaper – an article written by Lucy Miele in 1965 about a farmer in northwest Illinois named Howard Goodmiller. Mr. Goodmiller, age 76, wearing bib overalls and a straw hat, appears to be focussed on a clump of blooming lady's slipper orchids in his woods at Happy Hollow. He tells Ms. Miele, "My dad started transplanting lady's slippers years ago and I've been hunting them for over 50 years. I guess it's a Goodmiller failing." The yellow lady's slipper orchid is the only such variety native to northwest Illinois, therefore the only type he transplanted. Three other varieties of lady's slipper orchids on his farm he obtained from catalogs. He transplanted only a quarter of all the orchids he ever found (preferring to dig only with his hands to capture all the roots). "Now I wish I had taken them all. I always left more than half a clump whenever I found any, and almost all of them are now destroyed." Mr. Goodmiller explained that a state conservationist once told him that "it is in the best principles of conservation to attempt to save them" if the flowers were at risk of destruction.

My grandparents never met Mr. Goodmiller nor saw his orchids but that newspaper clipping eventually prompted Denise and me to investigate until in 2001 we discovered Happy Hollow Farm, identified at the roadside by a weathered mailbox, handlettered with Howard Goodmiller's name. Bravely we drove down the winding wooded driveway that lead to an old house and an even older barn, and met Howard's daughter, Elda Goodmiller. After showing her the article she confirmed that a colony of the yellow lady's slippers still remained and graciously invited us to return the following spring. Sure enough, that next first of June, there they were, blooming in the open shade of her woods. Nature had thinned their numbers over the decades, yet the testimony remained of the passion her father and grandfather shared for preserving these rare jewels.

In his book *The Same Ax, Twice* (if you read only one book this year, please treat yourself to this one), another Howard (Mansfield) shares stories of all sorts of folks passionate about all sorts of preservation. Civil War re-enactors, amateur astronomers who work for restoring darkness to the night sky by advocating the reduction of light pollution, even a man who records the sounds of nature at historic places like Walden Pond, striving to get as many minutes of natural, "historic" sound he can before it's interrupted by air and vehicular traffic (it's disturbing how briefly his longest recordings remain uninterrupted). In these and many other diverse examples Mansfield explores each subject's reasons for saving things but surprises us by getting to the core value of restoration for mankind:

"We may talk of saving antique linens, species or languages; but whatever we are intent on saving, when a restoration succeeds, we rescue ourselves." ●

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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:

Individual (\$15.00)

Family (\$25.00)

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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, June 14

The Backseat Serenaders

Friday, July 12

**The Round Midnight
Jazz Quartet**

Friday, August 9

The Firesides

Friday, September 13

Dealin'

Change Service Requested

www.mineralpointhistory.org



MPHS member Tony May sent these photos, of the house at 50 Shake Rag, illustrating the changes a house can go through over the years. Tony's grandmother, Gertrude Esch, lived here from the 1920s until the 1970s when the house looked much as it does in the earlier photo. Tony well remembers Grandma Esch's extensive flower and vegetable gardens and the large trees on the property.