

Spring 2021

## LANGLADE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



## Welcome to the Welcome Center

A major change in the museum, once remodeling is complete, will be the addition of a Welcome Center on the first floor. The space will offer visitors information on attractions and special events in Antigo and Langlade County in a friendly area to sit, talk, ask questions, and read about what the city

and county have to offer. The goal at present is to keep the Welcome Center open and staffed 6 days a week and into the evening on Fridays and Saturdays. The lobby of the addition will be kept open 24/7 so that visitors may collect information at any time.

## Remodeling: Phase 2

After reviewing the financial status of the museum's fundraising campaign and cost estimates, we are moving ahead with phase 2 of our remodeling plan. Work began at the end of February to repair the ceiling and upgrade the lighting on the first floor. This will greatly improve the appearance of the displays. One of our furnaces will be replaced along with some ductwork making the space more comfortable. We continue to work with architect Rod Cox and JAS Construction, both of

whom did such a magnificent job on the addition.

The Antigo Visual Arts gallery will relocate to the second floor with new panels for hanging art and gallery appropriate lighting.

Curator Mary Kay Wolf is busy planning the layout of display and research areas. If all goes according to plan, we will reopen in May. Fundraising continues as we hope to achieve everything on our wish list.



You may help by contributing to:  
Let's Make History  
c/o Langlade County Historical Society  
P.O. Box 215  
Antigo, WI 54409.

All donations are tax deductible.

## Music in the Park is Back!

An Antigo summer tradition returns, after a year of Covid-19, and the Historical Society will be there. On Monday June 7, we will be serving desserts at the concert in the City Park. The concert will

feature the Northernaires. We request that volunteers bring pies to the park shelter by 5:30 pm. Come and enjoy the music, get updates on our remodeled museum, and support our efforts

**CURATOR:**  
Mary Kay Morrissey Wolf

**DIRECTORS:**  
Dean Blazek  
Fran Brown  
Nancy Bugni  
Glenn Bugni  
Carol Feller Gottard  
Chris Haedike  
Lisa Haefs  
Joe Hermolin  
Diane Zuelke

## THANK YOU

### Thank You

To Let's Make History Fund  
from January 3, 2021 to present

Mrs. Rosemary Barnes  
Mary Brennecke  
CoVantage Credit Union  
Dr. John and Elsa McKenna  
Remington Foundation  
Teresa Sprecher  
Carol and Sam Stefan

### Membership Renewals:

Ted & Sue Baginski, Rod & Sallie Barta,  
Glenn & Nancy Bugni, Fran Brown,  
Dede Cromer, Jeanne Darling,  
Gale Demlow, Ludene Dewan,  
Chris Haedike, Sheila Hall, Sally Jansen,  
Ronald Koepke, Rion & Judy Korn,  
Sue Kramer, Cheryl & Jeff Marx,  
Richard & Laurel McConnell,  
Jacob Meister, Nancy Pelzer,  
Gloria Rettinger, Sandy Robrecht,  
Walter & Amelia Rugland, Ted Weaver,  
Gary & Nancy Whitman,  
Mitch & Sharon Zmuda,  
Diane Zuelzke

In the previous newsletter we misspelled the names of some donors to the Let's Make History Campaign. Donors Hope Reynolds & Gary Flemming (rather than Gary Fleming) and Louella & Gary Flemming (rather than Fleming). We apologize for the error.

## LANGLADE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

### Our Impact on the Web

We have been posting some of our photographs and documents online by partnering with Recollection Wisconsin. Our uploads of 1,528 items may be viewed at <https://recollectionwisconsin.org/institutions/langlade-county-historical-society>

Recently we added 223 more photographs of Antigo and towns in Langlade County and the

Northwoods to our online collection.

People have been noticing. Prior to recent additions, Google Analytics reported that about 18,900 views of our material occurred in the year 2020, up from about 11,300 the previous year. Being closed for remodeling has not affected the interests of web visitors to our archives.

### WHS Museum

The Wisconsin Historical Society's (WHS) planned new museum in downtown Madison had undergone some revisions. The original plan called for the new museum to be part of a much larger development on the block that includes the current Wisconsin Historical Museum, at the top of State Street on the Capitol Square. However, a recent study led to the discovery of a new, larger site, currently occupied by a state government building two blocks from the Capitol.

A major emphasis of the museum will be to accommodate special exhibits reflecting different aspects of the state. Initial planning began with listening sessions from October 2018 through July 2019. More

than 5,000 participated in these listening sessions around the state, offering ideas and opinions on what the new museum should include. These sessions included a very diverse representation of people from local communities, American Indian nations of Wisconsin, as well as African-American, Asian American, and Latinx groups.

Wisconsin is the first state in the country to emphasize local history and continues that philosophy with over 400 local history affiliates (including us). The WHS organizes one of the nation's largest local history conferences and provides expert staff to assist its affiliates. By collaborating with the new museum in Madison, we hope that we tell the rest of the state our region's story.

### Volunteer Docents Needed

With the reopening of the museum planned for May, after a year being closed, we are recruiting volunteers to be at the front desk. Volunteers would greet visitors, describe the museum layout and provide general information. No previous experience is necessary and we would train you. You will not be

working alone. Volunteers may take on additional responsibilities, if they wish, as they become familiar with the museum, its operation, archives and displays, and the new Welcome Center. It is expected that volunteers would sign up for a 3-hour shift, once per week. Call the museum at 715-627-4464 for more information.

# The Dust Bowl Affects Langlade County

On May 9, 1934 Alice Schumitch, a 24-year-old school teacher at Gillis School in Neva, was about to marry and living in the family farmhouse in Ackley with her father and two brothers. That day she wrote in her diary “The wind started blowing & just about blew the house away. Kept it up all night.” Her May 11 entry read “Had to clean up after the dust storm. Boys cleaned the yd. & the girls cleaned up inside. Grandma is pretty sick.” Normally, sweeping up dust would not be worthy of a diary entry but this was no ordinary amount of dust. It had come all the way from the Dakotas and Montana.

The 1930s saw devastating dust storms, a result of drought and years of poor land management in the southwest and great plains. Timothy Egan described a specific storm that started on May 9, 1934 in the Dakotas and eastern Montana in his book “The Worst Hard Time”. He writes “The sun at midmorning turned orange and looked swollen.... The next day a mass of dust-filled clouds marched east, picking up strength as they found the jet stream winds... By the time this black cloud hit Illinois and Ohio, the formations had merged into what looked to pilots a solid block of airborne dirt.” An estimated six thousand tons of dust were dumped on Chicago before the storm moved on to cover Boston and New York City. The dust storm measured 1,800 miles from the plains to the Atlantic and carried an estimated 350 million tons of dust. Dust seeped into the White House where Roosevelt was discussing plans for drought relief and, eventually, out to sea, covering ships 200 miles from shore.

Wisconsin and Langlade County were not spared. The Antigo Daily Journal reported that local conditions were exasperated by unusually hot temperatures (it was in the 90s- very hot for May). Planes in Clark County were forced to land and street lights were turned on at noon in many cities. Cars turned on headlights from LaCrosse and Eau Claire in the western part of the state to Milwaukee in the east. The top of Rib Mountain was

hidden from view. Farmers from Wausau to Janesville reported that exposed grain seed had been blown away.

The Antigo Daily Journal article observed “Housewives, many nearing the end of a general spring cleaning, saw their efforts defeated as the fine sand filtered in through closed doors and windows.” That was certainly true for Alice Schumitch and her family. A month later, on June 26 she married Leon Kretz, as planned, and set up house in Antigo. Her teaching contract was not renewed because married women were not supposed to teach.



*Alice Schumitch, all cleaned up, and with Leon Kretz on their wedding day, June 26, 1934, just a little over a month after Antigo experienced the dust storm or “Big Blow” of May 9.*



*Headline of Antigo Daily Journal May 10, 1934*

# The Lure of Fishing

The first weekend in May brings the onset of fishing season, an event eagerly awaited by many. Two men from Antigo have had a major impact on how people land a trophy fish or a meal. Both are enshrined in the Freshwater Fishing Hall of Fame in Hayward.

Todd Sheldon, owner of a sporting goods store in Antigo, once received a Mepps lure, made in France, from a friend serving in the military immediately after World War II. He had great luck with it on the Wolf River. Sheldon obtained more of the lures to sell in his shop. His friend arranged with a woman in France to send him Mepps spinners in exchange for nylons. Soon customer demand for lures exceeded her need for nylons so Todd began buying lures directly. In 1956, Todd sold his sporting goods store and formed Sheldons Inc. to focus on manufacturing and importing lures. He improved the design by incorporating tufts of squirrel tail fur

into the lure. He got the idea from a boy he met while fishing on the Wolf River who had so modified his Mepps lure and was having better luck than he was. By 1960, sales of Mepps spinners in the United States topped half-a-million, and continued to grow. He obtained exclusive U.S. rights and, eventually, the company. What started in a ten-foot-square room in the back of a small sports shop in Antigo had become one of the most important manufacturers in the fishing tackle industry.

Frank Suick was born in 1899 to parents who owned a tavern near the railroad depot. Many railroad men would hang out in the tavern, befriending young Frank. In the 1920s he would often hitch a train ride with the crew to Pelican Lake for a day of fishing. He once observed that an injured trout he had hooked was attacked by larger predator fish. It inspired him to whittle a lure to resemble the prey. Frank Suick soon became

legendary for his ability to catch prize muskellunge (muskies) and was known as the man who landed “thirty muskies in thirty days”. His lure became the classic “Suick Muskie Thriller” and his skill was noted by visitors to the family tavern who saw prize muskies mounted above the bar. Soon an industry was born. The first Suick Muskie Thriller lures were offered for sale in 1942. For four generations the Suick family has been manufacturing a wide variety of lures in Antigo.

These two men, Todd Sheldon and Frank Suick, have played a large role in making Wisconsin’s sport fishing tourism a \$2.3 billion industry that has created 13,500 jobs. Both companies are still family owned and based in Antigo



*Suick's: The Suick family and bar employees display Frank's muskies caught using the Muskie Thriller Mepps sign: Mepps lures in Antigo still solicit squirrel tails for use in lures.*

# Fifth Avenue Got a Face Lift

*Recent work has made Fifth Ave. much more attractive. Celebrations are planned for an official June inauguration. Here are some views from the past of the heart of downtown Antigo.*

**Top row:**

**Left:** *Soldiers welcomed home after World War I.*

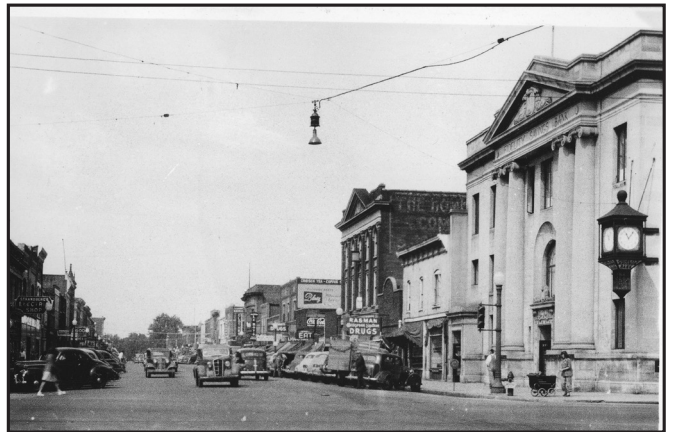
**Right:** *50th anniversary parade of Antigo's founding, in 1929*

**Middle row:** *Views of Fifth Ave. looking west from Superior St.*

**Bottom row:**

**Left:** *Palace Movie Theater 1920s (not the current cinema).*

**Right:** *Dixie Lunch in the 1940s*



**ADDRESS:**

404 Superior St., Antigo, WI 54409  
 Phone: (715) 627-4464  
 Email: [lchs@dwave.net](mailto:lchs@dwave.net)  
 web site: [www.langladehistory.com](http://www.langladehistory.com)

**MUSEUM HOURS:**

October 1 to May 1,  
 Thursday to Saturday

May 1 to October 1,  
 Tuesday to Saturday

10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

**MEMBERSHIP DUES**

Individual, 1 year: \$25  
 Individual, 3 years: \$50  
 Family, 1 year: \$30  
 Family, 3 years: \$70  
 Junior (18 or younger), 1 year: \$3  
 Business, 1 year: \$100  
 Life Member: \$250

**UPCOMING EVENTS**

**Mon. June 7:** We will be serving pie at the music in the park concert in City Park. Volunteers who are bringing pies should bring them to the shelter at 5:30 pm.

**Sat. June 12:** Celebrate the improvements to downtown Antigo's Fifth Ave. Watch for announcements of events and take a detour to visit our remodeled museum and Welcome Center.

**ITEM FROM THE MUSEUM:**

John Schroepfer was born in Austria in 1886 and came to Antigo as a toddler. He was a self-taught musician and violin maker who won praise from Charles Mills, director of the music school at UW-Madison. This is one of 153 violins he produced.



404 Superior Street  
 Antigo WI, 54409