

LANGLADE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Annual Meeting Wrap-up

This year the Langelade County Historical Society varied its routine for its annual meetings. We chose a venue outside of Antigo (at TimbeHaven in Polar) and held the event on a Sunday afternoon rather than a weekday evening to accommodate people reluctant to drive on November evenings. The new pattern was a success.

Over 50 people attended the meeting on November 5th to hear about remodeling plans for the museum. After a brief presentation by board president Joe Hermolin about problems we face with the current structure, Melody Hamlin and Rick Schroeder of the Wausau –based Funktion Design architectural firm described proposed changes that had been developed over the past year following meetings between the board and Funktion. The plan would make the interior more attractive, improve on some structural problems, and make the museum handicap accessible.

This plan is ambitious and will be completed in stages as funding becomes available. The presentation focused on Phase 1, which carries an approximate budget of \$460,000. It would include adding an access ramp to allow those in wheelchairs or with other mobility issues to enter the main floor of the facility; replacing first floor and basement ceilings; providing new ductwork to the basement for the first floor and

basement heating and ventilation systems; main floor period lighting; and adding a main floor unisex bathroom. Future work could include installing a small elevator to service all three museum floors and upgrading the existing men’s and women’s restrooms located in the basement level.

The presentation was followed by a lively question and answer period where attendees expressed opinions and concerns about how to proceed. During the following months the board will be considering details of the overall plan and will also be unveiling a fund-raising campaign to make the building more attractive and better fit to accommodate visitors.

At the meeting there was also election of board members for new three-year terms. Incumbents, reappointed unanimously and without opposition are Glenn Bugni, Lisa Haefs and Dean Blazek.



A Visit from Santa

An Antigo Christmas tradition continued thanks to collaboration between the museum, The Antigo Daily Journal, and the Community Association of Retirees (CAR). Santa was at the museum on 12 separate days. He received requests from 376 children accompanied by 383 adults. Museum volunteers and curator Mary Kay Wolf acted as Santa’s helpers while donations from CAR meant that each child got to take home a toy or book. The Antigo Daily Journal handled the negotiations to arrange for Santa’s time spent at the museum.



CURATOR:
Mary Kay Morrissey Wolf

DIRECTORS:
Dean Blazek
Fran Brown
Nancy Bugni
Glenn Bugni
Carol Feller Gottard
Lisa Haefs
Joe Hermolin
Gary Whitman
Diane Zuelzke

THANK YOU

In Memorium Donations

In Memory of: Lloyd Anstutz and Lillian Fronck from Alma Fraser

In Memory of: Margaret Hagerty from Jane and Andrew Powell

Monetary Donations:

James Aulik
James and Kathleen Wing
Langlade County Genealogy Society
Sheldon Foundation

New and Renewed Memberships:

Rod Barta
Fran Brown
Dede Cromer
Judy Grimm
Joe Hermolin
Bill and Beth Kelly
Sue Kramer
Jeff and Cheryl Marx
Don and Mary Mollet
Gloria Rettinger
Carol and Sam Steffan
Dick Strasser
Bill and Helen Williams
Diane Zuelzke

LANGLADE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Value of History

The relevance of history as a discipline is sometimes overlooked as emphasis in our schools is often placed on STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics). But knowing our history is important to us, our community, and our future. The American Association of State and Local History advocates for local history organizations. It is a national association that provides leadership and support for those who preserve and interpret state and local history in order to make the past more meaningful. In Wisconsin the Wisconsin Historical Society and its affiliate the Wisconsin Council for Local History work to achieve the same goals locally.

History is important in nurturing personal identity in a diverse world. By studying our history we learn about the many individuals and groups that have shaped the world in which we live. By knowing the stories of those who struggled, suffered losses and achieve success we are better able to develop personal values to guide us and our progress in relationship to others. History also helps develop critical skills- the importance of researching a topic, judging the reliability of sources, being aware of biases in sources, and analyzing conflicting evidence in order to develop a clear interpretation of how to proceed.

Awareness of our history is essential to our community as well as our personal development. History lays the groundwork for a strong and resilient community. Our connections and commitment to one another are strengthened when we share our past stories and experiences. Economic development is also aided by historical awareness. People are drawn to regions that have preserved a historical identity. Cultural heritage has

been demonstrated to be an essential component of a vibrant local economy that attracts talent and enhances business development.

Our future development also depends on knowledge of our past. By bringing history into discussions about contemporary issues we can better understand the origins and multiple perspectives of the challenges we face. This can clarify misperceptions, reveal complexities, temper volatile viewpoints, and open people to new possibilities. History inspires leaders by providing visions and role models for the challenges we face. Stories reveal how past generations met challenges they faced and may help provide future leaders the wisdom and courage to deal with the challenges of our time. Preservation of meaningful places, documents, artifacts, images and stories leave a foundation upon which future generations can build.

The Langlade County Historical Society is working to preserve our local history and make it available for the benefit of individual development, our community's well-being, and our future. Awareness of our past is an important part of our lives. William Faulkner is reputed to have said "The past isn't dead. It isn't even past." It is a sentiment that we at the museum believe and work to promote.



Antigo saved its first home from destruction in 1914 by moving it from its original site to the library grounds. It may be the first example of a Wisconsin community taking steps to preserve its history.

Women of Langlade County

March is Women’s History Month, dedicated to commemorating and encouraging the study, observance and celebration of the vital role of women in American history. So it is appropriate that we consider five women from Langlade County who made significant contributions in a variety of fields.

Bernice Stewart, as a child, followed her father, a timber cruiser, as he visited lumber camps. Upon graduation from Antigo High School in 1911 she went to University of Wisconsin-Madison, majoring in English. Her major professor was a Shakespeare scholar but encouraged her to write about her experiences. Her research on the folk tales about Paul Bunyan, which she heard as a child, was one of the first academic studies of local folklore.



Bernice Stewart documented the folktales of Paul Bunyan.

Helen Benishek graduated from Antigo High School in 1914. At the University of Wisconsin-Madison she studied landscape architecture. She was one of a few women in what was then a new profession and may well be the first woman landscape architect in Wisconsin. She returned to Antigo where one of her landmark projects was planning and designing Antigo’s City Park. Her plan is still in place today.



Helen Benishek was an early architect that designed Antigo City Park.

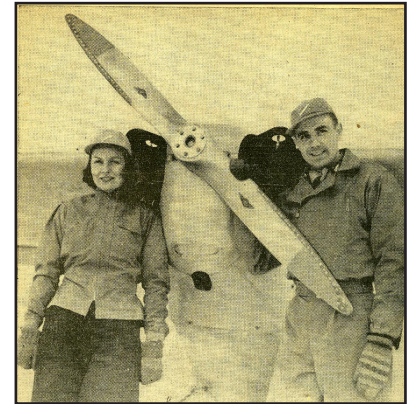
Emma Leonard’s husband Dan was elected sheriff of Langlade County in 1922. Emma was expected to help run the jail and tend to prisoners. When Dan died in office in 1924 Governor John Blaine appointed his widow to the position of sheriff; making her the first woman sheriff in Wisconsin.



Emma Leonard was the first woman sheriff in Wisconsin.

Meda Mates was an airplane pilot in the late 1930s and early 1940s when women aviators were rare and Langlade County had no airport. Together with her husband Fred they were

known as the “Flying Mates”. They were instrumental in establishing the Langlade County airport. Fred Mates was the airport’s first manager.



Meda Mates was instrumental in establishing Langlade Co Airport.

Dr. Elizabeth Steffen was the daughter of Dr. Lyman Steffen, a pioneer Antigo physician. Elizabeth, like her father, combined medical practice with community service. When she graduated from medical school in 1944 few women were in that profession. She practiced in Racine and helped found Family Planning Association of Racine (a forerunner to Planned Parenthood), and was a strong supporter of health care for the disadvantaged. She also did tours on the ship Hope which travelled to underdeveloped countries tending to medical needs of the local population.



Dr Elizabeth Steffen

Mesker Store Kits

The museum is hoping someone can help with some historical research. In the early 20th century and up to the mid-20th century a number of companies sold home kits. A customer would order a particular kit to be delivered (in stages) for assembly into a house. Sears was the largest such company, but there were others and a number of kit homes were built in Antigo and we are aware of one in Matoon.

But homes were not the only buildings that came in kits. Two rival companies, operating from the 1880s to the mid-20th century provided kits for storefronts. The Mesker Brothers Iron Works was based in St. Louis and was operated by brothers Bernard and Frank Mesker. A third brother, George Mesker, set up a rival business in Evansville, Indiana. The rival companies designed and manufactured ornamental sheet-metal facades and cast iron storefronts for businesses throughout the U.S. They also produced ceilings, railings, stairs, skylights, freight elevators, roof cresting, ventilation grates, and iron awnings. These

buildings are generally referred to as “Meskers”. As with the home kits, individuals in small towns who wished to have a distinctive style building but did not have access to an architect or skilled builder could select from a catalog showing a wide variety of styles with unique architectural features.

According to a 1915 catalog there were “Meskers” in every state of the union including 17 in the territory of Alaska. It is estimated that about 3,500 “Meskers” survive, many on the National Register of Historic Places. A Mesker & Co. of Evansville Indiana catalog from 1911 indicates 292 storefronts sold in Wisconsin. Most of these have not been identified. Records show that four kits from this company were sold to clients in Antigo: two fronts to F.W. Haefs, one to J.L. Klock and one to Laughlin & Kelley.

F.W. Haefs operated a harness shop in the late 19th century on the 700 block of Fifth Ave. But that building has vanished. Laughlin & Kelly ran

a hardware store, also on Fifth Ave. but that building seems also to no longer exist. However the Mesker kit sold to Klock may still have left a trace. The Antigo Daily Journal, in 1916, stated that Klock built onto the Louis Krom building which is the former Thelma’s store. The top façade of the store adjacent to Thelma’s is typical of that offered in the Mesker catalogs.

The museum has no old photographs to confirm this but if anyone has something in a family album or scrapbook showing the building we would like to hear from you. Antigo may still have the remnants of a significant example of early 20th century vernacular architecture – a “Mesker”.



Top: Cover from Mesker’s 1904 catalog
 Above left: A possible “Mesker” in beige brick next to the grey Thelma’s which was the Krom building.
 Above right: Detail of the upper façade of the beige building is a typical Mesker design

Elcho Historical Society being formed

Langlade County will soon have an additional historical society. A group in Elcho has been formed and joins museums in Antigo and White Lake that work to preserve the county's history. Here are some photographs that depict parts of Elcho's history. Moving clockwise from the upper left:

Grange Hall is the last extant building of the Grange movement in Langlade County. It is being converted into the museum of the Elcho Historical Society

Elcho Depot in a photograph by A.J. Kingsbury for his Antigo based postcard business

The CCC Camp 657 barracks on the shore of Otter Lake (from 1933-1941)

Kraftwood Gardens was the summer home of the Kraft family (of Kraft Cheese) and a popular tourist attraction.

Muskie Inn was a major resort hotel in the area.

An early 20th century Elcho baseball team.



ADDRESS:

404 Superior St., Antigo, WI 54409
 Phone: (715) 627-4464
 Email: lchs@dwave.net
 web site: 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

No upcoming events at the museum.

ITEM FROM THE MUSEUM:

The dictaphone was invented by Alexander Graham Bell in the 1880s and commonly used in offices in the early 20th century to record dictation that would later be typed by a stenographer. The recordings were made on wax cylinders which were used in similar machines until after World War II. Now a device that fits into the palm of your hand can record sound, video, take pictures, and browse the internet.

