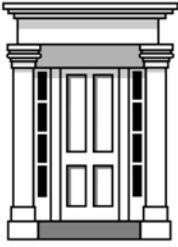


SHEBOYGAN COUNTY



HISTORICAL
RESEARCH
CENTER



Today in the United States the Salvation Army assists more than four-and-a-half million people during the Thanksgiving and Christmas time periods.

The Army was founded in 1865 in London by Methodist minister William Booth.

The Salvation Army is a Christian denominational church and international charitable organization structured in a quasi-military fashion.

The organization reports worldwide membership of over 1.5 million. Volunteers ring bells to inspire passersby to fill the red kettles.

The Researcher

The Newsletter of the Sheboygan County
Historical Research Center

Volume XXV Number 2

December 2014



A Sheboygan resident and his young son leave a donation at a Salvation Army kiosk in front of Prange's at Christmas 1943.

Red Kettle History

In 1891, Salvation Army Captain Joseph McFee worried that so many poor individuals in San Francisco were going hungry. During the holiday season, he resolved to provide a free Christmas dinner for 1,000 of the most poverty-stricken. Funding was a problem, but remembered an event in Liverpool, England where large iron kettles were placed at the docks into which passers-by tossed a coin or two to help the poor.

The next day Captain McFee placed a similar pot at the Oakland Ferry Landing. Beside the pot, he placed a sign that read, "Keep the Pot Boiling." He soon had the money to feed the needy at Christmas.

Six years later, the kettle idea spread from the west coast to the Boston area. That year, the combined effort nationwide resulted in 150,000 Christmas dinners for the needy. In 1901, kettle contributions in New York City provided funds for the first mammoth sit-down dinner in Madison Square Garden, a custom that continued for many years.

The Sheboygan County Historical Research Center is located at 518 Water Street in Sheboygan Falls.

Open Tuesday through Friday, 9:00am – 4:00pm and Saturdays from 8:30am to 12:00 noon.

Closed December 24, 2014 through January 5, 2015 for the holidays.

Phone: 920-467-4667

E-mail: research@schrc.org

Website: schrc.org

The Researcher is the official newsletter of the Sheboygan County Historical Research Center, 518 Water Street, Sheboygan Falls, Wisconsin.

It is published six times per year in August, October, December, February, April and June.

The Research Center is the local history archive for Sheboygan County and areas surrounding the county. It is a repository for paper records of all kinds.

The Research Center is a sister organization to the Sheboygan County Historical Society and Museum which collects the artifacts of the county.

If you file it, it comes to the Research Center. If you dust it, it goes to the museum.

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New Membership Year Has Started

The Research Center's new membership year began September 1, 2014. Sometime since then you received a letter asking you to renew your membership. Please know your membership is valued and the dollars you give make possible critical services at SCHRC. Membership cards have been discontinued, but you will receive a tax letter and thank you. Thanks for your patience. It takes a bit of time to process 800 memberships.

Go Paperless. Receive *The Researcher* via email. Save paper. Save postage and receive a more colorful newsletter. Contact Katie at research@schrc.org to sign up now. Catch us on Facebook— Updates daily.

Don't Miss Sheboygan County History column in the Saturday *Sheboygan Press* or online Friday through Sunday each week.

Upcoming Programs

SECOND SATURDAYS

December 13, 2014 - **Life, Death and Archaeology at Fort Blue Mounds** with Bob Birmingham is an archaeological detective story illuminating the lives of white settlers in the lead-mining region during the tragic events of the historically important conflict known as the Black Hawk War. Focusing on the strategically located Fort Blue Mounds in southwestern Wisconsin, Robert A. Birmingham summarizes the 1832 conflict and details the history of the fort, which played a major role not only in US military and militia operations but also in the lives of the white settlers who sought refuge there. Held at the Plymouth Art Center, 520 East Mill Street, Plymouth. 9:30am to 11:30am

January 10, 2015 - **The Life of Increase Lapham, Wisconsin's First Science Superstar with Martha Bergland and Paul Hayes.**

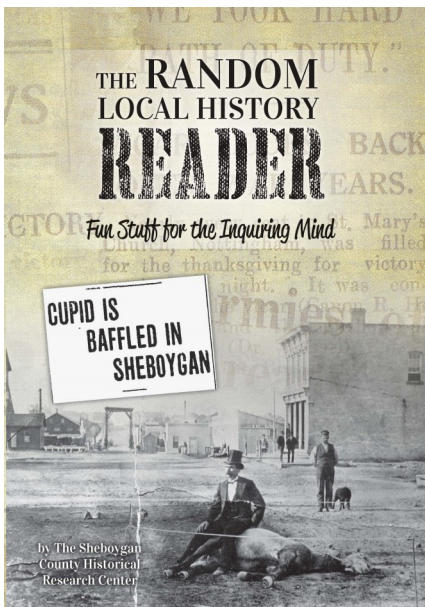
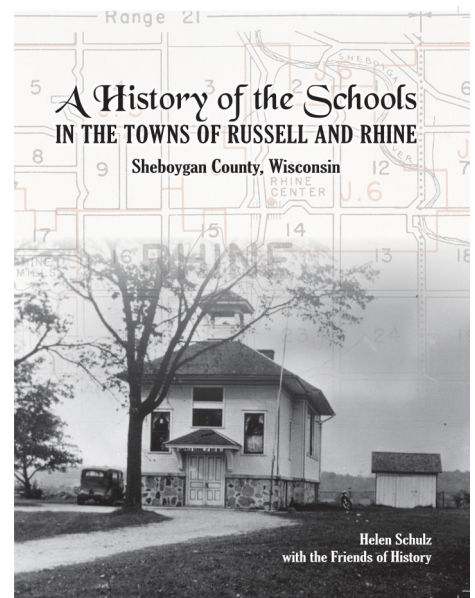
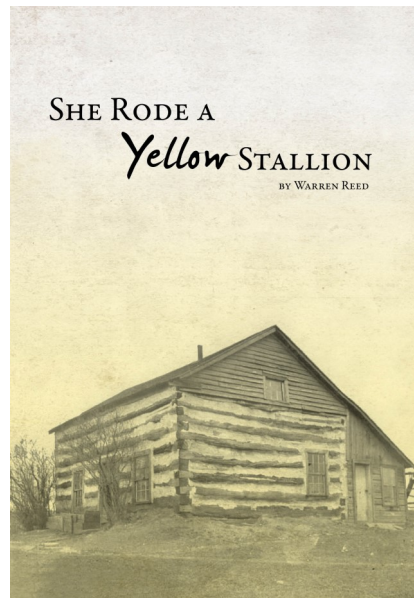
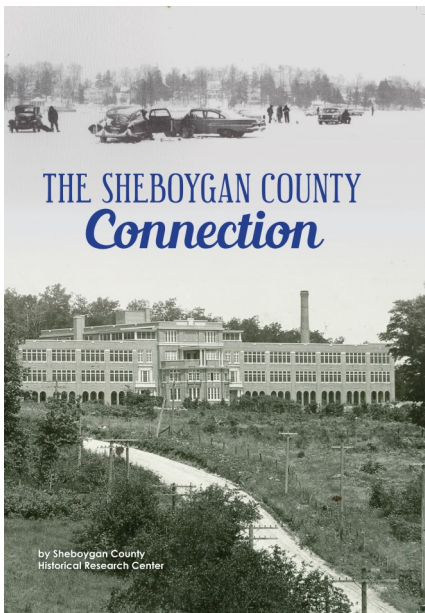
The Life of Increase Lapham, early chronicler of plants, rocks, rivers, mounds and all things Wisconsin. In this long overdue tribute to Wisconsin's first scientist, authors Martha Bergland and Paul G. Hayes explore the remarkable life and achievements of Increase Lapham (1811-1875). Lapham's ability to observe, understand, and meticulously catalog the natural world marked all of his work, from his days as a teenage surveyor on the Erie Canal to his last great contribution as state geologist. Self-taught, Lapham mastered botany, geology, archaeology, limnology, mineralogy, engineering, meteorology, and cartography. A prolific writer, his 1844 guide to the territory was the first book published in Wisconsin. Asked late in life which field of science was his specialty, he replied simply, "I am studying Wisconsin." Lapham identified and preserved thousands of botanical specimens. He surveyed and mapped Wisconsin's effigy mounds. He was a force behind the creation of the National Weather Service, lobbying for a storm warning system to protect Great Lakes sailors. Told in compelling detail through Lapham's letters, journals, books, and articles, *Studying Wisconsin* chronicles the life and times of Wisconsin's pioneer citizen-scientist.

GENEALOGY CLASSES

SCHRC, 518 Water Street, Sheboygan Falls, WI Time: 1:00pm to 3:00pm

December 8, 2014 - Photos, What We Can Learn From Them and How We Identify Them

Genealogy Classes and History on the Move will resume in April.



Shopping for the Holidays

The Sheboygan County Connection is a collection of forty-one stories about the way folks from Sheboygan County are connected to the greater world. Most were seen as Sheboygan County History columns in the *Sheboygan Press* from February to October 2014. Extra information and photos have been added. Topics range from ice fishing and the brutal winter of 1936 to the advent of Rocky Knoll and citizens' participation in the Manhattan Project. (\$20.00)

A History of the Schools in the Towns of Russell and Rhine is a reprint of an earlier book with much more information added. Photos have been enhanced and further identified. (\$25.00)

She Rode a Yellow Stallion is a reprint of a 1950 historical fiction novel by Warren Reed. Set in the town of Mitchell, city of Sheboygan and city of Milwaukee, Reed does a great job meshing the reality of the harshness of life in pioneer Sheboygan County with a love story between an unlikely pair. Warren Reed's ancestors were early residents of the county and he uses the knowledge from stories passed down to create an immensely readable story. (\$20.00)

Random Local History Reader is 150 pages filled with odd and interesting history. What is the real story of the Dead Horse? Who was the Black Terror of Sheboygan? Have you ever read an obituary for an outhouse? Learn the meaning of the term, Yeggman. Find out why Cupid was baffled. And read the full story behind the murder of revered, early teacher, John Sexton. Great reading for quiet time, you'll enjoy every story and photo included in this random collection of historical gems. (\$17.00)

SCHRC is your local source for books by author, Jerry Apps, and this year we're carrying a neat selection of the Haunted, Ghosts and the Supernatural History Press series.

And so much more!

Stop in at SCHRC to shop, check out schrc.org or call 920-467-4667.

“Meet Me at Laack’s”

by Scott Noegel

Laack’s saloon and dancehall in Johnsonville has been a staple for music and entertainment in Sheboygan County for more than a century, and its use as a place for community gatherings and celebrations extends back many decades more to when the town was called “Schnappsville.”¹



Carl Laack and his establishment, ca. 1912

Heinrich Wolfe built the first hall in 1856 as a general store and saloon combination. He added a grocery store before passing it to his son Fred, who then sold it to Hugo Leibner, who in turn sold it to Karl Maurer. Maurer’s widow Minna then sold it to Frederick (Fritz) and Anna Mog in 1883.² Under Fritz Mog, the town’s first Postmaster, the structure also served as a Post Office. In 1909, Mog sold it to Paul Steinhardt, who sold it to Carl and Ida Laack in 1912.



Edgar Laack, ca. 1930

Since this time, the business has remained in the same family, passing first to Carl's son Edgar and his wife Esther in 1926, and then to their son William and his wife Audrey. For many years, William also was Johnsonville's Fire Chief. Today Laack's is owned by William's son Carl, his wife Joan, and his brother Donald, who still continue the tradition of serving "Estherburgers," a fried burger on rye bread named after its creator, Esther Laack.

Laack's ceased operation only one time in its long history, when the building was destroyed by fire on July 14, 1939.³ There was a close call two decades later, on April 4, 1959, when an ice jam in the Sheboygan River flooded some of the village, forcing troops from Camp Haven to dynamite the river and break up the floes using an amphibious "duck," but the flood did not reach Laack's, and so it remained open.⁴



Esther Laack, ca. 1930



William Laack, 1974

For many years, Laack's included an "old time" general store that stocked everything from fresh bakery and eggs to clothing, paint, nails, underwear, and even bulk candy and peanuts during the Christmas season. During tougher times, many were allowed to purchase groceries "on credit." Due to changing circumstances the store was discontinued in the 1970s.

Nevertheless, what has remained a constant in the building's long history, is its use as a gathering spot and "watering hole." Even prior to becoming Laack's, it served as the location for many town meetings, political gatherings, farmer union assemblies, holiday events, and card playing tournaments (mainly Skat and Schafskopf). In the early days, there was a small horse stable under the east end of the ballroom that contained an elevator to transport guests to the dance floor.

Under the Laack family's management, the site became famous for its music. It quickly became a major location on the regional band circuit that boasted the musical groups of Bobby Art, Romy Gosz, Gene Heier, Harold Loffelmacher, Bob Mlada, Don Peachy, Dick Rogers, Russ Zimmerman, and more recently, "Carl Laack's (eleven-piece) Orchestra" and "Carl Laack's Polka Band."⁵



Dick Rogers Band, 1953

National orchestras also performed there, including those of Jan Garber, Eddie Howard, Guy Lombardo, Russ Morgan, and Dick Jergens. The orchestras, several of which had their own radio and television spots, made the place legendary.

In fact, it is difficult to find a time when live music was not playing at Laack's. As one might expect, bands performed at numerous showers and wedding receptions. However, back in the day, all events were open to the public and non-guests paid a cover charge that helped the new couple cover the costs of the band. Before the times of hand stamping, one was pinned with a ribbon upon entering. Live music also accompanied the town's annual events, such as the Sausage Festival (first Sunday after the Fourth of July) and "Fasching," held prior to Lent. Fasching (i.e., "carnival") is a German tradition handed down from the town's immigrant settlers that features a masquerade ball. Many certainly also have heard of Laack's "Pretzel Bender," an event that began forty years ago. Solely by word of mouth, the event became a regular sensation that brought thousands of people to Laack's and featured a midnight parade. All of these were major social events that brought the community together while providing occasions for meeting new friends. In fact, many couples also first met at Laack's.

Indeed, "Meet me at Laack's," has been a familiar refrain for four generations, but sadly, like all good things, this family tradition is coming to an end. Carl has announced that the business is up for sale. The familiar place that hosted countless card games, dances, and friendly German conversations, will soon leave the family that has enjoyed it for more than 100 years.

¹ I thank Carl and Joan Laack for the photographs and for checking the information concerning Carl's family history.

² This information appears in Franke, *Geschichte von Sheboygan County* (Sheboygan, WI: Demokrat Printing Company, 1898), p. 137, who incorrectly cites the year as 1885.

³ See the *Sheboygan Press*, July 14, 1939. The cause of the fire was unknown, and there was more than \$30,000 in damages. The Laack family narrowly escaped only in their bed clothing. The intense fire also destroyed the mill next door and melted two automobiles.

⁴ See the *Sheboygan Press*, April 6, 1959.

⁵ The Laack family is a very musical one. Not only has Carl played in bands since 1968, when he received \$25 a night, his mother Audrey also sang in the Sheboygan auditorium with her two sisters, Virginia and Joyce, and her brother William.

From The Random Local History Reader

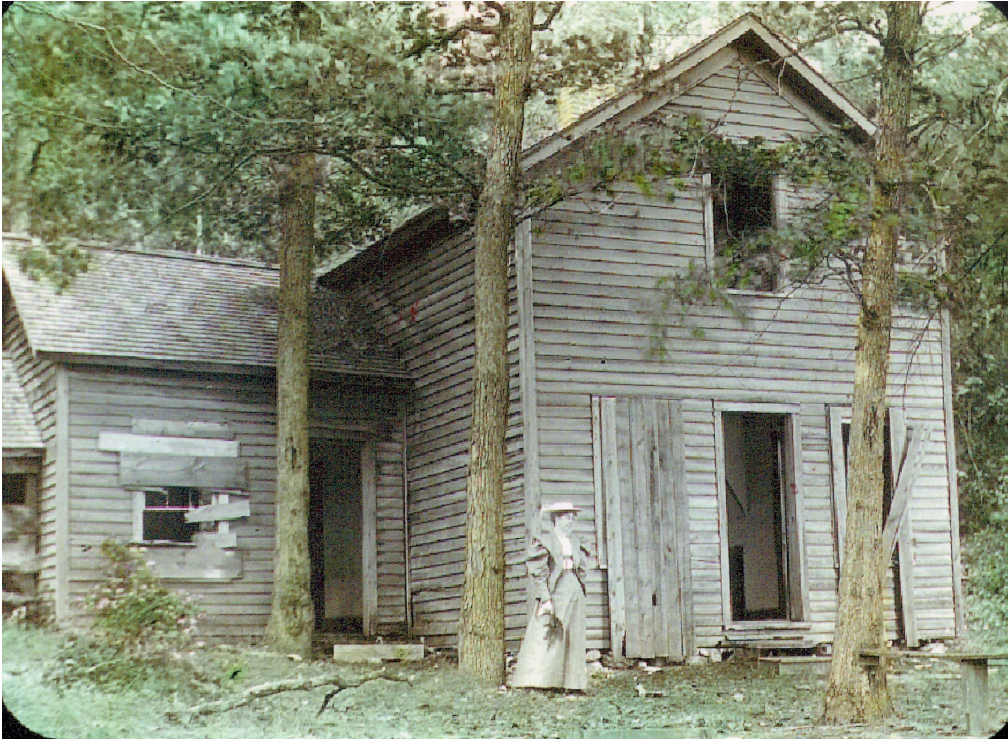
Steals A Pair Of Shoes

Sheboygan Press — July 8, 1911

Matt Urban, a Lithuanian, stole a pair of shoes Friday. He might have stolen several hundred dollars worth of checks but he had no need of them. He did however need the shoes; all good citizens and well dressed men do. The shoes however cost him a great deal more than their intrinsic value. He was fined five dollars and costs for the offense in all amounting to ten dollars and eight cents. His financial condition was not of the best, however, so he took twenty days in the county jail and gave up the shoes also.

Now, this aforesaid Mr. Urban had been looking for work Friday. He went to the office of the Parlor Frame Company to get a job. No one was in the office — a pair of shoes and a large number of checks were there. Passing up the latter he took the shoes and disappeared. Complaint was made and Matt was found with the shoes. He wanted both the shoes and work — but the fates are not so bountiful. Now he has the work (on the stone pile) but it minus the shoes.

Elkhart Lake's Haunted House



On May 3, 1894, John Schwartz sold a piece of property on the northern most point of Turtle Bay to Julius G. Wagner of Milwaukee. On that property there was an abandoned house which had been unoccupied for years and eventually acquired a reputation as being, "Haunted." Who or when the house was built isn't known and only one picture of it exists, probably taken about the time it was torn down. All that is known about it is the following article from the Plymouth Reporter of August 30, 1894.

"Elkhart Lake is about to lose one of its greatest attractions, the haunted house. Not that it is so beautiful in itself, but because of that element of romance and that smack of the supernatural, which have hung about it." ... The old gray walls with their staring windows are quite gloomy enough for the gruesome tale attached to them. The story goes that a man was murdered there long ago, and each night at the mystic hour of twelve, his spirit revisits the spot. A maple tree with foliage of a peculiar, sickly shade of greenish-yellow unlike any other near the lake stands near the house. The tree was a normal color until the night of the murder.

As might be expected the house is a favorite haunt of young people. Many a midnight party has been formed to investigate this interesting phantom. Nothing has ever been found but the ghost remains a fascinating mystery. This is the only known image of the house taken from a lantern slide. Who is that ghostly image of the lady in gray?

Sheboygan Press — June 7, 1921

Moonshine Egg Latest

UP Madison, Wis. — The moonshine egg has made its appearance in Madison. It has baffled both the police and the prohibition enforcement agents. The bootlegger inventing the deception told his secret only after going out of business.

He blew out the contents of hens eggs, he said and then filled the shells with liquor. Sealing wax was applied to repair the broken portions of the shells and make them liquor tight. The shells were placed in a large market basket and kept in plain view.

Evidence came to the authorities that the Madison man was selling liquor by the drink at his home and a series of raids were ordered. Eight times within six weeks officers visited the home, each time making a thorough search liquor was never found, even though spotters had reported to the officials that they had purchased there. An egg shell holds about three fingers of liquor, the bootlegger said.

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9th Annual Celtic
Christmas Tea

Nollaig shona. Merry Christmas. It's time to begin your holiday celebration .

Be sure not to miss the 9th annual Celtic Christmas tea scheduled for **Saturday, December 6, 2014** when *The Drowsy Maggies* entertain us with a combination of traditional Irish music sprinkled with something for the holidays.

The event will be held at the **Plymouth Historical Society**, 420 East Mill Street, Plymouth, WI from 1:00pm to 3:00pm.

This is a collaborative Irish/Christmas pro-

gram sponsored by the Sheboygan County Historical Research Center, the Sheboygan County Chapter of Celtic Women International and the Plymouth Historical Society.

Christmas treats, traditional brown bread, tea and coffee will be served in addition to the great music and even better conversation. A donation of \$4 per person is requested to help cover costs of the entertainment. This event is open to the public. Call 920.467.4667 for questions.