



Old Sauk Trails

Jan./Feb. 2007

The Newsletter of the Sauk County Historical Society

Historical Society Gets New Building Four-year struggle ends in Success!

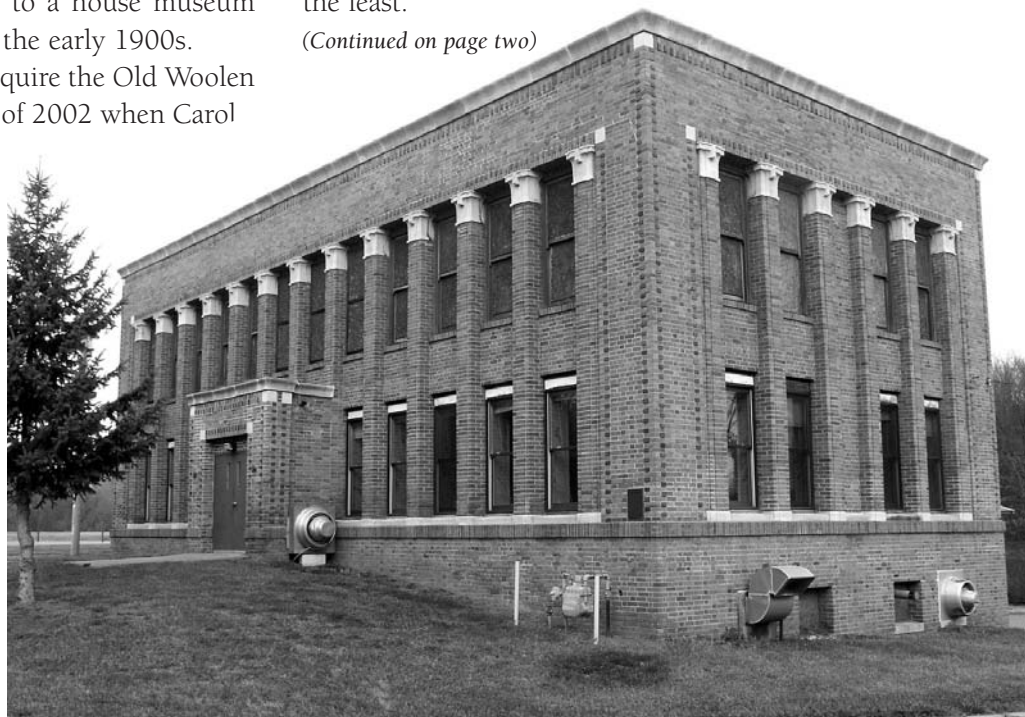
ON DECEMBER 19th, 2006, the Sauk County Historical Society acquired the old Island Woolen Mill administration building, located on Second Avenue near the Baraboo River on the east end of Attridge Park, from the city of Baraboo for \$1. This historic building is set to become the future home of the Sauk County History Center. Though extensive renovation is needed before this can happen, it is hoped that by the fall of 2007 the building will be open to the public. The lower level of the building will become museum space. The upper level will provide needed storage space for the Society. The main level will become a research library and reading room where individuals will be able to access information about their families, homesteads, and the county in general. Plans are for the current home of the Sauk County Historical Society, the Van Orden Mansion located on Fourth Avenue, to remain with the Society but be converted to a house museum highlighting life in Baraboo during the early 1900s.

The ambitious project to acquire the Old Woolen Mill Building began in the summer of 2002 when Carol Sorg, then a board member of the Sauk County Historical Society, called Tim O'Keefe, Director of the City of Baraboo Parks and Rec. Department, inquiring about the city's future use of the building. As the last remaining building of what was once the largest woolen factory east of Philadelphia, and a prime example of the work of the notable Madison Architects Claude and Stark, Carol well understood its historic value. For years the city had used the lower level of the building as a maintenance shop. But with the completion of a new

facility on the south side of town, the old building was deemed no longer necessary and was abandoned.

Discussions surrounding the old woolen mill building were placed on the side until the fall of 2004. With 60 years of archives under its roof, the Van Orden Mansion was filled with county history from the basement to the third floor. After careful consideration, SCHS Board of Directors at its January 2005 meeting decided to pursue the process of acquiring the old woolen mill building. Peter Shrake, Executive Director of the Society, was given permission to state formal interest in what was now informally called "The Attridge Building." The building however, clearly needed extensive renovations: a new roof, all new windows, a new heating/air-conditioning system, new electrical wiring, resealing of the foundation, and brickwork tuck pointed—a daunting task, to say the least.

(Continued on page two)



New Building (from page one)

A careful study revealed that, though aged, the building remained as solid as the day it was built, as well as environmentally safe. With that in mind, the Society pursued a very careful analysis of the financial obligations and fund raising needs required, should the building be purchased from the city. It also approached the county for a grant to help with the initial restoration of the building. The Sauk County Historical Society holds county documents that predate the Civil War, with more history being made every day. To have a place for these documents to be easily accessed by the public seemed like a project that would benefit the community and county government. With that in mind, a grant of \$100,000 was placed in the county budget for the initial restoration phase of the "Attridge Building," available only if the Society, in fact, purchased the building.

With many in agreement that the sale would be in the best interests of the city and the county, things progressed smoothly that spring. Everything was moving toward the grand finale in May 2006 when the Baraboo City Council would vote to approve the deal. Then the proverbial "other shoe" dropped. An old document was discovered in a forgotten file noting that Attridge

Park was acquired and restored in part through funds from the federal Land Water and Conservation Act (LAWCON). Federal money was involved, and federal approval was now required to sell the building. With that understanding, the Baraboo City Council approved the sale of the Attridge Building to the Society for \$1 pending the resolution of the requirements of LAWCON. Approval of the sale would now require the conversion of additional parkland on the part of the city of Baraboo to offset the land lost to the park by the sale of the building. This conversion would require the approval by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, as well as the National Park Service as part of the federal Department of Interior. Moreover, LAWCON required an in-kind conversion, not at the sale price of \$1, but at the appraised value of the old woolen mill building. The bright lights of the project dimmed considerably with this news.

Yet, the Society went forward with great tenacity, knowing how valuable the building was to the history of Baraboo, as well as how beneficial it would be to the county in whole as a history center. Society board member Bev Vaillancourt sent emails to the offices of state representative Sheryl Albers and Congressman Ron Kind explaining the project and asking for help. Each responded immediately with further contacts at the state and federal level. While Sheryl Albers worked with the DNR for a resolution to the problem, Congressman Kind contacted the office of Tammy Baldwin to coordinate efforts at the federal level. Meanwhile Society President Paul Wolter and Executive Director Peter Shrake worked closely with city attorney Mark Reitz to facilitate the lengthy process required by the city to comply with LAWCON. While at a conference in Washington, D.C., Bev Vaillancourt took the opportunity to visit the federal offices of Representatives Ron Kind and Tammy Baldwin and Senators Russ Feingold and Herb Kohl, with pictures in hand of the project, to garner further support. Everyone agreed on the value of the project, everyone shook their heads in disbelief at how the project has been stalled by LAWCON, and all agreed to help see the project through. Back in Wisconsin, Sheryl Albers was garnering further support from other state legislators. Official letters and calls abounded. The ball was rolling and gathering speed. Four months of uncertainty followed.

Then, miracles of miracles, on Friday December



Baraboo Mayor Pat Liston hands over the deed to the former Island Woolen Mill office building to Sauk County Historical Society President Paul Wolter. The acquisition of the building has been a 4-year project for the Society. Future plans for the building include a history center to house the Society's vast collection of research materials, and a venue to display more of its historic county artifacts. From left are Society Board members Bob Brown and Eleanor Chiquoine, Society Executive Director Peter Shrake, city Attorney Mark Reitz, Wolter, Baraboo Parks and Recreation Director Tim O'Keefe, Liston, Sauk County Board member Judy Ashford, State Rep. Sheryl Albers and Society vice president Beverly Vaillancourt.

8 the DNR reported that the National Park Service had given its approval for a conversion of land already owned by the city in return for the value of the old woolen mill building. Yet, joy was short lived when it further stated that before the sale could take place a determination was needed on the building's historic value. This required the involvement of the Wisconsin Historical Society/ Department of Historic Preservation to determine if the building would be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places and if so, protective covenances had to be placed on the property. Paul Wolter traveled the next day to Madison, with documents in hand, to meet with the Wisconsin Historic Society, pressing officials there on the need to move quickly on the project in order for the Society to secure the county grant. Once again, an immediate understanding of the worth of the project brought results. The Wisconsin Historical Society deemed the building should be placed on the National Register of Historic Places, the National Park Service was satisfied, and the sale was given final approval.

From the hard work of every member of the Society's Board of Directors, to the work of Executive Director Peter Shrake, to city and county officials, every participant had a key role in the success of the project. Special recognition must be extended to the support of our state and federal legislators who hastened the bureaucratic process that, without their intervention and coordination, certainly would have been in doubt. Unfortunately, Carol Sorg, who would have marveled at the process, never lived to see the conclusion of the project she started. Yet, the final step in this long process surely would have given her satisfaction.


The week the Society acquired the deed the Board of Directors discarded the clumsy name "Attridge building," for the new title "The Sauk County History Center". The renaming of the building ended one project and began another. The Sauk County Historical

Society now faces the exciting task of building a new museum and library. Raising an additional \$200,000 to renovate the building properly will be quite the endeavor. Yet, with sufficient and continued community financial and volunteer support, the building will enter its second century showcasing the history of Sauk County. Any one interested in donating funds or time to this project, please call Peter Shrake at the Sauk County Historical Society at 356-1001.



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Laptop Computer donated to Society

IT has been several months since the computers at the Sauk County Historical Society have been able to communicate with each other. New volunteer, John Bennin, a former Baraboo High school computer teacher, has spent several days getting them back in order. Now each machine can access the files of any other, making it much easier for staff and researchers to locate the information they want. For instance, the Society's vast collection of digitalized photos is located on a hard drive in

the Executive Director's office on the second floor. Now researchers have access to these images simply by pulling them up on any of the computers in the building. Mr. Bennin also noted our lack of a laptop computer and donated a new machine to the Society. This donation, among other things, will facilitate taking inventories of artifacts, located in the ballroom, and basement of the museum. On behalf of the SCHS, we would like to thank Mr. Bennin for his time and generous donation.

President's Report by Paul Wolter

"There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven." Eccl. 3:1

OVER the past couple of years I have pondered this bit of wisdom from the Scriptures as the Society has been on its odyssey to acquire the Island Woolen Company building in Attridge Park. Now that the handover has finally taken place it does indeed seem to fall into place in a larger plan. Though the process was truly frustrating at times and it often seemed like the whole thing might not happen, all things have worked out for the best. I would like to personally thank the City of Baraboo for the gift of the building and especially the efforts of Parks and Rec Director, Tim O'Keefe, who championed the idea from the start and saw the process through, and City Attorney, Mark Reitz, who also worked with the Society to make the transfer happen. A large debt of thanks goes to the Sauk County Board which saw fit to support the project and give us a good start in our fundraising goals, along with several private donors who have already lent their support. We have a good ways to go but the initial outpouring is encouraging. I would also like to thank Society Vice-President Bev Vaillancourt for her unwavering determination to see this project brought to fruition. She truly moved mountains in several ways.

As we embark on our second century with the acquisition of a new "old" building I can only imagine what Society members thought when the Van Orden Mansion was purchased nearly seventy years ago. The real estate purchase was certainly the largest but not the first that the Society had made up to that point. This year will mark the centennial of the Society's first real estate purchase in October of 1907 when the pre-historic Man Mound site was purchased in conjunction with the State

Archaeological Society. The preservation of this nationally and internationally important site is a testament to the dedication and determination of the founders of the Society. As we continue to carry on their vision to preserve and share Sauk County history I think they would be proud of our efforts. I want to thank all of our members for their support and hope they will commit themselves to our "Second Century." Someday a future newsletter will look back wistfully at the purchase of the Island Woolen Mill Office Building and hopefully praise our efforts now to preserve Sauk County's unique heritage.

Good Old Golden Rule Days now available on CD!

IN 1994, several area historians published a comprehensive 272-page history of the rural schools of Sauk County. The research and publication committee consisted of Bernadette Bittner, Ena Moll, Bill Schuette, Carol Sorg, Sandy Stiemke and Marie Wanless. Two printings of the book were sold out several years later. Requests for the book have come into the museum over the years; however, the cost for reprinting could not be justified. Now the book has been scanned and is available on a CD in PDF format. It can be read on your computer screen or printed out on your printer. As an added bonus, also included on the CD is the 70 page booklet "Rural School Teachers", a detailed listing of the teachers, where and when they taught. The cost to Society members is \$20, and for non-members, \$25. The CD may be ordered at the museum, or shipping is \$4.

Christmas Open House a Resounding Success

THIS SOCIETY'S seventh annual Victorian Christmas Open House was by far the most successful yet, attracting over 800 visitors! Book sales amounted to \$247, the raffle brought in \$435, and donations that day were \$463. The Society would also like to thank Raymond James Financial Services at the Baraboo National Bank and the Bank of Prairie du Sac for their financial sponsorship of the event. Twelve decorated trees at the mansion enthralled guests and the Society would like to thank Amber Moon, Bekah Kate's, The Ireland Shop, Dave Saloutos, DREAMS, King Louie's Java Stop and the Village Booksmith for decorating trees. Jeff Sorg donated the trees from the Sorg farm again this year in honor of his mother, Carol Sorg. Many musicians gave of their talents to provide festive Christmas music and over 100 dozen cookies were donated by Society members. This year's gingerbread house, below, was a recreation of the 1899 Foley House, located on Second Street in Baraboo and was created with the help of Salecker's Baraboo Bäckerei. A similar creation was the centerpiece of the Christmas raffle, which also included many items donated by Society members. The Society would like to thank everyone who helped to make the event a success and is pleased that it was well received by the public.



The 1899 Foley House recreated in gingerbread.



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Baraboo Library

www.scls.lib.wi.us/baraboo

The Baraboo Public Library has The Baraboo News Republic on microfilm beginning in 1855, indexes to births, deaths and marriages, Sauk County histories, older Sauk County directories, phone books and numerous other local history information.

Society Wish List

WITH so many changes happening in the Society this year, we need your financial help during this transitional period. The following are some of the items that are on our Wish List:

- Financial support for the remodeling of both the History Center and the Van Orden Mansion
- Archival supplies such as tissue and boxes to store clothing, file folders and file boxes to organize and store research files, boxes and storage for artifacts and envelopes for photos.
- Office supplies such as paper, envelopes, staples, paperclips and tape.
- Wood for bookshelves in the main research area
- Metal shelving for storage in the archive and artifact storage areas
- Office chairs for our volunteers
- Wastebaskets, desk sets, telephones and clocks for volunteer areas and each storage area
- Blinds for the History Center windows (there are 22 on the first floor alone)
- Period window treatments for the Van Orden mansion
- Wall to wall carpeting for the main floor of the History Center
- Flooring for the county museum in the lower level and archive storage on the third floor
- Flashlights for each area of the History Center
- Reproduce the side lights outside the History Center

We Care Program

THE Sauk County Historical Society participates in the Pick 'n Save "We Care" program. The Society's number is: **700500**. When registering for a Pick 'N Save ADVANTAGE PLUS CARD, please support the Society through this matching gift program.

Penny-farthing Bicycle

by Bill Schuette

THIS unusual high-wheeled bicycle was recently placed on display at the Sauk County Historical Society Museum. Known as the "ordinary" it was more commonly called the penny-farthing.

During the mid-19th century, bicycles were usually made of wood. One straddled the frame and propelled themselves by pushing with their feet. By 1870, metals became strong enough and began to be used in these two-wheeled conveyances. The pedals were attached directly to the front wheel, the chain drive having not been invented yet. The tires were of solid rubber, and the front wheel had long spokes, providing a smoother ride than previous bikes.

By increasing the diameter of the front wheel, (ranging up to 60 inches) makers realized that the bicycle could travel further with one rotation of the pedals. This machine was the first one to be called a bicycle (two-wheeled). These first bicycles were playthings of the rich, as they cost an average worker six months' pay.

The penny-farthing was produced primarily in England and the United States, their hey-day being the 1880's. The name was derived from two English coins, the penny and the farthing (one-quarter penny), the former being large in size, and the latter of a smaller diameter.

The handlebars are mustache-shaped, with a spoon brake towards the top which was operated by a lever on one of the handlebars.

To mount such an unwieldy contraption took much skill. A rider would place one foot on a small peg protruding from the rear wheel, grasp the handlebars and push off with the other foot. When sufficient speed had been attained, he would swing up and mount the seat. The gyroscopic effect kept the cycle upright.

From accounts of the day, the penny-farthing was notoriously accident prone. If the rider encountered a rut or large stone in



the road, an attempt would be made to hit the break and peddle backwards, slowing the vehicle. If that failed, the rider, who was high above the center of mass, would be propelled over the front wheel, landing on his head or "taking a header". When descending a hill, the rider was advised to place his legs above the handlebars, so that if the bike stopped suddenly, thrusting its passenger forward, the rider had a better chance of landing on his feet.

The Society's bicycle is unusual in that the small wheel is in the front, which, it was claimed, gave the rider better balance. This version of the penny-farthing was manufactured by the Eagle Bicycle Company in Stanford, CT, for four years beginning in 1883. The company's founder, Leonard B. Gaylor, patented this unique design.

By the early 1900's, the penny-farthing had seen its day. With the invention of the chain drive and gear ratios, the wheel size was reduced. The rider sat lower, and the ride was much safer.

Today these high riders may still be seen in parades and celebrations.

Cross, Jenks, Mercer and Maffei

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