



# Old Sauk Trails

Sept./Oct. 2007

The Newsletter of the Sauk County Historical Society

## Sauk County Historical Society Hires Executive Director and Curator

**A**FTER an extensive search the Sauk County Historical Society has hired Orris Smith of Reedsburg as its new Executive Director. A Sauk County native, Smith has been in retail management for many years and has also been very active in service organizations. Smith recently organized the Reedsburg Kiwanis group and is its charter President. In his new position with the Sauk County Historical Society, Smith will oversee administration of the Society and help it fulfill its mission to collect, preserve and share Sauk County history. Smith, who grew up in Baraboo, began his career working at the Al. Ringling Theatre for 9 years while going to school, and later transitioned to retail management in southern Wisconsin. Smith recently returned to Sauk County and has been a life long member of a Baraboo church. In his position as Executive Director, Smith will oversee budget implementation, be responsible for staff supervision, assist in fund raising, represent the Society at community functions, and oversee operation of the Van Orden mansion and the new History Center.

The Society has also hired a new part-time Curator, Destinee Swanson, of Deadwood, South Dakota. Swanson, who has been Curator and Archivist at the Adams House in Deadwood, has relocated to West Baraboo and accepted the position here. Swanson has a masters degree in American History and Museum Studies and brings years of practical museum experience to her new position. Swanson's duties will include overseeing the Society's collections, new accessions, exhibits and new education programs.

Stop by the Sauk County Historical Society and welcome Orris and Destinee!



*Sauk County Historical Society  
Executive Director, Orris Smith*



*Sauk County Historical Society  
Curator, Destinee Swanson*

## President's Report

WHILE almost a cliché, I must say “lots has been happening at the Society lately.” I would like to officially welcome our two new staff members, Orris Smith and Destinee Swanson. Smith started in August as our new Executive Director and found himself immediately initiated into our flurry of late summer activity, which included our presence at the Badger Steam and Gas Show. Smith helped with our book sales and exhibits at the show, which were praised by a staff member of the State Historical Society who happened by. Since the show Smith has been busy learning all of the systems of the Society's operations and becoming familiar with all of our volunteers and collections. Smith has come up to speed just in time for our new curator Destinee Swanson to start with the Society. Swanson has relocated from Deadwood, South Dakota where she was Curator at the historic Adams House. Her experience and training no doubt will build upon the work that has been ongoing at the Society to modernize collections management and display. Not to be outdone, work at the History Center has also been ongoing and exciting. I still have to pinch myself every once and a while that we now own such a significant piece of Sauk County history and can restore it for use as a wonderful new resource for the county. This sturdy historic building has stood the test of time and will last for many years to come as another tangible reminder of Sauk County's history and at the same time become a repository for that ever-expanding history. I look forward to our gala opening some day in the future and would like to sincerely thank everyone who has contributed to the Pillars of Progress Campaign. While there is much work left to be done, those “Pillars” are looking better and better.

Paul Wolter

## Upcoming Events

SCHS Annual Banquet and Business Meeting – Oct. 23, 6 p.m.

Baraboo Tour of Historic Haunts – Oct. 27, 8 p.m.

Holiday Light Parade, Downtown Baraboo – Nov. 17, 6 p.m.

Victorian Christmas Open House – December 8, 12-8 p.m.

## Sauk County History Center Update

THE HISTORIC Island Woolen Company building has seemingly grown several feet taller since the Society obtained the building in late 2006. The grade around the building has been restored to its original level, exposing about four more feet of brick on the front and north facades of the building. The change has brought about a distinctly grander feel to the building, certainly the clear intent of the architects. The original 1917 stairs to the front door also have been uncovered, and while in need of repair, they are still sufficiently intact to restore. As of this writing, thirty-six donors (inclusive of a one-time \$100,000 grant from Sauk County) have contributed nearly \$150,000 to the Pillars of Progress Fundraising Campaign. Every dollar contributed has been earmarked to purchase materials and labor needed for the building's restoration. To date, contributions have been used for masonry repairs and foundation sealing, a new roof, new utilities connections and re-grading. Sixty-one new and historically correct windows have been purchased for the building and await installation. Additional pledges of just over \$42,000 also have been received. Once realized, these dollars will be put toward continued restoration efforts. The Society's Board of Directors is committed to spending only cash on hand for the project. This leaves a current and pressing need for funds to install the windows and repair the front stairs, both projects costing about \$15,000 each.



# History Center Donors

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## CONTRIBUTOR

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\* Pledge

*If you are interested in making a gift to toward this important project, please contact the Society at (608) 356-1001.*

# Walking Tour of Downtown Baraboo a Great Success!

ON SUNDAY, September 9th a walking tour of historic downtown Baraboo was given by Society President, Paul Wolter. A group of nearly fifty people gathered on the Square to learn about the development of Baraboo and the business blocks, which were built around the courthouse square. Several massive fires occurred in the late 1800s destroying early wood business buildings and clearing the way for most of the brick buildings seen today. One rare survivor from early Baraboo discussed is the structure at 137 Third Avenue, the white building with gable front in the background. The building was built in 1850 by John Taylor as one of four store buildings on the south side of the Square. While the others were torn down or consumed by fire this building remains as the oldest and only all wood building left on the square, a unique link back to pioneer times.



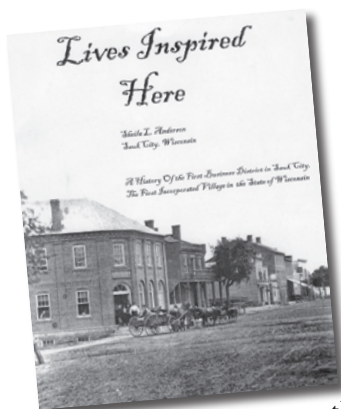
## Old Sauk Trails • Sept./Oct. 2007

The Sauk County Historical Society publishes *Old Sauk Trails* six times each year.  
Editor: Bill Schuette • Production: Bananaboat Ad/Grfx

**The Sauk County Historical Society and Museum**  
531 Fourth Ave. • PO Box 651 • Baraboo, WI 53913  
Open Tuesday-Saturday 12-5 pm year-round  
(608) 356.1001 • history@saukcounty.com  
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# New Local History Books Available

FOUR great new local history books have come off the presses this fall covering different aspects of Sauk County history. *Any of these would make a great Christmas gift!*



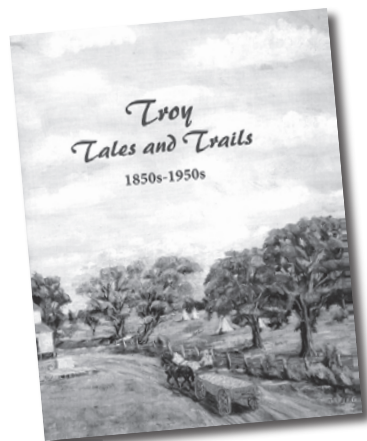
*Lives Inspired Here*, which outlines the history of the first business district block in Sauk City has been written and produced by Sheila Anderson. The 250 page book includes over 90 historic photos and took Anderson over twelve years of research and interviews to complete. The book covers the 900 Block of Water Street.

Copies can be obtained from Anderson directly for \$30 plus postage (\$4.60 within Wisconsin and \$5.50 outside of Wisconsin) by calling 608-643-8507. Copies will also be available at the Sauk County Historical Museum.



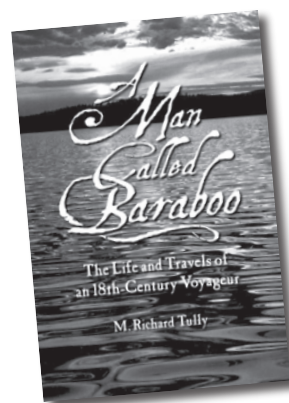
*America's Prettiest Playhouse* is a new full color booklet about the Al. Ringling Theatre with text by Dr. Bob Dewel, Mark Tully and Paul Wolter. The 47-page booklet is lavishly illustrated with historic and modern photos and drawings. The history and construction of the theatre along with a detailed

description of the building—from organ loft to orchestra pit—are included in this first-ever color publication about the theatre. Copies are \$15 and can be obtained at the Al Ringling Theatre.



*Troy Tales and Trails, 1850s-1950s* is a comprehensive illustrated history of the Town of Troy written and produced by the Harrisburg Home & Community Education Club. It covers the early history of the township, and histories of the schools, churches,

businesses, farm and home life, clubs, and other topics. The following communities are extensively covered in the book: Badger Valley, Black Hawk, Cassell Prairie, Cedar Hill, Fair Valley, Harrisburg, Lower Wilson Creek, Troy Center, Witwen, and north west Troy. The soft cover book contains 315 pages with 60 photos, most of historic buildings and events. Copies are \$25 (plus \$5 for shipping if mailed) and may be obtained at the M&I Bank in Sauk City; Bank of Prairie du Sac, Community Business Bank in Sauk City and Hall Drug Store. The book may also be ordered from Elaine Wilhelm, S10914 CTH C, Spring Green, WI, 53588.



Finally, M. Richard Tully's *A Man Called Baraboo* is scheduled to be on the press as you read these lines, and will be available through several local outlets (including the Sauk County Historical Museum) by the end of October. The first chapter of this book explores the dozens of theories for the origin of the name "Baraboo"

that have been circulating over many decades. The rest of the book tells of the life and times of the 18th-century fur trader that Tully ultimately identifies as "a man called Baraboo." The book draws heavily on primary sources and features numerous maps, illustrations (both original and historic) and photographs (including many fur trade-era artifacts) collected from the Library of Congress plus various museums, libraries and manuscript archives throughout Canada and the U.S.—including the Sauk County Historical Society's collections.

This 6x9 format, 190-page soft cover book details a period of Midwestern history that is often overlooked. It is extensively footnoted and includes a complete bibliography. Copies are \$12.95 plus postage (\$5.00) and will be available through Bananaboat Advertising Graphics, 620 Park Street, Baraboo WI 53913, or from the Sauk County Historical Museum.

Incidentally, *America's Prettiest Playhouse*, *Troy Tales and Trails*, and *A Man Called Baraboo* were all designed and produced by Bananaboat Advertising Graphics of Baraboo—the same folks who produce this newsletter!

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# “The Ghoul of Parfrey’s Gorge”

by Marshall Thomas Martin, M.D., Merrimack, Wisconsin, 1913

I HAD been riding nearly all day in the burning sun. It was the Fourth of July. My celebration had been a ten-mile drive to operate on a little boy who had received a pistol-shot wound at the hands of a playmate.

Late in the evening, I left the patient in comparative comfort; though my heart had many misgivings as to the outcome of the ordeal.

The night was more oppressive than the day had been. A black bank of ominous clouds was slowly rising in the west, and soon obscured the red crescent of the moon only a few days old.

Everything was dull and lifeless. The air was thick and motionless. The crickets chirped lazily, as if it was an effort. The frogs in the fens croaked listlessly. The mosquitos were dazed, and their usually intense falsetto was almost inaudible. There was an occasional lightning-flash, which was so distant that it seemed sluggish in its rippling course.

My faithful horse was breathing hard, even at a slow gait. However, in view of the approaching storm, I gently urged him on.

When about half way home, I passed near a most weird though picturesque glen. The proximity revived in my mind the many tales recounted regarding the uncanny though beautiful spot by ancient residents at their evening gatherings in old-fashioned log houses.

The glen is a rock-bound defile three quarters of a mile in extent, with precipitous sides rising sixty to one hundred feet above a small rivulet that winds and gurgles on the flinty floor of the ravine.

Instinctively, I touched the horse with the tassel on the end of my whip and hurried by the desolate and haunting locality.

Reaching home, without any untoward event, I lay down on a couch in the office to ponder over the labors of the day.

I had my gaze fixed on a human skull that graced the top of an oaken bookcase, when the office-door opened with a slight creak, and there entered a most beautiful girl, apparently about eighteen years old. It seemed that I was acquainted with my visitor, although it was some seconds before I could get matters arranged in my memory. It was little less than forty years since a face like that had come before my vision. The one who arose in my mind was a schoolmate a generation passed, and she had departed this life more than three decades before, when about the age of this young woman now

sitting daintily in my waiting-room.

I attempted to rise; but, with a graceful gesture, she motioned to me to remain on the couch.

She was the first to speak, and, with a most mellifluous voice, she said: - “I am Azubah. After your removal from Brookville, my parents sent me to the academy in Sunnyside. While there, the students became greatly interested in religious matters. My father and mother being firm believers in Spiritualism, I was called back from the school until the revival was a thing of the past.

“In a sort of desperate endeavor to enliven the monotony of existence, I eloped with a journeyman printer entirely out of my social and intellectual sphere.

“During our weary honeymoon, we visited this gruesome gorge, the mouth of which you lately passed so near and so hurriedly. We clambered up the east bluff to look down into the darkling abyss. Having gone about half the length of the glen, we came to a large pine-tree growing on the brink of the precipice. It leaned far over so that its top was much beyond the edge of the opposite wall. A wild impulse seized me, and, reckless of the results, I rushed impetuously toward the tree, telling my husband that I would cross on it to the other side. I ran up the slanting and almost horizontal trunk until about the middle of the chasm, when my feet slipped, and I was dashed on the mossy crags fifty feet below.”

At this point in her recital, I made a herculean effort to rise, and managed to stagger to my feet. I walked unsteadily toward the lovely apparition. Before I reached her, she had gracefully left the cushioned chair, opened the creaking door, thrown me a kiss with her tapering fingers, and vanished as noiselessly as had been her advent into my presence.

A few moments later, as I was striving to collect my tumultuous thoughts, there came a resound knock at the street-door. I hastened to open it, and, in the darkness, saw a young woman on horseback. She had reached from her saddle and struck the door with butt of her riding-whip. The horse was a fine animal, reeking with sweat and foaming at the mouth, while he champed nervously on the bit. The rider’s face looked strangely like the girl who had so lately occupied my attention; but I gave the resemblance no thought because of the imperative message that she bore. She said that I was wanted immediately up at the gorge, where a man had been injured by a fall among the rocks while out hunting.

As fast as possible, I hitched up a younger horse and started

rapidly on the five-mile trip.

The storm was just commencing, a few stray drops of rain were striking my carriage-top like shot. The lightning was vivid and incessant, revealing a long line of fluffy clouds in advance of the jetty stratum betokening a strong wind.

I drove as fast as safety permitted, keeping the road by the light of the constant electrical discharges. The heavy thunder was as ceaseless as the lightning.

The limit of travel by vehicle was reached, as the rain began to fall in sheets, and the wind to blow a hurricane.

I tied the horse to a tree, took my medicine-case, and went cautiously on among the rocks. As I neared the black and yawning portals of the gorge, the young woman who gave me the call suddenly appeared, and taking my valise, requested me to follow. Again noting the contour of facial lineaments so wondrously similar to those of my spectral visitant, I was loath to do her bidding, but, without a word, complied with her imperious command.

She led me not into the gorge, but along the ascent of the east bluff. She went bounding over the jagged and perilous rocks at such a pace that I was breathless and could ask no questions.

The deluge was now nothing less that appalling. There came a dazzling flash, followed by a reverberating crash of thunder that shook the hills. During this blinding lightning, I caught a glimpse of a large pine-tree inclined almost horizontally across the chasm.

I looked for the young woman, but she had disappeared. I called wildly, but no answer came.

I heard a wail like the cry of a tortured child. It was repeated. I turned toward the sound, only to hear it once more. My blood ran cold, I could not move a muscle. A quick motion among the leaves, a wild shriek, a heavy body launched against me, a hot breath on my face, and I toppled over with the impact. There was a sense of falling, falling, falling, and then all consciousness was gone.

With the returning glimmer of sensation, I found, by the lightning, which still came in an occasional mellow glow, that I was lying on the ground in a watery place some distance out from the jaws of the gorge.

I was stiff and sore, one arm and several ribs were broken.

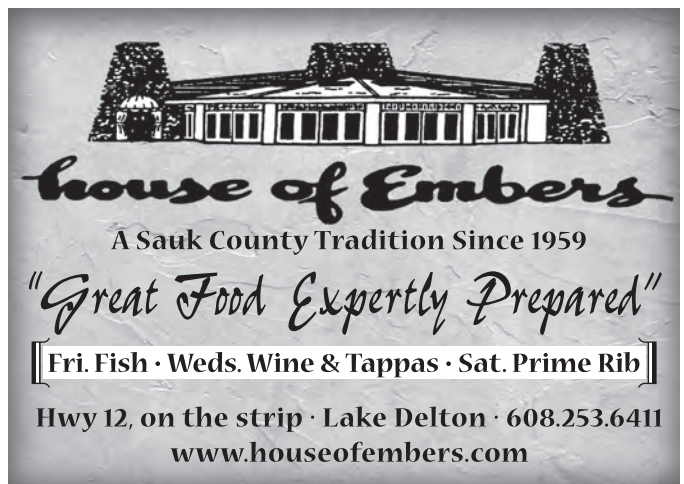
I managed to get to my horse, and rode slowly and painfully homeward.

The following morning, a report came to town that a gigantic wildcat was discovered dead, on the top of one of the gnarled boulders at the bottom of the gorge just above the seething, roaring waters of the swollen stream.

## Annual Banquet and Business Meeting Oct. 23

THE SOCIETY will hold its annual fall banquet and business meeting on Tuesday, October 23 at 6 p.m. at the Baraboo Arts Banquet Hall on Water Street. Dinner will be catered by Elite Catering followed by a presentation of the year in review including an update on the Society's expansion project at the Sauk County History Center. The special guest speaker will be Carol Anderson who will discuss *Troy Tales and Trails, 1850s-1950s*, one of the latest historical publications available in the county. Anderson is a member of the Harrisburg Home & Community Education Club which compiled and produced the book which covers the unique and fascinating aspects of this part of Sauk County. The Society will also hold a short business meeting to elect board members and update its members. An insert can be found in this issue to sign up for the banquet. The sign up deadline is October 19th.

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September/October 2007

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## New and Renewed Members

THANK YOU TO THESE MEMBERS WHO HAVE RENEWED BETWEEN MAY 1 AND JULY 31, 2007

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John and Elizabeth Davenport,  
Minnetonka MN

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David and Sherry Baldwin, Baraboo WI

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