



Richfield Historical Society  
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**A Visit to Holy Hill, 100 Years Ago - by Susan Brushafer**

Take an imaginary trip back to the late 1800s to early 1900s. For some time now, there have been sporadic stories about a place that some call Miracle Hill. You would have read about the beautiful Shrine, the fourteen stations of the Way of the Cross, scenic vistas, and miraculous cures that have called people's attention to this place. You and your family might have been curious about all of the attention Holy Hill, its official name, was receiving. Perhaps you saw the article entitled "The Lourdes of America" in the September 1, 1895 issue of the *Chicago Tribune*<sup>1</sup> that stated:

*"What Lourdes is to the Roman Catholics of France and Western Germany Holy Hill, in Wisconsin, is rapidly becoming to the followers of the church in the Northwest.*

*Each year sees an increase in the number of pilgrims who visit the place, until now it is estimated that before the present season of worship closes next October nearly 15,000 persons will have journeyed to the shrine where so many claim to have been freed from their physical sufferings."*

Maybe it was time for you to visit. What would you have found at the 'Lourdes of America'? How would you have journeyed to Holy Hill? Where might you have stayed? To satisfy your curiosity, imagine that you and your family made a pilgrimage to Miracle Hill around the early 1920s (before the present-day, third Shrine --as the Church at Holy Hill is known-- was dedicated in 1931.) Might your great-grandchildren and grandchildren have heard some of the following in the stories that you passed down to them about your trip?

**A Prediction of Popularity**

Holy Hill is the highest point in eastern Wisconsin. Approaching Holy Hill, a visitor traveled through white and red oak, elm, basswood, poplar, ash, hickory, and white birch. The beauty of the forest distracted the visitor's view, giving only occasional glimpses of the Hill itself.

In autumn of 1854, pioneer priest Father Francis Paulhuber was assigned to three congregations near Holy Hill. It was at that time that Father Paulhuber predicted:

*"...that hill yonder will become one of the most noted spots in all of this country. It shall be consecrated as a place of worship where tens of thousands shall come yearly to do homage to God and the Blessed Virgin Mary."*<sup>2</sup>

In 1855, Father Paulhuber purchased the Hill from the government by entering a claim. Building a Shrine on the Hill entailed many difficulties, so in lieu of a church, a large cross was erected on top of the hill in 1857. Roman Goetz hewed the fifteen foot cross from a white oak tree that grew at the foot of the Hill. He and his son-in-law, Matthias Werner, carried the cross on their shoulders to the top of the Hill. The cross was blessed in June, 1858 and dedicated in the name of the Blessed Virgin Mary.



**The Church at Holy Hill, 1923**

Work on the first Shrine was completed on Good Friday, 1863. In the sermon given during the dedication, the name 'Holy Hill' was formally used for the first time.<sup>3</sup> The second Shrine, the one you and your family are visiting, was completed in 1881.

### **The Journey to Holy Hill**

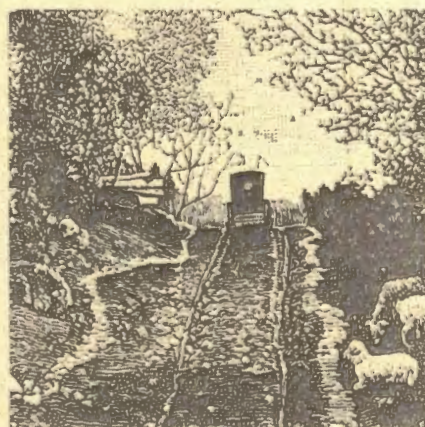
After the second Shrine was built, pilgrimages multiplied. There were several ways to get to Holy Hill including special trains, principally from Chicago and Milwaukee.<sup>4</sup> Passengers on these special trains recited prayers and sang hymns during their journey. The trains stopped in Hartford, Hubertus, and Richfield. Many passengers then traveled by horse-drawn stage, as your family has, when they got off the train in Richfield. It was said to have been quite a ride as it was thrilling and somewhat dangerous! The third horse pulling the stage had to walk at the very edge of the steep embankment leading to the Shrine.

Some of the earliest pilgrimages, numbering in the thousands, were the Slovaks and the Croatians who came principally from Wisconsin, Ohio, Michigan, Indiana and Illinois. They didn't depend upon the horse-drawn stages to get to Holy Hill. From the train stations its members walked, in procession sometimes with brass bands, the entire seven miles from the train stations to the crest of Holy Hill.<sup>5</sup>

Holy Hill is about the same distance from either Richfield or Hartford, and there are station stops on the Northern Division of the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad. Holy Hill can also be reached from Rugby Junction and Schleisingerville, station stops on the Wisconsin Central. Other visitors have told us that the drive from Hartford is the best as Holy Hill can be seen as a speck in the distance, eight miles to the southwest of Hartford.<sup>6</sup>

### **Lodging**

There had been several places for guests to stay while visiting Holy Hill. In 1879, a new parsonage was constructed in a ravine across from the ninth Station of the Cross (one of 14 carved-in-stone remembrances of Christ's crucifixion, 'stations,' that comprised the Way of the Cross.) This Way of the Cross was located on the climb up to Holy Hill and was one of the main reasons for people's visits. Father Ferdinand Raess, who cared for Holy Hill for eight years, lived there from the time construction was finished in October 1880 until September 1883.



**Approach (to Holy Hill) from Hartford<sup>7</sup>**

It became the first guest house. Unfortunately, it was destroyed by fire in October 1933.<sup>8</sup>



**One-Time Parsonage, *History of Holy Hill*,  
Rev. P. Cyril, O.C.D. March, 1923**

As Holy Hill became even more popular, not all visitors found places to stay following their journeys. In his book, *Miracle Hill, a Legendary Tale of Wisconsin*, W. A. Armstrong cites a clipping from the Milwaukee Daily Sentinel of August 16, 1888. It referred to the 3,000 people who made the pilgrimage to Holy Hill to celebrate the festival of the Assumption, a Catholic holiday, on August 15, 1888.<sup>9</sup>

Armstrong further noted that “besides those sleeping in the church, at least forty could find no accommodations.”

Around 1891, according to J. M. LeCount, author of *History of Holy Hill*, “Mathias Werner kept a sort of hotel a short distance from the road leading to Holy Hill, just outside of its entrance, where tourists to the Hill were entertained. Feed for horses, good lodging and a substantial meal could always be obtained, and at a low price at Werner’s hotel in an early day.”<sup>10</sup> “The hotel can accommodate as many as 20 guests at meals, but not more than half that number with comfortable lodging. The fare is simple, but at the same time abundant and substantial, and the charges are extremely moderate. Mr. Werner’s accommodations are ample for all ordinary days, but on feast days, excursions and other like occasions his resources are inadequate to entertain even one in every hundred that craves his hospitality.”<sup>11</sup> The Hillside Hotel was a very busy place that helped accommodate the many visitors.

Luckily, your family on its visit to Holy Hill was able to secure sleeping accommodations at a large dormitory and dining hall called the Holy Hill Hotel. The Holy Hill Hotel, formerly a parsonage, overlooked a ravine and was opposite the third station.<sup>13</sup> (*...of the fourteen Stations of the Cross.*)



**Hillside Hotel, later owned by Math. Stuetgen<sup>12</sup>**



**Holy Hill Hotel  
*Richfield Remembers the Past*<sup>14</sup>**

*“Christopher McGuire Sr. from near Holy Hill was in the city yesterday for lumber. Christ. tells us the lumber is for a summer hotel, which will be finished in early spring near the hill and that when done, he will name it the “shamrock” in honor of his native land.”*<sup>16</sup>

Since Christopher McGuire passed away in 1905, might Mrs. McGuire have completed the construction of the Shamrock?

In the 1890s, the two hotels on the Hill could accommodate four hundred pilgrims.<sup>17</sup> A snip from the Erin Plat Map 1915<sup>18</sup> shows where the Holy Hill and Hillside Hotel were located.

There were also places to stay in Richfield and Hartford. The Dickel Hotel and Livery, started in 1900 and located at the corner of Railroad and Depot Streets in Richfield was a popular place. The purpose of the Dickel Hotel, besides being a place to stay, was to bring visitors up to Holy Hill, and to transport salesmen to neighboring communities. The hotel’s owner, Mary Dickel, operated the Hotel for 56 years. Benny Dickel (Mary’s son), began offering his services while a young boy in 1903, driving passengers to Holy Hill.

The Hotel and Livery owned various rigs, some three- and four-seaters, and a buggy bus that held twelve to fourteen passengers. The approximately two and one-half hour trip from the Dickel Hotel to Holy Hill cost fifty cents.<sup>19</sup> Those were rough days for Benny as he’d sit in an open buggy or sleigh from 7:00 in the morning until 6:00 at night, many times in 20 below zero weather.



**Richfield Township 1915 Plat Map**

In 1906, the Dickels had a bus made in Mayville for \$375. In addition to bringing people to Holy Hill, it also took people to neighboring lakes such as Amy Belle and Bark Lake. The Dickel Hotel also hosted social affairs. The quote below is taken from a newspaper article found on wisconsinancestors.com<sup>20</sup> The Dickel Livery Service was eventually driven out of business in 1916 after the automobile came into common use.<sup>21</sup>

*“The grand mask ball given by Mrs. Dickel Sunday evening was a pleasant and paying affair. The large hall was filled to overflowing, 140 tickets were sold.”*

**Appreciating Nature on the Way to Holy Hill**

Sadie E. LeCount, who with her brother owned The Hartford Press, published a book in 1908 entitled *Holy Hill*. Excerpts from the book provide stunning descriptions of what a visitor to Holy Hill would have seen on the trek to the top of the Hill after disembarking from the train in Hartford.<sup>22</sup>

*“Passing through the little city, the road winds south and east, seeking the easiest route up the gradually increasing incline of the hills leading to Holy Hill, the highest of all. On either side the beautiful farm lands and dense woods. Often, overhead, tall maples and elms unite their branches to form a canopy across the road. One continual stretch of natural beauty makes delightful the seven-mile drive to the Hill.”*

**The Way of the Cross**

As noted earlier, in addition to the Shrine built at the top of Holy Hill, one of the foremost attractions at Holy Hill has been the Way of the Cross. This serene but somewhat strenuous walk includes the fourteen stations, each depicting a milestone on the last journey of our Savior. The Way of the Cross follows a steep hillside, covered with brambles

and overgrowth. Father Zimmer, who was the rector of Holy Hill from 1883-1893, purchased from Matthias Werner for \$100, the road which leads from the highway. Father Zimmer spent another \$40 to improve the road, which was in very poor condition.<sup>23</sup>



The only road leading to the shrine church was at the stone arched gate. A short distance from the gate was the first station.<sup>24</sup> The road leading to the stations of the Way of the Cross had become known as Stations Way.



Stations Way: Looking South on Stations Way from Hwy. 164, (September, 2020)



Stations Way: An Earth-Cut On The Ascent<sup>25</sup>

Ms. Sadie LeCount, in *Holy Hill*,<sup>27</sup> further describes the rugged beauty of the terrain along Stations Way:

*"The roadway winds about the Hill, rising at times gently, at others so abruptly that walking is difficult. Rarely during the summer are these Stations without their kneeling devotees. On either side lie the dense woods from which a tree has never been cut. The roadway is stony and worn smooth by the feet of thousands who have made the ascent of the Hill. No driving is permitted over this Path."*

The fourteen stations are located within an ever upward winding pathway to the Shrine entrance in woods extending a half mile on either side. They are the third ones to be erected. They replaced the original crosses which over the years had become weather-worn and dilapidated. The second set of weather-beaten stations were built of bricks, featuring zinc crosses and turrets at their tops. The new stations, built by gifts of faithful and dutiful donors, were carved and chiseled from massive blocks of solid Bedford, Indiana limestone.<sup>28</sup> They took Polish sculptor Joseph Aszklar fourteen years to complete. He carved one station each year, working from 1914 to 1928. The largest group was carved from a five ton block of stone. All the figures are life size.<sup>29</sup>

As visitors like our family reach the top of Holy Hill, where Station Fourteen is located, many are relieved to find refreshing, cool water. The Carmelite Fathers, who became the custodians of Holy Hill in 1906, are the ones who put in the 230 foot deep well, which was powered by a motor that forces water to the summit of the hill.<sup>30</sup>

Once more, we borrow Sadie LeCount's vivid description in her book, *Holy Hill*<sup>31</sup> of the landscape a visitor would appreciate from the summit of Holy Hill:

*"Beautiful beyond description is the scenery that stretches away on every side from the Hill. Rolling hills, fertile farms, blue lakes, lie in a panorama of loveliness about the Hill. From its summit can be seen the little City of*

Hartford, seven miles to the north; Pike lake further to the east, surrounded by its range of hills; to the south the lake of Waukesha county, and far away, to the south-east, on clear days, may be seen faint outlines of the city Milwaukee.'

## The Lourdes Grotto

Another addition to Holy Hill was a grotto built in 1897 under the guidance of Father Bertram, rector of Holy Hill from 1893-1906. The grotto, built on the south slope of Holy Hill was a "vivid reproduction of the grotto of Lourdes."<sup>32</sup>

According to history, in 1858, the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared 18 times, from February 11-July 16, to Bernadette Soubirous, a 14-year-old miller's daughter from the town of Lourdes in southern France.<sup>33</sup>



View from the top of Holy Hill, looking south toward Milwaukee (in background), August, 2020

Since most pilgrims could not afford a trip to France, nearly every shrine in the world erected a reproduction of the Lourdes grotto. Father Bertram procured a true picture of the Lourdes grotto and used it as the model for the Shrine most visited at Holy Hill after the church itself. At the original shrine in Lourdes, about three to five (out of a hundred sick people) were said to have been cured. One of the reasons pilgrims came to Holy Hill was to learn about the cures that happened there, the first being an eyewitness to a cure of a young lady in 1887.<sup>34</sup>

*"Miss I.K. suffered greatly from inflamed eyes for a number of years. She could scarcely identify large objects, even at a short distance. After coming down from the hill following her making a novena (private prayer) for nine days, she took the visor off of her eyes and exclaimed, "My God, I can see!" She found she was able to read the smallest print."*

In her book, *Holy Hill*,<sup>35</sup> Ms. Sadie LeCount describes a scene of believers working their ways up to the Lourdes Grotto:



Blessed Virgin Mary,  
Lourdes Grotto

*"Up and down the winding pathway of the Hill toil the lame, the blind and the sick, praying for the restoration they feel can be given them by "Mary, Help of Christians." Nestling on the summit is the pretty little church, filled with votive offerings, with discarded crutches and other artificial aids of crippled and pain-racked bodies, bearing silent testimony to the efficacy of prayer. Over all lies a hush that seems to speak of the countless prayers that have arisen for relief from mental suffering and bodily pain."*

## The Journey's End

Your family would always remember its visit to Holy Hill: the train ride to Richfield, the horse-drawn stage over the sometimes perilous terrain up the Hill, walking the up-hill path along the Stations of the Cross, visiting the lovely and peaceful Lourdes Grotto, and finally entering the door of the Shrine at the top of the Hill. Whether the visitor to Holy Hill is a believer in miracles or simply enjoys the beauty of nature, Fred L. Holmes, in his 1937 book, *Alluring Wisconsin*, sums up what might be considered to be every visitor's experience:

*"No place could be more alluring for meditation; none so elevating for the wholesome aspirations of life. The glacier which had dropped this load upon the landscape left for the generations a natural setting for the delivery of the Sermon on the Mount."<sup>37</sup>*

## References/Citations

- <sup>1</sup> "The Lourdes of America," *Chicago Tribune*, September 1, 1895
- <sup>2</sup> *History of Holy Hill*, Rev. P. Cyril, O.C.D. , March 28, 1923, page 13
- <sup>3</sup> Lou Wendel, Waupaca, WI, "information derived from History of Richfield Township" to accompany prints marketed through Landmark Galleries with permission from Richfield Sesquicentennial," December 11, 1996
- <sup>4</sup> *History of Holy Hill*, Rev. P. Cyril, O.C.D. , March 28, 1923, page 27
- <sup>5</sup> National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, <https://npgallery.nps.gov/nrhp/GetAsset?assetID=5cbb8b0d-1562-48df-a69d-6663a576be09>, page 24
- <sup>6</sup> *Miracle Hill. A Legendary Tale of Wisconsin*, W. A. Armstrong, 1889, page 22
- <sup>7</sup> *Miracle Hill. A Legendary Tale of Wisconsin*, W. A. Armstrong, 1889, page 36
- <sup>8</sup> *Holy Hill, Its History*, Mary Kearns, 1987, page 11
- <sup>9</sup> *Miracle Hill. A Legendary Tale of Wisconsin*, W. A. Armstrong, 1889, page 24
- <sup>10</sup> *History of Holy Hill*, J. M. LeCount, 1891, page 34
- <sup>11</sup> *History of Holy Hill*, J. M. LeCount, 1891, page 174
- <sup>12</sup> Post Card, Hillside Hotel, <https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Image/IM32129>
- <sup>13</sup> National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, <https://npgallery.nps.gov/nrhp/GetAsset?assetID=5cbb8b0d-1562-48df-a69d-6663a576be09>, page 18
- <sup>14</sup> *Richfield Remembers The Past*, Barbara A. Nelson, Margaret S. Holzbog, Holy Hill Hotel, 1996, page 156
- <sup>15</sup> *Holy Hill*, Sadie E. LeCount, 1908, page 17
- <sup>16</sup> Wisconsinancestors.com, McGuire, Christopher-providing lumber for new summer hotel - Story, 1890's
- <sup>17</sup> National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, <https://npgallery.nps.gov/nrhp/GetAsset?assetID=5cbb8b0d-1562-48df-a69d-6663a576be09>, page 20
- <sup>18</sup> Erin Plat Map, 1915
- <sup>19</sup> "'Bus' Driver Traveled Hard Road to Holy Hill," *NB-M Post News*, 7-8-1976
- <sup>20</sup> wisconsinancestors.com, Dickel, Mrs.-grand mask ball - Story, 1890's
- <sup>21</sup> "'Bus' Driver Traveled Hard Road to Holy Hill," *NB-M Post News*, 7-8-1976
- <sup>22</sup> *Holy Hill*, Sadie E. LeCount, 1908, page 5
- <sup>23</sup> *History of Holy Hill*, Rev. P. Cyril, O.C.D. , March 28, 1923, page 31
- <sup>24</sup> National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, <https://npgallery.nps.gov/nrhp/GetAsset?assetID=5cbb8b0d-1562-48df-a69d-6663a576be09>, page 18
- <sup>25</sup> "An Earth-Cut On The Ascent," *Miracle Hill. A Legendary Tale of Wisconsin*, W. A. Armstrong, 1889, Page 13
- <sup>26</sup> "An Earth-Cut On The Ascent," *Miracle Hill. A Legendary Tale of Wisconsin*, W. A. Armstrong, 1889, Page 45
- <sup>27</sup> *Holy Hill*, Sadie E. LeCount, 1908, page 5
- <sup>28</sup> *History of Holy Hill*, Rev. P. Cyril, O.C.D. , March 28, 1923, page 37
- <sup>29</sup> Register of Historic Places Registration Form, <https://npgallery.nps.gov/nrhp/GetAsset?assetID=5cbb8b0d-1562-48df-a69d-6663a576be09>, page 18
- <sup>30</sup> *History of Holy Hill*, Rev. P. Cyril, O.C.D. , March 28, 1923, page 45
- <sup>31</sup> *Holy Hill*, Sadie E. LeCount, 1908, page 6
- <sup>32</sup> *History of Holy Hill*, Rev. P. Cyril, O.C.D. , March 28, 1923, page 34
- <sup>33</sup> Lourdes Sanctuaire, <https://www.lourdes-france.org/en/apparitions/>
- <sup>34</sup> *History of Holy Hill*, Rev. P. Cyril, O.C.D. , March 28, 1923, page 54
- <sup>35</sup> *Holy Hill*, Sadie E. LeCount, 1908, page 5
- <sup>36</sup> *Inside Holy Hill*, Cornel Rosario, 2009, page 65
- <sup>37</sup> *Alluring Wisconsin*, Fred L. Holmes, (Milwaukee: E. M. Hale, 1937)

**President****Susan Sawdey**

Happy Summer! We were delighted to see the Moms, Dads, Kids, Grandmas and Grandpas who decided to attend our comeback event, Maple Syrup Family Day! It warmed my heart, even on a chilly day, to see hundreds of families enjoying our park.

By the time our Art Fair rolls around, on June 19<sup>th</sup>, everyone who wanted to be vaccinated will have had the opportunity and time to be fully protected. Fully vaccinated people can participate in outdoor activities, such as our events, without wearing masks.

The CDC also supports our smaller, indoor Community Programs for those who have been fully vaccinated. Our Community Programs will resume in September, and our committee will undoubtedly have a fabulous line up. Make sure to attend! We are so thankful to share our passion for history with you, and we are committed to bringing you more FUN, FAMILY FRIENDLY activities in the months to come.

Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/fully-vaccinated.html>

**Blacksmith Sop****Kathy Lauenstein**

In 1916, Richfield was said to have 250 residents. Ed Kratzsch, blacksmith and Frank Schoenke, farrier and blacksmith were doing their part. These craftsmen were important to the development of their communities. Farm equipment and tools needed to be created and repaired. Richfield, Hubertus, Colgate, Pleasant Hill, and Meeker Hill as well as Slinger and Hartford all had smiths working there. Today, you will still find in the area some fine craftsmen; and RHS smiths use the same methods they did back long ago.

Maple Syrup Family Day weather did not look good, but the smiths in the Blacksmith Shop were red hot. Dan Jorgenson, John Schmidt, and Mike Murphy made hooks for the Smoke House, and young and old learned how to do each step. It was great to see all our friends. The smiths are looking to the Thresheree & Harvest Festival. At the event, the smiths will feature a project and explain each step. Put the Blacksmith Shop on your, to stop and see list.

**Collections****Deanna Einwalter**

Having recently taken over the collection chair position, I will soon be organizing and continuing to catalog all our great artifacts. If you have an interest in helping to catalog or enjoy setting up displays in our many buildings, please contact me or someone on the Board of Directors. I encourage everyone to enjoy the history and stories our displays are portraying.

Seeing it is planting season, I thought everyone would enjoy some history of the early homesteader's plows. The early homesteaders used oxen and then changed to horses to break the prairie sod. Later, the Sulky plow was invented allowing them to ride the plow. A typical farmer would walk about 10 miles to plow just one acre of land that would produce 40 bushels of corn. We have the pleasure of having a few types of plows in our collection. Stop by the Richfield History Park events to see our many wonderful artifacts and their history.

**Education****Kathy Weberg**

One of the Education Committee's more popular programs is the "traveling trunk." Currently, RHS has four traveling trunks which travel to senior facilities with one or two of our volunteers who conduct an interactive program with the participants of the facility. In the past year (that year before COVID when we could actually do something,) we had been invited to adult day care facilities where our program was met with huge success. As things are opening up, we are once again being requested to bring our program back following the facilities' COVID guidelines. I am in the process of putting together a fifth trunk. (FYI, the trunks are actually rolling suitcases.)



One newly acquired item intended for the fifth trunk and pictured here, are two bells that were used in schools. The larger bell would have been used to call the children in from recess. How many of you have memories of that? Could well have been a Norman Rockwell picture! The smaller bell was placed on the teacher's desk for indoor use. Perhaps it was used to quiet a noisy classroom or perhaps to signal the changing of classes for recitation (as it was called) in a one-room school house.

The pictured bells are a treasured find of mine, along with my mother's teacher desk, which I found at an antique store. In the desk top drawer are the names of all the teachers who used the desk beginning with my mother's in 1924. Indelibly inscribed in my mother's handwriting, it says "Presented by the pupils of Oakdale School, December 17, 1924."



School Bells

If any of you like to talk about antiques and would like to share in presenting our traveling trunk program, please get in touch with me. Training provided!  
[kathyweberg@yahoo.com](mailto:kathyweberg@yahoo.com)

**Events Coordinator**

**Daryl Grier**

**Maple Syrup Family Day**

What a great event! Although the day was grey, folks had a good time. There were numerous hands-on activities and lots of demonstrations; some examples:

- How syrup is made
- Wool processing
- Lard rendering
- How to mill corn
- Winter soup making
- Activities for children in the Blacksmith Shop
- Winning a prize at the spinning wheel

The hotdogs, chili dogs, hot chocolate, cookies and sweets were enjoyed by many. The cotton candy was also a big hit. If you have any suggestions about this or upcoming events, contact Event Chair Daryl Grier, 262 628 4221 or [dgrier@charter.net](mailto:dgrier@charter.net).



At the Sugar Shack



Pioneer Homestead Learning

**Vegetable and Flower Gardens**

**Vegetables:** If you like fresh vegetables, volunteer to help plant and weed the RHS vegetable garden. Manure has been spread already, and it will be tilled prior to planting in late May. We'll have seeds and some plants – tomato, broccoli, squash and possible others available. If you can't be there planting day but can stop in to weed, that would

be great. We communicate to let each other know when the planting day is, what is ready to pick and the weed situation.

**Adopt a Flower Garden:** The gardens in front of the Mill kiosk and the area around the Wood Shed have been "adopted." There are other flower gardens that need help, especially around the Mill House & Horse Shed. You don't have to be a gardener; we have folks who can show you what to pull etc. Also, you are able to work in some of them sitting down! If you are able to help on planting day at the end of May (weather dependent) or any other time in either the vegetable or flower gardens, contact Daryl Grier, 262 628-4221, [dgrier@charter.net](mailto:dgrier@charter.net).



**Planning the Garden**

### **Silent Auction and Sweets 'n Stuff**

If you have been clearing out things that you have not used in a while, the Historical Society can help. At the Threshere in the Sweets 'n Stuff tent, we sell household items (rummage) including books. Auction items are also needed for the Silent Auction. Contact Daryl Grier [dgrier@charter.net](mailto:dgrier@charter.net), 262 628-4221 or Sharon Lofy [hsl1725@yahoo.com](mailto:hsl1725@yahoo.com), 262 297-1546 if you have any questions or would like to make a donation. All proceeds benefit our society!

### **Historic Sites**

### **Quint Mueller/Herb Lofy**

This is the time of year when summer projects really start to get underway. The relatively dry Spring has set the stage for a few more projects to get started that might normally have to wait for the ground to dry out. It's only the beginning of May as this is being written, so that prediction could very well be "all wet." One of the big accomplishments of late last year was getting the new culvert crossing to the threshing area put in place. Now that it is, we need to complete that project for one of its intended purposes, Threshere show traffic. Mainly, that will involve widening the path leading to it to allow traffic to safely pass through the area during the show.

One of the early projects in RHS history was the installation of the bridge just to the west of the Mill. As with most structures, it has a finite life. The "wood bridge" needs to be replaced now, as much of the wood has deteriorated. "Wood bridge" is in quotes because it is not actually a bridge, but rather a concrete culvert crossing. Many drivers of large trucks coming in have been scared to cross it, not realizing that the culverts beneath the wood are rated for much more than the weight of their truck. That means it was a success, in that it appeared like a simple wood bridge. Look for this project to be attended to this season.

We all like the exciting projects, like the Engine Shed and the Blacksmith Shop, but the reality is that maintenance is a major need. The Richfield Historical Park has been around for over 20 years, and many of the early projects have come full circle to be in need of maintenance. Some of these are not particularly fun, but need to be done. We always seem to be needing to paint something. Unless something magical happens, we will be addressing needs like this for the existence of the Park.

One of those maintenance projects that started last year continues on with steady progress. The storm window replacement project is approaching the 50% mark. Most of the lower windows in both the Mill House and Lillicrapp Welcome Center are now done, or underway. You may remember from the last newsletter; this project is not as simple as it may appear. Every window is slightly different and needs to be custom fit. We hope to have all of the windows completed this year.

Many years ago, we put a new foundation under the Wood Shed and poured a concrete floor. Over the years, it has had many different displays inside, but has not been utilized to the degree that we had envisioned. We are currently working on a new plan for displays in this building. Likely, you will see some changes inside the Wood Shed when it's time for the annual Thresheree.

As always, our goal is to keep the Richfield Historical Park in the best condition that we can. If you see a project that you might like to help with, please contact our project coordinator, Al Mayer (Al's contact information is elsewhere in this newsletter) or one of our many volunteers. They'll be sure to put you in touch with the right person.

## Library/Program/Newsletter

**Marge Holzbog**

### Help Solve the Mystery - Susan Brushafter

Some of us have been wondering why so few dated pictures of the Hillside Hotel and the Holy Hill Hotel have been forthcoming. Pilgrims in the late 1800s and early 1900s were noted to have found accommodations at these places. Are they one and the same? Where exactly were they located? If you have dated pictures of these hotels, please share with us! Perhaps you have a relative or friend whose grandparents or great grandparents might have made a pilgrimage to Holy Hill in the era of these hotels. Might they have a sketch or taken a picture? Help solve the mystery! Let us know what you have by sending your information to Marge Holzbog (envrnmnt21@aol.com or call 262 251 3882.)

### Saving Richfield's Family Histories - Lois Hessenauer

Have you ever looked through some old papers and found them to be faded and brittle? That is what will eventually happen to the thousands of Richfield Family documents which have been carefully collected over the past 20+ years. These have been meticulously filed and are invaluable for research. RHS will no longer have to worry about these documents deteriorating as a Digitizing project was started in 2020.

The RHS librarian/historian, Marge Holzbog, has sorted and organized all of the Family files. Soon an outside source will scan and save these documents as electronic Family folders. Once this is completed, these electronic folders can be accessed by authorized persons who need the information for research using any device that has internet access. These files will be searchable to make research easier. Included in each electronic family folder will be genealogical information, important documents, cemetery and war records as well as stories. Any photos associated with a family will be stored in the same electronic family folder. RHS is following its mission to Save Richfield's History!

## LWC Welcome Center

**Ruth Jeffords**

The Richfield Historical Society is not new to me, having been a member for many years; but I am new to the Lillicrapp Welcome Center as its current Committee Chair . . . and I'll have extremely large shoes to fill. Aerna Smith (in addition to her friendly and outgoing personality) has done an outstanding job creating the "General Store" within the Welcome Center. Throughout the years, visitors have enjoyed all the other historic displays created by Rona and her group. Countless hours of creative thinking, dedication and endless days and nights of hard work were key in making the Lillicrapp Welcome Center what it is today. **Thank you, Rona!!**

The priority of our creative team is updating some of the displays at the LWC. One of our initial projects will focus on the "Sears Catalog" and its importance throughout history. Display boards in the History Room of the

Welcome Center will provide a pictorial walk down the "Sears Memory Lane" featuring historical information and photos; and there is a LOT of history to share!

The first Sears Catalog came out in 1925; and in 1943, *Sears News Graphic* wrote that the Sears catalog, "serves as a mirror of our times, recording for future historian's today's desires, habits, customs, and mode of living." The roots of the Sears catalog are as old as the company. Richard Sears, a railroad station agent, started selling watches as a side business in North Redwood, Minnesota. The following year, he moved to the company's first Chicago location and hired watchmaker Alvah Roebuck. The two started a catalog business selling watches and jewelry in 1888, incorporating under the Sears Roebuck name in 1893. Prior to incorporation and under the banner "**The R.W. Sears Watch Co.**," Mr. Sears promised his customers that, "*we warrant every American watch sold by us, with fair usage, an accurate timekeeper for six years – during which time, under our written guarantee we are compelled to keep it in perfect order free of charge.*" Many of the early watches were made by the Elgin Company.

Farmers near small rural towns usually purchased supplies (often at high prices and on credit) from local **general stores** that carried limited selections of goods. Prices were negotiated relying on the storekeeper's estimate of a customer's creditworthiness. Sears took advantage of this by publishing catalogs offering customers a wider selection of products at clearly stated prices. The **Sears Catalog** gave America's farm families a lot of options at a lower cost; and prices often included delivery. The time was right for mail order merchandise. Fueled by the Homestead Act of 1862, America's westward expansion followed the growth of the railroads. The postal system too aided the mail order business by permitting the classification of mail order publications as "*aids in the dissemination of knowledge*" which entitled these catalogs the postage rate of one cent per pound. The advent of Rural Free Delivery (RFD) in 1896 also made distribution of the catalog economical.

Sears eventually became a household name because of its huge, jam-packed catalogs that advertised everything from **underwear to mail order baby chicks and entire barn and house kits**. Pre-cut kits for houses could be purchased from the "Sears Modern Homes" catalog from 1908 to 1940. Some kits (from a total of 370 models) contained more than 30,000 pieces (total weight of 25 tons;) each piece marked with a letter and number; and in some instances, a Sears shipping label was attached. Sinks and tubs had an "SR" cast into the item. Today, a few of the Sears houses remain standing in the areas of Richfield, Madison, Oconomowoc and in other Wisconsin towns. The "Book of Barns" was available between 1911 and 1929;\* everything came as a kit except for the building foundation. Today, only a few Wisconsin barns remain, one is in Bayfield and another in New Berlin near Southridge Mall. After a lot of maintenance and repairs throughout the years, the Bayfield barn is now a tourist attraction. There are less than 10 other Sears barns still intact across the entire United States! In addition to barns, farmers could also order kits for milk houses, chicken and hog houses, and corn cribs. **(\* See page 11 below for Catalog image.)**

#### **Other items added to the Sears Catalogs throughout the years:**

1896	Groceries, hand-cranked washing machines, Encyclopedia Britannica	1928	Craftsman Tools
1897	Edison's Graphophone	1929	Kenmore Laundry Equipment
1905	School Desks	1930	Mail Order Chicks
1909	Sears Motor Buggy (cars)	1948	Silvertone Wire Recorder, Radio & Phonograph System
1910	Electric Washing Machines	1949	Televisions, Hobart Dishwashers, Silvertone Hearing Aids
1911	Sears Auto-Cycle Motorcycle	1957	Automatic Electric Garage Door Opener
1912	Silk Stockings	1966	Sears Allstate Radial Tires
1913	First Automobiles Specialty Catalog	1968	Sears Diehard Batteries
1914	Private Electric Lighting Plants, providing power for homes and barns	1971	Kenmore Trash Compactor, Microwave Oven

Around the holidays, we ALL looked forward to their legendary Christmas Catalog, or “Wish Book.” Children (and adults) scrutinized each page, circling everything they “wished” to see under their tree on Christmas morning. Sears issued its first Christmas catalog in 1933, featuring such must-have items as a Mickey Mouse watch, a Lionel electric train set, a “Miss Pigtails” doll and live singing canaries. In the decades that followed, the catalog would be adorned with Christmas scenes; and by 1968, the catalog boasted 225 pages of toys and 380 pages of gifts for adults for a grand total of 605 pages.

Retail Sears stores spread across the country, and sales remained strong even during the Great Depression. But by the 1990s, Sears began to struggle as the company confronted competition from rival discount department stores including K-Mart, Target, and Walmart; as well as economic woes brought on by the Great Recession and the increasing dominance of e-commerce. Sadly, after **132 years** in business, former retail giant Sears filed for bankruptcy in October 2018, announcing it would close 142 unprofitable stores due to the mounting competition from big-box stores and, of course, Amazon.com. In 1993, Sears announced it was closing its catalog division, ending a storied era of mail-order bargain-hunting and wish fulfillment that had begun nearly a century earlier. The Sears Tower sold in 1994; and in 1998, the Sears Christmas catalog went online for the first time at **Wishbook.com**, a year before the **Sears.com** website was launched. Despite a brief return to profitability after a merger with Kmart in 2005, Sears continued to struggle. By the time it filed for bankruptcy, Sears had lost more than \$11 billion since 2011, even after trying to cut costs by closing hundreds of its retail stores across the country.



First Sears Catalog



First Modern Home Catalog  
(available 1908 – 1914)



First Christmas Book 1933  
(changed to “Wish Book”  
1968)

**Marketing**

**Doug Wenzel**

Our 2021 marketing mailer is set to go out. Like last year’s, it will go to all residences in the 53076, 53033, and 53017 zip codes – about 6,000 households in all. It will include descriptions of upcoming events, as well as an outreach for community support. We weren’t able to fully gauge the effectiveness of last year’s mailer, because we had to cancel events soon after it went out. This year we’ll be counting the \$50 drawing tickets submitted at the Art at The Mill and Harvest Festival & Threshere events to see if the mailer is having the impact we want.

Work is near completion on the project to create a new park map, to be mounted on a new sign at the south end of the Park as well as on the existing sign near the Welcome Center. The map will include all of the major buildings in the Park, as well as roads, trails, Coney Creek, and other points of interest. Each of the two maps will have the appropriate “You are here” icons. Thanks to Janet Scholl for creating a beautiful piece of graphic artwork! We will also develop graphics for the opposite sides of each sign with information about RHS and upcoming events.

Browsing Facebook recently I came across the Historical Wisconsin page, a group with almost 14,000 members. I posted a little blurb about the Mill and about RHS; and in the first 24 hours, I had over 550 "likes" and 41 comments. It looks like there may be some value in targeting groups with specific interests aligned with ours. I'll continue to look for such opportunities

## **Membership**

**Dorothy Marks**

I am the new Membership Chairperson, and I know I have very big shoes to fill in order to follow in Warren Wiedmeyer's footsteps. I will do my best to achieve what he had accomplished as the Membership Chair expediting the different phases of the position as well as recruiting members. After obtaining the current membership list, I am quite amazed at how many members are from across the USA; California to Pennsylvania.

As a member of RHS, my motto is "Adopt a Project." I did, and it is very gratifying. If you, as a member, see something that could use some TLC, please share with us your ideas, suggestions, talents, skills, etc. As with anything else, there is always room for improvement.

So please join in with us. RHS has much to offer; beautiful grounds and historic buildings, a friendly atmosphere and an absolutely fabulous newsletter three times a year. A very nice gesture also is "Gifting a Membership" for family, friends and/or neighbors. If you have not visited the RHS website, I encourage you to do so ([richfieldhistoricalsociety.org](http://richfieldhistoricalsociety.org).) It is very impressive.

We sincerely hope you will consider coming on board and partaking in the many things offered. If you have any questions/concerns, please feel free to contact any one of us, or I can be reached at (262 628 1037.) Membership fees remain the same: Annual . . . \$20.00/Lifetime. . . \$1,000.00.

## **Mill House**

**Cindy Schmechel/Clara Birkel**

This has been a very quiet year at the Mill House, as you can well imagine. With no events happening at the Historical Park that include Mill House tours, we have been busy trying to organize our annual Threshere display. With all of the beautiful vintage clothing that we possess, the main thing is for us to get mannequins and dress forms so that we can display those items in an interesting and appealing way. We will also be choosing the outfits to be displayed, get them washed and cleaned and will include a written history of each of them. We hope to make this display as interesting as possible so that our guests can see the different kinds of clothing worn by various family members allowing them to get a feel for what life was like when they lived there.

We are still looking for donations of dress forms, all genders and sizes. If any of you have dress forms that you would be willing to lend us for the Threshere, that would be greatly appreciated. We hope to make this year's display very special and to once again share the history of the Mill House and the people who lived there with our guests.

In the weeks leading up to the Threshere, we will be giving the Mill House a good cleaning; time and date to be determined. We will be looking for volunteers to help. We are looking forward to seeing you.

## **Mill Restoration**

**Al Mayer**

Last fall construction on the Engine Shed was moving along great, and then the cold and snow came. It looked like things have stopped; but our attention was turned to inside the Mill where, in order to work on the gearing underneath the Miller's deck safely, we built a temporary platform over the water raceway. The existing shafts in the Mill needed to be aligned and plumbed so the timber structure that supports the pulleys in the Engine Shed are located correctly.

Many of the original sheaves (wooden pulleys) and wooden support pieces have deteriorated over time, and to use them would only destroy them. We've decided to construct new sheaves from wood species used in the original items and rebuild matching replicas, saving the originals as items as artifacts. The 18" sheave shown here takes over 150 pieces of hard maple and oak to make!

So, back to the Engine Shed. We are working with a local Mason and getting ready to start setting stones to the concrete areas of the foundation. After the stone is laid, the siding can then be nailed on.

As you can see, the work on the Mill takes talents of many different interests. If you feel you would like to be involved in this endeavor, call me at 262-909-0129, or text. We've got a lot of interesting things to work on!



Top – Old Sheave  
Bottom – New Sheave

**Pioneer Homestead**

**Susan Sawdey**



**WOOL PROCESSING  
On the Homestead**

We have been hard at work processing wool this year. Our young visitors helped us wash & dry the fleece at Maple Syrup Family Day. At Education Day they picked and carded clean wool.

Attend the 2021 Thresheree and help us spin rolags (carded wool) into yarn!



**Project Coordinator**

**Al Mayer**

Spring has been a busy time at the Park. The Animal Shelter that was completed as an Eagle Scout project last December now has a fence added to allow farm animals to be part of the Pioneer Village experience at our events.

The brush and Buckthorn that has been thriving north of the Barn is being pulled out and burned. This will make it easier and safer to remove the dead ash trees that are on our "to do" list, and also makes the area look a lot better.

I would like to send a big Thank You out to all of the guys that come to the Park and spend a few hours every Thursday morning to take on some of the repair issues that come up as well as most of the maintenance from mowing and trimming, equipment repair, window repair, clearing trees and building fences. As shown in the photograph, many hands make small work. Piles of ash trees that were taken down in the Park have been split, stacked and are waiting to boil sap for the 2022 maple syrup season.

We have a list of projects that includes many maintenance issues like painting. But also there are improvement projects that add to the beauty of Park. We hope to soon have a flagstone walkway from the foot bridge to the Mill House. The stone was secured and donated from a Sussex Historical Church that we accidentally found just under the thick grass cover.

The bridge that crosses over the head raceway to the Mill has served the Park for many years, and time has taken its toll. The ability to carry a load is as good as ever, but the railings and posts need to be replaced. Plans are coming together to rebuild this bridge soon!

Something that RHS used to have in the past was a weekend work day so that members would have the opportunity to come out to the Park on a Saturday or Sunday and help with a project and get to know other Society members and their neighbors.

On the second Sunday of the month, beginning June 13, we will have our first weekend Park Day. Initially 10 a.m.- 2 p.m. We are planning to spend the day at the Grist Mill. Anyone interested please join us or if you have questions call/ text me at 262-909-0129/e- mail- [anjmayer@aol.com](mailto:anjmayer@aol.com)

**Volunteer Coordinator**

**Sharon Lofy**

Thank you for all the plant certificates that you ordered during our annual Richfield Historical Society Plant Sale. The sale is made possible through our partnership with Nehm's Greenhouse. The Society receives about a third of the certificate sales. As always, when you see all the beautiful plants, you might want to pick up a few extra certificates. I always have extra certificates for just that need.

Maple Syrup Family Day had a wonderful turn out. Thank you volunteers for making this event possible. The Art Fair, Saturday, June 19 is right around the corner. You will be receiving an email listing all the



**Animal Shelter**



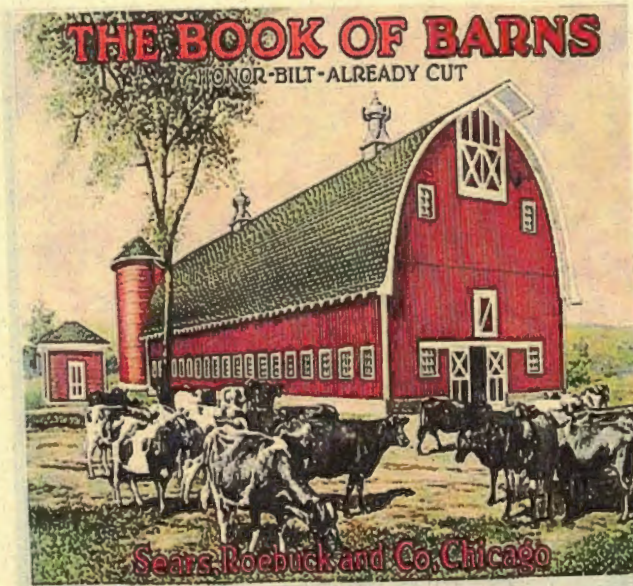
**Thursday Crew Cutting Wood**



volunteer opportunities available for that day. If you know of someone not receiving an email that would like to give a helping hand, let me know.

There are many opportunities to share your talents with our many committees – Mill and Mill House (tour guides), Welcome Center, Pioneer Homestead (pioneer era projects), Sugar Shack, Blacksmith Shop, Education (traveling trunk, kid's activities, Education Day), Collections, Thursday Crew (carpentry, building maintenance, electrical, masonry), gardening, flower beds, Marketing, computer skills, mailings, genealogy (interviews, research, filing), baking, and Events (cleaning, decorating, setup – before, during and after events.)

If you have any questions or want to offer comments or ideas, give me a call (262-297-1546 or send an email [hs11725@yahoo.com](mailto:hs11725@yahoo.com). Together we will help the Richfield Historical Society



Sears Catalog Available 1911 - 1929

## Art at the Mill

**When:** Saturday, June 19, 2021 *(New Date)*

**Time:** 10am to 4pm

**Where:** Richfield Historical/Nature Park (1896 Hwy 164)

**How Much:** \$2 per person (children 5 and under, Free)

### Fun Things to Do & See

- Visit the booths of 70+ talented artists to find that special something for you or as a gift
- Explore the tents of unique vendors for treats
- Feast on tasty food by LaCabaña (Mexican & Traditional)
- Listen to entertaining music in the morning & afternoon
- Bid on unique art work at the Silent Auction
- Ride the people mover to the exhibit area (FREE)

