

# *Starke County Historical Society*

## THE PRIDE OF STARKE COUNTY

May 2018

Newsletter



### **A Note from the President**

Once again, I will keep this brief since we are including a lot of pictures and articles to share with you in this Newsletter. One of our major goals was fulfilled this past December 29 when we were able to pay off the mortgage of the History Center! Thanks to some sound financial investments we had been holding and some major contributors such as the James Hardesty Grant, memorial contributions from deceased members and a couple others who wish to remain anonymous, our loan payments and mortgage balance of \$112,552.09 was PAID IN FULL.

The major renovations have been completed at the History Center to the point where we are now planning exhibits and displays to be in place for our Grand Opening on July 1, 2018 at our annual Ice Cream Social. We still have some minor things to wrap up, but many things are in various stages of completion. We have recently been gifted with a "Museum of Firearm Cartridges from 1850 to the Present" by the family of one of our longtime members. We are hopeful of having some of these items moved and on display for the Ice Cream Social as well.

I would like to acknowledge and thank the various members who have submitted articles and pictures for this Newsletter.

*Until next time . . .*

*Ron Vendl, President*

### **Bass Lake Festival Historic Tram Tour**

On July 29 & 30, 2017, the Starke County Historical Society once again sponsored the Historic Bass Lake Tram Tours during the Bass Lake Festival. Once again, the project was accomplished mainly through the efforts of Historical Society member Jim Nierman. Jim's experiences during his many summers here have left lasting memories that he is eager to share with the public.

With Jim serving as the tour guide, more than thirty stories of historic areas were highlighted as the tram slowly traveled around the lake. We also wish to acknowledge John McGrath who allowed Ron Vendl to use his truck to tow the trams. We shared Bass Lake history with 249 people who took the tram tour, enabling us to earn \$1,245.

The Festival Committee allowed us to participate in selling raffle tickets to help us defray the \$650 cost of the tram rental. Each ticket we sold could be applied toward that expense. Numerous Board members purchased many raffle tickets to help defray this expense.

While the trams were making their six trips around the lake over the two days, Historical Society members manned tables of historic Bass Lake pictures and artifacts at the Bass Lake Property Owners Community Center, some of which were for sale. Our members who assisted with this weekend's activities included: Russ Blais, Dawn Ferch, Mariann Gappa, Jerry Jernas, Jim and Joan Nierman, Mark

Rippy, Alan Selge, Melba Shilling, Evelyn Skronski, and Dolores Surfus. When it was all said and done, the Historical Society made a profit of \$1,581.50!



*Some of the antique tractors exhibited at the Ice Cream Social.*

### **The Facility Planning Committee**

The Facility Planning Committee, which oversees the renovation issues at both the History Center and the Schricker house, has resumed meeting after a winter hiatus. It can be reported that the main floor of the History Center is ready to receive exhibits and displays in line with the Conceptual Master Plan as each gallery flows into the next, educating and telling a story of Starke County in a chronological sequence. Visitors will come away with knowledge of the County and its history in general.

The basement continues to be readied for the storage of artifacts, documents, exhibits, etc., waiting for their display turn in the future. Volunteers worked many hours painting, installing additional shelving, inventorying, rearranging and other related activities, bringing this room up to a practical and more functional area.

The FPC is investigating exterior signage near the highway and the

procurement and placement of a flag pole. Several ideas have come to the Committee for consideration. Hopefully, both could be in place by the Ice Cream Social.

At the Schricker house, two major projects are underway. The entire roof is being repaired and re-shingled. The old shingles have been there since the early 1980's. In addition, the sagging front porch roof will be undergoing renovation and rebuilding. Both of these projects will be paid for with the grant we received from the Indiana Historical Society.

*Article submitted by Jerry Jernas*

### **Lincoln Train Marker/John Tierney Park Dedication**

On September 2, 2017, the Starke County Historical Society and Railroad Township Trustee held a double dedication at the former Little Company of Mary Hospital grounds south of San Pierre. As you may recall from our last newsletter, the Lincoln Funeral train made a brief stop in San Pierre on May 2, 1865, on its way to Springfield, IL carrying the casket of the slain President. Fifteen year old John Tierney hopped aboard the train to attend the funeral. John eventually owned the grounds where the Little Company of Mary Hospital was built.

Historical Society Board Member, Alice Dolezal, led the dedication of the Lincoln Train Memorial Marker at the entrance of the park. Trustee Mandy Thomason dedicated the grounds as John Tierney Park, and a portion of the grounds to be known as The Little Company of Mary Sand Prairie.

Speakers for the ceremonies included Charlie Adams, popular morning host of WKVI radio and Derek Luchik from The Nature Conservancy. Charlie recounted the story of John Tierney's trip to Springfield and how he became an influential San Pierre citizen living into the early 1940's. Derek spoke about the rare Bird's Foot Violet which he discovered while driving past the area one day. Through his efforts, the area is now protected from mowing to allow the violet to spread and some seeds from this location have been taken to the Kankakee Sands area and planted.

*Article submitted by Alice Dolezal*



*Charlie Adams, Ed Hasnerl, Alice Dolezal, Mandy Thomason and Derek Lucknik*

### **SCHS Bylaws Update**

Early in 2017, the SCHS Board determined it was time to address an update the Society Bylaws, basically unchanged since its founding in 1973. In April, 2017 a committee was formed to review the current bylaws and suggest revisions. Russ Blais chaired the committee. Melba Shilling, Dean Wells and Ron Vendl were committee members.

The bylaws of seven other historical societies were reviewed along with a "sample bylaw" outline offered by The Museum Toolbox as well as guidelines provided by the State of Indiana for non-profit organizations.

The result of this work generated the Revised Bylaws presented to the SCHS membership at its Annual Meeting on November 16, 2017. The approval of the Membership was unanimous.

*Article submitted by Russ Blais*



*The Woodshed Ramblers perform at the Ice Cream Social.*

### **Starke County Historian Appointed**

David Altman has been appointed by the Indiana Historical Society and the Indiana Historical Bureau to be the newest official Starke County Historian. He replaces Ed Hasnerl, whose term expired on December 31, 2017. The County Historian Through this program, Indiana's 92 volunteer county historians promote local history in their counties and serve primarily as resource people.

David is well acquainted with Starke County and its history, having made numerous historical presentations state wide on a

variety of subjects. Simon Kenton, Tecumseh, George Rogers Clark, the Lewis and Clark Expedition, and The Grand Kankakee Marsh are a few of his favorites. He has been interested in history since first grade. A resident of North Judson, he taught in the North Judson-San Pierre Schools as well as Knox Schools prior to owning a Lawn Care Service in the county.

During his three-year term as County Historian, he will be a coordinator of historical information sources for Starke County while promoting its heritage. Others who have served as Starke County Historian include Stella Bonner (1952-54), Helen Edgar (1981-83), Melba Shilling (1999-2005), Marvin Allen (2006-12), and Ed Hasnerl (2012-16).

*Submitted by Melba Shilling*



*Ice cream and cookies are served at the Ice Cream Social.*

### **Ice Cream Social**

On a bright sunny day, July 2, 2017, folks gathered on the lawn of the Starke County History Center in Knox for the annual Ice Cream Social. Board members dished out the traditional ice cream as guests wandered among the antique tractors and cars while listening to the bluegrass

country music sounds of The Woodshed Ramblers.

Inside, folks could see the progress of the building renovation, and view first-hand the display of Indiana Bicentennial Memorabilia, including an original torchbearer uniform, a replica of the torch, and the one-of-a-kind Bicentennial Barn Quilt.

If all goes according to plan, the Ice Cream Social this July 1 will serve as a grand opening of the Starke County History Center on U.S. 35 south of Knox.

*Submitted by Melba Shilling*



*Mark Rippy, Susie Szynalski, Frank Szynalski view the Bicentennial Barn Quilt, the replica of the Bicentennial torch, and Torchbearer uniform during the Ice Cream Social.*

### **History Center Showcase Donation**

The Ober Arbor Gleaners purchased three show cases for the History Center in 2017, making the presentation on August 9 at the beginning of the Historical Society Board Meeting. This is not the first time that the Gleaners have assisted the Starke County Historical Society. In previous years, they have given postage

stamps, paper products, and other items which have been extremely useful to our organization.



*Ron Vendl accepts the showcases from Gleaner member, Arlene Sellers.*

### **2017 Annual Meeting**

The 2017 Annual Meeting was held in the Knox High School cafeteria on November 16, 2017. More than 100 SCHS members and friends gathered for the carry-in dinner, followed by a business meeting during which proposed amendments to the Bylaws were presented for adoption. The Bylaws, as amended, were approved by a vote of the membership present.

Our program for the evening was "The Life and Times of Diamond Joe Esposito" presented by Historical Society member James Nierman. Many folks recognize the name since Jim has also researched and created the Historic Tram Tours we have been doing during the Bass Lake Festival the past several years. Jim is a longtime Bass Lake area resident and owned Diamond Joe's summer home property for twenty-one years. Some of the topics included in Jim's presentation shared Joe's birth and early life in Italy; his



migration to the United States and early years in New York and Boston (and his introduction to the Mob); his move to Chicago and rapid rise as a gangster, becoming very wealthy and powerful; why he selected Bass Lake for the location of his summer home; the “nice guy” activities he did for the residents of Bass Lake; and his murder and funeral in Chicago in 1928. The program was very well received by our audience.

In addition, the 2018 slate of Officers and Board of Directors was presented by the Nomination Committee. The following Officers and Board Members were elected: Russ Blais (At Large); Peg Brettin (Washington Twp.); Alice Dolezal (Railroad Twp.); Dawn Ferch (At Large); Marianne Gappa (Treasurer); Carl Goodrich (Davis Twp.); Van Janovic (Oregon Twp.); Jerry Jernas (Wayne Twp.); Patty Redlin (California Twp.); Mark Rippey (Jackson Twp.); Linda Schwarzlose (Vice President); Alan Selge (Knox Schools); Melba Shilling (Center Twp.); Evelyn Skronski (Secretary); Dolores Surfus (Knox Schools); Ron Vendl (President); Cassie Waletzko (At Large); and, Dean Wells (North Bend Twp).

*Submitted by Melba Shilling  
Membership*

**Please visit our updated website:**

[www.scpl.lib.in.us/historical/](http://www.scpl.lib.in.us/historical/)

**(Thank you, Rob Pitts!)**



### **Become a Member of the Starke County Historical Society**

The **purpose** of the Starke County Historical Society is to foster an interest in local history and the preservation of items of historical interest for future generations. Members live in many states, from California to New York. If you are already a member in 2017, **thank you!** If you are not a member of the Starke County Historical Society, you may join today and help us tell the story of our county and its people. Membership in the Society is open to anyone wishing to further the mission of the Society.

*Starke County Historical Society dues:*

*Individual .....\$ 10.00*

*Husband & Wife.....\$ 15.00*

### **Grow Our Endowment Fund!**

The Starke County Historical Society Endowment Fund in the Starke County Community Foundation has grown to more than **\$35,000**. The fund distributes a percentage of the annual earnings back to the Society for the Museum operation. Thanks to all who continue to make financial gifts to this long-term fund. If you would like to donate to the Starke County Historical Society's fund, go to the foundation's website:



<http://www.nicf.org/donate/reoccurringdonation.html> or call Sarah Origer at the Starke County Community Foundation at 574-772-3665.

### **The Starke County Flag**

The Starke County Flag was created during the Indiana Bicentennial in 2016. It features a total of twelve stars, representing each of the county's original townships when Starke County was founded. The nine larger stars represent Starke County's current townships and the three smaller ones represent the "lost" townships.

When Starke County was founded, it was a rectangle. During this time in Starke County's history, landowners west of the Kankakee River had trouble getting to Knox, so they petitioned the state legislature to transfer that area to LaPorte County. In 1842, the legislature did give our three "lost townships" to LaPorte County, leaving Starke County "boot-shaped".

Flags were donated to local schools, libraries and government. Some became torn, battered and, in some cases, missing. Seeing a need to have a display that illustrated the flag and also shared its story, Mark and Shirley Rippey decided to have a portable display created that could be shared in the community. They collaborated with OTES (Outstanding Tradeshow Exhibits of North Judson) to create the display which shares the story of our lost townships and includes the Starke County designer's names. This

display is available to be shared within the county to show our history.



Starke County flags are available for sale from the Starke County Historical Society. Nylon flags 3'x5', suitable for outside or inside display, are \$50. Miniature desk flags are \$5 each.

*Submitted by Mark Rippy and Melba Shilling*



*Families resting in the shade during the Ice Cream Social.*

### Mark Your Calendars

Starke County Historical Society  
Upcoming Events:

North Judson Mint Festival  
June 15, 16 & 17

Ice Cream Social  
July 1 GRAND OPENING  
Starke County History Center

Starke County 4-H Fair  
July 8 – 14  
Starke County Fairgrounds

Bass Lake Festival

July 27, 28 & 29

Historic Tram Tours on July 28 & 29 (AM only)

Yellowstone Trail Festival

August 18

Starke County Fairgrounds

SCHS Annual Meeting

November 15

Knox High School

Charlie Adams from WKVI will be our speaker.

*This Newsletter has been  
sponsored by:*

**Starke County Farm  
Bureau Co-op**



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History*

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### 2017 Memory Tree

The annual Fraser Fir Memory Tree, a donated gift from the Hensler Nursery and Historical Society member John Hensler, was decorated with 533 red ribbons in December. The tree has been a tradition in front of the Main Street former home of Governor and Mrs. Henry F. Schricker in Knox, whose house has served as the Starke County Museum for more than 40 years.

For one dollar, a loved one can be memorialized by a red ribbon on the tree. This tradition has grown over the years, and pays tribute to the many people who have made a difference in the lives of historical society members, as well as some non-members. We thank everyone who participated in this event at Christmas!



*Jeff Berg, Linda Schwarzlose, and Russ Blais are pictured here attaching the ribbons. Not shown were Dolores Surfus, Melba Shilling, and Ron Vendl (who were indoors preparing the ribbons yet to be hung).*

**Starke County History Center/  
Governor Henry F. & Maude  
Schricker House  
P. O. Box 52  
Knox, Indiana 46534  
574-772-5393**