



Official Publication of the Portage County Historical Society of Wisconsin

Mitchell House

By Dave Simonis

Looking back from 2019 we can recall Stevens Point's progressive movement regarding aspects of our city during earlier times. In regards to historical architecture and buildings...it is very easy to surmise a list of local treasures we lost like the Carnegie library, the former US Post-Office, the old county courthouse and others that succumbed to a wrecking ball. Several important and unique residential structures too were lost in similar fashion. Homes that were considered old, outdated or money-pits.

If you were to ask me about the one's I wish were still here today I would answer as such: the Bosworth-Dunegan mansion, the General Ellis residence and the Mitchell house. All 3 have stories and are worth discussing; however, I will focus on the Mitchell house in this article.

W.W. Mitchell was a prominent citizen and mill owner in Stevens Point back in the late 1800's owning several mills in Stevens Point and at Springville. He built a unique and exquisite home for his family on Clark Street in the year of 1874. Mr. Mitchell died in 1927; however, his widow (Clara Blake Mitchell) continued to live in the house until her death in 1933. In her will she bequeathed the house and the surrounding property (which bordered back to Ellis street) to the city of Stevens Point with a list of stipulations. The city would receive the house and all land for free but had to make the house a museum and the grounds a park. She further dictated that the park not become a children's playground nor a baseball field, and be named the Blake-Mitchell Memorial Park. Lastly, her adopted daughter and niece were allowed to live in the house as long as they wished or until the property became abandoned. The wording of the will was upon the death of either and not both women.

In 1937 the matter came up before the city after Mrs. Mitchell's daughter (Martha Kling) passed away in 1936. The sole occupant of the home now was the niece of Mrs. Mitchell (Belle Mitchell). The estate value of then 711 Clark Street (now between 1516 and 1524 Clark St) was set at \$55,000 at that time (today a value of over \$1.3 million dollars). A city

(Continued on page 3)



Society Events

"Murder on Main Street"

Friday, Oct. 18, 2018, 6:30PM
Meet at the Courthouse parking lot, Church St. by Civil War Memorial.

Synagogue

Open Memorial Day to
Labor Day
Saturday & Sunday 1 - 4pm
By appointment 715-600-4930

Historic Fire House No. 2

Open Memorial Day to
Labor Day
Saturday & Sunday 1 - 4pm
By appointment 715-600-4930

Heritage Park

Open Memorial Day to
Labor Day
Saturday & Sunday 1 - 4pm
By appointment 715-600-4930

Rising Star Mill

Friday, Saturday & Sunday
October 4th, 5th & 6th The
Rising Star Mill's Open House
featuring "The Barns of Portage
County"



President's Report

The 2019 museum season is now over. The 2019 season was a success for all four of our sites although the rainy weather and storms have hindered nearly all of our exterior construction work. The storm took out a number of large and small trees at Heritage Park. I wish to thank Jim Abbrederis and Anton Anday for doing most of the clean up of those downed trees and Ruthie Engford and Frank Clark for the donation of new trees to replace the downed ones. We had planned to have new roofs and other exterior work done on the Church/Museum and Depot early this summer but the rain has prevented this. Hopefully, this work will be completed by Thanksgiving.

Thanks also to Sarah Scripps for setting up a series of UWSP students to act as docents in the Synagogue museum his past summer. As in past years this site saw a steady flow of visitors.

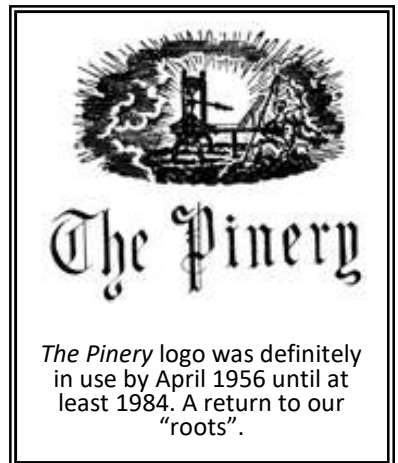
The Society received a large bequest from the estate of Ann Buck. Some of funds went into the long term support of the Society's programs by being placed in our foundation while the remaining amount is being used to help a variety of programs. The purchase of archival materials as one example.

As a last event of our remembrance of The Great War a ceremony was held as part of the Dozynki celebration. The ceremony was held at the Pulaski monument and dedicated a plaque/information board to the Polish Army (Haller's Army). This organization which had a recruitment center at St. Peter's Church sent men to fight for the independence of Poland during the war. Much of this ceremony was put together by Sue Koehl.

2020 will be the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II. The Society is now engaged in putting together a series of displays and other material to commemorate that event. We have three books that we are reprinting, Oasis of Hope (by A. Nix), Days of the Ching Pao (by M. Rosholt) and a series of interviews of men in the 82nd airborne who participated in the D-Day invasion. A display is planned for the Lincoln Center for the month of November. We have many other displays, panels and other items planned but are in need of financial help. The reproduction of photos, as an example, will require about \$200. The whole World War II project will, projected, cost about \$3,000. Any help that members or the public can give will be greatly appreciated. Mark any checks as WW II and send to the Society's P.O. Box-672 in Stevens Point.

The Society still needs aluminum (cans or other items), electrical cords or microwave ovens to help raise small amount of funds to pay for various odds and ends. Please leave them at the back door of the Synagogue on Water St.

**South
Side
1902**

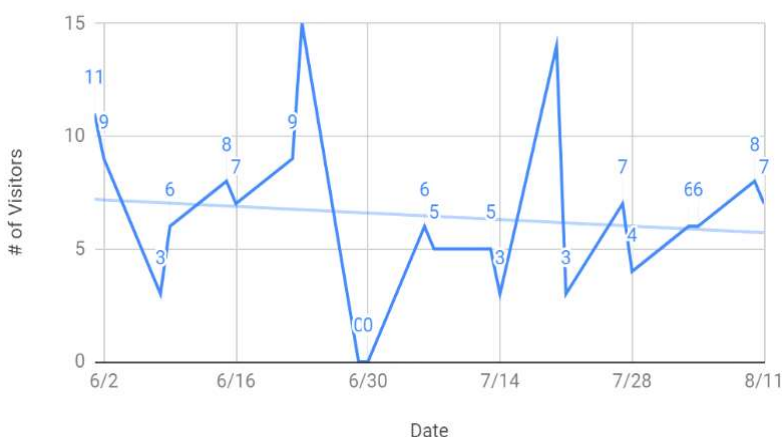


Beth Israel Synagogue Museum



The Beth-Israel Synagogue Museum completed another successful season. Three students from UW-Stevens Point worked as interns who were in charge of guiding tours, overseeing the bookstore, and taking on independent projects. Lucas Jagodzinski worked on creating an interactive museum webpage and compiling visitor data (including the attached chart). Marie Ackley created a proposal for a revised floor plan for the gallery space. Ackley also designed a new panel explaining Jewish terminology and traditions. Robert Jonet developed a new pamphlet for visitors that provided additional information regarding the Portage County Historical Society. The interns brought fresh ideas and enthusiasm to the museum, and we appreciate their hard work.

of Visitors vs. Date



(Continued from page 1)

council meeting on the matter reviewed the wording of Clara Mitchell's will and found the city was in its rights to take possession of the house and grounds and evict Belle Mitchell if desired. The President of the local Women's Club, Mrs. Elmer Mortensen asked that the city not to make a hasty decision and questioned whether the city would move ahead with actually evicting Belle? She brought up the fact that the will stated the property had to be a museum and a park and requested the council delay any action until the next meeting. One alderman said he would never accept the property unless all stipulations were removed, and another said the city couldn't afford to take on the property.

Discussion and visitation of the property by the city council and mayor stretched on until an official vote was taken November 18th, 1940. With a majority neighbors opposing the idea that the city should own the property, and council members opposed to the burden and restrictions place on accepting the gift – the Mitchell offer to the city was turned down. Representatives of the will thanked the city and announced that the lots would be put up immediately for sale. This included the stone-building at then 319 Main Street (corner of Water and Main Streets, now 949 Main St.) formerly owned by Clara Mitchell too. It was purchased by Frank Shippy and known now as the original location of Shippy Shoes. Clara's niece, Belle Mitchell, died in 1962 at the age of 87. A resident of the Portage County Infirmary (Portage County Health Care Center), she had been a patient in ill health there since first residing there in 1955.

The house was razed during 1941 and the Stevens Point Journal included a final picture of the imposing 66 year-old residence. (See photograph on bottom of page 8, "Photo to Remember".)

Fire House No. 2



Attendance was a bit down from last year. The week of and following the area storm felt the impact as local residents had less time for recreational activities, cleaning up trees/branches/limbs and awaiting power to be restored. The south driveway was paved at the end of July by B&B Paving. This was possible via a generous donation by our immediate neighbors to the south Tony and Sandy Bronk who offered to pickup 50% of the cost. Lastly a special word of thanks to Lee Pliska for his work around the site and sitting in as a docent.



Heritage Park



The Heritage Park season for 2019 was interesting and challenging. Our one-room schoolhouse program was very successful. Thanks to all volunteer teachers and the 750 students, adults who participated in this activity.

This year Mother Nature was not very kind to us. The Plover area was hit by the spring storms and flood. Then on July 20 a wind storm devastated the area. In both cases Heritage Park lucked out. The Park had very little water damage in the spring, but the wind

(Continued on page 5)



(Continued from page 4)

storm did rip six trees out of the ground. The park lost two spruce trees, one crabapple tree, two wild plum trees and one very large white pine that missed the church/museum north wall by about five feet. No one was hurt and no building suffered any damage. We were very lucky. Thanks go out to Mr. Abbrederis, Mr. Harpstead and Mr. Brown for helping with cleaning up the damage. Thanks to Shulfer's Landscaping, Ruthie (Engford) and Frank Clark and David Engford for their commitment to the restoration of the damaged areas and plantings. The only remnant of the storm is the Park sign on the southeast corner of the Park, which was also ripped out of the ground.

Unfortunately, because of Mother Nature's temper tantrum, our construction projects, planned for the Park this summer, had to be postponed. Residential devastation of the Village took priority over the undamaged buildings of the Park. It is our hope that by Thanksgiving we will be back on schedule. Keep your fingers crossed. Updates will be forthcoming.

The Pierce Building project is nearing completion. The Print Shop in the front half of the building has been electrified, insulated, enclosed and painted this spring and summer. The exterior trim work has been painted. The interior trim work awaits installation as soon as the floor is restored. This project has come a long way this year.





On June 15 and 16 we enjoyed Heritage Days at the Park. The performance by "Gray Catz" was delightful and well received by visitors. We are hoping to enlarge our craft artist program for next year on this occasion.

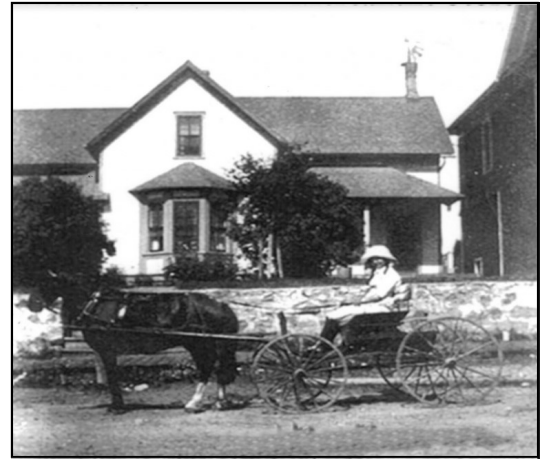
We were pleased by the number of visitors at the Park and by the number of requests we received for public service by the community. Our visitors came from all over the state, as well as from a number of other states and countries. Foreign visitors from Europe, East Asia, Australia and South America have carried information back with them from their trip to Portage County and Plover. It was a good spring and summer season for Heritage Park.

Murder on Main Street!
Friday, October 18, 2019 at 6:30PM.

Meet Erik McFarland at the Courthouse parking lot, Church St. by Civil War Memorial, on Friday, October 18 at 6:30 PM. The tour will conclude at the Riverfront Art Center
A Historical Walking Tour of Downtown Stevens Point.
Learn about early Stevens Point's most infamous homicides.
Not suitable for children due to graphic subject matter.

Free to the public. Donation, \$5.00 suggested, to the Portage County Historical Society is appreciated.
Rain or Shine. Dress appropriately for the weather.





Greater Mattoon Area Historical Society

By Jerry Rohlinger

On May 15th, Anton Anday and I traveled to Mattoon, WI at the invitation of the recently formed historical society. They were assuming that we could provide some wisdom on how to run a successful historical society?

We toured their major project, a restoration of a upscale residence that would be 'officially' recognized by the State as a 2-bed hospital, ca. 1910. It served this purpose until fairly recently. Photo: upper right.

They have made great progress for a new local history society having a web site and making significant progress on the restoration project. Anton and I provided some advise and a lot of encouragement to keep going!

Wednesday, Sept. 11th, members of their Board of Directors toured Heritage Park. Photo top left. We hope they enjoyed the tour and maybe picked up a pointer or two.

P.S. I had an ulterior motive for traveling to Mattoon! Its been 60+ years since I'd been there! My maternal grand mother's brother moved from Birnamwood to Aniwa and one of his children moved to Mattoon. With aid of the Mattoon Society I was directed to the grave of this family member.



Dedication of new Plaque at Casimir Pulaski Fountain





The Pinery

Is the official publication of the Portage County Historical Society, Inc. of Wisconsin published March 20th, May 20th, Sept. 20th and Dec. 20th of each year.

Officers

President: Tim Siebert
Vice-president: Dave Simonis
Secretary: Jerry Rohlinger
Treasurer: Janet Zblewski

Directors

Jim Abbrederis Anton Anday
Mary Egle Milo Harpstead
Dan Hoppe Diane Casselberry
Eric McFarland Mary Beth Anday
Sarah Scripps Beverly West
Jason Jones Brad Casselberry
CWMR, Ltd

A monthly business meeting is held the second Wednesday of each month, except for December, at the Synagogue Museum, 1475 Water St. Stevens Point, WI., unless otherwise announced.

An Annual Meeting is held the second Wednesday of April at a location to be announced. An annual report and election of Directors occur at this meeting

The membership and public are welcome to attend any meeting.

Visit our website at:
www.pchswi.org
Visit us on Facebook



"The purposes of this organization are exclusively educational and shall be to preserve, advance, and disseminate knowledge of the history of Portage County, Wisconsin."

Joining the Historical Society couldn't be easier! Just fill out the form and mail it today. Membership runs from January - December of the calendar year. Please circle the level at which you are joining or renewing.

| | | | |
|----------------------|------------|---------------------|------------|
| Student (ages 17-21) | \$15/year | Senior (62 & older) | \$20/year |
| Individual | \$25/year | Family | \$40/year |
| Business | \$50/year | Pioneer | \$100/year |
| Patron | \$200/year | Sustaining | \$300/year |
| Benefactor | \$400/year | Life | \$500 |

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

City/State/zip: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email address: _____

Sept. 2019

- | | |
|------------------|---------------------------|
| General Funds | Heritage Park |
| Synagogue Museum | Historic Fire House No. 2 |
| Rising Star Mill | Other - specify |

No thanks, I don't want to become a member, but here is my tax deductible donation to the Society \$_____ Please circle your preference.

I'm interested in Volunteering, please call me at:

Online Payments

Now accepting online Dues Payments, Donations and Ticket Sales to Society Events.



Mail this form with check made out to:

Portage County Historical Society

P O Box 672

Stevens Point WI 54481

Or contact us at:

Phone: 715-600-4930



Portage County Historical Society

P O Box 672

Stevens Point WI 54481

Phone: 715-600-4930

E-mail: pchswi@gmail.com

www.pchswi.org

Non-Profit Organization
US Postage Paid
Permit #92
Stevens Point
Wisconsin

Electronic Service Requested



Photo to Remember

Mitchell House located at 711 Clark Street (now between 1516 and 1524 Clark St)

