



WESTPHALIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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WINTER MONTHS

As you faithful readers know, our meetings are suspended during the winter. But is anything going on “behind the scenes”? See page two for some upcoming things.

LIGHT PARADE RECAP

We had another great evening in December for our annual Light Parade and Tree Lighting. The weather cooperated, we had lots of entries: 29! It was a great mix of businesses, organizations and local folks joining in on the fun! It was an all around success.

Doreen Schafer won the quilt.
Jerry (Margie) Wirth won the doll house.
Mary Lou (Steve) Thelen won the barn.

Check out our Facebook page or our blog page for pictures (links above).

DAN DROSTE PARK

One of the true gems of our community is Dan Droste Park. The park is named after Dan, who had the vision of building a park for the community. Back in the 1960s the local Junior Chamber of Commerce (JCs) was a very active volunteer group of people with the same vision.

On April 24, 1964 Dan had a fatal car accident at 6:40 AM coming home from work on I-96 by hitting a bridge abutment. At 23 years of age he left behind a pregnant widow, the former Helen Thelen. To help keep his memory alive, work started on the park in September 1964 with \$400.00 donated money to get started. The park area at the time was about a 7 acre parcel and was part of the cemetery. It was full of brush, weeds and junk (i.e. old bicycles, tires etc.). Father Miller was approached about the possibility of building a park area. He said they (JCs) could do whatever they wanted as long as a permanent structure was not constructed. A parking lot for about 20-30 cars was cleared on the west side; then a bridge was built to cross the creek to establish a picnic area. During this time makeshift ball fields were set up as well as an area for pony pulls, greased pig contests, greased pole contests, ice skating rink etc.,. The JCs approached the Lansing Diocese and St. Mary's about purchasing the property. With the concurrence of Fr. Schmitt and the Diocese, the property was donated: 50% to the Township and 50% to the Village. This took place in the late 1960s or early 1970s. Later the Township deeded over their ownership to the Village. So now it sits in the Township - owned by the Village - but not located in the Village proper.

Once ownership was established, other improvements could begin in earnest. Outside restrooms were built along the cemetery fence (behind the current white building). A building was also started where the current red building now sits. It had four walls, but no roof; it sat on a concrete slab. Until the roof was added, they had bands come in and there was dancing under the stars. Later a roof was added, but it did not last long because the snow caused it to cave in.

The permanent ball field with lights was built with the bleachers coming from PW High School; they had to be reinforced. Then, horseshoe pits and the chicken barbeque pit were built. In about 1979 or 1980, a well was dug and with water the park could have its current restrooms and drinking fountains. One time after a huge rain came, the existing bridge floated downstream so a new bridge had to be built.

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2024 EXHIBIT – LOCAL FARMING

This summer's exhibit about local farming prep has begun! We are now seeking photos of barns, barn raisings, miscellaneous farm buildings, aerial photos, and centennial farms. WHS will scan your photos at the WHS Museum and you'll take the photos home with you. We already had one scanning date, with more to come:

Sunday, Feb. 18, 1 PM to 3 PM

Saturday, Mar. 9, 10 AM to 1 PM

Tuesday, Mar. 19, 6 PM to 8 PM

Sunday, April 14, 1 PM to 3 PM

We look forward to seeing your contributions. While you are there, we will also pick your brains about other ideas for the farming series.

DAN DROSTE PARK CONTINUED

The three Behlen Buildings were donated. The large red building was dedicated to Tom Platte, who was a JC and died in a tragic accident. Jim Fedewa was a Behlen Building sales rep and an active JC member at the time. The swing set nearest the white building and the tall slide came from the old St. Mary's playground. The band shell was built by Roy Miller, as well as the signs in front. The entire park project involved a lot of dedicated people to help build it and continue to take care of it. If you have a chance, look in the Brown Book page 312 for a lot more detail about the park. The article has a picture of Helen Droste Peacock cutting the ribbon dedicating the park in Dan Droste's memory.

Special thanks to the following people whose recall of things about our beloved park here in Westphalia helped write this article: Evelyn Wieland, Elvan Pohl, Jerry Gross, Don Schneider, Stan Smith, Fred Martin, Roy Miller, and the Bierstetels: Leon, Jim and Jane. We also need to thank all of the former JCs who are no longer with us for their foresight and the few who are left.



LOCAL NEWS & UPDATES

Germaine Miller

We lost another long time member of our Historical Society. Germaine, at age 92, was a wealth of information about our area's history. Up until last year she was a regular attendee to our monthly meetings. We would especially like to thank her sons for contributing part of her memorial donations to our Society. It keeps the heat and lights on and enables us to continue doing the work we do.

Antiques Roadshow in Westphalia

We are again welcoming Dennis Beard to give free appraisals of your items. Dennis has been in the appraisal and antique auction business for the past 50 years. Dennis has been here in the past and we have been asked to have him back again; he is doing this free of charge.

He will be at the Museum March 12th with March 20th as a snow date. The hours are 6 PM until 8 PM. This is free of charge; however, he will NOT do guns, stamps, coins or fine jewelry. You will be limited to 2 items per person.