



www.westphaliahistory.weebly.com

www.facebook.com/westphalia1836

Email: westphalia1836@gmail.com

FIND US:
120 W. Main Street
Westphalia, MI 48894



WESTPHALIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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A PAINTING THAT TELLS A STORY

What do you see when you look at the large oil painting on the wall of St. Mary Church? Is it a meeting of men in the wilderness with churches in vision? Let's go back to the early 1930s...

Rev. Fr. Edward Gutha started his ministry at St. Mary in 1932. He was a priest who had a great interest in history. He was an artist and a musician. In 1934, Father and many others were making plans for the 1936 centennial celebration of Westphalia. One of his plans was to commission a painting to be hung on the wall in the church vestibule. It would be a companion painting of the "Fourteen Holy Helpers" already on the north wall of old St. Mary. What should the painting tell the people of Westphalia?

In the 1930s, a few sons and daughters of the first settlers were still alive and one was Bernard Hanses. He was the oldest resident of Westphalia and the son of John Herman Hanses, one of our Founding Fathers. Revella Hanses Smith tells us that Fr. Gutha spent many hours talking to her grandfather Bernard. What you see in the painting is what Bernard and others told Fr. Gutha.

The painting arrived in time for the centennial celebration. It depicts a meeting in the wilderness that was the beginning of Westphalia, in November of 1836; the first permanent German Catholic Settlement in Central Michigan. The men you see in the painting are Joseph Platte, the first to come to Michigan, followed by Anton Cordes, John H. Hanses and John Salter. They are greeting Fr. Anton Kopp and William Tillman who left Germany in August of 1836. These six men are the Founding Fathers of Westphalia.

This painting hung in the vestibule of St. Mary until April 29, 1959 when parishioners rescued it and the painting of the "Fourteen Holy Helpers" from the fire that destroyed the church. In 1983, restoration of the paintings and the frames was completed and the dedication took place in 1984.

The artist was G. Zamboni. This oil painting is 110" high and 80" wide. The frame itself is about 9" wide.

We must thank the 1936 historians Rev. Fr. Gutha, Bernard Hanses and many others. They gave us written recordings of our past.

Evelyn Weiland

WHS: WHY I JOINED

MEMBERSHIP: Help!

We haven't done any official ranking, but I think I'm the youngest member of the historical society - but why? I owe a lot of that to my mom, Charlotte Hengesbach, who took on typing up the newsletters when the historical society "took off" again in the early 2000s. She encouraged me to get involved. But my interest probably goes back even further.

I always liked the old stories, the old buildings and homes, and wondered what it was really like back when. Being part of the historical society has given me the inside scoop on interesting stories, pictures and artifacts.

If you're 40-60 or so, it's now our parent's generation who are the keepers of the stories, no longer our grandparents. It's now becoming our turn to make sure those stories are preserved.

So, stop into a meeting – we won't rope you into a committee the first night. But ...stop in. We'd love to have you and maybe you'll decide to keep stopping in.

And maybe, at some point, you'd want to make something for the bake sale, help set up for the cemetery walk or have the great idea for our next exhibit.

We meet the third Tuesday of the month (except January and February and this year March) at 7:00 PM.

Debbie Nurenberg

WHS: NEWS & UPDATES

Historical Society officers and directors:

Elections were held at the March meeting all officers and directors have agreed to serve another 2 year term. President Leo Pohl, Vice-President Glenn Fink, Secretary Margie Wirth, Treasurer Chris Piggott. Board of Directors: Bernie Thelen, Phil Hengesbach, Debbie Nurenberg, Theresa Quartermus and Karen Spitzley.

Bake Sale:

A big thank you to all who donated baked goods. This has historically been our largest fund raiser for the year. Portland Federal Credit Union has always been gracious in letting us have it there during the annual Westphalia Area garage sales. A big thank you to them as well.

SPORTS IN WESTPHALIA

Sports have always played an important part in our community, for that reason our annual display features any and all sports that members of our community have participated in. Steve Hanses, with help from friends, has put together a very nice display from over the year to pay tribute to our local home grown athletes.

As a reminder we are open the first Sunday of the month from 1:00 to 4:00 PM and the third Wednesday evening of the month from 5:00 to 8:00 PM or by appointment.

LIGHT PARADE NEWS: We hope that 2022 wasn't the last one!

Those of us who have been putting the parade together since the beginning have decided to hang it up. In other words we have basically aged out. If the community would like to see the parade continue please step up and take it over. It can be a business, bowling team, golf team, neighborhood, or individual. It doesn't really matter just as long as the younger generation is willing to step up.

We will pass along things we have learned along the way. It has always been a fun winter time event well received by our area and it would be sad to see it end like our former 4th of July parade that was held for decades. We, too, would enjoy watching the parade come through town instead of at the corners or in the background. After ten years of organizing and running the parade, we feel it's time for another group to take it over with fresh ideas and energy. Please consider if this is something you might be interested in.