



WESTPHALIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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2020 CEMETERY WALK

At this time we don't know if there will be a Cemetery Walk this year. Please keep in mind that we have not officially canceled it yet. We may know more by the time the June newsletter comes out.

2020 SPORTS EXHIBIT

The status of this year's exhibit is same story as the Cemetery Walk ; at this time we don't know if there will be a display this year.

Keep Steve Hanses in mind because if we don't do it this year we will do it next year.

However, we do know for sure that the display cannot be ready for this Memorial Day weekend as usual. We regret this, but we are not canceling our exhibit; we are just postponing it until a future date.

MEETINGS

As many of you suspect, we will NOT be having a May meeting. We hope to pick it up again in the near future. In the meantime, stay safe, stay healthy, and enjoy the beauty that spring, summer offers.

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EPIDEMICS OF THE PAST

The original plan was to do a story on the Bank Robbery in Westphalia as a follow up to the story in the last issue about the bank failure. However, in the meantime, another story has come up, so the robbery will have to wait until another issue....We have been here before. As the saying goes, "History repeats itself." By living through this epidemic, we are going through a period of time none of us have ever experienced.

The earliest recorded epidemic in our area was the dreaded Asiatic cholera, which came to Westphalia in the early 1850s. Cholera is an infection of the small intestine by a strain of bacterium which can be found in contaminated food or water; this leads to dehydration. Remember that people were not as aware of viruses and bacteria in those times the way we are now and refrigeration had not yet been invented. Food and water were deemed safe if it smelled or tasted alright.

Malaria fever was another sickness our ancestors dealt with. It was passed by breeding mosquitoes. This area was covered with heavy forests and swamps when our ancestors first arrived. There was the Klockner swamp, two miles south of town; the Rochol swamp, two miles east and one half mile north of town; the Weiland swamp, one mile east and one and a half miles south of town; and the Thome swamp, which was east of town. Another large swamp was near the cemetery. There were other swamps in the southern part of the township, such as the Kramer, Wohlfert, Pitchford and Lehman swamps, as well as others scattered around the township. Malaria was prevalent in the 1850s and 60s. As swamps were drained, fewer cases were recorded after 1868.

Diphtheria reached the area about 1863. Diphtheria is an infection caused by bacteria. It causes a thick grayish covering in the back of the throat, which can lead to difficulty breathing, heart failure, paralysis and can cause death. It can also be transmitted from one person to another. Children under 5 and adults over 60 are most at risk.

EPIDEMICS OF THE PAST...

In four months, this disease caused the death of ten young people in the parish, but the true total may have been much higher. For some time afterwards the cause of death listed in the burial records was "Halsweh" (sore throat) and "Braune" (tonsillitis) which were in all likelihood Diphtheria. In 1868, Diphtheria came back again. It is estimated that it took around thirty or forty victims this time. The number of burials increased from 19 in 1867 to 60 in 1868. Deaths then fell to 23 in 1869. It came back again in 1881, claiming about fifteen more lives. The Brown Book is a good source of information about these early epidemics. Thankfully our children are now vaccinated for diphtheria, whooping cough and tetanus as babies.

The Blue Book also goes into detail about these epidemics. Page 40 tells how the Paul family lost 3 children in two months (April and May) of 1866 to malaria. Page 51 tells how Anthony and Anna Catherine (Thelen) Rademacher, who married in 1861, lost 6 children during an epidemic. Another vivid example that can really hit home is the tombstone of John and Theresa Bertram in St. Mary's Cemetery. They lost 5 of their 6 children between 1873 and 1895.



The Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918 claimed the lives of 50 million people worldwide. Westphalia got lucky, with only one death attributed that: Leo Theis, a WW I soldier died of the flu in a hospital in France. Eleven deaths occurred in St. Johns, one being a 16 year old boy named Rodney B. Wilson. The Rodney B. Wilson High school was later built on property donated by his family in memory of their son.

Scarlet Fever also went through the area; while contagious, it was treatable. Oral history remembers people putting signs on their doors or windows to alert people that the house had a disease inside and warning people to enter at their own risk. Another story is that the men folk - if healthy - had to eat and sleep in the barn so they would not get infected....remember that our families were farm based and someone had to be able to do the chores and keep the farm going. It was also said that at one time the Parish priest had a child's burial Mass every day of the week during the 1880s.

BLUE BOOK SELLS OUT & REPRINT ON ITS WAY

Our last Blue Book was sold this past summer, so we have put in an order for a reprint of 200 copies.

This is now the 4th printing, bringing the total to 3200 copies made since 1986.

We think that 200 copies should hold us until the next generation of Historical Society members puts together a bicentennial book in 2036 - in which they can write about the covid-19 pandemic of 2020 with lots of personal stories from the younger generations in an "I remember when..." chapter.