



WESTPHALIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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MUSEUM HOURS 'til December : 1st Sunday/month 1 - 4 PM,
3rd Wednesday/month 5 - 8 PM

CEMETERY WALK 2019

Mark your calendars for September 22 at 2:00 PM. Our featured people are the following. Louis Bertram, owner of an early drug store in Westphalia, will be portrayed by AJ Schneider. Leo Gross, founder of Gross Machine shop, will be portrayed by son, Mike Gross. The first person buried in the 4th (and current) cemetery in 1872, Johann Pohl, will be portrayed by Great, Great, Great Grandson, Luke Pohl. Richard Schmitt will portray his father, Isidore (Izzy) Schmitt, who was a long time St. Mary Parish maintenance person. Carolyn Wirth, volunteer extraordinaire, will be portrayed by Kim (Wirth) Keilen granddaughter of Carolyn.

NOTICE: Transportation on Golf Carts and Rangers

This is our sixth year hosting the walk and each year it has gotten more popular, which is a good thing; HOWEVER, we are running into a problem. We offer rides in golf carts/Rangers for those who find walking difficult; however, with more requests each year, we could use more help transporting people.

- If you have a golf cart or Ranger and are able to help us transport people, please contact Margie Wirth at 989.587.6984 or 989.640.4437 (cell).
- If you need a ride, you can also call Margie and she will try to get you matched up. With so many requests, we ask that you do not simply show up expecting a ride. There is no guarantee we will have available spots as in previous years. You could also try to arrange your own ride prior to the walk if you know of someone willing to transport you.

Thank you for your help and understanding.

SHIPSHEWANA BUS TRIP

Chris Piggott has organized fun day trip to Shipshewana Thursday, October 17. We'll depart St. Mary's parking lot across from the church at 7:30 AM and return that night at approximately 8:45 PM. Plans to date:

- Musical called "A Simple Sanctuary" at the Blue Gate Theater
- A stop at E&S Sales; please remember that they do not take charge cards, so bring cash or check.
- Dinner with Lloyd and Loretta at their Amish home.
- Some time for shopping in the downtown area while we're there.

The cost for the trip is \$85.00 per person. Checks can be mailed to the Historical Society at box number 163, Westphalia. Or payment can be made directly to Chris Piggott. Don't wait too long; last year we had a waiting list and could not accommodate everyone who asked to be on.

WESTPHALIA, TEXAS CHURCH FIRE

It is with great sadness that we have to write about one of our sister Westphalia villages losing their church to a fire. The Church of the Visitation in Westphalia, Texas caught fire from an unknown source the morning of July 29. The parish currently serves about 245 families.

The community of Westphalia, Texas was started in 1879 by a group of Catholics originally from the Westphalia region of Germany looking for good farmland (sound familiar?). Just as our area was covered with trees, so was theirs with mesquite-covered grassy plains. By 1884 there were 13 families on 270 acres of homestead plots. The first church was built in 1884 and later destroyed by storms.

Their most recent church was started in 1893 and completed in 1895. The church had two bell towers, which were designed to sway 12 inches during high winds; the church body itself could sway 3 inches. At one time the church was the largest wood edifice west of the Mississippi River and had currently been one of the largest wooden structures in Texas. The church was about the size of Holy Trinity in Fowler.

Sadly, they were preparing to celebrate its 125th anniversary. The interior and exterior had recently been refurbished and repainted. This included the removal and re-leading of their beautiful stained glass windows, which were imported from Germany when the church was built. The church also had a large pipe organ worth between \$750,000.00 and \$1,000,000.00. The president of the Westphalia Texas Historical Society, Doris Voltin, whom some of us have had the pleasure of knowing, sent us the following information. The community is still in shock by how quickly the church was totally destroyed (about 45 minutes). The fire was fanned by an 18 mph wind from the southwest. The fire was so fast and hot only a few items could be saved: the tabernacle and Holy Eucharist, baptismal font, the long bench used by altar servers, the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a couple of chalices and statues of angels. The rectory had to be watered down and did receive some smoke damage. The little school museum and old convent remain standing as grand as ever with no damage. It is also unknown at this time if the large grand pipe organ was properly insured by the diocese. To view this tragedy one can google Westphalia, Texas church fire.

As more information becomes available we will put it in our newsletter; in the meantime, keep our sister parish in your prayers.

Go to our Newsletters page OR click this link to access an article with before and after pictures of the church.