



Westphalia Historical Society

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Upcoming Meetings

Next Meeting:

April 17, 7:00 PM

Reminder: You need not be a member to attend; however, we are always looking for new members to carry us down the road; we hope to see you there!

Bake Sale, April 27

We are again sponsoring a bake sale at PFCU in Westphalia during the first day of the Westphalia Garage Sales. PFCU is open 9 AM to 5:30 PM on Fridays, but we often sell out before closing!

We welcome donated bake sale items, which can be brought to PFCU that morning, or you can drop items off on Theresa Quartermus' porch at 310 Westphalia St. This has been a good fundraiser for us, and we thank you for your support!

**THE BUILDING IS CLOSED UNTIL
Memorial Day**

Many Thanks!

The Coley Fox family recently made a donation for the Johann Fuchs memorial plaque. We appreciate their generosity.

What's Old Is New Again

This past summer Margo Cook -Sullivan toured our museum. She was delighted to see our display about her father, Dr. Bruno Cook. She mentioned that she had additional items that we might be interested in, such as his original sign that was in front of his office and some other items from his practice. We of course wanted them! These items will be on display when we open in May.

She also had something else she thought we'd be interested in: the Easter Paschal candle holder from the church that burned in 1959. Margo explained that when the church burned down, her parents ended up with it for safe keeping. Her mother had it for years and now she has had it for years, and it's been taking up space in her basement.

Our first inclination was to turn it down; we often shy away from accepting religious items since we already have many (family Bibles, pictures, etc.) and do not need more. However, due to this item's historical significance, we accepted it.

Despite fire and time, it was in beautiful condition. We contacted Fr. Weber. He and Beth Markel looked at it and agreed that perhaps it was meant to be back in St. Mary's church where it started (since Margo lives in Fowler).

You may have already seen it in St. Mary's; it is in the south transit near Mary. Many thanks to Fr. Weber and Beth Markel for displaying this beautiful item from our parish past. And thank you to Margo Cook-Sullivan for thinking of us.

~ Leo Pohl, President

Cemetery Walk, September 16

The Cemetery Walk Committee has put together names for the 2018 walk. More information will follow as the event gets closer, but we hope you will put us on your calendar!

- Ron Spitzley, World War II fatality. You may recognize his name from our exhibit two years ago, which featured local veterans.
- Leo Bauer, local long time silo builder and builder of the fish pond in the cemetery.
- Bob Trierweiler, postmaster at the old post office.
- Elizabeth Hengesbach, mother of St. Nick (Ted Hengesbach).
- Maria Catherine and Adam Fedewa. Adam was the first Fedewa to emigrate to Westphalia.

CEMETERY WALK DVD: We still have Cemetery Walk DVDs (and other items) available in our museum. See us when we open this spring, or stop into the next meeting.



Cheering!

Cheering was different in 1949-1950. The girls did not have prepared cheers to work from; they had to come up with their own. St. Mary High School cheerleaders for the boys' basketball team that year were Connie Lenneman, Florence Cook and Nancy Ansbach.

They were playing an away game east of town (Laingsburg, Bath or Ovid). It was the beginning of the game, so they tried one of their new cheers:

"There ain't no fleas on us - there ain't no fleas on us .

There might be fleas on the referees.

But there ain't no fleas on us."

The referees were not amused and gave them a technical foul. They were not able to cheer and had to sit out the rest of the game.

Does anyone remember if the boys won or lost because of the technical? Connie, who shared this story, can't remember.

Local Artists Exhibit

Our exhibit this year will display works from local artists living and deceased: paintings, sculptures, pottery, ceramics, stained glass, needle work, wood carving, etc.

This exhibit will run from May to December 1.

If you or someone you know would like to display artwork, please contact Dan Arens (989.587.6565) or Ann Nurenberg (517.285.7780).

Who Was Johnny Geller?

In our past newsletters we have written about some of Westphalia's notable people. We told you about our early settlers in their first difficult years. We told you about some of our successful business people, and we told you about our war heroes. Johnny Geller was not one of these. He was the man who lived that little house north of town, next door to old Mr. Fernholz's shoe repair shop on Westphalia Street.

Johnny Geller was born in Westphalia on June 9, 1871; he was the first son of John and Christina (Miller) Geller. His mother died when Johnny was nine years old and in that same year of 1880, his father died, leaving Johnny and his younger brother, Ferdinand, orphans.

Very little is known of Johnny's childhood, but today, we in our 80s and 90s can remember him as a man who had a good sense of humor - he could make you laugh. He had a big heart, especially when it came to young children.

One of those was Lilly Mae Spitzley Fox, "When I was a little girl, Johnny Geller gave me a nickel. I felt like the luckiest girl in town that day. I think I went to Martin's Ice Cream Parlor for a popsicle. I also remember when Johnny helped my father, Tony, with the butchering. I would sit on the basement steps watching the men cutting the meat and making sausage. Johnny would ask me to sing or recite a poem. I think I recited a little rhyme."

Janice Wieber Fedewa also remembered those days of butchering on the Wieber farm on Tallman Road. "Johnny didn't have a car so Raymond, my father, would go to town and bring Johnny to our house to help with the work. He would stay for maybe a week and sleep upstairs in his own bedroom. Johnny enjoyed my mother's good cooking and my dad's good cider." It would seem that Johnny was a good handyman at butchering and sheep shearing.

Jerry Spitzley tells us that Johnny worked for the village as well. "He cut the weeds with a scythe and every so often he would stop to sharpen the blade with the stone he carried in his pocket. And he would use a broom to sweep the streets and I guess we kids followed him. When he thought we weren't watching, he would throw a few pennies in the dirt and then sweep them up and say 'look boys if you would help me, you could also find some money.'"

"Johnny was a prankster," said Donald Schafer. "I remember those days when he and Albert Frey worked for the village sweeping the streets. Sometimes Johnny would bend down pretending to pick up something from the dirt and then show Albert some coins in his hand saying, 'look, Albert, what I just swept up.' Albert would say, 'I can't believe how Johnny can find all that money. I never find any.'"

Read about another of Johnny Geller's clever pranks in the "blue book" *Of Pilgrimage Prayer and Promise* on page 72 where Norbert Fox recounts his memory of Johnny.

Johnny Geller celebrated his 90th birthday on the 9th of June in 1961, along with his friend, John Schafer, of Fowler. Johnny died in October that same year and was buried in St. Mary Cemetery alongside his mother and father.

Special thanks to Beth Geller Burns and Tony Fedewa for help with this story.

~Evelyn Weiland

