



Westphalia Historical Society

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Upcoming Meetings

Our meetings are the 3rd Tuesday of the month at 7:00 PM at the museum.

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!

Waking Up Guilty

60 years ago next month the body of Anna Hengesbach was found in a cornfield. Ted and Rose Marie Hengesbach have spent the past several years interviewing people, reading old newspapers and reviewing court transcripts and other documents related to her murder and the trials. They have drafted a book that's been titled *Waking up Guilty*.

The book covers the trials of Vincent Hengesbach, Anna's stepson who was first charged with Anna's murder, and Richard Pohl, Anna's neighbor who was later convicted.

Ted and Rose Marie are currently doing some tweaking and looking for a publisher. Thus, there is no known date for publication. We will keep you posted as we learn more.

Light Parade, December 1

It's time to start thinking about your entries for this year's parade (remember, our tradition is the first Saturday of December). Being December 1st is a Saturday, it's earlier this year and it's also the first day after firearm deer season closes.

This year Erin Smith, daughter of Ken and JoAnn Smith, has agreed to the honor of lighting the tree for us.

Andy Hengesbach's helpers at the Ionia Department of Corrections are creating a playhouse. They are working on a castle-type playhouse that would be perfect for boy or girl. This will be raffled off after the parade, but we hope to have it on display beforehand so people can see the excellent work that they do. It would be a great addition to those princess collections or dragons and knights. So start thinking about that child or grandchild that would love this for Christmas!

For those new to our parade and tree lighting, we start the parade by Simon's Flower Shop and end it two blocks to the west at our museum. At that point, we gather 'round the tree to see it lit. Local shops have treats to purchase and people enjoy community spirit. Parade entries range from golf carts to tractors, and represent our local schools, groups, individual families and neighborhoods.

Cemetery Walk, September 16

Coming this Fall -- our 4th Cemetery Walk. We will begin at 2:00 PM at St. Mary's Cemetery. It usually lasts about 1 1/2 to 2 hours. Here are this year's people of focus, but check out our blog to read about our past walks.

- Ron Spitzley, World War II fatality. You may recognize his name from our military exhibit two years ago.
- Leo Bauer, 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.



IN SEARCH OF FATHER KOPP by Glenn Fink

Reverend Father Anton Kopp was the pioneer priest of Westphalia, the first German Catholic settlement in Central Michigan. His story is covered very nicely in both of the Westphalia Area History books. When the "Of Pilgrimage, Prayer, and Promise" book was published in 1986, his story went up to the middle of 1861, when he was known to be at St. Joseph's parish in Wilmette, Illinois. What happened to him after that was unknown. Since then, however, more information has emerged.

Apparently, Father Kopp returned to Detroit where he probably had relatives. His health was most likely failing at this time also; his death from cancer was recorded as January 15, 1862 in Detroit. He was buried from Old St. Mary's parish and interred at Mount Elliott Cemetery in Detroit. The location of that grave, however, is a mystery.

Numerous inquiries, by telephone, and more recently, by online requests proved unsuccessful. **PROBLEM #1:** There was a fire, sometime prior to 1865, where many of the burial records were destroyed. At this point, I thought there was only one thing left to do: ROADTRIP!

Monday, July 2nd: the heat wave snapped in Lansing, and it was much less humid, as the "slow-moving" cold front passed through. The forecast for the rest of the week called for more heat and humidity, so it sounded like a good day to go. **PROBLEM #2:** You can definitely drive faster than a "slow-moving" cold front. It was 92 degrees and high humidity at 9:30 a.m. when we reached Mount Elliott Cemetery. It was brutal out there.

Mount Elliot Cemetery was established in 1841, originally for the Trinity Church Irish Catholic community. Eventually the cemetery, under the care of a corporation, was expanded to include all of the Catholic parishes. It started out as 11 ½ acres, but eventually grew to 65 acres. **PROBLEM #3:** the cemetery was much larger than I had anticipated, and even in comfortable weather it would have been a challenge to cover.

After a very helpful security guard at the front gate oriented us to the layout, we set out. I had the names of other Koppes with known burial sites, and so we decided to start there. We found the section and **PROBLEM #4:** no stones were there with the name Kopp. And **PROBLEM #5:** some of the oldest limestone monuments were worn smooth, with no inscriptions visible or so faint as to be unreadable.

They were literally melting away.

We also ran into **PROBLEM #6:** the majority of stones were flat top markers that were set flush with the ground surface and with time had sunk and were overtaken with the grass!

We walked many of the sections, but with the heat and humidity, we knew we would not be able to cover the entire cemetery. We did find a section with many priests. Again, many of the old limestone monuments were unreadable or barely readable.

On a positive note, we did find the grave of Father Anton Krams, who was pastor at St. Mary's, Westphalia from 1923-1932 (see page 26 & 27 in the Westphalia Centennial 1836-1936/brown book). I also found the grave site of a Gnaou cousin of mine. As we were leaving, my friend made the statement: "He doesn't want to be found."

I set out telling myself not to have too high of expectations of ever finding the grave of Father Kopp. Even so, I was feeling down as we left to go home. I eventually realized that it wasn't so much a sense of disappointment at not finding the grave as it was a sense of sadness that all those stones are lost - likely forever.

But I am ready to give it one more try, another road trip, on a cool autumn day, and later in the day to see if a different angle of light can help with the inscriptions. The search will continue, and just maybe we'll get lucky and he'll reveal himself.



Shipshewana Bus Trip

Chris Piggott is again organizing a fun day to Shipshewana this October. We leave Westphalia on Tuesday, October 23 and we will return the same day. The cost of the trip is \$85.00, which includes tips, admission to the play "Stolen the Musical" at the Blue Gate Theater, a visit to E & S Sales and dinner at an Amish home.

If interested, call Chris at (989) 587-6558. Seats are filling up fast, so if you're interested, don't delay.

Art Exhibit Continues Until December

If you haven't yet been to the museum to see the artwork by some of our local talented people, you are doing yourself a disservice! We have paintings, stained glass work, wood carvings, needlework, pottery, photography and other forms of art on display. Altogether, we have over 80 pieces for you to view.

Dan Arens and Ann Nurenberg put the exhibit together, while Bernie Thelen and Mallory Simon have redone the Westphalia businesses exhibit. This includes artifacts from last year and ones new to this year, so stop in to see that, as well.

The Bengel Sisters

Sister Agnette (Regina Bengel) turned 104 years old this past winter. She was born February 4, 1914. She is a Sister of Christian Charity; she spent her life teaching, but now lives in the Mother House in Wilmette, Illinois.

Besides her long life and devotion to the church, another interesting fact is that she three of her

sisters also became nuns. They were daughters of Theodore and Margaret Bengel.

Additional information about her career can be found in the pamphlet "Quiet Heroism", which you can find at the museum. This booklet contains stories of 87 sisters from Westphalia. You can pick one up for \$5.00. It's a light and interesting read.



Seated: Sister Agnette. Standing: Sister Dorothea, Sister Bernard, Sister Marina.

