



Westphalia Historical Society Newsletter

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Recent Donors

Peter & Susanne Lansing

David Trierweiler

Elizabeth Byrnes

Westphalia Historical Society P.O. Box 163,
Westphalia, Michigan 48894-0163



Election of Officers and Directors

Our by-laws require us to have elections every two years. The following have been elected for the next two years.

President: Leo Pohl

Vice President: Maggie Upson

Secretary: Margie Wirth

Treasurer: Chris Piggott

Directors: Karen Spitzley, Charlotte Hengesbach,
Teresa Quartermus, Phil Hengesbach, Maggie
Upson, Bernie Thelen, and Debbie Hengesbach

Next Display Series:

We have decided to pay tribute to our military veterans. If you or your family members have items such as pictures, uniforms, medals, flags, and other military items you would like to have displayed, please contact Bernie Thelen at 587-6885. *Please note: we will not accept any guns.* We may at some time in the future have a special meeting when family members can bring in their various weapons and share the stories that go with them. We know there are many war time souvenirs that people would like to share, as well as pictures from summer camps at Camp Grayling, Camp McCoy, Fort Custer, etc. and days of basic training. We would like to have all display items by March 20 to give us time to set things up for spring shows.

Do you use any of the following?

Our website: www.westphaliahistory.weebly.com

Our email address: westphalia1836@gmail.com

Facebook link: www.facebook.com/westphalia1836

Classes at the building:

Some of our display cases have been re-arranged to make room for classes. Peg Keilen and Alice Bengel are currently teaching knitting and crocheting. If there are other things you would like to see offered, please contact any of the officers and we will try to find an instructor. Also, if you know someone who has a talent they would be willing to share, please let us know.

Water Line Break:

Three days after being elected President of the Historical Society I got a call that we had a water line break in the building and the building was flooded. Bob (Hubby) Thelen, while walking through town, noticed water coming out of the building. He called the Village. They called Walt Thelen. Jim and Steve came with vacuums. Walt and Bernie, along with Maggie Upson and Phil Hengesbach, came to help move everything off the carpet onto the tile floor. A copper elbow had come apart at the joint in the electric panel closet. Needless to say it was a mess. Most of the carpet was soaked. They vacuumed, pulled up the carpet and got in touch with Clover Restorations from St. Johns. They brought out fans, dehumidifiers and other drying equipment to dry out the carpet. After three days the carpet was completely dry. Walt and Maggie baby-sat the drying equipment during this time, lifting carpet, and moving fans, etc. The carpet has since been re-tacked, cleaned and sanitized. Many thanks to those involved.

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An elderly gent was invited to his old friend's home for dinner one evening. He was impressed by the way his buddy preceded every request to his wife with endearing terms-Honey, My Love, Darling, Sweetheart, etc.

The couple had been married almost 70 years, and clearly they were still very much in love. While the wife was in the kitchen, the man leaned over and said to his host, "I think it's wonderful that, after all these years, you still call your wife those loving pet names."

The old man hung his head. "I have to tell you the truth," he said, "I forgot her name about 10 years ago."

Westphalia's Oldest Commercial Building

Let's step back in time to 1852. Joseph Platte, one of our Founding Fathers, was a very enterprising young man. It was his plan to start a village when he decided to move his business from the northeast corner of what is now Main and Heyer Streets, to the northeast corner of Main and Westphalia Streets. It would be a good place to build; it was on a low hill making for good drainage. The result of his plan was an imposing two-story frame building.

Germaine Miller has said, "Written on a rafter near the fan-shaped window in the south gable of the building are the words: Built by John Fisher of New York for Joseph Platte, June 9, 1852." In this building Joseph Platte operated a General Store, the first in the village. His son, Joseph Platte, Jr., continued that business for many years.



Peter Thome was the next merchant. His ads read, "You Know the Place on the Corner. You can buy Farm Implements, Gas Pumps and Engines, Wagons and Buggies."

After the Peter Thome Buggy Shop, Mathias Spitzley and Louis J. Wieber were partners in a business they called The Westphalia Hardware. In 1925, Mr. Wieber sold his interest to the Mathias Spitzley Estate. Then in 1929 Mathias Kloeckner bought an interest in the company, along with Anthony Spitzley, and they continued the hardware business. Mr. Kloeckner, busy with his farming, sold to Anthony and Isidor Spitzley and they in turn sold to William Spitzley and Joseph Hackenbruch. These two men apparently remained in business for only a short time.

If you're still reading this article, you can see that the building on the town's northeast main corner had many owners by the 1930s. Westphalia was a good place to set-up business, and Mike Pohl, who had a store known as the Red and White Grocery in Riley, came to our town in 1932. When he first came, his business was located on the west-end in the J. Arens Building. However, sometime in 1935, Mr. Pohl moved his stock to the building on the northeast corner of Main and Westphalia Streets. Here he sold groceries and hardware.

In 1946, Ed and Verena Witgen bought the building and opened-up a soda bar. Donna Witgen said, "It was my after-school job to wait on our ice-cream customers." For many, especially teenagers, it was a great place to go during the intermissions of the Friday night dance in Spitzley's Hall.

In 1950, the Witgens discontinued the soda-bar and sold the building to Frank Wieber of Fowler. For a few years the Wiebers had a lumber business in our town.

The next owners were Gus and Laura Pline, who operated a furniture store for fifteen years starting in 1956. They closed their business in 1971.

Bud (Gerald) Miller, the founder of the Westphalia Electric Company, moved his business from 119 West Main Street to 101 East Main – that well-known building on the main corner. And today, in 2016, the owners of Westphalia Electric, LLC continue to serve the public in that imposing frame structure. It has withstood the test of time – nearly 164 years!

