



# WESTPHALIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

October 2017

Volume 32

## We Remember

On September 18, 2017 the angels welcomed Dora Pung and her magic needle into Paradise. She was 99 years old; in those 99 years Dora made many beautiful quilts and baptismal shawls. We thank her for the good memories she shared with us. And now we pray, rest in peace, Dora.

On Friday September 22, Ed Baldwin died. Ed, in his gentle and friendly manner, was always willing to share his knowledge of the American Indian in his presentations for St. Mary's students. Rest in peace, Ed.

## Shipshewana Fun-Day Bus Trip!

The bus is full. Many thanks to Chris Piggott for organizing this event; perhaps we could plan other fun-day trips in the future. Any suggestions?

## Cemetery Walk

What a success! Approximately 370 people attended this year, and the weather cooperated again! The walk could not have happened without the volunteer help we had from the writers, actors, docents, golf cart drivers, cookie bakers, set-up crews, music performers, etc. Many of the volunteers are not yet Historical Society members. So again thanks to all who made this event successful.

So now, who should we think about doing next year? Remember that everyone has a story; some have never been told to anyone. If you have any suggestions, please let one of our members know.

Cemetery Walk CDs are available for both 2016 and 2017 for \$15.00 each. If you wish to have them sent to you, the cost is an additional \$3.00 each. If interested, please call Chris Piggott at 989 587-6558.



## Recent Donor

Thank you *Judith Thelen*. If you would like to make a donation, please send it to Westphalia Historical Society, P. O. Box 163, Westphalia, Michigan 48894.

## Johann Fuchs Cemetery Memorial Plaque

We've had much discussion on the placement of a memorial brass plaque honoring Johann Fuchs as "The Father of Immigration from the Eifel Area of the German Rhineland." He currently has a small concrete marker. We have received permission from the Cemetery Board for the placement of the plaque pending approval of the wording on the plaque. Many of us would not be here if Johann had not encouraged our ancestors to come to Westphalia. We are currently getting several quotes for the plaque ranging from \$1200.00 to \$1750.00 depending on the number of letters used. If you think you might be interested in helping to fund this project, please send your donation to the Society with a note that it is for the Johann Fuchs memorial plaque.

## Light Parade

It's that time of year again to think about our village Light Parade, which will be held Saturday, December 2 at 6:00 PM (rain date: Sunday, December 3). We received an email from St. Nick and he plans on being here again this year. Please keep an eye on the parish bulletin where we will announce this year's tree lighting honoree at a later date. Please consider entering the parade. Without any entries there will not be a parade and we would have many, many disappointed children, young and old in our village! The more entries the better. This year's tree is being donated by Glenn and Marie Smith. *If you plan to enter or need additional information, please call Leo Pohl at 587-3843.*

## Museum News

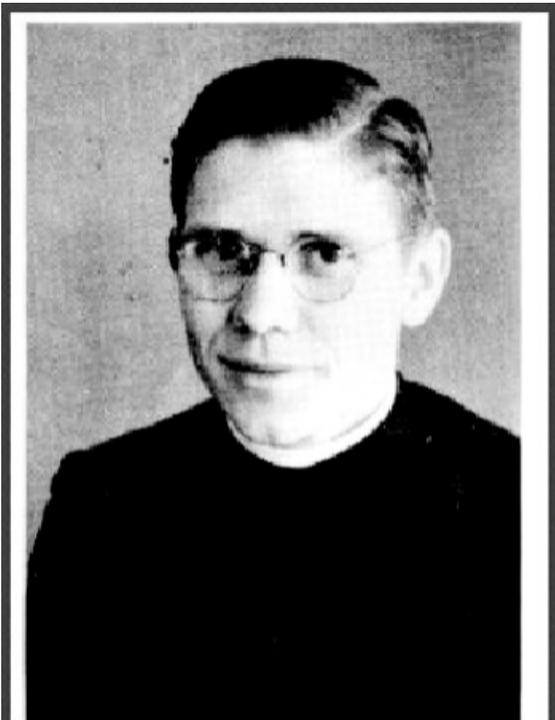
If you have not yet been in our building this year, we will be open after the Light Parade. After this, the building will be closed until spring 2018. It's a good opportunity to see what you know about our village.

## Westphalia Ornaments

We also have some of last year's Christmas ornaments for \$15.00 and will have this year's ornaments for \$15.00 Last year's ornament depicted a picture of our old church that burned in 1959. This year's ornament depicts a beautiful rendition of Our Lady of Westphalia.

All ornaments are handmade by historical society member, Glen Fink and he donates all proceeds from their sale to the Historical Society. Each ornament seems to be prettier than the previous one. It's a great opportunity to give a unique, one-of-a-kind Christmas gift.

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FATHER ERNEST KEILEN, S.V. D.  
Missionary to the Philippines since 1940  
Interned by the Japanese  
Liberated by the Americans Feb. 1945

## THIS IS AN ACCOUNT OF THE MISSIONARY LIFE OF FATHER ERNEST KEILEN, S.V.D. (SOCIETY OF THE DIVINE WORD)

By Janet Keilen Droste - June 2017

*Note:* This account of the life of my Uncle, Fr. Ernest Keilen, brother of my father, Walter Keilen, was compiled to the best of my ability from records of many letters to family members, newspaper articles and communications from the Society of the Divine Word. I am sure there is much more to be said about the life and experiences of this missionary priest who grew up in this small village of Westphalia, Michigan.

A book, *Rescue at Los Banos* by Bruce Henderson, gives a detailed description of confinement in the concentration camp. The "Keilen" name is misspelled but the person referred to is our Father Ernie!

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Ernest Keilen was born February 24, 1915 in rural Westphalia, Michigan, the 7th of 11 children born to Joseph Keilen and Mary Fedewa Keilen. His siblings were Walter, Dorothy, Verena, Laurretta (later known as Sr. Francis Keilen of Sisters of Christian Charity), Robert, Mildred, (Ernest) Vincent, Herbert, Anita, and Francis.

The Keilen family farm was located on the north side of the road on David Highway, 3 1/2 miles west of Westphalia. Ernest spent his early childhood on the farm, working along side his siblings and going to St. Mary's School in the village. His sister, Anita, remembers that Ernest was not interested in the workings of the farm; his interest was in study and beyond.

On September 3, 1930 Ernest entered St. Mary's Mission House in Techny, Illinois to begin his training with the Society of the Divine Word at the Society's seminary. On December 26, 1932 there was an accident from which Ernest suffered a broken spine. He was confined to the hospital and bed from Christmas 1932 to Easter 1933 before his studies could resume.

After recuperation from the broken spine, Ernest resumed his studies and graduated from what was referred to as the Central College in 1936. He was admitted to the Novitiate in East Troy, Wisconsin, June 21, 1936. After completing his Novitiate and Philosophy studies, he was assigned to the Philippine Islands to finish his theology studies at Christ the King Seminary in Manila, Philippines. In June 1940, he began his studies unaware that in a few short months the United States would be at war

with Japan, and the Philippine Islands would then be occupied by the Japanese from 1941-1945.

Not yet ordained, Ernest Keilen continued his studies but was placed in a civilian concentration camp. Concessions granted to all missionaries made it possible for him to complete his studies and to be ordained into the priesthood on June 24, 1943. Soon after ordination, Father Keilen was sent back to civilian concentration camp; his family unaware of his ordination!

More than 3 years passed when Pfc, Robert Keilen, brother to Father Keilen and part of General MacArthur's army pushing back the Japanese, found himself in the Philippine Islands. Robert immediately began making contacts about his brother and one day found himself in the company of a priest, also a member of the S.V.D., who had taught his brother. There he was told that Ernest, along with another member of the S.V.D. and two native seminarians, had been ordained on June 23, 1943. It was not until November 1944 that Robert was able to confirm by letter this information to his parents, Joseph and Mary Keilen in Westphalia, Michigan. Their last contact concerning their missing missionary son was more than 3 years! Robert's message to their parents was, *"Perhaps I may get to see him before long. All we can do is hope and pray."*

Liberation finally came for the 2,138 internees at Los Banos concentration camp. Many had already died and most surviving suffered from attacks of *beri beri* and like ailments following in the wake of malnutrition. An American rescue party was sent to stage a raid and snatch these internees from the hands of the Japanese. On February 23, 1945, Father Keilen was liberated in a commando raid by United States paratroopers, infantry and Filipino guerrilla forces.

Father Keilen reported as follows: *"The rescue party arrived at 7 AM on February 23, 1945. By 1 PM we were all, to the last man, back in safety behind the American lines. The raid was spectacular, carefully planned, perfectly timed and efficiently executed. Land, sea and air forces all contributed to the coordinated action."*

In March, the Army gave special attention to the liberated civilians and provided them with the very best in the way of food and nourishment. By April, shipping had been made available to transport and repatriate the internees; Father Keilen landed on

the west coast (USA) in May 1945 aboard a military transport vessel.

In a letter to his family, he further wrote: *"Our condition was desperate and our US boys came in just the 11th hour. God was good to us. It sure did seem good to see our boys, our flag, etc. Never did I appreciate the stars and stripes as much as I did since December 8, 1941. Never before did I realize and appreciate what it meant to be an American. If we were made to feel the pinch of poverty, the pang of hunger, privation of light and water, etc., etc., etc., we are glad to have been called up to bear for God and our country. I only trust that by God's grace, I have truly profited by it all for time and eternity."*

Father Ernest Keilen celebrated his first Solemn High Mass in his home parish, St. Mary's, Westphalia, Michigan June 13, 1945. He was attended by a bridal group of nieces and nephews as was the custom of the time. The children were dressed as a bride in white attended by bridesmaids and groomsmen. A "First Mass Dinner" and a parish reception were held in his honor.

Following his celebration, Father was appointed as assistant to Rev. Fr. George Esper in Fowler, beginning his duties on July 20, 1945. He returned to Manila November 12, 1945. Upon his return to the Philippines, he was assigned to the S.V.D. major seminary in Quezon City. He was honored to celebrate his Silver Jubilee of his ordination to the priesthood on June 24, 1968 at Christ the King Seminary Chapel.

Fr. Ernie continued his missionary work in the Philippines for the remainder of his life. He returned to the US in 1958 for a one-year furlough; again in 1973; then from May 1985 - April 1986 for his final visit "home." He celebrated his Golden Jubilee in the Philippines on June 23, 1993 in S.V.D. Christ the King Seminary Chapel. Only two of his siblings, Herbert and Vincent and their wives, ever made the trip to visit him in the Philippines.

The Office of the Procurator, Divine Word Mission Seminary, notified family that Father Keilen passed away in a retirement home on July 25, 1996 at age 81. He was buried on July 29, 1996 in the cemetery of Christ the King Seminary in Quezon City, Philippines, a cemetery for all S.V.D. members who have worked and died in the Philippines. *Remarks: "Indeed, we will surely miss him as he was a real friend for all of us. Let us keep him in our prayers."*