



Westphalia Historical Society Newsletter

December 2014

Volume 16

Our Recent Donors

Ken & Aggie Stump
Bill & Betty Wirth
Ted & Rose Marie Hengesbach
Leo & Evie Pohl
Tony & Sandy Arens
Monica Rademacher
Melvin & Dorothea Smith
Fred & Marie Theis

If you would like to make a donation, please send it to Westphalia Historical Society, P.O. Box 163, Westphalia, Michigan 48894-0163.



Christmas Remembered

By Bernadette M. Thelen

We always gathered at our grandparents' house in the early 1930's. There were six grown children, some married, and a few small grandchildren.

Tables were set in several rooms. After a great meal, we opened the parlor door to see the splendid tree that grandpa and the boys had brought from their woods. Decorations were beautiful - some old and some handmade. There were small candles clipped to the branches which grandpa lit for a while. We oohed & aahed until the candles were extinguished, so as not to set the tree on fire.

In the stable, the Christ Child, Mary and Joseph smiled on us as we sang "Silent Night" and more hymns. Our hearts were full of love and thanks for Baby Jesus and all of Heaven. Shepherds and sheep entered the stable as angels honored Our Lord. In the distance the three kings, high upon camels, followed the "Star of the East", bringing gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to the Christ Child. There is nothing like family togetherness - a tradition we have all kept.

Historical Society Building Grand Opening!!

Our Grand Opening is set for Saturday December 6th from 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m. with Evelyn Weiland doing the official ribbon cutting at 10 o'clock. Please come and join us for this special occasion. Since it is the Feast of St. Nickolas, he will be here (a.k.a. Ted Hengesbach). St. Nick will also have treats for the kids. There will be a raffle at 1:30 p.m. featuring 1) A beautiful Angel Christmas tree topper, handmade & donated by Trish Martens. 2) A handmade wood "Pirate" trunk donated by Andy Hengesbach which was made by the building trades group at the Bellamy Creek Correctional Facility in Ionia. The trunk would make a real nice blanket storage chest. It features real wood hinges that creak when it is opened and closed. 3) Several other donations. The building will feature old time Christmas decorations. We are very proud of our building and we hope you will agree!

Following the opening, please consider attending the 4:30 Mass to celebrate **Msgr. Fedewa's 60th anniversary** of his ordination.

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Notable Birthdays

A belated Happy Birthday to Agnes Wirth on her 95th birthday on October 28th.

Bernadette Snitgen Thelen and Evelyn Freund Weiland, classmates and 1944 graduates of Westphalia High School, are celebrating their 89th birthdays, Bernadette on the 26th of November & Evelyn on the 2nd of December.

Congratulations Ladies!

Book Signing

As mentioned in an earlier newsletter, Kurt Thelen, author of the book, *When Boppa Was a Boy* has agreed to autograph copies of his book. The signing will take place on Sunday, December 7th from 1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. in our Historical Society Building.

The book is a fun read, and you will recognize the names of many of the people in the book. Bring your copy with you or get one at the signing. Copies can also be obtained from his parents, Dennis and Joan Thelen at 587-6623. The cost of the book is reasonable -- \$10.00 -- and it would make a great Christmas gift.

On a Sad Note With a Possible Good Ending

The Champion Swamp White Oak Tree shown on page 132 of our "Blue Book" has died and fallen. The Arens Brothers have agreed to donate part of the family homestead tree to become the back drop of our future Donor Tree at the Historical Society. The intent is to have Platinum, Gold, Silver, and Bronze leaves with donor names engraved on them. As one tree has died, another tree will begin a new life.

The Legend of the Rooster

It is said that the only time a rooster crowed at midnight was the night that Jesus was born. "Misa del Gallo", the Mass of the Rooster, is celebrated at midnight on Christmas Eve in Spanish and Latin American countries. *By Evelyn Weiland*

Christmas Tree Trivia

Christmas trees have been sold commercially in the United States since about 1850.

In 1912, the first community Christmas tree in the United States was erected in New York City.

In 1923, President Calvin Coolidge started the National Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony now held every year on the White House lawn.

Thomas Edison's assistants came up with the idea of electric lights for Christmas trees.

In 1963, the National Christmas Tree was not lit until December 22nd because of a national 30-day period of mourning following the assassination of President Kennedy.

In 1979, the National Christmas Tree was not lit except for the top ornament. This was done in honor of the American hostages in Iran.

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Needed Items

If you have any of the following items just laying around and you would like to rid yourself of them, we could use them...

Old writing desk

Display cases

Coat rack

Small apartment size refrigerator -
(not dorm size cube)

Working copier—printer

Laminator

Digital camera

Again, if you'd like to give/loan any of these or other items that might be of historical interest, please contact Maggie Upson, 989 587- 4193 or Leo Pohl, 989 587-3843.

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Available Publications

Historical Film Footage 1936-1961. This contains footage taken by Fr. Gutha of the 1936 Centennial, and footage of the 125th Celebration taken in 1961. \$15.00.

Of Pilgrimage, Prayer, and Promise. The Story of St. Mary's Westphalia 1836-1986. \$23.00 each, or \$20.00 each when buying 2 or more.

Quiet Heroism. This book remembers the 87 Westphalia area women who entered the convent. \$6.00.

Sisters of Christian Charity. \$1.00 each.

Westphalia Area History, 1836-1976, 140 Years of Growth. \$40.00.

Westphalia High School Reunion, 1938-1950. \$3.00.

Historical Society Meetings are held at 7:00 pm on the third Tuesday of the month at 120 West Main St. Meetings are open to the public. Membership is required for voting privileges (\$5.00 annually).

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Memories of Christmases Past on Jason Road

By Ted Hengesbach

Christmas for me started with the first snowfall around Thanksgiving time. Before Santa arrived, St. Nicholas made his magical appearance on the evening of December 5th at our house on Jason Road. While gathered around the supper table in our kitchen, a loud thump on the east side porch sprang us into action. On the porch was a toy, some candy, and maybe a pair of mittens for each of us. If there was snow on the ground, so much the better. We could see St. Nick's footsteps in long strides leading to the driveway.

We put our Christmas tree up early – at least a week before Christmas Day! We hung large multi-colored lights, silvery icicles and ornaments from Christmases long ago on the tree. Mom showed us how to string each icicle separately on the branches. That lasted...well, it was not so long before we threw them in little bunches onto the tree.

I carefully set up the crib under the tree. I especially liked the Three Kings, so I put them there on day one! Some of our sheep had a leg or two missing. The donkeys had some missing too, and so they needed to be propped up to make them stand. One Christmas we put the electric train around the tree, but it invariably went off the tracks behind the tree. It was a scratchy business to set it back on the tracks and we stopped that in a hurry.

Each Advent season, on a Sunday morning after Mass, we would go to the back door of the convent. Sister Notburga was waiting for us. She would give me the biggest cookie I had ever seen. It was in the shape of a reindeer and so large that I nibbled at it for days thereafter.

The night before Christmas, I would make little signs for Teddy, Bobby, Louis, Mamma, Daddy and pin each one on a separate chair or one of the cushions on the sofa to help Santa out when he came to distribute the presents. (Editor's Note: He didn't forget Ruth (Sr. Angelica); she had entered the convent by this time)

I wrote letters to Santa, too. The one I remember best was when I requested a *little* bow and arrow set, since I knew I would never get a *big* one. When Christmas morning arrived, however, instead of my bow and arrow, I got a barn with wooden horses, cows, sheep, and pigs. That barn and I never got along. Whenever I looked at it, all I could see was a little bow and arrow set.

I got Lincoln Logs one Christmas, then Tinker Toys, and later an Erector Set. Mom and Dad's efforts to interest me in farming and the building trades, if that was their intention, did not work. In the end, I went to Sacred Heart Seminary instead and ended up in higher education.

In addition to toys and clothes, there were vats of frosted cookies in the shapes of hearts and animals, icebox cookies, and homemade candies were waiting for us on Christmas morning. Thinking about this now, when did Mom DO all this stuff without us finding out?

Dad and I would visit the Christmas crib in church and I put a penny in the collection box. I liked the camel best and so did he. The crib outside on the north side of the church was a favorite, especially after a fresh snowfall. (*I'm remembering the former church, of course.*)

After I grew my beard, I began to play Santa Claus and St. Nicholas at our children's school. I did it for so long and with such heartfelt exuberance that Santa and St. Nick were real. You see, I really do not just *play* these characters...in my mind, I AM Santa and St. Nick. Others think so, too!

Have fun with your own memories...and Merry Christmas!



