



# WESTPHALIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

June 2017

Volume 31

## Recent Donations

Leo Arens  
Ann Boak  
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Leo and Evie Pohl  
Don and Pat Stump

*Thank you for your support!*

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

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## *The Museum Is Open: Our Town: A Stroll Down Main Street*

The museum is open until the end of the year: the first Sunday of the month from 1 PM until 4:00 PM. and the third Wednesday from 5:00 PM until 8:00 PM. The new exhibit concentrates on our past and current village businesses. Bernie Thelen, Mallory Simon and Phil Hengesbach have done a phenomenal job of setting up the displays. The Giving Tree and Donor Board are also set up for all to see. If while visiting our museum and viewing the displays, you see a mistake, let us know so we can make corrections.

## *Upcoming Events*

### *Book Signing, August 6*

Author Kurt Thelen and his daughter/illustrator Kelsey Thelen Klages will be at the Museum Sunday August 6th from 1:00 PM to 4:00 PM to sign either of their two books, *When Boppa Was A Boy*, and the current book, *Ja*. Bring your books for a personal autograph. If you haven't bought a copy, they will have books available at the signing.

## *Cemetery Walk, Sunday September 17*

This year we will feature five more persons from our past. They are Johann Fuchs (Fox): the father of immigration from the German Rhineland; Marie Bengel: WWII German war bride; Joseph Martin: church organist for 50 years; Matt Belen: early butcher shop owner; and Sister Bonificia: German Sister of Christian Charity who taught here for 31 years.

The Cemetery Walk has been hugely popular. To make this event a success, volunteers are needed to help with research, write-ups, props and costumes. Anyone interested in helping can contact Margie Wirth, 587-6984, Leo Pohl 587-3843.

## *Light Parade, December 2*

The Light Parade has become a great community event and we look forward to another great showing in 2017. Get your imaginations rolling. Without participants there is no parade and lots of disappointed kids, both young and old.

## *Past Events*

### *Bake Sale, April*

The bake sale was very successful. A big thank you to Portland Federal Credit Union for allowing us to use their building. Thanks to all the bakers who donated baked goods, especially the person who always likes to be anonymous (we all know who she is). She brought 25 loaves of bread for us on Friday. On Saturday, she dropped off another 25 loaves to St. Mary's Hall for the Steubenville kids the next day! One can only imagine how nice her kitchen smells.

## *Antique Appraisal*

The evening of appraisals by Dennis Beard was nicely attended. We had about 31 people who brought in items to be looked at. Unfortunately we did not have an “Ah Ha” moment of a rare expensive artifact showing up. But it was still a lot of fun and a wide variety of items were brought in.

### *On a side note...*

**Congratulations** to Norbert and Lilly Mae Fox who have been married for 70 years. Norbert is a direct descendant of Johann Fuchs, one of feature people in the 2017 Cemetery Walk. He also was the narrator of the Historical Society DVD “Historical Film Footage 1936-1961” (available at the museum).

### ***Exercise for People Over 60***

Begin by standing on a comfortable surface, where you have plenty of room at each side. With a 5lb potato bag in each hand, extend your arms straight out from your sides and hold them there as long as you can. Try to reach a full minute, then relax.

Each day you’ll find that you can hold this position for just a bit longer. After a couple weeks, move up to 10lb potato bags. Then try 50lb potato bags and eventually try to get where you can lift a 100lb potato bag in each hand and hold your arms straight for more than a full minute (I’m at this level).

After you feel confident at that level put a potato in each bag.

*\*Joke found/submitted by a helpful WHS member; you had us going there for a minute!*

## *On a side note (continued)*

### ***Government Encourages German Immigrants***

A large factor attracting Germans to Michigan was the effort put forth by the US government and Michigan. Government-distributed pamphlets outlining facts and statistics of the state were published in German and English.

In 1826, a publication of the *Farmer’s Map of Michigan* encouraged immigration. It showed prospective settlers important facts when choosing land, such as water resources, nearby settlements, and places to go for trading. One publication, the pamphlet “The Immigrant’s Guide to the State of Michigan,” outlined land and soil types, education possibilities, religion and currency exchanges. It also insinuated that any immigrant with a mission of agriculture could expect prosperity in two to three years after becoming established.

The government was intent on bringing in Germans and tried to attract them with the vision that a few years of hard work would bring success.

Another draw was opening land offices. In 1836, the land office in Ionia opened making it easier for settlers to buy land in that area. In 1845, the state established the Foreign Emigration Agency in New York City with a budget of \$700.00 dollars to encourage immigration to Michigan. This was a common practice on and off during the colonizing years. Overtime, these offices hired special contacts who were well-known Germans. German immigrants seemed more likely to talk to and trust someone of their own nationality. For that reason, having German officials in emigrating offices was a strategic move.

### *Sources*

Hall Holbrook, Stewart. *The Yankee Exodus: An Account of Migration from New England*, 1950.  
“The Immigrant’s Guide to the State of Michigan”, 1849.  
Wills, Beth. “Early History of Ionia Co.” 1999.

# *Visiting the Seven Westphalias*

by Leo Pohl

In our last newsletter Debbie Hengesbach did a neat history on the seven US Westphalias. She listed when the towns were started and the current populations. In this newsletter we are going to continue the story. During the past summer my wife Evie and I, along with Russ and Rosie Snitgen, visited Texas, Kansas and Indiana where we picked off three Westphalias. Previously during trips out west we also visited two in Missouri and Iowa. This past January, Evie and I visited our last Westphalia in Maryland.

When we visited Westphalia, Texas with the Snitgens, we met a truly wonderful couple named Doris and A.T. Voltin. Prior to retiring they were cotton and corn farmers. Doris is the president of their Historical Society. I contacted Doris prior to our arrival and told her we were from Westphalia, Michigan. She said, "I've been there. I was in your 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary parade in 1986." She also said she had been very good friends with Francis and Marge Platte and also knew Millie Droste. When we got there, we met them in the church parking lot. She immediately let it be known to us that we had accommodations and dinner at their home that evening. Needless to say, we had a wonderful time with them and it was hard to hit the road the following morning.

## **Westphalia, Texas**

Westphalia is south of Waco and is dissected by state highway 320, the shortest state highway in Texas. In 1879, Theodore Rabroker brought his family and settled in the area. In 1883 the Catholic parish was established. The Church of the Visitation was built in 1894. The church recently went through a major restoration (i.e. the stained glass windows were all re-lead, the pews refinished and all new paint). The interior reminded us a lot of Holy Trinity in Fowler.

They have two buildings for their Historical Society. The old school, which had about three classrooms, and the old convent, which had about three classrooms downstairs and living quarters upstairs for the nuns who once lived there. In the downstairs they made what they call "The Cana Room." It is done in Victorian furnishings with a small kitchenette and is rented out for bridal and baby showers, etc. Another neat thing they did was decorate with 8x10 pictures of all the couples who were married in their church. These 650 pictures filled a couple of walls. While there, we picked up a small booklet about a young priest who came there in the mid 1950s and made it his mission to establish a water system in the village. Prior to drilling the well they relied on cisterns. In any event, after many setbacks they finally hit water at 3060 feet – our village wells are around 400 feet deep. As we have the 4<sup>th</sup> of July as our homecoming, they have an Oktoberfest to celebrate their parish homecoming.

## **Westphalia, Missouri**

The unique thing about this Westphalia is they also have a Westphalia Milling Company, which is also an ADM feed dealer. The mill appeared to be about the same vintage as our mill here. We learned that it is not unusual for them to get our mail and phone calls and visa-versa. We met Jim Schmitz, the owner/operator of the mill. He had an old yellowed front page of a newspaper framed in his office dated during prohibition. The headline read: "Westphalia Has Parade for Mayor Released from Prison." It seems the mayor had been a bootlegger and had to do some time when he got caught.

We visited the post office to get a phone directory to look for common names. While there, I told the post master we were from Michigan; he said he got mail all the time for Michigan and he pulled out a letter from someone paying a bill to Westphalia Electric. I told him I would tell John Lehman about it. He said, "John Lehman? He is a friend of mine." But evidently it is a different John Lehman. Their church is much like our old church. The parish also has a 4<sup>th</sup> of July type of celebration as a fundraiser.

## **Westphalia, Iowa**

The church was majestic and also somewhat similar to our old church. The town has a few small businesses, but the one that stands out the most is the bar. It is owned *by the church* as a revenue maker. Several years ago while

Harold Smith was still alive, he and Clara stopped into the bar. According to Harold, they were treated very nicely. Leon and Evelyn Weiland were also previous visitors. Unfortunately we were there on a Sunday and the bar was closed.

We also met a man teaching his daughter how to ride a bike; his name was Mark Schmitz. I told him we were from Westphalia, Michigan. He said, "I've been there". It seems he and a couple of friends rode their motorcycles to Westphalia, Indiana and our Westphalia several years ago. We had with us a new t-shirt from the Cruise-In. I asked if he wanted it; he said sure and thought it was kind of cool.

Another connection with Westphalia, Iowa comes from a couple of years ago when a man stopped in at Gross Machine shop here. He asked to see Gerry Gross, then he introduced himself as Gerry Gross, the mayor of Westphalia, Iowa.

### **Westphalia, Kansas**

Westphalia, Kansas sits in the middle of nowhere. It appears to have been a typical small midwestern town hit by hard the times and changing farming practices. The post office was closed; the only business we saw was a good sized grain co-op and a tire repair shop. There were several abandoned businesses, houses and mobile homes throughout the town. The church, St. Teresa of Avila, is small and appeared to be in very nice condition. It was obviously not the original church. We weren't able to talk to anyone since nobody was around other than a couple of people unloading grain. The pastor there, Fr. Quentin Schmitz, is a busy person since he also ministers to three other nearby parishes: St. Patrick, St. Joseph and St. Francis.

### **Westphalia, Indiana**

Westphalia, Indiana is located in the southwestern part of the state and is as isolated as some of the other Westphalias. It started out with German beginnings, predominantly Lutheran German. The community is served by the Salem United Church of Christ. We did not take the time to try and find someone since we were running short on time and it did not seem to have any common roots other than the name.

### **Westphalia, Maryland**

Westphalia Maryland is an unincorporated area, so its boundaries are not defined. While there is no town per se, our GPS took us to the area and onto Westphalia Road, which is about one mile long. The old Westphalia school, post office and general store are now long gone.

The area owes its name to the Westphalia plantation, a 500-acre land grant patented by Robert Wells in 1673. The reason for the name is unknown except that the land was on Maryland's western frontier. After the Civil War, the plantation was broken into smaller farms. The name was not forgotten, however, because a post office for Westphalia was established in 1891; however, it closed in 1909.

The area is now a suburb of Washington DC, and is only about ten miles from Capitol Hill (as the crow flies). The area is served by the Westphalia United Methodist Church. While there, they were just completing the new Westphalia Community Center, which included a nice basketball court. They also were building new homes in the Westphalia Woods subdivision. The only person we were able to talk to was a worker in the community center, and he had no idea there were six other Westphalias.

### ***Our Westphalia:***

Our Westphalia is the best kept secret in Michigan and by far the largest. The one thing that really stands out is that we are blessed by having local businesses. All of our business buildings in the village are currently occupied and it's up to us to make sure we continue to support them.

If while traveling you get the opportunity to visit a Westphalia, please do so. And especially consider visiting Texas and meeting the Voltins. Also, if you decide to stop in at Westphalia, Iowa, don't stop in on a Sunday as we did and find the bar closed.