



Markesan Historical Society Gazette



April/May/June 2017 ~ Heritage Day--Sept. 17th

Tours during the month of May at the Grand River Valley Museum were the Trinity Methodist Church group from Montello and fifty-six third graders from Markesan Elementary School. The students were full of questions and comments. Read some of their comments on the opposite side of this page. Amish students also toured the museum, spending an entire morning exploring the 3 buildings.

Historical Society members and visitors were treated to a Cuban trip in April as Julie Justmann Born gave an excellent presentation on her recent trip to the island country. "Cuba is a land of contrasts," she explained, "from horse-drawn conveyances to old motorized vehicles. You will not see casinos in Cuba and there is no access to internet service." Places of interest were the Bay of Pigs Museum, Revolutionary Square, Holy Trinity Church with its amazing artwork, the Tropicana Nightclub where Desi Arnaz performed, and a very old cemetery dating back to 1876 which covers 40 acres with mausoleums, chapels and family vaults. The hope for the future is going to be young Cubans who will change the country.

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During the May meeting, Karl Stewart gave a picturesque presentation of his trip to the Baltic States--Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

Karl told that Lithuania was the last pagan European country. It went back and forth in ownership between the Soviets and Germans. The Soviets deported 30,000 families to Siberia.

On 3-11-1990, it declared independence, adopted the euro in 2015 and joined NATO.

Latvia is famous for amber. Russia and Germany took it back and forth and both used deportation and mass executions for control. Remember the human chain? Latvians joined the chain of over 2 million people from Vilnius to Tallinn, became independent in 1991 and joined NATO.

Estonia was influenced by Finns and Vikings. German aristocrats controlled it until mid-1500s, Sweden, Russia and Germany took their share of years, with Russia and Germany mistreating the people. Estonia became independent in 1991, and in 2004 joined the EU and NATO.

When the month of May rolls around each year, thoughts turn to the Nehring/Birkie fire that happened in May of 1957. Excerpts of an article, published in the May 23, 1957 issue of the *Markesan Herald*, follow:

Fire which apparently started in or near the furnace room of the Nehring Hardware Co. building threatened to consume all of the buildings for a time (in the block) early Sunday morning. Prompt response by the Markesan Volunteer Fire Department and excellent fire fighting by the group of 25 men for an hour and half until fire departments from Ripon and Randolph arrived, can be credited for the fact that the fire itself was confined to the building which housed the hardware business and Birkie's Food Center.

The Hanson Drug and Department Store was severely damaged by an explosion which blew out stone walls several inches and caused heavy damage to the apartment upstairs and to the building and stock on the street level. The *Herald* building suffered only minor scorching and water damage and heavy smoke damage. The two departments arrived just in time to save the structure, when the fire was at its height. Eighteen persons fled the fire from the buildings most closely involved.

The blaze was discovered about 3 a.m. by Ellery Nehring, a brother of Earl and Harry, operators of the hardware store, and who occupied the rear apartment of the building. Fate stepped in when Ellery decided that he wanted a cup of coffee, after he had gotten up the second time to investigate the smoke odor in his apartment. On his way to his ice cream store, he noticed the blaze through basement windows on the south side of the store when he got past the Herald building. He immediately turned in the alarm.



Comments from the Markesan Elementary School third-graders after they toured the museum on May 26th:

"My favorite part of the museum was the piano room (parlor) because it had a piano that played by itself, without any hands." (This is a player piano).

"I liked how you displayed everything and how you all had all this time to do all of this."  
(Yes, it does take time to do the work in the museum).

"I learned that women who taught school had to wear a long skirt with lots of layers under it because it was cold in the school." (No forced air heat years ago). "I learned that 'sleep tight' comes from back then because they would tighten the ropes on the beds."

"My favorite part of the museum was the hunting shack because I like to hunt and it looks so cool. I like how the beds were made and the old ovens and I liked the traps and the animals in there."

"My favorite part of the museum was the teacher's room because it had a bell that rang. It was amazing."

"What I didn't know is that there can be so many milk bottles, and that everybody sleeps in one room."

"I did not know that people had to wear cotton swim suits. I know I wouldn't like that. I love your museum. I would like to come again."

"I had a lot of fun and I learned a lot of new stuff, like there was no electricity and people had to light candles, and if they had to go to the bathroom at night, they went in pots--  
Eew--and the last one up had to empty the pots."

"When I went to the museum I learned that back in time in the old days they used to milk by hand. I liked all of the old machinery that was there."

I did not know there were three or four tractor dealerships in Markesan. I thought Markesan was always called Markesan but it used to be Granville. There was a depot."



Needless to say, we love it when the third-graders visit. They will be the historians of tomorrow. It is hoped they will bring their families to visit the museum to become interested in continuing the work.

One never knows what one will find at rummage sales, garage sales and auctions. David Prill hit the jackpot when he bought a tray of slides at one such event. After looking the slides over, he discovered that they were photos of Markesan school events, village parades, the razing of buildings and the erection of new buildings in the village; along with photos of Markesan's businesses and homes.

He scanned them and can now show them, which he did for the June historical society meeting. It was a treat to see the former main thoroughfare and cars from the 1950s.



**Heritage Day**  
**Sunday, September 17th**  
**1-5 p.m. at the museum**

### **Meetings**

The Historical Society meets the second Wednesday of the month during the summer at the museum at 7 p.m. During the winter, meetings are at City Hall, 150 S. Bridge St.

### **MEMBERSHIP**

\$5/yr. individual  
\$100/ lifetime individual  
or husband & wife

### **Museum Hours**

The Grand River Valley Museum is open on Saturdays from  
1 to 4 p.m.

May through September.

The Museum is also open by appointment.

### **Board of Directors**

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