

Along the Riverway

A publication of the Sauk Prairie Area Historical Society

Summer 2021

Tombstones on the tube:

A virtual Saturday in the cemetery with August Derleth and friends

August Derleth chose his friends well.

The late, famed author and poet, along with two locally historic friends of his, will be brought to life by video through the screens of the medium of choice by viewers on Saturday, Oct. 16, beginning at 1 p.m. It is the first presentation of the *Spirits of Sauk Prairie: A living history cemetery tour*.

With the backdrop of their graves at the Sauk City Cemetery, Derleth, (played by popular Derleth impersonator David Schweitzer), will be wounded Civil War veteran and long time post master Conrad Kuoni, (played by former Sauk City library director Ben Miller), who was viewed as a hero and admired by everyone, not just Derleth. Josephine Merk, (played by author Darcy Miller), to this day, is a person young women can emulate. Derleth learned from them, and honored them both in life and in death.

The production is a partnership with the Sauk Prairie Area Historical Society and the August Derleth Society, which will be hosting its Walden West Fest that same weekend.

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SPIRITS OF SAUK PRAIRIE

A living history cemetery tour



Come join local historic characters August Derleth, Conrad Kuoni and Josephine Merk in this special virtual event beginning Oct. 16 at 1 p.m. Watch the SPAHS Facebook page in the coming weeks to find and access the link.

Local artists known for retro/vintage styles are paying it forward



Sisters Tanya Bare and Teresa Bare-Inman, owners of ReTwist-T in Sauk City, joined with artist Dan Kelter to make commemorative glasses for West Side Swistyle Dairy, donating \$1,200 to Sauk Prairie Area Historical Society from the sales.

Across from the village hall on Water Street in Sauk City is a cute, colorful little shop alight with personality, a dose of shabby-chic, filled with “vin-tique” home decor, specialty clothes, locally crafted jewelry and a pot-pourri of fun stuff with a Wisconsin flare, much of which is created locally by a wide ranging group of artists.

Sisters Tanya Bare and Teresa Bare-Inman, both Sauk Prairie School District grads, opened up ReTwist-T two years ago. There is a bubbly, infectious happiness and warm enthusiasm that emanates from the two sisters, neither of whom have ever met a stranger.

The love of art and the talent are in their genes. Their mom Denise was a graphic artist for many years. ReTwist-T is a full family affair, with Denise, their dad Ron, brother Travis and Tanya's daughter Angelica, a photographer, all helping out.

Since opening the shop, they've also opened up a studio space where at any give time, someone is creating. All told, it's an eclectic gathering of about 34 area artists

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From the desk of SPAHS board president Lise Meyer Kobussen

Dear valued members of the Sauk Prairie Area Historical Society,

I'm feeling truly grateful this summer for our new and old friends who've supported the Sauk Prairie Area Historical Society by joining us as members or renewing their memberships. We could not do the work we do without you. Because of our valued members, we continue to celebrate and preserve the rich history and spirit of our unique heritage as Wisconsin River communities.

I especially want to give a shout out to local artist Dan Kelter of County T, and Tanya Bare along with her sister Teresa Bare-Inman, both artists and owners of ReTwist-T in Sauk City, for their incredible donation of \$1,200 from the proceeds of Dan's creation of the West Side Dairy Swistyle milk glasses and coaster project still available at the ReTwist-T shop at

725 Water St. in Sauk City, (across from the village hall).

There are an array of centennial milestones coming up in just the next few years, starting with 2020. It was the decade that ushered in the automobile era—streets were paved and new steel bridges were built in both Sauk City and Prairie du Sac. Agriculture was shifting its power source from steam and horses to the gasoline engine. Electricity from the dam was being utilized in the villages and spreading out into the rural communities of the Sauk Prairie. The radio was the beginning of mass communication coming into your home.

We have a vast collection of 1920s memorabilia, photos and artifacts at the Tripp that will fill our planned exhibits. Artifacts include fun flapper dresses of that era, which set a new trend in stylish wear for women, and other clothing items of the day. There is a plethora of pages from magazines and local newspapers, the pages of which are filled with tidbits of information similar to the Facebook posts

we see today of our friends and family gatherings and celebrations, outings and trips.

We are in great need of volunteers who have a heart for Sauk Prairie history and are especially gifted, to set up new exhibits at the Tripp Heritage Museum. We want to look back at the 1920's to show the many similarities of the 2020's and how history really does repeat itself in one way or another. We welcome volunteers of all ages who are able to spare some time, ready to have fun reviewing our inexhaustible array of artifacts, a creative spirit and enjoy taking the reins on a project for at least a couple weeks. Please contact Tripp Heritage Museum manager Jack Berndt for more information about how you can help.

We are also looking into new digital media to preserve the outdated analog recordings of our history. With the changes due to Covid, we're exploring new ways to meet and communicate.

Enjoy the coming lovely fall!

Lise

David Geier joins SPAHS board of directors

It seems fitting that David Geier join the Sauk Prairie Area Historical Society board of directors last Spring.

A resident of Prairie du Sac, he's been an avid genealogy researcher for 30 years, and a valued contributor to the popular SPAHS Facebook group page. He has a commercial art degree from Madison College.

He's not just a genealogy lover, he's more interested in researching the lives of people who came before us.

"I don't like just having birth, marriage and death, and



His grandmother, Helen Dettman-Geier, was graduated from the former Sauk City High School with famed author August Derleth in the class of 1926. He has a photo of the graduating class getting their diplomas.

"I'm interested in late 1800s and early 1900s when my family lived in Roxbury and Sauk City," Geier said.

Geier was ten years old when he watched the TV mini-series "Roots," which led to a time when genealogy became popular. But he started studying in while he was

still in high school. Since then he's gathered and researched documents from tax rolls, to old fire insurance papers, to learn more about family members who've since passed on.

The Tripp Heritage Museum became a wealth of information for him because of its collection of the old Pioneer Press newspapers and other artifacts not easily found elsewhere.

"I'm here for the enjoyment and for preserving history," Geier said. "It makes me sad when I go into an antique shop and see family pictures for sale."

He enjoys metal detecting and has uncovered some historic gems in the area like a brass tag from a milk canister from the D.E. Wood Butter Company from Evansville but Geier's great grandfather, Henry Blankenheim was the name stamped on the top.

"It's my prized find," Geier said.

Geier replaces Ron Kindschi who resigned from the board last spring.

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spahs@frontier.com | 608.644.8444

565 Water Street Prairie du Sac, WI 53578

Visit us on the web at saukprairiehistory.org

Along the Riverway editor Kim Lamoreaux

Contact: lamoreaux7607@gmail.com

The Tripp Heritage Museum is open Friday and Saturday 10 a.m. - 1 p.m. or by appointment only.

have that be the end of the story," Geier. "It's the story in between, not just hatched, matched, dispatched."

He has family ties to the area, and likes to know more about them and how they lived.

Badger's early beginnings:

A look back 80 years at Badger Army Ammunition Plant

Editor's note: This is part two of a feature honoring the 80th anniversary of the beginnings of the former Badger Ordnance Works.

It was the day before Halloween 1941 when the *Sauk County News* published Wisconsin's official announcement of the coming construction of the Badger Ordnance Works (BOW), or "Badger," as it's known locally to this day. The closeness to Halloween is emblematic for Badger History Group museum curator and archivist Verlyn Mueller.

"That's the weekend the newspaper made the announcement," Mueller said. "In a negative way, it's appropriate. Nobody had any inkling anything like that was going to happen here. For it to come on Halloween weekend, it's maybe a little appropriate."

On Oct. 29 that year, U.S. Rep. William H. Stevenson of Wisconsin made the announcement that the BOW would be built on portions of rich farmland in the shadows of the Baraboo bluffs, near the Wisconsin River on 10,565 acres consumed by the federal government.

"This particular location was selected because it is ideal for powder work," Stevenson said at the

time. "The area is well drained and sandy and it is hidden away ... it is desirable to have plants of this type established away from the sea coast and away from large centers of population."

The local resistance came swiftly. Government entities, farmers living on the proposed site, conservationists and residents

protested in various forms. The Sauk County Board of Supervisors passed a resolution in October 1941 protesting the site.

Then came Dec. 7. The news of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor spread like wildfire across the country lifting the patriotism of Americans, and local residents and government officials were no different.

"After Pearl Harbor, however, both

the affected area residents and board members dropped their formal protests," said Sauk Prairie Area Historical Society museum manager Jack Berndt in one of his Facebook posts earlier this year. "By mid-December, negotiations had begun on land purchases and efforts were made to help the farmers relocate."

On January 15, 1942, *The Sauk County News* announced the

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Badger History Group Museum curator Verlyn Mueller and friend John Janzen ready to welcome visitors to his exhibit at the Badger Steam and Gas Show in Reedsburg on Aug. 22.



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“This is an event the whole family can gather around and watch and learn things about influential people who lived right here in our own community,” said SPAHS Tripp Heritage Museum manager Jack Berndt. “There are some great life stories for young folks to learn about all three of them.”

Josephine Merk and Conrad Kuoini were much older than the younger Derleth. But they became friends of his—Merk was famous for spearheading and helping to raise funds for the first Sauk City library and Kuoni owned a book store. Derleth is known to have frequented.

Merk is also known to have served on a local elections commission when women had only a few years before

won the legal right to vote.

Darcy Miller said that’s what draws her to the character.

“Most of her life women weren’t allowed to vote and she worked on the board of elections,” Darcy said. “She was an amazing woman who is almost single handedly the reasons for the library in Sauk City.”

That has a special resonance for Darcy. Her husband Ben, who plays Kuoni, was the Sauk City library director for four years.

Ben Miller said what struck him about Kuoni was his patriotism.

“He was an immigrant, but he came to this country and came to love it,” Ben said.

Schweitzer may be the most familiar with the author’s feelings about Merk

and Kuoni.

“Josephine—her death knocked the sails out of him,” Schweitzer said.

In character as Derleth, Schweitzer added, “I cherished my friendship with Josephine Merk for so many reasons. Every time she opened a book for me, she introduced me to so many new worlds.”

Schweitzer said events like this are important to keep the legacy of Derleth and other historical figures alive for all ages.

“It makes me think of a poem by Derleth called ‘Man Track Here,’ where he’s walking through a snowstorm and looks back and sees his footprints disappearing.”

BADGER continued from page 3

condemnation of 115 tracts of land for the future powder plant, including 74 farms, 26 cottages or residences, three schools, three churches, three cemeteries and a town hall.

The Halloween announcement of the pending taking of that land symbolically left its own ghosts. Families were forced from 74 farms and homesteads where loved ones were buried in cemeteries nearby. The plant’s history was haunted by 24 deaths, ten of which were from explosions and others from accidents on the site. The buildings were gone by 2004. Those who dedicated their working lives to Badger during its heyday are dying off and taking their stories with them. By the late 90s, the entire plant was a ghost town with close to 1,400 buildings facing demolition.

Any talk of relocating the cemeteries disappeared. They remain to this day.

“There’s a lot of history there in the names in the Pioneer Cemetery,” Mueller said. “The first settler whose claim was the northwest corner, Albert Jameson, was the first claim on this land. He’s buried in the Pioneer Cemetery.”

These are among the primary

reasons Mueller, 83, has continued for almost 24 years as curator and archivist at the Badger History Group museum located at the front of what is now the Sauk Prairie State Recreation Center, a public park managed by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

Mueller comes with special qualifications for the role. He was an employee at Badger for 16 years, during which the plant was re-named Badger Army Ammunition Plant, where Mueller, an engineer, monitored instrumentation that controlled manufacturing processes. For his last ten years, he was an engineer working on plant modernizations projects.

Today, he is well known as the public face of the museum. He isn’t sure when he’ll retire from it. He announced he may retire this year, then felt he had to retract that. The work, he said, “is too important.”

“I enjoy what I’m doing and it’s important,” Mueller said. “Those families who had to give up their properties and the 24 that died, they deserve something. It’s a story we have to tell. We’re the only one in the country doing that, when there were seven facilities like this.”

Mueller isn’t just about recording the history of Badger, he has a much larger vision for the future.

He drew up a new museum concept floor plan that envisions 80,000 square feet, with a cost estimate of at least \$12 million.

“That’s just for the bare building,” Mueller said. “Today that’s a \$20 million project with the doors open to the public. I don’t dream small. I think that’s what we need to be looking at and in that concept I included space for a DNR visitors’ center, a space for the Conservation Alliance, a glacial display and the Ice Age Trail.”

He said he wants to retire to, well, keep doing what he’s doing already.

“All that management stuff gets in the way of doing the real work,” Mueller said. “I want to retire from the curator and archivist responsibilities so I can concentrate on getting the descriptions and information on the photographs we’ve been scanning into the computer.”

Mueller said he is always happy to welcome any volunteers of all ages who would like to help. He can be reached at the Badger History Group Museum at 608-448-0244.

Maplewood of Sauk Prairie has a rich first 50 years

The oldest nursing home in Sauk City turns 50 years old this year. Not only is that a testament to the longevity and reputation of Maplewood of Sauk Prairie in the community, but the facility also shares a rich and intimate history with the area.

The building on Sycamore Street in Sauk City has had an elephant run through its halls in 1977, tornado damage in the 80s and a stream of local celebrities, some world famous, who've called it home near the end of their lives.

Arguably, the biggest Maplewood celebrity—in the literal sense—was Barbara the pesky pachyderm who paraded down a passageway of Maplewood, scaring the daylights out of residents and staff members alike. After escaping a visiting circus, she spotted her reflection in a large window of Maplewood. She charged right through it. Fortunately, no one was hurt, but she did some damage.

Maplewood quickly trumpeted through the headlines of virtually every area media outlet at the time, from Madison to Milwaukee.

Former Milwaukee Journal managing editor Steve Hannah was still a reporter in 1977. (Hannah is also the former CEO of *The Onion*, but let's face it—you can't make this stuff up.) In his book, *Dairylandia*:



Diane Ballweg, owner of Ballweg Chevrolet in Sauk City, and well known for her clogging skills, was among the 100s of entertainers visiting Maplewood.

Dispatches from a State of Mind, happened to be driving through Sauk City that day and spotted Barbara in a “Smokey and the Bandit-esque” chase scene with local and county cops, as well as the Prairie du Sac and Sauk City Volunteer Fire Departments.

Hannah's story includes this quote from a very calm resident he described as “a lovely little white-haired wisp of a lady, watching television in a room just off the main corridor,” who told him, “This kind of thing is nothing new to us. Have you seen the size of some of the

people around this place? Lots of elephants come here to retire.”

Famous faces of Maplewood

Maplewood's most lasting legacy begins with a list of past residents that reads like a Who's Who of Sauk Prairie. For a few of them, the name recognition reaches far beyond the local community.

Maplewood was the last home of Milly Zantow, known internationally for her pioneering of plastic recycling. She was a contributor to Wisconsin's 1990 recycling state

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whose media and work are all over the map.

With ReTwist-T's niche of local artists, Tanya and Teresa longed to give back to the community that helped raise them and honor its historic past.

Enter artist Dan Kelter, also of Sauk City, who, like the Bare sisters, loves when local history and art meet. Kelter's business called County T, is known for his apparel designs. But he had the idea to commemorate the well known, beloved, former West Side



Dan Kelter and his son Clark

Swistyle Dairy. Kelter found the logo graphics and used it to design vintage looking coasters.

But he couldn't just stop at coasters. He used the branding on eight-ounce glasses.

Kelter, Tanya and Teresa brought



in Fritz Wyttenbach, whose dad, Franz Wyttenbach, bought West Side Dairy in 1936, operating under the Swistyle label for 40 years. Franz died in 2007 at the age of 91. Kelter had the video camera rolling as the three unveiled the glasses to Wyttenbach, who proceeded to chug some milk of out them.

"I'll tell you, this brings back memories for me because I used to deliver milk for my dad," Wyttenbach said, "I just loved it—the door-to-door service and meeting all the people, talking with them, serving all the businesses down here."

Kelter also designed t-shirts and bags with the West Side Dairy Swistyle branding on them, which are also available at the ReTwist-T shop.

"When I find something to resurrect or do a design salvage," Kelter said, "it's sort of bringing them back. It generates a lot of nostalgia."

Tanya said the response to the



Fritz Wyttenbach tries out the West Side Swistyle drinking glasses which commemorate his dad's dairy business, as Teresa Bare-Inman (left), and Tanya Bare laugh and clap.

glasses from the community was phenomenal.

"The coolest honor for us was the amount of people that came in telling us stories about Swistyle, and having delivered for them," said said. "It was so cool to be part of something that was super sentimental, and be able to meet all these people and hear all their stories."

The package of two Swistyle glasses and four coasters costs \$25.

From those proceeds, Kelter and the Bare sisters donated \$1,200 to the Sauk Prairie Area Historical Society.

"You have a great museum there and this type of stuff appeals to those aware of the history," Kelter said. "It's a great way to enhance what great groups like the historical society do."

ReTwist-T can be found online at www.retwist-t.com. Kelter's work can be found on Facebook and Instagram by searching on County T.

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law, The Environmental Protection Agency's recycling policies and had a hand in developing recycling programs in the U.S. and internationally.

Just last year, Tom Every, more widely known by his alter-ego, Dr. Evermor, spent his last days at Maplewood. Locally known for his Sumpter-based sprawling playground of screaming Steampunk works of art, Every drew admirers all over the U.S., and was even featured on an episode of the popular TV series "American Pickers."

Alice Graff, a well known librarian at the Tripp Memorial Library for 40 years up through 1986, and who's continued legacy is the picturesque Queen Anne Victorian house at 393 Water Street in Prairie du Sac, was also a resident at Maplewood.

Another beloved local history character was Edna Koenig, better known locally as the "Bird Lady" of

the "Bird House" at 215 Jackson St., Sauk City.

Two well known and beloved doctors credited for growing the Sauk Prairie Memorial Hospital were Dr. Paul Bishop, who passed away in 2009, and Dr. Gibbs Zauft, who passed away in 2010, both lived at Maplewood near the end of their lives.

Building a history

Maplewood of Sauk Prairie, as it's known today, has come a long way since 1971 when seven local businessmen in the area came together, and where a cornfield stood, built a home for their aging neighbors and community members.

In 1984, the first addition was constructed, and 15 years later, Maplewood Village Assisted Living Facility was constructed next to the health and rehabilitation center, along with an addition to the front office. In 2006, 26 new private

rooms were added.

In 2019, Maplewood saw its most significant renovation and addition project with a state-of-the-art health and rehabilitation center, and

doubled its number of single suites with private, attached bathrooms. A new entrance and exit was added for short-term therapy patients.

"The shift through those 50 years is that people are living longer and requiring more intense care," said marketing director Michelle Kraemer. "People from Madison are now coming to Sauk Prairie for rehab services. With additions going on now, the rooms are suites. It's well kept and well manicured."

Kraemer said the staff and residents in the past up through today are well known for knowing how to have a good time. Numerous community groups come in to entertain, or just join in on the fun.

Maplewood's first administrator Tom Kraemer installed a bar, put up bar lights, and hired a cocktail waitress to serve the residents. There is a regular Happy Hour at Maplewood to this day.

"We love having the 4-H or Solo and Ensemble students, or Rory Bolton would just come play piano for us," Kraemer said. "Jenna McCann (a teacher at Merrimac Charter School), would bring students over and do Christmas caroling in the halls. Culvers really wants to see the residents go on tour, and they give us gift certificates for free ice cream cones. Not everybody has the funds to do that, and it really makes a difference."



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