



Did You Know

The first American fair is thought to have been organized in Pittsfield, MA in 1807 by Franklin Watson. It became known as the Berkshire County Fair and still operates as such today.

In 1841, New York organized the first state agricultural fair in Syracuse.

Overall, 47 of the 50 states have a state fair. Rhode Island, Michigan and Connecticut lack such an event. But, Washington DC does have one.

The first Wisconsin State Fair was held in 1851 in Janesville, with approximately 13,000 to 18,000 people in attendance. Sponsored by the state's Agricultural Society, it was held on a six-acre plot along the banks of the Rock River.

The Researcher

**The Newsletter of the Sheboygan County
Historical Research Center**

Volume XXVII Number 6 August 2017

Sheboygan County Fair



The Sheboygan County Agricultural Society was organized July 4, 1851. On October 1, 1851 the first annual fair was held in Sheboygan Falls on the hill behind the Free Hall, located on Madison Street. The agricultural displays were housed on the land in the Cole Historic District; the barn used at the time is now part of two houses on the corner of Adams and Michigan Streets in Falls directly behind the old Thorpe Hotel (Richards Supper Club).

In 1852, the fair was held at Plymouth, and in 1853 Sheboygan hosted the event. Beginning in 1854, Sheboygan Falls was home to the event. The 1857 fair was considered the first permanent location as the grounds were improved and buildings were constructed.

Sheboygan began its first Annual Sheboygan Driving Park and Exposition in 1888. This marked the beginning of a competition between Falls and Sheboygan which included duplicate fairs through 1890. From 1891 until 1895, the fair was held in Sheboygan. However, beginning in 1895 there was dissension between the Sheboygan Driving Park and the County Agricultural Society resulting in no fair being held in 1896.

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The Sheboygan County Historical Research Center is located at 518 Water Street in Sheboygan Falls.

Open Tuesday through Friday, 9:00am – 4:00pm and Saturdays from 9:00am to 12:00 noon.

Closed August 21, 2017 through September 4, 2017 for archiving.

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The Researcher is the official newsletter of the Sheboygan County Historical Research Center, 518 Water Street, Sheboygan Falls, Wisconsin.

It is published six times per year in August, October, December, February, April and June.

The Research Center is the local history archive for Sheboygan County and areas surrounding the county. It is a repository for paper records of all kinds.

The Research Center is a sister organization to the Sheboygan County Historical Society and Museum which collects the artifacts of the county.

If you file it, it comes to the Research Center.

If you dust it, it goes to the Historical Society & Museum.

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**Check out
schrc.org**

**Website updates
weekly
Go to History News
under Collections
Great Stuff!!**

Go Paperless. Receive *The Researcher* via email. Save paper. Save postage and receive a more colorful newsletter. Contact Katie at research@schrc.org to sign up now. Catch us on Facebook— Updates daily.

Don't miss Sheboygan County History column in the Saturday *Sheboygan Press* or online Friday through Sunday each week.

Welcome New Legacy Society Members

Marlene Roeseler

Sue Kennedy

Gretchen Tinkle

James and Charmaine Mohr

Carol Salm

Laura Prange Krawitt

Donald Klemme

Scott and Martha Gedemer

Fred Goebel

William, Richard and Duane Benninghaus

Closed for Archiving

The Sheboygan County Historical Research Center, 518 Water Street, Sheboygan Falls, will be closed Monday, August 21, 2017 through Monday, September 4, 2017 for archiving. Standard business hours resume Tuesday morning, September 5, 2017 at 9:00am.

(SCHRC closes twice each year, August and February, in order to keep current with new acquisitions.)

January 27, 1991, Faded Genes, Polkaland Co.

Q: I recently came into the possession of a collection of 45 rpm records (circa 1950s), many of which carried the record company label, "Polkaland, Sheboygan, Wis." Any information you could research on "Polkaland" would be appreciated (Sheboygan)

A: The Polkaland Recording Company, at 1210 N. Eighth St., was owned and operated by David A. Bensman of Sheboygan. Bensman was born May 1, 1913, the son of Abe and Mary Mazar Bensman. The family moved to Two Rivers when he was six and he attended public schools there, graduating from Washington High School in 1932.

He owned and operated the weekly newspaper, The Free Press, in Two Rivers from 1932 until 1941 when he moved back to Sheboygan. He had accepted a position as an instructor in the industrial arts department at North High School and, after four years as a teacher, he opened the Sheboygan Radio and Record Center at 2322 N. Fifteenth St. Bensman operated that store until September 1, 1949, when the business was moved to 1210 N. Eighth.

In 1955, Bensman started Sheboygan's second radio station WSHE operating it until October 1958. The station is now WKTS. According to newspaper accounts, Bensman began doing public address work in 1932, doing installation of sound equipment for fairs, picnics and celebrations throughout Northeastern Wisconsin. He was actively involved with the Sheboygan County Fair installing PA systems for the midway and grandstand.

The Sheboygan City Directories list Polkaland Recording Company from 1956 until 1964. David Bensman died May 3, 1963. He was survived by his wife, Rose (Swerdlow), one son, Marvin and a daughter, Leah.



In 1886, the Sheboygan City Railway Company began operating mule-drawn cars. The first lines were on Eighth Street and on Penn Avenue to the railroad depot. Extensions were added to Calumet Road (Drive). This 1895 shows a horsecar at Driving Park near Calumet Drive. This was a location of the fairgrounds before they were moved to Plymouth. The building is the William Pelk Boarding House and Saloon.

Continued from page 1.

Fortunately in 1896, Plymouth residents took charge and the Sheboygan County Agricultural Association was organized. This was a new organization that took charge of agricultural endeavors in the county. Thankfully, the fair wrangling ended at this point. In 1897, the first fair began its run in Plymouth on the new fair grounds located on Fairview Drive. It has been a grand success ever since.

Here's some more interesting info about the fair's time in Sheboygan Falls. The second location of the fair in Falls was a plot on the west side of town, a part of the property of Benjamin E. Sanford, a prominent Sheboygan Falls manufacturer and horseracing aficionado. Sanford's land was on the south side of the road near the old Point Drive In. A native of England, Sanford came to Sheboygan Falls to join the Phoenix Iron Works.

In the May 14, 1870 issue of the Evergreen Times the following item appeared: "B.E. Sanford is clearing the ground preparatory to making a track for horse racing on the flat west of his house. When it is finished we expect his splendid span of blacks will be ready to challenge the county and perhaps the state."

In August 1870, the Sheboygan County Agricultural Society announced its desire to have more extensive grounds in Sheboygan Falls in which to hold its annual fairs. It then leased from B.E. Sanford, for a term of 99 years, 18 acres " at the forks of the plank roads on the hill west of Sheboygan Falls" for \$74 per annum.

The contract required Sanford to "enclose the whole area with a good substantial fence six to eight feet high; to build a judges' stand for the half mile race track and provide all necessary seats for the uses thereof." The society "would build such other buildings as they may need for the uses of the fair, and each is to keep their own buildings and fixture in repair. Mr. Sanford is to have control of the grounds and appurtenances except during the Annual Fair when the Society is to control the same." The annual rental paid by the society for the use of the grounds was equivalent to seven percent of \$1071.13, which was an aggregate of the valuation of \$59.50 per acre including improvements. Mr. Sanford agreed to improve the grounds at a cost of \$2000.

The Nineteenth Annual County Fair was held at Sanford's on September 13-15, 1870 and was called the most successful one ever held, as it is every year. The general display of articles on exhibition was far greater and the number of people in attendance surpassed all expectations.



The baseball grandstand from the old White City Amusement Park in Sheboygan was dismantled upon its closing, and moved to the Plymouth fairgrounds where it seated fairgoers until .

The fairs continued to be held at Sanford's through 1890.

The centralized location in Plymouth was a boon to the success of the event, as Sheboygan merchants travelled there to set up displays, and farm exhibitors showed keen interest by entering more animals and bigger displays each year. When the Sheboygan County Agricultural Assoc. was formed it took out a ten year lease on 23 acres of land just east of Plymouth. This became the true home of the fair.

A half mile race track was completed in July, 1897 and to mark the occasion a harness race was scheduled for the last Saturday of the month— the beginning of racing of all kinds in Plymouth. There were also bicycle races and foot races that day. First prize for the horse race was \$25, but the foot race winner received only an umbrella.

In 1900, Plymouth virtually shut down in order to give everyone a chance to attend. Motor cycle racing moved in to compete with the horses in 1909, and spectators began to attend the fair in horseless carriages. In 1910, a special gate was opened just for automobiles in order to prevent spooking of the horses.

A special parade of autos was held one year with the top prize of \$11 to be distributed between the top five cars. Only four winners claimed a prize. The fifth became bogged down in the mud half-way there.

A model of a country home lighted by electricity was the big attraction in 1912, and in 1914 homemakers learned how electricity could keep butter and cheese fresher. An airship visited the fair in 1919 along with an exhibit on torpedoes.



Above: Harness racing September 1929 at the Plymouth Fairgrounds.

At left: Ostrich racing was a fun diversion during the 1950s. Did you know they can run up to 40 mph.

The 1910s through the 1930s were considered the glory days of the fair. Heated political speeches, Wild West shows, horseless carriage parades and fortune telling gypsies enlivened the event. Airplane stunt shows became a big thing during the late 1920s as did harness races of trotters and pacers.

Stunt fliers entertained crowds at the 1927 fair, the final day of which was marred by the burning of a large cross, evidently by local Klu Klux Klan members.

Stock car racing replaced harness races in the late 1940s.

Today, we see everything from farm machinery to sewing projects, midway rides to ice cream cones. The five-day extravaganza is a grand celebration of life in Sheboygan County looked forward to by everyone.

Continuing Connections with the Netherlands



Damage and flood scene from the outer islands of Zeeland in the Netherlands, 1953.

For the Netherlands, 1953 was a year of catastrophic disaster. A storm of biblical proportions, a perfect storm, hit the North Sea region of Europe during the night of January 31.

Large regions (20%) of the country lay below sea level, and another 50% of it was less than three feet above sea level. Ancient dykes protected the residents and reclaimed land (polders) from the fickle weather and the water of the North Sea. But, periodically, it was a country that suffered from major flooding.

Just a decade earlier during the height of WWII, Zeeland province suffered a tremendous amount of damage. Dikes were bombed by the Nazis and land was flooded in an attempt to chase away the Germans hiding deep in tunnels. Repairs to the landscape started in March 1945 and by February 1946 all the gaps were filled in.

On January 30, 1953, an Atlantic depression arose south of Iceland and moved into the North Sea where it grew and deepened. Covering the entire North Sea it merged with a second storm, one of hurricane strength and together they moved towards the Netherlands at high tide.

On the night of the 31st, the storm over the North Sea got even stronger, reaching gale force 11 – 117 mph. The Dutch coast was hit with force 10 – 102-- winds for 20 consecutive hours. The power of the storm drove the water so high that the water was unable to retreat, there was no ebb tide. It was a night no survivor would ever forget.

With no overnight radio broadcasts and telephone lines down from the storm, citizens awoke to flood water rushing in, already too late to escape. Not designed to hold back such high water levels, the dikes began to fail, 89 in all breaching 112 miles of protection.

Hurricane strength winds precipitated a huge tidal surge in the North Sea, a situation that was exacerbated by high tide. Water levels rose more than five meters above sea level, suddenly swamping Dutch sea defenses and deluging parts of Zuid-Holland, Zeeland and Noord-Brabant.

Statistics fail to do justice to the magnitude of this event. With the sea at fifteen to twenty feet higher than the land on the other side of the dike, when that dike fails, all hell breaks loose. In the Netherlands alone, the death

toll topped 1,836. Two hundred farm animals drowned. Three thousand homes and farms disappeared and another 43,000 properties were damaged.

The once-fertile polders were covered in ten feet of water that was really a horrid stew of stuff from septic systems, cadavers, and who knows what. It took nine months to repair the dykes and drain and clean the polders. The total financial cost was estimated at over ½ billion dollars.

Our connection to this story is family. Sheboygan County has had a strong immigrant connection to the Netherlands since the mid-1840s.

Locally, there was great concern for relatives of county residents living through the hell in Europe. The February 7, 1953 edition of the Sheboygan Press headlined, “Kohler Woman Talks With Father in Flood Ravaged Holland; Fears for Sisters.” Mrs. Alvin Fenton, whose husband was an engineer with Kohler Co., was a native of the Netherlands. She feared for her family still living there. Within days of the disaster she was able to establish phone contact with her father, Jacob Tak. It seems Fenton’s parents were safe in Amsterdam, but her sisters and their families lived on the hard-hit islands of Walcheren and Schouwen and their situation was unknown.

Mrs. Pauline Traas of Sheboygan received word from her niece, Cora Snoodyske, of Goes, Zeeland, of the horrors and suffering of the survivors. Snoodyske was safe, but tens of thousands had nothing left but the clothes on their backs.

By February 9th a bank account was opened at Citizens Bank for the Holland Relief Fund and a fundraising effort was started, led by Martin Nyhuis, Martin Leys, Anthony Droppers and Charlie Broughton. Within a week the fund from Sheboygan County surpassed the \$3,500 mark.

Always ready to help, relatives and friends here in the United States helped financially and sent supplies for years after WWII and the 1953 flood. The bond between Sheboygan County and the Netherlands remains strong to this day.



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Sheboygan County Fair Walldogs Mural, Plymouth, Division Street

Fall 2017 SCHRC Program Schedule

All programs are open to the public. Most are free of charge.
See schrc.org and our Facebook page for more information

(History on the Move) Oostburg Public Library

213 North 8th Street, Oostburg

1:00pm to 2:30pm

Tuesday, September 26, 2017 - Tales from the Rails

Tuesday, October 24, 2017 - The Sausage that made Sheboygan Famous

Tuesday, November 28, 2017 - Random Sheboygan County History

(History on the Move) Cedar Grove Memorial Library

131 Van Altena Avenue, Cedar Grove, WI

6:00 to 7:30pm

Tuesday, September 12, 2017 - Indian Mounds of Sheboygan County

Tuesday, November 14, 2017 - History of Farming in Sheboygan County

(History on the Move) Generations

1500 Douglas Drive, Plymouth, WI

1:00pm to 2:30pm

Wednesday, November 1, 2017 - One Room Schools

Wednesday, December 6, 2017 - On The Home Front WWII

(Genealogy Classes) SCHRC

518 Water Street, Sheboygan Falls

1:00pm to 3:00pm \$15 members, \$20 non-members

Monday, September 11, 2017 - Rounding up your family's black sheep

Monday, October 9, 2017 - Publishing your Family Genealogy or Family History Book

Monday, November 13, 2017 - Civil War Records, What's Available and How to Find Them

Monday, December 11, 2017 - How to Process Your Photo Collection

(Genealogy Classes) Kiel Public Library

511 Third Street, Kiel

1:00pm to 2:30pm

Tuesday, October 17, 2017 - Rounding up the Black Sheep in Your Family - It would be an unusual family indeed that had NO Black Sheep. And the hobby of genealogy wouldn't be as much fun. We'll learn techniques to find the those who did not always walk the straight and narrow.

Second Saturdays- Journeys Into Local History

Plymouth Arts Center, 520 East Mill Street, Plymouth

9:30am to 11:30am

September 9, 2017 - Michael Jacobs - On the Home Front - WWI - Patriotism surged in America after our entry into WWI in the spring of 1917. Volunteerism efforts not only boosted morale at home and abroad, but also provided necessary financial and manpower support for the war effort. Mike will take us back to the years of WWI.

October 14, 2017 - Melanie McManus - Thousand-Miler: Adventures Hiking the Ice Age Trail

In thirty-six thrilling days, Melanie Radzicki McManus hiked 1,100 miles around Wisconsin, landing her in the elite group of Ice Age Trail thru-hikers known as Thousand-Milers. In prose that is alternately harrowing and humorous, McManus takes you with her on an "into-the-wild" Ice Age experience through Wisconsin's forests, prairies, wetlands, farms, and far-flung small towns. Author and elite thru-hiker, Melanie McManus, will discuss her debut memoir, Thousand-Miler: Adventures Hiking the Ice Age Trail, and how she accomplished the fastest women's Ice Age thru-hike.

November 11, 2017 Jerry Apps - The Land - Join the author and historian for a walk in the woods, as he passes along lessons gleaned from listening to the land. With wit and wisdom inherited from his father on their Midwestern farm, Apps recalls stories that unite the generations.

December 9, 2017 John Eastberg - Three generations of Milwaukee's Pabst family & Mansions of Milwaukee's Prospect Avenue. A look at the magnificent mansions of Milwaukee's Prospect Avenue and the stories they tell. Rare historical photographs presented by Pabst Mansion Senior Historian, John Eastberg, with lively discussion that is sure to follow. He'll also take us through the first three generation of the Joseph Pabst family, with all their talents and quirks.

January 13, 2018 - Rochelle Pennington - The Hidden History Behind Charles Dickens Writing 'A Christmas Carol. A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens, is as much part of the holiday celebration as the holly and mistletoe. But whereas "A Christmas Carol" (written in 1843) is one of the most familiar works in all of literature, everyone knows the tale of the elderly miser Ebenezer Scrooge being haunted into generosity and Christmas cheer, the tale is largely misunderstood. Rochelle will take us behind the scenes to the real intent of this lasting story.

February 10, 2018 - Jim Willaert - Anything and Everything Wade House

Wade House Curator of Interpretation and curator of the Wesley W. Jung Carriage Museum, Jim Willaert will discuss the Wade House site focus on the hotel, but also celebrates the world of plank roads and stagecoach transport, horse-drawn travel and a mid-1800s Wisconsin settlement. Jim will take us back in time, highlight the Wade House historic site's growth and accomplishments and talk about the crazy stories that also accompany the real history of this amazing site.

March 10, 2018 - Matthew Kadow - The 75th Anniversary of the U.S.S. Cobia and much more.

Moored along the Manitowoc River, adjacent to the Wisconsin Maritime Museum, is the World War II fleet submarine USS Cobia (SS-245). Cobia has local and national significance as an icon of Wisconsin's shipbuilding heritage. It will celebrate its 75th anniversary of launch in 2018. Matthew, Education Programs Coordinator at the Wisconsin Maritime Museum will bring the launch of the Cobia to life, and bring us up to speed on the other amazing things happening in Manitowoc.

April 14, 2018 - Dennis McCann - This Storied River, A Tour of the Upper Mississippi River

Long-time journalist Dennis McCann takes us on an intimate tour of the Upper Mississippi River -- from Dubuque, Iowa, to the Minnesota headwaters, and dozens of places in between. Far more than a travel guide, "This Storied River" celebrates the Upper Mississippi's colorful history and the unique role the river has played in shaping the Midwest. McCann explores the stories of people and places linked by the Mighty Mississippi's past, informed by newspaper accounts, local historical society documents, and the shoe-leather research of an experienced reporter with a deep love for his subject. Each chapter includes a short list of must-see sites for the modern-day explorer.

May 12, 2018 - Mary Bergin - Wisconsin Supper Club Cookbook and filmmaker Holly De Ruyter's Old Fashioned: The Story of the Wisconsin Supper Club documentary.

The supper club is a tradition and now somewhat of a phenomenon found in the Upper Midwestern states of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Ohio, Michigan, Illinois, and Iowa. They are so retro that they are coming back in to vogue. Travel through the Badger State with Mary and discover what made these supper clubs and the iconic fare stand the test of time. With more than 60 recipes from 40 supper clubs, Wisconsin Supper Club Cookbook will uncover the secrets to the food and the drinks that keep people coming back to these landmark eateries any time of the day. Old Fashioned: The Story of the Wisconsin Supper Club - the film - will take us into this uniquely Wisconsin institution.

**The Lincoln Series with Steven Rogstad — A four-part series, How We Got the Lincoln We Got.
Tuesdays- October 3, 10, 17, 24, 2017 6:30pm-8:30pm**

Held at Sheboygan County Historical Museum, 3110 Erie Avenue, Sheboygan

Steven K. Rogstad, a nationally known Lincoln scholar, will be the instructor. Mr. Rogstad, a Racine native who, since age 6, has studied the life of Abraham Lincoln, graduated from Washington Park High School in 1977 and from the University of Wisconsin-Parkside in 1981.