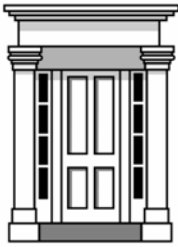


SHEBOYGAN COUNTY



HISTORICAL
RESEARCH
CENTER

The Researcher

The Newsletter of the Sheboygan County
Historical Research Center

Volume XXVII Number 2 December 2016

Cloongowla West, County Mayo, Ireland



Irish scenery in the area of Waitkus's crash landing in 1935.



See the full text of *Transatlantic Flight Builds Unexpected Bonds* on pages 4 & 5.



Above: Felix Waitkus, pilot and unexpected ambassador to Cloongowla West, County Mayo, Ireland at the time of his historic trans-Atlantic flight in 1935.

Below: Lithuanian postage stamp issued to commemorate the flight.



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 8:30am to 12:00 noon.
Closed Saturday, December 24th, 2016 through Monday, January 2, 2017 for the holidays.

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Website: schrc.org

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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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.

**Please support our Business members.
They make all the difference in the quest to save history.**



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Plymouth



Wenig Funeral Homes



Feldmann Engineering & Manufacturing

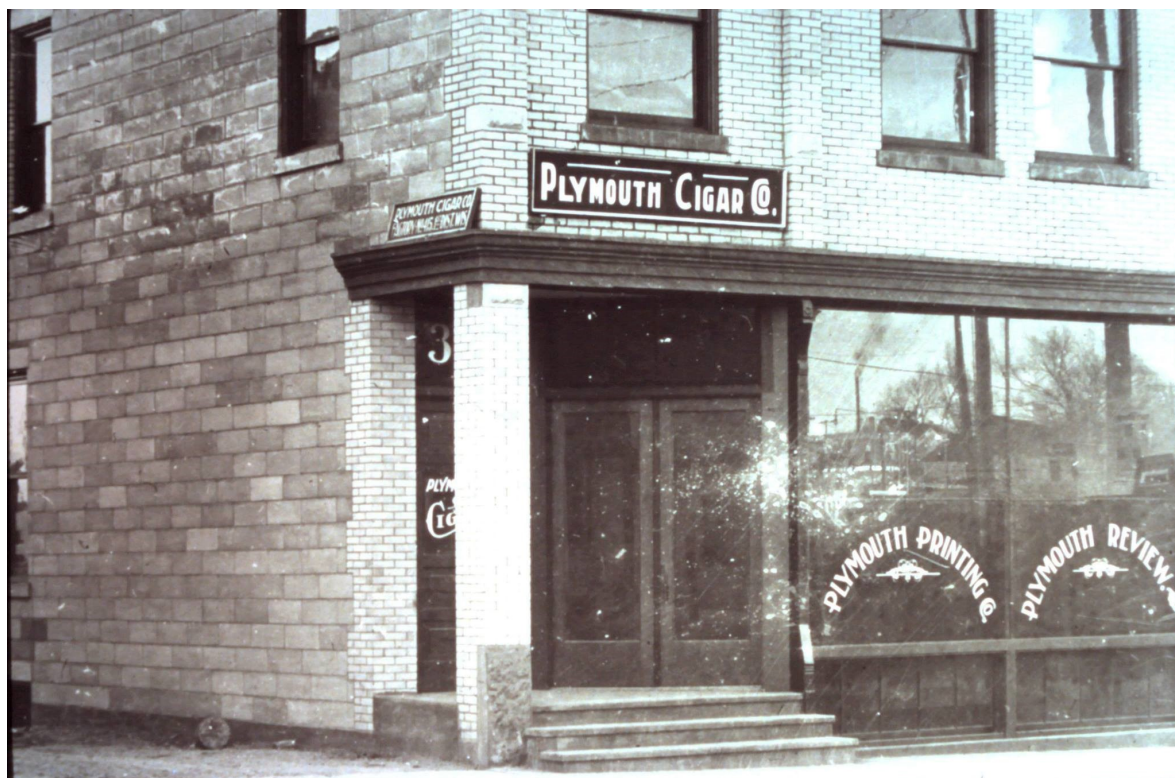


Oostburg State Bank

Plymouth Post, August 21, 1909.

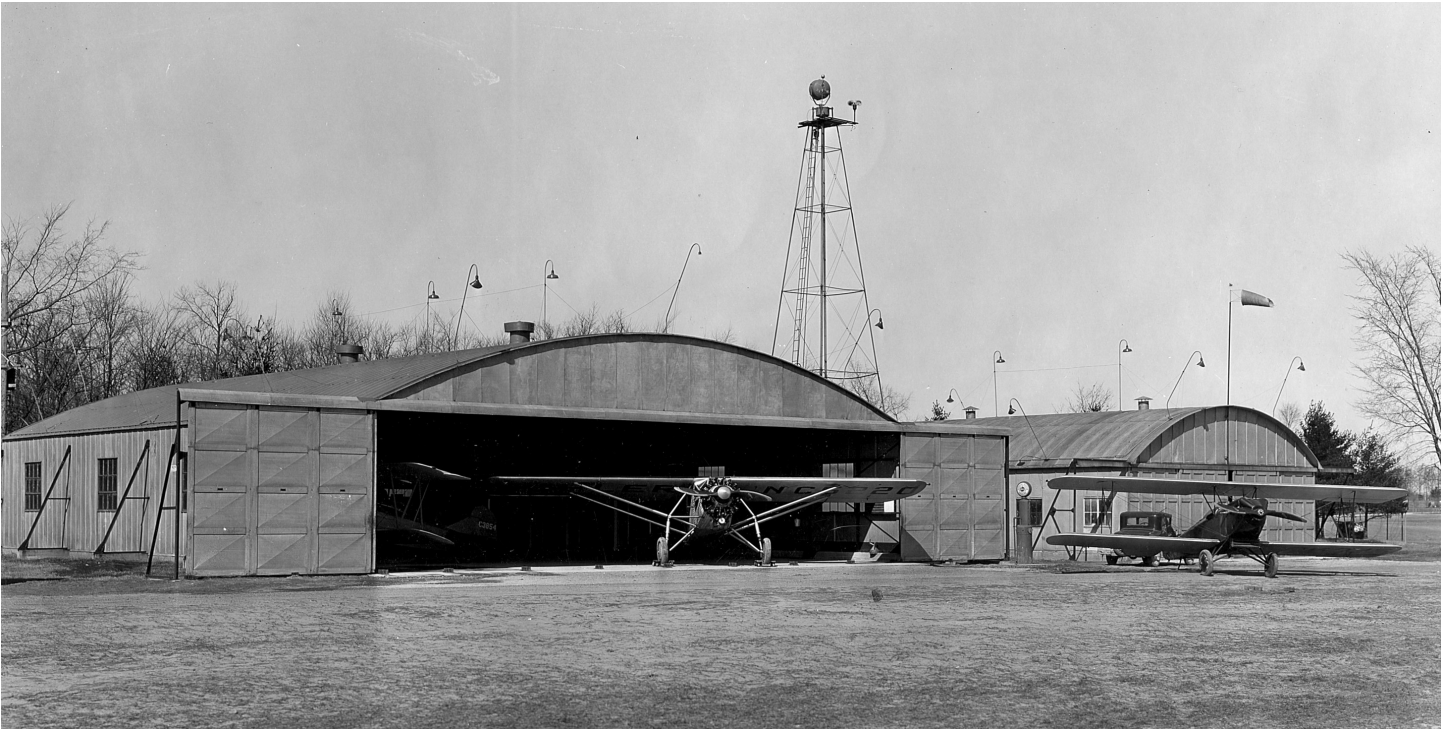
John P. Wilson, the senior partner of the Plymouth Cigar Co. celebrated his 70th birthday at the Cigar Company firm with his fellow workers. At the celebration, fried calf kidney and potato salad were served with the famous "Plymouth Barley Juice." R.W. Fischer entertained with many musical numbers on his graphophone. Mr. Wilson at the age of 70 is still very active and healthy.

The Plymouth Cigar Co, 31 East Mill Street, south side of street. This business was located adjacent to the railroad bridge which goes over Mill Street (at Mill and Caroline streets). Due to structural damage the building was torn down in the fall of 2016.



Looking for 1991 through 1995 Sheboygan Youth Band booklets. Please call SCHRC.

Transatlantic Flight Builds Unexpected Bonds



Kohler Airport

Pilots are a particularly competitive lot. Since the beginning of flight, aviators have vied to see who could fly the fastest, the highest, the farthest. Many have sought an aviation "first." Charles Lindbergh flew the first solo Atlantic non-stop trip in 1927. Amelia Earhart followed in 1932. Competition breeds innovation and excellence. And, of course, more competition.

So it wasn't unusual when in 1933, a group of patriotic Lithuanian-Americans sought to get their small ancestral home into the books by underwriting a record-breaking nonstop flight from New York City to Lithuania. Newly minted, freed from the ruins of the Russian Empire, Lithuania was ready for a bit of recognition. Steponas Darius and Stasys Girėnas, two young pilots, would be the men to follow in Lindbergh's footsteps.

The Lithuanian duo, took off from Floyd Bennett Field, New York City's first municipal airport, and headed for Kaunas, a distance of nearly 4,000 miles. Full of hope, their attempt ended tragically on July 17, 1933. Both men died when their plane crashed just 350 miles short of their destination; it was a national tragedy.

Undaunted by the setback, a second transatlantic flight was proposed. Chicago's large Lithuanian community would fund the venture purchasing a faster and more modern Lockheed Vega, christened the *Lituanica II*. When the pilot originally scheduled to fly backed out, the Chicago organizers turned to a young pilot named Felix Waitkus.

Born of Lithuanian parents, Waitkus was a natural pilot, whittling airplane propellers as a child, dreaming of flight. He joined the U.S. Army in 1928, graduated from flight school and was assigned to the 94th Squadron of the First U.S. Army Pursuit Group in 1929. In August of 1930, he was sent to Wisconsin to participate in the dedication of the Kohler Airport.

Anton Brotz Sr., president of Kohler village and head research engineer for Kohler Co, acted as Master of Ceremonies for the event. It was there that Felix met Martha Brotz, daughter of Anton. A friendship ensued, and they were married in 1934.

Brotz was also the manager of the new airport at Kohler; he hired Waitkus to manage the aviation school. Felix mastered navigation and worked with his future father-in-law doing aeronautical research and stress analysis. Together they rebuilt the *Lituanica II* in a hangar at Kohler Airport, preparing it for the long slog across the north Atlantic.

Kohler village buzzed with excitement that entire spring as work on the plane continued. On May 23, 1935 Lt. Waitkus



Ruined plane near Ballinrobe, County Mayo. The townland or exact location of the crash was in a neighborhood called Cloongowla West, northeast of Ballinrobe.

waved good-bye to a small crowd at the Kohler Airport and flew to New York. It took until September before weather conditions were considered favorable. Waitkus left New York early on the morning of September 21, 1935 and headed east over Newfoundland toward Ireland and on to Kaunas.

Mother Nature was no friend to Felix. Rain, fog and ferocious headwinds forced him to fly by instrument. Helped considerably by hourly broadcasts from the new high-powered RTÉ radio station in Athlone, Ireland, he learned that the poor weather conditions persisted all the way to the Baltic Sea. His fuel would not last, and exhaustion was taking a toll. Landing in Ireland was his safest choice.



Waitkus, center, greeting and being greeted by the citizens of Cloongowla West.

Coming ashore over Connemara in west County Galway, he flew east, spotting an open field near the town of Ballinrobe, County Mayo, some 30 miles northeast of Galway City. It was there, in a townland called Cloongowla West, that he caused quite a stir that Sunday morning, September 23, 1935. Felix was about to make a connection that would last well beyond his years.

The locals dropped whatever they were doing and ran to the aid of Waitkus. To this day they have vivid memories of the event.

Josie Flannery Murphy recalled hearing the plane. “It circled a number of times. Throngs of people rushed to the scene.”

Willie Hughes made his way to the plane by bike and was among the first to reach the crash site. He recalls helping the pilot emerge from the cockpit.

Father Norman Fitzgerald, who was eleven years old at the time, remembers the recovered plane being brought through the town on the back of an army truck.

John and Mamie Walsh lived about 100 yards from the crash site. James was preparing for Mass and left his home, one half of his chin lathered up, on hearing the noise. As he arrived, Lt. Waitkus was battering his way out of the place with a hammer. In true Irish style, Felix was invited back to their home where Mamie served him a boiled egg and some Irish brown bread. As the nearest phone was at the Ballinrobe Garda (police) Station, more than a mile away, he borrowed Mamie’s bike and headed to town to call home.

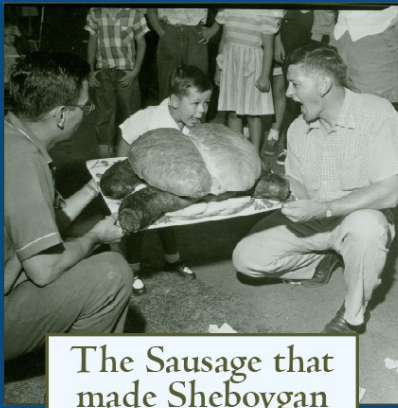
Patsy Murphy, nine at the time, remembers Felix’s friendliness and candor about the crash. His disappointment at the incomplete journey was evident, but he was also keenly aware of his good fortune in just surviving. Waitkus signed autographs handing out sticks of chewing gum to the kids who had surrounded the plane. A complete novelty at the time, chewing gum wasn’t common in Ireland for another 20 years. Murphy kept his stick of gum unopened as a souvenir, along with a piece of the fuselage that Waitkus signed. That very piece of fuselage was returned to Felix’s son Phil Waitkus at a ceremony in 2011 - Murphy vowed to keep it until he could return it to a member of the Waitkus family.

Though his flight was less than complete, and perhaps a bit of a personal disappointment, Waitkus was the sole pilot to fly across the North Atlantic in 1935, and just the sixth in history. His unexpected appearance eight decades ago in a place called Cloongowla West created a lasting bond between Ireland and Lithuania.

Remembrances of the event take place in Ireland on a regular basis. Ballinrobe’s “Fly Mayo Festival” has become a major focal point for the Lithuanian community in Ireland. It is also an event dedicated to the memory of Felix Waitkus, and Ballinrobe’s role in his remarkable story.

Ireland and Lithuania, small countries that have suffered much at the hands of others, found or created something personal that lasts to this day. They take a combined joy in just being a part of something bigger, perhaps not perfect, but amazing all the same.

The Rise of the Bratwurst



The Sausage that made Sheboygan Famous THE RISE OF THE BRATWURST

SHEBOYGAN COUNTY
HISTORICAL RESEARCH CENTER
WITH RICHARD A. STOELB

Available now at SCHRC

Below: Dolores Stoelb, Miss Penney's, later
the first Miss Bratwurst queen - 1953.

In 1953, the city of Sheboygan celebrated its centennial. To commemorate the milestone a week-long festival, running from Sunday, August 9 to Saturday, August 15, was planned. Each day would have a different theme with accompanying activities. A. Matt Werner, the publisher and editor of the Sheboygan Press at the time, suggested that Thursday, August 13, of Centennial Week be designated as "Bratwurst Day". It would be a day to pay homage to the city's rich German heritage and to the "noble" sausage that put Sheboygan on the world map. It would also be an opportunity to celebrate summer and show off everything that is good about Sheboygan. Overwhelming approval was given to the idea and thought by many that it could be the biggest day of the city's centennial celebration. The Sheboygan Jaycees would sponsor "Bratwurst Day" and operate their own stand and the six bratwurst manufacturers in the city namely; Wagner's Sausage, Sheboygan Sausage, Thielmann Sausage, Hertziger Sausage, Johnsonville Meats and Rammer Sausage would each have a stand to sell their products.

Thursday, August 13, 1953 "Bratwurst Day"

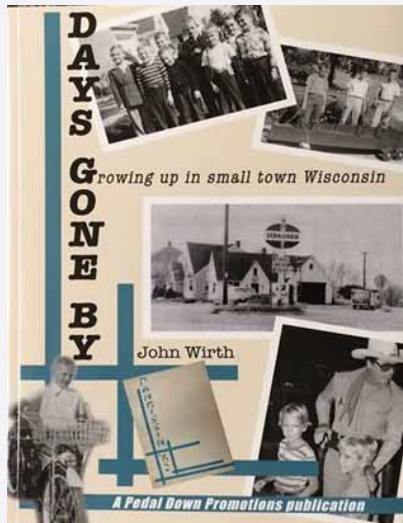
Official observance of Sheboygan's first Bratwurst Day began at 8 a.m. with a bratwurst breakfast and opening remarks by A. Matt Werner, Editor of the Sheboygan Press. There was a feeling of "Gemütlichkeit", a German word that expresses congeniality and togetherness. All along "Bratwurst Boulevard" the air was filled with the smoke and the enticing, mouth watering aroma of bratwurst "frying" and stimulating the appetite of the crowd. A single brat sold for \$0.25; a double went for \$0.35 and a bottle of beer would cost you \$0.15.



Welcome to our newest Legacy Society Members!

Robert and Marion Gorges
Chad Wilcox

New in the Bookstore



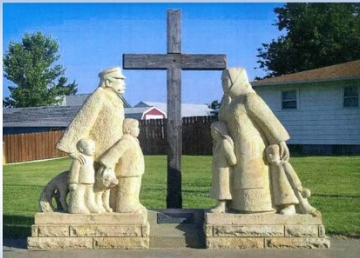
Days Gone By

by Mr. John Wirth
\$10.00 paperback

Days Gone By The Falls - Growing up in small town Wisconsin is John Wirth's poignant, colorful account of growing up in Sheboygan Falls in the 1950s and 1960s. The book features a collection of 39 newspaper columns, which have appeared on a regular basis in The Sheboygan Falls News since 2007. The book takes readers back to a time when imagination, creativity and the pursuit of good, clean fun ruled the lives of youngsters long before the clutches of modern technology swooped in to stifle such endeavors. Wirth paints a vivid portrait of an era in time when people worked hard without question and played hard without considering the possible dangers of youthful exuberance. Readers will meet several colorful characters who inhabited many memorable locales in the quaint, picturesque, Midwestern city of Sheboygan Falls. Whether you have your own memories of the 1950s and 1960s or are looking to find out what all the fuss was about, buckle in and enjoy the twists and turns of a real-life, small-town adventure ride going on 60 years in the making.

A Time for Reflection

The First One Hundred Years

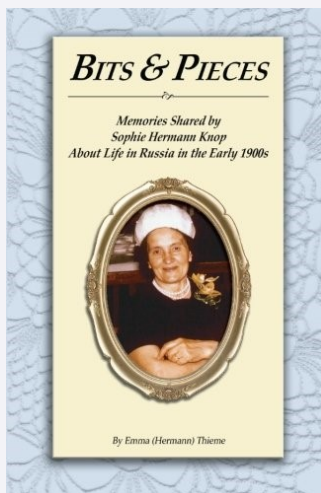


Germans from Russia
in Sheboygan, Wisconsin

A Time for Reflection

Germans from Russia in Sheboygan, Wisconsin
Ms. Emma Thieme and Mr. Fred Zitzer
\$10.00 paperback

The history, chronology, and maps in this booklet represent only a small part of the Volga German's unique heritage. Here is a brief look at the Volga Deitsch, how they got to Russia and why they came to America, and then to Sheboygan. It is a tale of more than 200 years of travel, hardship and joy endured by our ancestors. Older generations might recall the good times as well as the not-so-good when they read about old customs and practices. Younger people may learn a history they did not know existed. This 2016 update adds extra photos and more history.



Bits and Pieces: Memories About Life in Russia

Mrs. Emma Hermann Thieme
\$8.00 paperback

Sophie Hermann Knop was born and raised in Schaefer, Russia, a German-Russian community along the Volga River. In 1923, when she was 18 years old, Sophie traveled to Sheboygan, Wisconsin, where Gottlieb Hermann, had been living since 1912. During their long separation, Sophie endured great difficulties, including the Russian Revolution and the upheavals and famine that followed in its wake. Sophie willingly shared detailed descriptions of her life in Russia. Those "bits and pieces" follow a brief history of German migration to the Volga River area of Russia.

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