

THE RESEARCHER

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE
SHEBOYGAN COUNTY HISTORICAL RESEARCH CENTER

Volume XXXIII Number 6 August 2023

The Researcher is sponsored by Jay Christopher of Christopher Farm & Gardens.



Did You Know?

Actor Wesley Lau was born in Sheboygan and graduated from Central High School. He appeared in television productions, on stage, and in 25 movies including the John Wayne production, "The Alamo." He is most remembered for his role as Lt. Anderson on the TV series, "Perry Mason."



Photo: tvnewfrontier.blogspot.com

Do you know some historical "tidbits" about Sheboygan and Wisconsin? Would you like to share them with our readers? Email to richardstoelb@schrc.org; put "Did You Know?" in the subject line.

The Story of Civil War Veteran Van R. Grooms and How A National Scam Reached a Sheboygan Falls Attic

By Richard Zimmermann

A large framed official-looking document was recently uncovered in the attic of the Sheboygan County Historical Research Center. The document is a lithograph that depicts a massive Civil War monument which appears to stand approximately 100 feet high, when compared to the people shown standing around it. In the center of the monument is space for a handwritten summary of a soldier's service record. The lithograph was mass-produced for Civil War veterans who wished to perpetuate their war record as part of a fundraising campaign for a monument to the memory of soldiers who fought in the war.



Van R. and Mary A. Grooms

The lithograph in the Center's collection commemorates Sheboygan County resident Van R. Grooms. It notes his service with the 1st Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry Regiment during the Civil War. This

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SHEBOYGAN COUNTY
HISTORICAL
RESEARCH
CENTER

518 Water Street
Sheboygan Falls, WI 53085
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9 am to 4 pm
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The Researcher is the official newsletter of the Sheboygan County Historical Research Center, 518 Water Street, Sheboygan Falls, WI 53085.

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.

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Visit
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**The Research Center will be
closed for archiving
Monday, August 21
to Friday, September 1**



**Look for SCHRC Membership
Renewal information
coming soon!**

Welcome New Members

Darlene Frewert — Plymouth

Program Schedule

Genealogy Classes

at the Research Center, 518 Water Street, Sheboygan Falls, WI – 1 to 3 pm

Monday, August 14 – Land Records

Monday, September 11 – Newspaper Research

History on the Move

at Generations, 1500 Douglas Drive, Plymouth, WI – 2 pm

Thursday, August 17 – Cheeseville

Thursday, September 21 – Irish in the Town of Mitchell

Tap Room History

at Amore, 18 W. Mill Street, Plymouth, WI – 6:30 pm

Thursday, August 17 – Dr. Michael D. Jacobs – A Subversive Society Gets
its Clock Cleaned in Sheboygan County

Annual Meeting

at Amore, 18 W. Mill Street, Plymouth, WI – 11 am to 1 pm

Friday, October 13 – Patrick Jung – Slavery in Wisconsin

Lincoln Seminar

at Generations, 1500 Douglas Drive, Plymouth, WI – 6:30 pm to 8:30 pm

Join Abraham Lincoln scholar and Sheboygan County Historical Research Center Executive Director Steven Rogstad as he dives deep into the troubled life of Mary Todd Lincoln.

Tuesday, August 22 – Childhood and Motherhood

Tuesday, August 29 – Lincoln Marriage

Tuesday, September 5 – Civil War First Lady

Tuesday, September 12 – Assassination and Widowhood

Let's Develop Our Center

Collection care and management is the core of what the Research Center is all about. The organization's mission states it "serves the public by collecting, preserving and making available the written documentation and images of Sheboygan County." While the Center offers outstanding educational programs and a variety of activities and events, the care and management of acquired collections is truly at the center of what its staff and volunteers perform on a regular basis.

The Center has added two notable collections to its inventory over the past few months that are worth mentioning. During a thirty-year span, between the 1950s and 1980s, Town of Holland, Wisconsin native Wilmer L. Dana assembled over 80 scrapbooks that covered a myriad of topics and Sheboygan County communities between the 1960s and 1980s. With his eyesight failing him as he aged, he continued to work on his scrapbooks the final eight years of



his life while a resident of Sunny Ridge Nursing & Rehabilitation Center in Sheboygan. Before his death on January 22, 2011, Wilmer gave his scrapbooks to the Research Center.

The results of his labors are astonishing. He assembled scrapbooks that represented a staggering 20 communities, including Waldo, Parnell, Beechwood, Dundee, Batavia, Sheboygan Falls, Random Lake, Silver Creek, Boltonville, Oostburg, Cedar Grove, Plymouth, Howards Grove, Gibbville, Adell, Cascade, Elkhart Lake, Glenbeulah, Franklin, and Johnsonville. The topics that interested Wilmer were wide and varied. Many of the scrapbooks are devoted to eclectic topics such as auto accidents, snow storms, natural disasters, baby twins, triplets, quadruplets, locomotives, fires, Wade House, hobbies and collections, notable labor strikes, blacksmiths and work horses, factories, notable women, Road America, Girl Scouts, street rebuilding, Sheboygan churches, Sheboygan harbor and lakeshore, Sheboygan County fair, and Sheboygan Press. There are even scrapbooks solely about Cedar Grove High School, 1904–1953, and Cedar Grove churches, 1930s–1960s.

The Port Washington Historical Society recently gave the Center 92 architectural drawings of

buildings – 77 of them located within Sheboygan County. Both commercial and residential structures, these drawings add to our sizeable archive of nearly 1,300 architectural sets that are already contained in 40 drawers and 50 tubes in the SCHRC's archive. They are a rich resource for researchers who want to study the architectural history of Sheboygan County. The Center wishes to thank the Port Washington Historical Society for its generosity and thoughtfulness.

Keep checking the website and stay informed of everything that is happening with the organization during this special 40th Anniversary year. Please consider donating your family history to the Center. The need is always there for more volunteers, so please consider giving a few hours a week to assist with events, activities, and collection care. Let us make the Sheboygan County Historical Research Center the best it can be in preserving and promoting Sheboygan County history. Together, we can make a difference!

As always, thank you for all you do to support and help develop our Research Center!

Sincerely,

Steven K. Rogstad
Executive Director
steverogstad@schrc.org

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impressive, framed document registered his service with the regiment, the wartime record of the regiment, the battles it fought, and his final honorable discharge. Obviously, he was being recognized for exemplary service to his country during that conflict. However, a small note on the bottom of the document added some mystery to the story by stating, "This picture of the Easel Monument bearing the personal Army record of Van R. Grooms and his regiment was dedicated to him July 26, 1896, by his wife Mary A. and presented to family as a tribute to loyalty." Really? Easel Monument? Where did this all originate, and how did this lithograph come into being? Other questions immediately arise. Why is it that other museums and repositories of Civil War artifacts also boast ownership of similar framed certificates honoring other veterans? Where is this monument? It should quickly be noted that there is *no* monument, although monies were collected for its establishment. The cash all disappeared and the monument was never constructed. In the end, we only know that the Grooms family received a beautiful lithograph like hundreds – perhaps thousands – of veterans, who paid to have themselves immortalized on paper. The money for the large monument project was gone. How this came to be is the subject of this fascinating story.

Van Ransler Grooms was a twenty-three-year-old farmer from Sheboygan Falls when he enlisted in Company H, the 1st Wisconsin Infantry for three

years of service on September 16, 1861. He was mustered into service on October 8 in Milwaukee. The service record at the Wisconsin Historical Society notes that at the time of his enlistment he was single, possessed hazel-colored eyes and a dark complexion, and was 5'8" tall. He was mustered out with his company on October 18, 1864. During the time with his regiment, he served in the western theater of the war (west of the Appalachians and east of the Mississippi River).

He was wounded at the Battle of Perryville, Kentucky. He spent a great deal of time recovering at hospitals in Louisville, Kentucky, Quincy Illinois, Chattanooga, Tennessee, and Nashville.

Information housed in the Sheboygan County Historical Research Center describe his life prior to the war. Grooms was born in Grafton, Canada, on June 9, 1838 and moved to Wisconsin with his parents at age eighteen. After the Civil War ended, he married Mary Ann Smith on August 1, 1865 in Saukville. She was originally from Ireland. Together they had five children. After their marriage, the farming couple lived in various towns and villages, including Mitchell, Sherman, Town of Holland,



Framed lithograph found in the attic at the Research Center

Cascade, and Waldo. While his wife preceded him in death by four years, Grooms himself enjoyed excellent health until shortly before his death at the home of his son, Charles, in Sheboygan Falls on March 5, 1928. A funeral was held at the son's residence before a final service was held at a Baptist church in Waldo. He and his wife are both buried in Mt. Pleasant Cemetery in the Town of Mitchell. So far, this story is typical of farmers living all over the Midwest, and it demonstrates the quiet existence that many veterans experienced after the war. It is only when you throw into the story the Easel Monument Company's printing project and someone's attempt to scam approximately 400,000 veterans of

their money that the story becomes truly mind-blowing.

Fifteen years after the war ended, the federal government announced an expanded pension plan for Civil War veterans. Officially called the Dependent and Disability Pension Act of June 1890, the act was supported by both Houses of Congress, the President, and the Grand Army of the Republic veterans' organization. The act provided a pension to any veteran who

around was \$12 per month, and in March 1908, the Sheboygan Press announced that Van R. Grooms would receive \$15.00 per month as his pension. By this time the Grooms family lived in Waldo. This meant that a huge amount of federal money was being spent on Civil War pensions and the Act opened the door for a variety of illicit activities on the part of men seeking personal gain from corporate suffering. A man named John Worth Carnahan and his associates hoped to reap some

of the benefits of this expansive financing. It should be noted that a similar effort by the Bunker Hill Monument Association, beginning in 1823, raised funds sufficient to finance a large obelisk monument in the Boston area, which was completed in 1843 and still stands today. Carnahan also reported visiting the Gettysburg battlefield and taking inspiration from monuments he discovered there.

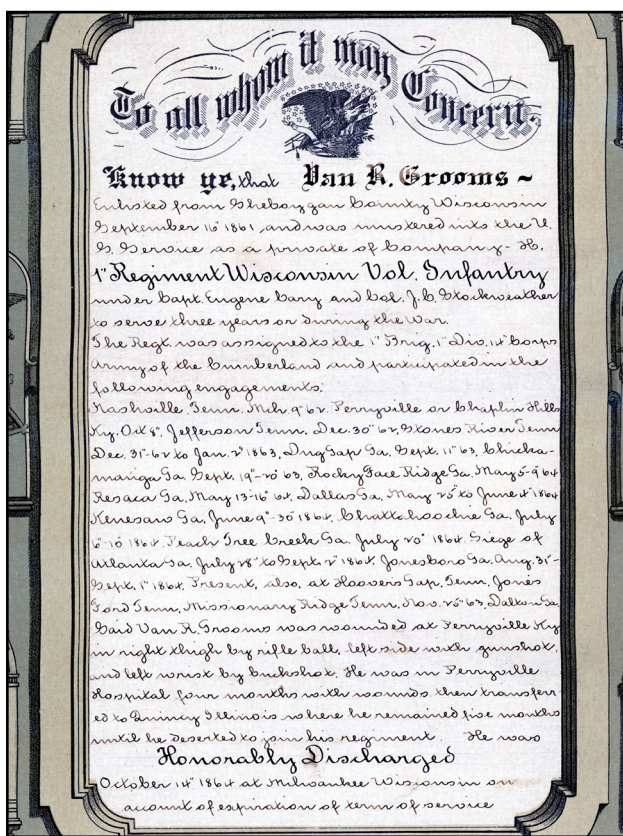
J. Worth Carnahan eventually printed 43 different publications during his lifetime.

One of his efforts, the Easel Monument Project spelled out his plan. In the 255-page 1897 book entitled, *Manual of the Civil War and Key to the Grand Army of the Republic*, Carnahan advertised the Easel Monument. He proposed collecting monies from Civil War veterans and suggested that

around 400,000 Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R.) members were eligible to purchase individual prints honoring their individual service. In the 1890s, there was a very large potential market for the sale. For a price, a member could obtain a 22" x 30" souvenir or a 15" x 20" smaller souvenir version. Members were encouraged to contribute more money towards the construction of the monument. He wrote that the northern state with the highest percentage of veteran contributors would have the monument erected in a suitable park within that state. He proposed that the monument be made of white bronze, reinforced with steel and stand 53 feet in height. The image of the proposed monument would be shown on the lithograph and included with the personalized print. He noted that the G.A.R. was founded in 1866 and by 1889 there were 272 posts established with 15,871 members in Wisconsin alone. He also noted that the 23rd National G.A.R. Encampment had taken place in Milwaukee during 1889. As the Pension Act of 1890 greatly expanded the number of veterans receiving monies from the federal government – and as the Easel Monument Association was conveniently established in 1895 – it may be assumed that the Association banked on the availability of funds for veterans to pay for the monument.

Unfortunately, none of this came to pass. In 1896, *The Lakeside Annual Directory of the City of Chicago* listed the Association's

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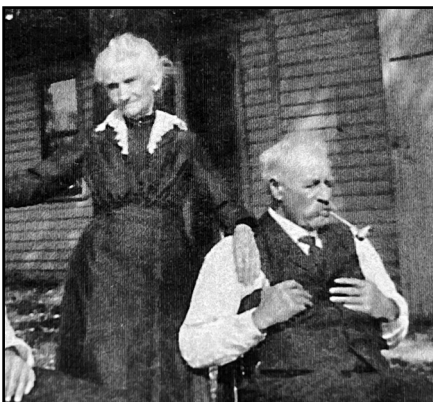
Close up photo of the lithograph

had served at least 90 days and was currently unable to perform manual labor of any type. Over 116,000 pensions were approved within the year, and the McKinley tariff rate that rose to 49% of certain imported goods was used to pay the cost. The original sum paid to a veteran at this time was

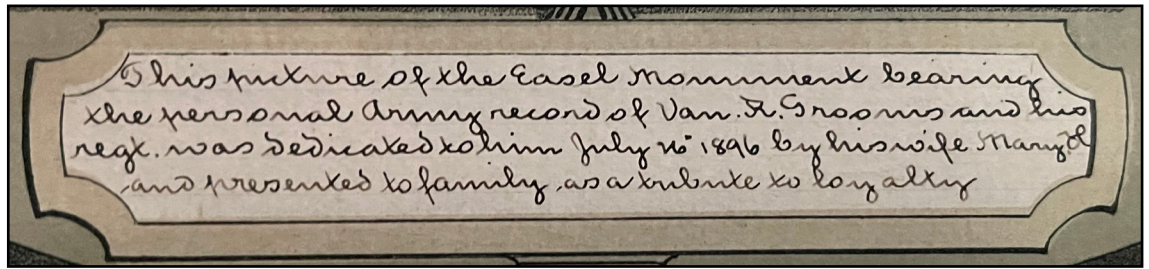
location at 334 Dearborn Street in Chicago. Chicago was the economic center in the U.S. for several printing companies that provided low-cost printing options at the close of the 19th Century.

Known as Printers

Row, this location provided entrepreneurs such as Carnahan access to inexpensive, privately printed books, lithographs, and other printed materials. Carnahan was also aware of imposters who claimed to sell these prints but kept the money without delivering any prints at all. In his 1896 publication, *The History of the G.A.R.* (page 66), he wrote a warning to readers under the heading, "An Important Notice," that fraud was being committed, he claimed, by others. It would appear, therefore, that while Carnahan himself did not originate the scam, other "interests" produced a sales force that traveled the country collecting funds for a project that was never undertaken. Perhaps one could say that while Carnahan was never proven guilty of anything, other



Mary A. and Van R. Grooms



Detail from lithograph. "This picture of the Easel Monument bearing the personal Army record of Van R. Grooms and his regiment was dedicated to him July 26, 1896 by his wife Mary G. and presented to family, as a tribute to loyalty."

counterfeit salespeople made off with significant amounts of money as part of a nationwide scam.

Veterans by the thousands purchased and paid for the lithographs, including Van Ransler Grooms, who was living in Waldo in 1896. But then the money all disappeared. On Wednesday, June 12, 1901, Carnahan was indicted by a grand jury in Ohio, and he was arrested and briefly jailed in Washington, D.C. He was charged with conspiracy to defraud residents of Ohio. But ultimately while some salesmen were later convicted of fraud, Carnahan was freed, and after a brief trial, was acquitted. For example, in 1897 the commander of G.A.R. Post No. 26, Department of Indiana reported that sales agent J. W. Patton, supposedly representing the Easel Monument Association and possibly from Pittsburgh, was a fraud and warned comrades against him. Where did the money go?

There appears to be no record of where the money went, and the actual funds for the project simply disappeared. The Easel Monument project dissolved in acrimony and lawsuits, but many

veterans were left with beautiful, printed lithographs that are located in private hands and museums to this day. A brief visit to eBay or other sales outlets for historical documents will uncover many of these printed relics. They are quite beautiful, and they seem to convey an accurate picture of the Civil War veteran's service with his regiment. The Sheboygan print for the Grooms family, residing in the Research Center is a marvelous piece, beautifully framed, that recounts the Civil War experiences of Van Ransler Grooms in the 1st Wisconsin Infantry. Visitors to the Sheboygan County Historical Research Center may also be interested in the photograph collection that chronicles the Grooms family following the Civil War. Many additional questions about the scam remain unanswered, but it is clear that this nationwide effort, sullied by rapacious salesmen, impacted many innocent families. The Grooms family apparently avoided the national scam. At least a beautiful print remained as one of their family heirlooms, carefully preserved down to the present day. However, the monument itself was never constructed, and the money was never recovered. 🍀

Testimonial

Wayne LeClair, good friend of Norb Lohuis, tells us, “Norb is very pleased with the recent article about the time he spent with Dan Blocker (Hoss Cartwright) during the Korean War.” Both Wayne and Norb recently became members of SCHRC. (You can find the article about Norb and Dan Blocker’s friendship in the April 2023 issue of *The Researcher*.)



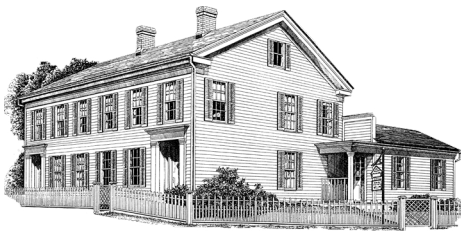
Above: Norb Lohuis (seated) with fellow veterans Wayne LeClair (left) and Richard Stoelb (right) at a breakfast for veterans held at Pine Haven in Sheboygan Falls. Richard, a researcher at the Sheboygan County Historical Research Center, gave a presentation about Norb’s time in the Army during the Korean War serving with Dan Blocker, aka Hoss Cartwright of Bonanza fame.

Gravestone Cleaning Workshop



The Research Center recently held a gravestone cleaning workshop at the Sheboygan Falls Cemetery. In honor of our 40th Anniversary, the graves of the Cole Family, who were considered pioneers of Sheboygan Falls, were cleaned. They once lived in the Mill House, which is now home to the Research Center. There are 13 members of the Cole family buried in the family plot. [Left to right: Jim Parrish and Jarret Parrish]





Sheboygan County
Historical Research Center
518 Water Street
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The Center recently was given 92 architectural drawings by the Port Washington Historical Society. The drawings represent 77 commercial and residential buildings within Sheboygan County, and 15 outside the county. A majority show buildings in Random Lake and Plymouth. Our volunteer Deb has just finished processing them for our collection. A big thank you to Deb for her hard work and to the Port Washington Historical Society for the gift!

Recently Acquired Collections

Researchers have another valuable resource in their arsenal in their quest for unusual information about Sheboygan County history. The 88 scrapbooks of Wilmer L. Dana have recently been indexed for easier use, which cover a variety of topics in over 20 county communities. Special attention is given to Cedar Grove high school and Cedar Grove churches. More about this collection is contained in the executive director's comments on page 3 of this issue of the newsletter. The Center wishes to thank volunteer Carole for her tireless efforts in processing the scrapbooks in order that they are made available for researchers.

