

THE RESEARCHER

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE
SHEBOYGAN COUNTY HISTORICAL RESEARCH CENTER

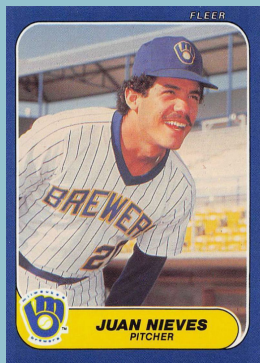
Volume XXXIV Number 4 April 2024



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

Did You Know?

Juan Nieves recorded the Milwaukee Brewers first no-hitter on April 15, 1987. He was the first Puerto Rican-born pitcher to accomplish this feat in MLB. The only other no-hitter the Milwaukee Brewers had was a combined effort between Corbin Burnes and Josh Hader on September 11, 2021.



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.

Hootenanny

By Richard Stoelb

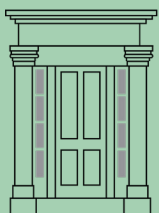
Just what is a Hootenanny? There is no single origin for the word. Basically, a hootenanny is an informal folk music party or gathering that can range from a small intimate affair all the way up to a larger community event. It can take place on a beach, in a park, in a coffee shop, in a backyard, in an auditorium, anywhere.

Folk music has been called the music of the common people. In fact, the word “folk” comes from the German word “volk” (pronounced folk) meaning the “common people.” Traditional folk music has been passed down from generation to generation telling stories in a way that anyone can understand. Contemporary folk songs often reflect the social landscape at the time they were written.

The U.S. was enjoying a folk music revival in the 1960s thanks to folk-singing groups like the Kingston Trio, the Chad Mitchell Trio, the Brothers Four, the New Christy Mistrels, the Limelickers, the Serendipity Singers, Peter, Paul, and Mary, and individuals such as Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, et al.

The DeCapa Five was a Sheboygan folk music singing group, but they were not Sheboygan’s only folk music singing group. There was Pete and Sam, the Tradewinds, and The Folk Singers Three. However, the DeCapas were Sheboygan’s most famous folk singing group. They were recognized outside of Sheboygan due to their numerous television and

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SHEBOYGAN COUNTY
HISTORICAL
RESEARCH
CENTER

518 Water Street
Sheboygan Falls, WI 53085
Open Tuesday through Friday
9 am to 4 pm
(920) 467-4667
schrc.org • research@schrc.org



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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Welcome New Members

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Ronald Mueller — Sheboygan

Program Schedule

Genealogy Seminar

at Generations, 1500 Douglas Drive, Plymouth – 9 am to 12:30 pm

Friday, April 19 – DNA 101: A Seminar for Beginners

For seating purposes, please register ahead of time by calling (920) 467-4667.

History on the Move

at Generations, 1500 Douglas Drive, Plymouth – 1 pm

Thursday, April 18 – Stories of the Sheboygan Marsh

Thursday, May 16 – Sheboygan County Cheese Factories

Genealogy Classes

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

\$15 for members, \$20 for non-members

Monday, April 8 – Getting to Know the SCHRC Library and its Resources

Monday, May 13 – Photos: Scanning, Archiving, and Analyzing

Second Saturdays

at Plymouth Arts Center, 520 East Mill Street, Plymouth – 9:30 to 11:30 am

Saturday, April 13 – Small-Town Wisconsin: Fun, Surprising, and Exceptional Road Trips, with Mary Bergin

Saturday, May 11 – Theodore Caspar Lutz: His Role as Contractor in the Building of the Key Maritime Settings for the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, with Tom Lutz

Book Club

at Sheboygan Falls Memorial Library, 330 Buffalo St., Sheb. Falls – 1 to 2:30 pm

Thursday, May 16 – *The Carving of Mount Rushmore* by Rex Alan Smith

Please register by calling (920) 467-4667.

Saloon Stories

at Chris & Sue's, W3820 County Rd C, Plymouth – 6:30 pm

Thursday, April 18 – Sheboygan County's Link to NASCAR presented by Jerry Mueller

Thursday, May 16 – The History of 141 Speedway presented by Joe Verdegan

Taproom History – Presidential Disability and Mortality

Location to be determined – 6:30 pm

Thursday, June 20 – James Garfield's Slow and Cruel Death

Thursday, July 18 – Grover Cleveland's Secret Surgery

Thursday, August 15 – Woodrow Wilson's Paralytic Stroke

Annual Meeting

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

Friday, October 11 – Stephen Kantrowitz presents How the Ho Chunk Thwarted Removal from Wisconsin

Let's Develop Our Center

As we enter into the spring season, I am very excited to announce a few pieces of news!

Starting April 1, the SCHRC acquired the building behind the Center at 517 Monroe Street, formerly occupied by Mersberger Financial Group. The building became available when Mersberger relocated to its new location in Sheboygan Falls. As a structure also included in the Cole Historic District, the property is a natural extension of the SCHRC campus and furnishes administrative offices, board room, collection processing space, and an education room for seminars, classes, training, and general meeting space.

This new two-story building will provide crucial space for Center functions. Once in-coming acquisitions are processed and entered into the Center's database in the Mersberger building, materials will be transferred to the Adams Street facility for storage.



The Mill House will continue to be used for research, collection storage, and other collection-related activities. This expansion into a third building further enhances the SCHRC's ability to expand its operations, improve its collection management processes, and provide staff and volunteers with additional space that had not been available.

Starting with this issue, the newsletter has been expanded from eight to twelve pages. As our collections, activities, and events increase, so does our responsibility to notify members and supporters about how the organization is growing and expanding. The additional four pages in each issue gives us an excellent opportunity to feature documents and photographs, profile individuals, share research methods, and allow for longer articles about subjects concerning the greater Sheboygan region. Not just a publication to inform the community about SCHRC events and activities, *The Researcher* can also be a useful tool to educate persons about research methods, tips, and advice. Therefore, you will be seeing periodic essays and case studies about a variety of subjects that lend themselves to improved research techniques.

We continue to look for volunteers. This year is being called the "Year of the Volunteer." With

more space to work, we have more opportunities for persons to work on a variety of projects and collection activities. The work at the Center never stops or stalls. Any hours you can give to the Center would be appreciated. We also have work that needs to be performed on our grounds. We could use a few dedicated individuals who would be willing to tend to the gardens this summer season. Do you love to garden? We need you! Do you know any Master Gardeners looking for a project? We have a few! We could also use a volunteer custodian and handy-man. Volunteers can pick your own days and hours. So, please keep the Center in mind and spread the word.

Please call me at 920-467-4667 to volunteer or to learn about volunteer activities that may suit you.

Keep checking the SCHRC website – www.schrc.org – for updates.

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steven Rogstad". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Steven K. Rogstad
Executive Director
steverogstad@schrc.org

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radio appearances on local and national networks. The originality of their material and their showmanship set this talented and versatile group apart. Their special blend of folk singing, that they called “fun singing,” singing just for the joy of singing, entertained audiences at banquets, private parties, church organizations, school functions, summer concerts, etc.

No one in the group had taken voice lessons, and only Joel Grollmus, the bass player, took lessons for the instrument he played. Ron Klusmeier organized the DeCapa Five. The group began appearing together in March of 1962 and consisted of Ron Klusmeier (guitar), John Ott (guitar and banjo), Mike Pungercar (guitar), Joel Grollmus (string and electric bass), and vocalist (soprano) Christine (Chris) Schommer. All the members were sophomores at North High School except Joel who was attending Urban Junior High School.

Klusmeier came up with the name DeCapa. “DaCapo” is an Italian musical term that means “from the beginning” or “go back to the beginning.” The intent was to show respect to folk music as the beginning music of our culture. DaCapo has been misspelled for so long, e.g., DaCappa, DaCapa, DeKappa, DeKappe, that no one really knows what the correct spelling is. However, for consistency in this article the spelling DeCapa or DeCapas will be used.



The DeCapa Five, circa 1963 (left to right): Ron Klusmeier, Chris Schommer, Mike Pungercar, Joel Grollmus, and John Ott

The DeCapa Five made their first television appearance on WFRV-TV, Channel 5—Green Bay, on Sunday, March 31, 1963, where they performed and were interviewed on the program, “Topic.”

On May 25 and 26, 1963, the DeCapas appeared for the first time on the annual Cerebral Palsy Telethon presented by United Cerebral Palsy of Northeastern Wisconsin. The telethon was broadcast on WBAY-TV, Channel 2—Green Bay and WBAY radio. They made subsequent appearances on the Telethon in 1964 and 1965. Celebrities that sang or appeared along with the DeCapas on the telethon were Ken Curtis (Festus on *Gunsmoke*/Sons of the Pioneers), Milburn Stone (Doc on *Gunsmoke*), Don Grady (Robbie

on *My Three Sons*), and Leonard Nimoy (Mr. Spock of *Star Trek* on TV and in motion pictures). Today many people don’t know who these celebrities are, but they were very well-known back in the day.

Chris Schommer Ealing recalls, “I got such a kick out of Leonard Nimoy. He was quite nice and what fun to have him want to sing with us. Bart Starr was nice as could be. He just didn’t sing with us.”

Mike Pungercar says, “I remember well with eternal thanks for the autograph he gave me for my mother: ‘To Connie, Best Wishes. Bart Starr.’ I still have that autograph as Mom gave it to me a week before she passed away. Leonard Nimoy, ‘Mr. Spock,’ sang ‘If I Had a Hammer’ with us.”

Ron Klusmeier recalled stars they met but didn't sing along with them, like Meredith McRae from Petticoat Junction; "What a beautiful woman and so nice." There was movie star Van Johnson and Kirby Grant who played Sky King on television in the series by the same name.

On a Sunday afternoon in early June 1963, the DeCapa Five met with the Folksingers Three, Dave Mundloch, Dick LaViolette, and Emilie Muuss, to try out some numbers in an impromptu jam session. Pete Vercouteren and Sam Frantz of Pete and Sam, and Nancy Likas, also attended the rehearsal. Joel Grollmus said, "We had such a good time that day that somebody came up with the idea that we entertain for a charity project. That way we could have the fun, and someone who needed it, could have the money." Ron Klusmeier and Peter Vercouteren approached the Sheboygan Community Fund with their idea to hold a Benefit Hootenanny. The community fund people liked the idea and agreed to sponsor the show. The performers volunteered their talents. They did not take any money for their performances. All proceeds would go directly to the Community Fund-Red Cross.

Ron Klusmeier handled the musical arrangements and supervised the show. Songs were arranged and rehearsals were held. Emilie Muuss, of the Folk Singers Three, was responsible for getting tickets printed and distributed, organizing the stage crew, the sound crew, lighting crew, ushers, and ticket

takers. The teens did all the work themselves. No outside help was used in any of the planning. A lot of students were also involved behind the scenes. Although their names are unknown, their contributions to the show are no less important, and it is only right that they too should be remembered.

On Saturday night, July 20, 1963, the Urban Junior High School Auditorium was filled to near capacity for a Hootenanny to benefit the Sheboygan Community -Red Cross Fund. Performing that evening were the very popular and well-known DeCapa Five. Joining them were the Folk Singers Three, Pete and Sam, folk soloist Nancy Likas, and Tony Schwaller on electric bass backing up Pete and Sam and the Folk Singers Three.

At 8:15 pm, the show, the first of its kind in Sheboygan, began. The audience did not really know what to expect. However, as the program went along, the people relaxed and joined in by clapping hands, tapping feet, and singing along with the performers. Joel Grollmus remarked, "The enthusiasm of the audience built up the spirit of the entertainers." Emilie Muuss said, "The crowd was great. The biggest thrill for all of us was the standing

ovation we received at the end of the show. Most of us had tears in our eyes."

After the show, Cliff Engeswick, Executive Secretary of the Sheboygan Community Fund, said the show was a complete sell-out and a complete success. Robert Levernz, General Campaign Chairman, commented, "This is the greatest youth production this town has ever seen."

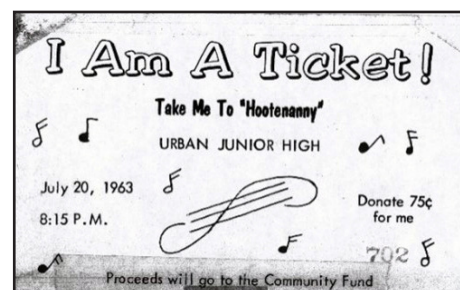
Tickets had sold for 75 cents each. Proceeds from the event were estimated at \$800 to \$1,000. When the final tally was made all the money went directly to the Sheboygan Community Fund-Red Cross.

Following the success of the Hootenanny at Urban, the DeCapa Five headlined programs to aid other organizations e.g., the Oconto Lions Club and the Sheboygan Optimist Club.

In September 1963, they opened a weekly series of half-hour Hootenanny-style programs broadcast from WFRV-TV and seen Sundays at 5:30 p.m.

On Sunday, December 1, 1963, the DeCapas headlined a Hootenanny at Sheboygan South High School Auditorium to benefit the Evening Optimist Club of Sheboygan. The following is from an article that appeared in The Sheboygan Press, Monday, December 2, 1963.

"The DeCapas' appeal...is a combination of smooth vocal blend, arrangements that carefully



Hootenanny Ticket

vary the many verses that mark folk music and exciting variations of rhythm in the instruments, especially the excellent bass... Work on the voice blend is evident in the DeCapas' numbers and Chris's unaffected soprano enhances many of their choice arrangements."

On December 8, 1963, they appeared on national television performing on the Ted Mack Original Amateur Hour broadcast on WISN-TV, Channel 12-Milwaukee. They were selected from approximately 1,000 performers competing in Milwaukee for spots on the show.

Ted Mack's Original Amateur Hour programs are considered national treasures and all of them are stored in the National Archives in Washington, D.C.

A DVD and a digital copy of the December 8, 1963, broadcast with the DeCapa Five singing "Going Away" is now in the Sheboygan

County Historical Research Center Archives.

On April 12, 1964, the DeCapas opened The Midwest Hootenanny Festival at the Sheboygan Armory for Jimmie Rodgers and his troupe, which included Cass Elliot (a member of the Big Three before she joined the "Mamas and the Papas") and Gail Garnet (singer/songwriter/recording artist/actress). Others in the show were Your Countrymen and The New Providence Singers.

Ron Klusmeier, John Ott, Mike Pungercar, and Chris Schommer graduated from Sheboygan North High School in June 1964. Joel Grollmus, the youngest member of the group, would not graduate until 1966. He left the DeCapa Five and joined a popular Sheboygan rock 'n' roll band called the Chantels. Perhaps the changes to rock 'n' roll, brought on by the Beatles and the British invasion, were more suited to Joel's talent and musical interests and he just wanted to move on in that direction.

would attend the University of Wisconsin, Sheboygan County Center.



WKTS record featuring "The Short Years" on Side A and "Brazos" on Side B

Ron wrote "The Short Years" as a tribute to their high school years and graduating class. George Larsen (North's Music Director/Teacher) was moved to tears when they sang it at a closing assembly. He asked if he could use it for subsequent graduating classes. Ron Klusmeier said, "I don't know if that ever happened, but it was sure neat to be asked." The song is side "A" of a 45RPM record that was produced by Sheboygan radio station WKTS.

July 7, 1964, Dick Biondi, a leading teenage disc jockey of the time, appeared on the stage of the Sheboygan Theater. The Dick Biondi Show was broadcast coast to coast featuring music and interviews designed for the high school and college set. A giant stage show featured several rock 'n' roll bands e.g., the Chantels, the Vikings, the Savoys, a surfer band called the Corruptors and Sheboygan's own DeCapas. It was a promotional gig and the only

Graduation did not mean the DeCapas would disband. Enthusiastic to keep their group status, the four graduates would continue their education locally. Ron Klusmeier would attend Lakeland College (University). John Ott, Mike Pungercar, and Chris Schommer



The Sheboygan Press, April 9, 1964, page 45

reason they appeared on the Dick Biondi national radio show.

In August 1964, they also performed at the Iowa State Fair in National, Iowa, and the Sheboygan County Fair in Plymouth. Also, that year the DeCapas were identified as one of the Top 20 folk singing groups in the U.S. by Chicago's WGN radio talent search program, "Travlin' On." Mike Pungercar recalled, "We were by far the youngest group in the competition fresh out of high school to be selected in the top 20. It was a great honor and experience."

Ron Klusmeier gives this account... "We were part of a national talent search contest at WGN. There were a number of 'name' groups there, but other than a young and relatively unknown Johnny Cash, I don't recall which ones. Cash's bass player was late, and I was asked to sit in for his sound check and rehearsal. What a hoot... I had no idea who he was or would become! All I needed to know was the bass notes for three chords! Chris, John, and Mike remember there were more Folk and Bluegrass groups, but a guy who looked like Dr. Kildare played guitar and sang won the money and the recording contract. Groups had been invited from all over the country. WGN had selected us based on our Ted Mack

appearance, the 45 RPM record 'The Short Years,' the Dick Biondi appearance, and our Green Bay telethon appearances."

In October 1964, the DeCapas played for Richard Nixon's campaign appearance in Milwaukee telecast on Channel 12. John Ott recalled "...at the end of his speech I began to play the intro to 'This Land is Your Land' which was supposed to be the grand finale. But he wanted to talk some more and I didn't see him gesturing as my back was to him, so I kept going as did the rest of the group. We drowned him out! He was very annoyed and showed it."

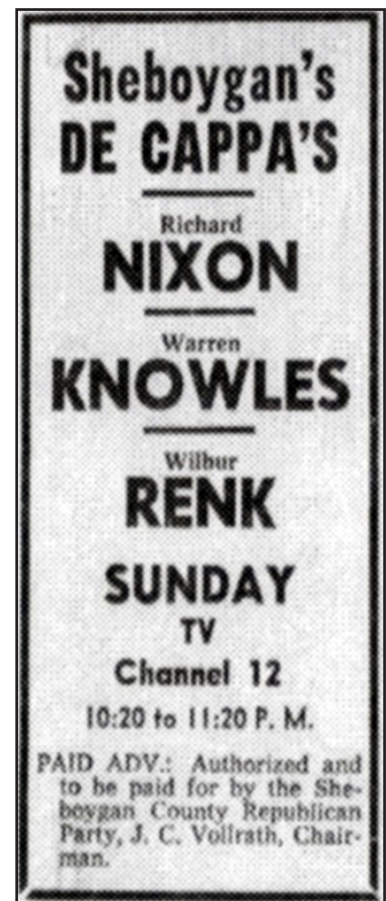
Because of commitments to work and school, Chris Schommer and Mike Pungercar left the DeCapas. However, on Friday, August 27, 1965, at the Jazzy-Rockin'-Nanny, put together by Klusmeier and held at Urban Junior High School, Mike and Chris joined Ron and John on stage singing some DeCapa favorites. From The Sheboygan Press, Saturday, August 28, 1965:

"Chris was never in better voice. The 'Summertime' tones ringing out beautifully and her sweet sincerity coming through again and again."

It was their last public performance and the audience was reluctant to

let them go. The DeCapas officially disbanded after the show.

Klusmeier resumed his music studies at Lakeland College (University) that fall; John Ott would be a sophomore at WSU-Platteville. Mike Pungercar and Chris Schommer would resume studies at the University of Wisconsin, Sheboygan County Center. 🍃



Newspaper ad



 Scan for more information!

Scan the code (or visit <https://bit.ly/decapa-five>) to view an online album filled with DeCapa memorabilia including a video of their performance on Ted Mack's Original Amateur Hour, digital recordings of "The Short Years" and "Brazos," an article about where the Hootenanny performers are now, photos, and newspaper clippings.

**SHEBOYGAN COUNTY HISTORICAL RESEARCH CENTER
PRESENTS**

2024

SALOON STORIES

THE HISTORY OF LOCAL AUTO RACING

AN HOUR OF LIBATIONS, LAUGHTER, AND LEARNING



BEGINS AT 6:30 PM

FEBRUARY 15

THE EVOLUTION OF RACING
IN SHEBOYGAN COUNTY
PRESENTED BY ROGER MUELLER
AND HENRY DICKMANN

MARCH 21

HISTORY OF ROAD AMERICA:
AMERICA'S NATIONAL PARK
OF SPEED PRESENTED BY
ERIC MUELLER

APRIL 18

SHEBOYGAN COUNTY'S LINK
TO NASCAR PRESENTED BY
JERRY MUELLER

MAY 16

THE HISTORY OF 141 SPEEDWAY
PRESENTED BY
JOE VERDEGAN

SHEBOYGAN COUNTY



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W3820 County Road C
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Food & Drink Specials Available

GENEROUSLY
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DNA 101: A Seminar for Beginners with Dana Kelly
Friday, April 19, 2024 — 9:00 am to 12:30 pm
Held at the Generations,
1500 Douglas Drive, Plymouth

This 3.5 hour seminar will introduce newbies or those who need help to the fun of DNA testing for genealogy. Dana Kelly, Executive Director of the Norwegian American Genealogical Center & Naeseth Library in Madison, Wisconsin will present the following topics.

1. Introduction to Genetic Genealogy – Understanding Your Match List
2. Applying DNA – Cousin Matching
3. Ethnicity Estimate
4. Company & Test Comparisons – Do you choose Ancestry, 23 and Me or others?

Bring your own test results if you need help with interpretation. Doors open at 8:15 am. Coffee, juice, water and snacks will be available. Generations is fully handicapped accessible.

**For seating purposes, please register ahead of time
by calling (920) 467-4667!**

Volunteer Spotlight

Deb Harder
Glenbeulah, WI



Tell us a little about yourself.

I love the outdoors, and have a degree in Wildlife Biology from UW-SP. I recently retired from over 30 years with the Department of Natural Resources, mostly in Plymouth and the Kettle Moraine–Northern Unit. I met my husband, John, while stationed at Plymouth, and we raised our daughter here. Although I grew up in Dodge County, my dad was raised from age 8 in Elkhart Lake. My grandfather, Carl Birkholz, was the commander of the German POW camp in Sheboygan, and after the war he retired and bought land out at Sheboygan Marsh. His father, Robert Karl, was a coachman for a Chicago beer baron and would spend the summers working for them in Elkhart Lake. So, though I'm not a native, it seemed fate to return to my roots here, and consider Sheboygan County my home.

How long have you been volunteering at the Center?

I've been volunteering at the Center for just over a year, although I visited here for many more years. One of my hobbies is genealogy, and the resources here are tremendous!

What prompted you to volunteer?

Researching my family history gave me a taste of the resources available at the Research Center, but I wanted to learn more about what the Center had to offer. Besides genealogy, I love local history, and preserving that past is a core mission of the center. The staff here is incredibly knowledgeable, helpful, and welcoming. Volunteering here allows me to indulge my interests, and work with a great group of people.

What are your favorite projects to work on at the Center?

My special areas of interest are maps, family histories, and cemeteries, so any chance I get to work on those projects is a special treat

How often do you volunteer?

It's incredible how quickly your time gets monopolized after retirement, but I try to get there 1–2 days per week.

Research Center Acquires New Building



The SCHRC has acquired the building at 517 Monroe Street in Sheboygan Falls. Formerly used by Mersberger Financial Group, the building became available as a result of Mersberger relocating to their new building at 1160 Fond du Lac Avenue in the Falls. This new building is across the parking lot behind the Center. The Center will take possession of the building on April 1.

With this acquisition, the Center now has three buildings on its campus. The Mersberger Building will be used for administrative offices, meeting rooms, and collection processing. The building at 511 Adams Street will be used for collection storage. The Mill House — which will remain the face of the organization — will continue to be used for research and book sales, exhibits, and other activities. For work flow, the current plan is to have collections received at the Mill House, transferred to Mersberger for processing, and taken to Adams for storage.

This is an exciting development! The new building provides valuable space for processing large collections, large-size documents, and architectural drawings. Volunteers who process collections often share space with individuals who visit the Library in the Mill House regularly for

research purposes. The large and open second floor will allow for several individual work areas, plus a large open area for spreading out work without compromising space for other work.

As collection acquisition increases and service to researchers, genealogists, and writers expand, the Center must continue to grow to meet the need of preserving the history of the greater Sheboygan County area. This building answers several needs for the SCHRC: more space for volunteer work, more space for collection processing, more meeting and classroom space for Center events and activities, and more office space! All of this shows GROWTH — growth that supports and inspires sustainability in the decades to come.

Steven K. Rogstad
Executive Director

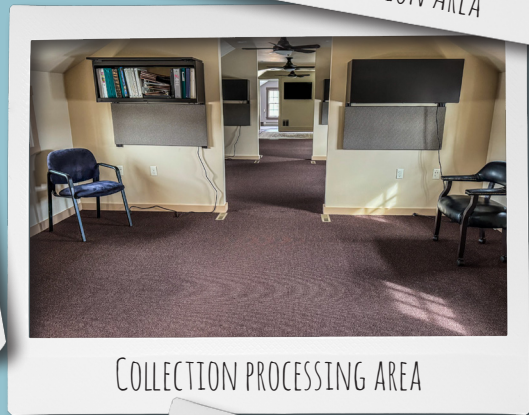




BOARD ROOM/CONFERENCE ROOM



RECEPTION AREA



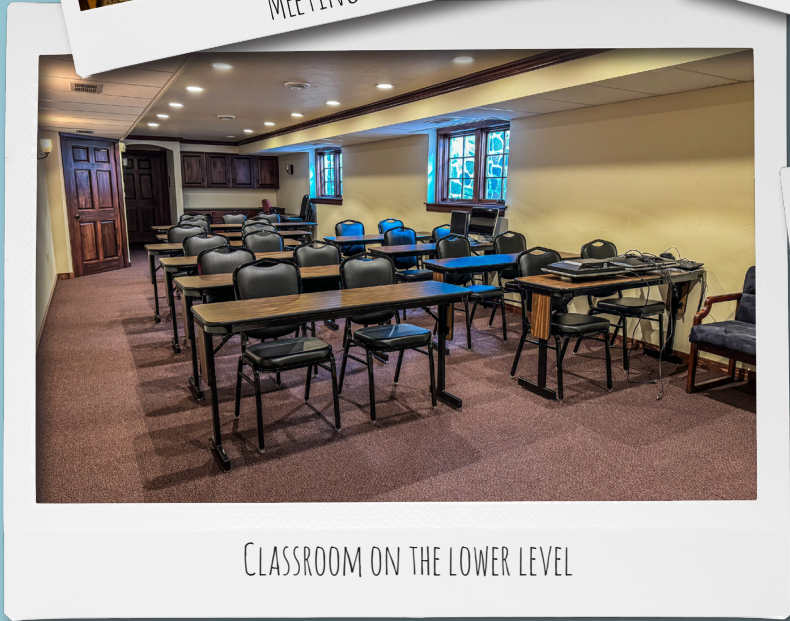
COLLECTION PROCESSING AREA



MEETING ROOM



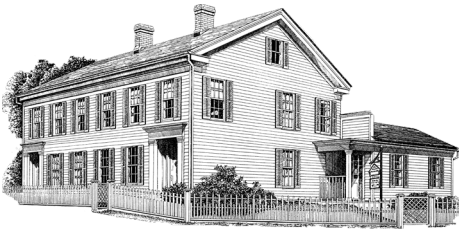
COLLECTION PROCESSING AREA



CLASSROOM ON THE LOWER LEVEL



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There was a full house at Chris & Sue’s on Thursday, March 21 for the second session of Saloon Stories. Eric Mueller presented “The History of Road America: America’s National Park of Speed.” We learned about the construction of Road America in 1955 and were fortunate to have Ward Torke, who helped construct Road America, in the audience.



SCHRC Book Club



May 16, 2024
 1 to 2:30 pm
 To register, call (920) 467-4667
 or scan the code above!

The book club will discuss Rex Alan Smith’s *The Carving of Mount Rushmore*. This is the first book to tell the complete story of Mount Rushmore and includes more than 60 black-and-white photographs!

Participants are responsible for obtaining their own book.

