NEW GLARUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Volume 1/Issue 8/November 2018

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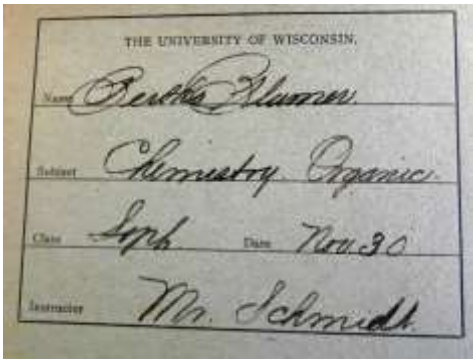

BOARD OF DIRECTORS REPORT – OCTOBER 2018

Two grant proposals were approved by the Board of Directors for submission to the New Glarus Community Foundation. One grant proposal focuses on securing professional consultant services for redesigning portions of the Hall of History exhibits for the 175th anniversary of the founding New Glarus. The second grant proposal, complimenting the first, is to secure dress forms so that costumes and clothing can be displayed as part of the exhibits. If this grant is received, we will also be able to collaborate with the Steussy-Kuenzi Legion Post to display military uniforms as part of the centennial celebration of the founding of the post in 2019.

The Board adopted an Equal Opportunity policy as part of its organizational structure confirming a commitment to non-discrimination and equal access to programs and activities, regardless of individuals' abilities.

We noted our progress in increasing the number of electronic newsletters that are distributed to members which saves postage costs. This month 42 copies of the newsletter will be sent via email and 72 copies will be mailed through the postal service. We thank you for your help in meeting our goal.

Recent Donations

LouAnn Bodenmann gave the Historical Society USDA pamphlets related to processing meat on the farm, an advertising pamphlet from Fuhrman's drug store about farm meat production and a Mt. Vernon Telephone Directory for the area published in April 1958. A Wilhelm Tell 28th annual advertising brochure and a placemat from Hofmann's Wilhelm Tell Supper Club was donated by John Colstad. We also received antique clothing from Katie Ingwell Elmer, autographed copies of "Letters from the Boys, Wisconsin WWI Soldiers Write Home" from author, Carrie A. Meyer and props for our Civil War exhibit from Jim Hulburt. William Blumer III donated a photo of the grand-daughters of New Glarus' first doctor, Sam Blumer along with some UW Medical school test and sketch books from the early 1920s belonging to Dr. Bertha Blumer, who practiced medicine along with her sisters in Hollywood, CA. Lastly a hand-turned wooden bedframe made by Fridolin Streiff, an 1861 immigrant and Civil War veteran, was shipped to us by Mary Ann (Schindler) Ward, a great-granddaughter of Fridolin, who lives in the state of Washington.

Preserving the History of Swiss Fashion

The Wilhelm Tell Guild has presented the Wilhelm Tell Play for more than 80 years, beginning in 1938. Young women of New Glarus served as Usherettes beginning with the first presentations of the pageant. In August 1940 the Usherettes debuted costumes representing the 22 Cantons of Switzerland. The costumes were sewn by local residents after much research into the styles worn in each Canton. Edwin Barlow, who conceived and directed the Tell play, recommended "dress up" styles using his collection of illustrations, representing garb of the 14th century.

Referred to as "Swiss Misses" and "Alpine Glamour Girls" in an issue of the Capital Times in 1940, the Usherettes, then and still today, bring bright and beautiful colors to the green of the outdoor amphitheater which is the Wilhelm Tell Grounds. The costumed Usherettes have not only served as hostesses for seating at the play, but are educated about the Canton that they represent so that they can convey facts about the Canton to visitors, such as languages spoken in the Canton, information about occupations of its residents and other unique features. The young women also provide folk dancing for entertainment during the intermission of the Tell play. The dances were added as a component of Usherette duties in 1940. Barlow brought Mrs. Rose Witschi, a former member of the Bern Opera and director of the folk dances at the Swiss Pavilion at the New York World's Fair, to New Glarus for two weeks to instruct the girls.

The value of the costumes at the time they were created is documented at $2000, which is approximately $35,000 in today's dollars. Some of the fabric and trim was noted as coming from New York City, which was Mr. Barlow's part-time residence. The original costumes were displayed for a week in the windows of the Manchester's Department Store on the Capitol Square in Madison and in subsequently scheduled fashion shows in New Glarus for Wilhelm Tell weekend, for Cheese Days in Monroe and at tourism promotional events in the Midwest over the past 80 years.

While the Tell Guild has been able to use a cedar closet installed in the Zwingli House of the Swiss United Church of Christ for storage since the first costumes were made, costumes have been individually stored in donated cardboard boxes. Cardboard can contribute to staining and deterioration of fabrics over time, and despite the cedar lined storage area, cardboard can also harbor insects that may do damage to expensive fabrics and trims on the costumes. In order to help preserve the costumes long-term, members of the New Glarus Historical Society supported the Wilhelm Tell Guild in applying for a grant to buy museum standard, acid-free storage boxes for the costumes and hats and to replace several costumes that have deteriorated through normal wear and tear. The Historical Society is fortunate to have access to the original Usherette photographs and documentation of costume fabrics compiled by recently deceased Elda Schiesser during the time she served as costume mistress for the Tell Guild. This catalog was later updated by Barbara Thacker in the early 1970s. This documentation will ensure adherence to the original concept of the costumes conceived by Edwin Barlow in 1940 when replacement costumes are sewn.

In addition, photographs of and featured articles noting the Usherettes colorful representation of Switzerland to visitors are present in preserved newspaper clippings in the archives of the Historical Society, a testament to the importance of this Tell Guild group to our community. Being a member of the Usherettes can be a very memorable volunteer commitment for young women of our community and an opportunity that offers them experience in public speaking and performance. Usherettes have been the representatives of the Village of New Glarus and the Wilhelm Tell Guild for numerous press conferences and part of the welcoming Committee for visiting Swiss dignitaries and resident dignitaries, including several Governors of Wisconsin, over the years. The photo below depicts Beatrice Hefty wearing the 1940 Canton Aargau costume.

Harvest Fest 2018

Harvest Fest was marred by continuous rain on Sunday, October 7, however our loyal and dedicated volunteer craftsmen and women braved the weather and we welcomed 237 visitors carrying lots colorful umbrellas to the museum for the event. Our bad weather back-up plan allowed us to move craft demonstrations inside the Village buildings which made it possible for lots of visitor engagement and opportunities for kids to try out old-time skills, despite the weather. A number of members of the Historical Society took advantage of their free admission benefit for the event. The bake sale and sales of grilled cheese sandwiches raised more than $300 to benefit the Historical Society. Check out our Facebook page for more photos of Harvest Fest 2018.

Children were fascinated to see the flames under the cheese kettle, grind corn and try their hand at leather tooling.

Warren Sveum the wheelwright and Ted Sponem, the blacksmith worked despite the rain.

Sherry makes soap, Rose paints flowers on china and Kim helps print a poster for Alice to take home with her.

DID YOU KNOW?

Nearly 50 of Wisconsin's 72 counties were represented by visitors signing our guest book during the 2018 tourist season. This year visitors also came to the museum from every state in the United States except Hawaii, Vermont and West Virginia. We welcomed many visitors from Switzerland along with guests from Australia, Brazil, Chile, China, Columbia, England, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, Mexico, Norway, the Philippines, Russia, Scotland, South Korea, Sweden, Taiwan, and the Ukraine.

We thank the Bank of New Glarus for their support in publishing the New Glarus Historical Society newsletter.

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