

Germantown Historical Society **Newsletter**



INCORPORATED – 1974

JANUARY, 2023

From the GHS President

Another year has passed, and winter is a good time to reflect on what happened last year and look ahead to next year.

The 2022 Oktoberfest event was again successfully held in September. People of all ages enjoyed an atmosphere of Gemütlichkeit, even though we experienced some periods of rain and even a short storm with high winds. The 2023 Oktoberfest will be held on the last FULL weekend of September 23 and 24. Planning is already underway.

2022 was an eventful year for the Christ Church Museum and Cemetery. The restoration and preservation of the 8 side windows was completed. They now look great and will be preserved into the foreseeable future. In spring of 2023 we expect the 2 front windows to be refurbished and completed.



Freistadt Pomeranian Dancers

The Christ Church Cemetery has been rejuvenated by Rex Melius and his Cemeterian volunteers. All the older 1800's grave markers have been straightened and cleaned to give the entire cemetery a "new" appearance.

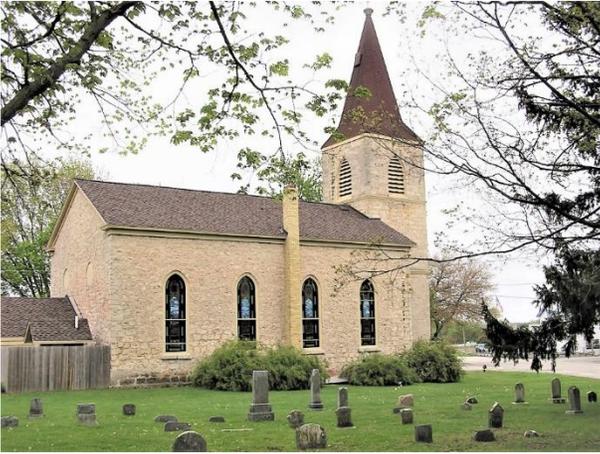
Also, Christ Church Cemetery was investigated using ground-penetrating radar by Professor Peter Neal Peregrine and his students from Lawrence University, Dept of Anthropology. Numerous unmarked gravesites were detected and further searching for possible hidden grave markers will begin in the spring.

The historic displays inside the Christ Church Museum have been receiving a great deal of attention being researched and given display cards to give the visitor a more enjoyable and informative experience. Arrangements of the displays have been improved and some "new" items added. In 2022 hundreds of visitors toured our 3 museums, and a common feedback comment was, "I had no idea how amazing this place is. Thank you for taking care of these historic items and buildings." In 2023 we are preparing to display a "new" 1890 potbelly stove in the Christ Church Museum and continue to discover all the old items that we already have and could be displayed in an interesting way.

In 2022 the Wolf Haus Resource Center welcomed over 30 visitors who were given hours of personal attention researching their ancestors and learning the role they played in the development of Germantown's early days. We also responded via email to numerous other inquiries about historical records or genealogy questions. In 2023 the Wolf Haus Resource Center will receive upgraded technology so many old 1800's documents and books can be digitally preserved and physically preserved in fire resistant storage containers.

Interested in "working" on historic preservation? Please contact us. Jim Dix 262 853 1953

Window Restoration Nearing Completion



This last fall the 8 side stained-glass window exteriors of Christ Church were refurbished and coated with new preservatives so that the metal structure holding the stained glass will be stable for many years to come. The protective storm windows received a new coat of caulk and paint. The work was done professionally by Tim McGuire and his employees.

In 1914 the Ladies Aid of Christ Church raised the money to create and install these works of glass art. Today, these windows look brand new thanks to a grant from the Theodore and Anna Grollman Fund, and a significant donation from Betty and Jerry Fuller. Betty's mother was part of the 1914 Ladies Aid group. Sadly, Betty's husband, Jerry passed away on January 4, 2023. The Christ Church window restoration will be part of their legacy.

The two front windows are to be completed this spring. Currently Essmann's Millwork has completed fabricating 2 new storm windows, and as weather permits planning for the removal and set-back of one of the stained-glass windows and then installation of the 2 protective glass windows in front to preserve them from the weather. We look forward to this work being completed this spring.

Thanks to Rex Melius and the Cemeterians

By Mary Bykowski, Volunteer Genealogist

When the Covid-19 pandemic had most people indoors and looking for something that was safe to do, I found myself spending time in some of the area's oldest cemeteries catching up on family history requests and filling submissions for the Findagrave website. One thing that was apparent was the sorry condition for many of the headstones and for the flat grave markers that were all but disappearing under weeds, grass and debris.

I had joined a Facebook group called the Cemeterians sometime before that being interested in the preservation and restoration of these gravestones and contacted the head of the Washington County group-Rex Melius. I told him about the Christ Church Cemetery in Germantown was really in need of his services and how would we go about making that happen.



Rex said that he has been doing this volunteer work for the past 6 years and it had all started by visiting his mother's gravesite and finding it overgrown with weeds and tired looking. To say nothing of the toll that the environment has on certain materials used for grave markers. Working with Jim Dix, the newly elected President of the Germantown Historical Society and getting permission from Marge Miller, member of Our Savior Church, who actually owns the cemetery, we made plans with Rex to supply him with the necessary materials and he would clean and restore the stones that needed it free of charge.

Now, two years later, the hard work that Rex and his volunteers have done make the cemetery practically gleam! Rex has cleaned over 125 stones, most days by himself from May to October, no matter what the weather. I interviewed Rex a while back and he said that in the past 6 years, he's probably done over 3,000 gravestones in Washington County!! He said that he has had many outstanding volunteers help him. One of them was a United Airlines pilot and his wife who were on vacation from out of state and when they read he



would be at the cemetery, they re-arranged their travel so they would be there to help. He also mentioned that he pays special attention to veteran's graves, especially from the Civil War mostly out of respect for their valor and sometimes from stories of veteran's descendants. There



aren't many people with that kind of commitment to honor those that have gone before us but those that also come after so others can continue to pay respects to their ancestors. Loving history in itself is commendable, but to go to such selfless lengths to preserve and protect it is something else entirely different. Rex is truly a hero in our eyes and we cannot thank him enough for his hard work and devotion.

Rex Milius, Leader of Washington County Cemeterians

Remembering Robert Kohls (1932-2022)



Recently we lost a dedicated and long-time volunteer for the Germantown Historical Society.

Bob Kohls passed away on December 23, 2022. Bob had a love of history, as he taught history and social studies for many years at the high school level. After retirement he researched his genealogy which culminated in writing two family genealogy books. He volunteered for the Historical Society for 30 years and was still active during 2019.

His dedication to helping at the Wolf Haus Research Center has been missed.

Germantown history and genealogy.....

By Mary Herrick, Volunteer Genealogist

The Hamlets of Germantown

German immigration to America began in the 1670's, settling in Pennsylvania. In the early 1840's they arrived in the Territory of Wisconsin, and they discovered the land looked very much like their homeland. Germany had rolling hills, woodlands, and areas of flat lands for farming and similar weather conditions.

They followed an old Indian footpath that ran from the shores of Milwaukee northwest to a sparse settlement called Town Nine. Federal land in the Territory of Wisconsin was open for homesteading. The first land was purchased by Anthony Wiesner and Levi Ostrander in 1839.

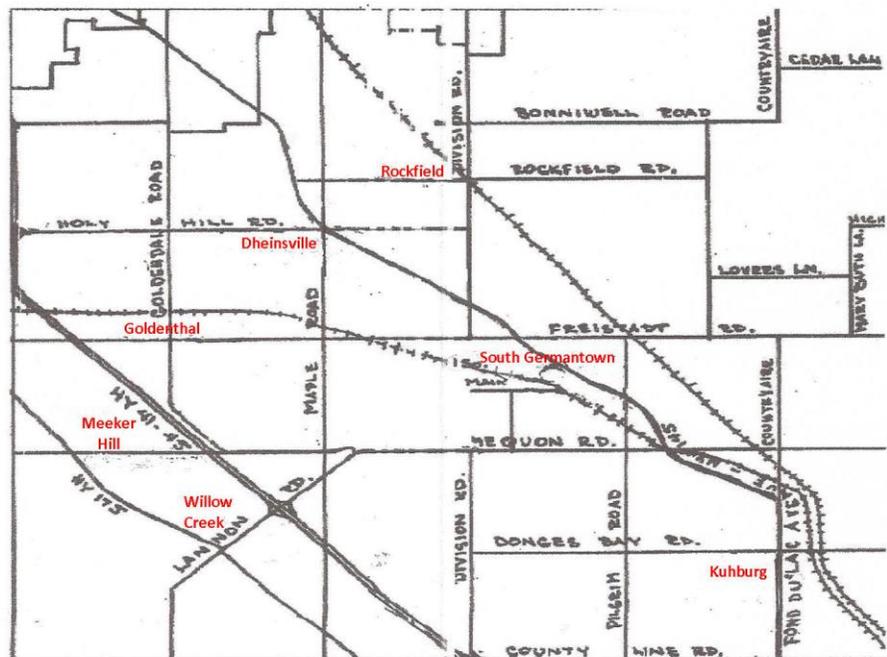
Homesteading required the land purchased to be ready for farming, a house to be built on the land and crops to sustain them for two years. After these requirements were met, they would own the land. The purchase price for land was \$1.25 per acre. By 1845 all the land was sold. The purpose was for Wisconsin Territory to achieve statehood. At this time the Territory of Wisconsin was part of the Northwest Territory.

The first town meeting was held on April 7, 1846 in a house that was built by John Mattes. Over time the Territory of Wisconsin increased in population. The main seat of government was in Madison where they conducted a census almost yearly beginning in 1836 until 1846. The purpose of the town meeting in 1846 was in response to a referendum which was issued to vote on the Territory of Wisconsin becoming a state and electing Town Officials. At this time the name Town 9 was changed to Germantown. The vote was 118 ayes 9 nays to become a state. The documents then traveled to Washington, D.C. for approval. This was a long journey by horse and wagon over dirt roads. On May 29, 1848 Wisconsin became the 30th state.

Germantown was mainly a farming community. The first settlers grew wheat as their main crop which was a staple for the families and the prime grain needed to feed their farm animals. Wisconsin had been one of the largest wheat growing areas in the country. After many years the ground was depleted of its nutritional value. The farmers then changed over to raising cows. Today, Wisconsin is known as the "Dairy State".

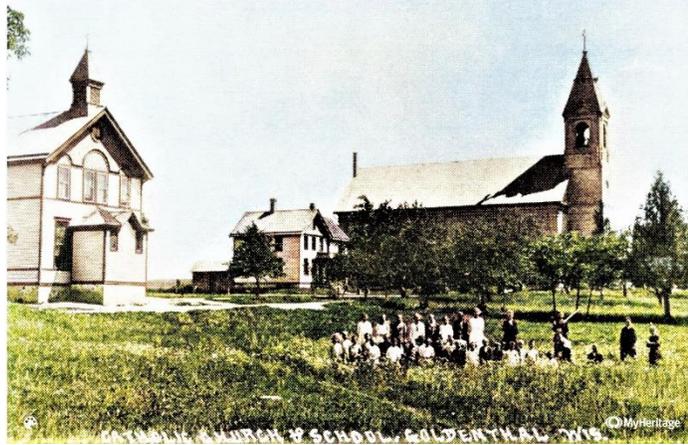
Germantown developed from seven hamlets:

Meeker Hill, Willow Creek.
Goldenthal, Dheinsville,
Kuhberg, Rockfield and
South Germantown.



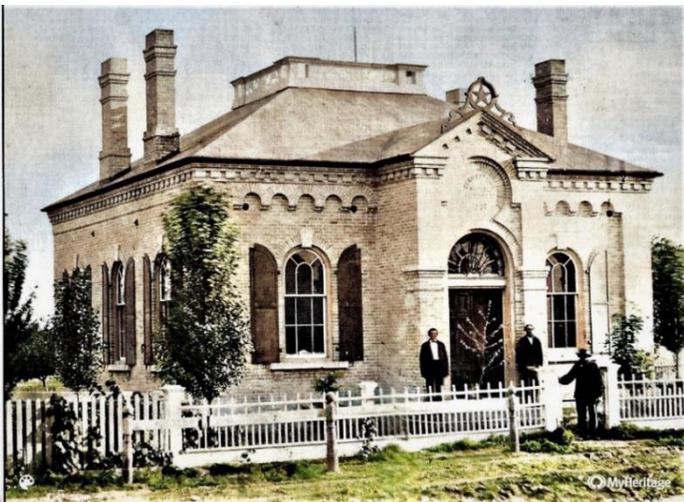
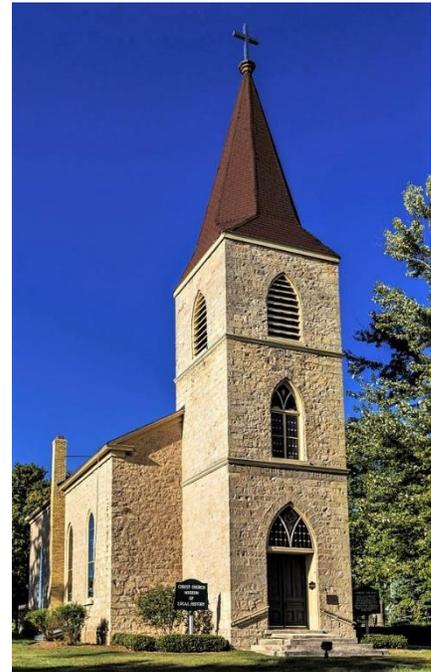
Over the years as more immigrants arrived, most from Germany and some from Ireland, the hamlets grew. The hamlet of **Goldenthal** was established around St. Boniface Catholic Church in the same way as the German tradition of the village with the church in the center. The immigrants who were Roman Catholics arrived from the Bavarian Region of Germany in the early 1840's. Goldenthal's name was changed to Goldendale and is at the crossroads of Goldendale and Freistadt Roads.

St Boniface Catholic Church, parsonage, convent and school
Established 1845
Church built 1867



Dheinsville was settled by immigrants from the Hunsruck area of Germany and followed the tradition of the church being in the center of the village. Today Christ Evangelical Church is on the National Register of Historical Places.

Christ Evangelical Church
Established 1842
Building constructed 1862

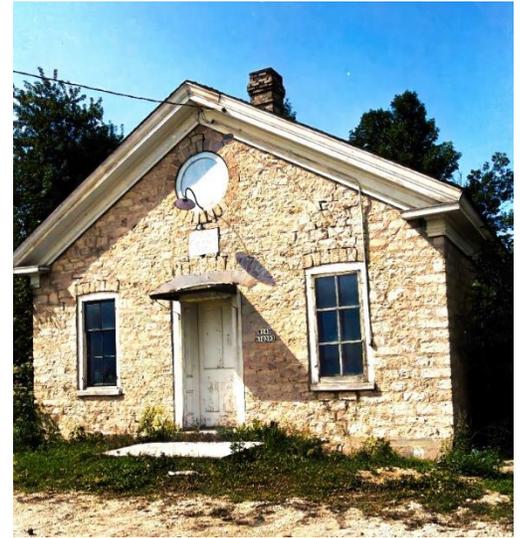


The hamlet included a general store with post office, the first insurance company in the state of Wisconsin, a stagecoach stop with lodging, and the Valentine Wolf shoemaker shop.

Germantown Mutual Insurance Company
Established 1854
Brick building 1870

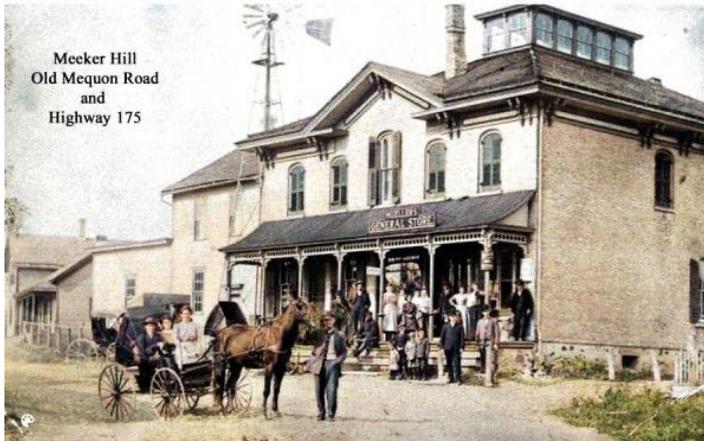
Kuhberg, translated means “cow town”. The village was settled by Hessen immigrants from the Hessen region of Germany. Originally it was a layover for farmers who were taking their cows to market in Milwaukee.

Also located in Kuhberg is School House #1. The schoolhouse was built with the stone from the local quarry at Rockfield. Schools were important to Germantown so the Town Board decided the schools were to be built within one mile of each other so students would be able to walk to school. On November 11, 1918, Armistice Day World War I, the name of Kuhberg was changed to Victory Center.



School House #1, Built in 1874

Willow Creek located on the western edge of Germantown, was another rest stop for farmers on their way to market. It was originally known as “Pigsville”.



Today, **Mecker Hill** located in section 19 remains a small hamlet. The original general store is still along the main road. The cupola on the roof and the porch which was along the front of the building has been removed.

General Store and Post Office
Late 1800's

The railroad was the major influence for the development of commercial business. In the 1850's two railroad lines were built through Germantown: the Chicago, Milwaukee, St Paul Railroad and The Milwaukee Road. The railroad increased the residential growth and the commercial market expanded beyond Germantown.

The Milwaukee Road line passed through **Rockfield** to service the area with stone from the lime quarry. The stone was used to build homes that replaced the original log cabins. In 1862 Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church in Dheinsville was built using the stone from the Rockfield quarry.



General Store and Post Office, Main Street, Rockfield, Late 1800's

South Germantown was originally Staatsville. The name was changed to South Germantown because further up the line there was a station called North Germantown. The railroad provided the ability to move products to Milwaukee and for the development of other towns to the north.

In 1927 the Village of Germantown was 1 mile by .625 of a mile in area. In 1963 all the hamlets were merged into one incorporated village known as Germantown. The land was annexed and today it is 35 square miles.

Main Street, South Germantown
Fire House, businesses, and
residences



The layout of the hamlets shows the strong German influence the immigrants brought with them from their homeland to America. They developed the area with small hamlets or villages with the church in the center surrounded by farmland. Many of the original farms are still here and are still being farmed. My great grandfathers' house built in 1866 still stands on the acreage that was his farm.

Today, there are fourth and fifth generation descents of the original immigrants still living in Germantown. We have strong roots with German traditions. These traditions are celebrated every fall at Oktoberfest with the German beer, food, music, singing and dancing of our ancestors.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT
2022 Donors

Theo & Anna Grollman Fund – Grant for Christ Church Windows
Betty and Jerry Fuller, for Church Windows
Tim and Pat Petzold, for Wolf Haus sign
Fritz & Eileen Gierach, for Festhalle
Go Riteway, for Festhalle
Beverly Wilke, in honor of Irene Blau
Associated Bank, for Bast Bell Museum
Ken & Barb Melius, in honor of Otto Dhein family
Barb & Jeff Lutz, for Oktoberfest and Christ Church Museum
Jeff Smoller, for GHS in general
All the generous sponsors for Oktoberfest – see page 9

ICH DANKE IHNEN SEHR --- I THANK YOU VERY MUCH

I wish to personally thank all the people who contributed in some way this past year volunteering for either Oktoberfest or for the Germantown Historical Society in general.

Thank you to the Oktoberfest Committee for the countless hours of planning this major event, and then actually going out and making it all happen, and then taking it down and cleaning up the aftermath.

Thank you to the Board of the GHS who supported and oversaw all of the various activities that required their attention throughout the entire year. Thank you to all the volunteers who selflessly contributed many hours working at the 3 museums or working from home doing online research to identify artifacts, colorizing vintage photos, or helping with other people's genealogy requests. Thank you to all the volunteers who contributed by helping with our 3 social media pages, newsletters, advertising, or placing Oktoberfest street banners. Thank you to the one hundred volunteers at Oktoberfest who directed parking traffic, cleaned up the trash cans, helped children paint pumpkins, grilled bratwurst, sat behind a table to sell things like raffle tickets or souvenirs, served German desserts, or poured a pitcher of beer. Thank you to all the individuals and companies who contributed financially or in kind. Thank you to all who wrote a check for a thousand dollars, a hundred dollars, or put a 5 dollar bill into a donation box. I sincerely appreciate every person who contributed in any way to help support the Germantown Historical Society during the last year.

Jim Dix, President GHS

SAVE THE DATE

**JOIN US FOR THE
ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING – TUESDAY, APRIL 18, 2023 5:30 pm**

**We are planning an Annual Membership Meeting
at Fox & Hounds Restaurant & Tavern
Details to Follow**

EMAIL REQUEST

We are trying to upgrade our mailing list to include email addresses. You can receive your Newsletters or timely reminders of upcoming events via email. Also, our Newsletters have several pictures which are much clearer and in color on the internet version.

If you wish to receive Newsletters via your email, please send your email address to Jim Dix at ghsjdix@gmail.com so we can update your record. Thank you.

Thank you to our Sponsors



Presenting Sponsor



Tourism and Betterment Grant



Event Sponsors



In Kind Sponsors

Premier Flooring – Aldo's Catering – Bub's Irish Pub – Witte's Vegetable Farm LLC - Auto Tech
 Proview Outdoor Services LLC – Armor Coating – Al's Locksmith Service – Eagle Disposal
 Arrowhead Golf - Pet's Supplies Plus, West Bend location - WCHS Washington County Humane Society
 Milwaukee Appliance (refrigerator behind bar) American Legion Post No. 1, Germantown (ice)
 - Pine Hill Orchard LLC Barb Lesch - dessert display case - Kiwanis of Germantown
 Germantown School District - Key Club - Wrestling Club - National Honors

2023 Dates to Remember:

April 18 - Annual Meeting – Third Tuesday of April

June 1 - Wolf Haus Opens for the Season

June 1 - Bast Bell and Church Museums Open by Appointment; or dates to be determined

September 23 & 24—2022 Oktoberfest

September 30 — Wolf Haus, Bast Bell and Church Museums Close for the Season

The Wolf Haus & Genealogy Research Center will be open on Wednesdays from 1:00 pm – 4:00 pm from June 1st thru September 30th

The Bast Bell Museum and Christ Church Museum of Local History can be toured during Wolf Haus Museum hours, inquire there. Also, groups are welcome to tour all three museums by appointment.

We Hope to See You

GERMANTOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P.O. BOX 31
Germantown, WI 53022
262-628-3170