

# *Germantown Historical Society* **Newsletter**



**INCORPORATED – 1974**

**SEPTEMBER 2021**

From the GHS President

In our last newsletter I talked about 2021 will be a year of transition to the “new normal”. The events of this summer have held true to that theme. The next time you take a walk through Historic Dheinsville Park you will notice several significant changes, and all for the better.

Beginning in the main parking area you will definitely notice it has been paved and improved with clear markings for public parking including designated disabled parking slots. The walkways to the new Festhalle and continuing through the park have also been paved which gives a whole new look and feeling to visiting and enjoying the entire park. The landscaping has been trimmed and maintained at a higher level. All of these improvements come at the expense and care of the



Village of Germantown Parks Department. We owe them a big thank you for this renewed interest in turning “our” park into one of the Village’s premier destinations. Indeed, we have noticed a significant increase in public activities at the park which previously had been only a hidden gem which was undiscovered by its own residents.

The three museums which we operate in the park, or across the street, have received attention also. The Bast Bell Museum has received a new coat of exterior paint, and some weather damaged boards have been replaced. The Wolf Haus is scheduled to have some deteriorating window frames restored and then given extra protection to preserve them for future generations. Again, this is being done at the expense and direction of the Village.

The GHS still owns the Potato Pancake House, and it is currently being restored at the expense and care of the GHS. The 30 year old roof which was covered in moss and mildew has been replaced with a “brand new” cedar shake roof. Actually, a good portion of the new roof consists of decades old cedar shake shingles which were preserved away from sunlight and now donated by Marge and Ken Miller. The Hessischer Verein sign will be restored and will remain on the building to preserve the traditions of that local German heritage organization.



The Church Museum displays are being redesigned and will eventually be presented in new cabinetry, etc. The church building exterior is being regularly maintained and new landscape stone has been installed to reduce future maintenance costs and improve its appearance.

The Christ Church Cemetery is being restored and cleaned by a volunteer organization called the Cemeterians. It is led by a very humble and decent man named Rex Melius. He has donated numerous hours raising old gravestones which were buried at least several inches deep below the surface, or almost completely buried. When needed he repairs the broken pieces to become whole again. Then the stones are cleaned and sprayed with a preservative.



Rex recently held a seminar at the cemetery in which a group of volunteers restored, cleaned, and preserved about 20 gravestones. Many of them were in the section closest to the church and road. Many were of babies or young children. Apparently, that was a designated area for the children who died young back in the mid 1800’s. All of this work was donated at no cost to the GHS or the Cemetery Association.

So, thank you to so many people who are contributing to renewing the physical appearance of our historic environment, and we hope others like you will join us in renewing the Germantown Historical Society.

Sincerely,  
Jim Dix



Volunteers are still needed to help arrange/sort items in the museums, as well as to assist with group tours at the museums. We usually have 6-10 group tours during the season which runs June 1<sup>st</sup> thru October 31<sup>st</sup>. The groups range from 20 – 60 people, and we need up to 3 volunteers for the larger groups to assist our museum employee with the tours.

Responsibilities include guiding the groups between the three museums and sharing with them the history of the area, the settlers and the museums. Tours are booked weekdays

usually between 10:00 am – 3:00 pm. Each tour lasts approximately 2 hours.

If you are interested in providing any assistance, please contact the museum at 262-628-3170, or Jim Dix at ghsjdix@gmail.com.



Preparations for Oktoberfest are in full swing. Did you know there is a shortage of imported beers? We are working on lining up alternatives if German beers are not available, to ensure a variety of choices. Exciting new changes including additional porta potties, new management of the food area, a new roof on the pancake house, paved walkways and main parking, a 50/50 cash raffle, meat raffles, a new platform for the Online Silent Auction and more.

Favorite past events like the Dachshund Dash, Classic Car Show, Bounce House for the kids, 55" Smart TV raffle and Barlympics continue. Some returning vendors, some new vendors/booths. You will need to come and find out who! **FLYER INCLUDED ON BACK - SPREAD THE WORD!** We are looking forward to seeing you again this year!

## In Memory of Dennis Dhein

Written by Jim Dix



In December, 2019 Dennis Dhein passed away at his home in Seattle, Washington. He was a lifetime member and supporter of the Germantown Historical Society. Dennis would often give generous donations to the GHS like the Dhein family Bible, and original confirmation certificates belonging to his ancestors who were confirmed in the 1840's in Seibersbach, Germany. He donated funds for the air conditioning inside Christ Church and to generally support the GHS.

In 2020 the Dennis Dhein Estate's Trust Fund named as benefactors both the Germantown Historical Society and the Our Savior's Cemetery Association who maintains the Christ Church Cemetery. Each organization received a gift of over \$120,000.

Over the years I was blessed to become a friend of Dennis. While he lived in Seattle, he would still return to Dheinsville every year. I would often meet him at Christ Church and would sit inside on a pew to have lengthy conversations about the latest news from Dheinsville and the GHS. One time my wife and I had dinner with Dennis when he mentioned his dream of returning to Seibersbach, Germany to visit the homeland of his Dhein ancestors. In 2019 that trip became a reality, and we were invited to join with him and his wife, Colleen. Dennis arranged to have our distant cousins, Peter and Gloria Dhein, be our local guides when we were in the Hunsruck region of Germany. One afternoon we attended a Dhein family get together at the local Dhein Bakery. Dennis distributed to everyone the GHS's brochure on the Walking Tour of Dheinsville.

The picture below shows on the far-left Sue and me standing next to Dennis and Colleen Dhein. On the far-right is the young family of Peter and Gloria Dhein who today still live in Seibersbach. The others are all Dhein relatives who gathered that day at the local Dhein Bakery.



Many people will miss Dennis and remember him as a generous and kind gentleman who always had a heart for his ancestors' history in both the Hunsruck of Germany and in Dheinsville, WI. THANK YOU, Dennis and Colleen, for the memories and your generous donation to help preserve your family's heritage in Germantown, WI.

## ***Germantown history and genealogy....***

By Mary Herrick, Volunteer Genealogist

Christ Evangelical Church was founded in 1842 by Philipp Dhein, William Waschmuth and Andrew Wetterau. It was one of the oldest congregations in Germantown. Their first gatherings were held in a log cabin schoolhouse. In the 1850s Philip Dhein Jr. donated one and one quarter acres of land to build a larger log church in the center of the Dheinsville community. In 1862 the present church was built of rough faced limestone blocks from nearby Rockfield quarry.

Above the entry door is inscribed with the words, "Ev. Christus Kirche". In 1901 the pulpit, altar and pews were purchased. In 1914 the Ladies Aid raised money for the stained glass windows and new electric interior lights. The colorful windows portray Biblical pastoral scenes. German was spoken at church services until 1927 when English became the spoken language at every second Sunday service.

In recent years accent lighting was added to show the beauty of the stain glass windows in the evening. A lighted cross was added on the peak of the bell tower and the entire roof received new shingles.

The 160 year old stone walls were tuckpointed with fresh mortar, and the front entry stairs were repaired to their original appearance. These improvements were made possible by generous donations from descendants of the original pioneer families.

The church has been leased or owned by the Germantown Historical Society since 1975. In 2010 the church received the Germantown Historic Designation. The church today is the best preserved and most historically significant remnant of the crossroads community of Dheinsville as stated in the documents from the United States Department of the Interior National Park Service. Christ Church is on the NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES since 1983.

In 1888, 26 years after the church was built, the three story bell tower was erected by the congregation and the bells were installed in 1890. In addition to the regular services the bells were rung at five PM Saturday evening to welcome the Sabbath. A young boy working in the fields, Elmore Kraemer recalled the welcome sound of these beautiful bells as the end of work and the beginning of his day of rest and worship. When the church was re-opened as a museum, Mr. Kraemer set up a permanent fund for the ringing of the bells every Saturday evening May 1<sup>st</sup> to October 1<sup>st</sup>. His enthusiastic and generous support of our preservation efforts is warmly remembered since his death October 17, 1976. The Bell Tower was dedicated to Elmore Andrew Kraemer on May 6, 1978.

The tradition of ringing of the bells at 5:00 PM on Saturday was continued by Oliver Schowalter. Today this tradition is continuing by his son Scott Schowalter and Orlan ringing the bells.

In the late 1970's the interior of the church was refurbished and painted, and artifacts were placed in display cases. Germantown Historical Society is currently working on renovating the layout of the interior floor plan of the church. The altar area will be changed back to a partial layout of the original church with the addition of religious artifacts on display. The new display cases will be updated with additional information.



## Christ Church Cemetery

The church yard is located adjacent to the church on the west and north side. The first documented burial was 1854. The cemetery contains many early pioneer settlers of the Dheinsville area and their descendants, including five Civil War Veteran soldiers.

The cemetery is currently maintained by the Our Saviour's Cemetery Association.

Currently we are collaborating on another cemetery project. The research center was contacted in 2020 by Mary Bykowski who was researching her ancestors who settled in the Germantown area. Mary is a contributor to the website Find A Grave. She was researching information on the first cemetery of St. Boniface Catholic Church at Goldendale.

Jim Dix and I met with Mary, Father Mike Petrie from St. Boniface Catholic Church, and representatives from the Speaker Corporation who is the current owner of the property. The meeting was to discuss the location of the original burial site of St. Boniface Cemetery. Mary has been working with the State Historical Society to obtain information on the process of making this determination. Ground penetrating radar equipment is used to provide location of old graves. At this time Mary has found a company that will provide the equipment for the St. Boniface project. This is an ongoing project to determine if anyone is buried at that location. We are currently working on the possibility of using this same radar equipment at Christ Church Cemetery to determine where the missing graves or hidden gravestones are located.



In the process of Mary's research on the original St. Boniface Cemetery, she contacted Rex Melius who is the founder of Cemeterians. They are a volunteer organization who restores tombstones in cemeteries. Rex Melius has offered to clean, upright and straighten tombstones at Christ Church Cemetery. The project is currently underway. The Germantown Historical Society Research Center is looking forward to continue working with both Mary and Rex on of these projects.

We hope that you will stop by to see the continuing progress of renewing this historic church building.

## 2021 Dates to Remember:

June 2—Wolf Haus Opens for the Season  
June 4—Bell Museum Opens for the Season  
September 25 & 26—Oktoberfest  
September 29—Wolf Haus Closes for the Season  
October 31—Bell Museum closes for the season

The Wolf Haus & Genealogy Research Center will be open on Wednesdays from 1:00 pm – 4:00 pm from June 1<sup>st</sup> thru October 1<sup>st</sup>.

The Christ Church Museum of Local History can be toured during Bast Bell Museum hours, inquire there.

The Bast Bell Museum is open Friday, Saturday and Sunday from 1:00 pm – 4:00 pm from June 1<sup>st</sup> thru October 31<sup>st</sup>.

**We Hope to See You!**

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