

Germantown Historical Society **Newsletter**



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Oktoberfest 2021

Fantastic family fun was enjoyed by record numbers once again at Germantown's Oktoberfest last September 2021. Thousands of people attended over the two-day event which featured good weather, music, dancing, Dachshund races, vintage car show, kid's play area, German beer, brats, and general gemütlichkeit.

2021 marked the 27th year that the Germantown Historical Society sponsored the event for the extended Germantown community. Our three museums drew hundreds of visitors who often would comment that they had no idea these buildings were here, but they found our tours fascinating. The 2021 event featured the return of Al Dobberfuhl playing the role of the local cobbler, Valentine Wolf. He demonstrated how to make or repair antique shoes while standing on the porch of the 1854 half-timber Wolf Haus. A new addition was Cemetery founder, Rex Melius, who set up a tent in the center of the Christ Church Cemetery to demonstrate how to properly clean and preserve cemetery stones. Both demonstrations were well received and enjoyed by visitors. We hope to add more of these type of attractions in 2022.

The success of this event is the result of many volunteers donating their time and talents. But I wish to single out the members of Oktoberfest Planning Committee who donated hundreds of hours and demonstrated outstanding dedication planning, preparing, and then actually making it happen. They are an impressive group of people that I cannot thank enough.



Bounce House – Kid's Play Area



Dachshunds Races drew large crowds



Pommersche Tanzdeel Freistadt Dancers



Festhalle Family Fun

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From the GHS President

The transition year of 2021 is now written into the history books. Much was accomplished, yet we look forward to still more progress in 2022.

Last year, the Village of Germantown significantly invested in more improvements at Dheinsville Historic Park by paving the parking lot and walkways and improving the landscaping. In 2022 we hope to see further improvements to the entry area of the Bast Bell Museum including fresh landscaping and signage to greet and inform our visiting guests.

The village also began some restoration work on the 1854 Wolf Haus. The “Cream City” brick chimney was tuck pointed and restored. In 2022 the Village will give further attention to the windows and some rotting wood timbers. The GHS will be creating a new entrance sign for the Wolf Haus which will also contain information about the historic building. Inside the Wolf Haus much work has been completed assessing what records and artifacts the GHS has in its possession. In 2022 some of those items will be further organized, labelled, and displayed for our visitors to see and enjoy. Last year, over 30 individuals contacted or visited our resource center and received personal attention and assistance in discovering their ancestral roots or property history. In 2022 Mary Herrick and I will be doing more community outreach to improve the community’s awareness of the GHS and its mission.

Last year, we began to pay more attention to the artifacts inside the Christ Church Museum. Assessing what historical items we have and how to best display them is an ongoing project which will take more time, but in 2022 we hope to create new displays and better inform visitors of the existing artifacts and documents. Last year, we took careful note of the exterior of the Christ Church building and found some of the stained-glass windows metal framings were beginning to show rust, and the “storm windows” needed maintenance. In 2022 we will implement a long overdue project to add protection to the front two stained glass windows, and repair and restore the 8 side stained-glass windows and their protective “storm windows”.

Another recent issue is that the lighted cross at the peak of the church steeple has gone dim. We have contracted to replace the interior cross lighting with new and updated LED lights. This difficult project of renewing the lighted cross will be completed soon.

The cost of these exterior projects exceeds \$34,000. We have applied for financial assistance from organizations interested in historic preservation but will not know if we receive any grants for several months. We have already received some individual donations designated for these projects, but we would appreciate any assistance from others who wish to contribute towards preserving our treasure which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The GHS has an obligation to protect and preserve our community heritage, and in 2022 we still intend to meet those obligations so future generations can learn about and remember their past.

Jim Dix, President GHS

Germantown history and genealogy.....

By Mary Herrick, Volunteer Genealogist

The story of the Valentine Wolf Haus and Christ Evangelical Church were written in the last two Germantown Historical Society newsletters. This is the story of the third museum located at the Dheinsville settlement, the Bast Bell Museum.

The story of the bells begins in a farm field in a small hamlet in Washington County called Rockfield. A young girl was walking through a field on the family farm when she came across a bell lying on the ground. Her name was Sila Lydia Bast. She probably never dreamed that this was the start of a lifelong fondness for collecting bells. Over the years she traveled the world and brought home beautiful, unique bells from far away countries. Her friends and relatives also gave her gifts of bells for her collection. Today, the bell collection numbers over 5,000 bells.

Sila Bast was born November 23, 1900 and was raised on the family farm about a mile and a half northeast of Dheinsville. Her ancestors were early settlers from the Hunsruck region of Germany. They arrived in Germantown in 1848 and many descendants still live in the area. Sila also had an interest in genealogy. She traced her family genealogy back to the 1600's. She wrote three books which are on display at both the Bast Bell Museum and in the Jefferies Genealogy Research room located in the Valentine Wolf Haus next to the Bell Museum. Sila was one of 12 children. A family member told us there was only one time that the whole family was together for a picture. It was October 23, 1911. This family portrait was recently donated to the Germantown Historical Society by her niece, Judy Bast. It will be hung in Christ Church on the east wall near the altar.

Sila was also known as an accomplished pianist who studied piano at the Wisconsin Conservatory of Music in Milwaukee. When Sila passed her family donated the Bast family organ to the Germantown Historical Society. The 1903 organ is located in the Christ Church Museum. She was also an avid gardener who was well known for her cactus garden. Sila and her sister Laura won awards for their cactus gardens at the Wisconsin State Fair in the 1930's.

In 1927 Sila left the family farm to work at her sister and brother-in-law's restaurant called Little Gem on Milwaukee's East Side until the restaurant closed in 1968. During this time Sila continued to collect bells. Her collection grew through her travels and restaurant patrons would bring her gifts of bells from their travels. Sila lived with her sister and brother-in-law in their home on Irving Place in Milwaukee. The attic of the home was remodeled to display her bells. To family members the attic became known as the "belfry".

In 1982 Sila moved to Whitewater to live with her niece, Ernella, who was a professor of Art at the University of Whitewater. As her bell collection grew, she needed a larger area to display them. A room above the garage was added for the bell collection.



The barn before and after restoration

Today the collection has its own building at the historical Dheinsville Settlement. The barn was originally part of the farm of the Valentine Wolf family. The restoration of the 1870's barn was completed in 2000 and is now known as the Bast Bell Museum. Sila's generous bell collection was bequeathed to the Germantown Historical Society and is on display here for the entire world to see. Since the time of Sila's passing in 1992, no more bells have been added in order to preserve her collection.

Part of the collection is the bell at the top of silo of the barn. Originally in 1930 it was donated by Oscar E. Klumb to the Calvary Community Church on Church Street in Germantown. Orville Klumb rescued the bell when the church was demolished for the expansion of the Gehl Dairy Company. The bell was displayed in his yard until another family member Doris Klumb donated the bell to the Germantown Historical Society June, 2000. The bell is rung at the end of each Bell Museum tour.



Sila's collection is one of the largest bell collections in the United States. Some of the bells of interest are the five-foot-high Pagoda from China, an Indian elephant bell, a Persian camel bell, a gong, a 1950 Swiss cow bell, various sizes of chimes, a set of hand bells, school bells, fire station bells and painted porcelain bells, some depicting holidays.

One of the most unique bells is from a Civil War battleship. It was given to Sila by a member of the American Bell Association. The bell is a wood battle rattle which is

commonly made of white oak or similar wood. The rattle was used on ships during the Civil War to call all hands to battle stations. Also on display is the Civil War mule bell which was used on camels before the Civil War in the southwestern desert of the United States. The largest size has a star design on top and is made of bronze.

During Sila's travel in 1953 to Germany and Switzerland her brother-in-law Ernie Hunziker had a bell made for her with her name on it. The bell is located in a niche just inside of the door to the Bast Bell Museum.

The collection can be seen during Museum open hours June 1st to September 30th and group tours by appointment. There is a nominal fee to enjoy the bell displays. Donations to maintain the bell collection are appreciated with thanks from the Germantown Historical Society.



Also housed in the adjacent room in the Bast Bell Museum barn is a historic Fire Station display that includes a pristine 1929 Seagrave Pumper Truck and other firehouse memorabilia.



There is a hose reel which was pulled by horses to fires, pictures of past Fire Chiefs and pictures of the original firehouse. The fire truck is seen in local parades and events within the community of Germantown.

In the last year the newsletters have highlighted the historical buildings that make up the Dheinsville Settlement. In the upcoming year we will continue to write an informative newsletter telling you about the early immigrants and how they began their journey and created Germantown.

To continue to preserve the Settlement and our heritage we ask for you to donate your time as a volunteer. Volunteers are needed not only during Oktoberfest but throughout the year to organize, teach and promote our history.

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 brighter 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.

History of the Pancake House

The restoration of the exterior of the Pancake House has been completed. And it is looking good. So, here is a little history on the old Pancake House.



BEFORE AND AFTER RESTORATION

In 1989 a new local organization was formed as a German club for people of Hessen descent. Hesse is a state of Germany located in the west central region, centered by the Frankfurt-Darmstadt metropolitan areas. This area is northeast of the Hunsruck area, where many of the Dheinsville immigrants came from. The name of this new organization was called Hessischer Verein (The Hessen Organization). In the spring of 1990, the organization began selling brats and torts at Mai Fest in Germantown. In the fall, the club won first place for best float in the 1990 Germantown Christmas Parade.

In 1991 Phil Fritsche submitted an idea to build a multi-purpose wagon to be placed on a trailer which could be used both in parades AND to sell food at festival events. It was constructed and first used in the November 1991 Heritage Week Parade and for food service. Over the years the “pancake house” was put to good use selling German potato pancakes and sausages at many Germantown Mai Fest and Oktoberfest events.

In 2008 the Hessischer Verein club voted to stop selling food, and the vehicle was purchased by the Germantown Historical Society which was made possible by a generous donation from the Wetterau Homestead. Since then, the “pancake house” has been permanently located in the food area at Dheinsville Park to be used annually at our Oktoberfest event.

This last summer the GHS chose to upgrade and restore the building. We replaced the old shingles with similar authentic cedar shake shingles. Half of those shingles were donated by Marge and Ken Miller who had some well-preserved decades old cedar shakes which gave the building an authentic antique look. The siding was upgraded with new rough-sawn plywood, and the railing and steps were structurally repaired to be safe. The carpentry work was done by John Swartz who is an expert in restoration. John also worked on restoring the Bast Bell Museum barn exterior and is restoring the Wolf Haus. He also will be doing some repairs on

the Christ Church Museum in the spring. The painting of the pancake house was done by volunteers, including Mary Herrick, Phil Fritsche, Stephanie Strand, Jim and Sue Dix.

The Hessischer Verein club is still active, and the GHS chose to honor their tradition by restoring their original sign. Now the “pancake house” can be used for many more years to sell potato pancakes and sausages at our Oktoberfest annual event. All proceeds from the pancake house sales are donated to the Germantown Historical Society to help preserve our Germantown heritage.

If you are interested in joining or helping either of these organizations, you may contact Phil Fritsche at grmnfst@yahoo.com or Jim Dix at ghsjdix@gmail.com

New Board Member

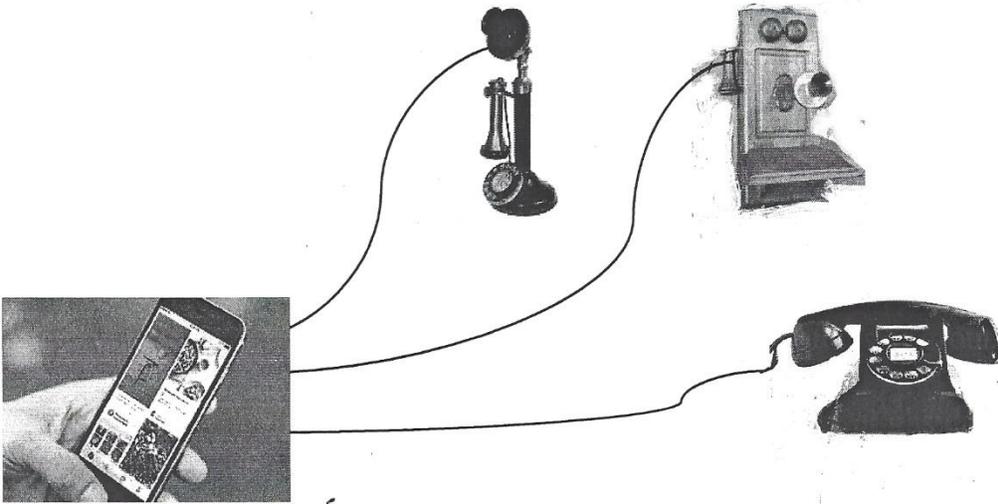
We are very happy to announce a new GHS Board member. Phil Fritsche has volunteered to serve on our board as a replacement for Sandi Dhein. Sandi will still be an active member of GHS but has taken on other responsibilities at her church which will require most of her time.



Phil Fritsche might be familiar to some of you. He is a graduate of Germantown High School, and Phil has previously served in various leadership roles in the Germantown community. He currently is the Publisher for the local Hometown Communications (Express News). Welcome aboard Phil. We look forward to working together with you on GHS projects.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT 2021 Donors

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Have you been thinking of volunteering at the Germantown Historical Society but don't want to do it by yourself? ***Phone a friend and volunteer together.***

Even if you only have time for one day a week or two days a month or maybe just once in a while there are projects you can do. We need people who enjoy learning about Germantown history, their ancestry and meeting new people.

Areas of help needed, computer data entry, scanning, IT, organize documents, mailings and miscellaneous projects.

We also need an "on call" list. People who can help occasionally with projects involving carpentry, moving furniture, painting, minor repairs, hauling items or grounds keeping.

Please consider helping out in some small way. Contact Jim Dix at ghsjdix@gmail.com or phone at 262-853-1953.

We would like to thank two of our new volunteers, KIM and SOPHIA for their time scanning documents and researching artifacts.

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING – TUESDAY, APRIL 19, 2022 6:00 pm

**We are planning an Annual Membership Meeting
at Fox & Hounds Restaurant & Tavern
providing the Covid restrictions permit gatherings
and we receive a positive response from members
Please see enclosed information and reservation form**

2022 Dates to Remember:

April 19 - 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 24 & 25—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