

Along the Riverway

A publication of the Sauk Prairie Area Historical Society

Winter 2021

35th annual Bald Eagle Watching Days to be hybrid event in January

Favorites "*Old Abe: Civil War Mascot*" and "*Eagles in Native American Culture*" return virtually to the Tripp

The 35th annual Bald Eagle Watching Days events will fly virtually this year, as efforts continue in taking precautions from the Covid virus.

The show starts in Sauk Prairie's elementary school classrooms on Friday, Jan. 14, 2022 with David Stokes' "*Animals That Live With Eagles*"

On Saturday, Jan. 15, virtual presentations before a live audience will be at the River Arts Center between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. with "*Live Birds of Prey*" with the Schlitz Audubon Nature Center, and Stokes' "*Animals That Live With Eagles*" program. The event headliner Marge Gibson of the Raptor Education Group, Inc., will stream live with a question and answer session and a pre-recorded bald eagle release.

The Sauk Prairie Area Historical Society's Tripp Heritage Museum will be open from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Jan. 15 with virtual presentations of their popular presentations by Art and Dawn Shegonee, "*Eagles in Native American Culture*," and Continued on page 5



Marge Gibson, executive director of the Raptor Education Group, Inc. visits virtually for the 2022 Bald Eagle Watching Days.

Who put the 'jolly' in the Holly Jolly Sauk Prairie?



In between the Willy Wonka Bar Stops and Fizzy Lifting Drink contests going on for the Holly Jolly Sauk Prairie day, the Man in Red himself showed up in front of the Tripp Heritage Museum in a vintage sleigh with Mrs. Claus giving away candy canes and posing for pictures on Dec. 4.

Kids had been busy working on their wish list letters to Santa, and many were dropped in the Holly Jolly mailbox. Santa had his work cut out for him after gathering up the important letters into his sleigh.

Santa and Mrs. Claus, (Sauk Prairie Area Historical Society board members John and Becky Nickel) brought their favorite elf (SPAHS board president Lise Meyer Kobussen) for some jolly laughs and happy holiday wishes for all.

Santa's lovely sleigh is a rental while he's in the area, provided courtesy of Michael and Connie Konkel, of Sauk City, with their own special Christmas connection as owners of the Konkel Tree Farm.



From the desk of SPAHS board president Lise Meyer Kobussen

Dear valued members of the Sauk Prairie Area Historical Society,

I just returned from a vacation in Switzerland and Ireland, where there are stately, ancient castles and buildings still standing, meticulously preserved, many of which are several thousand years old. America, however, is too new of a country, and we don't have buildings like that.

The Swiss and Irish people are so proud of their history. It is part of who they are, and it made me think of our local history of the Sauk Prairie area. We also have a rich history, although we only go back about 200 years. Our mission of the Sauk Prairie Area Historical Society is to preserve and share that history so that we can be a resource for local community members, as well as those that may be returning to the area to find their roots. Our role is to communicate our history so that we can celebrate and be proud of our Sauk Prairie roots. We don't want to forget the past because it is part of who we are today.

The Tripp Heritage Museum, long remembered as a library by many who are still alive today, is itself a treasured artifact of the Sauk Prairie community, cared for by the SPAHS which is supported by its members.

Because of Covid-19 concerns and precautions, the Tripp, like many other museums, was closed to the general public for over a year before re-opening this summer. During that time, we were unable to provide our normal offering of popular in-person events and programs.

However, by scheduled appointments, we continued

assisting many visitors coming to research information about their relatives. The Tripp has amassed a large library of printed family histories and stories, compiled by individuals over the decades and donated to the museum for historical preservation and research purposes. These are invaluable resources, as much of the information in these



"Old buildings whisper to us in the creaking of floorboards and rattling of windowpanes." — *author and naturalist, Fennel Hudson*

compilations can hardly be found on the Internet anywhere. They are often the words of our ancestors, writing first-hand about events of a time long gone with the winds of change, but which happened right here where we live.

We've had scheduled visitors that have come from as far away as Austin, Texas this spring, specifically to do family research using resources housed at the Tripp.

We've been able to assist people researching old buildings or homes, and often get inquiries from new owners and local realtors asking about the history of a home. To help

them, we share the images that have been preserved in 1,300 Edwardian Era, (1901-1910), glass plate negative photos. Our scanned photographs from these negatives have helped people renovate homes and buildings inspired by the original architectural styles of the past; or simply just enjoy a photo of their place as it once was in days gone by.

The Tripp and all our resources are here to serve those who've grown up here to learn about those who came before them, those who've made our community their home and those who come from far away to learn more about family members whose lives were spent here. It's a journey through time enclosed in one, beautifully preserved, historic building, rich in history itself, through which generations of Sauk Prairie residents have passed. We look forward to helping more of those visitors find their connections to the past.

Wishing the warmest and happiest of the holidays to you and yours.



Lise

The Sauk Prairie Area Historical Society Board of Directors

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The Tripp Heritage Museum is open Friday and Saturday 10 a.m. - 1 p.m. or by appointment only.

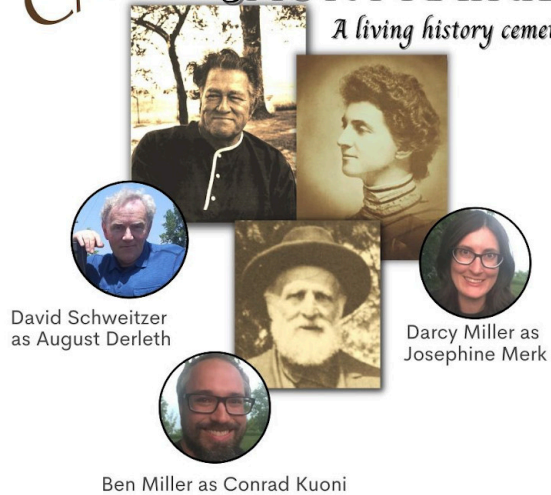
'Spirits' to appear next year

After being haunted with logistical and timing issues sprinkled with the unknowns of changing Covid precautions, a production in partnership with the Sauk Prairie Area Historical Society and the August Derleth Society of "*Spirits of Sauk Prairie, A Living History Cemetery Tour*" scheduled for October 16, was cancelled in late September.

In early 2019, this event was in its original planning stages as a live presentation as audience members walked through the Sauk City and St. Aloysius cemeteries in Sauk City paying homage to nine of the most impactful and memorable personalities for whom the Sauk Prairie area has well documented histories and photos. Some were founding members of the communities of Prairie du Sac and Sauk City, and all of them lived between 200 and 50 years ago. Actors were lined up to play August Derleth, Charles Halasz; sisters Rose and Barbara Trautman; Meta Meyer, Conrad Kuoni, John Kleinlein, J.S. Tripp and Josephine Merk.

The SPAHS and the ADS intend to re-schedule this event for sometime in 2022. More information will be announced in coming issues and on the SPAHS Facebook page.

SPRITS OF SAUK PRAIRIE A living history cemetery tour

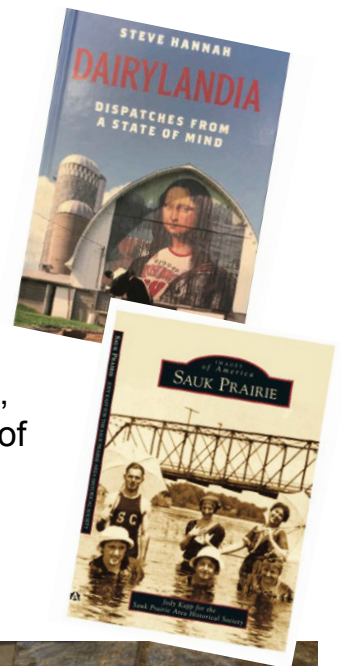


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A legacy in stone: Tom Ragatz' labor of love

The significance of buildings in the American culture cannot be understated. They often outlive their builders, even the builders' descendants. Some become such cherished assets that generations who come after step up to protect them.

Tom Ragatz, a successful and well known Madison-based lawyer for 40 years, was among those later generations whose ancestors came from Switzerland and built a little country church that has become a landmark.

It was clearly a labor of love for a man who spent most of his life devoted to and deeply involved in the things he believed in. His list of contributions would be exhausting to most people. He was president of the Dane County Bar Association and on the board of governors of the Wisconsin State Bar Association; director and president of the United Way of Dane County Foundation; director of the Foundation for Madison's Public Schools; director and president of the Business and Education Partnership; director and president of the Agrace Hospice Foundation; director of the Methodist Hospital Foundation; president of the Madison YMCA; president of the Wisconsin Sports Development Corporation; president and director of the Madison Club; foundation president of the First Congregational Church; and a member of the University of Wisconsin Foundation.

Yet, amidst all those responsibilities, he took the lead in fundraising for the on-going upkeep and preservation of Salem Ragatz church. He worked with the Sauk Prairie Area Historical Society and helped them bring the church under their umbrella of preservation initiatives. He arranged the donation of a Sub Zero refrigerator and a Wolf stove to replace outdated appliances in the kitchen.

But he didn't stop there.

A three-compartment sink was installed along with new flooring, and cabinets were repainted.

Tom spent time writing a letter every year asking family and friends to help take care of the building.

After all, it was Tom's family members who were instrumental in building the church. His great-great grandfather, Bartholomew, his wife Agnes, and nine children made the long journey from Switzerland to America in 1842, and settled on land west of Sauk City along the Honey Creek. The family donated six acres of land upon which the original log church was built in 1846, and later, the stone structure in 1875. Tom even

wrote a book about the family's journey in 1989 called "*The Ragatz History*."

The church is now on the National Register of Historic Places, not just because of its age and condition, but because of the example of the historic craft of limestone block and stack used to build it.

Tom died in September at the age of 87. His obituary in the Wisconsin State Journal described him this way:

"He invested in the community and built community, always bringing a smile and his sense of humor to those around him. And those



Tom Ragatz kept up a family legacy with the 146-year old Salem Ragatz church and helped make sure it was part of the Suk Prairie Area Historical Society.

investments will continue to pay dividends for those whom Tom touched. And his ideals, down-to-earth nature, and engagement with his community serve as a lasting model for all of us."

Editor's Note: Linda Atkins graciously contributed to this article.



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Art and Dawn Shegonee are well known for their presentation "Eagles in Native American Culture," where they teach about the spiritual symbolism of the bald eagle.

"*Old Abe: Civil War Mascot*" with the fifth and sixth generations of the LaCour family.

"The Tripp will be open for visitors, and two of our most beloved programs will be pre-recorded presentations shown on our smart board big screen," museum manager Jack Berndt said.

Art Shegonee is known as an expert in Native American culture education, part of which is the spiritual symbolism of the bald eagle. Art and Dawn's presentation is an interesting journey through Native American traditions surrounding the majestic bald eagle.

Old Abe the Civil War eagle was just a pet eaglet that LaCours'

ancestors bartered for with an Indian brave named Chief Sky. They raised and took care of him for awhile, then sold him to the Eau Claire 8th Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry Regiment for \$2.50.

The troops kept him as their mascot. In the years to follow, Old Abe became a celebrity of sorts. The LaCours tell his story much like anyone would speak of a long gone family member.

There will be plenty of opportunities in the area to view bald eagles in their natural

winter habitat in the Wisconsin River Valley.

Jennifer Lanzendorf, chairperson for Bald Eagle Watching Days said the newly renovated overlook on Water Street in Prairie du Sac near the Ruth Culver Community Library will be staffed with volunteers to help visitors see and learn about the area's wintering Bald Eagles.

"After our fully virtual event last year, Bald Eagle Watching Days 2022 will be back at the river," Jennifer Lanzendorf said. "With Covid diminished but not

vanquished, we will use the lessons we learned last year to offer a hybrid event, featuring live presentations for audiences at the River Arts Center, that we will livestream for the folks who can't attend in person. We're looking forward to a great event and hope to see everyone there."

Bald Eagle Watching Days Schedule

Tripp Heritage Museum

Sat., Jan. 15 - Open to the public 10-3 p.m. Virtual pre-recorded presentations of "Old Abe: Civil War Mascot" and "Eagles in Native American Culture"

Tour the museum's Ochsner Display - the state's largest private collection of over 300 mounted specimens

River Arts Center (RAC)

Fri., Jan. 14 - David Stokes at 1 p.m. live-streamed to elementary schools

Sat., Jan. 15 - 10 a.m. at RAC livestreaming with a live audience with Schlitz Audubon's "Live Birds of Prey"

David Stokes "Animals That Live With Eagles"

Filmed eagle release followed by a livestream Q&A with Marge Gibson, executive director, Raptor Education Group, Inc.



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FROZEN IN TIME: THE GLORY DAYS OF ICE HARVESTING

Editor's note: This cool story by Jody Kapp Berndt was published during the winter of 2014 as one of her weekly columns in the Baraboo News Republic and the Sauk

Prairie Eagle newspapers. She researches the cold, hard facts about the local ice industry near the turn of the century. Jody is the former programming director for the Tripp Heritage Museum known for bringing in memorable speakers and lively presentations. (Edited for space).

The installation of the Prairie du Sac Hydroelectric Dam 100 years ago with its strong output of water, makes it difficult for the Wisconsin River to freeze below the dam's spillway. For bald eagles on the hunt for fish, that's great. But not so good if your livelihood is cutting and hauling ice to a sawdust filled storage shed along Water Street.



Ice cutters in 1905 on the frozen Wisconsin River with Sauk City in the background.

Flashback to Sauk City, 1906 where neither mass electricity or mechanical refrigeration was yet part of daily life. People had "ice box" refrigerators, where a large block of ice fit into a metal chamber at the top of the box. Cold air circulated down and around zinc or tin storage compartments, lined with naturally-insulating materials like cork, sawdust, straw, or seaweed, to help cool food. Eventually, the block of ice melted, and the ice man delivered a fresh block.

Local businesses

The horse-drawn ice wagons and daily visits by the ice man was as much a social institution as the milk man. In Sauk City, that was the

Wisconsin River Ice Company, under the proprietorship of Richard Kuoni.

The Wisconsin River Ice Company started up in 1906 by Kuoni and his partner Frank

Littel who shipped a carload of ice to Sun Prairie as one of their first orders of business.

Breweries were the number one users of ice in the country, and Sauk City was no exception. Ice was needed to cool down the light and lager style beers during the aging process, and was needed to keep it safe during the transportation and storage.

In Prairie du Sac, The Prairie Lake Ice Company was formed in 1919, five years after the creation of Lake Wisconsin. Andrew Accola was appointed the director and man to call when ice was needed.

In the *History of Prairie du Sac*

Continued on page 7

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Businesses 2000, the late Paul Babington states that each block of ice weighed about 200 pounds and was around 24 inches thick. After the blocks were sawed, they were put on a conveyor. When they came off the conveyor, someone had to keep them moving or they would freeze together. This was a very wet and cold task. The blocks would be cut into smaller pieces and packed with layers of sawdust to help prevent melting.

Natural Location

The use of dammed up ponds, such as Lodde's and Koenig's Mill Ponds, were more than just geographical conveniences.

In a 1965 article in *Wisconsin History Magazine*, "The Wisconsin Ice Trade," by author Lee Edward Lawrence, he writes:

"Wisconsin's lakes themselves were often an ice-cutter's delight. Many of them had been dammed at their

outlets soon after settlement in order to provide water power, and the raised water levels eliminated much of the marshy short and very shallow, weed-infested waters."

Sauk Prairie was a natural choice to start up an ice cutting business for another prime reason - its railroad.

Lakes near railroad lines throughout the area were only an overnight from Chicago where the largest meat-packing firms needed to send their products all over the country in railroad cars packed tight with cold, Wisconsin ice.

End of an era

The rise of mechanical cooling came about during World War I with an increase in the production of munitions that needed to be stored under cool, dry conditions. Engineers created effective, small-scale mechanical cooling and freezing, which led to the creation of cheaper artificial ice production.

The second issue was a new-found

fear of germs and the idea that artificial ice was safer than natural ice. The seed was planted in the minds of the public, and artificial ice was viewed as the safer way to go.

The final straw was the railroad's bottom line. When ice-hauling reigned, the rail companies bent over backward to provide the cleanest of cars. But as the wheat season was extended later and coal came became a source of energy, ice no longer was the top dog. Rail companies dropped off dirty cars to the yards of ice companies, clearly sending the message that ice was an afterthought, and no longer worth the effort.

"The natural-ice business now appeared as anachronistic as the huge, trembling, and decaying structures still standing on Wisconsin lake and river shores," states Lawrence.

In December 1928, the local *Sauk County News* reported what the rest of the world knew was coming: "Richard Kuoni is going out of business and wants to sell his equipment at a reasonable price and rent out his buildings."

Reaching into the freezers for ice, think back to that hearty crew of men wrangling with the railroad timetables to make sure blocks of ice made it to our cities and into our ice boxes. One can close their eyes and picture them out along the Wisconsin River, heavy saws grinding and hear the laughter at night as they warm up beside the stoves of taverns up and down Water Street.



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Prairie du Sac dam, winter 1905

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