

sauk prairie area historical society



Prairie du Sac Wine Walk April 5 Features Tailgate at the Tripp

The Prairie du Sac business district is hosting its first annual Prairie du Sac Wine Walk Friday, April 5, from 6 to 9 PM. Stroll along Water Street and stop at 20 participating businesses. Taste wine, sample snacks, and enjoy entertainment along the way! This year's theme is sports and recreation so come dressed the part (referees, athletes, cheerleaders, fans, etc.).

Tickets will be sold on Eventbrite starting at 9 AM on March 1, 2019. Proceeds will go to The Friends of the Sauk Prairie Parks and Recreation Department. Only \$30 per person, limited to the first 400. The Sauk Hop Wine Walk sold out in less than one day so hustle up and make a game plan!



Price includes a wristband for one ounce of a red wine and one ounce of a white wine at each location. Every participant will need to have their wristband and official wine glass to be served at participating stops. Ticket holders can pick up wine glasses and wristbands at 509 Water Street, Prairie du Sac (corner of Water Street and Washington Street), the day of the event from 9 AM to noon or 5 PM to 6 PM. Ticket holders will also receive a map of the event with participating businesses, and a chance to win gift certificates/prizes if they make it to all 20 stops! Gather your group for a very memorable evening in beautiful downtown Prairie du Sac!

Questions? Call event organizer
Tracy Thompson at (608) 843-2267.

TAILGATE AT THE TRIPP

The Sauk Prairie Area Historical Society
& Mueller Sports Medicine team up
to create two events in one



Could the Sauk City boys championship team of 1956 drill their way to victory around the powerful hair of the 1909 Prairie girls? SPAHS archives



For the evening of the Prairie du Sac Wine Walk, the galleries of the Tripp Museum will turn into a Tailgate party reminiscent of those quintessential Wisconsin times shared with friends and family before the big game. We'll set the stage for scoring a great evening with pumped up jams, party foods, games, and a pop up exhibit including Sauk Prairie area sports memorabilia from the SPAHS collection, special items from the archives of Mueller Sports Medicine, as well as generous artifacts on temporary loan from community members. (Items for the Prairie du Sac display need to be brought in by 3/12.)

After the big tailgate on April 5th, we'll convert our pop up party into a long-term exhibition on Sauk City, Prairie du Sac, and Sauk Prairie sports. From the 1800s through the 1990s, we'll look at the key players, sports, and changes that have shaped our Sauk Prairie game. This exhibit will run through November 2020, growing and changing as new items, talks, and events are added. Do you have any objects (1800s to 1990s) related to sports history in the region you'd be willing to bring into the Tripp on temporary loan for the exhibit? Jerseys, photos, scrapbooks, cheer leading outfits, equipment, an old physical education suit? You-name-it, we'd love to consider it! Contact Jack at the Tripp 608.644.8444 or spahs@frontier.com. Thank you for making the Tripp a community gathering place to learn and grow together.

~ SPRING 2019 ~

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Visit us on the Web

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Winter Hours:

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By chance or appointment:
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to learn more.



Sauk Prairie Area
Historical Society



Jim Kirchstein prepares to record inside his innovative Cuca Records Studio. Sauk City, 1961.

ing with an uncanny sense of creativity, business acumen, and just plain luck to build one of the most respected independent recording houses still known today for its breadth of artists and sound innovation.

Later copied by Nashville studios, Kirchstein's ability to design a studio pleasing to both the muse of the musician and the exacting sound requirements of technician, all on a shoe string budget, is the stuff his rebel legend was built on. From blues acts out of Chicago, looking to escape mob-controlled studio rates, to classic folk acts rooted in the heart of Wisconsin's ethnic culture—Cuca Records gained a reputation as being worth the drive for both its respect of the process and the musician.

With a resurging interest in vinyl, perhaps the question to ask on March 9th will be: will Cuca rise again? Catch this rebel genius while you can.



Necessity, opportunity, an interest in electrical engineering, and memories of a childhood filled with folk music opened the door to an unexpected path for Kirchstein, right, when Cuca Records was born.

Cuca Records Q & A with Jim Kirchstein at the Tripp

Saturday | March 9

1 PM | Free

Did you know Sauk City was once home to one of the most sought-after recording studios in the Midwest? At its peak, even an up-and-coming David Bowie had to be turned away. The studio was already booked with a polka band.

On Saturday, March 9, at 1 PM, listen and ask Cuca Records founder Jim Kirchstein in his own words the story of how a small town Wisconsin boy with limited musical knowledge paired his growing passion for electrical engineer-



Remnants of Prairie still around Sauk Prairie

By Rick Chamberlin | STAR News | November 15, 2018

What is prairie?

That is a question Aldo Leopold asked three quarters of a century ago in an essay titled, "The Prairie: The Forgotten Flora."

To most Americans, the father of the Land Ethic wrote, prairie is "a flat place once dotted with covered wagons." A prairie was mostly that to me, too, as a small child enamored of westerns. The meaning of prairie later expanded slightly to include a quasi-real plain where a precocious girl and her struggling but loving pioneer family lived in their little house. Later still, prairie also became a place from which a Minnesotan baritone told folksy stories that wafted through the ether and into our radios.

Perhaps those meanings of "prairie" have become as woebegone for you as they have for me.

To truly answer Leopold's question for ourselves today, we would do well to also ask another: Where is prairie? When I moved to Prairie du Sac two decades ago, I assumed that all traces of the sprawling, verdant grassland the early French explorers found here had long ago been plowed up or built on. Indeed, only 0.15 percent of the Upper Midwest's original native prairie and oak savanna remain.

To both questions I have found fuller and more satisfying answers.



Monarchs cannot survive without milkweed; their caterpillars only eat milkweed plants, and monarch butterflies need milkweed to lay their eggs. Photo: Amy Chamberlin

Remnants of the 14,000-acre Sauk Prairie to which our community owes its name if not its existence, do survive, I've learned. The largest of those remnants, and the one with which I have become most familiar, has been hidden in plain sight to all but a few locals for generations.

Moely Prairie, named for the Swiss pioneer family that still owns the land, is a 23.5-acre sand prairie at the western edge of the village of Prairie du Sac, directly across Highway PF from Mueller Sports Medicine. Moely owes its survival to the foresight of Barbara Moely, who holds a perpetual conservation easement on the property, and to the fact that Barbara's ancestors never plowed this parcel of their land. Therefore, dozens of native plant species persisted, including prairie-smoke, pasqueflower, eastern prickly-pear cactus, rough blazing-star, lead-plant, little bluestem grass and Indian grass.

Barbara knew that her gift to the community would mean little if it were not cared for, so she gave management authority of Moely Prairie to The Prairie Enthusi-

Continued on Page 6.



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A Pioneer Schoolboy Reminiscences

February 14, 1930
Hollywood, California

Edward Keller sends a long letter to Miss Irma Lachmund of Sauk City, describing in great detail his cherished memories of boarding with her parents in her family home at 717 Water Street. The letter is a priceless treasure for its descriptions of Sauk City's culture, landscape, and industry in its earliest days.

Dear Friend:

...I did at one time stay at the home of your grandparents while attending school in Sauk City. I am pleased to honor your request to tell something about the Halasz home of that period. In fact, I shall enlarge the subject somewhat, and give you my recollections in general of Sauk City of the time in question.

It was during the year 1866/67. I was in my tenth year, that is to say in my childhood, long before I began to philosophize. No doubt my parents' desire was to place me in care of the very best people who would have me. The choice could not have been improved. No doubt the Halasz's extended a favor to my parents.

The Halasz family consisted of your grandparents, your mother, then a young lady, your uncle August Halasz, and a great-aunt, Miss Julie Rendtorff, who, not very long before, had come over from Hamburg. There was no house servant at that time, the ladies of the house taking care of all the domestic duties. However, there was a hired man, a very decent fellow (Wilhelm Prilep) who could be called upon to do any rough work, although his main duty was the care of the horses and the hauling of the lumber from the rafts in the river to the lumberyard. He was lodged and boarded at the home. Your

grandfather was considered to be a prosperous lumber dealer.

The home consisted of the original, little yellow sandstone house, one or one and a half stories high, to which had been added a larger frame structure in the rear. My memory has become quite hazy as to location and furnishings of rooms. I think the parlor occupied the whole front of the old house and contained the piano. It was used only to receive visitors and by your mother when she practiced at the piano. The sitting room adjoined the parlor, and I remember well therein a high stove and your grandfather's armchair near it, together with a large table, a rocker and several ordinary chairs. Of course there were nice curtains, but as to other things ornamental, such as carpets or rugs, pictures, etc., time has obliterated their impression from my memory. Nor can I remember if there was any library; it might have been in Aunt Julia's sanctum, which I never entered.

Your grandfather read newspapers every evening, sitting in his armchair with his feet up on the high stove, while I was laboring with my lessons at the big table. To one side and at the rear of the house, there was ample space for lawn, garden, barn and minor buildings. On the curbside of the sidewalk there was the stateliest row of shade trees in town, linden and elm. These, with the stone house and well-kept lawn, gave the place an aspect of distinction. I remember well that there was grapevines in the rear, and the fact that I was treated to a bunch of Concord grapes now and then up until Christmastime left a lasting impression in my mind. Your grandmother explained that she hung each bunch up in a cool closet.

...If I remember correctly, there was neither cat nor dog on the premises. Originally, they had but one horse, whose name was Proud, and I recall many a visit your mother paid at our house in Honey Creek, driving that spirited horse hitched to a top-buggy, all by herself. I surely was a youthful admirer of driver and horse. Later another animal was found to match Proud. It was the proudest team in Sauk County. I cannot assure you at this late day that they were blue blood Kentuckians. Their attendant kept them in splendid trim. During the warm season he would take them, occasionally, out for a swim in the river, to which I was an interested spectator when chance brought me into the presence of that performance.

...To my youthful mind Sauk City had several interesting features. There was, above all, the Wisconsin River, with its beautifully wooded islands and the cliffs on the opposite bank. In winter it offered ice for skating as well as for summer refrigeration. In springtime there was the high water with crashing icefields, and in summer bathing, shifting sandbanks, and the great lumber trade with its innumerable rafts flowing by from the more northerly parts of the state. At times these rafts encountered some difficulty in steering safely by the

wooden piers of the old bridges. I remember one bad wreck, the whole raft going to pieces and offering a great opportunity to the boys who possessed a rowboat to gather free shingles and lumber.

The fact that there were Indians in the neighborhood and I had heard and read that they had scalped settlers was the cause of the greatest scare of my life. It happed in the winter of which I am narrating. My father usually took me home for the weekends, but was detained from doing so at that time. I took advantage of a neighbor driving within a mile or two of our home. There were deep ruts in the snow, but the moon was shining brightly. After leaving the neighbor's sleigh, I had to watch my steps very closely and did not look ahead very far. Suddenly, I heard some prattle, which I immediately took for Indian, in front of me, and I saw two men with outstretched arms advancing towards me. With a cry of despair I jumped out of the road and down into a deep ditch. Then one said, "You foolish little fellow, it was all in fun!" They evidently were Civil War soldiers, as both of them wore the caped military mantle of the period. They spoke the Swiss dialect and their apology in reality was: "Du Dummes Buebli, mer haent ja blosz well spasse!" Of course, my people were most indignant over this joke.

Sauk City's main industry at that time was beer-brewing, and there were four, if not five, establishments engaged therein, supplying a number of other small towns with that beloved German beverage. I was not born with a taste of it. Later it took at least two years of my European residence before I acquired somewhat of a liking for it. However, I am now perfectly willing to join a peaceful rebellion against its prohibition. In spite of the breweries and numerous saloons, Sauk City had very little inebriacy. Drunken brawls were confined to special occasions, such as the celebration of the Fourth of July, and they were mostly staged by visitors from elsewhere, not of German nationality. Business men and artisans almost without exception, were substantial citizens and men of high character. In memory I still hold them in high esteem.

A certain number of them stood out as "characters" to me. Foremost was shoemaker Sturm, a Tyrolean. As a drummer he would lead the Fourth of July parade. Being tall, with piercing gray eyes, dark heavy moustache, in Tyrolean uniform with cocked hat, green coat and knee breeches, he was a marital and most picturesque figure of the day. Then there was Schleicher, the soapboiler, who possessed a kennel of at least half a dozen pointers and setters. Wherever he would go to make soap, these dogs would be with him and would enter the houses through any open door or window, preferably of the kitchen, to the exasperation of the housewives.

Apropos of the Fourth of July; this was but a few years after



the close of the Civil War, when patriotism had risen high in Sauk City and the country at large. Volunteers who had taken up arms were numerous, native and foreign born. Many had not returned from Dixie Land. So everyone joined in patriotic demonstrations on the Fourth. The marshall of the day was Brewer Lenz. All the school children, the girls in white and bright bows, marched in procession, but only those of the Catholic School contributed by singing an air in German which evidently had been written and composed for this occasion. I now remember only the words: Es donnert die Kanone Es flattert die Fahne im Winde/It thunders the cannon. The flag, flutters in the wind. The seasoned war veterans—and it was an imposing company—brought up the rear. They had some military step! In one of the oakgroves there was erected a bandstand and a dance floor. From the former, the Declaration of Independence was read and a patriotic speech made, both in German. There was beer and pink lemonade a plenty. It was the only day of the year on which I had a chance to taste an orange and eat a plate of ice cream. ~~~

Part II of "A Pioneer Schoolboy Reminisces" will appear in the next edition of Along the Riverway.



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asts (TPE), a local nonprofit conservation organization that restores and maintains prairies and oak savannas throughout the Upper Midwest. For the last two years, my wife Amy Chamberlin, my father-in-law Paul Anderson and I have worked with TPE Site Steward Denny Connor and a handful of other dedicated volunteers to help TPE rescue Moely Prairie from the encroachment of invasive and exotic trees and shrubs like Siberian honeysuckle and common buckthorn. Before the introduction of such species, woody growth on prairies was kept at bay by frequent fires, started by lightning or by native peoples driving game. Over millennia, prairies and their unique flora evolved with fire. Because most of the living plant tissue is underground, prairie plants are helped more than hurt by fire. Today, TPE uses prescribed burns as one tool to heal and restore these diverse, fire-dependent ecosystems.

Observant residents have witnessed the gradual restoration of the northeast corner of Moely Prairie since 2016. What had become a dense tangle of shrubs and trees again teems with native wildflowers, birds, bees and butterflies.

Last spring, Amy and I were trained to carry out a citizen science project that is part of a nationwide effort seeking to better understand monarch butterflies and, hopefully, save the species from extinction. With the help of The Monarch Joint Venture, a partnership of public and private organizations from across the U.S., we established a monitoring plot on Moely Prairie from which we gather data about milkweed and other native flowering plants that monarchs-and many other pollinators-depend on.

Scientists think many factors, including the overuse of certain agricultural chemicals, and climate change, have led to steep declines in insect populations around the world. The insects' crisis is our crisis; 1,200 crop species rely on pollinators (though not all pollinators are insects). Interestingly, new research also suggests that in temperate zones, grasslands soak up more carbon per acre than forests. Grasslands' deep and extensive root systems may make them more resilient than forests to our rapidly warming climate, too. What we learn from prairies can help us fortify our farms in the face of multiple threats.

So what is prairie? Prairie is sustenance. Even Leopold could not have foreseen how our dependence on the prairie, and the importance of preserving and understanding it, would increase, when he defined prairie as

"a community of plants and animals so organized as to build, through the centuries, the rich soil which now feeds us." But he would relish the irony; like the deep-rooted prairie itself, the better part of prairie's importance has remained hidden from view.



A field of Prairie Smoke goes to seed on the Moely Prairie. Photo: Amy Chamberlin

Yes, prairies sustain us, and not just physically. Over and over, the beauty of Moely Prairie bloom in spring, summer and fall has fed my soul.

And where is prairie? It's still right here in Sauk Prairie, in remnants like Moely, and Schluckebier Sand Prairie (1.8 miles west on Hwy. PF), and Hillside Prairie at the Sauk Prairie State Recreation Area. Even more remnants are thought to exist on private land. Thanks to generous landowners like Barb Moely and groups like TPE and the Sauk Prairie Conservation Alliance, these precious parcels are being rediscovered, preserved, restored and better understood.

VISIT MOELY PRAIRIE

Want to discover more about what prairie means to you, and to all of us? Please visit Moely Prairie, which is open to the public year-round. For details on how to access Moely, or if you want to volunteer to put more prairie back in Sauk Prairie, visit, "For the Love of Moely Prairie" on Facebook and @MoelyPrairie on Instagram. ~~~

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New Committee Raising the Roof on Our Lady of Loretto

One would think since Tripp Heritage Museum Manager Jack Berndt grew up in Prairie du Sac and retired back in the village over a decade ago he may be familiar with more than his fair share of local families. It didn't take long for him to realize he was out of his league when he showed up to his first meeting of the newly-formed Our Lady of Loretto Annual Fund Committee to brainstorm family connections to the parish.

"It's been truly amazing to work with this team. They seem to either know or be related to nearly everyone in Sauk County," shares Berndt from his desk in the Tripp's Walter Doll room overlooking Prairie du Sac's bustling Water Street. The Loretto annual fund committee including Mary Ann Hartman, Karen Diehl, Carol Mortrud, Jim Niddy, and Sandy Stiemke meets regularly to write thank you notes to donors and touch base on their goal to raise at least \$3,000 per year for savings towards the anticipated future roof replacement and minimal annual maintenance costs, such as summer mowing, needed to keep the church open for visitors and weddings. Beyond paid expenses, volunteers gather throughout the year to help sweep, clean, and maintain archival materials for the parish historical record.



While the quaint church located on the bend of Highway C between Denzer and Loretto, may lack modern amenities of plumbing and electricity, it more than makes up for these conveniences with its rich history and sweeping views of the ringing farm fields and bluffs. The parish of St. Mary of Loretto was formed in 1854. Worship was first held at Honey Creek in the living room of Katherine and John George Ledig, with the missionary priest walking 13 miles from Sauk City. By 1862, people were buried in the current cemetery at the foot of the bluff across the road from the church. In 1867, a log church was built on the cemetery's side of the road, but it burned shortly after, and the congregation resumed services in the Leidig's home.

The Loretto stone church we know today was built in 1880. The parish register was signed by forty-four men and two women. Services were held monthly and initially conducted in Latin. Later the language switched to German. After World War I, services switched to English. The church remained a mission church with services held monthly until 1942. By then attendance didn't justify that schedule, so services were cut back to several times each year. In 1960 the mission church was closed due to declining numbers. Robert Jaedike purchased the church in 1973, donating the building to SPAHS in 1975. The historical society continues to own and maintain the building while the Divine Mercy Parish (St. Aloysius) maintains the cemetery.

Since the newly-formed committee's first appeal was sent out in November, 2018, twenty one donors responded, raising a total of \$4,250. The first year's goal was a success! Parties interested in donating funds to the annual appeal are encouraged to contact the SPAHS or any member of the committee. Any funds donated to Our Lady of Loretto remain separate from the general funds of the Sauk Prairie Area Historical Society and are applied only to Our Lady of Loretto needs. The SPAHS also manages and maintains the Salem Ragatz Historic Church in Honey Creek. Friends and family members of Salem Ragatz also conduct an annual appeal, with funds being directed and maintained for church expenses in the same way.

If you are interested in learning more about either of these churches, taking a tour, or for rental information, please contact Jack Berndt: (608) 644-8444, spahs@frontier.com. Thank you for caring for these foundational building blocks of our heritage.

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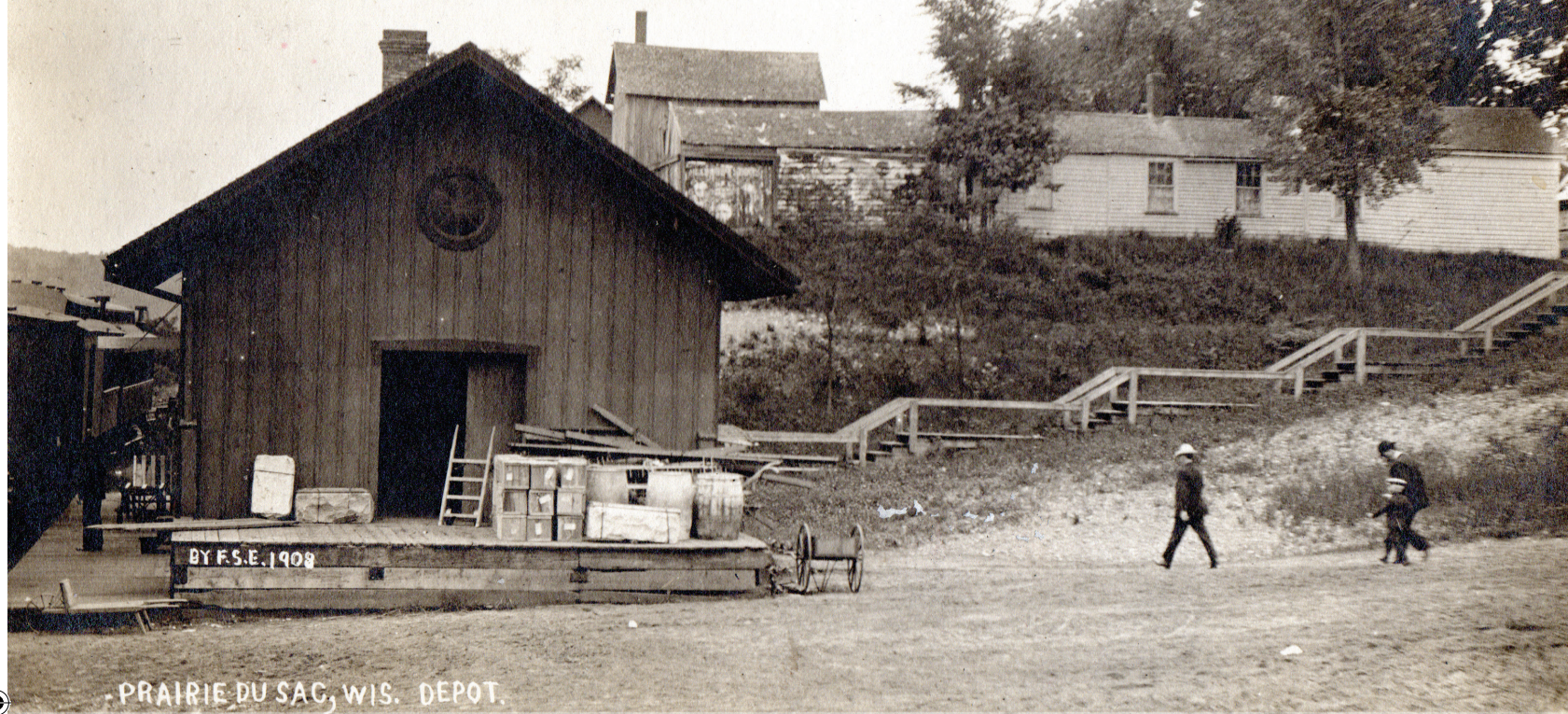
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A viewer looking south in 1908, from what is now the Ruth Culver Community Library, would have caught a glimpse of passengers and goods making their way to and from the Prairie du Sac Depot.



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