

sauk prairie area historical society



No Place Like Sauk Prairie

On April 15, 1945, twenty-two-year-old soldier John Charles Kaufman of Prairie du Sac wrote home from war against Germany to family friend May Sprecher. This letter was recently rediscovered in a scrapbook kept by Doris Litscher Gasser, now part of the SPAHS archives.

Kaufman's boyish language and observations about life abroad and at home has the ability to stir hearts and open minds nearly 75 years after it was first penned. Following the letter is a transcript of an oral history recorded of Kaufman by Nancy Camden for Spotting Wisconsin at Kaufman's home when he was 93-years-old. We hope you enjoy Kaufman's reminisces of growing up in Prairie du Sac as much as we have. Be sure to visit the Sauk Prairie Area Historical Society group Facebook page. Enter "John Kaufman" in the search box to hear Kaufman tell his story in his own voice. ~

France
15 April 45

Dear May -

Just a few lines to thank you for the swell package. It was just swell and really hit the spot. Everything tasted so good. I surely appreciate it and all the trouble it took. I really don't know how to thank you enough. It makes one feel so good to hear from people back in the old home town. A real moral booster I'd guess one would say.

...Continued on page 4



~ WINTER 2019 ~

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Visit us on the Web

saukprairiehistory.org

Winter Hours:

9:30 a.m. - Noon Tuesdays
9 a.m. - 1 p.m. Fridays
9 a.m. - 1 p.m. Saturdays

Summer Hours:

June, July, & August
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Sauk Prairie Area
Historical Society

Bald Eagle Watch Days 2020 Set to Soar @ Tripp Museum

Before we know it, January will once again be at our door, and with it, the annual Bald Eagle Watching weekend of events. This year's slate of events includes two programs at the Tripp Heritage Museum in Prairie du Sac, along with a myriad of other Bald Eagle-related happenings around town. Stay tuned to the Ferry Bluff Eagle Council's website (www.ferrybluffeaglecouncil.org) for your latest Bald Eagle news. And be sure to visit the Tripp on Saturday, January 18, for two fantastic Bald Eagle programs:



Joe LaCour Family
Old Abe
Civil War Mascot

Saturday, January 18
Tripp Heritage Museum
10:00 to 10:45 AM



Art & Dawn Shegonee
Eagles in Native
American Culture

Saturday, January 18
Tripp Heritage Museum
11:00 to 11:45 AM

Salem Ragatz Church Shines thanks to Volunteers

30 Seniors from Sauk Prairie High School helped kick off a transformation of the church's basement and kitchen area. With a new stove, upgrades to paint and flooring in the kitchen, and new chairs for the hall, Salem Ragatz's fresh look continues to make this the perfect country gathering place. A special thank you to Linda Atkins and Lise Meyer Kobussen. If you'd like to have an event at the church, please contact SPAHS.





SATURDAY 14TH DECEMBER

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10 AM to 2 PM

Remember the good old days of making memories while making construction paper chains, cutting out snow flakes, coloring Holiday pictures, and sitting on Santa's lap in a warm and magical setting?

The good old days are here again! The Tripp Heritage Museum's beautiful 1912 setting provides the perfect backdrop for a "keeper" photo with Santa and a relaxing and memorable day for young children and the young at heart to reconnect with timeless traditions. Each child will receive a special treat from Santa. A warm pot of wassail or a cup of John Joseph Coffee awaits adults. Bring your favorite cup along and we'll fill it.

While at the Tripp, check out our current exhibit on Sauk Prairie sports, visit the 300+ Ochsner bird collection, the 7,000-year-old Bradford Bison, and the stay & play children's Long Ago area.

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These Prairie du Sac Residents Are In Nation's Armed Forces



No Place Like Sauk Prairie...Continued from Page 1

We're in France now, and know the fellows that came out of Germany with us sure wished they were still up front. The news really is good. Spent most of the winter in Belgium or part of Germany. The Boys sure had high praise and had a lot of respect for the Belgium people. The war always seems to hit them worst. Being in between France and Germany. They're right back building up their shell ripped homes. We've never seen such hard working people. To top it all off, the women seem to be doing all the work. They work the farm which consists of a few acres. The farm and house is all one building. They take a lot of pride in their homes. They don't move as much as the Americans and their home is the same on for life. But many times the fellows remark, if some of the American women today could only see this!

I've seen lots of country since I've been here and haven't found anything that compared to Prairie yet. So it's still the best little town. Well, thanks again and say hello to Marion's folks, Doris, and her brothers for me.

John ~~

The following is an abridged transcript from Nancy Camden's oral history recording found online at <https://soundcloud.com/nancy-camden/john-kaufman-remembers-prairie>

Everybody was a Friend

I was born in Prairie du Sac, Wisconsin, in 1923. John Charles Kaufman. My dad graduated from Prairie du Sac High School in 1919. He got a Model T car. Worked at the Ford Garage for about a year and then there was a restaurant for sale across from grandmother and grandfather's house.

My mom and dad had Kaufman's Restaurant in Prairie du Sac. That was a Ma & Pa restaurant. My mother was the cook. Was either ham and scalloped potatoes or chops, fried potatoes, salmon patties, meatloaf, piece or two of lettuce with a peach on top. My dad did the soda fountain. Ice cream cones were a nickel, sundaes were fifteen cents. We'd just go help ourselves to ice cream, candy, and then we'd take off to play.

Our playground was out in the street. We had bicycles, of course. We did a lot of roller skating. We'd go sled-ding and get wet from the snow. There was a feed store that had one of those round stoves. We'd put our feet up against it and throw our clothes up against there to dry them out.

When I was growing up the town was approximately 949 population. At that time, farmers were still coming to town with horse and wagons. And there were hitching posts all over behind the front street. They would hitch their teams there and do their shopping. Once in a while, a team would get loose and they'd run down the street, so



somebody would have to run down the street to catch the team and bring it back again.

The railroad in Prairie du Sac came from Madison. It went to Madison, Mazomanie, Sauk City, and Prairie du Sac. Prairie du Sac was on the end of the line. The hobos during the Depression era, they had a camp there. There was always a little fire down in there. Once in a while we'd go and visit the hobos.



1920s Water Street, Prairie du Sac, as John Kaufman would have experienced it. The Bonham Theatre at far right where famed architect Frank Lloyd Wright took in a matinee before crossing the street to the tall, cream colored building, second from the left, for a 15 cent sundae at Kaufman's Restaurant.

There was always people in the restaurant. We were pretty much like a family. Frank Lloyd Wright was a customer. Prairie du Sac had a theater. He'd go to the matinee on a Sunday afternoon and he'd come over to the restaurant and have a soda or a sundae before he went back. In the restaurant we had a player piano. They would put a nickel in and select a sheet.

We always seemed to have food and money for clothes. We weren't rich. I think it was the ideal town to live in. I would say you couldn't have found a better place to live in when you were young. Everybody was a friend. ~~



Middle right: Now home to the Ruth Culver Library, this spot along Prairie's riverside Water Street was once home to a humble feed and hardware store and, bottom left, the Prairie du Sac Railroad Depot. A sketch by artist Doris Litscher Gasser, above, illustrates the camaraderie of the round stove. Clothes dried, sausages cooked, coffee boiled, and the art of *gemutlichkeit* practiced.





Sauk Prairie on the Big Screen

This past October, Sauk Prairie made the big time when it debuted to audiences everywhere through the Wisconsin Hometown Stories series on Wisconsin Public Television.

Thanks to local sponsors and the talents of the WPT team, the story of Sauk Prairie came to life—from the Sauk Indians to the arrival of early European settlers to the building of the Prairie du Sac Dam and the coming of the Badger Army Ammunition Plant.

If you weren't able to catch this program live on air, it's available online at <https://pbswisconsin.org/wpt-video/wisconsin-hometown-stories/>. A DVD of the program, including a bonus segment on the Freethinkers, is also available for purchase at the Tripp Museum for \$15 in museum or \$20 online at: www.saukprairiehistory.org.

With Gratitude for Service

Our sincere gratitude to Barbara Wolfe and Jim Maginnis for the many years of service they provided to the Sauk Prairie area through their leadership on the SPAHS board. Both Jim and Barb served on the board during the heavy-lifting of the Mueller Gallery restoration work in 2012 and the organization of the first public tours of the Prairie du Sac Dam in 2014. We will miss Jim's gentle way of leading with a good joke and Barb's amazing attention to detail.

We also say goodbye this issue to SPAHS newsletter producer Jody Kapp Berndt. As a newcomer to the Sauk Prairie area, her passion for the people, places, and stories of this region surprised, entertained, and inspired us all.

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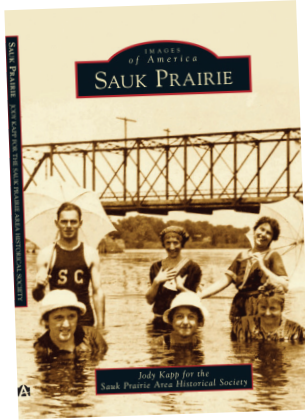
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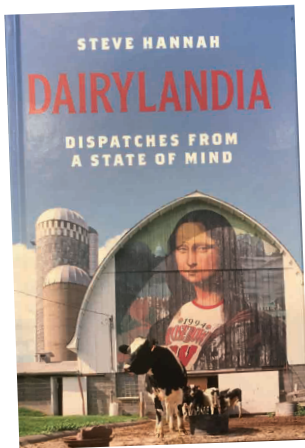
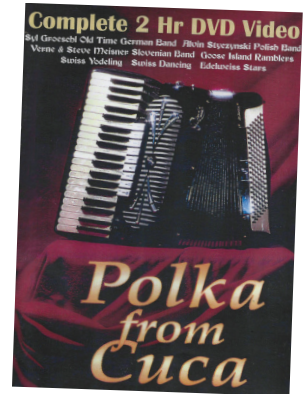


Holiday Gifts from the Tripp



Visit the Tripp Museum in downtown Prairie du Sac this Christmas in person or via our online museum store to find gifts for your favorite Sauk Prairie friends and family!

From books, to DVDs, CDs, and more, when you shop at the Tripp, you're not only fostering a love of all things Sauk Prairie, your purchase also supports the mission of the Sauk Prairie Area Historical Society. Your gift is two gifts in one.

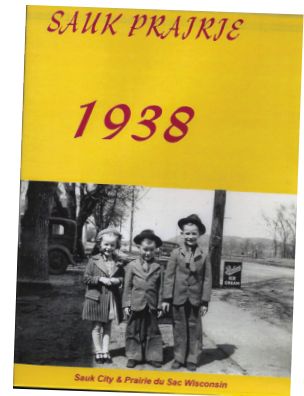


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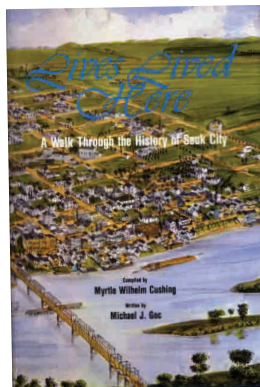
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Park Hall's bandstand appears enchanted under a white coat of freshly-fallen snow. The bandstand, originally built circa 1880, is part of the grounds of the Free Congregation of Sauk County, established by German 48ers in Sauk City in 1852 as they sought freedom in their new, beloved America. Photo: Jonathan Cody.



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