



Gibraltar Historical Association

Fish Creek, Wisconsin

Fall 2013

President's Report

Dear Friends of GHA:

As I write this note, our warm summer days are bygone and the smell of fall is in the air. The trees in the orchards are laden with fruit and pumpkins line the roadways. Fall will be vibrant when you read this newsletter as the park is taking on a golden hue. Fall is the grand finale of summer celebrations. What a sight!

Another summer of exciting events! Gibraltar Talks hosted six interesting presentations ranging from fishing, to farming, to exploring the Norsemen, to a sailor's songbag. All were well attended and we are already beginning to plan for next year. The Noble House invited guests to share in discovering a 100 years of wedding traditions and dresses, and GHA hosted a lovely tea and style show in late June. All in all, it was a wonderful summer season! We hope you had the opportunity to attend some of the events.

✿ *Barb McKesson*

GIBRALTAR HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

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| Landscaping | Laurie Buske |

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| | |
|----------------------|------------------------------|
| Administrative Asst. | Sara Sohns |
| Newsletter Editor | Sara Sohns and Barb McKesson |

Our Mission

The Gibraltar Historical Association has been established to collect, research, and preserve objects and archival materials which directly reflect or illustrate Gibraltar Township history; to pass on from person to person, to advance history, and to educate residents and visitors about this history; and to plan the preservation of historical buildings and green space in the community of Fish Creek, Wisconsin.

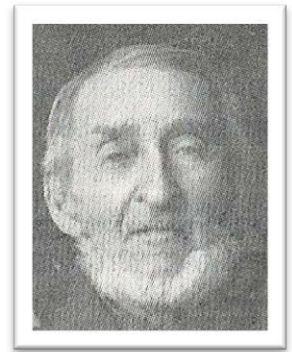
Noble House Museum
920.868.2091

Visit our website: historicnoblehouse.org

Happy Birthday Thorp Hotel

Several weeks ago in the “Traveling Back” section of the Door County Advocate, a short paragraph appeared acknowledging the opening of the Thorp Hotel in Fish Creek. The very first hotel built for the sole purpose of housing guests coming into the village on the Goodrich steamers. For Fish Creek, this earmarked the change from a small lumbering and fishing village to a destination village for those people trying to escape the oppressive heat of the larger cities of St. Louis, Chicago, and Milwaukee. It was the beginning of tourism. To truly understand this kernel of history, it is important to know a bit about the man who was responsible for the village itself, and it’s amazing history.

Asa Thorp came to Wisconsin on impulse. Observing the steady flow of immigrants on the Erie Canal, he gave in one day to the lure of adventure. Jumping aboard a flat bottomed canal boat in the spring of 1844, Asa rode to Boston where he switched to a lake steamer bound for Milwaukee. Asa found land near Rubicon and felt this was where he would make his home. But that was not to be.



Upon traveling to register his land, he met a man who observed him making butter firkens. This man, Graham Perry told Asa of riches to be had by anyone who could make barrels. Asa traveled with Perry to Rock Island and spent the entire summer making barrels. On his return trip aboard a Buffalo steamer, he began conversing with the captain of the ship and listened to the woes of the man describing the problems when plying the east shore of Green Bay. “There is no pier to take on cordwood,” the captain explained. “We have to send seamen ashore to pick up driftwood to burn.” And as they were passing what is now Fish Creek, he continued, “Now there is a place where an ambitious, hardworking man could build a pier and make a lot of money selling wood to lake steamers.”

Asa listened carefully and decided this was to be his future. He drew a map of the shoreline as they steamed back to Fort Howard. He thanked the captain, rented a horse, and went to Menasha to register the land. He chose land to the south and east of the Clafflin Cabin. He returned to Rubicon and then back to New York to tell family of his plans and to marry Eliza Atkinson. He returned to Rubicon with his new wife and other members of her family, but he was unable to return to Fish Creek immediately. Several years passed and he asked his older brother, Jacob to go to Fish Creek and take care of his land for him.



Finally, in 1853, Asa and Eliza joined Jacob and moved into a tiny fisherman’s cabin near the shore in Fish Creek. (Now behind Founder’s Square). Before the trip, Asa traded a space at his “not yet constructed pier” for a sawmill. They came with the mill, and he put it in operation immediately. Within one year Asa completed construction of a commercial pier, helped by Jacob and his other brother, Levi. Asa quickly got involved in the cord wood business, the lumber business, and the warehouse business. By 1862 he had built a rooming house for wood cutters, dock workers, saw mill employees, fishermen, and his own family of five.

By 1870 the number of ships operating on the Great Lakes reached 1500. Hundreds of vessels stopped at Asa's pier for cordwood. While tied up to take on wood, passengers would get off and walk around the village. Soon Thorp was asked about the availability of rooms or cottages. The passengers were greatly impressed with Fish Creek's cool air and quiet beauty. Asa quickly filled the vacant rooms in the big rooming house he had built for the wood cutters, dock workers, and other employees. He expanded the rooming house, but quickly realized another opportunity was knocking. Asa made plans to build a hotel plus a few tourist cabins for families wanting to spend more time in Fish Creek.



Wisconsin's population grew almost seven fold between 1850 and 1900. And Asa Thorp built his hotel in 1870. Immediately successful, the hotel with its lovely front porch was located where Founder's Square stands today. As the demand for guest rooms increased, Asa made several additions to the hotel and proceeded to build a number

of small tourist cabins. Guests were able to stay at Asa's "Thorp Hotel" for \$7.50 per week including three meals a day. To provide tourists with things to do, Asa cleared land for a swimming beach, made row boats available for fishing, and opened a livery stable to guests so they could rent horses and carriages for a ride through the lovely countryside. His business flourished.



The essence of Fish Creek and its surrounding countryside is reflected in the people and places that echo with its unique history. Walk through Founder's Square and visit Asa Thorp's original cabin. Step through the door of the Fish Creek General Store where the wooden floors creak with the footsteps of generations of settlers. Walk down the road to Sunset Beach and applaud the setting sun. Explore the back-roads where historic barns and grazing livestock recall days all gone. The names of the early settlers—Asa Thorp, Increase Clafflin, Alexander Noble, Alexander Lundberg, the Hill brothers, and Peter Weborg, among others—appear throughout the pages of Fish Creek's history.



Today no one would dispute the fact that the tourist industry is the lifeblood of Fish Creek! Large numbers of summer guests still come from the Milwaukee, Chicago and St. Louis areas, but today's guests from other cities in the Midwest far outnumber them. They all reside in the many hotels, cottages, and inns, condos, and motels . . . this, the opportunity that Asa Thorp recognized so many years ago. "Happy 150th Birthday Thorp Hotel!"

Excerpts taken from: "Fish Creek Echoes"
Barb McKesson

November 1913: Great Lakes Hurricane



The immense storm that ravaged the Great Lakes in early November 1913 has been called the “Great Lakes White Hurricane,” the “Ultimate Storm,” and the “Big Blow.” It was unmatched for early winter severity and is one of the greatest winter storms in the history of the Great Lakes region. This year marks its 100th anniversary.

This deadliest and most destructive natural disaster ever to hit the Great Lakes Basin killed more than 250 people and destroyed 19 ships and stranded 19 others. The financial loss in vessels alone was nearly \$5 million, or about \$100 million at current value. This included about \$1 million at current value in lost cargo totaling about 68,300 tons of coal, iron ore, and grain. Because of the great losses some historians named it the “Freshwater Fury.”

The storm originated as the convergence of two major storm fronts, fuelled by the lakes’ relative warm water. This gale produced 90 mph winds, waves over 35 feet high and whiteout snow squalls. A close analysis of this tragic storm and its impact on humans, structures and the landscape led to better weather forecasting and faster responses to storm warnings, stronger and better construction of marine vessels and improved storm preparations.



The heaviest losses from the “Freshwater Fury” of 1913 occurred on lower Lake Huron, but destruction took place throughout the Great Lakes region. On the waters of Green Bay, the tug “Martin,” towing the Plymouth cleared the Menominee Light bound for Search Bay in Lake Huron. The Martin and the Plymouth ran into huge seas entering Lake Michigan. To save the barge from the rocks the tug towed it with its crew to Gull Island, where it was anchored. The Martin then deserted the Plymouth and headed for shelter. Abandoned and helpless in the raging gale, the Plymouth met her doom alone. The seven men on the Plymouth used measures against the storm by lashing themselves to their boat to prevent being swept overboard. Days later, wreckage consisting of hatch covers, cabin work and broken lifeboats came ashore at Ludington, Michigan. Eleven days later a bottle with a dying message was found near Pentwater, Michigan. It read:

*“Dear Wife and Children. We were left up here, at anchor in Lake Michigan, by McKinnon, captain of the tug, James H. Martin. He went away and never said goodbye or anything to us. Lost one man yesterday. We have been out in storm forty hours. Goodbye dear ones, I might see you in Heaven. Pray for me. (signed) Chris.K.
P.S. I felt so bad I had another man write for me. Goodbye Forever.”*

In a grisly discovery, all seven men were found still lashed to the remains of their ship, frozen in time and place. Chris Keenan's body was found on the shore near Manistee.

The Great Storm of 1913 was so unusual and unprecedented, that it may be centuries before such a storm will be experienced again.

For more information, google Great Lakes Storm of 1913 or pick up the book "Freshwater Fury."

Research by Doug C. Blahník

Noble Square Garden Notes

It seems like yesterday that we were planning all the updates to our beautiful yard. What a season we have experienced. Our new trees continue to grow and expand, and our beloved Bud tree has proven that taking a hit from a fellow tree will not hinder its growth, but instead, may have even gotten the "boot" it needed to flourish.



Volunteers have once again fashioned our gardens to show off their bounty of perennials. The bushes in front of Noble House have taken nicely with added care and watering as they begin to set root and the grass fills in. The donated burning bushes have made it through the transport and the transplant, and are starting to show signs of growth, and we are eagerly looking forward to their fall display. If you have not had a chance to walk past our herb garden please take the time to indulge in the wonderful scents of flourishing herbs.

We are excited to share that soon we will be placing an "Anchor" in our center tree clump. Why an anchor, you ask? We have the opportunity to move an anchor to the property to signify and tell our history of being a harbor town. As this will be a rather costly project **we are always open to donations to keep our work moving forward.**

A Big Thank You to all who have helped us in tidying our yard; every single effort makes the big job seem small.

By Laurie Buske

WANTED: MEN & WOMEN VOLUNTEERS!

Are you interested in volunteering some time for GHA? It's a great opportunity to use your talents, spend time with fellow members, and help GHA as well.

In an attempt to keep costs down and improve efficiency, we have decided to explore the idea of asking members of GHA to volunteer for various tasks. There are many members who have talents we're unaware of and we are trying to put together a list of skills and people that we can utilize.

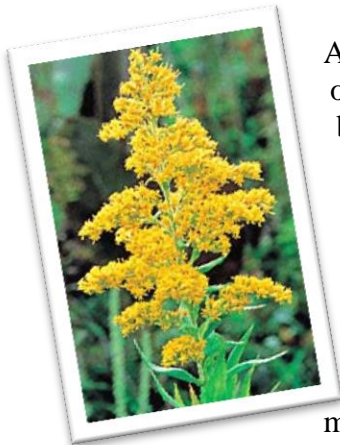
We need volunteers to assist with Special Events, various art projects, (such as putting together a Wedding Book, creating a Coloring Book for Children, making Posters), gardening at Noble Square, baking for Programs, Mailings, Set-Up for Activities, etc.

If this appeals to you, please email me at lschwaller@yahoo.com or call me at 868-2949.

Thank you for your consideration. You'll be glad you did!

By Linda Schwaller

GoldenRod



As our summer winds to a close and fall beckons us, many a great admirer of flowers will notice the most golden of our native flowers. Bursting with blossoms one atop another they are so full they almost become one giant plume of color. A close up view will disclose many a pollinator busy collecting pollen from its brilliant display. Goldenrod known for over one hundred different species is a true pleasure and not the culprit of the allergies in fall. For those who know better the terrible bearer of the airborne pollen is the invasive ragweed.

Our Native American predecessors used goldenrod in many ways, a medicinal plant whose uses would cure stomach ulcers, flu & colds, rheumatism, arthritis and kidney stones. Goldenrod even came to our rescue in America after all the tea of Boston was thrown into the harbor and our fore fathers discovered its leaves made the most wonderful tea. Thus the Liberty tea was born. Not only was it a delight to drink, it has proven to be one of the most beautiful natural dyes growing right on our roadsides. So the next time you are honored by the presence of a beautiful Golden stem of flowers, enjoy this versatile plant . . . Goldenrod.



By Laurie Buske

Good-bye Alexander

There will be some changes at the Alexander Noble House. Our resident “Alexander” is hanging up his cane and top hat and is retiring from his position as program director at GHA. There will be some large shoes to fill to organize and complete all the tasks Doug Blahnik accomplishes on a daily basis . . . If you need to know . . . ask Doug!!!



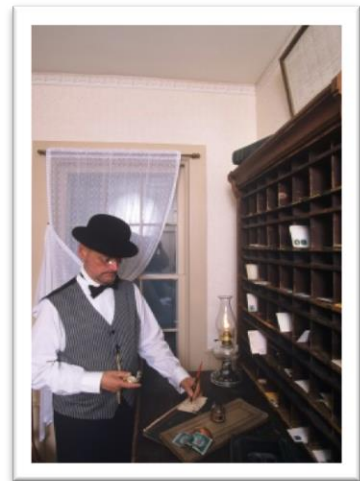
Doug’s experiences are many. Born in Algoma, he was raised on a farm and had plenty of chores to keep him busy. His father also ran an antique shop which probably gave him his love of “old things.” With parents living through the depression, Doug said they saved everything. His love of Door County began when he worked at the Anderson House for a \$1.00 an hour, three meals a day, a room, and laundry privileges. He graduated to working as a salad chef at the Sturgeon Bay Yacht Club. These early jobs would lead him to settle in Door County.

Not much more than 19 years old, Doug Blahnik began his teaching career at Liberty Grove School. He had twenty-nine 3rd and 4th grade children, and he taught Social Studies. He loved teaching history and often dressed as historical figures to make the classes more interesting. This interest in theater and history paved the way to work with Isadora Theatre and incorporate Children’s Theatre into his 5th grade classroom in Baileys Harbor. His teaching career lasted 40 years.

He came to Gibraltar Historical Association upon the invitation of Gary Schulze when they met at the YMCA. Mr. Schulze suggested that perhaps Mr. Blahnik would consider an interesting position at the newly acquired and renovated “Noble House.” When Doug arrived only two rooms were complete . . . the Parlor and the kitchen. He began with a “pack of cards” describing the furniture in the house. Soon the furniture and the artifacts began to tell the story of Alexander Noble and the Noble family.

Doug remembers that there were very few people on the board and that they staged small shows in the rooms that were not complete. Some of the first shows put on were “The Hackley,” “The Hill Line,” “A Hat Show”, and “A Valentine’s Show”.

From these small beginnings, the Noble House has grown into a 10 room treasure trove, open to visitors seven days a week. Annual shows focus on a particular time period or custom, and Gibraltar Talks are monthly “get-togethers” that share an interesting aspect of history. In all of these facets, Doug is the anchor. He has been our “go to guy” and we will miss him, his enthusiasm, his vest, cane, and hat, and his one of a kind impersonation of Alexander Noble. Thank you, Doug, for your inexhaustible enthusiasm and energy.



A little bird told me that he might fill in some “cracks” now and then if the cracks weren’t too deep!

By: Barb McKesson

Reflections of Silken Memories

"A most delightful afternoon at the Old Town Hall."

"From the table decorations to wedding cake and beautiful model in old wedding gowns . . . a perfect afternoon."

"What a special time we had . . . made me feel so happy!"

"I hope you will do this again next summer"

These are just a few of the comments heard after the tea and style show. A huge thank-you to Karin Kopischke for again doing a fantastic job of gathering models, fitting dresses, and telling the story of each gown.

There are many people who helped, not only for the tea, but also getting the Noble House ready for the season. Many thanks to the Ephraim Foundation for lending wedding dresses for us to display at Noble House and allowing the dresses to be modeled. And our thanks to the lovely young ladies for modeling these beautiful gowns. It was spectacular!

And to all of YOU who were so generous in sharing your mother's or grandmother's dresses and artifacts, our heartfelt thanks. Without all of this help and the volunteer efforts, we would not have been able to have such a beautiful show.

NOW FOR NEXT YEAR!!!! We are in the process of planning for next year. It appears that we will be doing a show entitled "A Glimpse of Fish Creek's Past." We NEED old sporting clothes dating somewhere between the 20's and the 50's. Did anyone in your family golf? Perhaps you have an old tennis skirt and racket, or maybe children's play clothes. Check your closets and attic or maybe a basement. But before you clean house and toss things away, let us take a look at what you have. You know the old adage, "One man's trash is another man's treasure."

By Eunice Rutherford



Legacy Bricks Already Mark History

The Gibraltar Historical Association continues its Legacy Brick Campaign with proceeds going toward projects and activities. The Brick Campaign is designed to place personalized brick pavers along the walkways surrounding historic Noble House and its beautiful gardens. Bricks are sold for \$75.00 each and a personal legacy message of 3 lines can be engraved on them.

By purchasing a brick you will be accomplishing two objectives. You will be helping with the continued restoration of Noble Square property and setting a lasting tribute in stone. Use your creative imagination to create a lasting memento.

Obtain a form online at historicnoblehouse.org or visit the History Center between noon and 4:00 p.m. on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday.

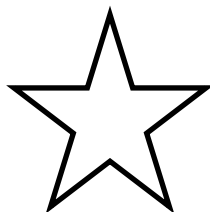


Mark Your Calendars

Before long we will be welcoming the holiday season with Halloween, Thanksgiving, and of course, Christmas. This year we will be celebrating the Tree Lighting on Sunday, December 8th at 6:00 p.m. As in other years, we will gather at 6 p.m. in front of Noble House, sing carols and light the tree. From there we will stroll down to the Old Town Hall and share supper together. We will sing some more songs, light the Christmas tree there, and Mrs. Claus will share some time with the children. Be sure to save the day!



**Sunday,
December 8th
6 P.M.**





**The
Gibraltar Historical
Association
is a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit
and is a member of
The Door County
Community Foundation.**

You can contact
The Door County Community Foundation
at (920) 746-1786

If you would like to become a member of Gibraltar Historical Association, cut on the dotted line,
fill out the form, include your payment and mail it to:

Gibraltar Historical Association, PO Box 323, Fish Creek, WI 54212

GHA Membership

Print Last Name or Use Address Label

First Name (s)

Address

City State ZIP

Phone Number

E-Mail

Membership

Individual \$15.00

Family \$30.00

Business \$50.00

Donations (In addition to Membership)

Pioneer \$50 - \$99

Settler \$100 - \$249

Historian \$250 +

Volunteers

Bakers Greeters

"Archivers" Gardener

Alternate (Mailing) Address

Address

City State ZIP

Date to Date

In the Shade of the Old Apple Tree

The apple orchards are laden with fruit and the growers are busy harvesting tree after tree . . . row after row. MacIntosh . . . Courtland . . . Snow ... Macgowan ... Honey Crisp and Sweet Tango. It reminds me of the poem September. Any one that attended the two room school in Fish Creek so many years ago, would remember this poem. All of us had to memorize it for Mr. Slaby, Sr. It was a must! Thanks Mr. Slaby.

September

The golden-rod is yellow;
The corn is turning brown;
The trees in apple orchards
With fruit are bending down.

The gentian's bluest fringes
Are curling in the sun
In dusty pods the milkweed
Its hidden silk has spun.

The sedges flaunt their harvest,
In every meadow nook;
And asters by the brook-side
Make asters in the brook,

From dewy lanes at morning
The grapes' sweet odors rise;
At noon the roads all flutter
With yellow butterflies.

By all these lovely tokens
September days are here,
With summer's best of weather,
And autumn's best of cheer.

But none of all this beauty
Which floods the earth and air
Is unto me the secret
Which makes September fair.

'T is a thing which I remember;
To name it thrills me yet:
One day of one September
I never can forget.

Helen Hunt Jackson

Another Special Thank You

Once again GHA would like to thank Tom and Beth Young and the Staff at Gibraltar Grill for the lovely dinner last June. Profits from this fundraising dinner donated by the Young's allowed us to archive the show "Garments of Our Foundation," and purchase mannequins for the show at Noble House. The Gibraltar Historical Association sincerely appreciates the generosity of this couple.

