

Mineral Point HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Dedicated to Preserving the Unique History of Mineral Point

Spend the Winter With a Good Photo Album

By Nancy Pfothenhauer

The woolly bears are solid black, the redwing blackbirds left weeks ago—all signs point to another long, beastly winter. So what are you going to do when you're snowed in? An online photo album of the early days of Mineral Point might be just what you're looking for.

Images from several of our excellent photo collections are now available to the general public through collaboration with Wisconsin Heritage Online (WHO).

MPHS is the steward of thousands of images, spanning more than 125 years, which form an invaluable record of our community. Our glass plate negative collection of over 1,300 images, dating from the 1870s to the 1910s, has been used for years as resources for the restoration of many Mineral Point buildings, as illustrations in our newsletters, and by researchers for various projects. It was supplemented last year with donations of the Professor Phil Lewis slides of Mineral Point, from 1971, and the Mary North Allen slides, from the 1990s. Each of these collections contains well over 1,000 images.

At the direction of the MPHS Board last year, directors Mark Speltz and Nancy Pfothenhauer researched available technology and resources for ways to make our photo collections available to a wider audience. They developed a plan that uses the World Wide Web, through association with the WHO search engine, which is hosted on Wisconsin Historical Society servers.

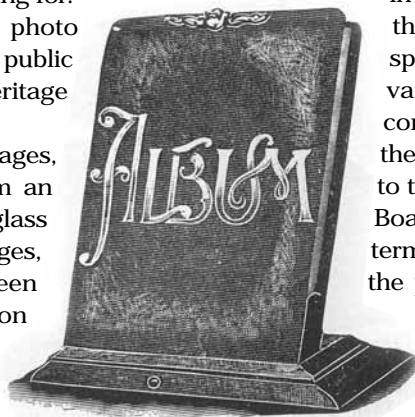
When it became apparent that the project would require expanded computer equipment and software capabilities, the MPHS Board earmarked \$11,000 from the Colwell Education Fund to purchase an extra-large scanner, a

regular scanner, a laptop computer, necessary software, a digital projector, and the startup fees for WHO.

Ken Colwell was a mental health therapist and early member of the Mineral Point artist community. When he died

in 1991, his will gave 10 percent of his estate to the Mineral Point Historical Society "to be used specifically to promote the concept of the variety of ethnic groups comprising the community of Mineral Point with emphasis on the various contributions of such ethnic [groups] to the history and development of that city." The Board felt that an excellent way to fulfill the terms of Ken's bequest would be to digitize all of the photographs currently held by the MPHS. In

addition to the online access, selected images will eventually be used in a printed or digital exhibit that details the contribution of the various ethnic groups to the history and development of Mineral Point.



Early Contributions

The project actually started in the 1980s when Pat and Ann Ripp, who owned a photography studio in town at the time, took on the daunting task of printing all the images from the glass plate collection. When we decided to digitize the collections, we consulted with Andy Kraushaar, Visual Materials Curator at the Wisconsin Historical Society. Although the advice is usually to digitize the primary source (i.e., the negatives), several test scans determined that the Ripp prints were so faithful to the original negatives that scanning the prints would yield results as good as or better than scanning the negatives. This allows the fragile

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Lowell Book Explores Local Histories and Connections

Review by Cliff Krainik

Mark Twain once cynically quipped that genealogists are like potatoes; he reasoned that the best part of both of them is underground. Clearly, Twain never encountered the likes of David Toay Lowell of Livermore, California, a man whose passion for his family's history led him on a ten-year journey culminating in the publication of *Finding Ourselves: A History of Six Families in Mineral Point, Dodgeville, Darlington, and Monticello, Wisconsin, with Their Origins in England, and Their Lives in America*.

What began as an investigation of his maternal family's ancestors evolved into a narrative account of six connected English families who settled in southwest Wisconsin during the early-to-mid 19th century.

Finding Ourselves is divided into six chapters, each containing the history of one of the related emigrant families. The Towells, Mitchell, Harris, Rogers, Roberts, Toay and Jacka families are chronicled by genealogical charts, abundant photographs, newspaper articles, and obituaries.

According to Lowell, "The men of these families were miners, farmers, or tradesmen in mining communities. The ethic of the individual as an independent businessman pervaded their lives." David Lowell is their "Story Teller" and the compiler of the many charts that establish the complex relationships between generations and families. In his voluminous acknowledgements, the author thanks the 40-plus cousins who

provided the historical data and photographs for this in-depth study. David explains that he "only knew six of the cousins personally before the research began." And so, the "Ourselves" in the title of Lowell's book pays homage to the collective efforts of the cousins who "put flesh on the bones" of their ancestors to tell the family story.

The ten select articles in the Appendix — Historical Background provide a rich mixture of vignettes that amplify and define the times in which the six families evolved. These tales include "The Story of the Mineral Point Railroad," "History of the Primitive Methodist Church," and, my favorite, "Warmed-Up Dynamite."

The graphic design, print typeface, and selected illustrations considerably enhance the visual pleasure of reading *Finding Ourselves*. Lowell's technique of dividing the family chapters with relevant paintings by Mineral Point artist Max Fernekas is especially appealing. Two of Fernekas' finest paintings of Mineral Point grace the dust jacket. Other examples of Fernekas' regional imagery appear with the distinctive paintings of Jennifer Sharp and Leslie DeMuth in a suite of illustrations entitled "Where They Lived."

Although originally settled in southwest Wisconsin, within a few decades some of David Lowell's ancestors migrated to western mining and ranching locations in Idaho, Montana, and California. The size of the tribe, of course, increased with each successive generation until the family

ties and relationships became obscured, almost forgotten. David and his cousins have succeeded in re-establishing those connections. In that regard, an index to the names and places of residence for Lowell's ancestors would have been an extremely useful component for this work, an addition that should be included in a subsequent edition.

Finding Ourselves is a valuable historic contribution not limited to the mere telling of a six-family saga. These families are in many respects representative of the inhabitants of southwestern Wisconsin during its formative years. Their struggle against frontier adversity — their failures and successes — gives lesson, inspiration, and cause for admiration to all who follow in the family chart. ●

Finding Ourselves. Hardbound, 401 pp. Livermore, Cal.: Camino Press, 2008. \$60 postpaid. Send orders to David T. Lowell, 1479 Lexington Way, Livermore, Cal. 94550. Please make checks payable to Camino Press.

Cliff Krainik is a photographic historian residing in Warrenton, Virginia. He is presently writing the combined biographies of Max and Ava Fernekas.



Cousins at the Coming Home Reunion at Orchard Lawn on July 19, which celebrated the publication of Lowell's *Finding Ourselves*. Photo by Thomas Ginn.



David Toay Lowell at the Mineral Point Railroad Station when he dedicated a book to the Mineral Point Railroad Society on July 18, 2008. Photo by Thomas Ginn.

negatives to remain safely ensconced in their archival packages.

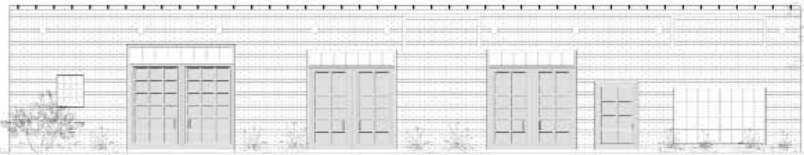
Former Mineral Pointer Dean Connors continued the process several years ago when he scanned all of the glass plate images, indexed them, and made them available on a compact disc. Scanning technology has made considerable strides since, so we are re-scanning selected images from the original photo collection to be added to the online WHO database. The slide collections will be scanned by a commercial service and will be added to the online collection in the near future.

This exciting project will take several years to complete. Volunteers will do much of the work. People who are interested in helping with scanning the photographs, researching the images, or with data entry are encouraged to send a message to MPHS@mineralpointhistory.org. The techniques used are easy to learn and user-friendly training will be provided.

As this newsletter goes to press, more than 75 images are already online with more being added almost daily. Some of the images are going online without descriptions, but that will be added later. Many of the photographs are of people or buildings that aren't identified, and probably never will be, but the pictures are fascinating. Browsing through the photos is a great way to glimpse our community the way it was and how it has changed over the years.

I'd like to insert a personal note: I've been working with these images in one way or another for two years and I still find the most amazing things in them. I am grateful to Pat and Ann Ripp and Dean Connors for the work they've done. You can't imagine how much time they committed to this project until you've done just a portion of what they did.

To see the photos that are already online, go to our website at www.mineralpointhistory.org and click on the link marked "Photos" on the front page. ●



North Elevation, 103 Commerce Street Renovation

Sielaffs Begin New Commerce Street Project

Nan and Ulrich Sielaff are creating new life for the old Farmers' Store Service garage. They are renovating 103 Commerce Street to bring the structure up to 2008 building standards while keeping its original character as a 1940s commercial building.

This building was part of a complex that was developed by Clarence Gratz. In 1935, Clarence purchased two Water Alley warehouses and the storefront building at 111 Commerce Street, and used them for feed, implement, and auto sales and service businesses. In 1942, when Gratz's farm implement business expanded enough to require a separate repair facility, he purchased the old Wisconsin House Hotel at 103 Commerce Street, demolished it, and constructed a new 3,000-square foot brick building with three service bays.

Gratz moved his implement business to the highway in 1977 and sold the Commerce Street building to Bob Camardo. For 30 years, the building housed Camardo's antique repair and restoration business known as The Federal Cabinet Shop.

In 2001, the Sielaffs acquired the 111 complex, where they have completed a stunning renovation that includes their residence. This summer, the cabinet shop moved into a new facility further south on Commerce Street. Because the 103 and 111 buildings share a parking lot, and Sielaffs' buildings on Water Alley were accessible only by a drive that crossed the 103 property, Ulrich and Nancy were motivated to purchase the adjacent building.

According to Ulrich, the original 103 building had large, paned windows, which were bricked shut. A drop ceiling hid the steel trusses that support the roof. He has restored the old window openings and the now-15-foot ceiling will keep the trusses exposed. Only one of the original overhead doors will be replaced with an operable door. The other two will look like doors, but will be closed off.

Ulrich is not sure what type of tenant will eventually locate there. "I can imagine a large studio and retail space that would be ideal for an interested artist or craftsman," he said. "The building will have great light, tall ceilings, and access for very large works." ●

Period Photography Primer Data from www.Wikipedia.com and Leelanau (Mich) Historical Society

Before digital, before film, images were captured on glass plates. In the 1850s, photographers produced a negative by placing a wet glass piece coated with a solution of collodion and silver nitrate into the camera, then exposing it by removing the lens cap for 15 to 30 seconds. An unlimited number of positive prints could be developed on paper, using chemical baths and light, from the negative. This was a welcome advance over the Daguerreotype, a one-of-a-kind positive image that could not easily be replicated. With the *wet-plate* method, pioneer photographers William Henry Jackson and Matthew Brady created powerful images of the western frontier and the Civil War.

A major disadvantage of the wet process was that all of it, from coating to development, had to be done before the plate dried. *Dry-plate* glass negatives were first manufactured in the 1880s; they allowed more time — hours or even days, after coating. Their disadvantage was slowness because an image required three to ten times more exposure on a dry plate than on a wet one.

Glass plate negatives as a form of photographic material largely faded from the consumer market in the early years of the 20th century, as more convenient and less fragile films were introduced. However, photographic plates were in wide use by the professional astronomical community as late as the 1990s. Such plates respond to approximately two percent of light received. ●

A Magical Night

Jay Gatsby would have approved. Approximately 125 guests surely did, when they savored the pleasures of the Roaring Twenties at Orchard Lawn on July 31. The hugely successful MPHS Founders' Day celebration featured a fun, bootleggy cocktail period filled with greeting, gathering, and sharing costume stories; a flavorsome pasta dinner catered by Café Four; danceable music by the especially talented Stellanovas; and the naming of three inductees into the Gundry Legacy Society.

All this in a truly beautiful setting created on the Gundry front lawn with a snazzy white tent; soft white tablecloths; white-draped gazebo; waxy, white long-stemmed roses; and large, white globe lanterns floating overhead.

Most folks were costumed. Some elaborately, others with a simple, whimsical note such as a turban or '20s-looking suspenders. There were beads and feathers and slinky chemises on women; elegant dinner jackets, slicked-back hairstyles, and imaginative hats on men. And lovely weather, too! ●

Below: VIPs (that's Very Important Planners) of the Founders' Day event, from left: Joy Geiseke, Sarah Burkhardt Sable, and Denise Ostragant



Three Inducted Into Gundry Legacy Society

Founders' Day honors individuals who have made outstanding volunteer efforts on behalf of the MPHS and those who have made large gifts to the Stewardship Fund, which serves as our endowment. This year, **Serena Nelson, Ken Colwell,** and **Dean Connors** were inducted into the ranks of the Gundry Legacy Society.

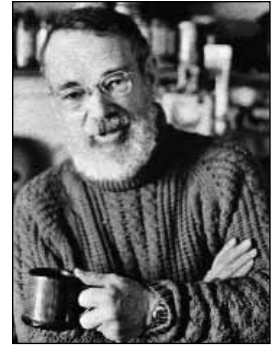
Serena Nelson has been a staunch advocate for the protection and celebration of Mineral Point history since the 1950s. She and her late husband, Mick, bought and began restoration of their home at the corner of Henry and Fountain Streets in 1956. Serena's latest project has been to save and to interpret the sandstone curbstones that line Henry (Alley) Street. [See *MPHS Newsletter*, Summer 2008.] When presenting her award, Jim Stroschein said, "Tonight we are honoring Serena's 50-plus years of work as a reporter, writer, and researcher that have inspired and enlightened both visitors and residents. Her work is evident throughout the town and Mineral Point is a more interesting, vibrant, and 'original' city today because of Serena's dedication and love of history."

The late Ken Colwell was a true renaissance figure in Mineral Point history. His enterprise was The Looms, a one-of-a-kind museum, gallery, and weavers' school housed in the old brewery on Shake Rag Street. According to Stroschein, it was such a popular and influential attraction that it still appears on some modern-day maps, almost 20 years after it closed. Ken was president of the Mineral Point Historical Society in the 1970s and early '80s, a time of tremendous challenges for the organization. The Colwell Education Fund allows the historical society to fund interesting initiatives relating to the study of the various immigrant groups that settled Mineral Point. "Ken's nephew, Todd Colwell, was not able to attend tonight," said Stroschein when presenting this award, "but he told me he was pleased that his uncle was being honored because Ken loved Mineral Point. Todd said he remembered coming to Uncle Ken's house—which is now the Mousehole on Shake Rag Street—for Fourth of July parties. He said the house was full of people and in the basement there was a spring that ran right through—from one wall to another. The adults would ice down their beer in that spring."

"Dean Connors is another renaissance man," said Stroschein. Dean moved to Mineral Point in 1995 and opened The Foundry Books, a treasure house of Wisconsin books and maps. He assumed the MPHS presidency in 1997 and provided important leadership at another critical time in the society's history when the Board grappled with the future of Orchard Lawn. His collaboration with Joan Young and Gundry family descendants led to two Gundry family reunions, which have added rich material to the interpretation of Orchard Lawn in the form of photographs, family history, and artifacts. "Dean's influence spreads far beyond Mineral Point," Stroschein continued as he presented the award, "as he was instrumental in saving one of the only surviving Michigan Territorial-era buildings in Wisconsin—the 1834 Prairie Spring Hotel (south of Mineral Point) along with other early Wisconsin buildings. In 2002, Dean was the recipient of the Wisconsin Historical Society's Award of Merit. We all have mentors, and I'm proud to say that Dean is one of mine." ●



Photo courtesy Caleb Uhe Photography.



Ken Colwell. (MPHS Archives.)



Serena Nelson and Dean Connors with one of the plaques that each received.

Takin' Their Show On the Road

Board members Mark Speltz and Jim Stroschein made well-received presentations at the 2008 Wisconsin Historical Society Local History and Historic Preservation Conference, which convened last month in Madison.

Mark's presentation, with collaborator Jim Draeger, was entitled "Fuelish Thoughts: Lessons Learned from the Lowly Gas Station." According to Mark, "Our goal was to introduce our just-published book and some of the lessons we learned while working on it. We talked about how even the humblest buildings have stories to tell and represent values and broader themes. Preserving and adaptively re-using gas stations helps us to preserve our history and the connections to those who came before us." Mark and Jim are co-authors of *Fill'er Up: The Glory Days of Wisconsin Gas Stations*, published this month by the Wisconsin Historical Society Press.

MPHS president Jim Stroschein appeared with Terry Thiessen of the New Holstein Historical Society to discuss how their small all-volunteer historical societies met the terms of a Jeffris Family Foundation challenge grant to restore two of Wisconsin's most significant historic house museums.

The conference attendees are mainly, but not entirely, from Wisconsin and represent large and small historical societies, museums, and preservation organizations alike. ●



Farm Life Exhibit

More than 650 people toured MPHS's Farm Life exhibit during its 18-week run, including all of Mineral Point's fourth grade students and the FFA students pictured here. The event was truly collaborative: More than 30 families and individuals contributed more than 100 photographs and artifacts to complement their engaging stories about the area's agricultural history. The exhibit was developed by volunteers and over 25 individuals volunteered their time to welcome visitors. ●



This image is used with permission of Barbara Fernekes Hughes.

Mystery Mural

While researching the biographies of Mineral Point artists Max and Ava Fernekes, Cliff Krainik has come upon a photograph of a very curious mural-size painting. The black and white photo is identified as "Maxie's mural taken in studio (Sat. July 17, 1954)." The handwriting is that of Ava Fernekes.

The large canvas depicts a romantic rural scene with towering leafy oaks, a broad dirt road, and an expansive cumulus-cloud-filled sky. By scale the painting measures approximately seven by ten feet. Generally speaking, Max Fernekes' landscapes and architectural paintings depict scenes taken from life, and yet this massive work appears to be an abstraction suggesting a theatrical backdrop.

Cliff is seeking an explanation of the piece and would appreciate hearing from anyone who has information about it. If you can help solve the mystery of Max's mural, please contact any MPHS board member. ●

Well-known author, storyteller, and historian Jerry Apps was a big hit when he appeared at the Mineral Point Opera House on September 11. The free, public event was part of the MPHS summer-long Farm Life initiative.



We are looking for a good, used electric clothes dryer for the laundry area at Gundry House. If you know of one or can suggest a good lead toward acquiring one, please contact the MPHS house manager, Janet Lawinger, at 987.2884. Thanks! ●



Notes from the President

By Jim Stroschein, President, Mineral Point Historical Society

I've Seen Better Daze

If you weren't there, you missed a great thing.

September 12, 2008. The last Jammin' on the Porch of the season. The band Better Daze was playing. A light rain started falling. A few groups of spectators left the lawn. Most stayed. The band played Deep Purple, Tom Petty, KT Tunstall (Black Horse & the Cherry Tree... Woo-Hoo...), AC/DC.

Ginger Brand started dancing on the driveway. The rain picked up. Joy Gieseke set down her wrap and accessories, jumped down from the porch (taking the steps would have been too easy) and joined in. A local artist named Bruce showed dance moves that are illegal in seven states and two provinces. Inspired, the dance crew swelled to 14 or 15. In the shadows of the porch, Allen Schroeder became the Tambourine Man.

Like I said, if you weren't there, you missed it.

The rain fell harder. Peg and Jeff Koehler loaned me one of their umbrellas. I thought, "Great future promotional item: the MPHS Jammin' on the Porch Parasol." Nobody left. I saw people mouthing the words to songs by Janice Joplin, Led Zepplin, and the Beatles. With the rain coming down, I expected Country Joe & the Fish any minute. I passed the tip jar, ala Mike Mitchell, and it filled rapidly. All for the band. There was a certain spirit among the people who stayed: "We're all experiencing this — in less than ideal conditions — and we're in this together and we're going to send summer out with a blast." Or, welcome fall in with a blast. Maybe both. Whatever. Your choice. The audience throatily demanded an encore. Better Daze delivered.

All of this, in the rain, on the lawn, on the porch, at Orchard Lawn.

Dead curators were rolling in their graves. A rock band playing at a house museum?

For a few hours on a late summer Friday night, an old house on a hill was THE place to be.

If you weren't there, you missed a great thing. ●



Dues Are Due; Annual Fund needs YOU

Your invitation to renew your membership and to contribute to the Annual Fund will soon be in the mail. To keep membership affordable for everyone, dues remain at the level they have been for years—\$15 for an individual, \$25 for a family, \$50 for a business.

Contributions to the Annual Fund, in addition to your dues, are very welcome. We are assuming that this year, in light of the poor financial news, some of our supporters will cut back on their usual gifts. This makes it even more important for others, who are able, to step in and take up the slack.

Please help us keep our mission alive, to keep people interested in the amazing history of Mineral Point, and to continue to collect and save the stories of our unique little town. Please renew your membership promptly with a check for as much as you can afford. ●

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Mineral Point Historical Society Membership Form

January 1, 2009 to December 31, 2009

All members receive the newsletter and free tours of Orchard Lawn.

Please check one:

- Individual (\$15.00)
- Family (\$25.00)
- Business (\$50.00)

Additional Contribution \$ _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

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Make checks payable to the Mineral Point Historical Society and return this form to:

Mineral Point Historical Society
P.O. Box 188
Mineral Point, WI 53565

Thank you again for your support!

Please remember to mail your membership dues.



A highlight at the 16th Annual Cornish Festival was this line-up of approximately 30 restored 1928-1931 vehicles, brought to town by the Illinois Region of the Model A Restorers Club.

Mineral Point
HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Dedicated to Preserving the Unique History of Mineral Point

P.O. Box 188 • 234 Madison Street
 Mineral Point, WI 53565
608.987.2884

2009 MPHS Calendar

Sunday, January 25 • 2 p.m.
 Annual Meeting and Lyceum,

Sunday, February 15 • 2 p.m.
 Lyceum, 2 p.m.

Sunday, March 15 • 2 p.m.
 Lyceum

**Friday, May 29 through
 Sunday, September 27**
 Orchard Lawn Tour Season

Friday, July 24
 Founders' Day

*Jammin' on the Porch will continue
 on second Fridays in June, July,
 August, and September.*

www.mineralpointhistory.org

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