



Westphalia Historical Society Newsletter

December 2013

Volume 10

Historical Society Raffle

Congratulations to Evan Thelen winner of the handmade Christmas Angel tree topper. And a big "thank you" to all who purchased tickets. The raffle was a huge success.

Historical Center & Museum Campaign

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If you would like to make a donation, please send it to Westphalia Historical Society, P.O. Box 163, Westphalia, Michigan 48894-0163.



Continuing our remembrance of those who have served our country....

World War I – (April 1917-November 1918) – More than 50 men from the Westphalia area served in this war with 2 of them giving their life; they were:

Edward W. Gruber, Pvt. – He was the son of John Gruber, Sr. & Anna Witt. Edward served with the Expeditionary Forces in France. One month before the war ended, he died. His body was sent home from France and his burial took place in Eagle Cemetery.

Leo J. Theis, Pvt. – was the son of Charles Theis & Ida Wieber. Pvt. Theis was sent to France with the 85th Division. In his letters home he wrote, "I'm with Peter Schmitz, Theo Droste, Otto Fedewa and Arnold Thelen." His last letter said, "Please pray for me. I don't think I'll ever see my home again." He died 17 Oct 1918 in France. His body was sent home in March of 1919 and buried in St. Mary's Cemetery.

World War II – (December 1941-September 1945) – Once again many (100+) from the area served our country and this time 3 gave their life; they were:

Martin J. Rademacher, Sgt. – He was the son of William Rademacher & Bertha Goerge. In October of 1943 at the age of 18 Martin was drafted into the Air Force and stationed in Italy with the 454 - 455 Bomber Squadron. He was killed 20 Nov 1944 on a bombing mission over Hungary. Their disabled plane was attempting a landing when it hit a landmine. Sgt. Rademacher was awarded the Purple Heart. In December of 1949 his body was brought home and laid to rest in St. Mary's Cemetery.

Theodore Schafer, Pfc. – He was the son of Nicholas Schafer & Oliva Kolp. Teddy, as he was better known, was inducted in June of 1942 and left for overseas duty with Company E, 36th Infantry, 3rd Armored Division in 1943. He was killed in action in France June 29, 1944. Pfc. Schafer's first burial was in Lacombe, France. In 1948 his body was sent home to Westphalia and laid to rest beside his parents in St. Mary's Cemetery. He was awarded the Purple Heart.

Ronald W. Spitzley, Cpl. – He was the son of Anthony Spitzley & Theresa Pohl. Ronald was inducted in 1943 and sent overseas to serve with an anti-tank company in General George Patton's Army. Cpl. Spitzley fought in battles from North Africa into France. He was awarded the Purple Heart after having been wounded in April 1944. He was killed in action December 31, 1944 during the Battle of the Bulge. His first burial was in the American Military Cemetery in Epinal, France. In 1948 his body was sent home to Westphalia and was laid to rest in St. Mary's Cemetery.

The Korean War – (June 1950-July 1953) – Once again many from the area (70+) served our country and this time we were fortunate to have all returned home safely.

The Vietnam War – (1959-1975) - Eighteen from our area served in this war. **Robert J. Thelen, Specialist 5** – son of Otto Thelen & Rose Schueller gave his life. He entered the armed services in March 1969 and after completing Paratrooper & Special Forces training was accepted into the elite Green Beret ranks. He was awarded many commendations, among them the Purple Heart and the Oak Leaf Cluster. He was killed in action Feb 21, 1971 while on special combat duty in Vietnam, just 15 days before he was to return home. Specialist Thelen's body was returned home to Westphalia for burial in St. Mary's Cemetery.

Afghanistan – The War on Terrorism

Jeff Pohl, T-Sgt. with the U.S. Air Force's 9th Special Operation Squadron, was one of eight crewmembers serving aboard an aircraft with the call sign "Ditka 03" on February 12 & 13, 2003. Jeff was the Right Loadmaster on this routine refueling mission into Afghanistan. Just after sunset, they took off from their base in Pakistan – their plane rising slowly north into the mountains of Afghanistan where they would refuel the helicopters. The flight back to the command base was faced with many problems: severe air turbulence and poor visibility. And then, they hit the mountain! Seven walked away from the wreckage, but Jeff wasn't so lucky. He was pinned in the wreckage, face down in jet fuel soaking into a cushion of packed snow. He suffered massive injuries. Of most concern was the internal bleeding, but Jeff was a fighter; he survived! The subzero temperature possibly saved his life as it stopped the bleeding. The son of Carl Pohl & Lillian Cook, Jeff is now retired from the Air Force, married and living in Texas where he doesn't have to endure subzero temperatures and waist-deep snow.

Moving on to pleasanter events....

Happy 90th Birthday to Norbert Fox!

And, here is a memory Norbert shared with us in the 1986 "blue book". "Back in the early thirties John Geller was walking down the sidewalk toward town. The first graders had just completed their first day of school and were coming out of the east side school building. Mr. Geller stopped, bent over, placed several fingers under his foot and cried "boys, help me! My fingers are caught!" Immediately four or five of the first graders pulled on John's leg from all directions. The next instant John straightened up and with a "Thank you boys", continued on his way to town."

From the Annals of Westphalia High School 1938-1939

Julius Hengesbach, son of William Hengesbach & Margaret Sontag, although listed with the freshmen of 1938-39, was a special student whose desire for a higher education caused him to avail himself of the opportunities which his earlier school days had lacked. Due to his somewhat advanced age (he was born in 1916) and great ambition, he was able to complete 2 years' work in English and Mathematics as well as Ancient History & 1st year Latin. The next year he moved to Conesus, New York and finished his high school work prior to joining the Society of the Divine Word. (After a stay with this order, Julius decided to become a diocesan priest and returned to Michigan. He was ordained by Bishop Joseph H. Albers on June 6, 1953 at St. Mary Cathedral in Lansing. He served in various parishes in the Diocese of Lansing & when the Kalamazoo Diocese was inaugurated in the early 1970s he served in that diocese until his retirement in 1989.) Father Julius died on May 22, 2002 at the age of 86 and is buried here in Westphalia.

Christmas in the Past

by Joe Rademacher

I will begin by sharing with you the events of those early Christmases that are special to me. Our Christmas tree was in the parlor. Some of you may say – so what's a parlor? In our house it was a special room. It was Mom's (Verena) room, with her best furniture, large floral wallpaper patterns, and the drapes carried the same theme as did the carpet. It was a bold floral!

You knew it was Mom's room. You only went in there on special occasions like Christmas or the Farm Bureau meetings. It was a place where the women gathered when the men from the Catholic Order of Foresters did their audits. Dad (Elmer) was on that committee for years.

Let's go back to that parlor room. It was where the Christmas tree was placed. Around the bottom was a nativity set. Mom would gather us in the parlor in front of the tree every night during the Advent season. She would lead us in praying the rosary. We boys would be on our knees as we prayed. We were young. More memorable though is that fact that we – Gary, John & I – spent most of the time rearranging the little evergreen trees and the figurines in the stable. I will always remember that. So, if we're talking about Christmas – just how did Santa arrive? We didn't have a chimney. Mom would close the door to the parlor. We played in the living room. Typically when we entered the parlor to see if Santa had come, we would find the south window wide open. This is how Santa got in there with the toys!

Winters in the 1930s and 1940s

By Bernadette Snitgen-Thelen

Way before TV, we played outside a lot with other "Townners". We had no snowsuits, sweatshirts, or snowshoes, so we wore sweaters, a wool coat, knitted caps, and two pairs of socks (cotton, long).

Real fun was on the hill across from our house. We ran from the center of the road and plopped down on our sleds to sail down on the snow. Ronnie Bohr gave us a real thrill when he stood on his head on the sled, and rode down the hill.

At our house, we did dishes and homework then sang as Eileen played the piano. For a short time we took music lessons from a man named Red Edwards who came to town once a week. I played guitar (borrowed). Dorothea played mandolin, also borrowed.

For a short time there was roller skating in Spitzley's hall, now Al Hengesbach Builders. Then there was roller skating in St. Mary's old hall, upstairs.

Of course we all attended St. Mary's Church and also the school taught by the greatest Christian Charity Nuns. In 1944 we graduated from Westphalia High School. There were seven students in the seventh Westphalia High School Class. Don Schafer returned from seminary to be the one boy in the class.

One time, Louie Droste let his son George take the car to go ice skating, but he had to take his sister Shirley along. I was her friend and got to go with them. George took some of his friends. The Portland ponds were not ready for skating so we drove back to Shotwell Bridge which spans the Grand River. We stepped carefully on blocks of ice on the edge of the river. Ice was solid on the river itself. I honestly do not recall if we just walked or skated, but we did go out there. When I told my folks where we had been, their hair stood straight up. Dad shook his finger and said "Don't you ever do anything like that again."

We skated 1 ½ miles west and south of town by John Martin's farm. We were tired and cold as we walked home into the house in tears with ice-cold hands and feet.

Our Simon grandparents kept us overnight sometimes. To warm up, we stood on their square register to soak up heat before running upstairs to bed, **B-R-R-R-R-R-R-R-R**. At Christmas time the tree bore little candles which were lit for just a little while.

Eight of us girls formed a group called "The Jolly Eight". Every month, on a Sunday, we enjoyed a grand meal followed by games, piano music, and singing. Members were Ruth Hengesbach, Revella Hanses, Lucille Pung, Evelyn Freund, Lilly Mae Spitzley, Jeanette Weiland, Germaine Snitgen, and Bernadette Snitgen. This group lasted for many years. Each of us celebrated 50 years of marriage, and Ruth, who became Sister Angelica, celebrated 50 years as a nun.

In St. Mary's old hall, now the funeral home, there were two bowling lanes in the basement. There we learned to bowl a bit.

And what do we oldsters do for fun now? We have a jolly good time playing cards!



This' n That:

In case you've missed it, we now have a website www.westphaliahistory.weebly.com.

Any questions or suggestions may be emailed to westphalia1836@gmail.com.

Next Meeting: 7 p.m. Tuesday, December 10 at the Township Hall.....

New Year's Eve

As I remember, it was customary in our neighborhood for my parents, Bernard & Lena Pohl, the Arnold Weilands, and the Harold Plattes to gather for the celebration of New Year's Eve. They would have plenty of cider and doughnuts for this festive and joyous celebration. Playing cards would go on till midnight, when the fathers of each home would go out into the snowy and crisp midnight air with their shotguns and shoot in the New Year – singing of the traditional New Year's Eve song –Neujahr Anschiesen – would begin. This was a New Year's announcement to all household members – the father and mother, sons and daughters, hired man and maid, the dog and cat, rats and mice – all of whom supposedly were in the homes.

This traditional song also extended a Happy New year to all of the barnyard animals – the cows and horses, swine and sheep, chicken and geese.

You can believe this if you want – one of the men shot off a telephone wire one New Year's Eve.

Each New Year's Eve was celebrated in the customary tradition as it was brought to this country by our German ancestors.

By Carl N. Pohl in our 1986 "blue book"

Christmas Blessings

And

A

Joyous New Year

To All