

Season's Greetings from the Belle Plaine Historical Society

2011 Winter Newsletter

Henry B. Tippie Annex

Henry Tippie may have left town after his 1944 high school graduation, but his deep affection for Belle Plaine is evident in his latest contribution to the area, the Henry B. Tippie Annex. Construction began in June on this addition to the east side of B.P. Area museum.

The first floor of the annex will house Mr. Tippie's private collection of artifacts and memorabilia, telling the story of his life—from the early years on his family's dairy farm east of Belle Plaine, through his years in the military, college, and the business world. Exhibits will also reflect the times and the history of the Belle Plaine area.

The second floor of the annex will include exhibits, Belle Plaine High School graduation photos (formerly in Drahos Shoe Store), and an auditorium that will seat over 180 people.

Dedication of the annex will take place August 2012.



Artist's Rendering of Annex

A Fond Farewell and a Warm Welcome

This autumn the Historical Society said farewell to two long-time board members—Chuck and Zina Gordon—and welcomed three who are new to the board—Rich Franklin, Christene Vokoun, and Mitch Malcolm.

Chuck and Zina Gordon, board members since 2002, recently moved to Wisconsin to be closer to family. In their time on the board, during which Zina served as Vice-President, the Gordons worked tirelessly to help the historical society realize their dream of a museum in Belle Plaine. As board members, watching this dream become a reality was one of their greatest rewards. Other highlights include watching the museum mural go up and seeing all the great things happening in Belle Plaine.

New board member Rich Franklin is a Belle Plaine native, who returned to Iowa after more than 30 years in California. He now owns Corn Belt Books & Video, formerly Main Street Video, in Belle Plaine and substitute teaches. One of his current projects for the museum is working with the business community to establish in-house exhibits.

Christene Vokoun and her family moved recently from Iowa City to Belle Plaine, to be closer to the Chelsea family farm. She has two wonderful sons and serves on the B.P. PTO. Her passionate interest in older homes and architecture led her to volunteer with the museum and then serve on the board. She will act as museum liaison with the local schools and teachers.

A 1979 graduate of Belle Plaine, Mitch Malcolm has lived in Alabama and Colorado, as well as Marion, Iowa. Additionally, his job with Kwik-Way has taken him on trips around the world. He recently took up residence once again in Belle Plaine and soon joined the museum board, where he serves as Vice President.

Belle Plaine: The DVD

Two thumbs up for the museum's new DVD that chronicles the history of Belle Plaine through photographs, oral histories, and video highlights of the past 150 years. Mitch Malcolm spearheaded work on the DVD, scheduled for release in 2012.

Mitch began this project to document the rich history of the area and to preserve for future generations the stories of current residents. Using a DVD format allowed him to mix media and give viewers the experience of seeing video and pictures almost come to life on a television or computer screen.

As his work on the film progressed, Mitch became even more excited by the depth of area history and the task of preserving and sharing that history.

Check out more about the DVD on the Belle Plaine Iowa Sesquicentennial Facebook page.



The Sunday History Series

March 4: Story of Nature Park

March 18: Prelude to Pioneer Pumpkin Fest

April 15: Memories of Rural School Classrooms

May 20: History of Elberon

All programs start at 2:00 p.m.
Coffee and cookies served.



Belle Plaine on the National Register of Historic Places

Herring Hotel

What do Teddy Roosevelt and William Jennings Bryant have in common? They both stayed in Belle Plaine's Herring Hotel. Built by W. P. Herring in 1900, this popular stop on the Lincoln Highway began life as a two-story hotel with a full attic and basement and, on the east side, a three-quarters length, open porch and a second story balcony.

A 1914 fire destroyed the attic and roof. As a result, Mr. Herring added a third story to the hotel, bringing the number of rooms from 29 to 40. Interior changes included moving the main staircase from the west side of the lobby to the NW corner and the front desk from the north side of the lobby to the west side. An addition to the dining room increased seating from 30 to 50. Five rooms were given private baths.

More remodeling in 1919 and 1920 included a Ratskeller, an enlarged steam-heated garage (for automobiles of hotel guests), a billiards room, a new boiler room, a gas station, and a refurbished interior. A final remodeling took place in 1922, and little has changed since.

Owner Jim Morrow and his daughter Kristine Pope had the building listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2008. Future plans for the hotel include a B&B and a youth history learning center.



Sankot Motor Company

After 90 years in the Sankot family, the garage is still going strong—not only as an active place of business but as a gathering place for people to meet, socialize, and discuss current events as they look out at the old Lincoln Highway.

Although owner and operator Bill Sankot focuses on repairing farm equipment and older cars, the business began life as the Sankot Motor Company, a Chrysler dealership with a 24-hour, 7-days-a-week towing service for Lincoln Highway motorists. The original Sankot owners—brothers Otto Benjamin (O.B.), Sid, and Charles—began the business in the early 1920s, after O.B. returned from WWI. The building they chose for their garage had been constructed soon after the Great Fire of 1894.

In the 1930s, Frank (Pansy) Sankot, a nephew to the three brothers, bought the business and began an auto repair shop. By the mid-30s, he had a Case (farm equipment) dealership, which lasted well into the 1950s. The Case sign, now famously associated with the Lincoln Highway, went up in the 1940s. Although the Case dealership eventually ended, Pansy continued to operate the repair shop until his death in the late 1970s. His son Bill then bought the business that is still operating today.

Thanks to Bill's efforts, in 1995 the garage was listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



What Else is New?



During the months of January and February, we will be open by appointment only and not keep regular hours. Look for our Grand Reopening in the spring, when you'll see our permanent collections reorganized and updates to our Genealogy Library.



One update to the permanent collections will be display cases for the Civil War—era quilt, the 1880's handmade American flag, and the military uniforms from WWI through the War on Terror. These cases will not only enhance presentation of the artifacts, but will also help to protect and preserve the materials.



Now exclusively available for viewing at the BP Area Museum is a documentary film of the 1970 BP undefeated football season. Game film was donated by Mrs. Dixie Carlson and contributions from several 1970 team members financed conversion of the film to digital media. Greg Pech edited and choreographed the action to music and photographs from the era.

Belle Plaine Trivia

1. What was the Pumpkin Vine?
2. What other BP businesses have been in the same family for over 80 years?
3. What day of the week did the Great Fire of 1894 take place?

1. The railroad line between Belle Plaine and What Cheer.
2. King Theater and Drahos Shoe Store.
3. Saturday (5:30 p.m. on July 28, 1894).