

In this issue . . .

Digital Museum Software. 2
Clasen/Wendt Family. 3
Thank You MCF. 4
Computers & Stamps 5
Beer Tasting Event!! 6
The Donated Check. 7
Membership application 8



The Newsletter of the Mequon-Thiensville Historical Society

Volume 24, Number 1, Spring 2022

historic times



Ravenscraft-Vickerman Living Platinum Life

By Jeff Wenzler

For many, making it to the “Golden Years” is a feat, and if you can make it healthy and happy, most would consider that living “The Good Life.” Well, there is another level, and that is “The Platinum Life.” This is the designation for one special community member who is turning 101 years young this May 3, 2022. Joan Ravenscraft-Vickerman was, and still is, an exceptional community member who represents the best of Mequon-Thiensville.

Joan was born in 1921 as is a member of the appropriately named group, “The Greatest Generation,” (1901-1927). Pause to let that soak in. 1921 was the year Albert Einstein received the Nobel Peace Prize in physics, The Chicago White Sox were accused of throwing the World Series, Warren G. Harding became the President, Adolph Hitler was named Chairman of the Nazi Party in Germany, Ellis Island was under quarantine due to a Typhus outbreak, and The Wisconsin Legislature passed the nation’s first equal rights bill giving women the right to vote, just to name a few.

Joan came along at just the right time. The world was changing, slowly but surely. It was ready for a spirited and motivated future businesswoman and servant leader of her community. Her roots were in Janesville and her education was at Miss Brown’s Business College in Milwaukee. Her business career here in Mequon started with her husband, Dale. He drove through rural Mequon on the two lane Port Washington Road where he found a little country store with six acres of land that he wanted to buy. Joan laughed that she didn’t even know where Mequon was. That was 70 years ago. They wanted to be business owners and now their dream would come true. That purchase of the Zedler Lane Food and Liquor

Continued on page 4.

Organizing History in a Digital World

By Fay Walker

With thousands, if not tens of thousands, of newspaper clippings, photos, articles, family stories, maps, documents and other items in our collection, and new things being added every day, have you ever wondered how we keep it all organized and accessible?

During the 35-year history of the Mequon-Thiensville Historical Society, items have been sorted by hand, copied, and filed in one of the many file cabinets or archival boxes in the society. As you can imagine, finding items in our collection has been a difficult task that has often relied on the personal knowledge of one of our volunteers. Between a growing collection and volunteer turnover, we needed a better way of managing our collection.



Thanks to generous donations from MTHS members Joyce Rosenberg, Judy and Glenn Helgeland, and Robert and Maureen Sievers, we have been able to purchase the equipment, software, and training needed to move forward in building a digital database to organize our collection.

MTHS has entered the digital age using a museum-management software tool called PastPerfect. This software helps us better man-

age and research our collections, plan exhibits, record loans, digitize additions to our collection, and stay in touch with our growing membership.

PastPerfect helps us to:

Collections Management

We can document objects, photos, archives, based on common museum management standards and practices.

Research & Reporting

We can search our collections in a variety of ways, including by keyword, query, and search term.

Membership/Contact Management

We can record memberships, financial donations, pledges, and volunteer hours. The software also allows us to send emails, produce bulk mailings, print letters and envelopes, and produce mailing labels through the use of Contact Lists.

PastPerfect software is not just a “one-trick-pony”. There many facets/modules including creating identifying numbers for accessions. How will the accession be remembered and later found? Each new item is given an accession number recording the item’s donation date and donor information, an object catalog number, a description of the item, a digital photograph, and a location in our office where it stored. In the future, we will be able to run a search for a name for instance and the software will show us every place in our collection where related information is stored.

Continued on Page 3

Digital World Software (cont.)

It's been an exciting time getting acquainted with the capabilities of this powerful museum management software, and we have only begun to scratch the surface of PastPerfect's potential. Currently we have only one person trained to use the program. As such, we're looking for volunteers/members that would like to help us to Better manage our collection.



The cut-copy-file system used for the past 35 years

If you have an interest or experience in database programs or would like to learn to digitally organize and maintain our collection, please stop by the archives on Thursday afternoons, or drop us a note at mthistory1839@gmail.com.



MTHS member Lois Clasen (lower right) brought her extended family to our archives recently to go through a box of her family's history with our Archivist, Mary Sayner. The area family names involved included Wendt, Clasen, Wetzell, Rheude, Hadler, and Hustings.

MTHS Board of Directors

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Email:	mthistory1939@gmail.com
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Support Us

MTHS is a 501(c)(3) donor-supported organization. Your tax deductible dues and donations are greatly appreciated.

Ravenscraft-Vickers' Platinum Life

Continued from page 1.

was only the start. They moved it down the street to the intersection of Port Washington Rd. and Zedler Lane and added a Standard Oil filling station. Later they sold that and built a new grocery store and restaurant on their six acres called the Port Zedler Drive-In with 17 car hops serving custard, floats and burgers along with indoor dining. Weekends were filled with hungry customers playing pinball and listening to the jukebox while feasting on a 95-cent Friday Night Fish Fry.

Eventually their business was converted over to a nine-room motel. Joan proudly shared that she was the only female board member of area's Motel/Hotel Association and the only small motel owner represented among the downtown giants.

With the unfortunate passing of her husband, Dale, Joan continued on with their shared dreams running their motel until 1990. She also served as the President of FOCUS, a women's business network, was a City of Mequon alderwoman and a candidate for the mayor's office, served as a parish councilwoman at St. James Parish (now Lumen Christi Parish), and was a dedicated parish volunteer educating youth for years.

Joan Ravenscraft-Vickerman has survived two husbands, ten decades, a World War, countless global conflicts, mind-blowing technological advancements, and now a pandemic. What were once evenings with the family on the floor in front of the radio listening to "One Man's Family" and going to nickel films starring Hoot Gibson and Tom Mix have turned into evenings reading mystery books by James Patterson.

Looking back over 100 years, Joan humbly offered her advice on living a good life. "Have Faith. It got me through everything. Be a people person. Become involved. Let them know you care. A lot of people are by themselves -- CALL THEM!"

I couldn't leave without asking the million-dollar question, "What does a woman eat to live a long life?" Her list was not what I thought it would be. It wasn't a diet of Omega 3, broccoli, or skim milk. Joan smiled at the question, paused and said, "I'm a good eater- I eat too much. I like chocolate cake, banana cream pie, and Guinness beer." Finally, Joan revealed the secret to her banana cream pie; "Use an Oreo cookie crust!"

Jeff Wenzler is a member of the MTHS board and the author of *The Pivotal Life, A Compass for Discovering Purpose, Passion and Perspective* .

Mequon Community Foundation Supports MTHS

The Mequon Community Foundation has actively supported the MT Historical Society for over ten years. When we were going through a period of transition in 2010, MCF gave us seed money to help bring in John Gurda as a speaker and funds to send out a long-overdue newsletter. As our collection grew and safe storage became an expensive problem, MCF again stepped up to fund archival boxes needed to preserve irreplaceable items in our collection.

Most recently, The Mequon Community Foundation stepped up to help us upgrade our technology. With their support, we purchased two high-quality, refurbished Lenovo computers, Microsoft Office software, a professional quality digital scanner, and surge protectors for all of our equipment.

To learn more about The Mequon Community Foundation, please visit the MCF website at www.mcfgives.org .

Edwards Supplies Computers To MTHS

As the MT Historical Society has grown, we have needed to build our technology resources. High-quality computers have increasingly become a major expense for our society. When the Mequon Community Foundation recently stepped up to help us purchase a new laptop for our oral histories and community presentations, our plan was to purchase one computer.

Thiensville resident and MTHS member Bill Edwards repairs, refurbishes, and installs computers. He stepped up to fill our needs. Bill provided us with two refurbished professional-quality Lenovo solid-state laptops loaded with MS Office software for about the cost of a new laptop. He also totally rebuilt and upgraded one of our ailing computers.



Board members Barb Johnson, Fay Walker, and Sam Cutler watch as Bill Edwards sets up one of our new computers.

MTHS and The Mequon Community Foundation thank Bill Edwards for his generosity and his willingness to share his computer knowledge and skills. Once again, the community has stood up to support the work of MTHS and stretch the dollars donated by MCF. We are very grateful.

Mequon River Postal Museum News

The Mequon River Postal Museum is getting ready for the upcoming season. The museum curator, Sam Cutler, recently held a docent training session for MTHS board members who will be available to open the museum for our expanded 2022 hours.



As many of you know, the postal museum is located in the 1839 Isham Day House across from Mequon's City Hall. In addition to the Thursday opening hours of recent years, additional times to visit the museum can now be arranged.

The museum features fun and informative storyboards about the interesting people who settled, built, and served the Town of Mequon as postmasters in the 19th century. The building is a story in itself and served as the hub of local business and politics during the mid-1800s. The Isham Day House is the oldest building in Ozaukee County that remains on its original foundation.

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR
SUPPORT OF MTHS!!**

Buy Your Tickets Now — MAY 5th

The MT Historical Society is breaking out of the COVID-era lockdown and holding a fundraising event for the community.

On Thursday, May 5th, your MTHS will be hosting a beer tasting evening at Reuter Pavilion in Rotary Park. The event will feature a wide variety of beers to sample along with live music by the String Along Band and food supplied by Chuck's Place in Thiensville. The event will run from 5-8

If you know of a business or person who would be interested in being an event sponsor or donating a gift card, please contact Fay Walker at mthistory1839@gmail.com or call us at 262-242-3107.



Admission will be \$50 per ticket, and attendance will be limited. No tickets will be sold at the door, and all attendees must be 21 or older. Tickets are now available online .

Buy your tickets at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/beer-tasting-fundraiser-tickets-309067066917?aff=ebdssbcitybrowse>

**MEQUON-THIENSVILLE
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

216 Green Bay Road, Suite 102
Thiensville, WI 53092
262-242-3107 | mthistory1839@gmail.com

Open Thursday afternoons, 2-5pm,
and by appointment.
For research assistance,
call archivist Bev Silldorff at 262-242-3290

MTHS Facebook Group Now Tops 5,000 Members

Over two years ago, the MT Historical Society launched a Facebook group to provide a place for the community to hold a friendly conversation about our history.

**YOU KNOW YOU ARE FROM ME-
QUON THIENSVILLE IF ...** now has over 5,000 members who share stories, pictures, questions, local historical trivia, and renew old acquaintances.

The group follows simple rules banning anything political, uncivil, or self-promoting. All members must answer a few questions to show that they are part of the community. Join us!! You will enjoy it.

Check Mystery Solved

In other parts of this newsletter, we've talked about the growth and organization of our collection of historic pictures, articles, and other interesting pieces of our community's history. Recently, a Thiensville insurance agent, Todd Davis, found a very interesting item while digging around in the crawl space of his office at 159 Green Bay Road. He was surprised to come across the old check and contacted us at MTHS to share his very interesting find.



What Davis found was a canceled 1939 check from Gierach's Grocery paying Quality Bakery in Cedarburg \$36.38. The check was drawn on the Thiensville State Bank and included a picture of the bank's stately art deco building from 1930. The check was signed by Raymond Gierach.

The historical society frequently receives donated items, and this check could easily have been accessioned, inventoried, and filed. But there was something about this check that brought about a little digging into its background. Who was Raymond Gierach and what was the history of his grocery store?

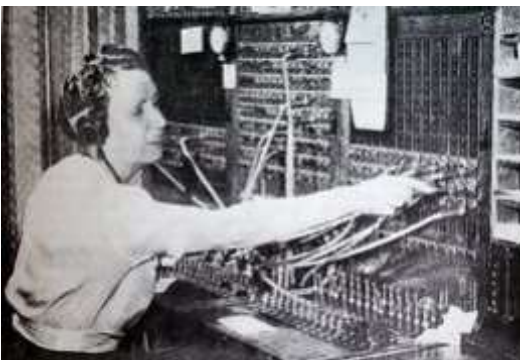
Ray Gierach was the youngest son of John Gierach and Augusta (nee Krueger) Gierach. Ray's father, John, was born around 1865, (exact date not noted) in Freistadt. At the age of 16, John Gierach was apprenticed to a blacksmith in Cedarburg, and he bought a smithy business in Thiensville eight years later. In 1889, Gierach started his own blacksmith shop in Thiensville and built a new building at 159 Green Bay Road. That same year, he married Augusta Krueger..

After 20 years as a blacksmith, the horse and buggy era began to fade and Gierach's business began to drop off. He closed his blacksmith business in 1910. Over the next three years, Gierach converted his ironwork business into a grocery store. The store remained in the Gierach family into the 1960s.



John Gierach

In the course of learning more about the Gierach family, we discovered several little-known facts. John Gierach was appointed as the Town of Mequon Tramp Commissioner in the early 1890s and



Eleanore Gierach Whitmann

was paid five cents for every referral he made to a gentleman named H. Mohrhusen who housed the "tramps". How long Gierach maintained that position isn't known, but it is known that he became the first village president of Thiensville in 1910. Another interesting note is that sometime after 1910, the kitchen of the Gierach home housed the village's telephone switchboard. Their daughter, Eleanore Whitmann Gierach, served as chief operator until 1929 when the number of subscribers outgrew her single switchboard

Mequon-Thiensville Historical Society

216 Green Bay Road, Suite 102

Thiensville, WI 53092

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Please Renew Your Membership

VOLUNTEER!

Call Mary Sayner, Volunteer Coordinator, at 262-242-3107 for information.



**I Would Like To Join or Renew
My Membership
in the Mequon-Thiensville Historical Society!**

Name(s) _____ Phone: _____

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City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Amount Enclosed: _____ Tax deductible 501(c)(3) donations are appreciated.

I would like the newsletter sent to my Email Address: _____

I am interested in volunteering with the Mequon Thiensville Historical Society Yes No

Annual Membership Levels:

- Individual \$ 15
- Family \$ 20
- Contributing \$ 30
- Business \$ 80
- Sustaining \$100

Please consider taking out a multi-year membership.

Please Mail Checks to:

M-T Historical Society
216 Green Bay Road, Suite 102
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Payments and donations are also accepted online at
www.mthistoricalsociety.org