



Sumner House

# Roselle History Museum Newsletter

Official Publication of the Roselle Historical Foundation  
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Winter 2016

Pick a color,  
any color



**2016 Christmas Open House**  
**Sunday, December 4, 2-4 p.m.**  
**Sumner House Museum**

Along with the usual sweets ‘n treats, an array of vintage toys and dolls will be showcased during the Open House festivities. In addition to sampling all the goodies and sipping the tasty beverages, guests will get to be kids again.

Coloring is trendy now for adults as well as children, and each guest will receive a souvenir coloring book that doubles as the traditional cookie recipe booklet guests have come to expect at this event.

The children will be pleased, too, as each booklet comes with its own crayons. Imagine their delight when Mom says, “Go ahead, it’s okay to color in the recipe book.”

And, as usual, that’s not all the Open House hosts have in store for you. Once again, Curt Wolfanger will bring the antique organ in the Richter House to life with his holiday renditions.



## *Sitting on the Bench* Curt Wolfanger

*(Organist Extraordinaire Curt Wolfanger shares his personal story about how it all got started.)*

I was raised in East Lansing, Michigan. At age 12, my first organ (of many) was a 50-year-old foot pumper parlor reed organ like the one in the museum. Before long, rather than having to pump it, my brother and I "electrified" it with a motor from a junked vacuum. The organ now played without pumping, but the vacuum was so noisy that we went to work in the basement and built a “sound proof” box to quiet the motor.

My next organ was a Hammond, which I bought for \$850 with money saved from my paper route. I thought, "Now I'm set. What more could I ask for!" Yeah, right. As a junior in high school, my next organ was a medium-sized Conn Organ with a Leslie Speaker.



*Curt Wolfanger entertains guests during Open House*

*(cont'd on Page 2)*

(cont'd from Page 1-Wolfanger)

After high school, I attended nearby Michigan State University. As my dad was a geology professor at MSU, I was privileged, during my junior and senior years, to play in every one of MSU's Spartan basketball games, though I never got off the bench—the organ bench, that is. I met Millie Sunderman at the MSU Lutheran Student Center and married her when we graduated. This year, our three daughters will join us as we celebrate our 57<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Never having dreamed of a career in the organ industry, I was surprised when I was asked to join the Conn Organ Corporation in Elkhart, Indiana, where I worked as a musical coordinator and product development engineer until the company closed in 1985.

I'm currently a co-founder/owner and marketer of a unique organ company, MIDI Concepts LLC. We build computer-based units, called 3/24 Duet Virtual Theatre Organs, that can be added to keyboards, digital pianos, and of course, computerized organs. The addition of an easy-to-connect "Duet" provides the owner with the fantastic sounds of a 24-rank theatre organ.

### *The Taste is Last Summer Fling*



Meet, greet, and eat all you can. The annual Taste of Roselle has become a tradition, an opportunity to see friends and neighbors and to visit interesting booths. Volunteers reported that many people visited the museum's booth, and a record number checked out the 1920s exhibit at the museum. Proceeds from face painting, book sales, and new memberships will go a long way toward maintaining Roselle's own top-notch history museum.

### *A Couple of Wise Americans Said:*

"True patriotism isn't cheap. It's about taking on a fair share of the burden of keeping America going."  
(Robert Reich)

"Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work."  
(Thomas Alva Edison)



Come Memorial Day 2017, Roselle could be a sea of red-white-and-blue, and a flag in the front yard of every home will do it.

You can have a beautiful 3x5-foot American flag installed in your front yard on the mornings of Memorial Day, May 29; Flag Day, June 14; Independence Day, July 4; and Veterans' Day, November 11. The flag will be removed at dusk on each of those days. All this will be done by Lake Park High School students and other volunteers. The "Flags for Roselle" program is available within the Roselle village limits.

A subscription for this unique service is \$40 for the year. You may pay by check, made out to the Roselle Historical Foundation and mailed to 39 East Elm Street, Roselle, Illinois 60172; or, you may pay online by going to the website [www.flagsforroselle.weebly.com](http://www.flagsforroselle.weebly.com).

Volunteers will be going door-to-door soliciting subscriptions, too. They will give you a donation envelope. You may enclose cash or a check and give it to the volunteer, or you may mail it in later.

### *Subscription deadline: April 1, 2017*

Volunteers are needed for the flag installation and/or the removal, as well as subscription solicitation. If you'd like more information about these volunteer opportunities, send an email to [rosellehistory@sbcglobal.net](mailto:rosellehistory@sbcglobal.net).

As a thank-you for your contribution, the American Legion will provide a flyer containing instructions on the proper care and display of the flag and saluting the flag—important information every family should have.

Encourage your neighbors to join this patriotic event. Proceeds from the fund raiser will be shared by the Roselle Historical Foundation, the American Legion Foundation, and the Lake Park High School Educational Foundation.

"The American soldier does not fight because he hates who is in front of him; he fights because he loves who is behind him." (Unknown)

## *The Morphing of a Landmark*

Joyce Clucas Kerr, a Roselle native, now of Dowagiac, Michigan, is a charter member of the Roselle History Museum. She was part of the original group of volunteers who, in 1987, turned the newly-acquired Sumner House into a museum. She also co-chaired the first Historical Evening 25 years ago that featured Frank Lloyd Wright, portrayed by Lyman Shepard (1922-2009).

When Joyce and her husband, Jim, retired and moved north, it didn't take Joyce long to seek out and join the Van Buren County Historical Society in Hartford (MI), where she continues to share her expertise and her enthusiasm for the preservation of local history.

Joyce shared a booklet published by the VBC Historical Society entitled, *A History of the Van Buren County Poorhouse*, which tells the story of the landmark building that morphed from the local poorhouse to today's thriving museum.

*(Thank you to the Van Buren County Historical Society for permission to print a condensed version of the booklet.)*

In 1866, the poor did not have the benefit of a social support system; the care of these people was provided by the county. This consisted of housing in a single structure, referred to as the "County Poorhouse," where the able-bodied earned their keep by assisting in maintaining the buildings and the surrounding farm.

The Van Buren County Poorhouse was originally a typical wood frame farmhouse set on 173 acres of farmland. As a result of a (deadly) fire in 1884, the county elected to rebuild in brick. The first addition to the brick building was made in 1910 and a second in 1920. The current structure consists of 44 rooms.

The first rooms you see on entry into the museum were originally the admitting office and sitting room for staff. The second room housed the manager and family, who were required to reside on the premises. On the second and third floors were the quarters of the hired staff:

cooks, attendants, and other employed help. The inmates' rooms and wards were segregated by a dividing wall through the center of the building. Each side had its own staircases and, eventually, bathroom facilities. The men resided on the west side of the building and the women on the east.

This segregation was even adhered to during meals, with the men being served first, and the women eating at a second sitting. This created a great hardship for a family that might be temporarily residing at the poorhouse due to a fire or natural disaster, as even husbands and wives were not allowed to be together.



*The Van Buren County Poorhouse c. 1900*

Other than it being a disgrace to reside in the poorhouse, the inmates were happy, considered it their home, were well-fed, content, and living a normal life. They attended social functions and holiday activities in the area. Because many of the inmates had no other relatives, the poorhouse residents became their "family."

The living quarters for the inmates were assigned on a basis of physical health. The main floor was devoted to bed-ridden inmates. The second floor housed the able-bodied, with the women working within the building and the men working out in the fields. These working inmates were capable of growing their own food supplies and selling the excess to help cover other costs.

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The ground floor was used for the kitchen and dining areas, with an attached root cellar. At the back of the building a laundry room was part of the 1920 addition.

The poorhouse operated successfully until 1952, when it was closed due to dramatic changes in the care of the poor; i.e., a welfare structure, with funds available to those individuals in need. During this period, the building housed the welfare business offices, but was abandoned in 1958 for modern facilities.



*Abandoned 1958-1972*

Sitting empty until 1972, it was a prime target for vandalism and became a windowless, debris-filled shell. In 1972, the Van Buren County Historical Society persuaded the county commissioners to lease them the building, in the expectation of restoring this proud old structure so it could again have an active place in society as a repository for the artifacts of Van Buren County. This action saved the building from imminent destruction. Now it has a place on the State Historical Register, thanks to the tireless efforts of the early volunteers of the Historical Society who had the vision and the willpower to bring this dream to a reality.

*(Ed Note: For more information, Google Van Buren County Historical Museum.)*



*Voila! The VBC Historical Museum Today!*

*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has. (Margaret Mead)*




Call 630-351-5300 to reserve a spot for the next

**Sip & Paint!**

**Friday, November 18**  
7-10 pm at the museum office, 39 E. Elm St.  
Cost per person is \$40, cash or check.  
You may pay at the door.

**Christmas** is just around the corner! Well, maybe not. Some people have their shopping done, gifts wrapped, and menus planned. Well, maybe not. But it's never too early to get ready for **December 4.**



**Color Me Christmas!** (See Page 1)

**Transcontinental Railroad**



**April 1** – “All Aboard” Historical Night  
7:30 p.m. – Trinity Family Life Center  
Hear about building the Transcontinental Railroad. Enjoy a little wine, cheese, and sweets. Track the details in the next newsletter and on the museum’s website and on Facebook.

## WHAT'S IN YOUR STOCKIN' ?



Checking one's stockin' on Christmas morning is a memorable time in a child's life. For those who were never quite sure about the "coal" story, it may have been a bit tense. The scare tactics worked, but that awful thing never really happened. Thank you, Santa.

Our man-on-the-street checked in with a few Rosellians to see what their favorite stocking stuffers were.

Tom Della Penna shares, "My grandmother always used to put books of 10 rolls of Life Savers and a Tootsie Roll bank in our Christmas stockings."

Topping Mark Boroughf's list were the traditional oranges and hard-shelled nuts that they would have to crack open afterward.

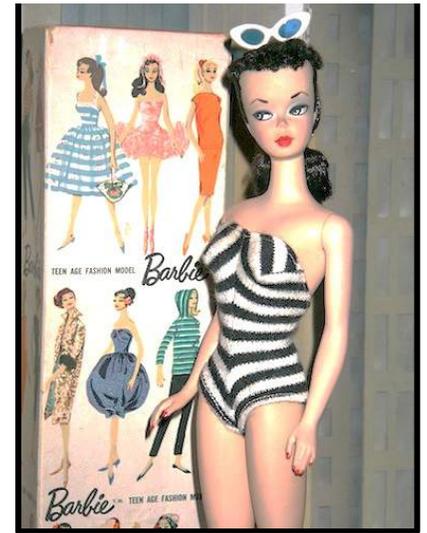
Diana Eckert and her siblings remember waking their parents before dawn and finding fruit and a candy cane in each stocking.

Frank Zielinski received bars of lead. In the 1930s, casting lead soldiers was very popular. You placed the lead bars in an iron ladle over a gas stove burner. After the lead was melted, you poured the lead into an iron cast. After the soldiers were removed, you painted them. You then set up a battleground in the living room and had a war with your brother using a small rubber ball to knock down the soldiers.

Dee Bonnan – "My mother knitted my stocking. My name, along with an angora-bearded Santa was on one side; my birth year, along with a decorated Christmas tree on the other. It was 3x12 inches, so gifts that might have been wrapped were actually stocking stuffers. I loved discovering outfits for my many dolls, but my all-time favorite stocking stuffer was a pair of ice skates for my 'McGuffy Ann' doll. My dolls were all cleaned up so Santa would see how well I took care of his presents to me." 

**Barbie Doll**  
**March 1959**

Barbie is a fashion doll manufactured by the American toy company Mattel, Inc., and launched in March 1959. American businesswoman Ruth Handler is credited with the creation of the doll using a German doll called Bild Lilli as her inspiration.



Barbie is the figurehead of a brand of Mattel dolls & accessories, including other family members and collectible dolls. Barbie has been an important part of the toy fashion doll market for over 50 years and has been the subject of numerous controversies and lawsuits, often involving parody of the doll and her lifestyle.

Mattel has sold over a billion Barbie dolls, making it the company's largest and most profitable line. However, sales have declined sharply since 2014. The doll transformed the toy business in affluent communities worldwide by becoming a vehicle for the sale of related merchandise (accessories, clothes, friends of Barbie, etc.). She had a significant impact on social values by conveying characteristics of female independence and, with her multitude of accessories, an idealized upscale lifestyle that can be shared with affluent friends. (*Wikipedia*)

Do you have a Barbie doll? She would be welcomed with open arms to the permanent toy display at the museum. Or, maybe you'd like to loan her to the museum temporarily. It would be fitting to have a local Barbie make an appearance during the Dec. 4 Open House. She can meet 'n greet other vintage dolls and toys.

(*Ed Note: Barbie was a teenager when she debuted in 1959. Assuming she was about 18 at the time, she is celebrating her 75<sup>th</sup> birthday this year. She's aging pretty gracefully, wouldn't you say?!*)



**ROSELLE HISTORY MUSEUM  
39 E ELM STREET  
ROSELLE IL 60172**

**Color Me Christmas!**



Artist: Joyce Kuhlmann



**REMINDER: Send us your email address if you'd like to receive the RHM Newsletter electronically.**

**Mission Statement**

To maintain and enhance a historically accurate museum with primary focus on Roselle and surrounding areas

To collect local facts and artifacts of today that will be our village history and pride tomorrow

To provide a dynamic historical and educational resource for our residents and visitors

**Board of Directors**

Ray Hitzemann, President  
Glenn Spachman, VP/Treas  
Ruth Bagel, Secretary  
Milan Bagel \* Hank Kvintus  
Walter Lotz \* Frank Zielinski

**Historian** - Joan Beauprez

**Museum Hours**

Sundays 2-4 p.m.  
Other times by appointment

**Newsletter Deadlines**

Aug 1, Nov 1, 2016  
Feb 1, May 1, 2017

**Editor:** Kay Cahill

**General Meetings** are held on the second Saturday from 10-11:30 a.m. at the Museum Office, 39 E. Elm St. Everyone is welcome.

**MEMBERSHIP FORM**

**Mail to: Roselle History Museum, 39 E. Elm St., Roselle, IL 60172**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ Email Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ ST \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Options (Circle one) **Email \* Reg Mail \* Both**

\_\_\_\_\_ New Member    Circle one:    \$30    \$50\*    \$100    \$250    Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ Renewal

\_\_\_\_\_ \*My contribution is at least \$50. Please send me a free copy of the *Remembering Roselle* history book.

I would be interested in helping in one of the areas of the Foundation's work. Circle one:

**Computer/Clerical \* Exhibits \* Parade float \* Research \* Single Event \* Buildings/Grounds**