



# Tales & Trails

NEWSLETTER OF THE BERLIN AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

**SAND MINING IN EARLY BERLIN**  
SEE PAGE 3 FOR STORY BY PAT GRAHN

**SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:**

- Baptismal Font borrowed to Old World Wisconsin
- Club nominated as Berlin Chamber Business of the Year
- Important dates for Spring 2013
- Picture at right - hand loading sand with Ferd Hopka wagons



**BAHS NOMINATED FOR BUSINESS OF THE YEAR AWARD**

Berlin Area Historical Society was honored to be among the nominees for the Berlin Chamber of Commerce 'Small Business of the Year' Award in December, 2012. This is the first year BAHS as been so honored. The Berlin Senior Center was awards this year's prize. Congrats to that great organization,

Member, Julie Boeck was chosen as the 'Citizen of the Year' for 2012. Our congratulations to Julie.

Honorees are nominated by members of the community during the months of October and November and then voted on by a committee of the Chamber Board.

This is one of several programs the Chamber has to recognize local business and business and community leaders.

**BAPTISMAL FONT BORROWED TO OLD WORLD WISCONSIN**

In November of 2012 Berlin Area Historical Society was contacted by a representative of Old World Wisconsin in Eagle asking if they could come and take pictures and measurements of our Baptismal Font. After discussion the club decided that OWW should just take the piece to their shop.

Old World Wisconsin is in the process of restoring their St. Peter's Church, the first

Catholic Church built in Milwaukee (1839) to its 1880s appearance. They wanted to use our 19th century Font as a model for this restoration project.

This font was crafted by master craftsman Louis Stetter for St. Paul's Lutheran Church in the Town of Seneca.

It will be returned in May in time for museum opening.

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**D A T E S   T O   R E M E M B E R**

Wisconsin Museum's Week  
May 12-18

Official opening of Berlin Museums  
Sunday, May 26 1-4 p.m.

WHS Regional Conference  
Wed. July 24 at Sheboygan



## FOX-WISCONSIN HERITAGE PARKWAY UPDATE

The Berlin Area Historical Society has been one of the partners for the Fox-Wisconsin Heritage Parkway project since about 2009. The vision of this collection of citizens and organizations was to promote a corridor running the length of two rivers—the Upper and Lower Fox River (and the Winnebago Pool

Lakes that join them) and the Lower Wisconsin River—that would showcase the rich natural and cultural heritage embodied by this historic waterway, and highlight and promote it as an outstanding destination for tourism and recreation on land and water.

Stretching more than 280 miles from the Bay of Green Bay in the

north to the Mississippi River in the south, the proposed Parkway follows the historic route of the 1673 journey of Fr Jacques Marquette and Louis Joliet.

The FWHP group applied to the National Park Service for Parkway status this past summer and that application was denied.

However, the multiple groups and partners of this movement have spent 18 months and held over 35 public meetings promoting the Parkway idea and they have decided to go ahead with plans to promote and tell the stories of the rivers.

Signage, information kiosks and networking will connect all the partner communities as they build a regional collaboration to tell the compelling stories of the river's collective history.

Visit [heritageparkway.org](http://heritageparkway.org) and see what events and activities are planned.

## ROTARY CLOCK

The Berlin Rotary Club has been working on a new project for 2013, the refurbishing of Nathan Strong Park with repair of the historic gazebo and upgrading the electric in the park.

One of its members, Jerry Bella has designed and built a unique clock that will be installed in the park along Huron St. This wooden gear-run clock stands over six feet tall and will be encased in a glass enclosure.

Along the support posts are engraved pictures of

all of Berlin's mayors with the dates that they served. On one side of the case will be a short history of the cannons and on the other will be a short history of the Soldiers and Sailors Monument. BAHS has been supplying Bella with the information for these histories as well as the correct dates for the mayors.

The Rotary Club hopes to have the clock installed in the Park in time for the 4th of July.

Be sure to check it out this summer.

## A.F. Gelhar continued

sand lumps and driving dump truck throughout high school and college. He notes he learned the business at his grandfather and father's knee.

In the 1980s, having mined out the Berlin Plant and running out of sand at Larsen, Jim looked for a new site. The company purchase land off of County A, just a little northeast of Markesan and west of Fairwater. He has completely modernized the company and is proud of the fact that the company hold high safety standards.

San started being sold to the oil and natural gas industry around 2009. This sand is used in underground deposits in order to harvest these products through a process

called hydraulic fracturing. However, the A.F. Gelhar Co. still has a strong loyalty to its foundry sand customers and is the major supplier of foundry sand in Wisconsin.

With the company nearing its 100th birthday, plans are in place for a new facility in Waupaca County to better service Wisconsin's northern foundries. The company has enough sand available in the Fairwater area for the next generation of Gelhars. Jim's 2 teenaged children are now getting into the business. Studies have indicated that only .01% of all U.S. companies are over 100 years old. Sixty-two percent of those are privately owned and 41% are in the manufacturing section. (Information from Vicki Ten-Haken, of Hope College in Holland Michigan.)

## THE HISTORY OF SAND MINING & THE A. F. GELHAR SAND CO. BY PATRICIA GRAHN

Have you ever wondered why this area is the home of two large sand companies, Badger Mining and the A.F. Gelhar Company? We have the glaciers from millions of years ago to thank for that. Both bank sand and bedrock sandstone is found in what is called 'The Berlin Sand District' which includes parts of five counties: Green Lake, Fond du Lac, Waupaca, Waushara, and Winnebago. The district runs a distance of 45 miles from Fairwater on the south to Readfield on the north.

The sand deposits of the Berlin District are sedimentary deposits of Glacial Lake Oshkosh on what was its southern extremity. Bank sand deposits formed when sand-sized material, washed from the melting glacier, collected in low areas. Bedrock sandstone, like that mined nearby Fairwater today, is believed to have formed as the beach migrated over the land in response to the slow sinking of the earth's crust. This bedrock sandstone was formed 500 million years ago during the Cambrian Period.

Mining is nothing new to Wisconsin. Natives mined easily accessible lead and traded it with other tribes throughout the nation. Trading lead with the white man started with Nicolas Perrot, a French fur trader in the 1680s. Miners moved to southwestern Wisconsin to mine lead and zinc starting in the early 1820s. Iron ore was mined in Dodge, Sauk and Jackson counties from the 1850s until 1915. Stone quarrying (granite/sandstone/limestone) started in the 1850s and became a major industry by the 1870s. There were granite quarries in Fairwater, Berlin, Montello and Redgranite.

As the industrial age caught on in the Fox River Valley, foundries sprang up and created a need for sand for forming castings. The February 20, 1864 *Milwaukee Sentinel* reports that a foundry was established in Berlin, Wis. (on the west side of the river).

Sandstone is often composed of 98% quartz. Because of the high quartz characteristics and the low clay content, sand was ideal for use in foundries. Foundry sand is mixed with various binders to make molds into which molten metal is poured to form

Castings. Castings are needed for almost anything made of metal: motor parts, agricultural implements, manhole covers, machine parts, faucet parts, military equipment, etc.

Although someone must have been mining sand from the Berlin Foundry, there are no reports of any sand mining companies in the Berlin District prior to 1900. Michael Chier established a sand mining operation in Berlin in that year which became the Chier Industrial Sand Co. In 1949 they purchased a sand deposit and established a plant in Fairwater. The Chier Sand Co is now known as Badger Mining.

At one time there were several mining companies in the Berlin area. Some other early sand companies were the Dubberstein operation started around 906, the Mix operation started during World War I, and the Kalupa-Zelinski-Jezwinski operation started in 1935. (None of these companies are in business today.

The A.F. Gelhar Co., now located in Green Lake county on County A, was founded in Berlin in 1919. Albert (Al) Frederick Gelhar farmed one mile east of Berlin. Sometime around 1919 he was approached by a sand broker to see if he would be willing to sell the sand he had on his farm. The Gelhar sand mining operation was then a part-time activity in conjunction with farming and other business ventures which included selling autos and operating a dance hall at the old Berlin fairgrounds just west of where the Berlin Hospital is now located.

Sand was dug off the Gelhar farm by hand with a shovel and loaded into horse drawn wagons to be taken to a railroad siding. Under ideal conditions it was possible to load 6 to 8 tons per day of sand or 1 1/2 train cars per day. At that time there were no tube-type railcars available for top loading. Al and his workers would pry off the tops of boxcars in order to load sand from the top.

The railroad siding used was the 'Wendt Siding' located one mile east of Berlin and held four rail cars. Theodore Chier from Chier Industrial Sand once

3 a.m. so that one could get to the depot and lay claim to a car. Car jumping was not unusual either and sometimes resulted in fist fights. On more than one occasion I had to lick a competitor with my fists, an incident which usually resulted in a \$2 visit to the office of Justice Wood."

Frequently Al and Theodore hauled from the same deposit and loaded at the same siding. They often shipped to the same foundry. If one could not ship a large order, the other filled in and completed the order in a type of subcontracting arrangement.

There is a local legend that there is a boxcar full of sand buried under the 16th green at Lawsonia Golf Course. However, the Gelhar family knows that this is not a legend. Al loved to golf and when the course was expanded from 9 to 18 holes in 1920, Al was on hand to help and provided the boxcar and sand.

In 1943 the Gelhar Sand Co became a full-time sand mining operation. Harvey, Al's son, worked or the company throughout the time he attended Berlin High School and Ripon College. When he returned in 1945 from service during WWII, he joined the company.

Al "officially" retired from the company in 1961, but still went to work and kept his hand in the business until he was in his 80's. He died on October 26, 1980, just 2 days after his wife of 63 years, Amanda.

In 1948 the Gelhards built a new processing plant in Larsen which was less than 10 miles from Neenah and Neenah Foundry. They now had 2 plant locations, Berlin and Larsen. (The Berlin Plant closed in the early 1970s and the Larsen Plant closed in 1987).

In 1952, the Gelhar sand operation was incorporated as A.F. Gelhar, Inc. In 1966, a plant was opened to process bank sand in Readfield. (this plant was sold in 2008).

Harvey never officially retired and worked up until 2 weeks before he died on Dec. 31, 2004 at the age of 85.

Jim Gelhar, Harvey's son, and the 3rd generation to work for the company, joined the business in the mid-1970's after college. Jim 'started at the bottom' pounding

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BERLINAREAHISTORICALSOCIETY.COM

**NEWSLETTER OF THE  
BERLIN AREA  
HISTORICAL**

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Meetings are held on the 2nd Wednesday during the months of Jan. through May and Sept. through Dec. at 6:30 p.m. at the Berlin Public Library, corner Park Ave and N. Pearl St. Guests are always welcome

The Berlin Area Historical Society is a fully recognized non-profit Educational Institute affiliated with the Wisconsin Historical Society. The Mission of the Society is to preserve and interpret the history of the Berlin Area.

Currently the Society owns and operates four museum buildings. The Museum of Local History, located at 111 S. Adams Ave includes a two-story brick house, the former Kroll Bottling Works and the former Huser Blacksmith Shop. This museum complex is open on the second and fourth Sundays from Memorial Day to Labor Day from 1-4 p.m. and always by appointment.

The one-room school house, Clark School is located at the entrance to Riverside Park on Water St. and is open by appointment.

Call 920-361-2460 for information on these museums or to make an appointment.

The Berlin Area Historical Society is maintained by DONATIONS and membership. All persons interested in history are encouraged to join.

**JOIN THE BERLIN AREA  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

Name.....  
Street.....  
City & State.....  
Telephone.....  
E-Mail.....

Do you have an e-mail address? Or a new address?  
Please let Lee Erdmann know so that we can keep our membership lists up to date.  
lerdmann  
@centurytel.net or  
920-361-2460

Individual Dues—\$10.00

Family —\$15.00

Make Checks payable to: Berlin Area Historical Society and mail to

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