



# Tales & Trails

NEWSLETTER OF THE BERLIN AREA  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

**SPECIAL  
POINTS OF  
INTEREST:**

- Berlin Historical Society's newest building
- New garden and resting spot
- Update on the 1st Nation sign
- Club News
- Letter to Letitia

**INSIDE THIS  
ISSUE:**

|                                 |   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| New Garden for museum           | 2 |
| 1st Nation sign update          | 2 |
| The Club's summer               | 2 |
| 1900 reminisces of Union Church | 3 |
| Membership & Meetings           | 4 |



**Future Home For Berlin Museum Of Local History**

## Berlin Historical Society's Newest Acquisition

On September 1st of this year Dick and Sharon Fortnum gifted the historical Johnson-Fortnum buildings to the Berlin Historical Society.

It is a monumental gift for the organization, will provide much needed storage right away and a possible new location for the Museum of Local History. A capital campaign is in the works right now. The goal is to raise enough money to be able to move all our displays and artifacts to this one story building making it very accessible to all who'd like to visit. The extra space will also allow the club to add new exhibits they don't have room for in the current buildings. The former showroom will become the clubhouse where meetings and programs can be held.

Parts of this historical building on Market Square became the Niels Johnson Machine Shop in 1869 when Mr. Johnson opened his business here. He provided foundry and machine

works to the steamboat and cranberry industries among other things.

Tim Fortnum joined his father-in-law in 1897 and shortly after began introducing the automobile to Berlin.

By 1910 they became a Reo franchise. Five years later the firm was offering Reos, Maxwells, and Oldsmobiles. In the 1920s Willy and Whippets had joined the line. Dodge and Plymouth were added in 1933 and by 1965 they were a full Chrysler dealership run by the fourth generation Richard Fortnum. Dick Fortnum retired in 2006 and the buildings have provide storage to a variety of entities since.

Having been a part of Berlin's history for over 150 years and located on the historic Market Square what better location to put Berlin's history on display?

**NEW GARDEN  
AND RESTING SPOT  
IN  
FRONT OF MUSEUM**

Thanks to club member, Andrew Pribnow and his grandfather the front of our museum has gotten a facelift. Gone is the out-of-control lilac bushes that overtook the sidewalk. In its place is a raised flower bed and a brick pad. Andrew used bricks from the former Huser Blacksmith shop that he rescued when that building was torn down plus others he found around the yard. A white wrought-iron bench offers seating to visitors. Two halved whiskey barrels will hold seasonal flowers and add height to the front of the building. Next spring the doors, trim and sills will all get a new coat of paint to complete the transformation.

**The 1st Nation Sign  
That was Damaged  
To be Replaced**

The First Nation sign that explains our 1st Nation monument was damaged sometime last spring. After finding that temporary repairs did not work, the club decided to have the sign replaced. Pannier Sign Co. was able to reprint the old sign in its entirety without having to recreate it. The new sign should be back in place in the next weeks.

The Berlin Historical Society created the First Nation monument in 2011 with the sale of the book, "The Mascoutin Nation and Its Massacre" and with help of metal sculptor Mark Fischer, a member of the Oneida Nation, Turtle Clan. It is of copper, welded in silver and recognizes and honors all the Nations that lived in our area before us.

It holds a place of honor in our yard and is visited by passersby.



**Update on Society  
Activities**

As with everyone else, due to the COVID 19 pandemic, the Society's activities were lessened over the summer.

We were able to open the Museum during the months of August and September. Thanks to the members who acted as docents for the Open Houses.

We did have to cancel our annual Oakwood Cemetery Ghost Walk for 2020 partly because of major repairs going on at Griffiths Chapel.

We have welcomed several new members to the organization both locally and out of town.

Folks have been generous over the summer donating a number of artifacts to the museum to add to our collections. We appreciate them thinking of us.



The "new" Union Church and a look at a Sunday School program



**Letter to Letitia, continued**

pride in a great new church—40x60 feet in dimensions, with its belfry in which was finally mounted the little 400 lb. Meneely bell which swung in the cupola of the sawdust church. I had often pulled the rope to announce the services at both places of worship.

I soon began to have a greater fondness for the new church than for the old. Its services were increasingly precious to me for my dear parents were its prominent workers and supporters. The Sunday never passed that either my parents or their children did not form a part of the choir and the Sunday School — until God took them, the one in 1863, the other in 1865, and we, their children, scattered to other places.

In the fall of 1856, I went to attend school at Appleton (Lawrence University). From that time until my Father's death in 1863, I know but little of the church except through letters from home. I was a teacher that winter at Waukau. That sad event removed one who had labored and prayed and given incessantly for the church's welfare. I reluctantly recall the fierce struggle and division which soon after befell the church, which at that time was Presbyterian in form. It seemed to break the ties which had bound me so long and closely to its communion. My further attendance at the Chicago Seminary from 1864-67 and my mother's death in Jan. of 1865, quite severed my connection with and knowledge of the church. I think that my last chance to worship there was the fall of 1868 as I was about sailing for India. I then gave a farewell address.

Since those days the membership must have completely changed—a whole generation has had time to pass away—but the church of God still lives—still advances.

Now, my dear old friend, I have written as the thoughts came to my mind and at different times. It may not interest you or the church, but it has interested me and if you find anything in it you deem worthy to present on your anniversary occasion I shall be glad. With best regards, I beg to remain,  
Yours respectfully, W.E. DeReimer  
Washington D.C.

The following is a letter written by W.E. DeReimer to Miss Letitia Megran in May of 1900 talking about his early recollections of the Congregational (later Federated) Church. Miss Megran's family were also members of this church He uses the term 'sister' as a fellow congregante.

The DeReimer family was one of the early families to settle at Strong's Landing in 1847. The senior Mr. DeReimer was a druggist and had a store on Huron St. They lived on Ceresco St. near S. Adams Ave.

Miss Letitia Megran  
Dear friend and sister,

Your welcome letter of April is just at hand, inviting some participation in the memorial services of the church on June 8, 1900.

I cannot express to you how deep my interest is in this matter, nor how grateful I feel for your invitation. Memories of the tender and precious sort associate themselves in my mind in connection with the church. All its early history lies before my mind in panoramic outline. Indeed I cannot help feeling that though I was but a young lad at the time, I was in reality a part of it from the very first.

I well remember the day of its organization in the old Stedman warehouse on the river bank, when my dear mother and father together with the ladies of Mr. Wright's family (Perhaps Mrs. Ayres' daughters were among them. Mrs. Wheeler will know) constituted the choir, and were essential elements of the membership of the new organization. I cannot remember many others except Charles and Mrs. Bartlett, and perhaps Dr. and Alden Merriman with their families. But the music of that choir sounded strangely sweet to me in that unplastered room, and the embryo organization seemed then a veritable offshoot of the Kingdom of Heaven in my childhood's being. It is one of those pictures which I cannot afford to let pass out of my memory.

The Baptist church was an earlier

organization which I think existed in 1847 when my father came to Berlin. At that time, on the north side of the street and almost directly opposite where your present church stands, was an old, dilapidated log house, once used for a schoolhouse, standing close to the road, and in Deacon Strong's cornfield which occupied all that land opposite your church. There, occasionally on Sunday, a Baptist circuit preacher, Elder Manning, used to preach to a small audience.

Later when the three story building, occupied below with Alexander's store, was put up — the Baptist worshiped, until their wooden building was erected, and as I remember, the Congregationalists worshiped alternately until their first pastor, Rev. J.B. Preston, came on from New York and the magnificent (?) old saw-dust church was erected on stilts in the center of the business district, just south of the main street, (*note: Park Ave. was called Main St. in the early years*). How inexpressibly happy the members of the church were to get into that commodious wooden shell of a church, so utterly cheerless and unattractive to every stranger—yet so well filled on Sunday.

I think I never knew so enthusiastic a Sunday School as that which gathered there. The scholars would do any amount of work that was asked of them in the line of Bible study. A wholesome rivalry grew up for committing the Scriptures to memory—and many a time did I and others repeat aloud a whole chapter of the Gospels as a result of a week's home study. I owe more of my familiarity with the language of the New Testament to the training I received in that sawdust church than to any other training. (The present day Sunday School scholar is too easily let off in the matter of memorizing the Bible).

The sawdust church was so named because of its construction. The frame was quite like that of a

barn, and its outer sheathing was of unplanned and unmatched boards nailed on vertically and battened with lathes. The inside was not plastered but boarded up with half-inch boards put on horizontally and battened with lathe strips over the cracks while between the inner and outer boards the space was filled with sawdust. This made warm walls, but as the building was two or three feet above ground on stilts, both floor and ceiling were cold. The little bell was in time mounted in the cupola and then we children were proud of our church.

The choir sat on seats arranged on an elevated terrace at the west end between the two entrances. The benches were homemade and the slats across their backs were, O, so tiresome for children. But we were glad to have them and to sit in them too.

If I remember, Rev. William Montgomery preached for us before Mr. Preston came. He also taught school during the week for a time in that church. Indeed the old church was used quite often for lectures, concerts, and the like and even for political gatherings. It was a most important factor in the development of the new city of Strong's Landing, or Strongsville—later Berlin.

With the coming of Rev. J.B. Preston and family, the church affairs had a decided boom, and the day of its progress was at hand. Seasons of spiritual refreshing were not remarkable for extent but were decisive and remarkably helpful. Accessions were numerous by letter and were particularly helpful. The Sunday School, as I remember, was very large and unusually interesting and the necessity for the new church became apparent.

I do not remember the date of the building. I only recall the fact that Mr. Wadsworth had the contract and was assisted by Mr. Ayres. I remember too, my youthful



WE'RE ON THE WEB  
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**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 three museum buildings. The Museum of Local History, located at 111 S. Adams Ave includes a two-story brick house, and the former Kroll Bottling Works. 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.....

Individual Dues—\$10.00

Family —\$15.00

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

P. O. Box 83, Berlin WI 54923

Do you have an e-mail address? Or a new address? Please let Bobbie Erdmann know so that we can keep our membership lists up to date.  
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