

MARION HERITAGE CENTER & MUSEUM

News from the Marion Historical Society

December 2020



Help!

We're doing our best to deliver on our Mission: *“to engage the public in the history, traditions, resource and on-going preservation of the Heritage Center museum for the enrichment of the community.”*

Last month, your Board of Directors revised the 2020-21 budget to ensure we can do that in spite of the challenges presented by this terrible year. Other than the \$1000 deductible for roof replacement, we made every reduction possible to control expenses. Unfortunately, we have less control over anticipated income. It is expected to fall even more! The bottom line suggests a deficit of about \$3000!

Although primary funding of our \$30,000/year budget comes from a variety of grants and membership dues, with doors closed, fundraising programs like pancake breakfasts, and soup suppers, plus sales to and outright donations from museum visitors are ZERO. Thanks to income from the Endowment of \$2500 – the net difference is that \$3000.

Unlike this picture that suggests we put the donation basket on the street – won't you please consider a check to P.O. Box 753 – Marion, IA 52302.

Jay Kacena, President

Marion Historical Society Mission

The *Marion Historical Society* is a membership organization that serves to engage the public in the history, traditions, resources and on-going preservation of the Heritage Center museum for the enrichment of the community.

For more information about joining call 447-6376

E-mail to: marionheritage@marionhistoricalsociety.org

See our website: <http://www.marionheritagecenter>

www.facebook.com/MarionHeritageCenter

Mailing address: P.O. Box 753, Marion, IA 52302-0753

If your mail was returned please call us.



ROOF REPAIR UPDATE

Lyle Hanson and his crew from *Double L Reconstruction* reshingled the roof in December. He'll rebuild the lost chimney (we still need bricks) in the Spring, repair another chimney and replace the roof fascia and trim.



Inside there is still insulation to blow in and some drywall and the ceiling tiles to replace.



CALENDAR



January 28, 2021 Board meeting at 2:30 PM, this month only.

No events until further notice.

Sponsored in part by:



Hotel Motel Grant fund

We remember the members who have passed since the last newsletter: Milton Arnold and Sara Fischel.





ENDOWMENT FUND UPDATE - 2019

Thanks to the expertise and judgment of the *Hills Bank Trust and Wealth Management Department*, the value of our Endowment fund has grown to about \$68,600 as of 11/30/2020. It made its first contribution to our operating income this year--\$2500. Since the principal deposited in the fund can never be invaded, it is essential that the total valuation be increased over time in order to meet the growing cost of operating our Heritage Center & Museum.

There are many ways members and supporters can contribute to the Endowment Fund: 1. Direct cash contributions; 2. Securities or other property suitable for conversion into assets of the fund; 3. Designation as a beneficiary to all or a portion of a life insurance policy, or; 4. A Qualifying Charitable Distribution from your IRA or retirement plan.

As the *Chamber of Commerce* says, Marion is the best city in Iowa in which to live and raise a family. It's because of the history and the heritage that has been passed down to us from our namesake, Francis Marion, the *Swamp Fox* of the Revolutionary War, the pioneers and veterans buried at Oak Shade Cemetery, and all of our residents and citizens since. Our Historical Society, our museum and our future are YOURS!

Please consider a gift in some form to the *Marion Historical Society* Endowed Fund. For more information you can contact Executive Director Lynette Brenzel at the Center – 319-447-6376.

The Cares Act and You

Kill FOUR Birds with One Stone! How often does a person have the chance to accomplish so much so easily!

Thanks to the CARES Act implemented earlier this year taxpayers can:

- 1 - Deduct up to \$300 for a contribution to the Marion Historical Society Endowment fund even if they do not itemize on their 2020 income tax return;
- 2 - Make that contribution with before-tax dollars if made directly from a qualified IRA plan;
- 3 - Help satisfy their IRA Minimum Required Distribution, and;
- 4 - Fulfill their desire to create sustaining income for our Historical Society!

Consult your tax advisor.

Marion Historical Society, Inc.

Board of Directors:

Jay Kacena, President
 Vic Klopfenstein, Vice-president
 Nevin Meredith, Treasurer
 Erik Miles, Secretary
 Vicki Barnes
 Vicki Hughes
 Mark Seidl



Retiring from the Board: Suzanne Barnes. **We thank her for her service.**

Meetings are held the 4th Thursday of each month
 at 3:30 P.M. at the Heritage Center.

The Grant Wood Trail and the Historic Marion Peatworks

You'll find an amazing piece of forgotten Iowa history on the Grant Wood Trail one mile east of Marion's Waldo's Rock Park. A sign commemorates the discovery there of an Ice Age bison skeleton in 1969 by workers of the *Marion Peat Company*.



Waldo's Rock Park

It doesn't mention that briefly after the Civil War this was the most valuable piece of real estate in Iowa, nor that a couple of rural Marionites inspired a widespread alternative fuel industry here aimed at making Iowa energy-independent. Many believed it would be the salvation of western settlement.

The 19th century was the Age of Wood in America. Homes, cooking and heating depended on woodlands. There were key Iron Age components, but wood was fundamental. Concrete and steel came later for construction, likewise coal and oil for fuel. Fortunately, the E. half of the U.S. was well-forested.

Settlers quickly claimed the woodlands of E. Iowa and the wooded sections bordering our inland rivers, but they were stopped at the edge of the prairies. A few individuals ventured out and dug homes into the ground or built "soddies," but they couldn't live far from woodlands because they still needed fuel for cooking and heating.

Railroads spread across the West after 1870 and solved the wood problem. A thousand towns in the western RR corridors were built with lumber that trains hauled in from MI & WI. They brought coal for heating too. Problem solved! But settlement in Iowa and a few other isolated locales occurred in advance of the RR's and followed a different pattern.

Settlers started arriving in Iowa after the Black Hawk Purchase in 1832. Immigration turned into a torrent after the second purchase in 1837 and word spread about our rich soil. Settlers didn't wait for the railroads, which were delayed by disorganization, the lack of capital, the Mississippi R. and then the Civil War. By 1870 Iowa's population had reached nearly 1.2 million people. Settlement had filled all the choice sections of IA, and then was forced to pause. Millions of acres couldn't be settled because of the lack of wood. Coal was the fuel-answer in a few S. Iowa counties, but it could not be transported far without RR's. *What to do?*



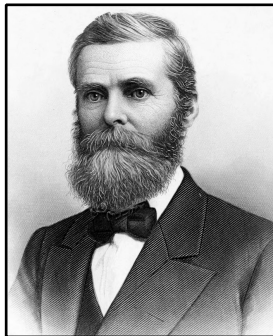
Marion peat bed.

It was called "*The Fuel Question*," and it was the biggest issue on Iowans' minds after the Civil War. Newspapers were filled with the discussion. How could we settle this land? Then in Jan. 1866 Jonathan Bundy, a Cedar County farmer and former rural Marion resident, brought botanist Dr. Charles C. Parry of Davenport the answer. Parry was the #1 authority on plants in Iowa and perhaps the entire West. A local newspaper had published his letter pondering the existence of peat in Iowa and its utility as fuel. It had never been reported in the State.

Bundy saw the letter and brought him a wagon full of dried plant-stuff he had excavated from a neighbor's field. He had found similar material in several other locations. This was peat, the elusive fuel-source Parry had described and Iowans had prayed for. Parry announced the discovery a week later, but Bundy hadn't needed confirmation. He had already begun organizing a fuel business.

Dr. Charles C. Parry

(1823-1890) was born in England and studied medicine at Columbia College in NY, and settled in Davenport after graduating in 1846. He practiced as a physician for only a few months and then gave it up to pursue botany. He served as the official botanist for the US geological survey of Wisconsin, Iowa and Minnesota in 1848-49. In the 1850's he was the official botanist and geologist for the Mexican Boundary Survey.



Jonathan Bundy was born in Belmont County, OH in 1803; He moved to IN c.a. 1822 where he is an acclaimed Henry County pioneer. He married Achsah (Doudna) in 1824 and in 1839 their son Thomas was born. The family came to Iowa in 1853, first settling in Salem in the SE corner of the State. They travelled overland to Linn County in 1854. Bundy started a farm just outside Marion on the Dubuque road. He was an inventor with several U.S. patents, and an entrepreneur; he started a mole ditching business on the side. It all may have been too worldly for his fellow Quakers, and Bundy was expelled from the Whittier Friends Church in 1855 for "disunity."

It was expensive to tile fields before the Civil War, and farmers saw mole ditching as a cheap and easy way to drain water from their fields. Ditching machines looked like plows, but instead of a mold-board they had a torpedo-shaped "mole" that the operator guided underground across the field. It left a tunnel into which the subsurface water ran and exited the field.

The tunnels silted in or collapsed after a few years, but they usually paid for themselves with increased crop-yields while they lasted.

In 1864 Bundy moved to Cedar County near Springdale where he resumed his ditching business, and there he made a momentous discovery. He moled a field and it didn't drain. Curious, he dug up a sample of the soil and discovered the soggy mass was more compost than mineral--decomposed plants, i.e. peat.

Bundy had never heard of peat and knew nothing of the Irish practice of drying and burning it, nor of the peat harvesting that had long been practiced back East by poor immigrants. As Bundy was wont to do, he experimented. Removed from the ground the stuff dried; squeezed into balls it became as hard as a baseball; pressed into forms the bricks burned like logs. Could this be the solution to The Fuel Question for which Iowans had long prayed? Bundy didn't need confirmation from an expert before setting a plan into action. He began traveling around E. Iowa looking for similar deposits, and lined up several other Friends to join him in investing in this promising new venture. He wasn't alone, but the fact is, in 1865 very few Americans had his vision.

Peatlands are rare in E. Iowa. It's a tribute to Bundy that he identified so many. Peat bogs look like marshes, but there's not much peat on the bottom of most Iowa wetlands. Peat is the remains of decomposing plants. Oxygen is scarce on the bottom and microbes work VERY slowly breaking down the plant-matter. A thick layer accumulates over time. But when a drought occurs (and they always do here eventually) and the area dries up, oxygen becomes abundant and microbes quickly digest everything. Peat bogs NEVER dry. Even in the worst drought the ground stays wet and oxygen-free. That requires some unusual geology. Botanists call these rare Iowa spots *spring marshes* or *fens*. Bundy probably learned to recognize them by their unique "indicator" plants. And he found them first here, on the outskirts of Marion. And in 1866, with his son, he started a peat fuel-plant, the first alternative energy facility west of the Mississippi. It operated until 1871, when the RR's arrived.



Congratulations and checks for \$75 were presented to the Heritage Center art show winners on behalf of our sponsor, *Hills Bank and Trust Company*. 2020 marked the nineteenth anniversary of *Art by Your Friends and Neighbors*. Thank you to all the on-line visitors who voted for their favorites among the artworks of 60 local artists, and special thanks to *Zum Creative* for designing the on-line exhibition.

L to R: Laura Cira, David Christiansen and Sheila Killham.

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