

# MARION HERITAGE CENTER & MUSEUM

News from the Marion Historical Society

July 2021



## BUILDING REPAIR UPDATE



### LET THERE BE LIGHT! by Jay Kacena

Now that repairs to the exterior of the building are nearing completion, we can focus on what is naturally a priority feature of any museum gallery: lighting.

The issue is: Should we reinstall the existing and admittedly inadequate trac lights for the \$4700 cost the insurance will cover, or should we follow the advice of our contractor and the experts at *Justice Electric* and upgrade the lighting system for an additional \$2400? It's better, brighter lighting, the LED instruments are cheaper to operate and produce less heat as well, reducing the risk of fire and lowering cooling costs. The decision is a no-brainer, but **we need your help** with the up-front cost. Address your "lighting fund" contributions to the Building Committee c/o Marion Historical Society P.O. Box 753 Marion 52302.



### Historical Society Members:

There are catastrophes like COVID-19 and disasters like derechos, but what do you call the impending retirement of our Executive Director Lynette Brenzel? She has postponed leaving all year to write and administer COVID PPP grants practically nonstop and shepherd through three Marion Hotel/Motel grants, which all together have offset our lost revenue from the soup and pancake fund-raisers. She has continued to manage our membership and accounting books and oversee a \$100,000 insurance claim and building repair. In her spare time she helped to coordinate the redesign of our web site, wrote twice-weekly history articles for Facebook and researched a storyline for our Fall (keep your fingers crossed!) reopening exhibit: *The Fuel Question*. Nine years of service dotting the "I's" and crossing the "T's" has made it possible for us to maintain our Heritage Center, a collection of artifacts and present a vibrant series of programs and events. We wish her well and have two more months to find a replacement. **Know anyone who might be interested?** Lynette will still be available to pass on her advice and perhaps will even return occasionally to share her latest research findings with us.

More news at the Annual Membership Meeting July 29, and please join us at the Ice Cream Social appreciation-reception for Lynette on Sunday, August 29 from 2:00 to 4:00 PM.

Sincerely,  
**Jay Kacena. President**



## Directors' Corner: Vic Klopfenstein

Pat and I have long admired a large (5 ft. X6 ft.) 1889 map of Linn County hanging on the walls of the *Aasgaard & Lawrence Law Office* at 1080 9th Ave in Marion. We've never seen it anywhere else. On several occasions we hinted the Museum would love to have it if the partners ever decided to redecorate. We were delighted when Karen Zierath called from their office this Spring and told us we could pick it up. Many thanks to donors Janice A. Aasgaard and James E. Kleeman, and to our crackerjack moving crew: Mark Klopfenstein and Craig James. The map will be on display in the main lobby with an appropriate plaque.



**Now Open:** On-line 20th Annual *ART by Your Friends & Neighbors* exhibition. Continues through July 30. Remember to vote and thank our sponsor: **Hills Bank.**

**July 29, 2021** Board meeting at 2:30 P.M.  
Followed by **Annual Membership Meeting** at 4:00 P.M.

**August 29, 2021** Ice cream Social Director's Retirement Party; 2:00-4:00 P.M.

## 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.

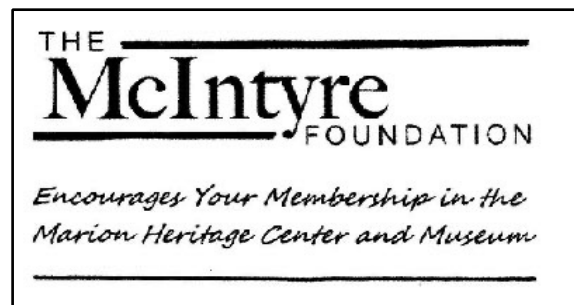
For more information about joining call 319-447-6376.

E-mail to:  
**marionheritage@marionhistoricalsociety.org**

See our website: <https://www.marionheritagecenter.org>

[www.facebook.com/MarionHeritageCenter/](https://www.facebook.com/MarionHeritageCenter/)

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



**Sponsored in part by:**



**Hotel Motel Grant fund**



Beneficiaries of income from retirement plans like traditional IRAs know that Uncle Sam wants his share when time comes to take it out. Do you know that you can escape that income tax, and satisfy your charitable wishes at the same time? By asking your retirement plan to make your Charitable Contribution directly, as part of your Required Minimum Distribution, you can support your Historical Society with money that would otherwise been paid in tax! You can direct this contribution to the Society to help pay for current expenses – or to the Endowment fund to help provide income in the future. Call for details.

At last report, that Endowment Fund, which is managed by *Hills Bank & Trust Co.*, had grown to more than **\$74,000** – even after contributing \$2500 to the 2020-21 budget. Some of that growth came from government “stimulus payments” received by members who had no need for the money! If that describes you, please consider a gift to the ENDOWMENT to assure future income for the Heritage Center.

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.

**Thanks** to the City of Marion Hotel/Motel fund and the **\$4,000** awarded for Fy2022.

We're grateful to receive funding this year from the Iowa Arts and Culture Emergency Relief Fund and the Capacity Building Grant fund administered by the Iowa Arts Council, a division of the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs, through last year's Federal CARES Act. The grants help support operating costs and will help us prepare to reopen in the Fall.

#### IOWA DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

IOWA ARTS COUNCIL    PRODUCE IOWA    STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA

Did you know the City of Marion has an official flower? You'll see them in our front planters courtesy of members Jim & Jean Young. **You can volunteer too--give us a call.**



#### *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

Meetings are held the 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday of each month at 2:30 P.M. at the Heritage Center.







It's **June 28, 1940**, the Summer sun is shining down on Marion and life is good for its 4700 citizens. You're looking South, down 10th Street from 7th Avenue at the NW entrance to City Square Park

Halfway down the other side of the street, beyond Murdoch's Funeral Home, and stretching to the Catholic Church across 5th Avenue, is a line of brick structures characteristic of the high standards set by early Marion builders. Next to Murdoch's property is the home and office of Dr. Herbert Gerstman and his brilliant artist wife, Maria. Across 6th Avenue, the former Methodist, later Baptist, church stands, more recently converted into the YMCA. Next to the "Y" is the furniture restoration business of Raymond Eckhart, an artist in his own right. Finally, on the corner across from St. Joseph's, the classic home of Mr. and Mrs. Tom McGowan.

From there, historic places stretch in every direction. You can recall the site of Linn County's first wood-frame courthouse and later - nearly next door, its great stone replacement - home to Linn County government until 1919. It is said that materials from the courthouse were later incorporated into the construction of Gordon's Hatchery, which stands in its place in 1940.

But history is a moving target ... moving in more ways than one.

**Eighty-one years later** Marion is home to more than 40,000 residents. Our history is the inheritance of another generation. . . reaching back to its founding in 1837 - reaching back indeed to its namesake, Francis Marion, the famous "*Swamp Fox*" of the American Revolution!



Return your attention to the YMCA building on the corner of 6th Avenue and 10th Street. Here, right in the middle of all this history, stands the Marion Heritage Center - the official repository of our past history. It holds volumes of city records and pictures, stories and documentation of the men and women who lived in our community since 1940 as well as those who pioneered the city for a hundred years before that.

The Marion Heritage Center and the history it preserves belongs to everyone who calls Marion home. *It's Yours!*

Heritage exemplified by high standards - from Francis Marion to Raymond Eckhart, to the many early leaders and hundreds of veterans buried in Oak Shade Cemetery; merchants and judges, builders, artists and entertainers. The good life we enjoy in Marion today is evidence that those who came before us had that attitude we now see expressed on the city's water towers: Reach Higher!

But don't forget the past – it's what got us here!

**Jay Kacena. President**

## The Fuel Question

Life in Iowa is impossible without winter fuel. Through most of our history we avoided the problem by living in the eastern forested sections of the State, but as those lands filled, settlers looked increasingly at the prairies and asked, "Where are we going to find the fuel we need to live there?" It was called *The Fuel Question* and it dominated newspapers statewide in the 1850's and 60's. Peat was the local answer, courtesy of a rural Marion resident, Jonathan Bundy, who discovered it in 1866, and with his son, Thomas, started the first alternative fuel business in the West. Selling for \$6/ton at local wood dealers, peat helped sustain settlement in Iowa and the local economy until the railroad arrived in 1871 bringing lower-cost coal.

Thomas Bundy, Jonathan's son, came to Linn county with his family in 1854 at age 15. He kept a journal of their trip and his early years here, and published excerpts 33 years later in the Quaker *The Friend* magazine in a series called "**Memories of the Prairies.**" They are one of the best-kept secrets in Iowa natural history.



"Prairie fires formed a marked feature of frontier life. . . When the surging flames held possession of these great fields of many miles in extent, the scene was grand and beautiful

beyond description, and sometimes became fearfully so to the few scattered settlers in their way. But there were times when the destroying element (fire) gain(ed) admittance to the jealously guarded timber lands, and then if it chanced in the midst of the dry season, as a great calamity it befell these sparsely timbered regions, and when an ominous smoke was observed rising from some piece of woodland, or when the dread news came that fire was raging in the timber pressing indeed was the employment of any good citizen if it was not at once laid aside to go out to battle with the fiery enemy. . . This was deemed not small matter in a land

of broad prairies and narrow belts of woodland, with the nearest known coal field a hundred miles away, and no means of easy transportation at hand."

"The great value and importance of the timberlands were generally overestimated, and with some individuals this degenerated into the meanest of miserliness. I have known old pioneers possessing large bodies of the best wood-lands where hundreds of cords of fallen and perishing timber lay wasting, yet who could not be induced to part with one load, though offered twice its value by a needy neighbor, and in its use themselves observed the strictest economy."

"The inhabitants of the prairies in early times cherished a deep aversion to these timber misers as well as to "land speculators" in general. Many indulged this antipathy to such a degree that they did not scruple to trespass on their lands to any extent that their own safety would permit. An example . . . occurred in Muscatine County. Four hundred acres of the best timber on the Wapsi-Nonock (Wolf Creek) was owned and held for extravagant prices by some man back East, who finally dying, the land was sold by his supposed heirs; but other claimants denied their right to it or to sell it, and a (law)suit was begun. . . The people of neighboring prairies began to take from it the "down timber," as they needed fuel; then to cut what they desired; and the raid upon it became general, without any effort of concealment or any apparent scruples of conscience. They strove with each other to gain the largest possible share of the spoils. The suit continued in law for a number of years, and when ended and the title made good, not one load of desirable wood remained upon the whole tract, and the land was scarcely worth the taxes due on it. Every tree had been felled, and every log and limb that was worth the taking was gone, but the lines and limits were strictly observed and scarce a sapling belonging to an actual settler had suffered, though he may have lived miles away on the prairie; for ordinary "timber stealing" was one of the most despised crimes. Thus we see how popular sentiment may be warped and turned into strange channels by a few favoring circumstances. " (T. E. Bundy; *Memories of the Prairies*, 1877)

T. E. Bundy on learning to live with each other upon his arrival in Linn county.



“A vacant house “to rent” was something almost unknown in that new country and we were glad to get shelter in one already occupied by two families and soon to have another added, four in all and entire strangers to each other, coming from four different States. This huddling together in such close domestic relationship of strangers so widely differing in customs, thought and habits, is one of the interesting and sometimes intolerable experiences of frontier life, yet it may be made a profitable school of forbearance and charity, and the common interests, and sympathies and sufferings of a new country does much to bind together in bonds of good fellowship, at least the better elements of a new settlement. I yet remember many of those neighbors and friends with a degree of warmth scarcely attained in later experience.” (T. E. Bundy; *Memories of the Prairies*, 1877)