



MARION HERITAGE CENTER & MUSEUM

News from the Marion Historical Society

December 2021



Robyn's December message:

Dear Members:

After nearly two years of a pandemic followed by a natural disaster, the Marion Heritage Center & Museum has been repaired and is open again! We have an exciting new exhibit: The Fuel Question, which explores the link between the US fuel shortage c.a.1850-1902, how Marion solved their problem locally, and the fuel crises we face today. Please come check it out! We're open Thursday - Saturday from 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm. We've already had a few guests visit.

Our annual Soup Supper was also a success, though it was a close call. The contractors were still putting up ceiling tiles on Wednesday afternoon, and the scaffolding wasn't removed until 3:00 pm on Friday. In the end, however, we served up 80 bowls of the soup, ran out of the hot dish, and brought in over \$1,000. It was a wonderful way for me to meet many people whose names I'd heard and some I hadn't.



I hope to continue to interact with each of you as time goes on. Please don't hesitate to give me a call, email, or stop by to introduce yourself!

Robyn Ireland



LIGHTING • BUILDING

As Robyn reports in her message this month—interior repairs to the Heritage Center just squeaked into place in time for the soup supper on November Seventh. To rave reviews!

The photo here clearly demonstrates that the new lighting is vastly superior to the old, thanks to the expert installation by Justice Electric. More than \$3000 in contributions to the special "lighting fund" made an upgrade to the spotlight track lights a reality. Artists and visitors to next year's Art Show will be particularly happy. We are very proud and grateful.



A very small amount of trim is yet to be completed on the exterior of the building. While a final tally of our insurance claim has not been made, we can profess our great satisfaction with the insurer, United Fire Group of Cedar Rapids and their Marion agent Bouslog Insurance. *jak*

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: www.marionheritagecenter.org

www.facebook.com/MarionHeritageCenter/

Mailing address:

P.O. Box 753, Marion, IA 52302-0753

Membership Committee Studies Changes to Dues System

Your Marion Historical Society is making great strides in moving our Administrative systems into the 21st Century!

Utilizing our new accounting program, the Membership Committee is looking at processing dues on a common anniversary basis rather than month by month as we have done in the past. To make the transition to everyone's dues falling in January, your next dues notice may ask for only a pro-rata portion of your dues for 2022.

Meanwhile, the Membership Committee and your Board of Directors would ask you to consider stepping up your contribution to the Sustaining Member level of \$100 rather than the amount you are billed. A little extra income following nearly two years of "darkness" will enable YOUR Historical Society to revive our programs and maintain our valuable facility.

Vicki Hughes



Director's Corner

Well, what to say about history.

History is not a dead thing. The dead do not remember. We do.

History is not as much about what we remember as it is about how and why we remember.

History is woven through us and every part of our lives. Our governments, our religions, our families are all history in the present tense.

History gives our lives value and direction. Our law, our national identity, our worship, and our sense of self are all products of long recorded and remembered history. We order our relationships with others on the basis of shared history.

Words like honor, fairness, decency, morality, generosity, and piety mean nothing without the historical examples that give them definition.

Anyone who professes a lack of respect for history merely wants to write the greed or passion that motivates them on a blank slate.

Constitution, legal precedence, ritual, tradition, it's all history, and without it we are lost.

As the written word made human experience transmissible and permanent, history is in the written word; and before that, it was in the spoken word of oral traditions handed down for centuries.

What makes us human is the unending story we tell ourselves, and that is history.

Mark Seidl

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 Fourth Thursday
of each month at 2:30 P.M.
at the Heritage Center.*

Sponsored in part by:


Hotel Motel Grant Fund

THE CURRENT EXHIBIT



I visited the Marion peat bed with my husband last week and dug up a piece of history. Pat & Vic Klopfenstein own the adjacent land and they invited us out to collect a sample of peat. A foot down we reached our goal—the remains of the very plants that had witnessed Jonathan Bundy and his son, Thomas, making peat fuel here just after the Civil War. To dig up peat is to travel back in time, such is the pace of decomposition in a bog, or more properly, a “fen” like this. A sizable portion (about 1/3) of the plants that were alive when the Egyptians were building the pyramids are still down there about 10 ft. At the bottom you can still find about 5% of those that were nibbled on by mammoths and bison 12,000 years ago. Bundy’s discovery of peat and successful fuel operation here sparked a statewide peat fuel movement that rippled arguably as far as California. Predatory competition of the railroads, legal in the 19th century, ultimately shut him down and everyone else, but here in Iowa we reexamined the Peat Question repeatedly in



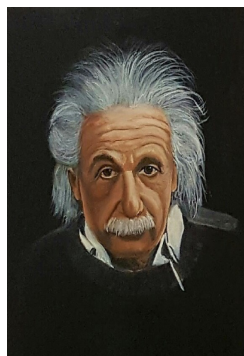
subsequent decades in our search for cheap reliable fuel. We’re very grateful to the visionary folks at NextEra Energy Resources for seeing the connection of our next exhibit, The Fuel Question, to their own efforts at Palo to provide us with clean reliable energy for the future, and contributing eight exhibit panels along with their Microgrid Trainer—equipment identical to the units they donated to Kirkwood College and that are currently being used to train our grandchildren to help manage tomorrow's energy challenges. History – it’s relevant Today, Tomorrow and Forever, and we’re grateful to you, for making it yours!

Lynette Brenzel

Art by Your Friends and Neighbors – LIVE!

After two years of “Virtual” exhibits, we are looking forward to seeing it “on the wall” again in 2022!

In this, the TWENTY-FIRST annual Art Show at the Heritage Center, the works of up to 75 local artists will be displayed including Paintings, Drawings, Photography and three-dimensional art like Ceramics, Sculptures, Woodcarving, Glass and Embroidery. Many of the entries will be for sale and, as in the past, visitors will be invited to vote for their favorite – the top three vote-getters receiving a prize of \$75 from show sponsor, Hills Bank and Trust.



The opening date and details regarding invitations to participate will be announced later.

Image: “Einstein” by Barb Prall



VOICES FROM THE PAST

This is the first of a regular feature of our Society's quarterly newsletters to share the stories and history of former Marion citizens and leaders who brought us to the place we are today.

Remembering Cira's

Many people today have fond memories of Cira's Grocery Store across Seventh Avenue from City Square Park. They talk about the ice cream on a stick made by Mike Cira's brother-in-law, Charlie Gallo. This unique confection was made of ice cream "wrapped" on a stick and dipped in chocolate which immediately became hard. Jack Larson says the "lollipops" were made for friends even after the Ciras retired. Joe Cira made them in quantities sufficient for Marion High School class reunions.

Following one of the town's devastating business district fires, the *Marion Sentinel* said the store was being expanded into a "super market" complete with "buggies" (we would



call them grocery carts today) for shoppers to retrieve their selected food stuffs. An ad announcing the 1945 re-opening included the following prices: three cans of corn for 23 cents, ten pounds of potatoes for 39 cents and five pounds of flour for a quarter. Fifteen cents would buy two cans of Campbell's tomato soup, three pounds of Crisco was 69 cents and two pounds of yams cost 22 cents.

One of Marion's oldest businesses, Cira's, dating back to 1907, was last listed in the Marion City Directory in 1967. Joe Cira operated the store with his father, Mike, for many years and worked for twenty years at Collins Radio after the store closed.



[This look back at Cira's Grocery was excerpted from the book *Around the Park: Marion Merchants* by Marion historian, Judith Hull. That volume and several others on Marion's past can be purchased at the Heritage Center.]

Marion Heritage Center & Museum
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P. O. Box 753
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