



# Langlade County Historical Society Newsletter

Summer 2011

**Curator:**  
Mary Kay Wolf  
**Directors:**  
Dean Blazek  
Steve Bradley  
Nancy Bugni  
Glenn Bugni  
Judy Grimm  
Lisa Haefs  
Joe Hermolin  
Jim Klapste  
Terri Torgerson

## A Busy Spring and Summer at the Museum

With the school year ending and expanded museum hours, activities have intensified. We always host several school groups and others in the spring, and this has continued with school group tours and tours for the Boys and Girls Club, as well as the Red Hat Ladies.

One boy exclaimed, "Gee, Antigo used to be really cool!"

Groups that have visited also include 4th and 2nd grades from North Elementary, 3rd grade from Birnamwood, and the summer school detectives class.

### Inside:

Page 2: Reefer cars and spud bags  
Page 3: Summer music  
Page 4: Flight history in Antigo  
Page 5: A long lived fire pumper; thank you's  
Page 6: Museum item

One interesting projects was a collaboration with the middle school to prepare a walking tour booklet of downtown Antigo. Teachers Mary Umland and Ashley Darr worked with the museum's archives to put together a booklet of what Antigo was like in the past.



*Teachers Mary Umland (l) and Ashley Darr (r) prepare their book about downtown Antigo.*

They used the booklet to take student groups on a walk through downtown Antigo.



*The museum classroom is often a big hit with school groups such as these students from Birnamwood.*

## Fun and Fund Raising at the Museum



*One shopper at the rummage sale checks in on his cell phone before making a purchase.*

Two events held in June proved to be enjoyable social events as well as fund raisers. Thanks to generous donations to our rummage sale we were able to raise about \$832 to maintain museum operations

A few weeks later we held our annual picnic commemorating the railroad's importance in Antigo's history. The poor weather forced us to move the event indoors. In spite of the inconvenience, people had a good time and the museum raised



*Chefs Mike Haefs and Steve Bradley grilled in the rain but under cover for the railroad picnic. Ice cream was served by the 4-H club and people ate indoors.*

## The Reefer Car: An Important Part of Railroad History

The railroad was once the primary method for farmers to get their produce to market. By the turn of the 20th century, perishables ranging from vegetables to milk and beer were shipped in refrigerated cars or “reefers” as they were known. Most reefers were owned and operated by private lines since many railroads didn’t want to invest in these expensive cars that usually generated no back-haul revenue and had limited seasonal use.

Some railroads had subsidiary companies that owned and operated refrigerator cars. Larger shippers used private reefers and the idea of using the sides of the cars for advertising quickly caught on.

One such shipper was Felix Zeloski of Antigo. He was the only potato grower in this area to have his own reefer car.

The railroads did not look favorably on private leasing companies.

They argued that private and leased cars made operations complicated because they had to be returned empty to shippers. Railroads also looked on car side advertising as unfair competition to their own advertising.

Beginning in 1927, disputes were reviewed by the Interstate Commerce Commission, who, in 1934 ruled that as of August 1, 1934, advertising would be prohibited on new reefer cars; and by 1937 all advertising should be eliminated. By 1938 the era of the moving, colorful billboard reefers was nearing its end. Trucks soon replaced the railroad as a means of getting goods to market.

*The information about reefer cars was supplied to the museum by Dick Strasser*



*Left: An HO scale model of Felix Zeloski's potato reefer car.*

## Potato Bags as an Art Form

From the 1930s and well into the 1960s potato farmers packaged their goods in 100-pound burlap bags. Each grower had his own logo on the bag and many contained interesting graphics.

Kevin Bula has an extensive collection of these bags and generously shared them with museum patrons during the railroad picnic and for some weeks afterwards.



*Left to right: Kevin Bula (in the distance), Wendy Bunster, and Dick Strasser set up the bag display in the museum's gallery space. Local artists' works will be on display in late fall in the same space.*



*Curator Mary Kay Wolf holds a bag of Wolf River Potatoes, owned by her father Ed Morrissey.*

# Summertime Means Music in the Park

The area has supported community bands for as long as the communities have existed. The museum's archives have photographs of many community bands dating back to the late 19th century.



# Antigo and Aviation History

Antigo prides itself as being an important railroad town, having long been headquarters of the Ashland Division of the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad. But it also played a role in aviation history.

The Wright brothers achieved their historic, first successful piloted and powered flight on December 17, 1903, at Kitty Hawk, NC.

It would take almost eight years before Wisconsinites would witness the wonders of a flying machine. In 1911 flights took place in a dozen Wisconsin areas, including Antigo. Wausau's John Schwister brought Wisconsin's first home-built airplane to Antigo and flew it at the Langlade County fair in September, 1911. Schwister was originally from Minnesota but lived in Wausau. He called his plane the "Minnesota Badger." When he flew at the fairgrounds he was the first Wisconsin flyer to be paid to fly. About 6,500 people witnessed the event.

The attraction was such a success that the following year county fair officials hired a barnstorming pilot, Lincoln Beachy, to come to Antigo. He performed three separate flights over the grandstand. For Beachy's flights in 1912, twelve thousand people came out to the fair.

The Antigo Daily Journal reported at the time: "Towns up and down the Northwestern line sent large delegations, and schools in many of the neighboring towns closed down so that pupils could see the Langlade County Fair."



Top Photo:  
John Schwister and his "Minnesota Badger."



Second Photo from top:  
Fairgoers in 1911 at the grandstand crowd around Schwister and his plane for a closer look.



Third photo from top:  
Lincoln Beachy in his plane.



Bottom photo:  
Beachy's flight at the Langlade County Fair in 1912.

## A Fire Pump with a Long Life

In 1910 a major fire raged out of control in downtown Antigo at Krom's Department Store. The fire department realized that they were ill equipped for such blazes; and in 1911 purchased a new horse drawn fire wagon. Even after the fire department had a fire engine, they continued to use the horse-drawn pumper in winter because the horses were more reliable on icy streets than the trucks. Eventually more reliable vehicles made the horse-drawn wagon obsolete. The fire department still kept the pumper and found a new use for it. As late as the 1930s, it was used to pump water out of buildings after spring floods.

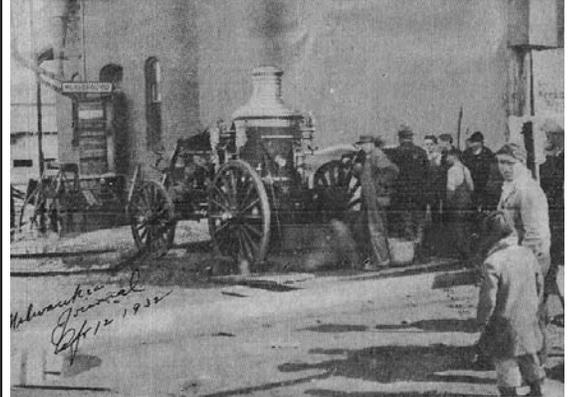
The 1911 American LaFrance Metropolitan Steamer from Antigo has been restored by Hal Fillinger of Pennsylvania and is on display at the Liberty Hall Fire Museum in Union, New Jersey.



*Top: The steamer sitting in the Antigo fire department station in 1911.*

*Bottom: The same steamer pump in 1932 still in use pumping out flooded basements.*

*The bottom photograph is by A.J. Kingsbury, submitted to the Milwaukee Sentinel.*



## Thank You:

**Bob Benishek:** Book on Langlade County Sheriffs

**Dean Blazek:** Print archives material

**Irene Boettcher:** Framed 1935 newspaper

**Margaret Constanine:** Items relating to Dr. Elizabeth Steffen

**Ken Czubkowski:** Navy shore patrol items

**William Kelly:** Engineering books

**Ron Priquette:** Class of 1958 picture from the teachers' college

**Dennis Pukall:** School books

**Eunice Rice:** WWII materials (in memory of Steve Dollby, Jr.)

**Roy Rocke:** AARP items

**Jeff Shannon:** Newspapers

**Bessie Steger:** Doilies

**Toni Thomas:** Post cards, books, newspapers

**Otto Ties:** Year book, Smith Bros. Lumber Co. bag

**In Memory of Myron Taylor:** High school yearbooks, pictures

### Monetary Donations

Johnson Electric Coil Company  
Langlade County Genealogical Society

Retired Nurses Association

Sheldon Foundation

*In Memory of Nancy Goodman* from

Dean and Polly Blazek

*In Memory of Ed Morrissey, Ray*

*Kirsch, Nancy Goodman, Dean*

*Harms, Georgia Ourada,* from Jim

and Connie Hubatch

*In Memory of Georgia Ourada and*

*Helen Girod* from Dean and Polly

Blazek

*In Memory of Jerome Filbrandt* from

Rosemary Filbrandt and family

### Membership Renewals:

June Diercks

Nick and Jeanette Salm

### Special Thanks:

Toni Thomas for landscaping

Butch's for flowers

**The Langlade County Historical Society sadly notes the passing of Jerome Filbrandt.**

**Jerry was dedicated to the museum and to the preservation of our history. He served for many years on the museum's board of directors and devoted time, effort, and money to maintaining the building.**

**His efforts benefited the entire community.**

**Address:**

404 Superior St., Antigo, WI 54409  
Phone: (715) 627-4464  
E-mail: lchs@dwave.net  
web site: www.langladehistory.com

**Museum Hours:**

October 1 to May 1  
Thursday to Saturday

May 1 to October 1  
Tuesday to Saturday

9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

**Membership Dues**

Individual, 1 year: \$25  
Individual, 3 years: \$50  
Family, 1 year: \$30  
Family, 3 years: \$70  
Junior (18 or younger), 1 year: \$3  
Business, 1 year: \$100  
Life Member: \$250

**Upcoming Events:**

Antiques Appraisal and Sale: Saturday, September 24, at the Antigo High School Commons  
AVA Art Gallery opening: In November, date to be announced, in the museum



**Items from the Museum:** This bench was part of a set that was in the Antigo train depot waiting room. Until recently it was in the community center but has found a new home in the railroad room at the museum.

Langlade County Historical Society  
404 Superior Street  
Antigo WI, 54409