

Historical Society News

P O R T A G E C O M M U N I T Y H I S T O R I C A L S O C I E T Y , I N C .

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- Election of 2015 Board of directors
- November Installation dinner
- Christmas Open House
- School Tours
- New Website

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2015 ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Our next general meeting on Wednesday, October 15, will be our election of officers for the 2015 year. If you are interested in serving on the board of directors please contact Lois Mollick; so, she can put you on the ballot. Her number is 219-762-4218 or at her email landj.mollick1@frontier.com

Coppess, Wanda Samuelson, Eva Udick, Richard Turnak, Sue Cowsert , Al Goin

will be on Wednesday, November, 19, 2014, at 6:00 pm. R.S.V.P. to Lois at 762-4218



Eva Udick telling stories to children.

The society provides the chicken, dinner rolls and beverages and we ask all members attending to bring a side dish and a dessert to share. We will have Jones School choir for our entertainment and swearing in of the officers.

Board members willing to serve:

- President—Valeria Roach
- Vice President—Anne Koehler
- Secretary—Donna Smith
- Treasurer— Barb Borg-Jenkins
- Board of Directors: Lois Mollick, Jim Franzen, Patti

SAVE THE DATE:

The installation of the 2015 Board of Directors will be held again at Woodland Park in the upstairs hall. It

You can pay your 2015 dues that evening.

This is the only notice you will receive; so, please put it on your calendar. It will be posted on Facebook and our new website.

N E W W E B S I T E

A few weeks ago we had a meeting about creating a new and updated website. Ron Garrison was able to create and have it up and going in just a few days. With the help of Stephanie Gabbert and Debbie Parker, they were going back and forth about the site and I sat there totally confused. With their knowhow

and creativity, the site is something we can all be proud of. Administrators of our new website are Donna Smith, Debbie Parker and Ron Garrison. Stephanie Gabbert is in charge of all the pictures and documents from the previous My-Family site.

nect to our Facebook page and can even Tweet on Twitter. Plus, there is a link to Picasa for our pictures but that will soon change to another page with all the pictures.

We now have 630 “friends” on our Facebook page and growing by the week. ~Kathy

On the new site we can con-

MUSEUM NEWS

By the time you receive this newsletter we will have given several days of school tours. Jones School brought students on September 29, 30 and Oct. 1. And Kyle School is scheduled for October 9. We really enjoy the school children's visits. Thanks to the members who come to volunteer on the tours. Makes for an enjoyable day for everyone.

A recent tour of about 15 came from Rittenhouse and among them was Hazel Briggs

Bradford. We hope she liked our display of her family. We took a picture of her in front of the display. We received so many documents and pictures that we didn't have room to display everything.

For the Alumni Open House on Friday, September 26, we had many school related items including scrapbooks from the 60's and 70's we received from the Portage Township School Media Center.

Our display of Cindy "Cupcake" Bean Photography will soon be gone. It was really a wonderful display and drew so many people to our museum. Now we have to put something in it's place.

Our computer and printer are now in fine working order thanks to Ron Garrison.

SOCIETY NEWS

Mrs. Marjorie G. Robbins Herren passed away on Sunday, September 21, 2014. She was almost 98 years old. She was a teacher at Portage High School for many years and a very nice lady.

Welcome to two new members that recently joined the historical society: Bob Shrader and Brendan Clancy.

Our last general meeting was attended by about 25 people even though no publicity got into the paper.

We were all riveted by the story of Belle Gunness and many attendees asked Bruce Johnson & Steve Ruminski questions. The documentary they showed was well done and can be purchased. Details will be available soon.

Are you a US military veteran?

We would like to borrow a picture of you in uniform for the "Military Tree." Debbie Parker is working on the project. With the photo include full name, rank, years of service and branch. Email it, Facebook private message or drop it off at the museum; include a return address so the photo may be returned.

VOLUNTEERS

Two young ladies were looking for somewhere to volunteer their help. They come once a week and help us in the museum. They are not members so I don't want to publish their names but we are grateful for their help.

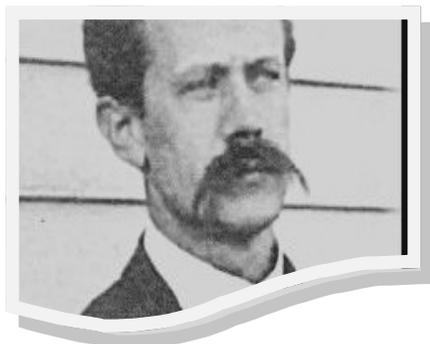
Help Wanted:

Volunteer in the museum, Volunteer for all events, schedule tours, make phone calls to get volunteers to help for tours, work on the newsletter, clean the museums, make contacts with people who help us at events, take in accessions, refreshment com-

mittee, membership chairwoman, nominating committee and serves on the board. These are just a few of the jobs Lois Mollack has been doing for many years. One person could not replace her. Oh, and the pay - nothing. Lois we are so grateful for all you do for the society.

*Lois we are
so grateful
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society.*

WILLIAM A. BRIGGS



William A. Briggs (1873-1958)

IT'S LIKE THIS -- IN INDIANA

By Al Spiers (written in 1957)

William A. Briggs is probably the only principal in Hoosier history to conduct high school in a saloon. And him a teetotaler yet!

This strange state of educational affairs occurred shortly after Briggs transplanted himself to Indiana.

Farm raised in southern Illinois, Bill, an eager, apt student, won a teaching license at 18, after a year at Albion Normal University.

After three years of hickory-sticking the three R's in rural schools near his home, Bill went to Valparaiso in the fall of 1894 to broaden his own education.

By spring, he lined up a new job in a township school at Crisman, a wee Porter County village -- so he hurried home, wed Rosa Lambert, his lifelong best girl, and became a Hoosier for good.

Crisman folk liked their new teacher. One day Trustee John Lenburg approached Bill with an idea.

"We'd like to start a high school", said Lenburg. "Think you could handle it?"

"I'll do my best," promised Bill.

There was one large hitch. Lenburg had just built a grade school house at McCool and no construction funds.

That led to a second idea.

For a time, Crisman had tolerated a big, rowdy, two-story saloon. When the joint got too raw, the village's good burghers firmly ran the saloonkeeper out of town.

Thus it was that Lenburg came to Briggs during summer vacation and asked, "Could you . . . would you teach school in a saloon?"

"Why not?" grinned Bill, when he learned the facts. "A little remodeling -- and fumigating -- should make it do."

Into the saloon that fall went desks, blackboards Bill and about 20 pupils, part of them in the townships first ninth grade class.

"We only had to use the saloon one year." Chuckled Bill. "In 1897, Lenburg was able to build the first four rooms of the present Portage Junior High School. We moved in that fall and added 10th grade."

That year Principal Briggs had two teachers. They taught lower grades and he conducted eighth, ninth and tenth grade classes.

During the next few years, more teachers and 11th and 12th grades were added.

Bill Briggs supervised Crisman's school 21 years -- until he collided with a new state law requiring principals to have college degrees.

Reluctantly, Bill resigned in 1918. He loved children and enjoyed teaching and it saddened him to leave the field of education.

But like most dark clouds, Bill's had a silver lining.

From the beginning, Bill and Rosa Briggs had contributed nobly to the Crisman school's roster -- five boys and five girls, born between 1896 and 1916.

To raise this big family properly, Bill first supplemented his low teaching pay by hiring out as a summer farm hand; later

buying 40 acres to raise truck produce.

Now he said to Rosa, "I'll get a night job so the boys and I can farm days. We'll get to know each other better..."

For the next 23 years, Bill manned a night shift shipping department desk in a Gary steel mill and farmed days with his sons.

An exhausting grind? Yes -- but worth it.

"We didn't get rich, but we gave the next generation 10 good citizens," Bill Briggs said softly. "Not one ever let us down or shamed our name. That's reward enough ..."

In retirement, Bill found time to indulge in a life-long hobby -- exploring and writing local history. In the early years, he and Rosa often spent Saturdays roaming Porter County in a Model T, seeking and quizzing old-time settlers and poking into musty records.

Bill had to forgo historical pursuits after Rosa suffered a stroke in the 40's. For eight years he nursed and tended her with loving care -- until death ended their 58-year union in 1953.

Since then Bill, now 84, has lived alone, caring largely for himself and easing a terrible loneliness by voluminous reading and historical writing.

Despite a hard life of struggle and sacrifice, Bill is an alert, lively, chirper, octogenarian. His talk is sharp, articulate and cultured, his good humor perky. That old tyrant, time, and another date cut our first chat all to short . . . and I hated to leave.

We are on the web
<http://www.inpchs.com>



**P O R T A G E
C O M M U N I T Y
H I S T O R I C A L
S O C I E T Y , I N C .**

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General Meeting
Wednesday, October 15, 2014 — 7:00 pm
Woodland Park

Election of 2015 Officers
Members please try to attend and vote for the new board.

Refreshments

C A L E N D A R O F U P C O M I N G E V E N T S

October 14, 2014, Tuesday—
Board Meeting, 6:30 pm

October 15, 2014, Wednesday—
General Election Meeting, 7:00
pm Woodland Park

November 19, 2014, Wednesday—
Installation Dinner, 6:00
pm Woodland Park

December 6 & 7, 2014 Saturday & Sunday— Christmas Open House, Museums at Countryside Park

The museum will close after the open house and reopen the first weekend of April 2015.

The Portage Community Historical Society is proud to announce the launch of our new Website. The new website combines new technology which allows us to publish to Facebook & Twitter when we publish an article to our website. We have many photos and articles on the website and will continue to add more as time goes on.

This new website was donated by Ronald Garrison and Bad Dog Web Hosting. Ron and Debbie Parker designed the site and graphics. Photos and information were used from our previous website which was created by Donna Smith; please take a look at the site today and let us know what you think.

www.inpchs.com



*Eva Wick
in the Trager
farmhouse.*