



McFarland Historical Society

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2005 Annual Potluck Feb 27th

Annual Potluck

Mark your calendar, our annual potluck will be Sunday, February 27, 2005 at 1 P.M. at the Municipal Center, 5910 Milwaukee Street. Please bring a dish to pass and place settings for your family. Coffee and milk will be provided and paper plates, cups and napkins will be available.

40th Anniversary Drawings

From its initial beginning in 1964 our society and museum has become one of Wisconsin's better small community museums. In fact there are few museums that compare to our broad collection of historic artifacts ranging from Native Americans to our rich Norwegian heritage and the establishment of the McFarland community by William McFarland. Our display includes woodworking and blacksmith tools, kitchenware, art and original crafts to name just a few.

Last year (2004) the McFarland Historical Society celebrated our 40th anniversary. If you recall in our January 2004 newsletter we announced that anyone renewing or beginning a new membership during 2004 of forty dollars or more, their name would be entered into a drawing for cash prizes donated by area businesses. We said a drawing would be held at our 2005 annual members gathering in February. We are pleased with the generous support we received from many of you. Fifty-eight individuals or families gave \$40 or more. Also, we are extremely pleased with the support we received from Amtelco, Culvers, McFarland State Bank, American Family Insurance (Jeff Engelkes), State Farm Insurance (Jim Hartman) and McFarland Animal Hospital (Dr. Randy Raasch). As a result of their generosity nearly 50% of those members who gave at the anniversary level of \$40 or more will be awarded 1 of 26 prizes ranging from \$15 gift certificates to the Grand Prize, a \$500 Savings Bond.

So come and join us Sunday, February 27th and see if you are a lucky winner. There will be door prizes too.

From the President

Our theme for the year is "McFarland and the Railroad," for it was one hundred and fifty years ago that the Milwaukee and Prairie du Chien Railroad company erected the first depot near what was to become McFarland two years later. In 1957 William McFarland laid out McFarland's streets and erected his first depot and home. (See "The Railroad's Influence in McFarland" later in this issue.)

A lot has been happening in McFarland that is historically significant. Madison is growing into our north side and McFarland is expanding eastward quite rapidly. Within McFarland, changes are evident in the new schools, the McFarland State Bank's move and expansion, and new commercial buildings. A new, much larger library will also occupy the center of town. With so many changes it is hard for historians to keep up.

Fortunately, the new library designs include a local history room which will help bring the community together and greatly improve our ability to record and preserve information of historical significance. Books and local publications at the museum are only accessible for a few hours each Sunday afternoon or with a board member's help, therefore, we will be providing the library with the society's collection of treasured old books, historical records and a large bookcase of bound "McFarland Community Life" (predecessor to "The Thistle") newspapers. We also plan to display locally important pictures and artifacts and make the history of McFarland more accessible to all.

On another note, the society's Board of Directors is in need of several more interested members to step up and help run the society. Board officer positions are open. A very rewarding experience for both you and the community and you do not need to live in McFarland. We meet on the second Monday of each month at the museum at 7:30 P.M. to about 9 P.M.

Dale Marsden, President



1909 McFarland train station with Eugene Eighmy's feed mill and William McFarland's first depot on the left and the second depot on the right.

Excursions; Where to next?

After last summer's successful trip to Mazomanie we will have to think a bit to top it. We could visit the Milton House and Museum, Stoughton's museum, or the Hoard Museum in Fort Atkinson. There any number of attractions we could go to .
(Open for member input at the Feb meeting.)

McFarland Historical Society Board Members

Earl Anderson, Roger Clason, Wesley Licht, Dale Marsden, Tim Mitchell, Ann Stajich, David Houghton, Carol Abernathy, and Mary Horton.

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Place
Stamp
here

What was needed was a depot somewhere in between. A young construction superintendent who had worked on building the Milwaukee and Mississippi line in the Milwaukee area was resigning after four years with the company. They propositioned him. 'Buy land near those lakes between Stoughton and Madison, build a depot there, and we'll hire you as our agent for it!' Young William McFarland agreed, and the first link in McFarland's chain of existence was forged.

It appears that someone could not wait for William to get started, for there is evidence that the first depot was built about a mile southeast of the edge of what was to become McFarland. A careful exploration reveals the probable site just where the tracks cross Highway AB. Indeed, William Colladay wrote, 'In 1855 the Milwaukee and Prairie du Chien Railroad Company erected a depot on the northeast quarter of the southeast quarter of section two. The village of McFarland was laid out on section three by Wm. H. McFarland in 1857 and the depot removed, the spacious residence of Mr. McFarland erected. The following season he moved his family from Milwaukee to his new home where he still resides.'

The railroad's books provide eloquent testimony of village activities by what crossed the freight car thresholds



when they stopped at the depot ...

The first entry was for 1611 bags of wheat (350 bushels) sent by J. Robson to W.B.& Co. in Milwaukee and was the first evidence that the railroad was run by and for wheat in those days, so far as McFarland was concerned. McFarland's early history surely depended on wheat as well. In 1850 the Town of Dunn, including the future McFarland, had thirty-two farms which, in the preceding year produced 6283 bushels of wheat as compared with 1,675 of corn, 3, 575 of oats, and 1,555 of barley.

On April 23, 1863 William McFarland received "2 wash mesheins", and on September 14 of that year he demonstrated his interest in the arts by receipt of "1 melodican, 1 stool". This would appear to be the melodian which now

stands in the meeting room of the McFarland Historical Museum.

More than wheat, household goods and supplies rode the rails in those young days of McFarland. People, too, took the trains. Records for the Milwaukee and Prairie du Chien Railway dating from the week ending November 7, 1867 to May 1876 indicate that many tickets were sold. There were forty-one destinations from which to choose until the end of October, 1873 when the addition of Chicago raised it to forty-two.

During McFarland's dry years the trains offered a means of escape for those who couldn't face that kind of existence. Roy McFarland remembered that, 'the farm boys and others would come to town by horse and buggy, put them in John McFarland's livery barn and take the train to Madison. Some of 'em 'ud come back lit to the gills and real happy.'

When William McFarland died, among his successors were Osmond T. Olson and Burleigh Allen. They were the men who saw McFarland through its years of being what Frank Custer referred to as '...the hub of the Southern Wisconsin vacation area.' In the days before the automobile began replacing the train, between 1905 and 1925, as many as ten trains a day stopped for passengers. A depot in Edwards Park, (shown at left) actually just a shelter, provided residents of that area with the convenience of a stop in their own neighborhood.

In 1968 the railroad reported that patronage averaged only forty-two passengers per mile in the previous year, and service was cut to Friday, Saturday and Sunday only. On April 30, 1971, the last passenger train left Madison on the rails through McFarland."

Railroad HELP Wanted!

Our theme for 2005 is focusing on the influence of the railroad in the McFarland area starting 150 years ago. If you have stories, photos or RR items of local interest, from long ago or of more recent vintage, please share them with us at the McFarland Historical Society. We need your help in making the historical record about the passenger travel and shipping of goods by rail more complete. Anything about the freight trains, passenger trains and depots in McFarland would be greatly appreciated. We are also interested in learning of local railroad enthusiasts who have model trains for a hobby. Please give us a call and help us out. Contact Wes Licht at 838-8178. Thank you.

mounted inside. Preserving and displaying this boat will be an important addition to the Historical Society collection of local artifacts of our past.

We are anxious to get a fund started to help defray costs for materials for both the boat work and the shelter. More details about cost estimates and shelter design will be provided later. Contributions can be made by payments to the Historical Society marked "Waubesa Boat Project".

Any members wishing to have a part in the project, for either or both of the boat work and shelter construction, should contact David Houghton.

The Railroad's Influence in McFarland

For 115 years, the railroad played an integral role in the early life of the village of McFarland. From the shipments of wheat and other farm commodities to the deliveries of manufactured products and building materials for the farming families, local business people and residents, the depot was the hub of activity for the area. Passengers also used the railroad stops in McFarland to board and travel to destinations for work, school, hospital visits and various forms of recreation. Excerpts from [City of the Second Lake, A History of McFarland, Wisconsin](#) provide an interesting collage of earlier times.

"Ribbons of steel gleaming in the prairie sunlight stretched unhindered from Stoughton to Madison on the section of railroad line completed in 1854. The stretch of rails was too long without a stop, thought officials of the Milwaukee and Mississippi Rail Road.



1880 photo of William McFarland's first depot (left) and his home, far right.

Lake Waubesa Boat Project

One of the original double-pointed touring boats used on Lake Waubesa early in the 20th century was donated to the society last August by Stanley Solheim, Town of Dunn. The society has already begun the extensive restoration work needed to bring it up to display standards. Under the professional guidance of Tim Kreft and Robert Christleib, the boat has been put under shelter and on a stabilizing platform where volunteers were able to begin removing the paint from the inner side of the boat. Continuation of the work awaits the warmer weather of spring. Completion is hoped for by the end of the summer.

The plan is to display the restored boat behind or to the side of the Historical Society building in McFarland. This will require constructing a display shelter roughly 20 feet long and 6 feet wide supported about 7 feet off the ground so that the boat can be displayed under it. Clear plexiglass will be added to protect the boat from wind-blown rain and snow. In addition, a historical information panel and pictures will be

