



# McFarland Historical Society

5814 MAIN STREET MCFARLAND, WISCONSIN 53558 PH: 608-838-3992  
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## Rob Nurre is the Surly Surveyor at the E.D. Locke Public Library Sunday, February 19, at 1 P.M.

### Our Theme for 2006 : Business

*The following excerpts are from the business chapter of City of the Second Lake, A History of McFarland, Wisconsin by Barbara Houghton, Jane Licht and Margaret Nielsen, Community Publications, McFarland, Wisconsin 1976.*

**A**s railroad records indicate, a wide range of needs was being met in McFarland within barely twenty years of its platting. Between Forton & Bay (1863) and Hoffman & Song (1867) a household's every imaginable necessity and quite a few non-necessities could have been supplied.

#### Main Street McFarland, 1908

An 1894 map of McFarland shows the presence of a carpenter, a cobbler, three grocery stores, a hotel (McFarland House), a grain elevator, a lumber yard, two tobacco warehouses, a creamery, an



implement store, cattle pens, a blacksmith shop, and the railroad depot. (Cont. Pg 2)



### Area Surrounding Second Lake to be Surveyed

**S**tep back in time to when McFarland wasn't yet established and imagine coming to this place and discovering its bountiful waters and marshes, dense woods and windswept prairies. Imagine hav-

ing to endure the elements and uncooperative squatters while carrying your axe, chain and compass, to mark off the land into mile-square blocks. As a surveyor in the early 1800's, you would be tromping many miles a day through the wilderness we now call home. You can have the opportunity to walk in the shoes of the original surveyor, learn how the land was first surveyed and how stakes were put down to mark each of the 36 sections of the township called Dunn.

Rob Nurre, Land Records Manager for the State of Wisconsin Board of Commissioners of Public Lands, will be visiting the E .D. Locke Public Library on Feb. 19, 2006, on the occasion of the Annual Meeting of the McFarland Historical Society. He will be the Surly Surveyor, sharing the stories about the work that needed to be done before McFarland settlers could buy their land, "right and proper." He will come with tools in hand, and with his surveying party (mostly willing audience participants), demonstrate the difficult process which put this area "on the map."

The Annual Meeting will start at 1 PM with beverages and dessert in the Meeting Room just inside the main entrance to the library. A very brief business meeting with the election of board members will precede the presentation by Rob Nurre. As part of McFarland's year-long celebration of its 150th birthday, this special program promises to be an entertaining and fascinating story of the incredible work that preceded the village's earliest development. Mark your calendar, tell your friends and don't miss the Surly Surveyor. 🗺️

## Obituary:

Alice Olson, 91, passed on Nov. 2, 1905.

A life and founding member of the McFarland Historical Society, Alice was a wonderful person to sit and talk with and a great source of local history. We will miss Alice.

**To help us with our records, please inform us of the deaths of any historical society members.**

## Our 2006 Theme

**Our historical theme for 2006 focuses on McFarland businesses. We'd appreciate any copies of stories, photos or other memorabilia related to former McFarland businesses, their owners and employees to add to our collection. Please contact a board member if you can share something about our community for posterity.**

**McFarland Historical Society  
5814 Main Street  
P.O.Box 94  
McFarland, Wis 53558**



**Dodi Kuell and Erin Lowell's kindergarten class enjoy a trip to the museum and are amazed by the Skare cabin and it's history.**

## McFarland Historical Society Board Members

Carol Abernathy, Earl Anderson, Ken Brost, Christie Campbell, Mary Horton, David Houghton, Wesley Licht, Dale Marsden, Tim Mitchell, Ellie Roberts, and Ann Stajich.

Place  
Stamp  
here

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## ***Business (cont.)***

By 1906 McFarland had grown and included five stores, a blacksmith shop, a hotel, a bank, a lumber yard, a creamery, a tobacco warehouse, a feed mill, a tailor shop, two churches (omitted on the 1894 map though in existence), a graded school, a doctor, a dentist and a lawyer. McFarland then boasted a variety of goods and services quite different from those of 1976 (the year this book was written).

Four yellow brick buildings anchored most of McFarland's business district to a small section of Main Street. A date on one of them – 1897 – pretty well sets the approximate age of all four. The dated building has had as varied a career as any building in the village. Ole S. Olson built it and left his name up under the eaves for all to see.

One of McFarland's earliest businesses was the lumber yard, said by Dorothy Helmke to have been started by Eugene Eighmy in 1856. Certainly lumber was prominent in the shipments received by Eugene and later by Freeman Eighmy at the depot. Another in the lumber yard succession was Brittingham and Hixon. The company, which was established in McFarland by Thomas Brittingham, Sr., provided a place where McFarland youth could find work. Roy McFarland went there at sixteen or seventeen to unload lumber and bags of cement. "I never got so tired in my life," he said, recalling those ninety-eight pound bags of cement. 🏠

## **A Trip Back in Time**

*by Wes Licht*

The weather was pleasant and the anticipation was great as approximately 35 McFarland Historical Society members and friends gathered on the morning of August 30 for a planned bus trip. We were heading north to Baraboo, once known as the "circus city of the nation" and later to North Freedom to visit the trains.

As we strolled into the lobby of the Al Ringling Theatre, we stepped back in time to 1915 when the plush and gilded "movie palace" first opened. Our guide told us how Al Ringling, the eldest Ringling Circus brother, built this theatre in the design of the grand French opera houses for approximately \$100,000, as a gift to the people of the community he loved. For awhile we sat entranced in the elegance of the spacious auditorium, encircled with the golden carved theatre boxes on the upper level, the rich tasseled draperies and the intricate ceiling frescos. We learned that from the start, the theatre featured live performances, from vaudeville to grand opera and attracted visitors from as far away as Chicago. Even first-run films made

their debut in Baraboo before they reached larger cities.

Today, as in decades past, patrons can still experience the magic as movies still flicker across the big screen and local theatre groups perform seasonal programs. Our guide walked us to the front near the stage and sat down to play the Mighty Barton theatre organ as it rose before us from the orchestral pits on its own platform. We took notice of the immense curtain with two small holes about head high, one near each end of the stage, with dark stains just below. Presumably these smudges of grease came from the mustaches and beards of the anxious actors checking out the audience. Moving through red-carpeted hallways, we also checked out the view from some of the luxury box seats, we marveled at the old ticket box and we peeked in the ladies parlor. We left with no doubt why this was tabbed the "prettiest playhouse in America" and placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1976.

With a bit of free time before lunch, members went separate ways to visit several of the specialty shops around Baraboo's historic courthouse square. Fine food and drink were then served at the Garden Party Café, located in the one of the pre-1900 buildings on the block, along with about five other businesses. I particularly enjoyed visiting the shop of the wood carver. Then it was back to the bus and on to North Freedom.

With tickets in hand and the train not due to leave for awhile, members of our group took advantage of the time to tour the various display areas of the Mid-Continent Railway. Foremost was the old depot with lots of wonderful railroading photos and accompanying stories. Of course a gift shop attracted some of patrons as well. Then outside to the yards where all kinds of historic engines and railroad cars were parked, some in great condition and others in various stages of repair and restoration. From the massive locomotives to small cabooses, from plain boxcars to fancy dining cars for 1st class service, they each had marvelous stories to tell. Some of these pieces were over 100 years old and still being used by the museum, offering service to patrons on special occasions. Others were just unusual. One engine sported a huge rotary snowplow in front with a large rotating blade that threw the snow out of a directional chute to clear the tracks. (*cont. pg 4*)



Historical society president Dale Marsden shows off the new local history room.

## Historical Society Room at the New E.D. Locke Library by David Houghton

The Historical Society's room at the new E. D. Locke Library, made possible by the Adelaide Adams endowment donation, is beginning to take shape. On Thursday, December 8, 2005 Earl Anderson, Barbara Houghton, and David Houghton moved the first Historical Society material into the room. Twenty-nine volumes of McFarland Community Life files dating back to 1968, fifteen Historical Society scrap books covering 1963 through 1999, and five of our History of Wisconsin books were moved using a dolly brought by Earl Anderson. Shelley Hartman, library director, greeted us as we moved around many persons who were completing the construction and installation work for the Library.

This room has our books and history books from the old library on shelves on one side of the room. Our books will be considered reference books that are not to leave the library. Under the windows is a long table to be used for reading and working. An enclosed display cabinet on the third side of the room is available for a rotating display of some of our most interesting artifacts. On December 27, Wes Licht, Dale Marsden, Barbara Houghton, and David Houghton worked to set up the first display, "McFarland and the Railroad."

Our room at the E. D. Locke Library will offer us many new opportunities for public exposure and outreach by our Society. On dedication day, January 8, 2006, we had flyers, brochures, and Historical Society membership cards in our room and welcomed many visitors.

## What's in a Name? Nothing if You Don't Know What the Name Is by Barbara Houghton

Are you a lifetime member of the McFarland Historical Society? Did you know that your membership is recognized on a plaque displayed in the front room of the museum on Main Street?

Several Historical Society board members were talking about that recognition display recently. They noticed that the names of lifetime members of the Society who were married were listed as M/M Samuel Jones. or M/M Ole Nelson. In each case the man's first name is the only first name listed.

In the City of the Second Lake, a History of McFarland, Wisconsin, it is noted that in all the railroad records only one woman's name appears. The role of women in the colorful history of McFarland is of great importance. To lose their first names as the years go by would be most unfortunate. Yet even now as today's Historical Society members look over the names, many are already forgotten.

The Historical Society Board has agreed to undertake the task of saving as many of those first names of the past as possible. The estimated total cost of making the replacement plates is between \$200 and \$300. The Historical Society would welcome donations from individuals who wish to support this project.

If you have any comments or questions, Dale Marsden, board president can be reached by telephone at (608) 838-3992 or by mail at 2614 River Holm Rd., McFarland, WI 53558

## John McFarland in his first tavern at 5920 Exchange St. Earlier he had run a livery at this location where the Artistic Beauty Salon now stands .



# Al Ringling Theatre



**This plush and gilded “movie palace” first opened in 1915. Eldest Ringling Circus brother, Al, built this theatre in the design of the grand French opera houses for approximately \$100,000, as a gift to the people of the community he loved.**

**Wes Licht, Gary and Marion Karls waiting for the steam train in the old depot which was part of the Steam Train Museum in North Freedom.**

*All trip photos  
by Tim Mitchell*



# Steam Train at North Freedom

## *Trip (cont.)*

The enclosed coach shed offered us a chance to see many of the fine coaches used for passenger service up close. A raised walkway gave us the opportunity to peer into these coaches and business cars to see the kitchen, smoking rooms, dining rooms and living compartments.

According to narratives provided, some of the beautiful interior features were restored with walnut paneling or cherry wood trim.

Everyone seemed ready to board the passenger train when it arrived at the depot. Most of us found seats on two different cars with plenty of leg room and lots of windows for viewing the scenery. The natural areas of the Baraboo hills did not disappoint its passengers. The tall conductor moved around among us punching tickets, making conversation and sharing interesting bits of railroad history. Like many of the workers we encountered, he had volunteered for many years. Even our engineer, a minister by trade, has been volunteering to drive this train for many seasons. At the stop we watched as the locomotive changed from one end of the train to the other. With the clanging of the interlocking couplings, the conductor called for "All aboard." Soon we were on our way back to the station and heading home on our bus. It had been a pleasurable nostalgic day with some good company. 🚂



"All aboard!"