

# O-BHS News

*Newsletter of the Old-Brule Heritage Society - Founded in 1998 to Preserve and Share the Heritage of the Old-Brule Region.*

**Volume I, Issue 2**

**December 1, 1999**

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## **SISTER GENEVIEVE SCHILLO TO SPEAK AT DECEMBER 7TH MEETING ON "FAITH COMMUNITIES" THAT NO LONGER EXIST IN THE OLD-BRULE REGION**

The Roman Catholic Church has had an important role in shaping the culture of this region for over 350 years. The Catholic French settled Quebec in Canada (and you remember Jefferson's Louisiana Purchase) and in their disputes with the British native peoples were caught up in these struggles for supremacy in the "New World." In their many bands and tribes they were exposed alternately to Catholic and Protestant missionaries. Native American attitudes toward explorers and settlers in the region were significantly shaped in these encounters. Once the British established themselves within the Great Lakes region they took over the fur trade from the French, and then in turn surrendered their claims to the Americans.

The Catholic Church did not abandon its converts in this region and maintained missions wherever numbers of communicants warranted it. Many of the workers moving west into the white pine logging regions were of the Catholic faith, French Canadian in heritage, and some were part Native American. Catholic churches, missions and chapels were set up in the area of Old-Brule during those years to serve these people, some disappearing early in the century. We have asked Sister Schillo to speak to us about these "Faith Communities," Blueberry and "Little Canada," or Maple, for instance, among them.

**Genevieve Schillo, C.S.J., Ph.D.**, is Director of Christian Formation for the Diocese of Superior, Wisconsin. She is author of a recent paper entitled "Holy Ground: Former Sites of Worship in the Roman Catholic Tradition, Diocese of Superior, Wisconsin." She is on the board of the new Superior Public Museums, Inc. and is a charter member of the O-BHS. The meeting will be held at the Amnicon Town Hall on Tuesday, December 7th, beginning at 7 p.m. Our regular business meeting will follow. Alice Christensen has volunteered to head up refreshments.

## **OCTOBER MEETING AND PROGRAM**

The O-BHS held its October meeting at the Cloverland Town Hall on October 12th. We featured a slide program by **Pat and Larry Luostari** with lunch served by **Margie Koskie**, and **Lila Magnuson**. O-BHS VP Larry and his wife, Northwestern English teacher, Pat, shared their photos and recollections of their recent trip to Europe (England, Spain and Finland). Their host in Spain was their daughter, Buffy, who is married and lives there. Pat was impressed by the architecture, and Larry was quick to make note of agricultural equipment and practices in what is now the European Union. The audience filled the Cloverland Town Hall meeting room. **Thank you Pat and Larry!**

**QUARTERLY MEETING OF DOUGLAS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETIES  
AT "HISTORY SUNDAY" IN LAKESIDE, OCTOBER 24**

Seven members of the Old-Brule Heritage Society joined with members of the Solon Springs and Douglas County Historical Societies to share our current projects and activities and to hear former county agricultural agent **Ray Polzin** give a talk on early agriculture in Douglas County. The purpose of these quarterly meetings is to get acquainted with others active in history within the county, to share mutual concerns, and to build county wide membership and support.

**BUILDING A WEB-SITE**

Efforts continue to establish a web-site. By coincidence the School District of Maple has just initiated a program to improve computer and technical literacy among its students through the use of digital equipment to create a "virtual museum." Your President and O-BHS member **Nancy Moreland**, and **Mike Denny** and School District media specialist **Michelle Suo** are serving on the committee which is planning the local programs intended to gather primary source historical materials within the communities inside the Northwestern School District. With this development our society is well poised to bring our web-site on line as District policies are now

created permitting appropriate non-profit groups to connect with the District's site. Board members **Audrey Hakkila**, and **Jackie Plunkett**, and your President have been shaping our own site with the help of **Mr. Dave Short**, Village Clerk in Poplar, who is a computer expert. We feel that we are getting closer to providing a wonderful site that students and the general public might access for information on local history and culture. We look forward to historical input from students and adults via e-mail and the internet. Our thanks again to **Dave** who is volunteering his skills.

*From the President:*

**I have to admit that this first year has been a scramble for me. "Jim is swamped," my cousin said as he listened to me describe all that I was trying to do at once. He was right. But it seemed that many of you on the Board and in the membership came forward again and again with timely efforts that helped make deadlines and move us forward. I can't express enough thanks to all of you.**

**As I get ready to pay my own dues for the coming year I feel it is important to examine these efforts of the past year to sense whether each of us has gotten his or her money's worth. Our programs, and our exhibits, which were free to all who attended, were of high quality throughout the year, and taken alone they seem to have been worth the price. We are still in a learning situation in everything we are doing, and I believe we will continue to get better in our understanding of what we are doing and how to go about it.**

**Our *handling* of our programs, too, will benefit from experience. We don't want anyone to miss a meeting or program because they haven't been informed. We have unique challenges in that**

**time conflicts have forced us to juggle our calendars and the times of meetings, and our flexible meeting locations demand members pay close attention to where our next event will be held. We'll be working in this newsletter and in other mailings and in contacts with the press to make sure we all know where and when our next meeting and program will be held.**

**But programs, exhibits and interpretive sites are only a part of what we want to do for our membership and for our communities. These programs and efforts are part of *sharing* our heritage. However, I feel at the present moment the areas in greater need of improvement are those related to *preservation* of our heritage. We need to begin to think in terms of looking within our own lives, within our families, and within our own local communities at irreplaceable lore that will be lost when someone passes on, moves, or when a business or an enterprise closes. We need to individually and as a group identify these people, these sources of tradition, and we need to act. We need to make and take oral histories on tape, audio and video. We need to get faces and dates and**

locations in photographs identified. We need to copy precious family documents, or retrieve in some way the information from them. And then as a group we need to provide the means to collect and store these facts, these memories, these traditions. We need to provide the formats for data gathering. We need to establish the systems that will make it possible to access what we find, and we need to make it a continuing effort.

The funds we collect in memberships and through the sale of magnets and other money

raisers must go to support both sides of our task. Among the young who are to benefit most from this effort this means working with computers. But it is up to us to fill the computers and their memories with rich, solid facts. I hope in the coming year to help our organization see how this might all be done, and to find and join with others to help all of us save the record.

*Jim Pellman (715) 363-2453*

## **EARLY EDUCATION IN POPLAR IN THE TOWN OF OLD-BRULE by Jerry Fechtelkotter**

*Starting with this issue of O-BHS News we will carry an article featuring some aspect of the history of the Old-Brule Region. In 1887 Poplar became the site of the first annual meeting in the Town of Old-Brule. But Poplar settlers had sought to educate their children even earlier. For this issue we asked Board Member and former Poplar teacher, Jerry Fechtelkotter, to address the history of education in Poplar.*

I became interested in Poplar's history about fifteen years ago. I was teaching at Poplar and was asked by one of the teachers at the Poplar School to give a talk about what Poplar was like many years ago. I really didn't know a lot about it, but I said I would try. This was when I started visiting some of our most senior, senior citizens. Several of them were very helpful and allowed me to borrow pictures they had of Poplar and its people from as far back as the late 1800s. I had these pictures enlarged to 8x10 and so began my pictorial history of Poplar.

In 1948 Irene Lundberg and the Boy Scouts of Troop 212 of Poplar did a lot of research on Poplar while working on a merit badge. It was through their research that I found a lot of information about the schools of Poplar. [The Scouts acknowledged the help of Mrs. Mable Sedin, Mr. Victor Isaacson, and the Jones family history written by Augusta Jones.] The pictures I have help to give a visual idea of our schools on the past.

The first school in Poplar was held in the section house which was located a little south and west of the Skelgas bulk tank. This was the year 1885. The school authorities received permission from the Northern Pacific RR in St. Paul to use one room in the section house for a school. Nineteen children attended school in the section house.

The first teacher was Miss Christine Larson, a Superior girl who roomed with Mr. and Mrs. Gus Bong at the section house. Gus Bong was section foreman for the railroad at that time. Track was being laid between Amnicon and Ashland. Because of the increase in enrollment it became necessary to build a school the next year. After many arguments concerning the location, a one room school was built on what was the site of the old Lutheran Church.

The school was built by the Town of Brule as Poplar was part of the Township of Brule at that time. John L. Olson and partner were the contractors. Members of the first school board were Mr. Berg, Director, Mrs. Charles Howard, Clerk, and J.M.M. Peterson, Treasurer.

On September 1, 1894, at the same time as the great Hinckley Fire, a fire, which started in Berg Park area, quickly spread because of all the dry tree tops left from logging, jumped the Wiberg clearing, and came raging through the town completely destroying the school and all its contents. During the time it was being rebuilt school was held in the First Lutheran Church which was located on Cemetery Hill. The cost to replace the school was estimated at around \$700. By 1898 it became necessary to add a classroom because of more families moving into the area. Now Poplar had a two room school.

Annie Carlson was the first teacher in the new addition. She will be remembered as Mrs. Charles Isaacson. The other teacher was Esther Bryden, who became Mrs. Brashear of Roque River, Oregon. (I have a picture of these teachers and their students.) By 1901 Poplar had become a state-graded school and was entitled to state aid.

In 1906 the school was sold to the Lutheran Church for \$200 and a new and much better school was built just about where the Poplar Market stands today. The school was a high two story frame building. The attic room was used as a workshop for the boys. The school was used until 1921 when ground was broken for the first brick school in Poplar. The price tag was \$22,000 and it served as it was until 1956. Classes ranged from grade 1 through grade 12. Three classes graduated from high school there (1941, 1942, 1943) before

more changes were made.

In 1943 the school board decided to rent classroom space in the newly constructed school in Lake Nebagamon, thus allowing fewer grades and less crowding in the Poplar School. This continued until 1949 when the Maple School District was formed and all high school students were sent to Northwestern.

In 1955 the first addition including the Bong Memorial and two classrooms were added to the "old Cracker Box" and later the second addition. Many happy hours were spent by hundreds of students in the Poplar schools but now all of them are a thing of the past. Progress has closed down the present school and there it sits silent with all the memories locked inside.

#### FUNDRAISING: LOCAL CALENDARS, MAGNETS

A reminder to contact **Mary Thoorsell** at **364-2513** for more information on purchasing the Fair Share Food Shelf 2000 calendar. For the year 2000 historical calendar in support of publication of the Brule History Research Group's efforts contact **Janet Follis**, P.O. Box 114, Brule, WI 54820 or phone **715-372-4948**. Cost is \$6.00 plus postage. The O-BHS has available for \$1.00 historical photos (mounted on magnets 2x3.5 inches) which are available in three images, "Davidson Windmill," "The Bong P-38" in black and white and color. The latest historical image, the "Waino Finnish Church," will be available soon.

Anyone interested in joining the Old-Brule Heritage Society is encouraged to attend any of our meetings and programs. To join they may contact any member or the President at the return address below, or call the President at (715) 363-2453, our Secretary, **Hope Swenson**, at 364-2296, or our Treasurer, **Alice Christensen**, at 364-2535. Our annual dues are \$15.00 for individuals, and \$25.00 for families, due at the time of our annual meeting in September. Higher levels of support are also available.

New Members: **Lora & Lee Olson, Char & Richard Harms, Norma Lind, Walt Pellinen, Virginia Niemi, David & Sheila Snell, Reuben Winkka, Erland Ukkola, Nancy Wiitala, Lorraine Tyykila, Janine & Doug Seis, Mae Shuler, Clarence Mattson, Erma F. Pierce, Ronald and Lucille Born.** WELCOME! And thanks to all of you for your many membership renewals. In our next newsletter we will list all members.

I have just read that **Al Parzatka**, who so generously contributed his memories to our program on the Brule CCC Camp, has died. Our sympathy goes out to wife **Aili** and to his family.

**Old-Brule Heritage Society, Inc.**

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