



# NEWSLETTER



## FALL 2023/WINTER 2024



**ANKENY AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

**Volume 30 Number 3**

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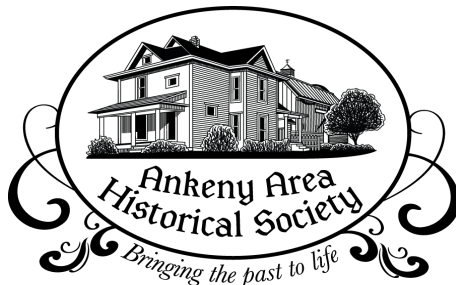
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## Message from the President

### Historic Homes of the Past.....

Ankeny has had several interesting homes during its 148 year history and in this newsletter. Two of them are highlighted in this newsletter, along with information about its family.



This home was built by Henry Wagner, an active, efficient farmer and community builder. He was born in Germany in 1843 and settled on a farm just north of Ankeny in 1869. It was a hundred sixty acre farm for which he paid \$10.00 per acre. The barn was built in 1880 at a cost of \$2,000 and was paid for with the profits from two shipments of livestock to Chicago. He was a stock buyer. His interests were varied and apparently quite successful.

The three-story Victorian house was built for the Wagner family in 1892 by Harry Haulman. The Wagners were the movers and shakers of the late 1800s. Henry Wagner died in 1929, leaving the house to his daughter Cora, she decided

(Continued)

## A Message From the President—*continued*

to move the entire building out to her farm in the country. In approximately 1932, the grand seven-gable house was maneuvered onto a huge wooden drum called a capstan, and was pulled by horses to the site two miles north of Ankeny. The journey across several fields took about three weeks. Some electrical wires had to be cut down which were in the house's way. That location today is near the NE corner of NW 18th and Ash Street. The house was torn down about five years ago and another new 'grand home' has been built in its place.

In the picture, this grand home was originally located on the NE corner of Walnut Street and Third Street. Today's address would be 416 SW Third Street. (It is where the Mark Gray Law office is located.) Note on the left-hand side of this picture, one can see the First United Methodist Church.

On a side note, a little information about Henry Wagner's career path includes banking. Banking became Henry Wagner's main interest and he was an officer of the Bank of Ankeny, once located where Carmen's Flowers is located today. In 1892, Henry Wagner became a director of the Capital City State Bank in Des Moines, Vice President in 1900 and President from 1905 to 1921. He remained chairman of the Board from 1921 until his death in 1929.

Son, Rolfe O. Wagner, followed in his father's footsteps and became Chairman of the Board and President at Ankeny State Bank and Capital City State Bank.

Rolfe built this lovely home in 1922. It is located at 122 SW Third Street in Ankeny. The Wagners called it home from 1922 to 1930. They must have missed the old place because they moved back to it in 1933 until 1942. Two other families lived in the home but following WWII, the Lilly Funeral Home took possession of the home until 1972. In 1972, V.W. Smith, a long-time oil jobber in Ankeny since the 1919 era purchased the home to restore it to the elegance of the Wagner home. It had always been V.W. (Vernon) and his wife, Ann's dream to own the home. They restored it to the comforts of a lovely home once again.



Another great family with longtime roots and a beautiful home in Ankeny is that of Matthew Sexauer. Matthew came with his parents in a covered wagon in 1850 when but a child three years old and they settled in Crocker Township in Polk County. In 1902 Mr. Sexauer quit active farming and built his present residence one half mile north of Ankeny. This home was erected with a beautiful modern brick residence which contained ten rooms and was heated by furnace, being provided with all the conveniences of a strictly up-to-date home. *There will be more in another article about Matthew Sexauer, separate from this article.*

The house that Matthew built is a show place in its own accord and is located at 710 NW Ash Street. (just north of Sunny View Care Center).

*(Continued)*



These are just three of the once elegant homes from the early 1900s located in Ankeny, two of which are still in our presence.

Co-President, Lois O'Donnell and I went on a tour of the 'old streets of Ankeny' with Tina Battani, a lifelong Ankeny resident about five years ago and enjoyed listening to the history she shared about Ankeny homes. Many homes were moved into Ankeny from the Enterprise coal mining community and many more were moved into Ankeny from the farms that were vacated because of the Ordnance Plant that forced them to move off their farms.



Yours in history, JoAnn Adamson



### *Thank-you Donors!*



We wish to publicly thank-you for your continued generosity. Without your help, the programs and improvements to our museum would not be possible.

#### General Donations:

Maurice & Donna Thompson	Jim & Sue Davidson	Trina Brainard	Jim & Elaine Brazelton
Judy Schaffer	Alvin & Catherine Overbaugh	Janet Kochheiser-Downing	Robert & Mary Jo Frazier
Carole Eckles-Harding	Struthers Brothers Kawasaki-Suzuki	Marilyn Shay	Curt LaBond
Dan & Pat Fliger	Shane & Tara Antle	Gary & JoEllen Nervig	Jim Nervig
Suzanne Taylor Martinez	Rex & Mindy Rexroat	Asa Hutton	Janet Christians
Spencer & Amanda Fontana	Ankeny Legion Albaugh McGovern 08-67	Daughters of the American Revolution	Modern Woodmen of America

#### Donations given in memory of the following individuals:

Gary Battles	Pat Brazelton	Alan Jones	Larry Pitts
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Your donations are truly appreciated. Please accept our apology if your name was not included with this issue.



# Museum Event Highlights



Asa Hutton and Jim Davidson help cut, load and deliver pumpkins for the Annual Pumpkin Project!



Above, Mr. & Mrs. Ankeny, portrayed by Tom Quinlin and Rose Taylor, made an appearance at A Night at the Museum.



AAHS volunteer tour guide Bev Heldt greets visitors at the house museum in historical clothing, as shown above.

Our gratitude to Wiseguys Wood Fired Pizza for gifting all free-will donations back to the museum. The pizza was awesome! Owners Andy Logan and Rob Logan are shown at right during A Night at the Museum event.







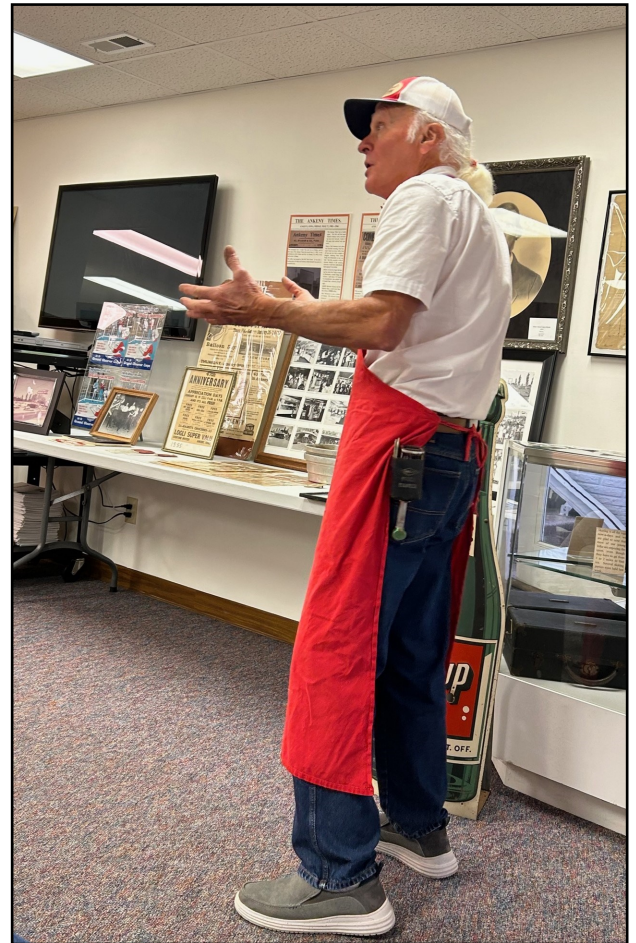
Wade and Pierce Lundstrom (grandchildren of AAHS members Bryan and Peggy Lundstrom) have fun posing in the Grant Wood photo op.



Shown above, Sue Davidson takes a needed rest after helping represent AAHS at RAGBRAI in Ankeny Uptown.



Above, Terry Adamson and Craig Griffieon contemplate getting one more piece of scrumptious pie at the 2023 Annual Ice Cream Social.



There was a great turnout for the Logli's Grocery Store presentation in May. Mark Logli, shown in photo at right, shared the history of his grandfather and store founder Pete Logli.

*Volunteers are the heart and soul of AAHS!*



# From the Archives



## <sup>9</sup>The Pioneer Life Story of Matthew Sexauer

Matthew Sexauer is a gentleman of fine social characteristics and a rare conversationalist, his stories of pioneer life being intensely interesting. He remembers that coming overland with team and wagon from the Mississippi River, he suffered greatly from hunger on the last stage of the trip into Des Moines, then a straggling village with no accommodations for travelers and at that time with no provisions to sell. The father, not knowing of the conditions at Des Moines, declined the hamper of food offered at the last stopping place before reaching Des Moines. Being unable to purchase a single mouthful of food for the entire party, was obliged to go without sustenance until they reached their destination near Polk City, about nine o'clock at night. Mr. Sexauer remembers that he shed tears and also he has a clear recollection of the deep sympathy aroused in the heart of his father. After the family was fairly settled in its home in the new country, the father and a government surveyor were one day engaged in the surveying near the family home. They discovered by an ominous noise that a rattlesnake was hidden in

close proximity and they called a dog which had been brought from Pennsylvania. The faithful animal quickly found the snake and shook it into pieces; however, as the dog was nosing around the grass, the head of the snake, which was still attached to about one foot of the body, viciously jumped at the dog and bit him in the head. He (the dog) ran to the house where Mrs. Sexauer in attempting to relieve his pain received some of the poison into her own system and her head swelled to double its usual size. The nearest physician was many miles away, but Mrs. Sexauer saved her life by drinking two pints of rye whiskey and the life of the faithful dog was saved by washing out his wound with common lye soap.

Mr. Sexauer also remembers that in 1858 the wheat and corn in this section was almost totally destroyed by the early frost and rust and farmers had gloomy forebodings as to the future. Wheat was then thirty-five cents a bushel and corn ten cents for that measure. There were forty fat hogs upon the farm and the father of our subject in the fall of 1858 killed two, and took to Des Moines with the carcasses, expecting to receive a reasonable price. However, he was offered only two and one-half cents per pound, which aroused his indignation to such an extent that he brought the meat home and preceded with the assistance of two men to build a smoke house. He then killed all of his hogs and smoked the meat, holding it for a higher price. In the early part of the season he planted corn which gave a fair yield and he also carefully stored away this corn for future demands. The next year witnessed the massacre at Fort Dodge and prices suddenly went up so, that he readily sold his part eighteen and twenty cents per pound, his seed corn for one dollar and fifty cents per bushel and five hundred bushels of wheat which he had carried over from 1857 for the handsome price of one dollar and fifty cents per bushel. This year marked the turning of the tide and henceforth the prosperity of the family was assured.

*\*This article was submitted by the great-granddaughter of Matthew Sexauer, Donna Bruce Thompson. It was one of many articles written about him upon his passing.*

# New Exhibit at The Ankeny Area Historical Society: Ankeny Coal Mining

We feel incredibly lucky to have had a skilled intern at our museum for the past two summers. Among the numerous projects he contributed to, Evan Albaugh successfully curated a brand-new exhibition showcasing the rich history of Ankeny coal mining. Thank-you Evan!

## Oralabor: A community of equality

Equality remains a cornerstone of a Polk County community nearly a century after a group of black miners drilled down roots there. Sunday mornings still bring testaments of faith at Mount Zion Baptist Church in Oralabor, where the congregation continues to be active as residents of nearby Des Moines and other area cities flock to its welcoming message...a tale of black and Italian and Eastern European immigrants who worked shoulder to shoulder in the Oralabor coal mine and another shaft in nearby Carney...Oralabor's history of black miners buying property is unique...when other area mines closed in the 1920s. Few traces of those communities remain. Under the United Mine Workers rules, miners of all races were paid equal wages. That environment aided the kind of racial integration found in Oralabor. The diverse makeup of Oralabor's mine force was mirrored in the community's educational system. (That sense of community continues in the area today.)

\* Excerpts from *DM Register*, February 27, 2005



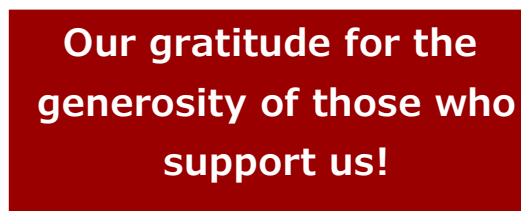
## YOU ARE INVITED!

Joining AAHS is a fun way to get to know Ankeny's history. You'll have a blast at events, learn some neat local stories and help us share Ankeny's unique culture with everyone.

So, why not join us and be a part of the history-loving crew?

To become a member, visit [www.ankenyhistorical.org](http://www.ankenyhistorical.org)

Or email [history@ankenyhistorical.org](mailto:history@ankenyhistorical.org)





## Museum Schedule

December 2023 thru February 2024  
*No Scheduled Open Houses*

Sunday, March 3, 2024  
*Open House 2 - 4pm*

Sunday, April 7, 2024  
*Open House 2 - 4pm*

Sunday, May 5, 2024  
*Open House 2 - 4pm*

Office Hours:

Tuesday/Thursday 10am - 2pm

Tours can also be scheduled by  
Calling 515-965-5795 or  
emailing  
[history@ankenyhistorical.org](mailto:history@ankenyhistorical.org).

A festive poster for the Ankeny Area Historical Society's Annual Christmas Cookie Sale. The background is blue with white snowflakes. Two Santa Claus figures are shown: one on the left swinging on a vine and one on the right holding a string of lights. The text is centered and reads: "ANKENY AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY'S Annual Christmas COOKIE SALE! SATURDAY, DECEMBER 9TH 301 SW THIRD STREET, ANKENY, IA TICKET HOLDERS: 10AM - 1PM OPEN SALES: 1PM - 2PM Choose 2 dozen of your favorite cookies, plus one treat from the goody table! Cost: \$20 - box is included Purchase tickets online at www.ankenyhistorical.org OR in person at House Museum Tues/Thurs 10am - 2pm".

ANKENY AREA  
HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY'S

**Annual Christmas  
COOKIE SALE!**

**SATURDAY, DECEMBER 9TH  
301 SW THIRD STREET, ANKENY, IA**

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**Choose 2 dozen of your favorite cookies,  
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