

Museum Notes

for the week of November 30 – December 6, 2025
by Kristen Parrott, curator

The heat is on! After many years of planning and preparation and fundraising, the Vernon County Museum and History Center now has heat and air-conditioning in its upstairs exhibit halls. Energy-efficient heat pumps are providing the warm air that is making the exhibits comfortable on these cold days. Many thanks to volunteer Gail Frie, and to the crew at Ethos Green Power Cooperative, for making this dream a reality.

Also a great big thank-you to all the people who donated money to this project. Having an entirely heated building is a big change for us! The upper floors of the building have been without heat for decades as the boiler no longer worked and then was dismantled. Be sure to stop by soon to enjoy the magic of central heating!

One of the objects newly on display in the delightfully warm halls is a quilt of U.S. Presidential portraits from Washington to Reagan. You will find the quilt near the “Fashion of ‘76” exhibit, as part of our commemoration of the U.S. 250th. It was embroidered and sewn by Ethel V. Munson, who lived on a farm on Sandhill Ridge, near La Farge. This quilt was never used, but was exhibited at the Vernon County Fair and the Maplewood/Bethel Home quilt show. It was donated to the museum by Ethel’s daughter, Sandra Smith, in 2017.

Another opportunity to experience our new heating system will be at the annual Holiday History Tour on December 14. The tour runs from 12:30 to 4PM, and starts at the Vernon County Museum and History Center, where you can enjoy holiday treats, tour the exhibits, and purchase tickets. Tickets are \$10 for adults and \$5 for children ages 5 to 12 (children under 5 are free).

Five historic sites in and around Viroqua are on this year’s tour, including the museum and history center, which was built as a teacher’s college in 1918-19. From there you can travel on to the other four sites in any order that you like. The historic Sherry-Butt House, built for the Butt family in 1870, is located at 795 N. Main St., and will be decorated for the holidays and ready to welcome visitors. The Foreaker School, built in 1888 in the Town of Liberty, is now located at 606 W. Broadway, where you can experience an old-fashioned schoolroom at Christmas-time.

Next door to the Foreaker is the historic St. Mary’s Church, built in 1908, which will be the site of live music all afternoon. The Firefly Brass Band will play at 1PM, Bill Kvigne at 1:30, the River Fools at 2PM, Marcia Dooley and Kathy Hanson at 2:30, and Janice Fortney at 3PM. This will also be the place to enjoy our annual hot chocolate bar.

New to the tour this year is the Colonel May School, located at E5732 Hwy. 56, west of Viroqua. This brick schoolhouse was built in 1922, replacing two earlier buildings. It closed as a school in 1962, and has had a number of owners and uses since then. Now the schoolhouse has been completely renovated and turned into a three-bedroom house, available for short-term rentals. Be sure to attend the Holiday History Tour to enjoy all of these unique sites!