

Museum Notes

by Carol Krogan

for the week of August 31 - September 6

The Vernon County Museum & History Center. What's it all about? Perhaps you are a life-long resident of Vernon County or maybe you are new to the area. Have you ever been a visitor?

Located at the corner of N. Main and E. South Streets, Viroqua, this former Teachers College, which opened for classes in 1919, has been the site of the museum since 1989. Previously, exhibits were housed in the former St. Mary's Catholic Church on West Broadway, Viroqua.

The Vernon County Historical Society has a long history and its mission has always been to preserve and promote Vernon County history. The museum's collections include objects reflecting the county's history as well as documents, books and photographs capturing the history of its communities, churches, schools, organizations and people, among other subjects.

The museum has an excellent genealogy and a local history research area. The archives hold many genealogical sources such as Vernon County history books, obituaries, tombstone inscriptions, indexed scrapbooks, newspapers, plat maps, family files, birth, marriage and death indexes and family history books.

Exhibits include Native American artifacts, military history, a general store, the astronaut Mark Lee Space exhibit and a tobacco exhibit, which was an important agricultural product in Vernon County for many years. Visitors can take a self-guided tour through the exhibit halls or guided tours for groups are available if staff is notified at least one week ahead.

Three other sites fall under the umbrella of the Vernon County Historical Society. The Sherry-Butt House, located on Main Street in Viroqua, is a historic home built in 1870 by Civil War Veteran Col. Cyrus M. Butt and his wife Margaret. The home's second owners, Orbec and Hilda Sherry, purchased the home in the mid-1940s. The décor of the home reflects both families and is open on Saturdays and Sundays from Memorial Day until Labor Day.

"Old" St. Mary's Catholic Church, located on West Broadway, was built in 1907, sits on its original site and is the first Catholic Church built in Viroqua. It is fitted inside with items from other area churches. Next to the church sits the Foreaker School. Originally located in the town of Liberty, it was purchased by the county in 1963 and moved to this location. The school is arranged just as it once was – as a one room school. It features wooden and cast-iron desks and the original chalk board. The church and school are open by appointment only. You can reach us at 608-637-7396 or at vernoncountyhistory.org.

Come visit us at the Vernon County Fair, being held September 10 - 14. The Vernon County Historical Society will have a booth in the Expo Center, manned by our faithful volunteers, and we will again feature our ever popular "Wheel of Questions". Sweepstakes tickets will be for sale with the top prize of \$300.00. Stop by and buy a ticket or two and test your Vernon County knowledge!

Please join us for our monthly genealogy class on Thursday, September 11 at 10:00 in the Vernon County Museum's meeting room. A presentation will be given about the on-line free website, FamilySearch (familysearch.org) with an overview of the website. It features many informative webinars that can be viewed anytime on your computer. As always, Vernon County Historical Society members can attend for free. Non-members are required to make a \$5.00 donation. If you are new at doing your family genealogy, you may consider becoming a member. A single membership for one year is \$25.00 which gives you unlimited access to the genealogy department's research materials and free access to our monthly genealogy classes always held on the second Thursday of the month from February through November. And remember, we are always here to help!