



# Princeton WI Historical Society Newsletter

630-632 West Water Street

PO Box 71 Princeton, Wisconsin 54968

April 2021

Vol. 2021, No. 1

## April 19th Meeting: See the Museum's Progress!

We are so pleased to be able to hold our first membership meeting in a long time on Monday, April 19th at 6:30pm. Please join us!

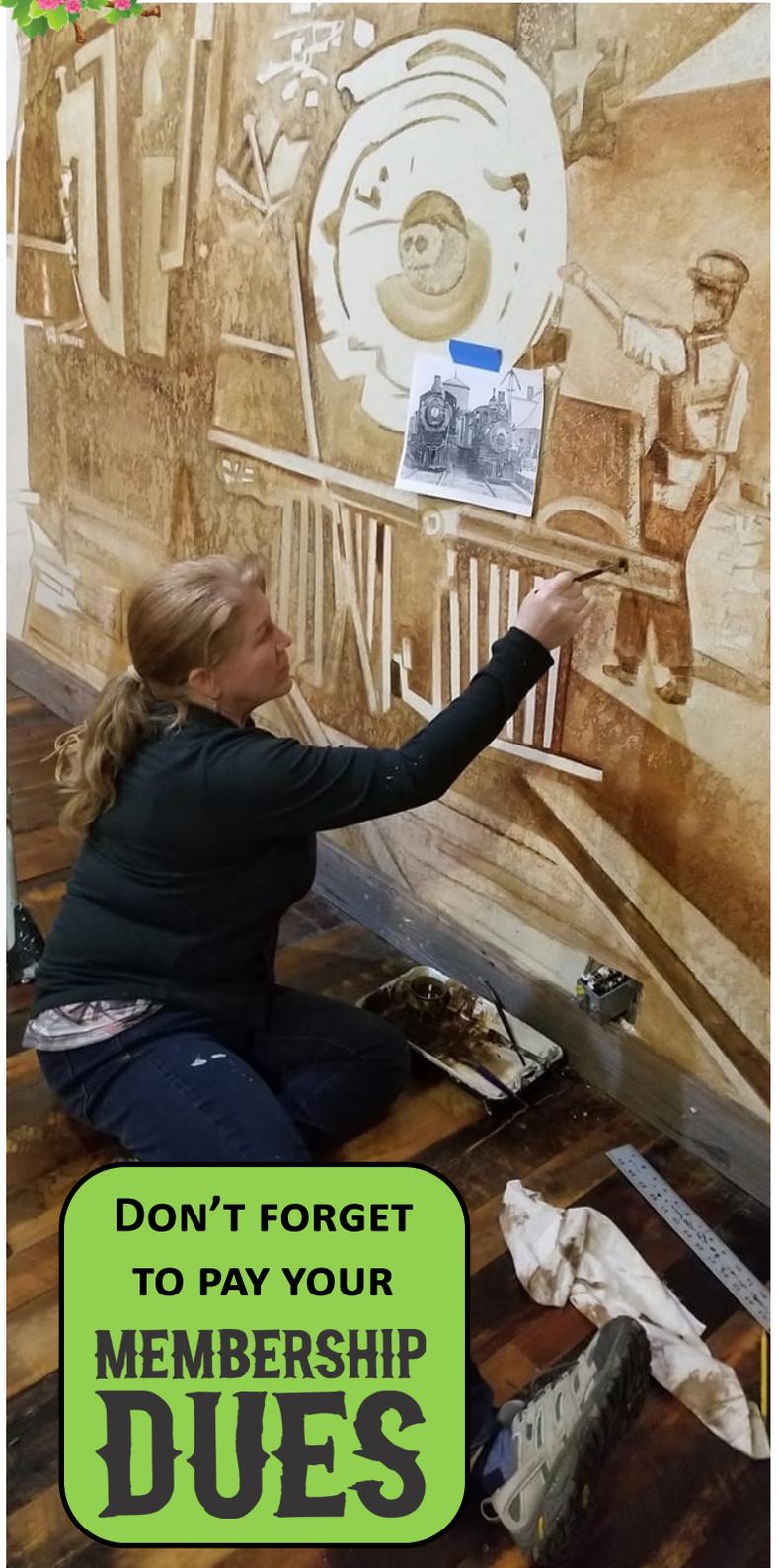
We ask that you wear a mask while you're here. In case we have a crowd, we will have a tent and chairs set up outside to shelter our members while social distancing— we'll take turns going into the museum. We can't wait to show you the progress we've made!

Although we're far from finished, we've been working hard to create a beautiful setting for Princeton's historic displays. From floor to ceiling, just about everything inside has changed! You'll love the steamboat, huge mural, and great artifacts from our city's past. We even have a very nice, handicap accessible restroom now. We'll show you what we want to finish this year, and what we hope to do in years to come.

We can't run the museum successfully without your help, so please bring your calendars— we'll be asking for volunteers to open the museum on Saturdays, work at fundraisers including the flea market food booth, and put on special events. We also need help organizing our archives and doing other office work.

Light refreshments will be served. As always, donations are gratefully accepted at the meeting.

We can't wait to see you on Monday, April 19th at 6:30pm!



**DON'T FORGET  
TO PAY YOUR  
MEMBERSHIP  
DUES**

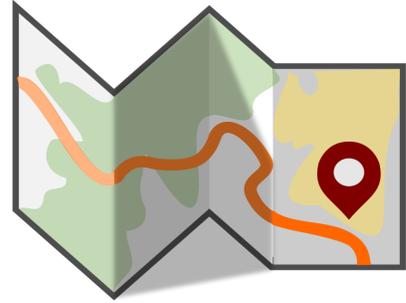
# Local History Field Trips

Do you love local history? You'll want to come with us!

Local legend Jerry Disterhaft will lead a car caravan to several sites around Princeton, and give a talk at each. We will meet at the Princeton Public Library (424 W. Water St). Carpooling is available if you wish.

Stops may include Huckleberry Road, Mount Tom, and Father Marquette's cross and holy springs (also the site of a Masoutin/Kickapoo/Miami village). You'll learn about the lost village of Hamilton, the hidden cemetery where war hero Colonel John Shaw is buried, where the Saint Marie train depot and ferry were located, and the natural history of the area.

**Wed. April 14th at 3pm**  
**and**  
**Thurs. April 29th at 6pm**

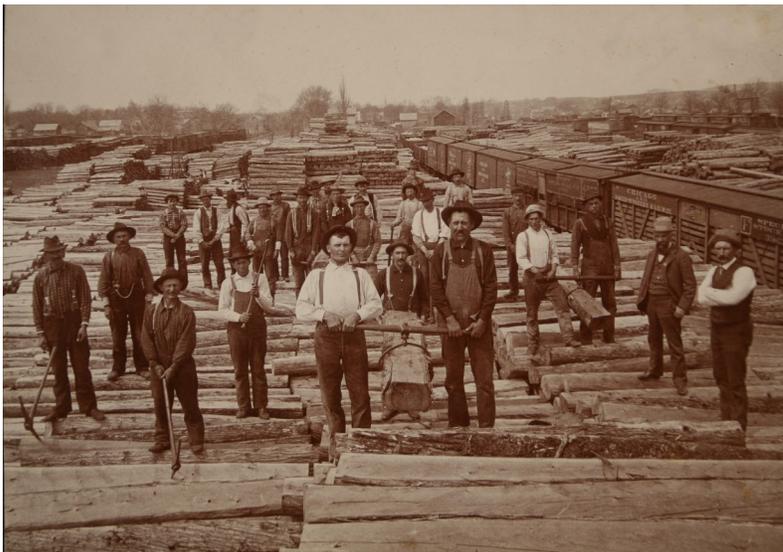


## History in Progress: Logging

By the late 1800s, logging was a huge industry in Wisconsin. This is especially true in places like Princeton, where major rivers like the Fox were used to transport tens of thousands of logs. Wood was not just used to build houses and heat homes, it was used for road beds (called "corduroy roads"), sidewalks, railroads, and food containers (barrels and tubs).

The picture below shows a work crew on the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad in Princeton in 1901 with thousands of logs being readied for use as railroad ties.

The logging near Princeton this spring has less to do with industry than conservation. In the White River Marsh Wildlife Area, major logging is taking place over several thousand acres. Before the arrival of Europeans, the area would have been largely prairie and oak savanna, with relatively few trees. Farming and drainage systems drastically altered the ecosystem. Now the Department of Natural Resources is seeking to remove all of the pine and most of the non-oak trees in the area, in order to bring the land back to its natural state. Hundreds of huge log piles await transport to lumber and paper mills.



## Historical Society Board of Directors Elected

Thank you to everyone who voted via mail and email in our last election. It's heartening to know that when times are difficult, we can work together and adapt!

### 2021 Historical Society Board:

Chairman of the Board:

President: Chris Frasier

Vice President: Joe Wyse

Treasurer: Victoria Wielgosh

Secretary: Laura Skalitzky

Board Member: Jim Frasier

Board Member: Elizabeth Ladwig

## Digitization Project Moves (Very) Slowly Forward

In our October 2020 newsletter, we told you about how, after many years, the microfilm records of *The Princeton Times Republic* were returned to us. These records include material dating back to the mid 1800s. Since then, we've been working to try to get them digitized, so that they would be easily searchable and available online for public research. After several months, Northern Micrographics, based in LaCrosse, was able to do a trial run scan on a single microfilm roll containing 1940s newspapers. Based on this, they provided us a quote for the whole project. Unfortunately, the price quoted is far outside of our means.

The State of Wisconsin Historical Society may be able to digitize our records for about half the price— but they have a very long backlog of projects, and currently only one person on staff is working. Due to the pandemic, all other personnel are at home. At this time, they do not have an estimate about when normal work will resume.

## Congratulations, Graduates



FIVE PRINCETON HIGH School seniors graduated with honors Wednesday, June 4. From left, Connie Swed, salutatorian; Donna Seminic, Thomas Coll, Joan Zimmerman and Carol Piasecke, valedictorian.

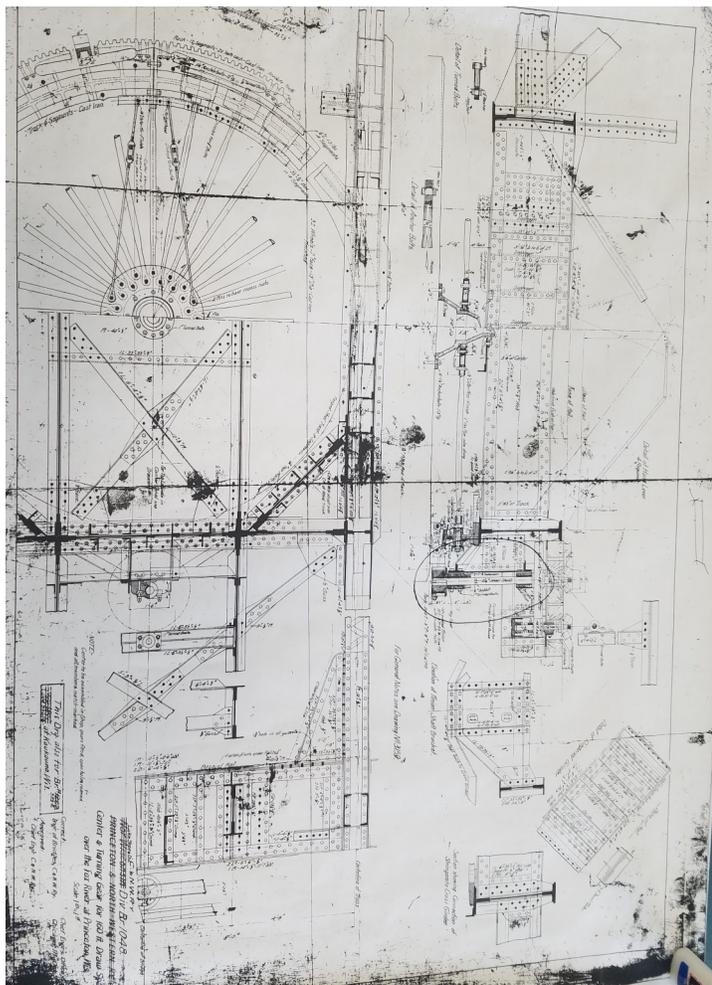
Congratulations to Princeton high school graduates, past and present!

At the left are PHS students graduating with honors in 1969.

One of the things we do as a historical society is to keep high school yearbooks from every year, so that Princeton residents can look back on their younger years. However, we are missing yearbooks from \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_. If you have a yearbook from one of these years, please consider donating it so it can be preserved for future generations.

Some day, we want to digitize all the yearbooks so that they are accessible (and searchable) online. Until then, keep an eye on our Facebook page— we'll be posting some high school memories from decades past!

# Black Bridge Blueprints Donated



After seeing the story about Princeton's "black bridge" in our last newsletter, local resident Mike Jansen made a fabulous donation— copies of the original blueprints for the building of the bridge. These stunning, hand-drawn plans detail every single bolt that went into the bridge's construction, and contain some fascinating details:

- ink fingerprints left by the architect 120 years ago
- incredibly small parts, including small wedges used in the bases of anchor bolts to keep them securely in place
- a note that explains that the "black bridge" has an identical twin built with the same plans, a railroad bridge in Kaukauna
- meticulous, beautiful hand-lettered labels, made with a fountain pen

*Center & Turning Gear for 160 ft. Draw Span  
over the Fox River at Princeton, Wis.  
Scale 1/16" = 1'*

**You'll be able to see these beautiful and highly technical blueprints at the new museum!**



FOX RIVER AT PRINCETON, WIS.

The main span of Princeton's "Black Bridge" was built in 1901, making 2021 its 120th birthday.

This railroad bridge was originally built as a swing bridge, meaning the entire bridge would pivot on its central support and instead of connecting the two banks, both ends would hang over the river. This allowed steamboats and other large vessels to pass through.

A spring cleanup of the bridge will take place on Sunday, May 2nd from 1-3pm. The event is sponsored

by Tabitha Pierce's American Family Insurance and the Princeton Public Library. Gloves, garbage bags, cleaning equipment, water, and snacks will be available to volunteers. Parking for the cleanup is available on North Farmer Street and on the grass just off the trail on Highway D. To walk the black bridge trail, go the VFW post at 136 N. Farmer Street, park on the curb, and cross the street. The trail is relatively short, shaded, and beautiful. In winter, it is a snowmobile trail.

# Bartel's Bitter Battle



Local character Roger Bartel is on the warpath, making accusations left and right on his blog. Although he has always been critical of the efforts of others when it comes to Princeton history, this might have been excused as merely passion. Now, however, he seems to be spending more time insulting others than researching history.

Bartel's three most recent blog posts were almost entirely about how he is right and others are wrong. In one, he likens himself to the hero Don Quixote, doing battle against local history plaques crafted by the City of Princeton, which he calls "badly executed" and "riddled with errors." In another blog post, he accused *The Princeton Times Republic* of publishing a story about Saint Patrick's Church "filled with errors and misinformation." He said that we, the historical society, should have requested a correction. He personally scolded the reporter over the phone, wrote a complaint to the paper's editor, and urged both to use his own book and blog as sources in the future. Ironically, old editions of the same newspaper were Mr. Bartel's main resource for writing his book, "Bartel's History of Princeton Volume I." The claustrophobically crammed tome credits the newspaper in its "Primary Sources" section, though it does not have a true bibliography. Perhaps this is one reason why Mr. Bartel churned out the book himself through a vanity publisher, rather than working with an actual publishing company such as the Wisconsin Historical Society press, or a university press.

In one of his recent blog posts, Roger Bartel wails, "...if the historical society and local newspaper won't defend our history, who will?" Clearly, he sees himself in this noble role. In yet another blog post, he boasts about correcting errors in a 1869 publication by Thomas McConnell, material published by Elaine Reetz, and information listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Is any of Mr. Bartel's fault-finding accurate? Maybe. It depends on what sources you're looking at.

Let's say that you are looking at Princeton area Censuses. A name, Ignatz Naperalla, is listed in 1900. In other census reports, the name is spelled Egnatg Napieralla, Iquatz Naperalla, and perhaps also Ignatz Napesslla. Which do you take to be the correct spelling? The oldest one? The newest one? An entirely different one, which a local family uses today? In order to make a decision, you study the original census entries, rather than the transcripts created later. Unfortunately, these are handwritten with a fountain pen, and sometimes extremely difficult to decipher. Also, census takers were not necessarily overly worried about spelling, even when they were good at it. To make matters worse, at the time of the first census, Ignatz was recorded as a young teenager newly arrived from Europe, whose occupation was listed as "farm worker" and "servant." This indicates he may not have been able to read or write his own name at the time. So what is the "true" spelling of the name? No doubt there *is* one absolutely true version. If we could travel back in time with a linguist and a stenographer, we could hear it from Ignatz's own lips, and transcribe his name with phonetic perfection. Unfortunately, that is not possible. We must look at all the sources available, consult those who may still be alive to remember their family's stories, and make our best judgement. Unless, that is, we are Roger Bartel.

*Continued on the next page —>*

# Bartel's Bitter Battle, Continued

For most if not all of his criticisms, Mr. Bartel seems to seize upon a single source and take it as the gospel truth. For example, he often uses information from early property records or excerpts from early editions of *The Princeton Times Republic* to accuse others of being wrong. But these are no more guaranteed to be 100% accurate than any other source. He himself has admitted to publishing errors repeated from early material.

If this were all, perhaps we could forgive Mr. Bartel as an eccentric and self-righteous, but well-meaning, historian. Unfortunately, his criticisms extend far beyond arguments about facts.

Roger Bartel has all but accused the Historical Society and the City of Princeton of actually being *immoral*.

- He insinuates that Princeton's historical plaques are merely a money-making scheme. In one of his many blog posts criticizing them, he says: "...I fear some leaders are more interested in the sale than the history. We should not continue to sell our historical soul..."

- He berates those who don't accept his version of history, accusing "some people" of not being able to "accept the truth," likening them to people who believe the earth is flat or the moon landing was faked. He declaims, "...the assault on truth is not limited to national politics; it's happening right here in our hometown with our history, and people who should be safeguarding our history are among the offenders."

- He accuses us, the historical society, of deliberately blocking his research efforts.

This kind of imperious bullying is bizarre, incomprehensible, and unwarranted. Many times in the past, we have explained to Mr. Bartel the following:

- Our officers have gone through many serious health problems in recent years. At one point, a battle with cancer and other personal issues affected our work to the point that we turned over the historical plaque project to the City. The City did its absolute best on short notice and with very limited staff time. **If** there are errors, we don't have an objection to helping correct them— but right now, this is not a priority.
- In the last year and a half particularly, between Covid-19, major renovations to the museum, and a lack of volunteers (most of whom are aging and have health issues) we have had very little opportunity to do more than stay afloat. We have shared what information we can with anyone who asks, if at all possible.
- Our current priority must be the maintenance of the museum and its contents. This entails raising money to pay for monthly utility bills and insurance, buy archival materials to preserve priceless documents and artifacts, and finish museum renovations. To raise funds, we try to recruit new members, share what progress we've made, and plan events. It all entails a great deal of time and effort.

We wish Mr. Bartel would spend even a tiny fraction of his energy helping us preserve history rather than insulting us. We have shared photos with him, invited him to sit down with us and discuss our differences, and continue to work on a digitization project which will directly benefit his work. Unfortunately, he has refused to meet with us, and has not attended recent meetings or a single volunteer work day. Undoubtedly, it is much easier to stay at home and be critical of the efforts of others.

Like many local civic organizations, the Historical Society is run by a very small group of volunteers. We are not paid. We have jobs, families, and other obligations. We have done the best we can for many years, and will continue to do so for many more. We hope that some day Mr. Bartel will lay aside his hectoring and grievances, and work *with* us instead of against us. Until then, we will not continue to dignify Mr. Bartel's bullying— this is the last time we intend to address it.

# Save The Dates

Provided the pandemic allows us, we have big ideas for 2021. All events are subject to change.

## **Saturday May 1st: Stone House Museum Opens**

Take a tour of Princeton's history. Every room tells a story! Open Saturdays from 10am to 2pm through the fall. Admission free, donations welcome.

## **Sunday May 2nd, 1-3pm: Cleanup at Historic Black Bridge**

Help us get this wonderful piece of our history in better shape. We need volunteers to pick up litter and scrape off graffiti. Sponsored by Tabitha Pierce's American Family Insurance and the Princeton Public Library.

## **Saturday May 8th: Princeton City Wide Garage Sale Day**

We'll have a bunch of great bargains for sale at the historical society— stop down!

## **Sat. May 29th, 2pm: Megow Park Clock Rededication**

## **Saturday July 17th, 10am-2pm:**

### **Grand Opening of the new Folklore Museum!**

Presentations, refreshments, ribbon cutting, museum tours and more. See our fabulous new exhibits!

## **Saturday August 14th: Flea Market Food Booth**

Can you help us raise some much needed funds? Please call 920-295-9008 to sign up to work a shift!

**Saturday August 28th:** Cemetery Walking Tours at 1:30 and 4pm with the City of Princeton.

At 6pm, join us at the VFW for **"Suds, Speakeasies, and Scawflaws!"** Try an authentic 1920s drink and listen to local author Gavin Schmitt's presentation on the crime, gangsters, and bootlegging of the Roaring 20s in Wisconsin. Hors d'oeuvre included in ticket price (cost TBD).

**Saturdays in October, 7-11pm:** Experience thrills, chills, and scares in our haunted museum! Small groups leave every 20 minutes. Waiting guests will hear short presentations about real-life horror in Princeton. Admission is \$10 for adults (18+), \$5 for kids under 18.

## **Saturday November 27th: Christmas in Princeton**

Come on down to our museum open house, or have a meal at our food booth at the craft fair!

# Make Time!

We hope you will join us on Saturday, May 29th at 2pm at the rededication of the historic clock in Megow Park on West Water Street. The clock celebrates both the founding of Princeton by Royal Treat and the birth of Wisconsin as America's 30th state in 1848. Its rededication entails a short ceremony and thank-you to those who have recently sponsored repairs and updates on the clock. We will have a display with more information on this great artifact, and we understand that the Chamber of Commerce is organizing a hit-and-miss engine to make old fashioned ice cream. Bring the family!



## We Need These: Can You Help Us?

- A volunteer to look through pictures & papers
- Volunteers to put artifacts in display cases
- Volunteers to paint, dust, clean, and make crafts
- Tool box and tools for every day maintenance and repairs
- A pot belly wood stove
- Pre-1950s food containers, including flour and sugar sacks, packages, boxes, tins, etc
- Skeleton Keys
- Large leaded glass lamp shade, 18" in diameter or more, for a special display
- Sturdy yard signs for our programs and fundraising efforts
- 100% cotton rags/material for cleaning
- An old hay mow ladder for our farm exhibit

## Contact Us!

Have a question about local history, genealogy, or our organization? Interested in donating? Want a topic featured in the next newsletter? Please email or write to:

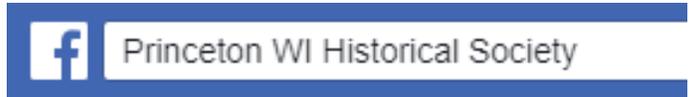
**princetonhistsociety@gmail.com**

630 West Water Street

PO Box 71

Princeton, Wisconsin 54968

**Don't Forget to "Like" Us on Facebook!**



## Volunteers Wanted

Please call 920-295-9008 for more information on volunteering. We need your help!

Our museum and historical society is entirely run on donations. This past year and a half was an especially difficult one, as we were unable to do our usual fundraisers because of the pandemic. Please consider sending even \$5.00. Address below. Thank you!

## Become / Remain a Historical Society Member!

- \_\_\_ \$2 Annual Student Membership (high school and lower grades)
- \_\_\_ \$10 Annual Individual Membership
- \_\_\_ \$15 Annual Family Membership (parents + children under age 18)
- \_\_\_ \$100 Lifetime Individual Membership
- \_\_\_ \$250 Lifetime Family Membership
- \_\_\_ \$500 Charter Membership
- \_\_\_ \$1,000 Donor Membership
- \_\_\_ \$5,000 Patron Membership
- \_\_\_ \$10,000 Founder Membership

**I am interested in helping with  
(please check one or more):**

- Computer Entry
- Special Events
- Building Construction
- Giving Tours at the Museum
- Staffing Our Fleamarket Booth
- Fundraising

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Apt. # \_\_\_\_\_

City, State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

**Cut out this form and send in your membership today! Make checks payable to the Princeton, WI Historical Society, and send them to PO Box 71, Princeton, WI 54968. All donations are tax deductible. Thank you!**