

Golden Years: Wheeling Historical Society Celebrates 50

By **DENISE FLEISCHER** Lifestyle Editor | Posted: Friday, May 15, 2015 9:32 am

With great pride Wheeling Historical Society representatives recently visited the Journal & Topics Newspapers, eager to discuss the local group's 50th anniversary.

All manner of Wheeling memorabilia was spread out on the conference room table in front of Bill Hein, Marilyn Chramy, Elaine Simpson and Joan Wiener.

Before Hein, president of the Wheeling Historical Society, informed the Journal about the society's 50th anniversary events, he presented a site plan, or a conceptual drawing for a historical preservation site known as Chamber Park. Ordinance No. 2444, which passed May 16, 1988, granted permission to allow multiple historical buildings on the property.

Disappointed, Hein said those buildings are not on the site. He felt this could have been the heart of Wheeling.

What is there is the original village hall, the Carriage House and original Community Presbyterian Church, built in 1865. All wonderful buildings, but which Hein feels could offer more.

Wheeling's original village hall, circa 1894, serves as a home base for the Wheeling Historical Society. Though it may be small, within its four walls history is nurtured.

"The founding purpose of the Wheeling Historical Society is the discovery, preservation and dissemination of knowledge about the history of the community of Wheeling," said Hein.

The society's founders were a steering committee of 12, initiated by the Wheeling Junior Women's Club in June 1965.

"The village hall, which also served as the local jail and court room is used to store, preserve and display all historical items along with the carriage house," said Hein. "Our members have various programs designed to illustrate Wheeling's past and there's also displays." The website wheelinghistoricalsociety.com features presentations and special events.

Speaking of special events, the 50th anniversary of the Wheeling Historical Society will be celebrated with two events.



Chamber Park

The Chamber Park Community Center, another historic site in Wheeling used by the historical society.

The Memorial Day parade at 11 a.m. Monday, May 25 will feature the Wheeling High School Marching Band. The parade will be held on Dundee Road beginning at Milwaukee Avenue. A memorial wreath will be placed at the southeast corner where the flags of America's military forces are located. The parade proceeds west to Wolf Road and then north to the Wheeling Park District's Chamber Park. Memorial Day services will be held at the park and also at the Settlers Day Picnic. The museum will conduct an open house for those interested in dropping in.

A Beer & Brat Fest will be held from 1 to 7 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 20 at Chamber Park. Members of the society will grill brats cooked in beer, hot dogs and serve potato salad for a fee. No outside food or beverages will be sold. Entertainment will be provided by a German-style band.

At the end of the year, Lollipop Lane opens on Dec. 5. Featured will be Santa and Mrs. Claus, a special anniversary tree, homemade cookies and free pictures with Santa.

In terms of history, "Wheeling Through the Years," published by the Wheeling Historical Society in 1987, states that travelers' need to dine was one of the main reasons the village came into existence.

Wheeling served as a convenient place for Chicago travelers coming through the northwest in the 1830s to pull off the road and relax.

Wheeling began as an "overnight stop for travelers from Chicago who were headed to the Wisconsin Territory through the overland trail, now known as Milwaukee Avenue."

Milwaukee Avenue dining establishments were built for this purpose. The Stagecoach Tavern was established in 1837 by Joseph Filkins.

When automobiles became a necessity around 1914, "Restaurant Row" was developed. Here you could find Hartmann House, Chicago House, Union Hotel, Behm's, Wenzlaff's, Red Mary's Wheeling Inn, Forbach's, Relic House and Blum's.

The "roadhouses" attracted visitors from other communities as well.

The village began to increase in population in the 1950s when farmlands were developed into subdivisions. Industrial and commercial land continued to change the purpose and village profile.

Here's a few facts that relate to Wheeling's history gathered by the Wheeling Historical Society:

- The first steps toward fire protection were made on Apr. 6, 1896. That's when a small committee began researching what was necessary and the cost.
- The Chicago House was built by Martin Armbruster in 1873 and was taken over by Henry Hartmann in 1901. It became known as Hartmann's Chicago House and then as Hartmann's House.
- Behm's Riverside Restaurant was on the site occupied by Hackney's on S. Milwaukee Avenue. Diners from the North Shore enjoyed it for years and it gave Wheeling women jobs.

- In 1917, Columbian Country Club was built by the Knights of Columbus. During prohibition, it was Bon Air. It was later renamed Chevy Chase Country Club and purchased by the Wheeling Park District in 1977.
- Before it was ever Don Roth's Restaurant on N. Milwaukee, it was an 1800s frame house of an early local general store owner named John Schminke. Roth's closed in 2010.
- St. Joseph the Worker Church, 181 Dundee Rd., opened on Christmas Day in 1958. A year later, the parish school opened.