

## Spring Newsletter – March 2022

### Spring Dinner Meeting

The 2022 Spring Dinner Meeting will be held on April 14 at 6:00 p.m. The event will take place at the St Paul's United Methodist Church at 426 N. Morgan Street, Rushville, Indiana 46173. After a short business meeting, Carol Holzback will give a presentation on the history of Rush County's small towns. This will be a continuation from the fall meeting's presentation and will be on the three towns not covered at the fall dinner. The meal will be catered by the Park Restaurant. Reservations can be made by calling the museum at 765-932-2492 or Monty McMahan at 317-695-6091 or email the museum at [rushhistorical@gmail.com](mailto:rushhistorical@gmail.com). The cost of the meal and program will be \$15 per person.



### History Makers at RES West



Each year the Rush County Historical Society features a “Can You Guess What It Is?” display case at Rushville Elementary Schools East and West. This year, twelve items from days-gone-by peaked the interest of our history thinkers. Everything from a Ballot Box to Ice Tongs to an Apple Butter Paddle made an appearance. Our lucky winners received a \$10 Gift Certificate to Pizza King. Congratulations to all.

RESW “Can You Guess What It Is” winners – left to right, Elise Cain (Best Penmanship [Mrs. Hadley]), Rebecca Scott (6<sup>th</sup> Grade Winner [Mrs. Hadley]), Riley Hensley (2<sup>nd</sup> Grade Winner [Mrs. Padgett])

### Amazon Smile

Did you know that orders you place on Amazon can help your local Rush County Historical Society? Amazon Smile is available at [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com). Amazon Smile is a simple way for you to support your favorite charitable organization every time you shop--at no cost to you AND the same products and prices are available. Amazon will donate 0.5% of every purchase to the Rush County Historical Society every time you order. All you have to do is select Rush County Historical Society as your preferred charity. If you have questions or need help with this process, call the museum and someone can walk you through the steps.



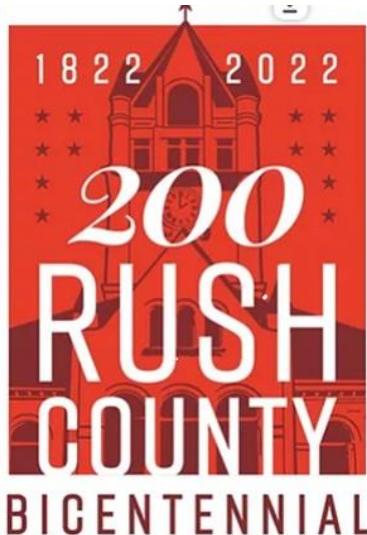
# Rush County Bicentennial

## Happy 200<sup>th</sup> Birthday, Rush County!

By John D. Wilson, Rush County Historian

Happy 200<sup>th</sup> Birthday to Rush County! Actually we were recognized as a county by the State of Indiana in April of 1822. But just like horses automatically age one year on January 1<sup>st</sup> each year, we are arbitrarily declaring we are 200 years old as of January 1, 2022. This is the 21<sup>st</sup> article I have written to commemorate the Rush County Bicentennial.

This year's celebration will last the entire year. During the last several months a core committee has been planning for 2022. Representatives from Rushville City, Rush County Foundation, Rush County Chamber of Commerce, Rush County Economic Development Corporation, Rush County Historical Society, Rush County Heritage, Rush County Genealogical Society, Heart of Rushville, Rushville Elks Club, the DAR and others have been involved.



Brian Sheehan is the chairman of the 2022 Bicentennial Committee. He has worked diligently to coordinate the year's activities. The big event for 2022 will be on Saturday, September 17<sup>th</sup> during Willkie Days Rush Fest. There will be a parade down Main Street and a concert at the Riverside Park Amphitheater. The act(s) for the concert are still being finalized. The parade will be in the capable hands of Sandy Fussner at the Rush County Chamber of Commerce. Call her if your group is interested in participating.

The Bicentennial Committee does not plan to "reinvent the wheel". Hopefully our annual events like the Rush County Fair (June 25--July 2), Pioneer Engineers (August 4-7), RCHS Homecoming (September 8-10), and other activities will be held as usual. The committee encourages these events to incorporate the Bicentennial Theme into their programs. Brian Sheehan has information on things like logos and merchandising. A commemorative coffee-table pictorial book is being prepared. More information about purchasing the book will be available later this year. Also, the Bicentennial Coloring Book is still on sale at the Rushville Pharmacy and Mocha Moose.

The geographic focus of our celebration will be in the neighborhood of Riverside Park. In 1822 the Flatrock River channel made a horseshoe bend back toward today's Morgan Street. This is where the original Rushville settlement began. The Rush County Founder William Laughlin's cabin was on the north side of the river, and his grist mill was on the south side. By the 1890's a one mile harness racing track called the Riverside Driving Park was constructed south of the river about where the Riverside Park Amphitheater is located now. (The Flatrock was straightened by the Army Corps of Engineers back in the 1930's to help with flood control. The new channel bisected the track.)

Riverside became a Rushville City Park in 2005. The Amphitheater stage building was designed to look like a giant Kennedy Covered Bridge, and it was built in 2005. Restrooms and a greenroom

were added in 2010. By 2017 a pavilion was constructed near the river levee to facilitate class reunions and other special gatherings. By 2021 a new water park called The Overlook was added where Miller's Restaurant formerly had been. The summer concert series have been sponsored by Rush County businesses, civic groups, and individuals.

What follows next are excerpts from an article about Riverside Driving Park that I wrote for the Amphitheater Concert Program:



By the early 1890's there were three competition harness tracks on the edge of Rushville; north, south, and east. Every township had at least one training track, and there were reportedly a total of 25 tracks in Rush County.

In the midst of this "horse boom" was William A. Jones and his son Harrie. William and Harrie built and equipped the Riverside Driving Park. William Jones was among the pioneer horsemen in Rush County. He gained notoriety as a half-owner of Hoosier Tom, but one of his greatest horses was Florence M., a daughter of Blue Bull 75. Florence M. won 42 out of 52 races.

The Riverside Driving Park opened in grand style on July 4, 1896. They held a pony race for boys and a balloon ascension was scheduled, but the balloon caught fire and never got off the ground. The horses that raced that day were valued at over one million dollars. They came from several states and were brought in by train on special cars. Over 5,000 people paid to see the races. Race purses were from \$500 to \$600.

Riverside Driving Park was a regulation mile track 60 feet wide. Shedrow stables with 160 stalls surrounded a paddock area with a speed office and blacksmith shop. There was a grandstand at the end of the main stretch at the southeast corner of the track. A footbridge (swinging bridge) was built across Flatrock River to make access easier from the hotels and saloons.

Baseball games and circuses were also held at Riverside Park's infield. Traveling circuses came to Rushville by railroad. The Cincinnati Reds visited Riverside and defeated Rushville's baseball club 23-4. Indianapolis played here too and won 28-10.

On September 16, 1899, the races were not held at Riverside because of inclement weather. Somehow a "bogus record" of races to be held that day was signed and submitted to the American Trotting Association (ATA). After a year-long investigation, the ATA issued an "edict of expulsion" against eleven horsemen and officials. Needless to say the reputation of Rush County harness racing suffered.

Then came the automobile. Dirt track automobile races were contested at Riverside's oval. During the 1920's and until WWII, 100 mile races were held. Some of the most famous local drivers were Bob Hayden, Arnie Krecht, Charles Morris, and "Wild Bill" Cummings. Three-time Indianapolis 500 winner Wilbur Shaw also raced at Riverside; driving his race car here from Shelbyville and then driving it home after the race.

Today we continue to be entertained at Riverside Park. As you sit on the grass or in your favorite deck chair listening to the music, don't forget the fascinating history of the Park. When the music stops, you may still hear the thunder of trotters headed down the stretch, "Wild Bill's" engine

whining flat-out, the roar of a circus lion, the crack of a baseball bat, or the joyful sounds of children spinning on a merry-go-round.

On September 17, 2022, we hope to see you at Riverside Park! Be a part of the Bicentennial celebration. Bring your own chairs. Admission will be free!

Thanks to Brian Sheehan, Mayor Mike Pavey, and Sandy Fussner for their help with this article.

## Rush County Bicentennial The Rush County Amish

Written by John Wilson, Rush County Historian

This is the 22<sup>nd</sup> article written to commemorate the Rush County Bicentennial. Forty-eight years ago I wrote a graduate paper about Amish education. The paper was entitled....The Educational Philosophy of the Old Order Amish in Rush County, Indiana.

In this current article I hope to examine the scope of Amish history in Rush County and to some degree how education may or may not have changed.

Since 1822 Rush County has been blessed with a variety of religious denominations that settled here. William Laughlin started the first Presbyterian Church in Rushville. The most numerous churches and worshippers were of the Disciples of Christ faith (Christian Church). There were also Baptists, Episcopalians, Methodists, Nazarenes, and Roman Catholics. One group of note was the Quaker faith (Friends). That denomination built meeting houses primarily in the western half of Rush County. The Quakers were extremely active in the Underground Railroad. Consequently an African American settlement north of Carthage established the first African American Methodist Episcopal Church in Indiana.

Then came the Amish. In 1969 a small group of Amish families investigated the idea of settling in southern Rush and northern Decatur counties. At the time land was available for \$380-\$400 per acre. By 1970 the Amish were moving to Rush County. They were farmers for the most part. They owned draft horses instead of a tractor, a horse and buggy instead of a car, and believed in providing their own power/lighting sources; not public utilities.



So, when did the Amish faith begin? The Old Order Amish faith was an outgrowth of the Reformation Anabaptist Movement in central Europe. Anabaptists in the 1500's were anti-Catholic and believed in a "rebaptism" in Christ. In 1535 Menno Simons, a former Catholic Priest from the Netherlands, became the leader of one group of Anabaptists that believed in the writings of Paul. They also believed in Jesus as the only "Herr". In 1692 Jacob Ammann revived Menno Simons beliefs in the midst of overwhelming persecution by Catholics in Alsace-Lorraine. Ammann stressed the need to shun those that had left the Anabaptist movement. So technically the Amish are named in tribute to both Ammann and Menno, the Old Order Amish of the Mennonite Church. Their beliefs are basically those of Menno Simons.

Barbara Yoder was the first to bring the Amish ideals to America. Her husband died on the way over, and she lived in America 28 years before more Amish immigrated. William Penn helped secure the first Amish community for her and others in 1727.

There were later some divisions of the faith. A division of the Amish in Ohio in 1876 came about over how to baptize believers in Christ. Most of the Amish that came to Indiana believed in sprinkling new members.



In 1984, [A Rush County Retrospect](#) article written by Laura Schmidt described some of the Amish convictions: "The young men do not enter military service but serve their time in civilian work, mostly hospitals. The Amish do not serve on juries, do not vote, and do not seek political office. They do not file lawsuits against others. They do not buy life or health insurance. They

have their own church insurance where each member pays in a certain amount regularly. In case of a major fire or other disaster, a special or extra assessment may be made on each member."

Schmidt went on to describe Amish education: "The Amish school in Rush County is much like schools used to be in Grandfather's day. It has two rooms, a full basement which serves as a recreation room, and an upper story where the school books and school records are kept. They teach the basics including math, reading, English, vocabulary, health, history, social studies, and a few other subjects. German is always taught once a week. There are two teachers, one for each room. Christmas is always a big event for the school."

In 2022 the Rush/Decatur Amish community has three church groups and three Bishops. The Amish still worship in the homes of its members, with worship services being held every week. Church services usually last three hours and are given in Pennsylvania Dutch, a dialect that may differ from one community to the next.

Other faiths are having problems filling the pews (benches). The same problem exists for the Amish. Those that leave the Amish faith tend to be younger adults under the age of 30. The apparent difference is when the Amish leave the faith they also leave a way of life.

There are recent allowances that were not used many years ago. Bicycles, cell phones, forklifts and Bobcats, and solar energy are now a part of everyday Amish life. One question sometimes asked is: "Do the Amish pay taxes?" The answer is yes. They pay taxes just like everyone else.

There are two Amish schools, both of them in Rush County. The curriculum has varied little in the last 50 years. But, the Amish Agreement with the State of Indiana now releases students from their compulsory education at the age of 15. So, each student has an eighth grade education, plus two years of vocational learning. Classes are conducted in the English language, but a class in German is still taught.

A three person board governs each school district. As is the case in most public schools, finding qualified teachers is difficult for Amish schools too. Consignment auctions are held twice a year to help offset the expenses of the two schools.

There are currently over 85 families in the Rush/Decatur Amish community. Amish families will average four-six children as compared to larger families in the past. In 1976 five families moved to West Union, Ohio. Then, a few years ago several Rush County Amish moved to Mays Lick, Kentucky.

Older Amish lament the good old days when they farmed with horses but know they can't grain farm big enough to be profitable in today's farm economy. Some Amish still raise cattle and farm a little, but most cash rent their ground.

Historically the breeding of Standardbred horses has been a part of the Amish economy. The Shrock family stood the stallion Whitefish Falls for many years, and the Coblenz family stood ABC Garland. Today Michael Detweiler is well known for breaking race horses, and his brother Marlin shoes Standardbred race horses for several stables.

Students from the Milroy Amish community have prepared a Milroy Amish community calendar for 2022. The calendar features several drawings of Milroy Amish businesses drawn by the students. Featured businesses are: Troyer's Country Store, Scenic View Books and More, Detweiler Cabinets, Milroy Shoes, Wagler Furniture, Hoosier Vinyl Products, E.J. Welding, Hershberger Cabinets, Hoosier Pallet and Mulch, Benco Poly Film, Milroy Building Supplies, Sunrise Greenhouse, Tree City Metal Sales, and Emma's Flowers. The calendar lists the birthdays of the Amish community and also gives their year of birth. By my count 402 people are listed, and the largest birthday months are June, July, and January.

Other Amish businesses in the community include Rebecca's Flowers, Country Side Hardware, The Spindle Shop, Rush County Wood, and Milroy Pallet.

All in all, the future for the Amish community in Rush County looks promising. Keeping the faith may be a challenge at times, but that has always been the case. Those that keep the faith are to be admired.

Special thanks to Norman and Mary Troyer, Marlin Detweiler, and other members of the Rush County Amish community for their help with this article.

## Rush County Historical Society Did You Know?

By Monty McMahan

The Rush County Historical Society is comprised of approximately 150 Members. Our members come from all walks of life, different generations, different communities, and different interests. The one common interest is the preservation of Rush County's vast history. In the paragraphs below we hope to share with you who keeps the Rush County Historical Society moving and, in the process, give a few folks the recognition they deserve.



We wish we could name everyone that donates even just a few minutes of their time to our organization, but there really are too many to name individually, but we will name a few of the outstanding ones.

The Historical Society is overseen by a twelve-person board of directors. Your current board of directors is President Monty McMahan, Vice President Kristen Hass, Secretary Stacie Berkemeier, Treasurer Becky Webb, and board members, Charlie Fields, Lou Starkey, Barb Drake, Michelle Amos, Sharon Scholl, Sharon Creager, Jeff Houser, and Bob Bridges.

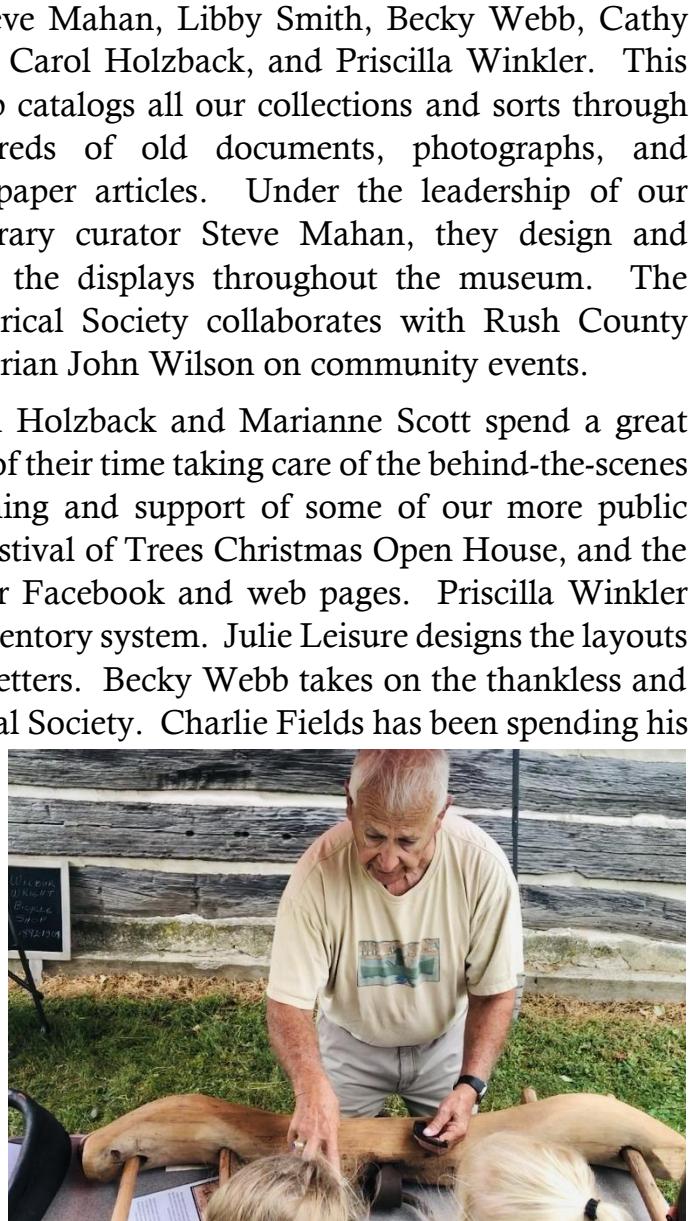
In addition to the board, the Historical Society is supported by our members. Most of our supporting members have served on the historical society board in the past. We have a group of volunteers that we affectionately refer to as our Monday/Thursday group. Comprising this group

is Steve Mahan, Libby Smith, Becky Webb, Cathy Kirk, Carol Holzback, and Priscilla Winkler. This group catalogs all our collections and sorts through hundreds of old documents, photographs, and newspaper articles. Under the leadership of our honorary curator Steve Mahan, they design and place the displays throughout the museum. The Historical Society collaborates with Rush County Historian John Wilson on community events.

Carol Holzback and Marianne Scott spend a great deal of their time taking care of the behind-the-scenes planning and support of some of our more public

events such as the Willkie Day parade float, the Festival of Trees Christmas Open House, and the Rush County Fair. Marianne Scott maintains our Facebook and web pages. Priscilla Winkler enters new acquisitions into our computer-based inventory system. Julie Leisure designs the layouts and oversees the printing and mailing of our newsletters. Becky Webb takes on the thankless and time-consuming job as the treasurer for the Historical Society. Charlie Fields has been spending his time refurbishing the Wendell Willkie historical markers.

In addition to the above-named events, the Historical Society hosts many events throughout the year. On the first Sunday of the month (March through November) the museum located at 619 N. Perkins is open to the public from 2PM to 4PM. The museum is also open each Monday and Thursday from 9AM to 11AM. Private tours of the museum can be scheduled by contacting the museum staff at (765) 932-2492.



Do you think you could be one of our regular volunteers? If you are interested in helping with projects at the museum or any other event that we host, please contact us. We will welcome your help. If you are interested in joining the Rush County Historical Society you can find more information on our website: <http://rushcountyhistory.org>. You can also find information posted on our Facebook page.

# Bicentennial Word Search

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**Words:** birthday, bicentennial, celebration, chamber, foundation, heritage, activities, parade, Willkie, amphitheater, Rush, concert, events, engineers, fair, logos, pictorial, book, commemorative, neighborhood, Flatrock, riverside, Laughlin, founder, cabin, grist mill, track, park, overlook, pavilion, horse, Hoosier, Blue Bull, history, race

*“Come – be a part of history.”*

Rush County Historical Society

Gowdy House Museum

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