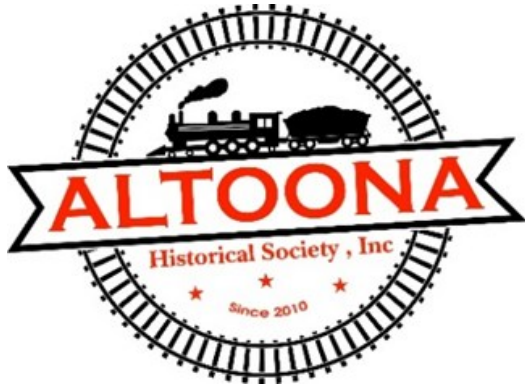




Mailing Address
Altoona Historical Society, Inc.
PO Box 1
Altoona, WI 54720

Newsletter

2025

July—December

Volume 3

Museum Address

Altoona Historical Society Museum
506 9th St. West
Altoona, WI 54720



Important Dates to Remember

June 25, 2025 BOD Meeting 10:00 a.m.

July 12, 2025 Open House 1:00 p.m.

August 9, 2025 Open House 1:00 p.m.

September 13, 2025 Open House 1:00 p.m.

September 24, 2025 BOD Meeting 10:00 a.m.

October 22, 2025 BOD Meeting 10:00 a.m.

November 19, 2025 BOD Meeting 10:00 a.m.

Special tours of the museum can be given by
calling Don Winrich at 715-559-3938

From Your President

Don Winrich

I am reaching out on behalf of the Altoona Historical Society, Inc., a 501 (c) 3 organization dedicated to preserving and sharing the rich history of our community. Our mission is to safeguard the stories, artifacts, and landmarks that define Altoona's heritage, ensuring they remain an invaluable resource for future generations.

As we continue to expand our efforts, we rely on the generosity of community members like you to support our work. Your contribution—whether large or small—will help fund exhibitions, educational programs, historical preservation projects, and community outreach initiatives. With your support, we can keep Altoona's history alive and accessible for all.

We would be deeply grateful for any donation you can make. Contributions can be made via check payable to the Altoona Historical Society, PO Box 1, Altoona, WI 54720. Additionally, if you are interested in volunteering or contributing in other ways, we would love to hear from you.

Thank you for considering this request. Your support is essential in helping us protect and celebrate the legacy of Altoona. If you have any questions or would like more information, please don't hesitate to reach out.

“Cinder City”
The Rails to Prosperity
The Community Times
Monday, August 19, 1985
by Jane Hieb

Nearly 10,000 people were on hand to welcome the first train to Eau Claire County. Beginning in 1856 rumors of rails and prosperity had circulated widely throughout Northwestern Wisconsin, but it wasn't until 1870 that the rumors became fact.

The coming of the railroads played an important role in the development of many small towns in Wisconsin. In 1881 two houses were all that marked a small settlement on the sand prairie east of the tough little lumber hamlet of Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

Named East Eau Claire originally, the area blossomed rapidly when the Chicago, St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Omaha Railroad (Chicago and Northwestern) established a machine shop and roundhouse there.

In the next year another ten houses appeared and the name of the thriving settlement was changed to Altoona, presumably after a railroad town in Pennsylvania.

The “baby city” as the town was often referred to, continued to grow. By 1887 the founding fathers were granted a charter to form a city government. Shortly after, a mayor and four city Councilmen were elected.

At one time both passenger and freight trains traveled the rails through Altoona.

Gerald Hagen, former mayor of Altoona, and state director for the United Transportation Union, has studied the history of the railroads for many years.

"In the 'heyday' of the railroads the Chicago-St. Paul Minneapolis-Omaha had over 19,000

miles of track, today there are 6,000 miles." Hagen explained.

"By 1914 there was also a street car connecting Altoona with Eau Claire and Chippewa Falls. Altoona had 2 hotels, 5 saloons, a grocery and dry goods store, three churches, and a school system," Hagen said.

Much of the growth the city of Altoona experienced during those early years centered around the railroad, according to Hagen.

Today with over 5,000 residents, Altoona is still growing. By the year 2000 city planners are expecting nearly 10,000 residents.

"We have lots of raw land and better proximity to the major shopping area's in Eau Claire than many families who live on the other edges of Eau Claire," Hagen said.

Altoona residents are especially proud of their school system. "In my 11 years here in Altoona, I've been constantly impressed with the excellent community support shown for the academic and extra-curriculum activities of the school," Ed Ristow, Altoona's High School Principal said.

"I believe we're one of the only two schools in the state with a long range curriculum plan from kindergarten to the 12th grade to go with our computer program." Ristow explained.

At one time, many years ago, there was some consideration given to consolidating the Altoona School System with Eau Claire. But according to both Hagen and Ristow that will never happen.

"The people here are fiercely protective and very dedicated to the Altoona High School System, Hagen said. And Hagen believes the people in Altoona seem also dedicated to protecting and preserving the "small town U.S.A."; atmosphere.

"We're a bedroom community, with no large industries, but there's a lot of city pride here in Altoona, it's a good place to live!



Student Librarian's Club as noted in the 1964 Headlight - Altoona High School Yearbook. These students helped the librarian with various duties throughout the school year. Names and year of graduation listed, if known. Standing L to R: Maryann Carbon (1965), Virginia Smith (1965), Shirley Hehl (1966), Sandra Lowery (1965), Andrea Duszynski (1966), J. Sobcyak, Willian Lenz (1965), Kathleen McDonald (1964), Virginia Klingbeil (1965), Darlene Hehl (1967), Patrick Connel (1964). Seated L to R: Bernard Lancette (1966), Linda Olson (1965), Cheryl Klavetter (1967), Roberta Gilbert (1964), Robert Crandall (1966), Steven Kaatz (1966), Daniel Welke (1965), Lynette Nimmo (1964), Barbara Olson (1967), Mrs. Held (English Teacher and Librarian), Karen Bergman (1964), Carol Kolkind (1964).



The picture to the left are
railroad routes
of the
Chippewa Valley



***Chicago, St. Paul,
Minneapolis, & Omaha
&
Milwaukee Road
&
Soo Line***



This doll was donated to the Altoona Historical Society by Jim Klingbeil to honor his mother Selma. A brief biography of Selma is below.

Selma M. Klingbeil, age 101, died on Wednesday, April 25, 2018 at Grace Edgewood Assisted Living and Memory Care in Altoona.

Selma was born on November 12, 1916 to the late Carl and Helena (Nelson) Henderson in Sarona, Wisconsin. She was a first-generation US citizen born to Swedish immigrant parents. Her father, a blacksmith, moved his business and family from Sarona to Campia, eventually setting up shop in Rice Lake where Selma graduated from high school in 1934. On August 5, 1938 she married William J. Klingbeil of Altoona.

Selma worked as a gifted seamstress, upholsterer, and knitting machine operator in her home in Altoona through the 1940's to 1980's. She made clothing for area residents as well as sewing the draperies for the school auditorium and making cheerleading outfits at times. She also sponsored a bowling team and used her knitting machines to provide the team with apparel. At the end of her professional sewing days, she continued

her creativity making many quilts, afghans, and beautiful porcelain dolls which she not only dressed in vintage costumes, but poured, fired and painted the porcelain as well.

She was active in community affairs including the drive to keep public schools in Altoona after the school was destroyed by fire in 1951, serving as Secretary for the new Little League and Babe Ruth Baseball in Altoona including development of the ball diamond at Tenth Street Park, as well as those on Spooner Ave, and as a Girl Scout troop leader and as an active member of Grace Lutheran Church in Eau Claire and Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Altoona.

Selma was a life-long learner and educator. She taught upholstery classes at Chippewa Valley Tech for nine years, and successfully encouraged her children to pursue their college educations,

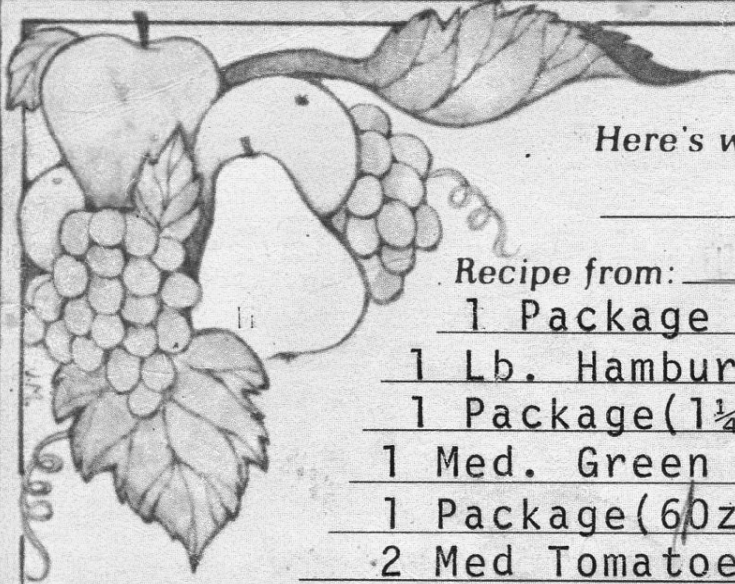
**The Article below is from the Leader
Telegram on August 7, 1961.**

Altoona Store Established in 1892 Sold

One of the oldest business establishments in the city of Altoona has a new owner beginning today.

Walter Kopplin, co - owner with his wife, Louise, of Kopplin's Grocery and Hardware Store located on Division and Lynn Ave. Saturday announced the transfer of ownership of this business and property to Alvin Wolf, formerly associated with the Co - op Shopping Center in Eau Claire.

What's Cooking!



Here's what's cookin : TACO SALAD

Recipe from: _____ Serves: _____

1 Package (7oz) Sea Shell Macaroni

1 Lb. Hamburger

1 Package (1 1/4 oz) Taco Seasoning

1 Med. Green Pepper (Chopped)

1 Package (6oz) Cheddar Cheese

2 Med Tomatoes

1 Med Onion

1 Head Lettuce

1 Package Taco Chips

1 Large Bottle French Dressing

Layer chopped pepper, cheese, tomatoes, onion,
taco chips and lettuce. Brown hamburger and
mix in taco seasoning following directions on
seasoning package. Cook Macaroni. Layer Ham-
Burger and macaroni on top and refrigerate 1 1/2
hours before serving. Before serving pour
on dressing and mix well

The Old Altoona Public School Fire Altoona, Wisconsin

Flames consumed the 38-year-old Altoona Public School building on Halloween night of 1951. The remains were bulldozed and hauled away. This school had been located on a hill. Its former site is now merely a paved block in Division Street between Daniels and Bartlett Avenues (see pictures at the conclusion of this Introduction).

As a consequence of this fire, an enormous amount of Altoona history was lost. Valuable records, pictures, trophies, furniture, and memorabilia were destroyed along with the building. These cannot be replaced; reconstituting them in any meaningful sense is next to impossible.

Something else was —and is —in danger of being lost. This involves the memories of all the happenings which took place in that building during the many years of its existence. There has always been the danger that these could be lost even if there had been no fire. The building was a mere shell that was brought to life by its students and teachers. They deserve to be remembered.

Memories die. They die along with the person who had had the memory. Forgetfulness will kill or distort them, perhaps beyond all recognition. Memories need not die. If they are recorded—and properly safeguarded—they will never die. They are a form of history and should be accorded respect on that ground.

Generations of our posterity to follow, interested in genealogy, may find such memories a treasure trove that will help them understand their predecessors and the times in which they lived.

It was a simpler time. Poverty was our common denominator. While we had contacts few people, we came to know them over prolonged periods of time.

Continued on page 8

We felt that we know them well. We knew who we could and could not trust. This awareness promoted a cohesiveness amongst us that was both reassuring and somewhat restrictive at the same time. Nowadays, people in an affluent society may become acquainted with a great many people but fail to know any of them very well. It has become politically-incorrect to ask and answer personal questions. "Don't ask, don't tell" has become something of a policy for many people. As a result, we now operate in a society of semi-isolated strangers with superficialities making up the bulk of our conversations. A memory project such as this might remind the readers that it wasn't always that way.

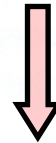
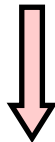
Without an awareness of our past, we are rootless. To those so afflicted, look around; there is history and there are roots.

John R. Thurston 10-24-2009

After October 31, 1951



Before October 31, 1951



Altoona House

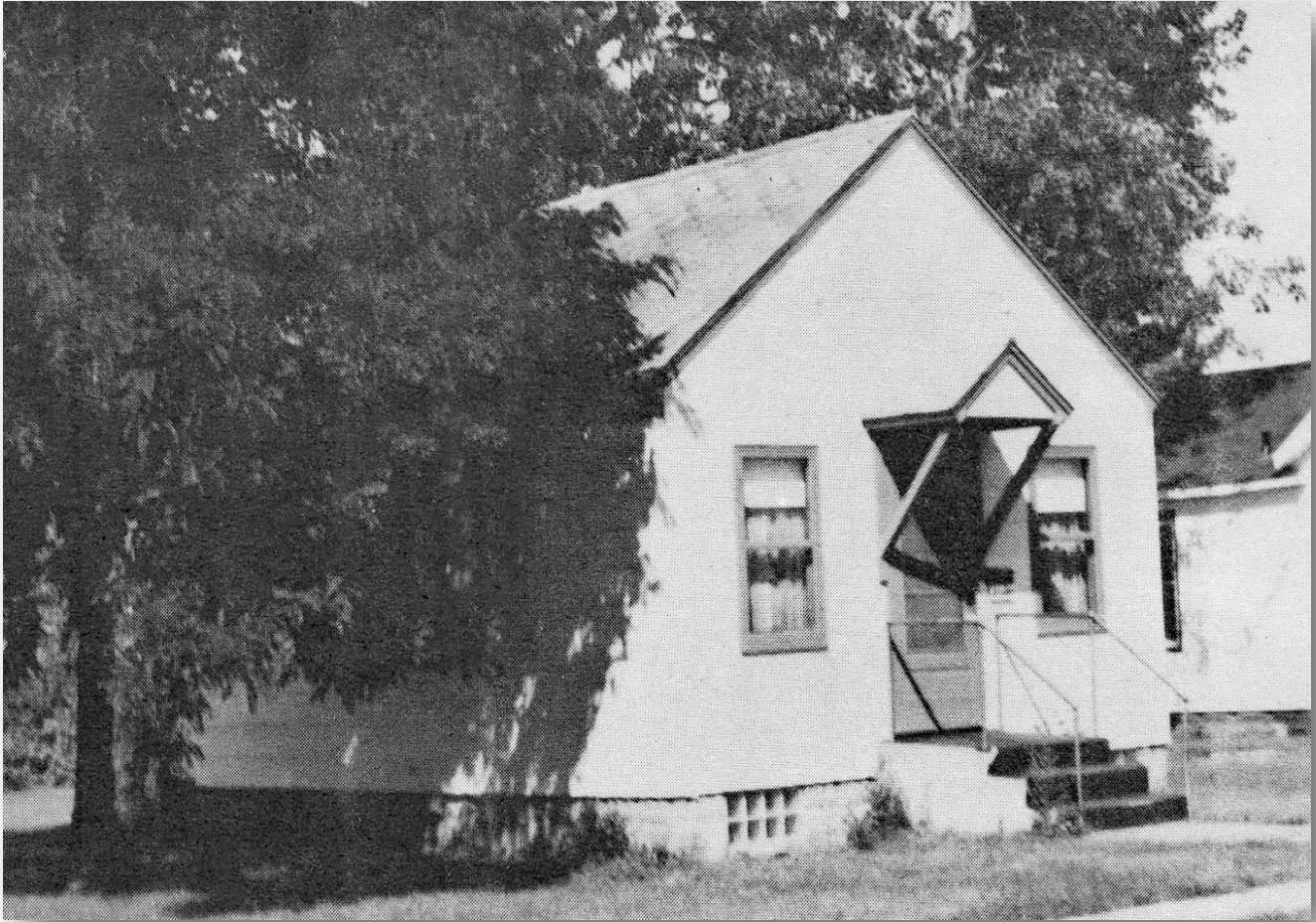


Altoona House Hotel, located on the southeast corner of Lynn Ave., and 1st St. East. It was built in the spring of 1882 and was Altoona's first hotel and restaurant. It was built by Albert C. Keniston and burned Tuesday, August 12, 1913, with loss of one life.

Club House of Hillcrest Country Club



Post Office



The Above Picture Was the Altoona Post Office Until About 1957

Altoona First Fire Department

In 1887, the Fire Department was established and equipped. Inventories indicate that the equipment on hand for the fire fighters is as follows: A hand and drawn vehicle with 2 barrels, a short hose, barrel pump, pails, axes, shovels, and a assortment of burlap bags.

In September of 1894, the inventory of fire fighting equipment showed that the Altoona Fire Department had made steady progress during its first seven years of existence, including it own building. The building was located on Lot 5, Block 1. which is the northeast corner of Lynn Ave and Divisiton St. The equipment the Fire Department had at this time was a hand engine and hose cart combination, a hook and ladder combination, 50 feet of 2" hose, 6 water barrels on wheels, and the assortment of axes, shovels, and other miscellaneous equipment.

During the early years of the Fire Department, the water supply used to fire fires was confined to water wells and Cisterns. Likewise, the railroad had a 65,000 gallon water tank that could be used if needed.

Below, is a page from Jeanetta Heuer's Physics workbook at Altoona High School in 1934. Jeanetta was born in 1919, passed away in 2020 at the age of 101. She graduated from Altoona High School in 1934.

Heuer, Jeanetta

Specific Gravity of Solids

Figure A

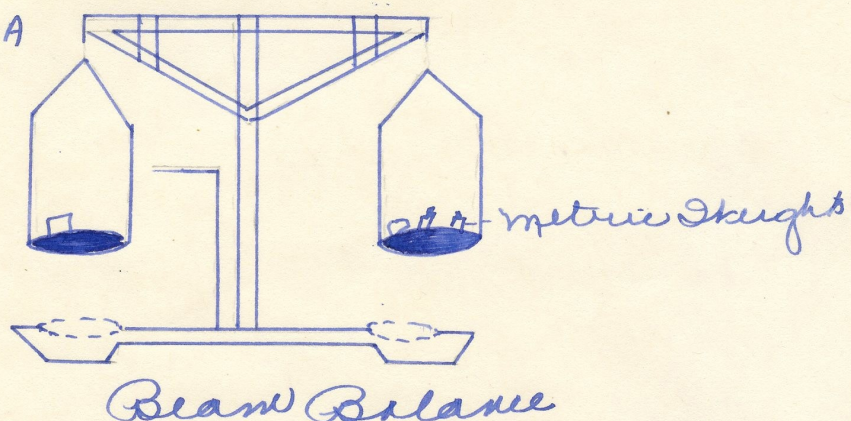


Figure B

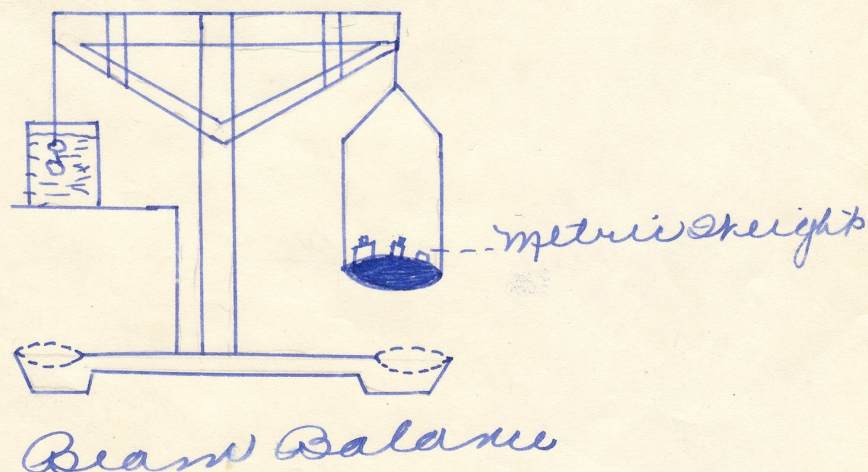
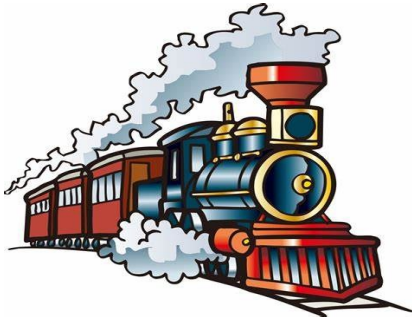


Figure A shows the piece of glass, rubber stopper, and cork how they were weighed in air. Each one was weighed separately.

Figure B shows the solids being weighed in water.



Whispers Of The Rail

In the dawn's soft golden embrace,
The whistle calls, a lingering trace,
Steel ribbons twist through valleys wide,
Where dreams and iron horses glide.

The clatter of wheels on wooden ties,
Underneath the expanse of endless skies,
A journey begins on this winding track,
A dance of the present, no looking back.

Smoke rises high, a ghostly plume,
Carrying stories through the quiet gloom,
The land shifts slowly, a painted scene,
From towns so small to the spaces in between.

Passengers watch with wonder anew,
As the world unfurls in shades of blue,
Fields of amber and forests deep,
While the heart of the train begins to leap.

Through tunnels dark and over bridges grand,
The rhythm of life, the pulse of the land,
Each station a chapter, each mile a part,
Of the timeless tale bound to the heart.

So let the journey be ever known,
On iron and steel, we're never alone,
For life is a train that's destined to roll,
Through the warmth of the sun and the whispers of coal.

To My Dear Friend Roger Rassmussen

I wonder where the years go.
Yet when it comes to missing you.
It stays as fresh as yesterday
Just like the skies stay blue.

Do memories fade and leave us?
We know they never could-
They simply grow more precious
I guess we know they would.

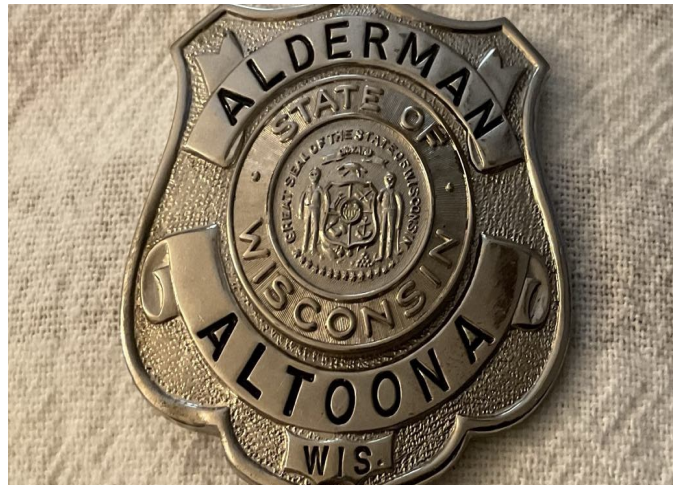
Some days might be dark and grey
Then a quick thought comes of you.
It brightens up a dreary day
It helps to get us through.

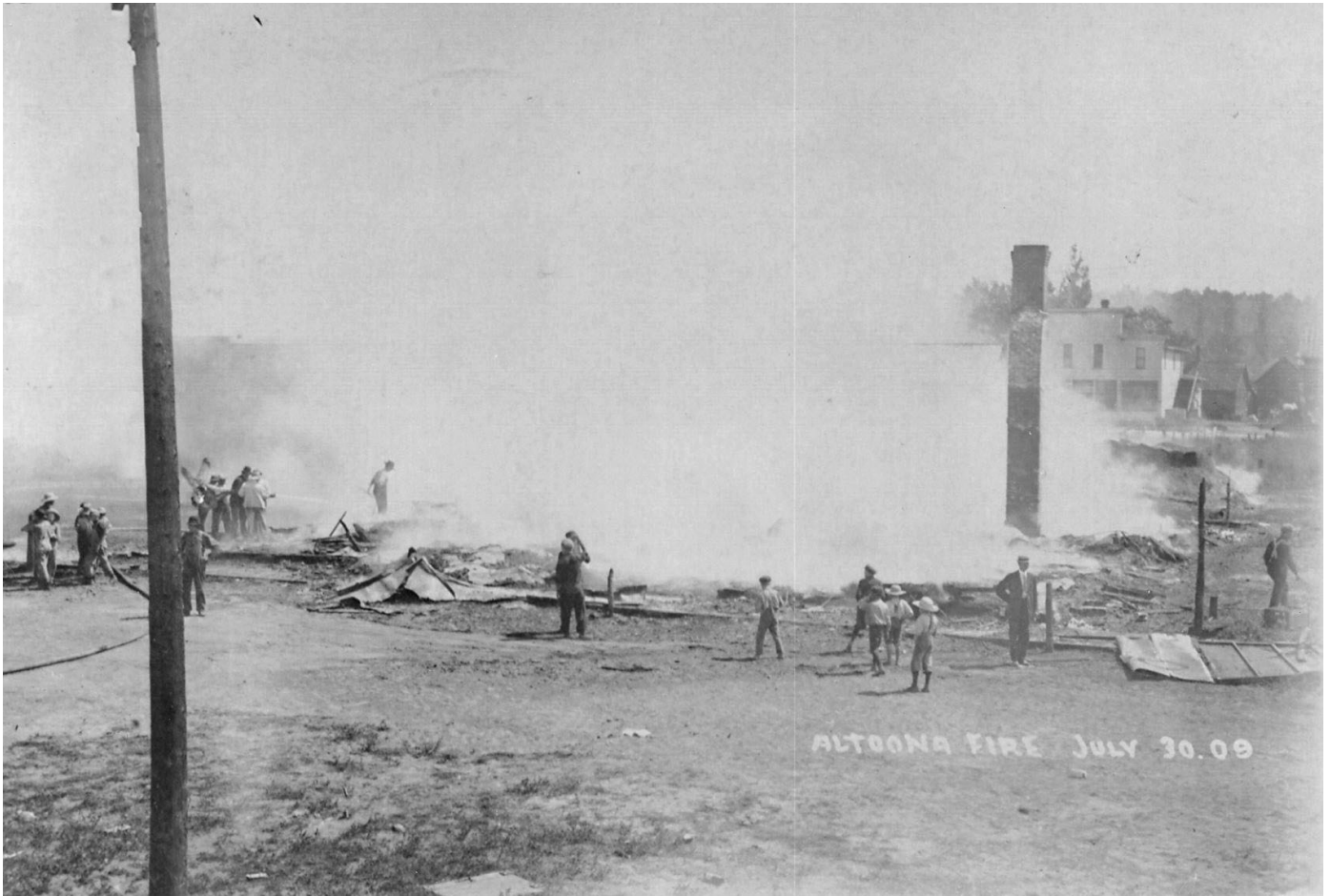
Precious moments-come to brighten our day.
Like a ray of sunshine-through the haze.
When the day ends- we can still smile
You seemed so close- for a little while!

Another year- another tear.
He grants you grace,
He's always near!
He promised comfort,
The year has gone well.
Tho' memories linger,
He gave me a "spell".
I miss you Dixie
Your loving ways,
I'll miss you Dixie
All of my days!

Poetess, Emma Leland
Easter Sunday 1998

This badge was once worn by Glenn Yarrington.
He served 4 terms on the Altoona City Council
and 3 terms as President of the Altoona City
Council.





Saturday, July 31, 1909

Eau Claire Leader Telegram

Picture credit (Herb Ruscin)

Altoona Threatened For A Time By Huge Flames

A fire fanned by a strong wind and threatening to devastate the greater portion of the business district of the little city Altoona, broke out yesterday morning just shortly before the dinner bell rang, and before the flames were gotten under control by the heroic efforts of numerous citizens and with the aid of a fire engine from Eau Claire, two buildings had been almost entirely devoured by the fire dragon and several adjoining structures suffered to some extent, totaling in all perhaps a loss between \$12,000 and \$15,000.

It was only a few minutes after the first tongues of flames were visible coming from the rear of the Frank Kneer saloon building that the whole was enwrapped in huge sheets of devastating flames, and which caused the citizens of Altoona to fear lest the path of the flames should be greatly widened by the wind.

The Outbreak

When the fire broke out just a little before mid-day, from causes not known the upper story of the building was occupied by Mr. Kneer's wife and children. He hurried upstairs and brought them down to a place of safety. Perhaps ten minutes elapsed when the flames stretched out and enveloped the adjoining building; that occupied by Fred Lehman, also a saloon. From there the flames jumped to the adjoining out-buildings a barn and two ice houses close by. The whole which was dry from the heat of the summer, burned rapidly.

Help Comes

Immediately after the flames were noticed leaking out from the rear of the Frank Kneer saloon, numer-

Continued on page 14

ous citizens came running to the scene. Only a few minutes passed after the fire started when the noon whistle shrieked and men—railroaders engineers, firemen, conductors, brakemen, roundhouse employees, yard men, and all came home for their dinner. The fire was espied and all hastened to lend a helping hand in quelling the flames, which were fast gaining much headway. Altoona has no regular fire department, so a bucket-brigade was soon formed and water was being thrown on the flames coming by way of the volunteer fire-fighters.

Summons For Help

Seeing more danger at hand, Eau Claire was called on for help, and this city soon responded by sending old fire engine, "The W. F. Bailey," which has seen many such services, to the scene, accompanied by thousand feet of hose and two firemen from No. 1 company.

The dispatch of the fire engine to Altoona was a record braking incident, perhaps little less than an hour elapsing after help as summoned the engine was pumping water upon the flames but too late to save the structures so fast did the fames devour the day material. The engine, a hose and men were taken to Altoona on a special made up of the Altoona switch engine and a flat car. Then engine from Altoona made a lighting trip to the city, where the fire engine was gotten aboard and a lighting trip was made back to the scene of the trouble.

Strong Wind

One of the strongest foes of the fire firefighters was the strong wind which was prevailing at the time which gave cause for much fear being entertained lest the depot and other railroad buildings which were directly across the street from the scene of the breaking out of the fire, should also be consumed. Water was played upon these structures and thereby kept free from the flames and heat during the fire.

Efforts Fail

All efforts proved futile in the fight to save the two large structures, which were first enveloped in flames. A little over an hour after the fire started these two buildings were razed to the ground by the fire and nothing but a mass of smoldering ruins remained.

The Losers

The building occupied by Frank Kneer as a saloon, was owned by John Walter of this city and the one occupied by Fred Lehman was owned by Matt Leinenkugel of Chippewa Falls. These were the only saloons in Altoona. The stocks carried by both saloons, together with all the fixtures were almost a complete loss. Both of the buildings were wooden structures. One of the ice houses which was consumed belong the Matt Leinenkugal while the other ice house together with the barn, which burned and several nearby small structures, was the property of John Walter.

The work of the fire-fighters in confining the flames to where they did is commendable. A Barber-shop, just next door to one of the burned buildings was save by throwing plenty of water upon it.

The Origin

As was stated the origin of the fire is not definitely known, but it is thought that it started from a pile of shingles which were at the rear of the Frank Kneer saloon, as the first flames were seen to coming from that direction. This building was recently being reshingled and the old shingles had been taken to the rear of the structure where they were placed in piles. It is possible that someone dropped a lighted cigar on the piles of shingles and started the fire.

Mission Statement

The Society was officially organized May 7, 2010 by an act of incorporation in the State of Wisconsin, given its non-profit status by the IRS in 2016 as an educational organization exclusively to collect, organize, preserve, protect, promote, and present the history of Altoona including but not limited to securing documents, photographs, video and audio recordings of individuals and groups, artifacts and historical buildings of interest to current and future citizens of Altoona and the surrounding area, consistent with and guided by the by-laws of the State of Wisconsin Historical Society.

Altoona Historical Society Beginning

The current Altoona Historical Society Inc. was incorporated in 2010 and received IRS non-profit status (501C3) in 2016. AHSI was founded by John and Amy Thurston, Jack Blackburn, James Klingbeil, Mark Hagen, Herb Ruscin, John Udler, Mark Quam, and Roger Rasmussen- holding its first meeting in 2009. An earlier historical organization was created to celebrate Altoona's Centennial in 1988. This organization ceased to exist soon after the Centennial event and all funds created were eventually transferred to AHSI.

Officers elected at the first annual meeting in 2010 were Mark Quam-President; Roger Rasmussen Vice-President; Jack Blackburn- Treasurer; and, James Klingbeil-Secretary. Additional board level positions were soon created for Historian and Parliamentarian . The initial organizational meetings created a business address, banking and mail box information, plus protocol and procedures for meetings. The Wisconsin Historical Organization provided a liaison connection- this person met with the Board and provided guidance. Incorporation papers were filed with the State of Wisconsin. Initial application forms were developed for non-profit status. Both incorporation approval and non-profit status approval is in place.

During its infancy AHSI held information meetings for new members, speakers for public forums, assistants to public school historical events, developed several calendars for sale, and sold various books/booklets at public events. Future events include the above plus interviews of individuals identified as having important historical information and experience as Altoona residents. A continuation of the collection, organization, preservation, and presentation of historical documents, photographs and artifacts will serve as the major focus during 2016-2018.

We Never Get Derailed

Altoona Public Library

The Altoona Public Library is the place to be this summer! The Summer Reading Program kicked off in early June and includes events for all ages – kids, teens, and adults. Events include weekly reading prizes for kids and teens, children's movies, clubs, weekly performers for the whole family, and more. The Kids summer program will wrap up with a picnic for readers and their families and the teen program will celebrate with a Teen After Hours Party for participants in grades 7-12.

The Adult Summer Reading Program offerings include Book 'Em Mystery Book Club summer meet-ups, guest authors, Plant Your Summer Pots class, Crafternoon @ the Library and more! This year we're offering a punch card for our adult readers with prizes along the way. Total participation in the summer reading program has exceeded 1,000 so far!

Many of the fall programs begin in September with something for all ages. Monthly adult programs include book clubs – Book 'Em Mystery, Food for Thought, and Cookbooks Club, Word Weavers (Writing) Group, craft clubs such as Knit & Crochet Club, Crafternoon @ the Library and more. Most adult programs do not require sign up, but specifics are posted on the website (<https://altoonapubliclibrary.org/adults>). Teens are invited to participate in monthly Chess Club and Ping Pong Clubs and hang in the special *Teen Zone* near the young adult collection. Monthly children's programs include Chess Club, LEGO Club, PJ Story Night and others. Sign-up for weekly Toddler Tales and Preschool Story Time sessions begins early September.

The Friends of Altoona Public Library group is a volunteer group that supports the library in a variety of ways. The Friends of the Altoona Public Library (FOAPL) raise and receive funds to help supply books, movies, music, and other needs. They also sponsor special programs and events for the people of Altoona and surrounding area. They are always looking for new members to join - visit the website for more information and to complete an application. <https://altoonapubliclibrary.org/friends/>

The library is open Monday – Thursday 9am – 8pm, Friday 9am – 6pm and Saturday 9am – 5pm. There is something for everyone! From board books to large print, DVDs, video games, and our growing Library of Things collection, you're sure to find something to fit your needs. Library staff are available to help request items from other libraries in the MORE library system if there's something you can't find.

Watch the website and social media accounts for details on upcoming programs. You can also sign up for the monthly library newsletter to stay up to date on any library events. The library staff is also happy to answer questions over the phone.

Altoona Public Library

1303 Lynn Avenue

Altoona, WI 54720

715-839-5029

<https://altoonapubliclibrary.org/>

Facebook/Instagram: @altoonapl



Scan to sign up for the Altoona Public Library newsletter:



*Libraries provide access to knowledge,
foster a love of learning,
and offer a space for connection and growth.*

AHSI DONATION FORM

Altoona Historical Society, Inc. is a nonprofit organization managed by volunteers consisting of a Board of Directors and Members. Your donation can help to preserve the history of Altoona, Wisconsin. All donations are tax deductible.

_____ Yes, I would like to help preserve the history of Altoona, Wisconsin by donating to AHSI.

Name (personal or business) _____

Address _____

Phone Number _____

Check one: Cell Phone _____ Other _____

Email Address _____

Donation Amount \$ _____

AHSI may list your name (personal or business) in printed materials and/or on the AHSI website.

_____ Please do NOT list my name (personal or business). I wish to remain anonymous.

Your address, phone number, email address will **not** be shared with anyone outside of the AHSI organization.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

PLEASE MAIL YOUR TAX DEDUCTIBLE DONATIONS TO:

**ALTOONA HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.
P.O. BOX 1
ALTOONA, WI 54720**

AHSI MEMBERSHIP FORM

AHSI members will be notified of meetings and will be able to participate in discussions and decisions regarding AHSI business. Your input will be appreciated. You will have opportunities to volunteer behind the scenes and at public events.

_____ Yes, I would like to help preserve the history of Altoona, Wisconsin by becoming a member of AHSI. Suggested Donation \$10/year.

Name _____

Address _____

Phone Number _____

Check one: Cell Phone _____ Other _____

Email Address _____

Membership Donation Amount \$ _____

I give AHSI permission to release my name and/or photos of my involvement with AHSI:

_____ Yes _____ No

Your address, phone number, email address will **not** be shared with anyone outside of the AHSI organization. To be more cost efficient, most AHSI information will be Emailed to members.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

PLEASE MAIL YOUR TAX DEDUCTIBLE MEMBERSHIP DONATION TO:

**ALTOONA HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.
P.O. BOX 1
ALTOONA, WI 54720**

"Railroads carve the path of progress, uniting places and possibilities."