

Victorians joined 'study clubs'

By Christine Blumer

The Victorians living in the late 19th Century were a social lot: the men spent their free time relaxing with the "boys" out at the hunt club; the women turned toward self-improvement and civic mindedness.

One of the oldest and most prominent organizations for the cream of Fort Atkinson's female crop was the Tuesday Club, organized in 1881. It was Mrs. N.F. Hopkins who, with Mrs. J.Q. Emery formed a 16-member "study club."

According to an article in the Milwaukee Free Press July 14, 1912, "The Tuesday Club of Fort Atkinson occupies an unique place among the women's clubs of the state. It was organized in 1881, and in spite of many changes and revolutions in the club movement, it has kept its first ideals and has remained for more than 30 years a study club pure and simple.

"The words 'study club' do not mean that its influence has not extended beyond its own membership. It has always been one of the influential and respected institutions of the community.

Written by Mrs. Joe (Lillian) Schreiner, who did some "stringing" for the Milwaukee newspapers, the article noted that the first 16 members studied "Romola" by George Elliot. The club also was active in protection of landmarks and natural resources, as well as promotion of the library and public schools.

The latter is mentioned by Mrs. Hopkins in reminiscences quoted in Koshkonong Country Revisited I.

"In taking a backward glance, I wonder that we were not discouraged at our undertaking, for there was no public library and very few reference books to be had; however, one kind friend offered to loan us some choice books from her collection and Milo Jones drew maps for us, which helped us greatly.

"The world did not swarm with study clubs, as at present, and we knew practically little of those which did exist. The systemized club work, as it is today, was a cloud in the distant horizon — no bigger than a man's hand. We were, in reality, a nameless orphan waif, but we were earnest, and we felt no need of a constitution or of officers. However, at the second season, it was thought best to have a program and this necessitated a name. Mrs. Jones, I think it was, suggested that the club be known as the "Afternoon Tea."

In its third season, the organization became Tuesday Club and elected officers. But its purpose remained unchanged.

"We as a club do not propose to sway the masses or lead the multitude, neither do we sign for pages of commendation or ask you to build

monuments of worlds or marble in honor of the Tuesday Club, but we do rejoice when spoken thoughts are rich with approval, which is a blessing to all labor," Mrs. Hopkins noted. "Surely they will be wrought in turret and tower by the master architect who directs as we build."

Her typically Victorian language is difficult to understand, but it all boiled down to having a place for the exchange of ideas.

Tuesday Club was one of the

Crawford. It was very heartily endorsed."

The article continued by listing what women attended and a description of their gowns.

Several study clubs were born after the turn of the century.

The Ingleside Club, formed in 1909, was named at the suggestion of Mrs. Herbert Main, who said in reminiscences published in Koshkonong Country Revisited II that the idea sprung up at a

dues, which rose to 50 cents in 1911 when it joined the state federation. In addition to cultural programs promoting the home and homemaker, the club was active in civic work.

The Coterie Club was organized with 12 members Nov. 2, 1908, at the home of Mrs. C.L. Goodrich. The name was derived from the Latin "coteria," which means a set or circle of friends who associate and meet together for social and friendly exchanges.

Mrs. William Rogers chose the motto for the Tuesday club, which the first year studied U.S. history and readings: "The brightest and best that knowledge holds, is the pure gold sought by the Coterie."

Dues were at 50 cents by 1910 and the bylaws were adopted in February 1911. The club donated to many community programs, including Forrest Law Sanitarium, beautification of the riverbank, the Red Cross, Christmas baskets for the needy and adoption of a French war orphan after World War I.

In 1905, 17 women met to form a study group at the urging of Mrs. Charles Pearce and Miss Blance Hager. The literary club first was called Scissors and Paste Club, and later, the Badger Study Club.

The group met Mondays but then changed it to Tuesday, the day other study clubs met. Its first topic was the State of Wisconsin; others ranged from history and geography to drama and biography.

The Badger Study Club met at various intervals during the Great War, but it did a great deal of Red Cross work, Christmas baskets and outfitted a worthy girl at her high school graduation.

Fort Atkinson women might have been reading on Tuesdays, but they were singing by Thursday. The Music Study Club was founded in 1911 by a Mrs. Swits, and offered musical programs each meeting.

"In this way, the Music Study Club gave to its members an opportunity to enjoy good music, study composers and in many ways giving a fuller understanding and appreciation of this great art," wrote Fort Atkinson author Crawford Thayer.

The club spread its talents throughout the community, and offered many public programs. Among the local artists in the Music Club-sponsored programs was Wesley Sontag, a virtuoso violinist who went on to teach at the Julliard School of Music. It also held a Music Memory Contest in the schools.

A Janesville Gazette article published apparently in the early 1950s reported that the Tuesday, Ingleside, Coterie, Badger and Music Study clubs had all banded into a city federation in order to work jointly for community betterment.



Crazy Eight Club in 1895 included Belle McMillen, Venice Westfield, Lillian Haumerson, Mae McMillen, Hattie Chapman, Agnes Foote (Hoard) and Amy Mason of Antigo.

earliest such clubs, but many followed its footsteps. The Imperial Club, for example, was begun about 1897, and was the sponsor of an annual gala ball at the city hall.

In January 1899, the club's third annual ball featured Eastern Star society women dispensing "refreshing punch," according to newspaper accounts. And "one of the pleasant features of the evening was a very pretty waltz, played by the orchestra, entitled the 'Imperial Waltz,' composed and dedicated to the Imperial Club by Walter

Daughters of American Revolution meeting the previous year.

She said she suggested to "Mrs. Sara Coe Telfer that we and a few other young married women start a study club of our own. Several of our friends had been married that year and were starting new homes and firesides. The organization meeting was held at the home of Mrs. Jessie Beach Olson. The club was named Ingleside, which means fireside."

The club, which had 10 charter members, charged 25 cents annual



Imperial Club minstrel show in 1899.



Congregational Church Gleaners' 'Trip Around the World' in 1900.

Lucien Caswell founded first Fort bank

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loans are made without a monthly or semi-annual required payment on the principal," said Hedberg.

"And in the golden days, banks didn't make loans on cars. I could never understand why local banks should permit finance companies to secure all loans on automobiles, especially when the credit rating of the local buyer was excellent. I decided that we would make a few such loans to determine how they would work out. When the elderly chief bank examiner paid his next visit to the

bank, he severely criticized the new policy, saying 'Hedberg, don't you know that when a man buys a car, he should have the cash to pay for it?'"

Hedberg continued, "On one occasion, an elderly couple came to the bank with a shoebox underarm. They told me they had some money which they wished to deposit in the bank. When the money was counted, there was more than \$10,000 in the box. The couple, apparently up to now, were fearful of the safety of banks and they admitted that they never left their home without taking

the shoebox with them."

Fort Atkinson Savings Bank, incorporated in 1909 by a group of citizens, was later renamed the Bank of Fort Atkinson. It was located first on South Main Street.

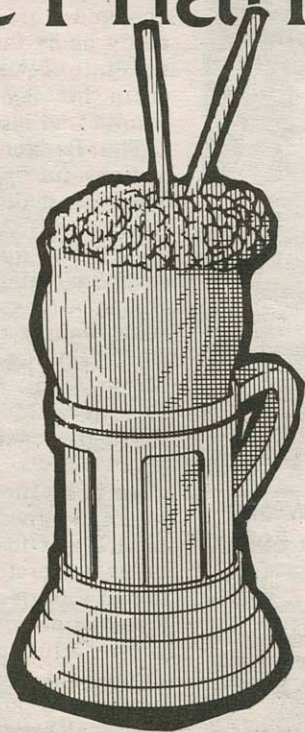
The old 106 S. Main Street building cost just \$2,400 to build in 1909. Inside the impressive building were tellers working behind a "bandit barrier", a 9-foot-high wall consisting of steel and bullet-proof glass. The barrier, according to early records, was not replaced with a chest-high counter until 40 years later in the 1960s.

It moved to a new building at the corner of Washington Street and Sherman Avenue in May of 1964.

Rounding out Fort Atkinson's financial services are the Hopkins Savings and Loan branch, which came to Fort Atkinson in September of 1982; First Federal Savings & Loan, which arrived in October 1981, and the Fort Community Credit Union.

The Fort Community Credit Union is an outgrowth of the Thomas Industries Credit Union, started in 1942 by employees of Moe Bros.

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Hunters flocked to Black Hawk Club

By Christine Blumer

"In truth, Wisconsin hunting is not as it used to be."

That's what Walter Frautschi wrote in the June 1945 Wisconsin Magazine of History, claiming that things had changed a lot in the 70 years since the Black Hawk Hunting Club opened its doors to area sportsmen.

It was in 1875 that a group of wealthy men formed the club at Blackhawk Island on Lake Koshkonong. The club was formally incorporated three years later and attracted members whose names were not only known locally, but state and nationwide as well.

The original members hailed from Whitewater, Fort Atkinson, Milwaukee, Beloit and nearby communities; there were only a few Chicagoans. But when word got out that Lake Koshkonong was shallow, had wild celery and was large enough to attract flocks of the canvassback, the king of game birds, hunters from as far away as Ohio, Pennsylvania and New York joined up.

"At one time, Lake Koshkonong had the reputation of being the best canvassback lake in the country and was said to have the greatest concentration of deep water ducks of any body of water on their line of migration," Frautschi wrote. "It is not surprising then that many of the great and near-great of the day coveted an invitation to be guests at this famous club."

An anonymous guest described the club in 1877: "Here we were, two miles from any house and the steward not expecting any company, but did we fare poorly? Judge for yourself: broiled prairie chicken and toast, baked potatoes, hot rolls, coffee and plenty of milk. Marckres, the steward, apologized for the 'meagre' fare, and said had he known of our coming he would have killed some woodcock for us. After breakfast, we took a sail across the lake, and then saw what makes it such a famous resort for canvassback ducks."

According to the writer, Marckres told him that until 1876, hunters using sneakboats to pursue the birds would bag 100 at a time. That drove them away, and was prohibited by law during 1875-76. Blinds and decoys were allowed since then, and, he said, he had seen scores from 40 to 75 canvassbacks shot by hunting parties per day.

"He told me of bagging hundreds of snipe, prairie chickens, quail and ruffed grouse, and during the afternoons of two days catching 64 black bass that averaged three pounds each; and then again 28 bass he and Valentine caught one morning before breakfast, in the river almost in front of the house."

The membership roster had some famous names on it: Pabst, Case, Spooner, Plankinton, Peck. Gen. Phil Sheridan frequented the Black Hawk Club, particularly in 1874 and later.

Wrote Frautschi in 1945, "The tradition at the hunting clubs was that the general matched his ardent love for hunting with a marksmanship commensurate with his status as a military man, but Ira Bingham, Koshkonong hunter, is quoted as saying, 'I have sculled the general many times up to a flock of canvassbacks and I also shot from the blind with him. He was a greater general, apparently, than a marksman.'"

Bringing humor to the Black Hawk Club was George Peck, Wisconsin governor from 1891-95 and author of "Peck's Bad Boy." The register for Nov. 1, 1888, noted that George W. Peck, while chewing tobacco, fell down the steps, swallowed his quid and falling face down into the mud.

When it was discovered at the annual meeting in 1894 that Peck owed \$40 dues — a situation in which members usually were suspended — the directors adopted a resolution saying that all current and past governors are honorary members and have all privileges except the right to vote.

According to Frautschi, the



Hooky, Spud, Bus and Loony Fritz caught 275 pounds of fish.

original Koshkonong flatboat or float was shaped like a pumpkin seed. The hunter lay in a long pit projecting below the bottom and under the waterline; the rest of the boat was wings.

"With decoys placed on the boat and just beyond its periphery, the setup was ideal for slaughtering ducks. Fortunately, our laws, which provide that hunters keep back of the reed line, today prevent the use of such engines of destruction," wrote Frautschi.

Also used then but now illegal are scull or sneak boats, but it was the monitor, named after the famous Civil War vessel, which made Koshkonong famous, said Frautschi. It was a modified flatboat in which the rower sat in a cockpit and was able to elevate a canvas extension in case of a high sea or cutting wind.

"Ira Bingham was the first designer, during his market hunting days, of the monitor," according to Frautschi. "But Duane Starin, a Fort Atkinson village blacksmith and a man whose activities were only slightly handicapped by having no legs, brought it to its highest perfection."

The Black Hawk Club president, G.E. Esterly of Whitewater, and E.D. Coe, publisher of the Whitewater Register, pushed for state law abolishing the use of "any float, sneak boat, sail or steamboat or floating box for hunting." W.Y. Wentworth, steward of the club from 1879-1905, also was game warden and took his responsibilities seriously.

"Dean Swift confessed that in those days the commercial men had a signal arranged to let them know when a warden was approaching," stated Frautschi. "With strong field glasses, they watched the flagpole of the Taylor Hotel Lake House for notice that an investigator was near. But we may be sure than Wentworth was aware of such dodges."

"Here we have the strange but commendable situation of a group of men, whose fraternity was motivated by a love of hunting, actually leading in the sponsorship of restrictive regulations which would tend to make the securing of game more difficult, and at the same time employing the services of a gentleman whose additional responsibility it was to enforce such laws," noted Frautschi.

The objectives of the club were to "properly protect game and fish, to enforce the laws concerning them, to foster public opinion in all that relates to the better protection of game, to elevate the moral standard of true sportsmanship and to encourage physical training and recreation of members."

Frautschi noted, "Not all members acquiesced in these principles at all times, but generally they were followed strictly."



A day's hunt bagged 65 ducks for Black Hawk Hunt Club shooters W.R. Ivey, Thad Chase, Frank Scribner and Bill Westerfield.

Theater opened in 1850s

By Christine Blumer and Tracy Gentz

The curtain rose on Fort Atkinson theater in the early 1850s, when Krebs Hall, a long white frame building, was built for dances, concerts, talent shows and the occasional traveling road shows.

It was behind what was known as the "three-cent corner," named after the only saloon that sold beer for three cents, until the 1940s, and in its final years was a second-hand store and cobbling shop.

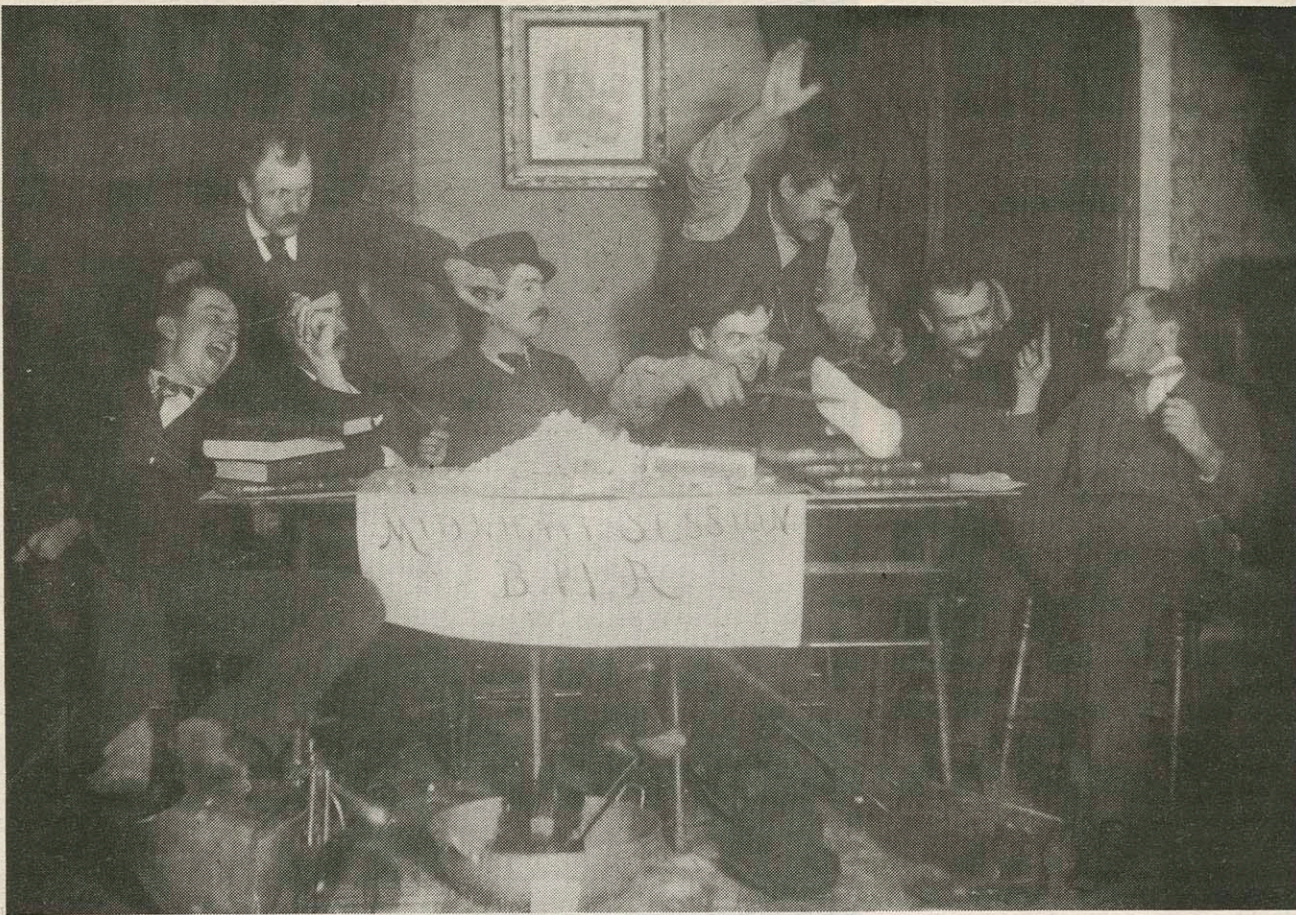
According to information compiled by the late Zida Ivey when she was curator of the Hoard Historical Museum, a group of people in 1884 formed a stock company and built a brick building for entertainment, which today is still in use as Arcadia Lanes.

The structure originally had a bell-tower which housed the community fire bell; the fire engine was in a room behind the dressing rooms in the basement below the stage.

"Not infrequently during a show the fire bell suddenly clanged out startling the audience and actors with its sudden alarm," wrote Ivey. "This was very effective during a death scene or as the romantic lead and his lady love came to a tense love scene. The actors forgot their lines and members of the audience found it necessary to run out and learn whether the fire was 'at our house' or place of business."

The audience sat on hard kitchen-type chairs that squeaked whenever they shifted or fidgeted. Footlights were hung on the floor and when not in use — and sometimes when in use — folded down out of sight.

Theater props were different than they are today. A storm at sea, for example, was produced by prop boys who held the edges of a large gray cloth of stage size or larger and shook it. A memorable snowstorm was produced, Ivey noted, "by sifting chopped paper through a large perforated tube extending across the top of the stage; for some reason the snow became clogged in the tube and was suddenly dumped out both ends (Continued on page 83)



Bachelor Club joking around in 1891.

'Spinsters' had single cause

By Christine Blumer

"Spinster/'spin-ster/n: an unmarried woman past the common age for marrying — spin-ster-hood/n.

Such is Merriam-Webster's definition of the single woman, a word which today, more often than not, is considered very offensive.

But the "old maids" of yesteryear apparently weren't as sensitive to such terminology, for Fort Atkinson's unmarried women "of age" formed their own Spinsters Society.

The March 28, 1884, issue of the Jefferson County Union reported on the formation of the Spinsters Society — the secretary was a Miss Ketchum — that met weekly, apparently to contemplate on what they considered the idealic life of matrimony.

"Now comes along a society which has long been wished for," the newspaper wrote. "It has been seen that the precious hours of leap year were being frittered away in idle talk, and nothing was accomplished. In order to make the most of the time yet remaining, a notice was privately circulated inviting all ladies of an uncertain age to meet to organize a society, the object of which should be to further the interests of the old maids of our city."

The article stated that the hall was filled with women age "sweet sixteen" and "to any other age you dare speak of above your breath. The chief ones meant

business and were not to be driven from their purpose by the sight of the crowd."

The single women outlined five resolutions:

—"That first, last and all the time, we are wishing to emigrate to the State of Matrimony;

—"That it is not only our duty but our privilege to employ all the artifices of which we are capable to induce the men to bow at our feet;

—"That leap year was ordained by the creator for our special benefit, and that we ought to be diligent in the use of time;

—"That we prey without ceasing;

—"That in view of our great necessities, the state Legislature should devise some method in the way of bounties, etc., that would bring the 'lords of creation' to their right senses."

There apparently was a lot of discussion about the last resolution; some women believed that the 'lords' would be after them just for the bounty.

"But when the vote was taken, it showed that men we want and men we will have, if by any means they are to be obtained," the article added.

Perhaps they should have joined forces with the Fort Atkinson Bachelors' Club, which, judging from an old yellowed photograph consisted of many a fun-loving "gay bachelor": their shoes are off, feet up, pipes in hand and they're having some back-slapping good times.

Woman sought husband in early 'personals'

(Editor's Note: The following was printed in the June 5, 1903, issue of the Jefferson County Union.

(It stated that, "We have received the following letter from an unknown correspondent enclosing \$1. Letters addressed to "m z x t" in care of this office will be held confidentially until sent for by the party writing the letter. As there was no request to fix up grammar or spelling we have printed it just as it came. One dollar is hardly enough for so long an advertisement, but on account of its unique character we will strain a point and insert it all.")

"Too correspnde with a goode man not over fourty years Who is abel to support a healthy widow of the same age or perhaps less with fore chil-

dren, 2, 4, 6 and nine years.

man must be willing to sign the following marks of a goode husbände.

1. To Git up at 5 o'clock without bein called if he begins work at 7 if not to hours before he has to go to work.

to Get a pale of fresh wall water and pump to pales of sisturn water each morning without askin.

3. In Winter take care of cold stove without havin to keep it on my mind to reminde him.

fore If not to work to keep out from the house exsept sick no obgection to his fishing if he can catch any sunday afternoons to go with me to the semitary.

fiv Must pervide matereal fore 1

cake and sevan pies each week my childrin like both.

6 Goode beefe to frie on tuesday and saturday nuff for 6 to much pork make my childrin sick a plenty of other foode.

Clothes for us that will mak us desent and you to hang up your overhawls in the barn You to tak a bath as often as i do up to 2 times a week if necessary.

Must scrap your feet i hav enuff to make the childrun cleane theyres you must acte pleased when i put arm around you and not mak fun of it. that dont go with me.

not to speke of departed wifes not me of departed husbändes ecsept at semitary while the other is rounde my childrun not to peddul but go to

schule and you to have descent work.

For these few marks which will binde on me as well as on you i agree to luv you like a goode wife i concent to marry you. If i dont concent no harm done is there send pikshure and make it your own address .

Mister editor, i inclothes 1 dollar for this but if i dont neede it so long i expect back what is fare make it as long as your can for the money.

i dont have to tell how much money ive got and i dont have to have no man just to support my childrun they can soon support themselfess.

i want a man nt no meere ornamente if there haint any them ime satisfide.

keep my name secret as i might not git the man i want."

Fire bell interrupted love scenes

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in great snow balls.

"To add to the grotesqueness of the scene," Ivey continued, "the tube itself dropped down and showed its full length and where the snow came from was no longer a mystery."

The drop curtain depicted a romantic scene in the middle with advertisements surrounding it. The scenery was typical of the era, with a lake in the background and urns and trailing vines scattered hither and yon over a stone wall.

Road shows stopping in Fort Atkinson would perform at the Opera House. They cost 10, 20 and 30 cents; for a few extra pennies, one could reserve a seat by ordering it at the Drug Store. The troupes usually stayed a week, offering a different play nightly with a Saturday matinee.

According to Ivey, the Opera House rented for \$10 per night, and a six-piece orchestra would play before the show began for \$12, if the troupe had none. Several days before the troupe's arrival, teen-age boys would drop handbills off at houses and in turn receive free tickets.

"In the 1890s and 1900s, a better class of plays was brought to the small city when companies were on tour," according to Ivey. "Between times, hypnotists and trained animals found their way to the local stage. Before the child labor laws gave protection to children, youngsters would appear in song-and-dance acts and took part in the plays. The Indian medicine shows also had their day, peddling their elixers and spell-binding talks mixed with cheap vaudeville. Strangely, standing room at these fake performances was at a premium."

The business eventually became the Lyric Theater, and by 1912 was purchased by W.G. Lloyd of Chicago, who began showing silent movies. John Bellman was appointed manager, helped by brothers Frank, who did the orchestration, and Otto, the projectionist. John's wife, Katherine, was cashier for the



High School Glee Club girls present 'Julius Caesar' in 1916.

business, which featured a movie theater upstairs and bowling alley downstairs.

"Our stage was beautiful," wrote Katherine Bellman. "Our props consisted of wood scenes, a parlor scene and some outdoor scenes. All the merchants would give us a chair or table and other pieces of furniture. Every year, the high school would have a class play," which was held there until the Municipal Building was completed in 1929.

St. Joseph's Catholic Church presented its annual children's art show at the Lyric, and each fall the Eureka Hook & Ladder Co. would put on two masquerade balls. There'd be a home talent show twice a year, and a roller rink was in business seven nights a week.

The Lyric Theater also was the spot where one took dates to the vaudeville shows, political meetings — Fighting Bob La Follette spoke there — Indian shows and eventually talkies. Cost was 5 and 10 cents on weeknights; 25 cents for weekend vaudeville shows.

"One of the first movies we had was D.W. Griffith's 'Birth of a Nation,' according to Bellman. "It was a big production which came from Milwaukee to our theater, and they

had all the kettle drums and the whole sound effects for the film. It was in the winter of 1916, and there was such a crowd of people that we could hardly seat them. Seats were \$1.50, and it was 26 below zero and they came from all over."

Bellman recalled that, in addition to the feature, moviegoers would view a slapstick comedy such as Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton or Harold Lloyd.

"As the years went by, we knew that talking pictures were coming so we sold the theater. Changing to talkies would have meant a lot of investment, and we were getting along in years. It was a strenuous life. We

sold it to the Herro family, and later it was turned over into the Arcadia Bowling Alley," according to Bellman.

The first true movie house was the Empire Theater, opened in 1907 by Theodore Notbohm and William Hunt in the then-George Niedecker building on North Main Street. George Notbohm, his wife and a Mrs. Towers played the piano while the movies were shown, and Hunt would drive about town in a car with a large sign advertising the night's feature film.

Its opening night featured a filmstrip, "Roosevelt in the Jungles" (Continued on page 84)



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Empire Theatre opens at 225 S. Main St. in 1909.

Silver screen arrived in 1928

(Continued from page 83)

of Africa." It is reported that the first night's attendance was a man and three boys. That doubled the second night and from then on, the crowds grew rapidly.

Located at 223 S. Main St., the Empire Theater employed a man to explain the movie to the audience; occasionally, the person who sang and played the piano would do the explaining. Illustrated songs were thrown on the screen.

The Empire Moving Picture Theater, as it was called, had on its screen some early silent pictures entitled "Little Lord Fauntleroy," "The Trap" and "The City of Silent Men."

The billboard over the Fort Atkinson theater when it first opened in September of 1928 read "Marion Davies attraction in 'Her Cardboard Lover.'" Its predecessor had been the Crystal theater, built by Fred Langhoff in 1920 and sold in 1922.

The building located at 209 S. Main St., now on Milwaukee Avenue, was turned into the Crystal Cafe and then the Ivanhoe Restaurant before becoming Fort theater.

In 1929, Fort theater was wired for "talkies" a major transition in the movie industry. It had another improvement in 1930 when an air conditioner was installed.

Moviegoers at that time could enjoy a movie for 10 cents, much less than today's \$5 admission.

The Uptown theater began serving Fort Atkinson residents in November 1937. It had an interesting cooling system: owners I.J. Craite and John Mayles flooded the theater's flat roof with 2 to 3 inches of water during the summer months. This supposedly helped keep the theater cool and protected the roof from the sun's rays.

The main floor of the theater seated 392 people, while the balcony held 92, for a 484-person capacity.

An American pasttime was born during the 1950s, when Fort Atkinson opened its first drive-in movie theater, the Highway 18 Outdoor Movie theater.



Budding actresses in a home talent play included Florence Quam, Marie Wandschneider, Lucia Perry, Nelle Colby,

Pauline Valerius, Anita Donkle, Doris Goodrich, Marguerite Edwards, Margaret Nelson.