MOUNT VERNON NEWS

In 1891, Mt. Vernon had its own newspaper, the Mt. Vernon Enterprise. The publisher and printer was Tom Everill. At years end in 1892, Tom Everill closed up his newspaper business. For many years the Mt. Horeb newspapers printed a regular weekly column titled Mt. Vernon Musings. The Mt. Horeb newspapers had four different names over the years: the Mt. Horeb Weekly, published from 1884 to 1887, the Mt. Horeb Progress, printed from 1892 to 1893, the Mt. Horeb Times, printed from 1894 to 1897, and the Mt. Horeb Mail which continues to be published today. The town of Blue Mounds, had a weekly newspaper from 1883 to 1885 called the Blue Mounds Weekly, which also featured Mt. Vernon news items.

The city of Verona has had a weekly paper called the Verona Press, from 1965 until present. The Verona Press once had a weekly column called “Mt. Vernon News.” For this column a Mt. Vernon reporter would gather the town’s weekly news, including the births and deaths, engagements, church and school notices, and social events. The news would be written up and sent to the newspapers. Few events got by the watchful eye of the town’s reporter, and one could always find out who was visited by whom for dinner or socializing, or who had gone where on vacation. Also mentioned were the crop and weather reports and illnesses and accidents.

One of the reporters for the Verona paper was Rose Rettenmund, who, in addition to her reporting duties, was active in the Zwingli Church and collected antique dishes and Hymnals. Miss Rettenmund reported from 1965 to 1968 when Mrs. Gerald Erfurth took over the duties. Two reporters for the Mt. Horeb paper were, W. A. Richards in the 1950’s and Mrs. Andrew. Nelson, who submitted the reports in the 1970’s.

One of the Mt. Vernon news columns written in the Mt. Horeb Progress in 1892 described a 4th of July celebration in Mt. Vernon:

A wagon full of ladies representing the different states and territories, drawn by a four-horse team driven by Uncle Sam, and followed by two ladies on horseback and the Mt. Vernon Coronet Band, etc., started from the town square. The whole procession reached to the old cheese factory by T. Jones, from the center of the village. The exercises of the day were opened by the Chaplain, Rev. G. W. Lincoln, leading in fervent prayer, which was followed by music by the bands, the reading of the Declaration of Independence by Michael Hobbs, oration by J. W. Leary on the general welfare of the country, etc., and singing by a well trained choir, children, etc. The rag-a-muffin parade was well presented and carried out besides games of various kinds. James P. McPherson and wife furnished an abundant supply of food for the visitors. The day was fine and all enjoyed themselves very much. Temperance drinks of all kinds were to be had on the grounds, and the fantastic toe was tripped until the wee small hours of the early dawn.

Other note worthy articles in the Mt. Vernon column of the Mt. Horeb Weekly News were; June, 1884: Wm. Hankel’s horses ran away with his son George, on Saturday. They were attached to a roller. George was thrown under and the roller passed over him, and he was injured. No other dam-

Left:
Postcard from 1914.
-Courtesy of Don Henderson.
age except the breaking down of two large gates. Since, I have learned that George was more seriously hurt than first supposed. And in the same paper: Person and Allen have started a butcher shop and intend to keep some ‘fresh’ meat,” and: Now the limburger is beginning to roll into the Mt. Horeb depot for shipment, and the air will soon be blue with the fragrance of the railroad boys. In April, 1884, the Blue Mounds Weekly News reported of Mt. Vernon: The people of the village and surroundings are happy over the order of the Postmaster General increasing our mail services from twice a week to six times a week, to take effect April 1st. And finally, reported in the Mt. Horeb Progress in 1892: Another jackass arrived at the ranch of Thomas Jones last week. Mt. Vernon now contains more jackasses to the square inch than any other town in the county.

HORSE PLAY

In a period of history when horses were a family’s prized possession, horse theft was considered a very serious crime. Mt. Vernon was not immune to this problem. In 1887, George Bowers had his prized mare stolen, as did Nels Hustad. As years went by, more families had horses stolen, and the crime spree continued unsolved. Eventually, a former Mt. Vernon harness maker, C. J. Agrelius, was apprehended for the crimes. He would steal the horses and take them to his home in North-western Illinois. Agrelius was sent to Madison for a trial. When the thief was interrogated, he confessed to stealing many horses, including one from Robert La Follette. He also revealed his secrets for disguising the stolen horses. One trick was to slice a potato, heat it and place it on the horse’s forehead, thus branding off some of the hair. This changed the steed’s black head to one with white on it, making the horse less recognizable to its owner. Agrelius was found guilty and sentenced to prison in Waupon. The “Primrose Anti Horse Thief Association,” was formed in 1891, as a result of Agrelius’s crimes. After the formation of this association no horse thefts were again committed.

MT. VERNON’S MUSICAL PAST

It was in the year of 1891 that the Mt. Vernon Coronet Band was formed with their bright new uniforms and shiny brass instruments. Each member of the band was responsible for the initial sixteen dollars and fifty cents for instruments and expenses. The instruments were ordered in September, 1891, and arrived just one month later. The band instructor was a man from Mt. Horeb, J. P. Moe. He came to Mt. Vernon on Saturday nights to lead the band practices, and by July 4th, 1892, the Mt. Vernon Coronet Band was ready for their first performance.

One can imagine the merriment brought from these minstrels at the annual parades and town gatherings. In 1897, the Mt. Horeb Times newspaper reported: “This is getting to be quite a musical hamlet. The violin, base viola, coronet, drum, organ, piano and harmonica could be heard all over on Sunday.” The newspaper also reported on this gathering, “The picnic given by the Mt. Vernon Coronet Band at the Big Spring west of the village on Friday, Sept. 13th, was a fine success. Although the weather was of the usual picnic order, a goodly number of the people gathered at this beautiful spot to spend the day. In the forenoon they were entertained with songs by the choir, music by the band, and one of Uncle Joe Henderson’s fine poems, which are always so fitting to these occasions. And then came the dinner. This was the crowning feature of the day, and was presented by the Ladies’ Aid Society, and the long table, with its bountiful supply of eatables and beautiful floral decorations, was evidence that the ladies had tried to outdo themselves.”

Music was important entertainment for the people of Mt. Vernon. In 1888, a Choral School had been set up in the Baptist Church with Ben Rogers the teacher. On Sunday mornings the Baptist Church would come alive with hymns. Nowadays, the Zwingli Church carries on the same traditions of singing praises. Today, Julie Stapelmann and Libby Sherwood teach music to the Sunday School at the church, as music teachers throughout the years have taught music appreciation to the local residents. Bernice Moore taught piano for many years, and Nona Erfurth helps students learn today. Mt. Vernon residents could always count on a spirited dance at the town dance hall on Saturday night as the rafters rang to accordion music and the floor would bounce to the polka beat. —Photo on page 24.


Left: The gazebo, erected in 1994, in memory of Bruce Logler, a local arm wrestler. -Courtesy of Walter Brink.