

Walworth County Historical Society



THE LEGACY

FALL 2012

Calendar for 2012

Annual Meeting
October 16, 2012
See Page 5

Webster House Museum
9 E. Rockwell St.,
Elkhorn
By appointment & for
group tours call
262-723-4248

Doris Reinke Resource
Center
210 S. Washington St.,
Elkhorn
Wed-Thurs 1-4pm
Or by appointment
262-723-7848

The Program Committee
requests that you send ideas
for tours, speakers, and
general programs. The
committee wants to provide
more events for members.
Remember, that you, as a
member, can tour the
museum for free.

Take advantage of that!

“ LIKE ” US ON “FACEBOOK”

Preserving our past with an online presence

The Walworth County Historical Society is getting socially connected, and needs your help to build our online networks.

Find us on Facebook under
“Walworth County Historical Society”
and on Twitter, @WalCoHistory.



This step into the digital world will give us the opportunity to reach hundreds of supporters in real time, updating them on events, fundraisers and volunteer opportunities, while continuing our mission of serving the public by educating about our rich, local history.

We encourage you to “check in” to the Webster House Museum or Doris Reinke Resource Center on your next visit, and post comments on your experience. Tell us what you learned or uncovered, and how we might be able to improve services.

We’re also looking for vintage photos to share online and other historically relevant content for the web.

To share materials, or for more information,
email: WebsterHouseMuseum@gmail.com or call Maureen
Vander Sanden, WCHS social media manager, at (262) 716-3715

The Society lost two good friends:

Marilyn Coogan, of Elkhorn, died August 6, 2012. She was a retired teacher. In 1956 she started teaching in a one-room school house. She was hired by the Elkhorn Area School District in 1970, where she taught until her retirement in 1997. She was a member of the Walworth County Historical Society, where she taught many times in the Blooming Prairie School at the fairgrounds. Memorials may be made in Marilyn’s name to: Fellow Mortals Wildlife Rehabilitation, W4632 Palmer Road, Lake Geneva, WI, 53147.

Ruth Cook, of Elkhorn, died August 14, 2012. She also was a teacher, but of Business Education and a church organist for over 80 years. She traveled the world with her husband, Howard as he hunted specimens for his bird collection. This is how WCHS acquired the impressive mounted bird collection in the museum. Howard and Ruth not only donated the birds, but also part of the money for the museum annex which enlarged the museum.

THE EMANCIPATION CELEBRATION

The anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, celebrated here on Tuesday by the coloured people; was a complete success in every particular, about two hundred from abroad being present. The weather was most favorable, everything passed off in a pleasant and orderly manner and the occasion was an interesting and enjoyable one to all who participated.

At 10:30 a.m. the large assembly at the Park was called in order by J.W. Lindsley, Esq., of Beloit, president of the day. After music by the band and prayer, offered by Rev. E.L. Harris of Delavan, the proclamation of emancipation was read by Mr. J.B. James, of Beloit. Rev. H.A. Lackey, of Beloit, orator of the day, was then introduced and delivered a most eloquent and able address appropriate to the occasion, which was listened to with intense interest.

At its conclusion Mr. James was introduced and made a short address which was well received. An adjournment was then had for dinner which was served in Clark's Hall. The afternoon was pleasantly spent by the guests at Delavan Lake. In the evening a grand Jubilee Concert was given at Harmony Hall by the People's Quartette, of Chicago, composed of Messrs. J.W. Harris, Wm Mack and Misses Mary Anderson and Fannie Mack, under the leadership of Mr. J.W. Harris. The hall was filled to overflowing and the concert was one of the best, of the kind, ever given in Delavan.

The dance which closed the day's program was attended by a large number, Donahue & Winn's fine orchestra furnishing the music. Altogether the celebration was an interesting and pleasant affair; and the local committee, headed by Mr. Al Matson, deserves great credit for their part in making it so grand a success.

The Elkhorn Cornet Band furnished splendid music during the day and received many compliments for their fine playing.

CARD of THANKS

On behalf of the committee of arrangements, I wish to express our appreciation, and thanks to the citizens of Delavan and especially the ladies, for their generous aid in assisting to make our celebration on Tuesday so pleasant a success.

AL MATSON, Chairman

BUSINESS CARDS

AL MATSON

FASHIONABLE BARBER, opposite Delavan House
SEA FOAM, 10 cts.; CLOSE CLIP 15 cts.
SHAMPOOING, 20 cts
Ladies and Children's Hair Cutting a specialty

From the Delavan Enterprise—June/July 1886

BORN A SLAVE

SOLD 3 TIMES

Story of Al Matson's Life, Reads as Thrilling as a Modern Novel

Down a flight of stairs in a basement in Delavan there is a man who has a life story as thrilling as a captain of industry, as pathetic in parts as some of the touching descriptions in David Copperfield, and as fine and constructive as that as Booker T. Washington. That man is Alfred Matson, born in Kentucky into slavery, sold three times on the auction block, and a resident of Delavan for forty-five years.

For nearly a year, the writer has been urging Mr. Matson to tell the story of his life. A fine sense of modesty and a feeling that no one could possibly be interested in his personal history, kept him from revealing the facts and he put the Enterprise reporter off with a passing remark that some day he might consider it, but not now.

Only the most constant proddings, threats and persuasive arguments finally won him over.

Mr. Matson's grandparents, his father and mother and all of his brothers and sisters were born slaves of white masters down at Hickman, Kentucky. His childhood was not the gift of a happy childhood and filled full of boyhood days of fishing, larking, playing, fighting a spell when the animal spirits surged, or dreaming the dreams of the future when he was to become a man. He was only a slave and his only outlook was that he would be in the yoke the rest of his natural days.

The Whipping Post

One of his early boyhood impressions was the ugly whipping post. The colored boys and girls learned their lessons early – but not in schools. When one of them disobeyed his master, he was tied naked to the post and whipped until the ground was spattered with his blood. The rest of the children were brought into the room and told that a similar fate awaited them if they did not mind.

When he was only a boy his father was sold and a few years later his brother and oldest sister were torn from his mother's arms. A colored woman's tears did not burn very deeply into her master's heart. Although she begged to kiss the children goodbye the marble hearted plantation owner would stand for no such nonsense as a colored mother's love for her children. And in the twilight days of her life she used to sit and wonder whether they were still living and what they were doing for she never did hear what became of them.

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Sold Three Times

Alfred Matson was never separated from his mother. He was too young and the old planters felt that he would command a larger price if he was allowed the luxury of a mother's affection for a few years. He was however sold three times. A fellow named Matson was his first owner.

Next his mother and he were sold to another slave owner named Ragsdale and finally Dick Prater, one of the greatest farmers in Kentucky, bought the boy and his mother.

These were the heartbreaking days of his life. No brothers and sisters to play with, no father for a chum, with a young small body which was supposed to do a man's work, he was kept in the cornfields. When he lagged a little in his work he was taken to the whipping post and if the boyish tendency to play while at work became too strong the blacksnake wounds were charitably bathed in salt water.

"Escape" from Slavery

About this time, back in 1862, the Civil War was raging down around Hickman, Kentucky. Just a few miles away the Union army was stationed. He secretly resolved that on the first opportunity he was going to strike off the shackles of his bondage and escape to the Yankee soldiers. A few days later the opportunity presented itself. He was given a horse and instructed to go to the house and get the noonday dinner. Even his mother did not know of his plans for he was all she had left in the world and he knew could never bear to hear of his leaving. The dinner was put in the basket and he started for the fields again.

Just as he hung the basket on the picket; in the hand made fence and as he was about to gallop down to the Union army camp, four soldiers in blue sauntered down the road on horseback. "What you got there, boy?" they asked. "Jes the noonday lunch," he replied. They took it off the fence, looked it over, and decided to take it along as their rations. "Want to go down in the army camp with us?" they queried. "Suh thing," he replied, and he joined the four riding his master's horse to freedom.

Food, Shelter—and Freedom

In camp he got a job working for a lieutenant. To a boy fortunate to get enough to eat and lucky to escape a whipping, the lieutenant's question of how much wages he would want startled him. All the boy wanted was his freedom, enough to eat, and a place to sleep. He got all of these with kind treatment and a few coins heaped on for good measure.

For a year and a half he traveled with this army which was the old 42nd Wisconsin. Here he met Capt. A.E. Smith from Delavan and many other Wisconsin men. Capt. Smith was on General Ransome's staff of the 2nd Missouri and served on the Red River campaigns. Later he was transferred to the 42nd Wisconsin.

From this time on the young lad followed the troops through Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas and was with them when they went through some of their worst battles. After this he got a job helping the cook on a steamboat which plied up and down the Mississippi River.

Seeing His First River

He will never forget the first time he saw this great body of water—the first river he had ever seen in his life. With eyes nearly jumping out of their sockets, he surveyed the mountains which seemed to reach into the heavens with a tremendous stream of water, the Mississippi river, flowing between them. He stood gaping so long that the lieutenant got impatient with him for holding up the military procession and promised to let him see all he wanted when they were once on the boat. For one whole day the boy drank in the panoramic scenery scarcely stopping to eat and begrudging going to sleep.

After the war was over and the negroes were freed he came to Wisconsin and traveled over to Boscobel. Many of the people of this section had never seen a colored man before and as he trudged from one farm to another many people encouraged their dogs to keep him up in a tree until their husbands came home.

He learned the barber trade in Platteville, worked for a time in Boscobel and came to Delavan May 1, 1880, to work in Sam Perry's barber shop where the Citizen's bank now stands.

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For nearly two years he corresponded with his mother trying to induce her to come to Delavan. Letters came back from her but they did not have a genuine ring. She declared she was happy and wanted him to return to the plantation. Feeling that something was wrong he wrote to his cousin and the letter broke through the censorship to him. Then the mother wrote her son that she had not received a single letter. When she told the old planter that she was worried about her son, he replied that he knew where Alfred was and he was all right. In 1881 she left the plantation and came to live in Delavan. She made this city her home until 1914 when she died and she now rests in the Spring Grove cemetery.

Mrs. Matson was also born in slavery and she can relate many interesting incidents of her early life in bondage. To them, have been born four children. All of them were given a public school education and Charles Matson holds an important position with a large musical house in New York.

There are few people in Delavan who are more widely read than Al Matson, as he is called around town. He can converse intelligently on nearly any subject, and a few checker players in this section ever care to challenge him a second time. During the forty-five years he has lived in Delavan people have come to know and respect him. Starting at a very humble station in life, he has lived a day at a time climbing slowly but surely, raising and educating his children, asking no favors of anyone and making a success of his life in his own way.

From The Delavan Enterprise, April 2, 1925



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In response to a request on Ancestry.com, by Beth Anne Peters, for information on Alfred C. Matson an inquiry was received as to the reason in seeking the information.

This inquiry was from Carol J. (Matson) Calvin, Milwaukee, a great-granddaughter of Alfred C. and Luticia Matson. Their son, Warren Matson was her grandfather.

Carol J. (Matson) Calvin

She contributed considerable information to this article as a result of her interest and knowledge of genealogy.

Carol J. Matson Calvin also teaches a class in genealogy and has published two books on and about her family! "The Russells/ Matsons and Descendants A Family Tree Album" developed by Carol J. Matson Calvin, December, 1993, published in the Milwaukee Public Library and "The Search for Russells Corners, A Wisconsin African American Family History" by Carol J. Matson Calvin, published in the University of Wisconsin Madison Library, 1998.

Ms. Calvin is a registered nurse with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Nursing from Marquette University College of Nursing and a Master's Degree in Education from the University of Milwaukee (UWM). A registered nurse for 40 years she spent 21 years in nursing education.

She is past president of the African American Genealogical Society of Milwaukee and of the Milwaukee Chapter of the National Black Nurses Association.

Michael Adrian Hunter

He also contributed considerable information to this article as a result of his interest in his family's history.

Mr. Hunter, a great-grandson of Alfred C. Matson, is a Yale educated social psychologist who is founder and director of Ivy League Tutoring, a twenty-nine year old tutorial agency through which Harvard, Yale, M.I.T., and University of Chicago graduates have provided one-to-one instruction to thousands of Chicago area preschool, elementary, secondary, collegiate, graduate, and adult students.

He is also theologically trained and has been active for over forty years in Christian education and evangelism ministries within the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

ANNUAL MEETING ~ ~ DINNER
w/ ELECTION OF OFFICERS & BOARD MEMBERS
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 16, 2012
EVERGREEN GOLF CLUB
N6246 US 67/12 (WISCONSIN ST), ELKHORN, WI

Cocktails with a cash bar begins at 5:30 pm
 Dinner served at 6:30 pm

MENU

House salad, roasted red potatoes, green beans, dinner roll
 w/butter, chocolate cake w/raspberry sauce & whip cream

Choice of entree:

- 1) pan fried haddock in buerre blanc sauce w/ tomatoes, capers and parsley
- 2) parmesan encrusted chicken breast
- 3) roasted pork loin

Pick entrée, fill out reservation form below and send in with payment.

DEADLINE DATE: SUNDAY, OCTOBER 7, 2012

WCHS Annual Dinner Reservation

Entrée choice:

- haddock name(s): _____
- chicken name(s): _____
- pork name(s): _____

Number of people _____ x \$ 25.00 = \$ _____ Total

Name: _____

Address: _____

Send check to: WCHS, PO Box 273, Elkhorn, WI 53121

Or to: Donna Elbert

23 Stam Street/ P.O. Box 1433

Williams Bay, WI 53191

THE MATSON FAMILY

Alfred Matson was born a slave on the Prater plantation near Paducah, Ky. on January 2, 1850. When Mr. Matson was 12 years old he ran away and crossed the Union lines. He joined the 22nd Wisconsin Infantry under General George Thomas as an officer's boy until he was discharged at Prairie du Chein, Wis. On May 1, 1880 he came to Delavan, Wis. He started work in Sam Perry's barber shop on Walworth Ave. He married Luticia India Russell on June 23, 1885 at Brodhead, Wis. They had four children—Stephen, Helen, Charles and Warren. He operated a barber shop and was considered "the oldest Delavan business man in number of years of continuous operations here." He died April 10, 1930. Services were held at the Methodist Church with burial in Spring Grove Cemetery, Delavan, Wis.

Luticia India Russell was born March 20, 1861 in Waverly, Tenn. She was brought north with her mother at the age of one year who was employed by the wife of an officer of the Union Army, Mrs. J. Reynolds. She attended school in Brodhead, Wis. After that she went to school in Elkhorn while working for the Baptist minister, Rev. Mr. Sweet and family. When 20 she went to South Waverly, Tenn., where she taught school. In 1883 she came to Delavan where she married Alfred Matson on June 23, 1885. She died December 8, 1935 and was survived by four children: Stephen, Chicago; Mrs. Helen Williams, Delavan; Charles, New York City and Warren of Milwaukee. Services were held at the Betzer Funeral Home with burial in Spring Grove Cemetery.

Stephen Matson was born on March 29, 1886. He was the first African-American to graduate from Delavan High School when he graduated there in 1906, married Josephine DeMoss, and had two children, Josephine and Elmer. He was a barber at the State School for the Deaf in 1923, he later moved to Chicago where he worked in a barber shop located at 351 E. 71st St. He died in Chicago and was buried there in 1971.

Their granddaughter, Josephine Matson Hunter, achieved prominence in Chicago for having been among the first African Americans to graduate from the University of Chicago, in 1931, with honors. She served in World War II, in England, as a volunteer for the American Red Cross, after returning to Chicago, she married, Thomas Hunter, and later taught school when her youngest child was in 10th grade. Mrs. Hunter spent her retirement years developing and implementing a tutoring program at Salem Lutheran Church.

Helen E. Matson was born in April, 1889 in Delavan. She married Edwin Wright on May 20, 1912 and later married Albert Williams and had one son, Malcolm. From 1930-1940 they lived at 819 Ann St, Delavan, WI. She died April 9, 1942 in Rockford, IL. Services were at the Betzer Funeral Home, Delavan, WI. Rev. Robert Eads of the Baptist Church officiated. Burial is in Spring Grove Cemetery.

Charles Matson was born in Delavan on January 29, 1892. He attended Delavan High School and graduated from there in 1910. He joined the Young Men's Club of the Baptist Church in 1915 and was elected Vice President in 1916. Charles Matson moved to Chicago where he was married August 10, 1915 to Ruthena G. Hodge at age 23. A son Charles A. Matson, Jr. was born November 14, 1916. He died March 2, 1918. Burial was in Oak Woods Cemetery, Chicago, IL.

Charles was an accomplished pianist in the 1920's and his wife was a singer. In the 1920's Harlem in New York City was the place to be for African-American musicians. For that reason Mr. and Mrs. Matson moved there in the early 1920's. Along with accompanying blues singer Mamie Smith and Clara Smith between 1920 and 1931 when they were recording with Okeh Records, he also made the following records.

In 1923, on the Edison label, Charles Matson's Creole Serenaders recorded "I Just Want a Daddy (I Can Call My Own)" and "Taint Nobody's Biz-ness If I Do" and introducing "Aching Hearted Blues." Matson's Lucky Seven in 1924 recorded on the Paramount label "Jail House Blues" and Lawdy Lawdy Blues." On the Gennett label in 1923 he directed Claire's Snappy Bits Band and recorded "Four O'clock Blues" and "Laughin Cajun Blues."

Ruthena Matson sang in 1927 in "Golden Dawn", "The Green Pastures" in 1930 and "Lew Leslie's Blackbird's of 1939 musical productions. In 1935 she was in several singing engagements in England.

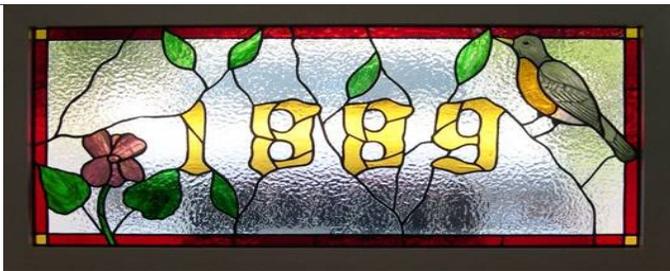
Charles was secretary of the New York Musical Union and directed leading New York Orchestras in 1935. Charles was also a casting agent. They lived at 1925 Seventh Avenue, NY, NY in 1940. Charles Matson died in 1974 at age 82. No information was found as to when or where Charles died. Ruthena Matson died in December, 1976 at 11433 Jamaica, Queens, New York.

Warren Matson was born in Delavan on November 12, 1894. A Boys Club of the Baptist Church was formed on March 16, 1910. Warren Matson joined the club on April 6, 1910 and signed the constitution. On October 19, 1910 he was elected Assistant Chief. He was married to Charlotte Smith on November 20, 1915 in Denver, Colorado. They had three children Warren Jr., Helen and Charlotte M. Matson Sanders who was born on May 28, 1929 and died on December 6, 1999.

Mr. Matson was one of the first African Americans to work at the A.O. Smith Company. He was an avid hunter, fisherman and also belonged to the Y Rod and Gun Club. He died on January 21, 1955.

Mrs. Charlotte Matson served as president of a local chapter of the National Council of Colored Women's Clubs and as a local council president. She died October 26, 1963.

Franklin Stoneburner
Delavan Historical Society
September, 2012



The 1889 Blooming Prairie School, under the auspices of the Walworth County Historical Society, located on the county Fairgrounds was moved there from its original location at the intersection of old 89 and highway 11 in 1959 after it closed its doors finally. In those days schools were located about two miles apart because the children of all ages had to walk to school. It cost the parents a cord of wood to send their child to school so that the schoolhouse was heated for the winter.

The Royal Joy Williams Questers had the Seth Thomas clock restored and repaired so now when you enter the school room you hear the tic toc of the Seth Thomas clock provided by the Fair office. The second improvement is a stained glass window above the entry door indicating 1889 as the year built and the illustration of the Wood Violet, the state flower along with the state bird, the Robin, designed and installed by the Gilbertson Stained Glass Studio.

Originally the school was surrounded by a blanket of wild flowers in spring and the children recorded the names of the flowers they saw each day resulting in a practical botany lesson from the blooming prairie.

There were three Blooming Prairie Schools in all. The first was a log cabin constructed in 1837, just one year after the territory was opened for settlement indicating the importance the early settlers placed on education considering the pressing issues of constructing homes for shelter and preparing the ground for food crops. The second building was of brick constructed in 1857. The present frame building was constructed in 1889.

by Gwen Tveter



Walworth County Fair Recap

Another successful year for WCHS at the county fair this year, our "mock" 2012 Presidential election ended with the following results:

Obama 106 ~~~ Romney 330 ~~ Other 28
 *** *** ***

Barbara Shreves, who heads up the regular spring and fall sessions at the Blooming Prairie school, had classes during the fair with the help of "teachers" Gail Folkers and Karen Kleist.

*** *** ***

A big thank you to Ilene Sheahan for heading up the annual Book Sale. It is our biggest fundraiser of the year.

*** *** ***

2012 Volunteers

Book fair

School House

- Allen Terry
- Anna Warzala
- Audrey Wuttke
- Barbara Steurer
- Caroline Terry
- Dave Chiaverotti
- Deb Ketchum
- Frank Eames
- Ilene Sheahan
- Katie Donoghue
- Larry Kocha
- Levon Milton
- Lianne Fritz
- Linda Starks
- Marian Clary
- Marianne Klemke
- Marilyn Traver
- Marlene Hodek
- Maryann Hay
- Myril Weber
- Pat Blackmer
- Ron Schildt
- Ronnie Kirkpatrick
- Ryan Schroeder
- Sylvia McDonald
- Wally Starks

- Barbara Shreves
- Gail Folkers
- Gwen Tveter
- Karen Kleist
- Lorraine Steinbicer
- Marilyn Jacobsen
- Marilyn Traver
- Marlene Hodek
- Merrybell Seeber
- Pat Jankowski

Town Hall

- Dan Richardson
- Estelle Richardson

WOOHOO!!!

Thank you to all the people who helped in anyway at the Fair: book donators, book sellers, setting up displays, supervising school and town hall; and teaching classes.

Doris

WALWORTH COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

9 East Rockwell Street

P.O. BOX 273
ELKHORN, WI 53121

Phone: 262-723-4248

E-mail:

walcohistory@tds.net

Web Site:

www.walcohistory.org

Newsletter:

walworthchsnewsletter@gmail.com

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Dan Richardson
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Vacant

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WALWORTH COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP FORM

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP CODE _____

TELEPHONE _____

E-MAIL _____

Membership Level: (Check One) Single \$15 Family \$20
 Contributing \$25 Patron \$50 Donation \$ _____

Volunteering Interests: (check all that apply)

Computer Work (w/ Microsoft Publisher, Word, Excel, Access, Other)

Photography Sewing and Fabric Conservation

Gardening Tour Guide (Docent) Research Assistant

Baking Painting & Maintenance Other _____

Please clip and send this form to: Walworth County Historical Society, P.O. Box 273, Elkhorn, WI 53121

Our Wish List

Can you help out by contributing one or more from the list below? Contributions of these items will help keep our costs down.

Paper towels, toilet paper, hand soap
Photos or your family members, places and/or events from Walworth County
A copy of your Walworth County family history

Plastic cups, plates, bowls, napkins
Garbage bags, light bulbs, & postage stamps

**COLLECTING,
PRESERVING
AND
SHARING
THE RICH HISTORY OF
WALWORTH COUNTY**

We welcome and solicit articles, citations, and photographs by members and volunteers for possible publication in *The Legacy*.

Please send material or suggestions to: walworthchsnewsletter@gmail.com or WCHS, PO Box 273, Elkhorn, WI 53121 or call (262) 723-7848.

Any articles must observe copyright restrictions and credit must be cited for material from other sources. All decisions are final and rest with the editorial staff.

WALWORTH COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

www.walcohistory.org

CORNERS OF ROCKWELL & WASHINGTON STS

Webster House Museum: Wed thru Sat 1-5 pm 262-723-4248 (*Seasonal*)

Doris Reinke Resource Center: Wed 1 - 4 pm 262-723-7848

Or By Appointments

“COLLECTING, PRESERVING AND SHARING THE RICH HISTORY OF WALWORTH COUNTY”

**Walworth County Historical Society
P.O. Box 273
Elkhorn, WI 53121**