

Preserving our
Historical Heritage



Price County Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 39 No. 1 Spring 2021

www.pricecountyhistoricalsociety.org



President: Etola Foytek, Phillips
Vice-President: Dr. Peter Dahlie, Phillips
Secretary/Treasurer: Lorraine Pilch, Phillips
Director: John Berg, Wisconsin Rapids

Director: Eric Tollefson, Phillips
Director: Tom Kaiser, Park Falls
Director: Bonnie Salm, Fifiel
Director: Sally McFadyen, Phillips

Director: Steve Eitrem, Fifiel
Director: Traci Dunbar, Phillips
Director: Len Schmidt, Park Falls
Newsletter Editor: John Berg

PRICE COUNTY: A CROSSROAD OF HISTORY

By: John L. Berg

Once a vast wilderness first dominated by the Anishinaabeg Ojibwe and other indigenous nations, to the first European explorers and settlers and onto the present, Price County's central location at the headwaters of the Chippewa and Flambeau Rivers watershed placed it foremost in the historical events in the history of Northern Wisconsin. In time, as those who made that history passed on, concerns were voiced about preserving the history of what happened here. As recalled by Lorraine (Laurie) Pilch in the PCHS Newsletter, January-April, 2013: "The Price County Historical Society was incorporated in November of 1959. In the early days of the Society discussion centered on the fact that many of the early settlers of Price County were passing away and much of the history of their efforts to carve out settlements, towns and cities out of the wilderness they came to in Price County were passing with them. The Society set out to obtain as much history, both local and family as they could about all areas of the county. They also deeply felt that relics of many years ago used by the people of Price County were a visual part of the story of how our pioneers lived and the hardships and sacrifices

they endured to build this area. Their fear was that all of this was fast disappearing and that it was vitally important to the members of the Society that the early history of Price County was preserved not only for them, but for generations to come. This was the initial focus and effort of the



Wisconsin Ojibwe (Anishinaabeg) painted by John L. Berg in 1976 from photo at Wisconsin Historical Society.

Society, with the hope that one day a permanent location would be found to house that history and display the relics that they were busy learning about and collecting. As almost everyone knows the Society in 1968 did realize their goal of finding such a building in the Old Town Hall Museum in Fifiel. The realization of that goal is not by any means the end of the story. It is only the first leg of a journey that continues to this day. It is a fascinating journey with many twists and turns and a story of people and places that will connect the past to the present and give a glimpse into the future. Any journey taken needs a starting place. While the idea of forming a Historical Society was probably talked about on street corners, coffee shops and local establishments the official written journey began at a meeting held on October 7, 1959 at the Price County Normal Building.



Painting by Alfred Weis, Fifiel, 1977
One of the "Four Stages of Logging."

family as they could about all areas of the county. They also deeply felt that relics of many years ago used by the people of Price County were a visual part of the story of how our pioneers lived and the hardships and sacrifices

Selected notes from the *Minutes* of the first meeting of the Price County Historical Society offers insight of concerns:

“The first meeting of the Price County Historical Society was held on October 7, 1959 at the Normal Gym in Phillips. Present were Mayor Bernard Zacharias, Mr. and Mrs. George Anderson, Prentice; Elsie Liebelt, Fred Anderson, Milo Johansen and Emma Walter. Mr. Shereck from the State Historical Society was also present. It was decided at this meeting to incorporate and become a part of the state organization.

Mr. Shereck stated nine directors could be selected from different parts of the county if desired. For incorporation purposes four directors were chosen: Milo Johansen, Elsie Liebelt, Mayor Bernard Zacharias and Mrs. Betty Anderson. Mr. Dahlie’s and Mr. Wiemer’s names were suggested as people who might be interested and might have time to assist with the society.

Mr. Shereck mentioned the fact that the Historical Society should not just be a means of getting a group of people together to go over past history or just for sociability, but for people who were truly interested in the history of their county. He mentioned other societies in the state, some of which had received allotments from their county boards, others which were self-supporting. He stated it should not be just a matter of paying dues, etc.

He also stated there could be other committees such as a signs committee, membership committee, administration committee and committees for museum and archives, research, publicity and promotion. He stated research and publicity could be one committee and museum and archives a collection committee.

He also suggested there should be three meetings, the first to incorporate, the second an organizational meeting and the third a public meeting inviting others who were interested.

Mr. Shereck stated there are 66 Historical Societies in the state, one at Madeline Island, one in Oneida County and one in Marathon County.

It was thought that our Historical Society should not consist of just older folks, but that membership ought to be some from all age groups and that the society should be for the purpose of preserving and obtaining historical facts which would be of interest to all people.”

Since 1959 successive boards have increased the collections, acquired and maintained two museums, along with other additions to the campus thereby setting the template to fulfill the mission of the Society; to preserve history for future generations.

As such, the Society has long needed a secure, climate-controlled building with sufficient space to house all of our archival documents, which presently include thousands of originals and copies of photographs, maps, journals, diaries, family histories and other historical records of the Price County area. These include photographs, local and family history and documents that predate the formation of Price County to more present day activities. These physical records are of great importance to preserving not only the history of the area, but also to individuals and researchers interested in local history. At present our documents and photographs along with our administrative records are housed in three different buildings located throughout the county and as you can imagine it has become more difficult as our collection grows to manage the logistics of not having a central location in which to consolidate operations.

This building and the positive benefits of centralizing operations and providing access to a collection of this magnitude is a huge, forward-looking venture. This is one of the most significant projects that the Society has embarked on in several years and we are confident that this will be a source of pride not only to our members and friends, but to the entire community. The Louis A. Koenig Research Center, now possible because of an extremely generous donation by Carol J. Koenig, who is the daughter of Louis Aloysius Koenig a native son of Fifield, as well as the generous donations from the community, will provide the Price County Historical Society, Inc. with the essential structure and venue in which to fulfill its mission to preserve the history of the people who made Price County a crossroad of history.

LOUIS ALOYSIUS KOENIG: A Native Son of Fifield, Price County, Wisconsin

By: John L. Berg

Northern Wisconsin was once a vast wilderness dominated by the Isanti Dakota, Anishinaabeg Ojibwe and Odawa, and Menominee nations. This changed after the Treaty of 1854 established reservations for the Indian nations, and the area continued to rapidly change especially after the Civil War decade. The next force of change came in the form of the Wisconsin Central Railroad, organized in Menasha, Wisconsin on February 4, 1871. In June of that year, the Phillips and Colby Construction Company was awarded the contract for construction and began building at Menasha on June 15, 1871. The railroad was built for economic and political reasons, and along the way earned a checkerboard of land sections alternating twenty miles each side of the grade from present Colby to Ashland. Competing interest for these land sections came from Cornell University (whose purchases by 1867 eventually totaled 499,126 acres of prime white pine lands), homesteaders, and some miners. By 1876, the railroad had reached the South Fork of the Flambeau River in what was then the Town of Flambeau in Chippewa County.

Originally a rail siding for dropping off loggers, supplies, tools, and equipment, Fifield became a town site which was surveyed and platted by the Wisconsin Central Railroad in September and October, 1876. Named after the State's Lieutenant Governor from Ashland, it quickly grew into a raw industrial frontier outpost noted for the antics of its burly loggers. Main Street was dotted with establishments serving alcoholic refreshments between the bank and several mercantile establishments.

While it never completely shed its wild reputation, the course of the next thirteen years saw Fifield gain a measure of 19th century refined civilization. A school and post office were established in 1877, and in March 1879, a new county, Price, was carved out of Chippewa and Lincoln Counties. A large hall established the seat of government for both the village and town in 1882, a Catholic church and parsonage were built in 1888, and a new school house was under construction in 1889. Fire consumed the business district and several residences on July 27, 1893, but the dogged resolve of the citizens of the village saw its

rebirth, with a large, two-story frame building erected to serve the village and Town of Fifield in 1894. This building continues to occupy its original location now as The Old Town Hall Museum housing collections of the Price County Historical Society, Inc.

It was the decade of the 1880s that saw the influx of immigrants from



Johann (John) and Theresa
parents of Louis A. Koenig

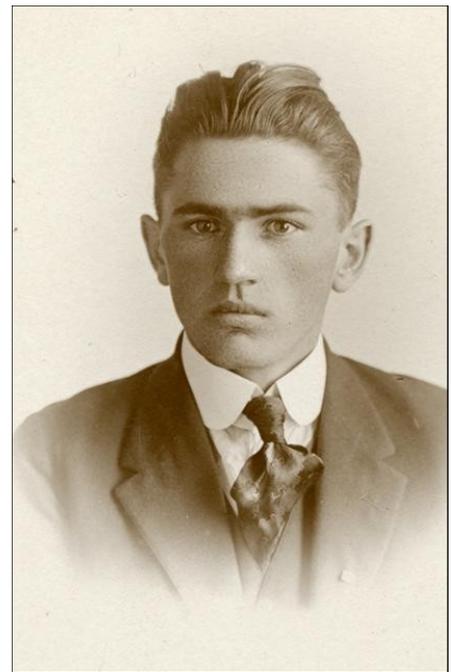
Europe, including Johann Baptiste König, born March 31, 1855 in Eisenstein, Kingdom of Bavaria, and Theresa Kundingner, who was to become his wife, born September, 1856 in Zelezná Ruda, Bohemia part of the Austrian Empire, now Czechoslovakia. Their granddaughter [Louis Koenig's daughter] Carol Koenig, is the family historian and was told that the *"...family never really spoke much English at home, so English was a second language for him [Carol's father Louis] ... geboren - German for "born" - used for birth and death dates in Germany, abbreviated geb. - want to make the point that they used/spoke German, not English, for that generation."* Carol further recalls, that *"... they spoke very low German- from Bavaria and Bohemia - very poor peasants, for sure. Johann Baptiste Koenig met Theresa Kundingner as a young man at the local market in Passau (Germany); the Kundingers (Bohemian) immigrated to the US and Johann (Bavarian) was the only member of his family to come to America to be with her."*

The König name was changed to Koenig after Johann's arrival in the United States, and sometime before Johann and Theresa were married in Chelsea in Taylor County, Wisconsin. Johann worked the woods as a lumberjack while Theresa set up their home. Their first child, Anna, arrived on October 4, 1882, followed by Carolina on April 23, 1884, and Theresa on December 8, 1885. Perhaps prospects looked better further north, for it was on June 1, 1887, that John [Johann] Koenig of Fifield, Price County, Wisconsin

purchased via a \$40.00 indenture, Lot 1 Block 9 in the Village of Fifield from the Wisconsin Central Railroad. Here he built a cabin with a dirt floor and moved Theresa and the three girls into the humble abode. The Koenig's first son, John, arrived on September 7, 1888, followed by Antone on May 4, 1892, and Rose on October 27, 1896. The Koenig's last child, the subject of our story, Louis Aloysius, was born on April 4, 1899 at Fifield and baptized April 13, 1899 by Reverend Father Bernhard Klein, at St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church in Fifield. Johann had also purchased 40 acres out of Fifield where he logged the pine for income, mixed with various stints in the local sawmill to keep food on the table and children clothed. Later on a larger house was built complete with a wood floor which gave a bit more growing room for the family. Johann's grandson, Stephen Louis Koenig recalls his father Louis telling about the hard work that parents had to put in just to survive. As Carol stated earlier, the Koenigs and Kundingers came from peasant stock and once here, it was a constant struggle to carve out a living in the raw Wisconsin frontier. Large gardens were part of the survival and children were enlisted into the family workforce as soon as they were able to contribute. Growing up in Fifield at the turn of the 20th Century had its share of limitations and opportunities. For village dwellers such as the Koenigs, domestic chores, gardening, and school were the required activities. However, there were those times when children, particularly boys, could go down to the Flambeau River to fish, and perhaps get out in the woods in the fall and winter to hunt. Hunting and fishing were necessary parts of life needed to provide food. Friends were made often via church and school, and often these relationships grew into close bonds. As teen years beckoned, opportunities to work in local mercantile businesses or in a local trade such as a livery or blacksmith shop might have emerged. By their late teens there were the traditional opportunities of marriage for the girls and mill work, woods work, trades work, or mercantile work for the boys. This is the world into which the subject of our story, Louis Aloysius Koenig, was born and raised.

Recollections of Louis by his children Stephen and Carol emphasized his love of the outdoors – especially the joy of fishing and hunting. Both children relate tales of Louis' physical stamina and his adventurous plunging into the woods on the deer

hunt - much to the dismay of his nephews and cousins who feared he might get lost. If this is Louis in later life, then is it not reasonable to infer that he learned those skills as a young man hunting and fishing in the wilds around Fifield? In fact, Louis' love of the outdoors would come to play a very pivotal role in his future career choice.



Louis A. Koenig, Fifield High School Class of 1918.

Louis was also a solid academic student and demonstrated promise as a scholar – he loved to read. Between his family responsibilities, those of church and school, and his desire to hunt and fish, Louis Koenig led a full life as a young man. Louis graduated in May, 1918 from Fifield High School, a time when the Great War was raging in Europe. Inducted in the United States Army at Madison, Wisconsin on October 11, 1918, at the rank of private, Louis was eager to demonstrate his love of America, the country in which he was born. On October 11, 1919, he entered into a Student Army Training Camp, and on his enlistment record, answered the statement "*Knowledge of any vocation*" with "*railroad yard clerk.*"

The Great War ended with the Armistice on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month in 1918 when Louis was literally on a ship in New York harbor, waiting to be shipped to Europe to fight. He did not deploy overseas nor experience combat, but he continued his service until honorably discharged on December 13, 1919 whereupon he was rated in good health and excellent character. He was entitled to travel pay to Madison, and from there he returned to his parents' home in Fifield. Carol recalls that her father was very proud to have served because he was very grateful for the liberties, freedoms, and opportunities as an American citizen. Louis' discharge was opportune as he arrived home

to spend time with his parents; although we do not have a record of her health, Theresa Kunding Koenig died December 22, 1919, at Fifield and is buried in the Forest Home Cemetery there. How this affected Johann we can only guess—he was 64 years old, and Louis, as the youngest child, and single with no obligations, would have been the likeliest one expected to provide for his father.



Private Louis A. Koenig WWI

Thus, once again in civilian life, Louis sought employment in the local lumber camps. Winter was prime time for woods work and Louis worked a variety of jobs from axe man to camp cook. Carol relates stories about his skills honed as a pancake “flipper.” Louis developed prowess in flipping pancakes on the big camp stove much to the enjoyment of his fellow

cookees – what the boss cook thought of his skills is not known. Stephen also related a story that Louis told him about working in the pond at the local mill as a “river pig” using the long pike-pole and peavey hook, and walking logs in the Flambeau to get them to the bull chain at the mill. Louis lost his balance and fell off the logs and into the river, and frantically struggled to grab a log and get out from between the logs. Stephen recalled his dad said that it was quite a harrowing experience; once Louis fell in the water, the big logs quickly closed together and blocked his way out of the water. Louis said he was a log roll survivor and had enough of that!

During the summer months, Louis parlayed his fishing expertise into serving as a guide for tourists. He would help them pack their gear and camping equipment into the wood guide boats and row them to destinations to set up camp. From there he took the tourists out on the water and guided them to the best holes to fish. He then cooked shore lunches and later at camp set up the meals, cooked them and settled everyone into camp for the night. Remember when I said these skills would be pivotal in Louis’ career choice? Stephen relates that his father’s reputation caught the attention of one of the executives of the Boston Store, with offices at that time in Chicago, Illinois. Price County was long

an attraction for the well-to-do sportsmen from Milwaukee and Chicago, due in large part to the advertisements of the Wisconsin Central Railroad and later the Soo Line Railroad. As the story goes, this executive hired Louis as his guide for the week he stayed up north, and was so impressed with his guide skills and his camp management, that he hired Louis upon each return trip. It was during one of these trips that the Boston Store executive queried Louis about what he was going to do for a career. It was the executive [himself a Northwestern University alumnus] who offered Louis a recommendation for entrance at Northwestern University in Chicago if he wanted to pursue his education. So how could this “kid” from little Fifield Wisconsin with only a rural high school education and a year’s worth of honorable military service prove he had the intellectual potential to take on Northwestern? Perhaps his army experience was the impetus that made him aware of the world beyond Fifield. Having successfully negotiated the rigors of military life, Louis demonstrated he had the ability to achieve beyond his means. We may infer that he realized he faced an up-hill struggle, for pursuit of an advanced education meant he also faced making a break from the lifestyle and culture of rural northern Wisconsin, where the value of education was not always understood or appreciated. And consequently, it meant a break from family and friends. While this is only speculation, and we don’t know what Johann thought of this, we do see Louis’ resolve and confidence to take a measured risk in the world beyond Fifield. The first logical decision was to challenge himself at an intermediate level and he did so by enrolling in the County Normal School at Stevens Point, Wisconsin presumably in the fall semester of 1921. This provided him with a reasonable challenge to develop his academic skills in an environment conducive to students making the first academic challenge beyond rural schools. As of this writing, we don’t know his courses of study; it is known Louis attended Stevens Point through 1923, and evidently achieved an academic record that earned him enrollment at Northwestern University School of Law in 1924. And let’s not forget the offer of a recommendation from the Boston Store executive who valued Louis’ guiding and saw potential in the young man. Having earned a record of academic distinction with a recommendation from a patron got Louis to the next level. And he applied himself to make the most of this opportunity.

Carol and Stephen both recall their father telling of long hours studying while paying his way through school. Jobs as a time keeper and night watchman at the University's Medical School allowed time for studying, while other jobs such as working downtown restaurants did not. Both children recall their father remembering his long arduous hours of work—and that he relished the challenges. Time for the amenities of college life were limited for Louis; he did join Sigma Delta Kappa, a men's professional fraternity for law, established on campus in 1921, but otherwise he was all business. Stephen did not recall his father mentioning anything about dormitory life; he presumed his father lived in a room closer to downtown Chicago. Persistent work and diligent study paid its dividends in the spring of 1927 when Louis A. Koenig graduated from the Northwestern University's School of Law. The next challenge was admission to the Wisconsin Bar. Louis passed the exams and earned admission to the Wisconsin Bar on October 4, 1927. Now, newly minted and licensed, Louis A. Koenig returned to Price County to put his education to work. In 1928 he established a legal practice in the county seat at Phillips, where opportunity for business was greater than in other Price County communities.

This is just the beginning of the story of what was to become an acclaimed career and a chance meeting with a young woman who was to change his life. In the fall newsletter part two will fill in the contours of the life and times of this native son of Fifield.



Louis A. Koenig Confirmation photograph taken sometime between 1912-1916 outside St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church, Fifield.
 Back Row Last man on right: Father Charles Schwaab {served St. Francis from 1912-1916}
 Middle Row second from left Men: James E. Feely. First girl ? Feely
 Seated: L-R Louis A. Koenig
 All others not identified at this time.
 Can you help with any identifications?

All photographs of the Louis A. Koenig family are from the Carol J. Koenig collection in the Price County Historical Society, Inc. Archives.

UPDATE:

Many of you have received in the mail or by e-mail a letter announcing the building of the Louis A. Koenig Research Center. We have had such positive feedback to this announcement and many donations have begun to be received. As you know in addition to the extremely generous donation by Carol J. Koenig, the Price County Historical Society has set a goal to raise an additional \$80,000. So far we have received \$15,000 toward that goal.

However, we also need to make a clarification on the donor recognition wall. There has been some confusion on the dollar amount for placement of names on the wall. The Board of Directors set the amount at \$150.00 **per individual**. As an example, that would mean, that if a couple wishes both of their names on the wall; the amount needed to include **both names** would be \$300.00. There have also been requests to donate as a family, business, etc. We request that if you have any questions regarding your donation or proposed donation that you contact our President, Etola Foytek, and discuss this with her. You can reach Etola at 715-339-2415 or by e-mail at efputter@pctcnet.net. We regret any confusion and thank you for supporting this project.

FORWARD BANK CHARITABLE MONEY MARKET ACCOUNT (CMMA)

Would you like to help with a charitable donation to the Society? If you have this type of account at Forward Bank and as of yet have not designated a charity to receive a yearly donation on your behalf please consider contacting Forward Bank and designating Price County Historical Society, Inc. as your "Charity of Choice." If you think that you may wish to pursue this type of account in the future or want more information about it, please contact Forward Bank. A flyer with information is also enclosed.

BRICK PLAZA EXPANSION AT FIFIELD SCHOOL MEMORIAL

Plans are to once again expand the brick plaza if we can get enough orders for bricks to make the expansion work with the present design. We will need at least 20 brick orders to make this happen. At present we have five orders with possibilities for several more. We would like to have this expansion done by the end of summer or early fall. Please read the enclosed flyer for more information. We will be including the flyer on our web and facebook site. Please also share this information with anyone that you think would be interested. You can contact Lorraine (Laurie) Pilch at 715-339-2481 or by e-mail at rjppilch@pctcnet.net for any additional information, questions or assistance in placing an order.

MEMBERSHIP

As of this newsletter publication we still have some members that have not yet renewed for 2021. If you see on your mailing label (the red portion) the year 2020 and you are not a life member then that means your renewal is due. We hope that you consider renewing your membership as we don't want you to miss out on all the exciting times ahead for the Society. A membership renewal form is included with the newsletter. If you know of someone that might be interested in joining the Society please encourage them to do so as we are always happy to have new members. Also memberships make a nice gift. You may renew by sending the membership form in with your check or online through our gift shop. Our members are the heart and soul of our organization and we appreciate each and everyone of you.

GARDENERS NEEDED. CAN YOU VOLUNTEER?



The Price County Historical Society is in need of individuals who can volunteer their time for some gardening of flowerbeds at the Greenfield School. Your help is requested as this is a rather nice accent to our grounds and they need some sprucing up along with some regular fall, spring and summer maintenance. Please call Etola Foytek at (715) 339-2415 or e-mail her at efputer@pctcnet.net to volunteer, ask questions or receive further information.

THE OLD TOWN HALL AND GREENFIELD SCHOOL MUSEUMS IN FIFIELD WILL BE OPEN FROM 11 AM TO 3 PM EVERY SATURDAY THIS SUMMER.

THIS SCHEDULE WILL CONTINUE THROUGHOUT THE SUMMER WITH THE LAST OPEN DAY ON SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 4 OF LABOR DAY WEEKEND.

STOP IN AND SEE SOME OF OUR NEW DISPLAYS!