

Fort Recovery State Museum Newsletter July, 2020

WooHoo – The Museum Opens for 2020

The long-awaited day – Wednesday, July 1! The museum will be open for the 2020 season from 12:00 to 5:00 every day through July and August, and like prior years, will be open those hours on weekends in September.

In order to reopen, we had to write a reopening plan including all the safety measures to be implemented because of the pandemic. It was approved pending the replacement of the huge and detailed displays that had been removed back in February so that our big window could be replaced. Those displays were put back

on Thursday, so we received permission to open the first of July. A huge Thank YOU to Louis Diller and Don Lennartz (with on-site assistance from Bob Portz) who completed that task. These volunteers are members/trustees of the Fort Recovery Historical



Society and are retired from professions that make them expert volunteers. We are so darned lucky to have experts, Don Lennartz, Louie Diller, and Bob Portz!

Special Health/Safety Provisions in Place

A top priority of the museum is now the safety of visitors and staff, so therefore in keeping with the policy of OHC, Fort Recovery Museum will be following guidelines provided by the Ohio Department of Health. From 12:00 to 1:00 each day will be designated as elderly and health challenged visitor time. During this hour each day, masks are required to be worn. For the rest of the time, masks are recommended but not required. Visitors are asked to maintain six feet of distance from other visitors, unless they are part of a family group.

A few of the adaptations that have been made to accommodate the ODH safety procedures include canceling the yearly speaker series (September is still on hold depending on conditions then) which had been set and advertised for 2020, removing the children's dress-up/play area, and limiting the number of visitors permitted in each room at a time. Group tours will be generally discouraged. Museum personnel and volunteers will be deep cleaning the museum each day and will do intermittent cleaning throughout visitor hours. Hand washing with soap in the restrooms will be encouraged, and hand sanitizer will be on hand at the admission counter. Sneeze guards have also been placed at Admissions and Souvenir Sales.

OHC has been very helpful in securing some of our needed supplies! They have also helped guide us through this process. We appreciate the organization and their people with whom we work.

July 12 Speaker, Seth Angel, Postponed

Because of ODH restrictions, The Saga of Ohio's Moravian Indians; The Gnadenhutten Massacre by Seth Angel, a Moravian and a Schoenbrunn site volunteer has been postponed until July, 2021. We have had a speaker series for at least the last 10 years. It is a professional and personal disappointment not to be able to present our scheduled speakers for this year. This has been a great tool of education, discussion and fostering interest in our history and in our museum itself.

Patrons – You are Amazing and Appreciated

Donations continue to come in for the support of the Fort Recovery Museum's efforts. We can't tell you how much those are appreciated. A new Patron List accompanies this newsletter with names added since it last was mailed. There are big and small things on our "Needs" list! Monument Lighting, Building Repairs, Dead Elm Trees Removal, etc. And if funds were available at some point, we certainly would like to continue the history-themed murals project in Fort Recovery.

Monument Lighting

A group of interested individuals and families have expressed interest and support for the lighting of our Fort Recovery Monument. Progress is being made in that effort. Stay tuned for an update in the August Newsletter.

Building Repairs

Just like you homeowners, you know there is a never-ending list of to-dos when it comes to maintenance and updates. Some of the museum's building needs are getting serious. This grand, beautiful building is 81 years old and beginning to show some age. (It was the last WPA Project and was built in 1938. See document below) A walk around the building, reveals rotting wood (especially around the windows), windows that need re-caulking and much wood trim/structures that needs to be sanded and repainted. Certainly, we want to be good stewards of this beautiful historic structure.



Fort Recovery Opera House (You can be involved even if not from Fort Recovery!)

A group of ambitious folks who value history and/or culture are working together to save and perhaps restore the Fort Recovery Opera House - a community treasure. Opera Houses were built in the 1800's and early 1900's in community's having a greater Protestant population. (Catholics typically had larger churches which could serve as gathering places for their parishioners.) These "Opera Houses" served all kinds of functions and events from Medicine Man shows to Farm Institute meetings; from vaudeville shows to genuine operatic performances; from school plays to high school graduations, etc.

The Fort Recovery Opera House, a rarity in the area, is located (typically) on the second floor of the building on the northeast corner of Wayne/Butler streets (stoplight corner). In September of 1883 Ida Schneider bought this tract of land from John Wurdemann and built the structure that stands there now. It housed two businesses on the bottom floor, now occupied by Brockman Appliances. Russell Morvilius purchased this building for his daughter who was a very young girl at the time. She showed amazing musical talent, singing and playing the viola. He saw the Opera House as a venue to showcase her talent. In time, she rose to the level of international prominence and even performed for the Queen of England.

What makes the FR Opera House even more impressive is its excellent condition. The pictures/portraits painted on the walls still remain quite visible and attractive. The flats for school plays not only contain original scenery but also the names of school children and others who performed there.

You can tour this one-of-a-kind beauty, but tickets must be procured (limiting group size). Tickets/reservations can be procured at Kaup Pharmacy, 419-375-2323. The tours are held on Sunday Evenings at 5:30 on June 28, July 12, 19, 26; and August 2 and 9. Check the Fort Recovery Opera House Facebook page for updates and pictures!

See you at the museum? Yeah, finally ! Nancy Knapke, Site Manager
And it Might Not Have Been – The Story of the Museum Building – WPA Project 1938

Sunset – and a tall, gray-haired man with the blue eyes of a dreamer sat alone gazing at his dream. This vision-now almost a reality – is Fort Recovery's new library-museum building, the achievement of a visionary with the driving power of a realist.

How Fort Recovery almost missed getting this beautiful structure --- how for months it hung in the balance possibly few have known or possibly ever would know but for the brief, modest remarks of a man, the above, a man who talks little and then seldom about himself. This day he happened to be caught in one of his rare moods of confidence.

"Yes, I come here (the library building in front of which he was sitting in his car) every evening after dinner to smoke my pipe and study the mistakes I've made during the day."

Yet to us as we listened to his unassuming, low-toned voice, I thought how really few he must have made after all, for the new and long-awaited home of the library-museum is, as all must agree, an artistic perfection.

They called it "The Hopeless Job" down at Columbus at the Ohio Historical Society office," consulting engineer Mooney's voice continued. Last year I had 45 such projects to supervise and check. This year I have only this one--- the last and most discouraging. Lack of money and lack of WPA men – even lack of interest, had kept obstacles constantly in the way of its materialization. Finally , the Ohio Historical office asked me if, in spite of the difficulties, I thought the building could be completed. Yes, I said, anything can be done, I suppose, although this is a tougher job than any in the state. Little did I know then that I was the one who was to get that job to do. Had I known it then , I would not have been so optimistic.

"Blue prints could not be followed; constant readjustments had to be made to meet the situation and the material at hand. WPA labor was very inexperienced and far from adequate. It was a battle from start to finish, and always one had to argue one's way through. I was determined, however, that in spite of difficulties, this should not be a slipshod job. Thirty-five years' experience as an engineer have taught me to have deep and profound regard and a real reverence for perfection in construction. I have so revered this building that I have actually feared it. I was determined and insistent that those old rotted timbers and that old roofing and flooring, at first scheduled to be used, should not be used in this building. And I won out." Stroking the fine white oak flooring, he added, "This is the finest flooring that can be bought."

"This building, he continued, I can say proudly, will stand until the last whistle blows. Look at those cantilever beams," and he pointed to those which supported the bay casements facing the West, "Look how perfectly they are finished underneath." and even without an engineer's experience, we could see the perfection of their construction. Like the old Greeks, Consulting Engineer Mooney builds not for the present but for the future, and his handiwork is as finished where the eye cannot see as where it can. His is the mind and eye of an artist, and this building may well be a monument to his artistry. One can see, too, that this may well be the favorite of all of his historical projects.

And like the brain child of any great artist, it is a handsome creation. It may well compare with a beautiful canvas or oil, a perfect statue or bronze, or a flawless musical score or tone poem.

When we commented on the beauty of the north wall, with its balance of fireplace and beams, Engineer Mooney said, "Yes, another engineer asked me the other day how I achieved the symmetry of those lines, and I replied, 'Oh, they just happened that way.'" This was a modest answer, we thought, for those things do not just happen, --- they are first dreamed.

On the outside, the north wall is nobly designed of matched native stone. Beyond one sees the gently sloping landscape to the Wabash River.

Of beautiful proportions, this library will in future years be a gracious host to many generations of readers and seekers after truth. With its dark stained beams, gracefully arched, studded and joined; its majestic and towering fireplace, also a gem in design; the walls to be lined with books; these casement windows opening to the west; and in the evening, the setting sun pouring its glow into this tranquilly and artistically perfect room --what a picture!

And then this man with the eye of an artist also proved that his was the soul of an artist, and this he had put in the beautiful tone poem, which he now had almost completed.

"I would like," this unusual dreamer-realist confided, "to see just one thing more. I would like to see, up there at the south end, an organ, with the burnt gold of the sunset filtering in. And I, myself, would like to lay those majestic strains of that soul-stirring composition of a great master ---"The Lost Chord."