



HERSCHER AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY & MUSEUM

JANUARY 2025
NEWSLETTER

"from past generations to future generations"

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

As I write this letter, we are fast approaching the end of 2024 and now look not only at the past year's events but are heading "full steam ahead" into 2025.

There are stories yet to be told, artifacts to be gathered, and events to be planned. Along with these noble endeavors, there are buildings and properties to be maintained and updated along with future planning to be considered.

As you will see in the newsletter, there are some pictures and articles on the Christmas Community Open House event at Anderson House. It should not be lost on any of us the importance of our very beginnings as a historical society. With that in mind, I wish to give a SHOUT OUT to the Foundation Board, which began over 20 years ago, and whose vision, effort, and commitment were the catalysts for where we are today as a historical society. The early funding raised to purchase the building for our Main Street Museum and later for the upstart of the donated Anderson House fueled those big projects.

It is our hope that as we move into 2025, you can be a part of that movement that finds it "worthy to hold on to our history" even for those not yet born.

We wish you all a very Happy New Year!

Mary Kirstein
HAHS President

MISSION STATEMENT

Herscher Area Historical Society's purpose is to capture and preserve history and artifacts related to Herscher and the surrounding area from past generations to future generations.

HONORING GERALD KROESCH



Steve Coy presented three pictures of Gerald Kroesch to the Herscher Area Historical Society. Steve worked part-time with Gerald Kroesch and the previous owners, Tim Gernon and Bruce Schreffler, at Schreffler Funeral Home in Herscher. In the photo on the left, Mr. Kroesch is seated between Mary Kirstein, president of the Herscher Area Historical Society, and Steve Coy. The photos were given in honor of Gerald's many years of service to his Herscher community. The families of Tim Gernon and Bruce Schreffler wanted to thank and recognize Gerald for his years working for the funeral home. The building was built around 1899, and it has been renamed "Anderson House" after the original owner, Mayor Anderson. In the center picture given, Gerald is standing with Jim Orrison, owner and director of the funeral home before the Schrefflers and Gernons. Mr. Kroesch worked for the three owners over a period of many years.

HAHS WILL HOST A PRESENTATION OF...

Everglades of the North: The Story of The Grand Kankakee Marsh

Saturday, January 25 – 1:00pm

at The Anderson House

161 W Myrtle St. in Herscher

This film was produced by Tom Desch, Brian Kallies, Jeff Manes, and Patricia Wisniewski. Tom Desch and possibly other members of the production team will be present to share the story of how this film came to be. Many people have seen this film previously; however, it is a local story that is worth telling and retelling. In the event of severe weather, this presentation will be rescheduled on an alternate date. If interested in attending this event, please send an email to herscherareahistory@gmail.com or call 815-426-2627 and leave a message.

CHRISTMAS DÉCOR SALE

Our Christmas Décor Sale in November brought out excited shoppers anxious to find that perfect item to decorate their home. We would like to thank everyone who donated items for this sale and those who purchased their new-found holiday treasures! The profit made at this event helps us to maintain our museums.



We will be accepting Christmas items during the month of January for our 2025 sale. If you have items you would like to donate, please email or call us to set up a drop-off time.

CHRISTMAS OPEN HOUSE



Keith and Penny Berger

The Herscher Area Historical Society hosted a Vintage Christmas Open House at the Anderson House Museum on December 19th. Members and guests were able to tour the museum all decorated for Christmas while enjoying homemade cookies and sipping on mulled wine or hot cider. More than 35 people attended the event.

A special addition to the display was an antique sleigh, on loan from Wayne Berger. The sleigh was out front for family and friends to take a picture in, all decked out for the holidays. Wayne said that the sleigh dates back to the late 1800s. Maddie Rogers volunteered her time to take pictures of those who visited.



Guests were also able to purchase a limited edition Christmas Ornament with a winter picture of Herscher Main Street. Contact the museum if you would like to purchase one.

Those visiting the Anderson House during the holidays will see our displays transformed with winter dresses and hats, common toys that would have been gifts under the tree, and even a Christmas Tree stand from the 1800s. If you have been through the museum before, please note that the displays are always changing with new items that have been donated to display.

5-YEAR PLANNED IMPROVEMENTS

These updates and improvements are the top projects that the board would like to complete through the donation of special funds.

MAIN STREET MUSEUM INTERIOR UPDATES

- Paint Entry Way
- New Flooring in entryway

EXTERIOR UPDATES

- Exterior Lighting for Mural

ANDERSON HOUSE MUSEUM INTERIOR UPDATES

- Ductless Heating & AC
- Railing to upstairs and down
- New Exterior Door for Meeting room
- Track Lighting

EXTERIOR UPDATES

- Walkways for Annex
- Front entrance ramp repairs
- Landscaping

CARRIAGE HOUSE UPDATES

- Front & Side Door Accessorized
- Interior Paint

MUSEUM HOURS

MAIN STREET MUSEUM

190 S. Main, Herscher

Open Fridays 9-11 AM and
the First Sunday of Each Month 1-3 PM

ANDERSON HOUSE

161 W. Myrtle, Herscher

Open the First Sunday of Each
Month 1-3 PM

Museum Board Meetings take place at the Anderson House on the Fourth Monday of each month at 5:30pm. Exceptions will be posted at 190 S. Main and on our website at herscherhistory.org. All members are welcome to attend.

Call the Museum at 815-426-2627 to visit the museums at a time convenient for you.

Email: herscherareahistory@gmail.com **Website:** herscherhistory.org

See last page of newsletter for additional contact information

RUTH KRUSE by Carol Webber



Ruth Kruse, born October 24, 1943, is one of nine children of Alice (Armstrong) and Laverne Kruse in Herscher. "I was born and raised on a farm two miles south of Herscher on the Herscher Road, and one of my brothers, Gerald, lives there today." She commented, "I didn't have to do farm work because my six brothers did those tasks, but the house work was done by my sisters (Janet and Lori) and me."

Ruth's siblings are **pictured below celebrating their parents' 60th wedding anniversary; from left standing: Karl (married to Paula) lives in rural Herscher; Gerald (married to Barb) lives on the farm; Ronald (married to Roxanne) lives in Kankakee; Randy (married to Carol) lives in Southern Pines,**

NC; Wayne (married to Elaine) lives in Missoula, Montana; Kenneth (married to Rhonda) lives in Peoria; seated from left: Ruth; Lori (who lives in Herscher); Alice and Laverne Kruse; and Janet Kresl (husband John is deceased) lives in Dwight. Janet is the oldest, followed by Ruth, Ronald, Kenneth, Gerald, Wayne, Karl, Randy, and Lori. Both of Ruth's parents are deceased and are buried at the Lutheran Cemetery south of Herscher, a mile north of their home. Ruth attended Herscher Grade School when it was located at the south end on Main Street and then continued at the north Main Street new grade school and graduated from Herscher High School in 1961.



Throughout her youth, she remembers the Labor Day Celebrations. "We came to town to eat lunch with relatives at either my Grandpa Otto and Grandma Carrie Kruse's home on South Elm Street or my great aunt and uncle, Ida and Vico Wadleigh, who lived at 163 North Oak, where I live now. After lunch, all of us kids walked to the park to enjoy seeing our friends or participating in and enjoying the activities and events there. After a return to the home for more food, we would venture back to the park for more fun. Other relatives' names who lived in and around Herscher when I was growing up were Dickman, Schlaich, Berger, Schwark, Witheft, Mau, and many more Kruse/Armstrong families. That fact resulted in many, many relatives.

She said she and her cousins always watched the parade from the corner of Main and Kankakee Street, next to the war memorial that was right in the middle of the intersection. “We never missed the parade,” she remembers.

After graduating from high school, she earned a degree in nursing from Silver Cross School of Nursing in Joliet. Next, she worked from 1964 to 1968 for Dr. Reinhold Schuller, whose office was on Main Street. “Bonnie Berger worked there too. We are related through our grandparents,” she added.

She next was a camp counselor at Walcamp in Kingston, IL, near the Wisconsin border, plus Ruth was a residence counselor at Concordia Teachers College, River Forest, IL; a missionary nurse in Nigeria; and then a public health nurse at Tulsa-City County Health Department, a career which lasted a total of 37 years.

Ruth tells her story of adventure and satisfaction mixed with daily challenges. “My greatest adventure started when Walcamp camp was almost over, and I had no job to return to.” She explained that the camp director asked her, “What are you going to do or what do you want to do?” Ruth replied, kind of joking, that she had thought about going to Africa to work. Ruth remembered, “The director picked up the telephone, dialed a number, and talked with a person for a couple minutes. He then handed me the telephone and said that the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS) Director of Medical Mission in St. Louis wished to speak with me.” Needless to say, Ruth was taken by surprise and spoke with him for five minutes. “When I hung up, I told the camp director that I would not be at work the next day since I was traveling to St. Louis,” she smiled. My parents’ and siblings’ reactions were “very accepting of my decision. Only Grandpa Alfred Armstrong couldn’t understand why I wanted to go there to work,” Ruth said.

“The next day I met with the Director, his secretary, and a nurse who was home on leave. After a couple of hours, I had filled out papers for a passport and visa and became an employee. I was given more information about Nigeria and the mission field than I can remember,” she explained. “After four months, I was boarding a plane at the Kankakee Airport and headed for Nigeria,” she said, “and I arrived in January 1970 which was a couple weeks after the tribal Biafran war had ended in Nigeria.” She explained that her first thoughts when she arrived were that the country was “hot, humid, and noisy.” She stayed in a guest house with a couple of other nurses from the LCMS Mission. “One of them was from Green Valley, Illinois, and her brother-in-law was the principal of Dwight (IL) Grade School, where my sister Janet taught first grade.” Ruth commented that this fact made her feel more at ease. Other nurses were in Lagos, Nigeria, resting and buying supplies. “After a couple days, we headed to our mission station,” she reported. “It was an all-day trip over bumpy roads; we were where the fighting had taken place, and we began helping at a nutrition station. There were many malnourished children. We went out into the bush and gave (CMS) corn, milk, and soybeans to try to positively affect their diets and health conditions. The items were high in protein and cooked like we prepare oatmeal.”

Since the mission group members were staying in private homes (with the owners away), the groups were told to move on by the Mission Leaders when the owners returned home or by officials. The local Army was always present and decided often who moved on. “After about a month, we were sent to Asaba, Nigeria, where I stayed for six months, working and helping with adults and children needing help.”

Ruth was assigned to the Immanuel Medical Center in the village of Yahe. “This center began in the 1960’s, but the clinic was ransacked during the war, and new supplies had to be purchased,” she remembered. “The clinic was up and running when I arrived. Each morning, prayers were said by the staff before the clinic opened. We had two metal sheds where sick children and their mothers stayed until the children were well enough to return



to their villages. We had a maternity ward plus a village where patients with tuberculosis stayed for six weeks of treatment.”

Ruth reported that in August 1973 she returned home to take a Nurse Practitioner course at St. Louis’ Washington University and then returned to Nigeria in 1974. She commented that there were often 50 in-patients at their clinic. “All patients had to have someone come along

with them, plus bring their own mat, blankets, food, and cooking utensils,” she said, comparing it with the medical care in the United States. **Photo left shows the clinic staff, maintenance workers, and household assistants with Laverne, Alice, and Ruth Kruse seated in the front row.**

For three weeks in 1975, Ruth’s parents made the trip to Nigeria. “My dad was still telling people about the trip until he passed in 2004. Some of the adventures included riding in my car with a five-gallon can filled with gasoline (petro as the British call it). The petro stations were few and far between, and we ended up needing that five gallons on our excursion. Visiting a game park, we were charged by a herd of elephants. When visiting a village, the chief thought my dad was rich, not monetarily, but because he had six sons. The chief even got on the floor and bowed down to Mom saying that she was a good woman and that she and her daughter looked alike. They enjoyed the food but when they were told what they were eating, they sometimes had a look of ‘you must be kidding me’ look on their faces. I was glad they visited because it gave them relief to know that I was in no danger,” Ruth related about their visit.

“The Nigerian staff was wonderful. They attended classes and learned to dispense medicine, give injections, clean wounds, make and dispense powdered milk with palm oil, and many other duties as assigned,” Ruth summarized. “We had a trained lab tech who would report blood counts and blood-borne diseases. Also, a certified staff person was trained to diagnose and treat many illnesses. Several staff members served as interpreters for the many dialects in our area; some staff could speak five dialects. We had a Nigerian midwife who assisted with the maternity clinic and delivering babies.” **Photo right is of two new mothers and their babies with Ruth standing behind.** The average weight of these babies was four pounds; at that time approximately 50 per cent of babies survived from newborn to two years of age.

She listed the most treated diseases as follows: anemia, malnutrition, kwashiorkor (protein deficiency), malaria, filaria (parasites in the blood), infected wounds, tuberculosis, diarrhea, dehydration, measles, and tetanus. “We had to be prepared,” she commented.

“When there was a measles outbreak, our clinic staff would visit villages to conduct mass clinics. The clinic events would convene at the village’s meeting place, under the big tree in the center. The villagers provided a table for the supplies. Two or three children would be there when we arrived, but when the mothers knew that we were there, they gathered their apprehensive little ones for the shots. Within 15 minutes, there were 50 to 100 to be treated.”

Ruth reported that her living conditions were comfortable to her; however, she did report that several new nurses returned home within several days because they found the living conditions too rough. “The house was cinder block, with a cement floor, and a tin roof, which was noisy when rain fell on it. We had a gas stove, kerosene refrigerator, kerosene freezer (for frozen medicines), and a water filter,” she remembered. “We had a clinic generator that was used from 7 to 9 p.m. and could be turned on for emergencies. With no air conditioners, fans could be used two hours in the evening.” Temperatures could reach 85 to 103 degrees during the day, and remain at 70 to 80 degrees at night.

“During the rainy season (the months of March through September), we had plenty of water, but during the dry season (months of October through February) we had to make our cistern water last for six months, and water rationing was enforced. I was shocked when I returned to the United States where water rationing was explained as watering one’s lawn only three days a week and washing one’s car could be done on only certain days,” she smiled.

“Part of my salary (in the local money denominations of “naira”) was hand delivered by Mission personnel, and the rest of the salary was placed into my home-town bank account,” she explained.



“Thus, I had funds to purchase some of my needs, such as, food, hand-made clothing, hand-crafted souvenirs, car parts, and fuel,” she recalled.

“Our transportation was mostly by motorcycle or land rover. Herscher’s Trinity Lutheran Church’s congregation donated money to help purchase an automobile, and we felt as if we were living in luxury and were very grateful,” she commented. **“The vehicle (above photo) with Ruth and Sandy was a VW Passat blue exterior with white interior, front-wheel drive, and four on the floor.”**

Fortunately, during her years in Nigeria, she received letters and cards from family, friends, and church members which helped her stay in touch with home. Ruth said, “One time the Herscher Ladies Aid sent a package of food in November; it arrived at Easter.”

In December 1976, Ruth returned to Illinois and attended St. Francis College in Joliet where she earned her bachelor’s degree in Health Arts. “For the next 23 years beginning in 1978, I worked in a nursing position at the Tulsa-City County Health Department and found many rewards there too by helping people in need in Oklahoma,” she said.

“I had always wanted to move back to Herscher where I grew up so that I could be close to my family,” she reported. In June 2019, Ruth had an opportunity to return to her hometown of Herscher. She currently lives on North Oak Street in a home her great-grandmother Mary Jane (Golding) Armstrong **(photo right)** had built in 1897.

Her son Alfred was Alice’s father and Ruth’s grandfather. “I daydream about what it must have been like in those days,” she wonders.

She commented, “I thank God for the opportunities I never imaged that I would have. Since then I have had the opportunity to serve with MUCH ministry in Haiti after a deadly earthquake which killed thousands of people and with MOST (Mission Opportunities Short Term) in Guatemala.”

Ruth summarized, “I have learned that people all over the world have the same basic needs: food, water, shelter, and love. The type of each need depends on their cultures.” However, Ruth summarizes, “My bucket list is not finished; I would still like to zip line the Royal Gorge, Colorado, visit the site of the Field of Dreams in Iowa, and attend a taping of the Price in Right television program in California.”

Ruth’s favorite Bible verse has served her well: “Ask and it shall be given you; seek and ye will find; knock and the door will be opened. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.” Matthew 7:7-8.

“God is so Good!” she exclaimed. “I found Nigeria and its people with their needs to be a place where I was comfortable doing what I had been trained to do.” She said she was confident she could succeed in her work. Interestingly, unlike Herscher, she was not related to anyone in Nigeria.



Contact Us:

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Follow our Facebook Page: Herscher Area Historical Society
Join our Facebook Group: Herscher Area Historical Society/Kankakee County West
Website: herscherhistory.org

REMEMBER HERSCHER AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY IN YOUR ESTATE PLANNING

Your legacy is important to us and our community. Please remember the Herscher Area Historical Society in your final wishes and estate planning. Your gift will ensure that the work of capturing and preserving the history of Herscher and County West continues for future generations. If you have questions, please contact the museum at 815-426-2627 and we will direct you to our legal advisor.



HERSCHER AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY & MUSEUM

SUPPLEMENTAL NEWSLETTER #22

FEBRUARY 2025

"from past generations to future generations"

HERSCHER (1890 – 1899)

By Bob Voss

During the 1890's, Herscher continued to grow. These news clipping will take us up to the turn of the century. Remember we are still in the day of horse and buggy.

- January 2, 1890
The hardware stock of Munger & Seroy is being invoiced at present preparatory to being turned over to Anderson and Provancel Jan. 1, Mr. Shays of Hibbard Spencer Bartlett & Co.'s wholesale house is assisting them.
- April 10, 1890
It must be the tariff is off of sewing machines as one of our young farmers bought one for \$1. "It was both useful and ornamental." We did not learn the name of the machine but it probably was the "Sucker".

Following will be found the secretary's report of the M.E. Sunday school in Herscher for first quarter of 1890: Officers enrolled, 8, average attendance, 6; teachers enrolled, 9, average attendance, 6; number of scholars enrolled, 70, average attendance 52; total number enrolled, 87, average attendance, 64.

(That is a lot of kids)

- May 29, 1890
Messrs. Sam Ether, Truair Comstock, and Salmar and George Mead started Saturday on a fishing excursion to Sugar Island.
- June 5, 1890
Ten of the pupils, Rhoda Bowlby, Ida Griffin, Drusis Flewelling, Bertha Holmes, Julia Ewing, Clarence James, Louis Miller, Henry Herscher, and George Hipke, will graduate Friday, the close of the school year. The graduating exercises will be given Saturday evening 8 o'clock, at the Presbyterian Church.
- August 7, 1890
Corn 41 cents: oats 30 and 31 cents today.

A few farmers have threshed their oats and as far as we have heard the yield is very small and averages for 20 to 25 pounds per basket measure.

The village authorities are putting in a public watering trough on Main Street to be supplied from the water tank. This is a move that will commend itself to all.

(For horses or for the public or what is it?)

- September 27, 1894

Last Friday, Lewis Betz died of consumption at his home on the town line. His funeral was held at the German Methodist Church on Sunday. He was a young man about 20 years of age and had to yield all hopes of a useful and happy life to that dreaded destroyer. His mother and three brothers have died of the same disease. A sister alone survives him.

(German Methodist Church??)

- June 27, 1895

W.H. James, a veteran of the Mexican War and still in the service of Uncle Sam as our worthy postmaster, became weary of life's pilgrimage alone and took unto himself a blushing young wife in the person of Miss Anna Lesch. Congratulations are in order from all quarters. Here are ours, Mr. and Mrs. James.

(William James must have been very young to have fought in the Mexican War 1846-1848)

R.P. Easton had a surveyor out from Kankakee last week and has laid out a plat thirty lots in the black walnut grove. These are offered to the public at prices ranging from \$75 to \$125.

(Does anyone know where black walnut grove is???)

- April 1, 1897

J.A. Fetterly of Herscher spent the day in the city. He has just purchased the 2-story frame building at Herscher occupied by H. James, for a drug store, for \$2,000. The building will be made fire proof by means of asbestos and iron, and has been leased for five years to Mr. James' successor in the drug business.

(This building was on the west side of Main Street where)

- April 29, 1897

Easton & James have bought the lot south of Karcher Bros. Store and will erect a new store building for their bank.

- July 8, 1897

Mrs. R.C. Munger's bakery business has increased to such an extent that it became necessary to build an oven out of doors. This was done during the past week and now she can fill all orders.

- November 11, 1897

**A ROBBERY AT HERSCHER
STORE DESPOILED OF LARGE QUANTITY OF GOODS
Bloodhounds Used to Track Thieves
Scent Leads to Kankakee And is Partially Lost**

The Village of Herscher was thoroughly excited on Thursday because of the burglarizing during the night previous of "The Leader" a gents furnishing store owned by Wolf Lieserowitz.

The generally accepted theory is that the thieves has been in town during the night, and that after Night Watchman Flewelling had retired from duty at his usual tour, 4 a.m., they took some of Jay Vicker's tools from Irwin's blacksmith shop and with them forced an entrance through the back door of the store. A quantity of goods stolen including 100 pairs of pants, 17 overcoats, silk mufflers, handkerchiefs and jewelry estimated to be worth between \$800 and \$900.

The stolen property was loaded into a wagon and driven out of town,

The Village President and others who became interested in detecting the thieves raised \$50 and sent for I. Florey and his two trained blood hounds from Decatur, IL. An old coat and the tools left behind by the guilty parties gave the dogs the scent. A party was organized consisting of Chas. Herscher, A.M. Seroy, Theo Armstrong, of Buckingham, David Miller, Allen Lee, and D. Mead.

Shortly after 7 o'clock last night, the dogs were given the scent and started out on the road north of Herscher, tugging at their leashes held by Mr. Florey and his assistant, G.E. Koontz, who followed at a lively walk. Seven miles were traveled in the first two hours and before 12 o'clock the trained hounds had led the party into Kankakee. The scent had been very distinct on the soft dirt road, but when the macadam pavement on Sough Washington Avenue was reached, the dogs were at a loss to know where to proceed. Too much time had elapsed and too many teams had passed.....the hounds has lost the scent..

The searching party hunted up Constable John Brink, who lead the hounds to the houses of several parties whose past reputation has caused them to be suspected whenever any burglary has been committed.

As they passed into a certain alley, the hounds gave strong evidence of having regained the lost scent, and at once bounded over the ground until they halted at the barn of one of the suspected parties. A brief search of the premises failed to reveal anything, and the searching party rested for the night.

The single horse with which the thieves drove to Kankakee had a peculiarly shaped hoof and shoe, a fact which will aid in the prosecution of the search.

Mr. Leiserowitz and a party of friends came from Herscher this morning and gave States Attorney Cooper the facts as collected. It is understood that as yet the evidence secured is not strong enough to warrant the arrest of anyone.

Mr. Florey and his hounds returned to Decatur this noon.

In connection with the Herscher robbery (Leiserowitz's store) it is stated by a resident of the village that the entire community has been suffering from petty thieving of late. Chickens, ducks, hogs and grain have mysteriously disappeared from a dozen farms within a month. Our informant says the indignation is so strong that some have indulged in talk of organizing a vigilance committee to protect their property from further raids by the vandals. The burglary at Herscher brought the feeling to a climax. The entire community would unite in an effort to apprehend the guilty parties.
(Now this is quite a story)

- January 13, 1898
Julius Wagner is a poorer but wiser man by about fifty pounds of pork. He had hung the cured meat in the upper room of his blacksmith shop, but someone wanted pork and so helped himself, sometime between Saturday night and Monday morning.
(More thievery going on)

The school board had to put two more seats in the high school, there now being fifty regularly attending pupils. This is the largest attendance ever in that department in the history of the city.

- July 12, 1898
Apparently the men of Herscher have a desire to look like boys again or else thought it was house cleaning time for the majority have shaved off their mustaches.

Harry Holloway has moved into the Wreck building with a stock of jewelry. He is a graduate of Chicago College of Horology

(I know, what is horology? It is the science of measuring time and making clocks)

- April 15, 1899
A band of gypsies were in town Monday and made a systematic canvas of the town visiting every back door and begging for food, money and old clothes. Tuesday several men leading some bears were in town, but met with a cold reception.
(Leading some bears...wow. I bet they did get a cold reception)

- December 5, 1899
The roof over the Odd Fellows' building caught fire last Friday morning, but prompt action stopped the flames before the fire got much headway and what might have been a serious conflagration was averted.
(Where was the Odd Fellow's building?)

If you can help us out with some of our questions, please let me know by emailing me at robertlvoss@aol.com.