



# *SELF – TOUR GUIDE*





P.O. BOX 243  
OAK CREEK, WISCONSIN 53154-0243

PRESERVE, ADVANCE, AND SHARE THE HISTORY OF OAK CREEK SINCE 1964

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## **The Meeting House**

### **(Gift Shop, Printing Press, Cobbler Shop)**

This building was originally an office and shop for Forest Hill Memorial Park. It was also the living quarters for the cemetery/museum caretaker. A stone fireplace was built and it became a cozy place to have Historical Society Meetings. In 1987, the meeting room was altered to serve as the location of the gift shop and registration desk for visitors.

### **Genealogical Archive Area**

Various Oak Creek Plat Maps and other information sources are located on the table on the south side of the room. Most of the archive information is located upstairs, including area documents, pictures, records, and area history. Archive information is available by reservation.

**The Gift Shop** contains numerous displays showing photos and locations of the area's schools, Post Offices, churches, and train depots. The Gift Shop offers various items for sale, such as Plat map reproductions, books and homemade items.

**Printing Press Area** is a room established to depict an old newspaper office or print shop. The printing press, type, and other equipment came from an old newspaper office in Sheboygan County at Elkhart Lake. The equipment itself, however, was not used to print newspapers, but more likely items like flyers or small posters.

### **Room Highlights**

The press itself is circa 1890, the large stone rectangle is called a printer's stone and was used to set up type on to make sure it was square before being put in the press. The machine in the SE corner is an old addressing machine.

**The Cobbler Shop** contains a lathe, buffers, sewing machine, shoe repair equipment, and replacement parts from a time when old shoes were fixed not thrown away. The Cobbler Shop shoe repair equipment came from the Sobczak family in memory of Mrs. Sobczak's father.



## **Hughes Log Cabin Homestead - 1844**

The Thomas and Bridget Hughes log cabin was built in 1844 and was located at the end of Ryan Road, near Lake Michigan, where Bender Park is now. It was built on land purchased from the government in 1839 by Patrick Heally. Mr. Heally sold the land to the Hughes on March 18, 1844. Thomas and Bridget selected a spot to build a one-room log cabin near a spring in the center of the 40-acres.

Families got together and helped cut logs until sufficient lumber was available to build. A basement was constructed under the entire log cabin. A dirt floor was left to allow moisture to come through to help preserve the fruit and vegetables. At one end, stone was used to construct the base for a large fireplace, the principal source of heat. The first floor consisted of two large rooms, later divided into three rooms and a pantry. An additional bedroom was located upstairs. The kitchen portion of the building was added probably in the 1920's.

The logs were all cut and hewed right from the property and nails were made or wood pegs were used. The fireplace was at one end of the room, which was used as a kitchen and dining room. While the house was in the process of being built, two big barns were built to house the cows, horses, pigs, and chickens. Later a stone house was built for the chickens and pigs.

Thomas and Bridget were Irish immigrants and several generations of the Hughes family members lived in the house over the years, the last being Matty Hughes, who was town assessor for many years. Thomas was the great grandfather of the late Irene Goebel and Dr. David Barrett, a South Milwaukee dentist. The Milwaukee County Parks Commission donated the homestead to the Historical Society in 1976.

The log cabin portion of the building houses various artifacts that found their way into early homes over the years. The cabin displays are not meant to represent what the cabin looked like at any given time, but provide a cross section of the type of furnishings that were available to Oak Creek residents.

The entire building was modernized during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. When the historical society gained possession in 1976, the clapboards and thick wide boards were stripped off the house revealing 10" by 10" oak logs that had originally been cut from the land. They had to be chinked with mortar and windows and doors had to be repaired. Plaster was removed from most walls and a wooden floor laid. A beautiful stone fireplace was erected to replicate the original.

### **Building Highlights of Special Interest**

#### **In the Kitchen:**

- Wood burning stove (the chamber/lid on the right side of the stove was used to heat water while cooking on the stove or in the oven).
- “Queen of the Household” book (sold door-to-door around the turn of the century as a reference for homemakers covering cooking, entertaining, and home remedies).
- Apple peeler (clamped to table)
- Rug beater
- Foot warmer (rectangular stone with wire handle which was heated by the fireplace and placed inside a blanket and then put on the floor of a horse drawn vehicle during cold weather).
- Butter churn

#### **Pantry area:**

- Milk bottles, kraut cutter, early toasters
- Early mason jars, bottle capper

#### **Living quarters:**

- 1880 organ
- 1890 Stereoscope with pictures
- Old sewing machine
- Loom
- Love seat
- Fainting couch
- Doll House (built by Laverne Hall in the 1930's)
- Photo of Thomas and Bridget Hughes and the log cabin before it was moved to the museum

#### **Bedroom:**

- Corn husk mattress, rope bed frame
- Chamber pot (used as a temporary substitute for a trip to the outhouse at night)
- Wash bowl and pitcher



## **The Blacksmith Shop**

Blacksmiths were an essential part of the community since farming was the livelihood of nearly all the people in the township. Blacksmiths would shoe horses, sharpen, and repair plows and fix just about anything the farmer would bring into the shop.

Originally, located on the northwest corner of Oakwood and Nicholson roads, the Edgar Wohlust blacksmith shop was one of eight blacksmith shops located in the Oak Creek area, the only one preserved. German immigrant, Mr. Niering, built the blacksmith shop in 1841. In approximately 1847, Frank Loppnow purchased the shop.

About 1850, Edgar's father Ernst decided he wanted to become a blacksmith and have his own shop. To learn the trade, Ernst walked 23 miles daily to fulfill his apprenticeship with Andrew Puetz, who had a shop that was located at what is now 51<sup>st</sup> Street (Smith Street) and Drexel Avenue. In 1886, Ernst Wohlust purchased the shop from Mr. Loppnow. Ernst built the shop larger, as there was not room for horse shoeing in the small one. Later, the small shop was annexed to the new one. This was made into a wood working shop where whipple and single tree horse harnesses, wagon poles, wagon wheel spokes and rims were made.

Edgar learned the trade from his father, which he started at the age of 12 years, and improved his skills while in the military service during World War I. Upon his return in 1919, he took over the blacksmith shop, as his father was in ill health, and he remained there to his last days. Edgar served as the local blacksmith for many years. He shod horses, sharpened plowshares, and could repair about anything brought to him by local farmers. As tractors replaced horses, Edgar adapted by learning to weld and repair tractors and Model T Fords. A record book lists names of customers, uses symbols to indicate the type of articles brought in and reveals many unpaid accounts during the Depression of the 30's. Often bills were paid in the fall when the crops were taken to the hay market to be sold. So, it was always a long wait for service rendered.

The blacksmith shop was a popular place and when someone wanted to get the word out about anything going on in the area, this was the place to advertise it. The campaign and dance posters on the walls are testaments to this. In addition to his blacksmith duties, Edgar was a musician with the popular local band, The Hillside Cowboys.

Edgar Wohlust died in 1964 and after his death his wife donated the blacksmith shop with a forge and various tools to our society. The shop was moved to the museum complex in 1967, but due to the deteriorated condition of the buildings, what is in place at the complex is only a portion of the original shop. Most of the tools on display were used in the shop.

### **Building Highlights of Special Interest**

- Coal forge used to heat steel
- Campaign Posters and special event notices – The Blacksmith shop was a great place to get the word out on any upcoming events since it was a popular place.
- Glass case in the SW corner contains Edgar's WWI memorabilia and on the top of the case is a ledger used in the shop to record business transactions. The symbols in the book represent the work done.
- Veterinarian supplies in the cabinet on the south wall with some horse remedies. The Watkins bottle contains vanilla which was used to rub in the nostrils of horses to mask the smell of smoke from the forge that might make the horses skittish due to the natural fear of fire.
- Dance posters mentioning the "Hillside Cowboys" as the featured band. Edgar was a member of the Hillside Cowboys as well as other prominent citizens such as Art Abendschein (first mayor), and Fred Brinkman (long time town and city treasurer).
- Trap door on the floor next to the forge was used to store coal that was used in the forge. Another story is that it was used to sweep horse manure into that pit under the floor.
- Hand operated drill press near the NE corner.
- Foot operated grinding wheel.
- "Marsh shoes" above the rear door were used to aid horses walking through soft land. They were buckled over the regular horseshoes.
- Handmade model of another Oak Creek blacksmith shop in the case in the SE corner. That blacksmith shop was located where the Menards store is now, on 27<sup>th</sup> Street.





## **The Town Hall - 1874**

Built in 1874 and made of Cream City brick, the Oak Creek Town Hall was used by the Town and City of Oak Creek until 1963. Its use as a town hall ended after 1955, when the newly incorporated city moved its operations to the old Hillside School building on Ryan Road. Other city departments used this building for the next 8 years. It was originally located where the Oak Creek High School Annex is now on the northeast corner of Howell and Puetz.

In 1964, the Town Hall was slated for destruction to make room for the new city hall. A group of citizens; led by Henry Mahr, committed themselves to saving the historic building. After raising enough money to move the building, a generous donation of land from then Forest Hill Cemetery owner Jack Hauter, gave the building a new home and in 1964, established the Oak Creek Historical Society at the location we are at now. This was the first building to be moved to the complex. The Town Hall is sectioned off to display various aspects important to the history of Oak Creek.



# **The Town Hall – 1874**

## **Building Highlights of Special Interest**

### **One Room School Area (Northwest Corner)**

The schoolhouse area contains many artifacts from Oakwood School. This school was built in 1883 and is located on South 27<sup>th</sup> Street (½ mile south of Hwy 100). That building is now being used by a private business. There are textbooks, desks, graduation programs, the school master's chair, water cooler, teachers' record books, 1886 US presidential portraits, and old teachers' contracts, some listing a salary of \$120 per year.

### **The Town Hall Area (Northeast Corner)**

- Several artifacts from Oak Creek's earlier city officials can be found in the Town Hall.
- The typewriter on the large table was actually used by the town clerk in this building for Township business.
- A small leather valise used by the town treasurer (circa 1900) to take tax money to the county courthouse.
- The tax roll from early 1900 sits on the podium on the large table. Records, pictures, 1876 Atlas, 1960 voting machine, and 1915 Town of Oak Creek tax ledger.
- Fred Brinkman's diary- a long time Town/City Treasurer
- Pot belly stove
- The old safe was used by Ernst Wohlust when he was Town of Oak Creek treasurer. He was elected treasurer on April 10, 1900. He collected property taxes at his home or in his blacksmith shop. The money was kept in this safe and when he could take time from his blacksmithing, he would take it to the Milwaukee County Courthouse. He would take a horse and buggy or sled as the weather permitted. There were bad men in those days, called highwaymen, and as they would travel along the roads, lay hidden in the tall grass or behind bushes and rob the travelers who came driving along. That was why Ernst Wohlust always carried a large revolver and a club with him when he took tax money to the courthouse.

# **The Town Hall – 1874**

## **Building Highlights of Special Interest**

### **The Town Hall Area (Southeast Corner)**

- Oakwood School bell - The school bell was in the belfry of the Oakwood School for many years. After it was removed, it was presented to Henry Mahr Sr. Mr. Mahr served on the school board for 32 years. The bell was used at Mahr's Orchard until the death of Henry Mahr in 1988. The bell was donated to the Historical Society by Mrs. Mahr in memory of her husband. Mr. Mahr was one of the founders of the Society in 1964.
- Various wood working tools donated by local family and society members are in the display case.
- Victorian Living Room
  - Victrola
  - Edison Phonograph
  - Sewing machine
  - Umbrella stand

### **The Town Hall Area (Southwest Corner)**

- Old telephone
- Oak lectern, once used by the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) and Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War when they met at the Milwaukee Old Soldiers Home.
- Veterans Honor Wall
  - Includes information about Oak Creek military veterans from the Civil War to Vietnam
  - World War I and II Military uniforms
  - World War II Oak Creek Veterans Book
- Oakwood baseball team uniform
- Local Oak Creek Baseball Team photos



## **The Summer Kitchen**

As the name implies, summer kitchens were used during the warm summer months to isolate the jobs like cooking, clothes washing, and sausage making that would need wood burning appliances, which would heat up the main house if done in there. In this way, the regular kitchen was kept clean, and the house cool during the summer.

Originally on the homestead of Clarence Franke, this building was on 27<sup>th</sup> Street, just north of Drexel Avenue. It is believed to have been built about 1890, according to Mrs. Clarence Franke. She said the summer kitchen was part of a home built by the grandfather of her late husband. It was on land homesteaded in 1850. The Franke family worked their farm in the area of 27<sup>th</sup> Street and Drexel Avenue since the 1850's.

The summer kitchen came to the museum complex in 1974. Irene Franke donated it to the Historical Society in memory of her husband Clarence.

### **Building Highlights of Special Interest**

- Circa 1900 kerosene stove.
- The washing appliances that are arranged from left to right, each covering roughly a different decade machine to machine.
  - Along the west wall is a wash bucket and scrub board circa 1890 Rocker type washer, clothes are washed by rocking the device back and forth, circa 1900
  - Plunger type washer used the up/down action of the mechanism inside to wash the clothes, circa 1920's.
  - The copper-colored machine is from the 1930's and used separate tubs, one for washing and the smaller one for spin-drying.
  - Maytag washer is from the 1940's.
  - The last washer is from the late 1950's, note the wringer used to squeeze out excess water.
  - Washtubs and laundry baskets are along the wall.
- The small wood burning stove was used to heat water.
- The south end of the building has some butchering and sausage making equipment.



## **Miller Farm Shed**

Oak Creek was primarily a farming community from 1832 until the 1950's. This building houses the tools and farm machinery used by farmers during that period. The building's purpose is to emphasize the importance of farming to Oak Creek by displaying many early farming implements that were used and for the most part donated by Oak Creek farmers.

The Miller farm shed was moved to the complex in 1984 when the widening of Puetz Road would have caused the building to be destroyed. It was located about a quarter of a mile west of Howell Avenue.

### **Building Highlights of Special Interest**

#### **Northwest Corner**

- Tillers and Cultivators used to break up and mix soil.

#### **Northeast Corner**

- McCormick Deering Cream Separator used to separate cream from raw milk.
- Case Corn Binder used to cut and tie up corn stalks.

#### **Southeast Corner**

- Threshing belt near the back of the building. The belt was used to transfer power from tractors or separate engines to operate numerous pieces of equipment, like a thresher to harvest grain or saw used to mill lumber.
- Green and yellow John Deere corn planter.
- 1872 grain seeder used to plant grain.

#### **Southwest Corner**

- Several farm stories about a few of the Oak Creek pioneers from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.
- Fanning Mill used to separate grain from chaff.
- Corn shellers, used to remove dried corn kernels from the husk.

# **The Outhouse - A Pioneer ComfortStation**

## **The Outhouse**

By Janet Armato

As I recall,  
It was about the size  
of a confessional.  
Within it  
I would realize  
(aware of both my purpose and intent)  
the meaning of my life and how it had been spent.  
In the silence of a woods or rural yard,  
I could contemplate how lax or hard  
my efforts to redeem myself from sin had been.  
So, too could I review  
the blessings I received,  
the losses that I grieved,  
and the dreams I yet hoped to achieve.  
Though it was often dark,  
there was a crescent crevice  
through which ambient light  
could glow, would glow,  
letting me know that  
no matter what my plight,  
every burden passes  
and, in the end,  
even the most trying times  
come out all right.