



The Story of the Meeme House



A Restoration Journey



Where We've Been and Where We're Headed

Imagine a small travel trailer, its silver metal reflecting the heat of a warm Wisconsin summer day. In this make-shift storage shed works a small team of dreamers, wearing dress shirts and sweating as they look over land plans transforming the 40 acre farm field around them into an outdoor historical village.

MCHS Board President Armond Kueter, Past President Joseph J. Rappel, and Pinecrest planning committee members had a vision for what our Society and museum could become and today we are entrusted with its success.

Over 50 years ago, neighbors like you gave generously, held bake sales, and passed the offering basket again and again to secure treasured century old structures and build, debt-free, what would become Pinecrest Village. When the first wave of visitors came to our museum in 1977, the future was far from guaranteed. Many sacrificed what little they had and their valuable time and energy to keep the gates open.

The Manitowoc County Historical Society and its Pinecrest Historical Village soon became part of the fabric of our community. It's where the stories of our ancestors are preserved, where our family roots are shared, and where our triumphs, tragedies, and laughter will forever live. It's the place we all count on to be there for us and for those of the future.

Our Manitowoc County Historical Society made the leap to purchase the historic Meeme House in 2013. While the project has faced many setbacks we are now in the home stretch of earning the needed funds to bring this \$1.2 million project to completion.

Much work has been done on the exterior over the past few years. The iconic front porch was recreated in 2020 and work is again underway to finish off the exterior of the Meeme House's south and west side addition. This

addition was inspired by the piece added to the original structure around the year 1890, which was in disrepair and not relocated with the main building. Architectural renderings were made to recreate the space to include a 1900s kitchen (with modern amenities 'hidden' behind it) and modern restrooms on the first floor and the treasured stage on the second floor.

The Meeme House project had the beginning goal of \$1.2 million and we were recently within \$300,000 of reaching this milestone. With costs uncharacteristically increasing, we have the need for an additional \$160,000 to complete the second goal of completely funding the project.

Help us continue what volunteers worked so hard to establish over 50 years ago. Our Pinecrest Village has grown remarkably over the past half a century. The Meeme House will help introduce our museum to new audiences and provide an ongoing source of income for the future.

During the 1977 dedication of the Village, volunteer and committee member Edward Ehlert asked, **"Where do we go from here"? He said that depends on you, your generosity, and your spirit.**

Consider making a gift to catapult our Manitowoc County Historical Society to the next level with a donation to our Meeme House project. The initial Pinecrest Village planning committee would never have dreamed that a small silver trailer in the middle of a field would one day blossom into a museum for over 12,000 visitors with over 30 structures.

In the same way, together with your neighbors, you can redefine what our future looks like with a new chapter for the historic Meeme House and the possibilities that await.



Looking Back

As immigrants came to Manitowoc County and roads became well traveled, stagecoach stops were built throughout the state. One of these stops, the Meeme House, still stands today.

Built around 1855, the Meeme House was located along the Green Bay Road. It was built by farmer and German immigrant, Michael Herr.

The Meeme House is described during a journey south along the Green Bay Road by immigrant Karl Pflaume, who came to settle near Newton:

"... we reached another house which was occupied by some Germans. However, since the house was not yet complete, and the room quite small, it took some effort to convince them to let us spend the night there. This was in March and it was too cold to sleep on the ground in the forest, and too far away from the next dwelling. So we stayed there, and were quite satisfied ... The man was from Bavaria. His brother, a young and hearty lad, explained that in a few weeks they would be heading to the Racine prairie to find work, just like a few others from their neighborhood. They wanted to earn some money in order to establish their own inn ..."

The early Meeme House was likely exactly as Pflaume describes – a crude “bed and breakfast” housing the family and a guest or two. With the passing of time it expanded into the large structure it is today.



>>>Meeme House, circa 1900



>>>Meeme House, circa 1910

The beginning of the story for the Meeme House starts with Michael Herr, a young immigrant from Bavaria.

In 1847 brothers Michael, Andreas and Peter Herr, along with their widowed father Karl, immigrated from Alzenau, Bavaria, to Wisconsin. Peter settled in Sheboygan County, while the others journeyed north into Manitowoc County. Andreas and Michael both purchased property along the Green Bay Road in the township of Meeme, approximately one mile south of the village of Spring Valley.

The Herr Family also became successful farmers and involved in the community with Michael being appointed the Manitowoc County Board of Supervisors in 1857 and Postmaster in 1887. Michael and his wife Elizabeth would have 5 children – their youngest son, William, later taking over the farmstead and Meeme House.

The typical rate was around \$1 a day, which included supper, lodging, breakfast and feed and stabling for a team of horses.

It has been said that during the Civil War a rally took place in the ballroom and the next day the Civil War volunteers walked to Manitowoc to join the unit. The Meeme House was also the location of the Meeme Post Office and included a dry goods store.

As of the 1870 Federal Census, the Meeme House property included 80 acres, 60 of which were improved and 18 remained wooded. The Herr possessions included:

Value of tools (implements and machinery): \$253

4 horses, 6 sheep, 5 milk cows, 6 swine, 5 other cows: \$702 value of stock

Bushels of Wheat in spring: 160

Bushels of Rye: 63

Bushels of Oats: 350

Bushels of Barley: 150

Pounds of Wool: 20

Bushels of Beans and Peas: 40

Bushels of Irish Potatoes: 50

Butter (pounds): 500

Tons of Hay: 30

Value of Animals slaughtered or sold for slaughter: \$160

In the late 1800s, ownership of the Meeme House transferred from Michael to his son, William and his wife Mary. In the Manitowoc County Directory in 1900 "Herr, W.A." is listed as "post master, hotel and saloon". The family also included 3 sons – Roland, age 7; Oliver, age 5; and Gilbert, age 1.

Evidence suggests the Meeme House underwent renovation and an addition around 1890. This is likely when the first floor was expanded to the southwest and the stage was added to the second floor's ballroom.

The second floor of the Meeme House represents one of the most notable aspects of the historic structure. It consists of three small lodging rooms, an open ballroom, and a stage area. The Inn's stage includes a canvas stage curtain adorned with a painting of a rural landscape. A pair of Moorish columns are

present in the foreground, while a small bridge straddles a stream leading back into a mountain range. The mountain denotes the Swiss Alps in a German countryside, while painted details such as the tasseled teaser along the top of the canvas, and a butterfly curtain date the mural from the late 1890's to the early 1900's. Behind this cover, the stage consists of several sliding canvas panels stretched over wooden frames with painted woodland scenes.

By the turn of the 20th century, the Meeme House was complete with a tavern, post office, and dry goods store on the first floor; and 3 boarding rooms, ballroom, and stage with puppet theater accommodations on the second level.

The Meeme Livery Stable is believed to have been constructed in the mid to late 1800s as well – and represents the only Livery Stable and Stagecoach Inn pair along the Old Green Bay Road that is still standing.

It is believed that the Meeme House stayed in the Herr Family for only a few more years before being purchased by Peter DeGroot, before Joseph Schwartz become the owner in 1909.

The son of immigrant parents, Joseph Schwartz was born in the town of Meeme to German immigrants around 1873. When Joe Schwartz, his wife Minnie, and their children moved into the Meeme House, the future of the building was far from guaranteed. The popularity of stagecoach transportation was disappearing and the Meeme House needed to reinvent itself as a rural civic center - with puppet shows, family celebrations, and a busy tavern.

Listed as “saloon keeper” in the 1910 census, the Schwartz family consisted of wife Minnie (22), daughter Adelina (3), and sons Gilbert (1), and Clarence (4 months). Minnie’s sister, Anna Wasmer (age 14) was listed as a servant.

Schwartz opted to not purchase the entire farm, instead scaling down to 5 acres which included the inn, livery barn, and the town polling house – which Joe helped construct in the year 1900 with local carpenter Edmund Kolb. According to a 1926 Manitowoc County directory, Schwartz owned the 5 acres for a total assessed value of \$2,800 and for several years, the inn operated as a saloon and fulfilled such functions as the town’s meeting and polling house. After Joe’s death in 1947, the inn was operated by his wife Minnie until her death in 1955. Their daughter, Valeria Sessler, took over the establishment and operated it until her death in 2012.

In 2013, the Meeme House, Livery Stable and Poll House were purchased by the Manitowoc County Historical Society to join the historic structures of Pinecrest Village. The structures were relocated to the museum in 2018 and work was quickly underway to restore the structures to circa 1915.

The Meeme Poll House and Meeme Livery Stable were opened to the public in 2020 and work is underway to complete the Meeme House itself – so all spaces can once again welcome guests as they have for over a century.

From the Meeme House Archives



Schwartz children playing on the south side of the Inn, circa 1915.

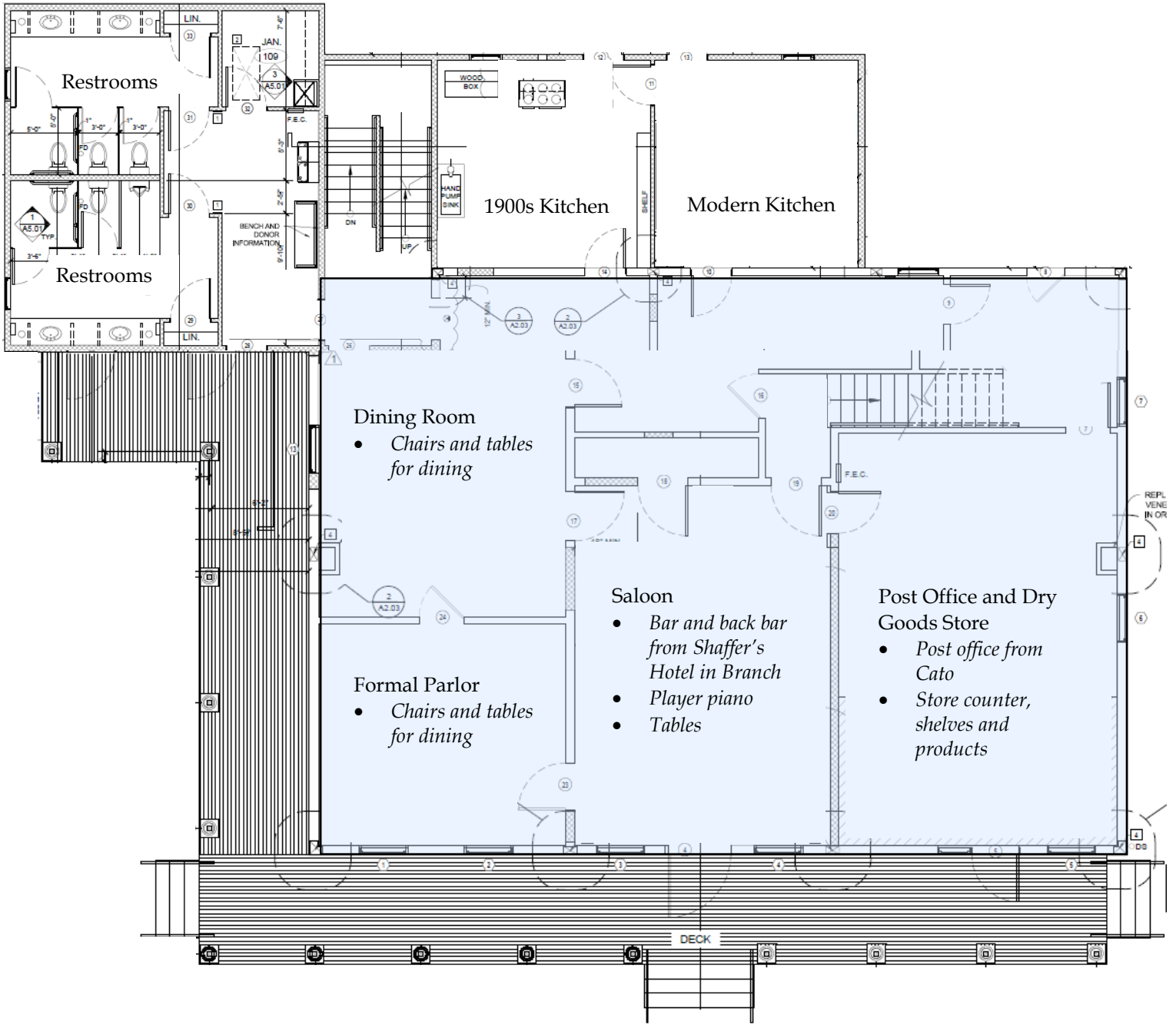


Members and neighbors of the Schwartz family perform a play inside the Meeme House.



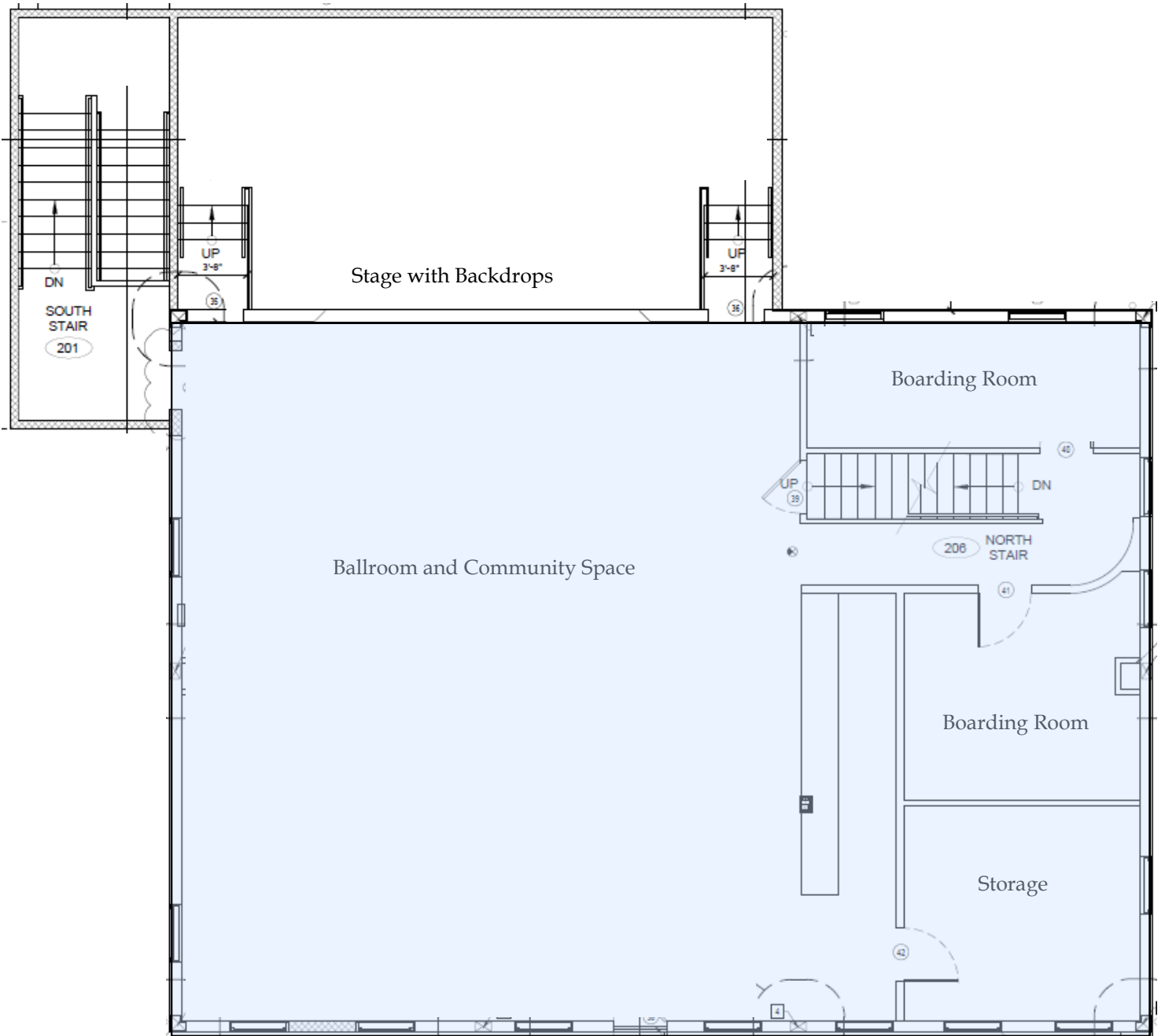
The Meeme Inn bar, circa 1900. This bar piece was recovered inside the contemporary bar structure and will be preserved inside the Inn.

The Meeme House Vision: First Floor



*The blue shaded area denotes the original structure of the Meeme House. The adjoining sections will follow the footprint of the original spaces but will be new construction.

The Meeme House Vision: Second Floor





What the Vision for the Meeme House will bring

The Meeme House will sustain its upkeep and needs with rental income and enhanced programming. Curriculum plans are developed for youth and family educational overnight experiences, as well as opportunities for formal rentals in the historic tavern and ballroom.

Calling all Boarders:

Imagine you came into Pinecrest Historical Village on a stagecoach. You are tired and hungry and you stop at the Meeme House for a night. This is exactly what our guests will experience during the youth educational overnight experiences offered at the Meeme House. Guests will register as a boarder and set up their cot for a night at the Inn. Guests will then have a snack in the dining area and be treated to an evening entertainment program in the ballroom. Hands-on experiences will continue in the morning by making a breakfast in the circa 1900 kitchen and assisting with chores, such as gathering eggs, making a rope bed, and doing laundry.

Historic Dinners:

Guests are invited to dinner at the Meeme House. Much more than a meal, you'll step back in time to get a glimpse of life in the past and a taste of history at a Historic Dinner program! Guests can cozy up to the wood-burning stove in the dining room and pass heaping dishes of meat and potatoes around the table. These programs would be available from October to March.

Tavern Game Nights would also welcome guests periodically to enjoy an old fashioned tavern experience!

Additional youth and adult programs will also take place in and around the Meeme House buildings.

| Income Projections | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Revenue Source | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 5 |
| Educational Overnight Program | \$5,000.00 | \$8,000.00 | \$10,000.00 |
| Facility Rentals | \$3,000.00 | \$5,000.00 | \$8,000.00 |
| Historic Dinners | \$3,000.00 | \$3,800.00 | \$4,000.00 |
| Yearly Income Projection Total | \$11,000.00 | \$16,800.00 | \$22,000.00 |



Be Part of the Meeme House's Next Chapter

Contributions are tax deductible. The Manitowoc County Historical Society is a 501 (C) (3) tax-exempt, nonprofit organization, Tax ID #23-7022183.

Donor Information

Name: _____
Address: _____
City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____
Home Phone: _____ Business Phone: _____
Email: _____

Gift/Pledge Information

- Please keep this gift/pledge anonymous.
- My company will match this gift/pledge.
- I/we pledge a total of \$ _____ to be applied in its entirety to the Meeme House project.
My/Our gift balance will be paid in the following installments:
 - Weekly Monthly Quarterly Semi-Annually AnnuallyThis pledge begins ___/___/___ (DD/MM/YY) and ends ___/___/___ (DD/MM/YY)
- A single gift. Payment information is below.

Check Information

- Enclosed is my check for a tax-deductible gift of \$ _____ made payable to MCHS.

Thank you for your generosity. Please return this completed form to:
Manitowoc County Historical Society, 924 Pinecrest Road, Manitowoc WI 54220



Manitowoc County Historical Society
924 Pinecrest Road
Manitowoc, WI 54220-3137

A vertical progress bar on a light gray background. The bar is filled with blue up to the 854,000 mark. Tick marks on the left side indicate the following values: \$1,200,000, 1,000,000, and 854,000.

WE ARE SO CLOSE!

JOIN US IN REACHING OUR GOAL OF \$1.2 MILLION FOR THE MEEEME HOUSE

DONATE TODAY!



>>> The Schwartz Family on the Meeme House porch, circa 1910