

The Founding of The Historical Society of Vandalia-Butler

“Aunt Mary” our Benefactor

The land upon which our Society’s buildings now stand originally consisted of 154 acres; public land purchased by Benjamin Furnas. The original deed was signed by President John Quincy Adams on September 30, 1825.

Ferdinand Hoottinger, a Swiss immigrant, and wife Elizabeth Puslat, from Germany, purchased 19 acres of the original property about 1889. They had a family of three sons and three daughters.

Mr. Hoottinger had stomach problems, after drinking the Alkaline Spring water he felt it had curative power. He then began selling it for .05 cents a gallon to the public.

Mary Hoottinger, born January 30, 1904 became the last surviving member of the family in 1953. She was born and lived in the family home for 90 years until failing health required her to move into assisted living at Spring Meade until her death on November 22, 1997 at age 93.

Many people affectionately called her “Aunt Mary”. She had many friends and she loved to visit with her customers who came to purchase water. She loved animals and had a couple of dogs around for several years.

Mary was a life member of St. Johns Lutheran Church, a founding member of the Historical Society, and the first to receive the Distinguished Service Award in 1986.

The Bicentennial Celebration in 1976 sparked new interest in our heritage. Several Vandalia & Butler Township residents were among this group and decided to form a Historical Society. There were 66 families who became charter members. A membership cost \$19.76 per year.

We were chartered as a non-profit corporation under the laws of Ohio on January 24, 1977. Our purpose is to collect, preserve and interpret materials of historic significance and provide for dissemination of information on such materials and encourage historical inquiry in said areas.

There is a sign in one of our buildings which states, “Help us to preserve your parents past for your children’s future”. We believe this sums up our purpose very well.

A two-story log house was discovered near Russia, Ohio in 1979. It was to be destroyed, so the Society purchased it and dismantled and moved it to the City Barn. It was stored there until a site could be found upon which it could be reconstructed. It remains there

until 1980. That year on September 16 “Aunt Mary” Hoottinger gifted her land & buildings to the Society. There was now a site for the Log House. Groundbreaking was held May 3, 1981 for restoring the Log House. On September 18, 1983 a dedication ceremony was held when the restoration was completed. The Vandalia-Butler Band, Boy Scouts, Veterans Color Guard, local officials from the City, Township and County governments were in attendance.

Our second restoration was the “Brown School”, which was moved from its original location on South Brown School Road to our property on September 11, 1991. It is a fine example of a 1864 one-room school; it has an excellent display of 1 & 2 room schools of Vandalia & Butler Township.

An education program is offered to local schools who wish to show students how school was taught in the 1860’s.

When “Aunt Mary” decided in 1994 to move to Spring Meade, the Federal farm house in which she lived so many years became the third restoration project. It has become an attraction to visitors who are curious to see how an 1840’s farm house was furnished.

In 1999 our Board and Trustees became aware of the acute shortage of space at our facilities and contacted a local builder to suggest a design for a meeting house and shelter to relieve the problem. The Society is very grateful to this young man for his generous donation in honor of his father and mother. He made it possible for us to have a building at a fraction of the cost of its true value. He wishes to remain anonymous. The building was dedicated July 2000.

In 2001 the Barn was chosen to be the fourth restoration project. Ground hogs had burrowed so many holes in the ground floor that it became a hazard to enter. This was solved by pouring a new concrete floor, rewiring and installing additional lights and installing a standing seam metal roof. Tools, buggies, etc. are now on display there.

The Alkaline Spring House was the fifth restoration to be completed in 2002. New floor joists and flooring was installed, a new foundation and new interior walls, new exterior siding and insulation and electric heat was installed. Half of the building became the Archives Office.

We continue to research local history and are searching for old pictures of both Vandalia & Butler Township.

Please support us in our work to maintain this property and present local history to our younger generations.