

Museum Notes

by Kristen Parrott, curator
for the week of December 27, 2017

“Normal School Days: Teaching Through the Decades” will be the topic of the museum’s first public program of the new year. The program will be held on Tuesday, January 9, at 1PM. (This is not the usual day and time for our monthly programs, but we took into account the holidays and the early nightfall in January.)

Graduates of the Vernon County Normal School from the 1930’s through the 1970’s will share their experiences of learning at the Normal School and then going out to teach in the county’s rural schools. The last class graduated in 1971.

The museum is housed in the former Vernon County Normal School building, and the words “County Normal” can still be seen carved into stone over the doors on the east side. “Normal School” is another term for a teachers training college.

This school began in 1907 in the attic of the Viroqua High School, which at that time was located in a red brick building near the present-day Pleasant Ridge Waldorf School. After 10 years in these cramped quarters, the training school very much needed its own space. In November of 1917, the county board voted to build a new building for the Normal School in Viroqua, the county seat.

Construction should have been done by November of 1918, but it was delayed by shortages of material and labor, probably caused by the war and the Spanish influenza epidemic. Instead the building opened in September of 1919, and the first class in the new building graduated in June of 1920. So, we will soon be celebrating the museum building’s 100th birthday.

Programs are held in the museum’s handicapped-accessible conference room. This program is free and will be followed by refreshments. Everyone is invited to attend, from those who have never heard of the Normal School, to those who studied at the school years ago.