

Museum Notes

for the week of January 18 – 24, 2026

by Kristen Parrott, curator

Looking at an old local newspaper recently, a couple of news items jumped out at me. The newspaper was the *Vernon County Censor* of December 23, 1925, so just over 100 years ago.

One news item said that, “The Smith school house in the town of Liberty was totally destroyed by fire of unknown origin on Tuesday night of last week.” Here at the Vernon County Museum and History Center, we have a file for each of the approximately 160 rural schools that once dotted the countryside. There’s a file for the Smith School in the Town of Viroqua, but we have no record of a Smith School in the Town of Liberty.

Possibly “Smith” was an alternate name for a school in Liberty. Plainview School is the most likely possibility, and it did have a number of students named Smith. The Smith school building in Viroqua was built in 1890 and is still standing, so that can’t be it. If you know of a Smith School in the Town of Liberty, please contact us at 608-637-7396.

The other news item that I especially noticed was a reference to Ben Glickman and Sam Gross being in the fur business. I recognized the name of Sam Gross, who was a part of Viroqua’s tiny Jewish community in the early 1900’s, but “Ben Glickman” was new to me. Could Ben Glickman also be Jewish?

I did a little newspaper research and found that Ben and Sam were sometimes in business together as “Glickman and Gross, The Viroqua Hide and Fur Company”. Other advertisements referred to the “Glickman and Gross Commission Co.” of Chicago, IL. Jewish merchants in small Midwestern towns a century ago often had connections to big cities where there were larger Jewish communities. And a brief paragraph in a 1922 *Censor* said that Ben’s wife was entertaining her relatives visiting from Chicago.

Sam Gross was born in Kiev, Russia (today, Ukraine), in 1885, and when he died in 1945, he was buried in the Jewish cemetery in La Crosse, Anshe Chesed Cemetery. So, I wondered if Ben was also buried in a Jewish cemetery, and did a little searching on <https://www.findagrave.com/>.

There I found him, Ben Glickman, 1889-1957, son of Bernard and Esther Glickman. Ben was born in Russia, married Leona Tiechner in 1913 in Chicago, and was buried in Westlawn Cemetery, near Chicago. That’s not a Jewish cemetery, but Leona’s parents were buried in Zion Gardens, also near Chicago, and that *is* a Jewish cemetery. I will add the Glickmans to the very small but growing list of Vernon County’s Jewish community of 100 years ago.

Our first monthly history program of the year has been scheduled for Tuesday, February 3, at 7PM, at the history center. February is Black History Month, and in celebration of that, Denise Christy of the Enduring Families Project will talk about some of the African-American residents of Cheyenne Valley in the 19th century. The Enduring Families Project is a program of the La Crosse County Historical Society. It was founded to create public theater based on the lives of early African-American settlers to La Crosse County and to Cheyenne Valley in Vernon County. More details next week!