

Museum Notes

for the week of May 29 – June 4, 2022

by Kristen Parrott, curator

A new exhibit about “Palma Grahn, County Nurse” has just gone up at the museum. In this column we first looked at the story of Palma late last year, when the Vernon County Health Department celebrated its centennial. Palma was the first employee of the Health Department, hired in December of 1921. She was given an office in the then-new Vernon County Normal School building, which today is home to the Vernon County Museum.

The county nurse’s duties included looking after the health of all the students in the county, including the Normal School students. Her office was on the 2nd floor, as is this exhibit, which reproduces her office with a desk, typewriter, books, etc. On the wall near her desk are several “Stories of Public Health in Vernon County”, featuring goiter pills, the polio vaccine, the Vernon County Asylum and Poor House, and the Red Cross in Vernon County during World War I.

Palma wrote a column for the local newspaper, the *Vernon County Censor*. From it we can learn a lot about the work that she did as county nurse. On May 3, 1922, she wrote about doing inspections at a number of schools, including Coon Valley and nearby Onward and Spring Coulee; Genoa, both public and private; and De Soto plus nearby Partridge, Victory, Battle Hollow, Sunnyside, Asbury, and Bad Ax Schools. Cars were slower and roads were rougher 100 years ago, so visiting as many schools as possible in one area at one time made good sense.

In Coon Valley, Palma did physical inspections of the schoolchildren, but the teachers themselves weighed and measured the children using a new scale purchased by the school board. She also noted in her May column that each schoolroom now had a “wash corner”, which I think means a basin of water and some soap for washing hands. Today’s schoolchildren who visit the historic Foreaker School museum, 606 W. Broadway in Viroqua, also use a wash basin to clean their hands. And the Foreaker boasts an old-fashioned scale in the corner, just like the one that Palma talked about in her 1922 column.

This new county nurse exhibit is in a room that is now devoted to the medical profession. Other long-time exhibits already in the room feature Dr. A.E. Kuehn, Viroqua area doctor; Dr. Lawton, who worked as a dentist in Viola and then Viroqua; and O.E. Davis, Viroqua druggist.

You can visit all the exhibits at the museum during our regular summer hours of Monday through Friday, noon to 4PM, and Saturday, 10AM to 2PM. The Foreaker School is open by appointment – call us at 637-7396 to set up a time to tour the school.