

Museum Notes

by Kristen Parrott, curator
for the week of June 24 – 30, 2018

July 4 is often celebrated with a special fervor in small towns, perhaps more so than in big cities. At the museum we frequently come across stories of long-ago July 4 celebrations in Vernon County villages. Often these celebrations included dancing and political speeches, cannon shots and baseball games, and lots of cold fried chicken.

World War I soldier Delbert Blakley of La Farge wrote home to his mother on July 1, 1918, when he was posted with the Coast Artillery Corps at Fort Heath, MA: “I guess I won’t get off the post the 4th but I don’t care as all I could do would be to go to Boston and I don’t care about going there for the 4th. I would like to go out to some country celebration.”

In *Dirt Roads*, Josie Churchill’s memoir of life 100 years ago in the Dell area, she described July 4 as “about the most important holiday of the year.” Her father would pick black raspberries that her mother baked into a pie – “a blackcap pie for the Fourth of July.” Her mother also made new clothes for the family in honor of the day, because “For the Fourth of July celebration, everyone dressed in his best.” Music and red-white-and-blue bunting were an important part of that celebration.

You too can enjoy an old-fashioned, small-town Independence Day celebration this year, complete with bunting and live music, by coming to the Vernon County Historical Society’s annual Marcia Andrew Strawberry Shortcake Social. The social will be held from 1 to 5PM on July 4 on the lawn of the historic Sherry-Butt House at 795 N. Main Street in Viroqua. The house was built in 1870 by Civil War veteran Cyrus Butt. It is located near the county fairgrounds.

Admission of \$5 includes strawberry shortcake, ice cream, lemonade or coffee, musical entertainment, and a tour of the house. The entertainment begins at 2PM and will be provided by the Viroqua Community Band and the Viroqua Area Men’s Chorus, performing popular and patriotic music.

The gracious home is filled with the furnishings and personal effects of the Butt and Sherry families, dating from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. A special addition this year is an exhibit of woodcarvings made by local artists Roger and Miriam Hatlem. The woodcarvings will be found throughout the house. This exhibit will be up through Labor Day.

If, heaven forbid, it should rain on July 4, the celebration will move inside the Vernon Memorial Healthcare Expo Center building next door at the fairgrounds. For more information, contact the museum at 637-7396. Hope to see you there!