

Museum Notes

for the week of September 27 – October 3, 2020

by Kristen Parrott, curator

Autumn is a good time to visit the exhibits at the Vernon County Museum, with warm days and cool nights keeping the exhibit halls at a comfortable temperature. Several new exhibits opened this summer, which you might not have had a chance to see yet. One of these is “Drops of Water”, about our county’s relationship to water.

“Drops of Water” explores how water has affected the history of this area through transportation, jobs, recreation, flooding, and more. The exhibit begins on the 1st floor near the museum’s main entrance, and then continues throughout the exhibit halls with a water droplet icon indicating water stories wherever they are found. For example, the Coon Creek Watershed display in the agriculture room on 2nd floor is marked with a water droplet, and so is the washboard in the ethnic exhibit on 3rd floor, because both tell water stories.

Several containers for holding or carrying water are found in the exhibit, including a plain brown ceramic water jar used by pioneers, a Victorian-era porcelain water pitcher and basin that would have been kept in a bedroom, and a rough khaki canvas water bucket issued by the U.S. Army. Also on display is a fancy silver tray and matching goblet from the late 19th century, used for serving ice water to guests, all of whom drank out of the same cup – not something we would do now!

In other exhibit news, an oil painting of the Hatlem family farm in Norway has just gone on display in the ethnic exhibit on 3rd floor. Donor Roger Hatlem of Viroqua writes about the painting, saying that “Hatlem is the name of a valley in Norway and the custom there is when you leave an area you take the name of the ...valley as your last name so people will know where you came from. The valley is about 60 miles north of Bergen and a few miles north of the Sognefjord (west end).

“In the painting the North Sea is on the other side of the mountain. The homestead had been in the family for over 600 years. The last relative to live there was my father’s mother who died in 1950 at age 89....The homestead was a grazing area for sheep and goats....My wife and I visited the area in 1983. Took a lot of pictures from which [local artist] Janice Fortney made the painting....There were no roads in the area till about 1960 or 1970. It was a thrill to have been there.”

You can see these and other exhibits at the museum now during our regular fall hours of Monday through Friday, noon to 4PM. If those hours aren’t convenient, you can also make an appointment – call 637-7396, or email museum@vernoncountyhistory.org. Masks are required, and museum tours are self-guided.