

Museum Notes

for the week of April 7 – 13, 2024
by Kristen Parrott, curator

We were very sorry to have to postpone our April program, but the weather was too inclement for our presenter and for some of our audience to drive here. The new date for the program about the Ku Klux Klan in Vernon County and western Wisconsin in the 1920's will be Wednesday, May 1, at 7PM.

Over the course of the last many months, we've been looking at the business directories that surround the original, wall-sized version of the 1878 Vernon County plat map. A copy of the map hangs in the 1st-floor hallway here at the Vernon County History Center. We began this series last July with the business directory for the village of Victory.

And now we end the series by returning to where we began, to a village along the Mississippi River, but this time the village is De Soto. These river towns were still bustling in 1878, although things were about to change as the railroads made their way into the county. In the future, more and more goods would be moved by train rather than by boat, and the small villages along the Mississippi would gradually lose businesses and population.

Two innkeepers advertised on the 1878 De Soto directory: B. Trott of the Bay State House, and Anna N. Miller of the De Soto House, who we looked at more closely a few weeks ago. Also catering to the river traffic, Sever Anderson ran a restaurant and sold "Fancy Groceries".

The village had several general stores. William Waldron, L. C. Larsen, and George H. Clarke all sold dry goods, groceries, and footwear from their general stores. Unusually, Waldron also advertised, "Country Produce taken in Exchange for Goods"; presumably he then sold the produce in his store. And Clarke described himself as "Also Buyer of Country Produce and Wool". Raising sheep for wool was common in this region in the late 19th century.

Several De Soto merchants were in the wagon business in 1878. J. A. Cooper made wagons and cutters and other vehicles, and the firm of Miller and Lemen sold accessories for horse-drawn vehicles, such as harnesses, whips, and fly-nets. C. L. Ingersoll and E. P. Warne ran a blacksmith and wagon shop in the village, while Erastus Cilley and son ran a blacksmith and wagon shop outside of the village, in Section 5 of the Town of Wheatland.

The Lyttle brothers are listed in the directory as dealers in lumber of all kinds, including lath, shingles, doors, mouldings, and eave troughs. D. A. Steele sold furniture and "Burial Cases", a combination that was once common and which we continue to see now, although to a lesser extent. L. W. Tenney is listed as an agent for Peck's Folding Spring-Bed Cover(!). And Fred Eckhart, a name more often associated with Viroqua, had a branch office of his grain dealership in De Soto.

Some businesses on the 1878 De Soto directory were for services, rather than goods. J. H. Hinds advertised as a collecting agent and a justice of the peace, and B. D. Jencks as a physician and surgeon. L. F. S. Viele worked as an attorney and insurance agent in Prairie du Chien, but is listed in the De Soto directory.

If you would like to learn more about these directories and see the original map, stop by the history center during our regular spring hours of Monday through Friday, 11AM to 4PM. You can also purchase our book, *The Alphabetical Index to the 1878 Vernon County, Wisconsin, Plat Map*, which contains a map of each township, and then an index of all the names found on the maps with location information. (Note that the book does not contain the business directories.) This book sells for \$12 at the museum gift shop and at our website bookstore.