

# The Iola Historical Society's Window

Quarterly Member and Activities Newsletter

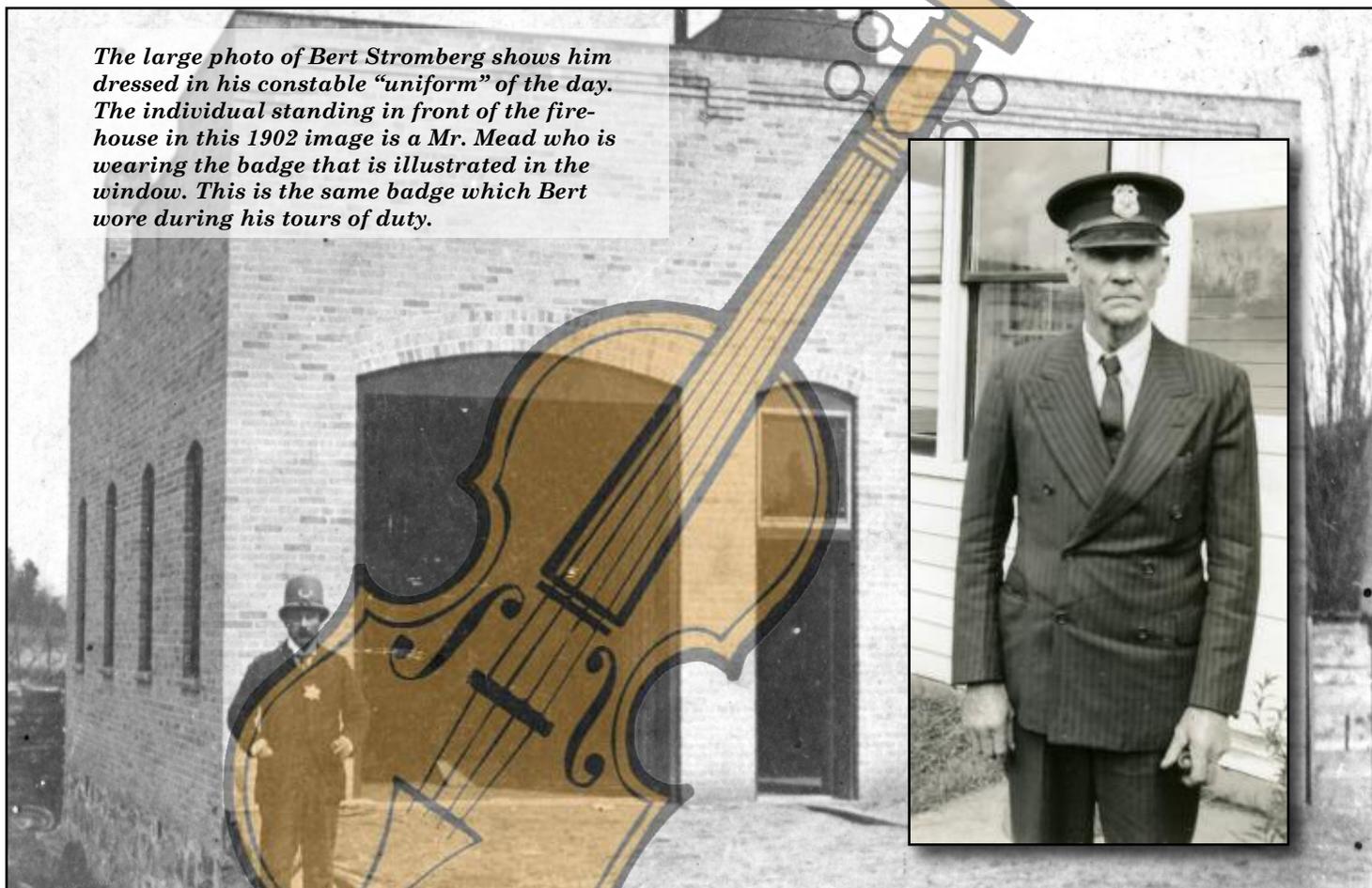
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*The large photo of Bert Stromberg shows him dressed in his constable "uniform" of the day. The individual standing in front of the fire-house in this 1902 image is a Mr. Mead who is wearing the badge that is illustrated in the window. This is the same badge which Bert wore during his tours of duty.*



## Bert's "Made In Iola" Violins

by Lyle Mork

The Iola Historical Society on August 21 received an amazing donation from Maynard Stromberg of South Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Maynard, who was born and raised in Iola, is the son of the late Engebret J. and Anna Sophia Stromberg of Iola. Engebret was best known in Iola as Bert.

For Many years Bert was Iola's Constable,

but Bert's personal passion was to make violins. Maynard has fond memories of Iola and is very proud of the violins his father, Bert, made over the years. Maynard inherited some of the passion for working on and repairing violins from his father. He still repairs violins at the young age of 92.

Maynard has been gracious enough to

donate violins that Bert had worked on to the Iola Historical Society. The violins will be on display in our museum, enabling future generations the opportunity to appreciate the work and passion that Bert put into making these musical masterpieces.

My wife Nellie and I went to South

*(Continued on page 3)*

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## President's Corner

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With summer coming to an end and with September 26 being the last Saturday that we are open for the season we will still have "Wednesday Work Days." Since we have more room to display items we have been working on organizing the displays in the depot and fire house.

The depot platform has been pressure washed and stained with a slate grey, semi-transparent stain. This will help seal the wood, and according to one of our members who is a railroad aficionado, "It looks good!"

We have also been setting up new displays at the Fire House. We have the display that George Kriewaldt donated, showing a mold that R. I. Anderson used for making spanner wrenches out of brass. George along with Bob Wilhite built the display case showing the mold used for making four wrenches in one casting, how the spanner wrench comes out of the sand after they have been cast, and how they look after they have been separated and polished into the finished product. Photographs also show how the castings are poured by Rhinard

*(Continued on page 4)*

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## In The Window

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Shown is the badge Bert Stromberg wore while serving as Iola's Village Constable and is now in the possession of the Iola Historical Society.

# Our Society Over The Years

by Robert Strand  
Part III: Helvetia Town Hall



*The Helvetia Town Hall as it appears today at our Historical Village*

### *Continued from the Summer 2009 issue of Window*

The society had also purchased the old Helvetia Town Hall (built in 1919) in 1996, which had been replaced by a new structure. At the time of purchase we really didn't have room enough on our existing property to move it on to, so we left it sit on the land it was originally built on, utilizing it for the storage of items we had acquired. We soon discovered that owning property out in the country was not a good idea, as there were break-ins and vandalism. This led to the decision to find a way to move it near our property in Iola.

It so happened the Mortenson Oil Company property bordering our property was being offered for sale. The Society joined with the Village of Iola in purchasing the property

from Mortenson, with the village acquiring their portion to construct a new lift station for the sanitary sewer system, while the society acquired the balance for \$18,000.

Krause Publications provided the necessary funding, extended as a courtesy by president Clifford Mishler, by extending an interest free loan for the money required. A portion of the funds required were also raised from local organizations, including the Iola Lions Club and the Sheveland-Taylor American Legion Post, along with a \$5,000 grant from Consolidated Papers.

Moving the building would present huge problems, principally involving a cost of several thousand dollars for having electrical, telephone and cable TV wires removed where they crossed the highways on the route that would be taken by the move. We found that our only option was to move it in two sections; that is, the roof structure had to be taken off and moved separately from the lower portion of the structure. Scott Bestul was hired, and he also donated a significant portion of the labors involved, to remove the roof without harming the interior ceiling, then reattach it to the lower structure, with a new roof being installed; even the old outhouse that served the town hall was moved to the new

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Stella Strand, Vice-President  
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*Continued on page 4*



*Shown are just a few of the many violin artifacts that were recently donated to our museum by Maynard Stromberg.*

## **BERT'S "MADE IN IOLA" VIOLINS** *Continued from page 1*

Milwaukee on August 21 to pick up this priceless collection, which was stored in two large wood trucks. Most of the collection is of partially completed violins, which will allow us to show the sequence of how the violins were made.

Other items donated were the tools used by Bert to make the violins, along with templates, and jigs used to assemble the violins. The tools are all hand tools, which include hand scrapers, various size chisels, mini-saws, a mini-plane and other small tools. A book that Bert had and used to learn how to make violins was also donated.

Maynard stated it took his father Bert about 400 hours to make a single violin and he then sold them for \$35.00 each which works out to about 9¢ an hour. Bert also made bows for the violins. In the late 1930s, 1940s and early to mid-1950's Bert served as constable and was referred to by the local people as Iola's Night Watchman. During the evening hours, after the stores and other places of business were closed for the day, Bert would make his rounds checking on the businesses to make sure the doors were locked and everything was secured.

When he made his rounds he would carry

a special clock and there were keys chained to metal boxes strategically located throughout the area where he made his rounds. These keys were for Bert to stamp a graph paper, indicating the time and location with a turn of the key in the clock.

Between the rounds, Bert would retire to the Iola Fire House, which was located at 175 E State Street, where A & E Products Inc. is currently located. While there he would work on carving string pegs and the necks for his violins.

The Iola Historical Society currently has on loan from Eugene Engebretson his father's violin made by Bert in 1933. This is confirmed by looking through the curved slots on the front of the violin. On the inside of the back panel is written, "E. J. Stromberg, Iola, Wis., 1933."

In addition to the violins, Maynard donated a wooden crate with "Remington Typewriter" stamped on its. It was full of sheet music for violins and other miscellaneous books and other items.

When we were removing the crate from the truck after we returned from South Milwaukee we noticed a label on one side of the crate and found it had been shipped to "Jacobson and Swenson, Scandinavia, Wis." Carl E. Jacobson & Olaf Swenson had a furniture store and funeral home in

Scandinavia. Carl Jacobson eventually moved to Nelsonville and was funeral director there, with Olaf Swenson remaining in Scandinavia.

Maynard has also donated several photographs of his parents, brothers and sisters. One of the photographs was of his father wearing his constable cap and badge. Maynard had donated the badge to the Iola Historical Society last year. It is now on display in the fire house at the Iola Historical Society.

The Iola Historical Society wants to thank Maynard Stromberg for this wonderful gift. This is truly a treasure for the Iola Historical Society and future generations of Iola residents. We hope to raise enough money to have a display case built to house the violins so they can be properly displayed.

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## **Events Schedule**

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### **Wednesdays, October 7, 14, 21, 28**

9:00 am Work Days weather permitting. 210 Depot St.

### **Monday, October 26**

7:00 pm IHS General Meeting, 210 Depot Street

### **Monday, December 21**

5:00 pm IHS Christmas Party, The Millstone, 300 N. Main St., Reservations required.

## OUR SOCIETY OVER THE YEARS

*Continued from page 2*

location. Moving of the two portions of the structure was handled by Schutte Bros. of Wausau.

The town hall was moved into Iola in 2002, with substantial donations having been provided by Chester Krause and Krause Publications, and contributions from other interested citizens.

*(To be continued)*

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## PRESIDENT'S CORNER

*Continued from page 2*

Anderson with the help of Ingval Olson and Rhinard's wife Lettie. This is a wonderful display showing the steps in making a spanner wrench.

When we start opening again next May, I believe the visitors will be surprised at how the displays in the depot and the fire house have been set up. The Iola-Scandinavia High School Community Service Class is currently working on a display unit for the other 14 molds we have from the R. I. Anderson Machine Shop. A glass show case has been added for displaying the badge, clock and key boxes for the night watchman as he made his rounds

We moved items that do not pertain to railroading or transportation from the depot and placed them across the street to the office-museum building at 210 Depot Street. Farm and military displays are in the process of being created.

We have started laying out a path system that will help direct visitors between buildings. We hope to start on the paths yet this fall and will probably use crushed lime stone or crushed red granite. We may prefer the granite because it looks richer than a white lime stone path, but that has not been decided yet and we need to raise money for the paths.

The visitor count is up from last year and I believe it will continue to increase each year considering our visitors typically state they heard about the Iola Historical Society from a friend and some because of



## Minstrel Show Performers

*This is one of many photographs the Iola Historical Society recently received from John Adams. John is the grandson of Palmer Gunderson who was a barber in Iola for many years. Palmer also enjoyed acting when he was younger. The above photograph shows a scene during one of the minstrel shows held at the Iola Opera House in 1918 or 1919 with local citizens being the actors. In the May 3, 1928, issue of the Iola Herald an article states that the Iola American Legion was sponsoring a minstrel show at the Iola Opera House on the 27th and 28th., so minstrel shows were still being held then and even into the 1930s. The Iola Opera House was eventually converted to the Iola Theater. Minstrel shows were pretty common back then, including Amos and Andy, who were on the radio for many years and later on television. Minstrel shows were made up of a group of entertainers, where some would wear black facial makeup, singing and performed variety shows. Today such appearances would be considered racist and highly offensive, but it is still part of our history. We have identified all but two people in the show, standing from left to right: Palmer Gunderson, Dr. Harris G. Hanson, DDS, Lee Huffcut, George Parks, Agnes Zwicky, Ed Weinmann, Lester Taylor and Alfred Zwicky. Seat center is Clarence Mead. The two ladies seated have not been identified.*

the Passport program.

The main reaction is how a small town such as Iola has such a wonderful historical village and they are amazed we have the first three mechanized fire apparatus the Iola Fire Department had dating back to the 1912 Waterous Pumper. The answer is a lot of hard work and dedicated people along with gener-

ous people donating money back to 1953 when IHS was founded.

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## Receive *Window* Free

Become a member of the Iola Historical Society and receive a copy of this quarterly newsletter as part of your membership.

Send your \$10 today to:

**Iola Historical Society**  
P.O. Box 412, Iola, WI 54945

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## Donors & Loaners

July • August • September

**ARCHIVAL DONATIONS** John Adams, Anthony "Tony" Amundson, Mark Anderson, Richard Anderson, Collin Bruce II, LolaMay Dalland, Betty Finch, Gerald E. Johnson, Chet Krause, Myrtle Larson, Myrtle Larson Estate, Jo Jo Mork, Ila Olson, Sharon Peterson, Dorothy Przybylski, Maynard Stromberg, Eugene Voie, Dr. and Mrs. James R. Wessely, **CASH DONATIONS and PROFESSIONAL SERVICES:** Deronda Engebretson, Myrtle Larson Estate, Gerald E. Johnson, David and Jeanne Nelson, Linda and Thomas Martin.