



McFarland Historical Society

5814 MAIN STREET, MCFARLAND, WISCONSIN 53558
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Edited by Dale Marsden



Historical Society Annual Meeting April 12

The 2026 McFarland Historical Society Annual Meeting takes place April 12, 2026 from 1 to 3 pm, in the Training Room at the McFarland Municipal Building at 5915 Milwaukee Street. All are welcome—you do not need to be a MHS member! Refreshments will be served.

This year, UW-Madison professor emeritus Calvin B. DeWitt will be the guest speaker. He was awarded the National Wildlife Federation's Connie Award for conservation in 2015. He has contributed actively to conservation and environmental stewardship at the local, state, national and international levels. Cal was elected to the Town of Dunn Board of Supervisors and became the Town Chairman in 1977 where he promoted land use planning and the protection of natural areas. Cal often invited his college students to visit his home on the edge of the Lake Waubesa wetlands. He sparked environmental stewardship in untold numbers of young and not-so-young people locally and through seminars in foreign lands. Cal will speak on the geologic history of the Lake Waubesa wetlands and the more recent history of the Town of Dunn.



Carrol Torgeson

The annual meeting will also include a summary of the McFarland Historical Society's activities and a salute to our Volunteer of the Year, Carol Torgeson. Carol has volunteered her time at the Larson House Museum from the beginning of the restoration process by painting, oiling woodwork, cleaning and assisting with various fundraisers. Her generous spirit and enthusiasm are especially evident as she gives tours of this house museum for our many visitors. A special PowerPoint of Carol's activities will be presented.

Questions? Please contact Jane Licht at 608-234-2504 or licht.jane@gmail.com.



Professor Cal DeWitt

Thanks to Bill Mitchell

Back in 2012, shortly after the McFarland Historical Society gained Ownership of the Larson House, Bill Mitchell volunteered to cut the grass on the lawn surrounding the house. It was a cool day when Bill arrived with his lawn mower and busied himself with this task. Bill volunteered his time, his equipment and used his own gas to complete this chore out of the goodness of his heart. Eventually, the lawn was landscaped, and sidewalks and a driveway were added. Bill found four other men to help with the mowing, and he set up a schedule for his mowing crew. Every weekend from May through September, one of them would do the mowing. The lawns have looked great ever since.

As the maple tree planted by Trees on Wheels back in 2014 has grown, so have the piles of leaves shed in the fall. Bill and his wife Joan have raked the lawn and loaded the leaves onto their flatbed trailer. Year after year they haul the large quantity of leaves to the Village Public Works disposal facility. Bill is quick to point out that he and Joan are a team since she has helped with mowing duties as well as with the leaf raking. After 13 years of service on the Larson House Mowing Crew, Bill has decided to retire. Thanks so very much to Bill and Joan for their very effective efforts.



Bill Mitchell mowing at the Larson House in 2025.

Strawberry Shortcake Social

Each year, many residents look forward to the Strawberry Shortcake Social on the lawn of the Larson House. Unfortunately, in 2025, June 22nd was just too hot to hold this popular fundraiser. Instead, we set up a tent and moved food to McDaniel's Park to be part of Bands on the Boardwalk in July. We joined other vendors selling food and ours was especially well-received by those visitors to the park. We sold out even before the band playing was over.

About half of the food had been saved by freezing the shortcake, strawberries and ice cream. The dessert was served a second time in September at the Museum during the Community Festival. Once again, our famous strawberry shortcake soon sold out. Volunteers who sold strawberry shortcake were Zoey Kampmeier, Kendal Kampmeier, Janine Turner, Marlene Richard, Gail Aaroen, Carol Beck, Jane Licht and Cheryl Salava.

The committee is hopeful that this year we will be able to host the Strawberry Shortcake Social at the Larson House. This way, guests can enjoy our delicious dessert, walk through the lovely interior of this house museum, view the colorful flower gardens surrounding the house and listen to some outstanding live music. The event is scheduled for June 28, 2026, from 1-5 pm. Mark your calendar!



These fun people marched in the McFarland Memorial Day Parade to promote the Strawberry Shortcake Social.

Afternoon Teas at the Larson House

As of this writing, there are no chairs available for afternoon teas at the Larson House Museum as they are completely sold out. The 2026 teas will be held on Sunday, May 3, and Saturday, May 9, both from 1-3 pm at the Larson House Museum at 6003 Exchange Street, McFarland. To find out about future teas, contact Gail Aaroen at gtaaroen@hotmail.com.

The fascinating history of tea and tea parties will be explained as participants partake of tea, lemonade and sweet and savory treats in the elegant ambiance of this beautiful Victorian home. Those attending are encouraged to wear their

Sunday best clothing and fancy hats. We have a wide selection of period appropriate hats on site for you to borrow for the event.

Ladies' afternoon teas were popular in the 1700's, 1800's and early 1900's in England and elsewhere. They were an opportunity for ladies of means to show off their fine place settings, perfect etiquette and lovely gowns as they hosted these events for friends. Our afternoon teas may include gentlemen and well-behaved children as well as the ladies. The fee is \$25, a real bargain for this unique experience. All proceeds benefit the McFarland Historical Society.

We are in need of volunteers to bake one of the confections to be served at the teas. Volunteers will be assigned a traditional recipe from the Society's "Taking Time for Tea" book edited by Judy St. Clair. Contact Gail Aaroen at 608-332-7989 or ataaroen@hotmail.com for more information.



Some of these ladies borrowed Larson House hats for their afternoon tea.

Rent the Larson House

Are you wondering where to hold your daughter's baby shower? How about a special venue for your book club meeting, retirement party, afternoon tea, or dinner party with close friends? If you are feeling creative and theatrical, how about a murder mystery? All these activities and more have been held at the Larson House Museum. Gail Aaroen (gtaaroen@hotmail.com) is the person to contact if you are interested. She will provide the rental agreement and give you suggestions and



This murder mystery held at the Larson House had a western theme.

support. Up to twenty people can be accommodated for a sit-down dinner and more if only hors d'oeuvres and beverages are to be served. In the summer months, the outdoor patio may be used, and tents, tables and chairs may be rented. Some of our customers arrange for food with the McFarland House Café or they may bring their own. Many groups have enjoyed the

ambiance of this lovely restored Victorian home. Our guests have been respectful of our antiques and artifacts, and we appreciate being able to offer this community treasure to enjoy. Contact Gail Aaroen 608-332-7089 or email at: gtaaroen@hotmail.com



Plant Sale at The Larson House

To raise funds for the Larson House Museum gardens, gardener Gail Aaroen and a team of volunteers dig extra perennials from the garden. After washing off the soil, they replant in sterilized potting soil and sell the plants from the Larson House Museum driveway. This is a hugely popular plant sale that you won't want to miss!

Plants include flowering and non-flowering plants suitable for full-sun to part-shade. Many Wisconsin native species are available. The sale will be held on the Larson House driveway on May 28, 29 and 30.

Marlene Richard and a middle school student prepare plants for sale.



Volunteer Opportunities

Do you love to play in the dirt? Would you love to learn about gardening from experienced gardeners? Do you enjoy giving back to your community? McFarland Historical Society has an opportunity for you to volunteer at their Larson House Museum at 6003 Exchange Street. It is a lovely restored Victorian House at the 4 way-stop in the center of town.

Our gardens will be featured in Brava Magazine this spring. We rent out the house for special occasions like birthday, bridal and baby showers. So, we like to maintain the gardens through the seasons.

Our gardening crew is aging. The majority of our group are over 70. We need to add to our group. Last fall we did get a young family, parents and their 9-year-old son. They want to teach him the importance to giving back to his community. What great role models! Interested? Contact Gail Aaroen at 608-332-7089 or email at: gtaaroen@hotmail.com.



Joan Mitchell is raking leaves at the Larson House

Lobby Display Honors the Ho-Chunk

Perhaps a thousand years ago, Ho-Chunk peoples migrated up from the south and settled in what is now Wisconsin. For many years there was a Ho-Chunk village in Babcock Park in McFarland. The area where Lake Waubesa empties into the Yahara River must have been a very attractive place to live because of its abundant resources. A committee of Wes Licht, Art Shegonee, Dawn Shegonee, Brian Ward, Dick Kohl, Gail Aaroen and Jane Licht developed a lobby presentation focused on the Ho-Chunk people.



Wes Licht and Rod Clark attached birch bark to the frame.

government finally allowed them to purchase land in Wisconsin. Today, many Ho-Chunk live in the Black River Falls and Wisconsin Dells areas.

Dawn Shegonee provided a display that includes photos of Art when he was a traditional dancer. She also added ceremonial sweet grass, tobacco, sage and cedar that would be burned together. The smoke would rise as prayers and be taken by the eagle to the Great Spirit Creator. On the other side of Dawn's display is an exhibit about local Ho-Chunk brothers, Walter and Harry Whitehorse, who served in the Navy in World War II.

A photo presentation also shows many Ho-Chunk people in their traditional regalia living in the late 1800's and early 1900's in Wisconsin. Sharon Page put together videos of Ho-Chunk people doing various activities that promote their culture. The entire display was enjoyed by visitors last summer, McFarland third graders in the fall, 9th graders studying U.S. history, and students who took Indigenous Studies. The exhibit will be available for viewing again this summer. Be sure to visit our lobby display, the main part of the museum, the log cabin and the early farming display on Sunday afternoons from 1 to 4 pm.

Artist Dale Marsden painted the background mural, and Wes Licht created a pattern for the construction of a Ho-Chunk home, ciiporoke (pronounced chi-poh-doh-kay). Ciiporokes were often made of woven reeds for the sides with birch bark on top, but some were built mainly of birch bark. Several society members met at the Licht's backyard to separate bark from birch tree stumps. A framework was made from sapling trees and the birch bark was attached. Art Shegonee directed hides from deer, bear and elk to be used to complete the ciiporoke.

Brian Ward wrote a history of the Ho-Chunk focused on the 1830's when the U.S. Government was intent on forcing them off their ancestral lands and moving them to reservations in Iowa, Minnesota and eventually, Nebraska. Each move was painful and caused loss of life. About half of the Ho-Chunk found their way back to their homes in Wisconsin, only to be rounded up and forced back to Nebraska. This pattern was repeated until the 1870's when the



Jane Licht is pointing to a Ho-Chunk style cradleboard that is part of the lobby display.

This group of Ho-Chunk dancers performed on the museum lawn during the Community Festival. The three older gentlemen in the center were drummers. Second from the right is Mary Funmaker who provided narration.



More Time for 2025 Third Grade Tours

Eight classes of eager third-graders visited our museum on October 3, 7, 8, and 9. After viewing the window display recognizing various early “Notable Women of McFarland,” they moved into the lobby to see the new exhibit featuring “First Nations of McFarland.” With a backdrop of Lake Waubesa painted by Dale Marsden, it showed a representation of Ho-Chunk village activities with the focal point being a birch bark home (ciiporoke). Students all had to peek inside to see the warm flickering glow of the fake fire warming this structure.



Dick Kohl helps a student team using the timber carrier.

The third-grade teachers from Waubesa Intermediate School (WIS) had arranged for more tour time with us this year at the museum. This gave the students the opportunity to try some wood harvesting skills with tools that early settlers used to make logs ready for building a log cabin.

Dick Kohl provided the vintage tools, introducing the peavey, cant hook, pike pole and various crosscut saws and demonstrating how they helped work with the logs. Then teams of third-graders, some paired with a volunteer parent, tried using the timber carrier, the two-person crosscut saw on a huge log and a bucksaw for cutting firewood on a saw buck. On various days, Dale Marsden, Travis Manning, Deb Brennum and Wes Licht assisted Dick with these activities. The students then visited the log cabin and the farm display in the annex.

Meanwhile inside the museum, volunteer guides from our membership (Carol Torgeson, Betty Kalhagen, Gini Nichols, Jane Licht, Rosalie Richardson and Gail Aaroen) were touring small groups of third-graders to all the various permanent exhibits. These guides also appreciated the extra time allotted for showing the exhibits and answering a myriad of questions. “More satisfying” was their general feeling to not being rushed by the former time restraints.

WIS teacher Libby Rowley, who organized the four days of trips, was also very happy with the new time changes. At the conclusion of the visits, she wrote, “Students were very enthusiastic about the hands-on activities they did while at the museum this year. The additional minutes were a positive addition and seemed to fly by! Please thank everyone for their hard work and dedication to the young learners of this community.”



Wes Licht introduces students to the Skare family log cabin.



Gini Nichols leads a small group of third-graders in the museum.



Betty Kalhagen shares information on old businesses in McFarland.

Victorian Christmas at the Larson House

Thanks to our dedicated crew of volunteers, Victorian Christmas at the Larson House seems to get better each year. These folks hauled many Christmas trees and tubs of decorations from the attic and basement, carefully decorated each tree, and/or hosted during the first Saturday and all Sundays in December: Carol Torgeson, Linda Scheid, Tim Mitchell, Aaron Jacobs, Wes Licht, Melanie Robak, Emily Wei, Joe Larson, Sylvia Krepeski, Thelma Allen, Deb Brennum, Marlene Richard, Carol Beck, Gail Aaroen, Mike Flaherty, Mary Jo Larson, Karen Kuenzi, Jane Licht, Michael Tiboris, Barb Doran, Courtney Pena, Travis Manning, Judy St. Clair, Jennifer Wiemer, Ashly David, Candy Mooney, and Cheryl Salava who also organized our cookie bakers. Those delicious treats were made by Cheryl, Mike Flaherty and granddaughter Elaine, Sharon Bowman, Sheryl Rowe, Melanie Robak, Marlene Richard, Carol Torgeson, Rosali Richardson, Carol Beck, Deb Brennum, Margit Schiefelbein, Barbara Volker, and Jane Licht.

Our Victorian Christmas was especially magical thanks to our fine musicians who graced the Larson House with their holiday music: Terry Peterson, Sue Vick Finley, DeAnn Larson, Betty Kalhagen, Jim Alsmo, Ralph Kieffer, Mary Linklater, Sharon Bowman, Rosalie Richardson, Glenda Phillips, Michael Tiboris, Lori Stoneking, and Randy Snell.

Winter Wonderland is the first Saturday in December. This year, in addition to the lovely decorations, tours, refreshments and music, our McFarland Library's children's librarian, Heather Kent, joined us to read stories for the visiting youngsters. It was delightful!



Terri Peterson has played the Larson House studio grand piano during the first Saturday in December for many years. Terri helped select this piano back in 2012.

After the fun of December was over, our "un-decorating and putting away" crews went to work in January. These were the same people who volunteered for the Victorian Christmas except for Joan Behr, Rod Clark, and Dale Marsden who joined us in January. You, dear reader, can join us next season. Just let Jane (licht.jane@gmail.com) or Gail (gtaaroen@hotmail.com) know of your interest. Note: We always have the coffee pot going and treats on the table during these projects.



Thelma Allen is standing next to the tree in the master bedroom that is full of the star ornaments that she made. These handmade fabric stars decorated the tree and were for sale to benefit the Larson House.



Heather Kent read holiday stories to the children and their parents.



From left to right are Candy Mooney, Karen Kenzi and her granddaughter Bodhi Heyn. Candy and Karen served as hosts at the Larson House.

Obituaries

Gene Simpson, 80

Gene Simpson passed away on Saturday, January 17, 2026, from complications of a rare neurodegenerative disorder. Despite a steady, five-year decline, he remained the big hearted, loving person that he always was. Gene is survived by Sue, his wife of 56 years. He will be deeply missed.

Gene was born in Stoughton, Wis., on October 14, 1946, to Hattie and Morris Simpson. He grew up as the third oldest child on the family farm in the Town of Dunn. Gene was part of the inaugural class of McFarland High School, and he played on the school's state championship 1964 football team. He also served in the Army National Guard and was able to participate in a Badger Honor Flight in 2024.

He married Susan Turgasen in 1969, and they lived for a time on Madison's east side. They started their family there before moving back to the Town of Dunn. Gene enjoyed spending time with friends and family - hunting, fishing, boating, golfing and playing cards. He worked for 40 years at Webcrafters in Madison. After retiring, he was able to enjoy his passion for both home repairs and being a good neighbor as a handyman at the Shenandoah Apartments in Madison. Gene could build or fix most anything and was known to travel with tools "just in case." We will miss him for that, but more so for his good-humored joking and kindness.

Arnold Vollmer, 98

Arnold "Arn" Lee Vollmer passed away peacefully on February 7, 2026, at the age of 98. He was born on July 12, 1927, in Chicago, Illinois, to Arnold A. and Dorothea C. Vollmer.

Arn attended Wright College of Chicago and Purdue University through the GI Bill. He served in the Navy during World War II.

He married Violet Riedel, in 1949 in Chicago and together they built a loving family.

Later in life, he married Carrol Aaberg Holen, in 1992, in McFarland. Carrol brought laughter and joy to Arn's life and he adored her deeply. Together they shared many happy years rooted in faith, friendship, and family.

Arn worked for a number of construction companies before serving as a civil engineer for the State of Wisconsin, where he eventually retired. He was known as steady, devoted, calm, and someone who always had a smile on his face.

Arn enjoyed concerts, plays, fish fries, bowling and reading. He loved the outdoors, especially golfing, fishing, camping, biking, canoeing, walking and bird watching. He faithfully served as a Scout Leader for Troop 53.

Wilson Dean Rossman, 89

Wilson Dean Rossman, of McFarland, passed away on Sunday, August 31, 2025, at home surrounded by family. He was born on December 14, 1935, in Dodgeville, the son of John and Katherine (Karr) Rossman.

Will graduated from Stoughton High School in 1955. He was united in marriage to Patsy Edwards on October 18, 1958, at McFarland Lutheran Church. Will served in the U.S. Army, spent a couple years in Germany and was discharged on October 31, 1962. In 2023, Will enjoyed a trip to Washington, D.C. with the Badger Honor Flight. He worked as a painter for the Madison School District retiring in 1998.

Will was a member of McFarland Lutheran Church, the Painters Union and Ducks Unlimited, living in Texas during winter months for over 20 years. Will particularly enjoyed special hunting trips with his son, Rory, as well as fishing. He was an incredible woodworker, making many different wood projects.

Audrey Helmke Endres, 93

Audrey Helmke Endres passed away in her home in McFarland, Wisconsin, on May 8, 2025. Born in 1932, she was the youngest daughter of Dorothy and Chester Helmke. Audrey grew up in McFarland with her sister Dolores Helmke (Fisher), twin sisters Carol Helmke (Lokken) and Corrine Helmke (Niedenthal), her mother and grandparents Ole and Mary Nelson. Audrey married John Endres in 1951 and together they ran a summer camp in northern Minnesota. After having been divorced by John, Audrey moved to Hawaii and later to Marcos Island in Florida where she made many good friends. She subsequently moved back to McFarland in 2017 and purchased the home on Main Street where she had spent her childhood. Audrey enjoyed the company of her neighbors and longtime friends. Audrey was a member of the McFarland Historical Society. She contributed artifacts she knew would be of interest and told stories of living in McFarland in the late 1930's and 1940's.

Christmas (Cont.)



Volunteers are putting Christmas trees into bags for storage. From left to right are Gail Aaroen, Aaron Jacobs, Rosali Richardson, Mary Jo Larson, Joan Behr, and Linda Scheid.

Please renew your by April 1st this year to stay on our rolls.

Your membership and donations help to support the McFarland Historical Society and keeps the museum operating. If you would like to volunteer, let us know. We also have board positions open if you are interested in becoming more active in the Society. Many area residents volunteer their time and energy to make this a successful organization.

I want to support local history as a member of the McFarland Historical Society. Please enroll me as a new or renewal member for 2026. (If you are a **life time member** new donations are appreciated.)

- Individual \$ 15
- Family \$ 25
- Individual/Family life \$ 150
- Supporting \$ 250
- Business \$ 250
- Support for Larson house _____

Amount Enclosed: _____

Name(s): _____

Street or P.O. Box _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

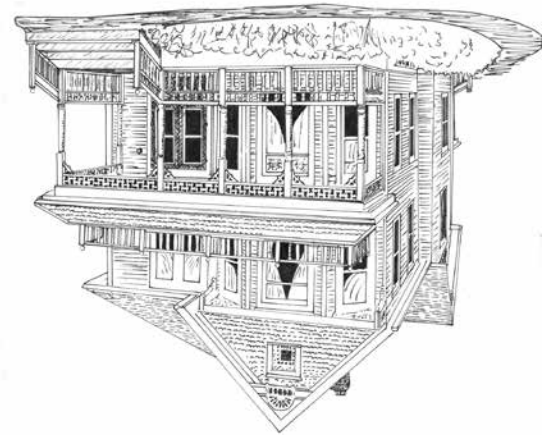
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Check here if you would like to receive **the color newsletter** by email in the future.

Go to www.mcfarlandhistorical.org for a color copy of the newsletter, information and color photos on all McFarland Historical Society activities. Photos are by Jane Licht & Sue Vick-Finley.

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