

Gone Gardening with Sheryl Popp

Caring for the past, preserving for the future

If you've been following *Gone Gardening* this year, you might remember that Jim Punzel was one of the volunteers I met at Lac Lawrann on potting day. He's the guy that has been there since forever, and is one of the guys who mixes soil for the pots. He mentioned to me that he and his wife Sally were the caretakers at Ozaukee County Pioneer Village in Saukville. It recently struck me that their work there would be a great story. On top of that, I'd never visited the site. It is a fascinating place, to be sure.

The Ozaukee County Historical Society operates Pioneer Village. In 1962, they were ceded land designated to become a historical rural village. Today, the village covers over seven acres and has 24 restored structures. Jim and Sally care for both the grounds and the buildings, and as part of their reimbursement for doing so,

make their home in a house just across from the village. Jim and Sally met in Northern Wisconsin, and have always tried to live in more secluded areas. "So this is just a perfect place for us to be," said Jim. The village is open to the public on weekends, offers school tours and has a number of annual events during their season; mid-May to mid-October.

The couple applied for the position of caretakers after Jim retired, and they been there since 2016. "When we came to interview, I asked if we had to clean all the buildings too," laughed Sally. "That would have been a deal breaker." However, that's not the case. Historical Society volunteers adopt a building, and come to do spring cleaning in April and help at other times, although Sally says buildings often need spiffing up after events. Especially when the weather has been as rainy as this

spring.

It's fairly hectic on weekends Jim informed me, but in the earlier part of the week, they're able to make their own schedule. Mowing, trimming and weeding take up quite some time. With buildings ranging in age from the 1840s to the 1900s, there is without fail, any number of things that need repair. "They always need TLC," said Jim. "You have to prioritize. And the Village Manager, Allen Buchholz, comes to help out with projects too. He remembers coming here as a boy." Also, the Ozaukee Master Gardeners come out once a month before events to care for the flowerbeds. Everything they have planted is historically accurate and native to the area. Since everything is authentic, not even mulch is allowed.

"We have learned so much history," said Sally. "The buildings come from all over:

near Myra, Cedarburg, Little Cedar Lake, Kirchhayn, Grafton. Also Sheboygan and Dodge Counties. One of the most interesting facts is that the Sinnen House came from Dacada, outside Luxembourg. It was taken apart piece by piece and craftsmen from Luxembourg came to reconstruct it. Royalty from Luxembourg came here for the dedication." Sally always loved field stone and with its history, this is her favorite building. Buildings include a hay barn, a trading post, sheds, a blacksmith shop, a summer kitchen, a smoke house, a train depot, homes, cabins and even an outhouse. The split rail fence separating the village from the parking lot, is from Little Kohler and dates to 1860. "I always remind children how old and fragile it is," said Sally. "Otherwise they would climb on it." Almost everything one sees inside the buildings has been donated directly or given previously to the Historical Society. "Visitors identify their ancestors' pictures for us sometimes," said Sally. "Or even remember visiting one of the buildings in its original location."

Annual events include Heritage Day, the antique tractor show, Bluegrass at the Village and more. This year, the WWII Reenactment camp was one of the those events that necessitated some serious clean-up. "I even mopped up the porches this year," said Sally.

School tours are frequent at the village. Sally says she has seen home school and parochial groups show up carrying their lunch in vintage pails, or even wearing period costumes. "They really, really enjoy being here," she said. "It's not a cake walk though," said Jim. "We're always on call and we can have some tough projects. We have some destructive critters.



The Blacksmith Shop dates to 1850. On most event days, a blacksmith visits to demonstrate his craft.

Woodchucks dug under the summer kitchen and the floor collapsed. That was a chore to rebuild. But we don't plan to ever move until we can't perform our duties. This is where we feel comfortable." "We had friends bring their grandchildren out not that long ago," said Sally. "Our friends explained what we do here. Their little granddaughter looked at us

and said, 'You mean you get to come over here and play whenever you like?' We told her she was right."

Pioneer Village is located at 4880 Hwy. I in Saukville. It is open to the public from Noon to 5:00pm Saturday and Sunday. To learn more, go to www.ochs.co.ozaukee.wi.us. You can also leave a message at 262-377-4510.



Jim and Sally Punzel are the caretakers of Ozaukee County Pioneer Village.



The Ahler Log House was the first building acquired for the village.