

# *The Butte des Morts Buzz*



*Newsletter of the Butte des Morts Historical Preservation Society*

*September, 2014 Volume I*

## *Kick-off Meeting a Success!*



Welcome to the Butte des Morts Historical Preservation Society! We are pleased to report that at our kick-off meeting on June 22 we had about 75 people in attendance and we now have over 50 memberships (about 80 people)! Anyone can still become a charter member by joining before the end of next year. Tell

your friends! If they are interested....Our charter membership runs until December 2015. Thereafter it will renew in December of each year. Membership is \$15 for an individual, \$25 for a couple, \$35 for a family, and \$5 for a student. Life time membership is \$250.

Some local dignitaries and many community members were present at our kick-off, including: Representative Gordon Hintz and Representative Penny Bernard-Schaber.

Many community members shared Butte des Morts stories and artifacts including numerous newspaper articles and photos. We had a great time listening and meeting new Butte des Morts friends! We will be sharing these and more in our quarterly newsletter, **The Butte des Morts Buzz**. If you have a story or information to share,

please contact Secretary Patti Yana at [BDMHPS@gmail.com](mailto:BDMHPS@gmail.com) or call her at 920-582-9616. Our BDMHPS address is PO Box 332 Butte des Morts, WI. 54927.

## *Meet the Board of Directors!*



*Back row, left to right: Jim Quillinan, Randy Domer, Skip Thorpe, Joe Yana, George Kontos; Front row: Deb Daubert, Patti Yana (Missing from photo: Vicki Wilson and Tom Kontos)*

**President: Joe Yana...** Joe was born in and grew up in Oshkosh, WI. He attended St. Mary's Elementary School, Webster Stanley Junior High, and graduated from Oshkosh High School. He went on to receive his Bachelor's degree in History and Political Science from UW-Oshkosh, where he met his wife Patti. They were married in 1975. Joe continued on to Marquette Law School. After practicing law for 5 years, Joe served as Family Court Commissioner for Winnebago County for 23 years. He serves on the Board of Directors for the Wisconsin Inter-professional Committee on Divorce and the Butte des Morts Conservation Club.

He is also an active member of the Butte des Morts Lions Club, Re:Th!nk, and the Winnebago County Heroin Task Force.

**Vice President: Randy Domer...** Randy was born in Oshkosh in 1951. He and his wife, Karen, have three daughters and six grandchildren. Randy is a food industry executive recently retired from SUPRVALU, Inc. with 23 years of service. Randy started in the grocery business at age 15 employed as a stock clerk and bagger for the Prescott family who owned Sawyer Street SUPERVALU in Oshkosh. He also is a 20+ year veteran with the Wisconsin Army National Guard, retiring from service as a Sergeant First Class. In 2013 Randy wrote and published a book entitled Yesterday in Oshkosh... My Hometown, tales reminiscent of growing up in Oshkosh in the 1950s and 60s. In his leisure time, Randy enjoys historical research, fishing, gardening, music, sports, cooking at home and writing. Today Randy is a member of the board of directors with the Winnebago County Historical and Archaeological Society and has a strong passion for local history. It was here that Randy's interest in the Butte des Morts community was fueled by the opportunity to help preserve the Grignon Hotel. The WCHAS appointed Randy as chairman to oversee the society's interests in helping save the historic site.

**Secretary-Treasurer: Patti Yana...** Patti was born and raised in the Milwaukee area and obtained her BS degree from UWO in Early Childhood. After earning her MA in

education while teaching Kindergarten she started volunteering anywhere and everywhere! She has lived in Butte des Morts with her husband, Joe, for the past 26 years. Living in a 105 year old house that has only had two previous owners got her interested in exploring its origin! With Joe being a history major and Patti being a teacher, she is always interested in learning things about history. BDM seemed a great place to explore history! Patti began exploring history while working on her family genealogy. Along with volunteering on numerous committees, ushering at the Grand Opera House, and volunteering at the Oshkosh Public Museum, Patti also serves on the board of the Winnebago County Historical and Archaeological Society.

**Deb Daubert...** Deb's first memory of Butte des Morts is one of the friendly people who helped her older brother get the family car back on the road after it slid off during a winter storm. They had been traveling from Wausau, where they lived, to Oshkosh to visit both sets of grandparents. A belated thanks to those nameless people.

She was born on a farm outside of Omro, but then moved to Wausau at age six. During college, she moved back to Oshkosh to live with her grandmother. However, at the same time her mother, Mary G. Daubert, decided to relocate (Deb's father died when she was twelve and Mary wanted to help elderly grandparents.) so she bought her new home circa 1973 in Butte des Morts. She

found work at the Winneconne Community Schools. Deb's two younger brothers, Myron and Matthew, many may remember as being their paperboys during the 1980s.

Deb has been the curator at the Oshkosh Public Museum since 1981 but actually started there in 1977 as an intern from UW-O and then taught art classes until she became curator. In those early years the museum actually took part in an archeological dig at the Grignon/Petford Hotel. She participated by cleaning many artifacts found near the foundation.

When Deb's mother started having health problems, she came to stay with her to help. Now that Deb's mother has passed on she spends her time at the Butte des Morts home and her 100+ year old, farm near Eureka.

**George Kontos...** George Kontos was born in Chicago in 1923 and moved to Butte des Morts in 1928. Having lived in Butte des Morts 85 years makes him the longest living BDM resident on our board! Thus he has a great interest in preserving the history of Butte des Morts. George attended Butte des Morts Elementary, still standing on County S and Spiegelberg Road. He then attended high school in Oshkosh, rather than Winneconne because he could get a ride there. He rode to school with Frank Tilly and Jesse Benedict. He attended college at UW Madison and Oshkosh where he met his wife Merle in French class. After serving in the Navy during WWII, George came back to Butte des Morts and later he and his wife Merle settled down here for nearly 60 years. They had two daughters and a son. George's Uncle Chris started a candy shop at what is now the White House Inn,

which originally operated as a hotel. George's dad James Kontos, operated "Jimmy's (aka Jimmie's) White House". George took over the White House in 1974 after his dad passed away. George also has worked as a realtor, Winnebago County bailiff, town constable, and eventually police chief, serving on the force for over 35 years. Thus George knows just about everyone in town!

**Jim Quillinan**... Jim graduated from Oshkosh High School in 1970. He moved to Butte des Morts in 1986 because he had friends here. He bought the former Grignon Hotel, originally built by Augustin Grignon, the first white settler in Butte des Morts. He was very interested in "Gus" and what he did to develop this town. At the time Jim purchased this historic building from the Winnebago County Historical Society, he hoped to eventually turn it into an art gallery, with art classes to be held there. However, now he is "stuck" with a very old house! This historic building is estimated to have been completed in the late 1840s.

**Harold (Skip) Thorpe**... Harold has lived with his family in Butte des Morts since April, 1973. He and his wife Lynn are retired educators, but keep busy these days taking care of their four grandchildren: Wyatt, Aubrey Grayson, and Bellamy, all Butte des Morts residents! When not busy entertaining this flock, Lynn creates beautiful crafts, tends her garden, and visits with neighbors while riding her bicycle through Butte des Morts streets. Harold spends his days writing twentieth century stories that are set in

the region of his youth in southwest Wisconsin. He also writes books for his grandchildren, set in Door County and Butte des Morts. He is excited to be part of our blossoming BDM Historical Preservation Society and is grateful to Joe, Patti, and Randy for having planted the seed.

**Vicki Wilson**... Vicki moved in with her grandmother, Clara Erdmann, when she was just under a year old. She went to the little school house just outside of BDM (on S and Spiegelberg Rd.) for kindergarten through 2nd grade. Vicki then went to Winneconne Schools through graduation. She attended UWO while working part time at Wisconsin Bell and worked there until she was married in 1975. They lived in Chicago suburbs for 4 years until her first daughter was born and decided the only place to raise kids was here in Butte des Morts! She then went back to work for the phone company and worked there for thirty years and retired in November of 1999. Since then she has been managing the White House Inn where she spent a great deal of time growing up so it's pretty much like home to her!

Vicki was part of the original navy aboard the USS Chicken Ship with Admiral George Kontos at the helm for the first Sovereign State day in Winneconne! Vicki said she didn't have a favorite memory because they're all so good she just didn't know where to start. She has lived in three different houses in Butte des Morts, but all on Washington Street, so you can see she didn't want to go far. This village has a rich history and Vicki is glad she's a part of it. We are too!

**Tom Kontos.....** Tom grew up in Butte des Morts and graduated from Winneconne High School. He graduated from Ripon College, and later graduated from the Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth. He is currently a retired Army Reserve Lieutenant Colonel, landlord, and volunteer firefighter and works as a Biomed for ThedaCare.

Tom is the son of the late Tom J. Kontos and Bonnie Porath Kontos, nephew to George Kontos. His wife, Heather Kontos, will begin teaching Math in Winneconne this year. Tom's 30 years of service included the Army, Army Guard, and Army Reserve. He is a veteran of Iraq and Afghanistan, and also served in Germany and various locations in the United States. He has belonged to the Winneconne Poygan Fire Department since 1990. He is a member of Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church in Fond du Lac.

His lifelong interest in reading History goes back to the bookmobile parked in front of the Grignon building. History was one of his degrees at Ripon, where he interned for a semester at the U.S. Army Military History Institute at Carlisle Barracks, PA. He once was published as a co-author of The Deployment Journal of the 39<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade Combat Team to Baghdad, Iraq in 2008.

Tom has inherited the wanderlust from his ancestors and loves traveling and always makes it a point to see something

historical. His interest in Butte des Morts History is multi-faceted. First he is greatly intrigued with the geographic location of Butte des Morts in the early fur trapping days and that one had to pass by it in order to get to the Mississippi River. Second, he is amazed at the early history of Butte des Morts itself to include the early settler and the Indians before them.

### *Meet Augustin Grignon!*



*Augustin Grignon*

Now that you've met our charter board of directors, let's get to know a little bit about Augustin Grignon, the first white settler in what is now known as Butte des Morts. Here starts a very brief sketch of Augustin Grignon....

**Augustin (aka Augustine, aka Augustus) Grignon** was born in 1780 in Green Bay, WI, the son of Pierre and Louise-Domitelle (de Langlade) Grignon. He was the grandson of Charles de Langlade, the first white settler in Wisconsin. Augustin had eight siblings. He married Nancy McCrae in 1805 and had five children with her: Margaret, Charles, Alexander, Paul,



and Sophia. Augustin was a Lieutenant in the War of 1812 and a Captain in the Black Hawk War. In 1813 Augustin moved to Kaukauna and three years later built the first grist mill and later the first sawmill right on the property using hydro power. Augustin Grignon, being a French fur trader, had already established a trading post in the Kaukauna area. Then in 1818 Grignon and James (aka Jacques) Porlier established a trading post about a mile from what is now the village of Butte des Morts. Historical records indicate this was the first trading post in Winnebago County. An historical marker was erected in 1929, marking the trading post near what is now the Overton farm on County Trunk S.

Around 1830 Augustin and his wife left Kaukauna and moved to Butte des Morts, leaving Charles and Alexander to run the family business and maintain the homestead. By 1840 he began to plat the land in Butte des Morts. Although Augustin Grignon was named the first Postmaster in Butte des Morts in 1849, he had other ideas for making a living. From most historical accounts, that is the same year he established the hotel that is located on the corner of Main and Washington Streets. During this time period Augustin fought to have Butte des Morts remain the county seat. But alas, that was not to be, and Oshkosh won out to be the coveted location in 1850.

**Coming next....**What happened to

Augustin Grignon after he established the hotel?

We will be sharing more stories about Butte des Morts in our future quarterly newsletters. Let us know what you'd like to see!

## *Welcome BDMHPS Charter Members!*



Meet our 2014-15 **charter members!** BDMHPS board members are **highlighted**. Winnebago County Historical and Archaeological Board members are starred\*. **Lifetime members are in red**. Welcome aboard one and all!! We thank you for growing with us!

**John R. Allen**

**Victoria Beltran & Marty Zoglman**

**Jackie Boese**

**Gail Bohner**

**Tim & Cathy Cook**

**Deb Daubert & Patrick Moore**

**Matthew Daubert**

**Randy Domer\***

**Beth & Pete Ehlert**

Michele Ellingson & Mike Kirby  
Lee Fenendael  
Robert & Rose Gayeske  
Patricia Gulbrandsen  
Nick Hergert & Family  
Jerry Huevler  
Julie Johnson\*  
Mike & Kathy Jung  
Joan Kaeding  
Bonnie Kontos  
George Kontos  
James Kontos  
Tom & Heather Kontos  
Jenifer Koser\*  
Miles & Diane La Fever  
Diane & Jerry Lang  
Bruce & Cindy Loberg  
Kim & Darrell Lubenow  
Debbie Markman-Beck & Larry Markman  
Hank & Sarah Mathewson  
Chuck Nichols  
Dick & Marti Norton  
Doug & Romi Norton  
Nyoka Pankey & Billy Jack German  
Bob Plummer  
Jim Quillinan  
Dan & Pam Reinhold  
Joan & Tim Riebock  
Nile Roeder  
Mary Schultz  
Allen & Valerie Stabenow  
Donald & Laurie Stowe  
Kathryn Boss Thomsen  
Chris & Treva Thorpe  
Harold & Lynn Thorpe  
Lisa Thorpe  
David Tovar & Family  
Margaret Turner

Charles Williams  
Amanda Wilson  
Vicki Wilson  
Ginny Wojtowski  
Brian Wood\* & Anthony Frommelt\*  
Joe Yana  
Patti Yana\*  
Lisa Zwickey\*

We are so pleased that so many of you have shown an interest in preserving the rich history of Butte des Morts and are quite humbled by the showing of support. Please let us know if there is a particular interest you have about Butte des Morts history and we'll dig into it for you! This is your organization too so we'd love to know what you'd like to see in this newsletter. Let us know!



### *What's the buzz?*

\*\*We are happy to announce our newest board member (listed above)... Tom Kontos, who filled a vacancy after our kick-off meeting. Welcome Tom! We're happy to have you join us on our team.

\*\*We are in the process of choosing our web site designer. This is an exciting process for all of us and well worth the expense! Details will follow in the next newsletter.

\*\*A small group of us will be going on our first outing on September 20. We will be visiting the historic Grignon Mansion in

Kaukauna, established by Charles A. Grignon, son of our very own Augustin Grignon. A summary of our visit will be in the next newsletter.



\*\*We had a table set up at Carpfest on August 10 to spread the word about our new society. Many folks stopped by to ask questions and share stories. We were excited to gain a few more members! We also collected donations for a fireproof safe that we will need to store sensitive documents. (Donations still welcome!) Thanks to members who volunteered to staff the table: Amanda Wilson, Skip Thorpe, Nyoka Pankey, Billy Jack German, Deb Daubert, and Patti Yana.



\*\*Joe and Patti Yana will be setting up interviews of long time Butte des Morts residents. If you have information to share or know someone who would be great to interview, please let us know! We hope to video these interviews for our future web site! Our first interview was

with the “most senior” Butte des Morts resident, Lucille Klug. We will be sharing her story in the next quarterly newsletter.

\*\*We will find out in October if our application to be affiliated with the Wisconsin Historical Society is approved. At that time we can then apply for our non-profit status, known as a 501 (C) 3. Having this status will permit us to write grants and allow for tax deductible contributions as well. We eventually would like to erect historical markers in Butte des Morts noting the previous use of several buildings. Just as an FYI, there is a one-time fee of \$400 for the 501 C (3) application.

\*\*Our next annual meeting will be in June, 2015. However, watch your emails (or mailbox) for other events we will be planning during the year! If you have a topic or an idea you’d like to share with those of us interested in the history of Butte des Morts, please let us know! Because public speaking isn’t for everyone, we’d be happy to write down your story and share it with others. If anyone has memories to share, we’d love to hear about them! Please contact Patti or Joe Yana at 920-582-9616 or [BDMHPS@gmail.com](mailto:BDMHPS@gmail.com). Thank you!!



