

# Monticello Area Historical Society News Letter



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## Museum looking for a few items.....

**We have these High School Annuals in our collection. We'd appreciate any yearbooks that fill gaps in this listing.**

### High School Annuals

Monti-Hi, 1927	Mohiscan, 1947	Mohiscan, 1948
Mohiscan, 1949	Mohiscan, 1951	Mohiscan, 1955
Mohiscan, 1956	Mohiscan, 1957	Mohiscan 1958
Mohiscan 1965	Mohiscan 1971	Mohiscan 1985
Mohiscan 1988	Mohiscan 1989	Mohiscan 1990
Mohiscan 1992	Mohiscan 1993	Mohiscan 1995
Mohiscan 1997	Mohiscan 1998	Mohiscan 1999
Mohiscan 2000	Mohiscan 2001	Mohiscan 2001-2002
Mohiscan 2003	Mohiscan 2003-2004	Mohiscan 2005
Mohiscan 2005-2006		

### Grade School

Primary School, PK-8, 1997-1998	Primary School, PK-8, 2000
Primary School, PK-8, 2001	Primary School, PK-8, 2003
Primary School, PK-8, 200-2004	Primary School, PK-8, 2004-2005

We are also looking for two other items for our collection. If anyone has one and would like to donate it please contact the museum. As always we are also looking for photographs of Monticello and its people. If you would not like to donate your photograph, we would appreciate it if you would allow us to scan the photo to put into our digital collection.

- *Cigar box with a photograph of the 8 Voegeli Brothers on the front*
- *Old photograph of Zwingli Church with a barn in the background*



### Special points of interest:

- We encourage all members to bring a friend to all programs
- Check out our new photo slide show on our website

[www.monticellohistoricalsociety.org](http://www.monticellohistoricalsociety.org)  
(DSL modem required to view slide show)

# Conversation... with Fred and Genevieve Escher

by Kris Crary



"I didn't even like Swiss cheese when I met Fritz, but I learned to," said Genevieve Escher, recalling the days when her courtship with Fred Escher was interrupted every few hours when he had to turn the cheeses. "Life was a timetable of when the cheese had to be turned." June may be considered dairy month now, but as a young man working in his father's cheese factory, Fred Escher had cheese on his mind seven days a week, throughout the year in all but the coldest winter months.

Fred Escher retired from the cheese making business 16 years ago, and for the last eight years he and his wife have lived along Lake Wisconsin in Okee. Mr. Escher's brother Art, a partner in the family's factory, the North Side Swiss Co-operative in Monticello, Wis., also lives in Okee.

According to Mr. Escher, Wisconsin dairy farmers are now shipping more of their milk as liquid and using less for cheese making. As a result, about half the cheese factories which existed in the southern part of Wisconsin are now closed.

Methods of making and distributing cheese have changed since Mr. Escher was a lad in his father's factory, too. While the factories used to make 180 to 250-pound wheels of Swiss cheese, today's factories usually make 50 to 60-pound loaves, which can be sliced into convenient sized pieces and packaged for distribution.

"We used to just cut it off the wheel, wrap it in paper, and throw it at 'em," recalled Mr. Escher. He added that part of the increased cost of cheese over the years can be attributed to the slicing, packaging and distributing required by today's customers.

In order to preserve Mr. Escher's boyhood recollections of cheese making in former years, Mrs. Escher wrote an essay entitled "Living in a Cheese Factory," which was submitted to the "Yarns of Yesteryear" writing project sponsored by the University of Wisconsin-Extension in the spring of 1980.

She wrote:

"My parents came to America from Alsace. Mother had worked for rich people in Strassburg and she was a marvelous cook. She could make rabbits, squirrels and pigeons taste like the finest gourmet cooking. Our spring salads were dandelions, which are



Mr. & Mrs. Escher

very much like endive. Her garden vegetables added variety to our meals.

My father was a cheese maker in Albany, Wis. He made wheel Swiss for 30 years. The first factory I remember had three kettles, two for cheese making and one for heating water to clean the utensils. Dad would make a fire in a wagon that was pulled under the kettles on a track set down in the floor. When the milk was heated the fire wagon was pulled under the water kettle. He had a noisy gasoline engine to run the separator. Butter was made from the cream. My mother's fresh bread with this butter is one of my fondest memories.

"They made cheese twice a day because the farmers didn't have milk coolers. They just milked the cows and brought it to the factory. Dad and the hired men worked so hard making cheese twice a day and sleeping a few hours in the afternoon and night. Our hired men were from Europe, too. They liked wine instead of water and by the time the cheeses were made at night the men would be yodeling down in the making room. Everyone worked so hard. Still it was a happy time and the farmers used to visit while they waited to dump the milk. Children rode along, too.

The winter months were very different. The cows were dry. Most farmers just had one for home use. Dad and the hired men made any needed factory repairs, and cut enough wood for the next year. Dad also did butchering for the farmers. His pay was the heads, tails, feet, and some liver. Mother made headcheese, pickled pigs' feet, and liver dumplings. They played yass, a Swiss card game, at night.

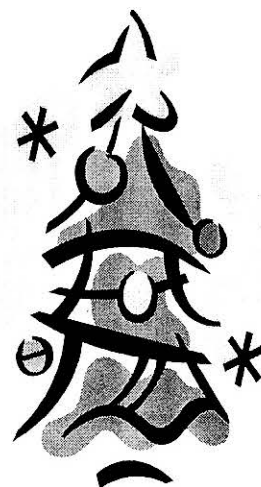
Our home life was so quiet - the only noise was that old gasoline engine on the cream separator. When the cheese buyer came in his new car - a Jeffrey - my brother Art and I hid under the bed. The thing was so noisy we were scared to death.

My family spoke a Swiss dialect, so I couldn't talk English when I started school. Those were a few difficult years for a small child with World War I going on. Children can be very mean without even knowing why.

When I was eight years old we moved to a larger factory in Monroe. There were several children living on farms near by. We had such good times fishing, sleigh-riding and, when we were older, going hunting. One of the farmers had a big field of watermelons. My brother and I used to take a cheese trier and plug the melons to find a ripe one. We wondered why that farmer always blamed us when some of his melons were missing.

The living quarters in those old factories were never very good. When

*Cheese making got started in 1846 when wheat prices dropped and chinch bugs at the crop. Farmers had to look for other means of income.*



we came home from school with the new idea about sleeping with our bedroom windows open at night, my father laughed and said he thought we were getting enough fresh air when the wind blew that snow across the kitchen floor last night. The dipper would be frozen in the water pail.

My brother and I weren't afraid of loud engines anymore - we took everything apart. Dad came around the factory to get the truck to haul the cream one day, and there we were with the truck apart. I can tell you he was very angry and gave us orders to get it back together at once. We got it back with teamwork.

When we became adults we moved to a bigger factory and were partners with our father, Emil Escher & Sons, operators of the North Side Swiss Cooperative, Monticello."

Save for a brief visit to California at age 19 - "to seek his fortune," according to Genevieve Escher - Fred Escher was involved in the cheese making industry with his father and brother Art from his childhood until his retirement in 1965.

Cheese making was always a gamble, said Mr. Escher, adding that over two months passed between the making of the cheese and its official grading. But an experienced cheesemaker could tell how the cheese would turn out before ever tasting it. "By the smell of the milk, you could tell pretty much how it would turn out," he said.

He recalled some bad batches of cheese made when farmers first began treating their cows with penicillin. First, the cheese did not set up properly because the penicillin killed all the bacteria found in milk, even those necessary for forming the cheese. And the odor of the residual penicillin in the milk was bad. Farmers soon learned to wait a few days between treating the cows with the antibiotic and using the milk for cheese.

He explained that cheese is a type of bacterial growth, and that various types of cheeses are made by using different starters - coagulating agents - in the milk. The specialty of the Emil Escher and Sons factory was Swiss cheese.

After the starter was added to the milk, the batch was kept cool for two weeks and stirred with a harp to separate the coagulating cheese. The forming wheels of cheese were then moved to a warm area where they were wrapped in cheesecloth and turned frequently. Gases escaping from the cheese gave this young Swiss its characteristic holes and flavor. Washing in brine tanks gave it a hard, strong-flavored rind. After about six weeks in the warm cellar, the cheeses were moved to a cool cellar to be aged for at least 60 days.

It was traditional at the family's factory, the North Side Swiss Cooperative in Monticello, to have an annual anniversary party at which a special cheese was made to be aged until the next year's party. At the party last year's party cheese was eaten.

According to Mrs. Escher, cheeses bought today will never have the flavor of the wheel Swiss made then. "I would grate the rind down to the bottom and use it in cooking instead of Parmesan cheese," she said. Mr. Escher added, "A good cheese is good from the rind in."

Mr. Escher recalled that the farmers in an area would join to buy a building and

then hire a cheesemaker who supplied the expertise, tools, and equipment. In 1933, shortly after Mr. Escher returned from California, the North Side Swiss Co-operative moved into a modern, new building, built for \$8,000 and equipped for another \$8,000. The Escher family made cheese at this factory until 1959.

A scrapbook kept by Mrs. Escher attests to the awards won by their Swiss cheese, the trip Mr. Escher made to Washington, D. C. as a member of a delegation, his election to the Monticello Village Board and his rise as a civic leader.

An avid fisherman, Mr. Escher purchased a vacation cottage in Okee in 1949 that was later remodeled to become a permanent home for him and his wife. Throughout the 1950s the Escher's and their children, Bill and Shirley, vacationed in Okee, and in the early 1960s Mr. Escher purchased the Sunset Harbor Marina near Okee. He and his son operated the marina on weekends, intending that it become a retirement business for Mr. Escher.

Mr. Escher did not retire when he left the North Side Swiss Co-operative, however. He worked grading cheese for a Monroe cheese dealer, and ran a laboratory in which he examined various cultures to instruct cheesemakers.

In 1965 the dealer for whom he worked asked Mr. Escher to go to Caracas, Venezuela to help set up a Swiss cheese operation for a nationally known cheese company. What would have been the culmination of his career turned to tragedy, however, when a reaction to one of the vaccinations he received before traveling abroad caused Mr. Escher to lose his sight.

"I intended to go for two or three months, but I was only there 10 days when I lost my balance and sight," recalled Mr. Escher. His wife, who was traveling with him, said the company rushed him back to the United States and spared no expense in getting him the best of medical care. He was in the hospital for 10- months, and about 10 percent of his sight has returned. "It's like moonlight, but it's better than nothing," he said.

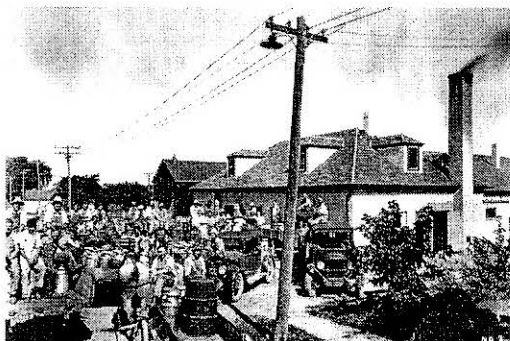
At this point Mr. Escher retired from the cheese making business and gave up the marina. He and Mrs. Escher continued to live in Monticello for a few more years, then remodeled the cottage in Okee and moved in permanently. Although their plans for retirement did not work out as hoped, "We're still here," said Mrs. Escher. Referring to their move, Mr. Escher added, "I've never been sorry so far."

Since moving to Okee, Mrs. Escher has become involved in many community activities, while Mr. Escher has found walking to be an interesting pastime. "You wouldn't believe how much it has changed," said Mr. Escher, referring to the development of Okee since 1949. When he and his brother Art purchased their lots, the area was mostly marshy

wilderness, broken only by a few cottages and Okee Lodge, he said.

"I haven't missed a day as long as I've been here," said Mr. Escher, explaining that he takes a five to six mile hike around the Summerville Park area of Okee every morning, accompanied only by his walking stick. "If I don't walk, the day is ruined -every day, even if it's 30° below."

The North Side Swiss Co-operative, shown here on its first day of operation, began serving the dairy farmers



**Monticello Native  
Writes Prize Poems  
Mrs. A. R. Nottingham, Detroit**



Boys and Girls, mostly  
from rural schools,  
collected milkweed  
pods to supply the  
waterproof floss used  
in making life  
preservers for the  
protection of American  
soldiers going overseas

*Mrs. A. E. Nottingham, 84 W. Park Hurst, well known, in Highland Park and north Detroit for her creative poetry, this week received the first copies of her book, "Bit-tersweet," just off the press. It was published by Horizon House, as the first prize entry in a poetry contest that it held, participated in by 300 contestants from all parts of the United States. Mrs. Nottingham, who writes under the name of "Lea Nottingham," is an active member of the Detroit Writers' League and is at present its poetry chairman.*

The above is from a Detroit newspaper. Mrs. Nottingham is the former Lea Kilgore. She was born here, taught in the public schools for several years, and has made frequent visits to her hometown.

The book is now on sale at the leading bookstores in Detroit. It contains 75 of the author's own poems, one of which is about Monticello.

Mrs. Nottingham a sister of Mrs. Geo. C. Steinmann, of this village. - Monticello Messenger, Mar. 18, 1943

### Upcoming Programs for 2008...

This is a *tentative* schedule for the spring 2008 MAHS programs. As always we welcome membership input if there is a speaker or topic you would like to see at our monthly programs.

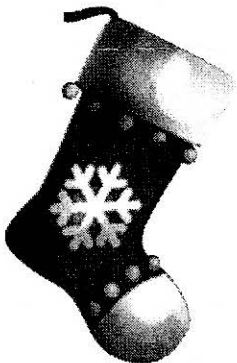
January—Kim Tschudy speaking on his new book on New Glarus

February—Janet Gobeli speaking on arrowheads and rocks, bring along any rock or arrowhead and she can help ID it

March—Kim Tschudy speaking about the area railroads

April— Walk down memory lane...photo slides show from the Museum collection

May—Annual meeting- possibly new slide show of photos



## Excerpt from the autobiography of Helen Haldiman



One Sunday night I had a date with Harold Youngreen who attended medical school at the UW-Madison. Before Harold and I went to the Chateau that night we had been on a walk through the village. We stopped on the bridge and looked over Lake Staedtler. There was a crescent moon and in its center a star. We both said we had never seen this before and thought it was so pretty. The next day we read that this was a phenomenon that would not occur for another 75 years, and I knew that in 2010 I wouldn't see it. Maybe you will and you'll think of me when you see it.

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When I was in the upper grades a Swiss family moved into the district. They had emigrated only a few weeks previous to entering school. Two boys and two girls came to school, and I guess we ridiculed them. They spoke no English, wore funny clothes, and had strange old world habits. The oldest boy, Alfred, was in charge of their lunch. At noon, the four gathered in one corner and Alfred distributed the lunch. Each received a chunk of home made bread, a hunk of cheese, one of bologna, and sometimes each had an apple. I could have communicated with them in Swiss because I had learned both Swiss and English before starting school, but this was at a time when it wasn't considered smart to be bilingual. Swiss were still called "green horns" and so I would have been embarrassed to allow others at school to know that I could speak Swiss.

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It's impossible to write a family biography and not include my brother in law Conrad, or Connie as he was better known in the community. To me he was more important an influence than most of my immediate family members. Conrad was a big man, 6 foot tall, dark haired, brown eyed and a weight of over 200 lbs for many years. Having spent my childhood years in a family of short people, his size always impressed me. Conrad was born on the Stauffacher farm and lived there all his years until 1964. He was one of a large family of three sisters and five brothers, and was the third youngest. At some time in the 1920's, his parents moved to a house in town and Conrad, his brothers Werner and Fred, and sister Marie remained on the farm. Marie, unmarried, kept house for her brothers and hired men. Fred and Anna lived in the newer house on the farm across the road. (Where Helen and Fritz would live years later). When Conrad and Emma married, Marie moved to town with her parents. The Stauffacher farm was always a big operation and at the time was one of the largest farms in the immediate area. Conrad was a progressive farmer and the brothers initiated many agricultural practices in the county. I remember how other farmers came to watch haying operations when Stauffachers bought their first hay baler. Other farmers laughed when soil conservation practices were started on the farm. Terracing the hills to retain the soil and moisture was a Chinese practice and unknown to Green County fields and so it was ridiculed when Stauffacher's started it along Hwy 69.

Conrad was my "father image" and I tried to never to anything that would displease him. I needed his love and respect. I owed him, for he took me to their home when I had no other place to go. It was Conrad who literally pushed me to attend Green County Normal. He knew how much I wanted more education, and pointed out that this was a cheap school. I remember that he financed my last semester with \$35 which I repaid \$5 a month when I began teaching.

Annual Memberships are accepted throughout the year but are due for renewal every May

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Type of Membership: (Please circle one)    Annual            Lifetime

The Monticello Area Historical Society was founded on December 1, 1994 and incorporated in 1996 by the Wisconsin Historical Society. All donations are tax deductible, however, membership dues are not deductible. The society is open to everyone. It is dedicated to the past and present for the future of the Monticello area. Members are encouraged to attend meetings and participate in activities whenever possible.

All donations shall be used to promote the work of the organization and its causes. Donors who wish to specify the use of their donation may do so.

Annual dues are:  
\$5.00 per individual  
\$10.00 per family

Lifetime membership:  
\$50.00 per individual

Dues are collected by the membership chairperson. Each member or unit will receive a membership card. Receipts for donations may be obtained from the MAHS treasurer.

Mailing Address for donations or memberships:

**Monticello Area Historical Society**  
**204 N. Main Street**  
**P.O. Box 463**  
**Monticello, Wisconsin 53570-0463**