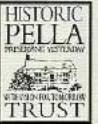


A Newsletter from the Historic Pella Trust

PRESERVE PELLA



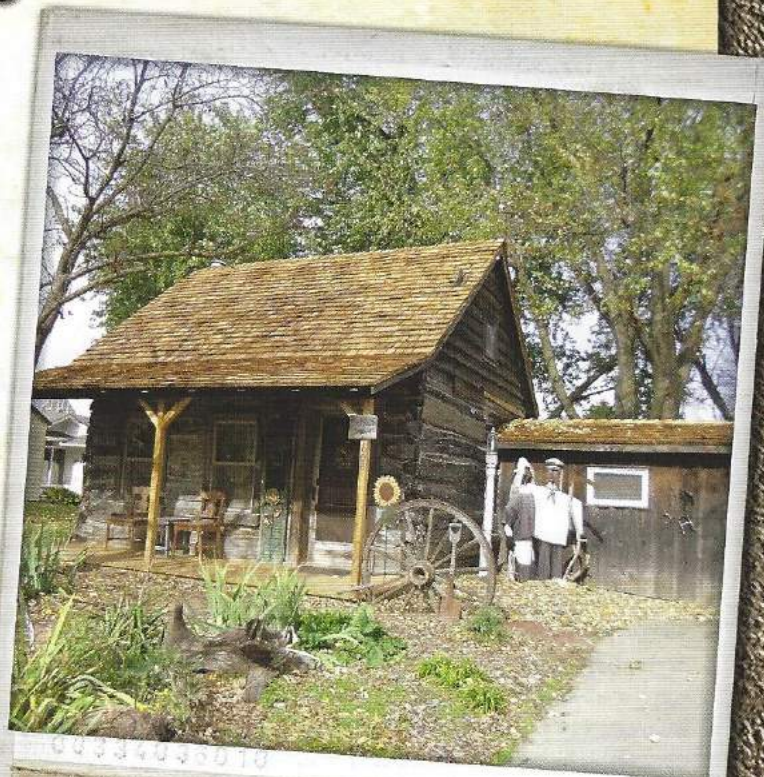
A WITNESS TO HISTORIC PELLA

Dr. Ronald D. Rietveld, Emeritus Professor of History, California State University, Fullerton, and a home-grown Pella boy

There once was a tree at the southwest corner of the house at 608 Lincoln Street that was witness to the early days when Iowa was still a territory, before it became a State in 1846. It stood in front of the Tuttle Log House, which was constructed in 1843—before there was a state called Iowa and before there was City called Pella. Today, although the tree is gone, there still remains a link with Pella, Iowa's, past—a “witness house,” if you please. It is made up of the original walnut trees from a timber north of the place, which were used to build it in 1843.

In October 1842, a treaty had been signed with the Sac and Fox Indians at Agency, Iowa, referred to as the “New Purchase.” Marion County was divided down the middle, with the eastern half available for settlement on May 1, 1843, giving the Native Americans six months to evacuate, although all did not do so. The western half of the county was open to settlement on Oct. 11, 1845. A few settlers had already moved into the eastern portion of the county on April 26, before the May deadline—the Hamiltons, the Warrens, the Clarks, the Nossamans, and the Welchs from Wisconsin Territory, who built a shack south of the future location of Pella on May 17, 1843, more in the direction of the Des Moines River.¹

That witness tree prospered in a relatively new county, having been organized on the 1st day of September, 1845, and containing, at that time, 720 inhabitants. On the 1st of April in 1846, with 1,440 souls, Marion County was regarded as not only one of the best counties of the New Purchase, but also one of the most attractive portions of the Territory of Iowa. The Des Moines River flows in a southeasterly course entirely across the county.²



The Tuttle Log House, built in 1843 by a party of two: Thomas and Nancy Tuttle.

As soon as the New Purchase was opened for settlement, Thomas and Nancy Tuttle, newlyweds, started out to set up a farm in the new area and reached the future area of Pella as they proceeded through the government lines. When the Tuttles settled there, they were not aware of the existence of another family or white people within twenty miles of them, although Native Americans lived in the area of the Des Moines River. Just a few feet north of the witness tree, the Tuttles, together, built a cabin on the edge of the nearest timber north of the present Pella site. Soon after, they made a claim on land south of their cabin, near the State Road to Fort Des Moines. This would later be known as “Garden Square” by H. P. Scholte or today’s Central Park.

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In August of 1843, four Buffington brothers and their families claimed land north of the Tuttle's, about three miles, soon styled "The Buffington Settlement." For a year, these families were the only neighbors to the Tuttle's, and then Jacob C. Brown from North Carolina moved into the area in 1844 and remained until 1847, when the Dutch came and H. P. Scholte bought him out. James Duese settled near future Pella a year later in 1845. Both Brown and Duese then settled in Summit, Iowa.³

Traffic through this area to and from Fort Des Moines passed by the Tuttle log house. Among those passing by the cabin was Moses J. Post, a 35 year-old licensed Baptist missionary circuit rider, traveling between Van Buren County and Fort Des Moines, who usually held services at the Nossaman school house, four miles south of the Tuttle's. As a part of his work, he also delivered mail on this circuit. With these frequent trips in the area, he knew the region, as well as the settlers who lived there, including the Tuttle's.⁴

At noon on Thursday, July 29, 1847, after a trip of 65 miles from the Fairfield, Iowa, Land Office, a Dutch search party of five people, led by the Reverend Post, drew up a farm wagon near the witness tree and arrived at the Tuttle's for lunch. They were introduced as a Dutch party interested in purchasing a large area upon which their colony of nearly 800 Hollanders could settle together. The committee included Scholte, Jan Rietveld, Isaac Overcamp, G. Vander Pol, and Teunis Keppel. [Scholte, Rietveld, and Overcamp helped organize the colony in the Netherlands in 1846.]

Before they made contact with any other settlers located in the area, Post helped Scholte, leader of "De Kolonie," purchase the Tuttle's land. Tuttle agreed to sell the land, including that of the claim cabin, to Scholte that July of 1847, and Scholte took possession of the claim after he paid Tuttle in the latter half of August. The price, with the payment in real gold, was attractive. In addition to selling, Tuttle suggested other settlers the party could visit to talk of purchasing their already established holdings, before word of such sales could spread and raise prices. Among them, John C. Brown and James Duese both sold their claims to Scholte. "From that moment on we rode around, and before nightfall we had the promise of each one of them to sell at a fixed price," Scholte related. But there were a few that the Committee did not trust and, thus,

they were "bound under witnesses with an earnest." Nothing like a down payment to keep the deal!⁵

The Search party believed they were only half done. They believed they still needed access to the Des Moines River. So early on Friday morning, the committee, along with the Reverend Post, as negotiator, journeyed out in the direction of the river. The settlers there did not know what was going on, and so the committee members interviewed each one separately, and by nightfall had made agreement with all of them in the same way. They requested time until Monday to close the deals with the settlers located along the river. This would give the Pella "Kolonie" a river transportation outlet, which was believed to be vitally important to help ensure the future commercial success of the Dutch venture.⁶

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On Saturday, the Committee members presented themselves at the appointed hour and place. Written contracts were given by both parties—by the American pioneers as sellers, like Thomas Tuttle, and by Scholte as the buyer, agent, and treasurer of the colony. All were to be fulfilled by the end of the month of July, 1847. But in order to do it, Scholte was obligated to include payment for the crops then standing in the fields and also the cattle and other chattels. However, Scholte possessed no authority to do so and there was not sufficient Association money to do so. But "having an awareness of God's guidance," and seeing the great opportunity for the colony in the rich fertility of the Iowa soil, as well as the ease with which it had been cultivated, Scholte did not hesitate to buy the land and improvements on his own responsibility, including

"such live stock and farming utensils as they could be induced to sell."

On Sunday, their guide and negotiator, Post, delivered "two outstanding discourses," enjoyed by the Committee members. The next day, Monday, contracts for the settlers along the Des Moines River were signed. Post would register them at the Land office in Fairfield. And the following day, Tuesday, the Search Committee began the trip back to Saint Louis to bring the good news that they had located an excellent site for their future home and prepared the way for the advance colonists to journey to their "Pella."⁷

The next thing the witness tree oversaw was the arrival of hundreds of Hollanders to the site of the Tuttle's house and claim cabin. From August 11 to 19, some arrived at the rise in the land that the Committee had selected, in wagons

drawn by horses, some in carts drawn by oxen, and some on foot, men in wooden shoes and velvet jackets, and women in "kledendrachten" [Dutch clothing] and caps [but no bonnets].⁸

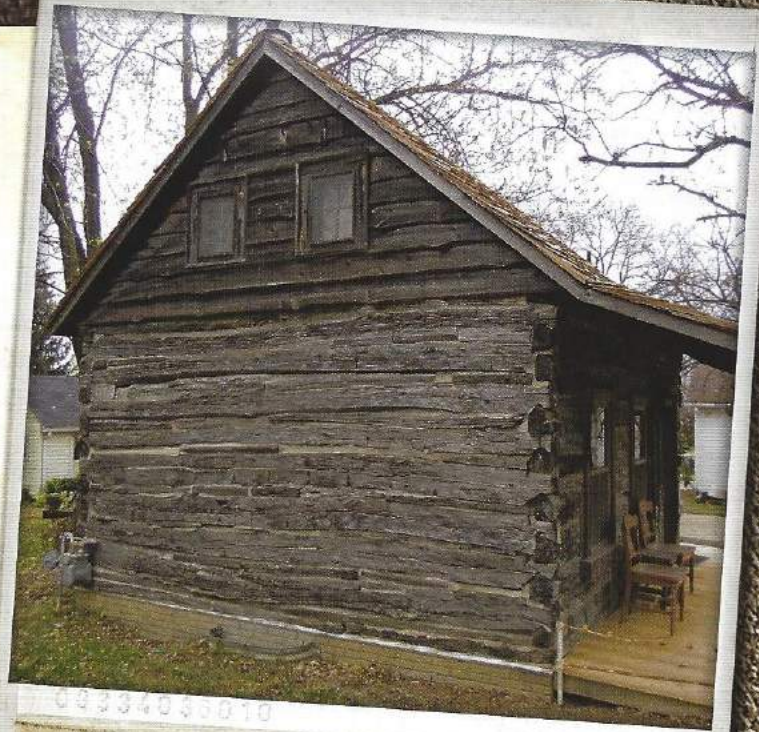
Scholte said: "In 1847, when I bought the claim of the farm of which the garden square is a part, there was a body of a log house [Tuttle's claim pen], which I directly finished for a dwelling house, in which I resided with my family and other persons in my employ at that time and I used the place known as garden square for a place to raise vegetables. I occupied the house on said garden square with my family, till the house where I live now in was ready."⁹

Slowly, these Dutch pioneers adapted themselves to their new and strange environment, and a wholly different standard of living, as their city grew and developed like any other frontier town of those early days. They were aided by some of those who remained in the Pella area, including the Nossamans, the Welchs, the Hamiltons, and the Clarks. With their encouragement and help, these first Dutch settlers in the new State of Iowa, gradually adapted and submitted to "frontier Americanization" and the Pella area was "transformed into one of the garden spots of Iowa."¹⁰

After 1869, the witness tree on North Street became the witness tree on Lincoln Street, which was renamed for Abraham Lincoln, the martyred 16th President of the United States and a personal friend of H. P. Scholte. Scholte played a serious and active political role in the Civil War era and made important contributions to his county, state, and country.¹¹

The Iowa Republican State Convention met in Des Moines in January 1860, and the delegates selected Scholte as a delegate at large to the Republican National Convention, which met in Chicago's famous "Wigwam" in May 1860. He was selected as one of the vice presidents of this convention, which nominated Lincoln for president on the Republican ticket. After a trip to Washington, D.C., to translate speeches of both Lincoln and William H. Seward into the "Holland language," as Scholte put it, he returned to Pella by way of Springfield, Illinois, and there visited with Lincoln on June 13, 1860. Personally invited by Lincoln, he visited twice with the president elect as well as Mrs. Lincoln and attended Lincoln's first inauguration on March 4, 1861, and continued his personal correspondence with the beleaguered president in the midst of the Civil War.¹²

Scholte actively supported the war effort in Marion County, in the State of Iowa, and in the nation. He worked to form a Pella Home Guard and even offered city lots "as a small token of our regard for our brave volunteers" to every man from Pella and Lake Prairie Township who would enlist and form a Union army company before September 1, 1862. He traveled to take the vote of Iowa boys in 1862 and 1863, even traveling down the Mississippi River to take the vote of Iowa troops in the Federal army in Little Rock, Arkansas. He rejoiced at Lee's surrender at Appomattox Court House in April 1865 and



Side view of the Tuttle Log House with its original walnut logs still intact.

mourned the assassination and death of Lincoln, his friend, that same month of 1865. It was said that Scholte suffered a heart attack upon hearing the news of Lincoln's assassination.¹³

After the war, and in declining health, Scholte decided to sell some of his landed holdings, including the Tuttle Log House and its witness tree. The Rev. Scholte and his wife, Maria, sold the Tuttle log house and surrounding property to Jan Steenhoek, deeded November 14, 1866. This is the first transfer of Lot 17 after the platting of North Pella in 1854. For whatever reason, perhaps sentimental, Scholte continued to own the Tuttle log house until 1866. On August 25, 1868, when H. P. Scholte died, his estate became the property of Maria, their two sons, Henry, Jr., and David, and their daughter, Dora. The claim cabin in Garden Square [Central Park], as well as the square itself, had already been deeded to Maria in 1862, during the Civil War, when he thought of joining the Federal army as a chaplain.¹⁴

The Tuttle-Scholte property on Lincoln Street eventually became that of my great grandparents Gerrit and Lubbertje Sneller [1912] and my grandparents John and Peetje Sneller by the early 1930s. After my grandmother's death, it was auctioned off and purchased by Bob Van Vark, who gave it to his daughter, Gail Van Vark Kirby, who is credited for saving the log house from destruction and development. And now it belongs to the Historic Pella Trust and is in the process of careful preservation.

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However, a major link to the Pella past was not lost when the witness tree was cut down sometime before 1973. The log house itself remains the one and only witness of the history of Pella, Iowa, from the days when Iowa was a Territory, when it became a State in December 1846, when the Dutch set up their "Kolonie" in 1847, and in the days of the Civil War.

Today, it still remains a strong witness! Indeed, the Tuttle Log House is both Pella's unique treasure with its connection to the history of Pella's past as well as its birthplace!

¹ J. B. Newhall, *A Glimpse of Iowa in 1846*. Iowa City, Iowa: State Historical Society, 1975, pp. 44-45. A reprint.

² Cyrenus Cole, "A Bit of Holland in America" (1895) in Zachary Michael Jacks, ed., *Iowa: The Definitive Collection*. North Liberty, Iowa: Tall Corn Books, 2009 pp.102-103.

³ William M. Donnel, *Pioneers of Marion County*, Part II, Chapter Five, 1872.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ William M. Donnel, *Pioneers of Marion County*, Part II, Chapter (1872); H. P. Scholte, *Eene Stem uit Pella*, pp. 14-19; K. Van Stigt, *Geschiedenis*, Part II, pp. 9-17; and Jan Nollen, *De Afscheiding* (Orange City, Iowa: De Volksvriend Printing House, 1898), pp. 49-51; In the Supreme Court of Iowa, December Term, 1874. William Fisher *et al*, Appellee vs. M. H. E. Beard, Appellant, p. 82.

⁶ H. P. Scholte, *Eene Stem uit Pella*, pp. 14-19.

⁷ H. P. Scholte, *Eene Stem uit Pella*, pp. 14-19; Van Stigt, *History of Pella, Iowa and Vicinity*, pp. 55-56; Jacob van der Zee, *The Hollanders of Iowa* (Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1912, pp. 63-64; K. Van Stigt, *History of Pella, Iowa and Vicinity*, 1897, Translated by Elisabeth Kempkes (The Scholte House Foundation, 1995), p. 57.

⁸ *History of Pella, Iowa*, 1847-1987, p. 13.

⁹ In the Supreme Court of Iowa, December Term, 1874. William Fisher, *et al*, Appellee vs. M. H. E. Beard, Appellant, p. 73.

¹⁰ Jacob van der Zee, *Hollanders of Iowa*, Chapters IX and XI.

¹¹ Ronald D. Rietveld, *Henry P. Scholte and Abraham Lincoln: Compatriots in the Civil War* in Robert P. Swierenga, Nella Kennedy, Lisa Zylstra, eds., *Dutch-Americans and War: United States and Abroad* (Holland, Michigan: Van Raalte Press, 2014, pp. 5-9; 16-18.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., pp. 22-26.

¹⁴ In the Supreme Court of Iowa, December Term, 1874. William Fisher, *et al*, Appellee vs. M. H. E. Beard, Appellant, p. 72.

GREETINGS FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Lynn Hinga Branderhorst

It doesn't seem possible that I have been in the Executive Director position with The Historic Pella Trust for nearly one year. The time has just flown, by which tells that I MUST be having fun as part of this outstanding organization.

In my short tenure, so many dreams for our organization, our community, and for Pella's future have come true. I have heard the excitement and gratitude toward The Historic Pella Trust as its members and Board of Directors have worked together to preserve Pella's historic homes and buildings in order to protect our community's rich history.

As the Executive Director, I will continue to work toward the dream that The Historic Pella Trust will become the gold standard for community restoration and historic education, both locally and nationally.

I hope you will join me in that dream! See the back page of this newsletter to learn more about becoming a Historic Trust member, volunteering for the organization, or simply sharing your dreams with us for this wonderful community that we call home.

A TALE OF TWO PONDS

Bruce Boertje

How rich and diverse is Pella's history? Let's take a moment to compare and contrast two seemingly unconnected landmarks that aligned decades later to produce two of Pella's major parks: Caldwell Park and Sunken Garden Park.

What is their connection? Each has a pond where countless numbers of young and old alike have spent hours fishing, ice-skating, playing hockey, and enjoying the outdoors. If we dig back a little, we find that both are legacies of long-gone, mostly forgotten Pella industries; each founded more than 125 years ago.

The businesses disappeared within 10 years of each other—one in the 1910s, the other in the 1920s. Both ponds were rescued from disrepair when the area around them was acquired in the 1930s by the city and turned into a park. Both received major upgrades 50 years later. And both continue to play major roles in our city park system.

Pella Drain Tile Co. was located on the future site of Caldwell Park in 1884. It manufactured clay drainage tile for use in farm fields. In 1890, it added brick manufacturing, seasonally employing from 15 to 30 employees. Two key ingredients for brick and tile manufacture are clay and water. The clay was obtained onsite, but since there were no city utilities available to provide water, a pond was dug as a water reservoir.

The factory flourished for several decades, surviving at least into the early 1920s and possibly until the Great Depression. Its bricks provided building materials for many of Pella's businesses and homes. At least five downtown business buildings came from those clay pits and kilns on the Caldwell Park site, including the Opera House, old City Hall (with the cement dogs out front on Main Street), and Pella's first movie theatre, the Electric Palace (now the east half of the Jaarsma Bakery complex). In addition, Jordan Hall on Central College's campus, old Lincoln School, and Fair Haven, along with many residential homes, are legacies of the Pella Drain Tile Co.

After the company ceased production, the site sat unused for several years. In 1935, during the heart of the Great Depression, Pella had a chance to obtain a swimming pool through the Federal Emergency Relief Act. Pella had been trying to raise funds to build a pool for 20 years, and now, thanks to the Works Progress Administration (WPA), the deal came together.

A location was needed, and the city council decided that the 11 acres of the former "Brick Factory" would make an excellent



A charming vintage photo of the Sunken Gardens Park pond.

site. The land was purchased for \$4,000. Pella's first swimming pool was built by hand. Half-frozen men with shovels, picks, and wheelbarrows were pictured in the *Pella Chronicle* when digging began on January 2, 1936. The old factory pond, which had been partially filled in to decrease the depth for safety reasons, was the sole remaining remnant of the Pella Drain Tile Co. In July of 1936, the pond was stocked with 50,000 bullhead. One year later, the swimming pool was completed, and on July 1, 1937 the pool, park, surrounding ball diamond, playground area, and pond were dedicated.

In 1936, Pella was also preparing to celebrate its second Tulip Time. The prior year's initial festival had come about so fast that there had been no time to order, let alone plant, tulip bulbs. Instead three-foot tall wooden tulips had hastily been constructed by local woodworker Georg Heeren and placed around town. Thousands of real tulip bulbs had been purchased to make the next Tulip festival authentic.

Following that second festival in 1936, members of Pella's Junior Chamber of Commerce, known as the JayCees, had an idea. There was an old overgrown lot with a lagoon on it that might be suitable for planting tulip bulbs to further attract visitors. The lot was located on Main Street, northeast of Lincoln school, not too far from downtown. This nuisance lot, lying unused for years, had an old pond that was known as a breeding ground for snakes, rats, and mosquitos. Since 1911, the area had occasionally been used for hot air balloon launchings, but mostly it sat empty and overgrown.

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This pond had started its life in 1893, when the Buwalda brothers—owners of the Pella Electric Company—constructed it across the street from their power plant. In 1888, the city council had awarded Abraham and Gerrit Buwalda a 20-year franchise to construct and operate Pella's first utility: an electricity generating plant. This facility was located on the west side of Main Street almost exactly where the new Lincoln School facility is being constructed. Very capital intensive, the business started slowly, but it soon flourished and the brothers added generating capacity and electric lines as demand dictated. Larger capacity demanded a water source, so the Buwaldas constructed a pond across the street—in the process giving away copious amounts of "rich black dirt" from its excavation. They then drilled the first deep well in Pella as their primary source of water, for it wasn't until 1896 that the city of Pella completed its first rudimentary water-works system.

The pond became a popular attraction. In November 1896, the Buwaldas installed lights around the pond so ice skaters could enjoy it after sundown. The next year, they stocked the pond with minnows and other small fish. Late in winter, once the ice was thick enough, blocks of ice were harvested and packed away for use during summer.

After 20 years, the electric franchise with the city expired and the city decided not to renew it. Instead they voted to erect a

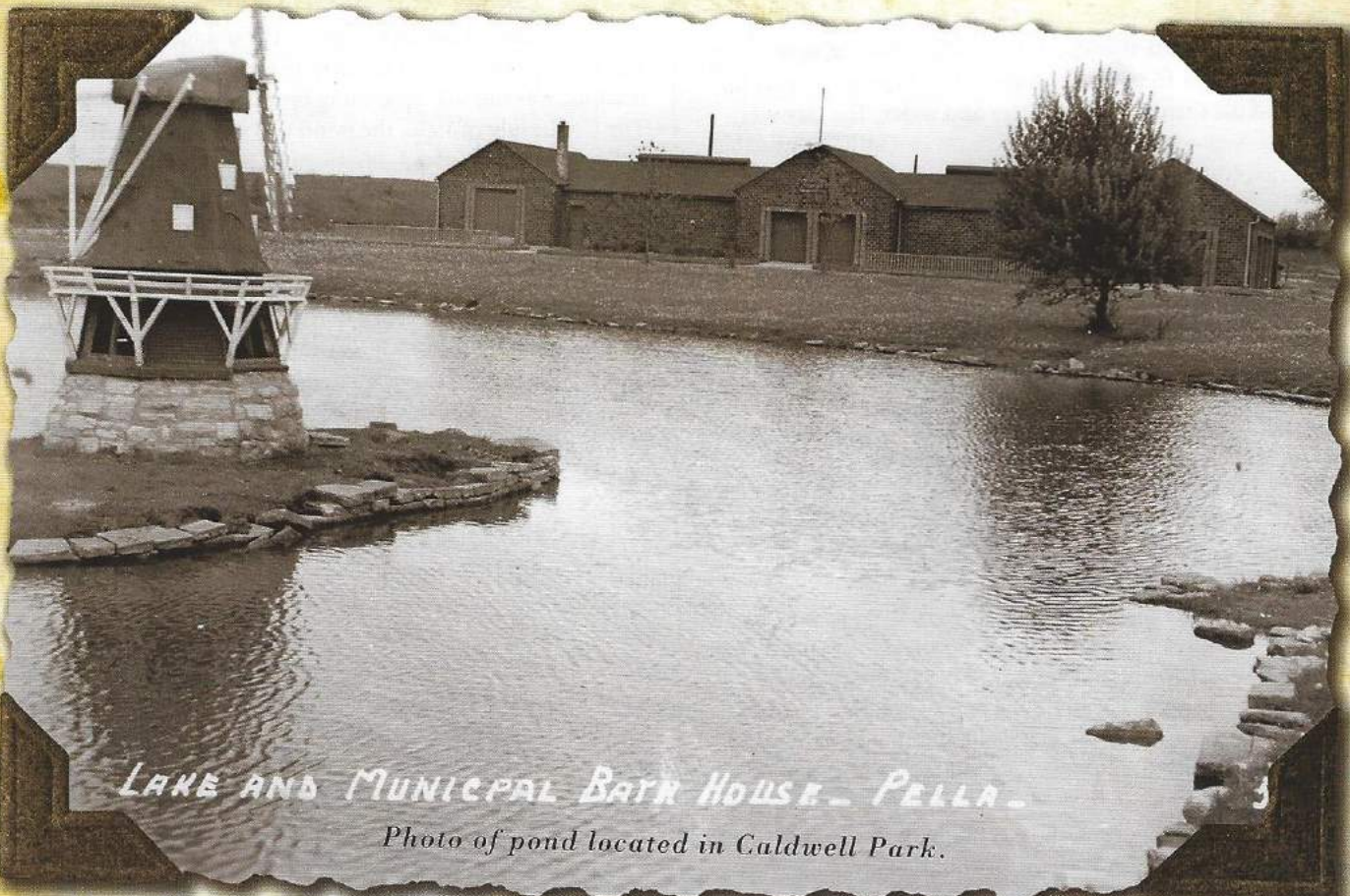
municipal electric plant, upgrading the city water system in the process. By 1911, the Pella Electric Company had ceased operation and with that, the pond fell into a state of disrepair that lasted for the next 25 years.

This is where the JayCees entered the picture. They arranged to have the lots containing the pond donated to the city by their owners, Walter Fowler and Henry Rhynsburger. The lots were cleaned up, and a drawing of the proposed park, called Tulip Town, was submitted. In mid-1936, a yearlong fund drive was commenced to construct a windmill at the site for a cost of \$925. This structure was completed in time for the 1938 Tulip Time. Since that time, the park—which was informally nicknamed "Sunken Garden" by the *Pella Chronicle*—has remained a staple of Pella for visitors and residents alike.

In 1986, a major renovation of Sunken Garden was undertaken. The pond was lined in concrete, sidewalks were re-laid, and trees, bushes, and tulip beds received a makeover.

In 1992, Caldwell Park's pond was drained, cleaned, and restored. A fishing contest in late July attracted more than 200 fishermen to the renovated pond to vie for more than \$2,000 in prizes ranging from a new bicycle to savings bonds.

Thus it happens that two unrelated ponds, dating back over 125 years, continue to draw thousands of visitors to Pella's parks. Their creators would undoubtedly be surprised and delighted.



LAKE AND MUNICIPAL BATH HOUSE - PELLA -

Photo of pond located in Caldwell Park.

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Groeten Alle,

This year has brought a new level of energy and accomplishment at Historic Pella Trust under the leadership of our new Executive Director, Lynn (Hinga) Branderhorst. Lynn's enthusiasm and focus are contagious and have helped make this an excellent year. We have also welcomed several terrific new members to our Board of Directors. They are bringing new perspectives and insights that will help us achieve our goal of maintaining more of our Dutch heritage and early architectural charm.

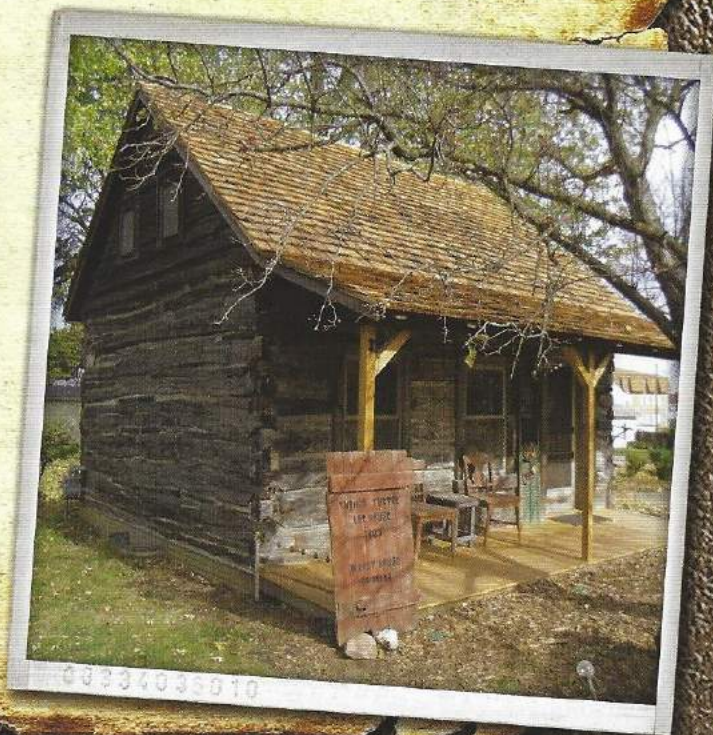
HPT has purchased the Tuttle Cabin from Gail (Van Vark) and Monte Kirby. This cabin, located at 608 Lincoln, is the oldest existing building in Pella. It predates the first arrival of Dominie Scholte and his band of scouts by several years. It is the site where Scholte made his first Pella land purchase from the Tuttle. Tuttle Cabin is truly the "Birthplace of Pella." HPT has already replaced the roof and rebuilt the porch for the cabin. We hope to make good use of it for education and anticipate making it more broadly available to visitors.

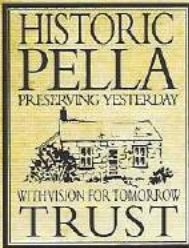
Steady progress is being made in having the City of Pella formally create an historic district between downtown and Central College. The City Council has already taken the step of creating a Pella Historic District Commission, and it is making steady progress toward creating an official historic district. HPT is staying active in its support of this effort.

The HPT has also worked to restore the old G. F. Stegeman Store at 1110 Washington, which was one of Pella's first stores. We hope eventually that a portion of the old store will become the new Historic Pella Trust office. Much of the foundation work and structural work was completed this summer. We hope to have the new roof and much of the siding work completed by snowfall. An old well was found in the process, and we hope to make it an attractive part of the store.

I would like to encourage you to visit and "like" us on Facebook. There, you will find a variety of great old Pella pictures and updates on HPT events. You are also invited to visit our website (www.historicpellatrust.org) or stop by most mornings and meet Lynn at our offices at 615 Main Street. The Historic Pella Trust phone number is 641-628-8003.

Het aller beste, Bob Zylstra





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RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP FOR 2016

Historic Pella Trust Membership Renewals for 2016 are underway now. We'd love to keep you updated on the current activities of the Trust. Your support is crucial for us to continue the work of preserving and protecting the rich architectural resources of Pella. We deeply appreciate your support. Please complete the form below and mail it with your contribution to the Historic Pella Trust office.

Historic Pella Trust | PO Box 1 | Pella, IA 50219

I would like to receive information on Historic Pella Trust and become a member.

Name _____

Address _____

Email _____

Membership Level: ___ Single \$35 ___ Sustaining Family \$100
 ___ Senior \$20 ___ Patron \$250
 ___ Family \$50 ___ Benefactor \$500
 ___ Business \$75 ___ Preservationist amounts over \$500

I would like to volunteer. Please call me at _____

If you are giving the above named person a gift membership, please include your name and address.

MAIL TO: Historic Pella Trust | PO Box 1 | Pella, Iowa 50219

KEEP IN TOUCH

EMAIL: If you would like to be added to our email list so you receive current updates, please send your email address to us at office@historicpellatrust.org

ONLINE: For ongoing and up-to-date information (including historic Pella photos), follow us on Facebook at [HistoricPellaTrust](https://www.facebook.com/HistoricPellaTrust).