

A Newsletter from the Historic Pella Trust

PRESERVE PELLA



THE ROCK HOUSE MOVES INTO A NEW ERA

Bob Zylstra

As you leave Pella on west University headed out on the old “Knoxville Road”, you pass a little stone cottage at the top of the knoll on the south side of the road. The locals have long called this the Rock House and its been standing there since it was built by Dirk Van Loon in 1856. The house is still on its small 1.58 chains x 1.62 chains (a chain is 66 ft) lot that Dirk purchased from Dominie Hendrick Scholte. Dirk had recently immigrated from the Netherlands where he had worked as a stone mason. He arrived in Pella with his wife Gertje (de Kort) and 9-year-old daughter Christina. A son Marcellus was born the following year. Dirk built the 16 foot x 24 foot house from limestone quarried from a cave south of Pella. He later added a frame addition onto the south side of the house. Dirk and his family lived there for 5 years, but then moved to a larger house when his wife became pregnant with a third child. He continued to do masonry work in the Pella area and later moved to Kansas as a homesteader.

(continued on page 2)



Rock House as It Appears Today

THE EILKO AND JOSEPHINE VAN HOUTEN HOME

Bruce Boertje

If these walls could talk – they would relate enchanted stories of bygone days. For instance: Friday evening, June 23, 1882. A time before electricity, indoor plumbing, paved streets or automobiles. The Ladies Reading Association of Pella was celebrating their first anniversary at the residence of Eilko and Josephine Van Houten. In addition to the Reading Association, out-of-town members of the Young Ladies Reading Circle from Burlington and Des Moines joined the celebration. Out front the street was lined with horses, buggies and carriages, as was the alley behind.

The Pella Weekly Visitor newspaper reported that the ladies “were amply accommodated at the spacious and beautiful rooms and gardens of the hostess”. It was noted that the weather, which had been threatening during the day, “finally proved most auspicious”. The supper was “served in tropical style, tables being spaced in the parlors, on the veranda and lawn.”

(continued on page 5)



Van Houten Home. Seen here in 1902 when owned by Eugene Dennis family.

**ARTICLE: THE ROCK HOUSE
MOVES INTO A NEW ERA**
(continued from page 1)

Over the years the little cottage fell into a state of serious disrepair. Edith Kuitert bought the building at auction in 1975 and committed to do the work to restore and save it. She had the house tuck pointed and repaired the siding on the south addition and completed a bathroom in the little room (“hojke” in Dutch) that had been added to the east side of the house. She noted that the stairway to the loft was made of solid black walnut. Edith donated the house to Historic Pella Trust (HPT) in 1997 for safe-keeping. HPT maintained the house until 2019 when it added a Conservation Easement to the house before selling it to Katie Douglas and her parents, Cliff and Kathy Douglas. (A Conservation Easement is a deeded contract between HPT and any current or future owner of the house that requires the owner to maintain the house and prevents its demolition.)

As you may have noticed, Katie and her family have been very actively restoring and improving the house since they purchased it. HPT had agreed to replace the roof on the cottage as part of the sales agreement, but this was just a start for the work that has been done. As you enter through the main door leading from the brick patio, you immediately notice the appealing combination of old and new. The entry door is now an old door that was salvaged from the old farmhouse where Cliff lived as a boy. The floor is the old original cottage floor they found under the kitchen carpet. It has been stripped and refinished. The south wall no longer leans out, but was pushed back into position and tied to the ceiling rafters after the old attic access hatch area was rebuilt. The ceiling is still the old bead board, but it needed a lot of repair and they had quite a search finding replacement boards that matched the originals. The kitchen has been consolidated on the west wall with all new appliances. This is a modern touch that makes the small kitchen fully convenient and usable. The main part of this south room is now a living area with



Kitchen Area



New Old Main Entry

TV, a couch and easy chair. The north wall of this room houses a small closet that has a stacked washer/dryer pair and the hallway leading to the bedroom has a built-in pantry. Katie’s mom Kathy said these “tiny house” design ideas let them build a lot of living space into the little cottage. The main bedroom is large enough to easily hold a queen size bed and is gorgeous. Katie refinished the old floors and the room has a pleasant eclectic mix of an old family bottle collection, an old Pella-made grandfather clock purchased at an estate sale along with recently purchased items from Work of Our Hands and Simple Treasures.

You walk past the updated bathroom in the little Dutch hojke to get to the stairway. The stairway is classic old Dutch since it is very steep and narrow. The new paint gives it a stylish look while it maintains its old bannister and balusters. The sleeping loft is also full of old and new features. The refinished old floor and classic wood ceilings are a tribute to the old. The built-in drawers in the knee-wall are a nice modern touch along with the new lighting. The Douglas’s said they received a lot of help on their project from their friend Steve Sereg who runs his contracting business, Sereg Builders, out of Oskaloosa.

When asked about the future use of the cottage, Katie said their plans were in flux waiting for the end of our pandemic. For now

(continued on page 3)



Living Area (Old Ceiling & Floor)



Main Bedroom



Bathroom in the “Hojke”

ARTICLE: THE ROCK HOUSE MOVES INTO A NEW ERA

(continued from page 2)

they are using the cottage as a place to stay for visiting friends and family while the outdoor space is available for rent for social gatherings. Eventually the cottage will likely run as a Bed and Breakfast Inn and a location for special events.

The Douglas's hope that the Rock House can be included in some future community open house event. So do we at Historic Pella Trust. We can hardly wait to see what new ideas will be there as they complete the project!

Historic Pella Trust is pleased and grateful for the loving care that the Douglas's are investing in this historic Pella gem.



Solid Walnut Stairway



Sleeping Loft

THE CROWNING JEWEL: PELLA'S FIRST HIGH SCHOOL

Bruce Boertje

The construction of Pella's first high school capped off an amazing decade of improvement that catapulted the city from its prairie roots into a thoroughly modern era. Dedicated in 1916, the high school building was a capstone to a dizzying period of major advancements.

The prior ten years saw the completion of Pella's first municipal electric power plant; the city's first sanitary sewer system; replacement/relocation of the water works plant (no more "brown liquid" as Pella's tap water was once called); street paving was begun and concrete sidewalks replaced wooden boardwalks; Pella's first public library building was constructed; home-delivery of mail began; the town's first two motion picture theaters opened; and Pella's demand for automobiles went from zero to being able to support four dealerships.

The Pella Chronicle newspaper praised the passing of a \$48,000 bond issue that funded Pella's first high school building. Under the

headline "High School Wins" the article declared that we "have a right to be proud that [we] live in Pella today". Students celebrated and "got a band out for a parade, marching all over town serenading teachers and others".

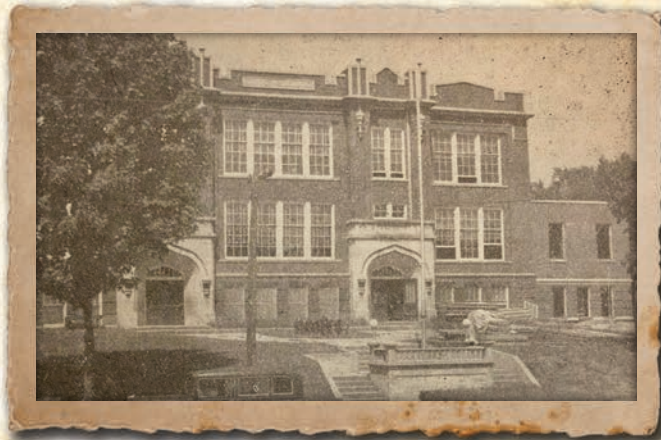
Prior to 1876 there were no high school classes in Pella's public-school system. But starting that year, and for the next 40 years, every high school class was held on the top floor of the original Webster School building. By 1914, 125 high school students were crammed into that single floor. Students were forced to sit two to a seat, or sit on windowsills, or stand for entire class periods.

Pella's first high school building combined timeless architecture with the benefits of the city's up-to-date infrastructure to provide a first class, modern facility that included the school system's first auditorium and gymnasium. The community was rightfully

(continued on page 4)



*Two-year-old Pella High School in 1918.
Note the dirt streets.*



Summer 1938. Part of the unfinished first addition is visible to the right.

ARTICLE: THE CROWNING JEWEL: PELLA'S FIRST HIGH SCHOOL
(continued from page 3)

proud of its state-of-the-art building. Within twenty years, steady enrollment growth mandated the addition of a library, study hall, additional classrooms, bleachers and a larger gym. In 1954 three more classrooms were constructed.

Even with these additions, the building's capacity proved inadequate and in 1959 a one-million-dollar bond referendum was passed that allowed the construction of a new high school on the east edge of Pella. This building opened in 1962 and allowed the original high school building to be used as a junior high/middle school for the next 16 years.

With the opening of a new middle school in 1978 the future of the original high school building was in doubt. In stepped the brother/sister duo - and Pella High alumni - of Stu Kuyper and Joan Kuyper Farver. As Rolscreen Company's president and chairman of the board, respectively, they oversaw Rolscreen Foundation grants of over \$850,000. These funds were given to update and renovate the former high school building into a much-needed, multi-function Community Center.

Through its history, Pella has had 11 public school buildings. Of the first six, this building alone remains. This century-old landmark represents Pella's culmination of its journey to the modern era, as well as a connection to a simpler time: when buildings were designed to last, and confidence for a better future remained unbridled.



Pella's first High School in 1946.

Friends of The Pella Community Center, a non-profit organization, is currently studying options for renovating and expanding this landmark building. Working alongside the city administration they hope to ensure the continued success of one of Pella's treasures.

The historic significance and benefits of this local icon continue to increase. Its prominent location and importance to the heart of the community are clear. As *The Pella Chronicle* noted when the original school building bond passed in 1914: "We prophesy that it is only one more step toward the front ranks of modern cities". In that regard, Pella's high school building stands as a successful symbol of that journey.

TUTTLE LEARNING WALK TAKING SHAPE

Jennifer Van Kooten

Activity at our 1843 Tuttle Cabin and the Tuttle Learning Walk has been bustling all summer long after the walk was laid in May and June. Walkers of all ages are enjoying the new route that connects Tuttle Cabin with Sunken Garden Park. They say they love it! Crews worked hard at building the walk starting in May; the cold wet spring having delayed the start. We worried about construction interference with the 16 groups of second grade and home school students planning to visit in April and May but the Covid 19 pandemic cancelled all school field trips and Tulip time tours. The virus also adversely impacted funds and donations normally raised during Tulip Time.

A late-winter snowstorm brought a surprise visit from WHO-TV's Roger Riley who did a news feature about the walkway. The interview was featured on several of their news programs over the weekend, which brought some nice recognition to the Trust and our project.

HPT is working on six informational signs, which will be placed along the Learning Walk. The

signs will share Pella's history and unique heritage along with QR codes linking to photos and more information. Two limestone benches have been donated as memorials by the families of Gene Van Wyk and Edward G. De Jong. These benches will nicely match the limestone outcroppings along the path.

The Learning Walk project is being funded by the Historic Pella Trust utilizing grants and donations from our supporters. The Trust is working to complete fundraising for the project. The project is a partnership with the City of Pella, who will own and maintain it. City Councilwoman Lynn Branderhorst mentioned that this project has set a good example of how a non-profit organization can help with civic projects through fundraising and planning.

The city has ordered a variety of plants, bulbs, shrubs and trees for the walk. This was funded through the Pella Garden Club and volunteers will soon help plant them.

We hope to complete the Learning Walk project in early 2021.



ARTICLE: THE EILKO AND JOSEPHINE VAN HOUTEN HOME
(continued from page 1)

Later, railroad agent and bandmaster J. Murray Cox's band, which had its foundation in the Civil War, "was on hand to dispense some of their best music... outside under the trees, which were decorated with Chinese lanterns, and through whose branches the silvery moonbeams fell." Inside, Eilko Van Houten played piano and accompanied vocalists Lillie and Mary Viersen, Miss Jennie and Carrie Snow, Misses Hattie Cory and Nell Cassatt, and Miss Stallard."

As the paper stated, all of the entertainment "contributed to make a scene most enchantingly fair, and which held sway until a late hour." The article concluded: "all went away merry as a marriage bell." Members of Cox's Band "have since been bragging on the good cigars Van sent out to them."

If these walls could talk – they would relate the early surroundings of the distinctive Van Houten home, still located at 306 East 1st Street (originally known as Perseverance Avenue). Today the area is entirely residential, but at one time a large general store stood immediately to the south. It faced University Street (then called South Street which was the original southern city limit of Pella) and was owned by Ernst Grafe, who also was a partner in the Washington Mill, which stood south across University/South Street. This three-story mill ran 24-hours a day during the busy season, grinding corn and wheat with its enormous steam engine that huffed and chuffed and simultaneously powered eight enormous grinding wheels. One block to the north of Van Houten's home stood George Blattner's Brewery.

If these walls could talk – they would recall the owners of this prominent Pella home. Eilko Van Houten had this unique residence constructed in the early 1870s. Van Houten was born in The Netherlands in 1839 and immigrated to America in 1849. He was a partner in the McClatchey Woolen Mill in northeast Pella before becoming a dealer in grain, produce and agricultural implements. He had a warehouse near the Des Moines Valley Railroad depot in South Pella and a downtown office on Franklin Street east of the American House hotel. In 1883 Van Houten moved to Bismarck, South Dakota where he and his brother operated a hardware and implement store for several years.



The 150-year-old Van Houten home as it appears today.



The Washington Mill was located one-half block south of the Van Houten home. Constructed in 1856, it burned to the ground in 1893.

In 1889 the Van Houten home was purchased by Hermanus "Buck" Van Vliet. At age six Buck and his parents accompanied the original Pella settlers to America where they lived in a sod house in what was called "Strawtown", now the location of Oakwood Cemetery.

Van Vliet was a colorful character that spent his life selling liquor, operating saloons and manufacturing cigars. Upon his passing in 1899 the *Pella Advertiser* newspaper described him as: "a rugged rough character who never learned to respect the temperance laws even for his own good, he was nevertheless a man of great generosity, spending much for the poor and needy and doing much for the material interests of the city."

In 1899 Eugene and Amanda Dennis purchased the Van Houten/Van Vliet home. Eugene was born in New Jersey and at the age of 16 served for a year as a drummer boy in the Civil War. Eugene was a farmer and later owned a real estate and loan office in Pella. After Amanda died in 1902 Eugene opened a pool hall in the current Work Of Our Hands building (627 Franklin Street). Eugene added a private billiards club upstairs and then prepared the basement for a bowling alley.

For the past 45 years the Van Houten home has been owned by Arvin Van Rheenen and his late wife Darlene. Today Arvin is preparing the property for sale. He has placed a conservation easement on the home that will protect it from demolition or drastic alteration. The Trust is grateful to Arvin for preserving this important slice of Pella's heritage. Even though walls can't physically talk, they stand as an enduring invitation to recall some of Pella's intriguing past.



Hermanus Van Vliet's original Buck Horn Saloon. Located at 624 Franklin Street.

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Current and Prospective Historic Pella Trust Supporters,
What A Year! Wat Een Jaar! What A Year!

At Historic Pella Trust we have a few accomplishments to cheer about this year, in spite of this whole corona virus affair. I invite you to watch our virtual annual meeting video which we plan to post on our website at www.historicpellatrust.org on November 12. Here we plan to have an inside look at a couple of little 1850's era Pella houses along with giving a more complete update on all of our major projects. Before then, I want to note a couple of areas where we are making progress that will likely have a particularly large effect on our future efforts to protect our important historic architecture.

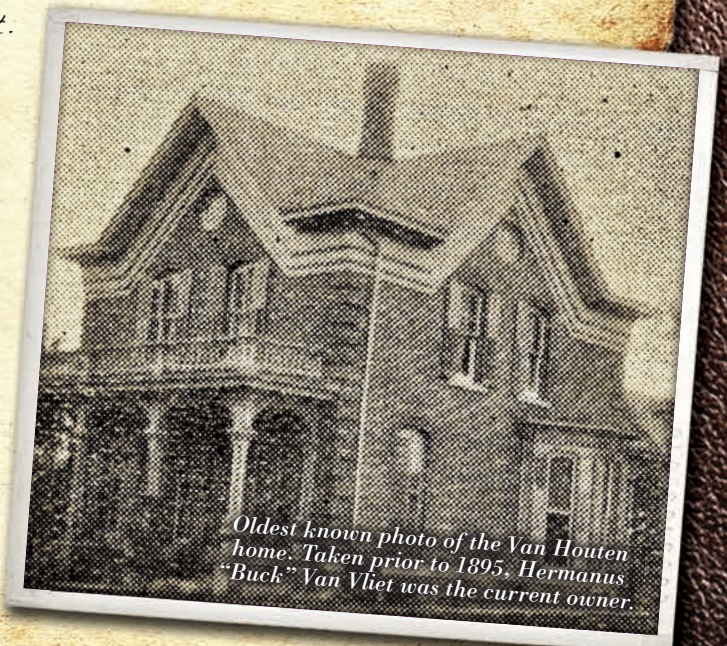
HPT has been using Conservation Easements since the late 1990's to protect properties. A Conservation Easement is a perpetual contract between HPT and property owners (current and future) that requires them to maintain the property and it prevents current or future owners from tearing the building down. This contract is recorded with the property's deed and does not end, but stays with the property deed. During the past year HPT has signed Conservation Easements with the new owners of the Rock House at 1401 University St., the Eilko Van Houten House at 306 East First St., the Old Blacksmith Shop at 914 Franklin St. (thanks to help from Bobby Klein) and will be signing one with the new owner of the Pella Brick and Drain Tile House at 222 Oskaloosa St. as part of our sales agreement there. This is our top year yet for using this important preservation tool and we hope to use this even more effectively in the future as a productive way of keeping our important old buildings from being torn down.

HPT continues to shepherd the process of creating a city ordinance to protect our Collegiate Historic District. This has been a slow process, but it is continuing to move forward. We have high hopes this process will be completed in the next year. Creating this historic district with a City of Pella ordinance is a way that provides legal protection for the approximately 60 houses in this district. Creating historic districts by city ordinance is a productive way of protecting an entire charming old neighborhood.

Historic Pella Trust continues its efforts to help maintain Pella's distinctive charm by protecting and promoting our historic structures and important architectural legacy. Many of our older buildings provide a special link to our Dutch heritage and give our village a comfortable, gracious feel. We have also enjoyed a large economic development benefit as we welcome countless visitors who come to enjoy our scenic Dutch town.

We hope that you see the value of our work to the Pella community. Our board and I trust that you and your friends will find ways to generously support these projects and our general goal of maintaining our special Pella architectural charm.

Het aller beste, Bob Zylstra



Oldest known photo of the Van Houten home. Taken prior to 1895. Hermanus "Buck" Van Vliet was the current owner.

GREETINGS FROM THE DIRECTOR

We celebrated our 25th Anniversary and annual meeting last fall at the Pella Opera House. Dave Baker, Iowa historian, entertained guests with an interesting program about South Pella's history. Guests viewed displays covering South Pella, including its railroad history.

Early winter brought in several grants for the Tuttle Learning Walk. Construction on phase one of the walkway began as soon as weather allowed.

We were honored to receive the 2019 Heritage Award from PACE Alliance in March.

After the sale of the Rock house, HPT purchased a historic brick home built by the Pella Brick and Drain Tile factory. This home is located just west of Caldwell Park. The Pella Christian High School Winterim class visited both the Drain Tile home and Tuttle Cabin as part of a home ownership course provided by Pella Home Realty.

Other special events included a Tuttle Cabin Christmas open house featuring historic fiber craft demonstrations of rug braiding and spinning. On July 4th, Tuttle was open for tours and demonstrations of historic blacksmithing and wool fiber crafts. We also participated in the 4th of July parade with our high wheel wagon. A virtual field trip of Tuttle Cabin is available on the HPT website. This video took the place of living history field trips for the schools.

The Trust says goodbye and thank you to our long-time renter of the Soul Sleeper Church: Alfred Post and Pella Books. This facility will be available for rent in early 2021. Interested parties can email office@historicpellatrust.org for details.



The online video for our annual meeting will include an inside look at two local historic homes: Strawtown Cottage and the Rock House. The link will be available at 7 pm, November 12th via our website (HistoricPellaTrust.org) or our Facebook page. We hope you tune in!

As always, our mission "To protect and promote buildings, landscapes, and sites important to the heritage of Pella, Iowa" is supported entirely by the contributions of members and project grants. A sincere thank you to everyone who has helped us preserve Pella's heritage. Please join us in 2021!

Respectfully,
Jennifer Van Kooten

PROTECT & PROMOTE PELLA'S HERITAGE WITH YOUR 2021 MEMBERSHIP

The Historic Pella Trust, established in 1994, is a non-profit preservation group that helps to preserve Pella's architectural resources so that future generations may continue to be enriched by the historic legacy of Pella's Dutch heritage and culture. **Mission Statement: To Protect and Promote Buildings, Landscapes, and Sites Important to the Heritage of Pella, Iowa.** We appreciate your 2021 memberships and partnership contributions for protecting the architectural resources of Pella, Iowa.

KEEP IN TOUCH

EMAIL: To receive timely Trust updates via email, please provide your email address on the attached form, or send it to: office@historicpellatrust.org.

Please visit HPT on the web and Facebook for local history, information and photos.

historicpellatrust.org



Follow us on Facebook.

Thank You for supporting the Historic Pella Trust!!

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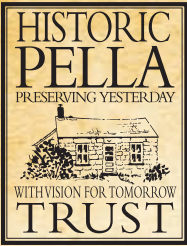
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DID YOU KNOW?



The Vander Veer home, located at 817 Oskaloosa Street, is the oldest existing structure in South Pella. Believed to have been constructed in 1879, this historic home was most likely built with brick manufactured at the local factory of either J. A. Toom or Nick Versteeg. The Historic Pella Trust is grateful for vintage homes such as this one, that help remind us of why Pella was founded and why it remains a great place to live and work.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- The Rock House •
- The Van Houten Home •
- Pella's First High School •
- Tuttle Learning Walk •

ANNUAL MEETING UPDATE

Don't miss HPT's virtual annual meeting featuring some very special tours. Watch at your convenience. Available at HistoricPellaTrust.org or via Facebook, any time after 7:00 pm on November 12.