

A Newsletter from the Historic Pella Trust

PRESERVE PELLA



THE VAN NIEUWLAND RESIDENCE & BLACKSMITH SHOP

Bruce Boertje

A historic building is almost never too far gone to be preserved. The Van Nieuwland Blacksmith shop is proof of that.

A devastating fire in late October 2017 very nearly spelled the end of one of Pella's oldest residences. This building, along with its associated blacksmith shop, is located northeast of West Market Park at 914 Franklin Street. This unobtrusive, one-story brick building is one of the five oldest remaining structures in Pella. By analyzing the property's abstract, its construction date appears to be 1854.

This building is representative of many early Pella structures in that it combines a residence with a commercial workspace – sometimes it was a store, other times a stable or a shop – under one roof. This was a common practice in Holland, where land was at a premium and compactness of buildings was a necessity.

The room on the west side of the home was used as a blacksmith shop. Research has shown that Philippus and Alida van Nieuwland lived in the home from 1857 to 1873, and that Philippus' occupation was a blacksmith. Evidence of blacksmithing is still visible on one of the building's exposed wooden pillars. Multiple branding iron impressions can be seen where they were burned into the wood as the smithy tested them out.



1980s view of the former Van Nieuwland property.

Over time, the main block of the building had three separate additions. This can, perhaps, be explained by the fact that Philip and Alida had three children when they purchased the three-year-old home in 1857. By 1860, they had five children, and nine children by 1870.

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TUTTLE LEARNING WALK

Jennifer Van Kooten

On the West side of the Tuttle Log Home is an adventure that waits for all who visit. It is an elegant brick pathway that follows a trail that once early settlers walked. You will find two donated limestone bench memorials, where you may decide to sit and ponder the significance of having a log home that was built in 1843, still located on the original site. You will also discover limestone outcroppings that give the walk a texture that early visitors would have found coming into Marion County, Iowa. Heritage plants greet visitors the length of the path with a variety of year around texture and color that may have been grown by the early settlers.

Visitors will find seven signs along this educational pathway. The first sign, just west of the log home, gives insight into what the area was like before the Dutch arrived. The Native Americans who moved to make room for the early homesteaders like Thomas and Nancy Tuttle. You will

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Tuttle Learning Walk looking north.

**ARTICLE: THE VAN NIEUWLAND
RESIDENCE & BLACKSMITH SHOP**
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The building has had at least a dozen owners over the years. For a time, it was divided into two apartments.

Over time the building gradually deteriorated. In 1977, the late Bob Klein, a local businessman and preservationist, along with his wife Doretha, purchased the property and renovated the building. For the next four decades the building remained in the Klein family, and was passed down to the couple's son, Bobby. One morning in 2017, a fire broke out in a small shed behind the building. Initially, the home's brick walls held back the flames, but eventually the fire gained a foothold into the 168-year-old rafters. It soon spread through the attic, ultimately causing the roof to collapse. Although the brick walls were left standing, the building was considered a complete loss.

Having inherited his parent's love of historic preservation, Bobby Klein determined to rebuild. After receiving notification from the city's structural engineer that the walls were safe to use, Bobby proceeded to put a new roof on the building.

Enter another historic preservationist. Shawn Thomas is a Californian who discovered Pella during one of his annual Knoxville Nationals visits. Shawn and his wife, Cyndi, appreciated Pella so much that they purchased a home on Franklin Street just down the block from the Van Nieuwland home. Shawn was looking for a place to work on, and store, some of his vintage race cars and memorabilia. He felt that the Van Nieuwland shop would be perfect for him. An agreement was reached for Shawn to purchase the building and to finish the renovation from the fire.

The two preservationists attached a conservation easement to the property, which protects the building against future neglect or demolition. Shawn is currently in the midst of lovingly restoring the building. The front room is the most complete. The other rooms are in various stages of restoration, but all are coming along nicely. Shawn hopes to have the building completed next year.

Pella's heritage is very important to the community – both culturally and financially. Pella widely promotes its Dutch heritage and each year thousands of people come to visit our town to experience our vibrant community. Our city's unique architecture is one way that we can maintain and share our history. As one preservationist stated: "Places are powerful common threads we all share. They commemorate our history, culture, and the collective stories that have shaped our community and our identity."

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Photo Captions:

- (A)** Blacksmith Philip Van Nieuwland tested his branding irons, 1860s
- (B)** Handmade nails found in the dirt floor of the blacksmith shop
- (C)** Front fire damage, 2017 (Photo courtesy of Kathy Kloosterman)
- (D)** Rear fire damage, 2017 (Photo courtesy of Kathy Kloosterman)
- (E)** New rafters and roof installation, 2018
- (F)** Kitchen renovation, 2021
- (G)** Front Room, 2021

ARTICLE: THE VAN NIEUWLAND RESIDENCE & BLACKSMITH SHOP
(continued from page 2)

There are those who are eager to demolish old buildings, and there are those that are just as eager to preserve them. In truth, we need some of both. The difficult part is finding the proper balance between preservation and replacement. One way to look at the decision: you can always change your mind and demolish a building later, but you can never change your mind and un-demolish it. When someone says that a building is too run down, or too blighted, or too damaged to save, point them to the resurrection of the Van Nieuwland Blacksmith Shop.



Maintaining an older building is not always easy or cheap. But its value in historical terms is irreplaceable. With the loss of each historic building, we diminish our community's culture and heritage, while edging closer to being another forgettable, indistinguishable town. ■

ARTICLE: TUTTLE LEARNING WALK
(continued from page 1)

find prairie plants and some traditional garden perennials that often were brought from their last homestead. These traditional plants provided nourishment for the settlers who were miles from the closest mercantile. The second sign will help you understand why 800 Dutch people decided to follow Dominie H.P. Scholte to Iowa to establish a community called Pella. Their desire for prosperity and freedom to worship as they pleased was motivation enough to invest in resettling. On the third stop as you travel north down the path you will discover how the Baptists influenced the location for the Dutch to settle and established higher education in the new community of Pella. The Dutch established many businesses that have kept Pella growing throughout the years. On the fourth sign you will discover some of these places and how the town transported their goods.

Not long after the Dutch settled the area the United States broke into Civil War. This is the topic of the fifth sign on the Learning Walk and you will discover some unfortunate events that happened after the war was over. You will soon emerge on the north end of the Learning Walk and see beautiful Sunken Garden Park with the wooden shoe-shaped pond. On the Southeast corner of the park is a historic windmill that was refurbished in 2019 while the walk was being planned. The sixth sign overlooking the park shares how this place came to be. One last sign before you exit the Tuttle Learning Walk on the north end gives tribute to the Dutch for their influence towards philanthropy. This sign recognizes how fortunate the community is to have businesses and individuals who invest in the community. Historic Pella Trust sincerely appreciates the corporations and individuals who invested to make this project happen!

The walk was officially dedicated and gifted to the City of Pella by Historic Pella Trust on September 25. The vision by the Trust to develop this educational destination started years ago after the Trust purchased the Tuttle log home. Country Landscapes presented a detailed color drawing of how a path could potentially look. The mayor and city council members met with Trust representatives at Tuttle log home to discuss the potential of a new path. The city project started with planning by local engineering firm Klingner



Views from the Sunken Garden entrance to Tuttle Learning Walk.

& Associates. Fund raising started in 2018 and finished in 2021, design took place in 2019 under an agreement with the City of Pella. Construction began in 2020, cement foundations and footings were poured under the limestone and the length of the path. A layer of bricks were placed on the cement foundation. The Historic Pella Trust designed, researched and wrote the seven engraved signs. The signage starts the conversations about early Pella and the Dutch influence and QR coding on each sign provides more information on each topic. Tuttle Learning Walk was built to preserve our Dutch heritage for future generations to enjoy. ■

SCHOLTE GARDEN: PROPOSED HISTORIC DISTRICT

Bruce Boertje

Many people are unaware of the extensive two-square-block Scholte Garden that once graced the area north of the Scholte house. The vast garden stretched all the way to North Street (now called Lincoln Street), which was the original northern city limit of Pella.

The elaborate Scholte home and extensive garden were constructed in part to appease Dominie Henry Scholte's wife, Maria. Following the death of his first wife, Scholte married Maria less than two years before leading the 800-member Holland emigration to America. Maria was born into a genteel, cultured Amsterdam family, and was reluctant to leave the security of her life in Holland. Relocating to the undeveloped western frontier of America held little appeal to Maria. Thus, the large home and expansive garden were built largely for her enjoyment.

The Scholte Garden was filled with trees, birds, flowers and winding walking paths. It remained a pleasant attraction to local citizens and visitors alike for nearly a half-century. Pella was even nicknamed The Garden City. This was due to the popular Scholte Garden as well as the numerous flower and vegetable gardens that graced many homeowner's yards throughout the city.

Over the first several decades of Pella's existence, the lots across the streets from the garden became desirable building sites. Homes sprang up along

Reformation Avenue (as Main Street was originally named) and Gratitude Avenue (as Broadway was first called). Today, some of Pella's oldest remaining homes border the former Scholte Garden.

By the 1910s, the Scholte heirs decided that it would be financially advantageous to divide and sell the garden for building lots. Over the next forty years a wonderfully diverse mixture of architecturally-styled homes replaced the trees in the garden. Today, this area contains the most eclectic variety of architecture in Pella.

The City of Pella's Historic Preservation Commission has proposed that a Historic District be designated for the Scholte Garden and surrounding properties to help protect these homes. A Historic District designation provides some high-level protection to a property. It requires that an acceptable explanation be provided before a demolition or building permit can be issued for the protected property. Alternatively, it requires that new buildings in the district meet certain minimum design requirements in order not to detract from the neighborhood.

This designation would be a fitting way to both honor and preserve what was once the pride and joy of Pella: the Scholte Garden. For more information on the city's Historic Preservation Commission or Historic District designation, visit www.cityofpella.com/430/Historic-Preservation. ■



Cottonwood trees in Scholte Garden.



A strolling path through Scholte Garden.



1900s: Boardwalks, paths & tennis court.

HISTORIC PELLA TRUST ANNUAL MEETING

Thursday, November 18, 2021 | 6:30 PM
Graham Conference Center | 812 University St, Pella, IA

Special Guest Presentation by Kent and Val Van Kooten

Let's Move a House! and Other Adventures in Historic Preservation

Valerie Van Kooten is a Pella native who spent most of her girlhood poring over the "Most Beautiful Houses in Pella" section of the 1922 Pella History Book, lamenting those houses no longer standing. She has since lived in old houses her entire life. She has been Executive Director at the Pella Historical Society since 2015, is a writer and editor, and is chairperson of the Marion County Pioneer Cemetery Commission.

Kent Van Kooten grew up on a farm between Searsboro and Grinnell. His antique interests lie in the agricultural realm, collecting antique tractors and farm equipment. He is Senior Training and Development Specialist at Vermeer Corporation and is also the curator for all of Vermeer's vintage equipment. He gets dragged into Val's schemes and participates in them willingly, most of the time. Kent is also a member of the Marion County Pioneer Cemetery Commission, a group that has restored more than 20 pioneer cemeteries in the county. ■



SESKER/WAECHTER/BOARDWALK HOME [UPDATE 2021]

Mikol Sesker & Jennifer Van Kooten

(Photo courtesy of Hopkins Roofing)

The magnificent 1914 Pella Home built by Adolphus Waechter was part of the Central College campus until 2018. At that time, it was known as the Boardwalk House. After the college decided the home no longer fit into their plans, the Historic Pella Trust worked with the college to promote finding someone willing to relocate it.

Mikol Sesker stepped up and had the enormous home moved south of Knoxville to her family farm, known as the Mint and More Farm.

Mikol said the final roofing material was installed during the fall of 2020. She chose copper for its longevity and to accentuate the slope of the roof. A team from Hopkins Roofing brought the curves in the roof to life, hand-bending the copper pieces onsite.

The exterior color change of the house is well underway, with the porch getting attention first. Neutral shades are replacing the previous blue paint. Application is with the traditional method of hand painting by brush.

Windows are another point of focus, as each window is being stripped, re-glazed, repainted, and double-hung counterweights rehung with new cords. The home's current storm windows are also being replaced with a more historically appropriate version.

The complete electrical re-wiring of the home is mostly finished. To maintain authenticity, modern light switches have been replaced with a vintage two-button style. The heating system, using over 90% of the original material, is set to go back online this winter



after being re-piped to a new dual boiler system. The owners are also getting ready to start on plaster repairs. A septic system is scheduled to be installed this fall, allowing the plumbing work in copper and cast iron to continue as well.

Mikol shared that a completion date has not yet been determined, as the preference is to allow ample time for each update to be fully and competently completed. The main goal is to honor the original workmanship of the house. ■

PELLA COMMUNITY CENTER UPDATE

In last year's newsletter we mentioned that a group, Friends of the Pella Community Center, is actively involved with preserving and renovating Pella's first High School building - now Pella's Community Center. The organization has been working alongside the city administration to provide suggestions and to offer funding assistance in updating the building and increasing its usefulness.

So far, the Friends have placed the building on the National Register of Historic Places, raised funds to hire an architect who is experienced in working on historic buildings, and hosted focus groups seeking guidance and direction for the future of the building. Last year, the architect returned a preliminary proposal that would greatly enlarge and streamline the art center and Crossroad's facilities. The proposal would also add a wing to the west side that would allow street-level access to the building, a new elevator, and new restrooms on every floor. In addition, the focus groups indicated a willingness to pledge nearly \$4 million towards the renovation.

To date, the city remains undecided on which direction to take the community center. However, City council members Lynn Branderhorst and Bruce Schiebout, who are both up for reelection



this fall, have been continuous and enthusiastic supporters of the renovation project.

Pella's first high school/Community Center building needs an update. Please voice your opinion on the project to the mayor and council. With sufficient community support, Pella's original high school building will be preserved, and its functionality vastly improved at the same time. ■

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Current and Prospective Historic Trust Supporters,

Eight years ago, HPT (Historic Pella Trust) started the work with officials from the City of Pella to create a process where residents could have their neighborhood declared a "historic district". These historic districts have special zoning requirements that protect neighborhoods from having their historic buildings needlessly torn down. They also prevent new buildings being added to the neighborhood that did not fit the style of the neighborhoods. This process is overseen by Pella's Historic Preservation Commission. Pella's first such district is the Collegiate Neighborhood Historic district which generally lies between Main St. and West Second St. and between Liberty St. and Independence St. This district was officially approved earlier this year after public hearings and action by the Pella City Council. HPT is excited about this approval which will include significant protections for the lovely old homes in this area. We are hopeful that more of these will be established to protect more of our charming old neighborhoods.

HPT is completing its project to create the Tuttle Learning Walk where our residents and visitors can learn more about the history of Pella in a garden-like setting. This path is located between Sunken Garden Park and the Tuttle Cabin on Lincoln Street. We hope you take the time to enjoy the walk and maybe learn a couple of new things about the history of Pella.

De J and Debbie De Jong have purchased Pella Books from Alfred Post. It is located in the old "Soul Sleepers" church just west of US Bank on Franklin Street. The Soul Sleepers church is owned by HPT and the circa 1858 building is the oldest existing church building in Pella. The De Jongs have made some very nice improvements to the interior of the church and invite you to stop by to see the improvements and their impressive collection of books.

This year we have welcomed two new members to our board of directors, Ann Summitt and Katie Douglas. These new members bring some terrific background and interests to help keep our organization energized and moving forward.

Thank you to all of our members and supporters. In this era of covid and political turmoil, you have continued to support us with your donations, your encouragement and your suggestions. With our sincerest Thank You!

Het aller beste, Bob Zylstra



Ribbon cutting at the Tuttle Learning Walk dedication and ceremony gifting the walkway to the City of Pella.

GREETINGS FROM THE DIRECTOR

Historic Pella Trust's projects have continued throughout the pandemic, highlighted by the completion of the Tuttle Learning Walk. It was funded entirely through your grants and donations. Large boulders on each end of the walk hold a sign that proclaims: "Designed by Historic Pella Trust and funded through its generous contributors. Gifted to the City of Pella for all to enjoy." Fund-raising for this project continued into this year, highlighted with many contributions and two large grants. Precision Pulley provided \$15,000 to help us finish the walk, while a loyal member surprised us with \$10,000. This helped the project to reach our goal. Please check out this beautiful destination soon. My sincere thanks to all contributors.

The character of some of Pella's core neighborhoods continues a slow evolution, changing from cozy historic family homes to a more modern and commercial look. Historic Pella Trust's mission is to help preserve Pella's historic neighborhoods and protect the fine artisanship of the older homes. The interest from homeowners in protecting their homes with conservation easements has increased. We can slow the attrition of landmark homes through these conservation easements and historic districts. Protective overlay zoning has been placed on the homes in the Collegiate Historic District and the newly-proposed Scholte Garden Historic District is in the works. These districts help protect the area from obtrusive architecture that would otherwise destroy the existing cohesive architectural fabric of the neighborhood.

Ownership of an older home can come with costs. For example, a new home normally does not require immediate repairs or upkeep, but eventually all homes will require maintenance. The quality of the base construction is important when investing in a home. Most older homes were built to last, using old growth native lumber and strong foundations. To obtain similar quality materials and craftsmanship today is very expensive. Having skills in carpentry, plumbing and electrical work, and doing some of the work yourself, can help save money if you invest in an older home. To help with homeowner responsibilities, the Trust has developed a new webpage titled *Find a Contractor for Your Restoration Project* to connect you with local contractors: <https://historicpellatrust.org/find-a-contractor-for-your-restoration-project/>.

We remain active in our mission to protect the architecture and characteristics of our historic neighborhoods. The artisanship in historic homes is irreplaceable; it is a work of art to be appreciated. Historic Pella Trust is increasing interest in historic architecture by working with the art programs in Pella schools and with homeschoolers. As a society, if we fail to inspire preservation in our youth, our historic treasures are likely to waste away in the landfills.

Your financial contributions fund educational opportunities that aid understanding of the long-term benefits of preservation. They also enable HPT to help preserve Pella's historic homes and landmarks.

Respectfully, Jennifer Van Kooten

PROTECT & PROMOTE PELLA'S HERITAGE WITH YOUR 2022 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 2022 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



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Thank You for supporting the Historic Pella Trust!!

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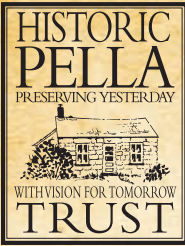
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A RESCUED TREASURE



*Former Pella artist John Smalley sketched the
Van Nieuwland blacksmith shop and residence in 1982.
Read about this historic treasure inside.*

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