



Fritz Retires After 22 Years On the Board

Fritz Sprunger recently retired from the Kidron Community Historical Society's board after 22 years of service. Having grown up in the heart of Kidron as a son of Silas "Cy" and Helen Sprunger, he developed a keen interest in the Kidron-Sonnenberg community and its heritage. But like many, he was not always interested in world or local history.

In the late 1990s, Leora Gerber invited Fritz to become involved at the Heritage Center. So he became a docent, and helped upstairs on the computer containing the genealogy database.

What sparked Fritz's interest in local history was a fraktur he spotted on display when the new Heritage Center opened in 1994. Fritz recognized it as having been stored in the attic of his boyhood home.

From there it had gone to his Uncle Clyde in Reedurban. Years later, in early 1994, Clyde's daughter, Betty Sprunger and her cousin, Marge (Sprunger) Gerber, were going through family things and ran across the old family record. Marge suggested they donate it to the Kidron Community Historical Society. They agreed, and Marge took it to the Heritage Center.

If that had not happened, it would likely have gone to a granddaughter living in the state of New York, and possibly been lost forever to Kidron's history.

In 2001 Wayne Liechty asked Fritz to consider becoming a KCHS board member to finish out the term of Steve Gerber, who was experiencing health concerns. Accepting the invitation turned out to be a most interesting and growing experience for

Fritz. Interestingly Steve and Fritz served together when Steve returned to the board in 2016 until his passing in the fall of 2023, just months before Fritz ended his final term.

In 2004, Fritz helped curate the annual exhibit: "Kidron's World: Enlarged by Service." Fritz's experiences living and serving in Japan were the foundation for designing and gathering information from over 150 people who served in more than 50 different countries.

In 2006, Leora and Fritz began working together on processing items donated to the museum. In 2007 Prudy Steiner and Glenn Miller began using a database. Since then every donated item has been systematically catalogued, along with a photo, donor, any known item history, and its assigned location in the museum. Currently Fritz and Leora meet regularly to accession, and Heritage Center Director Dick Wolf oversees the data entry.

One of the most interesting items Fritz helped procure is the weather instrument shelter that Ron Hahn used for his daily meteorological recordkeeping.

Another huge project Fritz cited was the 200th anniversary book, *Keepers of the Heritage*. He and Dick Wolf were coeditors. Individual chapters were written by locals. Published in 2019, it was well received, and is still available.

Dick Wolf said, "Fritz is a gentle soul. He is dedicated to constantly learning the stories of Kidron-Sonnenberg. He is meticulous in detail, easy to relate to and always had good insight for the board.



Fritz Sprunger scans a 3-ring notebook listing Heritage Center accessions. Behind him is the Christian R. and Adele (Lehman) Sprunger fraktur.



You are Invited

Members Banquet & Annual Business Meeting

Tuesday, April 23 | 6:00 pm

Kidron Mennonite Church Fellowship Hall

THIS WILL BE THE ONLY INVITATION ISSUED.

RSVP by Monday, April 15.

Following the banquet and a brief annual business meeting, the Varsity Singers from Central Christian School will perform, and a historical vignette featuring original settlers Ulrich and Katherine Lehman will be presented.

All current members are invited. To reserve your spot, or to confirm that your membership is up to date, please call 330-857-9111 (leave a message if no answer) or email kidronheritagecenter@gmail.com.

If you are not a member of the KCHS, consider joining this valuable support team. Membership information is on page 4 of the *Bit o' Vit*.



We will miss him, but are glad he will carry on the accessioning process."

Thank you, Fritz, for 22 years and counting of service with the Kidron Community Historical Society!

Fritz and Ellen (Hostetler) met at Bluffton University. For 25 years they were in mission-related service in Japan. On returning to Wayne County in 1992, both worked with senior citizens until retirement. They have been married 60 years and have two sons, Tim (Sheila) and Jon (Patti) and three grandchildren.

Smithies In the Saurer Blacksmith Shop

Saurer Blacksmith Shop, now located on the Sonnenberg Village campus, is a gray clapboard building constructed in 1906. It was a firm fixture in downtown Kidron where Floyd Saurer's smithing skills served the community from 1913 until 1967. In 2011 the structure was moved to Sonnenberg Village, where it has been restored and is functioning under the expert direction of Walter Mullett. John Klingler also frequents the shop which opened to the public at the annual Sonnenberg Homecoming in 2013.

A chat with Walt Mullett led to a fascinating conversation about Floyd Saurer, the original owner of the Saurer Blacksmith Shop, and the ingenious ways Floyd managed his business located just east of the square in Kidron.

Walt was an architect by profession. He became interested in smithing as a hobby around 1998.

John Klingler, a large equipment mechanic by trade, is a master smithie. He has won numerous awards and is in the Saurer Blacksmith Shop for special events where he can typically be found working metal using the forge. Their knowledge and enthusiasm for the trade is apparent as they work in Floyd's shop and share information about blacksmithing and Floyd's time in his blacksmith shop.

Much of the contents of the shop are as Floyd left it in 1967. When the Saurer family donated the shop to the Kidron Community Historical Society, Walt and numerous community volunteers sorted, cleaned and catalogued items from chain links to tire hubs, to an early Miller welder and a pedal velocipede powered metal/wood lathe. The lathe was used for metal machining, threading steel, and also for wood turnings. Not many blacksmith shops had such a lathe.

The forge is back to operating, using coke refined from coal to heat iron to a red-hot temperature to be hammered into hooks, fix chains, and sharpen plowshares. On a support post near the forge is a framed certificate dated 1942 naming Floyd as a Master Ironsmith by the National Blacksmiths and Welders Ass'n of America.

Floyd was well-known for his top-notch repairs to plowshares. He hard-faced the shares using a superior welding rod, making him known as the preferred craftsman because his technique held the cut longer than the original or a sharpened edge. That accounts for the typical row of plowshares curling throughout the shop during the winter that farmers had dropped off, waiting for Floyd's work to be completed before spring.

In addition to forging and welding, Floyd had a wheelwright shop in the back of his business. Iron tires were added to rims, and hubs were made and repaired. Wooden spokes made using a hand-drawn knife, and augers and reamers were

used to build and repair hubs.

Floyd was also a farrier. His toolbox and leather apron are among the artifacts in the blacksmith shop, right along with his signature striped denim overalls.

Among the items found in Floyd's shop were a variety of



Floyd Saurer in his blacksmith shop.

trade magazines and catalogs. Mullett said, "Floyd was advanced in the technology he used—he was up-to-date and knowledgeable." He had trade magazines and catalogs dated in the 1800s

and knew about and used modern, for the period, tools and machinery, including a Miller welder with a serial number that the manufacturer confirms was one of their first and is thought to have been built in Miller's garage in the early 1900s.

The till in the Saurer Blacksmith Shop has a variety of unique features. As was the custom in Floyd's time, he was paid with coins and paper bills. Ledgers show charges of \$0.43, \$0.50 and \$3.50. The till has a clever four-finger locking system and a gong to discourage unwanted fingers from entering the till. And to let him know when his wife, Essie, was taking out the grocery money.

Locals recall that Floyd had an ornery streak and remember that he once welded a penny to a nail and hammered it into the floor. When he would turn his back, an unsuspecting customer would attempt to pick up the penny, giving Floyd a good chuckle.

While a blacksmithing shop may have been seen as somewhat dirty, disheveled, noisy, and filled with dangers, the village blacksmith was a vital craftsman in his community. Walt has been impressed with Floyd's vast knowledge of the blacksmithing industry and his use of the most current practices of his time. Walt said, "He was just good at what he did!" Floyd served the Kidron community with expertise and reliability and was valued for his presence.

Walt and John are members of the Western Reserve Artist Blacksmith Association based in Burton. They sponsor a monthly Hammer In for the group of smithies to share stories, watch demonstrations and learn about their trade. In March they met at the Saurer Blacksmith Shop in Sonnenberg Village. Members of the WRABA have generously contributed their services at the Saurer Blacksmith Shop and Sonnenberg Village.

Visitors are invited to visit Walt in the Saurer Blacksmith Shop when it is open for Sonnenberg Village events, and usually on Tuesdays when Walt meets with the Tuesday work crew and works in the shop. Walt enjoys showing visitors around the shop and sharing stories and information about blacksmithing. For an appointment, contact Walt at wmullett22@gmail.com.

Sonnenberg Village

The volunteer group working on various projects in Sonnenberg Village met on March 4. They decided that the weather would not permit them to go back to work until at least April. However, they did spend an hour reviewing projects to start the summer work season. They also took care of a few small items including smoothing out the eastern driveway along the Rain Garden, and have ordered gravel to make that area smoother.

The Western Reserve Artist Blacksmith Association Hammer In on March 9 was arranged by Walt Mullett and attended by 40 people, all smithies from Northeastern Ohio.



Heritage Center Docents Needed

Docent def: a person who acts as a guide, typically on a voluntary basis, in a museum or art gallery.

The Heritage Center is need of more docents to volunteer at the Heritage Center welcoming and introducing visitors through the museum. Interest in meeting people from around the world and sharing the Kidron-Sonnenberg story would be an asset. Learning about the artifacts in the museum and the heritage of our community can be gained by spending time in the museum, hearing questions and finding answers. If you have gifts in the areas of hospitality, learning, teaching and/or listening, consider becoming a docent at the Heritage Center. Contact Dick Wolf by calling 330-857-9111 or sending an email to kidronheritage@gmail.com for details.



Have you visited the current exhibit in the Heritage Center with features such as the Kidron Merchants winning ways?

UPCOMING EVENTS

April 23 | 6:00 pm

Annual Meeting & Members Banquet
Kidron Mennonite Church Fellowship Hall

July 16 | 7:00

Wayne County Historical Society Band
Sonnenberg Village

August 9, 10

Sonnenberg Village Homecoming
Details in summer 2024 Bit o' Vit

Heritage Center Visitors Come from Near and Far

In 2023, the Heritage Center had visitors from the following countries: Bolivia, Bosnia/Herzegovina, Brazil, British Columbia, Canada, China, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, Paraguay, and Switzerland, and these states: Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, Washington and West Virginia.



Kidron Community Historical Society
P.O. Box 234
Kidron, Ohio 44636

330-857-9111

kidronheritagecenter@gmail.com

www.kidronhistoricalsociety.org

Address Service Requested

Nonprofit
Organization
Postage Paid
Wooster, Ohio
44691
Permit No. 228

SPRING 2024



Kidron-Sonnenberg Heritage Center

13153 Emerson Road • Kidron, Ohio

OPEN APRIL through OCTOBER • SATURDAYS • 11:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

CLOSED NOVEMBER, DECEMBER, JANUARY, FEBRUARY, and MARCH

The Heritage Center is closed November through March, but welcomes appointments to visit the museum and Sonnenberg Village.

Call and leave a message at 330-857-9111 for information or to schedule an appointment.

The Kidron Community Historical Society of Kidron, Ohio, founded in 1977, operates under the nonprofit charter granted by the State of Ohio. Your tax deductible gifts will help secure the future of the Historical Society and give you a part in preserving the heritage of this unique community.

Administration

Board President	Art Neuenschwander	Board Member	Sherri Steiner
Board Vice President	Veryl Kratzer	Board Member	Diane Sommer
Board Treasurer.....	Joan Nussbaum	Heritage Center Director	Richard Wolf
Board Secretary	Gloria Kaufmann	Sonnenberg Village Project Director	Ray Leisy
Board Member	Steven Miller	Bit o' Vit Editor.....	Judie Nussbaum

Kidron Community Historical Society Membership

Annual memberships are due in January and expire on December 31. Contact the Heritage Center if uncertain of your membership status.

Name _____

Address _____

Type of Membership _____ ☐ New ☐ Renewal

Membership Fee \$ _____ General Donation \$ _____

Would you like a receipt? ☐ Yes ☐ No *Thank you!*

Individual Annual Member \$30

Husband and Wife Annual Member..... \$45

Organization Annual Member..... \$50

Individual Life Member \$300

Heritage Club Member \$1000 or more

Send checks to Kidron Community Historical Society • Box 234 • Kidron, OH 44636