

Historic Home Features Two-Story Outhouse

Just mentioning a two-story outhouse sounds like the start of a bad joke. But it's enough to attract visitors interested in odd and historical sites, says Rick Krant, president of the Belle Plaine Historical Society in Minnesota. The outhouse is one of three known to exist in the U.S., and the second story is attached to the house by a 3-ft. skyway.

"The two-story house is the jewel on the crown," Krant says, noting it was added to a home built in 1871 that three prominent families owned over the years.

The second owner, Samuel Bowler, a Civil War veteran who owned a lumberyard and founded a bank, renovated and added to the house after he purchased it in 1886. Besides being a symbol of wealth, the reason was practical. Bowler and his wife had 11 children, and they could quickly get to the outhouse from their second-floor bedrooms, which was especially nice during cold Minnesota winters.

Each level has three holes. A wooden chute allows the waste from the top floor to go into the pit under the outhouse. The three holes on the first floor are in front of a false wall concealing the chute. The holes are different sizes to accommodate children and adults, and the roomy spaces include windows and plastered walls. According to a 105-year-old lady who lived there (now deceased), there was never an odor with good ventilation and



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the use of lye (or lime).

While the unusual outhouse is a big attraction, the Hooper-Bowler-Hillstrom House is also an important piece of local history. It was significant enough that the historical society formed in the mid-1970s when the last Hillstrom left, and a potential buyer planned to raze the house and build apartments. A local group purchased the

home, which became city property, with the historical society taking care of it, arranging tours and organizing events.

"The house was lavish ahead of its time," Krant says. "One other unique feature is a copper tub in the bathroom."

The society's renovations, based in part on wallpaper remnants and furnishings, give visitors a glimpse of three different eras—Victorian, Mission and 1850s farmhouse with yellow walls and red floors (a common practice to use paint leftover from the barn).

Krant says a museum filled with antiques, including circus items, in a barn on the

property and a restored 1868 Episcopalian church just 1 1/2 blocks away give history buffs and other visitors plenty to see in Belle Plaine.

Society members and costumed theater group volunteers offer freewill-offer tours by appointment and from 1 to 3 p.m. on the third Sunday of the month from May through October.

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Fun Grain Wagon Basketball Hoop

By Cindy Ladage

This year, there was a fun new creation for the kids attending the I & I Antique Tractor Club's Historic Days show in Penfield, Ill. Club members created a basketball hoop attached to a grain wagon.

Club member Ed Winkleman shared how this came about. "We had our spring auction in March, and this little old rusty wagon was at the auction. Club President Chuck Stelter and I got talking."

They decided to create a fun basketball game for the kids attending the show. "I said we should paint it up," Ed said about the rusty Ficklin wagon that he figured was from the late 1960s. The Ficklin Machine Shop was located in Onarga, Ill., and was owned by Roy and Steve Ficklin. The company sold to Toparte Inc. and filed for bankruptcy.

The Ficklin wagon was just the right size for their project. "I completed the painting," Ed said, "then Chuck did the woodwork and framing for the basketball hoops."

The wagon had been brought to be auctioned off until Ed and Chuck saved it. Ed said the wagon was obsolete for its original use. "Combines will hold more grain than one of those wagons today."

Ed said, "The wagon had to be sanded down because it was just a bucket of rust. After sanding, I put on two coats of primer and two coats of orange paint. It took about a gallon and a half of paint. The primer also took almost 2 gal."

"We made it so when you shoot in the wagon, the ball will roll down to the bottom down the chute, out, then back to the person shooting the baskets," said Winkleman.

Ed said he got the idea from others he'd seen. "I've seen a few around, and I saw a couple of pictures, and that's what got us



Hoop grain wagon can be towed to different events.

going. Ours is a little nicer than some; we put a little more time in ours."

The show was the third week in July. When asked about the time frame, Ed said, "The auction was the third week in March, and I started painting around the first of May. That took 2 weeks, then Chuck took it and started the framing for the basketball. We completed it about 3 weeks before the show."

At Penfield, there's an old school on the grounds. The school gym has a painting of their old Tiger mascot. Ed and Chuck had a professional draw the tiger and then turned the drawing into a decal for the wagon. They also put three stickers on the other sides that say "I & I Basketball Hoops." Club members donated the six basketballs used during the show.

Youth Forges His Blacksmith Skills

Blacksmithing is rare for most 11-year-olds. But, within 6 mos., Gavin Hughes, now 12, used up half the 100-lb. bag of coal he received for Christmas. While not typically a welcome gift, coal was perfect for Hughes. After watching blacksmiths at antique tractor and steam engine shows, he started looking around his family's Wisconsin dairy farm to find scrap metal he could use on an old cast iron forge he and his father, Alan, assembled from pieces. Hughes has been busy ever since, making useful hooks for the farm and as gifts. And he's also having a little creative fun.

"He pretty quickly used up my scrap pile. He used up all my small fenceposts," his dad laughs. "He got pretty independent quickly with this and will start the forge on his own."

Hughes first had to pump bellows to regulate the heat until he and his father figured out how to hook up an air compressor to make it easier and more efficient. Hughes uses a piece of railroad track for an anvil.

"The most challenging part is making sure the metal doesn't get too hot and burn off," Hughes says, adding, "I like it because you can do different things to be creative."

After seeing a snake made by another blacksmith, Hughes made one out of 5/8-in. square rod, adding curves and raising the head, finished off with chiseled eyes. Hughes also made a leaf necklace.

Most of his pieces have had practical uses. After gifting him a hook, Hughes' grandfather asked him to make more to hang his coats.

"I think it's great. There are a lot of skills learned that will help throughout life, and he's gaining knowledge that would be lost," Alan says. "The one thing I've learned is I'm getting an idea of what I don't know about metals and different alloys' weaknesses and



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strengths. My eyes are opened to learn, too."

Hughes celebrated his 12th birthday by teaching his friends how to make hooks. Now, one of them is interested in getting a forge.

"I want to get a real anvil and a gas forge," he says. "I want to be part of the shows and blacksmith there."

The Hughes plan to attend shows to learn more and are also part of a club with an open forge for people to work on.

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