

HISTORY OF THE VILLAGE OF THORNTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The organizational meeting of the Village of Thornton Historical Society was held at the Village Hall on June 25, 1975 with 67 residents present. Mr. Hoka, State of Illinois Historical Society, explained how to form an historical society in Thornton. A motion to organize an historical society was approved by unanimous vote.

From June to September, a constitution, by-laws, and articles of incorporation were drawn up by a committee and were approved on September 10, 1975.

The first slate of officers was presented on October 8, 1975. Those presented to hold office were Organizing President, Freda (Fritzie) Rietveld; Vice President, Sharon Boryk; Secretary, Alice Johnson; and Treasurer, Rosemarie DeMarco. Sherry Boyd, Delores Koch, Judy Volbrecht, David Diekelman, Virginia Rumbold and Clara Wagenaar were elected to serve on the Board of Directors. Those serving as incorporators were Freda Rietveld, David Diekelman, Lillian Johnson, Walter Diekelman, Judy Diekelman, Delores Koch, Erma Diekelman, Alice Johnson and Sharon Boryk. The organization was to be known as the Village of Thornton Historical Society. (It was so named because at that time there was also a Thornton Township Historical Society.) A Charter of Affiliation with the Illinois State Historical Society was received in February, 1976. Mr. & Mrs. Boyd Wagenaar filed necessary legal papers with the Clerk of Cook County.

Meetings were held in the conference room at the village hall until March 10, 1976 when they were moved to the lower level of the library.

When the village purchased the former Evangelical Friedens church at 208 Schwab St., it was offered to the Society as a potential museum; the museum open house was held on September 10, 1978. The Society conducted its first meeting there in April, 1979. Although the village stipulated the Society repair and maintain the building, they, as well as businesses, organizations and individuals continued to contribute to our success. Meetings and many fund raising activities were held there. The larger fund raisers took place on the Village Hall grounds or the fire department garage.

Between 1978 and 1979, repairs and renovations were made. Everything was done by the membership. Some of those who devoted an abundance of time were Oscar Claus, Henry Veldhuizen, Sr., and Bill Burke. These men did the heavier work while Martha Zander, Fritzie (Freda) Rietveld, Marge Loitz, Ruth Jansma, Erma Diekelman, Sharon Boryk, Audrey Connor Fleck, Lillian Johnson and Alice Johnson did major cleaning as well as cleaning artifacts for display. A couple of the women were brave enough to get up on the scaffolds to paint the ceiling. The entire building was painted and cleaned on the inside, windows were repaired, the basement was thoroughly cleaned, and outside maintenance was done. The museum was dedicated on Sunday, October 11, 1980. Meetings were then held in the basement and displays were on the main floor.

In 1984 the Society sponsored the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the first settlers in Thornton. Village organizations, businesses and individuals participated in the summer long event. The celebration began in the spring by presenting a play at Thornridge High School and continued with various activities throughout the summer.

There were a variety of fund raising projects in the early years (fall festivals, house walks, ice cream socials, etc.). Material Service Corp. allowed the Society to host quarry tours since the late 1980's. The first tour consisted of approximately 125 people touring the quarry in three school buses at a cost of \$10.00 per person. The fee was increased to \$15.00 in the 1990's and in the early 2000's to \$20.00 per person. (Tour prices were mainly increased due to rising bus rental fees.) The tour became so popular that there are now two tours each year (June and October). Each tour allows 270 people on six school buses. Due to the popularity of the tours, reservations are taken two to three years in advance but are currently booked through 2021. The monies received from the tours are used to improve exhibits, purchase artifacts and maintain the building. Hanson Material Service purchased the quarry from Material Service in 2006 and has allowed us to continue the tours. They also provide guides for each bus to explain the workings of the quarry.

In 1992, the Village purchased the property at 114 N. Hunter Street (old St. Paul Ev.

Lutheran Church). The museum was moved to the Hunter Street location soon after. The former sanctuary is used as the museum; the parish hall is used for displays as well as a meeting room. Additional space made it possible to improve and enlarge exhibits. The Society painted and put a new floor in the basement the summer of 2015 and is now being used for exhibits.

The Society maintains a huge historical document file as well as many artifacts and pictures.

Originally written in 1984/85 by Freda (Fritzie) Rietveld and Oscar Claus

Member names and current information added in October, 2015 by Margaret Loitz
(member since 1975)