Cedarville and the War Effort

(Inspired by LeRoy Wilson’s memories, Nelson Ottenhausen, author and former Cedarville resident, contributed one of his own to the historical society newsletter.)

Butterflies, especially the Monarch, have always fascinated me since my childhood. Even now, this amazing and graceful insect intrigues me whenever I see one, and over the years, I have seen many. Growing up as a child in Cedarville during World War II in the mid 1940s, my elementary classmates and I gathered milkweed pods during the fall as a contribution to the war effort. The milkweed plant grows wild in most of the Northern mid-western states and is quite plentiful around my old hometown.

At the time I didn’t know the reason why the pods were needed, only that we picked them for one or two years to help our country in a time of crisis. Later in life, I found out the military used the milkweed fluff to make life jackets for the navy and the merchant marines.

I recall going after classes to the southwest corner of a field adjoining the south side of the school property where a huge patch of milkweeds grew. We picked the knobby covered green pods, put them into bags and took them to the school basement where we spread them out on the floor or on a few tables to dry. Later, after the pods cured for a few days, someone came to the school and took them away.

When we picked the pods, we had to make sure to do the picking before the pod broke open or the wind would disburse the fluff and its seeds attached to one end. I remember the many Monarch butterflies that gathered around the milkweed patch whenever we picked. At the time, I noticed the butterflies never seemed to disturb them. They just flew from plant to plant and appeared to sit on the flowers for a while, then move on to another. I later learned they actually fed on the nectar in the flower, which is their only food source, and laid their eggs on the plant’s leaves, the food supply for the caterpillar stage of the butterfly.

Since I have lived in Gulf Breeze, Fl., these many years now, I have seen thousands of Monarch butterflies during their annual fall migration, passing through here on their way to their wintering grounds in Texas or Mexico. This part of the Florida panhandle is on a minor migration route, and the surrounding countryside is a gathering point for the hundreds of thousands of butterflies coming in from eastern Alabama, the entire state of Georgia and the east coast of Florida.

One year, during September, I happened to be on a walk and noticed a tree that seemed to be shimmering, like leaves blowing in the wind, but I knew the leaves had already fallen from this particular tree and it puzzled me. The closer I came to the tree, the more it seemed to be in constant motion. When I got close enough, I saw thousands of Monarch butterflies flitting around the tree’s limbs, causing the distant shimmering effect. One of the butterflies came toward me and almost landed on the sleeve of my jacket, but at the last instant, it decided to turn away and return to the rest of his kind.

Discover Sketch of 1855 School

A simple sketch of the Cedarville school that preceeded the existing 1889 structure was discovered last month in a heretofore obscure book in the local history department of the Freeport Library.

Previously only a written description of the two story, brick building was available and that was poor at best. The sketch was found in a photocopy of an 1859 Stephenson County plat book by Steve Myers, historical society board member, and was later photocopied by Ladona Wardlow, society member.
Discovery of the sketch confirms written statements that the 1855 building was two stories, that it was brick and that the 1889 building was constructed on the 30 by 55 foot foundation of the earlier building not including the east protrusion.

However, the sketch brings to light several previously unknown facts. The architectural style is obviously different. Also, there were two doors on the east side whereas the later building has one, suggesting separate boy-girl entrances and segregated classrooms in the 1855 school. The chimneys were located nearer to the center of the building rather than at the north and south ends and the roof was not as steep, indicating there was not as much attic space available.

Historical accounts report the 1855 building was constructed of Cedarville “soft” Canfield brick which had begun to deteriorate. Replacement was considered cheaper than repair. There is no indication of pupil placement during the work.

The 1855 building replaced a one story, frame building constructed in the late 1840s on the same site, according to several accounts. The frame school measured 20 by 30 feet. In the early 1850s school attendance became too large for this building and classes were held in the basement of the uncompleted Cedarville Lutheran and Reformed Church until the larger school was ready. It is not clear whether the frame structure was demolished or moved to another site.

In the early years the first floor of the 1855 school was used for classes and the upper floor as a public hall. Around the time of the Civil War the second floor was remodeled to accommodate a private academy that lasted a half dozen years.

February Lunch Financial, Social Success; Historical Society Board Set for 2006

The Cedarville Area Historical Society February 5 lunch netted between $650 and $700, according to Ruth Smith, CAHS treasurer. The monies came from food sales to approximately 200 persons, sale of publications, new and renewed memberships and donations.

The funds will go toward the society’s operating account to meet a predicted $2,000 need for the year. Earnings from other programs and sales during 2006 are expected to cover the balance.

At the annual meeting held earlier in the day, Steve Myers, Ruth Smith and Narcissa Engle were re-elected to the board for three year terms.

At the board’s February 7 organizational meeting, Jim Bade, Narcissa Engle, Ruth Smith and Denise Rogers were re-elected as president, vice president, treasurer and secretary for the current year.
Cedarville Sledding Time 70 Years Ago
By LeRoy Wilson

During the time of my childhood, we took our sledding seriously. There was no better place to sled than Cedarville. Drive or walk through our village and observe there are few level spots in our town.

There was terminology and an art to sledding in my day. First you didn’t want a sled that was much longer than from your knees to your head. This allowed for easy carrying and belly slamming. Belly slamming consisted of running as fast as possible and slamming the sled to the ground with your body on it all in one smooth operation. When a sled was too long, it was awkward to carry and slam because the rear of the runners struck the ground first resulting in a gut buster not a smooth slam. So much for the technical aspects of sledding.

The streets of Cedarville were usually coated with hard packed snow most of the winter. There were few autos so very little or no sand or cinders were spread. If cinder were spread, we kids swept them off.

Our sledding was done all over town, but there were a couple of favorite hills. Of course, one was the old school house hill. On a good sledding day and with two or three people on top of one another for weight, you got quite a run down the long school hill, up the shorter hill by Cronau’s, left and down the hill on Mill, left around the curve, across the bridge and left into the farm house drive. I’ll admit that by the time you turned into the farm’s drive, you were going quite slow. That was a record run and we always wanted to tie it.

Most nights with mild weather found us on Mill Street again with a different start (Top of next page)

Right: Steve Myers applies stucco finish to wall and ceiling in south room of museum prior to painting. The room with lighting, electrical outlets and re-finished floors should be ready for use when the museum opens in May.

Below: Family members on February 22 helped Mary Mau, oldest member of the historical society, celebrate her 99th birthday with a dinner at Beach’s Supper Club in Lena. From left are Bonnie Bade; Mr. and Mrs. Alan Youel, her nephew; Mary and her daughter, Marilyn Holmes. Mary’s great grandmother and Bonnie’s great great grandmother was Mariah Clingman of Cedarville who died in 1916 at the age of 106.
200 Attend February 5 Society Lunch

Soup, Chili, Sandwiches, Desserts, Beverages, Crackers, Vegetables, Candy Gone, Gone, Gone!