

Warehouse could become ag/industry museum

Few people outside of Edgerton realize that this region was once the largest tobacco producing area in the United States. From the 1880s to the 1920s, more tobacco was grown and shipped from Edgerton and the surrounding area than anywhere else in the country.

Edgerton was built on the tobacco trade. Evidence of this is visible in the few remaining magnificent large cream brick tobacco warehouses, 55 of which once covered most of the commercial district of the town.

A local owner of one of these warehouses, Tom Dickinson, is proposing to convert his 1885 National Trust Register building

into a local museum dedicated to telling and displaying Edgerton's unique agricultural and industrial history.

"Unfortunately, the recent bad publicity surrounding tobacco has pretty much buried just how important this crop was to the economic foundation at the beginning of the country, let alone Wisconsin and other regions in the U.S.," Dickinson said. "Had it not been for tobacco, it is doubtful if the English colonies would have survived. This story needs to be preserved and passed on, and this is the place to do it. I'm eager to see this historic gem warehouse developed into a museum

to tell these unique stories of Edgerton's rich and varied industrial and agricultural past."

Edgerton was also the home to a vibrant manufacturing sector. Hard on the heels of the tobacco industry was the manufacturing of truck trailer freight transport vehicles. The Highway Trailer Company was one of the earliest manufacturers of horse-drawn freight wagons and later became one of the world's largest builders of truck trailers. Edgerton was also home of the once world famous Nunn-Bush Shoe Company, and today is still the only place where the IKI pressurized container business has operated for more than 50 years.

The T.W. Dickinson and Sons Tobacco warehouse, located at 1 West Fulton St. in Edgerton, was built in 1885, and was known then as the Pelton-Pomeroy Warehouse #30. (The Pomeroy family was the first to grow tobacco as a commercially successful crop in Wisconsin in the 1850s.) Tom's Dad, and Ms. Diane Everson, Owner/Publisher of The Edgerton Reporter, collaborated to have the building successfully reg-

istered as a National Trust Historic Property in 1996. At one time, it was part of a huge commercial enterprise that resulted in millions of pounds of tobacco being shipped to the eastern U.S. where it was used to make the inner wrapper or binder for cigars. Tom's family has been directly involved in the tobacco business since the 1880s. Now he wants to give back to the community to commemorate the history that put Edgerton "on the map."

Tom foresees tying together the tobacco warehouse to the adjacent Edgerton train depot, another tobacco warehouse, and the former Pauline Pottery factory (Warehouse #10 on West Lawton St.) to form a museum "campus" complex that would allow plenty of space for outdoor exhibits of truck and horse drawn trailers, railcars used in tobacco transport, farm implements like tractors and planters, and other large display artifacts.

In addition, it is hoped that the recent revival of the history of Edgerton's unique and remarkable artisan pottery and industrial ceramics industry of the late 19th century will at-



The former Dickinson tobacco warehouse, located on the corner of Fulton and Main streets in Edgerton. (Edgerton Reporter photo/Benjamin A. Bovee)

tract enough interest to restart pottery production at #10. All of this would serve to enhance Edgerton's economic vitality through increased historic tourism, as well as provide a huge new educational resource for students of all ages, and researchers interested in agricultural and industrial history.

Tom is soliciting ideas, suggestions, participation and contributions (both financial and artifacts) for the museum project.

"This project, to be successful in making Edger-

ton a unique, attractive destination for travelers and tourists, will require total community involvement and support, including merchants and the city government," Tom said.

A group known as The Edgerton Museum Partners has been formed and will meet during the month of June in Edgerton. To attend the meeting, to get involved and support this terrific and exciting project or for further information, Tom can be reached at tomwd3@gmail.com or (703) 841-4992.

Shakespeare returns to Milton

Submitted by the Milton College Preservation Society

After a 40-year absence, the Bard is back in town. Long before American Players Theater made Spring Green the Shakespeare capital of Wisconsin, that distinction belonged to Rock County, thanks to Milton College's long tradition of annual Shakespeare performances through much of the 20th Century.

In honor of what would have been Milton College's sesquicentennial, Shakespeare returns to Milton in June with a special performance of "As You Like It." The Milton College Preservation Society is presenting the play at Cross-Pointe Community Church, the site of the former Dunn Athletic Center on the college campus, on June 23-24 at 7 p.m. both nights.

Professional actor and director Michael Chase has signed on to cast and direct the shows.

From 1905 to 1969, Milton College boasted the longest continuous run of college-acted Shake-

speare performances in the nation. The streak was broken in 1970, but Shakespeare returned for "A Midsummer Night's Dream" in 1976 and "Romeo and Juliet" in 1977, the final campus presentation before the school closed in 1982.

"As You Like It," a romantic comedy with music, dance and disguises, was performed for the college's special 50th anniversary celebration in 1917, making it a natural choice for Milton's Shakespeare revival 100 years later. The play was also presented six other times between 1907 and 1965.

Tickets are \$15 for the general public and \$12 for seniors, students and Milton College Preservation Society members. Tickets may be purchased online at Eventbrite.com or at Main Hall during office hours, Monday, Tuesday and Thursday, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

More information can be found on the Milton College Preservation Society Facebook page or at www.MiltonCollege.org.

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