



January 2021

GIANT KACHINA RETURNS TO WISCONSIN

On December 22nd, HCHS received an early Christmas present. It arrived by truck in a heavy-duty crate, not a gift box with a bow on top. The crate contained a giant-sized wood Kachina doll, intricately carved by **Joe Sem** in the 1950s in Greendale, Wisconsin. Basing his carving on an illustration by Ben Hunt in his 1938 book *Indian and Camp Handicraft*, Joe took it one step further by increasing its size and weight to 66 inches tall and 80 pounds, well beyond a doll to place on a bookshelf or mantel.

Joe's son, **Joe, Jr.** (known as "**Chuck**"), who now lives in Oregon, contacted our society early in 2020 and offered to ship his father's Kachina back to Wisconsin, at considerable personal expense. We accepted Chuck's very generous offer, as we feel the doll will be a great addition to the Ben Hunt Cabin, and especially popular with children.

Now, here's the back story: Joe Sem graduated from Boy's Tech High School in Milwaukee in 1932. He went to work for the Falk Corporation in the Menomonee Valley between the 27th and 35th street viaducts, retiring from there in 1976.

Joe, his wife **Maggie**, and son Chuck were members of St. Matthias Church and School in the 1940s. The whole family was involved with scouting there, with Joe as a scout leader and Maggie as a den mother for Boy Scout Troop 592. Chuck still has various patches from scout campouts and jamborees.

The Sem family moved to Greendale in 1950. Chuck is not certain how his father met Ben Hunt, although he certainly would have been aware of Ben as a result of the many articles Ben authored for *Boys' Life*, the official publication of the Boys Scouts. Another connection would have been Chuck's father's hobbies of woodworking and whittling. He remembers that his father was part of a group of men that met regularly with Ben at his cabin.

The Kachina was carved during that period. It took up residence in Chuck's bedroom where he hung his clothes from its horns. The doll, named "**Zike**," is well-traveled, having spent 10 years in California, 11 years in Hawaii, and the remaining years in Oregon.



Now, it's back in its birthplace, Wisconsin, and was moved into the Hunt Cabin on January 21st. We emailed photos of Zike in its new location to Chuck, who responded, "What a place of honor for Zike. I'm sure he feels right at home. If that cabin could talk, it would certainly be interesting."

We agree. Thanks again, Chuck, for your wonderful gift to HCHS!

(Continued)



Joe, "Zike" the Kachina doll, and Chuck



Judging by the partially obscured street sign, this parade probably took place in Butler, Wisconsin at 124th St. and Hampton Ave. Butler was known for its annual "Frontier Days" celebrations. The Sems are marching just behind the horses, with Joe carrying a small drum.



The Sems' Indian Lore Group performing on stage at a Milwaukee TV station, televised to the public



Joe Sem and son Chuck (both at left) playing the drum



Heavily armed, masked men were responsible for uncrating "Zike" the Kachina doll at HCHS headquarters. They probably are (l to r) Chris Schachtlie, Al Strekow, and Randy Sannes.

(photo by Katy Galewski)

WHAT IS A KACHINA/KATSINA?

Hopi katsina figures (Hopi language: tithu or katsintithu), also known as kachina dolls, are figures carved, typically from cottonwood root, by Hopi people to instruct young girls and new brides about katsinas or katsinam, the immortal beings that bring rain, control other aspects of the natural world and society, and act as messengers between humans and the spirit world.

Hopi people live primarily on three mesas in northeastern Arizona, about 70 miles from Flagstaff. In Hopi cosmology, the majority of katsinas reside on the Humphreys Peak, approximately 60 miles west of the Hopi Reservation. Each year, throughout the period from winter solstice to mid-July, these spirits, in the form of

katsinas, come down to the villages to dance and sing, to bring rain for the upcoming harvest, and to give gifts to the children.

The katsinas are known to be the spirits of deities, natural elements or animals, or the deceased ancestors of the Hopi. Prior to each katsina ceremony, the men of the village will spend days studiously making figures in the likeness of the katsinam represented in that particular ceremony. The figures are then passed on to the daughters of the village by the Giver Kachina during the ceremony. Following the ceremony, the figures are hung on the walls of the pueblo and are meant to be studied in order to learn the characteristics of that certain Kachina.

-- Wikipedia



Two Kachina dolls carved by Ben Hunt are on display in his cabin.

Did you guess correctly? Yes, it's John Gurda!



(Lee Fray Photo, 1961)

In the last issue, we if asked you could identify this Milwaukee personality from his teenage photo that accompanied the newspaper clipping we recently found in our archives:

JOHN GURDA, 14, eighth grade student at St. Mary school is one of the five finalists in a state wide essay contest sponsored by the Veteran's Administration. The subject of the 300-500 word essay was "Are We Losing Our Freedom of Speech?" The results will be made known in the latter part of June.

When we contacted John, he had no memory of the article, the contest, or the essay. He noted that the photo was "from my early greaser period."

Now Milwaukee's chief historian, John's future writing career was already in the works!



John Gurda at HCHS's "Cabernet at the Cabin" event in 2016

HCHS Board Nominations

The nominations and election of HCHS Officers and Directors have been postponed during COVID-19 times. We plan to proceed with these matters in Spring 2021. Below are the names of our current Officers and Directors. If you are a member of HCHS and have an interest in serving on our Board, please contact us at 5885 South 116th Street, Hales Corners, WI 53130 or by email at info@HalesCornersHistory.com.

OFFICERS

President -

Al Strekow

Vice President -

Randy Sannes

Recording Secretary -

Sandy Sannes

Corresponding Secretary -

Mary Bennett

Treasurers -

Michael Jedrzejewski,

Jim Bain

DIRECTORS

Katy Galewski

Mary Javorek

Kathleen O'Brien

Chris Schachtlie

Don Schwartz

Ruth Strekow

Thanks for your donations to support Ben's Cabin repairs

We are most grateful for the number of donations we have received above and beyond your membership fees. Thank you all so much!

TALES OF THE CORNERS

From the files of the
Tri-Town News and Hub.

90 YEARS AGO (1931)

- A venison lunch is served at the bowling alley in Hales Corners.
- The Hales Corners Volunteer Fire Company votes to pay the chief \$25 per year and firemen one dollar per run.
- The tenth Annual Milwaukee County Mid-Winter Fair is held in Hales Corners. About 232 exhibitors attend.
- Oliver Meyer starts a milk route in Hales Corners.

80 YEARS AGO (1941)

- More than 600 people enjoy free farming movies, lunch, and a dance provided by Hales Corners implement dealer Robert Ludwig at the Greenfield Town Hall.

70 YEARS AGO (1951)

- After repeated efforts, residents give up on raising the Hales Corners Community Christmas tree and it is left lying on the Triangle.
- Over 20 volunteers join in a "painting Bee" at Valley View School. This is the first time that the auditorium's concrete block walls have been painted.
- So far this year, 55.8 inches of snow have fallen in the area.

Research by Katy Galewski

WELCOME, NEW* AND RETURNING 2021 HCHS MEMBERS!

Kenneth J. Augustine
James Bain
Mary Bennett
Joan Berg
Dan & Diane Besson
Robert Burnham &
Patricia Laughlin
Esther Demerdash
Ronald & Kathleen
Dondlinger
Robert & Mary Forecki
Katy Galewski
Frederick & Marsha
Hammer

David & Margarete
Harvey
Michael J. Holmes
Frank & Judith Humpal
Mike Jedrzejewski
& Sybil Grandeck
Celine Kashishian
James & Jacqueline
Keuck
Bob & Dottie King
Mary Ann Kniep
Gary Kohls
& Karen Niessing

Ben Kreuzer / Greco
Homes LLC
Scott & Judy Kruger
Gregory & Romaine
Krystowiak
Mary Long
Jerry & Marjorie Pagel
Mike Praedel
Frank & Audrey Reineck
Randy & Sandy Sannes
Mel & Elaine Schmidt
Rosemary Selep
Joe "Chuck" Sem*

Walt & Nancy Sievert
Marjorie Stahl
Sherman & Sally Stock
Daniel & Kayellyn
Strasburg
Al & Ruth Strekow
Brian & Laura Touhey
Patricia Warchol
Jeff & Anne Weber
Janice Zeit
Kathleen Zellmer

Thanks to those of you have expressed interest in volunteering! We will contact you.

HALES CORNERS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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