



April 2021

As spring returns, our thoughts turn to nature and gardens -- including the prairie garden, planted 36 years ago, that adjoins the Ben Hunt Cabin. The article below first appeared in the Franklin/Hales Corners *Hub* newspaper on April 18, 1991. **Richard Barloga** was the co-founder and manager of the Milwaukee Area Land Conservancy. **Henry Poehler** was a Village Trustee and President during the 1980s and 1990s.

PRAIRIE TO RISE FROM THE ASHES by *Tami Witt*

Each spring **Richard Barloga** volunteers his time and talents to do something a bit unusual. He starts a fire.

This fire is, however, an asset to Hales Corners because it helps to ensure a scene of natural beauty while preserving a bit of history.

The annual prairie burning on the grounds of the W. Ben Hunt Center, marks the beginning of a new season of blooming plant life at the site.

[**Editor's Note:** Prairie burning has not been done since 2017, but there are plans to return to it after the prairie has been revitalized.] The center is home to the Hales Corners Library, Health Department, Historical Society, and W. Ben Hunt Cabin, as well as the surrounding grounds and natural prairie.

"There are about five species of native grasses and more than 40 species of flowering plants that are found in the prairie," said Barloga, a naturalist for The Park People. "The plants are perennials and have buds for the next year that are just below the ground surface." Burning off the plant litter from the previous season helps rid the new growth of sunblocking insulation, allowing the soil to warm sooner. This fosters growth of the new buds.

"The burning also allows minerals to be placed right on the soil surface in the form of ash," Barloga said. The minerals, in turn, act as natural fertilizers.

Within a few weeks after the burning, green shoots can be seen sprouting through the blackened earth and the cycle of new growth continues.

"I can't imagine what the grounds would be like without the prairie," said **Patricia Laughlin**,



2017 photo of the Ben Hunt Prairie and Cabin

Hales Corners Library Director. "Even in the bleakest part of winter, the prairie is still beautiful with the snow clinging to the tall grass and birds eating the seeds."

The flowers and other vegetation are in bloom from late May through September, ensuring a summer-long array of color and natural beauty.

"The prairie is a self-maintaining system that requires no human effort or energy to maintain the plant community," Barloga said. Once the plant litter from the previous season has been effectively removed through the burning process, there is no other upkeep, such as mowing or trimming.

The 20,000-square-foot prairie at the W. Ben Hunt Center was first planted by Barloga in 1985. According to Barloga, the reproduction of the prairie is not only esthetically pleasing, but it is a place for the natural species to survive when so much of the original prairies have been converted to agricultural use.

(Continued)

(Continued from page 1)

“In pre-settlement times about 6 percent of the state was covered by prairies,” he said. Those lands were proven to have the most fertile soil types. Therefore, many were adopted for agricultural developments.

“Most of Milwaukee County was once woodlands,” said Barloga. “Southwest Franklin had open oak forests and prairies as original vegetation cover.” It is only fitting that a bit of history be preserved on the grounds of the W. Ben Hunt Center.



A plant growing on the prairie at the W. Ben Hunt Cabin is described by prairie expert Richard Barloga. He led a tour of the prairie in 1993 for more than 30 people. The tour was sponsored by the Hales Corners Library, Whitnall Park Rotary, and the Hales Corners Historical Society. (Photo by Jeff Oien)

W. Ben Hunt, a noted author and citizen of Hales Corners, died in 1970 after living in the community for more than 50 years. An original cabin that he built was relocated on the grounds in 1985 and is situated just behind the prairie. Both the cabin and the prairie serve as fitting reminders of a part of Wisconsin history.



Smoke rises from the ground as a controlled burning is conducted in 1991 at the Ben Hunt Prairie. Members of the Rotary Club who helped in the burn include club president and Village Trustee Henry Poehler. Poehler uses a rake to spread and control the fire.

(Photo by Jack Plate)

The most noticeable plants in our prairie garden are the Prairie Sunflowers. They produce a yellow blossom and reach a height of over eight feet. By late July or early August, the prairie becomes a riot of color.



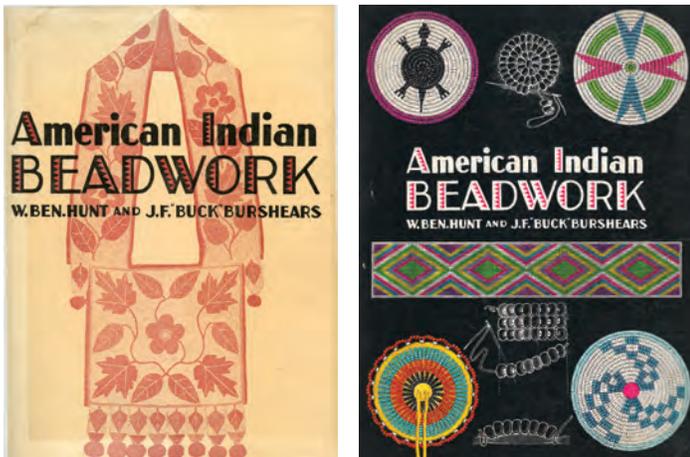
Cabin Repairs Project Gets Underway

A few months ago, HCHS announced plans to make expensive but critically needed repairs to the Ben Hunt Cabin to address log preservation and drainage issues. First of all, we want to thank all those who have generously made contributions to help fund this project! To date, we have received \$2,780, and additional donations are welcome. Contractors will start work on the project during the last week of April. When finished, rainwater will be diverted away from the cabin's supporting logs, and future rotting will be avoided.

To make way for the contractors, a bit of cleanup was necessary alongside the north wall of the cabin. **Jim Bain** and **Chris Schachtli** disposed of a stockpile of wood that had been stored there for years. They were joined later by **Al Strekow**, and the three of them removed a hunting skiff that was there as well. Ben Hunt built the boat for a handicapped friend who loved to duck hunt. Ben made it extra-wide so it would be more stable on the water. Temporarily, the boat has been moved inside the library building.

From the HCHS Images Collection

By dipping into our growing collection of photos and artwork the Village's past, we were able to find the images below that are referred to in the *Tales of the Corners* at right (see 1951 and 1971).



In 1951, **Ben Hunt** collaborated with his friend **J. F. "Buck" Burshears** on a book entitled *American Indian Beadwork*. Above left is the bookjacket of the original hardcover version that featured a photograph of a Woodland Sioux bandoleer bag with applied beadwork. Above right is a soft-cover version, published later, that featured Ben's illustrations of beadwork designs.



In 1971, board members of the State Bank Hales Corners presented **Rudy Holz** with a plaque honoring him for 34 years as president of the bank. (L. to R.) **Arnold Horn, Rudy Holz, Edward Bosch,** and **George W. Bosch.**

TALES OF THE CORNERS

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

90 YEARS AGO (1931)

- The Holz Motor Co. advertises a six-cylinder Chevrolet truck with a one-and-a-half-ton chassis for \$520.
- The Hales Corners Advancement Association votes to install five additional street lights in the Village.
- Dena Gilbertson, Hales Corners, is granted a patent on his quack grass destroyer.

80 YEARS AGO (1941)

- Hales Corners postmaster William Schreiber is happy to learn that the Village is getting house numbers.
- The portion of Hales Corners west of the car (Interurban) tracks is being surveyed for the sewage disposal project.
- Groundbreaking ceremonies are planned for the new Whitnall Park Lutheran Church.
- Mrs. Henry Bowers, Hales Corners, receives a telegram informing her that she has won the \$5,000 first prize in the Crisco limerick contest. (That's roughly \$90,000 in today's money.)

70 YEARS AGO (1951)

- W. Ben Hunt's latest book, *American Indian Beadwork*, is ready for publication. (See photo, upper left.)
- Transportation Co. officials announce that the Hales Corners bus line will be incorporated with the regular Forest Home Avenue route.
- Alvin Meyers, chairman of the committee to incorporate Hales Corners, announces plans to take a village census.
- Dr. Albert Kazmierski plans to open a dental office in Hales Corners.

50 YEARS AGO (1971)

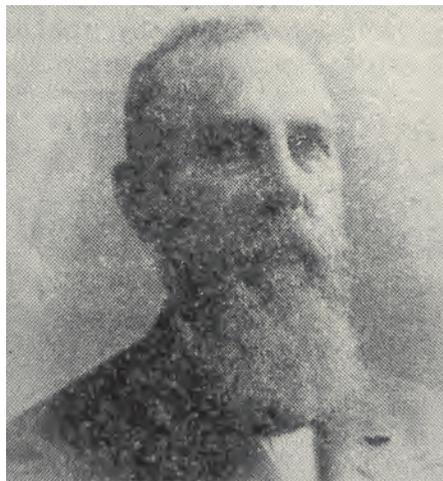
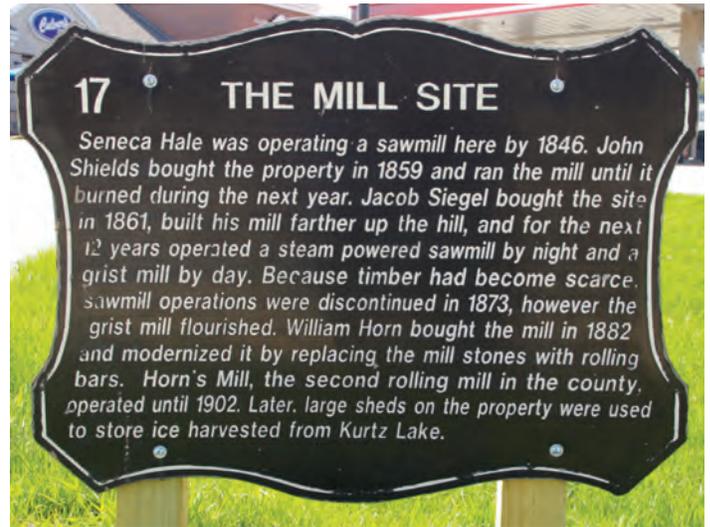
- Classified Ad: Three-bedroom ranch in Hales Park Highlands, \$35,900.
- R.W. Holz is presented with a plaque to commemorate his 34 years as president of the State Bank Hales Corners. (See photo, lower left.)
- "Once Upon a Time at St. Mary's" is this year's theme for the women of St. Mary's parish luncheon.
- *The Mouse that Roared* is presented by the senior class at Whitnall High School.

Research by Katy Galewski

A Sign of the Times

During the winter months, one of HCHS's historical signs was knocked down by a snow plow at the Hwy. 100 entrance to the Village Center, home of Culver's, Jetz, and Subway. The sign survived but the supporting posts were damaged. The owners replaced the posts and the sign was reinstalled by **Randy Sannes** and **Chris Schachtlie**.

The sign, shown at right, commemorates the site on which the first sawmill in the Village was built in 1846 on **Seneca Hale's** land. In 1859, John Shields bought the mill. Unfortunately, it burned down a year later. Then, **Jacob Siegel** bought the land and built a new sawmill. In 1862, he added a flour mill, so by day it was used to saw lumber, and by night to mill grain. In 1882, it was sold to **William Horn** and only used as a flour mill. It remained in operation until 1902. After that, the property's large sheds were used as storage for ice harvested from Kurtz Lake.



William Horn



Horn's Mill

WELCOME, NEW* AND RETURNING 2021 HCHS MEMBERS!

Constance Anderson
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
Jeffrey & Mary Javorek
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
David & Kathleen O'Brien
Jerry & Marjorie Pagel
Mike Praedel
Frank & Audrey Reineck
Richard & Carol Ann Rose
Randy & Sandy Sannes
Chris & Caroline
Schachtlie
Mel & Elaine Schmidt
Don & Suzanne Schwartz
Rosemary Selep

Joe "Chuck" Sem*
Walt & Nancy Sievert
Marjorie Stahl
Sherman & Sally Stock
Daniel & Kayellyn
Strasburg
Al & Ruth Strekow
Brian & Laura Touhey
Fred & Rose Mary
Walecki
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

5885 South 116th Street, Hales Corners, WI 53130 • 414-529-6150, Ext. 24

info@HalesCornersHistory.com • www.HalesCornersHistory.com • www.facebook.com/HalesCornersHistory