

## **Excitement Stirs as Museum with New Name Hopes for a Permanent Home**

The former Calhoun Memorial Museum received a new name after a unanimous vote of members present at the September meeting of the Chetek Area Historical Society. Prompting the new name were results of research indicating that describing the area served by a museum in its name significantly increases its recognition, and therefore its support, by tourists and members of the community.

The new name of the museum is the Chetek Area Calhoun Museum, and it honors the unique history of Chetek and the surrounding area by including it in the name. It was also decided to retain 'Calhoun' in its moniker, as Hazel Calhoun was instrumental in creating both the library and museum in Chetek.

The Museum has had some difficulty getting a foothold in the community with a somewhat nomadic past. It was initiated in the library, but with expansion of the library, it was moved to the Community Center. When the Community Center needed the space, the non-profit historical society was created to care for and maintain the collection. The assemblage of historical items was moved to a temporary space in a building at 120 Knapp Street, where it is currently on display.

Along with the new name, a renewed enthusiasm for the Museum has been noted in the community, and there has been significant progress during 2009. In March, Nancy Frank of Ridgeland (Meet Your Neighbor, Oct. 14 issue of the Alert), was asked to assist the museum, and under her guidance the members have made great strides in developing an increased public awareness and appreciation for local history.

The Museum hosted the entire fourth grade class from Roselawn Elementary School last spring, to tour the museum, play the Victrola, and learn about technologies their grandparents used for every day life. A float and costumed characters represented the Museum in the Libertyfest Parade. A drawing for fresh pies was held during the Red Barn Theatre's production of A Music Man, and over 1,000 people were introduced to the Museum with the new brochure. An event was held for the Resort Owners Association to acquaint them with the museum, so they could share the information with their guests. In the first issue of each month, a History Mystery Photo is printed in the Chetek Alert as a contest for reader, and the Museum window displays are being changed monthly to increase interest of passers-by.

The result of the increased awareness brought 969 visitors to the Museum during the 2009 season, which was approximately 30% more than in 2008. A \$300 solid oak display case was donated, and now houses valuables in the military room. Contributions have been made including many donations from personal collections of families of Chetek residents, businesses, and even a hand-written log book from the local cemetery. Twenty-two dedicated volunteers expended 426.5 hours of volunteer time to keep the doors open, welcome guests, and work on the displays. The membership of the historical society has grown by 250% since March, and seventeen of those memberships are at the \$100 level.

The future plans of the Museum include finding a permanent home in Chetek, preferably where it can serve as another reason for tourists and residents to be in the downtown area bringing traffic to local businesses. The Museum could be the centerpiece of a cultural center that would offer space for educational workshops and programs, host visiting displays, and showcase the roots of Chetek. Community support for this plan was evident when the Erspamer building became available. Several donors came forward and pledged support for the project, and one anonymous donor stood ready to cover the down payment should the bid have been made.

A website has been donated for the Museum and is currently under construction at [www.chetekmuseum.org](http://www.chetekmuseum.org). Information will be available there soon. Meetings are open to the public, and are held the second Monday of each month, except December, at 7 PM at the Community Center.

For additional information about the Chetek Area Calhoun Museum, contact Nancy Frank at 715-455-1144.