

Old World Wisconsin

Jennifer Van Haaften, Associate Director of Programs and Historical Resources, greeted the group and provided background information on Old World Wisconsin.

Although opened in 1976 as part of Wisconsin's Bicentennial celebrations, the idea of an open-air museum preserving some of the state's historical architecture dates back to the 1950s when the architect Richard Perrin noticed that many older buildings, particularly on farms, were being destroyed. The earliest post-fur-trade European settlements in Wisconsin date to the mid-1830s, and the buildings of the museum tend to be farm buildings constructed by these European settlers.



Fig. 11 Old World Wisconsin; children learning how to use an iron brace to drill holes

The Wisconsin Historical Society had been established in 1846 (two years before statehood), but only became interested in preserving buildings and sites in the 1940s. Many of the buildings' contents were donated in the 1970s and 1980s. The museum is organised according to the settlers' nationalities. Within the German buildings, whose interiors reminded members of Saxon buildings in Transylvania, were examples of painted furniture (*bauernmalerei*) and cupboards (a cupboard being a *schränk* in German). One of the German homes also contained a black kitchen, an inner room that was open to the top of the chimney and which became black over time. Architecturally interesting was the Polish house; a log house built using the 'stovewood' construction technique, whereby logs were cut into short lengths and stacked one on another, and set into lime mortar with their round face outwards. The Norwegian houses also contained a number of cupboards and pine (or bentwood) boxes. Of further interest were the furnishings of the Finnish farm, typical for the early 20th century in having been ordered from the Sears and Roebuck catalogue.

Christina Anderson

Endnote

Our grateful thanks to the people whose houses, museums and collections we were privileged to see, particularly Christopher Monkhouse at the Chicago Institute of Art, Lisa Stone and Nick Lowe at the Roger Brown House, John Bryan at Crab Tree Farm, Jon Prown at Chipstone and Joe Gromacki at Kelton House Farm. All were more than generous with their time and gave us invaluable insights into their collections, leaving us with much food for thought on what motivates collectors and the many different ways collections can be used to illuminate the past.

David Dewing and Polly Legg