

Rural Arts Museum keeps improving

A revived and more independent Colby Rural Arts Museum group is always looking for ways to continue improving its buildings.

In the last year, the group has separated itself from the Clark County Historical Society and now operates as its own entity. That means there's always plenty of work to do and plenty to see on its grounds just off STH 13.

The museum is also home to a fully-furnished one-room country school. Local school children have held classes there to learn what it was like in pioneer Wisconsin. There is also an extensive antique book collection.

An original log home sits in the center of the museum grounds. The cabin was originally built and occupied by the Schopper family near Dorchester. Descendants of the Schoppers disassembled and reconstructed the home on the Rural Arts grounds. The home is completely furnished with original furniture. Family members often visit the cabin and donate labor to maintain the more than a century-old structure.

While some buildings are open, others are still packed with old farm equipment, household items, horse implements and assorted other goods. The caretakers hope to show off its depot as part of the museum but getting it open to visitors has taken time and effort.

Saving the Depot

Seriously in need of a facelift, the first railroad depot in the Colby area is being preserved by the efforts of a group of local volunteers.

The "Save the Depot" fundraising drive had been put into motion by the Colby Train Depot Restoration committee, an arm of the Rural Arts Museum.

The depot was originally called Station 51 and was constructed by the former Wisconsin Central Railroad, which evolved into the Soo Line.

It was between STH 13 and the 100 block of First Street along the railroad tracks. The 30 foot-by-60-foot building was first called a railroad house and was used to store household goods of incoming pioneers.

During the busy years of passenger train service, eight passenger trains passed through Colby daily, as well as freight trains and a local train.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the railroad experienced a drastic slowdown in traffic. Less trains serviced Colby and the passenger and telegraph services were discontinued. Eventually the Colby



DEPOT'S NEW HOME- The Colby Depot was moved to the Rural Arts Museum grounds in the 1970s. Funds are currently being raised to restore the building.

Depot ceased to operate.

In 1971 the Clark County Historical Society submitted a request for the building, which laid idle for several years. On its 100th anniversary in 1972, the depot was moved to where it now stands as part of the Rural Arts Museum. The building was placed on a solid foundation during the Colby's centennial celebration in 1973.

Now, the depot is acting as a storage space with two rooms full of items that need to be inventoried. The museum group is looking for another building to house those items to get to its other improvements like painting, wiring and flooring.

Preserving history

With the depot being restored, the Rural Arts Museum group is looking at the rest of its grounds.

Its old schoolhouse could be used to host class visits as soon as windows are fixed and it is cleaned. Years ago that was a common practice but that has fallen off recently.

There is also furniture that can be added to the gazebo, which is landscaped. Other areas are slated to be beautified.

The museum also features a Heritage Building that has seven "Streets of Yesteryear" display rooms. These include a beauty shop, bank, dental office, farm-

house and millinery room. With another open room, the museum group is considering things like a historical reproduction of a lending library, post office, clinic, general store, clothing store, barber shop or laundry.

The Heritage Building also has plenty of work lined up for it. From painting to carpentry to cleaning, it needs a brush-up throughout.

Other buildings could also pop up on the grounds such as a firehouse, church, town hall or cheese factory.

The group is always looking for volunteers to help. From cataloguing its inventory to moving items to designing new displays, there's plenty of work to do. There's also a continuous need for monetary support.

The Rural Arts Museum is operated by volunteers and benefactors and is open Sundays, 1 p.m. to 4 p.m., from Memorial Day to Labor Day and also by appointment. Call 715-223-3039 for more information, or write to Rural Arts Museum, P.O. Box 73, Colby, WI 54421.

The committee is also seeking donations of building materials, especially lumber. Call Jane Holman at 223-1328 or Beisner at 223-3326.

With some extra money and plenty of elbow grease, the group hopes its museum could be the historical gem on the highway.