

# Kirn's collection includes memorabilia from Willard's past

by Dean Lesar

A ticket to the 45th anniversary party of the Slovenian Lodge in Willard cost 50 cents. The Willard State Graded School had its first bus in 1943-44. Donna Parkel was the first grade teacher at Willard in 1952.

These are all facts for Roger Kirn of Willard. His source of this knowledge is not a history book or other text source, but a collection of memorabilia he has been amassing ever since he can remember. He'll have his collection on display at the July 27-29 Willard Heritage Festival so others can reminisce about the old days with him.

Kirn grew up around Willard and still lives two miles south of town. He has been the town of Hendren's patrolman since June 1, 1976, and has had a hand in building many of the roads around Willard since then and even before. And all the while, he's had his eyes open for any item that may carry a bit of local history.

One of his most prized Willard relics is a set of handcuffs and a badge used by the Hendren constable in 1939. He got them at a garage sale, like he has many of his items. Hendren doesn't even elect a constable anymore, and it may have been 50 years or more since the handcuffs last kept some

scofflaw in check on the way to visit the local jail.

Kirn still has his first-grade report card from the long-gone Willard State Graded School. It was torn down in the late 1980s and was replaced on its site by the Willard Athletic Club. Like all of the children of his day from Willard, Kirn attended the Willard school before moving on to the Greenwood High School where he graduated in 1956.

Kirn's collection includes a fascinating array of items representing the town through the years. There is a set of old thermometers he's decorated with business names of area cheese factories and stores. He has an invoice sheet from the Simple Apron Manufacturing Co., that once operated in the Tioga area, and time sheets from Plautz Bros. road construction outfit, where he worked for several years. He has a key hanger from Suda's Store, a flour sifter from Mary's Store. Other items range from the Volk family's 1933 patron milk book (showing daily production of 250-450 pounds of milk) to a rain gauge from Walt Backus' Union 76 dealership to a diary of his own birth. He weighed 7 pounds, by the way.

Kirn usually has his collection



Roger Kirn of Willard for years has been collecting a variety of items tied to Willard's past. He holds a set of handcuffs and a badge used by the town of Hendren constable in 1939, items he snapped up at a local garage sale.

in boxes, but has it out now for the centennial weekend display. As he and his wife, Yvonne, dug out the

boxes, "We found stuff that we didn't realize we had," Kirn said. His collection includes several

unique historical photographs, such as one of a threshing machine that crashed through a weak bridge over Scott Creek. Kirn has an undated pennant from the Civilian Conservation Corps camp and a collection of license plate clip-on year tags from 1943-60. There is political memorabilia from days gone by (a matchbook extolling Everett Gorsegnor for district attorney), a 1959 Rock Dam Rod & Gun Club sign, and a complete set of buttons for a more recent event in Willard's history -- Beaver Days. Its history dates back only to 1994.

Kirn said he is always on the look-out for more items for his growing stash. Garage sales are his best source, and he picked up several items when going through boxes after relatives passed away. More things have come as gifts.

"I've been hammering at it for years and years," he said. "A lot of this stuff you never find anymore."

In addition to collecting Willard's history, Kirn has played a role in it. As a worker for Plautz Brothers, he helped shape many of the town roads that he now takes care of as town patrolman. Hendren has about 52 miles of gravel roads these days, and had more at one time before several miles were paved as county routes.

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