

Rare Books Discovered, Given to Historical Society

Because of the alertness of one man, the Waukesha county historical society is richer by several valuable and rare books.

When the society's secretary James Babcock, Waterville, began to dig into our county's past, he discovered the possible existence of books written by several county pioneers — men known outside the Wisconsin territory for their contributions to science and society.

Two Waukesha county pioneers who gained Babcock's attention were Dr. Increase Allen Lapham, father of the United States weather bureau, and Marvin Bovee, Eagle, who was responsible for the abolition of capital punishment in Wisconsin.

Bovee's book "Reasons for the Abolition of Capital Punishment" was published in 1873. It is remarkable, Babcock says, because Bovee recorded his correspondence on the subject with leading figures on the national scene in those war and post-Civil war days — Greeley, Longfellow, Bryant, Whittier and Garrison, to name a few. Many had opposed the abolition of capital punishment so close to the war because

Wisconsin," a survey of pre-historic Indian mounds, gained Lapham international fame. His discovery and observation of the tides on Lake Michigan led to the founding of the weather bureau.

Doctor Lapham's granddaughter sold her grandfather's books and desk to a Milwaukee bookstore when she left this area. The desk, given to Lapham originally by Solomon Juneau, disappeared, and his books were bought up by collectors and museums. Two of his personal references were unaccounted for until Babcock discovered them in the "Home of Retired Books" in Milwaukee this winter.

A worn, pocket-sized New Testament printed in Pittsburgh in 1834 and dated "Columbus 1835" which had been carried by the young scientist, and his "English Reader" printed in New York in 1821, and used by Lapham in his self education, were both quickly bought by Babcock. These, together with Lapham's hand-drawn map of the proposed canal route, which is already in possession of our museum, form the beginning of a Lapham collection. Babcock has a list of

"Since the society is the responsible agent for collecting and preserving material relating to the significant aspects of this community's history, these acquisitions are held in trust for the people of Waukesha county by its historical society," Babcock said.

The young Waterville historian received his bachelor of arts degree from the University of Wisconsin. His family has been active in Wisconsin—Babcocks served in the first state constitutional convention and his great-great-uncle George served in the Civil War from New Berlin.

The present Babcock, James, serves as secretary of both the county historical society and the Hawks Inn historical society. In the course of his constant research, he also discovered

the lost plans for the kitchen wing of the old Hawks Inn which is being restored in Delafield.

Babcock has been the recipient of a scholarship awarded by the local society to attend the museumology classes in Milwaukee. He has his own ideas of history and its interpretation.

"History is a matter of importance of values. Something is historically important when it affects a significant number of a community, its effects are still felt today, it influenced another development, or it characterizes the community," he said. "For example, I. A. Lapham founding the weather bureau affects the entire United States and a large part of the world. Bishop Kemper and Nashotah Mission affected the entire midwest."