

BIG CREEK SCHOOLHOUSE

Report Card

Summer 2026 vol two

So far in 2026 we:

Revised bylaws to reflect a more modern organizational model.

Expanded our veterans display to include Polk City stories from the War of 1812 to the Middle East.

Painted the second story west wall and began putting together a theatre display.

Improved foyer lighting.

Hosted 125 third graders from the new Big Creek School.

Hosted wonderful programs featuring Humanities Iowa speakers.

Cleaned the Office!

The 1915 Expansion of City Hall

Many of you will already be familiar with the Polk City's acquisition of the Big Creek Schoolhouse after the "new" school on the hill was built in 1893. The evolution of the second floor theatre is not as familiar of a story.

In the spring of 1895 Mayor Conrad Hug appointed a committee of two to "draw up plans for a stage in City Hall" as part of the five-year conversion of the school building to a municipal building.

William Elliot had the winning bid, being awarded both the stage and upstairs flooring jobs. His contract gave him 10 days to complete the work, and a committee was appointed to inspect it.

Glenn and Poole's book, *The Opera Houses of Iowa*, published 1993, records a rumor of this original stage. "**City Hall Theatre, 1904-1909, second story hall. Proscenium was 16' wide X 13' high; stage was 16' deep; 1' apron. Depth under stage 3' 6". Gas and electric light. May still be extant. Mgr. H. Eggleston.**"

Indeed, it was still extant, and when the turn of the century birthed a widespread construction of Opera Houses (between 1910-1912 Madrid, Woodward, Cambridge, Maxwell and Slater built one!) the decision was reached to update Polk City's theatre.

As recorded in June 11, 1915 City Council minutes, a committee was established, "for the purpose of considering extension of the City Hall". The Clerk was instructed to advertise for bids, the bidding process to be completed by July 1, 1915. The city would supply the building materials.

It appears the labor was completed by Lewis Ray Glenn for \$95.37, and J. D. Sprague was paid \$6.25 for lath and plaster. All was completed in less than a month.

In August a Box Social was held, the proceeds to furnish the new stage with curtains.

With the removal of the "lean-to" you can see the huge corner beam of the original building and previously unknown features of the addition!

On a side note: theatres were traditionally looked down upon as a little bit low brow and possibly immoral. Thus the term Opera House became popular.... clearly a more cultured and respectable venue, though in reality the same plays, musicians, and medicine shows appeared in them. The BCHS has one letter addressed to the Polk City Opera House, but it doesn't appear the name caught on.

We are so excited about the stage! We've made some improvements.



Come see the finished project this summer, and maybe receive a backstage tour.

Special thanks to *Painting by Jen* for their beautiful work.



Easy to donate through this QR Code.

Or send a check

Or drop a donation in the election tin at the Big Creek Schoolhouse Museum when you visit.

Big Creek Historical Society
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Polk City, Iowa, 50226

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www.polkcityhistory.org

Since we did away with BCHS memberships, the continued support of the community has been encouraging. Now you can contribute ANY time of year, not just during a membership drive. Even today! Please consider giving. We do need your support.

Even more than your money, we need you! What skill can you contribute to BCHS?

Do you want the museum to be open more often? Please volunteer.



YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT WILL PROVIDE THE DOLLARS WE NEED FOR UPDATES WITHIN THE MUSEUM, OPERATION EXPENSES AND SOME GREAT PROGRAMS.

What does that sign with the soldier in red mean? A Dragoon?

June 4: 6:00 PM

The Dragoon Trail as Hiked by Kevin Mason, Assistant Professor of History at UNI.

Upstairs at the Big Creek Schoolhouse Museum

Our settlement story begins with the 1835 expedition of the First U. S. Dragoons. With archival records, maps, indigenous histories and ecological data, Mason will explore how Iowa’s prairies and wetlands gave way to farms towns and transportation networks.

The Endless variety of QUILTS

June 25, 26, 27 hours TBD

At the Big Creek Schoolhouse Museum

Family quilts are treasured heirlooms. We have collected quilts for this special display during the 4 Seasons Festival.

How did Saylorville Lake come to be?

July 9: two showings 5:00 and 6:00 PM

Upstairs at the Big Creek Schoolhouse Museum

This documentary by past BCHS President Tom Cox uses photos and interviews to present both sides of the story, those who hoped to benefit from the Lake and those who lost the family farm.

ANNUAL EVENTS:

Farmers Market

Fall Fest-- Cemetery Walk at Polk City Cemetery

Light Up Polk City