

The Roderick Reese Papers

Roderick Reese (February 12, 1912 – September 3, 1988) was a citizen of Campbellsport who was interested in the history of the area, and was concerned that it be preserved for posterity. To this end, he did extensive research, regularly using primary sources (the original document or an exact copy thereof, such as photocopy, microfilm, etc.) whenever possible. His sources of information are often official records, such as those found in the Register of Deeds Office in the Fond du Lac County Courthouse. In fact, he sometimes gives the volume and page numbers. He interviewed many people including personnel from historical and genealogical societies, with whom he also shared some of his research. He visited business offices, schools, and post offices, and sought out people to help with the research and sometimes with typing the results. His research covered a broad variety of topics, but the most represented areas are the early history of the area, people, businesses, property ownership, and churches/cemeteries. The least represented are the arts, agriculture, and social issues. The following is a more complete list of the topics he researched:

- ◆ **the early history of the area**
- ◆ **the history of its government, public services, and infra-structures**
- ◆ **religion and the history of some of the churches**
- ◆ **information on local people, their daily lives as well as out-of-the-ordinary events; short biographies**
- ◆ **history of health care in the area**
- ◆ **history of businesses, including some farms**
- ◆ **history of property ownership**
- ◆ **histories of groups and organizations**
- ◆ **local community events**
- ◆ **some vital statistics**
- ◆ **records of some cemeteries, including both public and privately owned cemeteries; history of the cemeteries**
- ◆ **geological history, especially relative to bodies of water and dams**

It appears that the first step in Mr. Reese's approach was to take copious field notes, often on yellow legal pad paper. Unfortunately, he usually neglected to number pages. On any given topic, he seems to have

researched a number of different sources. Perhaps he hoped that each source would be able to provide some added detail. It is not surprising, therefore, that his notes contain a great deal of repetition, as well as a few discrepancies. There are often digressions from the topic; possibly the source interjected some distantly related tidbit.

Mr. Reese's second step was to compile all of the information he had gathered about each specific topic. He drew up a list of 156 files, as well as a long list of persons and agencies which had contributed to his research. These lists can be found in folder R-110 in the Roderick Reese Papers. We have been told by relatives that he offered the completed work (or the proposed completed work) to some entity, but that entity did not wish to have it. We have also been told that this compilation may have been shredded.

Fortunately, Campbellsport Public Library did accept his field notes, which the library placed in a local history file. He had placed the notes in large brown envelopes. On the outside of each envelope he wrote what its contents were. Mr. Reese submitted these to the library between 1981 and 1986. The public has had access to them, and probably used them carefully most of the time. However, it is obvious that pages have been mixed up, or even lost. It was not unusual at this point for the label on the outside of the envelope to differ drastically from the actual contents.

When the Campbellsport Area Historical Society (CAHS) took on the task of organizing and listing the contents of these field notes in the Fall of 2004, it immediately became evident that most of the folders were in urgent need of preservation and processing so that the public, including persons who cannot come to Campbellsport to use the materials, could continue to have access to them. The Roderick Reese Papers are a rich source of information, but until now, there was no resource by which users could find out if there was any information on a specific topic, or where to find it. In order to preserve this rich resource, and to make it readily accessible to the public, a small group of volunteers, headed by S. Connie Halbur, retired archivist, took on the long, labor intensive tasks involved. Among the challenges were 1) pages were usually not numbered; 2) Mr. Reese used an old fashioned way of writing "r", which can look like an "n" to younger folks (consequently, volunteers may have misspelled some words); and 3) Mr. Reese was a competent researcher, but not a good speller! At any rate, many of the folders can now be viewed online, on the Campbellsport Area

Historical Society link to the Village of Campbellsport web site:
<http://Campbellsport.govoffice.com>. To preserve the actual documents, most of them have been placed in storage in archival folders, and their contents entered verbatim on computer or photocopied. In many instances, an index has also been prepared. Patrons who come to the CAHS area at the Campbellsport Public Library will be able to view either the actual documents, a photocopy of them, or more frequently, a computer print-out of the verbatim entry, which is bound together with other folders in a set of comb-bound books. A Finding Aid has been prepared to help users examine what each folder contains, and where to find it. This, too, has been placed online.

Written by S. Connie Halbur