

Highland County Historical Society celebrates 50th anniversary, Part XX

**By Pamela Nickell
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Bless the peonies on the long west side of the Highland House for deciding to be in full, lush bloom on the actual date of the 50th anniversary of the Highland County Historical Society and its celebration scheduled for that very evening. Gorgeous!



But dandelions, some of the largest I've ever seen, and some pesky vines, including poison ivy, were in full competition.

Anniversary committee members had made sure the front half of the museum was beautifully prepared. (The back half is in disarray due to construction.)

The program planned, the planters in the southwest corner planted, the food ordered. The peonies were blooming, but those pesky dandelions were really not welcome.

So, at 6:30 that morning, I purposefully headed to the Highland House, tools in hand, to attempt to remedy the problem. Admittedly, early morning is my best time of the day, weeding is one of my favorite things to do, and I am not susceptible to poison ivy, so the next couple of hours were quite pleasurable.

The still quiet streets, anticipation of the evening activities, and beauty and fragrance of the bountiful flowers combined to make an exhilarating experience.

Before walkers stopped by to chat and Lana Daniels came by to check on her planters and the construction crew began their day, I was alone among the peonies. Fond and grateful thoughts of Robert Jones, aka Bob, Jones, or Jonesie, prevailed and kept me company.

I remembered that he had planted and lovingly tended these beauties. It had to take skill and patience because peonies do not transplant easily and take quite a while to re-establish themselves.

Peonies originated in Asia, are considered a symbol of good fortune, and were prominent in Victorian gardens in our country.

It is actually the state flower of Indiana. They are a subject of art and are mentioned by the English poet John Keats (1795-1821), in his poem, "Ode to Melancholy:"

*But when the melancholy fit shall fall
Sudden from heaven like a weeping cloud...
Then glut thy sorrow on a morning rose...
Or on the wealth of globed peonies.*

Jones loved this flower and had an extensive peony garden at his home as well. The thought occurred to me that there should be a sign in the garden acknowledging his generous donation of living history.

Fast forward to the evening celebration, when hostess and former Director Margaret VanFrank said she wanted to suggest something.

She thought a plaque should be placed in the Highland County Historical Society peony garden acknowledging that these lovely and extravagant flowers were the gift of her good friend, Jonesie, who called it a "memory garden." Coincidences like this are very exciting.

Margaret went on to say she would be glad to design, obtain, and donate the plaque.

Peonies in full bloom, living history, Memorial Day, 50th anniversary, grief (melancholy), good fortune, honor, memory...

We are blessed, aren't we?