

COME VISIT THE TOWER!

We trust our nesting pair of swifts will return to us in May, and we plan to host tours of the tower May 22nd and 23rd, prior to nest building. Look for a summer event to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Althea's tower construction. Join us on the Swift Night Out in August,. In October we plan to be at Heritage Days at Osborne, always a great place to meet interesting and interested people.

SWIFT NIGHT OUT: There is a continent wide program to document the number of swifts who roost communally prior to their migration in August and September. There can be several swifts, or hundreds, that roost together, and it's a remarkable sight to see them gather, circle, and then drop into the chimney. The goal is to count the number of swifts in any one roosting site during the second weekend of August and September. 2014 saw us at Guttenberg where we saw 38 swifts enter the chimney, Elkader where we saw 7, and our Tower Replica where we saw one swift come to roost. There were higher counts observed earlier in the fall, and the weather had turned cold by September, so in 2015, we hope to go August 7, 8, and 9th. If you know a roosting site, please do a count, or let us know and we will try to come and help.

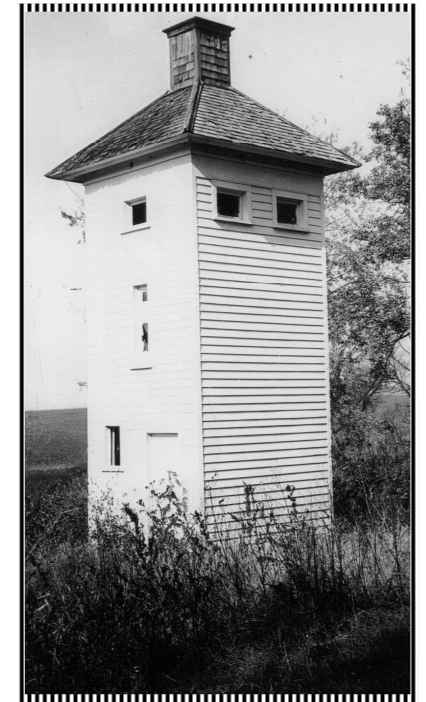
For information about the Tower, tours, presentations or other, please call 563-783-7791 or 563-964-2535.

You are welcome to visit the Tower replica at the National Cemetery site anytime, the informational sign and audio recording are available at all times.

FRIENDS OF THE SHERMAN SWIFT

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Farmersburg, Iowa 52047

FRIENDS OF THE SHERMAN SWIFT TOWER



National, Iowa

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2015 Newsletter

2014 IN REVIEW

NEW ARRIVALS: On June 22, after observing the adult swifts leaving the chimney, we scampered up the steps in the tower to observe the nest. To our delight, we found five tiny baby swifts, jumbled together in a small pile in the very small nest. Each one would have fit inside a thimble! To get an idea of the size of the babies, the nest measures four inches from side to side and two and one-half inches from front to back. Its deepest depth is $\frac{3}{4}$ inch. They were newly hatched and being fed very frequently by their attentive parents. The babies would soon outgrow the nest, and begin clinging to the wall nearby, followed by practice flights inside the chimney.



By the end of July, they were flying outside the tower chimney, and all five fledged, thanks to excellent caregiving by their parents. This fledge of five is especially important as The State of the Birds 2014 report lists chimney swifts as one of the common birds in steep decline. That's a sad and scary statistic.

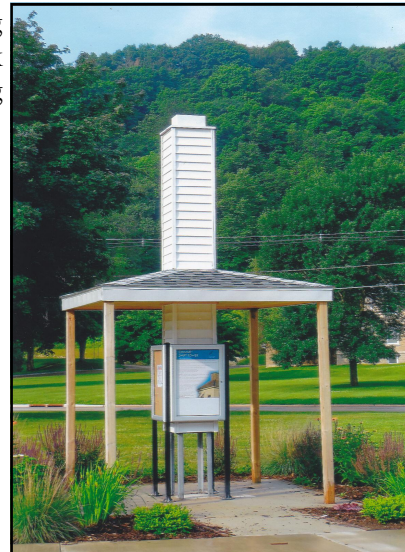
TOWER VISITORS: The Tower and Cemetery is a popular spot to stop, and this year we had seventy individuals, families or groups from 16 states, Canada and Germany sign the guest book. So far, we've had visitors from 31 states as well as England and the West Indies. Althea Sherman would be delighted to read the comments in the journal/register and would have enjoyed the drawings left by several young visitors. The monitor showing the swifts on the nest continues to be educational and very helpful in observing the swifts' activity without disturbing them. Stop by the tower to see the swifts on the nest.

FOUNDERS PARK TOWER: We added a sign to the small nesting tower in Founders Park, Elkader, Iowa, with information about chimney swifts, Althea Sherman, and our tower replica at National. We are grateful to Upper Mississippi Gaming Corporation for funds for the sign. Stop by and see it on your walk through beautiful Founders Park. We hope 2015 will see swifts using the tower for a nesting site.

ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO IN NATIONAL, IOWA.....

In 1915, Althea Sherman supervised the building of an artificial chimney where she could observe the elusive chimney swift. Little was known about the nesting habits of the chimney swift, and observations inside chimneys were difficult, to say the least. So Althea Sherman designed a 28 foot tall building with an artificial chimney down the center with openings where she could observe the nesting swifts.

Althea later wrote of the tower, "...after many years of use and observation made within it, I have failed to see how any improvements could have been made in the planning of it." Her sister, Dr. E. Amelia, suggested the tower be placed just west of the house where it was more easily accessible to Althea for study. Althea was 61 years old when the tower was built, so the proximity to the house must have been a great aid in saving her energy to climb the steps to the top.



Tower at Founder's Park
Elkader Iowa

NOTES FROM ALTHEA...

Althea Sherman papers, 1902-1936. MS49. Special Collections, State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines. Selected entries about the tower construction.



Special Archives
State Historical
Society Of Iowa

1915

March 30 Before eight o'clock Mr. Schmidt, Mr. Geo Glawe and Mr. Colensegen of Farmersburg arrived to lay the cement wall for the bird house.

April 6 E.C. Oelke came today to build my bird tower. His carpenters are Earl Dahlstrom, Julius Berndt, and Roy Engelhardt.

April 7 Most of my time was given to the building....

April 10 Shower (of rain)...I succeeded in closing the west windows in the bird tower. Men left at 3 o'clock.

April 14 The carpenters left today. One window yet to be put into the bird tower.

April 22 I began the work of painting woodwork on tower so the Wright boys can help me on Saturday

April 24 Painting of bird tower by Maurice & Carroll along with other work made a full day.

May 22 Maurice and Carroll helped, giving second coat of paint to tower and other jobs..

May 25 I finished the tinning in the tower

May 31 Maurice and Carroll helping this p.m. when staging about tower was taken down

June 10 Althea departed for Oberlin, Ohio, to attend her college reunion. She returned home June 20.

July 1 This a.m. for the first time I saw Chimney Swifts enter the chimney built for them. Four Swifts had been flying over the place for some time. I saw them fly over the chimney in a different formation than ever before. They flew directly over and then seemed the very slightest bit of retardation in their motions, I thought as they were over the hole so I stopped to watch them. After a brief while one dropped down into the chimney, then another followed, neither staid many seconds. Before long two entered again staying a trifle longer. All disappeared in a very short time after that. They left no sign inside of chimney that I could find.....

Althea would wait until 1918 for chimney swifts to nest in the tower she so carefully built.