

Swift Night Out

Two hundred and sixty-seven swifts entered the Fire Farm chimney in Elkader on August 8. McGregor School often has large numbers of swifts roosting there, but no swifts were seen there August 9 and 16.

Visitors to the Tower

Thanks to the 45 guests who signed the Register and shared kind comments. Visitors came from Iowa, Wisconsin, Illinois, Minnesota, Nevada and North Carolina. A number enjoyed a picnic at the site. We thank the Sherman sisters and the National Cemetery Association for providing continued upkeep of the Cemetery and site. Four visitors toured the tower on Labor Day. The site will be open for tours in 2021 on May 29—30 and September 4—5, from 1-4 PM, providing there are no Covid restrictions.

OUR THANKS:.

To Scott Chase who got the camera, solar panels and monitor working this spring, trouble-shot problems, and helped get the system ready for the coming winter.

To Corbin Schoulte who climbed the narrow ladder and put the chimney cap on to protect the chimney from winter weather. He made it look much easier than it actually was.

To those who gave memorials in honor of Marlene Doerring and Harold Krambeer. You made a new camera possible.

COME VISIT THE TOWER!

You are welcome to visit anytime. There is signage, an audio recording, a monitor to view the interior of the chimney, a rest stop and picnic area along with the National Cemetery where the Sherman family is buried.

FRIENDS OF THE SHERMAN SWIFT TOWER

18874 Hwy. 52
Farmersburg, Iowa 52047

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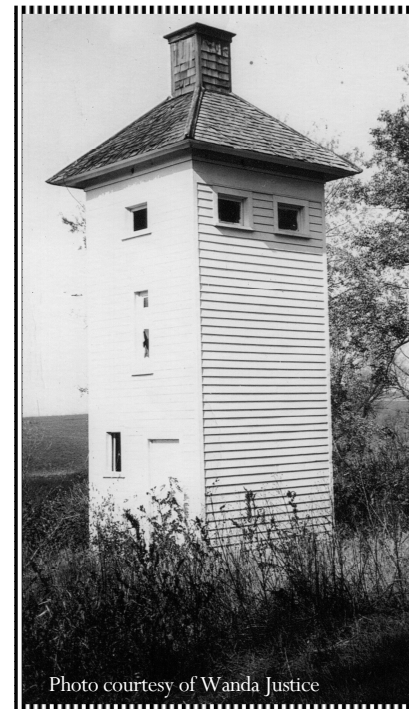


Photo courtesy of Wanda Justice

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2021 Newsletter

The swifts came in 2020, with a surprise for us

Spring work in the Tower got the new camera up and the solar panels, monitor and camera all talking to each other. It worked most of the time.

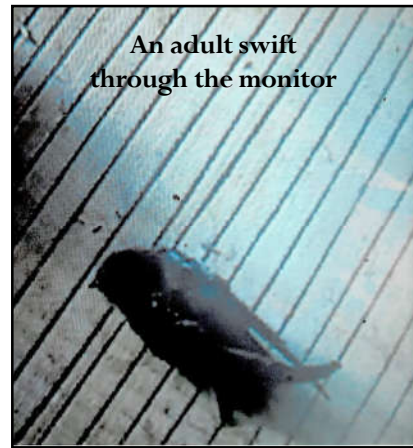
We saw swifts flying overhead in mid-May and found droppings in the rain pan at the bottom of the chimney. Two small sticks appeared on the south wall at the site of previous nests. Time went by but no more sticks were added. We heard and saw six swifts flying overhead. More droppings appeared. But no nest could be seen on the monitor. In Mid-June, a trip up to the chimney, and a check of the rain pan revealed a broken egg. Where did that come from?? The answer was revealed when we looked directly over our head on the east wall. There sat a small slender sloping nest. Apparently the first egg had been laid and then fell to the tray below.

This is the first nest on the east wall. Since 2012, the nests have all been built under the angled window on the south wall which likely provided some protection from rain. Our camera focused on this old site. We left the swifts to finish their work and later moved the focus of the camera. However, the camera now looked up at the bottom of the nest, not down from the top, not nearly as good a view.

Two young birds were seen on the wall in mid-August through the monitor. One looked a bit larger and the smaller one looked a bit “ruffled”. Usually the young swifts have fledged by early August, so these two were behind schedule.

Happily, the chimney appeared empty on August 30 so we trusted the young had fledged. On September 20, I went to clean the drain pan, and as I finished, I found the body of one of the young swifts between the rain pan and the wall. It was feathered out, but small. Perhaps it became lodged in the space and couldn't get out, or the heavy rains had somehow caused the young bird too much stress. Or..... So many questions and so few answers.....

Thankfully we had a nesting pair and one fledgling, giving us hope that they would return to National next year.



In Honor of our Veterans

Veterans from five wars rest in the National Cemetery beside the Tower. Cornelius Morgan, a neighbor of the Sherman sisters and a Civil War veteran buried at National, lived to see the death of his grandson, Leland Fremont Bachtell, also a soldier. Leland “Harry” Bachtell died of pneumonia in 1918 at Camp Cody, where he was in training to go to France in World War I. Harry was 20 years old. The FSST volunteered to place flags from the local veteran’s group on veterans’ graves for Memorial Day.



NOTES FROM ALTHEA...

Althea Sherman Papers. 1902—1936. MS49. Special Collections, State Historical Society of Iowa. Des Moines.

Althea Sherman was a tenacious and inventive protector of the swifts that used her chimney. The following entry is from May 13, 1924.



Special Archives
State Historical
Society of Iowa

REPAIRED NEST: The nest that has stood the wear and tear of the rearing of six broods in that many summers, I found this spring to become inaccured (*uncured?*). The east side of it (about 1/3 of it) had become loosened from the board to which it was attached, perhaps the bending of that board when climbing the ladder, but I hardly believe that because window cuts through that board. To secure the prospective nesting, I put very oily putty back of detached part, then with screw-eye to right, another over nest and small staple to left of nest I sewed with black No. 8 thread the nest in place so it will not fall I think.

Later in her journal she records: “2nd nest used in 1924”, so the swifts apparently chose to make a new nest instead of using the one she repaired. They made a new nest each year till 1933 when she noted “Fragment of it (2nd nest) removed May 26, 1933.”

Covid 19---Spanish Flu

Althea Sherman lived through the Spanish Flu epidemic that struck in 1918. There was no social distancing, no masks, and no hand sanitizer for those who came to visit the first nesting swifts in the Tower in 1918. Ninety-seven people, many locals, visited the Tower, but 18 were from the Conservation Association Meeting being held in McGregor. In 1919, as the pandemic subsided, there were 68 visitors, again the Conservation Association Meeting group along with many locals. In 1920 there were 121 visitors to the Tower. They came from Iowa, South Dakota, Kansas, Los Angeles, Chicago, Washington D.C., Minnesota, Missouri and one traveling from Seattle to New York.

Thanks for the memorials that made it possible to plant a swamp white oak tree near the Tower in memory of Harold Krambeer.

