

WILLIAMSTON OFFERS LOOK INTO HISTORY

Annual event
offers plenty
of surprises

By Kurt Madden
kumadden@lsj.com

WILLIAMSTON — The lesson plan for Williamston High School history students this fall isn't all about colossal national and international moments.

It's also about connecting them with their hometown: Williamston's mayors, teachers, farmers, soldiers, business owners, and landmarks.

History Day on Oct. 5 will offer those connections and the reward for the students could be more than just extra credit for any student in the high school's history classes.

The students will visit grave sites at local cemeteries, a one-room school house, a church and an exhibit at Williamston's Depot Museum focused on six brothers who were in World War II.

"I tell students that history didn't begin with them," Mitch Lutzke, history teacher and an accomplished historian. "And they are not likely to invent some sort of fabulous math formula. But they can become a living, breathing part of



FILE PHOTO

The restored one-room Branch School in Williamston Township is one of the sites for History Day.

history if they vote and help set policy."

The free event, now in its fourth year, is a community event, not strictly a school activity. Docents will be at seven different sites to answer questions and discuss their historic significance.

In past years, as many as 140 people have made the history rounds. Students are often accompanied by parents, siblings or friends. Docents field questions and their answers are surprising to

many, Lutzke said.

Visitors to the one-room Branch School are "pretty impressed with the historic accuracy" they find, said Tom Johnson, one of people who worked to restore the building to its present state.

"Gosh, I didn't know this was here," is something Johnson often hears. And, the fascination grows when Johnson explains that the area near the school, built in 1882, was once known as

"Little Africa," owing to the residents' rabid abolitionists views.

The rumor is that a home nearby was part of the famed Underground Railroad, a secret refuge for escaped slaves.

This year, visitors will see a McGuffey Reader, a multigrade teaching aid widely used in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

History Day visitors to St. Katherine's 127-year-old chapel are "astounded by the building itself and its upkeep,"

HISTORY DAY

A History Day Tour will be held in the Williamston area from 1-5 p.m. Oct. 5. Participants can begin the tour at any site and stop at any of the locations. Maps for the tour will be available at each site. Docents will answer questions.

The stops:

» The Branch School, 985 Sherwood Road, was built in 1863 and was a one-room schoolhouse for 99 years.

» Graves of historic interest at Foote Cemetery on Sherwood Road, Summit Cemetery on Beeman Road, Mount Calvary Cemetery on Rowley Road and St. Katherine's Chapel Cemetery on Meridian Road will be marked with signs; handouts available.

» St. Katherine's Episcopal Chapel, 4650 N. Meridian Road, was built in 1887.

» The Williamston Depot Museum, 369 W. Grand River, features two new exhibits — "History of Williamston Through Postcards" and "Family of Patriots" — the story of the Engardio family's six sons in WWII. For more information call (517) 290-7804 or 899-4898

said the Very Rev. Ronald C. Byrd, Sr.

"People often say they have driven by the chapel and hoped to one day see what it looked like in the inside," he said.