

KICKAPOO PEARLS: REDISCOVERED

It could be said that the Kickapoo Valley History Project was a once in a generation effort—but that would sell it short. I will soon be 80, and there hasn't been another Kickapoo Valley project like it in my lifetime. Brad Steinmetz, in his ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS for the 2010 edition stated, "In its relatively short life, the Kickapoo Pearls, and in some ways, the people who created it, have become something of a legend in the Kickapoo Valley. It is as meaningful today as when first published thirty years ago [now 40+]. The **Kickapoo Pearls** remains a treasure for the telling of the Valley's history."



The "**Pearls**" was part of a larger enterprise which included:

--A Kickapoo Valley textbook about its history and people.

--A documentary film.

--130 oral history interviews now archived at the Wisconsin Historical Society.

--A river project to clean up and promote the Kickapoo River.

--The Kickapoo Valley Energy Project which explored alternative energy back in the 1970s, resulting in a book, "**Kickapoo Sunrise**."



The **Kickapoo Pearls** was indeed an amazing effort. According to Dail Murray, one of its creators, it was published periodically "...as a way to share some of what we had learned from our own research and to make wonderful use of the photos, songs and images we had collected. [and was]...written about and for the people of the Kickapoo Valley." The "real" pearls were the people, their stories and the images that inhabit these pages.

Another of the **Pearls** creators, Dana Van Hosen, described herself and the History Project crew as follows: "We were, after all, "them hippies"! Day after day—even night after night—they came together in a church basement to create and assemble the **Pearls** in a newspaper format, cutting and pasting borders, clip art and photos as each person saw fit. It was truly a personal and democratic effort. Despite pressure by advisors to "clean up" the pages, these quirky illustrations would continue in all editions of the Pearls.



So, what's in this amazing book? Here are a few samples: ***Herbal Medicine; What's behind Kickapoo Town Names; They Saw It Change in Ontario; Railroad Abandonment; Kickapoo Century Farms; Starter Bread and Silo Lightning; Gays Mills Hydroelectric; Early History of Viola; Kickapoo Magnetism by Dale Muller; Big Wheel Rollin' in Readstown; Tales of Rattlesnake Tom; Old Coats Made into Rugs***; just to name a few!

The original Kickapoo Pearls was produced periodically as newspaper-sized editions. Eventually these editions were put together into one "book" with a cover and large clip. By 2010, there was not one copy available for sale anywhere. So, the Friends of the KVR rescued some well-preserved copies, then scanned, reprinted, and bound it into a real book. Now those have all been sold out, leaving not even one **Pearls** for sale anywhere. But, thanks to Michael Bushilla, the producer of the 2010 book, all of the digital files were retrieved and the New **Kickapoo Pearls** is again available at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve Gift Shop, a great place to shop for special gifts of all kinds!

~Chuck Hatfield