



Historical Perspectives

PORT WASHINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Volume 20, Issue 1a

Spring 2009

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County Courthouse renovated



It is almost four years since the Society met at the Court House to hear Tom Meaux, Ozaukee County Administrator, speak about the plans to renovate the historic building. On April 15 he will have the pleasure of presenting the restored courtroom which now serves as the County Board Room. He will give details of a most interesting restoration process.

The Port Washington Historical Society played a role in raising the funds for the project by

participating in the Historic Christmas events. The Society has been actively involved in maintaining the history surrounding the Court House starting with members Anna and Viola Ubbink working to have the building named to the National Register of Historic Places in 1976, the preservation of the items in the time capsule in the cornerstone laid in 1901 and in the preparation of items for the new time capsule that was placed near the cornerstone in 2001, the Jubilee year.

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President's message:

I am writing my President's letter from a warm southern climate. The drive down took us through many small towns along the way. As we passed through, I compared them to our Port Washington and thought how lucky I am to call it home.

With our lake, our buildings, and our heritage we always come out the perfect "TEN". And I always take note how many of these towns have that 1930's pillared bank building among their older structures, just as we have. These banks seem to be a part of the American landscape. That is why I feel an urgency to try in every way to save our **First National Bank building and the Business Man's Club.**

I hope that many of you will join me to let city officials know how important it is to keep Franklin Street the awe inspiring view it is. We receive compliments from our visitors all the time regarding the beauty of the downtown. The corner of Grand and Franklin Streets provides views of history—north, south, east and west—that is irreplaceable. These are gifts from the past that have been given to us. It is now our watch to keep them for the next generation.



- Geri Zehren, President

Society accomplishments and goals

Accomplishments for 2008:

- Finalized the move of genealogy materials to LACS
- Moved archives and office to 429 W. Grand Ave.
- Established utilities (phone, internet, insurances)
- Organized (an ongoing effort) Historical Society files and records
- Organized collections and archives (another ongoing effort)
- Trained volunteers in Pastperfect software (three so far)
- Established office hours (Monday and Thursday p.m.)
- Created the Franklin Street Walking Tour (site designation, historical information collection, creation of tour guide)
- Created a PowerPoint of The Franklin Street Walking Tour
- Acquired a projector for computer presentations
- Acquired a laptop (to be used for presentations and Pastperfect)
- Created historic displays in ten downtown locations for the summer
- Participated in Maritime Heritage Festival (tent and display at Rotary Park and three

Harbor Walk story-board displays)

- Participated in Main Street Project
- Applied for designating the old firehouse on the National Historic Register
- Redesigned website

Goals for 2009:

At the Office

- Ongoing organization of files and records
- Updating computers and addition of computer programs

At the Research Center

- Ongoing organization and compiling of artifacts and archives
- Further utilization of Pastperfect software so we can access what we have in our collections
- Transfer abstracts of southern Ozaukee County to OCHS
- Increase membership and volunteerism
- Coal Docks – continue to have input with the committee
- Main Street Program - Committee participation and Board ad hoc member
- Historical designation along Franklin Street
- Maritime Heritage Festival supporter and participator
- Grant writing
- Fundraising (we need ideas and people)

Wisconsin Chair Company: a brief look

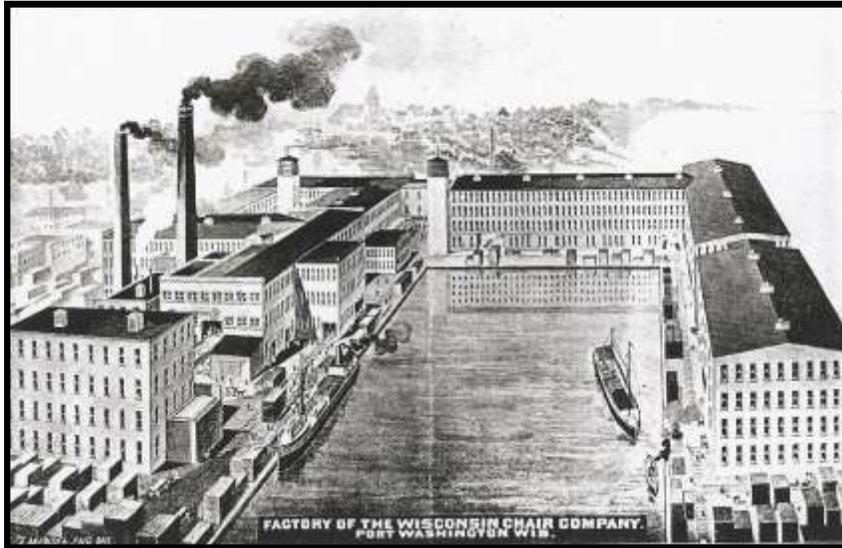
By Jackie Oleson

In 1888 J.M. Bostwick acquired the Port Washington Sash and Door Plant. Along with F.A. Dennett of Sheboygan they began the Wisconsin Chair Company. Success grew with the acquisition of the MacLean swing rocker patent in 1891. The company began to make money with these popular rocking chairs and employed 35 men. At this time the population of Port Washington was 1,600. In 10 years the city's population had grown to 3,000 and the Chair Company employed more than 800 people.

With the Depression of 1893 the Company and its owners ran out of money and resorted to paying laborers in lumber and company script. Following the Depression the company rebounded to become a major employer in Ozaukee County. In 1899, fire raged through the Chair Company in Port Washington. Regarded as the worst fire in the city's history, it destroyed nearly six square blocks of downtown including the company's tens of thousands of square feet in buildings along the north harbor slip, 11 small businesses and 14 homes, all east of Franklin Street from Grand Avenue to Pier Street.

The Chair Company rebuilt and for decades made a variety of furniture items for

home, school and office. It was the backbone of the economy of Port Washington for those many years. Because of World War II and other factors, production slowed and brought layoffs and the eventual closing of buildings. Eventually, buildings gave way to parking lots and a shopping center. Production ceased and the final end of the Chair Company came in 1959.



Some chairs made by the Wisconsin Chair Company

In honor of Port Washington's history, a chair decorating contest will be held to pay tribute to ye Olde Chair Factory that once graced the city.

Individuals, groups and organizations are encouraged to "Take A Seat" and line our downtown with colorful, and creatively decorated chairs. There is no theme; just pick up an old chair, grab one from the basement or raid grandmas attic and create some self expression for some else's seat.

Enter Now! Deadline is July 18th, 2009 (Fish Day). Registration forms may be picked up at: Port Washington Main Street, Inc., 116 W. Grand Ave. STE, 205 Port Washington, WI 53074. For information

call 262-305-4220.

If bringing a chair entry with registration, call the office first. Chairs will be displayed in downtown merchant windows until August 14th. The kick off for the chair displays is March 21 during the "Hot in the Harbor" event, but you have until July 18th to overhaul your ye olde seat and enter the ye olde contest.

Mersereau will be missed by Society members

by Ann Flierl

Society volunteer, Nancy Mersereau, passed away in February. Nancy grew up in Green Bay and graduated from the College of St. Scholastica in Duluth, Minnesota. She taught English at schools in northern Wisconsin and Texas. The Mersereau family moved to Port Washington in 1970. In 1971 Nancy was hired by the Ozaukee Press as a reporter and later served as the Managing Editor. Nancy is very well known for her community activity and her efforts in the Historical Society.

Nancy was elected to the Historical Society Board of Directors in April 2000. During her term, she accepted the challenge of serving as Treasurer. At that time, the \$250,000 restoration project to the Light Station occurred, involving a plethora of accounting activity.

Nancy's enthusiastic approach led to the



success of the Light Station Tower Dedication in 2002 and the grand opening of the museum in 2003. With her knowledge and expertise, she coordinated the staging of those events. She was also instrumental in chairing two antique show fundraisers for the Society. She was also a member of the committee that received a number of substantial grants that assisted in fundraising for the Research Center and the Lighthouse renovation. **Most recently, Nancy's journalistic skills, while serving as editor of the *Historical Perspectives*, added a new spin to the Society's quarterly newsletters.**

During these years, Nancy endured major personal challenges which did not deter her volunteer activities. She donated countless hours, creative talents, enthusiastic energy and positive approaches in assisting the So-

Memorials and donations accepted

Light Station Memorials

- In memory of Nancy Mersereau, a commemorative brick, by Mary Flierl, James Fowler, Linda Nenn, Rick Smith, and Geri Zehren
- A brick in memory of Glen Strunk, Wisconsin Lighthouse District (WILD)
- In memory of William O. Moeser, a Paramount floor-standing phonograph player and monetary gift, by Erik and Carol Moeser

Restoration Donations

- Lloyd and Toni Smith
- Ardy and Doug Ahsmann

- Paramount NYRL (copied) b/w advertising and record labels in large frame
- Henrietta Lesson Memorial by Roy and Geri Zehren
- Nancy Mersereau Memorial by Claudette and Frederick Pinkowski

Historical Society Donations

- Lloyd and Toni Smith
- Leroy and Joan Bley
- Marianne Kartheiser
- Thomas Klein
- Samuel DeMerit
- Suzanne and Ken Bruner
- Michael Hatfield

County Jail in Port Washington since 1849

by Angie Cope

In 1849 the first county jail was completed for a total of \$200 on land leased in Port Washington. This 14 x 20 foot jail was the

when talks began about construction of a more modern building.

By 1955 a new jail was built at the southeast corner of Main and Wisconsin Streets at a cost of \$300,000. The new jail boasted 36 cells — 30 for men, 3 for women and 4 for juvenile offenders. There were **Sheriff's Department offices**, a five stall garage, a locker room for the traffic division, a laundry room, a vagrant room, storage, a central control station, a lobby, an isolation cell and living quarters for the Sheriff and his family.

The 1955 jail basement housed a boiler room that served both the jail and the courthouse. This jail was vacated by the Ozaukee County **Sheriff's Department in 1991** when the state of the art Justice Center was constructed.

The building was used for storage between

(Continued on page 6)



Ozaukee County Jail as it appeared in the early 1900's (to the right of the court house).

first and only building funded by the county government prior to the 1853 division of Washington County to form Ozaukee County. Prior to this jail, prisoners were boarded in Milwaukee.

The first county jail offered 1 bed, 1 heating stove and 3 windows. In 1852 talks began to build a new jail, and the sites of Newburg or Trenton were discussed. With the division of the county into two, Port Washington became the home to a newly expanded 24 x 30 foot Ozaukee County Jail that was still standing in 1945



Ozaukee County Courthouse with jail in 1907

(Continued from page 5)

1991 and 2008 when it was razed to make way for county offices and parking.

Ozaukee County Sheriffs over the years:

1863-64 Wm. F. Opitz
 1865-66 Mike Dries
 1867-68 Peter Spehn
 1869-70 M. Dreis
 1871-72 P. Bucholtz
 1873-74 M.G. Ruppert
 1875-76 Frank Delles
 1877-78 Joseph Malherbe
 1879-80 Frank Delles
 1881-82 John P. Weyker
 1898 Wm. Alten
 1899 P. Watry or Wm. Alten
 1900-01 Wm. Alten
 1902-04 James Cassidy
 1905-10 Frank Delles
 1911-12 L.H. Schmitz
 1913-14 G.P. Scharl
 1915-16 L.H. Schmitz
 1917-18 Peter Watry Jr.
 1919-20 F.W. Learned
 1921-22 Joe Retzer
 1923-24 Henry F. Delles
 1925-26 Frank Bay
 1927-28 John Behrendt
 1929-32 Jacob Dahm

1933-36 P.J. Jung
 1939-40 Ben F. Runkel
 1941-44 Roland G. Schaefer
 1945-48 Wilbert J. Braby
 1949-50 Peter J. Huettmann
 1951-54 Louis A. Bathke
 1955-58 Edmund J. Bienlein
 1959-62 Roland G. Schaefer
 1963-66 Viol J. Eidenberger
 1967-79 Arthur E. Helm
 1980-90 Fernando Perez
 1991-? Michael D. Milas
 ?1997-present Maury Straub

If you have additional information to add or corrections to offer to this article, please share them with Angie Cope. A lot of very interesting information can be gleaned from the "Proceedings of the Board of Supervisors, County of Ozaukee, Wisconsin" held in the Society archives dating back to 1880.



Ozaukee County jail with Sheriff's residence around 1959

Board of Directors election this quarter

by Mary Flierl

The Historical Society is most appreciative of the leadership of the officers and board members during this past eventful year. The 3-year terms of Jackie Oleson, Marzenna Keller and Rick Fulop have expired. According to our bylaws the election of candidates for the Board of Directors takes place at the Annual Membership Meeting in April. The Nominations Committee is submitting three candidates to be elected at the meeting on April 15th.

Jackie Oleson has decided to continue on the board in order to provide continuity to the long range plans of the Society that include cataloging the artifacts at the Light Station and finding a permanent home for the Society. Since being on the Board she has developed a PowerPoint about the early history of Port Washington for the schools and children of the area. She worked with the city to develop a walking tour of Franklin Street. This included creating a brochure to be used by residents and visitors. She then created a PowerPoint of the walking tour. Jackie is involved with the Main Street Program and the Maritime Heritage Festival, both integral programs for the Society. Her interest in gardening involves her in the activities of the Ozaukee Master Gar-

deners and the Port Shore Gardeners. She also takes time to enjoy swimming, biking, cross country skiing, quilting and travelling.

As a candidate to the board, Grace Eernisse, wife of Marc Eernisse, brings a background of involvement in many activities in her local museum in Indiana. She presently is a member of the resource board of Interfaith Caregivers and is on the Board of Directors for the Port Washington Kiwanis Club. Grace enjoys collecting family history, antiques, china, crystal and old hymnals. She wants to help preserve the history of this area. She is willing to assist in fundraising and planning special events to aid the Society.

As a Charter Member of the Society and Volunteer of the Quarter in Fall of 2006, Michele Weiland is a familiar name to the Society. She has done layout and design for the newsletter since 2003 and now has indicated her intent to serve on the Board of Directors. Michele is a 6th grade teacher at Thomas Jefferson Middle School and has a great interest in genealogy, the local history of her home town, Port Washington, and travelling. Her intent as a board member would be to help make decisions that will sustain the existence and promote the growth of the Society.

Port Washington fire house nominated

The Historical Society has been notified that the nomination of the Port Washington Firehouse as a historic site on the State Registry will be considered on Friday, April 17th at the Wisconsin State Historical Society in Madison.

A presentation will be made by Tim Heggland at 10:30 a.m. in Madison before the History Committee, followed by the Wisconsin State Historical Society Board Meeting at 11:00 a.m.

The Society will send a delegation to support the designation of the building for historic preservation. Anyone who desires to attend may do so. For the past year or two Tim Heggland has been working on the research to support the application.

The Historical Society is the sponsor of the application. Contact Jackie Oleson if you would like additional information about this meeting.

Volunteer of the Quarter

Fowler recognized

Jim Fowler will be recognized at this month's meeting as our extraordinary volunteer! Jim has been reproducing old newspaper clippings for the archives at the Research Center as a long term project, he cleans the light station weekly and helps with projects at the Lighthouse. Jim also videotapes the Society quarterly meetings and is a general go-to guy. He has been a longtime member and former Board member. Congratulations Jim and thanks for ALL you do!



Enright presents lighthouses

- "Lighthouses of America" to Port Washington Yacht Club members on Friday May 8
- Wisconsin Marine Historical Society's May 14 meeting at the Town Club in Milwaukee
- Door County Maritime Museum's "Keepers' Kin Reception" June 12. 4:15 pm -8pm. John's talk is entitled "Lighthouses of Door County." (Door County Lighthouse Walk has been moved from mid-May weekend to June 13-14 for 2009)

For Rent: Live in a historic 1860 lighthouse

Live in the historic 1860 Port Washington



lighthouse! 2nd floor flat: 2 bedroom, 1 bath, parking. Great view of Lake Michigan. \$550 per month plus yard maintenance and snow removal. Thirty minutes north of Milwaukee, within walking distance of Port Washington's downtown and easy access to Highway 43. Very charming, modern and clean apartment. Lots of closet space, window treatments included and very friendly neighbors.

Call Jackie 262-284-9223 or Geri 262-284-2547 or email portwashistsoc@att.net for application and more information. Available immediately. Please tell your friends and get the word out!

Work, visitors and special visitors recognized

Rick Smith has been working throughout the winter to repair a persistent leak in the tower of the Light Station. The leak was noted shortly after the tower was installed in 2002, but the source eluded dozen of tubes of caulk over the years. Rick removed a portion of the ceiling in the watchroom, peeled off old caulk on the exterior parapet seams and resealed each seam and joint whenever

weather permitted. In between maintenance, artifact repairs, painting and display development, Rick often took time to give tours to lighthouse enthusiasts that appeared on site.

Recently, Rick and Leroy Bley played host to the new Luxembourg Ambassador, his wife, the new Director of LACS and Honorary Consul Gerda and Donald Hansen of Chicago.

Light Station reopens: volunteers needed

The doors of the Light Station swing open to welcome visitors **Mother's Day weekend** and will be open every Saturday and Sunday through Columbus Day, in October. Two or three tour guides are needed each day. Additional guides will be needed when school groups, tour busses or other pre-arranged group tours are scheduled.

Becoming a tour guide is a painless process. One evening of getting familiar with the safety rules and regulations set forth by the City and going over our operational directions will elevate you to the lofty position of Tour Guide. Reading over brief descriptions of the Light House, grounds and displays

and a few days on the job meeting and greeting our guests will convince you that becoming a lightkeeper is a fun way to donate your time.

Contact Rick Smith (1-262-284-3394) or Linda Nenn (1-262-284-3755) to arrange a training session. You will not be obligated to commit to a specific number of days or hours, although two days a month would be most helpful. Several of our guides are not **even from Port Washington, so please don't** think residency or prior knowledge of the Light Station or Port Washington is a prerequisite.

Paneful project at Light Station scheduled

Although the 2000 restoration plans called for the replacement of the windows throughout the Light Station, the lack of funds prevented this part of the project from being completed. This left windows that rattle as the wind and cold air find their way into the building. Some windows were painted shut, probably because they were stuck in place as the sashes rotted or the spiral opening mechanisms fell out of place, causing the windows to close unevenly.

Well, this year the time has come to bring relief to our panes. The Restoration Fund stands at \$15,000. The price of 22 double-

hung six-over-six windows, one cottage window with screens for the apartment kitchen, and two multi-pane basement windows—\$28,000.

Any donation to the Restoration window project will be gratefully accepted. Donations of \$100 or more will be recognized on a plaque. \$1000 will be acknowledged on the plaque and a brass name plate on a window.

Contributions may be sent to the Light Station Restoration, P.O. Box 491, Port Washington, WI 53074. Thank you for your generous consideration.



PORT WASHINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P. O. Box 491
Port Washington, WI 53074-0491
www.portwashingtonhistoricalsociety.org

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Society Calendar

Wednesday, April 15, 2009

7:00 p.m.

Quarterly meeting and program: History and Restoration of the Board Room by Tom Meaux, County Administrator

May 2009

Lighthouse Museum opens for weekend tours

Wednesday, July 15, 2009

Quarterly meeting & program 7pm

July 18, 2009

Fish Day

August 14, 15 and 16, 2009

Maritime Heritage Festival

QUARTERLY MEETING

Wednesday, April 15, 2009 at 7:00 p.m.
Ozaukee County Courthouse Administration Building
County Board Room, 2nd Floor
121 W. Main Street
Port Washington, Wisconsin