

## The Wisconsin Historical Society: Collecting, Preserving, and Sharing Stories Since 1846

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*The headquarters building of the Wisconsin Historical Society on the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus, as seen from Langdon Street. (Wisconsin Historical Society photo by Robert Granflaten)*

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Collecting, Preserving, and Sharing Stories  
Since 1846*

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## *The Wisconsin Historical Society: Collecting, Preserving, and Sharing Stories Since 1846*

Appropriately enough, the roots of Wisconsin's world-class historical society can be traced back to a conversation between two pioneers. In the autumn of 1845, Richard Magoon, an early settler of Lafayette County and a Black Hawk War veteran, happened upon Chauncey Britt, the editor of the Mineral Point *Democrat*. Magoon was concerned about losing the history of the territory he had helped to settle and suggested to Britt that the time was right for the organization of "an Historical Society, to collect, from the pioneers then alive, such facts in regard to the early history of Wisconsin, as they might possess, as well as to treasure up those occurring in the future."



*The Wisconsin Historical Society headquarters building, Madison, Wisconsin. (Wisconsin Historical Society photo by Robert Granflaten)*

Chauncey Britt felt that Magoon's idea was a good one and printed an unassuming little article in the *Democrat* calling for assistance from his "brethren of the press." Britt reasoned: "There are hundreds of men now in Wisconsin who could furnish much valuable information relative to the early history of the Territory . . . A few years more, and they will have passed away, and the future people of Wisconsin will seek in vain for the information which they can now communicate."



*Image of the Eben Peck cabin, painted by Isabella Dengel in 1891. Built in 1837, the Peck cabin was the first building in Madison, the city where only nine years later the Wisconsin Historical Society would be. (WHI Image ID 2859)*

Magoon's suggestion and Britt's forward-looking appeal set in motion the creation of the Wisconsin Historical Society, which today has grown into one of the largest, most active, and most diversified state historical societies in the nation. The Wisconsin Historical Society – older by two years than the state itself – possesses an extraordinary library and manuscript collection. A host of archival materials are made widely accessible to Wisconsinites via 14 Area Research Centers which are scattered throughout the state. A vast majority of the state's residents are within an hour and a half's drive of a center. The society has cultivated a network of nearly 400 affiliated local historical societies, operates 11 historic sites as well as the Wisconsin Historical Museum, and boasts a vigorous publishing program that produces an average of 15 new titles annually on a wide range of Wisconsin-related themes. The society preserves historically and archaeologically significant places in a variety of ways: protecting historic properties by administering Wisconsin's portion of the National Register of Historic Places and the State Register of Historic Places, providing guidance on the restoration and repair of significant properties, and protecting burial sites throughout the state.

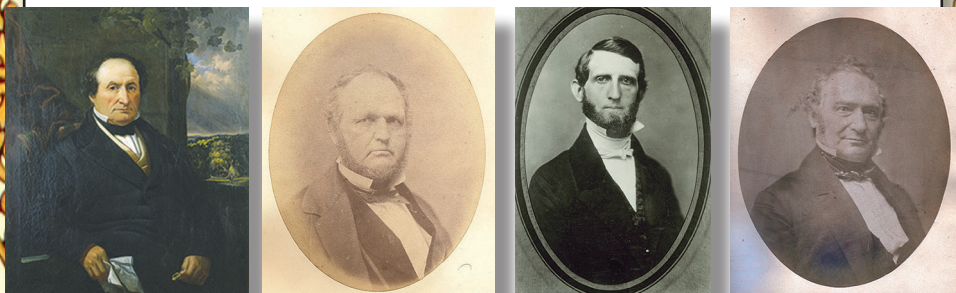
The Wisconsin Historical Society has long been a pioneering institution with a unique relationship to the people of Wisconsin. In 1853, the Wisconsin Historical Society became the first historical society in America to receive state funding; thus, because it is a public institution it is the society's responsibility to "treasure up" the stories of people from all walks of life. In this way, 167 years ago the society laid the foundations for a social history, which has enriched our knowledge of the past through the preservation and sharing of stories that include women, American Indians, African Americans, laborers, and many others traditionally ignored in historical accounts. The society preserves and shares the lives and

objects of people from every corner of the state. Membership is open to all who pay annual dues, and the society's collections belong to the people of Wisconsin.

Unlikely as it may have seemed, this all began in a frontier territory with no railroads, in a capital city with dirt streets where wolves and prairie fires were still hazards – in short, a place where history seemed more to be made rather than preserved. The creation of the Wisconsin Historical Society is a manifold tale of pioneers, perseverance, and forward-looking vision.

## The Early Years

Chauncey Britt printed another entreaty in September 1846, this time in the pages of the *Milwaukee Courier*. Britt's appeal came just as delegates from around Wisconsin prepared to gather in Madison for the state's first constitutional convention. Britt captured the attention of several delegates, and quietly a series of meetings took place, first at Morrison's American Hotel on the Capitol Square and later in the Capitol library. Little is known about these meetings, the source having vanished with an attendee who shortly thereafter moved to California and promptly died. Yet a basic organizational structure was created and officers were elected. Among the officers of the society were some prominent men of the Territory: businessmen Solomon Juneau and Byron Kilbourn, banker Samuel Marshall, and former Territorial Governor James Duane Doty. Plans were made for a meeting to be held in Madison in January 1847.



*Some of the first officers of the Wisconsin Historical Society. From left: Solomon Juneau (WHi Image ID 2733), Byron Kilbourn (WHi Image ID 27655), Sam Marshall (WHi Image ID 1835), and James Duane Doty (WHi Image ID 10020)*

This first annual meeting of the Wisconsin Historical Society in January 1847 was representative of the early years of the organization. Former governor Doty, one of the society's vice presidents, was selected to deliver an address before the assemblage, which he did not. Officers were elected to serve for the following year, but otherwise there was little activity. As one participant recounted, "I do not think much was done other than making an organization."

In January 1849, the society was reorganized and became more active. A constitution was adopted, which established the aim of the society to "preserve the materials for a complete history of Wisconsin embracing the antiquities, and the history of the Indian tribes." Resolutions were adopted, among them a request



*Increase Lapham, one of Wisconsin's most noteworthy scientists, was one of the charter members and cofounders of the Wisconsin Historical Society. Lapham's many accomplishments include writing a pioneering work on the destruction of forests in 1867, helping establish the Milwaukee public high school program, and helping establish the National Weather Bureau, the forerunner of today's National Weather Service. (WHI Image ID 1944)*

by Increase Lapham that “surveyors throughout this state be requested to furnish this Society with sketches from actual measurements of the ancient mounds and artificial earth-works in their vicinity.” Governor Nelson Dewey was made president of the society, and the bright and ambitious Lapham, future state geologist and father of the United States Weather Bureau, was made corresponding secretary. A library was begun, starting with the *Laws* and *Journals* of the Territory and government documents from New York State and the Smithsonian. With the arrival of Lyman Draper in 1852, the Wisconsin Historical Society was set on a path of growth and innovation that within a few decades would make it the envy of older institutions.

Lyman Copeland Draper was born September 4, 1815, in Erie County, New York, on a farm at the mouth of Eighteen Mile

Creek, so named because it was

18 miles from Buffalo. Lyman's father, Luke Draper, was a restless man, a sometime tavern keeper and farmer who had a keen interest in medicine. Luke and his family moved several times, seeking different opportunities along the eastern shore of Lake Erie before settling in Lockport, New York, in 1821. Luke kept a tavern in Lockport, in which young Lyman heard accounts from his father's patrons of adventure and war on the western frontier. Lyman also absorbed the stories of his grandfather Jonathan Draper, who had been one of the Minutemen at Lexington during the Revolutionary War and who later did sporadic duty in the New Hampshire militia combating British raiding parties. Lyman's father was also a veteran, seeing occasional service in the War of 1812 as it played out on New York's western frontier. Luke Draper was captured by the British, came under cannon fire while sailing with a couple of companions, and served with the New York militia that was disbanded rather than used to defend Fort George. On his way home from Fort George, Luke and another man were captured again by the British and hauled to Montreal for imprisonment.

As he grew, young Lyman heard these tales of high adventure and lamented the fact that he did not find accounts such as these in the books he read or in the words of orators. In time, Lyman would resolve to remedy this neglect, and to save from oblivion the stories and lives of the lesser-known men who, in Lyman's

words, “suffered more, and were honored less, than almost any equal number of adventurers in any country or age.”

Lyman inherited his mother’s diminutive frame, growing to only five feet tall and 100 pounds, hardly bigger than a schoolboy. “I am a small bit of a fellow,” he would one day explain. A correspondent later joked that Draper could “jump into one of my pockets and [I’ll] carry you all over the plantation . . . taking care you don’t fall out and break your neck.” His younger brothers quickly grew larger and more robust than he, and the restlessness and vigor he inherited from his father were directed toward the mind and the imagination. Draper read voraciously, did well in the intermittent schooling he received as a youth, and won the respect of the locals in Lockport through his learnedness.

At 17 Draper began trying his hand at writing, showing even at that age an unusual devotion to accuracy. Yet writing seemed to afflict the fragile little man with an odd array of ailments. As he matured and his ambitions grew, Draper planned to write a magnificent series of biographies of the pioneers, works that would go mostly unwritten as hypochondria got the better of him. Time and again he postponed his writing to collect more material or to treat a variety of maladies. Ultimately, Draper would complete very few works; it is as a collector that he is remembered.

As a teenager in the 1830s Draper began corresponding with pioneers and their descendants, a lifelong custom he practiced right until his death. In 1840, Draper began to supplement this written correspondence with interviews. To accomplish this, Draper traveled extensively through the Alleghenies and the South, finding old pioneers and recording their reminiscences. Explaining his inspiration to go to these great lengths, Draper once wrote to a friend: “I am very passionately devoted to the Pioneer history of the romantic West – I keep delving away at it, more for the real love I have for the thing itself than anything else.” Throughout his early adulthood Draper would try his hand at several careers, clerking and farming, even testing the waters of the newspaper business for a short time in Mississippi, and studied at two different colleges, but history and collecting were his first loves, and to them he would return whenever possible. In the fall of 1852, Draper found an opportunity to devote himself more or less full time to his scholarly pursuits.

A college friend, Judge Charles Larrabee, had for years attempted to lure Draper to Wisconsin, dangling various potential jobs before him: as state librarian, or as a professor at the state university, or with the nascent state historical society. By the time he arrived in Madison in October 1852, however, Draper discovered that Larrabee was out of power, a state librarian had been appointed, and the university needed no more professors. Meanwhile, the Wisconsin Historical Society’s founders were at a crossroads, unable to settle on a direction for the organization.



*Lyman Draper directed the society for over three decades, during which he built notable library and manuscript collections, as well as assembling a museum, or “cabinet,” as it was then called. (WHi Image ID 2629)*

Despite unfavorable career prospects, Draper remained in Madison. He was supported by a modest inheritance from an uncle and found a congenial reception among his fellow Baptists. Thanks to his inheritance, Draper needed only part-time employment to supplement his income; between times, he was free to work on his biography of a backwoods surveyor and adventurer named Daniel Boone. With an eye still trained on gainful employment, Draper introduced himself to influential members of the Wisconsin Historical Society, whom he impressed with his erudition and ideas to expand the society's activities.



*The Wisconsin Historical Society's first home was in the State Capitol, pictured here as the building looked in 1859. (WHi Image ID 3965)*

Draper later reflected that the historical society in 1852 was going through stages similar to those experienced by “kindred institutions – an early organization by the foresight of a hopeful few, followed by neglect, a brief sickly existence, and an early death . . . resuscitated again and again.” While a handful of the founders of the Wisconsin Historical Society expected it to grow into a sort of private club open only to members, others dreamed of a public institution devoted to all citizens of the state. Unsurprisingly for a western historian, Draper likened the society to “the old Kentucky hunter, his trusty gun . . . once accidentally failing him, he would ‘pick the flint, and try the old rifle again.’”

As it turned out, Draper was just the man to “pick the flint, and try the old rifle again.” In January 1853, having endeared himself to several prominent society members including Governor Leonard Farwell, then president of the society, Draper was admitted as a member and named to its executive committee. That winter, Draper sat down with Charles Larrabee to write a charter for the society, in which they stated, “The object of the Society shall be to collect, embody, ar-



range, and preserve in authentic form a library of books, pamphlets, maps, charts, manuscripts, papers, paintings, statuary, and other materials illustrative of the History of the State.” They went on to establish that the Wisconsin Historical Society should “exhibit faithfully the antiquities of the past and present condition and resources of Wisconsin. It should promote the study of history by lectures, and diffuse and publish information relating to the description and history of the state.” Under this charter, the society was authorized to collect broadly, open its doors to everyone, and receive substantial funding from the state.

What began as a club of history-minded amateurs seven years earlier was about to undertake a remarkable period of growth and innovation. For the next three decades the society would be guided by Draper’s forward-looking, democratic vision and matchless leadership. Though he did not have much to begin with, Draper did find one thing awaiting him at the Wisconsin Historical Society: a library, albeit one in embryonic form.

## The Wisconsin Historical Society Library and Archives

In 1853, Draper found a few dozen government documents housed in a glass-front bookcase, as well as a few manuscripts donated to the society some years earlier. From these humble beginnings, the library and archives of the Wisconsin Historical Society has grown into one of the finest collections for the study of North American history in the United States. Consisting of more than three million items including books, pamphlets, newspapers, and microfilm, the library has particularly strong genealogy, labor union, North American exploration, African American, and Native American holdings. It serves as the North American history library for the University of Wisconsin-Madison and houses one of the premier collections of Wisconsin, federal, and Canadian government publications. Each year the library adds over 7,000 books; an equal number of government documents including books, pamphlets, and reports; hundreds of newspapers; and 2,000 rolls of microfilm. In the society’s headquarters, the library reading room, which was refurbished in 2010, hosts upward of 100,000 visitors a year. The library’s digital collections hosted on the society Web site are viewed 35,000 times each day.

The society’s archives comprise 105,000 cubic feet of diaries, journals, memoirs, photographs, assorted government documents, rare books, sound and film recordings, and a wealth of other materials filling 37 miles of shelves. The archives have notably strong collections in a variety of areas, including film and theater, labor history, mass communications, maps, the McCormick-International Harvester collection, social action, and the well-known Draper Manuscripts, which is a collection of documents concerning the frontier west of the Appalachian Mountains. Most of this material is available to researchers through the network of 14 area research centers located on University of Wisconsin System campuses around the state and the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center outside Ashland. Additionally, the society serves as the state archives, preserving state and local government records and making these records accessible to the public.

When Draper was named the corresponding secretary of the Wisconsin Historical Society in January 1854, he set out at once to increase the size and scope of the society’s research collections. Though he had little money, Draper was able



*Map showing the locations of the 14 Area Research Centers in Wisconsin. They are located on UW campus libraries throughout the state as well as at the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center in Ashland.*

to accumulate volumes by appealing to the vanity of others. He wrote to dozens of prominent historians and public figures, named them honorary members of the society, and solicited contributions of their works. Twenty books came in that first month, 37 the next, and 45 the third, from such notable people as Francis Parkman, William H. Prescott, George Bancroft, and Emma Willard. Draper used a substantial portion of the first of the society's state funds to purchase a remarkable collection of Americana, including 17th-century French accounts of Canada and early editions recounting Jonathan Carver and Alexander Mackenzie's travels



*Bird's-eye map of Neenah, Wisconsin (WHi Image ID 22648)*

through the interior. Draper also convinced the legislature to print extra copies of government publications so he could exchange volumes with other institutions. In his first year at the helm, the library grew to more than 2,000 books and pamphlets, necessitating a move from the Capitol to the basement of Madison's First Baptist Church, where it occupied 2,700 square feet for the next decade.

Draper also gathered manuscripts, collecting beyond state borders. A typical appeal for manuscripts was added to Draper's first annual report in 1854, in which he submitted a list of "Objects of Collection Desired by the Society." Items on his list included "Manuscript statements and narratives of pioneer settlers – old letters and journals relative to the early history and settlement of Wisconsin, and of the Black Hawk War; biographical notices of our pioneers, and of eminent citizens, deceased; and facts illustrative of our Indian tribes, their history, characteristics, sketches of their prominent chiefs, orators and warriors."

History, to Draper, was a literary activity that should focus on elegantly written, factually accurate depictions of the heroic deeds of great men. While dreaming of the tomes he would craft about the lives of the pioneers, Draper desired to get as close as possible to the actual events, to record in minute and precise detail the lives he wished to celebrate. Accordingly, Draper continued to search far and wide for pioneers and their children, to gather their stories, diaries, records, and reminiscences. Draper's definition of a hero was also broad, seeing greatness in the men and women who settled the frontier: the wives and farmers, shopkeepers, and militiamen who had built their lives under difficult circumstances. Never shy about asking for materials, at the beginning of the Civil War Draper sent a circulating letter to a number of officers from Wisconsin's gathering regiments requesting they send him relics and curiosities. He also encouraged soldiers to

keep diaries for a large Civil War collection he planned to assemble, with which he planned to write an illustrated history of Wisconsin's involvement in the war. Like his other writing projects, this never came to fruition.

Draper gathered maps (many of them rare), daguerreotypes, portraits, and prints. He also sought perishable items such as newspapers, broadsides, pamphlets, magazines, and sheet music – items all too often here one day and gone the next – documenting contemporary life in America, knowing that in time these materials would be sources for history. “No sectarian feelings, no political prejudices,” Draper wrote, “have turned us aside from the high purpose we have had in view – to provide for all classes of honest and earnest investigators, facts and information upon almost all conceivable subjects of interest, profit and culture.”

Draper simultaneously collected for the Wisconsin Historical Society and for his own personal manuscript library, which was bequeathed to the society upon his death in 1891. This collection, known colloquially as the Draper Manuscripts, consisted of original documents, Draper's transcriptions of documents, interview notes, Draper's correspondence, extracts from newspapers and other published sources, muster rolls, military records, and more, covering primarily the period between the French and Indian War and the War of 1812 (ca. 1755-1815). Society staff organized the mass of partially sorted papers into 491 volumes divided into 50 series of varying lengths, arranged by geographic area, subject, and individual. Contained in the Draper Manuscripts are personal papers of some legendary figures in early American history, including Daniel Boone, Simon Kenton, Mohawk chief Joseph Brant, and George Rogers Clark, among many others. The Draper



*Painting of La Pointe, Madeline Island, Wisconsin, showing buildings of the American Fur Company and both of the Mission churches, ca. 1842. (WHi Image ID 42457)*

Manuscripts soon became the society's most famous and extensively used collection. In 1940, the society began putting the collection on microfilm to make it more widely available, and even published a guide for the collection that numbers almost 500 pages.

By the end of the Civil War, the library had grown to more than 20,000 volumes, which had the shelves in the Baptist church filled to overflowing, and stacks of books piled to the ceiling. Relief from overcrowding came in 1866, when the society was given three rooms on the second floor of the south wing of the new State Capitol.

After the move, the society's visibility increased as well. As many as 15,000 patrons visited the library and museum every year, with legislators, attorneys, newspaper editors, clergymen, visiting scholars, and dozens of university students navigating the collections daily. Draper was so well-known by this time that important cultural institutions around the nation happily exchanged materials with him. The library began comprehensively collecting publications of the United States government in 1870, and by the centennial year of 1876 the society had the largest library west of Washington, DC, holding 65,000 items; in 1883, it passed the 100,000 mark.

Incredibly, Draper accomplished this with only a few hundred dollars per year, a thousand miles away from the center of the book trade, and with the majority of new acquisitions coming as gifts. More importantly, Draper's collecting was innovative and unbiased. Not only were the standard newspapers of the day acquired, but also hundreds of volumes of colonial papers and then-esoteric journals such as the *Cherokee Pioneer* (the first Native American periodical) and the *African Repository* (an early African American journal). Draper's imaginative view of what "history" meant, as well as his universal tastes, laid the foundations of one of the nation's richest research collections. The principles of broad and impartial collecting have guided all succeeding generations of the society's librarians and archivists.

In 1887, Lyman Draper retired, and his hand-picked successor, Reuben Gold Thwaites, took over operations of the society. Energetic, enthusiastic, and, like his predecessor, diminutive (he once remarked, "My length from the top of my



*Librarian Daniel S. Durrie seated in the two-story-high gallery that the Historical Society occupied in the old South Wing of the State Capitol from 1866 until 1883. (WHI Image ID 23291)*

collar to the top of my heel is four feet, seven inches”), Thwaites differed from Draper in that he was systematic and orderly in his collecting. Thwaites adopted new practices in acquisitions, cataloging, research, and conservation of printed material. He established an antiquarian fund to gather money to buy items, and then planned a series of trips to obtain manuscripts that would fill gaps in the current collections of the society. Thwaites coordinated with potential donors, planned his itinerary carefully, and set a rigorous schedule. He detailed all he accomplished after one trip through the Fox Valley, noting the acquisition of “old letter-books, diaries, memoranda and letters, fully 2,000 documents in all, illustrative of olden times, particularly the fur trade and the conduct of Indian affairs.”

Prioritizing Wisconsin's legacy in collecting items, Thwaites successfully solicited and acquired the papers of notable Wisconsinites while also conducting interviews in order to create oral histories. Thwaites instituted the practice of sending society staff to libraries in other states, and later to Canada, England, and France, for the purpose of copying documents relating to Wisconsin. He himself went on two trips to Europe for this purpose. Thwaites also worked to gather records of contemporary society, especially those sources describing the history of localities and local matters, believing these to be important not only as historical records, but because they satisfied a genuine public interest.

As the 19th century drew to a close the Wisconsin Historical Society enjoyed a reputation as one of the leading historical societies in America. In 1893, future president Theodore Roosevelt praised the society as “the father of all



*Stacks of the society library in 1898, when the society occupied rooms in the third Capitol building. At one time, gas light fixtures were used in this space, allowing an open flame to burn perilously close to flammable items like the newspaper collection. (WHi Image ID 23287)*



*Frederick Jackson Turner's history seminar at work in an alcove at the society in 1893, when the society was still housed in the third Capitol building. (WHI Image ID 1910)*

such societies in the West." Roosevelt continued, "Every American scholar, and in particular every American historian, is under a debt to your Society, and a debt to the State of Wisconsin, for having kept it up." The next year another future president, Professor Woodrow Wilson of Princeton College, commented on legislative support for the society library, writing, "I have no hesitation in saying that its loss or impairment would be nothing less than a national calamity, so far as the scholarship of the country is concerned . . . Certainly no legislative grant could more directly contribute to the best interests of scholarship and patriotism than a grant to preserve such records as you possess."

Thwaites realized early on that most of the users of the society's collections were college students. Accordingly, he consciously, and programmatically, chose to "hitch the Society's star" to the future development of the university. Students were coming to Madison in greater numbers as enrollment increased fivefold in the last 15 years of the 19th century. Moreover, university faculty emphasized the consultation of a wide array of primary documents that were generally not available at the university library. Thwaites offered students unlimited access to the society's library stacks and opened additional rooms for study. Noted historian Frederick Jackson Turner, who regularly led his "little band of investigators" to the society, later wrote that this greater freedom for their work "was the opening of a new life."

Ties between the Wisconsin Historical Society and the University of Wisconsin grew stronger in 1900 with the construction of a shared library building on the university campus. The imposing neoclassical structure was filled with marble

staircases, mosaic floors, mahogany furniture, and state-of-the-art technology such as telephones and electric lights. Manuscripts, newspapers, and government publications were housed in their own reading rooms on the ground floor. From the main second floor hallway, researchers passed a massive card catalog and an elegant reference desk before entering the monumental reading room, with its 30-foot columns and stained-glass skylights. Initially, books from both the society and the university libraries were shelved in a single six-story stack wing. A decade later a second stack wing on the north was constructed to house the university's books. Advanced students and university faculty made up the lion's share of users, while undergraduates were tolerated and curious visitors were referred to a balcony where they would not disturb the scholars working below. For the next half century the society library would serve as the university's principal research collection.



*Reuben Gold Thwaites, 1899. Thwaites assumed leadership of the society in 1887 from the legendary Lyman Draper. During his 26-year tenure, Thwaites created his own legend, increasing the society's scope, modernizing its operations, and forging close ties with the University of Wisconsin. (WHi Image ID 62768)*

In 1907, the society began to take on new responsibilities with regard to state and local governments when the Wisconsin Legislature passed Chapter 88, Laws of 1907, the Wisconsin Archives Act. This act paved the way for the society to house and administer the state archives. Before this time, a great deal of effort had gone into collecting personal manuscripts, diaries, letters and the like, but little had been done in Wisconsin to preserve government documents. A survey of Wisconsin's government records was done by the American Historical Association's Public Archives Commission in 1904, the same year the state capitol building burned down. The report of this survey stated that, although damage to government documents had been limited by the fireproof vaults in which they'd been stored, the fire necessitated emergency storage that exposed these materials to a variety of hazards. Rather than create a new department of archives or wait to construct a new fireproof building for storage, the report's author suggested that non-current records be given to the Wisconsin Historical Society, "which has so amply shown its ability to care for them." Through numerous changes to the law, the society today still has the

responsibility to collect, maintain, and make available for use the records of the state over 100 years later.

This period just before World War I has been described as the library's golden era. From Thwaites's arrival until 1913, the library's endowment more than doubled, the collections tripled in size, and state support quadrupled. The staff grew from 4 to 31, and the number of users had risen almost tenfold. In the various offices and reading rooms, a dozen highly motivated librarians – mostly female, since women could be paid lower wages than men – were the core of the institution. They worked seven hours on weekdays and half-days on Saturday, with 26 vacation days in addition to the usual holidays. In the second floor administrative





*Annie Nunns, one of the library matriarchs who guided the society through the difficult years from World War I through the Great Depression. (WHI Image ID 97811)*

and Iva Welsh controlled virtually all aspects of library policy and operation for the next 30 years.

Referring to themselves as “the Big Three,” Nunns, Foster, and Welsh served the society during intensely difficult times, working long hours for little pay. Nunns would serve as the assistant superintendent, handling a litany of administrative matters, until her death in January 1942. Foster was the head of reference from 1904 until 1944, known for enforcing strict rules governing decorum in the reading room, creating the impression that transgressors who “whispered or even cleared a throat would be at least summarily ejected and at worst held for execution at dawn.” Welsh was the head of cataloging from 1909 until 1944 and was remembered for her expert knowledge of rare books, meticulous attention to detail, and “un-deviating adherence to established procedure.” Together the Big Three guided the library through the First World War, the Great Depression, and into the Second World War, when budgets were tight, staffing was short, and demands upon the library increased with a growing university to serve.

Succeeding Thwaites as society director was Milo Quaife, a scholar

suite, Thwaites cultivated donors and legislators while in adjacent offices others worked to stretch the budget, select books, and compile bibliographies.

On October 22, 1913, Thwaites died suddenly, having groomed no one to take his place. Even when the society was still housed at the state capitol, Thwaites had begun hiring a team of “young and devoted” librarians who were recent university graduates. They were an “exceptionally intelligent, well-trained, and agreeable body of young women” who took their professional responsibilities seriously and viewed their accomplishments with pride, and whom Thwaites held to strict standards and high expectations. Chief among these colleagues was Annie Nunns, whom Thwaites had hired in the late 1880s, the first of his female hires. In another era, Nunns, who was now assistant superintendent, would probably have been made society director; as it was, she, along with Mary Stuart Foster (known as “Mary, Queen of Stacks”)



*One of the professional young women Reuben Gold Thwaites hired was librarian Emma Hawley, shown here working on a typewriter she modified to accommodate library catalog cards. This 1892 photo was taken by Thwaites, who was also an amateur photographer. (WHI Image ID 23318)*

with high academic credentials. Arriving from the Lewis Institute in Chicago, and needing to fill very large shoes, Quaife chose to continue and improve on Thwaites's collecting programs. He expanded efforts to secure out-of-state records by employing a staff member to comb the files of various federal departments in Washington, looking for documents relating to Wisconsin. In 1915, the society's field representative sent back 10,000 photostatic copies that first year. Unfortunately the cost for this work was considerable, and the project had to be scaled back in its second year. Quaife also used the authority granted by the 1907 Wisconsin Archives Act to solicit records of the executive department and other agencies.

Quaife's tenure lasted for only six years, his successes mitigated by the debilitating impact of World War I and his legacy clouded by controversies with society members and legislators that caused him to leave Wisconsin. Quaife's successor, Joseph C. Schafer, another impeccable scholar, headed the society for the next two decades. He saw the organization as a well-oiled machine that required only ongoing maintenance, and he made no radical changes or innovations beyond those prompted by his personal scholarly interests. When confronted by the Great Depression, this hands-off approach resulted in a significant decline in the society's operations and its abilities to collect and process donations.



*Milo Quaife was just 33 years old when he was hired as society director in January 1914. Under Quaife's leadership, the society began publishing the Wisconsin Magazine of History, which continues to this day. (WHi Image ID 98885)*

By the time the matriarchs passed from the scene in the mid-1940s, decades of poverty and neglect had left the library in desperate straits. Both the society library and the university library were "disgracefully overcrowded," with too many books, not enough room for students, and overcrowded staff work rooms. A 1943 report concluded that the university needed its own library and a doubling of its book budget. To alleviate overcrowding, staffs of the society and university

libraries worked out coordinated collecting procedures to reduce duplication. Additionally, society director Edward Alexander enthusiastically embraced microfilm. The library bought its first newspapers on microfilm in 1942, and the next year Alexander employed library staff to microfilm the society's newspaper holdings. Within a year the library contained more than 1,000 reels of microfilm. All hard-copy subscriptions to out-of-state newspapers ended in 1945 and were replaced with papers available on film.

In 1953, the university library moved into the new Memorial Library on the block next to the Wisconsin Historical Society. Society collections were promptly redistributed into the vacated space, and construction crews began renovating the interior of the 1900 building. The separate first-floor reading rooms for manu-



THE AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION.

GROUP TAKEN BY FRED W. CURTIS, MADISON, MONDAY AFTERNOON, JULY 8, 1901.  
AT EAST FRONT OF WISCONSIN STATE HISTORICAL LIBRARY BUILDING,  
MADISON.

*The American Library Association group portrait, 1901, outside the society headquarters building. The organization's meeting happened in Madison because Thwaites wanted to draw attention to the Wisconsin Historical Society's new building. (WHi Image ID 45544)*

scripts, government publications, and newspapers became museum galleries, and all library materials were now serviced from a central desk in the large second-floor reading room. The reconstruction that ended in 1955 also expanded the library's shelving space by 40 percent and created 50 study carrels in the stacks for graduate students. That same year, the society donated approximately 100,000 books and pamphlets from its non-American materials to Memorial Library. The society continued to serve as the university's North American research collection, a role the Wisconsin Historical Society library still fulfills today.

The post-World War II era also saw a renewed effort to modernize and expand the archives. Under the direction of Clifford Lord, the society began collecting historical records at the national level in broad topical areas. Most significantly, he acquired the records of the Cyrus McCormick family and the McCormick-Deering company (later International Harvester). Lord also expanded a state-level effort to collect union records to national levels with the acquisition of the records of the American Federation of Labor and large industrial unions. But most significantly for the long term, Lord created a national collecting program for the records of mass communication, including broadcasting, print journalism, and advertising as well as film and theater studies. The generally stated purpose behind collecting in all of these areas was the same as for state and local history: to collect, preserve, and provide access to important historical records that provide critical, and unbiased, information to Americans about their history, politics, and economy.

In 1962, several government document repositories on scattered university campuses around Wisconsin were converted into active research centers. This

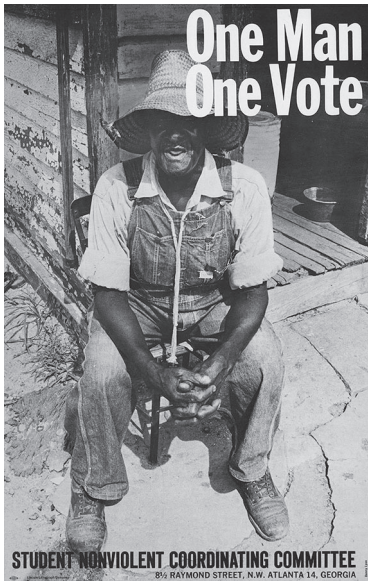
gave birth to the society's Area Research Center program. Each of the 14 centers serves a specific geographic region and houses records created in, and focused on, that region. Staffing is provided to help users navigate collections, and a courier system allows all the centers to share their collections with each other. This system makes the collections much more accessible than they were previously. Today, the society's Area Research Center system leads the nation in the size, scope, and usage of its network. The research centers benefit both the society



*McCormick poster, ca. 1882. The McCormick-International Harvester Company Collection contains documents, publications, photographs and films related to Cyrus Hall McCormick and the International Harvester Company. The collection includes more than 12 million pages or items dating from 1753 to 1985. These items document the history of the agricultural equipment industry, the McCormick family, and many other topics in fields as diverse as the histories of advertising, technology, labor, business, rural life, philanthropy, architecture, Virginia, and Chicago. (WHi Image ID 3600)*

and the University of Wisconsin System. Campuses aid the society by providing staffing and facilities to house records, while the society enables campuses to provide access to primary documents for undergraduates, high school students, and university faculty.

The Wisconsin Historical Society has documented some of the most pressing issues of the 20th century, including socialism, communism, Social Security and entitlements, civil liberties and free speech. During the turbulent decade of the 1960s, the society actively documented social reform movements. Field services staff gathered materials covering the anti-Vietnam War movement, the New Left, and the battles over reproductive rights and abortion, to name only a few. The society also collected letters, records, photographs, and other materials document-



*A Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee poster reading "One Man, One Vote," part of the society's extensive collection of materials documenting the civil rights movement. (WHi Image ID 53039)*

bicentennial oral history project interviews, migration of blacks to the city after World War I; and the Barneveld tornado oral history project, interviews conducted after that town's devastating tornado of June 8, 1984.

The 1970s saw a dramatic shift in the clientele the library and archives served as the Bicentennial of the American Revolution in 1976 awakened many Americans to their own family history. For most of the 20th century fully 90 percent of the library's users had been students and scholars; however, by the late 1970s genealogists made up half of the library's patrons. Students and amateur researchers were competing for seats in the reading room, while university researchers wanting a vacant microfilm reader needed to arrive as soon as the library doors opened. Many of the genealogists had no experience navigating primary

ing the civil rights movement. Among these acquisitions were materials from more than 75 "Freedom Summer" volunteers, including activist Andrew Goodman. Goodman was one of three young civil rights workers who went south in the summer of 1964 to work on voter registration and freedom school initiatives, only to die at the hands of white supremacists. The story of their civil rights activism and their murders formed the storyline for the 1988 film *Mississippi Burning*.

The society's Library-Archives Division also holds more than 450 collections with oral history content, including some interviews that were collected by society staff. The topics of these interviews reflect the collecting areas of the Library-Archives Division: local history of cities, towns, and villages in Wisconsin, immigration, heritage and ethnicity, politics, military service, agriculture, logging, forestry and conservation, and mass communication and performing arts. Researchers can listen to any recording at no charge in the headquarters building in Madison or purchase a CD for themselves. Highlights of the collection include the Beloit



*Woman and young girl holding signs opposing school segregation, Milwaukee, ca. 1964. (WHi Image ID 4993)*

documents, so library staff began teaching classes and publicizing the society's genealogical collections.

As the library and archives entered the computer age in the 1980s, library users' expectations began to shift. The initiation of a campuswide computerized catalog in the mid-1980s brought students to the library looking not for esoteric tomes or primary documents, but for information, often concerning current events. When the library catalog became available over the internet in 1993, researchers around the country and the world began to discover the extent of the society's collections. Consequently, society staff began fielding more and more calls from Hollywood writers, fact-checkers at national news outlets such as CNN, and attorneys arguing cases on each coast. Library patrons were no longer just academic historians – they were customers in a nationwide information marketplace.

Modern times bring new challenges and opportunities. Additional national- and state-level collecting programs have come and usually stayed. The statutes and procedures that govern the acquisition of the records of state and local governments have expanded as government's role has increased and as the records being created have moved increasingly into electronic formats. The staff follows detailed procedures for the appraisal, acquisition, and management of collections. Computer technology and the Internet have revolutionized intellectual and physical access to historical records. Nearly 300,000 pages from rare books, manuscripts, photographs, and other historical documents are posted on the society's Web site and receive more than 35,000 views a day. Another 6.4 million pages have been scanned by Google Books through a partnership with the University of Wisconsin and other major universities. And the society has licensed



*Longtime society archivist Harry Miller examining Land Office records in the Archives stacks. (Wisconsin Historical Society photo by Robert Granflaten)*

millions of pages of microfilmed newspaper content dating back to the Colonial era for access through online subscription services.

To implement these changes, the staff and organization of both the archives and the library have also undergone major adaptations. Most significantly, the two separate divisions were merged in 1999 and reorganized along functional lines to improve services and operate more efficiently. Over the past decade increasing portions of the staff's work has migrated to acquiring, managing, preserving, and providing access to digital content. In coming years, this trend will most likely accelerate. At the same time, major investments will occur to ensure that the existing record of Wisconsin and national history found in the many books, photographs, and documents collected over the centuries is protected and preserved.

In no way could Lyman Draper or Reuben Gold Thwaites, who worked to "treasure up" handbills, newspapers, letters, and similar ephemera, have anticipated the scope and demands of the digital age and its complex technologies. However, their commitment to the important work of history lives on in the present day, and their spirit infuses the efforts of the librarians and archivists who work to preserve and share the story of this state and its people.

## Revitalization and Outreach

In the 20th century, the Wisconsin Historical Society was deeply affected by the worldwide economic collapse that resulted in the Great Depression, forcing programs to contract as resources grew scarce. Yet even amid the political upheavals of midcentury, the society experienced a rebirth and successfully adapted to new user demands. The struggles against Fascism and Communism highlighted the need for Americans to better understand their national history, while Wisconsinites' renewed interest in their own heritage created a demand for genealogical information and local history materials. Responding to these and other demands of the mid-20th century, the society under its next two directors, Edward Alexander and Clifford Lord, would modernize older programs while also reaching out to Wisconsinites on the local level in a variety of new ways.

Following Joseph Schafer's death in 1941, Edward P. Alexander of the New York State Historical Association was hired to be the "young man in a hurry" who would jump-start the society into a new era. Alexander renewed the society's dynamic, ambitious vision that had gone dormant for the preceding two decades. Alexander refreshed the museum and the publications programs to make both more appealing to the public. Additionally, he reached out to local communities, strengthening ties with local historical societies and expanding the membership program. Underlying all of these efforts was Alexander's conviction that "a historical society must have popular appeal if it is to have influence in its particular community."

In 1946, Clifford Lord took the helm as director following the departure of Alexander. Lord brought big ideas and the conviction that things should happen quickly. There was little that Lord did not want the society to tackle, and less that he thought could not be resolved before lunch if everyone just put their hearts and minds to the task. Lord's political and cultural education was molded by the Depression, the New Deal, World War II, and the burgeoning Cold War. Lord

and his new assistants, mostly young World War II veterans, put their distinctive stamp on the century-old State Historical Society.

Lord and his staff believed that they were not just running a historical agency; they were making history in their own time. They faced both new opportunities and fresh problems, including the challenge of “relevance.” What useful purpose did the historical society serve in the new atomic age? What endeavors would justify the expense of maintaining it? The answers for these men, and especially for Lord, lay in recasting the society as an institution that would address modern problems.



*Dr. Clifford Lord, who here examines a book in the society's manuscript collection, directed the society from 1946 until 1958. An ambitious, energetic, and creative man, Lord was instrumental in reviving the society after the strains of two world wars and the Great Depression. (WHi Image ID 98886)*

Lord viewed history as part of the great “battle for the minds and souls of men,” a requirement for citizens to “know and understand” the basis of American democracy. As he said in an address on the importance of state and local history: “The study of history . . . clearly demonstrates the power of the individual to make his contribution, to shape or help shape the course of events; to make history where history is made – at the local level.” Society president George Banta Jr. made those goals even clearer in 1951 when he argued, “For those interested in combating Marxism . . . the serious study of state and local history can supply one of the most effective ways of blunting one of the major intellectual weapons of our adversaries.”

Reaching larger popular audiences was crucial if Lord and his staff wanted to achieve this goal. Lord and his assistants went so far as to create a mythical staff member, “the plumber from Kenosha,” who was “called into every policy conference, into the discussion of every new program, every promotional or publicity release.” Lord noted this fictitious plumber was a helpful addition to the staff, if a slightly aggravating person to reach. As Lord wrote, “We do wonder a bit . . . just how does one capture his imagination, his interest, his appreciation, his enthusiasm?” The society would still serve the university scholars and professional academics, but a renewed society needed also to reach men and women of all backgrounds and professions to be fully relevant in the mid-20th century.



## The Wisconsin Historical Museum

One of the tools Alexander, and later, Lord, would end up using to reach the public was a rejuvenated museum. When he joined the society in 1941, Alexander saw the latent potential of the museum, noting, “The treasures of the Society’s Library and Museum . . . were crying out to be used.” The society had been collecting artifacts and displaying them from its very beginning. The ravages of the Depression had taken a harsh toll on the efforts to build and maintain a museum collection. It took Alexander’s vision to rebuild that program.



*Nineteenth-century petition from Ojibwe clan chiefs. The animal figures represent clan leaders, the thick line represents Lake Superior, and the four small ovals represent rice beds. This petition indicates that the Ojibwe are of one mind and one heart and do not wish to be removed from their wild rice beds near Lake Superior. (WHi Image ID 1871)*

The creation of a museum, or “cabinet,” as the parlance of the time put it, was one of four functions outlined in the Wisconsin Historical Society’s 1853 charter. The cabinet lacked definition and purpose in the early days of its existence, but by the 1870s it had become a noteworthy part of the society’s holdings. A significant acquisition was the Perkins Collection, a 9,000-item assortment of Native American stone and copper implements obtained in 1875. Visitors also were drawn to the gallery of painted portraits and the cabinet’s assortment of “curiosities,” which included a silken tassel from the bed of Mary, Queen of



displays of the state's "ethnology, war history, photographs and engravings, bric-a-brac, and curiosities." Yet the fourth-floor location was still problematic, being fairly inaccessible to the public and unbearably hot in the summer months. Additionally, the only staff devoted to the museum was a janitor assigned to the society in its old quarters at the state capitol.

While public funding was sought to support other programs, Thwaites relied on private donations to support the museum. In early 1892, Thwaites convinced the society's curators to establish an antiquarian fund. Money for the fund came from membership dues and the sale of duplicate volumes from the society's library. By 1907, the antiquarian fund had reached \$10,000, from which the society's executive committee voted \$400 annually to fund museum acquisitions. That same year the Wisconsin Legislature increased the society's budget, which enabled Thwaites to lure Charles E. Brown away from the Milwaukee Public Museum to head a newly created Museum Department.



*Painting by Cal Peters depicting the battle of Bad Axe at the Wisconsin River on August 2, 1832. (WHi Image ID 4522)*

Brown immediately brought direction and order to the museum. Under his guidance the collections were classified and rearranged, an accessioning system was installed, field collecting began in earnest, and special exhibits became a regular occurrence. Brown also prescribed limits on what would be collected, generally limiting items to the broad fields of history, ethnology, archaeology, and art. Though these were not enforced strictly, they did help bring focus to the museum collections. Meanwhile, Brown overhauled the displays in each of the rooms of the museum to make them more attractive, which helped draw more visitors. The displays in turn influenced collecting as Brown identified and obtained items needed for new exhibits. Special effort was made to secure materials on Wisconsin's ethnic groups, religion, and obsolete farm implements as well as items pertaining to the post office, lumbering, or firefighting. Photographic collections also increased rapidly, as a flood of donations came in, including a complete set of photographs of Union generals, 465 photographs of Confederate officers, and numerous photographs of American Indians.

For the next 20 years museum attendance grew. Brown gladly gave talks and guided tours of the museum exhibits to school groups that visited in great numbers. University classes came to study cooking methods of Wisconsin pioneers

and Indians, while engineers studied early farm implements and industrial machinery. Women's groups, Boy Scout troops, delegates from any number of state conventions held in Madison, and a host of other visitors came through the doors as attendance swelled to between 60,000 and 80,000 people a year.

The Wisconsin Historical Museum's reach also expanded beyond Madison. Brown prepared displays of artifacts, implements, and photographs to circulate throughout the state. He also traveled around Wisconsin talking to schools, advising local museums and historical societies, and giving interviews to newspapers and, in the 1930s, on the radio. Brown worked with several groups, including the University of Wisconsin and the Madison Park and Pleasure Drive Association, among others, to mark and preserve Indian mounds in various parts of Madison and elsewhere in southern Wisconsin. Thanks to these vigorous activities in the museum, the society's visibility grew among several audiences, including schoolchildren and their parents and teachers, as well as the donors whose funding made the acquisitions and exhibits possible. Additional funding from the Wisconsin Legislature kept the museum functioning well until the Great Depression.

In 1932, the legislature cut the society's budget, just as the Great Depression dried up private donations. The society's executive committee and Superintendent Schafer struggled to find ways to maintain essential services. Brown turned his attention to his work with a Works Progress Administration project, and the museum was at a standstill for the next decade until the arrival of Alexander.

Alexander rejuvenated the museum in several ways. New exhibits kept modern concepts in mind, taking into account "structure, space, form, color, and light as a unified whole." Alexander hired additional staff for the museum and revised collection policies. For the first time, exhibits were placed in the first-floor galleries. Patrons passed these on their way to the library, making them more prominent than the fourth-floor galleries, which still held long-standing exhibits. Believing that "museums need not look like morgues," Alexander installed lighted cases to improve viewing of the displays. Exhibits changed frequently, covering a variety of themes including the circus and turn-of-the-century "do-it-yourself" projects. Once again, attendance soared. Although wartime travel restrictions and tight resources led to a decline in acquisitions, the immediate postwar years were encouraging in that the museum received greater funding. The extensive remodel of the headquarters building completed in 1956 effectively doubled the size of the museum as additional galleries on the first floor were cleared to make way for museum exhibits.

The theme of museum exhibits often coincided with special events or dates. In the fall of 1947, exhibits were planned and prepared illustrating a chronological history of Wisconsin in anticipation of the centennial of statehood the next year. The "Draper Centennial Year," commemorating Draper's hiring as corresponding secretary, was celebrated in 1954 with an exhibit featuring some of his works. In the early 1960s, the museum created displays titled "Meet Mr. Lincoln" and "Wisconsin in the Civil War" as the state observed the Civil War Centennial.

In 1967, the Wisconsin Historical Society began another remodeling project, a major addition to its headquarters building. The construction affected the museum more than any other society program. Displays in the first-floor galleries had to be moved occasionally to accommodate construction. Remodeling of



*A T-shaped addition to the society headquarters under construction, 1967. (WHi Image ID 98620)*

the fourth floor substantially reduced the available exhibit space as the gallery was converted into the archives reading room. One exhibit, a popular display on pharmacy, had stood in a fourth-floor gallery for close to 60 years. Even in the midst of the construction, the museum opened an exhibit titled “The Black Community: Its Culture and Heritage” that had been a year in planning and research. Planning also went forward for future exhibits celebrating famous Wisconsin women and another about Philip Fox La Follette, whose papers the society made available to the public in the summer of 1970.

Although the 1967 addition afforded more space to store books, manuscripts, and museum objects, just six years later society director James Morton Smith wrote that the building “already lacks space for library materials, museum and . . . archival materials.” An inventory of its collections found that the museum held about 50,000 objects, and even more items were anticipated with the opening of Old World Wisconsin in 1976. Austerity delayed movement on a solution to overcrowding until the late 1970s, when a long-range planning report identified the society’s major need as “space for the continued growth and proper care of the collections.” The society began to search for a building where the museum could move, to alleviate overcrowding at the headquarters building.

On July 18, 1980, under the leadership of director Richard Erney, the society purchased a vacant building on the Capitol Square in Madison that was the long-time home of the Wolff, Kubly and Hirsig hardware store. Over the next several years the building was renovated to house museum exhibits, fabrication facilities, and museum education staff and facilities. The museum relocated to the Capitol Square in 1985 and has called the location home ever since. Through displays titled “People of the Woodlands,” “Frontier Wisconsin,” “The Immigrant State,”



*Ojibwe beaded moccasins, made by Francis Weyman (Pywasit) as a gift for Mrs. Charles E. Lunberg. (WHS Museum #1954.241.a)*

“Making a Living,” and “Sense of Community,” visitors to the Wisconsin Historical Museum can learn about the history and shared experiences of the many cultures that settled Wisconsin.

Today, the museum’s collections contain more than 110,000 historical objects and nearly 400,000 archaeological artifacts documenting the history of Wisconsin from prehistoric times to the present. The museum has notable collections in the fields of anthropology, business and technology, costumes, textiles and personal artifacts, domestic life, and political and military life. These collections help visitors understand important trends and events of daily life within diverse

social, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. The Wisconsin Historical Museum building comprises four stories. A museum store, an auditorium, and exhibits space occupy the first floor, while the other three floors house exhibits of various display objects and artifacts relating to a particular area of Wisconsin’s past.

The Wisconsin Historical Museum, in addition to its exhibits, also holds events celebrating various facets of Wisconsin life, including music, beer, and quilting. The museum operates a vibrant foodways program; the popular History Sandwiched In is an informal brown-bag lunch-and-lecture series that covers a breadth of historical subjects. Museum visitors can enjoy topics such as Paul Bunyan’s Northwoods folklore and the maritime history of Door County, enabling them to make connections between Wisconsin’s past and contemporary issues of today. The Taste Traditions of Wisconsin programs, begun in the early 2000s, explore the rich culinary history, indigenous ingredients, and remarkable ethnic foodways of Wisconsin. Taste Traditions events pair noteworthy speakers with delicious meals, creating a unique experience for museum visitors. These events are routinely sold out.

The museum has gained national exposure, notably a 2012 episode of the Travel Channel’s *Mysteries at the Museum*



*The Wisconsin Historical Museum collects a variety of objects, from clothing to firearms, toys to furniture. (WHi Image ID 98887)*



Curator Joe Kapler holds the enormous Potter Knife. The 31-pound, six-foot-long knife was presented to Wisconsin congressman John Potter by members of the Missouri Republican Party in 1860, after Potter stood up for an antislavery representative from Illinois. (WHS Museum #1957.1122; photo by Joel Heiman)

featuring the twisted engine block from the truck used in the 1970 Sterling Hall bombing on the University of Wisconsin campus. In 2011, the Travel Channel's *Bert the Conqueror* received a tour of the museum's *Odd Wisconsin* exhibit, which highlighted some of the state's quirkier accomplishments, from snake oils and other objects of general quackery to the banjo-ukulele used by jingle composer Richard Trentlage in the first recording of the Oscar Mayer Wiener Song in 1962. Though the need for more modern facilities has once again become apparent, the Wisconsin Historical Museum continues to foster an appreciation of Wisconsin's past among the tens of thousands of visitors who pass through its doors annually.

## The Wisconsin Historical Society Press

Yet another program needing rejuvenation after the difficult Great Depression era was the Wisconsin Historical Society Press. The Wisconsin Historical Society Press is the oldest publisher in the State of Wisconsin, having published its first book in 1855. Now the press has grown into an award-winning publisher, offering an average of 15 new

titles each year on Wisconsin history and culture. Since 1917, the press has published a quarterly journal, *The Wisconsin Magazine of History*. The press has explored a variety of formats beyond books and magazines, including posters, textbooks, books for young readers, audio books, and e-books. While today the society press' titles appeal to a broad audience of general readers, since 1855 the press has played a key role in supporting the society's mission to connect people to the past, while at the same time preserving in print Wisconsin's unique and varied history.

When Lyman Draper took the helm as the society's corresponding secretary, he brought to the organization the conviction that the documents he and others collected deserved to be published and read, analyzed, and put to work helping us know and understand our past. Draper also envisioned a plan that would accomplish two goals at once, printing the raw material of history and using it to build the society's library. In 1855 the society printed its first book, properly titled *First Annual Report and Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin for the Year 1854*, a 147-page compilation of documents. Among the documents published in this volume were reports from the executive committee

and treasurer of the society, as well as a dozen articles and documents on topics including the French and Indian War and recollections from Green Bay in 1816-1817. Scattered throughout the volume were Draper's annotations, revealing the expertise he had acquired in Wisconsin history after only a few years in the state. The *Wisconsin Historical Collections* was designated as a departmental report, which meant that the state funded the printing costs for the 8,000 copies, and it became a significant tool Draper would use for barter.

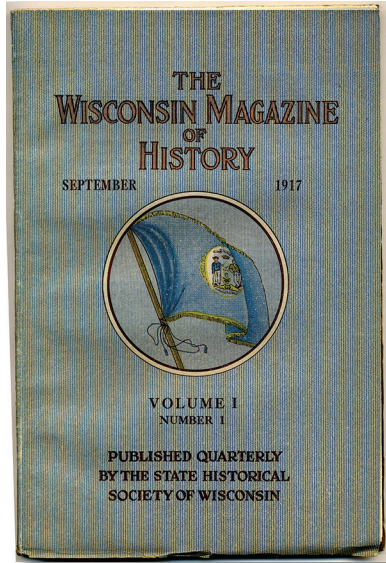
Every two or three years a new volume of the *Wisconsin Historical Collections* was issued, containing an increasing amount of memoirs, journals, narratives, interviews, and other eyewitness accounts of Wisconsin's past. By the time Draper retired from the society in 1887, the *Wisconsin Historical Collections* numbered 10 volumes and the society's reputation had grown steadily. Thwaites published 10 more volumes – 11,000 pages containing over a thousand documents – before the series was discontinued in 1915. Among the treasures in the *Wisconsin Historical Collections* are more than 100 pioneer reminiscences from fur traders, farmwomen, and Indian elders as well as diaries from travelers, soldiers,

immigrants, and missionaries, written while significant events in Wisconsin's development were unfolding, making it the single most comprehensive record of life in Wisconsin during the colonial era.

During his time as director, Thwaites was also the secretary and editor of the Wisconsin History Commission, which was formed to commemorate the semi-centennial of the Civil War. The Wisconsin History Commission would usher into print some titles of lasting significance, including Frank Haskell's account of the Battle of Gettysburg and Ethel Hurn's *Wisconsin Women in the War*, a remarkable volume detailing the various, and sometimes surprising, roles women played during the Civil War. While Thwaites came to be known as a first-rate editor, the bulk of his most impressive editorial work was done for other publishers, including the monumental *Jesuit Relations* and the *Journals of Lewis and Clark*. In all, Thwaites edited 170 volumes and wrote 15 others.

After Thwaites's untimely death in 1913, his successor, the youthful and much maligned Quaife, brought the press into the 20th century in significant ways.

Quaife was only 33 years old when hired to direct the society, yet he came equipped with ideas that showed he was well ahead of his time. Quaife proposed publishing a dictionary of Wisconsin biography, which was ultimately completed in 1960, and his idea for a historical atlas of the state was fulfilled by the University of Wisconsin Press in 1998. The society's publications expanded during



*The first issue of the Wisconsin Magazine of History, September 1917. (WHI Image ID 98888)*



Quaife's tenure to include monographs and secondary histories as well as miscellaneous reference works. Quaife also ended the long-running *Wisconsin Historical Collections* series, replacing it with a quarterly membership magazine titled *The Wisconsin Magazine of History*.

Quaife introduced the magazine to readers in 1917, noting that because "the historical interests of the professional scholars among our membership are catered to by numerous historical reviews," the magazine was meant to appeal to the intelligent layman "without sacrificing in any way the scholarly ideals of the society." The magazine was a decisive step into a new era for the press, connecting the society with Wisconsinites more closely than before. Every three months when a new issue of the magazine arrived, readers were given history in a more accessible format than the primary documents published until then. After nearly 100 years the *Wisconsin Magazine of History* has published over two thousand feature articles totaling more than 30,000 pages and continues to be an important part of the society and the press. In 2000, the *Wisconsin Magazine of History* was substantially redesigned for the first time since 1973. The switch to a full-color format was done to make the magazine "more attractive, more varied, and more appealing to a wider audience." In 2010, it won the Award of Merit from the American Association for State and Local History, having been called "a model for the field" and "the best magazine of its kind in the country."

After Quaife's ouster as director in 1919 he stayed on for another three years as chief of research and publications. Throughout much of the next two decades the press was less active as Wisconsin suffered through the Great Depression. With the rejuvenation of the society that came with the hiring of Alexander, press publications were modernized. The *Wisconsin Magazine of History* was revamped to look more appealing to the average reader and to make it more informative. Historians were commissioned to write a series of biographies on notable Wisconsinites. The press hired additional staff in 1948 and was able to produce over the next decade "the most distinguished shelf of publications ever to appear over the society's imprimatur." A closer relationship with the University of Wisconsin in the postwar era sparked the creation of Logmark Editions, an imprint of the society press that printed notable graduate theses.

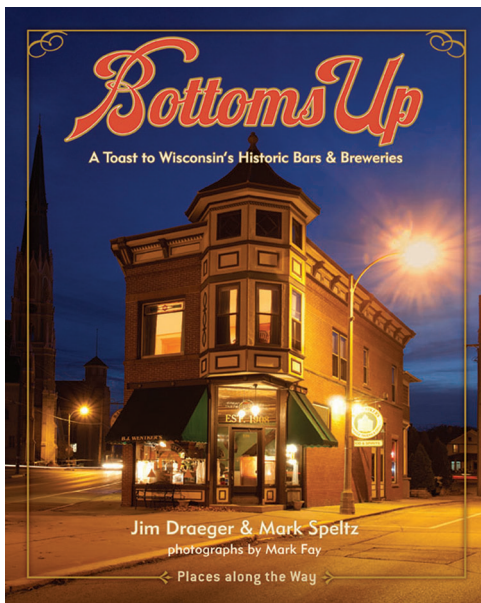
In 1960, society director Les Fishel revealed to select members of the society and the University of Wisconsin that the press was planning to create a multi-volume history of the state, beginning with the earliest times and stretching up to the modern day. Each volume would be approximately 400 pages and would encompass a significant period in Wisconsin's development: volume 1, *From Exploration to Statehood*; volume 2, *The Civil War Era*; volume 3, *Urbanization*



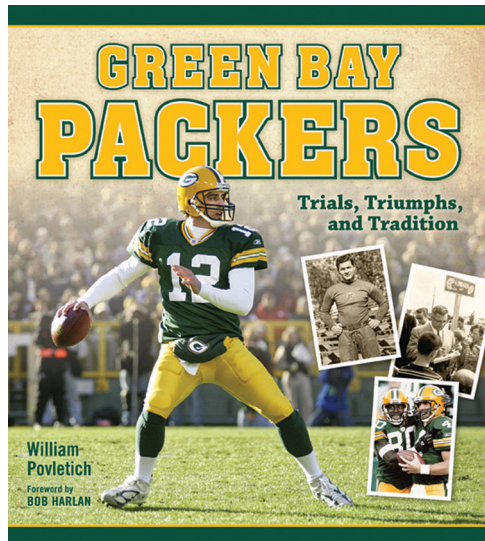
*Les Fishel, society director from 1959 to 1969. (WHi Image ID 79582)*

and *Industrialization*; volume 4, *The Progressive Era*; volume 5, *War, a New Era, and Depression*; and volume 6, *Continuity and Change*. The History of Wisconsin Series was an ambitious project, ultimately involving six authors and dozens of researchers, and has become the standard reference work for Wisconsin history. The first volume of the series was published in 1973, just in time for the farewell party for the volume's distinguished author, Alice E. Smith. Twenty-five years later, the sixth and final volume was published, coincidentally during Wisconsin's sesquicentennial year.

In 1976, the press published the first books in a series that continues to this day, the *Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution*, the flagship project of the National Historical Records and Publications Commission. Upon publication of the first two volumes of this series in May 1976, society director James Morton Smith, along with the press director and several of the series editors, traveled to Washington, DC, to present copies to Warren Burger, then Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. The press has since published 22 more volumes in the series and has at least seven more volumes in development. Following in the tradition of documentary publishing established by Lyman Draper, the series is a standard reference work employed by judges and constitutional historians nationwide and has gar-



*Bottoms Up: A Toast to Wisconsin's Historic Bars and Breweries*, by Jim Draeger and Mark Speltz, takes readers on a tour of 70 distinctive bars and breweries around the state.



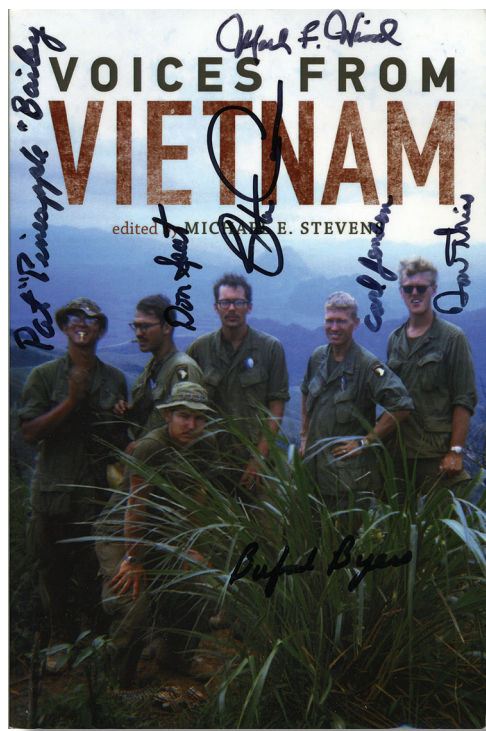
*Green Bay Packers: Trials, Triumphs, and Tradition*, by William Povletich, tells the story of how one small American city came to host one of football's most iconic teams.

nered rare praise, being called “the most important editorial project in the nation” as well as “a world treasure.”

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the society press produced half a dozen books annually, issued the *Wisconsin Magazine of History* four times a year, made a catalog annually and generated mailing lists, and promoted the books whenever possible. A former editor from the time recalled that the editors “periodically hauled [books] to historical conventions in places as distant as New York and Washington in the society’s station wagon,” all with a staff of five or so. Over the past quarter century, the press has attempted to find a synthesis between engaging larger audiences while not sacrificing scholarship in the process. While titles such as Peter J. Coleman’s *Debtors and Creditors in America: Insolvency, Imprisonment for Debt, and Bankruptcy, 1607-1900* contributed to a scholarly understanding of the American past, appealing narratives of the lives, events, and cultural elements that have contributed to Wisconsin’s makeup today have provided a way to engage a wider audience. Topics such as architecture and preservation, sports and favorite pastimes, cooking and foodways, popular culture, biography, memoir, and military history have predominated and have helped the press expand its readership within and even beyond Wisconsin’s borders.

The press has fostered a number of partnerships with external organizations to develop content and promote titles, which has led to an increasing number of books covering a diverse swath of Wisconsin history and culture. The press recently partnered with the Oneida Tribe of Indians of Wisconsin to create *A Nation within a Nation: Voices of the Oneidas in Wisconsin*; with the Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board on *Creating Dairyland*; and with the Special Olympics of Wisconsin and Wisconsin’s Board for People with Developmental Disabilities to publish and promote *Cindy Bentley: Spirit of a Champion*, to name just a few projects. Wisconsin Public Television has been an active partner with the press, resulting in projects like *Wisconsin Vietnam War Stories* as well as programs based on press titles, including *Fill 'Er Up* and *Bottoms Up: A Toast to Wisconsin's Historic Bars & Breweries*, which are part of the press’s Places Along the Way series. Working with these and other organizations has helped the press tell a variety of new stories and reach new audiences.

At the heart of the press’s recent efforts is the conviction that quality stories, well told, shared in print, have the power to move and engage readers. As an example, in the early 1990s, fewer than 20 years after the fall of Saigon, the society launched a project to collect and publish the letters and diaries of Wisconsin Vietnam War veterans. The project ultimately resulted in the society press book *Voices from Vietnam*, edited by Michael Stevens. Veterans often found it difficult to share their stories with their loved ones, yet many answered the call for materials. Donald Thies, who served in the 101st Airborne Division in 1971, was one of them. Among the materials Thies donated was a photograph of himself and several of his comrades taken just before a challenging mission that lasted several days. When the press reprinted this title recently, this photograph was selected to be on the cover. Thies was so touched by the use of his image that he contacted all of the veterans shown in the photo and had them sign a poster-sized image of the cover. He later presented the poster to Wisconsin Historical Society Director Ellsworth Brown.



*Vietnam War veteran Donald Thies presented this signed poster-sized book cover replica to society director Ellsworth Brown in 2012. (Wisconsin Historical Society Press)*

## Local History

In every community around Wisconsin there are people who are interested in the stories that make up their shared history – stories about schools, churches, businesses, and families, as well as about the events that have shaped their community’s identity. Local historical societies abound in Wisconsin, groups that have been busily engaged in preserving objects and accounts of the lives that influenced their particular experience.

In anticipation of the state’s semicentennial celebration in 1898, society director Thwaites successfully advocated for legislation that would allow the establishment of affiliates by exempting them from the payment of filing fees for their articles of organization. It authorized the society to provide uniform bylaws and require an annual report to the society. Thwaites urged local groups and libraries

to collect materials – diaries, letters, journals, books, and the like – relating to the history of their locale. He also spoke at gatherings, encouraging local leadership to build research centers, place historical markers, and develop museums, and promoting cooperation between local societies and schools in an effort to foster an interest in history among teachers and students. In 1899, Green Bay and Ripon became the first two local historical societies to affiliate with the Wisconsin Historical Society.

A generation later, as World War II raged in Europe, Edward Alexander noted, “Institutions which do not immediately serve the war effort tend to decline rapidly and nearly all educational projects have hard sledding.” Alexander believed that the study of local history “inculcates the highest kind of patriotism,” explaining, “America is big and impersonal and thus difficult to understand and appreciate as a whole.” On the other hand, a local community was “warm and human and personal, especially when its personality has been made known.” Clifford Lord pointed out the international importance of local history, writing, “We are engaged today in the greatest battle for the minds and souls of men and women which the modern world has witnessed ... Study local history and we dissipate the fog of intangibles ... We come to appreciate the significance of the American

experiment. We see the essential elements it has to offer to all men everywhere as a model and an inspiration. We begin to comprehend why democracy is still potentially the greatest revolutionary force on the face of the earth.”

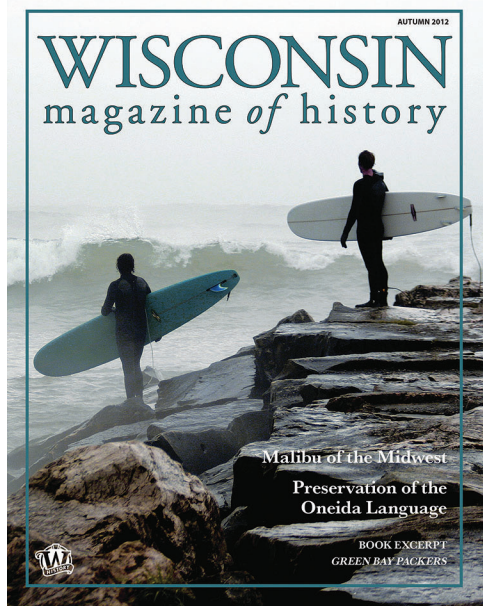
Even in wartime, Wisconsin’s local historical societies had successfully kept their members interested and involved, whether through planning new displays at local museums or gathering new items for display. Alexander did what he could to encourage the local societies, publishing accounts of their activities in the *Wisconsin Magazine of History* and working to codify stronger partnerships with the local societies. Alexander hoped, among other things, to circulate displays from the society’s museum collections to local museums around the state to “help them become even more active educational forces.” The Wisconsin Historical Society also began sending out instructional pamphlets to individuals wanting advice on operation of a local society and published articles in the *Wisconsin Magazine of History* to offer suggestions and encouragement to local societies.

A large measure of Lord’s program to revitalize the society after World War II focused on aiding local societies and local historians to better understand their localities. The study of local history, Lord wrote, “cannot help but make us bet-

ter citizens,” while it also had the power to “make us better people, for it cannot help but give us insight into how human beings act and react.” Most importantly, however, the study of local history would restore the importance of the individual in a sometimes all-too-impersonal world. As Lord explained, “When you get back to the locality you see that history, with God’s help, is made by men. We witness it every day. It is so obvious we overlook it.” Appropriately, then, Lord worked to improve the relationship between the Wisconsin Historical Society and the local historical societies that had become affiliated with it.

In 1961, the society’s board of curators created the Wisconsin Council for Local History to help promote communication and cooperation among local history groups. The Wisconsin Council for Local History brings together the almost 400 affiliated organi-

zations from all parts of Wisconsin, representing a variety of geographic locales such as counties, reservations, cities, villages, townships, and neighborhoods.



*The award-winning Wisconsin Magazine of History publishes well-researched, well-written, and lavishly illustrated articles on a wide variety of Wisconsin history topics.*

The council also includes organizations with specialized interests such as railroads, labor history, cemeteries, and particular ethnic heritages.

Also in the 1960s, the society created an Office of Local History to assist those who were interested in creating local historical societies, as well as to improve communication between the Wisconsin Historical Society and its affiliates. The Office of Local History soon began holding annual regional conventions, published a newsletter, *Exchange*, and produced a number of how-to pamphlets for local societies such as *A Cataloging System for Local Historical Society and Museums*. Today the society has two field representatives assisting local societies, one responsible for groups in northern Wisconsin and another for the southern part of the state.

One long-standing program administered by the Office of Local History is the Historical Markers program. In 1944, Governor Walter Goodland, foreseeing the end of World War II and the increased tourist travel that would ensue in the state, appointed a committee to study how best to mark historic locations in Wisconsin. Just after the war, the state began marking historic locations such as the site of Nicolet's landing near Green Bay. In 1950, the Wisconsin Historical Sites and Markers Committee came up with a standardized design for new markers, made of cast aluminum and painted brown with cream-colored lettering and featuring a "ferocious-looking badger." The next year, the first of these standardized markers was placed at the Peshtigo Fire Cemetery.

The markers program has been another way the society and local communities work together. While the society approves new-marker applications, individuals and groups pay for the markers themselves and choose the subject matter. Markers must denote places of historical interest significant enough to warrant commemoration on a local, state, or national level and must also touch on one of a wide array of categories including archaeology, architecture, culture, events, ethnic groups and associations, geology, legends, and natural history.

Today more than 540 historical markers dot the state, with new marker applications being accepted regularly. Wisconsin's historical markers offer a unique insight into the breadth of the state's history, showcasing how interests have changed over time and bringing the past to light with an immediacy that is not easy to replicate with other media. Travelers can see the place in Ashland County where Pierre Radisson and Medan Groseilliers built a crude stockade in 1659, or know when they stop at a wayside in Chippewa County that they are on the site of the old McCann farm where Old Abe, the War Eagle,



*Panther intaglio effigy mound historical marker in Fort Atkinson. (Wisconsin Historical Society)*



*The society's Historymobile brought displays and artifacts to communities around the state, beginning in the mid-1950s and continuing until the late 1970s. (WHi Image ID 98830)*

spent his early years. Markers engage the imagination in a specific time and place, helping us commemorate events while bringing us closer to the features that have helped shape our state.

One of the society's most distinctive and popular venues for connecting with local communities was the Historymobile. Called "one of the Society's most innovative and important educational services," the Historymobile consisted of a Ford pickup and a mobile home modified to host museum exhibits. In April 1954, the Historymobile set out from the state capital on its first tour of Wisconsin, carrying an exhibit titled "History through Our Historic Sites." For more than two decades the society sent a new traveling exhibit on the road for up to 230 days each year, parking at schools and village halls where residents would line up to walk through exhibits with titles such as "Wisconsin: Wilderness, Territory, Frontier State"; "Sawdust and Spangles: The Circus in Wisconsin"; or "Signers of the Declaration of Independence." The society printed study guides for the exhibits, one version for students and another for teachers. The curators who called the Historymobile home while on the road were also on hand to answer questions and interpret the exhibits. No admission was charged to view the traveling museum. A visit from the Historymobile was a special event for most communities. The local papers would announce its impending arrival, and schoolchildren as well as adults toured its exhibits with great enthusiasm. During its 23-year existence, the Historymobile traveled close to 80,000 miles and hosted an estimated three million people.

Today, the Wisconsin Historical Society provides a wide array of services for the almost 400 local societies with which it is affiliated. Local society members

regularly consult with staff about preserving or renovating historic buildings, establishing or improving museums, or preserving archaeological sites. Society representatives arrange regional conferences as well as an annual statewide conference where local society members can meet to share ideas and discuss common issues. In turn, local societies share in the mission and responsibility of preserving Wisconsin's heritage. Together, the society and its local affiliates have preserved a countless number of artifacts, photographs, maps, manuscripts, oral histories, and other documentation. Beyond the shared mission of preservation, they have worked together to educate the public about the past and have collaborated on special projects to enhance historical efforts in Wisconsin.

## Reaching Out to Schools

The Historymobile was only one of a number of society programs that appealed to young people over the years. The society's first attempts to be useful to schools began with Thwaites, who saw the society as an engine for popular education whose influence ought to extend to the borders of the state. He reached out to Wisconsin's schools, regularly giving talks to teachers in schools and at state conventions. In Green Bay, he sowed the idea of having a story hour at a local library, with stories ranging from Jamestown to the Civil War. Ever the newspaperman, Thwaites issued a bulletin of information and reported the idea to the *Library Journal*.

Like many of its outreach programs, the society's first school program began under the directorship of Clifford Lord. Intending "to increase greatly the tangible service we render to the people of the State," in 1947 the society launched an ambitious, multifaceted program for young people. In the spring of that year, the society helped establish prototype junior chapters in six schools to work out methods and experiment with teaching local history for young people. Membership in a junior club entitled members to *Badger History* magazine, a newsletter, a membership card, buttons, and a chapter charter. Dues ranged from 25 cents for groups of five or more to 75 cents for children not part of an organized chapter. Additionally, the society circulated copies of the *Wisconsin Teacher Newsletter* to teachers leading junior chapters. The newsletter reported on new chapters as well as program ideas developed in the various chapters and "conveyed a sense of participation in a state-wide program."

In October 1947, the first issue of the monthly *Badger History* was published. The magazine featured brief but informative articles on people and events in Wisconsin's past written by society staff and other experts, as well as articles written by schoolchildren. The magazine also printed suggestions detailing how children could be historians themselves by preserving objects, reading appropriate history books, or visiting historic places. The magazine had two distinct sections, one aimed at elementary grades and the other at the intermediate grades. Editors of *Badger History* aimed to connect with children by promising that "this new BADGER HISTORY magazine is yours ... Our magazine will be written FOR you and BY you. We shall print your stories, essays, poems, histories, pictures, hobbies, cartoons – all about your community, your county, your state."

Enthusiasm for Wisconsin history ran high with the statehood centennial only a year away. Yet little could society staff have known how popular the junior



program would be. In December 1947, Director Lord reported that the junior program had 102 chapters and close to 2,000 members. By the end of the program's first year there were over 14,000 members. Most importantly, the junior chapters were active in a number of projects. Several chapters wrote histories of their school districts or of notable farms in their areas, while others wrote about local churches or cemeteries. Chapters wrote often to the editors of *Badger History* to tell of achievements. A chapter in Waupaca reported that they were helping with a Danish Waupaca program, including compiling a cookbook and holding a literary benefit program. Another chapter reported, perhaps with a bit of hyperbole: "We also made a complete study of Wisconsin, learning everything we possibly could about it." At the conclusion of the first year of the program, Lord reported proudly: "The activities of our juniors would quite literally fill a book."

A decade later, Wisconsin had one of the most active junior historian programs in the nation. Membership had grown to include 20,687 students in 1,156 chapters. The society's director of the program noted with pride that in the first decade of its existence, *Badger History* had printed 1,100 articles written by schoolchildren. Growth in the students was also palpable, as the program director wrote: "The past is tied to the present in the child's mind as he finds, through interviewing and reading and writing, that history is real and alive." The society encouraged junior chapters by awarding prizes for group projects, essays, models of historic buildings, oratory and audiovisual projects, posters, murals, and scrapbooks. Up to six conventions were held at different locations in the state, drawing thousands of children to see skits and pageants, or to tour historic sites. By 1960, the society regularly fielded questions from several states seeking advice on how to start a similar program.

Participants reaped many benefits from the junior historian program. The conventions made "history palpable and alive – not merely dates and places in a book" for participating children. The program director noted the junior historians had the opportunity "to make new friends, find out what other chapters are doing, enter genial competition, gain poise in programs where they appear on the same platform with mayors, Chamber of Commerce presidents – even the governor." As they interviewed grandparents for special projects, children rescued stories that may have been forever lost; in addition, they sometimes found antiques and historic objects when visiting older people to talk about earlier times. Some young historians borrowed objects to create a museum in their schools, which developed an interest in history throughout the community.

Changes to Wisconsin's school system in the 1960s put an end to this promising program. As early as 1963, membership was declining, for which the program's directors commonly blamed school consolidation. Fewer teachers were inclined to invest time outside of the classroom to the project after consolidation, and larger schools provided more clubs to students, which also chipped away at membership. More problematic for the junior historian program was the institution of new guidelines for teaching social studies that most school districts adopted in the fall of 1965.

The new Wisconsin Social Studies Curriculum moved the teaching of Wisconsin history from middle grades to the fourth grade, which rendered obsolete much of the material available in *Badger History*. Responding to these new guidelines, *Badger History* was changed from a monthly magazine into social

studies resource units. The society published four new issues of *Badger History* each school year. Each issue covered a unique topic in Wisconsin history using language, pictures, and activities meant to appeal to fourth-grade students. Without the support of *Badger History*, where middle and high school students had formerly seen their work displayed, and where teachers could see the work of other chapters, enthusiasm for the program eroded further.

Some elements of the junior historian program held on for several years after the program's decline began. Membership cards were still available to junior historian chapters, but they were not advertised. *Badger History* in its new format continued publication until 1980, when it was halted altogether. Local historical societies were encouraged to create their own junior programs, with limited success. One school district in Walworth County continued to have an annual essay contest, a remnant of the junior history program, but this too had ended by the late 1980s.

The activities of the junior historian clubs foreshadowed a similar program begun in the 1990s: National History Day. National History Day has become one of the most fruitful venues through which the society engages younger audiences. Through National History Day in Wisconsin, schoolchildren from grades 6 to 12 are given a topic to research by examining historical issues, ideas, people, and events. Students' research is then presented in various ways, including exhibits, performances, documentaries, Web sites, and research papers. Presentations are judged at regional events, with winners advancing to the statewide competition in Madison. From these, a select number of participants are chosen to represent Wisconsin at a national competition, held each summer at the University of Maryland. In 2001, the program's first year in Wisconsin, almost 2,000 students participated in the program with the help of 41 teachers. During the 2011-2012



*It's obvious which state these National History Day participants are representing! (Wisconsin Historical Society)*

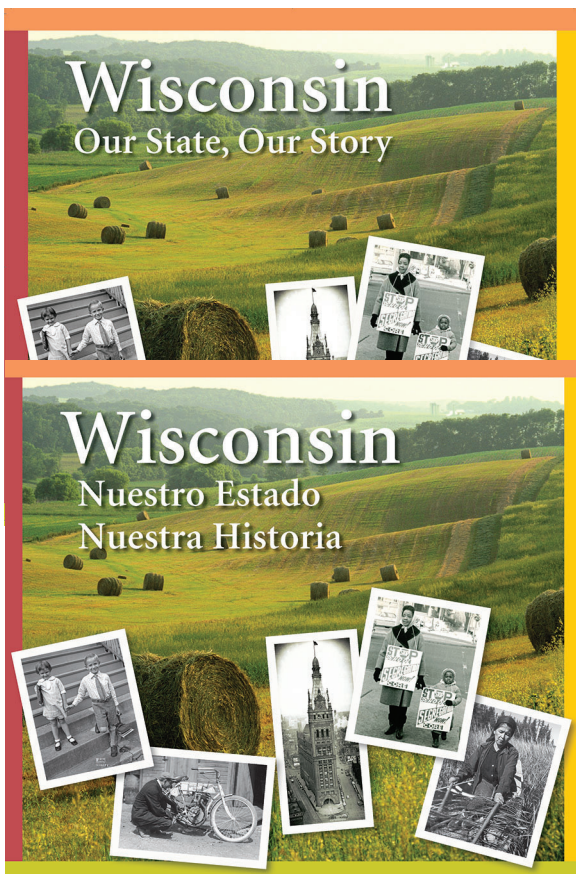
academic year, participation had grown to 9,000 students and 229 teachers at 103 different schools.

Participation in National History Day activities benefits students in many ways. They develop skills in research, writing, and critical thinking and have the chance to express themselves creatively. Student interest in history increases considerably as scholars do their own research, form their own opinions, and present their

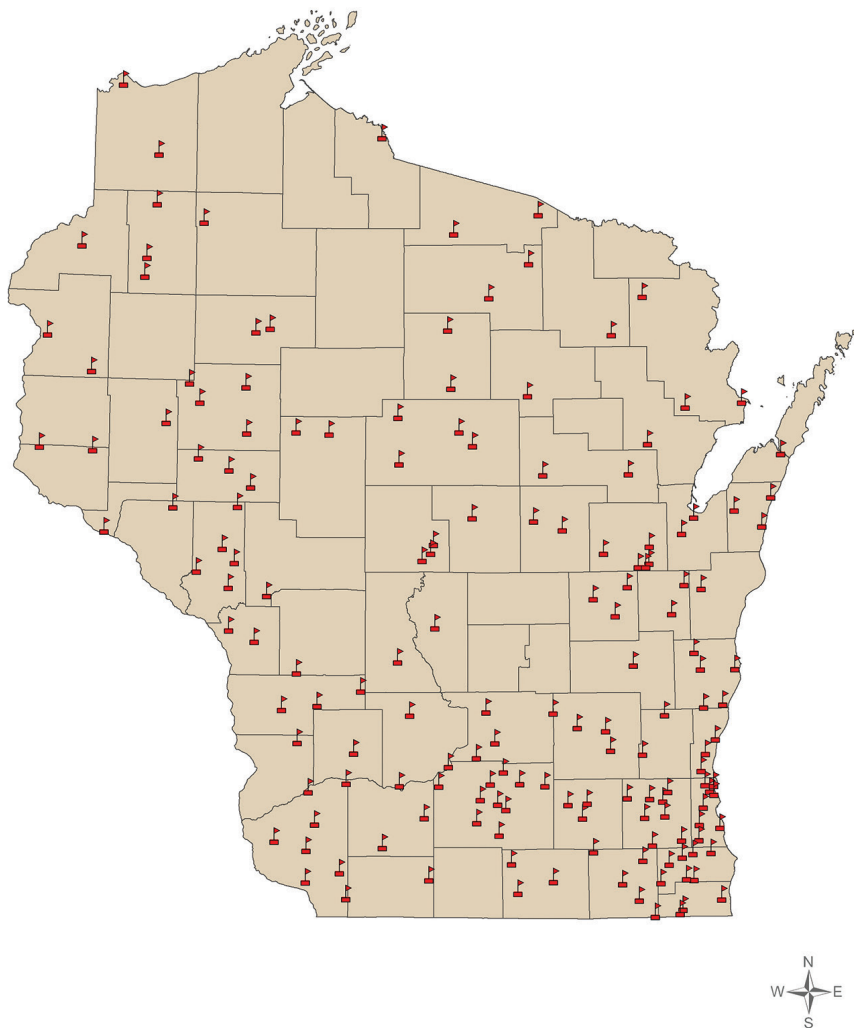
findings in the manner they choose. Moreover, students become aware of how relevant the past is to their modern lives. In the words of one participant: "History will never be just words on a page now that I have had the opportunity to do my own research through National History Day. It is a story that continues through everyone's lives and paves the way for the future."

In 1991, as the result of advocacy by local historical societies, the legislature provided authorization and funding for an expanded school services program to assist schools in the teaching of state history. In addition to holding workshops and training programs for teachers, the society began to develop new curricular material related to state history. In the 1990s, the Wisconsin Historical Society Press renewed its publishing

efforts to provide teachers and students with quality books for young readers. Working with the school services staff, the press began the New Badger History series. Books in this series covered a wide array of topics in Wisconsin history including immigration, archaeology, and land use, in a format and vocabulary appropriate for elementary to middle school-aged students. The press also produced teacher guides, which made the books more useful and accessible for Wisconsin



*Wisconsin, Our State, Our Story, the fourth-grade history textbook, was produced by the Wisconsin Historical Society Press in both English and Spanish versions. (Wisconsin Historical Society)*



Map showing the school districts in Wisconsin that have adopted the textbook *Wisconsin: Our State, Our Story*, produced by the Wisconsin Historical Society Press, for use in fourth-grade classrooms. (Wisconsin Historical Society map)

classrooms. These books were the forerunners of two additional projects that would see light in the early part of the 21st century: the Badger Biographies series and *Wisconsin: Our State, Our Story*, the press's fourth-grade textbook.

The Badger Biographies series started in 2005 with the publication of *Mai Ya's Long Journey*. Recounting the story of a young Hmong woman whose parents fled Laos during the Vietnam War, the narrative follows Mai Ya from her childhood in Thailand's Ban Vinai refugee camp to her new home in Wisconsin. The Badger Biographies series now numbers more than 20 titles and deals with a diverse set of lives, from famous Wisconsinites Curly Lambeau and Les Paul to

lesser-known citizens such as Casper Jaggi, a Swiss cheese maker from Monroe, and Dr. Kate Pelham Newcomb, who worked as a doctor in Minocqua in the early to mid-20th century. Books in this series have been used in children's classrooms as well as in a variety of literacy programs around the state for adults learning to read English.

*Wisconsin: Our State, Our Story* is a full-color, comprehensive textbook presenting Wisconsin history to fourth graders utilizing the "Thinking Like a Historian" method, an inquiry-based method showing students how to investigate the past by asking questions. Artifacts, documents, and vintage photographs illustrate the textbook, giving students a window into the past and the people, buildings, and objects that comprised Wisconsin in former times, while the lessons align with cross-curricular Wisconsin Model Academic Standards. To reach the state's growing Latino population, the press partnered with Milwaukee Public Schools to create a Spanish-language edition of the textbook, *Wisconsin: Nuestro Estado, Nuestra Historia*.

Keeping up with new technologies in the classroom, the society is now creating interactive whiteboard activities for use with *Wisconsin: Our State, Our Story*. These lessons are designed to conform to Wisconsin education standards and provide a wealth of instruction opportunities. Students who may struggle with plain text will find pictures, video, audio, and more to help guide them toward a better understanding of the content. Built-in vocabulary and assessment tools give educators a fun and engaging way to tackle difficult concepts as well as provide a snapshot of how well the students understand the material.

## Innovations

Just as social movements and political upheaval gave impetus to revitalization of the Wisconsin Historical Society in the mid-20th century, technological advances profoundly affected the way the society preserved and shared history with Wisconsinites. The society built upon Americans' love of the automobile by providing destinations for vacationing families as it began to acquire historic sites in the 1950s. Soon, however, it became clear that not every historic structure, place, or neighborhood could be owned and operated by one organization. The historic preservation movement of the second half of the twentieth century ultimately enabled the society to share tools and incentives with individuals and interested groups to preserve their properties. What's more, as the state historic preservation office, the society has stimulated hundreds of millions of dollars in economic growth by providing property owners with block grants and tax incentives to revitalize historic places.

As technology gave birth to new broadcast media through the 20th century, the society eagerly embraced these new forms to share history. The society first experimented with radio broadcasting in the 1930s and started producing television programs and films in the 1950s. More recently, a revitalized partnership with Wisconsin Public Television has brought a steady stream of programming across the state, while the internet, social media, and new classroom tools have enabled the society to be a daily presence in the lives of Wisconsin citizens via the society Web site, multiple Facebook pages and Twitter feeds, blogs, and interactive lessons prepared to supplement the society's classroom materials.

## Wisconsin Historic Sites

Automobiles helped grow Wisconsin's economy in the 20th century, creating jobs in manufacturing and in tourism. State and local governments improved roads, while resort owners and small-town boosters sent out promotional materials to attract travelers by showing the many pastimes and recreations available just off Wisconsin's highways. At the same time, a new trend in museum design began to take root: the historic site. Originally conceived in the 19th century as a new way to display artifacts in a historically rich environment, historic sites in the early 20th century evolved into places where people could experience "a feeling of historical mood, a haunting impression of having passed this way before." Just after World War II, the society began acquiring historic sites, giving automobile travelers a historic destination for day trips and places to visit while on vacation.



*The Dousman family and friends on the east porch of Villa Louis, ca. 1898. (WHI Image ID 60079)*

Since the 1950s, Wisconsin's Historic Sites have proven an innovative way to kindle public interest in history by letting people see the homes, accoutrements, clothing, and foodways of earlier generations. The Wisconsin Historical Society operates 11 historic sites: Circus World Museum, First Capitol, H.H. Bennett Studio, Madeline Island Museum, Old World Wisconsin, Pendarvis, Reed School, Stonefield, Villa Louis, Wade House, and Black Point Estate. The society's Historic Sites are much more than just places on a map where significant structures are preserved; they are gateways into other times and places where history is experienced and the senses are engaged, bringing visitors closer to the men and women who helped shape Wisconsin's development.

### *Early Days in Wisconsin*

Some of the first Europeans to set foot in Wisconsin were fur trappers and traders. The early 1600s saw a variety of French explorers skirt lands that would one day become part of Wisconsin. Étienne Brûlé is thought to have traveled along Lake Superior's south shore in 1622, while Jean Nicolet is known to have landed near the future site of Green Bay in 1634 while searching for a water route to the Pacific Ocean. Instead of a route to the spice-rich East, Nicolet found furs that could be made into the hats then fashionable in Europe. For the next two hundred years, the fur trade reigned in Wisconsin. Indian trappers and hunters provided furs to Europeans, who paid for them with metal knives, guns, flints, awls, and ammunition. Riches were plentiful for the traders who kept a steady stream of furs going east.

To protect this trading system, forts were built throughout the Great Lakes region. One of these was Fort Crawford, built in 1816 by the young United States government, on the Mississippi River's St. Feriolo Island on the site of a battle occurring two years earlier between the British and the Americans in the War of 1812. Situated in a channel of the river in Prairie du Chien, the island was strategically important but ultimately a poor choice for a fort. The island flooded often, which the soldiers garrisoning Fort Crawford found out in 1821, 1822, and 1826. The 1826 flood caused so much damage that Fort Crawford was abandoned and the site sold to Hercules Dousman, a representative for John Jacob Astor's American Fur Company. Dousman's rapport with local Indian tribes, as well as his keen business sense, made him indispensable to Fort Crawford and, ultimately, very wealthy as he later branched out into the lumber trade and land



*Interior view of the front hallway of Villa Louis. (WHI Image ID 42006)*

speculation. Dousman bought the site knowing that a mound on St. Feriolo Island was safe from the floodwaters and would be a beautiful location for an estate he planned to build.

Standing in this spot today is Villa Louis, the Wisconsin Historical Society's first historic site acquisition. In the 1840s Dousman had built an elegant, stylish home on the estate. After his death the property passed to his son Louis, who in 1870 tore down his father's original home, recycled some of the materials, and constructed a new residence in the Italian Villa style. In 1885, he added stables, barns, a racetrack, and other buildings to the estate and remodeled the interior of the villa to embody the principles of the British Arts and Crafts movement. The Arts and Crafts movement, which began as a reaction against industrialization

and machine-produced goods, stressed simpler ornamentation, quality materials, and traditional construction techniques in which craftsmen took pride in their work and creative expression rather than laboring in the difficult factory conditions of the day. Louis Dousman died shortly after the 1885 remodel at only 37 years old. The Villa stood little used or empty for several years when Louis's widow remarried and moved east.

Descendants of Hercules and Louis Dousman renovated the Villa in the early 1930s and offered the property to the Wisconsin Historical Society. The society at the time was struggling to weather the difficult Depression years, so the family arranged to have the city of Prairie du Chien operate the villa as a museum. As the society began its post-Depression rebirth, the family once again offered it Villa Louis, and on January 1, 1950, the society finally acquired the title to the property. Two years later, in April 1952, Villa Louis opened to the public. Subsequent donations and purchases of Dousman family papers, photographs, furnishings, and accessories original to the house help preserve the story of the Villa and even aided a major restoration of the estate that began in 1994.

Villa Louis today brings to life unique chapters in Wisconsin's past, from the days of the fur trade to the grandeur of the Victorian Era. Visitors to Villa Louis can experience such diverse activities as watching a reenactment of the Battle of Prairie du Chien and helping prepare breakfast in a Victorian kitchen. During the annual Carriage Classic, carriage drivers in period clothes test their skill at navigating obstacles or simply drive out for a country picnic – a favorite leisure activity in Victorian-era Wisconsin – bringing St. Feriole Island to life with beautiful horses and ornate carriages.



*The Villa Louis Carriage Classic is a pleasure-driving show held on the beautiful grounds of the historic site in Prairie du Chien. This show hosts one of the finest carriage-driving competitions in the Midwest. (Wisconsin Historical Society)*



At the other end of the state, Madeline Island was also touched by the fur trade. Situated in Lake Superior at the northern tip of Wisconsin, Madeline Island is the largest of the Apostle Islands and one of the first places in Wisconsin that missionaries and trappers saw as they traversed the Great Lakes in search of furs and souls. Island history includes a number of legendary names, such as French explorers Pierre-Esprit Radisson and Medard Chouart des Groseilliers, Jesuit missionary Father Claude Jean Allouez, and the fur trader Astor, who became America's first millionaire with the help of Wisconsin furs. By the turn of the 20th century, the fur trade having died decades earlier, Madeline Island emerged as a destination for tourists. One of the many who rode the rails from St. Paul was Leo Capser, who first visited the island in 1903.



*An interpreter at the Madeline Island Museum shows a pelt to a visiting family. (Wisconsin Historical Society)*

Capser was so taken by the beauty of the island he returned often after that first visit.

He and wife Bella eventually became summer residents of Madeline Island and dedicated themselves to preserving its unique story. In 1955, the Capsers bought four historic structures on the island: a small 1835 warehouse from the historic American Fur Company complex, the former La Pointe town jail, a Scandinavian-style barn, and the Old Sailors' Home, originally built as a memorial to a drowned sailor. The Capsers moved the buildings and joined them to form the Madeline Island Museum. With the help of local historians the Capsers built an impressive collection of artifacts documenting the history of the island.

The society acquired and assumed operations of the Madeline Island Museum in 1968. In 1991, the museum expanded by adding the Capser Center and, in 2005, the Walkway Gallery, connecting the new facility with the original museum. The Capser Center houses changing exhibits on island and regional history, an auditorium, a museum store, space for collections storage and exhibit fabrication, and staff offices. Thanks to the Capsers and their love of Madeline Island, visitors today can still see a wealth of objects from every chapter of the island's long story, from Native and voyageur artifacts from the fur trade era, to objects and photographs that detail the daily lives of the 19th- and early 20th-century settlers. Also on display are tools and equipment used in a number of industries once performed on the island, including logging, boat building, commercial fishing, and barrel making.

Even before Wisconsin achieved statehood, miners established a foothold in what would become the southwest corner of the state. In the 1830s, miners from Cornwall, in southwestern England, began settling in Mineral Point and through-

out the Upper Mississippi lead region. Before they built the small limestone homes similar to those they had left in England, many miners burrowed into hillsides like badgers, giving Wisconsin its renowned mascot. Mineral Point enjoyed a boom as a thriving commercial center that continued into early Wisconsin statehood when the lead deposits were finally exhausted. Many miners left the state in 1849 when word reached that gold had been found in California.

Almost a hundred years later, Robert Neal and Edgar Hellum found Mineral Point's history and heritage endangered. In 1935, Neal and Hellum decided to rehabilitate several original structures from Mineral Point's colorful past. They named their first restoration Pendarvis, after an estate in Cornwall. In the Cornish tradition, Neal and Hellum gave names to the other houses they acquired and renovated: Polperro and Trelawny. They also planted gardens around Pendarvis



*Pendarvis House, one of several houses restored by Robert Neal and Edgar Hellum. (Wisconsin Historical Society)*

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similar to those Cornish settlers planted when they first came to Mineral Point. Needing money to live and continue their renovations, Neal and Hellum opened the Pendarvis House Restaurant, specializing in authentic Cornish fare such as cakes, preserves, and pasties. The *Saturday Evening Post* once named Pendarvis House one of the seven finest restaurants in the United States.

In 1970, Neal and Hellum retired, and the Wisconsin Historical Society acquired Pendarvis, which has grown into a collection of 10 structures. The next year, the society began operating Pendarvis as a unique historic site telling the story of Cornish settlement and the heyday of lead mining in Wisconsin. The society also acquired 40 acres of land across Shake Rag Street containing the Merry Christmas Mine. In addition to preserving tangible evidence of Wisconsin's mining days, Pendarvis keeps Cornish heritage alive through Cornish language classes as well as special events featuring Cornish dishes prepared in the same way they were in Neal and Hellum's restaurant for 35 years. Visitors can

also enjoy a 43-acre prairie that features native flowers and grasses similar to those that welcomed Cornish settlers to Wisconsin so long ago.

At the same time the Cornish miners were settling the lead-mining region, Wisconsin was inching closer to statehood. During the fall and winter of 1836, near the picturesque hamlet of Belmont, Wisconsin's first territorial legislature established a government. One of the acts of this legislature was to make Madison the capital, after which many people and businesses left Belmont and the surrounding area. Two buildings used during the 1836 Territorial Legislative session – the Council House where the legislators met and a lodging house for the legislators – survived the ensuing decades, both eventually being used as residences. Initial work preserving and restoring the First Capitol buildings began in the early 1900s, led by the Wisconsin Federation of Women's Clubs. First Capitol State Park was originally established in 1924, and operated by the state of Wisconsin. More than 70 years later, the society acquired the buildings. After some restoration work, First Capitol opened as a historic site in 1996. Here visitors can see the buildings where lawmakers convened for just over a month in the late fall of 1836 and put 42 laws on the books. At First Capitol, in addition to making Madison the permanent capital, the legislature established Wisconsin's judicial system and called for building roads and a railroad.

### *Daily Life in Wisconsin's Past*

Wisconsin's path from its earliest days to the present has been shaped and influenced by innumerable acts of daily life undertaken by Wisconsinites of all backgrounds. Our ways of working and building a life are always changing. We continually employ new tools and methods as we develop the means of using them. By collecting and maintaining places, implements, and machines from days gone by, several of Wisconsin's historic sites give us a vibrant window through which we can experience the lives of those who helped shape our state.

In a state that's now crisscrossed by numerous interstate and county highways, with rail lines and airports serving many of its larger cities, it can be difficult to imagine how complicated it was to travel here in the mid-1800s. Roads were generally tortuous and in poor repair, making travel a lengthy, often grueling affair. Inns along the way provided respite to weary travelers. Some, like Wade House in Greenbush, became themselves a destination for locals who gathered to talk about the affairs of the day, share a meal or a drink, and maybe sing a song or two.

Wade House, a three-story Greek Revival stagecoach inn that became the society's second historic site in 1953, was built by Sylvanus Wade in 1850 near the Mullet River, which powered the sawmill where boards for the inn were cut. Wade House became a regular meeting place and was the scene of countless cotillions and caucuses. With the construction of a new plank road between Sheboygan and Fond du Lac, the bustling village of Greenbush seemed to have a bright future. However, little more than a decade later the railroad bypassed Greenbush, and the inevitable decline of the once-ascendant town began. Wade House remained in business until 1910. It then served as a private residence until 1941, when the owners sold it to a family friend who planned to restore the house.

When money ran out in 1950, the owners sold Wade House to Marie Kohler, daughter of the Kohler Company founder, and her sister-in-law Ruth De Young



*Wade House, built in Greenbush in 1850. (Wisconsin Historical Society)*

Kohler. The Kohlers began a three-year-long, top-to-bottom restoration of the old inn. Marie died before the restoration began, yet it was ably directed by Ruth, who sought to deed the property to the society upon completion of the project. Sadly, Ruth died three months shy of the grand opening, at age 46. On June 6, 1953, with poet Carl Sandburg on hand, Wade House opened to the public. In the ensuing years the society made additions to the grounds of Wade House. The Wesley Jung Carriage House Museum opened to the public in 1968, displaying the handiwork of several carriage makers. In 1999, builders and craftsmen working under the supervision of the Wisconsin Historical Society constructed a replica of the Herrling Sawmill, which stood near the inn in the late 19th century. The mill can be operated using water power or with the help of a motor when water is low.

Wade House preserves and interprets a truly unique chapter from Wisconsin's past as a place where travelers found rest and a good meal. Wade House also keeps alive Wisconsin's Civil War heritage with an annual Civil War weekend, where attendees can stroll through a Union army campsite, buy products at a number of merchants' tents, and see a reenactment of a Civil War battle. A new visitor center and the Wesley Jung Carriage Museum greet visitors and welcome them into a vibrant slice of 19th-century Wisconsin life.

The society's third historic site, Stonefield, located north of Cassville in southwestern Wisconsin, preserves and interprets Wisconsin's rich agricultural heritage. The grounds of Stonefield once housed the mansion of Nelson Dewey, Wisconsin's first governor, who moved to the state in 1836 to practice law. Dewey also worked to build the village of Cassville on the Mississippi River, believing it would be a major city one day. After completing his two terms as governor, Dewey again turned his attention, and his not inconsiderable fortune, toward Cass-

ville's development, including construction of a mansion on 2,000 acres of land near the Mississippi River. Dewey lost most of his fortune in the panic of 1873. The same year, his beloved mansion burned to the ground. A few years later the property was sold and a modest summer residence was built on the foundations of Dewey's incinerated mansion. The state acquired Stonefield in 1936 and managed it as Nelson Dewey State Park.

As early as 1932, the society and the University of Wisconsin's School of Agriculture began working on a plan to develop a farm museum in the state. Society director Joseph Schafer was keenly interested in the idea, and several conferences were convened throughout the state in the ensuing years to flesh out plans for the museum. The Great Depression effectively stifled any concrete progress beyond the planning stages for nearly two decades, but the idea was never extinguished completely. The society and the School of Agriculture proposed several sites in and around Madison for the museum, and each organization began collecting tools and implements. In 1953, the Wisconsin Legislature designated Stonefield as the state farm and craft museum, to be administered by the society.

Although Dewey had not been known for his agricultural expertise, the site of his estate offered ample space for a farm museum on a historically significant property. With state funding and the cooperation of local government, the society began to construct Stonefield Village. By 1961, Stonefield Village had grown to 30 buildings, comprising a re-created village with shops and offices emblematic of 19th-century Wisconsin rural life. Today, the State Agricultural Museum at Stonefield displays rare farm tools, implements, tractors, and wagons, while a re-created farmstead based on a Department of Agriculture plan from 1901 shows visitors how farmers led their daily lives before 20th century innovations such as electrification and television reshaped home life. The life of Nelson Dewey is remembered in the brick home built in 1879 on the foundation of his mansion. Costumed interpreters lead visitors through the residence's two floors, where



*A young visitor to Stonefield gets an up-close look at a blacksmith's work.  
(Wisconsin Historical Society)*

items that once belonged to Dewey give a vivid glimpse into the life of the 19th-century upper class.

Agriculture and daily life also play a big part in Eagle, where the society's largest historic site is located. In the same way that a historian uses a variety of source material to craft a narrative of the past, from diaries and letters to newspapers and governmental reports, Old World Wisconsin draws on a wide range of buildings, backgrounds, and experiences to tell the story of several ethnic groups that played prominent roles in Wisconsin's development.



*Above: The hardworking oxen at Old World Wisconsin in Eagle are a perennial favorite with visitors. (Wisconsin Historical Society)*

*Below: The Kruza house at Old World Wisconsin is an example of a Polish farmstead from the late 19th century. It is an example of stove-wood construction, a European building technique wherein logs are cut into short, uniform sections and stacked to resemble piles of firewood. (Wisconsin Historical Society)*



A decade of planning and collecting resulted in the 576-acre outdoor museum, which opened its doors in the bicentennial year of 1976. The society identified and collected more than 60 historic buildings from around the state. Each was carefully dismantled, moved to Eagle, and reconstructed. These farm buildings demonstrate the unique ways Norwegian, Polish, Danish, German, and Finnish immigrants built their lives in Wisconsin. The compelling story of a group of African Americans who settled in Wisconsin before the Civil War is told through the reconstruction of the Pleasant Ridge Chapel and the United Brethren Church.

Visitors to Old World Wisconsin are brought into a world where women washed clothes by hand and prepared food with fire rather than electricity, and farmers worked their fields with the help of horses and oxen rather than tractors. Various historic animal breeds common to 19th-century Wisconsin call Old World home, including horses, pigs, and the always popular oxen. Crossroads Village re-creates a typical Wisconsin town of the 1870s, complete with stores, shoemakers, blacksmiths, and services at St. Peter's Church. A variety of domestic arts from bygone eras are preserved and shared, from the wheelwright's craft to spinning wool into yarn. Kids can see how their forebears were educated in a one-room schoolhouse, where one teacher taught all grades.

Farther north, in Neillsville, Reed School also preserves Wisconsin's educational heritage. The society's 10th historic site opened to the public in 2007 after a significant renovation of the nearly century-old, one-room schoolhouse. Reed School was built in 1915, at a time when most Wisconsin children were educated in a similar one-room environment. First through eighth graders continued to get their education at Reed School until 1951, when schools in Wisconsin were rapidly consolidating. Gordon Smith, a former student at Reed School, bought the building and with the help of the Wisconsin Historical Society restored it to its 1939 appearance, the year Smith attended Reed School. The school is furnished with restored original and historically appropriate desks

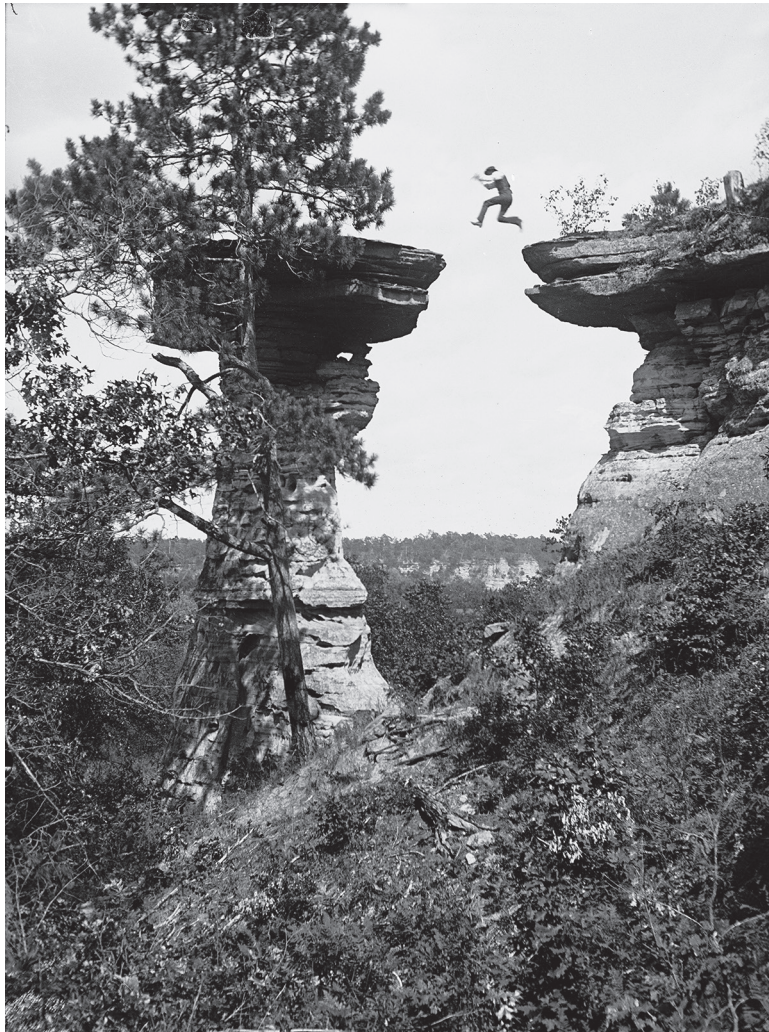


*Reed School, near Neillsville, interprets a 1939 one-room schoolhouse. (Wisconsin Historical Society)*

and chairs, while on the grounds visitors can see a restored baseball field where schoolchildren spent countless recesses at play.

### *Leisure in Wisconsin*

Wisconsinites have long harbored a healthy respect not only for work, but for leisure time and recreation as well. Even in the 19th century, shorter workweeks and easier travel via trains and automobiles inspired a new middle class to find ways to stay entertained and escape everyday life. Before television, radio, and movies, people sought out live shows at the theater. Traveling circuses were also



*Noted Wisconsin photographer H.H. Bennett took this famous photograph of his son Ashley leaping the chasm at Stand Rock, Wisconsin Dells, in 1886. H.H. Bennett's studio is now operated as an historic site. (WHi Image ID 2101)*



popular. Numerous places around Wisconsin – from Bayfield to Lake Geneva – have long been destinations of choice for people wanting to escape the cities. Yet one of the first places that comes to mind when we think of recreation in Wisconsin is the Wisconsin Dells, a place made famous by photographer H.H. Bennett.

In 1874, a writer voyaging down the Wisconsin River near Kilbourn City wrote of the excessive natural beauty he saw, exclaiming, “We move on from one spot which we think the most lovely to another that excels, and on through inexhaustible beauties, in a state of unalloyed rapture at the exquisite scenery.” This same scenery had already captivated photographer Henry Hamilton Bennett, who in 1865 purchased a tintype portrait studio in Kilbourn City. Bennett began selling stereoscopic views of the rugged riverbanks and stony outcroppings so characteristic of the Dells of the Wisconsin River. Bennett’s work appeared in guidebooks and other promotional literature that drew travelers to the area. In 1875, Bennett built a new photography studio in Kilbourn City, where he developed his distinctive photographs and sold them to tourists. Bennett was on the cutting edge of photographic technology of the time, and even conceived several inventions that made his trade easier, including a revolving solar printing house and a portable darkroom. Bennett also created a stop-action shutter that enabled him to photograph moving objects clearly.

Bennett died in 1908 and Kilbourn City was renamed the Wisconsin Dells in the 1930s, but the lasting beauty of Bennett’s work is preserved and celebrated in the H.H. Bennett Studio, which became a historic site in 2000. An earlier restoration had returned Bennett’s studio to its 1908 appearance. The studio now houses some of Bennett’s own handmade cameras, glass plate negatives, and many



*One of the beautifully restored circus wagons at Circus World. (Wisconsin Historical Society)*

original Bennett photographs. New technologies at the Bennett Studio bring his work to life, as visitors view stereoscopic images in 3D on high-resolution monitors through liquid crystal spectacles. Visitors can also see Bennett's photographs documenting the Ho-Chunk Indians, who made their lives around the Wisconsin River and nearby waterways.

At the same time as Bennett was working in his photographic studio, five brothers named Albert, Otto, Alfred, Charles, and John Ringling worked to perfect their circus act. After seeing their first circus as boys in the 1870s in McGregor, Iowa, the Ringlings were inspired to start their own act. In 1882, the Ringling brothers performed their first show in Mazomanie, Wisconsin, and two years later founded the Ringling Brothers Circus in Baraboo. Within a few years the brothers were touring throughout the state and Midwest and had welcomed their two other brothers, Henry and Gus, into the family business. By the turn of the century, the Ringling Brothers Circus had more than 1,000 employees, 335 horses, 26 elephants, and 16 camels, all of which needed 92 railcars to transport. Though they traveled around the country, Baraboo was the site of the circus's winter quarters, which the locals referred to as "Ringlingville."

Circus World Museum joined the society's growing family of historic sites in 1959 and is the nation's premier institution preserving circus history. While the society owns the land, buildings, equipment, and collections at Circus World Museum (with the exception of modern rolling equipment like trucks and trailers), the site is managed by Circus World Museum Foundation Inc., a nonprofit organization, via a lease-management agreement. Among the 30 buildings on the 64-acre site are several original buildings the Ringlings used between 1897 and 1916, as well as the remnants of a footbridge that once carried employees over the



*Circus World houses more than 8,650 colorful circus posters. (Circus World Museum)*

Baraboo River. Circus World houses more than two-thirds of the original circus wagons still in existence today, as well as an unparalleled archival collection documenting circus history, including circus ads and posters, journals, business records, paintings, handbills and heralds, costumes, rare photographs, films, and much more. Circus World Museum shares circus performances, magic shows, and animal performances, keeping alive crowd-pleasing Gilded Age entertainments. A popular feature for young visitors is the chance to create and perform in their own big-top production in the Kid's World Interactive Circus.

On October 8, 1871, there seemed to be what one Wisconsin lumberman described as “fire in the air.” As fire devastated millions of acres around Peshtigo, the Great Chicago Fire raged to the south, while lesser-known blazes erupted in



*Black Point Estate Historic House and Gardens, the society's newest historic site. (Wisconsin Historical Society)*

Michigan, all of which caused incalculable loss of property and unfathomable loss of life. Needing somewhere to go while their houses and businesses were rebuilt, many wealthy Chicagoans sought refuge in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. Some of these families chose to stay year-round, while others maintained summer homes on the picturesque lake. By the 1880s, Lake Geneva was a favorite retreat for the well-to-do who needed some time away from the city.

Chicago brewer Conrad Seipp was one of the lucky ones. The Great Chicago Fire spared his business, and for a time he was Chicago's largest brewer. His success allowed him the means to build a family retreat in Lake Geneva. In 1888, work was completed on Black Point, a Queen Anne-style “cottage” with 20 rooms, including 13 bedrooms but only one bathroom. Black Point is surrounded



*Vintage base ball at Old World Wisconsin is the re-creation of the styles, speech, rules, and terminology of the 1860s game. It's not only a competitive game, but also a reenactment of baseball life, similar to an American Civil War reenactment. It is a fast-growing sport in the United States, with 225 clubs in 32 states. (Wisconsin Historical Society)*

connect Wisconsinites to the past. The immediate future holds bright promise. In June 2013, 60 years after Wade House first opened, a new Learning and Visitor Center opened, offering a multitiered orientation to the historic site, including a large room for public and private functions, classroom and workshop space, a museum store, and a café. Additionally, this new facility is the home of the Wesley W. Jung Carriage Museum, which houses the state's largest collection of antique carriages and working wagons. A new interpreter-training center at Old World Wisconsin was recently completed, just the first step in a lengthy project to update and improve this site.

The sites offer visitors the unique opportunity to engage so many senses: the sight of historic barns, houses, and gardens, or beasts of burden toiling in fields in much the same way that oxen and draft horses broke the fields in pioneer Wisconsin; the tastes of food prepared using authentic ethnic recipes, traditional ingredients and tools and served in an historic setting; the sounds of a game of vin-

by eight acres, much of which is adorned with lush gardens, and has 620 feet of shoreline on Geneva Lake. Four generations of the Seipp family enjoyed the site before a descendant donated it to the state in 2005. While each generation added its own touch to Black Point, they kept all the older household items. As a result the cottage's furnishings vary in style from Victorian to the modern era. After a \$1.9 million restoration, Black Point opened to the public in 2007, being run by a board of volunteers. On January 1, 2013, the Wisconsin Historical Society assumed management of the site.

Each year the sites and museum draw in more than half a million visitors, and they will continue to be an important resource to

tage baseball, or exploding musketry, or music performed on an antique piano. Schoolchildren often rave about their visit to their parents, teachers, and friends long after experiencing one of the sites. One young visitor to Old World Wisconsin named Maddie was so moved by her experience that she wrote to Old World's director to thank him for the "amazing tour," and continued that her "favorite part (though I had so many) was probably getting to act like a child from the 1800s farm life." Maddie closed her letter by writing, "I hope to return again."

## Historic Preservation

The society's early history focused on owning historic resources – books, manuscripts, and artifacts. In the 20th century, the society added historic sites to its collections. The last third of the 20th century added a new dimension to the society's efforts. Throughout the nation, recognition grew that it was neither feasible nor prudent for every historic building to be owned by a government or historical agency. Instead, the society and its state and federal partners began to develop new tools and incentives that enabled others to better preserve our heritage.

With the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act in 1966, the society became the federally designated State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), an active role that continues today. The society nominates places of architectural, historic, and archaeological significance to the National Register of Historic Places in partnership with the National Park Service and manages the State Register of Historic Places. The society also reviews federal, state, and local projects for their impact on historic and archaeological properties, administers state and federal tax credit programs, and administers the state's burial sites protection program.



*The key to the renovation of the Stoughton Opera House was a spirit of civic volunteerism, a phased restoration plan, and persistent fund-raising efforts. The refurbished theater was rededicated on February 22, 2001 – the 100th anniversary of its original opening. (Wisconsin Historical Society)*

As in other states around the nation, Wisconsin's first steps in historic preservation were undertaken by private groups and individuals. In 1903, people concerned about preserving Native American artifacts and sites in Wisconsin founded the Wisconsin Archaeological Society. The group primarily focused on Indian

mounds and by the 1920s had helped save 500 mounds throughout the state. In 1908, the Wisconsin Federation of Women's Clubs partnered with the Wisconsin Archaeological Society and the Sauk County Historical Society to purchase Man Mound near Baraboo, the only surviving human effigy mound in the United States. Other projects typically involved the purchase of historically significant buildings, such as the Old Agency House and Fort Winnebago in Portage, the Little White Schoolhouse in Ripon, St. Augustine Church in New Diggings, and historic Hazelwood in Green Bay, the home of the principal author of Wisconsin's constitution. A significant legislative step toward preservation in Wisconsin came when Wisconsin enacted the Integrated



*Above: This velvet evening gown worn by Wisconsin First Lady Charlotte McAleer Kohler to President Eisenhower's 1953 Inauguration Ball is housed in the society museum collections. (WHS Museum #1960.211.2)*

*Top left: Dorothy Gregory Koltes prom dress, ca. 1927. (WHS Museum #1969.193.2)*

*Bottom left: Dorothy Turner Main dress, ca. 1926. (WHS Museum #1979.262.1)*



Park Act, Chapter 549, Laws of 1947, which made it possible for the state to purchase, restore, and develop properties of historic and archaeological significance. The first property purchased under this legislation in 1952 was a portion of the 1,000-year-old site of Aztalan.

In the post-World War II era, urban renewal and interstate highway projects threatened historically significant places and inspired preservationists to take action. A 1965 report titled "With Heritage So Rich" identified a number of preservation initiatives, including the identification and registration of historically significant properties and partnership on preservation issues at all levels of government. One year later, Congress enacted the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). The act established state historic preservation offices in every state. It also established the National Register of Historic Places, which defined criteria for determining the importance of a property. These standards have helped make the process of historic preservation more efficient, effective, and accessible.

The society's SHPO documents historic properties, reviews projects for effects on historically and culturally significant properties, and aids in preservation capabilities through workshops, grants, and training seminars. To date, Wisconsin has approximately 2,300 listings on the National Register of Historic Places. These listings encompass roughly 25,000 buildings. In addition, the state is home to 42 National Historic Landmarks, highlighting the important national historical and architectural contributions of the state, such as Taliesin and the Ringling Brothers winter quarters in Baraboo. These listings recognize properties as varied as rural one-room schools and major university buildings, the homes of workers, and the northwoods compounds of industrialists.

In addition to documenting the historic significance of places, listing provides opportunities such as tax credits and grants to help preserve the property. The society has worked with Wisconsin businesses and homeowners to ensure that they qualify for federal and state tax credits. As a result, nearly \$1 billion has been invested in Wisconsin since the mid-1970s for work to preserve the state's built heritage. Since 1976, the society certified nearly 500 projects that helped preserve income-producing buildings, which in turn brought \$150 million in federal tax credits back to the state. A similar program for homeowners has, since 1992, resulted in 2,166 projects with total investment in excess of \$100 million. Through the program, abandoned warehouses and schools have been turned into desirable apartments, and empty downtown storefronts now house restaurants and shops, adding a renewed vibrancy to Wisconsin cities and villages.

To help citizens, the State Historic Preservation Office created the Wisconsin Architecture and History Inventory (AHI), a digital source of information on more than 133,000 historic buildings, structures, and objects throughout Wisconsin. Types of places listed in the inventory include round barns, log houses, metal truss bridges, small-town commercial buildings, and Queen Anne houses that reflect Wisconsin's distinct cultural landscape. Each property has a digital record providing basic information about the property, and most include exterior images. More than 200,000 images of these properties are available online.

The society also began providing grants and technical advice to help communities across the state identify and protect historic resources. Municipal governments began adopting historic preservation ordinances and designating local landmarks and districts in the 1960s and 1970s. The first community in Wisconsin to develop a historic preservation ordinance and appoint a historic preservation commission was Milwaukee in 1963. Similar action took place in Madison in 1970, Fond du Lac in 1971, and Mineral Point in 1972. Today, a total of 68

units of local government have followed suit and are working to protect their historic resources with the assistance of the society.

In 1985, a group of state legislators, developers, architects, and attorneys formed the Wisconsin Historic Preservation Task Force. The group developed a comprehensive historic preservation legislative packet, much of which was enacted in 1987. These initiatives included the establishment of a Wisconsin State Register of Historic Places, a state tax credit program, and zoning and funding programs to support historic preservation. These improved programs help save ir-

replaceable historic resources in Wisconsin and also serve as ways of promoting investment within the state's borders.

The Wisconsin Historical Society works to protect archaeological resources as well. Early in the 20th century, the society's museum director began to gather archaeological information, which is still used today. However, the first major program at the society to focus on archaeology started 10 years before the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act. Federal legislation in 1956 initiated the interstate highway system, and the law provided for the protection and recovery



*One-thousand-year-old American Indian burial mounds shaped like birds and animals grace a hilltop in the Wisconsin River Valley in southwestern Wisconsin. (Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources)*

of historic, archaeological, and paleontological resources. Although the act did not make state compliance with these provisions mandatory, Wisconsin's Highway Department nonetheless created a procedure to allow limited archaeological research before highway construction. Federal law also required each state to select an institutional sponsor for archaeology, and the society assumed that role in Wisconsin.

In 1958, the society negotiated its first cooperative agreement with the State Highway Commission. The State Highway Commission provided money for field survey and excavation and the society agreed to prepare the reports and provide the storage for artifacts. As a result, the society improved its ability to tell stories from ancient Wisconsin. A decade of intensive fieldwork made significant progress. For example, archaeologists excavated the Millville Site in



Grant County and discovered the remains of 14 Native American circular houses that formed a community that was 1,600 years old. The success of the highway program led to negotiations with the Department of Natural Resources, which resulted in support for work at Wisconsin's most famous archaeological site, Aztalan, located along on the west bank of the Crawfish River east of Lake Mills in Jefferson County. Society archaeologists worked at Aztalan for three years focusing on the stockade, the pyramidal mound, and the village area.

The most important federal legislation affecting public archaeology was the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. This legislation created the Section 106 compliance process, which required that agencies using federal funds consider archaeological sites in project development. As a result, the society began to increase its archaeological field research on a contract basis with federal and state agencies. For example, in 1971, funded by the Army Corps of Engineers, the society began the first large-scale archaeological survey ever conducted in the state, the La Farge Reservoir Project. This was a 10-year study to locate archaeological sites in the Kickapoo River Valley in Vernon County. The La Farge survey identified over 200 archaeological sites, providing the first complete sequence of more than 10,000 years of human occupation in Wisconsin.

The state's 1985 burial sites protection law, Act 316, and the 1987 historic preservation law, Act 395, provided greater support for protection of both burials and archaeological sites. It also placed greater responsibility on state agencies to consider the impact of their construction projects and land-management practices on historical resources. In the past 25 years, the society has expanded on and added new efforts that advance knowledge of the past and protect historical locations for the future. The society maintains records on burials and archaeological sites, issues permits for investigations on public land, and administers a property tax exemptions program for owners who agree to protect important sites. In addition, educational programs raise awareness of ways that citizens can protect, enjoy, and respect local landmarks.

As a state abutted by two of the Great Lakes, with thousands of smaller lakes within its borders, many of which have been used for transportation, commerce, and leisure, not all of Wisconsin's archaeological sites are under dry land. The society administers a nationally recognized underwater archaeology program. As part of this program, society archaeologists document, study, and promote tourism. Wisconsin waters hold a wide variety of objects to be explored, documented and preserved, from an 1,800-year-old dugout canoe to 19th- and 20th-century shipwrecks. Naturally, since Wisconsin waters have witnessed 700 shipwrecks, downed vessels comprise many underwater archaeological sites. But several hundred other prehistoric and historic sites are known to exist on the beds of Wisconsin's lakes and rivers. The society's underwater archaeology program has conducted investigations on nearly 80 archaeological sites throughout the state. These efforts have resulted in 17 Wisconsin shipwrecks being placed on the National Register of Historic Places. With 860 miles of Great Lakes shoreline, 14,000 inland lakes, and thousands of miles of rivers and streams, the underwater archaeology program has a wide-ranging responsibility for studying and protecting all of the underwater archaeological resources that lie beneath the state's waters.



*Wisconsin Historical Society underwater archaeologist exploring a Lake Superior shipwreck. (Wisconsin Historical Society photo by Tamara Thomsen)*

The Wisconsin Historical Society's historic preservation efforts have had visible and lasting effects across Wisconsin. From a Finnish farmstead in Oulu in Bayfield County, to the Jeffris Flats apartments in Janesville, the society has aided the renovation and revitalization of buildings and neighborhoods around the state. One recent example is the renovation of the historic Pabst Brewery complex, which the State Historic Preservation Office is assisting through federal income tax credits. The first building to be completed on the 21-acre Pabst Brewery site is the Blue Ribbon Loft Apartments, a three-story, 140,000-square-foot brick building originally called the Washhouse and Cooper Shop. This building was converted into a 95-unit live/work loft-style rental apartment community. During construction, the developer reserved a percentage of the jobs to train unskilled workers from the surrounding neighborhood in the construction trades. This development has revived one of Milwaukee's most iconic buildings while supporting new businesses, providing affordable housing, and allowing residents to live and work downtown. Additionally, the project has been the catalyst for future development of the historically significant Pabst Brewery site and has brought federal dollars to Wisconsin. Through efforts like the Pabst Brewery renovation, the society preserves significant structures while also stimulating job creation, investment, and economic growth around the state.

## Radio, Television, and the Internet

Throughout the 20th century, the society embraced new technologies to share Wisconsin history in new ways. Soon after the introduction of radio in the 1920s, society experts took to the airwaves. In the 1950s, television was the new thing, and the society was active in creating programs seen on pub-

lic television stations around the state. The society's partnership with Wisconsin Public Television has led in recent years to several history-related programs as well as television documentaries based on Wisconsin Historical Society Press books. In the late 1990s, the society launched a Web site, *www.wisconsinhistory.org*, currently in its third generation, which has enabled the society to share Wisconsin and North American history with patrons around the globe.

As early as the 1930s, Wisconsin Historical Society staff used the radio as a way to reach out to the public. Charles Brown of the museum staff and Louise Kellogg, a researcher, writer, and historian who worked in the society library, both appeared on WHA radio occasionally, with Brown making nine appearances on the station in 1932. Ten years later society director Edward Alexander gave a course of 32 lectures on Wisconsin history over the two state radio stations then broadcasting, WHA in Madison and WLBL in Stevens Point. The centennial of Wisconsin's statehood in 1948 revived interest in history, and society staff made regular appearances for radio interviews. By the 1950s, radio was being explored as a means of better communication between the society and local history groups, including talks by experts to local groups broadcast over FM radio, and book discussions and study groups following assignments and lectures delivered by the society.

In the 1950s, the society also began to create television programs. In 1953, the society launched a 27-minute color film, *The Presence of Our Past*, which documented the wide-ranging activities of the Wisconsin Historical Society. With the advent of WHA-TV, the state's public television station, the society began to work with the new station to produce several programs, including a panel quiz show, *TV Museum*; 15 children's programs, such as *Grandma's Attic*; as well

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*Wisconsin Historical Society staff members working on a show with WHA-TV. (WHI Image ID 98936)*



as numerous five-minute short programs. On *Lori's Log Cabin*, a program for children that aired on public television in the 1960s, a society staffer played the role of a new settler in early Wisconsin who would ask other settlers for advice and help.

Throughout the 1960s, the society remained active in radio and television. Society staff created hundreds of programs for radio and television, including a public television series titled *Wisconsin Windows* that covered a broad array of topics ranging from the Civil War centennial to the historic sites. For several years society staff produced a series of programs on Wisconsin writers, while special programs for radio and television were regularly recorded in and around the society's headquarters building. The society at this time had on staff a coordinator for programming who worked on scripts, recorded numerous radio and television programs, and traveled around the state filming historic sites and other notable locations for use in a variety of radio and television shows.

The society and Wisconsin Public Television renewed their partnership in the mid-1990s as the sesquicentennial of statehood neared. *Sesquicentennial Wisconsin Stories* was a five-part installment of programs created by Wisconsin Public Television and the Wisconsin Historical Society in 1998. With episodes titled "This Place We Call Wisconsin," "Finding a Home," "Laboratory of Democracy," "Building a State," and "Time to Play," the series documented the people, places, and politics that helped make Wisconsin what it is today. The society and WPT collaborated on a series of 52 one-minute programs titled *Sesquicentennial Minutes*, documenting very briefly a wide assortment of topics, from Billy Mitchell to the Underground Railroad. The society continues to work



*Ho-Chunk group in traditional dress, 1900. From the Charles Van Schaick collection. This is one of more than 75,000 images available online at [wisconsinhistory.org](http://wisconsinhistory.org). (WHi Image ID 61591)*

with Wisconsin Public Television, regularly collaborating on documentaries for the *Wisconsin Hometown Stories* series, as well as documentaries based on society press titles, like the popular *Bottoms Up*, which has garnered national attention. The society and Wisconsin Public Television have additionally created Wisconsin-focused documentaries on World War II and the Korean and Vietnam Wars, as well as two new programs with agricultural historian Jerry Apps about the heritage of life on the farm.

Launched in 1997, the society's Web site, [www.wisconsinhistory.org](http://www.wisconsinhistory.org), plays an increasing role in making history accessible to people not only in Wisconsin, but worldwide. The amount of information available on the internet is already difficult to enumerate, and is growing steadily. Since 1998, more than 10 million pages from society collections have been shared on the Web. There are 163,000 pages from society collections appearing on University of Wisconsin Web sites, while 6.4 million appear in Google books. Another 3.8 million have been licensed to commercial firms for use in subscription-only newspaper collections. The society also sells copies of vital records and images through ecommerce applications. About 6,800 orders are placed each year, 26 per day, 80% of which are for genealogical records and 20% for image reproductions. Sales and licensing of online content generates about \$250,000 per year. As the internet has become a standard tool for researchers and history enthusiasts, the Web site will only grow in the future, while the challenge will always be to determine relevant content that meets user expectations.

## Entrepreneurship and the Wisconsin Historical Foundation

The Wisconsin Historical Society is unusual in that it is both a membership organization and a state agency. The society received a charter from the legislature in 1853 as a private corporation with a public purpose, and received funding from the state for the first time in 1854 to support society operations. In 1949, state statutes recognized that the society "had become a state agency through increased legislative control over the activities of the society." This law recognized that the society slowly evolved into a state agency by gradually transferring control to the state over various functions. The society started depositing its funds in the state treasury in 1920, its employees were subject to the civil service laws, its operations and funding were largely controlled by state statute, and the society held all property as a trustee for the state.

The society has always had to supplement the funds it receives from the state with other sources. These include membership dues, admission charges at historic sites, sales of books and copies of documents, photo reproduction licenses, and other fees. Private gifts, collected since 1954 by the Wisconsin Historical Foundation, and federal grants also help cover expenses. Volunteers have become an invaluable resource for the society. In 2010, 64% of the society's budget was covered by state tax revenue, including funding for 106.5 full-time positions. That same year, volunteers provided approximately 250,000 hours of labor, or the equivalent of 120 full-time positions.

The Wisconsin Historical Society has cultivated the support of private philanthropy for over 150 years. In his annual report of the society for 1856, Draper

expressed “the hope that many of our liberal and wealthy citizens may be induced to bestow a portion of their surplus wealth upon our society that it may . . . have an endowment to place it beyond the reach” of the caprices of nature and economic strain. While every director since Draper has actively sought private donations to increase the society’s activities and reach, an important development in this work came in 1954 with the creation of the Wisconsin Historical Foundation.

A group of society supporters established the Wisconsin Historical Foundation in 1954 as a nonprofit organization to assist the society in securing private sources of funding. For its first 50 years, the foundation had a board of directors that met, secured donations, and invested to grow the money it collected. While the state has, since 1854, provided generous financial support to the society, growing budgetary demands on the state steadily increased the need for private funding sources as the 20th century came to a close. Recognizing the need for more vigorous fund-raising, the Wisconsin Historical Foundation hired its first paid employee in 1998. The staff has since grown to 15, and the foundation performs four distinct functions for the society: financial stewardship, administering the society’s membership program, securing major gifts to the society, and strategic financial support for society initiatives.

In 2006, the foundation embarked on its first major philanthropic effort, *Forward! The Campaign for the Wisconsin Historical Society*. While the Forward Campaign set a goal of raising \$77 million, it was also envisioned as a movement to get a broad coalition of people involved in actively using history to understand their own stories and world, and to pass these on to the next generation. To accomplish this, the Forward Campaign set four fundamental objectives: transform the historic sites to provide engaging and educational experiences that are authentic, varied, and unique; update the society’s digital collections and services, including modernizing the society Web site; preserve the society’s world-class collections by securing renovations to the society’s headquarters building, as well as the construction of a new storage and preservation facility to store collections and master evolving conservation techniques; and create a far-reaching community of members, donors, advocates, volunteers, and leaders to take a more active role in discovering and appreciating their history.

The effects of the Forward Campaign are visible throughout the state and offer a compelling vision of the superb things that can be accomplished through the combined efforts of involved citizens and state support. In April 2010, the society was able to celebrate the completion of a \$2.9 million restoration of the library reading room. During the seven-month project, the room regained its original magnificence through the replacement of fluorescent lights with a reconstructed stained glass skylight, new furnishings, lighting, and shelving, and the restoration of many historic details obscured or missing since an earlier renovation in 1955. The restoration was celebrated as one of the biggest successes of the Forward Campaign to date in 2010, and more exciting projects are still in the works.

On November 8, 2011, the society broke ground for a new visitor center and the Wesley W. Jung Carriage Museum on the grounds of historic Wade House in Greenbush. The 38,000-square-foot, \$13.5 million building overlooking bustling Highway 23 midway between Sheboygan and Fond du Lac is a year-round, state-of-the-art facility showcasing Wade House’s outstanding collections and serving as a powerful tool for education and service to the community. Notably, the

project received about 55% of its funding from the state, with the remaining 45% was paid by private donations. The Forward Campaign was also instrumental in funding a new 3,060-square-foot multipurpose facility at Old World Wisconsin, housing a number of functions from curatorial to administrative staff spaces to training areas for costumed interpreters.

Increasing support for the society will be crucial in ensuring that this age is remembered not merely as a bright period in the Wisconsin Historical Society's long history, but also as the foundation for a society of permanently greater stability, strength, and scope. While a lot has been accomplished, the society has high aspirations for the future as it embraces new technologies, safeguards its world-class collections, transforms its historic sites, and, perhaps most importantly, seeks to engage the broadest possible public audience.

## Conclusion

A former director of the Wisconsin Historical Society once noted, "The varied programs of the society make it a state version of the Library of Congress, the National Archives, and the Smithsonian Institution, all rolled into one." The society has grown from a small gathering of pioneers in 1846 into a complex organization performing a wide range of functions. Yet the



*Robert La Follette Sr. and Robert La Follette Jr. (WHi Image ID 28147)*

basic mission of the society has remained largely unchanged: to collect, preserve, and share Wisconsin's stories.

The Wisconsin Historical Society has long been a leader and innovator among America's historical societies. Unlike historical societies on the eastern seaboard that had restrictive memberships, the society since 1846 has been supported by a membership open to anyone willing to pay dues. At a time when history was largely the tale of past politics and battlefield glory, the society has documented the lives of rich and poor, famous and unknown. Collecting contemporary history has been a constant focus, whether it be Lyman Draper collecting the papers of land speculator Daniel Boone or efforts of archivists to collect Web sites on contemporary politics. The society's collections and efforts have served as a model for other states, which have developed programs that were first tried in Wisconsin.



*Historical gardeners at Old World Wisconsin plant heirloom varieties of flowers and vegetables in re-creating early settler gardens. (Photo courtesy Nancy L. Klemp)*

While commonalities over time abound, the society has remained responsive to changing circumstances. Draper built a world-class library and manuscript collection without the help of a wealthy benefactor, instead securing regular state funding, making the Wisconsin Historical Society the oldest publicly funded historical society in

America. Reuben Gold Thwaites transformed the Progressive Era society into an engine of public education, leading the way for similar changes in historical societies around the nation. Clifford Lord transitioned the society from a largely scholarly research institution into a public service institution aiming to be of service to as many people, in as many ways, as possible. Under subsequent leaders, the society employed the latest technologies – radio, television, and the Internet – to connect to a broader public and reach out to young and old alike to share in Wisconsin's outstanding past.

Today, the Wisconsin Historical Society is one of the most active and varied historical societies in the nation. It faces new challenges, as it has in every generation since 1846. Time, technologies, social trends, and heightened expectations transform how the society collects, preserves, and shares our common history. It represents a covenant between generations. Just as those earlier pioneers worked to share the record of their successes and failures with subsequent generations, so the society of today ensures that generations yet unborn will know the events of our own time. It is a solemn trust, and one that the Wisconsin Historical Society has carried out well over the past 167 years.





*The library reading room at the society headquarters is a popular location for university students to prepare for finals. (Photo by John Nondorf)*

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# Capitol Visitor's Guide

## **Hours:**

Building open daily 8 a.m. - 6 p.m.  
The Capitol closes at 4 p.m. weekends and holidays.

## **Information Desk**

Located in the rotunda, ground floor.

## **Tours**

Daily Monday - Saturday at 9, 10, and 11 a.m., 1, 2, and 3 p.m.; Sundays at 1, 2, and 3 p.m. A 4 p.m. tour is offered weekdays between Memorial Day and Labor Day. Tours start at the Information Desk in the rotunda and last 45 to 50 minutes. Reservations are required for groups of 10 or more. Call (608) 266-0382 7:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. Monday - Friday, or visit the Web site at <http://tours.wisconsin.gov/pub/Reservations>.

## **Observation Deck**

6th Floor, accessible from 4th floor via NW or W stairways. Open daily from Memorial Day to Labor Day. There is a small museum devoted to the Capitol at the entrance to the observation deck.

## **Souvenirs**

Available at the Information Desk, include books, postcards, miniatures, and tour videos.

## **Capitol Police**

Room B2 North.

## **Handicapped Entrances**

At Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., East Washington Avenue, Wisconsin Avenue, and West Washington Avenue.

## **Parking**

Limited parking (meters) on the Capitol Square.  
Several public ramps are located within two blocks of the Capitol.

## **Senate Chamber**

South wing, 2nd floor; visitors gallery, 3rd floor.

## **Assembly Chamber**

West wing, 2nd floor; visitors gallery, 3rd floor.

## **Supreme Court Hearing Room**

East wing, 2nd floor.

## **Governor's Office & Conference Rm**

East wing, 1st floor.

## **Lieutenant Governor's Office**

East wing, ground floor.

**Attorney General's Office**

East wing, 1st floor.

**Legislative Offices**

To find a specific office, check one of the Capitol Directories located in the rotunda and on the ground floor of each wing.

**Hearings**

Information about the time and location of public hearings is posted at the entrance to each legislative chamber.

**Hearing Rooms**

North Hearing Room, North wing, 2nd floor.

Grand Army of the Republic Hall, Room 417 North.

Joint Committee on Finance, Room 412 East.

Senate Hearing Room, Room 411 South.

Additional hearing rooms are located on the 2nd and 3rd floors.

## Capitol Facts & Figures

**Construction Chronology**

West wing: 1906 – 1909

East wing: 1908 – 1910

Central portion: 1910 – 1913

South wing: 1909 – 1913

North wing: 1914 – 1917

First meeting of legislature in building: 1909

Dedication: July 8, 1965

Renovation: 1990 – 2001

**Statistics**

Height of each wing: 61 feet

Height of observation deck: 92 feet

Height of dome mural: 184 feet, 3 inches

Height of dome (to top of statue): 284 feet, 9 inches

Length of building from N to S & E to W:

483 feet, 9 inches

Floor space: 448,297 square feet

Volume: 8,369,665 cubic feet

Original cost: \$7,203,826.35

(including grounds, furnishings, and power plant)