

# THE REPORTER

Waupaca Historical Society, 321 South Main Street, Waupaca, WI 54981

Open Wednesdays, 12-3, Thursdays, 10-2, Fridays, 12-3

VOLUME 24 – NUMBER 3

Fall 2020

## WHS Annual Meeting Scheduled for September 24

The Waupaca Historical Society will again hold its annual meeting this year, though several changes have been made due to the pandemic.

This year, the annual meeting will be held at the South Park shelter on Thursday, Sept. 24 at 5 p.m. The shelter is outdoors and covered. Though the shelter offers numerous picnic tables, members are encouraged to bring their own chairs. No food or beverages will be served due to concerns over COVID-19.

The annual meeting will be abbreviated and include short reports from the director and treasurer. An election of board members will also take place. The board members up for re-election include Ashlie Buck, Nancy Weasner, Kent Pegorsch and Ron Arthur. Each board member is elected for a three-year term.

All members attending the meeting in person are required to wear masks and to follow social distancing guidelines. The meeting will take place rain or shine.

Any members that would prefer to not attend the meeting in person are encouraged to vote by proxy



The Waupaca Historical Society will hold its 2020 annual meeting at the South Park shelter on Thursday, Sept. 24 at 5 p.m.

before the meeting. The Waupaca Historical Society bylaws require that 10 percent of the qualified members—either in person or by proxy—constitute a quorum at an annual meeting. If you are interested in voting by proxy, please fill out the included form in this newsletter on page 7. Members can then mail the proxy form back to the Waupaca Historical Society or drop it in the mail slot to the right of the front door at the Holly History and Genealogy Center by Thursday, Sept. 17.

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## New Furnace/Air Conditioner Needed at Holly Center

Isn't the saying, "When it rains, it pours?" While it didn't pour, water did drip down into the lower-level of the Holly Center in July. The furnace/air conditioner, which sits above the kitchen area of the lower level, began to leak in July and luckily was discovered

within a few days. The system will need to be replaced this summer at a cost of \$5,000. WHS is asking for your help in purchasing this new heating/cooling system, which will help preserve our collections and the historic Carnegie library. Thank you in advance!

## At the Depot: Working on the Caboose

*By Mike Kirk*

Our main project this summer has been doing some much-needed work on the Milwaukee Road caboose. It was donated to WHS by James Taylor in 2012. He even paid for moving it. We had to lay the track and install utilities. Jim's wife bought it for him as a birthday present around the late 1980s. He had it remodeled into what I like to call an executive car. He first had it on his property east of Fremont and later moved it next to Bass Lake near Spencer Lake, south of Waupaca.

It has been in need of paint and new windows for some time. Last year, with the help of Brett Peterson, we got the front-side rust cleaned up and repainted. In a perfect world, we would have replaced the rusted metal with new on the back, but I was able to do a satisfactory job with body filler and rust reformer. Brett applied the Milwaukee Road orange paint with white and black trim after I finished the prep work. I have also replaced some cracked water pipes and installed two new windows and one window that was restored by Lane Streck. Currently I have completed removing what is left of the old roof coating. It will soon be ready for a coat of Flex Seal on the cleaned-up metal roof. The biggest part of the roof job has been working on the open grid roof walk.

The caboose is looking nicer than it has in years, and we are getting lots of compliments on it. Drive up the hill at the Depot and take a look!



(715) 256-9980

## Thank You for Your Continued Support!

*By Tracy Behrendt*

The last number of months have been a historic time in Waupaca and our country. Since mid-March, the Waupaca Historical Society, along with museums across the country, has had to change its plans and shut its doors to our daily visitors, renters and program attendees. It was not an easy decision, but one that meant putting the health and safety of our staff, volunteers and visitors first.

We continue to keep those concerns at the forefront of our decisions for the fall as well. The WHS Board has decided to keep our doors closed at the Holly Center this fall, opening only for appointments. These appointments can be made by emailing me at [director@waupacahistoricalsociety.org](mailto:director@waupacahistoricalsociety.org), calling the Holly Center or sending us a Facebook message. Appointments are one hour, and masks are required. We continue to clean before and after each appointment, sanitizing all touched surfaces and quarantining any books or items touched during visits.

If you have object donations, want to view the Holly Center exhibits or would like to purchase something from our gift shop, you can make an appointment for that as well! We would love to see you!

If you want to stay in touch with us at home, check out our Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/waupacahistoricalsociety>. We update it frequently with historic photographs, videos of our buildings, information on WHS, and, coming this fall, past historical programs at the Waupaca Historical Society! We also have two new and updated websites that you can check out, too—[www.waupacahistoricalsociety.org](http://www.waupacahistoricalsociety.org) and [www.chainolakeshistory.org](http://www.chainolakeshistory.org).

We look forward to seeing you all soon, but for now, stay home, stay healthy and thank you for your continued support of the Waupaca Historical Society!

## Support WHS at Upcoming Brat Frys

It's summertime in Wisconsin and that means brat frys! With our buildings closed due to COVID-19, the brat frys are one of the only fundraiser for WHS this summer. So come out and enjoy a brat, hamburger or hot dog to benefit WHS! Social distancing and CDC guidelines are being followed. The dates of our upcoming brat frys are:

Friday, Aug. 28 at Fleet Farm, 10 a.m.—4 p.m.

Friday, Sept. 11 at Holly Center, 10 a.m.—4 p.m.

Friday, Sept. 18 at Fleet Farm, 10 a.m.—4 p.m.



## WHS Craft Kits Available at the Library

Looking for something to do at home this summer? Waupaca area residents can pick up free craft kits from the Waupaca Historical Society this month! Beginning August 10, anyone can pick up a kit at the Waupaca Area Public Library—at curbside pick-up or at the front desk. Each craft kit contains instructions and supplies to make the project. There will be 100 kits available for each craft, and they are first come, first served.

From August 10 through 21, families can make a Victorian fancywork ornament out of seeds, beads and shells. Fancywork was a common hobby during the Victorian era, combining art with the natural world. From August 24 through September 4, families can make their own teddy bear. Named after President Teddy Roosevelt, the bear became a popular children's toy in the early 1900s.

The craft kits were made possible through a grant from Thrivent Financial.

## Habitat for Humanity, WHS Looking for Volunteers This Fall

The Greater Fox Cities Area Habitat for Humanity has rescheduled its "Rock the Block" event in Waupaca for Saturday, Sept. 26. The event, originally planned for May, was postponed due to COVID-19 concerns. The goal of the event is to make meaningful and impactful change in Waupaca. Some residential projects have already been started and completed, many of which are focused in the Third Ward.

Habitat for Humanity has also committed to several community projects, one of which is improvements and work at the Waupaca Historical Society. Some yard work has been completed at the Holly Center, and volunteers finished staining the Car Barn at the Depot in June.

In September, Habitat for Humanity will lead volunteers in replacing the Hutchinson House fence, which



was broken in the storm last year. Volunteers are needed to help put in the posts and install the fence at the Hutchinson House. If you are interested and able to help in September, call WHS (715) 256-9980 or email [director@waupacahistoricalsociety.org](mailto:director@waupacahistoricalsociety.org). We look forward to being a part of "Rock the Block" and seeing you soon!



# Strong Women of Waupaca: Sophelia Kurkowski

By J.J. Johnson

In 2016, WHS presented “Strong Women of Waupaca” at the Waupaca Area Public Library. Former WHS Board member J.J. Johnson had compiled articles on 13 Waupaca women who had influence in the community throughout the city’s history. The following is the first part of an article on Sophelia Kurkowski, a beloved high school teacher, librarian and historian.



“Looking at the life of Miss K, she may be best described in the

*Waupaca County Post* on June 17, 1962: “Although her name may never appear in bright lights or make the headlines of a newspaper, she is cherished as a friend and adviser of at least two generations of Waupaca High school students.

“Her love of history and of her students combined to leave a lasting impression. She is affectionately remembered as ‘Miss K’.” These remarks were written upon her retirement from the Waupaca High School where she taught history and headed the library for 36 years. She felt the school librarian was the heart of a school and that the librarian kept the pulse of the school. She also noted that students had better results when they did their research voluntarily.

“In line with these beliefs, over the years, Miss K’s responsibilities as the librarian became more involved and she began spending more and more time in it and less time teaching history classes to the point that during her last year at Waupaca High School she worked as a full-time librarian. During her tenure at Waupaca High School she saw the library grow from 2,500 volumes of books that were kept in a small room that later became the principal’s office to its own room that housed 6,000 books.

“Sophelia “Sophie” Mary Kurkowski was born May 15, 1898 in Berlin, Wisconsin to Joseph and Clara (Bartel) Kurkowski and had one sister, Josephine. She was proud of her Polish heritage and on the first day of classes as a teacher she told her students that her name was spelled SKI not SKY, as that was a Russian spelling. Her father Joseph was a butcher and when his employer moved to another city, Joseph moved his family so he could remain working for the gentleman. The family

lived in Berlin through Sophie’s first year of high school but then moved to Manawa where Sophelia spent her sophomore year. After that the family moved to Weyauwega where she attended high school there for her junior and most of her senior year before Joseph again picked up the family and moved to Amherst in 1915. Her graduation from Amherst High School in 1916 marked the fourth high school she had attended.

“After graduating from Amherst High School she continued her education, spending two years at the Normal School in Stevens Point after which she accepted a teaching position at Amherst where along with teaching social science she held the position as the school’s librarian in 1922. She modeled her life after her sixth grade teacher in Berlin, Miss Fitzmaurice, who also taught her that there was no shame in a patch on someone’s clothing but to not take care of that hole or tear was a shame. With this philosophy she believed dedication to her profession and holding to one’s principles was more important than self-gain and worldliness.”

**Continued on pg. 5**

## Strong Women of Waupaca: Sophelia Kurkowski

continued from p. 4

"In accordance with these beliefs, in all her years of teaching, she never asked for a raise in her salary, even while fellow teachers did ask and receive raises. When questioned about this by a former student who was later on the school board, she responded that if the school board thought she deserved a raise they would have given her one. Needless to say she received a raise that year.

"Miss K always enjoyed traveling and trying to learn all she could. During the summer sessions from her teaching position at Amherst she attended classes at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point and the University of Chicago. She later attended two summer terms at Columbia University in New York, which inspired her to start working on a Bachelor of Arts degree. Miss K went to the University of Wyoming during her next summer sessions where she received her master's degree and then completed her doctorate at Columbia University. Her thesis was on "The Importance of Salt to the Confederates," and she did her research at the University of Texas. She readily admitted that some of the summer schools she attended were selected in part on the basis of the historic value of the state and its historic sites.

"The era of her thesis was not surprising as the Civil War was of special interest to her. Having visited many Civil War battlefields, she was able to bring the subject to life to the point that students would recall that it was like being there themselves. Miss K also spent a lot of time at the Wisconsin Veterans' Home talking with the Civil War veterans. She taught that the war was about states' rights not slave rights and encouraged the class to attend the showing of "Gone With The Wind" when it played at the Palace Theater.

"When teaching the Revolutionary War she pointed out that not all the revolutionists fought for patriotic reasons but out of greed and opportunities to further



Sophelia Kurkowski or "Miss K" (middle) is pictured with two of her students.

their lot. This group of people she termed as "young rascals" and taught that the line between patriotism and treason was not easy to draw.

"While she was entranced with all aspects of history, her primary historic interests settled on the history of Waupaca and Wisconsin. Miss K began working in Waupaca in 1926 but continued to live in her home at Amherst. It was noted that during pep rallies for the boys' basketball team throughout her career at Waupaca High school, she would lead a cheer for the team. If she noticed that a student was not cheering, she went into the bleachers and scolded the student—even if the team was playing against Amherst. She also made a point of having copies of the *Appleton Post Crescent* displayed in the library on Monday mornings after a game so students could read about the Friday games and other weekend events."

**To be continued next newsletter!**



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## Appointment of Proxy

In accordance with the bylaws of the Waupaca Historical Society (“the Society”), and with respect to the Annual Meeting of the members of the Society for the year 2020 (which I will be unable to attend in person due to the health risks associated with the current COVID-19 pandemic) I hereby designate and appoint the Executive Director of the Society, Tracy Behrendt, to appear on my behalf – whether said meeting is conducted in person or via webcast (e.g. ZOOM) – as my agent and proxy, to act on my behalf and cast my vote on any and all matters with respect to which a vote of the members may be called (including, but not limited to, the election of directors to serve on the Society’s Board of Directors).

I hereby expressly acknowledge that the individuals up for re-election to three-year terms on the Board of Directors are: Ashlie Buck, Nancy Weasner, Kent Pegorsch and Ron Arthur, and have no objection to the re-election of any of them.

By signing below, and making this appointment, I am authorizing said Executive Director to exercise reasonable good faith judgment in her discretion to vote on my behalf in whatever way she feels would be in the best interest of the Society.

Signed : \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Spelled out (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

This Proxy form may be delivered to the Society in person by dropping it through the mail slot at the Holly History and Genealogy Center, or by mailing it there addressed to:

Tracy Behrendt, Director  
Waupaca Historical Society  
Holly History Center  
321 S. Main Street  
Waupaca, WI 54981

This Proxy form also may be delivered electronically by signing and dating this form, creating a digital image of it (i.e. jpg or pdf) and delivering it to Tracy Behrendt via email addressed to: [director@waupacahistoricalsociety.org](mailto:director@waupacahistoricalsociety.org). Please contact Tracy Behrendt by telephone at 715-256-9980 if you need assistance with this process.

Subject to change, the Annual Meeting of the members of the Society is scheduled for Thursday, Sept. 24, 2020. Signed Proxy forms must be received no later than Thursday, Sept. 17.

Waupaca Historical Society  
321 S. Main Street  
Waupaca, WI 54981

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

All programs are held at the Holly History and Genealogy Center, 321 S. Main St., unless otherwise noted.

*Due to COVID-19, the Waupaca Historical Society has cancelled its fall programs. We will reschedule these programs for 2021 if possible. Please check out our Facebook page for more information:*

<https://www.facebook.com/waupacahistoricalsociety>

**Staff:**

***Director:*** Tracy Behrendt

**Board of Directors:**

***President:*** Dennis Lear; ***Vice President/Depot Volunteer:*** Mike Kirk; ***Secretary:*** Betty Stewart; ***Treasurer:*** Ashlie Buck  
Marge Witt, Ron Arthur, Nancy Weasner, Jeff Weasner, Kent Pegorsch, Tim Drake, Brian Godfrey.

***City Council Representative:*** Lori Chesnut

***Board Members Emeritus:*** Glenda Rhodes