

THE REPORTER

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

Open by appointment only—call or email for appointment

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Winter 2021

Holly Center, Depot Remain Open for Appointments Only

With the health of our community, staff and volunteers our priority during the pandemic, the Waupaca Historical Society remains closed to the public. The Holly History and Genealogy Center and the historic Waupaca Depot (weather-permitting) are, however, open for scheduled appointments for research, gift shop purchases, and tours. These appointments are for one hour, and masks are required.

If you are interested in scheduling an appointment, please contact Tracy Behrendt at director@waupacahistoricalsociety.org or call 715-256-9980. Staff is only in the office on Thursdays and Fridays (weather-permitting), so email or Facebook are the fastest ways to schedule appointments or contact the Waupaca Historical Society.

If you would like to purchase a book, DVD or cookbook via curbside pickup, we would be happy to schedule a time on a Thursday or Friday! Check out our website for available gift shop items: <https://www.waupacahistoricalsociety.org/items-for-sale>.



2021 Programs Coming Soon!

With COVID-19 cases still high in our area, the Waupaca Historical Society will not resume in-person programming this spring. With this in mind, we are planning for ways to stay in touch and engage with you! Do you have any program/outreach you would like to see? Are there topics you would like to know more about? Send us an email at director@waupacahistoricalsociety.org and let us know!



At the Depot: New Model Railroad, Restorations Are Focus of Winter

By Mike Kirk

With the colder weather here, our work at the Depot has shifted to projects that we can do indoors. We have begun work on the HO scale model railroad in the basement. We have also been restoring several donated items for future display at the Depot.

In December, Jan Rademacher from the Waupaca Area Public Library read a train story and then visited us at the Depot. You can view the video created by Jan and Molly Reinke from the library here: <https://youtu.be/s3chtnzEjRA>. Kids of all ages will enjoy the storytime and tour of the Depot.

It has also come to my attention that this is the 150th anniversary of the first train to arrive in Waupaca. Here is a portion of the story written up in the Waupaca newspaper in 1871:

“Amid cheers and celebrations, the first iron horse snorted into Waupaca on a very cold Thursday evening, September 28, 1871. The entire town was in attendance for a glimpse of the first train; excitement ran so high that fist fights broke out with several bloodied noses. The train, consisting of a single engine and passenger car, was heard long before its

appearance. The engineer started to whistle long before its appearance. The engine started to whistle in Weyauwega, continuing until he reached town. Years of waiting paid off, and Waupaca would no longer be thought of as a sleepy little town on the Waupaca River.”

We look forward to possibly commemorating this event in 2021 at the Depot.



We have started working on the HO scale model railroad in the Depot basement. We have part of the benchwork built. We are currently working on the section that will feature a model of early 1900s Waupaca. This is a diorama of the Water Street bridge area that I am building at home. There is still plenty of work to do on it.



Volunteer Lane Streck has been working on the two semaphore signals we received from the Stevens Point railroad group. Brett Peterson (left) holds the completed blades for the camera.



Lane Streck has also been working on a baggage cart that was donated to the Depot several years ago. He helped to load the finished sections to take to the Depot.

Thank You For Your Support in 2020!



Museums, historical societies, and cultural institutions across the country faced many challenges in 2020—and the Waupaca Historical Society was no different. In a year of uncertainty, we have been incredibly comforted and humbled by your generosity and support. WHS enters 2021 with hope and confidence that we will further our mission to preserve Waupaca's history and reach out to our members and supporters at home and in person.

THANK YOU to all of you that donated to WHS throughout the year and to the Society's annual fundraising campaign. Donations will go directly toward several projects in 2021:

- Offer virtual programming during the pandemic and, when possible, in-person programs
- Purchase archival storage supplies
- Work on exhibits at Holly Center, King Cottage

Donations for Annual Fundraising Appeal

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Strong Women of Waupaca: Sophelia Kurkowski

By J.J. Johnson

This article is continued from the second part of "Strong Women of Waupaca: Sophelia Kurkowski," published in the last newsletter.

"Her Junior Historian students were not only inspired by her love of history but experienced hands on learning. When studying types of travel, she had the students depict the various styles with wood work. They also made wooden examples of various types of early weaponry during their studies. They experienced the historic method of making Christmas cards from wood blocks. Besides these testimonies to what they learned, Miss K's Junior Historians created a number of publications designed at collecting and preserving Waupaca's history. Some of these publications are, "A Teenage View of Waupaca" (1953); "Junior Historians" (1954); "We Remember" (1955); "Sites and Stories" (1957); "Homes of Waupaca and Vicinity" (1956-57); "Streets of Waupaca" (1960-61); and "Waupaca Stories." The group met twice a week under Miss K's direction. One of her students, Roberta Schweitzer, received an award for a paper she wrote on the history of the Hutchinson House Museum.

"One disappointment, though, was when Miss K submitted entries from the Junior Historians for the Maybelle G. Bush Award. Of the 51 entries received by the committee, two of Waupaca's were considered outstanding but, unfortunately, a high school was not eligible for the prize. One entry was a scrapbook of



The Junior Historian's publications, written with the guidance of Sophelia Kurkowski, are available for viewing at the Holly History and Genealogy Center by appointment.

historic sites, pencil drawings of the sites, descriptions, and a state map showing locations. The other entry was the historic sites marker project for the City of Waupaca. A guidebook was published giving location and description of 11 sites with a map showing the location. The white wooden markers were made by the students and the text for the markers were written

by junior chapter members Carol Barden, Beatrice Pillsbury, Leonard Schweitzer, Marjorie Schmahl, Marie Doro, Sally Cook, Marilyn Ware, Lena Rummel, Barbara Whiteside, Lois Reimer, and David Hathaway. A photograph of each site accompanied the entry.

"1956 was a big year for Sophia. The previous year, Waupaca's branch of the American Association of University Women, of which Miss K was a member, started raising funds to present her with a 10-week trip to 13 European countries. Former students and friends rallied to give back to this woman who inspired so many of them over the years and, at the end of the 1956 teaching year, there was not only enough to pay for the tour also enough left over to purchase a camera for her to record her travels.

"As she traveled through Europe, she wrote to the *Waupaca County Post* so that her many supporters would know the places she saw and how much she enjoyed the experience. This also solved the difficulty of needing to write to every person as she traveled."

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Sophelia Kurkowski: Part III

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"At the end of June 1956, Miss K left Waupaca, traveling by bus through what she described as throughways and turnpikes from Indiana to New York City. The trip took a week to make and, upon arriving, she was greeted and treated by former Waupaca people during a week's stay in the city. Upon arrival, she was taken to lunch at Town and Country on Park Avenue. A few days later, she was entertained at "a grand East Side restaurant" between attending sessions at the United Nations. She was introduced at the New York City's Women's University Club and, after a good Sunday dinner, spent the day riding the 5th Avenue buses.

"On Tuesday morning she joined the group of 24 other people with whom she would be sharing this experience of a "Study Abroad" program of art, architecture, music, books and history—all dear subjects to Miss K. They flew out from the Idlewild Airport on a KLM Royal Dutch Airline plane bursting with excitement. The plane flew low enough that Miss K could not only see the farms but even dots that were people out and about their daily lives.

"She had a stopover at Newfoundland before landing in Shannon, Ireland, where, while she was enraptured with the brogues and the number of air flights coming and going through the airport, there was some confusion over her luggage and she wrote that "the Irish almost claimed me—a story in itself..."

"Being the lover of history as she was, after passing through the battlefields and cemeteries from World War I and II and viewing an American Fourth Division monument, she wrote back how "history is so real when you see such important spots" and that she



Kurkowski

"never learned so much as I did in my trip from Brussels to Paris by bus."

Once in Paris, Miss K took in the Louvre, Champs-Elly-Sees, Arc de Triumphe, beautiful gardens, Invalides, Sorbonne, two parts of Montmartre and what she could only describe as awe-inspiring churches and palaces. Throughout her travels, while the group rested, Miss K would venture out to enjoy churches and palaces not covered on the tour...Always humble and a promoter of Waupaca, she wrote back regarding

her Paris experience: "I can't tell you what a great world has opened to me —and I thank everyone for being so kind. All the people think Waupaca is a fine place and very unusual because of this dumpy, elderly teacher's 'travel gift.'"

"She spent two days in Granada and enjoyed the Moorish accent. Throughout this portion of the tour, she learned much about Columbus and remarked that the guide was so informative that it was like being in a rolling classroom... At Genoa (Italy) she visited the replica of the *Santa Maria* in the harbor. The group also saw the statue dedicated to Columbus and the house where he lived until he was 14 years old.

"While Miss K found the artwork in Pisa magnificent, it was Siena that she loved. She found Siena's cathedral had the most interesting story—a portion remained unfinished because 80,000 people died of the plague during the work...

"The roads they traveled were in good condition and they passed white horned oxen and women that carried baskets of jugs balanced on their heads...

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Sophelia Kurkowski: Part III

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“The bridge they took when crossing the Tiber River was new—in some areas she had traveled bridges that were still being replaced from the destruction of the war—and they passed by close enough to see the summer house of the Pope by Castel Gandolfo then skirted a beautiful lake. Having come from Waupaca with its Chain o’ Lakes, she noted that they saw very few lakes along the tour...

There were three things Miss K wrote that she would never forget from their excursion through Italy; the Colosseum and Roman Forum, the bells of St. Peter’s Cathedral striking noon, and having an Italian man kiss her hands, although she did note that he kissed the hands of all 25 members of the tour group. Besides these highlights she remarked that she had dodged pigeons and eaten every kind of spaghetti—even some looking like bow ties...The bridges in Rome had been destroyed during the war and from her hotel room she could see the only bridge (the Ponte Vecchio) that was left standing although the other bridges were in the process of being rebuilt. At the National Gallery, huge boxes of art treasures taken by the Germans during the war could be seen being returned...

Afterwards she traveled with the group to Venice and Trieste before entering Yugoslavia where they were provided with a state guide. Then it was on to West Germany where she noted the industrious attitude shown by the people in their efforts to rebuild their country.

Once home, Miss K spoke of her trip to numerous organizations, which she illustrated with the many pictures she had taken. As with her students, she kept the audiences captivated with her quick wit in relating her adventures...

In 1956, Miss K became vice president of the

Waupaca Centennial Planning Corporation. This group was responsible for arranging a 1957 mid-summer program to celebrate Waupaca’s 100th anniversary of officially becoming a village. Highlights of the centennial included opening services in the churches, the dedication of the Hutchinson House Museum by the Waupaca Historical Society, a centennial program narrated by Attorney Wendell McHenry, the Brothers of the Brush, the Sisters of the Swish (of which Miss K was the first woman to be dressed in full costume), and a Centennial Ball.

In April 1957 Miss K went to Madison for the regional Junior Historians convention. As part of the convention, Miss K, along with nine other teacher-leaders, received a special award from the Governor for her work with the Junior Historian program over the previous 10 years. In typical fashion, while Miss K acknowledged that the award was a personal honor, she reminded people that it was also a great honor for the high school and Waupaca.

During her involvement with the historical society in 1958, Miss K helped organize the public auction that was held to raise funds to finish another room in the Hutchinson House Museum (when it opened for Waupaca’s centennial celebration in 1957 only three rooms were ready for the public to enjoy and other rooms were opened as funds allowed). She also planned a tour for members (and their friends) during the summer...

In 1962 Miss K retired and settled down to enjoy more fully the many souvenirs from her many experiences, shelves of books she had collected and walls filled with maps of all kinds. Her health took a turn in 1972 and, on March 14, 1974, she died at St. Michael’s Hospital in Stevens Point. Thus ended the life of a person who lived the motto she strongly believed in—“leave nothing unattended.”

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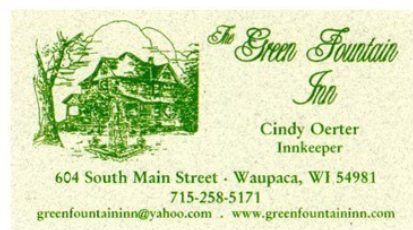


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Waupaca Historical Society
321 S. Main Street
Waupaca, WI 54981

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 spring programs. We have rescheduled these programs for 2022. Please check our Facebook page for more information:

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

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