

The WANIGAN

The Newsletter of the Marathon County Historical Society

2023 | Issue No.3

THE MARATHON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
PRESENTS

LIVING HISTORY CEMETERY TOURS

Voices FROM THE PAST

More information on page 4

CELEBRATIONS ARE IN ORDER!

By Russ Wilson, MCHS Board President

Our staff and volunteers are the best! Through their efforts MCHS has won the highest award from the Wisconsin Historical Society – the Reuben Gold Thwaites Trophy. It is a traveling trophy that we hold for one year, so please come visit before we have to give it up.

A Wisconsin Historical Society affiliate can win the Thwaites Trophy once during a 25-year period. This is our third. MCHS was organized in 1953, and we won our first trophy in 1958. We were awarded our second in 1989. Over forty years elapsed between the 1989 award and this one. We were handicapped from applying sooner because our vast archives and treasures were not readily accessible.

But many good things have happened in the meantime. Our programming and events have exploded in growth at the Woodson History Center and all over Marathon County over the last 15 or so years. We prioritized making our records and photographs available online, free, of course, as part of our contract for services with Marathon County, which we entered in 2020. The digitization process gathered steam with COVID, as did our virtual lectures.

By 2023 we were more than ready to submit our nomination for our third Reuben Gold Thwaites Trophy. To appreciate our breadth and depth of operations, primarily authored by Mary Forer, our executive director, please read our nomination, available by clicking the "View the Official Nomination" link on our website at marathoncountyhistory.org and in hard copy at the Woodson History Center. But let me cherry pick a few excerpts.

"Even though there never seems to be a lack of people wanting to donate their family heirlooms to our collections, the staff still actively seek to acquire specific items to fill in parts of our past that are not currently represented. For example, when preparing for upcoming exhibits, they've held public meetings and visited specific individuals to locate items that could be loaned, scanned or donated for use in the exhibit. At the same time, they hold oral interviews to gather first-hand stories of individuals who played a role in that piece of our history. These practices have not only been successful in acquiring new artifacts, photographs, documents, oral history recordings, etc. for the organization's collection, they have also increased community awareness and built excitement about the upcoming exhibits. The staff keep in close contact with businesses throughout the community, especially if they are celebrating an anniversary, expanding, or closing their doors, to let them know that we are interested in preserving their history."

"Each donation is carefully assessed, accessioned, and cataloged. As of the end of 2022, our database included an index of 16,500 artifacts, 20,200 photos (most of them digitized), more than 13,000 documents, and over 2,000 library reference materials."

"Equally as impressive as our collections and archival staff is our program, education, and library staff. Over the last several years, this ambitious group held an average of 220 programs, events, lectures, and walking tours each year. Combining the people served through these programs with the number of people who visited our exhibits, research library, and the Yawkey House Museum, we served an average of 16,381 people per year over the last several years."

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Russ Wilson, *President*
John Hattenhauer, *Vice-President*
Patrick Gosz, *Treasurer*
Andrew Dudley Shannon,
Secretary

Brett Barker
Bill Bertram
Sandi Cihlar
Robert Hagge, Jr.
Jim Hampton
Laurel Hoffman
Greg Huber
Jane Janke Johnson
Richard Lohr
Dorothy Maxfield
Brian Williams
DuWayne Zamzow

STAFF

Mary Forer, *Executive Director*
Gary Gisselman, *Librarian/Historian*
Janet Klutterman, *Administrative Director*
Ben Clark, *Archivist/Historian*
Anna Chilsen Straub, *Curator of Education*
Sheryl Del Conte, *Curator of Events*
Erick Konop,
Curator of Yawkey House
Alison Coady, *Front Desk Manager*
Mike Bresnahan, *Maintenance*
Kathy Volkmann, *Curator of Artifacts*
Linda Forbess, *Curator of Textiles*

The Marathon County Historical Society is supported in part by the City of Wausau Room Tax Funding & the B.A. and Esther Greenheck Foundation



WANIGAN PRODUCTION

Design and Editing
Alison Coady

Photo Selection and Colorization
Ben Clark

Co-Editors and Authors
MCHS Staff

The Wanigan is a quarterly publication sent as a benefit to the members of the Marathon County Historical Society.

The mission of the Marathon County Historical Society is to collect, preserve, and exhibit materials related to the history of Marathon County, and to use these materials to help people learn about North Central Wisconsin, connect with their roots, and explore their own historical connections.

"The staff ... offers a variety of artifact programs, lectures, presentations, and walking tours geared towards adults that are very popular among clubs and organizations, public libraries, assisted living facilities and more."

"Several years ago, staff and volunteers began our History Speaks program, which offers free monthly lectures on a variety of local and national history topics, and our History Speaks In Your Town program, which brought those lectures to locations around Marathon County to reach the people in our rural communities. Being the largest county in square miles, rural residents often struggle to visit us, so we put great effort into bringing our programming to them. This lecture series has been very popular and before COVID shut us down, we would be filled to capacity for almost every lecture."

"To further enhance the availability of Marathon County's history, the 'research' and 'explore' sections on our website were created. The 'research' section provides researchers with an index of over 133,000 entries from a variety of census records, city directories, military records, local history publications, and plat maps. This section also includes 773 biographies of people from Marathon County and 126 histories of the towns, villages, and cities of Marathon County. These indexes have been created over time by our hard-working volunteers and are now available through our website. The 'explore' section gives visitors an opportunity to investigate a wide variety of historic topics and includes articles, online exhibits, digital publications, online photo collections, oral interviews and recordings, and links to our History Chats, History Speaks and other videos."

We are filled with pride and gratitude upon winning our third Reuben Gold Thwaites Trophy thanks to the heroic labor of our staff and volunteers. There will be more to come. Please help us celebrate this well-deserved award!

WE ARE HONORED

We are thrilled to announce that the Marathon County Historical Society has been awarded the Reuben Gold Thwaites Trophy for Local History by the Wisconsin Historical Society!

We are honored to have been chosen, and thank all our staff and board members for their dedication to preserving and displaying history, and educating our community.

WE ARE CELEBRATING!

We invite everyone to join us for the presentation ceremony on
August 24th at 11am.

Reception to follow. Please RSVP if you would like to attend.

Call Alison at 715.842.5750



From the cover

VOICES FROM THE PAST: CEMETERY TOURS

By Sheryl Del Conte, Curator of Events

The Marathon County Historical Society presents our annual "Voices from the Past: Living History Tours" on Sunday, September 24, 2023, at Restlawn Memorial Park, 235962 N Troy St in Wausau. The first tour leaves at 11 a.m., and the last tour begins at 2 p.m.

During a guided tour through the historic cemetery, costumed reenactors will tell stories from Marathon County's past. This year we explore a new cemetery - Restlawn Memorial Park - and have the opportunity to tell the stories of more recent additions to our county's history. Come out to join us, you never know who you might meet!

Suggested donation is \$5 per person. Tickets available at the event. Rain or shine.
For more information, please call us at 715-842-5750.

About this issues' header

CROSSING THE OLD WISCONSE

By Erick Konop, Yawkey House Curator/Historian

The Marathon County Historical Society has just published a new virtual exhibit entitled *Crossing the Old Wisconsin*. This exhibit tells the story of 14 of Marathon County's historic bridges from the earliest covered wagon bridges to the modern highway crossings. Along the way, it touches on the natural, social, and political forces that shaped the bridges themselves, the communities they were built to serve, and the entirety of our county.

Crossing the Old Wisconsin is also a story of the rivers of Marathon County, in that it seeks to tell the story of humanity's attempts to overcome them. In many cases, the Wisconsin River and its tributaries were the reasons that our communities sprung up where they did. The rivers were, and continue to be, a major lifeline for the county and a boom to its economic activities. These same rivers, for all the benefits they provided, could also be a major hindrance. It did not take long for settlers to realize that a safe and reliable means of crossing the rivers could be just as important as having access to them. From Marathon County's first and only drawbridge, to a bridge meant to handle both cars and trains at the same time, and even a bridge that got lost in the mail, *Crossing the Old Wisconsin* is sure to give readers a new appreciation for the bridges that serve our communities.

Crossing the Old Wisconsin is free to view on our website and can be found at
www.marathoncountyhistory.org/blog/crossing.



Crossing
the Old Wisconsin
(**& other rivers of Marathon Co.**)

WAUSAU STREET NAME WORD SEARCH

By D. Scott Peterson, Volunteer

Try your hand at finding these street names from around Wausau. Answers at the bottom.

C V W V L X H A M I L T O N
 L M G X Z T M O P G K N Y Z
 E H R N O S C F P O B R P B
 V F A N C E C G L W R S A F
 E U N O S R E F F E J U C P
 L L T T C O L J H N A N D W
 A T V G D F L C M S C E L P
 N O Z N O U A D U T K G E J
 D N I I P J N A Y A S D I Z
 T C J H W G W B L R O I F O
 M U L S R U U B A K N R R M
 Q T R A W E T S A R E B A E
 B F N W R G T B R O W N G E
 G D N I L K N A R F T B T U

- | | | |
|-----------|-----------|------------|
| BOPF | FRANKLIN | KENT |
| BRIDGE | FULTON | MCCELLAN |
| BROWN | GARFIELD | MCINDOE |
| CHERRY | GOWEN | PARK |
| CLARK | GRAND | SCOTT |
| CLEVELAND | GRANT | STARK |
| DEKALB | HAMILTON | STEWART |
| DUNBAR | JACKSON | WASHINGTON |
| FOREST | JEFFERSON | WAUSAU |

ANSWERS

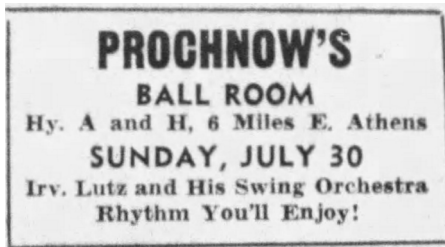
DANCING THE NIGHT AWAY

By Kathy Volkmann, Curator of Artifacts

In the 1930s, life in a small, rural Wisconsin town probably seemed old and boring to many teenagers. Erma and Lillian Tolk, who lived in the Town of Rib Falls in western Marathon County, found a fun way to break the monotony. Starting in the mid-1930s, the sisters attended many dances at local ballrooms, and enjoyed them all.

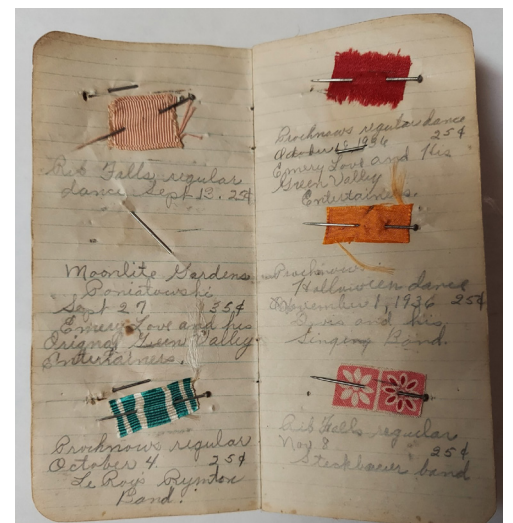
To commemorate these important social activities, a small but detailed notebook was kept, listing each dance that was attended - the date, location, ticket price, and the band that played. The notebook also contains the "ticket" for each dance, which was pinned to the clothes of the dancer to indicate they'd paid for admission. This often was a snippet of colorful fabric or a piece of ribbon or paper with the date printed on it.

Most entries are for Prochnow's Ballroom in Athens, the Little Chicago Pavilion, Corning Ballroom, and Moonlite Gardens in Poniatoski. The Harmony Aces, The Rambling Mountaineers, and Frankie and His Melodiers are just a few of the many bands that played for these dances. The price for a dance ticket ranged from 20 to 40 cents. Dances were usually advertised in the Wausau newspaper and several examples are included here - these are dances that are noted in the booklet.



The booklet begins in 1935 when Lillian was 17 - Erma would have only been 9 and it's unknown if she also attended dances at that age. The notes were obviously made by an adult, which leads us to believe Lillian kept the booklet. Entries end in 1940, which was shortly after Lillian was married and moved away. At that time, Erma was 14 and Lillian 23. Perhaps the younger sister wasn't allowed to attend dances without her older sister as a chaperone.

Lillian Tolk Gall died in 1987 and Erma Tolk Becker died in 2022. The booklet was donated to the historical society by Erma's children and came to us with details about the sisters, the booklet, and how much they loved to dance. It's a great example of the type of donation/artifact we love - it's local, it's identified, and it comes with a great story!



3 spreads from the booklet with details of the dance and the ribbon pinned to the page.

THANK YOU DONORS!

The Mint Cafe
for the volunteer appreciation cake

Carol Jamieson
in honor of John Hattenhauer's
birthday

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

Kathleen Row-Thompson, Bob and
Michelle Groene, Sophia Lease

Late night fun at VINTAGE GAME NIGHT

Come and join us at this evening of fun and games! We've got almost every vintage game you can imagine. Don't know how to play a game – no problem. Our volunteers will jump in to learn the game with you. September 21st is PJ night, and October 26th we celebrate all things fall! Join us wearing your favorite costume. Game night is 5-9pm at the Woodson History Center

Summer fun at STORYTIME IN THE GARDEN

With fall on the horizon, Storytime is perfect chance to enjoy the last of summer in the Yawkey House Garden at 11am on September 14. Join us for a story or two and a fun craft. Free for all ages.

Thank you to OUR GARDEN VOLUNTEERS

A special thank you to all our garden volunteers for their time and hard work making our garden beautiful!

Join the club! ANTIQUE STUDY CLUB MEETINGS

The Wausau Antique and Collectibles Study Club welcomes everyone to join them for their monthly meetings and programs, held on the third Tuesday of each month at 11am in the Lower Level of the WHC. Stop by to see the full list of fall topics.

Join us online for HISTORY CHATS & HISTORY SPEAKS



History Chats are 20 minute presentations that are livestreamed on YouTube and Facebook every Thursday at 12:30pm. All programs are recorded and can be viewed later.



History Speaks features a guest speaker on a Saturday at 2pm at the Woodson History Center every month. Programs are recorded and can be viewed on YouTube and Facebook.

Upcoming History Speaks . . .

Sept 30: Stevens Point and Wausau: A Shared History presented by John Harry

Oct 28: Marathon County in the 1950 Census: Insights and Discoveries presented by Scott Norrick

History Chats and History Speaks are co-hosted by the Marathon County Public Library, and sponsored by Janke Bookstore.

Back to school with THE LITTLE RED SCHOOLHOUSE

It's that time of year again, when we open the doors of the Little Red Schoolhouse to 4th grade classes from all over the county.

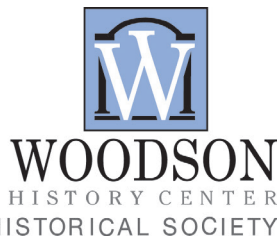
Classes start on September 12th and give children the opportunity to experience a day of school in 1904, including spelling bees, penmanship, outdoor games and more!

We are excited to welcome more than 52 classes this school year and can't wait to share and live history with them!



We want to say A BIG THANK YOU!

Thank you to Leigh Presley of Clearview Nursery, Lisa Hauser, Deb Bandt, and Eileen Presley for their generous donation of time and talent for our planters at the Yawkey House Museum and Woodson History Center.



Marathon County Historical Society
 410 McIndoe Street
 Wausau, WI 54403
 715-842-5750
www.marathoncountyhistory.org

Non-Profit
 Organization
 U. S. Postage
 PAID
 Wausau, WI
 54403
 Permit #550

Return Service Requested

CALENDAR OF EVENTS AT A GLANCE

- Aug 24: Award Presentation
11am at Yawkey House Garden
- Sep 14: Storytime in the Garden
11am at Yawkey House Garden
- Sep 21: Vintage Game Night
5pm at Woodson History Center
- Sep 24: Voices from the Past
11am at Restlawn Memorial Park
- Sep 30: History Speaks
2pm at Woodson History Center
- Oct 26: Vintage Game Night
5pm at Woodson History Center
- Oct 28: History Speaks
2pm at Woodson History Center

PHOTOS FROM . . .

OUR CHILDREN'S EVENTS



Its a party at
OUR CHILDREN'S EVENTS!

Our summer has been filled with fun activities for inquisitive minds of all ages. We partied in the garden at My Dolly and Me, spent a day in the schoolhouse at College for Kids, and relaxed with a book at Storytime in the Garden.