

July 2019 Newsletter

Keeping Your Future in Sight

Presentation by Dr. Randy Prestash

Founder & Senior Clinician at Summit Eye Clinic, Oconomowoc

This program will reveal the latest in Advances in Eye Exam Technologies and explain which Diagnostic Instruments and Amazing Treatment Options are right for you.

ADMINISTRATOR

The second quarter of our fiscal year is the busiest. Older exhibits are being changed and cleaned, and new exhibits are being constructed. This year, we present the history of Beggs Isle and the people who lived on that island on Lac LaBelle. In conjunction with our July program, we also have set up an Eye Doctor's Office, complete with equipment to test the eye in preparation for glasses, if needed. And, while enjoying all that is new or refurbished this season, take notice, too, of the beautiful collection of Compression Glass -- on loan from Pat Borgman.

The Education Committee was busy, as always, giving tours and outreach programs, and helping school students with their presentations. Barb Goetsch and Jolayne Lindberg lead the teams for these programs this year and did an excellent job.

The museum opened on May 2nd for the visiting season, and hours are on Thursdays, Fridays, and Sundays. Many of our experienced volunteer docents and greeters returned to keep the doors open, but we do have a few days which still need to be covered. If you have time or know someone interested in helping, please let me know.

2019 Gala was a wonderful success. Our guests enjoyed the food and drink, and the program was outstanding. Chad Lewis presented a very interesting program on the "Gangsters of the Past in Wisconsin" and included little known secrets about the area and some of the going-on activities of earlier times.

The Exhibits Hall has a new roof with all the trimmings! After the early rain season this spring, the roof was replaced. How nice it will be to look at the ceiling and know there is no leak! You may also notice there are railings on all the outdoor steps. Kurt Schrang has been quite busy lining up and advising the contractors. Of course, this extensive endeavor is taking quite a bite out of our funds, but we will enjoy the results for years to come.

EXHIBITS COMMITTEE

When I was a sixth-grader in my hometown of Cranston, Rhode Island, I never imagined that a motion picture playing at one of the downtown Providence theaters and a bit later at the only one in Cranston would originally be chosen to be "premiered" in a small Midwestern city whose long American Indian name I couldn't even begin to pronounce! I'm sure, however, that very soon in 1939, children throughout the USA could readily identify a particular wizard and a little girl named Dorothy, plus friends Scarecrow, Tin Man, and the Cowardly Lion ... and, yes, even the one and only Wicked Witch of

the West also understood the integral part each of them played in that famous movie. And 80 years later, everyone is still able to do so, as well!

How very lucky, then, are those of us living here in the Oconomowoc area today, who realize that only this one city in Wisconsin was picked by Hollywood to have the first public showing of that movie eight decades ago and who continue to celebrate the fame it brought to Oconomowoc eighty years later! The movie's lessons of Good versus Evil, of Helping Others in Need, and of Righting Every Other Wrong Possible remain an inspiration to us all!

Although "The Wizard of Oz" film may be "old hat" to some, and most (or all?) of its actors and actresses, I suppose, are dead, Dorothy and her trio of friends will live on forever, and their adventures will be shown on motion pictures screens, seen on family TVs, singularly enjoyed on computer monitors, and now, once again, in particular, at the Oconomowoc Area Historic Society's Museum. Our special appreciation must go to Nancy, her staff, and other volunteers for their work on this exhibit. So, I'm off to see the Wizard, the wonderful Wizard of Oz. Come join me, won't you?

Shirley Hinds, Chair

MEMBERSHIP

Hello, hello to all our Historical Society members! Please note that membership fees for the 2019 fiscal year were due on November 1, 2018. There are some of our faithful members who seem to have forgotten to send in their dues...it happens to lots of us now and then! If you are reading this newsletter at your friend's house, please check your records at home and send in your check. The membership form can be found on our website under the "Join Us" button in the upper ribbon of each page. You can print out a form and mail it and your check to the museum; or if you're in the neighborhood, stop in at the museum on a Tuesday or Thursday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., and leave your membership dues with Nancy or Barb. They'll make sure the information gets to the right place! Thanks to all of you who have already joined us. We appreciate your support!

Since our last newsletter in April, we have had only one new dual membership recorded - Joseph and Kathryn Brisk - who were given a gift membership by Mary Blaska and Casey Ehler.

We welcome Joseph and Kathryn and look forward to working with them in our society's activities. As you all understand, we are always in need of new people willing to invest time and energy in our organization, so if you have any ideas to help grow our membership, please speak up and let us know what you are thinking!

Our membership rolls for June 2019 show a total of 205 memberships with a breakdown of 89 single memberships, and 54 (108) couples' memberships, along with 8 student memberships. This is down from 234 memberships last year at this time. There are also 14 organization/business/municipality memberships and 29 free memberships, which are about the same number as in 2018.

Birthdays and Special Days

Have you thought of giving an Historical Society membership or purchasing one of our historical books or DVDs for that special day of celebration? Either would be a great gift which will last the entire year and give hours of entertainment.

Barb Elwood-Goetsch, Chair

MILWAUKEE NORTH WESTERN MODEL RAILROAD EXHIBIT

As many of you are aware, our model railroad exhibit has seen major changes over the last 12 months. The large center section known as Butler on Don Stewart's original layout has now been updated. Hooray! This was the one area that had never been re-done, and, for much of it, never was operable since moving to the museum in 1991. A small portion had been renovated on a makeshift basis seven or eight years ago, so the various routes which pass through could function.

To bring it all up to current modeling standards and make it good for many years to come, the entire Butler area was completely torn out first. The result was that none of the exhibit trains could function, as each train passes through one part of this section. In planning for a change in this, we timed the work so it would be mostly completed by the museum opening this spring, and now all trains are back in service and functioning. Our work included all new bench work and the supporting structure under the layout that is not visible. Also all new tracks, including a new yard, new turntable, and rebuilt roundhouse and diesel house were installed, as was all new wiring, and there is a lot of it, including a new central panel built and installed under the layout.

All of the above culminated with our pretend Golden Spike Ceremony (see attached photo showing adult and youth group members), reminiscent of the first actual Golden Spike Ceremony at Promontory Summit, UT in 1869, which marked the completion of America's first transcontinental railroad 150 years ago

Additional electrical refinements are now underway, as is new scenery being added. More details will follow!

Another big improvement was the addition of an actual model of a Milwaukee Electric Interurban Car, such as those that once passed through Oconomowoc on its route from Milwaukee to Watertown. (See the attached photo as it passes by the Oconomowoc Depot.) This model was built by our member, Shawn Becher, and it won a first place model award at the March meeting contest of the WISE Division, National Model Railroad Association.

For those who may have further interest in the history of this exhibit, a new video is now available for viewing on the internet. (See youtube Milwaukee North Western at Oconomowoc Museum.) Shawn Becher prepared and published this documentary with photos from 70 plus years ago all the way to this spring, 2019. This is an excellent 29 minute program on the history of our Milwaukee North Western.

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Since the beginning of 2019, the Education Committee has been very busy and involved in many different activities. During the month of May and early June, 264 pupils from Park Lawn, Summit, Meadow View, and St. Jerome visited us at the museum. While here, the students were involved in a

variety of "stations", such as learning the "joys" of doing laundry the old-fashioned way, how soap was made with pig fat and lye, and how a new-fangled device with a handle that was operated with a back and forth motion took the place of the washboard and made the process of doing laundry so much easier.

In other stations, they learned about what it would be like to attend a one-room school; the history of telephones and party lines, and how to use a rotary dial; how families used a Victrola to listen to music or a radio to hear the news, advertisements, or sporting events; the importance of the railroad to Oconomowoc's history, with a visit to the model railroad; how we take care of artifacts such as a 1865 hair wreath, an 1818 sampler, or marsh horseshoes; or how to place historic objects on a timeline.

Another station involved a trip through "The Streets of Old Oconomowoc", visiting the kitchen, the barbershop, the general store, the medical clinic, the hardware store, or the Strand Theatre to see "The Wizard of Oz." The Summit School students also learned about cemeteries and spent the afternoon at the La Belle Cemetery visiting the graves of people important to Oconomowoc's history, as well as the grave of one of only two War of 1812 veterans buried at La Belle.

All of this could never have happened if it weren't for the volunteer help of 23 different docents, many of whom volunteer for multiple groups. And what a variety of volunteers we had, from a college student to a great-grandparent! We can't say enough kind words about the students, teachers, and other adult chaperones who visited our museum! The kids were enthusiastic, eager to learn, and polite. We all had a great time.

Besides the school groups, the Education Committee also did a "PowerPoint Presentation" about the history of the Town of Oconomowoc, including the communities of Mapleton, Monterey, Okauchee, and the Village of Lac La Belle to the residents of Shorehaven Tower in late February. On our many trips around the township on snowy, icy, and cold winter days, we met many people who were eager to help us with our research into the history of the township.

With two other groups, the Oconomowoc Women's Club and the American Association of University Women, the Education Committee did an activity that involved a set of questions covering many facets of Oconomowoc's history. Would you be able to answer the following question? Who was riddled with bullets shortly after buying two blue shirts in a store in Oconomowoc using a one hundred dollar bill? After an answer was given, history was shared about the event. As you can imagine, there were lots of laughs and hopefully some learning as well.

A group from Lake Terrace visited the museum this spring and enjoyed a presentation about John Rockwell and Omar Rosenkrans. Finally, just last week the Education Committee met with a committee planning the 175th anniversary of the Town of Oconomowoc to share our PowerPoint about the history of the township and to exchange information with the committee.

Coming up next month, 19 visitors from Oconomowoc's sister city of Dietzenbach, Germany will visit the museum and learn about Oconomowoc's history, the German pioneers who settled in this area, and a comparison of the likes and differences of our two communities.

Jolayne Lindberg, committee member

Like this news? Become a member and get it timely and in color with photos.