

A conversation with new manager at the museum

Melody Brooks-Taylor is the new manager at the Museum at the Portage. She's been busy, but took a few minutes to answer some questions after a couple months on the job.

Q: Your professional background is rich with experience related to nursing, teaching, and healthcare administration. How do you use those skills at the Museum?

A: : Like most nurses, I enjoy working with people and problem solving. From my leadership roles, I



learned to focus on measurable goals and outcomes. So, at the Museum, we'll be seeing more of an emphasis on how to increase our museum attendance, how people interact with our social media sites, and how our members and community can be more engaged with the museum. As an educator, I always try to motivate students by keeping content interesting and empowering students with the tools they need to learn. This is exactly what we try to do at the Museum through our informative exhibits, knowledgeable docents, and local resources.

Q: What aspect of Portage history have you found to be most interesting to you?

A: I love the early history of the Native Americans in this area, the arrival of the European fur traders and explorers like Pierre Pauquette. We have an informative exhibit at the Museum describing this period with Native American artifacts and the portage between the Fox and Wisconsin rivers.

Q: What is the most unusual artifact you have come across at the museum?

A: When a visitor to the Museum recently found books about the Occult in Zona Gale's personal library, she pointed out Zona Gale's interest in mysticism on our Facebook site. I learned that Zona Gale was deeply affected by her mother's death in 1923 and beginning with her 1926 *Preface To A Life*, she started to have a more mystical writing style which differed from her earlier realism.

Q: What opportunities do you see on the horizon?

A: Collaboration with other artists and museums such as our upcoming film exhibit called "Faces of Wisconsin" which highlights local women and their personal connection with Wisconsin. As well as the opportunity to have temporary exhibits like this summer's "From Head to Toe: 100 Years of Portage Fashion" that complement our permanent collection.

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Portage Historical Society Museum at the Portage

804 MacFarlane Rd., Portage, WI

Scrapbooks reveal personal stories, recall icons of popular culture from past

As the third oldest city in Wisconsin, the history of Portage has been told many times in state, regional and local publications, most recently in a new publication about vintage homes in Portage. But if you want to know about individuals and families, then there's nothing like paging through the collection of scrapbooks at the Museum at the Portage.

It's in those yellowed pages that you'll read about the everyday events that marked the days of folks in Portage (marriages, deaths, retirement parties, school plays, softball games, etc.) while the larger world was preoccupied with the Gulf War, national politics, Kevin Costner in "Dances with Wolves," and Tianamen Square protests in Beijing.

For instance, the page with advertising for "Lonesome Dove."



popular on television in 1989, also has a photo of three girls turning cartwheels at St. John's School, and the facing page features obituaries for four Portage residents, and a photo of Jim Van Wormer from Van's Construction working to prepare the lot at the corner of Main and Cook Streets for new con-

struction, and . Turn a few more pages and there's the newspaper article about the day (5/21/89) that a bear "came up from the Wisconsin River bottom and roamed the west end of Portage for about an hour, eventually crashed through a storm door, surprising Laverne and Cozette Griffin as they were finishing dinner."

The scrapbook also records the 1991 kerfuffle that arose when Bob Mael, a former mayor, had tree trimmers prune trees on the sidewalk by the Ram Hotel which he owned at the time. It was speculated that Mael may face legal action for changing "seven city-owned trees into seven city-owned stumps."

Before the days of patient privacy, the local newspaper listed hospital admissions and discharges, and even noted that a well-known civic leader had been admitted to a Madison hospital. Many news stories and announcements about local residents included their street address.

Several of the scrapbooks have clippings about the ordinations, new parish assignments, and honors awarded to local Catholic priests. The same scrapbook contains news articles about the marriage of Prince William and Princess Diana, clippings that speculate on "Who killed JR?"'s reference to the popular TV series, and display a photo the Fifth Avenue apartment in New York City that the widow Kennedy moved to in July 1964.

For those who follow wedding dress fashion, the scrapbooks provide a glimpse into 25+ years of bridal styles, and wedding day photos are accompanied by descriptions of the bride's dress, such as this one from 1967:

"... gown of nylon and applique lace with a sweetheart neckline, long pointed sleeves and a belled

(continued on next page)

Scrapbooks *(continued from page 1)*

skirt and accented with a full length train of lace and nylon detachable at the shoulders. A fingertip veil of tulle with rhinestone and pearls completed her ensemble."

There were often descriptions of the dresses worn by bridesmaids, and sometimes a list of wedding showers that preceded the wedding.

The Museum currently has about 20 scrapbooks from individuals, families and organization. The most recent acquisition is the three-book collection compiled by Fern O'Donnell, who passed away at age 97 in February, 2017. Fern was born in Portage and throughout her life assembled scrapbooks containing articles about Portage and its people.

Museum to host film documentary about women, culture July 25-29

"The Faces of....." is a multipart series by international film maker Valérie Lanciaux whose aim is to create an international series where languages, accents, faces, and traditions will cross and connect, bringing together women and cultures from around the world.

The Portage Center for the Arts along with the Museum at the Portage will be presenting the premier of the Faces of Wisconsin. The project is not only about Wisconsin women and their cities but about how their societies work and how different cultures can live together. Other films in the series were set in Madrid, New York and Berlin.

The film is premiering at the Zona Gale Theatre Saturday July 22 at 7pm or visit the Museum at the Portage July 25-29 from 1-4pm where the film will be presented in a casual environment for your viewing enjoyment. Your FREEWILL DONATION will help support film production.

Long-time board members cited for service to Society

Portage Historical Society recalls with gratitude the contributions of two long-time supporters who passed away recently. Ruth Ramsay-Evans died on May 16 at age 94. She was one of the charter members of the Society, and served as treasurer for many years. Edward "Ted" Rebholz died on May 7 at age 81. He had also served on the board, including terms as president of the board, and was active on the board until he passed away.

Beer and prohibition on tap for Aug. 3 museum program

The Eulberg family started brewing beer in Portage in 1884. Join us on August 3rd at 6:30 pm at the museum when Dave Eulberg will discuss the impact of prohibition on the brewing industry and brewing techniques. The program is open to the public. Light refreshments will be served. *(Below, a 1930's scene at Eulberg's Bar.)*



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Head to Toe: 100 Years of Portage Fashion

A new exhibit at the Museum at the Portage features hats, dresses, sweaters, capes, shoes and accessories donated to the museum over the past 20 years. Included are, clockwise, a intricately embroidered yellow chiffon flapper dress, hats from the 40's and 50's, a rich jet-beaded formal dress from the 1880s, a transparent velvet brown flapper dress, and small purses to store the bare essentials for the well-dressed woman.

