

## Save the date! Annual dinner on April 16

All supporters and friends of the Portage Historical Society are invited to attend the annual dinner, program and brief meeting on Monday, April 16 at Trails Lounge Supper Club. As in the past, the social hour will start at 5:30 pm, followed by dinner at 6:30, and the program at 7:30.

Stephanie Miller-Lamb, executive director of the Al Ringling Theater will present a program about the restoration of The Al Ringling Theater in Baraboo. The \$3 million restoration of the almost 100 year old theater was completed in 2016 after nearly a quarter century of planning and fundraising.

Items on the dinner menu include steamed Walleye Pike, Chicken Cordon Bleu or Roasted New York Strip Loin. Each meal includes a baked potato, dinner salad, roll, dessert and coffee. A gratuity is included in the \$18 price per meal.

Following the program, there will be a short business to elect board members and the slate of officers proposed by the nominating committee.

Reservations for the dinner are necessary. Please call Sarah at 742-1319 or Melody at 742-6082. Reservation deadline is Friday noon, April 13. DO NOT make reservation directly with Trails Lounge.

*The Museum at the Portage will re-open for the 2018 season on Thursday April 6.  
(Special hours for Fiber Arts exhibit March 22-24, 10 am—5 pm).  
Museum hours for April and May are Thurs-Saturday from 1-4 pm.  
In June, July and August the hours are 1-4 pm.*

Portage Historical Society  
804 MacFarlane Rd.  
PO Box 727  
Portage, WI 53901

March, 2018

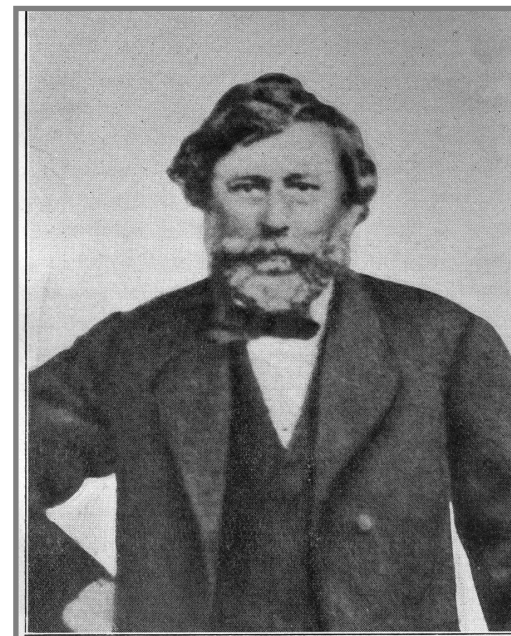


## Portage Historical Society Museum at the Portage

804 MacFarlane Rd., Portage, WI

## ‘The Count’ who came to Portage

The history of Portage is crowded with names of historic figures who passed through the area, starting with Marquette and Joliet in 1673, followed by explorer Jean Nicolet, naturalist Jonathan Carver, geographer and ethnologist Henry Schoolcraft, explorer and future president Zachary Taylor, medical pioneer William Beaumont, future president of the Confederacy Jefferson Davis, and Agoston Haraszthy (1812-1869), who is credited with establishing the California wine industry.



Wisconsin Historical Society, WHS-67619

with the revolutionary movement that was sweeping across Europe, and was eventually forced to emigrate to the United States. His life story is the subject of Strong Wine: the Life and Legend of Agoston Haraszthy by Brian McGinty (Stanford University Press, 1998), who describes him as bold, flamboyant

extravagant and a visionary. A chapter is devoted to Haraszthy in The Devil May Care: Fifty Intrepid Americans and Their Quest for the Unknown by Tony Horwitz (Oxford University Press, 2003).

In both books, Haraszthy's time in the Portage area is only mentioned in passing, but more details are provided in historical documents from the region. The 1880 History of Columbia County reveals that Haraszthy came to the Fort Winnebago area in 1842, and secured a contract to provide wood for the Fort, living on an "island" of the Fox River a few miles north of the Fort. But timber wasn't his only interest; he had an interest in agriculture and grew corn in Sauk County to supply the fort. On one occasion, he had "given too much time to hunting" and the corn harvest was delayed. But when Haraszthy turned his attention to the harvest, he was energized, and he and the helpers pulled the corn, threw it into wagons, husking as the wagons made its way to the river. The corn was delivered, and an unnamed witness said it was typical of Haraszthy's "energy and resourcefulness."

Satterlee Clark, sutler at the Fort and chronicler of early Portage in an article *Early Times at Fort Winnebago* (in Volume 8, Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin) writes not only about events at the Fort, but also about memorable characters he encountered at the Fort, including Haraszthy.

*"I must say something of Count Haraszthy and his family. In about 1842 or 1843, I am not certain which, Count Agoston (sic) Haraszthy came to Wisconsin, bought some property at Sauk City and the Wisconsin, and settled there with his family. He was a*



*nobleman in every sense, and he and his wife were among the most refined people I ever knew, and both were exceedingly good looking.*

*I saw them both frequently at home and at Madison. At the latter place they had a large number of friends and acquaintances, by whom they were much respected.”*

Haraszthy’s ties to Sauk County were longer-lasting than those with the Portage area. He and a partner purchased 10,000 acres for a town site and named it Haraszthy, a village later renamed Sauk City. He built mills, raised corn and other grains, had sheep, pigs and horses. He owned a store and a brickyard, and operated a ferry across the river. Perhaps most notable today is the fact that he planted grapes and dug wine cellars into the slopes about the town, and today the Wollersheim winery owns the property and uses the cellars.

Some sources indicate it was gold fever that then attracted Haraszthy to California, others indicate the climate in central Wisconsin didn’t agree with him and/or his determination to grow grapes for wine. In any case, he and his family left Wisconsin in 1849, settling in San Diego, and launched a number of business and agricultural projects. He was part of a syndicate that subdivided a section of San Diego, called “middle San Diego,” or Haraszhville. He was the first sheriff for San Diego county, and built a jail for the city. He served in the state legislature for a few months, and began to buy real estate near San Francisco. He started planting vineyards to grow grapes. The moist, foggy climate there proved unfavorable for grapes, and in 1856 he purchased a small vineyard in Sonoma County, and eventually moved the vines from San Mateo. Finally the entrepreneur had suitable growing conditions for the vines. He expanded his own vineyards, and encouraged others to plant grape vines. Haraszthy became the authority on grape growing and producing wine in the European tradition.

He traveled to Europe to bring back Zinfandel, Tokay and Muscat vines, and at his own expense planted then in his neighbors vineyards. The legislature

declined to reimburse him for his expenses, and once again the intrepid Haraaszthy plunged into another venture: buying a sugar plantation in Nicaragua, expanding it and adding a distillery. The next step was to find a site for a sawmill. He ventured alone to the site on a river and was never seen again. There was speculation that he was kidnapped or killed by Nicaraguan rebels. Others recalled that an alligator had recently dragged a cow into the stream and speculated that Haraszthy may have suffered the same fate. This energetic man was never seen again, and left behind a widow and six children when he disappeared in 1869 at age 57.

Next time you are enjoying a glass of wine or beer (Haraszthy is also credited with having the first hops yard in Wisconsin), offer a toast to this energetic, creative, man who passed through the portage, stayed for awhile, and struck out for high adventure.

From the Daily Register, Portage, Wisconsin, 28 April 1903: "A MUCH WANTED PORTRAIT. Agoston Haraszthy was an Old Resident and After Many Years of Effort His Picture is secured for Historical Purposes--He supplied Fuel for Fort Winnebago--Sketch of His Life - After many years of effort, Mr. A. J. Turner has succeeded, through the efforts of Postmaster Porter during his recent visit to San Francisco, in procuring a photograph of Count Agoston Haraszthy, who came to Wisconsin at an early date. The distinguished Hungarian had a most eventful career in this as well as the old country and elsewhere.”

Similar accolades appear on an undated and unsigned document tucked in an envelope taped to the back of the picture of the portrait that has been stored in a closet at the Museum at the Portge. *“He was probably the best educated man who ever came to this country from abroad having studied and mastered all the sciences through the medium of the Latin language, which was lisped by hit infant tongue before that of his native land. He soon became proficient in English. ... after he had mastered it sufficiently to communicate his ideas intelligibly, a more entertaining ... companion could not be found.*

# Fiber Arts on exhibit at museum this week

The Museum at the Portage will once again participate in the “Threaded Streams Fiber Arts Trail” March 22-24, featuring the elaborate ballet costumes designed and created by Janiz (“Jack”) Kos, and an art quilting pop-up display by Jean Leeson, a member of Madison Contemporary Fiber Artist who has exhibited her art quilts at Olbrich Botanical Gardens at Overture Center for the Arts . A dozen of her creations will be on exhibit and she will be at the museum working on another art quilt . The Museum will be open each of the three days from 10 am to 5 pm.

The ballet costumes were all designed and made by Janiz Kos, who started dancing in his native Lublinia in Slovenia (part of the former Yugoslavia) when he was six years old. As a teen he danced with the city’s opera company. Later he danced with the Vienna Opera and traveled widely. While serving in the Yugoslavian army he acquired nursing skills, and used those skills for many years after emigrating to the U.S in 1956, living in Portage, where he worked at Divine Savior Hospital and Nursing Home. Jack had a reputation as a very kind and caring health care provider. He maintained the dozens of costumes he brought

with him from Yugoslavia, keeping them in pristine condition for many years. The Portage Historical Society was given five of the costumes He died in 2009.

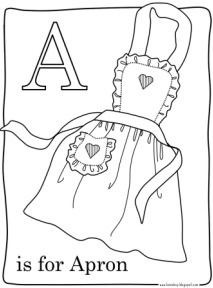
The Kos collection will remain on display after the Threaded Streams exhibit closes.



*Art quilting by Jean Leeson will be in the fiber arts exhibit at the museum. “Normally this quilt is on my bed at home,” quipped Jean when she set up her exhibit last week.*

## Exhibit, program to highlight functional and fancy aprons

Once upon a time, aprons were a common item in a woman’s wardrobe, and rare was the woman who worked in her kitchen without wearing an apron. Those days are gone for most modern women, but Trish Trinrud and JoAnne Genrich will bring their “Once Upon an Apron” program and exhibit about vintage aprons to the Museum at the Portage on Sunday, May 20 for an afternoon program. The aprons will remain on exhibit for six weeks.



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### Portage Historical Society

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