

## New support levels honor prominent persons from past

The names of three people prominent in the history of Portage will now be the designated titles for sponsorship categories for donations to the Portage Historical Society. As explained in a letter received by all 2015 PHS members, the board made the decision to rename the categories because “sponsorship” more accurately defines the donor’s role. To some, membership implies an obligation to attend regular meetings and assume a role in the operation of the organization or the museum. The new designated levels of support will allow individuals, families and businesses to provide the needed financial support, and opportunity to contribute time and talent if interested. The new schedule for sponsorship categories is:

**\$20-\$49 Pierre Pauquette**  
**\$50—\$99 Ansel Clark**  
**\$100 + Zona Gale**

Sponsorship at any level provides the donor with 20% discount on all books at the museum; newsletter, invitation to annual dinner meeting and program; and invitation to attend open house events.

**Pierre Pauquette** arrived in the area in 1820 as a fur trader with the American Fur Trade Company. He

transported furs for others, and was known for his physical strength. He also was able to serve as a translator for the Ho-Chunk people. He later set up a ferry service from the west side of the Wisconsin River.



**Ansel Clark** was born a slave about 1840, and came north after the Civil War. He joined company F and was later a constable and purchased a home on W. Wisconsin St. He was buried with military honors.

**Zona Gale** was born in Portage and early in her career after graduation from the University of Wisconsin she worked at newspapers in Milwaukee and New York City. On a visit back home in 1903 she realized that the men and women in her home town provided plenty of material for her many stories. She returned to stay in 1904 and in 1921 was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for drama. She was appointed to the UW Board of Regents, was a prominent pacifist and a philanthropist. She married local businessman William Breese late in life.



Save the date!  
 Monday, April 18  
 Annual dinner  
 meeting  
 @ Trails Lounge

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

Winter, 2016



## Portage Historical Society

Museum at the Portage

804 MacFarlane Rd

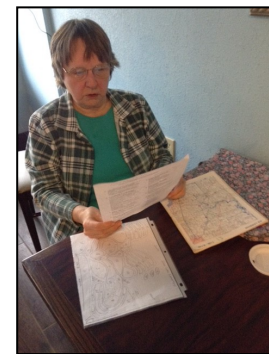
April—May, Sept—Oct, open 1-4, Thurs, Fri & Sat

June—Aug, open 1—4, Tues—Saturday

## Graveyard sleuth goes digital

A quest for information on her own ancestors by Anna Mae Axness developed into a 12+ year project to inventory all known gravesites in Columbia County, with the result being a searchable database for more than 76,000 gravesites and indexed obituaries from Portage, Columbus and Rio newspapers, some dating to the 1850s.

In 2002 she attended a meeting of the genealogical group at the Portage Library. Meeting in the Sanderson memorial room, she saw file folders with the list of gravesites and realized that she could convert the list into an alphabetized list that would make it easier for others to search the records, and from there the project snowballed. She wasn’t the first person to collect information from cemeteries and grave markers. Her predecessors in gathering cemetery data (Bob and Lucy Wright, Mr & Mrs. Donald Jellings, Betty Cook and Monna Aldrich) were in the field in the 1970’s and 1980’s. Anna Mae says that her interest in organization helped make the project manageable: for instance, she prepared a data sheet, and gave each of her many helpers a copy for every tombstone. They meticulously recorded the information. Sometimes the old inscriptions was barely legible, but the helpers recorded the



Anna Mae, above, favors the 1987 plat book over the 2004 version (cemeteries aren’t marked) and the 2012 version (cemeteries are marked but there’s more clutter with names on the page).

limited information they were able to gather. These cemetery detectives also checked the back of grave markers where dates of military service were often recorded, as well as names of minor children who may have been buried in the same plot. One of the groups that was involved in the inventory in Portage was River Crossing Charter School, and after training and some experience were able to process 2,000 gravesites in one day. They were involved with the data collection for three years, completing four cemeteries (Newport, Wyocena, Ohio (rio) and parts of St. Mary, Silver Lake and Oak Grove cemeteries in Portage. She also credits cemetery sextons such as the late John Mountford, sexton for Silver Lake Cemetery, with helping her locate and interpret information.

Many of the 90+ cemeteries that were surveyed are large and clearly marked, with perpetual care agreements allowing for neatly trimmed grass and attention to tilting grave markers. Other cemeteries are small with only a dozen or so gravesites, and no burials for many years, and no family members in the community to care for the gravesite. Anna Mae relied on the 1987 Columbia County plat book and knowledgeable cemetery neighbors, who knew that the graveyard was hidden in a grove of mature trees.

There are about a dozen family cemeteries in the county, some of them still in use. One of them saw only one burial, and another is the final resting place for five children who died of diphtheria. And there’s a least one cemetery that is off-limits: it’s on private land and the landowner does not want the location shared. Unless a person has relatives buried there it’s unlikely

# New artifacts added to museum collection

A wide variety of artifacts donated by many individuals were recorded in detail and added to the collection of the Museum at the Portage in 2015. All the items have a connection to Portage, whether it's shoes and boots from Ketchum's Bootery, to a photo of the Golden Gossips to a timber from old Ft. Winnebago.

One of the artifacts that arrived near the end of the season was a Dictaphone donated by Atty. Gary Roets, who now lives in Arizona. The equipment was from the office of longtime Portage attorney and later Judge Daley. The user pressed a button on the mouthpiece, which started the wax cylinder turning, and spoke into it. The sound travelled down the tube and vibrated a membrane attached to a needle cutting a groove in the wax surface of the cylinder. The needle inscribes a record of the sound vibrations into the cylinder. To replay it, the mouthpiece was detached and replaced with a pair of 'stethoscope' type earphones. Each wax cylinder can hold about 1200-1500 words, and can be reused 100-120 times by erasing it with a machine that 'shaves' the surface off.

Donors of artifacts in 2015 include Peggy Amend/Mary Langbecker estate, Joel Burbach, Virgil Chance, Jane Considine, Kathryn Curtis, Laurie Deakins, the Dorn family, Fred Galley, Jim Humphrey, Barbara Kaiser, Mary Jo Kohlhoff, Helen Kindschi, Jim and

Darlene Krause, Doris Monson, Bob Porter, Warren Rebholz, Earl Rhode, Betty Robinson, Gary Roets, Kathy Rowley, Barbara Sandberg, Joyce Scherbert, Margery Schultz, Gregory Smith, VFW Post 1707, and Linda Wendt.



*This Dictaphone was the 20th century predecessor to today's digital hand-held voice recorder.*

# Website gets new look

The Portage historical society website will soon have a new, updated look. The change is the result of board approval of a contract with Amalgam LLC, a local web-hosting and website design company. The new arrangement will permit the Society to update the website with current information as needed, and upload dozens of photos. Over time, more improvements will be made and the Board will pursue expanded use of FaceBook and Trip Advisor, both of which can be sources of information local, national and even international travelers use when they plan a visit to the area. To view the new website, visit [www.portagemuseum.org](http://www.portagemuseum.org)

## Portage Historical Society 2016 Board of Directors

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PO Box 727, Portage, WI 53901  
804 MacFarlane Rd., Portage 608-742-6682  
[www.portagemuseum.org](http://www.portagemuseum.org)  
[info@portagemuseum.org](mailto:info@portagemuseum.org)

# See you at the annual meeting April 18

Michael Edmonds from the Wisconsin Historical Society will be the featured speaker at the Portage Historical Society annual dinner meeting on April 18 at Trails Lounge. His illustrated talk will be about John Muir, one of the nation's most important environmental activists and writers. Muir (1838-1914) led the movement for national parks in the late 19th century, co-founded the Sierra Club, and inspired three generations of Americans to value and preserve wild places. Edmonds will focus on Muir's youth in Wisconsin, his conservation work, and the influence he had on later Wisconsin environmentalists such as Aldo Leopold, Sigurd Olson, and Gaylord Nelson. The Society's travelling exhibit, "Wisconsin's John Muir," will be in Montello in June. For more information about the exhibit, go to <http://wihist.org/1T1pTLQ>

Michael Edmonds has worked for more than three decades at the Wisconsin Historical Society. He holds degrees from

Harvard University and Simmons College and worked at Boston's largest antiquarian book shop and strangest library before moving to Wisconsin in 1982. His work has won national awards from the American Association for State and Local History, the American Library Association, and the American Folklore Society. In addition to his day job, he has also taught at the UW's graduate School of Library and Information Studies since 1986. He has authored five books, including *Out of the Northwoods: The Many Lives of Paul Bunyan*, published in 2009, and many articles on American history. His syndicated weekly column, *Odd Wisconsin*, appeared in the state's newspapers for the last decade.

The event will start with social hour at 5:30, followed by dinner at 6:30 and then the program. Details about menu options and reservations will be available in late March.

## Graveyard sleuth (cont'd from p. 1)

access will be granted. There are many unmarked burial sites in the county, and occasionally bones will be unearthed during excavation. In 1965 human bones surfaced when Divine Savior Nursing Home was built on W. Pleasant St. The bones were buried at Silver Lake Cemetery.

One of the more well-known burial sites is "Dead Man's Crossing" near the train tracks by Hwy. 16 in the town of Lewiston. A body was found by local farm girls over 100 years ago, but no one knew the deceased and it was speculated that he was a hobo. Section men from the old Milwaukee Road gave the man a respectful burial and placed a fence around the grave. For years the section crews maintained the site and the train engineers blew the train whistle as they went past.

There are many roadblocks that genealogists face: written records have been lost, cemetery name changes (for instance, St. Gabe's Cemetery in Randolph is now Annunciation Cemetery), surnames are misspelled, and wooden grave markers of the mid-1800's disappeared long ago. Even stone markers deteriorate over time with the inscription becoming barely legible and the stone cracking or crumbling. An emerging challenge for future genealogists will be the absence of

any tombstone or marker: though there are a handful of columbaria, cremains are often scattered at a favorite location of the deceased.

Cemeteries also reveal the ethnic groups that settled in the county: Welsh near Caledonia and Cambria, Norwegian near Rio and Otsego, Irish near Doylestown, Lodi and Portage, and Frisians near Freisland.

All the data Anna Mae has collected is on <http://usgenweb.org/>, a free source of genealogical information for all 50 states. The Portage Historical Society website also contains all the data under the "Genealogy" tab. The Portage Public Library also has a most recent DVD with all data and supplemental files on various related topics, such as old medical terms, images of insignias (GAR, Pythian Sisters, Masons, etc) seen on some gravestones, translations of foreign words seen on some tombstones, and a list of newspaper resources. Anna Mae also sells the DVD to individuals for a nominal price.

Despite her immersion in the topic of death and burial, she maintains a lively sense of humor. Her motto, she says is "I don't know which enjoy more. Digging up the dead or the live ones I meet along the way." Asked what her next project will be now that there's light at the end of the tunnel, she pauses a moment, and then: "organizing my recipes."