

Meet Sara Oostdik: new curator with background in museum work

The new curator at the Museum at the Portage will be busy in the coming months getting current with new accessions , and then start the process of deaccessioning items that are no longer needed in the Museum collection. She expects to be at the Museum Fridays from 8:30-4:30 pm year round.

Sara graduated from the University of Idaho with a degree in anthropology . She has held positions in collections management at the Museum of Moab, and at the Monroe County Local History Room and Museum in Sparta. She also was a volunteer at the La Crosse County Historical Society. If you see Sara the Museum, she may be found moving items to storage, doing cleaning and repair of items, cataloguing incoming items, organizing storage, conducting inventories of artifacts yet to be catalogued, overseeing deeds of gifts, “and other duties as assigned.” Sara can be reached by email at museumattheportage@gmail.com Be sure to introduce yourself to her when you see her at the Museum.



Attendees at the Friendship Village event on August 20 at the museum were treated to a reading of Zona Gale’s Miss Lulu Bett, presented by this troupe from Portage Area Community Theater. They are, front row, from left, director John Ribar, producer Sheril Lannoye, Joanne Dalton, Angela Hall and Bryn Romeis and back row from left, Greg Frank, Katie Seiler, Mike Haynes and Danny Smith. Well done, PACT!

Thanks for your support in 2022

INDIVIDUALS/FAMILIES

- Peggy Alf
- Peggy Amend
- Pat Atkinson
- Gary & Ann Bisping
- Sherry Bornick
- Bill & Irma Brockley
- Dennis J. Brown
- John Carroll
- Ted & Barb Chesney
- Jane Considine
- Mark & Mary Curran
- Kathryn Curtis
- William & Jean Damm
- Colleen Davison
- Mark & Laurie Deakins
- Dennis & Maribeth Dorn
- Ron & Debbie Dorn
- Dave & Judy Eulberg
- William Stroud Eulberg
- Ann Marie Fuerst
- Jane Fullerton
- Fred Galley
- Gerry & Betty Gast
- Janice Gifford
- Robert & Bobbie Goodman
- Jim & Mary Gorman
- Jeff & Janice Grothman
- Dave & Sandy Gunderson
- Elayne J. Hanson
- Martin Havlovic
- Ruthann Helmann
- Suzi Hemler
- Bonnie Hibner
- Joe & Kathy Houzner
- Jerry & Joan Indermark
- Steven & Natalie James
- Kay Jenkins
- Joan Johnson
- Barbara Kaiser
- Veronica Kamrath
- Geraldine Kelly
- Sally Kipfer
- Lynn & Nancy Kreier
- Mike & Robin Kvalo
- Sheril Lannoye
- Gary & Judy Larkin
- Mona Larsen

- Richard & Sally Lillie
- Sean & Peggy Malone
- Ken & Beth Manthey
- Sarah Mautz
- Edith McElroy
- John & Kathryn Miller
- Marie Moe
- Jeanne Mundt
- Sandra Nachreiner
- Gary & Barbara O’Hearn
- Darrell & Mary Parker
- A. Gail Phillips
- Pete & Jan Price
- Nan Rebholz
- Warren & Dorothy Rebholz
- Don & Candace Roeker
- Ray & Hazel Rogers
- Steve & Debbie Rohrbeck
- Richard & Kathleen Rowley
- Frank & Barbara Sandberg
- Nancy Schaper & Jim Jordan
- Florence Schieber
- William Smiley
- Dr. Stewart & Melody Taylor
- Dean & Judy Traut
- George Valko
- Vicki Vogts
- Bill & Eleanor Voigt
- John & Lila Waldman
- Ronald & Linda Wendt
- Lucille Wheeler
- Bill Welsh
- Thad & Bernie Whiting
- Russell Wyman

CORPORATE MEMBERS

- Ft. Winnebago Surgeon’s Quarters
- Indian Agency House
- Pflanz Mantey Mendrala
- Funeral Home

HONORARY MEMBERS

- Idella Anacker
- Marjorie Margelowsky
- Dorothy L. Schultz
- Gilbert Schwantes
- Delores Wade

Portage Historical Society

The Museum at the Portage

804 MacFarlane Rd, Portage, Wisconsin

Museum closed for the season.

See you in April!

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- Melody Brooks-Taylor

Museum Docents

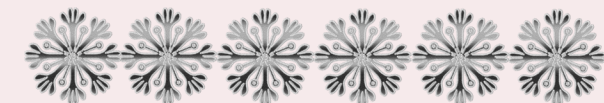
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# N.H. Wood left evidence of his days in Portage

Nathan H. Wood (1820-1887) was a prominent figure in 19th century Portage, not only for his business acumen and contacts , but also for his grand house on the corner of Franklin and Dunn Streets, his political opinions freely expressed in the local newspapers, and a brick panel—still visible—stating his opinion, near the top of the 210 W. Cook St. building. His name came back into discussion recently in relation to the mausoleum bearing his name in Silver Lake Cemetery.

The condition of the area surrounding the mausoleum prompted a letter from the PHS to Mayor Mitchell Craig, noting that dirt and brush had accumulated, and citing a booklet from Silver Lake Cemetery Association stating that the trustees had secured a lease from the Wood Estate for the N.H. Wood vault, for a receiving vault only, “for as long as grass grows or waters run.” The brush has now been removed and the mausoleum will be examined for its structural integrity in 2023.

N.H. was born in Ashfield, Massachusetts. At age 18 he left home and began to peddle goods on a circuit through New York. According to his obituary “his native push and business ability soon resulted in success.” In 1844 he settled in Little Falls, New York to operate a wholesale business. Five years later he was on his way to Chicago to establish his business there. The merchandise he planned to sell arrived before the building was ready, so a large amount of it was stored on the sidewalk. A competitor complained, and a fine levied. Notice of the fine was posted on the door and Wood achieved some attention and sympathy, and there were rumors that wonderful bargains were offered in the new store. Throngs of shoppers filled the sidewalk and the store, with the doors finally closed at 11 pm.



His next venture brought him to Portage where he bought about 12,000 acres in the towns of Pacific, Dekorra and Caledonia. In 1848 he opened a retail business in Pacific, and people from 50 miles away reportedly came to the Pacific store. For the next 18 years, Wood continued in the business with a revolving door of partners that included other names

prominent in early Portage history: Loomis, Osborn, Breese, and Gallette. Wood soon struck out on his own, and in 1876 constructed the W. Cook Street building during the presidential election: his sentiments were evident in the pithy comment carved on stone, still visible, above the 2nd floor windows: “Erected 1876—Tilden Reform & Less Taxation—Brand Official Thieves—Honor Honest Men.” The results of the election were controversial and contested, with the final results not settled until a month after ballots were cast for Samuel Tilden (D) or Rutherford B. Hayes (R).



There was no clear winner as results from three states were in question. There were claims of fraud, violence and intimidation. In the end, a panel of congressmen and Supreme Court judges awarded 186 electoral votes to Hayes and 185 to Tilden. The infamous Compromise of 1877 was born, resulting in the departure of Union troops from the South and the end of Reconstruction. (To read a more complete chronology of this messy conflict, see The Miller Center at the University of Virginia website.)

N.H. Wood was upset with this state of affairs: his opinion pieces sometimes masquerading as advertisements, appeared in the Portage newspaper at that time, the Wisconsin State Register.

A search for references to N.H.Wood in 19th century newspapers brings a variety of positions that Wood espoused. For instance in 1891 he announced that a team of judges would award cash prizes at the county fair to young milkmaids who were the best milkers and made the best cheese, and thereby attracting the attention of bachelor farmers who might be candidates to rent land and run a dairy farm on land owned by Wood. In the same edition of the newspaper it was announced that Haines Piano Co in New York ap-

pointed Wood as agent for their pianos, priced ranging from \$450 to \$1,000.

In June 1884 he proposed to make the high school self-sustaining, and using general funds to build a sewer. “But instead,” he wrote “it seems that through the indifference of citizens and the craven disposition of most of the aldermen ...” the \$7,000 from the general fund will be used to haul sand and dirt and the principal of the high school will continue to be employed whether we have money or have to borrow the same.”

In July 11, 1885 a notice appeared in the *Wisconsin State Register* under his name proposing to start a Civil Service Reform Party to “establish a black list of all thievish tax eaters who add to the public burden, thereby notifying them that they can never hold public office for as long as they live.”

Fifty years after Wood died, a “J. Rossiter” submitted a lengthy recollection in verse of Nathan Wood to the *Portage Daily Register*, commenting on Wood’s “basso profundo” voice, manners, fair play and generosity, though remarking that the low and marshy acres he owned was “not so very good.” The writer also noted that Wood’s once grand house had fallen into disrepair, the statuary gone, the marble fireplaces neglected.

The structure built into a side of a low slope at Silver Lake Cemetery bears the name of the owner, N,H. Wood. Are his remains in the mausoleum, or buried near the monument adjacent to the mausoleum? Obituaries for several other people who died in the late 1800s or early 1900s mentioned that their remains were placed in the Wood “receiving vault.” Many sources cite receiving vaults as locations where human remains were placed during months of the year when the ground was frozen. The advent of power equipment made receiving vaults unnecessary.

## Museum projects get attention

Several small but important maintenance projects were accomplished at the Museum at the Portage before it closed for the season, including

- Removal of shrubs from the front of the building by Portage Park and Rec; city arborist Emmett McCarthy will be consulted about appropriate replacements.
- A new security system was installed; included in the package is a heat sensor, water sensor in the basement, and temperature monitor.
- Air conditioner condenser cannot be repaired per assessment by HVAC dealer.

## Donation of 1905 diploma brings charming stories of rural life

The donation of a large, intricately-adorned Portage High School diploma from 1905 resulted in a subsequent donation of manuscripts that paint a loving portrait of life in the Portage area between 1895-1910. Nancy Proto-Robinson of Carmel by the Sea in California donated the diploma earned by Elizabeth Bain. Board member Peggy Malone visited the donor recently, returning to Portage with a series of letters from parents to adult children and a typewritten single-spaced 50 page reminiscence by Winifred Bain, sister of Elizabeth Bain.

*How Dear to my Heart* by Winifred E. Bain is, in her words “a chronicle of the Bain Family of Maple Grove Farm, Portage Wisconsin 1895 to the turn of the century.” The farm was located in Fort Winnebago township at the intersection of Hwy. F and Dumke Rd. It was written for her sisters in 1957 when the author lived in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Included in the 50-page document are detailed accounts of daily life.



- She recalls the day she was told to go to school with her older sisters. “Caring for tots during family was a service rendered by the public schools without question in those days,” she writes. When the sisters returned home after school they found their mother had given birth to another daughter.
- The observance of Memorial Day by Spicer School students who would take flowers and a flag to place on the gravesites of Civil War veterans at the nearby Spicer Cemetery In their young minds, she writes, “the recent Spanish-American War was but a skirmish,” the Revolutionary War a distant piece of history, and “we were expressing our gratitude and reaffirming our conviction that we, lucky children, were living in an age of lasting peace.”
- Three weeks from mid-June to early July are remembered as the hectic strawberry season, when the children were paid 1 cent a quart, and Winifred aimed for 500 quarts a season, “with a handsome \$5 bill on pay day as a considerable incensive.” Crates of berries were loaded on the wagon in the evening, ready to head for Portage six miles away, and hoping to reach market before the neighbor, Mrs. Callaghan, brought her crop of berries.
- The author of the chronicle graduated from Portage High School in 1909, and then “normal schools” in Milwaukee and Whitewater. She was a kindergarten teacher for several years before returning to the Milwaukee Normal School faculty. In 1929 she was awarded a PhD from Columbia University. She was president of Wheelock College in Boston (now part of Boston University). She was a leader in the field of early childhood education and development, and in 1936 Parents Magazine presented her its annual award for most helpful book to parents,” Bain died in 1965, and is buried in Augusta (Eau Claire Co.) alongside her parents.