



# Portage Historical Society

*The Museum at the Portage*

804 MacFarlane Road • Portage WI 53901

May 2024 Newsletter

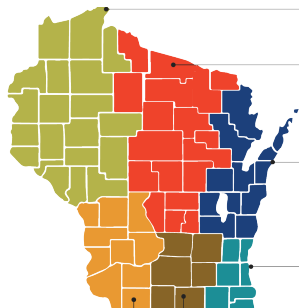
## Wisconsin History Makers Tour

The Wisconsin History Makers Tour will bring history directly to local communities in every region of the state through pop-up exhibits, artifact displays, public programs, art installations, and other activities.



History Walk displays will travel throughout the state starting this summer to mid-2027. The tour is a collaboration with local history organizations, libraries, community groups, cultural venues, and other partners. Learn about the things that make up Wisconsin's cultural identity through these pop-up history displays.

The South Central Region of the Wisconsin Council for Local History is the first stop on this venture. The Museum at the Portage will host a display from June 1 through September/October on the lawn at the corner of MacFarlane Road and West Franklin Street. Stop by to walk the display anytime during daylight hours and stop into the museum to see new exhibits featured this summer.



## Curator Corner

*By: Sara Oostdik, curator*

As the Museum reopens for the 2024 season, museum staff and the collections team are excited to share our recent changes with the public. Display cases were recently moved around the exhibit space to create a more open experience for visitors and make way for new exhibits. In addition, existing exhibits were looked over to simplify and clarify what we share about Portage history.



In collections storage, volunteers are busy sorting through clothing boxes to create a better inventory of what we have. Always present in the background of collections projects, is continual organizing of storage spaces to ensure they are clean and materials are in the safest conditions that we can provide.

We have had great momentum over the past year and the museum has a wonderful team of motivated individuals who are all eager to see projects completed. However, we can always use additional help. If anyone is tech savvy, and would like to learn Past Perfect (our collections management software), a priority of ours is to input all of our paper records into this system, which will make our collections searchable and well documented for future projects. Along with this project, I would like to have a volunteer start photographing our collections, which can then be added to our Past Perfect records.

If either of these projects pique your interest, please reach out to Sara at [museumattheportage@gmail.com](mailto:museumattheportage@gmail.com) or stop by the Museum on Fridays during open hours, and meet with Sara in person.

# THANK YOU

We want to thank General Engineering for their in-kind donation to the museum.

GEC scanned our large blueprints of the original 1912 William & Jessie Breese home, the 1928 addition to the William & Zona Gale Breese home, and the conversion in the mid-1940s to the Portage Free Public Library. They also converted the dark background blueprints to white background with black drawing! GEC did this work at no cost to us - thank you so much for being a supporter of our mission of preserving Portage history.

General Engineering Company



Engineers • Consultants • Inspectors  
[www.GeneralEngineering.net](http://www.GeneralEngineering.net)

## MUSEUM OPENING

Museum opening May 16, 2024:

1:00 - 4:00 pm  
Thursday - Saturday

Starting June 4, 2024:

1:00 - 4:00 pm  
Tuesday - Saturday

## EXHIBIT SPOTLIGHT

By: Peggy Malone



### William & Jessie Blackman-Breese

The William and Jessie Blackman-Breese exhibit features William's large traveling trunk, copies of the original 1912 architect's blueprints for their house built at 804 MacFarlane Road (location of the Museum at the Portage), two photos of the original house, and two red mantle lusters that were in William's childhood home (Llewelyn Breese's house next to the museum). These lamps belonged to Clara Breese, one of William's sisters. Sandy Gunderson had the mantle lusters and donated them to the museum. We have not found any portraits of Jessie Blackman-Breese, which is the one unfortunate missing aspect of this exhibit. We won't give up and will continue to search in all of the places Jessie lived: Whitewater, Ripon College, Boston Music Conservatory (now part of Berklee), and Portage.

### Vintage Portage Business Signs

The Portage Business Sign exhibit features signs from Johnson Tile, the Popcorn Stand, Pat Malone State Farm Insurance, Trails Lounge, Bidwell Ice Cream, Murison Funeral Home (door), and Hays Music Store, among several other signs. The exhibit will also include many smaller advertising items, from different Portage businesses, that have been given to the museum over the years.

*continued on next page*





Exhibit Spotlight continued from page 2

## Recreating Rooms from 1928

### Living Room:

One of our finds in the basement was the original lead glass cabinets in the back right rear of the original photo. We have them featured in our recreated room behind the sofa.

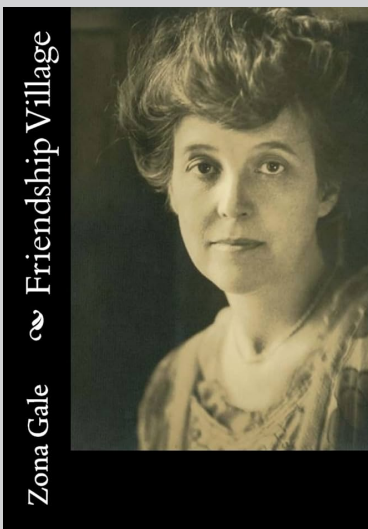


## BRICK MEMORIAL TERRACE



The Portage Historical Society has installed a brick paver memorial garden as you walk out the front main entrance of the Museum at the Portage. It's an opportunity to have an engraved paver honoring an individual, family or business. Engraved pavers will serve as a lasting tribute to those - past and present - who established Portage as a cultural center since 1854 and those who continue to serve the City of Portage. The paver memorial garden will be updated in the spring and/or the fall depending upon the number of pavers purchased. Pavers are available in two sizes: 4" x 8" for \$125 or 8" x 8"

for \$150. Your support of the Museum at the Portage will ensure our history will live on for generations to come.



## 33rd Annual Celebrating Friendship Village AUGUST 17, 2024

10:00 am - Program presented by Jeff Grothman  
Museum at the Portage, 804 MacFarlane Road

2:00-4:00 pm - Pie & Ice Cream Social  
Women's Civic League, 506 W. Edgewater Street

Come & enjoy a fun-filled day.

## ANNUAL MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

The Annual Meeting was held on April 23, 2024, at The Ballroom. Our speaker, Dr. Amy Rosebrough is the leading expert on effigy mounds in Wisconsin. She has her PhD in the Department of Anthropology and works for the State Preservation Office at the Wisconsin Historical Society.

Dr. Rosebrough discussed the sacred earthen sculptures created by Native people a thousand years ago to mark the graves of their dead. The effigy mounds, found primarily in Wisconsin, take the shapes of birds, bear, deer, bison, lynx, turtle, panther or water spirit are the most common images mostly built between 750-1200 AD.

The effigies are different from the other mound forms. Conical mounds are the most common type of mound in Wisconsin. This is what our state archaeologist refers to as “a great big mound”.

Linear mounds were also made by the effigy builders. They’re a little more recent in time. Linear are part of a class of mounds that we call geometrics - they’re long. They sometimes have projections and angles and bends to them.

They may have conical components to them, but they don’t appear to represent living beings, or at least not beings we can recognize.

Accompanying mounds at some sites are other Earth works such as enclosures. There is an “enclosure” in central Wisconsin which probably represents a dance ground. So you can imagine dancers in between two embankments conducting ritual and dancing as part of ceremonies related to the mounds.

The effigy mounds are, for the most part, concentrated in southern Wisconsin, and Madison sits at the epicenter of it. There are mounds in northeastern Wisconsin - they’re conical and linear in form with a few other geometrics, but they’re usually fairly low and pretty sparse. Up in northwestern Wisconsin are the great big mounds, and those are big conical and oval and low shaped mounds that, again, our state archaeologist says can be as big as a Buick. We have records of over 3,000 effigy mound sites in Wisconsin. Each one could contain one effigy mound, sometimes up to hundreds.

Most of those, however, are gone. They were plowed away in farm fields, roads were cut through them (Man Mound east of Baraboo is a good example), taken out in quarries, and cities were built on them. Maybe 10% of what used to be here is left, and of those, most have suffered damage in one way or another. So we have very few pristine examples of effigy mounds left, which is a real shame because, each mound is a unique work of art and a unique representation of ancient belief systems, and each is a sacred place to today’s native peoples and to others who respect the history and honor those who came before.



### BECOME A MEMBER

The Museum at the Portage is maintained by the Portage Historical Society, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. It was founded in 1995 and is dedicated to preserving the history of Portage and surrounding areas. Your support of the Portage Historical Society will ensure that future generations will continue to learn about Portage’s historic past. Join today!

Welcome to our new members in 2024:

- Arlene Rasmussen
- Sean Malone State Farm Agency - corporate

# UPCOMING EVENTS



“New Exhibit Reception”  
Popcorn & Soda Served

JUNE 1, 2024  
10:00 am - 1:00 pm  
Museum at the Portage

## HIAH Speaker Series

2024 Theme - “Trails”

co-sponsored by the Portage Historical Society

Tuesdays at 6:30 pm - Free Admission

Indian Agency House  
1490 Agency House Road  
Portage, Wisconsin



### **Dr. Michael E. Stevens – June 11**

Wisconsin State Historian Emeritus; Author

#### **The Making of Pioneer Wisconsin: Voices of Early Settlers**

Firsthand accounts of pioneers who followed the trail West to Wisconsin, 1830s-1850s



### **Dr. Rob Harper – August 13**

UW-SP Prof. of History; Native Amer. Studies Coordinator

#### **Sovereign Waterways: Indigenous Persistence and Wisconsin Rivers in the Nineteenth Century**

The role of Wisconsin’s riverine network in Indigenous survivance



### **Dr. Stephen Kantrowitz – Sept 10**

UW-Madison Plaenert-Bascom Professor of History

#### **Citizens of a Stolen Land: A Ho-Chunk History of the 19th Century United States**

A Nation’s journey through the Ho-Chunk Trail of Tears



### **Dr. Patrick Jung – October 8**

Milw. School of Engineering Prof. of History & Anthropology

#### **The Old Military Road: An Historic Highway Winding Through a Bigger Story**

A key frontier thoroughfare with weighty ramifications

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS & STAFF

Vicki Vogts, *president*  
Suzi Hemler, *vice president*  
Peg Amend, *secretary*  
Dave Eulberg, *treasurer*

Ann Marie Fuerst  
Fred Galley  
Nancy Kreier  
Peggy Malone  
Sean Malone  
Kathy Rowley  
Florence Schieber  
Heather Smith  
Melody Brooks-Taylor

**Curator:**  
Sara Oostdik

**Docents:**  
Judy Eulberg  
Sarah Mautz  
Linda Wendt

Portage Historical Society, Inc.  
P.O. Box 727  
Portage, WI 53901

Museum at the Portage  
804 MacFarlane Road  
Portage, WI 53901  
(608) 742-6682 (only during open hours)

Website: [www.portagemuseum.org](http://www.portagemuseum.org)  
Email: [museumathportage@gmail.com](mailto:museumathportage@gmail.com)

Hours of Operation:

May: Thursday - Saturday, 1:00-4:00 pm  
June: Tuesday - Saturday, 1:00-4:00 pm

Find us on  
Facebook



Be sure to "LIKE" us  
on Facebook and enjoy the  
changing posts about Portage's  
history. You can add comments  
about your own experiences or  
information about each post.