



Portage Historical Society

The Museum at the Portage

804 MacFarlane Road • Portage WI 53901

February 2025 Newsletter

Columbia County's Curling History



On February 12-16, the five curling clubs in Columbia County - Arlington, Lodi, Pardeeville, Portage & Poynette - will be hosting the U.S. Senior National Men's Bonspiel.

On Friday, participating senior curlers and their guests have an opportunity to visit the Museum at the Portage from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm to see our Curling Exhibit.

The following is an article from the Wisconsin Historical Society website:

The Amusing History of the Scots Influence on Wisconsin

One of the most bizarre Olympic sports is Curling, which has a proud Wisconsin heritage. After a long time in which Curling almost died out in America, the sport was revived in the 1930s by the invention of ice-making. A Wisconsin observer described it this way 60 years ago: *"It consists of sliding a stone down a 139 foot strip of ice and having it come to rest as close as possible to the center of a three-ring bullseye at the far end of the ice, or 'sheet', as curlers call it. The curling stones, which resemble tea kettles, are sent spinning down the ice while two sweepers under the direction of a 'skip' try to guide the stone by furiously sweeping the ice in front of it to increase its flight and to decrease its 'curl'."*

Curling was an important part of life among Scottish immigrants for much of the 19th century. Two of the earliest clubs in the nation were in Milwaukee (formed in 1847), in Portage (formed in 1850), and on the Fox River in DePere. Robert Jackson brought Curling with him to Wisconsin in 1848 and was still happily playing it in 1895 past the age of 70.

Curling in Wisconsin

The first match on the Wisconsin River at Dekorra is thought to have occurred on a frigid New Year's Eve in 1850. Its historian wrote, *"There is a reminiscing band of Scotsmen, full of nostalgia and perhaps of New Year spirits, cleared a space on the Wisconsin River for a Curling match. Immune to the blasts of the cold winter's night, the Scots used flatirons for stones. Later, finding this improvisation unsatisfactory, they engaged a carpenter and a blacksmith to make the stones of wood with iron handles. Iron stones came into use in the early 1880's and the first granite stones were imported from Scotland in the early 1890's."*

In 1860 the local press reported that, *"The ancient and invigorating Scottish game of Curling on the ice is becoming very popular in this neighborhood. Wednesday the 25th, being the anniversary of the birthday of Robert Burns, the Scotchmen of Caledonia, Dekorra and Portage had what is technically termed in Curling phrase a regular 'bonspiel' upon the ice at Silver Lake."*

The next winter, the curlers of Columbia County advertised in the Milwaukee papers that they *"hereby challenge any county in the state to the 'roaring game' with from 10 to 15 rinks to be played within the present month [February] at or within 30 miles of the city of Portage."* Whether anyone accepted their challenge has not been discovered.



The vintage photo above is Curling on the Dekorra Mill Pond in the late 1890's.

Many of our county's curling clubs are celebrating milestone anniversaries this year:

Arlington Curling Club:



The Arlington Curling Club is the “baby” of the curling clubs in Columbia County. The

club was established and a building was built near the Firemen's Park in 1954. It has a vibrant membership consisting of curlers from Arlington, DeForest, Sun Prairie, and Waunakee.

Lodi Curling Club:

The club was founded in 1880, and has been at its current location on the Lodi Fairgrounds since 1949. The club is a two-sheet facility, which was renovated in 2007 with a new warm viewing room, kitchen area, and a locker room.



Pardeeville Curling Club:



There were indications that there was Curling in the Pardeeville area before the Civil War, but no actual facts are known. Authentic

records of the first organization of the club have been lost or destroyed, however, the Grand National Curling Club of America lists Pardeeville as having a rink entered in the National competition in 1872. Newspaper articles from the early 1880s report league games, and visits by “the boys of Wyocena” for curling competition. The date used by the club (1875) is certainly not too early and it may be some years after the actual beginning of the club.

The first sheets of ice were laid out on Park Lake, probably in the small bay near the electrical dam on Main Street. One report from an old-time curler, C.W. Merrill, speaks of a “curling house” where Johnny B's BBQ now stands.

The first curling rink was located on the southwest corner of Chandler Park. In 1922, a building was built bordering Park Lake behind the village offices on the corner of Lake & Second Streets. Artificial ice was installed in the ice house in 1938. In the 1950s, the original wooden building was torn down so a new concrete building could be built. Since that major addition, the clubroom was enlarged, the lobby was remodeled, and the entire building was insulated. Heat and a dehumidifier were added to the ice house in the 2000s – big difference to the origins of Curling in Pardeeville.

Portage Curling Club:

Curlers initially played near the bank of the Wisconsin River and on Silver Lake. In 1879, the group erected a shed over the canal which sheltered two sheets of ice. In 1889, J.H. Wells purchased a former roller skating rink at the northwest corner of Wisconsin and Conant Streets and converted it to a curling rink. Later, the group placed an enclosed rink on the site of the creamery at 233 W. Edgewater Street. In addition, the canal was again utilized at this time. In 1910, the association continued to use these latter two sites for a while and constructed its enclosed four-sheet curling rink south of the canal and adjacent to the Wisconsin River. By 1923, the curling association sold their other rinks and added five sheets, a lobby, and basement locker room to the 1910 building. Fire destroyed this rink in 1945. In 1949, the club erected a new, four-sheet facility at 107 W. Albert Street where it still stands today.



Poynette Curling Club:



In 1875, the curling club was established on private property owned by the Jamieson family. The initial membership was an impressive 61 members.

Before that, it is believed that there was Curling on Poynette's lower mill pond starting in the early to mid-1850's. This was due to the immigration of many families from Scotland beginning around 1840 to the Dekorra township where the unincorporated Village of Poynette was located.

Family Histories Wanted

Did you know that the Museum at the Portage has an archive of Portage family histories? Whether a genealogy or memoir, it would enhance our collection. If you have a completed (or in progress) family history, please consider donating a copy of it to the Portage Historical Society. We frequently use them in research and often visitors find valuable information and clues to their own family histories in these files. We also have obituaries and cemetery records, school records, and much more. Our goal is to save Portage history and make it available to the public.

Renew Your Membership

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!

Membership Levels

Level	Donation	Store Discount	Genealogy Research
Pierre Pauquette	\$25-\$49	15% off	
Ansel Clark	\$50-\$99	20% off	
Zona Gale	\$100-\$249	25% off	1 hr free
Julia Rusch	\$250-\$499	30% off	2 hrs free
Frederick J. Turner	\$500+	35% off	3 hrs free

The Portage Historical Society is a volunteer-run society. Some residents think the City of Portage operates the Museum at the Portage - that's not true. The city owns the land and building, maintains the building exterior and lawn, and carries the building insurance.

The historical society is a non-profit corporation that raises money through memberships, fundraisers and donations, and is operated by volunteers. We pay for any restoration and renovations to the exterior and inside of the building, utilities, personal property insurance, and pays for exhibit materials, archival storage materials and all other costs. We have a very good relationship with the City and together we are preserving history.

You can help by donating to the Portage Historical Society, a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt corporation and can receive a tax deduction.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!!!

Annual Meeting and Dinner

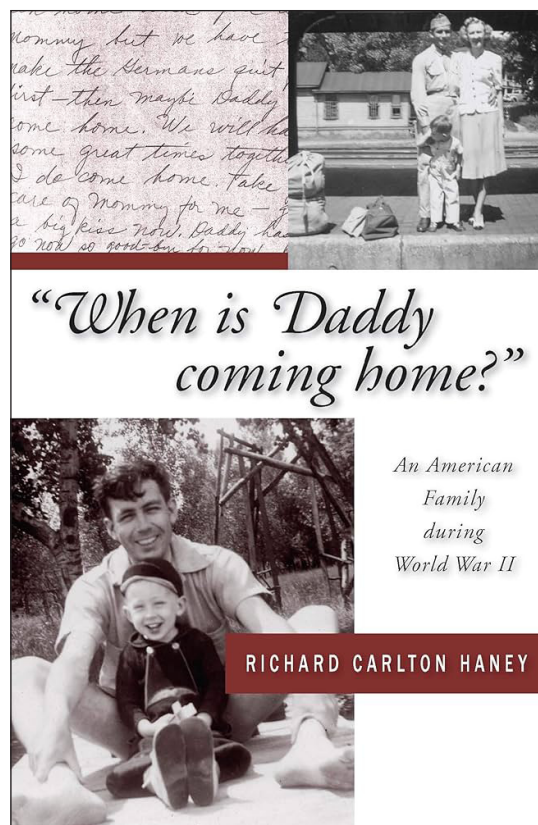
April 22, 2025 (Tuesday)

Knights of Columbus Hall
918 Silver Lake Drive, Portage

4:30 pm - social hour
5:30 pm - buffet
6:30 pm - presentation

Speaker Presentation:

Richard Carlton Haney, author of "When is Daddy Coming Home? An American Family During World War II", is a professor emeritus of history at UW-Whitewater. He earned his Ph.D. in history from UW-Madison and later graduated from West Point's post-doctoral military history program and the Army's National Security Seminar at Carlisle Barracks.



In Loving Memory



Candace Lea Roeker

8/10/1951 - 1/15/2025

Candy was born in Whitewater and graduated from UW Whitewater with a degree in education. She began teaching special education in Portage and worked there for 33 years helping hundreds of students.

In retirement, Candy helped to establish the River Haven Homeless Shelter in Portage and volunteered there for several years helping women and families. Candy enjoyed dancing including clogging, singing karaoke, golfing, traveling and spending time with her family.

Candy is survived by her husband, Donald Roeker, three children, two step-children, six grandchildren, and many family members and friends.

BRICK MEMORIAL PATIO



Outside the front entrance of the Museum at the Portage is a **Brick Memorial Patio**. Engraved pavers will serve as a lasting tribute to those - past and present - who established Portage as a cultural center in 1854 and those who continue to serve the City of Portage.

Pavers are available in two sizes:

- 4" x 8" for \$125
- 8" x 8" for \$150

Your support of the museum will ensure our history will live on for generations to come. When ordering online, you can pay with PayPal, a debit or credit card. Want to pay with a check? We do have paper forms available at the museum or you can email us at museumattheportage@gmail.com so we can mail you a form. We appreciate your support!

Please remember the Portage Historical Society in your Estate Planning

We are a 501(c)(3) charitable organization. Your donation will be added to our long-term investment account to guarantee our future.

New Logo



The Portage Historical Society has been in existence for 30 years!!! Our founding members took on a humongous task of creating an organization, creating exhibits, remodeling the interior of the former Portage Public Library to now be a museum, etc. A few of the original group are still involved with the museum board - Kathy Rowley, Nancy Kreier, Fred Galley, to name a few - THANK YOU!

We are beginning the next 30 years with a new logo for the Museum at the Portage. The original design idea came from Brad Conrad of the Chamber of Commerce and was finalized by Katelyn Purtell, Vicki Vogts' daughter. The new logo emphasizes the beautiful original arched entrance door to William Breese's home.

Curator Corner

By: Sara Oostdik & Peggy Malone

Sara & Peggy are working with a career advisor in the UW Madison Department of History on obtaining a graduate student to organize our N.H. Wood personal papers collection. The intern will be paid through a grant at no cost to us.

N.H. Wood is one of our earliest residents. He visited Portage in 1848, and bought 12,000 acres of land in the area. In 1851, Wood moved to Portage and, among other things, became a very successful merchant, as well as a prolific landowner. Our collection contains a box with many original documents pertaining to Wood that date from the mid-1800's until the 1900's. This collection includes land records, tax records and receipts, letters, records of intentions for Wood's Last Will & Testament, and various documents that are of historic significance to Portage.

This internship opportunity will primarily focus on archival management of the N.H. Wood collection including organizing documents by date and type, rehousing in proper folders and sleeves, and creating a finding aid to accompany the collection. In addition, the intern will create a digital version of the collection, as time allows. The intern will make an initial visit to the museum to familiarize themselves with historic Portage. The intern will then take the documents back to the UW to work on the project. The intern is expected to uphold collections management standards and handle the documents with care as they are old and fragile. A loan agreement will be created between the intern and the Museum at the Portage. We are anticipating it the project will be completed over the upcoming summer months.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS & STAFF

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Hours of Operation: Opening May 15, 2025

Website: www.portagemuseum.org
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