

1995 - 2025

Portage Historical Society

The Museum at the Portage

804 MacFarlane Road • Portage WI 53901

Summer 2026 Newsletter

“THE PORTERS - PORTAGE’S CONNECTION TO THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION”

By Peggy Malone

The A.A. Porter Family

The “Portage Families” exhibit now features the family of **Arthur Amasa (“AA”) Porter**, whose contributions helped shape the City of Portage for generations.

AA Porter’s parents, John Lorenzo (“JL”) and Eliza Boies-Porter, moved to the Pacific Township (just south of Portage) from Erie County, New York, in 1856. They were accompanied by JL’s son, DeWitt D. Porter (“DD”) from his first wife, Artemesha who died shortly after DD was born. After moving to the Portage area, JL and Eliza had three more boys: Arthur Amasa (“AA”), Leslie Llewellyn (“LL”), and Frank Flint (“FF”). AA and DD spent their lives in Portage. LL settled in the State of Oregon, where he practiced law, was a state senator, and raised his family. FF eventually moved to Oakland, California, where he married, had a daughter, and was a very successful real estate businessman.



A Revolutionary War Legacy

The Porter family’s American story began long before they arrived in Wisconsin. A.A.’s grandfather, Alexander Porter, lived in Connecticut and enlisted in the American Revolution on July 11, 1775, at just 18 years of age.

Alexander first served as a private in Abijah Rowles’ Company of the 6th Connecticut Militia until December 1776. In May 1777, he reenlisted in Jedidiah Huntington’s Company of the 8th Connecticut Regiment. He was stationed along Long Island Sound before being ordered to Boston, where he served at Roxbury with General Spencer’s Brigade. He remained in service until his discharge in 1780.

Following the war, Alexander lived in Hebron, Connecticut, and later Oppenheim, New York, where he died. He was originally buried in Freedom, New York, but by the early 1920s the cemetery had fallen into neglect. In 1924, A.A. Porter traveled east to recover the remains of Alexander and several other Porter relatives. Alexander was reinterred in Old Fort Winnebago Cemetery in Portage, while other family members were laid to rest in the Porter family plot at Pacific Cemetery, south of Portage.

The Porter family has also been recognized by the General Society of Mayflower Descendants, reflecting their deep colonial roots.

A.A. Porter and His Family

AA married Mary Rhynsmith in 1883. AA was a teacher, Pacific township treasurer, Columbia County Register of Deeds and the Portage postmaster. In 1908, AA became the owner/editor of the *Portage Register Democrat*, which he renamed the *Wisconsin State Register*. The newspaper eventually became the *Portage Daily Register*. AA built numerous apartment and business buildings, as well as homes in the city of Portage during his lifetime. AA and Mary had three children: Hazel (1889), Gladys (1894) and Roderick (1910). They raised their family in a stately house that still exists on the corner of Pleasant and Dewitt Streets in Portage.

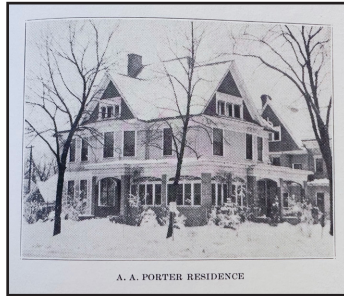
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The Next Generation

Hazel went to the Chicago Music College to become a music and art teacher. She taught briefly in Michigan and Arizona, then married John Gay, who was from Briggsville, and was a classmate of Hazel's at Portage High School. They moved back to Portage and had one child, Jacqueline. The Gay family lived on E. Conant Street, in an apartment building AA Porter built.

Gladys attended college at the University of Chicago, then became manager for the Postal Telegraph Company in Evanston, Illinois. She was briefly married, then eventually moved back to Portage. Gladys and Hazel became involved locally and nationally as members of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) and the Waubun Chapter of Wisconsin.



Roderick attended UW Madison, married, became a fireman, and eventually progressed to be Portage's fire chief. He and his wife, Kathryn, had two boys: Ray and Robert. The family moved to Marshfield then to Winnetka, Illinois, where Rod was the fire chief in both towns.

A Lasting Legacy

A.A. Porter died in 1946, and Mary followed in 1954. Together, the Porter family left an enduring mark on Portage. Through public service, journalism, business development, and civic involvement, they helped build the community, informed its citizens through the local newspaper, and contributed to the city's growth and prosperity.

Portage is fortunate to call the Porter family one of its own.

SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT UPDATE

WALKER VOIGT



Walker Voigt, the first recipient of the John & Lila Waldman–Portage History Scholarship in 2019, graduated in May 2026 with a Master of Science in Education in Professional Counseling, with an emphasis in Clinical Mental Health Counseling, from the University of Wisconsin–Oshkosh.

Walker is the son of Judge Andrew Voigt and the late Heather Voigt, the grandson of Portage Historical Society members Bill & Eleanor Voigt, and the great grandson of the Society's founders "Doc" & Kathryn Curtis.

He has recently returned to Portage and has joined the staff at Transitions Behavioral Health, where he will be serving individuals and families in our community. We are proud of Walker's accomplishments and are delighted to welcome him back home. We look forward to seeing the positive impact he will make in Portage for years to come.

25 YEARS AGO...

“Historical Notes” Newsletter
Volume 1, Issue I
April 2000

The Rose Garden is going to become a reality this year, that’s promised by Bonnie Oestreich, Merwyn Jenkins, and Elayne Hanson. Would you like to donate a rose bush to this garden? Or some other of your favorite perennials. Or if you have a green thumb and can give us a hand (or even advice), we’ll take it!



2026 Update:

Thank you to Ann Marie Fuerst for her many years of lovingly tending the roses in the Rose Garden. Her care and commitment have made the garden a welcoming feature for our visitors.

We also extend our appreciation to Doug Pearce for mowing the garden’s lawn and to Arlene Rasmussen for weeding and maintaining the landscaping. Their hard work helps ensure the Rose Garden remains attractive and inviting throughout the season. We are grateful for the many volunteers who generously share their time and talents to support the Museum at the Portage.

THANK YOU, SARAH PULLIAM



Sarah Pulliam has been a social studies teacher at Portage High School for 23 years and became a member of the Portage Historical Society a few years ago.

On April 15, Sarah gave a powerful presentation, “**The Power of Place: When Educators Become Witnesses,**” sharing highlights from her educational journey to Oświęcim, Poland—more commonly known as Auschwitz. The experience brought together dedicated educators to deepen their understanding of the Holocaust—not only what happened, but how, why, and what it demands of us today. Her presentation was both moving and inspiring.

For the second consecutive year, Sarah has also led a group of students in projects benefiting the Museum at the Portage. Last year, her students researched and created the museum’s permanent **Military Heroes** exhibit. This year, they toured the museum, researched each exhibit, and developed QR codes that allow visitors to access additional historical information throughout the museum.

We are fortunate to have an educator like Sarah who goes far beyond the classroom. She inspires students not only by teaching history but by experiencing it firsthand and helping them connect with it in meaningful ways. Her commitment to her students, local history, and the Portage community is truly appreciated.

Thank you, Sarah, for your passion, dedication, and the lasting impact you continue to make on both your students and our community.



CANAL DAYS & OPEN HOUSE HIGHLIGHTS



The Portage Canal Days celebration was held on June 6, and it was wonderful to see the parade return this year. The parade followed a new route, traveling down Thompson Street from the fairgrounds to Market Square.

A special thank you to Robin Kvalo for generously driving her truck and transporting our “canal diggers” in the parade. We also extend our appreciation to Debbie Rohrbeck and Melody Brooks-Taylor for purchasing and distributing candy to the many children who lined the parade route.

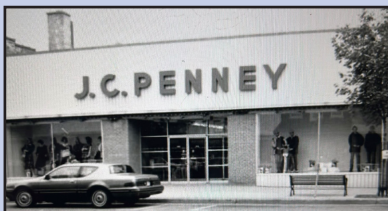
Following the parade, the Museum welcomed approximately a dozen visitors for our Canal Days Open House. We enjoyed sharing Portage’s rich history with everyone who stopped by.

A GLIMPSE INTO THE PAST

112 & 114 E. Cook Street

Home Theatre

The Home Theater Company owned by Walter Judson, H.M. Comstock, and E.G. Avers erected the Home Theater building at 114 E. Cook Street in 1910-1911. Probably the first building erected as a movie theater in Portage, it was constructed of white enamel brick. The building contained a lobby and large auditorium with seating for 352 and a stage. It was remodeled in 1950.



JCPenney Store

The building, constructed in 1964 replaced the older 112 & 114 E. Cook Street buildings which included the Windus Barber Shop (William Windus was a barber from 1892-1955) and Mack’s Jewelry Box (Daugherty 1898-1992) were in the building next door at 112 E. Cook Street. The JCP store in Portage closed as part of

JCPenney’s multi-year corporate restructuring. The location was fully shuttered during the major nationwide brick-and-mortar reductions.

Castle Furniture

In 1994, Castle Furniture moved into the former JC Penney store building.



The Ballroom

The former Castle Furniture building was purchased in 2005 and converted to The Ballroom bar and pool hall.

The Legacy

In November 2025, the Ballroom was sold and Legacy Sport Bar and Grill opened.



CURATOR'S CORNER

By: Sara Oostdik, curator



With visitors returning to the Museum and volunteers working on a variety of projects, it has been a busy and productive season!

Volunteers Peggy Malone and Sandy Nachreiner have been hard at work accessioning recent donations and documenting them for the collection. We have been fortunate to receive many wonderful pieces of Portage history over the past several years.

Earlier this year, the Museum received a beautiful oil painting of the historic Collipp home from Frank Treadway of California. Treadway has close ties to the Portage area and wanted to see the painting returned to its home community. Painted by Jenny Collipp Lloyd in the 1880s, the artwork depicts the Collipp residence on Silver Lake Drive across the east bay from New Pinery Road. The painting now hangs above the fireplace in the Museum's living room, where visitors can enjoy this treasured piece of local history.



During the winter months, volunteers sorted the abstracts, plat maps, and subdivision plans donated by Dane County Title Company (formerly Columbia County Title Company) after the closure of its Portage office. Historical societies from across Columbia County have visited the Museum to retrieve documents relating to their own communities and were thrilled to receive these invaluable historical records.

While we're adding new treasures to the collection, we're also taking a fresh look at how we care for the items already entrusted to us. As part of our ongoing collections stewardship, we're reviewing policies and thoughtfully removing duplicate items, objects in poor condition, and materials that fall outside the Museum's mission to preserve the history of the Portage area. A special thank you to Sarah Mautz and Kathy Rowley for their assistance with this important project.

This summer, we have several exciting plans to continue organizing and improving our collections storage. With the help of this year's scholarship recipient, Isaac Raines, we'll relocate our military and band uniforms to a single basement storage area where they will benefit from improved airflow and a more stable environment. We also plan to create a centralized location for our growing collection of documents and artifacts related to Zona Gale and the Breese family, making these important resources easier to preserve and access.

There is always something happening at the Museum, and we're grateful for the dedicated volunteers who make so much of our work possible. If you'd like to lend a hand with one of our many ongoing projects, we'd love to have you join us. Please email museumattheportage@gmail.com to learn more.

Thank you for your continued support, and have a wonderful summer!

THANK YOU FOR YOUR DONATION

Monetary Donations

Ruthann Helmann

(In Memory of Steve Rohrbeck)

Sean Malone State Farm Agency
(N.H. Wood Collection additional
archival supplies)

Thank You!

Amount:

☐ \$25

☐ \$50

☐ \$100

☐ Other \$ _____

☐ \$300

☐ \$500

Your generous gifts help the Portage Historical Society connect people to the past by collecting, preserving, and sharing stories. Additionally, your gift is critical to our daily operations at the Museum at the Portage. Thank you for your generous support and believing in the power of local history to inspire, educate, and connect us all.

In Honor of: _____

In Memory of: _____

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

July 14

HIAH Speaker Series - Dr. Heather Walder @ 6:30 pm

August 11

HIAH Speaker Series - Dr. Patrick Jung @ 6:30 pm

August 15

Celebrating Friendship Village
Jeff Grothman's presentation @ 11:00 am

September 8

HIAH Speaker Series - Dr. John W. Hall @ 6:30 pm

September 24

Museum's 30th Anniversary - "Behind the Scenes Tour"
MEMBER ONLY EVENT @ 4-6:00 pm

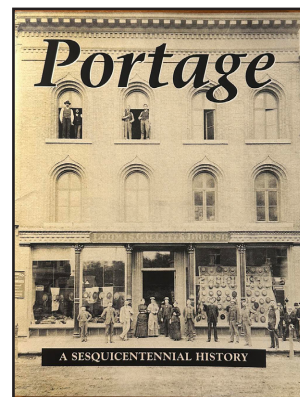
October 7

Membership Appreciation Night
@ 5:00 pm Social Hour & 6:00 pm Presentation

GIFT STORE

Books available for purchase at **THE MERCANTILE**:

- "Portage: A Sesquicentennial History" - \$30
- "Stories of the Upper Fox River" - \$10
- "Early 1900s Photographs: A Collection of Portage Homes" - \$20
- "Early Days of the Fox-Wisconsin Portage" - \$10
- "A Military History of Portage" - \$15



BRICK MEMORIAL PATIO



Outside of 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

OUR CORPORATE MEMBERS - PLEASE SUPPORT THEM



If your business or organization is interested in becoming a Portage Historical Society business member, please contact us at museumattheportage@gmail.com.

THANK YOU BUSINESS IN-KIND PARTNERS



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Hours of Operation:
Memorial Day to Labor Day
Tuesday - Saturday, 1-4:00 pm

Website: www.portagemuseum.org
Email: museum@portagehistoricalsociety.org

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