

1995 - 2025

Portage Historical Society

The Museum at the Portage

804 MacFarlane Road • Portage WI 53901

Winter 2026 Newsletter

GOING DOWNHILL IN WISCONSIN

By: Vicki Vogts

Downhill skiing in Wisconsin began with early ski jumping in the 1920s and quickly evolved into organized resorts by the late 1930s, featuring pioneering spots like Rib Mountain (n/k/a Granite Peak) in Wausau and Wilmot Hills near Chicago, utilizing CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) labor and makeshift lifts for the burgeoning sport, which grew with clubs like the Wisconsin Hoofers, even as many smaller hills, including iconic Telemark near Cable, faced closure due to financial struggles despite vibrant Nordic skiing traditions (like the Birkebeiner).

The Early Days (1920s-1930s) Norwegian students built the first ski jumping slide on Muir Knoll at UW-Madison in 1919, with official opening in 1920, establishing early winter sports. The 1930s saw the birth of true downhill areas. Rib Mountain in Wausau opened in 1937, one of the nation's first resorts built with CCC labor and featuring a J-bar lift. Wilmot Hills in Randall started in 1938, becoming a popular spot with its steep terrain for the region. The Wisconsin Hoofers, formed in 1931, became central to student skiing at the UW Madison, even forming an Alpine team by the 1930s.

Growth & Innovation (1940s-1970s) While gasoline rationing slowed some travel, areas like the Heiliger Huegel Ski Club near Milwaukee stayed active, installing snowmaking and chairlifts by the 1970s. Opening in 1947, Telemark became famous for both downhill and pioneering the huge cross-country Birkebeiner race, becoming a major destination. A new resort, like Deepwood near Wheeler, WI, is expanding the state's ski offerings (closing in 1988).

Challenges & Change (1980s-Present) Many be-

loved resorts, including Telemark, faced bankruptcy and closure due to economic pressures and competition. Some areas, like Granite Peak, saw major reinvestment, transforming into modern ski destinations. While some hills vanished, the history lives on, with Nordic skiing (especially the Birkebeiner) remaining a strong tradition, even as the landscape of downhill skiing shifts.

Ski Local at Cascade Mountain Ski Resort Cascade Mountain opened in the Town of Caledonia on January 13, 1962, with one double chairlift, five rope tows, and eight trails. A daily lift ticket cost \$5 at that time. Initial runs had names like "FlatFoot", "FancyFree", "Express" and "Zuma".



According to the Wisconsin Historical Society, construction on the Snowstar Chalet was completed in 1962. The one-story contemporary-style building has an octagonal footprint consisting of eight A-frame gables, with alternating narrow and wide peaks, extending from a central chimney. The base of the building is constructed of concrete block and there are vertical wood boards and rounded logs in some of the gable ends. The four wider gable ends each contain eight single light windows in two different sizes that are arranged in a stepped pattern. The main entrance is located in the north gable.

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For a brief period between 1978 and 1980, the resort operated an alpine coaster that was claimed to be the world's longest at the time.

Phil and Adele Walz purchased the resort from its original owners in 1977. At the time, there was only one lodge and a few chair lifts. The property now contains several buildings including the Peak Lodge (1985), Daisy Lodge (1999), Rob's Roost (2000), and Tube Town (2014).

After their son, Rob, and his wife, Vicki, took over in 2006, the second generation family made a commitment to grow and upgrade the resort. In 2016, they did a \$9 million expansion to advance the resort's snow-making abilities and added eight new ski trails, two additional chair lifts, a multi-building lodge, and a dining

complex at the base. Their third generation of the family is currently involved in managing the operations. The resort celebrated its 60th anniversary in 2022, continuing to modernize with new lifts. The Mogul Monster triple-passenger lift was replaced with a new fixed grip quadruple-passenger chair lift. The new lift will increase the number of people who can go uphill at one time and clear up congestion at the base area. The facility made improvements like adding more lighting for night skiing and creating a new tree run. The anniversary came as interest in outdoor sports had reached record numbers in the last few years. During the 2020-2021 ski-season, Cascade Mountain had limited ticket sales because of the pandemic.

Today, Cascade Mountain is a 176-acre downhill ski resort with 48 trails and 11 lifts, remaining a beloved family-run destination for skiing and tubing in the Midwest.

ANNUAL MEETING

Save the Date:

April 15, 2026 (Wed)

Knights of Columbus Hall

"The Power of Place: When Educators Become Witnesses"

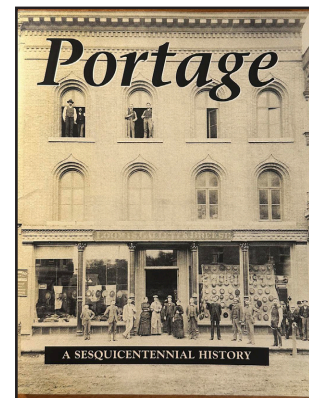
Sarah Pulliam, a Portage High School Social Studies teacher, will share her experience of traveling to Linz, Austria, Oswiecim (commonly referred to as Auschwitz), Poland, and Rome, Italy, in June 2025 with 25 educators and facilitators from 12 states and Vancouver, BC. The group was made up of career educators and first-year teachers, museum staff and classroom leaders, urban and rural, middle school to high school, general ed and special ed. For many, like Sarah, it was their first time overseas. The trip created an immersive and emotionally resonant experience for dedicated educators, brought them together to deepen their understanding of the Holocaust — not just what happened, but how and why, and what it demands of us now.



GIFT STORE

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

- "Portage: A Sesquicentennial History"
- "Stories of the Upper Fox River"
- "Early 1900s Photographs: A Collection of Portage Homes"
- "Early Days of the Fox-Wisconsin Portage"
- "A Military History of Portage"



MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

Why be a Member of the Portage Historical Society?

1. Support Local History Preservation

- The historical society operates as a nonprofit that collects, preserves, and interprets artifacts, maps, photographs, and records relating to the history of Portage and the surrounding area.
- Your membership fees directly help sustain the organization, protect historical collections, maintain the museum facility, and ensure history is preserved for future generations.

2. Contribute to Educational and Cultural Programming

- Membership supports ongoing and future exhibits, special programs, and public events that interpret Portage history, including exhibits on the Fox-Wisconsin waterway, local railroads, early community life, curling, and more.
- Some historical societies also offer member-focused lectures, presentations, or opportunities to connect with experts in local history.

3. Community Connection and Networking

- Members often join because they share an interest in local history and want to connect with like-minded individuals.
- The historical society can provide a community forum, often via meetings, member events, volunteer opportunities, and recognition of contributors.

4. Exclusive Benefits

- Invitations or early announcements for upcoming exhibits and events.
- Special members-only updates or newsletters.
- Discounts on merchandise, publications, or paid

events (if offered by the organization).

- Satisfaction of supporting a mission-driven nonprofit serving education and preservation goals.

5. Satisfaction of Civic and Cultural Stewardship

- Being a member reflects investment in the cultural fabric and historical identity of your community.
- Small local museums and historical societies often rely on memberships as a core component of their financial and volunteer support, making members integral stakeholders.

Did you know that only 35% of our income is from memberships and 28% of our income comes from the Portage Tourism Promotions Commission? 20% of our budget pays for just heating the museum building (old and not insulated well). Our furnace and air conditioning had significant repairs, reprinting of our visitor guide, and archival supplies were a large expense this year.

There may also be financial advantages to nonprofit membership, as a portion of membership fees may be tax-deductible, depending on individual circumstances.

By becoming a member of the Museum at the Portage, you join a community of supporters who value history, education, and local heritage. Your membership is an investment in Portage, Wisconsin—preserving its past, enriching its present, and inspiring its future.

We appreciate your continued and generous support of the Portage Historical Society and the Museum at the Portage! We could not do it without you.

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



THANK YOU TO OUR LOYAL MEMBERS

Frederick Jackson Turner Level (\$500+)

Dennis & Maribeth Dorn
Carole Vogts *
Lila Waldman

Julia Rusch Level (\$250-\$499)

Peggy Amend
Joyce Bisbee *
Dave & Judy Eulberg
Bobbie Goodman
Sean & Peggy Malone
Scott & Sara Reindl
Donald Roeker
Chad Schwenke *

Zona Gale Level (\$100-\$249)

Peggy Brown
Ted & Barb Chesney
Mark & Mary Curran
Ron & Debbie Dorn
Ann Marie Fuerst
David & Sandy Gunderson
Bonnie Hibner
Steve & Natalie James
Joan Johnson
Sarah Johnson
Barbara Kaiser
Veronica Kamrath
Alyxandria Klein
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A. Gale Phillips
Pete & Jan Price
Richard & Kathy Rowley
Frank & Barbara Sandberg
Florence Schieber
Dr. Stewart & Melody Taylor
Dean & Judy Traut
Bill & Eleanor Voigt
Vicki Vogts

Ansel Clark Level (\$50-\$99)

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William Stroud Eulberg
Katie Fleck
Jeff & Janice Grothman
Martin Havlovic

Suzi Hemler
Craig & Susan Hilliard
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Steve & Deb Rohrbeck
Pieper Schultz *
Ronald & Linda Wendt
Gerald & Carol Ziehmke *

Pierre Pauquette Level (\$20-\$49)

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Rich & Joan Bailey *
Sherry Bornick
Jane Considine
Kelsey Foster
Kasey Fragoso
Fred Galley
Jim & Mary Gorman
Carol Heisz
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Kay Jenkins
Sheril Lannoye
Rita Librera
Ken & Beth Manthey
Sarah Mautz
David McDonald *
Michael McNamara
Marie Moe
Sarah Pulliam
Arlene Rasmussen
William Smiley

Corporate Level (\$150):

Historic Indian Agency House
The Mercantile *
Pflanz Mendrala Funeral Home
State Farm Insurance - Sean Malone Agency
WauBun Chapter (DAR)

In-Kind Sponsor:

Galley Studio
General Engineering Corporation
Lion Tree Group
Natures Way Landscaping

LAWN MOWING & ROSE GARDEN VOLUNTEER NEEDED



The Museum at the Portage is seeking a volunteer to assist with lawn mowing and weeding in our Rose Garden. This help is essential to keeping the garden beautiful and welcoming for visitors throughout the summer.

Thanks to Henry Shortreed, a teen living a few doors down the street, has been mowing the Rose Garden for five years and is now attending technical school.

If you enjoy working outdoors and can donate some time to garden maintenance, we would greatly appreciate your support. Equipment (lawn mower)

can be provided, if needed.

Please contact Vicki Vogts at museumattheportage@gmail.com if you or know someone who is interested or would like more information. Thank you for helping care for this special part of the museum grounds.

CURATOR'S CORNER

By: Sara Oostdik, curator

Happy New Year! We accomplished an amazing amount of collections projects in 2025! None of this would have been possible without the help of Sandra Nachreiner, Debbie Rohrbeck, Vicki Vogts, and Peggy Malone. This team of go-getters jumps at each task with so much enthusiasm, and I am endlessly grateful for all of them.

Some of our accomplishments over the past year include removing several trailer fulls of unaccessioned junk furniture, trash, and broken items from the museum basement, re-shelving over 150 bound newspaper volumes on metal shelves, cataloging numerous donations, and refreshing several exhibits.

A recent project included organizing a storage space on the museum's second floor, which allowed for many mannequins and other display materials to be centralized in one spot, freeing up space in the basement. With this re-found basement space, our goal is to move the museum's collection of military uniforms from the current second floor storage to the basement with the rest of our clothing collection.

The museum building is very unique, with the basement being the warmest and driest part of our building! One of the main goals with our collections projects is to get items into environments that are best suited for their material type, which will further help with long-term preservation.

The next exhibit spaces to be updated are those on the second floor of the museum, particularly the school display and adjoining exhibits. We hope you will come to the museum in the Spring to see what has changed!

2025 also brought several new item donations, which in turn means a lot of accessioning and cataloging. Each item is given a unique object ID number and then a description of that item is recorded on paper and in our computer database. Thank you to Peggy Malone for all of her help accessioning!

Are you interested in learning more about curation and the Museum at the Portage collection? We are always seeking collections volunteers. Please reach out to Sara at museumattheportage@gmail.com, if interested!



THANK YOU FOR YOUR DONATION

Monetary Donations

Carol Heisz (textile archival supplies)

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

Thank You!

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.

Amount:

- ☐ \$25
☐ \$50
☐ \$100
☐ \$300
☐ \$500
☐ Other \$ _____

In Honor of:

In Memory of:

LEAVE A LEGACY - PRESERVE THE PAST - INSPIRE THE FUTURE

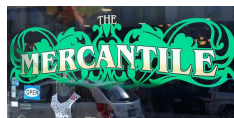
When you include the Portage Historical Society in your estate plan, you make a real and lasting difference for the Society's work by providing for its long-term financial health and success. While gifts designated for specific purposes are always welcome, unrestricted gifts allow the Society the greatest opportunity to strengthen the organization over time and the flexibility to address emergent priorities.

Your planned gift will connect people in meaningful ways to their shared past - inspiring future generations to better understand Portage's unique and vital contributions to our community.



Portage Historical Society, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization and donations are tax-deductible.

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.

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

THANK YOU BUSINESS IN-KIND PARTNERS



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Portage, WI

(608) 742-6682 (voice message)

Website: www.portagemuseum.org

Email: museumattheportage@gmail.com

Hours of Operation:

Closed for the Season

Reopen on May 14, 2026



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