

## Wreck of Edmund Fitzgerald topic for member appreciation night

Prof. Steve Ackerman from UW-Madison College of Letters and Science will share information about “The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald: The Ship, The Storm, The Song” on **September 11** for member appreciation night at the Museum. The event will start at **5:30**. Ackerman is Associate Vice-chancellor for Research and Graduate Education and the Director for the Cooperative Institute for Meteorological Satellite Studies.. It was “the weather” that resulted in the tragedy that happened on Lake Superior in November 1975, and Ackerman will review some of the weather data from that time period and well as discuss some of the theories about why the enormous ship went to the bottom of Lake Superior so suddenly, the history of ship, and the evolution of the song.



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## Portage Historical Society Museum at the Portage

804 MacFarlane Rd., Portage, WI

## Battlefield hero, his writing brought fame

His name is not prominent among those associated with Portage home – Zona Gale, Frederick Jackson Turner, Pierre Paquette, Henry Merrell, Margery Latimer, etc., but Civil War historians and Civil War buffs recognize the name of Frank Haskell who was laid to rest in Silver Lake Cemetery following his death in 1864. His words were quoted in the Ken Burns landmark documentary *The Civil War*, and the late pre-eminent Civil War historian Bruce Catton is quoted in *Gettysburg Heroes: Perfect Soldiers, Hallowed Ground* as saying Haskell’s account of the Gettysburg Battle is “one of the great, almost unknown books to come out of the Civil War.”

Frank Aretas Haskell was born in Vermont in 1828, and 20 years later followed his brother west to settle in Columbus, Wisconsin. He found a position as town clerk and superintendent of schools, and then two years later headed back East to attend Dartmouth College. He returned to Wisconsin after graduating in 1854, settling in Madison where he began to practice law. He also helped organize a militia group in 1860, and after the war broke out he was commissioned as a 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant and Adjutant of the 6<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin Infantry. He successfully trained a group of backwoodsmen who had no military experience, and eventually the regiment shipped out and became part of the Iron Brigade.

Haskell was appointed as Brigadier General John Gibbon’s aide-de-camp in 1862. Gibbon commanded the Iron Brigade throughout the Antietam campaign, and Haskell remained by Gibbon’s side throughout the general’s assignments, seeing action at Stephensburg, Rappahannock Station, Bull Run, Chancellorsville and others. On July 3, 1863, Gibbon’s brigades were at Cemetery Ridge at Gettysburg. Gibbon was injured, and the men in the brigade were leaderless. Haskell came forward and rallied the Union troops who were then able to withstand the assault known as Pickett’s Charge. Gibbon later credited Haskell for doing more than any other man to repulse the assault.

Sometime after the Gettysburg battle, Haskell put pen to paper and began writing a lengthy document describing the deadly three day battle (Union army reported 3,155 dead, 14,529 wounded, 5,365 missing; Confederate casualties were 3,903 dead, 18,735 injured, and 5,425 missing) from his battlefield vantage point. Haskell mailed his document to his brother, Harrison, in Portage, who shared the letters with Wisconsin State Register publisher Andrew Jackson Turner.

According to Frank L. Byrne and Andrew T. Weaver, editors of *Haskell of Gettysburg: His Life and Civil War Papers*, Turner declined publishing Haskell’s report, believing it was too lengthy for newspaper publication. Harvey Haskell took the Gettysburg manuscript to western Pennsylvania when he moved there years later, and in 1881 he published an edited version as a pamphlet for private circulation. Three additional versions were published, including a 1908 version reissued by the Wisconsin History Commission, which included Frederick Jackson Turner, son of the newspaper publisher who had passed up the manuscript 30+ years earlier. Byrne and Weaver report that the Wisconsin version numbered



2,500 copies, bringing the story of Gettysburg to a wider audience. When the Byrne/Weaver book was published in 1970, there had been nine printings and thousands of copies.

Haskell made a brief visit to Wisconsin after the Gettysburg encounter, but returned

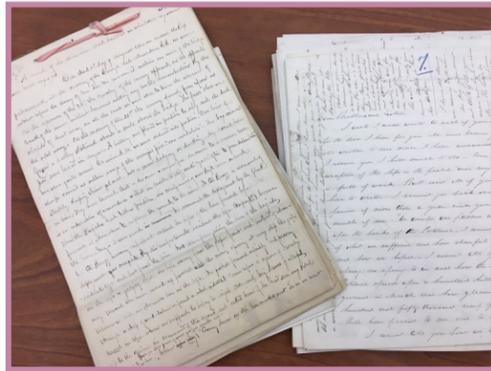
to the Army after being promoted to Colonel to lead the 36<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin Infantry. His regiment was at the battle of Spotsylvania Court House, and then on June 3, 1864, he was killed at the Battle of Cold Harbor,

(continued on next page)

## Battlefield Hero (cont'd from page 1)

after leading his men across an open field under heavy fire. A bullet to his temple killed him instantly.

His body was returned to Wisconsin, and the Madison City Council and his legal colleagues tried to arrange for his burial in Forest Hill Cemetery in Madison. However, his brother in Portage had already secured a burial site in Silver Lake Cemetery. Funeral services were conducted by an Episcopal clergyman at the Haskell home in Portage.



A collection of more than 30 letters from Haskell to his family in Portage are in the Wisconsin Historical Society archives, one still tied with a narrow pink ribbon more than 150 years later.

Rev. A.J.M Hudson predicted following generations “of freedom’s children ... will proudly read the record of thy life, will drop of tear of tenderness and reverently whisper” his name. The brothers, according to Byrne and Weaver, raised a “modest

shaft over his grave” but it wasn’t until much later that “the government would supplement it with even a marker identifying him as a Grand Army of the Republic soldier.

Author Frank Byrne, in his preface to *Haskell of Gettysburg*, writes that Haskell acquired his reputation at Gettysburg, demonstrating courage and military knowledge at a time of crisis on the battlefield, and agrees that “others might claim in similar accomplishment.” However, he

states, “no one else also wrote a gripping, detailed narrative,” and Haskell had the “literary interest and the technical skill to write a classic description of Gettysburg.” Frank Haskell, he concludes, “made it impossible to write or read very much about a turning point in American history without encountering his name.”

Haskell’s lengthy narrative of Gettysburg is housed at Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. The soldier was a busy correspondent, as witnessed by the collection of his sometimes chatty letters in the Weaver/Byrne book. There are nearly 30 of those letters in the Wisconsin Historical Society archives. While the Gettysburg “letter” is the most famous of his writings, his letters to family members, often written after “a hard wet day’s work” paint a picture of a man who is burdened with memories of battle scenes and the friends who died, but who also relished listening to the songs of birds in the surrounding trees, welcoming the comfort of “good new clean tents” and settles in for a night of rest ... “good sleep for the work of tomorrow.” He also writes a week later that the “humdrum of camp is as it was a thousand years ago, and every year since then. By the way, would it not be a good idea for some of you to write to me?”

Sources: *Haskell of Gettysburg: His Life and Civil War Papers*, Frank J. Byrne and Andrew T. Weaver, eds. 1970, State Historical Society of Wisconsin; *Portage, A Sesquicentennial History*, Michael J. Goc, 2004, New Past Press, Inc and Portage Historical Society; Catton Bruce, (1957) *We Were There*, Waiting. Retrieved from <https://www.americanheritage.com/we-were-there-waiting>; Anna Mae Axness, SilverLakeCemetery-BURIAL\_LIST.xlsx

## Upcoming events in the area, something for everyone

The Museum at the Portage is partnering with the Historic Indian Agency House for a lecture series featuring the fur trade. The fur trade and the Ho-Chunk of Wisconsin will be **July 17** topic for Janice Rice, a member of the Ho-Chunk nation and retired UW-Madison librarian. Independent researcher and frequent speaker Herman Bender will take a broader view on **July 24** when he discusses the Wisconsin fur trade. The series will conclude on **July 31** when archeologist Ryan Howell will cover the archeology of Ft Winnebago and associated sites. All programs start at 6:30 pm at the Agency House.

Check out the website for **Union Pacific Railroad** that is sending Big Boy No. 4014 on an extended tour to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the transcontinental railroad. In

Wisconsin it will be going through Altoona, Merrillan, Warrens, Adams, and Freisland **July 24 and 25**. See <https://www.up.com/heritage/steam/schedule>

Baraboo’s **Big Top Parade** starts at 11 am, July 20 on downtown streets featuring wagons from Circus World Museum. The influence of Zona Gale will be honored with

“**Remembering Friendship Village**” at 10 am on Aug. 17 at the Museum, including musical performance of a 1950’s musical score called “The Old Wauona Trail,” with slide show and talk. Women’s Civic League will host **ice cream social** at their clubhouse from 2-4 pm on the same day.

## Meet our new president, board members and summer intern

PHS president Vicki Vogts fell in love with history in her 4th grade class at Arlington Grade School when the teacher brought Wisconsin history to life by having the class host their own museum event and dress in period clothing. “I believe we can’t move forward unless we know where we’ve



been and where we came from,” she says. After graduating from Poynette High School she earned a degree as legal secretary and worked for various businesses: insurance, law, hotel management, engineering, and has been in Portage High School counseling department for 13 years. Vicki has two grown children, Tyler who is a construction manager in San Diego, and Katelyn who is in North Carolina where her husband is stationed with the Army in Fort Bragg. Her interests include curling in winter, and golf and pontooning on Swan Lake in the summer. “If I had a time machine I would go back to the late 1800’s and early 1900’s when our country was really growing and changing ,” she says, adding that her vision is to have the Society and the Museum out in front of the public as much as possible, and to have a coalition with other county historical societies — and the Sauk County and Dells Country Historical Society— to work together. If you have ideas, Vicki hopes to hear from you.

New board members include Sean Malone and Suzie Hemler. Sean, like his wife Peggy, also a board member, is a Portage native, has long been active in the Portage civic and

business community, and brings a wealth of knowledge about Portage to the board. Suzi has a love of antiques and history, she has been the administrative assistant to the Portage Schools Superintendent for 10 years.

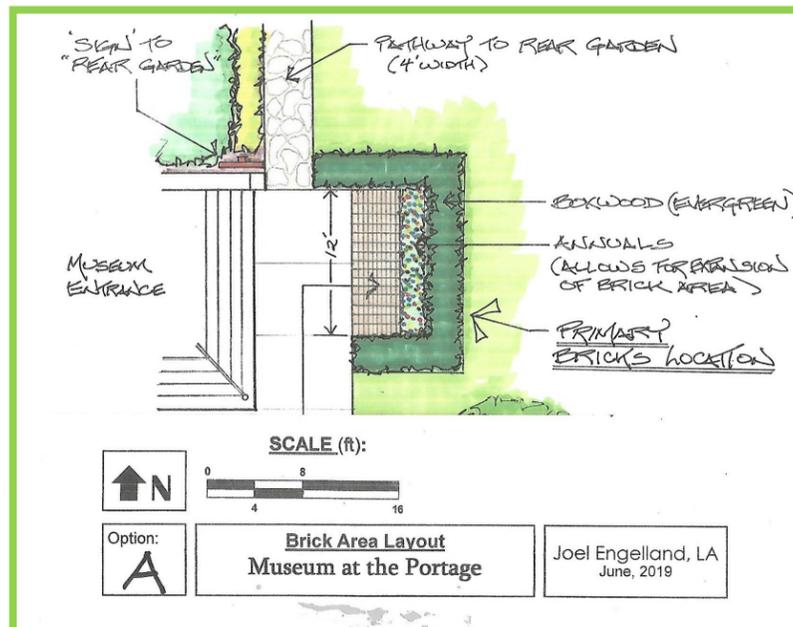


The internship at the Museum at the Portage has given Matthew Noojin first hand experience working with photographs and literary collections as he looks forward to returning to UW-Madison for his second year in the master’s program in Library and Information Sciences. He’s been learning about Zona Gale, and becoming familiar with some of her work, such as *Birth*, a book he describes as “powerful and unique.”



His current project at the Museum is cataloguing and preserving some of Gale’s letters and scrapbooks, and building a new photo archive to make it easier for patrons and researchers to access. Museums like the PHS museum not only provide educational and genealogical functions, he says, but also have the potential to provide some sense of continuity between the our times and the past.

Matthew was born in Tennessee and grew up in the suburbs of Chicago and New York City, and his primary academic and career interest is special collections, historical societies and academic libraries, and he believes his experience working with materials in the Portage museum has broadened his own professional and personal interest.



## Brick Walkway Plans Revived

Several years ago a fundraising project for a brick walkway to the rose garden at the Museum was started. For several reasons the project was tabled. After much discussion and with input from the brick vendor, the project has taken a different direction. Landscape architect Joel Engelland looked the at original project and at left is his recommendation, which the board approved at its June meeting, and now orders for bricks will again be sold but orders must be placed by **August 15**. If you are uncertain if you had previously ordered a brick, contact PHS treasurer Dave Eulbeg at 742-4957. With this newsletter is an order form and instructions for indicating how you want the brick paver engraved.