By-law change proposed
A proposed change to the by-laws of the Portage Historical Society would move the annual meeting from January to April. This change was proposed at a recent board of directors meeting because in recent years weather conditions in January have often discouraged members from attending the evening meeting.

According to the bylaws of the organization, a two-thirds vote by members attending any regular meeting called for this purpose may amend the bylaws, provided the amendment is submitted in writing to the membership 30 days prior to the meeting. This notice, therefore, fulfills the obligation to inform the membership of the proposed change.

Children’s furniture and other child-size items from Ruth Schultz are featured in a new exhibit at the museum.

Museum re-opens, open house May 24
The long-awaited re-opening of the Museum at the Portage will be celebrated Saturday, May 24 from 10 am to 4 pm. A fire at the museum in April 2014 prevented the museum from opening its door to visitors throughout 2014. Restoration to recover from the fire, smoke and water damage was a lengthy process, but the Museum opened to the public last month. With artifacts back in their rightful place, and after much cleaning and polishing, the board of directors deemed that it was time to mark the occasion with the grand re-opening event.

Refreshments will be provided, and board members and docents will be on hand to give guided tours, or visitors will be free to roam throughout the museum. Of particular interest will be the areas that underwent the most extensive and time-consuming restoration.

The grand reopening is open to the public at no cost. Normal museum hours through the end of May are 1–4 pm Thursday-Saturday, and during June, July and August the museum will be open 1–4 pm Tuesday through Saturday.

Mary was curator of Portage history
When Mary Langbecker passed away on March 3, we lost not only a faithful board member and museum docent, but also a person who was truly a curator of the Zona Gale story and legacy. Mary contributed many hours to the museum, and championed the preservation of all Gale artifacts. She had thorough knowledge of the museum collection, welcoming visitors and always taking pride in telling the stories of Portage. Mary was one of the board members who participated in the clean-up of the building after the fire, and she was working on getting an exhibit of Portage High School memorabilia ready for the new season. Mary is survived by two sisters, Peg Amend and Sally Kipfer.

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2015 Portage Historical Society Members

Patron
Bill/Peggy Amend
Kathryn Curtis
Dave/Judy Eulberg
Ann Marie Fuerst
Betty/Gerry Gast
Bob/Bobbie Goodman
Pat Halasz
Nathalie Hamele
Joe/Kathy Houzner
Robin/Mike Kvalo
Sean/Peggy Malone
Pflanz Mantey Mendrala Funeral Homes
Ted/Nan Rebolholz
Richard Rehm
John/Florence Schieber
Dorothy Schultz
John/Lila Waldman

Family
Anna Mae Axness
Ann/Gary Bisping
Jane Considine
William Stroud Eulberg
Fred Galley Family
Pat/Dave Galtmeyer
Jim/Mary Gorman
Vicki Vogts-Griespntag

Jeri Collins
Violet Daugherty
Colleen Davison
Ray Dorn
Ruth Evans
Irene Baxter Gloyd
Donald Hebl
Ruthann Helmann
Elizabeth Hinkley
Beth Hoskins
Joan Johnson
Sally Kipfer
Doug Klapper
Sheril Lannoye
Howard Lattion
Mona Larsen
Mary Loemans
Pat Madani
Ken Manthey
Sarah Mautz
Edith McElroy
Helena McMahon
Marie Moe
Sally Moe
Karen Nolan
Mary Baxter Poole
Elizabeth Robinson
William Smiley
Michael Wenzel

It’s not too late to renew your membership in Portage Historical Society or join for the first time. We look forward to hearing from you soon.

NAME ________________________________

STREET ADDRESS—PO BOX _________________________

CITY _____________________________ STATE ________ ZIP____________

PHONE ______________________ EMAIL ____________________________

Single $15_____ Family $30 _____ Patron $100_____ Benefactor $250 _____

Return to Portage Historical Society, PO 727, Portage, WI 53901

Remember when spring rains threatened levee?

It’s been many years since Portage residents have had to worry about the failure of the levee system that provides a barrier from high waters of the Wisconsin River. But there are still residents who recall the record high water of 1938 that threatened to lap over the top of the levee and cause considerable damage to more than “the flats” of Portage. Improvements to the levee over time came as the result of leadership from H.V. Tennant who was once described as “the backbone of the development of the levee system as we know it today.” He had worked with the Portage Levee Committee and the Wisconsin Water Regulatory Board. He founded General Engineering Company, served on the school board, the Park and Recreation board, and helped restore the Surgeon’s Quarters.

H.V.’s wife, Nellie Tennant, was chair of the committee to restore the Surgeon’s Quarters, was a charter member of the Civic League, and both she and her husband were involved with the development of Sunset Park. Nellie was also a published poet, and a member of the South Dakota Society of Poets, the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets, and the Wisconsin Regional Writers Association. Several of her poems were included in the Bicentennial Edition of Wisconsin History in Poetry edited by Henry C. Spear. Reading “Levee Song,” reproduced below, one can almost imagine the Tennants walking the levee on a spring night, looking for signs that could signal danger for the city.

Levee Song

We are on patrol—our lanterns swing.

The flood is high tonight;
In the wind and rain we tramp and sing.

We search in the grass for a seep or a spring
As a squirrel’s burrow, a rabbit’s den
We tramp and sing and our flickering lanterns swing.

The river, so placid in summer
So friendly—so quietly flowing
Now rages and claws at the levee,
And his strength is the strength of a giant,
Enraged that man’s power should defy him,
So we sing as we tramp the levee
Reading “Levee Song,” reproduced below, one can almost imagine the Tennants walking the levee on a spring night, looking for signs that could signal danger for the city.

The levee is safe, the levee is firm,
Man’s work is strong to oppose him.

Then the giant has wakened but
The levee grew higher and stronger;
The river, so placid in summer
Man’s work is strong to oppose him.

But while the giant was sleeping
From the valleys, the hills and the marshes
We are on patrol—our lanterns swing
There is still time to place your order for an engraved paver for the memorial walkway that will lead from the front of the museum to the rose garden on the north side of the building. A 4” x 8” paver is $125, and a 8” x 8” paver is $150. Individuals, families or businesses can be memorialized as detailed on the order form, available at the museum, or by calling 742-6682 or email to info@portagemuseum.org

It’s time to order paver for memorial walkway

There’s still time to place your order for an engraved paver for the memorial walkway that will lead from the front of the museum to the rose garden on the north side of the building. A 4” x 8” paver is $125, and a 8” x 8” paver is $150. Individuals, families or businesses can be memorialized as detailed on the order form, available at the museum, or by calling 742-6682 or email to info@portagemuseum.org

Photo courtesy of General Engineering Co.