

## Our Mission:

To enrich the experience of living in our community by telling the compelling stories and preserving the historic buildings and culture of the Washburn area.

# SUMMER 2023



## President's Letter

In the next several newsletters, in addition to event updates, we will be featuring one or more committees and the work they do to bring you stories from the Washburn area (City of Washburn, Towns of Washburn, Barksdale and Bayview) that have made our heritage so amazing. In this edition we will focus on the biennial Tony Woiak History Festivals and May Preservation Month. We would like you to meet the WHA board members who work hard behind the scenes to ensure that each presentation is flawless. We are proud of what we have accomplished and look forward to many more years of keeping our heritage alive in the Washburn Area. We welcome comments and suggestions which you can submit on our website, [washburnheritage.org](http://washburnheritage.org), just click on "contact us". Thank you for being part of our journey. - *Mary Gruhl*



### Meet Mary Cook - our newest member

I was born at the Washburn Hospital, raised in the Town of Bayview, and grew up about a mile from my paternal grandparents' home. I completed 8 years of grade school at St. Louis School and graduated from WHS in 1975. I loved rural life and loved my school years here. I

always thought it would be nice to marry, live and raise a family here, which I did. I married Tom Cook in 1979 and had three children — Abbie, Gabriel and Francie. I attended nursing school twice before completing my RN training in 1995 at the College of St. Scholastica. I worked as an LPN and RN since 1979, retiring from MMC in 2018. Sadly, Tom passed away in 2014. I have always considered us to be real Renaissance people as we both enjoyed the arts and God's beautiful creation around us daily. I continue to be involved in music, photography, nature walks, gardening, Church and am a busy mom and grandma. I am looking forward to being part of this organization and fulfilling some civic duty in years to come.



### Brownstone Days: Information Table and Historic Trolley Rides

Since 2009, WHA has provided the Washburn Area with all sorts of events, brochures, books and awards focused on preserving our heritage. On July 29 on Brownstone Days a table in front of The Snug will provide pamphlets, books, newsletters and membership forms. This year we will have a large display of photos from the events we sponsor. Please stop by to see how WHA continues to "enhance the experience of living in our city by telling the compelling stories and preserving the historic buildings and culture of the Washburn Area". You can also enhance your knowledge of Washburn with an historic trolley ride. Hour-long tours head up Washington Avenue from City Hall at 11 am, noon, and 1 pm. The ride is informative, air-conditioned, and FREE.



**Heritage**

WASHBURN HERITAGE ASSOCIATION

&

*The Washburn Area  
Historical Society*

Presents the 12th Annual 2023 Summer

## Tony Woiak History Festival

Harbor View Event Center, Washburn, WI  
All presentations on Tuesdays at 7:30 pm.  
\$5 admission | Students Free

**Tuesday, June 27**

### Houghton Point - History and Memories

Join Al House as he presents his research on Washburn's favorite rock "Houghton Point."

**Tuesday, July 11**

### Bayfield/Les Voight State Fish Hatchery

The "Old Building", recently named "The R.D. Pike Building" is listed on the National and State Historic Registry. **Darren Miller**, Operations Supervisor, will share the facility's history.

**Tuesday, July 25**

### Train Wreck at Pike's Creek

On an autumn day in 1884, nine railroaders lost their lives in a wreck just north of Pike's Creek. The trainwreck remains one of the worst disasters in this region's history, but the story has been almost completely forgotten; even its location became lost over the years. Join **Bob Mackreth** in some historical detective work and rediscover the wreck at Pike's Creek.

**Tuesday, August 8**

### The Downtown Fire in Washburn

On September 14, 1888, Washburn experienced the worst calamity in the community's short history. Join **Pete Mann** as he tells the stories surrounding Washburn's Great Fire of 1888.

Visit: [www.washburnheritage.org](http://www.washburnheritage.org) for more detailed information on each program.

## The Tony Woiak History Festival

– Remembering our Heritage

The Washburn Heritage Association has been producing Tony Woiak Winter and Summer History Festivals since 2012. Local citizens, as well as tourists and visitors have come together for festive evenings of remembering and preserving our heritage. Each season consists of a series of four events occurring every two weeks in mid-winter and again in mid-summer. The presenters are both academic historians as well as regular folks with stories to tell. The aim is always to give our audience an awareness of Washburn history in an accessible and entertaining format. We know it's been a successful evening when audience members stick around following the presentation to share their own Washburn memories with one another. The festival venue, The Harborview Event Center, is a warm and welcoming place for these community-building evenings.

But how did this history festival, which is much more than a formal “lecture series,” get started? And what does it take to bring the people and stories together? Read on, folks!

In 2012, local historian Bob Mackreth, had a conversation with Carla Bremner who was at that time the WHA President. Bob and Carla talked about the possibility of starting a History Festival to honor recently deceased Tony Woiak who had written two books about Washburn's history. The idea was presented to the WHA board and was enthusiastically embraced, leading to 11 years of festivals with over 70 wide-ranging topics that celebrate local heritage and history.

There have been many WHA board members who have served on the festival committee over the years and the Washburn Area Historical Society (WAHS) was brought in as well. Members of both organizations support the committee efforts in many ways, providing an opportunity for partnership and sharing common goals.

The committee meets throughout the year, planning for events well beyond just the current festival season. Here are a few of the tasks that keep this committee busy.

**Brainstorming ideas** for topics and for people to present those topics! There is a continuing list of suggestions and even after 11 years a slim chance that the committee will run out of ideas. Our history is amazing! Please contact a committee member if you can help with this. New ideas are always welcome!

**Reaching out to potential presenters** and confirming schedules and topics with them. Presenters submit a photo, title, and short description for publicity purposes. They let us know of any special needs they may require at the venue and we offer additional support as needed.

**Confirming schedules** with our host venue is paramount to a successful festival. The Harborview tries to provide an optimal environment for presenters and audience. We hope to continue to improve the viewing and listening experience for everyone.

“**Getting the word out**” is critical to a successful event and this is another area that we have been trying to improve. Posters are prepared to display at Washburn area public places. Ads are placed in the local newspaper and information is shared with the Washburn Chamber Blast, the Bayfield County Tourism Department, and WHA, WAHS, and Harborview websites. A final “reminder” email blast is sent to our members the day before each event.

**Applying for funding support** involves grant-writing to such organizations as the Apostle Islands Historical Preservation Conservancy, the Wisconsin Humanities Council, and the Washburn Community Education Foundation. These groups have been generous supporters over the past 11 years and we appreciate their encouragement.

**Continuing to share** these stories is accomplished by making video recordings of the presentations. You are able to find DVD's of many of the past presentations on loan at the Washburn Public Library. Or you can visit the WHA website and click on “History Festivals” in the lower left-hand corner of the home page ([washburnheritage.org](http://washburnheritage.org)).

Take time to thank our committee members and supporters. We hope to see you soon! Our first event is June 27<sup>th</sup>, so mark your calendars. Bring friends and family. Student admission is free. History is for everybody! History is us!



### Board Member Andrew Grimm

Since 2016, local Washburn High School History teacher and Tony Woiak Festival committee member, Andrew Grimm, has been the “man behind the camera.” He enjoys video-taping and is able to share aspects of many of the presentations with his students. Originally from central Wisconsin, Andrew has been teaching in Washburn for 13 years and has learned a lot about local history

through his involvement in the festival events! In addition, Andrew edits and prepares the recordings to upload them to YouTube and also creates DVD's. Each recording involves over 14 hours of conversion time, and to date Andrew has made 35 recordings! *Talk about a passion for history!*

### Kiosk News

WHA's kiosk is that colorful construction located on the corner of Bayfield Street and 3rd Avenue in Wikdal Park. It is a helpful information source. The front window is reserved for the Chamber of Commerce and the other three windows are dedicated to Washburn's history. The panels change monthly. Displays for the month of May celebrated National Historic Preservation month and we concentrated on Washburn's Court House history. In addition to being a beautiful brownstone building, it is the oldest courthouse still in continuous use in Wisconsin. To prepare this panel, the Kiosk Design Committee (Lynn Adams, Patra Holter, Ginny Pedersen, Sharon Stewart) took numerous trips to the courthouse for research. A full-scale copy of the panel was donated to the County Board of Supervisors for the courthouse's permanent collection.

At this time we have completed 23 panels. Currently, DuPont Legacy, Houghton Depot and the Community Medicine are on display.





## Bayview History Committee/Houghton Depot

In 2023, the Bayview History Committee (BHC) begins its second year of school programs and public open houses at the Houghton Depot. May was a busy month for the BHC, with the attendance of five classes of 4<sup>th</sup> graders from Washburn, Bayfield, and South Shore Public Schools. Over 60 students participated in field trips to the Houghton Depot to learn about the early history of the Bayview area. The Depot will host six open houses this summer on Saturdays from 10 am to noon. The dates of the public open houses are June 10 and 24, July 15 and 29, and August 12 and 26. BHC volunteers will be available to answer questions and operate the model train that will be running the tracks through a model of Bayview and Houghton Village around 1913. Explore the graffiti on the Depot walls put there by folks visiting the depot to mark their passage through the area. Visit us at the Depot and at our website at [www.washburnheritage.org](http://www.washburnheritage.org) and on Facebook [www.facebook.com/Bayviewhistory](https://www.facebook.com/Bayviewhistory) New volunteers are welcome to join us!



## Buildings and Sites Committee

Since January, the Buildings and Sites Committee focused on planning for May Historic Preservation Month. The committee, composed of Mary Cook, Sandy Johnson, Ginny Pedersen, Matt Simoneau and Karen Novachek, began by selecting the Bayfield County Courthouse to feature during

Preservation Month. The Courthouse, built in 1896, is designated a Wisconsin architectural landmark and was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1975.

Once the location was determined, the committee focused on planning various activities at the Courthouse. Preservation Month began with a BANG. We staged a reenactment of the seizing of the County records from the City of Bayfield, which had been the County Seat. Committee member, Matt Simoneau, was the star of the reenactment together with music and the discharge of a large cannon, which was very loud. Mary Cook helped with the music. Sandy Johnson and Ginny Pedersen organized a scavenger hunt for children that focused on finding various exterior features of the Courthouse. Then a smaller cannon exploded candy treats for the children. Karen

Novachek welcomed those attending and introduced City of Washburn Mayor Mary Motiff who presented a proclamation designating May as Preservation Month.

During the month, three tours of the Courthouse were led by County Administrator Mark Abeles-Allison. Three second and third grade classes participated in the tours and asked great questions about the Courthouse. In addition, Judge John Anderson gave a very interesting and informative powerpoint presentation regarding the history of the Courthouse to over 30 attendees.



During Preservation Month, WHA recognizes preservation efforts in the community. This year we honored Washburn Hardware and Sport owners, Nat and Susan Swiston, for maintaining their building's storefront appearance as it was during the late 1800's and early 1900's. Karen Novachek presented the Swistons and their employees with the Certificate of Recognition for Preserving Heritage.

One final month-long activity was promoting self-guided tours of all the historic buildings and homes in Washburn using the WHA informational brochure, Washburn Historic Buildings Tour. Matt Simoneau, assisted by former WHA board member, Dave Nyhus, installed identification signs in front of each tour stop.

The Buildings and Sites Committee thanks all who attended the events. It was a busy month and really informative about the County Courthouse. We have begun discussion and planning for 2024 Preservation Month. There





WASHBURN HERITAGE ASSOCIATION

## WHA Board of Directors

**President:** Mary Gruhl

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**Secretary:** Matt Simoneau

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**Treasurer:** Karen Novachek

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Lynn Adams  
Aaron Austin  
Mary Cook  
Ella Cross  
Andrew Grimm  
Patra Holter  
Sandy Johnson  
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### Advisory Board:

Carla Bremner  
Gary Holman  
Dora Kling  
Jane Weiler



*If you are interested in any of our projects and would like to volunteer to help, or have ideas for new projects, please talk to any board member. You can join the Washburn Heritage Association by filling out the form below.*

## Members and Donors

We appreciate your ongoing support of all our activities. We couldn't do it without you. If you don't see your name on the list below, please consider joining us. Thank you.

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The Washburn Heritage Association is a non-profit citizen group with no overhead expenses. We appreciate your support. Please send this form with your tax deductible donation to:

**Washburn Heritage Association ~ P.O. Box 814 ~ Washburn, Wisconsin 54891**