



HISTORY KEEPERS

2025
Issue 1
FEBRUARY

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear Members and Friends,

I am excited to share that WAHS was recently featured in the Norwegian magazine *Aftenposten Historie*, No. 1, 2025! Chief Editor Fredrik Larsen spent a full day in the Westby area last summer. I shared Westby's history and the collections at the Thoreson House Museum with him as we talked about the 200th anniversary of Norwegian immigration. We also visited Norskedalen,

the Snowflake ski hill and the Country Coon Prairie Church. I believe his article will encourage a win-win as more Norwegians visit our museum and bring their tourism dollars to Westby. (See a page from the article on the right.)

Our membership meetings are usually held at the museum on the first Tuesday of each month at 1:00 pm. March and April will be exceptions because our March 4th meeting will be held at the Daily Brew – just for fun, and because of the Spring election, our April meeting will be held on the 8th. We would love to see you at a meeting! Please find more information about our other 2025 programs, activities, and very special guests in the newsletter because we are making many other really exciting announcements in this issue!

I urge you to continue supporting our mission “to collect, preserve, promote, and communicate the history of Westby” because your involvement is crucial to the success of WAHS. Through donations, volunteering, and continued membership, your participation ensures our ongoing efforts to safeguard our heritage and continue our mission. Our end-of-year financial appeal campaign was very successful, and I thank the anyone who donated for your generosity and loyalty. If you missed the opportunity to contribute, you can still donate safely through the Annual Appeal button on our website.

For more than 35 years, WAHS has meticulously documented the region's history and its residents through artifacts, archival records, and genealogical collections. Each year, we continue to receive invaluable donations of artifacts, manuscripts, and photographs from individuals who recognize the importance of our mission to preserve their treasures and allow us to share them with others. If you have any questions, please reach out via our website, leave a phone message, email, or engage with our Facebook page. We appreciate your continued support.

Very sincerely, Blaine Hedberg



DRUM ROLL, PLEASE! DENNIS GAGE is coming to SWEET RIDES & SWEET PIES 2025!!!

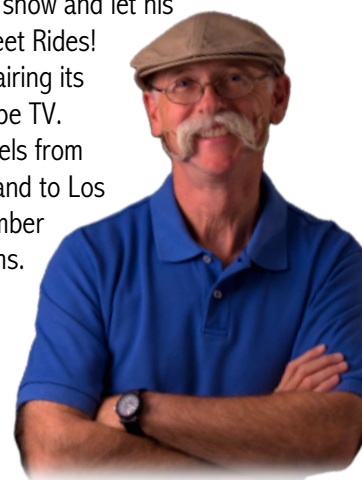
On Tuesday, Feb. 4, Garland McGarvey, SR&SP's chairperson, announced to the Westby City Council that Dennis Gage is coming to our 10th annual event! We could not be more excited to have this nationally known TV personality be part of our car show and let his 360 thousand followers know about Sweet Rides!

Dennis' show, *My Classic Car*, now airing its 29th season, can be watched on YouTube TV. In more than 600 episodes, Dennis travels from Anchorage to Hilton Head, and Long Island to Los Angeles to see all kinds of cars, any number of car shows, and countless car museums. Jay Leno is one of his very good friends and a frequent guest on the show.

Fun fact: Dennis has a PhD in chemistry, and during the 1980s, he worked in product development at Proctor & Gamble. Maybe that's why a resemblance to his famous mustache can be seen on the Pringles container!

In 2016, we had 15 cars at our first Sweet Rides & Sweet Pies. The event has grown faster than we could have ever imagined, and to get Dennis' attention is more than an amazing accomplishment! He is a major player in the car world, and we are already working on plans that will bring the best of a Midwest car show to Westby. Put Saturday, July 26 on your calendar now. The City Council is geared up, and we are lining up sponsors and volunteers. We have lots of ways you can help before and on the day of the event. Watch our Facebook page for updates – and watch some *My Classic Car* episodes before you come to meet Dennis in July!

Photos below: On Feb. 4, at the WAHS monthly meeting, SR&SP Chairman Garland and WAHS President Blaine announced that Dennis Gage is coming to Sweet Rides 2025. At the Westby City Council meeting that same evening, Mayor Danny congratulated Garland on hearing the great news!





Shining a Light on the Past

Junior ski jumpers have always been a part of Snowflake. Below are a few from 50 years ago on "The Times" front page, 3/6/75.

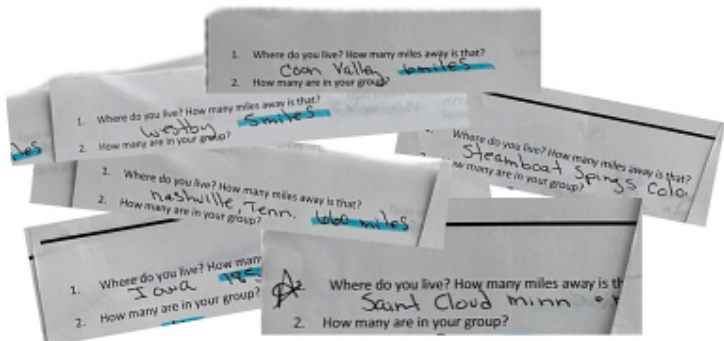
WESTBY JUNIOR SKIING CHAMPIONS

The Westby City Junior Ski Jumping champions are shown in the picture after announcement of the results of the competition held Saturday afternoon. From left to right: Brent Leum, 1st in the Pee Wee Class for age 10 and under, who had jumps of 13'-14' and 119.7 points; Ronnie Hall, 1st in Class III on the 15 meter hill with jumps of 44'-43' and 140.4 points; Jeff Jaeger, 1st in Class on the 30 meter hill, with jumps of 92 and 87 ft., and 139.9 points; and Mike Fremstad, Class I winner on the 30 meter hill with jumps of 109 and 108 ft., and 171.2 points. Mike also had the longest standing jump on the hill and was judged most graceful.



WAHS working with Snowflake

The Snowflake Ski Club is the longest-existing organization in our area that promotes Norwegian history and heritage, and WAHS is grateful to partner with them. At the 2024 ski jumping tournament, WAHS conducted a survey for the Snowflake Ski Club. The information gathered from people attending the tournament was used for a successful grant application whereby the club received \$6,500 for marketing. This year, WAHS members Garland, John with Nina, and Kathy did a follow-up survey for the club to see how successful those marketing efforts were and to gather more information for future grant applications. We found that people attending the tournament came from as nearby as Timber Coulee and as far as Nashville, TN and Steamboat Springs, CO. One third



WAHS was asked to collect information from attendees but we did 281!

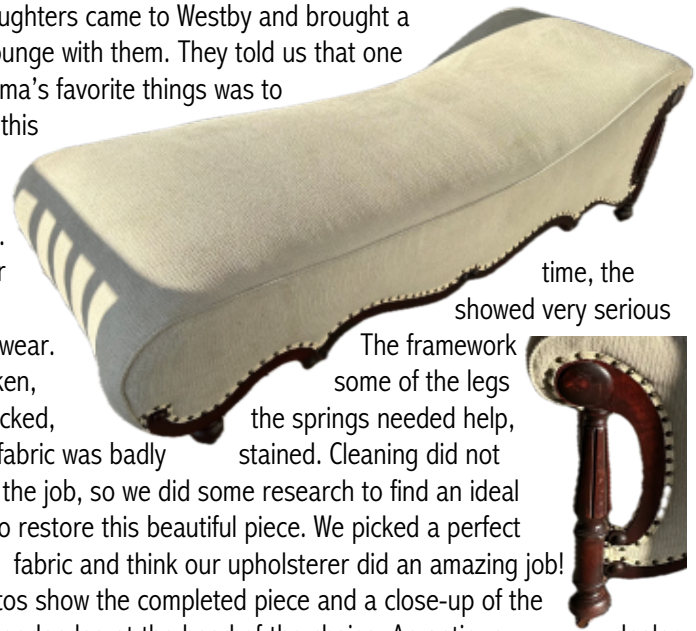
Katherine's chaise lounge is back home!

Last year, two of Katherine and Theodore Thoreson's granddaughters came to Westby and brought a chaise lounge with them. They told us that one of Grandma's favorite things was to relax on this

"fancy" piece of furniture. But, over time, the chaise

showed very serious signs of wear. The framework was broken, some of the legs were cracked, the springs needed help, and the fabric was badly stained. Cleaning did not quite do the job, so we did some research to find an ideal person to restore this beautiful piece. We picked a perfect

"period" fabric and think our upholsterer did an amazing job! The photos show the completed piece and a close-up of the ornate wooden leg at the head of the chaise. An antique dealer and our upholsterer both estimated it to be over 110 years old. There were layers of burlap and straw over the springs and signs of at least four layers of fabric that had covered the chaise at one time or another. A decorative band of fabric edging and new tacks complete the beautiful chaise, and we are happy to have it back home!



First Prize:
9" tall Norwegian wooden bowl
with hand-painted rosemaling

DEB MOORE



Second Prize:
6" tall Norwegian wooden bowl
with hand-painted rosemaling

MARY LEE



Third Prize:
\$50.00 cash

RUTH RUPP
Donated back to WAHS. Thank you!

Congratulations to the winners of our 2024 raffle and, thank you, again, to donors Siw and Kenny Volden for the beautiful Norwegian bowls.

of the people we surveyed stayed in paid lodging and spent more than \$100/person to be here. If that extrapolates to the estimated crowd of 4,000 attendees, we can estimate that the Snowflake tournament brought \$133,000.00 tourism dollars to our area!

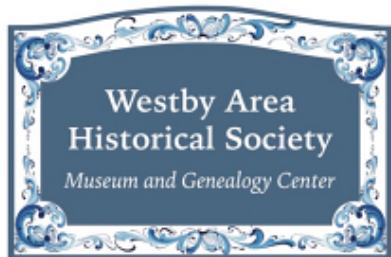
WAHS also sponsored prize money for the 2025 Snowflake Children's Coloring Contest, and we contributed to the program booklet by writing an article that encouraged people to support the Youth Ski Jumping Team and their efforts to finish putting plastic on the junior hills.

Snowflake also has a written club history from 1923 through 1974, listing officers, tournament winners, club milestones, hill modifications, etc. They have asked us to finish that history by updating the last 50 years. Referring to the information we put together for their 100th anniversary, scanning our collection of Snowflake programs, photos, and memorabilia, and reviewing the museum *Westby Times* archives, it will be an easy task, and we appreciate that they value our research as accurate and dependable. Some of the Snowflake members have even become WAHS members and volunteers — and we are so very grateful for them!

Annual Meeting Recap

Once again, we had a very successful Annual Meeting. Brad Pfaff, Loren Oldenburg, and a representative from Tara Johnson's office attended. Several local CEOs, Mayor Danny Helgersen, Westby School District Superintendent Steve Michaels, and Westby Chamber Director Stef Schroeder were also in attendance. We very much appreciate that these busy people take such a huge interest in our organization. President Blaine did a wonderful review of the events and activities of 2024 and VP John made his savory chili for our delicious lunch.

The Treasurer's Report verified that WAHS is in a good financial position moving into 2025 thanks to the success of our fundraisers and the generosity of our members!



2024 WAHS Treasurer's Report

CHECKING ACCOUNT		
1/1/24	Balance forward	\$6,821.15
INCOME	Donations and memorials	\$5,842.19
	Event – Sweet Rides	\$10,435.16
	Events – other	\$1,948.10
	Membership dues	\$620.96
	Bowl raffle	\$705.00
	Income Subtotal	\$19,551.41
EXPENSES	Acquisitions for collection	\$614.30
	Advertising	\$743.50
	Bank charges	\$68.00
	Computer, website	\$102.83
	Collections management	\$648.40
	Electric and water	\$1,189.98
	Event expenses - Sweet Rides	\$3,499.32
	Event expenses – other	\$2,045.31
	Heat	\$763.02
	Insurance	\$1,693.20
	Lawn care	\$2,525.00
	Maintenance of museum	\$2,129.73
	Memberships & conferences	\$173.00
	Office expenses	\$529.33
	Phone and internet	\$736.42
	Post office	\$102.00
	Printing	\$565.19
	Expenses Subtotal	\$18,128.53
11/30/24	Ending Balance	\$8,244.03

In 2025, we will be repairing, replacing, and covering the museum gutters and rotting fascia. We will also be working with a landscaper to reroute a couple of the downspouts and move garden plants to simplify the maintenance of the museum grounds while ensuring everything remains period-appropriate to the 1892 building. These projects will be a prudent investment in the Thoreson House Museum and a saving grace for our volunteers who work to keep our gardens beautiful.

2025 WAHS CALENDAR

In addition to our monthly meetings, we have at least one event or activity every month! Please plan to join, attend, or volunteer – we need you!

Jan. 31 & Feb. 1: Snowflake Ski Tournament
 Feb. 10 -14: Valentine's Member and Volunteer Appreciation
 March 8: WHS speaker: George Hesselberg; 2:00 pm
 March 19: History Advocacy Day in Madison
 March: Cemetery stone cleaning TBA
 April 26: Karve In; all-day woodcarving event
 May 17: Syttende Mai week: lefse/pølse sales, museum tours, Grandparent of Year, and school programs; TBA
 June 1: Museum Sunday "Open House;" 11 am – 2 pm
 June 10: Party on the Porch; 5 – 7 pm
 June 15: Museum Sunday "Open House;" 11 am – 2 pm
 July 6: Museum Sunday "Open House;" 11 am – 2 pm
 July 8: Party on the Porch; 5 – 7 pm
 July 20: Museum Sunday "Open House;" 11 am – 2 pm
 July 26: Sweet Rides & Sweet Pies; all-day event
 August 3: Museum Sunday "Open House;" 11 am – 2 pm
 August 12: Party on the Porch; 5 – 7 pm
 August 17: Museum Sunday "Open House;" 11 am – 2 pm
 September: Cemetery stone cleaning TBA
 October: Wisconsin Historical Society Annual Meeting; Baraboo
 November: Volunteer of the Year Award given
 November 11: Veteran's Day community and school programs
 December: Annual Meeting TBA

Please watch our Facebook page and check the May newsletter for updates and additions to this calendar.



WISCONSIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Dead Lines: Slices of Life from the Obit Beat with George Hesselberg

Please join us on Saturday, March 8 at 2:00 pm in the basement of the Bekkum Library for this very fun and entertaining program. George is an author and freelance writer who was a reporter for the Wisconsin State Journal for forty-three years. He covered every

beat, wrote hundreds of obituaries of the famous and the not-so-famous, and was a columnist for eighteen years. George's specialties are clear writing, compelling features, and investigative reporting. George received a BA in Journalism at UW-Madison and a history degree at the University of Oslo. His father worked at the Westby railroad depot in the 1950s and 1960s, which makes him very familiar with Westby! WAHS President Blaine has known George for many years and promises this will be a great way to spend a not-quite-Spring afternoon. The program is co-sponsored by the Wisconsin Historical Society as part of their History Makers Tour. Coffee and cookies will be served and George will even have a few of his books to sell.

History
Makers
Tour



History is the study of all the world's crimes.
Voltaire,
 French writer and philosopher
 1694 -1778

Thank You!
to our sponsors for their support!
It helps our general operations budget, our members, our newsletter, and our events!

FEBRUARY FOTO FEEDBACK

Class reunion time is coming soon, so we are getting requests for "Memory Boards." Can you tell us who this is on the right and why we chose her picture for our February Foto?



Only if it's time for you to renew your membership, will you find a separate invoice and envelope with your "History Keepers" newsletter.
 Dues are just \$20/person and help us to defray most of the cost of the newsletters! *We appreciate your renewal!*



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to Blaine and John for being reelected to the board, and thank you to Blaine, John, and Kathy for serving as our 2025 officers!



to our new member, Deb Stromstad!



Congratulations to Ava, our scholarship recipient, for finishing her first semester!



Please leave a message at 608-634-4478, find us on Facebook or email us at westbywihistory@gmail.com. Your ideas, opinions, and suggestions matter! We want to hear from you!

2025 Officers and Board of Directors

President and Curator – Blaine Hedberg (2027)
 Vice President – John Erlandson (2027)
 Sec't/Treas & Newsletter – Kathy Anderson (2026)
 Board Member – Dorothy Skaaland La Due (2025)
 Board Member – Carol Erlandson Navrestad (2025)
 Board Member – Marlo Volden (2026)

* Officers are elected at the Annual Meeting



Please share our newsletter with your friends, and encourage them to join WAHS by filling out and mailing this membership form!

Westby Area Historical Society

P. O. Box 42; Westby, WI 54667

www.westbywihistory.com

608.634.4478

westbywihistory@gmail.com

\$20.00 for Annual Dues from each of our WAHS members supports our education efforts, our quarterly newsletter and the Thoreson House Museum building.

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PLEASE ACCEPT MY TAX - DEDUCTIBLE GIFT to WAHS: _____