

HISTORY KEEPERS

2025
Issue 2
MAY

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear Members and Friends,

Happy Syttende Mai to everyone! The celebration in Westby was delightful, and WAHS was involved in many activities that you can read about on Page 3 of this newsletter. "A photograph is worth 1,000 words," so you will have a lot to digest in the description of our activities and the photographs you will see there.

This summer, WAHS will be busy with other events as well. We will welcome

visitors during an "Open House" at the Thoreson Museum and Genealogy Center every other Sunday from June through August. We will host "Party on the Porch" on the 2nd Tuesday in June, July, and August because it proved to be such a big hit last summer, especially when the weather was beautiful. Members enjoyed summer evenings relaxing on our beautiful porch with friends and other members. Everyone brings their own beverages and snacks, and we hope you can join us for one or all three. We have a bus group from Norway scheduled in July, and the 10th annual Sweet Rides & Sweet Pies, our biggest fundraiser, is "gearing up" for Saturday, July 26th, from 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM. This family-friendly event will feature hundreds of classic cars and more than 100 tasty pies. You can find a complete calendar of our member events on Page 4.

I would like to remind you that besides our newsletters, you can find

Gutters & Landscaping

We had to "bite the bullet" this Spring and spend some money. Rotted fascia boards and corroded gutters have needed attention for some time, and it has been more and more difficult to find someone to clean gutters every Fall. What CJ Seamless Gutters did won't prevent all future maintenance, but it will certainly cut down A LOT on the frequency of what we will need to do.

Also, our rock garden was out of control and was on a dangerous slope with many rocks to step over. Using perennials from there and other areas around the museum, a garden was planted under the front sign for everyone to see! Thank you, Old Stone Landscaping – the property looks beautiful!



an amazing amount of information about Westby's history by visiting *Westby, Wisconsin Remembered* at www.westbyhistory.blogspot.com, our WAHS blog, and on our WAHS website at www.westbywihistory.com. If you ever have a question or want to share something special that you know about Westby, please don't hesitate to send me an email. I am always looking for something to add to both of these resources.

Before I leave, I want to share some "fun facts" about our Facebook pages for WAHS and for Sweet Rides. In the past 28 days, we have reached more than 8,200 people. We have had over 1,100 "reactions" to our posts and 200 comments. The posts have been shared 98 times, and our photos have been clicked on for a closer view more than 1,250 times. We are reaching a lot of people! If you don't already "Follow" us, please do so for the latest and greatest information about WAHS.

Thank you for your continued support, and have a wonderful summer.

Blaine Hedberg, President, WAHS

10TH
ANNUAL



Great plans are coming together! On Saturday, July 26th, the City of Westby will have a full tank of events and activities. Since 2016, WAHS' annual fundraiser has exponentially grown, and our 10th annual event is expected to bring more than 400 vehicles to our city!

Dennis Gage, from TV's *My Classic Car*, will join SR&SP Chairman Garland McGarvey to cruise the property all day, from 10 a.m. until 3 p.m. They will look at all the special vehicles that motor to *Sweet Rides*, and they will talk to the owners to hear the stories of what makes a car so special. Photo opportunities will be available throughout the day!

The Main Street Construction Project will be finished by then, and Mayor Danny, the City Council, project managers, contractors, and construction crew members have already been invited to a special dedication of the new Main Street highway. Some special guests will also be here to thank legislators for approving the state funding for Westby. A small parade, some historic vehicles with particular relevance to Westby, and some guests will participate in the ribbon-cutting ceremony. Garland will say a few words about *Sweet Rides*, and the fun will begin.

To have a great event, we need great sponsors, and we thank our returning sponsors, most of whom have been with us since the beginning. This year, we are excited to welcome Dahl Automotive as the biggest sponsor of Sweet Rides. Their historic involvement with Westby will be spotlighted.

Preregistration will be open the first week of June so be sure July 26th is on your calendar! It's going to be huge!



Shining a Light on the Past

The connection between two wonderful Westby institutions is the topic of this article, published 40 years ago, when Syttende Mai and its relationship to the Bekkum Memorial Library were explained on May 23, 1985, in "The Times."

Later that year, on October 7, a groundbreaking ceremony took place and the new library was dedicated on Sunday, August 6, 1986.

Library Gets \$100,000 More

Owen and Dorothy Bekkum came to town with their antique cars and rode in the Syttende Mai Parade on Sunday. Many Ohs and Ahs were heard as their shiny autos zipped by – not to be outdone by the sleek new models.

After visiting with Mr. Gulsvig during the weekend, Mr. and Mrs. Bekkum presented him with a pledge for an additional \$100,000 for the proposed Bekkum Memorial Library. This is one Syttende Mai Westby won't soon forget. The Bekkums gave a similar pledge several weeks ago.



*Editor's note: The article goes on to say only \$40,000 more was needed to be raised by the community to build the library! Also, because we are celebrating our **10th Annual Sweet Rides & Sweet Pies** on Saturday, July 26, we just had to tell you that Owen and Dorothy Bekkum's vehicle (pictured above) is a 1904 Curved Dash Runabout. It was "the first mass-produced automobile and a precursor to Henry Ford's Model T, paving the way for the modern assembly line." The vehicle weighed 850 lbs., cost \$650 new, had a seven-horsepower engine, and could reach a top speed of 20 mph. It was a pretty significant piece of automobile history in the USA!



Find us on Facebook at: facebook.com/westbywihistory/

Find out more on Facebook that won't fit in this newsletter!

History Advocacy Day

On Wednesday, March 19, two WAHS Board Members attended the Wisconsin Historical Society's History Advocacy Day in Madison. This annual event presents a wonderful opportunity for 501(c)3 organizations to meet with state legislators, to thank them for supporting grant money for historical societies, and to encourage continued budget approval for funding for organizations that work to preserve history in our state.

Photo below: WAHS member Marlo, Sen. Brad Pfaff, Chris from Norskedalen, Cyndi from the Viroqua Bath House, and Kathy from WAHS.



Scholarship Winner



Congratulations to Grace Hoff, the 2025 WAHS scholarship winner! Grace will complete 20 volunteer hours and submit verification of a successful first semester of college to receive the \$500 award. Grace helped Blaine with collection management and the lefse/pølse sales. She will work more hours at our museum's Open Houses and Sweet Rides & Sweet Pies. Thank you, Grace, for volunteering. We wish you the best at college!

Cemetery Stone Cleaning Workshop

On Saturday, May 10, WAHS President Blaine had another successful workshop at the Coon Prairie Cemetery. Thank you, Randy Lunde, for asking us to clean one of your family stones for the demonstration. The before, during, and after photos show wonderful results of just a little effort and a few supplies. We will do another workshop in the Fall!



WAHS Makes a BIG Impact at Westby's Syttende Mai

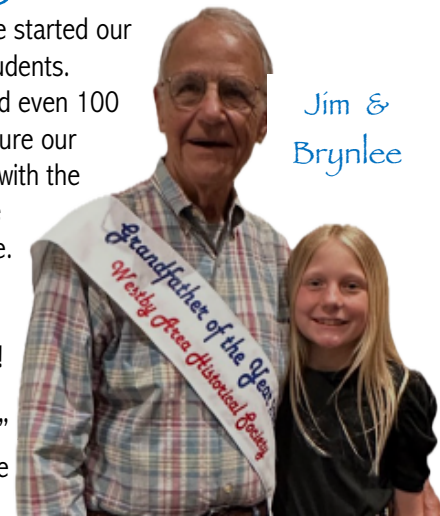
For many years, WAHS has been involved in Syttende Mai's festival, and this year was no exception! We started our activities on Friday, May 9th, with the first of 3 programs for all the Westby Area School District 4th grade students. Today's population in Westby has become more and more removed from the immigrants who came 150 and even 100 years ago. There is no personal connection for most of these students to relate to why we "old folks" treasure our Norwegian heritage. Our WAHS programs brought a personal reason to the students to help them connect with the importance of Norwegian immigration, especially because Norway and the United States are celebrating the bicentennial anniversary in 2025 of the first ship, the *Restauration*, with purposeful immigrants coming here. Teachers told us the students talked about our visits the entire rest of the day after we left! We thank them for inviting us to share information and are grateful they felt we enhanced their lesson plans for Wisconsin History, because Norwegian immigration and Syttende Mai are certainly a big part of that story in our area!

Next, we went to school on May 12th with Jim Munsch to surprise his great-granddaughter, Brynlee Berger, to let her know she wrote the winning nomination letter for this year's "Grandparent of the Year." later, on May 14th, we announced to everyone during intermission that Jim won our 2025 Grandfather of the Year Award. Since it began in 1999, WAHS has alternated this award from Grandmother to Grandfather, chosen from an exceptional nomination letter written by a 4th-grade student. We appreciated that Brynlee's letter never mentioned what Jim bought for her, and we were very impressed that she focused on what HE would enjoy and how HE would feel. In today's world of busy calendars, we were thrilled to recognize a great-grandfather and a family that considers multigenerational interaction an important part of their family relationships. Jim received a boutonniere, a sash, and a picture frame, and Brynlee received a \$25 cash prize. They walked in the Kiddie Parade and stopped at the museum on Saturday, rode in the Big Parade on Sunday, and will be at *Sweet Rides & Sweet Pies* on July 26th. Congratulations to both Brynlee and Jim!

Of course, we had an Open House at the Thoreson House Museum and Genealogy Center on Saturday, May 17th, with the help of Carol, Dorothy, Marlo, John and Randy. We had a record +129 people visit the museum, so they were exceptionally busy! President and Curator Blaine worked endlessly to get the museum ready. A donation of shelving and a bigger desk allowed us to better organize things in the Research Room, but it involved a lot of rearranging. Thank you, Blaine, for your work to make that happen in time for the Open House! Everyone commented on our wonderful displays!

Of course, we had our traditional lefse/pølse sale. Clinton Bagstad made our delicious lefse, and Borgen's took care of frying the pølse for us. Garland moved the lefse house into place, and Kathy, Marlo, Nancy, Pat, and Grace all volunteered to do the selling. So many people commented that they had been waiting for our tasty treat for many months and were happy we once again had this fundraiser. It was a huge success and we will continue our Syttende Mai tradition next year!

And, we can't forget the Big Parade! Garland, our *Sweet Rides & Sweet Pies* chairman, rode with Hayden Fredrickson in Hayden's very special 1968 Chevrolet C10 pickup. They made sure everyone along the parade route knew Dennis Gage of *My Classic Car* is coming to our 10th annual event. We are sure you will see Hayden's truck again on July 26. BTW – Hayden is the guy responsible for taking care of our museum lawn. Thanks, Hayden! The property looks wonderful because you always do a great job!



Jim & Brynlee



1. Blaine is ready for a WES program for 4th graders.
2. Kathy at the Coon Valley Elementary School.
3. Jim and Brynlee came to the museum to see our Syttende Mai buttons.
4. Nancy and Pat selling lefse/pølse.
5. Our great group of museum docents.
6. King Larry and Queen Dorothy Stoffregen came for a museum tour.
7. Garland and Hayden in the Big Parade driving the *Sweet Rides* entry.
8. The family was so proud to ride with Jim and Brynlee in the Big Parade.



"Forgiveness is the only way to reverse the irreversible flow of history." - Hannah Arendt, German-American historian and philosopher

WELCOME!

to new members, Marty Briggs, Elizabeth and Robin Schmuckel, and Joan Seymour!

Hello!
Summer

Be sure these dates are on your summer calendar!

Sun., June 8, 11am – 2pm: Museum Open House
Tues., June 10, 5pm – 7pm: Party on the Porch
Sun., June 22, 11am – 2pm: Museum Open House
Tues., July 8, 5pm – 7pm: Party on the Porch
Sun., July 13, 11am – 2pm: Museum Open House
Sat., July 26, 10am – 3pm: Sweet Rides & Sweet Pies
Sun., Aug. 10, 11am – 2pm: Museum Open House
Tues., Aug. 12, 5pm – 7pm: Party on the Porch
Sun., Aug. 24, 11am – 2pm: Museum Open House

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

FEBRUARY FOTO FEEDBACK

Congratulations to our member and Pie Crew volunteer, Pat Anderson Strittmater, as the first of many who could correctly identify Marge Terry, long-time Westby High School secretary, in our Feb. Foto.



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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!

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



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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

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\$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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