



HISTORY KEEPERS

2024
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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear Members and Friends of WAHS,

One of the first things I did after moving to Westby was to be bold and join the Westby Area Historical Society. In doing so, I have gained a deep appreciation of the vision, contributions, and diligence of our organization's past leaders and members. For the past thirty-five years, WAHS has evolved and repeatedly reinvented itself to maintain relevance and vitality in telling the story of Westby. We strive to enhance the understanding of our area's past and its

connection to the present, demonstrating that history is not just a series of events that happened to individuals long ago but is integral to the fabric of our daily lives.

In September, we commemorated our 35th anniversary. It was well attended despite Westby's road construction. The local downtown detour to Bekkedal Ave. has taken half the Main Street traffic past WAHS for 6 months. A new banner and updated sign lighting provided visibility for our WAHS Historical Society and Genealogy Center.

Our Thoreson House Museum is an amazing place where we are the recognized destination for Westby local history and considered to be the area's primary history educator, making history relevant in modern society. You can be very proud of all that has been accomplished during the past thirty-five years because of your membership. Updates on our website and through social media have also helped give everyone new ways to learn about our programs, resources and new acquisitions.

We are trusted keepers and tellers of our story. This trust must be nurtured and built upon if our organization is to thrive in the years ahead. People want what history organizations can give them: displays of real, tangible items from the past; the human, personal stories to see and hear; an accessible, friendly place where all are welcome to find information about where we came from, who we are, and how we got to be that way. Westby has a fascinating history and I believe when we engage our community on a personal historical level, we can do marvelous things.

Now I ask you to be bold with me and reach out to your friends and anyone with ties to Westby to join WAHS. Show them our website; how little it costs to become a member; and invite them to events and programs. Consider what you could contribute to our success with a small investment of your time and unique skills. I continue to be amazed at the range of knowledge and experience that exists out there, just waiting to be motivated. Please get involved and help us to continue to share our history for the next thirty-five years. If you have questions, please contact us through our website www.westbywihistory.com or leave a message at (608) 634-4478. You can also "Like" and "Follow us" on Facebook at www.facebook.com/westbywihistory. As always, thank you for supporting the Westby Area Historical Society! Blaine Hedberg, WAHS President

2024 VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR

Although we have many wonderful volunteers who do so many things for WAHS, this year's award winner was an easy choice! Ellie Brye has been our *Sweet Rides & Sweet Pies* pie-making team leader for many years. From planning, to figuring out logistics, to shopping for ingredients, to running the crust-making crew, to being there to lead the construction of all the pies, to baking pies, and helping to cut and package the pieces, she is there for it all! We depend on Ellie's delicious recipes, her guidance, her instructions, her baking expertise, and her warm smile. Ellie oversees every part of more than 60 pies, all made "from scratch" for our event. Everything happens in just the 3 days before our annual *Sweet Rides & Sweet Pies* because she insists the pies are as fresh as can be – never frozen. It's a big job and we are so thankful that Ellie has been there to mentor and encourage us. *Sweet Rides* is just another car show without the pies and Ellie is the reason we have the best pies ever! Thank you, 2024 Volunteer of the Year, Ellie!



Above L to R: Sweet Rides & Sweet Pies Chairman Garland McGarvey, Ellie Brye, and WAHS President Blaine.



Our Annual Member Meeting will be on Tuesday, December 10, at the Westby VFW; 205 N. Main Street.

11:00 Social Hour

12:00 Lunch

12:45 Short Business Meeting

Please **RSVP** so we plan correctly for food!



Shining a Light on the Past Legacy Donations make a difference!

In honor of the construction we have been living with since April, this Nov. 17, 2011, article is appropriate today! It outlines something that never happened!

DOT plans lane change by weekend

With the construction of the new Hwy. 14/61/27 four-lane corridor between the cities of Westby and Viroqua nearing completion, the Wisconsin DOT will hold a public meeting on Wednesday, Nov. 30, regarding the study and mapping of future bypasses around the two communities. The meeting will be held from 5 - 7 p.m. at Western Technical College - Viroqua, 220 S. Main St., Viroqua.

The proposed bypasses are part of a WisDOT long-range development study and consist of preserving and officially mapping the right-of-way for a four-lane bypass of Viroqua and Westby The Westby bypass limits extend approximately 3.6 miles from Sherpe Road to Cut-A-Cross Road.



We were so honored and proud to be asked to be part of both **Veterans Day programs**, one in the high school "old gym" on Monday, Nov. 11th, and another at the Westby Performing Arts Center on Tuesday, Nov. 12th. We brought uniforms that are always on display in our museum Military Honors Room as a visual highlight for these ceremonies. The uniforms had been worn by Stanley Hoilien (WWI Army), Hilmer Anderson (WWII Navy), David Thoreson (Air Force), Roberta LaDue (Marines), and Mark Olson (Army Operation Iraqi Freedom). It was wonderful for the uniforms to get deserved recognition and to have such a dramatic impact on the audience!

We still have a few **raffle tickets** for this beautiful rosemailed bowl! It came to us from Norway thanks to Siv & Kenny Volden. Another smaller bowl painted in the same pattern and \$50 are other prizes in a drawing that will be held at our Annual Meeting on December 10. Either bowl or the cash would make a wonderful Christmas gift! Talk to a WAHS board member, or call the museum, email us, or send a Facebook message if you want to purchase a raffle ticket.



While doing research recently, we ran across the above 10-year-old photo. Westby native and 1946 WHS graduate William Running, passed away in 2011. He left a large **Legacy Donation** to WAHS that William Engel, Running's executor, presented to WAHS Board Member Carol Navrestad. With this donation, WAHS was able to replace the windows and put siding on the Thoreson House Museum. Funds like these help secure that we can do the most expensive repairs and replacements at the museum. Won't you please consider a Legacy Donation to WAHS?

So many visitors from so many places!

That's right! The five pages you see here are this year's pages from our guest book. Of course, our museum **had many visitors** from Westby, Coon Valley, and other close communities but Washington to New York, Florida to California, and many places in between were noted as "home" to many of our visitors. It was extra fun to see the long list of people from Norway! We had two bus tour groups and other travelers from our ancestral birthplace who came to see our Thoreson House Museum and Genealogy Center! A big coup for WAHS is that Brekke Tours reached out to us in mid-October for information because they are already planning for 2025 tour groups to our museum. They were excited to hear what we could tell them about the Westby area, and we are sure that means more people will be visiting next year!

Veterans Day Programs

You Can Help Support WAHS' Efforts to Collect, Preserve, Promote and Communicate Our History, Culture and Heritage With a Raffle Ticket!



Repairs and improvements to the museum!

Thank goodness for members and volunteers who can do the work or recommend great service people! Since our last newsletter, we have done a few things. First, the basement walls were professionally sprayed. The stone was flaking, which would eventually cause problems. With a layer of foam insulation over the stone, we will be good for years to come! Next, when the furnace was serviced this fall, we found out the blower motor was dying. The technician suggested we replace it before it became an emergency, so we did that. He also suggested a “smart” thermostat because we aren’t at the museum every day. WAHS member Garland is very tech-savvy and was able to do that for us. Now, several members will monitor the building virtually this winter so someone will always be available if there is a problem. Then, because we have never liked the lights on the sign that was put in several years ago, we had a new light installed. It has LED bulbs that shine from below and are much brighter than the previous ones. Now, the sign can be seen and read much more easily at night. Finally, our WiFi router died. We were very lucky that Garland could also replace that because the museum can’t be without the internet, especially with our new “smart” thermostat. There’s always something but because of our successful fundraisers and events, we were able to do everything!



Foam was sprayed on the basement walls to insulate and prevent deterioration of the stone.

Right: A new “smart” thermostat will send alerts in case of a drop in the museum temperature.



Middle: A new light for the sign shines from below to make it much more visible at night.



Below: We had to get a new WiFi router.



Our 35th Anniversary Party was a big success!

On March 19, 1989, Dorothy Krause, then director of the Vernon County Historical Society, met with Ray Bakkum, Robert Becker (Editor of the Westby Times), Julda Call, Elaine Lund, Alma Mikkelson, and Cloie Neprud to discuss the formation of a historical society in Westby. It was recommended that they contact the Wisconsin Historical Society and on June 5, 1989, the first annual meeting of WAHS was held. The first elected Board of Directors was President Walter Buros, Vice President Margaret Garlick, Secretary Katherine Anderson, Treasurer Orin Larson, and directors David Vossetieg, Dorothy Krause, Elaine Lund, Ingrid Sadler, and Lorraine Borgen.

In 1881, Theodore and Katherine (Bekkedal) Thoreson moved their family to Westby, purchasing two and one-half acres of land. Theodore and his father, Ole, began a lumber and contract business in 1884. It was in 1892 that they built the Victorian house that is now the WAHS Thoreson House Museum and Genealogy Center. The influence of their construction business is evident in the use of various wood within the house. The inlaid living room floor, the bird’s eye maple woodwork, the pocket doors between the living room and dining room, and the beautiful staircase spindles are original. The Westby Area Historical Society purchased the house from John and Leah Walker on October 1, 1993, for \$65,000 to create the museum. The mortgage for the museum was paid off in August 2006, and since that time, many improvements have been made to make the building a usable museum space. Since 1989, 16 people have served as WAHS president, Blaine Hedberg serving longest at 7 years. The first “History Keepers” newsletter was published in 1994 and the current editor, Kathy Anderson, has served longest in that position for 10 years. On Sunday, September 10th, we had a party to celebrate the organization, the museum, and the collection!

Photos below from left: WAHS Board member Carol Navrestad with Sen. Brad Pfaff. WAHS VP John Erlandson with Rep. Loren Oldenburg.

WAHS Pres. Blaine with 2007 Grandfather Curt Moe. Nomination letter writer Chelsea with 2006 Grandmother Mary Daines.

2023 Grandfather Dan Kotek with wife Terri. We even had live music!!!



"History remembers only the celebrated, genealogy remembers them all."

The quote on the left is from Laurence Overmire. Born in 1957, he is an American poet, author, actor, educator, and genealogist.



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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If you guessed this is the North Coon Prairie Church in Newry, you guessed right!

Happy Thanksgiving, Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from WAHS!



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

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

2024 Officers and Board of Directors

President and Curator – Blaine Hedberg (2024)
Vice President – John Erlandson (2024)
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



Helping you build a better life.

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.westbywhistory.com

608.634.4478

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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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