

HISTORY KEEPERS

2026
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, with numerous WAHS activities taking place the week before and the weekend of the festival. I hope you enjoy the photographs of those activities later in this newsletter.

During the celebration, many attendees toured the Museum and Genealogy Center. WAHS collaborated with local elementary schools to give

presentations on Westby's history and Syttende Mai's significance. We announced the Grandmother of the Year at the All City Band Concert, participated in both the Kiddie and Big Parades, and, of course, sold lefse/pølse. I appreciate all the volunteers who made the WAHS Syttende Mai activities so successful.

This summer, as usual, the Thoreson House Museum will be busy. We will hold an Open House every other Sunday from June through August, 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. "Party on the Porch" will return on June 9, our "Kaffegruppe" is off to a great start, and we already have a tour group from Norway scheduled to visit our museum.

Our major summer event, the 11th annual *Sweet Rides & Sweet Pies* car show and pie fundraiser, is on Saturday, July 25th, from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm. This family-friendly event will feature hundreds of classic cars and over a hundred tasty pies. More details about this and the rest of our summer schedule are available in this newsletter. Please mark your calendars.

Through our past successful fundraising efforts and your continued generosity, our board of directors stays committed to ensuring that the collections of the Westby Area Historical Society are cared for and accessible. As an affiliate member of the Wisconsin Historical Society and a member of the American Association for State and Local History, WAHS enjoys the support of a large network of historical societies and leaders in the field of local history and preservation. We are grateful for their ability and resources in our endeavors at WAHS.

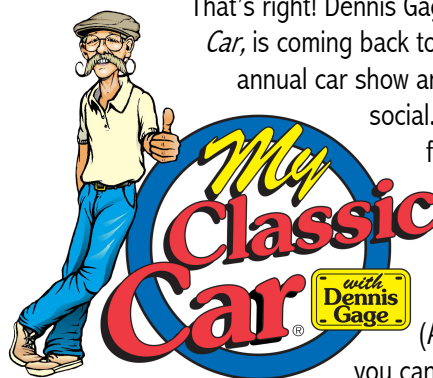
I am also grateful to all of you who continue to renew your membership, have recently joined WAHS, or have made donations or memorial gifts this year, because your financial support is essential. Thank you, and I hope you enjoy a wonderful summer.

Blaine Hedberg, President of WAHS

P.S. You can find an amazing amount of information about Westby's history, our new museum acquisitions, volunteer opportunities, events and activities, story highlights, and old images of Westby by visiting our blog, *Westby, Wisconsin Remembered*, at www.westbyhistory.blogspot.com, checking out our website at www.westbywihistory.com, or finding us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/westbywihistory/.

HE'S BACK FOR OUR 11TH ANNUAL SWEET RIDES

That's right! Dennis Gage, from the TV show, *My Classic Car*, is coming back to Westby on July 25th for our 11th annual car show and homemade pie with ice cream social. He has already put in a request for a piece of strawberry rhubarb pie like he got last year, and is anxious to talk to many of the people who bring their vehicles to our fabulous event. (Although his show is now retired, you can still find episodes on YouTube.)



Our first event in 2016 brought 15 cars and this year we are expecting over 300! Online registration is now open. Our Sweetie Pies Pie Crew has already had several planning meetings and they are busy harvesting rhubarb. Chairman Garland has already met with the City Council, City Manager Ron and Police Chief Scott to start outlining plans for the huge influx of cars and people we are expecting.

We will once again have 2 raffles for kids who are present for the drawing between 2:15 and 2:30. A blue Berg Buddy pedal car and a bright red fire engine pedal car have been generously donated by Auto Value, George's Auto, and Jeff Hughes. The fire engine will fit children from 3 – 5 years of age and the Berg pedal car is meant for those who are 5 – 8 years old. The Berg Buddie is like a go-kart, and the fire engine is a very special 1982 model in perfect, never-out-of-the-box condition. We thank the donors once again for their generosity!

We are expecting to hand out more than 70 trophies and the People's Choice Award sponsored by Mega Parts, serve more than



600 pieces of pie, have a 50/50 raffle prize of hundreds of dollars, and lots of fun on a great summer day. Please join us!

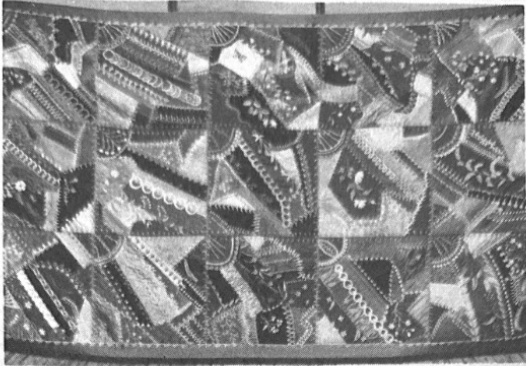




Shining a Light on the Past

The Times, on Thursday, May 15, 1969, was filled with news about Westby's coming Syttende Mai celebration – the first for several decades. Many advertisements promoted the festival, but this one caught our eye. Can you imagine how beautiful the quilt was?

David and Kay Vosseteig, owners of the Anderson Store in 1969, told us that Mrs. Walter Larson was the wife of the minister at Our Savior's Lutheran Church. The Larsons never had any children, but we have contacted nephews to see what happened to this important piece of history. There were 3 queens in Norway between 1820 and 1870, so which one/s did Karen sew for?



The above quilt was hand stitched by Mrs. Walter O. Larson's great-great-grandmother, Karen Hageburg Hanson. Mrs. Hanson was born in Valdres, Norway, in 1812. She came to America in 1870 and passed away in 1894. She was a seamstress for the Queen of Norway and all the material in the quilt is from the Queen's old dresses. She made this quilt for her own hope chest.

Selmer Oberson's hand carved Norse articles will also be displayed in our window.

PLAN TO SPEND "SYTTENDE MAI" IN WESTBY

Anderson Furniture

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Westby, Wis.

Co-sponsors of the La Crosse Drum & Bugle Corps

Buzzy's Pinewood Derby Race

This year, *Sweet Rides & Sweet Pies* is partnering with Westby Cub Scout Pack 76 to host a new event for kids and those who are kids at heart. Between 10 am and Noon, the derby race location at State and Bekkedal Streets will be open so people can wander the derby track area, choose or build a car, get an orientation to the derby rules, and test-drive the track. "Buzzy's Pinewood Derby," brought to us by the Martin Bekkedal Family and Westby Cub Scout Pack 76, will start at Noon, with prizes awarded about 2:15.

We are hoping this will become an annual "family-friendly" event for parents, children, grandparents, siblings, cousins, and friends to have a friendly competition and to cheer each other on. Contact Cub Scout Pack 76 or WAHS on Facebook, send an email to WAHS, or call Garland at 608-386-4296 to see how we can get a derby car kit to you. The kits are FREE to kids ages 0 to 17. Anyone 18 years of age and older is welcome to race, and their kit is only \$10.00. Kits are available now, and we encourage you to get them early so you have plenty of time to assemble, paint, and decorate them.



Photo above: Cub Scout leader Cody Murphy and Margaret Bekkedal.



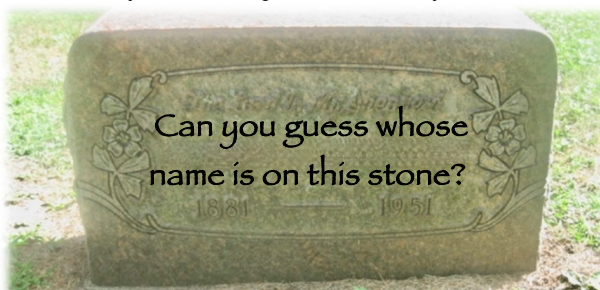
Car kit for Buzzy's Pinewood Derby.

Welcome to new members DeAnne Nelson, and Don and Paula Egge!



Cemetery Stone Workshop

Our Spring Cemetery Stone Cleaning Workshop, scheduled for Saturday, April 18, was rescheduled due to the severe hailstorm earlier that week. We hope you can join us on **Saturday, June 6, at 10 am** for this special workshop, which will help celebrate the 175th anniversary of the **Westby Coon Prairie Lutheran Church**. Using the marker of a person very important to the history of the congregation, you will learn the simple, easy process of how to safely clean a cemetery stone and get a little history lesson, too!



WAHS SUMMER SCHEDULE

- Tues., June 2: **WAHS Monthly Meeting** at Thoreson Museum; 1 - 3 pm
- Sat., June 6: **Cemetery Stone Cleaning** at Country Coon Prairie Church; 10 am
- Tues., June 9: **Kaffegruppe** at Thoreson Museum; 2 - 4 pm
- Tues., June 9: **Thoreson Party on the Porch**; 5 - 7 pm
- Sun., June 14: **Thoreson Museum Open House**; 11 am - 2 pm
- Sun., June 28: **Thoreson Museum Open House**; 11 am - 2 pm
- Tues., July 7: **WAHS Monthly Meeting** at Thoreson Museum; 1 - 3 pm
- Sun., July 12: **Thoreson Museum Open House**; 11 am - 2 pm
- Tues., July 14: **Kaffegruppe** at Thoreson Museum; 2 - 4 pm
- Tues., July 14: **Thoreson Party on the Porch**; 5 - 7 pm
- Sat., July 25: **Sweet Rides & Sweet Pies**; 10 am - 3 pm
- Tues., Aug. 4: **WAHS Monthly Meeting** at Thoreson Museum; 1 - 3 pm
- Sun., Aug. 9: **Thoreson Museum Open House**; 11 am - 2 pm
- Tues., Aug. 11: **Kaffegruppe** at Thoreson Museum; 2 - 4 pm
- Tues., Aug. 11: **Thoreson Party on the Porch**; 5 - 7 pm
- Sun., Aug. 23: **Thoreson Museum Open House**; 11 am - 2 pm

WAHS AND SYTTENDE MAI, May 16 & 17, 2026!



Lefse/Pølse Sales

The week of Westby Syttende Mai is extremely busy for WAHS because we are probably involved in more activities that celebrate this heritage festival than any other organization in town. This year, we chose the Grandmother of the Year and attended the All-City Band Concert to announce her, did 3 school presentations, had an Open House at the Thoreson Museum & Genealogy Center, had our lefse/pølse house open for 15 hours over 2 days, attended the Kiddie Parade, had 2 entries in the Big Parade, and sponsored Bertha's Rømmegrøt. All of these things took planning, paperwork, Facebook posts, emails, phone calls, purchases, gathering supplies and utensils, laundry, doing dishes, cleaning, gardening, good organization, making hundreds of copies, signage, towing the lefse house, lists, lists, and more lists, and many, many volunteers we need to thank who make it all possible!

4th Grade School Programs



Blaine and Kathy gave presentations for 3 classes about why Syttende Mai is celebrated in Westby. Early immigrants, the geography of Norway, bunads, trolls, naming patterns, the dangers of immigration, artifacts for students to see, and delicious sandbakkels to taste were just a part of the programs.

Sweet Rides in Big Parade



Sweet Rides & Sweet Pies was represented by Chairman Garland driving this vintage truck and Cub Scout Pack leader Cody walking to hand out pamphlets about the Buzzy Bekkedal Pinewood Derby. WAHS works very hard to make this a family-friendly event with activities for spouses and children to do.

Open House at Thoreson House Museum



L to R: Greeter Carol welcomes visitors Elida and Diane with tour guide Dorothy. Photo on right: John, Nina, Marlo, and Randy enjoy the beautiful Saturday weather as they wait for the first visitors to arrive.



Thank you, Jim and Kathy, Margaret, Corinne and Julie, and Sheri and Jerry for selling lefse/pølse. Selling out Saturday and nearly on Sunday made our fundraiser very successful! Also, thanks to Pat, Grant, and Kathy – sorry that we didn't get photos of you, too!

Grandmother of the Year

WHY MY GRANDMA SHOULD BE GRANDMOTHER OF THE YEAR

My Grandma is the best because she is so sweet. Whenever I'm sad she fills me up with joy. She has the best snacks and hugs.

My grandma collects baseball cards with me and my cousins. We love to talk about baseball together and we love a good laugh. She always tries to come to my sports games.

She never gives up when things are hard. She works so hard for her family it inspires me to work harder.

I love that my grandma wants to learn more about my family's history. She is willing to teach me about it too. My so dedicated to learning about it she's been to Norway.



We started with a wonderful nomination letter, made an announcement at the All-City Band Concert, and gave a corsage, sash, and signage for the Kiddie and Big Parades. Merna Fremstad and her grandson, Case, had a great weekend!

Sponsoring Rømmegrøt



It is our pleasure to sponsor the cost of ingredients for Bertha and Jean's rømmegrøt. They give all of the profits to Syttende Mai to help defray the costs of the festival, such as printing, that have no other way of being recovered.

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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!

2026 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 (2028)

Board Member – Carol Erlandson Navrestad (2028)

Board Member – Marlo Volden (2026)

* Officers are elected at the Annual Meeting

Human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe.

H.G. Wells
(1866 – 1946)



You will get a separate notice when it is time to renew your membership. Please do not pay before that time.

Dues are just \$20/person and help us continue our mission. *We appreciate your renewal!*

Celebrating Syttende Mai



Westby Area Historical Society history and heritage!



Celebrating the 4th of July



FEBRUARY FOTO FEEDBACK – how many of these Snowflake Ski Club board members did you get right?
Ralph Johnson, Tilford Bagstad, Steve Nelson, Dr. PT Bland, & Neil Hoven
Russ Holte, Fred Constalie, Glen Stakston & Alden Fremstad

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



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

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Your Annual Dues of \$20.00 supports our education efforts, our quarterly newsletter, and the Thoreson House Museum & Genealogy Center building.

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