



HISTORY KEEPERS

2025
Issue 4
NOVEMBER

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear Members and Friends,

Our commitment to preserving Westby's legacy is reflected not only in our growing archival collections but also in our ongoing outreach to schools, local organizations, and the broader community. By collaborating with educators and historians, we strive to make historical learning accessible and engaging for all ages. Through these partnerships, we can share the stories, artifacts, and traditions that define our region, inspiring pride and a sense of connection among residents and visitors alike.

As the region's recognized resource for local history and its primary history educator, we aim to make the past relevant in contemporary society and foster inclusive, history-based programs that welcome all members of our community. Our volunteers serve as ambassadors of Westby's heritage, assisting museum visitors, facilitating inquiries into family history, and promoting our initiatives and resources throughout the area. We invite those interested in joining our dedicated volunteer team at WAHS to reach out for more information.

Looking ahead to 2026, we encourage membership in the Westby Area Historical Society and invite you to visit to learn more about our collections. Your continued interest, membership, and financial contributions are critical to the success of our Historical Society and Genealogy Center. Funding enables us to develop historical programming, enhance exhibits, expand our genealogy collections, organize requested tours, and sustain daily operations. Donations may be securely made via the "Donate" button on our website www.westbywihistory.com/join/donate.

Whether you have supported us through a donation of an artifact, a yearly membership, or through our annual appeal, please accept our sincere gratitude. Your ongoing support is vital to advancing our mission. Your participation will help us be successful! — Pres. Blaine Hedberg

Please join us for our 2025 Annual Meeting!

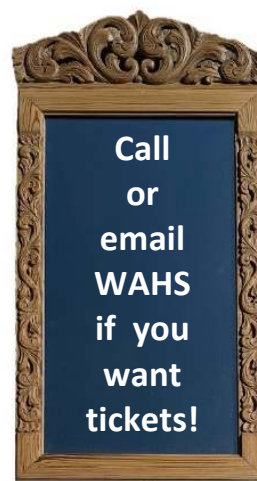
On Tuesday, December 9, we will meet at the Westby VFW, located at 205 N. Main St. Social Hour will start at 11:00 a.m., lunch will be served at Noon, and a short Business Meeting and Raffle Drawing will follow at 12:45 p.m. Please **RSVP** no later than Monday, December 1.

608-634-4478 or westbywihistory@gmail.com.



WHAT A YEAR 2025 HAS BEEN!

2025 has been a **very** busy year for WAHS! Please pat yourself on the back as you go back and scroll through our Facebook page to see things **WE** have done because your membership dues, volunteer hours, ideas, suggestions, and financial donations have made all of these things possible! You can also now visit our website at www.westbywihistory.com, to find an archive of our past newsletters, just in case you want to review them. Click on the "ABOUT US" tab at the top, then click on "NEWSLETTERS" in the dropdown menu to find them. Yes, our list of 2025 accomplishments is amazing because of you, our members, but do you know that many of our volunteers are not members of WAHS? In today's busy world, we know and understand that people do not have the time or energy to make a "membership" commitment, but want to help us in our mission to "collect, preserve, promote and communicate the history, culture and heritage of the Westby area." We have volunteers who love helping make pies for *Sweet Rides & Sweet Pies*. Others help when we host tour groups because they love talking with Norwegians. Maybe you know someone willing to volunteer just a few hours a year doing something they are interested in, or maybe others who live across the country but would help with a financial donation. "Like" and "share" our Facebook page, and tell everyone about our "History Keepers" archive. Maybe they will be inspired to volunteer, donate, or join!



WESTBY AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY Fundraiser

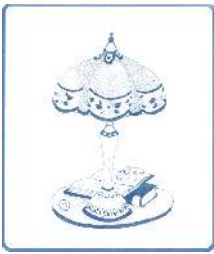
Acanthus Wood Framed Mirror

Hand-carved in Norway
17" x 32"

Tickets are \$5 @ or 5 for \$20. Only 250 will be sold!

Drawing at 1:00 p.m. on Tues.; December 9, 2025

WAHS Annual Meeting at Westby VFW
205 N. Main Street; Westby, WI 54667



Shining a Light on the Past

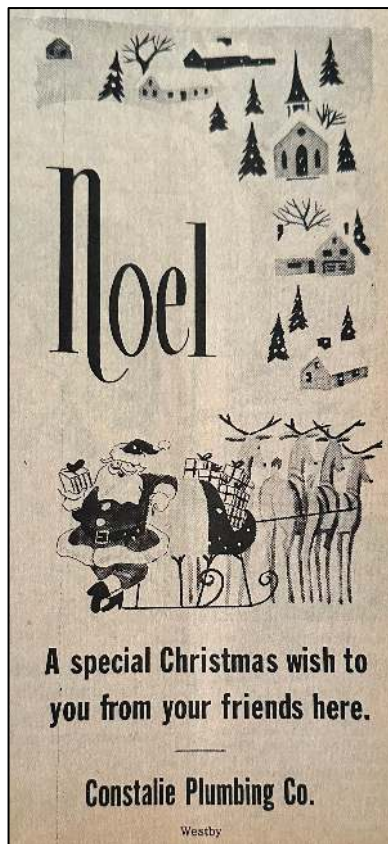
Because WAHS was recently so involved with the Norwegian-American Language Research Project, we thought you might like to read about Norwegian being spoken in Westby. This article is from The Times, December 24, 1970 issue.

Norwegian Christmas Service Broadcast

Christmas services direct from Norway will be heard on Christmas Day over WISV Viroqua. The full hour program begins at 1:30 p.m., December 25, with Pastor Haakon E. Andersen, General Secretary, Norwegian Lutheran Church; organist is Helge Dahl.

Norwegian services on Christmas Day have become a tradition in our region, having been presented each year over WISV since 1964.

Arrangements are coordinated by S. Scott Lee of Coon Valley in cooperation with the Norwegian Broadcasting system and with broadcast time provided by Gilbertson-Seland of Coon Valley, and Constalie Plumbing Company of Westby. Editor's note: Below Christmas greetings from the above sponsors appeared in the same newspaper.



Above left: WAHS VP John Erlandson presented Donna Pedretti with her mother's Lifetime Achievement Award at our November meeting. Above right: Elaine Olson.



Volunteers of the Year



At our November member meeting, VP John and *Sweet Rides* chairperson Garland presented the 2025 Volunteer of the Year Award to the members of our Pie Crew who could attend. This year, for the 10th annual *Sweet Rides*, about 30 people made and served 100 pies. Mixing flour and butter for the dough from scratch, hand-rolling the pie crust, washing and cutting fresh fruit, and cooking pie filling with special spices for delicious flavor — they worked together for 4 days before the car show, making sure our pies were the freshest and most delicious they could be!

This team has been working together for so many years that they are now a well-oiled machine. Each person has a "favorite" job that assures quality and consistency for every pie that is served.

The overwhelming number of people who attend *Sweet Rides & Sweet Pies* comment that it's great to see so many cool cars, but the pie is what brings them to the show. Thank you, Pie Crew, for making this event a huge success that is getting bigger and better every year!

Lifetime Achievement Award

In 2015, the members of the Westby Area Historical Society unanimously voted to establish a WAHS Lifetime Achievement Award. This distinction recognizes individuals who have shown outstanding dedication and commitment to WAHS; whose continuing contributions strengthen the mission of WAHS; and whose endeavors have had a lasting impact on our organization.

The Board of Directors is pleased to present our fourth Lifetime Achievement Award to Elaine Olson. In 2014, Elaine received the Volunteer of the Year Award, but she was so much more. Elaine dedicated her time, her passion for artifacts and their authenticity, her organizational skills, and her efforts toward fundraising. She even painted and decorated the museum. Her special touches for the Christmas and other fundraising events made those occasions so memorable. We will never be able to thank Elaine enough for her contributions to our organization.

Though given posthumously, the Board of Directors hopes that this honor will show her family and our community how she helped make a strong foundation for WAHS; how she provided invaluable assistance in the day-to-day activities and maintenance of WAHS; and how the future of the society is secure because of her efforts. Elaine made it her purpose "to collect, preserve, promote, and communicate the history, culture, and heritage of the Westby, WI area for current and future generations." We are proud and fortunate that she chose WAHS to be the beneficiary of her passion and efforts in Westby for history and community service.

WAHS Helps Norwegian Researchers!

During the week of October 13, researchers from Norway visited WAHS, asking for “as many as you can get” people to interview. They wanted Norwegian-speaking people who were born and raised in WI. When they left Norway, their goal was to interview 1 or 2 people in each of +/- 10 cities. Over 4 days and 30 hours at our Thoreson House Museum, they were able to talk with 25 people and get 16 recorded interviews, describing our help as “extremely productive!” Several of the stops they made before coming to Westby were less than stellar because viable subjects were not available for interviews, and they were getting worried about meeting their goal. Because of their success in Westby, they expected to go home with 24 or 25 interviews, so we did our Norwegian heritage proud!

The team of researchers was Professor David Natvig, who grew up around Madison and was educated at UW-Madison in Scandinavian Studies. He has lived in Stavanger for 8 years and works at the University of Stavanger; Sophia Haave, who is a student at the University of Stavanger working toward her PhD; and Professor Arnstein Hjelde. Many people in this area know Arnstein as he has been visiting Westby for almost 40 years, coming every 3 to 5 years. He has interviewed and recorded Norwegian-speaking people throughout the United States and especially enjoys coming to our area. He said that people in Westby and Coon Valley speak with a uniform Old Norwegian Gudbrandsdal dialect that has changed very little since the early days of immigration. Arnstein is a professor in the Department of Languages, Literature and Culture at Østfold University College. David invited him to come on this trip because of his language research background and interviewing experience.

The team explained that the purpose of their research is to “examine the intonation, or ‘melody,’ of the sing-song flow of Norwegian spoken in the Upper Midwest. It is important to the Norwegian-American cultural history and immigration story, and will tell what structures are robust, which are fragile, and what survives because language is what makes us human.” The team explained that there are only 3 other worldwide studies of this kind that they know of. Their project is being funded by the Research Council of Norway and the University of Stavanger.

Below photo: Bonnie Bagstad Anderson and Sam Bakkestuen were interviewed by David, Sophia, and Arnstein. Right photo: Arnstein with participants Ron Hoff and Mike Stakston (seated).



WAHS Visitors

In the first 10 months of 2025, 4,450 people have visited our website. More than 450 visitors from all over Wisconsin, 9 other states, and 10 cities in Norway have physically toured our museum! We also have more than 1,300 Facebook followers. In the last 90 days, we've had more than 194,400 “views” and more than 4,000 “interactions” with our posts. WAHS is getting noticed!

SNARKER DU NORSK? Because so many people have expressed an interest in speaking Norwegian, starting on January 13th, we will open the Thoreson Museum from 2 – 4 pm and every second Tuesday of the month for “Kaffegruppe!” This will be a VERY informal group – come when you can and stay as long as you want. Contact us if you want more information. WAHS will provide coffee and cookies! Put it on your calendar and bring a friend! 🇳🇴🇳🇴🇳🇴

What else has happened since August...

We've answered many genealogy research questions and general Westby history requests, talked to tour groups about Westby history, given tours of the museum, done our Fall Cemetery Stone Cleaning Workshop, displayed “Sloopers” materials at the library, and done furnace maintenance. Below are more things we have been doing!

Nina, John and Blaine set up a table at the Westby Walkabout on Thursday, 9/25. It was a beautiful evening and proved to be a successful couple of hours. They generated a lot of interest in the organization and even made some money selling lefse/pølse!



On Friday, 9/26, the museum was open for current and retired coaches from WHS, their players, other students, and the general public to celebrate the amazing legacy of Westby High School football. Pictured are Mark Anderson, Neil Hoven, & Mark Jacobson.



The Westby Chamber asked members to decorate lamp posts in town for an October fall festive look and to be entered in a contest. Our decorations in front of the creamery retail store showed pictures of Westby's famous “firsts” with an explanation on the back of each photo and why we chose that person.



WAHS VP “Fireman” John Erlandson and Nina Healy set up the WAHS trick-or-treat table at City Hall. The location was safer than having the kiddos walk across Main Street to the museum so they could hand out more than 1,000 pieces of candy and glow-in-the-dark bracelets.

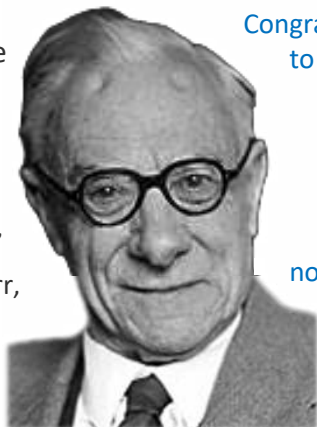


The American Legion/VFW Veterans Day program was enhanced by 5 uniforms we brought from our museum. WWII Army Stanley Hollien, WWII Navy Hilmer Anderson, Korea Air Force David Thoreson, Marine uniform of Roberta LaDue, and Mark Olson's Iraqi Freedom fatigues. Invited by the late Tom Sharratt last year, it's now an annual activity for WAHS! We then moved the uniforms to the WAPAC so a full house could see the uniforms during the Westby High School Choir's glorious patriotic evening concert!



"Study the historian before you begin to study the facts."

— E. H. Carr,
author of
What Is History?



Congratulations
to all of this
year's
winners!
We were
honored
to be
nominated!



**Happy Thanksgiving, Merry Christmas,
Happy New Year, and many blessings
to you and yours this holiday season!**



Welcome, new members!

Paula Haug, Sharon

Nerison & Gloria Storey.

SUMMER SNAPSHOT STUMPER If you guessed A. H. Dahl & Co., built in 1898 on the southeast corner of State and Main Streets in Westby, you guessed correctly.



**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
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Thank You!
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newsletter, and
our events!

Please leave a message at 608-634-4478, email us at westbywhistory@gmail.com, or find us on Facebook. 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



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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

westbywhistory@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.

WAHS EIN #39-1645990

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PLEASE ACCEPT MY TAX - DEDUCTIBLE GIFT to WAHS: _____