



October 2003

The Pinery

A Publication of the Portage County Historical Society

President's Report

The historical society hosted the Central Regional Convention of the State Historical Society. The event was held at the Whiting Inn and was attended by some 45 people from all over Central Wisconsin. The local society presented Wendell Nelson as the keynote speaker. He discussed saved houses in the county. Mary Egle, Joan Ouelette and Anton Anday each presented a sectional with the saving of historic buildings as the general theme. The afternoon was dedicated to the touring of two of the society's historic sites-Water St. and Heritage Park. The local board members would also like to thank Kerri Simonis for setting up the meeting at the Whiting Inn and John Noel for allowing us to use the site.

ANNUAL MEETING

The annual meeting of the historical society will be unique. The meeting will be held at the UW-SP archives (5th floor of the library). It will begin at 7:00 on October 15. The meeting is open to anyone but we would like to invite society members in particu-

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lar, up to the archives to see how our perishable objects are stored and how they are used. This is a research facility and the society is allowed about 1/3 of the area for our collection. This is the UW-SP's contribution to the society. The society has a very large collection of photos, letters and other kinds of paper items as well as valuable, small items. All of these artifacts are available to the public to use (while on the library site). The archivist will have examples of the various types of things available in our collection and make a presentation on the collection, as well as, the UW-SP collection and area research collection of the state society. Mark this on your calendar for a behind-the-scenes look at the archives.

FOUNDATION

The PCHS Memorial Foundation held a meeting on Sept. 17 and elected new officers. These include Wayne McCaffery as President, Tim Siebert as V. Pres., Jeanne Regnier as Treasurer and Karen Zinda as Secretary with Ramon Stade as member at large. The bylaws were looked at and some modifications were made to them. These will be available to interested parties after our next meeting in Oct. The board also discussed the possibility of placing some portion of our funds into the community foundation to "test" the viability of this move. The questions are which system will be the best for the financial interests of the society.

RENDEZVOUS

The annual rendezvous was a success. Nearly 1,000 people attended the event in mid July this past summer. The addition of the Threads of History aspect of the rendezvous has proven to be an important draw.

The board would like to thank several people for their help in making this event so successful. Beth Ann Laars has been the main force behind getting many of the re-enactors to the event. Andrea Mielke has been responsible, for the past two years, to make the Threads of History portion of the event very successful. Jerry Rohlinger has been the historical society board's person behind the event for the last 6 years. The project has been in his "lap" since its inception. Karen Zinda and Mary Egle were both deeply involved in making the event work through publicity and workers for the rendezvous. Anton Anday has seen to it that the park is in shape to host the event. Many other people were involved in making this event as successful as it is and I would like to apologize to them if I have omitted their names from this thank you list.

Planning is already moving forward for next year's rendezvous.

HERITAGE PARK

Anton Anday has been putting in a great deal of time on the Hei Corners School. During the summer a new, wood, flagpole was installed and the front platform had to be replaced. Mr. Anday is now in the process of finding replacements for the doors for the

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school. The doors are very old and are, simply, beginning to rot out at the base.

The Central Wisconsin Model Railroad Club has been working on the interior of the caboose that the society moved into the park last summer. We would like to strip and paint the exterior of the caboose next summer but the cost of this is \$8,000. Anyone willing to help us with a donation to this cause please send your donation to PCHS, P.O. 672, Stevens Point, WI 54481.

If the weather holds Mr. Anday plans to have the Engford (Circus) House both scraped and painted this fall. The structure's interior can not be worked on until the exterior is both secure and painted. Thanks to help from many of our life members the private loan the society had to move the house has been paid in full.

BOOKS

We have sold out of the *Echoes of Portage County* book. The book was published by the UW-SP publishing class and was sold, essentially, at the cost of publishing the book. Now that the entire run has been sold the society can republish it and use the proceeds for its projects.

Mr. Anday has also submitted the second volume of this book that will take the stories from the 1950's to the present.

Again, thanks are owed to a number of our life members who helped the society pay off the last portion of our book loan for *Land and Lumber*. The entire \$15,000 has now been paid back.

The other three manuscripts that the society has, Mr. George Rogers, Ms. Dorothy Zmuda and Casmier Sikorski are still on hold because of lack of funding to publish them. Each book would require somewhere around \$3,000 to \$4,500 to print.

LOANS

The society now has only two outstanding private loans left to pay back. One is for \$2,500 and was used to pay for the Engford House needs and the other is for \$7,000 which help pay for the basement under what will be our barn. We have been able to pay down our private loans to \$9,500 from a high of about \$30,000. Obviously the board is very pleased with this success. Much of this is, again, thanks to help from a number of our members. Anyone interested in helping the society pay down these two outstanding loans please send your contribution to Portage County Historical Society (P.C.H.S.), P.O. 672, Stevens Point, WI 54481. Thank you.

ALUMINUM CANS

A large thank you to those people who have been saving cans for the society. It is this source of income (.25 per pound) that enables us to publish this newsletter. The fact that you have not received one in some time is because a major source of "can money" from the high school has dried up. A decision was made to go to plastic bottles. That decision reduced our income from cans by about \$650 per year. It takes, roughly,

\$150 to publish each issue of this newsletter. With that said please let me ask you to consider, if you do not already do so, to leave your cans at the Water St. museum. They can be left next to the south side basement entrance and will be picked up there on a regular basis.

WATER ST. MUSEUM

The “We Believe” display that is currently up at the Water St. museum has drawn a good many people. The display takes a look at the various religious institutions in the county and a number of related items. The museum is now closed for the season but will reopen next June with the 2nd year of this display. If you wish to view it in the meantime please contact the society so that a time can be arranged.



‘Old Waubie’ --a friend to settlers

How would you like to be living in Waubakanish, WI 54481?

There was a suggestion once that our city be so dubbed in honor of a colorful American Indian “warrior” who became friendly with local residents.

In 1919, when Stevens Point underwent the last of several periodical debates about whether to retain what some called our “backwoods” sounding moniker, an unidentified Pointer wrote to the newspaper suggesting we resurrect the name of our neighbor of yore, Waubakanish, son of a Chippewa chief and grandson of a Potawatomie chief. That’s as far as the idea went.

Since then, “Old Waubie” has faded into history, his name all but forgotten.

A few weeks ago while researching another story, I found the newspaper account recommending use of a “romantic” Indian word to identify our city as opposed to the surname of George Stevens, who only passed through here in his comings and goings to and from an unsuccessful saw mill operation in Wausau.

Waubakanish? I knew the name and remembered my friend Marge Warner’s stories about this man, including her references to his portrait, which used to be displayed in the first public library building downtown.

Old Waubie became well acquainted with the settlers when the native population was rapidly taking flight in deference in new arrivals of more pale-faced folk. That sets him apart in history from many of his contemporaries. In addition, he was surely one of very few members of his generation of Indians in these parts who was photographed.

Nowadays, the portrait, I was pleased to learn, is still in safe keeping almost beneath my nose in the library of the local university. The Portage County Historical So-

ciety collection there also includes a precious description of the old Indian by a pioneer who knew Waubie for a quarter century.

The information, giving us a fascinating picture of life as it was once lived here, is included in the diaries of S. A. Sherman, a lumberman who was one of our county's first white settlers.

Sherman first met Waubakanish in about 1848, when the old warrior claimed to be 120 years old. "He was feeble and unable to keep up with the rest of his family in their wanderings through the forests. And as none of the tribes had a permanent location, their home was where night over took them," the diary reports.

In their first meeting, Sherman was making plans to make his first crossing of the Wisconsin River to explore the terrain and natural resources. In checking various sites, he came upon a settlement of several wigwams, which had been set up by the Waubakanish family in the vicinity of the present site of River Pines Living Center.

Waubakanish's son, Big Papoose was estimated by Sherman to be "between 6 and 7 feet in height, well-built with a large head, black eyes and hair with a feathered band around it." He was hired by Sherman for 25 cents to paddle the lumberman across the river in a birch canoe. The son was reluctant because ice was just breaking up during a spring thaw.

Sherman was probably amazed to encounter Waubie still wandering a decade later, this time near Shantytown. The Anderson and Brown Shingle Mill there attracted the old Indian, who sought warmth, rest and food before a campfire.

Waubie supposedly claimed his family had let him out to die, and was even considering tying him to a tree to hasten the process.

The story infuriated mill operator Anderson, who, in turn, threatened to kill Big Papoose if any harm came to the old man. There was another son and two daughters in the family, as well.

Meanwhile, Waubakanish continued his wanderings for yet another decade.

Membership Application/Renewal

The Society needs your support! Your renewal or new membership is necessary for the Portage County Historical Society to continue the preservation of our past.

Mail To:
Portage County Historical
Society
P.O. Box 672

Renewal _____ New _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State/Zip: _____



Annual \$15
Business \$25
Contributing \$50
Life \$100

Sherman gives no more information about the family's support except to report that Big Papoose met a horrible death in Shantytown after drinking kerosene and eating eggs atop a large measure of whiskey. White men were blamed by the diarist for the dastardly trick, and you can bet they never faced criminal prosecution.

It was Waubie's good fortune to have friends in strategic places. Mr. and Mrs. Robert Maine of Stevens Point were said by the Portage County Gazette to have given him all his clothing and other provisions in later years, and near Shantytown, a settler identified by Sherman as Harm Smith had married a "squaw," and the couple also opened their home to the old Indian.

The last time Waubie was seen alive, according to the diarist, was on July 1, 1871, while returning from the Pike Lake area. On July 7, "two Norwegians found him dead near the big spring and reported it to Dewit Brown, who was camping at the Gilchrist logging shanties on Pike Lake Creek. He (Brown) gave two Potawatomie Indians a quart of Whiskey to bury the body."

Waubakanish was not to rest in peace.

Five years after his death, while Sherman and his son, Eugene, were driving logs over Cedar Rapids on the Plover River, they located a fire pit in a small hallow with a small knoll beside it. After driving stakes and assembling a camp kettle over the fire pit, Eugene sat on the knoll only to discover discomfort from a protruding object.

When he stood up, bones were discovered, some of which were gathered up and tossed in the river. Upon further investigation, Eugene found a coat with buttons still affixed matching the description of what Waubakanish was wearing at the time of his death. The elder Sherman's response was to split two pieces of cedar and create a grave marker.

It would have been better if no marker ever went up, for news of the find spurred mischief in Stevens Point.

Albert Bentley, identified by Sherman as one of Waubie's old friends, learned that a Dr. McCulloch in Stevens Point had offered \$500 for the Indian's skull. Knowing others were in pursuit, Bentley reportedly arrived at the grave first, removed the skull and took it to town. Years later, when Bentley tried to reclaim his find for the purpose of sending it to the State Historical Society Museum in Madison, a brother of the doctor, Hugh McCulloch, and business partner congdon, said the skull was stored in the attic of their store on Main Street. However, they refused to give it up. I have been unable to locate any more reference to this macabre dispute or of the disposition of the skull. Could it still be in the store attic?

Some of the Wisconsin Indian history contained in the 1919 Gazette story about changing Stevens Point's name to Waubakanish is interesting at best, but according to David Wrone of the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point history faculty, not very accurate.

Reference of Waubie's incredible age, nonetheless fascinates Dave. While Indians did not measure time in years, he does concede that it was possible Waubakanish lived to very advanced age, which was not uncommon for Indians who had vigorous lifestyles and ate the kinds of natural foods that nurtured good health.

Diarist Sherman referred in his writings to seeing, many scars on Waubakanish's body when the old man wore little clothing during warm weather. This

may confirm some of the references in the Gazette article to the fact this “warrior chief had, as a younger man, led some of the Chippewa Indians in the massacre of Fort Dearborn (now Chicago) in 1812.

After this event, the Gazette continued, Waubakanish “became the staunch and trusted friend of the white man and no further depredations were committed upon the earlier settlers.” He had apparently lived in these parts from the time of the massacre until his death.

Our local university was recently favored with the arrival of Ben Ramirez Shlwegnaabi, a Chippewa Indian who is expert in the language of his tribe. What, I asked him, does Waubakanish mean. He first thought it was “someone who is different,” for it was thought, according to Marge Warner, that Waubie had a very large head (perhaps one of the reasons for the Stevens Point doctor’s interest in it.) But Ben later decided the real meaning is silver hair. Look at his photo. Was he born with it? An albino?

There’s an epitaph in the Sherman diary. Waubakanish was described as “a harmless person. I never knew or heard of any misdeeds he ever done.”

Which brings me to a suggestion. Those of you charged with the responsibility of naming public places, please give thought. That 1919 suggestion still has merit for a street, road, park, or a variety of other facilities except a casino.



Web Site

Our web site is developing a section on Polish Heritage. This move to concentrate on one ethnic group rather than continue to add articles randomly to our Online Archive was brought about by a visit from Waldek Biniecki. He had contacted us at our site and arranged a visit here in Portage County. Mr Biniecki is actively working in the Milwaukee and Franklin areas to preserve Polish Heritage and teach the Polish language to many residents. He informed us that our site had more information about the Polish experience in Wisconsin than any other he had seen.

During his brief visit here Anton Anton, Adeline Sopa and Jerry Rohlinger took him to the main areas of Polish settlement here in Portage County, Polonia, St Casimir Church, and St Peter’s Church.

With the assistance of Adeline Sopa, the Polish Heritage Society, Waldek Biniecki and others we will build a research area dedicated to the Polish immigrants that helped build Portage County.



The Society holds a monthly meeting on the second Wednesday of each month. Meetings start at 7:30 PM and are held in the basement of the Synagogue Museum, 1475 Water St., Stevens Point, WI 54481, Phone # (715) 344-4423. All Members and the general public are welcome.

To contact the Society write to the address below or call:

Tim Siebert (715) 344-7607

or

The Society at (715) 344-4423 or email to pchs_54481@yahoo.com

See our web site at www.pchswi.org

For contributing articles or comments on the Newsletter:
PCHS Newsletter, 1418 Wisconsin St., Stevens Point, WI 54481

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