

Official Publication of the Portage County Historical Society of Wisconsin

## History and Recollections of Local Radio's Funnier Moments

By Jim Shuh, June 28, 2002

Depending on your viewpoint, local radio arrived in Stevens Point either in the early 1920s or the late 1940s. Broadcasting Yearbook says WLBL, a state-operated radio station now licensed to Auburndale, signed on the air in Waupaca in 1922. It moved to Stevens Point in 1924, according to Malcolm Rosholt's "Our County, Our Story." It had studios in the Whiting Hotel before moving into what's now the Communication Building at the UW-Stevens Point. At first, the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture operated WLBL, but the legislature transferred control to the State Radio Council in 1951, and the station's transmitter moved to Auburndale. The call letters WLBL stand for "Wisconsin, Land of Beautiful Lakes."

In 1948, Stevens Point got its first locally licensed commercial radio station with the establishment of WTWT by Rosa Evans and her husband, Ralph. He ran a broadcast engineering business in Milwaukee, and together, they built the first station authorized to broadcast from Portage County. Later, the call letters became WSPT. The Evans sold the property about four years later to a group of Minnesota investors, which included Warren Burger and Harry Blackmun. Both men later became United States Supreme Court Justices, and Burger served as Chief Justice. Burger died in 1995, and Blackmun lived until 1999.

That group sold the stations to Sentry Insurance in 1968. Sentry added WRJN in Racine a year later, and over the next several years, purchased stations in five other Upper Midwest cities. In 1986, the company exited the broadcast business. Since then, the Stevens Point stations have had two other owners, Sage Broadcasting of Stamford, Connecticut and the present operator, Muzzy Broadcasting.

WFHR in Wisconsin Rapids, which first signed on in 1940, once had a Stevens Point studio which it used to broadcast Portage County news three times each day. Many people remember the late Stevens Point announcer, Bob Daniels, who broadcast news and sports, hosted polka music during

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### Society Events

**June 15-16** - Heritage Days. Craft demonstrations for both adults and children. Grey Kats band will be playing Saturday at 1:00PM

#### Synagogue

Open Memorial Day to  
Labor Day  
Saturday & Sunday 1 - 4pm  
By appointment 715-600-4930

#### Historic Fire House No. 2

Open Memorial Day to  
Labor Day  
Saturday & Sunday 1 - 4pm  
By appointment 715-600-4930

#### Heritage Park

Open Memorial Day to  
Labor Day  
Saturday & Sunday 1 - 4pm  
By appointment 715-600-4930

**June 15-16** - Heritage Days. Craft demonstrations for both adults and children. Gray Cats band will be playing Saturday at 1:00PM

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# President's Report

The summer season displays have been delayed due to the weather since the roof on the Church/Museum cannot be put up until we have dry weather. This also applies to the Bancroft Depot roof. However, the Hie Corner one room school project was, again, very successful. Roughly, 800 students and adults attended the presentations. They would spend time learning as they would have in 1910 and then take a tour of the Engford and Franklin houses along with the new barn. Thanks go out to Mary Beth Anday for organizing the program, Anton Anday and Carl Whittaker for taking the children on tours of the Heritage Park.

The Society has been the recipient of a significant amount of funds from Anne Buck. The amount was just over \$44,000. The Society split the funds in half and put \$20,000 into our accounts in the Community Foundation. The board placed \$7,000 in the Rothman fund which helps the Society to fund prizes for significant efforts in presenting and/or saving local history. The remaining \$13,000 was placed in the Society's general fund. The interest from this fund is used by the Society for a wide variety of projects. The Society's other funds include ones for the Synagogue, Fire House, Nelsonville Mill and Heritage Park. As mentioned above the Society obtains the interest from each of these funds annually to help promote projects in the various areas. The other half of the \$44,000 was divided among a number of projects for immediate use. These include \$4,000 for the Synagogue, \$3,000 for the Fire House, \$7,000 for Heritage Park, \$3,500 for painting the Nelsonville Mill and \$7,000 to purchase the necessary equipment and software to catalogue our collections.

The board has also seen four members renew their place on the board for a three year period. These include Dan Hoppe, Beverly West, Diane Casselberry and Sarah Scripps. The board also voted at the May Business Meeting to re-elect the officers of the Society. These included Tim Siebert for President, Dave Simonis for Vice President, Janet Zblewski for Treasurer and Jerry Rohlinger as Secretary.

Heritage Days will take place on June 15 (10-4)-16 (11-4). The Society is taking a different course this year. On Saturday (as well as Sunday) we will be presenting a number of craft demonstrations. These include, on Saturday, Calligraphy (10-12 am), Butter making (11-1pm), weaving (1-3 pm), wood carving (noon-5) and tatting and candle making all day. On Sunday we will present kids games from 10-noon), ringer washing (noon-3), tatting and candle making all day on wood carving (10 to 4). In addition, the band Gray Cats will be performing Saturday afternoon and the Society will have beverages available. We hope to have a square dancing demonstration on Sunday afternoon.

The Synagogue hosted a Shabbat service earlier in May. The museum

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## Rising Star Mill

**May 25 - 26, 2019** - Annual Rising Star Mill Art Show and Sale, . Saturday 10 am - 5 pm and Sunday 10 am to 4 pm.

**Friday, June 14,** 7:00 PM Patchouli

**Friday June 28,** 7:00PM Biebel & Basar

**Friday, July 19,** 7:00PM MoJo & Flipside

**Friday, August 16,** 7:30 PM Free Movie Night

**Saturday, Sept. 14,** 7:30 PM Art Stevenson & High Water

**Friday, Saturday & Sunday October 4th, 5th & 6th** The Rising Star Mill's Open House featuring "The Barns of Portage County"

**Admission to concerts is \$12 for adults, \$5 for students ages 12-18 Children under 12 FREE**



## The Pinery

*The Pinery logo was definitely in use by April 1956 until at least 1984. A return to our "roots".*

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is also getting the bookstore ready for the summer season. The Nelsonville Mill will be hosting its annual art show as well as trying to get a good deal of the building's exterior painted. Finally, the Fire House is seeing an interior upgrade on the second floor as the walls are re-plastered in the places that need work.

An exciting event has been proposed by Wisconsin Public TV. The series Hometown Stories is WPT's way of looking at the history and development of various Wisconsin communities. WPT wants to look at Stevens Point beginning the process this fall. The Society board has given its support to this exciting proposal.

The Society has received an award from the Wisconsin Historical Society for its Public Presentations on World War I. The presentation of the award will take place at Heritage Days, Saturday, June 15.

## Firehouse No. 2

We are currently finishing up repairing and painting of the upstairs day-room/hall. The plastered walls were in rough shape with cosmetic items and areas of missing or cracked plaster. The ceiling in the day-room/hall also needs attention and as time permits – may be repaired and painted yet this fall. Work will continue on exterior windows and general repairing of brickwork where necessary, and possibly tuck-pointing accomplished as time and funds permit.

A side driveway was approved last year by the board and we are waiting on the asphalt contractor to install. The neighbors to the south use the driveway for entrance to their garage and approached the Society about going in on the project and paying half of the driveway costs. Several bids were acquired and B&B Paving was chosen.

Storage of select PCHS collections are now also being housed in the upper hay-mow portion of the building. We continue to seek out exterior signs from past Portage County businesses to hang/display in the rear/jail room of the firehouse. To date we have neon, metal/porcelain, wood, and other various sign types on display (along with several older gas pumps and other area artifacts). Last summer 50 cushioned/stackable chairs were donated for the rooms anticipated future use.



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Curator Dave Simonis working on the upstairs day room.

On left is first 'patching' coat and on right is final 'skimming' coat. A little sanding and Dave can apply a coat of paint.

Anyone interested in helping at the Fire House, it will be open Saturdays from 9:30AM to 1:30 PM beginning Memorial Day Weekend thru Labor Day Weekend



# HERITAGE DAYS

June 15-16

Visit the Park to see our buildings and experience the craft artists displaying their works and teaching you how to do it!

	Butter Making	Calligraphy	Candle Making	Kids Games	Ringer Washer	Tatting	Weaving	Wood Carvers
<b>Saturday</b>	11:00AM 12:00PM	10:00AM 11:00AM	All Day			All Day	1:00PM 2:00PM	12:00PM Until close
<b>Sunday</b>			All Day	10:00AM 11:00AM	12:00PM 1:00PM 2:00PM	All Day		All Day

Saturday, June 15th  
see Gray Cats perform  
at 1:00PM



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Continued general maintenance and cleaning are to take place prior to opening for Memorial Day weekend.

## Beth Israel Museum

The Beth Israel Synagogue Museum is gearing up for another summer season! The museum is open every Saturday and Sunday at 1pm-4pm from Memorial Day through Labor Day. This year, three interns will be joining us from UW-Stevens Point. The interns are responsible for giving museum tours, operating the bookstore, and assisting with collections management for PCHS.

Lucas Jagodzinski will serve as the Managing Curator intern. He recently graduated majoring in History and Broad Field Social Science with teaching in-



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tent. He would like to work in education someday, whether it be in the classroom or at a museum. If he could meet one person in history, it would be Martin Luther King, Jr.

Robert Jonet just completed his third year at UWSP and is majoring in History with a minor in Museum Studies. Upon graduation, he plans to pursue a graduate degree in Historic Preservation. There are several filmmakers he would meet if given the chance, including Akira Kurosawa, Sergio Leone, and David Lynch.

Marie Ackley is a junior at UWSP majoring in Arts Management with a Museum Studies minor. Her goal is to work as an events coordinator for a natural history museum. She would like to meet Howard Carter, the archaeologist who discovered Tutankhamun's tomb. These incredibly talented students are a welcome addition to the museum.

If you have a chance, please stop by and say hello!

## Heritage Park

This summer will be busy!

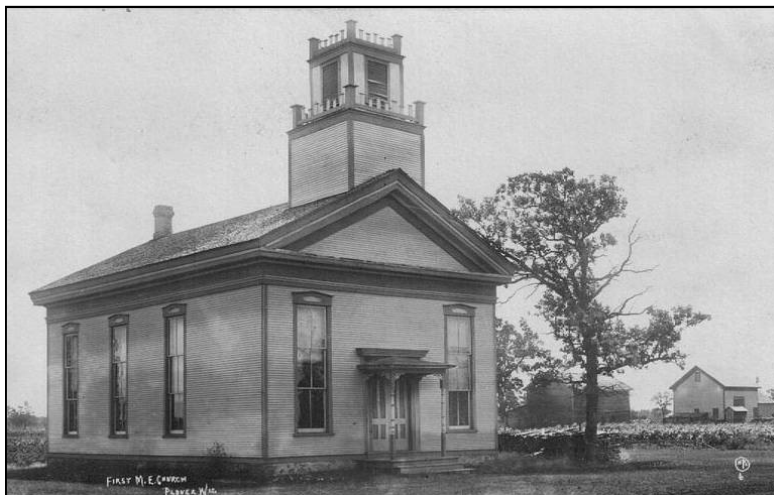
A new roof will go on the Bancroft Depot and the Church/Museum will have a replica of the original bell tower installed and a new roof also. In addition both buildings will be repainted this summer!

Work will begin as soon as weather permits. Because of this work the Church/Museum will not have a display this summer. The Bancroft Depot may be closed a few days also. All other buildings will be operating as usual.

Its hoped that the Print Shop, front part of the Agricultural Barn, will be completed before Memorial Day weekend, if not we'll shoot for opening before Heritage Days, June 15-16.

Heritage Days this year will feature the music of the Gray Cats performing on Saturday from 1:00PM to 3:00PM.

Crafters will be on hand to display and demonstrate their crafts. (See schedule on Page 4.)



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the noon hour and also managed the Stevens Point operation for the Huffman family. (The call sign “WFHR” stood for “William F Huffman Radio.”)

The Federal Communications Commission authorized what was to become WSPT to broadcast at 1010 kHz on the AM dial. It was one of many new stations to sign on across the country following World War II. But it received authorization to transmit only from local sunrise to sunset. The limitation to daylight hours-only broadcasting was necessary to protect the signals of other, more powerful stations in Toronto and New York on the same frequency. (During the day, AM radio stations transmit their signals via ground wave, but at night, sky wave transmissions carry radio station signals considerable distances. Too many signals result in interference, and since the United States population was still mostly rural in the 1940s, the government wanted to make certain that people living in the countryside were able to receive clear signals from powerful big city stations, free from interference.) After a period when the studio was located at the transmitter on Forest Street North, WSPT moved into downtown studios on Main Street. In 1966, the station relocated to a new building on Division Street.

Stevens Point first FM station - WSPT-FM - signed on the air in 1961. Not many people had FM receivers in those days, so the owners contracted with the Copps Corporation to furnish background music and occasional food commercials for broadcast in their stores. That move produced revenue for the station - enough to keep it operating. As FM became more popular, WSPT 's operators decided to simulcast - that is, broadcast the same programming simultaneously on both their AM and FM stations. Since WSPT had limited broadcast hours, listeners who wanted local radio service before sunrise or after sunset could buy an FM radio, and receive programming pretty much full time. (While WSPT could broadcast from 5:15 am until 8:45pm during the long days of June, short December days meant that during that month, the station could be on the air only from 7:30 am to 4:15 pm.)

The second operation to go on the air in Stevens Point was WWSP, the UW-Stevens Point's student-operated facility, which signed on the air for the first time in 1968. Barry and Sharon Nienow established WYTE, a country music station in Whiting in 1985, and a broadcaster from Texas built WMGU, (Magic 105) in Stevens Point a few years later. It programmed soft hits until going off the air in the early 1990s. Several years later, the frequency was sold and moved to Marathon City. Now called WKQH, it broadcasts classic hits from the WSPT studios.

WIZD, although licensed to Rudolph in Wood County, went on the air in the fall of 1990 from studios in Plover, broadcasting “Oldies” music. Although it isn't in Portage County, WGNV, a station broadcasting religious programming, lies just west of the Portage-Wood County line, north of Milladore.

So much for a brief history of radio in the Stevens Point area.





# The Pinery

Is the official publication of the Portage County Historical Society, Inc. of Wisconsin published March 20th, May 20th, Sept. 20th and Dec. 20th of each year.

### Officers

President: Tim Siebert  
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A monthly business meeting is held the second Wednesday of each month, except for December, at the Synagogue Museum, 1475 Water St. Stevens Point, WI., unless otherwise announced.

An Annual Meeting is held the second Wednesday of April at a location to be announced. An annual report and election of Directors occur at this meeting

The membership and public are welcome to attend any meeting.

Visit our website at:  
[www.pchswi.org](http://www.pchswi.org)

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*"The purposes of this organization are exclusively educational and shall be to preserve, advance, and disseminate knowledge of the history of Portage County, Wisconsin."*

Joining the Historical Society couldn't be easier! Just fill out the form and mail it today. Membership runs from January - December of the calendar year. Please circle the level at which you are joining or renewing.

Student (ages 17-21)	\$15/year	Senior (62 & older)	\$20/year
Individual	\$25/year	Family	\$40/year
Business	\$50/year	Pioneer	\$100/year
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Benefactor	\$400/year	Life	\$500

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May 2019

- |                  |                           |
|------------------|---------------------------|
| General Funds    | Heritage Park             |
| Synagogue Museum | Historic Fire House No. 2 |
| Rising Star Mill | Other - specify           |

No thanks, I don't want to become a member, but here is my tax deductible donation to the Society \$\_\_\_\_\_ Please circle your preference.

I'm interested in Volunteering, please call me at:

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## Photo to Remember

St Adalbert's Church and Rectory

