

Official Publication of the Portage County Historical Society of Wisconsin

Educational Evolution

By GENE KEMMETER

Wisconsin has always prided itself as a supporter of education, incorporating the principle of a free education in the state constitution. Portage County has followed that principle.

Education in the county has evolved from parental instruction, to one-room schoolhouses to one of the largest high schools in the state, not to mention the home for a University of Wisconsin campus and a vocational and technical school.

The first school district within the existing Portage County borders was established in Stevens Point in January 1847 at the request of Mathias Mitchell, James and John Campbell and others.

The first school teacher was apparently Mandana Hale who opened a private school north of the Public Square that April. Hale, whom later married Nathaniel F. Bliss, is the namesake for Bliss Center, the administrative center for the Stevens Point Area School District.

In 1850, the first public school building was constructed at the site marked by the historical marker in the municipal parking lot in the 1000 block of Clark Street.

Its use as a school building was short because it was too small, with a two-story building between Water and Elk Streets at the site of today's Lincoln Center, which replaced it.

The early pioneers had a thirst for education. In 1857, the Northern Institute, also known as "The Young Ladies Seminary" and the "Stevens Point Female Seminary," was founded by Mrs. Clarissa Northrop. Girls from about age 12 and older were enrolled in three departments: preparatory, junior and senior. Within two years, the school was opened to lower grades and also took in boys.

During the Civil War, however, the school closed down and the original building was divided into three residences in the neighborhood of Division and Oak Streets.

Plover residents were the second to establish a school district in the county in May 1847. However, education was probably conducted in private residences because village records indicate the board agreed to lease property for a school in 1853.

After most of the towns were organized in the 1850s, education was in the hands of town boards and the elected town school superintendents who hired the teaching staff.

School districts and rural schools were established throughout most of the county, with the schools

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Society Events

Annual Meeting is canceled!

All museums are closed until further notice!

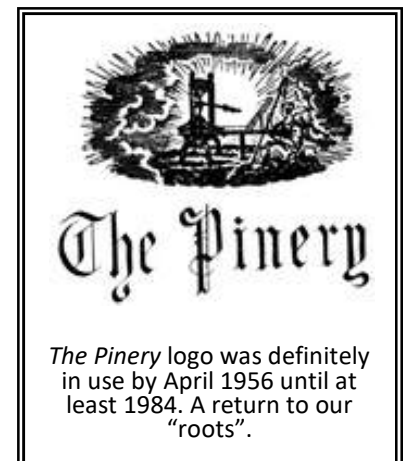
President's Report

Covid 19 has brought all of our public programs to a complete halt. Unfortunately, this will continue for the next few months. However, on the bright side, the time has allowed us to accomplish a number of construction things and begin to upgrade our collections inventory.

We have also received a number of World War II items that will enhance the display in the Church/Museum once we open again. These include a collection of items from Joyce Fox (not a native of the area but had a member of family here) including her story of being in the WAAC during the war. William Taylor has donated two dioramas. One of the Battle of the Bulge and one of D-Day which will be set up in the museum. The Society has been able to publish a couple of new books about men and women from this area and their involvement in the war effort. The books are At Ease and World War II stories. We have also been able to reprint three books. Malcolm Rosholt's The Days of the Ching Pao about the Flying Tigers in China and his roll in that effort. Island of Hope by Asbury Nix about his captivity on the Island of Corregidor during the war.

Perhaps our greatest hope at the point is that we have been offered the Morgan House (built in 1860 and on the National Register) along with the four out buildings and the two acres of land they occupy. The problem is that the owner wants \$350,000 for the whole thing and is looking to get a yes or no by mid-May. This is a lot of money but it is a once-in-a-lifetime chance and will double the size of Heritage Park. The property is located across Willow Street from the park. There is a lot of things that could be done with the property. The Morgan house is being looked at as a possible archive and research site, especially for the Wendell Nelson collection. Our current archival site is out of room and does not have any space for someone to do research. Part of the house can be used for our book store (currently in a small niche in the Synagogue and is overflowing). It is our hope that members can pledge an amount of funds so that we can tell the owners that we can purchase the site. We have also talked about the possibility of a sports museum on the site in one of the other structures. It would also give the Society a refurbished building (former garage) to use as a storage/construction area so that the various tools are not spread over the whole park. The possibilities are enormous.

As mentioned above the Society is to receive the Wendell Nelson archive. He was a local historian that spent some 30 years collecting information of the architecture and history of this area. The collection consists of hundreds of books on architecture but also some 150 to 200 three ring binders on the history of this county. We hope to be able to use the Morgan House for this collection and for persons to do research.



Capital Improvements Fundraising Goals - 2021

Possible expansion of Heritage Park with the purchase of the Morgan block to the south of Heritage Park. (est. \$350,000)

If we are successful in raising enough money to purchase the Morgan block we would own 4 of the 20 Registered buildings/sites in Portage County.

For more information and photos of the property, go to our website: www.pchswi.org. Button to Capital Improvement and More Photos is located just below the large image carousel on our Home Page.



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usually about two miles apart.

By 1882, Portage County had its first superintendent of schools, George W. Hulce, who was responsible for examining the various schools.

In the early days, a teacher sometimes was no older than the pupils being taught as seasonal workers, who often entered school during the winter months.

The first high school built in the county was just northeast of the corner of Clark and Church streets (the Charles M. White Library property) in Stevens Point in 1876. The first graduating class was in 1881, with nine students receiving diplomas.

Today, Stevens Point Area Senior High School is one of the largest high schools in the state with an enrollment of about 1,700 students.

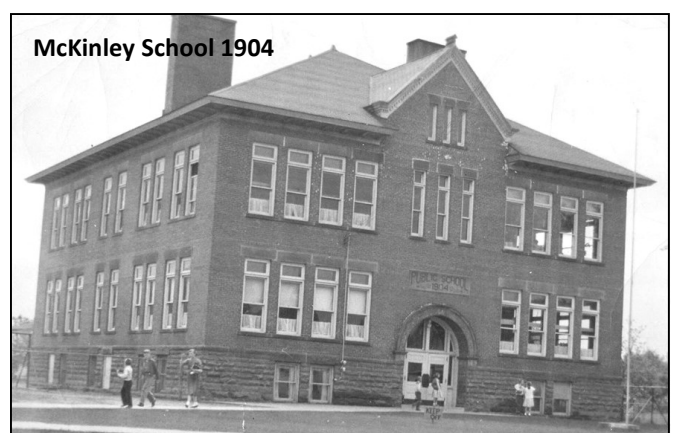
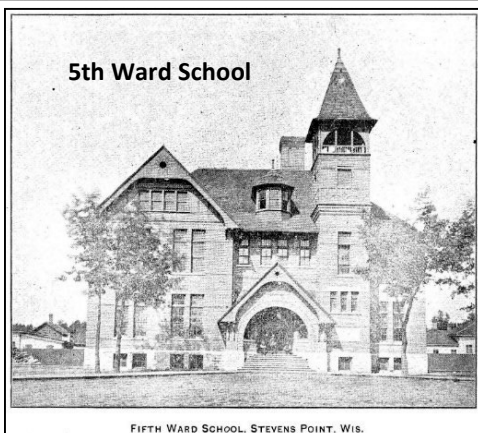
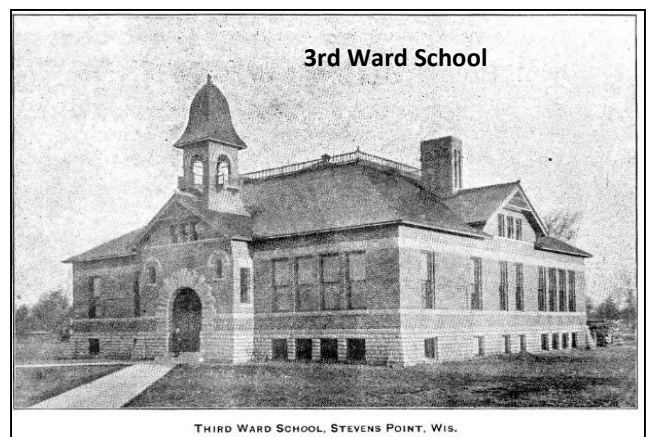
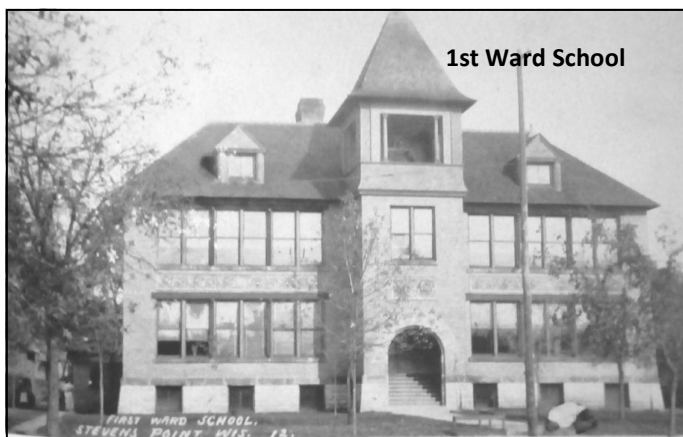
While public education was growing, the first parochial grade school was established by St. Stephen Catholic Church in 1873. The first parochial high school was St. Joseph's Academy for Girls in 1922. That school became Maria High School which later merged with Pacelli High School for boys.

By World War I, the number of rural schools reached their peak in the one-room school houses and then began to dwindle as multi-room buildings were constructed.

In 1947, the state enacted legislation to permit school consolidation, and the Tomorrow River School District in the Amherst area was the first to consolidate Amherst schools with several rural schools in 1940.

That slowly meant the demise for the one-room schools as classrooms by the 1970s. Some of those old schools remain, however, finding second lives as residences or other facilities.

Consolidations also led to the formation of the Stevens Point, Rosholt, Almond-Bancroft, Wisconsin Rapids and Tri-County school districts to serve county residents.



Heritage Park Report

In the last newsletter, we listed the project completions in 2020. Now we are considering the goals and objectives for 2021. We would like to complete the Post Office and Doctor's Office as well as the storage area and cover shell for the 40 & 8 by July. Two other small construction projects could also be completed by that time. One would be getting the metal roofing on the Pierce Building and the other is the construction of the cover/shell for the portable saw by the Barn Museum.

A major consideration for us is the possible expansion of Heritage Park with the purchase of the Morgan House block directly to the south. This issue is very costly, but important to our history because the Morgan House is on the National Historic Register. Time is of the essence for a decision.

Another big task will be the landscaping. Several trees were cut down so that a "vision triangle" could be maintained for the Canadian National railroad last year. The stumps will have to be removed and the ground reseeded. A sidewalk was also installed along Washington Avenue by the Village of Plover.

A third possible project is the purchase of the Morrison House and moving it to Heritage Park. A basement would have to be built for it. If this becomes possible, it may not materialize for several years.

There are several things that need to be done at the Engford House. The exterior needs painting. In the interior, the second floor will have to be restored with electricity, heating, and painting. The bathroom needs finishing work done since the new window was installed.

There is an extensive World War II exhibit in several of the buildings that we hope many people will be able to see this summer. When it is safe, we want to continue the One Room School program.

As you can see, there is a lot on our plate. Visitors, suggestions, and volunteers are always welcome.

The Rising Star Mill

The Rising Star Mill is still quiet! We do not want to be quiet but, we have respected the need to minimize personal contacts over the past year. There is a glimmer of hope for our immediate future. Normally we hold our first volunteer meeting in February when we confirm our sub-committee duties and plans for the summer months. This year, our first meeting will be in March. We still believe it will be best to limit our public access until later in the year.

Many artists have inquired about the annual Rising Star Mill Art Show and Sale. Show director Marianne Walker and her Art Show Committee are holding off on producing a show in May. Following our March meeting, a decision will be made as to whether to produce a limited outside event that will keep the public involved with the Mill. As mass inoculations expand, we may be able to accommodate a smaller event.

We Want to keep our volunteers involved and feeling appreciated. We have a loyal group who work diligently behind the scenes to keep the mill physically maintained and plan and support our fundraising activities. The inability to host any fundraisers have set us back in some of our plans. We do expect to get a major portion of the mill painted this summer so that it will continue to be a valued asset of the Portage County Historical Society and the Village of Nelsonville. Stay tuned!

Jim Walker

Plover DAR Launches Plover Cemetery Improvements

To (whom it may concern),

The Nay-osh-ing Chapter of the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution (NSDAR) located in Plover, Wisconsin wishes to inform the community about our project to clean and restore the grave site of Colonel James S. Alban. We researched his story as part of the "Wreaths Across America" program in 2019, and found that Colonel Alban played an important role in the history of Plover and Wisconsin.

In 1839, while exploring north of his family settlement, Colonel Alban was credited with discovering Devil's Lake and reporting its location. Along with other settlers in the area, he petitioned the Territorial Legislator to establish Sauk County.

He later settled in Plover where he opened the first law office in the area. In 1847 he became Portage County's first District Attorney and County Treasurer. In 1851 he was elected to the Wisconsin State Senate on the Whig Party and sat on the Committee for Incorporations and the Committee for Education.

In 1856 Colonel Alban started publishing his own newspaper, the "Plover Herald," which he used to advocate for emancipation. During the American Civil War, Colonel Alban received a commission as Colonel of the 18th Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry Regiment. He was shot during the Battle of Shiloh and *died* the following day. His body was returned to Plover and he was buried at the Plover Cemetery.

We were saddened to see the condition of his monument and the gravestones of three of his family members so our Chapter pitched in to do what we could. We cut back the bushes, cleaned the stones and were able to hire professionals to stabilize the obelisk. However, more work is needed. The bases of the stones need to be replaced and other parts of Colonel Alban's grave stabilized. The estimate for this work is approximately \$4,000. We are hoping to have the repairs completed in the spring of 2021.

If you would like to join us in supporting this project, your tax deductible donation can be sent to:

Nay-osh-ing Chapter.NSDAR
2041 County Road HH West
Junction City, WI 54443

NSDAR is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization and an acknowledgement of your donation will be provided.

Our Chapter members sincerely thank you for your consideration.

Nay-osh-ing Chapter
NSDAR



The Pinery

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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.



"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
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Mar. 2020

- | | |
|------------------|---------------------------|
| 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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