Local History Report

January 2025

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General Housekeeping

Looking ahead into 2025…

Thanks to a generous donor, we were able to secure three guest speakers this spring for the monthly Focus on Local History program. This is great in itself (they are excellent speakers and topics), but also frees me up. FoLH tends to take the most time of my history-related duties, and now that time can be used on other, bigger projects.

Thanks to children's librarian Sarah, I now have a white board where I have written my long-term goals for improving and expanding our collection. Some of these have already been started. For example, I would like to add more politicians' personal papers to the archive if they have a strong Kaukauna connection. Outagamie County Executive Tom Nelson has agreed to pass along documents that will not be archived elsewhere. John Lambie and Ron VanDeHey would also be excellent subjects.

My #1 expansion goal for 2025 is related to Wisconsin International Raceway (WIR). Efforts in the past to collect material was only modestly successful. Considering the world famous figures who have been to Kaukauna because of WIR, it should have a much larger imprint in our collection. I will (more) actively seek out printed material and original photography.

Finally, I have mentioned in the past the creation of a Kaukauna Police Department book to be something of a companion to Carol VanBoxtel's fire department book. This has been perpetually back-burnered, but can now move to the front thanks to the guest speakers (Daniel Seurer, Dr. Patrick Jung and Dr. Antoinette Powell). Ideally, the book's rough draft would be completed by May. (Similar to Carol's books, sales would benefit the library, not me personally.)

Recollection Wisconsin Steering Committee

A meeting was held January 14, 2025. Notes are available on their website, but I want to highlight items that directly impact Kaukauna Public Library.

Digital Public Library of America (DPLA): This is the national depository that Recollection Wisconsin is connected to. Kaukauna has digital items (e.g. photos) on RW, which in turn are available on DPLA. This is good, as it gives Kaukauna a national presence. In 2024, the host of DPLA announced they could no longer host, creating a scramble to find a new home. Free Library of Philadelphia stepped in to be the new host, so there was no loss of function or access.

The most exciting update, and most relevant to Kaukauna, is the development of new ways to "harvest" data from partners of RW such as ourselves. Currently, RW pulls data and images from the Kaukauna Memory Project, which is hosted by the Milwaukee Public Library. This was before my time, so I am not sure the details on how this came to be or how the things shared on there were chosen.

RW is looking into ways to pull items from PastPerfect. This is a bit technical, but as I understand it, PastPerfect has an API (application programming interface), which can share data from one program to another. (For example, if you sell things on Amazon, you can use a non-Amazon program to list your products because Amazon API showing item information and pricing is available to other programs.)

RW can access PastPerfect API, but the current issue is in the translation of it into something usable. The state database relies on a format called XML. Nothing has to be done on our end, so there is no extra work for myself or the volunteers… someone on the state end will have to convert the data, and it sounds like this is something actively happening. Once complete, all of our 15,000+ images will be fully searchable on both the state and national level, exponentially improving the usefulness of our collection.

As archives are increasingly going digital, Kaukauna has been at the forefront of bringing our history, heritage and culture into the digital age. This is something I am proud to be a part of.