

Local History Report

March 2026

A few updates since my last report.

General Requests

I thought the board may be interested in requests I've filled so far in 2026. Some of the ones that stand out are helping the Kaukauna high school band celebrate 100 years; assisting in getting a downtown building marked as a registered historic property; looking into the origins of Little League in Kaukauna (coming up on 50 years); and helping a patron track down vital records to get Luxembourg citizenship.

While all requests are interesting, I'm especially fond of the ones that help us connect with new people in the area or allow me the opportunity to learn new skills. Waking up each day, one never knows the random things you'll learn thanks to inquisitive patrons!

Recollection Wisconsin

The Recollection Wisconsin Steering Committee met on March 10. As part of this group, I offer suggestions on the direction taken by the state and its content partners (libraries and universities) with handling digital archives.

Currently, RW is conducting a user experience study to make the website more in line with the needs of its users (assuming it's not already perfect). To me, this has great potential – the Wisconsin Historical Society has been updating *their* website, and the digital resources (particularly books and documents) have never been more accessible. For researchers tracking down source material, it is easier than ever.

Requests from institutions for digitization help come in at a faster rate than they can be handled. Currently, four paid intern students per semester are handling this. New models are being considered to increase the number of students without increasing the budget. (Currently, selected institutions are not charged. Asking 20% or 50% of cost could stretch the RW budget further by adding another student or two each semester.)

RW is still in talks to leave DPLA (the national hub). As of this report, those talks are ongoing, but it seems increasingly likely RW will be part of a new regional hub or pull out altogether. DPLA charges members (states, not local organizations) annually, and it appears increasingly that the benefits do not outweigh the costs. Any decision will affect KPL only in a tangential way but speaking as a researcher and not as an RW steering committee member, a regional hub seems to me the best way to get relevant information to the public.

Police Book

New events, hires and retirements continue to happen weekly making history an unfolding situation, but the Kaukauna Police Department book is finished. The only thing left is formatting,

which is new for me, but in speaking with Carol VB and our marketing guru Jenny, I'm confident I'll figure it out in no time.

Miscellaneous

- Newspaper Archive was unavailable in March. While they have not been completely transparent, they've been open and honest about this. It appears a third party has locked them out. This has been a setback and comes at a poor time when we are moving ahead and working with them again. However, I am assured they will get things sorted out and (absolute worst-case scenario), we do have copies of all the files. We have lost nothing except access.
- In the near future, I hope to launch the biggest written history project yet for Kaukauna. In my almost eight years at KPL, I have assembled dozens upon dozens of biographies of notable figures, organization histories, building histories for important properties, etc. These hundreds of pages currently sit in digital folder out of public view. With the help of assistant director Berven, I would like to get them online in a format that is both searchable and cross-referenced. (I have referred to this as being like a Kaukauna-specific Wikipedia, though in practice it may be quite different.)
- The three summer Focus on Local History programs have been set, and will again be Grignon-themed this year. Topics are Maggie Grignon (notable painter and a daughter of Charles), Paul Grignon (one of Appleton's earliest settlers), and the St. Paul Nursing Home (Edith Acker Grignon was the first resident there).