

Local History Report

Summer 2025

Summer is always the busy season around here, so it's been a few months since my last report. Some highlights:

Paper Discovery Center

The Paper Discovery Center, a museum in the flats of Appleton, closed its doors for the last time in June. I was invited to salvage items related to Thilmany/Kaukauna. There were surprisingly few things that weren't bulky (and therefore not appropriate for our collection), but I was able to pull a few items. Other local organizations saved what they could – Appleton Historical Society was able to take multiple truckloads. The Paper Hall of Fame, previously housed in Appleton, was moved to UW-Stevens Point.

Two of the most common things I hear are, „I used to work here“ and „what did this building used to be?“ Building on Kaukauna's rich paper history is important, even as its impact seems to fade.

Dementia Cohort

Between May and August, I was part of a group organized by Kristin Laufenberg of OWLS discussing the connection between vulnerable adults (primarily dementia) and the library. We discussed items for checkout, programming and policies. Kaukauna Public Library does a good job approaching dementia needs with our memory kits and hosting Memory Cafe. I was able to pass on further ideas to our adult services librarian for consideration.

Things popular at other libraries we do not currently offer include: (a) Mystery Craft Kit. People donate leftover craft supplies and they randomly go in brown bags. This is also popular with teens. (b) Bingo. This requires a staff member or outside guest, but is an engaging social activity with few parts and little cost. (c) Matinee. Many libraries show an afternoon movie once or twice a month. There are countless movies in the public domain or included in our license. The biggest risk is blocking out a room for a program that may have no one show up and thus losing the space for others. However, if a slot is chosen in a time that has consistently been empty, I see this risk as very low. No staff time is needed other than pushing play, so a no-show would be a minor inconvenience compared to low attendance programs that often do require staff time for planning, etc.

If time permitted, it also seems taking local history programming to the community rather than relying on them to come to us would be of benefit. I have given talks to Roundhouse Manor and Statesburgh in the past with positive results. I have not been to St. Paul. These are not necessarily vulnerable adults, but they are a target audience for the programs I offer and many of the residents are not very mobile, especially after dark.

Yearbooks

The school district donated hundreds of yearbooks from 1999-2020. Retail on these books is in the \$50 range and we have been offering them for \$5. Sales were strong at first but have slowed down considerably. Remaining books will be part of the next Friends book sale. Because we received the books for free, any proceeds are welcome.

Grignon Mansion

This summer, my local history topics were Grignon-related. The purpose of this was cross-promotion, as I also serve as chair of the Mansion board. This promotion was successful, at least on the library end. Attendance of local history programs was higher than average during the Grignon-themed months. August in particular was well-attended with 15 (which sounds low, but any history program with 10+ is strong). The cross-promotion will likely be repeated next summer, as the links between the Grignon family and Kaukauna history are virtually endless and it appears this remains an area of focus that the community cares about.

Police Book

Throughout 2025, I've been working on the history of the Kaukauna Police Department, with forthcoming book sales supporting the library. Research is typically done at the library, and writing is done at home. I grossly underestimated how busy I would be this year and how little free time I would have. The project moves forward a little each day and will likely be out by year's end, but earlier projections were far too optimistic. Years covered are approximately 1880-1985.

Kaukauna Historical Society

Lyle Hansen, former publisher of the Kaukauna Times, has acquired the defunct Kaukauna Historical Society and hopes to revive it. Along with another person or two, I have met with Lyle a few times to discuss and advise on this. These meetings have not been on work time, but should something come to pass, it seems likely there will be some overlap between this group and my role at the library, even if not on work time.

Frankly, I don't know that a historical society is viable. The library already serves that purpose in all but name. There also exists a Town of Kaukauna Historical Society, making such an organization redundant. Further still, the Grignon Mansion has occasionally raised the idea of erecting a second building for the purpose of displaying artifacts and Kaukauna history. What need does a new historical society fill that isn't being met? And where would volunteers be drawn from, when the existing organizations are often struggling to find volunteers? All that being said, IF such an organization comes to pass, it makes sense for me/KPL to have a seat at the table rather than not.

The website is <https://kaukaunahistory.com/> -- at this time, it serves primarily as a link to Hansen's Time Machine blog.