

Local History Report

June 2024

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Newspaper Digitization. NewspaperArchive is working on reels for the 1980s, up to 1991. The project will be put on pause after that as our designated funding goes no further. Eventually, I would like to see the entire run digitized, but cannot say enough about how happy I am with where we're at. I use the online search multiple times a week, and I know one of our volunteers does, too. I can also say from personal experience, looking up items pre-1960 is far more common than post-1960, so the reels that get the most use are already done.

Newspaper Indexing. Our newspaper index is phenomenal, among the best I've seen anywhere. However, it was last worked on in 2008, as far as I can tell. With digitization paused in 1991, the index will be more useful for more recent things. I have a volunteer who currently pulls articles from the microfilm, but as that need shrinks, I will likely pivot them to this project.

Recollection Wisconsin. I attended my second steering committee meeting for Recollection Wisconsin.



A few things I would like to highlight in my own words. RW's **Culture Keepers Initiative** had a gathering hosted by the Ho-Chunk Nation. Nine of the state's tribes were represented, building community between them and with state archives. RW representative Kristen Whitson said they served "the best meal I've ever had in my life" and "you could taste the love." I believe it! (Completely unrelated: Ms. Whitson is an avid fan/follower of KPL's

social media presence!)

The **Digitization Initiative** (where graduate students visit libraries and historical societies to get their collections online) is funded for the next three semesters. A seat will be "held" each time for any indigenous group that wants it. This push to build trust with our First Nations is important in itself, but it also will do a great deal to improve our understanding of local and state history. Indigenous groups

have often been hesitant to share their heritage with others – historically, this was not met with acceptance, to put it mildly. Seeing more knowledge entering the public sphere will allow us to improve our understanding of the challenging history we often have to face. In Kaukauna, you cannot tell the city’s story without the Stockbridge, the Menominee, and others. The more we learn, the fuller and more accurate our story will be.

The future of **DPLA** (the national equivalent of RW) is still up in the air, but is expected to be gone by December 24. The most likely outcome is a Midwest-specific umbrella group hosted by Minnesota Digital Library. Frankly, I see this as an improvement rather than a setback as far as Wisconsin is concerned. Having Kaukauna’s digital holdings available nationwide is wonderful, but the overwhelming overlap of history is regional – railroads, fur trade, politics, native groups... Wisconsin (not surprisingly) shares much more with Illinois, Minnesota and Michigan than with other states, making a regional tool more fine-tuned for most research needs.

Much of the June meeting was brainstorming on how to promote Recollection Wisconsin, and **how Recollection Wisconsin can promote local collections like Kaukauna’s**. Although only my second meeting, I have been following the reports and literature for a while, and had much to contribute for this discussion. Specifically, I floated the idea of having monthly themes rather than (or in addition to) a focus on certain institution’s collections. A “dairy” or “circus” theme would, I believe, create more cross-traffic. Rather than a narrow KPL <-> RW pathway, why not a web that brings people to us from Whitewater, Superior, Mequon, etc?

Other ideas floated (not by me): having guest writers on the RW blog to draw in new eyes, and seeking researcher testimonials of how collections have aided them.

That was probably more thorough than it had to be, but the important takeaway for the board is: **Kaukauna Public Library is actively involved in the direction that statewide preservation efforts are going, and our own library is positively reflected as a result.** The next Recollection Wisconsin meeting is August 6.

Final Thoughts, Looking Ahead. Upcoming Focus on Local History programs include Holy Cross fire (June), the Kaukauna Telephone Company (July), the Sniderville settlement (August), the Eagle Mill, veterans of World War I, and more. I encourage you to attend, but if not, you can always ask for my notes.