

Local History Report

April 2024

Gavin Schmitt

I wasn't planning to write a report this month because I'm on vacation the first half of April, but we keep making progress and having updates!

NewspaperArchive

As of April 3, 2024, The *Kaukauna Times* (and *Sun and Zeitung*) is online and searchable, 1880-1974. At this time only key staff members have access, but it has *already* saved me time in retrieving information for patrons and for assembling materials for programming.

Veterans Project

Lyle Hansen, former owner-editor of the *Kaukauna Times*, has asked for a “veterans database” and this was largely something we were unable to do for various reasons; chief among them is time. We are now starting a project that is a compromise between a veteran-specific master database and what we already have as far as infrastructure.

We put out a call to the community for veteran photos, and these will be added to our existing photo collection in PastPerfect. Lyle has digitally clipped over 5,000 articles on Kaukauna veterans. In cases where we have photos, the information from the articles will be added as a photo description containing such information as where they were stationed, what training was received, etc. Articles with no matching photo will remain on file but not be added to the database.

This is a great tribute to those who served, and an excellent complement to the military information already on file, such as WWI and WWII letters and our original Grand Army of the Republic (Civil War) ledger.

Recollection Wisconsin

At the suggestion of the director, I applied for a position with the Recollection Wisconsin Steering Committee. To my surprise, I was one of two candidates chosen and I attended my first meeting on April 1, 2024.

In the simplest terms, Recollection Wisconsin (RW) is the state organization that oversees digitization efforts at libraries, universities, museums, etc. Kaukauna Public Library is a member of this, and much of our digital inventory is accessible from the state site. This is very helpful to researchers because the history of a business, organization or person rarely stops at the city limits. (The most obvious local example is the Grignon

family – based in Kaukauna, but active in Green Bay, Appleton, Oshkosh, Winneconne, Portage and countless more places.)

RW, in turn, is part of the Digital Public Library of America (DPLA), which replicates what RW does on a national level. People all over the United States can easily search for Kaukauna information through DPLA, RW or locally. There is, unfortunately, a concern that DPLA will be shifting to more of an institutional model rather than its current fully public incarnation, but discussions are already underway for yet another wider system – a Midwest-based collection. The challenge is, I suppose, to get information to more people without being redundant.

RW also has specific initiatives. I will cover three here, briefly.

1. Culture Keepers Collective. This is perhaps the most exciting, as it is a partnership with Wisconsin's indigenous nations and native-led. Preserving not only photos and documents, but the very language of some cultures.
2. Ideas to Action Fund. RW gives out 7-9 grants of \$5,000 annually to libraries and other institutions. The grant is for getting a new idea to being actualized, and is not limited to history, but culture as a whole. Appleton Public Library, for example, used the grant to fund a “piano project” to highlight Fox Cities Reads author, Kao Kalia Yang.
3. As a successor to Curating Community Digital Collections (CCDC), college students will be partnering with institutions to digitize collections. Students are paid by the state, and institutions targeted will be in cities or regions often overlooked.

This being my first meeting, much of this is new to me and I have a lot to learn. I should also add, this report is my understanding of what I heard and may not be 100% accurate in the phrasing – I would encourage board members to explore <https://recollectionwisconsin.org/> if they are interested.

Being on the steering committee is an honor and privilege – I am the only one from the Fox Cities, for example. I hope I am able to represent Kaukauna Public Library well and in some small way improve state efforts to preserve history.

On a personal note, being with RW is also an excellent networking opportunity. Getting to know historians and archivists from around the state on a first-name basis is a boon to me professionally and no doubt elevates the library's visibility and the incredible efforts we have taken to make KPL a great source for reliable information.