

SHADES OF THE PAST

Williams Bay Historical Society
Established 2013

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MISSION OF OUR HISTORICAL SOCIETY:

The purpose of the Williams Bay Historical Society is to assist in the preservation and exhibition of items of historical interest that are within the boundaries of Williams Bay, and the immediate surrounding area. It will seek to provide the public with educational opportunities to learn about our unique local history. It will also seek to organize and assist in the commemoration of significant dates and events in Village history.

A Word from the President

October 2019



Dear Members,

My love for Williams Bay, its community, and its history inspired me to join the Williams Bay Historical

Society. For the last three years, I was happy and loved being a part of it as its secretary. At our October 2019 Annual Meeting, I was elected President on the Board of Directors.

A little history of me. My name is Susan Kenyon Vavra. I grew up on Highway 50 between Williams Bay and Lake Geneva, which was considered “out in the country” when I was growing up. Although I attended Lake Geneva schools, my family has roots in Williams Bay for five generations. My husband, Dale Vavra, is also five generations according to Village records. We have been married for forty-seven years and are blessed with two daughters, one son, and seven grandchildren. I am a member of the Williams Bay Fire/Rescue Squad for over thirty-seven years and hold a current Wisconsin State Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) license. I recently retired from the Williams Bay School District. My passion and love for this Village and community are exemplified by the enjoyment of these roles in my life.

I am extremely excited to be the new President of the Historical Society. I will continue to have the privilege of working with our amazing Board of Directors and community members. The Directors include Henry Kenyon - Vice president; Dianna Woss - Treasurer; Pam Osman Jameson - Secretary; Phyllis Janda - Membership Secretary; and Directors Laverne Duncan, Ann Becker, Cindy Rademaker, and past President, Pat Grove, who will now

coordinate our new committees. This role is a new adventure for me, as our team strives to continue to promote our love for Williams Bay and its history.

The Williams Bay Historical Society is excited about getting more of our community involved in the success of this organization. We are forming committees such as fundraising and publicity, and are looking to invest in computer software to allow us to log donations made from the public like the 1906 map of the Chicago and Northwestern railroad that came into Williams Bay until 1965. We will continue to hold lectures and programs to educate you on the history of our village. Some of our past programs include: talks about the time Williams Bay was the iceboat capital of the world, the mammoths that use to roam Williams Bay, Native Americans, arrow heads, and Gage Marine boats.

I want to invite and strongly encourage anyone who would love to know more about Williams Bay to join the Williams Bay Historical Society. You are welcome to stop by and visit, join a committee, or take a look at our website, <http://www.wmsbayhistory.org>. Please feel free to contact me or any member of the Board of Directors.

Have a great day in the Bay, and I look forward to seeing what this next year brings to Williams Bay and our Historical Society.

Respectfully,

Sue Vavra
WBHS President
Williams Bay Wisconsin

Village of Williams Bay Celebrates First 100 Years

By Michelle Bie Love

After more than a year of planning, the official centennial celebration of the incorporation of the Village of Williams Bay took place on October 19.

Residents and visitors alike enjoyed a warm October day filled with entertainment, food, and fun activities.

However, the centennial celebration actually began in early September when the Williams Bay Historical Society and other Village organizations presented a month long historical display at Barrett Memorial Library. Visitors viewed displays of memorabilia, photos, and scrapbooks containing treasured Williams Bay memories.

Then, on October 12th, over 80 people attended the Williams Bay Historical Society's program on the Chicago North Western Railroad. The guest speaker, Craig Pfannkuche, a Chicago & North Western archivist, was fantastic! If you would like to learn more about the history of the Chicago & North Western Railroad visit the Chicago & North Western Historical Society website: www.cnwhs.org.

Following the program, the Historical Society held its annual meeting. Pat Grove summarized activities for the past year, and a Chicago & North Western map from 1906 was displayed for members to view. The map was donated to the Historical Society by Chris Pauley, who found the map at an estate sale a few years ago. The map was in poor condition and needed restoration before it could be dis-



played. With the help of Henry Kenyon, the Historical Society contacted Douglas Stone, a professional paper conservator in Milwaukee who had been a conservator for the National Geographic Society.

Stone said the map had been folded, and pieces of the paper were missing. It took four

months to preserve the paper and ink and remove the stains of time. It is still brown but not nearly as brown as it was. Stone applied a special acid-free backing to the map and framed it under ultraviolet light blocking glass. During the annual meeting a suggestion was made to display the map at Barrett Memorial Library.

The election for the Board of Directors took place during the meeting. Members of the 2019-2020 Historical Society board are Sue Vavra - President; Henry Kenyon - Vice President; Pam Osman Jameson-Secretary; Dianna Woss - Treasurer; Phyllis Janda - Member Secretary; Ann Becker, LaVerne Duncan, Pat Grove, and Cindy Rademaker.

Later in the day on September 12, Kristin Stone and members of the Williams Bay Centennial Committee presented an amazing tour of

Congress Club.

Tour participants were met by "Mrs. Hollister, Mr. Schwinn, Mr. and Mrs. Weeks, and Martha the maid," who took visitors back to life in 1924 at the Congress Club. Everyone who attended, agreed it was a very special visit to a very special place.

The Centennial celebration commemorated the events that began on June 26, 1919, when a group of Williams Bay men led by Lawrence A. Hollister passed around a subscription list and collected \$81 to pay incorporation expenses.

Circuit Court Judge Grimm granted the plea of the Village requesting incorporation on September 15, 1919, and the incorporation papers were recorded on October 23, 1919. Easton Johnson of Whitewater acted for the Village in all legal matters.

On October 23, 1919, the men living in the Village voted to decide if the Village should incorporate. One hundred and eight registered voters voted that day, 66 voted in favor of incorporation, 41 voted against, and one voted was invalid.

The first Village officials were: President: Storrs B. Barrett, Clerk: Oliver J. Lee, Treasurer: Arthur Anderson, Assessor: Arne H. Arneson, Constable: Carl M. Bjorge, Supervisor: J.A. Parkhurst, Justice of the Peace: L.A. Hollister, and Trustees: Henry W. Granzow, Harry V. Brumgard, Edwin B. Frost, John Andell, John Lackey, Alfred Pihl.

The first meeting of the new Williams Bay Village Board was on November 24, 1919.



"Mr. and Mrs. Weeks"

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Disease: Scourge of Early Wisconsin Settlements

By Michelle Bie Love

A recent discussion on The History of Williams Bay Facebook page about the cause of Captain Israel Williams' death in October of 1846 and his sons Moses and Austin in September of 1845 got me thinking about the hardships diseases caused early settlers.

Through the years its been said Captain Williams' death was caused by Malaria though more probably it was caused by Cholera or Typhoid fever. Most early documentation indicates Moses and Austin died from Typhoid fever though it may have been from Cholera.

When Walworth County opened to settlement in 1836, the influx of people brought the same diseases that were found in the East and Europe. Measles, mumps, diphtheria, and smallpox were some of the diseases that plagued settlements in the 19th Century. A visit to one of the old cemeteries in the area will demonstrate a large number of deaths within a short amount of time and within families, most likely the result of an epidemic. Though people were aware of the sickness in new settlements, few knew the real cause. It was widely thought it was a symptom of the settlement process itself, a miasma rising from the decomposition of logs, freshly turned soil, swamps

and bogs. Most expected these conditions would pass as a settlement became more established.

You probably don't think of Walworth County as a place where you would be at risk of becoming infected with Malaria, Typhoid fever, or Cholera, but all three diseases were found here in the 1800s. Swampy land was responsible directly or indirectly of causing Malaria, Cholera, and Typhoid fever before widespread drainage and tilling of farm land. Nearly everyone contracted Malaria; in fact, one historian commented chronic bouts of Malaria "was so prevalent that it was unusual to escape it." The common word for Malaria was "ague," pronounced "ag-yew." The symptoms cycled

between lethargy, teeth-chattering chills, high fever, racking headaches, and profuse sweating until the fever broke. Sometimes Malaria laid siege to entire families. Malaria is a recurring illness that repeatedly strikes throughout life, so sufferers never really recovered, but few died from the disease.

Newcomers not only brought their customs to their new homes, they also sometimes brought highly contagious diseases. Epidemics arrived aboard ships and stagecoaches. In 1850, 300 Norwegians and Swedes, most of who were infected with Typhoid fever, arrived in Milwaukee aboard the ship Allegheny.

People all over the Midwest became sick with Cholera and died in a matter of hours or days. Symptoms were severe, including nausea, vomiting, chills, thirst, diarrhea, and violent spasms. The death rate was between 50 and 90 percent. Cholera was attributed to a variety of causes but was eventually found to be caused by poor sanitation practices. But it could also be spread by people, animals, and by handling clothing and bedding used by victims.

People with Typhoid fever suffered from fever that started low and increased daily, headaches, weakness and fatigue, muscle aches, sweating, dry cough, loss of appetite and weight loss, abdominal pain, diarrhea or constipation, rash, and an extremely swollen abdomen. The fatality rate from Typhoid fever was about 30 percent.

The absence of sewage systems, clean water, systematic street cleaning, and effective methods for keeping and preserving foods, waterborne and airborne diseases were constant threats. Some who contracted a mild case of Typhoid fever became carriers of the disease; the most infamous was Mary Mallon or "Typhoid Mary," an Irish cook in New York who was presumed to have infected 51 people, three of whom died, throughout her career as a cook.

"Typhoid Mary" Disease remained a deadly part of daily life in early Wisconsin, though the threat of contagions was reduced by improved sanitation practices, widespread drainage of swamp lands, new medical treatments, and vaccines.



Memories of a Young Lad

By Warren Thornley

Easily the most vivid memory of my youth in The Bay is the occasional opportunity to join in a ride through the center of town on a large bobsled built and owned by Piehl's Lumber Yard. This sled was 'No Toy'—large enough to carry 8-10 young children plus the two adults required to handle the long and heavy sled - one adult to steer using a level steering wheel and another at the rear of the sled to operate the manual brakes. One long board ran the length of the sled as did foot rests on either side. One's first impression of this "toy" was of its length and weight.

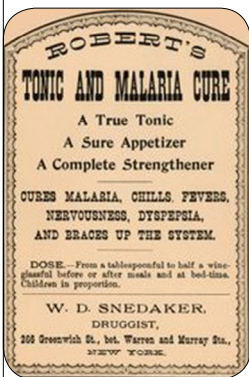
I don't believe any of we younger ones gave any thought to the possible danger involved in our moments of fear-fun! As I look back...ANY sort of crash at speed would have been a disaster but then youth is spared these fears.

The ride would follow this sequence: Locate the town constable and get his approval for the run(s). Locate two adult size men to operate the sled. Easiest chore, find about ten children to take the ride. Then, and only then, would Piehl's Lumber Yard release the sled and we'd all pitch in to haul it up the hill until we were even with the entrance to Yerkes Observatory.

ALL ABOARD! And we slowly began the ride down the hill — picking up speed that most certainly exceeded ANYTHING else traveling our streets. When we reached a point about opposite Southwick's Store, which is the building just across from the library, we'd all scream at the top of our lungs and in a flash we'd round the slight bend and drop at our highest speed, right through the center of town, passing the constable who'd stopped any traffic present, usually horse and wagons. Then we'd leave the road and cut through the park and out onto the ice-covered bay waters. A good driver would have us stopped on the far side against Cedar Point Park near the road. If agreed upon we'd do 'er again or others could claim a ride, fair is fair—NO argument!

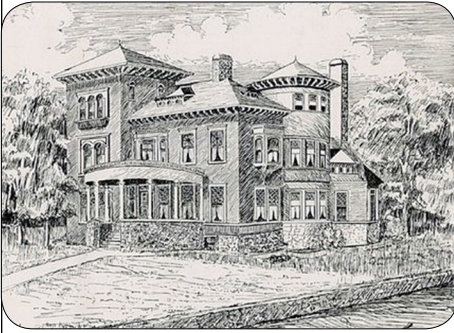
To this day, I've NEVER, EVER had a more exciting ride! My first was probably in 1929-30! The terrible speed coupled with the growl of the heavy runners on the snow and ice couldn't be duplicated, you'd hafta ride it!

Written in 2004 when Mr. Thornley was in his 82nd year.



Malaria cure advertisement

Tyrawley: John M. Smyth's Cedar Point Summer Home



Tyrawley, the summer home of John M. Smyth, stood on the eastern shore of Cedar Point at the east limits of Williams Bay. Begun in 1895, the Smyths took possession of the home in the summer of 1896.



Green house at Tyrawley

The Smyth family spent their first summer on Geneva Lake at Kaye's Park on the south shore directly across from Williams Bay. Two years later, Herbert

Beidler sold Mr. Smyth 28 acres and 1100 feet of shoreline, to build his lakeside home Tyrawley.

Tyrawley had a large carriage house with living quarters for their coachman, a gazebo reaching out over the water, a bath house for family and guests, utility outbuildings, and a greenhouse. Swain Nelson and Sons from Chicago designed the lawns, drives, flowerbeds, and stocked the Smyth's greenhouse.



John M. Smyth

In 1867, at the age of 24, John M. Smyth started a second hand furniture store in Chicago. The Great Chicago Fire in 1871 burned most of the city. But John was able to keep his furni-



Gazebo at Tyrawley ca. 1896.

ture store open. Many people could not pay to replace the furniture the fire destroyed, but John let them pay for their furniture over time, without any interest charge. The John M. Smyth Co. became one of Chicago's largest furniture stores for over a century.

According to his contemporaries, Mr. Smyth was a "cultivated gentleman; he was prominent, socially and politically, and enjoyed the reputation of a man of sterling integrity. He was one of the most quick-witted and polished of conversationalists, and a ready public speaker."

John M. Smyth died in 1909 from bronchial pneumonia. The Smyth family kept Tyrawley until 1916.

John Smyth Jr. purchased the old Bailey home and land on Geneva Street (across from the drive to Yerkes Observatory). The home was remodeled and enlarged, and the grounds landscaped. The Smyth family remained there for 33 years.

