

# SHADES OF THE PAST

Williams Bay Historical Society  
Established 2013

Volume 4 Issue 3 Summer 2017

## HISTORICAL SOCIETY INFORMATION

### SAVE THE DATE

**Pig Roast Fundraiser**  
Thursday, June 22, 6 - 8 pm  
Champs Sports Bar and Grill  
747 W. Main St. Lake Geneva  
\$10 per person--Tickets are available  
at Barrett Memorial Library or by  
contacting Sue Vavra 262-245-6163

**2017 Art Fest**  
July 29-30  
Edgewater Park, Williams Bay

**Williams Bay All-School Reunion  
Luncheon Saturday, August 12**  
Williams Bay School

**A Pictorial History of Williams Bay  
1836-1939**

Available for purchase in July.

**2017 Annual Dinner**  
Friday, October 13  
Watch for upcoming details

### Board of Directors

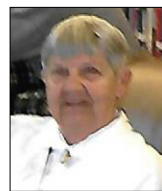
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Judy Bausch  
Phyllis Janda  
Ann Becker  
Toby Case

## The Wonders of Williams Bay Tour May 20, 2017

The second Wonders tour included 16 locations in and around the Village. In spite of the rain that forced changes to tour plans, the docents did an amazing job providing new and interesting facts to everyone who ventured out! More tour photos are on the Historical Society website:  
<http://wmsbayhistory.org>



### The Four Corners of Williams Bay--Docent Toby Case

#### Northeast Corner

The first subdivision was laid out in 1889. W. G. DeGroff was the first to purchase a lot. He was a carpenter and built a home on the Northeast corner of Walworth Ave and Geneva Street. It had a porch on three sides and he soon modeled it to serve High Tea. Mr. Mel Spence later began a full service restaurant and it continues to be a restaurant today.

This side of the street is also where the



first commercial buildings began. There was a general merchandise store and a meat market. At one time it employed four butchers. Next door was Hermanson's bakery. Further north was Roeker's blacksmith shop and later the blacksmith shop was owned by Louis Rasmussen.

#### Northwest Corner

C.M. Williams built a general merchandise store and in 1895 Joe Keat bought one half to house the Lake Vista House Hotel. The

hotel burned in 1903 and William Lackey began his three level pressed brick building. The lower level housed a pool hall, Granzow and Peterson Grocery Store, and a tea room. Later the tea room gave way to a drug store with Arthur Ohl, proprietor. A second drug store was across the alley. It had originally been a harness shop and then a hand laundry. On the second floor of the Lackey building, Mr. Lackey opened a hardware and dry goods store. The third space, on the front corner of the building, housed the U.S. Post Office. The third floor was and still is apartments.

#### Southwest Corner

Williams Bay folklore says this corner was the location of the first livery. It was said to have been dismantled and the lumber used to build the two houses to the south of the corner. In 1917 Mr. Van Belzer built the Star Garage. In 1923 Elmer "Hoppi" Hopkins and his partner Frank Walker purchased the business and built a brick building to service automobiles. Later they increased the size of the building and added an area for boat storage and service. They held the Chris Craft service contract as well as one for Johnson motors. The depression forced the partnership to

*(Continued on page 4)*

## History of Barrett Memorial Library



The library in Williams Bay has a colorful history. It has had a few different names over the years: Williams Bay Public Library, Storrs B. Barrett Memorial Library, and the current name: Barrett Memorial Library. The library in Williams Bay has its beginning in about 1900 in the home of Edward and Marie Williams. Their home stood at the location of the fire station. Mrs. Williams had only a few books. In 1902 Storrs B. Barrett arranged to have books brought to the library through the State Traveling Library.

Originally a clubroom and private bowling alley at the estate of George Sturges on the southwest shore of Geneva Lake, the building was moved to Williams Bay in 1906 through the efforts of Storrs Barrett. The Sturges family gave the building to the Village along with \$1,000 to help pay for moving it to its new location if the residents of the Village provided a site.

According to a newspaper article from 1956, "All plans were made to move the building across the frozen lake and to this day the legend exists that this was done. The story goes like this: 'On a bitter February afternoon in 1906, a group of people stood on the shore peering anxiously through a swirling snowstorm to catch the first glimpse of the four teams of horses laboring across the ice, hauling the building that was to be the first real library in Williams Bay. The men driving the horses

not only has to contend with the hazard of dodging the recently cut ice fields which supplied the ice storage houses of that time, but they also had to negotiate a seam in the ice which opened suddenly off Cedar Point. Only some expert maneuvering saved the library from having walleye pike as its first visitors. The transportation of the second section was no less a challenge.

A sudden warm spell made it impossible to come by ice, so the building had to be hauled across land. Peter O. Peterson was awarded the contract to move and repair the building. However, it is now believed that the ice broke up early on the lake and the building was moved by land."

In 1963, Les Sawyer, a long-time Williams Bay resident, did some additional research. He did so because he was watching from the beach when the building came across the ice. Les was 15 years old at the time. During his research, he found that Art Anderson, a former mayor of the Village was also there, as was Mrs. Walter Jewell. It is likely the bowling alley portion of the building was moved over land to Williams Bay per the newspaper account.



The exterior of the building was considered the "Mary Ann" style while the interior of the library was in the Queen Anne style which had the luxurious charm of days gone by. It was described as having a beautiful

wood paneled interior with a large fireplace. The bowling alley was a community room that was used in a variety of ways: official polling place, meeting room for the various Village clubs, a place of worship for the newly formed Lutheran church, and for war relief efforts during World War II.

In 1964, the Village built a new municipal building on the same site. It included a first floor library, village hall, police department, court room, and village board chambers. During Construction the library was housed in a bookmobile borrowed from the state. A bomb shelter was included in the basement. A children's addition was added in 1995, the village offices moved to the new Village Hall and the library used the entire first floor. In 2011, the library was renovated to its current space.



### The Ice Age and Mastodons Too

Docent Greg Trush

Approximately 400 to 500 million years ago, during the Ordovician and Silurian Periods of the Paleozoic (Ancient Life) Era, all of eastern Wisconsin was under a shallow tropical sea. During this early time, most plant and animal life were



only present in watery environments. These ancient seas contained numerous types of corals, brachiopods, crinoids, and cephalopods. Fossils of this period are frequently found in Williams Bay, and in many cases, are not that far from the surface.

Starting about two to three million years ago, the northern half of North America experienced a series of Ice Ages. It is the final glacial event, the so-called Wisconsin Ice Age (150,000

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### SHADES OF THE PAST

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### MISSION OF THE 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.



**Sacred Potawatomi Burial Ground**—Docent Deborah Dumelle Kristmann

At one time there were more than 500 Potawatomi living on the shores of Geneva Lake. Their main or royal village was located in what is now Fontana and

they kept a village for gardens and hunting on the shore of Geneva Lake in what is now Williams Bay.

On the south side of Elm Street is the location of the sacred burial ground of the Potawatomi in Williams Bay. Two of Chief Big Foot's wives and children were buried here. It is likely some of their deaths were caused by the whooping cough epidemic



that devastated Big Foot's tribe shortly before their removal to Kansas in 1836.

The wives were buried on a raised platform, dressed in fine broadcloth, and adorned with jewelry, and beads, and other trinkets. Each was buried with a pipe, tobac-

co, and a pail of whiskey for their journey to the spirit world. The remains were then covered with slabs of bark.

In 1890, Festus Williams described the burial of Big Foot's wives as he remembered it to James Simmons, author of the "Annals of Lake Geneva." His recollections of burial included a description of the clothing and trinkets.

It is likely the remains were interred underground by the Williams Family before or at the time of the burial of Mrs. Hannah Joy, mother-in-law of Captain Israel Williams, who was laid to rest in the sacred burial ground in 1838. Mrs. Joy's remains were moved to East Delavan Union Cemetery in 1892.



**History of East Delavan Union Cemetery**

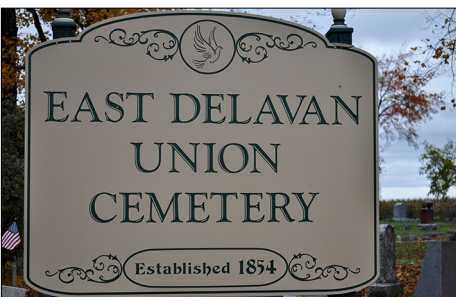
Docent John Grove

The cemetery was formally established on May 20, 1854 on property originally owned by Samuel

Utter. The first burial took place in 1843 after the accidental death of Alexander Utter, who died when the well he was helping to dig on his uncle's property caved in. Other burials took

persons who had no family or money for their burial. This long-filled "Potter's Field" is located in the center section of the cemetery behind the grave of Oliver P. Southwick.

There are 209 veterans buried in the cemetery, from the War of 1812 to the Vietnam War. Flags are placed on the graves of veterans by The Veterans of Foreign Wars every year before Memorial Day.



place here prior to the cemetery's formal establishment including Moses and Austin Williams sons of Captain Israel Williams in 1845, Captain Israel Williams in 1846 and his wife, Lavina in 1852.



Additional property was added to the cemetery through an 1892 gift from Augusta Weyrauch. An interesting observation from the original plat is the creation of a "Potter Field." This is a section of the cemetery that the county owned for the burial of



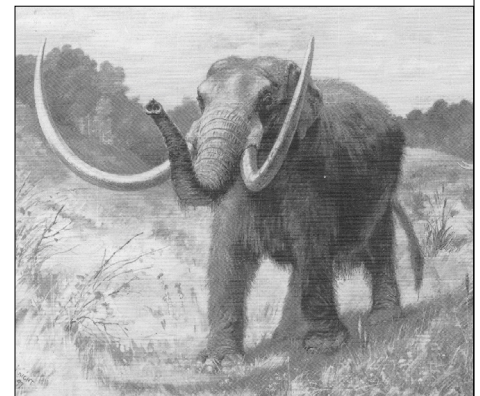
During a tour of the cemetery, visitors should note the longevity of some of the early pioneers and the number of deaths in 1857 as the result of a typhoid fever epidemic. Some of the early tombstones are easy to read while others are undecipherable. The cemetery is administered by a Board of individuals and funded through monies from perpetual care, donations, and investments. The original plat included 170 graves that were to be sold for \$10 per lot. Today the cemetery has over 2,000 burials and unfilled lots.

**The Ice Age and Mastodons**

*(Continued from page 2)*

to 11,000 years ago), that shaped the features that we see today in the Geneva Lake region.

Before the arrival of humans, this part of Wisconsin was home to animals whose habitat is now found elsewhere such as wolves, bison, and elk. There were also animals that are now extinct, like the wool-



ly mammoths and mastodons (part of the elephant family) and a giant beaver with a longer and narrower tail. Mastodon remains were found in gravel pits around the northwest corner of Williams Bay. In 1907, Mr. Michael Johnson, while digging in his garden on Congress Street, excavated mastodon bones and teeth. Poorly preserved the bones crumbled away while the enamel of the teeth preserved them.

Williams Bay may have been a marshy area after the last Ice Age, attracting elderly

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**The Four Corners** *(Continued from page 1)*

dissolve and Mr. Hopkins moved to the building next to the Lackey building and continued his business.

**Southeast Corner**



Leslie Sawyer built the cement block building that initially housed a grocery store and two restaurants. In the ensuing years this building would house a pool hall, beauty shop, and two restaurants, including the Keg Room.

Down the block is a building built by Henry Bjorge. He was a painter. Shortly after, Mr. Bjorge's nephew Carl came to join him in his painting business.

**The Ice Age and Mastodons** *(Continued from page 3)*

mastodons with its soft vegetation. Humans did not migrate to the Americas until about 20,000 years ago, and did not reach the Midwest until around 14,000 years ago when the glaciers had sufficiently retreated. Over hunting may well have been a major factor in the extinction of both the mastodons and woolly mammoths in North America



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