

FEBRUARY 2020

PRESERVE, PROTECT, AND PRESENT



TRAVERSE AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

FEATURED ARTICLE:

Early Mail Service: Talk About Your Snail Mail!

**The Traverse Area Historical Society Newsletter is published quarterly.
The four issues are published February, May, August, and November.**

BOARD MEMBERS

Stephen Siciliano

- *President*

Brian McCall

- *Vice President*

Jenny Loup

- *Secretary*

Matt Groleau

- *Treasurer*

Larry Hains

Sharon Jennings

Jim Warner

Peg Siciliano

INSIDE THIS NEWSLETTER

- **From President Siciliano's Desk**
 - *Continuing Successful Programing*
- **The Preservation Corner by Peg Siciliano**
 - *Con Foster Museum Collection*
 - *TC Local History Museum*
- **From the Desks' of Our Board Members & Much More!**

FROM PRESIDENT SICILIANO'S DESK

We concluded our calendar year with another successful season of programming. Our final program of 2019 was an extremely well attended presentation by Peg Siciliano on the history of the Park Place on November 17th. Peg described the development of the different versions of the Park Place from 1873 through the present. It remains an iconic landmark for downtown Traverse City with a rich history. The event included a great deal of audience participation where stories of those who worked at the Park Place or patronized the hotel were shared.

In addition to successful programming, the society remains financially stable thanks to generous donations from our members and book sales. These funds will be used this year on such projects as the preservation of the Hitchcock/Goodale farmhouse site at Hickory Hills.



We look forward to the coming events of 2020 starting with an encore presentation of “Abraham Lincoln through the Eyes of Political Cartoonists” on February 16th at 2:00 PM in the McGuire Room at the Traverse Area District Library on Woodmere Avenue. Hope to see you there.

TALES FROM THE CRYPT - KATHERYN CARRIER



“Santa on Bicycle” - Image courtesy of the Traverse Area District Library Local History Collection

Anniversaries at Rotary and the Salvation Army brought researchers in for material for commemorative books and videos.

The biggest change has been access to the collection. There is now one place, instead of two, to search the Archive—localhistory.tadl.org. The Omeka software allows searching by keyword, using quotes, and Boolean searches. Advanced searches can drill down in many ways including into the “text” which is especially good for the newspapers. The change has also brought forth a number of records that have barebones info, those that are “untitled.” We’ll be working on getting titles and more complete descriptions for those records. Until next time.

“If history were taught in the form of stories, it would never be forgotten.” Rudyard Kipling.

FROM MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE CHAIR JENNING’S DESK

As of January, 2020, the current number of TAHS members stands at one hundred sixty-three. We are happy to welcome new members Matt Hagen and Annie Klimek.

As we begin the new year, our resolution is to increase our membership by 10%. Please help us by spreading the word of our efforts to “preserve, protect, and present” the history of this wonderful area. Invite your family, friends, and neighbors who value local history to attend a tour or a presentation and encourage them to join us! Thank you for your loyalty and support!

THE PRESERVATION CORNER BY PEG SICILIANO

Con Foster Museum Collection

Because they know that I am a member of the TAHS Board, friends and acquaintances often ask me about the status of the Con Foster Museum artifact collection. I also get asked two other questions. First, why doesn't a town the size and importance of Traverse City currently have a History Museum? Secondly, what would it take to have a museum? The answer to first question is fairly simple; the answers to the second two are more complicated.

The Artifact Collection

The Con Foster Museum collection is being stored by the City in an environmentally safe, and physically secure, manner. Assistant City Manager Penny Hill has direct responsibility for supervising the collection. I have spoken with her within the past year, and I believe the City is aware of its legal responsibilities concerning the collection. This is particularly important concerning the removal of any items from the collection, something about which multiple people have expressed concerns.

That said, there are some items in the collection that legally will need to be transferred to other owners. These are the Native American artifacts. Most of these were added to the collection before the era of modern museum standards. In the last several decades, museum professionals have become aware of the need to keep culturally important items within the cultures that created them. This was codified in Federal Law in 1990, with the passage of The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA).

Once the History Center closed in 2014, the City felt its first priority had to be to do an inventory and examination of these Native American items. It received a grant to hire outside professionals to do this. Partial inventories had been done in the past, but not completed.

That said, it has been over four years since this examination of Native American artifacts began.

Continued ...

THE PRESERVATION CORNER CONTINUED

BY PEG SICILIANO

A Traverse City Local History Museum

To put it simply, Traverse City does not currently have a local history museum because over the last three decades no one has succeeded in coming up with a workable funding model for the type of museum they were trying to run: Namely a year-round, professionally-managed facility. It is often pointed out that several smaller area communities have local history museums, and while this is true, most of those museums are only open part of the year, and are run primarily by knowledgeable volunteers rather than by trained public history professionals. This substantially reduces the cost of operating such a museum.

To have a museum in Traverse City, interested individuals will first need to decide on what type of museum to have, based in part on reasonable funding expectations. Once that decision has been made, other things must be taken into consideration:

1. Artifacts - The City of Traverse City owns the largest collection of three-dimensional local history artifacts in the area (the Traverse Area District Library has a historical archive of two-dimensional photographs and documents). A local history museum could be a City museum or a private museum. Either way, City cooperation would be needed in order to display City-owned artifacts. Such loans are a standard museum practice, and professional guidelines on standards and documentation are easily accessible from State and National historical organizations. At this point, however, it is unclear whether the City is willing to work with a private museum.

2. Location – A small museum is usually not strong enough to be a stand-alone draw for visitors. Having such a museum in an already heavily-trafficked area would be critical. In some smaller communities, locations like this are oftentimes available at reasonable prices. However, in a growing city such as Traverse City, the cost for locations like these creates a major barrier to overcome.

3. Staffing – Volunteer or paid staffing would be needed for designing displays, covering open hours, and perhaps organizing special events. The type of museum has a big impact on staffing needs, however having reliable volunteers is critical to minimize the costs associated with paid staffing.

Continued ...

THE PRESERVATION CORNER CONTINUED BY PEG SICILIANO

As is evident, there are significant challenges to finding a way to have a successful museum in Traverse City. And no matter what, it is clear that without support from and cooperation with the City, there is little chance of making anything happen. While we at the Historical Society do what we can to ensure the City owned artifacts are being cared for, it is the voices of the residents that the City needs to hear from.

If you feel it is important for Traverse City to display the artifacts it owns in a local history museum, it is important that you let them know your opinion.

Your thoughts should be politely communicated to: *Assistant City Manager Penny Hill, City Manager Marty Colburn and to the City Commissioners by using the following joint e-mail: citycommissioners@traversecitymi.gov*

FROM TREASURER GROLEAU'S DESK

Your Historical Society is excited to let you know that we ended 2019 on a positive note. With an annual budget at break-even, we wound up with a \$4,294 surplus! This was due primarily to stronger than expected book sales (thank you to all those who bought books from us and to board member Larry Hains for arranging delivery), and stronger donations that we anticipated (including \$2,000 of a \$500 per month for 36 months commitment). We are so very thankful to all who support the organization!

Looking forward to 2020, the TAHS Board of Directors approved a budget that shows a \$5,315 surplus. This is unusual, and I wanted to take the opportunity to explain to the membership why we are accumulating in this manner. We have established a list of projects to consider funding, at near the top of this list would be to make a substantial contribution to the Archives at the Traverse Area District Library if they would also commit to providing funding for expanding the archives storage capacity. Unfortunately, the library is dealing with an issue with the roof system and it is unknown what the costs may be to resolve the problem. Because of this, the library isn't able to commit to funding out of their standard budget, and the archives project would need to be funded through

Continued ...

FROM TREASURER GROLEAU'S DESK CONTINUED

a grant. A few grants have been identified that may be appropriate for the archives, and our understanding is that the library plans to apply for grant funding for this project. However, until the grants are awarded, no commitments can be made by the library.

Understanding this dilemma, we have decided not to include the project in an approved budget. If the library would be awarded a grant for the project, we would then determine what portion we would fund through the Historical Society and what amount (if any) we would want to see funded through other means. We are still waiting to hear what the updated costs would be for the storage system that would expand capacity, so budgeting a specific number would be “putting the cart before the horse.”

So our members know, we are still moving ahead with funding our other projects on our list such as the preservation of the Goodale/Hitchcock home site at Hickory Hills. We are interested in pursuing additional historic projects, however, it will require your ideas and most importantly your time to help. Current projects are driven by the Board of Directors which is already stretched thin. We really need more engagement from people willing to put their time and efforts behind any new projects in order to take on anything beyond what is currently being worked on, and basic funding of activities.

Please know that in lieu of volunteer driven programs we still have important programs that we continue to fund such as the general archives financial support, the Petertyl Internship program, and supporting students who participate in the Michigan History Day competition. You can rest assured that your financial contributions will continue to be used wisely to Preserve, Protect, and Present the history of the Grand Traverse region.

FROM PROGRAM AND EVENTS COMMITTEE CHAIR LOUP'S DESK

2019 Tours Recap

Downtown Walking Historical Tours: 7 total tours conducted, 64 total attendees.

Oakwood Cemetery tours: 6 tours conducted, 30 total attendees.

Halloween Oakwood Cemetery tours: 3 tours conducted, 108 attendees.



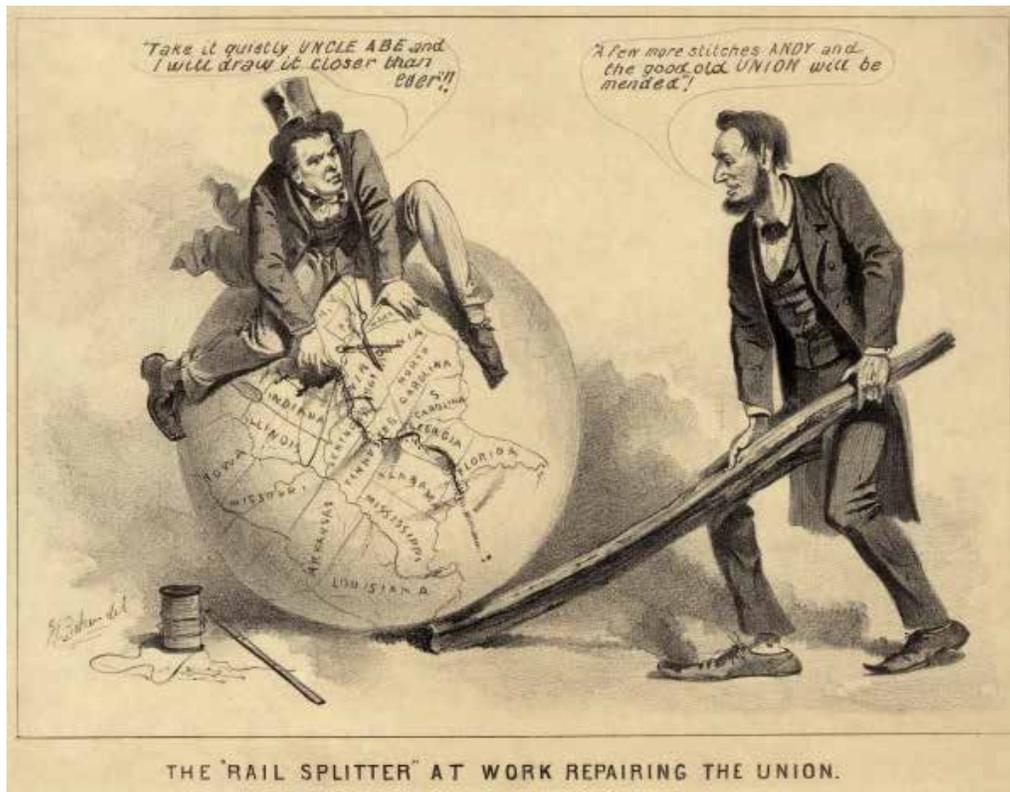
Traverse Area Historical Society board members Peg Siciliano and Larry Hains conducting the popular Oakwood Cemetery tours in the Halloween season.

This spring TAHS is back to hosting history programs at the Traverse Area District Library on Sundays. We are looking forward to our 2020 program series beginning in February. These programs will cover a variety of topics and are held in the McGuire room at 2:00 pm on the third Sunday of each month, February - May.

Our February program will take place on Sunday, February 16th. This presentation will be a repeat presentation back by popular demand. TAHS Board President, Stephen Siciliano, will be speaking on "Abraham Lincoln's Presidency Through the Eyes of the Political Cartoonists of His Day." If you think Presidents Trump and Obama have been roughly handled by today's press, you will be amazed by the treatment of the man who we now see as one of our greatest presidents. Siciliano has a PhD in American History from the College of William and Mary, where his area of special study was the Civil War.

Continued ...

FROM PROGRAM AND EVENTS COMMITTEE CHAIR LOUP'S DESK



“The Rail Splitter Repairing the Union” — a political cartoon of Andrew Johnson and Abraham Lincoln from 1865, during the Reconstruction era of the United States (1863–1877). Image courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Additional program topics will be announced via our Facebook page and website, so stay tuned!”

If TAHS members have ideas or requests regarding 2020 programing, please contact Jen Loup at loup.jen@gmail.com

As we are currently enjoying the setting-in of winter, TAHS is also looking forward to our 2020 tour season beginning in June! Our tours were well-attended in 2019, and we welcome any new volunteers as tour guides or assistants as we head into the Spring/Summer. Please contact Events and Programs chair Jennifer Loup for more information.

Early Mail Service: Talk about your snail mail!

Today, we take our mail service for granted. In fact, we complain about the deluge of junk mail that often fills our mail box. But what about the mail situation for the earliest settlers in our region? Prior to 1851, the only northern Michigan post office was on Mackinac Island. Reverend Peter Daugherty and members of the Old Mission settlement were able to send and receive mail only by making the long trek to the island. Lewis Miller, who operated a trading post at the settlement, would make the nip several times a year to replenish his stock and act as mail deliverer. Reverend George N. Smith established a mission in Waukazooville (Northport) in the summer of 1849. On July 2 of that year, in an entry in his diary, he mentions receiving mail brought down from Mackinac Island by members of the Old Mission settlement.

In October of 1849, Smith's diary tells of his trip to Old Mission to attend a meeting in which a petition was drawn up for a new post office at that location. Meanwhile, for the little Hannah, Lay and Co. lumber camp at the foot of the Bay, the only connection with the outside world was when sailing ships from Chicago brought in supplies.

The petition for a new post office at Old Mission received no action from Washington until 1851. At that time approval was finally granted and the Grand Traverse Post Office came into existence. The first postmaster was W. R. Stone and the post office was located in his log cabin. The mail was kept in a raisin box nailed to the kitchen wall until it could be transported north. Once a "reasonable quantity" of mail had accumulated, a Native



Stamps in use in the 1860's

Continued ...

American messenger was hired to make the hundred-mile trip to Mackinac Island. He was taken by boat to a point near Elk Rapids from where he started out on foot to his destination. When he returned some days later, he would build a huge bonfire on the shore to signal his safe arrival and postmaster Stone would go across to bring him the rest of the way home.

As the volume of mail grew, a delivery service was established that made regular trips once every two weeks. William Davenport of Mackinac Island was hired to provide the transportation. His dog team consisted of four hounds and a sledge made of thin boards. Whether on snow or the dirt trail, the lightly constructed sledge and the strong, healthy dogs glided quickly along the trail with their master jogging along behind.

By 1853, Perry Hannah decided the logging settlement had grown enough to have its own post office. A. Tracy Lay was sent to Washington to personally petition the government. The only problem encountered was in selecting a name for the post office. Lay wanted to call it Grand Traverse but that name was already associated with the Old Mission post office. A compromise was arrived at and the name became Traverse City. At the time the name seemed to overstate the reality of the little settlement of fewer than one hundred inhabitants. Eventually, nearly forty years later, the little settlement had grown to the point that it was officially chartered as a bona fide city.

With the new Traverse City post office established, the mail began to arrive from the south by way of Manistee over an old Indian trail. Once again, a Native American became the mail carrier making the trek on foot. Soon the volume of mail became more than one man could handle. The job then went to Hugh McGinnis who cut the first road through the wilderness from Traverse City to Herring Creek near the present site of Onekema. From that point the route headed south through Manistee, Ludington, and Whitehall.

As I reflect back on the history of our mail delivery service, I find it hard to complain when, on a rare occasion, an important piece of mail seems to be taking too long to arrive.

Written by JOY WILSON

VOLUNTEER FOR FUN AT MICHIGAN HISTORY DAY!

The TAHS is proud to once again be involved in the Historical Society of Michigan's annual Michigan History Day. In the past TAHS members have served as volunteers at our District #3 competition, and the TAHS has covered registration fees for area students who qualify for the State and National competitions.

Michigan History Day is an educational program of the Historical Society of Michigan. It is an educational program that encourages students to explore local, state, national, and world history. After selecting a historical topic that relates to the annual theme, students conduct extensive research by using libraries, archives, museums,, and

oral history interviews. They analyze and interpret their findings, draw conclusions about their topics' significance in history, and create final projects in one of five categories: paper, exhibit, documentary, website, or performance.

The TAHS will provide volunteers and cover registration fees to again this year. **The District #3 competition will be held on Saturday, March 21st** at Traverse City East Middle School. TAHS members interested in volunteering that day can assist with registration, room monitoring, judging entries and other duties. Volunteers must be college-undergraduate age or older.

Judges evaluate the participants' entries and provide constructive feedback to the students.

Judges should have an interest in history and education. The most important qualities for a judge are strong common sense and an enthusiasm for interacting with students. A judge should have a lively interest in history, but not necessarily a specific background in history. Training will be provided.

For more information go to the Historical Society of Michigan's website at www.hsmichigan.org. Click on the Programs/Awards icon, then on the top-row icon labeled "Breaking Barriers – Michigan History Day."

If you are interested in assisting with the District #3 Michigan History Day, e-mail the TAHS at traversehistory@gmail.com. In the subject line please note MHD Volunteer. Peg Siciliano, TAHS Board Member, will contact you about your interest.

SURVEY SAYS!

Thank you to those who responded to the email survey that we sent out last Fall. We had 32 responses from members that provided valuable feedback which was shared with the Historical Society Board of Directors.

We were happy to hear that most of our members are Very or Extremely Satisfied with the Historical Society. We did, however have about 10% of our members indicate they were Not So Satisfied or Not Satisfied At All and those individuals did give us valuable feedback on why. We even learned that we had a “hole” in one of our processes, and not all of the new members were getting added to the Member Email List. This was unfortunate, but we are so glad that it was brought to our attention so we could fix the issue. We can only address issues if we are aware of them. Both positive and constructive negative feedback are helpful and we want to hear from you if you have feedback that can help us improve the organization!

It was not a big surprise, however the survey results did confirm that we have an ageing membership base. 77% of the members who responded were age 70 and over. We have been discussing how to get more younger individuals involved in the Historical Society and have tried a few things. One key piece was making it possible to become member (and renew memberships) online through our website. Hopefully this will be a more attractive way for younger individuals to become a member of the organization. We also hosted 3 “History Salon” events last winter that seemed to attract a younger group of people. If you have other ideas out there, we would love to hear them. And of course, please help us by encouraging those who you know to get involved!

We also had lots of positive feedback about the Facebook posts, Monthly Programs, and the Summer Tours. It is always encouraging to hear that those things are valued. Please keep helping us spread the word, and we look forward to seeing more of your faces at the events we hold.

Finally, there were two topic areas that were predominant themes in the feedback from the surveys: Figure out how to get a museum in Traverse City, and try and get more local history into the schools. Regarding the museum, we do our best to stay on top of what is happening with the collection owned by the city. For what more that can be done, please see Peg’s article earlier in the newsletter. As for getting more local history into the schools, we are starting an initiative to see what we can do to make this happen. It is in its early stages, but hopefully we will be able to continue reporting out on what is happening.

When it comes to making things happen, it takes people who are willing to dedicate their time and effort to get involved. We would love to have more engaged involvement from our membership base. If you’re not sure how you might be able to help, please just drop us a line (email, phone call, Facebook, carrier pigeon, or any other method you can think of). We hope to get overwhelmed by people passionate enough to get involved!



OPPORTUNITIES FOR VOLUNTEERS



Would you like to...

- Be a docent on a history walking tour?
- Help out at the archives under the supervision of Katheryn Carrier, special collections librarian
- Explore ways of getting local history into the schools?
- Serve as all-around helper with regard to tasks that must be carried out regularly—newsletters, mailings, or maintaining the website?
- Attend TAHS board meetings to find out more about board activities and what you might do to participate?
- Attending TADL board meetings to let that board know we have a keen interest in maintaining the archives at the library.
- Or...do whatever job you think would be useful to the Society?

Leave an email at traversehistory@gmail.com if you are interested in doing any of these things. We can always use more help to preserve, protect, and present history!

CONNECT WITH US ONLINE!

TRAVERSEHISTORY.ORG | LIKE US ON FACEBOOK: TRAVERSE AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Traverse Area Historical Society - PO Box 7051 - Traverse City, MI 49696-7051
