

NOVEMBER 2019

PRESERVE, PROTECT, AND PRESENT



TRAVERSE AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

FEATURED ARTICLE:

A Brief History of the Hannah Lay & Co. Merchantile Operation

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*

Larry Hains

- *Treasurer*

Matt Groleau

Sharon Jennings

Jim Warner

Peg Siciliano

INSIDE THIS NEWSLETTER

- **From President Siciliano's Desk**
 - *Continuing Successful Programing*
- **The Preservation Corner by Peg Siciliano**
 - *Generous Local Donation News*
- **From the Desks' of Our Board Members & Much More!**

FROM PRESIDENT SICILIANO'S DESK

The theme for our society this year has been the growing number of successful partnerships.

Since 2016, we have had the successful partnership with the Traverse Area District Library. The Library now houses our formerly owned historical archives collection. We support the archives here at TADL through monthly financial donations and through volunteer service. This year we restored our Petertyl Internship program where two students under the mentorship of Peg Siciliano worked on collections during July. The great success of the program means we will look to continue and expand it next summer.

We partnered with the Dennon Museum Center to offer two programs this past year, one in November by Fred Anderson on the history of the Opera House, and the other in January by Peg on the history of the Traverse City Waterfront, linking that history with the temporary Detroit Institute of Art collection that was at the Dennon.

We are currently partnering with the Traverse City Department of Recreation to establish the preservation of the Hitchcock/Goodale farmhouse site at Hickory Hills. Matt Groleau is working with Derek Melville on arrangements and family descendent Gary Wilson is offering to financially support part of the project. The site has been cleared and plans for benches and signage are moving forward to be established in the spring.

Matt and Peg have worked with the Minervini Group to create a state hospital museum at the Commons. While it is behind schedule for completion, we have assisted with a historic timeline that is now on display and are hopeful it will be ready for the public before the end of the year.

We have partnered with Michigan History Days to support area middle school students in their presentations of history. In the past we have served as judges for the school projects. This year, we provided scholarships to all area students to cover their registration fees. This included providing support to our local area national finalist, Evan Stegenga, who was our keynote speaker at our annual meeting. Building these young historians is exciting work and we are looking to expand our partnership with area schools and their social studies teachers in the coming year.

Our most current exciting news on partnerships is two events last month. The first is the result of a year's work by Fred Anderson in working with two of our partners, the Downtown Development Authority and the Traverse City Arts Council to install ten "Then and Now" plaques in downtown Traverse City. The plaques were installed on October 21st and the official unveiling occurred the following day.

Continued ...

In addition to our partnerships, we have been very active in terms of programming with our monthly programs September through May and our tours June through October. For a recap of our programming this past year, please refer back to earlier quarterly newsletters. Once again this year, we concluded with three Halloween tours that were well attended.

The other exciting news is that the society has been selected to be one of the beneficiaries of the annual Shop Your Community Day on November 9th from 10 to 6. You can do your holiday shopping early and designate TAHS as your selected charity. A portion of the proceeds from your purchase amount will go towards our society if you designate us.

FROM VICE PRESIDENT ANDERSON'S DESK

LOCAL HISTORY PLAQUE PROJECT COMPLETED

After a two year time frame a TAHS led effort to place ten historic plaques in downtown Traverse City was completed. The Plaques were installed on Monday, October 21, 2019. Funding for this project was provided on a 50/50 basis by the Traverse City Arts Commission and the downtown merchants. Invaluable assistance was provided by the staff at TADL. Without the help of Amy Baritt and Katheryn Carrier the venture would have never occurred. The business partners Britten and The Camera Shop also provided great assistance

An unveiling was held Tuesday, October 22nd @ 3:30 PM in front of the Park Place. The Arts Commission and TAHS participated in that ceremony.



FROM MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE CHAIR JENNING'S DESK

Currently the TAHS membership stands at 166 members.

We are deeply saddened to report that Gov. William Milliken, one of our esteemed Lifetime Members has passed away. Gov. Milliken's family is deeply engrained in the history of Traverse City and he was very proud of their part in helping in the formation of this town. He will be greatly missed by many and most certainly the Traverse Area Historical Society. RIP Gov. William Milliken.

THE PRESERVATION CORNER

BY PEG SICILIANO

The Traverse Area Historical Society is thrilled to announce a generous monetary donation from a local entrepreneur! It consists of a total of **\$18,000.00** to be received in **monthly \$500 dollar increments** over the next **three years**. The TAHS Board is currently discussing how make the best use of this generous offer. Our hope is to use it to enable projects that will draw collaborative support from other community organizations and private individuals. Keep your ears open for further information as the Board carefully considers the next steps to be taken.

Preservation Opportunity for the Foundations of the Hitchcock/Goodale Farmhouse

A great deal of progress has been made over the past few months on this project. As you may have read in the Ticker or heard on Vic McCarty's interview of Matt Groleau, the project has been given the preliminary go-ahead from Derek Melville with the Traverse City Parks and Recreation Committee. The plan calls for 2 benches and an informational sign to be placed at the location next to the remaining foundation of the historic farmhouse.



Once approval was provided, the spot for the benches and signage was prepared so that it would be ready in the springtime for benches and signage to be installed. A commitment for the funding of the benches has been provided by Gary Wilson, who is a direct descendant of Helen Goodale and Thomas Hitchcock. The Traverse Area Historical Society has committed to funding the informational sign.

Over the wintertime the content for the signage will be put together for approval. Once that final approval is in place, we will be able to move forward with final placement and installation of the benches and sign.

State Hospital Museum

After the busy summer activities at The Commons, the small State Hospital Museum is getting attention again. The design process of the museum space is actively being worked on, and according to Krystal Fluette with the Miniverni Group, we should see the project completed before the end of the year. We are still interested in locating additional artifacts. If you know of any such artifacts that community members would be willing to donate, or loan, to the project, please email the TAHS at traversehistory@gmail.com.

If readers have other preservation concerns they would like to see addressed, please e-mail your ideas to contact@traversehistory.org

FROM PROGRAM AND EVENTS COMMITTEE CHAIR LOUP'S DESK

Once a month in March, April, and May of 2019, Traverse Area Historical Society hosted small gatherings we entitled our History Salon Series, held at 123 Speakeasy, downtown Traverse City. A salon, as a type of intellectual gathering, can be described with the purpose of entertaining and educating. Our history ambassadors began the conversation with a few prepared and thoughtful stories, and 10-15 attendees each month joined in the discussion. We used loose prompts for some of the stories, but also many people came with their own, all pertaining to local and regional history.

Attendees enjoyed the discussion of local history topics such as colorful characters, illicit operations and notable women of Traverse City history. Groups were small enough that everyone who wished to was able to engage in the stories and share some of their own. Many of the TAHS board members contributed their wealth of knowledge of local history in an environment where people had the opportunity to ask questions as well.



The secluded bar setting created a cosy and intimate atmosphere, but we are also considering other locations to perhaps revisit the History Salons this upcoming spring, 2020. If you are interested in helping, or have ideas to contribute to these events, we'd love to hear from you. Please contact Events chair Jen Loup at loup.jen@gmail.com and stay tuned for more information next year.

BOARD NEWS - NOVEMBER 2019 EDITION

At the annual meeting, our members reelected Sharon Jennings and Peg Siciliano for another three-year term and elected Brian McCall to a new full term. At our November meeting, Stephen Siciliano was re-elected President, Brian McCall was elected Vice President, Jen Loop was elected Secretary, and Larry Hains was re-elected Treasurer through the calendar year. Matt Groleau will succeed him as Treasurer in January. The board also received a letter of resignation from Fred Anderson. Fred has served on the board as Vice President and headed the Downtown Plaque Project to its successful completion. The Board expresses its deep appreciation for his wonderful service to the society and wish him well in his other volunteer service work.

A Brief History of the Hannah Lay & Co. Merchantile Operation

For 75 years the Hannah, Lay & Co was the owner of what would become the first and largest "big box" store in northern Michigan. In 1853, about two years after buying the Boardman lumber interests, the company built a boarding house and a 12x16 foot company store for its workers. Because of these conveniences the wives of many of the workers were enticed to join their husbands in the little settlement. Over the next years, as the community grew, so did the general store. By 1856, a private banking service was offered. In 1861, the village included more than 300 residents and the company store had become a 30x90 foot structure. In each of the next three years, additions were made to the building. In 1864, the store included four separate departments, entitled Provisions, Groceries, Dry Goods and Hardware.

Merchandise for the company store was purchased at wholesale in Chicago, transported by boat to the village and placed on sale at Chicago retail prices. In the early 1860's, Perry Hannah began to encourage some of the sales people in the company store to start their own businesses in competition with his own interests. As a result, small shops began to spring up along Front Street. At first, Hannah would sell merchandise to his competitors at the wholesale price he had paid. Eventually, the merchants began to make their own buying trips to Chicago and villagers were offered more variety in their shopping. By 1880, Traverse City had a fairly well-developed downtown shopping district stretching from Union Street to as far as Boardman Avenue.

By 1880, Traverse City's population included nearly 2,700 people and one year later, it became a chartered village with Perry Hannah as its

president. The future looked bright and, in 1882, Hannah, Lay & Co decided it was time to build a larger building - a much larger building! Not only was it the largest general store north of Grand Rapids, it was a brick building. Signs on top of the building proclaimed Hannah, Lay & Co to be "Dealers in Everything" and "Universal Providers." Advertisements claimed the building had five acres of floor space! After the logging operation was terminated, the company name became Hannah, Lay, Merchantile Co. For the next 40 years, it continued as the largest retail store in northern Michigan.

In 1928, it was not expected by the 107 employees of Hannah Lay that the "Universal Provider" would be closing after 75 years of service to the Grand Traverse region. Generations of families had worked for the store. Emanuel P. Wilhelm had been employed since his boyhood and had risen in the firm to become manager of the clothing and dry goods departments. He in turn trained his son, Emanuel E., who took over his father's position after he retired. He stayed with the firm as a manager and stockholder until the store closed.

Perry Hannah took great pride in his former employees who left the firm and became successful in their own businesses. J.W. Milliken and Frank Hamilton formed their own business, "aided by the good will and advice of Hannah." Eventually, the partners amicably dissolved their partnership and each formed their own business. In 1902, Perry Hannah had a Thanksgiving dinner to honor his past and present employees in which he paid tribute to each one in attendance. He referred to Bohemian merchant Prokop Kyselka as "the smartest businessman I have ever known."

Continued ...



Hannah Lay Mercantile Block, building remodel, 1909 - GT Pioneer & Historical Society

Following the death of Perry Hannah on August 13, 1904, his son Julius, took over management of the business. Just 14 months later, Julius Hannah died from a ruptured appendix and R. Floyd Clinch, son-in-law of A. Tracy Lay became manager of Hannah, Lay interests.

In the late 1920's Clinch decided to close the merchandise business. He announced a deal with the Montgomery Ward Co., but wouldn't act until he was assured that Traverse City would not be left without ample store facilities. Finally, late in 1928, an agreement was reached and an era ended. However, the Hannah, Lay name remained on Front Street until April of 1940. At that time the Hannah, Lay Hardware Co., owned by Gordon Pharo and located in the eastern one third of the building, was destroyed by fire. The insurance settlement for the building was \$37,000.

Written by BOB WILHELM AND BOB WILSON

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