

WINTER 2026

PRESERVE, PROTECT, AND PRESENT



TRAVERSE AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Traverse Area Historical Society Newsletter is published quarterly.

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FROM PRESIDENT SICILIANO'S DESK

Since our autumn newsletter edition, we have devoted our time to seeking support for our new endeavor to serve as a museum depository for local history three-dimensional artifacts and in developing our Winter and Spring 2026 programs.

Historical Society of Michigan Grant:

In the case of seeking funding, the board submitted a grant proposal to the Historical Society of Michigan (HSM) for shelving and storage materials for our growing history artifact collection. I am happy to announce that our full request was awarded. The HSM has awarded our society \$2,040.20 grant to purchase and install shelving units to hold these new collections and assist our volunteers in completing a full inventory. Beyond the funding, I believe it shows that the state historical society recognizes the value and hard work of your society.

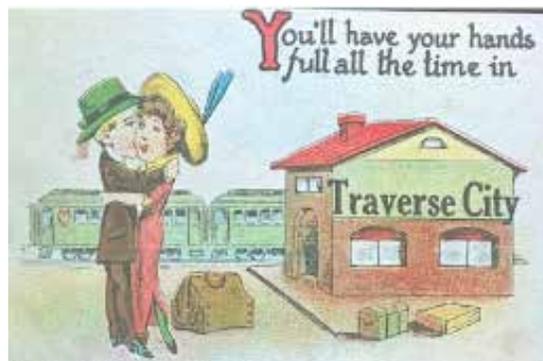
Winter and Spring 2026 Programs:

Regarding our Winter 2026 programs, we have offered two of these in January and February.

Our full schedule follows.

January 18th: Postcard historian Don Harrison and author and Board Vice President Marty MacLeod presented a highly informative and enjoyable program on the Postcarding Craze of the Early 20th Century. Showcasing local examples, Don and Marty shared about the beginnings of US Private Mailing Cards in the late 1800s and traced their development through the "Golden Age" of postcarding and into the 1960s. They also describe the photographers, their artistry, and the technical skills used to capture our local history in vibrant detail.

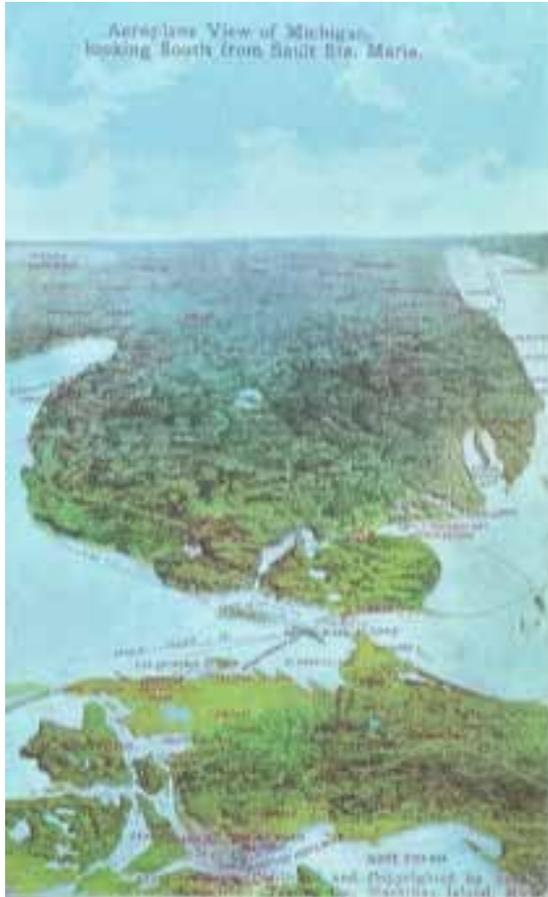
Postcards have told many stories about Traverse City. For instance, they provided some of the humor about the past as the card shows. (right)



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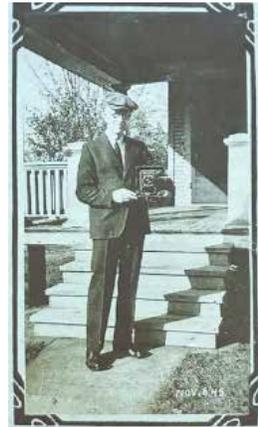
FROM PRESIDENT SICILIANO'S DESK CONT.

They also showed what the city looked like in the early 20th Century. Here is a postcard showing the Milliken Building. (right)



With the use of the new invention of airplanes, photographers were able to develop postcards showing the aerial views of our area. Here is one showing the bird's eye view of the southern Upper Peninsula and Northern Lower Peninsula. (left)

The presentation also shared stories about the famous photographers, among them Orson Peck. (right)



His use of photography also led to several humorous alterations of what the camera found. Here are two cards, the left showing the accurate picture of downtown Traverse and the right one showing the photographer's sense of humor.



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FROM PRESIDENT SICILIANO'S DESK CONT.

Finally, the postcards also provide important documentation of the past. Here is one showing the first home for city founder Perry Hannah. (top right)



Another postcard showed events as they occurred. Here are two of the period fire pumpers, Queen City 1 and 2 as they make their way down Front Street in 1905. (bottom right)



The audience enjoyed both the presentations and engaging with the presenters to determine the most valuable postcard shared with the attendees. We had forty-six attendees in person, and eleven others joined us via Zoom. For those who wish to see the recording of the presentation, please visit the Traverse Area District Library website at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NhdCvqYMgGI>

February 15th: Our program for February was an encore showing of the documentary “The Search for Anna & Levi: A Lost History of Black Homesteaders.” It was introduced by the Leelanau Historical Society and Museum Executive Director Kim Kelderhouse. She shared the successful collaboration from multiple historical societies and experts to develop the documentary and the Leelanau Historical Society’s success in funding the project.

The documentary itself brought to light an overlooked chapter of Leelanau County’s history and the broader story of African American settlement in the Midwest. The film explores the lives of Anna and Levi Johnson — early Black homesteaders whose farm once stood in what is now Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. Featuring interviews with descendants, local historians, and regional experts, this documentary offers a heartfelt and personal journey into a past that connects directly to our present. At the conclusion of the showing, Kim Kelderhouse and Joe VanderMuelen, the documentary’s director, answer questions about the development of the documentary and the historical background of the homesteaders and their descendants.



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FROM PRESIDENT SICILIANO'S DESK CONT.

The audience enjoyed the documentary and Kim and Joe addressed questions about the history and extensive research behind the project. Seventeen attendees watched the documentary in person and five joined us via Zoom. For those who wish to see the documentary, please go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UoZxJavQVbI>

The spring program schedule is as follows:

March 15th: Dr. Bradley Gills, Why rock the boat? Tribal fishing in the Grand Traverse Region

Dr. Gills will be speaking on the history of tribal fishing in our region. His talk will explore this rich history from the 1836 Treaty of Washington that preserved fishing rights for local Indian communities through the Grand Traverse Band's fight for federal recognition amidst the heated fishing controversies that defined the 1970s and 1980s, and on to the recent fishing compact settlement. This informative talk will showcase stories of survival, tragedy, perseverance, and how our Native neighbors have always been an integral part of our economy and communities from Northport to Eastport.

April 19th: Marty MacLeod, The Cradle of Traverse City: Slabtown

Based in part on her recent book, Slabtown, Traverse City's Premier Neighborhood, Marty MacLeod will trace the history of the West Side. What--and who--helped to transform that first shanty town into the vibrant neighborhood of today? Come find out, and perhaps share a story or two.

May 17th: Jordan Owen, Hidden in Plain Sight: The Carter Mill

Join local historian Jordan Owen to uncover a forgotten story of the West Bay waterfront—a location whose unique history has played a pivotal role in shaping the industrial and social landscape of the Leelanau shore of West Grand Traverse Bay over the past 150 years. Nestled on a familiar waterfront property that has been in constant use since 1877, the Carter Mill stood as the forgotten fourth bayfront lumber mill. The mill and the occupants that followed would form the foundation for the “Lower Greilickville” community, which continues to thrive and evolve to this day.

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FROM PRESIDENT SICILIANO'S DESK CONT.

Tour Volunteers Needed:

Hone your local history knowledge, get in your steps for the day, and enjoy Traverse City's beautiful outdoors: Volunteer as a TAHS Tour Guide this summer!

A basic knowledge of our local history would be helpful but is not required, as scripts for all three walking tours are written and ready to go. While it may sound daunting, current tour guides will help you prepare thoroughly with "on-the-job" training, starting this May.

Take your choice of one (or more!) of our current tours:

- Oakwood Cemetery (History of the three cemeteries and famous "residents")
- Perry Hannah & His Neighbors (Sixth Street architecture and the people who built these turn-of-the-century gems, plus Central School)
- All Over Old Towne (All facets of this fascinating neighborhood, from Sixth to 12th Street, Union to Boardman Lake, about 1.7 miles)

We offer each tour once or twice a month, usually mid-May through mid-October, on Saturday or Sunday mornings. They all run about 2 hours, for a maximum of 10 participants (but often fewer). There's usually a mix of tourists and local folks, but they're always fun and engaged.

Training starts in May (details forthcoming with the summer schedule), and we ask that you commit to four or five tours each season. Yes, it IS a chunk of your valuable time, but the satisfaction of sharing and witnessing people's delight in learning TC's unique story is its own reward.

Don't miss this wonderful opportunity to give back to your community--we promise you'll enjoy it!

FROM MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE JORDAN OWEN'S DESK

The stories of the Traverse Area aren't just found in dusty archives—they live in the vibrant community we share today. Because of your support, the **Traverse Area Historical Society** has been able to continue its mission of preserving our unique local heritage and sharing it with the next generation.

As we look toward another year of discovery, we invite you to **renew your annual membership**. (...and if you have recently renewed your membership, thank you!)

Why Your Membership Matters

Your dues are more than just a subscription; they show our community's commitment to preserving the record of our shared history. This past year, your contributions helped us: Maintain, catalog, and improve our extensive **local image and document archives**. Host engaging **educational programs and walking tours** that bring history to life. Advocate for the **recognition and protection of historical landmarks** throughout the region.

Membership Benefits When you renew, you continue to enjoy:

- Early access to Society events.
- Subscription to our quarterly newsletter
- Voting rights at our annual meeting.
- The knowledge that you are a steward of our shared regional legacy.

How to Renew Renewing is quick and easy:

Online: Visit our website at **traversehistory.org/about** and click the "Join/Renew" button.

By Mail: Complete the attached form and return it with your check in the provided envelope. (**PO Box 42, Traverse City, MI, 49685**)

In Person: Drop by our next monthly at the **Traverse Area District Library**

If your contact information has changed, please let us know so we can keep you updated on all our upcoming projects and events.

Thank you for being such an integral part of our community's story. We can't wait to see what history we will uncover together in 2026.

FROM COLLECTIONS COMMITTEE CHAIR SICILIANO'S DESK

Exciting Collections news! The TAHS was awarded a \$2,040.20 grant from the Historical Society of Michigan to upgrade our collections storage facility. The grant will be used to purchase movable metal shelving and more archival quality storage supplies (boxes, tissue, photo sleeves, etc.)

The Collections Committee will be meeting in late February to make plans for rearranging the storage unit. Be on the lookout for possible volunteer opportunities concerning these activities.

Committee Chair Peg Siciliano met with Kim Kelderhouse, Executive Director of the Leland Historical Society and Museum, and will be meeting with Amy Monette, Manager of TADL's Local History Collection and the Kingsley Branch Library. These local public history professionals are a wonderful resource for guiding the TAHS on best practices for collections management. As they say "It takes a village," and the TAHS greatly appreciates their input.

The Committee has also been busy accessioning (documenting and labeling) a wonderful donation of local business items. These include artifacts from the:

- Straub & Amiotte Candy Factory
- Morgan Canning Company
- The Hannah & Lay Company
- Walters & Hemmings
- Friedrich's Shoes
- Oval Wood Dish Company
- A World War I recruiting poster
- Bugbee & Roxburgh City Drugstore
- The American Drug Company, T.C.
- James G. Johnson, druggist
- E.E. Miller Pharmacy
- S.E. Wait & Sons, druggists

As always, thanks to all of the Committee members: Miles Lindberg, Pete Doren, Jim Warner, Fred Nelson, Bonnie Smith, Steve Vetch and Marty McLeod

FROM TREASURER OFFENHAUSER'S DESK

2025 proved to be a financial success, as TAHS met or exceeded its budgetary goals. The balance sheet is very strong, as we have more than sufficient funds in interest bearing, insured accounts, to meet any foreseeable rainy days.

Our contributions in '25 again reflect our strong commitment to local history, such as our local library's ongoing archive cataloging and their intern program. We also supported Michigan History Day, both locally and statewide. Over \$20,000, was contributed to specific projects, mostly the wrap up of the Anishinaabe marker grant project and including the new and updated historical marker (Le Grande Traverse) near the old cottonwood tree at the mouth of the Boardman River.

On the income side, we again have relied on our membership dues and generous donations, and we are grateful for your ongoing support.

NEWS ABOUT THE SOCIETY'S SOCIAL MEDIA

By Jordan Owen

Currently, TAHS maintains three social media accounts to help share both news about our organization and the unique stories of our region. We hope that you'll "like and subscribe" as well as engaging in the conversation!

TAHS Facebook Page — Where TAHS shares news with the community about activities, programs, and tour schedule. Follow the page to keep up to date on upcoming TAHS events and related news. Please follow at facebook.com/traversehistory

TAHS Facebook Group: Where TAHS members and friends can share and discuss historic images, content, and artifacts. Multiple posts a week spur an ongoing conversation that helps grow our understanding of the community. To join, search for the group on Facebook or follow the link from facebook.com/traversehistory

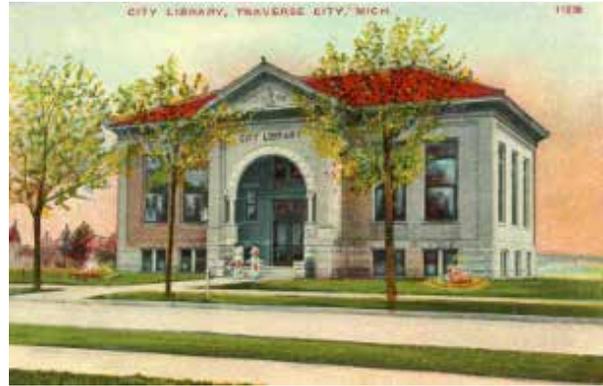
TAHS Instagram Account: — Another way for us to share unique historic images and content from around the Grand Traverse area! Please follow at Instagram.com/traversehistory

NEWS FROM THE TRAVERSE AREA DISTRICT LIBRARY

Amy Monette, Local History Collection & Kingsley Branch Manager

Hello from the Local History Collection!

Just in time for National Library Lovers' Month, the Local History Collection's monthly exhibit is ready for viewing! Titled "A Cradle of Democracy, Andrew Carnegie's legacy in Traverse City: From the Local History Collection," it features many nostalgic, fun, and curious images of our favorite Traverse City landmark, the Sixth Street Carnegie Library. Find it in the 2nd floor display case at Woodmere during the month of February!



In March, we will feature Women's Civic Organizations and their impact on Northern Michigan. Pictured above and to the right is a vibrantly colored photographic postcard of the exterior of the Library, long before the addition. This image is uncredited and is available online at <https://localhistory.tadl.org/items/show/19883>

In related news, TADL has submitted a proposal to the City of Traverse City, in response to their Request for Proposals issued in January 2026, on the possible tenancy of the Carnegie Building. The proposal outlines a partnership with the City to renew the Carnegie Building as a vibrant, publicly accessible community center, including expanded public hours, stewardship of the Con Foster Museum Collection, space for research and meetings, and community-driven programming rooted in local history and civic engagement. As a public institution with professional staff and preservation expertise, TADL is uniquely positioned to care for these cultural assets while keeping them accessible to residents. The proposal emphasizes long-term sustainability, collaboration, and increased public benefit. Thank you to everyone, and especially our friends at TAHS, for their ongoing support of this project, and we look forward to a positive response from the City Commissioners.



Finally, as promised, our intrepid team has been working to make our entire National Cherry Festival holdings available to you all in a digital format! Pictured to the lower right is the 1960 Float of the National Cherry Festival Queen with her Court, digitized from a slide that has long been in the archives but not previously scanned. This image is available online at: <https://localhistory.tadl.org/items/show/33190>. If you prefer your pictures to be moving, you can enjoy 32 minutes of digitized film from the 1947 Centennial Cherry Festival Parade, available on our digital archive at: <https://localhistory.tadl.org/items/show/32977>

Capt. Webb's Traverse Bay Line: The Area's Pioneering Water Taxi Service

By Steve Kelsch and Marty MacLeod, Traverse Area Historical Society

Henry J. Webb was a prosperous druggist in southwest Michigan who started spending summers at the resorts on Old Mission peninsula's Neahtawanta Point in 1870. Travel to the area was accomplished exclusively by water in those early days: the first rail line from Chicago via Grand Rapids didn't reach Traverse City until 1872, and it took another four years for the first passable road to arrive. But even then, getting from village to village by land was a near impossibility. For decades, the quickest and most reliable (not to mention the most comfortable and scenic!) route was by water – at least between April and December.

In 1887, "Captain" Webb bought a half-interest in the little steamer Onekama and with it established the Traverse Bay Line on a regular route from Northport to Traverse City, with stops at Bowers Harbor and Suttons Bay. Webb added the Lou A. Cummings to his "fleet" in 1889 and the Crescent in 1890. When the Columbia was built in 1892, he sold his interest in the Onekama to his erstwhile partner, and for fifteen years, Webb's three small wood-burning steamers made their daily rounds on the Grand and Little Traverse Bays.

Onekama (center) alongside the Lou A. Cummings, to starboard (center right)

The original Traverse Bay Line timetable from the Neahtawanta Hotel on Old Mission peninsula. (top right)

Let's start with the little Crescent, built by Duncan Robertson in Grand Haven in 1890. She was just 77 ft long, 16 feet abeam, and drew 6 feet. Webb hired Traverse City native George E. Johnson as captain – his first posting – and ran her from Traverse City to Suttons Bay, Omena, and Northport. Special excursions to Bowers Harbor and Neahtawanta were regularly scheduled.

Crescent with passengers and a lumber delivery at the Universalist Resort dock at Neahtawanta. Riding a steamer the seven miles from Traverse City to the Neahtawanta Hotel – with luggage – cost "resorters" 25 cents, 40 cents for a round trip. (bottom right)

TRAVERSE BAY LINE OF STEAMERS.
 THREE TUGS OF THE STEAMERS
COLUMBIA CRESCENT
 AND
LOU A. CUMMINGS
 2007 CONTRACTING CO. TRAVERSE CITY, MICH.
 This Line is Licensed by the U. S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of Navigation.
 Steamers Columbia and Lou A. Cummings.
 Regular Schedule between Traverse City, Suttons Bay, Bowers Harbor, and Northport.
 Steamer Crescent.
 Regular Schedule between Traverse City, Suttons Bay, and Northport.
 PLEASURE TRIPPER.
 DAILY EXCURSIONS.



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Capt. Webb's Traverse Bay Line: The Area's Pioneering Water Taxi Service

By Steve Kelsch and Marty MacLeod, Traverse Area Historical Society

A young Capt. Johnson (foreground) aboard the Crescent. Johnson went on to captain all three Traverse Bay Line. (top left)



Crescent leaving the City of Charlevoix astern in 1904 (top right)

Traverse City's busy excursion dock was adamant about its "No Bicycles!" policy, to the dismay of many. At 109 feet, the somewhat larger Lou A. Cummings had been built in 1883 for \$7,500, also in Grand Haven. Her primary route was between Traverse City and Petoskey via Charlevoix and East Jordan, but she was a familiar sight all over the bays as business warranted. Interestingly, after a long service life and three eventual rebuilds – first as the City of Boyne and then as the America out of Harbor Springs – her "bones" were discovered in the mud when Bay City built a new marina in 1958. (second from top)



Lou A. Cummings Passengers enjoying the Lou A. Cummings weather deck. (third from top)



Lou A. Cummings tied up at the Traverse City excursion dock in the foreground with the SS Illinois and an unidentified schooner at the Hannah-Lay dock behind Columbia, also 109 feet in length, was another Grand Haven beauty built in 1892. She was the workhorse of the fleet, carrying the mail and freight between Petoskey and Traverse City with stops including Norwood and Old Mission.



Columbia also made regular calls at Bassett Island (just off West Bay's Marion Island) for evening pleasure excursions out of Traverse City. In 1906, a rough-hewn fishing camp came down and a 250-foot dock and big two-story dance pavilion went up – a hugely popular attraction for years. In fact, the first motion picture in the Grand Traverse region was shown at the pavilion in 1907, electricity provided by the onboard generator. But all good things come to an end. The two islands were consolidated and sold to Henry Ford in 1917 and are now known as Power Island. (bottom right)



Capt. Webb's Traverse Bay Line: The Area's Pioneering Water Taxi Service

By Steve Kelsch and Marty MacLeod, Traverse Area Historical Society



Docked at Bassett Island for an evening's pleasure cruise (left)

The famous Columbia was even commemorated by the infamous Orson Peck, a Traverse City photographer and humorist of some renown, in this 1906 postcard that reads: "Dear Lillian: This is the boat we go out on quite frequently to Marion Island to dance. It takes $\frac{3}{4}$ hr. to run over, and on these moonlight evenings the ride is glorious. Alice" (below)

All three Traverse Bay Line boats were "lighted by electricity" by 1906 and licensed to carry the US Mail and American Express freight. Pleasure seekers on excursion could stop at all the popular destinations, and the Columbia and Lou A. Cummings alternated their north-south routes, so it was rare for passengers to be stranded for any length of time if they missed their intended sailing. The boats' arrivals were timed to connect with train departures, which, in turn, connected with Pere Marquette steamers sailing to Mackinac, Chicago, and beyond.

But starting in 1903, the new Traverse City, Leelanau & Manistique rail line cut sharply into Webb's business. It ran daily from Traverse City to Northport, where a ferry accommodating thirty-two rail cars carried freight and passengers across to the Upper Peninsula. The Lou A. Cummings was sold in 1905, the Crescent in 1906, and the Columbia in 1907. Capt. Webb himself died in 1906, and the people of Grand Traverse Bay were left – at least until Webb's son Charles and partners could reorganize as the Traverse Bay Transportation Company – without local water transportation for the first time in decades. Other lines with larger boats eventually plied the same waters, but Henry Webb's plucky little Traverse Bay Line steamers were the much-loved pioneers.



OPPORTUNITIES FOR VOLUNTEERS



Would you like to...

- Be a docent on a history walking tour?
- 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

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