



Newsletter

MISSION STATEMENT

The Grafton Historical Society is a non-profit 501(c)3 organization founded and operated by volunteers. We are dedicated to the preservation and sharing of Grafton area history.

GHS OFFICERS

Tom Krueger
President

Dave Antoine
Vice President

Debbie Krueger
Secretary

John Krueger
Treasurer

Nick Schanen
Director

January, 2025

Message from the President

My first message of 2025 begins with a belated wish for a "Happy and Healthy New Year" to all of our members and readers of this newsletter. On a larger scale, the last year has been very traumatic and difficult for many residents in the coastal states as a result of record breaking hurricanes and wild fire disasters. Our hearts and prayers go out to all those who have been impacted along with hopes for recovery, normalcy and a better 2025. The upper Midwest may have its own share of weather woes including cold and snowy winters but in the big picture, we are blessed to live in Wisconsin.

Committee Volunteers

I would like to start by recognizing and thanking the Historical Society board members for their dedicated involvement and hard work over the last year. In 2024 we expanded our board membership from eight to ten members which has been a big help, but we can always use more volunteer help at the committee level. Please feel free to contact me or any GHS board member if interested, or just curious about what the committees are and what they really do. No

Jim Wegner
Director

John Gassert
Director

Darrel Blank
Director

Phyllis Wiggins
Director

Emily Engstrom
Director

experience needed, just an interest in local history or history in general.

Historic Painting Restoration

Many of you that have attended the last few GHS presentations know that the GHS board had initiated the restoration of a very historic 1915 original oil painting of the Grafton Chair Factory building. Built in 1848, this building served as the Paramount Records recording studio and pressing plant from 1929 until 1932. The painting restoration work was completed by the end of year and turned out better than anyone could have hoped for! We are thrilled to display this amazing piece of art, that represents an important part of Grafton history. The historical society will still be collecting donations at GHS program presentations in January and February to defray costs incurred for painting restoration. Thank you for your continued support.

Black History Month

In a related matter, did you know that the month of February is Black History month? The significance of Black History month has much to do with Grafton history and the chair factory building. It was here that some of the most significant recordings of American blues music were made by a multitude of Black artists at the Paramount Records Studio. A Mississippi Blues Trail Marker is now located in Chair Factory Park on 12th Avenue at Falls Road, to commemorate the location of the chair factory and the Paramount Records Studio. It is in the month of February, we especially honor and celebrate this local connection to the blues and Black history in Grafton. To learn more about the dozens of Black musicians who traveled long distances to record in Grafton, consider a visit to downtown Grafton's

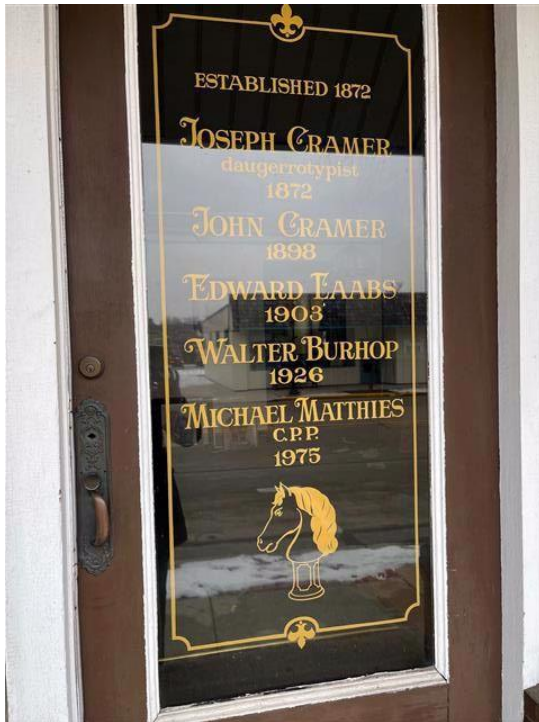
Paramount Plaza where 46 Blues artists have now been inducted to the Walk of Fame.

Grafton Historical Society Museum Space

As previously reported, the Timothy Wooden Building on Broad Street has space available and the Grafton Historical Society is anxious to reserve a space on the second floor for its archives storage, office and exhibits display. Before we can move forward with executing a sub-tenant lease agreement we need to ensure a steady source of funding for payment of lease fees and other museum expenses. In addition to securing grant funds, we are in the process of kicking off a fundraising campaign to take place over the next six months. With this endeavor, we are open to any suggestions and of course, volunteer help is always needed and most welcomed.

Working to “Discover, share and preserve Grafton history”.

Tom Krueger
GHS President



Historic Matthias Photography Studio Sold

The historic Matthias Photography Studio building in Grafton has now been sold. The photography studio has a long history in Grafton and in fact, is the oldest continuously operating photography studio in the United States.

Studio Established in 1872

The photography studio was established in 1872 by Joseph Cramer. Following his service in the Civil War, he started his photography studio in downtown Grafton after purchasing the lot for \$11. His son, Joseph Cramer, took over the studio in 1898. (It appears that it was also a bike shop for a brief time during these years.) Edward Laabs purchased the studio in 1903 and made portraits of Grafton families under the Laabs name. Walter Burhop who worked for Laabs as a teenager, took over the studio in 1926. He continued to create photographs under the Laabs name. Michael Matthias carried on the art of photography beginning in 1976 as Photography by Michael.

The building originally had gas lights, a hand pump, and a red glass window in the darkroom. There were also skylights in the roof to provide proper lighting for indoor photography.

Treasure Trove of Historic Artifacts

The building was a treasure trove of historic artifacts. Chief among them was a significant collection of glass plates, used in early photography. Some dated to the late 1800's. The Matthias family has loaned those plates to the Ozaukee

County Historical Society. The OCHS, with the assistance of GHS members, has begun the detailed process of cleaning, developing and creating print collections of the glass plates.

Show in the picture at right above are OCHS President Mary Ann Velnetske, 1st Vice President Alan Buchholz and archivist Jane Butz. Also shown is Pyper Flaig, a Grafton high school graduate, who is currently pursuing studies in History at Simmons University in Boston.



Ferdinand "Jelly Roll" Morton

The self-proclaimed inventor of jazz was born in New Orleans around 1890. Ferdinand Joseph LaMothe was born to parents who traced their Creole ancestry back four generations. Morton's exact date of birth is unknown because no birth certificate was issued for him. LaMothe's father left the family when the child was three years old. After his mother married William Mouton, Ferdinand adopted his last name, changing it to Morton.

Piano Player at a Brothel

Morton's childhood ended quickly when at 14 he took a job being a piano player at a New Orleans brothel. He added songs with some off-color lyrics and took the nickname "Jelly Roll." He convinced his great-grandmother, whom he was living with, that he was a night watchman at a local barrel factory. When she found out the truth, Morton was asked to leave her house because "the devil music would surely bring about his downfall."

He left New Orleans and began to tour around the South in minstrel



Big Break With RCA

His big break came in 1926 when he signed a contract with the Victor Talking Machine Company. That took him and his band to the Victor recording studios in Chicago. He stayed with RCA until 1931 when RCA did not renew his contract, as happened to many other musicians due to the Great Depression. In 1934 his composition "King Porter Stomp" became Benny Goodman's first hit and swing standard. Morton received little credit and no royalties.

Music Box Troubles

In the mid 1930's Morton became the manager and piano player for a Washington D.C. bar called The Music Box, but the venture was financially unsuccessful. Adding to his troubles, in 1938 Morton was stabbed by a friend of the Music Box owner. A nearby hospital for whites only refused him treatment so he was transported to a Black hospital farther away. The delay and subsequent treatment left him permanently prone to illness and short of breath.

shows. Eventually he made his way to Chicago and New York City. He toured with his girlfriend Rosa Brown as a vaudeville act from 1912 to 1914 and then spent some years living in Chicago. This was the time that he began writing down the music for his compositions. In 1915 "Jelly Roll Blues" was one of the first jazz songs to be published.

Move to Canada

At the onset of World War I, he moved west to California and then to Vancouver, Canada where he was variously described as "an itinerant pianist, vaudeville performer, gambler, hustler and according to legend occasional pimp."

Recorded for Library of Congress

During these years he recorded music and an interview for the Library of Congress. Because of the suggestive nature of the song lyrics, the Library of Congress recordings were not released until 2005.

Morton later developed asthma and died on July 10, 1941 in Los Angeles. It is estimated that he was 50 years old.



**THE GRAFTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY
PRESENTS**

Abraham Lincoln: *New Facts*

Researchers and collectors are constantly discovering information about America's most studied person. Come and hear about some of the fascinating new facts from Lincoln expert Dr. James Cornelius.



James Cornelius was the curator of the Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, Illinois for 11 years. With a doctorate in history, he spent his career all around books: writing, editing, cataloguing and preserving. He and his wife Anne retired to Grafton in 2023. He now volunteers at the Arts Mill Studio and St. Simon Church.

bank **five
nine**

All donations from our presentation will help fund the restoration of the historic Grafton Chair Factory painting.



**Thursday,
February 6th**

**6:00 p.m.
Rose Harms
Legion Post
1540 13th Avenue
Grafton**

**Free and open to the
public.**

**Refreshments and
Cash Bar**

**GRAFTON HISTORICAL
SOCIETY**

P.O. Box 481
Grafton, WI 53024

Website:
www.graftonareahistory.org

Email:
info@graftonareahistory.org



Thanks to all of our Life Time members.

Your support is so important to the Grafton Historical Society.

Darrel and Shelly Blank

Carol Curtis

John Duffy

Emily Engstrom

John Gassert

Kit Keller and Paul Rushing

John and Debbie Krueger

Steve, Shelly, Trevor and Riley Nauta

David Schanen

Nick and Vicki Schanen

Phil and Jean Steinke

Kenneth Wegner

Phyllis Wiggins

**Our membership year begins again in April. Please consider a Lifetime Membership
when you renew your membership for this year.**



It's completed!

The historic Wisconsin Chair Factory painting has been full restored with amazing results.

The historic painting is by M.P. Gossens, dated 1915, was discovered in the Wisconsin Chair Company building before the structure was demolished. This artwork is very important because the chair factory was central to putting Grafton on the map in the Blues music industry. The company had expanded into record production to supplement its sales of phonograph cabinets. Many famous Blues artists traveled to Grafton to record at the studio in the chair factory.

Originally owned by Bob Ahlers, the painting was gifted to the GHS by the Grafton Chamber of Commerce. The painting was not in good condition. It had extensive surface grime, several holes and tears, and was speckled with white paint. The GHS contracted with art restorer Melissa Klotka to bring it back to its original condition.

Coming soon ...information on where and when the restored painting will be on display for the public to view.

Shown with the picture is GHS President Tom Krueger.



Past Perfect Software Goes "Live"

Thanks to a generous donation of \$1,000 from GHS Director Darrell Blank, the Society's new online Past Perfect software will go "live" this week. Developed by museum professionals, this new software allows the GHS to build a fully searchable database of our collections. This Past Perfect software contains tools for cataloging and tracking diverse collections, along with tools for managing members, donors, and volunteers, including payments and gifts. The program's robust research and report functions provide staff and researchers multiple methods for searching and sharing information. A huge step forward for the Grafton Historical Society.

Pictured above are Director Emily Engstrom, who will be heading up the implementation of the software, Director Darrel Blank, and Treasurer John Krueger.



Watch for our survey...

Within the next two weeks, the Grafton Historical Society will be sending out a short survey of our members. Please take a moment to answer the six questions to let us know how we are doing! We're always looking for your comments and suggestions.





Wisconsin Lighthouse Presentation Draws Large Crowd

Nearly 100 people attended the GHS Wisconsin Lighthouse presentation January 16th. Ken and Barb Wardius told the story of Wisconsin's historic beacons with breathtaking photography of lighthouses from Milwaukee's North Point to Cana Island Lighthouse, and Grafton's own lighthouse. First bitten by the "lighthouse bug" in Door County, Ken and Barb

began accumulating Wisconsin lighthouse information and have explored the history of these amazing structures. They have since published four books on the subject.



"Timothy Wooden" Appears in Grafton Christmas Parade

Grafton's First Citizen, Timothy Wooden, again made a special guest appearance at the Grafton Christmas parade in November. Thanks to Walt Schmitz for doing a great job portraying Wooden, Miles and Dane Antoine, the trusty banner carriers, and Don and Maureen Somogyi for the loan of the wonderful antique car.



***Ozaukee History Co-op Meeting
set for Saturday, February 8th.***

GHS members are invited to attend the next history co-op meeting at 216 Green Bay Road, Suite 102, in Thiensville on Saturday, February 8th. The history co-op brings together historical societies and their members from Belgium to Mequon and Grafton to Freistadt for the exchange and sharing of historical information and news.



Ozaukee County Historical Society Sets Dates for 2025 Events

Here's a glimpse of the events being planned by the
OCHS for 2025:

April 19 - Easter Egg Hunt

May 16-17 - WWII Encampment

June 14- Flag Day Celebration at Stony Hill School

June 21 - Summer Solstice, Date Night

July 6 - Fire Up the Forge

August 10 - Bluegrass at the Village

September 6 - Planes, Trains and Automobiles

October 11- Autumn at the Village

OZAUKEE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

WINTER QUARTERLY MEETING

Monday, February 3rd

**Membership Update 7:00 - Presentation
7:30**

**Location: Cedarburg American Legion Post
W57 N481 Hilbert Street, Cedarburg
Free and open to the public.**

Cedarburg's Lumber and Quarry Men

Presentation by local historian, Chris Lese, focusing on the city's founders who built the downtown Cedarburg with timber and stone, buildings that have stood the test of time.

A walk around Cedarburg shows use of these materials gave our buildings their unique style and character. This talk will expand on these well known men and their construction businesses that were influential from the city's hopeful start to recent times. We will also see that beyond foundations, walls and elegant architectural designs, many of these men were committed to build a comfortable, family friendly community that lives on today.

Chris Lese is a Social Studies teacher at Marquette University High School and a Cedarburg resident. His articles on teaching and about his immersive student trips to Civil War sites have been published in a variety of education journals. Most recently, Chris and his students helped install the Cedarburg History Museum's "Wisconsin in the Civil War exhibit" and he gave a presentation on Currency in War.



DO YOU KNOW?

With this issue we'd like to continue our "Mystery Item" feature. If you have an idea what this item might be contact us

at: info@graftonareahistory.org.

If you have an item that you need help identifying and would like to submit it for a future newsletter edition, we'd be happy to include it.



DID YOU KNOW?

If you said that this **Mystery Item** from the last issue of our Newsletter was ...

An Early Ice Cream Maker

This consisted of a wooden bucket that was filled with ice and salt and had a handle which rotated. The central metal container, containing the ice cream was surrounded by the salt and ice mixture. This churning produced ice cream with an even, smooth texture.

Congrats to Margaret Bussone and Sue Duffy for correctly identifying our mystery item. Congrats to Helen Waldschmidt and Janine Hering for identifying the antique toaster in our Summer newsletter.

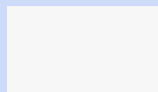




We're happy to report that the GHS membership is growing! This year we have already registered many new individual, family and lifetime memberships.

If you are not already a member, we invite you to join us to Discover, Preserve, and Share Grafton history.

<http://www.graftonareahistory.org>



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