



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

April, 2025

Message from the President

It has been a generally mild winter this year and now with the month of April our thoughts turn to hopes for a mild spring including warmer temperatures and early outdoor activities that don't involve snow at least until next Christmas. Unfortunately, there are no guarantees when it comes to our local weather. This is the Wisconsin we know and love.

With the month of April, the Grafton Historical Society also starts its membership year. Most, if not all of you who are members, should have received your annual dues statements by now. Our membership has been growing over the last year and we greatly appreciate your support of the Historical Society and all that we do.

Also important news is the date for our Annual Meeting. That date is set for **Thursday, May 8th**. Please consider attending this meeting. It's an important one. You will learn about the past activities and accomplishments of the society as well as future goals and vision for the coming year. In addition, the meeting includes an election of directors. This year there are five director positions to be filled. Directors serve a term of two years. The positions are open to any GHS member, and nominations are being accepted at this time.

In closing, over the past several issues of this newsletter I have hinted and made reference to progress in our search for

Jim Wegner
Director

John Gassert
Director

Darrel Blank
Director

Phyllis Wiggins
Director

Emily Engstrom
Director

building space that will hopefully serve as a future “home” for the Grafton Historical Society. We remain very excited about this possibility, but have a lot of work ahead to make it a reality. I promise you’ll hear more about this and how you can help share this dream.

Working to **discover, share and preserve** Grafton history.

Tom Krueger
GHS President



Who was the "real" Timothy Wooden?

Adventurer, real estate mogul, justice of the peace, eccentric, practical joker? Perhaps all of the above.

Wooden Arrives

Wooden was born in 1805 and as a young man travelled to what would become Grafton in 1839. When asked where he came from, he would reply that “I really didn’t come at all, but grew up with the land.” When he arrived, the area was a dense hardwood forest. The

agree to it.” It was noted by later biographers that Wooden had an “antipathy to anything which required considerable physical or mental exertion.”

A Local Character

Wooden had a reputation for being quite a local character with the white settlers. One story relates how he often borrowed tools, but usually forgot to return them. On one occasion, Wooden

Milwaukee River ran through it, providing a source of food, water and transportation for the early people living there. Native Menomonee, Pottawatomi, Sac, Chippewa and Fox all camped along the river. By the early 1800's, there was a village of nearly 100 wigwams where Pottawatomi and Menomonee tribes met for council. In 1836 Wisconsin was established as a territory by the federal government and by 1838 the Native American rights had been all but terminated by new treaties.

Friend of the

Native

Americans

Then, arriving on the scene, was Timothy Wooden. "Tim", as he was called, became a great friend of the Native Americans, enjoying practical jokes with them and recruiting tribe members to cut trees and gather logs to build Grafton's first dam at what was then called Milwaukee Falls. One account describes a practical joke when a group of Menomonee brought Wooden to Milwaukee Falls and tied him to a tree. The leader of the group then whispered in Tim's ear that he owed a debt of gratitude to the white settlers, so he would let Wooden go to return to Milwaukee. Wooden replied, "Walk all the way to Milwaukee! That's 20 miles. If you'll lend me one of your horses, I'll

borrowed an ax from a friend and promised he would be a "dead man" if he did not return it by a certain date. When the ax was not returned, the friend got together a group of other friends who had also loaned him tools and informed Wooden of his coming wake. Wooden was surprised at the news of his own demise but happily attended his wake – and returned the ax.

Justice of the Peace

During the 1840's, Wooden amassed a large real estate holding in what would become the village of Grafton. In 1846 he was elected justice of the peace for the town of Grafton.

In 1849, at the age of 44, Wooden contracted cholera. Luckily his sense of humor didn't desert him at the end. At the last stage of the disease one of his friends visited and said, "Tim, I do believe you are dying." Wooden replied, "Well, I ain't doin' nothing else."

Wooden is buried at what was the old Union cemetery in Grafton, now called Woodlawn.

After Wooden, a steady stream of Europeans came to the area. Most of the first were land speculators, but farmers soon followed, and the agricultural phase of Grafton began.



Ethel Waters

Ethel Waters, the great aunt of singer-songwriter Crystal Waters, had a career that spanned more than six decades and included touring with evangelist Billy Graham.

The first African American to star in her own television show and be nominated for a Prime Time Emmy award, Waters early years were filled with hardship.

Waters was born in October, 1896 in Chester, Pennsylvania to teenage mother Louise Anderson. Waters was raised by her grandmother, experiencing deep poverty. Of her childhood she said, "I never was a child. I never was cuddled, liked or understood by my family."

Waters married at the age of 13 but her husband was abusive and they divorced soon after. She took a job as a maid in Philadelphia and that's where her life turned around. She had the opportunity to sing two songs at a nightclub, which led to a job as a professional singer and dancer at age 17.

Different from the Southern Blues singers of her age, Waters was influenced by white vaudeville singers such as Nora Bayes and Fanny Brice. She wasn't a classic Blues singer like Ma Rainey or Bessie Smith, but became an example of the group of black singers known as "cake-walking babies."

Around 1919, Waters moved to Harlem and became a performer in the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920's. By 1921 she had made a record, only the fifth black



becoming one of the highest paid black recording artists of the time. She then joined the vaudeville circuit and her acclaim grew.

By the early 1930's Waters had begun appearing in films and theatre. She became the first black woman to integrate Broadway's theatre district. In 1939 she broke another barrier when she became the first black woman to star in her own television show, *The Ethel Waters Show*, a variety show. In 1950 she became the first black woman to star in a television series in a leading role, *Beulah*.

A turning point came when she was 57 years old and attended a Billy Graham Crusade at Madison Square Garden. Of that meeting she said, "I, Ethel Waters, a 380-pound decrepit old lady, rededicated my life to Jesus Christ, and boy, because He lives, just look at me now." Following this chance encounter, Waters often was an enthusiastic participant, touring with Graham on his crusades.

woman in history with that accomplishment. She signed with Cardinal Records, then Black Swan and then Paramount,

Over the course of her long lifetime, Waters was married three times. She had no children.

Waters died on September 1, 1977 at the age of 80. She is buried at Forest Lawn Memorial Park in Glendale, Illinois.



NICKNAME

FLAMINGTEXT.COM

Back when everyone in Grafton had one...

Excerpted from "Memoirs of my life in Grafton, Wisconsin, 1941-1967,"

by Gerald "Jerry" E. Mueller, Ph.D.

Perhaps nothing astonished visitors to Grafton more than the great number of nicknames and labels that locals applied to each other. Some of these nicknames were well deserved or understandable, while other mystify to this day. For example, we had a family friend, a person with whom we did much fishing and hunting, named Windy. Windy's nickname derived from the fact that he was a habitual fabricator of tall tales. I once asked Windy how large was the biggest northern pike he ever caught, and without much hesitation he replied, "I never really weighed him, but he had another five-pound pike in his stomach." Whenever Windy took a shot at a buck and missed, he blamed his jealous brother-in-law for having tampered with the sights on the rifle.

I must mention that for many of the older adults with nicknames, I never knew their given names until I was an adult. Sometimes, when I was a young boy, a visitor to Grafton would pull up to the curb and ask directions to somebody's house. If they only used the person's given first name, I often had no choice but to shrug my shoulders and say, "I don't know."

Here are the names of some of the people I knew personally when I was growing up in downtown Grafton. Note there are many instances where I still don't know the given first name of the individual.

Tom "Dewey" Goldberg, Marvin "Pidge" Dickmann, Orville "Squirrelly" Dickmann, Tom "Pee Wee" Bulgrin, Julius "Toots" Vey, Johnny "Hoopo" Vey, "Mugs" Zernia, "Hibber" Habich, George "Babe" Habich, Wilfred "Cocky" Spaeth, "Zinky" Paulin, "Puddy" Regner, Orville "Grumpy" Gramoll, "Whitey" Englebrecht, "Shorty" Meunier, "Little Joe the Barber", Henry "Heinie" Nemitz, George "Guzzy" Gosewehr, George "Ditch" Hilgart, Earl "Curly" Rilling, Raymond "Casey" Wegner, Jerome "Bupps" Dickmann, "Peanuts" Matthews, Robert "Smokey" Thelen, Erwin "Boomer" Teiss, Harold "Teno" Mueller, Robert "Spider" Webb, Walter "Doc" Rose and Allan "Skippy" Eernisse



GANGSTERS IN WISCONSIN

Wisconsin is famous for many things, including being a gangster hangout in the 1920's and 30's. Come and hear the stories of gangsters on the run to our state during the Prohibition Era.



Chad Lewis is a researcher and lecturer on topics of the strange and unusual. He holds a Bachelor's and Master's Degree in Psychology and for the past 30 years has travelled the globe in search of unique and bizarre history.



Sponsoring Partner 

**Thursday,
April 24th**

6:00 p.m.

**Rose Harms
Legion Post
1540 13th Avenue**

**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



Welcome to our New Members!

Your support is so important to the Grafton Historical Society.

Gary and Jilaine Bauer

Dale Bospalec

Rick Bulgrin

Cecilia Devine

Stephen and Joanne Greger

Bill and Lisa Harbeck

Tom Lubner

Pauline Morrison

Gregory Paylietner

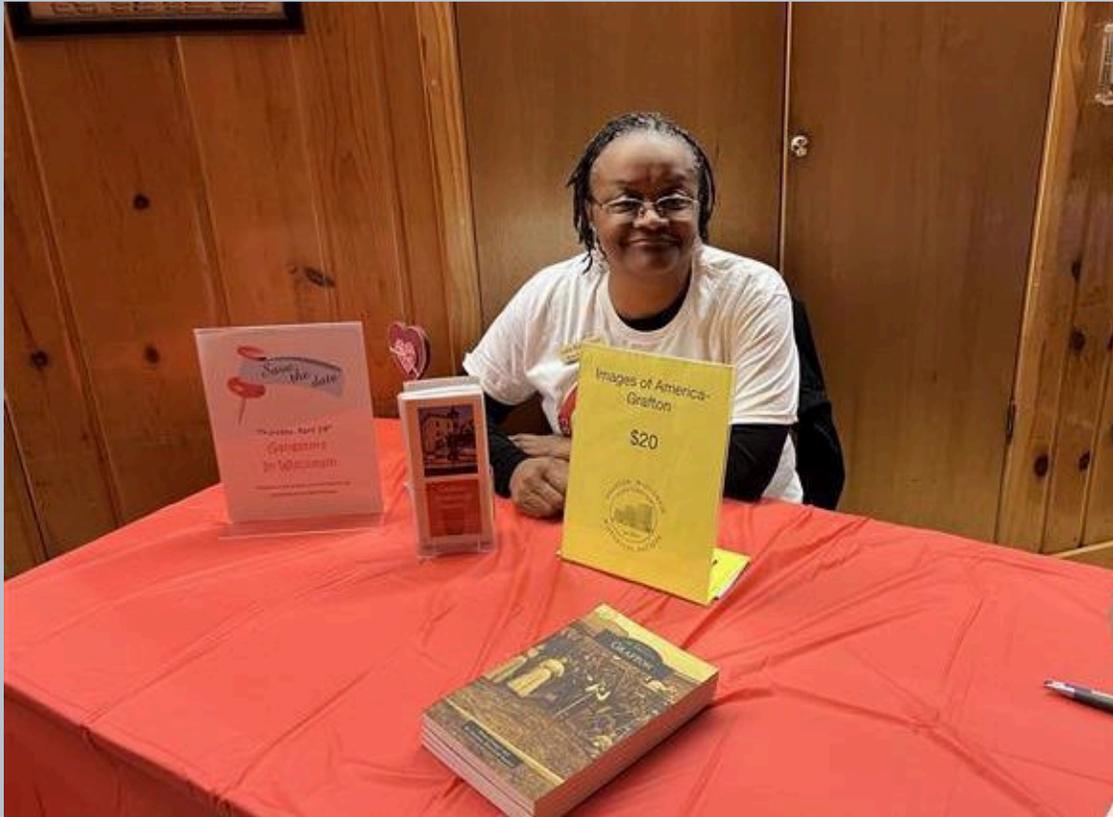
Derek Peterson

Mary Schreiner

Don and Maureen Somogyi

Emilio Torre

Thanks to all of you, our membership continues to grow!



Time to Renew Your Membership

Our membership director, Phyllis Wiggins, is happy to receive your membership renewals! Renewal notices went out on March 17th. Please remember to renew, and consider joining the growing number of members who have taken out a Lifetime membership. Thanks for your support!



**ANNUAL
MEETING**

Thursday, May 8th

4 p.m.

Grafton Public Library

Upper Level Meeting Room

You're invited to attend!



**Abraham Lincoln Presentation
Draws Large Crowd**

It was a record-breaking turnout on February 6 for the GHS presentation by Dr. James Cornelius on "New Facts About Abraham Lincoln." Nearly 150 people listened to fascinating stories about the life and times of Lincoln. Cornelius provided accounts of Lincoln as a young lawyer and lawmaker. He told the tragic story of what happened to Major Henry Rathbone, who was in the box with the Lincolns at the Ford Theater on the night of the assassination, dispelled some myths about Lincoln's health and his marriage to Mary Todd Lincoln, and closed his presentation by sharing with the audience the last known joke ever told by Abraham Lincoln.

The GHS is looking forward to more presentations by Dr. Cornelius.

EASTER EGG HUNT

Saturday April 19, 2025

Opens at 11:30 AM

Hunt Starts High Noon!

Ozaukee County Pioneer Village

4880 County Hwy I

Saukville, WI

Handicap Accessible!



Presented by: VFW Post 1393 Auxiliary West Bend, Waubeka 4-H, and Ozaukee County Historical Society

**2 Age Groups, Prizes, Visit the Easter Bunny.
Fun for the Whole Family. Chili, snacks, and
Refreshments available for sale.**



HISTORICAL FIRST IMPRESSIONS PRESENTS



ABIGAIL ADAMS

FORMER
FIRST
LADY

WEDNESDAY JUNE 4, 2025
LOWER LEVEL MEETING ROOM
6 - 7:30 PM

This captivating one woman performance highlights the life and experiences of former First Lady, Abigail Adams. Referring to the many letters written between the Adams, Mrs. Adams brings to life the early days of Washington, D.C. as seen from the windows of an unfinished White House.

 **GRAFTON**
USS LIBERTY MEMORIAL
PUBLIC LIBRARY



Pioneer Village Clean-up Day

Thursday, April 24 and Friday, April 25

9 a.m. - Noon

For more information, contact the
Ozaukee County Historical Society at 262-377-4545.



The Port Washington Historical Society

Speaker Series presents:

The History of Wisconsin's Indigenous: Past Present & Future

Dr. Carol Cornelius

Port Washington State Bank Community Room

Tuesday, May 20th at 7 p.m.

and

*Paramount Records of Port Washington and Grafton and the
Foundational African American Blues It Distributed*

Peter Roller, with musical accompaniment

Inventors Brewpub, Edison Hall

Tuesday, June 17th at 7 p.m.

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 steam iron... you were right. The first electric steam iron was introduced in 1926 in New York but was not a commercial success until the next decade. Legend says that the first irons were used in China more than 1,000 years ago. Flat irons, heated on stoves, were brought to the U.S. in the late 1800's and early 1900's.



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