



# 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.

November, 2025

## Message from the President

With this message I am pleased to announce that we have been working with the Grafton Arts Mill Coffee Roastery (AM Coffee) to display the Historical Society's prized painting of the Grafton Chair Factory. As many of you may already know, this painting was acquired and fully restored to near original condition in late 2024. We are currently working on display details, including a placard to accompany the painting and provide a bit of its history and historical significance. We hope to share this part of Grafton history with the public very soon and will let you know when and for how long the painting will be on display at the AM Coffee location.

Another bit of great news from the Historical Society is that the Native American Spirit Rock has now been successfully relocated from the Ahler's family property in Grafton to a new and very appropriate resting spot in Lime Kiln Park. Look for more coverage about the Spirit Rock in this newsletter issue. As president I would like to express the GHS board of directors' sincere thanks to the

## GHS OFFICERS

Tom Krueger  
*President*

Dave Antoine  
*Vice President*

Debbie Krueger  
*Secretary*

John Krueger  
*Treasurer*

Nick Schanen  
*Director*

Jim Wegner  
*Director*

Steve Greger  
*Director*

Darrel Blank  
*Director*

Phyllis Wiggins  
*Director*

Emily Engstrom  
*Director*

village of Grafton and its public works crew that did such an incredible job, and also to Richard Gonzalez who was masterful in performing the relocation ceremony with the kind of reverence to ancestors as dictated by Native American cultures.

Lastly, I am always grateful for all the work and efforts by our board members in doing the work of the Society, and keeping it active and viable in the community. All of us do, however, realize there is much more we could be doing with a few more resources and more volunteer help.

By way of background the Grafton Historical Society initiatives begin at the committee level, with our committees listed below:

- **Membership Committee**
- **IT/Website Committee**
- **PR/Promotions/Communications Committee**
- **Newsletter Committee**
- **Archiving Committee**
- **Program Meetings Committee**
- **Other Events & Fundraising Committee**
- **The Paramount Blues History Committee**

Although any of these committees would welcome new members, the committees most in need of help include the **IT/Website Committee**, the **Events and Fundraising Committee** and, the **Paramount Blues History Committee**. If interested, just curious, or you know of someone who might be a good fit with a committee or two, please contact me or any GHS board member. We do have job descriptions,

however, no experience is needed, just an interest in local history or history in general.

Working to "Discover, Preserve and Share" Grafton history.

Tom Krueger  
GHS President



## Grafton's Spirit Rock Finds New Home

A group of nearly 100 people gathered on Wednesday, October 29 to be present at the “Smudging Ceremony” that preceded the move of the Spirit Rock from the Ahler’s family farmstead in Grafton to Lime Kiln Park.

Following the solemn ceremony, conducted by Mr. Rick Gonzalez, four members of Grafton’s Department of Public Works used heavy lifting equipment to carefully load the rock onto a flatbed truck and drive it to its new location near the river in Lime Kiln Park. There, Gonzalez performed a second ceremony, to welcome the rock to its new and permanent home.

Alerted to the existence of the rock by GHS member Nick Schanen, Gonzalez, a longtime Grafton resident and elder of the Iroquois/Oneida Nation, contacted Johnathan Buffalo in Iowa, who is the Meskwaki Nation Historic Preservation Director of the Sac and Fox Indians of the Mississippi

in Iowa. Chief Buffalo confirmed that the rock was definitely one that travelled to the area from Canada with the glacier and it would have been highly revered by tribes living in the area in earlier days. The Spirit Rock would have had spiritual significance as a place where food and tobacco would be placed and burned to purify and honor ancestors.

The GHS plans to install a plaque explaining the significance of the Spirit Rock.

Of further note and relative to Native Americans in the Grafton area, Gonzalez told historical society members that the property at Green Bay and Falls Road contains an Indian burial mound. It was surveyed and mapped by renowned surveyor Increase Lapham, who performed surveys of Indian mounds throughout the state.

# Origins of Grafton's Spirit Rock



Have you heard about the Spirit Rock in Grafton that officials have determined must be moved? Oneida Nation Elder Richard J. Gonzalez, a local resident, will discuss the stone's origins and cultural significance, as well as the spiritual ramifications of the Stone continuing its journey.

The evening also will touch on the history of the Iroquois-Oneida constitution as viewed by colonial figures.

**LOWER LEVEL  
MEETING ROOM  
NOV. 6 @ 6 PM**



**GRAFTON**  
USS LIBERTY MEMORIAL  
PUBLIC LIBRARY



# Meade Lux Lewis

Meade Lux Lewis, born Anderson Meade Lewis on September 4, 1905, in Chicago, Illinois, was a pioneering American pianist and composer best known for his exuberant boogie-woogie style. His music helped define a genre and inspired generations of musicians across jazz, blues, and early rock and roll.

## Early Life and Musical Roots

Lewis began his musical journey with violin lessons arranged by his father, a guitarist who recorded two tracks of his own. After his father's death, Lewis switched to piano at age 16, influenced by Chicago blues legend Jimmy Yancey. His nickname "Lux" came from childhood friends who jokingly called him the "Duke of Luxembourg" after a comic strip routine he often mimicked.

## Rise to Fame

Lewis recorded his signature piece, *Honky Tonk Train Blues*, in 1927. Though initially overlooked, it gained traction in 1935 thanks to producer John Hammond, who discovered Lewis working at a car wash. The track became a cornerstone of boogie-woogie piano, known for its driving rhythm and train-like momentum.

## Carnegie Hall and the Boogie-Woogie Renaissance

In 1938, Lewis performed at Hammond's *From Spirituals to Swing* concert at Carnegie Hall, alongside fellow pianists Albert Ammons and Pete Johnson. The trio's electrifying performance sparked a boogie-woogie craze, leading to club residencies, national tours, and the founding of Blue Note Records<sup>3</sup>.

## Hollywood and Later Years

Lewis appeared in several films, including *New Orleans* (1947), *Nightmare* (1956), and an uncredited role in *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946), playing piano in Nick's Bar. Though boogie-woogie waned in popularity, Lewis continued performing in clubs and lounges, especially in Los Angeles and Minneapolis.

## Tragic End and Legacy

On June 7, 1964, Lewis died in a car accident in Minneapolis after a performance at the White House Restaurant in Golden Valley. His hypnotic right-hand riffs and thunderous left-hand rhythms left an indelible mark on American music, influencing rhythm and blues and the birth of rock and roll<sup>3</sup>.

Meade Lux Lewis wasn't just a pianist—he was a force of nature at the keyboard, turning every performance into a rollicking ride. His legacy lives on in the syncopated swing of every boogie-woogie beat.



## The Old Family Car

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

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

From my earliest years, I can remember my family visiting with relatives on Sundays. To do this on my mother's side of the family required my dad to drive our family car, a late 1930's Lafayette, a rather clunky-looking tan sedan with running boards.

We also used that car to attend weddings of family members in Milwaukee, Grafton and Sheboygan. Weddings in those days were large affairs that were held on Saturdays, accompanied by wedding dances that were held on Saturday evenings. The dances were invariably held in old, wooden dance halls scattered throughout the region. At each wedding celebration, there was the ever present polka band. Most dance halls had two bars: one served free beer to those 18 years of age and older. A second bar, a cash bar, sold whiskey and mixed drinks to those 21 and older who were willing to pay for it. I got free soda pop and a night of running around the dance floor, sliding through the sawdust and making a mess of my clothes.

We rode home from those weddings in the old LaFayette until its successor arrived on

the scene -- a 1947 blue Chrysler. With both cars, it was characteristic of my dad to never completely fill his tank with gas, unless he planned a major trip to northern Wisconsin for either a summer vacation or a late fall deer hunt. With gas at 20-30 cents a gallon, he would usually stop at a "filling" station and order two dollars worth of gas at a time. The problem he had with both cars was that he couldn't trust the fuel gauge, with the result that we often ran out of gas late at night after wedding dances or visiting relatives. That meant my brother and I would hike in the dark with my father to a local farmhouse to try and buy a gallon of gas. We irritated many a farmer who had to get out of bed in the wee hours of the morning to get us some gasoline, especially in the winter. I believe the main reason we had to accompany my dad was that fact that he was notoriously afraid of dogs, especially farmers' dogs! He always said his fear of dogs stemmed from the time in his youth, when, as a paperboy, he was chased and bitten by a dog.



**Now entering Grafton...but which  
one?**

Did you know that our village of Grafton is one of nine “Graftons” located around the world? It’s an interesting story about how the first Grafton began and then how the name travelled to the other side of the world.

#### **Grafton, Massachusetts**

Massachusetts has the honor of being the home to the first Grafton in the United States. It was founded in 1735 and named after Charles Fitzroy, 2<sup>nd</sup> Duke of Grafton, illegitimate son of England’s Charles II. (Shown above.) It was originally the home of the Nipmiec tribe of indigenous peoples. It has a claim to fame as Ethan Allen ran a gun factory there in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, and this Grafton played an important role in the American industrial revolution that began in 1793. It is also home to the Tufts University Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine. Today it has a population of almost 20,000.

#### **Grafton, New Hampshire**

Just a few years later, in 1761, New Hampshire’s Grafton was founded. This Grafton was named for Augustus Fitzroy, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Duke of Grafton. It began as a town of subsistence farming, small-scale industry and mica mines and granite quarries. It has the unfortunate distinction of ranking #100 in property taxes in the U.S. It also has a big problem with overbearing black bears that often enter homes and wreak havoc with people and pets. It is one of the smaller “Graftons” with a current population of only 1500.

#### **Grafton, West Virginia**

Head south for the next Grafton location – West Virginia. Legend has it that in 1782 a man named James

of the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers. It was named after Mason’s birthplace of Grafton, Massachusetts. It was a thriving town of 10,000 in the 1850’s due to the quarry industry. But the population continued to decline and in 1993 a major flood caused one-third of the residents to leave.

#### **Grafton, New South Wales**

It’s a long trip to the next Grafton, founded in 1851 in New South Wales. The area was first explored in 1831 by escaped convict Richard Craig. He was looking for what was called “Cedar Gold.” He found an area where Cedar trees were abundant, was given a pardon, and set about bringing hundreds of “Cedar Getters” to the area. Governor Fitzroy had the honor of naming the new town and he named it after his grandfather, prime minister of the United Kingdom from 1768 to 1770. Today Aboriginal and Torres Strait people still make up 10 per cent of the population.

#### **Grafton, New Zealand**

Founded in 1868, this Grafton is characterized by a town of historic buildings, many unchanged from the early 1900’s. It is today described as a “highly cohesive” community with a population that includes European, Maori, Pasifica, and Asian peoples. And it’s one more Grafton named after the Duke of Grafton. The current population is 3100.

#### **Grafton, Ohio**

Welcome back to the U.S. and Ohio’s Grafton. This Grafton was founded by brothers Jonathan and Grindall Rawson who came from Massachusetts to Ohio

Current, a veteran of the Revolutionary War, traded a gray horse for 1300 acres of land, and that became the present day Grafton. In the 1800's the town became a booming railroad center and it may have been named after John Grafton, an engineer on the Baltimore and Ohio railroad. In 1861 it was the site of a Civil War skirmish. The current population is 4,575.

#### **Grafton, Illinois**

Head west to find the smallest Grafton in the world – Grafton, Illinois, with a population of 772. It was founded in 1832 by James Mason at the confluence

in search of land to build a grist mill and sawmill. This Grafton has the dubious distinction of being home or neighbor to several prisons. The population is now almost 6,000.

#### **Grafton, North Dakota**

The last Grafton to be founded in the U.S. is in North Dakota. It began in an area first homesteaded by Nils Monson, a 29 year old bachelor who walked from Winnipeg, Canada to homestead in North Dakota in 1878. It was named after Grafton, New Hampshire. Today's population is just over 4,000.



## THE CHRISTMAS TREE SHIP

The Rouse Simmons was the original "Christmas Tree Ship" that sailed from Wisconsin to Chicago at the beginning of the holiday season for more than 30 years in the early 1900's. The ship was a three-masted schooner, easily recognized by waiting crowds when they saw a Christmas tree tied to her main mast and her deck loaded with thousands of Christmas trees. Come to the GHS presentation and hear her moving and tragic story...



Rochelle Pennington is an award-winning columnist and bestselling author of ten books. She is both a lively storyteller and an entertaining lecturer. She expertly weaves the perfect balance of humor, charm, and riveting facts into her captivating performances, with a focus on "the best of humanity."



bank **five  
nine** Sponsoring Partner

**Thursday,  
December 4th**

**6:00 p.m.**

**Rose Harms  
Legion Post  
1540 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue**

**Free and open to  
the public.  
Donations  
accepted.**

**Refreshments  
and Cash Bar**

**GRAFTON HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY**

**P.O. BOX 481**

**Grafton, WI 53024**

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**Email:**

**[info@graftonareahistory.org](mailto:info@graftonareahistory.org)**



## Back by Popular Demand...

An enthusiastic crowd greeted speaker Chad Lewis after his September 4th presentation on the **History of the Paranormal in Wisconsin**. His fascinating talk ranged from alien abductions to haunted places, mysterious creature to crop circles. After the presentation, members of the audience shared their own experiences with the "unknown."



# Dine to Donate

*Fundraiser to support the preservation and restoration of the historic  
1912 Saukville Firehouse at Ozaukee County Pioneer Village*

**Saturday**

**November 8, 2025**

**8:00AM-4:00PM**

**Toast Cedarburg**

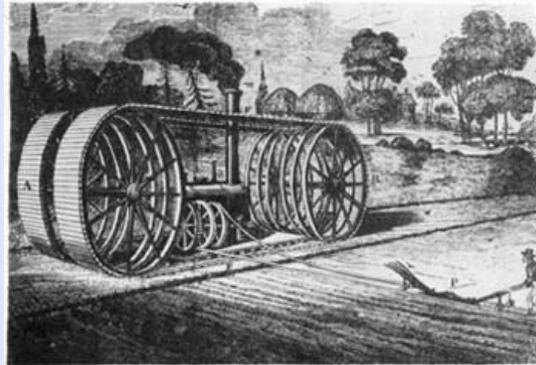
**1302 Washington Ave., Cedarburg, WI**



*20% of sales for orders on line, in person, carry out, dine-in, or gift cards during this event will help support our efforts to restore and preserve the historic 1912 Saukville Firehouse. Have a delicious meal while supporting a great project!*

## 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](mailto: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 Submarine**

The history of the submarine goes back to antiquity. Humanity has employed a variety of methods to travel underwater for exploration, recreation, research and significantly, warfare. While early attempts, such as those by Alexander the Great, were rudimentary, the advent of new propulsion systems, fuels, and sonar, propelled an increase in submarine technology. The introduction of the diesel engine, then the nuclear submarine, saw great expansion in submarine use — and specifically military use — during World War I, World War II, and the Cold War.



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