

From: Grafton Historical Society info@graftonareahistory.org 
Subject: The Edmund Fitzgerald, Amish in Wisconsin and St. Paul's Parish
Date: September 8, 2026 at 1:34 PM
To: tjkrueger1@me.com

DK



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
Archivist

Jim Wegner
Director

Steve Greger
Director

September, 2026

Message from the President

As I write, summer in Grafton has really warmed up, with higher than average temperatures that have accompanied kids heading back to school. This time of year also represents Meteorological Fall and the general start of football season. For me, the warm weather is still welcomed and it beats the "ice & cold" we all know is coming.

Weather reporting aside, I do have some historical society news and updates. Last May I reported on the Historical Society's plans for installation of a plaque at the Spirit Rock location in Lime Kiln Park. We now have approval from the Village and are in the process of completing plaque production and the logistics of installation and securing of funds for this project. At this point both Culver's Restaurant and Tommy's Car Wash have stepped forward to sponsor the plaque and we thank them both for taking such an interest in the former Ahlers' property and its early history, that really dates back to when the area was occupied by Native Americans. A special ceremony is now being planned for October 29th to commemorate this history and placement of the Spirit Rock plaque. Stay tuned for further details on this event.

In the last newsletter issue, I also reported on a future blues music program we are hoping to present later this year. The program would be a combination of blues music, its history and a soul food serving of chicken and waffles to put attendees in the mood for this blues music event. The program would be brought to us by blues artist David Watkins DJ, and now has been tentatively scheduled for February 11, 2027. This will be both a program and a fundraiser for the Grafton Historical Society so please mark the date on your calendar and stay tuned for further details and program information later this year.

In closing, the Grafton Historical Society is always looking for better

*Phyllis Wiggins
Director*

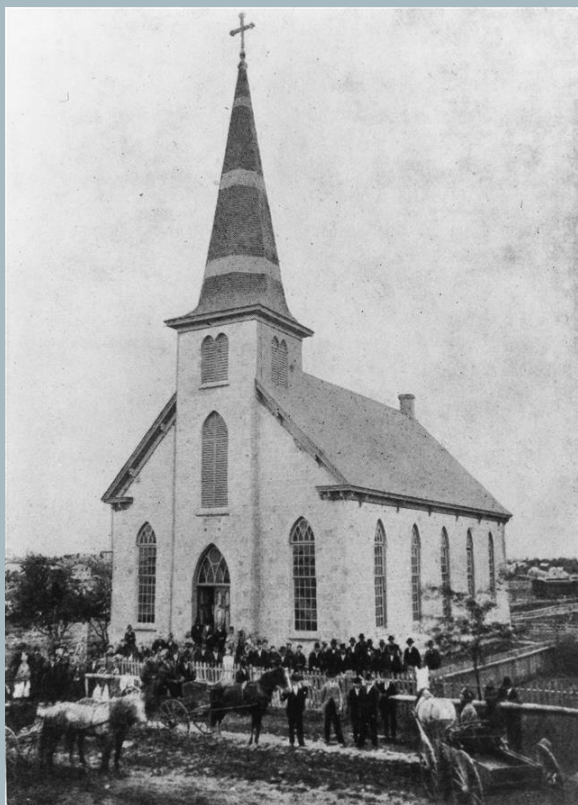
*Emily Engstrom
Director*

*Jim Miller
Director*

ways to engage with our members and followers. We generally hold monthly board meetings which are always open to both members and the public. The meetings' date, time and location are regularly posted on our website (www.graftonareahistory.org). We are most interested in what people are thinking - be it Grafton history questions, specific historical interests or new directions or suggestions for the board to consider. In pursuit of this goal, the Historical Society, starting in 2027, will begin holding quarterly membership meetings with a limited agenda that will include a select topic of interest and a miscellaneous topic where attendees will be free to "ask us anything" or share any stories of local or family history with the group. We will keep you informed on this new initiative and look forward to hearing more from all of our members and the public on how we can all work together to:

"Discover, Preserve & Share" Grafton history

Tom Krueger
GHS President



Left: St. Paul's limestone church building was completed in 1871 and used until it was replaced by a brick building in 1908. All services at St. Paul's were conducted in German until 1929.

Right: The original St. Paul's school was completed in 1908 at a cost of \$5,000. It consisted of two classrooms on the main floor and a fellowship hall and furnace room in the basement.

Pictures courtesy of St. Paul Church.

St. Paul's Church Celebrates 175 Years of History

Beginnings

When nine German Lutheran settlers gathered in a Grafton home on July 28, 1851, they could hardly have imagined what their small congregation—or the community around it—would look like 175 years later.

Grafton was then a small settlement of approximately 400 to 500 people along the Milwaukee River and Green Bay Road. Ozaukee County did not yet exist. Grafton was part of Washington County and, for a time, served as its county seat. German and Irish immigrants made up much of the young community.

It was in this setting that nine men gathered at the home of Karl Zeige and signed a constitution establishing St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession of Grafton, Washington County, Wisconsin. The original signers were Karl Zeige, J. A. Schletz, J. H. Bleier, Christian Bothe, Christian Pracht, Diedrich Kohlwey, Friedrich Kohlwey, Lorenz Birner, and Gottlieb Beer.

A Church and School Grow Together

Education was important to St. Paul almost from the beginning. Like many German Lutheran congregations established in Wisconsin during the nineteenth century, the founders believed that church and school belonged closely together. Children were taught academic subjects as well as Scripture, hymns, and Luther's Small Catechism.

In 1857, just six years after the congregation was organized, a building was constructed that served as both church and school. As the congregation grew, so did the need for permanent facilities. A limestone church was completed in 1871. For the next century, it would be one of the recognizable landmarks associated with St. Paul. Today, Providence Place Senior Living is located on this site, just west of the railroad tracks.

The congregation purchased land for a cemetery in 1875, with burials beginning in 1876. The cemetery, located off Highway 60, remains an important historical record in its own right, preserving the names of

The congregation and school also experienced the events shaping the nation. During World War I, 23 men from St. Paul were drafted into military service. All but one returned home. Friedrich Rose died from disease while serving in France.

St. Paul continued through the Great Depression and World War II. Much of this period also coincided with one of the longest pastorates in the congregation's history. Rev. John D. Schroeder was installed in 1903 and served for 45 years, retiring in 1948.

Grafton—and St. Paul—Grow

The years following World War II brought significant growth to Grafton, and St. Paul grew with the community.

By 1950, school enrollment had increased enough that a temporary classroom was established in the basement of the limestone church. A major addition to the school followed, providing classrooms, a library, and fellowship space. It was dedicated on July 22, 1951, as the congregation celebrated its 100th anniversary.

Growth continued during the 1950s and 1960s. Eventually, the 1871 limestone church could no longer adequately serve the congregation.

Construction of a new church began in 1966. The building was dedicated on December 10, 1967, providing seating for more than 700 people on the main floor, with additional seating in the balcony. An administrative wing connected the new church with the school.

The 1871 church remained standing for several more years before being razed in 1971.

St. Paul marked its 125th anniversary in 1976 and its 150th anniversary in 2001. Through the decades, facilities expanded, educational programs developed, and generations of pastors, teachers, students, and families became part of its history.

its own right, preserving the names of generations of families connected with St. Paul and the greater Grafton community.

From German to English

For decades, German was the language of worship and religious instruction at St. Paul. The language reflected both the congregation's heritage and the larger German-American population of southeastern Wisconsin. Even when St. Paul celebrated its 75th anniversary in 1926, its special anniversary worship services were conducted in German. By then, however, Grafton and St. Paul were changing. Younger generations increasingly spoke English in their daily lives and began requesting English worship services. In April, 1929, the congregation approved the introduction of one English-language worship service each month.

Education Through the Generations

St. Paul School continued to grow along with the congregation. A parsonage and teacher residence were constructed in 1901, followed by a new brick school building in 1908.

Increasing enrollment and an expanding curriculum required additional teachers. In 1912, Emma Nierode became the first woman to teach at St. Paul. She was succeeded by Caroline Ahlers, who served for 26 years before retiring in 1941. Other longtime educators, including Gustav Grothmann, Christian Merkschlager, and Paul Meyer, became familiar names to generations of St. Paul families.

Pastors and teachers served faithfully, with names such as Suelflow, Prah, Piepenbrink, Berndt, and Groppe becoming familiar to generations of St. Paul families.

The past 25 years have brought continued growth and change, including the construction of a new gymnasium, remodeling of the current church, and a major school expansion dedicated in 2025. The Christian Day School continues to serve the community under longtime Principal Michael Yurk, offering classes from 2K through eighth grade.

Celebrating 175 Years

Much has changed since nine men gathered in Karl Zeige's home in 1851. Grafton grew from a small settlement along the Milwaukee River into the community we know today. German gradually gave way to English. Buildings were constructed, enlarged, replaced, and remembered. Generations came and went.

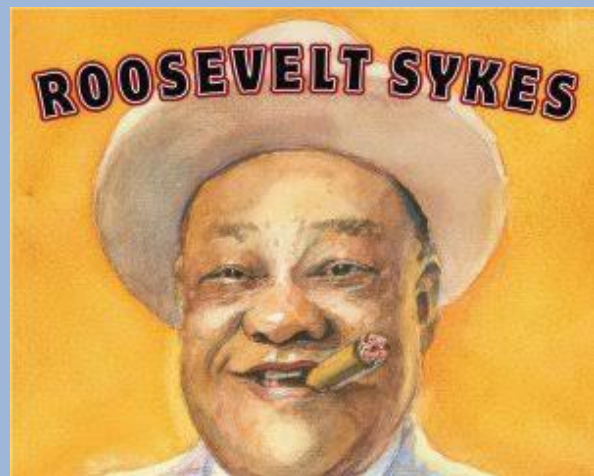
Yet 175 years later, people are still gathering at St. Paul to worship. The anniversary year provided a special opportunity to preserve photographs, tell stories, remember those who came before, and pass that history to another generation.

In doing so, St. Paul is preserving not only the history of a church and school, but also a small part of the history of Grafton itself.

By Jean Steinke, St. Paul Lutheran Church



Roosevelt Sykes



Roosevelt "The Honeydripper" Sykes born on January 31, was one of the most influential blues pianists and singers in American music. Widely regarded as the father of the modern blues piano style, Sykes helped shape urban blues through a career that spanned more than six decades. His energetic piano playing, booming voice, and witty, often humorous lyrics inspired generations of blues, rhythm-and-blues, and rock-and-roll musicians.

Early Life

Sykes was born near Helena, Arkansas, though some early sources list the nearby sawmill community of Elmar as his birthplace. When he was a young child, his family moved to St. Louis, Missouri, where he developed his musical abilities. He learned to play the church organ while visiting relatives near West Helena and soon taught himself piano. By his mid-teens, Sykes was traveling throughout the Mississippi Delta, performing in barrelhouses, gambling halls, and lumber camps, where he absorbed the rich traditions of Southern blues.

Recording Career

In 1929, Sykes made his first recordings for Okeh Records. His debut release, "44 Blues," became one of the earliest blues standards and remained his signature song throughout his career. During the 1930s he recorded prolifically for labels including Victor, Decca, Bluebird, and others, sometimes using pseudonyms such as Willie Kelly, Dobby Bragg, and Easy Papa Johnson because of exclusive recording contracts.



Unlike many blues artists whose careers faded during World War II, Sykes remained in demand and continued recording even during the wartime shellac shortage. His popularity earned him the nickname "The Honeydripper," which later became the name of his touring band.

Later Years

After spending many productive years in Chicago, Sykes relocated to New Orleans in the 1950's. He became a fixture at local clubs while continuing to tour nationally and internationally. During the blues revival of the 1960's and 1970's. European audiences embraced him and he appeared at major folk and blues festivals throughout Europe and North America. Even into his seventies, Sykes remained an engaging performer whose piano playing retained its power and vitality.

Legacy

Roosevelt Sykes left behind hundreds of recordings that document the evolution of the blues from the acoustic era through electric urban blues. He was inducted into the Blues Hall of Fame in recognition of his enormous contributions to American music.



The GHS Welcomes New Board Member Jim Miller

Jim is a long time resident of the Village of Grafton, his family having moved here in 1955. Jim graduated from Grafton High School and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

He is a second generation village trustee and a long time member of the Park and Recreation



Board. He is also a board member of the Aging, Disability and Resource Center of Ozaukee County.

The GHS is happy to have Jim as a member of our board.



THE SINKING OF THE EDMUND FITZGERALD

The Grafton Historical Society invites you to take an intriguing look at the last voyage and sinking of the Edmund Fitzgerald. The SS Edmund Fitzgerald was an American Great Lakes freighter that sank in Lake Superior during a storm on November 10, 1975, with the loss of the entire crew of 29 men. She remains the largest ship to ever have sunk on the Great Lakes. Join us as Rochelle Pennington takes us through the history and last hours of that doomed ship.



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."



Sponsoring
Partner:



**Thursday,
September 10**

6:00 p.m.

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

**Free and open to
the public.
Suggested \$5
donation.**

**Refreshments
and Cash Bar**

**GRAFTON HISTORICAL
SOCIETY**

P.O. BOX 481

Grafton, WI 53024

Website:

www.graftonareahistory.org

Email:

info@graftonareahistory.org

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**THE GRAFTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY
PRESENTS:**

THE AMISH IN WISCONSIN

Wisconsin has the 4th largest Amish population in the U.S. with more than 68 Amish settlements throughout the state. Join us for an informative presentation on the lifestyle of the Amish and the ways in which they come face-to-face with society outside their communities.



Mark Loudon is Professor of Germanic Linguistics at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. A Mennonite and fluent speaker of Pennsylvania Dutch, the first language of most Amish and Plain people, Mark serves as an interpreter and cultural liaison for Plain people in healthcare and the legal system.



**Sponsoring
Partners:**



October 15th

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

**Free and open to the
public. Suggested \$5
donation**

**Refreshments and
Cash Bar**

**GRAFTON HISTORICAL
SOCIETY**

P.O. Box 481
Grafton, WI 53024

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www.graftonareahistory.org
Email:
info@graftonareahistory.org

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Announcing...

**Culver's "Give Back" for the
Grafton Historical Society.**

The Grafton Culver's restaurant has announced that the GHS will be the beneficiary of Culver's **Give Back** program for the entire week of the new restaurant's

GRAND OPENING

October 5th through October 11th

When you dine at Culver's that week from 5-8 p.m., a percentage of your bill will be donated to the GHS. We will also receive a portion of gift card proceeds, purchased anytime during that week.

Hope to see you there!





Did you know? ...the village of Grafton has its own flag? Exactly 50 years ago, in 1976, Grafton adopted its first official flag.

It all began with a contest sponsored by the Grafton Public Library. Many people submitted designs and the winner was Ruth Holly, a long time and active member of the Grafton community.

The main design of the flag is a fleur-de-lis, which represents royalty. The three petals represent the three names that Grafton has had – Hamburg, Manchester and Grafton. The flower is a white lily which was the name of the flour produced at the Grafton flour mill which drew its power from the dam on the Milwaukee River. The blue background of the flag signifies the river.

Within the petals of the fleur-de-lis are several symbols of Grafton. The Native Americans depicted represent the Pottawatomi and Menomonee tribes that had settled along the shores of the river. The octagon barn represents Grafton, surrounded by a farming community, and uses the octagon because it is a distinctive barn design found primarily in Ozaukee county. The wheat and corn represent other agricultural products from the area.

The year 1835 is on the flag because it is the year that the first deed to the land in Grafton was acknowledged. 1976 represents the year the flag was presented to the village.



You're invited to visit our archives!

Every day the GHS receives more items for our society's archives. Our collection is growing and the public is invited to view the historic artifacts and documents. The GHS archives are housed in the Timothy Wooden building at 11th and Broad Street, adjacent to the Grafton Public Library. Visits are by appointment only. If you'd like to see the GHS archives and learn about more about Grafton history, please contact Nick Schanen, GHS archivist, at 262-327-8057.

Ozaukee County Historical Society presents

Autumn at the Village

October 3rd 9AM - 4:00PM

At Ozaukee County Pioneer Village-Saukville



Enjoy a day in the country and taste your favorite fall foods. Fun for the whole family!

Horse-drawn Hay Rides, Tractors & Small Engines, "My First Tractor Ride", Historic Demonstrations, Rural Farm History Exhibits, Baking in the Summer Kitchen, Music all around the village, Rope Making, Kids Crafts and more.

Admission: \$8 Adults. \$6 Students/Seniors. under 5 & OCHS Members are Free!

Thank you to our Sponsors:



Ken Albinger, Lila Bast, Peter & Louise Feider,
Laura Feider and Chris and Mary Ann Velnetske

See website for schedule: <https://www.ochs.co.ozaukee.wi.us/>



Images from Grafton's Past

Trip to the Creamery. In this 1906 image, Louis Sudbrink Jr. brings milk to the creamery in Grafton. The horse is wearing a leather fly cape, made from small stripes of leather that have been cut and braided into a net. Its swinging movements kept flies from settling on and biting the horse. While decorative, they also served an important purpose for farmers because a fly

bite could cause the horse to bolt. *Courtesy of the Sudbrink Family.*

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?

This **Mystery Item** from the last issue of our Newsletter was ...

...an early television.

The story of the invention of television is a complicated one. It is the result of not one inventor but many technological minds in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Constantin Perskyi coined the word *television* in 1900. Milwaukee's first television station was WTMJ, which began broadcasting on December 3, 1947. Early television sets were sparse. They were usually found in local taverns rather than homes, but by 1955 nearly 75% of all Wisconsin homes had a TV.



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