

MISSION STATEMENT

Preserving the past for future generations by collecting a unique and enduring collection of Polk County history shared with the public through programs, exhibits and research.

MUSEUM HOURS

Thursday - Monday
Noon to 4pm
Open Memorial Day
Weekend
through Labor Day

ADMISSION

No fee for admission.
Donations appreciated.

102 Main Street
PO Box 41
Balsam Lake, WI
54810

715-485-9269

Email:

Info@polkcountymuseum.org

HANDICAP ACCESSIBLE
ELEVATOR FOR ALL
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AIR CONDITIONED

Check out our
website!



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2020 - A Season of Historic Events & Opportunities

Last year was filled with unprecedented historical events: massive losses inflicted by a global pandemic (COVID-19), widespread protests over racial injustice, bitter political divisions amidst the Presidential election, and wildfires that burned more than 8.2 million acres in the American West. These are just a few of the stories of 2020, but they have all touched our lives in some way.

How will historians look back at this time and what records will be left for future generations? This is one of the roles of local historical societies. Here, at the Polk County Historical Society our goals and objectives will continue to be to:

- ✓ Provide Polk County residents and visitors the opportunity to immerse themselves in the culture and history of the Polk County Area.
- ✓ Present programs and develop exhibits which will both educate and spark curiosity.
- ✓ Preserve and procure historic artifacts and archival documents pertinent to the Polk County people.
- ✓ Preserving the past for the future, educating the community and chronicling for generations to come.

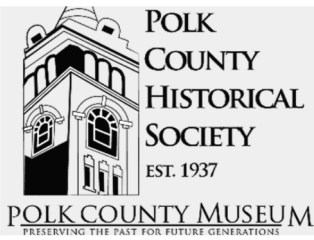
Last year we were forced to put our museum activities and events on hold, as well as close our 2020 Museum Season. But while we were not open to the public, the year created a wonderful opportunity to preserve and procure historical artifacts. We created new exhibits for museum visitors, increased our PCHS membership, improved our virtual presence on our website and social media, and secured additional funding during a difficult year. Finally, we were able to hire a full-time Museum Director, Leslie Waggoner. With her leadership, we look forward to the 2021 Museum Season!

Finally, I want to thank our members and donors, who despite a difficult year, have not forgotten the importance of history. With deepest gratitude, we thank you!

Greta Palmberg, President
Polk County Historical Society

***"The more you know about the
past, the better prepared you are
for the future."***

Theodore Roosevelt



MUSEUM DIRECTOR

Leslie Waggoner

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Bob Swanson

Sharon Kelly

Board Meetings are held the 1st Thursday of the month.

Welcome to our new Museum Director: **Leslie Waggoner**

Get to know our new Director

Leslie Waggoner is overjoyed to be named the Executive Director of the Polk County Museum. She has a rich passion for history dating back to her high school years. Leslie has a Bachelor of Science Degree from St. Cloud State University. Her studies focused on history and education. She also brings extensive experience in accounting, management, and leadership to this new position.

For the past 15 years, Leslie has been employed by the Ledger Publication. She started there as the newspaper layout person and eventually took over the business from her father and became the Publisher of the County Ledger Press and Laker. Prior to Leslie returning to her hometown of Balsam Lake, she worked at a fly in fishing lodge in Manitoba, Canada. Leslie also spent time at a Timeshare Closing company in Bozeman, Montana.

Leslie grew up on Little Balsam in Balsam Lake and enjoys boating and fishing. She is an avid outdoors woman and loves animals. Leslie will have been married to her husband, Brady, for 10 year this September and they have two beautiful children, Mary (7) and William (4).

Leslie looks forward to being part of the Polk County Museum family and working with the community to further education and bring history to life.



Help us tell Polk County's COVID-19 Story

The Polk County Historical Society is collecting documentation on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Polk County.

How can you help?

We are looking for artifacts, documents, journals, pictures, and everyday stories of the citizens of Polk County.

Email or Send Your Submission to:
info@polkcountymuseum.org or
PO Box 41, Balsam Lake, WI 54810

All contributions will be held in our archives with all rights given to the PCHS to use the materials for future exhibitions, displays, publications, or other future products. The Society reserves the right to decline any submission inappropriate to the project.



2020 – A Museum Year in Review



New Military Exhibits

We are excited to show off our new Military Room remodel that was completed in 2020 with the help of Board Member, Bob Swanson. Along with this remodel, new WWII exhibits were created in our main hallway to commemorate the 75th Anniversary of the end of the war.



Grant Announcement

In 2020, the PCHS was thrilled to receive a **\$10,000** grant from the Hardenbergh Foundation for museum operations. The Hardenbergh family has a rich history in the St. Croix Valley. David Bronson created his wealth in the St. Croix white pine logging boom in the mid- to late 1800s. With partners, he created the East Side Lumber Company then acquired a fleet of steam-powered paddle wheelers which pushed log rafts down the Mississippi to market. Learn more about the Hardenbergh history on their website:

<https://hardenberghfoundation.org/history>



What's new on our History Blog?

In December, we added the story of Roy Jack Hennings, “Doc Squirt” to our History Blog. Roy grew up in Cushing and is best known for his quick wit in his newspaper articles during the early 1900’s. He was adventurous and quite a prankster. Read more about his life on our website:

<https://www.polkcountymuseum.org/history-blog>



End of Year Fundraising Results:

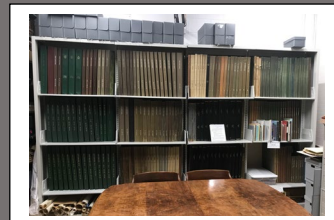
On December 1st, 2020, the Polk County Historical Society kicked off their first end-of-the-year fundraiser campaign along with Giving Tuesday. Our goal was to raise \$5,000.00 for additional funding for our 2021 Museum Season. We successfully raised \$3,325.00. The funds raised will be used to improve existing exhibit rooms, videotaping local experts sharing their story of an item, designing the brand-new County Ledger Press exhibit, support a student to experience the Pioneer school and to help us preserve items. We treasure every donation that we received, and in this difficult time we feel truly blessed that we were able to raise as much as we did. Thank you to all the donors for supporting the Polk County Museum!



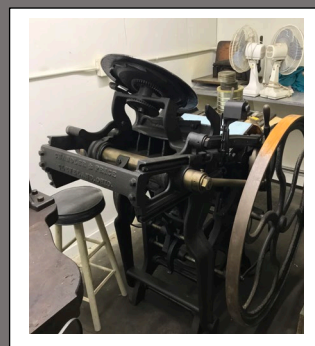
END OF THE YEAR
FUNDRAISER

Museum Operations

This year created the perfect opportunity to work on museum exhibits, archival storage solutions, and collection management. Here are some pictures of the work that was done during this year.



Over the last few months, Board Members and our Museum Director worked to find room for hundreds of Ledger Publications in a new home that will provide archive-quality protection.



Board Member, Tom Magnafici, worked with a team of volunteers to move this 1900 Printer from the Ledger Office to the Museum.



Caroline Rediske, Ruth Mugerauer and Greta Palmberg spent hours in our Archive Room organizing documents and re-storing these artifacts in archive-quality storage boxes.

Artifact Highlight – Joseph Stannard Baker

“A Secret Service Mission”

Joseph Stannard Baker (1838-1912) of St. Croix Falls, WI was in the secret service during the Civil War. His fascinating account of Civil War service can be found in the *Joseph Stannard Baker Memoirs (1838-1865)*, compiled by James Stannard Baker, 1980. One story in these memoirs tells of the repatriation of Southern women who were trapped in the North during the war. These women were told by families and friends that the war would be short, just to wait it out. Other Southern women were sent to Europe to wait out the war, but when funds ran out and the blockade tightened, these women were forced to return home to Northern ports. Now trapped in hostile territory, the women were in desperate circumstances. They could not communicate with relatives in the Confederacy, most were friendless, many were homeless and penniless. The women crowded into Washington to besiege the War Department and even the President for transportation through Union Lines.

At first, the War Department issued passes for women wishing to pass into Confederate lines and they were sent south with cavalry escort. But that plan was soon halted as the demand for passes outweighed available escorts. Union officials also discovered that passes had been issued to female spies and smugglers. Finally, there were reports that outposts could not tell the difference between forged passes and valid passes.

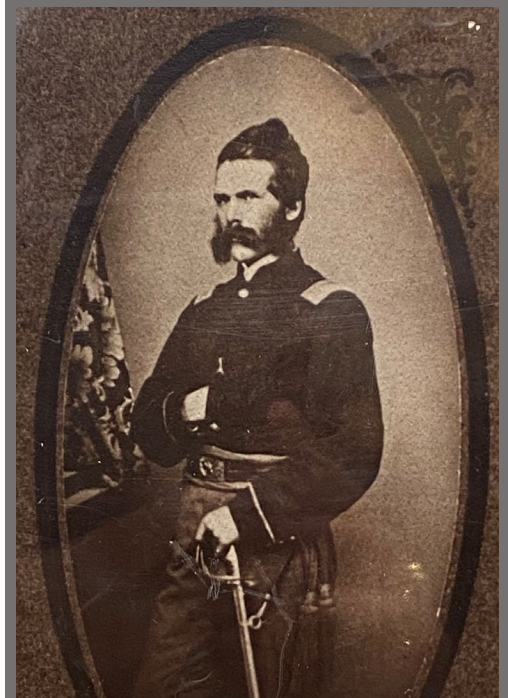
A new solution was found by the War Department, shipping Southern women on a flag-of-truce steamer going to pick up paroled Union prisoners of war. An announcement was made, and new passes for free transportation were issued for Southern women and children on the steamer, *New York*. The steamer would be leaving Washington on January 7th, 1863. After that date, no passes would be issued under any circumstances.

The morning before the departure, Joseph Stannard Baker learned that he was one of four plainclothes detectives from the Secret Service Headquarters in Washington assigned to accompany the women on the *New York*. In fact, at only 24 years old, he was the youngest of the four and told that he was in charge of the detail of detectives. The other detectives were a man named Camp; his cousin, Milo Baker; and his brother, Byron, who later participated in the capture of President Lincoln's assassin, John Wilkes Booth.

Upon boarding the *New York*, Joseph Baker soon realized that his assignment was not to just accompany the ladies, but to manage them. A quick look around the ship the morning of the 7th, found all furniture and bedding had been stripped and no provisions of food, water, or fuel for heating was made for the passengers. The *New York* had about 200 staterooms and as Joseph Baker looked at the crowds gathering on the wharf, there were about 600 women and children with “tickets”. An hour before the departure time, the detectives wired the War Department asking for a sailing delay and authorization to obtain food from the commissary and blankets from the quartermaster.

However, this was not the end of their troubles. The authorization from the War Department also included an order that all baggage had to be searched for contraband. Then another order came from Secretary Stanton stating that a dozen or so blockade runners were among the women onboard, so all women would also need to be searched for contraband including medicines, especially quinine, percussion caps, and gold. Joseph Baker had to think carefully about who could perform these searches on the Southern ladies. He quickly came up with a plan to enlist the help of Mrs. James Harlan, wife of the Secretary of Interior, and very active in the Commission's volunteer activities.

Throughout the three-day journey, the four detectives organized the accommodations and saw to the comfort of the ladies aboard. Joseph writes of a pair of ladies, a grey-haired woman dressed in mourning and her very sick 13-year-old daughter, huddled under a stairway. Although claims for bedspace had long since been solidly staked out, Joseph and Byron gave up their own stateroom for the couple. Later, that same woman, Mrs. Josia Payne, thanked Baker profusely and gave him her visiting card. Joseph writes, “*On it she had written that if she learned of friends of mine sick or imprisoned in the South, she would do what she could to help them. I often thought of her when I, myself, was in Libby Prison in Richmond, half naked, severely wounded, and starved. Her card was not in my possession when I was captured. Payne was a fairly common name in the South, I could not remember her first name or that of her late husband, and I had no idea where she lived, so I was unable to communicate with her, but the thought of her was considerable comfort.*”



Joseph Stannard Baker - Major, 1st District of Columbia Cavalry during the Civil War

Pictured below: Civil War uniform worn by Major J. S. Baker, donated by Harry Baker.

