



# THE HISTORICAL BULLETIN

September 2015

Vol. XXXIV, No. 3

A newsletter by the Brown County Historical Society dedicated to the preservation of history in Brown County, Wisconsin.

## 2014 HISTORIC PRESERVATION AWARD WINNER

### DE PERE LOCKTENDER'S HOUSE

by Jerry Abitz

Every school child in Wisconsin learns about the coming of the French explorers and the priests that followed whose mission it was to Christianize the native peoples. They came to the mouth of the Fox River and discovered that they could connect to the Wisconsin River which then led them to the Mississippi River and beyond. While this wonderful waterway sounds like a godsend, the reality of using it was a different story. There were many portages along the way. That first 33 miles of the Lower Fox from Green Bay up to Lake Winnebago had an increase in elevation of 169 feet. Each set of rapids or waterfalls required the travelers to stop, unload their canoe, and carry it and their baggage around the obstacle. Once past, they could relaunch their canoe and resume paddling.

As the area grew with settlers pouring into the region in the 1830s and 1840s, the river system carried more and more commerce. After many calls to improve this busy route connecting the Great Lakes to the Mississippi, the Fox-Wisconsin Improvement Co. came into being. Morgan L. Martin and a group of local investors had an agreement

to complete the project in three years. But the many set-backs (i.e., the governor's refusal to pay Martin for his personal investments, economic factors beyond their control, lack of funding, and the coming of the railroads) each contributed to the delay of or had some effect on this project. In 1866, this improvement company was forced to sell to New York investors, operating under the name of the Green

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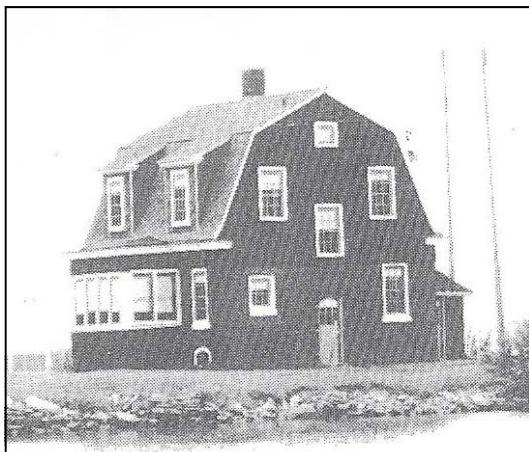
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The lives — and looks — of the De Pere locktender house, located on Government Island which serves as the west embankment/wall/levee of the dam and lock. Top: As it looks in the sunshine of this summer, the front entrance has a sitting area for viewing while eating or visiting (July 2015). Photo by Jerry Abitz. Middle: Photo (2000) originally published in the BCHS Historical Bulletin, Vol. XVIII, No. 2, 2001; courtesy of De Pere Historical Society. Bottom: Photo courtesy of De Pere Historical Society (circa 1920s-1940s).



## DE PERE LOCKTENDER'S HOUSE

(continued from page 1)

Bay and Mississippi Canal Company. Martin and the other local investors were not included in this new company. In 1870-1872, the U.S. Government bought out this company and took control of the improvements along this stretch of the Fox River. With various improvements, such as lengthening or rebuilding the locks, the era of commercial steamboat traffic began.

Because of the change in elevation, dams had to be constructed at each lock to provide a head of water for diversion from the river into the canal. Each lock had gates on each end that had to be opened or closed after a boat entered. In order to accommodate the change in elevation, valves either let water into the lock, if you were headed towards Lake Winnebago, or let water out, if you were heading towards Green Bay. Locktenders were employed to operate and maintain these controls. Small buildings were erected on site for the locktender and family to live in while tending the lock.

In the case of the locktender's house in De Pere (located on Government Island), the present structure was built in 1912. Previously the locktender

stayed in a shack (which still exists); the house provided room for his family as well. This 1-1/2 story, Dutch Colonial Revival style house was one of a number of similar locktender residences built along the Fox. The [lock] system was in full operation until 1983 when it was abandoned by the U.S. Corps of Engineers, thus eliminating the need for a resident locktender. Those buildings were then shuttered and allowed to decay.

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### BROWN COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

**OUR MISSION** — To preserve, present and share the heritage of Brown County history through preservation activities, exhibitions, educational programs and events.

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### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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**Top:** Location of the locktender's house as taken from the De Pere Bridge. On the right is the canal; on the left is the river. One can see a viewing pier/bridge mounted atop the underwater riverbed footings of the old bridge in the foreground. The bridge in left background is a fishing bridge. **Middle:** Pedestrian drawbridge over the canal lock. **Bottom:** Interior of the lock on the canal: front portal is open; back portal is closed. Taken from the pedestrian bridge. *Photos by Jerry Abitz (July 2015).*

## DE PERE LOCKTENDER'S HOUSE

(continued from page 2)

In 2001, the Brown County Historical Society gave a Historic Preservation Award for work provided by individuals to stabilize the house. They fixed the roof, painted the exterior, rebuilt eaves damaged by leaky eave troughs, and installed sheets of plywood to cover the window openings, painted to resemble windows, complete with shades. Throughout this time, the general public had limited access to this island.

Locally, this structure was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1993 as part of the De Pere Lock and Dam Historic District. With the planned re-opening of the locks by 2017, increased interest was focused on this building. After the preparation of a Historic Structures Report that outlined the possible feasibility of adaptive reuse, the Three Dam Guys LLC (Tom Burgess, John Meyer and Bob Weyers) proposed to restore this building in accord with Department of Interior Historic Guidelines, at their own expense, and to reuse it. As such, they reserved the upper floor for their offices and signed a contract with Alex and Linda Galt, operator and owner of Kavarna Coffeehouse in the On Broadway, Inc. district in Green Bay, for a seasonal café. Opened in 2014, Locktender's House is a refreshment stand and soft-serve ice creamery, located on the first floor.

Having visited the site several times, I marveled at the added attraction of a fishing pier as one approached the locktender's house, another pier for viewing the wildlife which utilized the underwater riverbed footings of the 1930s' bridge, plus a bridge over the canal to this island, all paid for by the City of De Pere, the Wisconsin DNR plus funds raised from private donors. (Near the entrance to Voyageur Park is a sign identifying the various categories of gifts and the donors.)

Residents and visitors now have easy access to the island via a footbridge over the lock that is part of the De Pere Riverwalk. This project is also adjacent to the Fox River Trail as well as Voyageur Park in downtown De Pere. Chairs and benches are available to accommodate visitors. On one visit, I was able to view white pelicans near the bridge. I believe, in the eyes of the users, this project is a great success and is something about which De Pere residents can boast to visitors and



**Top:** The front of the house is now the entrance to Locktender House, a seasonal café. To the left is the Fox River. **Middle:** The back view, as seen when approaching from Voyageur Park. The green shed-like extension is used for a public restroom. You can see the most recent De Pere bridge in the background. *Photos by Jerry Abitz (July 2015).*

friends. With the outpouring of local funds supporting this project, this says something great about De Pere as a community.

For its effort, Fox River Navigational System Authority (FRNSA) was presented with Brown County Historical Society's 2014 Historic Preservation Award for Historic Building Reuse. Receiving this award was Dr. S. Timothy Rose, board member, and Robert Stark, board chair.

Additionally, BCHS would like to recognize and congratulate the following organizations, without whose efforts the project would not have been completed — the Three Dam Guys LLC; the De Pere Historical Society; the De Pere Historic Preservation Commission; Definitely De Pere; Locktender's House café, operated by Alex and Linda Galt; the Wisconsin DNR; the City of De Pere; et al.

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## BCHS WELCOMES NEW MEMBERS TO BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**Note —** We are extremely grateful for the dedication and hard work of Board of Director members Nancy Farvour and John Shier who regretfully resigned before the end of their terms. The board welcomes two new members to fill those terms. — CD

### MARY KATHERINE MATHARANI —

Mary Katherine is originally from Vincennes, Ind., and graduated from Indiana University. After graduation, she moved to Boston and worked in communications and public relations before becoming a recruiting manager for an international engineering and scientific personnel company, where she met her husband Michael. The family's travels took them to Wilmington, Del., for two-and-a-half years before finally settling in De Pere. Mary Katherine has participated in several volunteer groups, including the Junior Leagues of Boston and Wilmington, the Service League, De Pere Women's Club, Green Bay-De Pere Antiquarians, the Symphony Guild, and several local historical societies. She



### BCHS' WISH LIST...

- ◆ Oreck upright vacuum cleaner (for use on hardwood floors and oriental carpets)
- ◆ Men's period clothing for cemetery walks (vests, bow ties, and bowler and panama hats)
- ◆ Card tables and chairs with padded seats
- ◆ Colored paper for printing



has done event planning and decorations for the Arthritis Fund, the De Pere Historical Society, and was the event planner and executor for the Brown County Gala for the American Cancer Society for five years.

### STEVE SRUBAS —

Steve has been an architect practicing at Berners-Schober in downtown Green Bay for more than 12 years. Berners-Schober is a full-service architecture and engineering firm which has been serving the greater Green Bay community for over 150 years. Steve's off-duty interests include photography, art and music. His photography and art tend to focus on existing architecture and form, while his music is a hobbyist's approach at preserving folk culture's old-time country square dance music.



### OUR MISSION

*To preserve, present and share the heritage of Brown County history through preservation activities, exhibitions, educational programs and events.*

### OUR VISION

*We envision a vibrant organization that connects the past, present and future and promotes knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the history of Brown County.*

### OUR CORE VALUES

*Collaboration, Education, Influence and Stewardship*

# EVENTS

Join us for one or all!

## *IF TOMBSTONES COULD TALK*

### 2015 "LEADERSHIP AND LEGACY" CEMETERY WALKS

*See Calendar of Events for details (page 6)*

Woodlawn Cemetery is the setting for the final cemetery walks of the season. Continuing the 2015 theme of "Leadership and Legacy," the characters you will meet represent a wide range of time periods and accomplishments. Visit with Jesse Buchanan - portrayed by Carol Jones, Albert Wiese - Dave Burke, Nathan Goodell - Roger Lawyer, Daniel Curtis - John Abbott, Gustav Kustermann - Michael Frazer, and Eva Waggoner Blood - portrayed by Loretta Delvaux.

Eva Blood's father believed the big thing in life was service to others, and that is exactly how Eva lived her life. As president of the Brown County Historical Society from 1935-1942, Mrs. Blood acquired the Cotton House from the Catholic Diocese, thereby preserving a historic treasure and generating the impetus for creating Heritage Hill. So join us! Discover little known facts about some of the leaders in your community!



Carol Jones portraying Jesse Buchanan.  
*Photo supplied by Carol Jones.*

House. Several light courses, including "savory" and "sweet," will be served. Following tea, guests will gather in the parlor to meet Elizabeth Baird, Caroline Tank, Elizabeth Martin and Elizabeth Arndt to enjoy their stories of life in the mid-1800s. Find out the impact these strong women made on their community. Note — Hats, gloves or period clothing are welcome, but not required.



#### **RESERVATIONS REQUIRED.**

**COST: \$20.00 PER PERSON**

(Visa/Mastercard accepted)

*Proceeds benefit Hazelwood Historic House.*

**NOTE — This program is the first in a series of teas celebrating the women of Northeast Wisconsin. Call for information and reservations (920-437-1840) or check our website ([www.browncohistoricalsoc.org](http://www.browncohistoricalsoc.org)).**

## CONNECTING OUR COMMUNITY



**OUR COMMUNITY IS DIVERSE AND VITAL!  
HELP TELL THIS STORY!!**

Brown County has a rich ethnic history. By 1900, over half of Wisconsin's population of two million people claimed foreign birth. They came by the shiploads, bringing their own customs, traditions and values which shaped our present culture. Today, the increased migration of other people groups continues to enrich our diversity but, like in the past, it also has created misunderstandings, new challenges to communication, and opportunities for mutual understanding and acceptance.

The *Connecting Our Community* project originated in 2012 at a conference sponsored by the Bay Area Community Council which, among other future goals for Brown County, addressed the vision to overcome divisions.

The *Connections* project's goal is to interview and gather hundreds of stories of affirmative experiences and dreams for the future, focusing on moments of community excellence. Project organizers seek stories from Brown County residents without discrimination (all income groups, elderly, youth, military veterans and their families, the LGBT community, and others), all of which will be made available on social media.

BCHS is assisting in this compelling project by inviting members of immigrant societies in Brown County to share their memorable stories. To share your story, contact David Littig (920-432-6603 or [littigd@uwgb.edu](mailto:littigd@uwgb.edu)). Project information from [www.cocbrowncounty.org](http://www.cocbrowncounty.org).

## THE WOMEN OF EARLY GREEN BAY AFTERNOON TEA SATURDAY, OCT. 3 — 1:00-3:00P

The time is late nineteenth century when the tradition of calling on one's friends for afternoon tea is commonplace. Enjoy the taste and feel of such an afternoon at an elegant Victorian tea at Hazelwood Historic





## SEPTEMBER

Wednesday and Thursday, Sept. 9 and 10, 6:30p –  
and Saturday, Sept. 12, 3:00p –  
If Tombstones Could Talk - Woodlawn Cemetery

## OCTOBER

Saturday, Oct. 3, 1:00-3:00p –  
The Women of Early Green Bay  
An Afternoon Tea and Presentation

## DECEMBER

Friday through Sunday, Dec. 4, 5, and 6, 1:00-3:00p –  
Holiday Victorian Tea  
Dec. 12, 13 and 19, 20; Saturdays 12:00-4:00p and  
5:00-8:00p, and Sundays 12:00-4:00p –  
A Dickens of a Christmas

## DE PERE LOCKTENDER'S HOUSE

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**Editor's Note** – For additional information about Morgan L. Martin, visit the BCHS website (<http://www.browncohistoricalsoc.org/>).



### Sources –

- Abitz, Jerry. "The De Pere Locktender's House." Brown County Historical Society's *Historical Bulletin*; Volume XVII No. 2, 2001.
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- Fox-Wisconsin Waterway, [www.https://en.wikipedia.org/Fox-Wisconsin-Waterway](https://en.wikipedia.org/Fox-Wisconsin-Waterway).
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*The photos included in this article represent only a few... Check out the BCHS' facebook photo album "[2014 De Pere Locktender's House](#)"*



## AT HAZELWOOD HISTORIC HOUSE!

The 2015 season is in full swing, and planning is already underway for 2016! Take your support of the Brown County Historical Society to the next level by donating your time and talents to Hazelwood Historic House! Whatever your interest, we have a volunteer opportunity that fits your passions. We are always in need of people who would like to learn more about Hazelwood and the Martin family to be docents. BCHS has lots of other needs for volunteers throughout the year, including:

**Baking** – Make sweet treats for our special events! We are in need of cookies and other desserts for our Victorian Teas, Cemetery Walks, A Dickens of a Christmas, and other events throughout the year.

**Gardening** – Hazelwood's extensive gardens require a lot of upkeep! Have a green thumb? We'd love your help!

**Actors** – We always are in search of actors to portray Green Bay residents during our "If Tombstones Could Talk" cemetery walk series. We also have several other small acting opportunities available throughout the year.

**Researchers** – Our cemetery walks don't happen without lots of research! Want to be involved but are the "behind-the-scenes" type? Want to learn more about the history of Green Bay? Consider becoming a researcher!

**Programming Committee** – Our special events can't happen without a dedicated group of volunteers planning behind the scenes. Our Programming Committee meets monthly/as needed to set the details that make each of our great events a reality.

**If you are interested in volunteering at Hazelwood Historic House/ Brown County Historical Society, please contact Kat at [bchsvolunteer@netnet.net](mailto:bchsvolunteer@netnet.net).**

## THE HISTORY BEHIND HISTORY'S MINUTE

In 2000, board member Dan Moran, a dedicated Hazelwood researcher and docent, offered to share his Hazelwood and Morgan L. Martin research at the monthly board of directors meeting. Dan wrote interpretive materials and articles for the BCHS newsletter, but created the History's Minute as a short, concise tidbit of history with which to end each board meeting. Dan continued to provide History's Minutes for years after completing his board tenure, but stopped when he changed focus to write a book about the Martins. Unfortunately, Dan passed away before he wrote the book. His great idea remains and board members continue to provide a monthly History's Minute about a variety of subjects.

We plan to add the History's Minutes to our website, and welcome submissions by our members. – CD

### HISTORY'S MINUTE — AUSTIN AUGUST STRAUBEL

by Tony La Lutzerne and Dan Liedtke

While most people know where the Austin Straubel International Airport is and many of us have been through its gates, how many of us know about the airport's namesake, Austin Straubel?

Austin August Straubel was born September 4, 1904, to Carl and Alice (Van Dycke) Straubel. He grew up in Green Bay and graduated from Green Bay East in 1923 and the University of Wisconsin in 1927.<sup>1</sup>

In 1928, he joined the Army Advanced Flying School at Kelly Field in Texas and completed its courses on June 22, 1929, becoming a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant in the Air Corps Reserve. For the next several years, Straubel attended all the specialized air training schools the Corps had to offer, most of which were based in California. Also during this time, Straubel married the former Isabel Walthall and had two daughters, Susan and Victoria.<sup>2</sup>

One of his most memorable experiences of training happened at Chanute Field in Rantoul, Ill. While observing some training exercises, Straubel saw one paratrooper's chute get caught on the plane as he jumped. He immediately ran to the base kitchen to grab a knife and a sandbag, instructing another pilot to come with him; they got in a plane where he instructed the pilot to get as close as possible to the other plane. Straubel then got out on the wing and



Tony La Lutzerne portraying Austin Straubel at Woodlawn Cemetery. Photo courtesy of BCHS photo collection.

lowered the knife to the stranded paratrooper, using the sandbag to keep it steady. The paratrooper was able to cut the line and land safely with his emergency chute.<sup>3</sup>

In 1939, Straubel was promoted to Captain and, in 1941, Major. On February 3, while returning to base in the Philippines in a B-18 bomber, his plane was attacked by Japanese fighters. Although he was badly injured and his plane damaged, he managed to land the plane on the island of Soerabaja (now called Surabaya). Unfortunately, he died the next day and was buried at the local hospital cemetery.<sup>4</sup> Straubel had received word on his deathbed that he had been promoted to Colonel.<sup>5</sup>

Straubel was the first aviator from Green Bay to die in service to his country. He was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and a Purple Heart. In early 1949, his remains were brought back to Green Bay and buried at Woodlawn Cemetery with full military honors. Later that year, Brown County dedicated its new airport in his name.<sup>6</sup>



#### Footnotes —

<sup>1</sup>Green Bay Press-Gazette. "Airport is Named for Native of City Who Died in Service." August 26, 1949:6.

<sup>2</sup>Green Bay Press-Gazette. "Major Straubel Killed in Action." February 6, 1942:1.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Green Bay Press-Gazette. "Airport is Named for Native of City Who Died in Service." August 26, 1949:6.

<sup>5</sup>McPherson, Irene W. *Four Decades of Courage*. Bloomington, Ind: AuthorHouse, 2006.

<sup>6</sup>Green Bay Press-Gazette. "Airport is Named for Native of City Who Died in Service." August 26, 1949:6.

# DOWNTOWN GREEN BAY WALKING TOUR

## SATURDAY, SEPT. 19, 10:00A-12:00N



*Photos at Top Left and Bottom Right courtesy of BCBS photo collection; Bottom Left by Kathy Kauth.*

Travel from Hazelwood Historic House through the center of the Historic Astor Neighborhood and along the Fox River through downtown Green Bay, learning about the history of the area. Discover how Green Bay's story is tied to that of the building of the nation itself as connections are made from the 1600s through the 1900s. Link street names, famous individuals and stories of Green Bay's history to the built environment and monuments that mark important locations and events.

**CALL TODAY  
TO RESERVE A PLACE  
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### HOURS for SEPTEMBER – DECEMBER, 2015

#### **BROWN COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

BCHS offices – 8:30a-4:00p, weekdays

1008 South Monroe Street, Green Bay WI 54301 [MAP](#)  
Phone: [920-437-1840](tel:920-437-1840) / [www.BrownCoHistoricalSoc.org](http://www.BrownCoHistoricalSoc.org)

#### **HAZELWOOD HISTORIC HOUSE MUSEUM**

*See details for events on page 5 of this issue.*

Tours, programs and teas scheduled at your convenience  
by appointment throughout the year.

#### **ADMISSION**

Adult \$5.00 • Seniors (60+) \$4.00 • Children (5-17) \$3.00  
Children under 5 are FREE. AAA discounts.

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HISTORICAL SOCIETY & HAZELWOOD HISTORIC HOUSE