



# THE HISTORICAL BULLETIN

August 2021

Vol. LX, No. 1

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

## !! NEW PUBLICATION FROM BCHS !! *THE GREAT FIRES IN WISCONSIN OF 1871*

October 8, 1871, commemorates the deadliest fire in American history.

Often referred to as the Peshtigo Fire, this wildfire took an estimated 1,200 to possibly 2,500 lives. The fires consumed portions of Brown, Kewaunee, Oconto and Southern Door counties, as well as a section of the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Popular folklore described the wildfire as jumping the bay of Green Bay although evidence supports that the fire was actually several separate fires that started on both sides of the bay of Green Bay.

In days following the fires, Frank Tilton, *Green Bay Advocate* editor, interviewed survivors from the affected communities. He compiled eyewitness accounts of the destruction, devastation and deaths in a publication to document and preserve the facts. Along with the scenes of blackened corpses and streets strewn with dead farm animals, Tilton describes instances of heroism, love and responses of support for Wisconsin sufferers.

In the 60th anniversary year — 1931, historian Deborah B. Martin suggested that the Society reprint Frank Tilton's *"Sketch of the Great Fires in Wisconsin . . ."* in the *Green Bay Historical Bulletin*. It appeared as Vol. 7, parts 1 and 2, 1931. Today, to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the fires, the Society is republishing the book with enhanced information.

Since 1931, many studies of the factors that united to create the fires' origin(s) and causes have been reviewed, analyzed and written. The Society included two scientific articles in this current publication in order to provide contemporary information regarding the weather patterns that set North-eastern Wisconsin ablaze. Professor Jerrold Rodesch, reviewer for this updated edition of the book, emphasizes the combination of Tilton's contemporary version of witness descriptions, in combination with the modern understanding of climate and wildfire provided by Moran, Somerville and Hopkins, resulting in the best historical perspective available to date.

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## The Great Fires in Wisconsin of 1871

### Sketch of the Great Fires in Wisconsin Truthful Incidents by Eyewitnesses

by Frank Tilton, 1871

### Wisconsin's Weather and Climate

by Joseph M. Moran & Edward J. Hopkins, 2002

### Tornadoes of Fire at Williamsonville, Wisconsin October 8, 1871

by Joseph M. Moran & E. Lee Somerville, 1990



~~ TO ORDER (see options below) ~~

If you receive the mailed version of the newsletter, see insert in this issue for book order form  
For e-version recipients, ordering information will be in the cover email for this issue.

# MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

by Christine Dunbar

I hope you are enjoying this glorious summer. We are very excited to be open and welcoming guests back to Historic Hazelwood. As we have done in the past, we continue to offer tours at pre-scheduled times as well as to individual groups. Be sure to call or sign up on our website for a tour tailored to your interests.

Not surprisingly, it was difficult to predict what COVID-19 would be like this season and how it might impact some (or all) of our activities, so we felt it necessary to postpone several events due to social distancing concerns.

By popular demand, we have added more programs to David Seigel's popular Downtown Fire Walks, and our annual Cemetery Walks are underway with entirely new casts of characters. There is still time to take part in the Road Rally on Saturday, Aug. 21, and discover our fascinating Brown County. (See more details on the back page of this issue.) We are very

## 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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grateful to all of the organizations and sponsors that make this event possible. *For a full listing of the events we are hoping to provide, see page 3.*

Faithful volunteers are repairing and painting the white fence in the front of Hazelwood. Although hot, humid, rainy weather has made this a slower process than anticipated, it is beginning to look fresh and sparkling again.

**You are welcome to  
grab a paintbrush  
and help!**

The Brown County Historical Society relies on the generosity of donors and members like you to help us raise funds that directly support educational programs, fun events and lifelong learning initiatives. Thank you for everything you do for the Society. If you are able, please consider donating this summer.

— Christine Dunbar

## MEET BCHS' NEW PROGRAM MANAGER



My name is Anastasia ("Ana") Olp. I am the new Programming Manager for the Brown County Historical Society at Hazelwood. If you have been active as a volunteer within the last few years, you might recognize me as the

former intern as well as a fellow volunteer!

I am so excited to be taking over this position, albeit, I have big shoes to fill. Throughout my internship I learned much of the inner workings that this position requires which adequately prepared me to transition into it. In spring 2020, I graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay with a Bachelor's degree in both history and art, although history and creativity has been lifelong passions of mine.

It is with that same passion I hope to provide some fun and interesting programs which will be both educational and entertaining. I look forward to continuing to bring the wonderful history of Hazelwood and Brown County to this community.

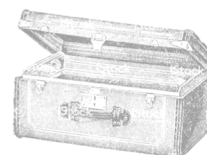
## Volunteer !!



[www.facebook.com/BCHS](http://www.facebook.com/BCHS)



# From Our Collections...



Hon. Albert M. Rosenblatt, who served on New York's Court of Appeals (2000–2007), reached out to the Society recently as he is writing an article about Melancton Smith (1744-1798). Smith was an important figure in 1788 at the Convention in Poughkeepsie, New York, when New York ratified the United States Constitution, thus joining the Union. He had four children, but his oldest, Richbell (sometimes spelled "Richbill") Mott Smith, died off the coast of Japan in 1800 when he was only 20 years old. Judge Rosenblatt discovered that the only known depiction of Richbell was located at Hazelwood Historic House when he did a newspaper search and found the article about Hazelwood in the July 18, 1965, issue of the *Green Bay Press Gazette* (p. 13, online at <https://www.newspapers.com/image/189172085/?terms=richbell&match=1>). He contacted us and requested a photograph of Richbell for his article.



Richbell Mott Smith

The painting of Richbell hung prominently on the staircase wall while the Martin family lived at Hazelwood. Elizabeth (Smith) Martin was the granddaughter of Melancton Smith (1744-1798), daughter of Col. Melancton Smith (1780-1818), and sister of Adm. Melancton Smith (1810-1893). The painting eventually traveled to Purcellville, Virginia, with the Martins' granddaughter, Helen Martin Pancoast, who bequeathed, upon her death, original Martin family artwork and furniture to the recently established Hazelwood Historic House. The original painting is located at the Neville Public Museum of Brown County and a copy hangs in its original location in Hazelwood.

An anonymous account, thought to be written by Deborah Martin or Helen Martin Pancoast, tells a romantic tale handed down through the family. According to the story, Richbell's mother outfitted a ship, hired a captain and crew, and sent her son, grieving over a broken love affair, to traffic in ivory along the African coast. The ship landed on the coast of Madagascar to carry on trade and Richbell vanished into the interior. After making a diligent but fruitless search for Richbell, the ship's master determined the natives had murdered him and sailed back home with the news.

The documentation of Richbell's death in 1800 does not provide a cause of death and remains a mystery.

## EVENTS

Join us for one or all!

**"Historic 1880 Fire Walk" Downtown Walking Tour on Aug. 27, at 6p; Sept. 3, at 6p; Sept. 4, 9a; and Sept. 19, at 1p** — Join author, firefighter and amateur historian, David Siegel, on an exciting, guided walking tour about the 1880 fire that swept through Green Bay. Starting at the origin site of the fire at South Washington and Chicago streets, David will guide you along the footsteps of the people and through places that were involved in the destructive fire of 1880. Hear about the how the fire broke loose and came to be locally known as the Great Fire of 1880.

These walking tours take place outdoors, rain or shine, so please dress accordingly.

**COST:** \$12/person; \$10/BCHS members

**Reservations Required. Limited tickets available.**

**Sign up on Eventbrite:** <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/historic-1880-walking-tour-tickets-151861384489>

**For more information, visit [www.browncohistoricalsoc.org](http://www.browncohistoricalsoc.org) or call 920-437-1840**

**If Tombstones Could Talk: The Good, The Bad and the Ugly Woodlawn Cemetery Walk on Sept. 8 and 9 at 5:30p; Sept. 11 at 4p.**

**COST:** \$10/person; \$8/BCHS members

**Reservations Required. Limited tickets available.**

**Hazelwood Holiday: Decorating through the Decades on Dec. 11 and 18, from 12:00n to 7p.**

**COST:** Regular admission; BCHS members, no charge

**Save the date!**

**BCHS ANNUAL PICNIC**

**Thursday, Aug. 26**

**4:30p — Visit Hazelwood House!**

**5:30p — Meal served on the Hazelwood grounds**

**Bring a lawn chair and your appetite! RSVP to 920-437-1840**

**We'll be there! You?**

*\*Events can be added, changed or cancelled without notice. To make sure you stay informed, make our website one of your Favorites — [www.browncohistoricalsoc.org](http://www.browncohistoricalsoc.org)!*



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**Sign Up  
Now!**

**JOIN US ON SATURDAY, AUG, 21, 9:00A—4:00P**

Cost is \$35/person; \$30/BCHS members; \$10/kids (ages 5-15)

For more information, visit [browncohistoricalsoc.org](http://browncohistoricalsoc.org), send an email to: [bchsvolunteer@browncohistoricalsoc.org](mailto:bchsvolunteer@browncohistoricalsoc.org), or call [920-437-1840](tel:920-437-1840).

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

#### ADMISSION

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Children (5-17) \$4.00 • Children under 5 are FREE.  
AAA and Time Traveler discounts available.

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