

Getting There Transportation in Beloit in the 1930s and '40s

This article researched and written by Ann Martin

In the last two issues we dealt with the early life of the Historical Society in Beloit. In the first we looked at 1910, and in the second 1915. We took a look at what Beloit was like during those years. A look into the goings-on in Beloit gleaned from articles published by the Beloit Daily Free Press. Now we jump ahead about 15 years.

In this issue we tackle a phase of the subject Transportation and mainly focus on the introduction of buses to the city. They replaced the Interurban and Trolley Car system of conveyance in Beloit arriving in 1930.

On August 13th, 1930, the city of Beloit entered into a new age of public transportation with the introduction of a fleet of eight buses to replace the existing street-car service. During the next two decades the bus system saw the people of Beloit through the challenges of a depression and a wartime economy.

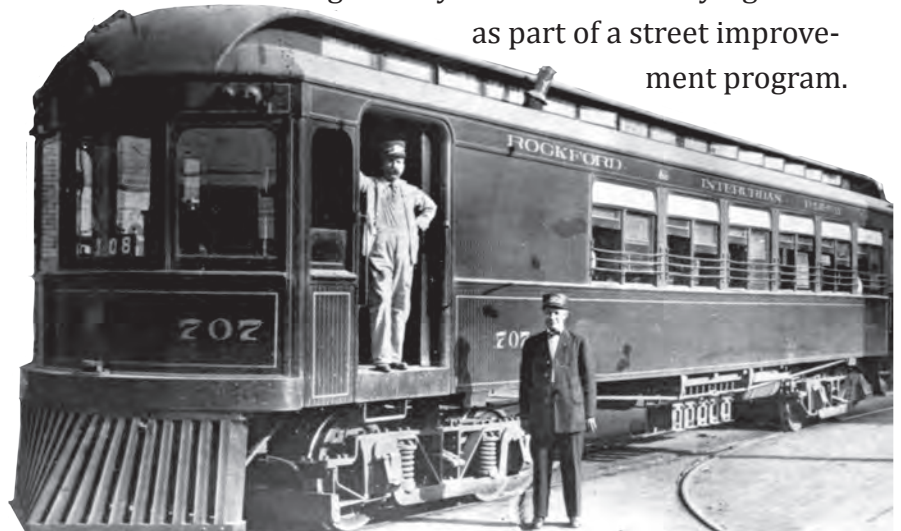


A rail system known as Rockford, Janesville & Beloit Railroad Co. had begun providing service between those cities beginning in 1902, and continued to operate under the name of Rockford & Interurban beginning in 1906. This interurban train company was approached to build local lines within the city of Beloit. No agreement could be reached, so the city turned to Joel B. Dow, a local attorney and Beloit College graduate with a keen interest in developing a public transportation system in Beloit.

With Dow as president, the newly-formed Beloit Traction Company began providing streetcar service in the city in 1907. The cars were powered by overhead wires that came

directly from a power station on Prairie Road. By 1928 six miles of track had been completed, comprising east and west loops and crossing the river on Grand Avenue. Cars ran in one direction in the morning and the opposite way in the afternoon.

The transition to city bus service was brought on by a number of factors. Streetcar ridership was declining with the growing popularity of automobiles. The streetcars were noisy and the lines interfered with radio reception. The track also required a great deal of upkeep, and the system was facing a costly removal and re-laying of track as part of a street improvement program.



Continued on page 4

Beloit Historical Society

Founded 1910

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Newsletter Contributors:

Paul Kerr, Dwight Alton,
and Ann Martin; edited by
Jen Scott.

Board meetings are the
third Thursday of every
month at 4 p.m. and are
held at Lincoln Center, 845
Hackett Street.

The Newsletter, *Confluence*,
is published quarterly for
the membership of the Beloit
Historical Society to inform
readers of Society activities
as well as educate them on the
history of Beloit. The Beloit
Historical Society manages two
sites, Lincoln Center Museum
with main offices at 845 Hackett
St. and Hanchett-Bartlett Home-
stead, 2149 St. Lawrence Ave. For
further information please call
(608) 365-7835 or e-mail us at
Pkerr@beloithistoricalsociety.com.
Or see our new web site which can
be found on the web at
beloithistoricalsociety.com.

In Memoriam

Arthur Adams	John Minter	Genevieve LeDell
Myron Clark	Robert Carlson	R.T. Morrill
William Dilworth	Chamberlin, LaShelle-Carr & Raymer families	Bobbie Lightfoot
Thomas Brown	Dennis Vance	Lafe Lightfoot
Edward Brown	Tom Heaney	Emma Spooner
Rubie Bond	Caleb Blodgett	Capaccioli & Stanto families
Ruth Irvin	George Merchant	Walter Blakely
Mary Degriss	Don Reichard	Virginia Blakely
Robert M. Stacy	Alf Harrer	Clayton Meyer
Yee Shee Wong	George LeDell	Tom Kunz
Jim Wong		Hardy Johnson

Year-end Appeal The End of the Year Appeal was quite successful. The Historical Society received contributions from 108 people and took into its account \$14,145.00.

20 Years

The fifth of February 2010 marked completion of my 20th year on the job. I celebrate it during the Society's 100th birthday.

The Beloit Historical Society has undergone a good many changes in its 100 years and I have experienced more than a few in my 20. We have become partners of a sort nurtured by you and your support and by the best volunteers in Beloit. We both move forward with optimism, and hope you all will continue with us as we celebrate another year. Here's to 2010!



Our Next Exhibit

When We Were Kids: The 1930's through the 1960's

Staff and volunteers are working hard to produce an exhibit about kids. The title of it is *When We Were Kids: The 1930's through the 1960's*. The exhibit offers four decades of artifacts representative of children's lives such as games and toys. A few local highlights are emphasized. One scene is of Hospital Hill where numerous youth of the past 8 decades took to their sleds. Another represents the Marble Tournament held at Vernon Park and later Strong Stadium. The Greater Beloit Area actually produced a National Marble Champ. The Soap Box Derby Races were a great drawing card for the crowds and there is a scene depicting that. And finally there will be a mock up



of a classroom scene representative of the 1930's & 40's complete with the portraits of Abraham Lincoln and George Washington hanging on the walls. After all what would an exhibit about kids be without a classroom setting? We plan to have an opening of this All Kids Exhibit in late Spring or early summer. We'll keep you posted.

Volunteer Opportunity

Docents, or guides, will be needed this spring to provide public tours of Hanchett-Bartlett Homestead. The property is owned by the Beloit Historical Society and includes an 1850's limestone Italianate mansion, a barn, and an 1870's school house. Tours are given by appointment throughout the year. Beginning in May, 3rd grade classes from Beloit schools will come on field trips to the homestead and additional volunteers will be needed. Training for docents will be provided. Volunteers receive a manual with information about the Hanchett and Bartlett families and descriptions of the furnishings and objects in each room. A walk-through of the property will be given by an experienced docent. Volunteers should enjoy learning about history and interacting with children and adults. Period clothing may be worn, but is not required. Please contact BHS if you would like to be a part of this program.

BELOIT FIRSTS

The **first European** to settle in the area that is now Beloit was Joseph Tebo (or Thibault) – a French-Canadian trapper. Native people, known by the settlers as the Winnebago, had already established a village called Turtle in the area.

The **first building** of any kind erected after the Thibault cabin was the double log house of Caleb Blodgett.

The **first name** given to the settlement by the founders of Beloit was New Albany.

The **first school** was taught in 1838 in the kitchen of the Blodgett cabin with John Burroughs as teacher.

The **first store** was kept by John Hackett in his cabin, located where the Strong Building now stands at State and Grand.

The **first banking business** was carried on by A.B. Carpenter in 1846.

The **first Beloit bridge** was constructed across Rock River in 1845 as a toll bridge. This was in the vicinity of the present day location of State and Public.

The **first brewery?** Early city directories list The Beloit Brewery at 134 State Street - "retail and wholesale beer," and J.C. Murray, 200 State Street, bottler of beer. George J. Schlenk founded a brewery in the early 1870's that operated in Beloit until 1915. The Schlenk Brewery was reported to average 350 barrels of beer daily in the mid 1890's. But was this the first brewery? Further research is needed.



Transportation *Continued from cover*

After some difficult negotiations, Wisconsin Power & Light assumed the rights to the Beloit Traction Company and prepared to replace the streetcars with buses. The Beloit Daily News reported that three of the retired streetcars were to be used by the city as warming houses at skating rinks. To ensure a smooth transition, the streetcars made their last run on the evening of August 12, 1930.

Live it? Tell us! If any reader can recall seeing streetcars used as warming houses, please call BHS.

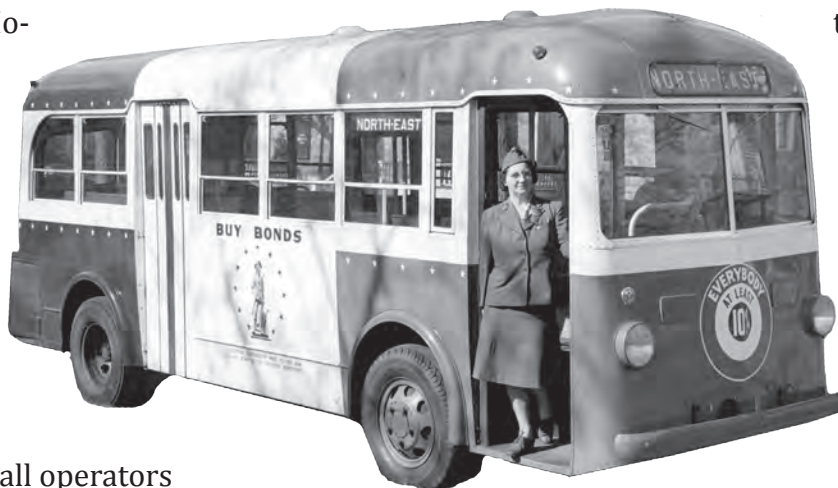
See it for yourself! A number of street cars and interurban train cars similar to those that serviced Beloit can be seen at the East Troy Electric Train Railroad Museum at 2002 Church St. in East Troy. A schedule of operations is shown on the web site at easttroyrr.org.

The fleet of eight type W Yellow Coach buses that debuted the following day was known as the “Orange Line” for the orange stripe that ran around the body. The Yellow Coach Company was a highly successful Chicago-based company that had been purchased in 1925 by General Motors. The operation was moved by GM to Pontiac, Michigan, and the type W bus was introduced in 1928. Type W became extremely popular with cities as well as with small operators of intercity transportation services. It was reported that the buses were painted maroon when

they first arrived in the city, and were therefore most likely originally destined for some other location.

For the first few months of operation the buses followed the same route as the streetcars. Wisconsin Power & Light circulated a request for public support and patience that read in part, “During these first days of operation when there is apt to be confusion, misunderstanding and occasional delay, we ask your kind cooperation. Beloit people are sure that we are doing everything possible to provide efficient and economical transportation.”

Adjustments were made to the routes and schedules during the next twenty years to meet changing circumstances in the city. Diagrams (on next page) show the original 1930 bus routes, 1941 routes, and 1949 routes. In 1930 approximately 90% of Beloit’s



population lived no more than three blocks from a bus route.

Changes in “headway” saw routes run 10, 15 or 20 minutes during peak times, and 20 – 40 during off-peak times. Service was provided on Saturdays until 11:30 p.m. and on Sundays. Both loop and through routes were used at various times, again changing

with economic conditions and need.

Single fares were ten cents or six tokens for fifty cents. A weekly pass sold for a dollar. BHS volunteer Lois MacGowan remembers making good use of her weekly pass when wartime gas rationing made the bus essential for thousands of working men and women. Lois recalls that the bus would often be filled with factory workers by the time it reached her stop at Cross Street and West Grand Avenue. The driver would slow down to call out that another bus was on its way. Lois says, "We knew the names of all the drivers and they knew all their regular passengers by name as well."

that was listed as "Beloit You Drive" in the 1928 directory and as "Beloit U-Drive Rent A Car" in 1930 – no doubt keeping up with trends in advertising lingo. In contrast, the 1948-49 City Directory lists

13 new car dealers and 23 used car dealers.

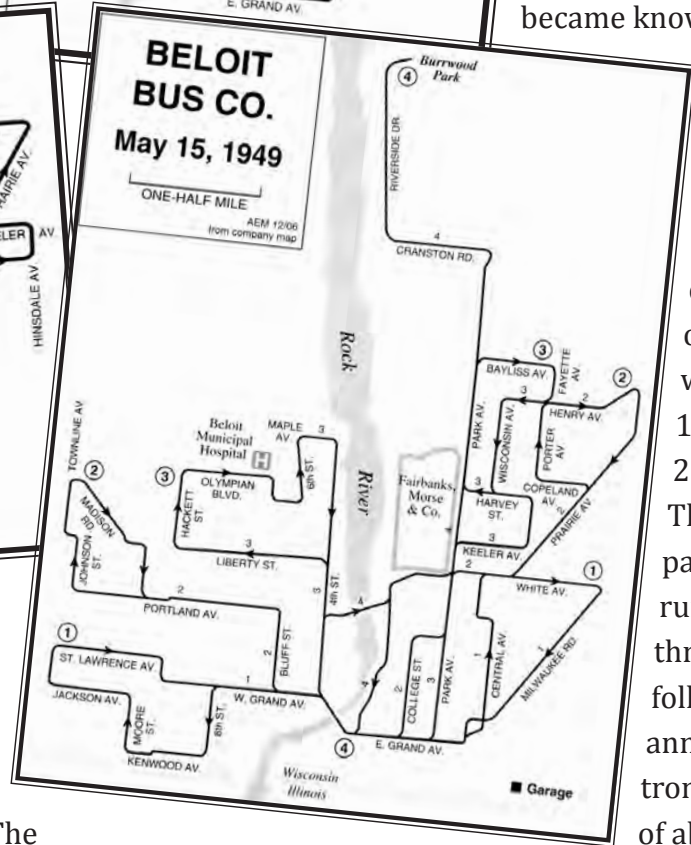
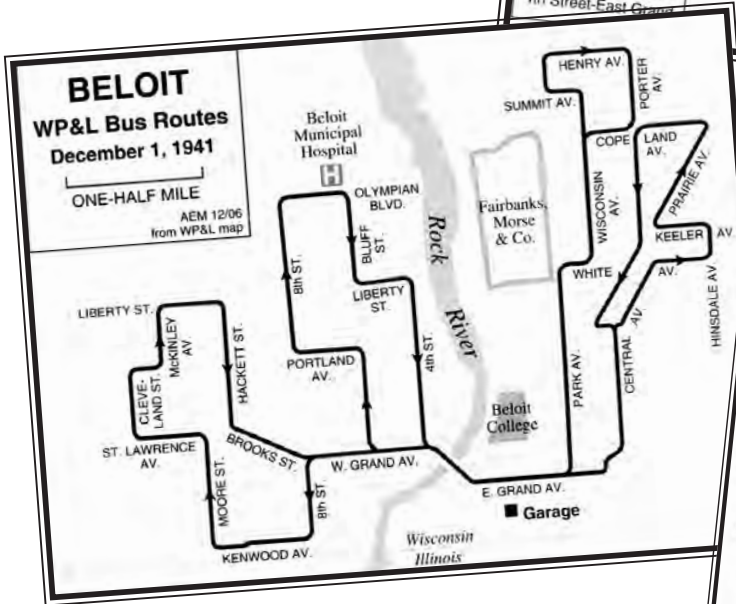
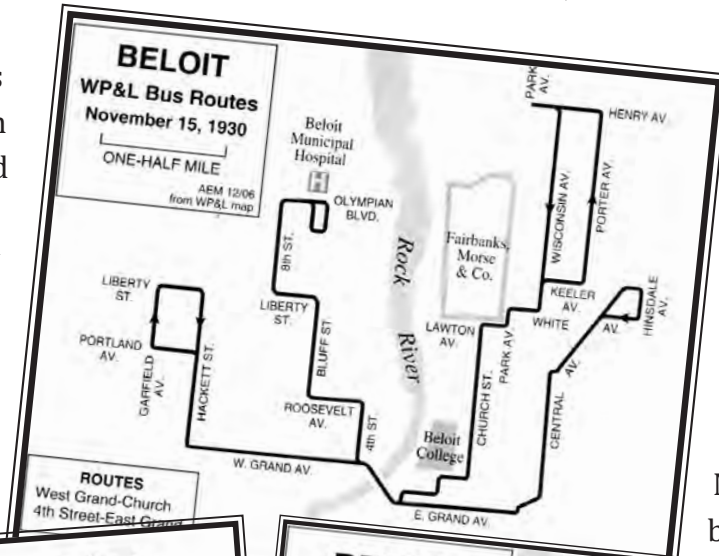
In 1944 the bus operation was sold to Arthur Gale, former executive vice-president of Wisconsin Power & Light. Under Mr. Gale the operation became known as the

Beloit Bus Company.

The total number of buses in operation was 17 by 1946 and 25 by 1947. The company began running three routes following an annual patronage peak of about 3 ½

million riders in 1948. By 1951 ridership had been reduced by almost half that figure as a postwar economy allowed more Beloiters to purchase cars.

Information for this article was taken from Beloit Historical Society files and from articles written by Russell E. Schultz. Anyone interested in knowing more about Beloit's transportation history may enjoy reading detailed articles by Mr. Schultz available at the BHS.



While public transportation was being promoted as a cheaper alternative to owning and maintaining a car, automobile dealers located primarily in the 300 – 500 blocks of Broad Street continued to offer a variety of makes and models. The 1930 City Directory lists 14 dealers offering everything from names known to today's buyers – Chevrolet, Buick, Pontiac, Oldsmobile – to those now recognized mainly by car buffs. The Baker Motor Company at 444 Broad Street advertised the Willys Whippet, a small car that initially sold for \$625 and was popular with college students. Russell Motor Sales, Inc., promoted Hudson's Great "8" and "The New Essex Challenger". A man named Bruno De Clark operated a car rental service

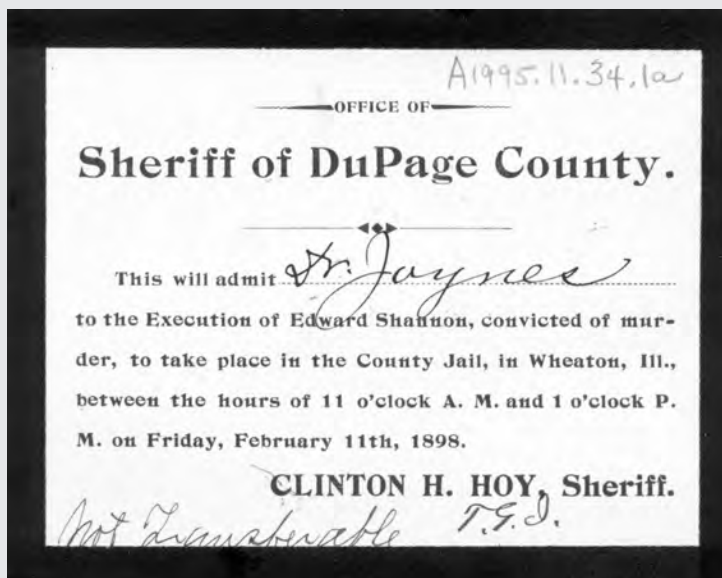
From the Collection

An Invitation to an Execution and other Curiosities

The Beloit Historical Society is a repository for many items of historical interest and every item tells a story. In 1994 the Society received a collection of objects and documents belonging to Dr. William Cullen Bryant Jaynes, who practiced medicine in Beloit from 1884-85. The collection was in a locked trunk given by Jaynes' second wife to her nephew. The nephew, believing that Dr. Jaynes was the son of the Janes for whom Janesville was named, gave the trunk and its contents to the Rock County Historical Society. Research by RCHS revealed that there was no Janesville connection, but that Dr. Jaynes was from the Beloit area and was a cousin of the Bartlett sisters. Although Edith Bartlett practiced medicine in Janesville, the collection was sent to BHS once the other Beloit ties were discovered.

On April 10, 1878, W.C.B. Jaynes was issued a certificate to teach third grade in any town of Superintendent District No. 1 of Rock County. The certificate was signed at Footville and lists Jaynes' age as 22. His highest score, on a scale of 10, was a 9 in U.S. History. His lowest was a 5 in Orthoepy – the study of the correct pronunciation and use of words. He was not rated in Ability to Teach, as the certificate also tells us that he had not previously taught or attended Teachers' Institute. It is likely that his family ties with the Bartletts led him to make a career change to the field of medicine soon afterward. He married in Beloit on May 20, 1888, and the announcement tells us that "Several years ago he graduated as a physician and surgeon at one of

the leading medical colleges in Chicago." He is further described as "a gentleman of pleasing address and culture, and possessed of a pure spotless character." His bride, Emma Ethel Johnson of Beloit, was "a lady of fine personal appearance and culture" and possessed "most amiable characteristics and womanly virtues." She died in 1893 after returning to Beloit in ill health where she was cared for by relatives.



Pocket diaries from Dr. Jaynes' Beloit practice list only patient names and payment made on accounts. Most of his working life was spent in northern Illinois, and the collection includes more detailed records from those later years. Those items include, among other things, a log of patient deaths that occurred in Durand, IL, 1890 – 94, and a "Special Tax Stamp" for a "Practitioner Dispensing Opium, Etc." issued in 1923 for Dr. Jaynes at a Rockford address.

One curiosity in the collection is a black bordered card admitting Dr. Jaynes to the execution of one Edward Shannon, to take place at the County Jail in Wheaton, IL, on February 11, 1898. Also

in the collection is a card mailed to Dr. Jaynes, apparently living or practicing in West Chicago at that time, announcing a stay of execution until April 12. Who was Edward Shannon and what was his fate? Further research provided by the DuPage County Historical Museum supplied the answers. Edward Shannon shot and killed his wife in Belvidere in 1895. The trial was moved to DuPage County on a change of venue from Boone County

– apparently because of attention generated by the case. Popular opinion in Belvidere was that he should hang. There was considerable opposition to the death penalty in Rockford and in nearby DuPage County. Shannon's supporters, including his sisters and his children (he was in his 70's at the time of the trial), collected signatures for a petition asking for life imprisonment instead. After the initial stay of execution, Shannon was deemed insane and sent to an asylum in

Chester, IL. It is likely that Dr. Jaynes was one of the physicians called on to confirm his insanity.

Other items kept by Dr. Jaynes include a black rubber ball - described as his first ball, a Masonic fez, an infant's nightgown, men's collars, several knives, business cards, and a book of card tricks. Written information with the collection explains the significance to Dr. Jaynes of some, but not all, of the items.

Anyone wishing to donate items of historical interest to the Society is invited to contact Paul Kerr at 365-7835. Society staff and volunteers draw on the collections for exhibits or displays.

Celebrating 100 Years

100th Annual Dinner

16 April 2010

Geoffrey Gyrisco will speak at the Society's **100th Annual Dinner** about *The Development and Decline of the Wisconsin Dairy Barn: The Transformation of Wisconsin Architecture*.

Program to start at 6 p.m.

Cost: \$35 for members/\$40 non-members.

Volunteer Brunch

22 April 2010

The Society holds its annual thank you to the Volunteers- our **Volunteer Brunch**. Presenting a program for the afternoon get-together will be Dr. Traci Nathan Kelly who will discuss the historical significance of cookbooks.

Oral History Workshop

15 May 2010

Troy Reeves, head of the oral history program at UW-Madison, will present an **Oral History Workshop**. Reeves has interviewed hundreds of men and women on dozens of topics during his twenty years of doing oral history in Idaho, Utah, and Wisconsin. He will offer a stimulating and informative overview of the art and science of oral history, and provide specifics on how to carry out an interview project. Whether your focus is on preserving stories of long-term Beloit folks to assist in celebration of the centennial, or on learning techniques to gather stories for your own family history, you'll enjoy this workshop. 9 a.m.-noon; free and open to the public. Donations are always welcome.

Running through March will be the usual Quilting Classes taught by Bobbie Fiske. They run on every Saturday from 9 a.m.-3 p.m.

100 YEARS - 100 RECIPES

The Beloit Historical Society is working to publish a cookbook in recognition of its 100th birthday. To accomplish this, however, we need your help. We're looking for 100 recipes- favorite,

family recipes and we need help putting the book together. So we need volunteer help as well. If any of you out there are interested in helping in any way please give us a call at (608)365-7835 and if you do have recipes you can e-mail them to pkerr@beloithistoricalsociety.com or mail them to 845 Hackett St., Beloit WI 53511. We thank you for the support.



beloithistoricalsociety.com



We've given the Society's web site a new look, more photos, and value-added content to better serve our members. We invite you to explore our pages, read past issues of this newsletter, learn about the rich history of Beloit, and even your own family tree.

Visit our web site at beloithistoricalsociety.com

The Vision of the Beloit Historical Society is to make history a focal point of community pride and to serve as a constant reminder to the community of its great and diverse heritage.

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Beloit Historical Society

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