

Beloit Historical Society
 Confluence
 845 Hackett St.
 Beloit WI 53511

Address Service Requested

Beloit
 Historical Society

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. Visit our web site at beloithistoricalsociety.com

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Beloit Historical Society **Confluence**

Connections: Beloit's Bridges By Paul Kerr
 Photos by Dwight Alton

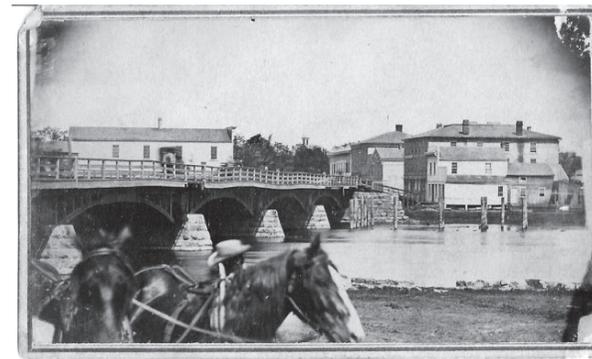
The necessity to connect is ever prevalent today. It was equally necessary a century and more ago. On a whole different level, the importance of connecting a hundred years ago served a practical and economic function. Bridges have a long history in Beloit because of the Rock River and Turtle Creek and were the main connectors of a divided Beloit. The river separates the east of Beloit from the west; the creek winds like a snake from the northeast curling its way south to join the river at the Wisconsin and Illinois state line. Where the two bodies of water meet is the Confluence.

of 1881." A "pile bridge" replaced that and lasted until 1920 when Beloiters were treated to a modern bridge crossing made of iron and cement. This became known as the Central Bridge.



Grand Avenue Bridge

Quite durable, Central Bridge didn't undergo major reconstruction until 1992 when the length of it was shortened from 249 feet to 227 feet and the approaches to it were widened from 40 feet to 48 feet to accommodate increased traffic. On 29 December 1993 the bridge, after \$1.1 million in reconstruction, was reopened to the public. In 1993 it was estimated that 8,300 cars daily cross Grand Avenue Bridge.



Central Bridge, East Grand

The earliest method of crossing from one side to the other was a rope ferry used from 1836 until sometime in the mid 1840s. Following this a wooden plank, toll bridge, was built and this crossed Rock River in the present vicinity of East and West Grand Avenue and operated for about a decade. In 1855 a non-toll bridge was built and lasted as the main crossing between west and east until the "Great Flood



East Grand Ave.



Original Shirland Ave Bridge. Built in 1856.

Another bridge to be built in 1920 was located further south and is another significant connection between east and west Beloit. This is the Shirland Avenue bridge. Construction began in 1920 but wasn't completed until 1922. With a span of 315 feet, the bridge has undergone numerous repairs:

continued inside



Connections: Beloit's Bridges
 Author of "Odd Wisconsin" to Speak
 Chicago Flower and Garden Show

Volunteers Wanted!



Spring means school tours at the BHS and we need your help! If you have a passion for story telling, consider becoming a Hanchett-Bartlett tour guide. Whatever your talents, we welcome new volunteers all year. Come on down and get involved!

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BHS Lincoln Center hours are noon to 4 p.m. Tuesday-Friday and by appointment on Saturday. Call 608-365-7835.

Beloit Historical Society

Founded 1910

Officers

Nancy Wallace, President
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Mary Herrmann
Mike King
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Jen Scott

Lincoln Center Staff:

Paul Kerr,
Executive Director
Dwight Alton,
Facilities Manager

Newsletter Contributors: Sue Kurth, Dwight Alton, Mary Herrmann, Paul Kerr; layout by Jen Scott.

Board meetings are the third Thursday of every month at 4:15 p.m. and are held at Lincoln Center, 845 Hackett Street.

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 Homestead, 2149 St. Lawrence Ave. For further information please call (608) 365-7835 or e-mail us at Pkerr@beloithistoricalsociety.com. Or see our web site at beloithistoricalsociety.com.

The Confluence is sponsored by **Beloit Auction & Realty, Inc.**
www.beloitauction.com

UPCOMING EVENTS

Chicago Flower and Garden Show March 17 at Navy Pier

Cold winter days can be temporarily forgotten for those who spend the day with Beloit Historical Society on a bus trip to the Chicago Flower and Garden Show March 17 at Navy Pier.

The bus will leave Beloit Historical Society's Lincoln Center at 7:30 a.m., with coffee and pastries served in the building prior to boarding. The return trip begins at 3:30 p.m., arriving in Beloit between 5:30 and 6 p.m. Cost is \$45 for members and \$50 for non-members, which includes bus service and entry to the show. Guests can choose from among several restaurants and bars on the pier to lunch on their own.

The show is more than just a visual delight of flowers. It is a visual shopping tour of gardening, greening, floral and home-related ideas. Local landscape designers, builders and suppliers create realistic solutions within feature gardens and displays that are geared to inspire and demonstrate the possibilities for home gardens, yards or balconies. There are free classes available at 11 a.m., 12:30 p.m. and 2 p.m.

"What a great way to spend St. Patrick's Day this year," said Sue Kurth who is coordinating this trip. "After taking in all that the show has to offer, drop in at one of the establishments on Navy Pier for a meal and a green beer or two to celebrate the Irish holiday. After all, no one has to drive back to Beloit, so they can party a bit before getting back on the bus for the trip home."

Volunteer Appreciation Lunch April 22 at Lincoln Center

For the April 22 Volunteer Appreciation Lunch, we'll hear the story-telling talents of local author, John Patrick. Several of Patrick's books, telling of his youthful days in Beloit and South Beloit, are available for sale at the Lincoln Center. The author, who is involved with the South Beloit Historical Society, uses the sale of his books to raise money for that organization, but also lets Beloit Historical Society keep \$10 from each of his books that we sell. While this event recognizes our volunteers with a free lunch, the event is open to the public as well for \$15. Members of BHS, who are not volunteers here, may attend for \$12.

Our **annual meeting will be May 15** and will feature Michael Edmonds who wrote "Out of the Northwoods," stories about Paul Bunyan and the saga of lies, hoaxes, thefts and greed that kept the stories alive. More information to come.

Get Info and tickets at
beloithistoricalsociety.com
or call (608) 365-7835

Wish List
Vacuum cleaner
Wednesday Volunteer

Please help!

Beloit Historical Society Fund Drive Contributors

The Beloit Historical Society extends our most heartfelt gratitude to our generous contributors to the 2014 annual fund drive. We surpassed our fundraising goal of \$14,000 with a total of \$17,800. Without your support, the Society could not continue to achieve its mission. Thank you!

\$1,000 and Up

Anonymous
Herrmann, Mary
Stauber, Steve

\$500 – 999

Keefer, Gayle
Paddock, Sam/Judy
Ranft, Rich/Pat
Schwaegler, Robert/Carol
Swanson, Lois

\$100 – 499

Arft, Larry/Karen
Beloit Floral – George/
Nancy Spelius
Blodgett, Frank
Brill, Wesley/Sonia
Calkins, Jesse
Chamberlain, Joe
Collins, Annie
Dexter, Richard
Eldred, Helen
Elliot, Steve
Frey, Mary
Gerhard, Dick
Gold, Kenneth/Sandy
Hansen, Kenneth
Johnson, Vicki
King, Michael
Kirkpatrick, Shirley
Lawhorn, Robert/Pauline
Lansbery, Curtis/Barbara
Luebke, Arthur
Masterson, George/Avis
Page, Lloyd
Patch, John
Reichard, Bev
Schnur, Michael
Stacy, Marcia
Torkelson, Kaaren
Wallace, Nancy/ Ramsey,
Tim
Warren, Tom/Mim
Weeden, Eugene
Woodard Jr., Henry

\$99 and Under

Adamsky, Sandra
Bachim, Marlene/Tony
Balsey, Lois
Beese, Erna
Bell, Karl
Ciulla, Joanne
Clay, George
Divan, June/Walter
Eastland, Jan
Ellis, Berenice
Finnegan, Eileen
Fizzell, Marjorie
Furman, Greg
Hanson, Ronald
Harris, M. A.
Hines, Caryl
Hudson, Kathryn
Jones, Kathleen
Jordan, Thomas
Julson, Curtis/Edith
Kace Jr., Victor
Kalkirtz, John
Kerry Ingredients
(matching)
Kinast, Catherine
Knowles, Juanita
Kunz, Macy
Kurth, Sue
Kuska, Barb
Lee, Marcia/Arnie
Mathews, Gloria
Matusiak, Constance
McMahon, Catherine
Meister, Nicolette
Merchant, Elizabeth
Meyer, Marlene
Moon, Richard/Linda
Niemic, Richard
Nightingale, Tom/Kay
Papesch, Lois
Pederson, Robery
Robinson, Judy
Rodermel, Willard/Beth
Roehl, Thomas/Jackie
Savange, Marcella
Schmaeng, Janice
Scott, Jennifer
Tester, Shirley/Bud
Tilley, Janet
Van Galder, Gene/Connie
Zickert, Sabrina

Additional Gifts

Rick Dexter gave generously to fund two up-coming projects at the Beloit Historical Society: Think Big (An internship program through Beloit College) and care and use of the Society's photograph collection.

Martin Kades gave the Society a generous donation to help with a matching grant.

Roger Dutcher gave to this year's fund drive in memory of his mother Beatrice Dutcher.



We ♥ our Volunteers!

Volunteers are the lifeblood of the Beloit Historical Society who help maintain two sites, a variety of programs involved with both and visitors who need their questions answered. In addition volunteers lend a charm and character to both places that for decades upon decades keep the people coming back.



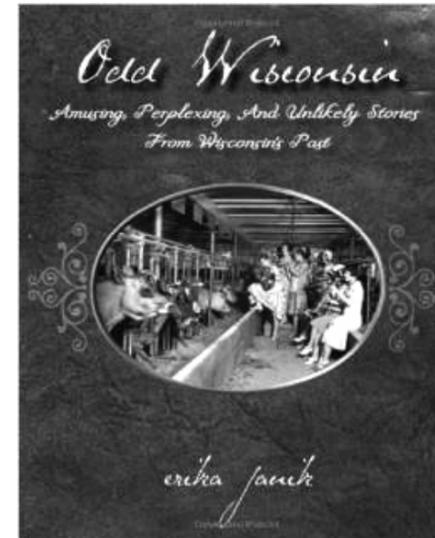
Wilma Jensen

September 2, 1944 - December 27, 2014

Wilma Jensen, a great volunteer of ours, died 27 December 2014. She was very helpful with school tours at the Homestead-enlightening 3rd graders to what life was like in a one-room school house. Very helpful, too, at our annual Heritage Days celebration. Wilma, whose mantra was "Life is Good", was one of the Beloit Historical Society's finest and we will miss her.

Join us at the Lincoln Center for an Odd Wisconsin evening!

"Odd Wisconsin: Amusing, Perplexing and Unlikely Stories from Wisconsin's Past." unearths the stories that got lost to history even though they may have made local headlines at the time. From "the voyageur with a hole in his side" to "pigs beneath the legislature," the book gathers 300 years of curiosities, all under the radar of traditional stories.



Janik will share some of the stories from her book when she speaks Feb. 20 in Beloit Historical Society's Lincoln Center, 845 Hackett St. The event is open to the public. The evening begins with a 5:15 p.m. social hour and 6 p.m. meal followed by the program. Cost is \$40 for members and \$45 for non members. Cost includes wine or beer, appetizers, entrée choice of baked cod or roast beef tenderloin with burgundy mushroom sauce, dessert and the program. Payment may be made on the beloithistoricalsociety.com website using PayPal, by check or in person at the Lincoln Center. For information call 365-7835.

"Oddity is often a great way to get people who think they don't like history, to like history," said Erika Janik, author of "Odd Wisconsin: Amusing, Perplexing and Unlikely Stories from Wisconsin's Past."

"Odd stories catch you off guard and make you rethink what you thought you knew," said Janik. "Odd Wisconsin" features information on Thomas Jefferson's descendants living in Madison, Marie Antoinette's clock in Milwaukee, a state gold rush, spiritualism and mediums, the beginning of the Gideon's Bible program, Wisconsin's missing first Constitution, the birthplace of Selfridge's department store founder and so many more stories.

"I think these odd stories also help to debunk the stereotype of the plain, stern Midwesterner. Wisconsin is a colorful place," said Janik.

Other books written by Janik are "Madison (WI): History of a Model City," "Apple: A Global History" (the fruit, not the company), "A Short History of Wisconsin," and her newest release, "Marketplace of the Marvelous: The Strange Origins of Modern Medicine."

Janik grew up in Redmond, WA, but now knows more about Wisconsin history than she ever thought possible. She has master's degrees in American history and journalism from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She has written and continues to write for the Wisconsin Historical Society, including the blog which culminated in the publishing of "Odd Wisconsin." Her work has also appeared in several state magazines and newspapers including The Wisconsin State Journal.



Erika Janik, author of "Odd Wisconsin: Amusing, Perplexing and Unlikely Stories from Wisconsin's Past."

1972, 1978 and again in the 1980s. With sidewalks on the north side and a ten ton limit this fine structure, like Central Bridge, has served Beloit admirably for close to a hundred years. And it has been one to handle nearly 8,000 vehicles daily back in the 1980s which, today, has probably increased.



Shirland Avenue Bridge



Portland Avenue Bridge

The 1920s seem to be the era of bridge building in Beloit because a few years later, in 1927, another bridge was built north of Shirland and Central. This, at the time, was designated the "Upper Bridge". Today, we know it as the Portland Avenue Bridge. This was another fine specimen of durability and longevity and held up until it was torn down and rebuilt 100 feet north of its original site. This was in 1995 and the construction was part of an expanded project that included revamping highway 81 and widening a stretch of 4th street. This new Portland Avenue Bridge is 650 feet long from abutment to abutment (where the bridge is secured on either side) and the cost of the overall project was \$5 million.



Portland Avenue Bridge

Another bridge north of Portland went up in 1956; it was called Henry. Today the bridge has been rebuilt and renamed. The Ken Hendricks Memorial Bridge is the newest crown jewel among bridges in Beloit spanning 556 feet across the Rock River. It has a width of 75 feet, sidewalks on both sides, street lighting, underdeck lighting, decorative railings and pedestrian overlooks making for one of Beloit's classiest connections between east and west. It cost \$7.5 million, opened to the public 8 September 2012, and handles 14,000 vehicles daily.



Ken Hendricks Memorial Bridge

Before discussing some of Beloit's other bridges we head north once again to one last east-west connection that is in the Town of Beloit. This bridge, as so many others, had a variety of names: Afton Road Bridge, the Newark Bridge and the Townline Bridge. The significance of it is its connection, not only with the east and west, but the connection to hwy 51-Riverside Drive. Located in the Town of Beloit it connects Afton Road to one of Beloit's main arteries of transportation. Construction of this bridge began in 1972 and from abutment to abutment is 1,150 feet. Its price tag was \$2.2 million and it is the longest span of bridge in the Beloit area. It has daily traffic of 2,000 vehicles.



Newark Bridge

Bridges that line their way across Rock River from Shirland to Newark are among the standout features of the Beloit area. These are important connections, durable structures of considerable cost, and have aided the increased traffic and population of Beloit from its founding until present day. But there are other bridges with a history worth mentioning and these span flood-prone Turtle Creek.

Two bridges stand out regarding Turtle Creek and they are the Milwaukee Bridge and the Broad Street Bridge.



Old Milwaukee Road Bridge

Back in the late 1920s William J. Lathers proposed replacing the two-lane, iron bridge on what is today Milwaukee Road but then referred to as "Old highway 14", with modern construction. On a sunny September day in 1931, Lt. Governor Henry A. Huber gave a speech dedicating this new bridge and emphasizing the valuable and hard work of Mr. Lathers who died before completion of the bridge. On that September day the Fairbanks Morse band played and dignitaries spoke. That structure cost \$107,000. Sixty years later, in 1991, a new bridge replaced it at a cost of \$2 million. The 1931 structure was lowered to grade crossing level with the railroad tracks and today serves as a vital link to interstates 90/39 and 43 north.



Milwaukee Bridge Dedication

The earliest bridge across Turtle Creek, spanning from Broad Street into South Beloit, Illinois, was made of plank and timber to accommodate a horse and buggy. This was replaced with an overhead steel truss, 16 feet wide, in 1901. By the late 1930s efforts were underway to get a new bridge and with

America entering WWII in 1941 troop movements between Camp McCoy and Camp Grant and other military centers made this a vital transportation corridor. Burger M. Engebretson, who was from Beloit and served in the State legislature as an Assemblyman, was instrumental in getting this bridge built and in 1942 it was opened for traffic.

It was called the Engebretson Bridge at that time. In 1978, it underwent repairs and again in 1997 opening as modern, new construction 31 October of that year. A far cry from the cost of the 1901 bridge at \$50,000, this new work cost \$3.5 million but offered four newly paved lanes for traffic, sodded terraces, new curbs and sidewalks. When it reopened in 1997, the Beloit Catholic Band was on hand for the dedication. The bridge, today known as the Turtle Creek/Hwy 51 bridge, is of modest length, 187 feet, but is 56 feet wide.

Mentioned here have been a few of Beloit's bridges. There are others like the Raccoon Creek Bridge out on St. Lawrence which went through some restructuring in 2007; the Cranston Bridge which underwent reconstruction in 2002 at a cost of \$1.1 million where the width increased from 30 feet to 72.5 feet and which were added curb, gutter and sewer; the "S" Bridge which ran from 1883-1926 and served as a rail connection between the west and east industrial districts of Beloit (This was replaced in 1928 and ran until around 1958); and the Woods Family Fishing Bridge, a gift to the city of Beloit, and dedicated 1 October 1997. And, in this article, there has been a concentration of the major bridges crossing from east to west but there is the Broad Street Bridge of the 1960s running north to south. Suffice it to say bridges are ever so important to Beloit, with rivers and creeks running through it, and they certainly have served their purpose of connecting us all for the past one hundred and seventy plus years.



Raccoon Creek Bridge