

Prairie du Chien Historical Society

2021 Year End Review



Our membership did not gather for the Annual Dinner Meeting scheduled for January 13th. Sadly, the event was canceled again due to another covid surge. This 2021 Year in Review Report is an attempt to pass on information that would have been provided at the annual gathering. This is summary of activities that occurred during the last year as presented by Committees of the Board of Directors.

Prairie du Chien Historical Society celebrated its 25th anniversary!

Dear Members and Friends of the Prairie du Chien Historical Society:

Last year and this year, in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Fort Crawford Museum remained open providing touring and outdoor programs.

Also, in the midst of the pandemic, the Prairie du Chien Historical Society completed the restoration of the St. Germain *dit* Gauthier-Coorough House. The house was opened to visitors on Saturdays and during special events on St. Feriole Island. It has been furnished based upon an 1840 inventory of the property and includes an exhibit on the house and the 4th Ward. The exhibit was made possible through a generous donor.

Additionally, in 2021, the Prairie du Chien Historical Society leased the Knowlton House from the Wisconsin Historical Society, made many repairs to improve the visual appeal of the house, opened a Museum Store in the structure and shared the space with The Planted Tree, adding to the enhancement of Downtown Prairie du Chien.

James and Eric Dyrud and the estate of **M. John Dyrud**, offered a challenge grant to help fund a proposed exhibit and educational programs on the four treaties held at Prairie du Chien in which the United States acquired the traditional lands of the Ho-Chunk and other Native nations. The challenge was matched and generously exceeded.

The Society is truly blessed to have an active Board of Directors and dedicated staff. The daily operation, interpretation, care of collections, programs, and maintenance of the Fort Crawford Museum and grounds could not have occurred without their support and dedication. You, the members of the Society, have also been generous with your time, pies and cookies, support of our programs, and donations. Thank you all very much.

Thank you and best wishes for 2022.

Mary Elise Antione, President

Board of Directors

Board of Directors

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Mary Antoine

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Nancy Thurn

Bob Ziel

Bill Howe, Emeritus

Staff

Brandon Brockway

Gene Bouzek

Brandon Brockway

Gene Bouzek

Julie Metcalf Cull

Jodi Russell

Standing Committees

Events, Exhibit & Education

Collections

Events, Exhibit & Education

Finance

Membership

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Social Media/Marketing Report
Mike Rider, Chairperson

Currently we are utilizing a combination of email marketing and Facebook. There are approximately 1198 Facebook followers, an increase of 319 in 2021. Our goal is to post 5-6 posts each month with a mixture of informational and promotional items. The goals for 2022 include development of a Prairie du Chien Historical Society website that will have jump offs for three sites: St. Germain dit Gauthier-Coorough House, Knowlton House, and Museums at Fort Crawford. We now have a new email address for Prairie du Chien Historical Society business.

It is:

pdchistoricalociety@gmail.com

Events and Exhibit Committee Report
Janet Finn, Chairperson

The Fort Crawford Museum under the direction of the Prairie du Chien Historical Society opened the 2021 Season on May 1, 2021 and on May 2, 2021, a recognition reception was held to thank the donors that helped make replacement of the pillars on the Fort Hospital a reality.

The celebration of the 25th Anniversary of the founding of the Society was celebrated with a new exhibit, "Prairie's Attic", which featured what a museum does: from preservation of artifacts to distributing local history in unique ways. An Ice Cream Social was held in July to culminate the celebration.

The St. Germain House was officially dedicated and opened in June.

A family-oriented set of 6 free programs, titled "Fridays at the Fort", introduced a variety of informational and recreational topics Friday afternoons in June, July, and August.

The annual pie auction fundraiser was successfully held at the PdC Public Library in July.

In August the Annual Tea featured a program on the 100th Anniversary of the Women's Suffrage Movement.

"Visiting Our Ancestors", a tour of local cemeteries, and "Spirits of Early Prairie du Chien", first person presentations of notable persons of Prairie du Chien's rich history, were held in October. Unfortunately, our bus tour to Minneapolis/St. Paul had to be canceled but plans are already being made for 2022.

The year's activities finished with the 15th Annual "Christmas at the Fort". Trimmed Christmas trees on the porches of the hospital sponsored by individuals, businesses and organizations helped everyone get into the holiday spirit. The Cookie and Candy Sale went well. Thank you to all our faithful bakers and buyers.

It is evident that the Board of the Prairie du Chien Historical Society is dedicated to planning, preparing, and presenting exhibits and programs that will tell the story of Prairie du Chien. With help and support from our membership and friends we feel confident 2022 will be as successful!

Maintenance Committee Report Cindy Standorf, Chairperson

The Maintenance Committee is responsible for the care of the buildings and grounds on the museum campus. Each year we rely on our faithful contingent of about a dozen volunteers to keep the grounds trimmed and mowed. Our mowing volunteers for 2021 were **Gene Bouzek, Terry Igou, Bob Ziel, Kati Forsythe, Jerry Wachuta, Bob Sutton, Chad Abram, Bill Huser, John Forst, Dave Hemmer, Pete Prew, Harry and Penny Remz and Bob Standorf.**

In addition to the grounds, there are other needs such as electrical, painting, setting up for events, repairs, etc. We had a four-person team who took care of these needs on a regular basis during the season. That team consisted of **Gene Bouzek, Bob Ziel, Jeff Mink and Bob Standorf.** Other volunteers were recruited for specialized events.

The plant beds are attended by Master Gardeners. **Cindy Noel** cares for the herb garden between the office and the hospital building. **Cheryl Frazier**, along with **Kati Forsythe and Cheryl Petersen**, maintain all the other beds on the property. In 2021, the gardens along the museum and visitor center were revamped to reflect vegetation that would have been in use during the period the Fort was in operation...roughly 1800-1865. Plants of that period had a purpose. They were edible, medicinal, aromatics or dyes. To help with identification, a notebook was created containing a photo and reference information for each plant. This notebook is located in the visitor center.

A big maintenance concern facing the museum in the future is our HVAC system. To maintain our collections and buildings we may be in need of some major equipment replacement. While at this time it is cost prohibitive, it is something for which we will need to plan.

Personnel Committee Report Lori Bekkum, Chairperson

The PDC Historical Society Personnel Committee was formed early in 2021 by the Historical Society Board of Directors. Our challenge was to analyze all staff jobs and make personnel recommendations to improve the effectiveness of operations.

Lori Bekkum, Bob Ziel and Joe Atkins were chosen to be committee members with Lori being the Chair.

Our early work used normal human resource job analysis techniques to determine what each staff member's activities were. We met in person with each staff member and then met with all staff members in a group to review our findings and take further input. At the same time as our staff investigations were happening, our worsening museum financial situation caused us to incorporate the impact of staff activities in exacerbating our overall finances.

Working with our Board of Directors, we made several recommendations to stop some activities and propose stiff restrictions on staff hours. Along with this we reduced one full time staff position and elevated one staff person to Museum Manager. Finally, we continued this process minimizing staff hours once the museum closed for the season.

Finance Committee Report Gary Koch, Chairperson

The financial picture of Prairie du Chien Historical Society showed some positives and negatives this year. Here are the positives on the revenue side; **total revenues for 2021 were \$145,429.38** including St Germaine and the Knowlton House, gift shop revenue \$23,562.04, admissions \$12,990.05, membership \$11,800.00, annual gift giving \$11,340.00, Knowlton House Pop-Up Grant \$10,000.00, challenge grant \$17,512.88, and other donations \$18,426.61. These all exceeded the expected budget! On the negative side of revenues, we again had to cancel the bus tour due to COVID which is an approximately a \$7,500 net revenue.

There were no real positives on the expenditure side as a majority of budget line items were overspent for one reason or another. The largest increases were: professional fees (legal fees for property dispute), wages and taxes (increased hours for Knowlton House, etc.), maintenance (sewer collapse to gift shop), utilities (inefficient systems for heat & a/c, copier rental (finally got rid of Xerox contract) and the cost of goods to furnish our additional gift shops with products. The good news is that some of these costs were on time events, and were paid for by the generosity of our donors. We are still in need of new furnaces and a/c in the lower building that would help reduce our utility bills. **Total Expenses for 2021 were \$158,416.51**. For the year of 2021 we had a **loss** in our operation and maintenance budget of **(12,987.13)**.

In 2020 we were able to secure a \$15,000 SBA loan at favorable rates that didn't require any payment until September, 2021. This helped us get through fiscal 2020. Because of the nature our erratic cash flow, it was decided to keep this loan and begin making payments at the relatively low cost of \$65.00/month. We still have current loans totaling \$79,000 for the renovation of St. Germaine House and an approximately \$14,000 loan at Peoples State Bank that we incurred previously.

I'm hopeful for next year, that we will have no big surprises and we can continue to move forward positively with the financial and personnel policies we've put in place. This is just a snapshot of our finances for 2021 and if you have questions, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Collections Committee Report Carolyn Sand, Chairperson

This year 45 people or organizations donated 160 objects to the Prairie du Chien Historical Society's collection. In addition, 200 more objects previously donated were also added to the collection. We are currently working to organize the many photographs and postcards that are in the collection along with the institutional history of the organization.

Membership Committee Report Joe Atkins, Chairperson

The committee focused on activities to retain our current members and enlist new members. To that end we developed a January 2021 mailing to current members and others in the community. We followed this up with a second mailing in March for those who did not respond to our earlier mailing. For the sake of comparison, in 2020 we had 127 paid members which raised \$11, 595. In 2021 we had 141 paid members which raised \$11, 750.

Museum and Collections Manager Brandon Brockway

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the Society's Board of Directors for my appointment as Museum & Collections Manager. I've enjoyed my role as interpreter prior to this decision and I will continue to work in that position in the future as well. The Prairie du Chien Historical Society has a fascinating collection of artifacts and I'm still amazed at the items that have been donated over the years. We continue to receive great artifact donations often, so be sure to follow our Facebook page to see some of the items that we receive.

One of the many accomplishments that we've made at the Society since I've been involved is our research library. We now have an indexed system to our local history vertical file and our library of books as well. As a historian and genealogist, I understand how important these resources are to the community. Please contact us for any research questions you might have, and we will be happy to assist you.

I look forward to meeting and working with you in the future!



Additonal staff members during the 2021 season were:

Jodi Russell—Museum Store Manager and Interpreter.

Julie Metcalf Cull—Public Relations and Interpreter.

Gene Bouzek—Buildings, Grounds and Maintenance and Interpreter.

Jean Pellymounter—Interpreter.

Jan Stavroplus—Interpreter.

Friday Wiles—Museum Manager and Interpreter.

There are many people who have volunteered their time and expertise during 2021 as in past years. **Volunteers** are an intregal part of the success of the Prairie du Chien Historical Society.

THANK YOU!