

The Union

Prairie du Chien Historical Society
Newsletter

April 2022 Volume 25 #1



Happy 150th Birthday, Prairie du Chien!

Prairie du Chien became an incorporated city of Wisconsin in the year 1872. Twenty-four years after Wisconsin became the 30th state of the Union, Prairie du Chien obtained a city charter that went into effect on April 1, 1872. The first city officers were:

Mayor:	Benjamin F. Fay
Clerk:	Nicholas Smith
Treasurer:	Otto Georgii
Marshall:	R. G. Mathews

The city was subdivided into four wards. The First Ward was south of the Fort Crawford property and was called Lowertown. Many still refer to the southern portion to the city as Lowertown. The Second Ward was between Bluff Street and Rice Street. The Third Ward was the area north of Bluff Street. And the Fourth Ward was St. Feriole Island. According to the state census of 1875 the population of those wards was 2948. Men totaled 1428 and women 1520. The ethnic backgrounds of the citizens were mostly French-Canadian, German, Irish and Bohemian. There were also 29 black people living in town—21 men and 8 women. They were not included in the total population number.

In 1872 Bluff Street, now called Blackhawk Avenue, was the primary business district. Each ward had a volunteer fire department. The Prairie du Chien School District was formed and two private schools were opened for higher education. The residents of the city were kept well informed of current events by the two local newspapers, The Union and The Courier. The 1878 Historical Atlas of Wisconsin proclaimed that “Prairie du Chien enjoys considerable commercial importance, having excellent advantages of position, and is now turning attention to manufacturing interests.”

Calendar of Events 2022

- May 1 Opening Day
The Fort Crawford Museum is open daily from 9:00 until 4:00.
- May 28 Prairie du Chien Anniversary Tour
The Villa Louis Historic Site, the St. Germain dit Gauthier House, the Crawford County Dungeon, and the Fort Crawford Museum will be open for tours with special programs.
- June 24 Friday at the Fort
Canine Companions
- July 8 Friday at the Fort
Arrowheads
- July 15 Friday at the Fort
Canoeing with the Voyageurs
Experience the thrill of paddling a fur trade canoe on the Mississippi River just as the voyageurs did during the 18th & 19th century. **St. Germain dit Gauthier House**
- July 22 Friday at the Fort
Tombstone Rubbings
- July 29 Friday at the Fort
Hoof Whistles
- August 10 Pies-A- Plenty
Prairie du Chien Memorial Library
- August 19 Tea with the DAR
- Sept. 28-30 Bus Trip to the Twin Cities
- October 1 Visiting Our Ancestors
- October 31 Museum sites close for the season
- November 5 Fete du Voyageur
- December 10 Christmas at the Fort



Board of Directors

Board of Directors

President

Mary Antoine

Vice President

Chad Fradette

Secretary

Nancy Thurn

Treasurer

Lori Bekkum

Joe Atkins

Ann Berns

Melissa Collum

Janet Finn

Mike Rider

Carolyn Sand

Cindy Standorf

Bob Ziel

Bill Howe, Emeritus

Staff

Brandon Brockway

Gene Bouzek

Jeremiah Brockman

Contact Information

717 S. Beaumont Road

Fort Crawford Museum

717 S. Beaumont Road

PO Box 298

Prairie du Chien, WI 53821

608 326-6960

society@gmail.com

pdchistoricalociety@gmail.com

[Web Site/Facebook](http://www.fortcrawfordmuseum.com)

[Fortcrawfordmuseum.com](http://www.fortcrawfordmuseum.com)

[Newsletter](#)

[Kathy Koch](#)

[Kathy Koch](#)

Highlights of the New Exhibit

To commemorate Prairie du Chien's 150th birthday, a new exhibit was designed and installed during the off season. It is located in the Museum of Prairie du Chien. Below are pictures of the exhibit.



This bedroom set was used by the Fay Family when they resided at 203 S. Minnesota Street.

Benjamin F. Fay (1822-1920), originally from Vermont, settled in Prairie du Chien in 1853. Here, he found economic success. His endeavors included proprietor of a general store, a grain and livestock dealer, real estate agent, vice-president of the company that operated the Bridgeport Bridge, president and treasurer of the Wauzeka Manufacturing Company and on the Board of the Artesian Well Company in Prairie du Chien. In 1881 Benjamin F. and Wilhelmina Fay moved to 203 South Minnesota Street (Wacouta Avenue). The house is a fine example of Italianate architecture and it has been on the Wisconsin Register of Historic Places since 2019.



Annual Bus Trip to the Twin Cities September 28th, 29th and 30th

Janet Finn is busy making plans and setting dates with venues in the Twin Cities area for an interesting and fun-filled bus trip for our faithful travelers. Please notice that it is three weeks earlier this year. Janet has grandmother duties during the middle of October, so a change of dates was necessary. When the itinerary is complete the information will be made available. Stay tuned!



Early in the winter Marcella Dante, long time member of the Prairie du Chien Historical Society, sent us a \$100.00 check with a note enclosed. It stated:

It is a generous offer and a wonderful idea. The Board has set up a fund for Marcella's challenge.

The lower building is in urgent need of HVAC replacement. The total cost is estimated to be \$15,000-\$20,000!

Members, take up the challenge to meet or exceed Marcella's donation to the building fund!

February 3, 2022

Dear President Antione, Board of Directors, and Society Members,

First, thank you for the newsletter covering the pertinent information that would have been part of the annual meeting. It was very informative.

The reason for writing this letter, however, is to issue a challenge. I want to challenge the membership to help initiate a fund to help finance a new HVAC system. While \$100 isn't a lot, I challenge each member to match this amount with an equal (or more) amount to start building a fund.

I have always had a strong fondness for Prairie du Chien and I want to help the Society continue to celebrate and preserve its history.

Sincerely yours,

Marcella Danti
PO Box 36
Livingston, WI
53554