



Excavators working on earth retention system in preparation for new addition. Photo courtesy Berglund Construction.

Construction Underway on Waukegan History Museum at the Carnegie

Early Spring 2023

Newsletter of the Waukegan Historical Society

President's Letter

Lori Nerheim

Thanks to our board of directors, volunteers, donors, and supporters, the Waukegan Historical Society is making tremendous progress on many fronts.

The restoration and construction efforts for the future Waukegan History Museum at the Carnegie are well underway, and we have accomplished so much since our groundbreaking ceremony. You'll find an update in this issue on what's been happening these past several months.

Our exhibits committee, working with the award-winning Luci Creative team, has started the schematic design phase for the new history and natural resources exhibits. They have been collecting content and artifact information from the Society's archives and collections, and examining the many stories of the people, places, landscapes, and events that have shaped Waukegan's rich history.

Ann Darrow and our team of research library volunteers have continued the work of digitizing historic photos, cataloguing our archives in the new collections and archives management system, and are preparing for our move to the Carnegie.

In celebration of Black History Month, the Haines House Museum in Bowen Park featured a pop-up exhibit on African Americans and their contributions to arts, culture, and local history. Staff members also offered free outreach programs for local classes and community organizations, and launched a new self-guided tour of Waukegan's African American Historical Sites on the Waukegan History Museum companion app.

We are truly grateful for all your support. I hope to see you at our Annual Meeting on May 20th at CLC's Lakeshore Campus!

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Holiday Open House Draws Record Number of Attendees

On December 6, we were thrilled to welcome a record number of guests to the Haines House Museum in Bowen Park for the Society's annual Holiday Open House. More than 150 people stopped in to celebrate the spirit of the season with us, including Senator Adriane Johnson, Mayor Ann Taylor and her husband Wayne Taylor, 5th Ward Alderman Edith Newsome, Parks Board Commissioner Anton Mathews and many of our Society members and friends.

A dedicated team of volunteers had decked the halls for the occasion. Visitors, some of whom were stepping foot inside the museum for the first time, marveled at the towering Christmas trees, complete with boxes wrapped in period-appropriate paper. New this year were the festive touches added to the dollhouse in the children's room. A mother-daughter duo, descendants of the original builder, cleaned and decorated the house for the holiday, just as their family had for generations.

It was wonderful to once again celebrate this long-standing holiday tradition. We'd like to thank the volunteers who made this event possible, and look forward to gathering again next season!

L to R: Park District Commissioner Anton Mathews, 5th Ward Alderman Edith Newsome, State Senator Adriane Johnson, Mayor Ann B. Taylor, Historical Society President Lori Nerheim, Historical Society Board Member Sandy Pokett and Park District Manager of Cultural Arts Ty Rohrer enjoy the Holiday Open House on Dec. 6, 2022.



Waukegan History Museum at the Carnegie Construction Update

Have you seen all the activity outside the historic Carnegie Library? Since the groundbreaking ceremony in October, Berglund Construction has made significant progress on the restoration of the 120-year-old building and construction of the new addition.

In the past four months, workers have:

Built an earth retention system and excavated to the finished floor grade of the new addition
The crew excavated and hauled away more than 3,000 yards of material, and installed columns and lagging to hold up the surrounding banks in the process. Ultimately, this will enable elevator access to all five levels of the museum.

Performed lead remediation to remove lead-based paint from the interior

Completed selective demolition of the plaster ceilings due to their poor condition

Repaired and replaced joists and removed the mid-level floor

Created plaster mockups to replicate the original colors and finish of the walls and ceiling

Carefully removed, photographed, catalogued, labeled, and stored all the original millwork for restoration
This includes windows, doors, casings, base trim and picture molding. As the project nears completion, the millwork will be reinstalled.

Begun heavy structural work on some of the lintels to create a larger opening for the boiler room

We have been fortunate with milder weather and the team is on track to finish this monumental project in time for the museum's anticipated opening in early 2024.



Berglund carpenters cataloguing the historic millwork carefully removed from Carnegie interior for restoration.

Photo courtesy Berglund Construction.

Research Library Temporarily Closed to Visitors

The John L. Raymond Research Library is currently closed as staff and volunteers prepare the archives for the move to the Waukegan History Museum at the Carnegie.

In the interim, we will try our best to accommodate research inquiries. Please submit requests online at waukeganhistorical.org/contact or email info@waukeganhistorical.org.

Save the Date

Waukegan Historical Society Annual Meeting

Please join us on Saturday, May 20th at 11 a.m. for our annual meeting and program. We will convene in the Eleanor Murkey Community Center inside CLC's beautiful new building in downtown Waukegan. This will allow us to see progress on the Waukegan History Museum at the Carnegie from above. We look forward to celebrating our progress with you!

Parking is available in the College of Lake County's parking facility located at 30 N. Sheridan Road. Park on the first or second level to access the new Student Center at 34 N. Sheridan Road. Once inside, take the elevator to the fifth floor.



Meticulous care is being taken to replicate historic paint colors and original plaster finishes.

Photo courtesy Berglund Construction.

Research Spotlight

Trailblazers in Waukegan History

Josh Bill

Our exhibit committee continues to meet with the award-winning design firm, Luci Creative, to come up with exciting content for visitors to the Waukegan History Museum at the Carnegie once we open our doors. The team of archivists (and this public school teacher) has enjoyed discovering new material to potentially include in our new museum spaces.

As the calendar turns from Black History Month to Women's History Month, a few intriguing stories have come to the surface that are especially fitting to share this time of year. There is still some research work to be done on these narratives, and I invite you to reach out if you have source material that would help us to elaborate on them.

Black Leaders Meet at Bowen Country Club

The Chicago Defender published a few stories documenting meetings held at Bowen Country Club in Waukegan. (For our members who do not know, Bowen Park was once utilized by Hull House as a summer camp for city children). During the 1930s, at least two meetings took place at Bowen Country Club to discuss opportunities for improving housing and employment opportunities in the Black community.

At a meeting in 1931, Thomas Arnold Hill, a member of the President's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership as well as the Director of Industrial Relations for the National Urban League, spoke to those assembled about the necessity for Black people to maintain industrial jobs in the midst of the Great Depression. In what seemed to be a similar convention, held at Bowen Country Club in 1937, national leaders including Lawrence Oxley, a member of Roosevelt's "Black

Cabinet,” and Al Smith, then with the Works Progress Administration, engaged in discussions on Black unemployment and housing during the Depression. Both conventions were described by the Defender as “interracial” meetings with the intent to improve living and working conditions for Black people.

There are missing pieces to these accounts. It is unclear why the meetings took place in Waukegan, though it makes sense that Jane Addams and/or Louise DeKoven Bowen allowed their Waukegan property to be used for this reason. It is also not immediately evident whether these meetings took place on an annual basis or if these were the only two meetings in Waukegan. In any case, we look forward to learning more about these compelling events.

Who was the First Female Doctor in Waukegan?

Our curator and researchers at the historical society often credit Beatrice Pearce as the first female doctor in Waukegan. Pearce practiced medicine above the family drug store on Genesee Street.

However, she might not have been the first woman in the city to do so. A recent article in a local newspaper listed Fanny Searls as graduating from medical school in 1877. (She was also the first female to register for classes at Northwestern University.) She would have completed her medical training before Beatrice Pearce. However, there is some question as to whether or not Searls practiced medicine here. Her obituary stated that she never practiced medicine in Waukegan, but she is listed as a physician in the 1880 census. She was also often quoted as being frustrated by the lack of opportunities she was given as a woman trying to make it as a doctor. She moved on to other lines of work: music and botany.

Regardless of who was actually first—a mystery we still need to solve—Pearce and Searls show that Waukegan has a long history of community members breaking barriers in an effort to improve the lives of others.

Thank You!

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Waukegan Historical Society.

Volunteer

Please contact me about volunteer opportunities.

Waukegan Historical Society

Founded in 1968, the Society collects, preserves, interprets, and exhibits significant materials about the history of the Waukegan area. The Society, in cooperation with the Waukegan Park District, operates the History Museum and Raymond Library and publishes this quarterly newsletter.

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Visit our website for more information
about events, exhibits, and our
extensive library.

waukeganhistorical.org

Waukegan History Museum in Bowen Park

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Manager of Cultural Arts: Ty Rohrer
847-360-4744
trohrer@waukeganparks.org
Museum Curator: Bryan Escobar
847-360-4749
bescobar@waukeganparks.org
Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays
12 p.m. – 3 p.m.

John L. Raymond Research Library

1911 N. Sheridan Road
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