



# Confluence

*Where Past Meets Present*

Volume 28 Issue 4

**BELOIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

July/August, 2021

## In this Issue

Looking Back.....	2
First Fairgrounds in Beloit....	3
Beloit's Outlaw Building....	4-5
New to the Collection.....	6
From the Collection.....	7
BHS Happenings.....	8-9
Trivia Teaser.....	10

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**TAKE ME OUT**  
*to the*  
**BALL GAME**

Beloit Historical Society is excited to showcase a brand new exhibit featuring the history of baseball in Beloit. The rich story of this beloved sport in the city stretches back over 150 years filled with triumphs, changes, and renovations. Pictures and artifacts display the evolution of the sport from the first statewide tournament in 1876, held in Beloit, to the present day opening of the new ABC Supply Stadium.

**Celebrate this new chapter in sports history with a visit to the Beloit Historical Society on our GRAND RE-OPENING SEPTEMBER 10, 2021**



"Line City" Baseball Club 1889 See story on page 10



## *Beloit Continues its long baseball tradition in New Stadium!*



Above: The sewage treatment facility occupied 217 Shirland Ave. for many years. This was followed by open land with a road along the river. The post office is in the upper-right corner.



3850 seat grandstand with clubhouse  
Photo: Mark Finnegan



A July opening is anticipated for  
the new  
**ABC Supply Stadium**



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**BELOIT HAD TWO GREAT FAIRGROUNDS**

The **first county agricultural fair** in Beloit was held September 28 and 29, **1852**, at Public Park (Horace White). Three thousand people attended and the receipts amounted to \$350. The first prize for the farm and flower garden was given to Mr. J.F. Willard whose daughter was **Frances Willard**, president of the **Women's Christian Temperance Union** and founder of the world organization of the same name. The following year the county society selected 8 acres east of Janesville for a permanent fairgrounds for the county fair.

Would you be surprised to learn that Beloit had **two large fairgrounds** of its own? You may have come across old maps of Beloit which showed race tracks that are no longer at those locations. One remarkable exposition grounds complete with grandstands, judges' tower and oval track for "sulky" races was located just **south of the state line** on the site of the former Holiday Inn. The first fair held there was August 20-23, 1901. This fair was on the grand circuit of fairs held in Libertyville, Woodstock, Elkhorn, Waukesha, Berlin, Milwaukee and Beloit. The fair advertised that *"the race track is one of the best in the Northwest with large amphitheater able to entertain thousands"*. The fair continued in the evenings with both the halls and grounds brilliantly illuminated with electric lights. This was also the site of the performance by Buffalo Bill Cody in 1900.

The area north and east of the **Fairbanks Morse factory**, was the grounds of the Southern Wisconsin and Northern Illinois Industrial Association. It was organized October 25, 1873, to showcase the products of local industries. The first fair was held September 14-16, 1875, followed by other years which were financially successful. The 50-acre location was leased for the duration of the fair and was comprised of buildings and a mile race track for "sulky races" which extended east of the office building in an oval reaching nearly to Prairie Ave. (then called Janesville Road). Betting was allowed with generous purses for trotting and pacing winners. In addition, there were pens and barns to display livestock for judging. Women participated with flowers, quilts, fine needlework, bread, cakes and jellies. Outside were displays of agricultural machinery, windmills, plows, cultivators etc.

In 1878, while the fair was in progress, **President Rutherford B. Hayes** was touring the west and stopped in Chicago. Beloiters invited him to visit the fair and he accepted. He was driven to the fairgrounds and served a meal in the dining tent on a table of pine boards on top of trestles. He addressed the crowd and spoke of the "hard times" of the depression since the Panic of 1873, but he saw signs of revival of prosperity ahead. A large crowd was present to send him off from the Chicago Northwestern depot. The fair died a natural death after several years of operation. In 1882, one of the original stone wagon works buildings was constructed on the site.

**Note:** Some old maps of Beloit will show an oval track west of the Turtle Creek bridge. This was a track developed when bicycles were all the rage in the 1890s. The racers used the track to test their speed.

Magnificent state line fairgrounds



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## A Beloit Building has been Violating the Law for 100 Years!

By Tom Larsen

In 1921 the S. S. Kresge Company selected Beloit to locate one of their five and ten cent stores. The location they chose was the Rock River, or more specifically the Central Bridge to build their \$85,000 building. They purchased the Brown Brothers Shoe building which was built in 1892 on E. Grand Ave. The new building was built directly over the river.

They began construction, but in July three officials were arrested by the United States government on the grounds of criminal violation of the rivers and harbors act of 1899. At the time they were accused of obstructing the navigable capacity of the Rock River by sinking abutments. The officials arrested at Beloit agreed to stop construction work when they appeared before court commissioner Robert Cunningham Thursday, July 14.



Picture of S.S. Kresge Co. Store - Brown Brothers Shoe Store is to the left (east)

The work subsequently proceeded to complete the building. However, they soon had another run-in with the law. In November while the building was still under construction, Kresge started signing leases for tenants to rent part of the upper floors for offices. It was their intent to resell electricity to the tenants directly. On December 9, 1921, the Beloit Gas, Water and Electric Company notified the building contractor that the building electrical system must be wired to provide a separate meters for each tenant. About March 1, 1922, the utility learned that Kresge was proceeding in directly providing electricity in the now completed building. In the forenoon of the next day, the service was shut off. A complaint was made to the Wisconsin Railroad Commission (predecessor to the Public Service Commission) and arrangements were made to restore service while the complaint was resolved. On July 6, 1922, the commission dismissed the complaint finding that the utility's rule requiring separate meters was not unreasonable.

For a period Kresge operated two stores next to each other, S.S. Kresge Co. 5 & 10 cents at 334 E. Grand Ave. and S.S. Kresge Co. 25 cents to \$1.00 at 340 E. Grand. (Until 1926 the railroad tracks, not the river, were used to divide East and West Grand)

In 1931 the issue of the Kresge building placement in the Rock River was before the Wisconsin Supreme Court in *S.S. Kresge Company, Respondent, vs. Railroad Commission of Wisconsin, Appellant*. At issue was a circuit court decision which issued an injunction preventing the State of Wisconsin from seeking the removal of the building from the river. The Supreme Court found that the state had the right to enforce encumbrances in the navigable water within the state. After, a motion for rehearing was denied. The case was published as:

**S. S. Kresge Co. v. Railroad Commission, 204 Wis. 479 (1931)**

May 12, 1931 - Wisconsin Supreme Court  
204 Wis. 479

The two Beloit stores were combined, and in the early 1960s, Kresge was rebranding their stores as Jupiter Discount Store. In 1973 Kresge built a new K Mart store on Prairie and the Jupiter store downtown was later closed.

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In the fall of 1981 the Overflowing Cup purchased the old Jupiter Store building. Many years of renovations with volunteer labor took place and eventually they added The Harbor for the Homeless in 1984 and regular church services in 1995.

On October 18, 1995, the City of Beloit acquired the building from the Overflowing Cup for \$550,000. On the same day they conveyed the property to Kerry Ingredients, Inc. with the understanding they would invest not less than \$2,000,000 into renovations in the downtown area. Kerry used the site as their general offices for the American Region.

In August 1996, Kerry was advised by an engineering consultant that the building piling in the river needed reinforcing. If repairs were not undertaken promptly, the building would collapse. Kerry sought approval from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to lower the river level to facilitate the repairs. That is where the

property's history again came to light. The DNR determined that the renovations were in violation of the city's floodplain ordinance. They found that there is no record that any previous owner of the Kresge building had received a permit for the building to occupy the river bed. A settlement was reached dated May 1999 in which Kerry would be allowed to continue to use the buildings, but that they must be removed on or before December 31, 2042.

In 2004 Kerry moved its offices at the Kresge location to the Iron Works Complex. In 2009 they completed the move to the Gateway development and the property was sold to the city for \$350,000. The address for the properties was changed to 80 E. Grand Ave. In 2011 Fatwallet started leasing the space from the city which was extended periodically to 2019.

In August 2014 Hendricks Commercial Properties approached the city about buying the E Grand properties as part of a proposal to redevelop the Wright & Wagner Dairy property. After a closed session meeting, the city council approved proceeding with negotiation for the sale. On May 18, 2015, the city council approved an agreement to "sell" the Kresge property to East Grand Development, LLC for \$1.00. The requirement to demolish the Kresge buildings, which the city estimated would cost \$2,000,000 was transferred to the new owner. The new owner promised to immediately commence with restoring the old façade of the buildings promptly upon receiving DNR approval. Since that time the city has agreed to modifications to the development agreement and on April 5, 2021 the city council met in closed session to discuss purchasing a strip of land at 80 E Grand Ave.

*(Editor's note - Many Beloiters tell of wonderful memories they have of shopping at the Jupiter Store. The most often mentioned is the sound of the old squeaky wooden floors.)*

Building (right-center) is the "new construction" Kresge building. Brown Brothers Shoe Store building (part of Kresge and Jupiter) is to the right



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**John Holmes' First Automotive Gasoline Powered Tractor**

In 1907, John Holmes invented an automotive gasoline powered tractor at 1105 Chapin Street in Beloit. John was working to repair farm equipment throughout the Beloit region and recognized a need for a small maneuverable tractor. Large steam powered tractors were in popular use at the time but they were too cumbersome for small farms.



John purchased a 2 cylinder upright marine gasoline engine manufactured by a subsidiary of Fairbanks Morse and put it on a frame similar to his automobile. The top speed was 5 miles per hour and weighed 3000 pounds but was suitable for many farm tasks such as putting up hay, sawing logs, harvesting corn, hauling, cultivating and plowing. The tractor achieved national fame in 1908 by being featured in "**Gas Power**" magazine and in 1917 was featured on the front cover of "**Power Farming**".



John worked for International Harvester for most of his life and is credited with providing improvements to farm machinery.

In 1957, the **Smithsonian Institute** requested copies of the tractor from John Holmes to use in a new agricultural exhibit. These pictures were later returned to the Holmes family and were recently donated to the Beloit Historical Society by **Tom Holmes**.

**CLASS REUNION MATERIALS**

We receive donations of class yearbooks for area schools along with reunion photos, invitations, programs, class lists, directories, mementos, buttons, newspaper clippings, videos and anything else that relates to a specific class year. Previously, we separated similar items for storage. We are now in the process of storing all items for a particular class together for ease of access for class members. Large three-dimensional items such as china or glassware are documented as being related to certain high school classes and can be requested by researchers for viewing.

Our major collections of reunion materials are for classes from Beloit High School and Beloit Memorial High School. We have smaller collections of reunion materials from Beloit Turner and the private high schools in Beloit. This is a work in progress to determine how people will be able to access the materials.

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These postcards represent the time during the first half of the 1900s when rail travel was so important in Beloit. We had two depots. The one on the east side (Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul) was demolished to make room for what is the former Beloit Daily News building on State St. The one on the west side, the Chicago & North Western depot (pictured in both post cards), was at W. Grand and Cross; its north side had the curved arch. It was built in 1900 immediately to the south of its not-so-classy predecessor. Beloiters proudly boasted that it was C&NW's only depot with a clock tower.

The last C&NW passenger train came through in 1965 and, by Dec. 1966, the structure was being demolished. Today, the Fifth St. bike path has replaced the tracks; only the stone wall that separated the tracks from St. Paul's Episcopal Church remains. The buildings in the postcards to the east of the depot were the Beloit Mitten & Glove Co. (in business until about 1947 with apparent demolition in mid 1950s) and the dairy (owned at different times by Sturtevant, Wright, and/or Wagner) and eventually occupied by Kerry Ingredients. The dairy building (and later additions post depot demolition) are now partly replaced by the first of three planned buildings called the Wright & Wagner Lofts, named in memory of the former dairy.

If you look in city directories, the depot's address is listed as 100 Bridge St. (1902), 100 East Grand (1904), and 200 West Grand (1926). These name/address changes are the bane of researchers of Beloit downtown history! How did such confusion happen? In May 1903, the Beloit Common Council renamed School and Bridge Streets to East and West Grand Avenue, respectively. The divide between East and West Grand was the C&NW train tracks (or Fifth St. to the north of the depot), not the Rock River as it is today. To the north of the depot, we had East and West Roosevelt, East and West Liberty, and so forth. The East section might consist of only 1 or 2 blocks! This was particularly confusing because the East or West modifier was commonly omitted. Bridge St. had also been divided along the railroad tracks, but was just called "Bridge" east of the tracks; addresses to the west supposedly carried a "W" designation. All was remedied in April 1926 when the City Council designated the Rock River as the dividing entity between East and West (revised ordinance 17.34). I have yet to see an explanation of why the train tracks were originally used as the E-W divider, but my guess is that it related to the intersection of the Rock River with the Wisconsin-Illinois state line. Those concerned with laying out the city in a grid pattern may have avoided using the meandering river. The train track, on the other hand, was a prominent N-S feature running just east of the river near the state line.

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### Message from President Rick Dexter

We made it through the Pandemic because of the generosity of our members, two PPP loans (one forgiven and the other in the process of being forgiven) and two grants from the Wisconsin Humanities Council CARES Relief Grants. What lessons have we learned from this? We learned that

while we may have a lot of information and artifacts in our collections, this is of little use when people including staff cannot access our building. We need to get more of our collections digitized and make them available on-line.

To this end we have decided to move our collections database from a standalone version of PastPerfect to PastPerfect on-line. This will take a while as we need to review and edit the nearly twelve thousand object records currently in our existing data base. This is necessary to ensure that our records will be searchable on this new platform. But we are starting on this journey. The result will be that information on our collections will be searchable on-line.

One of the benefits of having an Executive Director is that the Board of Directors no longer needs to manage the day-to-day operations of the Society. Most of the by-law amendments approved at the annual meeting reflect this change. Now the Board will be focusing more on the "big picture" topics, like developing and improving our policies and procedures, the fiscal growth of the BHS, and monitoring completion of our adopted strategic plan.

One of the ways we will organize this policy and procedure review is through joining the STEPS program of the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH). STEPS is the acronym for "Standards and Excellence Program for History Organizations." This self-assessment program was designed to help small and medium sized historical organizations, like BHS, determine how well they are meeting national museum standards. The program covers six broad areas; Mission, Vision and Governance; Audience and Community Engagement; Interpretation; Stewardship of Collections; Stewardship of Historic Structures and Landscapes; and Management.

We will be beginning the STEPS review at the next meeting of the board. Stay tuned.

### Meet our Three Summer Interns

I am an anthropology and museum studies student at Beloit College. I am a senior excited to enter the museum field to represent people like me and de-colonize museum practices. Interning at BHS has shown me how special it is to represent this wonderful town and its full history and people. I know that I will take everything I learn here to future museums I work in.



**Julia Hwang**



**Nicole Yaccarino**

I am a senior at Carthage College in Kenosha, majoring in history and minoring in creative writing. My summer Exhibit Development Internship is perfect for the blending of my skills and interests. Historical research and museum work has been my passion for years and I am honored to use this passion to help bring history to the people of Beloit.

I am an art history student and just graduated from Beloit College. I prefer to work in a museum or gallery to learn and use collection management skills. I have worked in this capacity at Wright Museum of Art. The experience of working with the collection at BHS through this paid internship, has taught me the methods of dealing with different types of objects like fans, textiles, metals and toys. I have written accession worksheets using the PastPerfect database, restored items and made archival boxes. All of this will be beneficial in my future career.



**Li (Lucy) Huixin**



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**Message from Executive Director  
Donna Langford**

Behind closed doors, the Lincoln Center is a hub of activity as we prepare for a full reopening in September. **We have been fortunate to be host to eight interns over the past year.** Through the innovative use of the internet, we were able to successfully complete marketing and exhibition projects. **This helped to alleviate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on our human resources but we are in need of volunteers to be a part of our team. Together we can do great things.**

Volunteers are an important part of the society's operations, providing talent, advice and other contributions too numerous to list. A wide range of opportunities are available to choose from; such as describing and photographing historic artifacts, planning or setting up events, gardening, mailings and many more.

Many of these opportunities can aide in job training and resume building. All of them contribute to the community. All training and equipment are provided and schedules are extremely flexible.

Information is available on our website  
<http://beloithistoricalsociety.com/volunteer> or  
by contacting the office at (608) 365-7835.

**Beloit Historical Society  
Thrift Sale!**

Lincoln Center, 845 Hackett Street, Beloit

**Friday, July 23  
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**We need your donations!**

Money raised will help support BHS Museum operations.  
**Items must be dropped off at Lincoln center by July 9th.**  
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**WELCOME  
NEW MEMBERS!**

Colleen Gill  
Rebecca Moffett



Our **Car and Mechanics Show** organized by our Education and Outreach Committee was held on a very warm Sunday, June 13, on the grounds of Lincoln Center. It featured cars, tractors and mechanical items from our collection.



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**Beloit Daily News April 9, 1926 by Jack Clarke**  
(about Line City Baseball Club picture on cover)

"A Great Beloit team, the "Line City" aggregation appeared on the field in the late 1880s and proceeded to become one of the best-known teams in this section. The Line Cities defeated about every outfit of class hereabouts with more or less ease, but the great team of the day then was the Pecatonica Blues.

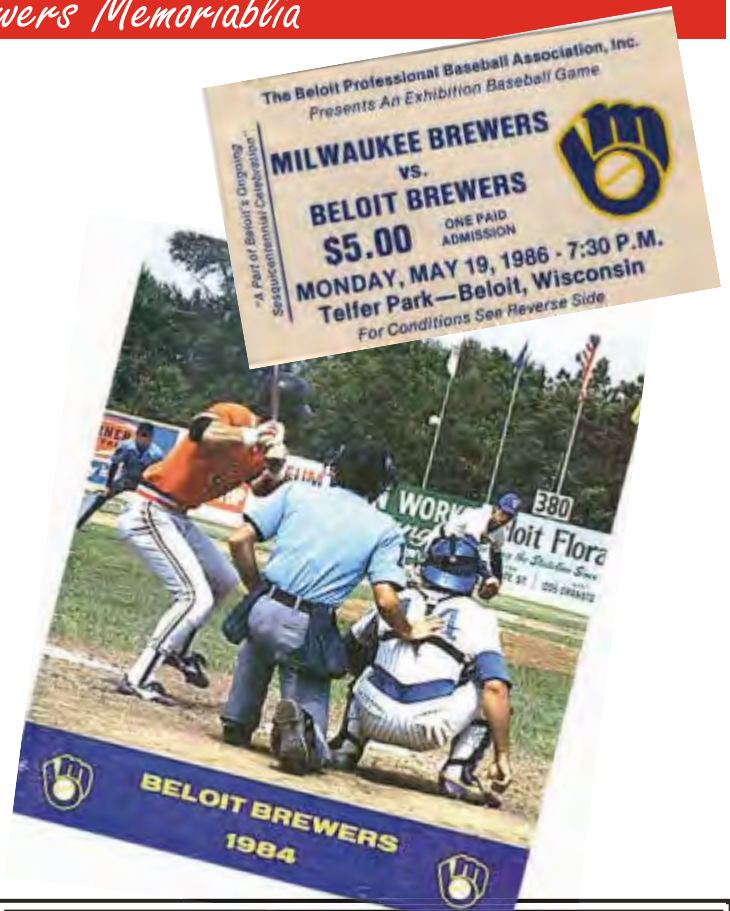
The Line City nine of course after subduing every type of opposition in the southern part of Wisconsin signed for new worlds to conquer and not finding any decided that new villages would do just as well. They dispatched a message to Pecatonica challenging them for the championship of something or anything and it is said the audacity of the deed caused much merriment among the bosses of the highly touted Blues team. The Pecatonicans, however, accepted and showed up in Beloit on Sunday, September 15, 1889, cocky and defiant as befitted the champs of all they surveyed.

The classic struggle between the Blues and the Beloiters was played on Montgomery Hill or Hayes pasture, as it was variously called. The site being in what is now South Beloit. An immense gathering of fans agog with the well-known excitement turned out for the contest and many of the bugs bet their brown derbies and strangler collars on the outcome of the affair.

The game started but in the first two innings neither team was able to shove a run across. In the third frame, however, Beloit counted four runs largely through boots on the part of the Pecatonica infield, then scored another in the fourth, one in the seventh and two more in the eighth.

Pecatonica, on the other hand, was kept as helpless as the Boston Red Sox through the sterling pitching of James Mullen. In the seventh his arm gave out entirely and Larry Rosenthal (Beloit postmaster) was rushed to the rescue. Larry finished the contest without allowing any man to get past second base and the Blues were stopped completely by his dazzling fast ball and sharp breaking curve. The final score was Beloit 8, Pecatonica 0, and this overwhelming defeat so disheartened the Blues that they were never in the limelight again.

None of the Beloiters ever went on to play big league baseball, but several of them received offers from major league clubs. The New York Giants tried unsuccessfully to sign Rosenthal on different times and the imposing record which he made on the mound here served to spread his renown throughout the west. Mullen also refused to enter the fast company, but it is extremely probable he would have made good. Rosenthal still keeps his interest in athletics and is one of the leading bowlers in the city".



### TRIVIA TEASER

#### Question - When was baseball first played in Beloit?

Answer: The Beloit Journal of 1860, reported that teams representing Manchester and Beloit played a baseball game on the farm of C. Chamberlain in Roscoe. Beloit won the contest 50 to 11. "The game lasted 2 1/2 hours and was played in a lively style," said the Journal. The Journal also reported that Beloit defeated the Bower City Club 61 to 8 in Janesville's first organized baseball game in 1866. The Beloit Olympians were wildly heralded in 1866 with many of the stars coming from Beloit College. They trounced teams from Whitewater, Madison and Milwaukee among others. They reached their zenith in 1863.

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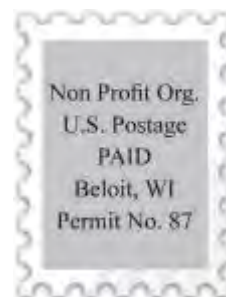


BELOIT  
HISTORICAL  
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# Confluence Newsletter

*Sharing Beloit's History to  
Enhance Community Pride*



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See page 7 for article on  
Beloit's Train Depots

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*Thank You!*