



Confluence

Where Past Meets Present

Volume 32 Issue 6

BELOIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Nov/Dec, 2023

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Contact Info

Phone
608-365-7835

Address

845 Hackett Street
Beloit, Wisconsin 53511

Office Hours

Tuesday - Thursday
12:00 P.M. - 4:00 P.M.

Email

info@belioithistoricalsociety.com

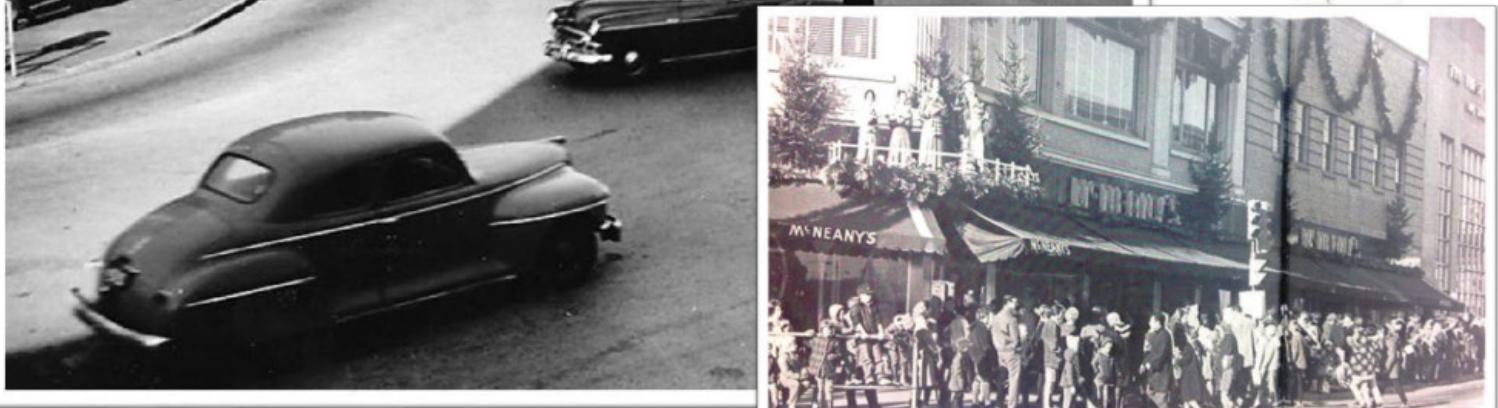
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Christmas Memories



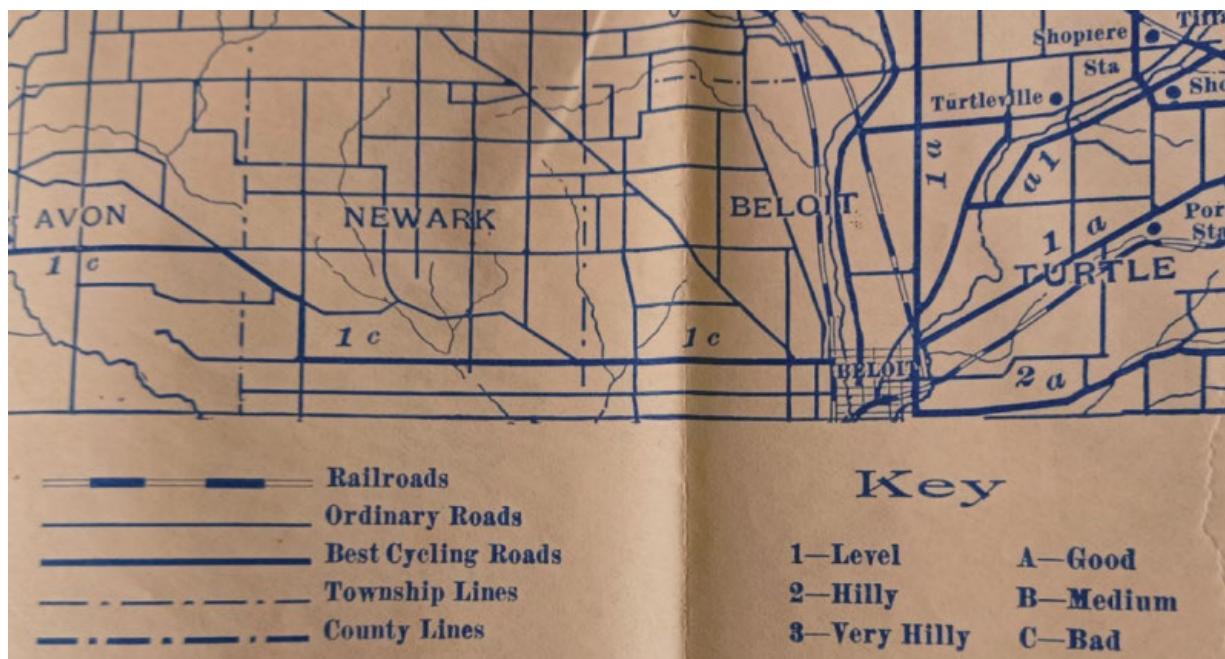
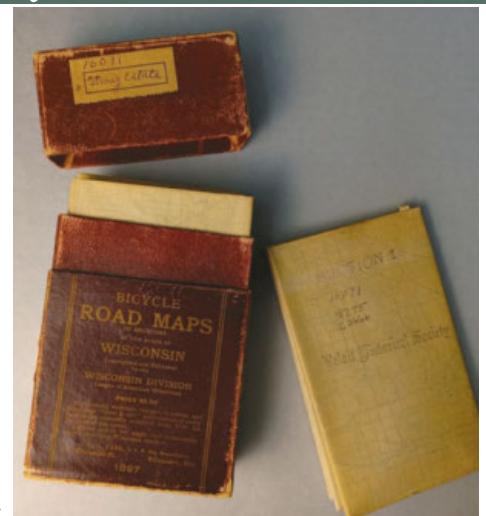
Natural boughs were the street decorations of the time. McNeany's carolers (insert photo) made their appearance for many years. There were so many people and so much traffic it took two policemen to make things run smoothly. What exciting times!(Corner of State St. and Grand Ave. looking west)

Here is an interesting bit of transportation history: The first big push to pave roads in Wisconsin came not from increased use of cars, but of bicycles.

In the late 1800s through the early 1900s, bikes became tremendously popular as a new, affordable and self-sufficient method of transportation. Wisconsin was no exception, as the map (below) from 1897 shows. At that time, there were no dedicated bike routes; but as personal cars were still quite rare, any road could be a biking route. The item on the right contains six maps showing different sections to cover all of Wisconsin, all stored neatly in a lovely two piece cardboard box. It is in very good condition and does not appear to have been taken out on any bike trips. These maps may have been intended to be an 'at home' reference, as neither the box or the maps were waxed or waterproofed in any other way that was common for paper items intended for outdoor use.

The map shows a bit of what cyclists at the time might have been concerned about, such as how hilly a route was and the location of the best roads for biking—although this map never indicates what might make a route the "Best Cycling Road". The creators of the map, the League of American Wheelmen, (now called The League of American Bicyclists) was founded in 1880 as a way for white men interested in biking to join together and share resources. Membership rules have since been amended, and they now work to support access to safe bike transportation for everyone.

The League reports that the main issue that cyclists in their group faced was poor roads. Their history page shares that, "bicyclists, known then as "wheelmen," were challenged by rutted roads of gravel and dirt and faced antagonism from horsemen, wagon drivers and pedestrians. In an effort to improve riding conditions ...more than 100,000 cyclists from across the United States joined the League to advocate for paved roads. The success of the League ...ultimately led to our national highway system."



The League continues to advocate for safe roads for all. While you unfortunately can no longer buy maps from the League, they do have resources to point riders to the best bike routes through online resources such as Google maps.

These featured items from our collection were donated by the Strong Estate in 1940.

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The family of Chester Clark, the mason of the Gaston Double House, originated in Amherst, Massachusetts, with the marriage of his father Elijah Clark and Sibil Green in 1805. Sometime after the birth of their 7 children, the family moved west to Marion in Wayne County, New York, where Elijah Clark died in 1833.

Chester Clark married Lucretia Rice in 1828 in Marion where their two children were born. He seems to have been the first of his siblings to move to Beloit. He reportedly arrived here in 1844 with his wife and family. His five brothers, one sister and widowed mother all relocated to Beloit or nearby areas by 1850. Four of his brothers Asahel, Elijah, Lucius and Dexter were medical doctors or dentists and many of their children and grandchildren followed in their father's profession. His brother Rufus had a farm northeast of Beloit on Prairie Avenue and his sister Mary Ann married Woodhull Helm in 1849. It was the first Presbyterian wedding in Beloit.

Chester Clark is credited with building all but one of the estimated 35 cobblestone buildings that once existed in Beloit. I suspected that Chester had learned the trade of masonry and more specifically the art of building cobblestone houses in western New York state where it was very popular building style. Wayne County still has over one hundred extant examples of cobblestone structures.

As luck would have it, I discovered the following letter that Chester wrote to the editor of a local paper that was published in "The Genesee Farmer" on March 8, 1838, Vol. 8, Number 9.

"Mr. Tucker—I observed in the Monthly Genesee Farmer of February a request for some one who was qualified to answer the inquiry concerning the manner of building cobble stone walls, of their durability, the proportion of the mortar, the expense of building, &c. Having had some experience in this business, I cheerfully transmit a few facts relative to the foregoing request.



The Gaston Cobblestone Double House was located at 536 and 538 Fifth Street. This is likely the largest cobblestone structure built in Beloit. It was constructed as the residences for Nathan Brockway Gaston (1811-1900) and his father-in-law Augustine John Battin (1798-1883), by mason Chester Clark in 1845. Clark is credited with building most, if not all, the cobblestone buildings in Beloit.

Gaston arrived in Beloit in 1842, built a mill race on the west side of the Rock River in 1843 and established the Gaston Scale Works in 1844. This is credited as being the first manufacturing company in Beloit.

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Having erected two or three buildings each season, for several years past, I shall only mention one which I built last season. It is 40 feet by 60, four stories high. The foundation is three feet high, the first story 10 8-12 feet high, the second 11 2-12 feet high, the third 13 3-12 feet, the fourth story 10 3-12 high; making from the foundation to the plates 48 4-12 feet in height, with a wing 24 by 34, one story. The whole was built of cobble stone, (not of the first quality) the outside was laid in courses of cobble stone four inches in thickness, and the larger stone on the inside. It is a steam flouring mill and has been in operation three months. It stands perfectly well - it is situated in the village of Palmyra, on Canal Street. As regards their durability, if they are laid with good materials and in a workmanlike manner, I am perfectly convinced they will stand and their solidity will increase as their age increases.

The quality and quantity of sand with the lime is very essential. The coarser and purer the sand, the stronger will be the cement and the firmer the wall. As for the proper quantity of sand with the lime, it depends on its coarseness and purity. The proportion which I generally use is from five to eight bushels of sand to one of lime in the stone. As for elegance and taste, every one who has seen a cobble stone building built as it should be, will acknowledge that it surpasses quarry stone or brick buildings. As for the expense of building, it is cheaper than almost any other kind of building.

If the above, after such corrections as you may deem expedient, will be of use to your readers, let it have a place in your paper; if not, throw it under the table; suit yourself and you will suit (sic)."

Your ob't servant,

Chester Clark

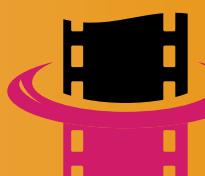
Marion (N.Y.) February 27, 1838"

Perhaps it was changing tastes but Chester seems to have abandoned building with cobblestones and masonry altogether sometime in the 1850s and become a farmer. Chester and family moved to Rockton in 1860, where he called himself a farmer. Subsequent censuses in 1870 and 1880 find him in Marshalltown, Iowa, farming. He died in 1882, in Orchard, Nebraska. His widow Lucretia died there four years later. Although he is buried in Nebraska, the legacy of Chester Clark still resides here in Beloit in his cobblestone houses that still stand after nearly 180 years.



Beloit once boasted that it was home to the greatest concentration of cobblestone buildings in the Midwest. This was predominately due to the presence of Chester Clark. Sadly, only a handful of these structures still exist in our city today. The work was time consuming and required particular skills for the construction. Skilled masons who can repair these structures are scarce. This makes it very expensive to repair and maintain the buildings.

On the left is a close-up view of cobblestone construction similar to that used in Beloit homes



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Beloit Hall of Fame

Five builders of Beloit were inducted into the 2023 Hall of Fame on October 15 at Lincoln Center. Bonnie Wetter introduced the Hall of Fame committee members who each introduced the inductees. Four of the inductees have passed away. The names of the recipients will be added to the tribute wall, and their information will be available for future researchers in the Beloit Hall of Fame section.



Hall of Fame Committee Members:

Bonnie Wetter, Chair
 Barbara Hickman
 Dick Gerhard
 Fran Fruzen
 Marty Densch
 Dennis Conerton
 Curt Lansbery
 Linda Ward
 Donna Langford



Arnold "Arnie" Lee



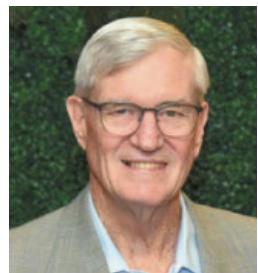
David Luebke



Timothy McKearn



Beverly Melton



Richard "Rick" West

Arnie Lee was an educator, school principal and administrator, an Adjunct Instructor at Beloit College and community leader in Beloit for many years. Other activities included school board, Kiwanas Club, board member of Family Service, YMCA, Voluntary Action, Beloit Comm. Foundation, Merrill Comm. Center and many others too numerous to list.

Dave Luebke was a educator in Beloit in various capacities for 33 years. He served on many boards: City Council, Beloit International Film Festival, Sports Hall of Fame, Police/Fire Commission, Community Development Authority, Business Improvement District and Beloit Hall of Fame. He also organized a "Welcome Home Vietnam Vets" event.

Tim McKearn was a business owner, educator (teacher and principal), civic leader and 4th generation son of Beloit. He worked for Beloit College as Director for Major Gifts and Blackhawk College Foundation. He served on the boards of Family Promise, Downtown Beloit Association, Visit Beloit, St. Vincent de Paul, American Cancer Society, Red Cross, Habitat for Humanity, Beloit Historical Society and Stateline Community Foundation.

Bev Melton was known for her volunteer efforts in the community and as a local business owner of Bev Melton Paper and Painting for 37 years. She filled many roles with The Angel Museum and was the founder of the museum's Hometown Heroes Celebration. Other activities included Beloit Altrusa, YWCA board, Zonta, Caritas and Salvation Army.

Rick West is a Beloit native and is known by many for his radio broadcasts of sporting events. He was a broadcaster for both WBEL and WGEZ. He has been active with Visit Beloit, Rotary Club and Elliot Perring Sports Hall of Fame. He was a sportswriter for 10 years for Stateline News and was Resource Development Director for United Way Blackhawk Region. He has been a highly respected emcee at community events such as Chamber of Commerce, Miss Beloit Scholarship Pageants, Memorial Day celebrations and various sport's banquets.

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Robert G. Blakely

- Attorney At Law -

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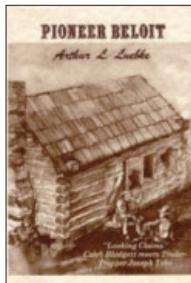
Gift memberships are a wonderful way to share your love of Beloit history with a family member or friend. Gift memberships are at the individual or family levels and provide the bi-monthly newsletter *Confluence* to their doorstep. Use the form on page 11 of this issue or stop by Lincoln Center for a certificate or book purchase.

(Please include a note stating this is a gift membership).



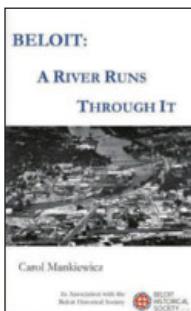
Pioneer Beloit provides the early history of Beloit 1830 – 1839. Discover how Beloit got its name. Read about settlers and some of the challenges they faced.

A bargain at \$5



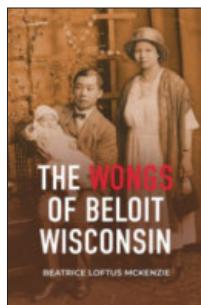
Beloit: A River Runs Through It Carol provides a thorough and enjoyable history of Beloit along the Rock River. Packed full of pictures, the book is a tour that can be enjoyed from an armchair or walking with friends and family along the river.

\$10



The Wongs of Beloit Wisconsin (2023 Book Award of Merit) traces the history of one of Beloit's most influential families from their journey leaving China to their life in our city. It is written by Beatrice McKenzie, Beloit College history professor.

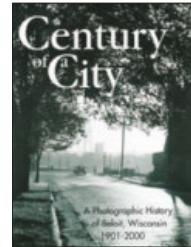
Signed copies \$25



Century of a City

This out of print book has resurfaced and the society has only 6 copies left. It is a photographic journey through a century of Beloit buildings, street scenes and many different activities.

\$20



The Book of Beloit provides history from 1836 to 1936. It was published in 1936 by the Daily News Publishing Company on the 100th anniversary of the arrival of the first settlers at the Turtle and Rock.

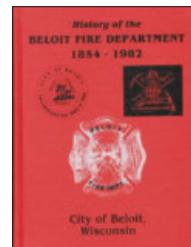
\$20



History of the Beloit Fire Department

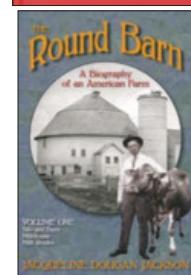
1854 – 1982 explores the history of the city's volunteer first fire fighters and the development to a professional department. Lots of illustrations show the changes in fire-fighting equipment and methods.

\$20



The Round Barn (volumes 1-4) compose a full, concrete history of dairy farming during the heyday of the American family dairy farm. The books are written by local author Jacqueline Dougan Jackson.

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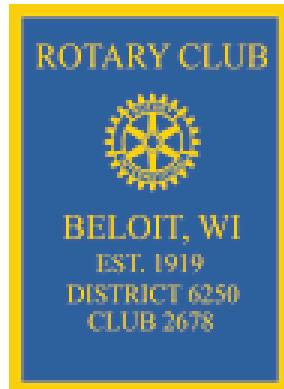
Message from Executive Director, Donna Langford

The Military gallery opened its doors to a new exhibit ***Their Stories: A Historic Timeline of Beloit's Veterans*** during Heritage Days on September 9. Billy Prieve put his heart and soul into this exhibit as he researched Beloit's military history, identified individuals to include in the exhibit and chose artifacts to display.

Many thanks to Billy Prieve and Liz Meek, Jesse, Sue, Doug, Norma, Vicki, Priscilla and Tom who made this exhibit possible!

The day's activities also included a Civil War encampment set up in our Community Room and a presentation by Jeff Kannel on African -Americans in the Civil War. The Civil War interactive encampment was popular with families as Liz Meek, dressed in a Civil War period uniform, described the encampment. Eight-eight visitors participated in the activities and made the day fun filled.

I gave a presentation to the Rotary on August 22 exploring the history of the Beloit Historical Society. Since our founding in 1910, the society has been preserving and sharing Beloit's rich heritage through programs and events.



HERITAGE DAYS EVENTS

Jeff Kannel, author of *Make Way for Liberty*, spoke about Beloit African-Americans who fought in the Civil War. Jeff is a volunteer tour guide at the Civil War Museum in Kenosha.

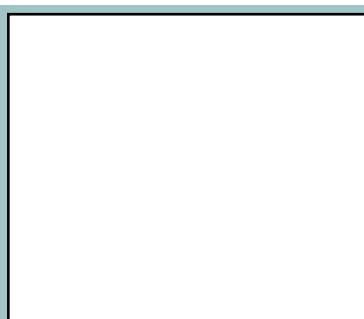
Beloit African-Americans on draft rolls,

- J. A. Bowling, 37, shoemaker, born NC
- Joseph Graham, 42, farmer, b MO (previous service with 2
- Frank Jerrick, 20, farmer, single, b MD
- Stanton Keys, 28 laborer, single, b AL
- Levi Morris, 30, barber, married, b NC
- Augustus Pollock, 30, barber, married, b NY

During 1863 and until Mar 1864, WI African American men drafted, but could not volunteer

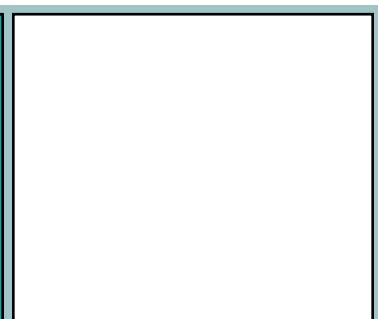
Photos courtesy of Mark Preuschl

Miss Beloit, Angelica Chapman-Sykes, posed for a Heritage Day's picture with Liz Meek, Civil War reenactor, and Jackie Jackson, BHS board member.



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Many people come to Beloit to enjoy a meal at the noteworthy Merrill & Houston Steak Joint on Pleasant Ave. Before or after the meal, the visitor may happen to drive by Merrill School or Merrill Community Center (1428 Wisconsin Ave.). Their drive could take them down Merrill St. to see the historic Brasstown Cottages or past Merrill Park (950 Fifth St.). The visitor may be in town for the Soreno Taylor Merrill History Prize ceremony at Beloit College presented to a student who shows high achievement and motivation.

All of these named locations and honors beg to ask -

“Who was this Soreno Taylor Merrill?

He came to Beloit in 1846 (born 9/24/1816) from Gill, Massachusetts. By an unusual coincidence, the principal of the Beloit Seminary resigned the same day that Merrill arrived. He was persuaded to take over the Seminary. This he did until its dissolution in 1849.

He was the first professor of Beloit College (1847-48) and was a life trustee (30 years).



Merrill Home - 703 Park Ave.

He was Superintendent of Schools for 3 years and a member of the Beloit School Board. He served on the County Board and State Legislature. He was commissioned to represent Wisconsin at the 1873 Vienna Exposition, the 1885 New Orleans Expo. and was Commissioner of the United States at the 1881 Paris Expo.

Merrill was very active in Beloit businesses founding the Rock River Paper Co. He was president of the Merrill & Houston Iron Works (later the Beloit Corp.), the Eclipse Windmill Co. (Colt Industries Fairbanks plant) and the Beloit Savings Bank.

He died in his home on October 22, 1905. Public funeral services were held in the Beloit College chapel. A tall granite shaft marks his grave in Oakwood Cemetery. He was inducted into the Beloit Hall of Fame in 1938.

* If you would like more information on this marvelous man, see our web site under Beloit History, About Beloit, From Beloit Iron Works to Beloit Corporation.

TRIVIA TEASER

Questions: 1) What was the first church building erected in Beloit?

2) What was the first business to open in Beloit?

Streets.

Lusk on the corner of State and Race permanent store was built in 1838 by Field and Turtle St., but the first store of any size and general store on State St., then known as

2) In 1837 John Hackett opened a small northwest corner of Broad and Prospect.

Congregational Church in 1844 on the

worship was built by members of the First

1) The first building exclusively for church

ANSWERS:

Welcome New Members

Robert Blakely

Rev. Larry & Roseann Froemming

Janice Grutzner

Mickey Mouse Tavern Inc (business)

Kathy Pann

Pricilla Praneis

John Ryan

Jim Van De Bogart

Harry & Kendron Wiersgalla

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United Way Day of Caring

Each year, the society is fortunate to be a host site for the United Way Day of Caring. On September 13, volunteers from ABC Supply Co. worked on landscaping needs. The volunteers were enthusiastic and amazing as a year's worth of weedy overgrowth and trees were removed from the fence-line we share with our neighbors. The weather cooperated and it was a joy to be outdoors.



The Day of Caring is a day when local corporate teams provide resources to non-profits to accomplish a project the non-profit cannot do alone.

Many thanks to the ABC Volunteers!



WELCOME SHARON GREEN

We are happy to have a new administrative assistant to help make operations run smoothly.

Sharon is a recent graduate of Rock Valley College where she earned a certificate in Billing and Coding. Spring 2024, she will receive her associate degree in Office Professional.

She graduated from Beloit Memorial High School in 1987. After living in Chicago, she decided to return to Beloit. She has 4 children and 11 grandchildren with whom she loves to spend time. She also enjoys cooking, bowling, eating out and attending church.

She enjoys working at BHS and learning about history. She especially likes being in the building since she attended Lincoln Junior High School as a student and loves to be a part of it again.

We are happy to have you join us, Sharon!

"Every town has to have a place to keep its history, otherwise it will be lost."

John Patrick

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*We have a new Legacy member!
Thank you.*

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