



Volume 31 Issue 2

BELOIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

March/April, 2022

Confluence

Where Past Meets Present

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Chester Department Store - Chester Days

In January, photos and the history of E.L. Chester Co. were donated to the BHS by **Donald Vogelson**. Donald's wife, **Susan Tarr**, is related to the Chester family through Lloyd Tarr who began work at the store as an office manager and later became a co-owner. From opening day until it sold, the business was owned and operated by the Chester Family. Founded October, 1894 by Edward L. Chester, it had a significant impact in the history of Beloit. Originally located at 208 W. Grand, this ready-to-wear clothing and dry goods store outgrew its small space quickly and moved to the Swale building at 140 W. Grand. Continued growth and an opportunity for a larger space moved the store to 136 W. Grand where it stayed until 1964 when the company was sold to H. F. Pfister, Jr. and in 1970 to D.J. Stewart and Co.



A new building was built in 1930 after an explosion demolished the original building.



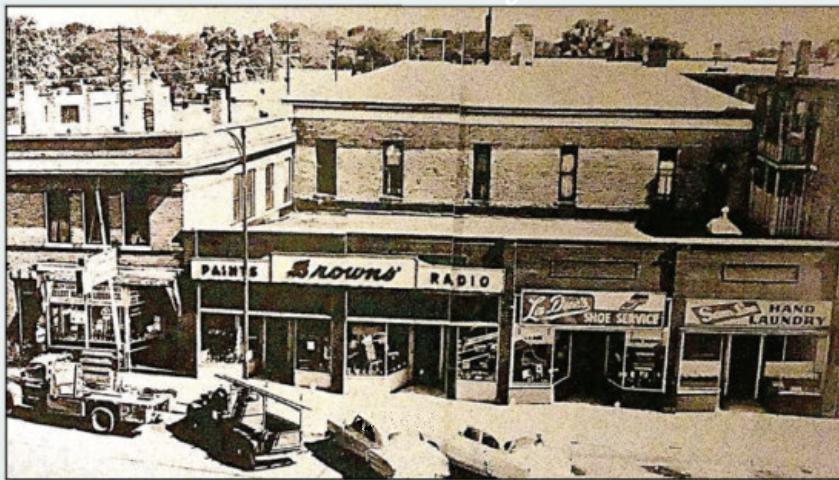
Oval Room opened in 1961

Susan Tarr modeled some of the children's clothing lines. This picture was used in an advertisement dated 1959.



(A more extensive article about Chester's appeared in Nov/Dec 2020 Confluence)

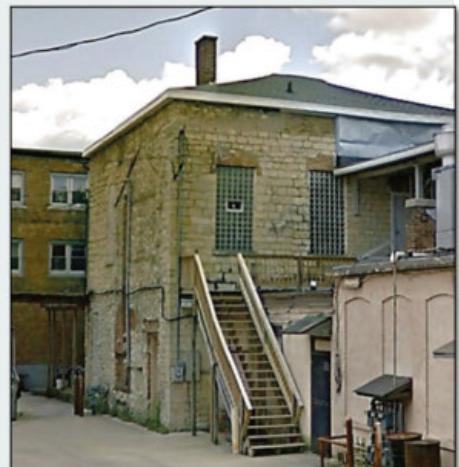
Looking Back at a Beloit "Secret"



The top section of the Brittan House (minus its tall Mansard cupola) can be seen in this mid-1900s picture before the business fronts were remodeled into the streamlined façade of present day.

More curious souls may want to venture down Cross St. to get a better idea of the age and grandeur of this dwelling. It is seventy five feet in width and the limestone bricks date it to a time when the city of Beloit was relatively new. Also, keep in mind that it was tradition for the workmanship on the parts of a home that would not be seen by the public, to be of less refined construction.

Those of you who have visited the Hanchett-Bartlett Homestead, have probably noticed the crude workmanship on the back of the house compared to the lovely stonework on the front and porch.



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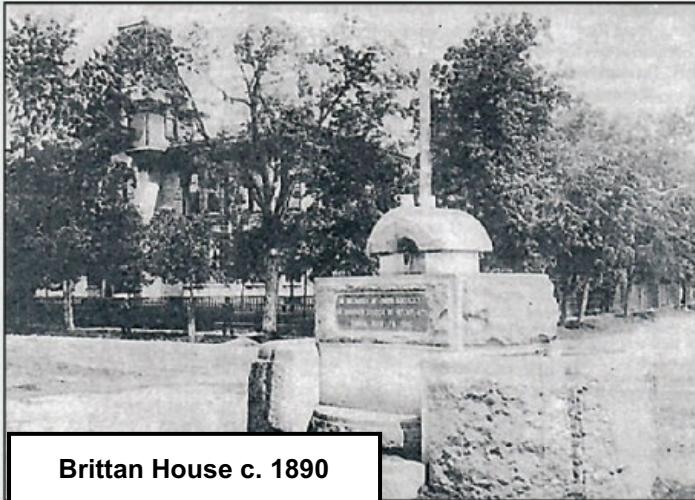
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Most towns and cities across America have a few secrets, Beloit included. However, thousands of people pass by one of ours daily and are not aware of its existence.

In the 1850s, Fourth & W. Grand was a pastoral setting of trees and dirt roads with a few homes planted here and there: William Blodgett had a beautiful home at the southwest corner of 4th and St. Lawrence (this was discussed in the Nov/Dec 2021 *Confluence*); Charles H. and Walter M. Brittan lived in a grand home south of the Blodgett place; and on the corner of 4th and Grand was the Brittan House with its vast lawn and large trees built around 1858. The house has maintained its spot on lot 60 of Hackett's Addition for over 160 years even though it is almost invisible to us today.



Brittan House c. 1890

But it wasn't built for Arthur Brittan for whom the house is named. Arthur Brittan is as much a mystery as is the home, and he doesn't enter into Beloit history until 1891. That year the city directory listed the house as his summer home.

Arthur is a mystery because there is no evidence available connecting him to the Brittans of *Hyde and Brittan Bank*, Beloit's first bank, founded by Louis C. Hyde in the 1850s; he was later joined in the business by his son-in-law Walter Brittan. There is also no evidence connecting Arthur to the many other Brittans who had various business enterprises in Beloit from the mid-1800s well into the mid-1900s. Arthur did not stay long in Beloit. In 1891 he is listed as being part of the company *Brittan, Graham & Mathes* of Chicago. In 1897 he is part of *Nimmick & Brittan MFG Co.*, Pittsburgh. In that year his occupation is listed as Commercial Traveler. In 1902 he disappears from the Beloit scene.

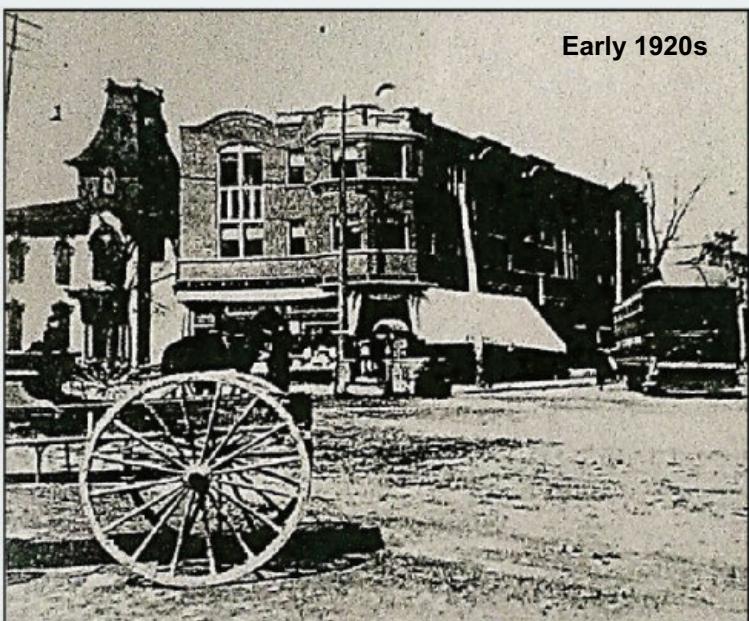
The Brittan House was converted into the Perkins Hotel from 1902 until 1915. Then James Kelly, long time manager of Perkins Hotel, bought the hotel and changed the name to Kelly Hotel; it remained so until 1917.

In the early 1920s, the Brittan Block building was constructed on the east lawn of the house. The Beloit business district was growing and making use of any surrounding available land. A short time later businesses were built in front of the house on the large lawn. It appears, this arrangement to enclose the house must have been a more suitable solution than to tear it down.

The former house/hotel was occupied by the undertakers Atkinson & McDowell, as well as Jones Hardware. In the '30s and '40s, Brown's Paint Store used the building. After that it has either been used for storage or left empty.

Many homes in Beloit have an interesting history. However, it is likely this is the only one to remain "hidden".

(some information used is from an earlier *Confluence* article)



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Beloit Women of Achievement

Throughout Beloit's history, women have made significant contributions to the City of Beloit. In honor of Women's History Month, the Beloit Historical Society recognizes two women who have significantly contributed to the growth and well-being of Beloit. Rubie Bond was inducted into the Beloit City Hall of Fame in 2007 and Faith Christiansen was inducted in 2010. The Beloit City Hall of Fame is located at the Beloit Historical Society.



Rubie Bond (1906-2001)

Ms. Bond personally observed and lived in the segregated South, her family coming to Beloit for a better life. She sought an education but often found that she was limited by her race for job opportunities. She became a Civil Rights Activist in times where such actions were not deemed "politically correct" and many times ran into obstructive racial

prejudice.

Ms. Bond was advisor to the Black Girl Reserve Club for the YWCA, which was not permitted to meet in the YMCA facilities. Ms. Bond convinced the local organization that the group was entitled to the same benefits as white girls to be full members of the YWCA and hold meetings at the "Y"- her efforts successful. She also worked to organize and recognize an integrated Girl Scouts troop which met at Burdge School, and soon all troops in all schools were integrated.

The 1920s and 1930s policy of segregating hospital rooms at the Beloit Municipal Hospital was changed by Ms. Bond when she took this issue to the City, demanding the cessation of such a policy in a tax supported institution.

Ms. Bond came from segregation and discrimination and worked as a leader to make changes in the community of Beloit. Her words best describe her belief: *"African-Americans are employed in many positions of responsibility today. This is excellent, but we must all work on attitudes. We must tolerate, respect, and celebrate our differences and accentuate our many similarities. It is up to each of us to accept one another as we are. We must learn to live together in harmony."*



Faith Christiansen (1912-1999)

Faith was born on July 15, 1912 and cultivated a life that would eventually lead her to Beloit. Faith graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Madison with a B.S. in Education and a M.S. in Classical Humanities and added another two years of education working on her PH.D at Northwestern University. Her primary role in Beloit for nearly 35 years was an educator.

Faith taught at many schools ending her long period of teaching at Beloit Memorial High School. Faith served two terms (1972-1976) on the Beloit Board of Education. Her campaign theme was "A dollar worth of education for a dollar spent."

Faith was active in many volunteer capacities as well. These included the Beloit Symphony Guild, Beloit Animal Welfare League, Beloit Welfare Council, Beloit Recreational Council, Beloit Water Committee, and the Beloit Memorial Hospital Board of Directors. Faith was also consistently involved with the Beloit Federation of Women, District Federation of Women, Intermediate Women's Club, West Side Monday Club, the Diplomats, Cub Scouts, and the PTA's of Morgan and Roosevelt Schools. In 1966, she was named Club woman of the year. In 1973 she was nominated for the Theodore Yeoman's Citizenship award given to Wisconsin Women judged to have made the greatest civic contributions. In 1974 she was honored as Beloit Booster of the Week.

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It was not uncommon for the skies of Beloit to go dark during the migration of great flocks of passenger pigeons. Wisconsin has the honor of having the **largest nesting** ever described when millions of birds followed an abundant acorn yield into the southwestern part of our state in 1871. The nesting area was over 100 miles in length. The last nesting of large size also occurred in the same area in 1882. The **largest flock** ever observed was estimated to be well-over 2 billion birds in Kentucky.



The passenger pigeon resembles the mourning dove but was twice as large

The Beloit accountings state that at dusk the birds would light on trees with such compactness that the branches would break off. Farmers freshly sowed grain could be eaten by the birds in a matter minutes. The farmers had several ways of killing them for their meat. One was to wait until they roosted for the night, then sit under the tree shooting upward. They would fall in bunches to the ground. Another method used was to net them whenever they settled on the ground and then club the trapped birds.

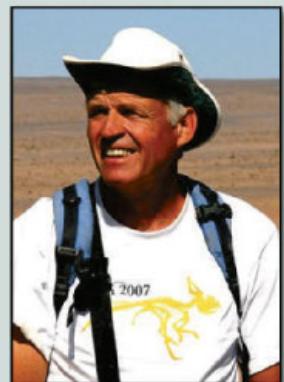
Prior to the construction of railroads, the number of birds killed was somewhat controlled because the market was small and confined to the immediate area. After rail lines were built, the express companies did a thriving business in shipping the pigeons. After nestings were reported, trappers arrived by the hundreds to the area. Pigeons were so plentiful that barrels of the carcasses would be shipped into Milwaukee and Chicago where they would appear on the various hotel menus. Farmers utilized such numbers as they could dispose of at their mealtimes. This senseless slaughter brought about the extinction of all the passenger pigeons for all time by 1914. The loss of a species is always to be regretted. This applies particularly to the passenger pigeon whose life history was more dramatic than that of any other bird.

ROY CHAPMAN ANDREWS SOCIETY CELEBRATES 100 YEARS

The Roy Chapman Andrews Society will celebrate the **19th Distinguished Explorer Award** event and the 100th anniversary of the first of his five Central Asiatic Expeditions. The event will take place on **April 29 at 4:30 in Beloit Public Library**.

"A Visual History of Roy Chapman Andrews, Beloit's Native Son" will be displayed at the library along with artifacts donated by Roy's granddaughter. A free lecture will be presented by Ann Bausum, who authored Andrew's biography: "Dragon Bones and Dinosaur Eggs".

Philip Currie, an internationally renowned dinosaur paleontologist, will receive the 20th Distinguished Explorer Award. Following the award presentation, Dr. Currie will share stories about his expeditions. A celebratory fund-raising dinner will be held at the Beloit Country Club. For more information, contact the Roy Chapman Andrew's Society.



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Welcome
Vincent Friedrichs,
New Administrative
Assistant for BHS

We are very happy to welcome Vincent who joined our staff on January 10, 2022.

New Year's brings new opportunities and changes in life. It's a process to become familiar with all of the information and procedures here at BHS, but it's definitely a challenge that can be overcome with time.

I hope that I can bring some important skills and viewpoints to BHS that will help the organization through the COVID era. I have a Bachelor's Degree in Historic Preservation and a minor in Archeology from Southeast Missouri State University. In college I interned at a couple of local history museums in central Illinois. I have worked with PastPerfect software, with collections, with program creation and with visitors as they come into the museums. Since I graduated college in December of 2017, I have worked as a paraprofessional and substitute teacher in a special needs preschool classroom.

I hope everyone is adjusting to 2022 as well as I have been.

TAKE A GUESS

If someone asked you to guess a Beloit business that has been here since **1867**, it would be quite likely that very few people, if any, would guess the company.

If you guessed Jackson Monument Company, you would be one of the select few to get the right answer. Ackley and Jackson started their Marble Works on Broad St. in that year which makes Jackson Monument **155 years old**. What a wonderful accomplishment for this company.

DAMAGE TO LINCOLN CENTER

Wind damaged our roof in mid-December. We are fortunate that snowfall has not been too great since then as we work with the insurance adjuster, architect and roofing company towards making the necessary repairs. Fortunately, the interior was not damaged and materials have been moved out of this area to prevent additional damage. The roof was flattened to "weather proof" until full repairs can be made.



Unexpected expenses such as this, are one of the reasons your financial support for our organization is so necessary. Thank you again for the funds you have given to support the buildings that house our precious collection. We couldn't exist without you!

BELOIT HAD 5 FAMOUS ANTHROPOLOGISTS IN FOREIGN FIELDS IN 1926

Roy Chapman Andrews was in Mongolia in search of dinosaur eggs

Dr. Ennis in Portuguese West Africa in search of "The Garden of Eden"

Dr. George Collie returned from Algeria with the skull of a prehistoric man

Alonzo Pond was off to China to join Roy Chapman Andrews in search of dinosaur eggs

Paul Nesbitt made important finds in Algerian fields



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Message from Executive Director, Donna Langford



Thank you to all of our members and donors who participated in our 2021 Year End Appeal. Our goal of \$20,000 was exceeded by 66 donations totaling \$73,225.00. Of these donations \$38,500 is restricted for specific projects and \$34,725 is for general operating support. Thank you everyone for providing this wonderful support! All of the donors who made contributions throughout the year are recognized on pages 4 and 5 of this *Confluence* issue.

April is National Volunteer Appreciation Month and I want to thank all of the dedicated volunteers who have made the Beloit Historical Society what it is today. Thank you to the volunteers who continued to work on their projects and the new volunteers who have joined us during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our volunteers have made adjustments during this challenging time to work remotely and observe other safety protocols in order to continue to work with Beloit history. Volunteers play a critical role in helping to share Beloit history with the community. Many opportunities are available.

The year has just started and we are already preparing for summer internships. BHS has been accepted as a host site for one full-time and one part-time intern to work with collections management. These interns will come from Beloit College and WAICU (Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities). We will be accepting student applications and conducting interviews over the next few months.

Looking forward to a great 2022!

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Mary Beardmore

Gary Osmond

Sandra Ovist

Ruthann Trinco

BHS gets help from Beloit College Students

On February 8, 2022, the Society was host to the Beloit College MUST 275 museum studies class. The students received a tour of collection storage rooms and the exhibit galleries. At the end of the tour we conducted a SWOT analysis to discuss the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats the students saw in collection storage. This activity not only provided the students with their first exposure to the SWOT analysis procedure, but also provided valuable feedback information to the staff of the Society.



Thank you museum students!

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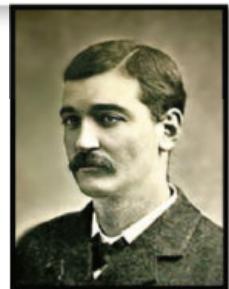


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DID YOU KNOW?

- * The intersection of 4th and W. Grand was once swamp land called "**the willows**". It was on the present site of the Chester's location that a basket factory sat where Beloit women made basketry from the willows.
- * A bank advertised that it would only "**Pay Interest on Savings**" if it could be invested profitably.
- * In 1845, tri-weekly, a stage line with 4-horse coaches left Whitewater via Milton, Janesville and Beloit to Rockford connecting with the Galena and Chicago daily line.
- * The first overalls manufactured in Beloit occurred with the opening of the Henry Rosenblatt & Sons plant at 800 Pleasant, the site of the former Rock River Paper Co. now the Brown Swiss Ass. This operation was later moved to the former Brass Works building on 4th St., later occupied by the City of Beloit Maintenance Dept. and is now part of the parking lot across from the high school.
- * It was in 1918 (the year of the Spanish flu) that Beloit's first health officer, W.L. Holt, started placing quarantine signs on homes for measles, diphtheria, small-pox, whooping cough, mumps, chicken pox, tuberculosis, scarlet fever and typhoid.
- * **Mae West** played on the stage of the Wilson Opera House and did not wear as many clothes as some of our local dignitaries thought she should. This was brought to her attention. The stage manager asked "What now?" "They want me to wear more." she said in her terse pouty manner. "Go out and buy me a rose."

TRIVIA TEASER



Question: Bartholemew William Barclay "Bat" Masterson was a famous western lawman. What was his connection to Beloit?

Answer: "Bart" had distinguished himself as a buffalo hunter, civilian scout and Indian fighter on the Great Plains. He earned fame as a sheriff and gunfighter in Dodge City, Kansas, during which time he was involved in various notable shootouts and is rumored to have left 30 victims as a result of those gunfights.

In the 1880s, he moved to Denver and became a gambler and a leading authority on the sport of prizefighting. He met Belloit's Johnny Kline at one of those fights, and they came to be great friends. Kline established a famous training center in Belloit in 1885 called "Manly Art Institute". It consisted of a 40-acre farm on the city's western outskirts and a downtown gym at the corner of Sixth St. and Olmypian. Bart came to Belloit many times during the following years to visit Kline and be involved at the training camp.

On one of his trips he brought a fighter by the name of John Clow. Masterson and Clow were in a downtown business on runaway horse dashed down the street headed for the plate glass window. Both men jumped out of the way just in time to avoid the horse and the shattered window.

Third. St. with their feet propped on the window sill. A writer at the age of 49. His column covered boxing and other sports. He obtained nation-wide prominence as a sports masterson later went to a New York newspaper as a sports writer at the age of 68, which was a ripe old age in those days for sports writers and lawmen.

Question: Who received federal appointments from Theodore Roosevelt and was one of the "White House Gunfighters"?

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The Brittanic Block is a very recognizable Beloit landmark beginning with its construction on Fourth and Grand in the early 1920s.

Learn more about its most interesting history on pages 2 and 3 of this issue.

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