BAILEYS HARBOR HISTORICAL SOCIETY

April 2026

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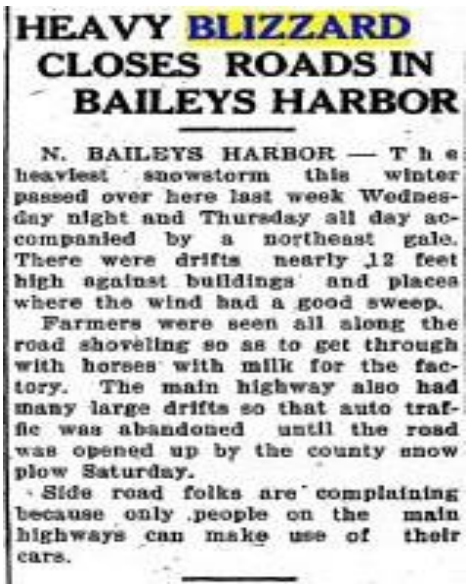

HEAVY BLIZZARD CLOSES ROADS IN BAILEYS HARBOR

N. BAILEYS HARBOR — The heaviest snowstorm this winter passed over here last week Wednesday night and Thursday all day accompanied by a northeast gale. There were drifts nearly 12 feet high against buildings and places where the wind had a good sweep.

Farmers were seen all along the road shoveling so as to get through with horses with milk for the factory. The main highway also had many large drifts so that auto traffic was abandoned until the road was opened up by the county snow plow Saturday.

Side road folks are complaining because only people on the main highways can make use of their cars.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS REPORT

Plans are being finalized for our popular summer public history programs. In collaboration with the Heritage Alliance of Door County, we will kick off the season at the History Days community event on **June 15,** from 10:00 a.m. to noon. The event will take place at Crossroads at Big Creek in Sturgeon Bay. Representatives from historical organizations throughout Door County will have displays. This year's theme, **"America at 250,"** celebrates the 250th anniversary of our nation.

In keeping with that theme, the Historical Society will welcome **DeAnn Umland** of the Jean Nicolet Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution for our first program on **June 17**. DeAnn will highlight early Baileys Harbor and Door County settlers who are descendants of American Revolution patriots.

We'll continue the celebration on **July 15** with an old-fashioned ice cream social and a slide show featuring Baileys Harbor Fourth of July parades dating back as early as 1910.

On **August 19**, our focus turns to the Toft House, one of the oldest buildings in our community. The Historical Society is fortunate to share space there with the Baileys Harbor Community Association, which operates the Visitor Center and hosts our local history displays.

Finally, the Historical Society's annual meeting will be held on **September 16**. **Save the dates!**

SHOVELING OUT HISTORY

"The heaviest snowstorm of the year passed over here, with twelve-foot drifts and abandoned cars on the road from a two-day blizzard, until the county snowplow opened it up after several days. Side-road folks are complaining because only people on the main highway can make use of their cars."

Sound familiar? This newspaper clipping, published in the *Door County Advocate* on March 3, 1926, describes a storm that echoes our recent experience with Blizzard Elsa on March 15–16, 2026. But what was different 100 years ago? As the article continues: "Farmers were seen all along the road shoveling so as to get through with their horses with milk for the factory."

If you have photos or would like to document and share your personal experiences from Blizzard Elsa, we would like to compile them and add them to our archives for future generations. Send them to us at: info@baileysharborhistory.org

REMEMBERING MARY ANN JOHNSON

Mary Ann (Christensen) Johnson passed away peacefully in her sleep in Waconia, Minnesota on June 10, 2025, at the age of 96. Her father immigrated from Denmark to the United States in 1915 at the age of 18 and her maternal grandparents immigrated from Sweden, settling in Cannon Falls, MN. She attended public schools in Chicago and went on to earn degrees in History and Spanish from St. Olaf College in Northfield, MN in 1951. After college, she began her career in international trade, working for an import/export firm in Chicago. She traveled extensively throughout Mexico, Central and South America, sourcing import goods and honing the global business and public relations skills that would shape her future.

Mary Ann married James H. Johnson and they welcomed two children into their household, Chris and Lisa. The family lived in Hinsdale, Illinois where Mary Ann was active in many community organizations. The family adopted Door County as their summer retreat and in 1969, inspired by her Scandinavian heritage, Mary Ann opened her first import shop, "Hjertehjem," or "Home of the Heart," in Baileys Harbor. She curated goods from Sweden, Denmark, Austria, and Iceland bringing Nordic craftsmanship and design to the Midwest. After the family moved to Lake Forest, IL, she opened a second "Hjertehjem" in 1980. Over 42 years in business, Mary Ann built a loyal following in both locations and was known for her impeccable taste, deep product knowledge and gracious hospitality. In addition she enjoyed producing fashion shows in her Door County store, often featuring family and community members as models.

She was deeply involved in St. Olaf College alumni life, founding the Door County Chapter of the St. Olaf Alumni Club in 1988. The club was a beloved feature of the annual 4th of July parade in Baileys Harbor. The group marched with banners, sang songs and always returned to "Hjertehjem" for coffee and a giant "Um! Yah! Yah!" cake after the parade.

Mary Ann's love of history also followed her to Door County. Patty Williamson, PhD (now deceased), wrote an article about Mary Ann for the Peninsula Pulse in 2010. In that article Patty describes the enormous contributions Mary Ann made to documenting Baileys Harbor History, before the Baileys Harbor Historical Society was formally organized.

Here's some excerpts from Patty's article: "As Mary Ann made friends with "old-timers" in Baileys Harbor – Janette and Catherine McArdle, Olivia and Lee Traven, Elsie Anclam, Pat Tishler, Roland Peil, Kenneth and Marguerite Zak, and Ernald Viste – she became fascinated with the town's history and began to write it down. 'Chan Harris, then editor of the Door County Advocate, encouraged me to record the old stories, and starting in 1990, he printed everything I wrote,' Mary Ann says. Dozens of detailed accounts appeared in the newspaper. In 2000, Mary Ann achieved the rare feat of simultaneously getting three Baileys Harbor buildings on the National Register of Historic Places: the "Bird Park" home of Albert Zahn, the Grandma Moses of wood carving; the Blacksmith Shop and Inn, once the home of Albert's nephew, August, who also owned the blacksmith shop next door; and the town hall and library donated by noted businessman Michael McArdle."

Mary Ann also created 24 recordings that were made at dinners she organized for the Baileys Harbor Research Group, which was active from approximately 1992-2006. Guests at the dinners would share stories of early days in Baileys Harbor. While the quality of the recordings is not great and the sound and lighting is often poor, with a lot of secondary noise, a fair number of the recordings were converted to DVDs, a number of which are available through the Door County Library System.

The Baileys Harbor Historical Society is working with the Laura Kayacan, a Door County Public Library Adult Services Librarian to confirm its holdings from Mary Ann's efforts and potentially work towards converting more of the recordings to formats that may be more easily accessible to the public. Watch for updates in future editions of this newsletter and on our website.

BAILEYS HARBOR COMMUNITY MURAL

In May 2012, the Baileys Harbor Historical Society agreed to serve as the nonprofit partner for the Baileys Harbor Community Mural Project. The idea for the mural to celebrate the past, present, future, and natural beauty of Baileys Harbor was conceived by **Nancy Rafal**, Baileys Harbor poet and former Historical Society board member. The mural also incorporates words from Wisconsin poet Lorine Niedecker, who visited The Ridges in the late 1960s and was inspired to write her poem "Wintergreen Ridge."

Local muralist and studio artist **Ram Rojas** created the stunning artwork on special panels that were installed on the north wall of Nelson's Shopping Center, formerly located at 8120 Highway 57. The Ridges Sanctuary also supported the project and assisted with grant applications. Although several grants and fundraising efforts covered part of the cost, a very generous individual, who continues to remain anonymous, ensured the $30,000 project could be completed. The mural was formally dedicated on September 28, 2013, during that year's Baileys Harbor Fall Festival.

The popular mural was dismantled in 2022 when the Town of Baileys Harbor purchased the Nelson property and converted it into green space. The seventy-three 4x8-foot panels were carefully removed, numbered, and placed in storage. Efforts to find a new single location for the full mural were unsuccessful due to zoning and sign ordinances, as well as the lack of available buildings large enough to accommodate its size.

Over the past two years, the Historical Society has brainstormed and conducted outreach to identify community groups interested in adopting relevant sections of the mural for display. Several organizations responded, including the Nelson Hardware owner and family, The Ridges Sanctuary, and the Door County Maritime Museum. The Door County Museum is also considering acquiring a section. The Ridges Sanctuary has already installed a large portion of the panels they selected in their visitor center, and the Nelsons plan to mount their chosen sections in their Fish Creek store. The Ridges also intend to install additional panels as part of their long-term property improvement plan.

We will continue to keep you informed as other organizations finalize their plans to display their sections for public viewing.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

The Historical Society welcomes new members Jesse Brunsvold and Anne and Dan DePrey who joined us since our membership report in October 2025. We also thank Steve Makovec and Fred Pieper for renewing at the Lifetime member level. We thank you for your support.

As of April 2026, the membership roster includes 113 households representing 160 individuals. Currently, 30 households have out of state addresses, some of which have a Door County seasonal address on file as do a few of the 80 households with WI addresses. The Baileys Harbor memberships increased from 50 to 53 since our last report. We hope that you will consider making a gift of membership to a family member or friend. You'll find the membership information on our website at: https://baileysharborhistory.org/join/

APRIL IS VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION MONTH

The Baileys Harbor Historical Society operates solely on the generosity of volunteers. Members provide financial support, greet and provide information at the Toft House, share personal treasures for displays, and provide treats for public programs. Board members serve without compensation to advance our mission to collect, research, preserve and disseminate knowledge related to the history of Baileys Harbor.

We extend our thanks to volunteer Cynde Krowas, who resigned from the BHHS Board of Directors due to conflicts with her busy work schedule as a Door County 911 Communications Center Dispatcher. Andreas Esau was elected to serve as Treasurer at the April Board meeting.

The history of numerous other Baileys Harbor volunteer organizations is preserved through our programs. Check out online video recordings of the presentations about our local churches, the Baileys Harbor Fire Department and the Baileys Harbor Women's Club on our website at: https://baileysharborhistory.org/videos/

We thank the Town of Baileys Harbor Board and Staff for their support of the Historical Society.

Contact or Visit Us

Baileys Harbor Historical Society
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www.baileysharborhistory.org
info@baileysharborhistory.org
The Toft House – May – October
920-839-2366
8061 Hwy 57
Town Hall Lobby Displays
2392 County Road F

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Baileys Harbor, WI 54202

Recipient Name
Street Address
City, ST ZIP Code