BAILEYS HARBOR HISTORICAL SOCIETY

AUGUST 2026

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS REPORT

Our June and July programs fell short of previous attendance records, influenced by factors such as a location change in June, poor weather, and limited parking due to public use of the Town lot and nearby streets. If you were unable to attend, you still can enjoy the presentations. The video recordings of **Daughters of the American Revolution – Door County Patriots** program and the slide show of past **Baileys Harbor 4th of July Parade photos** are available on our website: https://baileysharborhistory.org/videos/

The August program featuring the history of the **Carrington – Toft House** presented by Board member Marianne Newton, was well-attended and sparked meaningful discussion about preserving this 150+ year old historic site. That video will be posted on our website soon.

Mark your calendar for the **Historical Society Annual Meeting** on **Wednesday, September 16 at 11 am**. Howard Williamson will be honored for serving his 11th and final year on the Board of Directors. In addition to Howard's retirement, Katherine Jones will be leaving the Board at the end of 2026. Susie Bauldry has accepted a nomination to return to the Board for 2027.

Our bylaws require a minimum of six members on the Board, with a maximum of nine, leaving two additional vacancies available to those interested in serving. If you would like to learn more about becoming a Board member, please contact us at: info@baileysharborhistory.org.

Honoring our Veterans

The centerpiece of the Toft House display celebrating the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States honored WWI veteran **John "Jack" Wasserbach.** Jack served in Company G of the 128th Infantry during WWI and was awarded the **Croix de Guerre**, a French military decoration that predates the establishment of the Purple Heart. He received the honor for entering "No Man's Land" in France to rescue a fellow soldier. During the rescue, Jack spotted a German machine-gun nest and along with the help of several fellow soldiers, successfully neutralized it. A friend who received a letter from Jack, recalled how humble he remained about his actions. Jack wrote that "Everything was fine in France. Except he really would like to eat some fish!"

We thank BHHS members, **Tom and Joy Schram** for donating these remarkable items. The display, along with artifacts from other local veterans, will remain available for viewing until we close the Toft House in mid-October.

RESORT DAYS ON KANGAROO LAKE - 1969 TO 1988 – *BY TOM ESAU*

I'm sitting here in the three-season room of our home at Hidden Blossom just south of the historic Door County town of Fish Creek. It's 11pm on a summer night in 2026. The Milky Way is all aglitter, and gentle breezes are making soothing music in the surrounding trees – through the majestic oak at the edge of the woods to my right, the handsome birch in my neighbor's yard to my left, and the laden crabapple tree in our back yard just outside my windows. I call the soothing music "woodwinds."

Settled into retirement for ten years now, I'm reflecting on a boatload of Baileys Harbor memories from my early teenage years. Back then, my parents, June and Charles Esau owned Vista Villas – a delightful old resort on the east shore of Kangaroo Lake. There, breezes through the many maples and birches, the cedars and the pines produced similar woodwinds. Their calming music enveloped the cottages and whispered our vacationing guests into restful sleep. Here on this night in 2026 my backyard music is so very similar. Apparently timeless.

Listening with eyes closed just now, I suddenly recalled similar nights from the summer of 1969. That was the first of many summers that my siblings and I would be the "hired help" under our parents' ownership of the charming little resort. It was eight acres of heaven on earth, but we soon discovered that resort-keeping chores were endless. Regardless, we found plenty of time to relax and play, and many of our guests became lifetime friends.

Turns out the resort had quite humble beginnings. It was born in 1917 as a single summer cottage for Lynden and Gertrude Valentine (now resting in peace in the Baileys Harbor cemetery off County-EE). By the late 1930s several more cottages would be constructed for the Valentines by the Tishler family: the 2-bedroom Ridge, the 3-bedroom Lakeview, the Shadynook duplex with one bedroom per side, and the Sunnyside duplex with two bedrooms per side, the 2-bedroom Resthaven, the 4-bedroom Hilltop and the 2-bedroom Vista. The first cottage became the Valentine's office, and the historic Kangaroo Lake resort named Birchwood Cottages was born. Eventually Birchwood Cottages was listed in a poster on each of the Goodrich passenger ferries that sailed the Great Lakes - as one of a handful of suggested places to stay here on the Door peninsula.

My folks were the third owners of the Valentine's highly regarded resort. It was purchased in 1966 by the Pokryfke family and re-named Vista Villas. My family vacationed there in the summers of '67 and '68 and were planning to return in '69. To our surprise, it was put up for sale in December of 1968. Our parents closed on the property in March of '69 and thus began 50+ years of our family's adventures in Baileys Harbor. For nearly twenty years under our stewardship, we (along with dozens of returning vacationers) made countless memories at the humble place of Lynden and Gertrude's dreams. Many of our guests at Vista Villas had vacationed there when it was still called Birchwood Cottages. Almost all our guests returned in summer after summer.

By the late 1980s my siblings and I were off on our own, and we couldn't offer consistent help managing the resort. By the mid '80s, half the property was sold. Mom and Dad kept the Vista as their own summer cottage, still offering the Ridge and Sunnyside cottages for friends' and family getaways through the 1990s.

I reckon that when our former guests hear gentle "woodwind music" in their own lives, it's equally easy to recall fond memories of their summer vacations spent at our humble resort. It was so beautifully landscaped with rows of maples and cedars, stands of stately birches, and several colorful gardens throughout. So many places for guests to get lost and relax, but there was also so much to do. No digital distractions. Just plenty of beach time and swimming, rowing and motor-boating, fishing from our pier or from the causeway, or from a boat out on the lake. In one field we had volleyball and badminton. In another, baseball (500), football, and even croquet. A horseshoe pit and a shuffleboard court were in the

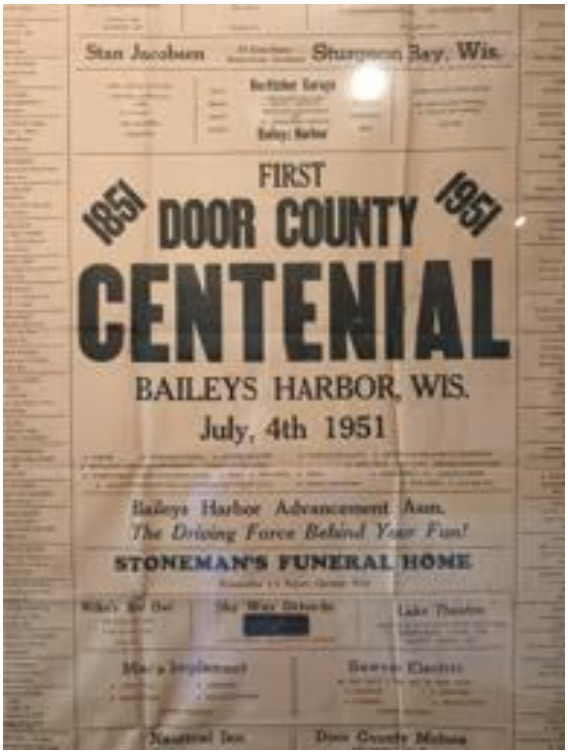
field up by the highway. When it was rainy we'd stay inside and play cards (Go Fish, Rummy, Crazy 8s, Old Maids, War, etc.), and board games (Scrabble, Monopoly, Risk, etc). Often on rainy days we teens could also be found outside in the elements, roaming the property making our own fun (and maybe even engaging in some harmless mischief too).

One can still see remnants of our quaint resort on the west side of Hwy 57 less than a mile south of Maxwelton Braes Golf Course and Lodge. The shuffleboard court is still there in plain view, along with two of those classic concrete/cedar benches that are common around Door County. Also, still in view from the highway - the handsome circular rock-walled garden from the 1920s (one of several such gardens remaining on former resort property!)

These days, I've started to write a book, detailing recollections of our years of stewardship at that enchanting getaway just south of Baileys Harbor. I hope to capture the essence of the simpler times we and our guests enjoyed there in the late 1960s through the 1980s. The book will also reflect on decades of Door County life that unfolded for my parents, my siblings and me, in the years after we stopped renting out the cottages. On the topic of Birchwood Cottages/Vista Villas and our resort years, my sister Melanie and I are planning a future presentation for the Baileys Harbor Historical Society. But for now, I'm closing my eyes again, getting lost in the music of the woodwinds!

NEW FINDINGS FOR LOCAL HISTORY

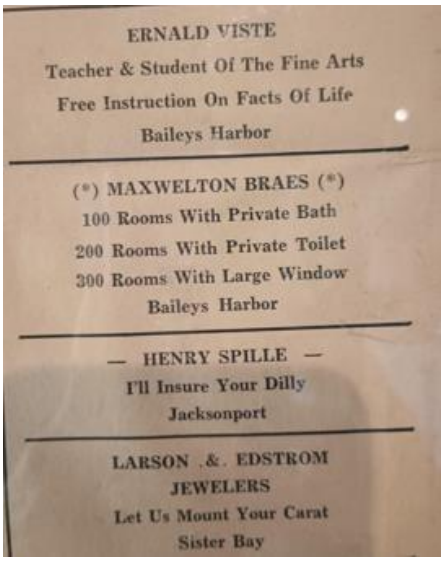
One of the benefits of collaborating with the Baileys Harbor Community Association to operate the Visitor Center and mount displays at the Toft House is discovering formerly unknown chapters of local history.



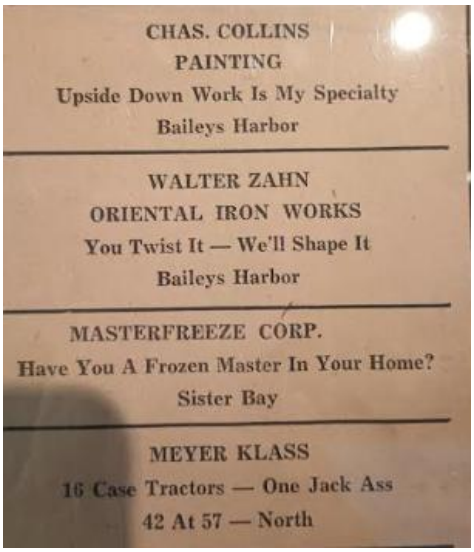
During our celebration of the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States—highlighting Baileys Harbor's long 4th of July traditions—we featured a large, newspaper-print, poster that has hung in the Toft House for at least the past 5 years. As in the accompanying photo, the poster advertised the 1951 Door County centennial celebration, held right here in Baileys Harbor. The event was coordinated by the Baileys Harbor Advancement Association, a group organized in 1949, working alongside representatives of other communities.

At that time, Baileys Harbor hosted the annual the 4th of July celebration because it was originally the first county seat in Door County. Given the scale of the centennial festivities, numerous committees were formed, with roles filled by residents from across the county as well as Advancement Association members. Committees oversaw decorations, speakers, floats, parade logistics, loudspeakers, prizes, bands, amusements, concessions, advertising, finance and even baseball. A major push involved recruiting contestants for the bathing beauty contest--resort owners were encouraged to present a representative from every resort in Door County. A Tommy Bartlett waterskiing show was scheduled as part of the celebration, too!

The centerpiece of the advertisement is surrounded by small and medium-sized box ads representing a wide variety of Door County businesses, many of them familiar names. Advertising helped finance the big event, like event sponsorships of today. One might expect a memorable centennial slogan accompanying each business name, but only the Advancement Association appears prominently: **"The Driving Force Behind Your Fun!"**



However, as one Toft House visitor and history enthusiast recently noticed, several of the individual advertisements contained questionable or off-color phrases. The volunteer on duty admitted—somewhat sheepishly-- that neither Historical Society members nor Toft House visitors had previously commented on the theme. It raised the question: had other visitors identified the theme but felt uncomfortable asking about it?



This discovery prompted further research. Who had printed this poster? Was the poster displayed widely across Door County? Were the businesses aware of the messages associated with their advertisements?

A search of the Door County Public Library newspapers archives produced only one reference: a letter to the editor published in the *Door County Advocate* the week after the celebration. Titled "**Centennial Posters**," the letter expressed disappointment that the posters "marred the dignity and reverence" of the occasion, describing them as having "the atmosphere portrayed as typical Skid Row." The writer apologized on behalf of the advertisers who had paid for the circulars but had no apparent control over the content and urged Door County residents to uphold "the cleaner and finer things of life." The editor added a note clarifying that the poster was **not** printed by the *Advocate*.

Historical Society members are invited to the Toft House to view the poster and decide for themselves whether the advertising approach was a harmless attempt to spark interest in the centennial events or an unfortunate lapse in judgment.

If you have information about the poster production or other community reactions at the time, we will welcome your insights at: info@baileysharbor.com

FILLING A GAP IN BAILEYS HARBOR BUSINESS HISTORY

Visitors to the Toft House often seek information about businesses they remember from past trips to Baileys Harbor or hope to learn more about ancestors who lived here. This was the case when Warren Solom of Minnesota recently stopped in to ask about his grandfather, **Art Solom**, who he knew had lived in Baileys Harbor and operated a store here.

Historical Society records include a document titled "*A Mini-Historical Walk of Downtown Baileys Harbor – 2016* which states: "**In 1923 Otto Voeks had purchased the grocery store at 8024 Hwy 57 from Art *Solomon***. (Now Harbor Market Grocery, Luke Collins Photography and Knit Whits). The Voeks ran the store for 40 years."

Our research using the Door County Public Library's newspaper archives confirmed that the original proprietor was indeed, **Art Solom**, (**not *Solomon***) an entrepreneur who first operated a seasonal butcher shop in Baileys Harbor in the summer of 1917. Reports from that era describe him securing pigs and calves from Menomonie and "transacting business" in various locations. In 1918 he lost a valuable horse while traveling to Menomonie on the ice. Art was born in 1888 and was just 29 years old at the time of his arrival in Baileys Harbor. His connection to Menomonie, Michigan and trade in that area reflect his early life in that area, according to his grandson, Warren.

Newspaper clippings from 1919 detail Art's preparations for a full store: **"Art Solom purchased the Cashimere Smith building, will fix up the barn and erect other buildings to carry on his business."** He installed a gas line and "waterworks" to the property, and by October had moved into his new residence. His store expanded rapidly—by November he invited the public "to give me a trial" and by December his range of goods was extensive as described in this advertisement. A brief note in an article in the Historical Society archives states: "Art Solomon is known as "the Jew" and never fails to wear his skullcap."

ATTENTION!

To the People of the Town of Baileys Harbor: I opened a Grocery Store and Meat Market for the sale of all kinds of staple and fancy groceries at very reasonable prices.

We also handle all kinds of Feed and we buy all kinds of Farm Produce and Stock.

COME IN and look it over.

ART SOLOM, Prop.

Baileys Harbor

(37w4)

Art gained notoriety in early 1921 after traveling to Chicago to purchase goods for his store and was held up by a robber. "The masked man poked a revolver into his abdomen and commanded him to elevate his hands. The highwayman went through all his pockets but only found $1.13." "The joke was on the robber," the paper reported, for "Mr. Solom had tucked away $175 in bills in his watch pocket, which the fellow had overlooked, supposing, of course, that he carried his money in his wallet."

In 1922, Art's brother-in-law Sam Panowsky arrived from Russia to make Door County his home and work for Art. Sam planned to send for his family soon. Shortly afterward, Art open another store in Jacksonport. Sam took over the Jacksonport location, but tragedy struck when he was killed after his automobile "capsized." His wife was enroute to the United States at the time. The paper noted, "Art Solom is meeting the widow of Sam Parnisky (sic)."

A 1923 news clipping reports that Otto Voeks purchased Art's Baileys Harbor store, while Art will acquire and ran the Voeks' store in Valmy. **"Mr Solom has been in our midst for a number of years and made a large number of friends who will be sorry to see him leave."** Later that year, a newspaper advertisement places him at the Kohlberg Store (sic) in southern Door County.

Here the trail ends in the Door County news. Warren shared that Art died in 1988 and is buried in Sheboygan County Hebrew cemetery in Kohler, WI and although subsequent years of Art Solom's life have yet to be discovered, Warren Solom has helped us fill a gap in our local history book.

MEMBERSHIP AND DONATION UPDATES

We welcome Warren Solom as one of the newest members of the Historical Society following his visit to the Toft House in August. Deb Rusy and Curt & Pat Neudecker extended their memberships for life when they submitted their renewals. Jonlee Peterson made a very generous donation in memory of her cousin, Leann Despotes, becoming a life member of our organization as well.

As a result of a gift membership, Bryson Lesar of Sheboygan Falls became the youngest member of the Historical Society this week. Bryson, a home-schooled 7th grade student this fall, visited the Toft House this summer and was fascinated by the displays honoring local veterans. Bryson shared that his interest in history started when he was 8 years old after attending a Civil War re-enactment. At age 10, he went to a WWII re-enactment event and liked it so much that he joined the re-enactment group. That led to reading more about U.S, French and German military history as well as becoming a collector of military memorabilia. Bryson, who was visiting his grandparents in Baileys Harbor last week, spent time with one of our regular Toft House volunteers helping to sort and catalog books for our collection. He hopes to spend time volunteering with us again next summer.

We thank Bobby Schulz for donating two early Baileys Harbor baseball uniform shirts. One shirt is currently on display at the Toft House through mid-October as part of our tribute to more than 100 years of baseball in Baileys Harbor.

ANNUAL MEETING – SEPTEMBER 16 – 11 AM

The Baileys Harbor Historical Society will hold its annual meeting at the Immanuel Lutheran Church Hall, on Wednesday, September 16 at 11 am.

A "sandwich and sides" luncheon will be served at a cost of $10 for members and $15 for non-members, payable on the day of the meeting. Meeting agenda items include: presenting the 2027 slate of candidates for the Board, honoring Howard Williamson for his 10 plus years of Board service and recognizing the Toft House volunteers.

Please RSVP no later than Friday, September 4 by writing to us at info@baileysharborhistory.org or by calling the Toft House and leaving a message. The telephone number is: 920-839-2366.

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

Contact or Visit Us

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The Toft House – May – October
920-893-2366
8061 Hwy 57
Town Hall Lobby Displays
2392 County Road F

Baileys Harbor Historical Society
P.O. Box 336
Baileys Harbor, WI 54202

Recipient Name
Street Address
City, ST ZIP Code