



In Memoriam to Librarian Beverly Millard

Spring 2021

Newsletter of the Waukegan Historical Society

President's Letter

Josh Bill

The Waukegan Historical Society was deeply saddened this winter at the loss of our most dedicated volunteer and head librarian, Beverly Millard. While it goes without saying, because I know everyone reading this likely had encounters with Beverly over the years, she was one of the most kind and generous people I've ever met. She selflessly gave her time, wisdom, thoughtfulness, and care to all of us. There was no research question you could bring to her that she could not answer. On the rare occasion that she might not have known the answer, she knew where to look and allowed you the joy of drawing research conclusions with her expert guidance. I know you all share our grief, but that you are also smiling for the time we were blessed to have Beverly with us. We dedicate this newsletter to her, though we realize that whatever we do to honor Beverly's memory, we will never be able to repay all she did for us. Thank you, Beverly. We miss you!

As the winter and the pandemic have marched on, the Board of Directors and many of our volunteers have been busy with the Carnegie restoration project. Alongside our partner, the Waukegan Park District, the society has worked with Harboe Architects to begin the schematic design process at the Carnegie Library. The society is also beginning to plan for the various exhibits and programming that will be happening once the Carnegie opens as our new home. We are hopeful to have more dedicated space for Waukegan history, the history of Ray Bradbury, environmental histories, and much more! Over the next several months, we will be engaging with community stakeholders and exhibit design firm in order to help us make the historical displays inside of the Carnegie as impressive and comprehensive as the restoration of the building will be. We could not be more excited about all that is taking place. We are also appreciative of our volunteers,

donors, and friends cheering us on. This is a team effort, and we are so glad you are part of this team.

Even though covid continues to keep most of us at home, we have continued the work of sharing Waukegan's history in a variety of ways. Our companion app included special sections commemorating Black History Month and Women's History Month with stories of the contributions of these groups to Waukegan's dynamic history. Our library and museum have reopened by appointment.

Finally, I want to celebrate two awards given to the historical society this winter. The Illinois Association of Museums recognized us for Excellence in Education Outreach and Excellence in our Covid-19 response. I cannot thank Bryan Escobar and Ty Rohrer enough for keeping us operational during the pandemic and ensuring that our Waukegan students continued to learn about the city's history, even in a remote setting. We all look forward to more normal times, but I hope you join me in applauding the work of the society in our outreach efforts. I truly think the best is still yet to come!

Annual Meeting

We would like to announce that our annual meeting will take place on Sunday, May 16th at 2 p.m. This will be a virtual meeting. While the vaccination effort is picking up speed, and there are promising metrics related to covid cases in Illinois, the historical society would still like to err on the side of caution when it comes to our members. We hope that this summer allows us the opportunity for in-person events, but we feel that the annual meeting is too soon to bring us all back together. Please watch the Waukegan History Museum's Facebook page and our website (waukeganhistorical.org) for updates on the program for the annual meeting. We will also have some society business to conduct at the meeting.

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In Memoriam to Beverly Millard

We are so sad to share that Beverly Millard, our long-time librarian, passed away on January 6. Beverly started volunteering for the Waukegan Historical Society in 1989. She took on the role of librarian for our Research Library and spent at least three days a week there helping researchers from around the world.



Beverly was a wealth of knowledge on the city's history, and she knew each nook and cranny of our library. Beverly especially enjoyed working with Waukegan High School students during history fair time. Over her 30 years working in our library, Beverly helped countless number of researchers. We estimated at one point that Beverly had volunteered over 30,000 hours for the Historical Society, and we know that number was low as she always took work home with her and would also come in to help people by special appointment on days we were closed.

Beverly received numerous awards and recognitions in her life including Waukegan Park District Volunteer of the Year in 2005, Illinois Parks and Recreation's 2007 Citizen Volunteer of the Year, grand marshal of the Waukegan Independence Day Parade in 2007, recognized by the Lake County Women's Coalition "Women of Character, Courage and Commitment" ceremony in 2014, and the Waukegan Park District's Jack Benny Arts & Humanities Award in 2019.

Beverly was still working at the Research Library

up until last March when operations were halted due to the pandemic. Even though we were closed, Beverly continued working from home by collecting newspaper articles and obituaries to add to our archives.

Beverly was an amazing woman, and her dedication, spirit, and knowledge will be truly missed. Beverly was a great friend, and we will forever be indebted to her for her impact on the Waukegan Historical Society and preservation of Waukegan's history.

Waukegan History Museum Report

Bryan Escobar

The springtime is usually when we see the largest number of school students visiting us at the Museum. Due to Covid, we have adapted our approach this school year. We are offering teachers videos and live presentations of our programming via online meetings with their students. This has allowed us to keep reaching our local students and sharing Waukegan history. As we move towards the end of the school year, we are working on ways to provide students with virtual walking tours to close out their Waukegan history experience for the year.

In our last newsletter we reported that the museum was closed again due to Covid restrictions. We are happy to say that we have now reopened again. Like before, visitors are required to make a reservation on Eventbrite. Tours remain self-guided, and the Waukegan History Museum Companion App provides information on the various rooms and artifacts visitors will see in the museum.

Thank you to Mike Mayfield

The Waukegan Historical Society Board of Directors would like to thank and congratulate Mike Mayfield in his recent retirement as Deputy Superintendent of General Recreation for the Waukegan Park District. Mike was a liaison for the Park District with the Historical Society, and he was a strong advocate for the Carnegie project. Thank you, Mike, for your support over the last years!

Illinois Association of Museums Awards

During the 2020 Illinois Association of Museums Conference the Waukegan History Museum was recognized with two different awards. We received an Award of Excellence for our Education Outreach Program, and an Award of Excellence for our COVID-19 Response. In each award we highlighted the work we have done in past years to increase the number of students we reach each year, and how the incorporation of the Waukegan History Museum Companion App made that possible. We are thankful to the IAM for the recognition, and to the help of volunteers with the historical society and partnerships with local educators that make our work possible.



Waukegan History Museum App

The Waukegan History Museum Companion App has received new features in the past few months. We have integrated video links to our Oakwood Cemetery videos, as well as the many Lunch and Learns that were done last spring by Ty Rohrer on Facebook. These can be found via the drop-down menu on the app. Also included is information related to Black History Month and Women's History Month. We plan on adding information to both categories, so stay tuned!

Coming this summer, we will be adding two new self-guided walking tours that will feature Sheridan Road and the Near North Historic District, and the Waukegan Dunes and lakefront. The Waukegan Dunes tour is being put together in partnership with Sharing Our Shore-Waukegan, with the goal of highlighting the wildlife that live at our lakefront.

Announcing Luci Creative

We are very excited to announce that we are teaming up with Luci Creative for the exhibit development and design of the Carnegie. Luci Creative is an award-winning exhibit design firm headquartered in Lincolnwood, Illinois. The Luci Creative team has developed some amazing exhibits in the past, and we know that they will help us create something very special at the Carnegie.

Pioneering Families

Waukegan Mayor Robert E. Coulson

Guest Author – William R. Coulson

This narrative was gleaned from hundreds of documents maintained by Robert Coulson during his Mayoralty, including extensive newspaper clippings from the time, correspondence, city reports, and photographs. And it has been flavored with the occasional personal recollection.

Part II

The 1949 Mayoral Campaign

Coulson filed to run in the February 1949 Republican Party primary election. Three others ran for the nomination, including two Waukegan Aldermen. But the novice Coulson won the Republican primary with 55% of the vote, and Mayor Wallin won the Democratic primary easily with 76%. Mayor Wallin was the clear favorite for re-election on April 19th. At the time Democrats controlled both the Presidency (President Truman) and the Illinois Governorship (Lake County's Adlai Stevenson).

The young Coulson vowed to 'stomp the streets,' and he did so, literally. He announced a series of 'get togethers' downtown at Genesee and Madison Streets. On weekends downtown Waukegan was jammed with shoppers from all over the county. There were no shopping malls yet. Coulson strode up and down the busy sidewalks introducing himself to people. The Waukegan police then started to push back. When Coulson announced that he would give a speech at Genesee and Madison on Friday, March 25th, Mayor Wallin's police threatened to arrest him for blocking the sidewalks. "Coulson to Defy Jail Threat Tonight" roared the Waukegan Sun-Times' headline that day.

This coverage produced a huge crowd downtown

for the showdown. Coulson arrived at Genesee and Madison at 8 p.m. He shook hands and chatted with people, but he did not make a speech or obstruct the walkways. "Curbside Capers"; screamed the News-Sun, "Coulson Stars"; "He has pepped up the Mayoral race." The publicity lit up the campaign and got people's attention. Coulson announced that he would give a speech from the County Courthouse steps on April 1st. And he got a permit to do so from the County government.

That night a torchlight parade escorted the candidate to the Courthouse's east steps. Several hundred voters turned out to listen. And the media was there. Coulson, in what the News-Sun called a 'blistering attack' talked about how Waukegan was on the verge of bankruptcy and that youthful, vigorous leadership was needed. The city, he said, needed plans to deal with finances, housing, traffic, waterways, and policing. He complained of the moral and structural deterioration of Waukegan. The press called Coulson a "new look" candidate.

Mayor Wallin's campaign never recovered. "Voters Throng to Polls in Huge Turnout" reported the News-Sun on election day, April 19, 1949. Coulson scored an upset victory, outpolling Mayor Wallin 7,528 votes to 6,311 (54%). As Mayor Wallin graciously congratulated Coulson in person on election night, Wallin's 14-year-old son was sobbing nearby. For the rest of his political career, Coulson reminded people how moved he was by the young man's tears, and how he realized then how terribly cruel politics could be.

Mayor Coulson Takes Office

On May 2, 1949, the new "Boy Mayor" of Waukegan was sworn into office (he was 36). In his speech he stated: "I believe in the future of this city. I refuse to say that anything is impossible. I deny that Waukegan is helpless to mold its destiny." The new Mayor certainly had his work cut out for him.

Mayor Coulson announced that Waukegan had

to live within its means. Improvements and maintenance had to be accomplished on a pay-as-you-go basis. Real estate taxes, state motor fuel taxes, and fees and licenses were the primary sources of income for the city. If the people wanted more city services, then they would have to approve tax hikes to pay for them. This philosophy shaped his policies on most issues. He insisted on a balanced city budget each year. The function of city government, he said, was to remove obstacles; not to create obstacles.

Waukegan had a weak Mayor/strong Council form of government. There were 14 Aldermen, two each from the seven city wards. They served staggered four-year terms. Most Mayoral proposals had to be approved by the Council. The Mayor could vote only in case of a tie. In addition to the usual city functions, the Mayor of Waukegan appointed the Grade School Board members. But the High School Board was separate from the City, and its members were independently elected. Waukegan media at the time was dominated by the powerful Waukegan News-Sun newspaper, which also owned the new AM radio station – WKRS, 1220 on the radio dial. Mayor Coulson abolished all secret and non-public Council sessions, and invited citizen comments at the Council meetings. He closed overused Civil Service loopholes and exceptions for the police and fire departments to try to minimize political interference. His home telephone number was listed on the phone book.

One of Coulson's first priorities was to get the Council's approval to raise money by auctioning off \$1.2 million in tax liens which Waukegan held on real estate whose owners had failed to pay their special assessments. These liens had sat in a city drawer for years, collecting dust but no revenues. Waukegan spent \$6,000 each year on a special department just to keep track of these liens. Private buyers were willing to pay about 30% on the dollar in cash for these liens. Auctions were held on several dates between February of 1950 and April of 1951, and realized over

\$300,000 for the city. Today many taxing districts utilize similar auctions, but it was a relatively new concept in 1949.

In 1949 the Cold War had descended upon the world. After the Soviet nuclear test in August of 1949, Waukegan participated in the federal Civil Defense Program. The City Treasurer was put in charge of the local effort. This led to approved buildings being designated as bomb shelters, the famed 'duck-and-cover' school films teaching kids to hide under their desks to survive an atomic bomb, and the hoards of food and water in Waukegan basements.

Then a hot war erupted in Korea on June 25, 1950 and lasted three years. The Korean war kept local rent control rules in effect, fired up the local draft board, and led to the call ups of local Army Reserve units from the Waukegan Armory. The war also subjected city projects to the federal restrictions on the use scarce war metals, such as copper. Waukegan kept its World War II designation as a 'critical defense area' due to the many local factories' defense contracts. This helped the city qualify for Federal dollars.

Mayor Coulson, as a reserve officer, was one of the few Waukegan Mayors to serve in the Army during his tenure. This military service required him to leave Waukegan occasionally for compulsory training courses across the country. On June 6, 1951, he was ordered to report for a physical exam, a precursor to a call up to active duty. Fortunately for Waukegan, the Army soon withdrew this order, citing a regulation exempting elected officials from active military service.

Mayor Coulson also enjoyed writing during his Mayoralty. He authored a weekly column in the Waukegan News-Sun entitled "The Mayor Speaks" on the issues facing the city. And he wrote and published numerous articles in national magazines on political and legal topics. In November of 1955 he wrote a contrarian Harper's Magazine article

entitled “Let’s Not Get Out the Vote,” that today has found its way into a number of college textbooks.

Income Tax Disclosure: A Waukegan First

In his “The Mayor Speaks” column for the News-Sun on February 5, 1950, Mayor Coulson publicly disclosed his 1949 federal income tax return. This was unheard of at the time.

The column was entitled ‘My Income Tax Return.’ He began by writing, “One of the unpleasant features of political life is the popular belief that all politicians are crooks and grafters.” The column then disclosed his calendar year income by source, which totaled a whopping \$5,797. The actual return was made available for inspection at City Hall. The Mayor wrote that “... my income is a personal and private matter”, but “a public office is a public trust”. “... Perhaps a man gives up some of his right to privacy when he agrees to run for office.”

Over twenty years later, both the News-Sun and the Chicago Sun-Times wrote about this seminal disclosure. On February 5, 1971, the Sun-Times noted that ‘income disclosure by public officials really got its start’ under Mayor Robert Coulson. A News-Sun article on February 3, 1971, was captioned ‘Coulson set the pace in income disclosure.’ The paper confirmed that Coulson’s 1950 column represented ‘the first such disclosure in Illinois – and perhaps the first in the nation.’ The Mayor continued this disclosure each year.

Waukegan Hails General MacArthur

In April of 1951 President Truman fired General Douglas MacArthur as the Korean War Commander. The General then embarked on a farewell tour across the country. On Thursday, April 26th he addressed 50,000 people at Chicago’s Soldier Field. Early the next morning he left the Stevens Hotel in a police motorcade headed up to his home in Milwaukee. Seventy-five thou-

sand people jammed the motorcade route. The General’s open red convertible stopped briefly at Fort Sheridan and at Great Lakes, where 12,000 sailors stood in formation. At the Courthouse in Waukegan Mayor Coulson presented a flower bouquet to Mrs. MacArthur, and then rode with the General all the way up to Zion. Photos show huge crowds of well-wishers along Washington Street east past the Courthouse, and then left onto Sheridan Road. Mayor Coulson and the General talked about his days at Fort Sheridan and his recollections of Waukegan. When the Mayor mentioned his own World War II service with the Office of Strategic Services in China, MacArthur curtly reminded him that ‘we didn’t need the OSS in the Pacific.’ Original photographs of the motorcade through Waukegan now reside at the MacArthur Memorial Museum in Norfolk, Virginia. Waukeganites spoke about this special day for decades thereafter.

to be continued...

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Waukegan Historical Society.

Volunteer

Please contact me about volunteer opportunities.

Waukegan Historical Society

Founded in 1968, the Society collects, preserves, interprets, and exhibits significant materials about the history of the Waukegan area. The Society, in cooperation with the Waukegan Park District, operates the History Museum and Raymond Library and publishes this quarterly newsletter.

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Visit our website for more information
about events, exhibits, and our
extensive library.

www.waukeganhistorical.org

Waukegan History Museum in Bowen Park

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troher@waukeganparks.org
Arts & History Specialist: Bryan Escobar
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By appointment only

John L. Raymond Research Library

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847-360-4772
library@waukeganhistorical.org
By appointment only



Virtual Annual Meeting

Sunday, May 16

2 p.m.

see page 3