

2011 Year in Review

Wisconsin Historical Society

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A Message from Ellsworth Brown, The Ruth and Hartley Barker Director of the Wisconsin Historical Society



Major milestones, progress on important capital projects, significant collection acquisitions, exciting new website content, award-winning publications and major fundraising progress are among the success stories the Society can point to with pride as we look back on the year 2011. Despite an economy still on the rebound from the worst recession since the Great Depression, the Society took several big steps last year toward what we expect to be a bright future. Following are some of the highlights:

Milwaukee Launch of the Forward! Campaign

In June we celebrated the [Milwaukee launch of Forward! The Campaign for the Wisconsin Historical Society](#) to raise \$77 million in support of four central initiatives that will transform how the Society shares Wisconsin and American history. Bud Selig, commissioner of Major League Baseball, was on hand to introduce the event's keynote speaker, Pulitzer Prize-winning author and historian, Doris Kearns Goodwin (pictured above with Ellsworth Brown, The Ruth and Hartley Barker Director of the Society, Bud Selig, and Craig Culver, chair of the Forward! Campaign). To date, the campaign has raised \$71 million of the \$77 million goal.

Ground Broken New Wade House Visitor Center and Wesley W. Jung Carriage Museum

In November we broke ground on this [major building project](#) that is part of one of the Forward! Campaign's key initiatives, [transforming Wisconsin's historic sites](#). The new 38,000-square-foot, year-round facility will overlook Highway 23, the busy Sheboygan County thoroughfare, midway between Sheboygan and Fond du Lac, giving the Wade House historic site far better visibility and a state-of-the-art building to showcase the site's outstanding collections and to serve the community. The project will also create jobs through construction contracts, with additional benefits accruing locally during construction. Among those taking part in the groundbreaking were Governor Scott Walker and Kohler Co. Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Herbert Kohler Jr., whose mother was the driving force behind saving and restoring Wade House in the early 1950s. A public-private partnership between the state of Wisconsin and generous benefactors is funding the \$12.1 million building project, with 45 percent of the total cost paid for by private individuals and foundations, including the Kohler Trust for Preservation and the Mark Jung Family, and federal grant dollars.

Plans Completed for New Off-Site Preservation Storage Facility

Two prestigious architectural and engineering firms, Engberg Anderson of Milwaukee and Smith Group of Washington, D.C., completed plans last year for the construction a much-needed 95,000-square-foot collections preservation and storage facility near Lake Mendota on Madison's northeast side. The building's state-of-the-art storage and climate-control systems will allow the Society to move the vast majority of its museum, library and archival collections to the modern facility in 2014, thereby alleviating cramped storage spaces at the Society's headquarters building. The Society will share the new facility with the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Online Exhibit of Rediscovered 1948 Centennial State Fair Murals Launched

The rediscovery of a [series of stunning, large-scale murals](#) developed to showcase Wisconsin's century of agricultural heritage at the 1948 Wisconsin Centennial Exposition provided an opportunity for the Society to exhibit nine surviving murals in an interactive online exhibit. For the first time since 1948, the murals are back in the spotlight, thanks to a collaborative conservation and collecting project with the Kohler Foundation. Because of this project, the Wisconsin Historical Society is currently home to what may be the largest murals ever painted in Wisconsin.

New Online 'Wisconsin in the Civil War' Collection Launched

The Society launched a major new section of its website, [Wisconsin in the Civil War](#), to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the war. It contains more than 20,000 pages of eyewitness accounts from historical documents, most of which have never been seen online before. The site also offers 44 biographies of Wisconsin Civil War leaders, 73 histories of regiments, 34 summaries of battles in which Wisconsin troops fought, and 68 compelling stories excerpted from the original documents.

Online Map and Atlas Collection Launch

The Society added the first 500 maps from its [map and atlas collection](#) to its website. Ranging in date from 1584 to 2010, the maps will serve as a resource for teachers, students, scholars and curious laypeople. Most depict Wisconsin or the Great Lakes, but several dozen show other parts of North America. Online users can examine most of the maps in extraordinary detail simply by clicking on any location on the map to enlarge the view. Thanks to a recent gift from the Caxambas Foundation, the Society will add many more historical maps to the online collection in coming months.

195,000 Historic Building Images Now Online

Funds raised as part of the Forward! Campaign made possible a two-year project, completed last spring, to post 195,000 images of historic properties on the Society's website. The images are a significant new resource for those eager to learn more about Wisconsin's historic buildings. You can explore these images and find out more about historic buildings by using the online [Architecture and History Inventory](#).

Rare Taliesin I and II Photographic Proofs Acquired

The Society acquired an exceptional collection of early photographic proofs of Taliesin, architect Frank Lloyd Wright's Wisconsin home and studio outside of Spring Green, that provides a rare glimpse of the structure in its earliest incarnations. Wright redesigned and rebuilt Taliesin numerous times during his lifetime. These changes, whether a result of fire or an outgrowth of Wright's ever-evolving philosophy about domestic architecture, often went undocumented photographically — especially the earliest iterations of the building, Taliesin I (1911-1914) and Taliesin II (1915-1924). The 25 photographic proofs document the celebrated structure from late 1911 to circa 1924. View an [online gallery](#) of these and other Wright-related holdings in the Society's archives.

Wisconsin Welcomes Home its Vietnam Veterans

Also in May, the Society teamed with Wisconsin Public Television and the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs to give a long-overdue "welcome home" to the state's Vietnam veterans. [LZ Lambeau™: Welcoming Home Wisconsin's Vietnam Veterans](#), held on the hallowed ground of Green Bay's Lambeau Field, delivered a massive, three-day tribute to those who served and those who never returned. Veterans, their families and the general public flocked to Lambeau Field by the thousands to take part in the moving event. The highlight was a tribute ceremony featuring music, aerial fly-bys, presentations and premiere segments of the ["Wisconsin Vietnam War Stories"](#) documentary produced by Wisconsin Public Television.

Papers of Longtime Congressman David Obey Acquired

Retired Wisconsin 7th District Congressman David Obey donated his papers to the people of his home state through a unique partnership formed by the Wisconsin Historical Society and the Wisconsin Institute for Public Policy and Service. The papers, which [document the influential lawmaker's entire 41-year career in the House of Representatives](#), will be made available to the people of Wisconsin and researchers worldwide. After Historical Society archivists organize the collection, the papers will reside in the Society's Area Research Center at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, the research center closest to Obey's base in Wausau. The public will also enjoy access to the papers at the Wisconsin Institute for Public Policy and Service at the University of Wisconsin-Marathon County campus in Wausau.

8,500 National History Day Students Take Part in the 2011 Competition

Participating students worked for months to create historical research projects related to the program's 2011 theme, "Debate and Diplomacy in History: Successes, Failures, Consequences." After selecting topics and completing extensive research, students presented their conclusions as documentaries, museum-style exhibits, dramatic performances, historical papers and websites at regional events throughout the state. The best of those advanced to the state event on May 7. The top contenders at the state event became [national finalists](#) and went on to represent Wisconsin at the national finals of National History Day in College Park, Maryland, in June.

The Wisconsin Historical Society Press Had an Award-Winning Year

It was another big year for [Wisconsin Historical Society Press](#) books, which won a total of 18 regional and national awards in 2011. Press books were nominated as finalists for a number of additional awards. The stand-out book for 2011 has been [Wisconsin's Own: Twenty Remarkable Homes](#) by M. Caren Connolly and Louis Wasserman with photography by Zane Williams. The book was generously funded by the Jeffris Family Foundation of Janesville and won [11 awards](#).

Old World Wisconsin Opens New Multipurpose Facility

The new facility at Old World Wisconsin, also a result of the Forward! Campaign, will serve a trio of purposes. Administrative staff and some curatorial staff moved into the 3,060 square-foot metal frame building, marking the first time in the outdoor museum's history that most of its permanent staff have one roof over their heads. Until now most of the staff shared cramped quarters in an old farmhouse plagued by myriad problems. The building will also serve as a facility for training the costumed interpreters who provide the life blood of Old World Wisconsin's visitor experience by telling the stories of the pioneers who built, lived or worked in the museum's 67 historic structures. The building also serves as Old World Wisconsin's period clothing department.

Major New Exhibit on Wisconsin Innovations Opens at the Wisconsin Historical Museum

From the invention of the typewriter and the first modern surfboard to the creation of the solid-body electric guitar and the advent of stem-cell technology, Wisconsin has played a key role in any number of fascinating innovations, a fact brought home in a new exhibition at the Wisconsin Historical Museum, [Wisconsin Innovations: From the Iconic to the Unexpected](#). We thank the [Madison Community Foundation](#) for its lead gift and to the many other generous sponsors that helped make the exhibit possible.

Fuldner Heritage Fund Established

A \$500,000 gift from the Jeffris Family Foundation established the [Fuldner Heritage Fund](#). The gift represented a major step toward the \$77 million goal of the Forward! Campaign. This endowed fund, named in honor of Henry Fuldner who served on the Jeffris Family Foundation board for 30 years, will recognize Wisconsin heritage by funding the preparation of National Register of Historic Places nominations in Wisconsin. The Society will begin contracting for nominations from the fund in September of 2012.

In Conclusion

The list of successes and milestones enumerated above took the dedication and forward thinking of a hard-working staff, the fundraising prowess of the [Wisconsin Historical Foundation](#) and its [Board of Directors](#) as well as the [Forward! Campaign Cabinet](#), the leadership of the Society's governing [Board of Curators](#) and the steadfast support of our members, volunteers and other donors. We are grateful to them all as we are to the Legislature and to the people of Wisconsin for helping us reach the goals and milestones we did in 2011. Best wishes to all for continued successes in the year that lies ahead.
