10th Year Begins With Member Drive

On the eve of its 10th anniversary, the Wisconsin Canoe Heritage Museum is looking to expand its membership in order to support its continued growth as an institution based in Spooner, Wisconsin. “When I think back on it, it’s hard to believe we have come this far in only ten years,” says WCHM Executive Director Jed Malischke.

Some of the highlights include the original building demolition and reconstruction in 2008; incorporation and IRS 501c3 certification in 2009; the first annual Grand Opening Canoe & Wooden Boat Show in 2010; bringing on board an executive director in 2013; hosting the regional WCHA Assembly in 2014 (and again in 2017); commissioning of the Rollin Thurlow Labrador Passage canoe in 2014 (and its retrieval in 2015); acquisition of the Tom MacKenzie estate artifacts in 2015; and construction of a new storage facility in 2016 for the ever expanding WCHM Collections. And all while building a series of new and changing displays to fill the exhibit hall and presenting various presentations and classes on various topics.

The WCHM currently has about 150 members, and would like to increase that base of support to over 200 in 2019. Membership typically provides from 15% to 20% of revenues, and plans for the future see that increasing to 25%. “Non-profits like the WCHM typically depend on memberships,” explains Malischke, “Not only for a substantial portion of our operating revenue, but also to show foundations and granting organizations that we have strong public support.” So your member donation supports the organization in two ways, and it’s tax deductible.

Recent Boat Donations To WCHM

The WCHM has acquired its first dugout canoe! Russ Anderson of Madison, Wis., made the donation on behalf of his grandfather, who pulled the dugout out of Bass Lake in Florence County over 50 years ago, and kept it well preserved at the Anderson summer home ever since. As Russ put it, “It was found on the bed of navigable water, so we feel it belongs to the public.”

Maureen Borell & Keith Collis of Minneapolis (pictured above) recently donated a circa 1949 Grumman “magnesium” canoe to WCHM. Grumman experimented with various metals to make canoes after WWII. This one was made of “Dowmetal,” an alloy made by Dow Chemical that was 85% magnesium. This particular canoe also has some interesting historical connections. It was owned by Maureen’s father Marv Borell, who was involved in the creation of the BWCA.

Former WCHM President Mike Johnson presented the museum with a donation of a restored 1947 16 foot Muller canoe. The Muller family has been making boats in Minnesota since 1872 and still owns and operates Taylors Falls Canoe & Kayak Rental to this day.

Other recent donations: a 1942 Old Town Guide and a Jimmy Skiff from Mark Douglas of Minneapolis (MN); a 1949 Old Town Yankee with original backrest and paddles from Sharon Bloyd-Peshkin of Forest Park (IL); an antique wood-frame canvas duck boat of unknown origin from Marlene Schmidt of Merrill (WI); and a 16ft Trailblazer Explorer canoe from Joe Scott of Apple Valley (MN) in memory of his brother George who built it from a 1960s kit out of Boy’s Life Magazine.
Origins of the Wisconsin Canoe Heritage Museum

On the occasion of its 10th anniversary, this article, reprinted from a 2012 edition of Living & Playing Magazine, and written by former WCHM President Mike Johnson, provides a concise and sometimes whimsical look into WCHM’s origins.

To achieve the perfect varnish coat on a cedar-strip canoe, the craftsman needs top quality spar varnish, the best badger hairbrush available, and a totally dust-free environment. It just wasn’t happening in my basement. In the spring of 2008, I was nearing completion of my third canoe, a 15-foot Bob’s Special, when my wife read to me an announcement for a meeting to discuss the possibility of a canoe museum in Spooner, Wis. At the time I had no interest in, or knowledge of, antique canoes, but the ad specifically mentioned a canoe shop. It was the thought of moving my dusty, noisy hobby out of my basement that compelled me to attend the gathering.

As I recall, it was a pretty subdued affair. Seven or eight attendees toed the sawdust on the floor of the Williams Wooden Boat shop while Gary Peterson from Rice Lake, Wis., outlined the concept: If a group of enthusiasts were to start a new non-profit and could turn an abandoned feed mill into an exhibit hall and canoe shop, the building and a collection of canoes were there for the asking. The idea didn’t sound too far-fetched to me, until we took a tour of the mill.

The building was a disaster! The city had purchased what was essentially a public nuisance, with plans to demolish it for additional downtown parking. There were holes in the roof and in the walls and several windows had been broken. Pigeon droppings were everywhere and there was a dead raccoon on the floor in the elevator. The smell alone was daunting enough to drive away all but the most quixotic. Still, through the course of the summer, the idea took root.

A board of directors composed of an attorney, a banker, an antique canoe collector, a park ranger, a fur trade re-enactor, a bluegrass musician, a small museum curator, and three canoe builders began to meet regularly. Before the New Year, we were a 501c3 non-profit corporation. By May 2009 the building had been stripped to the studs and reconstruction begun.

But the group was impatient. We wanted those canoes! In October 2008, four of us in two borrowed trucks had traveled to a storage building south of Madison, Wis., for what became known as “The Long Portage.” The canoe collection offered to us was the passion of Jill Weber Dean (and to a lesser extent, her husband Jeff). Jill had ties to Spooner; her brother Shane lived there. Throughout the 1970s and ‘80s, Jill and Jeff had traveled the Midwest, Eastern Canada, and New England acquiring and restoring the best examples of canoe craft, from such classic artisans as Dan Herald, John Henry Rushton, Bert Morris, and Evan Gerrish. They also bought canoes from the very best contemporary builders including Harold Gates, Walter Walker, Jerry Stelmock, and Henri Vaillancourt.

Once the collection was safely back in Spooner, the 50 or so volunteers and the half dozen contractors dutifully sheltered the boats from harm as they reconstructed the building. A grand opening was celebrated with a ribbon cutting ceremony during the first annual Canoe & Wooden Boat Show held on May 29, 2010, a day declared by the Wisconsin State Legislature to be “Wisconsin Canoe Heritage Day.”

Now in its third season of operation [2012], volunteer staffers greet visitors to the museum, the exhibit hall features a spectacular Rushton exhibit including a circa 1890s two-masted Vesper and a BWCA campsite complete with a bright yellow cedar/canvas Joe Seliga creation, and the canoe shop has a full complement of state-of-the-art tools, materials and molds for building canoes. For more information visit the group’s website at www.WisconsinCanoeHeritageMuseum.org.
**News Briefs & Upcoming Events**

**2018 Season Sees 600 Visitors From 23 States**

The Wisconsin Canoe Heritage Museum completed its 2018 season on September 30th. The previous four months saw over 600 visitors to the museum, with folks coming from 23 states: Michigan, Texas, Minnesota, Illinois, Arizona, South Dakota, Indiana, Pennsylvania, Colorado, Iowa, Oregon, California, North Carolina, Kansas, Mississippi, Ohio, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Missouri, Maryland, New Mexico, Nebraska, and of course Wisconsin. Oh yes, and British Columbia, Ontario, and England too.

**Alex Comb Paddle Class April 12 & 13, 2019**

Will you be ready for the spring paddling season? On April 12-13, 2019, you can get a good start by joining a canoe paddle making class at the Wisconsin Canoe Heritage Museum (WCHM) in Spooner, WI. In this two-day class you will actually make a canoe paddle in a design of your own choosing, using traditional and modern tools and techniques. Your instructor will be Alex Comb of Stewart River Boatworks from Knife River MN. Day one will start at 6:00 pm on Friday April 12 and day two will run from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm. The cost for participants is $95.00 plus materials cost ($35 for basswood, $40 for cherry, or $55 for a basswood bent shaft). The class is limited to eight participants for a real hands-on experience, so early registration is recommended. For more information or to register: 715-635-2479 or info@WisconsinCanoeHeritageMuseum.org.

**2018 Canoe Raffle Winner Takes The Cash**

Jane Palmisano from San Antonio (TX) was the lucky winner of the 2018 WCHM canoe raffle. Her winning ticket, which she purchased while on a visit to the museum this past summer, was drawn by WCHM Board member Lynn Herman during a ceremony at the museum on Sunday September 30th at 3:00 PM. The winner has a choice of one of two canoes or $1,000 cash, and Jane has decided to take the cash. That means we’ll all have another chance at the beautiful 15 foot cedar canvas tandem canoe that was built in the WCHM shop in 2017 on a MacKenzie-Yost MyPal form. Tickets for a 2019 raffle are expected to be available in time for Canoecopia.

**Morris To Return For 2019 Kayak Building**

Robert Morris from the Brewery Creek Small Boat Shop in Vancouver BC, and author of the illustrated instructional book “Building Skin-on-Frame Boats,” is expected to return in 2019 to teach another Greenland Kayak building class at the Wisconsin Canoe Heritage Museum (WCHM). While exact dates have yet to be established, the six-day course will likely take place at the end of July and into early August as it did last year. It will once again be limited to four students (and their partners) so that each will have the opportunity for a real hands-on experience. The 2018 class filled quickly and the 2019 class is expected to fill as well. Call 715-635-2479 or write info@wisconsincanoecheritagemuseum.org for more information or to register.
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