



South Milwaukee Historical Society

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717 Milwaukee Ave, South Milwaukee, WI

Meetings are held the second Monday in even numbered months at the Museum. Please join us to learn more about South Milwaukee's history.

The Museum is open on the third Saturday of each month from 10am to 3pm. You may also call 414-520-1285 for questions or to arrange for a private tour.



From The President's Pen—April, 2025

Happy Spring to everyone! I hope you made it through the long, hard winter! Now that Spring has arrived we have things that need attention here at your museum. We are looking for a new front door, as the old one is very, very old! Also, after all the work on the roof and siding, our lawn is in terrible shape. We-Engeries installed a new gas meter and the city will soon be replacing the lead pipes to the house. In addition, our sign in the front is in need of an update so people will notice that we are here! We are busy planning for this summer's Garden Tour and for a Rummage Sale in our back yard. We have much to do to keep the museum in "tip-top" shape.

On a sad note, we lost a very dear member and original founder of the South Milwaukee Historical Society—Chester Grobschmidt. He moved on to a new job in Heaven in February. I just want to say how thankful I am (we are) for all he did for the Society all these years since 1972. I had a special relationship with Chet. His service and support were major factors in the success of this museum. He was a wonderful mentor for me personally—always there to listen and help when I needed it. I thank you Chet for your lasting impression on my life. How do we express our loss? How do we express our feelings for the things you did for us? All we can do is say "Thank You." Our friends never truly leave us. They live on in the kindness they shared and the hope they brought into our lives. We owe you so much. Rest in Peace, Chet!

Richard Thinnas – President

Preserving our Proud Past since 1972

Founders: Dennis Rankin, Penny Rankin

Initial Directors: George Hook, Mary McCarrner, Bruce Rayeske, Dora Lee Szewczuga, William Domoe, Lilia Dishong, Chester Grobschmidt

Remembering Gondek's

Shared by the extended Gondek's family



In 1953 Edmund (Eddie) and Adele Guziewski Gondek along with their three (3) children, David, Camille and Michael, moved from California to South Milwaukee. They took over the ownership of the corner tavern at 1902 17th Avenue. One of the first projects was remodeling and creating the horseshoe bar. After 1955 they began serving food. Daughter Camille recalls homemade pizza from scratch being the first “big thing”. She remembers coming home from college on weekends to help make lots and lots of pizza dough. Niece, Joan Guziewski Lindstrom, recalls being the finished order runner from the upstairs kitchen to the tavern below at the age of about 8. Taking the telephone orders from the bartender to the upstairs kitchen then running down the back stairs from the kitchen with the food to the customer. “Probably allowed to help in order to keep me occupied while my mom, Stephanie, helped in the kitchen.”

Friday night fish fries soon became the staple of the business. The dining room was always full on Friday nights. A reservation prevented a family’s long wait in the bar or small tabled area next to the bar. Many families chose to order “take out”. The same quality food consisting of pieces of breaded fish with a cup of tartar sauce, french fries, buttered rye bread, coleslaw, and sliced dill pickles served on a paper plate covered in a sheet of waxed paper and wrapped in three sheets of newspaper to keep the food warm until you got home. The entire extended family and possibly neighbors saved their daily newspapers just for this purpose.

Joan Lindstrom and her siblings started babysitters for some of the older cousin’s children so they could work on Fridays. She recalls being in Junior High and dreading the Friday afternoon telephone calls as she walked into the house from school. One of the aunts would be calling needing a babysitter – somebody else had backed out. Pleas to not have to answer the calls went unheeded. When my siblings and I got older, we advanced from babysitters to working take-out, and then waitressing. The boys stocked beverage coolers, cleaned the facility, did furniture set-ups and advanced to becoming short order cooks. Being a member of the extended Gondek family included being part of the Gondeks’ workforce. There was always something that needed doing; buttering the rye bread, filling tartar sauce cups, cutting radishes, breading mushrooms, and washing dishes in the round hobart dish pit where all the tableware and glassware was sanitized. Fetching ice from the ice machine in the basement along with stocking the bar were frequent and heavy tasks during the course of a busy evening shift. We all learned and experienced many life lessons that helped us in later years by working at Gondek's.

Want to read more about Gondek’s? Check out the extended version (with pictures!) in the Your Memories section of our website.

Mark your calendar!!

2024 South Milwaukee
Garden Club & Historical Society
Garden Tour
& Art Fair

- Local artisans sprinkled throughout the gardens selling their handcrafted garden related items and more!
- Guest musicians at each of the gardens.
- Raffle prizes and other surprises on the tour!

Saturday, June 22, 2024
Garden Tour 9am-2pm

Visit 5 beautiful gardens and enjoy the wonderful Artisans & Musicians that will be located throughout the gardens. For more information contact Patti Bergeson | 414.768.9549 | pbergeson55@gmail.com


The museum will also be holding a vintage rummage sale at the museum during the garden tour! As we sort thru the museum we come across a lot things that don't pertain to South Milwaukee. We also have a fair number of extras. Things like Spectacle Books, Bay Mists, City directories and Midwest Pottery pieces. We never know what we'll discover but we'll have it out for sale! All proceeds will directly benefit the Historical Society.



The original reusable shopping bag!

The latest display at the BE Event Center highlights basketmaking in South Milwaukee. Stop by Skyline Deli or the Bucyrus Museum and check it out while you're there. Scan the QR code in the display and you'll be directed to our website where you can learn more.

Save the date!
Plans are in the works for a Walking Tour of Downtown South Milwaukee with City Historian Nels Monson on Saturday July 12
Details coming soon
Check our website and Facebook page



Museum Updates

Society member Joan Lindstrom has been working in overdrive getting the archive files at the museum organized. Among the files she's cleaned up so far are Grant Park, Lawson Airline, Continental Tile & Faience, Midwest Pottery, and the Railroad Depot.

Thanks to her efforts we're discovering things we didn't even know we had! One of those is a file about Tony Kotchi and his paintings of Old South Milwaukee. A previous curator started a booklet telling the story of each of his 20+ pieces. Current curators are toying with the idea of completing that booklet. We'll keep you updated.

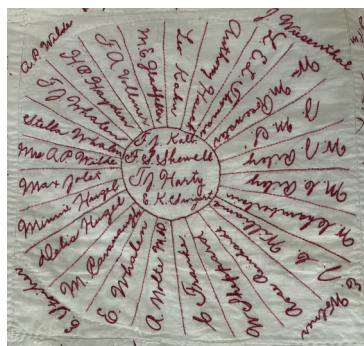
The Museum has his painting of the Rawson House hanging in our front entry. We're working to track down his other paintings to get updated photos.



Before taking on the files, Joan indexed two signature quilts at the museum.

The first signature quilt has red embroidery on a white background. It was created by the Ladies Guild of St. Mark's Episcopal Church. Residents bought patches which entitled them to write their names on the patch. Patches were later embroidered by the ladies and added to the quilt. The earliest patch is dated 1861; the last patch is dated 1899. The quilt was sold to the highest bidder, Frank Fadel, in the early 1900s. We don't know what his winning bid was. The quilt was donated to the society in 1984 by Mrs. Elvira Fadel.

The second quilt has white embroidery on white cloth. Talk about a challenge! And while we now know whose signatures are on the quilt, we have no other information at this time.



The quilts and lists of names are available at the museum for anyone to check out. The plan is to eventually have the information available on our website as well.



Board member Janet Rodman had the great idea to create QR codes for some of the displays at the museum linking them to the booklets posted on our website. We're hoping to create more QR codes in the future.

TIDS & BITS

We have a rather large amount of unidentified photos. People, places and things! We'll be asking for your help in the future to identify them. Here are a few examples. Anything look familiar?



Back of the photo says 1924

Reminder to New Members...

Your membership comes with one hour of free genealogy research. Contact Steve Schreiter at 414-762-5214 for details.

Come on in... we're open!

Upcoming Saturdays
10am—3pm

May 17

June 21*

July 19

August 116

**During the Garden Tour*

Visitors to the museum receive a coupon for \$5 admission to the Bucyrus Museum

Hope to see you there!

SENIORS CAN AVOID TAXES ON RMDs BY DONATING THEM TO QUALIFIED NON-PROFIT CORPORATIONS.

DONATIONS ARE 100% DEDUCTIBLE
UP TO \$100,000
(\$200,000 FILING JOINTLY).
(IRA custodians must arrange for transfer of funds.)

For detailed information,
google: "IRS RMD QCD"

The South Milwaukee Historical Society
is an all-volunteer 501 C(3) Corporation.
PROUD PAST, PROMISING FUTURE

Tours

The Museum is available for tours to Scout Groups, Civic Organizations and School Groups.

It is also available to individuals for research or tours. For more information or to arrange a tour, please call 414-520-1285

Thank you to everyone who signed up for the electronic newsletter. So far it's a big success! If you'd like to give it a try let us know. You can call or text 414-520-1285 or email us at Southmilwaukeehistory@gmail.com You can always go back to a paper copy if you decide you prefer that.

The South Milwaukee Historical Society is a 501.c.3 organization whose mission is "to preserve, honor and promote South Milwaukee's rich history for generations to come."



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717 Milwaukee Ave
South Milwaukee, WI 53172