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# DANE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## NEWSLETTER



The Dane County Historical Society Office and the Otto Schroeder Records Center are located in the lower level of the Lussier Family Heritage Building on Lake Farm Road just south of the Beltline near Lake Waubesa.

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## Frank J. Hess and Sons Cooperage - 1904-1966

By Mary Clark

*See related story on page 3 about the dedication of the latest Dane County Historical Society marker near the site of the original Hess Cooperage.*

The Frank J. Hess and Sons Cooperage of Madison, at its height, was Wisconsin's largest independent family-owned cooperage. The cooperage operated from 1904 through 1966, making quarter-sawn white oak barrels. The two Hess factory buildings stood behind the family home at 1952 Atwood Avenue in Madison.

Frank J. Hess Sr. was born in Kardasova Recice, in southern Bohemia on April 10, 1870. At the age of 14, he started a four year cooperage apprenticeship at the Pilsner Brewery in Pilsen, Bohemia. At 19, he traveled to America by ship and then by train to Chicago. He worked as a cooper manufacturing white oak beer kegs for seven years at Westside Brewery in Chicago; in 1896 he moved to Prairie du Chien to make barrels for the local Silversmith Brewery and for the G. Heilman brewery in La Crosse.



*Frank Hess Sr. working in the cooperage. February 15, 1954, (permission WHi 32267)*

In 1904, Henry Fauerbach of the Fauerbach Brewery in Madison persuaded Frank to move to Madison to start an independent cooperage business. Hess started the Frank J. Hess Cooperage at Schenk's Corners and operated it there with his four sons, Joe, Tony, "Foots" (Frank Jr.) and Eddie for 62 years. The four brothers began working with their father in the cooperage while still in grammar school. Josephine, Frank Sr.'s only daughter, also worked in the business as the secretary.

The cooperage manufactured and repaired beer, wine and whiskey barrels, half-barrels, quarter-barrels and four-gallon pony kegs for Fauerbach Brewery, as well as for the Hausmann Brewery at State and Gorham Streets, for the Breckheimer Brewing Co. on King Street, for Brunkow and Mueller at Pheasant Branch, for the Stork Brewery in Slinger, for Haertel Brewery in Portage and for other breweries in Baraboo, Monroe, Potosi, Rhinelander, Sauk City, Columbus, Watertown and Janesville. They also shipped barrels out of state to many eastern breweries.

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Frank J. Hess & Sons Cooperage (*Continued from page 1*)

The finished wooden barrels were heavy, and could dry out, leak or break. Quite often a single stave might crack or break, requiring repair. Hess, like many other cooperages, also spent much of their time repairing used and damaged barrels sent back to them by the breweries.

In the early years, the Hess Cooperage manufactured barrels entirely by hand, sawing and planing and finishing the staves and heads with hand-powered tools. At its peak, the cooperage could manufacture forty barrels a day.

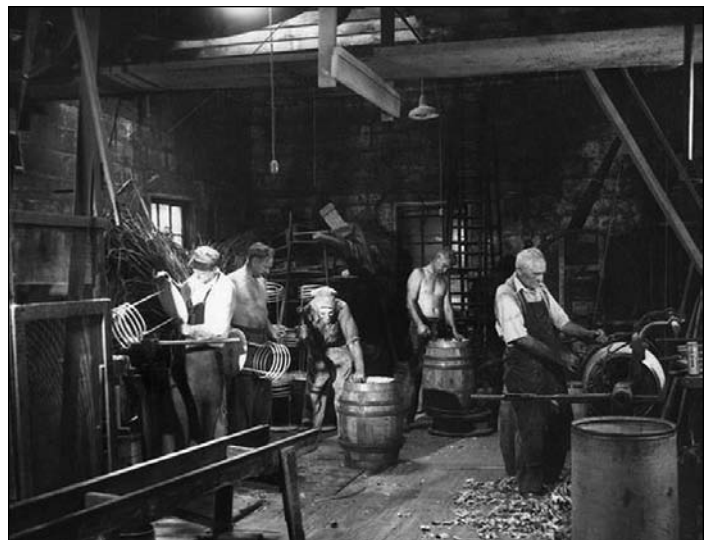


Joe, Eddie and Foots Hess (l to r) pose with a large oak log which will be cut to make barrels. Houses in the background are along the 1900 block of East Main St., Madison. 1954. (Image permission WHi32241)

An interview with Eddie Hess, son of the founder, was published in *Breweries of Wisconsin*.<sup>1</sup> “We had as many as thirty-five men working for us at one time. [...] We used only white oak for the barrels. The staves were purchased from a sawmill in Arkansas, but we were able to buy white-oak wood around here for the headings [tops and bottoms]. ... the barrels were made from staves that were cured outdoors for a year and a half. If the staves weren’t dried right, they’d crack when we tried to bend them.” (Apps, p. 79)

In addition to working with the white oak wood, and the steel hoops that were used to hold the barrel staves in place, the Hesses also used cattail leaves in the making of the barrels.

Eddie remembered, “You can’t make a beer barrel without cattails. We put a cattail leaf between every stave. This helps to keep the barrel from leaking. A tavern empties a barrel and rolls it outside where it sits in the sun. It dries out, and it could leak when refilled. When the breweries pick up the barrel they sprinkle water on it and it expands. All the while the cattail leaves between the staves make sure the barrel



Interior view of Hess Cooperage. Pictured l to r: Foots, Eddie, Joseph, Tony, and Frank Hess Sr. Notice the cattails in the background. 1954. (Image permission WHi1916)

doesn’t leak. Other materials might rot, but not the cattail. We used only the leaves from the female cattails, not from those with the cigars. We got our cattails right here in Madison, from where the Dane County Coliseum is now and from where the new city bus depot is. Those were marshy places where cattails grew. We harvested them in the fall and hung them up. It took a year for them to dry.” (Apps, p. 79)

During Prohibition, when the beer barrel industry waned, many cooperages went out of business. The Hess Cooperage continued by manufacturing barrels for the dairy industry. Of six cooperages operating in Wisconsin at the time, Hess was the only one that managed to remain open during the “dry” years. However, although they remained open, business was so slow that only Tony and Frank Sr. worked in the cooperage during those years. As soon as the Eighteenth Amendment repealed Prohibition in 1933, business picked up for everyone; so much so that no one could keep up with the demand. Eddie Hess told of the growth in the Hess business after Prohibition, “It was the Depression then, and it wasn’t hard to find good labor. We had policemen, plumbers, people from all walks of life, and sometimes entire families working for us – all making barrels. We shipped out a couple of carloads of barrels a day, and still couldn’t keep up. There was a demand for more barrels than we could supply.” (Apps, p. 80-81)

As the busy cooperages couldn’t keep up with the new demand for barrels, soon breweries began to look for other alternatives to the scarce wooden barrels. They moved to stainless steel, and then to aluminum barrels. The aluminum barrels didn’t leak or break, and they were much lighter.

*Continued on page 3*

## Frank J. Hess & Sons Cooperage (*Continued from page 2*)

In November 1965, the Hess Cooperage factory produced the last white oak beer barrels ever to be manufactured in the United States.



*Stacks of oak barrel staves and heads curing outdoors behind the Hess Cooperage. The round stacks are the heads and the square stacks are staves. 1954. (Image permission WHi32242)*

With no new barrels being produced, the Hess Cooperage remained in business a little longer doing barrel repair, and then finally closed its doors early in 1966, a victim of the demise of the American wooden beer barrel industry.

In the spring of 1966, an article about the then recent closing of the Hess Cooperage appeared in *Wisconsin Tales and Trails*.<sup>2</sup> The article celebrated the Hess brothers and their skilled craftsmanship. "In this age of stainless steel and aluminum, it is easy to overlook the significance of the wooden barrel in America's past. (Holland, p.12). Beer, wine and other spirits were brewed or fermented and aged, as they have been for centuries, in wooden barrels, tanks or vats. [...] The wooden barrel has indeed played a large part in our history, and the cooper has been an indispensable artisan." (Holland, p. 13)

### References:

1. App, Jerry. *Breweries of Wisconsin*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005.
2. Holland, Robert T. "The Last Wooden Beer Barrels." *Wisconsin Tales and Trails* Spring 1966: pp. 12-16.

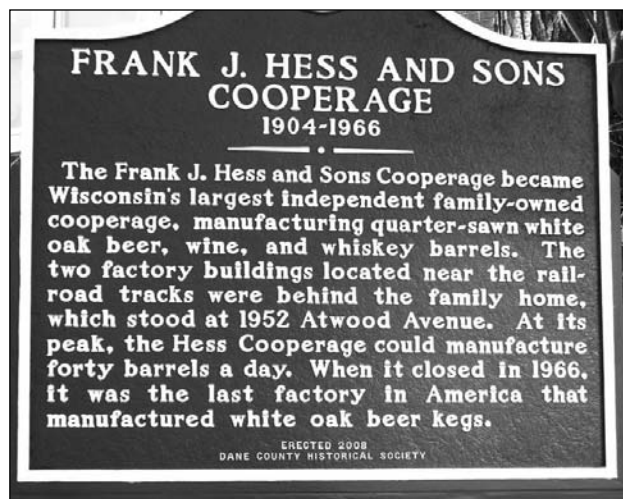
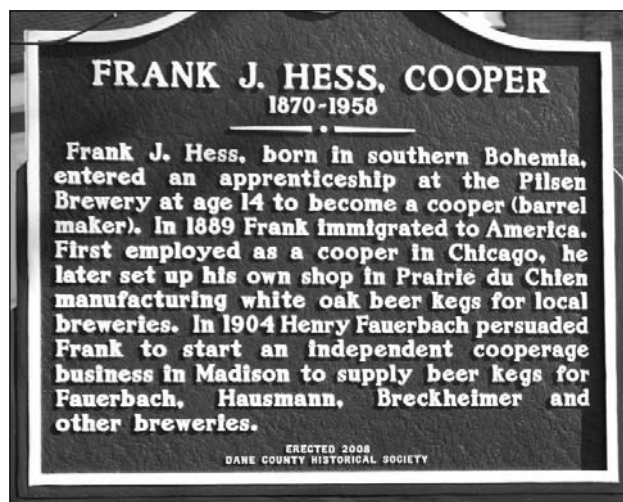
## Hess Cooperage Marker Dedication

Dane County Historical Society's latest historical marker was dedicated on October 18, 2008. The dedication took place on a beautiful sunny Saturday afternoon, with about 100 people in attendance to hear the story of the Frank J. Hess and Sons Cooperage and the efforts to erect this marker on the site, near where the original family home and cooperage factory buildings stood. Many of those in attendance at the dedication ceremony were descendants and relatives of Frank Hess.

A tent was set up nearby to show off some of the barrels and cooperage tools from the old family business.

The historical marker was erected on a little triangle of land along Atwood Avenue at Schenk's Corners in Madison. The marker is a two-sided post marker. One side tells the story of Frank J. Hess and his journey to Madison to set up his cooperage business; the other side describes the cooperage business that he built and operated with his four sons. Underneath the marker, attached to both sides of the post are aluminum plates printed with photographs depicting the operation of the business in its heyday.

Funding for the marker was secured through the Madison Home Brewers and Taster's Guild and the Historic Blooming Grove Historical Society. After the dedication ceremony everyone convened across the street from the marker site, at Tubb's Taco Palace to enjoy beer and tacos provided by the Hess family and Peter Fauerbach.



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# DCHS Membership – Renew Today!!

Membership dues provide essential funding that keeps the Dane County Historical Society operating. Your membership helps the Society carry out its mission of preserving Dane County's heritage for tomorrow's generations. Memberships and private support are increasingly necessary to ensure the work of the Society.

*Your support does make a difference!*

The Board of Directors is always searching for good ways to attract new members. Last year, we focused on revitalizing the Business/Professional membership category to encourage local businesses to partner with DCHS in preserving our county's history. We were able to pick up some new business memberships. We are very appreciative of our new business members and will continue to encourage more businesses and professional organizations to participate and become members.

For 2009, we are going to do something new. The Dane County Historical Society is supportive of all our sister local historical organizations in the county. There are about two dozen local or municipal historical societies in our county. If you are a member of another local historical society in Dane County, we will give you a **\$5.00 discount** on your Dane County Historical Society Individual or Family membership. Just indicate, on your renewal membership form, to which other historical society you also hold a membership for 2009.

We are also encouraging our members to please consider renewing your membership this year at the SUSTAINING level. Revenue from annual Sustaining memberships in the Dane County Historical Society will be applied to the Society's Legacy Fund, which is being built to ensure that the work of the Society will go on.

## Benefits of Membership in Dane County Historical Society

Members of the Dane County Historical Society receive:

- a copy of the quarterly Dane County Historical Society newsletter
- an invitation to attend and participate in the society's annual meeting
- advance notice of programs and events
- 10% discount on the price of society publications including *Forward! A History of Dane, the capital county*

- free copies upon request of special indexes created by DCHS
- password access to a special content area of the DCHS website

AND of course, all members receive the satisfaction of knowing that you are doing your share to help us preserve, promote, and share the important history of our county.

## Explanation of Membership Categories for 2009

Membership in DCHS is for the Calendar Year (January to December). At one time, we offered a Lifetime Membership category. We no longer promote that Lifetime Membership category in DCHS. However, I am sure you will be able to find a membership category that meets your needs.

### Individual Membership, \$15.00

This is the basic core membership in DCHS. Individual members have one vote on bylaws and other motions at the Society's annual meeting.

### Family Membership, \$20.00

Family membership includes all the benefits of Individual Membership for two people living at the same address. A family membership carries up to two votes at the Society's annual meeting.

### Contributing Membership, \$45.00

Contributing membership includes all the benefits of Individual or Family Membership. Additional funds from contributing memberships are used for management activities of the archives collection in the Otto Schroeder Records Center.

### Sustaining Membership, \$65.00

Sustaining membership includes all the benefits of Individual or Family Membership. Additional funds from sustaining memberships will be automatically added to the society's Legacy Fund.

### Business / Professional Membership, \$40.00

Business/Professional membership includes all the benefits of Individual Membership for a business, library, educational institution, or other organization.

### Student Membership, \$10.00

Student membership includes all the benefits of Individual Membership for a high school student.

# Sun Prairie Death List

By Jack Davison, *Sun Prairie Historical Library and Museum*

The Sun Prairie Historical Library and Museum maintains a database containing over 16,000 records of deaths and/or burials in the northeast region of Dane County. The database is known as THE SUN PRAIRIE DEATH LIST and is available on the web at <http://db.sun-prairie.com/deathlist>. The cemeteries included in the list are located in the townships of Bristol, Burke, Cottage Grove, Medina, Sun Prairie, Windsor and York in Dane County and Town of Leeds in Columbia County. The Death List also includes information on deaths for some people connected with Sun Prairie's history but buried elsewhere.

There are two main menu options that will be of most interest to visitors to the site: Death List and Cemetery List.

## Death List

Using the Death List option, you can find records for individuals included in the database. Searching the Death List is easy. Records can be searched by last name or maiden name, first name, parents' name, or spouse's name. There is also an Advanced Search capability that will search by additional data fields such as "occupation," "military service," "specific cemetery," etc.

Search Sun Prairie Death List	
Last Name (Maiden)	<input type="text"/>
First Name	<input type="text"/>
Parents	<input type="text"/>
Spouse	<input type="text"/>
Records per page	Select Value <input type="button" value="v"/>
<input type="button" value="Clear"/>	<input type="button" value="Search"/>

In the sample data record (*below*) for Charles Bird, an early Sun Prairie pioneer, all of the important vital information is displayed. If the Museum has a memorial card, burial permit, obituary or death certificate, the record will indicate that with a check mark in the box next to that field. If there is a checkmark indicating an obituary is available, and an electronic copy of the obituary is available, there will be a link to the text, so you can read the full obituary online. If no online obituary is available, when you click the link, you will see instructions for how to obtain a hard copy of the obituary from the Museum. If a page number is given, it indicates that

Deceased Detail			
Last Name (Maiden)	Bird -		
First Name	Charles Hopkins		
Spouse	Lovina M. [1] Margaret [2]		
Parents	Zenas & Tabitha		
Born	02/22/1813		
Died	01/14/1883		
Cemetery	Sun Prairie Cemetery		
Memorial Card	<input type="checkbox"/>	Burial Permit	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>Obituary</u>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Death Cert	<input type="checkbox"/>
Page	2088		
Occupation			
Military			
Obit File	obit\OB_BirdCH.pdf		
<u>Comments</u>	<input type="button" value="Cancel"/>		

an obituary or death certificate is in the archives of the Sun Prairie Historical Library and Museum.

The fee for obtaining obituary copies from the Museum is \$2.00 per page. Send a request to the Sun Prairie Historical Library and Museum at 115 East Main Street, Sun Prairie, WI 53590, or email your obituary request to [pklein@cityofsunprairie.com](mailto:pklein@cityofsunprairie.com). If you email your request, a Word document containing the requested obituaries will be returned to you by email and the fee can be mailed to the above address. Soon, a PayPal payment option will also be available.

## Cemetery List

If you select the menu option of 'Cemetery List', you will find the names of the thirty cemeteries included in the Death List, plus a short paragraph about the cemetery, a photo from the cemetery, and a map giving the location of the cemetery.

Long range plans for the Death List are to have all pre-1923 obits in the Museum's collection added to the online site. Currently there are only a handful which are fully transcribed, with about 100 more scanned and ready to load. Most of the work on the Death List has been done by Jack Davison and Clem Batz. There has

*Continued on page 7*

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# Dane County Roots

We are starting a new feature in the Dane County Historical Society newsletter. Since the society often gets inquiries in the genealogical vane, and since many of our members are interested in doing genealogy, we will use this space to offer tips and other information of interest to those doing genealogical research on people and places in Dane County.



## Tech Tips

By Stef Morrill

**Geni.** Today, web sites and other applications are including more media, mapping, and other interactive features to create complete environments for individuals to collaborate on genealogy projects for fun or work.

Geni is a website that brings multimedia and collaboration to the family tree ... and it's completely free!

Using Geni, you create your tree by adding basic information about family members. You can stop there, or you can also add video and photos to make a virtual family-tree scrapbook. If you'd like, you can invite other family members to collaborate on your family tree. If you don't invite anyone, only you will be able to see your tree. Once your family members have joined, you can send them messages and have discussions. You can view your tree as a list, as an index of names, as a map of either current locations or places of birth, or as a timeline.

To get started, visit Geni's website: (<http://www.geni.com>) or watch their video tutorial on YouTube: (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lcd7dRdlHG4>).

**World Archives Project.** Ancestry.com is trying to increase the number of indexed records available to genealogists and other history buffs, and you can help. Their new World Archives Project relies on volunteer help for indexing. Here's how it works:

Ancestry.com gathers historical records and adds them to their system.

Participants view the records and enter facts to create a searchable index.

The index created is added to ancestry.com free to everyone.

All of the indexes created as part of the World Archives project will remain free to the public on Ancestry.com. Ancestry.com will also donate copies of the indexes and images of the records themselves to partnering government archives and genealogy societies, along with providing free advertising to partnering genealogy societies.

Active indexers who subscribe to Ancestry.com's paid services will receive a 10 to 15 percent discount on renewals. To get started, go to <http://community.ancestry.com/wap/download.aspx>. You will need to provide your name and email address to set up an account. You will also need to download and install the software used to index. It is recommended that you use Internet Explorer 7 to download and install the software, and you will need an active internet connection throughout the installation process.

### DCHS Board of Directors Officers Elected

At the meeting of the Dane County Historical Society Board of Directors on August 18, 2008, the Board nominated and elected officers for the board for 2008/09.

Mary Clark – President

Joanne Jensen – Vice President

Stef Morrill – Treasurer

Barbara Furstenberg – Secretary

*See the 2009  
Membership Form  
included with this issue.  
Please take time to fill it out  
and return it to us.  
We value your membership!*

## Makes A Great Holiday Gift!

### Dane County Historical Society Presents FORWARD! A History of Dane: the Capital County



FORWARD traces the history of Dane County through the twentieth century. As home to state government, Dane County history provides background and insight into the development of Wisconsin throughout this period. The book was researched and written by Allen Ruff and Tracy Will. Tracy Will is well known to many Wisconsinites as one of the hosts of the popular television series, *Wisconsin Stories*, developed cooperatively by Wisconsin Public Television and the Wisconsin Historical Society. The first published history of Dane County in nearly 100 years is replete with fascinating details and rich graphics. It has over 400 pages of text, hundreds of pictures, complete index, maps, photos, and graphics enliven the text.

I would like to order \_\_\_\_ number of copies:

Dane Historical Society Members @ \$26.95 each \$ \_\_\_\_\_

OR Non-Members @ \$29.95 each \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Shipping and Handling: Add \$3.00 per copy \$ \_\_\_\_\_

TOTAL ENCLOSED \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Mail to: DCHS, 3101 Lake Farm Rd., Madison, WI 53711  
If you wish to pick up the book in person to save shipping and handling charge, please call DCHS (608-224-3605)

## Sun Prairie Death List (Continued from page 5)

been some discussion among various other local historical societies about expanding the Death List to include cemeteries from other parts of Dane County. No final decisions have been made, but there remains interest in expanding the list.

If you use the Sun Prairie Death List, please take a moment to click on Survey at the main menu and leave your comments for the developers, to let them know how you liked the list.

View Cemetery		
Cemetery	Bristol Lutheran Cemetery (Br. Luth)	Comments
Address		
Township	Bristol	Section 29
Description	Located at 6835 County Hwy N just south of Happy Valley Road and adjacent to the Bristol Lutheran Church. About two miles north of the City of Sun Prairie and State Hwy 151. Church was purchased from Methodists in 1907 for \$1200 and in 1912 additional land was purchased for cemetery use. Church was originally named First Lutheran Church of Bristol and name changed to Bristol Lutheran Church in 1949.	
Map		
Picture		

## Dane County Bookshelf For Your Information

Occasionally, the Society hears about publications related to Dane County. If anyone knows of additional publications about Dane County, its history or its people, please pass them on to us. If anyone would like to donate books, town or family histories, or other publications about Dane County to the records center, please let us know.

*An East Side Album: a Community Remembers*, by the East Side History Club. Goodman Community Center, 2008. 156p. This book was published to commemorate significant people, places and moments in the history of the east side of Madison; and to celebrate the recent opening of the brand new Goodman Community Center (formerly the Atwood Community Center). It contains many B&W photographs and personal reminiscences of familiar sites, past and present.

*Fill'er Up: the Glory Days of Wisconsin Gas Stations*, by Jim Draeger and Mark Speltz. Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2008. 194p. This book is filled with interesting color pictures and text about vintage and unique gas stations around Wisconsin – with several examples from Dane County. Companion 30 min. DVD documentary is also available.

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Dane County Historical Society  
3101 Lake Farm Rd.  
Madison, WI 53711

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Please check your mailing label. If it says 2008, then you have not yet renewed your subscription in DCHS. Please renew now!! If it says COUR, you are receiving this Courtesy Copy of the newsletter as a friend of the Society.

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## President's Message from Mary Clark



*Mary Clark*

Well, as we get close to the end of another year, it is time to renew our membership in the Dane County Historical Society for 2009. Please take a moment, now while you are thinking about it, to send in your membership renewal form. The Society depends on our loyal friends and supporters to be able to continue keeping and preserving the history of Dane County.

This year, we have provided for electronic renewal of your membership through a PayPal account. It is simple and quick. Go to our website at [www.danecountyhistory.org](http://www.danecountyhistory.org) where you will see the link to renew your membership.

Or, if you prefer to do things "old school" you'll find that this issue of the newsletter contains a membership renewal form.

Either way, please renew now. And why not give a gift membership to Dane County Historical Society to a friend or family member who also loves history?

I want to thank everyone who gave so generously over the past year. We all need to remember that for the past to become history... it needs a keeper. It needs people like you working through historical societies like ours to record and keep the stories of the past, and to carry those stories forward for future generations. That is what Dane County Historical Society is all about. We couldn't do it without you!!

Mary Clark

The Dane County Historical Society Newsletter is published quarterly (Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter), by the Dane County Historical Society and printed by The Printing Place. Submissions are due 15 days prior to publication. Reader reviews, testimonials, flak and flattery, are also welcome. Send to: DCHS Newsletter, 3101 Lake Farm Rd. Madison, WI 53711. E-mail: <a href="mailto:dchs@danecountyhistory.org">dchs@danecountyhistory.org</a> Mary Clark, President, Howard Sherpe, Editor, Dane County Historical Society
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