Badger Ordnance News
Winter 2022

Badger History Group Inc.
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Affiliate of the
Wisconsin Historical Society

Member of Sauk Prairie Area Chamber of Commerce

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Museum off US Hwy 12
Sauk Prairie State Recreation Area
(SPSRA is the property of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources)

The mission of the Badger History Group, Inc. is to collect, preserve and share the histories of the former Badger Army Ammunition Plant and the Sauk prairie. We help each other learn from the past, engage with the present, and guide our shared future..

Board of Directors

Orie Eilertson, Merrimac
Verlyn Mueller, Prairie du Sac
Michael Mossman, Leland
Sandy Stiemke, Sauk City
Heather Sonntag, Madison
Dan Haling, Prairie du Sac
Frank Wolf, Mazomanie

Newsletter Editor
Michael Goc

MUSEUM OPEN AGAIN

TUESDAY- SATURDAY 10:00-4:00
MASKS AND SOCIAL DISTANCING REQUIRED
HAND SANITIZER AVAILABLE
NO MORE THAN SEVEN VISITORS AT A TIME

Speaking of Birds and Bees and Other Things

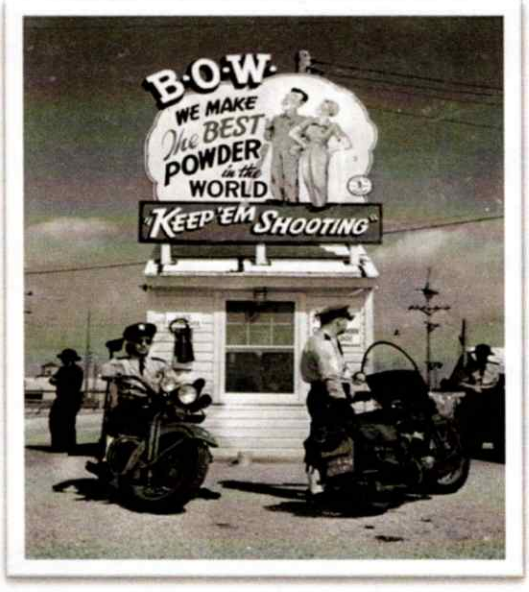
February 10, 2022, 7:00 pm
At the Museum and on Zoom
Mike Mossman

Out in the wilds and croplands that have succeeded the Badger Army Ammunition Plant, conservation biologists study all sorts of creatures and their relationships to the land. It is historical work because the cultural forces expressed in land use create habitat for animals. This informs conservation efforts and demands that researchers collect data that will provide historical references for the future. Ecologist, BHG co-founder and our current vice-president Mike Mossman will tells us how wildlife has changed on the site over the past 200 years, why, and what it teaches us about ourselves and our future.

The happy group here gathered for a holiday party in December. They are (l-r) super volunteers Jack and Sue Heinzelman; bd mbrs Orie Eilertson and Sandy Steimke; Lisa Hartmann, Deb Haling, bd mbrs Mike Mossman, Verlyn Mueller and Dan Haling, Pat Wolf and bd mbr Frank Wolf. These are the people who make things happen at BHG.

We can't promise you a Harley

But we do have hats, T-Shirts, books and videos you can purchase to support the mission of the Badger History Group. Available at the Museum



You can also become a member, renew your membership or make a donation. Just go to our website.

Yes, the guard force did use Harley Davidson motorcycles to patrol the perimeter during World War II.

Upcoming Programs

At the Museum and on Zoom

March 10, 2022, 7:00 pm
BOW/BAAP's Impact on Sauk County
Like a big rock dropped in a pond, the impact of Badger rippled throughout Sauk County. Paul Wolter, Executive Director of the Sauk County Historical Society will tell us where some of those waves landed.

April 14, 2022, 7:00 pm
Production of Nitrocellulose at BOW
The two main ingredients of propellent production were nitrocellulose and nitroglycerin. This lecture will describe nitrocellulose and how it was manufactured at BOW. Presented by our board member Frank Wolf who was also Chief Project Engineer at BOW.

May 12, 2022, 7:00 pm
Unintended Consequences of Badger Ordnance
The presence of Badger Ordnance/Army Ammunition Plant affected thousands of people and places well beyond the fence line. Author (your editor) Michael Goc will talk about how Badger changed the lives of individuals and communities throughout Wisconsin.

From the Archivist

Verlyn Mueller

In December of 2020, Orie Eilertson, Jack Heinzelman and I installed three large framed photo prints on the walls of the hallway to the Exhibit Gallery. The first one that visitors see is the photo at left. All three photos are 60" high x 79" wide.

These photos were originally mounted in the main lobby of the River Arts Center at the Sauk Prairie High School in 2002 when the Badger History Group sponsored a lecture series and the *Inside the Fence* photo exhibit of Badger Army Ammunition Plant images. After the exhibit, they were mounted in the Commons at the UW-Platteville Baraboo Sauk County campus. When the UW remodeled the Commons the prints were returned to us.

The photo prints were made by Great Big Pictures of Madison, from negatives from the Army archive at Badger Army Ammo Plant. Originally mounted high out of reach of people, they were not framed and did not have the normal glass protection. Because here they were going to be mounted within the reach of people and subject to the touch of many hands I framed them with a Plexiglas front. The natural oil on our hands would cause irreparable damage to the photos.

The photo here is of the recruiting sign located north of the main entrance to the Badger Ordnance Works on US Hwy 12 & State Hwy 13. (Before the Interstate Hwy was opened State Hwy 13 went all the way to the Wisconsin, Illinois border.) The building in the background is the south wing of the WWII Recreation Hall and today the location of the Farmers' Memorial. One of the other photo prints is of the Main Gate Guard House. The third depicts people walking from buses inside the plant to the change houses to change from their specialized work clothes to street clothes.

A Short Review Of Our 2021 Business Year

Like everyone else, COVID has impacted the museum. Museum staff wear masks when we are outside the office talking to visitors. In the office we have not been wearing them, we are all triple vaccinated and we are spaced some distance apart so we feel comfortable without masks. If one of us gets exposed to COVID we will have to make some changes. I do take steps to minimize the risk inside the museum for us and our visitors. We have had visitors turn around and leave the museum when they enter un-masked and are told "masks are required". Entries in our guest register are about half what they were before. I think that is because our visitor traffic may be down slightly and fewer people sign the guest register than normal.

We had to replace the furnace for the exhibit gallery because of high carbon monoxide (CO) at a cost of about $4000.00. We will pay that bill out of operating budget funds but will need to replace that money for future operating expenses. I am working on a year end President's report that will have a few more details. I look forward to an improving year in 2022.

January 1966

On January 3, 1966 the Green Bay Packers defeated the Cleveland Browns in the NFL championship game at Lambeau Field. It was the last championship game before the "Super Bowl Era" began. In the vicinity of the recently re-named Badger Army Ammunition Plant, many a football fan had other news to cheer.

On December 29, picking up on a leak from the office of Wisconsin Senator William Proxmire, CBS-TV newsreader Walter Cronkite announced that the US Army would reopen Badger. The news was a surprise to John Troyer, the Commander's Rep at Badger, but it was not unexpected. Troyer had been ordered to prepare cost estimates for reactivation months earlier.

Walter Cronkite

Even so, he would have preferred to have received notice directly from his superiors, instead of the evening news. The Army Ammunition Procurement Agency later explained that it had scheduled its announcement for January 5 and was as surprised by Cronkite's scoop as John Troyer. Perhaps the Agency was run by Packer fans who were distracted by the big game.

The reopening of Badger was a logical step in the American "escalation" of the war in Viet Nam. President Lyndon Johnson had launched the Air Force and Navy on the long range bombing mission dubbed Operation Rolling Thunder in February, 1965. The following June, General William Westmoreland, commander in Viet Nam, said he would need an additional 150,000 troops to fight the war in '65 and another 100,000 in '66.

To arm them for combat, he also ordered an equally large number of the new M-16 rifles. After years of trials the Army had settled on WC846 Ball Powder as ammunition for the M-16. By the end of 1965, the sole manufacturer of WC846 was Olin-Matheson Corp., the operating contractor at Badger.

Olin also produced WC846 at its own plant in East Alton, Illinois. Workers there had been on strike and some observers speculated that starting up Badger was a ploy to break the strike. That was unlikely since the Army soon would need all the ammo it could get and not just for the M-16.

The Army also needed small scale rockets fired from helicopters and airplanes to support its infantry, ammunition for machine guns, as well as propellant for artillery shells. Badger was the only one stop shop for all these items in the entire country. If the United States was scaling up combat in Viet Nam, Badger had to supply the fire power.

Except for rocket, Badger production areas had been well-maintained since the post Korean War stand down. Ball Powder, smokeless and the acid areas were all up and running by September of '66. Rocket waited until June of '67, because it had a lower status on the maintenance schedule and because it had to be retooled to produce new MK-43 "sticks."

This was the start of Badger's greatest period of production. Between 1966 and 1975, it would surpass its output in both previous periods individually and approach surpassing them combined.

Badger had more areas running than in previous periods, but changes outside the fence also eased production. The plant was no longer plagued by worker shortages. The population of the region had increased as had the number of automobiles and the quality of the roads they traveled on. Badger Village was already in private hands as a condominium set up targeted at senior citizens, but the willingness and the ability of workers to commute made it unnecessary anyway.

Badger was ready when the call to operate--no matter how sad the reason--arrived.