Badger Ordnance News
Summer 2023

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 Halling, Prairie du Sac
Frank Wolf, Mazomanie

Newsletter Editor
Michael Goc

At BHG's Annual Meeting

With

A Picnic & Bus Tour

Sunday July 23, Noon-3:30 pm

Noon – meet at Museum for bus
12:30 – Picnic and Bus/Walking Tour-- South by Theolke Cemetery and Kettle Pond
2:15 – return by bus to Museum for Meeting

If you received an evite, RSVP by June 30
After June 30, call or email for availability

From the President

Mike Mossman

Change and Continuity. Such is the nature of history. We are blessed with the opportunity to study and learn from these processes that have played out on the Badger Lands over millennia —the vast changes in the landforms, the people, plants and animals, as they have responded to evolving natural and geopolitical forces. From plate tectonics and glaciation to immigration, displacement, fascism, imperialism, chemistry, how life strives to thrive, and the need for community. This history resides in the land, its plants, people and other animals, artifacts and stories. If we listen, it will enrich us, connecting us more deeply with home, each other, and the flow of time that we are fortunate to be part of.

The mission of the Badger History Group is to learn these myriad histories, and to preserve and share them, for they are vital to both present and future. In the process, we have become part of this history, because we interact with it, not just by looking at the past, but by engaging with the present, where history is made.

In 1998, in response to the Army's announcement that the 7,354-acre Badger Army Ammunition Plant would close, and discussion began about its future disposition, BHG formed as a loose but dedicated working group of local historians, affiliated with the Sauk County Historical Society. We focused on learning—and helping the community and decision-makers fathom—the varied histories of the site, and not treat it as a just a piece of real estate. The public and its agencies were expected to decide on the site's future, though very few people understood its rich histories and its meaning. Yet many individuals knew and cared intimately about specific aspects of it—the connections of the Ho-Chunk and of the displaced farm families and workers, the site's industrial potential, the environmental issues. Our goal at that time was to help all tell their stories, and come to a better, common understanding, rather than argue about what should happen to the land.

We collected data, helped lead tours, interviewed—and held reunions for—displaced residents and former workers, co-produced the video documentary *Powder to the People*, the book *Powder, People and Place*, and the photographic exhibition *Inside the Fence.* We were represented on the Badger Reuse Committee and had a major effect on its recommendations, which led to the current arrangement of collaborative ownership. Acknowledging our diverse, yet common historical connections with Badger saved the day from discord and lowest-common-denominator compromise.

Be careful what you ask for. In the early 2000's BHG became the main archival repository for BAAP artifacts and records, including thousands of large-format photographs. We reorganized and in time incorporated as a 501(c)3 non-profit membership organization with a board of directors, and eventually developed an on-site archives and museum.

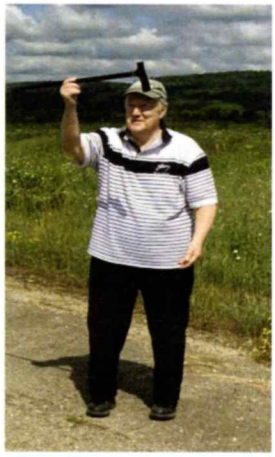
For the past eighteen years, BHG was led by Verlyn Mueller who served as both curator and archivist, and usually as president of the board. With the help of Orie Eilertson, he worked full-time, overseeing the Herculean task of accepting, organizing, and cataloguing this massive collection of Army records, along with our own interview tapes,

family histories, media accounts, and other important materials relating to the plant and the people who lived and worked on the Badger Lands, as well as coordinating volunteers and developing the museum, mobile displays, website and lecture series. Verlyn was the face of BHG, welcoming museum visitors, giving off-site presentations and staffing displays at community events like the Cow-Chip festival.

Transitions. In about 2020, it became clear that despite BHG's success with the archives, museum and public outreach, it was time to reassess our progress and direction. We reviewed our archives and its needs, and with the help of other community members and experts, engaged in the soul-searching exercise of strategic planning.

We could see that Verlyn, with his vast and intimate knowledge of the Badger Plant and the displaced families, was essential to the cataloguing process, for example to identify the many unlabeled Army photographs and the significance of maps and records. He was also irreplaceable as the museum curator, available to museum visitors. He needed more time for these critical functions and to be freed from the responsibilities of running the organization. Surely, BHG would benefit by dividing our labors and taking advantage of the talents and dedication of its other board members and volunteers.

So, Verlyn retired from the board and became our first paid staff, as archivist and curator. The board reshuffled into committees and got to work on the group's second major transition: securing competitive grants to digitize our AV interviews, and develop a new and much-visited website; revamping the lecture series; streamlining financial, membership and newsletter processes; building relationships with partner organizations; and planning for on-site field tours, a new Facebook page, and more. We have revived the group's original, broad perspective on Badger history, which had narrowed over the years to focus more on the Plant itself in order to care for the materials we had received from the Army. Our recent membership drive was very successful—in great thanks to you.



We hope to keep growing our membership and our role among Badger landowners and the greater community. We expect to continue changing in order to fulfill our mission. Thanks to all members, and others who care for this wonderful and complicated place, its history and future. Check out the website. Stop in at the museum. And if you're not a member, please join!

And, we always love to hear from you.

Pictured are the people on the board of directors who made BHG what it is and are working to make it better for tomorrow:

Opposite page: Archivist, curator, museum director **Verlyn Mueller** in his archives. Then President **Orie Eilertson** signing the lease with WDNR in 2015 that keeps us in our Museum. Above: tree-hugger and chronicler **Dan Halling;** treasurer and tour guide **Frank Wolf;** founder and president **Mike Mossman** with genealogist and membership secretary **Sandy Stiemke**; Left: historian, photo archivist, IT guru and secretary **Heather Sonntag**.

BHG News

Our 2022-'23 Speakers' Series concluded with Dan Halling reporting on champion trees on the property in April, shifted to your editor's review of the 1970s in May, and returned to trees with Heather Sonntag covering the history of trees and timber before and after the powder plant arrived.

Plans are being made for the '23-'24 season and we want to remind you that you don't have to attend in person. We can Zoom to you. We'll have the line-up ready for our next newsletter.

Our new web site is up and running. We have received many positive reviews and a few messages of constructive criticism. Whether the message is thumbs up or down it will help us improve the site. Let us know what you think.

We have been updating our membership list and many long-lost members have returned to the fold as paying members. This news and other items are on the agenda for the annual meeting on July 23. As Mike Mossman has reported in this issue BHG is transitioning to a more active, efficient organization that can better meet its mission.

May 2023 Finances

Start Checking Balance =	$	39,777.52
Income		
Membership	$	950.00
Donation Box	$	271.00
Sales	$	150.00
Donations	$	7,430.00
DNR Utilities Refund	$	-
Interest	$	2.03
Total	$	8,803.03
Expense		
Bluffview Sanitary	$	62.39
TDS	$	397.82
Waterfront	$	1,097.99
Certificate Deposit	$	25,000.00
Money Market	$	15,000.00
Staples	$	437.41
Gaylord Supplies	$	212.41
Verlyn	$	866.67
Total	$	43,074.69

The 155

In its three periods of operation, Badger produced many different types and quantities of propellant. In terms of quantity, the number one product was propellant for 155 mm artillery. The United States adopted the 155 in its rush to arms after entering World War I. It was already the standard size for the allied French and British armies and our War Department decided it was better to adopt it instead of developing its own artillery round.

In every war since, American artillery pieces have fired 155mm rounds and still use them today. It is the NATO standard and is in common use around the world. The Ukrainians are firing so many 155s in their war with Russia that the US and its allies are hard-pressed to meet the demand and still maintain stockpiles for their own defense.

When the Soviet Union collapsed and the Cold War ended, the US reduced its arms industry, including Badger Army Ammunition Plant. The era of large scale land wars in Europe was supposed to be over. The US and its allies would no longer need huge volumes of the 155, so they thought.