

# The Union

Prairie du Chien Historical Society  
Newsletter

July 2022    Volume 25 #2

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## From the Desk of the Executive Director

Ever since its formation in 1996, the Prairie du Chien Historical Society has strived to preserve and interpret the rich history of the community. The Society now consists of the Fort Crawford Museum, the Museum of Prairie du Chien, and the St. Germain dit Gauthier House. It's because of visionary and dedicated leaders that so much has been accomplished. A true example of this leadership is our local historian and author, Mary Elise Antoine. Everyone in the community knows that Mary is the person to ask when a question about local history comes up. I personally have an "ask Mary" file on hand whenever she stops by the Museum. Mary decided that she had fulfilled her goals as President of the Prairie du Chien Historical Society Board and she's now focusing on the St. Germain House. On behalf of the Society, thank you Mary for your dedication and service over the years.

Because of this transition, Prairie du Chein native Chad Fradette, will serve out Mary's term as President of the Board. I have also accepted the position as Executive Director of the Society. As a lifelong tourist to the area, I offer a slightly different perspective on the community, and I never tire of the beautiful landscape and fascinating history. I look forward to continuing the Society's mission as well as exploring possible ways to better preserve and educate the community about the past. I'm constantly reminded that this community's history is an important part of the larger picture, and it is our responsibility to serve as caretakers for our next generation of historians and preservationists.

Brandon Brockway, Executive Director

## Calendar of Events 2022

There are still two more “Friday at the Fort” programs scheduled for the summer. You don’t want to miss them! The program starts at 1:30 on the grounds of the Fort Crawford Museum. The programs are family oriented and age friendly. Donations appreciated.

**July 22** Tombstone Rubbings

**July 29** Hoof Whistles

**August 10** Pies-A-Plenty

Last year’s pie sale in conjunction with the book sale at the Prairie du Chien Memorial Library during Crazy Days was such a big hit it was decided to do it again this year. Whole pies or slices of pies will be sold from 9:00am until 3:00pm or until the pies are gone.

**August 19** Tea with the DAR

The Fort Crawford Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution celebrated its 105<sup>th</sup> anniversary at the museum in April 2022. It is because of the DAR that the Fort Crawford Hospital exists today. It was at their December 13, 1921 meeting that the group made it their mission to save the remains of the hospital ruins and prevent the land from being subdivided into building lots. The cost of the property was \$1,250.00. A down payment of \$500.00 was made and after 4 years of fund raising the remaining \$750.00 was paid. In December 1925 the Fort Crawford Chapter of the DAR became owners of the hospital.

Enjoy an afternoon with members of the Crawford County Chapter of the DAR. Pre-registration is required for a reservation. Cost: \$10.00

**Sept. 28-30** Bus Trip to the Twin Cities

**October 1** Visiting Our Ancestors

**December 10** Christmas at the Fort



### Board of Directors

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## The Birrenbach HVAC Challenge

The Museum of Prairie du Chien (lower building) has been experiencing heating and air conditioning (HVAC) problems for the last several years and we have had large repair bills. The systems have become unrepairable, and need to be replaced. Because the Museum uses that building for storage of the collection, it is very important that we get the new systems in quickly to limit damage and also to provide our visitors with a comfortable tour.

The Birrenbach endowment was created in 2019 in the amount of \$25,000, and has provided \$2,500/year to our general operating budget. The fund is invested and until this year has provided a nice return. Ken and Dorothy have since passed away, so Gary Koch contacted their daughter, Julie, proposing that \$7,500 of the fund be offered as a challenge to the community to match that amount dollar for dollar. She contacted her siblings, and they agreed! If we were successful in our fundraising, that would give us \$15,000 for new HVAC system. This would help to pay for the new system, protect the collection, and make the visitor experience much better!

Member Marcella Dante proposed the HVAC Challenge back in March and the it was sent to our membership in the April newsletter. The following list of people met Marcella's \$100.00 challenge. They are: Janet Finn, Carolyn Sand, Mike Rider and Chad Fradette. To date, there is \$500.00 towards the \$7,500 goal.

Please send your tax-deductible contribution to the PdC Historical Society at 717 S. Beaumont Rd., Prairie du Chien, WI 53821.



Looking east from the corner of Blackhawk and Wacouta.  
A vintage postcard from the PdC Historical Society's Collection.

## Annual Bus Trip to the Twin Cities Returns September 28<sup>th</sup>, 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>

The wait is over! The bus tour is planned! Time to make your reservation!

The date for the “annual” bus tour fund raiser for the Prairie du Chien Historical Society is set for Wednesday, September 28, Thursday, September 29, & Friday, September 30, 2022. Our last spectacular trip was in 2019. It has been a long two years.

The cost of the trip is \$585.00. This cost is all inclusive. It includes transportation, motel accommodations, all meals, and tickets and admission fees for all venues.

Venues include: 3 plays, 2 museums, 1 Historic House Tour and 2 mystery stops.

Everyone attending must show proof of having the COVID-19 vaccine. Masks may be required in some venues (this will be addressed as we get closer to the time of departure).

It has been challenging as well as fun planning this trip! Looking forward to resuming this informative and entertaining event.

Please call the Fort Crawford Museum (608-326-6960) to reserve your seat by making a \$100.00 deposit. The deadline for the deposit is **Thursday September 1, 2022**. This deposit can be brought to the museum (Daily from 9 am – 4 pm), or mailed to the museum at 717 S. Beaumont Rd., Prairie du Chien, WI 53821. Please contact Janet Finn, tour coordinator, with any questions.

### Wish List from the Collection Committee

In 2021 the PdCHS received a wonderful donation from the Vesterheim American Museum in Decorah, Iowa. The artifacts were personal objects belonging to Dr. Benjamin Franklin and Susan Brown White. The White Family moved to Prairie du Chien prior to the Civil War. Dr. White practiced medicine here before enlisting in the army. Dr. White died in May, 1862 after becoming ill while treating sick soldiers. He was 35 years old.

On exhibit this year are three of Susan Brown White’s dresses. The dresses will go into storage when the current exhibit is replaced. They will need to be stored in archival/acid free textile storage boxes. The cost of one box is approximately \$90.00. Donations for the purpose of purchasing these types of storage units would be greatly appreciated. If interested please contact the Museum at 608 326-6960. Thank you!



**Visiting Our Ancestors**  
**Saturday October 1, 2022**

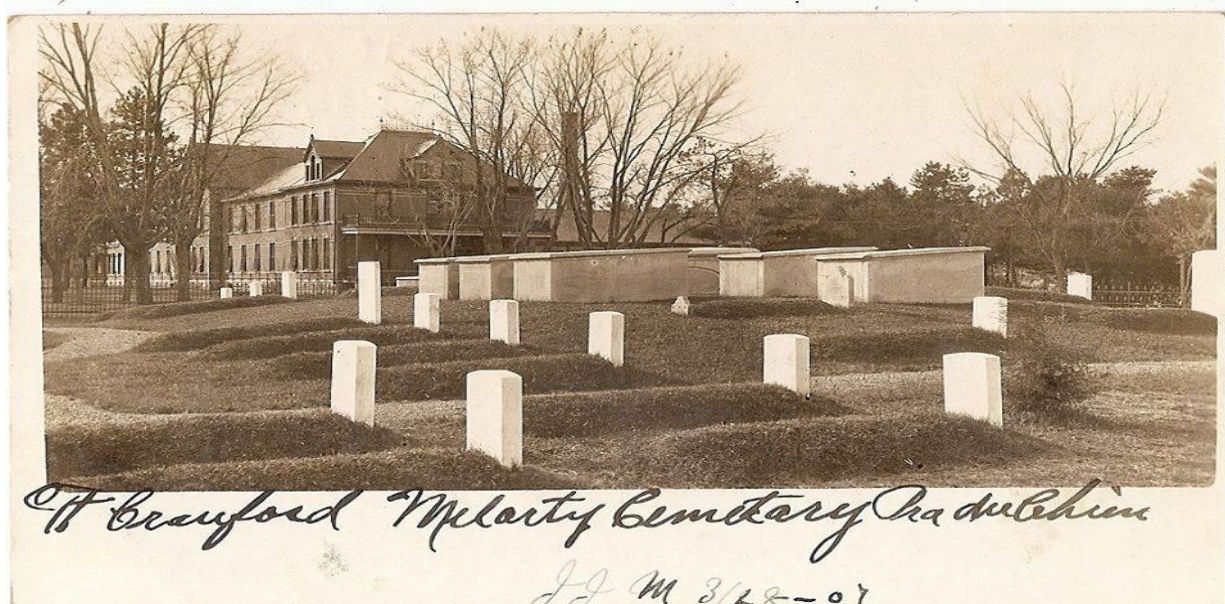
This year's event is jointly sponsored by The Prairie du Chien Historical Society and Villa Louis Historic Site. Each tour begins at the Brisbois Fur Trade Warehouse located at the Villa Louis. There will be an introduction by Mary Elise Antoine and then all guests will board a bus. The guests will visit the Old Catholic Burying Ground (Frenchtown Cemetery), Calvary Cemetery, St. Gabriel's Cemetery, Fort Crawford Soldiers Plot, and the Lowertown Cemetery (Evergreen Cemetery). At each stop, guests will be introduced to the cemetery and meet historic men and women associated with the cemetery. For guests who have participated in past *Visiting Our Ancestors*, the tour this year is special in honor of the 150th Anniversary of Prairie du Chien. The guests on this tour will meet many new history personages.

Each tour lasts about three hours. Wear walking shoes. The tours will occur no matter the weather.

**Tours begin at 10:00 am, 12:00 pm, and 2:00 pm**  
**Reservations Required \$27.50 per person**

Members of the PdC Historical Society and/or the Wisconsin Historical Society will receive a 10% discount on tickets. To receive the discount, tickets must be purchased through the Wisconsin Historical Society Box Office 608 264-4848. BE SURE TO SAY YOU ARE A MEMBER.

By this date a new book, *Old Catholic Burying Ground at Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin 1816-1840*, will be available to purchase.



# Villa Louis Speaker Series: Book Talk & Walking Tour "Enslaved, Indentured, Free: Five Black Women on the Upper Mississippi, 1800–1850"

Oct 23 • 2 PM - 3PM, followed by optional walking tour • Prairie du Chien

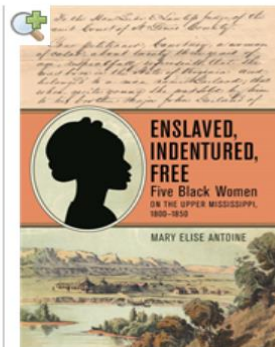
Visit Villa Louis for engaging discussions on fascinating subjects, including this book talk and walking tour with Mary Elise Antoine.

## About the Event

Join Villa Louis and the Wisconsin Historical Society Press for the book launch of Mary Elise Antoine's newest book, "Enslaved, Indentured, Free: Five Black Women on the Upper Mississippi, 1800–1850." Guests are encouraged to join Antoine for a walking tour of the first Fort Crawford site on the Villa Louis grounds after the talk. Antoine's books will be available for purchase and signing. Signing will take place before the talk and after the walking tour. The walk is over grass, please wear appropriate footwear.



The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 made slavery illegal in the territory that would later become Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin, and part of Minnesota. However, many Black individuals' rights were denied by white enslavers who continued to hold them captive in the territory well into the 19th century. Set in this period of American history, *Enslaved, Indentured, Free* shines a light on five extraordinary Black women—Marianne, Mariah, Patsey, Rachel, and Courtney—whose lives intersected in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin.



Focusing on these five women, Mary Elise Antoine explores the history of slavery in the Upper Mississippi River Valley, relying on legal documents, military records, court transcripts, and personal correspondence. Whether through perseverance, self-purchase, or freedom suits—including one suit that was used as precedent in Dred and Harriet Scott's freedom suits years later—each of these women ultimately secured her freedom, thanks in part to the bonds they forged with one another.

This event is free.

## Event Details

Sunday, October 23, 2022  
2 PM - 3PM, followed by optional walking tour

[ADD TO YOUR CALENDAR](#)

## Location

### [Villa Louis](#)

Villa Louis, 521 Villa Louis Rd  
Prairie du Chien, WI 53821

[villalouis@wisconsinhistory.org](mailto:villalouis@wisconsinhistory.org)

For more information, please contact the Wisconsin Historical Society Box Office at 608-264-4848 or [boxoffice@wisconsinhistory.org](mailto:boxoffice@wisconsinhistory.org).

### Accessibility

Wheelchair access is available to the 1850 Brisbois Fur Trade Warehouse and restrooms, the first floor of the Villa Louis mansion, and the restrooms located near the mansion. Guests with additional mobility needs are encouraged to contact Villa Louis directly at [villalouis@wisconsinhistory.org](mailto:villalouis@wisconsinhistory.org) or 608-326-2721.

### Map

