



# MANITOWISH WATERS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

November 2020

## Election Day!

Election Day is upon us, and with it, we thought we would take a look back at politics and government over the years and how they have touched and played out in the Northwoods and Manitowish Waters. And, please vote!

### Government on the Home Front

By Frank DiLeonardi



As the saying goes, all politics are local. But, what has governance looked like over the years in Manitowish Waters? To find out, we consulted our archives and spoke with **John Hanson, town board chairman** since 2001.

Did you know that from 1928-1940 we were named the Town of **Spider Lake**? And, before that, we were part of Lac du Flambeau, according to town historian **Michael Dunn**.

Our original form of electing government officials was through a caucus, with the first annual caucus of Spider Lake Township held on March 17, 1928. **T.J. Koerner**

was selected as chairman for the caucus, with **W.O. Strandberg** elected clerk. The chair called for nominations, and the caucus nominated Koerner as the first town chairman, without opposition. (To see the Spider Lake Township meeting minutes from 1928-39, click here: <https://mwhistory.org/spider-lake-minutes-2/>.)

Our officials back then were a town chairman, two supervisors, a clerk, an assessor, a town treasurer, a justice of the peace and a constable. They were elected through a caucus until about 1950 when it switched to the general election process still employed today. And, along the way, the magistrate and constable were phased out, with Manitowish Waters relying on Vilas County resources.

#### Town Name Change

In 1940, Manitowish Waters was born. "You would think that when the name change came up in a board meeting in 1939, it would be a big event. One of the supervisors made a motion to change the name to Manitowish Waters, it was seconded and it passed. That was it," Hanson shared.

It is believed that we needed to change our name because there was another Spider Lake in

the state, and we wanted our own post office. "The Postal Service said if you want your own, you need to change your name," Hanson explained. Until that time, Manitowish served as our post office. So, in addition to becoming Manitowish Waters, that timeframe marked the beginning of the MW Post Office, believed to be housed initially in one of the cottages at Rudy's Resthaven, Parkside Tavern today.

#### Zoning Ordinances

A major event in local politics, in Hanson's mind, was the town establishing its own zoning ordinance back in the mid-1980s. "It's been particularly beneficial to how our lake shores have been developed because one of the unique things they did back then was to create 200-foot minimum lots so that prevented real dense development on the lake shores. The citizens didn't want a town with 50-foot lots."

During his time as town chairman, Hanson believes additional changes to the zoning ordinance and the comprehensive plan, which outlines how the citizens would like to see how the town develops (and its update), were significant. "Arriving at the ordinance that we did, some people thought

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**The Manitowish Waters Historical Society will hold its annual meeting and elect officers for 2021 at 4 p.m., December 9, 2020 at the Community Center.**

*All members of the MWHS are invited to attend and participate.*

# A Word From Our President



Jim Bokern

## **Greetings from the Manitowish Waters Historical Society,**

I think it's safe to say no one expected the year we are experiencing. With that, we want to thank our membership and friends for your understanding and flexibility. Unfortunately, Covid-19 precautions caused us to cancel several of our summer events.

We were able to conduct the majority of our outdoor events like hikes, pontoon tours and paddling trips. The newly acquired **North Lakeland Discovery Center** 26-foot pontoon boat allowed us to host up to eight guests per tour and maintain social distancing protocols. We want to thank the benefactors who made this timely purchase possible.

We have been working diligently to adjust to Covid-19 limitations and continue to preserve our community's history, share historic discoveries, and collaborate with a variety of organizations. Please

check our link to the [2020 accomplishments](#) to view all of our efforts this year. Our new **YouTube** channel currently has 20 historic videos for you to review, and we started podcasting some of the amazing *Northwoods* sporting articles from the 1890s-1920s. Just go to [mwhistory.org](#) and click on the "Podcasts & Videos" link on the menu bar to enjoy some of our newest research and historical insights. Be sure to check in periodically or subscribe so you don't miss our updates. For further updates and insights, also check out our new Facebook page, Manitowish Waters Historical Society.

Going forward into 2021, the Manitowish Waters Historical Society has elected to plan for a full slate of events and cancel events as health care best practices dictate. We will endeavor to respect the health concerns of our membership and will continue to focus on advancing our mission. Please stay tuned to the spring and summer newsletters for our 2021 programs or check online for the status of 2021 events.

Highest regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink on a yellow rectangular background.

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## Campaigning in MW!

That's soon-to-be Wisconsin Governor **Walter J. Kohler Jr.** in the suit in the front, circa 1950 as he campaigns in MW. He's standing in front of Rudy's Resthaven, site of The Parkside Tavern today. **Rudy List**, owner, is standing behind the gentleman with the white sweatshirt and hat with the sunglasses on the left.

Kohler won the election, becoming the state's 33rd Governor, serving three terms (1951-57). His father, **Walter Sr.**, was Governor from 1929-31. If the last name sounds familiar, yes, they are part of the Kohler family as in the plumbing supply giant, the Kohler Co.



Also in the picture are MW residents **Otto Burich** (far right), **Adolph Mussatti** (third from right), **Harold Barkstrom**, the MW airport's first manager (fourth from right), and **Palmer Hanson** of Hanson's Hardware (with sign). If you can identify anyone else, please let us know.



# Sandra Day O'Connor Visits Manitowish Waters



**Justice Sandra Day O'Connor** (left) is with **Audrey Voss Dickerson** and **Ruthie Dickerson Gardner** at Voss' Birchwood Lodge for breakfast. "She was gracious and liked to talk with my mother," says Ruthie.

**Sandra Day O'Connor**, the first woman appointed to the United States Supreme Court, is said to have enjoyed her visits to the Northwoods, including Manitowish Waters. But, the real question is, how did a Supreme Court Justice find her way to Manitowish Waters? Well, for the story behind the story, we turn to **John McFarland**:

"We met Justice O'Connor some years ago through mutual friends. Justice O'Connor and her husband John were visiting **Jay and Kathy Brentlinger**, friends of theirs who lived in Lac du Flambeau during summers and Phoenix during the winters. Jay and the O'Connors had been friends for many years, and when Jay and Kathy were married, Justice O'Connor performed the civil ceremony for them.

"On the occasion of their visit up here, Justice O'Connor happened to notice a portrait Kathy had which I had done. The Justice was quite taken with the portrait, and Kathy said she should meet the artist. So, she arranged for the six of us to get together at our house, and that is how we met.

"When I do portraiture, I look for a certain type of face, one that shows the character and life experiences of the subject. I

do not do commissions nor do I do young people as, for the most part, the imprint of life isn't very evident yet. When I met Justice O'Connor, the impact was immediate: this was a face that defined what I look for in a subject. During our visit that evening, I asked Justice

O'Connor if she would allow me to do her portrait, explaining how I worked and what I looked for in my subjects. She quite readily agreed, however, with a caveat. She said we must read her early autobiography, and we had to come to Washington D.C. where I would do the photographic studies I would need to do the portrait. "The Brentlingers, Barbara and I flew out to D.C. about six weeks later and spent four days there. Justice O'Connor had our stay planned out, and we were royally treated. On the last day, we met in her chambers at the Supreme Court Building, and we did the photo session there. Ordinarily, when I do a portrait, I keep the original, and the subject is given several "giclee" prints; however, this was a Justice of the Supreme Court, and a print wouldn't do. So, the original went to Justice O'Connor, which she hung in her chambers, and I got the print."



**Here is John's portrait of Justice O'Connor.**

# Then and Now



The original town hall was built circa 1930 by **Neal LaPorte** for a reported \$3,000. And, that included the two outhouses behind the building! Town business was conducted there until the early 1960s when the current community center was erected. Of course, that facility is just finishing up an expansion and facelift. Pine Lawn Cemetery is now in the approximate location of the original town hall.

## Government on the Home Front

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it was too strict, some thought it wasn't strict enough so it was a compromise. It was complicated and took a substantial number of meetings and work to get it done."

### Uihlein's Contributions

The town chairman also points to the arrival of **Liz** and **Dick Uihlein** and all that they have contributed to the town over the years as a major impact on the town. "They and others have made significant contributions to the town, our parks, our bike trail system." Hanson is proud, in particular, of our parks. "Looking at our park system, the playground here and the facilities around the community center, Rest Lake Park, Koller Park, that's all been upgraded, a pretty significant accomplishment."

### Manitowish Waters Airport

Hanson was drawn into public service and town politics originally because of the MW airport, which began operating in the late 1940s. "We had moved back up here

after we closed the store (Hanson's Hardware) in Minocqua so I had retired," Hanson recalls. "Some people came to me who weren't very happy with how the airport was being managed. We had an airport commission, and they seemed to be asking for more and more money. Some people were asking when would this end. So, that was the reason that I ran and got elected. The first meeting we had we abolished the airport commission and started a (town) committee, which we still have. And that gave the town board a little bit more control of what was going on over there."

### Palmer Hanson

Palmer Hanson, John's father, served as town chairman from 1961-1969 and was a profound influence on John. "My dad dedicated his life to public service when he wasn't running his businesses. He was one of the original directors of the Howard Young Hospital when that was formed,

the Lakeland Memorial Hospital at the time, and he was on the county board for a long time, was involved in the chamber of commerce and, of course, all of his service on the town board, so he definitely influenced me."

### Road Management

Beyond the zoning ordinance changes during his tenure, Hanson also cites how the town has changed its management of its roads as a key change. Previously, the 55 miles of town roads used state aid only to improve them. "That first town board I was on, we proposed putting money in the budget for town roads. The quality of our roads is really pretty good. So, of that 55 miles, I think like 50 miles of it is hard surface now, and I think nearly all of it has been re-done in the last 20 years."

And the airport continues to hold Hanson's attention. Today, upgrades are funded by federal (90%), state (5%) and local dollars

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# I Like Ike!



And Ike liked the Northwoods! Our 34th President of the U.S., **Dwight D. Eisenhower**, liked to visit and fish the area. The notation on the photo below indicates that it was taken on July 14, 1946 at **Moody's Resort** on Big Lake. President Eisenhower is with his four living brothers at the time (from left to right, **Arthur, Milton, Earl, Ike and Edgar**; Roy passed away in 1942). They are enjoying a good laugh because Earl sat on a fish hook.

Locals who guided Ike included John Brunner, who we featured in our May issue in a story by his daughter, JoAnn Brunner Miller ([http://ppolinks.com/mwhistory/2020\\_3\\_3%20Guides.pdf](http://ppolinks.com/mwhistory/2020_3_3%20Guides.pdf)).





The new Manitowish Waters Fire House designed by HGA just north of the old station.

## Government on the Home Front

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(5%). "When we built that hangar about 10 years ago, that was a \$575,000 project that cost us \$27,000."

### Fire Company

In Manitowish Waters, we have a fire company rather than a fire department, meaning that the town contracts services with the fire company, which is independent from the town. That's significant, Hanson notes, because while the town budgets for fire equipment,

"most of their equipment is purchased through their fundraising. That's a huge benefit for our tax payers."

### Other Governmental Agencies

Part of Hanson's job as town chairman is to maintain relationships with other governmental entities and agencies. "The county and state have been pretty fair with us. The county doesn't have to invest much in us as we are a pretty low maintenance community for them. In terms of the state, we deal mainly with the DNR."

Hanson says that while there have been challenges with the

DNR relationship, there are times that we cooperate very well. "One of the plus things we've had with the DNR is they owned Rest Lake Park. So, we had a land-use agreement with them to use it. In order for us to get things done there, it was necessary for us to get title to that property. We talked to the DNR, and they said you have 160 acres off of Highway K that we surround."

The result was a trade, the property off of Highway K for Rest Lake Park. "They said you put two restrictions on that park property. One, it will never be sub-divided. Two, it will be perpetually open to the public. We'll trade you even, which they did. We got \$800,000 worth of property for \$400,000."

### The Future

Moving forward, there will be many things for Hanson and his eventual successor to focus on. "When you look at what we have here, the airport, the library, the fire company, dealing with the DNR, dealing with the state, economic development, there's a lot that needs to get done and then it has to be managed."

## Who, What, When and Where ?

From 1931 through 1932, local residents and State Conservation Commission employees collected data on the experimental **Barr Fishway**, which was similar to a fish ladder, allowing spawning fish to travel up stream past a dam to sustain fish populations. The photo shows the use of a fyke net above Rest Lake Dam, allowing for fish to be counted daily throughout the spring to determine if the Barr Fishway helped spawning fish.

Thanks to **Bob Kovar** and the **Rayala family**, we have secured a copy of a pamphlet describing the invention by **Harry Barr** of Ironwood. Click here to see the pamphlet:

<http://ppolinks.com/mwhistory/The%20Barr%20Fishway.pdf>





# Government Programs Shape The Northwoods



A postcard sent out by the CCC from Manitowish Waters

## The Civilian Conservation Corps

With the U.S. in the throws of The Great Depression, **President Franklin D. Roosevelt** created the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1933 as part of his **New Deal**. It was a voluntary work relief program for unemployed men ages 18-25 and lasted until 1942. Its mission was directed toward the development and conservation of forests, streams and lakes of public lands.

The CCC manifested itself in the Northwoods with **Camp Mercer**, located on the Manitowish River just outside of Manitowish Waters. You can read about the Camp and its impact on the Northwoods at: <https://www.mwhistory.org/early-history/ccc-660-co-sf-79/>.

The MWHS has been working with the DNR and the Iron County Recreational Enthusiasts (ICORE) to create a walking trail at the Camp Mercer site. Preliminary work has started, and we look forward to sharing more about this important project in 2021.



## The Youth Conservation Corps



While the CCC was a federally directed program that played out locally, the YCC was a Wisconsin initiative that eventually became a national operation.

In 1961 under the leadership of **Governor Gaylord Nelson**, Wisconsin created its YCC, a voluntary work program for youths ages 16-19 to take on projects to improve the environment. Locally, the YCC was at Statehouse Lake, the current location of the **North Lakeland Discovery Center** (NLDC). The Wisconsin model eventually became a national program when President Richard Nixon signed legislation in 1971.

You can read about the Statehouse Lake YCC at: <https://www.mwhistory.org/government/ycc/>. An interpretive trail is in the works at the NLDC for 2021 as well, and we look forward to sharing more about this trail in the future.

## MWHS Board of Directors

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**John Hanson** Vice President

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Any questions or comments on our newsletter can be directed to Jean Bettenhausen at jmcbett@gmail.com or Frank DiLeonardi at fdileonardi@icloud.com.

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for video presentations**

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for your listening enjoyment**

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**Go to <https://www.mwhistory.org>  
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## Membership & Donations



Those interested in joining the MWHS should complete the form below and send in your form with \$20 to:

**Manitowish Waters Historical Society  
P.O. Box 100  
Manitowish Waters WI 54545**

*Those considering joining the Manitowish Waters Historical Society are encouraged to explore our web page, attend MWHS events and reach out to board members.*

**Student Memberships are available for \$2, renewing each May.**

### Donations

Donations can be sent to:  
**Manitowish Waters Historical Society  
P.O. Box 100  
Manitowish Waters WI 54545**

**MW Historical Society is an approved 501c3 charitable organization, and contributions may be tax deductible. Please contact us for additional information.**

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**Thank you for supporting the Manitowish Waters Historical Society.  
Memberships renew each January.**