

A gift from Ambrose

Written by KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM
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<http://www.ozaukeepress.com/images/061313/donationSM.png> **Late Port historian's daughter donates trove of his memorabilia to Historical Society**

Ambrose P. Mayer's extensive collection of historic Port Washington photographs and memorabilia — everything from bricks from demolished buildings to promotional items bearing the names of long-gone city businesses — is now in the hands of the Port Washington Historical Society.

Mayer's daughter Jeanne Mayer donated the collection to the society, which her father helped found.

"This way, a new generation can enjoy it rather than it sitting in a closet," she said. "I didn't want it gathering dust. This way, I can still see it, and others can, too."

Historical Society President Jackie Oleson said the collection is "fabulous."



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“It’s such a wonderful donation. We really appreciate the generosity of the family,” she said. “It’s pretty amazing.

“We were kind of overwhelmed to see it all. There are a lot of items here — some really cool stuff. There are wonderful photos in albums and frames and information about Port Washington, as well as bricks from a lot of the buildings that were taken down — bricks that were most likely made here in Port.”

Oleson said the collection includes several tubs of scrapbooks filled with photos, roughly 40 pictures in old frames and memorabilia — ink blotters from businesses like Bode’s Sinclair Service and Port Washington State Bank, caps from Werking’s Dairy, a coin purse from Ewig’s House of Music and a key chain from First National Bank of Port Washington.

There are items from Port Brewing Co., Ewig Bros. and Schmit Columbia Garage, as well as other businesses.

“This will help us fill in some of the gaps in what we know,” Oleson said.

Jeanne Mayer said her father’s collection was extensive, taking up an entire basement wall in his home.

Her father had asked her to keep the collection for a decade after his death on July 4, 2000, before doing anything with it, she noted.

Ambrose Mayer, who was known as the city’s unofficial historian, had an unabashed love for the City of Port Washington, and served as an alderman and mayor for more than a decade.

His family had lived in Port Washington for six or seven generations, and he told Ozaukee Press in 1994 that his interest in the city’s history was sparked by his interest in genealogy.

“The more I got into my family, the more I got into Port Washington,” he said. “I just love Port Washington.”

He began collecting bits of the city’s history in the 1960s, a time when people looked to the future and often neglected the past. He treated the items he collected with love, saying he considered it a way to show how much he cared about a community that gave him so much.

His collection may have started slowly, his daughter said, but that changed later.

“It became a bit of an obsession at the end,” she said. “He did as much research about things as he could. He always wanted to make sure there were names or dates on everything he had.

“This was Port Washington. It was his home, and he wanted everybody to love it as much as

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he did.”

The Historical Society hopes to digitize parts of the Mayer collection, as well as a collection of photographs and slides from the Paul Wienen family, and put some of it online.

Oleson said she hopes the Mayer donation will prompt other donations.

“I think there are probably families that have things in their basements and in their attics that they might not want,” she said. “Often these things are not valuable monetarily, but they are valuable historically.”

Even if family members don’t want to give up an item, the society would appreciate borrowing it to photograph for its collection, creating a permanent record for the community, Oleson said.

“Historical groups only have what people have been able to save,” she said. “Once it’s gone, it’s lost forever.”

Image Information: THE AMBROSE P. MAYER collection of historic Port Washington photographs and memorabilia was recently donated to the Port Washington Historical Society. Looking over a portion of the collection were Mayer’s daughter Jeanne Mayer and Bob Bretl of the Historical Society. Photo by Sam Arendt