

Historical Argyle's PAST TIMES

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The Waddington Memorial: Argyle's Community Building

The idea for Argyle's Community Building—officially named the Waddington Memorial—began with a letter mailed from sunny St. Petersburg, Florida, in early 1924. The letter came from Frank A. Waddington, who offered \$20,000 for the construction of a memorial to his father, James S. Waddington, an Argyle pioneer, merchant, County Judge, State Senator, and bank founder.

The timing was uncanny. Just weeks earlier, Atlas editor George G. Gaskill had written about wealthy donors in nearby towns such as Boscobel and Fennimore who had funded new libraries. With typical flair, he ended his article with a challenge: "Argyle needs a library and community building. Will someone please build one? All right. Thanks!" Waddington's letter was, in effect, the answer.

The village board quickly accepted the offer, with the stipulation that all functions held in the building would be free of charge. While Waddington first imagined a grand library like Darlington's, Gaskill and others persuaded him that a multipurpose building would better serve Argyle. A prominent corner lot at Broad and Milwaukee Streets was selected, requiring the relocation of the Powell house "up the hill" to the new Grandview Addition, where it still stands today.

Within months the project was underway. A cornerstone was quietly laid containing Waddington's letter, a photo of Main Street, a scroll listing local officials and the architect, and a copy of the Atlas reporting his gift. Construction advanced rapidly, and by March 1925 the new building was ready: the library housed on the second floor, furniture in place, and

finishing touches installed by local craftsmen such as William O. Hendrickson, who wired the electrical work, and Peter Jensen, who fashioned the staircase trim and inlaid wood sphere.

The Waddington Memorial was more than a library. The second floor included an auditorium with a stage and council chambers. On the ground floor were public baths with hot showers, a convenience for both townspeople without indoor plumbing and visitors in town on business. From his office across the street, Gaskill wryly observed the popularity of the baths, joking that some seemed to have "saved up for years" to enjoy them.

The dedication ceremony took place on October 15, 1925. Reverend Oscar S. Paulson offered the invocation; Village President C.A. LaVassor gave the welcome; Gaskill presented the historical background; and Professor E.B. Gordon of the University of Wisconsin delivered the main address. Though the day honored James S. Waddington, curiously no portrait of him has ever been displayed in the building. Instead, above the door to the auditorium are portraits of Allan Wright, who named Argyle in 1844, and Frank Waddington, the benefactor whose generosity made the project possible.

Frank himself was in poor health and unable to attend. In a touching gesture, the school band led the community in a march to his home for a serenade. Frank Waddington passed away just four years later, in 1929, at the age of 58. Having never married, he left behind no descendants, but his gift to Argyle ensured that his family's name would remain closely tied to the town's civic life.

Nearly a century later, the Waddington Memorial remains a pillar of community life, a place for gatherings, performances, meetings, and memories. It stands as a tribute not only to the Waddington family, but also to the enduring spirit of Argyle—where civic pride, neighborly cooperation, and the spirit of giving to the community have shaped the town's history.



Second to None, the 30th Anniversary Edition - a History of Argyle, WI 1844-2024 is available to purchase through the following: at Argyle branches of First National Bank and Trust and Woodford State Bank; at Historic Argyle's booth during Argyle's Homecoming October 4th and the Holiday Craft fair on Dec. 6th; and online at www.historicargyle.org. With the holidays approaching, it would make a perfect gift for friends or family.



Historic Argyle is seeking new members. If you are passionate about preserving the rich heritage of Argyle for future generations, please think about joining our dedicated group. You can reach out to any current member or explore our website at www.historicargyle.org. Your commitment to our community is fundamental to our mission.



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Historic Argyle is a non-profit organization created to preserve, protect and promote the cultural heritage and architectural history of the people and places of the Argyle, Wisconsin area. Incorporated in 2000, for the primary purpose of acquiring and restoring Argyle's "Saxton House", the boyhood home of Robert M. La Follette from 1862-1870.