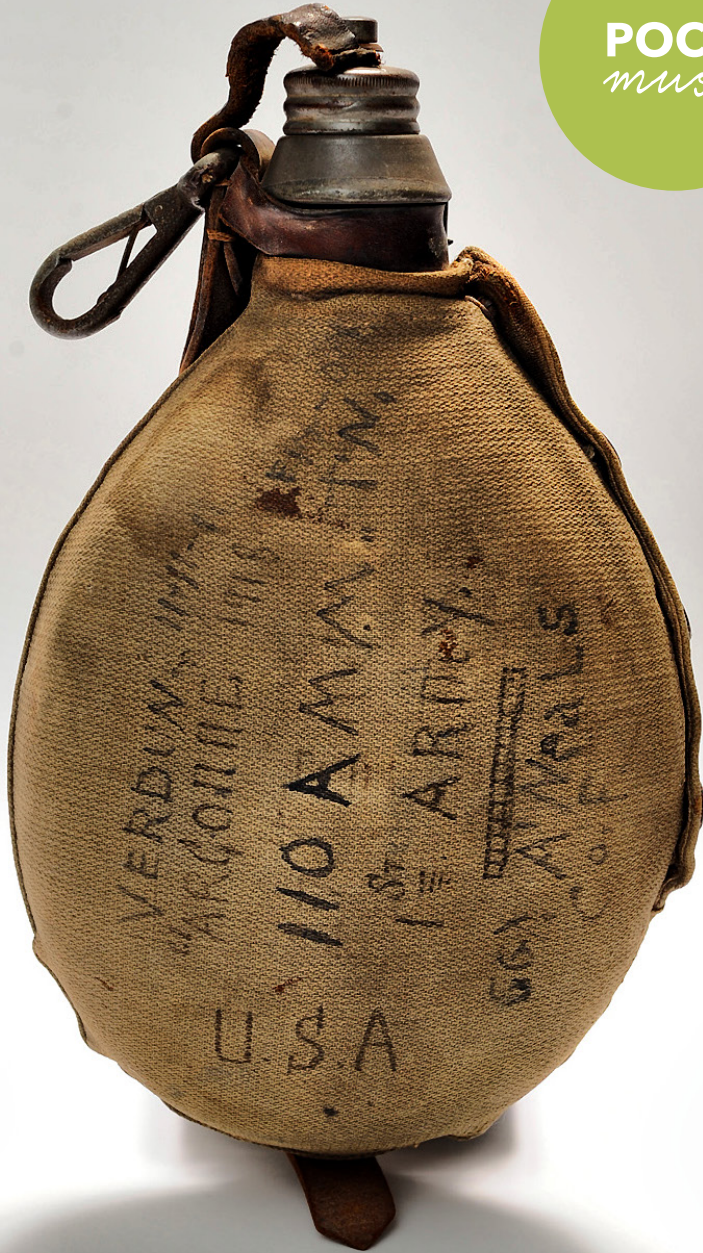


POCO  
*muse*



# Connections

Exhibition Catalog

# Connections

## About the Exhibition

*The PoCo Muse believes that objects tell important stories. Surprising discoveries can emerge when we slow down and engage with them directly.*

Our collection boasts an eclectic assortment of artwork and artifacts gathered over more than a hundred years. Like all museum collections, it evolves with every new object added. It's useful to step back occasionally and consider the entirety, as if viewed from 10,000 feet above. How does this all fit together? How do the pieces connect?

This exhibition, rather than stepping back, takes a closer look. Gathered here are pairs of objects that speak to each other in unexpected ways. The objects may appear different at first glance, but after careful consideration, they reveal important relationships. The exchanges cover a wide range of topics, from industry to sports to space travel, and they reflect how this community sees itself. As you join their conversations, we hope you ponder the ways these objects connect with everyday items and experiences in your own life.



## Connections

### TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

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# Take A Closer Look

The work of a museum can be summarized with two small words: *collect* and *connect*. The primary function of a museum is to collect and preserve objects that are significant in some way. The museum's collection is its heart and soul. But museums do not collect just for the sake of collecting—they want to do something with the objects in their care. This requires making connections. A museum must connect objects to their original context, to other objects, and to communities and ideas outside its gallery walls. Collecting and connecting need each other. These intertwined functions are vital to everything we do, but this exhibition, aptly called *Connections*, brings them to the forefront.

*Connections* is the product of a long period of transition as the PoCo Muse reimagined its future in a new home at 20 Indiana Avenue in downtown Valparaiso. The planning process required serious reflection and discussion. We asked ourselves hard questions. *What is it that we do here? What really matters? Why?*

At the same time we were pursuing this process, we also undertook the physical relocation of the collection, an arduous task involving intimate and hands-on engagement with individual objects. Artifacts needed to be assessed before they were packed and moved. We carefully took each object in our hands, feeling its weight and looking closely at its details. Long-forgotten treasures were thus discovered, and interesting connections started to emerge. Our collection felt like a great web of meaningful relationships rather than a random assortment of things.

We centered the planning process around a belief that objects can tell remarkable stories, a fitting synthesis of the dual work of collecting and connecting. The facilities at our new home allowed us, for the first time, to properly care for the objects in our collection and engage meaningfully with them. What better way to reintroduce ourselves to our communities than with a permanent exhibition that mirrored our own internal process of rediscovery?



Porcelain doll (detail), circa early 1900s — 2022.9.13

*Connections* pairs related objects which speak to each other in surprising ways. It is a collection of twelve small exhibits that each explores its own theme and topic. Some of these relationships are overt, such as two business journals (1) or representative works from local artists (3). Others are more unexpected, like two objects that share similar forms but perform opposite functions (8), a canteen and packaged crackers (12), or a hotel tag and a postmark stamp (7). Relying both on in-depth research and more associative, and at times, mischievous thinking, we found that the strange incongruity of a relationship could actually serve as a key to unlocking other important discoveries.

A few guiding principles helped direct the exhibition's development. First, we kept a tight focus on the specific details of an object. *What are its materials? What*

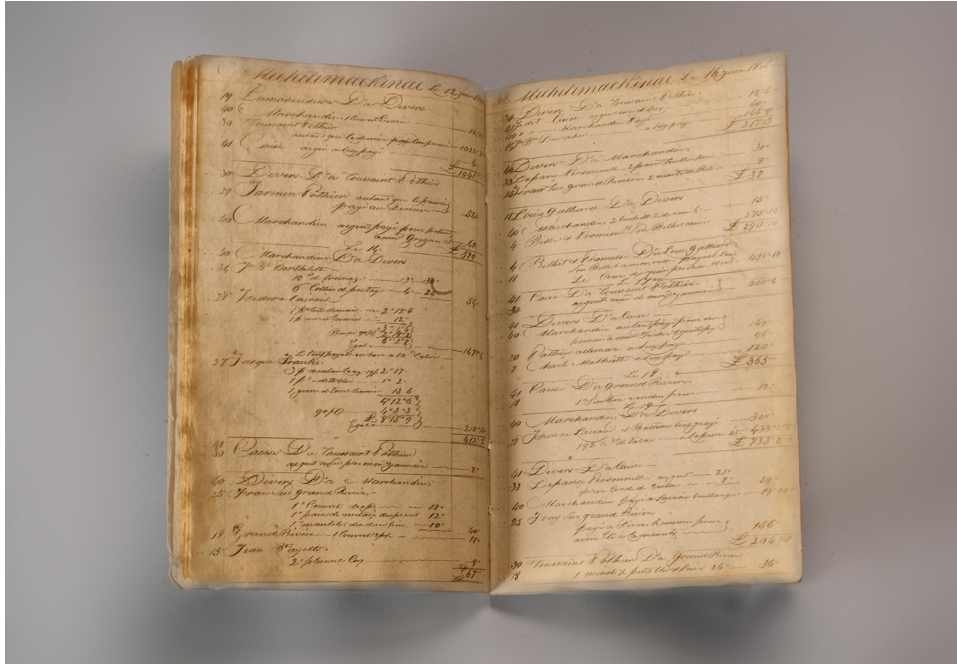
*about it is odd or visually compelling? What is difficult to photograph or reproduce? Second, we made connections freely. Who does this remind you of? Have you seen this before? How do you feel when you hold it? Finally, we stepped back to evaluate. Is there a variety of texture (e.g. scale, color, time periods) to the selections? Are there connections between connections? Do they reflect our communities?*

Our intention for this exhibition was to tell a comprehensive story of this region and its people with artifacts from our collection to support it. This is a valid expectation and a reasonable strategy for making a great presentation. But early on, we wondered if our approach for *Connections* would yield a narrative that holds all its parts together. Our collection cannot fully reflect and support such a large-scale story, because it has gaps, especially regarding certain communities. In another sense, however, this exhibition shows that what is most specific and personal can also be most universal. Ultimately, we found that *Connections* succeeds in telling an important and comprehensive story of this place, and perhaps more tellingly, it is one that sheds light on a museum's dual mission.

Like most small regional museums, many of the artifacts in our collection have been donated to us. The question in our case, then, is not so much, *Why do museums collect?* But rather, *Why do people entrust them to us? As we drew close to our collection these past few years, a simple answer slowly revealed itself. The objects on display here—from the NASA space crackers to the porcelain doll—each seem to speak of their original owners: I was here. This mattered to me. Please take care to remember.* In this polyphony of diverse voices speaking to each other, we start to hear a story of how this county remembers itself.



Gold ring with photograph (detail), circa 1952 — 2014.28.10



Joseph Bailly account book, 1799-1802 — 2015.61.4

## 1

*Journals and diaries are invaluable resources for researchers. They offer immediate, first-hand accounts of everyday life from long ago. Presented here are two journals that document the daily life of two immigrants to Porter County who contributed to the economy and development of this region.*



John B. DeCrow diary, 1888 — 1901.18.23

Joseph Bailly was an independent trader in the extensive fur-trading network that spread from Montreal to Louisiana, and, ultimately, to Europe. Born in Quebec in 1774, Bailly established a homestead and trading post along the Little Calumet River in 1822, making him the first white settler in Porter County. (The restored homestead is now protected by Indiana Dunes National Park.) The site was near the crossroads of several important trails, and it became a prime meeting place for Native Americans and European pioneers. This personal account book, written entirely in French, lists what Bailly bought and sold between 1799 and 1802 while running his business at Fort Michilimackinac in northern Michigan.

John B. DeCrow was a farmer who moved to Morgan Township from Mansfield, Ohio, in 1866. His diaries paint a remarkable picture of life during his time, documenting everything from daily chores and business dealings to social gatherings, the weather, and notable local events (including the day Valparaiso first introduced gas lighting). DeCrow and his wife Mollie harvested sap for maple syrup and grew corn, wheat, oats, potatoes, cabbages, and berries. They raised sheep, pigs, chickens, and cattle, sometimes transporting their livestock to the Chicago stockyards for sale.



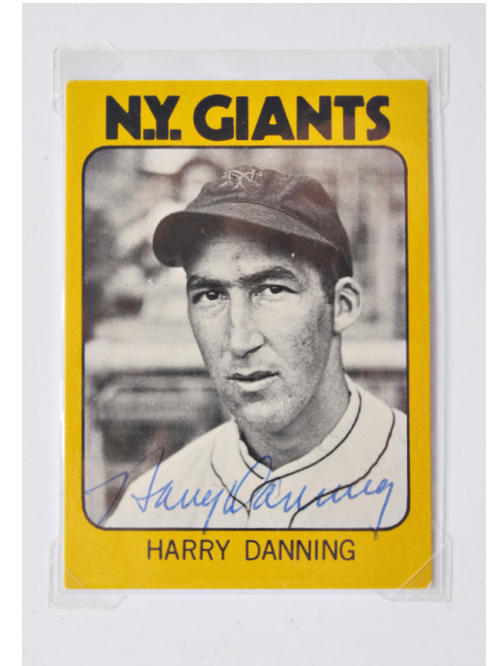
Cartes-de-visite souvenir album, circa 1869-1874 — 2016.29.1

## 2

*In the 1880s, American tobacco companies began harnessing the power of new and affordable photographic methods. As a marketing strategy, they included in every pack of cigarettes a card that featured pictures of celebrities: war heroes, actors, athletes. When children began collecting the cards discarded by their parents, gum and candy companies recognized an opportunity to appeal to younger audiences. The baseball card phenomenon of the twentieth century was thus born.*



Bryce Drew card, 1998 — 2018.41.11d



Harry Danning card, 1980 — On loan from Viktoria Voller

The genre of photography known as *cartes-de-visite* became popular in the second half of the nineteenth century and offered a relatively cheap way for people to obtain portraits of loved ones or famous figures. The *cartes-de-visite* album on the opposite page was assembled by Rose Howe, the daughter of Joseph Bailly, Porter County's first white settler. The resulting souvenir album records her family's trip to Europe about 1870, displaying notable landmarks and local residents in traditional garb.

Seen above left is a Bryce Drew basketball card from his 1998-99 rookie season with the Houston Rockets in the NBA. He is best remembered for his performance in the 1998 NCAA Basketball Tournament, as he led 13th-

seed Valparaiso University to the Sweet 16. Drew's game-winning three-pointer in an upset victory over Mississippi—known forever as "The Shot"—cemented his legacy as a local hero.

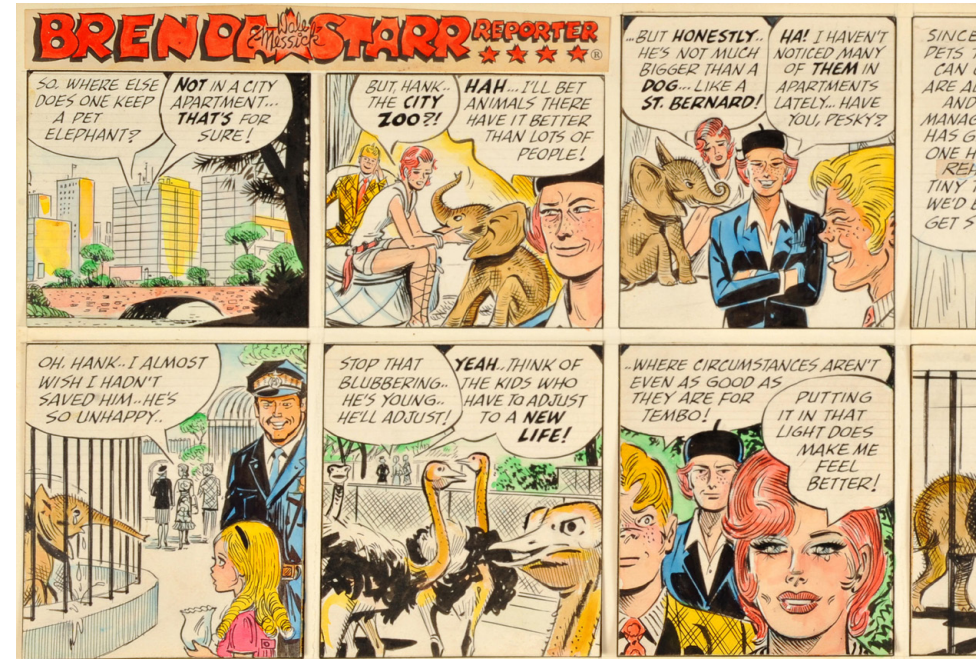
Harry Danning (1911-2004) spent his entire professional baseball career with the New York Giants. Known as an exceptional hitter and defensive catcher, "Harry the Horse" was regarded by many, including Babe Ruth, as "the best catcher in the world." He was a four-time All-Star and was inducted into the Jewish-American Sports Hall of Fame. In 1943, Danning was drafted into the Army and was discharged due to arthritis, ending his baseball career. Danning moved to Valparaiso in 1980 to be near his daughter.



Linocut block, circa 1930s — Hazel Hannell (1895-2002) — 2022.32.7

### 3

*These two objects exemplify intermediary stages of a creative process. While neither is a finished product, each allows us to see the direct work of the artist's hand. Although designed for different audiences using distinct media and techniques, these pieces also share similarities in drawing style and composition. Flat, bold shapes bring focus areas forward in both works, and sections of cross-hatching softly recede into the background. Notice how the first panel of the comic strip, like the linocut, features a central building shown at an angle, framed by large trees and foliage in the foreground.*



Brenda Starr: Reporter illustration (detail), 1971 — Dale Messick (1906-2005) — Watercolor and ink on paper — 1901.13.1

Artist Hazel Hannell created an image of the Furnessville home designed by her husband, Vin Hannell, on this linocut block. Originally a weekend retreat, the house became the couple's permanent residence after the Great Depression. Hannell used a knife to carve out the desired image on the block and reveal the "negative space" in the flat, uncarved surfaces. After applying ink with a roller, the block was impressed onto paper, creating a mirror image of the design seen here.

Another well-known Porter County artist, Dalia "Dale" Messick, who lived and worked in Ogden Dunes, created this series of ink and watercolor drawings for the nationally syndicated, multi-panel comic strip, *Brenda Starr: Reporter*. Each panel was drawn, painted, cut out, and mounted to a paper in preparation for publication. This sequence, published on April 18, 1971, shows Brenda Starr, Hank O'Hair, and Pesky Miller bringing a baby elephant named Tembo to the city zoo.



Pneumatic tube capsule, circa 1914 — On loan from Karen Doelling

# 4

*These two objects served a similar function in helping local businesses exchange money with patrons. The brass in each of these tools bears the marks of repeated handling by their users. This tactile “memory” tells a story and invites a viewer to participate in a physical way. Imagine a former cashier encountering these objects decades later. Even after all that time, muscle memory might kick in, allowing them to suddenly recall how it felt to slide the door on the capsule or the familiar sound of the register drawer opening. It may even trigger a long-forgotten anecdote with coworkers.*



National Cash Register 542-EL-4F, circa 1914 — 2022.42.1

Local history has the power to connect people through shared memories of daily routines and resident characters. Two businesses from the commercial district of downtown Valparaiso, Lowenstine’s Department Store and Wark’s Hardware Store, demonstrate the phenomenon even years after they ceased operation. South county residents remember annual pilgrimages to shop at Lowenstine’s for back-to-school products. Old-timers still tell stories of encounters with the memorable hardware owner, Jim Wark.

One detail from Lowenstine’s continues to resonate in the collective memory—the pneumatic tube system. Prior to the popularization of cash registers in the 1890s, sales slips and money were transported from point of sale to a central cashier via pneumatic tubes powered by compressed air in multilevel department stores like Lowenstine’s. This brass tube

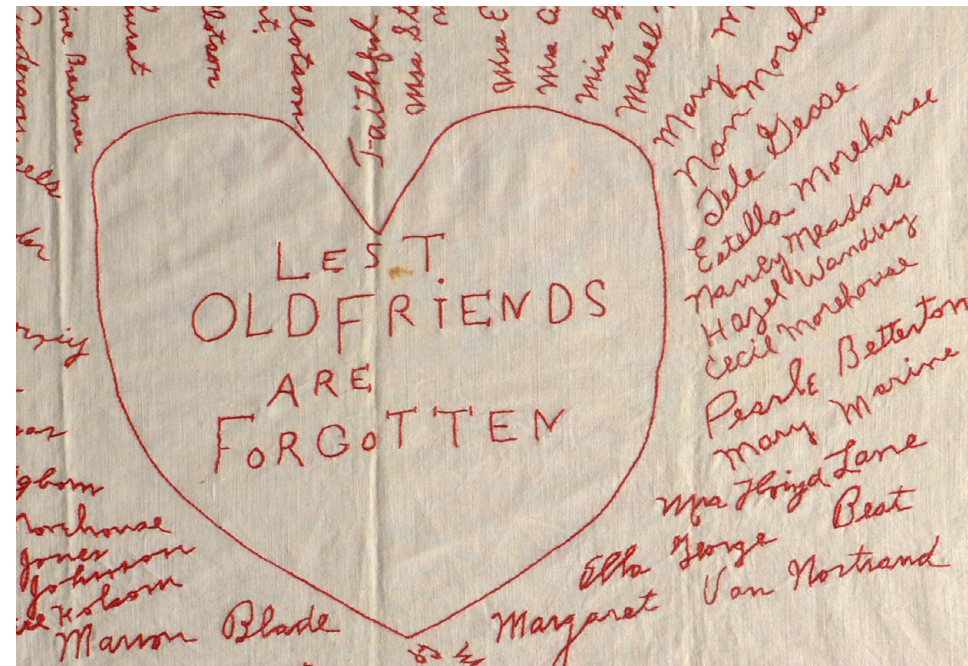
capsule was collected by former employee Karen Doelling. The Lowenstine family operated the store on Franklin Street from 1895 to 1987. The building was ultimately destroyed by fire in February 1996.

Wark’s Hardware also experienced a noteworthy fire. On July 3, 1927, an employee accidentally lit a string of firecrackers in a window display, destroying much of the building’s façade. This beautifully ornate brass cash register survived the fire as well as a 1992 burglary attempt. Manufactured in 1914, this National Cash Register Model 542-EL-4F was one of the last brass registers made as production ceased in the following year due to the demands of the war effort. Certain areas of the metal show uneven coloring. Much of the brass was nickel plated, and the treatment gradually wore off after frequent handling by cashiers.





Funeral card, 1898 — 2017.70.38



Autographed embroidery quilt (detail), circa 1911-1915 — 1901.14.1

**5** *These two objects employ mottos which represent the communal power of remembrance.*

Mass-produced framed sayings were extremely popular during the late Victorian period. Short, pithy statements were approachable and almost universally relatable, able to fit many grand sentiments into a few short words and reflect community values of family, friendship, and loss.

Funeral memory cards were shared as keepsakes by grieving families in keeping with traditional mourning rituals in the late nineteenth century. Valparaiso native Carl Specht died of typhoid in 1898 at nineteen years old, shortly after enlisting to serve

in the Spanish-American War. His family purchased this card from the mail-order catalog of H. F. Wendell & Company, self-described as “the largest memorial house on Earth.” Catalogs offered the choice of many mottos, poems, and designs. This design features lilies, a Christian symbol of purity, devotion, and resurrection.

While disorganized and unfinished in appearance, this embroidery is well-preserved. The thirty-nine signatures radiating from the heart-encircled motto “Lest Old Friends Are Forgotten” belong to women of the Morrison Community Club in Kouts. The members of this club raised funds and volunteered for community organizations. They came together around social activities like creating autographed friendship quilts. Visible traces of pencil lead indicate unique signatures that provided guidelines for the needlework that followed.



*Taxidermy preserved dog, circa early 1930s — 1901.15.1*



Helen Slanger and "Daisy," late 1930s



Litha Ballenger and her porcelain doll (seen at right), circa early 1900s — 2022.9.1 and 13

## 6 What do we choose to preserve? What responsibility do we have for personal heirlooms entrusted to us?

These are important questions for museums and families alike, as both must preserve meaningful and valuable artifacts and memories. Presented here are examples of efforts made by multiple generations to care for and memorialize beloved non-human members of a family.

Daisy was the beloved pet dog of Helen Slanger of Portage Township. After Daisy was hit by a car and killed in the early 1930s, she was preserved by a local taxidermist using a plaster form, an advanced technique for the time. Daisy remained with the Slanger family

until she was donated to the PoCo Muse in 1974. In 2017, taxidermist Jim Phares of nearby Westville restored Daisy. Phares remembered seeing her in the museum as a child. Originally named "Chism," the moniker Daisy was applied later as she occupied an iconic place in the PoCo Muse Collection.

This doll was donated by Joyce Wheeler Ivey, granddaughter of its original owner, longtime Valparaiso resident Litha L. Ballenger Wheeler. Manufactured by the Kestner Doll Company in Waltershausen, Germany, in the first decade of the 1900s, the #154 model doll is made of bisque porcelain and kid leather. The photograph above shows young Litha Ballenger and her doll wearing matching dresses, bows, and hairstyles. The doll has been altered over the years. At present, it has straight brown hair, and the patches, pins, and shoes do not match its manufacturing era.





Hotel Lafayette room tag (left), circa 1904 — 2015.51.2

Tassinong postmark stamp (right), between 1837-1903 — 2015.25.2



Tassinong postmark stamp (detail), between 1837-1903 — 2015.25.2

**7** *These two small tokens bear witness to locations no longer in existence, preserving their historical significance at risk of being forgotten completely.*

This small metal postmark stamp with a wooden handle comes from the Tassinong post office, which was established a year after Porter County's founding in 1836. Tassinong was an unincorporated village originally platted in 1852 in Morgan Township. By 1884, almost all Porter County post offices were receiving their mail by rail. Tassinong was one of only two that were still served by horseback. At the turn of the twentieth century

when the Kankakee Marsh was being drained, the people of Tassinong refused to support a proposed rail line to their town. The railroad company decided to bypass the village and promote a new town called Kouts. The Tassinong post office was discontinued in 1903, and, for all intents and purposes, the town disappeared. All that remains today is a historical marker on Baums Bridge Road.

This brass tag accompanied a key for Room 21 at Hotel Lafayette, located in Valparaiso at the southeast corner of Lincolnway and Lafayette Street, the current site of Central Park Plaza. Between 1845 and 1919, the location was home to various taverns and hotels. Hotel Lafayette operated between February 1904 and October 1910, when it was renamed the Spindler Hotel. In 1919, G. G. Shauer purchased the property and opened the beloved Premier Theatre in 1921.



Iron handcuffs, 1866 — 2018.38.1

# 8

*Form follows function, as the saying goes. But what if two objects with similar forms perform completely opposite functions?*

*While this pairing originated from a playful exploration of similar shaped objects, careful consideration revealed other exciting connections to the history of the PoCo Muse. And beyond that, other connections to other pairings featured in the exhibition emerged.*



Sewing scissors (detail), circa early 1900s — 2018.40.1c

These iron handcuffs are designed to bind. Porter County Sheriff Robert Jones used them to restrain arrested persons as he transported them to and from the 1871 Porter County Jail. That building is the former home and a current historic site of the PoCo Muse, located across Franklin Street from the current PoCo Muse building. Jones was the first sheriff to live in the residence connected to the jail following its construction in 1872. The design for these cuffs was patented by Andrew Rankin in 1866. The manacles could be opened by inserting a key into the holes on the end of each cuff.

This small pair of sewing scissors was designed to cut apart. They were originally displayed in an exhibition in 1939 when the PoCo Muse was located in the old courthouse. The scissors were donated by Porter County resident Ella Parker Morehouse (1875-1959), along with a small fabric carrying case containing other tools from a sewing kit belonging to her mother, Ella George Parker, who carried it in a case that was originally intended to hold calling cards. The case was decorated with a dark mourning border after Ella George's own mother died. Mourning borders more commonly accompanied letter envelopes to indicate to a recipient that the sender was in mourning.



Handmade violin in original case, date unknown — 2018.37.1a

**9** *“I guess I was luckier than most people, and I guess I was luckier than I deserved to be.”*

Fred Smoke (1884-1963) was a Morgan Township farmer and philanthropist who is credited with donating more than one million dollars to local organizations. He acquired his fortune through personal frugality and his skill navigating the stock market. He began donating his money in 1961 while being treated for cancer. It is believed the handmade violin was made by Smoke's brother. It was donated in 1964 at Smoke's request before his death in 1963.

The portrait of Smoke is on loan from the Pines Village Retirement Communities in Valparaiso, which received significant funds from Smoke to begin its construction. The painting was created by Harriet Rex Smith, a prominent Porter County artist and teacher. Smith lived in Valparaiso until 1977 when she moved away and established her “studio in the woods” just outside Ashland, Oregon. Very few people knew of Smoke's wealth. Smith's portrayal captures this humility—the fields of farmland in the background, his unbuttoned shirt with bolo tie, and his quiet expression. When asked about his sizable philanthropic efforts, Smoke reportedly said, “I did it for the people I love and the country I love. Anyway, I guess I won't feel a heck of a lot different.”



Portrait of Fred Smoke — Harriet Rex Smith (1921-2017) — Oil on canvas — On loan from Pines Village Retirement Communities



Central School, circa early 1900s — 1901.16.1

# 10

*Charles Lembke was one of Porter County's most prolific and prominent architects. Here we examine three of the eighteen schools he designed. One was destroyed by fire, another still stands, and the third was razed. The fate of each building speaks in different ways to the preservation of neighborhood schools and historic structures still relevant today.*



Gardner School, 1972 — Betty Lou Shotliff (1917-2019) — Watercolor on paper — 2022.33.1

The photograph of Central School depicts the second iteration of the school that was designed and built by Lembke in 1904 and later destroyed by fire on December 28, 1938. In an effort to save money with the building that would replace it, the city consulted Lembke's original design plans. The photograph captures the hallmarks of Lembke's style—the sturdy appearance of the limestone and brick construction. The third Central School, still standing, mimics these trademarks faithfully.

Gardner School was built in 1899 and, like Columbia School and the Memorial Opera House, features four cylindrical turrets, a signature of Lembke's work at this time. The school closed in 1972, prompting much public debate about plans for its use and maintenance, one involving its reuse as an arts center. It was around this time and likely in response to this rumor that Betty Lou Shotliff created this watercolor painting of Gardner. The building still stands and until recently housed the Valparaiso Boys and Girls Club.

Shotliff lived in Lake County and eventually moved to Ashland, Oregon. Two other Porter County artists exhibited here, Hazel Hannell and Harriett Rex Smith, also established Ashland art studios in their later lives.



Columbia School, 1964 — 1901.17.1

Columbia School, also known as “1st Ward School,” was built in 1892 and represents one of Lembke’s earliest and more ornate designs. Over time, the high expenses for upkeep led to the structure being abandoned in 1964. When it was razed in 1965, former pupils, young and old alike, watched on with tears in their eyes. The cornerstone, apparently containing school work from the inaugural 1892 classes, was saved by the school board. The limestone block (pictured above in the top left corner) with the names of the county commissioners engraved was donated to the museum.

While the engraved stone from Columbia School undergoes restoration, the exhibition presents the original weather vane that adorned the school’s turret (pictured at right). Usually placed at the highest architectural point of a building and featuring an arrow, a weather vane

indicates the direction of the wind. While many weather vanes are strictly decorative, the hollow construction of lightweight tin suggests this one was also functional. Soon after Columbia was razed in 1965, the cornerstone was salvaged from the wreckage, but the weather vane was not to be found. Curator Genevieve Bundy urged that whoever rescued it donate it to the museum.



Columbia School, circa 1965 — 2014.55.23





Wedding dress (detail), 1948 — 2015.39.1



Gold ring, circa 1952 — 2014.28.8



Fluted vase (detail), circa 1917 — 2015.27.1

**11** *These beautifully crafted objects were fashioned from the detritus of three different wars. They serve rich symbolic functions and embody the dignity and creative resourcefulness of servicemen and women.*

This silk wedding dress was worn by Virginia Lee Lamb of Valparaiso at her wedding on September 12, 1948, to John Jefferson Miller Jr. of Chesterton, who served in the US Navy during World War II. Silk was a scarce commodity during and after the war, and dresses like this one were made from the silk of parachutes

brought home as war souvenirs. Lamb's dress was fashioned with a yoke and long pointed sleeves of lace. A pleated peplum, fitted at the waistline, formed a long train. A fingertip veil and a single strand of pearls given to her by the groom completed the ensemble.

The gold-colored ring and vase are examples of trench art, decorative items made from available materials by soldiers or prisoners of war. The ring features a raised central heart with the word "Korea" engraved within. It was owned, but not created, by Sergeant Joseph Ognovich of Portage who was stationed in Korea during 1952 as a private first class. The vase is constructed from a spent shell casing, engraved with an intricate floral design and the words "Verdun, Graonne, Champagne 1914-1917." Neither the owner nor the creator is known, but the piece elegantly commemorates World War I.



WWI-era German canteen, circa 1917 — 2017.29.55

# 12

*These two objects speak across time and geography, and they share a function: to provide vital nourishment to individuals on distant perilous missions. Their conversation raises important questions about the nature of personal souvenirs. Why do we bring home objects to remind us of significant places or events? How can a souvenir activate memories or spark the imagination? Can it help us communicate to other generations the sometimes-inexpressible quality of our experiences?*



Packaged crackers from NASA training, circa 1991 — 2017.57.2

Albert A'Neals, a Valparaiso resident, brought this German-made canteen home with him as a souvenir from his service in Europe during World War I. A'Neal's writing on the canvas cover reveals a number of things: his name and rank (Sergeant A'Neals), his company (110 Ammunition Train, 1st Army, Company F), and mentions of two major battles ("Verdun" and "Argonne"). The latter refers to the Meuse-Argonne offensive, which A'Neals witnessed during the final months of the war.

Mark N. Brown of Valparaiso acquired these crackers while preparing for his second space flight as a NASA astronaut, a five-day mission with crew STS-48 aboard the orbiter Discovery in 1991. Ready-to-eat foods such as this have many advantages for space travel in zero gravity. They required no rehydrating or heating preparation. The clear, rigid packaging prevented breakage and crumbs, a considerable challenge in space. Its printed label, sticker, and stamped information allowed for quick identification and easy storage. The resulting trash can be readily compacted.

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RTC Contracting  
Simko Signs  
Ron Trigg  
Viktoria Voller

## POCO MUSE

**Hours: Tuesday-Sunday, 11a-4p**

The award-winning PoCo Muse maintains free general admission as this area's oldest institution devoted to the history and culture of Porter County.

Visit our newly-imagined and fully-accessible building—the fourth home of the Porter County Museum since 1916.

### MISSION

We engage Porter County's rich past with its evolving present to educate, enrich, and inspire our communities.

### VISION

We believe our work of interpreting this area's history and culture empowers Porter County residents to form a strong and purposeful sense of place, identity, and community.

### VALUES

**Free, Open, and Accessible**

We meet the needs of our communities as a welcoming and inclusive gathering place.

**Meaningful Storytelling**

We connect stories with artifacts to encourage imagination, introspection, and empathy.

**Hands-on Learning**

We create opportunities to learn from interactive and intergenerational experiences.

**Collaboration**

We work together with people and organizations aligned with our mission and vision.

**Responsible Stewardship**

We uphold the collection and history of our institution with integrity and accountability.