



# Fort Foundation Focus

by Fred A. Rose, Volunteer Publicist

[www.fortfoundation.org](http://www.fortfoundation.org)

As most of us know, the Hoard Historical Museum celebrated a reopening last October after its extensive renovation and expansion. Actually, the ceremony, on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the museum's original opening, signaled only a partial completion of the whole process. Though the museum is open, and the staff has moved back in, the addition of certain special exhibits and the restoration of the original kitchen of the Hoard house will take additional time. For those of you who have not visited the "new" museum, I would urge you to spend a couple of hours there. Having done that, I think you will be strongly inclined to plan a series of revisits over the next several months to see the ongoing progress.

The Hoard Museum is really quite a place. Those who have visited other small town museums know what to normally expect. They are naturally small, they have limited collections, and the collections usually have real relevance only for those in the community.

Not so of the Hoard Museum. It belongs to the class of museums that reflect major historic evolution, not only of the region, but of the society and the country as well. And with the new renovation and expansion, it has truly joined the next class of museums. You can no longer "go through" this museum in an hour or two. It contains a lot of interesting exhibits that take some time to absorb. It transcends the community, but it is built on the foundation of Fort Atkinson as one of the earliest white settlements in Wisconsin, the role of Wisconsin in the Indian wars, the role of Wisconsin in the Civil War, and the origin of Wisconsin having become the nation's dairy state. Lots of info!

When asked what she thought was most important to stress about the Museum, Sue Hartwick, museum director, said, "I've often been struck with how we are a local museum with a national story to tell. I think that is what makes us unique. We tell the story of the mysterious effigy mounds, a national phenomenon that was centered right here; the story of the Black Hawk War, encapsulating the sad national story of Native American removal; the story of William Dempster Hoard, a national agricultural leader and the father of the Wisconsin dairy industry; and the story of the Lorine Niedecker, a local poet with an international reputation."

There are other less visible ways in which the Hoard Museum has joined the ranks of "real" museums with this expansion. The Hoard Museum, like all but the smallest museums, has more material than can be displayed. Some of these artifacts contain priceless history of the region, many in the form of paper documents. The bulk of these "other historical artifacts" were stored/stacked in the basement, as best as possible. They were not in a climate controlled

environment, and therefore paper items, in particular, tended to mold and deteriorate. Some had to be discarded each year. A "major" museum stores such things in a controlled environment, thus ensuring their survival for history. The Hoard Museum now joins that rank of museums.

Another function of "real" museums is to provide a sorted and cataloged access to the stored artifacts. Of course, you have to be a responsible person doing research to have access to those stored artifacts, but such organized access is provided. Again, the Hoard Museum now joins the ranks of such museums.

I would like to cite some quotations published in the Daily Union on Monday Oct. 22, 2007, on the occasion of the *Preview for Donors* event, held a few days before the actual official re-opening. As you would expect, Museum director Sue Hartwick was enthused: "What you see here is a tribute to this community – a tribute to the generosity and the vision of so many people who, over these past 50 years, have taken such good care of this wonderful museum."

Philip Jones, president of Fort Atkinson Community Foundation (FACF) at the time of the reopening, described the new museum as being "similar to walking into any professional metropolitan museum." He added, "the support for the project is something the city should be proud of. It is a gem. There really is no other way to say it"

Of course we expect local citizens to be enthused, but consider the following comment by Tom Shea, Milwaukee Public Museum Assistant Director, who is designing the *Mysteries of the Mounds* exhibit, scheduled to be completed this coming summer. He enthusiastically described the Hoard Museum as an "impressive facility."

Why have I devoted a Foundation column to the museum? Well, the total price tag for the expansion and renovation was about \$3,800,000! That is a huge sum for a community our size. And, of course, as with most of the projects that set Fort aside from its peers, the Fort Atkinson Community Foundation provided a major part of that – fully half of it. That's right, \$1,900,000! Where did all those dollars come from? Of course much of it came as generous donations from you, the most caring citizens any community ever could hope to attract! Keep it up!

The Hoard Museum is just one of the many ways that the Foundation contributes so much to the quality of life here in Fort Atkinson. If you would like to make a donation, or would like to learn more about the Fort Atkinson Community Foundation, you may visit the Foundation's Web site, [www.fortfoundation.org](http://www.fortfoundation.org), or you can contact Helen Rose, Program Administrator, at 920-563-3210 (office) or 920-563-4926 (home).