

# Wisconsin Historical Society: Ellsworth Brown will retire as Ruth and Hartley Barker director of the Historical Society in 2018

Posted on Thursday, Aug 10, 2017

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

**Contact:** Kara O’Keeffe

Wisconsin Historical Society

E-Mail: [kara.okeeffe@wisconsinhistory.org](mailto:kara.okeeffe@wisconsinhistory.org)

**Thursday, August 10, 2017**

**Madison, Wis.** – Brian Rude, president of the Board of Curators of the Wisconsin Historical Society, announced today that Ellsworth Brown will retire as the Ruth and Hartley Barker Director of the Wisconsin Historical Society in March 2018. The Board of Curators has launched a nationwide search for the next director and plans to fill the position upon Brown’s retirement.

Brown began his leadership of the Society in July 2004. He returned to his native Wisconsin after 33 years of successful management of major historical organizations including the Carnegie Museums of Pittsburgh and the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, the Chicago Historical Society, the Tennessee State Museum in Nashville and the Dacotah Prairie Museum in Aberdeen, South Dakota.

Brown has been a member of the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History Board since 2007 and is a former member of the Smithsonian’s Council and the Board of the National Museum of the American Indian. He previously served as president of the American Association of Museums and is a past president of the Downtown Rotary Club of Madison.

“I will be 75 in March 2018 and have decided that as I complete nearly 14 years with the Society, it is the right moment for me to leave a rewarding profession,” said Brown. “I have been asked, ‘Where are you going?’ and answered, ‘I am going

home ... and will remain in the Madison area.”

Rude praised Brown’s many contributions to the Society and the State of Wisconsin including the execution of the first major capital campaign for the Wisconsin Historical Society. The Wisconsin Historical Foundation’s “Forward! Campaign” raised \$77 million in public and private monies from 2006-2012 to support:

- A new State Archive Preservation Facility, which will be one of the finest archival facilities in the nation when it opens in November;
- The addition of a visitor center and museum at the historic Wade House in Greenbush;
- The renovation of the historic library reading room in the Society Headquarters; and
- Increased endowment and annual unrestricted and program support.

Rude also cited an increase during Brown’s tenure in the Society’s statewide services by the creation of a new Division of Education and Outreach and adding two new important historic sites: Black Point Estate & Gardens on Geneva Lake; and Reed School, a classic one-room schoolhouse in Clark County.

According to Rude, “Ellsworth has enhanced the national standing and reputation of the Wisconsin Historical Society. The Board of Curators thanks him for his leadership efforts in the preservation of Wisconsin’s heritage and his unwavering commitment to helping the Society connect people to the past by collecting, preserving, and sharing stories.”

Brown expressed his pride in the organization. “It has been a pleasure and a distinct honor to be associated with great and capable people, world-class collections, the scale of the Society’s services, and the depth and quality of the work that is done in every division of the Wisconsin Historical Society.”

He also praised the support of the Society by the Administration and the legislature. “The Administration and other political leaders in Wisconsin have demonstrated their support for our mission and their deep commitment to the heritage of our state,” said Brown.

Brown gave advance notification of his retirement plans to the Society’s Board of Curators. Its Succession Task Force has been engaged in extensive planning over the last several months to ensure that the transition to a new Ruth and Hartley Barker Director is smooth and productive.

### **About Wisconsin Historical Society**

The Wisconsin Historical Society, founded in 1846, ranks as one of the largest, most active, and most diversified state historical societies in the nation. As both a state agency and a private membership organization, its mission is to help people



connect to the past by collecting, preserving, and sharing stories. The Society serves millions of people every year through a wide range of sites, programs, and services. For more information, visit [wisconsinhistory.org](http://wisconsinhistory.org).