



WASHTENAW IMPRESSIONS

HISTORICAL HAPPENINGS

Dexter Historical Society — Bazaar, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday, December 1, at museum, 3443 Inverness. Handmade wooden weather vanes, toys, decorations, clothing, baked goods, gift wrap and cookbooks are among items on sale. A photographer will be there to snap children's pictures as they talk to Santa in his sleigh.

Christmas sing, 7:30 p.m. Saturday, December 15, outdoors at the museum, led by Fat Bob, the Singing Plumber. It will be outdoors this year because it was so crowded inside last year.

The museum will be open 1-3 p.m. December 4, 8 and 11, then close until April.

Manchester Historical Society — The society gathered about 40 items of current and historical materials which were sealed in the cornerstone of the new Manchester Township Hall and Fire Station in ceremonies November 4. It will be a treasure trove for future historians.

Salem Historical Society — Current activities center on raising money and fixing up the former one-room South Salem Stone School at North Territorial and Curtis Roads. The society had a rummage sale there. Windows have been boarded, electricity turned on, a new culvert installed for a second driveway and furnace work is underway.

Bake sale, 9 a.m.-6 p.m. Friday, December 7, at State Savings Bank in Salem.

Saline Historical Society — The society was to visit the 1890's Queen Anne style home of Penny and Douglas Jones on Michigan Avenue which they have been restoring for the past year for its November 20 meeting. A relative of Matthew Rentschler, the builder, also was to speak.

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FORD MUSEUM CURATOR TO TALK ABOUT OLD PHOTOS NOVEMBER 29 AT NEW SALVATION ARMY BUILDING

The curator of photographs at Henry Ford Museum will speak on "Old Photographs—How They Were Made, How to Care For Them and Evaluate Their Significance" at the WCHS meeting at 8 p.m. Thursday, November 29, at the new Salvation Army Building at West Huron and Arban.

She will also show slides of early Washtenaw County scenes from the Ford Museum collection and ask help in identifying some of them.

She is Cynthia Read, a native of

Ann Arbor, who graduated from Pioneer High School before going on to Kalamazoo College and the University of Chicago library school. She worked briefly at the Michigan Historical Collections before going to Ford Museum. She is assistant librarian for cataloguing and research with particular interest in old photos.

Anyone attending is invited to bring in old photographs if they have questions about them. Parking available in lot off Arban.

WCHS CHRISTMAS MEETING AT CLEMENTS LIBRARY; SOCIETY'S HOLIDAY ORNAMENTS TO BE IN EXHIBIT



The U-M's Clements Library of early Americana on South University Avenue will be the setting for the WCHS Christmas social meeting from 3-5 p.m. Sunday, December 9.

The library will be featuring all during December a display of very special Christmas items from its collection such as a first edition of Dicken's *Christmas Carol*, a first book printing of *The Night Before Christmas* and a letter from Robert E. Lee to his son describing the family Christmas at Arlington mansion, his home.

The society will loan old-fashioned Christmas decorations

FOR GENEALOGISTS: 'AY, THERE'S THE RUB'

Mary Jane and Chester Trout of Lansing will present a program on "Cemetery Rubbings," at the Genealogical Society of Washtenaw County meeting at 2:30 p.m. Sunday, December 2, at Washtenaw Community College.

Mrs. Trout is on the state library staff and secretary of the Michigan Genealogical Council.

This is a combined November-December meeting. Help session at 1 p.m.

from its collection. In addition, any member who has a very old or unusual ornament he would loan is invited to call Dr. John Dann, director of Clements Library, 764-2347 days or at 426-8142 after 6 p.m. Such items would be locked inside display cases.

All members of county and local historical societies are invited to the social meeting. Punch and cookies will be served. Arrangements will be made to allow parking on both sides of the street that day.

As usual lots of Christmas cookies are needed. If you can donate some, please telephone Esther Warzynski, refreshments chairman, at 662-6275.

COUNTRY CHRISTMAS SET AT COBBLESTONE FARM

The Annual Country Christmas at Cobblestone Farm will be from 12 noon to 4 p.m. Sundays, December 2 and 9, at 2781 Packard Road. The house will be decorated and there will be a country store with handmade items, gift items and baked goods for sale.

NEXT ISSUE IN JANUARY

Because the December WCHS meeting is so early there will not be another issue of *Washtenaw Impressions* until January.

OLD COURTHOUSE CLOCK INSPIRED POET

Carlton F. Wells, U-M professor-emeritus of English who remembers when Robert Frost, the famous New England poet, was poet-in-residence at the University, shared his recollections and recited some of his favorite Frost poems at the October WCHS meeting.

Frost was in Ann Arbor a total of three years, 1921-23 and 1925-26, he noted. U-M President Marion LeRoy Burton who had invited him to the U-M died suddenly February 18, 1925, a few months before Frost was to begin a permanent post here as Fellow in Letters.

Dr. Burton's passing may have had something to do with Frost's leaving after a year of that appointment, he said.

In 1950, Time Magazine featured Frost on its front cover. Time representatives interviewed Professors R. W. Cowden, Wells and Dean Erich Walter about Frost in Ann Arbor, but not one syllable of it appeared in the final 3,800 word article.

The Time coverage was in honor of what was thought to be his 75th birthday. All standard reference works listed Frost's birthdate as 1875. Professor Lawrence Thompson, Frost's biographer, however, found information in a letter from Frost's mother that it was actually 1874.

Following Frost's death in 1963, Dorothy Tyler of Detroit, who had been a student of Frost's at the U-M in 1925-26, wrote a memorial article, "Remembering Robert Frost", from which Wells quoted.

Miss Tyler says Frost was the second poet in residence in the world. Miami University of Oxford, Ohio, had the first—Percy MacKaye, a friend of Frost.

Frost was asked to give a memorial oration for Burton. Miss Tyler writes, "What I and those who knew him recall was that he was greatly distressed by this duty. I remember still his perturbed look and his words that all but asked

that this cup might pass from him; I had met him on the campus before the event."

Frost returned in September that year and "took up residence then in a beautiful little Greek Revival House across the Huron River, on Pontiac Street, which had caught his eye and mind at an earlier time. A home for Jean Paul Slusser was later built on the site, and Robert Frost's house was moved to Henry Ford's Greenfield Village, where it is called the Ann Arbor House.

"All the records say that Frost had no academic duties and they must be right. But, if so, it is certain that he made his presence felt as a kind of radium lighting up the dark places for students with a creative impulse, and very likely for those without one as well.

"But his early residence on Washtenaw Avenue, in the perlieus of Fraternity Row, was no place for a poet." It was the home of Professor D'Ooge, Wells noted, and in Frost's letters from Ann Arbor in Untermeyer's collection, he makes some humorous references to his landlady trouble. Mrs. D'Ooge was rather difficult in some ways, Wells observed.

One of his best poems, "The Witch of Coös", was written in Ann Arbor. It's the best ghost story in the language, Wells said. It was recited here in the late 1960's in the program, "An Evening's Frost".

"The house on Pontiac Street was a long way from campus," Miss Tyler wrote, "and if you trudged all that way to see him, either you had been invited or you were certain (you hoped) that you would be welcomed without an invitation. And it was a good place for poetry and for setting off on long, nocturnal rambles, as the poet 'acquainted with the night' was wont to do."

That 14-line poem was much admired by President John Kennedy, Wells noted. When Kennedy went to Amherst to lay the cornerstone of the Robert Frost Library in

early 1963, he quoted this poem and remarked to Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "That opening line is wonderfully perfect" and it is—"I have been one acquainted with the night."

Now you who have been in Ann Arbor a good many years remember the old County Court House had a clock tower. And if from Pontiac Street he walked down at night toward the depot he would see this "one luminary clock against the sky", Wells said. Frequently Robert Frost's friends would walk him home, then Frost would walk them back.

After reciting the poem, Wells noted that Miss Tyler got into Frost's class called English 186. Miss Tyler continued, "Later an announcement in the *Michigan Daily*, over the names of Professors R. W. Cowden and Louis I. Bredvold, gave the names of 'Students for Mr. Frost's Class'. There were added such glosses as 'Mr. Frost's Anointed' and 'Many are called but few are chosen'."

Robert Frost came back to Ann Arbor several times and the last time he came to give a reading was 1962.

When he came back in 1930, already a Pulitzer prize winner, they put his reading in the Sarah Caswell Angell Hall on the second floor of the Barbour Gymnasium and it was adequate. But between 1930 and 1962, his name had burgeoned. It was known all over the country, not only because he had published additional volumes of poetry, not only because he had become a Pulitzer prize winner four times, but most of all because of television. He had the perfect television presence and he had the voice that belonged to a genuine New England poet. There wasn't a bit of pretense about him.

When he came in 1962 to Hill Auditorium—and I think there was an admission cost—it was standing room only. Donald Hall, the poet and a friend of Frost's, introduced him. Frost, 88, walked very slowly. I wasn't sure he was going to make it

to the lectern, but the minute he got there and spoke, you knew that he was vigorous, clear-spoken, in perfect form for the one-and-a-half hour program that he gave, Wells said.

Back in the early 1920's, Robert Frost was given an honorary degree by the U-M, but it was a measly master of arts degree. They gave honorary doctorates to wealthy business tycoons who were generous with the University, to scientists and others, but to Willa Cather and Robert Frost they fobbed off a master's degree and that rankled with Frost.

He had gone from strength to strength. Oxford University had given him a doctor of literature degree and various other institutions, a total of 40 degrees, when he was back here in 1962.

Erich Walter, sensing that Robert Frost was somewhat troubled by this, put the question to Frost, "Could you come back in June?" and I think he said in effect, "pick your own degree". He was given the doctor of laws degree—which I think wasn't in his collection yet.

When Frost came back in June Dean Walter was busy, so the Wells's met him at the train and drove him to Inglis House. I saw a good deal of him that weekend, Wells said. He gave us a copy of his volume, "Aforesaid" and signed it—it's one of the prizes that we have.

That same weekend a former student of mine and a very good poet, Theodore Roethke was here for an honorary degree but Frost stole the show.

"Robert Frost's teaching methods—unique, heterodox, but also memorable, are known to many and have been discussed in several books," Miss Tyler wrote. "Probably they would not serve for an entire curriculum with a degree at the end. Who thought less of such matters than he who would joke after the bestowal of honorary doctorate number 70 or so that he had been "educated by degree-education"?—but certainly some of his students would not have exchanged his classes for all the other courses



Michigan Historical Collections,
Bentley Library, U-M

ROBERT FROST (1874-1963)

Sketch by U-M historian Wilfred Shaw
about 1930.

in the big book.

"Who that ever heard the voice of Robert Frost could mistake it for any other, even as it comes over the radio on a recording? It was a voice full of overtones and undertones, of nuances and many modulations. It was a voice that lasted through his life, almost unchanged in old age. Where the poetry left off, the talk began."

He was a great talker. He tired the night with talking, Wells said, and fortunately some people, have recorded his talk at some length. One of them is a professor at Middlebury College who has written a very good book on him.

I must tell you about his return in 1930, Wells said. Quite by chance as I came down the corridor in old University Hall, Robert Frost came out of Dean Bursley's office and he knew me well enough to say "hello" to me.

I said, "Mr. Frost, I hope you'll include the poem called 'The Walker' tonight."

He said, "I don't have a copy of it. It hasn't been collected yet."

I said, "It appeared in an anthology and it's in Angell Hall library. I'll be glad to get a typescript of it for you."

He said, "Well, let's go over and have a look at it."

When I gave him the typescript, I said, "Mr. Frost, when you have finished with it would you mind signing it as a memento of your visit?"

He said, "No, no, I will write it

out for you."

I said, "Oh, no. It's 30 lines long. No need for that."

He said, "Yes I will."

Time went on, year after year, and no poem. When he came back in 1947 for a reading, he agreed to meet with students for two hours in the Michigan Union. The English department asked me to introduce him. The minute he saw me in the corridor, he said, "I never sent that poem to you, did I?"

I said, "No, but there's no need for it."

He said, "Well, this time I will."

He not only sent it to me, he put it between board covers and the letter that accompanied it said he'd had to copy it twice to get it to come out right on the page.

Frost didn't publish many of his poems until he had had them around for a month or more. This poem he had first published as "The Walker" and then improved it later.

He changed the title to "The Egg and The Machine." It deals with Frost's defiance of the machine age, and the egg is a turtle egg. They are elongated, soft-shelled eggs shaped like a torpedo and the torpedo image is important to the poem, Wells noted.

In the last two lines, he has a turtle egg in his hand and he is expressing his indignation at the locomotive that had interrupted his solitude and originally says:

"The next machine that has
the power to pass,
Will get this plasm in its
polished brass."

But then Frost realized the front of a locomotive doesn't have much polished brass and brilliantly improved the line to read:

"Will get this plasm in its
goggle glass."

"Goggle glass" is on the front of the locomotive, a kind of cyclopan single eye, and getting the alliteration—it was a perfect line. This could have happened on the Ann Arbor Railroad, I like to think, Wells said.

The highest motivation of a poet—and of an artist, too, I suspect—is to be remembered, to write some-

thing so true and so perfect that man will not willingly let it die. Robert Frost put it this way, "I hope to lodge a few pebbles which will be hard to get rid of," and, of course, he has done that.

I think the pebble that would be hardest of all to get rid of is that magical 16-line poem called "Stopping by Woods on A Snowy Evening," published in 1933. I heard him first read it in the old Mimes Theater, a wooden structure about where the revolving cube in front of the University Administration Building is now.

One of the things that we ought to remember is that Frost was a consummate craftsman. Of course the best craftsmanship is so natural, so felicitous, that you have the feeling that he wrote it without any trouble.

This poem, as a matter of fact, came to him after he had been up most of the night writing a blank verse poem, "New Hampshire" by the kind of magic that no poet can tell you how to cultivate — it just comes.

Frost pointed out that in this poem, he came upon an unusual stanzaic pattern which rhymed "AABA." He picked up the "B" rhyme in the next stanza, "BBCB." Frost said that could have gone on all afternoon, except that if you've said what you want to say, it's time to call it quits. And so in the last stanza there is no new rhyme, and the line "And miles to go before I sleep" is repeated like a refrain so that it ties it together. That is just the ultimate of art, Wells said.

Stuart Udall in the Department of Interior was the prime mover in getting Robert Frost to appear in the Kennedy Inauguration. Many of you will remember that when this venerable poet, then 87, came to the lectern, the wind was blowing and it was cold. He couldn't get the manuscript of the special poem he'd written for the occasion to calm down.

Well, Robert Frost's luck was with him. If he had read that poem we would have been bored. It was a long poem, 40 lines I think, in praise of President Kennedy. Very few occasional poems last very long.

Instead, he gave the 15 line poem that was appropriate, "The Gift Outright." It is in epitome the history of the colonies and the United States up well into the HAPPENINGS (cont.)

Plans for a special December meeting were not set at press time, President Paul Meyer said.

Ypsilanti Historical Society — 2-4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday, December 8 and 9, at museum, 220 North Huron, Mrs. Patricia Yargeau will demonstrate making porcelain doll heads and display some of her creations.

All-city Christmas party, open to the public, 2-5 p.m. Sunday, December 16, at museum. Gilbert House residents will loan antique dolls for display and the Methodist Junior Choir will sing. Punch and cookies will be served and the museum decorated, complete with a Danish-style Christmas tree done by the Ypsilanti Garden Club.

nineteenth century and he does it in 15 lines.

Frost went to Moscow in the summer of 1962 and had a much celebrated interview with Krushchev. In Moscow, he read "The Mending Wall" at the time the Berlin Wall was given a lot of attention and it wasn't difficult for many people to make the transition.

In fact in 1941, Wells continued, we had in our home a refugee from Poland who had narrowly escaped Hitler's invasion and his favorite Frost poem was "Mending Wall."

Wells said he personally had enjoyed the poem because along the old interurban line toward Concord (Michigan) there were a few dry stone walls, perhaps not as large as those in New England, which reminded him of it.

KEMPF NAMED TO BOARD, OTHER TERMS CLARIFIED

President David S. Pollock appointed Paul R. Kempf to the WCHS Board of Directors to fill a vacancy and proposed the following slate, which was adopted by the Board, to clarify the terms of some directors:

Terms expiring in June 1980, Robert Gamble, Wystan Stevens, Lois Foyle and Dr. William F. Bender; June 1981, Angela Welch, Herbert Pfabe and Hazel Proctor; June 1982, Wilma Steketee, Harold Jones, Thomas F. Lacy and Kempf. Directors at large are Herbert Bartlett, Saline; Douglas Crary, Ann Arbor; and Warren Hale, Milan. Lacy and Bartlett switched places.

WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEETING

8:00 P.M. THURSDAY
NOVEMBER 29, 1979

New Salvation Army Building
West Huron at Arbana
Ann Arbor, Michigan

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