



# WASHTENAW IMPRESSIONS

## KAREN'S COLUMN: PAT THOMPSON VOLUNTEERS FOR MoMS GARDEN JOB; STILL NEED EDUCATION CHAIR, QUILT SIGNATURES

Last month I mentioned that we needed someone to take over the gardening activities this coming spring. I was very happy to receive a response from Pat Thompson, a member of the Society and an avid gardener.

She is meeting with Ella Grenier, who has done such an outstanding job tending the garden to date. Ella will be passing on all the important garden information, such as which plants were transplanted from the original site

of the house and how she helped them grow and prosper. Welcome, Pat, and many thanks for assuming this important task!

Perhaps we can be lucky this month and identify someone who might be interested in leading the Education Committee! This job is for someone interested in working with school children.

At the present time we have a traveling exhibit that goes to third and fourth grades, consisting of 12 objects in common use about 100 years ago. The children guess the objects using a multiple choice form. The leader talks to them about the object and how it was used. There is an adult version available to adult groups, too.

There are also two other traveling exhibits, LIFE BEFORE ELECTRICITY and FROM HATS TO SPATS. The latter is geared to older children, having to do with clothing and fashion.

These were developed with a grant from the Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation. They do not require anyone to accompany them to the classroom. They are self-contained, with materials for the teacher and artifacts which the students may touch and handle, related books and laminated photographs, all packed together in a plastic container.

The Education Chairman would be responsible for scheduling these exhibits when requested. And, of course, this



Photo by Karen O'Neal

Dr. Russell Bidlack signs the signature quilt.

person might become interested in researching and developing other exhibits around other topics.

However, our basic need is for someone to oversee the comings and goings of these exhibits. Please call me if this sounds like a way YOU might like to become involved.

The quilt is gathering more signatures. You can sign it at the next meeting or call me and I will bring it to you! The quilt has space for 320 signatures, 255 have signed so far, leaving room for 65 more.

We need to fill all the spaces soon so that it can be quilted in time to be hung in the Museum when it opens in May. For a \$20 donation to the Museum Building Fund you may add your signature to this lovely quilt, made for us by the U-M's Faculty Women's Club Quilting Group.

I was especially pleased to get a signature from Harriet Birch, grand-daughter of early Ann Arbor resident, David Allmendinger. Perhaps there are others out there who ought to be represented on this quilt. We welcome any and all signers!

Lee Rohrer, the carpenter who did the Museum Shop, is back and has started on the restroom and other things we need to finish. A committee is meeting to plan our opening festivities. Anyone who would like to help with this--please call the Historical Society at (734) 662-9092.

Karen O'NEAL, (734) 665-2242

## DR. WHITESELL TO TALK ABOUT RESTORATION OF DETROIT OBSERVATORY

The latest on the "Restoration of the Detroit Observatory at the University of Michigan" will be the topic of the WCHS meeting at 2 p.m. Sunday, November 15, at Bentley Historical Library on North Campus.

The original 1854 observatory is not yet ready for visitors but Dr. Patricia S. Whitesell, director and curator, will summarize her adventures in doing the research, writing a book and operating the grand scale restoration of the little observatory near the U-M Medical Center.

## WCHS REMEMBERS CAROL FREEMAN

Carol Willits Freeman, who died October 13 at age 86, was an active member of the Washtenaw County Historical Society in the 1980's decade after she published her history, *Of Dixboro: Lest We Forget* in late 1979.

The WCHS Board voted to donate \$50 to the museum fund in her memory. She served a three-year term on the Board of Directors, served as corresponding secretary and assistant corresponding secretary.

She arranged and guided a tour of 100-150 year old houses in the Dixboro area and co-chaired the WCHS 125th birthday party in 1982 with Esther Warzynski.

If there was a list of volunteers to be thanked for helping park cars, staff a booth or whatever, Carol's name was almost always on it.

## WCHS HAS 100+% OF POINTS NEEDED FOR MEMORY BOOK

Thanks to Bill Knapp's Restaurants and all the WCHS members and friends we have collected the 20,000 points required for a special leather bound memory book to record names of donors to our Museum on Main Street (MoMS).

We even have a start on our next goal to be set soon. One point is given for each dollar spent. Anyone may ask for the yellow points slip from the cashier each time. Please continue to collect points and give or send them to Alice Ziegler, 537 Riverview Dr., Ann Arbor, MI 48104.

# ANTIQUe TOOLS SHAPED WOOD WITH ELBOW GREASE

Before electric drills and cardboard boxes carpentry and commerce were quite different than today. Wood had to be shaped by hand and much merchandise had to be shipped in wooden barrels.

Allan Pearsall, a carpenter in Ann Arbor for 53 years, who collects antique tools, displayed a sampling of his collection of more than 2,000 tools at the October WCHS meeting held at the Dexter Historical Museum.

He comes from a line of carpenters. His grandfather worked on the Ypsilanti water tower and his son is a carpenter. But he got started collecting tools because his wife likes to go antiquing and they both like to travel. Instead of sitting waiting for her he looks for tools.

Pearsall, who sports a fluffy white beard, said "I first want to tell you I'm not Santa Claus, that's my cousin." He punctuated his discussion of tools with some explanations of old sayings that were based on early trades. He has been collecting about 30 years and has traveled to 17 different countries in Europe and the Far East.

"The oldest brace I have is dated 202 years. Another is dated 1799. All the old braces had a pad that you didn't change. You had another pad with a different bit on it. They drilled small holes. They had other tools they could use to drill bigger holes such as the two handed tool he had that comes in all different sizes and you can really bear down on it. He also had a type a blacksmith would make.

All of us call them a brace and bit. Years ago they made them out of wood and the grain would crack. Then they got an idea to brace them there so they wouldn't crack. Pretty soon the man would say hand me down a brace. Then it got to be called a brace and bit.

They made a lot of them in England. They were well built. England made a lot of very nice tools. In fact, their tools are too nice, for example one made of ebony and brass. It would cost a carpenter maybe three days wages to buy it whereas Mr. Stanley came out with a brace that would cost him maybe three hours work.

"The company that made the ebony and brass brace went out of business about 1910. If you want to buy one now they are around \$500."

He had a 200 year old brace and bit from Norway. It was made from the root of a tree to try to get away from the grain problem.

"If I go into an antique shop and see something nobody else has, I'm in heaven. But I don't want to get too excited—the

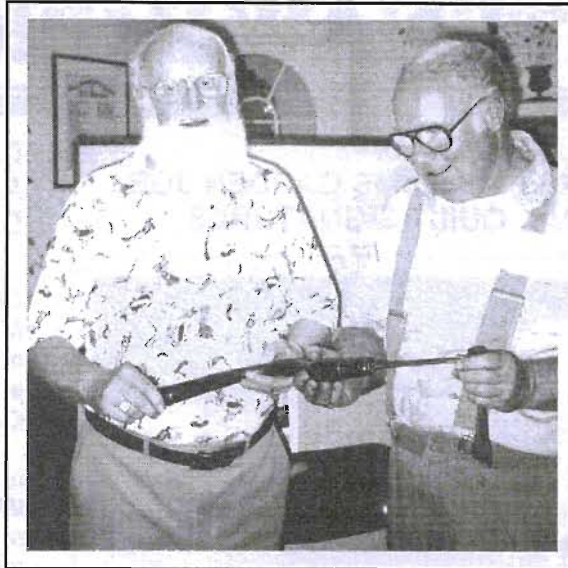


Photo by Karen O'Neal

Allan Pearsall, antique toy collector, (left) talks with Wally Fusilier about one of his tools.

dealer will raise the price.

So I say to my wife, so he can hear it, maybe that would look nice hanging in the kitchen or something. Then I ask how much is it?

"I have paid \$35 for a tool I've had for years. The first time I took it to a meeting a guy offered me \$400 for it."

He showed a plumb bob,—"They've been using them since the time of the early Egyptians only maybe they just had a rock tied to a string. This one has a patent date of 1867."

"The patent date was when they registered it with the government. Sometimes you could take the date given to the patent office and find it was a Sunday when they were closed—sometimes they cheated and just put a date on figuring no one could tell the difference."

"Over here are barrel maker's or cooper's tools. These are for small barrels. You get your barrel pieces together and use three tools: first you have to make round grooves all the way around, then when the lid goes down it will hit that groove and stay in place.

The lid of the barrel was wider than any wood boards so they had to join them together. They used one particular bit. They put two pieces of wood together and had a dowel in there every so often. Then they would stick them together with glue and hope they would stick.

"There were wet barrels and dry barrels. A wet barrel was for anything with liquid in it; the dry barrel would be for flour and grain. They had to use barrels. They didn't have any cardboard boxes.

"All ships were set up for hooks on the end of a barrel to lift them up and take them off.

"You had to have a bung hole in a barrel to fill and empty it." He had a tapered tool to drive in to make and plug the hole. "The further you drove it in, the tighter it got."

He showed a hoop driver to push the flat metal hoop into place. Some had wooden hoops. The wood would be about the size of a finger and they would drive a hook into each side and hook the ends against each other.

"The inside of a barrel should be pretty smooth." He had a tool to smooth it off.

Allan said that he was descended from John Alden several generations back. "He was a cooper. He made barrels for the Mayflower. When he got settled in this country he became a joiner.

"Years ago when I joined the carpenter's union I thought a joiner was someone who joined the carpenter's union but a joiner really is a man who makes joints in wood or puts molding on it. Joiners also make staircases.

He showed some adzes and a cooper's plane. Big wood planes are very hard to find because they cut them up for wood, he said.

"You all know the red and white barber's pole. Back in the mid-1800s pulling teeth was part of the barber's job, also bleeding sick people so the red part was for the blood and the white for bandages.

"They had a tool with blades to cut the patient for bleeding. Then they put a heated glass over the cut to create a vacuum and suck out all the 'bad' blood."

"At one time wigs identified what you were. If you had a big wig, people would know you were a judge or a lawyer. If you had a tiny pony tail maybe you took care of horses. George Washington who had big, white, fluffy hair was a country gentleman.

"Sailors would grow their hair while they were at sea, then sell it for wigs when they came back.

"It took a lot of skill to be a wig maker. He had to sew every individual hair to a cloth something like a gunny sack but finer. When the wig maker was busy he had a little guy to shave the customers. He would send them to the 'little shaver.'

He noted that sailors wore very coarse knitted socks. "When the sailor got tired of darning them he cut off part, tied the end in a knot and put it on his head, and thus had a stocking cap.

"You know Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin. It would take one man only an hour to take the seeds out of cotton with a cotton gin that would have taken one man three

days to do without it.

"But he didn't make much money from it--it was so simple everybody could produce it themselves. The cotton gin didn't help the slaves either because people wanted more cotton."

"So Whitney contracted with the government to make guns that were exactly alike--mass

produced--so you could take a barrel off one and it would fit another like a Model T Ford. He made the lock, he made the stock, he made the barrel so he sold it to the government 'lock, stock and barrel.'

"Here is a 'traveler.' I've spent eight years at Lawton School taking tools over there and helping kids with carpenter work and they all thought this was a pizza cutter.

"It's not. It's a wheelwright's tool. You can measure anything round where you couldn't bend a yard stick.

"The wheelwright would make a wheel, then put a tire on it. In this case the 'tire' was a long stretch of iron. He'd use this tool to mark the wheel and iron to fit so he could weld it together by forging it.

"He'd get the wheel flat and the iron 'tire' red hot, then have four or five people pick the iron up with tongs and set it over the wheel. Then they had these big hammers and they would burn it in, pressure push it down, then quickly pour water on it to shrink it. They got them pretty darn tight."

He showed a French bowl adz for shaping wooden bowls. The user would take a chunk of wood. He'd start at the top and go around and around and pretty soon it would look like a bowl."

"There was a trade called a hatter which made hats. He had a big wheel. He would take a mold that he wanted the hat to look like, stretch felt over that and attach it to the wheel.

"When the wheel was full he'd start turning it and it would go down through a trough filled with liquid with chemicals in it to make the felt stiff. It had mercury in it and after while the hatter went mad, thus he would be a 'mad hatter.'

"One thing the English made too nice was a short level of mahogany and brass. I don't know who would use a short level like this and I don't know who would pay so much for a short level.

"Factories often had a line shaft going all the way across the top of the building with wheels and belts going down to the machinery. The one line shaft drove everything else.

"It was awkward for a full grown man to get up in the rafters to grease the shaft so they had little kids do it. They called them grease monkeys.

"Farmers used a tool called a froe a lot. You can make shingles or split something down the middle. Big froes are hard to find because people threw them away. People

think the smaller ones are cute.

"They had curved froes to make buckets. To make a bucket they would cut a piece from a log of whatever height they want the bucket. When they end up the bucket would be in pieces but they would be curved. There were different froes for different size buckets.

He showed a router for gouging out or making a furrow in wood. He bought an augur in Thailand made by a blacksmith. You put it under your arm and take little bamboo strips and split them to make a parasol or something.

"In Thailand today they are still using their antique tools. They didn't want to sell them. When I saw this in the window I got so excited I didn't know if I was giving the guy Hong Kong money, Bangkok money or American money. I think it is very old.

"Every state in the union had an ax with their name on it, all a little bit different. The ax was very important to the growing of our country.

"The French and English brought over these little axes called trade axes. They'd bring over barrels of these and trade with the Indians who only had stone axes. All a stone ax did was kind of beat things to pieces.

"They still make these trade axes for South America. All they are is a piece of metal. They get it red hot and fold it over like a butterfly and pound on it until it is all one piece. The Indians would grab a tree branch and stick it in for a handle."

He bought a plane in Hong Kong that he thinks is made of rosewood and well over 100 years old.

"When they started to make molds in a shop it took away from a Stanley tool he has that has up to 55 blades. It now sells for \$800, he paid \$20.

He has a maul to split rails made from a burl on a tree. It is used against a metal wedge. Tools to cut tongues and grooves and nailers were on display, also a Davis level made during the Civil War, a large screw driver to turn big heavy screws made by blacksmiths and a file maker's hammer.

"The file maker had a little anvil and chair. He'd sit and take a blank file and put it on the anvil. Before it got hard he'd take a little chisel and cut teeth in the file. It took a lot of time.

He said his grandfather was a typical carpenter--it took him about 40 years to get a handrail upstairs. He said he, too, finally nailed the bridging just before he sold a house he built and had lived in for 25-30 years.



## MYSTERIOUS J.Q. HAY SIGNED MoMS DOORPOST

By Susan Wineberg

A few months ago we wrote about the exciting discovery of an older doorway buried in an interior wall of the museum building. This wall now houses part of our Museum Shop and, thus, is no longer visible.

We are planning to outline the doorway in a light paint so visitors can see where the door of the original portion of the house once stood.

While examining this doorway before it was covered, we noted a signature on one of the boards. The lettering seemed to indicate "J.Q. Hay."

On examining Louis Doll's Index to the *Argus* of 1835-1839, we found two mentions of letters for John Hay in the papers from July of 1836 and July of 1839. In those days everyone had to go to the Post Office to get their mail, so it was advertised in the paper that you had a letter if you didn't come and pick it up.

Both of these dates are consistent with construction dates for the two phases of our building so it would not be surprising if this John Hay was the same man who signed our doorpost. We have no way of knowing if it is the same person, but it would be nice to think this was one of our carpenters.

We don't know anything else about this man or this family. There were many other Hays who also had letters waiting: James, Jane Ann, George, George P, Henry and Sarah. All date from 1836-1838. If anyone knows anything about this family, please let us know!

## FEBRUARY TOPIC TOLD

The February 21 program will be about "*The Sauk Trail: Roadside Culture and Transportation History in Southern Michigan.*" No programs are planned in December and January.

## ONE CHAIR FILLED, ONE CHAIR TO GO

Lisa Black has volunteered to be Museum Shop chairperson. WCHS still needs an Education chair to arrange rental of WCHS's loan boxes on "*Life Before Electricity*" and "*From Hats to Spats*" to teachers and present its "What's It " games to school classes and adult groups.

Thanks Lisa. If you are interested in the education position please call (734) 662-9092.

## JUDGE KELLOGG'S PARTNER IN NEW YORK MILL LATER SETTLED IN WEBSTER, CONVERTED TO UNIVERSALISM

Judge Charles Kellogg, who built New Hope Mill in Cayuga County, New York in 1823, and later lived in the WCHS museum house (MoMS) in Ann Arbor had a partner with a half interest in the mill who came to Washtenaw County in 1828, a few years before Kellogg did.

He was John Williams, who built what is now known as Cottonwood Farm. Before moving here he sold his interest in the mill to Dorr Kellogg, one of the judge's sons.

Webster Township was organized in April 1833, in the Williams' Michigan home and he was elected the first supervisor by one vote.

About 1833, a three or four hour meeting was held at the Williams' home to organize a church society. John had been a Presbyterian since he was 16 and had served either as a deacon or elder for 30 years or more in New York.

John served as a trustee and member of the building committee. John's daughter, Hannah Williams Kingsley, gave a plot of land for a meeting house from the 80 acres her father gave her.

The church was erected in 1835 and Williams built a steeple for it at his own expense.

John Williams died in 1843, at age 61, but he is not buried in the church cemetery. He and his wife and mother are buried in a plot on his farm.

The explanation is found in the papers and memoirs of the Rev. Nathaniel Stacy, a Universalist minister in Ann Arbor 1835-40, in the Clements Library.

Dwight Kellogg and Edward Fuller, described as leading Universalists who ran a store in Ann Arbor, said they had known Williams "from first recollection," and introduced him to Stacy.

Stacy tells of the "astonishing conversion" of Mr. Williams who resigned from Webster Church in May 1835. The other churches frowned on Universalists and the Williams family thought he was crazy.

His son, Jeremiah Day Williams, who wrote most of the history of Webster in the 1881 Chapman history and the 1906 Beakes' Past and Present of Washtenaw County makes no mention of Universalism but says his father declined connecting himself to the newly organized Webster Church because one of the founders was a free mason.

Incidentally, the mill and the Webster Church are both still running.

## AROUND THE COUNTY

**Chelsea:** The Depot Museum is open 1-3 p.m. Saturdays and by appointment, 475-7047.

**Dexter:** The Chamber of Commerce is planning a Victorian Christmas Festival from 11 a.m.-5 p.m., Saturdays Dec. 5 and 12 with carolers, horse-drawn sleigh rides and folks in Victorian costume.

**Milan:** Tom Nanzig of the Civil War Roundtable (and WCHS Board) will talk about "Christmas with Soldiers in the Civil War" at the Milan Historical Society dinner meeting, Wednesday, Dec. 16, at the Se-

nior and Community Activities Center

After dinner at 6 p.m., Nanzig, in uniform, will show slides of how the soldiers spent Christmas and New Year's.

**Pittsfield:** The Township is starting a new historical society. They have lined up 23 member families. They are appealing for suggestions for inexpensive speakers, programs and projects to start with.

They ask if other societies would put them on their mailing list at P.O. Box 6013, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. They also invite calls to Robert Lillie (734) 971-0495 or Mona Wenzel (734) 677-3437.

**Saline:** Wayne Clements, president of the Saline Area Historical Society, recently received the Distinguished Volunteer Service Award from the Historical Society of Michigan at its annual meeting in Midland.

The German-American Alliance will give a program on "Heritage of German Culture and Traditions in America" at the Saline Society's meeting at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, November 18 at the Depot Museum.

**Ypsilanti:** Historical Museum, 220 N. Huron St., open 2-4 p.m. Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays. Archives open: 9 a.m.-noon Monday-Friday.

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### WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

#### 'RESTORATION OF THE U-M'S DETROIT OBSERVATORY'

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November 15, 1998

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