

IMPRESSIONS

WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER • FEBRUARY 2001

NORTHFIELD HARVEST, OR
ALL YOU EVER WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT NORTHFIELD TOWNSHIP

Wystan Stevens



Photo by Susan Wineberg

Wystan Stevens • 1999 • Forest Hill Cemetery.

*On a cold and windy Sunday afternoon in November, about 75 people came to St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church and heard Wystan Stevens speak about his 1999 book, **Northfield Harvest**. Stevens is a well-known figure in Ann Arbor, having been resident caretaker/curator of the Kempf House from 1970-1983. He has actively written about, photographed and spoken on many aspects of Ann Arbor and Washtenaw County history. Nowadays he is most famous for his October tours of Forest Hill Cemetery. Thanks to Rev. Eugene R. Andrus for all his help with the program.*

Holding up a copy of the book, Stevens remarked that although the date of publication is officially 1999, it really didn't get released until February of this year (2000). Published by the Northfield Township Historical Society led by Tom O'Brien and aided by Rusty Towers, the book represents his research over a three-year period. He chose the title to reflect the history of the area, Northfield having obtained its name because of

its fields and its northern location. A committee collected as much as could be discovered and their goal was to publish the book to coincide with the new millennium. A previous book on the township entitled **Looking Back** was used as a starting point, but Stevens was given carte blanche to add and expand this text. Both Stevens and the committee were surprised that their product wound up being 400 pages long with almost 400 illustrations! This included not only photographs, but also invitations to harvest festivals at the old hotels at Whitmore Lake going as far back as the 1860s, post cards, maps, news fragments, and illustrations of local post office memorabilia (thanks to Frank Whitehouse). Stevens also plumbed his vast collection of Washtenaw County post cards to use about 50 cards in the book.

"I thought today that I would describe Northfield Township by reading little segments from this book, in the style of visiting authors as seen today at Borders Books. I'm going to begin with a selection from the first chapter, which is literally a scrapbook chapter. It has no original added text and is only a selection of amusing or interesting items from old Ann Arbor papers. We begin with a letter to the Editor from the *Michigan State Journal*, an Ann Arbor weekly newspaper, dated June 22, 1841. It introduces a main focus of the book—a history of Whitmore Lake. Although the northern half of Whitmore Lake lies in Green Oak Township in Livingston County, we have taken some interest in that area in order to cover the entire history of Whitmore Lake.

"Have you ever been to Whitmore Lake? If not, throw down your quill instant and prepare for a trip thither. It is about 10 miles north of Ann Arbor and is decidedly the most beautiful lake in Michigan. The water abounds with pickerel, bass, sunfish and perch. There are several boats upon

February Program

Dr. Russell Bidlack will speak on "*The John Geddes Letters, 1825-1844: Ann Arbor Pioneer and Local Historian.*" The lecture will be Sunday, February 18th at the Bentley Library at 2 PM.

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Northfield Harvest (continued)



Postcard of the Clifton Inn, Whitmore Lake. Postmarked 1914. Loaned by Wzystan Stevens

the lake and they take great pleasure in accommodating those who may visit the lake. It is nearly round and nearly 2 miles in diameter... The surrounding country is highly beautiful and romantic and the neighboring inhabitants are intelligent farmers. I do not know a more charming retreat from the heat of Michigan in the summer... a sportsman can amuse himself with all the game he may desire. The Tremont House kept by Mr. Stevens (no relation) I can recommend highly. Mr. Stevens is a gentleman of the most polite manners... and does all in his power to advance the comfort of his guests. His larder is supplied during the summer with all the choicest varieties of game and in his bar may be found liquors and wines which do great credit to his taste and to his desire to add to the enjoyment of his guests... The lover of a julep or a cobbler can here be gratified to his heart's content and after refreshing himself with these nectar drinks he can recline him on the verdant green and puff a genuine Principe or a true Regalia..."

Mike Krehbiels wrote chapter two, which is the first chapter in the old book, on the aboriginal history of the township. An original survey map, done by Joseph Wampler in 1819 and discovered by Tom O'Brien in Lansing, is included in this chapter. Northfield Township is the sixth township from the meridian along the baseline—the northern border of both Northfield Township and the county. The

axis that was formed by the intersection of the meridian and the baseline formed the locus for the beginning of all the surveys of land in Michigan. This grid was imposed over the land before settlement to avoid land disputes which had been rampant in the older parts of the US. With firm land boundaries, less friction would develop.

Chapter three is about the first settler of the township, Benjamin Sutton. He came from Detroit with the founders of Ann Arbor, John Allen and Elisha Walker Rumsey in 1824. Their paths separated at Plymouth and Sutton ended up in the howling wilderness of what became Northfield Township. Originally, it was governmentally attached to Ann Arbor Township. In 1824 there were only three townships in Washtenaw County: Dexter, Ann Arbor, and Ypsilanti. Gradually these were subdivided into the 20 townships that exist today. A township is simply an area of 36 square miles, although sometimes if a shore is present it's not quite 36. Whitmore Lake and by extension Northfield Township have, since their founding, been regarded by Ann Arborites as the kind of back door to Ann Arbor. It's where people went for recreation, especially fishing, boating, swimming and entertainment. The hotels hummed with dances in the 1930s and 40s. Pavilions were built for this purpose.

Benjamin Sutton came from Sussex County, New Jersey. He became a farmer

and often went down to Ohio to buy livestock, but he didn't really stay long. He moved to the Sangamon Valley of Illinois in 1834. George Sutton, his brother, put more of a stamp on the township as he published his memoirs about life in Northfield. One is called the *Battle of the Bee Tree at Sutton's Corners*. The latter was where the Sutton farm was located on Joy Road at Sutton. This was the original settlement and site of the first Sutton School. This Bee Tree Battle of 1826 is the only known account of conflict between the settlers and the Indians of Washtenaw County. The story appeared December 20, 1887 in the *Ann Arbor Argus* (*Mr. Stevens read from this paper*).

Another pioneer was Christian Zuck (a German who was born in New York State and moved on to Missouri) who tried to start a silk industry in Whitmore Lake. Stevens quoted a story by Zuck's grandson that described Zuck trying to drown a buck in the lake in 1832. Zuck built a Greek Revival house in 1833 that still stands on Main Street near the Methodist Church. It is now the oldest surviving building in Whitmore Lake.

There is some Civil War history scattered throughout the book. The first Civil War soldiers were mustered in at the Clifton House, one of the big hotels in Whitmore Lake. Company G of the 3rd Michigan Cavalry, known locally as the Sutton Guards after the township's first family, never really saw action in any major battles. But George Sutton went to Grand Rapids where there was a Presentation of Swords ceremony and here is what he reported to the press (November 29, 1861, *Michigan Argus*) [I love the language used]:

"Thursday morning, November 14th, George Sutton Esq., on behalf of the ladies of Whitmore Lake presented to each of the commissioned officers of Company G, 3rd Regiment, a beautiful sword, sash and belt. ...Mr. Sutton spoke as follows: 'Gentlemen, the ladies of Whitmore Lake and vicinity have entrusted me with a small token of their regard which they entertain for you personally as well as for the company you command. You gentlemen, and the men under you, left your homes and those dear to you at your country's call to put down a rebellion the most formidable and least called for of anything in the annals of history. The great sacrifice the citizen soldiers experience in leaving their homes to fight the battles of their country, can only

be remunerated in the consciousness of having done right. And now gentlemen, allow me to present to each of you a beautiful sword, sash and belt... not for their intrinsic value but because they are suitable for you to wear on this trying emergency. Use them, gentlemen, with fidelity to yourselves, to the gentle hands that nurtured you in your childhood, to the millions of the unborn that will follow you and to the honor and glory of this great republic'..." (The recipients responded in suitably flowery language thanking Sutton for this honor). Stevens continued by quoting Baur's reply.

Tom O'Brien contributed a chapter on the Irish settlement of Washtenaw County. He turned up a lot of names that we intend to research genealogically since it is the largest ethnic group in the township. Of course this is intimately tied up with the history of St. Patrick's Parish as well. Interestingly, the parish first had no name, then it was St. Bridget's parish, and then it was changed again. Germans also migrated from western Washtenaw County to the southern part of Northfield Township. These Germans organized the church we meet in today in 1869, which is fairly late. The earlier churches were organized by Pastor Schmid in the 1830s and were in the western part of Washtenaw. This was the last church he organized before his death. The original pine church burned in the 1930s and this structure replaced it.

We have a chapter on the Farming Tradition that Rusty Towers contributed to. We have reprinted engravings from the 1874 Atlas showing some of the old farmsteads. Included is a segment on Centennial Farms and the oldest farm families. We also have a memoir of Peter and Mary Ellen Kelly, who lived on a farm just north of Horseshoe Lake. We've also included a Peter Kelly poster from an election campaign of 1966 found in the Kelly archives in all its kelly-green glory! We also have a chapter on the hamlet of Emery and the Leland family that created it. The Leland homestead, a beautiful Greek Revival house, still stands on North Territorial near Earhart.

We also have a chapter on the Post Offices. The first was established in 1834 at Whitmore Lake. Stevens related a tale of how one postmaster—Nelson Halleck—tried to stop the distribution of a newspaper that opposed his candidacy! Since Postmaster was a political office then, the

politics of the post make fascinating reading.

Another chapter deals with the churches of the township, including photographs of churches that have disappeared either through fire or demolition or radical remodeling. The Cyclone of 1917, which wreaked havoc on St. Patrick's Church, merits its own chapter and contains dramatic pictures of the damage done by this storm.

Following this we have one on the one-room schools. Some we couldn't find pictures of but we have documented many of them.

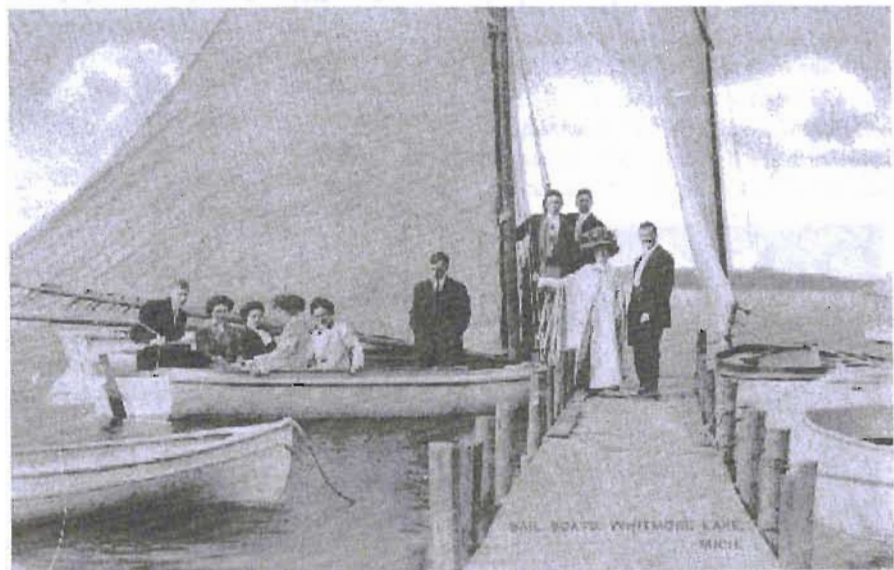
Much of the history of the business community is directly connected with the building of the Ann Arbor Railroad (then called the Toledo and Ann Arbor) through the township in the 1880s. Alas, the trials and tribulations of the building of this railroad would take another issue of *Impressions*. Suffice to say that with the building of the railroad, the reputation of Whitmore Lake and its hotels was significantly boosted. The chapter includes maps showing the old right of ways and tales of the maneuverings of Elam S. Worden and James M. Ashley as right of ways were built and then abandoned. (Stevens read a long passage dealing with these nasty events). There are also quite a lot of photos of trains and depots along the route, and of course, the usual stories of the worst train wrecks.

Chapter 19 deals with the Grand Hotels of Whitmore Lake, namely the Clifton House (first built in 1842) and the Lake

House (first built in 1852 and the larger of the two). Both hotels eventually were destroyed by fire. The Polly Market today occupies the Lake House site. But many menus, advertisements and post cards survive and are amply represented in the book. There is even a chapter on the excursion boats. Mr. Stevens read a long fishing story. This is followed by a chapter on saloons, which is followed by a wonderful memoir by a woman named Helen Dodge McArthur telling about her life and the building that is now the Whitmore Lake Library. Then we have a memoir of Francis Shields, an attorney in Livingston County who summered at Whitmore which tells many funny stories (Stevens read one).

"Finally, I'd like to review an account of an annual occurrence that happened for years beginning in 1878. This was the Annual Farmer's Picnic and it lasted until World War I. It was a late summer ritual at Whitmore Lake, attracting crowds of thousands who packed the hotels, saloons and beaches. Hundreds of buggies and bicycles lined the village streets. Emery Leland and some friends started the tradition. It was a huge affair in the 1880s and included farmers from Wayne and Livingston Counties. Both the frivolous and serious sides of the occasion were written up in the *Argus* of 1889." (Stevens read from the item.)

Stevens ended his talk with a plea to preserve historical records and a two-fisted slide show, one of his trademarks. Buy the book and you can enjoy the photographs and amusing stories of life in a Washtenaw County township.



Postcard dated 1915 of folks sailing at Whitmore Lake. Loaned by Wzystan Stevens

Future Programs

We have a wonderful selection of topics this winter and encourage you to attend. All meetings are held at 2 PM and light refreshments are served following the talk.

Sunday • February 18th

A perennial favorite, **Dr. Russell Bidlack**, Dean Emeritus and Professor Emeritus of Library Science, will lecture on the cache of **John and William Geddes Letters** covering 1825-1844 which he purchased last year. This will be held at the Bentley Library.

Sunday • March 18th

Peggy Haines, Washtenaw County Clerk and Register of Deeds (and WCHS Board Member!) will tell us about the election process and give a **tour of the new County Annex** Building at Ann and Main.

Sunday • April 22nd

Note change of date due to Easter

The U-M Observatory will host a tour for us and Director **Dr. Patricia Whitesell** will speak on "*The History of the U-M's Detroit Observatory.*"

Wednesday • May 16th

Our **Annual Meeting** will be held at **Webster Church** in Webster Township. Our speaker will be **Willah Weddon** of Stockbridge. A former journalist with the *Ypsilanti Press*, *Jackson Citizen Patriot*, *Lansing State Journal* and *Detroit Free Press*, she was a member of the Capitol Press Corps in Lansing and wrote about the First Ladies of Michigan. She has published four books on the First Families of Michigan and has won many awards for her publications.

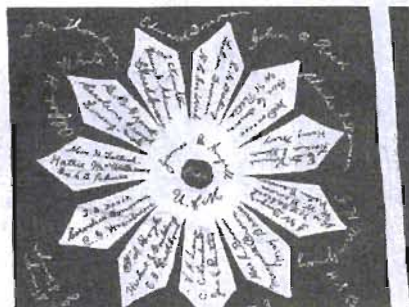


Photo by Susan Wineberg

Red and white quilt from c. 1898. Does anyone know anything about it?

Around The County

The **Genealogical Society of Washtenaw County** will meet Sunday, **February 25th** at 1:30 PM in the Auditorium of the Education Center, 5305 Elliott Drive, McAuley Health Center/St. Joe's Hospital complex. Use parking lot P. The speaker will be Mr. **Randy Gladstone**, co-curator of the Mason Historical Museum, who will talk on "*Treasures Found in Museum Archives.*" The hunt for missing Stockbridge newspapers "**The Town Crier**" will be presented by **Cynthia Grostick**.

The **Dexter Historical Society** presents its 28th Annual Pioneer Arts Fair on **March 17, 2001**. It will be held at the Dexter High School, 2615 Baker Rd. More than 50 juried artists and craftspeople representing a wide range of folk art, including lace making, wood carving, caning and rushing, rag weaving, painting, calligraphy, tinsmithing and broom making will be present. There will be a craft table for children, entertainment and a bake sale. All proceeds benefit the society. Tickets are \$2.00 for adults and \$.50 for children. Call 741-1877 or check the website for changes and updates: www.hvcn.org/info/dextermuseum.

The **Saline Historical Society** will host the first of a series of three lectures on **Wednesday, February 21st** at 7:30 PM at the Saline Depot, 402 N. Ann Arbor Street. **Rick Kuss** will speak on "*The Life of Founder Orange Risdon*" who was a government surveyor, local entrepreneur and founder of Saline. Mr. Kuss is a Saline City Councilman and former mayor of Saline. He is also a student of historic preservation and a member of the historical society. The second talk will be Wednesday **March 21st** and the third will be on Wednesday **April 25th**, the date Risdon received his patent to purchase property in Saline. April 25th is also the 125th anniversary of his death. The April event will be held at Weller's and reservations for this \$20/plate dinner will be taken by Wayne Clements, 429-9621. **Founders Week** will conclude with activities at the Depot on Saturday **April 28th** from 11-3. For more information contact Agnes Dikeman at 769-2219.

The **Ypsilanti Antique Fire Preservation Group Museum** will have open houses on **February 4th and 11th** from 2-5 PM. Admission is free. The Museum is located at 110 W. Cross St. Call 547-0663 for more information. Speaking of fires, the

Milan Area Historical Society is busy restoring its **1897 Fire Station** and has raised \$236,000—half the amount it needs to complete this job. They held a dinner dance in November as a fundraiser and more events are planned. Call Jim Cullip at 439-7156 for more information.

Salem has been in the news quite a lot lately. **Don Riddering**, President of the **Salem Area Historical Society**, has collected hundreds of signatures to protest the demolition of a 120-year old brick church on Dickerson Road, just south of Six Mile. Now rental housing, the former church would be torn down for a parking lot for township offices! So far, their efforts seem to have succeeded. Also reported in the news was an effort to adopt a **Hamlet Center District Ordinance** to breathe new life into the 1873 hamlet that still centers on the 127-year old frame building known as "The Store." The new ordinance would allow for mixed use zoning in 'village scale' with a pedestrian orientation and would preserve the historic character of the buildings. Hopes are that this will revitalize the area and draw new businesses, such as banks and restaurants, to the area.

Help!

We are desperately in need of someone to be our **Corresponding Secretary**. The duties include labeling and mailing post cards for our meetings, the *Impressions*, and thank you notes.

We also are looking for someone to head a **Fund Raising Committee**. This person would coordinate our various fund raising activities, including letters to businesses, our antiques appraisal, and our fund raising item of the year.

Anyone interested please contact President Walters, 662-9092.

Business Support

This month's issue of *Impressions* is co-sponsored by

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Around The Town

The **Kempf House Center for Local History** will again be hosting its famous **Valentine Teas**. A sumptuous tea of sandwiches, scones, other sweets and two choices of tea will be served **February 10 and 11** at 312 S. Division St. Seatings are at 1:30 and 3:30 and reservations are required. The cost is \$15.00/person. Call 994-4898.

The **Cobblestone Farm** will once again be hosting its Winter Evening on **February 16th** from 6-9 PM. Come experience a typical evening on a mid-19th century farm. The seasonal crafts, games and more will delight children. The farm is at 2781 Packard Rd. Call 994-2928 for more details.

On Sunday, January 28th, **Eberwhite Elementary School** will celebrated its **50th birthday** with an Open House from 2-5 PM. There were special displays and guests. Memorabilia is being collected by **Marcia Dykstra** (mdykstra@provide.net or 996-4230). Some famous alumni are Mark Potter (an ABC News correspondent), Andy Moeller (UM coach), Bill Kirchen (musician with Commander Cody) and Lou Fancher (children's book illustrator).

UM Detroit Observatory's Winter Lecture Series

The UM Observatory has announced its Winter Lecture Series. On **February 20**, **Russell Bidlack** will speak on the John Geddes Papers, 1825-1844. It will be held at 3:00. On Tuesday **March 13th**, **David Strauss**, Prof. of History at Kalamazoo College, will speak on Percival Lowell and the Canals of Mars. This will be held at 7:00 PM. On Tuesday, **April 3rd**, **Dr. Howard Markel**, Director of the Historical Center of Health Sciences, will speak on the history of the UM Medical School, 1850-2000. This will be held at 7:30 PM. All lectures are held at the Observatory. The Observatory continues its Open Houses on Wednesdays, Feb. 7, March 7, and April 11 from 3-5 PM and on Thursdays Feb 22 and March 22 from 12-2 PM. Also, for \$400 you can own an original brick from 1854. For more information call 763-2230.

Snow Hampers Xmas Open House



The first snowstorm of the aughts wreaked havoc on our museum building, causing water damage on the interior and daily headaches for President Walters. Eventually the gutter on the north side of the house was removed and conditions improved. However, attendance at our two weekend open houses suffered as a result. The water leakage also caused damage to the phone

lines and to our alarm system and things are only now getting somewhat back to normal. Thanks to Joe O'Neal, Bill Sturgis, and Jay Snyder for helping above and beyond the call of duty. We did manage to host 25 students from the 3-4th grade classes of Mack School.

Pam Newhouse once again decorated our Christmas tree with dried hydrangeas from our garden, pinecones and berries. Karen O'Neal once again brought in dollhouses and dollhouse furniture which belonged to her mother Frederica Button Koykka of Cleveland, Ohio. And Karen Simpson once again made her delicious ginger punch. Also on display were the Lewis Hodges dollhouse, a sleigh loaned by Lita Ristine made by Gustav Schmidt on Detroit Street and a complete antique French Village and cookie cutters also from Karen O'Neal. Thanks to them and to all of the volunteers who came to docent for the open houses.

Judge Samuel Dexter's House To Be Sold By U-M

The home of **Judge Samuel Dexter**, known as **Gordon Hall**, will be sold within the coming year. The University announced in November that the house, for which they will seek historic designation, and the surrounding 70 acres, would be sold to the highest bidder. The house was constructed by Judge Dexter, the founder of the Village of Dexter, in the **1840s** and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Unfortunately, this listing does not protect it from demolition or inappropriate changes. The house is one of the county's finest examples of Greek Revival architecture and it is known that it was used as a station on the Underground Railroad in the 1850s to help slaves escaping to Canada. Dexter's granddaughter, Katherine McCormick, donated the house to the U-M in 1950 and it was then remodeled into four apartments that are rented to faculty and staff.

In December, the **Dexter Area Historical Society** announced the formation of two committees chaired by Paul Cousins, owner of Cousin's Heritage Inn, and Paul Bishop of Bishop Insurance, to buy the house and grounds to prevent the property from

becoming a subdivision. They will be seeking private and corporate help to buy the property, estimated to be worth \$1-2 million.

Panoramic Maps From Library Of Congress

An article in the *New York Times* reported that the **Library of Congress** has several collections of maps online, including panoramic maps made between 1847 and 1929 (lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/pmhtml/panhome.html). These **bird's eye views** show streets, buildings, trees, farms, mountains, rivers and harbors. The panoramas were not just of large cities but of small towns all over the U.S. The library has 4.5 million items and large map collections depicting military campaigns, exploration, and environmental characteristics.

New Member On Board

At its last meeting the Board welcomed **Scott Jacob** as a new Director-at-Large. Scott is a native of Sylvania, Ohio and in 1990 founded the Sylvania Area Historical Association with two other friends. Today this group manages a museum and has monthly exhibits. Scott has been pursuing a degree in Historic Preservation at EMU and currently works at the Treasure Mart. He will be helping us plan and organize our exhibits in the coming year. Welcome aboard Scott!

Lightning Rod Wanted

President Walters' computer was fried last November and she's requesting an antique lightning rod from our readers. Anyone with a spare rod is encouraged to call her at 662-9092.

Condolences

We are sad to report the death of Alberta McCadden, the mother of our Collections Chair and Recording Secretary Judy Chrisman. The Board voted to donate \$50.00 to the Museum Fund in her honor.

We are also sad to note the death of two longtime supporters. Howard Sumner Holmes of Chelsea Milling died January 3rd of this year and in November of 2000 member James Lau of Saline, a regular attendee at our programs, died. We send our condolences to all their families.

How To Join

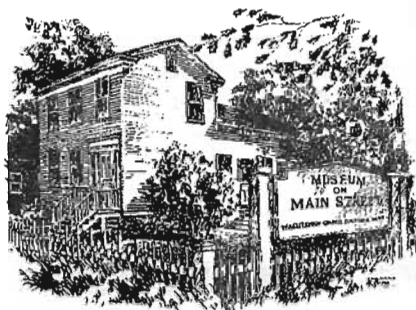
Send name, address and phone number with check payable to WCHS to: Treasurer, WCHS, P O Box 3336, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-3336. Annual dues are individual, \$15; couple/family \$25; student or senior (60+) \$10; senior couple \$19; business/association \$50; patron \$100. For information call (734) 662-9092 or e-mail us at WCHS MoMS@aol.com.

You Really Measure Up!

Treasurer Patty Creal reports that we have collected \$6,343.00 from our ruler request. I guess we really do measure up! Thanks to all of you for your continued support. We have many bills to pay and the money goes directly to support the Museum. And many thanks to all of you who have joined or renewed your membership. We really do count on you to make us a going concern.

Masonic Items Donated

Collections Chair Judy Chrisman reports that Ted Aprill, retired owner of A & L Parts has donated the Knight's Templar uniform and sword of his father Theophil O. Aprill. The uniform is complete with coat, 2 hats, apron, rings and tie tacks. We also received some business ephemera from A&L as well. Thank you Mr. Aprill!



WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Post Office Box 3336
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106-3336

**THE JOHN GEDDES LETTERS,
1825-1844**

**SPEAKER
DR. RUSSELL BIDLACK**

**SUNDAY • 2 PM
FEBRUARY 18TH, 2001**

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