

# IMPRESSIONS

WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER • FOUNDED 1857

RICHARD L. GALANT, PhD

## President's Letter

Dear WCHS Member,

The autumn is a wonderful and very special time of year for each of us I am sure. The holiday season provides us more opportunities to be with our family and friends, to share memories, and to create new ones. It is a time when the fruits of our lives' yearly harvest are being recounted and shared with those closest to us. Now each of our own 2006 histories has almost been completed.

WCHS members have helped support and preserve the rich history of Washtenaw County in several ways during this past year. One has been by their volunteer support. Recently, members have given their time to clean up the garden outside the Museum and tended to the flora life that surrounds it. The white and yellow mums on the Main-Beakes Streets corner now beckon visitors to come in and see our latest exhibition.

Other WCHS members chronicled the county's history with donations to the Society of various artifacts from times before. Over the past year, the Society has received such items as 100-year old lace tablecloth; flapper dresses; musical instruments; and items used in the kitchen. One of the most favored items of visitors to the Museum is a 1920's map of the UM campus, done in a light artistic style, that was created as a fundraiser for the construction of the Michigan League.

Finally, the Society has received monetary donations. Funds are used to maintain the Museum and support the exhibits that are presented in the Museum.

**For all of this year's support, the Society is most thankful for these contributions.** If you would like to contribute, either as a volunteer or donor

of artifacts or financially, the box below provides information on how you can make 'history' with WCHS.

### WAYS OF SUPPORTING WCHS

- Volunteer to help the Society with a special task, i.e., serve as a docent/greeter
- Donate former family or business artifacts
- Provide Financial Support through:
  - Remember WCHS in your will when making estate plans
  - Make a matching gift with your employer. Contact your employer to see if the Society qualifies.
  - Paid-up life insurance that no longer serves its original purpose
  - Property may be donated
  - Gifts of Securities

Be sure to confer with a financial advisor or your tax consultant before making any donation decision.

You can contact WCHS about ways to support at 734.662.9092 or e-mail: [wchs-500@ameritech.net](mailto:wchs-500@ameritech.net)

## Sesquicentennial Plans

2007 will be the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Washtenaw County Historical Society. Plans are in the works to celebrate with year-long activities. Sue Kosky is chairing the festivities.

### OFFICERS

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### INFORMATION

Published Seven Times A Year  
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Ann Arbor, MI 48106-3336

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Email: [wchs-500@ameritech.net](mailto:wchs-500@ameritech.net)

Web Site:

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

Annual dues: January-December individual, \$15; couple/family \$25; student or senior (60+) \$10; senior couple \$19; business/association \$50; patron \$100.

GRACE SHACKMAN

# Germans That Came to Washtenaw County in the 1800s

*On Sunday, October 15, 2006, Grace Shackman, a local historian and author, told Washtenaw County Historical Society members and guests at the Glacier Hills Retirement Community about her research on the Germans that came to Washtenaw County in the 1800s. She employed PowerPoint to project images on the large screen.*

In 1825, Conrad Bissinger was the first German to come to Washtenaw County. Shortly thereafter he left the area only to return later and thus qualifies as the first German in the county. By 1829, large numbers of Germans began to arrive, many via the Erie Canal. The first families to stay were the Manns in town and the Allmendingers and Schillers just out of town.



Top Left: Early German settlers, Emanuel Mann and wife.

Top Right: First German church just west of Ann Arbor on Jackson Road. The inset is Pastor Friedrich Schmid.

Bottom Left: Bethlehem Church, built in 1845, at the corner of West Washington and South First Streets.



Zion Lutheran Church, 1870s, at the corner of South Fifth Avenue and East Washington Street.

By 1831, the German families wanted a German church. Pastor Friedrich Schmid, a graduate of the seminary in Basal, Switzerland, was sent, in 1833, from Stuttgart, Germany, to minister to the German families. He founded the first German church in Michigan just west of Ann Arbor on Jackson Road.





Top Left: New Bethlehem Church, begun in 1896, on South Fourth Avenue.

Top Right: Home of Karl and Fredericke Rominger on 215 South Fifth Avenue.

Bottom Right: Typical German-style interior of a home.

Bottom Left: Ann Arbor Organ Works owned by David Allmendinger.

Right: ~~Ann Arbor Bottling Works, 122 East Washington Street, W. Fred Schlanderer, prop.~~ WAGNER'S BLACKSMITH SHOP, ASHLEY ST, LATER USED BY HENRY OTTO



Most of the families were Lutherans, with a few German Methodists and some Catholics. Pastor Schimid founded many churches in the county and as far away as Saginaw. To be a member of his church, one only had to be German and Christian.

In 1845, the German community, which had been steadily growing, built the Bethlehem Church at the corner of West Washington and South First Streets.

In 1847, the German Methodists organized a church on the corner of Jefferson and Fourth Streets. Then in the 1870s, because of a disagreement, the Bethlehem congregation split and some formed the Zion Lutheran Church which they built at the corner of South Fifth Avenue and East Washington Street.

Beginning in 1896, the remaining members of the Bethlehem group spent twenty years building a new church on South Fourth Avenue.

Germans arrived in waves, usually for economic reasons or because of war, draft or politics. Karl and Fredericke Rominger left Germany after his

involvement in a failed 1848 Revolution. They settled in Ann Arbor and Karl was the first German doctor. Their daughter, Marie, was the first female bookkeeper in town. Although the houses were built American-style, the interiors were typically German. The gardens were planted to reflect



Wagner's second blacksmith shop on Ashley Street, later rented to blacksmith and band leader, Henry Otto.



The Germania Club sold insurance but mainly served as a social center. Members met on the top floor located on West Washington Street. Today it is the Earle Restaurant.



Plays presented in the Swabish-dialect at the Schwaben Verein located on South Ashley Street.

Bottom Left: The Lyra Male Chorus conducted by Professor Reuben Kempf.



their homeland with crops such as cabbage, mulberries and grapes.

The newcomers needed money or a backer to get here and become established. Often someone with a business here would send for help for the business or home. Many were involved in trades: bakers, blacksmiths, merchants, manufacturers, jewelers, restaurateurs and brewers.

The German families tried to recreate the German life-style with music and clubs. They kept their German language in their schools, newspapers, churches and many businesses until after World War I.

Although the men fled their homeland to avoid the wars and revolutions, they did not hesitate to enlist in the American Civil War and World Wars I and II.

Tuebingen has been Ann Arbor's Sister City since 1965. The area with its hills is like the Ann Arbor area. Two years ago some of the officials from Tuebingen came to Ann Arbor to plan the 2005 visit of Ann Arbor officials to celebrate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of sisterhood. About a dozen Ann Arborites traveled to Tuebingen for the celebrations last year.

Below: Henry Otto's Ann Arbor Band.



AROUND THE COUNTY

# Upcoming Events

**Annual Christmas Sing**  
**Friday, December 15, 2006**  
**7 p.m.**

Dexter Area Historical Society Museum  
 Inverness, Dexter



**20<sup>th</sup> Annual Antique Show**  
**Friday, January 19**  
**11-7 p.m.**  
**and Saturday, January 20, 2007**  
**9-5 p.m.**

Washtenaw Farm Council Grounds 5055 Ann Arbor-Saline Rd., Saline 734-769-2219 or [www.salinehistory.org](http://www.salinehistory.org). More than 50 juried dealers from far and near with a variety of quality antiques in two heated buildings. Fund Raiser for Saline Area Historical Society's two museums.

**Genealogical Society of Washtenaw County.**  
**Sunday, January 28, 2007**  
**1:30 p.m.**

St. Joseph Mercy Hospital Education Center Auditorium.

Mark Harvey, State Archivist of Michigan, will lecture on "Genealogy of a House" followed by a class "Understanding Our Ancestor's Political Activities" by Larry Kestenbaum, Washtenaw County Clerk.

**Valentine Teas**  
**Saturday, February 10 and Sunday, February 11, 2007**  
**Seatings at 1:30 and 3:30 p.m..**

Kempf House Museum, 312 S. Division, Ann Arbor 734-994-4898 or [www.kempfhousemuseum.org](http://www.kempfhousemuseum.org) Experience a traditional Victorian tea in a house museum setting.

**Top Left: The Steuben Guards were the first local company to leave for the Civil War.**

**Center Left: Student soldiers of the Second World War at the Old German Restaurant.**

**Bottom Left: Tuebingen, Germany. Photo by Stanley Shackman**

**Top Right: Allmendinger store in Tuebingen, Germany. Photo by Stanley Shackman**

# Upcoming Events (cont.)

**Bolcom & Morris and Friends**  
Friday, February 23, 2007,  
8 p.m.

Kempf House Museum, 312 S.  
Division, Ann Arbor, 734-994-4898  
or [www.kempfhousemuseum.org](http://www.kempfhousemuseum.org).  
Experience an evening of music in  
a house museum setting. Reserva-  
tions accepted after January 1,  
2007

**Genealogical Society**  
**of Washtenaw County,**  
Sunday, February 25, 2007  
1:30 p.m.

St. Joseph Mercy Hospital Educa-  
tion Center Auditorium  
Xavier Allen, local historical re-  
enactor and storyteller, will lecture  
on "The War of 1812-A Perspective  
from Upper Canada" followed by a  
class "War of 1812 History and  
Ancestors" by Carolyn Griffin and a  
panel of members.

DECEMBER 2, 2006 TO JANUARY 17, 2007

## Lights, Ornaments and Trees

This exhibit at the Museum on  
Main Street covers the use of lights,  
ornaments and trees popular in this  
county and this country from 1900 to  
the 1960s. Trees, ornaments and  
lights from the collection and on loan  
will be highlighted as well as  
reproductions of ornaments not  
readily available. The different periods  
of holiday decoration will be presented  
by use of the Society's collection of  
toys, clothing and dollhouses. We  
will feature some of our new  
acquisitions in this exhibit. This  
exhibit was researched with the help  
of our new volunteer, Carolyn Mitchell.

Our open house will be held on  
Sunday, December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2006 at 2:00  
pm with a presentation about  
"Christmas Collectables" by certified  
appraiser of antiques, Dale Sirkle.  
Dale will talk about our display as  
well as bring examples of lights, trees  
and ornaments from his own  
collection. This talk is open to the  
public and all are welcome.

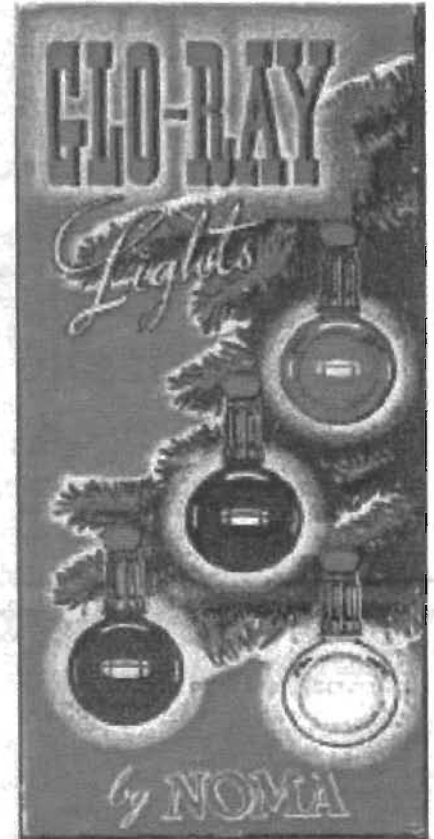
**Colors:** The history of the colors  
of Christmas date back to the  
"Paradise Tree" of 11<sup>th</sup> century  
Europe. The color white represented Innocence, Red (the apple)  
knowledge and green the fir tree.

**Ornaments:** The first account we have of a decorated tree with  
ornaments in a home was 1605 in Strasbourg, Germany. The use of  
ornaments on a real tree spread in Germany with cookies, bread and nuts  
serving as decoration. Small gifts also made their way to the branches of  
these "Sugar Trees."

**Trees:** The use of the Christmas tree was brought with German  
immigrants to the United States. In the 1880s, a *Ladies Home Journal*  
cover of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert (German) caught the social eye  
of the public and decorated trees became "the thing."

The glass ornaments of Lausha, Germany were seen by F.W.  
Woolworth who brought them to his Five and Dime stores in the early  
1900s. The appeal of these colorful glass ornaments took hold with the  
American public.

**Lights:** Christmas trees were rarely lighted in America before 1900 by  
either candles or electricity. Some families in large cities used candles or  
glass candle cups (also called Fairy Lights) for decoration. The tree was



Glo Ray lights

kept in a room behind closed doors until Christmas Eve. The candles were lit and only then was the door opened so that the children could see the tree.

Lighting a tree with candles or electricity wasn't common even during the prosperous Roaring Twenties. Only after World War II did a lighted Christmas tree become universal in America.

### Early Electric Christmas Lighting in America

The world's first practical light bulb was invented by Thomas Edison in 1879. In 1882, an associate of his, Edward Johnson, is credited with electrically lighting a Christmas tree for the first time. The tree was set up in the parlour of his New York City home in the first section of that city to be wired for electricity.

In 1895, President Grover Cleveland displayed the first Christmas tree lighted electrically in the White House. It was a magnificent tree with more than 100 multicolored lights. This event generated enough publicity that members of "high society" began hosting Christmas tree parties. This remained a pastime for the rich since a typical lighted tree cost upwards of \$300 (over \$2000 today), including a generator and the services of a wireman.

### Electric Christmas Lights 1900-1920

Early homes were wired for ceiling or wall lighting only, and the only way to tap into the electric power circuit was through a light fixture socket. Strings of lights, or festoons, were attached to heavy porcelain and later, composition plastic sockets. "Lamp" was the term used in Edison's time for all forms of electric lights (light bulb is a fairly recent term). The "lamps" in each festoon were pear-shaped clear glass or clear glass painted in various colors. Only more expensive lamps were made of colored glass, and some were "frosted" by dipping clear glass in acid. Later lamps were produced in globe shapes.

World War I closed the import market to the United States. Since electric Christmas tree lights were becoming popular in the United States, an enterprising man named Louis Szel went to Japan in 1917 to start the industry there and teach the technique to laborers.

Concurrently, the General Electric Company began developing filaments made of a fragile metal called "tungsten" for household light bulbs around 1910. This material was superior to carbon—it burned cooler and longer, used less current, produced a whiter light, and provided consistent

light output from lamp to lamp. General Electric called these lamps "Mazda" after the Persian god of light, Athura Mazda, and they became the standard for the industry. Around 1920, General Electric commissioned the famous painter, Maxfield Parrish, to create advertising for the Mazda lights.

### The Roaring Twenties, 1921-1929

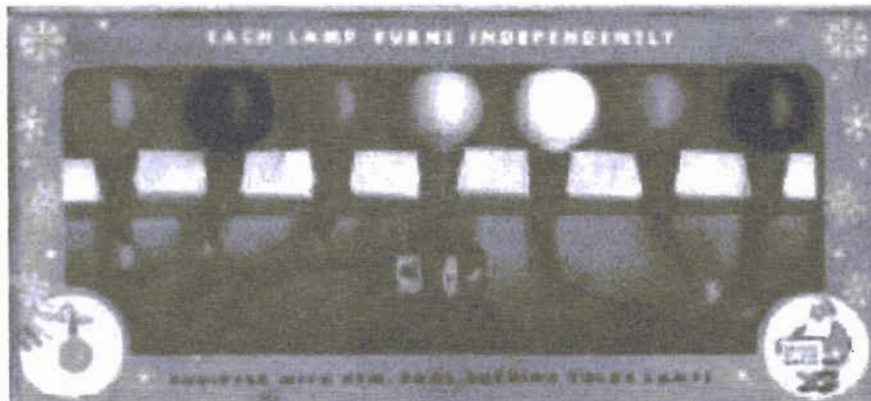
The American Christmas tree lighting came into its own in the early part of the 1920s. The public embraced the idea of lighting trees electrically, and many more towns and cities were wired for electricity. By 1930, most homes were wired for the now standard two-bladed wall plugs, making decorating with electric lights more convenient.

In tune with the times, General Electric and Edison Electric sponsored many "decorating with color-light" contests in an effort to increase sales of the new product. The strategy worked, and within several years communities across the country were holding competitions at Christmas.

### The Depression Years, 1930-1940

By 1930, Americans were feeling the full effect of the stock market crash in 1929. Most people had little or no money for unnecessary luxuries such as Christmas tree lights, so they either went without or made do with old sets.

As the Depression dragged on, Christmas lights sales were half of what they had been at the beginning of the decade. Lighting companies introduced a large variety of new designs and novelty lights in an attempt to spur sales. Most of these lights were of Japanese manufacture, with one remarkable exception. About 1932, the Matchless Company introduced Matchless Stars, beautiful solid



String of round Christmas lights

glass ornaments surrounding a brighter than normal lamp. The glass points and crystal center were imported from Czechoslovakia and assembled in the United States. Due to their high cost and economic conditions, they were only moderate sellers. After World War II, when Czech glass was no longer available, they were manufactured with Lucite until the Matchless Company ceased producing them in the 1950s.

### **The War Years, 1941-1948**

In October 1941, NOMA issued their product catalogue featuring several new products, including an illuminated tree top angel. The company was set for a heavy selling year when disaster struck. On December 7, 1941, the Japanese attacked the U.S. naval base in Pearl Harbor, and the next day President Roosevelt declared war on Japan.

The war had an immediate and drastic effect on Christmas light manufacturing and sales. Most American companies turned their production lines over to whatever they could produce that would help the war effort. Metals of all types were in short supply, and no electric Christmas lights were made during the war years. Sets in warehouse storage were sold as long as they lasted, and after that Americans made do with old sets just as they had done during the Depression.

Artwork used on boxes became more somber, using less color to save on precious supplies. In addition, wartime boxes were of thinner construction than those made earlier

### **After the War Years, 1946-1950**

With the world at peace, American Christmas celebrations became grander and grander. Lighting companies took a year to achieve full production again, but by 1946 they were able to offer many innovative lighting outfits, plus old standbys.

The most famous innovation of the period was the bubble light. Although they were invented in the late 1930s, they could not be produced until 1946 due to the Depression and World War II. NOMA first mass-marketed their Bubble Lites in 1946. The lights consisted of a glass tube filled with a chemical called methylene chloride and a plastic base that holds a light bulb in close contact with the tube. The units bubble whenever heated, and the chemical has such a low boiling point that it will even bubble from the heat of a hand or sunlight from a window.

### **The 1960s**

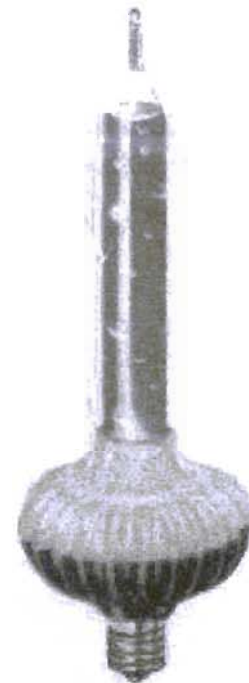
The trend toward ever larger and grander Christmas celebrations continued through the 1960s. Two noteworthy innovations occurred during this era, miniature or "fairy" lights and aluminum Christmas trees.

"Fairy" lights were introduced from Italy in the late 1950s and swept the country in the 1960s. The design and construction improved until they became the accepted form of Christmas lighting to this day.

In 1959, the Aluminum Specialty Company introduced the first aluminum Christmas tree. One of their toy sales managers, Tom Gannon, came up with the idea and it was an immediate success. Other companies soon began to produce aluminum trees which were popular until the late 1960s. Due to the extreme danger of using electric lights on highly-conductive aluminum tree branches, rotating multi-colored floodlights, called color wheels, were sold to illuminate the trees.

The trees lost popularity just as quickly as they had gained it, due in part to a well-received television cartoon, the Charlie Brown Christmas Show in 1965. Charlie Brown refused to buy an aluminum Christmas tree, and the American public decided that he was right.

Other decorations include lighted figures and novelty items that were introduced to the American public almost as soon as Christmas lights. Some examples are candles, wreaths, angels, and Santa Claus, among other figures. Lighted table top trees were also an important line for most Christmas lighting companies from the late 1930s and throughout the 1940s and 1950s.



**Bubble light**





**WASHTENAW COUNTY  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

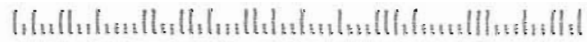
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**SUNDAY • 2 PM  
FEBRUARY 18, 2007**  
**“ONE ROOM SCHOOLHOUSES”**  
**SPEAKER • LINDA CHAPMAN**  
**COBBLESTONE FARM BARN**  
**2781 PACKARD ROAD**  
**ANN ARBOR**  
**INFORMATION • 734.662.9092**

MEMBER 2006  
JOHN & JUDY CHRISMAN  
13617 UNIDILLA RD  
GREGORY MI 48137

48137-3713-17 0001



# Join Us at Our Sunday Programs

**WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY**  
General Meetings: September 2006 - May 2007

- Sunday, 2/18/07**    **ONE-ROOM SCHOOLHOUSES**  
2:00 PM            Cobblestone Farm Barn, 2871 Packard
- Sunday, 3/18/07**    **CARNEGIE LIBRARY PROJECTS**  
2:00 PM            Ann Arbor District Library, 350 S. Fifth Av
- Sunday, 4/15/07**    **DIXBORO UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**  
2:00 PM            Dixboro United Methodist Church,  
near Plymouth Rd & Cherry Hill Rd, Ann Arbor
- May 2007**            **ANNUAL WCHS MEETING**  
**TBA**                Potluck supper / election of officers

## Mission Statement

*The purpose of the Washtenaw County Historical Society is to foster interest in and to elucidate the history of Washtenaw County from the time of the original inhabitants to the present. Its mission shall be to carry out the mandate as stated through the preservation and presentation of artifacts and information by exhibit, assembly, and publication. And to teach, especially our youth, the facts, value and the uses of Washtenaw County history through exhibits in museums and classrooms, classes, tours to historical places, and other educational activities.*