



# IMPRESSIONS

WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER • FOUNDED 1857

RICHARD L. GALANT, PhD

## President's Letter

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When you were in school studying history, it may have seemed that all history was about was memorizing an event, and the day and time it took place. Often the human side of history was overlooked, especially when we were cramming for an important exam and quiz. Take heart – the human side does exist bringing many heartfelt rewards.

In recognition of May as National History Month, I am proud to announce that at the May 5<sup>th</sup> Ann Arbor City Council meeting a plaque was presented to the Society honoring the Society's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Our celebration in July of our anniversary was well-attended. Many WCHS board members deserve credit for their work, particularly Sue Kosky, Dean Greb, Susan Wineberg and Pauline Walters.

During 2008 and 2009 we will be remembering the 100<sup>th</sup> Year of the Car.

In 1908, both the invention of the Model T and the formation of General Motors took place. Washtenaw County has made significant impact on the start-up and development of the car as a product and industry. Events and activities will be taking place later in the year and they will be announced in *Impressions*.

Another celebration of the human side of history was our display **KITCHENS – 1830 to 1950**, which concluded on May 18. There one could bring back memories of smelling warm cookies baking in the oven.

Next, in mid-June, we will mount the exhibition **WEDDING CUSTOMS IN WASHTENAW COUNTY** where you can view gowns and learn about customs of early Washtenaw County residents. Come to the open house and have a slice of wedding cake.



President Richard Galant with award and WCHS members. Photo by Cynthia Yao.

DICK MOEHL AND DAVID FERGUSON

# The Light Station on St. Helena Island *Heritage Worth Preserving*

On Sunday, April 20, 2008, members of the Washtenaw County Historical Society and guests from the Glacier Hills Retirement Community gathered in the Community's Hanson Room to hear Dick Moehl's presentation on the restoration of the light station at St. Helena Island, located in the Straits of Mackinaw about seven miles west of the Mackinaw Bridge.

Dick Moehl, one of the founders of Beacon Investments in Ann Arbor, became interested in light houses and concerned about their neglect. He and others formed the Great Lakes Lighthouse Keepers Association (GLLKA) in the early 1980s.

By 1989, GLLKA obtained a \$20,000 grant from the Bicentennial Fund to restore the roof and replace the doors and windows of the lighthouse keeper's quarters. In 1988, the St. Helena Light Station was added to the National Register of Historic Places.

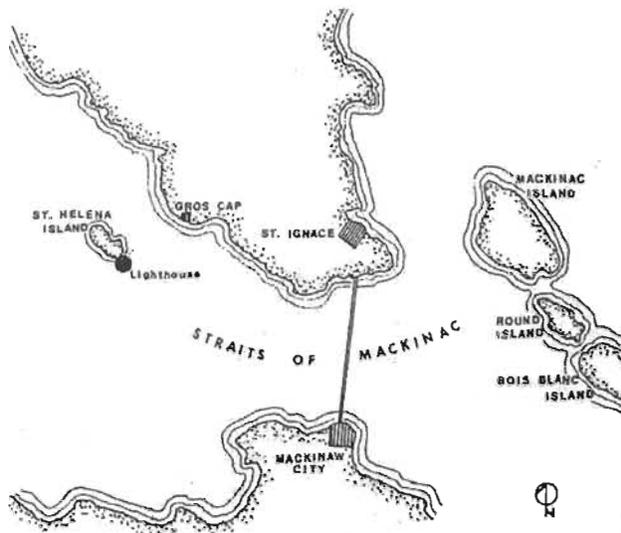


Then



and Now -- 2007

The lighthouse tower and keeper's quarters are pictured before restoration and after completion in 2007.



St. Helena is a 266-acre uninhabited island in the Straits of Mackinac. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, more than 200 persons lived on the island servicing ships that came through the Straits. The island is approximately one-half mile wide and three-quarters mile long.

In 1873, a lighthouse was built at the eastern end of St. Helena to mark the shoals northwest of the Straits of Mackinac. It was manned by a keeper and an assistant keeper during the shipping season until it was automated in 1922. The Coast Guard only maintained the light tower and, after that, allowed the ancillary structures to fall into neglect. Vandals and the ravages of time took their toll.

Dick Moehl's son, Michael, was an Eagle Scout in Troop 4 from the First United Methodist Church in Ann Arbor. In 1989, the troop began to be involved in the cleanup of the light station. That evolved into many yearly projects.



The brick oil house was vandalized and many of the bricks were stolen. In 1991, the scouts of Troop 4 replaced the missing bricks which were difficult to find because of their irregular size.

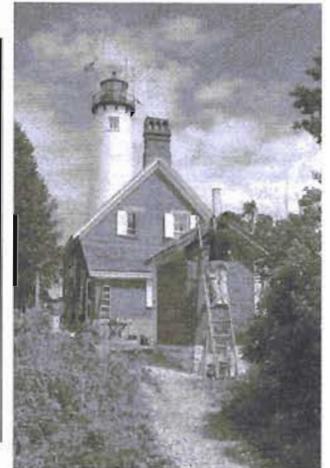
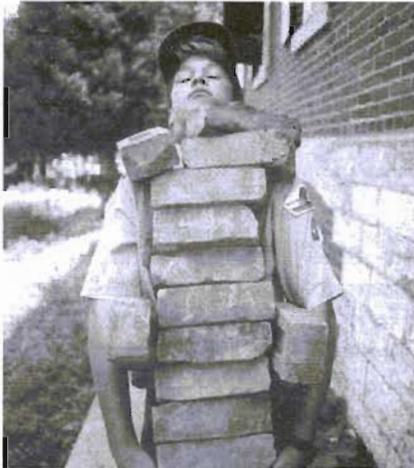


The photo at the right shows the condition of the keeper's quarters in the mid-1980s. Fortunately, most of the door and window trim were relatively intact.



A boat that is large enough to traverse the Straits of Mackinac is too large to land at the island. So, while the large boats moored in Lake Michigan, Zodiacs, shallow draft rubber rafts, landed at the island bringing all necessary personnel and materials. They even transported an organ for the keeper's house on a shallow draft Zodiac raft.

By 1991, Scouts had built a visitor interpretive center, prepared a one-eighth scale model of the light station, held annual Maritime Heritage Education Workshops, received a Keep Michigan Beautiful Award, built an osprey platform and bat houses, restored the privy and published the first edition of the *Educational Resource Guide*.

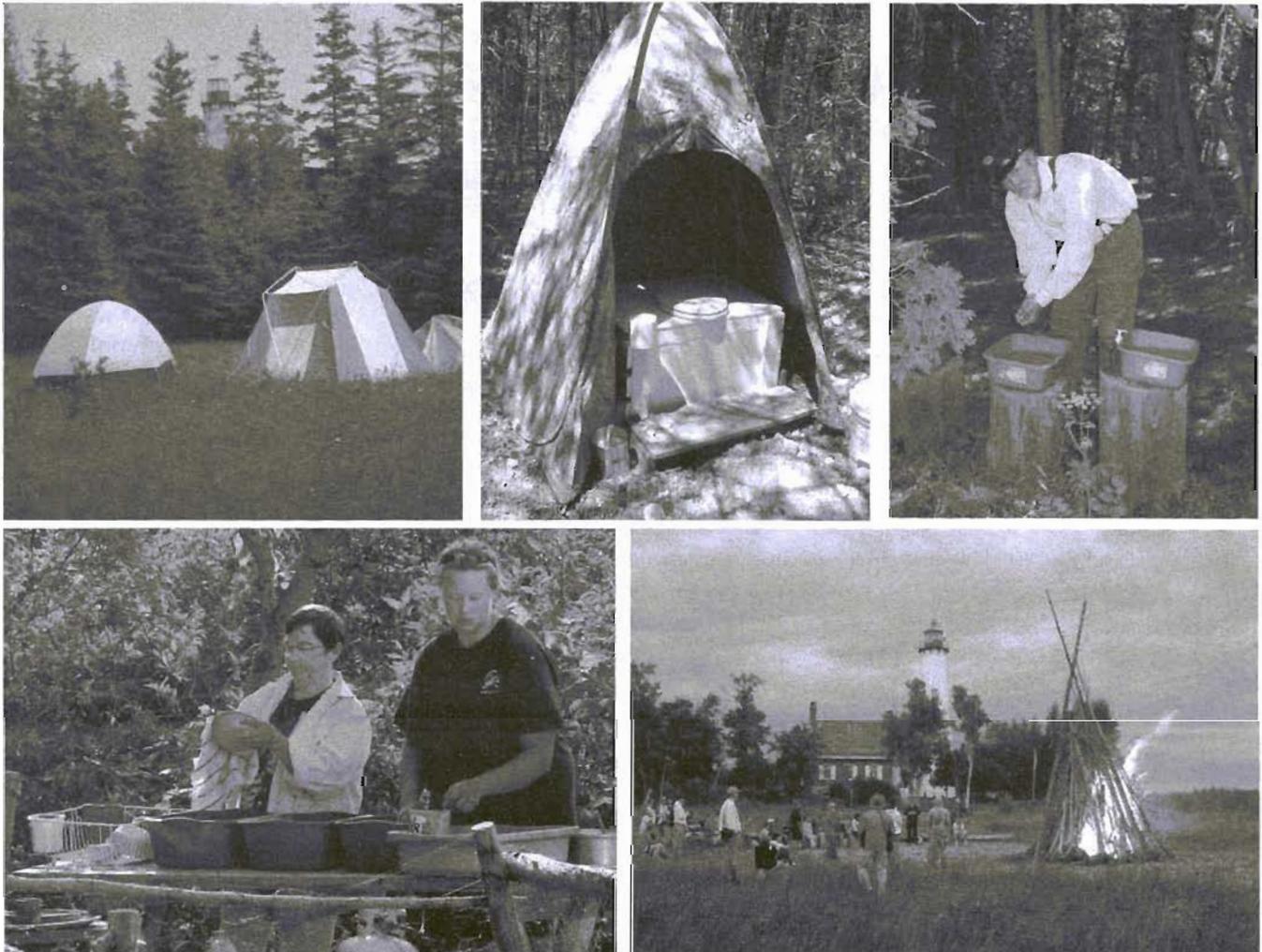


Matt Stanich is shown carrying bricks for the oil house. In 1990, Scout Jon Morrison, created a model of the light station as his Eagle Scout project. With the help of the Coast Guard Station at St. Ignace, the lighthouse tower was painted, and scouts undertook a major beach clean-up, restored a small bedroom in the dwelling and, with the help of Girl Scouts of Troop 253, created an emergency supply storage box. Girl Scouts from Troop 272 in Lansing built picnic tables funded by Home Depot. Another Girl Scout Troop from DeWitt constructed a washing table and contemplation bench.

In 1992, Troop 4 was awarded President George H. W. Bush's 630<sup>th</sup> Points of Light award for the work at St. Helena.



Each summer the scouts that came to work at the light station lived in tents and sometimes as many as twenty tents were necessary. Scouts and adults had their own eating utensils in a sack and did their own clean up.



The highlight of the week's work was the bon fire.



The lantern housing was restored and flies the 37-star 1873 version American flag, created by Dixie Edwards, an assistant scout master.



A ca. 1909 photograph of the boat house was used to draw plans for a replacement. Lumber for the project was cut from trees felled at Pellston airport in 2000 and footings were poured by hand in 2001. The building was framed and the shingle roof installed in 2002 with clapboard siding installed in 2003. Then, in 2004, the doors and windows were added and the following year the floor was finished. Finally, in 2006 the replica of the original boat house was finished. Further work included installation of the rails into the water for the boat car as shown in the photo at right.

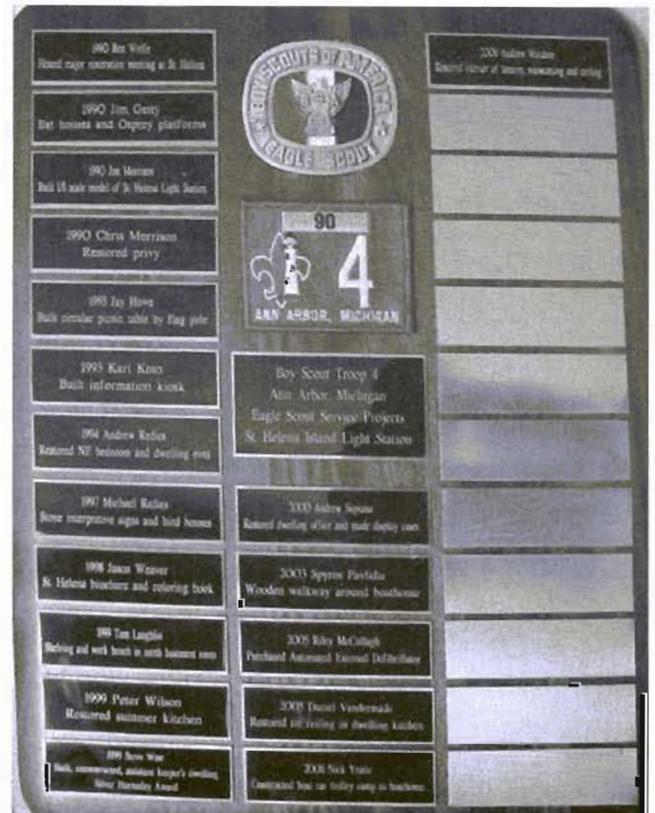
Troop 4 assembled for a group photo in the mid-1990s.



Eighteen scouts worked on their Eagle Scout service projects at St. Helena Light Station. In addition to Boy and Girl Scouts having the opportunity to learn skills and merit badges, there was an academic collaboration with students from Central Michigan University's Biology Department who were studying amphibians and reptiles on St. Helena Island, resulting in two master's thesis being initiated.

The Great Lakes Lighthouse Keeper's Association also offers Maritime Heritage workshops for educators on the island.

*Photos by permission: Great Lakes Lighthouse Keeper's Association.*





Great Lakes Lighthouse Keeper's Association  
 P. O. Box 219  
 Mackinaw City, MI 49701-0219  
 eMail: terry@gllka.com

Internet sites of interest:  
<http://www.terrypepper.com/lights/michigan/st-helena/st-helena.htm>

<http://lighthouse.boatnerd.com/gallery/Michigan/St-Helena.htm>

<http://www.gllka.com/restoration/index.htm>

<http://www.lighthousefriends.com/light.asp?ID=214>

## Our Thanks to Donors

This issue of *Impressions* is printed on paper donated by the *Ann Arbor News* and is fully supported by a grant from the Buhr Foundation. The Washtenaw County Historical Society greatly appreciates these contributions.

# 2008 Calendar of Events

All events are held at the Waterloo Farm Museum, 9998 Waterloo-Munith Rd., Grass Lake 49240, unless otherwise indicated.

**Antique Tractor, Truck, and Farm Equipment Show**  
 Saturday, May 17 • 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.  
 Sunday, May 18 • Noon – 5 p.m.

This free event will feature over 100 Antique Tractors, Trucks and Farm Equipment from local collectors and clubs from around Michigan.

For further information please contact Ron Kaiser at 517-851-8745.

Admission for Tours of the ten-room farmhouse is: \$3 Adults, \$2.50 Seniors, and \$1 for Children 5-17. Children 5 & under and WAHS members are free.  
 Contact: Ron Kaiser at 517-851-8745

**Waterloo Area Historical Society Annual Meeting**  
 May 18 • 12:00 p.m.

A report on the previous season's activities and outlook for 2008. For further information please contact Arlene at 517-851-8745.

**Museum Open to the Public Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays**  
 Friday, May 30 to Sunday.  
 August 31 • 1 p.m. – 5 p.m.

Costumed guides lead tours of the ten-room farmhouse and grounds.

Admission: \$3 Adults, \$2.50 Seniors (62+), \$1 Children 5-17  
 Free for Children 5 & under and members of the Historical Society  
 Contact: 517-596-2254

**First People of Michigama: Pontiac's Rebellion**  
 Saturday, June 7 • 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.  
 Sunday, June 8 • 12 p.m. - 5 p.m.

This event features an authentic Woodland Indian village complete with traditional Native crafts, cooking, games and trade. Lamplight tour on Saturday night.

Admission: Adults, \$4, Seniors (62+) \$3, Children 5-17 \$2  
 Free for Children 5 & under and members of the Historical Society.  
 Admission includes a guided tour of the ten-room farmhouse.  
 Contact: Wesley Perry, 517-763-6409

**Blacksmiths, Soldiers and Log Cabin Weekend**  
 Saturday, June 28 • 10 a.m.-5 p.m.  
 Sunday, June 29 • Noon – 5 p.m.

This special event features a Blacksmith Festival and a Civil War Living History Encampment. On Sunday, we join the statewide celebration of Michigan's log cabins.

Admission: Adults, \$4, Seniors (62+) \$3, Children 5-17 \$2  
 Free for Children 5 & under and members of the Historical Society.  
 Admission includes a guided tour of the ten-room farmhouse.  
 Contact: Arlene Kaiser, 517-851-8788

**Pioneer Day**  
 Sunday, October 14 • Noon - 5 p.m.

A celebration of the fall harvest season. Our Dewey School Museum is also open for tours during this special event.

Admission: Adults, \$4, Seniors (62+) \$3, Children 5-17 \$2  
 Free for Children 5 & under and members of the Historical Society.  
 Admission includes a guided tour of the ten-room farmhouse.  
 Contact: 517-596-2254

**Christmas on the Farm and at Dewey School**  
 Saturday, Dec. 6 • 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.  
 Sunday, December 7 • Noon - 4 p.m.

A re-creation of the holiday's traditions on an 1880's Michigan Farm and a one-room school.

Admission: Adults, \$4, Seniors (62+) \$3, Children 5-17 \$2  
 Free for Children 5 & under and members of the Historical Society.  
 Admission includes a guided tour of the ten-room farmhouse.  
 Contact: Mary 517-851-7890



**WASHTENAW COUNTY  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

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Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106-3336

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U.S. Postage

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**SUNDAY • 2 PM**

**SEPTEMBER 21, 2008**

**WCHS GENERAL MEETING**

**YMCA: 150 YEARS IN ANN ARBOR**

**PITTSFIELD DISTRICT LIBRARY**

**2359 OAK VALLEY DRIVE**

**48108**

**INFORMATION • 734.662.9092**

**www.WashtenawHistory.org**

**WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY IMPRESSIONS**

**MAY 2008**

## **Kempf House Museum**

312 S. Division St.  
Ann Arbor, MI 48104  
(734) 994-4898  
[www.kempfhousmuseum.org](http://www.kempfhousmuseum.org)

Open House Tours — Spring 2008  
Sundays, 1:00 to 4:00 PM,  
Admission Free, Donations  
Welcome

Sunday, May 4, 11, and 18  
(Closed May 25, Memorial Day  
Weekend)

Sunday, June 1, 8, and 15

Parking is available in the large  
public lot just south of the House.

## **Saline Area Historical Society**

The Rentschler Farm  
Museum, 1265 E. Michigan Ave.,  
Saline will reopen for free  
Saturday tours on May 3 from  
11:00-3:00. The animals will  
return for summer residence, the  
garden will be planted, and  
flowers will be in bloom. Plan to  
visit any Saturday.

The Depot Museum, 402 N.  
Ann Arbor St. is open each  
Saturday.

Information:  
[www.salinehistory.org](http://www.salinehistory.org)  
734-944-0442.

## **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.*