

MUSEUM ON
MAIN STREET



A Museum Of County Life

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Impressions is published seven times a year, from September to May

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The Washtenaw County Historical Society is a 501(C)(3) organization. Annual Dues, which are from January through December are:

Individual: \$15; Couple/
Family: \$25; Student or
Senior (60+) \$10; Senior
Couple: \$19; Business/
Association: \$50;
Patron: \$100.

IMPRESSIONS

WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER • FOUNDED 1857

Still Time to Explore 19th Century Crimes

If you haven't yet experienced Murder, Mayhem and Mischief in 19th Century Washtenaw County, currently playing at the Museum on Main Street, not to worry. There is still time. The exhibit runs through November 29. (See related stories on Page 3). The Museum is open Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday from noon to 4 pm. Groups are welcome, as are individuals, by appointment. Arrangements can be made by calling 734-662-9092.

WCHS Welcomes New Docent

Patra Kobeck, a WCHS member, was so impressed with the "Murder, Mayhem and Mischief" exhibition that she has volunteered to be our docent on Wednesdays. Welcome Patra!!!!

Here's the Answer

Last month the challenge was to decide which crimes in 19th century Washtenaw County were most prevalent. This is what the research numbers showed:

- Theft: 40 percent
- Drunk and disorderly conduct: 27 percent
- Assault and battery: 9.5 percent
- Forgery/murder: 3 percent
- Passing counterfeit money: 3 percent

Holiday Exhibit to Return to MoMS

The trains, dolls and dollhouses of the popular Holiday Exhibit at the Museum on Main Street will again take up residence from December 12 through January 24. A member of the AA Model Railroad Club will be at the Museum on Saturday, Dec. 12; Sunday Dec 20; and Saturdays, Dec 26, Jan 3, 9, 17 and 23. A representative of the AA Doll Collectors will be on hand on alternate weekend days beginning Sunday, Dec. 13 and then on Saturday, Dec. 19, and Sundays, Dec. 27, Jan. 2, 10, 16 and 24. There will be activities for children on all days. Firefly, the magic clown, will return for one weekend only: December, 12 and 13, from 1 to 3 pm. The museum is open Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays from 12 to 4 pm. The exhibit is designed to help you and your family get into the holiday spirit, so come on down!



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President's Letter

The newly revised Mission Statement directs our Society's effort to "our community," which of course means community members of all ages.

One of our important goals is to significantly grow Society membership, which has remained nearly steady at 450 members for several years. We have also noted that a significant percentage of members are enrolled in our Senior or Senior Couple categories.

To that end, some really good news was included on the front page of the Sunday, June 21, 2009, *Ann Arbor News*. Under the heading, "Portrait of an aging county" demographics from a new data book put together by Blueprint for Aging noted two important statements for our Society: 1) "People 55 and older make up 19 percent of county residents" and 2) "The county's older population is expected to double by 2025 to almost 90,000 people."

So as the Mission Statement focuses us on "our community" of all ages, the goal to add members points us certainly to exert greater efforts to add younger members while knowing that, if membership continues to come primarily from the senior category, that category should minimally double over the ensuing years. Even then it will take a lot of hard work by the board and existing Society members.

Ann Arbor's Main Street Earns Recognition



For the first time, an organization outside Ann Arbor and Washtenaw County recognized the value of one of the city's historic districts. The American Planning Association named Ann Arbor's Main Street to its 209 Great Places in America.

"South Main Street is downtown Ann Arbor's center of activity and community gathering place," the Association says. "The continuous rhythm of detailed masonry building storefronts right at the sidewalk's edge contributes to an exciting pedestrian environment. The City of Ann Arbor's continuous efforts to preserve these buildings — most housing locally owned businesses — ensures that the street's unique appearance and character remain intact."

City officials said Main Street was singled out for its forward-looking planning and development aimed at helping lower the city's carbon footprint. Among other things, the city is increasing housing density, preserving historic buildings and increasing transportation choices along Main Street, city officials said.

World War II Nurse Shares Her Story

Mildred MacGregor's audience listened in awe as this 97-year-old Ann Arbor resident recounted her story at the Washtenaw County Historical Society meeting on Sunday, October 18. The lecture was held at the Bentley Historical Library.

In 1942, MacGregor, then Mildred Radawiec, was one of 30 volunteers from the University of Michigan Hospital who traveled to the major battle theaters of World War II to tend to the medical needs of American soldiers. Radawiec, 30 at the time, left a comfortable position as a nurse and postponed her marriage to a soon-to-be doctor to serve until 1945. What began as a collection of memories committed to paper at a Turner Center writing group is now a book published by the University of Michigan Press. Called "World War II Front Line Nurse," the book is available for purchase at the Museum on Main Street.

At the lecture, MacGregor told about sailing without escort on the Queen Mary on December 7, 1942, one year after Pearl Harbor. "She [The Queen Mary] carried an entire army division, 17,000 passengers and 2,000 crew. After fighting a 90-mile per hour gale storm, which tilted the Queen Mary at a 40 degree angle, and eight days at sea, zigzagging every seven minutes to avoid suspected U-boats, we landed in Grenock, Scotland and then continued on to Oxford, in England, for two and a half months."



Mildred MacGregor autographed books after the lecture.



Ralph Beebe, WCHS vice president, introduces Mildred MacGregor to the crowd gathered at the Bentley Historical Library to hear about her World War II experiences.

MacGregor filled her fascinating talk with stories about following the First Infantry toward St. Lo while bombers "blasted the German Resistance and cleared a path through the hedgerows so our tanks could join in the action." She talked about tending to the German wounded left behind, about dispensing anesthesia during surgeries using what she had learned from a quick three-week course in England, and about the very young wounded American soldiers that broke her heart.

"Their first question when they saw a nurse was 'Where are you from?' If by coincidence you were from the same state or even more from the same city, it brought a deep sigh," said MacGregor. She went on to tell the story of one such boy from Ann Arbor.

"He and his buddy were beyond help," she said. "I reached for his medical tag and jotted his name on a scrap of paper and put it in my fatigues pocket. At the end of the war, after I returned home, I contacted the family and told them that I was with their son when he died. They knew he had been killed in action and were broken hearted to have lost their only son, but were comforted to know that someone from home was near him in his final hours."

MacGregor went on to describe service in North Africa and Sicily and then the harrowing landing at Omaha Beach following D-Day. "We nurses landed on Omaha Beach on the 22nd of June after spending the night crossing the English Channel in the crowded hold of a Landing Ship Tank (LST), trying to sleep in a hammock. We joined our surgeons and began operating as soon as the tents were set up. There was no such thing as hours on duty or days off."

OFF THE SHELF
**Rentschler
 Family
 Cookbook
 Makes
 Great Gift**

Celebrating more than 100 years of the Rentschler Farmhouse the Rentschler family, along with the Saline Area Historical Society, published a cookbook in 2006 that includes many of the recipes of the extended family. While most of the recipes are in a familiar format, some were so familiar within the family that only a list of ingredients and the oven temperature were passed down.

Occupied by the Rentschler family from 1901-1998, the farmhouse, outbuildings and four acres were purchased by the city of Saline. Since the Museum farmhouse is open only May through October, a good way to visit the farm is through the recipes contained in "The Herman & Elsa Rentschler Family Cookbook," available in the Museum Shop at the Museum on Main Street for \$12. Recipes representing the original German heritage of the family and many suitable for holiday enjoyment include pretzels, Schnitz Brocht, fig cookies, hermits and hickory nut drop cookies. Veal and pork casserole, cucumbers in sour cream and niffles are just samples of the book's contents.

This book makes a good gift or a resource for the cook or family wanting to know more about the German heritage of Washtenaw County and the Rentschler's extended family.

Murder, Mayhem and Mischief Crime Stories

More Than a Circus

Van Amburgh's Circus was in town and on May 23, 1871, 61 U-M students skipped class to attend a performance. All were suspended until the fall term. The students petitioned for leniency claiming the number of students suspended was large enough to spoil classes and injure the University and they were not informed that skipping class would lead to suspensions. But the suspensions remained in place.

On May 25, 1876, 400 students attended Forepaugh's Circus. Anticipating trouble, the ringmaster hired 50 men who had been deputized. Ropes were attached to the bleacher seats to make them collapse if the students became rowdy. Calm reigned until later that night when students sawed wagon spokes and lifted planks from a bridge, making it impossible for the circus to make its next stop in Ypsilanti. The owners claimed \$4,000 damages: \$2,000 in Ann Arbor and another \$2,000 because they could not get to Ypsilanti for the next show.

Such acts by U of M students led University's President Angell to write in 1875, "It is one of the conditions of work like ours that the petty mischief of some reckless students or a triumph in some athletic game will be paraded through the papers with more noise than the results of twelve months manly and undemonstrative study of 1200 students."

It Wasn't Lizzy Borden

On October 26, 1871, Henry Wagner informed his brother that he had killed his own wife.

Mrs. Wagner was a lovely woman, slight and well-proportioned with beautiful black hair. Recently widowed with a young son, she had immigrated from Germany slightly more than a year before. In Ann Arbor, she operated a fancy goods store with Mary Miley and lived behind the store at #4 Washington Street.

When Officer Leonard arrived at the Wagner home, he found Mrs. Wagner "in night dress lying on her right side, her feet extending under the bed a short distance, one arm was under her and the other thrown over and upward toward her head. Her head was one mass of pounded flesh and bone from it had flowed half a gallon of blood; around her were splatters of blood and clots of bloody gore covered her night dress. Near her lay the murderous weapon, a common hatchet, and that too was stained with blood."

The Wagners had only been married since July 17. Mary Miley testified that they "lived unhappily." The problems began within two weeks of the marriage. Mr. Wagner apparently was not only a very jealous man but a greedy one too. He felt he deserved the money willed to her by her first husband, who just happened to be his older brother. According to Chapman's History of Washtenaw County, Mrs. Wagner shouted, "I cannot live with a crazy man," and Wagner replied, "Give me my money and I'll go."

She must not have given it to him because then he murdered her – and his little nephew. Outraged citizens threatened to lynch him; however, they did not. He stood trial and was convicted. The March 21, 1872 Manchester Enterprise reported that he arrived at the state prison in Jackson.

Did'Ja Know?

Alpha Washtenaw Bryan was born in February, 1824, the first settler child born in the county and the Bryan's sixth child. Mrs. Bryan was seven months pregnant when the family hacked its way through the underbrush to reach what became Washtenaw County.

Way Back When

When Speeding Could Cost You a Buck

Riding or driving over a bridge at a speed faster than a walk could result in a fine of \$1. That was the law in Michigan in 1857, and that included Washtenaw County.

Highway commissioners were instructed to post signs at the end of bridges admonishing travelers to observe the speed – no faster than a walk. Commissioners also were instructed in the collection of damages if anyone caused injury to a bridge. Being caught in that act could cost as much as three times the cost of the damage. In addition, they were on the lookout for property owners who felled trees across public roads or caused drainage ditches to become clogged, thereby directing water onto or across the roads and possibly washing out the roadway.

Besides being alert to vandalism or negligence, the commissioners had the responsibility of cutting "noxious weeds within the limits of highways" twice each year, once before July 1 and again before Sept. 1. And once a month from April to December, they were to remove all the loose stones lying on the beaten track of each road.

Hmmmmm. Is this still governing the mowing along our Michigan roads?

Of Chickens and Hogs

Heated discussions in the past few years in Ann Arbor led to the passing of an ordinance allowing city dwellers to raise chickens on their property. Yes, there is some red tape and several hoops to jump through, but with an application, an announcement to neighbors, inspection by authorities, the building of a "proper" domicile for the fowl and the elimination of roosters, one can raise chickens in Ann Arbor.

But how about hogs? Well, at one time you could, but not now. The first ordinance passed by the mayor, recorder and aldermen of Ann Arbor was to prevent hogs from running at large. Wordage in the document left no doubt as to what the term hog meant because the ordinance identified swine, hogs, shoats or pigs.

Should the marshal find any of these wandering animals, he is allowed to drive them to a pound and will earn ten cents for each hog, shoat or pig so driven to that pound.

The second part of the ordinance charges the marshal with providing a suitable pound within the city. For all his efforts the marshal shall return the animals to rightful owners after he collects his ten cents for driving each to the pound, six cents for taking in the animal and reasonable charges for keeping and feeding it while at the pound. However, the total charges are limited to twelve and half cents per day for each animal.

Upcoming Events

Northfield Township Historical Society

WHAT: Fall membership meeting with speaker, Loren Estelman

WHEN: Thursday, Nov. 19
Potluck Dinner: 6 pm followed by program at 7:15 pm

WHERE: St. Patrick's Catholic Church Social Hall, corner of W. Northfield Church and Old Whitmore Lake Roads

DETAILS: Mr. Estelman, noted author and speaker, discuss incorporating history into writing. He will autograph copies of his latest book, "The Branch and the Scaffold."

ADMISSION: Free and open to the public. If you are attending the potluck dinner, bring a dish to pass and your own utensils.

Saline Area Historical Society

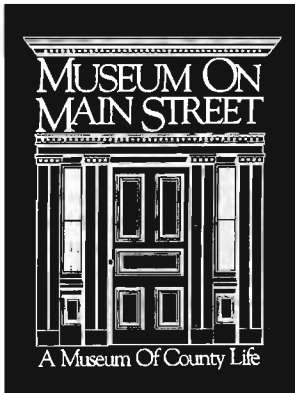
WHAT: Christmas on the Farm

WHEN: Saturday, Dec 12, 12-5 pm; Sunday, Dec 13, 1-4 pm

WHERE: Rentschler Farm Museum, 1265 E. Michigan Ave., Saline

DETAILS: The 12-room farmhouse will be decorated with things that might have been found on the farm. A live tree will grace the parlor with genuine 1930's ornaments and lights. Simple window decorations, good aromas throughout the house, and pleasing sights and sounds will greet visitors. The dining room table will display German-American foods, all made with farm products. (See Off the Shelf, P 4) Spinning and sock knitting will be demonstrated.

ADMISSION: By donation
INFORMATION: 734-944-0442 OR 734-769-2219



**WASHTENAW COUNTY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

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Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106-3336

Do not miss this year's
TRAINS in TOYLAND
December 12 – January 24

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Ann Arbor, MI
Permit No. 96

Sunday • 2 PM
November 15, 2009

Ann Arbor Railroad -- Then & Now
Speaker: Dave Harrell, President
Ann Arbor Railroad Technical &
Historical Association

Glacier Hills Retirement Community,
Hanson Room
1200 Earhart Road • Ann Arbor
Members & Guests Welcome

WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY *IMPRESSIONS*

NOVEMBER 2009

Make Note

There will be no meeting in December but be sure to visit the Museum on Main Street for the Holiday Exhibit, featuring trains, dolls, dollhouses and Firefly the Magic Clown. The exhibit will run from December 12 through January 24.

Mark your calendars for:

Sunday • February 21, 2010
Art Work of Washtenaw County, 1893
Wystan Stevens and Kingsbury Marzolf
Ann Arbor District Library

Happy Holidays!

Mission Statement

*The mission of the Washtenaw
County Historical Society
is to educate
and inspire our community
to engage in the preservation
and presentation of area history.*