

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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www.WashtenawHistory.org

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

Great Day for a Walk



Sunshine and warm temperatures greeted participants in the Historic Preservation Walk, held May 16 in conjunction with the Washtenaw Wanderers. They began their 10 K and 5 K walks at the Museum on Main Street. Volunteers from the Washtenaw Wanderers were on hand to help sign walkers in and provide maps and information about the 36 historic sites featured. The walk covered Kerrytown, the U of M central campus, downtown Ann Arbor, the Old West Side and Lowertown.

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Annual Meeting Report

Some 25 WCHS members attended the May 19 Pot Luck and Annual Meeting. Board Member Dale Leslie presented a talk and video about Kiwanis.

The following nominated slate of officers was elected unanimously:



Rosemarion Blake, who was celebrating her birthday, retired from the board and was presented with a certificate, WCHS life membership and a bouquet of flowers.

President: Leslie L. Loomans
Vice President: Karen L. Jania
Recording Secretary: Judith M. Chrisman
Corresponding Secretary: Pauline V. Walters
Treasurer: Patricia W. Creal
Board of Directors Elected for a Three-Year Term (to 2013): Ralph P. Beebe
..... Tom Freeman
..... M. Joanne Nesbit
..... Jan E Tripp
Endowment Committee Elected for a Two-Year Term: David LaMoreaux

WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY LEADERSHIP

President

Leslie L. Loomans

Vice President

Karen L. Jania

Immediate

Past President

Richard L. Galant, PhD

Treasurer

Patricia W. Creal

Recording Secretary

Judith M. Chrisman

Corresponding Secretary

Pauline V. Walters

Directors

Ralph Beebe

Tom Freeman

Dale Leslie

Michelle L. McClellan,
PhD

Susan Nenadic

M. Joanne Nesbit

Jay Snyder

Jan E. Tripp

Susan Cee Wineberg

Cynthia Yao

Robert Yuhasz

Directors-at-Large

Hon. Julie A. Creal

Mary Florida

Wayne Florida

Richard L. Galant, PhD

Dean Greb

Susan Kosky

Donald C. Smith, MD

Advisors

Ina Hanel-Gerdenich

David LaMoreaux

Thomas F. Mich, PhD

Louisa Pieper

LESLIE LOOMANS

President's Letter

Washtenaw County Historical Society's Mission Statement ends with "presentation of area history." Presentation by the Society in the past has primarily been composed of exhibits at our Museum on Main Street (with docent enhanced presentation) and program lectures presented at locations throughout the county. This formula continues to be very successful. In fact, attendance has significantly increased during the past couple of years.

In this day of electronic communication our website has become an additional part of the process of presenting history. Just recently the entire archive of *Impressions*, going back to issues from 1943, has become available on the site. The archive contains an impressive array of area history and it is on the internet only a click or two away. History of our museum house, past exhibits back through 2006 and many, many links to area history blogs, columns, etc. are featured as well. Additionally one can view, in color, covers of area history books available in the museum gift shop.

A future goal is to include photographic access to our collections on the website. So, if you haven't already done so, make a "Favorite" of our website and enjoy hours and hours of presentation of area history. Go to www.WashtenawHistory.org

In Our Garden

Waving from a pole donated by the Fox Tent and Awning Company, an 1857 American flag was raised in honor of the Washtenaw County Historical Society's 150th anniversary. It was donated by Rob and Libby Boehnke and was erected by members of the Society. The flag also flew at the 2007 anniversary celebration. Long-time Society members Ella Grenier and Anne S. Benninghoff initiated the garden and Pat Thompson, who spent many hours there, enriched it. The plantings between the sidewalk and curb were directed by Iris Gruhl. A generous gift from Ted April, Jr. allowed for expansion of the plantings, which are now maintained by a cadre of volunteer gardeners led by Master Gardener Lilly Ferguson.



Our Newest Acquisition

One of WCHS's newest acquisitions is a bassinet donated by Myung Raymond. It originally belonged to Mack and Wanda Laubengayer Ryan, who lived at 205 North Division in a home that Wanda's parents, Tobias and Sarah Staebler Laubengayer, purchased in 1901. The bassinet was meant to be for the Ryan's son who was born in 1918 and, unfortunately, lived for only a few days. He was to be the Ryan's only child.

In the 1950s Mack Ryan, a well-known Ann Arbor attorney sponsored a young girl, Myung Ok, who immigrated to the United States from Korea. Her father, a friend of Ryan's, once lived on Ann St. around the corner from the Ryan home. On a trip to San Francisco, Mr. Ryan asked Myung to come from Sacramento, where she was attending college, to meet him. He invited her to visit Ann Arbor during her summer break.

During that visit, Ryan and his wife asked Myung to stay in Ann Arbor, live in their home and attend the University of Michigan. They "treated me like a daughter," said Myung. Ryan arranged to have Myung's credits transferred and she enrolled in the chemistry department at U of M. While a student, she met and married Frank Raymond. The couple moved out of state for a few years, and had their first child, a girl. They later returned to Ann Arbor and when their second daughter was born, the Ryans insisted that she have the bassinet.

The original Ryan home was built for Alonzo Palmer. It was a small brick house facing Ann Street and in 1867 Palmer's second wife, Love Root Palmer, added the section of the house facing Division. Myung Raymond remembers the home as large and lavishly decorated in the Victorian style. She also remembers a large mural on the walls depicting the journey from Germany to Ann Arbor made by Wanda Ryan's mother, Sarah Staebler Laubengayer. Wanda died in 1960 and Mack remained in the house until his death in 1970. It is now divided into apartments.



OFF THE SHELF

Michigan Man Makes Good

Osbert Edwin Williams, born in Dexter, MI, was known as Bert to his friends and family, and O.E. Williams professionally. In *Men, Wind and Courage*, Nancy Lynn Mess, author and relative of O.E., takes the reader on a fascinating journey through a life that included designing aircraft; establishing a manufacturing business and a school; and putting on flying exhibitions in Pennsylvania, Michigan and Alabama.

Having earned the reputation in Webster Township as a young man who, if a steam engine broke down, could fix it, O.E. found work in Ypsilanti and moved on to become chief engineer with the Lackawanna Railroad. In 1908 his interests turned to flight. He built and launched models of wing and tail sections and then launched the O.E. Williams Aeroplane Company, once located in Flint and then moved to Fenton. Just manufacturing planes was not enough for Williams, however. He flew them, barnstormed around the country giving aerial shows, and established a school of aviation.

This is the story of not just one visionary, but of several, and a movement that has grabbed a giant piece of the transportation pie. O.E. Williams died in a plane crash in 1917, the end of a visionary and a pioneering spirit.

"Men, Wind and Courage" is available in the gift shop at the Museum on Main Street.



Crossing Lake Michigan by Train



Ann Arbor No. 5 and No. 4 crossing the Great Lakes in 1924

Grant Brown, Jr., the speaker at the May 18 meeting of the Washtenaw County Historical Society, said his interest in the Ann Arbor car ferries was sparked during summers with his family on Crystal Lake, three miles north of Frankfort, Michigan, when he was a boy. Being at that place during that time gave Brown a front row seat on the comings and goings of the big ships (260 to 380 feet in size) that carried loaded railroad cars between Frankfort, Michigan, and Kewaunee, Wisconsin.

After eight years of research and four years of writing, his book, "Ninety Years Crossing Lake Michigan – The History of the Ann Arbor Car Ferries," was published in 2008 by the University of Michigan Press. The book was available at the lecture and also is for sale at the Museum on Main Street Gift Shop.

"As I researched the book, I talked with former captains and many crew and family members," said Brown. "I pored through logbooks going back to 1900, more than 2,000 newspaper articles, annual reports, correspondences, the Michigan archives and records from the National archives."

Brown began his talk with a historical overview of the ferries, which began in 1892 when James Ashley,



Ice buildup in Frankfort Harbor

a retired Ohio politician, wanted to make his railroad, the Toledo, Ann Arbor and North Michigan, more profitable. Ashley's idea was to ship full railroad cars across the lake on large ferryboats, bypassing the two- or three-day logjam through the busy freight yards of Chicago. But to make it work, the boats had to cross Lake Michigan year round and in all kinds of weather.

"Previously, car ferries at the straits and around Detroit, operated across rivers, in sheltered waters, but never across the open water of Lake Michigan," said Brown. He further explained that making the vessels more seaworthy was doable. But of greater concern was the fear that cars might break loose in a storm and fall off the ship or that cars might tip over on their sides, causing the ship to sink.

Ashley found a way to secure the cars, which is detailed in his book. The next problem to solve was the winter ice that formed on the Wisconsin side of the lake and blew to the Michigan side because of the prevailing northwest winds.

"The concern was that the westerly winds would fill Frankfort Harbor with ice, shutting it off for the winter," said Brown, who went on to describe some of the 90-year battles with ice. These included "windrows" which, Brown explained, are formed when sheet ice is shoved

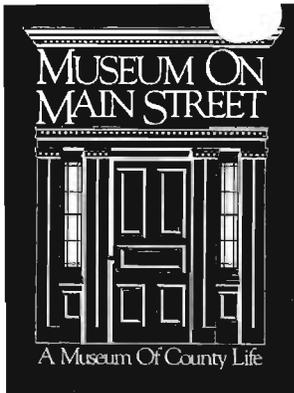
together where there is a crack, forming chunks of ice 15 ft. high, along with the challenges of operating without modern navigation aids.

Brown entertained the more than 85 people attending the lecture at Traverwood Library with stories of some of the harrowing trips made by the car ferries, the captains who had to navigate their ships through ferocious storms, and the entrepreneurs and business people involved.

Brown, who worked for paper manufacturer S.D. Warren Company for 37 years, has raced sailboats in northern Michigan, Boston and St. Louis. He spent eight years in the U.S. Coast Guard Reserve, where he learned navigation and shipboard procedure.



James Ashley



**WASHTENAW COUNTY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

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Members & Guests Welcome

WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY *IMPRESSIONS*

MAY 2010

Check Out the Historical Washtenaw Area Attractions Brochure

An updated Washtenaw County Historical Consortium (WCHC) brochure, listing 27 places of historical interest, has been included with this issue of *Impressions*. The brochure is supported by the member units of the WCHC and by the Ann Arbor Area Convention & Visitors Bureau, Washtenaw County Parks & Recreation Commission, Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation and the Ypsilanti Area Convention & Visitors Bureau.

Additional copies may be obtained, for \$2 each. Send your check, made out to: Washtenaw County Historical Consortium, and mail it to: WCHC, P.O. Box 3336, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-3336. For more information about the Consortium, visit www.WashtenawHistory.org, and <http://www.hvcn.org/info/wchs/consortium/index.html>

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.



*Wishing you all a great summer!
See you in September*