OAKLAND



GAZETTE

Governor Moses Wisner Mansion (ca. 1845)

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Autumn 2003

OCPHS Book Receives Top State Award

A book published by OCPHS and authored by member **Bruce J. Annett Jr.** is the unanimous choice to receive the Historical Society of Michigan's top award for excellence and achievement in the collection, preservation, and promotion of state and local history.

"Asylum: Pontiac's Grand Monument from the Gilded Age," a comprehensive study of the circa-1878 state hospital, received the 2003 Award of Merit — the highest award presented by the state's official historical society and oldest cultural organization.



Bruce J. Annett, Jr., Society Board Member and Celebrated Author

Annett spent three years researching and writing the book, which includes over 150 historic images. He relates that a generation before Oakland County became involved in automobile manufacturing, the state hospital began to transform the area from its rural roots. The facility, designed by one of the most prolific and accomplished architects of the 19th century, was a city within a city, imbued with the optimism and exuberance of an America celebrating its centennial.

The book retails for \$24.95, and is available directly from the Society. Annett is executive director of marketing and public affairs at Lawrence Technological University and has served on the OCPHS board since 1978.

A Message from the Treasurer:

SOCIETY FACES, DEALS WITH FISCAL CHALLENGES

Like so many other non-profit organizations, The Oakland County Pioneer and Historical Society has faced serious funding challenges over the last year. The county's cutbacks, low investment interest, and the uncertain economy have certainly affected us. No recent decision has been as difficult as the one to move to an all-volunteer staff and to reduce our hours of operation.

As is so common in times of adversity, however, we are pulling together for the common good. The initial dismay at our situation is being replaced by a can-do spirit that has shown itself in many ways:

- An operations group, has formed to assist the executive committee in day-to-day administration of the society's activities.
- Several grants have been received or are pending to further our mission.

 Continued on page 2

Society Wins Two Grants

A pair of grants totaling \$15,000 have been awarded this Organization by the Lula C, Wilson Trust and the General Motors Corporation, The Wilson Trust is furnishing \$5,000 for professional consultation and operating support. This sum is intended to underwrite expert advice in strategic planning, grant writing, fund raising, membership, as well as other initiatives aimed at improving the Society's longtime health.

The GMC grant of \$10,000 is earmarked for improving the Society's public accommodations, and may be put toward varied uses such as picnic tables for the grounds, audio visual equipment for presentations, or aid in handicap access to certain structures on the property,

Deborah Johnston, GM Communications Coordinator, cited the society's unique offerings, the wealth, of information unavailable from other sources, and its service in educating hundreds of school children each year as important factors in making the award, Rosemary Gallardo, president of the Greater Pontiac Area Chamber of Continued on page 7

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Library News

We have two new (to us) cabinets of card catalog drawers, which replace our old metal stacking drawers and shoe boxes, and will house obituaries and family information. These were donated to us by IHM Mother House in Monroe and the Saints Cyril and Methodius Seminary library at Orchard Lake, and we are very happy to have them. They are located in the main reading area of the library and can be freely used by researchers. Thanks to member **Bruce Annett** for putting our request on the Michigan library network.

OCPHS has purchased Michigan's Early Military Forces: A Roster and History of Troops Activated Prior to the American Civil War to add to the collection. This compilation explores in depth the military history of Michigan from 1754 to 1850 and the men who served. It should be a valuable research aid, especially for researching men who served in the War of 1812 and the Mexican War.

We are looking for metal library bookshelves to put in the book area to house our growing book collection. They would need to be 12 feet long, 6 feet high, and 12 inches deep. This would enable us to use our space more effectively. If you know of any library or business that could fill this need for us at no cost, let us know. We would also like a microfilm reader/printer in good condition.

The Pine Grove Library also welcomes originals or copies of letters from Oakland County military men and women to their loved ones at home during our nation's conflicts. A prized example, recently reviewed by our staff, was written on Feb. 25, 1865 by James Oscar Pattan, a soldier stationed at Fort Creighton, Chattanooga. Pattan penned it to his wife Libby at their home in Highland Township. Such correspondence reveals the human, personal drama in wartime exchanged between loved ones.

Our Library research hours are now Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday from 11:00 to 4:00. Research fees for non-members are \$5.00 per day. There is no cost for members to research. There is a charge for xeroxed copies of information, however. We also welcome inquiries by phone, email or regular mail.

Library Staff.
Pam Gosik, Jo Pate, Fran Wilson

School Tours Resume

After a summer hiatus, school tours have begun again at Pine Grove. Tours are available by appointment for Tuesday through Friday and usually last 1 1/2 hours. Children, teachers, and parents can visit the Wisner mansion, summer kitchen, root cellar, privy, smokehouse, and the famous Drayton Plains one-room schoolhouse near the entrance to the Pine Grove grounds. This latter structure is also available to teachers who wish to give their class a nineteenth-century educational experience. The schoolhouse rental fee is \$25.00 for two hours and \$5.00 for each additional hour.

The fee for guided tours is \$3.00 per student. We require one adult per ten children. The required adults receive complimentary admission and additional adults are \$5.00 each. Picnic lunches can be eaten outside, or in the event of inclement weather, in the schoolhouse. The schoolhouse and carriage house, which also houses a renovated farm museum in its basement, are barrier-free structures, but the Wisner Museum is not. Please plan accordingly if your group has physically challenged persons.

Please note that the Society requires a non-refundable deposit of 50 percent in advance for all group tours. The amount must be remitted to our office no later than 14 days prior to the scheduled tour. The balance is payable on the day of the tour.

A Message from the Treasurer

Continued

- Representatives from the corporate world (GM, Merrill Lynch, NuTech Graphics, to name a few) have been introduced to our offerings and are becoming involved.
- Exciting new events such as the Harvesting History Festival are joining old favorites like the Ice Cream Social in generating interest.
- Participation in off-site events, among them Arts, Beats, and Eats and the Quaint Quilter's Exhibit, is increasing our exposure throughout the community.
- Other civic and cultural groups are using our facilities for their events. The workshop on Archeology Day, October 25, for example, highlighted recent investegations from around southeastern Michigan.
- Volunteers and donors continue to promote and preserve Oakland County's history in large and small ways. All are important.

Yes, we face continued economic hardship. But we also have important reasons for optimism, a burgeoning momentum, and the will to effectively address the challenges ahead.

Sincerely, Amy Annett, Treasurer

Gone But Not Forgotten: The Society Says Goodbye to a Long Time Member

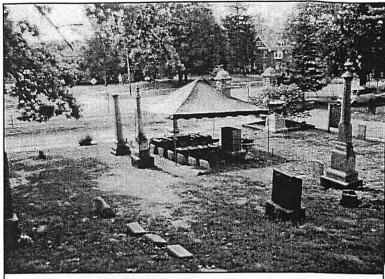
Faye M. Donelson (1905 - 2003)

On September 25, 2003, an early autumn day with a light wind stirring the branches of ancient trees in Pontiac's Oak Hill Cemetery, Fay M. Donelson, devoted Society member, was laid to rest surrounded by the history she loved. Miss Donelson was 98.

Overlooking her family plot from a nearby hill are the graves of Col. Stephen Mack, founder of Pontiac; Gen. Isreal Bush Richardson, hero of the Battle of Antietam; and Moses Wisner, twelfth governor of Michigan. As a genealogist and recorder of past events Ms. Donelson knew these figures well. This was particularly true of Moses Wisner whose property is now occupied by the Oakland County Pioneer and Historical Society, an organization she faithfully served for over a generation.

Born on Valentine's Day 1905 to Mark and Blanche Donelson, a farm couple, Faye drew strength and pride from her pioneer roots. Her most distant North American ancestor was Daniel Donelson who journeyed from Scotland to Massachusetts in 1736. Daniel fought in the French and Indian War and his son, Mark, in the Revolutionary War.

Fay's great grandfather Ira came to Pontiac in 1827 and built a log cabin on the southwest corner of Elizabeth Lake and Voorheis in Waterford Township. Eleven years later the cabin was replaced by a proper farmhouse and the property eventually increased to 200 acres on which the Donelson's raised hay, alfalfa, corn, wheat, oats, barley, rye, and buckwheat. While on the farm Faye contracted polio in 1916, and though suffering its aftereffects for many years, she never complained.



Donelson plot awaiting the mourners at Pontiac's Oak Hill Cemetery in September 2003.

Her earliest formal education was undertaken in a one-room schoolhouse at the corner of Cass Lake and Elizabeth Lake roads. This rudimentary start left her with an unquenchable thirst for learning and a joy of sharing knowledge that culminated in a teaching career which spanned more than 30 years in the Detroit metro area.

Faye became a member of this society in 1967. She worked tirelessly on a host of committees and served as its president from 1976 through 1978. Faye was equally at home at the top of a ladder painting wood trim or assisting in the Society library with its collection of clippings. In 1975-76 she got her hands dirty working as an amateur archaeologist, searching for the old Wisner carriage house. She loved every minute of it. As this writer said to the <u>Daily Oakland Press</u> some years back, "Faye embodied the very purpose of our Society—preservation of the past for the enrichment of future generations." Without question, she was a lady for all seasons.

SOCIETY VOLUNTEERING IS ALIVE AND WELL

A special thanks to the following for their help with the White Elephant Sale by either bringing in "Elephants" or helping with the sale. The participants were: Sylvia Adams, Bruce and Amy Annett, Kathryn Daggy, Susanne Elmy, Gaylor Forman, Miriam Foxman, Frank Gallardo, Rosemary Gallardo, David Hackett, Judy Hudalla and her son Scott Tupper, Ann Irwin, Barbara Irwin, David Irwin, Rex Lamoreaux, Bonnie Lepp, Charlie Martinez, Jean Milton, Jo Pate, Virginia Rodgers, Gale and Connie Scafe, Richard Stamps, Patti Tossey, Mike and Gale Willis. This July event raised \$510.05.

Society members also participated in the Sixth Annual Arts, Beats & Eats celebration in downtown Pontiac over the Labor Day weekend. Those volunteers who manned the OCPHS booth were: Sylvia Adams, Gale Scafe, Rex Lamoreaux, David Hackett, Judy Hudalla and her son Scott Tupper, Miriam Foxman, Bruce and Amy Annett, Dick and Debbie Anderson, John Harding, Rodger Zeller, Margaret Jackson, Janice and Kimberly Bell, Mike Fraser, Jim Bowie, Guy, Nancy and Tom Duffield; Mike and Gayle Willis along with their granddaughter Amy and her friend Shelly. Also helping in our booth from the Kiwanis organization were Twilla Nissley and her two friends Pat and John. For their efforts the Society realized \$1650.00.

U.S. 30th INFANTRY DIVISION: WORKHORSE OF THE WESTERN FRONT

From the WWII Memories of Cpl. Bob Ellis: As told to Charlie Martinez



View of Omaha Beach, N;ormandy, about the time the 30th Infantry Division came ashore. (Author's collection)

Climbing down his troopship's cargo net on D-Day plus 6, Corporal Bob Ellis looked out over Omaha Beach and muttered, "What a hellava way to see France." None of his Company's briefings or scuttlebutt could have prepared Ellis, a native Detroiter and now Farmington Hills resident, for the scene of organized chaos unfolding ahead. The beach was rubbed raw by the rasp of jeeps, trucks, tanks, and construction equipment --- lumbering back and forth while lines of GIs threaded their way between this traffic and up the steep slopes to the waiting enemy beyond.

That first night ashore Ellis recalls the ground-shaking explosions and the sky illuminated like a Fourth of July celebration with artillery fire and flares dropped from German planes. A number of unburied American dead gave mute testimony that not all enemy pillboxes had been neutralized, leaving the upper reaches of the beach only semi-secured. However, moving inland on 15 June 1944 the 22-year-old corporal and his unit took part in an attack on an elite SS Division. From that point on, the war suddenly became a very personal experience.

Bob Ellis entered service 3 January 1943, received basic training, and spent three

months on guard duty at the Sault Ste. Marie locks. A year later he joined the 30th Infantry Division at Camp Atterbury, Indiana. Division departed for Europe in February 1944. Bob recalls with a chuckle, "We left Boston on Lincoln's birthday and arrived in Liverpool on Washington's

birthday." Overseas Ellis served with H.Q. Company, 2nd Battalion, 117th Infantry Regiment of the 30th Division.

Nicknamed "Old Hickory" after President Andrew Jackson, victor of the Battle of New Orleans in 1815, the Division was activated in September 1917 at Camp Sevier, South Carolina. It was originally composed of National Guard units from North and South Carolina, as well as Tennessee. As part of the American Expeditionary Forces in World War 1, the 30th distinguished itself in several major battles.

In July 1944 the Division spearheaded "Operation Cobra," a strategy devised by Gen. Omar Bradley and his First Army staff. The concept was to breach German lines using Allied air superiority and "carpet bomb" a select sector of the enemy front. This was done on 24-25 July but on both occasions many of the bombs fell on 30th Division positions, killing 153 men and wounding another 530. Nevertheless, elements of the Division regrouped and drove a wedge into the German front between the towns of St. Gilles and Marigny. This was exploited by Patton's Third Army, which moved into Brittany and onward into Brest.

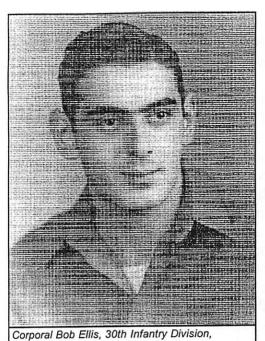
After 49 days of combat the Division got a much deserved rest. But they hardly had time to replace clothing, equipment and take a shower when word filtered down that the Germans were planning a counterattack. On 30 July the Division, bolstered by 800 replacements but still understrength, boarded trucks and left for the French town of Mortain. Ellis describes this community as quite small and nestled in a wooded highland region at the foot of a rocky hill. This hill, dubbed 317 after its height in meters, looked down on a road junction, which led to Avranches, a key target in Hitler's plan to smash the Allied advance.

Arriving in Mortain on 6 August 1944, the 30th had about four hours to become acquainted with their surroundings before Field Marshall von Kluge and his armored columns struck. Mortain was quickly overrun and hill 317 surrounded.

For the next five and a half days some 700 men of the 30th held off a series of German assaults on their hill, calling in friendly fire on their own positions when the enemy got too close. Because of their vantage point the GIs were also able to spot German activity throughout the area and direct artillery rounds on SS armor and supply lines with great effect.

On 9 August the Germans demanded the surrender of Hill 317. The Commander of E Company heard of the demand and issued a negative response that was terse, emphatic, and unprintable. The 30th fought on valiantly, refusing to give up a foot of ground even though they were short of ammo and had numerous casualties. Finally, at 1300 hours, 12 August they were relieved. The price for their defense was bloody. The 2nd Battalion 120th Infantry lost 277 men killed, captured, and missing in action.

In early October the 30th breached the famous Siegfried Line and at mid-month



had, with the help of the 1st Infantry Division, surrounded Aachen along the western German frontier. The Allied

U.S. Army (Ellis Family Collection)

push into Deutschland was interrupted by General Rundstedt's counteroffensive on 16 December 1944. This action was popularly christened "Battle of theBulge." Ellis and his unit were bivouacked in the German town of Hongen at the time when they were ordered to join a convoy and return to Belgium post haste. There they set up a defensive perimeter near the village of Roanne and eventually met up with their old adversaries, the 1st SS Panzer Division. The job of expelling the Germans was no easy task but the 30th managed it. Ellis, lugging a 40-pound radio pack, vividly remembers the deep snow, bitter cold, and tenacity of the SS resistance in the Ardennes Offensive.

In 1945 the 30th was back in Germany and in March of that year Ellis and his

unit crossed the Rhine River after a nightlong artillery barrage that softened up the enemy. For this trip Bob won the Bronze Star. By the end of World War II the 30th was stationed at Saafeld, Germany.

On March 16, 1946 Colonel S.L.A. Marshall, U.S. historian for the European Theater of Operations, wrote Major General Leland S. Hobbs, Commander of the 30th. In the matter of division presidential unit citations, Marshall said that he and 35 historical officers had picked Hobbs's division as the best of the best. "We feel that the 30th was the outstanding infantry division in the ETO," Marshall stressed. Corporal Bob Ellis has every reason to be proud of that statement. And we in turn have every reason to be proud of Bob.

GOLDNER WALSH TO SPRUCE UP PINE GROVE'S LANDSCAPE

By Fran Wilson

Goldner Walsh Nursery has offered to do a landscape plan for Pine Grove's grounds, which would incorporate landscape plantings that might have been here at the time of Moses Wisner and his family. Jim Slezinski, Vice President of GWN and landscape horticulturist, spent some time here in September looking over the grounds, old photos, and listening to our needs and ideas. He was inside the mansion with Charles Martinez when the blackout occurred on August 14th. They both thought that only a fuse had blown until they drove home.

This year Goldner Walsh Nursery is celebrating its 50th anniversary in the nursery business. In 1953, Al Goldner opened Goldner Walsh, Inc. on Telegraph and 12 Mile on a 7/8ths acre plot that today is the home of Wendy's restaurant. In 1980, Al purchased the property and buildings belonging to Pearce Floral Company, dating back to 1890, on Orchard Lake Road in Pontiac, and moved his business there. His



Original Location - Telegraph Road



Today's Location - Orchard Lake Road

wife, Jean (Walsh) Goldner, managed the flower shop initially, while Al renovated the greenhouses, primarily to house his orchid collection. He retired in 1988, when he sold the business to Tim Travis and Jim Slezinski, the present owners. Al still resides in Bloomfield Township and has an active interest in the world of horticulture.

Goldner Walsh Nursery is committed to a positive role in the community. In addition to beautifying the grounds and median of their property on Orchard Lake Road, they have contributed to projects within the city such as beautification of City Hall and designing and implementing a new community vegetable garden and children's playground garden for the Women's Survival Center in Pontiac. For these contributions, Tim Travis was presented with the 2002 Mayoral Tribute Award by Mayor Willie Payne. We are proud of them and happy that they are creating a historic landscape plan for us.

ANY LAST WORDS? Researching Your Dead Relatives

By Jo Pate

When you begin a family search your energy is devoted to collecting dates and places of birth, marriage and death of your ancestors. It doesn't take long to realize that these bones of your family are not enough. It is time to add some flesh - to make a real person. The best place to begin is to start at the end of their lives. Finding death information is challenging and often frustrating; however, everything you can gather will add another layer of flesh to your family.

The materials you should collect will be death certificates, obituaries, funeral home records, cemetery records, Bible records, memorial cards, diaries, family stories, etc.

Death certificates are the beginning. Be cautious, however, about the names of parents and places of residence often listed on certificates. Why? Your grandmother has just died and 15 minutes later a hospital attendant is asking you all sort of questions, such as: where was she born, what was her maiden name, what was her first name, what is her birth date, what are her parents' names? Your mind is full of her death so how can you possibly remember her name was "Minnie" when you can only think of "Grandma". Many certificates indicate names of parents as "unknown". This often means that you can't possibly think of the names at the time the question was asked, not that they are unknown. Death certificates are "official" but consider them one piece of evidence, not the entire story.

Obituaries are the prize in the crackerjack box. Occasionally you find a 11-inch column that lists every organization your grandma ever joined, every church, four generations of kinfolk, all schooling and every place of residence. All this information reminds you that she had a life other than being your grandmother. Start tracking down the information included in the obituary. Call or write the churches for any further information they have. Contact the organizations listed and see what material they have in their files.



The grim Reaper makes a house call. From Hans Holbein the Younger (1497-1543)

Case in point: a random search for a great-grandmother at the Oakland County Pioneer and Historical Society turned up an application for membership in that Society, since she lived in Detroit and Pontiac all of her life. That application listed her parents, date of arrival from Lincolnshire, England (1852), and, her maiden name. Grandma is starting to be a real person.

Newspaper death notices are handy to have and useful as a research tool. Today the name of the funeral home is given, if, indeed, there was a funeral.

Funeral Home records can be very helpful in your research. There is no standard for required information for funeral homes, each decides how much or how little it wants. One funeral home in the Oakland County area used copies of death certificates as their records; another used names, date of death, and place of burial. Then, there are the places such as Harper-Mulligan Funeral Home in Detroit (with half of their burials in Oakland County). The information on their early records includes names of parents and where they were born, names and places of residence for all siblings, attached copies of newspaper death notices, and notes if out-of-area newspapers were notified to copy the item. What connection did Grandma have with that other area of the country?

Funeral Memorial cards are useful. The name of presiding clergyman may indicate church affiliation. Suggested organization for donations may suggest a type of disease or illness that should be investigated. Was it genetic? Should you be concerned? Have others in your family had the same problem? If the organization for donations is a volunteer or charity group, did grandma receive aid or was she a volunteer?

Family stories are important parts of grandma's life. Too often at funerals, friends and family exchange stories. And how you wish you had known some of them while grandma was alive. These stories give a new dimension to the woman you knew as grandma. They can tell with love her mistakes, and share her disappointments with understanding. Record this information while it is still fresh in your mind, or better yet, make time to visit with those friends and family and taperecord these memories. These can be transcribed and shared with family, and also preserved with other memories. Grandma is becoming a real person.

Cemetery records can fill in more information about your family. Why was that particular cemetery chosen? Are there other family members there? Is there a family plot with other burials that you should know about? Is there a child's stone with only a single name? Who is this child?

Bibles and family records, including diaries, add the finishing touch to grandma's life. Additional family information in Bibles may help you go back another generation or so. Diaries may aid in making grandma's life real, and give you a taste for how she grew up and spent her days. What in the world did she do before television?

There is so much to learn about our parents and grandparents while they are still alive. Few of us have the opportunity to

know great-grandparents; but researching them, we may better understand our parents, and ultimately, ourselves.

Oakland County Pioneer and Historical Society has the following materials that may assist your with research:

- Death certificates are not available at our Society. They
 can be obtained at the Oakland County Court House.
 Some early death records from Oakland County, starting
 1867, are on microfilm and we hope to have them
 available soon.
- Obituaries and death notices for Oakland County persons are available at the Society Library.
- 1. May Rockwell Howlett Collection. Card files that are transcribed from newspapers, county records and additional sources. Can contain birth, marriage and death dates, family relationships and supplemental information. Alphabetical by surname.
- 2. Faye Donelson Obituary Files 1982 1998. Death notices clipped primarily from the Oakland Press and the Observer-Eccentric. Alphabetical by surname.
- 3. Society Notebooks 1893 1999. These contain obituaries from local newspapers. Indexed, but some scrapbooks cover many years, so are not inclusive.
- 4. Scrapbooks 1876 1945. OCPHS scrapbooks, as well as scrapbooks from donors. Many of them are indexed.
- 5. Obituaries and death notices. New scrapbooks are being created by years, 1995 2003.

Bound volumes of Oakland County Newspapers dating from 1830 to 1945 (not inclusive) are at the Society Library. If you know the date of death, we can look up an obituary in our volumes, but photocopies cannot be made because of the fragile condition of the books.

- Funeral Home Records
 - 1. Brace Funeral Home 1887 1951. Indexed. Being transcribed with new index, to preserve the original ledgers.
 - 2. Dusenbury Funeral Home
 - 3. Harper-Mulligan Funeral Home volumes 1 & 2. Detailed information about deceased and families; many burials in Oakland County. Good source of information about Cornish immigrants. Indexed. Other volumes to follow.
 - 4. Steinbaugh & Wessels Funeral Home 1836 1949. These are not in Society collection, but are accessible.

A listing of all funeral homes in Oakland County with addresses and phone numbers.

A considerable amount of information is available on churches in Oakland County. A publication about St. James's Episcopal Church of Birmingham, contains baptisms, marriages, and funerals, is new on our shelves.

There are many volumes of cemetery readings from most townships in the County.

Society Wins Two Grants Continued

Commerce and OCPHS board member said, "This grant is a wonderful example of what can happen when organizations work together for the benefit of the community."

In bestowing the Wilson Grant, Mr. Harry Hunter, Institutional Client advisor stated: "We extend our best wishes to you for continued success and look forward to hearing about your accomplishments during the year. The Lula C. Wilson Trust is pleased to contribute to such a worthwhile program." Society president Mike Willis replied that the Wilson Trust has been a valued benefactor to the Society for a generation. "We sincerely thank them for the continuing commitment."

Board of Directors 2003

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Administrative Changes at OCPHS

On August 11 President Mike Willis announced that Administrative Director, Jamie Karl, would be leaving the Society as of August 16, 2003. He said in a letter to the Board that "Jamie's talents would be sorely missed but her vision for moving the Society forward will continue. We thank Jamie for a job well done and wish her the best of success in the future".

In the interim, the Society's Executive Committee composed of Mike Willis, Charlie Martinez, Amy Annett, and Kathryn Daggy will be directing the Society's daily business activities. The Executive Committee will also be meeting on a weekly basis with key members of the Finance, Library, Membership, Maintenance and Grounds, and Tour Guide committees so that all major aspects of the organization are covered.

Board Meeting for November

All members at large are cordially invited to attend the Society's board meetings which are held in the Carriage House on the Pine Grove grounds beginning at 9:30 a.m. These meetings are scheduled alternately on the third Wednesday or Saturday during the months of February through November.

In January, the board meeting is replaced by the Annual Meeting usually held at an off campus site selected by the board of directors. No board meeting is normally held in December.

The November board meeting will convene in the Carriage House on Saturday, November 19, 2003.



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