

Vol. 50, No. 4

Dedicated to the history and heritage of Oakland County, Michigan

December 2017

THE OAKLAND COUNTY PIONEER AND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Email: [office@ocphs.org](mailto:office@ocphs.org)Web: [www.ocphs.org](http://www.ocphs.org)**PRESIDENT'S CORNER***Charlotte Cooper*

As our warm autumn changes into winter, we are reminded that "Change is Constant." Pine Grove has changed since the last issue of the *Gazette*!

*Accomplishments...* The summer kitchen was painted; tree trimmers took down one dead tree and pruned others; and the muskrat holes were plugged. The Pioneer

Museum, supply room, furnace room, and library were cleaned and organized. Joy Dockham's office and closet were reorganized, and she got a new title: Operations Manager. There is a new gift shop in the Carriage House, and an application for a Summer Social grant has been submitted.

*Volunteers...* Read about the GM Global Propulsion group's work on our campus in this issue. Students from Oakland University came twice and worked outside, cleaned the Pioneer Museum, scanned photos and documents, and began an inventory of the Wisner bookcase in the mansion. WWAM folks did landscape work in preparation for the Victorian Open House.

*Giving...* ***We are in the presence of History and we are in the presence of the Future.*** OCPHS/Pine Grove is self-sustaining, receiving no financial support from any government entity, and we hope that you'll consider a tax-deductible end-of-year donation. Our website, [www.ocphs.org](http://www.ocphs.org), offers several options for giving online. You will receive our undying gratitude, and you'll know that you have helped to sustain and advance the programs of Pine Grove.

*Members...* Historic records in our archives from the 1940's revealed a tradition of OCPHS members making smart and caring decisions regarding preservation and dissemination of the history associated with Pine Grove. The tradition continues 70 years later. We could accomplish nothing without our members who volunteer their time and talent.

Warm holiday greetings to all! - Charlotte

**SERVICE TEAM SPRUCES UP PINE GROVE**

On October 6, a volunteer group from General Motors Global Propulsion Systems (formerly GM Powertrain) completed four projects at Pine Grove. The team deals primarily with safety issues and furnished all materials and labor.

- \*The sign at the driveway entrance was raised so it can now be seen when approaching Pine Grove from the north.
- \*The handicap ramp behind the schoolhouse was made safer. Due to the rainy day it was not painted; this is a goal for the spring.
- \*Shelves and hooks were added in the storage sheds for better organization.
- \*The entry of the Carriage House was painted; a new light fixture was installed; and the carpet and threshold strip were replaced.

We hope to continue a partnership with these folks that are doing so much for our community as part of the "Healthy Pontiac" initiative!



(Photo courtesy of Charlotte Cooper)

#### **4TH ANNUAL DINNER AUCTION ANOTHER "GRANDE" SUCCESS!**

Our "Grande Night to Remember - Black and White Bash" at the Lafayette Grande on October 7 was a delightful event! Our guests looked festive in black and white attire, and close to \$4,000 was raised in support of OCPHS. To all who attended, volunteered, donated, bid, and enjoyed the evening...thank you!!!



(Photos courtesy of Wesleyann Johnson)



#### **THANK YOU TO OUR "GRANDE" SPONSORS AND FRIENDS!**

***Ms. Eddie Delbridge  
Mr. & Mrs. Bo & Maureen Young  
Mr. Rodger Zeller  
Carl's Golfand (Bloomfield Hills)  
Erebus Haunted Attraction (Pontiac)  
Fillmore 13 Brewery (Pontiac)  
Goldner Walsh Garden & Home (Pontiac)  
Henk Studio/Kathie Henk (Pontiac)  
Professional Instant Printing (Waterford)  
Strand Theatre (Pontiac)  
Slow's BarBQ (Pontiac)***



## THE HAUNTED MANSION AT PINE GROVE

*Barbara Frye, Haunt Instigator &  
Wandering Spirit*

This year's version of the Haunted Mansion was only one evening unlike the first, which lasted four weekends through the month of October 2015. This Haunt featured a family reunion of the spirits of the Wisner Family, coming back to share their memories of a beloved home. Eliza and Baby Helen greeted guests in the Gift Shop, and Judge Charles Wisner (known to the family as Chip) showed off his watercolors in the Dining Room. Alpheus Clark (Jessie's husband) told stories in the Family Room while Moses (the Governor) and his wife (Angeolina) held sway in the Formal Parlor. An Itinerant Preacher was the guest in an upstairs bedroom and Florence Wallace ushered our guests out of the mansion and over to the schoolhouse for light refreshments. An Undertaker, a skeletal horse, and a Grave Digger greeted patrons on the short walk past our tiny cemetery to the school. What a lovely Haunt; everyone enjoyed themselves, spirits and guests alike!

We had a dedicated crew of 25 volunteers who worked very hard in a short period of time to research, decorate, develop their stories, and plan for this event. They are to be commended for a job well done.

Cast (in order of appearance):

- \*Eliza - Jane Karaguleff
- \*Chip - Terry Currin
- \*Alpheus - Bruce Toncray
- \*Moses - Brian Golden
- \*Angeolina - Diane Clark
- \*Preacher - Nik Karaguleff
- \*Florence - Debra Jackson-Dechert
- \*Undertaker - Fred Liimatta
- \*Grave Digger - Joe Alessi

Support Crew: Laurie Bishop, Nancy Calendine, Charlotte Cooper, Sara Cote, Joy Dockham, Nancy Duffield, Barb & Judy Hudalla, Ann Johnson, Bobbie Kolbe, Ray Lucas, Debi Parrott, Pamela Richards, Pam Schmaltz, Kari Vaughan, & Rodger Zeller

After all was said and done, we can call it good and look forward to the next "Family Reunion!"



*(Photo credit: Unknown)*

### **DID YOU KNOW...**



**...that OCPHS has a bargain book shelf?**

**The new Corner Store (located in the Carriage House) is a unique space to find a book at a rock-bottom price.**

**It is called "One Shelf-One Book-One Dollar." Each and every book on this shelf costs only \$1.00! Selections include hardcover, paperback,**

**mysteries, love stories, biographies, histories, poetry, political – some old, some new – and anything else you can think of. You choose your book and place a dollar in the dish provided. All books are donated and can be purchased, read and re-donated or discarded as you wish. It looks like a long, cold winter ahead, so stock up on your pleasure reading for the season. The Carriage House is open Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, 11-4, every week.**

**Stop in and stock up!**

**- Jo Pate, volunteer**

## **A WISNER MANSION MYSTERY!**

***Dave Decker, Board Member***

In September of this year, a fellow Board member expressed concern that the stairway in the Wisner House entry hall was pulling away from the wall. This was alarming news, to say the least. If true, this would suggest that our parlor was collapsing, perhaps into a dark hole in the ground. It was so alarming that an excursion was immediately undertaken to determine its factitude. Participating in this expedition into the deep underground realm of the house were several Board members, an architectural historian, and at least two measuring tapes. A bottle of water and granola bar for sustenance (and in case of emergency) were also included.

The results of this exploratory endeavor were quite satisfying. Our stairway will outlive us all, including the house itself. Questions were raised, however, about the skill of the bricklayers who built that wall...one assumes they used a loose rope as a straight edge. That wall has more waves in it than Lake Erie in the fall. Our stairway sits quite naturally with a gap between itself and the wall, meant to accommodate this abomination of brickwork that we call a "parlor wall." So that's that.

But here's the question – why is there a brick wall in that location in the first place? It's an interior wall. Or is it? Was this the northern wall of the house at one time? Who caused this? Why are we here? As conversation about these issues swirled around us, the granola bar was eaten in a moment of panic and we resolved to answer these burning questions.

Since more information was needed about the construction sequence of the house itself, we engaged our research librarians. They flew into action and, after some weeks and a flurry of paper floating everywhere, managed to locate a dusty binder in a file cabinet (bottom drawer, way in the back) labeled "CAP Survey." The Conservation and Preservation (CAP) Survey was undertaken in 2002 by an architectural firm of some note. Its goal was to ascertain the condition of Pine Grove's historic structures and recommend preservation methods and repairs to protect our fine buildings. It appears that a number of its recommendations were quickly adopted, which our mansion and schoolhouse benefit from to this day.

A primary goal of the CAP Survey was quite specific – ascertain and document the construction sequence of the house. The results of this investigation were, coincidentally, exactly what we were looking for, once we determined that our stairway was as solid as Giza.

But first, some history. We know that Moses Wisner purchased 28 acres (of which 5 remain) of land from Joshua Terry in 1844, for which he paid \$1,000. This equates to about \$31,000 in today's dollars. We know from other land transactions of the same period that one acre of unimproved land sold for about \$2.50 per acre; at that amount, the property without any improvements would have cost Wisner about \$71.00. That's about \$79.00 per acre, or \$2,200 total, in today's dollars. Either Wisner made an incredibly bad deal - with Joshua Terry standing in the background rubbing his hands together with glee – or there was something special about this particular piece of ground.

We choose to believe the latter. The property was improved; it had buildings. More specifically, a house and possibly other structures. But most importantly, there had to be a house here. Wait! There's more! We also know from a title transaction that Wisner made a deal with Solon Comstock in June of 1845 to "do for Moses Wisner...on or before the first

day of April next Six hundred and fifty dollars of Carpenter and Joiners work where ever said Wisner may elect in the Township of Pontiac...(enough of said work to be done this Season to enclose whatever brick house said Wisner may build this Season in said town as the masons progress with the work)"...The gentlemen were trading land and cash for the work Comstock was to perform at Wisner's fancy, new, as yet unfinished house.

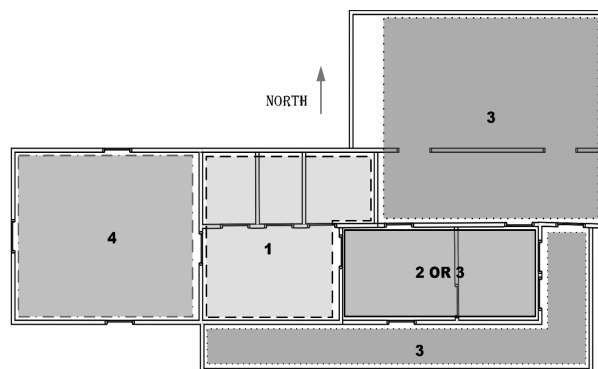
And now we address the CAP Survey and the physical evidence. As anyone with a historic home knows, the story of a house is found in its basement. This house's basement is odd, to say the least. There is a fieldstone foundation, but it only supports the center section of the house, not the parlor and not the western wing (our Gift Shop). There are brick foundation walls that segment the basement in unusual ways. There is a plaster and lath ceiling in one section. There are brick walls in front of the fieldstone foundation walls. Other mysteries: The fieldstone foundations are capped with several courses of brick – in some places as many as 11 courses – raising the level of the basement ceiling and house. The floor joists are dimensionally accurate and all saw-cut; a two by six is actually two inches by six inches. There are no hand-hewn wooden beams, and where they would be, a brick wall stands to ceiling height.

These are not unusual construction techniques for the 1840's, and they point to Wisner's goal of building a very fine house.

There is a traditional story told by some within OCPHS that the Gift Shop/Kitchen wing was built first, that it's the house that Joshua Terry built. It's an old story; we even have chronologies written by volunteers from many years ago that describe the kitchen wing as being the first structure on the property. But evidence points to it being built LAST. Until some document is unearthed that can give us precise information, we will never know the exact timing of the construction, but it was all done within a 10-15 year span.

The Wisners were in a hurry.

What's clear is that Moses and Angeolina Wisner dramatically remodeled a house and made it a wonderful home for themselves and their family. It was a place to entertain important people, run the state, and live. What Wisner intended to do with it after he returned from war will always be a mystery. But there was a reason there's an elaborate drain system under the front lawn, described as brick tunnels with arched roofs. There was a reason the builders decided not to put a full basement under the parlor wing. There's even a suggestion in Florence Wallace's writings that Wisner wanted to tear down the kitchen wing. Was he intending a much grander building? Was his goal to make Pine Grove even finer than before the war? We will never know. But it's fun to imagine the possibilities.



*Construction sequence sketch of Wisner Mansion*

## **VICTORIAN OPEN HOUSE 2017**

***Kathy Davis, Chairman***

What a beautiful day for this event! I appreciate all the help from our great volunteers! The securing of sponsorships has put OCPHS in a positive financial place on the year-end budget.

The House Committee (consisting of Sue Grifor, Sherrie Morgan, Adrian Rawls, Priscilla Shelton, Anne Liimatta, Angela Rawls and myself) cleaned, decorated, and organized the mansion. Nancy Duffield and Jo Pate adorned the mannequins in beautiful period dresses. Kathie Henk presented exquisite floral arrangements for the Hallway, Office, Family Room and Formal Parlor and a large centerpiece for the Dining Room table.

The Summer Kitchen was polished up and decorated by Janet and Ronald McAlpine. Their daughter Ronda, her husband William Speiser, and granddaughter Victoria came from Ohio to help. Janet, Ronda and Victoria greeted guests in the Summer Kitchen with special tasty treats. Ron McAlpine and William Speiser were docents in the downstairs hallway of the house.

Dale Kath shared his personal story of his childhood experiences at the Wisner home until the age of 6 while greeting guests in the Office. The Dining Room was attended by Sue Grifor. Sue created many displays throughout the house and brought several versions of the book "The Night Before Christmas" to show in the Green Room along with children's items.

Sue also did displays for the WWI exhibit in the schoolhouse.

Sherrie Morgan greeted guests in the Family Room until Musica Royale began their performance. In the Formal Parlor, Rodger Zeller spoke and pianist Dan Delmastro played Christmas songs. The Military Room had our Civil War expert, Larry Hathcock, on hand to answer questions.

In the upstairs hallway Ann Johnson, the great-great-niece of Moses Wisner, greeted visitors and shared her family stories. Ann donated the items for the "12 Days of Christmas Silent Auction" held in the Carriage House.

Our clothing experts, Joan Hayes and Nancy Duffield, explained the items in the Back Bedroom. Patty Malloy, daughter of Tom and Mary Connell, was stationed in the Wisner Bedroom. Mary and Tom were celebrating their 60<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary and could not attend! Later, Dwight Keith greeted guests in the Wisner Bedroom. The Toy Room featured a display of christening gowns that Jo Pate and Nancy Duffield prepared for showing.

In the Gift Shop, Barb Hudalla organized, cleaned, and very professionally displayed a variety of items to entice guests to make a purchase. Her friendly

personality promoted memberships and few people entered the house without a bag from the Gift Shop!

In the Schoolhouse, John Scholl explained the WWI display, which he helped organize. Santa Claus, portrayed by Bo Young, visited with our little guests and gave out coloring books made by Barbara Frye and stuffed animals donated by Linda Porter.

The Carriage House was filled with tasty cookies and hot cocoa served with smiles by Sara Cote and Claire Pryor. Nelson Haynes and Ray Lucas shared their vast knowledge of the various farm artifacts in the Pioneer Museum.

The gate keeper team consisted of Kari Vaughan, Skip Upcott, Gerald Hoopfer, Joy Dockham and Barbara Frye. They kept warm with a heater but enjoyed the mild weather. The parking lot was supervised by Fred Liimatta and crew. Fred also hung the greens on the mansion (donated by Charlotte Cooper) while Barbara Frye supervised. Bill Clink and crew helped where needed outside. Charlotte Cooper and Ann Johnson put the final touches of red ribbon on the mansion's pillars. Charlotte and Ann also oversaw OCPHS' float in Pontiac's holiday parade the previous day. We enjoyed a collaboration with the Troy Historical Society.

VOH co-chair Barbara Frye took care of all graphic design and a lot of behind the scenes work to make this a very smooth, timely and extremely successful event. She labeled pictures and paintings in the house for our guests' enlightenment. A special thanks to Barb for overseeing last-minute details to ensure success!

### **Individual Sponsors:**

Joyce Scafe  
Bruce & Amy Annett  
Ann Johnson  
E. R. (Skip) Upcott  
Ray Lucas  
Reida Gardiner  
Lori Miller & Curt Snyder  
Andrew Berry D.O.

Fred & Anne Liimatta  
Charlotte Cooper  
Pat Kaltwasser  
Bo & Maureen Young  
Rodger Zeller  
Margaret Ann Jackson  
Marion Steeber  
Linda Porter



### **We Remember:**

*In Honor of: Gale and Connie Scafe ~ by Joyce Scafe*  
*In Honor of the Jacques, Thompson, Asher, & Bieri Families ~ by Mr. & Mrs. Ronald P. Bieri & Kathleen LaBrosse*  
*In Memory of Bernice Matheis ~ by Ken Matheis*  
*In Memory of Margaret Wilmot ~ by Claire Pryor*  
*In Memory of Miriam Foxman ~ by Susan Williams*  
*In Memory of Samuel C. Parker ~ by Catherine Jo Dixon*  
*In Memory of Janine Saputo ~ by Colleen Barkham*  
*In Memory of Mike Willis ~ by Joan Hayes*

**~ 12 Days of Christmas Silent Auction Fundraiser ~**  
Items on display in the Carriage House  
Auction bids taken from 1 pm to 3 pm - winners announced at 3:15 pm



OCPHS Float  
Sponsored by:  
Charlotte Cooper  
& Ann Johnson



2017 VOH

### **Our Business Sponsors:**

Complete Automation, Inc. - Lake Orion  
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Genisys Credit Union - Pontiac  
The Henk Studio Inc. - Pontiac  
Vintage Press - Pontiac  
Frye Photo - Pontiac  
Nelco - Pontiac  
Professional Instant Printing - Waterford

OCPHS is pleased to welcome the following new members who have joined since our last publication:

Michael Klockow  
Benjamin Anderson & Portia Fields-Anderson  
Victoria McGuinness  
Mary Whitmire  
Pamela Brett  
John & Louise Reece  
Geoffrey Leach  
Mona Parlove  
David Porath & Renee Voit-Porath  
Gregory Kosch, Jr.  
Janis Decker  
Joan Cooper  
Mike & Vesta DeRiso  
Lois Seddon

#### **IN REMEMBRANCE**



**Our deepest sympathies to member Reida Gardiner who lost her husband, George Gardiner, on September 22 at the age of 84. George attended Tufts University, graduated from Fisk University in Nashville and received his Master's Degree and Certificate of Advanced Study from the University of Chicago. He also served in the Korean War.**

**George was a librarian for over 40 years and ultimately became dean of Kresge Library, Oakland University, retiring in 2000. He was a member and Assistant Executive Secretary of the American Library Association (Library Administrative Division) and founded the publication *The National Librarian*. His personal passions included his extensive Black-American literature collection, editing, poetry, cooking, genealogy, tennis, photography, gardening, and spending time with his granddaughter.**

*(Photo courtesy of The Oakland Press)*

#### **Membership and Donation Form**

Name:

Address:

City/State/Zip:

Phone:

Email:

Send my *Gazette* via: ☐ U.S. Mail ☐ Email  
(Please add \$5 to cover cost of printing and postage if sending via U.S. Mail)

**Please Make Me a Member!** (indicate level):

- ☐ \$15 Student
- ☐ \$20 Individual
- ☐ \$20 Non-Profit Organization
- ☐ \$35 Family (two adults & minor children)
- ☐ \$100 Patron
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- ☐ \$500 Friends
- ☐ \$500 Corporate Sponsor
- ☐ \$Gift Membership (provide recipient's name & contact info):

**Please Accept My Donation!** (indicate preference):

- ☐ \$ Annual Giving (general operating costs)
- ☐ \$ Fill In the Gap (expanding hours & services)
- ☐ \$ Preservation (historic buildings & contents)
- ☐ \$ Where Needed or Other (specify):
- ☐ \$ In Memory of / Honor of (provide name):

**What Prompted Your Support?** (check all that apply):

- ☐ Interest in Oakland County History
- ☐ Invited/Introduced by Member/Friend
- ☐ Received Copy of *Gazette*
- ☐ Attended Event or Tour
- ☐ Research Library / Archives
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- ☐ Website / Facebook
- ☐ Other (specify):

Mail this form with check payable to OCPHS to:

**Oakland County Pioneer & Historical Society  
405 Cesar E. Chavez Avenue  
Pontiac, MI 48342**

For your convenience you may also join or donate online at [www.ocphs.org](http://www.ocphs.org). Thank you for your support!

We are a 501(c)(3) organization  
Donations are tax deductible in accordance with applicable law

## FROM THE GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT TEAM

*Bill Clink, Co-Chair*

It's been a busy year at OCPHS and we are pleased to report that, in spite of schedule conflicts, good deeds are being done in the world of history. Once again the Growth & Development Team hosted a successful fall auction event. We had a delightful crowd of black and white costumed characters supporting history through their procurement of many interesting and fascinating items. All who attended said they had a lovely time and look forward to our next auction event.

Our Victorian Open House once again had a great showing of guests along with lovely weather perfect for strolling the grounds and viewing the Wisner Mansion. The only downside was that Santa Claus had to leave the sleigh and reindeer at home on account of lack of snow.

It was a treat to be joined by the Troy Historical Museum for Pontiac's Holiday Extravaganza parade. They dressed in costume and carried their organization's banner. We were so impressed by their enthusiasm and team spirit that Dave Decker and I stopped by their facility to express heartfelt thanks for their participation and support.

As 2017 comes to an end, we once again encourage you to remember us during your holiday giving. Your contribution could be that little bit extra that puts us over the top for this year. Our leadership has worked hard fixing up the campus and taking care of the buildings. Your support is always a big help and truly appreciated. Have a great holiday and we look forward to seeing you in 2018!

## WE LOVE OUR VISITORS!

**Recent visitors to Pine Grove are finding the Wisner Mansion well staged and clean. They express appreciation for tour presentations, which have covered various topics. Above all, they are amazed and impressed that our Mansion, its furnishings, our collections and our history are THE REAL DEAL. Here are some of the groups we proudly hosted this fall; let's plan to host YOUR group in 2018!**

**\*Members of a local Presbyterian Church**

**\*National Societies, Sons and Daughters of Union Veterans**

**\*Students from Oakland University**

**\*Officials from the Rochester Museum at Van Hoosen Farm**

## MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

We look forward to seeing you at these upcoming events...

**Sunday, January 21 -  
"Picnic in the Cemetery"  
(Mini Lecture Series)**

*Presented by Bill Grandstaff*  
2:00 pm / Admission \$7

**Sunday, February 18 -  
"History of Pop-Up Books"  
(Mini Lecture Series)**

*Presented by Maureen Young*  
2:00 pm / Admission \$7

**Sunday, March 18 -  
"Native American Lore"  
(Mini Lecture Series)**

*Presented by Dwight Keith*  
2:00 pm / Admission \$7

**Sunday, April 22 -  
"Captain Furlong in World War I"  
(Mini Lecture Series)**

*Presented by Larry Hathcock*  
2:00 pm / Admission \$7

## **OCPHS Officers and Board of Directors**

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Linda Porter



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**IT TAKES A VILLAGE...**



Volunteer Ray Lucas rakes leaves and black walnuts on the Pine Grove campus.  
*(Photo courtesy of Charlotte Cooper)*

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Submissions, content suggestions or comments are  
welcome.

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Editor: Kari Vaughan

Contributors: Bill Clink, Charlotte Cooper, Kathy Davis, Dave  
Decker, Barbara Frye, Jo Pate, Kari Vaughan

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Board members Charlotte Cooper and Ann Johnson create a festive atmosphere.  
*(Photo courtesy of Barbara Frye)*