



Vol. 52, No. 2

Dedicated to the history and heritage of Oakland County, Michigan
THE OAKLAND COUNTY PIONEER AND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

June 2019

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Charlotte Cooper



This summer will bring warm sunshine, our annual Social, and big changes to Pine Grove. At our June meeting, the Board of Directors voted to hire Michael McGuinness as Executive Director with a trial period of six months. Joy Dockham has resigned from her position as Office Manager to pursue her dream of starting a non-

profit. We will miss this lovely lady who has kept her composure through many upheavals during the past two and a half years. We wish her much luck with her new adventures, and expect to see her back as a volunteer!

OCPHS has not had an Executive Director in many years. We are fortunate to have the opportunity to hire Michael to fill the position. His resume and experience are outstanding, and his passion and plans for the Society are exciting.

This month's Board meeting also saw the election of officers for the next twelve months: Charlotte Cooper, president; Sara Cote, first vice president; Rodger Zeller, second vice president; Kathy Davis, secretary; and Bill Grandstaff, treasurer. All look forward to serving the Society for another year.

Warm regards, *Charlotte*

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR OUR ANNUAL SUMMER EVENT!

Rodger Zeller, Summer Social Committee Chair

Mark your calendar for Saturday, July 27! This year we are preparing to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the beginning of Oakland County and are emphasizing our pioneer roots by calling our annual summer social the "Pioneer Reunion & Social." The summer social is our major community outreach event. We need to let Oakland County residents know we are here and ready to help them find their family's roots. So, let's help by supporting our annual summer social!

We need volunteers to step up and commit to specific tasks. We have had a reasonably good return of the solicitation letters, but most have been for sponsorships only. We also need the support of local business sponsorships; we typically solicit these via personal contact. There are business packets available in the office or by email.

See our flyer for the Pioneer Reunion & Social below! Info is also posted on Facebook and our website. If you need a web-ready copy to email to a friend, please request one from our office. Thank you for your support!

PIONEER REUNION & SOCIAL

Saturday
July 27, 2019
11 AM to 5 PM
Pine Grove Historical Museum
405 Cesar Chavez Avenue, Pontiac Michigan

GENISYS CREDIT UNION

Blue Star Museum

★ Fun for the Whole Family! ★
 ★ Tours of the Wisner Mansion ★
 ★ Historical Speakers in the Gazebo ★
 ★ Local Musical Entertainment ★
 ★ Oakland County Parks & Recreation's Retro Games ★
 ★ DIA Drop in Workshop ★
 ★ Children's Activities in the School House ★
 ★ Gift Shop is open for your shopping pleasure ★
 ★ Old Time Craft Show ★
 Free Admission includes Ice Cream & Cake!
 ★★ FREE secure parking on site ★★

All proceeds benefit
The Oakland County Pioneer & Historical Society
The Pine Grove Historical Museum
★ a Michigan 501(c)(3) non-profit organization ★
(248) 338-6732 - www.ocphs.org - office@ocphs.org

Headquarters of the
Oakland County Pioneer and Historical Society

THE STORY OF THE CHALLENGE COIN

John Scholl

In the modern era of warfare, the Challenge Coin was first used during World War One. Before the entry of the United States into the war in 1917, volunteers from all parts of the country came to fill the newly formed flying squadrons. Some were wealthy scions attending colleges such as Yale and Harvard who quit mid-term to join the war. In one squadron, a rich lieutenant ordered medallions struck in solid bronze and presented them to his unit. One young pilot placed his medallion in a small leather pouch that he wore about his neck. Shortly after acquiring the medallion, the pilot's plane was severely damaged by ground fire and was forced to land behind enemy lines. He was immediately captured by a German patrol. In order to discourage his escape, the Germans confiscated all of his personal identification except for the tiny pouch around his neck. He was taken to a small French town near the front. That night the pilot escaped, taking advantage of a bombardment. He succeeded in avoiding detection by donning civilian attire. With great difficulty, he crossed no man's land and eventually stumbled onto a French outpost. Saboteurs had plagued the French in this sector; they sometimes masqueraded as civilians. Not recognizing the young pilot's American accent, the French thought him to be a saboteur and made ready to execute him. He had no identification to prove his allegiance...but he did have the leather pouch containing the medallion. He presented it to his would-be captors and one of the Frenchmen recognized the medallion. Execution was delayed long enough to confirm the pilot's identity. While waiting, they gave him a bottle of wine.

Back at the squadron, it was subsequently ensured that all the pilots carried their medallions at all times. This was accomplished in the following manner: A challenger would ask to see the medallion. If the



challenged could not produce his medallion, they were required to buy the challenger his drink of choice. The tradition continued throughout the war and for years afterward, and the medallion is referred to today as a "Challenge Coin."

The above Challenge Coin, along with a Certificate of Excellence, was presented to OCPHS this past December by the Michigan World War One Centennial Commission. Photo courtesy of John Scholl.

LIBRARY UPDATE

Terry Currin

Librarian Terry Currin is currently going through all of the "Small Manuscript" files. These files contain a fascinating assortment of letters, documents, etc. that have been donated over the years. When completed later this summer, a summary of each file will be added to our PastPerfect computer program, joining the books from our library that were entered last year. This should make it easier to search for the literature we have collected over the last 150 years! If you would like a tutorial on how to use the PastPerfect program, please contact Terry via email at thecurrins@yahoo.com

OUT OF TOWN VISITOR

Barbara Frye

One of the most gratifying endeavors of OCPHS is being able to help descendants of Oakland County pioneers discover their roots. The library research crew receives requests on a regular basis to fill in the voids for people's family history from near and far. Just last week a lady from Olympia, Washington, called to find the burial place of a deceased cousin. We found him and she was delighted. She plans to photograph his grave, now that she knows where it is, when she visits Michigan, and take the photo to his sister who is 101 years of age!

Back in January we were contacted by James C. Parke asking if he could come to OCPHS to do some research on his ancestors, Joseph McConnell and Hervey Parke. He planned to come up in the spring from his home in Greenville, South Carolina, to visit his sister in Grosse Point. He is in the process of writing an historical novella about his family and wanted to see where they had lived. Did we have anything of interest? We said absolutely!

After many emails back and forth, Jim's appointment to visit Pine Grove was set for Wednesday, April 24, at 11 AM. When he arrived, Dave Decker gave Jim a tour through the Mansion, paying special attention to the portraits of Hervey & Mercy Parke and Hervey's compass. Ray Lucas pulled out volumes and maps that Jim eagerly pored over to fill in the gaps in his story. As it was a beautiful day, I took Jim on a whirlwind tour of Pontiac. He was

especially interested in the old McConnell house on Auburn Avenue, as this is the setting for his novella.

We started our tour downtown at the corner of Pike & Saginaw, the site of the Hotel Hodges, as we traced the path his protagonist would have trod to get to the McConnell's home on Church Street. We stopped at the American Legion Hall, taking many photos and discussing the "improvements" made to the original architecture over the years. We followed the course of the Clinton River from its plunge into the tunnels to Oak Hill Cemetery, where we visited the Parke/McConnell family plot. Finally I took Jim to the beginning of what had been Parke Street and followed that route back to Pine Grove. Jim was on the street named for his ancestor; he was elated!

In the course of our research and discussions, we learned that Jim is a great-great-grandson of Captain Hervey Parke's brother Dr. Ezra Smith Parke (both brothers were residents of Pontiac and are buried in Oak Hill). Ezra's son Hervey Coke Parke was the co-founder of the Parke Davis Pharmaceutical Company. Jim is related to Joseph McConnell through Capt. Parke's daughter Cleantha B. Parke McConnell, Joseph's mother (I think we need a chart!)

This is what our Society is about! Jim is now a member of OCPHS and promises to keep us updated about his writing exploits. In closing, Jim is still searching for something called the "Memoirs of Cleantha Park McConnell" to complete his research. If you have any knowledge of it, please let us know!



*Jim Parke at the gravesite of Capt. Hervey Parke in Oak Hill Cemetery.
Photo courtesy of Barbara Frye.*

2019 PONTIAC ARTS CRAWL

Barbara Frye



For a second year running, Mike McGuinness and Renee Voit-Porath spearheaded a grassroots event in downtown Pontiac to highlight local artists and culture. OCPHS was once again invited to participate in this hugely popular one-night explosion of local talent. Initially our part was to coordinate a *Flashback Photography Exhibit* that turned into *Postcards from the Past*, courtesy of Geoff Brieger's postcard collection. Super-sized postcards graced every vacant window along the Saginaw corridor to the delight of the more than 5,000 attendees walking the streets that Friday evening. OCPHS also had two window exhibits at 25 N. Saginaw, the old Enggass Jewelry store. One window featured "womanikins" dressed as they might be for the Suffrage movement of 1919, which will be the topic for the Annual Oak Hill Cemetery Walk on September 22 of this year. The second window was all about Pine Grove, featuring the photography of Barbara Frye and a photo collage from the Robinson-Frye Collection of downtown Pontiac in the 1920's and 30's. Several views of the old Oakland County Courthouses were also displayed.

The Arts Crawl occurs the first weekend in May on Friday evening from 5-10 PM. All planning and implementation is achieved by local volunteers. Large banners sponsored by local businesses help advertise the event to surrounding communities. The entertainment features local musicians, artists, vendors and street performers. Two notable features this year were Ron Finch with his giant motorcycle and Pewabic Pottery producing raku pottery in the street. OCPHS is grateful to be included in this worthwhile community movement. See you next year!



*The window displays at 25 N. Saginaw.
Images courtesy of Barbara Frye.*

THOMAS TURK – PIONEER PONTIAC
MERCHANT 1820-1896
Gottfried Brieger

In the last couple of years the Society acquired an unusual collection: 20 large ledgers dating from 1864-1904, and one from 1914. These ledgers consist of invoices compiled, initially, by the Pontiac merchant Thomas Turk, and then his sons William G. and Gregory B. Turk. According to Bruce Annett, they contain thousands of beautiful invoices and trade cards that of themselves have significant value as art objects and to collectors of paper goods. Items purchased from various suppliers were then retailed in the Turk store, a general store that sold a massive variety of goods to Oakland County citizens. Turk purchased all manner of hardware, cooking utensils, hunting, farming, building, and household items to sell. The invoices for these goods illustrate the wide range of items required by a largely agricultural community that, at least initially, was situated at the edge of the wilderness. This is a brief account of the founder of this substantial business.

Thomas Turk was born in Bramhill, England, in 1820, and came to this country and Pontiac in 1837, apparently by himself. He initially became a farm worker, but by 1839 had joined a survey party headed for the Grand Traverse Bay area. In the process, he also assisted in the construction of the first log house, a mission, between Mackinaw and Manistee, which became known as the "Old Mission." In the spring of 1840, he joined another surveying party to Thunder Bay and Alpena. There were virtually no settlements in these regions at the time and the going was not easy.



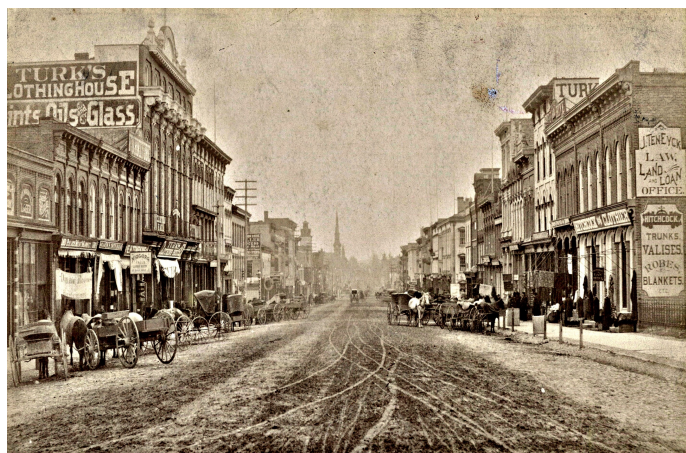
Mrs. THOMAS TURK.



THOMAS TURK.

By 1842, Thomas returned to his native England and found a spouse, Maria Gregory, whom he married in March of 1844. That year, the couple returned to Pontiac stocked with \$300 worth of merchandise and commenced business. Unfortunately, 1844 was also the year of a disastrous fire in Pontiac which consumed most of the city's wooden buildings. Not surprisingly, Thomas engaged in construction labor in addition to

his grocery business and over the next thirty years he built at least 22 buildings and dwellings in the city. He was highly regarded for his strict business methods and great integrity. The couple had six surviving children, and by 1875 he had turned over his business to his three sons, Thomas H., William, and Gregory. He was a long-time Mason and the couple traveled back to their native land nine times.



Looking south on Saginaw Street from Huron Street, circa 1880. Store located at 47 N. Saginaw St.

His grandson, Arthur Pound, visited the main store as a boy, and gives a humorous description, of which the following is an extract. By the time Arthur visited, his uncles William and Gregory had taken over the business. "...What had been a progressive enterprise in the ante-bellum days, became, toward the end, rather more of a curiosity than a business.

While merchandise shifted rapidly toward color, packages, electricity, and quick service, Turk Brothers changed not at all...The southerly show window, for years on end, held bunches of bananas as permanent fixtures. A bunch of bananas entered the window in the green flush of youth, ripened into yellow beauty, and then declined to a black and shriveled old age...Turk Brothers believed in a place for everything and every thing in its place...The candy counter, mostly stick candy, gum drops, peppermints in jars, and cream candies in open wooden pails, stood just across the way from the hand-powered freight elevator...I was often rushed off to Turk Brothers for supplies. The store exuded delicious, exotic odors for the nostrils of youth. I met this ambrosial compound of smells head-on, and charged through to the big red coffee grinder operated by Mr. Langendorph or Mr. Lane. If either worthy was in the mood to oblige, a small boy was permitted to grip the handle on its last rounds and let the great wheel carry his feet off the floor and through a full circle. Ecstasy! Ecstasy!...If Mr. Voorheis happened to be slicing cheese, a morsel always seemed to stick to the knife stuck in my direction, while he looked piously in the other direction...Beyond the stove at midstore we boys were not supposed to venture because of the

bar...its very presence was a fly in the otherwise smooth ointment of Turk family relations. Later liquor dealers fell under ban of public opinion so complete that only the Common Council was open to them. I recall one year that seven out of ten aldermen were saloon keepers. Turk Brothers took no interest in politics and little interest in liquor..." Thus reflected Arthur Pound, grandson of Thomas Turk, in an autobiographical sketch.

Thomas Turk died in 1896, and is buried in Oak Hill Cemetery. He is described, in the words of the *History of Oakland County*, "As a business man he has been eminently successful in the manifold transactions of a period of over thirty years, and is well known and thoroughly appreciated and respected by many friends and the public generally as an upright, honorable gentleman and worthy citizen."

(Images courtesy of Geoff Brieger)

CURIOSITIES FROM OUR COLLECTIONS

Barbara Frye

Recently a small leather-bound Bible resurfaced at Pine Grove. Who was its owner? Why is it here? Did it belong to someone famous? Curious!

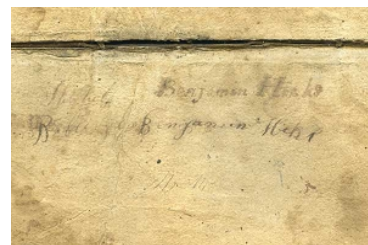
Inside the front cover was the signature of Benjamin Hicks. Not a lot to go on without dates or place of origin. Where do we start? Do we have a genealogy for the Hicks family? Not on our shelves. Do we have a small manuscript? No, nothing there either. Is there anything else in this Bible? YES! On the reverse of the second cover page for the New Testament there is a list of names and birth dates, a father's name and children. This gives us a place to start. The logical place to look for them would be in the 1850 US Census, but Benjamin Hicks is not listed in the regular Census; rather, he appears in the 1850 Agricultural Census. Tiny clues...we keep digging...

When researching a family you know nothing about, you have to follow those tiny clues to see where they lead; unfortunately, many are blind alleys and brick walls. Any amateur genealogist is all too familiar with that aspect of family research. The birth date of the first child in October of 1798 means we can start searching

records beginning in 1800 for this family. Are there perhaps land records? Lucky for us, there were - Benjamin C. Hicks bought land in section 35 of Rose Township in October 1835! Now we are getting somewhere!

1835...That date would make him a pioneer settler! Could he be listed in the early Histories of Oakland County? Oh, glory day, he is! The research team found articles on the family in the 1877 *History of Oakland County*, the 1891 *Portraits & Biographical Album of Oakland County, Michigan*, and the Rose Township History book. We found him, along with the rest of his pioneer family! Benjamin Cole Hicks, with his father, Benjamin Hicks, came to Oakland County in 1835, bought land, built a log cabin and log stable, brought the rest of the family from New York, and were successful farmers in the early years of the county. It is to the hard work and resilience of these families that we owe a debt of gratitude as Oakland County comes up to its 200th birthday.

Thank you, Benjamin C. Hicks, for your contribution to our future! All this because your research team (Geoff Brieger, Ray Lucas, Dave Walls and Barbara Frye) became curious about a small leather-bound Bible in our collection.



(Images courtesy of Barbara Frye)

WISNER HOUSE COMMITTEE REPORT -
JUNE 2019

Kathy Davis, committee chair

*Adrian Rawls has placed on display artifacts and furniture from the Wisner and Wallace families.

*The Wisner Home was purchased July 1, 1844, and with age comes required maintenance. The seven chimneys and outside bricks need replaced and tuck pointing, as well as the Summer Kitchen and Smoke House. We have two estimates from historic preservation contractors ranging between \$29,000 and \$39,000.

*In the basement, vent reduction is needed to add support pillars, and climate control for the house.

*The bathroom in the Gift Shop needs repairs.

The beautiful Wisner House is as wonderful as any of the historic homes at Greenfield Village. We are proud to preserve it and thank you for your support!



A special moment: Veterans Dave Decker, Van Jones and Fred Liimatta raise two new flags at Pine Grove.

(Photo courtesy of Charlotte Cooper)



IN REMEMBRANCE

Barbara Irwin



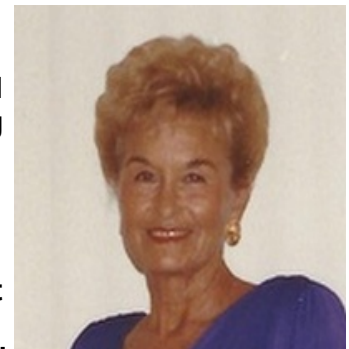
Long-time OCPHS member, director and loyal supporter Barb Irwin passed away on March 22 at the age of 91. Barb graduated from Pontiac High School in 1945 and Western Michigan University in 1949, where she was homecoming queen and member of the Sigma Kappa Sorority. She taught at Wilson Elementary in Pontiac and helped organize the Pontiac YMCA Swim Team, serving as the girls team coach from 1967-1971. She was an active member of First Presbyterian Church of Pontiac and a loving wife, mother and grandmother. OCPHS cherishes our fond memories of Barb's service and extends our condolences to the family.

(Photo courtesy of The Oakland Press)



Jacqueline Powers

OCPHS recently received a donation from Christopher and Debra Smith in loving memory of their relative Jackie Smith Powers, who passed away in Florida on November 26, 2018 at the age of 91. Jackie was born in Waterford



to the late Norris and Jessie Smith. She worked for the Michigan Bell Telephone Company for many years before marrying John Powers and moving to Florida. The couple enjoyed traveling, dancing and golfing. We thank the Smith family for their generosity and are pleased to share in honoring Jackie's life.

(Photo courtesy of Mohn Funeral Home, FL)

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

Please join us for these upcoming events...

**Saturday, July 27 -
Pioneer Reunion and Social
11:00 AM – 5:00 PM
Admission: FREE**

OCPHS Officers and Board of Directors

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1st Vice President

Sara Cote

2nd Vice President

Rodger Zeller

Secretary

Kathy Davis

Treasurer

Bill Grandstaff

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- ___ \$ In Memory of / Honor of (provide name):

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

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- ___ 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. Thank you for your support!

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

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WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

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

- Kate Howard (Columbia City, IN)**
- James Parke (Greenville, SC)**
- Kevin Church (Lake Orion)**
- Mary Anne Walsh (Pontiac)**
- Austin Johnson (Troy)**

Did you know you can support the Oakland County Pioneer and Historical Society while you shop? When you make a purchase through Amazon Smile or with your Kroger Plus Card, a portion will be donated back to us! Registering is simple and takes just minutes. Follow the instructions on each store's website, or call our office and we will assist you!



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Oakland Gazette is a publication of the Oakland County Pioneer and Historical Society. Submissions, content suggestions or comments are welcome.

Volume 52 Number 2 June 2019

Editor: Kari Vaughan

Contributors: Charlotte Cooper, Terry Currin, Kathy Davis, Barbara Frye, John Scholl, Kari Vaughan

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