



Vol. 53, No. 1

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

March 2020

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GENEROUS PROPERTY DONATION EXPANDS PINE GROVE CAMPUS

Friends of OCPHS, something momentous that especially excites our Executive Director has transpired since the previous edition of the *Gazette*: Our Pine Grove campus has expanded! One of our members amazingly donated an adjacent property on Short Street to the Society. In addition to the land, there is an existing house and garage on the property. The short-term plan is to use the structures for storage and exhibit space, which will allow for less crowded conditions in our existing facilities. Three cheers for our brilliant benefactor!

MASTERPIECE STEINWAY PIANO MOVES INTO THE WISNER HOUSE

Members Dr. Joanne and Tom McClure have earned our eternal gratitude for their generous purchase of a 1953 Steinway piano for the Wisner House. Dr. McClure has played the Wisner family piano in the house's formal parlor for us at events, most recently at December's Christmas Open House. After consultation with professional pianists and piano restoration experts, it was determined that the advanced age and condition of the Wisner piano has rendered it too fragile for use. It will be for display purposes only going forward. Dr. McClure took the initiative to both learn of the existing piano's internal condition, and to generously donate a Masterpiece piano that could be safely played at our signature events. The McClures also provided for a protective cover and the delivery of the near-mint condition instrument. Going even further, they will ensure it is re-tuned annually. Please join us in singing the praises of the McClure musical angels!



Dr. McClure with the 1953 Steinway piano

BRICKS ENHANCE GROUNDS LANDSCAPING

Thank you to Zaremba and Company landscape designers, who recently donated four pallets of high-quality, historic-style landscape bricks. President Charlotte Cooper was able to successfully make the connection on our exterior's behalf. The bricks have been staged to enhance flower beds, pathways, and the bases of trees. Zaremba and Company's offices are located in downtown Pontiac at 17 S. Perry Street, and their owner is Patrick Zaremba. If you use them for your own project, be sure to say thanks for their support of OCPHS! Fun fact: For decades, 17 S. Perry Street was home to the Pontiac Paint Manufacturing Company.



PROFESSIONAL DISPLAY MATERIALS UP OUR EXHIBITS GAME

Board member Ann Johnson has generously donated an array of display materials from her former antiques store, which have elevated our exhibit and merchandise staging. In addition to multiple smaller display cases, she has provided various other display and storage materials that better help us do our preservation work. She has also shared professional table coverings which enhance the look of our Carriage House. Thank you, Ann!



We have also received two large glass display cases from the Greater West Bloomfield Historical Society that were no longer in use at their Orchard Lake Museum. Historical Societies that play together stay together, and we thank them for sharing!

Images courtesy of Mike McGuinness

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Charlotte Cooper



Historically, the Spanish Flu was an unusually deadly influenza epidemic that infected 500 million people – about a quarter of the world's population – from January 1918 through December 1920. President Woodrow Wilson and his supporters were obsessively protective of

public morale and the existential need for unwavering support of the effort to fight and win World War I. Public health authorities told people it was just the ordinary flu by another name. They simply didn't tell the truth about what was really happening.

A century later, we are deluged with rapidly changing information about the current COVID-19 pandemic. Perhaps the most critical lesson from the Spanish Flu era is that government and society can never be truly prepared for a pandemic.

However, there is always a silver lining to every event and issue. Life is slower and quieter right now. We have more time to review, research, reorganize, repurpose, recycle – in all areas. During this time, I encourage you to keep the faith and to stay safe, healthy, and happy!

Warm regards! *Charlotte*

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Mike McGuinness



At times, historical societies can strike some as sleepy or stodgy. At times, the concept of “history” does not excite the uninitiated. At times, it may seem as though not much “history” is being made. This is not one of those times.

For the sake of posterity, and the vantage point of a future reader of this edition of our long-running *Oakland Gazette* newsletter, please take into account that life-changing history is unfolding before our very eyes as we compile this issue.

You, future reader, have the benefit of knowing how our current saga ends. Presently, we do not. The emerging global COVID-19 pandemic and national public health emergency is dramatically changing our way of life, not to mention this organization's activities and future planning.

As Executive Director, I am actively working to recalibrate our efforts and ensure we weather this surreal experience. Many local history sites may not survive, and I will not allow us to suffer that same fate. Though I don't wish to be grim or fatalistic, one New York Times-reported estimate is that as many as one third of our nation's museums will not reopen after what is now forecast to be a sustained closure period.

Our facilities have been closed to the public since March 16 and will remain in that status for the time being. On that day, Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer issued an Executive Order closing all museums and libraries (among many other facilities) to limit the further spread of the virus. Although closed to the public, I have been here every day, forging ahead for progress, and will continue to actively respond to all inquiries and communication we receive.

Similar edicts have been issued stopping public events and gatherings larger than a handful. All of our Society's upcoming scheduled events were postponed, including two Bicentennial Lectures and the Oakland County 200th Birthday Celebration. Other events in future months may meet a similar fate. I will continue to proactively handle these matters to the best of my ability, but we are presently treading on unfamiliar terrain.

This point in our nation's history is uncertain and changing daily. Our organization is solid and I'll keep working aggressively to strengthen it further, but it is undeniable that extended closure and forced event cancellations would seriously dent our resources. The support of the community will sustain us, if they will indeed support. Please consider becoming a Bicentennial Sustainer of our organization (see page 8). Your monthly financial support will provide the safe harbor we need to weather this growing storm.

P.S. I wanted the Oakland County Bicentennial Year to be a memorable one, but this isn't quite what I had in mind!

2020-2023 BOARD OF DIRECTOR CANDIDATES

The following individuals have submitted applications to join or continue their service on our Board of Directors this year. We present to you their names, qualifications, and goals for the Society. The Annual Meeting and Election will take place on Saturday, May 16 for all of our members. Watch your email for further information about this gathering.

KATHY DAVIS

Kathy lives in Pontiac and is retired from accounting. She is educated in business administration and accounting. Kathy has been a member of OCPHS for twelve years and a Director for six years, currently serving as recording secretary. She has led the House, Mini Lecture, and Victorian Open House committees and oversees the docents for special events. Kathy is active in her church and Masonic groups and is interested in history, art, and preservation. As a Director, she will help to educate and present our campus to visitors; help secure donations from individuals and grants; and encourage Board members to stay interested in helping us grow.

DAVE DECKER

Dave lives in Clarkston and owns North Oakland IT (Information Technology). He has been a member of OCPHS for over five years; has volunteered on the Library Research, Collections, Grounds, and Summer Social committees; and has given tours and spoken on behalf of OCPHS to other organizations. Dave led the organization of and is the current chairman of the History Coalition of Oakland County. He also mentors with the Veterans Treatment Court. As a Director, Dave plans to continue forward progress for OCPHS, and to keep smiling.

JOY DOCKHAM

Joy lives in Clarkston and is the office manager for the Pontiac Creative Arts Center. She holds a BS in Education, MA in Literature, and MM in Business. Joy has been a member of OCPHS for three years. During that time she served as office manager for two and a half years; bookkeeper for the last seven months; and a volunteer in numerous areas. Joy is particularly interested in working with our finances and Collection Room. She is an active member of DAR Sashabaw Plains chapter and the Pontiac Community Foundation. As a Director, Joy will help OCPHS continue moving forward within the community and Oakland County.

BILL GRANDSTAFF

Bill lives in Romeo and is retired from Hodges Supply Company in Pontiac. He holds a BA from OU, has been a member of OCPHS for seven years, and has served on the Board for six years, including two years as Treasurer. Bill has served

on Summer Social committees and has portrayed Governor Moses Wisner at Pine Grove events. He is a Library Trustee in Romeo, serves on the Planning Commission, and organized and runs a Civil War Roundtable. He is particularly interested in the Civil War. As a Director, Bill feels we are on the cusp of an exciting time and he hopes to continue spreading the enthusiasm.

ANN JOHNSON

Ann lives in Pontiac, is currently putting her retail experience to use at Kohl's, and is training to become a presenter at The Henry Ford. She has been a member of OCPHS for ten years, where she discovered that she is a descendant of Moses Wisner. Ann has served on the Board for three years, on the Summer Social and Victorian Open House committees, and is a docent and leads tours when needed. Ann is particularly interested in the Wisner House and its artifacts. She has always loved history, especially the era represented by Pine Grove, and she takes pride in representing OCPHS. As a Director, Ann will continue her many activities at Pine Grove, and plans to assist with the 2020 inventory of the house.

LINDA PORTER

Linda lives in Pontiac, holds a BA from MSU, and is a retired elementary teacher. She has been a member of OCPHS since 2012 and a Director for six years. Linda is most proud of initiating and co-chairing the Gala Dinner Auctions for six years. She has also served as a docent at Summer Socials and the Victorian Open House, and on the Fundraising and Sponsorships committees. Linda is a member of the 1901 Carriage Team and serves on the Pontiac Historic District Commission.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS REPORT

Charlotte Cooper

The Board of Directors held their first electronic meeting by telephone on Saturday, March 21, with fifteen of the nineteen Directors participating. The Board adopted a Diversity and Inclusion Policy for OCPHS for best practices purposes and which will help secure particular grant funding. Two items requiring votes will be on the agenda at the Annual Meeting and Election on May 16. In addition to the above candidates running for election to the Board, there will be a motion to add a sentence to *Article V, Directors, Section 5* of the bylaws to bring electronic meetings into compliance with Parliamentary Procedures. Regarding the interests of the membership, the Board thoughtfully continues to oversee the general management and control of the business affairs of OCPHS.

**STANDARD VEHICLE CARRIAGE
PRESERVATION PROJECT UPDATE**

Mike West, Carriage Team Chair

The Carriage Team is very happy to report that the fundamental preservation work on the Carriage is now complete and the day is close when we will be able to put it on display. It has been a few years in the making, but a lot of preparation and many challenges had to be overcome to ensure that the uniqueness and integrity of the Carriage would be protected.

The Carriage Team was tasked with finding technologies to “preserve” the Carriage, raising funds to cover the costs, storing the Carriage in a secure place while this was being done, finding a buggy shop to do the work, and locating a place near Pine Grove to put the Carriage on display. Many thanks to Bob Sowles, Don and Nancy Calendine, Alyce Voit and Paul Hudacek, Linda Porter, Sue Grifor, Sherie Morgan, Laurie Bishop, the generosity of our donors, the OCPHS Library Team, and Tim Dye, co-founder of the Pontiac Transportation Museum, for their roles in making all this happen. And, of course, Ed Lee and Steve Cartier for inviting us to use the lobby of the beautifully restored Wisner School where the Carriage will soon be on display.

In the very first meeting about the Carriage, the decision was made to “preserve” it, which proved to be more difficult than “restoration.” For example, “restoring” the 119-year old wooden body would mean sanding, filling, and repainting. There are plenty of shops that do that kind of work, making the task easier. “Preserving” the body meant that we had to find technologies to protect and enhance the old painted surfaces and blend that in with areas where the paint had flaked off. Mary Fahey, Chief Conservator, The Henry Ford, was invited to study our Carriage and she recommended materials and methods that we could try. Thanks again to Alyce Voit and Paul Hudacek for showing us a staining technique that helped overcome this challenge. Staining and a couple coats of boiled linseed oil gave the body a more uniform appearance and provided a luster that brought out the original hand-painted pin striping and lettering.

The Carriage's top, dash, and fenders were deteriorated beyond salvaging. Furthermore, the original top material is no longer being made, but we found a replacement that appears close. The fenders and dash were originally made with leather and those materials are still available. Our

Amish buggy shop has an antique sewing machine specifically made to sew leather onto metal fender frames. So, the dash and fenders are made out of material and using a sewing technology very similar to those used by the Standard Vehicle Company.

We evaluated six buggy shops in three different states and settled on one in Michigan found by Linda Porter – an Amish farmer with a thriving buggy business. The proximity enabled us to make several visits to check on the progress of the work.

Meanwhile, we began to raise the needed funding. I can't mention the names of key donors here, but when we receive their permission we will individually thank them on a placard placed next to the Carriage when it goes on display. Speaker fees that I received for my presentation, “Carriages to Cars,” went directly to the fund. We were still a little short of our financial goal, so Don and Nancy Calendine, Carriage Team members from Day 1, wrote their first ever grant request and received \$1500 from Motor Cities Heritage, which got us to our goal.

We hope to have a Carriage Team meeting at the end of March to address the final touches needed and discuss the probability of a “Carriage Unveiling” fundraiser to celebrate the completion of this preservation project and the return of the Standard Vehicle Carriage to its home city. Stay tuned!



The circa 1901 Standard Vehicle Carriage with the original Standard Vehicle factory building in the background. Pictured are: First row – Adrian Rawls and Nancy Calendine; second row – Don Calendine and Alyce Voit; standing behind carriage – Paul Hudacek. Image courtesy of Mike West.

COLONEL WISNER'S CIVIL WAR PISTOL
COMES HOME TO PINE GROVE

Dave Decker

In December of 2018, Geoff Brieger and Dave Decker resuscitated a project to investigate a pistol believed to have belonged to Moses Wisner, owned by Charles Defer of Garrettsville, Ohio. Dave made contact with Mr. Defer and spent some time negotiating the transfer of the gun to OCPHS. Mr. Defer believes, as we do, that the gun was Wisner's, and that it rightfully belongs here.

It took a year to accomplish due to conflicting schedules and so forth, but Charlotte Cooper and Dave Decker met Mr. Defer in Ohio and picked up the gun on January 9, 2020. It was delivered to Pine Grove the next day and is on "semi-permanent loan" to OCPHS.

Dave emailed the Colt Company's archivist, inquiring about the purchase history of the gun and providing the serial number stamped on every component, and received a response on January 16. Paul Szymaszek, Colt Archive Properties Archivist, stated "the records on this particular gun show it was originally included in a shipment to B. Kittredge & Company, one of Colt's largest dealers in Cincinnati, Ohio, on August 16, 1862." It is extremely likely that this is the pistol Moses Wisner carried with him to Kentucky.

The following is Charles Defer's account of how he came to be in possession of the pistol, which he wrote in January 2020:

"I grew up in Streetsboro, Ohio. In about 1965, when I was 9 years old, a family friend needed a place to stay and moved in with us. His name was Angelo Pisano. He served in World War II. A jeweler by trade, he dabbled in firearms. One day he showed me a collector grade Colt pistol from the 19th century. I remember looking at it with the wide eyes of a kid. We lost track of Angelo in the late 70's.

Angelo surfaced again in the 1990's. By then I was married with children, but still living in Streetsboro. We traditionally always had dinner on Sunday afternoon. He would show up every few months for a meal. At one of those meals, I mentioned him showing me that Colt long ago. He told me that pistol was long gone, but that he had one he would bring me the next time he came.

A few months later he showed up at my house and handed me a pistol wrapped in a greasy cloth. It was an 1849 Colt Pocket Pistol. We had no internet at the time, so I pulled out a book and determined its production date was 1862 based upon the serial number. I noted the inscription on the brass back strap which read COL M. Wisner. Knowing that the pistol may have been used in the Civil War because of the date of production, I asked Angelo about

that. He said he had done research but didn't find any colonel by that name who served in the war. He passed it off as probably an honorary title, perhaps a Kentucky Colonel. I only saw Angelo a few times after that before he passed away. Unfortunately, I never asked him where he got it.



In the early 2000's I got access to the internet. One day I did some research about the name on the pistol. I checked Union soldiers in federal service and also checked Southern soldiers with no luck. Sometime later I read that so many of the soldiers who served in the war were from state militias. I started searching again and hit upon Moses Wisner. When I read about his life, the date of production fit very nicely. Furthermore, I discovered the Oakland County Historical Society and the house at Pine Grove, his former home in Pontiac, Michigan. I also showed the pistol to a gun dealer. He told me the inscription looked authentic. He also mentioned that if someone was out to create a counterfeit, they would more likely choose a more well-known historical figure.

After finding all of this out, I didn't really feel right about having the pistol locked away in my house. I felt it would be better to have it displayed at Pine Grove where people could see and appreciate it. That is what led me to sending the pistol to the Oakland Historical Society. I can now rest easy knowing the pistol is in good hands."
- Chuck Defer, Hiram, Ohio

We are extremely pleased that Mr. Defer saw fit to share this significant artifact with our Society. Due to his forward-thinking and generous actions, the Executive Director has bestowed upon Mr. Defer and his family Life Member status in OCPHS. We tip our proverbial hat to you, good sir, and will sing your praises in perpetuity. Images courtesy of Mike McGuinness.



WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

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

CARE House of Oakland County

Pontiac Regional Chamber of Commerce

Diane and Michael Bennett – Rochester

George Blake – Bloomfield Hills

Martha and Peter Blom – Orchard Lake

Regina Campbell – Auburn Hills

David Carroll – Rochester Hills

Hon. Brenda Causey-Mitchell – Pontiac

Sarah Dennis - Rochester

Earline and James Dowell – Pontiac

Heather Duenas – Pontiac

Louis Fanelli – Auburn Hills

Oakland Circuit Judge Kameshia Gant – Southfield

Rev. Dr. Chris and Debbie Johnson – Pontiac

Marilyn Morgan – New Hudson

Tamara Orza-Ramos - Pontiac

Leslie Persin – Sylvan Lake

County Commissioner Angela Powell – Pontiac

Suzanne Rossi – Lake Orion

John Sauve – Brighton

Patrick Shaul – Novi

Greg Snyder – Clarkston

Marti Szilagyi – Bloomfield Hills

Andrew Therrien – Ortonville

Lisa Varnier – Berkley

Robert Waddell – Rochester Hills

We thank these new and existing members who have been upgraded to Life Members due to their recent generous support of OCPHS:

Charlotte and Darrell Cooper – Clarkston

Chuck Defer – Hiram, OH

Dr. Joanne and Tom McClure - Northville

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

***All upcoming events are TENTATIVE, considering uncertain public health restraints.**

April 29

Oakland County Bicentennial Lecture Series:
Oakland University Professor DeWitt Dykes on the African American Experience, held at the Southfield Public Library
(In partnership with the Southfield Historical Society)

May 16

OCPHS Annual Meeting & Election

May 16

Downtown Pontiac Art and Architecture Walking Tour

June 13

Governor Moses Wisner Grave Marking and Birthday Celebration

June 28 (note date change!)

Pontiac Historic Home and Garden Tour

July 25 and 26

Bicentennial Summer Social

August 7 and 21

Summer Outdoor Concert Series

September 12

OCPHS Bicentennial Gala

September 20

Oak Hill Cemetery Walk

September 23

Oakland County Bicentennial Lecture Series:
Oakland University Professor Dan Clark on the Local Labor Movement, held at the West Bloomfield Public Library Main Branch
(In partnership with the Greater West Bloomfield Historical Society)

October 17 and 18

Haunted Museum Family Fun Days

October 25

Downtown Pontiac Ghost Tours

November 14

“Dishes Past” Historic Cuisine Popup Dinner

November 28

Vintage Holiday Market & Hanging of the Greens

December 5 and 6

Christmas Magic at the Museum

**2020 SUMMER SOCIAL TAKES ON SPECIAL
BICENTENNIAL SIGNIFICANCE**

With the Oakland County Bicentennial Year upon us, our Society's annual Summer Ice Cream Social for 2020 has become the Bicentennial Summer Social. The traditional one day affair will now be held over two days: Saturday, July 25 and Sunday, July 26. Just as the days are doubling, the activities and fun are doubling as well. Plans include the unveiling of bicentennial landmarks and refreshed facilities, upgraded historic tours, new artifacts exhibited, bicentennial gardens throughout our grounds, classic car show of vehicles made in Oakland County, live musical performances, historical reenactments, petting zoo, and much more. Dynamic sponsorship and vendor opportunities abound for your family or organization. Watch for more details and contact our office to find out how you can be an active part of this once-in-a-century celebration!

OCPHS Officers and Board of Directors

President

Charlotte Cooper

1st Vice President

Sara Cote

2nd Vice President

Rodger Zeller

Secretary

Kathy Davis

Treasurer

Bill Grandstaff

Directors

Nancy Calendine

Barbara Frye

Sue Grifor

Ann Johnson

Ronnie Karpinski

Anne Liimatta

Fred Liimatta

Evan Monaghan

Linda Porter

Adrian Rawls

Rosie Lance-Richardson

Priscilla Shelton

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Skip Upcott

Membership and Donation Form

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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):

- \$10 Student
- \$20 Individual
- \$20 Non-Profit Organization
- \$35 Family (two adults & minor children)
- \$100 Patron
- \$200 Benefactor
- \$500 Friends
- \$500 Corporate Sponsor
- \$Gift Membership (provide recipient's name & contact info):

Please Accept My Donation! (indicate preference):

- \$ Annual Giving (general operating costs)
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- \$ 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
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- Attended Event or Tour
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- Newspaper / Magazine Article
- Volunteer Opportunities
- Website / Facebook
- Other (specify):

Mail this form with check payable to OCPHS to:

**Oakland County Pioneer & Historical Society
405 Cesar E. Chavez Avenue
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For your convenience you may also join or donate online at www.ocphs.org. Thank you for your support!

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**BICENTENNIAL SUSTAINER FINANCIAL
SUPPORT NEEDED**

As with other businesses and activities, the state of Michigan has ordered our facilities closed to the public and our events postponed. This drastically impacts our revenues and threatens our organization's ability to meet our fixed expenses. Our annual insurance payment is fast approaching; we must keep our nationally-significant historic site safe and covered. We need your help to weather this national public health emergency. Please consider becoming a Bicentennial Sustainer for our Society with a one-time or recurring monthly donation. You may donate with a check payable to "OCPHS" or securely online via our website. Please call or email with any questions. With your financial support, we can preserve and celebrate another century's worth of Oakland County history.

- Mike McGuinness, Executive Director

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