

OAKLAND GAZETTE

Oakland County Pioneer & Historical Society's Newsletter

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FIFTY YEARS LATER: PONTIAC SCHOOL BUS BOMBINGS

Historical Society Helps to Commemorate, Study Transformative Event in Local History



On August 30, 1971, a group of men with Ku Klux Klan affiliations broke into the Pontiac School District bus yard at night and dynamited ten empty school buses. The blast was loud and startling, with then-residents from Pontiac, Waterford, Lake Orion and beyond sharing vivid recollections of hearing it at the time. Thankfully there were no injuries as a result — but the figurative reverberations were intense. The next day, it was all the community could talk about. By September 1, it was a leading international story (*Continued on Page Three*)

STATE ARCHAEOLOGICAL HISTORY BIG DISCOVERY

From the University of Michigan: "Thirteen thousand years ago, most of Michigan was covered in a wall of ice up to a mile high. Archaeologists believed this kept some of the continent's earliest people, a group called Clovis after their distinctive spear points, from settling in the region. But an independent researcher along with University of Michigan researchers have identified a 13,000-year-old Clovis camp site, now thought to be the earliest archaeological site in Michigan. The site predates previously identified human settlements in the Michigan basin and potentially rewrites the history of the peopling — or settling — of the Great Lakes Region." — *Courtesy of the University of Michigan News Release*

That independent researcher's name is Thomas Talbot, and the noteworthy site of these discoveries is the Belson family's property in Michigan's St. Joseph County.

MILFORD DESK GOES HOME

Our Society Donates Historic Artifacts



Our Historical Society's Board of Directors voted unanimously in August to donate the pictured historic desk and chair to the Milford Historical Society. It is a happy ending for a bit of a local mystery. Read further on Page Two to learn the back story and rationale.

52nd Annual Summer Social a Success!

Be sure to check out the Summer Social insert in this edition to see images from our high-turnout Summer Ice Cream Social in July, and to celebrate the generous sponsors who made this year's successful event possible.

MILFORD ARTIFACTS HEAD HOME

Mystery Yields a Pleasant Outcome

Our Historical Society has had in our possession a maple slant top desk and chair. The desk has been on the second floor of Governor Wisner's house for some time. These items don't appear to have been donated to OCPHS but were just "here." The desk has an unusual (for our society) brass plaque attached, which says: Desk of Isaac Pratt Jackson 1824 - 1886 Founder of the "Milford Times" Presented by his granddaughter Margaret Rowe Mastick (Mrs. Earl S.) of Milford."

Our Collections Chair Dave Decker searched our accession records, loan documents, and inventories. There's no record of the donation or a loan. There isn't an accession number on the desk. Margaret Rowe Mastick was Isaac's granddaughter. Her father had taken over as editor and owner of the *Milford Times*. She probably inherited the desk and chair through her father.

From the research into Margaret and from conversations with Jackie Swenson at Milford Historical Society (MHS), Decker assembled a possible sequence of events which ends with the desk residing at Pine Grove: Before 1971, Margaret made a few small donations to our collections, mostly textiles. In 1973, she was one of the 15 people who chartered the MHS. In 1975, MHS re-chartered as a museum and obtained the building which is their museum space. They spent two years restoring the building. This was a major renovation to the space. Until it was complete, MHS had very little storage space for furniture or other large objects.

In 1977 Margaret Rowe Mastick passed away. The working theory is that the desk and chair were donated to MHS by her around 1973-74 as foundational pieces to their collection, and they installed the plaque at that time. They have at least one other object with a brass plaque mounted on it, suggesting this was their practice for important objects in their collection. We think the desk and chair came to OCPHS around 1974-75 for safekeeping during renovations. If Margaret had been ill, or otherwise not present at MHS when their house was completed around 1976-1977, the desk and chair may have been forgotten here, and essentially abandoned by their society. In any event, there doesn't appear to be anyone around from that time period to corroborate this and so we are left with conclusions based on assumptions. And the conclusion seems to be – from both our perspective and that of MHS – that the desk should be in their possession.

At the August Board of Directors meeting, the vote was unanimous for the Oakland County Pioneer and Historical Society to donate these items to the Milford Historical Society, so they can return to the community of their historical significance. They have been safely delivered to their museum, and received warmly by Director Jill Eastcott and Jackie Swenson.

Article adapted from Collections Chair Dave Decker's Research Report. We celebrate his leadership on this effort, and thank the Milford Historical Society for their receptivity.



Jackie Swenson, left, and Director Jill Eastcott of the Milford Historical Museum pose with the desk in front of Gov. Moses Wisner's porch

FIFTY YEARS LATER: PONTIAC'S BUS BOMBINGS

(Continued from Page One) and a dramatic part of a school racial desegregation saga that was the most dominant story throughout Michigan that year.

The Pontiac School District had been previously court-ordered to bus students between elementary schools to racial integrate the student population, due to its inability to provide fair classroom resources and to otherwise come up with a solution to overcome the district's existing segregation (a problem tied into the city's decades of housing discrimination, and that was prolonged for many years by school board and administration decisions to essentially kick the can down the road). The court also found the district had been intentionally placing Black teachers and principals only in schools with overwhelmingly Black student populations and mandated that be rectified as well, but they'd been making swift changes on the staff integration front.

PONTIAC BOMBING CHARGED TO KLAN

F.B.I. Arrests Six in Plot
to Destroy School Buses
Used in Desegregation

Special to The New York Times

Families were scared and uncertain about what the school year, mere days away, was to bring. The school district itself wasn't sure, either, and had been legally appealing the court decision to defer the costly logistical (and political) challenge. And protests were frequent.

It was into that very charged and uncertain environment into which a fuse was quite literally lit. Fear and violence was used in an attempt to enforce the racial status quo. Thousands of scared parents, confused children, and strained educators had to forge through the figurative wreckage to make a new school year happen despite the trauma.

This was in 1971. Exactly fifty years ago. The Pontiac community (the schools, definitely, but the entire city and surrounding vicinity) is still living with the scars of this domestic terrorism, and of the court-ordered racial integration struggles more broadly. It shaped Oakland County's history, and it had an outsized impact on state and national education policy... not to mention local, state, and federal elections.

With that said, there is no one simple, definitive account of this significant event in our local history. Why is that, you ask? For starters, there were roughly 83,000 residents of Pontiac at that time. And Pontiac's School District covered parts of multiple cities and townships. Over 24,000 students were enrolled in the massive public school district. In other words, there are tens of thousands of firsthand perspectives. Each student, each citizen, saw a different aspect of the unfolding struggle. And people with those firsthand observations are still alive. Lots of them.

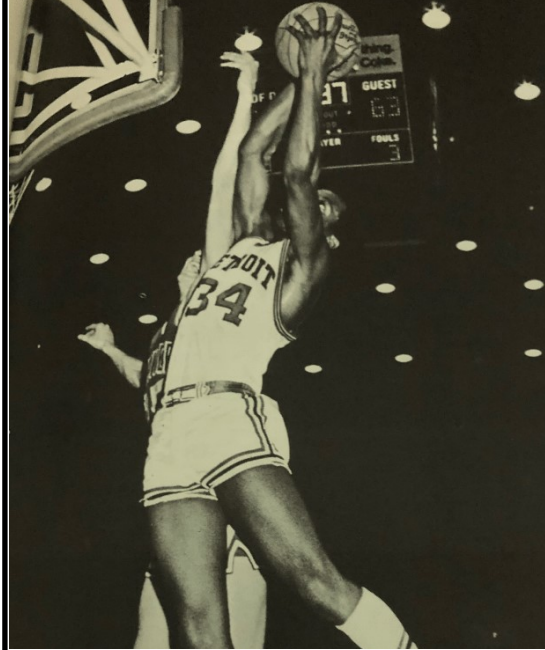
The bombing incident was the most headline-grabbing aspect of the ordeal, and what national stories frequently emphasized, but it is interestingly an afterthought in many of the oral histories we've recorded from those who lived through it. They reflect most on how the schools' integration struggles impacted their family, their educational experience, and the strain it placed on their beloved community.

Five decades later the historical accounts of what all happened in that period, and what it all means, are still being written. And we are right in the thick of it. We've given multiple virtual talks on the topic this year, and are gathering oral histories and artifacts from community members. Please submit any memories or insights you have to offer.

School Buses in Pontiac, Mich., Are Destroyed by Fire Bombs



In Memoriam



R. FRANK RUSSELL (above) - A pillar in the Pontiac community, Frank was from a family of basketball royalty; he was a star athlete at Pontiac Central, University of Detroit, and played in the NBA for Chicago.

FRAN WILSON - Our Research Library is where it is today due to her steadfast service. Fran was librarian here for years and loved being here. She was loved and we'll miss her dearly.

A hearty congratulations to our friends at the **Southfield Historical Society** for winning **Historical Society of Michigan 2021 State History Award** for Local Societies, and to the **Birmingham Museum** for their Institutions category win.

The wrought iron fence at **Mount Hope Cemetery** in Pontiac has tragically been removed by the Archdiocese. Thanks to our member **Angela Rakowski** and multiple volunteers, however, the fence pieces have been saved from the scrapyard. They are currently stored at our History Center while plans are made for preserving them.

We welcomed a great group from **Lakecrest Baptist Church** of Waterford for a tour of our Oakland History Center campus and facilities in July. We encourage you to contact our office if you have a group that you'd like to tour with us and we'll schedule your own private tour opportunity.



We were thrilled to welcome the storied **Van Wagoner family** to our Oakland History Center in June as we celebrated the legacy of Oakland County's own Governor **Murray D. Van Wagoner**. **Patty Van Wagoner Andrews** was in her element leading up to the celebration, and that day; we will remember her fondly.

We are devastated to share that we have lost many titans of local history since our last newsletter. In future editions we will share more about their lives, but we wanted to share the somber news with you about our departed friends:

PATTY ANDREWS - At age 99, Patricia (Patty) Van Wagoner Andrews was a longtime member and the driving force behind our recent Governor Murray D. Van Wagoner Day celebration. A longtime Birmingham educator, she operated a local history museum of sorts out of her house.

LORETTA COLEMAN - Departed at 72, Loretta was a bright, bright light. She was an active part of her Pontiac Central Class of 1968 reunions, and helped raise the funds that restored the Chief Pontiac statue that had previously stood in Pontiac Central High School.

GAYLOR FORMAN - Aged 97. Gaylor served for decades on our Historical Society's Board of Directors and he has been a friend of the Society's members for generations. Even as he wasn't able to physically attend as often, Gaylor continued his generous support. He will be missed, though his memory and legacy will live on through our historic site.

JUDY HUDALLA - Gone too soon, Judy served on the Society's Board of Directors for years and is included in the roster of Directors Emeritus. She steadfastly volunteered in the Society's Gift Shop for many years. Her daughter, Barb, continued her mother's dedicated volunteerism here.

Pictured is reenactor Alex Konieczny engaging with attendees about soldier life during the Civil War. We had multiple reenacting groups present for the Ice Cream Social this year.



Pictured is a musical performance by the children of Accent Pontiac. This year we had multiple musical performances by a wide array of local musicians across both days. Many attendees shared their enthusiasm for the expanded live music this year.



2021 SUMMER ICE CREAM SOCIAL SPONSORS



*"To our generous event sponsors,
we are grateful for your continued
support. You made hundreds of
children's days brighter this year!"*

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The Turpin Family

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& James Lewis

Rick & Patricia David

Alleycat Café

Frye Photo

Green Room Café

Goldner Walsh Garden & Home

The Henk Studio

Honor Community Health

Lydia Barnes Potter Chapter,
National Society Daughters of
the American Revolution

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Sashabaw Plains Chapter,
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the American Revolution

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*Donation In Memory of
Gaylor Forman*

*Donation In Memory of
Charlie Martinez*

*Donation In Memory of
Fran Wilson*

2021 SUMMER ICE CREAM SOCIAL SPONSORS



OAKLAND HISTORY CENTER

At Pine Grove

PONTIAC, MICHIGAN



The pony rides were a popular feature for children.



The Wisner Dining Room table set for company. In the center is one of the beautiful floral arrangements donated by The Henk Studio. The Wisner Home was open for tours and a highlight for many first-time attendees. Thank you to the volunteers who made this and other features possible.



Pontiac Theatre IV performed scenes from MacBeth.

News Briefs

Latest Local History Happenings

The **Lydia Barnes Potter Chapter of the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution** has done superb work with the Veterans Memorial Garden to the side of our 1865 Schoolhouse. We look forward to its dedication ceremony here, October 10 at 1 pm.

Our Board President **Charlotte Cooper**, through her **National Society Daughters of the American Revolution New Horizons** member course, won a first in state for historic preservation, a first in division for historic preservation, and a first in national for historic preservation. Congratulations!

Member **Jim Parke** of South Carolina made a research trip to our Research Library this month. He is developing a historical novella involving a gathering held at the **McConnell House** in Pontiac, circa 1860. "He wants to know and understand Pontiac as his ancestors would have done on a daily basis. What started out for Jim as an inquiry into his family history has become a quest and a friendship with" our Society, per **Barbara Frye**. She, **Dave Decker**, and **Geoff Brieger** assisted Jim with his research and understanding. He also connected with **Joe Carr** of the **American Legion Cook-Nelson Post 20**, which is housed in that very McConnell House; Jim was thrilled to tour the property that is his focus.

Society member **Mike West**, who has previously served as our Board President and is well-versed on Pontiac's impressive carriage production era, is giving his "Carriages to Cars" presentation with the **Bloomfield Historical Society**. It is on September 26 at 3 pm at the **Bloomfield Township Public Library**. Admission is free.

At the end of 2020, Michigan Governor **Gretchen Whitmer** signed Public Act 343, establishing a new State Historic Tax Credit program. This is a noteworthy development for future historic preservation projects. We'll be monitoring this program as it rolls out.



Spotted at our Oakland History Center during our Outdoor Flea Markets in August: This epic Ford Model A and protest license plate from the 1930s. **Ford Model A Car Clubs** had a convention nearby; we were a stop on their sites to see.

Research assistance with the ongoing **Patriot Project** is still sought. The project is compiling and researching Revolutionary War Veterans who made Oakland County their home and are buried here. The goal is to make that happen, a complete list, in one place. Kudos to **Barbara Frye** for her initiative with the effort.

Dedicated Society member **Dave Decker** generously donated a substantial portion of the funds needed to print and install interpretive signage at the Wisner Ice House site, and the Smokehouse. They are in place and able to be viewed.

Last month, the city of **Sylvan Lake** celebrated the 100th Anniversary of their municipality first being incorporated as a village. **Helen Jane Peters** presented on the Sylvan Lake Inn's history, **Brian Golden** presented on the Interurban system's history, and **Greater West Bloomfield Historical Society's** President **Gina Gregory** extolled the contributions of Helen Jane in preserving the community's history. Our Executive Director **Mike McGuinness** was on hand to address attendees and mark their milestone. He also presented flash drives containing thousands of images and articles on Sylvan Lake; our past research fellow **Katie Root** thoroughly digitized every part of Helen Jane's many volumes of Sylvan Lake scrapbooks. A digital copy was given to Helen Jane, the city of Sylvan Lake, and the Greater West Bloomfield Historical Society. A digital set also exists at our Oakland History Center Research Library for those seeking the materials.

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MESSAGE FROM OUR BOARD PRESIDENT



'Change' is the word included in most of the articles that I write as President of the Board of Directors. Change is constant and reliable. We can always depend on life, events, and especially the weather to change.

'Consistency' is the word I adopted for 2021. It is the 'conformity in the application of something, typically that what is necessary for the sake of logic, accuracy, or fairness.' I find that

I am consistent in not working out and not practicing my harp. However, I am consistent in being on my computer several hours daily for various non-profit organizations.

More good words are Respect, Support, Gratitude, and Recognition. When we can Consistently Respect others, Support their ideas, be Grateful for their efforts, and Recognize their contributions, we can create positive Changes.

I send a sincere Thank You to all the OCPHS members who give time and effort to make this organization the best history center in Oakland County!

Charlotte Cooper, President,
Historical Society Board of Directors

WELCOME TO OUR NEWEST HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERS:

Friends of Royal Oak Township. Maria Alegre, Pontiac. Joe Alsup, Waterford. Bonnie Balduf, Sterling Heights. Clinton Ron Bartholomew, PhD., Jackson. Soliana Berhane, Oak Park. Don Bradley, Utah. Michael Craine, Gregory. Mary Drexler, Troy. Judith Ellison, Royal Oak. Renata and Tom Erickson, White Lake. Brigitte Hall, Oak Park. Cheri Marie Hannah, Florida. Randy Harp, Ferndale. Susan Hawkins, Southfield. Nancy Heron, Waterford. County Commissioner Bob Hoffman, Highland. Nicolette Jenaras, Lake Angelus. David Lightner, Auburn Hills. Wendy McNeary, Pontiac. Fred Miller, Pleasant Ridge. George Milne, PhD., Rochester Hills. Michael Matthews-Pennanen, Berkley. Carmelo Moyet, Pontiac. Mary Posey, Pontiac. Cristie Prince, Georgia. Laura Rock, Oak Park. Katie Root, Waterford. Susan Scerbo, Waterford. Bonnie Steward, Pontiac. Leon and Tracy Vanwormer, Pontiac. Pamela Williamson, Pontiac.

2021 OAK HILL CEMETERY WALK A HIT

Great Migration theme for annual fundraiser to support restoration efforts



Historical Society member William Carrington volunteered as a reenactor, portraying fascinating local figure Herman Binga. Right: Historical Society member Connor Newton also volunteered as a reenactor, portraying a Wilson Foundry supervisor; member KT Robinson volunteered as a tour guide. Photographs taken by member David Porath. We are grateful for all who attended and volunteered. We celebrate the dedication of Historical Society members Nancy Calendine and Lori Miller for orchestrating this annual tradition, and for all they and Larry Keehn do year-round to help preserve this vulnerable site.

RESEARCHER MAKES LONG TREK FOR OUR LIBRARY

By Dave Decker: "We were visited in August by Don Bradley, Church of Latter Day Saints historian of Salt Lake City, Utah, and his research partner, Clinton Bartholomew of Jackson, Michigan. Don, a passionate researcher of all things Joseph Smith (founder of the LDS Church), and Clinton were here for a compressed two-day dig into our archives relating to Smith's visits to Pontiac, his connections to Stephen (and Temperance) Mack, and the early history of Oakland County and Pontiac as "planned communities." Through our records and through pointing these fellows to some online resources, we were able to give them a great deal of context and information they'd never considered. Both joined the society, purchased books, and were impressed with the information we had at hand." They also met and talked with members Geoff Brieger and Ray Henry while here.

Catch our Oakland History Center's Upcoming Events!

Photography Exhibit Talk & Reception *(Sept. 25 at 4 pm)*

Pontiac Homecoming Week Tours & Exhibit *(October 7)*

Veterans Memorial Garden Dedication *(October 10 at 1 pm)*

Pontiac Walking Ghost Tours *(October 23 and 24)*

Harvest Festival & Farmers Market *(October 31 at 1 pm)*

Christmas Open House *(December 11 and 12)*



**OAKLAND
HISTORY
CENTER**

At Pine Grove

PONTIAC, MICHIGAN

Oakland County Pioneer & Historical Society

*Saving & Celebrating Our
Local History Since 1874*

Located at our Oakland History Center
405 Cesar E. Chavez Avenue, Pontiac, Mich. 48342

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www.OaklandHistoryCenter.org

You can stay in touch with us in between editions of the *Oakland Gazette*! Follow us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram if you're on those social media platforms, where we post daily content. Sign up for our weekly email updates and you'll receive exclusive historical content + upcoming event invites. **Call us at: (248) 338-6732.**

Daniel T. Murphy Building Dedication



Oakland County recently renamed the North Oakland Health Center building in the county complex to honor Daniel T. Murphy; he was the first County Executive, and had a formative role in our county government for decades. Pictured left to right: Jerry Murphy, on the county Historical Commission and one of his sons; Gwen Markham, a County Commissioner, board member with our society, and one of his daughters; Dave Coulter, current County Executive, and J. David VanderVeen, the airport director who started at the county under Murphy.