## OAKLAND



# **GAZETT**

ISSN # 1534-8849

Vol. 55 No 1.

Dedicated to the history and heritage of Oakland County, Michigan

March 2022

## THE OAKLAND COUNTY PIONEER AND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

405 Cesar E. Chavez Avenue Pontiac, MI 48342

(248) 338-6732 office@ocphs.org www.oaklandhistorycenter.org

### **LILLIAN DRAKE AVERY HONORED**

By Barbara Frye



Lydia Barnes Potter Chapter of the NSDAR recognized Lillian Drake Avery as a woman in American History at their March Meeting.



Barbara Frye (left) receives the certificate and medal from LBP Regent Barb Hofmann to be housed at OCPHS where Mrs. Avery spent many hours collecting and categorizing artifacts presented to the Society.

Ordinarily this Certificate and medal would have been presented to a living descendant of the family, but as none could be found, it seemed appropriate to add this to the many documents Lillian Drake Avery bequeathed to her beloved Pioneer Society.

### A PINE GROVE MYTH

by Dave Decker

"Since Moses Wisner paid \$1,000 for 29 acres of land from Joshua Terry in 1844, there must have been a farm here."

Ah, institutional memory, how you fool us. It's like a game of telephone tag: stories are told over and over by different people, and the stories evolve into myths. Over time, the origin story of Pine Grove has undergone this transformation. It's time to set the record straight...at least for now.

The story goes that in 1844, Moses Wisner paid \$1,000, or about \$33 per acre, to Joshua Terry for an improved 30 acres of land. That's a lot of money - the equivalent of \$37,000 today. Especially when, in 1835, Silas Moon had paid \$350 for the full 80 acres (or about \$4.37 per acre) on which Pine Grove sits today. In today's money, Moon paid about \$13,000 for three times the acreage.

And so the presumption has been that there must have been a house or barns here to justify that high cost.

Let's put this one to rest: Moses Wisner didn't buy an improved, working farm. He bought high-value land, well situated between the Saginaw Turnpike and the railroad. It was an ideal location for a successful lawyer to establish an estate and working farm. He bought it when land prices in Pontiac were in an ever-upward climb, and he bought it with expansion in mind. Wisner was a seasoned land speculator. He recognized not just the current value of the land, but its future value, as well.

There were two large fields to the north and west of Pine Grove - the railroad cut through them. Wisner would later buy these fields and raise cows and sheep there. There were also other factors at play.

In the title abstract for the property (Figure 1) there are two entries: a description of an 1843 court case, and a warranty deed. The court case describes a "mistake" made by Joshua Terry in a land sale. In the court case, a \$287 judgment was issued against Terry and his partners. The money was awarded to Abraham Mathews, who subsequently bought the "right" land at auction for \$350. And then promptly sold it back to Joshua Terry, who then sold 29 acres of it to Wisner.

15TORY HADDEN

## A PINE GROVE MYTH (cont.)

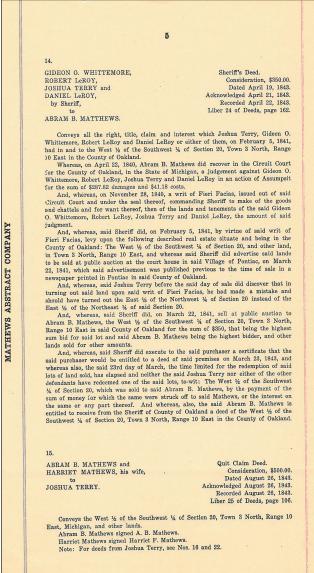


Figure 1

One of the partners in this land deal was Robert LeRoy, son of Daniel LeRoy. Both were attorneys and land speculators. Robert had been accused of shady land deals before, but never convicted.

Wisner and Terry may also have had other assets in play here: Wisner knew land and speculated in it, in Pontiac and in Genesee County (guess who had some land deals going in Genesee? Joshua Terry and his partners, Daniel and Robert LeRoy). It suggests that the \$1,000 could have been part of another negotiation, although that's a big assumption.

Moving on: OCPHS lore says that the \$1,000 price was for the land and "improvements". Could that be the case? Well, the deed doesn't mention any improvements:

"Know all men by these presents that I Joshua Terry of Pontiac in the County of Oakland State of Michigan in consideration of one

thousand dollars grant by Moses Wisner of the same place the receipt whereof I do hereby acknowledge do hereby give grant sell and convey unto the said Moses Wisner all that certain tract or parcel of land described as follows to wit: Commencing at the south west corner of the south west quarter of section number twenty in Township numbered three north of range numbered ten east, thence north one degree and fifty minutes west on the west boundary thereof twenty four chains and sixteen links to the center of the Saginaw Turnpike, thence along the center of the same south forty six degrees and fifteen minutes east thirty three chains and ninety two links to the north boundary of the aforesaid quarter section, thence on said boundary south eighty eight degrees and twenty minutes west twenty three chains and eighty four links to the place of beginning containing twenty eight acres and eighty three hundreds lying in the Detroit Land District and in the county and state aforesaid.

To have and to hold the aforementioned premises to the said Moses Wisner his heirs and assigns to his and their use and behalf forever. And I do covenant with the said Moses Wisner his heirs and assigns that I am lawfully sign in fee of the aforementioned premises that they are free from all encumbrance, that I have good right to convey the same to the said Moses Wisner, and that I will warrant and defend the same premises to the said Moses Wisner his heirs and assigns forever of same the lawful claim and demands of all persons.

"And I Lucinda wife of said Joshua in consideration of the above do hereby release all my rights of dower in the above premises. In witness whereof we the said Joshua + Lucinda have herewith set our hands and seals this Second day of July in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and forty four."

(Copied from a copy of a contract between Moses Wisner and S. B. Comstock in the possession of Emma Howard, descendant of Comstock. The original of this contract was given to the Foundation for the Wisner home.) I Solon Comstock of the County of Oakland State of Michigan for the consideration hereinafter mentioned do hereby agree to do for Moses Wisner of the same place on or before the first day of April next Six hundred and fifty dollars worth of Carpenter and Joiners work where ever said Wisner may elect in the Township of Pontiac in said County (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) and all of said work to be done in the very best manner and in such style and kind as said Wisner may elect and in case said Comstock and Wisner cannot agree as to the value of said work & labor then the same is to be referred to Elkanah Comstock and Chester W. Tuttle whose decision shall determine the value in cash that said work and labor may be worth. And I said Wisner in consideration of the above do agree to pay said Comstock during the months of January or February one hundred dollars in cash and I do further agree when said work and labor is finished to convey to said Comstock by warranty deed a certain farm now owned by me lying in the Township of Grand Blanc in the county of Genesee in said State. Said farm consists of from ninety six to one hundred acres and is the same farm heretofore deeded by the U. S. to one Tobias Sowtenbury and by him to said Wisner and is now occupied by one Joel Bardwell and lying directly opposite of General Hascall's farm in said County of Genesee. Witness our hands and seals this 26th day of June 1845 S. B. Comstock

See page 3

## A PINE GROVE MYTH (cont.)

But wait, there's more. Society lore says Solon Comstock contracted with Wisner to "enclose a brick house" on land Wisner owned in Pontiac (see the contract, above).

This has been interpreted to mean an existing house. But it's not there - Wisner hadn't built it when the contract was made.

So, where are we? Here's a quick timeline.

In 1840/1841 Joshua Terry and his partners sold land to Abraham Mathews in error, resulting in a lawsuit which may have cost Joshua Terry some money. His sale to Wisner may have helped recoup that loss and it's possible Wisner and Terry had an arrangement about the price and other deals elsewhere.

In 1841, Moses married Eliza Richardson. In 1842, they had a son, Edward. At the time, they were renting quarters in Pontiac - probably at the Hodges House hotel.

In June of 1843, Wisner contracted with Solon Comstock to finish "whatever brick house said Wisner may build this season" in exchange for cash and a farm. That's a new house, not an existing one.

On July 2nd of 1844, Wisner purchased the Pine Grove property from Joshua Terry.

On July 24th, Eliza gave birth to their daughter, Hellen. On the 29th, Eliza died, followed a few days later by Hellen.

In the aftermath of this tragedy, Wisner concentrated on building his law practice and acting as a prosecuting attorney in Lapeer County. And in the meantime, built the small house that was later expanded into his mansion.

He worked in the Genesee or Lapeer County areas until 1848, when he finally convinced his second wife, Angeolina, to marry him and move to Pontiac.

She was a hard sell and Moses wrote her often, almost always mentioning the improvements he was making at Pine Grove. From those letters we think Moses and Edward moved into the house in 1845 or 1846.

While the documents we have at hand don't line up with the society stories we've heard over the years, we think it's time to properly say who built the first house on Pine Grove land: **Moses Wisner**.

### SPRING FLEA MARKETS, EXTENDED HOURS, AND TOURS

Our spring season begins with the return of our flea markets and tours - check out the bargains and tour our buildings and grounds every Saturday afternoon in April and May. Lots to see and do, let's make a deal!

If you have items to donate for sale, please contact our office to arrange drop off, and thank you for your support!

#### PRESIDENT'S COMMENTS



**Celebrating OCPHS** 

"Reflecting on the early days of OCPHS, I've been struck by how much and how little has changed. This Society has been through high and low points since its formation in 1874, and it has endured. We treasure what OCPHS was, take pride in what it has become, and celebrate what it can be."

I have misplaced my source for this, but it was true when this was published, and it is true now. We treasure what OCPHS was, take pride in what it has become, and celebrate what it can be.

OCPHS continues to change, and here are some recent changes to celebrate. The Gazette has basically returned to its former format, thanks to Barb Frye and her committee. The exhibits in the Carriage House change regularly thanks to volunteer Tracey Crowe. We welcome the coming of spring, thanks to Mother Nature, as we say goodby to the icy parking area at Pine Grove. The OCPHS Planning Commission is a new team which will make recommendations to keep the Society vital and healthy in the future.

The Society has some historical celebrations coming up! In January 1874, the 'Pioneer Society of Oakland County' was officially organized. The name has changed several times, but we are now 148 years young. Watch for celebrations in 2024 for the OCPHS 150th!

Moses Wisner was born in 1815. We will celebrate his 210th birthday in 2025, along with other events that happened in 1815. In April 1945, President Jayno Adams led the way for the 'Oakland County Pioneer and Veterans Historical Foundation' to purchase Pine Grove from Florence Wisner Clark Wallace.

We are looking forward to the future so that we'll be prepared for whatever may come. Come join us!

Warm regards, Charlotte Cooper

#### **CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS**

Nothing is constant except change. We embrace that concept wholeheartedly and so a new format for our Oakland Gazette is here. We've formed a committee to publish this beast, and we'll be adjusting our format to your needs as members.

With your help, we'll be putting your work here too. So, the floor is open. What do you want to know about the society? Do you have questions? We have answers! Do you have an interesting story you would like to share?

Let's publish it! Let us know via email – and submit articles to <a href="mailto:gazette@pinegrovewisner.org">gazette@pinegrovewisner.org</a>. We're happy to hear from you!

#### **ARE YOUR DUES CURRENT?**

The Dues Paying Membership is the back bone and the life blood of any Society. Without that support the Society would cease to exist.

Membership is annual, running concurrent with the financial year, January to December.

If you have paid your dues for 2022, **thank you for your support**. If not, this is a gentle reminder to support your Society with your dues or tax-deductable donation. Thank you!

#### **BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

President: Charlotte Cooper, Clarkston 1st Vice President: Sara Cote, Highland 2nd Vice President: Dave Decker, Clarkston

Secretary: Barbara Frye, Pontiac Treasurer: Joy Dockham, Clarkston

**Board Members:** 

Nancy Calendine, Pontiac Kathy Davis, Pontiac

Iris Dominguez DeLaO, Pontiac

Bill Grandstaff, Romeo

Gloria Harris-Ford, Pontiac Dyann Hayes, Bloomfield Hills

Gwen Markham, Novi

Evan Monaghan, Pontiac Connor Newton, Waterford

Linda Porter, Pontiac

Adrian Rawls, Pontiac

Rosie Richardson, Pontiac

Rita Ski, Birmingham

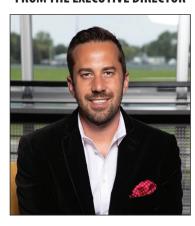
Skip Upcott, Pontiac

Rodger Zeller, Waterford

Ann Stevens, Pontiac

Executive Director: Mike McGuinness

## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Congratulations to our Historical Society's membership on making it to the 148th year of the organization's existence!

On February 27, 1874 the society had its first gathering. Enduring for this long ain't easy, but it sure is worth it. Thank you to our members, volunteers, donors, supporters, and visitors who help keep us alive.

We're working hard to make it a productive year and we welcome your continued support and participation. There is so much local history to be saved and celebrated. We warmly welcome your involvement. Please be in touch with any ideas, questions, or support. Thank you again!

Mike McGuinness

#### **WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!**

Teri Adelberg Weingarden, West Bloomfield Aimee Badarak, Sterling Heights Steve Baker, Berkley Kent James Douglas, Waterford Connie Donnellon, Clarkston Mike Donnellon, Clarkston Ann Erickson-Gault, Troy Claudia Filler, Auburn Hills Norma Gonzalez, Lake Orion Irma Hayes, Pontiac Sharon Kelly-Person, Southfield Lisa Kiefer, Rochester Hills Katie Lochner, Rockwood John Makar, Georgia Ken Martin, Pontiac Eddie McDonald, West Bloomfield Corey Rowe, Rochester Hills Yolanda Sanchez, Pontiac Mary Schusterbauer, Ferndale Michael Short, Westland Linda Simpson, Pontiac John Paul Torres, Waterford Kris Young, East Lansing Don Zwiesler, Howell

#### **VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES**

One of the best ways you can support OCPHS is through volunteering, and boy could we use your help! With spring and summer on their way, there's a lot to do!

It isn't all work: Come have a cup of coffee and a relaxed day. Or take on some research of your own, maybe just help move stuff around. There's no wrong way to volunteer!

Here are a few areas where we could use some help:

## Administrative Help

Help keep our records and bookkeeping in order and make a positive difference in the day-to-day operations of OCPHS.

#### **Collections**

Processing new donations, classifying, inventorying and cleaning. Help us keep our collections in order.

## **Community Service**

Do you have community service through school or the courts? Come get some hours and enjoy our company.

### **Data Entry**

We use the cloud edition of PastPerfect to manage our collections and membership. If you've got the chops, we've got a keyboard and mouse ready.

## **Docents and Guides**

Supplement our awesome docent and guide crew. Conduct tours of the house and grounds, answer questions, and teach history all at the same time.

## **Event Planning Committees**

Our events all need planning and coordination. Come help us put wonderful events together!

### **Grounds and Buildings**

We have lots of opportunities to garden, keep the grounds clean and in order, and help maintain our buildings. A great way to spend a morning or afternoon.

#### **House Committee**

Help create displays and work with our house team to clean, maintain and present our awesome house.

### Research Library

Answering patron's questions, greeting visitors, and shelving materials. Or index scrapbooks and clipping books, or work on your own projects.

### **Schoolhouse Committee**

Keep our schoolhouse tour-ready and work with our schoolhouse committee, planning and creating exhibits, and work with local schools and groups.

#### Interested?

Contact our office to learn more.

#### **COLLECTIONS**

#### **Accessions This Quarter**

Items accepted into our collection recently:

- A thread cabinet from Waite's Department Store in downtown Pontiac.
- A mantel clock and mirror once belonging to Michael Crofoot of Pontiac.
- A number of items relating to Pontiac Central High School, Webster Elementary, and celebration ephemera from the 1982 Super Bowl.
- Reprints of the 1954 and 1955 Green Book.

#### **New Donations Paused**

We've received several large donations during the pandemic. These donations need processing, and we've paused accepting new items into the collection until May to clear the backlog.

Donations in process include a large document and photograph collection from the LeBaron family, thousands of documents from the estate of the late Ray Lucas, a number of uniforms and clothing items from various donors, a collection of materials from the Habel family, several dozen books from the Oakland County law library, and more.

If you have exceptional items to donate that simply can't wait, please contact us to arrange accepting the items. If it can wait until May, we thank you for your indulgence.

That doesn't mean we aren't accepting donations for items to sell, though!

We're happy to receive donations in whatever form to support our society in our April flea markets.

Contact the office to arrange dropping off items for sale.

For information about donating an item to OCPHS' collections, contact us via the usual means and thank you for considering our collections as a destination.

### WITH OUR THANKS

Many thanks to Member Kari Vaughan for her tireless efforts in editing & publishing this Gazette for many years.

We also wish to express our profound gratitude to Executive Director Michael McGuinness for stepping in when Kari stepped back to spend time with her family.

#### **BOARD ELECTIONS**

According to the OCPHS Bylaws and the Society Charter a Board of Directors is empowered to conduct the business of the Society.

Ordinarily, a Nominating Committee is appointed in January and candidates would be solicited and vetted, to be elected at the Annual Meeting in May of each year.

At the February Board of Directors meeting, it was decided that no new candidates would be sought for the 2022-2025 term (only).

Four current Board members are up for reelection. Their submitted biographies follow the bylaw excerpts.

The pertinent section of the bylaws is:

#### **ARTICLE V. Section 2**

A Board of Directors shall be elected by the general membership at the Annual Meeting. The term of office of directors shall be three (3) years, one third to be elected each year by the general membership with the results announced at the annual meeting.

## Running for Re-election in 2022:

Charlotte Cooper: OCPHS Membership, Service, Leadership – I've been a member of OCPHS for about twelve years, a board member for nine years, and president for five years. I've served on multiple committees, set up displays, lead tours, and created a float. I helped organize and am very excited about the new Planning Commission.

Other service organizations - I helped organize and am an active member of Clarkston Area Genealogy Society. I am a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution, displaying active leadership skills at the local, state, and national levels. I am also a certified ski instructor.

**Sara Cote:** "After driving by for over a decade and always wondering what lay beyond that 'Pine Grove Historical Museum' sign, I came across the website in an internet search for local historical attractions. After my first visit, I fell instantly in love with this little-known place with the really long name. I became a member and soon after hosted a talk on edible landscaping in the Carriage House.

I then began volunteering as a docent in the mansion and had fun dressing in period clothing and sharing the fascinating history of the governor and his family. While taking a break from a 10-year career in the stressful world of real estate, I received an email about a part-time office job at the museum. I decided to apply and was thrilled to learn I had been chosen for the position.

#### **BOARD ELECTIONS**

As the former office manager, I feel I was instrumental in increasing community awareness and involvement in one of Oakland County's 'best kept secrets.' One accomplishment I am especially proud of was utilizing print and online media advertising to increase attendance at Small Talks to some standing-room only events. I also enjoyed working with our neighbors, Ed Lee and Steve Cartier, on the Short Street land acquisition project. I am delighted to see the project has come to fruition and feel it has added greatly to the beauty and safety of Pine Grove. As a board member, I hope to continue spreading the word about this important part of local history and promoting and preserving its mission for generations to come."

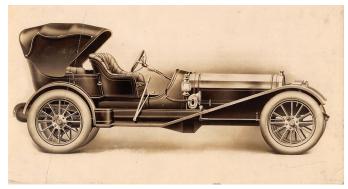
**Barbara Frye:** I am a Photographer / Graphic Artist, with a knack for doing research. I have experience as an Assistant Director and Stage Manager in Community Theater, as well as performing "Improv" at the Michigan Renaissance Festival, and at Canterbury Village in Lake Orion. I enjoy working with people.

As a director I hope to help guide OCPHS to continue to be a progressive force in the Community with regards to preserving the History of Oakland County and the history of the many cities, and historical figures that it contained.

Rita Ski: While growing up within a block of Oakland County I usually read a book a day, mostly biographies or historical novels of days long past. As an adult I returned to live here and discovered the summer social at the Oakland County Pioneer and Historical Society. Finding out, unlike most museums, it receives no governmental funding, I began volunteering to help it thrive. This museum is a well-kept secret that puts smiles on children's faces after a visit as they discover their past. I enjoy contributing my time and money to help the Oakland History Center and the Society continue its mission for those who come after us.

Our Annual Meeting is, in addition to when we elect board members, also when bylaws changes are considered and voted upon by the membership.

We also celebrate our volunteers and present awards and other fun stuff - so please consider attending on May 21st.



Random photo from the collection: A lithograph from the catalog of the Welch Motor Car Company. Welch was founded in Chelsea, Michigan and moved to a plant at the west end of Osmun street in Pontiac in 1904, merging with GM in 1911. The cars were marketed to wealthy citizens, were powerful for their day and won races around the country. We have a number of items related to this early car maker in our collection.

#### AROUND THE HISTORY CENTER...

Rita Ski's efforts to renew memberships continue, and her work is the reason our renewal drive has been so successful. Dyann Hayes has been equally helpful in this yearly ritual, writing thank you letters and supporting Rita's efforts. Thank you both!

Tracy Crowe's undying quest to keep us well organized and our displays fresh, as she resets our exhibits in the carriage house are worth a note. Tracy has also been working with Linda Watson as they organize our vintage clothing collection.

David Porath has been photographing the Charlie Martinez Lithics Collection. The photos are wonderful, professional images of these objects and are certain to let researchers work with them virtually. Thank you David!

Lurking about...

...are Bruce Bandy, keeping our HVAC systems and electricals "current" and ensuring our artifacts are in comfortable surroundings.

...Adrian Rawls, working to put our mansion into tourready condition and freshening its look.

...Herb Szymanski, keeping our sidewalks clear and preparing for our April fleas.

...Paul Bertalan's knowledge of vintage bottles led us to three great Pontiac area items as he sorted a large donation of bottles from last year.

...Geoff Brieger, in the back room quietly accessioning artifacts and books - an unending stream and Geoff keeps it moving while entertaining us with his stories and running commentary on the world at large.

#### **FINANCIAL SNAPSHOT SO FAR - 2022**

General Fund (2 accounts) Oak Hill Cemetery Cash Balance	<u>\$6,424</u>
Restricted Funds	\$228,619
Total Assets	\$264,047
2022 Annual Budget	\$103,000
Budgeted YTD Revenue	\$8,583
Actual YTD Revenue	\$7,971
Budgeted YTD Expense	\$8,583
Actual YTD Expense	(\$11,890)
Total (Under)	(\$2,695)

#### Treasurer's comments:

Welcome to every February: Revenue below budget, expenses over budget. This resolves as the year progresses and our seasonal programming kicks in.

Notably, year to date revenues are higher than expected thanks to Rita Ski's (and the team's) efforts in renewing memberships.

If you'd like copies of our financial reports, contact us at office@ocphs.org.

<sup>...</sup>Pam Schmaltz and her pursuit of soldier's stories which just keep on coming - are putting the Wisner Memorial Stadium plaques into perspective. This is a valued and emotional work we hope to present to you this year.

<sup>...</sup>The research library team - Dave Walls, Barb Frye, Ben Bird, and Dave Decker - have been busy working with patrons and Internet queries - answering questions and digging up information about our past. It's always gratifying to dig into areas you'd never expect - always interesting stories!

<sup>...</sup>And everyone we've missed: Thank you for your support! Just because you're not listed doesn't mean you're not seen!

## THE OAKLAND COUNTY PIONEER AND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

405 Cesar E. Chavez Avenue Pontiac, MI 48342

### ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Non-Profit Org. U.S. POSTAGE

**PAID** 

Permit No. 868 Royal Oak, MI

#### **2022 EVENTS ROSTER**

**Spring Flea Markets and Open for Tours**Saturdays in April and May

Historical Society 148th Annual Meeting Saturday, May 21

**Governor Moses Wisner 207th Birthday Celebration** *Friday, June 3* 

Summer Ice Cream Social (53rd Annual!) Saturday, July 30 + Sunday, July 31

> Oak Hill Cemetery Walk Sunday, September 18

Hauntiac Car Show + Woodward Scream Cruise
Saturday, October 8

**Christmas Open House** 

Saturday, December 10 + Sunday, December 11

## Follow us on social media and watch your email for further information on these events!



Facebook: www.facebook.com/oaklandhistorycenter



Twitter: www.twitter.com/oaklandhistory



Instagram: @oaklandhistory

We regularly send out email updates between Gazette editions, including local history stories and details about upcoming events.

If you don't receive these and would like to be added to our email list, contact us today to let us know!

#### IN THIS ISSUE

Page 1 Lillian Drake Avery Honored
A Pine Grove Myth: Who Built the First House?

Page 3 Spring Fleas, Hours and Tours
President's Comments

Page 4 From the Executive Director
A Dues Reminder

A Dues Reminder
Call for Gazette Contributions
Welcome New Members
Officers and Board of Directors

Page 5 Volunteer Opportunities at OCPHS

Collections Report With Our Thanks

Page 6 Board Elections Information Board of Directors Candidate Profiles

Page 7 Around the History Center

Financial Snapshot

Page 8 Events Schedule

## **ABOUT THE OAKLAND GAZETTE**

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

Volume 55 Number 1, March 2022

Editor: Barbara Frye

Gazette Gang: C. Cooper, P. Schmaltz, D. Decker, M. McGuinness