



THE OAKLAND COUNTY PIONEER AND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

405 Cesar E. Chavez Avenue Pontiac, MI 48342

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"HE SAVED SO MANY LIVES" --- STORIES FROM THE WISNER STADIUM PLAQUES

By Pam Schmaltz



Earl Frederick Burgess
U.S. Army Medical Corps
1909 - 1945

"Earl was all I had," she said. "All I had. It would help so much in bearing this if I only knew what happened. What was he doing? How did my boy die?"

This is an open letter to a Michigan mother whose only son was killed on the Villa Verde Trail in the Caraballo Mountains with the famed Red Arrow Division. Mrs. Olive Sweet Burgess, widow, of Hamilton Court in Pontiac, wrote to a Detroit News war correspondent that her only son, Pfc. Earl F. Burgess, with the Medical Detachment of the 126th Infantry, had died of wounds on Luzon April 11, 1945, and she wanted to know how. She got her answer from the men who served with him:

"Earl was called 'P-38 Burgess,' nicknamed after one of the finest fighter planes in the world. To his friends, it was more than a nickname, it was a laurel of respect. When the going was tough, 'Old P-38,' a litter bearer with the front-line troops, was the fastest man we had in getting to the wounded. He feared nothing, he just went up there and got him out. No matter what was asked of him, he did it. He was slight in build, you know, but he never complained when he carried litter after litter of wounded men up and down muddy mountain trails, so often under fire. I sure got a kick out of P-38 in action. When it was really hot up there, he would always say: 'Well, I got to get out there and bring in one more man.' It was always one more man with him until all the wounded were safely in.

You want to know what happened to him . . . at 1300 hours in the Mt. Imugan area of the Villa Verde Trail your son left the aid station with three medics and two others to retrieve a wounded rifleman. As they crawled across an open area, enemy machine guns opened up on them. Under fire, they started to bring in the rifleman when a 90mm mortar hit three feet behind them. The wounded man was killed instantly and all six, including Earl, were wounded, him the most seriously. He never knew what hit him – he was knocked unconscious and died soon after. He is listed as having died of wounds from mortar fragments.

He is buried at the USAF Cemetery No. 1 at Santa Barbara, Luzon. It is a beautiful cemetery, Mrs. Burgess, with tall stately palm trees, with white crosses on the graves from the chestnut trees of America and with grass and flowers from back home on those graves. You will want to know, too, about how so many of the Red Arrow boys made the long trek to the cemetery by jeep, by truck, by hitchhiking down the Villa Verde Trail, to say a last farewell to your son at his grave. And I thought it so splendid that almost to a man all the veterans of C Company, the soldiers who were with him when he was killed, all those veterans made that pilgrimage.

Perhaps Pfc. Lewis wrote your son's epitaph: "All of us liked old P-38 Burgess," he said. "He saved so many lives."

BOARD OF DIRECTORS ANNOUNCES NEW OFFICERS

At the July board meeting of the Oakland County Pioneer & Historical Society an election of officers was held for Board members who will guide the Society for the coming year. Board members are elected at the Annual Meeting of the Members and the Board selects officers at the next board meeting. Candidates are put forth for the offices of President, 1st & 2nd Vice President, Recording Secretary, and Treasurer, per Society bylaws. Officers serve a one year term, but may be re-elected to their office. Officers elected were:

| | |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------|
| President: | Sara Cote |
| 1st Vice President: | Dave Decker |
| 2nd Vice President: | Connor Newton |
| Recording Secretary: | Barbara Frye |
| Treasurer: | Joy Dockham |

Congratulations to the newly elected officers!



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

President: Sara Cote, Highland
1st Vice President: Dave Decker, Clarkston
2nd Vice President: Connor Newton, Waterford
Secretary: Barbara Frye, Pontiac
Treasurer: Joy Dockham, Clarkston

Board Members:

Nancy Calendine, Pontiac
Charlotte Cooper, Clarkston
Kathy Davis, Pontiac
Iris Dominguez DeLaO, Pontiac
Bill Grandstaff, Romeo
Gloria Harris-Ford, Pontiac
Dyann Hayes, Bloomfield Hills
Gwen Markham, Novi
Evan Monaghan, Pontiac
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

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

Rosemerry Allen, Southfield
Gerald Auten, Virginia
Danna Berry, Pontiac
Carlos Bueno, Pontiac
Serge Danielson-Francois, Dearborn
Tom Driscoll, Birmingham
Jane Easton, White Lake
Stephanie Fakih, Bloomfield Township
Larinda Forstad, Florida
Denise Hatter, Pontiac
Rosemary Johnson, Redford
Jim Klunk, Huntington Woods
Sue Klunk, Huntington Woods
Lukas Lasecki, Farmington Hills
Kristofer Libstaff, Holly
Barbara Littleton, Orchard Lake
Dave Littleton, Orchard Lake
John McPhail, Royal Oak
David O’Ryan, Waterford
Dorothy O’Ryan, Waterford
Hollie Rybicki, Pontiac
Jon Szykowski, Dearborn
Eugenia Wigington, Pontiac
Rod Wilson, Rochester Hills
Sue Wilson, Rochester Hills

Society Membership dues run from January to December of each year.
Please consider OCPHS for your end of year tax deductible donations. Thank you.

Photo credits to
Ronald Karpinski for the first
three photos, and to Barbara
Frye for the last three photos
accompanying this article.



Mike McGuinness as Stephen Mack



Dave Decker as Cpt. Hervey Parke



Hannah Jeffrey as Lovina Mack



Jerry Cleland as Chief Sashabaw

2022 OAK HILL CEMETERY WALK

Lori Miller

The Friends of Oak Hill Cemetery presented their 7th annual cemetery walk on September 18th. This was a special year celebrating Oak Hill’s 200 year anniversary. Volunteers welcomed 155 attendees “*Back to the Beginning*” with presentations by an outstanding cast of volunteers who shared the stories of early pioneers and notable citizens from the early 1800s.

Attendees had the opportunity to meet Col. Stephen Mack, Pontiac’s founding father and Capt. Hervey Parke, the surveyor who laid out the cemetery in 1839. They also met Col. Mack’s daughter, Lovina Mack, who was the first burial in Oak Hill. Also in attendance were early pioneer, Major Oliver Williams and Native American Chief Sashabaw. Elizabeth “Lisette” Denisen Forth, a former slave, landowner and philanthropist, also shared her story. Attendees also experienced presentations of Oliver Meakins Green’s newly installed headstone and the restoration of the Osmun mausoleum. Both projects were completed recently thanks to many donations. Other features at the walk included funeral cookies, a photo opportunity, display of Fisher mansion artifacts and unique items for sale.

This year, the Friends of Oak Hill Cemetery moved their fund raising efforts to the next level by offering sponsorship opportunities. Sponsors received complimentary tickets and recognition for their donations. The Friends would like to thank McLaren Hospital, Liberty Bar, The Stoneway Group and United Wholesale Mortgage for their Silver sponsorships. And thank you to all the Bronze sponsors as well as the numerous donors and volunteers. All proceeds from the sponsorships, donations and tickets sales go to the restorations and enhancements in the cemetery. The Friends look forward to continued efforts to preserve our historic cemetery!



Connor Newton as Oliver Williams



Portia Anderson as Lisette Forth

LOCAL DAR CHAPTERS SUPPORT OCPHS

Barbara Frye

Local Chapters of the Daughters of the American Revolution participate in historical preservation and community service. OCPHS is fortunate to have two chapters actively working toward those goals here at Oakland History Center.

Many Daughters are also members of our Society and other historical and genealogical societies. These ladies are truly dedicated to their communities and volunteer their time and talents here and throughout Oakland County.

Lydia Barnes Potter Chapter of Waterford and Sashabaw Plains Chapter of Clarkston, are just two whose members pitched in to make the Annual Summer Social a success.

The Lydia Barnes Potter Chapter volunteered to be the ice cream vendors for our Summer Social. Not only did they sponsor the ice cream sandwiches, they distributed them and sold water, pop, and chips to thirsty social attendees!



LBP members Barb Sauerwald, Pam Schmaltz, & Sheri Nazawa (photo by Barb Hofmann)

The Sashabaw Plains Chapter prepared a diorama and program about Elizabeth Denison Forth, a very enterprising woman, born into bondage, who with perseverance and guts, gained her freedom, became a savvy entrepreneur, and left a legacy that built a church on Grosse Ile.

The Sons, Daughters, and Children of the American Revolution can trace their family lines back to an individual who participated in the conflict fought for the Independence of our nation.

Their mission is to promote the history of the United States and to be good citizens of that nation. They volunteer their time in service to their fellow citizens and their communities. Oakland History Center is grateful to be the recipient of the attention and service from both the Lydia Barnes Potter and Sashabaw Plains Chapters of the NSDAR. These dedicated

members are an asset to our Historical Society. ~ ed



Sashabaw Plains Regent, Cindy Jahn, with Lisette display at Summer Social. Photo Credit: Barbara L. Frye

PRESIDENT'S COMMENTS



Hello Members!

I am so glad you are here! I am honored to have been elected the new President of the Board of Directors of the Oakland County Pioneer and Historical Society! I have been a member for over 10 years and was previously the Office Manager and also served as the First Vice President for the past five years.

I am so thankful for all of you! I am so proud of what we have accomplished and can not wait to see what we will do next! We couldn't do it without all of our amazing staff, volunteers and members. If you haven't been to our campus lately, come by and see our new and improved beautified grounds and refreshed carriage house, library, mansion and school house. We are always adding to our collection and changing displays to create something interesting for members new and old. We are truly a sight to see and the best kept secret in Oakland County!

Thank you for being a part of us and a part of history. Stay tuned for many more exciting moments to come!

Sincerely and humbly,

Sara Cote



2022 SUMMER ICE CREAM SOCIAL

Michael McGuinness

Our Historical Society's 53rd Annual Summer Ice Cream Social was a hit! Thank you very much to the many sponsors, boosters, volunteers, attendees and shoppers that made the two-day celebration so successful. July 30th and 31st was a banner weekend for visitors to our Oakland History Center, with crowds in the hundreds each day. With every passing year our long-running tradition of the Summer Ice Cream Social becomes even more impressive. These past few years we've been able to stretch our legs and utilize even more of the acreage on our historic campus, and the 2022 version continued to expand our event's horizons. Thank you again -- and mark your calendars for the 54th Annual Summer Ice Cream Social on July 29th and 30th, 2023!

Sincerely,
Mike McGuinness, Executive Director



And this too...

WOMEN'S RIGHT TO VOTE
SPOTLIGHT ON THE 19TH AMENDMENT



September 14, 2022

Sponsored by
PATRIOT WEEK
Renewing The American Spirit



A BIG THANK YOU TO THIS YEAR'S SUMMER ICE CREAM SOCIAL SPONSORS + BOOSTERS:

National Endowment for the Humanities
June & Cecil McDole Foundation
St. James Mortgage Corporation
Al Hernandez & Family
Congresswoman Brenda Lawrence

Michigan Humanities Council
Lydia Barnes Potter Chapter, NSDAR
Sashabaw Plains Chapter, NSDAR
Avalon Energy Systems
Congresswoman Haley Stevens

State Senator Rosemary Bayer
County Executive Dave Coulter
County Commissioner Charlie Cavell
County Commissioner Gwen Markham
Pontiac Mayor Tim Greimel
Sum Bridges Construction
Dot LaLone & Family
Dr. David Dinger & Family
Julie Dreyer & Family
Blair McGowan & The Crofoot
Andy Meisner & Family
Mark Thomas & Family
Bloomfield Twp. Trustee Stephanie Fakih
Brett Nicholson & Liberty Bar
Meijer of Auburn Hills

State Senator Jeremy Moss
County Treasurer Robert Wittenberg
County Commissioner Marcia Gershenson
County Commissioner Angela Powell
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Charlotte Cooper & Family
Gregg Bloomfield & James Lewis
Dr. Bruce & Carol Turpin
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In Honor of Fran Amos
In Honor of M. Beatrice & Richard H. Frye
In Honor of Robert Dustman
In Honor of Gaylor Forman
In Honor of Miriam Foxman
In Honor of Pauline & David McGuinness
In Honor of Kenneth Neal
In Honor of Gale & Connie Scafe
In Honor of Patricia Van Wagoner Andrews
In Honor of Esmo Woods

*Listed Donors Current as of July 28, 2022. We welcome all additional support!

**YOUR SUPPORT ADVANCES OUR
NONPROFIT'S MISSION OF SAVING +
CELEBRATING OUR LOCAL HISTORY!**

www.OaklandHistoryCenter.org



**OAKLAND
HISTORY
CENTER**

At Pine Grove

PONTIAC, MICHIGAN

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



As with any nonprofit organization or collective effort, our Historical Society rises and falls with the efforts of dedicated citizens who take the time to power our efforts. Every day, in a variety of ways, our cause of saving and celebrating our county's fascinating local history is advanced because of people like you. If not you, though, then who? Please invest in our cause with your time, your talents, your treasure, and your tentacles (meaning, your outreach and your network).

I want to highlight for posterity three recent instances of community members coming together to go above and beyond, helping us do our important work. First, this year's Summer Ice Cream Social was a beautiful group effort and made a giant, positive impact for the hundreds of attendees each day; thank you to this year's sponsors, volunteers, and attendees. Second, over forty General Motors employees came out to Pontiac's Oak Hill Cemetery to help clean up those hallowed grounds ahead of our Cemetery Walk. And, third, what a wonderful Oak Hill Cemetery Walk we had this September; thank you to this year's sponsors, volunteers, patrons and, in particular, walk coordinators Nancy Calendine and Lori Miller. We are proud of the myriad ways our Historical Society members make a positive impact through our Oakland History Center and throughout the many communities in Oakland County.

Finally, I want to reflect on the late Gaylor Forman. In previous Oakland Gazette editions, we shared news of his death and celebrated his decades of involvement. As a result of his generous decisions when setting up his trust, the estate of Mr. Forman has resulted in a recent donation to our Historical Society's endowment fund. His generosity means that our long-term savings are in a stronger position than they were at the time of the previous newsletter, and our organization will be better positioned to go even further into the future. Mr. Forman, I lift up your memory and am grateful that you prioritized saving local history in your life. Bless you.

Michael McGuinness



THE 1857 OAKLAND COUNTY LANDOWNERS MAP

Our society has a map on display in our carriage house:



The map is one of around 300 produced by S.H. Burhans of Chicago. It's the first "landowners" map of the county, in which farmers and land-owner are shown. It's 5 feet wide by 6 feet high and was originally mounted on wooden dowels. The original cost of a map was \$6.00 or around \$200 in today's money.

These maps have a complex history and were by any measure difficult to produce. The process took two years, a period long enough that different landowners appear on different copies of the map, and there are 3 different map styles. In 1992, LeRoy Barnett of the State Archives of Michigan wrote a comprehensive history of these maps, which you can read here: <https://www.ocphs.org/pdf/1992-3/>

This summer, the Oakland County Historical Commission undertook the effort of finding as many of these maps as possible – as a result, we now know of 20 copies of the map. Several are on display while the remainder are in storage at various places around the county. It is a fascinating, very useful look at a snapshot in time for Oakland County.

If you would like to see this map or a copy of it in person, please visit:

- OCPHS – That's us! It's in our Carriage House.
- Clarkston/Independence Library Community Room
- Troy Historic Village (in the Poppleton School)
- Baldwin Public Library, Birmingham
- Hadley House Museum, Holly
- Northville Mill Race Park (in the Wash Oak Schoolhouse)
- Oakland County South Oakland Health Center, Southfield
- Warner Mansion, Farmington (currently closed for renovations)

Or, online, in lower quality, on our website at:

<https://www.ocphs.org/1857-oakland-county-map/>

Come one, come all for our annual Holiday Open House, taking place on Saturday, December 10th and Sunday, Dec. 11th! The wintry decor, tours, crafts, games, live music, and historic displays will be taking place from Noon to 4 pm each day. Last year's theme focused on nutcrackers and we had so much fun with it that we're decking the halls with nutcrackers of all variations again this year, but with even more yuletide gusto.

Please lend us your nutcrackers for us to display them throughout Governor Wisner's House and our historic facilities. You can bring them in to the office any time between now and the festivities. And, if you're feeling especially filled with the holiday spirit, we welcome any individual, group, or family that would like to 'adopt' a room to festoon with holiday magic and nutcracker-inspired decor. Contact our office at (248) 338-6732 to let us know of your interest, or with any questions.

AROUND THE HISTORY CENTER...

Brick mason Al Hernandez (the same gentleman who did a masterful job with the Summer Kitchen exterior repairs) was here working on the exterior brick repairs and tuck pointing of the Wisner House.

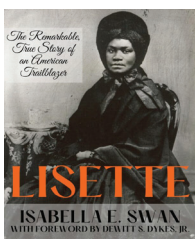
Elizabeth Sparks Adams Lifetime Achievement

Nancy Duffield came in with some of her family for a visit. As luck would have it, Geoff Brieger was in that day; Geoff was last year's Elizabeth Sparks Adams Lifetime Achievement Award recipient. Nancy was one of our awardees this year, but her health and mobility prevented her from making it to the Annual Meeting this spring to receive her award. Geoff and Mike got to present it to her with her family there, and she was both thrilled and surprised. Nancy spent many years volunteering here, as did her late husband Guy, and she and Jo Pate put in many, many hours organizing the society's clothing and textiles collections. Here is Nancy receiving her award surrounded by her family. Congratulations Nancy!



ELIZABETH DENISON FORTH MURAL:

The 60-foot high mural of Elizabeth Denison Forth on the exterior of the Riker Building garage in Downtown Pontiac has been masterfully completed by artist Zach Curtis. There was a ribbon cutting ceremony for the completed mural on Wednesday, August 17, 2022 at 10:00 am in front of the mural. Everyone was welcomed and encouraged to attend! Michael McGuinness spoke at the function in his capacity with our Historical Society, and had copies of our reprinted Isabelle Swan book available at the event.



Copies of the reprint of *Lisette* are available at the The History Center office or at our website:

<https://www.ocphs.org/product/lisette/>

RESEARCH ASSISTANT WELCOMED

Research Assistant Ellie Keys: Eastern Michigan University Graduate Student Ellie Keys (her focus is on historic preservation) started in August with her research assistant volunteer work in the Carriage House. She'll be coming every Friday to assist with research projects and the goal is to have her take the lead on inventory projects. She'll be working with Board Vice President Dave Decker on that initiative.

CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The floor is open. We want the Gazette to reflect our Society, that is YOU! What do you want to know about the society? Do you have questions? We have answers! Do you have a fascinating history to relate about your Oakland County ancestors? Do you have an interesting story you would like to share? We want to know!

We can publish it! Let us know via email – and submit articles to gazette@pinegrovewisner.org. We're happy to hear from you!

BURIED TREASURES

Did you find something in the garage or attic that might be of interest to a history geek? Perhaps you found a City Directory, or an old school yearbook. Items like that can find a new home in our Library! Donations to a 501 (c) 3 are tax deductible. Consider a donation, ask for a tax receipt. Thanks for your support!

2022 COMING EVENTS

Governor Wisner's Home Available for Tours
Tours Available by Appointment, Contact the Office

Hauntiac Car Show & Woodward Scream Cruise
Saturday, October 8th, 2:00 to 5:00 pm

Outdoor Fall Flea Markets
Saturdays in October, 10:00 am to 5:00 pm

Downtown Pontiac Walking Ghost Tours
Saturday, October 22nd (Tours at 6, 7, 8, and 9 pm)
Tickets \$20 per person, benefiting our Historical Society

Harvest Festival & Farmers Market
Sunday, October 30th, 1:00 to 4:00 pm

Marching in Holiday Extravaganza Parade
Saturday, December 3rd, 10:00 am lineup
Downtown Pontiac

Holiday Open House
Saturday, December 10 & Sunday, December 11
12 to 4 pm each day

All events held at OCPHS Campus unless otherwise noted
405 Cesar E. Chavez Avenue, Pontiac, Michigan

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AND HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

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Pontiac, MI 48342

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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!

email: office@ocphs.org

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ABOUT THE OAKLAND GAZETTE

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

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