

IMPRESSIONS

WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER • MARCH 2000

MARY CULVER

Harry Bennett • Hatchet Man, Architect, Artist, and Animal Lover



Photo by Mary Culver

The "Castle" at 5668 Geddes Road, 1997.

A record-breaking crowd of over 100 people filled the UAW Local 849 Union Hall in Ypsilanti to hear Ann Arbor's Historic Preservation Coordinator Mary Culver speak on Harry Bennett on February 20, 2000. Culver has a degree in Historic Preservation from Eastern Michigan University and is a native of Ann Arbor. She gained her love for Washtenaw County and its historic buildings from her father, Sam McAllister, a U of Michigan librarian.

To list all the labels that were applied to Harry Herbert Bennett during the span of his unusual life would be quite beyond the scope of this talk. He was unique and would have stood out in any cultural context. This man was called Henry Ford's alter ego, "the Little Giant," and the "Little Man in Henry Ford's basement." But he was so much more than just a trusted employee of Michigan's most famous millionaire and more even than the most despised member of Ford's executive staff, although he was both of those.

According to his biographers, Harry Bennett was born on January 17, 1892 in Ann Arbor. He never had a chance to get to know his father, because he was killed, according to Harry's own account, "in a brawl with a man who struck him over the head with a chair." He described his mother as a "fine

cultured woman, a talented painter, liked and admired by all who knew her." He explains that after his father's death, his mother married a Mr. Robert Winslow, a member of the U/M faculty who taught foundry operations in the Laboratory shops of the Engineering School.

Tom DeWald, a reporter who wrote several articles about Bennett in the 1970s, claimed that the Bennetts lived at 204 E. Ann Street in Ann Arbor. My search of the City Directories for 1883 through 1894 found no one named Bennett listed as a resident of Ann Street. However in 1891, the year before Harry claims he was born, a Miss Imogene F. Bennett is listed at 7 Maiden Lane. The next year she's listed as a teacher residing at 15 Maiden Lane with Eve A. Bangs, the widow of Martin, Miss Gertrude M. Bangs and Mr. Sidney M. Bangs, a printer for the Inland Press. Then in 1897, a full five years after Harry's reported birth, she appears as F. Gene

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Antiques In April

Once again, the WCHS will be sponsoring an **Antiques Appraisal** by the **DuMouchelles Art Galleries** of Detroit. It will be held on Saturday, **April 8, 2000**, at the Dixboro United Methodist Church. Each person may have up to three carry-in size items appraised. Written appraisals will cost \$15, verbal \$10. Refreshments will be on sale with free beverages. Dixboro Church is located at 5221 Church Street, off Plymouth Road just east of Cherry Hill Road. Numbers will be issued and appraisals will be done in order. For more information call 662-9092.

MARY CULVER

Harry Bennett (continued)

Bennett, widow of Vernor Bennett, and she's back at 7 Maiden Lane. I was unable to find any other reference to substantiate the existence of Vernor C. Bennett. However, I'm persuaded that Miss Imogene F. Bennett and F. Gene Bennett are the same person, Harry's mother. In 1903 Robert Winslow, listed as a molder, is shown in the City Directory as residing at 1010 Wall Street with his wife, F. Gene Winslow. And to make the story even more confusing, in just two years' time, Robert Winslow is residing at 947 Wall Street with no wife listed, and in 1906 F. Gene is there but not Robert!

Some of you may even recognize the 947 Wall Street address as this rather famous house which just two years ago this month made the trip from Wall Street to the Arboretum.

Although he never really bonded with his stepfather, Harry's life in Ann Arbor was secure enough, and for a while Harry even sang in the choir at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, developing a love of music that was life-long. When Professor David Lewis of the U/M's Bus. Ad School interviewed him in 1974, he admitted that he no longer played the saxophone, but still managed a performance for his guest on the organ in his living room.

His step-dad, Robt. Winslow died when Harry was about 13, and he went to live temporarily with an uncle in Saginaw until he and his mother moved to Detroit in about 1909. At that time, he said his ambition was to become a commercial artist, and he claims to have attended the Detroit Fine Arts Academy to hone the talent for drawing and painting that he must have inherited from his mother's gene pool. But there was another set of genetic imperatives in the picture, and conflicts over his mother's strict efforts to make sure he wasn't "spoiled" led him to leave Detroit to join the Navy in 1911 when he was 17. Some reports have claimed that Harry's academic life was over at the end of the eighth grade when he was suspended for being incorrigible. Again, I found no evidence to support the claim. However, it was apparently in the Navy that Harry found another talent, this one also provided by his father's side of the family. Harry fell in love with boxing. He was small--only 5'7" on a 145-pound frame--and "it

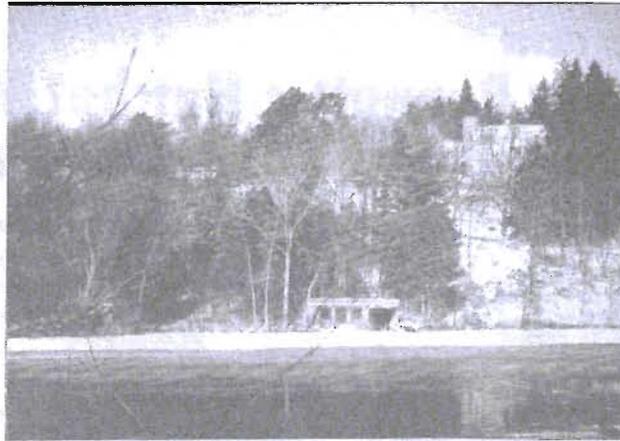


Photo by Mary Culver

The castle, boat house, stables and guest house from the south, 1996.

was the only sport for which I found myself eligible." But once more his father's pugnaciousness changed his life's direction. He had finished a tour of duty, intending to "re-up" after some R-and-R and was on shore leave with a buddy in New York when he got into a brawl with Custom Officials at the Port Authority. By sheer coincidence, one of William Randolph Hearst's most noted journalists, Arthur Brisbane, was a witness to the scuffle, and for some unknown reason decided to help the scrappy sailors. Once they were remanded into Brisbane's custody, Harry's buddy promptly re-enlisted in the Navy and disappeared from our story. But Brisbane had an appointment to interview the man whom some say was even better known to his countrymen than their president, and he thought this cocky sailor ought to meet him too. His date was with Henry Ford whose model T, that rugged, mechanically simple, ugly black automobile had put Americans on wheels by the millions, necessitating changes to their landscape that made Detroit the transportation capitol of the world. That day at Ford sales headquarters on Broadway, Ford, now in his fifties, asked the young sailor, "Can you shoot?" When Harry said yes, thinking maybe the man was looking for a bodyguard, Ford offered him a job in the company. Harry claims his answer was, "Well I won't work for the company, but I'll work for you." And the rest is history.

In Keith Sward's 1948 book entitled *The Legend of Henry Ford*, he described Bennett's function as his master's "all-in-all." He served as friend, advisor, spokes-

man, confidante, strategist, hiring agent, chief of personnel, production whip, political intermediary, informer, personal body attendant, captain of the guards, commander of the household troops, and at least figuratively, as the prince regent and lord high executioner.

Accomplishing all of this took time; Bennett first was assigned to the department at Ford where motion pictures were produced for the sales and marketing efforts of the company. Mr. Ford was also concerned about security at his new plant and he was aware that his Rouge plant employees were an especially rough lot. How Harry Bennett managed to leave his drawing board and become Ford's security guru is a story of one man's tenacity in an era of sweeping industrial change.

You've already heard from Professors Lewis and Ligibel about some of Ford's theories of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. In addition to his efforts to mitigate his workers' tedium through his Village Industries and efforts to return to the virtues of an agricultural economy, Ford had an almost missionary zeal for a very old-fashioned concept called redemption. He believed that even a convicted felon was only a victim of his circumstances, and could be redeemed by improving those circumstances. Ford reasoned that if a man had a good job that paid a living wage, he could afford to marry and raise a family, to own a house and perhaps even tend a garden to provide his own food. And he put his money where his mouth was, hiring, with Bennett's help, a significant number of convicts discharged from Michigan prisons. While some characterized the Ford plants as operated by convicted thugs, these men became Bennett's eyes and ears. Together with his mentor, Harry Bennett created and headed the Ford Motor Company's most notorious and feared unit, the Ford Service Department. In Harry's words, "Ford Service" was the name used for plant police." After the 1933 skirmishes with burgeoning union activity and the passage of the National Labor Relations Act, Bennett was designated by Ford to direct all labor relations for the firm. In 1937 *The New York Times* printed that Harry was "said to have more authority in the company than any-

one except the Fords,” meaning Henry and Edsel, and Edsel was so often in conflict with his father that even he was forced to defer to the old man. Harry, on the other hand, always managed to avoid conflict with Ford, mostly by doing exactly as he was told and doing it quickly, efficiently and without questioning how or why. Professor Lewis says, “Bennett did anything Ford told him to do, without question and with dispatch.”

The lofty position he eventually reached was achieved and had its origin because of an American tragedy that threatened every man of wealth and position. This was the kidnapping of Charles and Anne Morrow Lindbergh’s infant son. Even before the body was recovered, men like the Fords were struggling to find ways to protect their precious children. For Henry Ford, the problem was passed to Harry Bennett. Ford’s children, including Edsel, were old enough to enjoy the protection of bodyguards provided by Bennett’s Service Department, but Edsel, who had been named president of the company in 1918 when he was only twenty-five, had four children who were vulnerable, and Bennett had access to people who could guarantee their safety as no others could. Here’s how he described the times:

“Only if you lived in Detroit during Prohibition times could you know how bad the crime situation was...Through Bert Brown of the United States Secret Service I was introduced to the man who, it was claimed, was the head of the Detroit underworld - Chester LaMare, a short, bull-necked, swarthy Sicilian. Through Joe Palma, I also met other men of the underworld in both Detroit and New York. We gave LaMare a Ford agency, known as the Crescent Motor Sales Company, and he became a partner in the underworld’s control of the fruit business in Detroit. Mr.

Ford had become disgusted with the bloodshed between warring underworld factions over fruit distribution, and told Bennett to find out who really controlled it and give the company’s fruit concession to them with the understanding that there was to be no more violence, or he would not permit fruit to be sold at the plant. “No more violence” also promised safety for the Ford grandchildren.

Ford assigned Bennett the job of guaranteeing the grandchildren’s protection from kidnapping. “I don’t care how you do it, and I don’t even want to know how. Just do whatever you have to for them to be safe.” For Bennett, there could be only one organization that could make such a guarantee possible, and that was the mob. The fruit concession was the quid pro quo that would keep the guarantee in place. Some say the food concessions at Ford Motor plants are still operated by the mob.

Bennett claims that “the reason I was able to deal with these underworld people for so long and still stay alive was that I always kept them obligated to me, but never became obligated to them. If I had ever accepted even the smallest favor from one of them, I would have become their man; and eventually that would have been the end of me. But even with this policy, a number of times we got into ticklish situations that I survived only by great good luck.”

He goes on, “Because Mr. Ford came to dominate my life so completely, to the extent that I had no existence outside the Ford Motor Company, late in the 1920s I decided to build a home away from Detroit. . . just outside of Ann Arbor, which came to be known as ‘the Castle.’” . . . [it] was a three-story brick structure with two towers” which, though not in the original plan, had been suggested by Mr. Ford. A narrow tunnel was built, leading some distance

out from the house toward the river, and it was connected to one of the towers accessible through a secret door and winding staircase. Bennett had raised lions and tigers at home for several years and often took them to the plant. “I have always been fond of cats of any kind, and this became a hobby with me. At the end of the tunnel I kept my lion and tiger cages.”

Most of you have



Photo by Mary Culver

One of the concrete “trees” used to ventilate the pool, 1996.

heard the story of how Bennett snuck one of the lions into the back seat of a friend’s car. As the man drove home, he felt a paw placed on either shoulder and with his hands shaking with fear and the lion’s head atop his own, he drove home, eased out of his car and locked the garage door.

When Ina Hanel, Jan Enns and I were doing the Intensive Level Historic Survey for Superior Township, we searched everywhere for the name of the architect who might have designed the Castle. Professor Lewis believes, and I tend to agree, that it was a joint effort of both Bennett and Ford, and like so many of Ford’s plants, it just grew. I don’t think it’s coincidence, though, that both Ford’s Fairlane estate and Bennett’s castle have crenellated towers, so evocative of the castle-keeps built for defense in the days of King Arthur. Both estates are graced, if one can call it that, with underground tunnels too.

Harry goes on, “Around the time I was building the Castle, Mr. Ford decided that it was important to build up better relations between the company and public officials.” This began even before the house was ready for entertaining, so Bennett bought a series of yachts for the purpose. “Soon”, he says, “I had to turn my home into a veritable nightclub. It became hard work for me, and hard on my family. Entertaining for Mr. Ford became such a large part of my job that I fell almost completely out of touch with what was going on in the plant the last ten years I was there.”

Between the two men, the complex was



Photo by Mary Culver

The guest house and theater at 5668 Geddes, 1997.

to become almost a corporate fortress as well as a resort for Ford Company clients and prospective allies. By 1930 it encompassed almost nine acres on the north side of the Huron River with a Geddes Road address. This parcel included the brick twin-towered "Castle", a garage, and stables for the horses Bennett also loved. It also included a guest house, (originally built as a dowry house for Harry's mother and later turned into a theater where his daughters put on amateur entertainments), a pool house (since removed), and a boat-house with painted murals on its walls and with a fireplace at one end. Few were aware that Bennett also owned another 70 acres on the south side of the river on a low sandy peninsula. This was called "the Island" because it was separated from the property to its south by the Michigan Central Railroad tracks. Here Bennett's love of horses was indulged to an unusual point seldom seen outside of Kentucky. It comprised stone stables, a barbecue pit, a hotdog stand, a blacksmith shop, a carpenter shop, and to complete the complex, an oval horse-ring with raised bleachers.

Perhaps the most remarkable landscape features were built around an elaborate canal system dotted with miniature structures built for the shelter and enjoyment of wild waterfowl on the river. Among others, the collection included a small-scale but architecturally accurate replica of the U.S. Capitol, a pristinely simple New England-style church, and a lighthouse and bridge made of rounded river-washed cobblestones. Bennett loved to have the geese, ducks, and herons that lived on the river swim up his miniature canal and strut across his manicured lawns. In fact their tameness was the reason for one of Bennett's most heartbreaking discoveries. One day in the middle of a union dispute, he was alerted that agitators were on their way by boat to raid the Castle. One can imagine how smugly he must have felt as he climbed his tower, loaded the gun emplaced there, and waited to defend himself. He must have heard the boat engine die as they pulled into his boatdock below the house. But he was horrified to hear gunshots, some say machinegun shots, as wave after wave of the waterfowl he'd tamed were mowed down in the water. Bennett is said to have destroyed the sluices for his canal that same day. He left the miniature garden structures to be erased by time and the

weather, and never again was tempted to lure the beautiful wild things onto his lawn.

Another incident of violence led to a change in the design of the front entry of the Castle. Harry describes how he thought he heard a strange noise at his front door and upon investigation found himself the target of a sniper. In some accounts, it was his daughter that was injured.

One intrepid trespasser, an architecture student at the U/M, described his astonishment when he stumbled onto an oval swimming pool near the Castle. "I was leaning against a tree for several minutes before I noticed something quite unusual. The tree was made of cement. We looked around and saw several more of them, some about ten feet high and others even



Photo by Ginna Jordan

A secret panel in this living room fireplace once divided the room into public and private space, 1996.

taller - about 25 feet. Further examination showed that the trees served as ventilation ducts for the swimming pool's heater. At places where it appeared that limbs had been cut off, we found soot-covered screens."

The mystery of the cement trees was explained to me in an interview with the son of a Ford employee named Barnabei, part of a crew of Italian craftsmen that included John Angeloti, who, according to some, may have been Bennett's designer. Not only were the trees cast of concrete, the "log" cabins on the island were also cast to resemble the real things.

Few were also aware that other Ford men lived in close proximity to Bennett. One of his neighbors was the U/M's famous Harry Kipke, one of Fielding Yost's All Americans and later head coach of two National Championship teams at Michigan in 1932 and '33. Bennett's address

was 5668 Geddes Road and Kipke's was 6200. In 1937, Kipke was terminated as head football coach, a move which stunned his alumni supporters. An article by the late Tom Jones which appeared in the *Ann Arbor Observer* in May 1997 charged Kipke with violating NCAA rules by allowing his players to be hired for summer positions at Fords where, it was believed, Harry Bennett gave them time off and a place to hold illegal practice. Kipke wasn't unemployed for long. In 1938 he went to work as a manufacturer's representative for the Ford Motor Company, and a year later he announced his plans to run for the U/M's Board of Regents, an election many say was won behind the scenes with Bennett's help in spite of losing every precinct in Washtenaw County. In 1950 Kipke was appointed to the U/M Board in Control of Intercollegiate Athletics, the successor to the body that had fired him in 1937.

In August of 1997, the Castle went on the market for \$1.5 million dollars, and I managed to get the real estate agent to allow me to come to the open house. These slides are the result. The Living Room is a large space once divided by a secret panel in this fireplace into public and private areas. I also have photos of the Dining Room with its oval plaster ceiling decoration, the downstairs Powder Room and the marvelous baths upstairs.

There is another floor facing the slope to the river under the main floor, and here were rooms for drinking, gaming, cards and other entertainment. Marble floors and wonderful murals set an opulent scene, and I was surprised to find little evidence of the sort of storage most basements have, even when, like this one, they're the walk-out variety. There is one set of cupboards, but it's not what it seems. Inside one of the doors is a ring that pulls out to move the entire cabinet over far enough to reveal a hidden stair. Four or five steps down is a beautifully tiled little room with a tall metal column rising from a tiled basin about 3-4 feet in diameter. The pipe appears to be a simple tin construction until you see the faces decorating its capitol. Could they be cats? At the top of the column, water can be made to spray the basin underneath. It's usually referred to as a fountain, but I believe it was designed as a bath for the cats. From this room, a tunnel led to their cages.

In 1945, Henry Ford II was released

from military service to begin to take over the reins of the company. He faced the daunting task of converting the "Arsenal of Democracy" into one of the automotive post-war "Big Three." At a meeting of the company's Board of Directors, Bennett who by that time was a Director in his own right, claims to have anticipated the change of command. He sat through a reading of what was proposed to be his old boss's "resignation", obviously ghost written for a man whose writing skills and other mental faculties were long gone. Then Bennett rose and angrily congratulated his new boss and asked to be excused. But the ordeal he saw as a farce wasn't over until the other Directors, mostly all Ford family members, elected Henry Ford II President of the company. Bennett disputes the accounts that claim he was fired. According to his book, after the meeting was over, "I told Henry I wanted to talk with him, and we went into his office. I felt bitter, as anyone else might have. I told Henry, you're taking over a billion-dollar organization here that you haven't contributed a thing to. I had always said that when Mr. Ford left I would go. I walked out of the Ford Motor Company. It was all I could do to keep myself from running down the hall, I wanted to get out so fast."

Although he remained on the payroll for a year and a half, and even toyed with becoming an agent for the company, Bennett's reign as Henry Ford's right-hand man was over. And in a final irony, on April 7, 1947, with the Rouge River flooded and all electric power and telephone communications at the Ford Fairlane estate cut off, in a unheated room, lit by oil lamps and candles, Henry Ford died of a massive cerebral hemorrhage. Bennett did not attend the funeral. To him, Mr. Ford had died two years earlier during the 1945 Board of Director's meeting. He never returned to Michigan to live.

The house was sold to Harold A. Stark, a metallurgist in 1948, and two years later Mr. Stark acquired the Island across the river for his company, Electro Arc. His son, Harold, Jr. told me an incredible story of Bennett's generosity. One Sunday, when he was only a teen-ager, his father received a call from Harry Bennett, asking if he could come out to the estate for a visit. Stark knew that he still had business interests in the area, and they probably also knew that he'd been subpoenaed to testify in Detroit in Senator Estes Kefauver's investigation of the Detroit underworld. In any case, they were happy to welcome him back to his remarkable house and probably had a whole list of questions about it that only he could answer. In the course of the tour of the house

and grounds, they came within sight of a fence on the east side of the parcel where horses were corralled. To their surprise, the horses began to whinny and dance toward the fence, tossing their beautiful heads and pawing the ground. They recognized their owner, and the Stark family witnessed a wonderful reunion between the ex-boxer and the horses he still owned and loved. Rubbing the muzzle of one and turning to Harold Stark Jr., then just a high-school student, he said, "what do you think about this one? The young man gulped and said, "He's the most magnificent animal I ever saw." "He's yours" Bennett replied. Harold Jr. couldn't believe he'd heard him correctly. He wanted desperately to ask Bennett if he had, but he was afraid Bennett would say he was only kidding. Later he asked his father if he had heard Bennett give him the horse.

"Oh yes, his dad said, the horse is yours."

"But why would he give something like that away so casually?"

"Because that's the way men like that get things done" his father replied.

In 1974 Professor Lewis spent hours with Harry Bennett on the west coast, and the story of how he gained entry and even Bennett's confidence is a testimony to his powers of persuasion. Bennett had an art studio in his home where, with special glasses to accommodate his failing vision, he continued to paint. His cats, downsized from the lions and tigers that he once tethered to trees in front of the Castle, numbered three. To show off for Lewis, he made a circle of his heavily tattooed arms, and Lewis laughed to see all three jump through it.

Strangely appropriate, wouldn't you say? after all the people Bennett had gotten to jump through hoops for him?"

Mary can provide a detailed bibliography on Harry Bennett for those who are interested.

Attention Teachers!

LOAN BOXES AND WHAT'S IT? GAME AVAILABLE. WCHS offers a travelling exhibit of small artifacts, set up as a "What's It?" Game, for schools and other groups. We also have two loan boxes—"Life Before Electricity" and "Hats to Spats" which can be rented for a \$15 fee and a deposit. Sally Silvennoinen will demonstrate the What's It? Call her at (734) 971-5086 or leave a message with Pauline at 662-9092.

Knapps Points Have Changed

Knapp's Points Coordinator Esther Warzynski reports that Bill Knapps is no longer giving out yellow slips towards community purchases. However, you can still collect points for the WCHS by saving your cash receipts when you dine there. We are close to our goal and will soon be able to purchase acid-free boxes for storing our textiles.

New Items In Our Collection

Collections Chair Judy Chrisman reports the donation of one of the original chairs from the Ann Arbor Bus Depot. Kathleen Timberlake, who purchased it at the Salvation Army when the bus station's Art Deco interior was altered, gave the chrome and leather chair. Built in 1940, the Bus Depot on West Huron will soon only be a façade as a modern skyscraper will soon be attached to it.

Also donated last month (by yours truly) were an inkpot from the Geo. Wahr Bookstore and blotters dating to the 1940s from the Ann Arbor Bank, Fox Tent, and Ann-A Fuel Company.

To donate an item to the WCHS, contact Judy at 769-7859 or write her at 1809 Dexter Rd., Ann Arbor, 48103. You will be sent an acquisitions form for tax purposes if the item is accessioned.

Salem Barn Is Saved

The latest issue of the Michigan Barn Preservation Network News reports that dedicated volunteers in Salem Township were able to dismantle and reconstruct an 1830s barn built by the township's first settler John Dickerson. Twenty-two members of the Salem Historical Society gave 500 hours of work to help owner Paul Hensley move the barn from its original site on Chubb Road to the corner of Curtiss and North Territorial Roads, where the Society has already restored a stone one-room schoolhouse. Our hats tip to all of you in Salem for a job well done. Anyone interested in the Barn Preservation Network should contact them by calling Steve Stier at 517-347-3073.

DALE LESLIE

Movies On A White Sheet

The U.S. entry into World War II saw an overwhelming outpouring of patriotism and a heightened sense of duty by Americans on the home front.

In Michigan, the automotive plants that employed thousands of workers quickly retooled to manufacture military hardware. No new passenger cars were produced during the war. Men and women of all ages and backgrounds tackled an ambitious schedule of war production, including the around-the-clock assembly of the B-24 "Liberator" bomber at the world's largest factory at Willow Run. The cosmopolitan citizenry shared a fixed mission: "We must save the world from tyranny." It was a proud moment for the world's foremost democracy.

Ralph Peterson, an ambitious, young professor at Eastern Michigan University who lived in Ann Arbor, was disappointed when he failed the physical exam required to enter the military. Nevertheless, by providing instructional and vocational education and through an innovative avocation he contributed significantly to the war effort. Outside the classroom, Professor Peterson sustained community morale with an innovative and entertaining outdoor motion picture road show and attracted large audiences throughout Washtenaw County. The theater venue would magically appear at dusk, in surrounding village squares, schoolyards, vacant lots and cow pastures. The brilliance of tinsel-town was reflected in the smiling faces of the residents of Chelsea, Dexter, Dixboro, Saline and Whitmore Lake.

A tall, studious man, Ralph Peterson looked like a college professor. He was reserved and methodical and showed his good humor with a face of amusement rather than

hearty laughter. His demeanor was the perfect match for a tobacco pipe, which he smoked occasionally. Along with his devoted wife, Evelyn, the Peterson family of six lived in a large, yellow, wood-frame house on McKinley Street, just east of Yost Field House. With four young children -- including twins -- Evelyn's career was on hold as she cared for their own home front.

"Ralph was committed to the war effort," Evelyn recalled.

"He was never a man who waited for others to lead. If he had an idea and it could help support the country, then he went ahead with it, regardless of the odds." So, during World War II, the Peterson team of over 60 showmen met weekly at the McKinley Street address where they became couriers of the celluloid to over a score of area communities. "I can still picture our two-year-old son, Ralph Dale, pulling himself up to the window as the workers arrived and exclaiming, 'There are the men, mommy! There are the men!'" Evelyn recalled. At dusk, a parade of citizen ants from all points of the community, saw it as a job but I also remember the excitement and anticipation of the evening program."

Ralph's son Duane also has fond memories of those years. There was no cost of admission to the Peterson productions. "Dad had a good, working relationship with many of the out-county general stores and gas stations. He would drop into a community a week prior to the show and ask for financial support as a gesture of community spirit. He seldom walked away empty-handed," Duane said.

Although each member of the audience had their own favorites, Westerns and Romantic films were generally the most popular. The audience also enjoyed an assortment of comedies and film shorts.



Photo supplied by Dale Leslie

Aerial view of the historic Dixboro School (1888) and Village Green, 1981.

Once young Duane had earned his driver's license, the understudy would frequently carry lead baton for his dad. His solo flight included piecing together the pre-feature local talent shows. "People sang solos, there were vocal and instrumental groups," he said, "The live performances kept the audience entertained until darkness fell."

"Now that I am older," he reflected, "I am nostalgic in recalling the many small communities we served and the people we touched plus the priceless experience of working with my dad." Indeed, it's remarkable how Ralph Peterson, his son Duane and their loyal band of showmen were able to sustain local wartime morale by projecting movies on a white sheet.

Do you have a story you'd like to tell? If we have room, we will be happy to print articles we receive from our readers. Please send them to Susan Wineberg at 712 E. Ann St., Ann Arbor, MI 48104 or by e-mail (preferred) to swines@umich.edu.

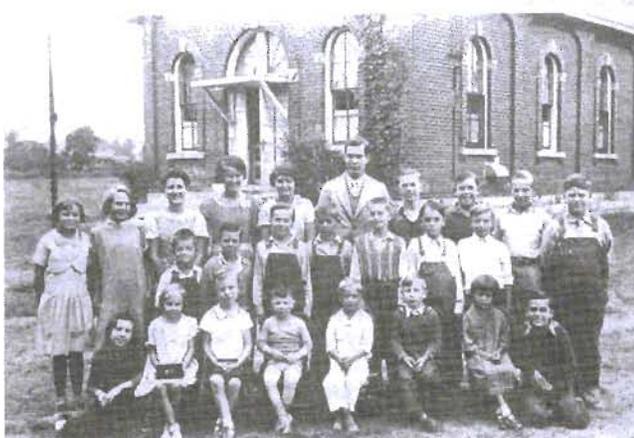


Photo supplied by Dale Leslie

Dixboro School Class of 1933-34. Dale Leslie's uncle, Bud Leslie, is second to teacher's left (the teacher is Ivan Parker).

Our Endowment Is Growing

Treasurer Patty Creal reports that we are nearing our goal of \$5,000 for the Endowment Fund. We are hoping that with this \$5,000 capitalization we will be able to find better investment opportunities. Thank you everyone who has contributed to the endowment for our Museum Building.

WCHS Program Schedule

Mark your Calendars for our future programs. All programs are on the third Sunday of the month from 2-4 PM and are free and open to the public. Refreshments are usually served. All members receive a post card reminder of the event with instructions on how to reach the site of the lecture.

Sunday March 19, 2000

Joe O'Neal will take us on a tour of his **Collection of Argus cameras and optical devices** located in the former Argus factory at 401 Fourth St (at William). O'Neal became fascinated with these products after he moved his successful construction company into the former Argus factory on the Old West Side. The collection has grown so large that he now has his own small museum, which he will share with us in a personal guided tour.

Saturday April 8, 2000

We will be holding another **Antiques Appraisal by the DuMouchelles Gallery** on this date. Ernest DuMouchelle has agreed to be the appraiser. It will be held at the Dixboro Church from 10-3.

Sunday April 16, 2000

Grace Shackman, local writer and historian, will lecture on Michigan architect **Alden Dow in Ann Arbor**. Though best known for his work in Midland, Dow had a strong connection to Ann Arbor through friends and clients including his sister Margaret Dow and her husband Harry Towsley. Shackman's slide tour of Dow's local work will be shown in the comfort of the new auditorium at one of his later works—Greenhills School.

Wednesday May 17, 2000

Annual Meeting and Potluck will be held at the Chelsea Depot at 6:00 PM. We will hear about the History of the **Chelsea Milling Company** by Howard S. "Howdy" Holmes after stuffing ourselves with the usual feast. Holmes will tell us about the famous Jiffy Mix Company his

father founded in Chelsea.

Saturday June 3, 2000

A **van trip to Midland, Michigan** will leave at 9 a.m. and return at 6 p.m. The cost will be \$40/person and there will be a limit of 30 people. We will tour the Alden Dow Home and Studio and enjoy a box lunch in the living room of this lovely home. We will visit the home of his parents, Herbert and Grace Dow, which is next door. We end the day with a stroll through the beautiful Dow Gardens. Depending on the number of subscribers we will take one or two 15-person comfortable vans for the two-hour drive to Midland. Refreshments will be provided on the morning trip and a brief comfort stop will be made both going and returning.

Two Board Members Resign

I regret to report that two board members have resigned. Lisa Black, who has served for three years as our gift shop coordinator, is just too busy as a realtor to continue serving on the board. Lisa has also helped out at our Antiques Appraisals and her good humor and spirit will be missed. Terry Brinkman, the nephew of Alice Ziegler, only recently joined the board in September. He finds he must return to his native Nebraska to help his family there. We wish him the best of luck in the future.

One More Business Supports Our Newsletter

Yet another business has come forth to support the society and the newsletter. Thank you **Harris Marketing Group** for helping history!

Still Wishing

We still need a fairy godmother, father or whatever to tackle some very large projects that need to be completed. The house needs to be repainted at a cost of \$5,000. We also need to have the lighting completed in the parking lot for a cost of \$3,000 and in the front of the house for \$1,000. If you find money burning a hole in your pocket because of the booming stock market, please think of the WCHS!

Speaking of the stock market, we would like to alert our members and supporters of other ways they can give to the society. Members can remember the WCHS in their wills when they make their estate plans. This is an excellent way to provide financial support to the Society. Another way to help the Society and your tax position is a gift of paid-up life insurance. Individuals may find themselves with a paid life insurance policy that no longer serves its original purpose of providing financial support for a spouse or children. By assigning the policy as a gift to the Society, the donor receives a tax deduction for a contribution in the amount of the cash-value of the policy. The Society receives the benefit of the policy upon the donor's death. Confer with your tax consultant before any decisions, however.

Property may also be donated with significant tax advantages. The land you own can even be donated now while reserving the right to use it for the remainder of your lifetime. Gifts of Securities can also be advantageous to the donor in that capital gains taxes can usually be avoided. Employers who will match your donations to qualified charitable or educational organizations sometimes offer Matching Gifts. Contact your employer to see if the WCHS qualifies. There are lots of ways you can help the WCHS grow and prosper.

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Around The County

The **Saline Area Historical Society** presents Tammy Freeberg from the MSU Extension Office who will discuss "The State of Agriculture in Michigan, Including County Trends" on **March 15th**. The meeting is at the Depot Museum, 402 N. Ann Arbor Street, at 7:30. On Wednesday, **April 19th**, **Cathy Andrews** will speak on furniture styles, with information on how to identify genuine antiques. And on **May 6th** the **Rentschler Farm** will re-open with a Springtime on the Farm exhibit. For more information call Wayne Clements at 429-9621 or Agnes Dikeman at 769-2219.

The **Dexter Pioneer Arts Fair** will be celebrating its 27th year on Saturday, **March 18th** at the Dexter High School, 2615 Baker Rd. from 10-4. More than 50 artists, selected by jury, will demonstrate and sell historic and ethnic crafts. All proceeds go to support the Dexter Area Museum. Among the artists will be Sue Lentz, rag weaver, Adabelle Hill, watercolorist, and members of the Ann Arbor Chapter of the Embroiderer's Guild of America. There will also be demonstrators of lace making,

stained glass, calligraphy, basketry and tinsmithing, and a children's story corner and activity table of pioneers crafts. Lunch served from 11-2.

The **Ann Arbor Doll Collectors and Ann Arbor Model Railroad Club** will be displaying their wares in the lower level of the Ann Arbor District Library, Main Branch, from **April 3-28**. Over 480 dolls, bears and trains will be on view. Club members plan to offer 15-minute guided tours of dolls and bears from 1-5 on April 8, 15, 16, and 22. Check with the library for tour times by calling 734.327.4200 or Pat Girbach, 734.662.6676.

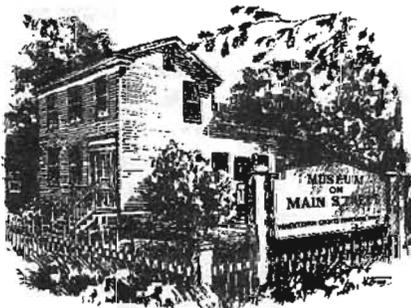
The **Genealogical Society of Washtenaw County** will have its next meeting on Sunday the **26th of March**. Genealogical Computing Editor, Liz Kelly Kerstens will discuss her own computer program Clooz. It is like a document filing cabinet that can be called up when needed. The second part of the program will be our own Webmaster, Sharon Brevoort, who will present "How to Build A Web Page." This event is at 1:30pm. Meet in Lecture Hall

#2, Liberal Arts and Science Bldg. Washtenaw Community College.

The **Plymouth Historical Museum** has a new exhibit entitled "**American Vacations and Leisure**." In conjunction with the exhibit, Plymouth collector **Dan Hershberger**, President of the Society for Commercial Archaeology, will be speaking on "**Early Auto Touring in America**" on **March 9th**. The lecture will be held at the museum located at 155 S. Main St., Plymouth, at 7:30. The public is invited.

Next Program

Joe O'Neal will be taking us on a tour of his collection of **Argus Cameras on Sunday, March 19th (note change of date) at 2 PM**. It will be held at the former Argus Building, now O'Neal Construction, located at the corner of Fourth and William Streets. This historic building was formerly the Keck Furniture Co. Post cards will give details.



WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Post Office Box 3336
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106-3336

COLLECTION OF ARGUS CAMERAS

SPEAKER • JOE O'NEAL

**2 p.m. • Sunday
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