

WINTER  
2017

# Impressions

NEWSLETTER | WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Movies were the favorite local entertainment in 1927. But with a comfortable monopoly, Ann Arbor theaters were in no rush to join the sound revolution.

## The Talkies Come to Ann Arbor

At the end of 1927, Ann Arbor was a small college town. On New Year's Eve, the Ann Arbor News estimated the population to be 28,493. During the golden age of silent films, however, even that modest number was more than enough to keep five movie theaters bustling.

Near the 12,000 students on the UM campus were the large Majestic

Theater on Maynard, and the Arcade on North University; the small Rae was downtown on Huron just west of Main Street, just a few blocks from the decade-old twin theaters the Orpheum and the Wuerth, on Main near William. The Wuerth/Orpheum complex, with seating for 1,500 people, was the biggest in Ann Arbor. The Rae, which sat only 200 people, was the smallest.

*Continued on page 6*

## Inside...

- 2 Pauline Walters Memorial Award in Spring 2017
- 3 WCHS Updates
- 4 Argus Views of World War II
- 6 The Talkies Come to Ann Arbor
- 10 Around the County
- 12 U of M - Celebrating 200 Years

Top Photo: Jack Cook began working as a Michigan Theater projectionist at age fourteen, and ran Ann Arbor's first talking picture show in 1929. (Photo by Eck Stanger, November 1942. Ann Arbor News)

# WCHS

2016-2017  
BOARD OFFICERS

**President**

Karen Jania

**Vice President**

Anita Toews

**Treasurer**

Leslie L. Loomans

**Corresponding Secretary**

Patricia W. Creal

**Recording Secretary**

Judith M. Chrisman

**BOARD MEMBERS**

Joseph Cialdella, Ph.D.

James Davis

Dave Easterwood

Tom Freeman

Emma Haldy

Deborah Kingery

Dale Leslie

Jay Snyder

Susan Cee Wineberg

Cynthia Yao

**DIRECTORS-AT-LARGE**

Richard L. Galant, PhD

Susan Kosky

Dennis Powers

Jan Tripp

**ADMINISTRATOR**

Bev Willis, *Impressions* Editor

**MUSEUM DOCENT  
& GIFT SHOP MANAGER**

John Kilar

**ARGUS MUSEUM CURATOR**

Cheryl Chidester

**ADVISORS**

Ina Hanel Gerdenich

David LaMoreaux

Louisa Pieper

Kay Williams

*Impressions* is published four times a year by the Washtenaw County Historical Society, a non profit 501(c)(3) organization. Donations are tax deductible

## Message from the President – Karen L. Jania

### The Pauline Walters Memorial Award

The Pauline Walters Memorial Award was established June 2016 in memory of Pauline Walters. Pauline served the Washtenaw County Historical Society for many years in various capacities including good will ambassador, Corresponding Secretary, Membership Chairperson and President.



**Purpose of the Award**

This award supports the mission of the Washtenaw County Historical Society, which is “to educate and inspire our community to engage in preservation and presentation of Washtenaw County history.”

**Who is eligible?**

The award is open to any individual or organization with a project meeting these criteria. The winner/s of the award will be presented to the public at the WCHS annual meeting in May at which time the winner/s should be prepared to give a short presentation about the winning project/s.

**The maximum award amount is \$500**

All submissions must be postmarked by April 1, 2017

**To apply:** submit a maximum 2 page proposal outlining your project, how it supports the mission, how the money will be used and a time line for project completion. Please send your proposal to:

Washtenaw County Historical Society  
Attn: Award Committee  
P.O.Box 3336  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-3336

**Questions?** Email the Washtenaw County Historical Society: [wchs-500@ameritech.net](mailto:wchs-500@ameritech.net)

### The Washtenaw County Historical Society

P.O. Box 3336 • Ann Arbor, MI 48106-3336 • 734-662-9092 [wchs-500@ameritech.net](mailto:wchs-500@ameritech.net)  
[washtenawhistory.org](http://washtenawhistory.org) • [facebook.com/washtenawhistory](https://www.facebook.com/washtenawhistory)



**Museum on Main Street**

500 N. Main St  
Ann Arbor, MI 48104-1027  
(at Beakes & E. Kingsley)

**HOURS** Saturday & Sunday,  
12 Noon – 4:00 PM  
by appointment Monday-Friday  
Groups are welcome,  
Call 734-662-9092

New exhibit opens  
early April - see page 12

## Membership Renewal

When you join the Washtenaw County Historical Society, you become part of a 160-year-old heritage of local history preservation. Your memberships and donations support the work and the mission of the society and expand our capacity to serve in the following ways:



- The preservation of local history
- Care for the collection
- Educational programs, walks, talks and tours
- Rotating exhibits at the Museum on Main Street and the Argus Museum on W. William Street
- Community outreach to local schools, libraries and other historical institutions

Membership runs 1/1-12/31.

### Membership Benefits

- Quarterly issues of the newsletter *Impressions*
- Educational programs and activities
- Opportunities to volunteer
- Meet other history fans
- Discounts at the Museum on Main Street Gift Shop

### 3 Ways to Join or Renew

**BY MAIL:** Current members received renewal letters with return envelopes in December.

**IN PERSON:** The Museum is open on Saturdays and Sundays from 12 Noon - 4 PM when there is an exhibit.

**ONLINE:** You can securely renew or join anytime at [washtenawhistory.org](http://washtenawhistory.org). You do not need a PayPal account to use the service.

### Questions about Local History?

WCHS board member Susan Wineberg can try to help answer them, or point you in the direction of the resources or people who can help in your research. Email your questions about local history to the Washtenaw County Historical Society at [wchs-500@ameritech.net](mailto:wchs-500@ameritech.net).

February

26

## History of the Huron-Clinton Metroparks

There are 13 beautiful parks, covering over 25,000 acres throughout Wayne, Oakland, Livingston, Macomb and Washtenaw counties. This regional park system created in 1940 by the citizens of Southeast Michigan, provides recreational and educational opportunities while serving as stewards of our natural resources. In this program you will learn how these parks were formed and what makes them so special.

Presented by Joseph Cialdella – Washtenaw County Historical Society board member and Michigan Humanities Council Program Officer.

**Sunday, February 26 • 2:00- 4:00 PM**

**Dexter District Library, lower level**

3255 Alpine Street, Dexter, MI

Bring a Friend!

This is a free program and open to the public.



### Dexter-Huron Metropark Opened in 1952

The Washtenaw County Road Commission transferred ownership of four tracts of land in Washtenaw County along the Huron River to the Huron Clinton Metroplotan Authority (HCMA) in the early 1950s. These two hundred twenty acres, which were the first acquisition on the Huron River between Belleville and Kensington Metropolitan Park, were divided into three Metroparks: Dexter-Huron, Delhi, and Hudson Mills. All three were originally intended for "passive recreation," as places that would encourage an appreciation for nature, environmental restoration, and land preservation along the area's ancient highway. Dexter-Huron already existed as an informal picnic area.

# Argus Views of World War II

By Cheryl Chidester Argus Museum Curator



Phoebe Johnson assembles the T149 telescope.



Helen Doe, Edna Belleau, Christine McAlister, Phoebe Johnson & Reba Nichols discuss the assembly of the T149.



Adjusting the mirror on the T149 is Mary Lou Brown.

The story of Argus's contributions to the War Effort is significant. While the company's innovations and production of lenses and sighting equipment manufactured for the Allies in WWII have been recognized, very little was known about Argus's wartime radio products, particularly in radio aviation.

Wartime issues of the monthly employee newspaper *Argus Eyes* often included photos of the optical staff and products. Argus's annual report from 1943 showed military sights, scopes, and optical components. A new plant, across the street from the original Argus factory on 4th Street, was completed in 1942 and expanded in 1944. After the war, *Fortune Magazine* highlighted the "optical division" in a multi-page article titled *The Fall and Rise of Argus*.

Much less attention was paid to the radio production that took place in the old Plant 1. Over the years it came to be referred to as "Bendix sub-contract work." The only documentation is brief mentions in *Argus Eyes* and six pages of cryptically captioned photos in a 1946 Argus report headlined "World War II Activities."

The report pages showed both the optical and radio products, but gave very little specific information. The optical products were relatively few in type (though produced in large

numbers) and turned out to be easier to identify than the radio products. The optical products often had a distinctive shape or application that could be identified from wartime Army optical manuals.

Early in the war some were marked "I. I. I." (International Industries Incorporated, Argus's corporate name during most of the war), and several were shown in wartime ads in ways that clearly indicate their applications.

Argus Museum patrons, and Argus Collectors Group (ACG) members, Mike Reitsma and Pam Buckley, began capturing Argus's WWII radio production by attempting to identify and display every device shown in the 1946 report and to put the Argus material into technical and historic context.

With a couple of exceptions, Argus's name did not appear on its radio production. The photos in the 1946 report were not identified as an Argus-made component. Instead, they were given generic names like "bomb control transmitter" (for the BC-1158) or "power driven band switch" (for a component in the BC-433 radio compass). Identifying these components required the examination of the insides of any and all WWII airborne radios to be found. Several years later, with diligent research (including AAF manuals and Argus Eyes

publications) and collecting from a variety of merchants (including HAM swap meets, eBay, flea markets "warbird" websites and garage sales), and a generous loan from a radio expert in Iceland, they achieved about half of that objective.

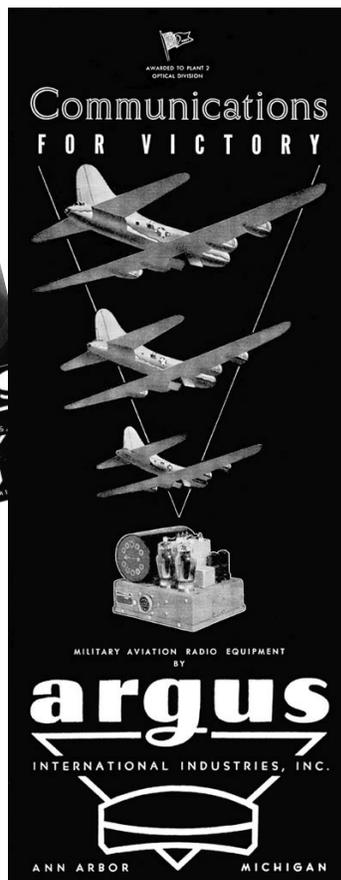
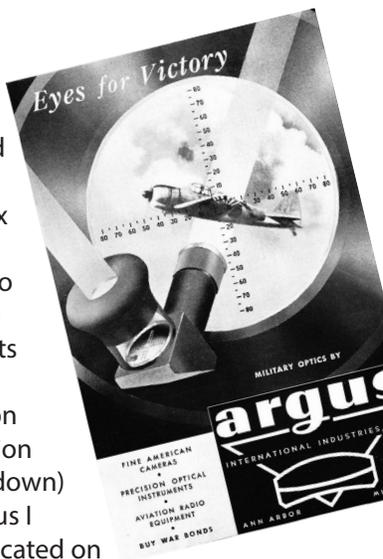
Mike and Pam then drove their collection, *Argus Plant I Radio Production in WWII*, to Ann Arbor where it was displayed during the 2015 Argus Collectors Group/Argus Museum Fall Conference. It tells of an important chapter in our local and national history. It is on long-term loan to the Argus Museum with hope that the collection can be shared with appropriate historical organizations to gain wider exposure. We are planning to have this Argus radio aviation collection, alongside Argus WWII-era optical products, on display this fall at the Michigan Military Technical & Historical Society Museum in Eastpointe. The opening of the exhibit will coincide with the ACG/Argus Museum 2017 Fall Conference. Much of the information given in the article is credited to Mike Reitsma and Pam Buckley.

Hundreds of American companies shifted their peacetime assembly lines to wartime work during WWII. The contributions of large companies to prominent weapons are best known. Ford made B-24's. Fisher and Chrysler made Sherman tanks. Eastman managed the centrifuges at Oak Ridge. Boeing made the B-17 and the B-29.

The contributions of uncounted smaller companies probably best illustrate the breadth of the industrial impact of the war. In 1940, the Argus Camera Company (which at that time was known as International Industries Incorporated [III]) began preparing for War Department work.

*Continued on page 5*

By the end of 1940, it had contracted with Bendix Radio in Baltimore to make radio components and began construction of an addition (now torn down) on the Argus I Building, located on W. William, to manufacture military optics. Argus converted wholly to War Department work late in 1941 and began a conversion back to civilian camera production in the last months of 1945.



Another instrument that Argus manufactured elements for, and is part of the collection, is the MP-28. During WWII, Army aircraft electrical systems ran by distributing a 24-28V supply globally and

then boosting it up locally to the hundreds of volts required by receivers and transmitters. This boost was accomplished using "dynamotors." These devices consisted of a DC motor that ran off the 26V supply, turning a generator that output a high-voltage AC supply. Filters in the dynamotor or receiver smoothed out the AC into a high-voltage DC supply that was used by the avionics. The MP-28 was the dynamotor for the Bendix TA-12 transmitter. The TA-12 was used by

many commercial transport and passenger aircraft and by Canadian Lancaster and Mosquito bombers during the war. One of the very interesting things about the MP-28 is that it is one of few Argus WWII radio products that appeared in Argus's wartime ads. It is shown below three B-17s in the above ad titled "Communications for Victory."

Examination of wartime *Argus Eyes* issues suggests that Bendix radio compass equipment, primarily the control boxes for Bendix radio compasses, comprised a large fraction of Argus's wartime radio production. There are two relatively complete radio compass systems in the collection, the SCR-269 and the MN-26. The SCR-269 was the most common radio compass on American bombers during the war. The MN-26 was used before and during the war on both military and civilian transport aircraft.

A radio compass is basically a radio receiver connected to a directional antenna. It allows the navigator to determine the direction of a distant transmitter. A second bearing to another transmitter allows the aircraft's position to be determined. The MN-26 system requires the pilot or navigator to manually adjust the direction of the antenna. The SCR-269 system includes circuits in the BC-433 receiver that direct the antenna toward the tuned transmitter. This classifies it as an automatic radio compass.

We have featured just a few of the devices and have just touched upon the wealth of information in the expansive collection. Showcasing it with Argus optical devices will, we believe, present a significant and impressive display. Support for this effort is needed and greatly appreciated. For information on this, and other Argus Museum projects, please contact the Argus Museum Curator at: [cchidester@onealconstruction.com](mailto:cchidester@onealconstruction.com) or 734-769-0770.

Argus fabricated parts for a variety of instruments for other companies as well. Included in the collection is an A. C. Delco autopilot component. How is this related to Argus? Page 26 of the Argus 1946 report shows an item identified as a "turn control." After looking at hundreds of similar things on "warbird" websites, in on-line auctions, and at military collector shows, a very similar item was found; it was labeled "A. C. Delco." Research revealed that production demands of the war forced A. C. Delco to farm out product manufacturing to diverse companies including makers of pinball machines, cameras, typewriters, and thermostats.

### The Argus Museum

525 W. William St.  
Ann Arbor, MI 48103  
(734) 769-0770

**HOURS** Monday-Friday  
9:00 AM – 5:00 PM

Follow us on  
Instagram & Facebook!  
[washtenawhistory.org](http://washtenawhistory.org)





The Rae, an early Ann Arbor movie house, opened in 1915 on Huron Street. Its name comes from the first letters of its original three owners first names. The movie house closed just at the advent of sound films in 1928.

**(Cont. from page 1)** The Rae was an independent theater. The rest were owned and operated by Butterfield Theaters, a chain that owned ninety-seven theaters throughout the Midwest.

It was a momentous period in the history of the still-young movie industry. That October, Warner Brothers stood New-York on its ear with the release of "The Jazz Singer," the movie generally remembered as the first talking picture. It wasn't actually the first film to use a synchronized spoken soundtrack in place of silent movies' written captions, but its reception was a powerful demonstration of the potential of talkies.

The people of Ann Arbor were seemingly unaware of the event. There is not so much as a mention of the furor stirred by "The Jazz Singer" in the Ann Arbor News, even though the paper carried a regular column on the society page entitled "New York Day by Day." The anonymous author of the column evidently had no love for the film business, or for the new national celebrities it was creating. "Hollywood has its points," he sneered in January 1928, "but come to think of it what are they?"

The hinterlands didn't share the columnist's indifference. People in Ann Arbor flocked to the movies. "The theaters were always full on most nights," recalls Jack Cook, who worked as a film projectionist from the 1920s into the early 1950s. After new releases arrived in town, typically on Sundays, packed houses were

common until a significant portion of the city's population had seen them.

Demand for films was so intense that the Butterfield chain was hard at work building the most majestic silent movie house Ann Arbor had ever seen. On Thursday, January 5, 1928, the Michigan Theater opened its doors for the first time. On that date, the *Ann Arbor News* wrote that the "decorations rival those of the largest houses in the nation." The theater was by far the largest in Ann Arbor, with a claimed capacity of 2,000 persons. The actual capacity, Jack Cook believes, was closer to 1,800, more than 5 percent of the entire population of the city.

When the Michigan opened, it, too, was packed night after night. But despite its popularity as a movie house, it was obsolete before it ever opened. It was built as a silent movie theater at the time when the silents were already doomed. Just fifteen months after the Michigan's grand opening, it was eclipsed by what the *Ann Arbor News* hyperbolically pronounced "the most momentous event of all time in local amusement history": the arrival of the first talking pictures in Ann Arbor".

The theater industry in Ann Arbor in the late 1920s was a small community within the community. Each theater had a projectionist and an assistant projectionist, ticket sellers and ticket takers, managers and assistant managers, and numerous ushers. (The Michigan Theater, Jack Cook recalls, boasted of "an usher on every row of seats.") Before the coming of sound, each theater also had its own musicians to accompany silent films, and the bigger theaters also hired vaudeville acts and comedians to perform before and after the movie.

Those large payrolls meant that theater owners felt financial as well as popular pressures to switch to the

*Continued on page 7*



When it opened in 1928, the Michigan Theater boasted an army of uniformed ushers.



Henry Aldridge was one of the leaders in saving the Michigan Theater. For years he had worked with others to restore the Barton Theater pipe organ, originally used to accompany silent films.

new sound movies. Although the theaters "had to install extra projectors and hire relief projectionists" to handle the more complex sound films, Jack Cook recalls, they also were able to let go their musicians. The introduction of newsreels and short one-reel sound films to supplement feature films also meant that the theaters no longer had to hire live acts to fill their bills.

On the front page of the February 18, 1929, *Ann Arbor News*, a small story appeared with the heading "To Install New Equipment Soon." The story went on to tell how the Wuerth Theater would, after extensive alterations to the projection booth, install sound projection equipment. At the time, there were two competing systems of motion picture sound: Movietone, which incorporated a track on the film itself, and Vitaphone, which used a separate sound system synchronized with the film. Since some studios used Movietone and some Vitaphone, the Wuerth would be equipped for both. The first talkie using the new equipment would be presented on Sunday, March 24, 1929.

Given the popular enthusiasm for "The Jazz Singer," the only question is why it took a year and a half after its opening for sound movies to finally come to Ann Arbor. The most likely explanation is the cost of the changeover-sound equipment and the remodeling it took to accommodate it in the previously silent movie houses were expensive-coupled with the mechanics of the local theater industry. The Butterfield chain had a virtual monopoly of movies shown in Ann Arbor. Without any appreciable competition, there was no pressing reason for the Butterfield chain to rush into the expensive conversion of their silent movie houses to sound.

When Butterfield finally did begin to switch to sound in Ann Arbor, they introduced it in only one theater. And even that gradual conversion was delayed to give priority to more competitive cities. According to George Westenfeld, another longtime Butterfield projectionist, sound equipment intended for the Wuerth actually arrived in Ann Arbor early in 1928. Before it could be installed, however, it was pulled off the railroad platform and reshipped to Bay City, where another Butterfield theater urgently needed it to match a sound-equipped competitor. With production of sound equipment lagging far behind demand nationally, it was almost a year before replacements arrived.

The renovations at the Wuerth Theater continued through February and into March 1929. Work was done when the

theater was closed so as not to interfere with the regular schedule. The work crews included the area superintendent from Western Electric, the company that developed the Vitaphone system. The projection machines at the Wuerth did not have to be replaced, only modified for the two systems. Sound heads were placed on the projectors for the Movietone system, and the synchronized disk system for the Vitaphone system was installed in the projection booth. This in itself was no real problem. It was the amplifiers and speaker system that took up the most space and caused the major renovation of the projection booth. This caused further complications for the projectionists. Not only did they have to learn how to operate the new systems, but the renovation made it harder to get out of the booth in a hurry should a fire start. Since in those days movies were printed on highly flammable nitrate film, fire was a constant threat. All it took was for the projector to slow down during the showing of a film for the heat of the projection lamp to set the film on fire.

Excitement built in the community in anticipation of the belated arrival of Ann Arbor's first sound movies. On Thursday, March 21, 1929, the Wuerth Theater was featured prominently on the front page of the *Ann Arbor News*. The main story described in detail the bill of entertainment for the first "all talking" show in Ann Arbor. Destined to be the first talking movie shown in Ann Arbor was a Fox Movietone seven-reeler called "The Ghost Talks," a farce that starred Charles Eaton and Helen Twelvetrees. The feature was accompanied by three Fox "sound shorts," one-reel films of popular vaudeville acts of the day: Rooney and Bent, Beatrice Lillie, and Joe Cook. Also on the bill was a Fox Movietone newsreel.



(Continued on page 8)



The Majestic opened on September 19, 1907. The Maynard parking structure now occupies the Majestic's former site.

On Saturday, March 23, the *Ann Arbor News* ran two full pages of advertisements from local businesses congratulating the Wuerth Theater and its management. That night, before the big opening the next day of the films that ushered in the age of sound in Ann Arbor, projectionists Jack Cook and George Westenfeld and their boss, Paul Dangel, had a private showing. They had to check out the film and equipment and also time the entire run of all five films.

Both Cook and Westenfeld began working in movie houses before they entered their teens. At the age of ten, Westenfeld began putting up posters for the Butterfield chain in Bay City. (He replaced another boy who was struck and killed by a car while on his posting route) By the time he turned fifteen, Westenfeld persuaded the projectionists to teach him to show films, and eventually he transferred to Butterfield's Ann Arbor theaters when the Bay City theater closed.

Jack Cook, born on a farm six miles south of Ann Arbor, began hauling ice to a pop vendor in the lobby of the Rae at age twelve, and as a teenager was recruited by the theater's owner as a projectionist. From the Rae, he became a substitute and weekend projectionist at Butterfield's



The Arcade Theater was a silent movie theater that opened in 1914. This theater was destroyed by a fire in 1928.

Wuerth-which is how he wound up with the honor of projecting Ann Arbor's first talkies on Sunday, March 24, 1929.

The Wuerth was scheduled to open for a 7 p.m. show and a 9 p.m. show. People started queuing up early. By 7 p.m. the line stretched out the door of the theater on Main Street, down the block to the corner of Liberty Street, and at least a half a block west on Liberty. Needless to say, it was a complete sellout. Jack Cook and George Westenfeld were both in the projection booth, along with Paul Dangel, but it was Cook who actually projected the films.

The second sound film shown at the Wuerth played a week after "The Ghost Talks." It was a Paramount effort entitled "Interference" that starred Evelyn Brent and William Powell. It was preceded by three shorts and a Movietone newsreel.

People came in such droves to the Wuerth's sound movies that even Butterfield's comfortable monopoly was forced to adapt rather quickly. Within little more than a year, all the film theaters in Ann Arbor switched over to sound. (The independent Rae, the last, converted about eighteen months after the Wuerth.) Even as

reconstruction went on at the Wuerth, the manager of the year-old Michigan Theater, Gerold Hoag, had announced that the palatial silent picture palace, too, would change over to sound. Hoag was quoted in the February 23, 1929, *Ann Arbor News* as saying the Michigan would have "talking where talking is best and silent where it is most appreciated."

In fact, sound movies had come to Ann Arbor to stay. Within a few years, production of silents ceased. Jack Cook continued to project talkies at Butterfield's Ann Arbor theaters for more than twenty years, spending much of that time at the Michigan. In 1952, seeing the decline of the movie industry in the face of television, he left the business to work for Purchase Radio. George Westenfeld worked out his career as a projectionist, but still worked occasionally setting up equipment for live stage shows.

It was only since the establishment of the Ann Arbor Silent Film Society in 1981 that silents again had regular public showings in Ann Arbor. And it was not until the first Ann Arbor Summer Festival in 1984 that the Michigan Theater Foundation and the Ann Arbor Symphony began an occasional collaboration to present silent feature films with orchestral accompaniment and a live vaudeville prologue, the first full-fledged silent productions in Ann Arbor since the golden age of silents nearly sixty years before.

---

**DENNIS ALLEN** is a teacher, historian, musician and writer. He graduated from U of M with a dual major of History and Social Science and a Master's Degree in History from Eastern Michigan University. For 16 years he was the Historical Society of Michigan's Book Review Editor. Currently working at the University of Michigan as Manager of the Introductory Physics Labs, Allen contributes to the ongoing development of new experiments, writes and teaches. He also plays bass.

# WCHS Educational Programs

Extensive use of glass and open design concepts create a connection with nature



The WCHS 2016 Educational program series concluded with an afternoon of Mid Century Modern Architecture presentation at the Pittsfield Township Administration

Building on November 20, 2016. Local historian and author, Grace Shackman, shared many engaging stories, facts and images with the members and guests. Washtenaw County was a national leader of mid-century modern architecture. These buildings and homes (built from 1940 to the 1970) feature simplicity and integration with nature. Ann Arbor has several examples, many designed by UM School of Architecture professors.

Some of the architects discussed were Alden Dow who apprenticed with Frank Lloyd Wright, UM Professor Robert Metcalf who according to Michigan Modern, designed more than 78 houses in Ann Arbor, 15 of which remain in the Ann Arbor Hills neighborhood; William Muschenheim who painted his doors and trim all a different vibrant color and Ann Arbor native, David Osler. The program concluded with questions and answers.

The WCHS Educational programs series offers a mixture of talks, tours and walks throughout the year. If there is a topic, place or person that you are interested in, email your ideas to Anita Toews at [toewsam@gmail.com](mailto:toewsam@gmail.com) or call 734-662-9092.

## 2017 Spring

### Sunday, February 26

**2:00 PM** History of the Huron-Clinton Metroparks with Joe Cialdella at the Dexter District Library, lower level. See page 3.

### Sunday, March 19

**2:00 PM** Walking tour and talk at the Ypsilanti Automotive Heritage Museum in Depot town.



### Friday, April 21

**2:00 PM** Walking tour and talk at the newly renovated William L. Clements Library.



---

## You are invited to the February Meeting and Program of the Genealogical Society of Washtenaw County

### Sunday, February 26

**1:30 PM**

#### "Grandma Was Adopted? Using Adoption Resources and DNA Testing to Build the Family Tree"

1:30 PM – Presented by Bethany Waterbury. If you have an adoption or unknown parentage event in your family, you know how challenging it can be to fill those branches on your

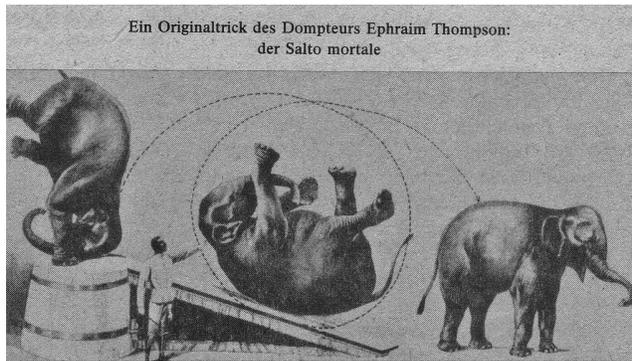
family tree. Depending on the state and time period, adoption records can be extensive or non-existent. Increasingly, genealogists are successfully turning to DNA testing to work around restrictions on access to adoption records. This talk will explain which records are available to genealogical researchers during different time periods and provide information to determine whether DNA testing

might provide the answers you are looking for. The meeting and Program includes a talk: "**African-American Churches in Washtenaw County**" by Omer Jean Winborn

The meeting is free and open to the public. Education Center Auditorium, St. Joseph Mercy Hospital Campus, 5305 Elliott Drive Ypsilanti, Michigan

# Around the County

## Ypsilanti's own world famous circus performer



Ephraim Thompson was born in Ypsilanti on October 28, 1859. He left at an early age having been caught up in the fever of joining a circus. Ephraim joined the Adam Forepaugh Circus, one of the biggest of the time, and learned his trade. When he left

the Adam Forepaugh Circus, he went into the circus business for himself owning four elephants and touring primarily Europe for some 20 years.

An article praises his work with elephants and reviews his shows in

Germany. The elephants were famous in their own right. In 1906 he brought the show to his home town of Ypsilanti, together with his troupe of four elephants, for three performances at the opera house. "He carries with him four elephants which have traveled all over Europe with him and among which is the only somersault elephant in the world, Mary, which was a smash hit. The elephants were amazing and were named Rose, Tillie, Mary and Mina". Ephraim's parents, Frances and Phillip Thompson, were born in Kentucky and their children included George, Edward, and Moses as being born in Ontario, Canada, and Ephraim, Julia and Charles born in Ypsilanti. He died in 1909 in Egypt.

## Forest Lawn Cemetery – Home to some of Dexter's Early Leaders and Heroes

Forest Lawn Cemetery is the oldest cemetery in Dexter. It is an historical site located near Mill Creek at 8059 Grand Street. Many of the early leaders of the Dexter area are buried there including:

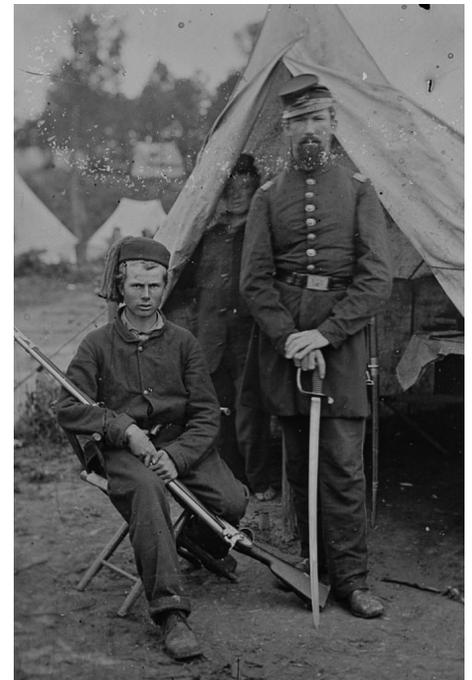
**Samuel William Dexter (1792-1863)** was the son of Samuel Dexter, an early United States Senator, Secretary of War and Secretary of the Treasury. In 1826, Samuel Dexter was appointed Washtenaw County Court Justice, and he was the first postmaster. He was a well-known abolitionist, and there is evidence that Gordon Hall was used as a "station," on the Underground Railroad.

**Harrison H. Jeffords (1834-1863)** graduated from the Law School at the University of Michigan. He felt compelled to join the Union Army during the Civil War. He served as a Colonel and Commander of the 4th Michigan Volunteer Infantry. During the second day of the Battle of Gettysburg

(July 2, 1863), Jeffords was mortally wounded by a Confederate bayonet in brutal fighting in the wheat field. He was attempting to rescue the 4th Michigan's colors (their flag). The townspeople of Dexter raised the needed funds to purchase and install a monument in his honor.

**Calvin Fillmore (1810-1879)** was a brother of US President Millard Fillmore. Calvin designed and built Gordon Hall (1841-43), the home of Judge Samuel Dexter, and the first Methodist Church and many other buildings in the Dexter area.

**Sylvester Noble (1792-1829)** was one of the first settlers of Dexter Township. The county history says that Noble was also an abolitionist, as does his obituary, which states that "during the days of slavery his sympathies were strongly engaged on the side of the oppressed and his house was frequently made a station on the underground railroad."



Captain Harrison H. Jeffords (right) and another young Union Zouave of the 4th Michigan Volunteer Infantry Regiment posing in front of a tent during the Civil War. Jeffords was mortally wounded at the Battle of Gettysburg. Photo: Mathew Brady.

## County Roads are Actually Centuries Old

The road network in Washtenaw County began as a series of native trails, usually following rivers and streams and connecting Indian villages while providing access to hunting grounds. These paths, worn deep by centuries of foot travel were located on high, dry ground along waterbeds and streams. They linked the numerous rivers that covered the state, providing a continuous transportation system. Such roads as Huron River Drive and US-12 generally follow Indian trails. Later, these trails were widened to connect major settlements, and thus roads like Dexter-Chelsea Road, Ann Arbor-Plymouth Road, Saline-Milan Road, etc. were established. After the county was surveyed, a mile grid system of roads was superimposed over the existing road network.

Michigan became a territory in 1805 and in 1827 townships were given responsibility for road building within their jurisdictions. When Michigan became a state in 1837 the constitution provided for a continuation of the township road system. Townships which controlled the construction and maintenance of the roads were divided into numerous road districts, each under the charge of a highway commissioner. Individual property owner's road taxes were assessed at 62.5¢ per day, however, township residents could work off the tax by working a certain number of days per year on road construction or maintenance, or providing a yoke of oxen, a team of horses or other equipment. The system of road districts did not result in a coordinated road system. In 1893 the County Road Law was passed which encouraged counties, by vote of the people, to establish a County Road Commission. Washtenaw County voters approved the creation of a County Road Commission on April 11, 1919 with an initial County Road system of 22 miles. ([www.wcroads.org](http://www.wcroads.org))

## Satisfy Your Hunger for History with a Lunchtime Lecture Series



**Wednesdays**  
**12 Noon – 1:00 PM**

The Kempf House  
312 S. Division Street  
Ann Arbor  
734-994-4898  
Free, but donations are appreciated

### March 8

**Bird Center of Washtenaw County** Educational Team Member Rayelene Mieske, will present Blue, a live Blue Jay, "in person", as an ambassador for the Bird Center and for all wild birds. She will talk about how the Center got started and how it services community by rehabilitating and releasing rescued birds.

### March 15

**Green Things Farm Show and Tell.** Nate and Jill Lada, local organic farmers whose farm supports our Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), as well as a traditional farm stand that includes local meats and flowers, custom transplants, wholesale options, and even summer dinners.

### March 22

**Good Tickle Brain** Mya Gosling, Shakespearean-themed web-comic creator Mya's Good Tickle Brain website and Facebook page sport off-beat and witty take-offs on Shakespearean plays. Expand your imagination with a listen to this creative presenter.

### March 29

**The Peace Corps, Sierra Leone, and Me** Norm Tyler, local author/architect What prompted a naive nineteen-year-old from small-town Michigan to work in villages in West Africa where locals had never before seen a white person? Norm will tell first-hand stories based on his personal diary from his two-year tour as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Sierra Leone, West Africa, the narrative of book, *The Peace Corps, Sierra Leone, and Me*. Norm is also the lead author for books on Historic Preservation (also translated into Korean), Community Planning (also translated into Chinese), and Greek Revival architecture.

### April 5

**Pastor Frederick Schmid, missionary to early Germans in Ann Arbor** Barbara Wilson Foster, organist at St. Marks Lutheran Church in Ypsilanti will share her studies of Pastor Frederick Schmid, who was sent in 1833 as a missionary from Basel, Switzerland, to the German settlers in southeast Michigan. Walking or traveling by horseback, he founded about 20 churches, including Bethlehem in Ann Arbor. Some music familiar to German pioneers in the mid 1800's will also be performed.

[Click here  
to join or  
renew  
online.](#)

**The Washtenaw County Historical Society,  
established in 1857, is 160 years old this year!**

**Thank you so much for your membership and support.  
It makes the work of the WCHS strong, sustainable and  
present for future generations.**

## Celebrating the University of Michigan's Bicentennial



At 2 a.m., October 14, 1960, three weeks before the election, presidential candidate John F. Kennedy addressed a densely packed crowd in front of the Michigan Union with an electrifying speech. Kennedy spent the night at the Union. In the morning, crowds followed his motorcade up State Street.

The class instructor is Jason Jay Stevens. He is a Lecturer in the Museum Studies program at the University of Michigan, and an Adjunct Professor teaching exhibit and environmental design at the Lawrence Technological University, College of Architecture and Design.

Jason is also a museum exhibit designer and co-founder of *Flutter & Wow*, an Ann Arbor-based multimedia lab/design/fabrication studio that implements exhibition projects for museums, galleries, and commercial and private clients. Jason collaborates with curators, exhibition planners, interpretative specialists, and educators to work on projects ranging from the exhibition of fine art and participatory/interactive exhibition to traveling science exhibits and environments. Clients include the Detroit Institute of Arts; Mid-America Arts Alliance; Great Lakes Children's Museum. Prior to this, Jason served as exhibit designer and fabricator at the Ann Arbor Hands-On Museum. This is one exhibit you won't want to miss!

### The Journey in a Day: 200 Years of Student Life at the University of Michigan, 1817–2017

Witness two hundred years of Ann Arbor, American and world history, reflected in the lives of U-M students.

Our next exhibit at the Museum on Main Street will open in early April. Created by U-M students, it surveys two hundred years of daily rituals, social life, the challenges and victories of broad cultural movements. Viewers will gain insight on the roles students have played in events that shaped our lives.

This exhibit is designed by U-M students participating in the class "Museums 498" in the History of Art Department in collaboration with the U-M Bicentennial Office.



Students in 1952 celebrated the birthday of Betsy Barbour House, designed by Albert Khan and opened in 1920. Regent Levi Barbour donated the land and money for the women's dormitory, named for his mother. Photo courtesy Bentley Historical Library



Off-campus student housing between 1890 and 1910.