



Impressions

NEWSLETTER WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Rest in Peace

The Washtenaw Way of Death

You'll see an 1890s casket when you walk into the front room of the Museum on Main Street this Fall. At the turn of the century, the dearly departed would have been surrounded by lots of flowers and candles, which were used to mask the scent of death. All mirrors in the house would have been covered with black fabric, and the same fabric draped around photos of other family members in the house. Black fabric indicates mourning and there were elaborate customs and clothes.

This parlor (pictured here) offers a look into mourning and funerals of the Victorian era. From clothing to customs and all of the essentials the undertaker would have brought to the home for an in-home funeral. Visitors will gain a new understanding of the importance of embalming in the middle room. You can also read about the history of the industry and local funeral homes.



Enter a private mausoleum of post-mortem photography, or walk by a unique cemetery filled with meaningful symbolism in the third room. You can follow pathways in our digital cemetery with an interactive touch screen.

This exhibit incorporates furniture, clothing, textiles, photos, jewelry and other items that residents have donated. We have been entrusted with the care and preservation of these artifacts and strive to use them when presenting local history through exhibits and displays.

"Rest in Peace" is enriched by components that were loaned or provided for the displays. We would like to thank Bob and Marcia McCrary, Mike Mitchell and Staffan-Mitchell

Funeral Home, Cheney J. Schopieray and Clements Library, Karen Jania and Bentley Historical Library. When you come see it, we would appreciate your completing our brief survey. Your feedback and any ideas you have for future exhibits or programs is welcomed.



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Our mission is to educate and inspire our community to engage in the preservation and presentation of area history

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MESSAGE FROM **THE PRESIDENT**

Our Society's Mission Statement includes the words, "to educate" and our Strategic Plan accordingly includes Education Objectives and Goals. Recent discussions by the board may result in an additional Objective in the Education section.

Earlier this past spring board member, Dale Leslie, suggested that the Society should consider establishing an endowed scholarship fund for local students pursuing studies in historic preservation. At that point board members agreed the concept would fit within our Mission but, of course, recognized that funding would be a significant challenge. Dale and fellow board member, Tom Freeman, agreed to study the concept for feasibility over the summer.

They reported at our September board meeting and after an extended discussion the concept was redirected to financially supporting an annual internship at the Society. Endowment could be a future goal but the immediate objective is to attempt a pilot project with a modest budget line item in 2013. Additional board members joined the committee to work through the fall and early winter to develop the concept in detail.

This could result in a completely new program for Washtenaw County Historical Society. The board would value your input.

Leslie Loomans



Check us out, on the web and

www.WashtenawHistory.org

Washtenaw County Historical Society

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Museum on Main Street

500 N. Main Street

Ann Arbor, MI 48104-1027

(at the corner of Beakes,

E. Kingsley & N. Main Streets)

Museum Hours

Saturday & Sunday,

12 Noon – 4:00 PM

and by appointment

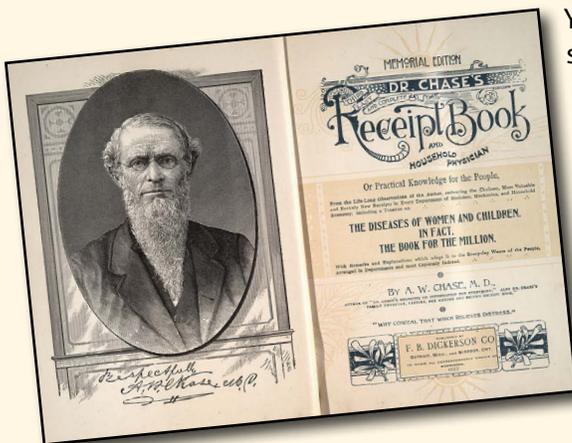
for groups or individuals

THEN & NOW

DR. CHASE'S STEAM PRINTING HOUSE, 1864-1868

This brick building once housed the printing plant of Dr. Alvin Wood Chase. He published the *Ann Arbor Courier* and his book *Dr. Chase's Recipes, or Information for Everybody* at this location.

Dr. Chase's book and the Bible were the two books most frequently carried across the country by the pioneers. Part cookbook, part moral advisor, part medical handbook, and heavily practical throughout, Dr. Chase's book claimed to contain just about everything a nineteenth century householder needed to know in order to survive. It was filled with general information about just about every aspect of Civil War era American life: food preservation, storage and preparation in a pre-electrical time, along with animal husbandry and general farming and medicine. It was also sold in German, as publishers were aware that many of these pioneers were recent immigrants whose only language was German.



You can see the building as it stands today at 301 N. Main Street and read more about why Dr. Chase regretted selling the rights to his own publication and building to Rice A. Beal in *Historic Buildings, Ann Arbor, Michigan* by Marjorie Reade and Susan Wineberg. It is available at the Museum Gift Shop

You Have a Positive Impact

WCHS members have helped support and preserve the rich history of this County in several ways this year. We thank those who volunteered to plant, maintain and clean up the gardens around the Museum, organize and document collections, erect a new flagpole, scan photos and other tasks that it takes to run an active and engaged historical organization.

WCHS board members have donated generous amounts of time, expertise and personal resources to help ensure our visitors have a first class experience when they come to the Museum. The monetary donations have been used to maintain the Museum and support the exhibits and programs. We have been able to upgrade our exhibit hanging system, add more flowers to the garden for next year's blooming and introduce a new element of technology into each exhibit. This work is only possible because of your support. It is deeply appreciated.

Annual Renewal for 2013

Membership dues envelopes will be sent out with the next newsletter. WCHS gift memberships are a great idea for the history lovers in your life. We offer interesting programs, the newsletter *Impressions*, and volunteer opportunities. You can renew online via PayPal at WashtenawHistory.org

Certificates Offered

Certificates commemorating milestone anniversaries are offered free of charge, by WCHS to organizations, businesses, churches, schools etc. For more information call 734-662-9092 or send an e-mail to wchs-500@ameritech.net.

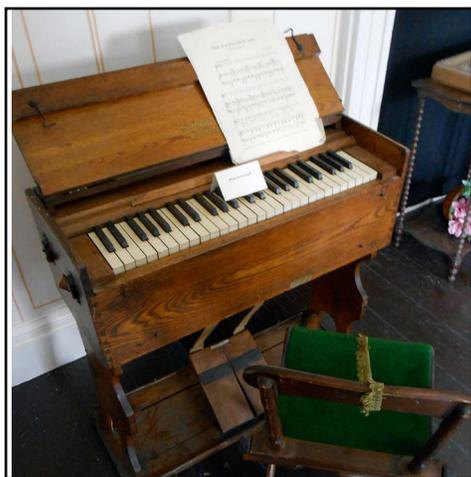
2012-2013 Program Dates

November program information is on the back page. The 2013 Winter-Spring program dates are February 17, March 17 and April 21. The Annual Meeting will be Sunday, May 19, 2013.

WCHS EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM NOTES • MIKE MITCHELL

Frank Staffan was a builder and stone mason who came to Chelsea, Michigan from Europe in the 1850s. He built some of Chelsea's important buildings, including the township hall, two churches, and many of the downtown shops. By 1858, he was the first funeral director in Chelsea. In 1923, his son, George Staffan and grandson, Frank Wood Staffan, opened the Staffan Funeral Home in Ann Arbor and were in business for 49 years.

In the early days of the Chelsea funeral home, families came to Frank Staffan primarily for him to build caskets; they would hold funerals in their own homes or churches. Everything was brought into the home from a "Jack in the Box" curtains that provided the backdrop for the casket, a portable pump organ and the cooling board. The actual "funeral home" was a place to store supplies such as a horse drawn hearse, caskets, a mobile organ, or a "cooling board," which was a precursor to embalming.



The American funeral industry was really started by carpenters. With the onset of the Civil War and the first practical arterial embalming a whole new industry began.

From a historical standpoint most of the cemeteries were connected to churches so you had a short distance to walk.



Mike Mitchell was the guest speaker on Sunday, September 18. He has a BS in Environmental and Natural Resource Policy from MSU and spent two seasons working in Yellowstone National Park and has been at Staffan-Mitchell Funeral Home since 2003.

With the plague cemeteries were moved to the outskirts of town for health reasons. "In the Chelsea Manchester area there are a few churches where we just use the hearse and if the weather is right everyone walks behind it, whether it be a hay wagon, horse-drawn or the motorized hearse, everybody walks behind it".

The Staffan family owned the funeral home for four generations before Mike Mitchell's parents, John and Gloria Mitchell purchased it in 1981. Michael said "As someone who grew up with the industry, started in the business, left it for 10 years and came back – I can see how we are looking backwards to move forward. The oldest/newest techniques in the funeral industry are green burial and in-home vigils." People had many interesting questions. One of the audience members told him he was amazing and responded delightfully to our queries.

What did the industry think about popular show "Six Feet Under"?

It was an accurate portrayal and very close to home to me because I had an older brother who had always been in the business, a younger sister that didn't want anything to do with it and myself who started in it left and came back to it in 2003.

What is a green burial?

The oldest newest trend in the funeral industry is green burial. The greenest funeral was in the 1800s because everything was done at home, there wasn't any embalming fluid yet, there was ice. In 2012 we use dry ice. There are local cemeteries who will provide burial without the use of casket or concrete burial vault. To say something is green, we can use our horse drawn hearse, we can use recycled paper, do no arterial embalming with toxic chemicals.

How far back do your records go?

In Chelsea between the 20s and 30s. Between the 1800s to the 1930s the records for the building are great, but sparse for the business. When his wife died, Frank W. Staffan's family told us they had funeral records from the Ann Arbor Staffan Funeral Home dating from the 1930s up to the 60s in their basement. We were glad to go get them. They have the vital information like you would find on a death certificate, where the burial took place, what the casket was, who the officiant was and who the next of kin would be. We have those stored at our facility in Stockbridge. The books are about 6-8" thick and there are 15 of them.

What is a burial vault and why is it required?

The vault is an outer burial container. Each cemetery requires you to have the casket lowered into the vault and a top placed on. It is a cemetery rule and not a state law. The burial vault originally came about as a method of protecting the body and the grave goods from grave robbers. Then as time marched on and the plague came through in Europe they were made with different apparatus like bells, whistles, some even had chambers with tubing that would go over the persons mouth so they could yell if buried alive. For a geener burial, we can use a topless vault and turn it upside down so it protects the grave from caving in but allows you to go back to the elements.

What are the biggest changes you have seen in the industry?

When I talked to my dad, who started this work in the 60s, he said you saw three to four days of visitation. Neighbors would come, food would be prepared, people would mourn but also a celebrate the life. Before funeral homes, the family and community would care for their deceased, washing, shrouding and preparing the body for burial. By doing things back in the home whether its a birth, vigil or visitation it can bring a sense of closure and community.

What has been really fascinating in my industry in the last few years is the advent of the memorial tribute video, we are entrusted with historical photos that go way back. If their families hadn't wanted this, who knows what would have happened to these images. We are thinking about approaching families and saying this is historical to Manchester or Chelsea or Ann Arbor and is it OK to share these photos and family histories.

Thank you to the Staffan-Mitchell Funeral Home who will be donating their Ann Arbor Funeral Records to the Bentley Historical Library.

Do you enjoy public speaking with a focus on history?

The Historical Society receives requests from schools, retirement communities and organizations for public speakers. They are interested in learning more about the local and regional history of Washtenaw County and the state of Michigan. This past September we had two new requests from schools for a talk about Ann Arbor's early history. Our goal is to fulfill as many of these requests as possible. If you are interested in public speaking opportunities and have specific topics of expertise, email wchs-1000@ameritech.net with your contact informations, topics and availability.

MYSTERY PICTURES FROM ANN ARBOR

Jeff Knorek found some old photographs at a yard sale a few years ago labeled Ann Arbor. Some had comments written on the back and the front.

We don't know who these people are, but maybe you do. Let us know at the Museum on Main Street.



"Me, Nelson Baker, Jo Warbeck, Pearl Baker, Ashley St. House"



"My Dad's Horse & Ldy. wagon at the White Swan Ldy." The White Swan Laundry was located on Catherine Street in the 1920s-30s

Local History Digital Resources Available Online at AADL.org

The Ann Arbor District Downtown Library has a large collection of local history on the second floor, including a variety of sources for genealogy research. They have put several collections on line at aadl.org including:

Then & Now Over 130 articles from the Ann Arbor Observer with an image gallery of historic photos.

Ypsilanti Gleanings Articles and stories from the official publication of the Ypsilanti Historical Society, with an extensive image gallery of YHS photographs and illustrations.

Making of Ann Arbor Discover the history of Ann Arbor through full-text access to several books and several image collections.

Old News Read full issues of 19th century newspapers and browse or search articles and photos from the 20th. Old News includes over 115,000 articles and photos from the Ann Arbor News, Ann Arbor Courier, Ann Arbor Argus, and Ann Arbor Argus-Democrat.



High Steppers: The story behind the picture

In October of 1950 Alfred Eisenstaedt was in Ann Arbor on assignment from Life Magazine to shoot a feature package on the Michigan Marching Band. "Another picture I hope to be remembered by is this one of the drum major rehearsing at the University of Michigan. It was early in the morning, and I saw a little boy running after him, and all the children in the playing field ran after the boy, and I ran after them. This is a completely spontaneous, unstaged picture." When President Bill Clinton was offered any Eisenstaedt print as thanks for a sitting in 1993, he chose this one.

Help preserve our past for future generations

As a community museum we get the pleasure of having school age children come to an exhibit with their classmates, family or friends. It's exciting to watch their faces light up when they see an authentic Michigan soldiers Civil War uniform or the tandem bicycle that Junius and Ella Beal rode throughout the world or the vintage toys from a holiday exhibit. The work of the Historical Society is strengthened and sustained through the endowment gifts, bequests and other types of financial gifts we receive. These contributions provide long-term financial stability for the museum and the ability to expand our exhibits and programs.

A planned gift simply means making the decision today to provide a gift for the Washtenaw County Historical Society that may not be realized until after your lifetime. Gifts like this allow you to make a statement of support that becomes a lasting legacy to the Society. There are numerous ways to provide a planned gift: bequests, charitable remainder trusts, gifts of appreciated stocks, real estate, life insurance and retirement assets. Such gifts can offer lifetime income benefits to you and may reduce estate tax liabilities for your estate. For information please call 734-662-9092.

Good Books Make Great Gifts!

Are you looking for a selection of interesting books written by local authors about Washtenaw County? The Gift Shop at the Museum on Main Street offers over 50 books about the history of Michigan and Washtenaw County. There are many other items including post cards, note cards, tote bags, throws and more. Shop sale proceeds support our Museum.

Browse and shop on-line at www.WashtenawHistory.org

Or stop by the Museum located at 500 N. Main St., at the corner of Beakes, E. Kingsley & N. Main Streets in Ann Arbor. We're open Saturdays and Sundays 12 Noon-4PM and by appointment, call 734-662-9092

YOUR GUIDE TO HISTORICAL ATTRACTIONS AROUND THE COUNTY

Gerald R. Ford

Presidential Archives

1000 Beal Ave., Ann Arbor
734-741-2218

The public is welcome to examine the original files of President Ford, his White House staff, and other government officials from the 1970s.

FordLibraryMuseum.gov

Historic Hack House Museum

775 County St., Milan
734-439-7522

The 1885 Queen Anne style Hack House Museum features artifacts of Milan and 19th and early 20th century America. Summer kitchen, barn, and more. Hours by appointment.

HistoricMilan.com

Ann Arbor Hands-On Museum

219 E. Huron, Ann Arbor
734-995-KIDS

More than 250 hands-on exhibits on four floors invite you to push, pull and experiment for yourself. Explore the fascinating world of science 7 days a week. Admission: Members-Free, Non-members \$10/Person ages 2 and up. Free for babies under two. Every Thursday evening they are open until 8pm and admission is just \$5 starting at 5pm! Aahom.org



John B. Swainson Room and John Schneider Blacksmith Shop

324 E. Main, Manchester

The building was an operating blacksmith shop in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. See displays of original tools used by local Blacksmith, John F. Schneider. The John B. Swainson Room, contains memorabilia relating to the life of the former Governor and Manchester resident (1925-1994). Open by appointment only by calling the Manchester Area Historical Society at 734-428-7722. ManchesterAreaHistoricalSociety.org

Kempf House Museum

312 S. Division, Ann Arbor
734-994-4898

The Kempf House is an 1853 Greek Revival House Museum interpreting Ann Arbor history and Victorian lifestyles from circa 1850 to 1910. Kempf House is open for guided tours on Sundays, 1-4 p.m. (except holidays).

KempfHouseMuseum.org

Kids Are Chefs, Too!

Saturday, November 17, 2012

10 AM - 12 Noon

Matthaei Botanical Gardens

1800 N. Dixboro Rd., Ann Arbor

Release your inner chef! Learn how the original Thanksgiving celebration used native plants and items brought from Europe, while today's Thanksgiving feasts include foods from around the world. Learn to make foods from native plants as well as plants brought by immigrants and explorers to America. Make a decorative centerpiece to take home. \$8.00/child includes activities and materials. For more information call 734-647-7600 or go to our website: Mbgna.Umich.Edu

Stearns Musical Collection

1100 Bates Dr., Ann Arbor
734-763-4389

More than 2,000 musical instruments have been acquired since Frederick Stearns donated the original collection in 1899, making this one of the largest, most distinctive collections from around the world. Housed in the School of Music on the UM North Campus. Music.Umich.edu

Margaret Dow Towsley Sports Museum

Schembechler Hall
1000 S. State, Ann Arbor
734-747-2583

This museum captures the tradition and spirit of over 100 years of athletic competition at the UM. Exhibits share the story of Michigan athletes as part of the Rose Bowl, Big Ten Championship competitions and U.S. Olympic teams. See the Little Brown Jug, the trophy for the winner of the Michigan-Minnesota Football game. You can also see the 2012 return of the Paul Bunyan trophy that goes to the winner of the Michigan-Michigan State game!





Drawing by Michael Klement

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WCHS NOVEMBER PROGRAM EXHIBIT TALK



Remembrance through music and imagery

Mortality is a useful lens through which we may view many aspects of early American society. From the transatlantic movement of ideas and traditions, and the universal experience of death to personal and collective remembrance. Our guest speaker is Cheney J. Schopieray, curator of the recent exhibit "So Once Were We: Death in Early America" and Assistant Curator of Manuscripts at the William L. Clements Library. He also serves on the board of the Michigan Archival Association.

Sunday, November 18, 2-4 PM
Ann Arbor Senior Center
1320 Baldwin Avenue, Ann Arbor

You are invited to this free event, bring a friend!
Call 734-662-9092 or email wchs-500@ameritech.net

