

MUSEUM ON MAIN STREET



A Museum Of County Life

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Impressions is published seven times a year, from September to May

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The Washtenaw County Historical Society is a 501(c)(3) organization. Annual Dues, which are from January through December are:
 Individual: \$15; Couple/Family: \$25; Student or Senior (60+) \$10; Senior Couple: \$19; Business/Association: \$50; Patron: \$100.

IMPRESSIONS

WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER • FOUNDED 1857

If Buildings Could Talk

The Museum on Main Street unveiled its newest exhibition, *Use it or Lose it: Historic Preservation in Washtenaw County*, on Saturday, March 6. The exhibits on display tell the tale of lost, threatened and preserved buildings throughout the county. Most of the churches, homes, schools, farms and businesses date from the 19th century. Early 20th century edifices, such as the Ann Arbor home designed by Frank L. Wright, are included because of their unique historic value. The exhibition will be open weekends and by appointment until June 20.

One historic property that is not in the exhibition but deserves acknowledgment is the library at 229 W. Michigan Avenue, in Ypsilanti. Originally built during President Woodrow Wilson's administration as a post office, the building barely escaped demolition in the 1960s when the city entertained bids for renovating it as a library. Bids ranged from \$58,000 to \$121,000. Many decision makers felt they might as well spend an extra \$30,000 and rebuild to their exact specifications. Then on Sept 29, 1962, the solution presented itself in the form of Ralph S. Gerganoff who claimed his firm could do the necessary work for less than \$8,000. Kudos to Mr. Gerganoff because not only was the building saved, but was recently renovated a second time. If you have not been in this building, treat yourself by stopping by for a visit. It is a beautiful reminder of our past while servicing the present and preparing for the future.



Ypsilanti Post Office



Post office interior



Post office turned library today



New board member Bob Yuhasz makes sure the new exhibit banner can be seen.



Frieze from original post office building

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LESLIE LOOMANS

President's Letter

One of our yet unformed strategic plan objectives is research. As an amateur researcher of county history I generally am searching to simply satisfy a curiosity, as opposed to planning for an article or a book. For some years I have observed an old railroad bed along the south side of the Huron River, a little west of Ann Arbor. My assumption has been that this was an early path of Michigan Central Railroad as it followed the sinuous riverbanks before bridges were added to straighten and shorten the line.

In Brenda Bentley's book, *Riverwalks, Ann Arbor*, she notes the original path of the Michigan Central and includes a portion of the 1843 Washtenaw County map by S. Pettibone, which is before the straightening of the rail line occurred. The full map is at the Bentley Historical Library and within moments it confirmed the section of bed I've observed was indeed part of the original path. An Internet search suggests the Michigan Central reached Dexter in 1840, which fits with the 1843 map. An 1874 Washtenaw County plat map shows the shortened path with the railroad bridges crossing and re-crossing the Huron. So when were the bridges added? I may continue to research.

More recent news includes the appointments of Dale Leslie and Bob Yuhasz to the board of directors, which is now full for the first time since last May. Annually the membership elects officers and four of 12 board positions, which are three-year rolling terms. Under the bylaws the president, with approval of the board, may appoint members to fill vacancies.

MoMS Attendance Triples

In a year characterized by the word "downturn," attendance at the Museum on Main Street has more than tripled since 2008. The exhibitions that created such interest were: *Trains in Toyland*, *Coming to Washtenaw County* and *Murder, Mayhem and Mischief*. And because of the increased number of visitors, donations and gift shop sales are on the rise as well.

New Hours at MoMS

The Museum on Main Street is now open Saturday and Sunday from noon to 4 pm. Groups are welcome, as are individuals, by appointment. Arrangements can be made by calling 734-662-9092. Admission and parking are free. Donations are welcomed.

'Thanks for the Memories'

Thanks to WCHS members Jan Tripp, Karen Jania, Carol Wargelin and Susan Wineberg for a job well done. Led by Tripp, the four spent many hours digitalizing past issues of *Impressions*. Reading through the earlier years is a wonderful "walk down memory lane" as well as a reminder of what we owe our predecessors. We invite you to read through these past issues at:

http://hvcn.org/info/wchs/website/impresions_archive/impresions_archive.html

Membership Report

As of February 19, 247 people have renewed their membership or have become members of the Washtenaw County Historical Society. The label on the mailer section of your most recent *Impressions* will indicate whether it is time to renew your membership.

- If the line above your name reads: 20xx, this indicates the most recent year you donated to the Museum Fund, Endowment Fund and/or the Storm Window Fund.
- If the line above your name reads: 20xx / Member 20xx, this indicates the most recent year you were a member and a donor.
- If there is no notation above your name, you have been neither a member nor a donor in recent years.

New members who pay their dues after September are recorded as members for the next 15 months. We welcome all new members and hope you will encourage your friends and family members to join us in carrying out the work and purpose of our Society.

Way Back When

Celebrating Women's History Month Circa 1901

To celebrate Women's History Month, Gertrude E. Woodard may have led a parade through Ypsilanti in her 1901 Covert Motorette vehicle. This Ypsilanti resident also led the way for many women by purchasing her own automobile. She traveled to the manufacturer in New York to spend four days learning to drive and care for her new car.



Gertrude Woodward blazing the trail

Woodard graduated from Ypsilanti High School and then in 1892, from Michigan State Normal School. She worked in Chicago as a research librarian before returning to Ypsilanti to work as the assistant librarian at the University of Michigan Law School. Dean Hutchins, when informed of her plan to purchase a car to drive to work, "brought his hand down emphatically on the arm of his chair, exclaiming 'What in the world do you want with an automobile!'" She was not deterred by his response nor the fact that, when she cranked it to begin her journey home, the car made so much noise classes had to pause before resuming.

Woodard's vehicle went a frightening 18 miles per hour, had no reverse gear and required a pint of gasoline for her daily journey to work and back home. She always carried spare gasoline, an extra battery and a sheet of burlap for extricating her car from muddy roads. She never had an accident and could tell the difference in grades of gasoline. She paid \$3.50 for her license and driver's card in 1911. Gertrude never married, living most of her life with her sister, Ada, in Ypsilanti. She died in 1906 at the age of 96.

WCHS Welcomes New Board Members

Dale R. (for radio)

Leslie was born and raised in Ann Arbor, leaving only to attend college and to serve in the U.S. Army. He holds a bachelor's and two master's degrees, including an MA from the University of Michigan. Dale and his former mate, Linda, have two sons. The Leslie family founded, owned and operated Leslie Office Supply, Inc. in Ann Arbor for 36 years prior to its sale in 1997. Now retired, Dale actively volunteers in the community at the Kiwanis club, the Washtenaw Historical Society and the Humane Society. He is an avid writer, primarily about local history, and more than 30 of his writings appear on annarbor.com (just enter "Dale Leslie" into the home page search box).

Robert Yuhasz has

lived in Washtenaw County his entire life. He was born in Bridgewater, where he lived until he and his family moved to Ann Arbor in 2004. Always interested in history, Robert thought he would be a teacher. While at Eastern Michigan University, however, he changed his major to business administration. After earning a bachelor's degree, Bob went to work for the Ford Motor Company, starting out on the line and then moving into a supervisory position in material handling. He and his wife of 16 years, Diane, have three daughters.

Preservation Network to Hold Meeting in Ann Arbor

The Michigan Historic Preservation Network (MHPN) conference will be held Thursday, May 13, through noon on Saturday, May 15, at the Michigan League, in Ann Arbor. The conference marks the 30th anniversary of MHPN.

Four tracks during the conference will focus on the conference theme, "Celebrating Sustainable Communities," the skills needed to make sustainability work, hands-on techniques, and tours. A daylong workshop on Thursday will be devoted to developing and marketing community heritage assets; Morning sessions in Ypsilanti are complemented by an afternoon 'road trip' to explore the region's transportation network. A bonus session on "Vacation Packaging Basics" is scheduled for Wednesday afternoon.

Special events include the Vendors' Showcase, Community Open House, and Candlelight Tour on Thursday evening; a mid-day Friday keynote by Carl Elefante, a key figure in the national conversation about historic preservation and sustainable design; and the Annual Preservation Awards Friday evening. Saturday features historic district commissioner training, a tour for those interested in Ann Arbor's Modern architecture, and, for the first time ever, an open-microphone session tapping the paranormal to better understand your historic property.

For more information, go to www.mhpn.org

Back Stories of Local Architecture

Why does the Arena Bar building at Fourth and Washington have a weathervane shaped like a cow?¹

How did Harris Hall get its name?²

What building had entrances on both Main and Washington?³

These are a few of the tidbits that entertained and educated those who attended the February 21st WCHS PowerPoint presentation at the Downtown Ann Arbor District Library. In their talk, Ann Arbor Historian Wystan Stevens, and U of M Professor of Architecture Kingsbury Marzolf, presented material from an 1893 book titled *Art Work of Washtenaw County*. The book contains black and white photographic plates that illustrate specimens of local architecture, among them churches, business blocks and University buildings. Stevens and Marzolf said that they wonder why some were included while others were omitted.

For example, the oldest structure in the book was built in 1860, while two noteworthy temple-style Greek revival homes of that era were left out. One is the home of bookseller and publisher George Wahr, and the other is Kempf House. Was Greek revival considered passé according to the elevated taste of the 1890s? Stevens and Marzolf pointed out that the book features four buildings owned by Junius Beal, including his house, an 1860 structure that stood on the present site of the downtown library. Stevens suspects that Beal subscribed heavily to the book project, skewing attention to his properties.

"That would make *Art Work of Washtenaw County* at least in part a vanity project," said Stevens. "That may explain why the worthy Baptist and Unitarian churches were left out, while other churches received whole pages for themselves."

Included in the book is Dr. Chase's Steam Printing Works, on the



Harrier and Walker Buildings in the 1800s



Harrier and Walker Buildings now



The Old Firehouse



Hands On Museum

northwest corner of Main and Miller. It was built in stages, in 1864 and 1868, by Alvan Wood Chase. Until its sale a year or two ago, it housed the Dobson-Macomber Insurance offices, still looking like old photos except for the loss of an unusual arched cornice.

"Rice Beal, uncle and adopted father of Junius, acquired the newly-completed Dr. Chase Building in 1869, when Chase, a raging hypochondriac unable to cope with the stress of a successful business, decided to sell everything he owned and leave Ann Arbor," said Stevens. "Beal also bought Chase's weekly newspaper, *The Peninsular Courier and Family Visitant*, and the stock and rights to future publication of a bestselling volume of advice and home remedies, *Dr. Chase's Recipe Book*. The book was already selling well, but it became wildly successful under Beal's ownership — a publishing phenomenon that made Junius Beal a millionaire.

"In 1883, Rice Beal built the exuberantly over decorated Beal Block, on the northeast corner of Main and Ann," continued Stevens. "The upper floors held offices while the first floor was rented to the U. S. Post Office. In 1935, the Beal Block was torn down for a planned expansion of the *Ann Arbor News* headquarters next door. At the last minute the *News* decided to build new on the corner of Huron and Division, where a daily paper was assembled until publication ceased in 2009. The Beal lot was vacant until 1940, when a Kroger store was built on the corner. When Kroger left, the building became a Salvation Army Thrift Store. A new Washtenaw County office building now occupies the site."

Junius Beal inherited the Courier Block (Dr. Chase's) and the Beal Block when Rice died in 1883. Junius, who served for 32 years as a U of M regent, acquired the former Gregory Hotel in 1885 and remodeled the upper two floors for the use of Ann Arbor Masonic lodges. The Masonic Block was on the northwest corner of Main and Huron. There was a big Masonic assembly hall on the top floor and several storefronts on the bottom floor, including the Ann Arbor Savings Bank and George Wahr's bookstore.

"In the mid-20th century, when the Municipal Court was there in rented space, it was known as the Municipal Court Building," Stevens adds. "After 1924 when the Masons moved to a new Masonic Temple, a drop ceiling in the great room obscured the view of the original painted ceiling and its murals and the old assembly hall was cut up into small offices. One of these became the county legal aid office, where in 1971, somebody left an electric coffee pot plugged in overnight, igniting a fire that gutted the building. The brick walls remained standing, however, supported in part by an aluminum skin that had covered the outside. The corner lot stood vacant for nearly 15 years before Hobbs and Black designed One North Main."

Talking about their preservation work, Stevens and Marzolf said they are proud of helping to save the Haarer (1888) and Walker (1893) buildings, on Liberty west of Main, and the firehouse (1882) on Huron at Fifth. The old firehouse, once painted bright red, is now part of the Hands On Museum.

"If one looks closely at the decoration above the windows, one will see symbols of firemen's helmets and speaking trumpets," said Marzolf. "Firefighters in that era were



Dr. Chase's Steam Printing Works



The Dobson McComber Building

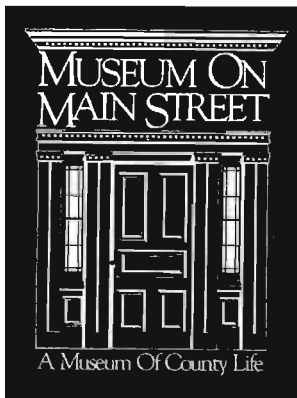
volunteers who did not wear uniforms when they were summoned to fires. The helmet was the badge of office and the speaking trumpet was used by the foreman to issue orders to civilian helpers. The tower was not only lovely but functional as well. Its height offered a vantage point for spotting fires and for allowing the fire bell to be heard at a distance."

The lecturers decried demolition and faddish renovations. They cited five-term Ann Arbor Mayor William E. Brown Jr's "get rid of it" philosophy. Brown, who was mayor from 1945 to 1957, spurred razing of the old Washtenaw County Court House to build the current structure.

Stevens and Marzolf remarked that the 1950s were a difficult decade for old buildings. Several were saved, only to be covered with aluminum paneling, which Marzolf confessed he had thought "grand at the time." He now "shudders at the thought."

Answers to questions in first paragraph

1. It was Hoelzle's Meat market at one time.
2. Samuel Smith Harris, Episcopal Bishop of Michigan, was instrumental in raising funds for this building, which was to be a center for Episcopal students at the University
3. The Eberbach Hardware Company — perhaps the least prepossessing work of architecture in the book



**WASHTENAW COUNTY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

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**Sunday • 2 PM
March 21, 2010**

**The Restoration
of 1526 Pontiac Trail**

**Ypsilanti District Library
5577 Whittaker Road
Ypsilanti, MI**

Members & Guests Welcome

WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY IMPRESSIONS

MARCH 2010

Make Note Dates to Remember

Sunday • April 18, 2010
Ninety Years – Lake Michigan Crossings
Traverwood Library
3333 Traverwood Dr.
Ann Arbor, MI

May • 2010
WCHS Annual Meeting
Watch for details in future *Impressions*

Mission Statement

*The mission of the Washtenaw
County Historical Society
is to educate
and inspire our community
to engage in the preservation
and presentation of area history.*

Wedding Bells at MoMS

One Washtenaw County couple has chosen to begin their own family history at the Museum on Main Street, Saturday, June 26. It will be the first wedding to take place at MoMS.

