



# WASHTENAW IMPRESSIONS

## DRIVE ON 'BACK BURNER'; CHAIRMAN, PRESIDENT SUBMIT RESIGNATIONS

With just under \$50,000 pledged in the fund drive for a proposed \$750,000 museum at Barton Dam Powerhouse, the Board of Directors have decided to put the campaign on the "back burner" for now.

President Leigh Anderson submitted a letter of resignation saying he was unable to wholeheartedly support the museum site. John Corey, general fund drive chairman, also asked to be relieved of his duties.

The greatest difficulty has been getting underway the major gift aspect of the campaign, David Pollock, a director and member of the museum committee, explained to the membership at the September meeting.

The museum plan is also hindered, he said, in that arrangements have not yet been completed between the City of Ann Arbor and the Village of Barton Hills for an exchange of property which will provide a right of way into the museum site. After that, hopefully, the city will proceed to put in a gravel road or at least some kind of minimal surfacing providing easy access to the site, now accessible only by private road.

Consideration is being given to restoring some form of limited hydroelectric power generation at the dam, he continued, using compact, modern equipment in a lower level of the building retained by the city. He saw this as a plus

## SALINE ELECTS OFFICERS

Paul Meyer is the new president of the Saline Historical Society. Sylvia and Dick Coleman are sharing the vice-presidential duties while Penny and Doug Jones are co-treasurers. Mary Lirones is secretary. Norman Blackie is immediate past president.

## HISTORICAL HAPPENINGS

**Chelsea Historical Society**— Meets 8 p.m. second Monday of month at McKune Memorial Library. Alice Ziegler, editor of *Impressions*, will speak in November on "Washtenaw's Revolutionary Heroes."

**Dexter Historical Society**— Old Boy and Girl Scout uniforms on display through December. Museum open 1-3 p.m. each Tuesday and second and fourth Saturdays of month. Annual Christmas bazaar Saturday, December 1.

**Saline Historical Society**— Meets 8 p.m. third Tuesday of month at high school library. Stuart Thayer, until recently curator of the WCHS collections, was to speak this month.

**Ypsilanti Historical Society**— Lydia Hearn will demonstrate and teach the art of wire sculpture from 2-4 p.m. Sunday, November 11, at the museum, 220 North Huron.



## 'OLD HOUSE GAME'— A RESEARCH WORKSHOP PLANNED NOVEMBER 16

"The Old House Game"—a workshop on how to research the age and history of older homes—will be held from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Friday, November 16, at the U-M's Bentley Library on North Campus.

Peter Schmitt of the archives at Western Michigan University at Kalamazoo, a specialist on the subject, will speak along with Mary Jo Pugh, reference archivist at Bentley, and Richard Neumann, an architect and vice-chairman of the Ann Arbor Historic District Commission.

For further information telephone Louisa Pieper at Kempf House, 761-4510. It is co-sponsored by AAHDC, the library and Washtenaw County Historic District Commission. Fee not set at press time.

## WCHS BOARD ELECTS POLLOCK PRESIDENT

David S. Pollock, assistant to the president of Washtenaw Community College for community relations and a director, museum committee member and past vice-president of WCHS, was unanimously elected president by the WCHS board of directors to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Leigh Anderson.

Anderson's resignation was accepted with regret and he was commended for his dedicated service to the society. Vice-president John C. Dann declined the presidency on the ground that he has been a member only a short time.

## PROF. WELLS TO RECALL WHEN ROBERT FROST WAS AN ANN ARBORITE

"Robert Frost in Ann Arbor" will be Professor-Emeritus Carlton F. Wells's topic at the WCHS meeting at 8 p.m. Thursday, October 25, in Liberty Hall at Great Lakes Federal, Liberty at Division Streets.

Professor Wells was on the U-M English faculty when Frost came to the University as poet-in-residence in the 1920's. He will share his recollections of Frost's time here and recite a number of Frost's poems which he has committed to memory.

## HISTORIC HOMES TOUR SET SUNDAY, OCTOBER 28

An Ann Arbor Historic Homes Tour will be held from noon to 5 p.m. Sunday, October 28, sponsored by Greenhills School Auxiliary.

Five homes in the vicinity of Hill and Washtenaw will be open plus Kempf House, 312 South Division, and Greenhills School, 850 Greenhills Drive, where refreshments will be served. Tickets at \$5 each are available at Kempf House or by telephoning 761-4284.

# Common Soldiers Of 1776-82 Tell It As It Was: The Heroics, The Inglorious; Joking With Washington, Ft. Griswold "Massacre", Debunk General Putnam's Ride

A Revolutionary War scouting party which had been out all night, halted along the main road from Boston to New York about 8 a.m. one July morning.

A gentleman rode up and said, "You have got 60 rifles in a quarter of a mile (in other words, 60 British cavalrymen)."

The scouting party struck across the fields and formed into a hollow square. The light horse surrounded them, there being only 27 in the American party.

The British commanding officer told Ensign Smith, the American commander, if he would resign himself up, he would be used like a prisoner and he would parole him and his men. Smith told him he should not do it.

The British officer said, "If we have to fight and take you we will cut you into inch pieces."

Smith said, "You must take us first."

The British officer gave five minutes to surrender. Smith said, "Charge and be damned."

Thus begins one of 80,000 Revolutionary War veteran's pension applications in the National Archives in Washington, D.C. Dr. John C. Dann, director of the U-M's Clements Library of American History, has read through them and written a soon-to-be-published book on them. He previewed his findings in a talk at the September WCHS meeting.

"The above account continued, Smith ordering every man on his right knee and the breech of his gun on the ground. Smith stood in the center and told his men the first that would give back he would cut off his head with his sword. Then one corner of the (light) horse charged on them and their horses were pricked. One of the horses was thrown and the rider fell over into the hollow square. Smith put his foot onto the horseman's sword and said, 'I have got one, I want some more. Charge again.'

"The 'horse made another charge and were repulsed. The third charge was made and repulsed again and our party took a prisoner and killed a horse and one of (Smith's) men's arms was broken and a bayonet broken. The 'horse rode off and formed and our men all raised on their feet and rested, and the prisoner sat in the center.

"Smith then ordered one of the soldiers to take the commander off his horse as he was parading his men. The soldier drew up and shot him and the officer fell dead. Then another officer took command and he was ordered to be shot which was done. Then the third took command and rode out in front of the 'horse and said to Smith, 'If you shall give up it shall be well. If not we shall send for 100 more horses and have you, we will.'

"Smith told him to 'send and be damned. I want to manure the ground with the Tories so that it should bear something after the war.'

"Two of the (British) horses were dispatched immediately. Smith ordered his men into rank and file at two paces distant in front and rear opposite to the spaces so as to fire through them. Smith ordered the front ranks to begin scattered fire on the right and to fire on the left and the rear to do the same from the left to the right and every man to take good aim which was done which drove the 'horse off.

"There were but 24 left on the field beside the two that had been sent away. The rest were taken or killed or wounded and the scout went home to their own party."

That was the account of one Benjamin Jones, who joined the Connecticut line in May 1781, when he later applied for his pension.

Dr. Dann undertook this research as one of the library's Bicentennial publications, at the suggestion of a library trustee.

He found it "quite a job. Anyone

who has read microfilms know they are not easy reading. Even reading through the 898 reels quickly, it took 1½ years and involved many 80-hour weeks." While the applications have been used by genealogists for 75 years to get information about individuals, they have never been looked at overall as he did. Since they are indexed only by name of applicant, there is no other way to get at them, he said.

"About 20 percent of the records were created as a result of the 1818 and 1820 pension act for poverty stricken veterans, the remaining 80 percent as a result of the comprehensive pension act of 1832 for veterans of six months or more in any form of service.

"Being in the revolution was no more glorious than being in Viet Nam while you're doing it," Dr. Dann said. "Only in hindsight does it take on a romantic aspect. By 1832 you began to have a certain glorification of our history.

"The Revolutionary army was not one army but about fifteen different armies. You had voluntary corps raised by individuals in local towns as in the Civil War, continental units, state lines (official state troops in each original colony), state militia, Indian 'spies' or frontier fighters, coast guards, actual behind-the-lines spies, continental and state navies (some with only one or two boats) and privateers who attacked shipping for profit. They were exempt from draft but not eligible for pension.

"The veteran who had his papers could almost automatically get a pension. Continental soldiers were well documented, but for the average person who had served in the militia, if they had ever been given any papers, which is not entirely likely, they threw them away. There are hilarious excuses given. It's possible that almost everybody's house burned down in the course of a lifetime but I always wonder a little bit. An immense number blamed fires.

Then a lot blamed their wives for washing their clothes with their papers in pockets, or throwing them out when they cleaned house.

"If they had no papers, they had to give detailed reminiscence of their service. Most are boring as can be—'I served under such and such a person. I remember such and such as we marched to such and such.' But once in a while you get a veteran who loves to tell tales. You have to find that in combination with a good transcriber because a good percentage of the men couldn't write anyway or were so old it was difficult for them, but shorthand was a fully developed art at that time and once in a while you get an absolute prize.

"The application consists of the narrative plus birth date, parents names, where they lived, when married, childrens names and such.

"From a demographer's point of view, this is a huge sampling of the existing population of that time and it gives you history of families over 75 years.

"If anyone is interested in mobility, there is practically not a human being in the pension applications who didn't move from one town to another, one state to another in the course of his lifetime.

"The applications tell things about the Revolutionary War which are not in standard history books. Certain persons were there at the exact right moment to tell you things about an important event that nobody knew about before.

"There was the case of the British attack on Fort Griswold in Connecticut. It was noted because they massacred the Americans in the fort. It was considered to be one of the bloodiest, most dishonorable actions of the British during the war.

"This fellow was in the fort and managed to get out. He tells in detail what happened. It sounds like it was a misunderstanding.

The American officer surrendered and handed his sword to the British officer. The British officer, don't know why, took it and

rammed it through the guy who had just given it to him. So then the second in command of Americans took his sword and rammed it through the British officer. The second in command of British, ran a sword through the American. It went on like that. They just did each other in. Unfortunately from the American point of view, the British had more people.

"There is a famous print of General Israel Putnam, one of the true characters of the Revolution, riding down the stone steps at Greenwich, Connecticut. Supposedly when the British were coming, Putnam jumped on his horse, rode all the way down the stone steps from his house to the water and escaped. This captured the imagination of everybody back then, was made a big deal of, and featured in school books.



**GEORGE WASHINGTON**

To his troops, a jolly good fellow.

"Lo and behold, I found a narrative of his 13-year-old waiter who went down the stone steps with him, and he said, Putnam only rode about five feet, got off his horse and walked it down, hopped on the horse at the bottom and rode off.

"I found records of dozens of conversations with George Washington, Putnam, General Greene, Benedict Arnold—real back and forth conversations. I found a lot on Arnold's treason, Indian captives, spies, black veterans and women. It's true, in many cases blacks have participated in American history from the beginning but we've forgotten it.

"There are accounts where widows apply for husband's pensions. One talked about what she did during the war—traveled with the army doing washing and cooking for her husband and others. She got two pensions because she married two different

veterans and she deserved them both for her own sake.

"There's a staggering amount of factual information on battles, construction of forts, locations of headquarters, food, living conditions, sports, recreations. One fellow said it was boring while he was stationed in this little town in New Jersey so they made a little canal and ran salt water into a freshwater pond so the oysters would taste better.

"Then he said how they would grab onto horses tails and the horse would run through this little creek and they'd see how long they could stay on.

"You also get attitudes of the soldiers. George Washington to my mind seems like that rather aloof, cool individual on the schoolroom wall in the Stuart portrait. To these soldiers, he was approachable. They'd go right up and say, "Can I borrow your spy glass. I want to take a look at something." They would even go up and joke with him.

"Like so many great military commanders, Washington, I think, was cool with his officers, maintaining the chain of command, but with the average man he was warm and friendly. The Washington that comes across through hundreds and hundreds of references is a very athletic, youthful, pleasant, wonderful person, the kind of person you'd do anything for.

"Of course Washington got his men to serve without money, without food, without shoes. I found cases of where he cries because a young soldier got killed. He comes off more like Abraham Lincoln.

"We tell about the brotherhood between France and America. It was a marriage of convenience, I can tell you. The Americans didn't think much of the French and vice-versa. Americans liked the French hard money, that was the best thing they could say about them.

"A certain other truth comes out. These things are uncensored. They tell you some things that happened that their officers might have wished had never been told because

they show that this war was not entirely glorious. They tell about cowardice. They'd say, 'My colonel was shot. It was obvious that he was shot by his own men.' The frontiersmen were just as rough and tough and vicious as the Indians were to them and just as interested in scalping as the Indians.

"I found cases where Americans cold-bloodedly murdered prisoners. These things are relatively minor in terms of the total war but they are reality.

"The most significant impression that I got was the vital role of the militia. The militia has a bad historical reputation as undependable, undisciplined, too democratic, deserting like crazy. It's true but when they were fighting on their own home turf they were exceptionally efficient and important in conducting a continental sized war with no financing worth a darn.

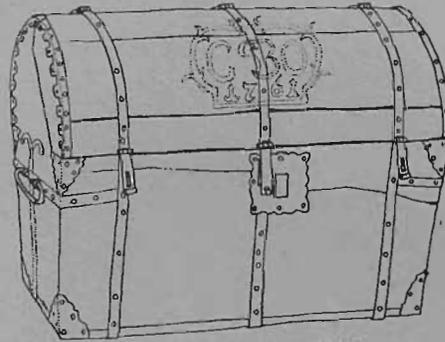
"They knew the countryside, they could eat their meals at home. They brought ingenuity to fit local situations which never could have come from a central source. There were people during most of the revolution standing every single mile on the beaches of the Atlantic, watching for ships. Regular patrols went out on the frontier—there were people walking all over Ohio, western New York and Pennsylvania, Vermont and New Hampshire.

"My general feeling overall in going through these things is I don't see how the British could have won that war."

### GERMAN BRIDE'S CHEST, 218 YEARS OLD, GIVEN TO WCHS BY MRS. CASH: BROUGHT HERE IN 1850'S

A large 218-year-old bridal chest originally owned by a great-grandmother of the late Marie Rominger of Ann Arbor has been donated to the Society by Mrs. Demaris Cash of Treasure Mart.

Approximately four feet high, the wooden trunk, banded with iron, has the bride's initials, "CBO, 1761" painted on the front. She was Christinia Benigna Oetinger who died in 1764 in Tuttlingen, Germany, according to an inscrip-



Drawn by Jane Southwell

tion in German on the back of a portrait of the bride.

Lela Duff notes in *Ann Arbor Yesterdays* about the former Rominger home at 315 South Fifth Avenue, "at the top (of the staircase) stands a huge ark-shaped chest 200 years old, in which young Mrs. Rominger brought her bedding to America in the 1850's."

Dr. Charles Rominger, Marie's father, was a practicing physician with such an absorbing interest in geology that he was state geologist of Michigan from 1870-85. Marie, who died in 1955 at age 92,

was Ann Arbor's first female bookkeeper.

The recent owner of the chest has the portraits of the bride, as noted, the bridegroom, Johann Christoph Klemm, and another Rominger relative, M. Johan Casper Hoechlen, born August 28, 1750.

### GSWC FINDS ANOTHER REVOLUTIONARY SOLDIER

Another Revolutionary soldier buried in Washtenaw County was found last summer by a group who "read" the Gillet Cemetery in Sharon township for the Genealogical Society of Washtenaw County.

He is Richard E. Lord, the father of the first doctor in Ann Arbor, David Lord, who was also Washtenaw's first county clerk. The veteran was born in Lyme, Connecticut, in 1765, and enlisted at age 12. He died September 6, 1843. His grave was marked in 1967 by the Plymouth-Northville DAR Chapter. The cemetery is at the northeast corner of Sharon Valley and Sharon Hollow Roads.



### PLAN SHARING SESSION

Group sharing of problems and solutions is planned for the Sunday, October 28, Genealogical Society of Washtenaw County meeting at 2:30 p.m. at Washtenaw Community College. Help session at 1 p.m.

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WASHTENAW COUNTY  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
MEETING

8:00 p.m. THURSDAY  
OCTOBER 25, 1979

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