

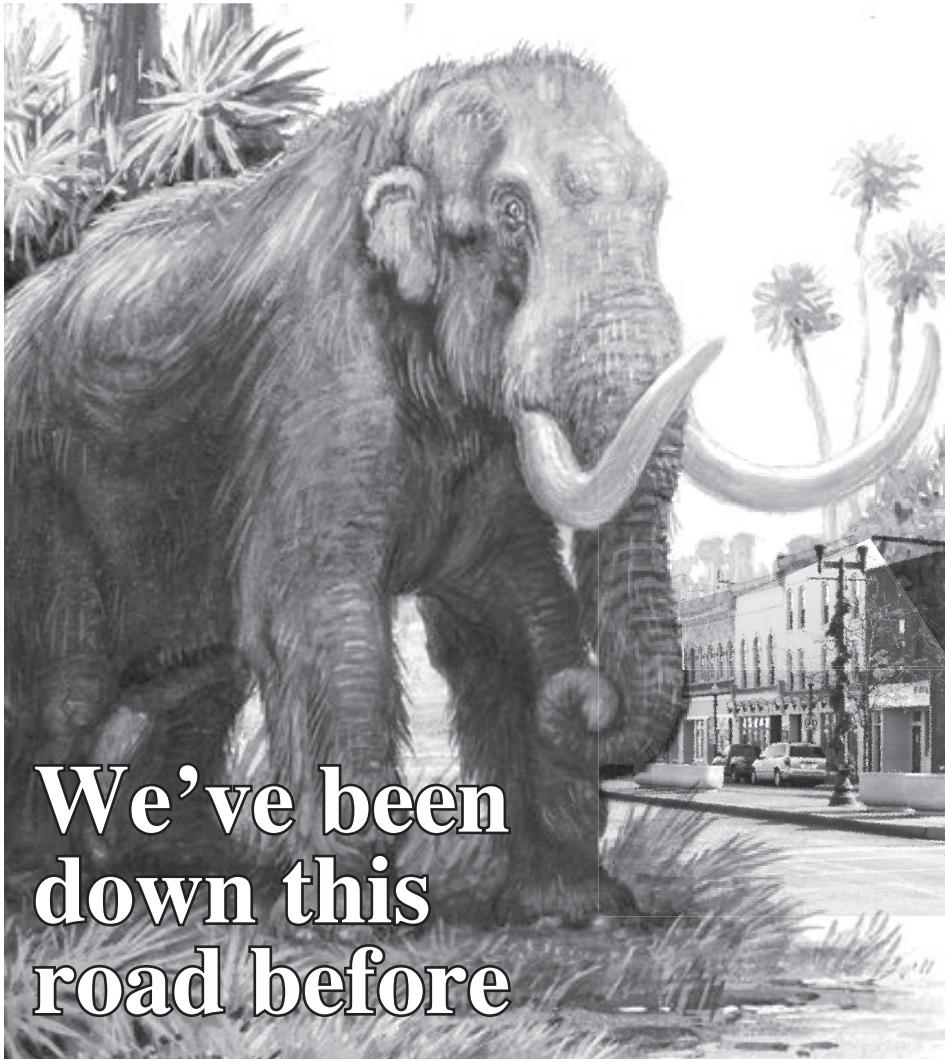
# Ypsilanti GLEANINGS

YHS Museum & Archives

Official publication of the Ypsilanti Historical Society, featuring articles and reminiscences of the people and places in the Ypsilanti area



**SPRING 2013**



**We've been  
down this  
road before**

## There's always been heavy traffic on downtown's Michigan Avenue

*By Tom Dodd*

**Michigan Avenue  
US-12  
US -112  
Congress Street  
The Chicago Road  
Military Highway  
Sauk Trail  
Mastodon Highway**

**T**ake another look at downtown Ypsilanti's Michigan Avenue. Take away the cars and trucks; take away the concrete and asphalt. Let's even take away what's left of the Interurban tracks and the paving bricks and get right down to the dirt. Now we can see footprints on the bare earth. The traffic where this thoroughfare crosses the Huron River has been coming through for centuries. Welcome to our Real Main Street.

*[continued on page 3]*

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# From the President's Desk By Alvin E. Rudisill

**O**ur major maintenance efforts over the past several weeks have been dedicated to: 1) the repair and painting of the stairways leading to the second floor and the basement and the replacement of the kickpads; 2) the resurfacing of the floor in the front hallway and the painting of all the front hallway trim; and 3) the purchase and installation of runners in the front hall. Our next efforts will be to repair and/or replace the front and back entrance doors. Our sincere thanks to all those involved in these efforts, and to the volunteers who moved artifacts around so the repairs could be completed.

Our February membership meeting program was presented by Bill Nickels on "The Stark-weather Farm." Bill has become quite an expert on the farm and the next issue of the GLEANINGS will contain an article about the farm.

There have been some changes in the EMU Interns that serve in both the Museum and the Archives. First, Lauren Carpenter is now Lauren Thomson due to a recent marriage. Congratulations Lauren! Second, Deirdre Fortino graduated with a Master's Degree in Historic Preservation and has been replaced by Melanie Parker. Congratulations Deirdre and welcome Melanie.

We are continuing our efforts to raise funds to pay off the balance owed the City of Ypsilanti for the purchase of the property at 220 North Huron Street. We are still approximately \$20,000 short of our \$125,000 goal and our Endowment Fund Advisory Board will be planning and implementing fundraising programs over the next few months to close out this effort. Our thanks to all those who have made significant contributions in support of the YHS Museum and Archives over the past few years.

If you are not currently on our email *listserv*, please call the Museum at 734-482-4990 and have your name added. We are using the *listserv* only for program notifications. Your email address will not be shared with others. Also, please check the Event Schedule on our web site for upcoming special programs and displays.

We are looking for volunteers as docents for the Museum or research assistants for the Archives. Both the Museum and Archives are open from 2 to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday. If you are available during that time and are interested in helping us preserve the historical information and artifacts of the area, or in educating the general public about our history, please give me a call at 734-476-6658.

## Up-coming Coming Events at the Ypsilanti Historical Society MUSEUM

**31 March**

Museum and Archives  
Closed for Easter Sunday

**18 April- 19 May**  
**Art Exhibit**

**19 May**

**Quarterly Membership Meeting – 2 p.m.**

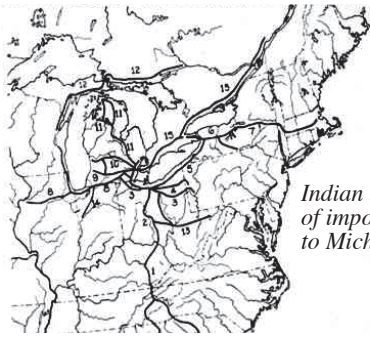
**1 June**

**Annual Yard Sale**



# Michigan/mastodon Avenue

[continued from the front page]



Indian trails of importance to Michigan



Major Indian tribes and trails - 1760

## This road is a path; a very old path

The earliest inhabitants of this Michigan peninsula traveled mostly by water and, for most Native Americans, by birch-bark canoe, along lakes and rivers. Few Indians inhabited the upland, drier portions of land—areas mostly seen while “just passing through.” Light Indian canoes were easily guided through the rivers that kept a regular flow before deforestation took place. These same routes and their portages were later used by the first European travelers.

Once on land, however, paths were created for foot travel. As those paths developed, at least a few were the beginnings of highways like downtown’s Michigan Avenue.

## Some early Indian trails are still in place

- **Sauk Trail**, followed roughly the line of present US 12 from Detroit through Ypsilanti and to Lake Michigan through the “smile” of prairie that extended across the bottom of the lower peninsula

- **Saginaw Trail** from Toledo through Saginaw to Mackinac, part of which forms today’s Dixie Highway

- **Grand River Trail** between Detroit and Grand Rapids, now followed by the trunk line US 16

- **Sault and Green Bay Trail** east/west across the upper peninsula, now by US 2 and State Rte. 35

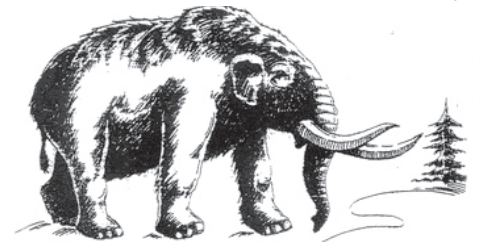
The Sauk Trail ran through Illinois, Indiana and Michigan. From west to east, the trail

connected Rock Island on the Mississippi River to the Illinois River near modern Peru, with the trail along the north bank of that river to Joliet, and on to Valparaiso, Indiana. It then ran northeasterly to LaPorte and into southern Michigan through Niles, Three Rivers, and Ypsilanti, ending at the Detroit River. The trail followed a winding path along the ridges of dune and moraines that marked the earlier glacial period Lake Michigan shorelines. European settlers improved the trail into a wagon road and later into modern highways.

## There are even older trails

Many will settle for tracing the origin of these roadways back to the Native Americans but some of these ancient paths were here even before that. Sections of the trail followed the southern boundary between

[continued overleaf]



Mastodon skeletons have been found near Textile and Carpenter Roads and in the gravel pits along Michigan Avenue west of Saline (north of Harry’s Furniture)

## Ypsilanti Historical Society

ONLINE

220 North Huron Street - Ypsilanti, MI 48197

<http://ypsilantihistoricalsociety.org/>

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Welcome!

*For information about upcoming Society events, visit us online at:*  
[www.ypsilantihistoricalsociety.org](http://www.ypsilantihistoricalsociety.org)

The Ypsilanti Historical Museum is a museum of local history which is presented as an 1860 home. The Museum and Fletcher-White Archives are organized and operated by the Ypsilanti Historical Society. We are all volunteers and our membership is open to everyone, including non-city residents.

### A Matter of Trust

On-Line Bookstore: Click your mouse on the book at the right to visit the YHS on-line bookstore that includes more than twenty books on the history of the people, places, and things in and around Ypsilanti. You can pay for your order using your credit card and the secure “Google Checkout” system. Pick out a book for family members or friends and we will ship it to any address within the continental United States.

Technical support for this site provided by Nonprofit Enterprise at Work’s SBC Ameritech WebConnect Program. Domain and Web Hosting Services provided by Huron Valley Community Network.



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*U of M's old fossil*

the dense forest and the mixed grassland regions. The presence of a mastodon trailway along the same path indicates that humans may have been using a long established game trail.

Every generation of road-builders in history has had to skirt the edges of the great salt marsh between Ypsilanti and Saline. Pittsfield Township's C. Edward Wall still harbors dreams of installing life-size sculptures of mastodons in that marshy area just east of the City of Saline.

### Side roads proliferated

Narrower tributaries from the major trails cut swaths through the prairie that extended across Michigan's lower peninsula. "An Indian trail was merely a narrow path, about 12 to 18 inches wide, permitting only single-file travel," noted Dorothy G. Pohl, Director of the Ionia County Road Commission, in her report to the Association of Southern Michigan Road Commissions in 1997. "It was not until the coming of the white settlers, laden with supplies, that the trails were improved. The use of the packhorse was the first step in the process of widening these pathways. Branches and bushes were broken off from each side of the trail and soon it was several feet wide. Later, when settlers flocked to Michigan Territory, bringing their possessions in oxen-drawn wagons, there was a need for even wider roads."

Henry Schoolcraft, at present-day Michigan City, Indiana in 1820, described the trail, as a "plain horse path, which is considerably traveled by traders, hunters, and others..." and said a stranger could not follow it without the services of a guide because of the numerous side trails. The Sauk Trail intersected many important trails and early roads including the trails to Vincennes, Green Bay, Fort Wayne and north to Little Traverse Bay.



*Paths through tall grass prairies connected the main Indian trails*

Sections of the Sauk Trail still exist in some form. There is a winding road still called Sauk Trail which runs from Frankfort, Illinois to Dyer, Indiana, passing through Sauk Village, Illinois. Johnson Sauk Trail State Park in western Illinois sits on another section of the trail. Sauk Trail forms the southern boundary of Sauk Trail Woods park. When America's first national transcontinental highway, the Lincoln Highway, was built, its route through western Indiana followed the roads built over the Sauk Trail.

### Treasures found along the paths

Along the many trails, archeologists have identified over 1,000 mounds, 80 enclosures and embankments, 30 so-called 'garden beds,' 750 village sites, and 260 burying grounds. Unearthed along the Indian paths are miscellaneous artifacts such as arrowheads, hammers, knives, drills, hoes, spades, pipes, fragments of pottery, and large and small effigies in stone.

The ancient highway in Northwestern Lower Michigan has revealed countless Native American artifacts and campsites. Near Mesick, nearly 50 mounds have been discovered. U.S. Forest Service workers have found 150 circular fire pits near Buckley.

MSU's Randall Schaeztl has paraphrased from C.M. Davis' *Readings in the Geography of Michigan* (1964): "Those who travel its fading lanes often find themselves on a journey that leads them back in time. Faded and worn stone markers remain at certain sections of the trail to point the way down the old highway which has nearly been lost in the pages of time. The evidence that it was also an old stagecoach route is that there are tracks of wagon wheels found along certain parts of the trail. Information available at the Forest Service also states that a silver oxidated cross, which is believed to have belonged to a Jesuit priest, was found

at Buckley. A sword and pieces of metal that resembled armor were additional relics obtained at the site. Records indicate that a sword and armor found at the location may possibly have been from the French explorer La Salle, who is known to have visited St. Joseph, Michigan at one time.”

Entire communities of Native American families walked these trails. The paths followed the areas of least resistance and crossed rivers where they were shallowest. When European settlers arrived, many of the trails became stagecoach highways.

Roadways continue to follow the old paths. The Michigan State Highway Department was created by Governor Fred Warner in 1905 and the State Trunkline Act came into play in 1913. Pohl and Brown highlight the 1916 Federal-Aid Road Act, the beginning of snow removal in 1918, gasoline taxes in 1925, and further legislation that created the infrastructure of today’s roadways.

In her report to the Road Commission, Dorothy Pohl’s study (with Norman E. Brown, MDOT Act 51 Administrator) on the history of roads in Michigan goes far beyond early Indian trails. Their study examines farm-to-market routes in 1805, military roads in 1816, early State-sponsored transportation improvements, township road-building in 1817, private turnpike companies, swamp land roads of 1859, and on to the 1880s impact of bicyclists.

Pohl concludes, “Many of us in the road business have heard and used the phrase that the roads just “grew” there. Now we really know what happened!”

## “The Calf-Path” *by Sam Walter Foss*

One day through the primeval wood  
A calf walked home  
as good calves should;  
But made a trail all bent askew,  
A crooked trail as all calves do.  
Since then three hundred years have fled,  
And I infer the calf is dead.  
But still he left behind his trail,  
And thereby hangs my moral tale.  
The trail was taken up next day  
By a lone dog that passed that way;  
And then a wise bellwether sheep  
Pursued the trail o’er vale and steep,  
And drew the flock behind him, too,  
As good bellwethers always do.  
And from that day, o’er hill and glade,  
Through those old woods  
a path was made.  
And many men wound in and out,  
And dodged and turned and bent about,  
And uttered words of righteous wrath  
Because ‘twas such a crooked path;  
But still they followed — do not laugh —  
The first migrations of that calf,  
And through this winding  
wood-way stalked  
Because he wobbled when he walked.

This forest path became a lane  
That bent and turned and turned again;  
This crooked lane became a road,  
Where many a poor horse with his load  
Toiled on beneath the burning sun,  
And traveled some three miles in one.  
And thus a century and a half  
They trod the footsteps of that calf.

The years passed on in swift feet,  
The road became a village street;  
And this, before men were aware,  
A city’s crowded thoroughfare.

And soon the central street was this  
Of a renowned metropolis;  
And men two centuries and a half  
Trod in the footsteps of that calf.  
Each day a hundred thousand rout  
Followed this zigzag calf about  
And o’er his crooked journey went  
The traffic of a continent.  
A hundred thousand men were led  
By one calf near three centuries dead.

They followed still his crooked way.  
And lost one hundred years a day,  
For thus such reverence is lent  
To well-established precedent.

A moral lesson this might teach  
Were I ordained and called to preach;  
For men are prone to go it blind  
Along the calf-paths of the mind,  
And work away from sun to sun  
To do what other men have done.  
They follow in the beaten track,  
And out and in, and forth and back,  
And still their devious course pursue,  
To keep the path that others do.  
They keep the path a sacred groove,  
Along which all their lives they move;  
But how the wise old wood-gods laugh,  
Who saw the first primeval calf.  
Ah, many things this tale might teach  
But I am not ordained to preach.

*The author used the above poem as a springboard lecture in his Creative Problem Solving classes*

## The mastodon is our state fossil

The giant mastodon (*Mammuth americana*) was designated the official state fossil of Michigan in 2002. This magnificent animal disappeared from the Ypsilanti area about 10,000 years ago. One of the most complete mastodon skeletons was discovered near Owosso, and is now displayed at the U of M’s Museum of Natural History. The most intact trail of mastodon footprints (30) has been found along Michigan Avenue west of Saline across from Harry’s Furniture. The campaign to adopt the mastodon as Michigan’s state fossil was led by David P. Thomas, Sr., a geology instructor at Washtenaw Community College.

## Mastodon vs. mammoth?

The American mastodon is different from the woolly mammoth. Mastodons had straighter tusks and both the body and head of the mastodon is longer and squatter than the woolly mammoth and its back doesn’t slope like a mammoth’s. Mastodons were about the size of an Asiatic elephant of today, but its ears were smaller than modern elephants. They had thick body hair similar to a mammoth, but mastodon teeth suggest the diet of a browser, not a grazer. The mastodon also lacks the high, peaked knob on the head seen on the woolly mammoth. Mastodons are an older species, originating in Africa 35 million years ago and entering North America about 15 million years ago.



# Some call it “Y-Town”

Ypsilanti has its sister cities all over the country

**D**uring a recent election cycle, Ypsilanti Township saw the appearance of t-shirts with “Y-Town” emblazoned, and why not? We love the uniqueness of our name, even if it’s only the first initial. Some locals contend that only residents are allowed to use its cognomen: Ypsi. All others are condemned to suffer with its exotic quality as we listen to detect a “yip” in its introduction—a clue to help detect interlopers.

Ypsilantians have long been accustomed to friends’ and relatives’ puzzlement at the name of our city. They mispronounce it, misspell it, and often miss the reason for its being named for the hero of the 1829 Greek victory for independence from the Turks.

The misinformed even marvel at the fact that our postal address starts with the exotic letter Y, as if they had never heard of Yale, Youngstown, or Yonkers.

Sure, Yaphank, Yreka, and Yataha may give pause for reflection—since they’re not Greek—but would they be surprised to

learn that there are fifty-six U.S. Post Office addresses that begin with the letter Y? (Alas, nearly half our states—twenty-two—have no post office names beginning with Y.)

York is the most prevalent Y-town among our nation’s Y-addresses. There are thirteen Yorks (-town, -ville, -shire, or -Heights,) and the greatest concentration is in that state with York in its own name.

We have Indian Y-names and Amish Y-names but only one Greek Y-name, although there are two more Ypsilantis—not big enough to rate their own post office and ZIP code. Eight of the other Y-towns seem to be named for people: Youngstown (two of them) and Youngsville, Yates Center, Yoakum, Yoder, Yanceyville, and Young Harris. So far, no town seems to be named for Old Harris.

Some of the Y-post offices might sound even funnier than Ypsilanti: Yulee, Yataha, Yazoo City, and Yolo sound pretty odd at first but if we lived there we would probably become just as accustomed to it as we have become with our own.

When we run down the list of other American Y-towns, we realize we have a pretty good player in the game.

Thank you, Chief Justice Augustus Woodward; we’ve grown accustomed to the name you placed upon us and gladly carry the hero’s name forward into history.

*[VARIOUS SOURCES: A bunch of “Ys Guys” in the Fletcher-White Archives with not enough to do on a cold, winter afternoon. Consider spending more time in the Archives; you never know what you will find there. Hey! Why not?]*

*Roy Rogers used to sing, “Why, oh why did I ever leave Wyoming? Why, oh why did I ever have to go? ‘Cause the sheriff back there’s looking for me high and low...” But Wyoming does not count as a “Y-State.” Sorry.]*

York AL  
Yakutat AK  
Yuma AZ  
Yellville AK  
Yolo, Yorba Linda,  
Yosemite, Yountville, York, Yreka,  
Yuba City,  
Yuculpa, Yucca Valley CA  
Yataha, Yulee FL  
Young Harris GA  
York Valley,  
Yates City IL  
Yorktown IN  
Yates Center KS  
Yerkes KY Youngsville LA  
Yarmouth, York Harbor, York Village, Yellow Springs MD  
Yarmouth Park MA  
Yale, Ypsilanti MI  
Yazoo City MS  
Yorkville NJ, Yaphank,  
Yonkers, Yorkshire,  
Yorktown, Yorktown Heights, Yorkville,  
Youngstown NY  
Yadkinville, Yanceyville, Yaupon Beach NC  
Yellow Springs, Yorkville, Youngstown OH  
Yale, Yukon OK  
Yamhill, Youcala OR  
Yankton SC  
Yorkville TN  
Yoakum, Yorktown TX  
Yorkshire, Yorktown VA,  
Yakima WA,  
Yoder WY


Y-town?  
Well why not?

A  
E  
I  
O  
U  
(and sometimes)  
Y

**Why did the character ‘y’** disappear in favor of ‘i’ in English spelling? We notice this when advertisements try to sell something as archaic or old-timey, writing wife as *wyfe*, for example, or time as *tyme*.

Thomas Cromwell, 1st Earl of Essex, well illustrates the phenomenon in plain English: “*I amongst other have indured a parlyament which contened by the space of xvii hole wekes wher we commynd of warre pease Stryffe contencyon debatte murmure grudge Riches poverte penurye trowth falshode Justyce equitye dicayte opprescyon Magnanymyte actyvyte fove attempraunce Treason murder Felonye consyli ... [conciliation] and also how a commune welth myght be ediffyed and a[lso] contened within our Realme. Howbeyt in conclusyon we have d[one] as our predecessors have been wont to doo that ys to say, as well we myght and lefte wher we begann.*”

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# CRUISIN'

## Ypsilanti

by Fred Thomas

*American Graffiti* is a 1973 coming-of-age film by George Lucas. The movie is a study of the rock and roll and cruising cultures popular among post WW II baby boomers. Set in Modesto, California in 1962, the film is a nostalgic portrait of teenage life in the early 1960s told in a series of vignettes, featuring the story of a group of teenagers and their adventures within one night.

In the mid 1950s Ypsilanti teenagers cruised and listened to rock and roll music, too, much to the chagrin of their parents. Cruisin' scenes similar to those in *American Graffiti* were played out in our town before George Lucas was old enough to drive.

In my opinion, the boom years of the drive-in era in Ypsilanti were 1954-1959 when the streets of our city and adjacent township were alive with cruisers. Few ventured out during the week as school or work demanded their time. However, when the weekend arrived, they hit the roads, hoping to sow wild oats. Local drive-ins attracted those in search of excitement like flowers lure honeybees gathering nectar. And, like bees in flight, carloads told each other which places were buzzin'.

As adolescents my buddies and I could only watch the older kids passing as we stood curbside and longed for the day when our

The author's first car that he used for "Cruising Ypsilanti" was a 1950 Ford

turn would come to join the seemingly unending caravans of cars. Finally I reached the rite of passage. January 22, 1957 was my sixteenth birthday and I got my driver's license that same day.

One benchmark in life is the day you acquire your first automobile. It signifies the cutting of the apron strings. Adult responsibility now belongs to you. Misuse of the vehicle can spell disaster. However, that thought never enters your mind. All you can visualize is how neat it will be to drive your own car, going wherever you want, whenever you want. Before long I bought my first car, a 1950 Ford. Thus began my regular participation in the ritualistic activity commonly called "cruisin'."

My ego depended on that car. I could feel my chest swell whenever someone made a complimentary remark about it. Whether arriving at a local high school or a drive-in, the vehicle provided me advance recognition. Friends saw it coming and knew immediately who was driving. What follows is a summary of a typical evening's cruise in my black Ford.

A Saturday afternoon phone call usually confirmed plans for an evening of drive-in hopping. That called for a meticulous car cleaning at *Talbot's Mobil Service* at 2851 E. Michigan Avenue at the corner of Ridge Road. For seventy-five cents you could scrub

your own vehicle. A friend pumped gas there, and would often assist me if business was slow.

Next a cleanup at home and a change of clothes was in order. Not to be forgotten was the extra time needed to apply a little dab of Brylcreem to my hair and assign each strand its proper place. In addition, my departures were often delayed as a reinforcing ego demanded I check my appearance in the mirror at least four or five times in order to validate "how cool" I looked!

As prearranged, two or three cohorts would be picked up. Each passenger would throw in a buck for gas. Driving responsibilities rotated from weekend to weekend, depending on the drivability of our respective autos. Immediately a consensus would determine the initial destination on the circuitous cruising route. Often it was *Frostop*.

*Frostop* is a name that at its zenith was familiar to millions. In the 1950s, Frostop experienced tremendous growth. The signature brown and yellow, neon lit stands, with their gigantic, revolving root beer mug on top alerted drivers to locations from considerable distances. Reddaway's Frostop location at 3015 East Michigan Avenue was the township's easternmost drive-in. Ingress and egress from either Holmes

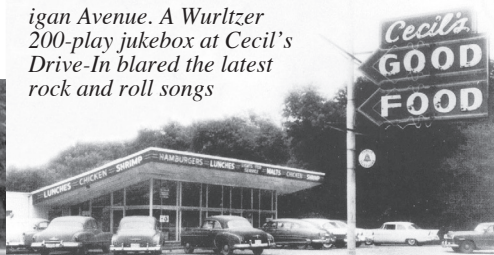
[continued overleaf]

It was easy to see the large lighted neon sign at Cecil's Drive-In at 1215 East Michigan Avenue. A Wurltzer 200-play jukebox at Cecil's Drive-In blared the latest rock and roll songs

Reddaway's Frostop Drive-In at 3015 East Michigan Avenue was a popular stop



One of the stops on the Old Chicago Road was Rea's Drive-In at 1370 East Michigan, owned and operated by Kelsie and Roy Tillman



## Cruisin' Ypsilanti

[continued from page 7]

Road or Michigan Avenue made the lot conducive to cruising.

After a root beer float and cute comments to the car hops, we would head west, toward town. The next stop on the Old Chicago Road was **Rea's Drive-In** at 1370 East Michigan, owned and operated by Kelsie and Roy Tillman. (See *GLEANINGS*, winter 2012, page 29 for more about them.) Their barbecues were on our favorites list. We would occasionally stop for one. However, the parking lot was usually full and consequently not easy to maneuver in and out of.

A quick shot across the highway took us into **Covey's Drive-In** at the corner of Michigan and Burbank. A slow rolling inspection of the crowd at this curved cafe and we would be on our way, barring any social contacts, of course.

Re-entering Michigan Avenue was precarious due to a 50 mph speed limit. Crossing over to **Bill's Hot Dogs** at 1294 East Michigan had to be done quickly and only after two oncoming traffic checks! Bill and Eileen Bristol opened the small curb-ser-



*Stan's Cafeteria at 62 Ecorse became Elias Brothers Big Boy not long after opening. The double-decker Big Boy hamburger and the Slim-Jim ham sandwich were available only there*

vice-only stand in 1935 and operated it for many years. The hot dogs were delicious, but parking was all next to the highway and to exit you often had to avoid traffic when backing out. Also, Bill was not happy when cars sat too long and took up space. Besides, Bill's employed only curb boys and they were not particularly receptive to our offhand remarks. A dog and a beer, and we moved on.

Just west of Bill's on the north side was **Cecil's Drive-In** at 1215 East Michigan. You could not miss the large lighted neon letters spelling out "Cecil's Good Food" to passers-by. A spacious parking area provided ample room for customers. Inside and outside service was available at all hours. The restaurant was well lighted and inviting with red and yellow leather covered seating and the long, brightly polished stainless steel soda fountain. A Wurltzer 200-play jukebox blared the latest rock 'n' roll songs outside, but was toned down inside. Good food, seeing numerous cool cars, and chances to meet friendly females would bring us back often to loop the busy lot.

Our stays at Cecil's could last more than an hour. Eventually we made our departure onto US-12 and again headed west. At Ecorse and Michigan a left turn steered us to nearby **Stan's Cafeteria** at 62 Ecorse. If the name does not sound familiar, think of the **Elias Brothers Big Boy** which it became not long after opening. The double-decker Big Boy hamburger and the Slim Jim ham sandwich were only available there. I recall prices being higher. For that reason our routine was to pull through and survey the place for people we knew. If the search was in vain, we exited.

Before turning left onto Ecorse we debated a right turn and a visit to the small **Ecorse Drive-In** at 161 Emerick, but generally decided to forego it, and head to greener pastures.

Another left hand turn onto Michigan and a right turn onto Prospect Street would lead us to a popular hangout, the **Chick In Drive-In** at Prospect and Holmes Road. (See *GLEANINGS*, summer 2009, p.12 and p.22 for the history of this continuing business). Following prolonged conversations with newly met acquaintances, we would head south on Prospect to the next traffic light where we turned right.

Forest Avenue took us to the intersection with Washtenaw where we turned right again (*Forest now ends at College Place*). Soon we would reach the westernmost drive-in, three hours after leaving Frostop and covering a distance of only about six miles. **McNaughton's**, at 1303 Washtenaw was a likely place to meet acquaintances from school who lived within walking distance. This made the extended driving effort worthwhile.

The drive-ins we visited were in no particular sequential order. Where we ventured was often a result of tips other groups had given us. The last loop before heading home was normally through the Chick In or Cecil's, as they stayed open later. The excitement was over and we were ready to go home.

### Take a ride down memory lane

Take a parent or grandparent with you. Begin at the Chick In. Turn left and follow Holmes to the eastern end. Make a right turn. Frostop was at this corner. Head west on Michigan. Rea's was near the Hana Korean restaurant. Covey's is now a Roy's Squeeze In. Bill's Hot Dogs is now Bill's Drive-In. Cecil's burned down in the mid 1960s when it was called Barhops. I am not sure about the status of Stan's, or the Ecorse Drive-In. McNaughton's is no longer there. Yes, some of the 1950s drive-ins still exist, and some don't. But, your parents' and grandparents' stories of cruisin' Ypsilanti still exist in their memories. Ask them to share a few.

[Fred Thomas moved to Ypsilanti in 1948, graduated from Roosevelt High School in 1958 and then from Eastern Michigan in 1965. He currently lives in Phoenix, Arizona.]

A black and white advertisement for 'THE ROCKET'. At the top, the word 'THE ROCKET' is written in a stylized, blocky font with a rocket ship icon to the right. Below this, it says 'OVER 6000 GIFTS!' and 'Candy\*Toys\*Novelties'. In the center is a large illustration of a classic tin robot, surrounded by several small, colorful starburst or snowflake-like symbols. At the bottom, it reads 'A Nostalgic Wonderland In Historic Downtown Ypsilanti', '122 W Michigan Ave', and 'www.ShopTheRocket.com'.



# An exciting FIND of Ypsilanti railroad history —By Gerry Petty

Every so often something is found in the YHS Museum/Archive that absolutely flabbergasts me as to its very existence from so many years ago. We now have such a long-forgotten artifact in our possession from Michigan's railroading past, as well as other business documents. They all concern Ypsilanti and its surrounding small towns in 1846 during the rebuilding of the Michigan Central Railroad and other items of interest.

Although Ypsilanti had a railroad as early as September, 1838, it was a privately-owned line named the Detroit and St. Joseph Railroad. It was badly under-constructed and under-funded becoming insolvent early on and was eventually taken over by the State of Michigan in 1840. After running through more than \$5 million in funds and doing an equally sub-standard construction job, the State decided to sell its stake in the Central Railroad of Michigan in 1846. By this time it went as far as Kalamazoo, a distance of about 143 miles from Detroit

Investors in 1846 were able to raise \$2 million to purchase the CRM with the hope of making it profitable and running the line to Michigan City, Indiana and then to Chicago, Illinois. Beyond Chicago the railroad was to eventually serve several other states. The now successful MCRR exceeded its own expectations and, by 1925, the MCRR had 1,871 miles of roadway and 4,139 miles of track. Finally, in the 1940s, the New York Central line bought out the last of the bonds and began to control the railway.

This last October, while looking around the archival storage area, Al Rudisill came across a very old accordion file. I had never seen this file, even during our Archives move back in 2007. This ancient file had been given to the YHS sometime in 1954, gratefully accepted and evidently forgotten for 58 years! Just on its own that is something too, but what was truly amazing was that it was a treasure trove of 19th century business documents: checks, promissory notes, deeds, doctors bills, a 1924 divorce document, demands for payment and best of all, the payrolls for about eight weeks of the newly formed, Michigan Central Railroad! Additionally, it also contained all of the information as to the workers, the amounts of pay and about 30% of the additional bills submitted to the railroad for



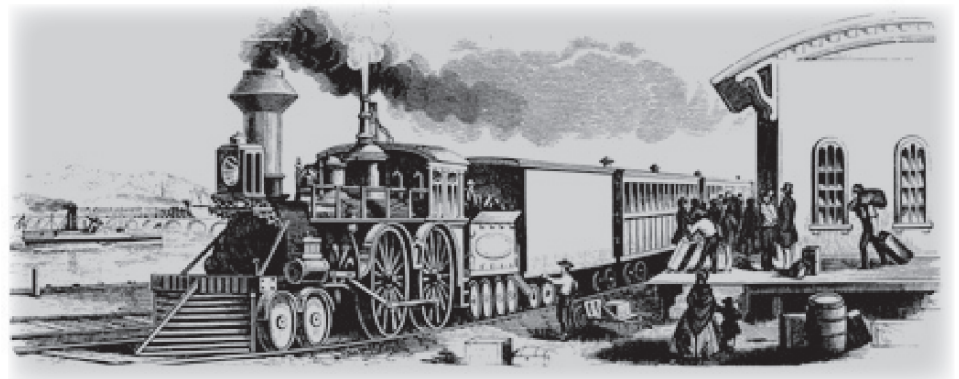
services along the roadway/track laying operations from Dearborn to Denton, Ypsilanti, Pittsfield Station, and out to Grass Lake Michigan!

Contained on these MCRR payrolls were their pay rates, for the typical 10-hour workdays, the names of the workers, and their actual signatures. As an example: a rail-layer made 87¢ a day, skilled workers made one dollar a day and a team of horses were contracted for a dollar a day as we have the actual draying bill moving rails and ties to the work area (the owner of the team was a local worker putting down rails too). We also have a bill from one of our local restaurants for \$5.25, which was never eaten as the labor crew was called away from their dinner by a wood fire they had to put out. Probably it was railroad ties and wood braces needed to redo the badly built roadbeds that had caught fire. We also have a record of a Denton farmer submitting a bill for several hundred dollars from a fire caused by one of the passing Michigan Central Railroad steam engines. It did quite a bit of damage, according to the bill.

In 1846, these workers were not paid weekly but 'about' monthly. They were paid not by check, voucher, bank deposits, but CASH-in-hand. Paying in cash requires

a physical payroll, lots of small change—which included half cent pieces—and lots of silver and gold coins as there was no United States paper currency. Almost all of the local banks were put out of business during the panic of 1837, and people were very reluctant to accept ANY paper money from private banks. All of this required a personal sign-off checklist to receive the workers pay. It was not unusual for a railroad to have an express car that carried cash payrolls and other valuable items to certified recipients and this probably was the way these men were paid. The headquarters of the MCRR was Detroit, about 39 miles away and the existence of this payroll document should have been destroyed when the last workers had all been paid and the payroll audited. It is all very quizzical as to why this payroll never made it back to Detroit!

All of these wonderful MCRR documents will be placed in a separate file, as the documents are physically large and the attendant tertiary bills constitute a separate heading for the MCRR business file. (MCRR: 1846 Bus. documents/payrolls.) For people who study business history, these are just full of information for the early development of Michigan railroads, and 19th century business documentation and forms of this era.





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# Museum Advisory Board Report

*By Kathryn Howard, Chair, Museum Advisory Board*

Spring! Isn't it wonderful for all of us who couldn't be a snow bird? We had, in spite of the severe weather, lots of activity at the museum. From Estabrook School we had several student tours of 3rd and 4th graders. Also, we had a group of "Questers" from Detroit.

We are now getting ready for our Artists of Ypsilanti and area Art Exhibit of oil, watercolor and pastel paintings. We have so many talented artists. This year we are also having photography, so if any of you are camera sharks, please let us know. The Art Exhibit runs from April 23rd to May 19th.

Classes of 2nd and 3rd graders at the Willow Run School are studying the history of Ypsilanti, will be making post cards, and have asked us to display them. We will be excited to see their work.

New exhibits will be going into the showcases: Diane Schick's Hummel collection in the library and Donna Carpenter's Irish Beleck collection in the other large case.

Lost Ypsilanti is in progress and will be exhibited from June 4th through September 1st. Prominent Citizen's of Ypsilanti's past will be featured.

In September we will be having a quilt show; if you have a quilt you would like to exhibit, contact me or the museum.

The front hall floor [at right] has been refinished and new carpet runners have been laid. A new carpet runner has also been placed in the upstairs hall. Both back stairwells have been repainted by our Intern, Lauren Thomson.

Lauren will be graduating in the end of April, and so will be leaving her position as Intern. She has been a tremendous help in her two years with us. We will have a new Intern from the Graduate Historic Preservation Program by the first of May.

Our next long-range project for the museum is working to make our dining room more attractive.

We welcome new help and docents. We would also like volunteers for contributing desserts for our quarterly meetings and special functions. I hope you can come and see our new exhibits and attractions. Have a wonderful spring.



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# How did it get there?

-By Fred Thomas



## The Consolidated B-24 "Liberator" bomber

*Taken at Willow Run when 139 was transferred to Post 379 (photo courtesy of the Ypsilanti Historical Society)*

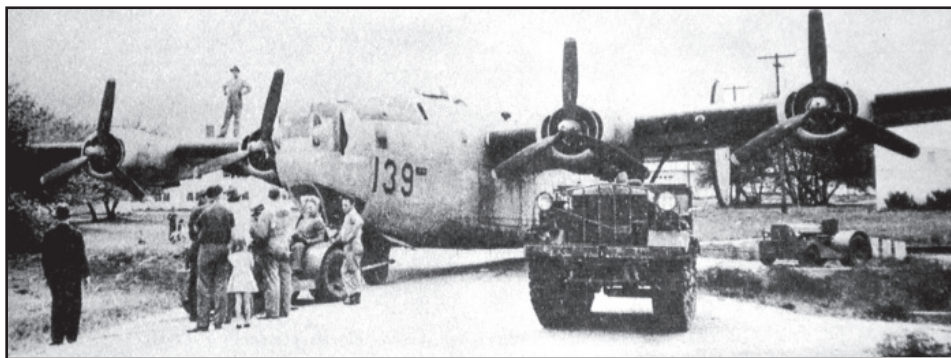
Nowadays an Eby-Brown Company warehouse occupies the northwest corner of East Michigan Avenue and Spencer Lane. The large facility is hard to miss. However, had you passed the same location sometime between 1946 and 1950, what you saw would have left you wondering. Parked in an orchard at this intersection was a huge WWII airplane. Around it a gateless, four foot high, picket snow fence stood guard to keep onlookers from getting too close.

It was a B-24 Liberator bomber. From October 1942 until April 1945 employees at the Ford Motor Company's Willow Run plant produced 8,865 of them. Each aircraft required 1,225,000 parts to manufacture, at a cost of \$297,627. The B-24s proved well worth the time and money. They saved countless lives while bringing hostilities to an earlier conclusion.

With 110 feet of wingspan and 4 monstrous engines facing the highway, the sheer size of this winged behemoth made it impossible to pass without notice. The question was, "How did it get there?"

One evening, late in 1945 several members of a nearby veterans' group decided to ask the War Department for a dummy bomb to use as a war memorial. The request was denied. Thereafter a member suggested, perhaps in jest, that they ask for a plane instead, and they did. To their surprise, notification soon arrived that they would receive a B-24 to display.

Bomber 139 landed at the Willow Run airport February 26, 1946 for delivery to



*It was a challenge to move 139 from Willow Run to the Edsel B. Ford American Legion Post 379, located in a log cabin building on the south side of Michigan Avenue (photo courtesy of The Story of Willow Run by Marion Wilson - copyright 1956)*

the Edsel B. Ford American Legion Post 379, located in a log cabin building on the south side of Michigan Avenue opposite the government owned corner property.

After an acceptance ceremony, the retired war bird was taxied to the airfield apron to await transfer to its place of honor. However, the challenge was to figure out how to move it without major difficulty, using a caterpillar tractor hitched to the nose wheel, and a smaller tractor hitched to each side wheel.

After difficulties getting out of the Kaiser-Frazer yard the first day, the slow moving vehicles traveled Ecorse Road west to Ford Boulevard. En route a wing clipped a tree which had to be cut down to clear the way. In addition, highway signs and overhead electric wires were temporarily removed so the plane and its accompanying procession of helpers could pass.



*Guests of honor at the dedication ceremony held May 26, 1946 were Mr. and Mrs. Henry Ford (photo courtesy of The Story of Willow Run by Marion Wilson - copyright 1956)*

By evening the crew reached Forest Avenue. The next day the movers headed east to Spencer Lane, and the orchard location where the 67 foot long aircraft was positioned among the apple trees.

A ceremony to dedicate the plane was held May 26, 1946. Guests of honor were Mr. and Mrs. Henry Ford. The American Legion post was named in honor of their son Edsel who had died in 1943. In addition, it was Henry Ford's company that was responsible for the bomber plant. Old 139 had returned to the place where it made its maiden flight, home to Willow Run.

*[continued overleaf]*

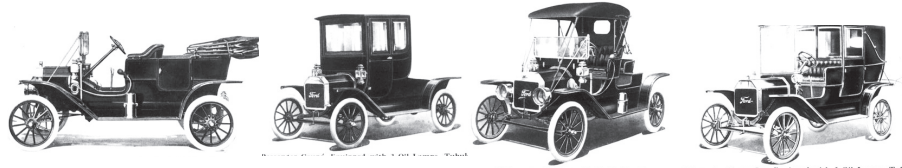
## How did it get there?

[continued from page 11]

Life for the former sky warrior was not as glorious as it had been flying combat missions overseas. The protective fence was no match for curious folks longing to explore the interior of the aircraft. Over time souvenir hounds picked away once vital parts. Bit by bit neglect increased. No longer did admirers come to recall the valiant service it had performed supporting America's war efforts. Finally, in 1950, the remaining carcass of the once majestic Liberator was carefully removed by workers from a scrap metal company.

As a pupil at Spencer Elementary School in the late 1940s I often stood and marveled at the giant craft. I recall being saddened when I arrived at the school one day only to find the B-24 gone. For more about old number 139 see pages 78-83 of Marion Wilson's *The Story of Willow Run*.

(Fred Thomas moved to Ypsilanti in 1948, graduated from Roosevelt High School in 1958 and then from Eastern Michigan in 1965. He currently lives in Phoenix, Arizona.)



## The 1914 Model T Ford Station Wagon

May 31, 1927, the last Ford Model T rolled off the assembly line. It was the first affordable automobile, due in part to the assembly line process developed by Henry Ford. It had a 2.9-liter, 20-horsepower engine and could travel at speeds up to 45 miles per hour. It had a 10-gallon fuel tank and could run on kerosene, petrol, or ethanol, but it couldn't drive uphill if the tank was low, because there was no fuel pump; people got around this design flaw by driving up hills in reverse.


Ford believed that "the man who will use his skill and constructive imagination to see how much he can give for a dollar, instead of how little he can give for a dollar, is bound to succeed." The Model T cost \$850 in 1909, and as efficiency in production increased, the price dropped.

By 1927, you could get a Model T for \$290.



"I will build a car for the great multitude," said Ford. "It will be large enough for the family, but small enough for the individual to run and care for. It will be constructed of the best materials, by the best men to be hired, after the simplest designs that modern engineering can devise. But it will be low in price [so] that no man making a good salary will be unable to own one - and enjoy with his family the blessing of hours of pleasure in God's great open spaces."

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We hear Ypsilanti singing

## Historic Choir sings of WWII heritage



By Val Kabat

### 30th Anniversary Concert to feature the Consolidated B-24 bomber, “The Liberator”, built at Willow Run airport in World War II

The Ypsilanti Community Choir is excitedly looking forward to their 30th anniversary celebration on Thursday, May 2. The concert, which is free, will be held at Emmanuel Lutheran Church, 201 North River Street, and will begin at 7:30 p.m.

What makes this concert especially exciting is that the choir will be premiering a new work by Ann Arbor composer Karl Osterland. YCC’s association with Osterland dates back to the early 1980s when he and founder Denise Rae Zellner were colleagues in Music Youth International.

In addition to Osterland’s day job as president of Ypsilanti’s FasTemps, a full-service staffing agency. He is music director and organist at Historic Trinity Lutheran Church in Detroit, where he directs three services each Sunday. When approached about the possibility of writing a new work to commemorate YCC’s anniversary, Osterland looked for an inspiration unique to Ypsilanti. He found it in the B-24 “Liberator,” which contributed so much to the Allies’ efforts during World War II.

Reflecting on the creative process, Osterland says, “I find the incredible speed and unity of purpose in the US and especially in Ypsilanti during WW II to be very inspiring. In some ways, it was Ypsilanti’s finest hour—a time when the hopes of a nation

were being played out at that bomber plant. It fascinates me.”

It was 1939, and the first B-24s were being produced at the rate of one per day at San Diego’s Consolidated Aircraft plant. Dearborn’s Ford plant was under government contract to produce some of the aircraft’s parts. But then Henry Ford’s production chief, Charles Sorenson, visited the San Diego plant. After seeing the manufacturing process in person, Sorenson was sure that Ford—using the assembly line—could do better. He was right, and by August of 1944, the Willow Run Bomber plant was producing one B-24 per hour.

Henry Ford’s 80-acre factory with a mile-long assembly line employed more than 40,000 people. This was the largest factory in the United States, and the largest anywhere outside the USSR. It had the largest assembly line in the world (3,500,000 sq. ft.) at the time of completion. Ypsilanti’s major contribution to the war effort caused the rest of the world to see southeastern Michigan as the “Arsenal of Democracy.”

Not considered the most attractive of WWII’s flying arsenal, the Liberator nonetheless provided incomparable service during the Second World War and the Korean conflict that followed. Many pilots and crewmen were disappointed when



first assigned to fly the enormous bomber, nicknamed the “flying barn.” But after a successful mission or two, Liberator crewmembers almost always sang her praises.

Osterland’s music captures the “rumbling, grumbling” assembly line, where the workers “Keep those parts a moving, always proving we can get the job done” and also the dedication of the pilots who “soar as on wings of an eagle and grasp the heavens . . . righting the wrongs and enforcing the will of a people who would be free.”



*The Choir in rehearsal*

### Ypsilanti Community Choir 30th Anniversary Concert

Premiering “Liberator”

by Karl Osterland

Thursday, May 2 • 7:30 p.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran Church

201 North River Street, Ypsilanti

Admission is free



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**The following unedited  
timeline gives more clues  
regarding Sanscrainte's  
possible connections to  
what would later be known  
as Ypsilanti**

*[All notations and parenthetical comments  
are attributed to the author]*

## **A Sanscrainte Timeline** *by Kevin Lajiness*

**1723**

Jean Baptiste Romain Dit Sanscrainte b:  
May 16, in Montreal, Canada

**1754**

Married: 25 FEB in Montréal, QC Suzanne-  
Amable DENIAU

**1754**

Jean Baptiste Romain dit Sanscrainte b.  
probably Laprairie

**1760**

January 7, JEAN ROMAIN DIT SAN-  
SCRAINTE witnesses the mutual consent  
of the nuptial benediction to michel Boier  
and to josette marguerite de lignon at mich-  
ilimakinak

**1760**

October 9 Jacque (one source says female)  
Sans Crainte born to Jean Baptiste Sans  
Crainte and Indian slave michilimakinak

**1761**

jean romain dit Sanscrainte witnesses, the  
mutual consent of pierre duprés and of marie  
joseph carignan at michilimakinak July 18,

**1765**

Jean Baptiste Sanscrainte (John Soncrant)  
came from Quebec (this would have been  
the father the son would have only been  
11 years old and the date may be right for  
when he set up the post but he was in Mich-  
ilimackinac as early as 1760 and up to 1795  
as noted by Greenville treaty notes –Kevin  
Lajiness) and settled on the north bank of  
the Huron river (Detroit Area) at present  
day West Jefferson. He sold this property to  
Gabriel Godfroy in 1796- Rockwood, The  
Huron River, Patricia Quick, Rockwood  
Area Historical Society



*From Jim Woodruff's Topologist's Blog*

**1778**

Margaret Solo m. Jean Baptiste 7 Romain  
dit Sanscrainte, bap 24 Dec 1754 Montréal  
PQ; ma 13 Oct Detroit MI

**1779**

Serjeant Sanscrainte, whose father (who  
had come with Clarke from the Illinois) at  
that instant stepping up raised the muzzle  
and obtained his son's life by applying to  
Colol. Clarke

**1779**

Jean Baptiste Romain dit Sanscrainte was  
deeded land on Rivire-au-Loutre (Otter  
Creek) in by the Potawatomes

**1786**

15, May Deed from Potawatomie for land  
on the River Raisin; signed by 5 Indians  
with totems; witnessed by J. B. Sanscrainte  
and Francois Navarre. From Labadie Fam-  
ily Papers. (This is attributed to both Jean  
Baptiste Sanscrainte 1749-1822 [I question  
these dates] and Jean Baptiste Romain dit  
Sanscrainte b.1754)

**1790**

Explorer Hugh Heward's journal describes a  
trading post, operated by Jean Baptiste San-  
scriante, in near the Potawatomi settlement

Moravian indians

**1795**

(Nov 9 1810 –fifteen years ago) the late  
surveyor, McNiff came up the Huron with  
Sanscrainte the interpreter to survey land  
by order of John Askins

**1795**

No prisoners remain in our hands in the  
neighborhood of Michilimackinac. Those  
two Frenchmen present (Messieurs Sans  
Crainte and Pepin,) can witness to the truth of  
this assertion “ (Indian to general Wayne)

The search for our first European settler continues

# Jean-Baptiste Sanscrainte's story

By Michael E. Van Wasshova

In the summer and fall issues of the Ypsilanti Historical Society's newsletter, the GLEANINGS, Tom Dodd wrote two satirical stories concerning a French-Canadian man with the surname of Sans Crainte. [Have no fear! J.B. Sanscrainte was here, GLEANINGS, Fall 2012 and Our French Connection memory bank is still growing, GLEANINGS, Winter 2012.]

I, being not only a member of the Ypsilanti Historical Society, but also a member of the French-Canadian Heritage Society of Michigan, the Genealogical Society of Monroe County and Descendants of Early Frenchtown, already knew of this family. As a matter of fact, the Sanscrainte family is a collateral part of my family tree. Not only that, but on the voyage that was mentioned in the Hugh Heward Journal that Mr. Dodd sourced, a member of my French-Canadian family was a participant. That man was Joseph Lamirande, my third great grand father who was hired to transport material across country by canoe and portaging. So this had become a personal story as well.

One problem when using the Heward Journal, is Mr. Dodd's assumption that Jean-Baptiste Sanscrainte's site was located in or near what is now Ypsilanti. In reading the journal no definite land mark of any kind is mentioned. All that is written is the date, 1 April 1790, the type of trees and that Mr. Sanscrainte was along the Huron River.

The Jean-Baptiste Sanscrainte who was mentioned in the Hugh Heward record was not the first Jean-Baptiste Romain dit Sanscrainte in North America. He was born in Montreal, Quebec, not France. He was actually a second generation French-Canadian and the third in line with the name Jean-Baptiste.

We must explain here that the word *dit* is the French word for *also known as* (aka)



French traders meeting with Native Americans at a peltry

in English. This was a purely French-Canadian custom. There were various reasons for this practice, which we will not go into at this time.

From our research the Romain *dit* Sans Crainte family came from the parish of St. Martial in Angouleme, France. The first Jean-Baptiste of that surname to arrive in North America was born there in about 1696. He married in Montreal, Quebec on 30 June 1722. The subject of our story was the grandson of that union. Jean-Baptiste the III, as we will call him, was born in Montreal in the year 1754. He married Margaret Solo in Detroit on 13 October 1778. They were the parents of eight children.

Jean-Baptiste III lived a very full and adventurous life, judging by the records we have uncovered in our research. He was a family man, trader, Indian interpreter for both the Americans and the British and was involved in many of the historical events that we learned of in our American history classes. The story of this man could fill a book, but that must wait for someone else to write.

## So to keep this story short I will attempt to inform you of the real facts of Jean-Baptiste Romain dit Sanscrainte.

Jean-Baptiste III began his adventurous life while a very young man. His father, Jean-Baptiste II, brought him along while seeking places to establish missions. The father somehow had connections with the Jesuits and was involved with the founding of missions at Black Rock, Fort Meigs, Maumee, Huron (which is now Windsor) and St. Lawrence (now Toledo). While

along on these travels the younger Jean-Baptiste became acquainted with members of the area's many native tribes and began his career as an interpreter and trader. He learned the customs and the native way of life which served him throughout his long life.

A year after his marriage to Margaret Solo (also spelled Soleau) on 13 October 1778, Jean-Baptiste III negotiated a deal with several tribes in the Detroit River region to purchase thousands of acres of land along the River Raisin, known to the French as Riviere aux Raisins, which is now the city of Monroe.

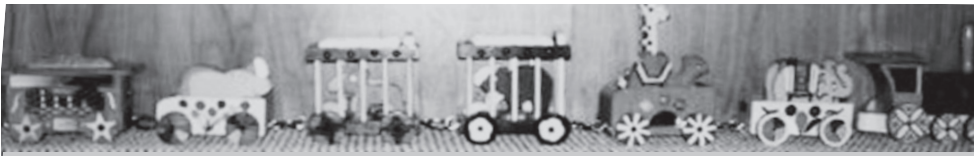
In August of 1794 Jean-Baptiste III was involved in the Battle of Fallen Timbers along with at least four other French-Canadians from the Detroit and River Raisin region. They fought for the British, who at the time ruled the region, and the Indian allies of the British. General Anthony Wayne's Northwestern American Army defeated the British allies. After that battle the Indians had little desire to fight for the British as they had received no help from them.

Along with several other French-Canadians from the region, Jean-Baptiste was recruited by General Wayne to bring in many chiefs from the various tribes to sign the Treaty of Greenville.

Also in the records that have been located, Jean-Baptiste and members of his family were involved in the Battle of the Raisin. Some records have him on the side of the British, some with the Americans. We do know that at least three of his four sons, one named Jean-Baptiste, fought with the Kentuckians and had property destroyed during the battle.

Jean-Baptiste III died in 1838 at the age of 84 while out hunting for horses.

(Michael E. Van Wasshova is a member of the Monroe County Historical Society and a regular visitor to the YHS Archives.)



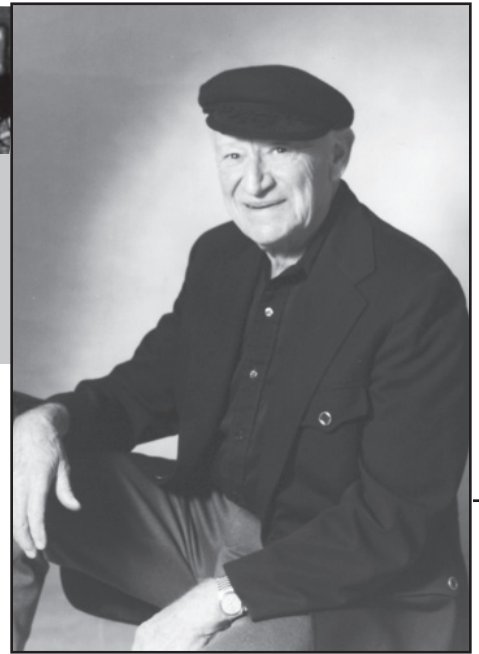
# Donald H. Porter: Craftsman and Artist

By Peg Porter

Publicly he was a school administrator, active in many community organizations (Lions, March of Dimes, Meals on Wheels, Congregational Church), husband of Ruth and father of Margaret, Don Jr. and Jane. Privately he loved to work with wood. He built at least three boats, a summer cottage, and a home addition. But he liked to build smaller objects as well. His woodshop was particularly busy as the holidays drew near. His Christmas outdoor decorations won the local holiday lighting contest at least five years in a row when he finally asked not to be part of the judging.

He built cradles for his granddaughters, toy chests and trains for his grandsons. Other children and adults were also given a Porter original. Many of his items were made from scraps of wood left over from larger projects. He particularly liked hard woods although many of the toys were made with pine. He decorated much of what he built. Garlands of flowers, hearts, and birds adorned his creations. Sometimes the paintings told a story; he used names in his paintings to honor the receiver.

Several of his creations were on display as part of the Museum's holiday decorations. He loved Christmas, loved making decorations and creating gifts. He did not consider himself a craftsman or an artist. And yet, he was.



Above: Don Porter served as an administrator in the Ypsilanti Public Schools

Above left: Don Porter's "circus train" had animals riding in the cars with the giraffes', for example, having an open car letting them look out and survey the passing scene

Right: One of the doll cradles designed and built by Don Porter

The following is an outgrowth of the holiday display. A number of people asked for an article about my father focusing on his art. This was not an easy assignment because, in large part, he rarely spoke about himself. In addition, he was a humble man and did not believe he was especially talented. Others thought differently. Fortunately, some of his work has survived.

Donald Porter never talked much about how he learned his craft. It was as if he always knew. The Porters of Colonial Massachusetts and later Nova Scotia, Canada, had numerous builders, particularly ship builders, painters, weavers and others who produced useful or beautiful items. Donald's grandfather, Titus H. Porter, was a builder who worked both in Nova Scotia and in coastal Massachusetts. According to one family source, he built homes, public buildings and, of course, boats. The latter included everything from fishing boats to racing yachts. The Porters were cousins to the Crosbys, well-known boat and yacht builders (The Crosbys also produced one famous entertainer, Harry or "Bing", but that is another story).

It is not surprising that one of Don's first projects was a speed boat built from a kit and christened the *Mickey Mouse*. He went on to build a rowboat, the *Mimi*, and a cabin cruiser, *Mimi II*. The cruiser was modeled after the Crosby cruisers, which I knew, but had no idea of its significance until I began researching the Porter family.

When the family home was built on Owendale in the early 1940s, Don created a workshop in the basement. The workbench had small drawers on three sides. These held nails, screws, bolts, all carefully organized. The workshop was a prime example of his skill in utilizing space. No longer just a builder he was now a designer as well. Several of his design projects were featured in *Better Homes and Gardens*.

In the mid 1940s, Don built the Porter cottage on Base (a.k.a. Baseline) Lake. The Davis family gave Ruth and Don the two lots as a wedding present. Mother had lived with Spen and Hazel Davis while she attended the Normal and helped take care of their four children. On the north shore, the property had views of "Peach

The cottage on Base Lake built by Don Porter was an H-shaped structure with the kitchen, living room, porch and master bedroom all having a lake view







Above: The Porters and their cousins, the Crosby's, were boat builders. The boat is the Crosby Cruiser.

Left: Don built this rowboat called the "Mimi I"

Mountain" and the hills on the opposite side. My parents designed an H-shaped structure with the kitchen, living room and porch and master bedroom all with a lake view. The focal point of the main living space was a field stone fireplace. The cottage had four bedrooms (one was very small) and a bathroom. Don did most of the construction with the help of a group of friends. The finished kitchen featured a bay window with a custom made table. On the sides of the table he painted the names of all who had helped in his usual decorative style with garlands and hearts. As a child I used to study the names and as a result I "knew" some of Ypsilanti's most prominent citizens.

The upper kitchen cabinet doors were painted to tell the story of building the cottage. Unfortunately, holes for hinges were drilled on the wrong side of one the doors leaving the story out of sequence. That was one of the few "goofs" I remember. We left them that way. The mistake proved to be a good conversation starter and also a test of visitors' power of observation.

While the structure was impressive, it was by no means fancy. We had only cold running water for a number of years. Water had to be heated for dishwashing. Baths were taken in

the lake. Mother refused to allow a phone for a long time although she eventually relented for emergencies. No TV was allowed either. We learned to make our own entertainment.

The next big building project occurred in the early 1950s. A large two story addition at the back of the house nearly doubled its size. This, like other projects, was done in my Dad's "free time." His job with the Ypsilanti Public Schools was demanding and time consuming. We got used to things being torn up although we still didn't like it. A mother robin had constructed a very nice nest while building was underway. As a result the back wall was not erected until the birds had hatched and were on their way. *The Ypsilanti Press* published a feature story on our feathered visitors.

Our backyard held, at various times, items our Dad made for his three children. I, the oldest, had a swing set although this was not a typical swing set by any means. A pipe was attached to two tall trees. Attached by chains were a swing, a trapeze, and a set of rings. He was ahead of his time in "re-purposeing" items; the trapeze was a smaller pipe and the rings were metal as well. Since I seemed to prefer looking at the world upside down, I spent most of my time hanging from the trapeze or the rings. My brother had a fort-jungle gym, a two level wooden structure that had a slide and a fireman's pole. Our sister, Jane, had Lilac Cottage, a small painted playhouse with aqua trim. For a number of years, our backyard often resembled a neighborhood playground.

As we were growing up, Dad was very busy overseeing the construction of at least six new school buildings as well as his usual responsibilities of budget, finance, transportation and maintenance, and executive secretary to the Board of Education. When he retired, I am told, three people were hired to fill his "position."

With the arrival of grandchildren, he returned to his workshop where he created doll cradles, toy boxes, and toy trains. Each one of the items was personalized with the child's name and most had his unique decorative painting. His "circus train" was displayed at the Ypsilanti Historical Museum during the 2012 holidays. The animals ride in different cars; the giraffes, for example, have an open car letting them look out and survey the passing scene. A doll house shows the same level of detail with each of the rooms individually decorated. It is these smaller items that best exhibit his artistry and craftsmanship. He created a short publication called "Making Toys from Scrap Materials." Had he access to today's technology his ideas would likely have reached a larger audience.

As he grew older, he did more carving focusing on shapes in hard woods. His creations became more abstract but also more beautiful. His love and appreciation of wood was clearly apparent.

Our mother, Ruth Porter, certainly appreciated her husband's talent. There were a few times, however, when she wished he would take up golf or fishing. One day Mother and I returned from a shopping trip to Ann Arbor to find the kitchen cupboards being demolished. "Don, what are you doing?" Mother exclaimed. Dad responded that she had told him many times that she wanted different cabinets. "I didn't mean right this minute. We have company coming!"

I have a brother-in-law who did not know our father but hears about him often. Mike once remarked, "Are you sure he did everything you say he did?" Janie and I answered, "Oh yes, he did everything. You just had to know our Dad."

[Peg Porter is the Assistant Editor of the *GLEANINGS* and regularly contributes articles about growing up in Ypsilanti.]



Several of Don's designs that were created in his workshop in the family home on Owendale were featured in *Better Homes and Gardens*

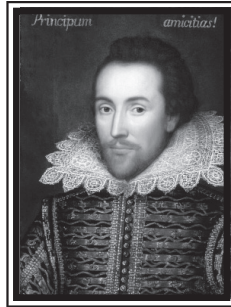
# History's message: Just do the job and leave your name!

The Ypsilanti Historical Museum is more than a collection of ancient artifacts and historical data; it is a collection of people.

Imagine the late Peter Fletcher assembling a group in the Archives meeting room which included Jack Miller, Ray Barber, Eric Maurer, Todd Barker, Patsy Chandler, Gary Clark, Virginia Cooper, Peg Porter, and Cheryl Farmer. What might be the focus of such a meeting? Does the list of their names offer any insight into their commonalities?

Their surnames might hint at the meeting's agenda. They could be tracing family histories back to occupations or crafts that were the origin of their surnames or cognomens.

William Holden, in a 1974 article in Midwest Tool Collectors Association's publication [*What's in a Name?*], offers this explanation: "In early days many a man was not known by a surname. Rather, his iden-



*What's in a name?  
That which we call a rose  
by any other name  
would smell as sweet...  
-William Shakespeare*

tification was associated with his occupation or craft. Each hamlet and town had a miller, for example, who operated the mill for grinding the grain. If his given name happened to be "John", he was referred to as "John the miller" to distinguish him from "John the carpenter".

Times change and literacy expands. Written records demand an accounting of who's who. "Fred the cook" was shortened to "Fred Cook" and the surname "Cook" went on to designate generations afterward.

Herewith is a starter list of surnames found in records at the Museum or Archives whose names likely have come from the talents of their ancestors. Some remain the same in current usage; others need some explanation due to language and fluctuations of craft or talent:

- Archer - soldier with bow and arrow
- Barker - tans hides with bark
- Bellows - bellows-maker, operates forge
- Boardman - cuts timber
- Boomer - hobo or explosive population representative
- Bowman - see Archer
- Brewer - like Matt Greff at the Corner
- Brewster - female brewer (Rene Greff)
- Carter - transports merchandise by cart
- Cartwright - makes carts
- Chandler - candle maker or purveyor of nautical supplies
- Clark - clerk
- Cooper - barrel maker
- Crocker - potter
- Currier - processes leather after tanning
- Cutler - makes knives and scissors
- Draper - curtain-maker
- Falconer - raises and trains falcons
- Fisher - fisherman
- Fletcher - arrow maker
- Forrester - lumberman
- Fowler - traps small birds
- Gardner - cultivates vegetable garden
- Glazier - glass worker
- Glover - glove-maker
- Goldsmith - jeweler/craftsman
- Hooper - makes hoops for barrels.
- Horner - made utensils from horn
- Keeler - barge tender
- Loomis - loom maker
- Mason - stone cutter
- Maurer - iron maker
- Miller (Mueller, Moeller, Muller)
  - ran the grain mill
- Minor - miner
- Naylor - nail-maker
- Packman - peddler
- Pearlman - deals in pearls
- Pittman works in the pit with a pitsaw
- Porter - carries and delivers
- Roper - rope-maker
- Sandler - sandal-maker
- Seaman - crews on a ship
- Shearer - shears sheep for wool
- Slater - a roofer from the quarry
- Smith - blacksmith
- Stoner - mason
- Tanner - makes leather from skins
- Taylor - tailor
- Thatcher - roof-installer
- Tyler - makes and sells tiles
- Wagner (Waggoner) - makes wagons
- Wainwright - wagon-maker

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# Some Greek culture to accompany our Greek name Hebe fountain(s) found (but not in Ypsilanti) *By Tom Dodd*

Readers of the GLEANINGS persevere over the loss of a local landmark they have never seen. Stories abound of the elaborate fountain that stood near what is the front door of today's Ypsilanti City Hall, but faded photos of the complex pile of vessels with the figure of Hebe atop are all they have seen. Still, the discovery of this community artifact would be a delight to those who recall its story. Help is on the way.

In 1889, Ypsilanti philanthropist and benefactor, Mary Ann (Newberry) Starkweather donated—among many other contributions to the she city loved—a fountain that stood on the southeast corner of Michigan Avenue and Huron Street. The elaborate baroque casting had watering sources for dogs, horses, and people. Birds, she must have figured, could sip at any level. At the top of all this was a statue of Hebe, the Greek mythological goddess of youth, the daughter of Zeus and Hera.



## Who's Hebe?

Hebe was the cupbearer for the gods and goddesses of Mount Olympus, serving their nectar and ambrosia, until she married Heracles (the Roman equivalent of Hercules). Another of Hebe's jobs was to draw the bath water for Ares, but she was known as *Ganymeda* in that role. She was also recognized

as a female footman for helping *Hera* enter her chariot. Hebe had many helpful responsibilities; she was young and full of energy.

The name *Hebe* comes from the Greek word meaning "youth" or "prime of life" and how very appropriate it was for a city with a Greek name to have at least one example of Greek mythology in the form of a prominently-placed sculpture. (*Juventas*

likewise means "youth", as can be seen in such derivatives as *juvenile*. In earlier days, *juvenile* did not necessarily connote *delinquency*, nor did *adult* mean something *dirty*.)

In art, Hebe is usually depicted wearing a sleeveless dress. There are historians who posit that it may have been the image of Hebe emblazoned on the wall of the Hay & Todd Manufacturing Company to hype their Ypsilanti Health Underwear in 1865. After all, the five-story figure was female and posed in the classical tradition. It was the advertising policy of that company to juxtapose their product with classical art forms such as cupids and young Greek women to titillate the Victorian sensibilities of their clientele long before Maidenform bras were shown in American magazine ads under the headline "I dreamt I (whatever) in my Maidenform bra."



*A mid-century Maidenform model dreamed of going to a "masquerade" in her bra*

Ypsilanti's famous fountain has been absent for many years; some think it may be found at the bottom of the Huron River, but that's just conjecture. Street talk has placed it in the DPW's salt barn, and other speculators surmise it was turned into bomber parts in World War II. No viable discovery of the iconic fountain has been made to date.

Perhaps another place to look for Ypsilanti's lost fountain is under the foundation of today's police station since Hebe was also worshipped as a goddess of pardons or forgiveness; freed prisoners would hang their chains in the sacred grove of her sanctuary at Phlius.

Hebe depictions were popular in the 19th and early 20th century for garden fountains and temperance fountains, and were widely available in cast stone. Thoughtful and nostalgic Ypsilantians can still find the



*Starkweather's fountain at Huron & Congress (Michigan Avenue)*

visage of Hebe and her bare arms in a variety of locations where an earlier ethic of historic preservation may have saved their Hebe-depictions from destruction:

- Tarentum, Pennsylvania, displays two such cast stone statues of Hebe. The mold for these statues was donated to the borough by the Tarentum Book Club on 6 June 1912.
- In Vicksburg, Mississippi, the Bloom Fountain was installed in 1927 near the municipal rose garden, thanks to a bequest of \$6,500 in the will of Louis Bloom, featuring a Hebe of cast zinc.
- At Bowling Green, Kentucky, the Hebe fountain in Fountain Square follows Canova's model, in patinated (in colors) cast iron example, purchased in 1881 from the J.L. Mott Iron Works of New York, at a cost of \$1,500.



*Hebe, in a typical water-carrying pose*

*[continued overleaf]*

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## Hebe fountain(s) found

[continued from page 19]



*Antonio Canova's Hebe became the model for others to follow the Roman tradition*



*The girls on the porch (the caryatids of the erechtheum) seem to be moving toward the future; note how each has one knee beginning to move forward, denoting a drastic change in the Greek Order and a move toward Rome and, eventually, the Renaissance*

### More Hebe fountains and sculptures:

- Tarentum, PA
- Vickburg, MS
- Bowling Green, KY
- Memphis, TN
- Montgomery, AL
- Birmingham, England
- Forlì, Italy

• Similar Hebe fountains, probably also from Mott, are located in Court Square, Memphis, Tennessee, and in Montgomery, Alabama.

• There is a bronze statue of Hebe, by Robert Thomas (1966), in Birmingham city centre, England.

• Antonio Conova also sculpted four different statues of Hebe: one of them is in the Museum of Forlì, Italy.

**Which "classical" style is that?** Anyone wishing to separate Greek from Roman depictions of this popular mythological goddess need only to examine the placement of the feet. Greek sculptures usually have the feet placed parallel to each other with the legs straight; Romans would often bend one knee, placing one foot at a slight angle to the other. Art critics contend the Greek statuary was actually a carved column intended to help hold up a building (see the *caryatides of the erechtheum* at the Athenian Acropolis). Romans, by contrast, seem to be "moving into the picture."

*(Tom Dodd taught art history at Schoolcraft College and Ann Arbor Community High using Helen Gardner's Art Through the Ages as a secondary source. He focused on 19th Century Architecture every spring semester, using Ann Arbor's North Division Street and Ypsilanti's North Huron Street as primary sources to contrast and compare.)*

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# Are you smarter than an eighth-grader?

## What it took to get an 8th grade education in 1895

Remember when grandparents and great-grandparents stated that they only had an 8th grade education? Well, check this out. Could any of us have passed the 8th grade exam in 1895?

This is the eighth-grade final exam from 1895 in Salina, Kansas, USA. It was taken from the original document on file at the Smokey Valley Genealogical Society and Library in Salina, and reprinted by the *Salina Journal*.



Alvin Edward Rudisill (second from left in back row) completed his eighth grade education in 1913 in this one-room school in Grandview School District #21 in Harding County, South Dakota. Rudisill is the father of our *GLEANINGS* editor, Dr. Alvin Eugene Rudisill.

## 8th Grade Final Exam: Salina, KS - 1895

### **Grammar** (Time, one hour)

1. Give nine rules for the use of capital letters.
2. Name the parts of speech and define those that have no modifications.
3. Define verse, stanza and paragraph.
4. What are the principal parts of a verb? Give principal parts of 'lie,' 'play,' and 'run.'
5. Define case; illustrate each case.
6. What is punctuation? Give rules for principal marks of punctuation.
7. Write a composition of about 150 words and show therein that you understand the practical use of the rules of grammar.

### **Arithmetic** (Time, 1 hour 15 minutes)

1. Name and define the Fundamental Rules of Arithmetic.
2. A wagon box is 2 ft. Deep, 10 feet long, and 3 ft. Wide. How many bushels of wheat will it hold?
3. If a load of wheat weighs 3,942 lbs., what is it worth at 50 cts/bushel, deducting 1,050 lbs. for tare?
4. District No 33 has a valuation of \$35,000. What is the necessary levy to carry on a school seven months at \$50 per month, and have \$104 for incidentals?
5. Find the cost of 6,720 lbs. coal at \$6.00 per ton.
6. Find the interest of \$512.60 for 8 months and 18 days at 7 percent.
7. What is the cost of 40 boards 12 inches

wide and 16 ft. long at \$20 per metre?

8. Find bank discount on \$300 for 90 days (no grace) at 10 percent.
9. What is the cost of a square farm at \$15 per acre, the distance of which is 640 rods?
10. Write a Bank Check, a Promissory Note, and a Receipt.

### **U.S. History** (Time, 45 minutes)

1. Give the epochs into which U.S. History is divided.
2. Give an account of the discovery of America by Columbus.
3. Relate the causes and results of the Revolutionary War.
4. Show the territorial growth of the United States.
5. Tell what you can of the history of Kansas.
6. Describe three of the most prominent battles of the Rebellion.
7. Who were the following: Morse, Whitney, Fulton, Bell, Lincoln, Penn, and Howe?
8. Name events connected with the following dates: 1607, 1620, 1800, 1849, 1865.

### **Orthography** (Time, one hour)

1. What is meant by the following: alphabet, phonetic, orthography, etymology, syllabication?"
2. What are elementary sounds? How classified?
3. What are the following, and give

examples of each: trigraph, subvocals, diphthong, cognate letters, linguals.

4. Give four substitutes for caret 'u.'
5. Give two rules for spelling words with final 'e.' Name two exceptions under each rule.
6. Give two uses of silent letters in spelling. Illustrate each.
7. Define the following prefixes and use in connection with a word: bi, dis-mis, pre, semi, post, non, inter, mono, sup.
8. Mark diacritically and divide into syllables the following, and name the sign that indicates the sound: card, ball, mercy, sir, odd, cell, rise, blood, fare, last.
9. Use the following correctly in sentences: cite, site, sight, fane, fain, feign, vane, vain, vein, raze, raise, rays.
10. Write 10 words frequently mispronounced and indicate pronunciation by use of diacritical marks. And by syllabication.

### **Geography** (Time, one hour)

1. What is climate?  
Upon what does climate depend?
2. How do you account for the extremes of climate in Kansas ?
3. Of what use are rivers? Of what use is the ocean?
4. Describe the mountains of North America.
5. Name and describe the following: Monrovia , Odessa , Denver , Manitoba, Hecla, Yukon, [continued overleaf]

## Eighth grade exam

[continued from page 21]

- St. Helena, Juan Fernandez, Aspinwall and Orinoco.
- Name and locate the principal trade centers of the U.S. Name all the republics of Europe and give the capital of each.
  - Why is the Atlantic Coast colder than the Pacific in the same latitude?
  - Describe the process by which the water of the ocean returns to the sources of rivers.
  - Describe the movements of the earth. Give the inclination of the earth.

[Gives the saying "he only had an 8th grade education" a whole new meaning, doesn't it?! No, we don't have the answers! And we don't think we ever did! But we did figure out that "Orthography" was handwriting.]



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# Horse Thieves at Work!

By James Mann

On the evening of Tuesday, June 4, 1901, Milo Hammond, the son of George H. Hammond who owned a farm south of Ypsilanti, heard a noise from the barn. Milo decided he had best take a look. At the barn Milo found two men hooking a horse to a buggy. The men had run the buggy out of the barn, harnessed the horse, and were about to make it fast to the buggy when Milo found them. He had never seen the men before, but the horse and buggy were the property of his family. These men were horse thieves at work.

The surprised men turned and began to run away, with Milo running after them. The two men separated, each running in a different direction, with Milo running after one of the men. Milo continued the chase until near the residence of George Moore, when the man turned and fired a gun at Milo. "Hammond," noted *The Ypsilanti Sentinel-Commercial* of Thursday, June 6, 1901, "being unarmed, concluded it was time to quit the chase." This was one of three attempts to steal horses in the area that week. The Friday before, a horse, carriage, harness and robes, were stolen from the farm of George Jarvis, which was just east of the George Hammond farm. "The horse stolen is a large bay, weighing 1300 pounds," noted *The Ypsilanti Sentinel-Commercial* of Thursday, June 6, 1901. "The animal has a white spot on its nose. There is also a slight enlargement on one of its hind legs." The horse was traced by officers to about two miles south of Willis, where all trace of it was lost.

A horse belonging to a John L. Hunter, was stolen the following Sunday. The horse was traced to Toledo but again the trail was lost. At about this time in Toledo, two police detectives, Nichter and Hassenzahl, were in a residence section of the city when they saw a man known as Frederick Shoemaker driving a horse. For some reason the appearance of the horse struck them, so they closely examined the horse. The two knew nothing of the horses stolen at Ypsilanti, so no further action was taken. Then, about two weeks later, officers from



Ann Arbor arrived in Toledo, and handed out a description of two stolen horses. The description of one matched that of the horse Shoemaker had. Officers made a search of the city, but failed to find Shoemaker.

One morning soon after, Detective Nichter was walking on Erie Street, when he saw Shoemaker. Nichter waited as Shoemaker approached, and then arrested him. Shoemaker resisted and Nichter dragged him into a grocery store where he telephoned for the patrol wagon. Shoemaker tried to escape but was handcuffed and placed in the wagon when it arrived.

"When searched at the station a bank book from a Cleveland savings bank was found on his person, with nearly \$400 credited to him. The deposit of \$55 was made on Wednesday, and the officers believe that this money was secured from the sale of the stolen horse. To Nichter, Shoemaker admitted that he had stolen the horse, but he said that it had died with the colic. Later he was taken before Chief Raitz and Judge Wachenheimer, and he refused to talk about the affair. He was forced to admit that both of the horses stolen in Michigan were taken by him, but he would not tell where they were or how he had disposed of them," reported a story published by *The Ypsilanti Sentinel-Commercial* on Thursday, June 27, 1901.

Shoemaker was taken to the jail at Ann Arbor, where he refused to answer any questions. Deputy Sheriff Fred Gillen visited Cleveland on Wednesday, July 3, 1900, to search Shoemaker's place of

## Horses were the target of thieves in the early 1900s

business. There, with Cleveland officers, Gillen found five horses, several buggies and wagons, harnesses and a high stack of blankets. Gillen returned to Ann Arbor, where he questioned Shoemaker, an account of the session was published by *The Ypsilanti Sentinel-Commercial* on Thursday, July 4, 1901. "Where did you get all that truck?" asked Gillen.

"They are the accumulations of thirty years," answered Shoemaker. "I bought them." "Who from?" "Different people." "Those last two horses you got. How did you get them there?" "I bought them off a horse jockey and drove them to Cleveland from Toledo." "Did they come in at the same time?" "Yes." "Now what's the use of your lying?" demanded Gillen. "You know that you got into Cleveland the night before and the horses came by boat. Your man asked you where the horses were and you told him they were coming." Shoemaker said he was not lying. "The fact is," said Deputy Gillen, "that everything in your place of business was stolen except your broom stuff. Every single thing." "Didn't you find a bill there for a new wagon I bought?" Responded an indignant Shoemaker. "No, I didn't," said Gillen. "Well, it's there. I bought that wagon." Gillen laughed at this, pointing out this was the only item Shoemaker could say he purchased. "How did you come by this electric car fare receipt that was found on you?" asked Gillen. This was in regard to the interurban service running at the time. "It registers that you came from Springwells to Ypsilanti on the day that horse was stolen." "I never saw

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## Horse thieves at work!

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it before," said Shoemaker. "Well," said Gillen, "we will have the conductor up here to identify you." "If I could only get bail bonds," said Shoemaker, "I could fix up all these matters." "Nobody in this county would go on your bonds. The best place for you is right here in jail, for if these farmers get hold of you they will sling you up to a telephone pole," said Gillen. To this, Shoemaker said nothing. Two of the horses found in Shoemaker's barn were identified as those stolen from Mr. Jarvis and Mr. Hunter.

"B. D. Kelly, George Seaver and Burt Moorman went to Cleveland Saturday night to examine the stock of things found on the premises of the supposed horse thief, Shoemaker, who is now in the jail at Ann Arbor, to see if they could not find among the articles something stolen from them," reported *The Ypsilanti Sentinel-Commercial* of Thursday, July 11, 1901. "They returned Monday, having been successful, so far as the articles stolen from Kelly and Seaver were concerned. Each found and positively identified his lost horse blankets and Kelly in addition found his neck yoke. While in the city they also found the horses stolen about a year and a half or two years ago from Fount Watling and Horace Laffin. They fully recognized the horses, but of course the owners will have to go to Cleveland and identify their property before they can be brought back. The horses were sold to parties in Cleveland, who are now in possession of them."

On Wednesday, July 17, 1901, Lenawee County Sheriff Shepherd arrived in Ann Arbor accompanied by a Mr. H. Stretch of Tecumseh who identified a horse brought from Cleveland as belonging to him. Sheriff Shapherd was asked, "How many horses has Shoemaker stolen from your neighborhood?" "One anyway," replied Sheriff Shepherd. "Probably two—and possibly ten. We have been missing them for the past three or four years and we think he is the man who has done the job."



Washtenaw County Deputy Sheriff Kelsey was asked, "How many from Washtenaw County?" "At least six and possibly ten." He answered, reported *The Ypsilanti Sentinel-Commercial* of Thursday, July 18, 1901.

"Shoemaker," noted *The Ypsilanti Sentinel-Commercial* of Thursday, July 25, 1901, "it would appear, had been doing a land office business for the last two years, stealing horses by the wholesale. He ran a broom factory in Cleveland and would start out with a load of brooms, telling folks there he was going to take a trip through Michigan. After securing a bunch of horses he would take them to Toledo and send them by boat to Cleveland, where they were disposed of."

Shoemaker faced examination for the theft of a horse and buggy belonging to a Dr. D. W. Nolan on Wednesday, July 31, 1901. *The Ypsilanti Sentinel-Commercial* of Thursday, August 1, 1901 reported Dr. Nolan's testimony substantially as follows: "On December 19 last, I was out in the country on a professional call and as I was coming in I recognized this man as a driver of one of the horses. The horse was known as Nell. When I reached the stable I asked one of the boys who had Nellie. They said a gentleman came and got her to go to Saline to get a girl. Said he gave his name as Hogan. When I returned the next day the horse had not come back. I became alarmed. I have not seen the mare since. Her value was about \$100."

Under cross-examination Dr. Nolan testified: "It was about half past one that I saw him, as I was coming in. It was within that hour. He was coming toward me and I had a good chance to recognize him. It was quite a cold day—not real cold, but the

man had on an overcoat and the side curtains were up. He had no whiskers, but a mustache. I recognize him by his appearance. He had a peculiar stoop and I saw him here and in the jail and recognized him as the man. I am positive he is the man. This man did not have on a stiff hat, it was a faded brown."

"When the adjournment at noon was taken," reported the account, "Dr. Nolan declared if they would let him in a room with Shoemaker for about ten

minutes there would be no more need of any justices, prosecutors or lawyers to tend to the matter." The next witness was Frank Healey who testified as follows: "I was in the employ of Dr. D. W. Nolan. On or about December 19, I saw the defendant under these circumstances. He came to the barn and wanted to get a rig to go to Saline to get a girl. It was about 12 or 1 o'clock. I gave him a rig. I have never seen the rig since. I had a good opportunity to see him at the barn. I am positive he is the same man. He had no beard then, but he has one now. I recognize his voice. I would recognize it through the phone."

Under cross examination Healy said: "He had a cheap ulster and brown Fedora hat. I never talked over the identity of Shoemaker to Dr. Nolan." Shoemaker took the stand in his own defense: "I never saw this man Healy. I was not in Ann Arbor in December 1900. I was at 45 Abbey Street, Cleveland, Ohio. I did not hire a rig in my life either at Ann Arbor or any other place. I have never had an ulster coat in my life." Under cross examination Shoemaker said: "I drove through Ann Arbor about six years ago, while living in the city of Toledo and put up at a barn below the jail. That was the only time I ever was in the county for 25 or 30 years. I went to school here in Ann Arbor about two months. I do not know when it was or who my teacher was, but it was in the high school. I don't know who were in the class. I was living at Hickory Ridge. I do not know the house where I lived. All I remember was it was in Ann Arbor. I was arrested in Cleveland last spring for assault and battery by some stranger. I got bail. I appeared in court but did not hear my case called and was taken



on an attachment. I paid \$25 and costs amounting to \$43. Aside from that I was never arrested before. I now own and wear a brown hat, but never owned or wore one before.”

Shoemaker was bound over for trial during the next term of the court, with date set as October 6, 1901. At the end of the trial the jury considered the evidence from 11:40 a.m. until 2:50 p.m., with time out for dinner. The jury returned a verdict of guilty as charged. Judge Kinne spoke: “Shoemaker, stand up. Have you anything to say why sentence should not be passed upon you?” Shoemaker answered: “Only that I never did steal anything. I never needed to steal anything. I suppose the jury brought in a verdict according to the evidence, but people have sworn to things here in which they are mistaken.”

“I don’t see how the jury could reach any other verdict. There are no mitigating circumstances about your case. You have no family, you had money and you had a business. Yet you left Ohio and came into Michigan and committed a bad crime. It demands a severe punishment that will be a lesson to you and to all who are disposed to commit such crimes. There are some localities that do not wait for courts and juries to act, but take it in their own hands. I speak of this to show you how people view the nature of your crime. The sentence is that you be confined in the state prison at Jackson for a period of ten years from and including this day.”



[James Mann is a local author and historian, a regular contributor to the GLEANINGS, and a volunteer in the YHS Archives.]

## Out of mixed fortunes, a lasting legacy for Ypsilanti

By Janice Anscheutz



**T**he Gilbert name is familiar to most Ypsilanti residents. Many of us can remember going to the beautiful Gilbert Park on Michigan Ave. at Park Street to enjoy the riverbank, to have a picnic, or to cheer on our children playing in Little League baseball games. We keep these images in mind, even as the park today has been overgrown with grass and trees and put on sale by the city as part of the Water Street parcel.

Other landmarks of the Gilbert presence are readily apparent to those who merely visit Ypsilanti, as well as to its citizens. Cars traveling north from the Huron St. exit of I-94 pass by the imposing and currently expanding Gilbert Residence, a senior residence and nursing home founded by the Gilbert family. Those taking a train through town, or walking through the beautiful historic east side, won’t fail to notice the Gilbert House on North Grove St., the former family home of John Gilbert, Jr. Today a stylish apartment house, the building remains a widely admired architectural showplace. For many male Ypsilanti residents, it is also the source of vibrant childhood memories. Few among them nearing the age of fifty will fail to recall fun-filled hours spent in this spacious structure when it served as a recreation center and later hosted a popular Boys Club.

In light of the renown of the Gilbert name in Ypsilanti, and the legacies by which it is remembered, you may have wondered, as I have, who the Gilberts were and what eventually became of them. I hope you’ll find this account of the Gilbert saga informative, and that it will do justice to the honor the Gilbert family is due for its contributions to the enrichment of our Ypsilanti community.

### The rise and fall of Major John Gilbert

The Gilbert family history begins with the life of Major John Gilbert, a resourceful man who devoted his many assets of intelligence, energy, skills and money to improving the lot of his family and community. His efforts, however, produced very mixed results of successes and failures, making his life story at once amazing, exciting, and sad.

John Gilbert was born on March 16, 1774 in the town of Lenox, Massachusetts, near Pittsfield, Massachusetts. His mother was Debiah Sweeting, born in 1745, and his father Captain Job Gilbert. The parents had been married in Norton, Massachusetts in 1769 and raised two sons, John and Thomas.

Job Gilbert was well known for his military service in the Revolutionary War. And in the book [continued overleaf]

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## Gilbert family

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“*Michigan Pioneers and Historical Society Collections*,” published in 1896, we learn that he also played a role in the earlier French and Indian War. The publication’s memorial report credits Captain Job Gilbert for his actions as part of “a small band of provincials which under the command of Washington, covered [General] Braddock in his defeat and led his broken column to a place of safety.” In this battle, which took place near Pittsburgh in 1755, British and British Colonial forces had been routed by a party of French and Indians, and General Braddock had been mortally wounded. The then Colonel George Washington, though himself badly wounded, had been forced to take over for Braddock and, with the help of Gilbert and others, lead the British retreat.

Captain Job Gilbert was a man of many talents. He was a surveyor, worked on large engineering projects, and was knowledgeable in the operation of iron ore furnaces and the construction of mills using water power. All of these skills he passed on to his son John, who applied them in major undertakings while still a young man. Those projects and Gilbert’s subsequent business ventures are reported in a well-researched online article written by Ray Berg, entitled “*Major John Gilbert—The Founder of Manchester*” [viz. Manchester, Mich.] We learn that, at the tender age of 18, John assisted his father in surveying and developing a large tract of land in the Rochester area of New York State. He also studied mill operations and civil engineering under his father. And when the Gilbert family settled in what is now Syracuse, New York in 1799, John helped design and build the Onondaga furnace, which was used in manufacturing equipment for the military.

While living in Syracuse, John Gilbert met Susan Ann Haskins (1784-1873), to whom he was married on May 4, 1803. Susan’s father was Captain William Haskins, a wealthy Revolutionary War veteran who had served in that war with Job Gilbert. The young couple eventually had six children: Lavina b. 1805, Harry Hegerman b. 1807, George Washington b. 1812, Emily Louise b. 1816, John Jr. b. 1820, and Susan Ann, b. 1823. It was in Syracuse that John’s career prospered. Applying his skills as a surveyor,

land speculator and civil engineer, he soon accumulated considerable wealth.

John also worked with his brother Thomas at the burgeoning salt works in Salina, New York. And, after distinguishing himself as a cavalry quartermaster in the War of 1812, where he was awarded the commission of Major, he was hired by the governor of New York, along with his father Job, to perform both surveying and construction work on the new Erie Canal in the area of Syracuse, Rochester, and Lockport, New York. It was while bringing this massive project (1818-1823) to a successful completion that John met a man with the unusual name of Orange Risdon. John hired him as a surveyor, and also partnered with him in land-speculation activities that earned both men a considerable amount of money.

We learn more about the Gilbert/Risdon partnership in the online article by Ray Berg. In 1824 the United States Congress passed The General Survey Act of that year. The act mandated that the Army Corps of Engineers not only survey but undertake the improvement of a military road from Detroit to Chicago.

For this project, Gilbert was hired as a surveyor and Risdon as the survey director. While discharging their nominal duties in the new territory, the two men also took advantage of their positions to purchase some of the best large tracts. Gilbert himself was able to scope out and file land patents on prime areas for the development of mills and towns. Between May 10, 1826 and October 1, 1835 he filed purchase claims on several of these sites, which included what are now the mill pond and downtown area of Manchester, Michigan.

Gilbert also invested in large holdings of land along the Chicago Road, now Michigan Avenue, including those later developed as downtown Ypsilanti and Pittsfield Township. Other land was purchased in Jackson, Hillsdale and Lenawee Counties. Gilbert was especially interested in land that held the potential for running a mill by water power, or that lay along the soon-to-be-improved road to Chicago. In the year 1830, however, both John Gilbert and Orange Risdon returned to New York State and their families.

## Migration to Michigan and business success and failures

Though he was glad to be reunited with his family in New York, Gilbert remained excited about his prospects for land speculation and development in Michigan. Moreover, he, like Risdon, was a Mason, vulnerable in New York at the time to a rising wave of anti-Mason distrust and hostility. John quickly decided, therefore, to gather his large family together and pursue his fortunes for good in the new Michigan Territory. The trip proved a challenge for a family with six children ranging in age from seven to twenty-six, who had been used to living the good life in the settled urban center of Rochester, New York.

The family left New York in the winter, traveling with horses over snow-covered roads and crossing the Detroit River in a birch-bark canoe—the unharnessed horses being brought to Detroit later by ferry-boat. While the trip was difficult enough through snow and ice, one can well imagine how much more difficult it might have been in spring, when the roads would be deeply

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### ...scoped-out claims on ... mill pond and downtown area of Manchester, MI...

rutted and the wagon wheels prone to sinking in mud. After arriving in Detroit, the family is said to have stayed on a while at the Woodworth Hotel,

before completing its journey and finally arriving in Ypsilanti in January, 1831.

A fellow surveyor of the time, C. E. Woodard, wrote a narrative describing Washtenaw County as it looked when he first saw it in the year 1833, around the time that the Gilbert family made Ypsilanti its permanent home. The narrative mentions the Gilbert farm and the Gilbert Park area:

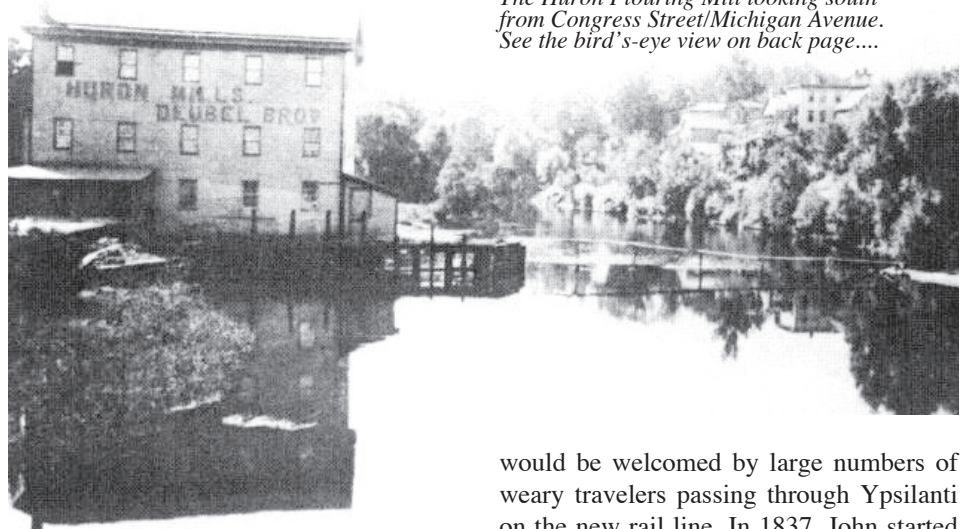
“It was nearly unbroken wilderness. ‘Lo the poor Indian’ had nearly abandoned his happy hunting grounds in these parts and gone west. Except in the fall of the year when he took up his line of march along his well beaten trail towards Fort Malden, Ontario Canada to receive his annuity and return. He was seldom seen. At the time of the Black Hawk War the few scattered settlers were naturally alarmed at the apparent activity among the Indians. At times hundreds might be seen camped on the banks of the Huron near the East Public Square and on Gilbert farm. [NOTES: “East

"Public Square" was located on the south side of East Michigan at Park Street. This is where Gilbert planned the town square and where Gilbert Park was originally located. Gilbert Farm was located at West Michigan Avenue and Platt Road.] But I do not remember ever hearing anyone ever being molested by them or even trouble by their begging food for the land. Then it was alive with all kinds of wild game and plenty of meat could be had for the killing of it. They were better off than their white brothers being better hunters....

It was always understood that our most important highways--the Chicago Road and others followed the general lines of these main Indian trails, thus admitting the Indians' skill in their part in Civil engineering, selecting the best ground on which to locate our Highways. The main trail going through Ypsilanti was more or less used as an Indian trail down to 1834 and their camp grounds plainly marked by the ashes of the camp and the then standing of the Poles of the Wigwams. On the Gilbert farm 4 miles west of town, and which became the big Harwood farm was one of these camps near where Mr. Woodard was then living."

Not only did John Gilbert have a large farm on the Chicago Road near Ypsilanti, but he immediately started developing his other land investments in both Ypsilanti and Manchester. Like other Masons in the village of Ypsilanti, such as Walter Hewitt and Samuel Post, he quickly became instrumental in the planning of the town and was elected the first village president in 1832. Gilbert served in this position for two terms. By 1833 he joined other investors who pooled their money for a shipping boat that would carry goods between Detroit and Ypsilanti. This venture failed, however, and John's money was lost.

Despite this setback, and while he was still the first village president of Ypsilanti, Gilbert undertook yet another project in 1833, using his surveying and land-development skills to plat out the village of Manchester on land that he owned. His original plans called for one grist mill and one saw mill, fourteen blocks (some of which he named), one store, one house, one barn, and a bridge--all of which were near the River Raisin. In naming the village Manchester, Gilbert probably had in mind the village of Manchester on the Erie Canal



The Huron Flouring Mill looking south from Congress Street/Michigan Avenue. See the bird's-eye view on back page....

in New York State (itself named after Manchester, England) where he had worked as a civil engineer during the 1820s. In any case, he was soon able to sell his platted land in Manchester at a sizable profit.

John's next venture was to invest \$500 in a million-dollar scheme involving a number of investors to build a railroad line from Detroit to the mouth of the St. Joseph River. Surveys were completed, but the scheme fell through before any construction work on the line was started. In 1837, the state of Michigan purchased the surveyed land, as well as all rights for developing and building the railway. This reversal, however, did nothing to diminish John's entrepreneurial ardor.

Before the first train on the completed line passed through Ypsilanti in 1838, he and his son John Jr. had developed facilities ready to make money from it. By 1835, Major Gilbert, with his partner and soon-to-be son-in-law, Abel Godard, had purchased and rebuilt a water mill and dam on Water Street at what is now Michigan Avenue. The mill, which was used to produce flour, was first called Harwood's Flouring Mill, and later Huron Flouring Mill. Next to it was a large supply and feed store, run by John Jr. This operation proved profitable in providing goods and food stuffs for the building of the new rail line.

Harvey C. Colburn's *The Story of Ypsilanti*, published in 1923, makes clear, however, that not all of Major Gilbert's planning and development investments were profitable. Perhaps his biggest failure was his vision of a new luxury hotel that he believed

would be welcomed by large numbers of weary travelers passing through Ypsilanti on the new rail line. In 1837, John started construction of a palatial four-story edifice at the corner of River Street and the Chicago Road (now Michigan Ave.). Unfortunately, Colburn tells us in his book, "The main part of this hotel fell in before it was quite completed." When *The Story of Ypsilanti* was published in 1923, the kitchen of the hotel was still standing, while the opulent spaces and rooms in what Colburn had parodied as "Gilbert's Temple of Folly" had long before been reduced to rubble.

### A curious side note

Here, I might note as an interesting aside a still unsolved mystery that originated less than a mile from the ill-fated hotel at about the time it was being built. The mystery was discovered by John Gilbert's oldest son Harry, who had become something of a celebrity in the area. Colburn tells us about it in his book:

"In 1835 Ypsilanti came into possession of a mystery which time has left unsolved. Isaac Kimball and Harry Gilbert were hauling earth from the edge of the bluff not far from the site of the present Beyer Hospital [now a nursing home on South Prospect near Michigan Avenue] for the filling of a lot nearby.... Unexpectedly the spades of the diggers struck a buried timber. Curiosity stimulated their labors. More timbers appeared, and planking. The uncovering and removal of one of these planks revealed a dark hole beneath. Into this, a light being procured, the intrepid explorers descended. They found themselves in a well-built subterranean room, ten feet square and eight feet high. Seeking the proper entrance to this room they discovered a burrow leading southerly for one hundred feet, into the ravine, its opening being effectually screened by bushes.... Further exploration of the hidden room revealed a furnace and half a metal shell containing grease in which

[continued overleaf]

## Gilbert Family

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a wick was floating. These exhibits being placed before the concourse of villagers resulted in much speculation but no tenable theory. No resident, even of the earliest comers, had known of the cave's existence, or at least would confess to such knowledge. This being the case, it was reasoned that the cave must be referred to the Godfroy period. Perhaps in the days of the old Indian trading post, a gang of counterfeiters had made the place their rendezvous and burrowed out a workshop in the bluff-side. To be sure, this theory did not explain the need for elaborate secrecy in the wilderness nor did it explain how the cave could have remained hidden from Godfroy's Indian visitors, who must have often passed that way. So the mystery remains."

### A final fall from riches to rags

In 1835, tax records indicated that Major John Gilbert was one of the wealthiest men in Ypsilanti. His first home had been a wooden structure at the corner of Michigan Avenue and River Street, but by 1835 he had moved his family into a brick home, which still stands at 302 North Grove Street.

Unfortunately, John's fortune did not last long after this. A final business investment proved so imprudent that, in a single plummet, it brought him down from wealthy and powerful, to penniless. In this dealing, he invested not only all the money he had, but money obtained by mortgaging his extensive property holdings, including the mill. The assets were used to purchase shares in a bank started by his son-in-law Abel Godard, husband of his daughter Emily, and by Godard's brother, Lewis Godard. This proved to be a major mistake.

In his 1985 book *Obsolete Banknotes and Early Scrip of Michigan*, Harold L. Bowen identifies Lewis Godard as "king of the bank wreckers." Gilbert's money was invested in the Monroe and Ypsilanti Railroad Co., of which Lewis Godard was president. "No road was ever built, but provided Mr. Godard with an ample supply of bills to be used in starting new banks," writes Bowen. With an ironic twist, he offers as an example Godard's start-up of the Bank of Coldwater: After having crisp new bills printed and with the signatures scarcely dry, "Lewis Godard walked out



302 North Grove Street

of the little one-story bank building into a village of wooden stores, wooden hotels and wooden residences. At the Central Exchange he boarded a westbound stage, for the generous purpose of 'creating specie'.... As the Cashier truly said, 'They broke the bank the first night.'"

By 1840 John Gilbert's mortgages were called in and his dreams for wealth and prosperity were shattered. He lost control of the Huron Mills and most of his land holdings. Earlier, he had deeded a few pieces of land to his son John Jr.

At this point in his life, the handwriting was clearly on the wall for John Gilbert. This once ambitious, resourceful, brave, and skilled man, who did so much to develop what are now the city of Ypsilanti and village of Manchester, retired from business and political life. By 1850, as disclosed in the census of that year, he was living in his home on North Grove along with his wife, his daughter Emily, Emily's daughter, and several others. There is no mention in the census of Emily's husband, Abel Godard, who seems to have left Ypsilanti along with the Gilbert fortune.

The poignant letter copied below, written in 1849 by Major Gilbert's son George Washington Gilbert to his brother John Gilbert Jr., gives us a sense of just how far the Gilbert family had fallen. In it, George pleads with his brother to help him find a job in order to support his parents, his sister Emily, and Emily's daughter. George himself was married to an Ypsilanti grocer's daughter, Maria Ann King. Here is his letter:

*Ypsilanti, March 10, 1849*

*Dear Brother*

*We have had a very sudden death in our family. Mr. King died yesterday at 12 o'clock as we were walking up from his store to his house, on arriving at Grants corner he was*

*attacked with a fit of coughing and ruptured a blood vessel. He died in about three minutes, there was none of his family present but myself until after his death, it was a sudden and very unexpected blow to his family, the funeral will be attended at 2 o'clock p.m. tomorrow. (Sunday)*

*If you have an opportunity to help me to a situation on the Rail Road by applying to Mr. Brooks or Mr. McCurd you will be doing me a great kindness as well as assisting our Father & Mother being out of employment at this time and our Father & Mother looking to us for support & Emily and her daughter for assistance it has used up all of my available means. I have nothing to look to nor means to assist them with unless I can get into some employment such as I have stated. If they should wish to employ any more assistants I should ask for references as to qualifications you may refer them to B. Follett, C. Joslin or any of the business men of this place or Ann Arbor.*

*Yours Truly, Geo. W. Gilbert"*

Reduced to near poverty, Major John Gilbert and his wife Susan were still living in their home on North Grove St. when he died on January 19, 1860, after years of poor health. John's death came just a year before his heart could be gladdened by the revival of the family fortunes achieved by his namesake son, John Jr. That revival remains embodied in the elegant mansard-roofed mansion and park-like grounds of the Gilbert House, which was completed in 1861 and continues to glorify the east-side neighborhood across the street from Major Gilbert's modest final residence. Susan Gilbert died thirteen years after John in the home of her son George Washington Gilbert in Detroit, and she and her husband now rest together at Highland Cemetery.



*The Gilbert Family plot at Highland Cemetery*

*[Janice Anscheutz's story of the Gilbert Family's rise from ruin to renewed riches will be told in the next issue of the GLEANINGS, when we take up the life of Major Gilbert's son, John Jr.. Anscheutz is a regular contributor to the Society's GLEANINGS publication.]*

# **The Skeletons of Bell Street**

By James Mann



**T**homas Smith, an employee of the Ypsilanti City Water Department, was digging a trench on Bell Street, on the morning of Tuesday, January 17, 1933. Smith was in for a surprise, when he uncovered human bones above the water main in the center of the street. When Smith found the bones, these were in no order, with the skull and jawbones next to the thigh and legs.

“A box had evidently contained the remains at one time, as rotted fragments were uncovered around the bones. That burial had taken place not so many years ago was indicated by the fact that bits of rusted metal, which appeared to be screws were found imbedded in the wood,” reported *The Ypsilanti Daily Press* of that date.

“Several of the teeth were found in pieces of the jawbone,” continued the account. “They furthered the belief that the skeleton was that of a mature person. Although cavities were located in the teeth, no dental work was evident.”

There was never a cemetery on this site, and, to add to the mystery, Smith said the remains were found directly on top of the sewer. Dr. J. J Woods examined the remains and estimated they had been in the ground for no more than 50 years.

“An attempt is being made to shed further light on the case among the old-timers of the city,” concluded the account. Some conjecture that this may be the first discovery of an ingenious murder, in which the corpus delecti was secreted under a city street.”

The remains were turned over to Dr. W. B. Hinsdale of the University Of Michigan Museum Of Anthropology. He concluded the remains were of four persons, two men, a woman and a child. He was able to determine there were four bodies in the grave, by the thickness of the fragments of the skulls. Dr. Hinsdale said, if more of the skulls had been recovered and assembled, then the race of the individuals could have been determined.

“Some of the bones are large, indicating that the person was probably a man of tall stature, while others of a similar kind are much smaller, leading to the belief that they are those of a woman. The condition of the teeth indicate, according to Dr. Hinsdale, that the person from whose jaw they came was not older than the early twenties,” reported *The Ypsilanti Daily Press* of Thursday, January 19, 1933.

“No implements, jewelry or other trinkets were found with the bones, and their position in the earth led to the belief that the bodies may have been crowded into a small box in a cramped position and buried in that way,” noted the account.

Dr. Hinsdale noted that it was a practice of the Native-Americans of this region, to intern several individuals in one grave. He pointed out, that only a few months before, the remains of men, women and children were found on property owned by the Ford Motor Company near Ypsilanti. “The pres-

ence of the fragments of board,” he noted, “however, is a disturbing element.”

“If an anthropological expert had been present when the bones were taken up,” said Dr. Hinsdale, “he would have been able to determine whether the soil had been touched within comparatively recent times. He also would have made a close study of the bones in the position in which they lay to determine whether they had been placed there originally or whether the interment was re-burial.”

At the time it was estimated the individuals were thought to have died about 100 years before, it was noted, a smallpox epidemic was raging in the state. During the epidemic, several bodies were sometimes buried in the same coffin. This was offered

**“Some of the bones are large, indicating that the person was probably a man of tall stature...”**

as a reason why several persons were buried in a single box. “In a Detroit cemetery from which bodies were moved several years ago,” noted the account, “workmen discovered from positions of bodies buried during the plague that in haste to dispose of the remains, some had been buried alive.”

Part of the mystery was explained by Robert Simons of 604 East Michigan Ave., who explained, the bones were first uncovered some thirty-five years earlier, perhaps in 1896, when workmen installed the water main. He had been the foreman of the crew who had found the bones in the center of the street.

[continued overleaf]

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## Skeletons of Bell Street

[continued from page 29]



“Although he cannot recall the exact position in which the bones lay, Mr. Simons says it was such that those who made the discovery believed that there were three skeletons. The skeletons were not complete; several of the bones having rotted and the condition in which they were found made interested parties believe the bones had rested in their grave for a long time,” reported *The Ypsilanti Daily Press* of Friday, January 20, 1933.

At the time of the first discovery of the bones, it was assumed the remains were of

Native-Americans who had once inhabited the region. Simons said no artifacts were found with the remains, which were usually buried with Native-Americans.

“The fragments of the box surrounding the bones when discovered Tuesday are explained by the fact that the workmen placed the skeletons in a container, not attempting to preserve any orderly arrangement. The receptacle was then put in the ditch, when the main had been installed and covered up again, Mr. Simons stated. No investigation was held at the time of their first discovery and no formalities were gone through when returned to their resting place,” the account concluded.

## No artifacts were found with the remains...

One part of the mystery was explained, but another was left unsolved. No one

could say if the remains were those of Native Americans, or of pioneers who died in the smallpox epidemic. Certainly, whoever they were, they deserved a better interment than the one they received.

[James Mann is a regular volunteer at the Fletcher-White archives and a prolific history writer who frequently contributes his research to publication in GLEANINGS.]

# Membership Application

## *Ypsilanti Historical Society, Inc.*



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Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Type of Membership:		New	Renewal
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Family	\$20.00	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sustaining	\$30.00	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Business	\$75.00	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Life	\$200.00	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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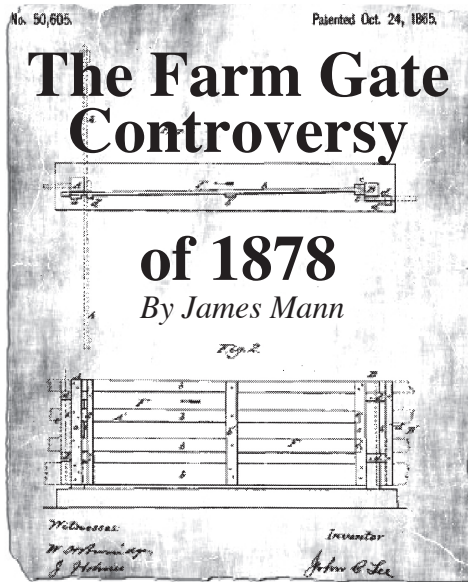
**Ypsilanti Historical Society**  
**220 North Huron Street**  
**Ypsilanti, MI 48197**

Farmers in Washtenaw and other counties in Michigan were angered during the summer of 1878, as agents of a firm in Ypsilanti worked to collect royalties on a farm gate in common use. A circular was issued to warn the farmers of legal action, unless the royalties were paid. The circular read: *You are hereby notified that suit will be brought against you in the United States Court, for an infringement of patent upon the 'Field Fence and Gate combined,' as secured to John C. Lee, of Medina County State of Ohio, by Letters of Patent, dated October 24, 1865, and number 50,605; and which said patent, with full right to collect damages for all infringements thereof, has been assigned to us. No further notice will be given before suit is brought, and you may pay to Babbitt & Griffin, Attorneys at Law of the city of Ypsilanti, the regular rates; with fifty per cent, additional, in full settlement for your infringement, at any time before the commencement of said suit. Signed, Joseph Bickford & Co.*

Farmers whose farms did not exceed sixty acres were to pay \$3, those not exceeding one hundred acres, \$5, those not exceeding one hundred and sixty acres, \$8 and those two hundred and forty acres were to pay \$10. "The firm secured the co-operation of several agents, and have been scouring the country, picking up many a dollar from farmers," noted *The Ann Arbor Courier* of Friday, August 2, 1878. "They have not adhered to their printed schedule of terms for rights, but have bull-dozed what they could, anywhere from fifty cents to ten dollars for a right."

Farmers claimed agents of the firm told them other farmers had paid the rates, only to learn later this was not the case. "Mr. Cook, Jr., of Pittsfield, says that Alfred Miller, of Saline, and Joseph Bickford, brother of the Ypsilanti Bickford, represented that several of his neighbors had paid for a right, when such was not the case, and therefore procured \$10 of him. Mr. Phillip Lohr says the same game was practiced on him. Mr. C. C. Warner, of Lodi, also paid \$8 for a right, and how many more we do not know: but the number is quite large for the short time they have operated," noted *The Ann Arbor Courier*.

The farmers were angry for the fact that the type of gate in question had been in general use in the county before the patent was issued. This, if true, would make the



The patent Mr. Lee had for improvements to the farm gate relating to constructing a fence so that any panel along the entire fence could be readily converted into a gate

patent worthless, as, under patent laws, no article is patentable unless it involves a new principle or discovery. Farmers asked Washtenaw County prosecuting attorney J. Willard Babbitt, to prosecute the suit on their behalf. He refused and further refused to turn the case over to someone else. This should not have come as a surprise to the farmers—Babbitt had a conflict of interest, as he had been retained by Joseph Bickford & Company as their attorney. At this time the county prosecuting attorney held the office while in private practice.

"In order to make a test case," reported *The Ann Arbor Courier* of Friday, August 23, 1878, "they have brought suit in the United States court against two men by the name of Gardner, who reside in the township of Livingston County, and Mr. Robert Yerkes, of Wayne County. Upon the termination of these suits it will be determined if the present owners of the patent can realize from their investment."

As suits commenced in the United States Circuit Court against some of the farmers who had refused to pay the royalty, it was important for the farmers to have the question of the validity of the patent settled. The general belief among the farmers was they had a good defense, but the cost of legal action was more than one farmer could afford. A meeting was held at the fairgrounds at Ypsilanti, where the Michigan Farmers' Mutual Defense Association was organized. The Executive

Committee of the Association had the duty to employ legal counsel for any member of the Association who was taken to court for refusing to pay the demands.

"Any resident of Michigan may become a member of the Association by sending his full name and address, with two dollars, to the Treasurer," reported *The Ypsilanti Commercial* of September 14, 1878. On October 30, 1878, the president of the Association, H. D. Platt, with Mr. N. C. Carpenter, traveled to Seville, Medina County, Ohio, to meet with Mr. John C. Lee, the original patentee of the Lee Gate. There, as noted in *The Ann Arbor Register* on November 7, 1878, they "found Mr. Lee to be by reputation an honest, square dealing man, by occupation a farmer, residing two miles south of Seville."

When told the reason for their visit, Lee provided all the information he was in possession of so as to place the facts before the farmers of Michigan. In an affidavit, Mr. Lee stated that his patent was "for an improvement in a gate, known as the two post gate, and that my improvement consisted in the dispensing with one post and the cross slats and in the use of a strip perpendicular with the post and slats running parallel with the gate; and further states that the two post gate was in common use in this county at the time my patent was issued."

Mr. Lee said he had told Mr. Bagley, of the firm of Dale, Bagley & Root, that he did not claim a patent on the gate post in common use, but an improvement on that gate. He said he showed Mr. Bagley the difference between the two gates as he had both in use on his farm. "Mr. Lee," the letter concluded, "told Bagley that if he collected royalty of the farmers of Michigan on the two post gate it would be nothing less than swindling."

The United State Circuit Court must have agreed at least in part with the view of Mr. Lee, as it seems the court did not uphold the patent. Those who had refused to pay the royalty were right and saved their money. "Those farmers who paid royalty on their gates are now looking for redress," noted *the Ypsilanti Commercial* of Saturday, November 16, 1878. "But as they paid their money simply to avoid being sued, redress there is none."

[James Mann is a local author and historian, a regular contributor to the GLEANINGS, and a volunteer in the YHS Archives.]

# Ypsilanti GLEANINGS

YHS Museum & Archives

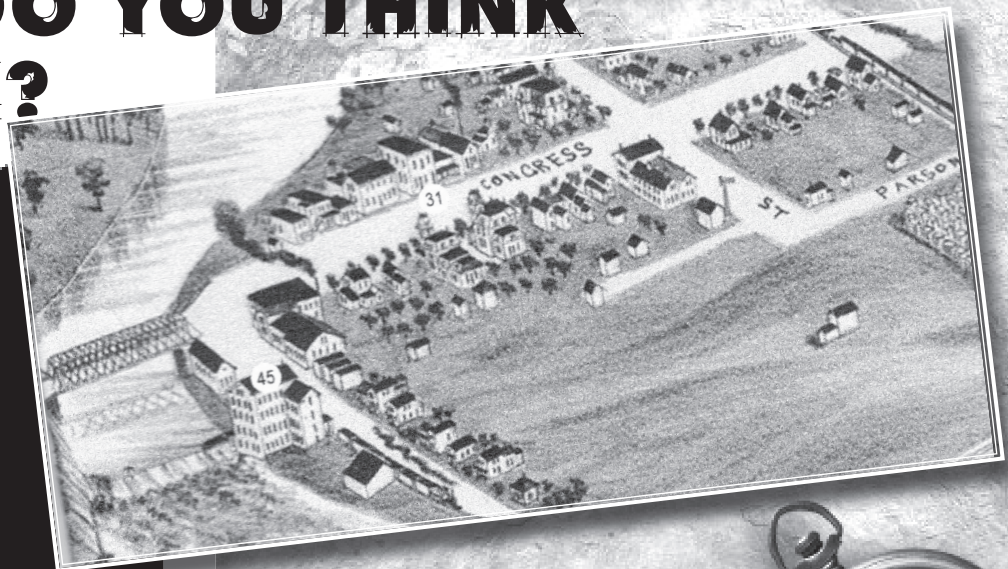
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## WHERE DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?

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Pieces of  
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History

from the  
Fletcher-White Archives  
of the Ypsilanti  
Historical Society



From an 1890 panorama view looking north-east: Congress Street is now Michigan Avenue and that's Riverside Park in the upper left corner, so this is basically the site of today's still-waiting-to-be-developed Water Street project. The four-story building on the east bank of the Huron River (#45) was the mill owned by John Gilbert at one time. See page 25 for Janice Anscheutz's initial installment on Ypsilanti's famed Gilbert family.

