

Ypsilanti GLEANINGS

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



SPRING 2019

The Ladies' Literary Club of Ypsilanti Observes 140th Year

BY PEG PORTER

(The Literary Club is one of the oldest continually operating clubs in Michigan. It is unique to Ypsilanti, founded by a Michigan Normal faculty wife with a vision. Sarah Putnam saw the potential of a study group for women dedicated to learning and self-development. Its Clubhouse is an important historic landmark familiar to many. This article tells the story of the founding and early years of the Club. It continues today nearly a century and a half later, a place where interesting and interested women can learn from and support each other.)



Ladies' Literary Club watercolor painting done by club member Barb Starnier in 2003.

1878. Rutherford B. Hayes was President. Queen Victoria reigned over a vast Empire. Lambert Barnes was the Mayor of Ypsilanti. Thomas Edison patented the phonograph. Gilbert and Sullivan's H.M.S. Pinafore opened in London on May 25. The population of Ypsilanti was around 5,500. In June, 17 ladies met in the Library Rooms of the Arcade Building to begin a program of study and self-improvement. This fledgling organization would be known as the Ladies' Literary Club.

The Club had its roots in the Ladies' Library movement of the 1860's. Previously, access to libraries was limited to the wealthy, either through private libraries or through academic institutions. In cities and towns people established lending libraries, the forerunners of the public library of today. A Ladies Library Association was established in Ypsilanti in 1868.

Mrs. Daniel Putnam was active in the Kalamazoo Ladies Library. When the

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Putnams moved to Ypsilanti, she joined the local Library Association and on becoming the Board President, suggested the possibilities of group study. A committee was appointed. Its findings led to the establishment of the Ladies Literary Club with Sarah Putnam as President. (Colburn).

The mid-19th century also witnessed
continued on page 4

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FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK BY BILL NICKELS

Kirk Profit, Ypsilanti's state representative during the 1980s, stopped by the museum during the holidays and expressed a desire to financially help the museum. He asked questions about our expenses. When he learned that the cost of preparing, printing and mailing the Gleanings is approximately tied with utility costs as our third largest annual expense, he offered a challenge to the membership – he will donate \$1000 for one of the four issues if others will step forward with a like donation for the additional three issues. Kirk – THANKS for your support and confidence in our mission. Answers to the challenge would be fantastic!

During the November Board of Trustees meeting, Virginia Davis-Brown announced her retirement from the Board

of Trustees. She was first elected in 1992 and has served for 26 years – more than half of the museum's existence! In addition, she has arranged museum tours, scheduled docents, served as chair of the Administration Committee, supervised museum cleaners, planned docent luncheons, designed displays, cleaned and organized the basement before it became the archives, served as Acquisition Chair and did everything else she thought needed to be done. As she continues helping with displays, we will still be able to use her institutional memory!

Marcia McCrary agreed to join our Board of Trustees as a replacement for Virginia and was officially elected during our January Board of Trustees meeting. Marcia has been a long time



The Tucker car in front of the home in Ypsilanti where the Tucker family lived.

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The Starkweather Chapel in Highland Cemetery is currently undergoing restoration.

Archives volunteer specializing in genealogical research. She brings past experience as curator at the Michigan Firehouse Museum and board President of the Genealogical Society of Washtenaw County. Earlier in 2018, Tom Warner filled a long time vacancy on the Board of Trustees. With a history degree and music minor from Eastern Michigan, Tom is a life-long area resident and devoted to keeping our community history for the future.

With gorgeous Tiffany windows, the Starkweather Chapel in Highland Cemetery has been one of Ypsilanti's last major buildings to undergo restoration. Led by Barry LaRue, the chapel now has a new tile roof, copper half-round gutters, and refinished front doors. With much more work to be done, Barry will be presenting a program about the history and plans for the chapel on Sunday May 5th. Members will receive an announcement in April.

Ypsilanti resident Preston Tucker designed and built a car of the future right after World War II. Preston's grandson, John Tucker, is using family memorabilia for a museum display to tell his grandfather's story and keep his memory alive in Ypsilanti. Preston lived at 110 North Park and

operated Ypsilanti Machine and Tool Company behind his house where he designed a gun turret that revolutionized the protection of our heavy bombers during World War II. Much of the design of his Tucker 48 automobile also occurred here in Ypsilanti. By rotating display items, John will keep the display fresh. We are fortunate to have this special Ypsilanti display.

Ypsilanti area school yearbooks are one of the most used collection our archives has for genealogical research. We were reminded that our members may have Ypsilanti, EMU, Willow Run or Lincoln school yearbooks they no longer want and would be willing to fill our missing years. The museum can be contacted at 734-482-4990 or yhs.archives@gmail.com.

I wish to extend a special thanks to the donors who made our 2018 Annual Fund Drive a major success. It is the continued support of our greater community that allows us to continue our mission. We were saddened to learn of the death of Joe Butko Junior but appreciate being identified as an "in lieu of flowers" organization. The Butko family has been a supportive friend of YHS for many years.



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the expansion of educational opportunities for women. Some historians have identified this period as the beginning of the women's movement. During colonial times girls received minimal training, much of it related to their future as wives and mothers. They were likely taught the alphabet but reading received little emphasis. The girls also were taught basic sums while the boys moved on to study mathematics. Boys and girls were soon separated and girls typically left school after a few years to help at home or simply because it was assumed that they had learned all they needed to know.

There were exceptions, of course, but usually limited to young women from wealthier families. Even then the curriculum for girls emphasized social skills, music and art. The pioneers in women's education established their own schools where females were taught science, math, history and literature. It was not until the advent of public schools, however, that females began to receive an education that was similar to that offered to males.

The founding of the Ladies' Literary Club and group study was an indication that women wanted to keep learning and if that meant they would learn from each other, then that is what they would do.

Sarah Putnam was a remarkable lady. Her considerable influence with the Ladies Library Association and the founding of the Ladies' Literary Club is even more impressive when learn-



Sarah Putnam, Founder of the Ladies Literary Club.

ing that she was blind. She lost her sight as the result of a lightning strike while living in Kalamazoo. She, however, was a natural leader, took on numerous challenges and dealt with them. Other women who participated in the early years of the Club included Mrs. John Watling (her husband was a dentist and a founder of the Dental School at the University of Michigan), Harriet Rexford (her husband was the Postmaster), Rocena Norris (member of an Ypsilanti pioneer family), and Sarah George, wife of Austin a professor of English at the Normal.

The Ladies developed their own curricula of studies, beginning with the French Revolution, and then moved on to Germany. They then studied the Tudor dynasty and the tumultuous period following the death of Elizabeth I. From there they focused on Ancient Rome, Spain and Greece.

During 1888 and 1890 they studied Britain, its geography, people, cathedrals and writers.

During these early years, meetings were held in members' homes or in the Library at the Arcade Building. As the Club approached the end of the 19th Century, the areas of study broadened to include the emergence of newer academic fields of study such as sociology. From there topics such as "Equality," "The Kindergarten," and "Our City Charter" were explored. The Ladies began to realize they could have an impact on public policy. Some members were active in the Women's Suffrage Movement which would ultimately result in establishment of voting rights for women in 1920.

In 1902 the Club had its first outside speaker, a Judge Harriman from Ann Arbor who spoke on the life and writings of John Greenleaf Whittier. Over the years the Club engaged more guest speakers thus moving away from its initial impetus of self-improvement through reading, research and presentations. In part this was due to women having more active lives outside the home. An additional factor was the amount of time devoted to fund raising.



Blanche Walton,
President of the
Ladies' Literary
Club from
1881-1882.



Sarah George,
President of the
Ladies' Literary
Club from
1882-1883.



Eunice Watling, President of the Ladies' Literary
Club from 1895-1897.

Club membership grew steadily. By 1910 the rooms at the Library could no longer comfortably accommodate the membership. As early as 1896, club members began to think about establishing a "home of their own." In the meantime, the Club rented rooms at the newly built Masonic Temple. Then in 1913, the Grant Residence at 218 N. Washington went up for sale. The asking price was \$3,000. It was discovered upon inspection that the house needed an additional \$1,500 in repairs... On December 10, 1913, the Ladies decided to purchase the property. One major stumbling block remained, other than a \$200 legacy left by Mrs. Ann Bassett; the Club had no funds to complete the purchase. Very few women had money of their own. If they were married, all assets were in the name of their husbands. Some members had inherited money and there were members who had paid employment but these were few in number.

The local banks would not loan money to a group of women. Fortunately Thomas McAndrew loaned the Club \$2,000 and with that, fundraising began. One of the most effective individual fundraisers was Helen J. Cleary, whose husband P.R. Cleary founded Cleary College. Helen used her charm and considerable contacts in securing donations including a \$50 gift from President Jones of the Normal.

With the establishment of the Club-

house, social activities expanded. Each meeting ended with an afternoon tea. That tradition continues to this day and despite the more casual dress of members, we are most truly "Ladies" as we sip our tea, enjoy tea sandwiches, lovely cookies, fruit and vegetables.

New members continue to join the club and to sign the membership book, a fragile notebook that has survived the many years since 1878. With that comes the realization that each new member is part of a continuum that has witnessed many changes in the lives of women.

Penny Schreiber, past president and editor of the publication celebrating the Club's 125th anniversary, wrote: *"Remembrance of things past... continuity of Club traditions and awareness of the splendid women from long ago whose names grace faded Club yearbooks...also explains the Club's resilience."*

References: "The Ladies' Literary Club, Ypsilanti, Michigan," "125 Years 1878 - 2003" and "The Story of Ypsilanti" by Harvcey C. Colburn."

Suggested Further Reading: "The Ladies Buy a House," **Gleanings**, Winter 2013 (Peg Porter) and "The Lady Gets a Facelift," **Gleanings**, Winter 2017 (Peg Porter).

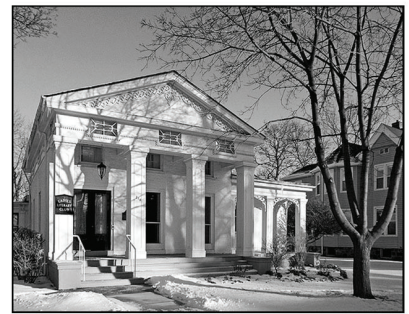
(Peg Porter is the Assistant Editor of the Gleanings and a regular contributor of articles.)



Julia A. King,
President of
the Ladies'
Literary Club
from
1903-1905.



Mary Putnam,
daughter of
Sarah and Daniel,
served as
President of the
Ladies' Literary
Club from
1925-1927.



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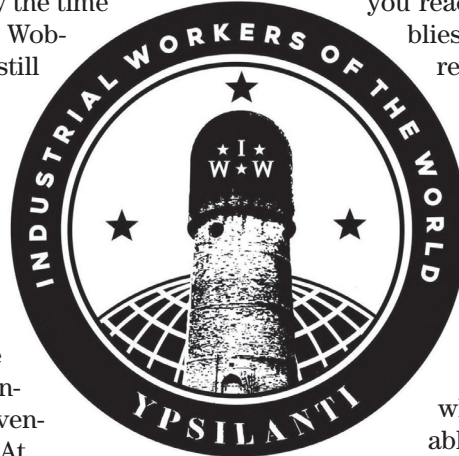
The Wobblies Connection to Ypsilanti

BY ROBERT ANSCHUETZ

Have you ever met a Wobbly? Perhaps you have a Wobbly living next door. Maybe you even have a friend or relative who is a Wobbly and you didn't even know it. If you don't happen to know a Wobbly today, you most certainly would have known one if you had lived in Ypsilanti 100 years ago when it was home to many Wobblies. By the time you reach the end of this article, you will know the general history of the Wobblies and might come to realize that you may know a Wobbly who still resides amongst us in Ypsilanti.

The cities of Chicago, San Francisco, Philadelphia, Cincinnati and Ypsilanti are obviously very different in many respects. Yet, they share a role in American history that has given them an important common distinction. That role is rooted in an international labor union known as the Industrial Workers of the World, or IWW, which was founded in conjunction with a broad-based labor convention held in Chicago on June 24, 1905. At its peak in 1917, the IWW union boasted a membership of over 150,000 workers, and while those numbers declined dramatically in the 1920s and following decades, the organization persevered and remains active to this day. Inspired by the motto "an injury to one is an injury to all" and the slogan "one big union," the IWW continues to support a variety of industries, including lumber, newspapers and mining. It has also stayed true to its international origins maintaining branches in the United States, Canada, Australia, Africa and Europe. Members of the IWW, known as "Wobblies," carry an identification card known as a "red card."

Wobblies have been historically associated with the socialist labor movement, where workers are thought to be the lynchpin of industry. The IWW has pushed for the right of workers to elect their bosses and for a shorter workday and workweek for all employees. The union opposed U.S. involvement in World War I, triggering a crackdown by both the government and corporations. Within the IWW there was a large disagreement between those who sought to either centralize or decentralize the organization. That led to a schism in 1924 from which the union never fully recovered. Following the 1924 IWW convention, two factions each claimed to be the "real" IWW, and in some cities there were even two IWW halls. By 1960, Wobbly membership had dropped to only 125.



The logo for the Wobblies in Ypsilanti.

Thereafter, however, the rise of the civil rights movement, anti-war protests, and various university student movements boosted membership to around 400, where it remains today.

The origin of the name "Wobblies" is unclear. One often repeated story involves a Chinese restaurant owner in Vancouver who provided credit to IWW members. Unable to pronounce the letter "W," he would ask his customers if they were members of the "I Wobble Wobble" union. Another possible origin of the name relates to the term "Wobbling the Works," which meant engagement in a "soft strike" characterized by decreased efficiency on the job. Others believe that, because many IWW members were carpenters, "Wobblies" references a tool known as a "wobble saw." Still another theory holds that "Wobblies" originated as a pejorative nickname for IWW members, many of whom were often unsteady, or "wobbly," from drinking too much.

Ypsilanti played a role in the early existence of the Wobblies. Industrial workers in and around Ypsilanti joined the IWW. Oakley Johnson, a native Michigander and member of the Socialist Party of America, attended a Wobbly street meeting in Davenport, Iowa and got to know Frank Little. Little was a prominent IWW union activist who was later lynched in 1917 in Butte, Montana by agents of the copper mines. Johnson signed up for his Wobbly red card and enrolled in Michigan State Normal College (now EMU), where he graduated in 1917. Upon graduation, Johnson was appointed as principal and teacher of a rural school near Ypsilanti. One day during the school year, he was pulled from his classroom by representatives of the U.S. Department of Justice and interrogated about his nationality, his political leanings, and why he had contributed money to the legal defense fund established to help mem-



The "Little Red Songbook" of the IWW.

bers of the IWW. After the incident, Johnson wrote about his interrogation in an Ypsilanti newspaper and gathered sympathy from his students and locals.

On the day before his school let out for the summer, an out-of-town mob gathered at Oakley Johnson's school to confront him, but Johnson was aided by his students to go out a back door from which a local farmer drove him to safety. The commencement address at Johnson's school was delivered by Professor Hoyt of MSNC without the presence of Johnson, who thought better of attending the graduation ceremony. Professor Hoyt was not sympathetic to Johnson's political leanings, and he used the occasion to express his regrets that the mob that had come to abduct Johnson had had to go home empty-handed. Johnson's graduating students, however, refused to sit on the graduation stage without their principal and picked up their diplomas at a later date.

Through the years, the Wobblies have worked their way into American culture through literature, jargon, symbols, song and even film. The black cat symbol, created by Wobbly member Ralph Chaplin, is often used on union picket signs to signify wildcat strikes. A 1979 movie entitled "The Wobblies," directed by Stewart Bird and Deborah Shaffer, explored the history of the union that was open to all, was worldwide, opposed WWI, and tried to resist capitalistic greed.

During the Great Depression, the Wobblies had a close association with transient workers, commonly known as "hobos." According to legend, hobos in the Northwest were required to possess a Wobbly red card in order to be allowed to ride the rails looking for work, so many hobos signed up with the IWW. Many of the hobo slogans and symbols, such as "riding the rails" and "living in jungles," were adopted by the Wobblies and incorporated into their lingo. The IWW's

efforts to organize all trades allowed the lingo to expand and include terms relating to mining camps, timber work and farming. Other derivations of Wobbly lingo came from sources such as Native American languages, immigrant languages and jargon. The word "muckamuck" or phrase "high muckety-muck" in Wobbly lingo refers to someone important and arrogant, and is often used to refer to bosses and upper management. A list of additional Wobbly lingo includes:

Accommodation: Local freight train

Beanmaster: Cook

Can: Jail

Duds: Clothes

Fink: A strike breaker or informer

Flipping a rattler: Boarding a moving box-car

Frogskin: Dollar bill

Gandy dancer: Someone who maintains railroad tracks

Goon: A thug

Graveyard shift: Night work

Hoosegow: Jail

Java: Coffee

Kicks: Shoes

Muck Stick: Long-handled shovel

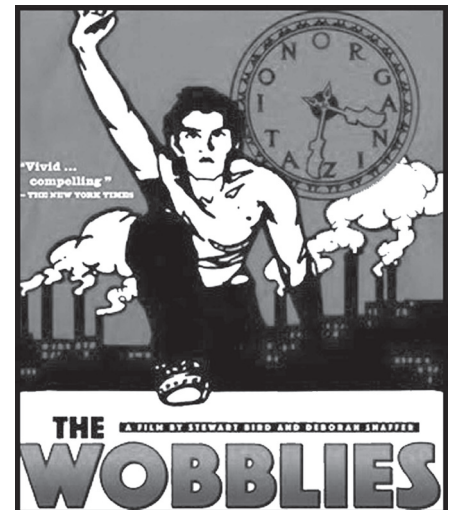
Plough jockey: Farmer

Rotgut: Cheap liquor

Tinhorn: A smalltime gambler

Yeggs: Crooks, lazy people, tramps

Another Wobbly term is the word "Boomer," which refers to a construction worker who travels to the job, a transient railroad worker, or a seasonal or migratory worker. Ypsilanti held its own "Boomer Daze" in Depot Town for many years in the 1970s and 1980s. Boomer Daze events included a Boomer costume parade, contests, a Hobo Jungle campout at Frog Island, track-walking contests, Tramp Art exhibit, Mulligan stew and drinks,



Advertisement for "The Wobblies" movie.

and the crowning of the Hobo King and Queen. The Ypsilanti Boomer Daze continued to be popular until 1982 when homelessness became more prominent, and the organizers felt it was inappropriate to celebrate poverty and the misfortune of others.

The Wobblies attracted several members who wrote folksongs about the struggles of employment and making ends meet. Other songwriters outside of the organization also wrote songs about the Wobblies. These songs were compiled in the IWW Song Book, which has gone through at least 30 editions since it was first published. A song called "Popular Wobbly," written by Valentine Huh-ta under the pen-name T-Bone Slim, first appeared in the 1920 edition of the Wobbly Song Book. The first verse is sung: "I'm as mild mannered as I can be. And I've never done them harm that I can see. Still on me they put a ban and they threw me in the can. They go wild, simply wild, over me." Of course, T-Bone Slim wasn't really talking about being popular; he was talking about getting beaten to a pulp by company-hired thugs.

One popular Wobbly songwriter and labor union legend was a man named Joe Hill. Hill was an immigrant from Sweden, who Americanized his name and traveled the country from New York to San Francisco looking for

work. Hill became a spokesperson for the Wobblies through his cartoons and folk songs, including "The Preacher and the Slave" in which he coined the phrase "pie in the sky." In 1914, Hill was arrested for the murder of a Salt Lake City grocer and his son. He was convicted of the murder in a controversial trial and executed after much outcry from high-profile figures and many labor unions. Following his death, several folk songs written about Joe Hill made their way into *The Little Red Song Book*.

Although Wobbly membership dropped throughout the decades following its formation, the IWW retained its general headquarters in Chicago until 1990. From there, the general headquarters were moved to San Francisco from 1991-1994. In 1994, local resident Fred Chase was elected to head the IWW as its General Secretary. Chase had joined the Wobblies in the 1960s after he met an organizer at a "Students for a Democratic Society" convention in Ann Arbor. Following his election to head the IWW, Chase chose not to move to San Francisco, where the organization's existing headquarters were located, but, instead, to move the headquarters

to Ypsilanti in a small storefront building at 103 W. Michigan Avenue. Ypsilanti was chosen over Ann Arbor because of its blue-collar roots. "Ypsilanti is a working-class city," Chase said. "We felt we'd fit in better here." In Ypsilanti, the IWW general headquarters functioned as an office, meeting center, and museum filled with Wobbly memorabilia. The city housed the IWW headquarters until 2000, when they were moved to Philadelphia. In 2006, the headquarters were moved to Cincinnati and in 2010 back to Chicago, where it all began.

During the time that the IWW general headquarters were

located in Ypsilanti, the union launched an organizing drive against Borders Books in which its members picketed stores in several major cities, including Ann Arbor, where Borders Books had been founded. Strikes and picketing for various reforms during this four-year period were also held in California, Washington, Pennsylvania, New York, Montana, Africa, Massachusetts, Indiana, Texas, Finland, Russia, and England.

After the headquarters moved away from Ypsilanti, membership in the Ypsilanti General Membership Branch of the IWW declined and the chapter eventually disbanded. The remaining Wobblies of Ypsilanti transferred to the Detroit branch. During an upswing in blue-collar employment, the Ypsilanti-area Wobbly membership gradually rose again in the 2000s, and Ypsilanti was once more awarded its own IWW branch in 2017. The Ypsilanti Wobblies have made their presence known recently through participation in parades, breakfasts, and membership-awareness drives. Ypsilanti IWW members are proud to be called "Wobblies" and take pride too in Ypsilanti's role in their union's history.



Advertisement for "Boomer Daze" in Ypsilanti.

Now you, too, share some knowledge about the history of the Wobblies and their connection to Ypsilanti. You may even be able to sing some Wobbly songs or converse using Wobbly lingo with the Wobblies that are still present in our community. And when someone asks you how Ypsilanti stacks up to the great cities of the United States, you can say that Ypsilanti shares an important role in history along with Chicago, San Francisco, Philadelphia, and Cincinnati. Then you can tell them what you know about the Wobblies.

(Robert Anschuetz grew up in Ypsilanti and is a regular contributor of articles to the Gleanings.)



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Recent Museum & Archive Acquisitions

The museum and archives receive donated items on a regular basis to add to our collections. It is through these donations that we have a furnished museum and an archive full of research material. We will be including recent acquisitions in the upcoming editions of the Gleanings. Thank you to all of our generous donors! Here are the new items in our collections.

Number	Donor	Item	Description
HSA-2019-01	Russ Kenyon	Photographs	Prospect School Class photographs from 1962/63, 1962/63, & 1964/65; Lakeview 1907 Class photograph 25th Annual Heritage Festival Invitation; First United
HSA-2019-02	Nancy Taylor	Historical Material	Methodist Church print; EMU 1988 Huron football poster
HSA-2019-03	Clifford Larkins & Larry Thomas	Posters	EMU Aurora editorial staff poster; Zach Harris designed event posters; Hopkins-Thomas family photographs
HSA-2019-04	Jane Schmiedeke	Pamphlets	Home Tour & Garden Tour pamphlets and invitations
HSA-2019-05	Lawrence & Jane Darling	Yearbooks	Ypsi Dixits; Riverside Study Club Rosters; 1860 Tuttle Hill
HSA-2019-06	VIRGINIA DAVIS-Brown	Family Information	Alice Johnson genealogical information & newspaper articles and obituaries pertaining to the DAR
HSA-2019-07	Earnest Griffin	Scrapbooks & Photographs	Thomas R. Forsyth Scrapbook, Ypsilanti High School class photos, commencement pamphlets, & articles, & Misc.
HSA-2019-08	Tom Warner	Yearbook & Photographs	RHS Class of 1953 Photograph, RHS yearbook 1953 "The Highlight," & Ypsilanti Area Sesquicentennial Book
HSA-2019-10	Steven James Seiler	Book	"The Rise of Faygo 1907-1987" by Steven James Seiler
HSA-2019-11	Michael W. McCloy	Program	1959 Emmanuel Lutheran Church program
HSA-2019-12	Robert Fairson	Photograph	1935 ACME Newspaper Photograph of Richard Streicher Jr.
HS-2018-662-1	The William and Nathalie Edmunds Estate	Document File	The Handy Document File made by the A.C. Barler Manufacturing Co, Chicago, IL
HS-2018-663-1	Jim McMaster	Tea Cup	Ruby red flask glass Ypsilanti tea cup, circa 1900-1910
HS-2018-664-1	Robert Farquharson Estate	Vest	Motor Wheel vest
HS-2018-664-2	Robert Farquharson Estate	Jacket	Motor Wheel quilted jacket
HS-2018-664-3	Robert Farquharson Estate	Jacket	Motor Wheel lightweight jacket
HS-2018-665-1	Jane Bird Schmiedeke	Coverlet	Jacquard coverlet, navy blue and cream, 1844
HS-2018-666-1	David Novak	Bayonet	World War I military bayonet
HS-2018-667-1	Carol A. McClure	Patch	US Navy Aviation Ordnanceman
HS-2018-667-2	Carol A. McClure	Hat	US Navy dress blue service cap
HS-2018-667-3	Carol A. McClure	Uniform	US Navy dress blue service uniform, Aviation Ordnanceman
HS-2018-667-4	Carol A. McClure	Uniform	US Navy undress white service uniform
HS-2018-667-5	Carol A. McClure	Pin	Hash Pin, National Defense Service Metal
HS-2018-668-1:18	Diane Schick	Collectible Plates	Bing & Grondahl, Christmas Plates: 1963, 1965, 1966-1968, 1969(x2)1970-1978, 1986
HS-2018-669-1 :28	Diane Schick	Collectible Plates & Figurines	Hummel collectible plates and figurines
HS-2018-670-1:25	Norman & Karen McFall	Punchbowl Set	F.B. Rogers Silver Company silver punchbowl, tray, ladel, and cups
HS-2018-671-1	Mickey Ichesco	Bank	Ypsilanti Savings and Loan car shaped bank

Search for Author Comes Full Circle to Ypsilanti

BY LAURA GELLOTT



Polly and Jeanne with their mother, Helen Perry Curtis in Florence, 1933. Their year in Europe was the basis for Helen's book, *Jean & Company, Unlimited*.

My life as a reader began in Ypsilanti. My mother taught all of us to read before we started kindergarten. Every other Saturday morning we went to the library on Huron Street which was the former home of Mary Ann Starkweather that she donated for a Ladies Library⁵. The children's room was on the second floor. One climbed the curving staircase to be greeted by the sight of the Tiffany stained glass window behind the librarian's desk at the top of the stairs. Going to the library carried with it the solemnity of going to church.

It was, however, a book that came not from the library but from the book shelves in my grandfather's house at 1023 Washtenaw Avenue that would be the most influential book of my childhood. It was the book that set me on the path to the academic career that took me far from Ypsilanti. But in a twist of fate, the search for the author of that book led back to my home town.

I was not yet 10 years old when, that day at Grandpa's house, my mother handed me a book that belonged to her at that age. "Here," she said, "you'll like this. It's about a girl who goes to Europe." I didn't just like this book. I fell in love with it. "*Jean & Company, Unlimited*," by Helen Perry Curtis, published in 1937, was just what my mother said: the story of a girl who, with her mother, sails to Europe aboard a glamorous ocean liner. While Jean's mother travels the Continent collecting material for a book on folk costumes, Jean spends a year at a Dominican convent boarding school in the south of France. There she meets girls from all over Europe: Jeannette from France, Giovan-

na from Italy, Janesika from Czechoslovakia, Jenny from Norway – all Jeans. The girls form a club with the businesslike name "*Jean and Company*." Jean spends the summer vacation and the second year of this European sojourn traveling with her mother and visiting these new friends in their own countries.

"*Jean & Company*" sent me on my own journey. The interest in Europe it inspired led me to earn a Ph.D. in European History, followed by a 30 year college teaching career. And with that, of course, came my own trips to Europe – to many of the places first visited by Jean. The book became, as I often said only half-facetiously, "*The only guidebook I ever needed*."

From the very beginning I wondered: "*How much of this story is true?*" From time to time in that now-distant pre-internet age I would look up Helen Perry Curtis's name in various library sources, with little luck. Later I made a few attempts at a Google search, turning up only the occasional used copy of "*Jean*" on Amazon or E-bay.

But then one night came a lucky break: a hit on a Helen Perry Curtis Room in the student center at Doane College in Crete, Nebraska. Nebraska?! My Helen Perry Curtis was a sophisticated New Yorker who took her daughter on a dazzling trip.... But it was the most solid lead to date, so I sent an inquiry to the college archivist. I was rewarded next morning with the first of a flurry of emails from a Janet Jeffries. Yes, she wrote, this was the Helen Perry Curtis I was looking for. Helen's father had been president – found-

ing president no less -- of Doane College for 40 years. Helen was born and raised in Crete, in the heart of Nebraska's immigrant Czech communities. Helen's interest in Eastern European folk culture, something evident in the pages of *"Jean & Company,"* would thus have been a well-grounded one.

But the most important piece of information in Janet's emails was the fact that she had once met Helen's granddaughters. Would I like their addresses?



Polly and Russell Wells after their marriage in Hawaii, 1947.

I was soon corresponding with Helen's three granddaughters: Susie on Martha's Vineyard and Martha and Pat in Chatham, New Jersey. All three were thrilled to learn that someone held so dear the book published by their beloved grandmother so many years ago. Before long, Martha and Pat invited me to come to New Jersey during the time that Susie would be making her annual summer visit. They promised *"lots of family photos, letters, genealogy, diaries, etc."* as well as possible day trips to Newark and Trenton where Helen had worked in museums. Who could resist?

From the moment I stepped off the plane in Newark that day in July 2015 and met Pat and Susie at the top of the concourse our connection was instantaneous. That afternoon, as conversation flowed, I casually mentioned my hometown, Ypsilanti, Michigan. Stunned silence, followed by gasps. Martha and Pat, it turned out, along with their parents and younger brothers, had lived in Ypsilanti from 1955 to 1957 when their father, Captain Rus-

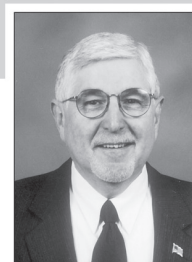
sell Wells, a career Air Force officer, was assigned to the base at Willow Run. So, not long before that day when Mom pulled a book off the shelf at Grandpa's house (*"Here, you'll like this..."*), Helen Perry Curtis's daughter and her young family were living on Le Forge Road in Ypsilanti.

That afternoon Martha and Pat brought down box after box from the attic, from closets, from under beds and from bookshelves. As I studied the contents, I knew that Helen's life demanded a

proper biography. And in an incredible stroke of luck, one of the boxes yielded a packet of 25 letters written between July of 1955 and August 1957 from Ypsilanti.

During this and subsequent visits to New Jersey I came to learn much more about the lives of Helen and her two daughters, combined for purposes of the book into the girl named Jean. The real-life daughters were Jeanne (Susie's mother) and Polly (Pat and Martha's mother). Helen, it turned out, had first traveled to Europe in 1914, with her mother. The two women were caught in Paris at the outbreak of World War I -- an experience richly detailed in letters home. Helen returned to France in 1918-19 as a volunteer with a YMCA canteen in Chaumont, where General John J. Pershing and the American Expeditionary Force were headquartered. During the final offensive Helen served in a mobile canteen mere kilometers from the Meuse-Argonne Front. She later spent several months with the YMCA in the occupied Rhineland.

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In 1932, Helen took Jeanne and Polly, then 11 and 10 years old respectively, to Europe for a year. Helen, who had left her career as director of the State Museum in New Jersey when she married John Curtis in 1920, had in the meantime established herself as a successful free-lance writer. She convinced her husband that she and the girls could live more cheaply in Europe, where she would find material to sustain a steady flow of magazine articles. Jeanne and Polly did indeed attend a Dominican convent school in the town of Grasse in Provence; subsequently they spent a semester at the progressive Cours Maintenon in Cannes. At the end of the school year Helen took the girls first to Venice and then to Salzburg. In Salzburg Jeanne and Polly lived for a month at Schloss Klessheim, the Duncan School of Dance run by Elizabeth Duncan, sister of the great Isadora. As the year drew to a close, and joined by John, the family traveled to Paris and from there flew to London before heading home. It was during this year abroad that, in addition to writing about everything from French gardens to European Christmas customs, Helen published a series of articles in *American Girl*, the magazine of the Girl Scouts, fictionalizing her daughters' European adventures. Helen continued these articles when, in 1936 and 1937, she returned to Europe with Jeanne and Polly, this time working as a tour guide for the New York based company Europe on Wheels. These articles, gathered together and slightly revised, became *Jean & Company, Unlimited.*"



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As young women, Jeanne and Polly's lives were affected by the Second World War, much as their mother's life had been by the First. Following her graduation from Swarthmore College in 1942 Jeanne joined the Red Cross and met her doctor-husband at an army base in Indiana. Polly's class at Vassar College was fast-tracked to early graduation in 1944 so that the women would be freed for war work. Polly took a teaching job at the Army Air Force base in Kealahou, Hawaii, where she met Russell Wells, one of the airmen operating the radar station. It was love at first sight. The two were married four months later in Hawaii. From there the growing family was stationed first at Mitchell Air Base on Long Island, and then at Sidi Slimane Air Base in French Morocco.

It was from Morocco, in April of 1955, that Polly wrote to her mother about the family's next assignment. *"Big news! We know where we're going. A twix came in Tuesday that Russ is to go to Willow Run, Michigan. It's an air reserve training center, and he's hoping it will be a good job."* Polly, who as a teen-ager had traveled – more than once – to Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, now described Michigan as if she had an encyclopedia at her elbow: *"Michigan is a very beautiful state, and ... has the longest coastline of any United State, not counting its inland lakes -- over 1400 miles. So maybe we can have a boat after all. Martha says we'll have a duck at least."*

Polly, Russ and the three children: Martha, Patricia, and Peter, arrived in Ypsilanti at the end of July, 1955. Their first night was spent at a motel, dining next door at Bill Knapp's where the children enjoyed the restaurant's signature chicken-in-a-basket. Next day the family moved into a rented house at 1712 Le Forge Road. The importance of the local military community at Willow Run was immediately evident. *"The major's wife from down the way just came in to see if I'd go join them for some cool refreshments.... Also acquired a kitchen table and chairs and two living room chairs from the major's wife."* Russ and Polly's furniture was in transit from Morocco, so the loan was appreciated – and essential. The family's first nights in the house were spent sleeping on blanket rolls.

Housing options in Ypsilanti were limited. Rentals were expensive – *"125 a month. What a hideous price."* Russ and Polly looked into buying a house; Polly wistfully described a beautiful old ten-room house on a corner lot in town, but the \$21,000 price put it far beyond their reach. *"There are a lot of development houses but they have puny rooms and puny lots and no dining room."* While Polly doesn't mention a specific neighborhood, her description of *"new little brick ranches"* matches the West Willow subdivision rather than the siding-clad houses of Nancy Park or Shady Knoll under development at the same time. *"It would be OK,"* Polly continued, *"if you didn't have any furniture, and got bunk beds for every member of the family and stood*

up to eat, but we would never fit into one with our family and accoutrements." For many a young Ypsi family in 1955, including my parents who bought their first home that very same year in West Willow, those houses marked a step up. But for Russ and Polly, whose furniture finally arrived from Morocco where they had enjoyed spacious quarters, expectations were different. In late September the family moved to 1704 Le Forge Road, the rental property vacated by "the

major" whose wife had warmly welcomed Polly two months earlier. 1704 Le Forge would be home for the Wells family for the next three years.

Russ and Polly experienced additional uncertainty during the first months in Ypsilanti. Willow Run could not yet fully accommodate the Air Reserve Flying Center to which Russ had been assigned as an instructor. Willow Run was still the site of southeastern Michigan's commercial airport. The frequent delays and slow development of Detroit-Wayne into Metro Airport would be accomplished only by the late 1950s. Russ and four other instructors thus made a daily commute to Selfridge Air Force Base – prior to the completion of I-94 a two hour trip each way. The length of the commute was compounded by the cost. "Gas is terribly high here. Costs \$5.00 to fill the tank of our car.... Gas is about 34 cents. Then they have a sales tax on everything around here, and no commissary. So it makes everything high." In December the flight school and Russ's job finally consolidated its operations



Patricia, Peter, and Martha Wells in the backyard of 1704 Le Forge Road. Polly wrote her Nebraska-born mother that they had "Corn growing 20 ft. back of the back door. You'd enjoy hearing it rustle, Mummy."

at Willow Run.

Polly set about making the rented house on Le Forge Road a home. She wrote long letters to her mother describing painting the rooms and sewing curtains, and enclosed drawings detailing the placement of furniture in each of the rooms. Polly wrote happily of the Brownlee Utility Junior Playhouse that Russ and a friend picked up in Milan and drove back to Ypsilanti in the friend's pickup truck.

Russ and Polly assembled the pieces of the playhouse, which was "barn red with white trim and green door and window boxes, and the inside will be yellow with white trim and a deck grey floor.... Russ and I sat out in the playhouse last night with the electric lantern and made a folding table which can fold flat against the wall. Russ gets a huge kick out of the playhouse. He made a small weather vane for the roof; looks very cute." A visit to the Humane Society resulted in the adoption of two Siamese kittens. "Russ fought his soft heart not to get a puppy too." Russ did eventually get his dog. On a later visit to the Humane Society he found a beagle puppy he named Sunny Day Sal. Sal would be a part of the Wells family for a good long fourteen years.

Polly wrote to her mother: "Marf and Pishy [Martha and Pat] have a circus all day with all the kids around here. Peter rides his tractor inside and outside with great gusto. There are a black kitten and pup next door, and cows down the way. Our life is complete."

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In September Martha and Pat enrolled as a second grader and kindergartner respectively in Bennett School at Le Forge and Geddes Roads. *"It's a real country school, red brick, large fenced yard and swings, slide, and seesaws. Kindergarten thru 8th grade."* Each girl was one of only four students in her class; Martha remembers Teddy Griffin, along with a Chery and Cheryl. The school was only *"a half mile from us, but they can't walk alone as the cars go too fast, and being a dirt road (as most secondary Michigan roads are) they would be blinded by dust every time a car went by.... Don't like the idea of little girls walking that distance on back roads alone."* The teacher, Mrs. Allen, taught 35 children in the one-room schoolhouse. *"Mrs. A. is a fine person, and a fine teacher.... She has been teaching for 30 years, and believes in good discipline and gets good results with her teaching methods. ... Both girls love school, and Mrs. Allen is very pleased with their progress, and always asks me about the school M[artha] went to in Africa, and about Hawaii."*

After two years in North Africa, Polly relished the changing seasons in the American Midwest – although she was taken aback by the ferocity of the thunderstorms and the frequency of tornado warnings (*"I didn't know they even had tornadoes in Michigan!"*) She described vividly the Michigan winters, about which she initially had reservations: *"Our snow is just beautiful -- about five inches in the last two weeks, and it has been too cold for any to melt. Still just as white as when it fell. Every morning we are covered by a sparkling frosting – every twig and weed and roof (all edged with icicles) and we have had pink sunrises all week, so you can imagine how lovely it looks. The ride to school and back is a joy.... We have frozen a large space back of the playhouse and the children can skate there and slide around. They can coast over in the*

pasture." Spring brought further revelations of the beauty of Michigan. *"Our countryside really is lovely – should be popping into spring soon. The big tree in our front yard is the first in bud (it was the last to lose its leaves in the fall too). I'm itching to do some planting. Martha has been scraping up a garden plot for herself. It's wonderful to be able to shoo the children outdoors all day."*

The end of the school year provided opportunities to explore Ypsilanti and environs. *"The other evening on a drive on a back road we found an acre of mossy woods blanketed with white, pink, lavender, mauve, and purple trillium, violets, wild blue phlox, wild spring geranium.... The children picked huge bunches which lasted nearly a week."* They discovered the Irish Hills, as well as the Pinkney Recreation Area, where Silver Lake quickly became a favorite spot: *"We went last Tuesday and spent the afternoon and cooked hot dogs on one of the grills. Russ said it was the best picnic we'd ever had – and he usually isn't too enthusiastic about picnics. We had a lovely drive afterwards. We went by Halfmoon Lake, but it's not nearly as nice – so*



Polly, with son Peter Wells at Silver Lake, Pinkney Recreation Area.

took it off our list." Polly wrote to her mother about a family trip to The Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village in descriptions every Michigander will recognize. The museum is *"as big as the Smithsonian, terrific collections of every automobile since the beginning, planes, trains, motors, telephones, phonographs, etc. Then he has complete shops set up: violin shop, shoemaker, pharmacy.... You press a button on the door and peer in the shop windows while a pleasant voice tells you all about it. Peter was enthralled with the trains.... We'd look at other things and miss Peter and always find him in his train, conducting tours or just absorbing pleasure from being in it."* Greenfield Village, *"houses collected by Henry Ford and moved to this spot,"* also delighted the family. *"Russ was especially interested in the Wright Brothers bicycle shop and house, brought from Dayton. The original contents are also included. They had a small-scale wind tunnel, the first of its kind. I was asking Russ only the other day who built the first wind tunnel, and we found our answer right there."*

Much of Polly and Russ's social life involved other young military families at Willow Run. Of New Year's Eve 1956 Polly wrote: *"We had the Smiths and Marlows over.... The other two officers were either in NJ or [had] no baby sitter. We had a very pleasant time sitting around talking and had refreshments and watched the Times Square celebration and felt very smug that we weren't there."* When Doris Smith's new baby was born (*"in the civilian hospital here"*) a few weeks later Polly kept the Smith's older child for the five days (then the norm) that Doris was in the hospital and provided dinner every night for the new father. And it was at a *"squadron picnic – five couples and assorted small fry"* at Silver Lake that Polly met for the first time another military wife with whom she shared a connection: the woman and



Martha, Patricia, Peter and Robbin with Russ and his beloved 1946 Ercoupe N99726; Nebraska 1958. The Wells brothers recently tracked the plane through its ID number, locating it in Florida.

her husband had moved into Russ and Polly's former quarters at Wheeler Field in Honolulu. *"I met them for the first time at the picnic, and when she heard 'Polly Wells,' she said 'You aren't Polly CURTIS Wells, are you?'"* When I said yes she then thanked me most heartily for the use of my *Joy of Cooking* I had left behind by mistake. She said she had been enjoying it for the last seven or eight years and had always wondered where we lived so she could write to thank me. Now she has done it in person.... They were in Japan for a tour while we were in Morocco ... and have been at Selfridge till they moved down here.

Polly's love of family life is evident. Her letters provide a nuanced picture of 1950s domesticity. A graduate of Vassar College, Polly majored in early childhood education. It was a job teaching kindergarten that took Polly to the military base in Hawaii where she met her husband. When her first child was born a year later, and with the couple's frequent moves (Willow Run was the fifth posting of their married life) Polly became a fulltime wife and mother.

I read Polly's letters with a shock of recognition. They are letters my mother could have written: descriptions of the life of a young, well-educated wife and mother, at home in Ypsilanti with a growing family. (And Polly, just like my mother, apparently resisted buying a new typewriter ribbon until even the red stripe on the top

was exhausted!) Polly wrote those long letters to her mother in time stolen from attacking the mountain of ironing that never seemed to shrink, and the need to have dinner on the table for five every night when Russ got home from work. She writes about her children, especially her two daughters, with such affection and honesty and insight that, meeting Martha and Pat for the first time as women in their late 60s, the descriptions from six decades earlier rang true.

But Polly's letters also sparkle with wit and sarcasm. Describing 1704 Le Forge Road she writes: *"We live on a dirt road (in a house – hah!)"* In a long letter to her best friend from Vassar, Blanche Ulmer Pavlis, Polly described Pish's exuberant manner of expression: *"Daddy, I just love you so much I can't stand you!" I told Russ those were sometimes my exact sentiments.*" And Polly's letters in the spring of 1956 deal with her happy anticipation of the Vassar College reunion she planned to attend that summer.

Writing to Blanche, Polly observes: *"You are so gloriously happy in your beautiful family, Binker. I'm so glad. Life is a very precious thing.... We love the home life, too."* Polly acknowledged that family was perhaps even more important to her given that military life meant frequent moves, leaving newly-formed friendships behind. *"I'm not expressing*

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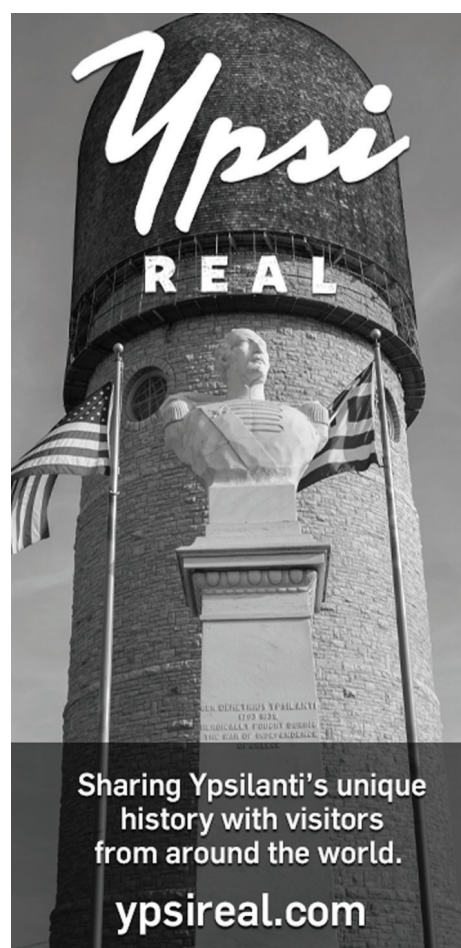
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this in a very original way, but I'm very serious about it. It's a wonderful rut, family life."

The Wells family increased in size while in Ypsilanti. Robbin (endearingly nicknamed Poncho by his father) was born in March of 1957 at Beyer Hospital (the aforementioned civilian hospital). Helen Perry Curtis came to Ypsilanti to help Polly with the new baby – just as she had done when Martha was born in Hawaii and Pish and Peter at Mitchell Field AFB on Long Island. Helen earlier visited Ypsilanti in the summer of 1956, returning with the family after the visit east for the Vassar reunion.

Discovering these letters more than sixty years after the fact it is impossible not to see their poignancy. From the very first letter Polly wrote to her mother from Ypsilanti she was already looking towards Russ's retirement from the Air Force and the dream of moving back east, for good. *"Got a bee-Utiful 10 cu ft GE refrigerator-freezer 2-door and a GE stove.... Our first purchase for our New England dream house."* Subsequent letters count down the years and numbers of postings remaining until Russ retires, and speculate on what he will do afterwards. *"Six years aren't long when you think we've been here a year less 3 days – but they seem a lot longer when you think its 2/3 of the time we've been married and all the things we've done in nine years. Keep your ears open if you hear of any fascinating houses someone is giving away. We might even buy it now and spend our vacations working on it...."*

And she wrote movingly to Blanche about the one thing she was not able to experience with Russ – flying. *"It's a part of his existence which is entirely separate from me and to which I can never belong."* She was dying to go up in a plane with him, she told Blanche, but it was against regulations for him to take her. *"He talks about flying when I can draw him out on it – the beauties of night flying. I don't worry when he is flying – I have complete faith in him."*

The Wells family left Ypsilanti in September, 1957 for Russ's assignment to Offutt AFB near Omaha. It was while in Nebraska that Polly was finally able to fulfil her desire to fly with her husband when, after much searching and looking involving the whole family, Russ bought a 1946 Erco Coupe, a small two-seater plane. Polly, the children, and even Sunny Day Sal enjoyed frequent opportunities to go up in the plane with Russ.

Russ's last assignment with the Air Force was Littleton, Colorado in 1958 where he worked at the Denver Federal Cen-



The story comes full circle: Polly Curtis Wells with her niece Susie Fauteux and daughters Martha and Pat Wells, Chatham, NJ, July 2015. Polly is holding the copy of *Jean & Company, Unlimited* that author Laura Gellott's mother gave her in Ypsilanti nearly 60 years ago.

ter and Lowry AFB. Their son Christopher was born in 1959. Russ retired from the Air Force with the rank of major on December 31, 1962.

In the story of her parents' lives Pat compiled in 2016 she wrote: *"At the end of the school year the family relocated to Edgartown, Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts. Russell got a job with National Executive Airlines, based on the Islands and Florida. On January 9, 1964, the DeHavilland Dove in which Russell was co-pilot developed engine trouble on take-off and crashed. Both Russell and the pilot in command, William Martin, Jr. were killed. There were no passengers aboard."*

In a remembrance of his mother published in *The Vineyard Gazette* in January 2017 Peter Wells wrote:

"My mom [was left] to raise five kids, ages 4, 6, 11, 13 and 15, alone. She bought a house on the corner of North Summer Street and Simpson's Lane. We rented the house out during the summer and stayed on either Manaca Hill or out at Cape Pogue. She stuck it out for four winters on the Vineyard and then moved us back to New Jersey to be near her mother and sister. She bought a 200-year-old house in Chatham Township, taught nursery school, sewed drapes and slipcovers for my grandmother's business, rode horses with my sisters and succeeded in getting all of us educated and started on careers. She managed to get back to Chappaquiddick yearly. I took her out sailing often. She loved driving out to Cape Pogue. One of her last voyages around Edgartown Harbor was bundled up in an overstuffed chair in the back of my pickup aboard the On Time II."

Polly died on April 15, 2016, ten days short of her 94th birthday. On a sunny day in June her five children, three daughters in law, 11 grandchildren, 12 great-grandchildren, along with her sister Jeanne's children and grandchildren and several of the children of her childhood friends gathered to inter her ashes alongside Russ's in the cemetery on Chappaquiddick.

More than sixty years after Polly wrote those letters from Ypsilanti, and nearly fifty years after I left my home town, the letters open up a window to life there in the mid 1950s. And they serve to bring full-circle the adventure that began that afternoon on Washtenaw Avenue when my mother handed me a book, saying: *"Here, you'll like this. It's about a girl who goes to Europe."*

(Laura Gellott is professor of history, emeritus, at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside [Kenosha]. She is writing a biography of Helen Perry Curtis.)

Museum Advisory Board Report

BY NANCY WHEELER, CHAIR

After the holiday decorations were packed and stored away the Museum looked very somber and plain. Placement and exhibit chairperson, Karen Nickels, worked her magic and created the following displays to liven up the museum: (1) Two Centuries of Reading: In celebration of Reading Month, the children's room is set with 17 appropriately dressed dolls and mannequins reading books from the 1800s thru the 2000s. (2) Interurban Railway: This enlarged display has been moved to the costume room. The Detroit-Jackson-Chicago railway was the last company to use the Interurban tracks. Note all the stops along the line. (3) Cigar Boxes: The 13 boxes are dated and information about the companies is included. (4) Women's Undergarments: A hoop, bloomers, garters, camisole, petticoat, and other "torturous" garments are shown. (5) Sewing Items: The beautiful 1800s sewing box of Emma Killian is displayed along with antique sewing accessories. Of special interest is a silver bodkin set. This was used to thread ribbon in lace for added decoration. A waist (blouse) is open to show sewing techniques. (6) Wade Figurines: Red Rose Tea included these small porcelain figures in their boxes as a gift to their patrons. We have 63 on exhibit. (7) Keepsake and Treasure Boxes: Twenty Seven boxes that held handkerchiefs, powder, or other things are ready for new treasures. Notice the handmade box shaped like a shoe covered in shells and jewels. (8) Tucker Car: John Tucker, grandson of Preston Tucker has loaned us Tucker car items and set up the exhibit in the Edmunds-Ypsilanti Room. Read Bill's President's Report to learn more about the exhibits. More new displays are in the planning stage.

Docent retirements: Long-time docent, Ann Thomas decided to hang up her name tag, and retire from volunteering at

the museum. Ann always expressed pleasure with the new exhibits and information she learned each month during her shift. After 28 years of service, we will miss her helpful attitude and musical laugh. Rita Sprague, 12 years of service, and Midge Fahndrich, 18 years of service, also retired at the beginning of the year. A huge thank you for all of those years of service, you will be missed!

Welcome to new Docent Melissa Hunt-Loy and Evan Milan. We still have room for four new helpers working one Saturday or Sunday shift per month. We provide training and only ask for a commitment of one 3-hour shift each month. Call 734-482-4990 or email YHS.Museum@gmail.com to get started!



The silver bodkin set that was used to thread ribbon in lace for added decoration.



A hoop, bloomers, garters, camisole, petticoat, and other "torturous" garments are displayed in the "Women's Undergarments" display.



The Children's Room has a display set up to celebrate "Reading Month."

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A Detroit-Jackson-Chicago ticket is part of the "Interurban Railway" display.



The house at 304 East Forest is an example of Greek Revival, typified by low pitched gabled roofs with pediment like gable returns and rectangular forms.

THE HISTORY OF THE HISTORIC EAST SIDE OF YPSILANTI

BY JANICE ANSCHUETZ

People come in two varieties – they either LOVE old houses or HATE them. It is hard to convince either type to change their mind. When we purchased the historic Swaine House at the Northeast corner of River Street and Forest Avenue in 1968 to move into with our growing family, it was considered such an unusual event that there was an article in the Detroit Free Press about the “Young Family Bringing New Life to an Old Home”. It was no easy task to purchase a home in our east side neighborhood. Houses on River Street, Oak, Maple and Cross were “redlined” and mortgages and insurance were very difficult to obtain for these homes. A “redlined” designation meant that they were not areas that banks and insurance companies wanted any part of because the neighborhoods may have been integrated and the homes were over 50 years old. Therefore, when applying for a mortgage, a potential home owner had to put a down payment of at least 50% of the appraised value of a home and, even then, excellent credit was only a minor consideration in obtaining a mortgage on one of the beautiful old homes in my neighborhood.

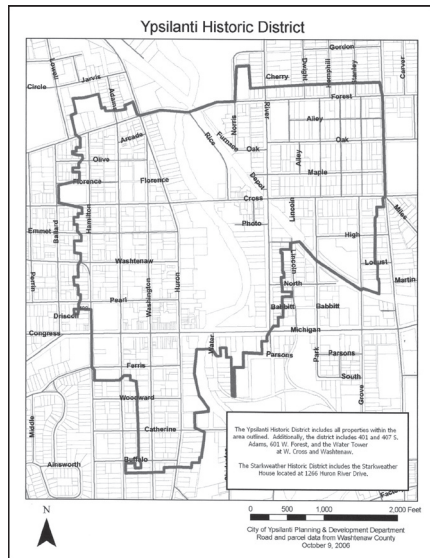
Loans for home improvements on these structures were

usually denied as well. Unless an original family still owned the home, they were generally sold via land contract to land contract. It was not unusual to have four land contracts on the same old house and slum landlords sold them to each other without making any improvements. The zoning at that time was R8, which meant that up to eight families could live in a large, old historic home. Given this “perfect storm” for neighborhood decline, what is now the Historic East Side neighborhood was the last place where a young family wanted to move. All of this made for an unsafe neighborhood as prostitutes, drug dealers and vagrants were able to rent single rooms with shared baths within their welfare check budgets. Housing values kept going down and banks and insurance companies did not want any part of these dwellings as they declined in value.

Even so, there were a few of us who loved the old and mainly crumbling houses, the large lots and gardens, walking through the alleys all within a neighborhood which had pubs, a pharmacy, several small grocery stores and people in a variety of colors, backgrounds, education and wealth. Our family was soon joined by several others who appre-

ciated and wanted to live in our neighborhood. Because our zoning allowed nearly anything to occupy the lots within the neighborhood, old houses were being bought and torn down and other old homes were being used as offices, hair salons and so forth. Motor Wheel Corporation on Norris Street tore down old houses for parking lots. Eastern Michigan University moved some of their offices into our neighborhood. We had several people approach us to purchase our home to tear it down for a used car lot, an office building, or divide it into multiple rooms for rent. We loved our house just the way it was and we stayed and joined with several other young families who had recently moved in and shared our passion for the unique Historic East Side.

Because of the destruction of our com-



Map of the current Ypsilanti Historic District without a few of the additions such as the Starkweather Farm.

munity we formed the East Side Citizens Association, which then became the East Side Historic Neighborhood Association. We had meetings, dealt with the issues of crime and zoning with the city, published a newsletter which also contained articles about some of the history of homes, and worked diligently to change the zoning back to single family residential which would provide some protection. When old homes continued to be torn down, we joined in the effort to form a Historic District Designation.

We were inspired and impressed with the successful efforts in 1973 of many hard-working citizens in the forming of the Ypsilanti Historic District, mainly to protect the magnificent buildings on Huron Street between Michigan Avenue and Cross Street from being torn down, and its inclusion by the State



This unusual Queen Anne style home is located at 305 Maple Street.



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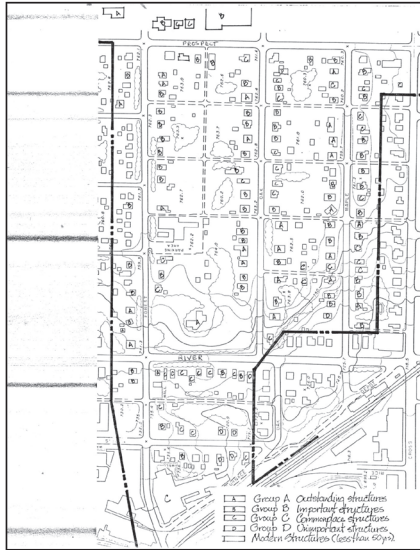


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Historical Commission as a registered Historic Place. Nearly out of desperation to save our neighborhood, in 1978 several of us worked on an application to form an addition to the Historic District of Ypsilanti, Michigan.

I thought that you might be interested in knowing, or to be reminded of, what a unique and wonderful neighborhood we are fortunate to live in. In order to provide justification for adding the East Side neighborhood to the Historic District, a neighborhood report was researched and written by me, Janice Anschuetz, Gene and Georgina Fries, Constance and George McCreedy, Shelly and Bruce Rankin, Marilyn Tabor and Wesley Weir. The Federal Government provided an outline of the topics which we needed to research and write about in order to submit the 40-page document to the Ypsilanti City Council for the initial step of its journey to being recognized as historically significant. In 1978, over 40 years ago, the city council accepted our application and the Historic East Side became part of the historic district changing the direction of our neighborhood. It has been my pleasure, living here for over 50 years, to enjoy the changes and see once derelict flop houses turn into beautiful historic homes again. I donated a copy of this report to the Ypsilanti Historical Society Archives if anyone wishes to read the original. We did an historic survey of the streets and the original document includes photos and designates the homes by types such as Carpenter Gothic, Victorian Wing and Gable, and so forth.

As stated in our narrative "The East Side neighborhood is unique among residential neighborhoods in Southeast Michigan. It is a 19th Century neighborhood relatively undisturbed by infill or encroachment by modern development. While deterioration has dulled its luster, it has not fallen victim to the decay that has destroyed many similar neighborhoods...We believe that this report, together with its Appendix, can serve as rationale for add-



The survey of the houses in the proposed East Side Historic District from 1978.

ing the East Side to the Historic District, as well as a guide for evaluating the impact of any potential changes to the area. Little information bears directly on the growing desirability of the East Side as a residential area, but the net result, the character, ambiance, and individuality of the neighborhood are attractive and deserve to be conserved and nurtured. The East Side Citizen's Association believes that the Historic District will be an in-

valuable tool in furthering the rebirth that has begun on the East Side." And to that I say AMEN.

Following is the first part of the Application for the East Side Historic District designation from 1978.

The Cultural Importance of the East Side Historic District: For over 150 years, the East Side of Ypsilanti has been an area which has contributed to the economic, social, cultural, and political life and growth of this city. We will demonstrate that it is a culturally important area in terms of being an integral part of the development and heritage of Ypsilanti. The area has housed prominent early settlers, land investors, scholars, innovative civic and business leaders as well as generations of families (many homes have housed one family for close to a century), tradesmen, merchants, and political leaders. All of these have championed the character of the city of Ypsilanti, and helped make way for the growth of the middle class.

More specific information on some of these people and their contributions will be found in the appendix (note – I haven't included that in this Gleanings article due to length, but the original



The Queen Anne home with an unusual tower located at 116 Maple Street.

petition can be found in the archives) which the East Side Citizens Association plans as a continually growing document as more and more information is researched. (note – This continuing research was written in the newsletters that we published and distributed in the neighborhood and most of that research is in various Ypsilanti Historical Museum archive files.) However, we will briefly outline here some of the more striking contributions of East Side residents and their effect on the character of the city. In 1825, Joseph and Sophia Peck came to this area by sailing vessel from the East to Detroit, and then traveled with stock and children by flatboat to Snow's Landing at Rawsonville. They purchased 80 acres of land from Prospect St. to the river and from Forest to Holmes, which they shared with a permanent camp of tents belonging to the Pottawatomies. This area was known as Peckville, and although a rich wilderness, the extensive Peck family thought to build a brick school house, which in 1858 had 139 pupils enrolled. Parts of this structure still remain at 101 E. Forest, and descendants of Joseph and Sophia lived in the home built in 1838 which was still standing and well maintained at 401 East Forest until the late 1950s.

The tone of Ypsilanti began to change with the excitement engendered by several developments, primarily outgrowths of the Industrial Revolution and steam power. The East Side's proximity to the railroad (steam engines) which could bring raw materials such as lumber into the new city for production into manufactured products, which could be shipped by train to markets throughout the United States, plus the nearness to the Huron River which could be channeled for power, helped to develop the East Side as one of the most desirable places in the city to invest and live in. Many still standing large homes, such as the Swaine Home, were built with money generated by the outgrowths of the Industrial Revolution.

Land investors and prominent busi-



An example of Carpenter Gothic located at 321 East Cross Street.

nessmen of the time, not only bought and sold property on the East Side, but lived there with their families as well. Some examples are the Follett home which stood on River Street between Oak and Maple. Follett, who is well known for the character of buildings in Depot Town, built a large home with extensive gardens and a fountain operated by a windmill water pump. Part of this structure still exists. Benjamin Thompson, builder of The Thompson Block in Depot Town (note – This is not correct. The so-named Thompson Block was built by Mark Norris out of bricks from the Western Hotel he owned across the street from it and was originally known as The Norris Block. When he died in the 1850s, Thompson bought the block and renamed it.) likewise lived at 116 Maple Sreet. Joslin, who is well known for his early civic and business interests which shaped the character of Ypsilanti also lived on River Street between Oak and Forest Street (correction - Forest Avenue).

The Michigan Central Depot and its gardens were known throughout America for their unique beauty, and the agent who directed The Michigan Central plantings lived at 305 Maple (The Damon House). Several resi-

dents of this area shared Damon's nationwide fame, and yet chose to dwell in this East Side area of Ypsilanti. The story of Hutchinson is well known in this city; an innovative idea and hard work helped make him a millionaire, yet he built his mansion on River and Forest Sreets. Another lesser-known successful businessman was Charles Vandussen who grew up at 329 Maple Sreet, worked his way up to be president of the Kresge Co., and came back to Maple Sreet where he moved the small family homestead off the lot (to 314 E. Forest) and built a more fashionable home on the lot than the small Greek Revival which still stands.

The East Side boasted cultural leaders. Two that come to mind are Frederick J. Swaine who was called "The Father of Classical Music in Michigan" by Frederic Pease (Pease Hall at EMU) and Professor Gill, for whom Gill Hall at EMU is named, made his home at 416 E. Cross. Frederick Swaine's 106 year old piano still stands in the parlor of the house he built at 101 E. Forest.

Among other prominent East Side city leaders residing in this area were: Dan Ayers Stadtmiller a prominent judge and his wife who was treasurer of Ypsilanti from many years; Ray Burrell

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The Swaine house at 101 East Forest is an example of a very elaborate Queen Anne Style.

who was mayor of Ypsilanti in 1935; and Joseph Thompson, now a prominent person on Mackinaw Island and his father, O. E. Thompson businessman and former Dodge Dealer owner, as well as Maro Read who was President of The Ypsilanti Savings Bank.

During the 1920's, smaller homes were built among the large Victorian homes in this area, which culturally reflect both a change from extended-family life-styles to nuclear family living, and also the rise of the middle-class family into a distinct economic unity now able to purchase a home. Many of these homes were built by Frederick Bortz, whose widow still lives in a house built by her husband. (note: Francis Lidke, who lived at 326 East Forest, also built some of these homes.)

In summary, the East Side of Ypsilanti has been an area which has contributed to the economic, social, cultural, and political life and growth of the city and is unique and worthy of preservation in that it continues to reflect the character, charm, and economic patterns of the city's history.

The Architectural Importance of the East Side Historic District: (note:

Brue Rankin, part of the team that researched and wrote this document, is an architect and if I remember correctly was largely responsible for the architectural survey done of our neighborhood and writing this part of the application.) The East Side of Ypsilanti represents a continuity of Architectural styles spanning the 19th Century in Southeast Michigan. While only a few structures are outstanding examples of their particular style, the neighborhood is unusually pure as a 19th Century neighborhood. Only a few homes are modern (post Depression) and very few have been altered to a degree that destroys the character of the Architecture.

Except for a brief period (1890's), none of the homes represent the largest or most elaborate forms of their respective styles. Rather, most represent the interpretation of major styles into the forms of the average working man. They are the "everyman" homes common to so many early cities, which most often have been lost to the expansion of downtowns or to more recent urban decay.

Four basic styles are represented. The earliest is Greek Revival, typified

by low pitched gabled roofs with pediment like gable returns and rectangular forms. (A good example would be the small house at 304 E. Forest). The Italianate style, while not the most common, includes some of the most interesting homes in the district. These are “cube” form frame houses, symmetrical and almost square with hipped low pitched roofs with generous bracketed overhangs. The newest style prevalent on the East Side in Bungalowoid (early 1900’s) is typically small, one story with a porch roof often integral with the main roof. These homes may have gables forming a second story. (A good example would be 329 Oak. Good examples of Italianate are 306 Oak and 214 Oak).

The most important general style is Victorian. Victorian architecture encompasses a combination of many different styles. It is often eclectic and therefore difficult to describe. Several distinct types may be identified that are clearly definable. Queen Anne (600 North River, 323 Maple) is characterized by irregular outlines and massing, steep pitched roofs and a variety of color and textures. Different wall surfaces are often used on the same structure with various shaped windows. Gables and chimneys are important. Two unusual Queen Anne homes with towers are 116 Maple and 305 Maple. Carpenter Gothic is characterized by very steeply pitched roofs often with pointed or arched windows in the gable ends or inside gables. Several houses on the East Side show the influence of this style though quite simplified (305 Oak, 611 North River). Shingles Style is perhaps an extension of Queen Anne in which shingles in various patterns and forms are used as a major siding treatment. The only good example is 217 Oak.

The Victorian style in general is used in this study to classify the many late 19th Century structures with steep roof pitches and asymmetrical form which are not otherwise identifiable as specific styles. Most are small, simple homes which borrowed only general forms and simple details from the

more elaborate structures commonly discussed by historians.

One form of structure which crosses several style lines and may be the single most important architectural element unifying the neighborhood is the “wing and gable”. This form is one of the most common forms of small homes built during the middle and latter portions of the 19th Century (1850-1890). The East Side includes examples of this form in Greek Revival, Victorian, and even Queen Anne style, from very simple (316 East Forest) to very elaborate (101 East Forest). A very common variation is “wing and shed”, having a shed added to the side of the basic two story structure (304 East Forest).

The character created by the streetscape and the consistent architecture are extremely important in this area. This is a 19th Century neighborhood intact and basically complete.

The houses in the East Side were surveyed in an effort to document their architectural historic value and relative importance to the character of the neighborhood. The survey method was developed by the Saginaw County Planning Commission to evaluate an area considered to be important for its community as a neighborhood.

The houses were grouped into four categories, based on their individual and collective importance. Group A structures are outstanding examples of their particular style, in generally good condition, worthy of preservation in their own rights. They form the nucleus of the district. Group B structures are important to the visual character of the neighborhood and the history of the area. Their character should be maintained. Group C structures are commonplace, but are important to the overall fabric of the neighborhood. Properly maintained, they will support the character of the neighborhood, restored they would add to it. Group D structures are of little value to the neighborhood and need not be retained if structures more in character could replace them.

Modern structures (built since 1925), a number of which occur on East Forest, are not included. In most cases they do not detract from the character of the neighborhood and should be maintained.

A map shows the concentration and pattern of homes of relative architectural/historical value. One of the most important factors in the analysis was the environmental context. The total number of structures in the proposed addition to the historic district is 167, including some commercial and industrial buildings. Of these, 25 or 15% are Group A, 64 or 38% are Group B; just over half, then, are important for their architectural and historical value and are worthy on their own, of inclusion in the historic district. Group C includes 36, or 21%, structures which of themselves, are not worthy of preservation as historic structures, but which do contribute to the overall historic character and continuity of the neighborhood. Thus, fully 75% of

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the structures in this area contribute enough to the neighborhood to merit conservation. (If the concentration of new homes on the north side of Forest is eliminated, that percentage approaches 85%).

This study is not an in depth analysis of each structure but rather, an overview survey based on external inspection only. Much fine detailing lays hidden beneath asphalt or asbestos shingles or aluminum siding, having a great deal of potential for restoration. Treated as a whole, the East Side is an Architectural entity worth of preservation.

The Geographical Importance of The East Side Historic District: The East Side area generally bounded by Forest Avenue, Prospect Street, and Michigan Avenue, comprises the residential community which was serviced by, and which supported the East Side commercial district now known as Depot Town. In the early days of Ypsilanti's development, the Huron River appears to have had a distinct separat-

ing effect on the city.

The development of mills on the Frog Island portion of the river (which was dammed as early as 1827) gave rise to a significant commercial district in the Cross-North River area by the 1830's. The extent of the development is evidenced by the Western Hotel built in 1838 by Mark Norris. Bricks from this brick and stone structure were used to build the Thompson Block (first known as the Norris Block) and other pre-Civil War buildings illustrating the size and magnitude of the hotel. With the rise of the lumber and paper industries in the 1860's, Depot Town developed rapidly. As lumbering faded and several mills closed, the development in Depot Town stopped (towards the end of the 19th Century).

The East Side residences document the growth pattern of the Depot Town area possibly even better than the structures in Depot Town itself. The earliest houses in the neighborhood are Greek Revival homes from the 1830's. Most are small, the homes of

tradesmen, the workmen who built and operated the mill (with the exception of the Peck House, the early homes of businessmen were on North River and North Huron Streets).

As Depot Town blossomed in the 1860's, the merchants and businessmen of the area used their profits to build the larger Italianate and Victorian homes of the 1870's, 80's and 90s. They were joined by educationers from the Normal College. Most of the larger homes of that period are concentrated about the crest of the hill (200 block of Oak and Maple). The smaller homes of the workers were built farther away in the 300's block of Oak and Maple. Several of the later homes (such as the Hutchinson House, 600 North River, or the Reed House, 323 Maple), were built in the 1890's in the Queen Anne style. There were the homes of business leaders in the city as a whole, reflecting the merging of the city in the late 19th Century into a more unified community.

At this time (1889) Mill Street became



The Hutchinson House at 600 North River Street (circa 1913) is an excellent example of the Robber Baron style.

Maple Street. The mills were gone and the railroad had long since cut the street off from the river. Another measure of the stature of the neighborhood was the fact that it was the first area of the city to be electrified (1887), the Swaine House (101 East Forest) being the second home in Ypsilanti to have electric power. In 1894, the cemetery between Cross and Oak Streets became Prospect Park, through the efforts of neighborhood citizens, most notably, the Reeds. This was the first park in Ypsilanti. At least two early 20th Century mayors of Ypsilanti lived on the East Side.

With the turn of the century came the rise of the Middle Class, working people with sufficient means to own their own homes. This trend is reflected on the East Side by the infill of bungalowoid and other smaller homes built between the turn of the century and the Depression. With the exception of the East Side of the 500 block of North River Street, these 20th Century homes are spotted through the neighborhood between older homes which

originally had been separated by open lots. This pattern is clearly seen on the north side of Oak Street in the 300 to 400 blocks where nearly every other house is 40 to 60 years newer than its neighbor.

The 500 block of North River Street on the eastside of the street, was occupied by the Follett Homestead (an early Gothic structure which lasted only until the end of the 19th Century. The solid block of bungalowoid homes that replaced it are unique, the result of the only major redevelopment on the East Side.)

The East Side then, represents in its architecture and pattern of development, the influence of the industrial and commercial fortunes of the Depot Town area. It illustrates the pattern of Ypsilanti's early growth and provides the context for two of the earliest and most significant park developments in the county, and in fact, the entire state.

End of the Application for the East Side Historic District: I hope that you have enjoyed learning more about the

Historic East Side of Ypsilanti and the reasons that it is important to not only the city's history, but reflects the growth of the state of Michigan. In another issue of the Gleanings, I will provide you with a self-guided walking tour so that you can learn more about some of the people who built and lived in these beautiful old homes. The walking tour will be based on the extensive survey of homes that we did as a requirement for this application and was included in the appendix. You may want to save this article to provide you with more depth as you stroll up and down our tree-shaded and garden-enriched Historic East Side and remember that in 1978 when we submitted this narrative, our community was rapidly going "downhill" and in danger of being torn down and replaced by nothing less than an industrial park.

(Janice Anschuetz is a local history buff and a regular contributor to the Gleanings.)

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The Ypsilanti Senior Center

BY SALLY SILVENNOINEN



An addition was added to the "Little House" in Recreation Park in 1963.

Ypsilanti Senior Citizens/Community Center is a hidden gem, with its history tied into the "Little House" located in Recreation Park in Ypsilanti. Recreation Park was originally the Fair Grounds, where the community celebrated the Fourth of July, county fairs, horse racing and other occasions. The Fair Grounds were sold to the city in 1905. This is when a little club house, in the center of Recreation Park, was scheduled for recreational activities. Today, the park and the sidewalks attract friendly people to meander through the charming 19th century neighborhood of homes and magnificent, mature oak trees. The Center is located at the south end of Oakwood Street and North Congress Street. The east side of building has a beautiful collection of rose bushes in a garden. The south side of the building has the community gardens organized by Growing Hope. Those in the community who become involved are good stewards of this beautiful gem of a "Little House."

In 1939, the Girl Scouts of Ypsilanti were given use of the "Little House" at Recreation Park. "Each troop helped paint, make curtains, waste baskets, sit-upons, etc., to furnish the house. It was used for Council meetings, parties, overnights and the summer craft program," wrote Lois Katon in a history of Girl Scouts. The Katon notes indicated there were 14 troops

in Ypsilanti in 1939, with 350 girls as members. The scouts slept in the loft during over-nights. During the winter, the scouts would skate on the frozen surface of the wading pool and then warm themselves by the fire in the "Little House."

In time the Girl Scouts moved to a new location, and "Little House" was used as a voting precinct. When the voting precinct was moved to the new police station on Michigan Avenue in the late 1950's, the "Little House" was left virtually unused.

The senior/community center started as an idea, developed by Alice McFadden and Jesse Rutherford from the Recreation Department, for a community building where adults could gather for recreational, educational and physical activities.

On December 6, 1961, the center was officially opened to the theme, "A Coffee Break for Senior Citizens." During

the coffee break, guests from all segments of the community came to show their interest in this new program. Organized at that time by the Recreation Department and funded by Ford Local 849 and UAW-CIO, the program was initiated. Furniture from the Gilbert House was put in place with the help of many individuals. It became an attractive drop-in-center with all the necessary equipment, ta-



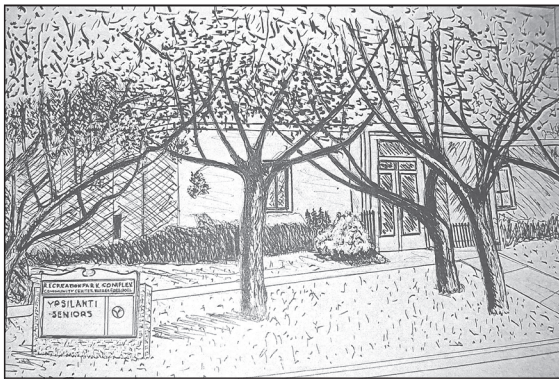
The main entrance to the Senior Center.

bles for cards and games, dancing, group singing, arts, potlucks and socializing.

The seniors soon outgrew the "Little House" and needed an addition which was added in

1963. The community of volunteers from the skilled labor trades, business owners, professors, doctors all worked side by side donating time, labor and money for this community project.

Thirteen years ago, the city closed its Recreation Department, which cut its funding for the senior center. Monica Prince, the director, stepped in to keep the doors open and provide activities for seniors. Monica states, "We partnered with a number of organizations, such as Washtenaw Community College for our senior exercise program, Eastern Michigan University interns share their studies and the AARP federal job training program for seniors help staff our reception and kitchen areas." The center is open 9:00 to 2:00 providing hot, nutritional lunches from a federal senior nutrition program administered by Washtenaw County. This past year, the center celebrated its 57th anniversary in the



A sketch of the Senior Center by Harold Sole.

am hoping we will be able to keep our doors open until 4:00 pm maybe one or two evenings a week. There are seniors who are still working. We would like to provide opportunities for them during the evening.

If we expand hours it would be nice to have more intergenerational activities from 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm so there can be a community connection. Our seniors have a wealth of knowledge. These are the values we can share and connect as a community. Our seniors can pass down information and our youth can pass up new information on technology. We are expanding not only in activities but providing more resources for seniors.

I would like to expand the building. Although its floor space is small, the possibilities are limitless. These are my hopes, dreams and wishes. This is my wish list.

This is our mission statement. "Our mission: To provide opportunity for positive, safe and structured recreational, educational and networking activities targeted toward seniors and the community that supports them."

We are dedicated to continuing our work to fulfill our mission of providing services for seniors in the area. The "Little House" is a hidden gem and was just the beginning. We need to keep pushing our mission because a lot of people who could benefit from our programs don't even know we are here.

community.

We just started a new Memory Café where caretakers and care persons can socialize. What I am hoping to see in the future is expanded hours. I

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A new Memory Café has been established at the Senior Center where caretakers and caregivers can socialize.

(Sally Silvennoinen is an active member of the City of Ypsilanti Senior Center Writer's group.)

Two Bottles of Blood on the Wall

BY JAMES MANN

Sometime in 1894 Professor William Sherzer gave a reporter for “The Ann Arbor Argus” a tour of the museum of the Normal School, now Eastern Michigan University. The reporter later noted, “...prying into the recesses of forgotten relics they came across two bottles, each about three inches long and an inch in diameter.”

In one of the bottles there appeared to be coal cinders saturated with blood. On the bottle was a label, yellow with age, stating the bottle contained the blood of Colonel Ellsworth. The second bottle appeared half full with a dark red liquid. On this the label said it held the blood of Jackson, the murderer of Ellsworth.

“The bottle seemed to be carelessly sealed,” reported the account published by “The Ann Arbor Argus” on Tuesday, March 20, 1894, “and yet the blood after the lapse of more than thirty years was still in a liquid condition. There was some further writing upon the labels which the writer does not at this time recall. The history of these two interesting relics, that is, how they came to be in the museum there, no person now about the institution can relate.”

So, how did samples of blood from the first Union officer to be killed in action during the American Civil War, and the confederate sympathizer who killed him, come to be in Ypsilanti, Michigan? Elmer Ephraim Ellsworth had been a law clerk for Abraham Lincoln in his office in Springfield, Illinois. There he studied law under Lincoln, and the two became friends. Ellsworth stood only five foot six inches, but Lincoln would later call him, “the greatest little man I ever met.”

At the outbreak of the Civil War, Ellsworth raised the 11th New York Volunteer Infantry Regiment, called the “Fire Zouaves,” because the men were raised from volunteer fire fighting companies and for their colorful uniforms based on the Zouave soldiers of France in Algeria. These men answered the call of President Lincoln to defend Washington.

The now commissioned Colonel Ellsworth visited his friend at the White House, and viewed through a telescope to Alexandria, Virginia, to see a large rebel banner flying from the roof of the Marshall House. The flag seemed to mock President Lincoln, and to others it became a symbol of the inability of the North to take action against the South.

On May 23, 1861 Virginia ratified secession from the Union by referendum. The next day Ellsworth and his men crossed



Colonel Elmer Ephraim Ellsworth in his uniform in 1861.

the Potomac River by steamboat, while the men of the First Michigan Infantry Regiment approached the city by the river road. Confederate forces had withdrawn from the city; the soldiers faced no resistance as they moved through the city.

As Ellsworth led his men past the Marshall House, he saw the Confederate flag was still flying from the roof. Ellsworth, accompanied by seven of his men, including Corporal Francis E. Brownell, entered the Marshall House. Inside the Marshall House they found a man who appeared half dressed as if he had just gotten out of bed. Ellsworth demanded to know why the rebel flag was still atop the building. The man said he was a boarder.

Now Ellsworth rushed to the roof of the Marshall House, to pull down the flag. This was not the more famous “Battle Flag” but the “Stars and Bars” the official flag of the Confederacy. The flag was large as well, some eight feet by fourteen

feet in size. Ellsworth pulled it down, and as he was coming down the staircase he exclaimed, "boys, I've got the first prize."

At this, the man who appeared to have just gotten out of bed stepped out of his bedroom holding a shotgun in his arms. He was James W. Jackson, proprietor of the Marshall House, and an ardent secessionist. Jackson said, "And I the second." Then he shot Ellsworth dead. Now Cpl. Francis Brownell shot Jackson, then pinned

his body to the floor with his bayonet. The body of Ellsworth was returned to Washington, and the body of Jackson was laid out in his bedroom.

A short time after, the company of First Lieutenant D. A. Wise of the First Michigan Infantry was detailed to the Marshall House. He arranged for six of Jackson's friends to carry the body to a hearse, which was followed by Jackson's widow and daughter. They followed the hearse as it was driven beyond the lines. "After he was car-



MARSHALL HOUSE, ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA, 1861

The Marshall House in Alexandria, Virginia in 1861.

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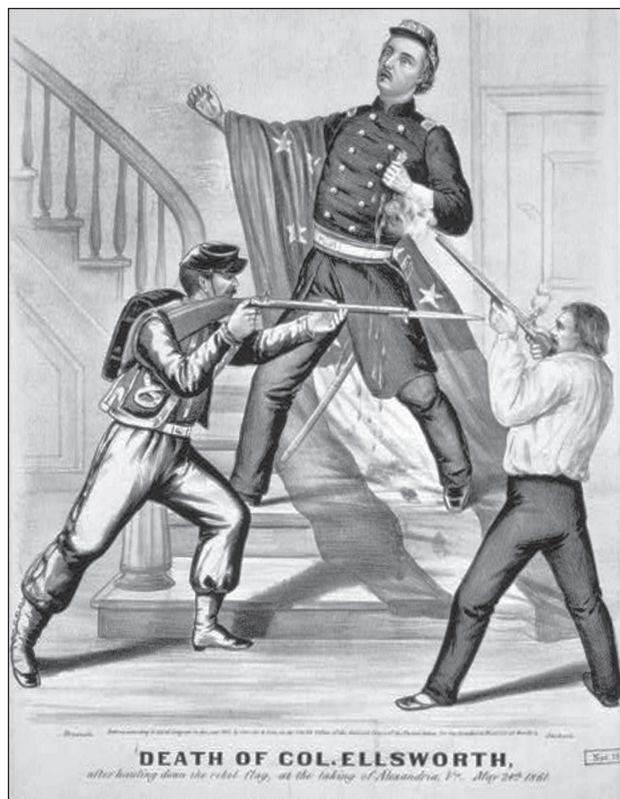
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An illustration depicting the death of Colonel Ellsworth.

ried away," recalled Wise later, "I took two small vials and as the blood of both men had not yet been cleaned away I scraped up on my knife blade some of each from off the oil cloth and sealed the bottles up. On the morning of the 26th I sent them to Prof. Welsh, who was then principal of the Normal School. With the proper labels on them I made the request that he have them analyzed to see which was the bluest and best blood."



The Stars and Bars was the official flag of the Confederacy from March 1861 to May of 1863.

The body of Ellsworth lay in state in the East Room of the White House, and then was buried in Hudson View Cemetery, Mechanicville, New York. Ellsworth was a hero in the north, and many honors were bestowed in his memory, including the naming of new communities in the west, songs and poems. Ellsworth Road in Washtenaw County may have been named in his memory.

Jackson, who was a hero in the south, was buried in Fairfax cemetery. Cpl. Francis Brownell received the Medal of Honor. The Marshall House was demolished in the 1950's. So, where are the two bottles today? As in 1894, today, no one can say.

(James Mann is a local historian, a volunteer in the YHS Archives and a regular contributor to the Gleanings.)

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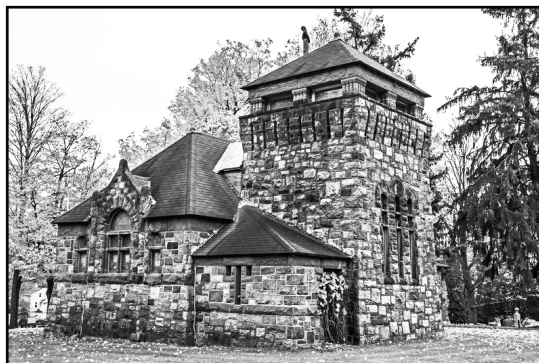
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