Ypsilanti GLEANINGS

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

SPRING 2021

Ypsilanti Historical Society in New Initiative Seeking Local African American HISTORY

BY RICK KATON

A recent meeting at the Ypsilanti Historical Museum, including Mayor Lois Richardson, State Representative Ronnie Peterson, former State Representative Kirk Profit, Historical Society President Bill Nickels and others, was called to discuss a concern shared by everyone present. Our museum tells a story of early life in Ypsilanti in a house built in 1861 by Asa Dow, who came to Ypsilanti to help Daniel Quirk found a bank. The large residence reflects the comforts that a prosperous businessman might enjoy from helping to develop a promising, growing community. It is an appropriate story to tell, but it is not the only story of Ypsilanti.

Brown Chapel A.M.E., established in 1843, located at Adams and Buffalo streets, the second oldest active A.M.E. church in Michigan. It's likely the Chapel assisted in the safe travel to the freedom seekers on their way to Canada.

Other early citizens did not come to Ypsilanti to found a bank. Some arrived in fear for their lives and their freedom. The year 1861 marked the beginning of the American Civil War. Before it began, a small number of the victims of slavery passed through or settled in the free territory, and later the free State of Michigan. Ypsilanti was founded where the great Sauk Trail crossed the Huron River. The trail became US-12, the major early highway between Detroit and Chicago. A significant number of enslaved people from the south sought to escape bondage by fleeing for their lives. For freedom seekers, Detroit was a gateway to Canada, a country free of slavery long before the United States. The Underground Railroad, a network of citizens sympathetic and helpful to the freedom seekers, used the highway as a path to freedom, and the path passed through Ypsilanti.

Dr. Helen McAndrew with son and husband William. They were supporters of the abolition of slavery.

Some early citizens of Ypsilanti took part in this effort. Mark Norris, the founder of a number of local businesses, was said to be a strong supporter of the abolition of slavery. George McCoy, father of the inventor, Elijah McCoy, was known to have transported freedom seekers to Detroit in a tobacco wagon with a false bottom. William McAndrew, husband of physician Helen McAndrew, was credited with similar efforts. Citizens such as these may have

In This Issue...

Society Briefs

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

DURING THE PANDEMIC CLOSURE
Ypsilanti history and genealogy research requests and museum donations continue to be welcomed at:
archives.yhs@gmail.com or 734-217-8236

www.ypsihistory.org

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From the PRESIDENT'S DESK

BY BILL NICKELS

In spite of the continuing influence of COVID, 2021 is off to a good start for our members. Scott Slagor, City of Ypsilanti Preservation Planner, took his second Ypsilanti Walking Tour on Zoom and presented "Historic West Cross." Nobody paid much attention to the history of West Cross until Scott took time to do some research. He shared his discoveries during our second virtual General Membership meeting on Sunday March 21st. Members received a postcard reminding them of the meeting and received an email containing a link to the Zoom program.

On Sunday May 2nd, we will present our third General Membership meeting featuring author Greg Fournier discussing his new book titled *Detroit's Purple Gang: Detroit's Kosher Nostra*. The Purple Gang was Detroit's version of Al Capone's mob in Chicago. Greg also authored *Terror In Ypsilanti – John Norman Collins Unmasked* and *The Richerd Streicher Jr. Murder*, both Ypsilanti stories. All three of his books are available in our gift shop by calling 734-217-8236.

Our members received a "WANTED" note with their membership renewal letter in February. We were looking for snapshots and/or old 8 mm films from the '50s through the '70s for the production of a period film. With Ypsilanti native Brian Kruger and his *Stunt3 Productions*, the project is moving along towards completion.

Starting with this issue of the *Gleanings*, articles about growing up in Ypsilanti during the '60s and '70s written by Ypsilanti natives will be included. This series will continue in *Gleanings* issues during 2021 and beyond.

Ypsilanti's Black History, in many cases, goes back to the Civil War. We do have an Ypsilanti Black History file collected by EMU Librarian AP Marshall. The file is rich in names, places, and dates, but lacks personal experiences related to living and growing up in Ypsilanti. Kirk Profit approached me and expressed a desire to tell about these personal experiences. With State Representative Ronnie Peterson and Mayor Lois Richardson, Ypsilanti's Black citizens will be invited to share their memories for the writing of another series of *Gleanings* articles that will fill this historical gap.

We have some really GOOD NEWS for 2021 and beyond. In spite of the financial hardships imposed by COVID, Eastern Michigan University will continue our partnership that provides Graduate Assistant Internships to staff our Museum and Archives. Their graduate students are from their Historic Preservation Program and bring professional expertise to both our Museum and Archives. A BIG THANKS to EMU President James Smith!

As the weather gets warmer and the number of people getting vaccinated increases, we are increasingly hopeful that we will be able to reopen both our Museum and Archives by early summer. We continue to be available for archival questions by calling 734-217-8236 or emailing yhs.archives@gmail.com. In the meantime stay safe.

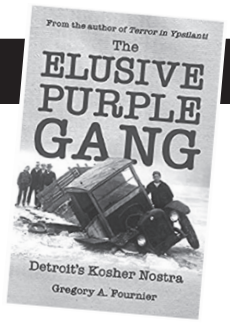
SAVE THE DATE

May *Virtual* Meeting

May 2, 2021 , 2 PM (est)

Author Greg Fournier will discuss his new book

The Elusive Purple Gang: Detroit's Kosher Nostra



helped to establish a somewhat more tolerant, if not entirely welcoming attitude toward freedom seekers in the community. It appears that some refugees and freedmen of color even felt safe settling and staying in Ypsilanti.

African Americans living in the north still faced many dangers. After the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, Federal Marshalls, and even bounty hunters, charged with returning the *"property"* of slave owners, sometimes attempted to fulfill their mission by snatching free persons of color and delivering them into slavery. Actual fugitives, and even freedmen, were never truly safe until after the Civil War was decided. Many people my age were taught in school that, at that point, the heroic white people who carried out the Civil War for the Union, led by Abraham Lincoln, *"gave"* the slaves their freedom, and a chance to live happily ever after. We rarely heard about the more than 100,000 African Americans who volunteered to wear the uniform of the Union and take up arms to help win their own freedom. We also heard little of the struggles and betrayals that followed their liberation, as they tried to recover from over two hundred years of bondage for people of color. Most had been forbidden, by law, to even acquire the ability to read or write. Many had been kept in living conditions barely fit for animals.

After the end of the war in 1865, the restored union entered a period of Reconstruction. Much was promised. There was talk of *"forty acres and a mule"* to help with the transition to freedom. Free schools were established. A constitutional amendment *"guaranteed"* freed slaves the right to vote. Even an early civil rights bill was passed. In parts of the south, African American public officials were elected. Communities of color formed, and commerce sprang up. Ulysses S. Grant was elected president, and remembering the loyal and brave service of the black volunteers, he championed the cause of freedom, and sent troops to enforce the new laws when needed. But all of that was bargained away with the election of Rutherford B. Hayes as the next president. It was a disputed election, and he needed the support of the defeated white, southern Democrats to attain power. He offered, in return, a free hand for them to overturn the restrictions of Reconstruction and put themselves back fully into power. They disenfranchised their African American citizens of the vote by circumventing the law, and installing the near-slavery conditions of sharecropping on a widespread basis. The civil rights law was repealed. Prisons were turned into labor camps to further exploit cheap labor with African Americans, arrested on trivial charges, as the primary victims. They saw it *as "putting the negro back in his place."* Terrorist groups, including the Ku Klux Klan, arose to enforce the new (old) order. Lynchings became more common. The land and the mule never arrived.

We have touched on the *beginning* of the African American story, at the national level, during the history of Ypsilanti. But there is so much more. All of these developments affected why and when black Americans made the decision to leave behind terrible oppression and seek, hopefully, better conditions elsewhere, in places like Ypsilanti.

There was *"Jim Crow"* segregation in the south, backed by the Supreme Court's Plessy vs. Ferguson decision, supporting the doctrine of *"separate but equal."* There was the industrial revolution, with ever growing demands for labor that eventually reached African Americans. There was the Model T Ford that put transportation within reach of individuals, helping to spur *"The Great Migration"* to the north. There were wars that offered hope of earning full citizenship through service, but resulting in mostly menial assignments, no respect, and no change in the conditions that the soldiers returned

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to. There were the Roaring 20's, the Great Depression, the New Deal, organized labor, and WWII. Throughout these currents of history, the modern civil rights movement was being born, as the 1940's, '50's and '60's produced Thurgood Marshall, Rosa Parks, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and many others. There was the landmark civil rights legislation of the Lyndon Johnson presidency. There was the Vietnam War. There was Affirmative Action. These were great currents of American history, but African Americans played a major role in all of them, and their lives were affected in unique ways. Movements like urban renewal, the Interstate Highway system, school desegregation, professional sports desegregation, and The War on Drugs, with mass incarceration, also played their parts, while multi-racial popular music and entertainment played in the background. Throughout these landmark historical happenings, Ypsilanti experienced the comings and goings of other groups with ties to changing conditions. The Normal School grew into a university. The Second World War brought streams of job seekers to staff the Arsenal of Democracy, and later, the auto plants. Many came from the south and mid-south with different cultural norms and expectations, including attitudes toward race.

This writer is able to cite these influences on African American history largely due to the efforts of the great educator, historian and story teller, Dr. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. of Harvard University. One of the few benefits during the pandemic lockdown of the past year has been the rebroadcast by PBS television of some of Dr. Gates's wonderful documentary series, such as "*Reconstruction: America After the Civil War,*" *"And Still I Rise,"* and *"The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross."* His series, *"Finding Your Roots*," shows that many families have a story, and the stories can be fascinating. The work of Dr. Gates, and others, helps to frame the context in which the history of our people, black and white, takes place in this country. It helps to stir an awareness of our personal histories as well.

With a bedrock of religious faith, Ypsilanti's African American community has lived through and been part of all of these stories. Some citizens have even played major roles that others may not be aware of. Some have, of course, also had unique accomplishments of their own.

The group meeting, described in the first paragraph of this article, was called to discuss finding ways to uncover and share the stories of today's African American Ypsilantians. We hope to make the Ypsilanti Historical Museum a place where some of these stories can be better illustrated and shared with the community. We also hope to share some of these wonderful stories through the publication you are reading now. The *"Gleanings"* of the Ypsilanti Historical Society has long been distributed to hundreds of local history enthusiasts four times each year.

Any citizen or former citizen of Ypsilanti is encouraged to share a story of historical interest through the *"Gleanings"* by contacting the Ypsilanti Historical Society. It can

Some of the local stories we have to tell . . .

Jon E. Barfield was born in Ypsilanti in 1951 and graduated from Ypsilanti High School in 1969. He earned a degree at Princeton and a law degree from Harvard University. He and his brother and sisters took over their father's highly successful company and gained new heights, making it one of the most successful black-owned businesses in America.

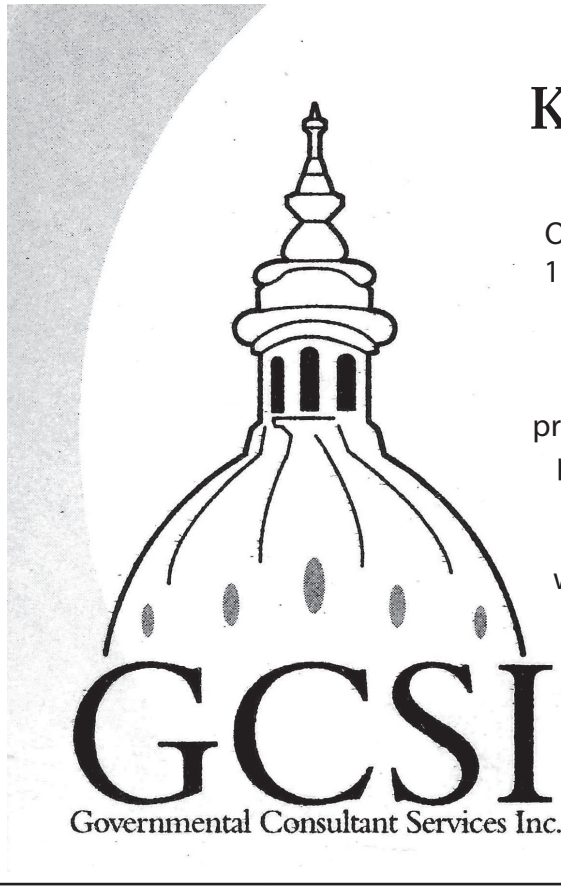
Louise L. Bass came to Ypsilanti for graduate work at Eastern Michigan University and the University of Michigan. She was a distinguished educator, teaching mathematics to generations of young people. She gave her time to countless organizations and was a devoted member of Brown Chapel A.M.E. Church.

Charles Eugene Beatty came to Ypsilanti to attend college in the early 1930's. He set World records in track competitions. He became an educator and was Michigan's first black public school principal.

be from long ago, or more recent. We wish to extend a special invitation to African American citizens, now and in the future, to share family stories that have come down, or that you have experienced yourself. These stories need to be preserved to share with young people in our community, and for future generations. Perhaps your story involves one or more of the historic events or movements listed above that still affect us today!

If you would rather tell your story verbally than write it down, don't worry. We are making efforts to provide recording capability so you can leave your mark on posterity. If you can tell it, you can share it. Let us hear from you. Let your children and grandchildren hear from you. Let's make sure our museum can tell the complete history of Ypsilanti!

(Rick Katon is a lifelong Ypsilantian, a Historical Society board member, and an occasional contributor to "Gleanings.")



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Growing Up in Ypsilanti in the ‘60s Before

The four older Gellott children in front of our house in West Willow in 1959.

“The Sixties”

BY LAURA GELLOTT

Whenever I hear the words “Friday Night Lights,” I return in memory to Ypsilanti.

The damp evening chill holds the smoke of burning leaves. It is 1962, or 1963, and along with my father and a couple of my siblings, we are at Briggs Stadium, where the Eastern Michigan Hurons are on the field. We are not *in* the stadium, but standing on the Oakwood Street side of the field, with others interloping on the proceedings. The memories of those chill fall evenings endure long after any recollection of what happened on the field.

The proximity of the EMU campus is a significant part of my memory of growing up in Ypsilanti in the 1950s and 1960s – the 1960s before it became ‘The Sixties.’ As an historian and professor, I would one day hold forth on the concept that decades don’t neatly align. There is Europe’s Long Nineteenth Century, extending to 1914; or the short American Century: 1945 to, perhaps, September 11, 2001, or January 6, 2021. So too, The Sixties – the turmoil and counter culture that came to characterize it – could be said to begin in 1963 with the Kennedy assassination and end only in 1974, with Nixon’s resignation. Or one could argue for an even shorter decade, 1963 to 1970, when campus protest ran head-on into the Kent State shootings and the self-inflicted wound of the bombing of the Army Math Research Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where, in 1977, I would enroll as a graduate student.

My family lived, during the short incarnation of the 1960s, in the newer section of College Heights: defined by Whittier, Roosevelt, Witmire, Kingwood and Collegewood Streets, between Cornell and Mansfield. The neighborhood was developed and built in 1962. By the time we moved into our house on Kingwood in late August, construction had leapfrogged Candy Cane Park and houses were going up on the newly carved-out Courtland Street. We walked to St. John’s Elementary School on Florence Street. The route took us through campus: down “Old Kingwood,” as we called it; up Oakwood, and through the campus: behind the bleachers of the baseball field and past the power plant; past Rackham Hall; past the boulder, which increased in density with every rival coat of paint applied by fraternities and soror-

ities; past the dormitories; before cutting over to Forest Avenue and up Ballard Street to St. John's. Often, going home, and with advance permission, we walked Cross Street to Washtenaw, stopping at the McKenny Student Union for a coke, our put-on grown-up airs undoubtedly fooling no one.

Groundbreaking for St. John's High School, 1961.

The early 1960s – the '60s before The Sixties – was a time when college life still resembled that of the 1950s. West Cross Street was lined with shops catering to a student crowd. Marshall's Book Store, musty and dusty, its scarred wooden floors creaking underfoot. Mellencamp's University Shop –"For Guys / For Dolls:" its windows displaying pleated wool skirts, cashmere sweaters, and Madras-plaid purses (my sister and I each bought one of those). Superior's, with its soda-fountain counter, booths, and juke box. During Homecoming Week, student organizations, armed with buckets of tempera paint, covered the windows up and down Cross Street with Greek logos, football caricatures, and Peanuts characters ("A Charlie Brown Christmas" having first aired in 1965).

My childhood and adolescence were not spent entirely in College Heights. My parents' trajectory went from living at my grandfather's house on Washtenaw to an upper flat across the street. From there, thanks to a VA mortgage and the GI Bill, my parents achieved at a young age what it took their parents much longer to realize: the dream of home ownership. That home was a brick ranch in West Willow, one of hundreds such, built in 1955, identical but for the color of the siding trim. Living room/dinette, kitchen, three bedrooms, one bathroom, a sink and toilet in the basement tucked into a room roughed out in two-by-fours and plywood. Fifteen thousand dollars, as opposed to the $21,500 my parents paid seven years later for the four bedroom, two-and-a half bath house in College Heights (my parents saved $4,000 by foregoing the two-car garage and family room).

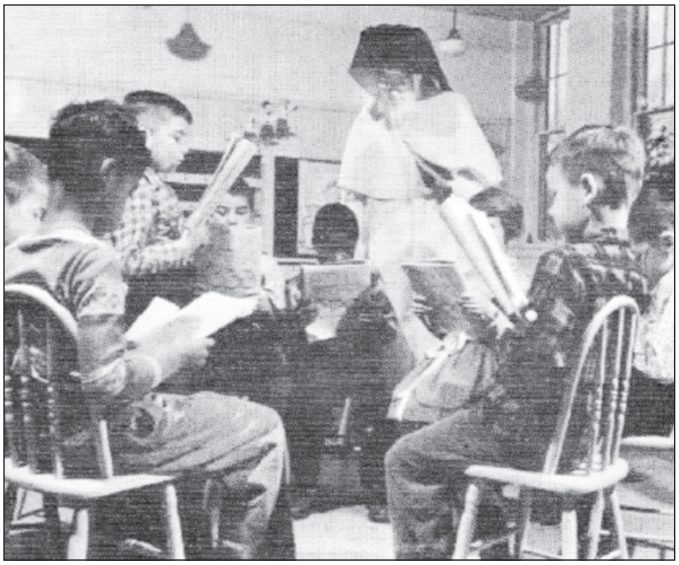
At the new house on Kingwood in College Heights in the Spring of 1963.

West Willow at its beginnings reflected the optimism of the 1950s. The houses were starter homes in the truest sense. Growing families, fathers with family-supporting jobs, allowing mothers to remain at, or consigning them to, the home. And was there ever a better metaphor for the dominance of the auto industry in southeastern Michigan than West Willow? Streets named for cars: Hudson, Olds, Desoto, Nash, Dodge, Buick, Studebaker, Zepher, Chevrolet. Our house on Nash Street backed onto "The Field," a tract of undeveloped land, our untamed and wild playground, where we climbed – and fell from – trees, dug sand pits, and built forts of discarded corrugated metal and carpet remnants carelessly tossed there. The field extended to the Willow Run Expressway, the General Motors Assembly Plant, and the Willow Run Airport. The assembly plant produced Hydra-Matic transmissions, and starting in 1958, the Corvair. The Body by Fisher Cinderella Coach logo, shining across the expressway and field, was a neon night light into our bedrooms; its comforting glow conveying the stability and permanence of an economy built on the automobile. Did we fail to notice that, with few exceptions, those car brands after which West Willow's streets were named weren't made anymore? That which rises….The car culture ultimately contributed to West Willow's decline. The redesigned and expanded freeway system created a lasso around the subdivision. Property values plunged, and homeowners fled.

A constant factor linking life in West Willow to that in College Heights were the bi-weekly visits to the Ypsilanti Public Library. The library of my childhood was the old Ladies Library, originally the Starkweather home, on Huron Street. 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. Going to the library carried with it the solemnity of going to church. In 1963 the library moved to the old post office building on Michigan Avenue; less glamorous, but still a building that conveyed a sense of civic grandeur and purpose.

The other connecting link was our attendance at St. John's School, first the grade school and then St. John's High School, at 2020 Packard Road, now the Faithway Baptist complex. The high school began in

1957 in classrooms at the grade school on Florence Street, and graduated its first class from there in 1961. That same fall, the building on Packard Road opened. In 1966-1967 (my freshman year) an addition doubled the size of the building. For much of that year students attended on a split-shift schedule to accommodate the available classrooms and the construction site around us. By 1970 it was all over. The high school closed its doors, our class the final one to graduate. The full history of that brave little high school, what it accomplished during its short life, the fierce fight to save it, and the legacy the school left in the lives of the hundreds of students who passed through its halls, has yet to be fully written. But it too is a story of the 1950s and 1960s: one that encompassed the optimism of the 1950s, the baby boom, and the bricks-and-mortar era in the history of the American Catholic Church. By the end of the 1960s, the wider sense of upheaval, social change, and the seismic currents shaking the foundations of religious life, especially that of communities of vowed sisters, converged to precipitate a wave of closures of Catholic schools, including our high school.



A classroom in the old Needham Hall Building, St. John's Grade School, 1955.

St. John's Grade School was also illustrative of the 1950s and '60s, as well as the dawning Sixties. The grade school consisted of two adjacent and connected buildings. The older one, Needham Hall, built in 1884 (it was torn down in 1980), housed grades one through three. The 1955 addition – all glass and cement block, with a fire door exit from each classroom – was built to accommodate the baby boom generation. On warm fall and spring days, the turquoise fire doors on both the Cross Street parking lot side as well as the Florence Street side of the building stood wide open; and with all interior classroom doors open into the corridor as well a magnificent breeze stirred through the building. Inconceivable today, in the era of school shootings, that doors just steps off a street should be flung wide open. "Never such innocence again."

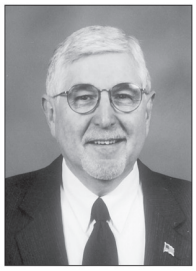
But it was in those same classrooms that announcements of The Sixties arrived. The Kennedy assassination on a rainy Friday afternoon in November, 1963. The Civil Rights Movement. It was in the aftermath of Bloody Sunday in Selma in 1965 that students at Ypsilanti High School staged a demonstration and walk-out, marching up Cross Street towards the EMU campus to join a demonstration there. I remember our seventh-grade teacher, Sister Marion Therese, telling us to go to the windows of our classroom so that we could "see what is happening in our country." The directive was conveyed in a manner that signaled the gravity of the event and approval of it as well. A year earlier, St. John's Parish had been assigned the first Black priest ordained in the Archdiocese of Detroit in forty years, Fr. Donald Clark. The week after Bloody Sunday, Fr. Clark announced from the pulpit his intention to go to Selma. The next day, in the telling of my grandfather, who helped count the Sunday collection, an irate parishioner phoned the rectory, shouting at the pastor that he did not want any of his money to go to support that [n-word] priest's trip south. Fr. Young, my grandfather reported with satisfaction, told the man to give him his name and he would return not only the amount the man had contributed that Sunday but every dollar he had donated during the previous year. It was in a classroom at the high school, in November of 1968, that we heard over the P.A. system the news that Hubert Humphrey had conceded the presidential election to Richard Nixon. In spring of 1970, from our house on Kingwood, we heard the pop of tear gas canisters as police broke up a student protest over the expansion of the Vietnam War into Cambodia and the shootings at Kent State.

The wider world intruded into the realm of childhood and adolescence in other, enjoyable ways as well. One such was the annual Fourth of July Parade. Given Ypsilanti's status as host of the state's largest parade, Michigan's governors traditionally attended, marching at the head of the parade. I remember Governor G. Mennen "Soapy" Williams, in his trademark polka-dot green tie, and Governor George Romney. My parents, born and baptized Democrats, were nevertheless enthusiastic Romney supporters. "Go shake hands with the governor!" they urged, and we ran into the street to do just that. The parade route usually ran east on Cross Street, headed towards downtown. One year, for some reason, it ran west on Washtenaw Avenue. Grandpa's front porch, with its glider swing, became the parade's unofficial reviewing stand. My grandfather, Ted Weber, was widely-known in Ypsilanti: retired manager of the Ypsilanti-Ann Arbor Detroit Edison office, active in Kiwanis/County Board of Supervisors/Salvation Army/St. Vincent de Paul Society. City officials and notables, passing in open convertibles, waved and called out "Hi Ted," as my grandfather acknowledged the greetings with a simple raised hand and nod of his head.

For several years, the Fourth of July celebrations concluded with a backyard cookout at the home of Ann and George

Makhov. Ann Owens Makhov, one of my mother's closest friends growing up, was the daughter of EMU classics professor J. Henry Owens and his wife Clara, a teacher in her own right. In the mid-1960s, Clara Owens was the driving force behind Ypsilanti's Greek Theater, an event which, in the summer of 1966, staged performances of "The Oresteia" with Dame Judith Anderson, and "The Birds" with Bert Lahr, in Briggs Stadium, converted into a replica of an outdoor Greek theater. The Owenses and the Makhovs were emissaries of a wider world. Ann Owens was born in 1930 in Paris, during her father's sabbatical year abroad. Eaves- dropping on the adults' conversation, I heard George tell of how, as a teenager, he and his father fled the ethnic cleansing and chaos of post-World War II Eastern Europe. Ann and George, both scientists, met at the University of Michigan. Governor and Mrs. Williams attended their wedding; Nancy Quirk

Edward Jones
MAKING SENSE OF INVESTING



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Williams, after all, came from another prominent Ypsilanti family. My mother admiringly quoted Ann as saying that she and George would live on bologna sandwiches for a month if it meant they could spend a weekend in New York. Those Fourth of July gatherings brought together people from the worlds of Eastern Michigan and U of M, people interested in books, in the arts, in politics; a glimpse into a wider world just over the horizon.

Family Christmas in West Willow in 1959.

That horizon was drawing closer in the spring of 1970. Our government teacher, Mr. DuBay, a talented young man who was earning his law degree at night at the University of Michigan, assigned a major term paper to the seniors. The college-bound students were also taking an English course in the mechanics of term paper writing with Sister Carol Denise. The two arranged for our class to have library privileges at EMU's new Porter Library. I was writing a paper, in retrospect laughable in its ambition but not without some core of insight, on the changing tone of the country as reflected in the three presidential elections of the decade: the victories of JFK, LBJ, and Nixon. The feeling of those Saturday afternoons in a university library: the newness of it, the promise of all those unread books, lingers in my mind long after memories of other university libraries in which I have spent a significant portion of my life have crowded in.

Our family left Ypsilanti in the fall of 1970. My departure, at least, was foreordained. I was entering Marquette University, a path that would lead to graduate school at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The day we drove away from the house on Kingwood, headed for Milwaukee, there was a For Sale sign in the front yard. The closing of St. John's High School was followed that spring by a decision

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to close the seventh and eighth grades as well (the entire school closed in 1971). Not only were four of my brothers and sisters stranded by the shuttering of the junior and high school grades but my mother, a teacher at the school, lost her job as well. It was time to honor Dad's oft-expressed wish to shorten his daily commute to the General Motors building in Detroit by moving closer to the city. By the time Thanksgiving Break came around, I came "home" not to Ypsilanti but to Royal Oak.

As the years went by, Ypsilanti became for me a place of memory; a Brigadoon revisited for class reunions, or the occasion of my grandfather's 100th birthday, celebrated with a reception at the Gilbert Residence. Only in recent years: with renewed contact with St. John's classmates, with connections to the work of the Ypsilanti Public Library (born of feeling the need to "give back" to my first library), the discovery online of *Ypsilanti Gleanings* and an introduction to the Historical Society, has my hometown become again for me what it always was in fact: a living, breathing, changing town: one that bears the scars and wears the accomplishments of history, a place where people still spend their childhoods and lay the foundations for a life, wherever that life may hold or take them.

(Laura Gellott is professor emeritus of history at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside, Kenosha. She recently published Helen Perry Curtis and the European Trip of a Lifetime, an excerpt of which appeared in Ypsilanti Gleanings in Spring, 2019.

Information about the book and its author can be found at https://www.helenperrycurtisbio.com)

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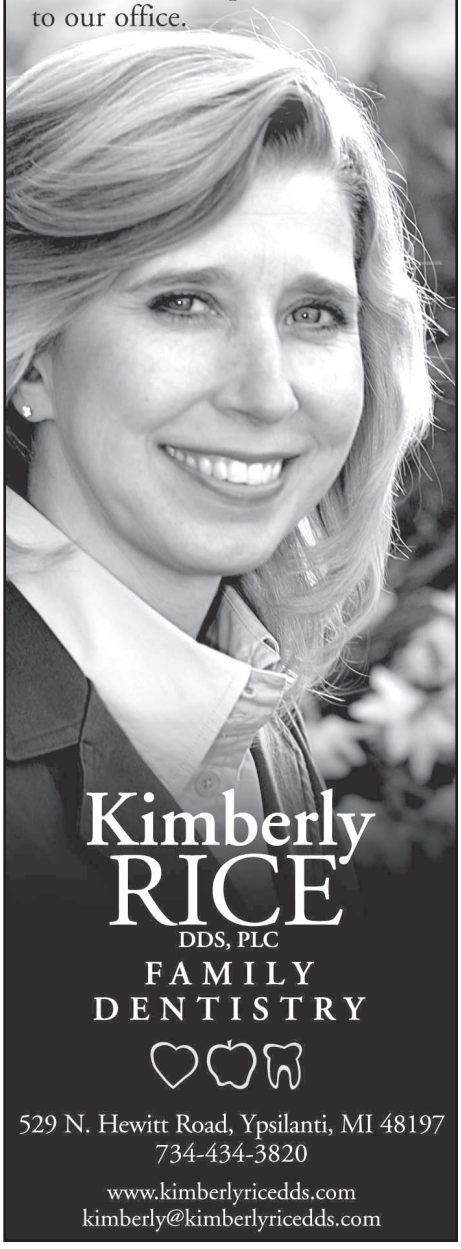

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Growing Up in Ypsilanti in the 1970's – River Street

Robert, Kurt, Eric, Arlea, and Jennifer Anschuetz circa 1973.

BY ROBERT AND ERIC ANSCHUETZ

Growing up at the corner of Forest Avenue and River Street was a great location for kids growing up in the 1970's. Our Anschuetz family had seven members including parents Bob and Jan, with children Arlea, Robert, Eric, Jennifer, and Kurt. We lived midway between Depot Town and the Highland Cemetery along River Street, and spent time going in both directions and everywhere in-between.When we were kids, we often walked down River Street to Holmes Road, then a quick jot toward Dwight Street brought us to a large hilly property we kids used to call *"Fiddley Field."* We're not sure how it got that name, but that's what we called it. We never questioned who owned the field, as far as we were concerned it was a public park for kids. There were lots of mini-bike trails through the field, and we often rode our bikes on those trails. We also did a lot of butterfly netting in that field.

Further down River Street, cutting through Highland Cemetery, we were brought to a small creek that we used to call "Sniggley Creek" at the edge of Clark Road. The creek was actually a small little pond that was full of pollywogs and frogs in the water in the springtime, but dried up throughout the summer. Like "Fiddley Field", we had no idea where "Sniggley Creek" got its name. That mystery was solved, however, in the Summer 2010 issue of *the Gleanings* in an article by George Ridenour called "On the Banks of Sneak-a-Leak-Creek". The article talks about the creek and pond across from his childhood home on Clark Road that he called Sneak-A-Leak-Creek. The name must have had something to do with relieving oneself in the creek! Anyway, it's interesting that "Sneak-A-Leak" morphed into "Sniggley" over the course of a couple generations of Ypsilanti kids like the childhood game of "telephone." Say Sneak-A-Leak fast and you can see how it happened.

We also played in Highland Cemetery quite a bit as kids. This could be part of a side trip to Fiddley Field or Sniggley Creek, or as separate excursions. Highland Cemetery has

served as the main burial grounds for most of Ypsilanti's residents since it was established as an alternative to the original cemetery where Prospect Park now stands. Our Anschuetz family could not walk through the cemetery without visiting the graves of the Swaine family who were the only other residents in our family home. The Swaine family built the house at Forest and River and were buried in a family plot toward the back of the cemetery along the bluff that leads to the Huron River. Coincidently, a tombstone adjacent to the Swaine plot marks the grave for an Ypsilanti resident named Anna Shutts, which is eerily similar, at least in pronunciation, to our last name, "Anschuetz", especially if she went by "Ann" rather than "Anna."

Highland Cemetery gravestone of "Anna Shutts" next to Swaine plot.

It seems odd that a cemetery would be a childhood playground, but it was close to our house, had lots of areas to explore, and we always felt a little bit like we were breaking rules as kids running around a sacred site. Some other neighborhood kids thought the same way as we did. These older kids used to create scavenger hunts throughout the neighborhood, and one of the stops during the game was frequently at the cemetery.

We would often go to the cemetery with our cousins who came to Ypsilanti to stay with us a couple weeks in the summertime from their house in Grosse Pointe. On many occasions, we would just take a walk through the cemetery to enjoy its beauty. To this day, we know of no other cemetery that is more beautiful than the Highland Cemetery. There are big trees that turn glorious colors in the fall, and provide the graves with abundant shade in the summer. There are beautiful old graves, each of which represents a unique individual who had some connection to Ypsilanti – at least on the day that they died. Many of the street names in Ypsilanti are personified by the graves in the cemetery. Sometimes, we would make an adventure out of trying to find the oldest graves in the cemetery.

Highland Cemetery also has a couple of beautiful mausoleums. On more than one occasion when we were exploring the cemetery, the door to the main mausoleum was actually open. We dared each other to go inside, and we seem to remember seeing crypts on the racks, but we didn't dare touch them. We were as afraid of being caught inside as we were scared of being inside a mausoleum with several dead bodies. At one of our older cousin's lead, we held mock séances in the cemetery in order to try to "communicate" with the dead. The séances never were successful, but we sure had fun trying to reach someone from the afterlife. We never were brave enough to have a séance inside one of the mausoleums, though!

Heading in the other direction down River Street, the destination was toward Depot Town. Fortunately, the walk to Depot Town took us past the Hutchinson House mansion, known as Casa Loma before it was purchased by the High Scope Foundation. Casa Loma was another large playground to us with lots of trees to climb. It also had Black Walnut and Ginkgo trees that dropped smelly fruit that would stain our hands for weeks and left bitter tastes in our mouths as we dared each other to taste them. On the way to Depot Town, we would always go to the Train Station. At that time in the 1970's, the Ypsilanti Train Station was still an operational stop on the Detroit to Chicago Route. In the evening, many businessmen in suits would get off the train in Ypsilanti, returning from their jobs in Detroit. The interior of the building wasn't occupied very often, and we would often peek in the windows to see what it was like inside.

After satisfying our curiosity at the train station, we would move on toward Weber's Drug Store on Cross Street in Depot Town. With every spare dime or quarter that we had, we would walk down to Weber's to buy a baseball, a candy bar, or chewing gum. Sometimes we would buy a kite and go fly it at Frog Island. Weber's had everything a kid could want – candy and toys! If we felt extra motivation, we might walk further down River Street all the way to Michigan Avenue for a trip to Miller's Ice Cream. We could sit for an hour eating one of their huge ice cream sundaes or banana splits before walking off some of the calories heading back home.

Growing up on River Street in Ypsilanti during the 1970's led to a great childhood of exploring, playing, and learning about life. As our Mom, Janice Anschuetz, has written about in many articles published *the Gleanings*, we are truly a proud part of the River Street Saga.

(Robert and Eric Anschuetz both grew up in Ypsilanti and are regular contributors to the Gleanings.)

Have You Ever Been in a Pickle?

U of M medical students working on a pickled body.

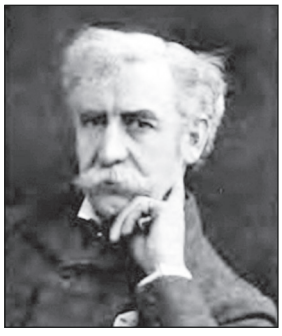
University of Michigan's Pickling Vats!

BY JANICE ANSCHUETZ

WARNING: If you are prone to bad dreams or you are squeamish – read no further. In many ways, I now wish that I hadn't seen those few paragraphs in a weekly newspaper, *The Jeffersonian*, covering Sanilac County where our family cottage is located. Each issue of *The Jeffersonian* has a reproduced article with news from one hundred or more years ago. The article that I read started innocently enough with the headline *"114 Years Ago in Sanilac County"* which would make the original information from about 1906. The reproduced article begins by noting that the newspaper now has a phone, gives the number, and reminds people *"Don't forget to call your news item. Two more deaths have occurred at the county poor farm. Rhonda Slattery, aged 79 years died on Thursday and William Wells, aged 84 years, passed to the great beyond on Sunday night." Then the story becomes interesting: "The remains of these poor unfortunates were sent to the pickling vats at Ann Arbor."*

Did you notice the reference to poor old people who had died and their bodies being sent to *"the vats at Ann Arbor?"* Well, of course, I found that curious and I didn't know what it meant, but it was worth researching, so if you are brave and love history as much as I do, read on! If not, now is the time to turn the page. For those readers remaining, I will tell you what I have learned. The University of Michigan medical school started in 1850, and soon after the Civil War, it grew to become the second largest medical school in the United States. Students were required to learn anatomy through dissection and even had to participate in that familiar college tradition of BYOB - not the well-known acronym of "bring your own bottle", but rather the policy of "bring your own body." BYOB was encouraged, even though it was not always possible. This innocent requirement quickly turned into a cottage industry known as *"resurrection"* – or in other words, grave robbing, in order to provide medical students with dead bodies to be dissected in anatomy classes.

In 1875 Dr. William J. Herdman

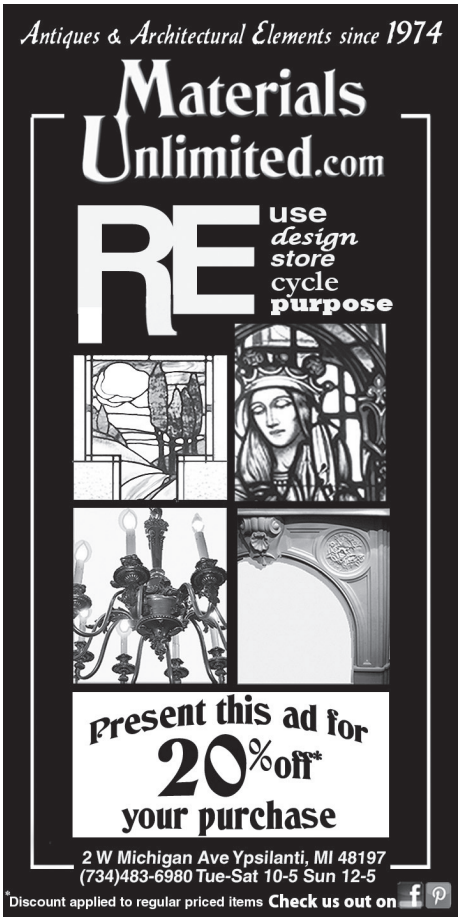


Head of the U of M Anatomy Department - Dr. William Herdman

graduated from the medical college and then went on to be in charge of not only the demonstration of anatomy, but the supervisor of the pickling vats at the university where bodies were kept until needed for education. The man responsible for the care of the deceased in the brine was the janitor, a man by the name of Gregor Nagele, who was hired for this gruesome task in 1850, and continued until 1896. The vats were large communal tubs that were filled with preservatives. It seems that the bodies often arrived in large barrels filled with a preservation agent, with the word *"pickles"* written on the outside. Corpses were always naked, so that no article of clothing could be used to identify the dead. It is said that they would be delivered to the basement of the medical building where Nagele would make sure that payment was made, and then a mixture of red paint and nitrate of silver was injected into the veins. Next, they were placed in one of the vats with stones weighing down the bodies.

Grave robbing was a common threat for grieving loved ones, especially in a town as close to the University of Michigan campus as Ypsilanti. It is said that often a delegation composed of friends and relatives watched over a loved one's grave day and night until it was assumed that the body had decayed enough to be no longer profitable for the criminals to want to steal it. There is a great deal of information available that tells us of the methods used for this profitable business. Various forms of communication, including local daily papers with obituaries, as well as word of mouth, would alert the thieves of a death. Thieves preferred a burial in a county cemetery over one located in town, because there was less chance of being observed. Ideally, the theft would happen in the *"dead of night"* following the burial and required at least three men to orchestrate the robbery. One would be responsible for the horses and wagon which would drive the other two men to within walking distance of the fresh grave with their shovels, tarps, and pick axes. The freshly dug soil would be easy to dig through to the coffin and the soil would be placed on a tarp until

University of Michigan Medical School.



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it was time to return the dirt to the grave. The coffin would then be removed and pried open. All clothing would be taken off of the corpse and placed back in the coffin as it could otherwise be used to identify the deceased if it were to be taken with the body. Any valuables would be kept by the thieves. The corpse was then wrapped in another tarp to be easily transported to the waiting horse cart. Any items on top of the grave such as flowers, small stones, or notes would have been placed on the tarp exactly as they had been on the top of the fresh grave. The last chore would be to return the soil, which was removed from the tarp, tap it down, and then replace any items back on the grave in the same position, with care, so that it would be difficult to detect that the fresh grave had been tampered with.

They hunted old Naegle's vat clean through;
Of the "subjects" they found they swore that *two*
Were the *one* that they were seeking.

A newspaper drawing of a pickeling vat.

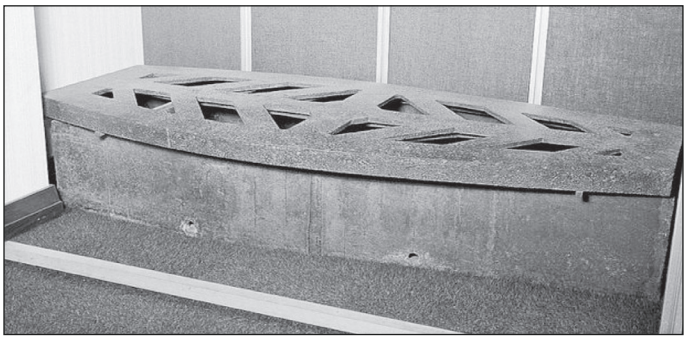
If the body had been taken within a day's drive of Ann Arbor, it would be delivered to Gregor Nagele whose nickname was "Doc." From further away, the body might be shipped by train in one of the barrels labeled *"pickles,"* or even placed in a wooden or metal box with abundant ice, shipped by train, and then delivered to the medical school. It seemed that the University of Michigan Medical School, as the number of medical students increasingly grew in the 1870s and 1880s, never had enough bodies. The school became not only the butt of jokes, but of fear. It is no wonder that we read in the obituaries of several Ypsilanti residents who had died during this time that they wanted to be buried in their own yard. Eighteen-year-old Mary Elizabeth Thompson of Maple Street, expressed this wish and was buried in her own backyard rather than the nearby cemetery, even though it is a small city lot. I know of two eastside Ypsilanti houses where family members were buried. I was once shocked when a relative of the family that had built and lived in our home at the corner of Forest Ave. and River St. told me that she was told that her great-grandfather was buried in our yard! She didn't know if the person who told her that was joking but they pointed out the spot and I surely don't want to get out my shovel and investigate, even though we have dug up seven tombstones from our backyard, which I wrote about in a previous *Gleanings* article. (After further research it seems that these tombstones were replaced by more elegant matching ones at Highland Cemetery and yes the man that was perhaps teasingly said to be buried in our yard's name was on one of them. He was the brother of the home's owner at that time.)

Such was the fear that a grave would be violated and the body of a loved one would end up in *"the vats"* at University of Michigan or another medical school, that an Ypsilanti inventor who owned a foundry actually was awarded a patent for a locking metal coffin that, once it was closed, could not be pried open. John Gilbert, builder of the beautiful Gilbert home on Grove Street, describes this feature in his patent application*: "My invention has for its object to so construct a metallic coffin that when a corpse is placed therein (sic) and the lid is closed down, the coffin cannot again be opened…It consists in providing the coffin lid with internal self acting fastening hooks when placed in position."* There is no question that this was invented to deter grave robbers.

Gilbert wasn't the only inventor trying to protect a loved one's body. I found a patent for a type of grenade that was mounted on top of a coffin that would be activated by the gun powder stored in the coffin if the grave were disturbed, which no doubt would leave the grave robber himself as a customer for the pickling vats. There were other more passive methods to protect a coffin such as iron cages which were driven into the ground surrounding the grave and completely covering the top of it. These must have worked because they can still be seen intact in some cemeteries in Scotland.

This grisly practice, the buying, selling, and pickling of dead bodies in the vats, gained national attention for the University of Michigan Medical College and both "Doc" Nagele, the janitor, and his supervisor, Dr. Herdman, were grilled about the purchasing and preserving of corpses. Numerous articles were written about them and this practice in newspapers across the nation. The reason for this is that in May of 1878, a man by the name of John Scott Harrison, who had been a congressman from Ohio, and was the son of the former President William Henry Harrison, and father of the future President Benjamin Harrison, was buried in North Bend, Ohio. During the service at his grave, his son John Harrison, Jr. and others noticed that a nearby grave of one of their friends had been dug up. John and a delegation of friends soon visited a nearby medical school searching for recently departed Augustus Devin's body. They were shocked when Devin's body was not discovered, but instead found the remains of John Harrison Jr.'s father, the late congressman John Scott Harrison, in a pickling vat.

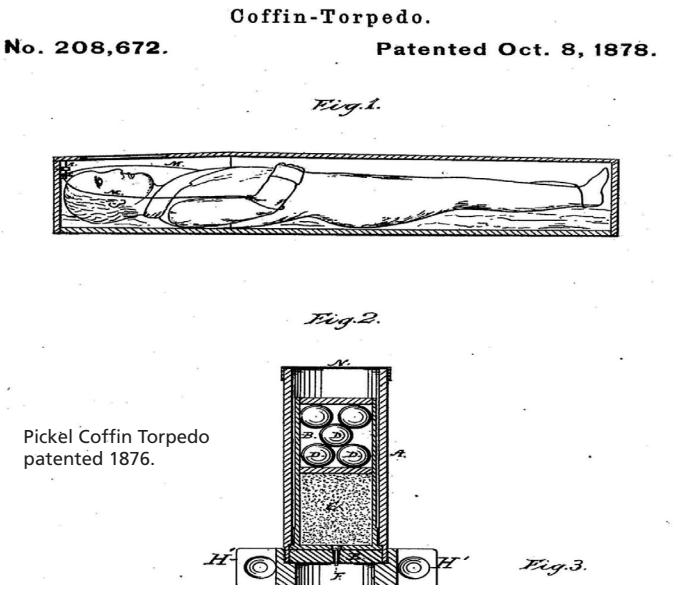
The search did not end there. The men traveled to Ann



A robber proof coffin.

Arbor looking for the still-missing body of Mr. Devins, and on June 12, 1878, an account was written of this endeavor which provides us with a glimpse of the pickling vats at the University of Michigan. It reads as follows: *"The building, a great, gloomy old stone pile, situated in the outskirts of the town, was found nearly deserted, and the school term having closed, and nobody, but the janitor, whose name was Negley (sic) in charge. After some protestations on his part, which were quieted by the displace of a documentary authority, he led the way to the cellar under the building, where he admitted that there were a few bodies which had recently been sent in, and been put in the pickle by himself. There arranged along the side of the vats, were three monstrous vats containing a large number of dead bodies floating in brine. Piled high above these were a large number of empty coffins, rudely broken open and rifled of their precious dead, while upon a rough table in the center of the room, was a mixture of red paint and nitrate of silver, used for injecting the veins. First Negley hurled from their places huge rocks which had been placed above to weigh down and keep in place the bodies. Then, with barred arms, and an expression of fiendish satisfaction, he began reaching down into the vats in search of bodies. As the weights were removed they floated to the surface and were seen to be closely packed in tiers in the vats, like so many slaughtered hogs for the market."* This account gets even more ghastly and therefore I will not quote it here, but the end of the story was that after more than 40 bodies had been dragged out with a type of hooked poker, one by one, the search was finished as poor, misfortunate Devin's body was claimed by his friends and taken back to Ohio.

In my research, I wish that I had not read about other gruesome encounters with pickled cadavers and descriptions of the bodies floating or weighed down in these hellish tubs. This included a University of Michigan medical student discovering the remains of a young woman he had recently danced with in rural Washtenaw County, as well as a fully formed baby bursting forth and floating to the surface, delivered in death from a beautiful woman with long dark hair when the poker nudged her body. It is said that Negley, the keeper of the dead, laughed when this happened, speared the infant, and held it up so others could see it and then weighed it down with a rock in the slimy brine.


Coffin-Torpedo.

No. 208,672. Patented Oct. 8, 1878.

Fig. 1.

Fig. 2.

Fig. 3.

Pickel Coffin Torpedo patented 1876.

Now this ghastly venture was covered in newspapers nationwide as well as locally. Outrage continued for many years. For example, in the early 1880's one of the local

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In 1881 a law was passed requiring that anyone of any age who died in one of Michigan's many poor houses had to be turned over to the University of Michigan Medical School.

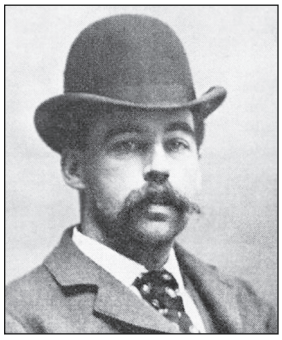
newspapers, *The Ypsilanti Sentinel*, seemed to reflect the feelings of the community of Ypsilanti: *"The study of medicine seems to develop the disposition of hyenas and vampires and an average medical student seems to imagine that the acquirement of his profession consists in hacking and mutilating dead bodies. Even female students become she hyenas, and cackle round a corpse, like magpies. Yet when all these creatures enter practice. what are they? Mere pill peddlers.(sic) Not one in ten of them can amputate a limb, or reduce a dislocation."*

In 1880, the regents of the University of Michigan Medical School charged Herdman with illegally dealing with grave robbers. When Herdman appeared before them, he defended himself by stating that bodies were difficult to come by legally and that he had exhausted his search and felt *"compelled to employ in this clandestine business."* The next year in March 1881, a letter that he had written was produced as evidence of his dealing with grave robbers. It was published by the Maryland newspaper, *the Baltimore Sun*. It read, in part, *"Ann Arbor, Mich., Nov. 21, 1880…I learn through Dr. Rochester of Buffalo, that you are prepared to furnish material for dissection, and I write to ask you how many you may be able to furnish us during the next three or four months, what price you may want, and how you have been in the habit of shipping. We consume over 100 in the course of a winter, and if you desire, and we can make satisfactory terms, we can give you large orders. Please let me hear from you at once. W.J. Herdman."*

"Doc" Gregor Nagele the janitor and keeper of the vats.

There was no doubt that the medical school was needing and seeking corpses by any means possible. This scandal, and what to do about it, went as far as Lansing and the Michigan State Legislature. With the help of Dr. Herdman, a law was passed in 1881 demanding that anyone of any age who died in one of Michigan's many poor houses, including the one for Washtenaw County where the Nelson Meade County Farm Park is now located on Washtenaw Avenue, and the one located in Sanilac County, where the short newspaper obituary starting my research on *"the vats"*, had to be forwarded to the University of Michigan Medical School. This act finally brought to an end

the lucrative business of grave robbing which had frightened communities, especially those near Ann Arbor. However, the vats continued to be in use for many years. The janitor, "Doc" Nagele, keeper of the pickled dead, retired in 1896. He was said to be a clever man who forgot all English when questioned about his duties in the basement of the building. We learn more about Dr. Herdman in *The Cylopedia of American Medical Biography* published in 1912. He was described as a tall man of over six feet *"perfectly proportioned with a large head covered with luxuriant brown hair, high forehead, brown, bush eyebrows shielding the deep set eyes, long curly mustache, deep glance, kindly manner and of remarkable dignity."* He was a Sunday School teacher who once ran for mayor of Ann Arbor, but lost after it became known that he was convicted of assaulting a man for stepping on his newly painted floor. He left his position of being in charge of anatomy and dissection and went on to found an electro-therapy lab at the University of Michigan, and even invited Nikola Tesla to lecture about the benefits of electro-therapy for various ailments. His name became known world-wide when one of his former students, Dr. Henry H. Holmes, who had worked in the vats under Dr. Herdman's supervision, gained international fame as being a confessed serial killer of more than 27 victims. Holmes had started his infamous career by murdering a fellow University of Michigan medical student after taking out a large insurance policy on him. This body was kept on ice and used for at least 3 other fraudulent insurance claims.



Dr. Henry H. Holmes – a serial killer who got his start by working in the vats.

So, my research started innocently enough when I asked myself *"what vats?"* after reading that paragraph in the Sanilac County newspaper. Now you and I both know the answer, and dear reader, I have left out the parts most likely to cause nightmares. I also learned what my mother meant when she told me that I was now really *"in a pickle."* This expression finally makes a lot more sense!

(Janet Anschuetz is a local historian and a regular contributor to the Gleanings.)

Depot Town Train Wreck of 1929!

Corner of Cross St. and River St. as it existed prior to the 1929 train wreck.

BY ROBERT ANSCHUETZ

Most Ypsilanti residents are familiar with the great train wreck of January 21, 1929 that created the distinct corner of the Sidetrack building at the southwest corner of Cross St. and River St. in Depot Town. A description of the train crash is well-covered in a January 18, 2009 *Ann Arbor News* article by James Mann: https://www.mlive.com/news/ann-arbor/2009/01/1929_crash_reshaped_sidetrack.html.

The culprit of the train wreck was a broken wheel axel on the 12th car from the end of an 85-car freight train as it travelled eastbound past the train station toward Depot Town. The crippled train car broke loose, jumped the track, and catapulted into the corner of the building then known as the Candy Store or Caldwell building. It is interesting to note that prior to the crash, the corner of the building had been built at a 45-degree angle to the intersection, roughly parallel to the adjacent train tracks, to keep passing trains as far as possible from the corner of the building in order to avoid such an accident.

The *Ypsilanti Daily Press* reported on the spectacular incident as follows*: "Mrs. Louis Cadwell, the owner, who lives on the second floor, had left the building only a few moments before and was going to her garage in back of the stores, when she heard the crash. She rushed to the street to find the entire east wall caved in, her household effects strewn in the street, and the roof of the building sagging precariously. It fell in after the accident, leaving only the Cross Street wall standing, and it was torn down soon after."* The train crash shaped the building into what we see today, creating a nice spot for people and train watching as part of the Sidetrack's outdoor patio.

Although there have been stories and descriptions of the train wreck floating around, not too many photos survive that capture the incident. A few years ago, the Sidetrack acquired an original press photo of the wreck that was pub-

Crews cleaning up the wreckage on the side of the building.

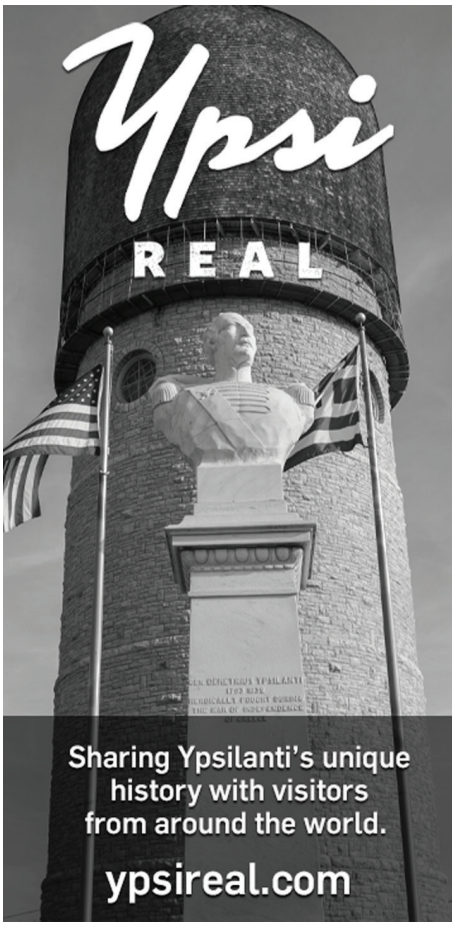
lished in their web-based newsletter which showed the original notch in the side of the building.

About 10 years ago while searching for Ypsilanti-related items on eBay, I saw an Italian newspaper available for sale on the ItalianeBay site that documented the Depot Town train wreck. The eBay listing included some key words from the issue of the article, which included the word *"Ypsilanti"*, and also had a tiny picture of the Italian artist's conception of the wreck. The article showed a fantastic drawing of the Depot Town train wreck with a caption below it. Unfortunately, I didn't place a bid on the item, but I downloaded a grainy picture from the eBaywebsite. This seems to be the same grainy image which Tom Dodd used in his article about the Sidetrack in the Summer 2006 version of the *Gleanings*.

Although I captured the tiny low-resolution picture from the eBaywebsite, I regretted not purchasing the full Italian newspaper which contained the artist's concept of the wreck. Furthermore, I didn't even make note of which Italian newspaper it came from or the date when it was published. Every once in a while, I searched on the Italian eBaywebsite for the word "Ypsilanti" to see if the newspaper would ever come up for auction again. Finally,about 10 years later in December 2019 it showed up again on the Italian eBaywebsite! This time I purchased the newspaper.

The Ypsilanti train wreck was shown on the back cover of an Italian weekly newspaper published in Milan, Italy, called *La Domenica del Corriere*

The corner of Cross Street and River Street about a decade after the train crash.



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(The Sunday Courier). The date of the issue was February 17, 1929, which was about a month after the train wreck occurred. A translation of the caption below the Ypsilanti Train Wreck illustration reads as follows: *"A new kind of catapult. In Ypsilanti, Michigan, a freight car detached from the convoy through a strange circumstance, and went to run over a brick building, imploding it. There were three victims. (Illustration by A. Beltrame)."*

La Domenica del Corriere appears to focus on the sensational stories from around the world. The front cover of this particular issue depicts a wolf attack in Transylvania.

Classical Paintings by Archille Beltrame.

Domenica del Corriere was a weekly newspaper which was published for 90 years from 1899 to 1989. It came out every Sunday free with *Corriere della Sera*, but was also sold separately. The newspaper was known for its dramatic artwork, which is why issues were saved by their readers, and its issues are still collected to this day.

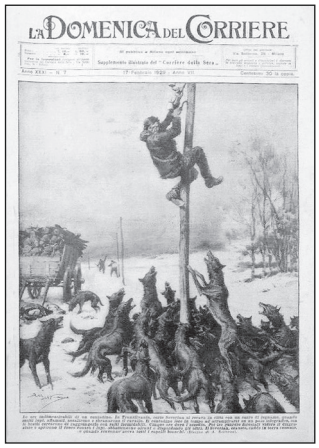
Achille Beltrame produced fantastic cover art for issues of Domenica del Corriere. So, who exactly was A. Beltrame, the artist who depicted the Depot Town train wreck for an Italian newspaper? Achille Beltrame was born in 1871 in Arzignano, Italy. He studied art in Venice, and later enrolled in the Brera Academy. In 1899 he began working as an illustrator for the newspaper *Corriere della Sera* and he also illustrated the *La Domenica del Corriere* of Milan where he worked for almost 50 years. Beltrame was also a noted painter. Beltrame held his first solo exhibition at Ranzini Gallery in 1941 in Milan. He died in 1945. Achille Beltrame's work has recently been offered at auction on multiple sites of the Internet, with realized prices ranging up to $7,500.

Archille Beltrame – artist of the 1929 Depot Town train wreck.

After rediscovering the Italian newspaper depiction of the Depot Town train wreck, this world-wide media coverage of the wreck has some closure now. This was originally a story about Ypsilanti that was covered in an Italian newspaper in 1929. Now, an old Italian newspaper that had an article about Ypsilanti is being covered in the *Gleanings*, almost 100 years later. It can now truly be said that the story of the Depot Town train wreck has literally gone halfway around the word and back!

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

The back cover of the February 17, 1929 issue of La Domenica del Corriere depicting Depot Town train wreck.



The front cover of the February 17, 1929 issue of La Domenica del Crriere depicts a wolf attack.

Cover art by Achille Beltrame from other issues of Domenica del Corriere.

Dr. Ruth Gerry M.D.

BY JAMES MANN

Dr. Ruth A. Gerry M. D. was one of the great women of Ypsilanti. At a time when few women worked out of the home she became a medical doctor, one of the few of her era. She was one of the pioneers who changed the role of women.

Gerry was born in Otsego county, New York, in about 1827, and graduated from the Women's Medical College in Philadelphia. She was Assistant Physician of the Women's Hospital in Boston. She became acquainted with Dr. Seth Gerry, a dentist, through a mutual friend, at Jamestown, New York, where she was practicing medicine. The two were married in about 1857. Soon after their marriage the two moved to Ypsilanti where each opened a practice.

This was a time when few women were in the medical profession, and there was much opposition to those who had defied convention and entered such a career. Dr. Gerry applied for membership in the Washtenaw County Medical Society in 1871, but her application was turned down. One doctor, a male, complained that he did not see why women would want to join an organization when they knew *"they were not wanted."* The following year Dr. Gerry reapplied, and this time she was admitted.

"Mrs. Gerry was a skillful physician of the regular allopathic practice, -very successful," noted The Ypsilanti Commercial of Saturday, December 16, 1876. *"She was kind and large-hearted; could not endure to see suffering without rendering all the assistance in her power to alleviate. She established a hospital in our city of a high order."*

Dr. Gerry cared for those unable to afford medical care and played a key role in the founding of *"The Ladies' Free Hospital Association"* in 1872. She and her husband Seth lived at 57 Pearl Street, now 615 Pearl, and had the house enlarged to provide space for the hospital.

Those who fell sick in this period of history were expected to be treated at home by their families. There was little care available to anyone who was alone in the world, or were far from home, such as students at the Normal School, as Eastern Michigan University was then known.

"Mrs. Dr. Gerry, moved by the need of such an institution," reported The Ypsilanti Commercial of February 17, 1872, *"put all of her available means into a building for this purpose on Pearl Street, 53 x 76 feet, including wings, and three stories high. Poor, sick students from abroad, especially Normal students, have been befriended, nursed and restored to health at this hospital. The faculty have come to regard it as an invaluable blessing to our city. In a growing community like our own – with so many strangers from abroad - it is indispensable. Quite a number of our citizens have contributed nobly towards this hospital. The ultimate design is to make it a free one for friendless sick women."*

Dr. Gerry opened a bath establishment at the hospital in 1876, placing an advertisement in The Ypsilanti Commercial: *"Dr. R. A. Gerry Turkish Baths for Ladies and gentlemen. Hot, cold, shower and plunge baths with or without electricity. If you wish to enjoy real luxury, patronize the above. Cleanliness is next to Godliness, and essential to perfect health, and nothing cleans so effectually as the TURKISH BATH. An experienced matron in charge for the Ladies' Department- Open daily from 6 a. m. to 9 p. m. Sundays 6-10 a. m."* The bathing rooms would see some 200 ladies and gentlemen take advantage of the establishment within six weeks.

Dr. Gerry was not pleased with women trying to be fashionable, by keeping in the style of the time, by wearing tight corsets to achieve the narrow waist. She expressed her views on the subject in the January 6, 1872 issue of The Ypsilanti Commercial writing: *"What an achievement: How beautiful! How nice it would look on her tombstone. 'She died early, but in her short life she succeeded in making for herself the smallest waist that was ever known!, noble creature! She died in the undertaking - but what of that! After such a pinnacle of glory has been reached!"*

This was a woman who worked to make the world a better place. She was active in the struggle for women's suffrage as well as the right for women to study medicine at the University of Michigan. "She possessed a consecrated zeal in her profession, and this remarkable zeal made her a martyr," noted The Ypsilanti Commercial. *"Rising from a sick bed to attend to a patient was her last professional work. She returned to her bed never to leave it again alive. Her zeal to relieve suffering humanity knew no bounds."*

Dr. Ruth Gerry died on December 8, 1876, at the age of 49. As a finial tribute to her life, the male doctors of the city were the pallbearers at her funeral. The Commercial noted Dr. Gerry had a daughter, adding: *"May the mother's mantle fall upon that daughter, and inspire her to imitate that noble zeal the womanly heroism of her departed mother."*

That daughter, Harriet, graduated from the University of Michigan School of Medicine in 1883. She was the second woman doctor on the staff of Harper Hospital. Harriet contracted tuberculosis and died in 1899. She is buried beside her mother at the north end of Highland Cemetery.

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

Minor Family Residence at 301 N. Washington St., Ypsilanti, Michigan.

DR. MAX MINOR PEET -

Ypsilanti's Renowned Ornithologist and Neurosurgeon

BY ROBERT ANSCHUETZ

Dr. Max Minor Peet.

While researching Gleanings articles, I like to seek out prominent Ypsilanti residents who may have slipped through the cracks of Ypsilanti history. There have been surprisingly many Ypsilantians who excelled in one field or another, but this article is about a person who was prominent in not one, but two fields – ornithology (the study of birds) and neurosurgery. Although Max Minor Peet's expertise in the fields of ornithology and neurosurgery may suggest otherwise, Peet was undeniably no "bird brain".

Max Minor Peet was the son of Lafayette and Eunice Ann (Minor) Peet. Max's mother, Eunice Minor, was born in Ypsilanti on December 20, 1850 to Ashley and Sarah Minor. Eunice had been a teacher for some time at the Union School in Ypsilanti prior to her marriage to Lafayette Peet. Lafayette Peet was a widower at the time of their May 3, 1876 wedding at the home of Eunice's parents, Ashley and Sarah Minor, at 301 N. Washington St. in Ypsilanti. Lafayette and Eunice Peet resided in Livingston County, Michigan, where Lafayette owned and operated a general store in Parkers Corner.

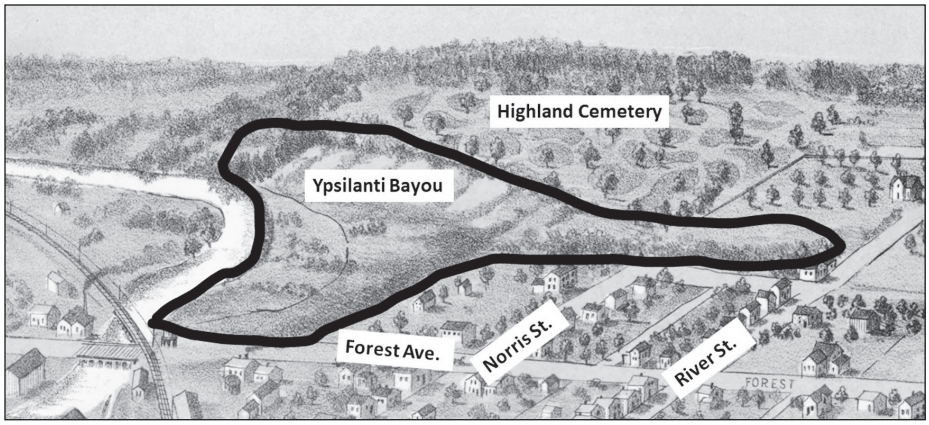
Max Minor Peet was born in Iosco, Michigan on October 20, 1885. On the evening he was to be born, the Peet family physician could not be located, so the family sent a messenger to the residence of Dr. John Wessinger of nearby

Howell, MI. *"How fast can you get to Iosco?"*, asked a frantic voice accompanied with a loud knock on Dr. Wessinger's door. Dr. Wessinger made it to Iosco in about an hour, galloping his horse as fast as he could go. Max Minor Peet's first name was suggested by Mrs. Theresa Gehringer, mother of the Detroit Tiger Hall of Fame second baseman, Charlie Gehringer. The Gehringer family lived on their farm in Iosco, not far from the Peet residence. Max's middle name came from his mother's maiden name. One wonders whether Mrs. Gehringer thought of the play on words for Max Minor Peet's first and middle names that suggest "Large Small".

After Max was born in 1885, the Peet family welcomed a second child, daughter Gertrude Peet, who was born in 1889. Sometime after that, Max and Gertrude were sent to Ypsilanti for schooling, perhaps moving into their grandparents' house on Washington St. to be looked after by their aunts and uncles following the death of their grandfather in 1899.

Max Minor Peet was a good student and excelled at science while attending Ypsilanti High School. He took to studying birds at an early age, a field known as ornithology. While he was still in high school, the University of Michigan held an ornithology contest intended for college students. Peet was so confident in his birding abilities that he asked and received permission to enter the competition. Low and behold, Peet won first prize in the contest, beating out all of the students who entered the contest from the University of Michigan. The first prize was an original Audubon print illustration.

Peet studied for a short while as a special student at Michigan State Normal College, now Eastern Michigan University. In 1906, he enrolled at the University of Michigan in a combined literary and medical course of study. As an undergraduate, Peet capitalized on his interest of ornithology by becoming an assistant instructor in the Zoology department. During this time, Peet published several articles about ornithology and birds. These articles included: "*Observations on the Nesting Habits of a Pair of House Wrens*","*Annotated List of the Birds of the Porcupine Mountains and Isle Royale, Michigan*", "*The Fall Migration of Birds at Washington Harbor, Isle Royale*", and "*An Ecological Study of the Birds of the Ypsilanti Bayou*".



The Ypsilanti Bayou – Depicted in an 1868 Map.

Peet's study of the ecology of the birds of the Ypsilanti bayou began while he was still in high school and is one of the earliest important studies in avian ecology in the United States. The Ypsilanti Bayou consists of approximately 60 acres of land to the west and southwest of the Highland Cemetery. Over a period of six years from 1902-1908, Peet made observations of birds in the Huron River valley. Peet's paper identified the habits and habitats of 154 different species of birds in the Ypsilanti Bayou. He noted their nesting habits, their feeding habits, their migration patterns, and how commonly they were spotted in the region. From his study, Peet noted about the Ypsilanti bayou that *"the bayou alone offers exceptional opportunities for the study from an ecological standpoint, because of the variety of conditions and the fact that it is practically free from changes due to man. It is further favorable in that it lies directly in a line of migration, the Huron River valley being well-known as a path for these birds."*

Peet was one of the first ornithologists to discoverer the nesting place of the rare Kirtland Warbler near Roscommon, MI. Based on a tip from a rural mail carrier in the area, Peet traversed the area in a horse-drawn buggy when suddenly he heard a sing-

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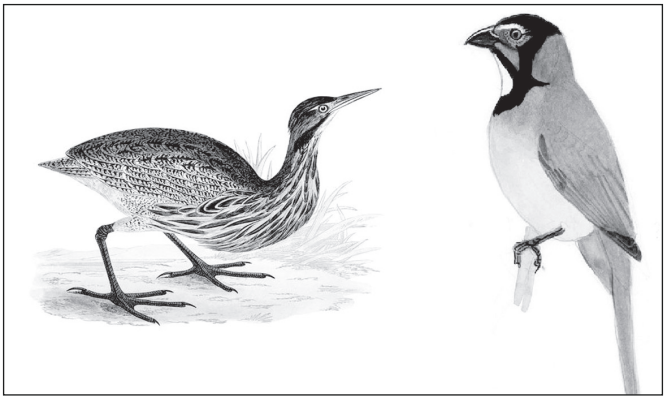
ing bird with which he wasn't familiar. Dismounting the buggy, he spotted several Kirtland Warblers and took some specimens which are now displayed at the Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C.

Peet soon became known as one of the leading ornithological researchers in the Midwest, and in fact, the entire United States. Peet was an excellent shot with a rifle, a skill he inherited from his father. Peet started collecting bird specimens early in his life and perfected the art of taxidermy, inventing techniques that required a delicate touch. Peet later said that any proficiency that he acquired in surgery started with taxidermy performed on hummingbird skins, which is a highly delicate procedure. Peet's collection of birds eventually grew to what was probably the largest private collection in the country. Peet's mission was to build a collection representing all of the American bird specimens found in the United States, which amounts to approximately 1,400 individual species. He came close to his goal and constantly was in touch with other ornithologists to help him complete his collection.

Peet's expertise in ornithology was rewarded by having the western form of American Bittern and a subspecies of the Chiapas Black-headed Saltator named in his honor. In a 1936 paper by the University of Michigan Zoology department titled *"A New Subspecies of Bittern from Western North America"*, Pierce Brodkorb writes, *"I propose to provide a name for the bird of western North America. In view of his constant efforts to secure material pertinent to problems engaged upon by members of the Museum staff, and in recognition of his thirty years of service in the field of ornithology, it gives me pleasure to dedicate this bird to Dr. Max Minor Peet, Professor of Surgery in the University of Michigan, as Botaurus lentiginosus subsp. peeti."* In a similar manner in 1940, Brodkorb named a subspecies of Black-headed Saltator in honor of Peet as the *Saltatoratriceps* subsp. *peeti*, which is found in eastern Oaxaca and Chiapas, Mexico.

Peet received an A.B. degree (atrium baccalaureus, meaning Bachelor of Arts) from the University of Michigan in 1908. In 1910, he received both his M.A. degree and his M.D. degree from the UofM Medical School. After graduating from the UofM Medical school, Peet served for two years as an intern at the Rhode Island Hospital in Providence, RI. Following that, Peet was awarded the Robert Robinson Porter Fellow in the John Herr Musser Department of Research Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania.

From 1913-1916, Peet served as Assistant Instructor in Surgery and Assistant in Experimental Surgery and Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. From 1915-1916, Peet was appointed to a position as an Assistant Instructor in Surgery at the University Hospital, Pennsylvania. From 1914-1916, Peet served as Assistant Visiting Surgeon and Acting Chief Surgeon at the Philadelphia General Hospital. During his time in Philadelphia, Peet studied under Charles H. Frazier who was one of the first specialists in neurosurgery in the country. Peet was also being trained in neurology by William Gibson Spiller, another leading doctor in his field. On October 5, 1915, Peet married Grace Stewart Tait of Rhode Island. Max and Grace Peet returned to the University of Michigan in 1916 where he was appointed to the position of Instructor in Surgery at the UofM Medical School.



American Bittern and Black-Headed Saltator – Subspecies of these two birds are named for Max Peet.

Peet not only taught surgery at UofM, but he also conducted several ground-breaking procedures that helped advance the science of neurosurgery. Peet worked closely with his protégé, Edgar Kahn, perfecting techniques together. Peet was an excellent surgeon, and explored bold techniques. One of his colleagues described Peet as having the superior surgical traits of imagination, skill,

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Dr. Max Peet and Dr. Edgar Kahn – University of Michigan Surgical Staff circa 1940.

Treating Infantile Paralysis in the UofM Medical Pool - Dr. Max Peet is 3rd from right.

and great daring. Kahn said that Peet *"was so secure in himself that he did not know the meaning of jealousy."* Peet and Kahn formed quite a team at the UofM, pioneering many procedures through the 1920's, 1930's, and 1940's. Peet's contributions to the science of neural surgery soon made him one of the world's most distinguished practitioners in that field, as he published numerous articles in medical journals. In 1930, Peet was named the Chairman of the Department of Neurosurgery.

In 1933, Peet focused his medical studies in hypertension, or high blood pressure, and came up with a surgical technique for its treatment known as splanchnicectomy. Peet performed the delicate nerve-cutting operation more than 2,000 times. In 1935, Peet won world acclaim when his paper on the use of surgery in the treatment of damage to the heart was read in London before the International Neurological Congress. Peet was the only surgeon in the country who could perform an operation to relieve pain in the jaw in less than a half hour, a procedure that normally took four hours. Peet was also credited with his work on curbing infantile-paralysis, or childhood polio. Peet perfected a zinc sulphate spray preventative, which was administered to more than 5,000 Canadian children. In 1937 Canada reported that the Peet Treatment helped conquer their polio epidemic. In 1938, Peet was appointed a director of the Roosevelt Foundation's fight against infantile paralysis.

In 1934, a group launched the National Committee for Birthday Balls that sponsored a dance in every major town across the nation, both to celebrate President Franklin D. Roosevelt's birthday and to raise money for the Georgia Warm Springs Foundation for research and treatment of Infantile Paralysis. The Birthday Balls raised about a million dollars per year, with contributions split between the Warm Springs Foundation and the local communities where the balls were held. One such birthday ball was held on January 30th, 1936, FDR's birthday, at the Intramural Sports building at the University of Michigan. Max Minor Peet was on the planning committee along with other prominent Ann Arbor residents, including Mayor Robert Campbell. Dancing started at 8:30 pm, and special permission was necessary to be granted to University of Michigan women students to attend the event. To cap off the evening, FDR delivered a radio address to the nation at 11:30 pm which was broadcast to the Ann Arbor Birthday Ball crowd through a public address system.

Peet was a member of the Central Neuropsychiatric Association, the Detroit Academy of Surgery, the Michigan State Medical Society, the Washtenaw County Medical Society, the American Surgical Association, the American Board of Surgery, the American College of Surgeons, the Society of Neurological Surgeons, and he was a fellow with the American Medical Association. Peet was an honorary advisor to the Washtenaw County chapter of the infantile paralysis foundation, otherwise known as the March of Dimes. Peet received an honorary master's degree in education from the Michigan State Normal College.

Peet continued to be engaged in ornithology via the UofM Zoology department throughout his long career with the UofM Medical department. From each of his many trips to medical conventions and to far places for

medical consultations, Peet returned with some new ornithological specimens or data. Peet accompanied the University of Michigan Museum of Zoology staff on three ornithological expeditions. In 1932 Peet accompanied the museum staff to the Chisos Mountains in Texas to collect specimens of the Colima Warbler and White Throated Swift, which was known as the fastest bird in the United States.

Despite feeling ill on the morning of March 25, 1949, Peet gave his scheduled lecture to his medical students. Peet collapsed and died of a heart attack within the next hour. The UofM hospital director said at the time of his passing, *"It's going to be very difficult to replace Dr. Peet. He will be missed not only in this institution but in the world at large. He ranked with the few outstanding brain surgeons in the world. He was always willing and able to help anyone, and usually performed one or two operations daily."* One of his students, shocked after learning of his death said, *"He gave a very good lecture this morning. It was fine as wine."*

On April 5, 1949, the President of the University of Michigan, Alexander G. Ruthven, filed a memoir for record honoring Peet's death that was adopted by the Executive Faculty of the Medical School. President Ruthven was well acquainted with Max Minor Peet, since Ruthven himself received a PhD in Zoology from UofM in 1906 and immediately became an instructor, curator, and director of the University Museum. It was Ruthven who accompanied Peet in 1905 on two bird expeditions to the Porcupine Mountains and Isle Royale, as well as a 1907 trip to Iowa.

Following the death of Max Minor Peet, the UofM Board of Regents adopted the following memoir:

The Regents of the University hereby record their sorrow and their sense of loss, occasioned by the untimely death on March 25, 1949, of Dr. Max Minor Peet, Professor of Surgery in the Medical School. A native of Michigan, a graduate of this University from which he had received the degrees of A.B. in 1908, and A.M. and M.D. in 1910. Dr. Peet had achieved international distinction by his skill in neurosurgery and in particular by the advances he had made in the surgical treatment of hypertension. The amount of good he did in the course of his life, by the alleviation of suffering and the restoration of hope and usefulness to the afflicted, and by the instruction of others in the profession in which he himself was a leader, is incalculable. Incalculable, too, is the personal loss which the entire University community, Regents, faculty members, officers, students and alumni has suffered through the sudden passing of one who was so friendly and helpful in all his personal relationships and so highly respected for his attainments and the integrity of his character. He was the recipient of many honors at home and abroad: the history of our own Medical School will forever list his name among those who contributed most to its fame and success. To Dr. Peet's surviving family the Regents send all their sympathy, and they direct that this memoir shall be incorporated in their official records.

Planning FDR's1936 Birthday Ball - Max Peet at far right next to Ann Arbor Mayor Robert Campbell.

Shortly before Peet's death, not only was he continuing to pioneer breakthroughs related to bird species through an X-ray study of their skulls instead of simply studying their plumage. This was long before DNA sequencing, and at the time was a revolutionary idea. Peet was elected an Associate of the American Ornithologist's Union in 1933, and a full Member in 1948. Peet personally collected over 15,000 birds in his lifetime, and his total collection of birds numbered 32,314 after he acquired a large collection from the estate of Henry H. Kimball. After Peet's death, his family gave the collection to the University of Michigan Museum of Zoology where it comprises a good portion of the museum's total bird collection.

Max and Grace Peet had three children, Max Minor Jr., Stewart Tate, and Martha Eunice Ann. The children were born in Ann Arbor, where the Peet family resided at 2030 Hill St. Max Minor Peet, Jr., was a long-time Washtenaw County Probation Officer. Max, Jr. died in 2008. Stewart Peet was a pilot in WWII in the Army Air Corps who later started his own flight operation, the Peet Flying Company. Stewart died in 2010. Max and Grace Peet's daughter, Martha Peet moved to Ypsilanti and received her Master's Degree in Special Education from Eastern Michigan University. Martha married Atwood R. McAndrew,

Max Minor Peet and Alexander G. Ruthven Camping during a 1907 Ornithological Expedition in Iowa.

Jr., who was the grandson of Ypsilanti's first woman doctor, Dr. Helen Walker McAndrew. Martha and Atwood McAndrew had three children and later divorced. Atwood McAndrew,Jr. would subsequently marry Marilyn Lee Tucker Parsons, who was the daughter of Preston and Vera Tucker, famed Ypsilanti resident and manufacturer of the Tucker Torpedo automobile. Martha McAndrew was a longtime resident of Ypsilanti and was deeply involved in Ypsilanti community services with the Ladies Literary Club, the Thrift Shop, and the Community Concert Association. She was employed at Faber's Fabrics and EMU before retiring and moving to New Mexico with her daughter. Martha McAndrew passed away in 2016.

Max and Grace Peet, along with their daughter Martha, are buried at Forest Hill Cemetery in Ann Arbor. Max's parents, Lafayette and Eunice Peet, along with Max's sister Gertrude are all buried at Highland Cemetery in Ypsilanti. Eunice's parents, Ashley and Sarah Minor, along with all of Eunice's siblings (George, Mary, Carlie, Emma, and Henry), are also buried at Highland Cemetery. Max Peet's Uncle Henry Minor and his wife Addie (Gilmore) Minor lived at 724 N. River St., the Gilmore family home. Addie was the sister of Eugene Gilmore, who was featured in an article in the Summer 2019 issue of the *Gleanings*. Eugene Gilmore was the President of the American Hospital Association. We can only speculate whether Max Minor Peet knew that his Aunt Addie Minor's brother, Eugene Gilmore, and his son-in-law's grandmother, Dr. Helen Walker McAndrew, held prominent positions in the medical field just like he did. Max Minor Peet's Uncle, Henry Minor, had a very tragic ending to his life. Henry was a baggageman for the Michigan Central Rail Road. In 1910, Henry was murdered at the MCRR rail station after being shot in the Adam's apple while confronting the culprit of a jewelry store robbery. Before he died, Henry reportedly was able to shoot the suspect.

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

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