

Ypsilanti GLEANINGS

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



SUMMER 2026

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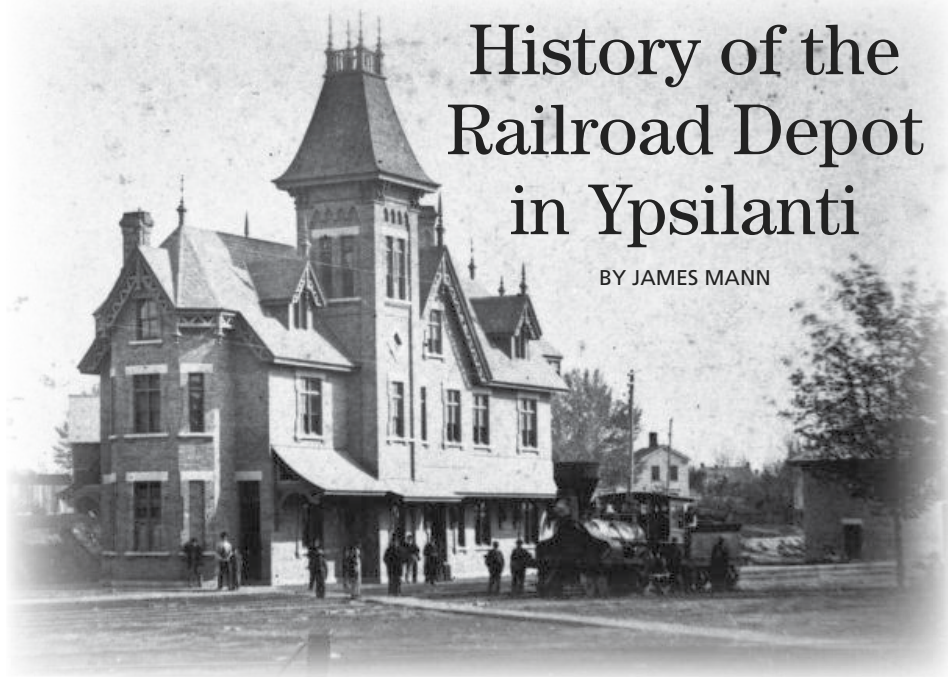
The Ypsilanti Historical Museum is a museum of local history which is presented as an 1860 home. The Museum and Rudisill, Fletcher-White Archives are organized and operated by the Ypsilanti Historical Society. We are all volunteers and our membership is open to everyone, including non-city residents.



www.ypsihistory.org

History of the Railroad Depot in Ypsilanti

BY JAMES MANN



The newly constructed depot as it appeared in 1864.

The old Michigan Central Railroad Depot on the corner of Cross and River Street is for sale, at only \$375,000. The building is said to be structurally sound, but has no heat, no electricity, and no plumbing. Needs work!

The present building is the third reincarnation of a depot in Ypsilanti. The first depot was made of wood and built in about 1837, when the railroad tracks were laid out. This was a long, low wooden structure with projecting eaves supported by iron brackets cast to look like eagles. The first train arrived at Ypsilanti in February of 1838. This structure remained in use into the mid-1860's, when it was replaced with an immense three-story brick structure with a tall central tower.

The original depot, no longer in use, was cut into two by Dr. Babbitt. Then according to Harvey Colburn in *The Story of Ypsilanti*, "One half was added

to the house on the corner of River and Babbitt Streets, where it still remains, while the other was converted into the residence just east on Babbitt."

The new depot was in the Gothic Revival style of architecture, with strong Italianate and Second Empire influences. The second and third floors provided the station master with a home for himself and his family. The tower was six stories in height and topped with a Mansard roof with a flat top. When built, the depot was said to be the finest between Detroit and Chicago.

Passengers would enter the building at the main entrance, at the center of the building. Here, the interior was divided into two waiting rooms. On the one side was the space for men and on the other was the space for women. At this time, it was thought best to keep the two

History of the Railroad Depot in Ypsilanti continued on page 3

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From the **PRESIDENT'S DESK**

BY BILL NICKELS

Let me start this report with an apology to the spring Sponsors of the Gleanings, whose names were improperly listed. The mistakes occurred from a computer glitch that has been corrected for the future. It will be the first thing I check when I see this new issue!

I have been corresponding with Jim Sargent, an EMU grad and author of crime mysteries some using Ypsilanti as a setting. He occasionally writes and asks for confirmation of some Ypsi information. If you like mysteries, you might give his books a try. His Mickey Matthews series include references to Ypsilanti. He has an ad on page 3 of this issue.

Ypsilanti's 4th of July Parade will be our local celebration of our national semi quincentennial. YHS's entry in the parade will feature the Statue of Liberty and Betsy Ross displaying a Bennington flag with George and Martha Washington.

Our Fall Quarterly Meeting is Sunday October 18. Artemis Alex will share the history of her families Avon Restaurant and the businesses on the south side of Michigan Avenue's 200 block. Something to look forward to!

We did receive an Americea250MI

grant for \$20,000 with an additional \$3,000 copay. We are moving along with updating our electronics and inventorying our museum collection. The grant will culminate with the creation of an exhibit featuring our very significant artifacts that tell Ypsilanti's and Michigan's histories.

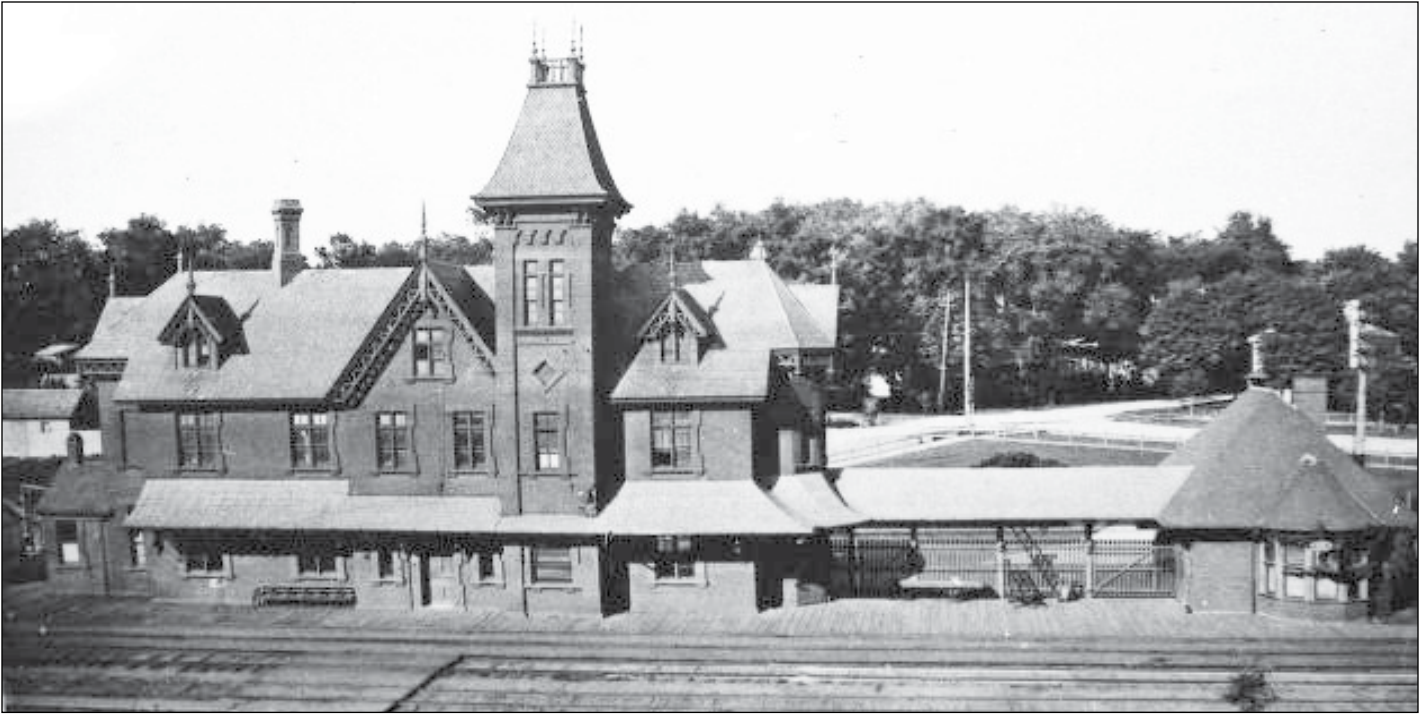
A deposit was made to our roofing contractor for the replacement of the museum roofs. The construction date has not been determined. It may be late in the summer, pushing our paint project into next year.

I was given a set of pictures from cousins Ted and Karen Peters concerning their grandparents' home on N. Prospect. The pictures tell an interesting story. Fredrick Peters Senior and Matilda, their grandparents, founded Ypsilanti Dairy. Fredrick had door-to-door daily milk routes back when few people had refrigerators and milk had a short shelf-life. He had his house moved from 203 N Prospect to 120 N Prospect to make room for a retail milk outlet. The house and retail outlet survive. By the mid-1960s, improved refrigeration, cheaper grocery store milk prices, and longer milk shelf-life ended the need for Ypsilanti's more than ten local dairies.

Have a safe and enjoyable summer!



Fredrick Peters Sr. and wife Matilda having their house moved.



The depot after the improvements of 1890.

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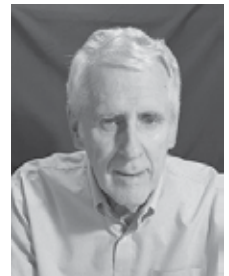
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Jim and his granddaughter, Audrey Deichmann, are co-authoring a new series of young adult mystery novels that take place in Charlottesville, Virginia in 1942 and 1943. Jim is a retired professor of American History. His accomplishments include an undergraduate degree from Eastern Michigan University, followed by his masters and PhD in US History at Michigan State in 1970.



The depot as it appeared after the fire of 1910.

apart, as it would never do “to expose the more refined to the elements which made the men’s department the abominable hole it was.”

This changed in 1883 with the arrival of a new station agent, a Mr. Damon, who removed the partition. “There was much protest against this,” reported *The Ypsilantian* of April 24, 1890, as there were concerns about the behavior of the men in front of the women. “The agent did find it necessary to exercise diligence and authority, for a time, but the result was a great improvement in the department and the designation, ‘Gentlemen,’ on the south door, became far more appropriate than it had been.”

Further improvements were made in the depot, beginning in the fall of 1889. “The present alterations more completely remove the separation between the two departments, by shorting the ticket office which projected in the center of the room, and rounding the corners,” noted the account. “This very much more brings it all into one room, and does more than any other single feature to make the room pleasant. There is a single ticket window, in the rounded north end, and a broad window pane brings seller and buyer in full view of each other – a great improvement upon the contracted and barred prison windows that have been so common. Ticket agent Durand is quite proud of his office. The old telegraph room at the west end is opened by a broad doorway into the main room, and is arranged as a private waiting room for the ladies, while a pleasant alcove is gained at the east end by removal of the closet. A paneled wainscot of red birch runs around all the walls, and the casings and beaded ceiling are of the same handsome timber.”

At the west end of the ladies’ waiting room, an ornamental brick fireplace was installed, replacing heat stoves, which were considered unsightly. Steam coils were to be installed in the fall, to provide warmth in time for the cooler weather.

A water cooler had been removed and replaced with a public drinking fountain, supplying city water in an exhaustless



Damage to the depot from the train derailment of 1939.

stream and free to all. “What cannot be had in Ann Arbor’s beautiful depot is a drink of good water.”

Until 1890, baggage had been stored in two sheds, one at each end of the depot. Now, in 1890, a single baggage room stood at the east end of the depot, connected to the main building by a breezeway. The telegraph office was moved into the baggage room, with a bay window which gave a good view both up and down the track. The old baggage rooms were removed and the one on the east end was replaced by a flower garden.

The interior of the depot was changed again in 1899, when the duties of the ticket agent and the telegraph operator were combined.

The ticket office was removed from the center of the depot, and a partition was constructed at the east end of the waiting room. Here one man serviced passengers as both ticket agent and telegraph operator.

At about 10:00 am on the morning of May 28, 1910, smoke was seen rolling up from the roof of the depot. The alarm was sounded and the fire department responded as soon as possible, but the fire had a good start and the location made fighting the flames difficult. The fire was finally extinguished after about two hours. The building was damaged as much by water flowing through the roof as by the flames. “Several holes were made in the roof, and the rafters and wooden supports were almost completely destroyed,” reported *The Ypsilanti Daily Press* of May 28, 1910. The cause of the fire was not determined but was thought to have been because of poorly insulated wires or a heated chimney.

The community was disappointed to learn of the decision by the railroad not to build a new modern depot, but to rebuild the old building. When the work was finished, the depot was a single-story building with a smaller tower.

At 5:08 am of the morning of Thursday, August 10, 1939, the Ypsilanti Police Department received a phone call from a telephone operator. The operator told the police, “The



Depot after the repairs from the wreck of 1939.

phone is off the hook at the depot, and there's no answer." The reason was simple; the phone was buried under a pile of bricks.

A few minutes before the call was placed, an east bound freight train, loaded with eggs, sand, and merchandise, had crashed into the depot building ripping out the office and destroying the tower. Faulty equipment was believed to have been the cause.

"A lower center section of a track frame at the side of the track near the Railroad Street crossing showed where the trouble first started. What looked like an old break apparently let the framework give way a few feet south of the crossing and for some distance there were wheel marks to a point where one set of wheels was thrown clear off the train when it came into contact with a siding switch."

"As wheels were torn from beneath the car a coupling was apparently broken, a part being found near the Forest Avenue street crossing, a quarter mile from the depot, where the cars finally left the track, and fully a quarter mile past where first signs of trouble were found. Along this route of more than a half mile there was considerable road bed damage, rails being torn loose and requiring repair before trains could pass," reported *The Ypsilanti Daily Press* of August 10, 1939.

The tracks were clear for traffic after four hours and 28 minutes.

"The first train to pass on the east bound track after the wreck was No. 16, due into Detroit at 7:07. The train, loaded with disgruntled passengers left Ypsilanti at 9:40."

In part because of the early hour when the accident occurred, there were few people at the depot, so no one was injured. The damage to the track and depot were repaired, but this time, the tower on the building was not replaced. The current tower on the depot is a more recent reconstruction.



Glory days past the depot stands empty and unused.

The railroad closed the depot in the 1960's, and since then the building has stood empty. From time to time, plans have been made to turn the depot into a restaurant. These plans have for one reason, or another fallen through, and the building continues to stand as an empty shell. Once it is purchased, perhaps something new will hatch from it.

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

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Harry and Betty Wismer

Ypsilanti's Ultimate Power Couple

BY ROBERT ANSCHUETZ

Harry and Betty Wismer personified the definition of an Ypsilanti power couple in the 1940s and 1950s. The couple had ties to Henry Ford, professional football, and national media. Their engagement and wedding made the national news, their names were known across the country, and yet they educated their children in the Ypsilanti Public Schools and they melded in with the citizens of Ypsilanti through church, social clubs, and civic organizations. After their divorce, their national prominence continued with politics and book authorship. Their story is quite an interesting and fascinating one to tell.

Mary Elizabeth "Betty" Bryant was born on June 18, 1918 in Dearborn, Michigan. She was the niece of Henry Ford and Clara Jane Bryant Ford. Mary's mother was Katherine Hayes (Wright) Bryant and her father was Edgar LeRoy "Roy" Bryant. Roy Bryant was the brother of Clara Ford, though he was almost 20 years younger than her. Henry Ford's connections with Ypsilanti have been well documented - from the farms he owned, to the village industries, to the creation of Ford Lake which supplied power to the Ypsilanti Ford Plant, and finally to the Willow Run Bomber Plant. When Henry Ford decided to build a dam on the Huron River to power the Ford Plant in the 1920s, he purchased property on both sides of the Huron River that would encompass the entire shoreline of the future Ford Lake. The Ford Lake Dam was completed in 1932, and Ford Lake soon rose above the Huron River riverbed and created shoreline property suitable for parks and homes. Even after Ford Lake was created, Henry Ford maintained ownership of the property surrounding the lake before slowly selling off property. Ford didn't like the idea of commercial businesses on the shores of Ford Lake, so he was selective about to whom he sold the property. In 1969, the Ford Lake Dam, powerhouse, and Ford's remaining 1,000 acres of land adjacent to Ford Lake were donated to both Ypsilanti and Ypsilanti Township in a partnership called JYRO



Betty Wismer in her wedding gown as seen in the May 12, 1940, issue of *The Port Huron Times Herald* newspaper.



Harry Wismer at the microphone of the Mutual Broadcasting System, which was formed as a cooperative between WXYZ Detroit, WGN Chicago, WOR New York, and WLW Cincinnati.

(Joint Ypsilanti Recreation Organization). Several parks were created out of the donated property. In 1990, the City of Ypsilanti signed over the Ford Lake Dam, powerhouse, and the JYRO property to Ypsilanti Township.

Harry Milton Wismer was born on June 30, 1913, in Port Huron, Michigan. He was a multi-sport star at Port Huron High School. Wismer played college football at both the University of Florida and Michigan State College. His football career was permanently derailed with an injury sustained during a game against the University of Michigan. Still wanting to be part of the athletics scene, he began writing for the school newspaper and began broadcasting Michigan State sporting events on radio station WKAR in East Lansing. In 1934, he was hired as the public address announcer for the new Detroit Lions football team that had just moved from Portsmouth, Ohio. The Lions at the time were owned by George Richards, who also owned the Detroit radio station WJR. In 1936, Wismer became the full-time WJR sports director and served as the play-by-play radio announcer for the Detroit Lions.

Harry Wismer's engagement to Betty Bryant was announced at an open house at the Bryant family home in Dearborn on New Year's Day, 1940. A miniature bridal party was arranged in a half circle of white flowers on the main table. Napkins on the table with the names "Betty and Harry" revealed the engagement news to the more than 125 guests at the party. Betty had previously attended Ward-Belmont College in Nashville, Tennessee, and had recently graduated

from Denison University in Granville, Ohio. Several newspapers around Michigan and the United States covered the engagement announcement. The wedding date was set for May 11, 1940, and would take place at the Martha-Mary Chapel at Greenfield Village in Dearborn. As the wedding date approached, details of the wedding were provided to national newspapers. An article in the April 23, 1940, issue of the Detroit Free Press indicated that Betty would have four bridal showers. The first bridal shower and dessert was held at the home of Mrs. Walter Morlock in Ypsilanti.

The Wismer-Bryant wedding was a formal evening affair. It was attended by 300 guests, many of whom traveled far distances to attend. Among the celebrities at the wedding were Mr. and Mrs. Henry Ford, Walter "Spike" Briggs, Jr., son of the owner of the Detroit Tigers, and Mickey Cochrane, former player and manager of the Detroit Tigers. Betty's wedding party included a matron of honor (her older sister), two maids of honor (two younger sisters), and six bridesmaids. Harry's wedding party included a best man and eight groomsmen. Amongst Harry Wismer's groomsmen were noted Detroit Free Press columnist and poet Edgar A. Guest and a famous speedboat racer named Gar Wood. Betty wore her mother's wedding gown and she carried white orchids and lilies of the valley. The Martha-May Chapel was lit by hundreds of white candles set in the central chandelier and in each of the chapel's wreathed windows. Following



Harry and Betty Wismer's home on Ford Lake. The home in Ypsilanti was given to the couple as a wedding present by Betty's Uncle Henry Ford and Aunt Clara Ford.

the wedding ceremony, Betty's parents held a reception at their home on Cherry Hill Road in Dearborn. The newlyweds honeymooned in Pasadena, California, where they were honored by a high tea with 150 guests.

One of the first houses built on Ford Lake was on a large tract of property owned by Henry Ford on Ford Dam Road

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Seated: Harry and Betty Wismer holding baby Henry with Betty's mother Katherine Bryant. Standing: Henry Ford, Clara Ford, and Betty's father Edgar LeRoy Bryant. Circa 1942.

(now 1700 Grove Road). Newspaper reports at the time indicated that this house was built by Henry and Clara Ford in 1940 as a wedding gift for their "favorite" niece, Betty, and her new groom, Harry. In the Sunday, July 28, 1940, issue of the *Detroit Free Press*, there was an article about a scale-sized model of the new Wismer home on Ford Lake in the "People Are Talking...." column. The article reads: "*People Are Talking about the marvelous scheme devised so that Betty Bryant Wismer could visualize the new home uncle and aunt, the Henry Fords, are building for her and Harry's wedding present. Blue prints mean nothing to Betty, so the builders put the whole edifice up in cardboard. The young chatelaine-to-be walked through the rooms and saw at once that there should be a door opened here, a foot added to a room there. Incidentally, the whole house is built around a patio, which features a grill for informal, outdoor supper parties.*"

The 4-bedroom, 6-bathroom, 3,400 square foot, single-story Wismer home on Ford Lake was opulent. The house stood on over 10 acres of land, some of which has since been subdivided and sold. The lengthy stone shore wall on the lake was built with the finest stone, and the enclosed boathouse at the lakeshore could be accessed through a lengthy tunnel from the main house. The house had a swimming pool, manicured gardens, and landscaping throughout the property that provided an elevated view over Ford Lake. The property included a guest house and was very secluded from Ford Dam Road, with trees and an angled driveway providing the privacy that the prominent couple required. Probably due to privacy concerns for such a prominent couple, the Wismer address was never listed in the Ypsilanti

City Directories spanning the 1940s and 1950s.

During their first year of marriage, the couple settled into their home on Ford Lake in Ypsilanti. On April 8, 1941, the Wismer couple welcomed a baby boy named Henry Richards Wismer. The birth announcement was included in a listing of numerous births in the Detroit-area in the April 22, 1941, issue of the *Detroit Evening Times*. The announcement listed their residence as Ford Dam Road in Ypsilanti, but their residence was the only listing that did not include an exact address. Four years later, on February 7, 1945, the couple had a daughter, Wendy Wright Wismer.

In 1941, Wismer was hired by the NBC Blue Network, which was the predecessor to ABC, where Wismer would in short time become its national sports director. During the 1940s, Wismer was named Sportscaster of the Year three times by the *Sporting News*. Harry broadcasted national sporting events and news segments on the air. To hear one of Harry Wismer's radio football broadcasts, here is a link to the 1946 Army vs Navy game: <https://tinyurl.com/mvezcdm8>. Harry's voice in media also went beyond sports. In 1945, during World War II, Harry Wismer narrated the Ford Motor Company short film called "*The Story of Willow Run*" which can be viewed on YouTube at this web address: <https://tinyurl.com/fkzbph3d>.

Harry Wismer was known as having an enormous ego and was a name dropper. He often mentioned celebrities who were in attendance at the games he broadcasted, and he was known at times to make up celebrity names that were at the games even when they were not. In 1953, ABC showed Notre Dame football games in a tape-delayed and compressed format on Sunday evenings to a national audience with Wis-



Harry Wismer (at right) with Willow Run Plant Manager M.L. Bricker (seated), U.S. Senator Homer Ferguson, and President Harry S. Truman at Ypsilanti's Willow Run Bomber Plant standing behind a "Station B-24" microphone.



In 1947, Massachusetts Congressman John F. Kennedy and ABC's sports director Harry Wismer were named two of the ten most outstanding young men in the United States and presented awards by Seldon Waldo, president of the Junior Chamber of Commerce.

mer as the broadcaster. That same season, the DuMont Television Network presented live prime-time professional football coverage and Wismer handled the broadcasting duties. Wismer was the broadcaster for many other prominent games, including college bowl games and the annual Army-Navy game.

In 1947, Wismer, joined an ownership group that purchased the Detroit Lions. The ownership group included C.T. Fisher, Spike Briggs, and other prominent Detroiters. The involvement of Spike Briggs ensured that the Lions would continue to play at Briggs Stadium, which was owned by his father. Wismer's interest totaled 15% ownership of the Lions. Wismer was also named as the secretary of the Detroit Lions. In 1948, Wismer appeared as himself in the Columbia Motion Picture film called Triple Threat. The movie was a sports drama film and several football players and announcers appeared in the film.

From 1942 to 1951, Wismer had been the primary broadcaster for Redskins football games. Around 1950, Wismer was named to the Redskins Board of Directors and took a 25% ownership of the team. He would ultimately take the position of vice president and director of

the Redskins. Because he couldn't be a part-owner of two competing teams, he had to divest himself from his share of Detroit Lions ownership, so he placed his 15% ownership shares in the name of Betty's father, Roy Bryant.

In 1954, newspaper articles reported that Harry Wismer moved into a new Park Avenue apartment in New York City so he could be closer to the hub of national sports. He wrote a bi-weekly syndicated newspaper column called "On the 50-Yard-Line" and also edited and narrated a weekly TV commentary for "This Week in Sports." A newspaper article stated that Wismer conducted his interviews from his apartment, and that "*Wismer has seen to it that all the necessary facilities have been built into his new Park Avenue apartment.*" The article went on to say that "*Wismer's home still is Ypsilanti, Mich. But his professional career now demands that he live in New York.*"

In 1959, a rival football league to the National Football League (NFL) was announced that would begin play in 1960. This league was to be called the American Football League (AFL) and the league needed executives to run it as well as prominent owners to come forward and purchase franchises for eight teams. Wismer was named as the chairman of the AFL and was selected to be the franchise owner of the AFL's New York Titans due to previous ownership experience with the Redskins and Lions, plus his



In 1948, sports announcers Harry Wismer, Tom Harmon, and Bob Kelley appeared in the Columbia Pictures football movie called "Triple Threat." This was the lobby card for the movie.

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ties to media which could help promote the league. Wismer was required to sell his interest in the Redskins in order to purchase sole ownership of the Titans and he had previously divested from the Lions. Wismer was able to negotiate a contract with ABC to be the network broadcaster of the AFL games. Wismer allegedly said that he chose the name Titans for his team because Titans were bigger than Giants, a jab at the NFL's New York Giants football team. Wismer faced numerous challenges in New York, foremost of which was the fact that his team had to compete with the existing and successful Giants. Whereas the football Giants played in Yankee Stadium, the Titans played their first three seasons at the Polo Grounds in New York, which had been abandoned after the baseball Giants left in 1957.

Although he was quite well-off financially and well-known nationally, Harry Wismer was the least wealthy member of AFL owners. He was notoriously cheap and ran the Titans organization out of his New York City apartment. His secretary allegedly worked out of the living room and he sold tickets out of one of his bedrooms. The coaches would discuss gameplans at his dining room table. The Titans struggled with attendance for the first three years of existence, and the team's finances were on shaky ground. In spite of this, the team was fairly competitive and posted records of 7-7, 7-7, and 5-9 in their first three seasons. In 1963, the Titan's team finances were in shambles and in order to avoid going into bankruptcy, the AFL arranged a sale of the team to a group of investors led by David "Sonny" Werblin for one million dollars. The team was renamed the New York Jets and they began playing in the newly constructed Shea Stadium in 1964. In 1965, the Jets signed a young quarterback named Joe Namath, and less than six years after Wismer sold the team, they won the Super Bowl in 1969.

Wismer's broadcasting background and previous football connections made an impact in professional sports, even though his AFL team was not initially successful in New York. Wismer came up with the idea of sharing league broadcasting rights to all teams in the league which set the standard in professional football broadcasting contracts. During the time he was organizing the Titans, Wismer was approached by actor and writer George Plimpton who asked to join the team's training camp for a Sports Illustrated article. Wismer agreed, but there was no follow-through and Plimpton



Harry Wismer interviewed movie star and future princess Grace Kelly, her father John B. Kelly, and her brother, Jack Kelly, both former Olympic sculling champions, as a fund-raising drive for the 1956 Olympics.

approached the Detroit Lions instead. The book that Plimpton subsequently authored, *"Paper Lion,"* became a best seller. Plimpton had the following to say about Wismer: *"He was an odd man. He used to say 'Congratulations' to many people he met, on the grounds that they had 'probably' done something they could be proud of."*

While Harry Wismer was pursuing fame and fortune in broadcasting, Betty Wismer and her children led a more down-to-earth, though still prominent, lifestyle in Ypsilanti. In 1945, Betty Wismer was amongst those honored at

the annual meeting of the Ypsilanti Red Cross as having donated 150-500 hours of service to the organization. Betty was a member of Ypsilanti's Ladies' Literary Club and was also a member of the theatrical group called the Ypsilanti Players and in 1954, she was elected the president of the theatrical group. The Ypsilanti Players continued into the late 1990s.

Betty Wismer was a member of the Ann Arbor branch of the Women's National Farm and Garden Association. In 1950, Betty hosted the meeting to elect the board of the association, and the *Ann Arbor News* on May 10, 1950, stated: *"Following the meeting, which was held in the recently remodeled guest house on the Wismer farm, tea was served by the hostess."* It is interesting that the newspaper referred to the Wismer property as a *"farm."* In 1955, an article in the Springfield, Illinois, newspaper stated that Betty Wismer was in town with her two children and her parents. The article in the June 12, 1955, issue of The (Illinois) *State Journal-Register* stated: *"Mrs. Wismer, noted author on gardening and flower arrangements, recently returned from an extensive trip to Spain, Italy and the Mediterranean countries securing material for her forthcoming book on formal gardens."* It is unclear whether the book that she was planning was ever published.

In 1955, Betty Wismer played a lead role in the Ypsilanti Players' production of *Dial M for Murder* which was performed at St. Luke's Episcopal Church. In 1956, Betty directed skits presented by several Ypsilanti churches that were held at the Brown Chapel AME Church on S. Adams Street. The skits were held in conjunction with the World Day of Prayer on February 17, 1956, and had the theme of *"One Flock, One Shepherd."* In 1957, Betty Wismer served as the Ypsilanti chairperson for the Michigan Chapter of the National Nephrosis Foundation, a common disease fa-



Betty Wismer, seated at left, with fellow members of Ypsilanti Ladies' Literary Club.

tal to half of its young victims. Betty was also involved in politics. In 1958, Harry and Betty Wismer were co-chairs of the Washtenaw County Republican convention. Betty was selected as one of the representatives for Precinct 8 in Ypsi-

lanti Township, and was named the Washtenaw County representative on the state Republican central committee. The Wismer children attended Ypsilanti Public Schools and went to Roosevelt High School.

During the tumultuous time of starting up the New York Titans, the marriage of Harry and Betty Wismer fell apart. The couple officially divorced in July 4, 1959. Betty Wismer remained in her Ypsilanti home with her children, while Harry moved full time to his New York City apartment. In 1962, Harry Wismer was married to Mary Zwillman. 1964, Wismer accepted \$100,000 in a Detroit Lions stock settlement with his ex-father-in-law, to whom Wismer had previously transferred his share of Lions ownership. Incidentally, the Lions were purchased that year by a relative of Betty's, William Clay Ford, who was Henry Ford's grandson.

In 1965, Harry Wismer wrote a book called *"The Public Calls It Sport."* The book was semi-autobiographical and also discussed his philosophy on life. The book didn't sell well. A quote from the book states: "...no matter how good you think you are, how shrewd you are, there is always someone down the block, across the street, in the next town, who is a little better, shrewder, more ruthless." Harry un-

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doubtedly learned this lesson with the New York Titans ownership and the AFL's battle against the larger and more established NFL.

Following his New York Titans football team being sold from underneath him, Wismer returned to sports broadcasting but his best years were behind him. In 1967, he was diagnosed with cancer. In December of that year, he suffered a horrible accident at a New York restaurant where he fell down a flight of stairs. He died the next day on December 4, 1967. Harry Wismer is buried at Lakeside Cemetery in Port Huron.

After Harry and Betty Wismer's 1959 divorce, Betty Wismer married Charles Edward Potter at Betty's parents' estate in Dearborn on May 7, 1960. Dr. John Metlar of the Congregational Church of Ypsilanti presided. Potter had also recently divorced his first spouse. Charles Potter had served in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1947-1952, and served as a U.S. Senator from 1952-1959. Betty had been Potter's campaign manager for Washtenaw County in 1958 when he was defeated in his bid for re-election to the Senate by Philip Hart.

Betty's second husband, Charles Potter, was born in Lapeer, Michigan, and was educated at the Michigan State Normal College in Ypsilanti, where he graduated in 1938. After college, he worked as an administrator in Cheboygan County. In World War II, Potter served as a Major in the 28th Infantry Division of the U.S. Army. He was seriously wounded at the Battle of the Bulge in France and lost both of his legs to a land mine. That was the third time Potter had been wounded in the war. Potter was awarded the Silver Star (twice), the Purple Heart, and France's Croix de Guerre. Despite the loss of his legs, Potter was able to stand and slowly walk



Betty Wismer in a 1955 production of "Dial M for Murder" presented by the Ypsilanti Players. Betty Wismer is seated, with fellow actors Paul Richie and Robert Richardson.

through the aid of artificial limbs and two canes.

After his discharge from the Army in 1946, Potter served as a vocational rehabilitation representative in the U.S. Department of Labor. In 1947 he was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives to fill a vacancy caused by the death of Frederick Bradley. He served in two additional congressional sessions until 1952. In 1952, he was elected to the U.S. Senate to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Arthur Vandenberg, and served as a Senator from Michigan until 1959. Potter served on several

commissions and in 1965 he wrote a book called "*Days of Shame*" about his observations while serving in Congress about the McCarthy hearings. Potter had been one of the first Senators to stand up to McCarthy's investigative tactics.

After their wedding in May of 1960, Charles and Betty Potter delayed their European honeymoon until Betty's daughter Wendy finished out her school year at Roosevelt High School. The couple then moved to the Washington D.C. suburbs where Charles Potter had an established residence after many years in Congress. Potter died on November 23, 1979 in Washington, D.C. Betty retired to Winter Haven, Florida, where she died on January 23, 1994. After her death, her remains were reunited in burial with her second husband Charles Potter at Arlington National Cemetery.

Harry and Betty Wismer's son Henry attended Roosevelt High School and later the University of North Carolina. He joined the military and was married in the spring of 1965. He was tragically killed on October 22, 1965, at the Kingsville Naval Auxiliary Air Station in Texas. Henry Wismer's AF-9J Cougar collided mid-air in a training exercise with another jet. Wismer ejected after the collision, but his parachute did not open.



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Harry and Betty Wismer's residence in Ypsilanti lasted about 20 years, from 1940 to 1960. However, their connections to Ypsilanti went above and beyond their time living in the city. Through the years, each was connected to Ypsilanti in other ways, and perhaps they didn't even realize it. Here are some of the other connections the couple had with Ypsilanti:

Betty Wismer's uncle Henry Ford had many documented connections with Ypsilanti, including village industries, farmland, property, Ford Lake, and Willow Run.

Harry Wismer was a friend and business partner of Walter "Spike" Briggs, Jr. Spike Briggs attended Harry and Betty's wedding. Both Harry and Spike were co-owners of the Detroit Lions. Spike Briggs was the son of Detroit Tigers owner Walter Briggs, Sr., who was born in Ypsilanti and grew up on River Street. Eastern Michigan University's Briggs Hall and Briggs Field were named in his honor.



MSNC graduate Charles Potter was a member of the House of Representatives from Michigan and a U.S. Senator. Betty Bryant Wismer married Charles Potter and moved from Ypsilanti to Washington, D.C. in 1960.

Harry Wismer was a friend of Harry Bennett, who was Henry Ford's notorious right-hand-man who had a home on the Huron River near Ypsilanti. It was through Bennett's connections that Wismer was first introduced to Henry Ford. Wismer had a good appetite and was known on occasion to have had an early lunch with Harry Bennett and a later lunch with Henry Ford, all on the same day. Of course, Henry Ford would soon become Wismer's uncle after Wismer married Ford's niece.

Betty Wismer's second husband, Charles Potter, had several connections to Ypsilanti. The couple only lived in Ypsilanti for a short time af-

ter they were married in 1960 before moving to Washington D.C. However, Charles Potter had previous strong ties to Ypsilanti as he attended and graduated from Michigan State Normal College.

Charles Potter ran for Senate against Michigan's lieutenant governor, Philip Hart, in 1958. Hart happened to be married to Jane Briggs, the daughter of Walter Briggs and the brother of "Spike" Briggs. Jane was an aviator who was the first female helicopter pilot in Michigan and qualified in the 1960s as one of the participants in the Woman in Space Program, which was composed of thirteen American women who were tested and screened for potential spaceflight. The group was later known as the "Mercury 13."

Philip Hart served as Lieutenant Governor of Michigan under Governor G. Mennen "Soapy" Williams. "Soapy" Williams was married to Nancy Lace Quirk, who was born in Ypsilanti and was the daughter of Daniel and Julia Quirk, from the prominent banking and paper family in Ypsilanti.

Today there are a few existing reminders of Harry and Betty Wismer's time in Ypsilanti. Their former Ypsilanti residence still stands today and their estate is still admired by boaters on Ford Lake, though the property has been subdivided since the time that the Wismer's owned it. Wismer Road stands across Grove Road from their former residence. There are also the fading memories from old newspapers and aging Ypsilantians who once rubbed elbows with one of the power couples of not only Ypsilanti, but also Michigan and the United States. It reminds us that we have something pretty special here in Ypsilanti that would attract a couple in the national spotlight to live here when they could have lived literally anywhere in the world.

(Robert Anschuetz grew up in Ypsilanti in the historic Swaine house at the corner of Forest Ave. and River St. Robert is a regular contributor to the Gleanings.)



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Update on Woodlawn Cemetery

BY JAMES MANN

This is an update on a story published in the Fall 2018 issue of the *Gleanings*. That story opened with stating that Woodlawn Cemetery at 7800 South Huron River Dr. was a project waiting for someone to take on. Woodlawn Cemetery is one of the abandoned cemeteries of Washtenaw County. For years the cemetery, located between Carton Avenue and Brown Drive just east of the Michigan National Guard Armory, appeared as little more than an empty field. Beginning in the spring of 2025, work to restore the site has been carried out, with the project continuing into the current summer.

The site was purchased by the Rev. Garther Roberson, of the Second Baptist Church, in 1945 for use as a cemetery for the African American community in Ypsilanti, as few cemeteries then would accept the remains of African Americans. The dedication of the cemetery was held in March, 1946.

"The tract of ground includes about five acres which has been recorded for cemetery purposes. It carries the approval of the Township Supervisor, Otis Toose. Plans are being made to landscape the property. Funds from the sale of lots will be set aside for perpetual care. The 'surface marker' method will be followed in grave designations," reported *The Ypsilanti Daily Press* of March 9, 1946.

The Rev. Roberson died in 1955, and ownership of the property passed to his wife Estella Roberson and a Mrs. Booker Rhonene. Soon after inheriting the property, the women declared bankruptcy. Both women have since died.

The Woodland Cemetery Association had failed to file the appropriate papers of incorporation, and no money had been set aside for the perpetual care of the grounds. The last burial in Woodland may have been in 1965. That same year the cemetery was abandoned. By 1971 Woodlawn Cemetery was considered the "worst maintained" in Michigan.

The Ypsilanti Press of Friday, November 26, 1971 reported:

"Most of the graves are sinking, some as much as three to

four feet, and a heavy rainfall could expose the caskets, making it a little easier for whoever is responsible for management of the cemetery to count the number of occupants," "A narrow swath divided the cemetery covered with weeds and bushes, often reaching one's chest. Few of the graves are identified by markers, and some

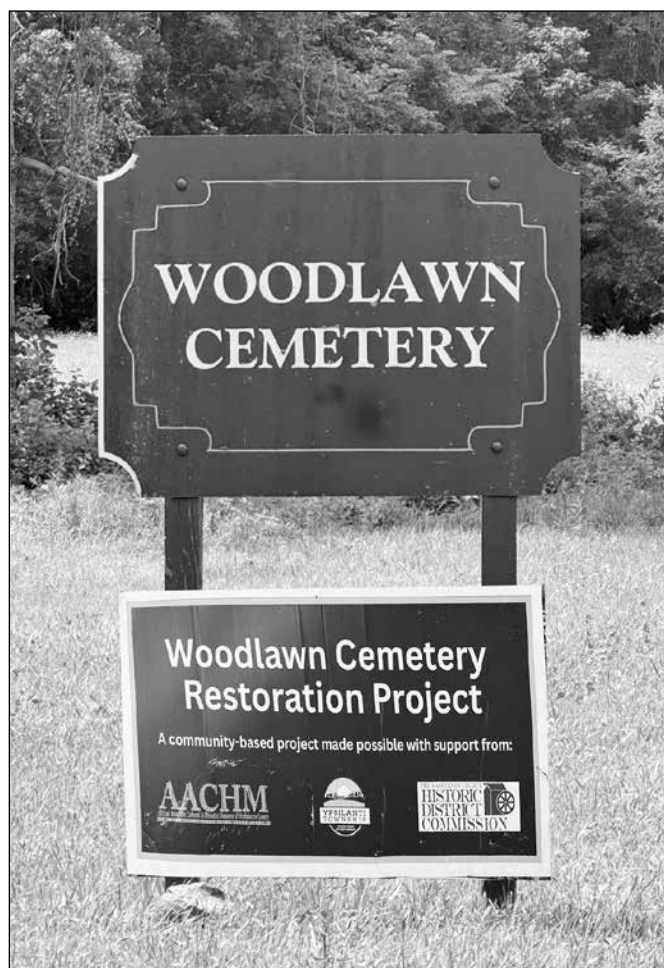
cement tombstones bear dates of birth and death inscribed with a nail without a name."

"One cannot walk around the gravesites," continued the account, *"without fearing his feet will be 'caught' in one of the holes. The stark combination of the rubbish and bright colored artificial bouquets, coupled with the thought of bodies lying beneath, makes one sick. The flowers may very well have been there for months or years."*

The restoration of Woodlawn Cemetery began last year with the collaboration of the African American Cultural and Historical Museum of Washtenaw County, the Washtenaw County Historic District Commission and Ypsilanti Township. The work began in the spring of 2025 with the removal of overgrowth and invasive species, and identifying and preserving historically significant trees

and plants. The plan for the restoration of Woodlawn Cemetery was developed by Historic Preservation Specialist and Archaeologist Kat Slocum of the Washtenaw County Office of Community & Economic Development.

Over time headstones were covered over by soil and grass, and part of the restoration process includes locating and uncovering the stones. Some of the headstones are no more than hand poured concrete slabs with the names etched in with a nail, because the families could not afford to purchase a stone. There were thought to be perhaps 150 people buried in Woodlawn Cemetery, the



Woodlawn Cemetery Restoration Project on South Huron River Drive, Ypsilanti.

majority African Americans. The exact number was not known, as the records of interment were destroyed in a fire years ago. Using ground penetrating radar to locate covered stones it has been discovered that there are at least 500 people buried there.

Work is continuing with landscaping and ground restoration.



Volunteers Kat Slocum and Kenya Tucker-Ibarisha read the names of uncovered headstones during the restoration project at the Woodlawn Cemetery in Ypsilanti. *Photo Courtesy of Josh Boland/Bridge Michigan*

Soon there will be an installation of a historic marker which will provide interpretive information.

In the long term, Ypsilanti Township has agreed to accept responsibility for the care of the site. This will include the cleaning and maintenance of gravestones and the landscape of the cemetery.

Woodlawn is no longer an abandoned cemetery.

(James Mann is a local historian and is a regular contributor to the Gleanings.)



Headstone of Garther Roberson, founder of Woodlawn Cemetery. *Photo Courtesy of African American Cultural Historical Museum of Washtenaw County*



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AHHH!!! Summer Vacation – It Took a Village

BY C. TINO LAMBROS

Yes!! Summer vacation! School is out and thoughts return to those glorious days of my youth in Ypsilanti in the mid 1950's and 60's. How we looked forward to the time off. It wasn't until a decade of teaching that I understood that summer break was for the teachers, not the students.

Mom's brightly colored spring flower beds would signal the beginning of the summer season even though a few weeks of school were still left; the irises, the tulips, the crocuses, the violets. Then dad would plow our next-door lot and plant his vegetable garden. There was nothing that tasted better than eating sweet peas or green beans right from the garden. With saltshaker in hand, the only tomatoes I would eat were

right from the vine. Somehow the flavor was enhanced when I was standing in the middle of the garden. One friend remarked, *"There was no other place in the city and so near EMU's campus where one could see cornstalks."*

The downside was the growing grass. We didn't have a power mower. Just the reel and push mower. And push you must. If the grass got too long, you were in for a serious battle to win the lawn war.



C. Tino Lambros as a young boy.

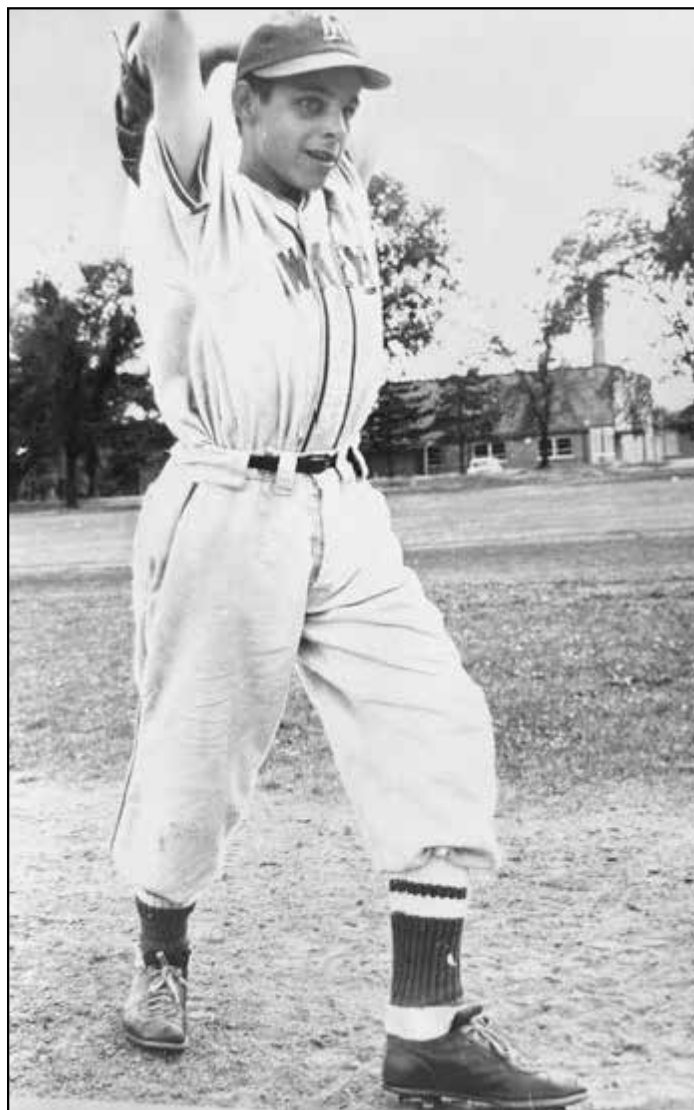
Those were carefree days, those summer months in Ypsi. It was safe. It was secure. It was a great time to be growing up. There certainly wasn't a lot of money to buy fun. It was a creative time. We invented ways to keep busy and have fun.

It was a time when it took "the village" to raise the children. Everyone in the neighborhood took part. This wasn't because everyone was a nosey busybody with nothing to do. No! It was because everyone was outside and on front porches and everyone knew all the neighbors and kids and could spot inappropriate behavior. Our parents welcomed this knowledge, this help, and were thankful for the information. And, instead of attacking the messenger or calling a lawyer, we young ones got confronted about our indiscretions, which after a couple of occurrences, were eliminated.

Those warm, lazy days! Kids put out the Kool-Aid and lemonade stands to raise a few dimes and quarters. This was especially true on the Fourth of July when the great, annual parade went by my West Cross Street home.

It was considered fine to let us ride our bikes wherever we wanted to go, even as a preteen. So, we did. We rode all over, to the park, downtown, across town. It was our freedom – our independence. I'm sure our parents worried about us, but we had no hesitation. It also taught us responsibility.

There were many safe places to "hang out." Some of the places included Recreation Park in the daytime and at night, The Handy Store, The Detroit Lions training camp at Michigan State Normal College – now Eastern Michigan University. And sometimes we just sat on the front porch. Every 4th of July we attended The Happyland Carnival. Often the carnival was in the large, open areas around Estabrook School. Then it moved to Waterworks Park along the Huron River. The McNaughton's Drive-In and the The Martha Washington Theater were favorites. And at all these places there was



C. Tino Lambros playing baseball (Babe Ruth League) at Recreation Park.

someone in “the village” that knew you, neighbors, friends, relatives, and acquaintances. The “eyes” were on you, but this was o.k. and not an invasion of your privacy, but a part of the “village” network.

The village was our neighborhood first. We knew all the people around us, front, back, and on our sides. Maybe we didn’t know everyone, but we knew that the widow Mrs. Johnson lived three houses down and across the street and she knew us. Mr. Dykman ran the local grocery store, the Handy Store, and everyone knew him, all his family, and his employees. My Little League coaches, the Goodsman brothers, one was the junior high principal, and the other was one of the owners of my favorite store, Mellencamp’s Clothing Store - both were my Little League coaches for three years. A classmate’s dad owned the hardware store, Walker Hardware and another friend’s dad owned Allison’s Shell Station across the street. The village was everywhere.

One attempt at beating the system was getting into the Martha Washington Theater for the “12 and under children’s price”. I had just turned 13 and being rather small for my age, it was worth the anxiety of scamming a reduced children’s price. I quietly and innocently gave the ticket lady my small pittance. She paused and contemplated the situ-

ation for what seemed like a very long time. I did not know this lady. After what seemed like an eternity, she said, “*Well, I think you are still o.k. for the children’s price, Tino.*” I’m not sure I recovered enough to enjoy the movie. I tried to figure out how she knew me. Later that week I had my first Babe Ruth League baseball practice and there she was – the mother of one of our best players. Neither Mrs. Adamick nor I ever brought it up. But I never paid the children’s price again.

It was a beautiful time. A time of innocence, a peaceful time. Yes! Looking back, it looked like the best time to grow up in America – a little more than Mayberry and Opie, a touch of Leave It to Beaver, a dash of Ozzie and Harriett, the teen appeal of American Bandstand, the universal variety of The Ed Sullivan Show, and the hokiness of The Mickey Mouse Club.

And all... without air conditioning. How primitive!

Ahhh!!! Sweet nostalgia – that which looks so good thirty years later or in my case more like 60 years ago. They are wonderful memories of lasting friends. It was a happy time. It takes a village!

(C. Tino Lambros grew up in Ypsilanti and has written several articles about his boyhood memories.)

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Reverend Doctor Henry P. Jacobs -

A Man Who Healed Minds, Bodies and Souls

BY JANICE ANSCHUETZ

Rev. Dr. Henry P. Jacobs was a former slave and one-time resident of Ypsilanti. He founded Jackson State University and was a member of the state house of representatives in Mississippi.

If anyone were to make a movie about the life of Reverend Doctor Henry P. Jacobs, it would be interesting and exciting. No one would believe that it was the true story of an intelligent and courageous man who changed the lives of many before and after the Civil War and continues to do so today at the Mississippi University he founded after the Civil War. I am fascinated by this man and would like to tell you about him and only hope that this narrative does him justice. Our story begins on July 8, 1835, in a slave cabin on the Gibb Family Plantation in South Carolina. A baby boy was born and he was named Samuel Hawkins. He stated that his slave mother's name was Mary Dill on a bank application in later years. We know that he had at least two brothers. Records indicate that the Gibb family owned about 30 slaves. Samuel and his family moved with their owner and many slaves to a new plantation in St. Clair County, Alabama, in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains.

At about the age of five, the young boy was charged with caring for the patriarch of the family who was an elderly invalid, and in one account the man was described as being insane. At the time, it was illegal to teach someone who was Black to read and write, but Samuel was determined to learn those skills. No doubt, knowing the value of these skills would ultimately change his life for the better and would lead to his lifelong commitment of teaching Black people of all ages to read and write.

By the age of 30 he was married to a fellow slave by the name of Louisa and had several children. Here, our story becomes exciting and we can only imagine the planning that this intelligent and courageous man exhibited when he carefully and neatly

forged "free papers" for himself, his wife, three children and two brothers. Using his master's horse and buggy, the fugitives started their perilous journey north to Canada. They snuck away on July 24th, 1856, and were stopped twice along the way. Their forged paperwork was carefully examined but it was done so skillfully by him that they were allowed to continue on their journey to freedom. Just three weeks and about 750 miles later, they crossed the Detroit River into the "promised land" where Canadian laws ensured they would be free. If you wish to learn more about the Canadian/American laws regarding escaped slaves, I suggest that you read the interesting and well-documented book *I've Got a Home in Glory Land*, written by Karolyn Smardz Frost.

Once in Canada, Hawkins and his family shed their slave names and took the surname Jacobs. He named himself Henry Jacobs though he was commonly known as H. P. Jacobs. Being a man of faith, within months of his successful escape, he was baptized in the Detroit River by a fellow former slave named Reverend William Troy who was one of the ministers to Canada's refugees and author to the book *Hair-breadth Escapes from Slavery to Freedom*. Later, on September 18, 1858, he was ordained a Baptist minister.



The old Second Baptist Church at the corner of Catherine and Hamilton Streets in Ypsilanti.

We do not know when Jacobs moved to Ypsilanti. Ypsilanti at that time had the largest African American population of any community in the state of Michigan with about 16% of its inhabitants being Black and there seemed to be a link between the Blacks in the small village to those in Ontario. I was trying to find out what year the

family moved to the United States and found that on October 1, 1859, they were blessed with a baby girl named Mary who was born in Amherstburg, Ontario, Canada. Shortly after this

date the family moved to Ypsilanti. We know this because we can locate them in Ypsilanti in the 1860 United States Census. The records indicate that Louisa and Henry had the following children living with them at that time: Hannah, age eleven, Harold, age nine, Samuel, age five, Mary, age one, and Elizabeth. His occupation is listed as a janitor and we learn that his wife also worked as a janitor at the Michigan Normal College, which is now Eastern Michigan University. The January 11, 1865, *Ypsilanti Free Democrat* wrote about Jacobs' reputation: "Rev. Mr. Jacobs, for a number of years a janitor at the Normal, is pastor. He is a good thorough worker, and of good natural abilities."

Yet in spite of the good reputation, he was accused of setting a small fire at the school. He was innocent of the charge and it was deemed to be racist in nature. Jacobs seemed to take every opportunity available to him. While employed at the Normal, two of his daughters enrolled in the school and obtained their teaching credentials and are considered among the first African American women to do so. They both went on to become celebrated musicians and also music teachers.

Reverend Jacobs was very active in civic affairs in Ypsilanti and showed amazing leadership which would have been unusual for any citizen, let alone one who had grown up under the confines of slavery. He quickly gathered a following and preached at the Second Baptist Church. At that time, it did not have a church building but met in various locations in the Village of Ypsilanti, including private homes. He led a fund-raising drive to purchase a lot in the city and build the Second Baptist Church at the corner of Catherine and Hamilton Streets. He also started and led a type of woman's benevolent society which provided food, clothing and housing and even burial for the poor in the village. This young minister would go on to become one of the most prominent Baptist ministers in the entire United States of America!



The Mississippi historical marker indicating that Jacobs was the founder of Jackson State University.

We find a letter Jacobs wrote which was published in the *Ypsilanti Commercial* newspaper of April, 1865, and I quote it here:

"Mr. Editor—The Second Baptist Church of this city (Colored) had a donation party a few evenings since. We were happily addressed by Rev. Mr. Hewitt, and Mr. Jennes. After a pleasant time, the following resolutions were adopted: 1st We return our most hearty thanks to the good citizens of this city, for their kindness in helping us get up a donation to aid in paying for our lot, and to build a house of worship. 2nd We will ever pray for our soldiers that are doing battle, to maintain our country, and for the extermination of slavery the world over. 3rd We trust Abraham Lincoln will be the next President, John C. Fremont Vice President, and Austin Blair the next Gov. of Michigan. With these men to rule u we think the country is safe. Henry Jacobs"

Jacobs had a strong drive to right wrongs in society and while in Ypsilanti noticed that although the schools were integrated, Black students were traditionally seated in the back of classrooms and there were no Black teachers. This soon changed when he founded a school for African American children, taught by Black teachers and led by a Black principal. This actually was the beginning of segregated schools in Ypsilanti, which later became a battle ground for the NAACP in Ypsilanti who a century later fought to integrate Ypsilanti schools.

Jacobs was not afraid to involve himself in politics, even the unpopular and controversial issue of allowing Black men

to fight in the Union Army. He was one of the hosts of the historic meeting held in Ypsilanti in 1863 with other important Black leaders of the time such as Martin R. Delany, who is considered to be "*The Father of Black Nationalism.*" Their conclusion and demands were that African American men should be allowed to join the army and fight but under the condition



The Natchez Seminary, which eventually became Jackson State University.

that they were considered full citizens of the United States. This meant that the term “white” be removed from all laws and that any law making a distinction between Black and white be edited recognizing them as equal.

Soon after the Civil War was over, Jacobs traveled to Natchez, Mississippi, where he organized a number of Baptist organizations throughout the state. He also started two schools to teach Blacks to read and write – both adults and children. Two of his daughters, with newly acquired teaching certificates from Ypsilanti’s Normal College, soon joined him in Mississippi as teachers. One of the schools, the Natchez Seminary, was opened by Jackson in 1877 under the American Baptist Home Mission Society. The school went on to eventually become Jackson State University, which still thrives as a Historically Black College and University (HBCU). Jacobs is honored by having the most prominent building at Jackson State University named after him, known as the H.P. Jacobs Administration Tower. The building houses the Office of the President, General Council, Division of Academic Affairs, Research and Economic Development, Division of Business and Finance, Division of Institutional Advancement and Division of Graduate Studies.

The college he started in Mississippi seemed to be an extension and growth of the school Jacobs began when he left Ypsilanti shortly after the Civil War was concluded. He believed that in order to be successful, African American citizens needed to be able to read and write. I found an interesting review of his first school published



The H.P. Jacobs Administration Tower at Jackson State University.

in April, 1867, written by J. P. Bardwell who was the agent of schools for the Freeman’s Bureau. Without correcting the grammar of the narrative, it reads:

“Another School reporting between Seventy and Eighty Scholars is taught by Rev.

Mr. Jacobs & Mr. Habersham, both colored, who have applied to the Bureau for aid – They are perhaps better than no teachers, but both are quite deficient in Education. While visiting their School, I noticed a Bulletin board hung up in the School room, with their Rules written upon it, about half the words were misspelt – I doubt whether either of them can read a Sentence in the third Reader correctly, but the Freedment think them the best teachers in the city, & pay them more promptly & more willingly than the best qualified white teachers-“

Sadly, Henry’s wife Louisa died of pulmonary tuberculosis in 1869. After this, their young daughter, Ann Jacobs DeHazen brought the younger children back to Ypsilanti and raised them. Her home still stands at 111 South Adams Street, across from the United States Post Office, and I always think of that accomplished woman while I wait in line to mail a package at the downtown Ypsilanti Post Office and can see the house from the window. She was a noted piano teacher and taught from that house and was married to Robert DeHazen who, like her father, was a leader in the Black community of not only Ypsilanti but the State of Michigan. Sadly, Anna died on March 6, 1895 at the age of only 42 years old and is buried at Highland Cemetery.

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As if founding and teaching a school after moving from Ypsilanti was not enough for this selfless man, in 1868 Jacobs entered Mississippi politics. He served as a delegate to the state's 1868 Constitutional Convention, which was charged with rewriting the laws of the state in order to recognize Black people as citizens. This led to his election to the Mississippi House of Representatives where he served three terms.

The year of his second marriage is not known. His second wife's name was Louisa Foster. They had one son named Foster who was born in Natchez, Mississippi on April 3, 1878. She was a teacher. During this time, he continued to travel back to Ypsilanti in order to visit family and speak at various gatherings and celebrations. We read in the *Detroit Free Press* of July 23, 1886:

"Ypsilanti, Michigan, Emancipation Day will be held in this city on Monday, August 2, by the colored population of this vicinity. Delegations are expected from neighboring cities and towns, after which a procession will be formed and march to the fairgrounds (author's note – now Recreation Park) where the festivities will be held. After dinner Mayor Cromwell is expected to deliver an address of welcome, followed by speeches from Hon. H. P. Jacobs, a colored representative from Natchez, Miss., Hon E.P. Allen and Hon Chas. R. Whitman of their city, and Daniel Mills (colored) of Detroit. The remainder of the afternoon will be devoted to baseball and athletic sports. In the evening a dance will be given at the Arcade rink and a social at Light Guard Hall."

Now, if all of these achievements and efforts to help others were not enough for one man who was born and remained a slave for many years, Jacobs continued his education and earned a medical degree in a program open to African Americans in Louisville, Kentucky, on May 3, 1890, at the age of 65. There seems to have been several reasons for him to become a doctor. For one, he wanted to be financially independent so he did not have to depend on the hard-earned money of his congregation for his income. Another reason seems to be that in caring for others, he provided much needed medical consultation and treatment to those in need, as well as spiritual healing. This is the first time he was able to find a medical college which would accept Black students. This is how he became known as Reverend Doctor Henry P. Jacobs.

Reverend Doctor Henry P. Jacobs died at his Natchez residence on Thursday, 14 December, 1899, at the age of seventy-four. He was buried at the Natchez City Cemetery. His obituary states:

"For several years before his health failed him he filled several pulpits and charges in various Southern States. Rev. Jacobs had also represented Adams County in the legislature during the 'Republican regime in Mississippi.' His widow, one of the oldest teachers in the Union school, and a son were left to mourn his demise."

Even though his son, Foster R. Jacobs, died of pulmonary tuberculosis on January 18, 1905 at the age of only 27 in Los Angeles, California, it seems that he followed in his father's footsteps as a public servant. A newspaper death notice published in *The Liberator* newspaper of Los Angeles, July, 1905, gives this tribute to him: "A brilliant career was cut short. He held a position as a clerk in the city assessor's office where he was rated among the most efficient." The article goes on to list the relatives who survived him in 1905 and we find that of Jacob's children, only his half-sisters Mary, Jewell and Lida were still alive, as well as his mother.

This very short narrative is only a fraction of the life of an amazing man who was not only intelligent

but courageous and moral and lived in a very troubled time in our country for Black people striving to help our country do the right thing in recognizing their citizenship. He seems to have never stepped back from a difficult battle to ensure that generations following slavery were educated and that the laws of the land were changed to recognize everyone as equal.

Our own city of Ypsilanti boasts a mural on the barber shop at 432 Harriet Street as a daily reminder of the Reverend Doctor Henry R. Jacobs. It was painted in 2015 by a group of high school students from Ypsilanti Community Schools, which is fitting because of his commitment to education. I have written many biographies for the Ypsilanti Historical Society's *Gleanings* of amazing citizens of our city who have influenced change but never have I ever admired a man and his life and legacy more than this gift to the earth, the Reverend Doctor Henry Jacobs. Who would have guessed that a little baby, born as a slave, would grow into such an amazing hero. If a movie were made of his life, it would be exciting, interesting and no one would believe it to be true.

(Janice Anschuetz has been researching and writing articles for the Gleanings for over 25 years, and is pleased to be able to share them. She has majors in history and sociology from Eastern Michigan University as well as a Master's of Social Work from the University of Michigan and loves to be able to learn more about the history of Ypsilanti and the amazing people who have called it home.)



The H.P. Jacobs mural on the barber shop at 432 Harriet Street in Ypsilanti was painted by Ypsilanti High School students.

Museum Advisory Board Report

BY NANCY BALOGH

This year, the United States celebrates its semiquincentennial, that is a mouthful and let's just say the 250th birthday of our nation. Toward this milestone the State of Michigan offered a grant, America2025MI to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States. The Ypsilanti Historical Society has been awarded the grant. The project will seek to inventory approximately 50% of YHS's collection, focusing on objects related to Ypsilanti's development through industry, labor, education, transportation and migration. The work will be led by two paid graduate students from Eastern Michigan's Historic Preservation Studies Program and will take a year to complete.

Cheryl Farmer, former mayor and local historian has donated a family heirloom to the museum. It is a hanging lamp that was given to her by her parents, Donald Richard and Dorothy Ruth Mattoon Farmer. Farmer explained, *"Dad got it from his mother, Verna Viola Sullivan Farmer who inherited it from the estate of her favorite Aunt Susie who bought it from the Sears catalogue in the late 1800's."* It was converted from kerosene to electric in the 1960's.

The Museum Advisory Board welcomes two newly appointed members. Kathy Gilden Bidelman attended Roosevelt High School on the campus of Eastern Michigan University from kindergarten through 12th grade. She received her B.S. at E.M.U. in chemistry and microbiology and master's in library and information science from the University of Michigan. She retired from U. of M. after 30+ years at the school of education and chemistry departments. Kathy



Hanging lamp donated by Cheryl Farmer.

is also a volunteer docent for the museum and assistant editor for the *Gleanings*. Kathy is a "Beyer Baby" and a life-long area resident. She is committed to preserving Ypsilanti's history and believes in its importance for the future.

Tom Hubbard moved to Ypsilanti in the 1970's as an undergraduate student and has stayed in the area ever since. Before joining the Museum Advisory Board, Tom volunteered as a museum docent. After many years, he retired as a University of Michigan staffer. As a long-time resident of Ypsilanti, Tom remarked, *"I'm grateful that so much Ypsilanti history has been preserved and presented so well in the Museum."*



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Ypsilanti's Own Legend, **THE SMEET FROG**

BY KASEN SAUL

Everybody has heard of creatures such as Bigfoot, the Loch Ness Monster, or even the Chupacabra. These creatures are often referred to as cryptids. The definition of a cryptid is “An animal whose existence or survival is disputed or unsubstantiated.” Cryptids often stem from urban legends passed down through generations that, over time, begin to gain traction in the mainstream media or through word of mouth. For example, the legend of Bigfoot began in a forest in California in 1958. Fast forward 67 years, and Bigfoot has almost become a household name, despite no actual evidence of the creature’s existence. Now you may be wondering, “How does this relate to Ypsilanti?” But did you know that Ypsilanti has its very own cryptid?

The Smeet Frog is the name given to the cryptid that supposedly has made its home in Ypsilanti. The Smeet Frog is said to be like any other frog except for two distinct differences. The Smeet Frog is said to have a thick layer of fur unlike any other amphibian, as well as the ability to fly. The myth of the Smeet Frog seems to have begun in 1996, but really gained a lot of popularity in 2010. The original tale claims that in 1996, 3 filmmaking students at Eastern Michigan University wanted to make a documentary about the Smeet Frog. These filmmakers then went “missing” and all that was found was their video footage floating down the Huron River in a cooler. This story was said to have been inspired by the popular movie at the time, *The Blair Witch Project*, in which a similar situation occurs. However, in 1999, the legend of the Smeet Frog began gaining more traction, as a marker was put up on a walking path that runs under the Cross Street Bridge. This marker would flesh out more details surrounding the Smeet Frog. The details included things such as the appearance of the Smeet Frog, as well as noting things like how the creature only comes out at night and that the number of Smeet Frogs is actually in the tens of thousands. This marker was not officially put in by the City of Ypsilanti and was eventually removed from the site. This did not stop the legend, however, as over the next 13 years three more markers would be put up detailing the Smeet Frog. These details mentioned things such as the migration patterns of the Smeet Frog, as well as potential dangers that might come along if you

end up catching one of the frogs. It is said that the Smeet Frog travels every year from the northern coast of Labrador to the Huron River in Ypsilanti. It is also stated that catching a Smeet Frog comes with some risks as the frogs could be poisonous, carry leprosy, or even lay eggs under the catcher’s skin! These are just a few details included in these markers; the last marker would be placed in 2013.



Signs about the Smeet Frog appear randomly around Ypsilanti.

Another version of the Smeet Frog legend seems to add to the story. This version of the legend adds that in 1845, a naturalist at Eastern Michigan University named Peter Boggs discovered the Smeet Frog in Ypsilanti. Boggs recorded that Smeet Frogs live in the darkest and murkiest parts of the Huron River. Also stated is that the Smeet Frog was once a staple food and ceremonial item for the Native Americans who hunted the banks of the Huron River. The frogs were not easy to catch or find, however, as the fur on the back of the Smeet Frog would help the creature blend into the moss along the river. One part of the legend also states that the island known as “Frog Island” was named when Ypsilanti

Mayor Smedly J. Snodgrass heard the croaks of the Smeet Frogs coming from the island. This version of the tale is a great example of how legends like the Smeet Frog begin to gain popularity. There are many flaws to this addition to the tale, but it makes the legend seem fun and inviting for anyone who would want to celebrate the fictitious history of the Smeet Frog.

One of the most important but also overlooked aspects of not just the Smeet Frog but also other cryptid legends is the effect it plays on the community. In the case of the Smeet Frog, there have been local gatherings that have formed to celebrate the cryptid and its legend. Recently, there was a gathering of Smeet Frog enthusiasts at the Ypsilanti District Library aptly named “Smeet Fest”. The invitation for Smeet Fest was posted online on the Ypsilanti Reddit page, inviting guests to come out and celebrate by doing things such as Mad Libs, journal pages, coloring pages, as well as a password to get into the event, which was “Nice to Smeet You.”

There are different ways that these creatures can help the



A marker located by the Cross Street Bridge gives information about the Smeets Frog.



The Ypsilanti District Library hosted a "Smeets Fest."

community come together. For example, the Smeets Frog has its very own Facebook page. This helps to spread the legend further to people who may not know about it. With Ypsilanti being the home of a large university, there are many new students coming to the city every year. Methods such as the Facebook page or posters put up around town help new people become familiar with the legend and feel as if they know a piece of Ypsilanti history. It is a fun method

to get people involved and talking within the community. Maybe people meet new friends by going to events such as Smeets Fest; regardless, it is fun to have local legends to celebrate.

(Kasen Saul is a graduate student at Eastern Michigan University.)

Call for Volunteers!

Are you interested in looking at old pictures and documents from the history of Ypsilanti? The Ypsilanti Center Archives is looking for volunteers to help with a variety of tasks. Jobs include inventory, scanning, and file organization. No archival experience needed, just a passion for local history.

If interested CONTACT

Catherine at 734-217-8236 or yhs.archives@gmail.com

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If you love the idea of a place with a fascinating past you will enjoy being a docent at the Ypsilanti Historical Museum.

It's easy and slow paced with plenty of time to explore the many artifacts of the museum and delve deeper into the city's rich history. "

Docent – Nancy Balogh

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