

● Winter 2014

Impressions

NEWSLETTER

WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Winter Turns to Spring on Sunny Pastures Farm

The winter of 1832 in Pittsfield Township Michigan was tough. According to John Geddes in a letter he wrote in March 1832 to his brother William: "the 26th of January was 11 degrees below zero, the coldest day in the middle of the day of any day since we had the thermometer." Back in 1932, Poet J. Raleigh Nelson looked out of the windows of this 1830s farmhouse and described the "midnight winter wind, as it roars across the empty winter fields, tender winter wheat shivering in the cold, tossing the trees about the house, the frightened chatter of the shutters and the snarl of sleet against the pane". When one stands in the farmhouse now and looks out of the window during these blustery days, it feels like 100 years ago in Pittsfield Township. You can imagine the thoughts of the farmers as they looked over their barns and pastures and those of their neighbors when the winds roared. *(Continued on page 4)*

WCHS

Our mission is to educate and inspire our community to engage in the preservation and presentation of area history

Welcome to the Quarterly Issue of our Newsletter

This is the first issue of *impressions* in our new quarterly format. We hope that you enjoy reading about the History of local farms, an insider's view of the Geddes family, the current exhibit at the Museum on Main Street and the latest addition to the WCHS family: The Argus Collection. Let us know what you think. Feel free to share any comments, suggestions, articles and ideas for future issues. email Bev Willis at wchs-1000@ameritech.net. We look forward to hearing from you!

New Exhibit Opens this June at the Museum on Main Street

Our next exhibit is about the history of Farms in Washtenaw County. Michigan's farming industry began with early settlers who grew crops *(Continued on page 6)*

Inside...

Features

- 4 Farms in Washtenaw County
- 6 From "Sunny Pastures"
- 9 The Geddes Family: Brothers Letters & their Farms

Highlights

- 2 Letter from the President
Argus Collection Announcement
- 3 New Volunteer Opportunities
- 8 The Top 10 Reasons to come to the Museum on Main Street

WCBS

BOARD OFFICERS

President

Leslie L. Loomans

Vice President

Karen L. Jania

Treasurer

Patricia W. Creal

Recording Secretary

Judith M. Chrisman

Corresponding Secretary

Pauline V. Walters

BOARD MEMBERS

Joseph Cialdella

James Davis

Tom Freeman

Dale Leslie

Diana Mankowski, PhD

Sally Silvennoinen

Jay Snyder

Anita Toews

Jan E. Tripp

Susan Cee Wineberg

Cynthia Yao

Robert Yuhasz

DIRECTORS-AT-LARGE

Richard L. Galant, PhD

(Immediate past President)

Dean Greb

Susan Kosky

ADMINISTRATOR

Bev Willis, *Impressions* Editor

MUSEUM DOCENT

& GIFT SHOP MANAGER

John Kilar

ARGUS COLLECTION CURATOR

Cheryl Chidester

ADVISORS

Ina Hanel Gerdenich

David LaMoreaux

Louisa Pieper

Kay Williams

Impressions

is published four times a year
by the Washtenaw County
Historical Society, a non profit
501(c)(3) organization.
Donations are tax deductible

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Last September I wrote that a special committee of the board was conducting due diligence on a possible donation to the Society of a significant artifact collection pertinent to the history of Washtenaw County. I am pleased to write now that the Argus Collection was donated at the end of 2013. This extensive (almost 2000 items) and significant Collection represents an important part of the history of Washtenaw County and the City of Ann Arbor. We are very grateful to the donors, Joe O'Neal and Bill Martin.

The Argus Collection features products manufactured by the Argus Camera Company and tells the story of the company's history. The Argus One Building at 525 West William was the initial home of the Company and currently houses the Collection. The Collection will remain in the Argus One Building. It is open to the public Monday through Friday, 9-5, except for holidays. I'm pleased to announce, also, that the Curator of the Collection, Cheryl Chidester, is now an employee of the Society and will continue her important work with the Collection.

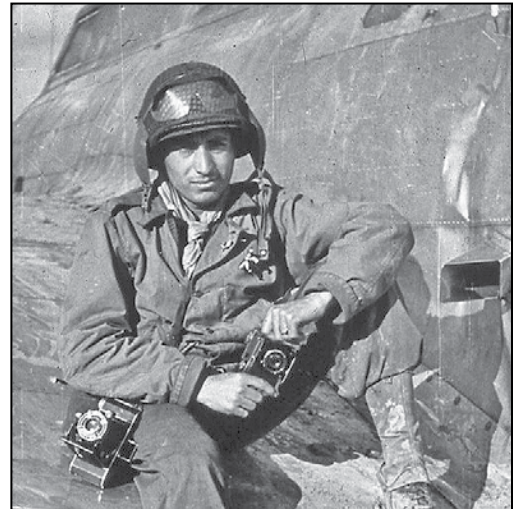
The donation of this Collection fits perfectly with our Society's Mission Statement: "... the preservation and presentation of area history." Effectively this becomes Washtenaw County Historical Society's second museum location. Do make plans for an early visit.

Les Loomans

They call it "The Brick"

For nearly three decades (1939-1966), it was the best-selling 35mm camera in the world, and is given credit for popularizing the use of 35mm film. In 1945, *Fortune Magazine* said that Argus had "overnight changed candid camera photography in the U.S. from a class hobby to a mass pastime." Photojournalist and soldier, Tony Vaccaro, achieved worldwide fame for the images he captured in Europe during WWII with his "black brick".

In 2001, Joe O'Neal spoke at the March Educational program at the Argus Building about the collection. And he talked about Tony with whom there is an emotional connection. 'In 1944, the company was renamed Argus, Inc. Argus Inc. did two totally different things during this era to win the war and I'm the only one who looks at the second thing as having any meaning. First, they produced hundreds of thousands of lenses that went out so the war could be won. And second, a young soldier named Tony Vaccaro purchased one of the cameras like mine. Tony came to my office one day and I thought he was a salesman. But Tony's story unfolded: he went to war as a young man with an M-1 rifle on one shoulder and an Argus C-3 on the other. He took over 3,000 photographs from the front line, many taken of his comrades being blown to pieces. Tony got his supplies from bombed-out apothecaries and did his developing in a helmet. He then hid the film. These photos were important because they brought to us at home the harshness, the cruelty and the evilness of war. We have several Vaccaro photographs in the museum. Karen and I were fortunate to be able to meet Tony, who lives in Brooklyn. Tony's camera - the thing speaks for itself - is a mess with broken parts but still in working condition. The sale of that one camera to Tony is an uncelebrated aspect of the impact Argus had on the war effort. We truly appreciate Joe O'Neal and Bill Martin for making the donation of such an important collection to the WCBS.



In 1944, Private Tony Vaccaro was with the 83rd Infantry Division of the U.S. Army on the Western front. He called his cameras, a 35mm Argus C3, 'black brick.' (Photo: T. Vaccaro)

Collecting Community History

The WCHS is always interested in expanding our collection of artifacts, photographs and documents that represent Washtenaw County history. All items are preserved, some items may be displayed in exhibits, while others may be highlighted in *Impressions* or used for research.

In addition to the Argus Collection, recent donations include: A land grant to Eber White signed by President John Quincy Adams and an abstract for a plot sold by John Allen from Brian Urganhart. We also received digitized photos of the Feiner family from Lynn Suits whose great grandmother was Flossie Feiner.

Lynn Smith donated a phonograph record of *I Want to Go Back to Michigan*, ca.1909. Other donations include: Two stock certificates from Ann Arbor Co-Operative Society, several University Musical Society programs and twelve issues of *The Woodmen*, a newsletter of Boy Scout troop 11 at Mack School from Charles Thrall; an Ann Arbor High School Student Directory from 1897-8; and *The Law Students' Helper*, January 1896 from Ellen Ewing.

Do You have Items to Donate? Contact Curator Judy Chrisman by email at judychr@aol.com or call the Museum at 734-662-9092.

Thank You Argus Collection Supporters

When the Washtenaw County Historical Society membership renewal letters went out for 2014, there was a new category, "Argus Cameras". The Society wants to thank those of you who made a contribution to this fund. It is encouraging as we move forward with the important work to know that our "Friends of History" value this effort. There is still time to renew your 2014 membership and support the WCHS Argus Collection. It's easy online at WashtenawHistory.org.

The Museum on Main Street

Current Exhibit: Three Courses

The Dinnerware Museum

Open Until May 12

Museum Hours: Saturdays & Sundays

12 Noon – 4:00 PM and by appointment

Groups are welcome. Call 734-662-9092

Email: wchs-500@ameritech.net

500 N. Main Street

(at Beakes & E. Kingsley)

Ann Arbor, MI 48104-1027

WashtenawHistory.org

[facebook.com/washtenawhistory](https://www.facebook.com/washtenawhistory)



Photo by Judith Tomer



The Washtenaw County Historical Society

P.O. Box 3336 • Ann Arbor, MI 48106-3336

Volunteers Wanted

As a non-profit organization we welcome the involvement of motivated volunteers. Some opportunities include:

- Cataloging and photographing artifacts.
- Light filing and sorting in the museum office.
- Helping maintain the garden and grounds.
- Helping set-up and dismantle museum exhibits.
- Membership Committee.
- Indexing and scanning documents.

If you think you could help out, please download the volunteer form from www.WashtenawHistory.org. Or email Diana Mankowski at dmankows@gmail.com. We would love to hear from you.

Current Opportunities

Do you like working with data?

The **membership volunteer** is expected to maintain a spreadsheet of current members and to provide timely lists as needed for newsletter and other mailings. Work from home with occasional meetings at the museum. Experience using Microsoft Excel is a must. The volunteer must be able to enter data accurately. The position requires a commitment of about one hour per month and 10 hours per month in December and January.

Do you enjoy cultivating relationships?

The **community relations volunteer** is responsible for managing the complimentary newsletter mailing list. The volunteer is expected to work with the board to develop list criteria that supports the Society's program and goals. The volunteer should have familiarity with local groups/individuals likely to support WCHS objectives. Work from home, and be available for occasional meetings and reports to the Board. The commitment is for two hours per month from September to June.

For more information or to sign up email Jan Tripp at Jan_Tripp@comcast.net

Disaster Preparedness and Response Plan Adopted by the Board of Directors

Under the leadership of WCHS Board member Anita Toews we now have the most comprehensive and complete Disaster Preparedness and Response Plan in place for the Museum on Main Street. Board members Judy Chrisman, Jan Tripp and Karen Jania also served on the committee. From floods, to emergencies to first aid and fire – steps for first responders and recovery procedures are clearly defined. This document is available digitally, in print as well as a pocket response plan that folds to fit in a wallet along with a magnifier.

New Exhibit Coming this Summer

(continued from page 1) feed themselves and support their families. Settlement was steady in the 1820s and 30s and subsistence agriculture was the economic driving force. Most of the products of the area farms, orchards and mills were consumed locally. The coming of the railroad in 1838 increased settlement and opened markets to local farmers. But the opening of the University of Michigan and Michigan Normal School (Eastern Michigan University) changed the fundamental nature of our community. Our goal for this exhibit is that visitors will gain insight into how Washtenaw County's first settlers lived and worked on their family farms.

We will explore some of the major changes in how farm work is done and how farming as an industry has developed over the last century, both nationally and locally. In addition, you will gain an understanding of the influence farming (and changes associated with farming) has on what we eat.

The building housing the Museum on Main Street was built in 1835 and one of its early inhabitants was Charles Greiner, a gardener. We want the experience of this exhibit to begin the moment you enter the grounds of our corner plot—imagining the farms, orchards and suppliers that were once our neighbors. Look for the opening after Memorial Day on Sunday June 1.

Washtenaw Farm & Garden Center: Once Around the Corner from the Museum



From 1938 to 1940, the present 124-stall farmers market was built by the federal Works Progress Administration, a Depression-era jobs program. WPA workers roofed and paved the market and added another short wing extending west from Detroit Street. A market headquarters, a small tan brick building, was built in the middle, where the parking is today. Market managers used the back room for an office, while farmers used the lounge in front to get warm and to eat sack lunches.

Shortly after the market was finished, Charles McCalla built a cinder-block building just north of the market for his Washtenaw Farm Bureau store. He used the new building as a store and feed mill, and the old lumber warehouse on the corner of Fifth and Kingsley for storage and parts. (Both buildings are now part of Kerrytown.)

McCalla ground grain into livestock feed and sold prepared feeds, seeds, pet supplies, and penny candy. With such a convenient location, many market farmers bought supplies there. In 1962, McCalla's son and daughter-in-law, Ray and Shirley McCalla, took over the business and renamed it Washtenaw Farm and Garden Center. In 1969, they sold the buildings to Kerrytown's developers and moved their operation to Dexter.

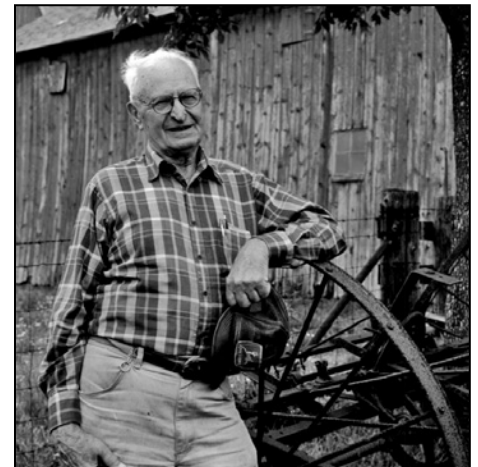
Another nearby business that catered to the farmers was a small eatery run by Bill Biederman. At the time the WPA market was built, there were still four houses along Fourth Avenue west of the market. Bill Biederman lived in one of the houses and ran a modest restaurant in his kitchen, serving breakfasts and light lunches – hamburgers, chili, soup. John Biederman worked as a dishwasher and cook for his uncle when he was a teenager. He remembers there were about nine stools and some little armchairs. **By Grace Shackman**

We want to Include your Family's Farming Heritage

Did you grow up on a farm or do you currently live on a farm? Do you have a family history, photos, documents or artifacts related to your family's farm, that you would like the community to learn about through this upcoming exhibit? Just let us know what you have and we'll do the rest. Contact Judy at 734-662-9092 or judychr@aol.com

You can share as many items as you like: journals, diaries, letters, artifacts and photographs of family, farm work, buildings, livestock, crops, even the family pet dog!

103 Years and Still on the Farm



Read about Don Staebler, 103 years old, and other Washtenaw County farmers on storiesofchelsea.org

The Staebler family farm is located in Superior Township. Within the expansive walls of the restored barns, 140 year old farmhouse and garage, are a collection of artifacts spanning more than 100 years of rural Washtenaw County history. Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission purchased the Staebler Farm for development of a County park in 2001. Former owner Donald Staebler, who still resides in the farmhouse under a life-lease, agreed to donate farming implements and other historical artifacts for future public education and enjoyment.

Experience Life on the Farm at County Museums

The Pittsfield Township Historical Society's web site is full of information about three historic farm museums within six miles of each other that interpret three distinct eras of American agriculture. For more information about these museums see pittsfieldhistory.org

Cobblestone Farm is located at 2781 Packard Road, in what was the northern portion of Pittsfield Township. This farmstead interprets regional agriculture and farm life from 1800-1860. Building on the site's domestic and agricultural heritage, guests are engaged in rich sensory experiences based on a farm family's journey through the seasons and the years. cobblestonefarm.org



Sutherland-Wilson Farm - This historic farm is located in Pittsfield Township at 797 W. Textile Road. This farmstead interprets regional agriculture and farmlife during the 1850-1900 time period. This was the home of Pittsfield Township pioneers Langford and Lydia Sutherland who came to Washtenaw County in 1832. This property was designated a Centennial Farm in 1981.

Rentschler Farm - Located about one mile from Sutherland-Wilson Farm at 1265 E. Michigan Avenue just east of Saline, Michigan. The farmstead interprets regional agriculture and farm life during the 1900-1950 time period. This farmstead, now known as the Rentschler Farm Museum, consists of fourteen historically significant structures built primarily around the turn of the century. The land was first farmed in 1825; and in 1901, the farmstead was purchased by Emanuel Rentschler. The Rentschlers continued to farm the land until the 1990s.



Do you know where these photos were taken?

These images of Ann Arbor, circa 1910 are from the Virtual Motor City Project. This digitization project of Detroit News photos is a Wayne State University Library System and Walter P. Reuther Library collaboration. Explore more photos online at dlxs.lib.wayne.edu. If you know where these photos were taken email wchs-500@ameritech.net or call 734-662-9092.



View of unidentified street in Ann Arbor, Michigan



Exterior view of large home or boarding house in Ann Arbor, Michigan, with fieldstone porch

Judges Needed for History Day State Competition

We need the help of educators and community members with an interest in history to serve as judges at the **History Day state finals in Saline on April 26, 2014, 8AM-2PM at Saline Middle School**. You should be interested in history, we provide training in how to judge the History Day entries and you will be placed on teams with seasoned veteran judges. One of the pleasures of judging at History Day is to meet students who have a passion for their topic.

Every year, thousands of Michigan students grades 4-12, research and prepare projects on a range of historical topics. Students can present in a variety of formats, from the traditional research paper to a documentary, an exhibit, a web site, or a live performance! For more information contact Tammy Bames at the Historical Society of Michigan, 517-324-1828 or email bames@hsmichigan.org. You can also register online at www.hsmichigan.org/mhd/judges.

Sunny Pastures: The View from Lohr Road

(Continued from page 1)

The white farmhouse on the hill at 3261 Lohr Road in Pittsfield Township is a Washtenaw County Historic Landmark. The Washtenaw County Historic District Commission placed an historical marker on this site in 2006. It is one of a handful of pre-Civil War homes and farm structures remaining in the entire County.

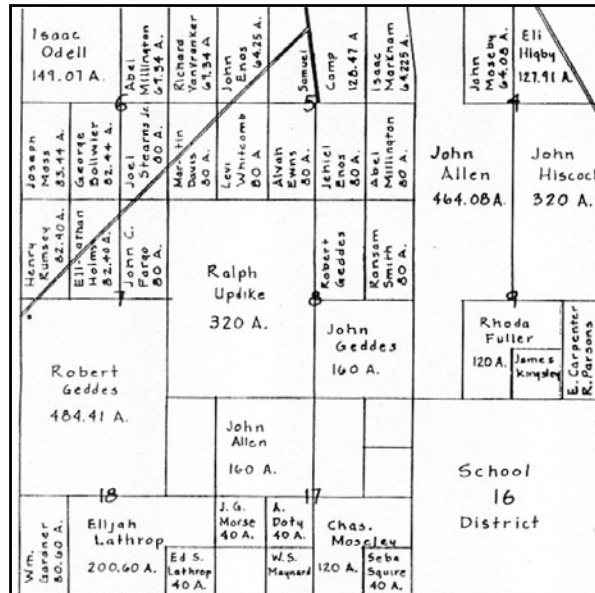


David Wilsey came with his parents who were the first to settle in sec. 8 in 1830. David was the Pittsfield township treasurer (1848-49), and township supervisor (1869-1874). Samuel Sperry purchased 100 acres of the farm in 1845. In the City Directory the address for the Sperry farm was "S. Main, 1/4 mile s. of limits". In 1891, according to the *Ann Arbor Argus*. George Sperry had "a choice display of

Back then the property was surrounded by other farms, livestock and wide open land. Pittsfield Township was known to be an agricultural region. Today, 194 years later, the property is surrounded by traffic, apartments and across the street from Kohl's.

apples" in the 43rd Washtenaw County Fair. A fruit bearing apple tree remains in the front yard today. The road that passed in front of the farmhouse was soon named Lohr Road for the Lohr Family. George Philip Lohr bought his large farm of 295 acres in Pittsfield township in 1870. He was married to Mary Ann Bach, sister of Philip Bach.

The land was first granted in 1820 to Ralph Updike. He was next door neighbors with John Allen, Robert Geddes and John Geddes. Land ownership was generally recorded in an area as soon as settlers began to arrive. Michigan was a public-domain territory where unclaimed land was surveyed, then granted or sold by the government through federal and state land offices. When Updike arrived to the Ann Arbor area from New York with his family in 1823, he found a small hamlet of a few log houses. He soon purchased a few hundred acres of land 2.5 miles south of Ann Arbor. He erected a log house and lived there for three years. The house and farm buildings were built between 1830-1849. From 1830-1935 the farm was owned by two families, Wilsey and Sperry.



1820/30s Plat Map of Pittsfield Township

J. Raleigh Nelson bought the farm in 1935 and called it "Sunny Pastures". Nelson was the founder and first director of The University of Michigan International Center (IC) from 1938-1943. The Center was created to serve the needs of the growing international student population and celebrated its 75th anniversary in 2013. Hundreds of

alumni who returned to their homes in foreign countries, were grateful to Nelson for teaching them the use of the English language, and both Mr. and Mrs. Nelson for acclimating them to their new surroundings in Ann Arbor. He was also involved in various community organizations, including the Starr Commonwealth for Boys, the Ann Arbor Community Fund and the Paul Laurence Dunbar Center on Fourth Avenue.



Original hand-hewn beams are held together by wooden pegs in the attic of the farmhouse

In his retirement from the University of Michigan Nelson wrote two books. *Lady Unafraid* was about the year spent by his mother as a missionary teacher to an Indian tribe on the shores of Lake Superior in the early 1860's. *From Sunny Pastures* was a book of poems written in the quiet reflection of life that only nature and time can bring.



The Nelsons bought their sixty-acre farm “three miles south of Ann Arbor, in the lovely rolling pasture lands of Pittsfield Township”. They restored what was then a one-hundred-year-old farm house, in its avenue of magnificent elms. They developed two acres of lawn, laid out extensive flower gardens, and, with the help of their farm neighbors, brought the neglected acres of rich land back into profitable production. They named their country place “Sunny Pastures” for they looked out the windows of the old house across nearly a mile of fields and pasture lands, green in the spring and summer, golden in the autumn, crystal in the winter, but bright always when the sun shone. The book of poems *Sunny Pastures*, published in 1952 tells how they loved it.



In 2006, WCHS board member Susan Wineberg found a signed copy of Nelson’s book “From Sunny Pastures” and gave it to Letitia Byrd. There is a name stamped in the front of the book: A.M. Bentley, PO Box 10, Owosso, Mich 48867. This book may have originally belonged to Alvin M. Bentley III or his wife Arvella for whom the Bentley Historical Library is named.

Listening

These mid-March mornings, I'm listening—
 Listening for what I scarce know.
 I place my ear to the silence
 That has lain so long on the snow—
 Listening for sounds of my neighbors
 That tell that their day has begun—
 Earl Perkins in the field with his tractor,
 Ed Green in the swamp by the run
 Calling the cows to the milking,
 Walt Schneider calling hogs on the hill.
 The long, long winter silence
 Lies like a spell on us still.
 Not even the call of a rooster,
 When the darkness brightens toward dawn,
 Nor the quavering song of a robin
 In the elm at the edge of the lawn!
 I'm listening, my ear to a silence
 That throbs in the magical air.
 I can hardly wait for the moment—
 The suspense is almost painful to bear—
 When faint, now far, now near,
 I hear the call of a bluebird
 And know that, at last, spring is here.



David R. Byrd

At "Sunny Pastures"

These are the things that I love best—
 Day's dawning, the afterglow in the West,
 The full moon riding high
 In the infinite spaces of a midnight sky,
 The summer sun across my wheat,
 Turning it gold in the midday heat.
 I love the long, sweet dawns of June,
 And the autumn haze of an autumn noon,
 And winter mornings, when a huge red sun
 Rises over the woodlot down by the run,
 And pendant crystals on orchard trees,
 And grassblades, stirred by the morning breeze,
 Shine ruby, shine emerald and diamond and rose.
 But the little white farmhouse on its own little hill,
 In my thought and affection, holds first place still,
 And those who are in it, safe and warm
 From rain and wind and winter storm.
 These are the things that I hold most dear,
 Winter and summer, throughout the year.



J. Raleigh Nelson

In 1975, someone else fell in love with the farmhouse when architect David Byrd and his wife Letitia, purchased the house from the estate of the late J. Raleigh Nelson. David served on the Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners (1968-1972) and the Ann Arbor City Planning Commission (1968-1971). Byrd also served on Ann Arbor’s Human Rights Commission in early 1970s. He was a charter faculty member at Washtenaw Community College heading the Construction Technology Program. Byrd’s love for authentic restoration was transported from the classroom to this old farmhouse. The restoration was the perfect teaching tool. Students earned while they learned—gaining on the job experience helping to raise the sagging floor, jacking up the roof, putting in new rafters, and replacing the gingerbread on the outside. It is now the David R. Byrd Center, a member of the Washtenaw County Historical Consortium. It serves as a cultural and community center during the Fall, Spring and Summer months. And even now... the full moon still rides high in the infinite space of a midnight sky over the little white farmhouse on its own little hill.

Washtenaw County's Heritage Tours
Historic Farms and Barns

The Washtenaw County Heritage Tourism Project offers four distinct themed driving routes to guide visitors and locals through the County's cities, villages, and rural areas. Two of the four tours are related to our upcoming exhibit.

On the **German Heritage Tour**, you'll explore the back roads of Freedom, Lodi, and Scio townships to see a landscape dotted with traditional farmsteads associated with the State's largest and first German settlement. Then follow the **Historic Barns Tour** through Bridgewater, Manchester, and Sharon townships to see examples of nineteenth and twentieth century structures associated with one of the region's strongest industries: agriculture.

The Heritage Tourism Map Project is funded in part by the Michigan State Historic Preservation Office and supported by several local partners, including the Ann Arbor Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, Ypsilanti Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, Saline Chamber of Commerce, Saline Area Historical Society, Washtenaw County Historical Consortium, and the Genealogical Society of Washtenaw County. For more information and to download the maps go to www.ewashtenaw.org and select "Historic Preservation in Washtenaw County" on the quick links menu or call (734) 222-6878.

What did the Pioneers eat on?

Families moving into the western wilderness brought some dishes with them, most of which were pewter. The pewter plates gradually disappeared, and china or ironstone ware took their place. The points of fork tines would not sink into china as in pewter, and meat in process of cutting was harder to hold on china than on a plate of the soft metal. During the War of Independence pewter dinnerware was donated to the army so metalsmiths could produce musket balls. A domestic pressed glass industry emerged, giving families an inexpensive alternative to the metal. The art of eating on china plate was finally acquired, and pewter departed forever from the pioneer trails.

The Top Ten Reasons to Visit the Dinnerware Museum's "Three Courses" Exhibition at the Museum on Main Street



*by Margaret Carney, Director and Curator
The Dinnerware Museum, Ann Arbor, MI*

10. You own some of your grandma's special dishes but you aren't originally from Washtenaw County and you wonder if this new Dinnerware Museum might be interested in the donation.

9. You have never actually seen radioactive dinnerware before.

8. You were always curious what dishes the people on the Titanic were eating off when it sank 100 years ago.

7. You always wanted to see the flamboyant Czechoslovakian Moser glassware owned by Liberace that he had copied from Queen Elizabeth's cupboards.

6. You want to put your name in a free raffle to win a place setting of children's dishes created in Ann Arbor by Constructive Eating, Inc.

5. You have been looking for an educational, fun, and free family activity.

4. You always wondered what dishes Henry Ford took with him when he went camping with Thomas Edison, Harvey Firestone, John Burroughs and U.S. President Warren G. Harding in the early 20th century.

3. You eat everyday, sometimes even three meals a day, and frequently you eat off of dishes – and you wonder why there is a museum devoted to this subject.

2. You have heard that this is the only museum in the world devoted to the topic of dinnerware and it is here in Ann Arbor.

...and the number one reason you should visit is...

1. You've been a member of the Washtenaw County Historical Society for ten years, but you've never stepped inside the Museum on Main Street!

The Exhibit is open Saturdays and Sundays, 12 Noon-4PM and by appointment.

Groups are welcome, Special Tours are available.

Call 734-662-9092 or email wchs-500@ameritech.net

The exhibit closes Sunday, May 12



Dear Brother: An Historical Collaboration

Sunday, November 17 was a special day in Washtenaw County History. It began with a tornado watch as high winds and heavy rain were expected to come through the area. We were having our meeting on the third floor of the Downtown Library from 2-4 PM. Even with the weather more than 40 people came to hear the presentation "Dear Brother".

The Geddes Letter project is a collaboration between the Ann Arbor District Library, the Bentley Historical Library, and the Washtenaw County Historical Society. Karen Jania, WCHS Vice-President welcomed everyone, gave an update about the current exhibit at the Museum on Main Street and then introduced the afternoon's program and panel.

Andrew MacLaren from the AADL gave a quick tour of the Geddes Letter web site. He demonstrated some of the cool features of the site and other resources. Andrew then turned the program over to Pauline Walters, the 2013 Ann Arbor Historic District Commission's Preservationist of the Year.

Pauline was one of the many volunteers who worked on this project determined to complete Russell Bidlack's work. The goal was also to make this treasure of information about the early settlement of this area available online to all citizens.

A brief background of the project was shared about how WCHS board member Sally Silvennoinen, who lives in the home that belonged to John Geddes and museum volunteer, Roger Stutesman, spent many hours reading and transcribing the scanned letters. The Bentley Historical Library provided high resolution scans of every letter.

Using PowerPoint, Pauline guided us through a very comprehensive, informative and entertaining timeline of events. Roger shared with the audience, the meaning of some of the now uncommon words used in the letters. There was a lot of audience participation as we had to guess what some of the words meant!

There were many questions and comments from the audience. This was very exciting because this is a work in progress. As we get the input from our readers we can grow the project and update the site with what we have learned from the community.

Experience Pioneer Life at aadl.org/geddes_letters

The Geddes Letters Project on the Ann Arbor District Library Web Site is a collection of over 100 letters written between early Washtenaw County settler John Geddes and his brother William in Pennsylvania. The letters begin in 1825 and end in 1844 when William moved to a farm in Pittsfield Township. The letters were found in abandoned house in Groton, Massachusetts in the late 1990s. They were purchased by Professor Russell E. Bidlack from a collector and later donated to the Bentley Historical Library. Professor Bidlack transcribed many of the letters and was assisted by members of the Washtenaw County Historical Society.



The letters offer a first-person glimpse of the social, political, and economic life in the County before 1850. John Geddes (1801-1889) was an important figure in early Washtenaw County history. He arrived in 1824 and with his brother Robert, purchased land in Ann Arbor, Pittsfield, and Superior townships. They operated a sawmill first on Fleming Creek and later on the Huron River at the former settlement of Geddes. During his life, John Geddes was

politically active and was elected to various local and state offices including Justice of the Peace and State Representative. Today, the Geddes family is remembered for the settlement of Geddes (or Geddesburg) that at one time had its own post office and railroad station as well as Geddes Avenue, Geddes Road and Geddes School.

Good News From Pennsylvania

Don Rhoads, Jr., local historian and Lebanon County Historical Society Vice President, sent a letter of appreciation to Les Loomans about the lovely chat he had with Pauline Walters about this project. He included a copy of *Campbelltown Pennsylvania A Historical Review in Words and Photographs*. Rhoads said: My particular interest was the letters written between William Geddes and his brother John have been digitized and made available on the web. They are a wonderful record not only for your area, but for Lebanon County, including the Village of Campbelltown that William Geddes indicates in his letters.

John Geddes



A Geddes Family member shares recollections of William Geddes on pages 10-11.

William Geddes: Pittsfield Township Pioneer Farmer

This article was written by Mrs. Carl S. Geddes. Carl Geddes (1910-1985) was William Geddes grandson. It was originally published in Family History Capers, Vol 9, No. 4 Spring 1986 by The Genealogical Society of Washtenaw County, Michigan, Inc.

On the twenty-fourth of April, 1820, the United States Congress passed an important act "making further provision for the sale of Public lands." A few years later William Geddes, a young Pennsylvania man in his 20s, seized the opportunity to purchase land in an unsettled region then known as Michigan Territory. William's tract of land in Section 22, Township 3 South of Range 6 East, was in 1827 only open spaces and woods. The land, today called Pittsfield Township

William's make-up was ingrained with the pioneer spirit; his grandfather, William Geddes I, had emigrated from Randallstown, County Antrim, Ireland, to America in 1752 at the age of seventeen. Moreover, the two older brothers of William II, John and Robert, also had decided to settle in Michigan Territory in 1825. However, the younger brother did not move to his new land immediately but remained in Lebanon County, Pennsylvania, where the rest of his family lived. His mother had died in 1808 when he was only six years old, but he had an aging father, and several brothers who also resided there. The records indicate that his father, Robert Geddes, passed away July 14, 1832, and that William was an executor of his accounts.

Four years later in 1836 William married Jane McBay, some twelve years younger than he. Jane gave birth to their first child, Robert, on May 27, 1837. Also that same year William's brother, John, returned from Michigan to Pennsylvania to marry Fanny Savage. John had founded the little town of Geddesburg on the Huron River in Washtenaw County in 1826, and by this time it had become a thriving mill center about which John undoubtedly gave glowing accounts. Perhaps John urged William and Jane to go to their land in Michigan, but the couple stayed in Lebanon County for the time being.

In 1839 a second child, Sarah, was born to Jane and William, but she died within a year. They were blessed two years later with another daughter whom they named Mary. Then on September 29, 1843, a third daughter, Caroline, entered the family.

It was the following year, 1844, that William, now forty-two years old, moved with his wife and three children to the land he had purchased in Michigan years before. According to tradition, the first part of the journey to Detroit was by boat. Then they traveled in an open oxcart on a narrow road that was to become U.S. 12, but it was no highway in 1844 and had few stopping places along the route. We can only speculate how difficult the traveling was in 1844 in a wagon heaped with their belongings and slowly drawn by oxen. The hardships must have been especially trying for Jane with three little children, the youngest only a year old.

However, by this time their farmland was not absolutely isolated. Eight miles or so to the northwest lay the village of Ann Arbor, already the home of the University of Michigan. Ypsilanti was a growing pioneer settlement about eight miles to the east. Not too far west there was a post office. Moreover, neighbors lived within walking distance.

The two-story house which was soon built still stands at 5174 Platt Road. Renovated and modernized it was known as home to the Charles W. Geddes family just as it had been years before to the family of his father, John B. Geddes. Memorabilia in the family's possession include not only the land grant document, but also an ox yoke, a muzzle-loading rifle, and double-barrel shotgun plus an old wooden trunk full of record books, receipts, letters - all of them clues to their way of life.

On June 12, 1846, a second son was born to Jane and William Geddes in their new Michigan home. They named this son William, and it is this William who was to become the father of John B. Geddes and the grandfather of Carl S. and Charles W. Geddes, both of whom in the year 1984 still lived on the land their great-grandfather paid for in 1827.

The pioneer had a barn built the year following the birth of his fifth child. A receipt dated August 4, 1847, indicates that F. J. VanSickle received eighty dollars in full for building this barn. All of the large timbers were hand-hewn with an axe. Unfortunately, this barn along with an addition that had been built in 1918 was destroyed by fire some time in the middle of the twentieth century.

When son William was six and the last-born daughter, Isabel, was four, their father evidently decided 'a school ought to be built.' Records indicate that William Geddes leased a corner of his farm to Pittsfield Township for a schoolhouse. A contract with A. I. Eggleston to work on this schoolhouse was dated August 4, 1852, and in September of the same year the foundation was laid.

As director of the school, William Geddes kept memoranda of costs of materials and of labor as well as the names of individuals contributing their time and toil. For example, stonework for the foundation and three porches cost \$11.62.

Continued on page 11





William Geddes

Payment for 32,400 bricks for main walls and gables came to \$33.50. A man named Terry "plastered the chimney" for two dollars, while Horace Carpenter furnished one thousand feet of which wood lumber for ten dollars. In 1853 and 1854 William Crabb did the necessary painting. John Tyler charged \$1.75 for hauling timbers and scaffold poles. Samuel A. Morgan hauled mortar, water, and bricks, and Leonard Tyler received thirteen dollars for "attending the bricklayers."

It may well have been a neighborhood project of sorts, for the aforementioned Samuel A. Morgan and one of the Tylers lived on Morgan Road across from the schoolhouse which was built on the corner of Morgan and Thomas Roads. Morgan Road was named after the early pioneer who had settled on a one-acre plot in 1839.

Thus a school came into existence through the work of many hands, giving access to early schooling not only to Wm. Geddes' offspring but also to generations of children of the district. The pioneers realized the value of education.

William Geddes himself had fine penmanship and evidently enjoyed reading as well. As early as November, 1846, he sent three dollars to T. T. Worth Company in Pennsylvania for a two-year subscription to the *Lebanon Courier*. Ties with his original home area were thus not completely broken. A statement dated January, 1864, indicates that he also subscribed to the *Saturday Evening Post* for two dollars per year.

As for other needs, the Geddeses evidently traveled (probably by wagon) to the village of Ypsilanti for some of their supplies. An August, 1854, bill lists items bought from the Hewitt Bros. Co. As it was still an era of barter, William was able to exchange thirty dozen eggs for half of the cost of the following articles: coffee, tea, candles, 4 yds. calico, 4 yds. lace trim, 3 yds. ribbon. We can thus surmise by the last three items on the list above that Jane Geddes like other pioneer women, spent many an hour sewing clothes for the family.

Among the memorabilia found in the old trunk is a commiserative letter dated March 29, 1851. It was written to Jane by her brother, Robert McBay, concerning the death of their mother. "We must be resigned to God's will," he wrote. In three other letters McBay urged Jane to take the doctor's medicine in order to get well. Grief and hardship may have been taking their toil on the pioneer wife. "You must keep up your spirits," her brother advised. "Go out and see your neighbors. There is no use grieving and meeting trouble before it comes."

Ten years later Jane was not feeling well, for a statement written on a slip of paper reads, "Mrs. William Geddes to Dr. E. Mills -\$2.50, July 24, 1861." The medical attention did not avail, however. That year marked the end of life's journey for forty-six-year-old Jane McBay Geddes. Her husband, William, was now a widower at the age of fifty-nine with five children, but fortunately for him, they were all old enough to be of considerable help to their father.

Robert, now twenty-four years old, must have done a great deal of the farm work; William, too, would have been an expert farmhand at age fifteen. Twenty-year-old Mary no doubt took over the housework with the help of her two younger sisters, Caroline and Isabel. But the sorrow of the family was to be compounded within a year of Jane's death. On April 10, 1862, the father again sought the help of Dr. Mills. This time the patient was nineteen-year-old Caroline. Her life was cut short on July 13, 1862.

A scrap of paper, dated simply September 16, points out that William Geddes paid "fourteen dollars in full for one set of tombstones manufactured by Spaulding Teachout, Ann Arbor, Michigan, and sold by agent Vander Cook." These markers stand at the Geddes grave sites in the little Harwood Cemetery on the corner of Campbell and Textile Roads. Pioneer William Harwood, who had settled in the area in 1834, donated this piece of his land "to God" as a cemetery. Mention should be made that since then generations of Harwood descendants have been born in Pittsfield Township.

As the years wore on, pioneer William Geddes continued to face changes in the family situation. On March 8, 1864, daughter Mary married Charles Armstrong and moved away, leaving sixteen-year-old Isabel to carry on the household duties alone. Years later on September 13, 1874, son William married Jennie Standbridge, whose brother in turn took Isabel as his bride. Only Robert, who never married, remained in the homestead of his father. However, on the paternal land not too far distant, William and Jennie built a house now designated as 2730 Morgan Road. Here their two children, John B. and William, were born, but not until after the old pioneer had completed his earthly passage. On his tombstone are chiseled these words :

William Geddes
Born Lebanon County, Pennsylvania
Died May 21, 1877
Aged 74 years 4 months 23 days

His pioneering in Pittsfield Township had ended. But on the Geddes farm which he established, the two old houses still standing in 1984 as this account is being written, hold within their walls untold memories of the human experience of several generations. Rising high above the house at 2730 Morgan Road, seven lofty pine trees, which the pioneer's son and grandson planted to the north and the east of their home, symbolize that the strength, sturdiness, and striving of the pioneer spirit have not vanished.

A transcript of a 2003 interview with Pauline Geddes and her daughter Hannah Geddes Wright at the Platt Road home, is online at pittsfieldhistory.org.



Drawing by Michael Klement

Educational Programs

WCHS Spring Talks

The winter weather of 2014 has been unusual in many ways, impacting our program facilities and speakers' travel. However, Spring brings the first talk of the year on April 27th followed by our Annual Meeting on May 18. A postcard announcement will be sent out for these events and information will also be on our website at washtenawhistory.org

The Genealogical Society of Washtenaw County

Sunday, March 23, 1:30 - 3:00 PM

TUSKEGEE AIRMEN presented by Col. Alexander Jefferson, one of 32 Tuskegee Airmen from the 332nd Fighter Group to be shot down serving with one of the most decorated fighting units in the War, the legendary, and feared "red tails."

Education Center Auditorium, St. Joseph Mercy Hospital Campus, 5305 Elliott Dr., Ypsilanti

washtenawgenealogy.org

Kempf House Museum

Wednesday, March 26, 12 Noon

SEEING THE ELEPHANTS Susan Nenadic, author and historian, will discuss the surprising roles of women in the Civil War- as soldiers and as spies! Admission: \$2, members \$1 312 S. Division St., Ann Arbor

kempfhousemuseum.org



"The Snowplow" on North Division Street

This is how they did it 75 years ago. The big snow tires, powered sidewalk plows and whirling brushes were still something in the future. Following two days of heavy snow in Ann Arbor in December 1938, the city hired a dozen private contractors with horses and plows to help the community dig out. The walk on N. Division St. was being cleared when this picture was taken. This photo was taken by Eck Stanger in Winter 1938 and published in the Ann Arbor News, January 28, 1973. The Ann Arbor District Library offers digitized newspaper articles and photos from the Ann Arbor News archives at oldnews.aadl.org.

In the Winter of 1910, it was easier to travel through town by sleigh

Walker's, opened in 1907, was one of the city's largest livery businesses, with more than thirty horses and a wide variety of buggies, wagons, and sleighs for rent. Learn more about this era through the Downtown Ann Arbor Historical Street Exhibit Program. This award-winning series of permanent sidewalk exhibits, wall displays, pedestal images and other artifacts is the first of its kind in the nation at landmark sites throughout downtown. You can also explore the exhibits online at aastreet.aadl.org/aastreet



Lew Hammond drives a cutter from Walker's Livery (515 E. Liberty St.) in the winter of 1910.

Adelbert Walker lived next door (Photo: Bentley Historical Library)