

# Impressions

NEWSLETTER WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## Exploring Washtenaw County History

**WCHS connects the community to the virtual – and real – world of research and discovering a love of history**

*By Beverly Willis*

In January 2012, the Washtenaw County Historical Society received an email from Karen Regen, a producer for the Syfy Channel, who was developing a story about a “sorority haunting” in the fall of 2008 at the Phi Rho Alpha sorority house in Ann Arbor. She was researching the house for a show called “School Spirits” and had several questions. This TV program invites area historians, professors and authorities to weigh in and explain what is often unexplainable.

Another recent email came from someone looking for information on the original Ann Arbor Railroad Station; specifically with regards to the Romanesque style architecture. Mark Hilderbrandt noted that “Ann Arbor has had TWO railroad stations, and one Interurban station. The Michigan Central Railroad station was built in 1880 of Richardsonian lines, field-stone walls and currently exists as the Gandy Dancer restaurant. A gandy dancer was a trackworker, lowest class of railroad worker, and a funny name for a classy restaurant.”

The Ann Arbor Railroad Station on Ashley street, built around 1886. It still exists as a nursery school.”



**THE COMMUTER** Ann Arbor, Michigan, circa 1910

*Michigan Central Railroad Station, now the Gandy Dancer (Detroit Publishing Company)*

Wystan Stevens adds “Both buildings are in the book *Historic Buildings, Ann Arbor, Michigan*, written by Marjorie Reade and Susan Wineberg. There are also two Downtown Ann Arbor Historical Street Exhibit panels on the Broadway bridge that talk about and show pictures of both stations.”

These are just two of the many interesting and unique requests we receive at the Museum on Main Street. Sometimes people call with questions, or stop by or even write a letter. We get dozens of emails with questions from people about the history and heritage of our county.

We are fortunate to have an active local history scene, in person and on the web. People are using our website more often and there are many reasons why. *(Continued on page 3)*

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

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## The President's Letter

Every visit to a museum ends with a visit to the gift shop. Museum on Main Street's gift shop should not be missed. Occupying the smallest main floor room, it is not large, but it is full of local area historical items—mostly books. Over 40 different available books by mostly local authors represent a treasure trove of Washtenaw County history. It's even accessible online. Go to our website at [www.WashtenawHistory.org](http://www.WashtenawHistory.org), click on Giftshop and you can view every book cover and read a brief description (Thanks to a lot of work by our board member Jan Tripp). They may be ordered online or by mail.

Our museum docent, John Kilar, has recently taken on the added responsibility of Gift Shop Manager. With his docent's knowledge of the exhibits he can easily direct you to materials in the shop that relate to the exhibit or a particular topic you are researching. So, going to the gift shop online and by mail works, but the richest experience is to visit the museum, enjoy the current exhibit, see our 1835-1839 house and end with a visit to the gift shop.

*Les Loomans*



Check us out, on the web and  
[www.WashtenawHistory.org](http://www.WashtenawHistory.org)

**Washtenaw County  
Historical Society**

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**Museum on Main Street**

500 N. Main Street

Ann Arbor, MI 48104-1027

(at the corner of Beakes,

E. Kingsley & N. Main Streets)

**Museum Hours**

Saturday & Sunday,

12 Noon – 4:00 PM

and by appointment

for groups or individuals

**Current Exhibit**

*Bad Habits: Drinks, Drags  
and Drugs in Washtenaw  
County History,*

February 4-April 29

**www.WashtenawHistory.org** is an information rich online source of local history from A-Z. WCHS board member, Jan Tripp, has built our online presence and established a great resource for members, researchers, students and newcomers. Anyone can enjoy our easy-to-navigate pages with many links to timelines, postcards and photographs, as well as virtual, aerial, driving and walking tours in and around Washtenaw County. On the home page of our website, you will find a sampling of links to interesting blogs, columns, and other web sites dedicated to telling our history written by local historians and history buffs.

The Syfy channel has informed us they are moving into production and that during the research process various local archivists and librarians were of tremendous assistance including those from WCHS. She asked if one of our members could serve as the voice of authority in an on camera interview. We certainly will assist as best we can.

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## Upcoming Exhibit at The Museum on Main Street - Opens May 27

### What's in a Name: Streets and Roads of Washtenaw County

The streets and roads of Washtenaw County have a hidden history that reveal insights into our founders and local families. We can have a lot of fun learning about our community by discovering how the streets got their names. This exhibit opens just in time to start the summer with plenty of outdoor places to learn about at the exhibit. Then you can get outside and explore on foot or bike or skates with our Walking Tour brochure that can be downloaded as a podcast at **www.WashtenawHistory.org**.

In Washtenaw County we have streets named after presidents like Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Hoover, McKinley, VanBuren and Eisenhower. Beakes street, the corner where our museum sits, was named for Samuel Beakes, owner of the *Ann Arbor Argus* and the youngest man to serve as mayor at age 27. Geddes Avenue and Road was named after John and Robert Geddes, two brothers who built a sawmill on the Huron River in 1825. Washtenaw Avenue appears on an 1859 map as "Middle Ypsilanti Road" according to Lela Duff's, *Ann Arbor Yesterdays*.

In Lowertown Ann Arbor across the Broadway bridge, business man Anson Brown, named streets after the New York financial district: Wall Street, Canal Street, Broadway and Maiden Lane. Anson Brown's building is now the oldest surviving commercial structure in Ann Arbor and currently houses the St. Vincent de Paul store. Once there was a mirror image of the building across the street where the anti-slavery newspaper, *The Signal of Liberty*, was published by Rev. Guy Beckley and Theodore Foster. See pages 4-6 for more information about that building and it's role in the Underground Railroad history of Washtenaw County.

## Make Your Mark on our Online Map, or on the Exhibit Memory Wall

Our current exhibit *Bad Habits: Drinks, Drags and Drugs in Washtenaw County History* tells the story of alcohol and drugs in the culture and industry of Washtenaw County. The local history is part of a larger, national story—one where Prohibition closed saloons and led to bootlegging and alcohol raids; where drug stores and pharmacies made big money in the nineteenth century selling "magic cure-alls".

Included in the exhibit are medicine bottles from historic local pharmacies, memorabilia from local bars, and recipe books with popular cure-alls, photographs, posters and more.

We want your participation in this exhibit and provided a way for you to include your memories of bar culture and help us collect a record of local watering holes, past and present.

### Share Your Memories in the Museum

Post pictures, memories of your favorite spots and pin them on the map on the Memory Wall.

### Share Your Memories Online

We have created an interactive map where visitors can add the names and locations of as many of your favorite places (past and present) along with comments and photos to a Google map of Washtenaw County. The link is on the home page of our website at **www.WashtenawHistory.org**. We appreciate those of you who have shared your stories and photos so far. Please share yours and bring back the memories that others may also enjoy.

### Renew Your membership, Join the WCHS or Shop Online!

You can renew and pay for your annual membership or make donations and buy books online. Your credit card payment is made through PayPal, the most widely used method to securely submit payments online.

Renew, join or shop at **www.WashtenawHistory.org**

# Michigan's Role in the Underground Railroad

Reported by Beverly Willis



Carol Mull is a founding member of the Michigan Freedom Trail Commission and current chair. She is an historic preservationist and Underground Railroad scholar.

The weather on Sunday, February 19th followed this year's unusual pattern of a balmy and sunny afternoon. Our February program took place at the Pittsfield Township Administration Building in the large and sun drenched meeting room. The guest presenter was Carol Mull, author of *The Underground Railroad in Michigan*.

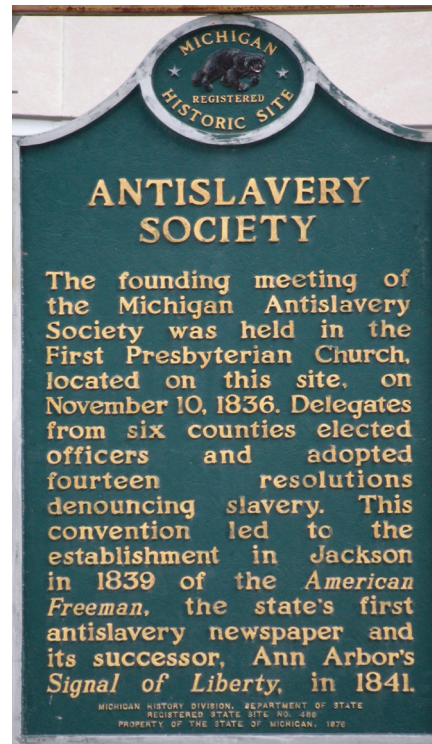
This book details the history of the Underground Railroad (UGRR) and anti-slavery activities in the state of Michigan and, in particular, this area. From first person accounts to an historical overview with national perspective her book reveals Michigan's critical role in the movement to end American slavery.

Karen Jania, WCHS board vice-president and program chair, welcomed everyone and introduced Carol Mull.

Ms. Mull began her talk by greeting and acknowledging the family members of Asher Aray who were in the room. Aray was a free man of mixed descent who was an Underground Railroad conductor and one of the people she wrote about in her book. Aray along with William Webb Harwood and Roswell Preston were all active in the UGRR. They had neighboring farms in the very area where the talk was being presented along that stretch of Michigan Avenue in Pittsfield Township.

The Northwest Ordinance established five states of which Michigan was one, that banned slavery and created a huge territory where slavery was not allowed. Michigan citizens participated more than any other state in anti-slavery activity because of our geography. Many of our early settlers came to Michigan by way of the Erie Canal and from the New England area through New York. There were many religious revivals that helped convince people to look at and consider social reforms in a new way.

Escape from slavery was happening from the very beginning. The direction was, not always north. In the 1850s and 60s people were escaping west, east into the swamps of Florida, north and then east. Waterways were very important and Michigan had many waterways.



People who had been involved in antislavery activities back East began settling in Michigan. A state-wide anti-slavery society was established.

There is a marker at the old Ann Arbor News Building where the first meeting was held at the church that was located there. They were mainly men from Detroit and Adrian. Women were also very active, the men of the association

encouraged the women to form their own groups. Laura Haviland was one of Michigan's most important UGRR activists. She and her husband started a school in 1840 that was open to people of all races. She personally went into the south to help people obtain freedom.



Laura Haviland



*The Ingalls Block (across the street from Anson Building on Broadway) where the anti-slavery newspaper, The Signal of Liberty was published*

Locally, Guy Beckley and Theodore Foster shared Haviland's sentiments. At that first Anti-slavery Society meeting they had a number of resolutions about actions they wanted to take. They wanted to persuade people about slavery and they decided that lectures and a newspaper would help convince people to do the right thing. They started an anti-slavery newspaper called the *Signal of Liberty*, published in the building pictured above, located on Broadway in Ann Arbor opposite the oldest commercial block in Ann Arbor.

The newspaper had great influence and thousands of subscribers. It was very important because it listed the names of the people who attended the meetings. It also published the minutes from every annual meeting, with all of the names of the people who attended from all of the counties. It's a wonderful source of research for us now. For the people who were living in that time, it was the source of what was really going on. Often covering the stories local media would not. It is now available online at the Ann Arbor District Library website, [www.aadl.org](http://www.aadl.org).

We don't have that many records about escapes to Michigan. We do know that in 1838 a man named Joseph Mallory came from Augusta,

Georgia, and walked the entire way. It took about eight months to get to Canada. He was invited to stay in Washtenaw County but chose to go to Canada because he wanted to be sure he was free. People often stayed in Detroit and Ypsilanti but if there was a risk of being taken back, Canada was the only desired destination.

By 1840, an informal network to help people escape slavery became better organized. It was supposed to be secret so all names were not known to prevent trickery by slave holders.

There was no set route, no set path, but there were a few people who were actively helping people escape. They became known as people who could help along the way.

In Ann Arbor Robert Glazier would take people to other Quakers he knew. These were people who left the original Quaker meeting and formed the evangelical groups. They were opposed to slavery and would allow people to take an active role.

There are reports in the 1840s about freedom seekers coming through Michigan. We know about Caroline Quarrels who came from Missouri and stayed at the Guy Beckley house on Pontiac Trail in Ann Arbor. His co-publisher, Theodore Foster, lived in Scio Township and worked in secret because he had neighbors who were opposed.

By 1847, Kentuckians realized people were escaping to Michigan and that they had never gotten anyone back. In 1847, there were a series of raids attempting to take people back into slavery. *(Continued on page 6)*



*Guy Beckley house at 1425 Pontiac Trail (still standing) in Ann Arbor, circa 1930*

*(Underground Railroad continued)*

However, Michigan would not return escaped slaves or help those coming after them.

UGRR Conductor John Fairfield would physically go into the south and help people, but insisted they arm themselves and promise to fight to the death. In 1853, he brought 28 people out which was a very large group and an extremely dangerous journey. When they reached the Ohio River, it was very high and people nearly drowned attempting to cross.

They made it safely to the other side and met with Levi Coffin who had been an UGRR operator in Indiana before he moved to Cincinnati, Ohio. Coffin was a Quaker, who were pacifists, and did not want to assist Fairchild. Coffin did not believe in violence but the cause of freedom was greater to him and he helped this group to their next safe place.

They knew they were being chased and headed west to Indiana and then on to Michigan. Fitch Reed, a station agent who lived in Lenawee County, documented their journey in Michigan. The emancipators left his

property in Cambridge, Michigan, at sunset, arriving before dawn the next morning on the Aray farm Fitch Reed wrote: *"next east was Ypsilanti. Bro's Harwood and Ray, keepers."*

They stayed right here in Pittsfield Township on the Aray farm. William Harwood, Roswell Preston and Asher Aray were all neighbors who worked together. This time Aray provided the wagons and horses to get everyone to Detroit and his wife, Catherine, cared for the group.

The safe arrival in Canada was documented in 1853 by a Detroit newspaper.

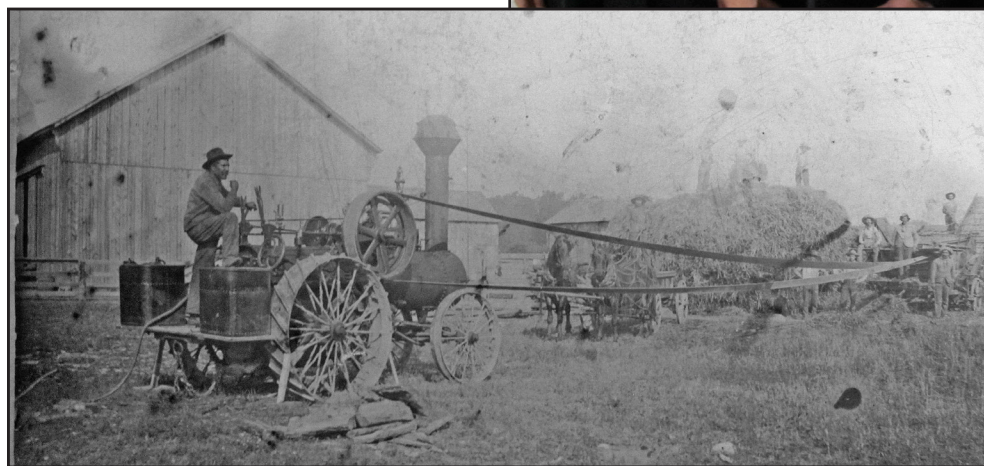
The Aray and Harwood farms were right down the road from where our lecture took place. Ms. Mull gave more examples of Michigan churches, institutions and citizens who were involved in the anti-slavery movement. How we stood as a state against the moral offense of slavery, worked to abolish it and provide a place where people felt free to live their lives in the peace and security that is the birthright of every American.

There were several questions and comments from the audience and the program ended with a personalized book-signing and author greeting.

*Asher Aray's Great Great Great granddaughter Shawn, with Great Great granddaughters Pat Whitsitt and Karmen Brown, met two new relatives for the first time at the program.*



*Asher Aray*



*Asher Aray Farm, date unknown (Ypsilanti Historical Museum)*

### ***Impressions... Hard Copy or Email?***

If you would prefer to receive your newsletter via email only, please let us know. Send an email to [wchs-500@ameritech.net](mailto:wchs-500@ameritech.net).

#### **Watchman of the Tracks**

WCHS Board member, Dale Leslie, remembers the people, places, and events in over 50 years living and working in the Ann Arbor community. Download your free copy at [www.Washtenaw.History.org](http://www.Washtenaw.History.org)

# History Programs & Events Around the County

The Washtenaw County Historical Consortium is a volunteer organization representing 27 museums, libraries, and historical attractions in and around Washtenaw County, Michigan. Member organizations can post their events directly to the online calendar and we will list as many as we can here. For more information see [www.hvcn.org/info/wchs/consortium](http://www.hvcn.org/info/wchs/consortium)

## Kempf House

### Wednesday Noon Lectures

**12 Noon-1 PM** Kempf House  
\$1: members, \$2: non-members.

#### April 11 *The Ann Arbor Symphony Orchestra: Listen and Learn*

Zac Moore, General Manager of the AASO, will speak about the Symphony's upcoming performances. Listen and Learn about the music performed in the 2011-12 season, and the finale on April 21.



#### April 18 *Anatomy of a Supreme Court Appointment*

The story of Gerald Ford's appointment of John Paul Stevens to the Supreme Court to replace William Douglas has some surprises. Donna Lehman, an archivist at the Ford Presidential Library, takes us behind the scenes as President Ford ponders this appointment.

**April 25** *A young SEABEE Enters the Navy and Comes Home During WW II*  
Reverend Lew Towler, of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, explains who the SEABEES were, how they got their name and logo, and his extraordinary experiences going in and coming home from service-another example of the "greatest generation".

### KEMPF HOUSE MUSEUM

312 S. Division St., Ann Arbor  
734-994-4898

## Spring on the Farm

**Sunday, April 15, 12 Noon - 4:00 PM**

The farmhouse will be open for tours, and costumed volunteers will depict mid 19th century farm routines and preparations for spring such as spring cleaning and cooking. The public can enjoy traditional lawn games for children like hoops and stilts. The gift shop will also be open and stocked with new merchandise. Join us in welcoming warmer weather, along with the resident goats, sheep and historic varieties of ducks and chickens. [gtaylor10@comcast.net](mailto:gtaylor10@comcast.net)  
**COBBLESTONE FARM**, 2781 Packard, Ann Arbor, 734-794-7120.

## The War of 1812

**Sunday, April 15, 2:00-3:30PM** **Saline Area Historical Society Education Program.** John Gibney, Director of the Monroe Historical Museums and the River Raisin Battlefield, will return to Saline to talk about "The War of 1812". Michigan's only major battlefield in this war is not far from Saline. It is now America's newest National Park. Mr. Gibney is an adjunct instructor in the Historic Preservation Program at EMU and Civil War instructor at WCC. He is an outstanding re-enactor and a wonderful speaker. Education programs are always free and open to the public; light refreshments will be served. An opportunity to purchase a National Park Passport and/or to acquire an official Saline stamp will be available this afternoon. **Saline District Library, 555 N. Maple Rd., Saline, MI**  
Call 734-944-0442 for more information.

## Genealogical Society of Washtenaw County

**Sunday, April 22, 1:30-4:30PM**

**St. Joseph Mercy Hospital Education Center Auditorium**, 5305 Elliott Dr. (off E. Huron River Dr. at Clark Rd.). Use parking lot P. The lecture and class are free and open to the public, bring a friend! For more information contact: Marcia McCrary, President (734) 483-2799, [gswcmi@gmail.com](mailto:gswcmi@gmail.com)

**THE PROGRAM:** "Thrice Accused, Thrice Excused: Slander and Withcraft Trials in 1600." Presented by Grace Bliss Smith.

**THE LECTURE** "Tracing Collateral Lines." Taught by Carolyn Griffin.

## Spring Wildflowers Along the Saline River

**Sunday, April 29, 2-4PM.** During this hike, search for the many wildflowers that bloom in the floodplain forest area and nearby woods. Blue cohosh, Solomon's seal, trilliums, Dutchman's britches and many more species should be present. Ground may be wet; wear shoes/boots than can get muddy.  
**Draper-Houston Meadows Preserve.** From US-23: Exit #27 (Carpenter Road), southbound. Turn right on County Street, continue onto Main Street. Main Street will turn into Mooreville Road. Entrance is approximately 0.25 miles on the south side of Mooreville Road.



Drawing by Michael Klement

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## THE WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY – 2012 PROGRAMS

### BAD HABITS:

DRINKS, DRUGS, AND DRUGS  
IN WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORY

**Sunday, April 15, 2012 • 2-4 PM**

Bethel United Church of Christ  
10425 Bethel Church Road • Manchester, MI

University of Michigan Professor and  
WCHS Board member Michelle McClellan  
will talk about our current exhibit at the  
Museum on Main Street. "Bad Habits"  
tells a history of alcohol and  
drugs in the culture and  
industry of Washtenaw  
County.



WCHS Members are invited to the

## Annual Meeting

**Wednesday, May 18, 2012 • 6 PM**

Milan Senior Center  
45 Neckel Court, Milan, MI

The Potluck Dinner begins at 6:30 PM  
There will be a short program at 7:30 PM  
with a special guest speaker  
followed by the election of officers.

Bring a dish for eight to pass.  
Beverages and dinnerware provided.

*Six free educational  
monthly programs are a  
WCHS membership benefit.*

*Bring a  
Friend!*



For information call **734-662-9092**  
Email: [wchs-500@ameritech.net](mailto:wchs-500@ameritech.net)  
[www.WashtenawHistory.org](http://www.WashtenawHistory.org)