



Drawing by Michael Klement

# Impressions

NEWSLETTER WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## Washtenaw's First Families



First Meeting House of the Germans in Michigan, 1 1/2 Miles west of Ann Arbor. House erected in 1833. Photographed in 1881. Standing, left to right: Mrs. Sophie Hutzel, Rev. John Neumann, Emanuel Mann, David Allmendinger. Seated, left to right: John Jacob Schaffer, Pauline Allmendinger, Mrs. David Allmendinger, Mrs. David Allmendinger, Sr., Herman [Allmendinger grandson], Caroline Shaffer, Mrs. William Guenther and daughter Lydia. (Copy print neg in Sturgis collection at the Bentley Historical Library)

“ The young live in the future, the middle-aged in the present, and the old in the past. Youth look forward with bright anticipation; those in the prime of life feel that everything with them is the living present; the aged person dreams of the past, when he was strong of limb, with undimmed eye, fighting his way through life, and overcoming every obstacle placed in his path. ”

Pioneer Association, The History of Washtenaw County Michigan, Chas. C. Chapman, 1881

The Washtenaw County Historical Society is the oldest county historical society in the state. Withstanding continuity challenges and many name changes, we are still here doing the work of collecting and preserving the history of the county.

When the early pioneers came together and shared memories of the past, they were reminded of their co-partnership of suffering, endurance, kinship and fellowship. There was a natural drawing together. This resulted in the many state, county and township pioneer societies that existed. But in 1873, General Edward Clark, President of the Ann Arbor Pioneer and Historical Society, met with 20 of the oldest

*Continued on page 5*

### “Journal of Munnis Kenny, Michigan Pioneer”

This new book is a humorous and fun-to-read account of Munnis Kenny's 1828 journey on the Erie Canal from Putney, Vermont to Washtenaw County. Webster Township author, James Baldwin Parker, retraced Kenny's trip by car in 1985 and has included photos from that adventure in this book. It is available in the gift Shop at the Museum on Main Street. WCHS members get a 10% discount!

### Argus Cameras: Pioneers in American Photography

Argus was a camera company founded in 1936 in Ann Arbor. Their model-A camera was the first affordable (\$12), American made full-frame 35mm camera to sell in sufficient quantity to be considered a commercial success. The Argus Museum Gallery is hosting “Steel Cities” an exhibit of the work of photographer Deborah Kingery from October 24th-December 18th. The Gallery is in the Argus Museum at 535 W. William Street in Ann Arbor. Hours are Monday-Friday, 9 AM-5 PM.

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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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## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Although you are unlikely to see our newest equipment at Museum on Main Street on your next visit to view the current exhibit, a new furnace and air-conditioning system has just been installed. It was quite a financial shock to this year's budget to find that our furnace needed immediate replacement with colder weather rapidly approaching. Both units were 20 years old, had served well, but have now been replaced with new, higher efficiency equipment. Hopefully they will be with us more than 20 years into the future and that some of the cost will be recouped over time with the higher efficiencies.

Obviously, as caretakers of our 1835/1839 house and historic collections, we are alert to the need for heating and air-conditioning and the need to focus on temperature control, proper humidity levels and air quality. Our Washtenaw County Historical Society has the honor of being preservationists of very important artifacts but, also, the responsibility to do the job correctly.

*Les Loomans*

### **What a Washtenaw County home like ours might have used for heat in 1892**



#### **Washtenaw County Historical Society**

P.O. Box 3336

Ann Arbor, MI 48106-3336

734-662-9092

[wchs-500@ameritech.net](mailto:wchs-500@ameritech.net)

#### **Current Exhibit:**

September 7-December 1

**The Legacy of  
Michigan Football**

#### **The Museum on Main Street**

500 N. Main Street

Ann Arbor, MI 48104-1027

(at Beakes & E. Kingsley)

#### **HOURS**

Saturday & Sunday,

12 Noon – 4:00 PM

Groups are welcome

by appointment.



Check us out on Facebook

[www.WashtenawHistory.org](http://www.WashtenawHistory.org)

# Balancing the Budget

Back through the years your Society, like many membership organizations, has had difficulty balancing the budget. The amounts on one side of the ledger were easily attained, but matching amounts on the other side proved more elusive.

This changed several years ago when the WCHS received a bequest from the estate of Doris Anna Bach. The annual earnings from the bequest now amount to several thousand dollars each year. These earnings enable WCHS to pay professional staff to carry out the educational mission of the organization. We trust that you have appreciated the professional touch which has been present in recent years.

Sustained income from a portfolio of sound investments is the bedrock upon which the Washtenaw County Historical Society is built today. We, who have been elected to guide WCHS, experience that balancing the ledger even in these economic difficult years is less traumatic because a long-time member had the foresight to establish this bequest.

Funding in one general area, building improvement and maintenance, remains difficult. This difficulty did not

arise by surprise. It was anticipated more than a decade ago. At that time provisions were made for the establishment of an Endowment Fund to address the future need. This respected way of income generation is not unique, it is a mainstay of many institutions.

The benefits of the WCHS Endowment Fund are now coming into focus. Only the earnings generated by the invested principal of the Fund that may be spent. Use of earnings from the Fund are restricted to building maintenance and improvement.

In 2012 the Endowment Fund received the largest single donation to date, \$10,000. This boosted the Fund's invested principal to more than \$40,000. With continued growth at this rate, significant annual earnings are anticipated.

We now ask you to help the Endowment Fund grow. Earnings from your combined donations enable us to appropriately maintain the major physical treasure of the Washtenaw County Historical Society. The WCHS is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization and all donations are tax-deductible.

*By Jay Snyder, WCHS Endowment Fund Committee Chair*

“ Few will have the greatness to bend history itself; but each of us can work to change a small portion of events, and in the total; of all those acts will be written the history of this generation. ” Robert F. Kennedy

## Why Join the Washtenaw County Historical Society?

It is a great opportunity to meet people with a common interest while knowing that you are helping to preserve local history. This 156 year old non-profit organization is dedicated to preserving and presenting the rich history of our county. Our sources of income are the memberships, donations, fundraising and bequests. The money is used for collection care, educational programs, exhibits and building maintenance.

Benefits, in addition to supporting our museum, include receiving the society newsletter *Impressions*, a 10% discount in the museum gift shop, research assistance and Invitations to programs, exhibits and events. Memberships run the calendar year.

### 2014 Memberships

1. You can use the form below and mail checks made payable to the WCHS to PO Box 3336, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-3336.
2. You can wait until receiving the membership renewal year-end letter and use the remittance envelope that will be enclosed.
3. You can join anytime and pay online using PayPal at our website [www.WashtenawHistory.org](http://www.WashtenawHistory.org)

#### Membership Categories

- \$15 Individual
- \$10 Youth/Student
- \$10 Senior (age 60+)
- \$19 Couple (one 60+)
- \$25 Family (adult/child)
- \$25 Library/Organization
- \$50 Business
- \$100 Patron
- \$250 Sponsor
- \$500 Sustaining
- Endowment Fund Donation**  
\$ \_\_\_\_\_
- General Donation**  
\$ \_\_\_\_\_

## I want to Support the Washtenaw County Historical Society!

Your Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Organization /Business \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

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**NEWSLETTER PREFERENCE** Send WCHS newsletter, *Impressions* by:  
 Email (color PDF)  Mail  Both

**RECEIPT PREFERENCE** Send WCHS receipt by:  
 Email  Mail

# A 114 Year Road Trip - Ann Arbor to Texas



Car dealer Edward Staebler in a Toledo Steam Wagon, circa 1901. ([www.autonews.com](http://www.autonews.com))

Staebler and Son was a well established bicycle dealer before becoming Ann Arbor's first automobile dealer. The "Son" was Edward W. Staebler, who would serve as mayor of Ann Arbor from 1927 to 1931. Staebler tried to sell the Chicago-based Trimoto in Ann Arbor, but found that it lacked power, so he traded it for a Toledo Steam Carriage in 1900.

Staebler let Howard Coffin, an engineering student at the University of Michigan, use his shop to build his steam car. He built one car between 1900-1901 for \$400 and some spare bicycle parts.

Howard (1873-1937) was born to Julius and Sarah Jones Coffin who had emigrated from England. After the death of his father, Sarah moved the family to Ann Arbor. Howard graduated from Ann Arbor High School and studied engineering at the University of Michigan. He lived at his mother's boarding house at 71 Hill Street and became friends with fellow boarders and UM students, Roy Chapin and Roscoe Jackson. They would later form the core of one of the strongest groups of innovators and leaders in America's young car industry.

Lack of money forced Coffin to leave school and get a part-time job with the post office from 1896 to 1900. He drove this car himself for three years while delivering mail in Ann Arbor. Reports of the time said "Coffin's car ran better than any machine of a similar type then known."



## Then...

Howard Coffin with Steamer Car ca 1899-1900 (Bentley Historical Library)

a deal with wealthy department store owner, Joseph L. Hudson, who was the uncle of Roscoe Jackson's wife. The new company (and the car) was named the Hudson Motor Car Company, after the financial backer.

Thanks in large part to its stock capitalization, Coffin

took his fortunes early and decided to enjoy them, leaving the company as a millionaire in his thirties.

## Where is Coffin's Steam Car Now?

The Coffin Steamer was sold in 1903 to Edward Waples, an Ann Arbor real estate dealer. After moving around the country in the hands of various owners, the car came into the ownership of the Hudson Motor Car Company in 1913. By 1915, it was parked in Coffin's Michigan garage in Grosse Pointe Farms. In 1936, the car was donated to the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn where it spent 34 years before once again passing into private hands. Eventually, the Coffin Steam Carriage was bought by Feltz Terrill and is currently on display at the Terrill Antique Car Museum, 500 N. Texas Street, De Leon, Texas.

## Now!



Staebler noted in his records in the fall of 1901, "When we tell people the price of our Toledo (selling for \$900), they mention the cost of the mail carrier's car and tell us they will wait until our cars become cheaper, or build their own machine. Thus far, we have been unable to sell any carriages".

Coffin didn't stop building cars. He left UM six months before graduation and went to work for Oldsmobile in 1902 as an engineer and, by 1905, he was Oldsmobile's chief engineer. He was known as "the Father of Standardization" as a result of his initiative in establishing recognized standards in specification of materials and designs, a development which made possible the low-priced automobile.

In February of 1909, H. E. Coffin, Roy D. Chapin, R. B. Jackson, Hugh Chalmers, F. O. Bezner, J. J. Brady and Lee Counselman, many of whom had worked together at Oldsmobile, realized the dream of starting their own independent automobile company. As chief engineer and designer, Coffin wanted the car named after him but his partners disagreed. They didn't think the motoring public would want to drive around in a car named the Coffin.

But even more than a name, they needed money. The partners struck



Edward I. Thompson sits on the running board of his Reo automobile in October 1910. In the automobile are his wife Henrietta Margel Thompson (1875-1942) in the front seat and Blanche Root (Mrs. J. Atherton) Marrs (1874-1961) in the left rear. The other woman is unidentified. Thompson (1863-1953) was an Ypsilanti businessman with his father O.E. Thompson. REO car company was started by Ransom E. Olds (Oldsmobile) in 1904 (*Ypsilanti Historical Society*)

**Washtenaw County Pioneers, continued**

settlers to organize The Pioneer Society of the County Washtenaw, to be comprised of men and women who came here before 1840. Clark said, "in order to obtain the early history of the county, it would be necessary to take immediate steps, before those who had assisted in making the history were laid in their graves, and had become traditional." Every subsequent generation who has been entrusted with documenting and preserving history has felt the same urgency of timing.

Over the years, our Society has had many names but always one purpose. If the Washtenaw County Historical Society had no other reason for being, its existence and continuance is justified by its prime function – the collection and protection of local history.



PARKER MILL COUNTY PARK - Geddes Road, Ann Arbor

**Fall County Event Information is at Your Fingertips**

Over 25 historical organizations and agencies throughout the county form the Washtenaw County Historical Consortium to promote local area history. The member organizations represent historic homes, farms, depots, mills, churches, schoolhouses, the Detroit Observatory, museums with historical collections, and two libraries for historical or genealogical research. Click on the calendar for a list of area events at [www.wchconsortium.org](http://www.wchconsortium.org). You will also find links to the member websites.

**Get an Up Close Look at Coffin's Hudsons in Ypsilanti's Automotive Museum**



When you come to this museum, bring your camera and be prepared to take a lot of pictures. The Ypsilanti Automotive Heritage Museum tells the story of local automobile companies and presents some beautiful cars surrounded by detailed exhibits and displays. The museum also includes Miller Motors, a fully preserved pre-war automobile dealership that still operates serving America's vintage Hudson fleet. The Museum is open Tuesday - Sunday 1:00 to 4:00 PM, closed Monday. Admission is \$5.00 for adults. Children 12 and under are free when accompanied by an adult. Call 734-482-5200. The museum is at 100 East Cross Street, in the east end of Depot Town at the corner of Cross & River Streets. Free parking is available behind the museum.



# The History of Michigan Football

September 22 marked WCHS's first educational program after its summer break. Held at the Bentley Historical Library, the program featured Bentley staff members Brian Williams and Greg Kinney speaking on "University of Michigan Football History: From the Archives." Williams and Kinney have both been with the Bentley Library for about 20 years, and have a wide knowledge about the history of the University of Michigan. Kinney's salary, half funded by the University of Michigan Athletic Department, is a testament to the importance Michigan places on properly maintaining the history of its sports programs. Michigan is one of only a handful of Athletic Departments across the country that supports a formal archive of athletics and a position to maintain that archive.

The Bentley stacks hold around 100 books on Michigan football and innumerable manuscript items related to the sport. The twenty-two WCHS members and guests who gathered had the opportunity to view and hear about a selection of these treasures and the stories they illuminate. A few of those stories are shared in this article.

## Early History

One of the first items projected on the screen was a scan of a petition by the 1883 rugby team to be allowed to go east to play a series of three games in four days (Michigan lost to Yale, Harvard, and Wesleyan). In its early years, starting with the first varsity team organized in the late 1870s, football was called rugby; it was organized and managed by the students themselves; and they needed to request permission of the University to leave campus to play away games. The team practiced on the north end of the diag,



1879 University of Michigan football team Back row: Jack A. Green, William W. Hannan, David DeTar, Charles A. Mitchell, Frank Reed, Albert S. Pettit, Middle row: Irving Kane Pond, Tom R. Edwards, John Chase, Charles H. Campbell Front row: Collins H. Johnston, Richard Guy DePuy, Edmund H. Barmore (Bentley Historical Library)

approximately where the chemistry building is today. The first home field, Regents' Field, was set up in 1893 near the current location of Schembechler Hall and eventually moved to Ferry Field, at the current IM Building, in 1906.

According to Williams and Kinney, the first official University of Michigan football game is the one played in Chicago on May 30, 1879, when Michigan defeated Racine, WI, with a score of 1-0 (scoring was also much different in those early years). Approximately 100 Michigan students traveled west to see the game and cheer on "footballist" Irving Pond as he executes a series of back somersaults across the field to score Michigan's first touchdown. Pond went on to become a successful architect, designing the Michigan Union and League.

Kinney especially enjoyed sharing stories of what became of former football players after they left the University. In addition to Pond, he shared a photo and story of John Chase, who went on to serve in the Colorado National Guard and lead an attack on coal workers in the Ludlow coal strike and massacre of 1914. Several photos told the story of Giovanni "Count" Villa, who played tackle as a student (1893-1896), returned as part of the first all-alum coaching staff of 1898, and went on to become a lawyer in Chicago even though the papers reported academic troubles in his early years as a UM student.



Giovanni "Count" Villa (Bentley Historical Library)

## Interesting Trivia and Controversial Arguments

The many archival photos projected on-screen offered little-known tidbits of Michigan football history. Did you know that Michigan claims to have played the first ever Homecoming game in the Big Ten in 1898, including an alumni game? Were you aware that Fielding Yost, when coaching at Ohio Wesleyan, put himself into the game as a player versus UM? Or that in 1940 Michigan took the first transcontinental plane flight by any college football team?

The audience also learned the considerable affect World War II had on the University football program. The football team benefited from the many military trainees who were allowed to play for the University while assigned to the military training programs it hosted. Elroy "Crazy Legs" Hirsch was one of these trainees, transferred from the University of Wisconsin, and in the 1943-44 he was the first Michigan athlete to earn a varsity letter in 4 different sports in a single year. Another trainee, Bill Daley, became the only player in history to win the Little Brown Jug for both Minnesota and Michigan because of military transfer to Michigan in 1943.

Williams and Kinney attempted to debunk the argument that Notre Dame vs. Michigan is just a regional rivalry, showing archival pieces from the Bent-



Michigan halfback Tom Harmon carries the ball during a November 1939 game against Ohio State. The Wolverines would go on to defeat their longtime rivals, 21-14. Harmon, who also played basketball at Michigan, led the nation in scoring in 1939 and 1940.

(Bentley Historical Library)

ley used in John Kryk's book *Natural Enemies*. The items included an 1894 letter written by a former Michigan football player who had been hired as Notre Dame's first official coach.

Perhaps most interesting was Kinney's discussion of African American players on the Michigan football team, especially under the leadership of Fielding Yost. Many people know George Jewitt was Michigan football's first African American player in 1890-91. Many people also believe that there were no other black players at Michigan until Willis Ward in 1932-1934. In fact, as Kinney illustrated with team photos, there were at least three black players who helped make up the various UM football squads during that time: Abner Howell in 1902, an unidentified player on the 1917 squad, and Belford Lawson in 1921 and 1923. None of them earned a varsity letter or played a game

that we know of, but their presence on the squads makes a good case that the segregationist rap often assigned to Fielding Yost is not as valid as previously believed.

### Tom Harmon

The second half of the program was devoted to legendary Michigan halfback Tom Harmon. Guests were given time to peruse the Bentley's current exhibit "Harmon of Michigan," which includes a number of intriguing photos and archival documents by or about Harmon in the Bentley's collection. The exhibit will be on display at the Bentley until December 20; see the Bentley website for more info ([bentley.umich.edu](http://bentley.umich.edu)). After a break to view the exhibit, Williams and Kinney ended the program with a screening of *One Saturday Afternoon*, a film produced in 1965 to commemorate the 25th anniversary of Harmon's Heisman Trophy win.

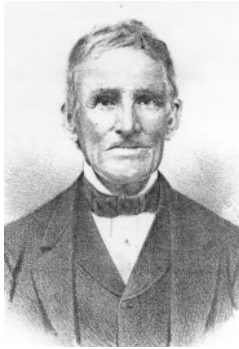


1902 Michigan Football Team. After high school, Abner Howell studied law at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. He took on several jobs to pay for his schooling, and pursued legal studies while playing football as a Wolverine from 1902 to 1904 under Coach Fielding Yost. The Wolverines won the national collegiate football title during each of those years. Abner was a gifted fullback who contributed to those victories. He appears here in the 1902 team photograph. (Bentley Historical Library)



Drawing by Michael Klement

## Fall 2013 Educational Programs & Exhibits



John Geddes



William Geddes

### The Geddes Letters Project

This program is about the Geddes family and the letters that brothers John and William exchanged in the earliest decades of Washtenaw settlement. John Michael Geddes (1801-1899) and his brother, Robert (1797-1866), were early settlers and built homes at Dixboro Road and Huron River Drive – both of which are still occupied. William (1802-1877) was living in Lebanon County, PA. His brothers bought land for him in Pittsfield Township off Platt Road and he moved to that farm in 1844 at which time the letters stopped.

**Sunday, November 17 • 2-4 PM**

**Ann Arbor District Library – 343 S. 5th Ave., Ann Arbor**

### ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY – NOVEMBER 11, 1918

Veterans Day pays tribute to all American veterans – living or dead – but especially gives thanks to living veterans who served their country honorably during war or peacetime. On the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month of 1918, Germany signed an armistice with the Allies – the official end of World War One.



Commemorated as Armistice Day in 1918, November 11 became a federal holiday in the United States in 1938. After World War II and the Korean War, Armistice Day became Veterans Day, dedicated to American veterans of all wars. **The WCHS thanks all of our veterans for your military service.**

## You are Invited to the Current Exhibit at the Museum on Main Street

Experience the inspirational tradition and history of Michigan's key coaches, players and games through a selection of items from the private sports collection of Ken Magee.

Highlights include helmets, photos, documents, artifacts and "a" little brown jug. You'll see game day programs including the rare and original 1902 program from the first Rose Bowl game played when Michigan beat Stanford 49-0.

This exhibit is co-curated by University of Michigan Museum Studies Program students, Megan Boczar and Alicia Juillet.

### The Legacy of Michigan Football!



**Groups are welcome! Call 734-662-9092. We are open Saturday and Sunday, 12-noon to 4pm and by appointment. Mondays 12-3. It closes December 1.**