

February 1979

# YPSILANTI GLEANINGS

PAST SCENES and OLD TIMES

YPSILANTI HISTORICAL SOCIETY ~ PUBLICATION ~



Ypsilanti Historical Museum  
~ 220 N. Huron Street ~

YPSILANTI GLEANINGS

EVENTS AT THE MUSEUM FOR FEBRUARY AND MARCH ----

FEBRUARY

FEBRUARY 11th - at the Museum - two until four

DIANE ANDERSON WILL HOLD A VALENTINE MAKING PARTY WHICH WILL BE HELD ESPECIALLY FOR CHILDREN - adults invited.

FEBRUARY 18th at the Museum - three until five

AT THIS GENERAL MEETING OF OUR SOCIETY RUTH REYNOLDS WILL SPEAK ON AND ANSWER QUESTIONS ABOUT - VICTORIAN COSTUMING THROUGHOUT THE DAY - WHAT MILADY WORE MORNING, NOON AND NIGHT. RUTH WILL USE AS EXAMPLES THE CLOTHES FROM OUR COLLECTION.

MARCE

MARCE 18th at the Museum - three until five

AT THIS GENERAL MEETING THE "SWEET ADELINE" SINGING GROUP WILL ENTERTAIN WITH A MEDLEY OF EARLY AMERICAN SONGS FOR THE FIRST PART OF THE PROGRAM AND A SING-A-LONG FOR THE SECOND.

MARCH 25th at the Museum - two until four

ESTHER ENSIGN, JANE SALCAU AND JANE BIRD WILL DEMONSTRATE FOR ALL AGES JUST HOW TO DECORATE EGGS FOR EASTER.

## YPSILANTI GLEANINGS

We are indebted to Alan and Harriet Stewart for allowing us to reproduce the three interesting and unusual letters written by Alan's great grand uncle during the period of the Revolutionary War.

James Heron was born in 1752 in Wigtonshire, Scotland and died in Richmond, Virginia in 1801. When a boy he was apprenticed to an uncle who operated a mercantile business in Glasgow and when James came to America in 1771 he continued in that business along the southern eastern coast. These letters are written from Talbot County, Maryland.

### LETTERS OF JAMES HERON

Talbot County, Md., June 1775

Dear Brother J:

I have been for some time looking for letters from my father, A. McGilland and you but to no purpose- were you to send your letters to the care of some persons in Glasgow they could be forwarded to me by Spiers, French & Co's shipping every 2 or 3 weeks who come within a few miles of me, or had you succeeded in what I recommended in my former letters, getting franks, you might send me letters free every month. Concerning myself, I have only to advise you that I am as well, as fat and as strong as ever I was in my life. Pork and homies (broken Indian corn fry'd) agree as well with my constitution as pork in beaten potatoes. Hitherto business has done pretty well but in consequence of the nonimportation every person in Trade in this County will be idle in a few months and how long we may continue we know not.

Your having heard no doubt of the trouble and confusion of this Country has perhaps may you anxious to know in what situation we are in. Certain acts of the British Parliament since his Majestys' accession having been deem'd unjust and an infringement of the People of America, a Congress of Representatives chosen by the people of each Colony was held in Philadelphia last fall. They drew up a state of their grievances, petitioned his Majesty for redress and associated to stand by one another (in case some of the Acts should be attempted to be opposed by military forces in any of the Colonys), to defend their Lives, Liberty and Property, but instead of the Prayer of their petition being granted a greater number of ships and troops was ordered to America to compel the people to submit to the obnoxious acts, and some Americans declared to be in active rebellion.

Since the Fall in consequence of the proceedings of the

Congress the people all over the continent have formed themselves into companys and been learning the Military Exercises in which several of the colonies are very expert.

The 19th of April a body of about one thousand soldiers was ordered by General Gage, Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony to march into the country and destroy a quantity of warlike stores provided by the Colonists in the execution of which a skirmish happened wherein the Americans seem to have had the better, pursuing the Regulars for about twenty miles till night parted them and had it not been for a reinforcement that the soldiers received about noon it is probable they would have been all cut off. The King's Troops lost 65 killed, 85 wounded, the Provincials killed 43, wounded 21. This affair is differently represented, some say that the soldiers fired first upon the country people and that what they did was in consequence of the Army being the aggressors, others the contrary. The country was pretty agitated for above one hundred miles from the action, the people had got in arms and were marching to assist their brethern before they could be informed that their presence was not necessary. (1)

The last post brought us an account that the Forts of Ticonderoga and Crownpoint have been surprised and taken by a body of Colonials, they being apprehensive that an army of Canadians was intended to be sent against them. (2) These forts secure the only pass whereby they could come to New England by land.

We are also informed by last post that the inhabitants of New York being informed that an army was on passage for that place had requested the advise of Congress now sitting at Philadelphia whether they should not oppose their landing and what they thought necessary to be done. It was: "Recommended for the present that if the troops which are expected should arrive the said Colony be on the defensive, so long as may be consistant with their safety and security; that the Troops be permitted to remain in the Barracks, so long as they be + have peaceably and friendly, but that they be not suppose to erect Fortifications, or take any steps for cutting off the communications between town and country, and that if they comit hostilities or invade private property, the inhabitants should defend their property and repel force by force - that the warlike stores be removed from the town and that place of retreat in case of necessity be provided for the women and children of New York, and that a sufficient number of men be embodied and kept in constant readiness for protecting the inhabitants from insult and injury".

Perhaps I may make a voyage to Scotland if our disputes with the Mother Country are not soon settled (3) - which I hope they will but I fear the worst.

We are now in a state of great confusion. The law has lost its dignity and force by the appointment of committees which are above the law in some substance having the populace upon their side. In some Colonies nothing is allowed to be done in the Courts except on Criminal business and upon attachments.

Upon looking over my letter I find that I've run to a much greater length upon political matters than I thought I had, but my paper is large and the insertion of them may perhaps save you the trouble of reading something worse.

Our crops, especially wheat are likely to be very good, but if these troubles continue a great part of it will likely rot upon our hands as we will not be allowed to export it.

Although this letter is directed to you I desire my father and Andrew McGill to see it as it is wrote to them likewise. I thought it needless to put them to the expense of postage having nothing interesting to them to communicate but as it affects me - write to me always of all your affairs - my compliments to all friends - I am very sincerely,

Your affectionate Brother  
James Heron

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- (1) From THE WORLD ALMANAC BOOK OF FACTS 1978  
Paul Revere and William Dawes on the night of April 18, rode to alert Samuel Adams and John Hancock at Lexington and others that 700 British were on the way to Concord to destroy arms. At Lexington, Mass., April 19 the Minutemen lost 8 killed, 10 wounded. On return from Concord the harassed British lost 273. (Battle of Concord Bridge)
- (2) Colonel Ethan Allen (joined by Colonel Benedict Arnold) captured Fort Ticonderoga and also Crownpoint.
- (3) James did return to Scotland twice - dates unknown. It would be interesting to read his letters about those trips.

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Talbot County, August 1, 1775

My Dear Father:

Since my last letter I have not had the pleasure of receiving from you and the time is now fast approaching when I can scarce expect to receive any.

Our correspondence with every other part of the World will

cease on the 10th of this month, the Colonies from New Hampshire to Georgia inclusive having resolved not to have any mercantile connection with Britain, Ireland and the West Indies after that time, and the Parliament having passed a bill restraining them from trading with any place else. I am afraid it will deprive me of the pleasure of your letters for some time, and of all other intelligence from Scotland. If there should be an opportunity, I hope you will not let it slip.

Trade is now near an end. I have still a few goods on hand. When they are sold and my debts collected, I will be idle 'till there is a change of times which I and every good man ardently wishes for.

I have some thoughts of making a voyage to Scotland in the Spring if I can make it conveniently. It depends upon getting in my debts, procuring passage and other circumstances. If the times had been as usual I would not have thought of a-jant to Scotland for some time until my purse had been heavier.

His Majesty's army to the amount, by our best accounts, of about twelve thousand are in Boston and in Charlestown about a mile from the entrenched and fortified, and the American Army of about twenty five thousand are so entrenched within little distance of them as to prevent their having any communication with the county. In this situation it is likely things will remain for this season. It is not probable the regulars will attack the Americans and they will not be attacked by them.

Since my last letter there has been but one battle wherein the Americans gave ground but the British maintained more loses in men. We have frequent account of squabbles between small parties on each side but none are of much consequence. There are few men on this continent fit to bear arms that are not trained for the militia.

I am very anxious to hear whether your health remains good. If it is you should be very careful to preserve it that your afternoon of life be as agreeable as our present state will admit - of which is the fervent prayer dear father of,  
your dutiful son,

James Heron

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Talbot, Md. 28 Nov. 1777

My Dear Brother:

How happy I should be if instead of writing to you at this distance I had but as long of your company as I shall take

to write this letter.

A friend of mine going to France I serve the occasion to send you this which he promises to put in a way to reach you. I judge of your anxiety to hear from me by the pleasure it would give to me to hear from you.

This unhappy war having reduced me to idleness I am more weary of than ever I was of employment and will soon be obliged to enter into some kind of business again as well for amusement as profit.

It is needless to inform you that Burgoyne was sometime ago defeated and taken with all his army. (1)

Howe has Philadelphia. From his seeming determination to stay there and Washington's to dislodge him we expect to see them exert themselves to the utmost this winter and spring to execute their purposes. (2)

Of these things no doubt the papers inform you. The war gets hotter and peace seems further removed than it did at the beginning of the dispute.

Remember me in the most affectionate manner to my father, sisters and friends. I wish long to hear from you,

As ever,  
James Heron

(1) Americans beat back Burgoyne at Bemis Heights October (near Saratoga) and cut off British escape route. Burgoyne surrendered 5,000 men at Saratoga, New York, October 17, 1777. (Fr; THE WORLD ALMANAC BOOK OF FACTS 1978)

(2) Howe defeated Washington near Brandywine Creek, Pa., Sept. 11, 1777 and occupied Philadelphia. Congress moved to Lancaster, Pa. Inclusive battle of Germantown, Pa., Oct. 4. Washington's army wintered at Valley Forge, Pa.

France recognized independence of 13 Colonies, signed treaty of aid with Benjamin Franklin, Silas Deane, Arthur Lee on February 6, 1778. Sent fleet under Admiral d'Estaing, British evacuated Philadelphia in consequence June 18. (Fr: THE WORLD ALMANAC BOOK OF FACTS 1978)

## BIOGRAPHICAL BITS

Continuing our plan to include in "Gleanings" biographical information on local families we thought this letter concerning the family of the late Joseph Thompson interesting for inclusion in this issue because of the mention of the "Boston Tea Party".

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February 5, 1909

Frank T. Emerson:

Your letter was handed to the writer for an answer. I have a chart of the Thompson family. My oldest grandfather was Alexander who had land granted to him in York, Maine in 1701. He had a brother who had land granted him in 1706 and another brother who settled in Saco, Maine. William Thompson settled in Dover, New Hampshire.

I found in the Detroit Public Library an account of a Thompson who came over in the Mayflower as a hired man.

I have no chart of the Emerson family but a history. My grandmother was a Simpson who married an Emerson and lived at York, Maine, Scotland Parish. There were 6 children; Henry, William, Oliver, Mary, Hannah and Mercy, (who was my mother). My mother lived with a Ben Simpson who had been a 'Liberty Boy' and one who heaved the tea overboard into the Boston Harbor. Ben was a bricklayer.

My mother often said she was related to Ralph Waldo.

Henry (oldest brother of mother) settled at Castine, Maine; William (2nd brother) was drown in Boston Harbor with a number of merchants when on a fishing excursion. Oliver (3rd brother) was the father of John O. Emerson, founder of the Emerson Shoe Co.

Grandsons of Henry & Catherine were in Business in Boston. One has a grocery within a block of U.S. Hotel. Another one is a book publisher in Boston. Charles, grandson on Oliver, managed the R.G. Grover Co. one - I think a son-in-law of Grover. You can find him at their store in Boston. The Emersons were all very capable people and good business men.

I was born in Ypsilanti in 1838. My father settled here in 1823, went back East and married my mother in 1835. My Aunt Hannah had married Hiram Thompson previously and settled here in 1839. These two families being all that came West. In 1854 I went East and rode on Fremont Street in the first horse car that was new then in Boston. I married a Miss Cooper. All together I have lived in the N.E. about 3 years.



mostly in York, Maine and Northwood, New Hampshire. I have been in business here in Ypsilanti since I was 16 years old. We have three sons and my son Len, who wrote to you has three. Making seven Thompsons all in business together. You could probably find in your Boston Library twice more than I have written. This letter is long-winded. I wish I knew more of the Emerson family -

yours, truly,  
Oliver E. Thompson

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#### BITS AND PIECES FROM THE ARCHIVES

From a letter of William A. Fletcher dated 4/30/62 to his brother Foster:

Old Henry Clark, Guy's father, used to say that the Presbyterian Church after its face lifting (1898) put him in mind of a fellow wearing a plug hat, a pair of overalls and a pair of patent leather shoes. He rather ignored the beautiful new windows in the body of the church which were protected by opaque glass covering them on the outside.

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This information helps verify that 1898 was the year the Tiffany Memorial windows were installed in the First Presbyterian Church. William A. Fletcher was age thirteen in that year. Church expenditures for that year list "glass" but no mention of what kind.

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From THE TRUE DEMOCRAT - Friday morning, January 6, 1865

FIRE - A NARROW ESCAPE - Tuesday morning a fire occurred in Dr. Gerry's office over the 1st National Bank at 4 o'clock. A Mr. William Sheldon and Frank Joslin were sleeping in the bank. When providentially they woke up. The fire was already underway and had burned so that the coals dropped down into the banking room. The fire originated from a pan of ashes. It is unsafe whatever circumstances to leave an ash pan or pail with ashes in it over night. Strange as it may appear there is no cistern on Congress Street. The fire was put out by pails resorting to the neighboring wells. A Cistern is essential. A word to the wise is sufficient!

Bits & pieces (continued)

It must have been this fire in the Bank in the building at 130 W. Michigan (old Congress Street) in 1865 that caused the making of a big Cistern in the center of South Washington Street.

This big cistern remained unused and unknown until October of 1978 when the Telephone Company was excavating in the street.

It was an unusual discovery and caused much excitement and speculation. Water was pumped into the cistern thinking it might leak into the basements of nearby buildings - and proving what we don't know! None ever did!

There were other cisterns. In Depot town there was a big cistern just the north side of East Cross just before the Railroad. It was probably built after the devastating fire of 1881 which destroyed the Farmers' store and other buildings in that block.

The cistern most frequently put to practical use was the one located on Florence Street back of the old High School. Twice there was a serious fire in the High School and in 1904 the clock tower was struck by lightning and the big handsome steam pumper from the Fire Department across the street was put to work pumping water from the cistern. It produced pressure enough to put a stream of water to the top of the tower and so great it took two men to hold the hose.

The old cistern downtown on South Washington Street was never needed for a fire. No major fires in the downtown area until after 1950, one hundred years after Ypsilanti's most disastrous fire in 1851.

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## ANNUAL REPORT OF THE MUSEUM DIRECTOR

Given at the Annual Meeting of the Society on January twenty-first, 1979.

Another successful year has passed for the Ypsilanti Historical Museum with over two thousand visitors signing the guest book during the year. The Christmas Open House for the Community swelled that number by about two hundred, for at least that many persons attended that event.

Scout Troops, Brownies and Bluebirds have had guided tours as well as classes from five local schools, namely: Ardis, Adams, Chapelle, Woodruff and the Apostolic Christian School. The latter school sent its honor students as a reward and it seemed as if the whole school came. A class from Eastern Michigan visited us and another is scheduled to come in the near future. Ethel O'Connor arranges for competent guides for these groups.

In cooperation with the Public Library, we hosted a group from the Washtenaw Genealogical Society at which time our resources were explained to them. Among the organizations who have met or visited here this year are: The Garden Club, the P.O.E., A.A.U.W., a committee from the Rotary Club and the D.A.R. It might be mentioned here that a member of the New England Historical Society was among those who visited the Museum this year.

Eighteen states and three foreign countries were represented, with California and Arizona leading in numbers - California seven and Arizona four.

Our Sponsored Church Tour in June, while not as successful as we might have wished, was very worthwhile and we appreciate the fine cooperation of the churches involved. We are indebted, too, to Arthur Howard who made attractive posters for us. The tour was really a rare opportunity for the community to visit the churches and to learn something about them.

A memorial gift was given this year for Albert Barrett who passed away in February at his home in Paris, Tennessee. He and his wife, Nell, were interested and dependable workers when they resided in this city. With money from friends, relatives and from the Administrative Committee an antique brass candelabra was installed in the 'White' room. Mrs. Alan Stewart made the arrangements for this project.

We are always grateful for the many devoted volunteers and helpers who keep the museum open for the public each weekend, and who can always be depended on to help with visiting groups.

Report of Museum Dir. pg.two

The Administrative Committee meets monthly to plan activities. The loyal members of this committee are:-

Ethel O'Connor is in charge of scheduling volunteers. Flora Block is the liaison with the schools. Deci Howard is the keeper of the plants in the solarium and in other rooms. Her efforts with an herb garden were destroyed by a city worker who didn't know he wasn't cutting grass! Eileen Harrison is the maker of our best seller-the Clothes Pin Dolls. She is also in charge of the selling case. Ann McCarthy makes the plans and supervises the Special Events that are held here. A Valentine making session will be held in February and an Egg Decorating Bee before Easter. Ann also comes to the Museum two days each week as an Assistant to the Director. Harriet Stewart supervises the cleaners who come each month, and also helps set up exhibits in the cases. Dorothy Disbrow is the competent secretary and is the ever willing planner and helper. **Foster** Fletcher joined us this year and offers suggestions to us.

While not a member of the Administration Committee, another person who should be mentioned is Ruth Reynolds who acts as custodian of the clothing collection. She is a volunteer from B.S.V.P. who comes each Tuesday morning. The February meeting of the Society will feature Ruth as the speaker at which time she will talk about some of our holdings.

There are several Society members who are always willing to help whenever called upon -- Carl Scheffler, Arthur Howard Alan Stewart, LaVern Howard and William McCarthy. These men deserve special mention special thanks.

Finally, it has been a gratifying year for the director, who when she took the job, did it as a temporary assignment. It has been a pleasant association with the above mentioned group without whom we could not function as we do.

Doris Milliman  
Museum Director  
Ypsilanti Historical Museum

A MEMBER OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE -----

Harriet Stewart (Mrs. Alan), is our featured member of the Administrative Committee this month.

She has been on the Committee since its organization in 1971 and is an invaluable worker.

Harriet supervises the cleaners who come each month and all various housekeeping chores here at the Museum. She also assists with special exhibits and is ever alert for people who have collections to put on display.

Both Harriet and Alan are avid antique collectors. Their great interest is in the collecting of 'primatives' but they have many other antiques besides those. They are always very generous in sharing their collections - by allowing them to be displayed at the Museum so that we may all enjoy them.

Harriet is a graduate of Momouth College in Momouth, Illinois, and served as Children's Librarian for the County Library system there after her graduation.

Following her marriage to Alan she was Librarian in Forest Hills, a suburb of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

The Stewarts came to Ypsilanti in 1942 and Alan then worked for the Ford Motor Company as a Material Handling Engineer. The Stewarts have two sons who live in this area.

Harriet has also served as President of the Thrift Shop and of the Womans' Association of the Presbyterian Church.

The Museum is indebted to both Harriet and Alan for the many hours of time they have spent here working. Alan is also a former President of the Historical Society.

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We have had an excellent response to our request that you (and your friends) use the Museum facilities to show off your collections in our cases. Case displays before the Christmas holidays, over the holidays and at present are from private collections.

We would also be interested in displaying collections which your children would be willing to share with us.

THANK YOU -

Grace Cornish (Mrs. Herbert) has been in charge of the refreshments this year and the food served was indeed refreshing and different. Her efforts as well as those of her husband have been appreciated.

Thank you also to others who have contributed refreshments for the monthly meetings.

REPORT FROM THE ANNUAL BUSINESS MEETING -

January 21, 1979

William Edmunds has finished his term as President for the Society and Carl Scheffler his as former President, and appointed member as Budget Chairman. Their dedication is appreciated.

Two new members were elected to the Board: Rene Burgess and Stanley Harbison.

Three Board members are starting their second term: Herbert Cornish, William Riccobono and Phoebe Miller.

At a brief Board meeting following the meeting Herbert Cornish accepted the position as President and William Riccobono as Vice President.

The Board consists of the following people:

Herbert Cornish	Foster Fletcher-City Historian
William Riccobono	Doris Milliman-Museum Director
Michael Philbin	Dorothy Disbrow-Sec. & Archivist
Frank Burgess	LaVern Howard-Appointed member
Stanley Harbison	as Chairmain of Buildings.
Phoebe Miller	
Rene Burgess	

## YPSILANTI GLEANINGS

A very cordial welcome to our new members -

BOELTER, DeEtte  
1695 Cliff's Landing #202  
Ypsilanti

DICKERSON, Margaret  
8655 Kingston Court  
Ypsilanti

BROOKS, W. Wilfred, Mr. & Mrs.  
1012 Washtenaw  
Ypsilanti,

WILLIAMSON, F.B., Dr. & Mrs.  
922 Pleasant Drive  
Ypsilanti

## RECENT ACQUISITIONS

Miss Eileen Harrison  
310 Florence

Original mold for the Ypsilanti  
medallion.

Kenneth MacDonald  
1263 Elmwood Dr.  
(In memory of the late  
Mary MacDonald)

Express wagon - about forty  
years old.

Lawrence Ogden  
2020 Collegewood

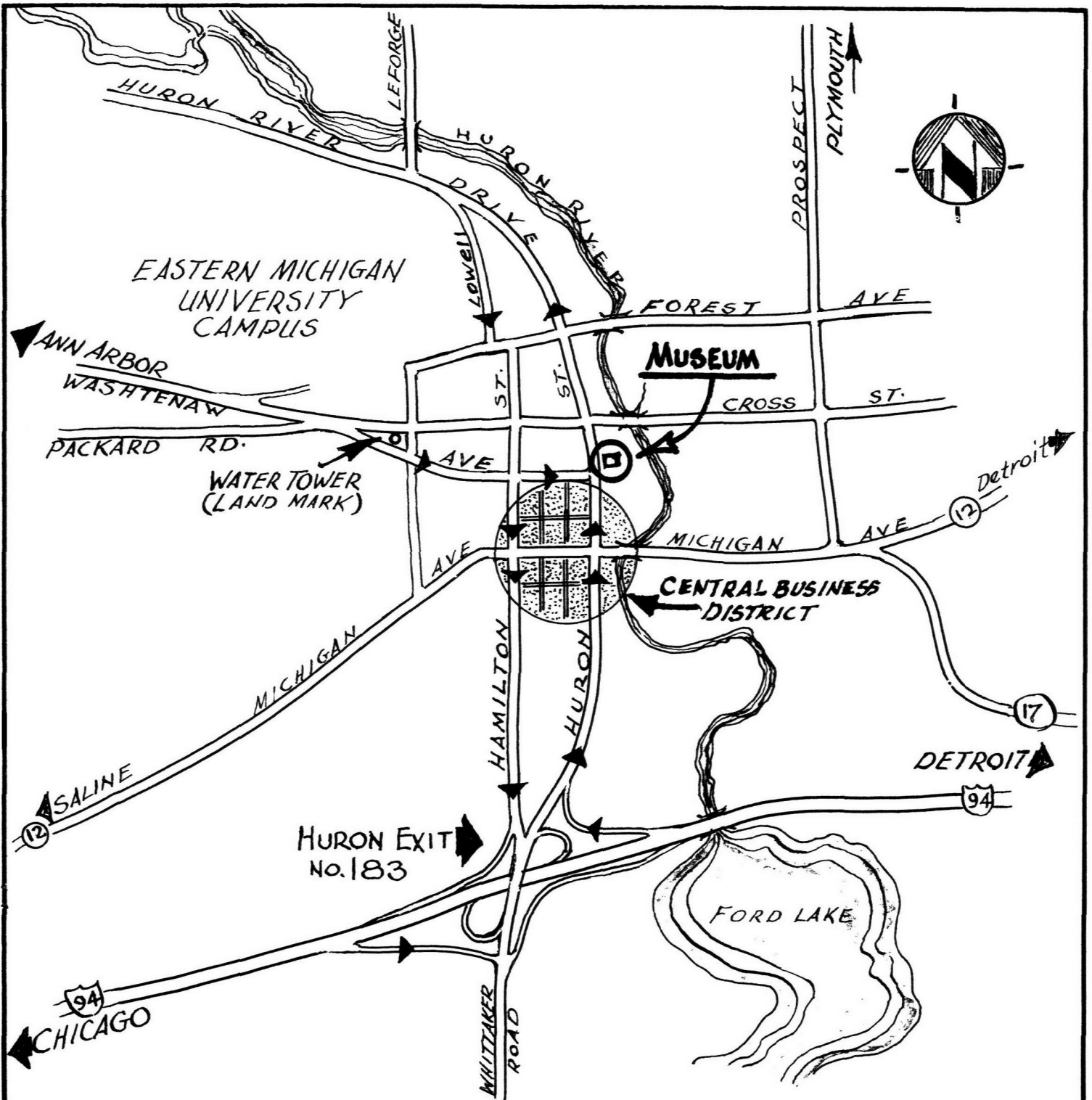
Old postal of the Water Tower.

Miss Ada Holmes  
1573 S. Congress

Eighteen old postals - scenes  
of Ypsilanti and "The Normal"

St Aubin, Fred W.  
809 Hemphill

HISTORY MICHIGAN STATE NORMAL  
SCHOOL - pub. 1899



**YPSILANTI HISTORICAL MUSEUM**  
**220 NORTH HURON STREET**  
**YPSILANTI - MICHIGAN**

**ZIP CODE 48197**  
**PHONE 313-482-4990**

**MUSEUM HOURS**  
**FRI - SAT & SUN - 2-4 PM.**  
**HISTORICAL SOCIETY**  
**ESTABLISHED 1960**

**FOSTER FLETCHER ~ CITY HISTORIAN.**  
**LAREA SWARTS ~ MUSEUM DIRECTOR.**  
**DOROTHY DISBROW ~ ARCHIVIST.**