

Ypsilanti GLEANINGS

YHS Museum & Archives

Official publication of the Ypsilanti Historical Society, featuring historical articles and reminisces of the people and places in the Ypsilanti area.



SPRING 2010

Eph Thompson – Elephant Trainer

By George Ridenour

I received the following email on October 2, 2009: “Dear Sir, I am sorry to trouble you in these busy times but I am trying to trace the history of my great grandfather Eph Thompson. An article in the Ypsilanti Daily Press Wednesday, June 6, 1906 seems to suggest that there was a write up about him running away from home at the age of 14 but I have not been able to find anything that connects Eph to the town of Ypsilanti and I was wondering if you would have anything in your archives that might throw some light upon him. Any information or indeed where I might write to would be gratefully received. Ray Perkin, England U.K.”

Little did I realize that this request would lead to an amazing discovery? I would find the roots of one of the worlds greatest ELEPHANT TRAINERS right here in Ypsilanti! Not only did he turn out to be a world famous elephant trainer but he was black! This was an amazing feat for a black man of the 1870-1909 eras!

From Ray I learned that he was said to have been born October 28, 1859 and died April 17, 1909 in Alexandria, Egypt. He is buried in Surrey, England. His father was Phillip Thomp-
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Moses “Eph” Thompson –
Animal Trainer.



Poster featuring “Mary,” the only somersault elephant in the world at that time.

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From the President's Desk

By Al Rudisill

Our next quarterly meeting is Sunday, May 2 from 2:00 – 4:00 p.m. We hope you will join us for the meeting and program. Refreshments will be served following the meeting and entertainment. Also coming is the Annual Art Exhibit which is scheduled for May 9 to 23.

Michael Newberry is the new Eastern Michigan University intern in the Museum. He replaced Veronica Robinson who graduated and moved to Chicago. Veronica is seeking a job in Chicago and is scheduled for a number of interviews in the historical preservation field.

The new expanded and resurfaced parking lot has relieved some of the parking issues we have had over the past several years. Our sincere thanks to all of our members and friends contributed their time or money for this major project. During the next several months we will be focused on getting the front entry steps repaired and installing storm windows on all the windows in the museum.

Make sure you read the book review for the new book authored by our own Laura Bien

titled "Tales from the Ypsilanti Archives." The book was released this past month by American Chronicles – A History Press Series. Read the book review on page ?? of this issue of the Gleanings and then come in to the Archives and purchase a copy. There is a book signing scheduled in the YHS Archives on April 24 so you can either buy your book now and bring it back for the signing or wait until then to purchase your copy.

The Annual Yard Sale this year is scheduled for June 5. If you have items to donate for the sale please give us a call and we will come to your location and pick them up. Also, items can be dropped off at the Museum from 2 to 5 pm, Tuesday through Sunday. Last year we raised over \$5,000 during this event and we hope to duplicate that this year.

We are always looking for volunteers as docents for the Museum or research assistants for the Archives. Both the Museum and Archives are open from 2:00 to 5:00 pm from Tuesday through Sunday. If you are available during that time and are interested in helping us preserve the historical information and artifacts of the area, or educating the general public about our history, please give me a call at 734-476-6658. ■



Ypsilanti Historical Society

220 North Huron Street - Ypsilanti, MI 48197

Home
Administrative
Archives
Collections
Contact Info
Donations
Event Schedule
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Welcome: The Ypsilanti Historical Museum is a museum of local history which is presented as an 1860 home. The Museum and Fletcher-White Archives are organized and operated by the Ypsilanti Historical Society. We are all volunteers and our membership is open to everyone, including non-city residents.

A Matter of Trust: The Ypsilanti Historical Society has initiated a five-year campaign to raise \$400,000. This amount will cover the cost of purchasing the property the City and completing the many deferred maintenance projects on the buildings and grounds. You may view a Power Point presentation related to the campaign by clicking your mouse on "A Matter of Trust" and then clicking on the first picture. The arrow at the top of the page will forward the program to the next slide.

To view on-line programs click on the links below:

Historical
Highlights
of
Ypsilanti

Markers
and
Statues

www.ypsilantihistoricalsociety.org

Eph Thompson –
Elephant Trainer
continued from front page

son. That was all that was known of the early years.

Checking our archives proved discouraging as there were few black families by the name of Thompson in this area let alone one with a child named Eph. Internet searches produced vague remarks about Eph and little of his history or heritage. The Circus Historical Society produced little concrete information. Most bits of information were a few sentences long and referred to his color more than his abilities.

However, we were able to find the announcement in the Ypsilanti Daily Press of June 2, 1906, page 2, under THE STAGE column which headlined: “*Extraordinary Attraction Engaged by Manager Scott.*” To summarize, the article stated that Eph

“The elephants were amazing and were named Rose, Tillie, Mary and Mina...Mary is 13 and the only somersault elephant in the world.”

Thompson left Ypsilanti at an early age having been caught up in the fever of joining a circus. He left Ypsilanti, circa 1873, with the Adam Forepaugh Circus, one of the biggest of the time. He learned his trade with this circus. When he left the Adam Forepaugh Circus he went into the circus business for himself owning four elephants and touring primarily Europe for some twenty years.

A June 4, 1906, Ypsilanti Press article again repeated the appearance of Mr. Thompson, giving little of his Ypsilanti background. The article praises his work with elephants and reviews his shows in Germany. Mr. Thompson was present with a vaudeville show along with his elephant act.

The elephants were famous in their own right. In the Ypsilanti Press of June 5, 1906, it indicated they were housed at the Hawkins House and guarded by the Council City Marshal Gage. Further, “...

longing to show his home people what he has done he brings his troupe of four elephants to this city for three entertainments at the opera house...He carries with him four elephants which have traveled all over Europe with him and among which is the only somersault elephant in the world.”

The show was presented at the local opera house and was, according to the Ypsilanti Daily Press of June 6-7, 1906, a smash hit. “*The elephants were amazing and were named Rose, Tillie, Mary and Mina. Rose is the tallest and most powerful. Tillie is 19. She appeared as “soldier girl.” Mary is 13 and the only somersault elephant in the world. Mina, 11 years old will appear as a prize fighter for tonight’s show!*”

We still did not have any links to Ypsilanti other than brief reports in the papers. We

did, after several reviews, come across the 1870 US Census of Ypsilanti. There listed was a Thompson family, black, of Ypsilanti. The parents Frances and Phillip Thompson were born in Kentucky and the children listed included George, Edward, and Moses Thompson as being born in Ontario, Canada, and two others Julia and Charles born locally.

Again, searching the archives I came across a card, in pencil, which showed articles in 1906 and again in 1956! How can this be when I know that he died in Egypt in 1909? He was, so the story goes, listed as seriously ill with “white disease” in Philadelphia a year prior to his death. White disease was another name for TB. How could there be a story of him in 1956 some 50 years after his *continued on page 20*

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W. S. CLEVELAND, Sole Manager,
Care of Wm. Morris. 1440 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

Ad in the New York Clipper on March 10, 1906. However, the elephants evidently did not sell. In the March 7, 1908 issue of Billboard a small article indicated the Ringlings had offered \$50,000 for the four elephants.

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Ad in Billboard from December 22, 1906.

Harvey C. Colburn

By Margaret Porter

Any student of Ypsilanti history knows about Harvey C. Colburn and what he wrote. Chances are, though, that very few know little more about the author of the first history of Ypsilanti. Some may know he was the minister of the First Congregational Church during the 1920's and most of the 1930's. There is much more to Harvey Colburn. In fact, his personal history is worthy of publication.

Colburn was a relative newcomer when he authored the history. He arrived in Ypsilanti in 1918 to assume the ministry of First Congregational. Just five years later he produced *The Story of Ypsilanti* in recognition of the city's Centennial. He drafted the book in Charleston, South Carolina, his birthplace.

So just how did it happen that a South Carolinian became the city's pre-eminent historian? It all started with the Civil War. His father, William Harvey Colburn was born in Vermont in 1847. He enlisted in the Union Army in 1861 but was discharged a year later due to a disability. Harvey's mother, Alice Cade, was born in 1849 in Rochester, New York. Alice's father was a builder. It is likely that Alice's father moved his family south shortly after

the Civil War in order to take advantage of Reconstruction monies.

It is unclear why William Colburn relocated to Charleston. It was there he met Alice Cade and married her October 22, 1874. Harvey was born two years later. His father died when he was three, leaving Harvey to be raised by his mother and maternal grandmother. He grew up in Charleston, leaving when he was about 19 to head north and enroll in Hillsdale, College in Hillsdale, Michigan. He graduated in 1900 and was honored for composing his class poem. He would continue to write poetry throughout much of his life.

Following graduation from Hillsdale, he enrolled in Oberlin's Graduate School of Theology receiving his master's degree in 1903. He married Mary Scott on May 22, 1907 in Marysville, Ohio. She would be a wonderful life partner. Together they would raise a family of six, four girls and two boys. During the early years of their marriage, they moved several times as Reverend Colburn accepted calls from various churches in Ohio. While serving as the minister in Bellevue, Ohio, he came to the attention of the First Congrega-

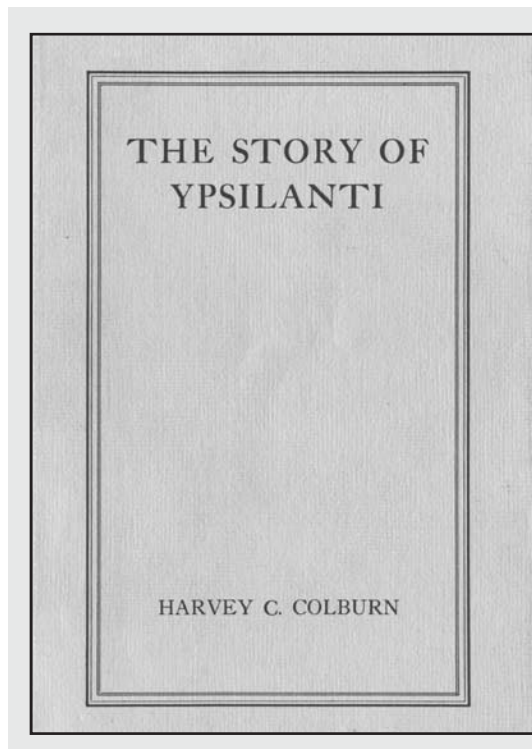


Harvey C. Colburn.

tional Church of Ypsilanti which was looking for a minister to succeed Lloyd Morris. Dr. Benjamin D'Ooge, a Professor of Classics at the then Michigan State Normal College, visited Bellevue and extended an invitation to Colburn to "visit Ypsilanti to look us over."

Evidently Harvey Colburn and his wife liked what they saw. He assumed the position of Minister on July 1, 1918. First Congregational was a good fit for the Colburns. The congregation was growing; its finances sound and its members were involved in the life of the larger community. Further, Ypsilanti was not only a college town but also a center of manufacturing and commerce. The city established a Board of Commerce in the early 1900s. The Board provided oversight for the City's Centennial. A Committee on History was established in anticipation of the city's Centennial in 1923.

The compiling of a history preceded the formation of the committee. It seems that Ypsilantians have long taken an interest in the history of their community. The local chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution began preparing a series of papers on local history. Helen Jenks Cleary was the Chapter historian. The wife of the founder of Cleary College (now University), Helen devoted herself to research. She combed old newspaper files, reviewed old letters and set about interviewing the older members of the community. Her dedication produced a significant amount of material that was incorporated into *The Story of Ypsilanti*.



Far Left: The original version of "The Story of Ypsilanti."

Left: Harvey Colburn portrayed an Indian chief in the historical play presented during Ypsilanti's Centennial Celebration in 1923.

Helen Cleary was a member of the Committee on History along with Dr. Carl Pray, the Chairman of History and Social Science, at the Normal. The third member was Florence Shultes, a Professor of History who worked with Dr. Pray. Dr. Pray and Miss Shultes were both members of First Congregational. Dr. Pray held numerous positions in the Church. He is best remembered as the developer of an active youth program that drew young people to the Church. One of these was the author's father, Don Porter. The Committee had the task of finding someone who had an interest in history and was an accomplished writer. Not surprisingly Harvey Colburn's name was put forward. Despite his already busy life as the minister of a growing congregation and the father of six children, Colburn took on the task.

The history was produced under a tight timeline. It had to be published in time for the City's Centennial. Colburn had to function both as editor and author. He had a number of prepared papers that he used whole or in part in addition to his own narrative. His aim was to tell a story. It's likely that Carl Pray provided assistance with structuring the history; each chapter covers approximately a decade with subsections devoted to significant events or trends of that period. For example Chapter IX - 1870 to 1879 - highlights Shops and Stores, The Huckleberry Line, The Town Band, Decline of the Seminary, The Training of Teachers, Churches, and Ypsilanti's Semi-Centennial.

During the summer of 1922, Colburn became ill during a trip with his family. A usually vigorous man, he was slow to recover. His doctor recommended a period of prolonged rest. He chose to return to Charleston to recuperate. However he took with him boxes of materials which he used to write the history. It's doubtful this was the type of rest his physician had in mind! He later remarked, "I really enjoyed the coordinating of newspaper files, time-yellowed letters and ancient documents with County records and histories."

The writing proved restorative and Colburn returned to Ypsilanti with a first draft. Various citizens were enlisted to review the draft and corrections were made. Colburn added a Prelude beginning with the glaciers that moved slowly across our State and area creating its topography and geology. The closing

pages are devoted to the upcoming Centennial Celebration with images from the first 100 years. The Story of Ypsilanti was completed April 10, 1923.

Harvey Colburn served as minister of First Congregational until August 1, 1937. During his ministry the Church celebrated the 50th anniversary of its founding. Colburn would live to deliver the sermon at the 75th anniversary service. It was a few years later when he announced he had "finally retired." Between 1937 and 1957, he was the Chaplain of Ypsilanti State Hospital. Oberlin granted him an Honorary Doctor of Divinity in 1930. In 1947 the First Congregational Church of Ypsilanti named him Minister Emeritus. He filled in for then minister Gordon Speer and officiated at weddings and funerals.

He also stayed active in the community and was frequently called upon to speak to community organizations. Often his topic was the history of our town. His listeners described him as both informative and entertaining. He particularly liked to tell the story of the short "secession" of East Ypsilanti from West Ypsilanti. He continued to write as well. He wrote and edited a monthly bulletin called Lawn Care for O.M. Scott and Sons. Orlando McLean Scott was Mary's father and the founder of the business that would grow into Scott Lawn and Garden. Harvey and his wife Mary were avid gardeners. They enjoyed attending garden shows throughout the country.

While Colburn's historical studies and writing included a history of Washtenaw County churches and research on Indian Trails, he was not above participating in the Centennial Town Pageant. He was an Indian Chief complete with an impressive feathered headdress. Harvey Colburn was a "Man for All Seasons." A poet, writer, scholar, horticulturist and a clergyman, he was the ideal author for the history of Ypsilanti's first 100 years. How fortunate we are that he agreed to take on this assignment and leave a wonderful legacy for his adopted hometown. ■


Sources: First Congregational Church of Ypsilanti publications, the Ypsilanti Press, History of Eastern Michigan University, U.S. Census Records, Union Army Records.

(Margaret Porter is the Assistant Editor of the Gleanings and a regular contributor of articles.)

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The Swift House

By James Mann

The Gilbert Residence on South Huron Street, a highly rated home for senior citizens, stands on what was once the site the Swift house, one of the grand homes of Ypsilanti. For many years this was the home of Helen Swift, and then her daughter Harriet. The Swift house was demolished to make room for the Gilbert Residence. What is not well known is the fact the Swift house was once a treatment center for alcoholics.

Helen Conklin Swift was born on July 26, 1849, in the house at the corner of Washington and Emmet Streets, now the home of the Ladies Literary Club. She was the daughter of Isaac Conklin who was active in local business and was one of the original organizers of the

First National Bank in 1863, was for many years president of the Ypsilanti Gas Company and a director of the Peninsula Paper Company. Helen married Ward Willard Swift on February 27, 1867, and the couple had five children. After her father's death in 1884, Helen took over many of his interests and would always be identified with them.

Ward Swift seems to have shared an interest in real estate with Helen. The Ypsilantian of March 22, 1888 reported: "*Mr. Swift has (purchased) three new houses—one at the northern point of Washington Street, where it runs into Huron Street, and two back of that on Arcadia Street, the short street that extends diagonally from Huron to Adams. The latter two are small cottages, and the first is a two story frame with extreme dimensions about 28 x 32 feet. The old house between these, on the corner of Huron and Arcadia, also owned by Mr. Swift, is being repaired, with new and higher roof, etc.*"

At about this time in 1888, Helen Swift acquired the old Judge Joslyn homestead on South Huron Street. She either had the old home demolished and a new structure built,



Helen Conklin Swift was born in 1849 in the house that is now home to the Ladies Literary Club.

or had the old house remodeled. Then in 1892, she sold the property to The Michigan Institute for the Treatment of Alcoholism. Investors from Detroit had purchased the rights for the State of Michigan for the Keely Gold Cure, and formed an incorporated stock company.



The Swift House at 203 South Huron Street in Ypsilanti.

The Keeley Institute was founded by Leslie Keeley in 1879 at Dwight, Illinois, and was the first time alcoholism was treated as a medical problem and not as a moral weakness. "Alcoholism is a disease," said Keeley, "and I can cure it." His treatment called for his patients to line up four times a day for shots, which Keeley said contained bichloride of gold. They also had to take a preparation every two hours every day. Chemical analysis revealed the proprietary tonic contained just over 25% alcohol, ammonium chloride, aloin and tincture of cinchona but no gold. The shot contained sulphate of strychnine, atropine and boracic acid. Today the treatment is remembered as an example of successful quackery. In 1892, however, the Keeley Gold cure seemed like a good investment.

Several residents of Ypsilanti, including Helen Swift, bought stock in the company. The company moved its operation to Ypsilanti, and purchased the Swift property on South Huron Street. When Helen Swift left the property, she

left the house furnished and ready for use. The property was said to be the most admirable for the purpose that could be imagined.

“Although located in the heart of the city, but two blocks from the main business street, it is quiet and almost rural in its park-like character. The house, which was a few years ago rebuilt and embellished in modern style, stands well back in the spacious grounds, with fifteen rods of rich sward between it and the street, shaded by original native oaks. Ten rods in rear of the house, the lawn ends at the top of a steep, wooded bluff, 30 or 40 feet high, at the foot of which flows the swift current of the Huron River. The property has a front of 350 feet on Huron street, including a cottage at the south corner, and extends back of the remaining two lots south to Race Street, on which there is a front of over 400 feet, reaching to the river. The fine brick stable and carriage house is located on Race Street, and the whole area of the grounds is about four and a half acres,” reported The Ypsilantian of Thursday, May 19, 1892.

“The lovely rooms within the house were left not only with all of their rich and luxurious furniture, but bric-a-brac upon stands and mantels, draping, bedding and linen in place as Mrs. Swift had them for ornament and use, make every room inviting. The south front room on the first floor will be the manager’s office, and the dining room in rear of that, and opening from the end of the hall, will be a reception room. The north front room will be the operating room, and

“At the sounding of a gong morning, noon, afternoon and evening, those to be treated passed in single file through the operating room for the treatment which they had facetiously termed ‘receiving the shot.’ “

in rear of that is Dr. Poole’s private office. Mr. Rose has his office on the second floor, where the two front chambers will be retained with sleeping apartment furnishings for use in case of a visit from any eminent guests to whom the institution should desire to pay especial honor, as the officers of the company, or Dr. Keeley himself;” noted The Ypsilantian of Thursday, June 2, 1892.

“The premises,” noted the account, *“are to be further improved and embellished. The old brick stable, lately used for an ice house, will be removed when it is empty. The handsome new stable that Mrs. Swift erected on the Race Street*



Harriet Swift, who never married, lived in the house at 203 South Huron Street until her death in 1958.

front of the premises, will be reconstructed, a new front put upon the north face, and considerable addition built upon the east, to adapt it for a club house - reading rooms, hall for debates and other entertainments, billiard rooms, etc. On the east side, a bowling alley is to be constructed, where the poultry houses now are, and these are to be removed to the river bank and converted into boat houses.”

Those to be treated at the Swift house often arrived while in an intoxicated condition, and were placed in the care of an attendant until sobered up. Then the treatment began. This consisted of a hypodermic administration of the Gold Cure four times a day. At the sounding of a gong morning, noon, afternoon and evening, those to be treated passed in single file through the operating room for the treatment which they had facetiously termed ‘receiving the shot.’ They would also take a preparation from a vial which they carried in their pocket every two hours while awake.

“The patrons of the Keeley Institute are chiefly men of social position and intellectual worth. Physicians, lawyers and members of other learned professions are frequent among them; and their restoration to their proper position in the family and community, and transformation from lost and hopeless men to good citizens and earnest reformers, is a work worthy of the honors that
continued on page 24

Amanuensis Wanted!

By Tom Dodd

What a thrill it is to come across a new word - one that we are sure we have neither heard spoken nor seen in writing. Then, all of a sudden, up pops this new playmate whom we have never met before. Sure, some of the other kids may have known this newcomer, but it is a total surprise to this old teacher (who thought he knew every word in the English language by age 75).

Society President Al Rudisill is looking for an amanuensis to work with several boxes of audio tapes left in the Archives by A.P. Marshall. A.P.’s lectures tell of the contribution of early Black pioneers and of the little that is known of stations of the Underground Railroad in Ypsilanti. All he needs, says Al, is someone who is skilled at amanuensis to transfer the audio versions to written format.

Amanuensis:

A literary or artistic assistant, in particular one who takes dictation or copies manuscripts. (*ORIGIN: Early 17th century Latin from (servus) a manu (‘slave) at hand (writing), secretary’ + -ensis “belonging to.”*)



The 1944 Christmas Eve Air Plane Crash

By George Ridenour

The Ypsilanti Daily Press for December of 1944 included the following story: *20 Persons Unhurt As Planes Collide – Air Transport And CAP Trainer Crash In Air; Two Jump To Safety.* Ypsilanti: Twenty persons escaped injury yesterday morning as a Civil Air Patrol training craft and an American Air Transport airliner collided in mid-air and forced the occupants of the CAP plane to parachute to safety.

Capt. Victor Evans set the passenger craft down safely after the collision which crumpled a wing tip on the big plane and sent the smaller machine out of control.

Donald Gridley, Ypsilanti, pilot of the CAP trainer, and his student, Miss Eleanor Cramer, 18, also of Ypsilanti, jumped while their plane was 1,200 feet off the ground. It was Miss Cramer's first jump.

CAP Plane Crashes: The CAP plane crashed near 5521 Thomas Rd. about four miles south of Ann Arbor while the airliner was guided to earth in a field near 1330 Willis Rd. not far from the Ypsilanti State Hospital. Gridley and his student landed near the CAP plane.

The air-liner, on the New York-Chicago run, was carrying 15 passengers, a three-person crew, and considerable mail cargo. Passengers stayed briefly at a farm home near where their ship had been landed and then were transported to the Willow Run airport where another air-liner later picked them up to continue the journey.

Gridley told investigating officers that he had "just finished a regular instructional flight when I heard a bursting noise and found the tail of my plane gone.

Makes First Jump: "I decided to abandon the plane and told Miss Cramer to bail out. It was the first time she had ever worn a parachute but as soon as she realized the difficulty she went over the side at 1,200 feet. I saw the air-liner a mile ahead of us but I didn't realize it had hit us or that it was in trouble."

Sheriff's officers reported that they were told by the air-liner co-pilot, J. Richard Lyons, that the CAP plane came down from above and that a piece of its landing gear hit one of the transport's wings. Passengers on the bigger plane were eating lunch at the time and quickly fastened safety belts being cautioned to do so by Miss Mary L. Brauer, Stewardess.

CAP authorities said they would make an investigation of the accident. Lyons, co-pilot for the air-liner is a native of Owosso and a graduate of the University. He was formerly an instructor at the Ann Arbor airport.

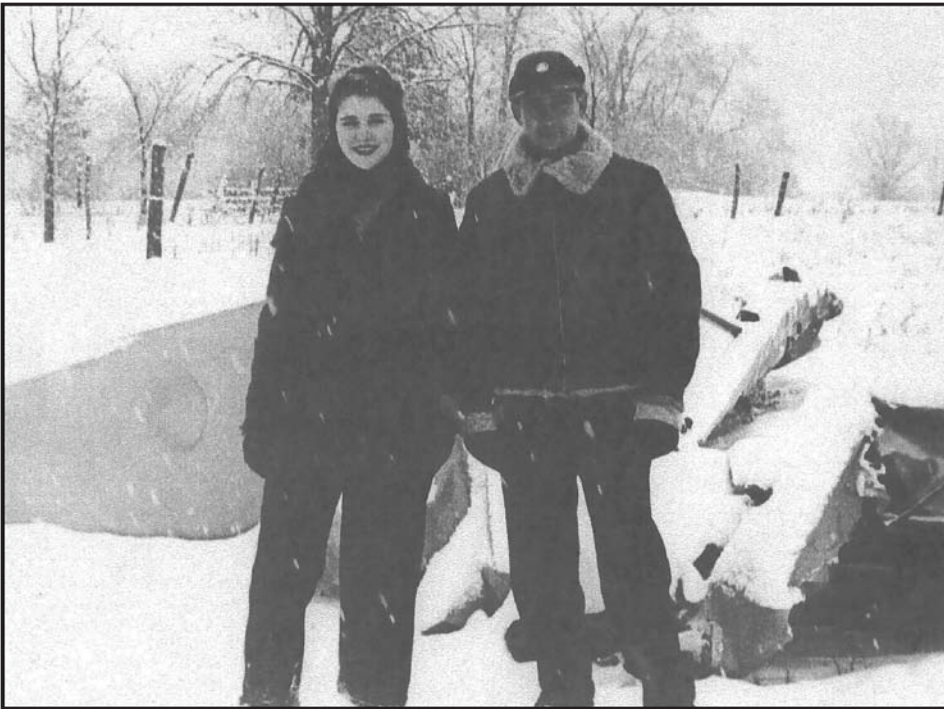
The rest of the story as told to George Ridenour by Ms. Eleanor (Cramer) Rose:

Told by sources that Ms. Eleanor (Cramer) Rose was indeed alive and well we decided to try and interview her for the Gleanings. On a recent cloudy, blustery, winter day we met Ms. Rose at her apartment complex in the old Ypsilanti High School. Her eyes twinkled, she held a steady smile, and spoke in a clear voice about her adventure on Christmas Eve, 1944. You could tell and sources confirm that there is no one quite like "Ellie!"

She indicated she was 18 years old and on a training mission for her license. She was flying out of an airport near Munger Road in Ypsilanti that was used by Don Gridley, Civil Air Patrol pilot, instructor, and neighbor of Ms. Rose. She had urged him to take her up for a final lesson. Before boarding the aircraft he asked her to put a parachute on because part of her flying lesson would include learning how to recover from a tailspin and a parachute was mandatory gear. She was tall and with the parachute on remembers her head hitting the top of the cabin and being uncomfortable. However, she did enjoy flying and was determined that she would get her license.



The damaged DC-3 after landing in a field with 15 passengers on board.



Ellie" Rose and Don Gridley in 1944 in front of the remains of the Civil Air Patrol trainer.

She remembers hearing a noise like a loud "thud" which turned out to be the tail coming off her aircraft. There had been a collision between the Civil Air Patrol plane and a DC-3 American Air Transport airliner, carrying mostly servicemen. The airplane with Rose and Gridley was severely damaged and the American Airliner was able to make a belly-landing in a field near Willis Road near Ypsilanti State Hospital.

Ms. Cramer remembers being very scared when Don told her to climb out on the strut of the plane, jump, and then count to 10 before pulling the ripcord. She jumped but only counted 1-7-10 before pulling the ripcord. Pulling the cord that early could have caused the parachute to get caught on the plane but she says "God was with me." She remembers how beautiful it was with the deep snow and was able to see for miles. She knew that Don had jumped and also knew that the plane they had been in was on fire. She was frightened that she might come down in trees or worse electric wires. Also, she had never had instructions on "how to guide" the parachute.

The Civil Air Patrol Plane was a total loss. The FAA and Civil Air Patrol did countless investigations and interviews to determine the cause of the accident. Don Gridley was eventually exonerated in the crash.

At the age of 17 Miss Cramer had come to Ypsilanti to visit her aunt and uncle living on Oak Street. She had grown up and attended school in her native Montana. While here the aunt and uncle who had no children asked her to stay with them. She agreed. She met Don Gridley who was a neighbor and flying enthusiast and that is how she developed her interest and came to be in the plane that Christmas Eve, 1944.

The incident did not stop "Ellie" from getting in a plane two days later. However, when she tried to take off, the airplane's skis got stuck in the snow on the runway and the nose tipped down and the propeller broke off. At that point Rose's ambition to become a pilot ended and she traded her interest in flying for downhill skiing. However, Christmas Eve from 1944 to the present has been enthusiastically celebrated and remembered by Eleanor "Ellie" (Cramer) Rose and her family.

Thanks, Ms. Rose for the interview and for the photos that will be placed in the files in the YHS Family Collection. ■

(George Ridenour is a volunteer in the YHS Archives, regularly conducts historical research on people, places and things, and is a regular contributor to the Gleanings.)



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Ward G. Swarts (1906 – 1979)

By Michael Newberry

Ward G. Swarts, local architect, designed over fifty residential houses in southeast Michigan from 1939 to 1959. At least forty of these houses were built in Ypsilanti and nine were built in Ann Arbor. Many of his house designs produced contemporary buildings with a traditional and symmetrical approach. Many of his floor plans were traditional as well (center hall plans etc.).

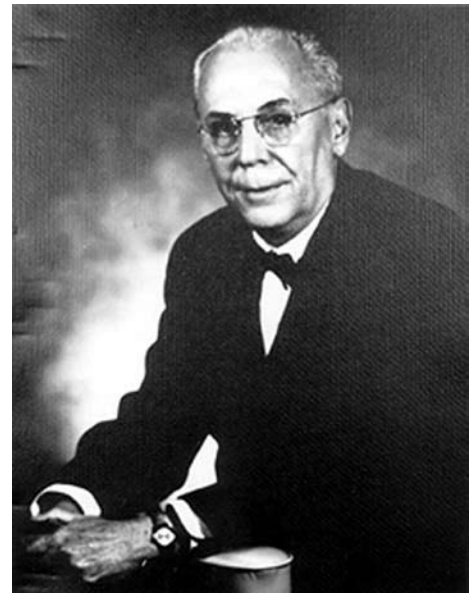
Ward Swarts was born in Auburn, Indiana in 1906 and married LaRae Foote, also from Auburn, on September 2, 1928. Ward began his college career as a Pre-Med student at DePauw University but soon discovered his love for architecture after dissecting frogs didn't pan out so well. Shortly after they were married, Ward and LaRae moved to Ann Arbor, Michigan, and Ward began attending classes at the College of Architecture and Design at the University of Michigan. Ward received his degree from the University of Michigan in 1935, and the couple moved to Port Huron to wait the required time before taking the State Board examination for Architects. Upon passing the board examination, Ward and LaRae moved to Ypsilanti where Ward set up an independent practice. His first house was actually designed with colleague, Houston Colvin, and was created for a family friend while he was still at the College of Architecture and Design at the University of Michigan.

Shortly after graduation and beginning his architectural practice, Ward was called upon to serve as an architect for the U.S. Military in Mexico from 1942 to 1945. Swarts resumed his independent architectural practice in Ypsilanti after returning from Mexico in 1945. He designed houses and public buildings predominantly in the Ann Arbor/Ypsilanti area until 1956 when he formed a partnership with Gwen Morhous. Together, they operated under the name of Swarts and Morhous until 1958.

Local public buildings designed by Ward Swarts include the Ypsilanti Board of Commerce, the Dr. Harris Medical Building, Trinity Baptist Church, and the Ypsilanti Police Station. In 1959, Swarts left Michigan and

his architectural practice behind to accept the position of Director of Architectural Projects at Colonial Williamsburg. Here he served in this capacity from 1960 until 1971 when he was forced to retire due to complications from a burst appendix three years prior. During this time in Virginia, Ward and LaRae raised their two children Stephen, and Susan, and saw them graduate from the College of William and Mary.

Ward and LaRae Swarts returned home to Ypsilanti, Michigan in 1973 after a fourteen year absence. That year marked a new beginning for once more serving their local community. LaRae served as the Museum Director at the Ypsilanti Historical Society for four years, and both Ward and LaRae served on the Board of Directors of the Ypsilanti Historical Society. In this capacity, Ward spent countless hours providing architectural advice to local historic home owners. As a restoration architect, he was also involved in the creation of the Ypsilanti Historic District in 1973. He also designed the space that currently holds the Ypsilanti Room and Gift Shop at the



Ward G. Swarts.

museum. In 1977, Ward and LaRae Swarts moved back to Reston, Virginia to finish out their retirement in a warmer climate and live close their daughter, Susan. Ward passed away in 1979. ■

*(Michael Newberry is a student in the graduate program in Historic Preservation at Eastern Michigan University and is serving an internship in the YHS Museum.)
continued on page 17*



The Broadway House in Ann Arbor, Michigan was Ward Swarts' first design.

The Famous Ypsilanti Fence Trial

By James Mann

As we come into a new age of urban farming, the keeping of farm animals such as chickens, goats and cows on city lots, we must consider the legal issues that arise. For example, will urban farmers be liable for damages done by their animals to the neighboring properties? To find the answers, we must seek guidance from the past. The question arose in 1920 in Ypsilanti Township.

Every farmer who lived near William Gotts and John Lewis attended the session in the Ypsilanti Town House on Wednesday, February 25, 1920. That was the day Justice D. Z. Curtiss heard the case between the two. There was great interest in the case as an important issue was involved – “does the Huron River make a good fence line?”

The road to the Town House was crowded with automobiles and cutters. The benches and seats were filled with farmers and their help. The wives of Gotts and Lewis graced the occasion with their presence. One of the wives spent her time in the session making fancy edging for lingerie.

“Some were in overalls, some were in hunting corduroy suits, some had overcoats, but more dispensed with this necessity for city life. One man came with an overcoat made from real buffalo skin, but showing at least 60 years or more of wear. Pants were tucked in boots, and in one instance, the owner of a fur cap forgot the formality of removing it while the court was in session,” reported The Daily Ypsilanti Press of Wednesday, February 25, 1920.

“The sign, ‘No Smoking,’ was absent,” continued the account, “so quite a number of those present indulged in the luxury of a pipe or a cigarette. And as the testimony proceeded, the loud laughs broke the monotony of the proceedings when some witness was describing the unruliness of the cattle owned by the defendant.”

Justice Curtiss knew his audience, and had hunted up a wooden spittoon and placed

it in a convenient spot. He also had chairs moved from behind the railed off part of the room, and placed near the center. There were also chairs placed close to the great cast iron stove, which was the source of heat on this winter day.

The suit involved a bill of \$56 for damage done to corn, potatoes and fodder destroyed by cattle owned by John Lewis. It seems the cattle of Lewis persisted in breaking down a fence or wading across the Huron River to get at the crops of William E. Gotts. Testimony brought out that Lewis had settled once before with Gotts for damages, when his cattle broke through the fence on a previous occasion. He did not deny the further damages done by his cattle, but did question the amount of damage done. Lewis, having paid Gotts damages once, considered the matter settled and felt he should not be expected to pay for further damages by the same cattle. He felt he had fulfilled his obligation. In the end, Justice Curtiss did not agree, and awarded Gotts \$51 and costs.

“The case is typical of the frequent claims for damages that arise among farmers for the breaking in of neighboring stock,” wrote Justice Curtiss in his decision, which was published by The Daily Ypsilanti Press of Saturday, February 28, 1920, “and injuring and destroying crops. Usually, as in this case, inefficient fencing plays an important part in the trouble.”

“There is a statute restraining the collection of damage done when the complainant has failed to maintain a legal fence,” noted Justice Curtiss, “But the testimony shows that neither party had a legal fence, so the court took the view that the cattle broke in across the line of both parties, and Lewis is stopped from availing himself of the statute.”

Curtiss thought it doubtful Gotts could legally recover the time and effort spent in driving the Lewis cattle from his property, and dropped the \$5 car charge from the bill.

“No person,” concluded Curtiss, “is bound by common law to fence against the beast of another, but owners of beasts are liable for any damage done by them on the lands of another.” The Ypsilanti Fence case was settled. ■

(James Mann is a local author and historian, a volunteer in the YHS Archives, and a regular contributor to the Gleanings.)

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Rest at Ease Mr. Opem

By George Ridenour

The YHS Museum has received a donation of military uniforms that were collected by Martin Opem, a life-long resident of Ypsilanti. The inventory includes both domestic and foreign uniforms that cover the Civil War through modern day. There are uniform jackets, pants, shirts, belts, helmets, and a wide variety of military caps.

Martin kept his uniform collection at his life-long home on Summit Street in Ypsilanti. He decided to collect uniforms after a visit to the Gettysburg battlefield because of his interest in local and national history. He derived a great deal of pleasure from collecting the uniforms, learning their history, and displaying them (including displays at the YHS Museum). Before collecting uniforms he had tried collecting stamps and coins but they did not satisfy him like collecting the uniforms.

In his collection he had a Revolutionary War Colonial soldier's outfit, General George Custer's K Company hat band, Confederate and Yankee Civil War uniforms, a British Air Force officer's coat and a German Field Marshal jacket complete with iron cross. His collection contained both authentic and reproductions of military uniforms.

In addition to writing letters, Martin used a variety of ways to obtain uniforms. The cost of collecting was estimated at over \$2,000 over a 20 year period. One could see him occasionally waiting at a bus stop on Washtenaw near the water tower, sometimes dressed in uniform, sometimes just standing and waiting.

Martin Opem was 63 years old at the time of his death in 2009. He was working in Ann Arbor and was a member of the local Civil Air Patrol. He was born, raised and lived his entire life in the house on Summit Street.



One of the Uniforms donated by Mr. Opem is this USMC Officer's Dress Blues – Lieutenant General, c. 1961. Ribbon Bars include: Navy Cross, Silver Star, Navy & Marine Corps Medal, WWI Victory Medal, Purple Heart, Air Medal, Navy & Marine Corps Commendation Medal, Navy & Marine Corps Achievement Medal, Selected Marine Corps Reserve Medal, National Defense Service Medal with rifle expert badge and Naval Aviator Badge.

You can rest at ease Mr. Opem. Your unique uniform collection will now be used for the enjoyment and education of the people visiting the YHS Museum for years to come. Good job sir! ■

(George Ridenour is a volunteer in the YHS Archives, regularly conducts historical research on people, places and things, and is a regular contributor to the Gleanings.)

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Ypsilanti History – It's a Test!

By Peter Fletcher

This is the second in a series of tests related to the history of Ypsilanti.

1. Where did the gypsies stay when they came through Ypsilanti from time to time in the 1930's?
2. Who always sat in the front office of the original Cleary College Building in downtown Ypsilanti in the 1920's and 1930's?
3. What former prominent public official lived in room 401 at the Huron Hotel for many years?
4. Name the Ypsilanti auto dealer who served on the Mackinac Island State Park Commission who was such a tightwad he refused to donate to the campaign of the Governor set to reappoint him to this coveted spot so as a result he was bounced?
5. Name the two commercial movie theatres in Ypsilanti prior to World War II and explain how they differed in their cinematic fare?
6. Three downtown Ypsilanti landmarks burned down at different times in the 1960's. Name them and what succeeded them?
7. What other building was built by the Swift family on the site of the Gilbert Residence at 203 South Huron Street?
8. Tell us about the bank robbery at the old National Bank of Ypsilanti when the money never left the bank but the culprit still spent six months in Federal Prison for the crime.
9. Other than being sons of Azro and Elizabeth Fletcher what did William, Harris, Robert & Foster have in common arising from an eerie coincidence at Ypsilanti High School?
10. During World War II Welch Hall on the EMU campus was pressed into emergency use for what educational purpose?
11. The initials "YPS" signifying Ypsilanti, MI gained national prominence for what reason after World War II?
12. Once each year in the 1930's the President of the University of Michigan would make a special visit to a private home on the west side of Ypsilanti for what important task?
13. Who was the last Republican (in 1963) to carry every precinct in the City of Ypsilanti when elected to a state office. Who was it and what office?
14. When voters in the City of Ypsilanti adopted a local option for liquor by the glass it carried in every voting location except one. Where was the exception?
15. At that same election the first attempt to adopt a millage to build a new library was defeated. What observation about the city did this provoke?
16. During World War II the southeast corner of the front yard of the Ypsilanti Public Schools at 210 West Cross Street was covered twice a year with two commodities, collected from all over town by students, badly needed for the war effort. What were they?
17. In 1942 a large billboard was installed next to the downtown Post Office on Michigan Ave. What was put on it?
18. On Sunday morning, November 24, 1963 every Church was crowded in Ypsilanti. Why?
19. Who left the office of Michigan Lt. Governor to become President of Eastern Michigan University and then returned to becoming Lt. Governor four years later?
20. What Ypsilantian was ordered to accept appointment to a state constitutional office he did not want by the Governor with the reminder "I have done things for you I did not wish to do - now you have to do this for me."?

(Peter Fletcher is the President of the Credit Bureau of Ypsilanti and is widely known for his inspirational speeches.)

Turn to page 24 of this issue to check your answers.

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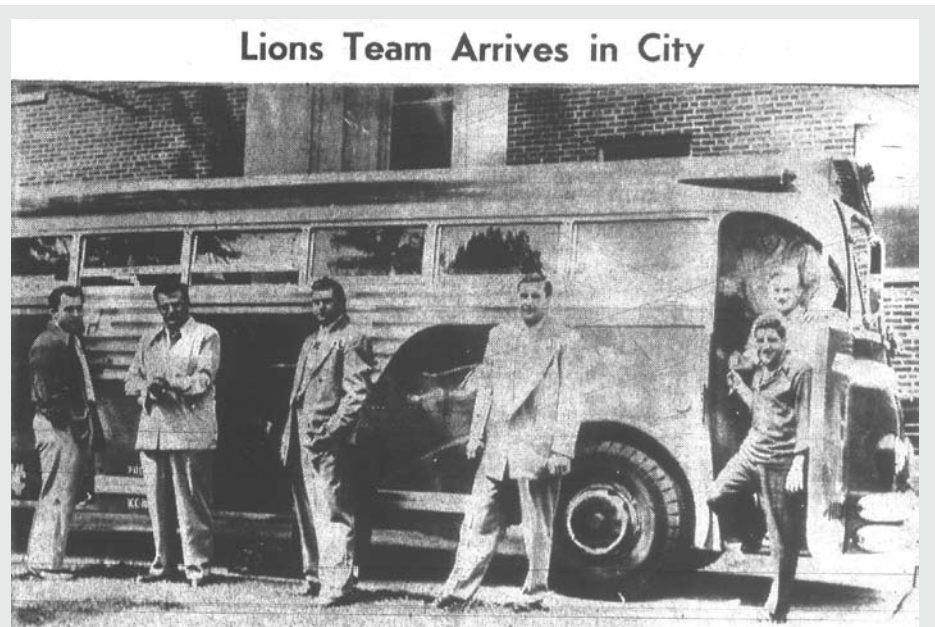
When Lions Stalked the Streets of Ypsilanti

By Derek Spinei

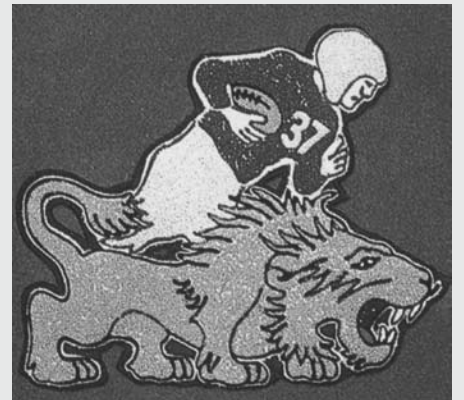
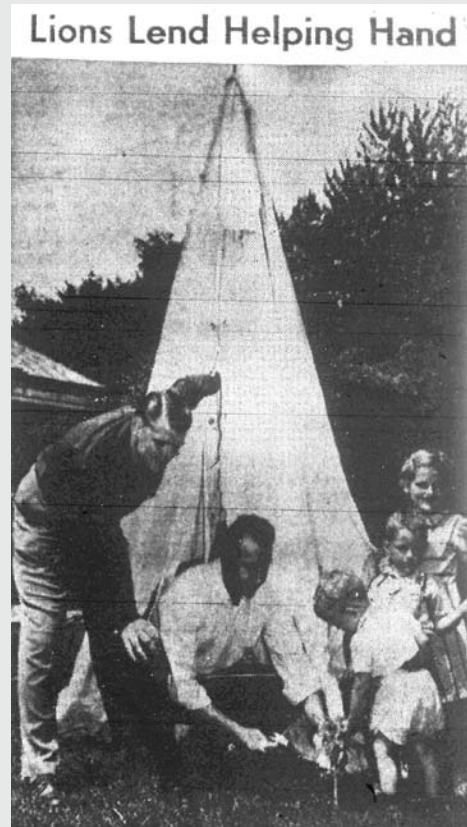
On Aug. 1, 1949 the Detroit Lions reported for training camp at a new location, Michigan State Normal College. The players received physicals in Bowen Field House and enjoyed room and board in the Lydia I. Jones dormitory on campus. Players arrived in town by bus, train, plane and automobile. The next day training started with lectures and exercises, bodily contact would come in a few days. In his second year as head coach, Alvin "Bo" McMillin had the offense practice his "cockeyed T" formation and instituted a "Fat Man's Table." Here overweight players were fed from a special menu prepared by Karen R. Lurting, the director of Jones dorm. For three meals a day, the players at this table were denied fats, carbohydrates and sugars, while they were given plenty of protein. The rest of the team ate 5,000 to 6,000 calories per day, but the select "Fat Men" got only 4,000 to "assist in achieving a trim football team."

To get out into the Ypsilanti community, Lions players helped set up tents for the Kiddie Karnival at Recreation Park, an event which used to be sponsored by the Ypsilanti Department of Parks & Recreation. However activities on the practice field were less enjoyable. Twice-daily practices and full-contact intra-squad scrimmages were punctuated by rain postponements and agonizing 95 degree weather. When two players collided with Coach McMillin, straining the inside ligament of his right knee, it's easy to imagine him taking out his frustration on the team.

As training camp neared completion, the roster was whittled down from 60 to less than 45 and preparations began for the seven game exhibition schedule, far more rigorous than today's four game pre-season. Most of the players cut where eventually acquired by the Lions' new farm club, the Wilkes-Barre Bullets of the American Association.



Ypsilanti Press article from August 1, 1949. "DETROIT LIONS FOOTBALL TEAM MEMBERS stretch their legs after their bus ride from Detroit. Approximately 25 players rolled in today. The rest of the famous pro-football team arrived in Ypsilanti by train, plane and automobile. The brawny football players will reside in the Lydia Jones Dormitory at Michigan State Normal College during their training period here."



Above: Lion's logo from the 1950s.

Left: Ypsilanti Press article from August 8, 1949. "Russ Thomas, All American from Ohio State, who plays left guard for the Detroit Lions, supervises Chuck DeShana (kneeling), All American from the University of Alabama, as Chuck helps the youngsters set up the tents for the Kiddie Karnival. Youngsters are, from left to right, Bobbie, Eldon and Sallie Walbrecht from Recreation Park. The Kiddie Karnival sponsored by the Ypsilanti Department of Parks and Recreation, will open Tuesday, at Recreation Park at 7 p.m.

For eight seasons training camp was hosted by Michigan State Normal until it moved to Cranbrook in Bloomfield Hills in 1957. All regular season home games were played

at Tiger Stadium and exhibition matches took place at University of Detroit Stadium, neither of which still are still in existence. The Ypsilanti teams featured many personnel



Welcome banner on Michigan Avenue in 1953.

who had participated locally at the collegiate level for Wayne State University, University of Michigan, Michigan State University, and University of Detroit. Many individuals who later became Pro Football Hall of Famers practiced here including Joe Schmidt, Doak Walker, Bill Dudley, Lou Creekmur, Jack Christiansen, Yale Lary, and Bobby Layne.

While using Michigan State Normal for training camp, the Lions got steadily better. They were 4-8-0 in 1949, 6-6-0 in 1950, and 7-4-1 in 1951 after McMillan was replaced by Raymond "Buddy" Parker as head coach. McMillan died in March of the following year at age 57, too soon to see the Lions go 9-3-0 and defeat the Cleveland Browns for the NFL Championship (there was no Super Bowl until 1967, when the NFL and AFL merged). To top that achievement, the Lions beat Cleveland again for the championship in 1953, but posted a 10-2-0 record. In 1954 they unfortunately lost in the championship game to archrival Cleveland after going 9-2-1 in the regular season. 1955 was a forgettable season at 3-9-0, but the Lions got back into shape for 1956 going 9-3-0.

All told, the Lions amassed a record of 57-37-2 with two world championships while Ypsilanti was the site of training camp. In light of the team's current woes, maybe they need to abandon their Allen Park facility and set up shop once again at Eastern Michigan University and find some of that Ypsilanti football "mojo." ■



Aerial view of the MSNC sports fields in the 1950s facing east. The football field was located where the Mark Jefferson and the Oakwood parking lots are now located.

Music at the Museum

By Bob Southgate

The museum has often had musical groups and instrumental soloists as part of our many and varied programs. The local chapter of *Sweet Adelines International*, *Voices in Harmony*, has often been a part of this musical heritage. This chorus has smaller groups that have performed for us on several occasions. One of these quartets, *Harmony 4 Fun*, most recently sang for our Christmas open house last December.

Sweet Adelines International is a world-wide group of women who come together to enjoy singing four-part harmony in the barbershop style. This international organization has chapters all over the world. *Voices in Harmony* has a growing membership of more than 60 women from Washtenaw and surrounding counties and they meet weekly in Ypsilanti. The group shown performed in period costume for the Docent Appreciation Lunch several years ago. Perfect for the audience at the museum was the historical theme of World War I music. This smaller group performed in authentic period costume. They most recently sang for the 2009 Docent luncheon featuring the history of barbershop music in America.

The second group shown by the Christmas tree is the *Harmony 4 Fun* quartet. This *Sweet Adelines International* group of 4 local women last sang at our December 2009 open house. From the left: Nancy Kingsbury, tenor; Terry Mull, lead; Jill Burton, bass and Shirley Southgate, baritone.

The Ypsilanti Museum is always ready to showcase fine local talent in its ongoing quest to encourage the development of the unique creativity found in our community. This museum has found a rich source of musical excellence. ■

(Bob Southgate is a member of the YHS Board of Trustees and also serves on the YHS Museum Advisory Board.)



The Sweet Adelines "Voices in Harmony" group that performed at the YHS Docent Appreciation Lunch.



The Sweet Adelines "Harmony 4 Fun" quartet that sang at the YHS 2009 December Open House.



House at 1307 Westmoreland in Ypsilanti that was designed for Bancroft Brien in 1939.



House at 150 Greenside in Ypsilanti that was designed for Charles Lamb in 1958.



The Ypsilanti Police Station at 505 W. Michigan Avenue in Ypsilanti was designed by Ward Swarts.



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Finds in the Fletcher White Archives

By Gerry Pety

One of the fascinating aspects of my position as archivist at the Ypsilanti Historical Society is the possibility of finding overlooked and unusual artifacts which have been donated over the years. Some of the time these artifacts have nothing to do directly with Ypsilanti history, but they are still very interesting! All of the wonderful finds in this article were contributed by Mrs. Jane Schmiedeke. Thanks Jane!!

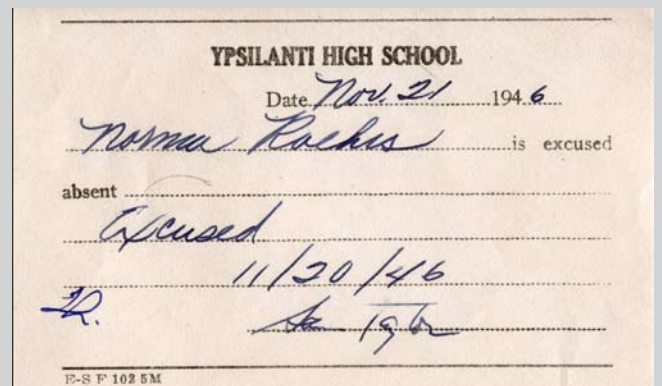
Excused absence slip for a student, Miss Norma Roehrs, who attended Ypsilanti High School during the Fall semester of her senior year as a member of the graduating class of 1947. As you may note in the 1947 Dixit yearbook, she was very active as a student during her high school career. The only question is why was she excused?

One of the items received was an ink blotter from the Smith Brothers Company, makers of their famous menthol cough drops. This ink blotter was used as an advertising medium for pharmacists who sold these drops to their customers. Originally, cough drops were sold individually and dispensed in small bags from ornate jars in the pharmacy. However, the image of a box on the blotter indicates that this item may date from a later time.

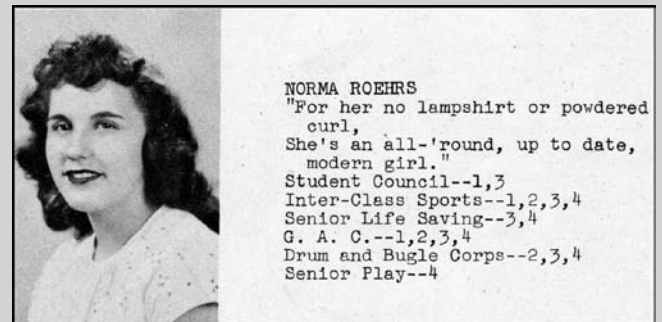
Included also was a train ticket for ½ of one way from Ypsilanti to Saline, dated June 13th, 1896 issued by the Lake Shore and Southern Michigan Railway. This was also known as the Huckleberry Line and ran from the Ypsilanti depot through Michigan State Normal College campus. If you go onto the campus today you can still trace the actual "right-of-way" for the train as it went West on its way to Saline through Fountain Plaza, the Citizens Bank property, across Packard Road, and eventually the Miles of Golf driving range, then known as Carpenter's Corners.

Scrip is essentially a receipt, or acknowledgement of a debt to be paid at a later time. This rare Ypsilanti 5 cent scrip was payable only when tax receipts were sufficient to cover the amount due or upon notice, or call, by the city government for redemption. In 1933 the United States was experiencing the greatest depression in its history and legal U.S. currency was in critically short supply. In lieu of sufficient money, local governments, states and even companies resorted to the issuance of scrip. It was illegal but due to the conditions of the time most of the scrip remained in circulation without notice by the Secret Service as it filled a necessary monetary need to transact business. This scrip became a trade item, just like goods themselves and was sometimes sold at a discount for genuine U.S. currency. This note was issued by the City of Ypsilanti under the mayoral administration of Matt Max after July 15th 1933. ■

(Gerry Pety is the Director of the YHS Archives)



Excuse slip from Ypsilanti High School from 1946.



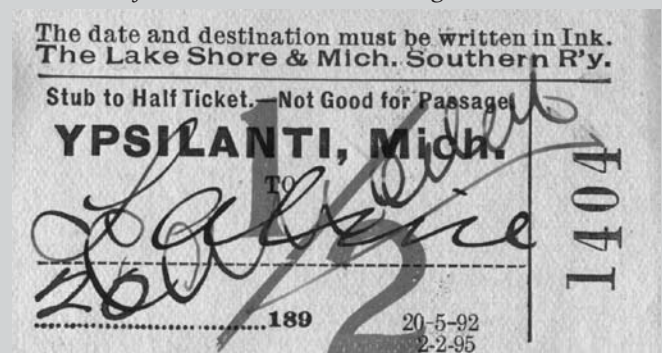
Norma Roehrs information from the 1947 Dixit Yearbook.



Smith Brothers Cough Drops ink blotter that was used to advertise the product.



Train ticket from the Lake Shore & Michigan Southern Railroad.



Time-Script Money issued under the mayoral administration of Matt Max in 1933.

They Called Him "Yip"

By George Ridenour

The Spring 2009 issue of "The Gleanings" featured information about a little known ball player from Ypsilanti. His name was Frank Malcolm "Yip" Owen. He first pitched for the Detroit Tigers in 1903 and from there went on the Chicago White Stockings/White Sox. He pitched six innings during the 1906 World Series which was won by the Chicago White Sox vs. the Chicago Cubs. He had an excellent career with the Sox. He finished his career on May 12, 1909.

The local Ypsilanti paper of November 17, 1899 was estatic with praise for Frank as a ballplayer who had gained local fame in his pitching. He even came to the notice of the owner of the Detroit Tigers who eventually signed him to a contract. The paper proclaimed: "Owen is an all around athlete and sportsman and possesses a fine physical make up and unusually strong constitution. Ypsilantians' have long predicted great things for Owen...."

It has been 100 years since "Yip" unlaced his shoes and came back to Southeast Michigan. Spring training is now in full swing and where ever in the universe they are playing celestial baseball you can be sure "Yip" is on the mound.

Now, more of the story! Frank was a product of the Ypsilanti school system and in fact did pitch for Ypsilanti High School. He pitched with the Michigan Agricultural College aka Michigan State University prior to being signed by the Tigers. According to Owen family lore Frank, as a child, was taken by his physician father Malcolm K. Owen to the Spanish American War zone in Cuba to observe and help in the hospital where Malcolm was assigned.

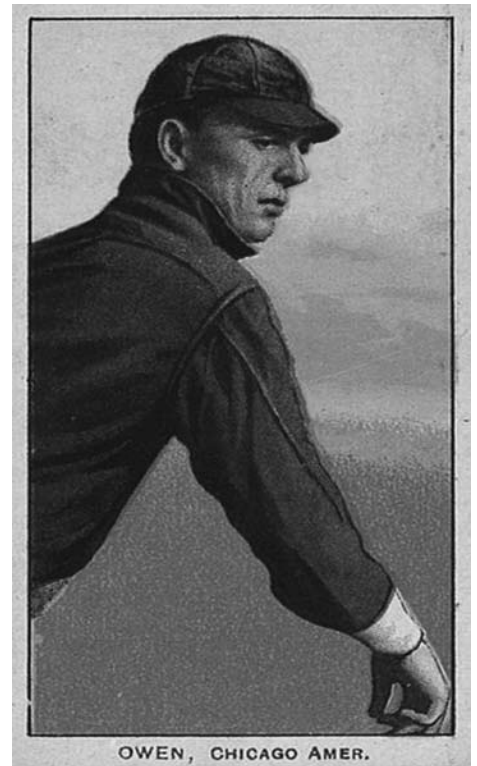


Frank "Yip" Owen in his Chicago White Sox uniform.

Moving from the Tigers to the White Sox he won 21 games in 1904, 1905, and in 1906 (World Series) had 22 wins with six shutouts! The last five years saw him in the minor leagues and finally he ended his life and career working with Ford Motor Company in Dearborn.

Many of the ball players, actors, singers, and vaudevillians were quite the characters in those early years. They were cult heroes, bums, hard drinkers, cigar smokers and roustabouts, with not a very stable lifestyle. Facts, myths, and exploits, real and imagined, were celebrated and made legend by the Chicago Daily Tribune. One celebrated piece from the Chicago Daily Tribune of March 9, 1907, is summarized as follows: "Frank Owen's gun and ignorance of the Texas law got him into more trouble at San Antonio today. The incident furnished a lively morning for President Cominsky and the White Sox party, and narrowly missed costing the White Sox pitcher a trip to Mexico (for breaking the law!)"

Another story that put him in the record books is summarized from the Chicago Daily Tribune of July 2, 1905: "Owen Wins Two Games for Sox...."Ypsy" pitches eighteen innings at St. Louis earning double victory." This went into the record books!



"Yip" Owen baseball card.

James Mann cites a story from the January 5, 1909 Ypsilanti Daily Press. Seems burglars broke into the home occupied by Frank. They left most of the treasurers but did seize and
continued on page 20

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Eph Thompson – Elephant Trainer *continued from page 3*

first and last appearance in Ypsilanti?

The following is from the Ypsilanti Daily Press of May 18, 1956 which answered so many questions for Mr. Perkins and me: “*That race or color is no bar to a person who has it in him and has the ambition to advance is well illustrated in the case of MOSES Thompson, perhaps the greatest elephant trainer in the world who is visiting his old home in the city. Better known as EPH, Thompson was born in this city of colored parents. At the age of 14 years he caught the circus fever and was employed with Adam Forepaugh’s (aka 4 PAWS) circus. His first job was carrying water for elephants and from that day on, his career was marked out; he was destined to become a great elephant trainer. He gradually climbed the ladder of fame, until he became the keeper of the heaviest and perhaps the ugliest elephant that ever remained in captivity. Bolivar, whose only rival for honors of being the largest elephant in the world was Jumbo, who was taller, but not as heavy. While with Forepaugh, he had charge of 32 elephants He entered vaudeville, going to*

Europe with his own elephants. While in the circus business he has travelled twice around the world and has touched nearly all the important cities of the United States, India, Europe, and Australia.” (Reprinted from Ypsilanti Daily Press of May 18, 1906)

There, in that one article, Mr. Perkins found his long lost Great Grandfather and his connection to Ypsilanti. After 15 years it looks like EPH has given up the ghost. I have included in our archives family files and more information and stories of Moses “EPH” Thompson which will be used for later publications. Thanks Ray for sending me on a journey of discovery about one of the most fascinating citizens with ties to Ypsilanti that I have had the privilege to write of in three years of searching through Ypsilanti history.

P.S. Ray: I have advertisements which show that the Adam Forepaugh circus did play in Ypsilanti in May of 1873 which could turn out to be the date Eph left town and started on the path of destiny. ■

(George Ridenour is a volunteer in the YHS Archives, a research expert on family history, and a regular contributor to the Gleanings.)

They Called Him “Yip” – *continued from page 19*

make off with a diamond fob. This was valuable as it had been presented to the winning Chicago White Sox team after they won the World Series from the Chicago Cubs. Obviously, with only 14 made this object was rare and unique. The thieves were never caught.

Finally, we all have lores or legends about us. Frank is no different. May I quote from his great niece an enduring bit of lore? “Frank was first married to Eulalie (Ulla) Carson, the youngest sister of William H. Carson, my grandfather. He came to stay with his brother-in-law and family after Ulla’s death. My mother, Frances Carson (Sinkule ten Cooch) remembers an uncle “with a head of snow white hair who used to stay with them.” Poor Grandmother Margaret (Muir) Carson would receive phone calls which added to the lore of Frank Owen. (There was a large wood behind what is now West Middle School near the present day Ypsilanti

High School). “Our house was on the corner of Congress and Mansfield. Seems the calls were that while walking through the woods someone would run upon a man sunbathing nude in the woods.” This lore became a source of legend. Frank loved to have a few beers, with friends and players from the old days, in local taverns.

The economy changed after the start of World War II and Frank moved to the Fordson Hotel in Dearborn, Michigan. He died there on November 28, 1942, alone. He was survived by a brother Edward and niece Miriam Owen of Des Moines, Iowa. Frank is buried at Greenlawn Cemetery, Detroit.

Well that’s a few more details about a boy whose name should be known to all of Ypsilanti. A boy nicknamed “Yip” or “Ypsy” who became a baseball legend. ■

(George Ridenour is a volunteer in the YHS Archives, regularly conducts historical research on people, places and things, and is a regular contributor to the Gleanings.)

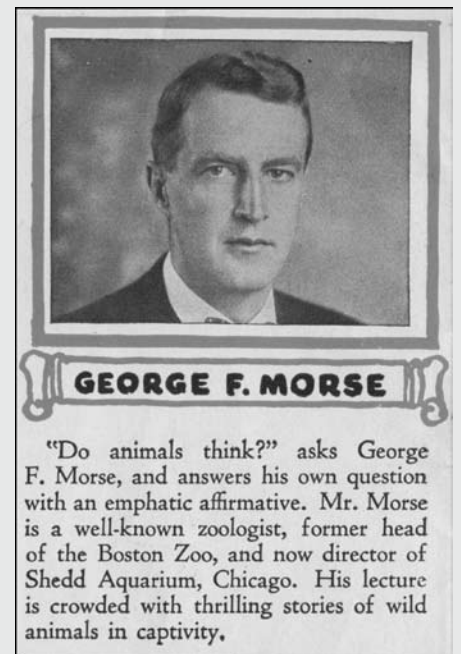
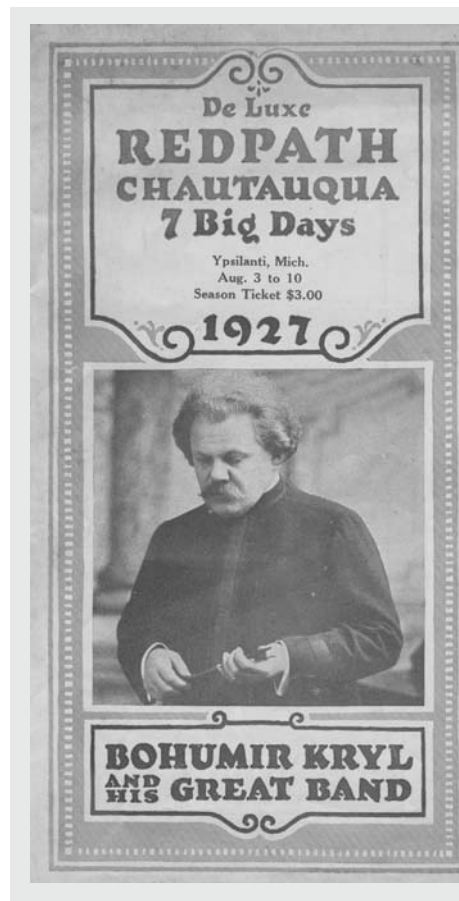
Enlightened Ypsilanti

By Derek Spinei

The social phenomenon of Chautauquas came about in the late 19th Century as a way to bring knowledge and culture to isolated communities across the United States. Regional circuits were established to deliver travelling enlightenment to all parts of the country in the form of theater, music, art and lectures. Prior to radio and television, communities were excited and grateful to be able to experience mass culture and entertainment which was otherwise unavailable to them locally. While the circus and vaudeville acts may have passed through town, these could not offer the sophistication and educational quality of Chautauqua. So important did these cultural revivals become that President Theodore Roosevelt asserted Chautauqua was “the most American thing in America.”

The Chautauqua idea was founded on the belief that “everyone has a right to be all that he can be - to know all that he can know.” The name comes from Lake Chautauqua, New York where the concept was first realized by Methodist minister Lewis Miller in 1874. To appeal to the most people, Chautauqua was populist but not political, religious but non-denominational. Usually held in large tents, Chautauqua audiences were exposed to social reformers and humorists, Shakespeare plays and John Phillip Sousa marches.

Chautauqua first appeared in Ypsilanti in 1884. Travelling performers were hosted by local study groups like the Chautauqua Literary Scientific Club and the Prospect Street study club. In 1886, Ypsilanti mayor Watson Snyder started his own Chautauqua called Bayview Colony in Petoskey, Michigan to which many Ypsilantians would travel. Rail service to Ypsilanti allowed consistent visits by



Above: George F. Morse was one of the featured lecturers in one of the early Chautauqua programs.

Left: Poster for a 1927 Chautauqua program.

Chautauqua groups for the next half century. They would typically lodge at the Hawkins House on Michigan Avenue and performed in Ainsworth Park.

De Luxe Redpath Chautauqua which visited Ypsilanti in the summer of 1927 offered performances of novelty, Eastern European folk and classical music. Theatrical plays included the comedy *The Goose Hangs High*, and a most informative lecture was given by Myra T. Brooks entitled “Girls of Today.” Even the daughter of famed political force William Jennings Bryan, Ruth Bryan Owen, gave a speech on “Modern Arabian Knights.” Each event had an admission price of 25¢ to \$1.00, or \$3.00 for the entire season.

Another year’s Chautauqua provided a chance to hear the sounds of the mandolin wielding Ramos Mexican Orchestra. A brochure informs us that “The charm of Old Mexico, the land of the gay caballero, breathes through their enchanting melodies. The senioritas sing as well as play.” Lecturers orated on such topics as “Re-creation Through Recreation” (T. Dinsmore Upton) and “What Does Europe Think of Us?” (Anna Dickie Olesen). A rendition of the Broadway comedy *Tommy* was also staged; though it shouldn’t be confused with The Who’s rock opera *Tommy* which itself became a Broadway hit in the 1970s. Not to be left out, children were entertained by magician The Great Reno’s “A Trip to Magic Land” and

continued on page 22



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Enlightened Ypsilanti *continued from page 21*

Anton Chekhov's farce "A Marriage Proposal" as presented by The Tatterman Puppets - a curiously sophisticated choice of programming for a children's puppet show.

The Great Depression spelled the end for organized Chautauqua circuits, and easy access to mass communication and motorized transit made rural communities less dependant on Chautauqua for cultural enrichment. Teach-ins of the 1960s closely mirrored the atmosphere of Chautauqua though avoided that term. By the 1970s, Chautauquas were being recreated for

nostalgic retirees. One held in Ypsilanti in the summer of 1970 was billed as "[bringing] back many pleasant memories for old-time Ypsilantians." The label "Chautauqua" was revitalized in the mid-1970s based its use in Robert M Pirsig's popular philosophical novel, Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance. Today, Chautauqua culture lives on mainly through the Chautauqua Institution's lake retreat at Chautauqua, NY. It functions somewhere near the crossroads of a summer camp, college campus, artist colony and music festival, supporting its own opera company, symphony orchestra and ballet. ■

(Derek Spinei is a student in the graduate Historic Preservation program at Eastern Michigan University and is serving an internship in the YHS Archives.)



The Chautauqua program included the Ramos Mexican Orchestra.



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The magic of The Great Reno was featured in a Chautauqua program.

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Fatal Accident Followed by Tragedies

By James Mann

Officers of the Michigan State Police Post, members of the Washtenaw County Sheriff's department and volunteers including Boy Scouts, newspaper reporters and others, formed search parties on the afternoon of Monday, January 7, 1935 to search for Mrs. Anna Filant. She had disappeared from her farm on Tuttle Hill Road, one half mile south of Textile Road. This was the latest in a series of tragedies that had taken place over the previous five months.

The series of tragedies began shortly before 10:00 p.m. on August 5, 1934, when Adam Filant, husband of Anna, was crossing East Michigan Avenue near Lincoln Street, with two companions, Harry Smith, R. F. D. 1 and Stephen Swaney, 10 North Grove Street, when he was struck by a car. The car was driven by Carlton Renton, who was returning home from doing laundry at the home of his mother-in-law on Prospect Street, and was returning to his home on Pearl Street by way Factory and Grove Street and Michigan Avenue. Renton was driving at a speed between 30 to 35 miles an hour. Patrolman Maurice Miller just happened to be driving a short distance behind Renton, and later said the car was not moving at a speed to make it noticeable in comparison to other traffic.

"The three men were seen by the driver in time so that he swerved the car to the right but was unable to avoid striking Mr. Filant; he told officers to whom he made a formal statement this morning. The man was struck by the fender, thrown over the hood and the windshield was shattered by the impact," reported The Ypsilanti Daily Press of Monday, August 6, 1934. "Mr. Filant's death resulted from a skull fracture," noted the account. "He also had a fractured jaw, and his right arm and right leg were broken."

Adam Filant was born on March 28, 1889 at Clock in German Poland, the son of Thomas and Katherine Filant. He moved to the

United States in May of 1910 and settled in Detroit where he attended night school and mastered the English language. On January 26, 1913 he married Anna Kukulkah and the two moved to the farm on Tuttle Hill Road in 1916. She had been born in Tarnow, Poland on February 24, 1889 and came to the United States when 20 years of age. The couple had three children.

Carlton Renton was a lifelong resident of Ypsilanti born on May 21, 1910. The accident left him feeling distressed and he would never drive a car again for the rest of his life. His life ended on the night of Thursday, December 14, 1934, in an automobile accident. Renton was a passenger in a car driven by Leonard Wales of 18 North Grove Street, when at about 11:40 p.m. three quarters of a mile west of U.S. 23, on Washtenaw, Wales

"The series of tragedies began shortly before 10:00 p.m. on August 5, 1934, when Adam Filant, husband of Anna, was crossing East Michigan Avenue near Lincoln Street, with two companions..."

tried to pass a truck. As Wales did, he saw another car coming from the opposite direction. Wales decided not to take a chance by driving between the two vehicles and swung back into the lane of traffic. As he did, the car may have struck snow at the edge of the road, causing Wales to lose control of the car and striking a tree. After striking the tree the car went a distance of 50 to 60 feet, as parts of the car, wheels, doors and fenders were torn off. Renton was thrown out of the car. He was rushed to St. Joseph's Mercy Hospital in Ann Arbor, where he was pronounced dead. Renton had sustained a fractured jaw and fractures of the skull. "Death of Mr. Renton, it is feared will have a serious effect on his father, whose grief is intensified by his inability to speak. The father, William Renton, has been practically helpless and unable to talk since last spring as result of an apoplectic stroke. He is unable to ask questions with regard to the accident or find solace through speech. He is also unable to control his hands sufficiently to communicate with other members of the family by writing," reported Ypsilanti Daily Press of Friday, December 14, 1934.

Anna Filant continued to live on the family farm on Tuttle Hill Road with her three children, Josephine, 20, Eugenia, 19 and John, 16. Anna Filant grieved over the death of her husband for five months and three days, when, it is believed, her mind became unbalanced and on Monday, January 7, 1935, she wandered away from the farm. Her daughter Josephine followed her tracks in the snow, and found a handkerchief which she identified as her mother's. This was at a spot where Mrs. Filant had apparently become ill and had fallen to the ground. "There were indications that she had taken a Paris Green (rodent poison) mixture at this place, which was only 30 feet from the river," noted The Ypsilanti Daily Press of Tuesday, January 8, 1935.

"The daughter told state troopers that a small amount of Paris Green had evidently been

taken from the pail in the shed recently, as some of it was spilled on the bench and floor," noted the account.

State Police began a search, but were hampered by heavy fog over the Huron River, limiting visibility to no more than 100 feet. The search through the rain, fog, and wet snow was resumed the next day, and ended at 2:45 p.m., when Washtenaw County Deputy Sheriff Thomas Knight found the body in the Huron River at the Ford Motor Company dam. The body was partly submerged and face down in the water, on the west side of the dam near a concrete abutment at the south edge.

The children were saddened when told the news, but relieved as well, as they feared the body would have been covered by the snow and ice until spring. Funeral services for Anna Filant were held at St. John's Catholic Church and she was interred in St. John's Cemetery beside her husband. The series of tragedies had come to an end. ■

(James Mann is a local historian and author, a volunteer in the YHS Archives, and a regular contributor to the Gleanings.)

News from the Fletcher-White Archives

By Gerry Pety

The YHS Archives advertises itself as “The Collective Memory of Ypsilanti,” and that is truer now than ever. Normally when one grows older, memory begins to fade – but not here. The older the archives get, the more of that “collective memory” is uncovered and exposed as our volunteers research the past and write articles and books for your knowledge and pleasure. The articles appear not only in the “Gleanings” but also on the Internet and in our local papers. Now, one of our own is again turning some of this research about our past into a delightful panoply of recently discovered memories that has slipped into the abyss of time.

Laura Bien, our Friday hostess in the YHS Archives, is a prolific writer and researcher and has written a book titled “*Tales from the Ypsilanti Archives: Tripe-mongers, Parker’s Hair Balsam, The Underwear Club & More.*” The book is available in the YHS Museum gift shop or in the YHS Archives. The Society will be sponsoring a book signing for Laura on April 24 between 2 and 5 p.m. in the Archives. But don’t wait to buy your copy, pick up one now and then bring it back on April 24 for the author’s signature and a little conversation.

A special thanks to Bill Ridenour, who is related to our own George Ridenour - Saturday host in the YHS Archives, for a copy of a book on the Underground Railroad in this area. This book adds to our “collective memory” of this explosive era in our history.

We extend our sincere appreciation to George Ridenour for his efforts in assisting people with research on family members and friends who once lived in Ypsilanti or the surrounding area. In addition to being an outstanding researcher, George is also a prolific author who contributes regularly to the “Gleanings.”

Laura and George are only two of the many people who volunteer time in the Archives and we keep adding to our staff. Recently Amanda Ross, who has experience working at The Henry Ford, has volunteered to serve as a staff member in the Archives on Saturdays. Welcome Amanda! We know that eventually the “researchin” and “writin” bug will infect you too as it has everyone else here in the Archives. ■

The Swift House – *continued from page 7*

it’s illustrious discoverer is now receiving in two hemispheres,” concluded the account.

By 1896 the Keeley Gold Cure had left Ypsilanti and the city directory for that year lists Helen Swift as living at 203 South Huron Street. The reasons for the Cure leaving the city are unclear, perhaps another city made a better offer and obtained the franchise. Now the house was once again a residence and Helen Swift lived in the house until her death at the age of 78 on Wednesday, June 29, 1927. Her daughter Harriet, who never married, lived in the house until her death August 8, 1958. The house by then had been purchased by the Gilbert Fund and plans were made for the building of a senior community. The house was demolished and the Gilbert Resident was built in its place.

(James Mann is a local historian and author, a volunteer in the YHS Archives and a regular contributor to the “Gleanings.”)

Postscript by Peg Porter, Gleanings Assistant Editor: When my parents were first married



A pictorial drawing of the Gilbert Residence by architect Ralph Gerganoff.

they lived in an apartment on Huron Street. Hattie Swift offered to let them store some furniture and wedding presents in her carriage house until their new home was built. Not long afterward, a fire destroyed the carriage house and its contents. Hattie, who felt badly about their loss, gave them several of her antiques. Two of them, a marble top table and a rosewood melodian now grace my home. I remember going with my mother to visit Miss

Swift when I was about five. As I recall, we went in the side door, into the kitchen where it appeared Hattie spent most of her time. She took us into a small parlor where we had tea. Much of the house was closed off no doubt to save money. She was a tiny little lady with white hair. She seemed so happy to have visitors. I feel fortunate to have spent some time with her and to have items from an interesting time in Ypsilanti’s past. ■

Answers for Ypsilanti History – It's a Test!

1. Waterworks Park at the foot of the CatherineV Street Hill.
2. The college founder Patrick Roger Cleary.
3. John Munson, President of Michigan State Normal College.
4. Joseph H. Thompson, the Dodge dealer.
5. The Martha Washington for first run movies and the Wuerth featuring cowboys & Indians.
6. The Dixie Shop next to the National Bank which then took over the space, the Ypsilanti Press at North Huron and Pearl Streets and was never replaced and the Masonic Temple which moved south of town and was replaced by the Ypsilanti Arts Center.
7. The Kealy Cure - an early effort to cure alcoholics. At the time that included Fred Swift.
8. A teller was consistently short \$10 to \$30 and finally his cash was secretly marked and it turned up in his savings account at the same bank.
9. Each one was elected President of his senior class at Ypsilanti High.
10. Fifth and Sixth grade classes were overflowing with newcomers from the south so the excess attended classes in some extra rooms on campus because enrollment was down due to the war.
11. Prior to Metro Airport, Willow Run was the passenger air field for Detroit and "YPS" was the baggage tag.
12. He would come to plead for university appropriations from Representative Joe Warner of Ypsilanti, a powerful legislator at the time.
13. J. Dan Lawrence, prominent local attorney and banker who was elected a delegate to the 1963 State Constitutional Convention.
14. The First United Methodist Church.
15. Ypsilanti, the city that would rather drink than read.
16. Scrap paper in various forms and old iron and metal.
17. A list of all the men and women from Ypsilanti in the armed forces.
18. This was the Sunday following the assassination of President Kennedy and every place of worship in the country saw the same phenomenon.
19. James H. Brickley.
20. Peter B. Fletcher when Gov. Milliken appointed him a Trustee of Michigan State University in 1980.

Book Review – *continued from back page*

liquid spiraled down the drain." Bien then explains why Clara's efforts to escape the law were not as successful as she had hoped. "There was only one problem: Clara's sink wasn't connected to the water system. The pipe went through her kitchen wall, draining wastewater into her yard. And at the end of that pipe, Clara saw Officer Connors collecting the moonshine as she poured it out. She desperately threw water into the sink, but it was too late. Connors had over a quart of evidence."

Bien tells of the girls at Harriet School altering old worn out clothing so children

would have something to wear during a cold winter of the depression. "Not only were the children sewing usable garments that were going back into the community, but they were also doing it with style - they were hand-sewing on bias tape. This is the colored decorative strip seen around the edges of things like potholders and aprons. It is folded three times and is devilishly difficult to sew by hand. No problem for these ten-year olds."

This charming volume of Ypsilanti history will be enjoyed for years to come by everyone who has either lived in our great city or had relatives who resided here. ■

(James Mann is a local historian and author, a volunteer in the YHS Archives, and a regular contributor to the "Gleanings.")

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Ypsilanti Historical Society Officer Signature: _____ Date: _____

INTERPRETATION: This Agreement shall be interpreted under the laws of the State of Michigan.

Book Review Tales from the Ypsilanti Archives...

By James Mann

We are very pleased to announce the publication of a new book titled "Tales from the Ypsilanti Archives: Tripe-mongers, Parker's Hair Balsam, The Underwear Club & More" written by our own Laura Bien.

The Ypsilanti Archives in the basement of the Museum at 220 North Huron Street is a treasure trove, not of gold, silver or diamonds, but of stories from Ypsilanti's past. Laura Bien has mined this rich vein in frequent trips to the Archives, and has shared these stories in her Dusty Diary blog, and her columns in The Ypsilanti Courier, The Ypsilanti Citizen, The Ann Arbor Observer and AnnArbor.com. A few of these gems are now collected in one volume.

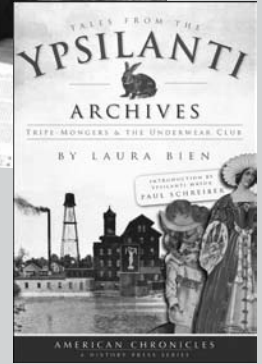
The book includes stories on many diverse topics from Ypsilanti's past including: the battle the city waged against standardized time; the history of the Ypsilanti High School colors; and, Inez Graves the Angel of the Depression. Included in the book is the story of Lora Bryant - the Normal College student who disappeared in 1907; Elijah Pilcher - the itinerant Methodist preacher including the travails and hardships of his calling; and John Norton, the Civil War veteran who could not take of himself.

Each story is carefully researched and crafted, giving a glimpse of the rich history that is Ypsilanti. Bien is a talented writer with a gift for



Above: Laura Bien in the YHS Archives doing research for one of her writing projects.

Right: The new book recently authored by Laura Bien.



words. She conveys a sense of place, whether it is to a 19th Century store or the scene of a murder, the reader has a feel of the setting. Take for example the tale of the Clara Richards, the Flapper Bootlegger, as she tried to save herself from arrest as police raided her home. "Clara was determined that her luck wouldn't run out. She grabbed a jug of moonshine and ran to the kitchen sink, where she upended the jug. Glug, glug, glug - the incriminating 'shine was almost gone! The clear *continued inside on page 25*

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