

September, 1945

# YPSILANTI GLEANINGS

PAST SCENES and OLD TIMES

YPSILANTI HISTORICAL SOCIETY ~ PUBLICATION ~



Ypsilanti Historical Museum  
~ 220 N. Huron Street ~

**YPSILANTI - CITY AND TOWNSHIP**

**CITY**

George D. Goodman, Mayor  
Joseph A. Warren - Manager  
Herbert C. Smith-Deputy Manager  
James Ashby-Clerk

**TOWNSHIP**

William Winters, Supervisor  
Frank Daniels, Jr., Treasurer  
Anna J. Stepp, Clerk

**COUNCIL**

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Harold R. Baise  
Robert Cherris  
William Paul Clay, Jr.  
Mattie L. Dorsey  
Nathalie E. Edmunds  
Martin E. Gillentine  
Eric Jackson  
Susan Lindsay  
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**TRUSTEES**

Richard Brahan  
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**YPSILANTI HISTORICAL COMMISSION**

Bradley Harris, M.D., Chairman  
Max Lurkins  
Richard Skinner  
Mrs. Clarence Henry  
Mrs. Carl Miller  
Arthur J Howard  
Viola Carter  
John Elwell  
Foster Fletcher, City Historian  
Mrs. D.W. Disbrow-Secretary-  
Archivist

**YPSILANTI HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

Dr. Elizabeth Warren- President  
Mr. Carl Scheffler-Vice President  
Mrs. Ward Swarts-Museum Director  
James Westfall-Treasurer  
Miss Doris Milliman  
Mrs. Arthur J Howard  
Thomas Tobias  
LaVerne Howard  
William Edmunds, M.D.

THE YPSILANTI HISTORICAL SOCIETY HAS BEEN CHOSEN AS THE WINNER OF THE 1975 "AWARD OF MERIT" BY THE AWARD COMMITTEE OF THE STATE OF MICHIGAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY FOR "ITS DEVELOPMENT AND OPERATION OF A SUCCESSFUL HISTORICAL MUSEUM".

THIS YEAR THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE MICHIGAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY IS BEING HELD ON MACKINAW ISLAND IN THE GRAND HOTEL AND THE SOCIETY WILL BE PRESENTED THE AWARD AT THE LUNCHEON ON SEPTEMBER 15TH.

GRACE AND JOSEPH H. THOMPSON WILL ATTEND THE LUNCHEON AND ACCEPT THE AWARD FOR THE YPSILANTI HISTORICAL SOCIETY. JOE IS A MEMBER OF THE MACKINAW ISLAND COMMISSION.

September, 1975

A BRIEF HISTORY

of the

ARCHIVES, HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND MUSEUM

The Ypsilanti Historical Archives date back to the year 1809 when there was no Ypsilanti. That was the year Gabriel Godfroy an early French explorer built a log structure - the first non-Indian building in Washtenaw County - on the west bank of the River Huron 100 yards north of the old Sauk Trail. This was an Indian Trading Post. Gabriel Godfroy, an intrepid explorer, interpreter, citizen of Detroit in the Northwest Territory, had traveled overland and on the rivers, all across the area between Detroit and St. Joseph. The River Huron evidently fascinated him, and with two companions, Romaine LaChambre and Francois Pepin, he selected a rectangular area of 2352 acres running west from the Huron, and on June 11, 1811 the United States deeded this area to these Frenchmen, in four strips which are found today on all maps and known as French Claims. Benjamin Woodruff and companions, John Thayer, Robert M. Stitts, David Beverly and Titus Bronson arrived on April 22, 1823 and Woodruff took title to 114 acres on the bluff on the east side of the Huron and nearly a mile south of the Sauk Trail. Here he established Woodruff's Grove.

Judge A. B. Woodward selected the name Ypsilanti for the 253 lots on the registered Plat of 1825 and the Ypsi-

Ypsilanti Historical Archives has the Deed for the first lot sold from this Plat, dated September 12, 1825.

The Indians moved out and the settlers moved in bringing with them furniture and artifacts from the place of their origin. Nearly every family had one member who was a letter writer and saved many of their letters.

Churches and Schools were established and some of their old records were received by our Archives, discovered in an attic - a record of the Congregational Society when it was with the Presbyterians, showing that in 1834 the Janitor was expected to ring the bell for Church Service, toll it for funerals, keep the lamps in oil and also do the cleaning and dusting, all for \$6. per month. There was no central depository for such items. Families scattered, died and letters and records were lost.

However, the Ypsilanti Archives has 135 hand written letters from Sylvester Noble to his mother and sister during his three years of service as Clerk for General Sherman in Atlanta and also in the march to the Sea. Dr. Donald Disbrow of the History Department of Eastern Michigan University edited the letters and wrote an article about them which appeared in the March 1968, issue of "Civil War History" magazine. The Noble home was where 212 S. Huron is today but of course the old house is gone.

Many items were brought to light during the 50th Anniversary Celebration in 1873. But again, there was no place for them. In 1874 "Washtenaw County Atlas" helped

preservation of the old family homes, farms and places of business. There are 235 sketches in that remarkable old book and a reproduction has been made of it and combined with the "Atlas" for 1915. Copies of that combination are for sale in the Museum.

The revival of the Michigan Pioneer Society and those records, plus the publication in 1881 of the Chapman "Washtenaw County history" has kept old memories and records from being completely lost.

Then with the planning for the Centennial Celebration in 1923, Mrs. P.L. Skinner and Mrs. P.R. Cleary gave freely of their materials - scrapbooks, letters, pictures - accumulated and carefully preserved thru their years, with Florence Shultes, history professor at Michigan State Normal College, for guide and consultant, the material was given to Harvey Colburn to assist him in writing the "History of Ypsilanti", now considered one of the finest in Michigan.

Nearly ten years later, Louis S. White, an office worker for the Michigan Central Railroad, began his methodical, tremendous work for Ypsilanti Heritage.

In 1934 at an evening gathering of friends, including Mayor-elect Ray Burrell, the suggestion was made, half in jest, that Ypsilanti ought to have an historian, a person who would collect and protect historical items, and all those present agreed that Louis S. White was the one to do this work.

Louis S. White was born in Grand Rapids, January 10, 1887 and came to Ypsilanti in 1916. Thru the years he had seen the decline and complete disappearance of the electric Interurban, the rapid rise of the automobile and bus, the building of highways and the great changes everywhere after World War I. His perspective and energy were unusual - his home was filled with historical materials. Mayor Burrell had the City Council make Louis the official Historian as soon as he took office in 1935, and a room on the third floor of the City Hall was used for some of the storage. In 1957, the State Legislature passed Public Act #123 making it possible for cities to "raise and appropriate money...to help any activity or project which tends to advance historical interest in a community".

The State of Michigan has always been interested in preserving our heritage. In fact it was in 1828 that Lewis Cass, 2nd Governor of the Northwest Territory, established the Historical Society of Michigan, nine years before Michigan was a State.

December 21, 1959, Louis S. White petitioned the City Council to establish a Historical Committee and appoint a Historian. April 18, 1960, Resolution #60-143 creating the office of City Historian and establishing a Historical Committee was adopted unanimously. The following Historical Committee was appointed to serve five years.

1. Rodney E. Hutchinson, Mayor
2. Wesley M. Dawson, Postmaster
3. Ruth L. Snaw
4. Curtiss D. Bassett
5. Yvonne Williams

and Louis S. White, historian, to serve for an indefinite period. Rodney S. Hutchinson was Mayor, Donald Fulford, Susan B. Hill, Edward Heyman, Edward Nehlsen, Andrew Smith and John Burton were the Council members at that time.

Thru the efforts of Mayor Hutchinson, rooms were refurbished on the second floor of the Municipal Court Bldg., 206 N. Huron, and the historical material was moved.

With so much material, it was obvious that a system was needed to record and acknowledge the many items being received. Marion Spear a trained librarian who had recently retired from the Ypsilanti Public Library, was hired on a very modest basis to set up our system which meets the requirements of the State of Michigan. Ruth Shaw, charter member of the Historical Committee, was her helper and contributed 1200 obituaries for the autobiographical file and entirely on a voluntary basis.

The Historical Committee formed a Historical Society late in 1960 and the following officers were elected in January 1961: Foster L. Fletcher, President, John Elwell, Vice President, Mrs. Oramel L. Edden, Recording Secretary, Mrs. Carl Miller, Corresponding Secretary, Harry L. Smith, Treasurer.



Plans were made by the historical Committee and the historical Society for a museum which would be staffed by members of the Historical Society.

In 1965, the basement of the Public Library at 229 W. Michigan were renovated thru money from the City of Ypsilanti and the physical efforts of William Edmunds, Kenneth Leighton and Society President Phoebe Miller. For the first time it was possible to have material displays and there was a room which could be locked for the safe-keeping of the Archives. All material in the displays came from the Archives.

On the authority of W. Robert Semple, City Manager, Mrs. Donald W. Disbrow was hired as our first Archivist on a part time basis, beginning February 23, 1965. Mrs. Disbrow is a typist and had been a manuscript reader for several years with the J.W. Lippincott Company.

Louis S. White died in 1963 and left not only a gap in our historical ranks but he had left an impressive collection of historical material; 1631 films, an autobiographical file with 30,000 names, census records from the surton Collection in Detroit, maps of the area and so much material that will not pass this way again.

In 1966, Foster L. Fletcher was appointed City Historian and it was his duty to go on with the preservation of material collected by Louis S. White. Fletcher is a lifetime resident of Ypsilanti and brought with him for the task, his wife Mary S. Fletcher, a graduate as a history

Major from the University of Wisconsin. It was a special project of the Fletchers to set up streetguides for the oldest city directories and then to have pictures of sites and structures with as much history as possible for as many of the streets as possible.

Mrs. Fletcher died in August 1968 before the project was completed but the files that were completed are the ones most in use for histories in the Archives. Researchers from both of our local Universities use the files and recently a student from the School of Architecture, Lawrence Institute of Technology, who is writing his doctoral thesis on the old houses along route #12, used this file and expressed his opinion that it was the most comprehensive gathering of house files he had found in any of the towns along the route. It is used frequently by home owners, local architectural firms, the Ypsilanti Sesquicentennial Committee, the Ypsilanti Festival Committee, the Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation, the Depot Committee and the local newspapers.

John Burton was Ypsilanti's first black Mayor and at that time he was one of only two black Mayors in the United States. Burton was Mayor in 1967-68 and it was at that time he offered the Barnes-Ross house which the city owned at 220 N. Huron, to the City Historian Fletcher as a real place for the Museum and Archives. John Burton is the man we must always remember as the one who made it possible for our Museum and much better quarters for the Historical Archives.

Architect Zack Gerganof did a study of this old mansion and wrote a description of what would be necessary to repair and remodel the building, estimating the cost might be as much as \$14,000. City Manager John Cartwright agreed with the suggestions and asked that the money be spent over two fiscal years. The Historical Commission with Arthur J. Howard as Chairman, readily agreed and the change from eight apartments to a museum building was accomplished with most of the house being used as a museum and the Archives still very cramped for space.

The handsome brick structure had been built about 1860 and had four fireplaces which had been preserved thru the years.

The Historical Commission and the Historical Society were fortunate in having two City Managers who were sympathetic with the museum plan and both W. Robert Semple and John Cartwright were able to persuade the City Council of the importance of preserving our heritage and establishing a museum where displays could be made.

The name Florence Smalley Babbitt is well known in the State Historical Archives and we hope to have Ipsilanti recognize Florence Babbitt (1847-1929) as the greatest collector and preserver of Americana in Michigan. One of Mrs. Disbrow's first duties was to catalog the huge Babbitt collection in the home of the late Dr. Eugene Elliott, wife of a former President of Eastern Michigan.

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This collection had been given by Mrs. Sabbitt to the old "Normal" when the city could find no place to store it. The Ypsilanti Archives does contain many of her items and displays in the Museum exhibit some of her treasures which we are fortunate enough to have.

Ruth McIntire Allen has added much to the Museum with the unusual display of the infamous Andersonville Prison items, the paper published somehow by the soldier prisoners from the Union troops and a roster of a section of the prison. Mrs. Allen gave the funds for the large display case where the Andersonville items are on display with other Civil War pictures and documents, cherished by us and sought by State and other archives. Ruth has also deposited many items now in the Archives and promises much more from her store of historical pictures, newspaper clippings and documents having to do with the Ypsilanti area.

Harna Osband (1870-1947) daughter of William Merritt Osband (1836-1916) publisher of the old "Ypsilantian" was an unequalled source for both oral and written stories of early days and events.

The Ypsilanti Historical Museum was opened in 1971 with a schedule of 2-4 every Friday, Saturday and Sunday, and staffed by volunteers whose total number was 131, forty six of them taking turns each month as Guides for the Museum. Miss Eileen Harrison was President at that time and Miss Doris Milliman was the Museum Director

...serving for three years on a voluntary basis.

With the Ypsilanti Sesquicentennial celebration beginning to make plans for 1973, our Archives were the basis for all information for the events and more and more people could see the importance of the Archives and the need for more space. After the Sesquicentennial was over and the Committee cast up their accounts, Bradley Harris as Historical Commission Chairman and Historian Fletcher were successful in have \$2,300. given for use as needed in the Historical Archives.

William Edmunds, then President of the Historical Society and with help from his Councilwoman wife, Nathalie Edmunds, obtained funds for the alteration of the last apartment in the Barnes-Ross Building, at last to house the Archives.

Architect Ward Swarts drew the plans for the three rooms giving us 1800 square feet of space for files and working area. City Manager Joseph Warren, always having a great appreciation for historical material agreed to the project and in 1974, forty years after Louis S. White began his prodigious collecting, the Archives are housed in pleasant rooms which can be locked and which have an outside entrance.

Architect Ward Swarts served for 14 years on the staff of Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia, and Ypsilanti is most fortunate in having Ward and his talented wife, LaRea, return to live in the community. LaRea Swarts became Director of the Museum in 1974 and has charge of all the

displays. She not only is imbued with a thorough knowledge of antiques but also knows how to scrub floors, clean glass cases and keep an experienced housekeeping eye on the entire building. The resource talent available to us and given so generously, of the Ward Swarts couple, is something that could not be hired.

The City of Ypsilanti Council allows an annual budget for the upkeep of the building, the utilities, and other items necessary for the Archives and operation of the Museum. In return for the City investment, the Museum represents something the entire community can show off and visit with pride. The Historical Society is doing an outstanding job in taking care of the mansion with material encouragement from the Archives and the Historical Commission. The Historical Commission is a part of the city government.

The brick mansion at 220 N. Huron is not just a house furnished with antique or old furniture but a very real Museum with varied displays. The Archives represents one of the few places in the County where documents and historical items can be deposited and have an excellent chance of being preserved.

The newsletter edited and compiled by Historian Fletcher and Archivist Disbrow, is titled "Ypsilanti Gleanings-Fast Scenes and Oldtimes" and is published six times a year, representing items from the Archives and news of the Historical Society.

#### ADDENDUM

Some anthropologists believe you can tell a lot about a civilization by studying the games played. Our civilization is not quite dead enough for such a study so let's talk about the game of Golf that generated a lot of interest and added much to the social life in Ypsilanti when the Washtenaw Country Club organized that summer of 1899.

We add a postscript to Clark M. Greenstreet's splendid history of the Washtenaw Country Club, attempting to tell the story of how Ypsilanti happened to take up the game of golf.

In 1886, there was a Ypsilanti Polo Club and Social Society with Harry Lamb as President; Herbert Humpreys, Sec.-Treas. and S. J. Bowling, Captain. The clubroom was at 23 W. Congress, now Michigan Avenue. Polo is a game for the rich and originated in the 'Inscrutable East' with much help from the British when they occupied India. There is a ball used in the game of polo but several times larger and of different composition than the ball used in golf. During the 1890s, Ypsilanti was well represented by a Cricket team and in 1970 our Historical Archives were puzzled by the gift of a cricket bat from the family of the late George Lucking. The bat was properly catalogued, acknowledged and forgotten until the story was told of Ypsilanti having had a Cricket Club and a team with perhaps international reputation.

In 1895, the team was invited to play a match in Windsor, Ontario, a British Province that elected staying under British rule and not become the 14th of the rebelling Colonies in 1776. The Ypsilanti cricket team travelled to Windsor and took 10 players, one more than the required 9. At game time, Windsor was able to find only 3 players. To prevent a forfeit and no match, Ypsilanti graciously offered the loan of their extra player to Windsor and the match was on. As the closely contested match progressed, an Ypsilanti player who shall be nameless, in an allout prodigious swing at the ball, lost control of his bat which flew thru the air striking the loaned player in the head and killing him.

After that, cricket was given up in Ypsilanti and a new game less hazardous was found, Golf. And that's the story Frank Todd told, the Todd of 'Hay & Todd', the manufacturers of the famous unionsuit, as he played golf at the old Washtenaw Country Club after the turn of the century. The original list of the 1899 Washtenaw Club follows:

A.A. Van Cleve, Rev. William Gardam, S.E. Douge, D.B. Douge, Robert W. Hemphill, Jr., D.L. Quirk, Jr., E.C. Cornwell, I.N. Swift, J.B. Colvan, W.L. Pack, L.S. Platt, Duane Spalsbury, Charles D. Church, David R. Morford, all from Ypsilanti and Henry W. Douglas, from Ann Arbor.

Tracy L. Towner is listed as the Notary Public witnessing the signatures but is not listed as one of the organizers.



By 1912, the Washtenaw Country Club had 48 members from Ann Arbor and included many well known names: Junius E. Beall, Ross and Bradley Granger, Irvin and Corwin Huston, Walter C. Mack, Frank J. and Don S. McIntyre. There were three women members in the Ann Arbor list: Elizabeth W. Dean, Mrs. Josephine Hurfin and Mrs. W. Condon.

There were 74 Ypsilanti members, ten of them women. Eliza P. Stewart, Julia A. King, DeLynn Deubel (Cameron) and Fannie Cheever Burton are examples of the women interested in the game of golf. The list of males begins with Frederick Alexander, F.A. Barbour and includes William B. Hatch, Rev. Frank Kennedy, E.A. Strong, T.L. Towner, Atwood R. McAndrew, L.H. Jones, S.D. and John E. Thompson, E.A. Lyman, Frank L. Showerman and many more.

The dues that year were \$14 and membership limited to 125. The Country Club became a great social center from Fall until Spring. Club members could rent the Clubhouse for \$5. The orchestra for the dinner-dance parties was often Lou Kilian, violin and Carrie Bergen (Chauwick) piano and cost \$5. A combination including Tony Whitaire, violin and Hoppy Dotavich, piano cost \$10. "Those were the Days, my friend; we thought they'd never end".

A CORDIAL WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS \_

FITZARRIS, John E., Mrs.  
360 Owendale

PETERS, Fred, Mr. & Mrs.  
1206 Westmoorland

HIGH SCOPE  
Educational Research Foundation  
125 N. Huron  
Attn: Mr. Charles Wallgren

QUIGLEY, E.  
358 C. Avenida Castilla  
Laguna Hills, California 92653

VOILES, Jack, Mr. & Mrs.  
#927- 2446 Lake in the woods  
Blvd.

In Memoriam

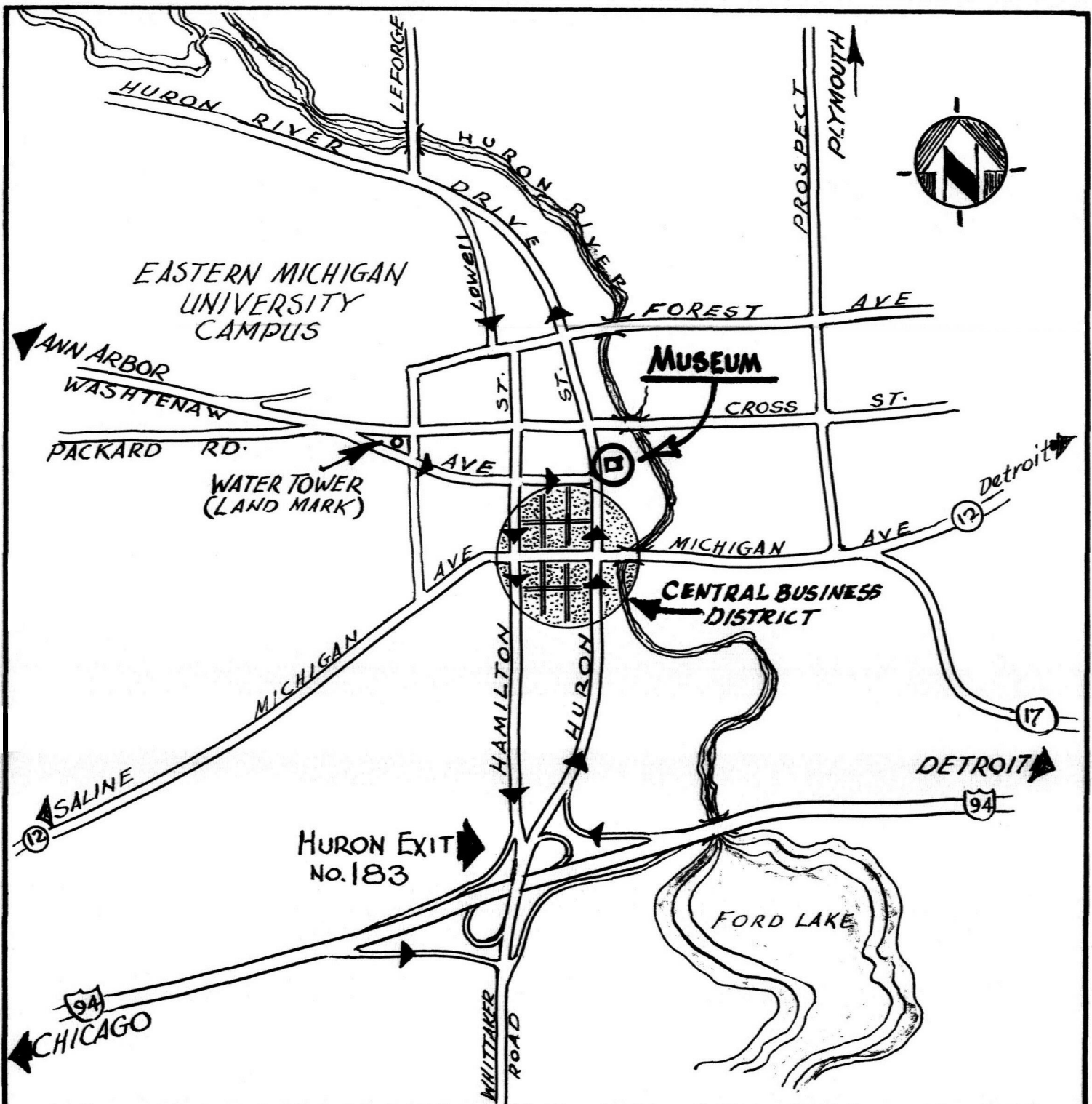
Helen Louise Johnston (1885-1975)

A charter member of our Society who was born on September 17, 1885 on a farm which is now part of the Willow Run Airport. Her father, Perry Vorce, settled in that area after serving in the 112th N.Y. volunteers in the Civil War.

Mrs. Johnston always supported the projects of the Society and faithfully attended our meetings - we will miss her friendly presence.

## RECENT ACQUISITIONS

Anonymous	Roosevelt High School year books 1932, 1933 (4)
Mr. & Mrs. Eugene Congdon	Sled belonging to the late Judge James Breakey - about 1908
Mrs. Albert Barrett Paris, Tennessee	Four pottery crocks, two large two small- "History of Ypsilanti Township" and school maps.-"Ypsi- Dixit" 1913-14-18 & 19- "Aurora" 1922 & "Ypsi-Sem" magazine for 1912-13-14- Curling iron, button hooks, ink bottle & book
Mrs. Fred Peters	Two coverlets (about 1870), pencil box, sweet grass "Indian made" bas kets, bound volume 1887 "St Nicholas"- English pap. Atlas- (prior to 1830)-, wooden presses, clothing belonging to Mrs. Peter's grandmother.
Mr. Angelo Angelocci	Scrapbook containing promotional material, newspaper clippings, letters, etc, on "Y" Building -1970
Miss Evangeline Lewis	Black velvet, bead trimmed shoe buckles.
Mrs. Marie Hatch	Two large bread boards, rose & whi table cloth (estate of late F. Lady)
Mrs. Walter Tuobs	Pewter mug belonging to Inez Graves' father-1854. Fourteen old books.
Mr. James Westfall	Set of playing cards from "Pan American Exposition- Buffalo" 1901
Mrs. Mildred H. Wildman	Eight revised editions of McCuffey's "Reader" (from primer to sixth- 2 copies 3)
Mr. Ben Sovey	Rotary Club Roster, 1933-box suspenders buttons, sheet of "wire hooks and Alpha eyes"-upholstry needle, adv. card-"Children's nose Supporter"



**YPSILANTI HISTORICAL MUSEUM**

**220 NORTH HURON STREET** **ZIP CODE 48197**

**YPSILANTI - MICHIGAN** **PHONE 313-482-4990**

**MUSEUM HOURS** **FOSTER FLETCHER ~ CITY HISTORIAN.**

**FRI ~ SAT & SUN 2-4 PM.** **LAREA SWARTS ~ MUSEUM DIRECTOR.**

**HISTORICAL SOCIETY** **DOROTHY DISBROW ~ ARCHIVIST.**

**ESTABLISHED 1960**