

Ypsilanti GLEANINGS

YHS Museum & Archives

Official publication of the Ypsilanti Historical Society, featuring articles and reminiscences of the people and places in the Ypsilanti area



FALL 2012

Samuel Post: Ypsilanti's “squeaky-clean” politician

By Janice Anschutz



Sam Post dressed in his silk hat and frock coat



An ad for
Sam Post's
Queen Anne
Soap

In 1857
Sam married
Amanda
“Mandy”
S. Flower,
who was
born in
New York

In this election year it would be an honor for any politician to be labeled “squeaky clean.” In the mid-1800s, Ypsilanti laid claim to a politician who was “squeaky clean” not only in the usual moral sense, but, in time, in a quite literal sense as well. This luminary was Samuel Post. In July of 1854, he was present at the founding convention of the modern Republican Party in Jackson, Michigan. Years later, he founded the highly prosperous Detroit Soap Company.

In his day, Post was such an accomplished, imaginative, gregarious and unusual man that his very appearance attracted attention both in Ypsilanti and Detroit. He was known for his stovepipe hat and frock coat, and for carrying a gold-tipped cane. Whether he was seen on Congress Street (now Michigan Avenue) in Ypsilanti, or on Woodward Avenue in Detroit, heads would turn and people would wonder whether Samuel was an escaped wedding guest or an actor in costume. Yet, it is said that all those who actually met this friendly and vibrant man believed they had made a true friend. To one and all, he was known as “Sam,” and no one who met him ever forgot him. *[continued on page 3]*

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From the President's Desk

By Alvin E. Rudisill

We continue to receive financial support from members and friends related to our efforts to raise \$125,000 to pay off the balance owed the City of Ypsilanti for the property at 220 North Huron Street. Since December of 2011 we have raised approximately \$70,000 of that amount. The original purchase price was \$250,000 back in 2006. \$125,000 was paid at that time with the balance due in 10 years without any accrual of interest.

The Ypsilanti Heritage Festival held August 17-19 provided another opportunity to showcase our Museum and Archives. Our volunteers worked hard to host over 200 visitors over that weekend. In addition to visitors to the Museum and Archives, the Society had the opportunity to participate in some of the programs at the "Chautauqua at the Riverside" event held at the Riverside Arts Center. Tom Dodd provided the leadership in planning and conducting the Chautauqua program which featured exhibitions, lectures, demonstrations, panel discussions, Q&A sessions, musical performances and documentary films. We were extremely pleased to hear that Tom will propose a similar Chautauqua program for the 2013 Heritage Festival.

Many of our readers will be disappointed to discover that our regular feature "It's a Test" on Ypsilanti history is missing from this issue. Our good friend and author of this feature, Peter B. Fletcher, has experienced some temporary medical problems. We look forward to his speedy recovery and the return of this feature in the Winter 2012 issue of the GLEANINGS.

Our next quarterly meeting will be held on Sunday, September 9, 2012, from 2-4 p.m. We will have a brief business meeting followed by a program by Bill Nickels titled "The Norton Family in Ypsilanti." Norton family members have lived in Ypsilanti for almost 150 years and we will be dedicating and renaming our solarium "The Norton Family Solarium." Members will be notified of program details by email or postcard. If you are not currently on our email *listserv* please call the Museum at 734-482-4990 and have your name added. We are using the *listserv* only for program notifications. Your email address will not be shared with others. Also, please check the Event Schedule on our web site for upcoming special programs and displays.

We are looking for volunteers as docents for the Museum or research assistants for the Archives. Both the Museum and Archives are open from 2-5 p.m. 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 in educating the general public about our history, please give me a call at 734-476-6658.

Ypsilanti Historical Society

220 North Huron, Ypsilanti, MI 48197

<http://ypsilantihistoricalsociety.org/>



Museum:
734482-4990

Archives:
734-217-8236
[Archives Database](#)

Online

Welcome!

The Ypsilanti Historical Society which is presented by the White Archives and the Ypsilanti Historical Society is open to everyone, including non-city residents.

For information about upcoming Society events, visit us online at:
www.ypsilantihistoricalsociety.org

Samuel Post

[continued from page one]

The family background

Samuel Post was born on November 9, 1834, in a brick home surrounded by gardens, in the middle of what is now the south side of Michigan Avenue, between Huron and Washington Streets. *Livingstone's History of the Republican Party*, written by William Livingstone in 1900, gives us more information about this family: "[Post's] ...parents were William Rollo Post, a hatter, and Mary Ann Pardee. Both parents were born in New York State, came to Michigan in 1830, and located in Ypsilanti, where they continued to reside until death, both dying in the same year at the advanced ages of 86 and 87. When they came westward the methods of travel were very primitive, the Erie Canal furnishing the best means of crossing New York State, and an ox team being used for the journey from Detroit to Ypsilanti. Mrs. Post's father, Israel Platt Pardee, was a Captain in a New York regiment during the Revolutionary War and the more remote ancestors were French Huguenots who fled to this country to escape religious persecution by the Catholics during the reign of Louis XVI."

William Rollo and Mary Ann Post eventually had four children, Lucy Ann Post (1827-1922) and Eliza Pardee Post (1832-1862), Samuel (1834-1921), and Helen



Sam Post's father, William Rollo Post

Mary Post (1838-1917).

Samuel's father, William Rollo, is best known in Ypsilanti history for building what was sometimes called the Ypsilanti Follies. According to Harvey C. Colburn in *The History of Ypsilanti* (1923), this large four-story building, proposed for a hat factory, was adjacent to the Michigan Avenue Bridge and called "The Nunnery," based on its venerable appearance. Before it burned down in the great fire of 1851, the building was used as a school that began as The Presbyterian Session House. There are accounts of William's bravery



Sam Post's mother, Mary Ann (Pardee) Post

in trying to save the doors of the building, while flames fanned around him. William was also a land speculator and, with his partner Judge Lazelere, extended the town plat south to Catherine Street in 1857.

Samuel's start in business

William's propensity for business seems to have been inherited by his only son Samuel. As a young lad, Samuel made a name for himself as a street merchant selling apples and chestnuts. Livingstone tells us that "At ten years of age, while attending school, he was employed by Charles Stuck, in his general store, to work, when not engaged in the school room, at \$2.00 a month...." In an article in *The Ypsilanti Daily Press* of October 30, 1954, more is written about Samuel's early ambitions. "His salary finally was advanced to \$6.00 a month, and at the age of 16, he left school in order to give all his time to business. At the age of 21 he was earning \$50.00 a month and decided it was time to strike out for himself."

As often happened in Samuel's life, just the right person came along at the right moment to help. On this occasion it was an interesting man by the name of Rev. John A. Wilson, who served at St. Luke's Episcopal Church. Rev. Wilson lived in Ann Arbor and had no horse, so he walked to Ypsilanti to conduct services and the business of the church. The elder Posts and their children were active members of St. Luke's, and Samuel's sister Lucy sang in the choir.

[continued overleaf]

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

2 p.m. September 9

Quarterly Membership Meeting

September 23 – October 14

Quilt Exhibit

November 22

Thanksgiving Day
Museum & Archives closed

Noon – 5 p.m. December 9

Christmas
Open House

Ypsilanti Historical Museum, 220 N. Huron Street, Ypsilanti

Samuel Post

[continued from page 3]

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Samuel is said to have explained his ambitions to open his own store to Rev. Wilson and to have asked his advice on how to raise \$500 to add to the \$500 he had saved from his own small salary. He was so convincing in his eagerness that the kind Rev. Wilson lent the young man \$500 from his own savings to be paid back, without interest, over the next five years.

The *Ypsilanti Daily Press* article states: "Post entered into partnership with Robert Lambie, a man who had learned tailoring in Scotland and together they launched into the dry goods business. It was successful and later Post sold [his share] to his partner and built the Post Block which housed the largest general store in town." The Post Block is situated on the north side of what is now Michigan Avenue (then Congress Street), between Washington and Adams. In its day, it was surely one of the most elegant blocks in the county, housing both the famed Opera House and the glorious Hawkins's House Hotel.

Family Life and Civic Stature: Samuel's personal life also prospered during this time. In 1857, he married a beautiful young woman, Amanda "Mandy" S. Flower, who was born in New York. The couple soon had three children: William Rollo Post, born in 1858; Helen E. Post, born around 1860; and Samuel Post, born in 1867.

In 1865, the young family moved into a large brick home on West Forest near College Place, at the edge of the campus of the Normal School. Samuel's parents and his sister Helen, who taught at the college, lived with them. Samuel had bought the home from a local merchant, Adonijah S. Welch, for \$9,550. With its large lawn and



The Post house on West Forest near College Place, at the edge of the campus of the Normal School

gardens, it was the perfect place to raise a family and also to entertain and impress others. By this time, Post was considered a man of substance and character, and one of the most important people in Ypsilanti. He was a warden at St. Luke's Church and a prominent and prosperous citizen of Washtenaw County.

A career in politics

Several sources, such as the *Ypsilanti Daily Press* article cited above and an obituary at the end of Sam's life, add substance to a Post family legend. It reports that Samuel was present when the modern Republican Party was formed at its first party convention, in July, 1854 at Jackson, Michigan, under the spreading limbs of an old oak tree. Samuel was just a young man at the time, only 20 years old, but keenly interested in politics. At the convention he met the Republican politician Zachariah Chandler, a Detroit dry goods merchant, who soon became a helpful friend.

To pursue his ambitions for a political career, Samuel first sold off his share of the dry goods partnership in 1870, earning a good profit. In the same year, he was elected to the state legislature, and two years later became head of the Republican

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Party in Washtenaw County.

We learn more about Sam's burgeoning political career in Livingstone's book on the Republican Party. While in the state legislature, Livingstone tells us, Post "... was Chairman of the Insurance Committee and of the Committee on Federal Relations. As Chairman of the former Committee he framed or reported some very important legislation, including the general law under which the first Insurance Commissioner, Samuel H. Row, was appointed and virtually created the Insurance Department." Post was also a member of the State Central Committee and attended many state and national conventions.

With growing national exposure, and the help of his friend Zachariah Chandler, who knew President Grant personally, Post was appointed by the President in 1873 to serve four years as the United States Pension Agent at Detroit. He was subsequently re-appointed by President Hayes, and served a total of twelve years and ten months in this office.

In a Detroit newspaper article, found in the archives of the Ypsilanti Historical Museum and dated January 11, 1947, W.K. Kelsey provides interesting additional information about these honored appointments: "This was considered a fat job; so lucrative, indeed, that the former pension agents had departed with the funds. Therefore Uncle Sam demanded that the holder of the job post bond in the amount of \$600,000."

That was a high hurdle even for Sam Post. "He knew he was honest," Kelsey writes, "but the temptations of the pension office had been proved great. He consulted his old friend Daniel Lace Quirk, president of the First National Bank of Ypsilanti—knowing that Quirk was a strong Democrat and unlikely to help a Grant appointee. But Dan Quirk signed the bond for \$50,000.00 which was a lot of faith in those days. When Sam Post showed Dan Quirk's signature to other responsible men in Ypsilanti and Detroit, he had no difficulty raising the rest."

In his *History of Ypsilanti*, Harvey C. Colburn sheds even more light on the special credentials required for the Pension Agent's job. He quotes Post as saying, "Had Quirk not signed, I doubt if I could have filed the bond. There were no guar-

antee companies in those days and the pension office was in ill repute. Three preceding agents had absconded and bondsmen had suffered. I was a Black Republican and Quirk a strong Democrat, but Quirk put his name down for \$50,000." It is said that, in later years, Sam would stop by the First National Bank of Ypsilanti and joke with the tellers, asking them if Quirk had \$50,000.00 in his account!

From squeaky-clean politician to a squeaky-clean business

Samuel Post's career as United States Pension Agent at Detroit came to an end with the election of President Grover Cleveland who appointed a Democrat to the position. But this also freed Sam for a new undertaking. Having distinguished himself as a "squeaky-clean" politician, he now formed a squeaky-clean business, the Detroit Soap Company. Again, he started out with a partner, Digby V. Bell. But, following the early death of Bell, the company was reorganized and renamed the Queen Anne Soap Company. At this juncture, Samuel's sons, William R. and Samuel, Jr., joined the management. From then on, the company, located in Detroit, prospered under Sam's leadership and skills as a salesman.

A good American businessman and a typical Englishman of the Victorian Age

In 1893, at the age of 59, Samuel rented out his beautiful home on West Forest to the president of the Normal College, and for 45 years it served as the official residence of the college president. In 1938, the home was torn down and replaced with a new official president's home. King Hall, a dormitory, was also built on the site. For



The Post Block with the Opera House and Hawkins Hotel where Sam Post lived as an old man

many years, Sam's two beautiful and rare Camperdown elm trees continued to stand outside King Hall. There they reminded passers-by of the grace and elegance of the stately Post home, until they finally died of old age over a hundred years after they were planted.

On leaving his home, Sam took residence (presumably with his wife Mandy and sister Helen, though the records don't make this clear) at the then elegant Hawkins House Hotel on the north side of Michigan Avenue (then Congress Street). From that location he commuted daily to various destinations by trolley or train.

In a letter written by Carl W. Dusbiber to the Ypsilanti Historical Society many years ago, we learn something about Sam's life as an elderly man: "He was a typical Englishman of the Victorian age. He wore a stovepipe hat, a frock coat and his jowls were garnished with sideburns.... Mr. Post lived ... at the Hawkins House, which at the time was considered one of the best hostleries round about. He went to the Michigan Central Depot for his frequent trips to Detroit; he always rode in a carriage.... Sam Post was a very picturesque figure. And he was friendly and affable. He was on the vestry of St. Luke's Episcopal....He occupied a private pew, indication that he was a very generous contributor. [continued overleaf]

Samuel Post

[continued from page 5]



The Queen Anne Soap building in Detroit



Sam Post Jr. went into the soap business with his father and brother William

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I observed all these things, because around 1904, I was a choir boy at St. Luke's and once a month Sam Post and the reverend gave the boys a jolly party."

Samuel's unusual appearance was commented on in the newspaper article by Kelsey: "For 40 years or more, Sam Post was a notable figure in Detroit. Strangers who passed him on the street stared at him. Who was he? A medicine man from some show? An advertiser of something? A strayed wedding guest? For wherever he went, Mr. Post was arrayed in a silk hat and a frock coat. Long after these articles of apparel had become the signs of an extra-formal occasion, Sam Post wore them to his daily work. It is probable that Mr. Post adopted this garb when he was elected to the Legislature in 1870, and decided that it was the correct attire for a statesman.... He was in no sense ridiculous; the costume became him. But it made him a marked man, so that people asked who he was and got so they felt they knew him, saluting him and speaking to him as they passed, receiving a courteous nod in return. No doubt Sam Post enjoyed this publicity and thought it was good for Queen Anne Soap, as well as for himself."

A pioneer in creative sales promotion

Not only was Samuel's appearance a good advertisement for Queen Anne Soap, but he had many ways to make sure that the public knew about—and bought—his product. Each bar of soap had a trading card inside. These are now common on eBay, and the card illustrations ranged from flowers and infants to farmers with moonshine. Another gimmick was that the soap was sold at a discount by the case to enterprising housewives who, in turn, would keep the coupons inside the case and sell the bars of soap to family and friends. The coupons could then be exchanged for such diverse items as furniture, lamps, and even a trip on a daily excursion boat to Cedar Point on Lake Erie! My mother-in-law always proudly displayed her family's Victorian desk bought with soap coupons.

Mrs. Addie Murray of Farmington, Mich. wrote about her childhood introduction to Queen Anne soap: "I was a small girl living in Detroit and my mother would walk with her four children to a spot known as Campans dock. We would board the Belle Isle ferry and for about ten cents ride all of a summer afternoon and evening up and down the river with the orchestra playing 'In the Good Old Summer Time.' My first notice of Queen Anne Soap when I learned to read was a mammoth sign located at the river's edge, which I saw on the excursions. Then later I remember Mother saving the wrappers for a new parlor lamp or something."

Perhaps Post's most imaginative venture into advertising was at the Detroit Fair and Exhibition of 1899. Visitors to the fair could smell the tantalizing fragrance of Queen Anne Soap, said to be the first scented soap, and couldn't believe their eyes when they saw a full-sized cottage carved out of a giant block of the product!

Sam's last years and legacy

After the age of 80, Samuel Post sold the soap company and also the famed Opera House in the Post Block. The Opera House was never the same after that, and the Hawkins House Hotel was hit by a "cyclone" in 1883 and rebuilt around 1886. The Ypsilanti Opera House was converted into a movie theater in 1918, which, according to the April 2, 1918 issue of *The*

Michigan Film Review, was called the Forum Theatre. The Forum then became the Wuerth Theater which showed silent films and held occasional live shows. The part of the building that was the Wuerth Theater was torn down in 1959 to provide space for a parking lot.

Samuel Post died in Miami, Florida in December, 1921, and, after a well-attended funeral at St. Luke's on North Huron Street, joined his wife Amanda, who had died in 1901, in peaceful rest at Highland Cemetery on North River Street.

Today, we can remember Sam Post not only for his squeaky-clean conduct as a politician—and the squeaky-clean product he made at the Queen Anne Soap Company—but as a talented public servant who was elected to the state legislature, appointed by the governor to serve six years on the Board of Trustees of the Michigan

Asylum for the Insane, and appointed by two United States presidents to head the United States Pension Board at Detroit.

Sam was also a community activist. He was a life-long member, warden, and supporter of St. Luke's Episcopal Church. As reported in the 1908 *Book of Detroiters*, by Albert Nelson Marquis, he was also a member of the Detroit Board of Commerce and of the Masonic Order, Knights Templar, Detroit Post No. 384.

Ypsilanti historians know Sam Post best as a colorful and productive contributor to the city's early growth. His Post Block still stands today as a reminder of a creative vision that can continue to inspire our efforts to make Ypsilanti a more vital and attractive place to live.

(Janice Anschuetz is a local historian who contributes regularly to the GLEANINGS.)



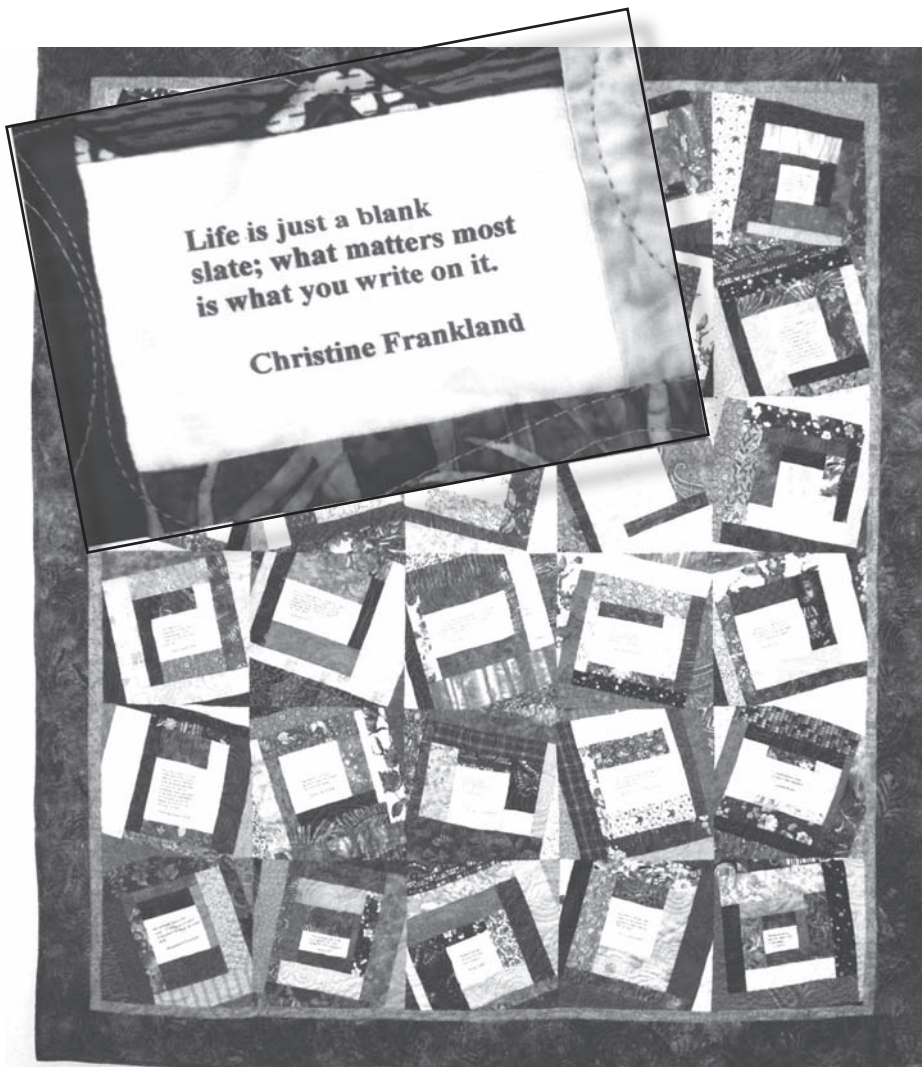
“Queen Anne Soap – without an equal as a family soap”

Quilt Exhibit Sept 23 to Oct 14

This year the Ypsilanti Historical Museum will present its 10th annual Quilt Exhibit from September 23 thru October 14. You will want to visit during that time to see the array of beautiful quilts crafted by local artists.

In addition, you will have an opportunity to win a quilt crafted by a member of the Historical Society and on display in the Heritage Room. This quilt may be used as a large wall hanging or a sofa quilt. It is titled “Wisdom” and is described as “a scrappy log cabin quilt—with attitude.”

The centers of the log cabin blocks consist of quotations by well-known persons, both past and present. You need only drop a donation and your name and phone number in the receptacle provided. The drawing will take place at the close of the exhibit and the winner will be notified shortly thereafter. The proceeds from this drawing will be dedicated to much needed enhancements to the Museum.



“Wisdom” is described as “a scrappy log cabin quilt – with attitude.”



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Museum Advisory Board Report

By Kathryn Howard, Chair

*The War of 1812 display
depicts various phases
of events in the war*



It is early fall and hard to believe our summer activities are over. Attendance was down as we do not have Macy's Museum Adventure Pass (MAP) program as in the past. The final program in the series will coordinate museum visits with library Summer Reading programs. The new MAP program is an online program. Library patrons will use the www.detroitadventurepass.org to see what is going on.

The Heritage Festival went very well. The weather plays a great part in this. The case display of the War of 1812 will be shown until November. The display is a collection from one of our members depicting phases of events in the War. There are pictures and a 15-star United States flag of this time also in the library.

The Lost Ypsilanti exhibit was very interesting, as many people did not realize these towns existed. A new display is our collection of typewriters, starting from the 1890s up to electric ones.

The most exciting event for fall is our Quilt Exhibit, which runs from September 23rd to October 14th. One wonders at the superior workmanship that goes into all of these quilts, especially the detail of the design and fabric used. This display is under the leadership of Rita Sprague. Rita has designed a beautiful quilt called "Wisdom" which will be on display. You can win it by giving a donation and dropping a ticket with your name and phone number in the receptacle. If you have a quilt or piece you would like to display, call Rita at 734-483-3600.

Fall tours are being booked now. The Quester Group will be touring October 17th. The holidays will be here and, if you have an interesting collection you want us to see, call us: Karen at 734-483-8896 or me at 734-482-7081. The Holiday Open House is December 9th. Come and see the Museum in all its festive glory.

An acquisition we have received is a lovely silver tea and coffee set with tray—a gift from Mary Cosgrove. Thank you, Mary.

Come visit us and see all the wonderful displays we have planned for you.

An invitation to visit the Contagious Hospital

By James Mann

For many years those inflicted with contagious diseases such as smallpox, cholera, and other easily transmitted diseases were quarantined to prevent the spread of the illness. This often meant placing them in a residence where the person lived under quarantine, forcing those who lived in the residence to stay in the place and forbidding others to enter until the risk of contagion had passed. The other option was to choose a place in the community, such as a house or other building, as a place where those afflicted could stay separate from others. Here those who were ill could stay until they had recovered, or, as was often the case, were dead.

In Ypsilanti, the old city hall at 6 East Cross Street was the contagious hospital, where those who had to be kept apart were housed. Beginning in about 1913 and continuing into the early 1920s, the contagious cases were sent here to be cared for. It is said the children of the neighborhood, walking to and from school, would cross the street to avoid walking on the sidewalk in front of the building.

The building was not ideal for the purpose it was then used for. It was built in 1858, as the first city hall and jail. It became the contagious hospital after the city hall was moved into the Quirk House on North Huron Street.

To show the public just how bad conditions were in the hospital, Ypsilanti City Health Officer Dr. Charles H. Pillsbury declared Thursday, March 23, 1922 “open day” at the hospital. “We have had no cases of contagion at the hospital for about a week and it has been thoroughly fumigated and cleaned so that no one need fear visiting it,” said Dr. Pillsbury to *The Daily Ypsilanti Press* of Tuesday, March 21, 1922. “I would be glad to have everyone who has any doubts as to the need of a new contagious hospital come to the old building next Thursday and see just what the city now has for the care of contagious cases. I think the visit will convince them of a need for the new hospital.”

For one thing, Dr. Pillsbury pointed out, the arrangement of the building allowed for the care for patients afflicted



Ypsilanti's old city hall at 6 East Cross Street was used as a contagious hospital beginning about 1913 and continuing into the early 1920s

with only one kind of contagion at a time. “Whenever there are cases of different contagious diseases in the city,” noted the account, “private homes often times have to be quarantined and several members of the family kept indoors at the same time.”

“The present contagious hospital,” continued the account, “is comprised of a hall, one front room, which serves to store coal, a place for a cot for a nurse, and kitchen and dining room. The room is several feet below street level. Behind this room is one big room partitioned off into eight little rooms. Every other one of these little rooms has a window. The other four rooms are without windows and ventilation only such as comes in over the tops of the partitions which are built only three-quarters of the way to the ceiling. It is the arrangement that makes it impossible to care for more than one type of contagion at a time. A single wash bowl and one little toilet at the end of a little hall serves all of these rooms. The place is heated by three stoves and even these do not prevent freezing of water pipes in cold weather, according to the city health officer.”

The basement of the building had been used as the old city jail, but because of its deplorable condition was not used as part of the hospital, noted the report.

Dr. Pillsbury told of the case of a four-year-old girl who contracted scarlet fever

while living in a household of 12 to 14 persons, most of whom were employed. “Rather than quarantine the whole house,” explained Dr. Pillsbury to *The Daily Ypsilanti Press* of Saturday, March 25, 1922, “the child and mother were taken to the present contagious hospital where there were other cases of scarlet fever. After a two weeks’ stay, the mother and some of the other patients contracted diphtheria, because of the unsanitary construction of the building [which] could not possibly be properly disinfected.”



“I have a feeling this could be something contagious, doctor!”

“A few days later,” continued Dr. Pillsbury, “another case that appeared to be scarlet fever was brought in and developed into smallpox and not having any means of isolating this case, the mother developed smallpox because the vaccination failed to work, as sometimes happens.”

This triple infection,” concluded Dr. Pillsbury, “as you can [continued overleaf]



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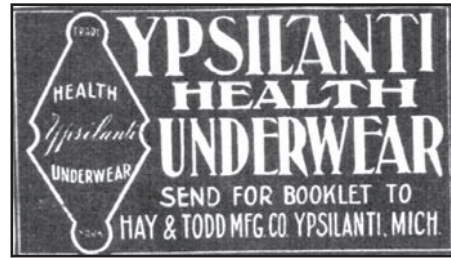
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Contagious hospital

[continued from page 9]

see, delayed the quarantine stay very much and deliberately infected this patient and others with two other contagious diseases that they would not have had had they not been sent to this building.”

On the open day at the hospital, fewer than a dozen residents took advantage of the invitation to visit the building. Still, voters approved funding for a new building as the contagious hospital. This new hospital was not built, perhaps because new and better space had become available at the new Beyer Hospital.

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

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Controversy at Ypsilanti's nickelodeon

By Laura Bien

This story previously appeared in the Ypsilanti Courier.

Ypsilanti's first movie theater wasn't the Martha Washington at Washington and Pearl (now the Déjà Vu) or the Wuerth on Michigan Avenue (now a salon adjacent to the Wolverine Grill). In 1907, a tiny nickelodeon opened in a former grocer's shop on the west side of North Huron, just north of the present-day Dalat.

In its earliest days, The Vaudette didn't show movies, but still images from a turn-of-the-century slide projector called a stereopticon. Resembling a lantern-camera hybrid, the stereopticon had a slot in which a glass plate with an image could be inserted. A variety of illuminants were used including kerosene, acetylene gas, and an apparatus that burned a piece of the white alkaline material lime in an oxyhydrogen gas flame, giving rise to the technical and later metaphorical term "lime-light."

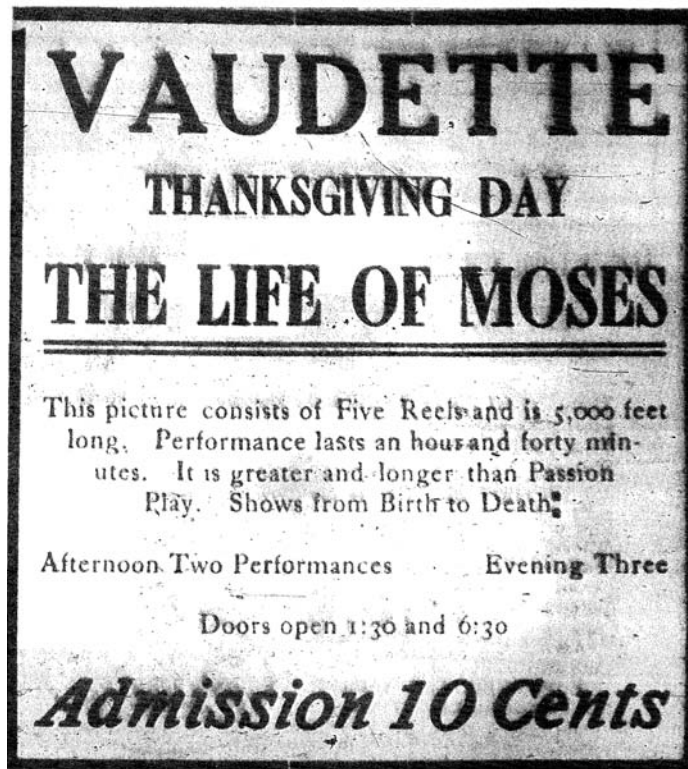
Visitors to the Vaudette who had paid their nickel could choose one of the forty or so plain wooden chairs arranged on the old grocery store's wooden floor, facing the small makeshift screen in back. To the side of the screen sat an upright piano at which a woman played popular pieces of the day to accompany the images being changed by her son Russell at the stereopticon. Pianist Elizabeth was accompanied by her husband, singer Bert Reader, a former local barber who'd founded the Vaudette.

Bert's English-born parents Thomas and Eliza had had their six children in three different countries. Their first, Comfort, was born in England. The family immigrated to Canada around 1860, where Lizzie, Josie, William, and Edward were born. Around 1875 the family moved to Michigan, settling in Ypsilanti. Bert, Thomas and Eliza's last child, was born just a few days before July 4, 1876 - his parents gave him the middle name of Centennial.

In July of 1896, Bert married Elizabeth Myers, the Michigan-born daughter of German immigrant parents, in Essex, Ontario. The couple settled in Ypsilanti on River Street, moving in a few years to a house at 728 Lowell on the north side of town near the present-day EMU campus. Bert worked as a barber at his brother William's shop, the Opera House Shaving Parlors, at 222 Michigan Avenue. Elizabeth kept house and tended their toddler Russell.

When the grocer's shop at 19 North Huron closed, Bert purchased it and became a theater manager. If Bert had the genial gregarious nature of a good barber, it carried over well into his new career of entertaining the public, as he was well-known and well-liked in town.

Bert rode his bicycle to work. An accident resulted in a front-page story in the May 17, 1909 *Ypsilanti Daily Press*. One sub-headline read, "Residents Living in Vicinity of Forest Avenue and Hamilton Street Highly Edified by Spectacular Exhibition. The proprietor of the local moving [picture] theater, it is said, was gaily bowling along Forest Avenue mounted on his steel steed, and whistling 'In the Good Old Summertime'," said the



A 1919 ad for a screening of the film "The Life of Moses"

article. In cutting across a vacant lot, Bert ran into a wire that someone had erected to keep passersby off the grass. "The wheel stopped—the whistle stopped—everything stopped but Mr. Reader," said the paper. "He kept right on going and those who saw the evolutions he made declare that he is perfectly competent to draw \$1,000 a week at any summer resort. Mr. Reader is not saying much, but he walks with a perceptible limp."

The Vaudette customarily did not advertise in the *Daily Press*, but it made one exception around Thanksgiving of 1910, when it ran an ad for a screening of the blockbuster film "The Life of Moses." Unlike the usual one-reel silent movies shown at nickelodeons, this film's five reels took 90 minutes to play. Bert charged 25 and 35 cents [\$5.80 to \$8 today], with a Thanksgiving discount price of 10 cents. Other popular 1910 films included the sentimental "Abraham Lincoln's Clemency," an early, 13-minute version of "The Wizard of Oz," a 16-minute version of "Frankenstein," the nine-minute documentary "A Day in the Life of a Coal Miner," the four-minute "Aeroplane Flight and Wreck," and one of the earliest stop-motion films, the four-minute "The Automatic Moving Company," about furniture moving itself into a house.

One 1910 movie sparked controversy in Ypsilanti over the issue of whether it should be shown at all. The film was of a famous boxing match between the world heavyweight champion, Jack Johnson, and former champion James Jeffries. Born in 1878 to two former slaves, Johnson ascended through the boxing ranks to win in 1903 what was then called the "World Colored Heavyweight Championship." Johnson offered to fight the then-world heavyweight champion Jeffries, *[continued overleaf]*

Nickelodeon controversy

[continued from page 11]



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who refused. In 1908 Johnson caused a sensation by defeating Canadian Tom Burns in Australia for the world heavyweight championship. This triumph brought Jeffries out of retirement to challenge Johnson. On July 4, 1910, Reno hosted the "Fight of the Century." When Johnson defeated Jeffries, winning \$65,000 [\$1.5 million in today's dollars], black Americans celebrated and were attacked in race riots that broke out around the country. Multiple deaths were reported, especially in the South.

The film of the fight was widely banned, lest it reignite similar violence. When Bert Reader wrote to the film company to ask if he could show it, many Ypsilantians were apprehensive. *The Daily Press* asked the mayor if he would forbid the film's screening at the Vaudette.

"Whether or not the Johnson-Jeffries fight picture will be shown in Ypsilanti is as yet an uncertain problem," said the July 25, 1910 *Ypsilanti Daily Press*. "... When asked if the pictures would be allowed, [the mayor] said, 'I shall not interfere.' The matter would be decided, concluded the paper, by the police commissioner. Ypsilanti police may have vetoed the screening, as no mention of it appears in subsequent issues of the paper.

By 1910, the era of opulent movie palaces was beginning, and that of dingy storefront nickelodeons was fading. *The Daily Press* condemned the Vaudette as a fire-trap. *The Press* singled out the theater's lack of safe fire exits and made reference to a recent nickelodeon fire in Dowagiac. There, the flammable celluloid film caught fire and the blaze destroyed the theater.

Bert closed the Vaudette around 1912 and returned to working as a barber. In 1915 the Martha Washington opened, offering plush blue seats and elegant decorations in place of wooden chairs in a bare room. The Wuerth opened. Eventually, the Vaudette's building was demolished. Its onetime owner nearly lived to see a second centennial; he died in 1965 and with his wife and son is buried in St. John's Cemetery.

Today the Vaudette's onetime site is a parking lot, but a century ago, small audiences in front of a rattling film projector watched the magic of silent movies.

(Laura Bien is the author of "Hidden History of Ypsilanti" and "Tales from the Ypsilanti Archives." She can be contacted at ypsidixit@gmail.com.)



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The Morris Mausoleum at Highland Cemetery

By James Mann

Hidden among the trees and pathways of Highland Cemetery is a small mausoleum, of simple eloquence. This is the Morris Mausoleum, where Webster J. Morris and his wife Ann are entombed.

Webster Morris was born August 8, 1840 in Rome, New York. At the age of 14 he began an apprenticeship at a newspaper in Toledo. At the outbreak of the American Civil War, he enlisted in Company D of the Third Michigan Infantry Regiment at Grand Rapids on May 10, 1861 for three years. According to the Record of Service of Michigan Volunteers in the Civil War, Morris was mustered into service on June 10, 1861, and promoted to the rank of Corporal in July of 1862. He was promoted to the rank of Sergeant in January of 1864, and discharged at the expiration of his term of service at Detroit, Michigan on June 20, 1864. After the war he started a newspaper at Lowell, Michigan, and began the first daily newspaper at Mt. Clemens.

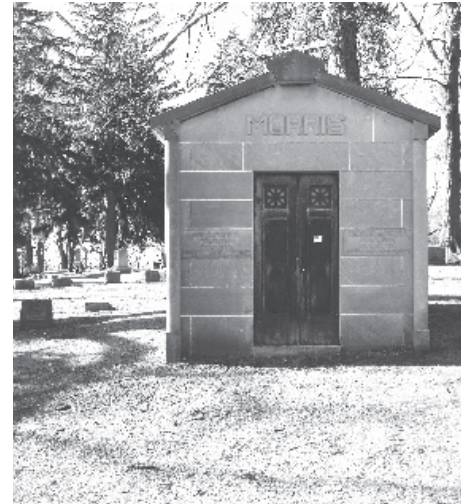
After he retired from the newspaper business, he moved to Ypsilanti in 1921, the same year his wife Ann died at the age of 78. She died on December 9, 1921. The

lot where the mausoleum stands was, according to the Highland Cemetery records, purchased for \$175 on April 21, 1922.

Morris appears to have made the move to Ypsilanti so he could stay with his daughter Floy, who was married to James Clark. *Polk City Directories* list Webster Morris as staying at the home of his daughter and son-in-law at 504 Huron Street. James was a baker, who ran his own business. James died at the age of 60, on July 8, 1929.

The death of his son-in-law, as well as his own declining health, may have caused Webster Morris to move out of the house on North Huron Street, as he died on January 21, 1931, at the age of 90, at the O'Kief Hospital in Grand Rapids. The cause of death was Cerebral and generalized Arterio Sclerosis, with death occurring at 5:40 a.m. Funeral services were held at the house at 504 North Huron on Saturday, January 24, 1931. The body was entombed, with that of his wife, in the mausoleum he had built ten years before.

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



The Morris Mausoleum in Highland Cemetery that was built in the early 1920s

Notable persons interred at Highland

- **Edward P. Allen**, US Congressman and Civil War veteran
- **Owen Cleary**, Michigan Secretary of State and president of Cleary College
- **P. Roger Cleary**, founder of Cleary College
- **Byron M. Cutcheon**, Civil War brevet brigadier general and Medal of Honor recipient and Congressman from Michigan to the U.S. House of Representatives
- **Justus McKinstry**, disgraced Civil War brigadier general
- **Edwin F. Uhl**, Mayor of Grand Rapids, Michigan, Ambassador to Germany and United States Assistant Secretary of State.

-Source: Wikipedia



Highland's Starkweather Memorial Chapel

HIGHLAND CEMETERY: A valuable resource for historians

Highland Cemetery continues to be an excellent source of information for researchers of Ypsilanti history. Stories abound among the hundreds of markers placed in memory of Ypsilantians who have passed. Their stories often appear in *GLEANINGS* as examples of good citizenship and dynamic industry for their progeny in today's community.

The historic cemetery property comprises 100 acres, founded in 1864, and designed by Col. James Lewis Glenn in 1863. Highland Cemetery is the site of the Starkweather Memorial Chapel which was commissioned by Mary Ann Starkweather to honor her husband. The chapel, an example of the Richardsonian Romanesque style, was designed by George D. Mason and completed in 1889. There is also a Civil War memorial on the cemetery grounds, where an inscription shows it was also presented by Mary Ann Starkweather. The entrance to the cemetery is at 943 N. River St. The cemetery is in a wooded area of oak, pine, cedar and willow trees. Each gate at the cemetery entrance is constructed of decorative wrought iron and measures 10 feet high and 81 inches wide.

The Highland Cemetery Association, a non-profit cemetery company founded in 1863, owns and operates the cemetery. In 2009, the cemetery began sponsoring an ice cream social after the annual Ypsilanti Memorial Day Procession which terminates at the cemetery.

Craig Porter – Freestyle Champion

By Peg Porter

Several months ago I found a message in my voice mailbox from Lauren at the Ypsilanti Historical Society. She told me she had received a call from a Scott Porter who thought I might be his cousin. She asked for his telephone number so she could forward it to me. I had not been in contact with my Porter cousin for over 30 years and was anxious to talk to him. I knew that his sister, Mary Ruth, had died tragically as a result of early-onset Alzheimer's less than five years ago. I called Scott that same afternoon. Scott had "found me" through computer searches. He had read some of my GLEANINGS articles which convinced him that I was, indeed, his cousin. He then found the YHS website and telephone number. A number of phone calls and email exchanges followed. We shared family stories and I provided additional information on the Porter family tree.

We talked about the Johnny Weissmuller story contained in the article that follows and his dad's experience as a State Champion swimmer. We were both interested in trying to document the story we knew and began to assemble what information we had. Scott shared photographs and we both did considerable research. The story that follows is the result of our collaboration. It is dedicated to the memory of Craig Porter and his daughter, Mary Ruth.

His high school nickname was "Fish." He was tall, with long arms and legs, broad shoulders and slim hips: the ideal body type for swimming. He was the second son of Evelyn Havelock Porter and Ellen Craig Porter, both immigrants to the United States from Canada. Craig Porter was born in Webster Township in 1912 while his father was herdsman at the Brookside Dairy.

When Craig was still quite young, the family moved to Ypsilanti where they opened a small restaurant in their home at the corner of Brower Street (now College Place) and Washtenaw Avenue, just a few blocks from the campus of the Michigan Normal. Craig attended the Laboratory



Craig Porter, Ypsilanti Roosevelt's outstanding swimmer

School. When the new Roosevelt High School opened in the fall of 1925, both Craig and his older brother Don enrolled. At the time of its opening, Roosevelt was a state-of-the art high school. The ground floor had a swimming pool, shower room, and locker rooms.

By the time Craig began high school he was already a swimmer. There were few pools, no community pools, and, unless your family had a lake cottage, your opportunities to swim were very limited. So where and how did Craig Porter develop the skills that would make him a State Champion swimmer in a few short years? Perhaps he attended Camp Hayo-Want-Ha, a YMCA camp on Torch Lake. Don, his brother, spent several summers at the camp. It's also possible that Laboratory School students had access to the college pool, a few short blocks from his home. Finally the Porter brothers had friends whose families had cottages on Portage or Base Lake.

Although he expressed interest in both baseball and track as a high school freshman, he joined the Roosevelt Swim Team. His first meet took place March 2, 1927 against River Rouge. Three days later he participated in the Inter-Scholastic

Detroit Yacht Club Seagulls patch worn by Craig



Roosevelt's 1930 Swim Team finished fourth

meet at the University of Michigan. Craig was rewarded with his first varsity letter that year, the only freshman class member to receive one.

He swam freestyle 40-, 50- and 100-yard events as well as the 240-yard relay. He set school records, only to break his own records. In March of 1929, Craig led the Roosevelt swimmers to a Class B State Championship, winning first in the 50- and 100-yard freestyle as well as swimming to a first place in the 240-yard relay. In 1930, the Roosevelt team finished fourth, winning four meets and losing only two. The two they lost were to class A schools. *The Rough Rider*, Roosevelt's school newspaper, described him as "Roosevelt's freestyle artist."

In his senior year, the *Rough Rider* paid tribute to its champion swimmer. "...Craig Porter, an athlete who has forgone the pleasure of playing football, basketball or baseball that he might excel in a sport he likes best and so to add another laurel to the fame of Roosevelt High School." He was also recognized for his leadership as Captain of the swim team for three years.

In the spring of 1930, a tennis team was organized at Roosevelt. The team's coach



h in the State Meet



Above:
Olympic
champ and
Tarzan star,
Johnny
Weissmuller

Left:
Swan dive at
the Detroit
Yacht Club –
- check that
wingspan

Did an Ypsi kid beat Johnny Weissmuller in swimming?

a higher level of competition. The competition included members of the 1928 U.S. Olympic swim team who trained at the Club. Could Porter have beat Weissmuller in practice?

There is at least one other time when the two swimmers' paths may have crossed. Weissmuller returned to Michigan in the summer of 1930 with his water show. He was a star attraction at the Eastern Michigan Water Carnival in Bay City. Weissmuller's show toured the country and attracted large audiences who wanted to see the man who won five gold medals in the Olympic Games. Often Weissmuller would challenge the best local swimmers to a race. Was there such a race in Bay City or elsewhere in Michigan? Did, in fact, Craig Porter beat Weissmuller. Did the Weissmuller publicists spread the word that Weissmuller was tired from traveling and therefore it wasn't a valid race?

The search for documentation of the Weissmuller-Porter race continues. The author and other family members believe the story is true. Should any GLEANINGS readers have information to share, please contact Peg Porter at the Ypsilanti Historical Society. Perhaps the more interesting question is: could Craig Porter have been a member of the United States Olympic Team in 1932?

His times in the freestyle kept dropping through his senior year in high school (1930). The major barrier to achieving Olympic status was money. At the time of Craig's high school graduation, the country was plunging into what we now call The Great Depression. Money was always tight around the Porter household. Now, with fewer people having money to spend on a restaurant meal, money became even more of an issue. Craig's parents were able to provide their two sons with the basic necessities, primarily food and shelter. The boys were expected to work to earn money for any "extras." Don worked steadily from [continued overleaf]

was faculty member, Leonard Menzi. Menzi would later become the school's principal, serving in that capacity for nearly 30 years. Craig showed up for the first team practice. Although he was only able to play tennis for several months before his graduation, he was awarded a varsity letter in that sport.

While Craig Porter was attending high school and developing his skills as a competitive swimmer, Johnny Weissmuller was on his way to becoming one of the country's most well known swimmers and later the movie's second Tarzan. Weissmuller was born in 1904 in Romania. His birthplace would later create some controversy when he was named to the U.S. Olympic Team in 1924. While still a child, he swam regularly in Lake Michigan. As a teenager, he began swimming with the Illinois Athletic Club. Later he would win three gold medals in freestyle events at the 1924 Games and two more gold medals in the 1928 games. In addition, he played on the U.S. Water Polo teams in both 1924 and 1928. The teams earned a bronze medal at the Paris and Amsterdam games. Weissmuller parlayed his success in the Olympics into first a modeling career and then an acting career. He played Tarzan in 12 movies

to become the best known of the screen Tarzans.

There is a story that is well known to members of the Porter family. Friends and classmates of Craig Porter knew the story as well. The story is simply this: Craig Porter once raced Johnny Weissmuller and Porter won. How could this have happened? Weissmuller was nearly ten years older than Porter, an Olympian and world record holder. How could a teenager from a small high school in Michigan beat the man who would become Tarzan and who frequently boasted that he never lost a race?

Craig Porter, unlike Weissmuller, was not a bragger or booster. To the contrary, he was quiet and never talked about himself. If you had questioned Craig about whether the story was true, he would nod his head "yes" but would not go on to say when or where. There are at least two times when such a race could have occurred. While still in high school, Craig was a member of the Seagulls, the swim team of the Detroit Yacht Club. We do not know how he was recruited for this team nor how he made regular trips to Detroit to practice and race. Swimming with the Seagulls did provide him with more professional coaching and




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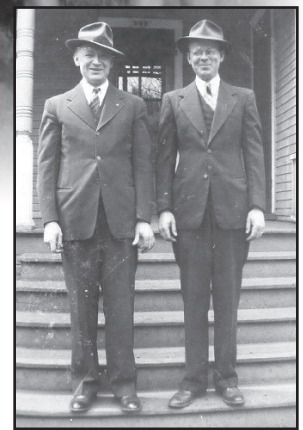
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Porter cousins at Base Lake – Don’s kids were swimmers while Craig’s were not.



Porter Women: left in front row - Craig’s mother Ellen Craig Porter; second from right in front row – sister in law Ruth Young Porter; far right in top row – Craig’s wife Doris Shroeder Porter

Craig Porter in his late 30s

Porter brothers at family home – Don is left and Craig is at right

his early teens primarily with Lamb’s grocery. He did not participate in high school athletics by choice. He wanted his own car (a convertible), a speed boat, and an occasional trip. He was able to earn enough to get them.

Craig, on the other hand, devoted his time and energy to swimming. The University of Michigan offered Craig a tuition award if he were to agree to attend college and join the swimming team. This was not a “full-ride” by any means. He would need to pay for books, fees and transportation. The resources were not there. He would have to work (if he could find a job) to pay for all other expenses.

Swimming is a demanding sport. It requires focus, discipline, and many, many hours in the pool. To add a full class schedule—plus a job—would be daunting. Had he been able to swim for Michigan and assuming he had remained

healthy, he likely would have made it to the Olympic swim trials and perhaps made the U.S. Team. That was not to happen. Instead, he alternated work with school and received a degree at Michigan State Normal College (now Eastern) in 1938. He met and later married another student, Doris Schroeder, in 1940. They would have a daughter and son, Mary Ruth and Scott. Craig would spend his working days in a lumber yard, retiring early because of chronic health problems. He died on Christmas Day, 1976.

The focus of this story is not lost opportunities, but to recognize one of Ypsilanti’s outstanding athletes or as the Roosevelt Rough Rider summed up his years in high school “...he is one of the greatest swimmers ever produced at Roosevelt.” That remained true until the Roosevelt High School closed in 1969.

(Peg Porter is Assistant Editor of GLEANINGS and a regular contributor)

Competitive Swimming

Then (1920s-1930s)

and Now

While working on the article about my uncle Craig Porter, the Olympic Swimming events were on TV and, since swimming is one of my favorite sports, I spent lots of time watching. I wondered how the sport had changed over the years and if it were possible to compare times in certain events from the Games in 1928 and 2012. My brother, Don Jr.—a former swimming coach—and I put our heads together and identified some significant differences.

Swim suits:

Then – men and women wore the one-piece tank suit, usually woolen. The suit created a drag on the swimmers both because of the material and the fact that water went through the suit, slowing the swimmer.

Now –synthetic form fitting suits perform almost as a second skin with virtually no drag.

Equipment:

Then –virtually none.

Now—swimming caps also fit the head like a second skin. Swim goggles fit in the eye sockets. No leaks with these streamlined goggles.

Swimming Pools:

Then—pools were usually shorter affecting how a swimmer swam a certain distance. Pool water was very turbulent during a race.

Now—pools are longer, many are built to Olympic specifications. A small run-off rims the edge of the pool allowing the water to remain less turbulent, easier for swimming.

Racing Turns:

Then—in a multiple lap event, the swimmer touched the wall, turned and pushed off. We estimate this type of turn took almost two seconds.

Now—racers use a race turn—essentially a somersault that has little effect on time.



Race Officiating:

Then—the starter had a gun that fired blanks. Other officials had stopwatches.

Now—technology has replaced people in measuring time; time can be measured in much smaller segments. People do rate diving events however.

Training:

Then—swimmers trained by swimming.

Now—weight training is common.

High School Comparisons:

- Craig Porter, 1929, 50 yard freestyle: .28
- Vlad Morozov 2010, 50-yard freestyle: .1943 (lead-off swimmer in relay)

Report from the Fletcher-White Archive

By Gerry Pety, Director

We have been busy in the Archives sorting and filing the materials given to us this summer by the Eastern Michigan Archives. Al Rudisill and company have been sorting, classifying and adding to our database which is on our website. So if you would like to know what we have just view it at www.ypsilantihistoricalsociety.org! Marcia McCrary, our Thursday host, and our Archives Assistant Director, Deirdre Fortino, have spent a lot of time keeping the database up to date. We now know what we have in the Archives and where it is, which is a real accomplishment!

Diving into history

Every now and then we have a visitor in the Archives who provides us with new information. Recently an individual visited who is scuba diving in Ford Lake where the old settlement of Woodruff's Grove was thought to be. The area was flooded in the 1930s to provide an artificial lake for power generation and flood control of the Huron River. Under 30 feet of water the old village sits, or what is left of it. We now know that the village sits some distance from a deserted road entering the lake near the northern point where the Huron River enters. The diver says he will continue to dive in the hopes of finding more and better artifacts - maybe even some treasure. He will report back if he finds anything of interest.

Tiny towns researched

For the last year we have been collecting 'place names' of settlements that have largely disappeared not only from the landscape but our memory as well. Sometimes these little places were just names to the locals so as to make it easy to find, but many times they were also economic units where business and services were found. One that has been recently recognized as a defunct settlement or place name is Sobers Corners, back when there was a TB sanatorium at the intersection of Ridge and Geddes roads. I doubt it was just the hospital but we just don't know. The other place name was at the junction of Lowell and Jarvis streets known as Norton's Corners. Mr. Norton, founder of Norton's Flowers, had several greenhouses near the Michigan State Normal College campus (now EMU) back in the 1920s to the 1940s. But that is all we know about these place names. In both cases we have no pictures, references, maps, layouts, history - almost nothing.

We are also looking for more information about Frains Lake, Urania and Carpenter's Corners. If you have any additional information about these places or Willis, Stony Creek, Paint Creek, Cherry Hill, or Superior, please pass it on to us here in the Archives. The information on a lot of these places is out there, I just know it, but we need your help to find it!

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Hot topic ethics addressed by state editor

Featured in a program entitled "History Writers Tell It Like It Was," three prolific contributors to *GLEANINGS* comprised a panel discussion at August's Chautauqua at the Riverside, a new addition to the annual Ypsilanti Heritage Festival.

MICHIGAN HISTORY magazine editor Patricia Majher moderated the panel consisting of Laura Bien, James Mann, and George Ridenour, all regular habitués of the Ypsilanti Historical Society's Fletcher-White Archives.

The hottest topic of the panel may have been the issue of publishing controversial topics from our history such as crime and violence. Herewith is Editor Majher's September/October editorial on the identical topic at the state level...

What's that old rule of etiquette? "Never talk about sex, politics, or religion in polite company?" Well, we're breaking that rule in this issue with an article about Katharine Dexter McCormick, the Michigan-born woman who financed the development of the birth control pill. Not that McCormick's story is salacious, in fact, quite the contrary. Behind a shield of social activism was a woman who was utterly devoted to her husband and his lifetime battle with mental illness. Still, McCormick's early association with Margaret Sanger and Planned Parenthood may strike some of our readers in the wrong way. And we're prepared to get a few letters to the editor voicing that displeasure.

The McCormick article is the only one in this issue that might be viewed as provocative. But, in the interest of full disclosure, we should warn you we have a couple of manuscripts in the works for 2013 that could also raise an eyebrow or two. For instance, a noted historian and professor plans to tackle the subject of slavery in Michigan, which existed here until the 1830s (despite its prohibition by the Northwest Ordinance of 1787). Both Indians and Africans were held against their will during this period, and many prominent citizens—from merchant William Macomb (who owned 26 human beings) to the mayor of Detroit to the territorial governor—profited from their forced labor.

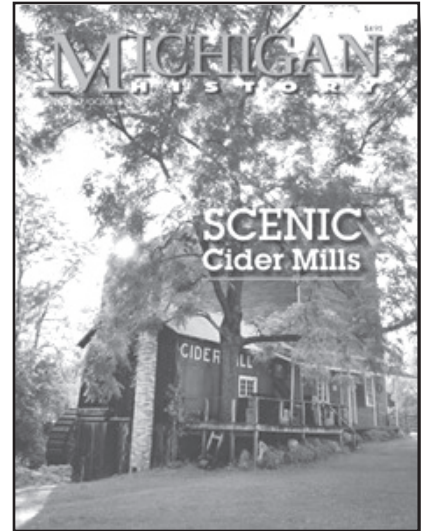
Are you surprised to hear about this? It's mentioned in passing in such standard texts as Dunbar and May's "Michigan: A History of the Wolverine State." But the upcoming article in *MICHIGAN HISTORY* will shed considerably more light on this subject that has been too long ignored or ill-reported.

Some will disagree with our decision to publish articles on such difficult or challenging subjects. "I don't want to read about the bad stuff" is how one person worded it in a conversation with me at a recent Historical Society of Michigan conference. But the reality is if we left out the "bad stuff," we'd be telling only half the story of our state. And that wouldn't make us very good historians. Or responsible journalists.

We feel a great responsibility to you, to presenting you with articles that educate, entertain, and inspire—sometimes all in the same piece.

We'll never go back to being strictly a scholarly journal. And we don't plan to become so entertainment-oriented that good history is sacrificed to the telling of a good tale. Instead, we'll continue to occupy the middle ground, where our special blend of painstaking research and engaging writing resides. And we hope you'll continue to enjoy the fruits of our labor for many years to come.

-Patricia Majher, *MICHIGAN HISTORY* magazine, September/October 2012



The cover of the September/October issue of *Michigan History* featured historic cider mills

Until recently, there stood a house by the intersection of Michigan Avenue and U. S. 23, notable for many, perhaps, because it stood alone surrounded by overgrown wild grass. The house had the appearance of neglect and age. The house was old, as it was built in 1840. This was the site of Roberts' Corner.

This was the farm of the Roberts family, on the old Chicago Road, now Michigan Avenue. The house was originally a stage coach stop where the horses were changed, and travelers could relax for a bit. What became the dining room was at first the tavern where whiskey was two or three cents a shot.

In the tavern was a large fireplace where travelers would circle around and tell stories or gaze into the flames of the fire as steaks were broiled. This fireplace was also a means for deciding the order in which guests were treated to rounds of drinks.

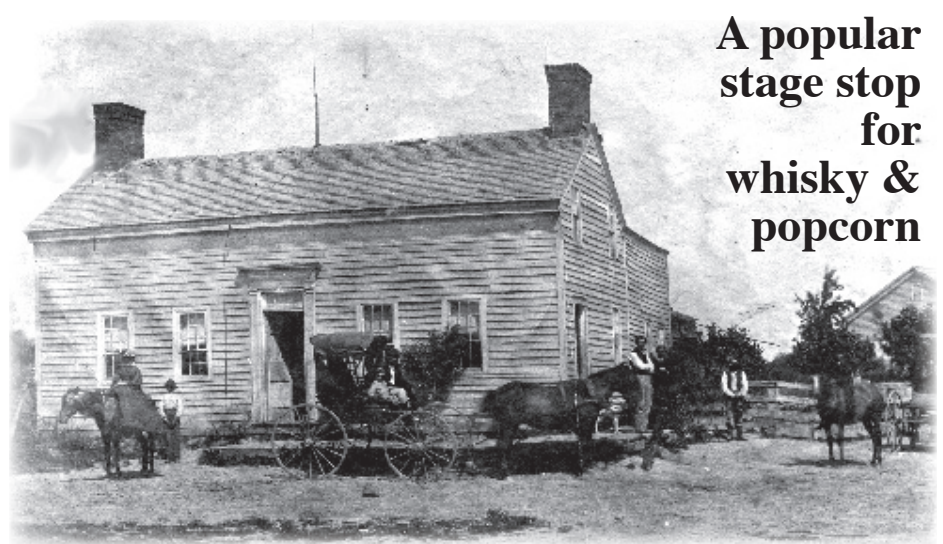
"When time lagged and excitement was wanted, someone suggested that they all lie down in front of the fireplace for the drinks. A circle was drawn from one corner of the hearth to the other out and away from the fire about an arm's length. All stretched out on the floor with their heads to the mark and extended an arm toward the fire. He who could leave his hand against the heat the longest time would be the winner. The one with the shortest arm usually won. The first to give up was the first to treat, and so on in turn. The last one only would be the real winner," noted *The Ypsilanti Record* of Thursday, February 8, 1917.

In May of 1911 a new bride arrived at the farm named Clara Roberts. Charles married the former school teacher in the Episcopal Church. The couple made the journey to the farm in a carriage from the livery of Oliver Westfall. The couple had to wait as the wheels were changed to runners, as there was eight feet of snow on the ground. As they rode to the farm, the couple probably snuggled close for warmth, as it was eight degrees below zero. At the time, what is now Michigan Avenue was a single dirt track road.

Years later Clara would see the first improvements in the road, as the farm was the headquarters for the road crew. The

Roberts' Corner

By James Mann



Roberts' Corner was located at the intersection of Michigan Avenue and U. S. 23

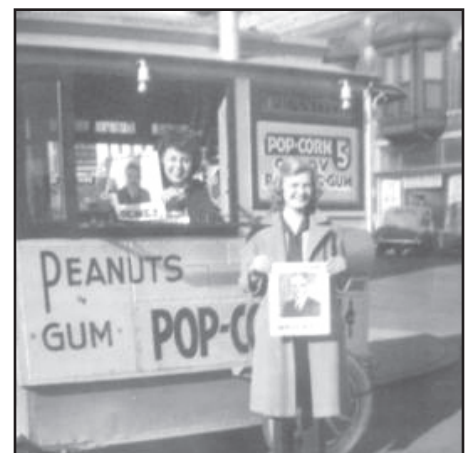
A popular stage stop for whisky & popcorn

workers were, for the most part, prison labor. The heavy work was done with teams of horses and the men slept in a huge tent in the field behind the barn.

"Water from the Roberts farm was used exclusively for a distance of ten miles along the roadway and a doctor, imprisoned in a notorious abortion case, was responsible for its purity. Although the men were fed state food and had their own cooks, many had money of their own and supplemented the meals with sandwiches and pie made by Mrs. Roberts. The doctor took the orders from the men, made the deliveries and saw that Mrs. Roberts was paid. She remembers that their favorite pie was lemon," reported *The Ypsilanti Press* of May 22, 1961. Clara Roberts was still on the farm when modern machines were used to pave and widen the road by changing the landscape to its present shape.

Roberts' Corner had another landmark as well, that of a concession stand. For at least 32 years the Netterfield family parked their concession stand on the northwest corner of the intersection of West Michigan and Carpenter Road. Rows of yellow lights flashed on and off to beckon families to stop for a few minutes to purchase popcorn, candy apples and more.

Every year the Netterfield family traveled from Tampa, Florida to work the fair and carnival season. Paul Netterfield



None of the historic images in the files seemed to match Pittsfield natives' memories of the gorgeously gaudy Netterfield popcorn wagon. This example from Minnesota was the closest they could find to their memory bank.

had found the spot at the intersection and stayed for a week, and then two weeks, then three. Then, for years after, the family would arrive in April and open the trailer for business until the Fourth of July, when the fair season began. There is only one newspaper clipping from *The Ypsilanti Press* in the Roberts file in the Archives to tell the story. Whoever clipped the story from the paper forgot to write the date of publication of the story. Then again, there are still those who remember.

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

Gerganoff (continued!) By Peg Porter

Ypsi car shows lacking in one aspect?

Ypsilantians have become accustomed to seeing classic vehicles in expositions in the parks, cruise nights in the neighborhoods, and driven on our city's streets, but isn't there one whole category missing? Why don't we see a historic panoply of exotic funeral hearses lined up at the gates of our graveyards some day? It's a genre of transportation we have not yet exploited in our auto-exotica town.



Gerganoff's house at 1330 Huron River Drive established the "Michigan Modern" style

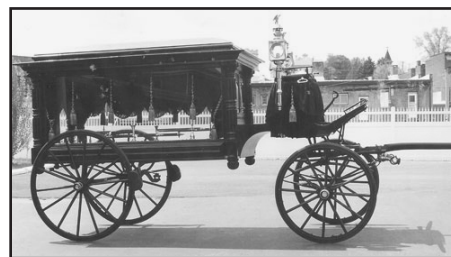
The headline article in the June 10 Business Section of *AnnArbor.com* read "SOLD! Investor buys historical Washington Square building in downtown Ann Arbor." Longtime readers of GLEANINGS might remember an article I wrote in the Summer 2009 issue titled, "R.S. Gerganoff: An Architect for the 20th century." That article has since been reprinted in its entirety on the State of Michigan Website, Michigan Modern.

James Costello will oversee the restoration for the new owner, Cameron Holdings from Okemos, MI. According to Mr. Costello, "it's a special building, and post restoration, it's going to be exceptional. The building was designed by Ypsilanti architect Ralph Stevens (sic) (R.S. Gerganoff).

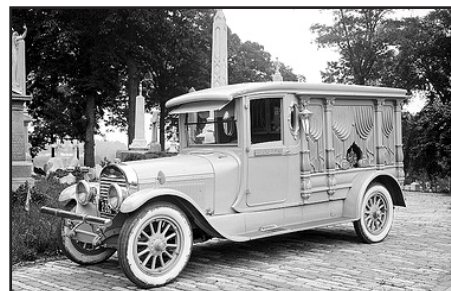
It was first known as the Ypsi-Ann Building...Gerganoff also was the architect for what is now the Beer Depot in Ann Arbor, in addition to several landmark buildings in Ypsilanti." He mentions Beyer Hospital, buildings on the EMU campus, and several Ypsilanti schools.

It is rewarding to see that well-documented historical articles are used by developers in the restoration of properties. And, to this author, it is especially pleasing to have early 20th century buildings appreciated for their historical value. Now if we could just find a way to finance the restoration of the Gerganoff home on Huron River Drive we would have a real treasure of mid-20th century residential architecture that could draw architectural historians and students from southeastern Michigan and beyond.

When Ralph S. Gerganoff (gerGANoff) died in 1966, The Ypsilanti Press editorialized that his passing was evidence that the "Horatio Alger Club" was shrinking. His life was the stuff of Horatio Alger's stories, young men starting life with nothing and through hard work achieving wealth and respect.



1880 Rockfalls hearse



1924 Lincoln hearse



1926-8 Studebaker hearse



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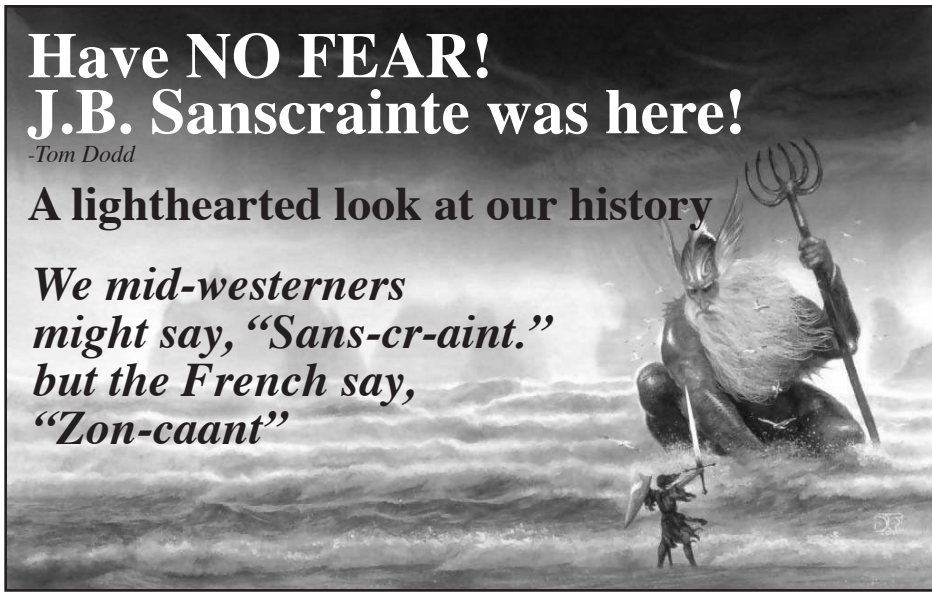
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Have NO FEAR! J.B. Sanscrainte was here!

-Tom Dodd

A lighthearted look at our history

*We mid-westerners
might say, “Sans-cr-aint.”
but the French say,
“Zon-caant”*



The older we get, the more difficult it is to learn new things. Until the Fall 2009 publication of GLEANINGS, most readers were content in their understanding that Gabriel Godfroy was the first European to settle what is now Ypsilanti. All that has changed as we adjust to the fact that the French held forth here from the time of LaSalle’s crossing in the 1600s. Local Scout troops are sure his party camped in Riverside Park before he left the Huron River at Belleville to go overland toward Lake Erie, but there’s no evidence to support that. Delta County Topologist Jim Woodruff, 90, has documented LaSalle’s crossing in his “Topologist’s Blog” for all to examine. Woodruff may even be related to Benjamin Woodruff, another of our “founders,” but others can trace our settlement’s origin back even further.

When Karl Williams was a student in EMU’s Historic Preservation Program, he noted in the Fall 2009 GLEANINGS, “As indicated in Hugh Heward’s 1790 journal, Gabriel Godfroy was both aware and involved with the trading post established by Jean Baptiste Sanscrainte at Ypsilanti as early as 1790...”

Since that revelation, local Francophiles have been brushing up on their high school foreign language skills to further document the Sanscrainte claim. Was Sanscrainte his actual name, or was the word a description of his character? There are still French descendants around with the same last name, but the literal interpretation of that appellation gives rise to still more fascinating contemplation.

We are surrounded by last names that once denoted skills, crafts, or professions, but few carry over into today’s reality. Carpenter, Miller, Mauer, Cooper, Wheeler, and many others have ventured far beyond the crafts of their ancestors. Still, it is a tasty exercise to examine how Ypsilanti’s first European entrepreneur may have fit the description: *Sans crainte*, in the French language is “without fear,” an apt greeting for anyone venturing into the unexplored wilderness of 1790.

Was Jean Baptiste Sanscrainte truly fearless?

From the French: *Sans crainte* = do not fear. Literally, be without fear. Jean Baptiste Sanscrainte must have been fearless to venture into the swamps of this peninsula in the 18th century and he could well have shared this optimism with others to goad them to find their way to his establishment.

Sanscrainte’s literal encouragement has spread to the rear window of today’s pick-up trucks with their over-sized wheels and jacked-up axles:



Sanscrainte’s decals cover the sides of speeding NASCAR racecars at the Michigan International Speedway in the Irish Hills:



The SoBe soft drink company has picked up the “don’t be

afraid” theme for an energy drink described in a recent review thusly: “Imagine a glass of orange soda, with some grape drink. Now, add in some salt water, urine, and Canadian bacon, and you’ve pretty much got what No Fear tastes like.” Don’t be afraid; drink up!

*Don't be afraid;
drink up!*

Sanscrainte’s motto is plastered on the back of leather motorcycle jackets and can be found in chromed, drop-shadowed graphics encircling a human skull perhaps to encourage riders to abandon their helmets and conform to the recently liberalized state law permitting motorcyclists to expose their skulls to the raw pavement of the Interstate.

Steve Thomason, who sells himself much in the manner we might ascribe to J.B. Sanscrainte, as “husband, father, son, brother, friend, pastor, teacher, artist, writer, sinner, saint, and child of God,” leads his church youth group with a spin-off of the original:



Consider, then, the possibility of quotes pulled from an imaginary interview with Jean Baptiste Sanscrainte, proprietor of a peltry and trading post at the juncture of Native American trails crossing the Huron River at that time:

A post mortem interview with Jean Bapstiste Sanscrainte, the first-known European settler in what would later become known as Ypsilanti

• **Did you enjoy a good season collecting beaver pelts for the king and his court? It seems everyone at Versailles is wearing beaver hats. Business must be good.**
Selon moi, on peut affirmer sans crainte que nos propres attentes ont également été dépassées.

[In my view, we can be reassured that our own expectations have also been exceeded.]

• **Do you make a good living bartering for pelts with the natives?**
Aujourd' hui, nous (continued overleaf)

No Fear; Sanscrainte was here

continued from page 21



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pouvons affirmer sans crainte que nous avons trouvé notre place en Europe.

[However, it is also important to focus on a distribution of income that is just and equitable.]

- **How well does a French trader get along with the indigenous people?**

Nous parions sur la paix, qui consiste à s'exprimer librement, tranquillement et sans crainte.

[We choose peace, which is simply to be able to express oneself freely, calmly and without fear.]

- **Can travelers count on good quality food and drink offered at your trading post?**

On nous dit surtout: " Croquez, buvez, avalez sans crainte; il y a une étiquette qui nous protège.

[We are told above all to 'eat and drink without fear; you are protected by the label'.]

- **How do the French, English and Indian people get along these days?**

N'oublions cependant jamais que vivre en paix sans crainte d'être persécuté constitue le droit fondamental.

[Let us never forget that the fundamental right is to live in peace without fear of persecution.]

- **What about sending our children into the Great Northwest? Will they be safe?**

Il faut que les parents puissent sans crainte laisser leurs enfants et adolescents voyager sur ces ferries.

[Parents must feel safe in allowing their children to travel on these ferries.]

- **What plans do you have for observing the New Year (1800)?**

Je veux garantir à mes électeurs qu'ils pourront profiter librement du passage à l'an 1800 sans crainte du lendemain.

[I wish to ensure that my constituents are free to enjoy the millennium without fearing the morning after.]

- **How secure was the transfer of your property to Gabriel Godfroy?**

Personnellement, j'ai toujours été d'avis que vous agissiez, dans le cadre de ces controverses, sans crainte ni parti pris.

[For my part, I have always believed that you act in those controversies without fear or favour.]

- **Have you any second thoughts about your place in history and the stories that might be told about you in future issues of GLEANINGS?**

Nous pouvons donc, sans crainte, poursuivre la poursuite de la recherche, source de progrès, en mettant des balises pour éviter tout abus.

[We need have no fears concerning research, which is a source of progress, as long as there are clear markers to prevent abuse.]

- **Merci, Monsieur Sanscrainte.**

Noticing how cleverly M. Sanscrainte has worked his name/motto into every reply to our queries, we can reasonably assume that he was immensely successful in his peltry business and made a handsome profit when he sold it to late-comer Gabriel Godfroy and his subsequent heirs by the same name.

(Tom Dodd was certified to teach French sixty-five years ago, but needed a great deal of outside help to pull together this story.)



Non-local banks think Frog Island is a Jimmy Buffet song.

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Mom's Clothesline

THE BASIC RULES

Authors unknown

1. You had to wash the clothes line before hanging any clothes - walk the entire length of each line with a damp cloth around the lines.
2. You had to hang the clothes in a certain order, always hang "whites" with "whites," and hang them first.
3. You never hang a shirt by the shoulders - always by the tail!. What would the neighbors think?
4. Wash day on Monday! Never hang clothes on the weekend, or Sunday, for Heaven's sake!
5. Hang the sheets and towels on the outside lines so you can hide your "unmentionables" in the middle (perverts & busybodies, y'know!)
6. It didn't matter if it was sub zero weather ... clothes would "freeze-dry."
7. Always gather the clothes pins when taking down dry clothes! Pins left on the lines were "tacky!"
8. If you were efficient, you would line the clothes up so that each item did not need two clothes pins, but shared one of the clothes pins with the next washed item.
9. Clothes off of the line before dinner time, neatly folded in the clothes basket and ready to be ironed.
10. IRONED?! Well, that's a whole n'other subject!

A POEM

A clothesline was a news forecast
To neighbors passing by,
There were no secrets you could keep
When clothes were hung to dry.

It also was a friendly link
For neighbors always knew
If company had stopped on by
To spend a night or two.

For then you'd see the "fancy sheets"
And towels upon the line;
You'd see the "company table cloths"
With intricate design.

The line announced a baby's birth
From folks who lived inside -
As brand new infant clothes were hung,
So carefully with pride!

The ages of the children could
So readily be known
By watching how the sizes changed,
You'd know how much they'd grown!

It also told when illness struck,
As extra sheets were hung;
Then nightclothes, and a bathrobe, too,
Haphazardly were strung.

It also said, "Gone on vacation now"
When lines hung limp and bare.
It told, "We're back!" when full lines sagged
With not an inch to spare!

New folks in town were scorned upon
If wash was dingy and gray,
As neighbors carefully raised their brows,
And looked the other way!

But clotheslines now are of the past,
For dryers make work much less.
Now what goes on inside a home
Is anybody's guess!

I really miss that way of life.
It was a friendly sign
When neighbors knew each other best
By what hung on the line.

Some things became "history"
without our even noticing:

Advertising dinosaurs from another age

WIVES.

Look this ad over carefully. Circle the items you want for Christmas. Show it to your husband. If he does not go to the store immediately, cry a little. Not a lot. Just a little. He'll go, he'll go.

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Husbands:
Look this ad over carefully. Pick out what your wife wants. Go buy it. Before she starts to cry.

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FREE for CHUBBIES

Fall and Winter Fashion Book full of charming Chubby-size Clothes

Girls' sizes 8½, 10½, 12½, 14½
Teen sizes 10½, 12½, 14½, 16½

It pictures the newest dresses, coats, suits, sweaters, underthings, skirts, blouses for girls and teens too chubby to fit into regular sizes (and everything is priced the same as "regular sizes").

Lane Bryant

From a painful collection of obsolete advertising. Who can remember what "nine out of ten doctors recommend"?

**GENE BUTMAN
FORD SALES**

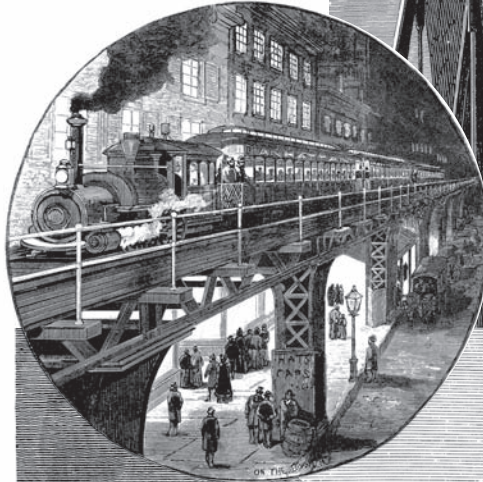


Ken Butman, Owner

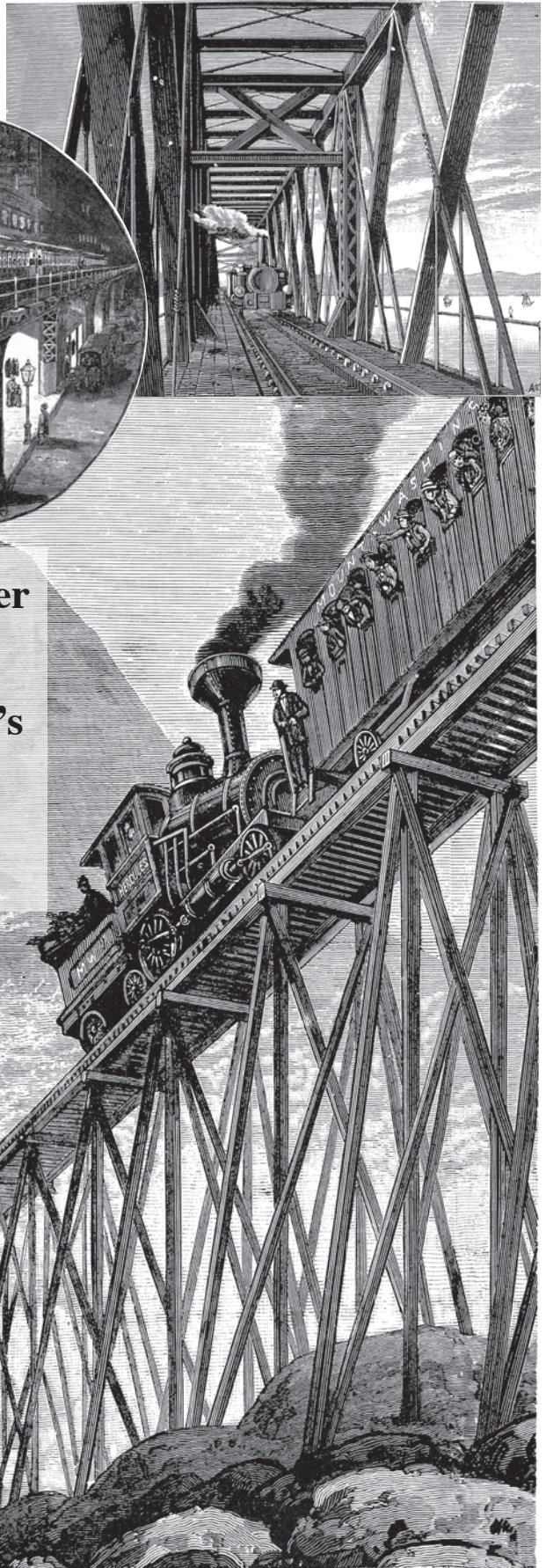
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1918



**Longer, higher
bridges were
being built,
but Ypsilanti's
downtown
bridge set
new records**



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Interurban bridge built in 120 hours

-from Electric Railway Service, by Detroit United Lines, April 19, 1918

via Ann Arbor's WYSTAN STEVENS



Above: Ypsilanti's 1918 bridge set new records for the industry. Right: Pile drivers c. 1918



A remarkable accomplishment in bridge and track construction has just been completed at Ypsilanti on our Detroit, Jackson & Chicago railway. In less than 120 hours a railroad bridge was built over the Huron River, and approximately 2,776 feet, or about eight blocks of track constructed and cars operated over the new span, re-establishing service between Detroit and Jackson, which was temporarily suspended because of the unsafeness of the concrete structure over the Huron River on Michigan avenue.

This bridge formerly served to accommodate both vehicular and pedestrian traffic. Due to recent floods the west abutment was undermined and washed away, thereby leaving it unsafe to carry the loads of our large type interurban cars.

Immediately after this bridge was pronounced unsafe by a bridge engineer of repute, steps were taken to detour to the south with tracks which also necessitated the construction of a new bridge. One might, from the very short time that was consumed in the construction of the bridge, form the opinion that it is a makeshift of the pontoon type; but the substantial character of the bridge is vividly shown by the photo which was taken the last few minutes that the Track Department bridge crews were engaged in putting on the finishing details. At the point where the new structure is built the Huron river is approximately 135 feet wide, which makes the bridge structure about 150 feet in length.

There were day and night forces of bridgemen engaged in this work; the night force being aided greatly by the use of several carbide lamps and clusters of electric lights, which attracted large crowds of curious spectators each night to the scene. The crews worked in 12-hour shifts, and the pile-driver that was utilized in driving the piles never ceased operating from the time the first pile was driven on Sunday night until the last pile was driven on the opposite side of the river, on Wednesday morning.

In laying the tracks on River, Race, Catherine and Washington streets several pieces of special work were required, which were fabricated in our shop, and delivered on the ground ready for installation within 30 hours after the order was given to the shop. A considerable amount of grading was necessary to carry the tracks on the proper level through the low lands adjacent to the river and south of Michigan avenue, where the branch-off was made from the main line.

There were approximately 100 men engaged each twenty-four-hour day in the work of constructing tracks and bridge. Nearly all of the material that was used in the laying of tracks and building of the bridge had to be loaded on flat cars at Detroit and hauled to Ypsilanti, a distance of thirty miles.

The Overhead Department set a new pole line and trolley for the entire new route in a very expeditious manner. The necessary signals were installed, and a derailer placed before the first regular car



operated over the bridge. The entire work was completed so that the first regular passenger car operated over the new route at 2:36 p.m. Friday, April 12th.

The bridgemen, trackmen, linemen, and all others who had anything to do with the work are deserving of much credit for the never-tiring manner in which they labored until the work was successfully completed.

Until the new bridge was completed we experienced considerable trouble in handling freight shipments for points west of Ypsilanti. Such shipments had to be transported across the old bridge by wagon and loaded onto freight cars. Now that the new bridge is in use through freight can be handled and rapid, excellent service again given to shippers.

A patchwork of facts to get us ready for the annual Quilt Show

READY, GET SET, SEW!

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Quilting may date back as far as ancient Egypt.

Early European quilts were introduced by Crusaders in the 12th century in the form of the *ake-ton* or *gambeson*, a quilted garment worn under armour which later evolved into the doublet.

One early decorative work is the "Tristan quilt", from around 1360.

Russia holds the oldest quilt extant. The quilted linen carpet was discovered in a Mongolian cave and may be seen at the Saint Petersburg department of the Rus-

sian Academy of Sciences, Archaeology Section.

Quilting was popular in America in the 18th and early 19th centuries. Women spun, wove, and sewed to clothe the family. Commercial blankets and coverlets were an economical bed-covering for most people.

Whole cloth quilts were made of a solid piece of fabric as the top.

Broderie perse had an applique of cut-out motifs from printed fabric sewn onto a solid background. Broderie Perse bedcoverings were used on "the best bed" or just for impressing

guests staying in the home.

Medallion quilts are made around a center. *Toile* or *Tree of Life* was an appliqued motif or a large pieced star or other pieced pattern. The central area was surrounded by two or more borders.

With the industrial revolution, women no longer spent time spinning and weaving to provide fabric for their family's needs

Quilts were made to raise funds to support the abolitionist movement then during the American Civil War. The patterns were much like those from mid-

century but the purpose was different.

Abolition quilts offered narratives of the terrible plight of slaves. "Conductors" of the Underground Railroad often sewed secret messages into their quilts. A log cabin design could signify a safe house.

The English Victorian influence was slow to catch on quickly in the United States.

Amish quilts show bold graphic designs, distinctive color combinations, and exceptional stitching. Quilts were often the only decoration in an Amish home.

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19th century solarium creates cozy respite

-By Lauren Carpenter, Ypsilanti Historical Society intern

A unique feature in the Asa Dow House is the Solarium. This south-facing room just off of the Library room was designed for the growing of house plants and for the comfort and enjoyment of the family living in the house. The slatted floor allowed both for the ease of watering the plants, and for their ventilation. A trap door in the ceiling of the sunroom could be opened to allow for cool air from below the floor to flow through the enclosed space on hot days.

House plants—and the sunrooms that were designed for them—were common in the mid- to late-nineteenth century in homes like the Dow House. Next time you visit the museum, be sure to look into the solarium to see the new plants that have been added, representing a greater variety of the kinds of house plants that were popular in the mid to late nineteenth century.

These varieties include tabletop **palms**, also called parlor palms, native to southern Mexico, and the **arrowhead vine**, native to South America. **Dracaenas** (dragon trees) added height and visual variety. The **peperomia**, native to Central and South America, produces white, cord-like spikes which rise above the heavily textured leaves.

The **Boston fern** and hanging **ivies** were also popular, as was the **snake plant**, the tall dark green succulent with sword-like leaves. These plants were also known as “mother-in-law tongue” presumably because of their sharp edges! The snake plant is native to western and southern Africa, and was introduced in Europe in the late 17th century. Their stately appearance and hardy nature made them a popular addition to the family solarium.

Another succulent, the **Christmas cactus** was widely available in the 1860s. Native to Brazil, it was introduced in England in 1818 and became widely used in both Britain and the United States. The Christmas cactus in the solarium is over 30 years old, and blooms two to three times during the winter months with deep pink flowers.

One can just imagine the soothing and peaceful atmosphere of a warm and sunny place to sit among the blooms and foliage during the cold Michigan winters.

The warm, moist air is as good for people as it is for the plants



Right: French doors lead from the library to the house museum's south-facing sun room



Tropical plants thrive along shelves above a slatted floor

Exotic plants from around the world

- Palms
- Dracaena
- Peperomia
- Ferns
- Vines
- Ivies
- Snake plant
- Christmas Cactus



A Boston Fern gets plenty of indirect light here



Ypsilanti GLEANINGS

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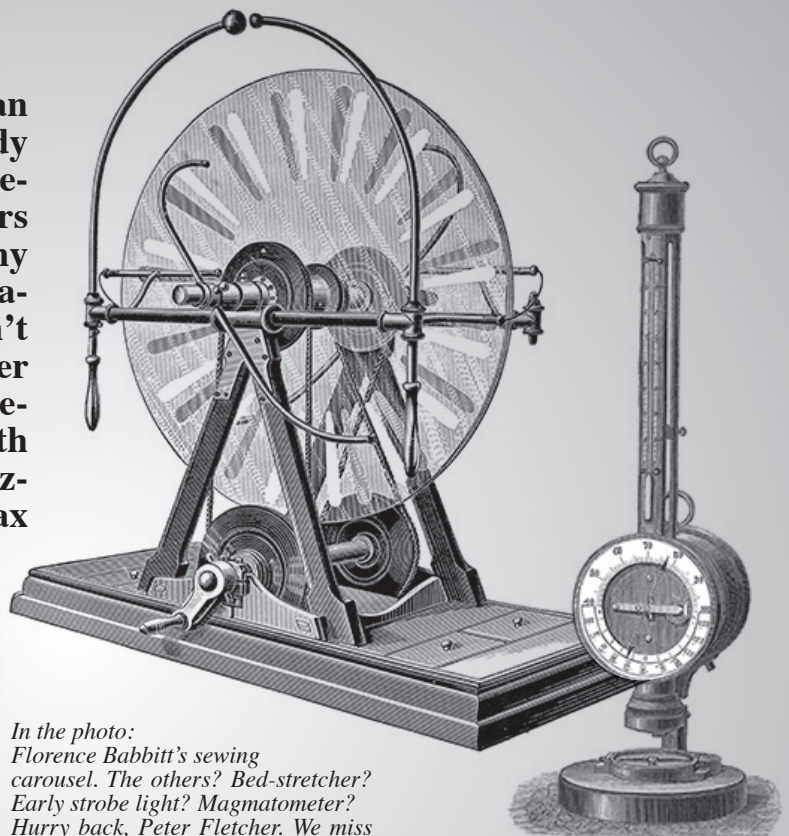
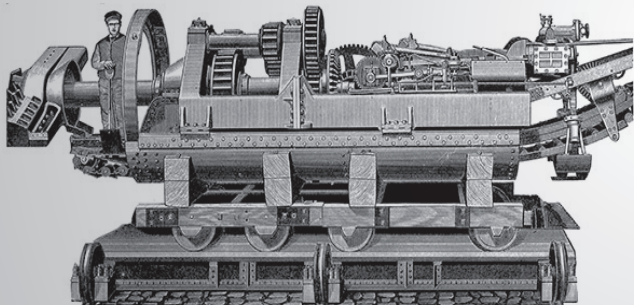
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Name that gadget!

Whats-its
in history



When this photo of an antique spool caddy showed up in the museum last spring, puzzlers puzzled. Those uncanny Victorians were outrageously creative. Don't be too perplexed. Peter Fletcher may soon return to these pages with whole new kinds of puzzles and quizzes to tax our brains.



*In the photo:
Florence Babbitt's sewing
carousel. The others? Bed-stretcher?
Early strobe light? Magmatometer?
Hurry back, Peter Fletcher. We miss
your quizzes in these pages!*