

# Ypsilanti GLEANINGS

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



SUMMER 2014

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An Ypsilanti City Hall meeting in 1950: (left to right) Robert Fink, Doris Milliman, Creston Meyers, Ance Damoose (City Manager), Daniel Quirk (Mayor), George Weins (City Attorney), Fred Greenstreet, Amos Washington and Carl Sheffler.

# The Damoose Family ... IN YPSILANTI ...

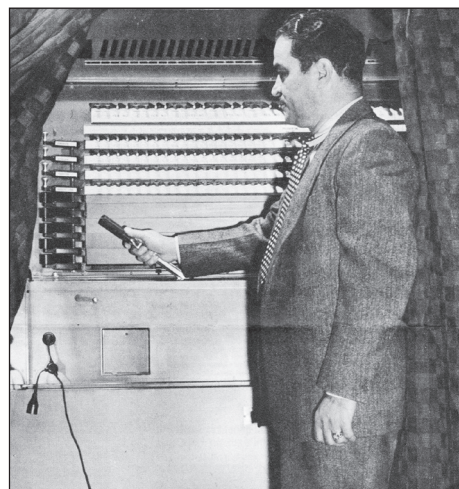
BY ALVIN E. RUDISILL

The City of Ypsilanti launched a new form of government in 1947 when Naseeb G. Damoose was hired as the first City Manager. Damoose had been recruited from the City of Battle Creek where he had served as Director of Public Works and City Engineer.

Damoose was 44 when he became Ypsilanti's City Manager. He was married and had three children, Marcia, Mary Lynne and John. His wife Camillia (Boone) Damoose was a descendant of the famed pioneer, Daniel Boone. Damoose had graduated from Central High School in Battle Creek in 1918 and

According to a report from that time Damoose's duties as City Manager in Ypsilanti would include:

*"insuring enforcement of laws and ordinances; supervising and managing all city utilities, public improvements and other facilities; preparing and administering the city budget; making recommendations to the City Council for adoptions of such measures as he deems necessary; acting as centralized purchasing agent for the city and personnel director for all city employees. He is also responsible for the operation of Beyer Hospital with specific responsibilities delegated to a hospital manager through a Board of Trustees."*



Naseeb G. "Ance" Damoose served for 7 ½ years, beginning in 1947, as Ypsilanti's first City Manager. Here he is shown in 1950 checking out the new voting machines.



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

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



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# From the PRESIDENT'S DESK

BY ALVIN E. RUDISILL

Our "PAY OFF THE MORTGAGE" campaign is in full swing and we expect to pay off the balance of the mortgage on the property at 220 North Huron Street in September of this year. The "Buy a Brick" campaign has netted over \$16,000, the yard sales at the Nickels home in Normal Park and the Rudisill home in College Heights have brought in over \$6,500, the Rotary Club of Ypsilanti donated \$1,000 and provided a challenge grant of \$4,000 (which has been matched), the Bank of Ann Arbor donated \$1,000, the Haabs Restaurant fundraiser brought in just under \$400 and the Kripps Family Foundation donated \$1,000.

We expect to sell bricks through August of this year so if you haven't bought a brick you still have time. Our fundraising will need to cover the cost of repairing the front limestone sidewalk in the front of the Museum and the installation of the bricks along each side of the walk. We thank all of you who have made financial donations and devoted your time and energy to this program.

Later this summer we plan to have a "Volunteer Maintenance Day" at the Museum to catch up on some needed yard and building maintenance. We will be emailing our local members and asking them to show up on a Saturday with some yard tools or paint brushes. The primary projects will be scraping and painting the handicapped ramp and working on the flower and bush beds around the Museum and Carriage House. We hope you will join us.

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 and 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 to serve as docents for the Museum or research assistants for the Archives. Both the Museum and Archives are open from 2:00 to 5:00 pm 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.

*(NOTE: Some of the information published in the Cub Berdan article in the Winter 2013 issue of the Gleanings was quoted from Jim McKinney's blog about Cub Berdan on the Michigan Fiddlers website. The blog can be viewed on the Internet at: <http://www.michiganfiddle.com/cub-berdan-overview-1>. The photo of Cub Berdan published in that article also came from Jim McKinney, who obtained it from Cub Berdan's granddaughter.)*



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

**For information about upcoming Society events, visit us online**

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

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from the University of Michigan in 1925 with a degree in Engineering. Later he attended Michigan State University and received a certificate in Bacteriology and Advanced Sanitary Engineering. In 1953 Damoose was presented with a Distinguished Alumni Award from the University of Michigan - College of Engineering.

His starting salary in Ypsilanti as City Manager was \$8,000 per year. Damoose served as Ypsilanti's City Manager from 1947 to 1955 when he accepted the position of City Manager for Traverse City. He had been a very popular and effective City Manager in Ypsilanti and the following resolution was passed by the Ypsilanti City Council upon receipt of his resignation:

*RESOLVED BY THE COUNCIL  
OF THE CITY OF YPSILANTI:*

*Whereas*, N. G. Damoose has accepted the office of City Manager of Traverse City, Michigan, and therefore tendered his resignation as City Manager, City Engineer and Purchasing Agent of the City of Ypsilanti, and

*Whereas*, he has been an outstanding city official for eight and one-half years and his efforts on behalf of the City of Ypsilanti have made a great contribution to the betterment of the entire community and its citizens; and

*Whereas*, through his diligent and conscientious efforts a substantial reduction in City Tax Rate was realized in addition to accomplishing a vast and much needed street improvement program and expansion of municipal services; and

*Whereas*, through his professional leadership he has brought honor and esteem to our official city family; and

*Whereas*, the welfare of his city has always been paramount to his mind – thus being an inspiration to not only his fellow workers, but his fellow citizens as well,

*Now, therefore, be it resolved that*, we officially record the gratitude and appreciation of the City Council and the entire community for the excellent and valued services rendered by N. G. Damoose for the past eight and one-half years and wish him and his family God-speed in their future endeavors.

*Further*, that a copy of this resolution be forwarded to the City of Traverse City, Michigan.

*Mayor Rodney E. Hutchinson*

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“Ance” Damoose died unexpectedly in 1967 from an apparent heart attack. He was 65 at the time and still held the position of City Manager of the City of Battle Creek. His wife Camilla had gone to visit her mother in the hospital and when she returned home she found “Ance” unresponsive in a chair in the living room. He had suffered a minor heart attack three years earlier but had fully recovered and returned to his job just three weeks later.

In 1969 a wishing well was dedicated in Traverse City Clinch Park in memory of N. G. “Ance” Damoose. Funds to construct the well were raised by friends of the Damoose family and contributions thrown into the well serve as a living memorial, with funds going to improvements for Clinch Park and the Traverse City Zoo. The plaque on the wishing well reads, *“In memory of dedicated and dynamic city manager ‘Ance’ Damoose.”*

“Ance” was very proud of his heritage. His parents came to the United States from Syria in 1900. He was one of five children and was the first in the Damoose family to graduate from college. He was also very proud of his three children who all earned college degrees; Marcia a Bachelor’s Degree from Eastern Michigan University, Mary Lynne a Bachelor’s and Master’s Degrees from the University of Michigan, and John a Bachelor’s Degree from the University of Michigan and a Master’s Degree from Columbia University. Marcia remained in Ypsilanti and became



Ypsilanti City Manager “Ance” Damoose with his wife Camilla (center) and Betty Fenker (right) who served as Ypsilanti City Clerk.

a community leader in a wide variety of organizations. Mary Lynne became a leader in the Shaker Heights Schools program that has been widely emulated all over the United States and John’s career was with the automotive industry. He was brought to Chrysler from Ford Motor Company by Lee Iacocca and was Vice President of Marketing.

After “Ance” Damoose passed away, his wife Camilla moved back to Ypsilanti to be near her daughter Marcia (Damoose) Harrison and her son John who was a senior at the University of Michigan. Before her marriage, Camilla Da-

moose spent summers in stock theaters and taught drama to a wide variety of students. She had graduated from the Northwestern University School of Speech and played opposite stars Miriam Hopkins, Joe E. Brown and Margaret O’Brian in stock companies throughout the United States. She toured with Chautauqua and taught acting at Interlochen. When she first moved to Ypsilanti she found that the Ypsilanti Civic Players group started by D. L. Quirk had declined. She reestablished the group and remained active in their activities for ten years. She was active in many Ypsilanti groups and became involved in activities such as directing the Beyer Hospital Auxiliary in a Christmas Tea Skit. She was a member of the Ladies Literary Club and each year produced a play for Drama Day using members as actors. Camilla passed away in 1992 at the age of 86 from Alzheimer’s complications.



“Ance” Damoose served as the City Manager in Traverse City from 1956 to 1964. In 1969 a Wishing Well was dedicated to his memory in Clinch Park. (L to R) Traverse City Mayor Nick J. Rajkovich, John Damoose (son of Ance Damoose), Camilla Damoose (widow of Ance Damoose) and Traverse City Commissioner A. R. Jacobs.

Marcia (Damoose) Harrison has been a resident of Ypsilanti since she was ten



Marcia (Damoose) Harrison was awarded a Distinguished Service Award in 1991 by the Ypsilanti Area Chamber of Commerce for her dedicated involvement in community groups and projects.

years old. After receiving her Bachelor's Degree she held a variety of jobs at Cleary College, Washtenaw Community College, Wilson Learning Corporation and Eastern Michigan University. In addition, she has served on many volunteer boards including the Ypsilanti Board of Education, Washtenaw Community College Board of Trustees, Ann Arbor Convention and Visitors Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, PCHA Board of Directors, Gilbert Residence, Citizens Bank and the Heritage Festival.

In a 1988 article in the Ann Arbor News, Sioux Shelton of the Break-away Travel Agency is quoted as follows: *"Marcia is the most dedicated volunteer that I have ever, ever seen, and I've known many, many volunteers. She absolutely doesn't know how to say no. She's wonderful and you can depend on her. She's done everything."*

In 1991, while Marcia served as the Director of the EMU Corporate Education Center, the Ypsilanti Chamber of Commerce selected her to receive the 1991 Distinguished Service Award. A community profile in the Ann Arbor News indicated that *"While Marcia has enjoyed her commitment to historic, education, political and service oriented groups, her first and greatest joy comes from her relationship with her three sons John, Tom and Scott, her "Greatest Accomplishments."*

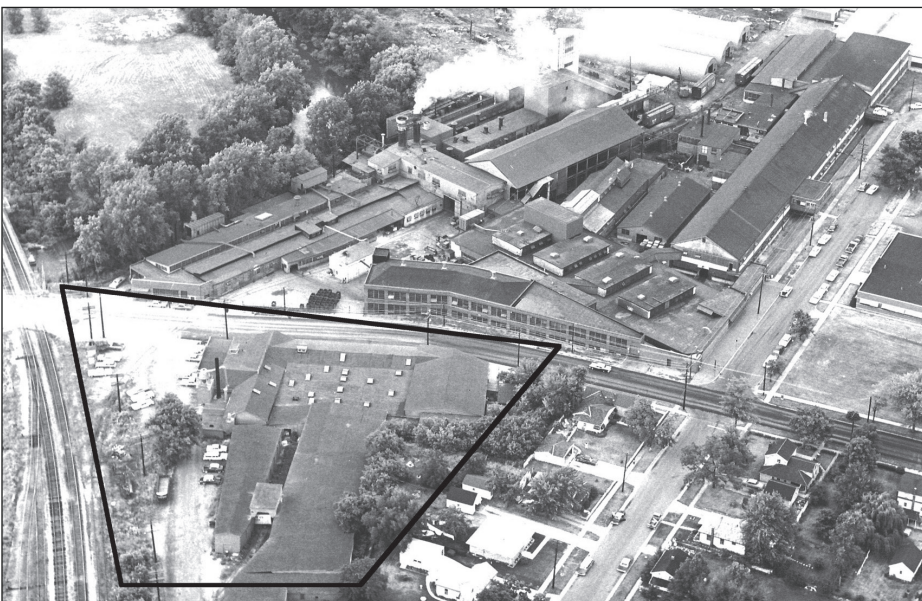
Marcia's sons John, Tom and Scott grew up in Ypsilanti, attended Ypsilanti public schools and graduated from Ypsilanti High School. John, the oldest of the three graduated from the University of Michigan and became a fighter pilot in the United States Air Force. He is now a pilot with Delta Airlines. Scott graduated from Purdue University and



The Michigan Ladder Company is owned and operated by Tom Harrison.

is a Senior Account Director at TMV Group, an advertising agency in Royal Oak, Michigan. Tom received a Bachelor's Degree from Michigan State University and an MBA from the University of Michigan. In 2005, after living and traveling abroad as the Managing Director of Carhartt Europe, he became CEO of the Michigan Ladder Company. The Depot Town location of the Ladder Company dates back to 1901. Tom took over the leadership of the Ladder Company when Robert Nissly, a member of the family that owned the company since the early 1920s, decided to retire. Although the company still builds the traditional wooden ladders they have expanded the business and are producing fiberglass ladders in addition to other products. Marcia volunteers daily and Tom's wife Gina, serves as the Marketing Director for the company. Thus the family tradition of Michigan Ladder continues.

*(Al Rudisill is the President of the Ypsilanti Historical Society and serves as the Editor of the Gleanings.)*



This is an aerial view the Michigan Ladder Company (within the outline) in July of 1965 with Motor Wheel Corporation in full operation across Forest Avenue.

# The River Street Saga Continues: Benjamin & Elvira Norris Follett

BY JAN ANSCHUETZ

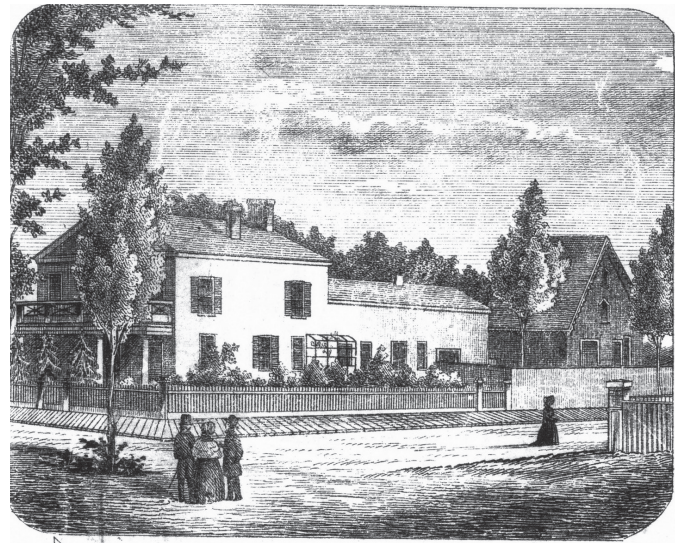
In the Spring 2014 issue of the Gleanings we met Mark and Roccena Vail Norris who were described as the “parents of Depot Town.” They were also the parents of two children: Elvira and Lyman Decatur. In this installment of “The River Street Saga” we will learn more about Elvira, her life, her family (including her amazing husband, Benjamin Follett), and their own influence on the growing town of Ypsilanti in the nineteenth century.

We can only imagine the challenging life of Elvira, who was born in a log cabin on January 22, 1821 in Covington, New York. When she was only seven years old, the Norris family made the grueling trip from New York State to a sparsely settled wilderness lacking any degree of civilization – a place without a church, organized town council, roads, mills, or even a name. Mark and Roccena soon helped to change that and contributed greatly to making Ypsilanti a community in which people wanted to live - complete with a town organization, a railroad, laws, schools, churches, cultural opportunities, a library, stores, mills, and beautiful homes.



Mark Norris Follett (named for his grandfather) who died at six years old.

For the first year of their arrival, the Norris family lived behind a storefront at what is now the southwest corner of Michigan Avenue and Washington Street. This cramped space did not stop Elvira’s mother from teaching children of the settlement in one of the four rooms that the family shared. Roccena was dismayed that there was no place for religious instruction or worship and quickly organized a Sunday School for all ages that met in a log cabin each week and would also welcome circuit riders to preach when possible. The Norris home was always available to offer hospitality to visiting preachers.



The Follett residence as featured in the Washtenaw County Plat Map publication in 1856 and 1864.

The following year, the small family was able to move into the first sawn wood-frame home east of the Huron River, and within a few years was living in a brick mansion which was originally built for Roccena’s uncle. When her uncle was unable to move into it, Mark and Roccena purchased the unfinished structure from him for \$1,000. It was in this eight bedroom mini-mansion on River Street that Elvira and her brother spent their childhood. Aside from the years 1834 to 1836 when she attended a celebrated all girls finishing school in Detroit, Elvira received her entire education in Ypsilanti.

Elvira grew up accustomed to fine gowns, a beautiful home complete with gardens, and indulgent parents. She had friends, a church community, and charitable activities to keep her occupied, and enjoyed the status of being a part of one of the wealthiest families in Washtenaw County due to her father’s ambition and hard work. She was brought up to cherish reading and education and the finer things in life. Her brother spoke of Elvira’s education in a life sketch he prepared for Elvira’s funeral. Speaking of his own childhood home on River Street he stated

*“...the pioneer home was perhaps a better school for life and its duties than most of our modern young ladies’ seminaries. In that home, heart, mind and soul were trained into symmetry and strength. That hospitable roof sheltered more than one guest, from which the family gained more than they gave. The ‘prophet’s chamber’ was seldom vacant in their day, when the traveler was forced to rely upon private hospitality for entertainment*

by the way, and the growing girl may have learned much of that breadth of broad-gauge sympathy with all classes and conditions, which she displayed in later years, from this contact with the men and women of many types, which the exigencies of those pioneer times brought to the door.”

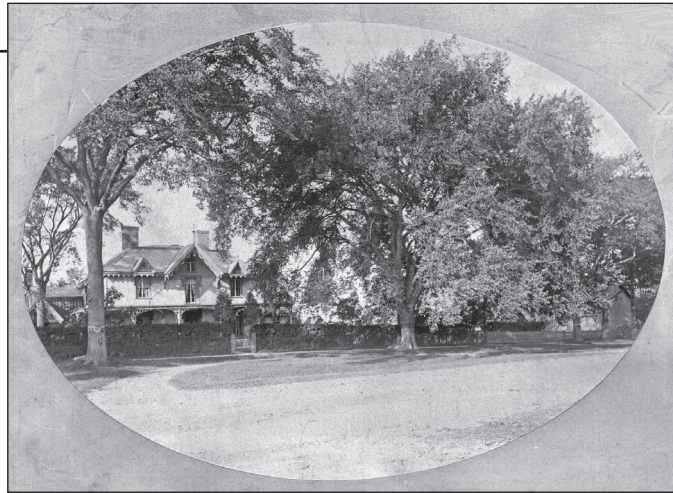
Mark Norris, Elvira’s father, was from a large family with 14 children and many of Elvira’s uncles and aunts on both sides

of her family moved into the community. One of her uncles, Justus Norris, who lived nearby and ran her father’s Western Hotel on River Street, was a noted and outspoken abolitionist in Washtenaw County. More will be written about him in another segment of “The River Street Saga.”

Elvira’s maternal grandmother moved from New York State to enjoy living on the Huron River in their fine house. It was not unusual for Elvira and her mother to travel back to New York by train or ship to visit family there or to enjoy some of the “cures” offered at that time in various spas. On one such trip, she arrived home at the train station in Depot Town only to have her father meet his beloved wife and daughter in a beautiful new carriage pulled by two matching and elegant horses which delivered them to the family home one block away. There, another surprise awaited them - a new grand piano in the parlor.

You might imagine that it would be difficult for a young woman brought up in luxury to find a suitable husband in the frontier town of Ypsilanti, but somehow the right man was waiting for her, living only a few blocks away. Benjamin Follett, who would wed Elvira, seemed the perfect match. He too had been born in New York State, where his father had been a store owner as had Elvira’s father when they lived in New York. Benjamin’s parents were Nathan and Nancy Keith Follett. Prior to marrying Nathan, Nancy Keith was a young widow with two children of her own. When they were married in Canandaigua, New York in 1818, the young couple was admired for their handsome appearance. Benjamin was born the next year in 1819.

Nathan owned a hat store and was also a successful businessman. The family lived in Batavia, New York, and was comprised of Benjamin (who was the oldest) along with Nancy Keith’s two children from her first marriage. In a family paper written by Roy K. Spencer, we learn that Nathan built a hat factory and was also a banker. *“For many years he was one of Batavia’s most prominent citizens. He was repeatedly elected to the most important posts*



The Follett House c1870.

in Batavia’s village government, he was vestryman of the Episcopal Church, and he became one of the wealthiest men in Batavia.”

Benjamin grew up in a large and luxurious home with servants, some of whom were once slaves on the Virginian plantation on which his mother grew up. His mother and father were adamant abolitionists and when they inherited the plantation they

freed the slaves, sold the property, and moved north to a state that did not allow slavery. Some of their former slaves moved with them and became paid servants. We read that Benjamin’s childhood home was always filled with the pets that his father Nathan loved including dogs, cats and birds. Sadly, this happy family life came to an end with the death of a child in infancy and the death of Nathan’s young and beautiful wife. Nathan married again a few years later to a first cousin and they had three more children before she also died.

Perhaps because of an anti-Mason sentiment in New York at the time, or perhaps because Benjamin simply wanted to “go west and seek his fortune” as many young men were advised to do, he arrived in Ypsilanti as a young man. We do know that Benjamin Follett was first mentioned in the written history of Ypsilanti at the age of 19, in the year 1836. At that time he was employed as a cashier for the Bank of Ypsilanti. In T. H. Rinchman’s book *Banks and Banking in Michigan with Historical Sketches*, published in 1887, Follett is described as “a worthy, conscientious and competent young banker.”

Mark Norris was a major stock holder in the Bank of Ypsilanti and we can only guess that Mark and Roccena invited this eligible young bachelor with a good character, family, and prospects into their home to meet their young daughter from a similar background. We do know that by 1841, after the failure of the Bank of Ypsilanti in the “Wild-cat Schemes” of the time, Benjamin had returned to Batavia, New York to work as a bank cashier and to be closer to his family. It was there that he sent for and married Elvira on September 23, 1841. The young couple lived in that community for two years even though Elvira missed her family and friends in Ypsilanti. Letters from her father found in the Ypsilanti Historical Museum archives, which counseled her to try to make the best of her new community and to always speak positively of the people of Batavia, seem to suggest that Elvira was not happy living away from her River Street home.

It seems that Mark and Roccena also missed the company of their daughter and Mark might have influenced their return to Ypsilanti by offering his son-in-law partnership in a mill. Perhaps the “icing on the cake” was building and gifting them a spacious, elegant, and charming new home on the east side of River Street, between Oak and Maple Streets, just three blocks away from Elvira’s childhood home. In 1843, after two years in New York, the young couple returned home. We read in Sister Maria Hayda’s book *The Urban Dimension and the Midwestern Frontier, A Study of Democracy at Ypsilanti Michigan, 1825-1858* that “Benjamin Follett possessed relatively large amounts of capital from his own family resources in New York” which he was ready to invest in Ypsilanti. In fact, tax records from the 1850 federal census cite him as owning \$27,000 worth of real estate and he was estimated to be the fifth wealthiest citizen in town.

The partnership with his father-in-law sharing the ownership of a mill did not work out. It seems that Benjamin was not a successful miller and within a few years had returned to banking and financing. He also spent time and energy investing in railroads, building and running a fine hotel, investing in a store, two mills, and other ventures. Benjamin had a gift for leadership and soon became a pillar of Ypsilanti life, influencing its development. Like his father before him, he believed in giving back to the community and sharing his time for the good of the people of the growing town. In 1860, Benjamin was elected Ypsilanti’s third mayor. As such, he helped to organize the first fire department and paid for the fire equipment out of his own money. Later he served on the city council and was active in the Democratic Party. He was an active member of St. Luke’s parish and served on the building committee for a new church. Benjamin partnered in a land deal which added a vast amount of area to the city of Ypsilanti. He influenced city lead-



Nathan Follett

ers into building the first city hall and jail on Cross Street on the east side near Depot Town. Benjamin was one of the founding members of the Masonic Wyandotte Lodge Number 10, and built their headquarters in what is now known as the three-story Masonic Block on Cross Street in Depot Town.

Benjamin invested heavily in the growing Depot Town area by financing and building a lavish hotel in 1859 which is still standing and bears his name as The Follett Block. Not only that, but this amazing, energetic, and imaginative man also organized and led a choir which regularly sang and entertained the community in Follett Hall located in the building. His business interests extended to the Peninsular Paper Company, the Farmer’s General Store, the Eagle Mill, the Huron Mill, as well as other business undertakings.

Benjamin’s father Nathan moved to Ypsilanti in the year 1849. Nathan was only 50 years old at the time of his second wife’s death. He had 5 children to raise alone and his financial status, as well as his personal life in New York State, quickly nose-dived when three friends for which he had signed promissory notes defaulted. That left Nathan responsible for their debts, which amounted to a large sum of money. Spencer tells us that “saddened by the death of his wife and disillusioned by

the conduct of his alleged friends, he packed his furniture into a railroad freight car, took his numerous family, consisting of his four daughters and the two children of Nancy, whose husband had died a few years after marriage to settle in Ypsilanti, Michigan, where his son, Benjamin, was an active and successful citizen.” Nathan also brought four or five servants with him but they soon tired of the “wild west” of Ypsilanti and returned to the “more civilized” New York.

Nathan was able to reclaim his role as a community leader in his new town of Ypsilanti. He purchased the stone house across from the Quirk mansion on North Huron Street and had enough capital to buy and run two successful flour mills in town. He joined his son Benjamin in becoming an active member of the Episcopal Church and was remembered as a man who, like his son, lived his Christian religion with kind regard for all. An example of this was his interest in the education and promotion of a young black man, John Fox. Nathan hired him to do minor clerical work but paid him well enough so that he was able to study law and be admitted to the bar. Indeed, this liberal attitude that all people were equal seemed to be extended to his son Benjamin who was rumored to aid escaped slaves.

While Benjamin, his father, and father-in-law were busy making money as the town of Ypsilanti expanded, Benjamin and Elvira’s family expanded as well. They had seven children, five sons and two daughters, to fill their large home and their hearts. The oldest daughter, Alice, was born in 1844. Another daughter, Lucy Elvira, followed in 1847. A son, Nathan, was born in 1849 and another boy, Lyman Decatur, in 1851. Benjamin was born in 1854. Mark Norris was born in 1858 and his brother Simeon Keith, born in 1860, completed the family.

Elvira’s widowed aunt, Mrs. Blackmon, sister of her mother, came to live



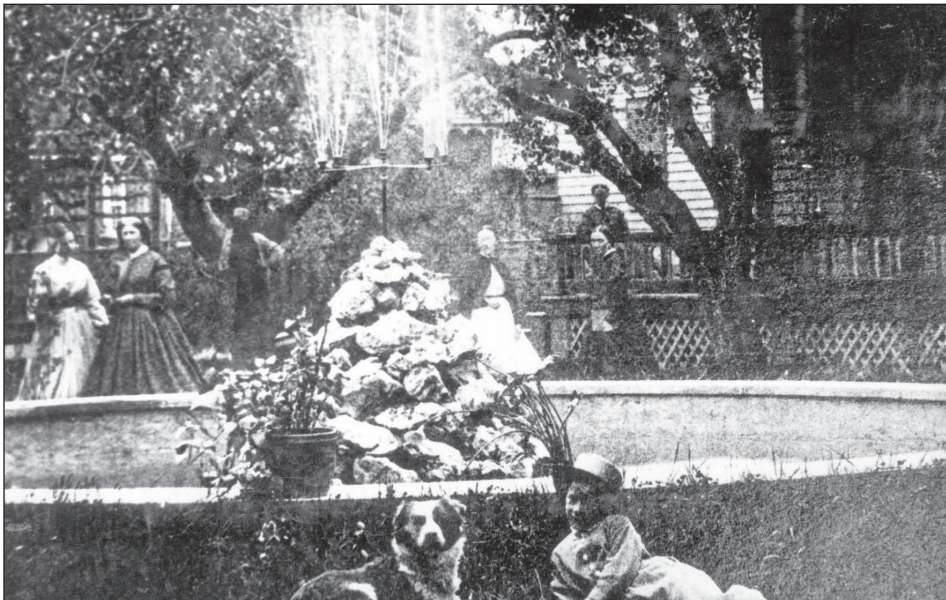
with the family soon after they moved into their River Street home and became a second mother to the children. Lyman Norris tells us "For thirty years this good aunt remained with them, leaving this home only for an eternal one. During all these years, she bestowed upon Mrs. Follett and her children all the love and care of her motherly heart. Her presence made it possible for Mrs. Follett to enter more into outside affairs than she could otherwise have done; to take many journeys, longer and shorter, with her husband; and to assist him more freely in that large hospitality which he so enjoyed."

A photograph of happy children, dogs, flowers, grass, and a fountain in front of their charming house on River Street gives us the impression that Elvira and Benjamin were well rewarded for their work ethic. In *The History of Ypsilanti*, written in 1923 by Harvey Colburn, this River Street mansion is described as follows: "The beautiful Follett home was for years one of the show places of the city. It was situated on River Street in a grove of oak trees extending from Oak Street to Maple, a great rambling structure with big bay windows. The surrounding grounds were extensive,

*brilliant with flowers, and adorned by a large fountain fed by a windmill standing on the hill above."* The home was the first in Ypsilanti illuminated by gas lights. People came from miles around just to admire the barn which was considered one of the finest in Michigan, if not in the country.

Benjamin and Elvira, though busy with their family and life in Ypsilanti, also enjoyed traveling. In 1853 the young couple, along with her parents and brother, took a vacation which included visiting Montreal, Bellows Falls, New Haven and New York. In her letters we read that Elvira thought that traveling and adventure were important to further her education and life views. She was also interested in a healthy life style and one of her favorite excursions was to visit the water cure at Elmira, New York, sometimes staying there for several months. Her youngest two children were born there.

Elvira also had a serious side. Like her mother, she was dedicated to helping to improve the community. She was a life-long member of The Home Association, which she helped to organize in 1857 and later served on the board and as an officer. This was a group of wom-



The Follett Residence in c1870.





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en from various churches, who attempted to make the lives of the poor and destitute of the community better in any way that they could – providing food, transportation, clothes, and even firewood.

For many years she was one of the vice-presidents of the Detroit Home for the Friendless and her organizational and interpersonal skills helped to form the agency and its policies. She shared her mother's love of reading and was the first president of The Ypsilanti Ladies' Library Association. Her brother commented that *"the influence of this valuable Library Association upon the mental growth and culture of the town has been very great; and she was one of the most indefatigable of the body of intelligent, cultured women, to whose labors the library owes its continued success."*

Alas, the lives of this energetic, active, happy, and productive couple changed. First Elvira's father Mark Norris died in 1862 after an extended and painful illness. The next year, in 1863, his namesake, their six year old son, Mark Norris Follett, died suddenly of diphtheria. After that, things only seemed to get worse. Benjamin Follett was one of the founders of the beautiful Highland Cemetery on River Street which was dedicated in 1864. Little did he know that only four months after making one of the speeches at the opening ceremony, he, himself would be buried there. It seems that he attended the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, leaving in good health and then on September 1<sup>st</sup> he was stricken with coughing and hemorrhaging of the lungs and conveyed back to his River Street home and family. In a letter written to her grandmother in late 1864, daughter Alice stated *"Father gains very slowly and coughs a good deal. Dr. (sic) was here and insisted there is no tubercular disease of the lungs. He does not want him to go away for all winter but wants him to visit and be away from all worrying business. It seems*

Benjamin Follett was one of the founders of the beautiful Highland Cemetery on River Street which was dedicated in 1864. Little did he know that only four months after making one of the speeches at the opening ceremony, he, himself would be buried there.

Benjamin Follett.

*very slow and discouraging."* Benjamin and Elvira followed the doctor's orders and left for the water cures they had often taken at Elmira, New York. The night before they left they gathered their family around them in prayer. Benjamin also met with the pastor of his beloved church and placed in his hands a discharge of mortgage for the new church and parsonage, stating that he couldn't leave the earth without doing this. He had paid the remaining amount of the mortgage with his own funds.

The doctors at Elmira offered him little hope and told him that he would die soon. He accepted this calmly but said that he wished to live. His entire family traveled to New York and was with him when he died on December 26, 1864 at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, offering prayers and comfort. He was only forty-five years old. He was so well-loved and respected in Ypsilanti that when the train carrying his body home for burial arrived at the depot a few days later, a crowd was waiting to welcome him home, including formal delegates from the city, friends, townspeople, and representations of organizations and businesses.

The young Benjamin lay in state in the

parlor of his beautiful home the next day from nine in the morning until one in the afternoon and it was reported in his obituary in *The Ypsilanti True Democrat* that there was *"a constant throng of visitors to see the corpse. Dressed in his business suit he looked natural as if he had quietly gone to sleep."* At one in the afternoon the remains were then escorted to St. Luke's Episcopal Church on North Huron Street, which he loved so well. The funeral sermon described him as a true Christian man who daily lived his religious with honesty, generosity, and love for all men. From the church the long funeral procession brought the body of Benjamin Follett back to his beloved River Street where it remains to this day at Highland Cemetery, now surrounded by the remains of his loving wife Elvira and much of his family.

Elvira was left to raise six children, which she did with the help of her aunt. Death visited the River Street mansion again within the year when daughter Lucy died at the age of 18. Elvira's oldest daughter, Alice, married in May, 1865 and one by one, the Follett children grew and left home. Elvira, often in the company of her mother, continued to be active in community endeavors. She also was able to enjoy travel and adventure and in 1873, accompanied by her son, L.D. Follett, went out west to visit her two sons, Nathan and Benjamin, who were living as pioneers on a ranch in Fort Collins, Colorado. Elvira's health was not good at this time, but she thought that the change of climate might be helpful. While in Colorado, she ventured into the mountains for campouts of three or four days with her sons and returned in good spirits believing that the adventure had much improved her body and her spirits. Her letters to friends reflected her joy in anticipating trips and also in returning from them.



In 1876, Elvira's mother, Roccena Norris, died a painful death following a long illness, and the next year, 1877, her aunt, Mrs. Blackmon, who had been a second mother to the Follett children and lived with them, also died. Unfortunately Elvira's health was on a decline and she spent less and less time at her own beloved home, which she refused to move from, and more of it with her children in Grand Rapids, Detroit, and even Kansas, but she returned to her home on River Street to live out her last days.

Even though she was an invalid, suffering with pain, the last four years of her life were blessed. Her children and grandchildren often came to stay with her, and her River Street mansion again came alive with lively conversation and children's laughter and games. She continued to enjoy reading, learning, and reflecting on her well-lived life. Thinking that death was near, all of her children were summoned to their childhood home on River Street in late summer, 1884. However Elvira seemed to have rallied from the visit and they left back to their own homes. Shortly after that, Elvira caught a chill and died on September 10, 1884. She was 63 years old. After a well-attended viewing at the home and funeral at St. Luke's, her brother Lyman so eloquently stated *"The weary, pain*



(left to right) Mrs. Mark Norris, Mrs. Benjamin Follett, Lucy Uhl and Mrs. Ed. Uhl.

*racked body was laid to rest beside that of the husband of her youth, in beautiful 'Highland Cemetery', which now crowns the hill that overlooks the valley of the Huron, and where in the month of June, 1828, she and her mother caught the first glimpse of the home they afterwards came to know and love for almost half a century."* Elvira returned to River Street to rest for eternity.

And what of the beautiful mansion that was once the crown jewel of Ypsilanti? Part of it still remains, a shadow of the glory that it once was. The "gymnasium" of the Benjamin Follett estate on River Street was purchased in 1861

by Charles Woodard and moved to 301 Grove Street. He converted it to a residence and added a two story wing in 1863. The Woodard family lived in the home for almost a century. Unfortunately, the home and property were on a decline when purchased in 1980 by Joseph Mattimoe and Henry Prebys who have lovingly restored, improved, and turned the homes and gardens into another east side showplace. The barn had burned down, and after the death of Elvira, the house and garden were untended. In 1904, Shelly Hutchinson, who had grown up across the street from it, purchased the home and land to use for gardens to glorify the mansion that he was having built on River Street between Forest and Oak Street.

Though the Follett mansion is gone, the legacy of Benjamin and Elvira Norris Follett lives on in other structures - the Follett and Masonic Blocks are an integral part of Depot Town. Take a walk down Cross Street in Depot Town and feel their presence in the love, vitality, and hope that this generous couple bequeathed to Ypsilanti, Michigan.

*(Jan Anschuetz is a long time member of the Ypsilanti Historical Society and a regular contributor to the Gleanings.)*



The "gymnasium" of the Benjamin Follett estate on River Street was purchased in 1861 by Charles Woodard and moved to 301 Grove Street. He converted it to a residence and added a two story wing in 1863.



East Cross Street looking west in c1859. The Follett Block is on the right side of the street.



# NORVAL HAWKINS:

## *The Greatest Salesman in the World*

BY JAMES MANN

Henry Ford called Hawkins his  
"MILLION DOLLAR A YEAR MAN."

Norval Hawkins is said to have been the greatest salesman in the history of the Ford Motor Company. A native of Ypsilanti, Norval Hawkins was born July 10, 1867, the son of Walter H. Hawkins and Satatira Welch Hawkins. His grandfather was Abiel Hawkins who was the founder of the Hawkins House Hotel. Norval Hawkins attended Ypsilanti High School and Cleary Business College, and moved to Detroit in about 1885. Although he would live most of the rest of his life in Detroit, he always considered Ypsilanti his home and visited often.

He married Mabel Roberts on September 27, 1893. The couple had no children. Hawkins was convicted of embezzling \$3,000, and sent to prison. *The Ypsilanti Commercial* of October 9, 1896 reported his father-in-law, Col. T. R. Roberts, had pleaded for his release before the State Pardon Board. He was pardoned in December of 1896 and went to work for Buffington & Company of New York who made shirts.

Hawkins joined the Ford Motor Company in 1907 where he set up a time-cost study. *"But the toilsome record-keeping of the cost-accounting systems he installed initially was a bureaucrat's heaven and production man's hell, and the later is where much of it went,"* wrote Charles

Sorensen in his autobiography, *My Forty Years With Ford*.

*"Under Hawkins's cost-time study,"* wrote Sorensen, *"a part such as a piston entered production bearing a ticket which covered every operation. If ten operations were involved, an entry was made on the ticket after*

In December of 1907  
Hawkins was named  
General Sales  
Manager, a post he  
would hold for the  
next eleven years.

*each stage before proceeding to the next one. If one piston was lost in the move, all progress stopped until the missing piece could be found and accounted for. The time consumed in each operation was computed in lots of 100 or more, and results were tabulated on a card file which ultimately*

*found its way back to the foreman so that he might check timing at each stage. Not only did the process mean delay from one operation to another, but when a motor assembler couldn't get pistons, all car production was held up."*

On a Sunday morning Henry Ford and Sorenson entered the record room Hawkins had set up, where file drawer after file drawer was filled with cards and tickets. The two pulled each drawer out and turned it over so the contents spilled out onto the floor. They left the office in a shambles. That was the end of Hawkins cost-accounting system.

In December of 1907 Hawkins was named General Sales Manager, a post he would hold for the next eleven years. *"The year before Hawkins became the company's sales manager,"* noted The Detroit News of Wednesday, August 19, 1936, *"6,181 cars were marketed, while there were only eight small sales branches with a few hundred dealers. Under his administration, the sales and assembly plants increased to 86, and the dealers organization to nearly 11,000...during the 11 years that Mr. Hawkins was sales manager of the company, despite the repeated multiplication of factory space and enormously augmented manufacturing equipment, it was said the company had never built a car that was not already sold far in advance of its production."*

When sales agents expressed concerns their territory could not sell a dozen cars a year, Hawkins would have the agent drive him about the territory and, in a single afternoon, sell a dozen cars to farmers and townspeople. He then turned the sales over to the agent. During the year 1915, the Ford Motor Company sold 300,000 cars,

**Hawkins filed for  
bankruptcy in November  
of 1935, with liabilities  
at \$350,377.46 and  
assets of \$293.45.**

**He had made a fortune  
which he had lost during  
the bank crash of 1933.**

and, it is said, Henry Ford called Hawkins his, *"Million Dollar a Year Man."* Hawkins did not like glass partitions between dealer show rooms and their repair shops. They reminded buyers of expensive repair bills. He also did not like advertising for anti-skid chains, they made buyers think of accidents.

Hawkins went into the hospital in September of 1913 because of appendicitis. *"In the hospital,"* noted The Detroit News, *"he found some things that were annoying to a sick man. For instance, the chair in his room when moved, made a harsh sound on the bare floor, and he thought it ought to be rubber-tipped. Why, he wanted to know, weren't these and other needed improvements made?"* The reason, he was told, was because there was no money. The day Hawkins left the hospital he raised \$55,000 for

the improvements he felt the hospital should have.

Hawkins left the Ford Motor Company in 1919 and joined General Motors in 1921, with a reported salary of \$150,000 a year. He left General Motors in 1923 to return to the accounting business. He also wrote books on how to achieve success in business. Two of his books, *"The Selling Process"* and *"Certain Success,"* sold over 80,000 copies.

Hawkins filed for bankruptcy in November of 1935, with liabilities at \$350,377.46 and assets of \$293.45. He had made a fortune which he had lost during the bank crash of 1933. *"Every one of the obligations I owed the Detroit banks,"* he explained, *"was secured by collateral consisting of shares of stock in Detroit banks and trust companies. Practically everything I possessed was tied up in those stocks. When the crash came,"* he said *"it wiped me out."*

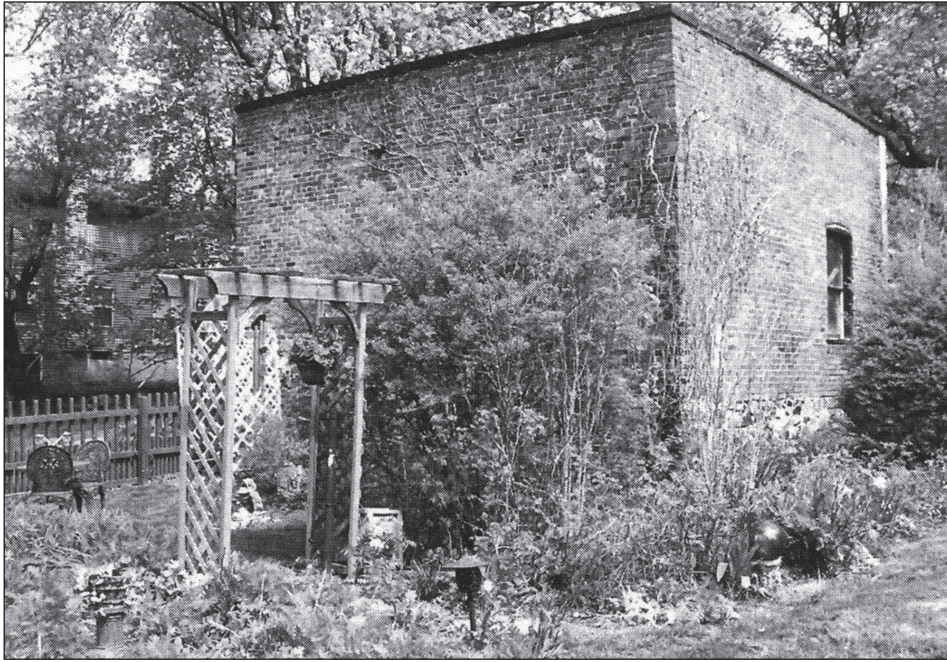
Norval Hawkins died at his home in Detroit on August 18, 1936, at the age of 69. His wife had left to visit family in Kingsville, Ontario, but he was not feeling well and decided to stay home. He was listening to the broadcast of a baseball game on the radio when he had a heart attack.

*(James Mann is a local author and historian, a volunteer in the Ypsilanti Historical Society archives, and a regular contributor to the Gleanings.)*

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Parts of the Peck Street Primary School that was built in the early 1800s still on the Swaine/Anschuetz property on River Street.

# The History of the Peck Street Primary

BY JAN ANSCHUETZ

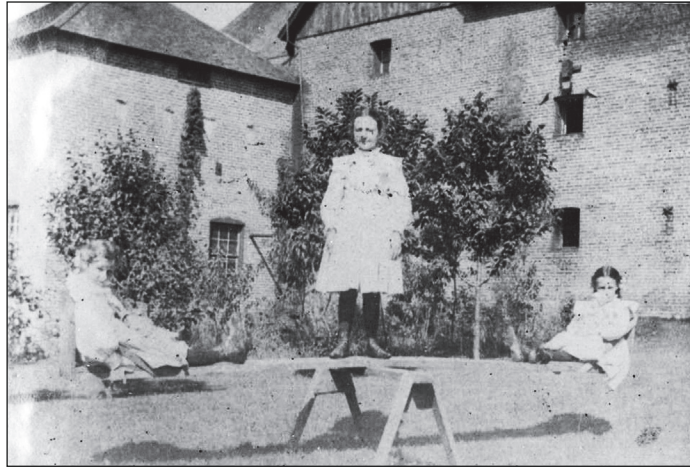
There is no street sign that identifies Peck Street today. It is the second driveway north of the intersection of East Forest and North River Street. At one time it led the way to an artesian well, now covered by a stone, which early settlers to Ypsilanti could draw pure water from until they built their own wells. In the early 1820's the Peck family had built a double log cabin on their property, which had extended from Forest to Holmes, the Huron River to Prospect Street. The cabin was located on River Street at Peck Street. If you follow Peck Street today you will come to a large brick structure. It is an unusual shape and size, now located on the Anschuetz/Swaine property at 101 East Forest. It began as a dream of Sophia Peck who came to this area from New York in 1823 where she had been a "school marm." The wilderness that she arrived in needed many things including a school, so after her husband Joseph established a farm, built a mill and replaced their log cabin with a large and fine house still standing at 401 East Forest, he built a brick school house called the Peck Street Primary.

The brick school house was large enough to accommodate 100 students and was operated by the Peck family until they sold it in 1850 for \$40 to the 4<sup>th</sup> Ward School District which converted the curriculum of the school into a graded system and it became one of the first graded schools in the state of Michigan, as opposed to students studying at their own pace in primers. The building and the

grounds that it was built on were sold again in 1866 when it was "bursting at the seams" and a bigger building was needed for the growing number of students. The 4<sup>th</sup> Ward students then went to the much larger school called the Seminary. The building and grounds were purchased by Leonard Wallington and with his father in law George George, and his brother in law Worger George helping, he converted the structure into a malt house. As maltsters they bought grains from farmers, converted it into malt, which was then sold to several breweries in Ypsilanti. In the picture you can see the daughters of Leonard and Patti George Wallington playing in the yard next to the converted school building in the late 1870s. The Wallingtons as well as the George families all lived on River Street.

About 1872 a young man, Frederic Swaine, whose family were licensed brewers to the Kings and Queens of England for many generations, came to Ypsilanti from Kent, England, fell in love and married the daughter of George George. He also invested in the malt house and within a few years he bought out his in laws - George George, Worser George and Leonard Wallington. With his inheritance and his knowledge of the latest brewing methods, he soon added steam power to the malt house and greatly changed and enlarged the building, creating a two story 50 x 94 foot structure. His business was so successful that he rented nearby houses to store grain. He also built a large Victorian Italianate home on the property in 1875 for his young family.

Sadly, this ambitious young man died at the young age of 47. His wife, two young daughters and the bank attempted to continue the business, but the malt house was closed around 1900 and the large building was used to store ladders from the Michigan Ladder Company.



Maude and Ethel Wallington with Florence Swaine with the Malt House in the background in c1879.

The malt house came to an end for good about the year 1912, when it was torn back to the original school section. The bricks were sold and used to build a commercial building at Michigan Avenue and the Huron River. The two additional lots that it stood on were sold and Sears Roebuck kit houses were built on them by the owners of the lots – the Lidke and Bortz families.

However, parts of the Peck Street Primary remain. The structure that now exists was once part of the school. The brick wall defining what is now the Swaine/Anschuetz property from the building to East Forest is the remains of the exterior west wall of the malt house. The present owners of the property have found two slate pencils and a slate from just outside of the school, and while installing a fence 35 years ago, the family dug up seven tombstones. Later they found out that they were used as either

fill or garden stones when the George family remains were moved from Prospect Cemetery to Highland Cemetery and newer headstones were purchased. The west wall of the building was replaced in 1873 when the original school house wall fell down due to the huge quantity of grain that was stacked against it. The north side, which would have been the entrance of the school, faces what was once Peck Street. It is now a driveway. When the Anschuetz family purchased the Swaine house and property in 1971

the rotten roof was letting in rain and damaging the brick walls. All of the trusses had to be replaced and the bricks repaired. The weight of the snow and ice on the roof caused it to collapse around 1985 and it was again rebuilt.

More information can be read about the Peck family, Peckville, the George and Swaine families and the Peck Street Primary in articles researched and written by Janice Anschuetz and published in the Ypsilanti Historical Society publication – Ypsilanti Gleanings, the Summer-2010 and the Fall-2011 editions.

*(Jan Anschuetz is a long-time member of the Ypsilanti Historical Society and a regular contributor to the Gleanings.)*



The Swaine girls with friends outside the Malt House in c1885.

L. C. WALLINGTON.                      F. J. SWAINE.                      W. GEORGE.

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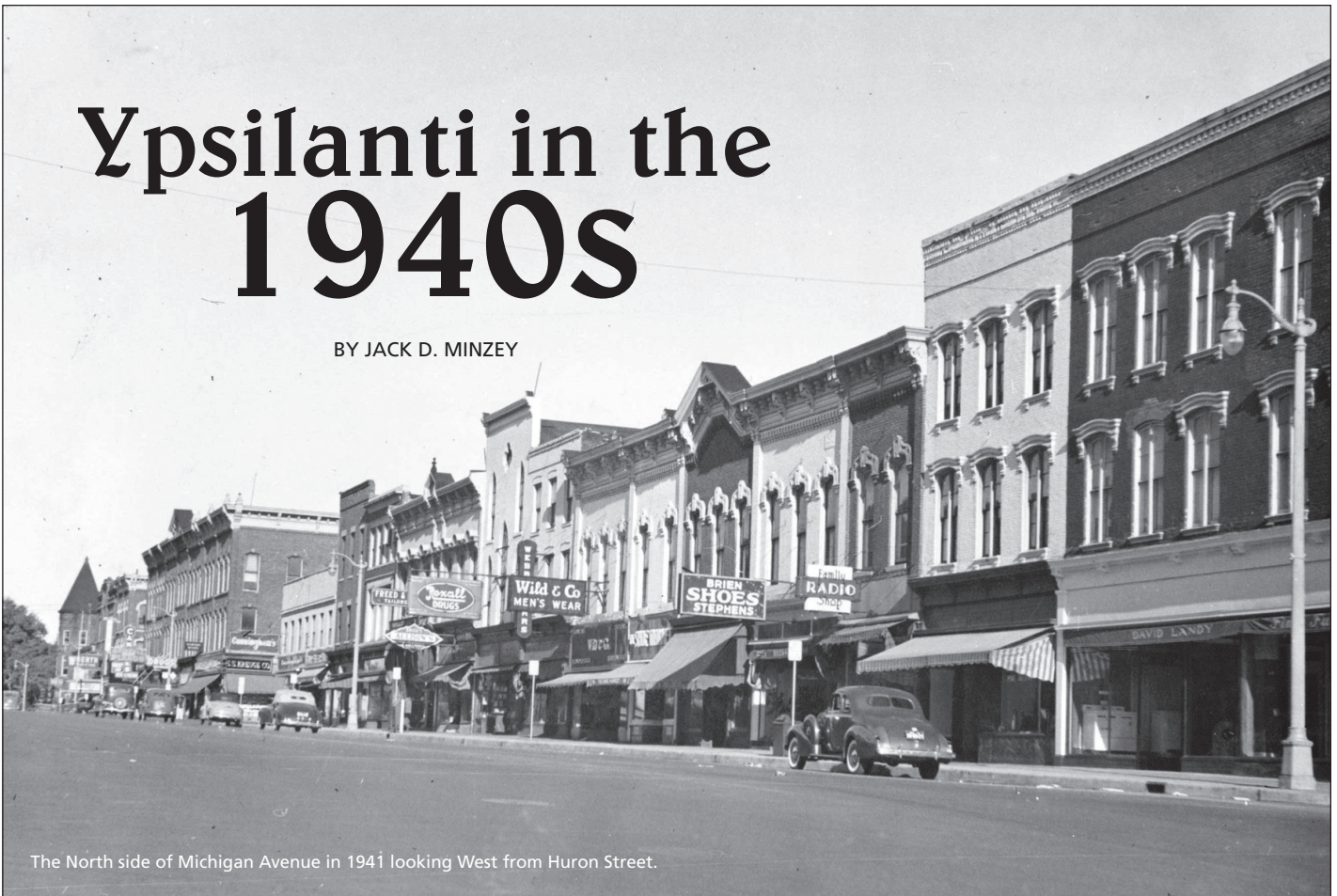
YPSILANTI, MICHIGAN.

CASH PAID FOR BARLEY AND HOPS.

An advertisement for Wallington, Swaine & Company Maltsters indicating that cash was paid for barley and hops.

# Ypsilanti in the 1940s

BY JACK D. MINZEY



The North side of Michigan Avenue in 1941 looking West from Huron Street.

In February, 2014, the Ypsilanti City Council was meeting to discuss the further development of their Water Street Project. When a member of the audience made some references to Ann Arbor, one of the council members responded that “Ypsilanti is no Ann Arbor.” This comment bothered me since I can remember a time when Ypsilanti was greater in reputation than Ann Arbor. I immediately set about writing an article on the Ypsilanti that I remembered and grew up in during the 1940s. At that time, it was my recollection that Ypsilanti was the gem of Washtenaw County, with a unique teacher’s college, an outstanding school system and a reputation as a quaint village that most people envied.

As a result of that article, I received a communication from Barbara Hamilton Cornish in which she commented about the Ypsilanti of that day, and she sent me the following statement. “Wow! You sure captured the slippery slope that Ypsi has experienced. I remember the beautiful tree-lined streets, Washtenaw Avenue. (much narrower than it is now), being proud when I boasted about being from Ypsi, feeling excited to go shopping downtown - Melencamps, Haywards, Nissleys sewing shop, Terry Bakery (free cookies for kids), creaky old floors in the two “dime stores” (Kresge’s and Woolworth’s), Cunningham’s Drug Store on the corner of Washington and Michigan Avenue with their soda fountain, Seyfried’s Jewelry store where

Bill bought my engagement ring, The Dixie Shop, Willoughby’s Shoe Store, Buster Brown Shoe Store (the x-ray machine for your feet), Marsh Office Supply and gift shop, the Martha Washington Theater where Disney movies created lines of patrons that wound around the corner from Washington Street to Pearl Street, The Coffee Cabana behind the theater (greatest hamburger ever), The Wuerth Theater on Michigan Avenue, old Cleary College where my grandfather, sister and brother used to sit on the lawn and eat ice cream cones, two banks, The Casanova Restaurant (across from Haab’s, the post office on Michigan Avenue and the library on Huron Street. Lots of memories as my sister and I rode our bikes from our house east of Prospect Park to the downtown area and then flying down the four hills behind the classic City Hall building hoping that we would be able to stop before we braked by the river’s edge.

On the corner of Huron Street and Cross there was a small Gordon’s food store (building is no longer there). Walking to the older Ypsi High from our house on East Cross Street we would pass the pond and the cannon in Prospect Park where we used to be on the iced tennis courts every evening and weekends playing crack-the-whip during the winter, then visiting Weber’s Drug Store before we would be leaning over the Cross Street Bridge at our beautiful Huron River.”



These nostalgic comments got me to thinking about the downtown that I knew in the 1940's, and I decided to try to verbally recreate the Michigan Avenue of those days. To help me, I turned to Harold and Marlene Moffett Britton who were raised in Ypsilanti and were a significant part of the Ypsilanti business community. We met for several hours and compiled a list of the places we could remember. I also shared my list with several other people in order to fill in some of the names which we had been unable to recall. I received a great deal of help from Doreen Binder who had a wonderful recollection of the area called Dutch Town of which she had written in "The Gleanings" in the summer of 2004. It is very likely that the list is not complete. I still receive calls from my sources who remember something else about Main Street. However, it is probably complete enough to get some of you "old timers" to thinking about those wonderful days when Ypsilanti was the "Gem of Washtenaw County."

There were many areas of commerce in Ypsilanti in the 1940's. There was the area on Cross Street around Michigan State Normal College. There was the historic area called Depot Town. There was another area along Ecorse. There were also many individual businesses in neighborhoods throughout the City. This list deals only with the area along Michigan Avenue from Ballard Street to Grove Street. The businesses listed are in the blocks described but not necessarily in the order they existed. There was an area we called "the point" at the intersection of Ballard and Michigan Avenue. On that site was a Standard Gas Station owned by Badaluccos.

The White Palace Restaurant at 7 East Michigan Avenue in c1939. The restaurant continued operation until the early 1960s.

The White Palace menu featured an "Extra Large T-Bone Steak" including potatoes and a side of Bread and Butter for 75 cents.

**THE BLOCK ON MICHIGAN AVENUE FROM BALLARD TO HAMILTON**

North side:  
 McClure's Mobil Gas Station, Brook's Grocery.  
 South side:  
 Jones' Blue Sunoco Gas Station (where the current Police Station is now), Kroger, Dr. Williamson's office (a house).

**THE BLOCK ON MICHIGAN AVENUE FROM HAMILTON TO ADAMS**

North side:  
 Meyers Restaurant, Greyhound Bus Station, Cleary College.  
 South side:  
 Shell Tire, Chamber of Commerce.

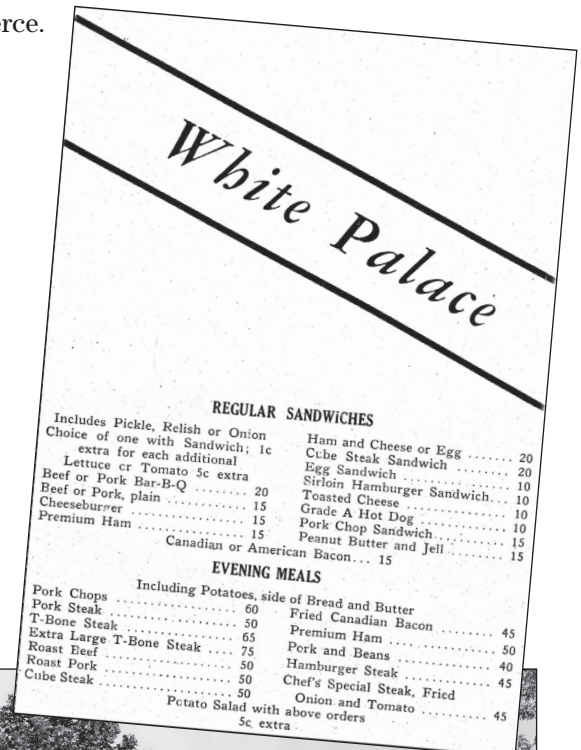
**THE BLOCK ON MICHIGAN AVENUE FROM ADAMS TO WASHINGTON**

North side:  
 Ernie's (soda shop), Wolverine Restaurant, Greystone Hotel, Wuerth Theater, Jack Spratt's Restaurant, Moffett's Shoes (Buster Brown), Michos' (soda shop), Grinnell's Music Store, Carty's Music Store, Richardson's Drugs, Spiegel's Catalogue Store, Miller Jones Clothing Store, Augustus Furniture, Western Union, Kresge's Dime Store.

South side:  
 Post Office, Gas Company, Dawson's (hardware and lumber), Mack and Mack Furniture, Cigar Store, Avon Restaurant, Tap Room.

**THE BLOCK ON MICHIGAN AVENUE FROM WASHINGTON TO HURON**

North side:  
 Cunningham's Drugs, Family Radio, Hartman's (women's clothing), Sally Shear Clothing, Freed & ? (tailor?), Wild and Company Men's Wear, Allison's Clothes, Mellencamp's Clothes, Shaffer Hardware, Weimann and Mathews Drug Store, Sports Store, Webb and Mars Sewing Needs,



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McClure's Service advertising featured pictures of employees and the statement "Where Friendly Service is a Habit not an Accident."

Seyfried's Jewelers, Shoe Market, Brian-Steven's Shoe Store, A.J. Green Jewelers, Landy's Furniture.

South side:

National Bank of Ypsilanti, Dixie Shop (men's and women's clothes), Campus Shoes, Giddes Hat Shop, Willoughby's Shoe Store, M and S Hardware, Snappy Joes Restaurant, The Apparel Shop, Campbell's Jewelers, Terry's Bakery, Restaurant.

### THE AREA ON MICHIGAN AVENUE FROM HURON STREET TO RIVER STREET

North side:

Haab's Restaurant, Furniture

Recovered, Moose Lodge, Bowling Alley, Schriener's Barber Shop, White Palace Restaurant, Chapman's Auto, Packer's Outlet (grocery), Miller's Ice Cream.

South side:

Ypsilanti Savings Bank, Markham's Restaurant, Moorman's Lumber Yard, Serbay Motors, Silkworth's Gas Station and Auto Repair, Sesi Lincoln Mercury.

### THE AREA ON MICHIGAN AVENUE FROM RIVER STREET TO GROVE STREET (DUTCH TOWN)

North side:

Lounsberry's Standard Gas Station, Woodruff Elementary School, Ken



Tom Willoughby took over the Willoughby Shoe's store on West Michigan Avenue from his father and eventually expanded the business to five stores.

Brokaw's Gas Station, Dolph Thorne's Tire and Appliance Store, A & P Grocery Store, A & W Root Beer Stand. South Side:

Thompson's Dodge and Chrysler Dealer, Michigan State Police Post, Carrie Chadwick's Piano Store, Clarence Tyrrell's Plumbing Shop, Bomber Restaurant, Emil Batchelor's

Meat Market, Max Bitker's Dry Goods, Al Holzhauer's Print Shop, Parkview Pharmacy (McLhargie and Binder), C.F. Smith Grocery, Russell's Bakery, Steffe's Gas Station, Herzbergs Processing (junk dealer), Otis Tooze's Barber Shop.

There were also many businesses on

the cross streets and parallel streets to Michigan Avenue. For example, on Pearl Street there were the following businesses: Congdon's Hardware, Bill's gas station, Huron Hotel, Freeman-Bunting Insurance, Manakis' Shoe Repair, Wiedman's Ford Dealership, a Restaurant, and Hunt's Gulf Station. Perhaps someone with a vivid memory and a historical interest will wish to compile a list of these businesses and organizations.

These were Golden Days for Ypsilanti, a thriving community, and a wonderful place in which to live. It was a place where residents of Ann Arbor wished their community could be like Ypsilanti. This is hard for rookie residents of Ypsilanti to believe, but "old timers" know this as a fact. Oh how wonderful it would be if we could recapture life in Ypsilanti as it was then.

*(Jack Minzey is an active member of the Ypsilanti Historical Society and a regular contributor to the Gleanings.)*



The Thorne Tire building on East Michigan Avenue was built in the mid 1930s and was demolished in July of 1962. Mr. Thorne was a driver for Henry Ford I.

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## PAUL E. HUBBELL - *Professor, Pacifist, Poet*

*Characters - the second in an occasional series about unique and interesting Ypsilantians.*

BY PEG PORTER

Paul E. Hubbell's teaching career began at Michigan State Normal College in 1923.

I think I must have been about ten years old the first time I saw him, a tall gray haired man marching down our street. He carried a walking stick that he swung back and forth, up and down, like a baton. As he came nearer, I heard him speaking. Before he got much closer I went up the front walk and in the door. I was to see him many more times over the years.

Paul E. Hubbell was born in 1891. He grew up in the small community of Hat Creek amid the rolling hills of central Virginia. He attended Wake Forest and the University of Richmond. After completing his undergraduate studies he taught high school history. He was named a Rhodes Scholar, sailed to England, arriving in Liverpool on October 1, 1914 to begin graduate work at Oxford. Shortly after his arrival World War I began. He left Oxford and traveled to Egypt where he was awarded the British Military Recognition for civilians. He would return to the United States, sailing from Naples, and arriving in July 1916.

He joined the U.S. Army shortly after his return. World War I was one of the bloodiest of all wars. Because the United States entered the war later, this country did not suffer the terrible losses that, for example, England did. However, Hubbell's war experience made him a committed pacifist. It's impact on his life should not be underestimated. He

was able to return to Oxford where he was awarded a Master of Arts in 1920. He married an English woman who was a sometimes actress. They were to have one child, named Ann. His teaching career began at Michigan State Normal College in 1923; he retired in 1958. His area of study was Modern History with a emphasis on World War I.

In his long retirement (he died in 1993) he devoted himself to writing poetry. He also contributed many letters to the editor primarily on the subject of the war in Viet Nam. He was a prolific poet, self publishing at least six books. He became known as the Poet of Grant Street. Some of his collections contain poems by his Ypsilanti neighbors and other Michigan poets. His extensive reading and study is reflected in his poetry. Occasionally he sold his books door to door. The object was not to make money but to share his work with others.

Late in life he was named a Grand Poet at a local elementary school teaching poetry and encouraging young grade school students to try their hand at verse. He apparently derived great pleasure in working with the children as he had no grandchildren of his own.

As for me, I later realized why he was speaking on his afternoon walks. He was reciting poetry. The rhythmical walk, the baton walking stick all seemed to support that theory. Some-

## A Political Kitty

By Paul E. Hubbell

Our candidate's cat has a wonderful dream  
of getting fat on butter and cream.  
Her political flair is charming to see,  
for she likes to rub against everyone's knee.

This attractive pussy has a way all her own  
and great ambition for election has shown;  
She wishes much notice from all voters there,  
I rather think that's a good campaigner's air.

Kitty gives you a lot in the line of attention;  
Her costs will be light on a government pension.  
Economy minded, please give your consent,  
elect her and you'll see your taxes carefully spent!

one once told me that he had heard that  
Hubble had been gassed in the War. He  
may have been but it seems more likely  
that he was a man in love with words.  
Walking the neighborhood as the day  
came to an end brought him pleasure  
and a measure of peace.

*(Author's note: the Ypsilanti  
Historical Archives has a complete set  
of Hubbell's published work as well as  
letters and academic papers.)*

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

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# Gertrude Bennett Went Missing

BY JAMES MANN

The atmosphere in the Bennett household on Geddes Road must have been tense on that evening of Monday, January 3, 1938. Gertrude Bennett, the 17 year old daughter of Harry Bennett, was missing. Her father had good reason to worry, as he was head of the Special Services Department at the Ford Motor Company. This department was charged with keeping Ford workers from joining a union. Bennett and his men carried out this task with sometimes brutal means. Harry Bennett had made many enemies, and he often received threats against himself and his family. Bennett had received a message the Friday before, claiming to be a friendly tip, advising him to keep a close eye on his daughters. Gertrude was the second daughter of his first marriage.



Gertrude (Bennett) Hughes.

That morning Gertrude and her sister Billie, who was then 19 years of age, left the family home on Geddes Road at 7:30 a.m., to go to the Michigan State Normal College, now Eastern Michigan University. Billie was a student there and Gertrude was to arrange for classes for the next semester. The brakes on their car were frozen, so they called Russell Hughes, who lived nearby and was a student at the Normal, to ask if he could give them a ride.

At 1:00 p.m. that afternoon Billie was handed a note by the clerk at McKenny Union from Gertrude. The note read: *"Billie, I called Ester (Mrs. Bennett, their stepmother) and I have a 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. sports class, also a WAA (Women's Athletic Association) dinner at 6:00 to 8:30 p.m. Go on home and I'll call you and Max (Maxine Wilbur, a friend) to come down after me when I'm through."*

Gertrude did not call and the family became alarmed. Their father made several inquiries, which failed to turn up any information. Bennett had men of the Ford Service Department search for Gertrude until 1:00 a.m. Then he called the Michigan State Police at 1:00 a.m., and a broadcast was sent to police agencies. The Michigan State Police made their headquarters for the case at the Bennett home, and agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation were standing by to enter the case if evidence of kidnapping was uncovered.

*"In Detroit the highest police officials, from Commis-*

*sioner Pickert down, were called from their beds to be notified," reported The Detroit News of Tuesday, January 4, 1938. "In addition to spreading the alarm by radio and teletype, the Detroit police resorted to the rare procedure of using the flasher system." Under this system, lights flashed over police call boxes, and beat patrolmen were to call the precinct.*

Harry Bennett feared his daughter had been kidnapped either for ransom or revenge. Police considered a third R, romance, as more likely. Adding to the theory that romance was the reason for the disappearance, was the discovery that Gertrude had withdrawn \$50 from her savings account at the Ypsilanti Savings Bank. Bennett was sure his daughter would not have eloped, without first telling him of her intention.

Questioning of friends of Gertrude lead police to believe the romance theory was the more likely explanation. Friends had seen Gertrude standing by the car of Russell Hughes in front of McKenny Union that afternoon. According to Richard K. Eckert, service station manager at Ballard Street and West Michigan Avenue, *"Russell Hughes, accompanied by Trudie Bennett, drove into his station at 3:30 p.m. Monday, filled their tank with gasoline and drove west on West Michigan Avenue."* reported *The Ypsilanti Daily Press* of Tuesday, January 4, 1938. *"In the car,"* the account continued, *"which answered the description of that driven by Hughes, was a suitcase and a set of drums. Young Hughes has played intermittently in various dance orchestras in this vicinity during his high school years and while he has been in college."*

The Bennett family did not believe Gertrude had eloped with Russell Hughes. *"The diamond ring Trudie wears was given to her by her father,"* said Mrs. Bennett. *"Billie has one like it. Hughes gave Trudie a Christmas present, but it did not signify an engagement or any close friendship. It was a manicure set."*

Russell Hughes had stopped by the family home where he picked up an extra suit and other clothes, and, according to his mother, he said he would be away overnight. *"Gertrude,"* his mother said, *"was in the car when he drove off."*

*"Descriptions of Hughes and the girl were broadcast to every State Policeman in Michigan. Authorities of Indiana, Ohio and neighboring states were asked to co-operate,"* reported *The Detroit News*.

*"Captain Don Leonard of the state police, who had set up official headquarters in the Bennett home to direct*

the search for the couple, announced at 1:00 o'clock this afternoon that he had been informed they obtained their license at 6:00 p.m. yesterday from County Clerk Carl Walters at Auburn but that Walters had been ill at home and unaware of the nationwide hunt." reported *The Ann Arbor News*.

Gertrude gave her age as 19, and said her father was employed by the Detroit Edison Company. Russell Hughes may have had second thoughts about the elopement, as he was heard to say something about waiting. To this Gertrude said, "No, I want to get married." The couple was married by Justice of the Peace Miles Baxter. "He said they seemed

*excited like any young couple."*

News of the marriage brought an end to the search, and a sense of relief to the Bennett household. "I hope the guy has a job and can support her." said Harry Bennett, "They're on their own now." Later, after he had taken a six hour nap, Bennett added, "...Of course, Trudy is still my daughter and I will do anything I can to help her. It's all over now." Harry Bennett was many things; one of them was a father.

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



Harry Bennett's castle overlooking the Huron River valley between Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti.

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Ed Thompson sitting on the running board of a 1910 Reo automobile with Mrs. Ed (Henrietta) Thompson in the front seat and Mrs. Atherton (Blanche) Marrs with another unidentified person in the back seat.

# Artist Lays Down His Brush

BY GEORGE RIDENOUR

(Author's Note: Information in this article was derived from articles in the following issues of the *Ypsilanti Press* and the *Ypsilantian*: 08/14/1885, 03/23/1929, 07/05/1929, 08/30/1951, 06/28/1963, 05/26/1965.)

The *Ypsilanti Press* announced the death of Ed Thompson opting to use the headline “*Artist Lays Down His Brush.*” Thompson was born in Ypsilanti on August 30, 1863. He was the son of Oliver and Elizabeth (Cooper) Thompson, the family that the “Thompson Block” in Ypsilanti is named after.

During a twenty-five year career in Business in Ypsilanti Ed Thompson engaged in the manufacture of farm implements with his father and two brothers. He was well regarded in the business community. According to his *Ypsilanti Press* Obituary he was engaged in civic work with the City of Ypsilanti Park Board and had a large part in developing Recreation, Prospect, and Quirk Parks. He was also a member of the Kiwanis Club and Phoenix Lodge F & AM.

The *Ypsilantian* described Ed Thompson in the August 14, 1885 edition as follows: “*Ed Thompson is a blooming young bachelor of twenty-two and a talented and accomplished member of eastside society. Ed early manifested a tendency towards art, especially drawing and caricature. He is a commanding stature, has an air of easy don't care about him. He is very much interested in young ladies and very much in love with Wallie Brooks. He has plenty of time to make up his mind and is in no hurry to change his relations.*”

Well, he did not marry Wallie Brooks and instead married Ms. Henrietta (Maegle) in 1891. She preceded him in death in 1941. He, at his death, was survived by three nephews. Ed and Henrietta Thompson are buried in Highland Cemetery.

Upon retiring he took up his passion of painting. He became a noted, at least locally, artist of some skill. He had no formal training and was self taught. The *Ypsilanti Press* of March 23, 1929, described his work as follows: “...*pirates, nature scenes, familiar nearby scenes. Sources*

*included photographs, local “characters” for portraits, landscapes, plants, old taverns, and character studies.*”

Further: “...*Though Mr. Thompson does not take his art too seriously he is careful of details.... He has NOT taken any art instruction, his work being the result of natural talent which until he retired from business, he had no*



Ed Thompson's oil painting of Demetrius Ypsilanti that currently hangs in the YHS Archives.

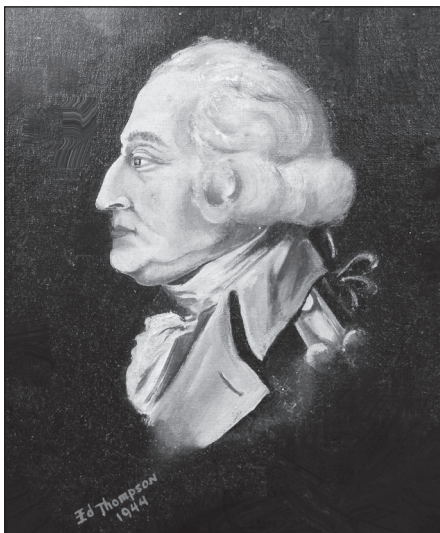


opportunity to indulge. Versatile as Mr. Thompson has been in the short time in which he has been painting, he has noticeably omitted the use of women.....”

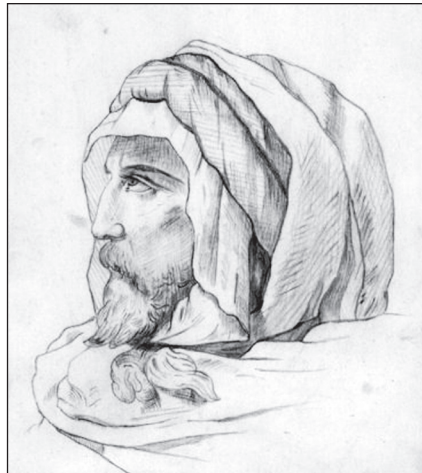
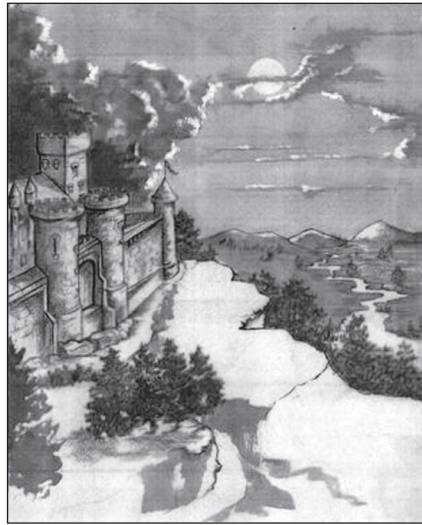
According to the Ypsilanti Press of June 28, 1963, Mr. Thompson painted two well known portraits of General Demitrius Ypsilanti. One was owned by Charles L. McKie and was loaned to William Anhut for hanging in the lobby of the Huron Hotel. Another was gifted to the City of Ypsilanti and for a number of years hung in the Council Chambers.

**However**, the Ypsilanti Press of May 26, 1965, reported a surprise. Another portrait had been found. The news report read: “...It's existence comes as a surprise because it was supposed that Mr. Thompson had painted only (2) TWO PORTRAITS, ONE FOR City Hall and one which he gave to Charles L. McKie. Mr. McKie remembers only the two, his on loan to the Huron Motor Inn (aka Huron Hotel) and one for City Hall.” The Ypsilanti Historical Society has two of the three paintings. The one hanging in the archives is illustrated in this article. The other one hangs in the front hallway entrance to the Museum. The Ypsilanti Press of August 30, 1951 reports that “He has completed about 200 oils and at least 50 beautiful water colors.”

I hope this article will revive interest in Mr. Thompson and his hobby.



An Ed Thompson oil painting of George Washington.



Drawings by Ed Thompson.

(George is a member of the YHS Archives Board, a volunteer in the YHS Archives and a regular contributor to the Gleanings.)

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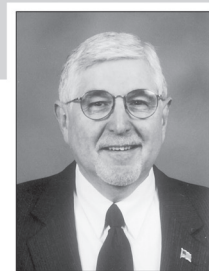


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# Museum Board Report

BY NANCY WHEELER — CHAIR OF THE MUSEUM ADVISORY BOARD

The spirit of Kathryn Howard continues at our Museum with the generosity of her family. We have a beautiful sofa, chair, shelf unit, milk glass, pictures, linens, glassware and other items. Some are already on display and others soon will be. Many boxes of her things were sold at the yard sale.

Thanks to Virginia Davis-Brown and her committee, the May 10<sup>th</sup> High Tea was a huge success! All 48 tickets were sold. The many choices of tea and savory and sweet dishes were served expertly by our men waiters. Participants could choose from 25 Museum hats to borrow for the afternoon. Get your reservations in early next year, only 48 seats will be available.

Al told you of the yard sale profits in his report. We had about 23 volunteers who each worked from five to fifty hours before and during the sale. This was the 15<sup>th</sup> Ypsilanti Historical Society yard sale hosted by Karen and Bill Nickels and we haven't even attempted to calculate the hours they have put in over the years.

"The Best of Lost Ypsilanti" will be featured July 1 through September 1 in the Museum. The title tells it all. Reminisce with Virginia Davis-Brown, Jack Livisay and Bob Southgate and their favorite discoveries about our city. Photographs always accompany their narratives.

New exhibits in the Museum include toys, games, and a quiz on kitchen tools. Pending exhibits include post cards, model cars, and Fiesta Ware dishes. We would like to exhibit your collection, call the Museum at 734-482-4990.

We continue to be on the Underground Rail Road Tour of the African American Cultural and Historical Museum. We are scheduled for eight tour groups this season. If your group would like a Power Point presentation, contact the Museum at 734-482-4990.

Three Estabrook's third grade classes walked to the Museum on June 10 for tours. We can arrange group tours. Call us. (You do not have to walk here as we have parking spaces.)

If you have three hours per month, why not become a Docent (guide) at the Museum? You will be trained and get to work with interesting people in a fascinating job.



The beautiful sofa and chair that were donated to the Museum by the family of Kathryn Howard.

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