



Ottawa County Historical Society



www.ottawacountyhistory.org

First Quarter 2021

2021

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Port Clinton Lighthouse Festival



The Port Clinton Lighthouse Conservancy is moving forward with plans to hold its fourth annual lighthouse festival in 2021. Following a highly successful 2019 festival, the Conservancy was forced to cancel last summer's festival due to the Covid-19 Pandemic. Now, with a large portion of Americans scheduled to be vaccinated by the summer, the Conservancy is hopeful that it will be able to hold the festival on its scheduled date of Saturday, August 21st, at the Waterworks Park in Port Clinton.

Although a final determination on holding the festival will not be made until May, the Conservancy is moving ahead with some of the initial planning, to include the contacting of vendors, and is actively looking for volunteers to help with the event. If interested, please indicate how you would like to help in an email to: Contact@portclintonlighthouse.org.

2021 Membership Renewal

We're about 85% to our membership renewal goal. Please take a moment to complete and return your membership form. Being a member helps support the Society's mission---to discover, preserve and celebrate the history of Ottawa County. As a member you'll receive a printed copy of the quarterly newsletter and invitations to special events the Society sponsors. Thank you for all your continued support.



**Happy 200th Anniversary
Marblehead Lighthouse!!**

Eighty Years On

By Patrick O’Keeffe

A drive on Sand Road in Catawba Township one fine winter day had me do a double-take. Did I see what I thought I saw? If you’re into old “stuff,” this has probably happened to you: somebody leaves something out in the rain—or snow—who has no idea of its value. By value, I’m not talking money here. I’m talking history.

I turned around and went back to the spot. Sure enough, way out across a field, along a hedgerow, sat a rusty old trailer by a pile of firewood. Oh, so what? A rusty old trailer?

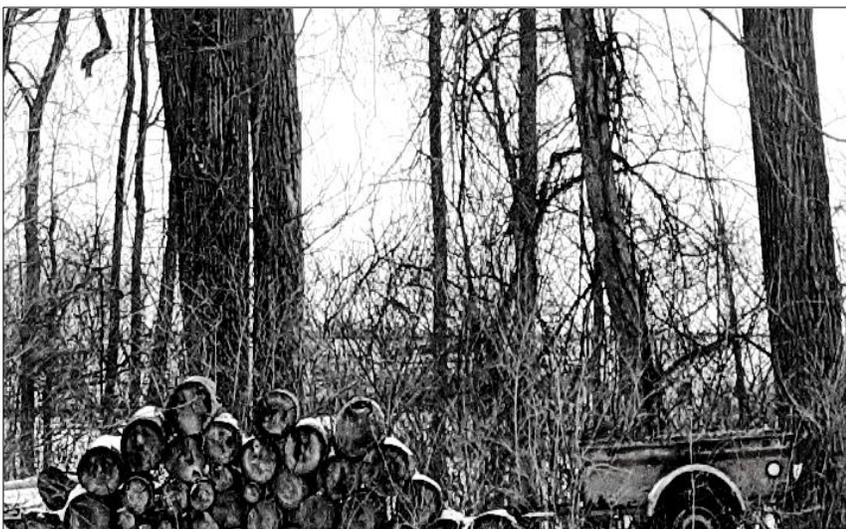
The specific item itself may be of scant significance. Not so when it comes to the story surrounding who made it, just how the manufacturer happened to be awarded the contract, and the iconic vehicle it was paired with. Now, we’re talking history! Hint: you may have seen trailers identical to this one, or variations of it, at the Aviation Museum out by the airport.

In 1940, the US Army decided it needed a reconnaissance car. Specifications went out to over a hundred manufacturers of trucks, tractors and automobiles, asking for bids on the design for a 40-horsepower, 1,300-pound vehicle with four-wheel drive that could carry soldiers and artillery. The first company to respond was the relatively unknown American Bantam Motor Company of Butler, PA.

Remarkably, in just 49 days, Bantam engineers delivered a prototype. Other companies followed, including Willys-Overland and Ford. Even more remarkably, after subjecting all prototypes to rigorous performance testing, the Army accepted the Bantam design as the most reliable.

But, with America’s entry into World War II looming, a delivery of 75 per day would be required. Bantam simply didn’t have that kind of production capacity. Manufacturing contracts for the new General Purpose vehicle (GP, or “jeep”) were awarded to Willys, Ford, and others, using the Bantam basic design, though modified to have a Ford grill.

So, what about Bantam? In compensation, the Army awarded Bantam a contract to design and produce a utility trailer. Thus, the Bantam Trailer came about, serving through the war as the jeep’s companion, a general cargo hauler, and in many other variations, such as field kitchen or medic station. Eighty years on, one of them sits in the snow along a hedgerow in Catawba, waiting to be put to work.



The rusty old Bantam trailer
by a pile of firewood
on Sand Road

HEROISM AT MARBLEHEAD

by Merlin D. Wolcott

(Note to reader: Merlin D. Wolcott wrote this story in the 1960s for the Great Lakes Historical Society's *Inland Seas* publication. He had a special interest in the history of the Marblehead Peninsula as he was a descendant of Ottawa County's Benajah Wolcott. Merlin was a genealogical researcher and of Great Lakes history in general. He died in 1993. Bowling Green State University holds Merlin Wolcott's papers.)

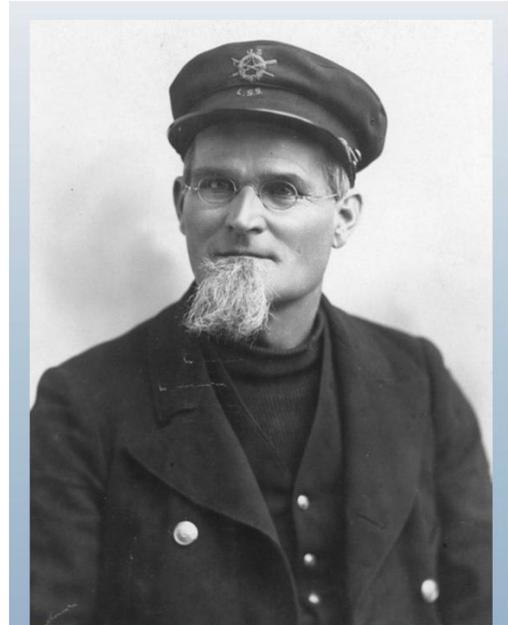
In a little bedroom close to the eaves of a house on Marblehead Peninsula, which overlooks Lake Erie, a young man sat working on a gun stock. When he turned to look out at the storm which had forced him inside, he saw the small vessel, *Consuelo*, fighting a raging sea. The vessel was in distress as she pitched and tossed — and then, suddenly — Captain Lucien Clemens saw the disaster happen. The vessel gave a sudden, mighty lurch and disappeared. She had capsized and soon wreckage began to appear on the surface of the water.

In spite of the violent storm, Lucien, with his brothers, Hubbard and A.J., set out to search for survivors. They used a flat-bottomed skiff, which records show was only 12 feet long, 3 feet wide, and 15 inches deep, and they pushed into the fierce gale towards the wreckage. The Clemens' wives, children and neighbors watched from the shore as the three men struggled against the sea. At times their family and friends thought the three brothers were lost as the small boat came up on the crest of a high wave, and then seemed to disappear, but with another wave, the boat would come into sight again.

After struggling against the violent storm, the Clemens finally reached the wreckage, and they found the mate and another sailor, who had clung to the crosstree of the mainmast for about an hour. Taking the two surviving seamen aboard, the small skiff almost swamped! All their efforts to get the two weary men to Kelleys Island were futile. The few miles became a great distance in the rough water, and after an hour's hard pull at the oars, the Clemens were unable to make the shore. At this moment of despair, the sight of smoke made them realize all would soon be well, for the tug *Winslow* from Kelleys Island had come to their assistance, and took the rescued men from the skiff.

This is what had happened. The *Consuelo*, a sturdy schooner of about 450 tons, left Detroit for Buffalo heavily laden with block stone on April 30, 1875. On the following day one of those typically violent Lake Erie storms came up from the northeast. The cargo of stone had either been stowed to make it easy to unload, by leaving the rollers under it, or the stone had been hastily and improperly loaded. Whichever the case might have been, the cargo shifted when the vessel pitched, and without warning, capsized two miles north of Marblehead on May 1, 1875. Five of the crew perished, and only the two who had clung to the rigging were saved.

For this heroic and voluntary act of bravery, the three Clemens brothers were notified in a letter dated June 30, 1876, from Charles T. Conant, then Acting Secretary of the U.S. Treasury, that they had been awarded the first U.S. Life-Saving medal. "I have the honor to transmit herewith a life-saving medal," wrote Mr. Conant, "of the first class, which has been awarded to you . . . for the extreme and heroic daring manifest by you in the rescue, under circumstances of peculiar peril and difficulty, of two men from the wreck of the schooner *Consuelo*, near Marblehead, Ohio, on the 1st of May 1875." The letter went on



Lucien Clemens in his Life Saving Service Uniform. Image courtesy of the Great Lakes Historical Society and National Museum of the Great Lakes

to say the Department was gratified that the first medals should commemorate an action of such distinguished gallantry.

This brilliant gold medal, 4¼ inches in diameter, depicts a life-saving scene with a wrecked vessel in the background, and three men rescuing a seaman in the foreground. The top edge reads in bold Roman letters, "Life Saving Medal of the First Class." The reverse side shows a figure holding a laurel wreath standing near a monument. On the center of the monument is engraved, "Lucien M. Clemens, Wreck of the *Consuelo* on Lake Erie, May 1, 1875."

Congress voted to honor lifesavers with this medal on June 20, 1874. The Director of the Mint was in charge of selecting a design for two medals, one to be designated as "first class," and the other, "second class." Artists were asked to compete for a prize and the drawing submitted by Anthony C. Paquet was finally chosen, the dies were cast and the medals encased for award. The names of claimants for the medal were examined by a Commission composed of the Chief of Revenue Marine Division, the Chief of the Navigation Division, and the Supervising Inspector General of Steam boats. The Commission was required to report their findings after a careful evaluation of all testimonies. The persons selected must have endangered their own lives in saving or endeavoring to save the lives of others from the perils of the sea within the United States or upon any American vessel. The medal of the first class was for extreme and heroic daring while the second class was for an act somewhat less distinguished.

When the Federal Government organized a Lifesaving Station at Marblehead, on September 9, 1876, there was no question of who should command the operation. Lucien M. Clemens was naturally appointed, the man whose seafaring skill had saved two lives the year before when the *Consuelo* capsized.

Captain Lucien M. Clemens was my great uncle and has always seemed to me a most remarkable man. He began his heroic career by saving two lives, but later led many rescue operations near Marblehead. Any one of his 70 missions with his crew reads like a daring adventure. His journals are a collection of thrilling narratives. Some marine disasters were small and called for assistance only, while others required gallant rescue of life. Vessels in distress ranged from small sloops and scows to large steamers such as the *V. H. Ketcham*, of 1,600 tons.

A typical entry, dated September 18, 1883, tells about the *William St. John*, a steamer of 31 tons, while crossing Lake Erie from Leamington, Canada, to Sandusky, Ohio, with a cargo of fish, mistook the channel and ran aground at Sandusky Bay. The lifesaving patrol rushed to the scene near the Cedar Point Light, a distance of five miles. The patrol found the steamer *George M. Marsh* near the disabled vessel, but was unable to get a line to her. The lifesaving crew went back to the station for a longer line, and when they returned worked four hours to get the *St. John* off the bar. The local newspaper described the action this way, "Capt. L.M. Clemens of Marblehead Life-Saving Station with his seven men, did all that was possible for men to accomplish. A nobler, braver, or cooler-headed set of men have never been entrusted by a Government with a dangerous duty. Amid the terrific breakers and angry sea they did not for a moment swerve from the performance of their perilous work. They had been on the lake all day Monday picking up and taking care of small boats and fishermen, and although tired and almost worn out they nobly responded to the call for assistance from the *St. John*. The owners of the *St. John* feel grateful to them for duty well and fearlessly done."

Even in the winter, before the sailing season opened, Lucien and his men frequently performed rescue duty. For example, on February 20, 1888, four men from Kelleys Island were seen being carried by ice and wind out into Lake Erie. Lucien got a volunteer crew together. They shoved the surfboat across the ice some distance to get her into the water and rowed to the scene. The victims, grateful for the rescue stated, "This is to certify that the Point Marblehead lifesaving crew on February 20, 1888, came to our rescue when we had given up all hopes and expected to be carried down the lake in the ice and lost." This was signed by Henry Elfres, J. Hemmeline, H. F. Schnell, and Frank C. Reinhart.

Another deed of heroism is dated October 12, 1895, when the American schooner, *E. C. Roberts*, stranded on Starve Island Reef in a gale. The reef has always been a Lake Erie danger spot, and the scene of many tragedies. Captain Clemens and his crew were towed the 8½ miles out to the reef by a tug. The sea was very rough, and the *Roberts'* four men were in imminent peril. For a time it was thought the schooner might be completely wrecked on the reef. The *Roberts'* crew was taken to Kelleys Island in the lifeboat. When the weather moderated, the lifesaving crew got the vessel off the reef, thus saving the vessel and cargo valued at \$7,500.00, with a loss of only \$1,000.00. Captain Crockett, master of the *Roberts*, wrote to Mr. S. I. Kimball, Superintendent of Life-Saving Service, "The schooner *E. C. Roberts* stranded this morning on Starve Island Reef in a heavy northwest gale, seriously endangering the lives of all on board. We were rescued by the Point Marblehead lifesaving crew, assisted by the tug, *John E. Monk*, and I wish to extend my thanks for their able assistance."

Not all the services of the lifesaving crew were acknowledged, yet their labors were available for wrecks and casualties whenever needed. The records show that Clemens and his crew saved some \$400,000.00 in cargos and vessel property; and at least 89 lives were saved during Lucien's twenty years of service at Marblehead.

Lucien was a man of quiet dignity in his brass-buttoned navy blue uniform with a shining lifesaving insignia on his duck-billed cap. He liked the warmth of a sailor's turtle-necked knitted sweater which he frequently wore with the uniform vest and coat. His most distinguished feature was his goatee. All his long life he wore chin whiskers which lightened with the years. Although I was very young when I first met him, I remember his quiet reserve. He was no idle chatterer, although he especially enjoyed talking about the Lakes and sailing.

After the death of Captain David Dobbins, Superintendent of the Ninth Life-Saving District, Lucien was recommended for that position. William McKinley, then Governor of Ohio, wrote a letter stating that Clemens was "a reliable, competent and worthy man." Rutherford B. Hayes wrote from Spiegel Grove, "The qualifications, experience and record of L. M. Clemens justifies recommendation." However, he was not appointed, but continued faithfully at his post until retirement on March 31, 1897. Captain Lucien Clemens was a "beachman," a master of boat craft and the art of surfing. Most of all, he proved himself skilled in wreck operations. He selected his own crew, and year after year, wrote weekly transcripts for journals about the operations of his post. For long years he served his country and fellow men diligently. His years of service exemplified forcibly many deeds of heroism in safe-guarding life and property on the Great Lakes.

LINDA HUBER

Cosmic Rayz Atomic Emporium

The Liberty Aviation Museum will be opening a new store in the spring of 2021. The Cosmic Rayz Atomic Emporium located in the former Green's Pharmacy in Downtown Port Clinton will feature a restored classic 1950s soda fountain serving up traditional ice cream and soda creations surrounded in a nostalgic atmosphere. A wide-ranging mix of products including retro themed toys and novelties, hard to find bottled sodas, bulk candies originally sold at Green's, collectibles, and much more will be available.

Some of the original signage will remain in place, along with other reminders of the building's history. Flooring, plumbing, lighting, and other electrical work are being completed to make visitors comfortable and make every visit a memorable experience in a historic setting.

All proceeds from Cosmic Rayz Atomic Emporium will assist in supporting the Liberty Aviation Museum, a 501-C3 non-profit organization, receiving no government funding. A soft store opening will take place soon in the spring, with a grand opening celebration to follow shortly after.

OCHS 2021 -Memberships

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Karin Messner '21
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Bill & Jean Nicholson '21
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Sandra Zenser '21

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Ray Lambert '21
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Welcome New Members

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Jane Milholland
Thomas Styancho
Brian Tanquay
Janet Traub & Jim Toppin

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Online: Using PayPal, you can make a donation directly to the Society by clicking the PayPal button on our new website.

Through purchases you make: When you purchase items through AmazonSmile (Amazon's charity website) or through Kroger supermarket and designate your charity as Ottawa County Historical Society, a portion of your purchase will be donated to the Society

Please mail me the following items.

Item	Description	Price each	Shipping/ Handling each	Tax each	X Quantity	Total
Book	<i>Along the Highways & Waterways of Ottawa County</i>	\$20.00	\$4.00	\$1.68		
Book	<i>History of Ottawa County - the First 175 Years</i>	\$49.95	\$5.00	\$3.85		
Book	Volume I: <i>How We Got Here, What We Did</i>	\$15.00	\$4.00	\$1.33		
Book	Volume II: <i>Recollections and Voices</i>	\$15.00	\$4.00	\$1.33		
Book	Volume III: <i>Across the Townships</i>	\$15.00	\$4.00	\$1.33		
Book	Volume IV: <i>Threads and Textures of a Tapestry</i>	\$15.00	\$4.00	\$1.33		
Book	Volume V: <i>Ottawa County Through Their Eyes</i>	\$15.00	\$4.00	\$1.33		
Book	Volume VI: <i>Memories and Adventures</i>	\$15.00	\$4.00	\$1.33		
Book	Volume VII: <i>The Stories Continue</i>	\$15.00		\$1.05		
Book	Complete set of Oral Histories: Volume 1 through VII	\$105.00	\$6.00	\$7.77		
Book	<i>Combined Atlas of Ottawa County - 1874 & 1900 NEW PRICE</i>	\$15.00	\$4.00	\$1.33		
Book	Historic Driving Tour Guide: <i>Historic Railroads of Western Ottawa County</i>	\$4.00	\$2.00	\$0.42		
Book	Historic Driving Tour Guide: <i>Historic Railroads of Eastern Ottawa County</i>	\$4.00	\$2.00	\$0.42		
Book	<i>The Keeper's House - children's coloring/activity book</i>	\$3.00	\$2.00	\$0.35		
Book	History of Ottawa County Historical Society	\$7.00	\$3.00	\$0.70		
Book	<i>Hearth Cookbook</i>	\$5.00	\$3.00	\$0.56		
DVD	Bicentennial War of 1812 Re-enactment: <i>The Skirmish on the Peninsula</i>	\$15.00	\$2.00	\$1.19		
Book	<i>Marblehead Lighthouse on Lake Erie</i> by James Proffitt	\$15.00	\$3.00	\$1.26		
Book	<i>Lights at the Portage</i> by Richard J. Norgard	\$10.00	\$3.00	\$0.91		
Book	<i>Lake Erie's West Sister Island</i> by Martha Dykes	\$10.00	\$3.00	\$0.91		
Book	<i>My Island Home</i> by Gladys Curd McMeans	\$10.00	\$3.00	\$0.91		

Note: if books are being picked up do not include shipping/handling charge.

TOTAL

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Inside:

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OTTAWA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

2021- ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP DUES - due in January of each year
(If your address label does not say 2021 or Life Member it is time to pay dues.)

Single \$15_____ Family \$25_____ Student \$10_____

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