



Ottawa County Historical Society



www.ottawacountyhistory.org

Second Quarter 2021

2021

Officers

President

Patrick O'Keefe ~ 419-635-5579

Vice President

Becky Shemenski ~ 419-898-3852

Secretary

Linda Huber ~ 419-702-7060

Treasurer

Doug Huber ~ 419-702-7060

Trustees

Nancy Dunham ~ 419-797-2244

Linda Huber ~ 419-702-7060

Kathy Leonard ~ 419-734-9365

Richard Norgard ~ 419-797-2917

Becky Shemenski ~ 419-898-3852

John Starcher ~ 419-656-0095

Dave O'Neal ~ 419-898-2000

Erin Sandvick ~ 330-620-3609

Brennan Madison ~ 419-341-1538

Past Presidents

Nancy Dunham ~ 419-797-2244

Paul Moon ~ 419-276-6593

Richard Taylor ~ 419-836-7449

Membership Chairman

Linda Huber ~ 419-702-7060

Program Chairman

Nancy Dunham ~ 419-797-2244

Corresponding Secretary,

Oral History Chairman,

Newsletter Editor

Martha Dykes ~ 419-732-1843

Blair Museum of Lithophanes at Shedel Arboretum & Gardens

The Blair Museum of Lithophanes has opened at Shedel Arboretum & Gardens in Elmore. The world famous collection has become a permanent attraction at Shedel. It is the world's largest collection of lithophanes, including some 2,300 pieces. The exhibit is housed in the newly renovated 1881 Shedel Manor House.

Toledoan, Laurel Blair, assembled the collection during his world travels. It was previously located in Blair's Old West End home in Toledo. There are pieces that are one of a kind.

The name is a term derived from the Greek, *litho* meaning stone and *phainen* meaning to cause to appear. Lithophanes are three-dimensional translucent porcelain plaques which when back-lit reveal detailed images. They were first created in Europe in the 1820s. Artisans would carve into a wax with small tools like what dentists use on a back-lit piece of glass. Next they would create a plaster mold of the lithophane. From the mold porcelain slip would be added to create a positive of the image. Finally once the porcelain has dried it is put into a kiln and fired at 2000C. When the lithophane is backlit, typically by lamp or candle before the electric light, the lights and darks in the carving are seen in minute detail, making the pieces look three-dimensional. The lithophanes were used in practical ways as candle shields, night lights, fireplace screens and tea warmers.

The Blair Museum collection will be open to the public Tuesday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. (8 p.m. on Thursday) and Noon to 4 p.m. on Sunday through October 31. Shedel is located at 19255 West Portage River South Road, Elmore, Ohio. Additional information is available at shedel-gardens.org.

Photos of the lithophanes can be seen on Shedel's website.

www.shedel-gardens.org

Unique Legacy of Holy Assumption Orthodox Church By Patrick O’Keeffe

The influx of foreign-born people played a major role in the establishment, settling and development of the Ottawa County region. The uniqueness of those groups created a vast richness of diversity that defines the local culture to this day, a diversity reflected in the establishment and construction of the region’s many churches, of which Holy Assumption Orthodox Church is uniquely representative.

Right from the start, the first settlers to arrive and stay put in what would become Ottawa County were a diverse mixture. French-Canadian hunters, trappers and fruit growers were followed by Connecticut land speculators and surveyors and Quaker farmers from Maryland, as well as veterans of the War of 1812 who later moved their families to the area. Settlers established themselves pretty much along the coasts, avoiding the dark interior except for those few arable patches of ground conducive to putting plough to ground.

From about 1820 to 1920, a swelling of population included a vast influx of European immigrants. By 1874, The Hardesty Atlas recounted from the official 1870 census a total population of 13,364, one in four of which were foreign-born, that proportion varying by township. A listing of figures for Put-In-Bay Township, for example, had the proportion of foreign-born at 31%. In attempting to describe Salem Township, the Atlas authors conceded that, in just four years since the census had been taken, the figures were no longer relevant: “...there has been a rapid increase since that time by immigration...”

It is well known that the largest portion of immigrants to the region were of German origin initially. Hardesty, reflective of that fact, published its atlas in both English and German. German immigrants provided much of the labor to two major industries: the proliferation of wineries along the coast and on the islands; and the lumber business, by which settlers moved inland, clearing trees, draining and converting the Great Black Swamp to rich farmland.

Along with lumber and agriculture, a third major industry, quarrying, accelerated. The entire region is underlain with Dolomite, limestone layers deposited in the Paleozoic Era. In the later decades of the 19th century, multiple new quarries opened up, and earlier-established ones vastly increased output, most notably the Kelley’s Island Lime and Transport Company (KIL&T) in Marblehead.

The labor was back-breaking, paying as little as six cents an hour, supervisory personnel earning ten cents. KIL&T, finding it difficult to attract workers from among the established population, vigorously pursued recruitment of foreign workers, dispatching labor agents throughout Europe. That strategy for filling the ranks was successful: in the first decade of the 20th century, the number of workers in just the Marblehead quarry ranged from 1,000 to 1,500. The proportion of immigrants of eastern European origin rapidly grew.

Thus, over that hundred-year span, the diversity among early settlers had expanded to include a host of nationalities, each with its own language, customs and culture. Individual groups constructed their own churches, clinging to and re-establishing what was familiar. Early on, coastal settlers established Methodist and Episcopal churches. People of French-Canadian origin established one of the first Catholic churches in Carroll Township. With the influx of Germans, additional Catholic and many Lutheran churches rose up throughout the county.

Uniquely characteristic of this phenomenon was a group recruited to Marblehead from an eastern corner of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. They were Slavic Orthodox Christians who, like others, were eager to worship within their own tradition. In 1898, the head of the Russian Orthodox Diocese of Alaska, Bishop Tikhon, hearing of their needs, purchased land for them. He journeyed to Ohio to lay the church’s cornerstone, bringing with him icons, gifts from none other than the Tsar of Russia, Nicholas II.

Today, Holy Assumption Orthodox Church remains an active parish in the Marblehead community. It is situated a half-mile from Marblehead Lighthouse State Park, one of the most visited public sites in Ohio. Its humble edifice of local limestone on Marblehead’s Main Street is a reminder to visitors and residents alike of the uniqueness with which individual immigrant groups contributed to a rich cultural diversity that defines our region, making it a true microcosm, not only of the state of Ohio, but of the United States at large.



Mark Your Calendar!

The Grand Opening for Historical Society's summer activities is scheduled for Saturday, July 10. The plan is, of course, tentative because of considerations that must be kept in place due to potential resurgence of Covid. Based on the success of the vaccination program so far, it looks good for an outdoor event in which we can all, once again, meet and greet each other.

The Rotary Fish Wagon is scheduled for that day (thanks Bill Coder) at the Keeper's House, where we'll have plenty of tables set up in accordance with safe distancing protocol. Also, the storytellers are putting together a short program for your enjoyment...you may be able to meet some pretty interesting characters from our past.

Please do the following:

1. Mark your calendar for July 10.
2. Watch the website:
<http://ottawacountyhistory.org/> and/or the Beacon or News Herald for actual details once this is a "go."

Reciprocal Member Guest Column



The Lakeside Heritage Society operates the Heritage Hall Museum in Lakeside and has an archival collection with thousands of photographs and documents related to the Marblehead Peninsula, Lakeside, and the Chautauqua Movement in America. LHS is pleased to announce that the Archives will be moving from its current location to 210 Walnut St. in Lakeside, formerly known as The Shade Tree. The building is being completely remodeled to provide a climate-controlled environment for the collection. The new Archives will be open to the public from Memorial Day through Labor Day. We welcome research requests and invite you to visit! For more information about LHS go to:

www.lakesideheritagesociety.org.

Kathy Venema, President



Immigrants of Ottawa County

The Society is applying for an Ohio History Connection historical marker to honor the immigrants who helped develop Ottawa County in the late 1800s. It was a bit of a challenge evaluating what location would best meet our objective and selected Holy Assumption Orthodox Church in Marblehead for the marker location. One side of the marker will reference Holy Assumption and the other side will provide more details on the County's immigrant experience and Port Clinton's St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church. To help defray the cost of the marker we are applying for a William Pomeroy grant. If all goes well, an August 2022 dedication ceremony is tentatively planned.

LINDA HUBER

Oral History Publication Update

Volume 8 of the oral history publications is progressing. There are four stories that are still in the works and need to be completed before we can publish.

Many thanks to OCHS member, Nyle Kardatzke, for submitting two stories from his book *Leatherport, Ohio, USA-Stories of the Great Black Swamp*. Nyle is also the author of *The Brown House Stories* (about a house south of Graytown), *The Clock of the Covenant* (about the Elmore Church of God), as well as other books. His books can be found on Amazon.

Rebecca Lawrence-Weden, of San Antonio, Texas, who is the great niece of Capt. Edward Herman, the last U.S. Lighthouse Service Keeper at the Marblehead Lighthouse, has allowed us to use part of his story in this issue. More of his story can be found on her website: <http://www.lighthousediscovery.com>

MARTHA DYKES, EDITOR

Note: This is the first of a three-part series on farming written by Patrick O’Keeffe in "History of Ottawa County---First 175 Years."

Agriculture

We cannot talk about agriculture of the latter 1800s without finding ourselves, once again, experiencing an ongoing theme of this narrative about our County: diversity. Farming to our forebears involved something quite different than today’s methods of coaxing the soil to yield its produce through scientific means. In those days, it was more the art of figuring out what the land in a given location had to offer. What grew the best in Harris Township would not have been what grew the best in Danbury. Leading up to 1900, the boom in agriculture took place in a broad variety of ways.

The wine industry of eastern Ottawa County, which would become legendary in the 1900s, had its beginning in the mid-1800s. The first inhabitants on North Bass Island arrived in 1844. In the 1850s, some began



Women & Man in Vineyard 1890. (Photo provided by Ottawa County Historical Society)

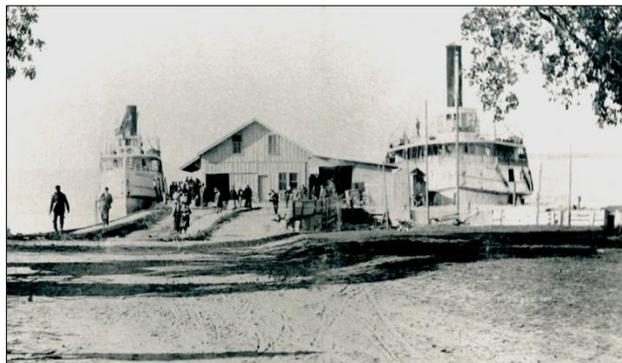
growing grapes. It was soon noticed that the climate of the islands was a perfect place for the type of grape cultivation that produced good wine.

Meanwhile, in 1854, Middle Bass Island was included in Jose de Rivera St. Jurgo’s purchase of a number of islands, including South Bass, from Alice Edwards Vinton. Mrs. Vinton had received the land from her father to be used as a dowry, but was forced to sell when her husband insisted that the dowry be in the form of cash. De Rivera sold Middle Bass a few years later to a German count, William Rehbarg, who immediately saw the potential for a winery. The count brought German experts to the island to begin the process, and by 1875, the Golden Eagle Winery was the largest winery in America. In 1884, the Lonz family purchased it, and built on its success and reputation. It would go on to become world famous.

Over on Kelleys Island and then on the mainland, a new type of grape was introduced by Cincinnati banker and winemaker Nicholas Longworth, who had found them growing wild along the Catawba River separating North and South Carolina. Initially, he had begun producing sparkling Catawba wine

from grapes transplanted to his Ohio River Valley vineyard. It was from this variety of grape that our own Catawba got its name. It was also introduced at Put-In-Bay. Grape growing became an important part of Catawba’s economy. Henry Ellithorp and H. Newton started the first commercial grape business in 1860. Before long, multiple wineries were in operation on Catawba. The Catawba Wine Company had a cellar of 130,000-gallon capacity. The Mon Ami Winery, built in 1871, has had many owners. Norman Mantey called it The Mon Ami Champagne Company and converted the first floor of the winery to a restaurant, still in operation today. In June of 1863, a new township was established from a part of what had formerly been Van Rensalaer and given the name Catawba in recognition of the importance of the Catawba grape.

While growers on the islands were perfecting their vineyards to produce better wines, Catawba made a radical change. Within another two decades, local growers recognized the greater profit potential of peaches and apples, and most of them abandoned grapes in favor of those products. Andrew Reynolds, who had moved his family to Catawba from Sandusky to avoid the cholera epidemic, had laid out the first peach orchards in the 1860s, and soon apple and peach orchards were producing commercially. It is estimated that by 1880, over 35,000 peach trees grew on Catawba. The township came to be known as the “peach belt” of Ohio. Fruit went by boat to markets in Detroit, Toledo, and Cleveland. The Catawba Dock Company built dockage suitable for side-wheel steamers and other large boats. Initially, the Union Fruit Company operated on the east side and rival Catawba Island Fruit Company on the west. The Union Fruit Company built a new dock at Ottawa City in 1882, which is today the site of the Miller Ferry Dock. Eventually these two companies consol-



Union Fruit Company dock to accommodate larger boats needed to ship fruit to markets in Detroit, Toledo, and Cleveland. Still in use today by the Miller Boat (Photo courtesy Ottawa County Museum)

idated to become the Catawba Union Fruit Company.

A town grew up in the center of the township called Peachton, consisting of a post office, the Episcopal-Methodist Church, a blacksmith shop, school and store with a dance hall on the second floor. The Hardesty Atlas of 1874 indicates that 800,000 bushels of peaches were produced in a single season. Today, nothing survives of the town but its gravestones on Cemetery Road. It has been said that peach production was so high on Catawba that at times it caused a glut in the market. Fruits would be left hanging on the trees to rot, fed to hogs, or dumped in one of the sinkholes around the township. In one attempt to deal with too much of a good thing, some enterprising growers converted the old Gideon Owen Winery on East Catawba Road into a Peach Brandy distillery, but the business was unable to turn a profit and closed it within a few years.

The railroad never having made it to Catawba, peaches were hauled by horse and wagon to Gypsum and Danbury for shipment to remote markets east and west. Canneries operated in both Port Clinton and Gypsum, which provided summer employment to many in the area. Wagonloads of the fruit were sold at auction at a market in Port Clinton. By the end of the century, Ohio ranked first in peach production, thanks in a large part to Ottawa County fruit growers.

Although further west fruit production was also part of agriculture, especially in areas near the lake, such as Carroll Township, other forms of farming gained prominence. Four years after the founding of Ottawa County, Erie Township was established. While fishing, hunting and trapping, especially trapping of muskrat, continued as a way of life along the lake, most of the inland acreage in the township was involved in agriculture, raising both grain and hogs. Early on, farmers took bountiful oat and corn to the nearest mill in Venice, near Sandusky, and then later to newly established mills at Fremont. These arduous journeys, which involved fording streams and hauling goods through the mud, often took weeks to complete. Slowly, roads were laid out and built, corduroy roads at first, which allowed travel and transport of goods by heavy wagons, greatly increasing trade and economic growth. In the latter half of the 19th century, increased drainage projects brought more of the land under cultivation.

The developmental stages of agriculture in the 19th century, from basic survival through sustainable farming to entrepreneurial opportunity, paralleled the lives of a number of immigrants who arrived here

with nothing in the 1840s. By the turn of the century, they had become the key influences behind building the communities that dotted the county. We have already mentioned William "Billy" Clark, the founder of Clay Center—he was certainly representative of this spirit of hard work and clever entrepreneurship.

The Great Black Swamp covered approximately 1500 square miles between the Maumee and Sandusky Rivers in Northwest Ohio. It included the whole of Ottawa County except the islands and eastern townships of Catawba and Danbury. It had lain undisturbed for thousands of years until the arrival of settlers. In most of the western County, as already mentioned, farming evolved in parallel with clearing of the land by the lumber industry and drainage of the swamp. The swamp had been a flat land of towering trees that was covered in water much of the time. There was very little sloping grade to drain it and the soil under the surface was impermeable clay. The conversion of this formidable swamp into farmland took 60 years, from about 1840 to 1900. Many diaries kept by the people who first lived here attest to the severe hardship endured by those who accomplished this feat.

At first, farmers were faced with removal of huge old growth trees, a problem whose resolution was aided and later solved by demand for lumber. Drainage was a two-step process that required ditches for channeling surface water and tiles beneath the surface to lower the water table. The ditches came first. And it was soon apparent that this required an organized and co-operative effort.

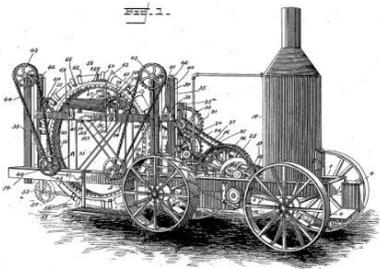
The 1859 Ditch Law authorized construction of open surface ditches by County Commissioners upon petition by landowners. The landowners were assessed for the cost. Ditches were "marked out" by a surveyor and then contracts were let in half-mile lengths. The work was done by men and horses. By 1880 drainage ditches had been constructed on the perimeters of most every land section in the counties of the Black Swamp. These "road ditches" emptied into existing streams and ultimately into the rivers.

Subsurface drainage required tile. The concept of tile drainage was brought to this country by an immigrant from Scotland named John Johnson. It's likely that Black Swamp farmers had some exposure to the idea of tile drainage. Even before tile mills arrived in the 1880's, farmers had been constructing drainage systems made of wood under their fields. Early tile mills were often associated with existing sawmills—the sawmill operator became a part-time tile maker. The process of trenching and laying of tile required

skill and knowledge. The trenching speed of hand ditchers varied, but two men were expected to finish 800 feet a day, with a third man to lay the tile. They typically earned \$1.50 per day.

Then in 1892 came the invention of the mechanical "Buckeye Ditcher" which revolutionized the installation of under drainage tile for northwest Ohio farmers. The inventor was a Bowling Green machine shop worker named James B. Hill. He sold his first model for \$700. By 1900, most of what had been swampland in 1840 Ottawa County had been drained and was now under cultivation.

(To be continued in our next newsletter.)



**Black Swamp Ditching Machine,
James B. Hill patent July 31, 1894**

Photo provided by U.S. Patents & Trademarks Office



Carroll Township - Enos Williams taking peaches to market at the turn of the century.

Photo taken by his daughter, Nina.

courtesy Carroll Township Museum



Three retired railroad workers who picked peaches on the Rofkar farm.

L-R-Chas. Baum, Wm. Miller, & Christ Schmidt

courtesy the Ottawa Co. Historical Society



Late 19th Century from the Union Fruit Company Dock showing Ottawa City

courtesy the Ottawa Co. Museum



Pumpkins at Gypsum Canning Company, Railroad Street. Woman in white apron c 1910 is Margaret Kolesar Chimo

OCHS 2021 -Memberships

Life Members

Ruth Weisenauer
Becky Shemenski

Patrons (\$100 +)

Spencer Andrews
Lydia Moon Barnard
John Bayliff
James Blum
Bill & Sharon Coder
Margaret Debien
Tim Feller
Doug & Connie Focht
Ron & Diane Gerkenmeyer
John & Mary Jane Gibson
Dr. Mark & Tina Hablitzel
Suzanne Dempsey
Novotny Hartenfeld
Skip & Ellen Honsperger
Warren & Kathy Leonard
Richard & Catherine LeSourd
Paul & Maria Moon
Randy & Sarah Riedmaier
Holly Gast & John Starcher
Alex & Bonnie Thomas
Tom & Mary Wiseman
Wm. & Darlene VanDerGressen

Sustaining (\$35)

David & Sue Blankenbeker
Marlene Gulas
Edward Hartung
(Hartung Title Agency)
Jim & JoAn Herl
Linda Kay Kresser
Karin Messner
Janice F. Netcher
Bill & Jean Nicholson
Oak Harbor Public Library
Molly & Jim Sass
Sandra Zenser

Sponsors (\$50)

Lee & Natalie Bredbeck
Kathleen Brunt
Bob & Anne Butcher
Richard Celek
Lloyd & Audrey Dayton
Diane DeVries
Joanne Fleming
Larry Fletcher
Bob & Cindy Grimm
Edna Hansen
Joel & Kim Hirt
Roger & Barbara Jensen
Nyle Kardatzke
James I. Kleinhans
David A. Kuehn
Ray Lambert
Elizabeth Moon Maloney
Bill Moon
David Moon
Virginia Prusik
Mark & Julie Stahl
Robert & Katherine
Steinmiller
Richard & Susan Taylor

Members

Jean Alexander
Dick & Jan Batke,
Denise Bell
Mayor Jacqueline Bird
Frank Butwin
Arlene Carr
Susan & Dennis Charvat
Esperanza & Jordan Davenport
LaVonne Dodge
Richard & Nancy Dunham
Theo & Julie Dunham
Cheryl Grissinger Dunn
Martha Dykes
Tom & Mary Evans
Dean Fick
Rod Gale
Joseph & June Gall
Dr. David & Pat George
Judge Kathleen Giesler
David & Debra Grimm
Deb Grissinger
Dr. Michael & Cathy Hablitzel
Ron Hart & Nancy Beadle
David Hirt
Sue Homsy
Linda & Doug Huber
Nancy Ihnat
Kyle Johannsen
Jill & Jerry Lawrence
Donna M. Lueke

Ray & Georgette Machar
Brennan & Torrie Madison
Todd Marsh
Richard Martin
George McCormick
Jane L. Milholland
Ralph Moon
Gretchen Wahlers Morris
Richard Norgard &
Suzy Wittenmyer
Patrick & Karen O'Keefe
David O'Neal
Kathryn Orta
Virginia Park
Margaret Phillips
Linda Price
Karen Russo
Arline Sabin
Donna M. Schell
Linda Schlievert
Carlton & Judy Schwan
Susan M. Smith
Thomas Styancho
Janet Stephenson
Brian Tanguay
Robert & Annette Textor
Janet Traub & Jim Toppin
Sally Heximer & Rich Vedell
John M. Williams
Laura Womach & Rich Williams

Ottawa County Historical Society
P.O. Box 385
Port Clinton, OH 43452



PRST STD
U.S. Postage PAID
Permit No. 118
Port Clinton, OH
43452

Inside:

Blair Museum Lithophanes
Holy Assumption Orthodox Church
Mark Your Calendar!
Lakeside Heritage Society
Immigrants of Ottawa County
Oral History Publication Update
Agriculture
Memberships

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 _____
Sustaining \$35 _____ Sponsor \$50 _____ Patron \$100 or more \$ _____
Contributions \$ _____ Keeper's House \$ _____ Other \$ _____

The OCHS is a non-profit organization.. Your contribution may be tax deductible.

Name _____

Address/City/State/Zip _____

Phone Number _____

Email _____

Total enclosed _____ Date _____ Check # _____

Mail to: OCHS, P.O. Box 385, Port Clinton, OH 43452

I am interested in volunteering.