



# Ottawa County Historical Society



www.ottawacountyhistory.org

Third Quarter 2019

## 2019

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Martha Dykes ~ 419-732-1843



## The Tall Clock Saga

To refresh our readers, the Keeper's House acquired a Lancaster Tall Clock eighteen years ago. It is a Smithsonian catalogued clock which was built sometime before 1816! After preliminary work on the clock by Bill Williams, it was placed in the hands of Joe Wise of Wise Fine Clocks, Fremont. Joe lavished his tender-loving-care on this treasure for years taking it home with him each winter.

Joe passed away several years ago, and this summer the clock stopped. It was again placed in the hands of Wise Fine Clocks, Fremont, for repairs which included the hand fabrication of a brass part so the strike mechanism would work properly. Upon return of the clock to The Keeper's House, the technician, *Jason Pfaff*, replaced the works, adjusted the bonnet, and thoroughly cleaned and oiled the fine Appalachian Cherry/Butternut cabinet. Whereupon, I asked for the bill, knowing it would probably be substantial in view of the highly technical nature of the work done. Jason said, "*There is no charge!*" Upon recovering, I asked, "*Why, how can you do that?*" Jason explained that he and Joe Wise worked on the clock seventeen years ago, that it was the oldest and one of the finest clocks they had ever encountered and they had pledged *to the clock* that they would care for it as long as it was at The Keeper's House. Oh my, what a revelation!

How do we thank Wise sufficiently? That such people are still around doing business in this day and age is so refreshing. ***Thank you Jason and Wise Fine Clocks!***

PAUL MOON

## OCHS Storytelling at the Port Clinton Lighthouse Festival August 17<sup>th</sup>

The OCHS Storytelling program is most grateful to the Port Clinton Lighthouse Festival for providing us with audience and setting in which to share our stories. In honor of Lighthouses, water was the designated theme. Each story paid tribute to the theme of water -- Patrick O’Keeffe’s Pennsylvania farming family who came to Toussaint for the water, Tepp Dunham’s small boat trip from Pelee in a storm. Martha Dykes, in researching her book on West Sister Island, became intrigued with the lighthouse keeper’s children and the watering of their donkeys. Extra-ordinary to think of challenges of those former times. Dickie Dunham first encountered lake swimming in the 1930s from a cottage in Eagle Beach on Catawba and Rich Norgard’s story took place in 1864 when a woman on Put-in-Bay recalled the day when Confederates confiscated a ferry boat for freeing prisoners on Johnson’s Island.

The OCHS Program Committee, in considering future offerings, became intrigued with “the art of storytelling” and its potential to entertain as well as educate. The Lighthouse Festival provided focus for helping us get started and thus began a project that, with its potential for empathy and communication, we hope will grow into a county-wide agenda. We think of this as a work in progress – the coming forward of talents and imagination that inspire and encourage one another in the story telling process – Susan Doell and Debbie Gordon of Playmakers, who “became” the speakers in Rich and Martha’s scripts, the music of Patrick Fleming and Alex Hefner that helped set the mood of the scripts and the generosity and charm of Kathleen Giesler, moderating. We appreciate Trinity Methodist Church for allowing us to use their Youth Room to rehearse.

Looking at the past reminds us of the realities of those lives that came before us and the impact that our present actions come to bear. The storytelling, through its emphasis of close connection between audience and speaker as well as past and current times, provides a unique opportunity for renewal of our own commitments.

We are looking ahead to several program formats that appeal to our history, county wide, including scripts that show the diversity of lifestyles, settlement and opportunity. We would also like to develop an October story telling theme of county ghosts. For more information regarding participation or scheduling a program, contact any member of the

Storytelling Project: Nancy Dunham, Martha Dykes, Kathleen Giesler, Sue Haney, Linda Huber, Rich Norgard, Patrick O’Keeffe, Suzy Wittenmyer.  
(photos by Kathy Leonard) NANCY DUNHAM



**Moderator Kathleen Giesler  
and music by Patrick Fleming  
& Alex Hefner**



**Water written & told by  
Patrick O’Keeffe**



**The Day the Rebels Came  
written by Rich Norgard,  
told by Susan Doell**



**Donkeys on West Sister  
Island, written by Martha  
Dykes, told by  
Debbie Gordon**



**Boat Trip & a Lake Erie Clipper,  
written & told by Tepp Dunham**

## *From the President's Desk.....*

### **Whence the “Keeper’s House?”**

One of the joys of involvement in our group comes from engaging in activities that bring attention to the Wolcott House in Danbury. We present it to the historical community as the home of the first keeper of the lighthouse, the “Sandusky Light,” as it was once known, the venerable structure serving as a beacon to maritime travelers since 1821. Thus, the “Keeper’s House.”

*But, is it?*

That old stone house, the second oldest standing structure in Ottawa County, was built in either 1822, a year after the lighthouse, or 1832, eleven years after, depending on how one views the records. Official entries, which were actually made by a recorder in Norwalk, seat of Huron County, long before the formation of Ottawa County in 1840, are confusing at best. They simply don’t allow for a clear interpretation of when the house was built. On a page containing other listings dated in the 1830s is one dated in the early 1820s concerning Danbury’s Wolcott house. It possible that someone tried to make a correction by making an entry that had been left out a decade earlier. Or, the 1820s date to that entry is simply a mistake. Nobody knows.

Those of us who docent at the house include in our narrative that the house was built in 1822, making it the home of Benajah Wolcott, the first keeper, who died in 1832 from Cholera. Suppose we could travel back in time and determine that the entry has a mistaken date, that the house was actually built in 1832. It would mean that Benajah could at best have lived there only a few days or, more likely, not at all.

*Why does this matter?*

Having come to live in Ottawa County from somewhere else, I must confess to a high degree of astonishment at the way certain historical nerves seem to throb here. For example, just after *History of Ottawa County—the 1<sup>st</sup> 175 Years* came out, I was confronted by a reader who proposed that I, as editor, was perpetuating a fraud on the community because of the way the old stone house was described as the first keeper’s house, which was “not true.” And since then, well-intentioned members of our Society have questioned whether we are being honest by telling visitors that this house was the keeper’s house because there was “another” keeper’s house next to the lighthouse.

Now wait a minute... If Benajah Wolcott was the first lighthouse keeper, and if he lived in this house (or lived in the one for which this was the replacement), was not this the first keeper’s house? Or, if he had the misfortune to die days or months before he got to live here, was this not still the keeper’s house while his wife, Rachel, was the keeper? I’m a newcomer, I suppose—after all, I’ve only been here for a quarter century. In that time I simply have not yet developed an understanding of why this “issue” comes up. Maybe we confuse accuracy with truth.

The house has long been a central focus of our Society. A few visionaries saved it from the wrecking ball back in the 1980s and developed its legacy into what it is today. One hopes that we can expect our future efforts will include identifying similar treasures in Ottawa County, and possibly saving, restoring and presenting them to the public.

When visitors ask—it is the most frequent question we get—why the keeper’s house is so far from the lighthouse, my reply as a docent includes these facts. A 14-year-old boy from Connecticut joined the Continental Army and served many years under Generals Washington and Wayne fighting the War for Independence. Many years later, that same boy, at the age of 60, was appointed by President Monroe as the first lighthouse keeper. This was his house. It was built to replace a previous structure made of lesser quality materials.

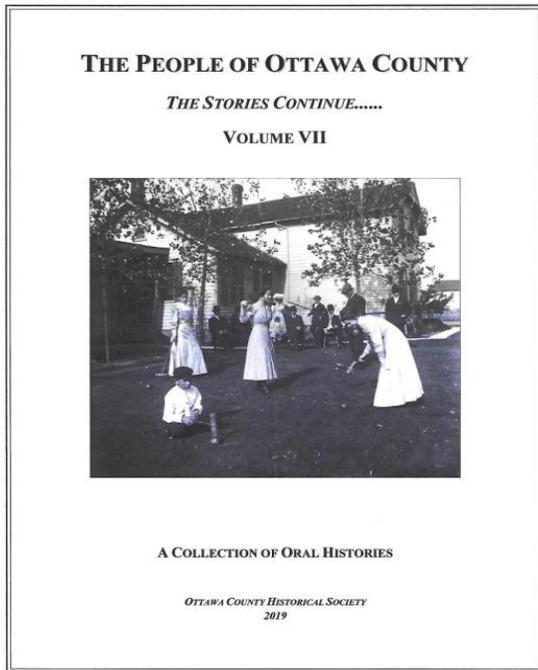
Now, if we could go back in time and discovered that he was not actually 14 when he enlisted, but was maybe 13, or 15...would we have been perpetuating a lie all this time?  
PATRICK O'KEEFFE

### **Bean Soup & Corn Bread**



Time to hoard the ham bones and grind the corn for Benajah’s favorite bean soup and corn bread to be served at the Keeper’s House during the Civil War reenactment on October 12. Volunteers are needed to keep the kettle full-*and the stomachs*-of visitors, soldiers, and musicians. No particular recipe to follow-just one happy mix.

Please call or text Kathy Leonard at 419-512-1741 if you can contribute either bean soup or corn bread, or if you would enjoy helping at the serving table. Thanks very much.



## The People of Ottawa County, *The Stories Continue*

This, the seventh volume of *The People of Ottawa County* continues the tradition of exploring history through the voices of its people while at the same time, adding new dimensions. The twenty-four selections in this publication include memoir, essay and rediscovered files as well as new oral history interviews that taken together create a unique portrayal of the heart and soul of this county through the years.

While the interviews and articles in this volume touch upon those early times, they mostly reflect the later generations tracing back their family origins, documenting names, places, enterprises, vital to the new communities. To read these testimonies is to take a close look at the county in the making, little by little, as it is today -- the origins of the roads and transportation, the draining of the swamp, the adaptations of the people to the landscape – fishing, farming, wine making, the quarrying of the limestone bedrock.

Editor Martha Dykes, Sandy Zenser, Janet Stephenson, Peggy Debien and Kathy Leonard members of the OCHS's Page&Stage oral history project deserve special commendation for the care and thoroughness with which a variety of sources have been resurrected.

Their work keeps us mindful of the many county connections whose interest in history have helped to keep alive our local stories -- John Liske's work from the Oak Harbor Library, Jennifer Fording's help from the Harris-Elmore Library and the late Grace Luebke, Genoa's civic opera house, the Ottawa County Museum, Catawba Island Historical Society and Lake Erie Islands Historical Museum.

The photographs that illustrate the stories have been gratefully accepted as gifts from family collections. This volume celebrates a sense of region and how through time it slowly comes of age.

NANCY DUNHAM

## Port Clinton Perch Wagon

Saturday, July 13, the Society hosted the Port Clinton Perch Wagon. A dual fundraising event for both the Rotary, visitors purchased perch dinners and sandwiches with a side of hand-cut French fries. Frontier-style hearth cooking was underway in the Keeper's House. *(photos by Kathy Leonard)*



Visitors await food prepared by the  
Port Clinton Rotary Club



L-R Beck Shemenski offers hearth cooked molasses  
cookies to Pam Allen of Lakeside

## OCHS Annual Potluck Picnic

The annual society summer potluck was held August 21 at the Keeper's House. Patrick O'Keeffe shared his storytelling performance *Water* in costume as presented at the Port Clinton Lighthouse Maritime Festival. In addition to the traditional cooked ham, guests brought their favorite dishes.



Patrick O'Keeffe performing *Water*  
Photo by Kathy Leonard

## Gaspard-Joseph de Lery

Excerpt from Beaver County, PA historical magazine  
*Milestones*, winter 2019



One interesting but lesser known person of our local history was Gaspard-Joseph Chaussegros de Lery who was the son of the Chief Engineer of New France (Canada). Born in New France to a military family, he joined the French colonial forces at the age of twelve. He quickly became an assistant engineer.

In his day, France owned New France and occupied the Mississippi corridor all the way from New Orleans to and including the Great Lakes area. They claimed the area starting at Lake Erie south to the Ohio River and all its tributaries. Their title to these

lands was based on the explorations of Rene-Robert Cavalier Sieur de La Salle between 1673 and 1687. La Salle never kept a journal but only related the story to a friend in Paris years later.

There was no easy connection between the French Mississippi River possessions and New France. To reach Illinois country, troops or travelers had to cross Lake Erie, and take a land and water route to Lake Chautauqua, then to the Allegheny and finally the Ohio River or 'Belle Riveiere' as it was known to the French.

In 1730, a connection became necessary as the Chickasaw Indians in Mississippi became troublesome to the French. As part of a massive effort to subdue them, the Baron de Longueuil would lead a large military expedition from Montreal nearly 1,600 miles to the vicinity of present Memphis, Tennessee. The plan was for the expedition to rendezvous with others moving north from New Orleans and south along the Mississippi River from forts based there. His expedition was the first large military force to travel through Western Pennsylvania.

Among the 442 men of Longueuil's Expedition was a young 18 year old assistant engineer named Ensign Gaspard-Joseph Chaussegros de Lery who left a record of his activities. He was tasked with the important job of creating a map of the expedition's route between Niagara Falls and the Ohio River using the compass surveys and dead reckoning while calculating distances. During the journey he also kept a diary. As he passed down the Ohio River, he became the first white man to note the existence of the mysterious Indian carvings known as petroglyphs. He noticed there were many 'marks and figures of men and animals cut out on the rocks, as if with chisels' This made him the first white man to record their existence.

Although Longueuil's mission against the Chickasaw met with mixed results, the main benefit of the expedition became de Lery's map which was to become the most accurate representation of the course of the Ohio River up to that time. It also gave in great detail the route, along with necessary portaging places, lakes, Indian villages and connecting streams needed to reach the Ohio River from New France.



## Coming Events

### Winter Hours

Ottawa County Museum will resume winter hours after Labor day. They will be open Wednesdays from 12 noon to 3 p.m.

### Union Cemetery Walk

**When:** Saturday, September 28, 2019 at 4 p.m.

**Where:** **Oak Harbor Union Cemetery,**

11565 Ohio 105, Oak Harbor

Sponsored by Oak Harbor Public Library, Dick Martin, Connie Starnes, John Crosser and John Liske will share stories and history about the older parts of the cemetery. Park on the north side of Route 105 in grass next to the road. Be aware the ground is uneven and not walker or wheelchair friendly.

Please register @oakharborpubliclibrary.org or call 419-898-7001.

### Autumn Wine Event

**When:** Saturday, October 12, 2019

(Hours to be announced)

**Where:** **Liberty Aviation Museum,** 3515 East State Road at the Erie-Ottawa International Airport, Port Clinton

Event will be held in the Museum's main hangar. Museum galleries and Hangar 2 will close at 5:00 p.m. Call Liberty Aviation Museum for more details at 419-732-0234.

### Lighthouse Festival - Union Encampment

**When:** Saturday, October 12, 2019,

11:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

**Where:** **Wolcott Keeper's House,**

9999 E. Bayshore Road, Marblehead, OH

The Ottawa County Historical Society Lighthouse Festival Civil War Encampment honors Henry Wolcott, son of Benajah and Rachel. The Ohio 14<sup>th</sup> Volunteer Infantry encamps for the occasion. Special performances from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. by Ohio 73<sup>rd</sup> Volunteer Regimental Band with 15-piece authentic uniforms and instruments playing Civil War era music. Fireplace cooking demonstration; docent guided tours; gift shop and museum open. Bean soup, cornbread, and cider. Annual fundraising drawing at 3:00 p.m. Partial funding support for this event provided by a grant from the Ohio Arts Council

### Fall OCHS Membership Meeting

**When:** Sunday, November 10, 2019, 12:30 p.m.

**Where:** **Catawba Island Club**

4235 E. Beach Club Road, Port Clinton

Fall meeting of the membership with election of officers. All welcome to attend! Frank Kuron, author of *Thus Fell Tecumseh*, will explore the legends surrounding the death of the great Shawnee leader, Tecumseh, and William Henry Harrison. Mr. Kuron lives in Toledo and is well recognized for his research on Tecumseh and local tribes of Northwest Ohio.

Cost: \$25 per person. Make check payable to the Ottawa County Historical Society. Please send reservations by **Wednesday, November 6** to: OCHS c/o Patrick O'Keeffe, 1011 Taft Street, Port Clinton, OH 43452

### Annual Holiday Stop & Shop

**When:** Saturday & Sunday, December 14 & 15,

Saturday: 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.;

Sunday: 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

**Where:** **Liberty Aviation Museum,**

3515 East State Road at the Erie-Ottawa International Airport, Port Clinton

Free admission. Contact the Museum for details at 419-732-0234.

### WWII Era Big Band USO-style

#### Hangar Swing Dance

**When:** Tuesday, December 31, 2019

(hours to be announced)

**Where:** **Liberty Aviation Museum,** 3515 East State Road at the Erie-Ottawa International Airport, Port Clinton. New Year's Eve World War II-era Big Band USO-style Hangar Dance. Contact Museum for further details at 419-732-0234.



November 3<sup>rd</sup>

Please mail me the following items.

Item	Description	Price each	Shipping/ Handling each	Tax each	X Quantity	Total
Book	<i>Along the Highways &amp; Waterways of Ottawa County</i> <b>NEW!!</b>	\$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> <b>NEW!</b>	\$15.00	\$4.00	\$1.33		
Book	Complete set of Oral Histories: Volume 1 through VII	\$105.00	\$6.00	\$7.77		
Book	<i>Combined Atlas of Ottawa County - 1874 &amp; 1900</i> <b>NEW PRICE</b>	\$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</i> - children's coloring/activity book	\$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.

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Port Clinton, OH 43452



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**OTTAWA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

**2019** - ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP DUES - due in January of each year  
*(If your address label does not say 2019 or Life Member it is time to pay dues.)*

Single \$15\_\_\_\_\_ Family \$25\_\_\_\_\_ Student \$10\_\_\_\_\_  
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Contributions \$\_\_\_\_\_ Keeper's House \$\_\_\_\_\_ Other \$\_\_\_\_\_

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

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

**I am interested in volunteering.**