



# Ottawa County Historical Society



www.ottawacountyhistory.org

Fourth Quarter 2021

**2021**

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Nancy Dunham ~ 419-797-2244

## **Corresponding Secretary, Oral History Chairman, Newsletter Editor**

Martha Dykes ~ 419-732-1843

## **Spring Meeting of the Membership**

Looking ahead to 2022, we are planning a bit different format for our Spring meeting of the membership. Mark your calendars for Saturday, May 14 at 11:30 a.m. at The Arts Garage in Port Clinton. Book author and artist, Robert Kroeger will be our guest speaker to tell stories from and sign copies of his book *Historic Barns of Ohio*. In addition, Bob will have a painting demonstration producing an artistic creation of one of Ottawa County's historic barns. The painting will be auctioned with proceeds benefitting the Historical Society's Scholarship Fund.

Bob's passion for painting and wanting to preserve historic old barns led Kroeger to visit all of Ohio's 88 counties, capturing what he sees as a part of Ohio history that is vanishing to age and decay. The paintings he created culminated in the 2021 publication of the book. The barn from Ottawa County selected for the book is the Lowe barn on Route 2 called *Tornado*.



Lowe barn called *Tornado* - painting by Robert Kroeger

## To the Future

By Patrick O’Keeffe

One of the measures of an organization’s success is how well it responds to unanticipated circumstances that arise—as they always do in any endeavor. Our much abbreviated season is a testament to that.

We started out in the spring hunkered down. Even the Board meetings were conducted from behind personal computer screens. It wasn’t until May, when vaccinations looked like they were about to render somewhat promising numbers, that we finally began to peek out at each other in person.

Our first public event wasn’t until July 10, and then the Wolcott Keeper’s House season was clipped to just a few weeks and only two days each week. Then, once the Delta Variant raised its ugly head, we had to reverse course following the Civil War Encampment and shut everything down again.

What is amazing is the enthusiasm with which so many of our members involve themselves in activities when there is just a glimpse of hope of accomplishing anything at all. I’d started out planning that this article name everybody I could think of who had contributed to this year’s endeavors, but soon realized it would be far too cumbersome, not to mention risk inadvertently leaving someone out. I will just note that the list of names I compiled with that in mind numbers well over thirty individuals. That’s almost a third of our membership!

We are a vibrant organization. With one leg tied to the ball and chain of Covid, we have been slogging ahead with all sorts of doings that, hopefully, we will be able to include in activities for 2022 and thereafter.

Paul Moon has been vigorously pursuing plans whereby our entire community can make a big fuss over the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the appointment of Benajah Wolcott as the first lighthouse keeper and celebrate the construction of the house itself, the focal point of so much of the Society’s efforts in the past thirty years. Oh, and by the way, celebrate the lighthouse too.

Nancy Dunham’s ongoing insistence that as historians we should be telling stories has led to development of the fledgling History Speaks group. With the accomplishment of a couple of performances, it has begun to gain momentum and some notice in the community, which bode well for upcoming seasons.

Linda Huber, fitting it in among all the other things she does, has been the impetus behind a plan to launch a scholarship program for area-wide high school seniors. This is part of a larger effort to more specifically engage the youth in our community in appreciation of their history.

All of these efforts reflect a broadening of the Society’s focus. In 2018, we restated our mission as, “To discover, preserve and celebrate the history of Ottawa County and to promote a heightened awareness of our local place in time.” That is, while we celebrate the past, we must work at being an instrument that actively delivers our legacy to the future.



### Do You Like to Cook?

*Would you like to cook over the hearth as your ancestors did in 1822?*

If you like to cook, and especially if you have an interest in hearth cooking as was done in the 1800s, please contact Becky Shemanski at 419-898-3852 or at: [becky.f.ski@gmail.com](mailto:becky.f.ski@gmail.com).

There is an immediate need for help with hearth cooking and a need for a fire builder, one to build and keep the fire at the correct temperature for cooking and baking during demonstrations.

We have lots of fun demonstrating hearth cooking during our events open to the public and offering samples of our results!



## And the Winners Are ....

Our increasingly popular annual raffle was once again a great success this year, thanks largely to both Becky Shemenski for the nitty-gritty administration of the event and Brennan Madison for once again seeing to the tickets by way of a contribution from his Frederick Insurance Agency. John Starcher provided a \$50 gift certificate to Village Pro Hardware. And, of course, Alex Porter, who once again stepped in as our official ticker puller at about 3 o'clock at the Civil War Encampment event on October 9.

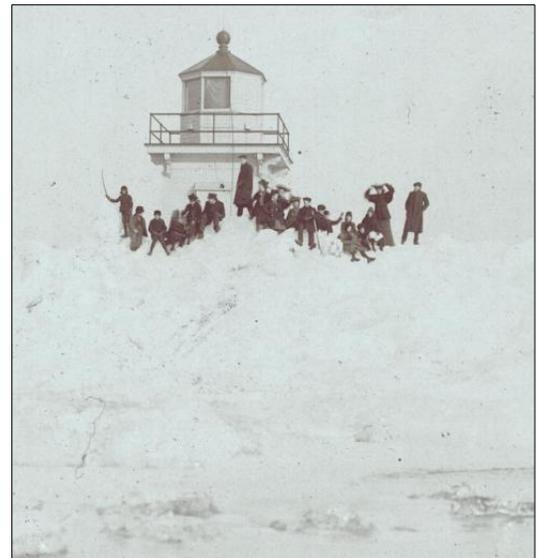
This year, the first prize chosen out of three was a Ben Richmond print showing a scene inside the Wolcott Keeper's house that included the first keeper's coat and hat and fiddle with bow. Wendy Caperton of Wooster Ohio, ticket ending in number 0491, was the winner. A teacher from Wooster, Wendy had walked into our midst that afternoon. When she learned she won, she excitedly said she plans to brag about her experience with folks in her area. She also said she took many photos and plans to share them with her friends and tell them that she found our event and its location to be quite a treasure.

Scott Lamb of Amherst, ticket 0607, was our second winner. He chose the \$50 gift certificate from Village Pro Hardware. Scott frequents our area in the summer season and was quite literally a very happy camper to have won the prize.

Coming in third in prize choices was a signed copy of the *History of Ottawa County -- the First 175 Years*, won by Joan and Jim Herl of Catawba, ticket 0295. They reported back a few days ago that they're enjoying the book at their leisure as they winter in Florida.



"Lightkeepers", the popular sculpture by Andy Sacksteder, artist-in-residence at the Port Clinton Arts Garage, now has a permanent plaque. The new plaque identifies the work and its creator, and informs visitors that it is "dedicated to the keepers of the Port Clinton Lighthouse". The lighthouse keepers are listed in the order in which they served, beginning with Austin Smith, appointed as keeper of Port Clinton's first lighthouse in 1833. The plaque also recognizes the David Jeremy and Darrell Brand families, "without whom the lighthouse would not have survived." The sculpture was acquired by the Port Clinton Lighthouse Conservancy as the result of a community fundraising drive. The plaque was installed this past week by Masonry Construction.



Revelers sit atop a mountain of push ice on the west pier of the Portage River with the Port Clinton Pier Light in the background. This undated photo, donated to the Port Clinton Lighthouse Conservancy by the Port Clinton Yacht Club, makes clear the lighthouse was just as important as a gathering place for community then as it is today.

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

## **Agriculture**

Since World War II Ottawa County has seen great changes in agriculture. These days, a visit to the County Fair reveals an absence of many of the old home farm exhibits. Up to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the evolution of agriculture had passed through two stages: first, as a means of survival for the pioneer, and second, self-sustainability for the farm family. The earliest farmers here cleared a few acres of forest and then plowed up and cultivated the often-boggy land. These were followed by well-run family operations that could have included, at a minimum, fruit orchards, nut-bearing trees, dairy, poultry, beef, and a vegetable garden. Changes in farming were slowly driven by improvements in agricultural technology. Farms turned more to specialization in fruit, hay, grain, dairy, pork or poultry.



**Benton Township.** Kevin M. Fox in front of his storage bins and forty-foot header combine, 2015. This combine new with both corn and grain headers would cost around \$600,000. These farm implements are guided by GPS (Global Positioning System is a navigational system which uses satellite signals to tell where you are and gives directions) not by the operator. Photo provided by Sandra L. Zenser

After World War II, farming increasingly became involved in the global marketplace. Cooperative elevators were abandoned in favor of distant, larger facilities easily reached by train.

Much of the locally grown grain was shipped overseas. Agricultural technology underwent exponential development. Today, no-till planting enables growing crops from year to year without mechanically disrupting the soil. No-till’s powerful benefits offer improvement in soil fertility, more efficient sowing time and the decline of erosion. Single-row implements have gone to planters that can drill 16 rows of corn and 32 rows of soybeans in a single pass.



**Benton Township.** In 1996 a no-till or zero tillage planting of soybeans over corn stubble. Photo provided by Kevin M. Fox

The result is that in the current stage of agriculture’s evolution, small family farms are mostly gone. Depending on its location and soil quality, farmland today is worth about \$5,000 per acre. The Kevin Fox family, as an example, now farms 6,500 acres, which they either own or rent. Kevin’s motto, painted on his office wall, states in part, “...farming, despite hardships and disappointments, is the most honest and honorable way a man can spend his days on this earth. I believe in 200 bushel corn and 60 bushel soybeans. I also believe that the only good weed is a dead weed!”



**Graytown.** Once part of the cooperative elevator system in the township. The Luckey Farmers, Inc. elevator in Graytown, Ohio, and the 2015 fall soybean harvest. Photo provided by Sandra L. Zenser

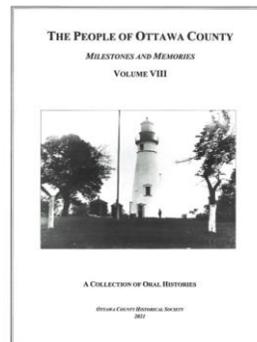
No doubt, a farmer from 1820 would barely recognize his counterpart in today's fields. A team of oxen or a mule to hitch a plow to would have been a treasured possession back then. What once was very labor intensive has turned high-tech. Today, a lone farmer can plant and harvest thousands of tiled acres from the air-conditioned cab of a half-million-dollar, self-propelled vehicle that he or she controls through GPS coordinates, joystick at their fingertips. Although contemporary technology has maximized yields, it has not been without problems that still need to be solved. Most recently, concern over algae blooms in Lake Erie and local streams has contemporary farmers looking to still further advances in technology that will enable a more sustainable approach. Methods that eliminate over-use of weed eradication and fertilizer, especially phosphorus, is highly anticipated by growers and environmentalists alike.



Beryl Schiller plowing a field using a single row plow and a team of horses, c. 1923. Photo provided by the Myron Schiller Family.



## Oral History Publication Update



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

Hopefully, the book will be ready for the publisher by January, in time for the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Marblehead Lighthouse celebration and 200 years since Benajah Wolcott was appointed as the first light keeper.

Due to Covid our committee has not been able to meet or interview any Ottawa County people. Thankfully, I have managed to find enough interesting stories to be included in this volume.

MARTHA DYKES, EDITOR

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