



Ottawa County Historical Society



www.ottawacountyhistory.org

First Quarter 2023

2023

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Spring Meeting of the Membership

All aboard! This May, historians, John Liske and Dick Martin, will be our tour guides for a *Toledo/Port Clinton/Lakeside Interurban* adventure. Long time Ottawa County residents, John and Dick will share the fascinating history of the interurban as it traveled from Toledo, Oak Harbor, Port Clinton, and Lakeside with the last stop at Bay Point in Marblehead.

The meeting will be held at Lakeside in Wesley Lodge (Fifth St. & Central Ave.) on Sunday, May 7. (Lakeside gate fees not in effect.) Lunch at 12:30 p.m. and a presentation following at approximately 1:00 p.m. Reservations required. Additional details will be mailed to the membership and event information is available on our website at www.ottawacountyhistory.org.

So, mark your calendars and we hope to see you there!



Announcing our Ottawa County Historical Society Facebook page! Social media is vital in our times, and our new Facebook page will allow us to connect in real time with people around the world. It's a quick way to get our message to the residents of Northwest Ohio as well as show the global community what the Ottawa County Historical Society has to offer. Best of all, it's free. So like us today.

LISA HOSSLER



2023 Spring Cleaning at the Keeper's House

WHEN: Saturday, May 20 - Time: 10:00 a.m. - noon

WHERE: Keeper's House, 9999 Bayshore Road, Marblehead

We need help with the annual inside cleaning of the Keeper's House and Annex. Bring light cleaning supplies (brooms, rags, Windex, buckets, rakes, etc.). We'll be sweeping out the cobwebs inside the Keeper's House and Annex. Pizza will be served at noon. All welcome!

Questions call Dave O'Neal at 419-898-2000. **Thanks so much!!**

Talk about History

By Patrick O'Keefe

As historians, our attention is most often focused on our own past, or at least those aspects of it that relate to our local history. Once in a while, events are of such magnitude that they shake us out of that tendency. Such was the case with World War II. Much has been written about Ottawa County's contribution to being suddenly drawn up into a whirlwind event so much bigger than itself.

We have been lucky to know and have among us Dr. Harold Brown, long a resident of Ottawa County. Years ago, as an adolescent in Minnesota, he developed an interest in flying. He took lessons on his own dime, saving up the money he earned working after school as a soda jerk. He graduated from high school at the age of seventeen, six months after Pearl Harbor. America was at war with Germany and Japan.

When he turned eighteen, this young man decided to join the army and volunteer for training in an experimental program at Tuskegee Institute to become a pilot in the air corps. He had two things against him. He was under-weight—the low limit was 128.5 pounds—and he was a black man trying to go back to the deep south, his parents having previously moved north to escape the worst of Jim Crow.

To overcome the weight issue, he pursued a diet of ice cream, malt and an egg until he achieved 128.75 pounds, and was accepted into the Tuskegee program. While at the training base in 1940s Alabama, he avoided the dangerous—often lethal—enforcement of Jim Crow by only visiting black neighborhoods when off the base. He was one of 355 men to complete training as a Tuskegee Airman.

Second Lieutenant Brown was immediately sent to Italy with the 332nd Fighter Group, where he flew thirty missions in a P-51, its tail painted a distinctive red. The Tuskegee Airmen became legendary for their protection of American bombers. A former B-17 pilot I spoke with many years ago, who flew out of bases in North Africa, exclaimed, "Whenever we saw that our escort had those red tails, we knew our chances for survival had just gone up."

In 2019, Harold Brown told the Cleveland Plain Dealer, "It was felt that this big experiment (utilizing black pilots) was going to fail and fall flat on its face. They'll never make it... That was really one of our biggest motivations, that we cannot fail."

After thirty missions, Brown found himself parachuting out of his plane over Linz, Austria. The P-51 had been disabled by flying chunks of a train-engine boiler that had been blown skyward from him having strafed it. He was met on the ground by angry citi-

zens who took him to a tree to be hanged. A constable rescued him, hid him in a bar overnight, and turned him over to a German POW camp—the first non-segregated military camp he'd ever been in. Six weeks later, the camp was liberated by General Patton.

Brown remained in the service, which Truman, citing the heroism of the Tuskegee group, ordered desegregated. Brown went on to fly missions in the Korean conflict. He remained in the Air Force, a flight instructor at Tuskegee Army Airfield, then at Lockbourne Air Force Base in Ohio. He also qualified as a Strategic Air Command B-47 bomber pilot. He retired from the military in 1965 as a Lieutenant Colonel.

Following retirement, Brown received a degree in Mathematics from Ohio State, and went on to earn a Doctorate in Education, and served as Vice President at Columbus State Community College. He retired (again) in 1986. His recent passing at 98 means we will no longer see him on the street, or in a store, no longer enjoy that smile, that unassuming presence of a hero—a hero who has long allowed us to claim him as our own.

"I've always had a passion for learning, for setting goals and achieving them, for being as good or better than others in like circumstances around me," he wrote in his memoir, *Keep Your Airspeed Up: The Story of a Tuskegee Airman*, which he co-authored with his wife, Dr. Marsha Bordner, former President of Terra State Community College in Fremont.

Talk about History!

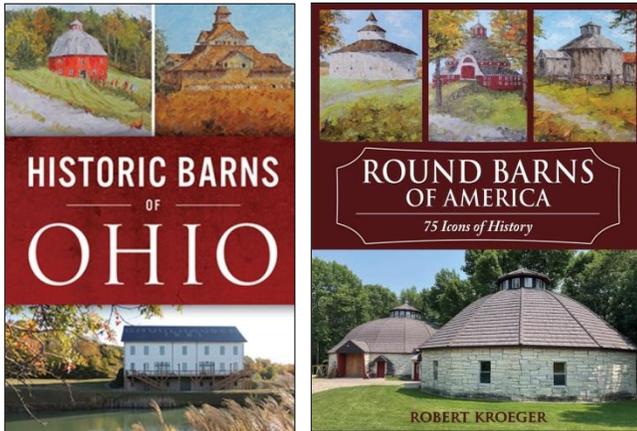
Fundraiser for the OCHS Scholarship Fund

*"Barns represent the heart of America, and the old ones are bleeding. So many barns, so little time." -
Robert F. Kroeger*

In early 2000s while staying in a rural bed and breakfast in Licking County, Ohio, a lonely deteriorating barn, "Granville Gray," called out to Bob. With roof sagging, boards missing, corners slightly tilted, and in obvious disrepair, it captivated his eye. Suddenly a voice whispered, "Paint it and write about it." Paint and write he did! His first book, *Historic Barns of Ohio*, tells a barn story from each of Ohio's 88 counties and features the painting for that specific county. His second book, *Round Barns of America*, expands that passion across America showcasing the stories and paintings of 75 round barns.

Please join us at Port Clinton's The Arts Garage (TAG) for a painting demonstration and barn stories

talk. For sale will be his two books: *Historic Barns of Ohio* at \$25 and *Round Barns of America* at \$35 (cash/check only). Doors open at 4:00 p.m., barn stories talk at 6:00 p.m., and book sales/signing at 7:00 p.m. Free and open to the public. Donations encouraged. Proceeds benefit the Ottawa County Historical Society Scholarship Fund. TAG is located at 317 West Perry Street, Port Clinton, Ohio.



Historical Marker Dedication

On Saturday, April 1 at 2:30 p.m. Ottawa County’s 21st Ohio historical marker will be dedicated. In response to a special call from the Ohio History Connection, the Society submitted an application to honor the major role immigrants played in helping to shape the County’s development. A significant challenge was in determining that one artifact to best reflect their contributions. If one drives anywhere within the County, the answer becomes fairly obvious--the churches. Holy Assumption Orthodox Church, built 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.



Please join us in helping to honor all the immigrants of Ottawa County at the dedication of the historical marker “Holy Assumption Orthodox Church/Immigrants of Ottawa County.” The church is located at 114 E. Main Street in Marblehead. Tour of Church and refreshments available.

Oral History Project

by Janet Stephenson

Note: This article was written by Janet as the introduction for Volume III of the People of Ottawa County book series.

The books that we have published are an important aspect of our oral history project. Volume I *How We Got Here, What We Did* was published in April 2003. Volume II, *Recollections and Voices* came out in July 2004. These books were a collaborative effort spearheaded by the Ottawa County Historical Society with the assistance of the Ida Rupp Public Library, Lake Erie Islands Historical Society and the Lakeside Heritage Society.

In the summer of 2001, the Ottawa County Historical Society considered joining the Wallpaper Project, which would be an Ohio Bicentennial production *From Here - A Century of Voices From Ohio*. Groups from throughout Ohio would submit oral histories that would be used to compile a stage presentation to tell Ohio's history and heritage. Our group decided to participate, and so we began collecting our group of local histories. Interviews were conducted, and we also had available from Lakeside and Put-in-Bay several that had been done previously. We submitted our group of stories and also asked to have one of the presentations for Port Clinton.

In order to create interest for the June 2003 show, we arranged a program of readings from several of the interviews for the Historical Society's annual meeting in November 2002.

As the group was making its selections for the state presentation as well as our own local one, we came to realize what a really great collection we had. Making cuts, choosing to include or not include made us want somehow to find a way to share them more widely. The brief glimpses and sound bites did not do justice to the stories these people were sharing with us. So the idea of a book to include more became a fact, although we had certainly not set out to create a book.

What seemed easy and obvious, though, became complex, formidable, intriguing. In our small group there were many varying opinions, reflecting our own interests and differences. We used what we had and tried to portray all parts of the county, but we soon learned how much we did not know about the county. We couldn't use all that we had and making choices was not easy.

Along the way, it also became obvious we needed suitable photographs to illustrate the stories. That required another large portion of time, but we are particularly proud of that part of the book. We were assisted here by Vicki Ashton of the Ottawa County Historical Museum, who allowed us to use photos from their collection.

The first book was published, but we had featured it as Volume I, so it seemed we needed to get to work on Volume II. We tried to collect interviews with a conscious effort to include a variety of interests, experiences, ages, careers, but especially all the areas of the county. Some people offered to do an interview; we asked some; we received suggestions. We got our map out. Were there some gaps that need to be filled?

Ottawa County is a large and diverse county. East and west have very different interests. There is a challenge in presenting Ottawa County; our checkered past with tales of lawlessness, bootlegging, rum running, scandal, the hard-working farmers; the orchards; the fishermen; the resort and vacationland interests. Memories are not always the same. There is our truth and my truth. How do we have a fair picture without hurt or harm? There is the good, the bad, the sad, the critical, the personal. We hope our selections have done a fair job. We have learned from each volume and hope that Volume III will reflect that. *[as well as subsequent Volumes IV through Volume VIII]*

A Word or Two about Interviewing

There are books, manuals, workshops, seminars that suggest a very structured situation with specific instructions and questions for conducting interviews. I don't believe any of ours fit into that category. In my opinion, they seem more like an interrogation or examination, very intimidating. There is a difference between a real historical document and memories or reminiscences. We have tried to include the personal - the everyday life - not another accounting of what can be found in history books.

Most of ours are more spontaneous, casual, although we do speak with the interviewee before the taping, discuss the general subject or area and suggest they may want to make a few notes. We prepare general questions to give it, if possible, some coherent form. Sometimes it works; sometimes it doesn't. We've had to reorganize some of our transcripts. Too many interruptions can interfere with the flow or remind some of their forgetfulness.

It is necessary to have a quiet place without distractions. I'm reminded of an interview we did on a summer morning on Main Street in Marblehead. The windows were open, the traffic, especially trucks, was very loud. A good recorder is a necessity.

When the interview is concluded, we ask people to sign a "release" and explain how we may use the interview. After the tape is transcribed - as soon as possible - we send a copy to for their approval or remarks.

Respect for the interviewee is very important. Some people are quite frank and open, and that may cause us to consider whether to use parts of the interview. Others are very private and don't share certain things which we'd like to clarify or ask about. Occasionally, we hear things we are pretty certain are incorrect. How do we handle those situations diplomatically? The introduction in Volume I addresses that with this statement:

Oral Histories are valuable in recording first person testimony and historic flavor. At the same time, their accuracy is subject to memory and personal interpretation. They are intended to be read as such.

Most of our interviews last one to one and one-half hours. That's enough for both parties.

The books that we have published are:

- *Along the Highways & Waterways of Ottawa County*
- Volume I: *The People of Ottawa County - How We Got Here, What We Did*
- Volume II: *The People of Ottawa County - Recollections and Voices*
- Volume III: *The People of Ottawa County - Across the Townships*
- Volume IV: *The People of Ottawa County - Threads and Textures of a Tapestry*
- Volume V: *The People of Ottawa County - Ottawa County Through Their Eyes*
- Volume VI: *The People of Ottawa County - Memories and Adventures*
- Volume VII: *The People of Ottawa County - The Stories Continue*
- Volume VIII: *The People of Ottawa County - Milestones and Memories*

Note: We are seeking people to join our group. Anyone interested in conducting oral history interviews or assist with publications is invited to contact the Ottawa County Historical Society oral history project on PAGE&STAGE, please, contact Martha Dykes at:

419-732-1843 or email martgene80@gmail.com

Lighthouse Season

Article by Karen Wells. This article appeared in the Fall 2022 edition of the Great Lakes Lighthouse Keepers Association quarterly publication, the *Beacon*. Reprinted with permission.

Most volunteers at Great Lakes offshore lighthouses focus their operations on the summer months with occasional trips into September or October. Historic lightkeepers, however, typically stayed on station into December, supporting the end of the traditional navigation season.

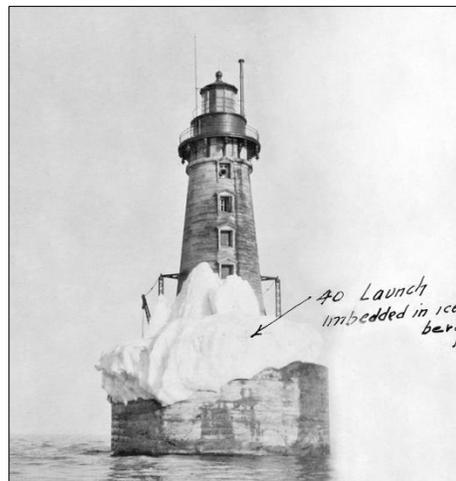
Late season support was arguably some of their most important duty. The Mataafa Storm of 1905, The Great Lakes Storm of 1913, and the Armistice Day Storm of 1940 all occurred in November, causing a significant number of shipwrecks and loss of life. Individual sinkings such as the *Carl D. Bradley* in 1958, the *Daniel J. Morrell* in 1966 and *Edmund Fitzgerald* in 1975 also occurred in November. Even with the presence of lights and fog signals, sudden storms and blizzard conditions made navigation difficult.

It was often a balancing act to ensure the safety of keepers needing to return from remote locations with these duties. An 1891 letter sent to Keeper Lewis Bourisseau of South Fox Island Light Station reflects this: "Your Assistant and yourself are hereby granted permission to leave the island this winter to live on the main land. You should remain as late as possible, so as not to endanger your lives in reaching the main shore, and should return to the station as early in the spring as practicable."

It could be difficult to predict how late was "too late." The keepers at Stannard Rock got iced in on several occasions often as early as November. In 1913, for instance, a major ice storm encased the light in ice. A rescue party was called and twelve men worked from the eleventh of November to the fifteenth to free the trapped keepers using steam lines, shovels and axes to break them out. While more frequent on Lake Superior, icing was a significant risk to keepers on the lower lakes as well. In 1927, three keepers at Spectacle Reef were trapped for four days by a buildup of ice that blocked the tower's doors. They were finally retrieved on December 14 by the *Poe Reef* Lightship as it returned to Cheboygan for the winter. The keepers had to lower themselves out of a fifth-floor window by rope to escape and cross the ice on foot for their rescue.

Lightships had been an early solution to marking locations where building lights was difficult. Over time, approximately three dozen Great Lakes locations made use of lightships. Their use was problematic in given the difficulty to install them early in spring due to ice or unfavorable weather and the need to remove them in fall before they got iced in. Ultimately, this shortcoming resulted in them being replaced by permanent lighthouses and by 1940, only the *Huron* remained.

While remote lights were typically seasonal operations, there were locations and time periods when there was pressure to remain open year-round to support railroad ferries that operated year-round. A telegram dated December 14, 1897 reads: "Ration South Fox Island and keep it lighted if practicable." Further correspondence on December 18th asked how much it would cost to rent a boat for the winter and promised the Ann Arbor Railroad ferry would deliver provisions. By December 22, though, the Lighthouse Board revoked its order to keep the station open that year.



Stannard Rock encased in ice - April 29, 1922

Photo courtesy of U.S. Coast Guard

Correspondence on the topic resumed in fall of 1898 when letters from the Manistee Transit Company, the Ann Arbor Railroad & Steamship Lines and the Minneapolis, St. Paul & Sault Saint Marie Railway Company requesting "certain stations be kept open during the winter" including Beaver Island, South Fox Island and North Manitou Island. Later letters inquire if South Fox had enough mineral oil to last until May 1899 and, if not, how much additional they would require. It appears the station did remain open that winter as George Chamberlain of Vicksburg, MI was appointed Second Assistant Keeper in February 1899. In inquir-

ing about transport, it was suggested that he see if he could get there by fish tug from Charlevoix. Another evidence that the station remained open was that the annual report of the Lighthouse Board recorded the fog signal was in operation 581 hours that year and consumed about 42 cords of wood and 43 tons of coal. A normal year's operation was typically in the 250- to 350-hour range.

There was apparently not enough benefit to justify a repeat the following year as correspondence in December 1899 recommends discontinuing the Beaver Island and South Fox Lights for the winter with provision that a notice to mariners is posted to that effect.

There did not appear to be a fixed date for closing a particular station and it seemed to be topic of correspondence each fall. An October 5, 1892 letter to South Fox's Bourisseau allowed that he and his assistant could leave for the winter but "not until the close of navigation, which under no circumstances will be prior to December 7th." Years later, correspondence from the Naval Secretary to the Ninth District Inspector dated December 4, 1906 directed him to "maintain the light and fog-signal at the South Fox Island Light Station during the winter, or until the steamer service at that location is discontinued." Another year it was suggested they close the station "no sooner than December 22nd."

My research did not find instances where a keeper got left behind, but Hyde's *The Northern Lights* recounts a story where a keeper's family was left to over winter. In November 1883, the keeper at Passage Island, northeast of Isle Royale, went to Port Arthur (now Thunder Bay, ON) for supplies. Winter storms prevented his return, leaving his Native American wife and three children alone on the island until spring. His wife fished and snared rabbits for food, barely escaping starvation though her resourcefulness.

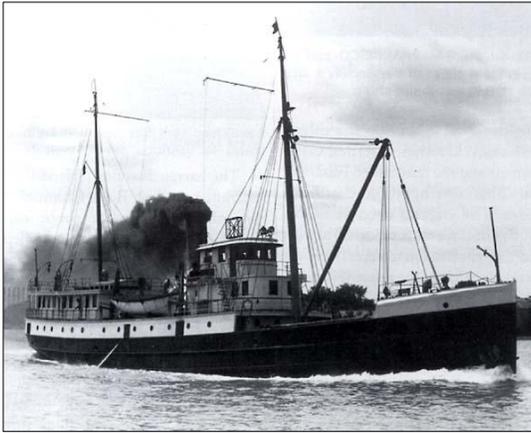
Departing a remote light station was a risky proposition, particularly when the only available transport that late in the season might be a relatively small boat. It could have tragic results. The keeper, his wife, niece, and two assistants left Squaw Island for the winter on December, 15, 1900 in a twenty-two-foot sailboat headed for St. James on Beaver Island. The boat capsized in a squall. Both women, one of the assistants and the family dog perished before the two survivors were

rescued by the steamer *Manhattan*. Their experience, unfortunately, was not all that unusual as at least two other lightkeeper fatalities were recorded that season on Lake Michigan alone.

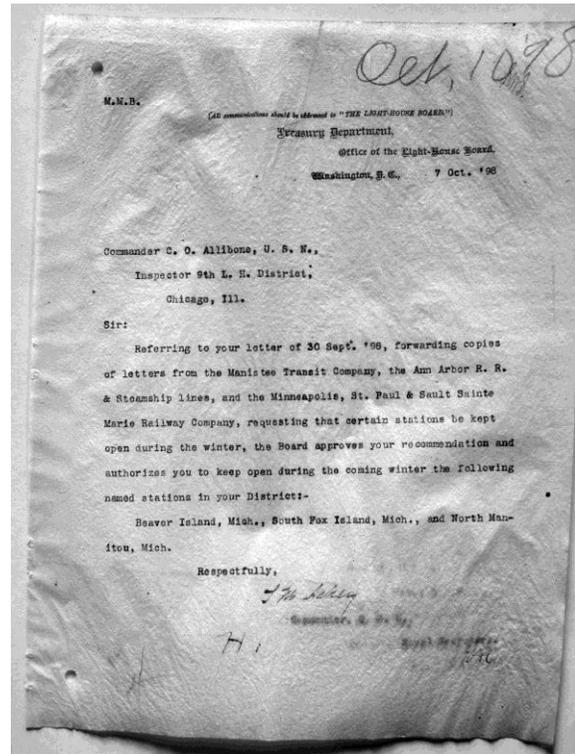
Even with larger vessels, retrieval was not problem-free. On December 2, 1911, the tender *Marigold* removed the keepers from Stannard Rock. A week later, after having weathered a storm and run low on both food and fuel, they picked up the crews from Raspberry, Sand & Outer Island Lights in the Apostles over the next several days. By December 16, they finally reached Rock of Ages Light, off Isle Royale, where the keepers where down to their final can of food. Two of the keepers suffered frostbite transferring off the island. Returning to Duluth with limited coal left in its bunkers, the *Marigold* reportedly had to push through two miles of ice to reach the dock. After a quick resupply, she prepared to head out to retrieve keepers from Passage Island and Devil's Island lights. Fortunately, by this time, a Canadian icebreaker had retrieved the keepers at Passage Island while the crew of Devil's Island had walked over the lake's frozen surface to safety.

Nor were the challenges simply in the distant historic era. Betty June (married to Coast Guardsman Robert June, who served at South Fox in 1955-56) told the following story in an oral history. "We (she, her husband and their three preschool age children) were on the island from April 1 until December 4, 1955. The (Coast Guard Tender) *Sundew* came to get us. They gave us 4 hours (notice.) We didn't have time to eat even. That's how I left my sewing machine. I just didn't have time to get it packed. I packed up all my canned goods. They sent out a boat from the *Sundew* and they wanted us to climb the ladder. The captain didn't know there were women and children too. We went out and it was really rocking. My fingers got smashed between the boat and the dock in the process. They were going to do their buoy run to Mackinaw City. They didn't have anything for the kids to eat, all they had was some ice cream. Finally, they took us in to Charlevoix."

So, the next time you have a weather delay visiting or volunteering for a remote lighthouse, do appreciate that what we face today is much easier than the lot of the historic lightkeepers.

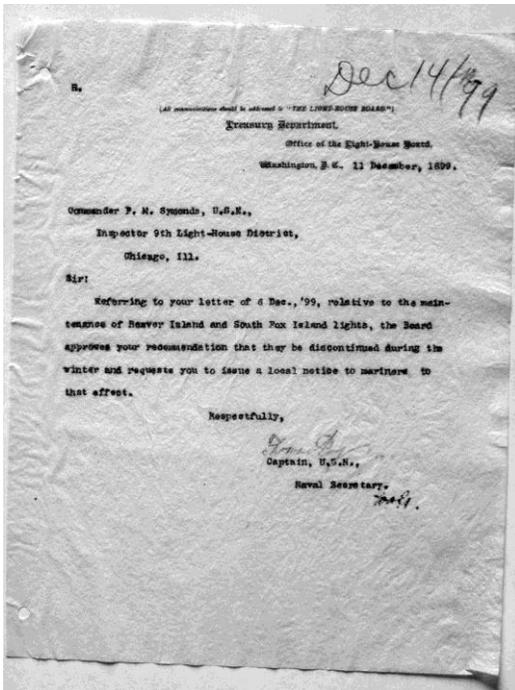


U.S. Lighthouse Tender Marigold
image courtesy of Coast Guard archives



Letter requesting several northern lights remain open for winter 88-89

Courtesy of National Archives



Letter authorizing Beaver and South Fox to close for the winter in 1899 *Courtesy of National Archives*

Welcome New Members!
 Laura Z. Moon
 Paul & Elisabeth Christian
 Tom & Jonnie Debbink

Memorials

In Memory of Roger Jensen
 Harmeyer Farms
 Margie Bringe
 Becky Shemenski
 Mr. & Mrs. Thad Kosnikowski
 Mike & Mary Schlievart
 Gerald Goldsby & Anita Manseck
 Deb & Jim Zwiak
 Glen & Beth Lepper
 Elmore Senior Center

In Memory of Janet Stephenson
 Martha Dykes
 LaVonne Dodge
 Becky Shemenski
 Doug & Linda Huber

In Memory of Ray Machar
 Bill & Sharon Coder
 Becky Shemenski

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Ottawa Co. Historical Society**
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Through purchases you make: Kroger super-market and designate your charity as Ottawa County Historical Society, a portion of your purchase will be donated to the Society

OTTAWA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP DUES – Membership year January 1 through December 31

Levels and Dues: (check one)

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Name _____

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Phone Number _____

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Additional Donation: You may also use this form to make a separate donation. You may select from the following funds. Please specify the amount of your additional donation.

___ OCHS General ___ Scholarship ___ Wolcott Keeper’s House

Total enclosed _____ Date _____ Check # _____

I am interested in volunteering.

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

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