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# Ionia County Historical Society CHRONICLE

Ionia County Historical Society  
P.O. Box 1776  
Ionia, MI 48846

www.ioniahistory.org

# Ionia County Historical Society CHRONICLE



The *Almost* Monthly Publication of the Ionia County Historical Society — August 2007

## The Two Freds...

Fred Chapman (the younger) was introduced to the members by Joe McCord, who shared some biographical notes about our guest speaker, his career and on-going community involvement in Ionia County.

Mr. Chapman took the podium, starting up his overhead projector, and introducing the audience to "the two Freds" — Fred W. Green and Fred A. Chapman. Although the two actually had little in common other than name; Green was short, Chapman was tall; Green was gregarious, Chapman was reserved; Green was a socialite, Chapman was a manager. But they proved to be a remarkable team, complimenting each others talents and capabilities on many joint ventures throughout the years.

Fred Green held a law degree, had been 1st Lieutenant in the Spanish-American War, and became an attorney in Ann Arbor. Fred Chapman had been born in Leeds, England, coming to the U.S. with his parents via Toronto when he was 4 years old. Later settling in Detroit, Chapman got into the reed furniture business there when he came of age.

Reed furniture was becoming exceedingly popular at the time, and the enterprising Mr. Green speculated in the industry as well. In 1903, through Mr. Green's acquaintance with a John Thwaites, president of an existing furniture manu-

factory, both Freds became part owners, then later co-owners, of the reed furniture firm based in Ypsilanti.

Green was the idea man, the negotiator and entrepreneur; Chapman was the "go-to guy" and talented manager of industry. This partnership resulted in a prosperous enterprise.

Mr. Green, seeking more profitable means of production, discovered the labor force within the Michigan prisons just at a time that the prison system - particularly in Ionia - was seeking to diversify. The Ionia Reformatory had just lost a lucrative agreement in textile production and had the workforce and facilities; the two Freds had the resources, know-how, and market for the reed furniture business. In 1903, a deal was struck, and the community of Ionia was set on a new course.

So then, in addition to the prison farm production, shoes, soap, cigars, and other furniture, 280 prisoners began a new trade within the walls of MR. By 1907, the two Freds (now majority stock holders in the company) and the entire operation had moved to Ionia and a new level of success.

But this success began to outgrow the capacity of the prison facility, and by 1912 the new facility at Main and Dexter was put into production with employees from the community. In 1913, just as the new facility began production, there was a fire at the prison which destroyed the factory and its inventory, so production was accelerated for the new factory to meet the demand. By 1918, there was no more prison labor employed by the company.

To the benefit of Ypsilanti Reed Furniture Company, the automotive industry was beginning to grow, and needing skilled woodworkers and industrial innovators. A close relationship with the industry (our presenter showed photos of Green and Chapman with Henry and Clara Ford, and noted meetings with auto-industry giants like R.E. Olds and others) expanded a role for Ionia in that industry that continues today.

In 1915, Green and Chapman bought into a struggling paint company in Grand Rapids. They

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## DUCK RACE!

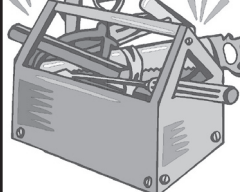
at Bertha Brock Park  
FALL FESTIVAL  
Saturday, Sept. 15th



Ask Hank Knoop for details!

## THANK YOU...

...to Bill Keim for his work on the index for the World War II "Blue Star Mothers" photo albums. On display now at the Blanchard House!



## THANK YOU...

...to Dennis Ehlert for his work on the windows and painting at the Carriage House. Looks great!

## ARE YOUR DUES PAID?

If you'd like to help us preserve the area's heritage, please fill in the form below and send it, with check or money order, to the ICBS Treasurer, care of Box 1776, Ionia, MI 48846.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, St, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Please Check Your Membership Type:

Regular = \$20

Sustaining = \$35

Corporate = \$250

Life = \$1000

Gift = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Free Honorary Membership for Students under 18

Please Share a Little Information:

Renewing Member

New Member

If you're a new member, how did you hear about us? \_\_\_\_\_

*If you are already a member (thank you!), please pass this membership form on to a friend.*

## Minutes of the August '07 Meeting

The August meeting of the ICBS was called to order by president Linda Ciangi at approximately 7:00 p.m. at the Blanchard House on Wednesday, August 1. Due to the heat and humidity of the day, hand fans were waving all around the room!

It was moved by Bob Nixon and supported by Gerry Perry to accept the

secretary's report as published - motion carried. Hank Knoop delivered the Treasurer's report, noting that the June & July income was \$1640, and the expenses amounted to \$1660 total. There are also several new memberships included in that income total, and invoices going out to our "business buddies" to solicit their annual contributions. Hank also asked that a notice be included in the next Chronicle to remind

**Minutes...**

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members that paid membership will be required to vote in the October ICBS elections. It was moved by Bob Nixon and supported by Barb Ehler to accept the Treasurer's report, and the motion carried.

President Ciangi thanks Joe & Joan McCord for their work on the Fair Queen's reception before the Fair Parade. Our two entries in the parade were well-received, the 55-Chevy winning an award. Hank Knoop also reported that their involvement in the "Antique Village" at the Fair went very well.

Linda also updated us on the plans for the upcoming '50s event - the celebration at the Theatre on August 9th. She reviewed some donations, contributions, and displays for the event. She also noted that advance tickets are available.

Another "yard sale" is being planned - this time to be in the Carriage House. This is scheduled for September 8th, and volunteers are needed for publicity and the day of the sale. We me also be able to offer carriage rides to visitors.

President Ciangi is meeting with other organizations to coordinate events and activities, hopefully to contribute to the success of all.

Meeting was adjourned at 7:30 for our special guest presentation from Fred Chapman.

If ever you have some interesting tidbit, story, or photograph that you think Chronicle readers would enjoy — particularly as it pertains to Ionia's colorful past, please don't hesitate to let me know. I will be glad to publish it in the Chronicle!

— D. McCord, Editor

**Minutes of the August '07 Board Meeting**

The Board of the ICBS met on Wednesday, August 15, at 10:00 a.m. at the Blanchard House.

The first item of business was the storm door for the back entry; Gerry Perry has contacted someone to install a new one.

The gate on the fence at Adams Street was found detached and lying on the ground. Hank Knoop put the gate in the Carriage House for now.

The Fabulous '50s party at the Ionia Theatre was a huge success. This activity was for the Blanchard House and the Ionia Theatre. Ron Pearson and the Three Strings from Portland performed, and Fred Wolfe presented his tribute to Elvis Presley for an evening of "wow" entertainment. They played to a full house at the Theatre, and each organization was awarded with \$1200. Many thanks to all who helped — volunteers are the necessary element in these activities. Many thanks to all the Elvis fans who attended. It was such a success that Fred Wolfe will return in December with his repertoire of Gospel music with two shows.

Our next fundraiser will be a "yard sale" on Saturday, September 8th, at the Carriage House (\*see note at the end of these minutes). Volunteers are needed to set up on Friday and for the sales on Saturday. An Enrich event, the Farmers Market, and a wedding at

**Order Your Rural School Newsletter today from the Ionia County Genealogical Society!**

The newsletter will be published three times a year at a cost of \$12.00 per year. Complete the form here and send in your check or money order (no cash please) to:

**ICGS Rural School Newsletter  
P.O. Box 516  
Lake Odessa, MI 48849-0516**



**DON'T FORGET!**

**PAY YOUR DUES BEFORE OCTOBER 1ST  
SO YOU CAN VOTE IN THE ANNUAL ELECTIONS!**

the Theatre are also happening that day.

September 15th will be the Fall Festival at Bertha Brock Park. The Historical Society is planning on an exhibit. McCord have contacted Tom Dickenson about having a race car there (\*\*see note at the end of these minutes).

Sunday, October 21, at Eclectic Gallery, from 1 to 5 p.m. will be an ICBS Road Show Appraisal with Glen Rairigh. If you wish to volunteer for this activity, please call Joan at 527-3369.

It was discussed to plan an outing at Greenview Point in Lyons. More information will come later as plans progress.

Hank Knoop has done a great job putting together a list of programs for the 2007-2008 year. Hank is also working on the Membership List. If dues are not paid by the October meeting, members will not be eligible to vote.

The Ionia County Genealogical Society is planning a Rural School Newsletter to be published three times a year for a cost of \$12.00 per year. They are seeking school memories and pictures for future newsletters and also subscriptions. (A form is available in this issue of the Chronicle.— ed.)

The wedding on August 11th was very nice - the service taking place in the conservatory at the Blanchard

House.

There will be a bridal shower at the house on August 18th - Barb E. and Linda C. will be hosting. On September 11th the Committee for the Women's Festival will meet at the house at noon - Joan M. and Doni K. will host. Another shower will be held there on September 16th with McCords as hosts. On September 25th, the Portland Historical Society will be holding their meeting at the Blanchard House, and Knoops will host that meeting.

There are more folders of information available for those who would like to give tours at the house. These folders contain information on the house and the items on display via a room-by-room description.

The meeting was eventually adjourned (I assume).

**NOTES OF NOTE AFTER THE MEETING:**

\*The "Yard Sale" on September 8th will be at the Ionia Area Commission on Aging (not the Carriage House).

\*\*The ICBS will be co-sponsoring a "Duck Race" at the Fall Festival, organized by Hank Knoop and to be assisted by Ionia Boy Scout Troop 85.

**ORDER FORM**  
(Please Print)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State and Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

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For office use only

Check No: \_\_\_\_\_

Date Rec'd \_\_\_\_\_

**The Two Freds...**

*continued from page 1*

were initially their own best customer, producing varnishes for their Reed furniture, but that company later grew into a national concern, developing new metal finishes for Steelcase furniture and more. That concern eventually became today's Guardsman products, a division of Valspar.

Another of the pairs' endeavors that still exists today is the Ionia Free Fair. In 1915, after the earlier Ionia District Fair had folded, Green (while serving as mayor of Ionia) proposed the concept of the Free Fair. Free admission was quite a revolutionary idea, and caught on quickly. The city of Ionia purchased the fairgrounds, Green served as president and Chapman as secretary, and they rallied all their influence to bring in air shows, agricultural exhibits, automobile displays, plus circus acts and entertainment. The attraction was effective - and over 17,000 people visited the first Free Fair.

Both Green and Chapman were on the board of the National Bank when it was reorganized in 1934, and were prominent in many community affairs. Fred Green pursued higher office, too, becoming Governor of Michigan for two terms beginning in 1927. He was Governor then during the closing years of the "roaring '20s" and left office just after the stock market crash. Most of his tenure was during years of almost rampant prosperity, and Gov. Green (recognizing the importance of travel tourism to Michigan) was known as the "Road Governor." Many highways and road improvements were instituted during this time, and Gov. Green is credited with inventing the "double yellow line" now seen on every major roadway. Fred Chapman, meanwhile, headed the Ionia County Road Commission, and later took the position of Warden for the Reformatory.

Through the early thirties, the two Freds continued to be involved in community affairs, economic, social, and political - until Fred W. Green passed away in December of 1936, and the partnership became a matter of history. His long-time partner Fred Chapman passed away in 1938.

"The two Freds" shaped much of Ionia's community through the first several decades of the 20th century for which we are all thankful. And our thanks to our friend Fred Chapman for his presentation.

The Chronicle is the official publication of the Ionia County Historical Society. It is written, edited, and published by David McCord, Secretary. Any comments, suggestions, or contributions should be directed to the editor care of the ICBS at P.O. Box 1776, Ionia, MI, 48846 or via [www.ioniahistory.org](http://www.ioniahistory.org).

**Upcoming Programs and Events**

**Sunday, August 26th, 1 to 4 p.m.**

The Blanchard House will be open to the public for "Summer Sunday" tours and displays.

**Wednesday, September 5, 7:00 p.m.**

**Regular Membership Meeting**

at the Blanchard House

**Program:** History of Boy Scouts & Girl Scouts, with exhibits and many stories to tell!

**Saturday, September 8th**

**Historical Society Yard Sale**

at the Ionia Area Commission on Aging.

*Donations and volunteers are welcomed!*

**Saturday, September 15th**

**FALL FESTIVAL AT BERTHA BROCK PARK**

Come join in the festivities! Something for everyone!

**Wednesday, October 3, 7:00 p.m.**

**The ICBS Annual Meeting and Election of Directors**  
at the Blanchard House.

**BE SURE YOUR DUES ARE PAID ON TIME!**

**Sunday, October 21st, 1 to 5 p.m.**

**Antiques Road Show Appraisal!**

with guest appraiser Glen Rairigh

at the Eclectic Gallery - 412 W. Main St., Ionia

**Wednesday, November 7th, 7:00 p.m.**

**Regular Membership Meeting**

at Dood's Jewelry - 223 W. Main Street in Ionia!

**AVAILABLE AT THE BLANCHARD HOUSE "GIFT SHOP"**

**A FEW OF THE ITEMS ON SALE**  
and suggested donation for each:

**Meredyth Jones Lithograph,**  
"Ionia County Court House"...\$15

VHS Videos of Ionia Historical Subjects...\$10

**Headlight Flashes 1896** (a publication of the Detroit, Lansing and Northern Railroad featuring 28 pages of Ionia information)...\$10

**Ionia, 1907 Souvenir Book** reprints...\$10

**City of Ionia Centennial** booklet...\$5

**History of Ionia**...\$3.00

*... and more souvenirs and information!*

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR INTEREST AND SUPPORT!**