

Here's the latest issue of the...

Ionia County Historical Society CHRONICLE

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

www.ioniahistory.org



The Gingerbread Blanchard House!



Planning for next year (already!)

First weekend in May is the Tri-River Museums Group's "Spring Into The Past" tours of local museums. May 17th will be the Ionia Historic Homes Tour. Spring will also bring another Appraisal Road Show.

JOIN TODAY!

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 ICHS 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.

Ionia County Historical Society CHRONICLE



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

"Happy New Year!"

MORE THAN YOU EVER WANTED TO KNOW

Minutes of the December Meeting

The December 07 meeting of the ICHS was briefly convened following the annual Holiday Pot-Luck, which was attended by over 30 members

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That greeting will be said and heard for at least the first couple of weeks as a new year gets under way (and we all learn to write "08" on our checks and correspondence!). But the day celebrated as New Year's Day in modern America was not always January 1.

ANCIENT NEW YEARS

The celebration of the new year is the oldest of all holidays. It was first observed in ancient Babylon about 4000 years ago. In the years around 2000 BC, the Babylonian New Year began with the first New Moon after the Vernal Equinox (first day of spring). The beginning of spring is a logical time to start a new year. After all, it is the season of rebirth, of planting new crops, and of blossoming.

The Romans continued to observe the new year in late March, but their calendar was continually tampered with by various emperors so that the calendar soon became out of synchronization with the sun. In order to set the calendar right, the Roman senate, in 153 BC, declared January 1 to be the beginning of the new year. (When Julius Caesar enacted what has come to be known as the Julian Calendar in 46 BC, the previous year lasted 445 days to get in synch with the seasonal year and get January 1 back on January 1!)

By the way, it is often said that April Fools Day came about after the change of the calendar when the folk who were out of touch with the changing times continued to celebrate the March/April New Year's Day. What a foolish thing that was.

In northern countries, the onset of winter was seen as the final phase of the year, and the first signs that this season was ending (and therefore the new cycle beginning) was the Winter Solstice - the shortest day and longest night of the year. Therefore, a celebration was held to celebrate this new cycle with many of our modern traditions having their roots in ancient times.

THE CHURCH'S VIEW

Although in the first centuries AD the Romans continued celebrating the new year, the early Catholic Church condemned the festivities as paganism. But as Christianity became more widespread, the early church began having its own religious observances concurrently with many of the pagan celebrations, and New Year's Day was no different. New Years is still observed as the Feast of Christ's Circumcision by some denominations.

During the Middle Ages, the Church remained opposed to celebrating New Years. January 1 has been celebrated

as a holiday by Western nations for only about the past 400 years.

NEW YEAR TRADITIONS

The tradition of using a baby to signify the new year was begun in Greece around 600 BC. It was their tradition at that time to celebrate their god of wine, Dionysus, by parading a baby in a basket, representing the annual rebirth of that god as the spirit of fertility. Early Egyptians also used a baby as a symbol of rebirth.

Although the early Christians denounced the practice as pagan, the popularity of the baby as a symbol of rebirth forced the Church to reevaluate its position. The Church finally allowed its members to celebrate the new year with a baby, which was to symbolize the birth of the baby Jesus.

The use of an image of a baby with a New Years banner as a symbolic representation of the new year was brought to early America by the Germans. They had used the effigy since the fourteenth century.

FOR LUCK IN THE NEW YEAR

Traditionally, it was thought that one could affect the luck they would have throughout the coming year by what they did or ate on the first day of the year. For that reason, it has become common for folks to celebrate the first few minutes of a brand new year in the company of family and friends. Parties often last into the middle of the night after the ringing in of a new year. It was once believed that the first visitor on New Year's Day would bring either good luck or bad luck the rest of the year. It was particularly lucky if that visitor happened to be a tall dark-haired man.

Traditional New Year foods are also thought to bring luck. Many cultures believe that anything in the shape of a ring is good luck, because it symbolizes "coming full circle," completing a year's cycle. For that reason, the Dutch believe that eating donuts on New Year's Day will bring good fortune.

Many parts of the U.S. celebrate the new year by consuming black-eyed peas. These legumes are typically accompanied by either hog jowls or ham. Black-eyed peas and other legumes have been considered good luck in many cultures. The hog, and thus its meat, is considered lucky because it symbolizes prosperity. Cabbage is another "good luck" vegetable that is consumed on New Year's Day by many. Cabbage leaves are also considered a sign of prosperity, being representative of paper currency. In some regions, rice is a lucky food that is eaten on New Year's Day.

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Minutes of the December Meeting

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and guests and was a big success.

Several topics were discussed, including thanks to the decorations committee for their wonderful work around the Blanchard House this season (see photos on page 3) and to the Maintenance Committee for all their work on the house in recent months.

The upcoming holiday events were reviewed as well (a very busy time for us all).

Hank Knoop delivered a summary of the year's finances with the very good news that the ICHS actually did very well, with income exceeding expenses! With thanks to all those who conceived, organized, and worked on fund raising activities throughout the year, Hank expressed optimism for the 2008 season as well.

Annette McCord unveiled her Gingerbread Blanchard House for the meeting (I helped a little - D.M.), and at the Pot Luck it was decided to keep the "food sculpture" and research how it could be preserved and stored for future use. David McCord (yours truly) also announced the launching of the new and improved ICHS website.

With a "Merry Christmas" to all, president Linda Ciangi wished all a "Good Night."

Minutes of the Dec. Board Meeting

President Linda Ciangi called to order the Board Meeting of the ICHS at 7:05 p.m. on Tuesday, December 18, 2007. Present were Ms. Ciangi, Barb Ehlert, Doni Knoop, Hank Knoop, Gerry Perry, Stephanie VanderMolen, and David McCord.

Pres. Ciangi announced that the ICHS had received a \$1,000 donation from WalMart, and a thank-you would be sent. Hank suggested inviting a representative from WalMart to a meeting for a photo and formal thank-you. Hank also reported that we had received \$795 income from the recent concert at the Ionia Theatre. Joan McCord reported (by way of a written report) that \$40 had been earned at the Dec. 8 luncheon.

Linda spoke about the Guitarr Raffle plans with B-93 and noted that tickets would be sent to members along with their Chronicle newsletters, and are also being sold at "Balloons and Gifts Galore" on Main St. in Ionia. The drawing will be at the B-93 Birthday Bash at the Fairgrounds in June - plans still being defined.

Barb Ehlert reported on the 2008 Home Tour progress, and it appears that three homes have already committed to the tour. Other plans are being discussed, but real

progress is expected to be made after the holidays.

There are rumors that the Blanchard House will be a favorite place for prom parties again this year - that last year's event was a big success. Weddings and receptions will be further promoted, as well as parties and gatherings for businesses and organizations. Suggestions have been made that the house be promoted as a location for photography studios to rent; members will ask around to determine the "going rate" for such arrangements. Also, it was mentioned that we might hold a special reception for our "business buddies" in appreciation for their support. David will update the new website with rental information and include a downloadable PDF copy of the standard rental agreement.

David also reported that the Photo Gallery on the new website has been started, but still there's a long way to go. At some point in the near future, a training session will be held for interested parties who would like to help keep the Home Page and Calendar information current on the site. David also shared information with the Board about registering some additional "domain names" for the ICHS site - presently using only "ioniahistory.org". The registration of additional names will make the site more "findable" by Google and Yahoo and other searches. The Board voted to invest up to \$200 in this effort (moved by Doni, supported by Barb), which David will manage. David also suggested that the ICHS join a couple of notable organizations, namely the National Association for State and Local History and the Michigan Museums Association, to help promote our group. The Board supported the idea, and David will research the cost and benefits to report next month.

Still to come will be training for the software to manage the ICHS collections with Jerry Adams. This will probably occur sometime in mid to late February.

The Board discussed the need to clean up the displays in the basement, and to repair the basement walls and such where needed. The Board will resume this discussion in the spring, schedule some "muscle power" and work out the possible refurbishment of some of the displays.

Hank noted that some damage has been done to the house because the gutters are clogged. Linda C. will secure an estimate to have them cleaned out this spring.

Linda also asked Board members to be thinking about special activities for the Summer Sundays to draw people to the house and grounds.

Hank reported that the invoice for the roof repair had

finally come in (\$1500), and the Board had discussed spending up to \$80 for a new phone and answering machine. It was moved by Barb and supported by Doni to do so, and the motion passed. Barb E. will be in charge of this purchase. The Board also approved \$80 to review our Chamber membership (moved by Linda, supported by Gerry).

The office of Corresponding Secretary is still open, and Barb will contact Bonnie Theodore to see if she is still interested in the office. If not, Hank suggested that Mike and Carol Gallagher might be good candidates for the position.

Thanks had been received from the Women's Festival Committee for the use of the house for their December meeting. Several other December events and activities were reviewed.

Joan McCord also reported that copies of Insurance documents had been received from Jerry Gregory at Carr Agency for his review (as was requested at the October Board Meeting). These have been turned over to Hank Knoop.

The house has been rented for private parties on Dec. 23 and Dec. 30.

A printed 2008 Calendar was passed around which has been published by "Mandolin Graphics" in Lowell which has photos and stories of Ionia (city) history. These fine calendars are available for only \$6 at Manciu's on Main St. in Ionia. Thanks to Joan McCord for her work on this, and supplying the copy for review.

Treasurer Hank Knoop conveyed two checks totaling \$69.20 to David McCord to be given over to Joan McCord to cover reimbursement for stamps and other expenses.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

Father Christmas visited the Blanchard House on Dec. 9th, thanks to Jim Dood.



More about "Happy New Year":

AULD LANG SYNE

The custom of singing this song on New Year's Eve goes back to the British Isles from the 18th century when guests ended a party standing in a circle and singing this song. The custom first was rooted in Scotland; the lyrics were written in 1788 by Robert Burns. The lyrics were put to a traditional Scottish folk melody - NOT the one we're most familiar with today. The older melody is every bit as beautiful and sentimental - the newer one dates from the early 1800s.

In the Scottish dialect, auld lang syne is "old long since" = "the good old days." The traditional lyrics begin with, "Should old acquaintance be forgot and never brought to mind." The entire song's message merely means to just forget about the past and look ahead to the new year with hope. Even the rowdiest of parties has often ended with quiet drunks singing this song as a tribute to the past year.

(Not to say some of us can't sing, but using noise to welcome in a new year goes back to ancient times when it was felt that noise scared off evil spirits.)

And speaking of Scotland, the New Year's celebration there is called Hogmanay (pronounced "hog-muh-NAY") - the Scots word for the last day of the year (Old Year's Night). This is normally only the start of a celebration which lasts through the night until the morning of Ne'erday (1 January).

OTHER NEW YEARS

The Chinese New year is celebrated on the first day of the First Moon of the lunar calendar. The corresponding date in the solar calendar varies from as early as January 21st to as late as February 19th. It's celebrated as "everybody's birthday!"

Rosh Hashanah occurs on the first and second days of Tishri. In Hebrew, Rosh Hashanah means, literally, "head of the year" or "first of the year," so it's commonly known as the Jewish New Year. The Bible refers to the holiday as Yom Ha-Zikkaron (the day of remembrance) or Yom Teruah (the day of the sounding of the shofar). The holiday is instituted in Leviticus 23:24-25.

The most important and most celebrated part of the holiday season in Japan is New Year's day, known as O-Shogatsu. It's a very busy time between the 24th of December, when school gets out, and the first of January. People can also watch temple ceremonies on TV where a huge gong is struck 108 times to wipe away the sins of the past year.

Tet, which means the first morning of the first day of the new year, is the Vietnamese New Year. The celebration lasts for 7 days. Homes are cleaned to get rid of bad fortune associated with the old year. A special ceremony called Le Tru Tich is held at midnight. The ritual involves firecrackers and gongs and other festive items that make loud noises to usher out the old and welcome the new.

The Islamic year begins on the first day of Muharram, and is counted from the year of the Hegira (anno Hegirae)—the year in which Muhammad emigrated from Mecca to Medina (A.D. July 16, 622). The Islamic new year is celebrated relatively quietly, with prayers and readings and reflection upon the hegira.

NOTE: I tried to find a New Year's Day in India, but there isn't just one - there are MANY "new years" holidays for many different reasons, historical, spiritual, and agricultural.

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 ICHS at P.O. Box 1776, Ionia, MI, 48846 or via www.ioniahistory.org.

Upcoming Programs and Events

Wednesday, January 2th, 7:00 p.m.

Regular Membership Meeting

at Ionia Theatre - 201 W. Main Street in Ionia

Including a short movie — "The Snows of 1936" followed by "special entertainment"

Tuesday, January 16th, 7:00 p.m.

ICHS Board Meeting at Kitty's Café - Main St. Ionia

Wednesday, February 6, 7:00 p.m.

Regular Membership Meeting

Ionia County Court House

with your tour guide, Joe McCord

Tuesday, February 20th, 7:00 p.m.

ICHS Board Meeting at Kitty's Café - Main St. Ionia

Wednesday, March 5, 7:00 p.m.

Regular Membership Meeting

at Dood's Jewelry, 223 West Main St.

(part of the "Tin Ceilings Tour")

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



Just a couple of images of the wonderful Christmas decorations that graced the Blanchard House this year. (Much more impressive in color, of course!) Thanks to the committee and those who donated to the effort. And thanks to the Clauses that stopped by as well. Ho ho ho!

Travelogues at the Ionia Theatre

Come travel with us each Thursday at 9:30 a.m. for a FREE travel video, sponsored by the Ionia County Historical Society.



January 3.....Little Palaces-Historic Movie Houses

January 10.....Tour of Ireland

January 17.....Wisconsin Dells & House on the Rock

January 24.....Niagra Falls

January 31...Big Bend, America's Last Primitive Frontier



...and many more coming in 2008!