



The Chronicle is the official publication of the Ionia County Historical Society. It is written, edited, and published by David McCord, Secretary. Any comments, corrections (of course), or contributions should be directed to the editor c/o the ICCHS at P.O. Box 176, Ionia, MI, 48846 or via www.ioniahistory.org.

Ionia County Historical Society
P.O. Box 176
Ionia, MI 48846



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 ICCHS Treasurer, care of Box 176, Ionia, MI 48846.

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City, St., Zip: _____

Phone: _____

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Please Check Your Membership Type:

- Regular = \$20
- Sustaining = \$35
- Business Buddy = \$40
- Corporate = \$250
- Life = \$1000
- Free to Students under 18
- Gift = \$ _____

Please Share a Little Information:

- Renewing Member
 - New Member
- If you're a new member, how did you hear about us?

Thanks!

Have you got something to donate?

The Historical Society accepts most donations of antique and vintage photos, documents, or larger artifacts IF they are relevant to Ionia's history in some way. Please contact a board member for more information, and be sure to get a receipt for your donation—it may be tax-deductible! (We are a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.)

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For information on your long-lost relatives in Ionia, please contact the Ionia County Genealogy Society.
<http://ionia.migenweb.net/ICGS/icgshome.htm>



It's BACK!

A Newsletter from the ICCHS!

Greetings, friends. Once again I must offer my apologies for the long delay between newsletters over the past year or more. Here's the good news: **The Ionia Free Fair Centennial book is finally done!** That was filling all the hours I could find over the past year, and made it impossible to publish the Chronicle. Now I hope to get back on a regular schedule and do my best to keep everyone informed of past, present, and future goings-on.

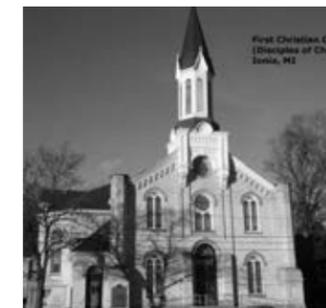
The regular features will remain, including summaries of our monthly programs and reports on the various projects undertaken by the ICCHS. The calendar is just as full as it ever was (if not more so), and there are **lots of opportunities for you**, dear reader, to become more involved in the fun and fascination of discovering our local history.

A plea for help:

I can do a lot of stuff, but I do need to sleep sometimes! I really would like contributions from anybody. This could be stories, anecdotes, or images relating to Ionia's history. Your subject might be a book report, recounting a trip to a historic site, review of a movie relevant to Michigan history, or advice on doing research or on-line resources. "Found On Line" would be a great title for a regular feature. (Contact me for "submission guidelines" to make it easy on us all.)

Because I'm the Secretary of the ICCHS, I will take care of the calendar and business side of things. I can also report on events I can attend. But there are a lot of goings-on that I can't participate in, and I would like to get a paragraph or three from you that I can put on the page and keep our members (and non-members) informed.

Sincerely, *David M.*



So Far in 2016 at the ICCHS

Great Programs, Events, and Projects have both entertained and educated the many folks who have attended our monthly programs.

We visited Ionia First Christian Church in January. A considerable volume would be required to recount the fascinating history of this church, from its earliest congregations, to the influence of the famous Rev. Isaac Errett, the installation of the amazing 1893 pipe organ (J.W. Steere & Sons, opus 350), and the on-going restoration efforts in this beautiful church.

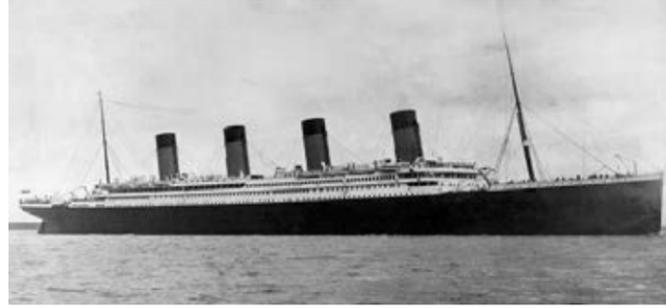
In February we paid a visit to the new (vintage) home of Father Charlon Mason which he has decorated with uncounted antique artifacts. He graciously invited us to see his beautiful furnishings and decorations throughout the house, each with its own story.

Partnering with the Ionia Community Library, the ICCHS was proud to host a presentation by Craig Elliston, former gardener for Monticello, the estate of President Thomas Jefferson. The photography was outstanding, and the stories even more so, of the extensive

Continues on page 2



gardens. President Jefferson was a devoted “gentleman farmer” and extremely interested in the variety of flowering plants and experimental crops that he could grow on his estate.



Also in partnership with the Library, in April we enjoyed a presentation by Jay & Barb Follis on the story of the RMS Titanic and its connections to Michigan. Aside from an informative program, Mr. & Mrs. Follis had set up a display of artifacts from the period and memorabilia of this remarkable story.

For something a little different, the May program consisted of a musical recital by David McCord, Doug Trumble, and Bryan Kimble, joined on some numbers by Colleen Farrell. The program was called “A Century of Song” and included 20 tunes from the past 100 years and the stories behind them. (Photo below by Mark Workman.)



In June, we enjoyed a heartwarming presentation by Bob Sykes, consisting primarily of artifacts which told the story of his grandfather’s service during World War One. Some excellent items, including service manuals, medals and pins, photos and articles, served to enhance Bob’s presentation with pride, humor and pathos. Thanks, Bob, for sharing this with us!

The Historical Society strives to bring interesting and informative programs to the community every month. Be sure to put us on your calendar for the first Wednesday of each month at 7:00 p.m. Most presentations are at the John C. Blanchard House, but some are elsewhere. Watch our calendar here and on-line for details.

Other Events and Activities during the first half of the year:

The popular documentary called “The Factory” is about our own Ionia heritage. The one-million-square-foot facility (Ypsi-Reed, Ionia Manufacturing, Mitchell-Bently, AO Smith, or General Tire/Gencorp) was a centerpiece for the city for nearly 100 years. Students at Ferris State University, under the direction of associate professor Joshua Pardon, produced this video, and in February, members of the Ionia County Historical Society attended a special showing at Ferris and served on a panel to discuss it afterwards. Also present was Chris Engeman, former factory employee. This video has now been released to the public broadcasting system, and is being viewed all over the country.



In March, the Historical Society was once again at the Ionia Business Expo with our corner booth.

The ICHS participated in the annual “Spring Into The Past” event in May in which small museums throughout central Michigan start the summer season with free admission and special programs. (This year we were only open for one of the days of the event due to a rental at the Blanchard House).

The annual Upstairs/Downtown Tour was a huge success - the best attendance ever in its 8-year history. Ten business-district buildings opened their upper floors to guests to learn the history behind each one. Pictured below is just one of the presentations in progress. (Photo below by Goose Elliot.)

June was a busy month, including participation in the annual Main Street Car Show. The third annual Oz Festival



Also available in the ICHS Gift Shop:
Rosette: A Novel of Pioneer Michigan
by Cindy Rinaman Marsch.



This wonderful novel is based on the journals of Rosette Cordelia Ramsdell who lived near Lyons, Michigan in the 1850s. In the voices of Rosette and her family, the novel traces how we both choose and suffer our destiny. It brings us enduring themes of friends and family as they make the most of the harsh American pioneer life.

WE NEED YOUR HELP!

Help is desperately needed with **Summer Sundays (greeters and tour guides), maintenance projects, inventory, publicity, and general help!** Please contact the Board of Directors, a friend who is a member of the Historical Society, or visit a monthly meeting to ask what you can do to help keep the Historical Society ALIVE!

SOUVENIRS

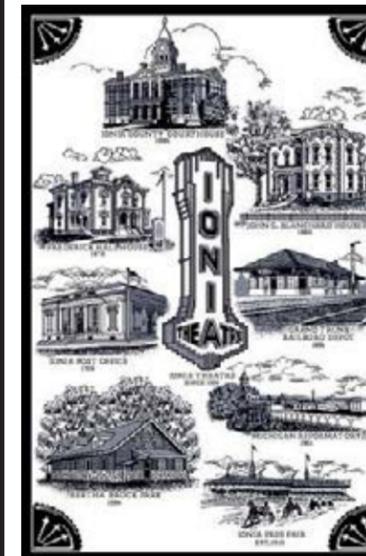
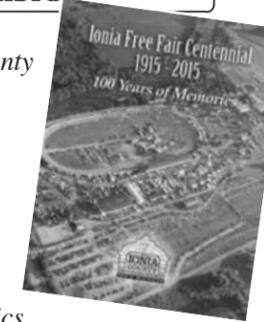
MEMORIES & MOMENTOS IONIA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY HERITAGE & HISTORY

The newest addition to our collection of Ionia County memorabilia, the masterwork for 2016:

Ionia Free Fair Centennial 1915-2015

100 Years of Memories

Compiled by David McCord with the help of many contributors, this 8.5 x 11 inch book contains 328 pages of history and over 1,000 photos and graphics. Softcover: \$29.95 / Hardcover: \$44.95 (add \$5 for postage)



Do you have your souvenir Ionia History blanket yet? This attractive heavy throw is large, warm, and looks great in anyone’s home. Available in shades of gray or burgundy. \$75 for this beautiful souvenir of Ionia. (\$65 for ICHS Members).

DVD Video on the history of Ionia’s major employer for nearly 100 years, produced by students at Ferris State University and shown on public television throughout the country. Only \$10 for the former factory employee in YOUR family!



ALSO AVAILABLE: Reproductions of historic Ionia publications —

- 1887 “Headlight Flashes” Special Ionia Edition
- 1907 Ionia Souvenir Book
- 1973 Ionia City Centennial Program Book
- Antique Ionia Postcards

Historic DVD Videos

‘Sno Wonder DVD — 1936 Ionia County Road Commission + 1940 Bertha Brock Snow Festival Short films that show us a glimpse of the challenges and the fun of Winters in Ionia County a generation ago.

1939 “We’re In The Movies” A promotional film produced by Ionia businesses and organizations. It’s a wonderful look into our town over 70 years ago.

1950s Home Show and Free Fair Movies

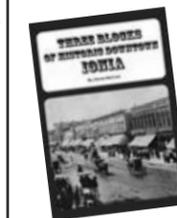
1976 U.S. Bicentennial in Ionia

1937 Ionia Airport Inaugural plus Bertha Brock Park’s 1940 “Winter Festival”

1973 Ionia Centennial Documentary “Ionia’s First 150 Years” and “Ionia - A Look Back” - Films by Monroe MacPherson

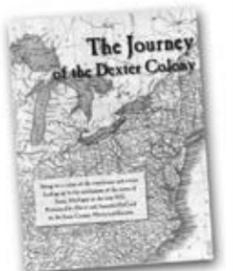
DVDs are available for \$10 each!

A History of Bertha Brock Park on its 80th “Birthday” by David McCord. \$6 each



Walking Tour of Historic Downtown Ionia - 40-pages of history by David McCord. \$5 each

The Journey of the Dexter Colony, 1833, by David and Annette McCord. A detailed history of the settling of Ionia, fully illustrated. \$12 each (\$15 with postage)





ORDER FORM



Over 300 pages. Over 1,000 photos.

Relive the good times, and discover a century of history behind the World's Largest Free Fair.

100 Years of Memories

Discover the fascinating history behind "Michigan's Greatest Outdoor Event" in this 328-page book - new for 2016! The story reaches back beyond 1915, featuring details from each of the Ionia Free Fairs—the who, what, when, and where. There are over 1,000 photos, personal stories, facts and figures. Take a nostalgic journey through the Free Fairs you might remember, and those you may not. Order yours today! (All proceeds go to the Ionia County Historical Society to aid in the preservation of all aspects of our local history, including the thousands of artifacts, photographs, and documents associated with the Ionia Free Fair.)

Yes! Please reserve my copy of the new book

"Ionia Free Fair Centennial, 1915-2015 — 100 Years of Memories"

Your Name: _____ Quantity: _____
 Address: _____
 City, State, ZIP: _____
 Phone / Email: _____

Softcover — \$29.95 _____
 Hardcover = \$44.95 _____
 Shipping = \$5/book _____
Total Order = \$ _____

Will Pick-up Please Deliver

Your book can be picked up at the John C. Blanchard House in Ionia, 251 East Main St, whenever the facility is open. If you'd like the book delivered, please note the \$5 charge per book when you calculate your total order.

The softcover version (full-color laminated cover over high-quality black-and-white interior) will be available in early July. The hardcover (featuring a full-color gloss cover and black-and-white interior on gloss paper) will follow soon after.

Payments may be in cash, by check (made out to the Ionia County Historical Society), or by Credit Card. Please provide the appropriate info here:

Name On Card: _____
 Card Number: _____
 Exp. Date: _____ Security Code: _____
 Auth. Signature: _____

Submit your order and payment in person, or forward this completed form with your payment, to:
FREE FAIR BOOK, c/o Ionia County Historical Society, P.O. Box 176, Ionia, MI 48846
 Please visit our website at www.ioniahistory.com for more info, and visit us on Facebook.

began with a Historical Society display on Thursday, June 16 at the Commission on Aging called "Party like it's 1939."

Several members of the ICHS helped with the event, including as members of the costumed characters greeting guests, posing for photos, and helping with the costume contest. On the Sunday after, the ICHS held a Silent Auction at the Blanchard House as a fund-raiser. (Photo by Goose Elliott.)



Plus there were many tours and rentals at the Blanchard House, contributions of door prizes for other Ionia area non-profits, and the ICHS has taken on the task of keeping Cornell Alley cleaned up!

And there's more to come for 2016!

Our monthly programs continue in August and September. October will be the Annual Meeting with elections of new Board Members and a recap of the year past and the year to come.

The Ionia Free Fair parade is upon us, and the ICHS is partnering with the Ionia Sentinel-Standard to celebrate the newspaper's 150th anniversary. At the fair, there will be a presence at the "Antique Village" display, and an opportunity to showcase the new "Ionia Free Fair Centennial" book for sale. (See more information elsewhere in this issue).

Summer Sundays continue, opening the Blanchard House for the public to tour and enjoy.

In September, the Bertha Brock Park Fall Festival comes around again, and the ICHS will host the annual Duck Race on Bellamy Creek. October includes visits to historic sites on the annual Tri-River Museums Bus Tour, plus our popular Cemetery Tour in which volunteers relate the biographical adventures of the folks resting there.

Be assured there will be more to come as the Autumn months cool down. We hope you all can be a part of the fun!

There's always more going on at the Historical Society!

Projects presently in progress include repairing the front steps at the Blanchard House and tuck-pointing the sandstone exterior. There are some items on the list for the interior of the house, too, including installing a jack post under the kitchen doorway, enhancing some electrical circuits in the basement/museum, and on-going work around the grounds. The Thursday afternoon work crew continues the cleaning chores, as well as cataloging the collections of documents, photos, and artifacts that have been donated to the ICHS. Other projects include the creation of new and interesting displays for the museum.



Above: The Blanchard House when it was new - scanned from an 1882 3-D photo. Note the pines on either side of the walk.

Long term and larger projects are going to take some time. Linda Ciangi is working with the City of Ionia to erect a monument to Governor Green (Michigan governor from Ionia, 1927-1933). There's also a dream project to erect a new building to house our museum displays that would break us out of the confines of the Blanchard House basement and allow the Historical Society to really tell the story of the larger community of Ionia County through the past 200 years of history.

Whatever your skills or interests, the ICHS can use your help! Please join in when you can.

200 years ago —

• The year 1816 is known as the Year Without a Summer (also the Poverty Year, the Summer that Never Was, Year There Was No Summer, and Eighteen Hundred and Froze to Death), because of severe climate abnormalities that caused average global temperatures to decrease by about one degree Fahrenheit. This doesn't seem like much, but it resulted in major food shortages across the Northern Hemisphere.

Evidence suggests that the anomaly was predominantly a volcanic winter event caused by the massive 1815 eruption

of Mount Tambora in the Dutch East Indies, the largest eruption in at least 1,300 years after the extreme weather events of 535–536. The Earth had already been in a centuries-long period of global cooling that started in the 14th century. Known today as the Little Ice Age, it had already caused considerable agricultural distress in Europe. The Little Ice Age's existing cooling was aggravated by the eruption of Tambora, which occurred during its concluding decades.



(The eruption of Tambora was two orders of magnitude larger than the 1980 eruption of Mount St. Helen's, pictured above)

• The Battle of Negro Fort was a short military siege in July of 1816 in which forces of the United States assaulted and managed to blow up a slave-fortified stronghold in the frontier of northern Spanish Florida. It was the first major engagement of the Seminole Wars period and marked the beginning of General Andrew Jackson's Conquest of Florida.

• In Michigan, Great Lakes shipping was extremely prosperous, with many schooners being built at many settlements along the coasts of the territory. In July at the territorial capital in Detroit, Governor Lewis Cass greeted a white man named John Tanner who had been raised by natives near Mackinac. Tanner had been adopted by Indians at the age of 9 when his parents died. He had forgotten how to speak English.



150 years ago —

• Vernors is a ginger flavored soft drink and the oldest surviving ginger ale brand in the United States. It was created in 1866 by James Vernor, a Detroit pharmacist. According to company legend, prior to the start of the American Civil War, while a clerk at the Higby & Sterns drugstore in Detroit, James Vernor experimented with flavors in an attempt to duplicate a popular ginger ale imported

from Dublin, Ireland. When Vernor was called off to serve in the war, he stored the syrup base of 19 ingredients, including ginger, vanilla and other natural flavorings, in an oaken cask. Vernor joined the 4th Michigan Cavalry on August 14, 1862 as a hospital steward, was promoted to second lieutenant on September 20, 1864, and was discharged on July 1, 1865. After returning from battle four years later, he opened the keg and found the drink inside had been changed by the aging process in the wood. It was like nothing else he had ever tasted, and he purportedly declared it "Deliciously different," which remains the drink's motto to this day.

• In June of 1866, armed raids of the Fenian Brotherhood against British army forts and customs posts in Canada were fought to bring pressure on Britain to withdraw from Ireland. The Fenians were an Irish Republican organization based in the United States. They divided Catholic Irish-Canadians, many of whom were torn between loyalty to their new home and sympathy for the aims of the Fenians. Protestant Irish were generally loyal to Britain and fought with the Orange Order against the Fenians. While the U.S. authorities arrested the men and confiscated their arms, there is speculation that some in the U.S. government turned a blind eye to the preparations for the invasion, angered at actions that could have been construed as Canadian assistance to the Confederate States of America during the American Civil War. There were five Fenian raids of note between 1866 and 1871 and all of them ended in failure.

100 years ago —

• The M.A.C. Aggies played their annual football game against the University of Michigan at Ferry Field on October 21, 1916. It was the 11th game between the two schools dating back to 1898. Michigan had won seven of the prior ten games, but M.A.C. had defeated the Wolverines in 1915. Michigan won the 1916 game by a score of 9 to 0.

• In the summer of 1916, Ernest Hemingway (pictured at right) departed Chicago for one of his many fishing trips to Northern Michigan. Hemingway's love of fly-fishing in Northern Michigan inspired his popular "Nick Adams" short stories.



• The Flint Scottish Pipe Band has the distinction of being the oldest continuously running Pipe Band in Michigan. It was founded in 1916 by Scottish immigrants intent on preserving their Scottish Heritage through the music and dress of their homeland.

• Reverend Elam E. Branch and Earl W. De La Vergne finished their memorable work (with the memorable title) "History of Ionia County, Michigan: Her People, Industries and Institutions, with Biographical Sketches of Representative Citizens, and Genealogical Records of Many of the Old Families." The book was published by B.F. Bowen & Company in 1916, and is a valuable resource for historians and genealogists even today.

E.E. Branch (the credited author, pictured here) was born in 1871 in Kalamazoo County. In 1891 he married Jennie Gorham (2 years his senior) in Lawrence, Van Buren Co., and by 1901 he was the pastor of Bethel Baptist Church in Kalamazoo. His pastoral career led him to Ionia, as well as Nashville and Hartford. By 1940, they resided in Grand Rapids, and later moved to Alma where Elam passed away in 1948.



50 years ago —

On a quiet day in March, 1966, seven eyewitnesses reported an unidentified flying object maneuvering over Livingston and Washtenaw counties. Ordinarily, these reports might have been dismissed by officials as the work of cranks. But this time, the seven witnesses WERE officials—police officers and sheriff's deputies from the two counties.

Their stories also were backed up by more than 100 witnesses, including William Van Horn, a civil defense director, and dozens of students who watched the football-shaped object for four hours as it maneuvered near the University of Michigan campus, a nearby airport and a local swamp.

In Ionia a few months later, "a 400ft, silent, black oval shaped object was seen hovering above 50-60ft pine forest [north of town]. The object moved very, very slowly a few feet above the treeline. Absolutely quiet with NO air disturbance to the surrounding trees, etc. Oval blackened the starfield." (This quote was taken from the official report.)

NOTE TO ALL NEWS MEDIA: House Minority Leader Gerald R. Ford, R-Michigan, today sent [a] letter to the chairman and the ranking Republican members of the House Committee on the Armed Services and Science and Astronautics, urging that one committee or the other investigate the subject of Unidentified Flying Objects. (UFO's)

Rep. Ford was not satisfied with the Air Force explanation of the sightings in Michigan and he described the "swamp gas" explanation given by J. Allen Hynek, UFO skeptic and researcher, as "flippant."

• The beginnings of the Arden Corporation began in Ionia where the first manufacturing plant opened with two sewing machines and 10 employees in the summer of 1966. The business had been established 2 years earlier by Bob and Martie Sachs. At the time no one knew Arden would grow into an international company with four manufacturing facilities in the United States, offices in Asia, and manufacturing partners in China, Taiwan, Vietnam, and India.

• The Ionia Community Theatre (ICT) also started in 1966 with a small handful of drama enthusiasts that held a series of workshops. That led to the performing of three one-act plays on the stage in the third floor ballroom of the Ionia Elks Lodge. The ICT is still with us today.

Upcoming Programs and Events

Wednesday, August 3, 7:00 p.m.
"Who was John C. Blanchard, and how did he get rich?"

John C. Blanchard House, 251 E. Main St.

Wednesday, August 17, 7:00 p.m.
 Business Meeting at the Blanchard House
 Open to all interested parties.

Wednesday, September 7, 7:00 p.m.
Actor's Guild Presentation
 at the Blanchard House, 251 E. Main St.
 partnering with the Ionia Community Library.

Wednesday, September 21, 7:00 p.m.
 Business Meeting at the Blanchard House
 Open to all interested parties.

Sunday, October 2
"Spirits of Ionia's Past"
 Our annual Cemetery Tour.
 (Watch for more details coming soon!)

Wednesday, October 5, 7:00 p.m.
 Annual meeting at the
 Blanchard House, 251 E. Main St.
 including the election of new Directors.

Tuesday, October 11 (all day!)
 Tri-River Museum Group's Annual Bus Trip
 Exploring Michigan Museums

**Don't forget to visit the
 Blanchard House and Museum,**
 Sundays, 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. through August



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