

Ionia County Historical Society CHRONICLE

The *Almost* Monthly Publication of the Ionia County Historical Society — February 2009



The Ionia County Court House

From “History of Ionia County, Michigan” by Rev. Elam E. Branch, 1916:

“We, your petitioners, being citizens of the county of Ionia and destitute of those privileges and advantages which have uniformly been extended to all those counties in said Territory of Michigan which, like Ionia County, have been rapidly increasing in wealth and population by organization and determining on suitable situations for seats of justice, therefore ask that commissioners may be appointed to fix and determine upon the place suitable for the erection of a court-house and other county buildings for the county of Ionia. For which your petitioners will ever pray.” This paper was dated in Grand River, Ionia County, July 12, 1833.

Mr. Dexter gave the west half of the court house grounds (west of present-day Library Street) to the County of Ionia for a court house site (as he also gave ground to Kent county for the same purpose out of the land he owned there). The act organizing Ionia county took effect on the first Monday of April, 1837, and county officers were duly elected on the second Monday of the same month. In accordance with the provisions of section 4. the first term of the circuit court of Ionia county was held in the school house at Ionia County Seat, the Hon. Kaphroditus Ranson presiding, on the last Monday in May, 1837.

A wood building was constructed on the lot for use by the courts which served until the 1880s. No details of that building remain, except that it was in the south east corner of the lot.

The first move toward getting the present courthouse built was made by J. S. Gage, at the October session, 1882, of the county supervisors. Supervisor Gage had a committee appointed to investigate the advisability of building a court-house. The committee reported at the January session, 1883, and it was decided to procure plans for a structure which should house all of the county officials. It was resolved to place a proposition before the voters to raise forty-five thousand dollars for the erection of a court house. This proposition was voted on in the spring of 1883, and was carried. Plans were immediately drawn and Clare Allen received the contract and began work upon the structure, but he had not proceeded to any great extent when, in July, 1885, his business went bankrupt. As a consequence, the building committee took charge and proceeded with the work. This committee was composed of C. Waterbury, Levi Shotwell and E. P.



Gifford. The courthouse was then completed in the spring of 1886 and, although the contract price had been only forty-two thousand three hundred and eighty dollars, the total cost of the building ran up to over fifty-seven thousand dollars. It was furnished complete with the best furniture at a cost of five thousand three hundred dollars. On July 3, 1886, the dedicatory services were held and Ionia county then ranked among the foremost of the state as to the beauty and efficiency of its temple of justice.

The outside of the building (an eclectic architectural style) includes facing of locally quarried Ionia sandstone, as are several other major buildings in town. Until the 1940s, the courthouse janitor and his family lived in rooms in the courthouse basement.

Above the tiles in the main court room is a grand arched
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MINUTES of the February '09 Mtg.

The February 4, 2009, meeting of the ICHS was called to order at 7:00 p.m. at the Ionia County Court House by president Linda Ciangi with a “Happy Valentine’s Day” greeting. She also extended an immediate thanks to Chris Haskins, who has been doing some much-needed repairs at the Blanchard House, and to Kathleen Perrin for running the January meeting in her absence.

The Secretary’s report was accepted as published in the Chronicle.

Under the heading of old business, the latest revision of the Blanchard House Rental Agreement was presented by Kathleen Perrin. It was suggested that we ask Dan Balice (Attorney and ICHS member) to review the document before we put it to use. Stephanie VanderMolen continues to work on the new Rental Brochure. David McCord presented several ideas for a Historical Society logo (A favorite was chosen – watch for it in future documents!).

March 7 will be the Community Expo, and the ICHS will again

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share a booth with the BPW at the event. David Wodarek, a caricaturist, has been engaged as entertainment for the event (from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.) A door prize drawing is also planned to help cover the costs, and donations for prizes are welcomed. A sign-up sheet was circulated to staff the booth.

We are also signed up for a booth at the April 24-25 "Inside Yard Sale" at the Armory. Please gather donations for the sale and contact Hank Knoop about getting them to the site.

"Spring Into The Past" – the annual event of the Tri-River Group of local Museums – will be held May 2 and 3. The Blanchard House will be open for tours. [NOTE: See later developments in the Board Meeting Minutes about this event! – D.M.] The theme of the event is "Honoring Those Who Serve" and museums are urged to set up displays on that theme.

D. McCord also asked the membership for permission to set up a "Google Account" which would provide the Historical Society website with additional capabilities. The permission was unanimously given, particularly because the arrangement is free!

Hank Knoop being in Arizona, there is no Treasurer's Report.

In the category of New Business, president Ciangi reported that Pastor Larry Brown from the First United Methodist Church asked for ideas for the "Music on the Green" event coming in July. (The ICHS participated last year.)

We have four business partners who have agreed to decorate rooms in the Blanchard House for next Christmas. "Keeper of the Crows", "Sid's Flower Shop", "Ionia Floral", and "Eclectic Gallery" will be given a tour of the house to choose a room, and collaborative promotions will be arranged. In addition, Hank Knoop is working on a similar arrangement for the exterior of the house.

Brad Garrison will stop in at the next Board Meeting (Feb 17) to review some of the repair concerns for the Blanchard House and provide some professional advice.

The RAVE organization has asked to rent the Blanchard House on May 15 – both floors – for a wine & cheese party / fund-raiser. The board will discuss the arrangements.

It was also noted that "people make the house a home" and some discussion was had about types of activities that would help attract the

interest of visitors for the summer.

The next membership meeting will be held at the Commission on Aging building on March 4; David McCord will present information on "R. Buckminster Fuller – Crackpot Genius."

The meeting was adjourned at 7:55, and the podium turned over to Joe McCord to present information and conduct a tour of the Court House.

MINUTES of the February '09 Board Meeting

The ICHS Board met on Feb. 17 at the Blanchard House presided by president Linda Ciangi. Brad Garrison visited the house just prior to the meeting to look over some issues around the house that may require some repair and/or maintenance. He took some notes and will report back to the Board soon. His wife, Sue, who had helped with many projects around the house, will be able to address some issues, other may require some specialized skills.

The Ionia Expo is coming up on March 7 at the Ionia High School, 9:00 to 3:00. We'll set up on Friday evening between 6:30 and 9:00 p.m. Door prize items are still to be finalized, and volunteers to be scheduled as well. BPW has submitted their share of the booth fee, and the artist is scheduled and ready. A table will be provided, and we will bring another.

In regards to the new logo, D. McCord is getting prices on a rubber stamp which can be used for many applications.

The "Indoor Yard Sale" at the Armory will be the April 24th & 25th. A "set-up / take-down team" is needed. Hank Knoop is standing by to accept donations for the sale to be picked up and delivered. The Board wishes to be clear that items for sale are ONLY donations to the Society for that purpose, and not items from our historic collections. A sign-up sheet has been started for volunteers for the sale.

The "Spring Into The Past" event with the Tri River group is scheduled for May 2 and 3 – HOWEVER, the Blanchard House will be rented for a bridal shower on the 2nd. Therefore, the Blanchard House will only be part of the Tri River tour on Sunday the 3rd from noon to 5:00. The Tri-River Group will make a "punch card" available for museum-goers, and the ICHS

needs to invest in a unique hole-punch for the purpose. (About \$10. – D.M.)

Directors are encouraged to think forward about Summer Sundays – displays, activities, etc. that can be advertised to draw in visitors. We will probably have a display of historic photos with prints available for sale. Hosts are encouraged to be in costume when possible. Carriage House plans need to be worked on to be ready when Spring gets here. D. McCord showed the Board some historic toys he's working on that can be for sale or as prizes for kids. The Scavenger Hunt still needs to be refined, too.

Amy Smith has asked the ICHS to judge the art department again this year. Discussion of the displays of photos and a possible float for the parade were discussed briefly.

President Ciangi is pursuing the hosting of the Chamber's Business After Hours at the Blanchard House, probably in November. More to come as we get closer to the date. Displays of artifacts from old Ionia businesses would be appropriate.

Treasurer Hank Knoop presented his forecast for the next couple of months, noting that (with heating bills and insurance coming due) there may be a \$6,000 shortfall before summer gets here. Without a Home Tour, Guitar Raffle, and Christmas Concert, the year's fund raising future is a little sparse right now. In addition, WalMart did not donate \$1000 as in years past. President Ciangi noted that plans are in the works for another concert at the Theatre for the ICHS. She and Barb Ehler have been investigating some options, and plans to coordinate with the Main Street restaurants are being considered as well.

Calculations will be coming soon to see if it is fiscally possible.

Saturday, March 28 is the tentative date for the next Appraisal Road Show - the location is still to be determined. Joan McCord hopes to confirm this soon.

The Church Tour is on for May 16, and Doni Knoop moved that we provide refreshments at the Blanchard House that day (if not a "tea")

On September 26th, the DDA is planning "Buckaroo Ball" including a horse-racing game at the Theatre among other things. The ICHS will consider opportunities to be a part of that event, if possible.

Stephanie V. passed around proofs for the new Rental brochures. A few edits were suggested by the Board and estimates will be got for producing 200 copies in time for the Expo.

Kathleen Perrin has taken on the chairmanship of the Calendar project now. (Ads need to be sold and photos collected for the 2010 calendar by August.)

Hank Knoop brought up a few other items from past minutes to be addressed, including the purchase of a portable heater for the house had been discussed, and it was decided that Linda C. and Barb E. would go shopping for one. The opportunity to acquire valuable artifacts from the Viggo Nielson estate precluded the heater purchase – but it is still on the "to-do list."

"Yours truly" had to leave before the meeting was adjourned. Business conducted thereafter will hopefully be reported by a member of the Board to complete this report.

— D. McCord

HELP HEAT THE HOUSE!

To make a contribution to the fund to heat the Blanchard House for the coming winter, you may send a check or money order to the Historical Society. First Bank will also accept contributions at their offices. — THANK YOU

Our Court House continued from Page 1

ceiling the same style as that in the rotunda. Restoration for now is beyond the County's means. The wooden owl above the judge's bench was carved by A.F. Schaffer, who also carved features of the New York State Capitol and custom carvings for the Vanderbilts. The large rectangle in the center of the rotunda was originally made of stained glass panels, but this was changed in 1957 to conform to the fire marshal's requirements.

There are 13 fireplaces on the first two floors which had apparently been piped to burn gas. The building is heated with steam, and the chimneys are sealed. There was a 12-foot-wide metal eagle perched above the main entrance until 1995. During remodeling it was taken down and found to be in very bad shape and not repairable. (It also had some bullet holes in it from shooting at pigeons - and missing.)

In a large glass case in the hall is a flag carried by Union Soldiers from Ionia during the Civil War. It was donated after the war by the 21st Michigan Volunteers who had served under General J.H. Kidd. The woodwork through the building is red oak with cherry trims, and the third floor is all trimmed in butternut. (The historic marker in the front lawn of the courthouse is incorrect in this detail.)

The courthouse was electrified in 1922, but no other significant changes were made until 1980 and 81 when the third floor (which had never been used) was completed, the elevator was installed, and changes made to the second floor plan as well. The total cost of the remodeling project was \$300,000. During the refinishing of wood trim, the mural above the main stairway was discovered under many coats of paint. Research has revealed that all the panels in the rotunda were once covered with such elaborate murals.

In 1983-84, more remodeling was done to create the Probate Court Room on the second floor. The clock in the south tower was installed in 2001, and in the north tower in 2005. The tower had been design for four clock faces, north, south, east, and west.

Thanks to Joe McCord for his tour and fascinating trivia and stories about the Courthouse – far more than have been related here!



Upcoming Programs and Events

REMEMBER!

Thursday Evening Workshops at the Blanchard House.

If local history is of interest, this is a great way to get involved. Stop in!

Wednesday, March 4, 7:00 p.m.
Regular Meeting - Ionia Commission on Aging
PROGRAM: David McCord presents
“Bucky Fuller - Crackpot Genius”

Saturday, March 7
Community Expo at Ionia High School

Tuesday, March 17, 7:00 p.m.
Board Meeting - Location TBA

Saturday, March 28
Annual Spring Appraisal Road Show
(Date yet to be confirmed)

Wednesday, April 1
Regular Meeting (No Foolin'!)

April 24-25 “Inside Yard Sale”
at Ionia Armory

Sunday, May 3
“Spring Into The Past” Museum Tour
includes the Blanchard House

Saturday, May 16
Ionia's Historic Church Tour

*For other upcoming events - visit the ICHS
website at ioniahistory.org.*

Ionia County Historical Society 2008-09 Board of Directors & Officers—

Linda Ciangi, President — 527-4945
Kathleen Perrin, Vice Pres. — 522-0018
Gerry Perry, Director — 527-4572
Stephanie VanderMolen — 616-755-0731
Barb Ehlert, Director — 522-0844
David McCord, Secretary — 527-3784
Hank Knoop, Treasurer — 527-3130

Here's the latest issue of the...

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Ionia County Historical Society
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www.ioniahistory.org



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
- 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!

Join Us at the Ionia Theatre at 9:30 a.m. every Thursday for FREE ICHS Travelogues!

March 5 = Voices of Grand Rapids

March 12 = A Tour of Ireland

March 19 = Iceland

*March 26 = South Dakota - The Corn Palace
and Mt. Rushmore*

April 2 — The Appalachians

April 9 — The Life Giver

April 16 — Touring England

April 23 — The Great Smokies

April 30 — Greenville Gliders of World War II

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, corrections (of course), or contributions should be directed to the editor c/o the ICHS at P.O. Box 1776, Ionia, MI, 48846 or via www.ioniahistory.org.