



The Almost Monthly Publication of  
the Ionia County Historical Society

# the CHRONICLE



## BETWEEN THE GALLEY AND THE GUN

When the members arrived at the June ICHS meeting, on the center table of the parlor was a vintage football trophy. Linda Ciangi explained, as she began her presentation, that this trophy had been actually left on her doorstep. Among the names on the trophy is Henry Meir. Linda, being a fan of Ionia Football, began to research the team commemorated by the award and thereby met Pat, the daughter of Mr. Meir. And this led to the subject of Linda's presentation this evening.

Henry was adept at the art of wordsmithing, documenting events and relating stories as a youth. Graduating from IHS in 1927, his talent for storytelling was obvious even then, and he was also known for his cooking skill. His father had been Ionia's lamplighter in the olden days, and there is an example of Henry's youthful mischief carved into the brick of a downtown building - initials commemorating some romantic relationship. When World War II was declared, Henry wished to serve, was passed over at first due to a hernia, but was later accepted and became a cook in the Navy.

He was trained at Great Lakes and then Norfolk, and assigned double duty as Pastry Cook and Machine Gunner. The vessel to which he was assigned would carry LSTs filled with troops and equipment to the beaches of the Pacific theater. In May 1944, they left New York Harbor, arriving in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii in August, where they intercepted a lot of precious mail.

(Linda mentioned here a side note about the US Post Office in San Francisco through which all the Pacific GI Mail was sent. There is an excellent historical exhibit there commemorating this.)

In September they proceeded to the Marshal Islands, and thence to the Philippines by October, making ready for the impending combat. At Mauriti, the battle commenced, and Linda read verbatim several days' entries from Mr. Meir's chronicle of the events, describing the astonishing contrast between dull daily duty, the overwhelming anxiety of waiting for something to happen, and the close-quarters action of coastal engagements with the enemy.

Here then, Linda shifted her narrative to the activities on land, where the Allies were working on an airstrip near the beach. In the caves overlooking this activity, Japanese soldiers were in hiding, trying desperately to avoid the American patrols and trying simply to survive while they hoped for reinforcements. She read then from the diary of a Japanese soldier, giving his intimate personal account of their desperation, their fear and fragile courage. A final entry in the diary described a near encounter with the Americans while he was scavenging for food. The diary ended shortly thereafter—the soldier had met his end by an American bullet. The diary found its way from his pocket to the souvenirs of Henry Meir.

She then resumed the readings from Henry's own account, how they finally had seen success in their struggles to take the land from Japanese control, and by October 24, they left for New Guinea. From there they saw many ports of call through the next year, including a stop at Okinawa in April of '45. His diary went on to recount how they got word of goings on around the world, sometimes gaining news even from the notorious Tokyo Rose, broadcast across the Pacific. They heard of the President's death, and also the passing of Ernie Pyle. They heard rumors of Germany's surrender, and then finally confirmation. They followed closely the progress of Peace Talks. Finally in September came V.J. day, and the unbridled celebration of victory. By October, they were back in San Francisco.

These personal accounts of warfare are precious keepsakes, and Linda expresses her deep thanks to the family in sharing their contents. They two diaries are kept on a shelf back-to-back.

### MINUTES of the June '09 Mtg.

The June 2009 meeting of the ICHS was called to order by president Linda Ciangi at 7:00 at the Blanchard House. She welcomed members and guests, one of whom was Mr. Paul Frost, Middle School history teacher. She also noted a change in the calendar: the June Board Meeting will be on the 24th, rather than the usual 3rd Wednesday, due to schedule conflicts.

The Secretary's report was accepted as published with one date change to the calendar, as moved by Bob Nixon and supported by Cal Smith.

Under old business, the Church Walk of May 16 was deemed a success, although the weather resulted in a slow start. Thanks to Joan McCord for her efforts. Reports were mixed: Dave Cook said they had nearly 500 attending at the First Christian Church, but "few" had toured the Presbyterian Church. The guide books put together for the tour have been re-covered and are available as a historic reference of local church stories.

A R.A.V.E. fund raiser was held at the Blanchard House on May 29, and the committee felt it was a great success, hoping it would become an annual event.

Volunteers are needed for Summer Sundays to act as hosts and greeters at the Blanchard House. Please contact Linda C. if you have a few hours on a Sunday afternoon (1 to 4 p.m.) to help. We are hoping to have some occasional entertainment and special programs throughout the summer.

The ICHS will have a float in the Free Fair Parade this year, and help is needed to put that together. Work dates are still to be determined - let Linda C. know when you are available to help.

David McCord is in charge of our computer, including the entry of inventory information and scanning of photos and artifacts. Contact him if you're interested in helping with that effort and work sessions will be scheduled. (Saturday mornings are best for David.)

The Ionia Car Show will be on Main Street this coming weekend, and the ICHS will have information to hand out on the upcoming Superstars Show (August 16). Thanks to the Sentinel for their support in contributing the FULL PAGE AD in a recent issue of the weekender. Sponsorships are still available, and publicity suggestions are always welcomed.

The office area has been rearranged to make a better showcase for our Souvenirs and Ionia memorabilia

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we have for sale. Suggestions are welcomed to expand those offerings. There is also a rack which will hold literature, including our Scavenger Hunt pages for youth taking the house tour, and a pocket for suggestions and notes for the Board.

Hank Knoop brought out several copies of Ionia DVDs that had been produced with soundtrack problems, offering them to members if they'd like to watch pictures without sound (and several members said yes).

Hank Knoop then presented the Treasurer's Report (copies available on request). It was moved by Dave Cook, supported by Mike Gallagher, to accept said report, and the motion passed.

Under the heading of New Business:

The Garden Club has visited the house and, assisted by ICHS members, the lawn continues to improve and look "lovely and inviting."

Wednesday, July 1, will be our annual Pot Luck at the house, with social hour from 6:00 to 7:00, a flag-raising by the local Boy Scouts, and food at 7:00.

The Tri-River Group will be meeting at the BelRockton in Belding on July 14th with a program entitled "Nutcackers and Canes." It begins at 11:00 a.m. and tickets are \$10.00.

The children of Howard Strachan and their cousins came to the house on May 30 to see the vintage wedding dress and Masonic uniform donated by their family. They gave a generous donation for archival supplies and joined the Society to keep advised of our progress.

David McCord reported that Deb Dudek's walking tour brochure has now been revised and resized, so interested members can contact her for updated copies - and take the tour!

Also, the Relay for Life group is putting together a calendar to include local cancer survival stories. If you are interested in contributing to that effort, contact Linda C. or a member of that group.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 and Linda C. took the podium for her presentation (see lead article in this issue).

## MINUTES of the June '09 Board Mtg.

The Board met at the Blanchard House at 7:00 p.m. on June 24. Present were Linda Ciangi, Gerry Perry, Kathleen Perrin, Stephanie VanderMolen, David McCord, Barb Ehlert, and Hank and Doni Knoop.

First on the agenda were the Carriage House projects. Hank Knoop met with Bob Miller regarding the roof (there are decayed shingles and leaks to be repaired), who estimated approximately \$4000 to replace it. The members suggested other roofing contractors to be contacted, and spoke briefly about fund-raising and grant possibilities for the project. David McCord also noted that he's making a bit of progress on the historic workshop project for the Carriage House, and other uses of the

space were noted as well.

Some windows are in dire need of repair and restoration, particularly on the "sun side". It would be nice to be able to open some windows for ventilation in these summer months, and this is going to take some work - they are all swollen shut. More to come on this project.

Volunteers are needed for Summer Sundays. Some dates are still unstaffed, and some under-staffed, so interested folks should contact Linda C. with their available days.

At the Free Fair this year we will have a display of local businesses, and we'll have use of a tobacco display from the Antique Mall. (I also have a note about a \$50 display case - I don't think that's the same one. — D.M.)

The float for the fair will be built upon a trailer from C&L Trucking. David McCord and Stephanie VanderMolen will supply the signage. Linda C. has most of the other components together, and will arrange a work session.

Joan McCord suggested Ed Bentley to help judge the art at the Free Fair this year - he will be contacted to see if he'll be available.

For the ICHS "Souvenir Shop" Linda C. suggested that we get some historical photos reproduced and framed for sale. She showed a few examples, and the board thought a \$15 or \$20 price would be reasonable. It was also suggested that photo scans be put into a computer slide show as well.

The topic was raised of access to our research materials, and that the small second floor room might be a better place for the ICHS "office" instead. Those research materials - city directories, local histories, plat books, and high school annuals would be more accessible if they were in the book case in the east parlor. The process would also allow us to sort and catalog those books as they get moved, and some of the unrelated literature (old albums and school books) might be better displayed elsewhere (the museum, perhaps). This idea will be further discussed as a potential for Thursday evening work sessions.

The Garden Club has removed a large (too large) evergreen from the front garden, and will be meeting Tuesday to discuss options for that bed. The pipes are still in the ground from the sign that used to be there. Mention was made of reusing these for a new sign, something parallel to the street, to compliment the Historical Marker (which is perpendicular to the street). More to come on this topic as well.

The next Board meeting would normally be July 15, but due to the Free Fair activities going on that week, the Board is considering moving it to the 24th or 29th. This was left undecided for now.

The Board adjourned to inspect the upstairs window situation and other items informally.



## Upcoming Programs and Events

### Thursday Evening Workshops at the Blanchard House.

*This is a great way to get involved. Stop in - 5:00 to 7:00 p.m.*

Wednesday, July 1  
Annual Independence Day Pot-Luck  
at the Blanchard House

Saturday, July 18 a.m.  
Ionia Free Fair Parade - with an ICHS Float!

*(The ICHS also participates with displays in the Antique Village at the Fair, and prizes for the Art Department for Historical subjects.)*

Wednesday, August 5, 7:00 p.m.  
Regular meeting at the Blanchard House

## AUGUST 16: SALUTE TO THE SUPERSTARS

LIVE Concert at the Ionia Theatre to benefit ICHS  
See our website for more info & get your tickets now!

DON'T FORGET SUMMER SUNDAYS  
and be sure to help if you can spare the time!

*For other upcoming events - visit the ICHS  
website at [ioniahistory.org](http://ioniahistory.org).*

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

Linda Ciangi, President — 527-4945  
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Gerry Perry, Director — 527-4572  
Stephanie VanderMolen — 616-755-0731  
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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 ICHS at P.O. Box 1776, Ionia, MI, 48846 or via [www.ioniahistory.org](http://www.ioniahistory.org).

### FROM THE EDITOR — D. McCord, ICHS Secretary

Sorry I didn't have time to do quite as much as I would like to for this month's newsletter. It's summer, and all the extra activities that go along with that simply overwhelmed my schedule. There are so many wonderful events and activities during these months for the ICHS and in our community, I hope you will be able to participate! Please visit the website for more information, and I look forward to seeing everyone around town this month! Thanks for your understanding.