



the **CHRONICLE**

The Almost Monthly Publication of
the Ionia County Historical Society



MINUTES of the June 2010 Business Meeting

The June business meeting of the Ionia County Historical Society was called to order at 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, June 16, at the Blanchard House by president Linda Ciangi. Also present were Stephanie Vandermolen, Kathleen Larock, Barb Ehlert, Hank Knoop and David McCord.

Linda C. first noted that the Chamber is offering members the opportunity to show a video loop at their booth at the Free Fair this year for \$150. The board chose not to participate.

The ICHS set of Ionia High School annuals is ready to display for the visiting Alums on June 26. Linda has some Alumni items to sell, and asked if they could be offered at the Blanchard House. For each item sold, the ICHS would get \$1.00. Stephanie supported the motion, which passed. She also noted that someone had asked her to sell them a '64 annual, which the ICHS has an extra. The board supported this sale as well.

The June 7 book signing with author R. Hamilton and organized with the Ionia District Library, drew 70 people. Thanks to Kris and Barb Haskins and Annette McCord who attended in costume.

The Flea Market that was held at the Blanchard House lawn on June 11 was also a success, bringing in \$479.85 for the Society. The items which did not sell were donated to the Christian Service Center and Goodwill, with the exception of a few more valuable items that will be offered through eBay by Barb Hogan. There were 7 vendors altogether, and the board felt there would be room for more next time. Thanks to Hank K. and Kris H. for the heavy lifting.

Penny Beaman of Enrich was at the Flea Market and Kris spoke with her about the availability of volunteers for ICHS events. She has forms and procedures that we could use and learn from, and the Board decided to invite her to a future meeting to discuss the idea.

The board then discussed "planning" in general for events like the Flea Market, with Kris H. pointing out that many of the same members continue to make things happen at the last minute, or that things might go better with more detailed plans. The idea of a checklist was discussed, as well as some sort of standard lead-time for events to ensure that plans are in place well before the day of.

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IONIA FREE FAIR!

The June program on Wednesday, the 2nd, was presented by Dave Hess. It was his third visit with reminiscences of his many years involvement with the Free Fair. He spoke of local folk and big celebrities known to most of the members present.

Dave related that his very first experience at the Ionia Free Fair was in 1955. He was in college, and visited a girlfriend in Battle Creek who suggested they attend the Fair. He had a memorable time, noting that the midway and sideshows were quite different then!

Dave had the opportunity to move to Ionia in 1964 when he accepted the position of principal at Emerson School. Later that year, he was shoe-shopping at the Strand Shoe Store on Main St. in Ionia when he happened to mention to Nels Strand that he had been involved in broadcasting and publicity. Nels, serving on the IFF Board at the time, invited Dave to participate. The IFF office was on the 2nd floor of the JC Penny building at the time (now part of FirstBank's offices), where Dave went to meet with Cork Teachworth, the IFF director at the time. And the rest, as they say, is history.

Dave also noted that a fellow Free Fair volunteer was the late Ralph Bartelt, former president and charter member of the ICHS, and long-time teacher in Ionia. Ralph, coincidentally, once taught in Grant Park Indiana, not far from Dave Hess's hometown of Momence. He related other tales of coincidence regarding his hometown roots and Michigan incidents, including the fact that his father had initiated the Momence Gladiola Festival in 1937 after having visited Holland's Tulip Fest.

Dave then produced some 8x10 photos of Free Fairs in past years, each with a tale to tell. One was of the traditional Governor's Day luncheon held each year at the fair, this one sometime in the 1950s held at the High School Gym (now the Middle School). At the podium was Gov. G.M. "Soapy" Williams, who holds the record for re-elections in the state. He also had a photo of Gov. Romney taken at the Fairgrounds.

There was a photo of the Degger family - the company who provided the midway attractions from 1965 to 1978 at the Fair.

Dave's first fair in 1965 was also the 50th anniversary of the Free Fair (having been started by Fred Green and Fred Chapman and others in 1915). They added several days of extra shows to the schedule to commemorate the event, extending the week-long Fair to ten days, which continues to

this day. The headline act that year was trumpeter Al Hurt, who did three sell-out shows and returned to the Fair again in 1980.

Dave also told stories about Myron Florian, the famed accordionist with Lawrence Welk, and Gordon MacRae, actor and singer (who sang "happy birthday" to IFF secretary Audry Furman in the little ticket office under the grandstand). Country Music was



NEXT MONTH: July 6 — Annual Member Pot Luck
Bring a dish to pass - fun and festivities in store!

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The Carriage House Roof fundraising continues with three donations so far, as well as a \$500 grant from the County Foundation. The June issue of the Chronicle will include a donation form, as will the website for electronic donations. Hank also suggested a mailing to go out to ALL members in mid-July to wrap up the campaign. Linda moved and Stephanie supported that \$50 be allocated to paying for this mailing; the motion carried.

July 9 and 10 will be the American Cancer Society's Relay for Life in Ionia. The ICHS is invited to participate, but the Board decided that it was too late to put a team together, but the idea was put forth to donate a couple of items to their silent auction. Linda also would talk to Gary Ferguson about potential tickets or discounts for the Johnny Cash Tribute show in August.

The Free Fair parade will be July 24, and Linda and Marilyn Nash are planning to create a "railroad station" theme to show items which trains brought into Ionia over the years, including people and freight during different time periods. "I hear that

train a-comin'" was considered for a banner on the float.

The Antique Village display will again be chaired by the Knoops, and as yet there is not a theme for the ICHS display. This will be in the Floral Building this year.

The Kids Club event held at the Blanchard House on Sunday the 13th was good but not very well attended. The idea is worth working on further for future opportunities.

Stephanie brought in the letters ready to send to area Funeral Directors along with Blanchard House brochures and explanatory inserts to invite their patrons to use the House for funeral teas, etc.

Kris Haskins presented the Board with a file copy of his report on Ionia Baseball in the 1860s and 1870s, and David McCord noted that his documentation of the "Journey of the Dexter Colony" is also available to copy and offer for sale by the ICHS.

Stephanie suggested that the sketch of the Carriage House done by David McCord be used to print postcards for sale, and framed prints be sold - perhaps raffled off. David will set up the artwork and provide some copies for the ICHS.

The July meeting will be the annual Pot Luck — "rain, shine, or lack of power."

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

Ionia Free Fair Antique Village

Antiques & Volunteers Needed

Volunteers are needed so that four to six people are always in the Floral Building. All interests and physical abilities are welcome. People are needed by the doors, they can be seated, to provide information and others are needed to walk around and explain exhibits. The shifts are: 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m., 2:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m., 6:00 p.m. - 10:00 p.m.

These shifts are needed every day of the "ten best days of summer". If you would like to work, please call Karen Merchant at 522 - 1495. This is fun, just ask the folks who have helped for the last several years. For everyday that you work at the fair you will receive a free parking pass good for that day.

FREE FAIR MEMORIES

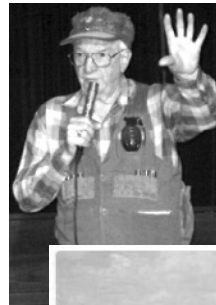
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slow in coming to the headline schedule at the Fair until Roy Clark visited in 1972 with a series of very successful shows. His appearance was followed by Loretta Lynne and many others. In later years, country stars were common on the bill.

Dave also related a tale of George Burns's visit to the fair, which was very poorly attended. Mr. Burns was the consummate professional, however, having seen many an empty theatre before him in his decades of vaudeville. Dave has a note on George Burns' personal letterhead - the text of a radio commercial he did for his Free Fair appearance.

Dave also spoke of the many acts - clowns, opening acts, novelties and orchestras - who appeared many times at the Fair. One such was Wes Harrison, a sound-effects man. Dave played an interview with Mr. Harrison he had done, including a sampling of his sound effects work.

Many more hours could be spent telling tales of the Free Fair, now in its 95th year. Thanks to Dave for sharing these stories with us, and helping to make the Free Fair a success for so many years.



(Left) Wes Harrison - Mr. Sound Effects - is still performing! Here he is in a self-promotional photo.

(Below) View of the midway at a Free Fair in the 1960s - a postcard found on eBay!



Summer Sundays at the Blanchard House!

Please join us for our summer activities at the Blanchard House, 251 E. Main St., Ionia. Tours and entertainment from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. on Sundays during June, July, and August. Something for everyone!

July 4th

A perfect day for a display inside honoring our veterans.

July 11th

The Ionia Community Band will perform on the lawn from 1 to 3 p.m. Inside will be a display of musical memories. (Bring your lawn chair and enjoy the music!)

July 18th

A display celebrating the Churches of Ionia, with old hymns being played on our antique church organ.

July 25th

Ionia Free Fair will be the high-light of the weekend, including images of Fairs of Yesterday.

August 1st

[To Be Announced]

August 8th

Local History on display inside and a live Bird Show on the lawn, with an eagle, owl, and falcon. Bring a lawn chair and learn about birds of prey!

August 15th

A display about the pioneers who settled Ionia in 1833, with genuine artifacts from our collection.



Upcoming Programs and Events

Thursday Evening Workshops at the Blanchard House. 5:00 to 7:00 p.m.

Wednesday, July 7, 7:00 p.m.
Annual Independence Day Pot-Luck
at the Blanchard House
EVERYONE WELCOMED!

Wednesday, July 21, 7:00 p.m.
ICHS Business Meeting
at the Blanchard House

Wednesday, August 4, 7:00 p.m.
Monthly Program Meeting
Bill Davis presents: **TRAINS!**

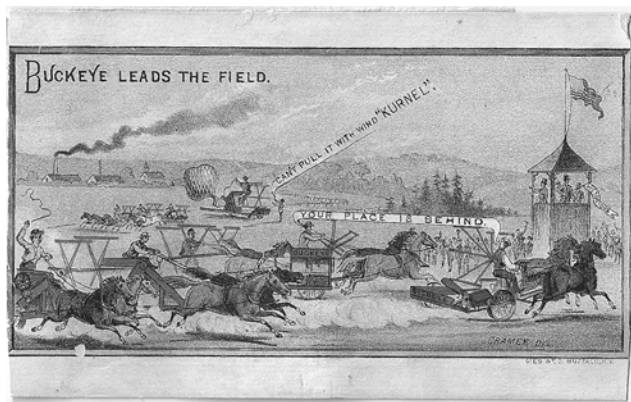
August 14, 8:00 p.m. at the Ionia Theatre:
TRIBUTE to JOHNNY CASH
with Terry Lee Goffee - at the Ionia Theatre
Proceeds to the Theatre and ICHS!

Wednesday, August 18th, 7:00 p.m.
ICHS Business Meeting at the Blanchard House

**BE SURE TO CHECK THE SCHEDULE OF
SUMMER SUNDAYS IN THIS ISSUE!**

— and —

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



Do not fail to examine them.

For descriptive circulars, address

AULMAN, MILLER & CO.,

AKRON, OHIO

W.J. Parkhurst,

Presented by

OPP. NOVELTY MILLS, IONIA, MICH.

19th Century Advertising Card for Buckeye Harvesters racing at a Fairgrounds, on the back of which is stamped "W.J. Parkhurst, Opp., Novelty Mills, Ionia, Mich."



John C. Blanchard House Historic Carriage House

www.ioniahistory.org

Support the Roof Project

Our carriage house at the John C. Blanchard Estate is in desperate need of a new roof. The "Support the Roof Project" will help raise the money needed to preserve this important piece of Ionia History. Construction on the carriage house will begin by November 2010. Become a sponsor and help preserve history.

I want to help preserve the Historic John C. Blanchard Carriage House.

Name: _____ Contact: _____

Sponsorship Levels:

Quantity

Dollars

Shingle Sponsor at \$40. per row

Board Sponsor at \$100. per 4' X 8' sheet

Other donation amount: _____

Total Dollars _____

Please make checks payable to the ICHS.

Please mail completed form to: **ICHS Treasurer, PO Box 176, Ionia, MI 48846**

Please reply by July 31, 2010.

Thank you for your support, you are making the difference.

Donations may be tax deductible Tax Id# 23-7423779

Contact Hank Knoop with questions 616-527-3130





the CHRONICLE

www.ioniahistory.org

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

Ionia County Historical Society
P.O. Box 1776
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 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
- ☐ 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 ICBS Travelogues!

July 1 — Iran, then and now

July 8 — The Black Hills

July 15 — Gliders of Greenville - WWII

July 22 — Italy

July 29 — Yosemite National Park

August 5 — Ionia, 150 Years

August 12 — Muir & Lyons, A Look Back

August 19 — Belding, City of Silk

Ionia County Historical Society 2009-10 Board of Directors & Officers

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