



The Almost Monthly Publication of  
the Ionia County Historical Society

# the CHRONICLE



# JUDGE OF PROBATE

Judge Bob Sykes addressed the members of the ICHS at our March meeting. Mr. Sykes is a 5th generation Ionian, and the 21st Probate Judge in Ionia. The office was created with the establishment of the state government in 1837. Until the mid 19th century, it was not required to be a lawyer to hold the office of Judge. The 8th Circuit Court was set up in 1851 covering Ionia and Montcalm Counties. At the time, the Circuit Judge literally "rode the circuit" from town to town. In 1968, the District Courts were established, and the office of Justice of the Peace was discontinued.

Judge Geer Smith was Ionia's longest-serving judge, and A.B. Morse was probably the most famous - holding many other offices in local, state, and federal service, including sitting on the State Supreme Court. The present District Court building was named for A.B. Morse when it was built.

He noted that three judges in Ionia today were from Ionia High School's Class of 1980. (Admitting that it seems "pretty incredible.")

Judge Sykes outlined some of the duties of the Probate Judge, beginning with concerns about wills, trusts, and estates. A large proportion of cases he deals with are regarding Guardianship or Conservator issues, and he also works with Power of Attorney and Advocate and Juvenile Delinquency cases. One of the highlights of the office is in working with Adoptions, but the darkest are cases of child abuse. Youth protection proceedings, abuse and neglect, as well as substance abuse are a large part of the job.

Ionia has some of the best programs available for counseling and support - and, he reminds us, these come with a significant price tag.

Judge Sykes shared some stories with us - a variety of anecdotes, some humorous and some tragic. We are grateful for the Judge's service to the community, and for his presentation.

## About a Judge

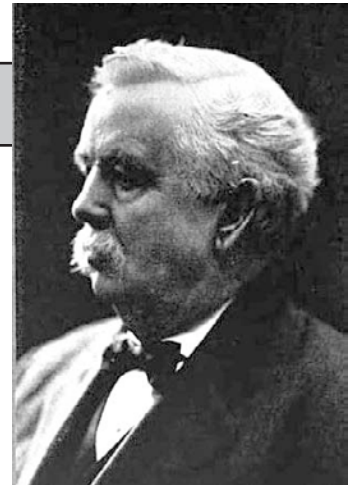
*The following account is mostly from E.E. Branch's History of Ionia County, 1916. A.B. Morse was just one of many Judges of distinction in Ionia's history.*

Allen B. Morse was born on January 7, 1839, in Otisco, Michigan, to John L. and Susan (Cowles) Morse, the eldest of nine children. Educated mostly at home, he excelled at Mathematics, Botany, and Literature. He studied for two years at Michigan Agricultural College preparatory to teaching school.

In 1860, he began studying the law but left at the age of twenty to enlist in the Union Army. He was promoted for bravery to lieutenant and adjutant of his regiment, and at Missionary Ridge lost his left arm; returning to Ionia he entered the study and practice of law. The name of Adjutant A. B. Morse always stood as a synonym for honesty, integrity and ability, and his name became familiar, to every family in this county.

He came to the bar in 1865, was later a member of our state Senate, and later was elected to the supreme bench of the State of Michigan, though a Democrat, by nearly thirty thousand votes majority against the great jurist, Thomas M. Cooley, making a fine record as a judge. Later, he was called from the bench to accept the nomination upon the Democratic ticket for governor, being defeated by only a few thousand votes by the Hon. John T. Rich. Shortly thereafter he was appointed consul to Glasgow by the government of the United States, a position which he filled with honor to the nation and much credit to himself for a period of five years.

At the expiration of his term he came back, and, declining further political honors, entered into the private practice of law. He enjoyed a large and lucrative practice until about the year 1907, when he retired from practice and is now enjoying a comfortable old age with a record that is a pride to his friends, and must be a source of comfort to himself.



## MINUTES of the March 2010 Mtg.

The Ionia County Historical Society met at the Ionia Co. Mental Health building on Wednesday, March 3rd, at 7:00 p.m. President Linda Ciangi called the meeting to order with greetings and welcome to guests Will Coffee and Bob Sykes.

One correction was reported for the Secretary's Report: the April meeting will be at the Blanchard House. It was moved by Joe McCord and supported by Kathleen Larock to accept the report as published. The motion passed.

President Ciangi expressed a hearty "thank you" to all those who helped out

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with the Valentines Day “Elvis for Everyone” fundraiser. The event was a great success, bringing in badly needed funds for the Blanchard House.

Gerry Perry reported that his wife, Rita, is not doing so well, and Bob Nixon is also in the hospital. Prayers are appreciated. Also, ICHS member Kent McFadden has passed away.

The Chamber Expo is coming up on March 13 - staff is needed, as well as set-up and take-down help. (A sign-up sheet was passed around.)

March 27 will be a free genealogy program at the Sunfield Historical group’s meeting.

The Appraisal Roadshow is all set for April 24 also at the Commission on Aging. Chairperson Joan McCord reported that the only volunteers still needed is someone to act as cashier - please contact her if interested.

The Tri-River Group’s “Spring Into The Past” museum tours are scheduled for May 1 and 2 - the Blanchard House will be open for that. Clean-up sessions will be scheduled to get ready for our guests coming through the house that weekend.

June 5 is the Ionia Car Show on Main St. and the 19th is the Farm Power Show with many historical farm displays and competitions.

June 7 we will be hosting a book signing at the Blanchard House by author R.L. Hamilton, who has written a historic novel. For more information, contact Joan McCord.

A Yard Sale fundraiser is scheduled for June 11 at the Carriage House. The Garden Club will be selling flowers, and we may coordinate with an event at the Methodist Church.

## MINUTES of the March Board Mtg.

The Board of the ICHS met at the Blanchard House at 7:00 p.m. on Thursday, March 18, 2010. Present were President Linda Ciangi, Directors Kris Haskins, Kathleen Larock, Barb Ehlert, and Stephanie VanderMolen, plus Secretary David McCord, and Doni Knoop representing treasurer Hank Knoop.

The Yard Sale is rescheduled for Friday, June 11, due to the house being rented on the 12th. Barb E. and Doni K. are in charge of the event, and there are artifacts in the Carriage House that need to be sorted and evaluated to see if they might be “de-accessioned.” (sold) The Friends of the Library will be invited to sell excess books at the sale, and someone has asked to have a table to sell their own items. The idea was put forth to charge \$10 for a table, and invite other sellers. It was noted that, if there were many in attendance at some point, a porta-potty might be set up to reduce traffic in the house.

The Expo on March 13 was a success, bringing in \$101 on our raffle. The butterfly house was won by member Pam Withrow. It was suggested that we try for a different position next year.

Spring cleaning is under way to prepare for the season. Things are

July 1 will be the Independence Day fireworks in Ionia.

The August 14th Johnny Cash Tribute, in partnership with the Ionia Theatre, is coming along well. T-shirts are available (Linda C. showed the members a sample) for \$20 each (\$25 for 2XL and larger). Contact Linda to order yours.

Hank Knoop presented the Treasurer’s report, saying it was a very good month for the organization. It was moved by Cal Smith and supported by Joe McCord to accept the report; the motion passed. As always, details and copies of the report are available on request.

Under “New Business,” the idea for a Cemetery Tour for next year around Memorial Day, as a potential fund-raiser for the Historical Society. There were concerns about mosquitoes, and about transportation. More interest was expressed in the event, but also in having a tour for members as part of a regular monthly program. Both Oak Hill and Highland Cemeteries are preferred locations for the tours. More to come.

Kris Haskins reported on his meeting with the Civil War reenactors, saying that their calendar appears to be full for this year, and he will continue to keep in touch with them for potential future opportunities. It was suggested that we get in touch with other reenactor groups as well.

After a hearty chorus of “Happy Birthday” for Secretary David McCord, the meeting was adjourned. Joe McCord introduced Bob Sykes, Probate Judge, to deliver his presentation.

being sorted, moved, and Barb Hogan has begun to inventory the books in the upstairs cabinets. A writing desk has been moved into the room that used to be Mr. Blanchard’s office, adding a bit to the “official” air of the room.

Plans for floor refinishing and carpet cleaning were discussed, and new rugs have been purchased for the upstairs parlor (“tea room”).

Kris Haskins reported on the water damage seen in the wardrobe room upstairs. He inspected the roof and attributes the problem to ice buildup. The board decided to table the issue and revisit the situation later in the year.

A list of repair projects has been compiled, and will be updated whenever suggestions are submitted. The idea was put forth to designate September as a “work month” to take on some major projects.

Window sills need work, the front stair rail is loose, and it was suggested that we power wash (or at least scrub) the sidewalks. Carpets need cleaning within the month of April. Windows will be washed (by Clingers as before) to be done by the May 1 “Spring Into The Past” event. Also, the door mats, inside and out, were discussed as well.

Hank K. and a community service person have begun clearing the creek bed.

President Ciangi noted that we

## Upcoming Programs and Events

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

Wednesday, April 7, 7:00pm  
Monthly Program at the Blanchard House

**“Ionia Baseball in the 19th Century”**  
Presented by Kris Haskins

Monday, April 12 — 2:00 and 7:00 p.m.  
**ICHS Tour Guide Training Sessions**

Wednesday, April 21, 7:00pm  
Board Meeting at the Blanchard House

Saturday, April 24  
**Antiques Appraisal Roadshow**  
at the Ionia Commission on Aging

Saturday, May 1 & Sunday, May 2  
**“Spring Into The Past” Museum Tours**  
at the Blanchard House and other area museums.

Wednesday, May 5  
Monthly Program at the Blanchard House  
**“The Journey of the Dexter Colony, 1833”**  
presented by David & Annette McCord

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

have an extra copy of a 1973 Ionia High School annual, and someone has expressed interest in purchasing it. Kathleen L. moved that we ask \$25 for it, which was supported by Stephanie V. and passed.

Stephanie V. and Kris H. shared suggestions for Summer Sunday activities that they had received from Joan McCord. Stephanie moved that she be invited to coordinate those activities, which was supported by Barb E. with the stipulation that the staffing is available. A list of activities was read and most met with support. Stephanie will contact Joan M. to get a plan started for the summer. David M. will share his musician mailing list with Stephanie for the purpose as well.

Doni mentioned that Mike Golden was digitizing some films for someone which documented several Free Fair parades from the 60s. The films’ owner has given permission to give the ICHS a copy on DVD. Mr. Golden said that if we wished, he would look into a 16mm projector to digitize some of the films we have in our collection as well.

The web calendar is being updated, and the home page is due for an update

as well. David M. will make it a point to promote the upcoming programs more prominently in the Chronicle and on the website.

Knoops are once again invited to coordinate the Antique Village display at the Free Fair this year. It was moved by Kris H. and supported by Barb E. to donate \$30 for prizes in the Art Department again this year.

Kris H. fixed the outgoing message on the answering machine.

Tour Guide Training is scheduled for April 12, and the Antique Roadshow is scheduled for April 24 - still on schedule. Both are chaired by Joan McCord.

The format of the ICHS monthly meetings was discussed. Kris H. pointed out that the “regular” meetings to be more about sharing history with the community through programs and presentations, and David M. suggested that the meetings presently called “Board Meetings” should be renamed “Business Meetings” to focus on running the organization. This will be presented to the general membership at the April meeting for discussion. The meeting was adjourned 8:45 p.m.

## SPRING INTO THE PAST!

For the 8th year, the Tri-River Historical Museum Network will have their museums open for tours on Saturday and Sunday, May 1st and 2nd, from 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. There are 19 museums in the group, and each one is unique to its location.

To encourage everyone to visit all of the museums, when you visit your first museum, you may pick up a "punch card". Then, during May, June, July, and August, you can have your card punched at each of the listed museums. Turn your card in by September 1st with your name and address attached at any of the Tri-River museums for a prize drawing at the end of the season.

Remember that the museums are open regular hours throughout the summer in addition to the "Spring Into The Past" weekend. You will receive a brochure with this information included. Enjoy your summer months with visits into history!

### Participating museums are:

Alton Historic Church Museum, Lowell; Averill Historical Museum of Ada; Bowne Township Museum & School, Lowell area; Belding Belrockton Museum; Boston-Saranac Historic Depot; Cascade Historical Society; Charlton Park Museum & Historic Village, Hastings area; Pine Forest Museum, Edmore; Fallasburg Historic Village & School, Lowell area; Fighting Falcon Museum, Greenville; Blanchard House & Museum, Ionia; Lyons-Muir Museum, Lyons; Lake Odessa Historic Depot & Freight House; Freeport Museum; Oakfield Pioneer Heritage Museum, Greenville area; Lowell Area Historical Museum; Portland Area Historical Society at City Hall.

**More info can be found on-line at [www.ioniahistory.org](http://www.ioniahistory.org), including contact information for these museums.**

*I am looking for two paintings done by my great-grandfather, Charlie Morrison (1868-1939). They were last seen in 1947 in his wife, Amy Morrison's, estate, which went to the Seventh Day Adventist Church in Ionia. They were said to be signed "CM."*

*The first was an autumn scene of a wooded lake. The second was in Ionia of horses drinking water where the trains filled with water.*

*Please keep this in mind as you peruse the offerings in garage sales and estate sales you may attend. (Or anywhere else!) If they are inexpensive, I'd be happy to buy them. If not, a photo would be greatly appreciated!*

*Please also tell me the location where you spotted them/it.*

*Thank you!*

*Merrilee Morrison-Cotter  
(616)527-1199*

**IONIA**

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# the [www.ioniahistory.org](http://www.ioniahistory.org) **CHRONICLE**

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).

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 ICHS Treasurer, care of Box 1776, Ionia, MI 48846.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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Please Check Your  
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Please Share a  
Little Information:

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- New Member

If you're a new member, how  
did you hear about us?

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\_\_\_\_\_

# Thanks!

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

April 1 — Barn Red

April 8 — Ancient Rome (Blessed Easter to All)

April 15 — France

April 22 — Camp Forgotten (CCC)

April 29 — Seven Wonders of the World

May 6 — March off the Penguins

May 13 — Spain

May 20 — Greece

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

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