



The Almost Monthly Publication of
the Ionia County Historical Society

the CHRONICLE



“THE MESSAGE IN THE STONES”

“Cemetery Markers -

Their History and Evolution” was

the program for the May ICHS meeting, presented by Deb Dudek of the Ionia District

Library. Accompanied by a computerized slide show and hand-outs for the members, Ms. Dudek began with ancient history. Stone markers are a tradition with Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, and Christians which goes far back in antiquity. Some cultures believed that stone slabs were needed to keep the dead from rising from their graves! The weight of the markers was meant to keep them from climbing out from beneath the heavy rocks.

(Marking sacred places and burial sites predates recorded history throughout the world, including erection of stelae or “standing stones”, often having symbolic inscriptions, and tumuli or cairns - arrangements of stones or mounds in symbolic shape or orientation. – D.M., just showing off.)

Early grave markers were made from wood (carved or painted) or rough stone (also sometimes painted) and did not last long against the elements of nature. Reflecting not only superstition but also religious piety, the icons and symbols representing the beliefs of the deceased would be displayed on their memorial. Often, symbols and signs were used to communicate the identity of the interred to the illiterate.

But to put it simply: The more the wealth of the deceased, the more elaborate, prominent, and permanent their memorial. Carving cost money (especially lettering or sculpted likenesses) and so did higher quality stone.

In Europe and old New England, some carvings on headstones were made to frighten the living to maintain a righteous life by depicting horrible images of damnation, such as skeletons, angels of death, and winged skulls.

A major turning point in funerary and memorial customs was brought about during the reign of Queen Victoria. Her celebrity and popularity was nearly global in its effect, and many of our modern traditions can be traced to her influence. She established what has been called a “cult of mourning” after the passing of Prince Albert, commemorating the dead through jewelry, clothing, social etiquette, gifts, services, and even séances.

Also influential in the change of custom was the availability of mass-produced grave markers. The mechanized harvest and transport of stone plus better tools for engraving brought more permanent memorials within reach of the commoner’s budget. In addition, the standard of living was climbing.

Finally, in the United States, the Civil War with its overwhelming casualties made funerary customs all too common-

place. Those Victorian trends became American traditions within a generation. As the fallen were moved from their battlefield mass graves to the family plot, markers were in great demand. In many cases, the marker was all that could be had.

In addition to the gravestones, the caskets, too, were becoming more significant. Cabinetmakers became Undertakers as their craft was in greater demand, and their showrooms evolved into Funeral Parlors. By 1865, most cabinetmakers were listed under both professions in city directories, and by 1875 their switch to a new career was complete.

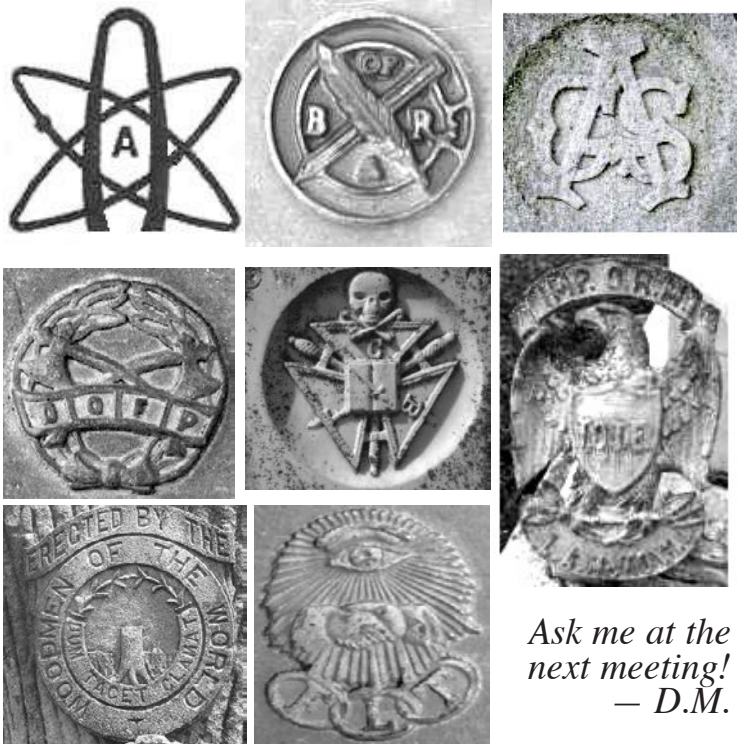
As varieties of stone became more readily available, more durable markers began to be more common near the end of the 19th century. Even markers of iron, bronze, and alloys were often erected.

Unfortunately, the ravages of time still take their toll, no matter what the material might be. Acid rain and pollution eats away the material, as well as the natural elements of ice and erosion. Those inexpensive wooden markers of yore are all but gone, unless they are routinely replaced. Vandalism and neglect cause otherwise long-lasting memorials to fail in their vigil.

Interestingly, the term “headstone” is often a misnomer. In many cases, stones might be set at the feet of the interred, or even at the middle. Tombs, mausolea, and carcophogi can include headstones, cornerstones, keystones, or simple plaques on any or every side.

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Can you identify these headstone symbols?



Ask me at the next meeting!
– D.M.

...STONES

But withal, you will find the symbology varies little over the past several hundred years.

The images carved on grave markers can tell a bit about the deceased, or the family's attitude towards them. Deb shared a six-page summary of such symbols, their history and meanings. From anchors to wheat, and from the obvious to the bizarre, many have lost their meaning over the generations. The subtle symbolism in the rose, for example, by the way it's displayed or the maturity of its blossom once indicated the age of the deceased or the manner of their passing. Organizational symbols (such as Masonic or religious emblems) and patriotic icons convey a bit about the individual. In more recent decades, the imagery has become more literal - from musical scores to team logos to complete portraits etched in stone. (Who knows - maybe one day 3D Holograms will hover perpetually above the grave? >shudder<)

With a closing mention of creative epitaphs (a subject all its own!), Deb shared a list of resources for those interested in pursuing the subject further. As always, she reminded us all that the library staff are eager to help. Thanks to Deb for a "spirited" program!

"Here lies the body of Mr. Alexander Lenard
who died Dec 2nd, 1730, Aged 30 Years."

Just look at that symbolism!



MINUTES of the May '09 Mtg.

The May 6, 2009, meeting of the Ionia County Historical Society was called to order by President Linda Ciangi at 7:30 p.m. in the parlor of the Blanchard House. After a welcome to all members and guests, Dave Cook moved the the Secretary's report be accepted as published; this was supported by Mike Gallagher and passed.

Under old business, the President thanked all who contributed and help out with the Indoor Yard Sale at the Armory on April 24 & 25. Over \$200 was earned for the ICHS general fund.

The "Spring Intro The Past" museum tours were also a success, with 20 visitors, many of whom were touring other museums; they asked to have their Tri-River Group Museum Pass "punched."

Hank Knoop and Chris Haskins continue to make progress organizing and cleaning in the Carriage House. Considerable yard work has been accomplished by Hank & Doni Knoop, Kathleen Perrin, Barb Ehlert, Cal Smith, Bryan Quinn, Chris Haskins and the Kid's Club (who helped clean up along the creek on Earth Day).

Hank delivered his Treasurer's Report (copies available on request) which showed a \$1000 shortfall for the month of April. In addition to the items on the report, \$100 was contributed towards fertilizer for the lawn. It was moved by Dave C. and supported by Mike G. to accept the report; motion carried.

New business included the kick-off for the Farmer's Market on May 14th, where the ICHS will have a table from 3 to 7 p.m. with items left over from the Armory Yard Sale and tickets and information for the August 16th concert.

May 16th will be the Church Walk from 10 to 4, and the Blanchard House will be open to serve as "headquarters" for the walk. Some refreshments will be offered, and fliers to be handed out. Joan McCord, who chaired the Walk, prepared some detailed program books in limited quantities for each church on the tour, as well as maps and info sheets for the visitors.

June begins our Summer Sundays series, opening the house to visitors from 1 to 4 p.m. those days. If anyone would like to be "greeters" or tour guides, or provide refreshments, please contact Linda C. Volunteers are encouraged to dress in 1880s period costume if possible. (If you'd like to, but don't have the appropriate costume, contact Barb Ehlert for help.)

July 18th will be the Free Fair parade and we are planning a float with the theme "Solute to Local Businesses." This will also be the theme for our Antique Village display at the Fair. Set up for that is July 15. Our Business Buddies and Concert Sponsors are being invited to join us on the float.

The Blanchard House dining room has been rearranged a bit to accommodate an 18th century "bureau" on

loan from Tom and Mary Kay Moular from the Union Hill B&B. They also gifted the ICHS with three lamps and a framed display of crocheted pieces.

A five-piece wicker set was purchased from the B&B by Linda Ciangi. This set was identified by Gov. Green's granddaughter as being from the Ypsilanti-Reed factory. It will be used in the Fair Parade and (weather permitting) for lawn parties and outdoor activities at the Blanchard House.

A set of dishes have been placed in the dining room for use by members. These were originally purchased in Oklahoma in the 1940s, according to the previous owner. It's a service for 8 which is very Victorian in style.

Also, a box of miscellaneous items will be sorted through at a future Thursday night work session.

President Ciangi noted that members can be involved in several ways in the coming months:

- Sign up to host our Summer Sundays
- Donate to the care of the House and grounds.
- Contribute in funds or labor towards the Fair Parade Float
- Become a part of the Antique Village experience
- Donate to the Superstars concert to help cover postage and publicity costs

Ed Bently addressed the members briefly with the idea of doing an art show focused on Ionia artists and/or portraits of Ionia citizens. He showed an example of a portrait of Gertrude Page which was found in the Blanchard House attic. (He will be paying to have this painting restored for us!) If any members are interested or have knowledge of any art which might be relevant to the project, please contact Ed or an ICHS Board Member. As soon as enough pieces have been collected, the show will be scheduled.

Kathleen brought out a parasol of lace and crepe (modeled by Barb E.) which had been donated by Ann Slowens. A green "Campaign Cane" was donated which had been used by Gov. Green during his campaign for Governor in the '30s. (This is the third in our collection now.)

Dave Cook noted that Nicole Frost has left the service of the County as Park Manager at Bertha Brock Park. She had been instrumental in running the annual Fall Festival in September, and Dave is looking for someone to help fill the void in her absence. Interested parties should contact him ASAP. (The ICHS participates each year with a Duck Race and table-top display.)

With that, the meeting was adjourned for refreshments and fellowship.

The next meeting will be June 3 at the Blanchard House, and the program will be on "World War II Diaries" presented by Linda Ciangi.



MINUTES of the May '09 Board Mtg.

The May 20, 2009, meeting of the ICHS Board of Directors was called to order by President Linda Ciangi at 7:00 p.m. in the Blanchard House. Also present were Gerry Perry, Barb Ehlert, Stephanie VanderMolen, Kathleen Perrin, David McCord, Hank Knoop (late), and guests Annette Lally, Pat Lally, and Dan Balice.

The President reported on the progress of the Superstars concert scheduled for August 16th, passing around sample fliers recently produced for hand-outs and mailings. Letters have been sent to potential sponsors for the event; so far FIVE sponsors have signed on. The Sentinel-Standard has offered generous ad coverage, and Keeper of the Crows is mentioning the event in their advertising as well. Gerry Perry reports that the refurbishing of the dressing rooms in the Theatre will be done in time for the event, too. It was also suggested that we make a special effort to connect with the Red Hat clubs to promote the event.

The Board was asked to approve \$30 for prize money at the Free Fair Art Department for 2009. The motion was made by Gerry P., supported by Barb E., and carried.

The ICHS received a letter from the Michigan Works Summer Youth Works program offering the services of young labor free of charge during the summer months. Help can be arranged through the program for supervised projects.

Linda C. noted that several members would be attending a "Mourning Tea" in October. Deb Dudek has suggested this as a possible fund-raiser activity for the ICHS, so this is a research visit and details will be brought to the Board for consideration of a 2010 event.

Reports were favorable for the Church Walk this past Saturday (once the weather cleared up).

Our guest, Annette Lalley, addressed the Board with regards to the family's store on Main St. The L&D Hardware has been closed and unused for 11 years, and not only represents over a century of service to the community, but the historic building also contains many antiques and other artifacts of the business. It is the family's wish that the property would be restored and open to the public as a historic attraction (for lack of a better term). Much discussion was had about the possibilities, plans, and pitfalls involved in such a project, and Dan B. offered comments from his position as Attorney and as Mayor, as well as an interested citizen (with as much nostalgia as anyone else, too). Everyone agreed that further discussion would be very much desired, and eagerly await the opportunity to help with the project if possible.

There was a reminder to the Board of the visit of the "Buseum" to Ionia on the 27th at 7:00 p.m.

Hank K. reported \$100 donation from Don Jandemoah, accompanied by

a report on the Greenview Point park from Gerry P.

Hank had met with an insurance inspector a few weeks ago, and received several recommendations from them. One was in regards to repair to the Carriage House roof, which Hank is pursuing with Bob Miller. The adequacy of our installed emergency lighting was questioned, and will be addressed. The firm also requested that exits be better marked for emergency reasons, and this, too, is being addressed. More on this anon.

Hank also reported that the garden hose situation has been improved, much to the joy of the garden club (who maintains our gardens at the B-House). On a related subject, \$110 was spent for fertilizer and grass seed, and it has been applied to the lawns.

Linda C. purchased an antique stove — it is in the Carriage House awaiting action.

Stephanie V. pointed out that our "Museum Store" is quite hidden in its present location, and unless a docent points it out, guests don't realize they can purchase souvenirs of their visit. After brief discussion, it was decided that Stephanie would look into creating a display of wares that can be put in the office area between the kitchen and east parlor.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 p.m.



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, June 3

Regular Meeting at the Blanchard House

Program: **World War II Diaries**,
presented by Linda Ciangi

Sunday, June 7

"SUMMER SUNDAYS" BEGINS!

at the Blanchard House, 1:00 - 4:00 p.m.

Volunteer hosts are welcomed!

Wednesday, June 24, 7:00 p.m.

Board Meeting at the Blanchard House

Wednesday, July 2, 7:00 p.m.

Our annual Independence Day Pot-Luck!

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!

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

Headquarters, Grand Army of the Republic Washington, D.C., May 5, 1868

I. The 30th day of May, 1868, is designated for the purpose of strewing with flowers or otherwise decorating the graves of comrades who died in defense of their country during the late rebellion, and whose bodies now lie in almost every city, village, and hamlet churchyard in the land. In this observance no form or ceremony is prescribed, but posts and comrades will in their own way arrange such fitting services and testimonials of respect as circumstances may permit.

We are organized, comrades, as our regulations tell us, for the purpose, among other things, "of preserving and strengthening those kind and fraternal feelings which have bound together the soldiers, sailors, and marines who united to suppress the late rebellion." What can aid more to assure this result than by cherishing tenderly the memory of our heroic dead, who made their breasts a barricade between our country and its foe? Their soldier lives were the reveille of freedom to a race in chains, and their death a tattoo of rebellious tyranny in arms. We should guard their graves with sacred vigilance. All that the consecrated wealth and taste of the Nation can add to their adornment and security is but a fitting tribute to the memory of her slain defenders. Let no wanton foot tread rudely on such hallowed grounds. Let pleasant paths invite the coming and going of reverent visitors and fond mourners. Let no vandalism of avarice or neglect, no ravages of time, testify to the present or to the coming generations that we have forgotten, as a people, the cost of free and undivided republic.

If other eyes grow dull and other hands slack, and other hearts cold in the solemn trust, ours shall keep it well as long as the light and warmth of life remain in us.

Let us, then, at the time appointed, gather around their sacred remains and garland the passionless mounds above them with choicest flowers of springtime; let us raise above them the dear old flag they saved from dishonor; let us in this solemn presence renew our pledges to aid and assist those whom they have left among us as sacred charges upon the Nation's gratitude,—the soldier's and sailor's widow and orphan.

II. It is the purpose of the Commander-in-Chief to inaugurate this observance with the hope it will be kept up from year to year, while a survivor of the war remains to honor the memory of his departed comrades. He earnestly desires the public press to call attention to this Order, and lend its friendly aid in bringing it to the notice of comrades in all parts of the country in time for simultaneous compliance therewith.

III. Department commanders will use every effort to make this order effective.

By command of: JOHN A. LOGAN, Commander-in-Chief.
—General Orders No. 11, Grand Army of the Republic Headquarters



the 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.

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: _____

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!**

- June 4 – White House Miniature*
- June 11 – New Zealand*
- June 18 – Surprise Feature!*
- June 25 – Paris, France*
- July 2 – Ionia, 150 Years*
- July 9 - The Canadian Rockies*
- July 16 - American Castles*
- July 23 - Cirque de Soleil*
- July 30 - The Grand Canyon*

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