

# Ionia County Historical Society CHRONICLE

The *Almost* Monthly Publication of the Ionia County Historical Society — September 2008



## About Aprons

Dictionary.com lists no less than 21 definitions for the word, originally coming to English in the 13th century from the French “napron” signifying a protective cloth (also the source of the word “napkin”).

Betty Yeiter and Marge Harding of Lowell entertained the members of the ICHS with tales of aprons. Utilitarian, decorative, or symbolic, nearly everyone has an apron story.

Early ancestors of today’s aprons associated with the kitchen were more like bibs, but can also include full-body smocks. Of course, many aprons are found outside the kitchen or housekeeping field – nurses, butchers, bakers, cobblers, farriers, chemists, gardeners, blacksmiths, carpenters, and various other crafts have their own unique apron designs. Even apron color was, in days of old, a distinguishing mark amongst the various crafts and guilds.

But most often, in poetry and fond recollection, we think of the aprons worn by homemakers. Hanging from a line in the parlor of the Blanchard House, our presenters hung an array of different styles from plain and functional to frilly and fashionable.

In the 1930s, aprons protected clothing when many families had little to spare. In the 1940s, many kitchen aprons were set aside as “Rosie the Riveter” went to work. After WWII, aprons became very popular again as part of the “June Cleaver / Harriet Nelson” stereotype. As blue jeans became the more popular everyday garb-around-the-house, and prosperity lessened the need for protecting one’s clothing, aprons became less necessary and less common in the home. In the 1990s, there was a surge of apron fashion again, but mostly as a fashionable nostalgia. In recent years, one is most likely to see a Bar-B-Q apron with some cartoon or logo emblazoned across the front. (Aprons are sold as souvenirs. Dave Cook noted that the Ionia Theatre quickly sold 144 aprons displaying the Theatre logo.)

From flour sacks to frills, aprons come in a dazzling array of forms. In “the olden days”, a girl’s first sewing project would often be an apron, and might be made of remnants or cast-offs. Bright gingham, flowery prints, fancy embroidery and lace, heavy muslin or sheer linen – you name it... it’s probably in an apron.

And more than an article of clothing, aprons bring back fond memories of mothers or grandmothers and family life. By invitation, many of the ICHS members at this meeting wore aprons. Betty and Marge asked

*More on page three...*



**BE SURE YOUR DUES ARE PAID BY OCTOBER  
FIRST SO YOU CAN CAST YOUR VOTE FOR TWO  
NEW DIRECTORS!**

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](http://www.ioniahistory.org).

## Minutes of the September '08 Mtg

The September 3, 2008, meeting of the ICHS was brought to order by President Linda Ciangi at 7:00 at the Blanchard House. Several guests and new members were in attendance, introduced to and welcomed by all. (Joan McCord reminded that new member contact information needs to get to her to be on the Chronicle mailing list. Also, prospective members can be sent sample copies to help recruiting!)

One correction was offered the Secretary's minutes from last month: Linda Ciangi's program for next June as in RE: World War II diaries (not WWI as reported). It was moved, supported, and passed to accept the minutes as otherwise published.

Treasurer Hank Knoop presented his report, pleased to announce that the Fabulous Fifties concert in August netted us over \$2,000 – thanks mostly to Linda C.'s efforts. The total income for the month was over 5 times the expenses! (Wouldn't it be great if we could do that every month!) As always, detailed reports are available from Hank on request. NOTE: Hank is looking for someone to help send letters to our "business buddies" to solicit donations for the coming year. Interested parties please contact him directly.

Under the heading of "old business," President Ciangi Thanked those members who staffed the house for our "Summer Sundays" and reminded those assembled about the ongoing Thursday evening workshops at the Blanchard House. Many interesting artifacts are being found in our collections during these sessions, including (for example) some photos of the Cleveland Street Bridge being built.

David McCord reported on behalf of the Nominating Committee (himself, Dave Cook, and Doni Knoop) that we have had three nominations for the two open Director positions to be voted upon at the October annual meeting. They are: Barb Ehlert, Kathleen Perrin, and Bonnie Klingbeil. The floor was open for additional nominations from the membership, and (none appearing) a motion was put forth by Dave Cook to close the nominations. Supported by Gerry Perry, the motion passed. Members were reminded that their memberships

must be paid by October 1 to be eligible to vote in this election. Your truly reminded the members also that the positions of Secretary and Treasurer do not have to be Board Members, so hats can be tossed into those rings by any member!

Saturday, September 13th, at 9:30am, Jerry Adams will be at the Blanchard House to instruct any interested members in the use of the Museum software which he has so graciously donated to us. To sign up for this class, see President Ciangi.

Hank K. reported on the progress for the Duck >quack< Race to be held at the Fall Festival at Bertha Brock Park on September 20. Ducks >quack< will be sold (\$1.00 each or 6 for \$5) all day, and the race will commence around 3:00 p.m. There will be an ICHS display table to be staffed where tickets will be sold, and (thanks to McCords) free apples will be handed out to visitors. Scouts of Troop 85 will again be helping out with the race.

Family Portraits at the Blanchard House by Becca Usher are being scheduled. (See details elsewhere.) Certain rooms will be decorated for Christmas, other areas not (to accommodate the wishes of the photographic subjects). Stephanie VanderMolen asked about pictures in the Carriage House with the Sleigh (Cutter). Doni K. noted that the Carriage House is kind of a mess, but the Cutter could be easily carried onto the lawn for outdoor photos.

The "Rediscover Downtown" tour is on for October 11, but the multi-city bus tour part of the event has been cancelled. Joan McCord noted that the "Upstairs Downtown" tours are coming along nicely for that day, and the next committee meeting would be September 6 at the Lamplight Restaurant on Main St. Volunteers are always welcome for various roles. (See details elsewhere.)

Under new business, our next Appraisal Road Show is scheduled for November 1 at the Commission on Aging from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. This continues to be a very popular (and entertaining!) fund raiser for the ICHS, and we encourage all members to attend – with or without items to be appraised.

House Rentals include: A wedding on September 13, and gather-



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**Portrait Sitting: \$40**

**50% will be given to the Ionia County Historical Society.**

**A variety of custom holiday cards available.**

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**4x6 = \$7**

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**5x7 = \$9**

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**16x20 = \$92**

**October 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th.**

**Evening and daytime appointments available. You may schedule by contacting Becca directly at 616-560-5530 or [beccausher@yahoo.com](mailto:beccausher@yahoo.com)**

**Visit Becca's website at [www.photosbybecca.com](http://www.photosbybecca.com)**

**Visit the ICHS website at [www.ioniahistory.org](http://www.ioniahistory.org) to see photos of the Blanchard House and the many beautiful Victorian settings available.**

ing of antique auto collectors on October 4th. Local folk are establishing a Michigan chapter of a "Paranormal Institute" (not sure which one), and they have rented the Blanchard House for a meeting on the evening of September 26. They invite all interested parties to attend.

Programs for the 2008-2009 season are now on the calendar (as published in last month's Chronicle). Member comments and suggestions are still very much welcomed by the Board. President Ciangi asked Joan Nixon if she would continue calling those who have volunteered to pro-

vide refreshments at our meetings, and she consented to do so.

The next Board Meeting will be held at the Blanchard House on September 16th at 7:00 p.m. and all members are welcomed to this last meeting of the current Board.

The meeting on October 1 will include our Annual Meeting and, as usual, there will be no scheduled program. Election of new Directors will take place and the new Board will meet immediately afterward to elect officers for the next year.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:45 p.m. and our program for the evening introduced by Joan McCord (see story on page one).



Above - Wilma Ackerson displays some "Apron Technique" with an apron from her personal collection while Marge Harding looks on.

## About Aprons...

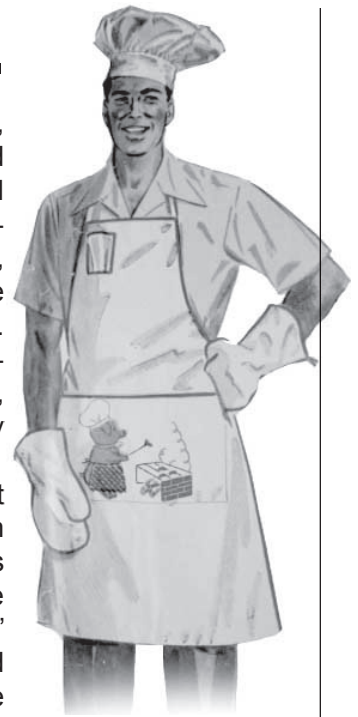
them to tell their apron stories, and more than a dozen shared stories: Sunday dinners and social events where the "special aprons" would be worn, and everyday chores when the apron was an essential article. With a variety of pockets, fastenings, and even sewn-in towels, aprons, it seems, are very handy things!

Wilma Ackerson brought along a dozen or so of her own apron collection, with various stories to go with each. She demonstrated her "berry-pickin' technique" with one of them, and showed a very well worn antique she found

"in a big ole trunk." She also generously donated an embroidered apron that commemorated "Lilly White Flour" – a product of Ionia's former J.J. Hale & Sons mill.

Closing with famous quotes and a bit of poetry, the ladies emphasized the "folklore of aprons" and what this simple garment can mean. Thanks to our guests for their entertaining and informative presentation!

Left - a blacksmith's leather apron.  
Below - portrait of George Washington wearing his ceremonial Masonic Apron.



### HISTORIC IONIA NOW ON DVD!

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HISTORY FOR  
YOUR OWN  
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ONLY \$15 EA.  
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TODAY!

## What's Up There?

The "Upstairs Downtown" tour in Ionia's historic business district will include nine second and third floor sites. You can see what wonders are generally hidden from the sidewalks, and learn some fascinating facts about "What's up there."

Tickets are priced at \$2.00 for each location, or a package deal for the entire tour \$10.00. There will also be a door prize, and more! Mark your calendar now: Saturday October 11, 10:00 a.m to 5:00 p.m. This event benefits the ICHS in cooperation with the Ionia Area Chamber of Commerce observation of the "Rediscover Downtown" program.

### Find Out on October 11th...



Here's the latest  
issue of the...

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P.O. Box 1776  
Ionia, MI 48846

[www.ioniahistory.org](http://www.ioniahistory.org)

**BE SURE YOUR DUES  
ARE PAID BY OCTOBER  
FIRST SO YOU CAN  
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TWO NEW DIRECTORS!**

## 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!**

## Upcoming Programs and Events

Saturday, September 20, 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

### FALL FESTIVAL AT BERTHA BROCK PARK

**We'll be Duck Racing for fun and prizes!!!**

Wednesday, October 1, 7:00 p.m.

ICHS Annual Meeting at the Blanchard House

***Voting in two new Board Members!***

### SATURDAY, OCTOBER 11 "UPSTAIRS DOWNTOWN" TOUR

(See details elsewhere in this issue)

Tuesday, October 14, 7:00 p.m.

Board Meeting at the Blanchard House

Wednesday, November 5, 7:00 p.m.

Regular Meeting at the Blanchard House

*For other upcoming events - see the enclosed  
flier, refer to the minutes, and visit the ICHS  
website at [ioniahistory.org](http://ioniahistory.org).*