



# the **CHRONICLE**

The Almost Monthly Publication of  
the Ionia County Historical Society



## A Message from the ICHS President, Kathleen Cook

Dear ICHS Members and Friends,

Like the Tin Man in the Wizard of Oz, moving in forward motion can manifest itself in many different ways. Our hopes were to go back to the way things were before the pandemic but it didn't take long to realize that we were still a bit rusty. We opened the doors on Thursday afternoons for cleaning but tours were by appointment only. We hosted the Ionia Free Fair Queens Brunch but we didn't participate in the parade. It didn't take long for us to realize that it is okay to loosen our grip on how things have always been. It can be tempting to measure our success by numbers and what can be tracked but what is most important is how our members and community feel as we move forward.

For many years, the Historical Society has been trying to maintain two goals, to preserve and promote our rich local heritage and to care for the John C. Blanchard House. To do both is becoming more difficult as time goes by. We have an abundance of local artifacts that cannot be adequately displayed and really should not be placed in a cold, damp basement. The items that are not in the 1880-1900 timeline take away from the Victorian feel. When visitors come to the house, we want them to feel like they are stepping back in time. What is the best way to move forward?

On April 14, 2020 the ICHS Board of Directors approved and signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the City of Ionia. The City, Library and Historical Society mutually agreed to lease the Hall-Fowler Home for use as a museum if the November library millage should pass. The City agreed to contribute \$150,000, in yearly installments of \$50,000 for three years, with the purpose of establishing a museum which will initially be called the Hall-Fowler Museum. This museum would be setup to have its own 501c3 status.



This idea came about when walking from an Ionia Community Library Board Meeting to a Historical Board Meeting. In my mind I listed what I knew to be true:

- The library holds fraction of what other libraries do in a community of our size.
- The community loves the building.
- To pass a millage for a new library, we will need to repurpose the Hall-Fowler house into something that the public can still visit regularly.
- Marion Hall-Fowler gifted her family home to be used as a library.

As I drew nearer to the Blanchard House my mind shifted to some artifacts that I had in hand. I had some treasures that pertained to local history but where can we store them? Then I listed comments and concerns from our members.

- We have a collection of items in the basement of an old house. It is damp, cold and hard for many to access.
- When we walk into the Blanchard House it doesn't feel like going back in time.
- We have a lot of great things that tell our story but we don't enough space.
- We need a place for our research books and pictures so we can make the house more look like it did in 1880.

As I entered the front walkway the idea of making the library into a museum could be the solution for both parties. I shared my idea with Linda Ciangi and she suggested that we talk to Jerry Adams. Jerry is the son of Bud and Helen Adams. He graduated from Ionia High School in 1981 and was active in the establishment of the Lowell and Rockford Museums, among others. We presented the idea to the ICHS board of directors and to community stakeholders and here we are today.

Moving forward can feel uncomfortable but I hope you can

loosen your grip on how things have always been. Imagine some of the unique events that can happen at the Blanchard House if we focus only Victorian Times. A Victorian Christmas complete with the music of the time (Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker ballet debut in St. Petersburg in 1892)? Maybe a summer reading program theme party revolving around R.L. Stevenson's Treasure Island or Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn? Moving

*Continues...*

forward, we need to offer events that appeal to all generations.

To move forward, we need to keep an open mind and do the things that make the most sense. For years, volunteers would give up a Sunday afternoon with few or no visitors for tours. It was time to question and reassess. Are we using the time of our volunteers wisely? Are we still having fun? What makes the most sense? As it turns out, tours by appointment work well.

If you have ideas, comments or concerns as we move forward, please reach out to me or other board members. I hope to see you at the next general membership meeting on September 1, at 7:00.

Tally-ho! — Kathleen

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The following article is provided the us by Dale Parus, Director of the Ionia Community Library:

### THE VIBRANT GAINS OF REIMAGINED DOWNTOWNS AND THE CONNECTION TO THE IONIA COMMUNITY LIBRARY

A 2014 study\* published by the Michigan Main Street Center found a strong link between public reinvestment in a city's downtown area and its economic activity and growth potential. The study found that the reuse of a community's functionally obsolete but still beautiful historic assets aided their downtown revitalization effort.

The future of the Ionia Community Library (ICL) is similarly linked to the benefits mentioned in the report. Mercantile Bank recently donated their downtown Ionia facility as a space to relocate the ICL. District voters will be asked on Nov. 2 to approve 0.98 mills to renovate, operate and maintain the former Mercantile location. The 22,000 square foot facility spans three downtown buildings on Main St. and is four times larger than ICL's current location at the Hall-Fowler home. The project repurposes the obsolete bank space in the middle of downtown into the new ICL that that will provide the Ionia community with 21st Century service.

What will happen to the Hall-Fowler Home? The library has a written agreement with the City of Ionia and the Historical Society to transition Hall-Fowler into a museum and local genealogy library. The ICL guarantees that \$150,000 will be set aside to care for the historic Home by a new Museum Authority. Thus, two historic locations will be protected and put to new uses by the passage of the ballot proposal.

Now is the time to reimagine your library. For more information and a millage calculator, please visit [citizens4icl.org](http://citizens4icl.org). Questions may be emailed to [c4icl2021@gmail.com](mailto:c4icl2021@gmail.com), or you may contact the library at (616) 527-3680.

Relocate. Repurpose. Reimagine.

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\*THE ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF MAIN STREET IN MICHIGAN. "Prepared for the Michigan Main Street Center and the Michigan State Housing Development Authority by PlaceEconomics Washington, D.C.," May 2014

# What's Happening at the Blanchard House?

Despite all the lock-downs and quarentines and restrictions, the Ionia County Historical Society continues to be buzzing along this year with plenty of accomplishments and activities!

Maintaining the house is, of course, the primary interest during this slow season. Cleaning and groundskeeping are the most visible activity, of course, but there are plenty of behind-the-scenes tasks to perform as well.

The house has had some visitors, from visiting tourists from afar to local Ionians. There have even been a couple of tour buses. Rentals continue as well for reunions and receptions.

Standing committees continue their work, too, such as Accessions and fund-raising efforts. The tool displays in the Carriage House are coming along, and the grounds have never looked better. (Thanks to the day lilly enthusiasts and the Cook Family for their beautification efforts!)

Here are a few scenes of activity over the past few months:



ABOVE: Barb Hogan and Kathleen Cook cleaning things up during our weekly Thursday work sessions. BELOW: David & Annette McCord gave a tour to members of BSA Troop 185.





*LEFT: Lawn care never ends. Here's a photo of Kim Grant giving the flowers a drink.*

*BELOW: The Carriage House workshop is actually being used as a workshop. Cleaning up antique tools and other artifacts has generated some sawdust. Signs of productivity!*



# YES!

another

# YARD SALE!

Saturday, September 11 on the lawn of the Blanchard House, 231 East Main Street.

**PROCEEDS to support the Historical Society.**

**If you have items to donate, please contact Kathleen Cook: 527-2626**

# SPIRITS of Ionia's Past 2021

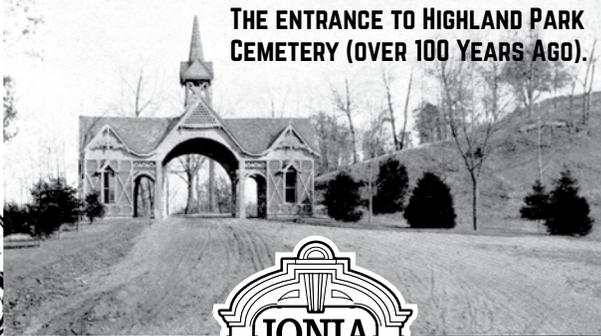
On Sunday, October 10th,  
1:00 p.m. until 4:00 p.m.



Highland Park Cemetery  
East Main St. at Prairie Creek

**Just \$5.00  
Admission!**

THE ENTRANCE TO HIGHLAND PARK  
CEMETERY (OVER 100 YEARS AGO).



## REMEMBER!



If you have a few hours to spare, the ICHS would appreciate your help with our projects and activities! Please contact a Board Member if you'd like to help.  
THANK YOU.

## COMING SOON:

**SEPTEMBER 1, 7:00 p.m. — MONTHLY PROGRAM** at the Blanchard House. This month we'll have a progress report on the Carriage House Workshop and Tool Display by David McCord.

**SEPTEMBER 11 — YARD SALE** at the Blanchard House. Donations of items to sell are welcomed! Contact Kathleen Cook (see back page).

**SEPTEMBER 29, 7:00 p.m. — BUSINESS MEETING** at the Blanchard House.

**OCTOBER 6, 7:00 p.m. — Annual Meeting and PROGRAM** at the Blanchard House. Rumor has it that there will be LIVE MUSIC of a historical nature. Be prepared to sing along (if you wish).

**OCTOBER 10, afternoon — SPIRITS OF IONIA** Cemetery Tour at the Highland Park Cemetery. Once again we will visit the gravesites of notable citizens from Ionia's history. Watch our Facebook Page for more details in the coming weeks.

**OCTOBER 27, 7:00 p.m. — BUSINESS MEETING** at the Blanchard House.

**NOVEMBER 2 — VOTE** for the new Ionia Community Library and Museum project!

**HOUSE & MUSEUM TOURS ARE BY APPOINTMENT ONLY.** We will attempt to accommodate your schedule if volunteers are available. Contact Kathleen Cook (see back page).

**NOTE:** Some visitor restrictions due to Covid may be in effect at the house, so be prepared!



# 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 176, Ionia, MI, 48846 or via [www.ioniahistory.org](http://www.ioniahistory.org).

Ionia County Historical Society  
P.O. Box 176  
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, P.O. Box 176, Ionia, MI 48846.**

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

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

City, St., Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Please Check Your Membership Type:

- Regular Membership = \$20 Per Person
- Business Buddy = \$40
- Corporate = \$250
- Life Member = \$1000
- Student (under 18) FREE
- Enclosing an additional Gift = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

I am a:

- Renewing Member
- New Member

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

Send my newsletter by US Mail.

Send a link to get my newsletter by email.



MEMBER

*Be sure to monitor our Facebook Page & Website for current information!*



### **Ionia County Historical Society 2021 Board of Directors and Officers**

- Kathleen Cook, President — 616-527-2626
- David McCord, Vice President — 616-902-0033
- Bryan Kimble, Director — 616-897-6592
- Stacy Tchorzynski, Director — 517-763-1770
- Dave Cusack, Director — 517-763-1770
- Linda Ciangi, Secretary — 616-527-4945
- Mary Kimble, Treasurer — 616-897-6592
- Barb Ehlert, House Rentals — 616-522-0844

For information on your long-lost relatives in Ionia, please contact the Ionia County Genealogy Society <http://ionia.migenweb.net/ICGS/icgshome.htm>



Visit us at [www.IoniaHistory.org](http://www.IoniaHistory.org) and find us on Facebook, too!

Thanks!