President’s Message by Doug Klein

Many of our Mason Area Historical Society meetings, events, programs, facilities, and more have been moving and improving at a rapid pace this past year. We used to meet the first Monday of each month from March through December. However, since we decided to vary our general meeting days and times, the programs that follow our monthly meetings have been very well attended. Some had over 80 people in attendance! A few of our recent 2019 meetings/programs are reviewed inside, and a there is a list of planned 2020 meetings/programs.

Our occasional “forums” -- new events being held on select days during the Museum’s regular hours -- have also proved quite popular. A walking tour of a downtown block, a photo viewing session featuring local Wyeth history, and a “Seven Gables” discussion of experiences in that eerie location (east of Mason and south of Dansville) have been featured.

Since the Society is a volunteer-operated nonprofit organization, fundraising is a constant. We are addressing our needs in a variety of ways through our events and outreach into the community, including upcoming plans for a revived membership drive. A new grant from the Dart Foundation is helping us replace the six large windows in the Virginia Schlichter Auditorium as soon as warmer weather arrives in 2020. Additional capital improvement donations and grants are being sought from other sources to assist in facility maintenance.

Our museum displays are always undergoing rearrangement and changes. Check out the military room! New display fixtures are being used to better relate the stories of Mason’s past. Please encourage people to revisit the Museum regularly to appreciate the new work that our volunteers have put into the exhibits.

Our “Welcome Room” and gift shop right inside the Oak Street entrance is being renovated. It already has posted information about the history of the Mason area AND the history of the Mason Area Historical Society.

The Mason Sycamore Creek Garden Club continues to contribute greatly by beautifying the grounds of the Museum and the Pink School. They also use our Museum for meetings and the Pink School’s Bicentennial Park for their Sunflower House and youth garden project.

Our website continues to be well maintained and our social media and publicity communications are outstanding. However, MAHS’s “The Slate Newsletter” has not kept pace. The last issue of this newsletter before this one was published in August 2016.

It is now our intention to publish this newsletter quarterly to come out near the beginning of each December, March, June and September. It will also be posted on the website. Deadlines to include information are about one month prior to publication. Your contributions are very welcome!
Some of the more interesting things in the MAHS’s reprint of the 1899 Cookbook are the advertisements from Mason area businesses. Many local restaurants featured oysters on the menu, especially for lunch. The following article by Sandy Perry explains why that food was so popular.

Oysters Were Once a Mason Favorite
by Sandra Perry

When questioned about eating oysters today, the response is usually a resounding YUCK! or YUM! Oysters are rarely found on menus except in the most upscale restaurants, being priced about $3.00 per fresh oyster. They are usually available in larger grocery stores, either fresh in jars in the cold case or in cans on the shelves, but still pricey. Living where we do – a long way from the oceans that oyster call home – we just don’t think about oysters very much.

There was a time, however, in the 1880s and 1890s when Mason was wild about oysters, it was a real mania. They were available fresh or canned from groceries, lunchrooms, restaurants and saloons. Oyster suppers and oyster socials were offered by youth groups, women’s associations and other community gatherings.

In 1886 an advertisement in the December 12 edition of the Ingham County News read as follows, “On December 24th, A.L. Vandercook will give a dish of raw or cooked oysters to every customer who purchases $1.00 or more worth of goods at the Beehive grocery.”

Shortly after Christmas, the same newspaper ran this item: “It took 23 people to wait on the throng of customers who came for the free dish of oysters at A.L. Vandercook’s on Christmas Eve. His sales were greater than during any week in the history of his business.”

How did this curious appetite develop? In the 1870s gigantic oyster beds were discovered on the east coast off New York and then Baltimore. In no time at all the oysters were being hauled out of the sea by the ton and sent directly to canneries or loaded on ice in railroad cars for the journey westward.

Oysters were healthy, cheap and best of all – they were unusual and almost unknown in parts of the U.S. away from the seacoasts. Those parts, like Mason, were excited to try new foods from far-away places that could be delivered easily by railroad, so oysters soon became a rage which endured until the oyster beds were exhausted about 1900.

Today we must be careful of the source of oysters we eat because they are filter feeders – a single oyster can filter 50 gallons of seawater a day to obtain nourishment. Any pollutants in the water will pass through and sometimes remain within the oysters. It seems unbelievable that there was a time when fresh oysters were hauled across country by rail and were still fit to eat. The reality of the situation is that the east coast waters from which they came were so pristine – without erosion or pollutants – that oysters were a very safe food if still fresh.

It has been nearly a century and a half since Mason was wallowing in oysters. When viewed from 2120, what will be the food that it seems we couldn’t live without – Pizza? Tacos? Water in plastic bottles?... What do you think?

Mason Area Historical Museum
Docent Volunteer Opportunities

We are always looking for friendly faces who want to work as docents, taking on one (or more if you can) 2-hour shifts a month at the Museum and/or Pink School.

You’ll be paired with a partner who enjoys Mason area history too!

Please contact Mary Hagen at 517-676-5314 if you are interested in either of these docent volunteer opportunities.
Ephraim Danforth Buried in Mason

by Katina Pine

Mason was settled back in 1836 by Lewis Lacey, who built a sawmill here for the Charles Noble & Company out of Monroe, Michigan. A year later, an executive from the company, Ephraim B. Danforth, moved here and became the first postmaster of the town then known as Mason Center.

The first settler of Mason, or in what is now the township of Vevay, was Lewis Lacey, who came here in February or March 1836, to build a sawmill for Noble & Co., of Monroe, and to chop twenty acres on section 8. Upon the completion of the sawmill, Ephraim B. Danforth, a member of the firm above named, settled at a place and assumed charge of their interests. He located there in 1837. The firm owned seven-eighths of the land in the old village plat of Mason.

Mr. Danforth was elected one of the first associate judges for Ingham County in 1838 and was re-elected in 1842. He was twice elected to the State Senate, and in 1848 was appointed by the Governor and commissioned by the Senate to lay out and construct a state road from the village of Mason to Lansing. In 1850 he was a delegate to the convention which framed the present constitution of the State. While a member of the Senate he, together with Hon. Joseph H. Kilbourne, worked with untiring zeal to secure the location of the State capital at Lansing, and, as is well known, their labors were crowned with success.

In 1850, Mr. Danforth sold his interest in the village of Mason and removed to Lansing, where he died, Aug. 17, 1853. He was engaged in the milling business in the latter city, and during his residence in the county was one of its most useful and prominent citizens.

Excerpt from "Early Settlements" link of the Mason, MI history posted at:
http://www.usgennet.org/usa/mi/county/ingham/MasonErlySet.html
Main table of contents at:
http://www.usgennet.org/usa/mi/county/ingham/Mason.html
Obtained from: findagrave.com

North Pole Radio Hour Play at Museum This Week and Next

The Mason Area Historical Society and Generations Community Theater have teamed up for a second year to bring live "community theater" back to Mason. This year, Generations is performing "North Pole Radio Hour," a short play directed by Marilyn Wulfekuhler, that fits so well with the holiday season, at the Museum.

Tickets at the door are $10 each or $8 for students. You have your choice of six performance dates: Friday, December 6 and Saturday, December 7 at 7:00 p.m. and Sunday, December 8 at 2:00 p.m. Also, on Friday and Saturday, December 13 and 14 at 7:00 p.m. and Sunday, December 15 at 2:00 p.m. Auditorium doors open one-half hour before each performance, but the Museum will be open an hour prior for visitors.

This production is a fundraiser to support the upkeep of the Museum. Many area residents fondly remember the Mason Coventry Players, but they last performed back in 2004. As was done years ago and last year as well, this year's play will be performed in the Museum's 90-seat Virginia Schlichter Auditorium.

We will have our short December 2019 business meeting prior to the first performance of the play at 7:00 p.m. on Friday, December 6th. There will be no general membership meetings in January or February. The Museum will also be open only Saturdays during the winter. The Board will not meet in December but will resume monthly meetings in January on the third Tuesday at 7:00 p.m. at the Museum.
Publications of the Mason Area Historical Society Make Great Gifts

The following items are for purchase at the Museum. Many are also available at the Maple Street Mall.

**DVD:**
“Mason by the Sycamore” -- $10. Tells the story of Mason from the glacial era to the 1950’s.

**BOOKS:**

- “Blue Stars in Every Window” – Mason in WWII - $30. Stories about the war experience of 300 Mason area veterans and about how the war years affected the home-front in Mason. Available at Ware’s Pharmacy, Bestseller’s Bookstore and Coffee Company, Kean’s, Maple Street Mall and the Museum.

- “Down by the Sycamore” – Six volumes, total. Volumes 3, 4, 5, and 6 are $5 each. (Volumes 1 & 2 are out of print). Nelson Brown’s columns which appeared in the Ingham County News from 1937 to 1961 lovingly compiled by his daughter Margaret Brown Doolittle. Stories of life in Mason and the people who lived in the town during those years.

- “Family Stories” - $10. Mason people tell about their families.

- “School Stories” - $10. Mason people tell about school days.

- “A Mason Cookbook from the Year 1899” - $10. Compiled by “12 Presbyterian Ladies” of that time and now reproduced in its original form by MAHS. Lots of recipes you can really use, ads from 1899 Mason businesses, and helpful hints from the past (e.g., the book recommends that everyone should wash their hair at least once a month).


- “Margaret the Mouse and the Pink Schoolhouse” - $10. A children’s book about a one-room school, dedicated to Margaret Doolittle.

- “A Walk Through Time” A free pamphlet that takes you on a walking tour of historic downtown Mason. You can find this at the Museum and the Hometown USA Visitors Center at no charge.

MAHS Veterans Day Meeting Postponed Due to Weather

Because of this year’s Veteran's Day snowstorm, the Mason Area Historical Society postponed its November meeting until Monday, November 18. Over 80 people came out to the meeting and program at the Museum, nonetheless!

There is no admission fee for MAHS meetings and programs. However, after the Society’s treasurer reported a deficit on the year to date, the audience passed the donation can around the auditorium and collected over $300. The Society is dependent upon memberships and donations. While some of our events have sponsors, please consider donating at any unsponsored events (like this one was) in the future.

After a very brief business meeting, Scott Shattuck, a local military historian, discussed “Civil War Companies K and F and How the American Legion Took Over.” He highlighted several prominent Mason area soldiers who contributed to the Union cause during the Civil War, including two pairs of brothers who were very close throughout the war. He also brought their stories forward into the twentieth century and answered audience questions throughout his presentation.
Many Experienced Mid-Michigan’s Dark Past at October 14 Meeting

It was “standing room only” at the Society’s meeting on Monday, October 14. Over 100 people crowded into the Museum to hear author Rod Sadler share stories that were the subjects of his first two books. The books contain sensational true crime stories with ties to mid-Michigan. Copies of the books were available for purchase after the meeting’s program but are now available online and through local bookstores.

Rod Sadler’s first book, “To Hell I must Go,” is a true story of a deranged woman who some might refer to as Michigan’s own Lizzie Borden. Here is the book’s synopsis: Alfred Haney had suspected there was something peculiar about his young wife for a very long time. The conversations she had with no one visible had become more and more frequent. On a cool spring morning in 1897, he left his Williamston, Michigan home to earn his day’s wage. When he returned, he discovered a macabre murder so bizarre that it shook the entire community to its core.

His second book, “A Slayer Waits,” depicts a double murder as an act of desperation. An escaped convict slays an unsuspecting mid-Michigan farm couple in cold blood before continuing his escape. Months later, the killer is re-captured and returned to a Michigan prison—thus beginning a long, painful saga of legal battles.

Many shudders ran through the audience during his telling of these true and grisly tales. Many questions also followed his presentation and he then discussed the research on his new book about a local murder that was much more recent. Rod Sadler promised to return to talk about that book when it is published.

Meeting Days Varied in 2019

Have you noticed that we are varying our meeting days (and even some meeting times) to enable members with set commitments on their calendars (like City Council meetings) to attend more MAHS meetings per year? Also, have you noticed that we are varying the patriotic songs we sing after the Pledge of Allegiance? While we have no general membership meetings in January and February, we plan to continue this practice in 2020, so check the dates and times for upcoming meetings carefully!

Helping With a Mason Tradition

The Mason Area Historical Society is helping the community keep a holiday tradition going. A group called “100+ Women Who Care” raised funds to help replace the live Christmas Tree in front of the Courthouse.

The Society is holding the funds until they are needed by Ingham County and the City of Mason when they plant a longer-lived tree to replace the present one. While the current tree grew quickly enough to be called by many “The Big Tree,” it is now dying. In the next couple of years, it will be replaced by a longer-lived Christmas Tree which will likely be planted across the sidewalk from the present tree. Electricity will need to be extended to it for use in lighting the tree and for concerts and other events on the Courthouse lawn.

Multi-colored LED bulbs light up the tree between the day after Thanksgiving and New Year’s Day each year. Mason was one of the first communities in the nation to put LEDs on a live tree.
MASON AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Membership/Donation/Volunteer Form
Please return to: P.O. Box 44 * Mason MI 48854

* This form is for NEW MEMBERS ONLY — Current Members are notified by mail when membership is due.

___ I/my family would like to be an annual member of MAHS. ($15 ind. / $25 family)
___ I/my family would like to be an annual PATRON member of MAHS. ($40 dues)
___ I would like to be a LIFE MEMBER of MAHS. ($300 one-time dues payment)

You may also support MAHS by contributions to any of these funds:

___ MEMORIAL FUND $ ___ contribution
* Designated to help sustain MAHS programs and viability — donations, bequests, and memorials to this fund are invested for the future.

___ CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT FUND $ ___ contribution
* Designated for major repairs to the Historical Museum and Pink School facilities.

___ ACQUISITION FUND $ ___ contribution
* Designated to purchase special artifacts or documents related to the Mason area.

Enclosed is check #__________ for the amount of $__________ (payable to MAHS) to support the society in the areas designated above.

NAME: ____________________________
ADDRESS: ____________________________
CITY: ____________ ZIP: ____________
PHONE: (______) _______ - ____________
EMAIL: ____________________________

OTHER WAYS YOU CAN BE A PARTNER IN PRESERVING MASON HISTORY
Please indicate area(s) of volunteer interest below and an MAHS Representative will contact you.

___ Museum Docent: Volunteer 2 hours per month to staff the museum (Tu/Th/Sat. 1-3pm)
___ Program Speaker: Present a 20-30 minute program at a monthly meeting.
___ Baker: Provide baked goods for special events/meetings and fundraisers.
___ Researcher: Help to fill our files on areas of Mason history that interest you!

To keep apprised of society news and events, all members and patrons receive the MAHS newsletter and other communications via email. Please note we will not share your contact info/email.
MASON AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
2020 MEETINGS / PROGRAMS
at the Mason Area Historical Museum
on the corner of E. Oak and Barnes Streets in Mason

- January and February – No programs

- March 11 (Wednesday), 7 pm – Photo Restoration with Joe Yarborough

- April 9 (Thursday), 7 pm - Rural Electrification with Carolyn Cooper

- May 4 (Monday), 7 pm – Downtown Mason – evolution of the E. Maple block with Sandy Perry

- June 17 (Wednesday), 7 pm – Mason’s Barns with Jim Mulvany, board member of MI Barn Preservation Network

- July 16 (Thursday), 7 pm – The Interurban Railway with Tim Nolte from the Lost Railway Museum in Grass Lake, MI

- August 10 (Monday), 7 pm – The Mason Esker with Ralph Taggart

- Sept 20 (Sunday), 1 pm during Down Home Days Festival Weekend – Appraisal Fair with Maple Street Mall Staff

- October 28 (Wednesday), 7 pm – Mason RIP (Funeral Stories) with Sandy Perry

- November 10 (Tuesday), 7 pm – Building Mason’s Homes with Carolyn Cooper
**Mason Area Historical Society**

*Board Member*

2020 Board of Officers

President: Doug Klein*
Vice President: Mike Beard*
Treasurer: Susan Kosier*
Secretary: Cathy Pinkos*

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**Board Members & Committee Chairs**

Displays: Carolyn Cooper*
Docents: Mary Hagen
Membership & Fundraising: Shirley Renwick*
Facilities: Doug Klein*
Communication & Internet: Randy Spottek*
Acquisitions & Curating: Doug Klein*
Pink School: Mary Coughlin*
Events: Shirley Renwick*
Hospitality & Refreshments: Mike Beard*
Hospitality: Annie Lambrecht*
Refreshments: Patricia Harvey*