President’s Message by Doug Klein

In January and February our Museum’s weekday hours are curtailed and our Society’s monthly meetings and programs are not held. However, during those months we have held two “forums.” Forums are special events held during the Museum’s regular Saturday hours.

On January 25th a forum was held to celebrate the 183rd birthday of our state and on February 22nd another forum was held to discuss the two years Malcolm X spent in Mason as a teenager.

In 2019, we had three forums: a walking tour of a downtown block, a photo viewing session featuring local Wyeth history, and a “Seven Gables” discussion of experiences. We are planning to hold more forums for certain Saturdays in 2020. Your ideas and participation are always encouraged!

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. Please consider helping us. A grant from the Dart Foundation is helping us replace the six large windows in the Virginia Schlichter Auditorium this year. Additional capital improvement donations and grants are being sought from other sources to assist in facility maintenance.

Our Museum displays are always undergoing changes. Check out the military room and welcome room to see our latest efforts to better relate the stories of Mason’s past. Please encourage people to revisit the Museum regularly to appreciate the work that our volunteers have put into the new exhibits.

On behalf of all our members, the Mason Area Historical Society extends its very sincere condolences to the family and friends of Joseph “Joe” E. Bement, who passed away on February 17, 2020.

His genuine love for his family’s local history along with his highly personable smile allowed him to befriend so many in Mason, others in our surrounding communities, and beyond.

Joe dedicated himself in numerous ways helping to preserve Mason’s history with his continued commitment to the Mason Area Historical Society. Friends and family have vivid memories of him enjoying greeting patrons during the MAHS pie sale fundraisers, as well as other MAHS events.

He was deeply respected and loved by his community and will greatly be missed by all of us that were honored to know him.
The earliest residents of Mason built log houses because they had no other choice of building materials. The source of heat for comfort and cooking was an open fireplace. Keeping food cold in all but the dead of winter was a problem, leading to smoking or drying meat and other food for longer storage.

But the need for cold or at least cool storage remained, and a pit or hole in the ground, insulated with dried grass, straw or sawdust and covered with logs or boards was the immediate solution. Over time the pit developed into a root cellar which was usually deeper, ventilated and contained shelving of some sort.

As the population of Mason increased, lumber became more readily available and more elaborate houses were constructed which had basements. And the root cellar moved indoors! By the 1850s Mason had the Beech Foundry (where the local Quality Dairy now stands) which was producing cast iron wood-burning stoves for kitchen use and other models for heating rooms, so people could be warm but their food stayed safe and cool in the basement. The degree of coolness for both pit and basement could be supplemented with ice harvested from the Rayner ponds in the winter and sold door to door well into the summer. The winter ice harvest was stacked and insulated so that it lasted for many months.

By the 1880s wood and coal-burning furnaces were being installed in the basements of houses, thereby warming them considerably. The root cellar was often converted to a coal cellar and the cooling of food moved upstairs into the kitchen – into a large wooden box with shelves, doors and a tin lining – the ice box. A large block of ice was inserted and would keep food cold for about a week but the drip tray that caught the ice melt had to be emptied regularly. This was about the same time that electricity was introduced into residential homes but its connection to refrigeration was still a long way into the future. Oddly, iceboxes were sold as refrigerators and the term icebox became more widely used after the electric refrigerator was invented.

As cities became larger, sources of unpolluted pond water to harvest for ice became harder to find. Mechanical refrigeration was in its infancy in the early 1900s, but the first major use became the commercial production of ice so that everyone had access to a fresh, pure source. By 1930 cutting and storing pond ice was a thing of the past. Many people at the time were unhappy with the new man-made ice and thought it was not as cold as pond ice.

The first mechanical refrigerators in the 1930s cost twice as much as an auto and tended to leak poison gas, however, progress continued. We have William F. Dart, later of Dart Manufacturing, to thank for all that refrigerator door storage space. He invented and patented the idea in 1934. Unfortunately, while the idea is alive and well today, Mr. Dart never realized a penny from it.

The invention of Freon gas stabilized the industry and allowed refrigerators to enter the home market just before World War II. However, production was halted immediately after the war started and didn’t resume until 1945. The desire to own a refrigerator was huge! Refrigerators became a very hot item and by 1950 80% of all farms and 90% of all urban homes had an electric refrigerator, setting new standards for food safety.

Meeting Days Still Vary in 2020

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? We plan to continue this practice in 2020, so check the dates and times for upcoming meetings carefully!
April 9th Program is on the Historic Mason-Dansville Rural Electrification Experiment

On Thursday, April 9, 2020 at 7:00 p.m. the Mason Area Historical Society will hold a monthly meeting and program at their Museum located at 200 E. Oak Street in downtown Mason.

Carolyn Cooper will speak about the “historic Mason-Dansville rural electrification experiment of 1927.” It proved that electricity was an asset on farms and at an affordable cost. Major rural electrification didn't happen in the area until almost 10 years later.

Our April 9, 2020 program presenter Carolyn Cooper recently won recognition from the Ingham County Historical Commission for the major publication “Blue Stars in Every Window – Mason in WWII.” Stories about the experiences of 300 area veterans and how the war years affected the homefront in Mason. It is available for $30 at the Museum.

This local electrification project was so important because Michigan State College (now MSU), Consumers Power (now Consumers Energy), and the handful of farmers involved demonstrated that there was a practical use for electricity on the farm. They showed that they could run a variety of new labor-saving devices (many invented by the College during the study) and adapt some existing devices to run off electricity at an affordable cost to the farmers.

Prior to this, the general notion was that there was no practical use for electricity on the farm beyond lighting the house. The findings from this study led to a groundswell of Michigan farmers wanting electricity and Consumers Power extending lines throughout the state.

December Generations Community Theater Play Contributed Over $1300

The Mason Area Historical Society and Generations Community Theater teamed up for a second year to bring live “community theater” back to Mason. This past December, Generations performed “North Pole Radio Hour,” a short play directed by Marilyn Wulfekuhler, that fit so well with the holiday season, at the Museum.

The production was a fundraiser to support the upkeep of the Museum. This year, the group raised over $1,300 for the cause. Many area residents fondly remember the Mason Coventry Players, but they last performed back in 2004. As was done years ago and the last two years as well, the play was performed in the Museum’s 90-seat Virginia Schlichter Auditorium.

Attend an Auto Insurance Meeting

Do you have questions about the Auto Insurance Reform that goes into effect in July? You're invited to an "Auto Insurance Reform Town Hall Meeting" hosted by Trinesha Goebel - State Farm Insurance Agent. Attending a meeting is free and is open to everyone, regardless of which insurance company you are with.

The meetings are being held in the 90-seat Virginia Schlichter Auditorium at the Mason Area Historical Museum, 200 E. Oak Street in downtown Mason beginning at 6:30 p.m. Call (517) 676-4500 to be sure a meeting is happening on your choice of the upcoming dates the auditorium is reserved: March 16 and 23, April 16, 20, and 28, May 5, 12, 20, and 28, or June 2, 10, 15, and 25.
MAHS March 11th Meeting To Discuss Photo Restoration

Presenting at the Mason Area Historical Society’s March meeting will be Joseph Yarbrough of Light & Shadows Photography who will discuss photo restoration. Many damaged, faded old photographs (slides, negatives or prints) have the potential to be professionally enhanced.

The MAHS meeting will be on Wednesday, March 11, 2020 at 7:00 p.m. at the Mason Area Historical Museum, 200 E. Oak Street in downtown Mason. Admission is free and the public is invited to attend.

“The presentation will include examples of image restoration projects I have completed over the past decade,” said Joe Yarbrough. “Projected and printed examples will show the original images and the final result of the restoration process. Ample time will be given for questions both during and after the presentation.”

Participants are invited to bring photographs to the meeting to be evaluated for potential restoration. Refreshments will be served in the lobby after the meeting.

Publications of Mason Area Historical Society Now Available at the Museum

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, 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 and growing up in Mason’s past.

“School Stories” - $10. Mason people tell about school days, including one-room schools.

“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.
1903 Head-On Train Collision Could Have Been Much Worse

On April 1, 1903, two freight trains collided head-on south of Coy Rd. The engineer of one of the trains was seriously injured, but no one died in the accident, as the crews of each train jumped when they saw the danger. The sound of the boiler exploding on one of the engines was heard for miles. One car that just missed being wrecked was filled with dynamite. It was determined that the accident occurred because of a train dispatcher’s carelessness.

May Meeting on Downtown Block

Prominent local historian Sandy Perry will present on the “Evolution of the E. Maple Block” at the Mason Area Historical Society meeting on Monday, May 4, 2020 at 7:00 p.m.

The 100 block of East Maple Street north of the Ingham County Courthouse was once the address of the Ingham County Jail. The most prominent feature at the east end of the block is now the Mason First Presbyterian Church. The “Old Stone Church” was built with fieldstones from farmers’ fields in the Mason area.

In the present day, the 100 block of E. Maple Street still features retail storefronts, a brick County building, and the stone Presbyterian Church.
**Mason Area Historical Society**

*Board Member*

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