

The Milford Historian

Mission Statement: We are organized exclusively for educational purposes. We bring together those people who are interested in history, especially the history of the Village of Milford and Milford Township.

Ghost Town of Kensington

When the Erie Canal opened in 1825, it created a vast territory of opportunity. Many eastern families headed west to Michigan, Ohio and beyond seeking a new, more prosperous way of life. Soon farms and supporting businesses were established, and small towns began to emerge. Some of these communities were successful, some were not. As we learned in the September/October 2004 issue of the *Milford Historian*, one such town was close to Milford, in an area many of us enjoy today for its natural beauty, wildlife and recreational opportunities: Kensington Metro Park.

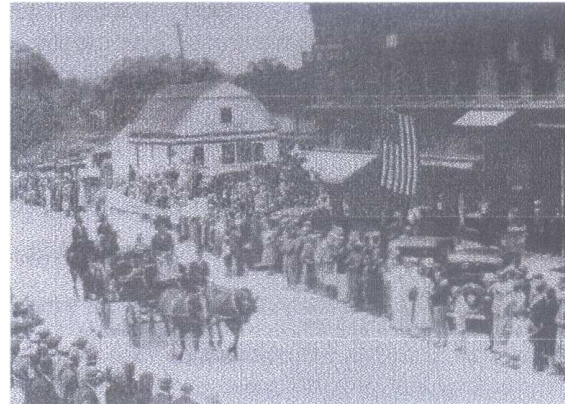


Bob Hotaling, Supervisory Interpretive Naturalist at the park, has done extensive research on the birth, life and demise of the town known for over fifty years as Kensington. He will share this and more in his presentation entitled "The Ghost Town of Kensington."

Our evening will begin with a sumptuous potluck dinner at 6:30 p.m. at the Milford Methodist Church, 1200 Atlantic Street. This will be followed by a brief business meeting at 7:30 p.m. and then our special program. Our meetings are open to the public and all are welcome. Mark your calendar and bring a

From Your President...

At the May 19th General Membership Meeting another historical Milford picture will be raffled. This one is of the 1932 Milford parade. It should certainly appeal to our members who like vintage vehicles and vintage clothing. I especially enjoyed the advertising in the store windows. The picture would be a great addition to your home. Tickets are only \$1.00 each and the proceeds will be used to purchase appetizers to enhance our general meetings.



I would like to thank Sue Gumpper who led our efforts to apply for a historical grant from the State of Michigan. Unfortunately, we were not selected to receive the grant. We are disappointed, but still plan to send a committee of people to Lansing for Past Perfect training. Past Perfect is a computer program that will allow us to accession museum artifacts.

I would like to thank the Historical Society women who worked diligently for several days to clean, brighten and arrange the interior of the Museum. This is a great start! An outside Work Bee is scheduled for May 21st. We especially need men for the heavier

friend!

[Click here for more on other ghost towns of Michigan.](#)

<p style="text-align: center;">May General Meeting Thursday, May 19, 2005 6:30 p.m. United Methodist Church 1200 Atlantic Street</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>A-G</u> <u>H-N</u> <u>O-Z</u> Dessert Main Dish</p> <p>Salad Everyone: table service & beverage (coffee provided)</p>

jobs. The ladies are also welcome, of course. A sign-up sheet will be available at the general meeting on May 19th. If you're a member who hasn't contributed in awhile, this is a great chance to support **your** Historical Society!

We are again in charge of the Milford 4th of July Parade. Katherine Rheaume assures me that the parade plans are on schedule. The Village is now requiring us to help with the post-parade cleanup. We need as many volunteers as possible to assist with this. You may e-mail Katherine at kmr1989@earthlink.net

David Chase



4th of July
Parade
2005

It's less than two months away!

The 4th of July parade will be the Society's first community-wide event of 2005. The parade will be on Monday, July 4, 2005 (unlike last year when it was on July 3rd, a Saturday). Board member Kathy Rheaume is the chairperson. She is already working on the arrangements that

Powerhouse Progress



include a fly-over of jet aircraft from Selfidge Air Base in Mt. Clemens. Please be prepared to participate. Kathy can be reached at 248-684-7373, if you'd like to volunteer.

Give Us Your Treasures.

With spring house cleaning just around the corner, we remind you that Granny's Attic is a great place to donate your unwanted items. Although the Granny's Attic Sale itself won't be until July 8-9, we'll happily take your treasures now and store them until then.

Importantly, remember that your Historical Society receives the proceeds from the sale and you receive a deduction on your 2005 income taxes. For donation information, please contact David Chase at 248-421-3637.

Granny's Attic 2005



Home Tour 2005

Homes are needed!



Interpretive Planning Workshop

On April 18th, Judith Reiter and Sue Fleming-Bailey facilitated a daylong workshop to discuss ways to communicate the Powerhouse's many stories to the public. The guide for this "interpretive" process was John A. Veverka, an internationally known interpretive planner, trainer and author of "Interpretive Master Planning."

The day began with a 9 a.m. visit to inventory the Powerhouse and its site in Central Park. The planning process continued at the historic Opera House on Main Street until 4 p.m. Among the stories identified for possible interpretation were:

- [Henry Ford's "Village Industry" concept](#)
- [Albert Kahn/Art Deco architecture](#)
- [Hydroelectric power generation](#)
- Milford factory workers

The job ahead is to translate these ideas into exciting displays and interpretive panels based on Veverka's report and recommendations. Judith Reiter says "this is where we give meaning and context to this beautiful building and turn it from a question mark (?) to an explanation point (!) for our community and visitors." Now is a great time to get involved! Just call Judith at 684-0684.

Powerhouse exterior restoration. Check it out!

The Powerhouse now looks like the skeleton of a winged giant. Go see it...and take your camera. The exterior restoration began in March with removal of limestone and brick. Even in this condition you can imagine the elegant structure that will emerge when the masonry repair is complete and the large windows are restored. This work - and plans for future phases - is bringing new life and excitement to this under-used corner of Central Park.

The project began in February with asbestos abatement work. Demolition and structural steel repairs have been completed.

*New Sponsorship
Packages Available*

Efforts continue on our biggest fund-raising event of the year - Home Tour 2005. Leading this activity for us are Kelly Irwin and a committee consisting of members: Sue Bullard, Robert Crawford, Sue Gumper, Judith Reiter, Bill Schimmel and Judy Waara.

Judith Reiter advises that the special Home Tour sponsorship packages introduced last year will again be offered for 2005. Please contact Judith for details at 248-684-0684.

The event will be on September 17th and 18th and **homes are needed**. This is the essential success factor. If you would like to volunteer your home or know someone that might, by all means, please contact Kelly Irwin at 248-684-2348. The help of many more members will be needed as preparations progress. Please be prepared to enthusiastically volunteer.

Masonry restoration will be finished in May, followed by installation of the quarry tile floor and windows in July.

The Pettibone Creek Hydroelectric Station is one of three buildings that comprised Henry Ford's "Village Industry" in Milford. Ford's vision was the coexistence of technology, modern production and farming. The restored Powerhouse will be a lasting resource for telling this important, but little known, story about automotive history in a small town.

Restoration of this 1939 Art Deco building is a joint project between the Village, the Milford Historical Society and the Downtown Development Authority. The Michigan Department of Transportation, the Federal Highway Administration and other local, regional and national sources provide funding.

Still needed to ready the building for a tenant are carpenters, electricians, plumbers, tradesmen and in-kind donations of equipment: furnace, toilet room necessities, etc. If you're interested in being a part of this volunteer group contact Jeff Anderson at 248-787-4292

History Feature Article

From Plaster to Drywall

Are the ceilings and walls in your home plaster or drywall? If it's an historic home they're probably plaster, if not, they're probably drywall. But why, how, and when did this major change in home construction occur? These questions are answered in the following article by Arrol Gillner titled "Plaster Walls Fall by Postwar Wayside." My thanks to Norm Werner, our webmaster, for bringing it to my attention. -Ed.



Before World War II, American homes were routinely plastered inside—a painstaking process that first required nailing thousands of feet of wooden strips known as lath to the ceiling and walls of every room.

The lath was covered with a coarse layer of plaster called the “scratch coat.” The wet plaster squeezed through the gaps in the lath, locking it to the walls and ceiling. Days later, when the scratch coat was dry, a second “brown coat” was applied to make the surfaces roughly flat. This, too, had to dry for several days. Last came the “skim coat,” a thin layer of pure white plaster that produced a smooth finished surface, something like the cream cheese topping does on a cheesecake.

Depending on the weather, this process could take days or weeks, during which no other trade could work inside the house. This was how plasterwork had been done for centuries, and there seemed no reason to change.

Welcome New Members We are pleased to announce that **Don and Elaine Hunter** are our newest Historical Society members and that **Josephine Foster** has become a lifetime member.

Dues are Due!
Com' on pay up... please.

A few members still have unpaid membership dues. Our Society depends on these dues to help maintain the Museum, publish this newsletter and execute events benefiting the community.



Dues can be paid at the May 19th General Meeting, at the Museum or mailed to the Milford Historical Society at 124 E. Commerce Street, Milford, MI 48381. Thank you.

MHS Volunteers for History

In this issue the Society wishes to recognize and thank the following members for enriching the Society and

Then came World War II, and with it an urgent need for military structures ranging from barracks to whole bases. Faced with shortages of both labor and material, Uncle Sam was desperate to find faster and cheaper ways to build. And since beauty was not much of an issue, eliminating plaster was an obvious starting point.

Enter the United States Gypsum company, which way back in 1916 had invented a building board made of gypsum sandwiched between sheets of tough paper. After more than two decades, the product they called Sheetrock still hadn't really caught on. Even its successful use in most of the building at the Chicago World's Fair of 1933-34 didn't do much for sales. But the urgencies of wartime construction changed all that.

As the government soon came to appreciate, Sheetrock did away with the need for wood lath, multiple plaster coats, and days and days of drying time (hence its generic name, "drywall"). Installation was simple: After the 4x8 sheets were nailed up, the nail holes were filled, paper tape was used to cover the joints, and a textured coating was troweled on to help disguise the defects.

Of course, all this was only meant as a stopgap replacement for plaster, but as you've probably guessed, it didn't turn out that way. By the war's end, many builders who'd gotten used to slapping up drywall were suddenly reluctant to go back to the trouble and expense of plastering.

What's more, Sheetrock's arrival coincided with the rise of Modern architecture, which preferred plain, flat surfaces to the fussy moldings and reveals of prewar styles. To Modernist tastes, the fact the Sheetrock couldn't be molded the way wet plaster could was hardly a drawback. People seemed more dismayed by the flimsy cardboardish sound of the walls in their postwar homes, but they soon got used to it.

Flimsy or not, there's no doubt that Sheetrock proved a huge boon to the postwar housing industry. Prior to the war, the typical American developer built about four houses a year. By the late 1940s, a developer like the legendary Bill Levitt was able to churn out 17,000 tract homes

the Milford Community:

- Museum Interior Spring-cleaning: **Mary Lou Gharrity, Sue Gumpper, Marlene Gomez, Sue Bullard, Judith Reiter, Brook Qualman;** student docents **Kati Feeney and Laura Bonhard; Janice Spence** (Rochester, NY).
- Historical Grant Application: **Sue Gumpper.**
- Powerhouse Interpretive Planning Workshop: **Judith Reiter,** leader; **Dave Anderson, Sue Gumpper, Margaret Wheeler, Jerry Wheeler, Bob Crawford, Jay Qualman,** participants.
- Oral History Project: **Margaret Wheeler, Brook Qualman, Jay Qualman**

WELL DONE

The next time you see these members, please thank them for supporting your society and consider doing so yourself. We'd really like to print your name here!

Upcoming 2005 Events

May 19....General Meeting and Program
(*Ghost Town of Kensington*)

July 44th of July Parade

July 8-9...Granny's Attic Sale
(Lawn of Museum)

July 16Picnic (Wixom Hist. Museum)

Sept.8General Meeting and Program
(*One Room School House*)

Sept. 17-18...Home Tour 2005

May General Meeting
Thursday, May 19, 2005
6:30 p.m.

at Long Island's Levittown, sell them for \$7,990, and still make a thousand dollars profit on each. Mass production was the key to the postwar housing boom, and Sheetrock helped make it happen.

For more on plaster repairing in historic homes, [click here](#).

**United Methodist Church
1200 Atlantic Street**

A-G

H-N

O-Z

Dessert Main Dish

Salad

**Everyone: table service & beverage
(coffee provided)**