

# 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.*



## Pontiac is the Program

The roots of the Pontiac automobile go back to the 1890s and Edward M. Murphy's successful Pontiac Buggy Co. in Pontiac, Michigan. Murphy took an interest in the early smoking, sputtering "horseless carriage." He equipped a section of his buggy works for car production and, on August 28, 1907, founded the Oakland Motor Car Co. In 1909, Oakland joined the General Motors Company, newly formed itself in 1908. In the mid-1920s, Oakland division was challenged to develop a vehicle priced between Chevrolet and Oldsmobile. Featuring its own six-cylinder engine and largely Chevrolet parts (which were in excess supply at the time), the first Pontiac debuted at the New York Auto Show in 1926. It was the lowest-priced six-cylinder car on the market and was advertised as the "Chief of the Sixes." Pontiac was such a success (seventh in sales in just two years) that, in 1932, the Oakland name was dropped from the vehicle line and Pontiac became the name of the division.

At our September 9th general meeting we will learn more about the history of Pontiac. John Sawruk, a retired GM engineering director and avid historian, will present the history of what is currently called the Pontiac-GMC Division of General Motors. John will focus on the evolution of Pontiac beginning with the city of Pontiac and the Pontiac Buggy Company, the Oakland Motor Car Company and Pontiac Motor

## From your President...

We tried something new for the Home Tour this year. We offered Home Tour sponsorships, inviting our corporate community to help us keep our history alive.

Although we started soliciting quite late, with the help and guidance of our friends at the Milford Times, we signed up three "Sponsors" and three "Supporters." At the Platinum level (\$2000 and above) we welcome the Milford Times. Italy American Construction, opening a new location in Highland, is a Gold sponsor (\$1000 - \$1999). The Milford branch of the University of Michigan Kellogg Eye Center joined us as a Silver sponsor (\$500-\$999). As "Supporters" (\$120), we welcome Tige Reader, a long time resident of Milford and associate broker with RE/MAX Homes, Inc., Steve Suser with Sparkies American Grill, Dave Armstrong with Monthly Shopper, and Heritage/GMAC Real Estate.

Sponsorship support is especially important as our programs, services and expenses continue to grow. If you would be interested in joining as a "Sponsor" or "Supporter" for next year's Home tour, please call the Museum.

Judith Reiter

division, including some of its WWII materiel. John and his wife Marge are lifetime members of the Milford Historical Society whose home on Summit Street was the Hibbard Tavern and today is a Michigan Historic Site.

Importantly, at this month's meeting we will also be presenting the Society's 2004 Preservation/ Restoration award to Genise and Eric Horsley, or their representative, from the Clothing Cove at 414 North Main in downtown Milford.

Our meetings are open to all. Please plan to attend and bring a friend to the best potluck in town!

### September 2004 General Meeting

Thursday, September 9, 2004

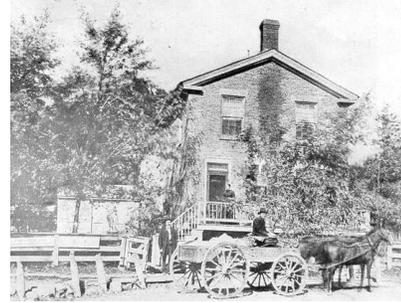
6:30 PM

United Methodist Church  
1200 Atlantic Street

<u>A-G</u>	<u>H-N</u>	<u>O-Z</u>
Main Dish	Salad	Dessert

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

## 2004 Home Tour Nears

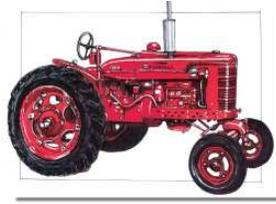


*Docents still needed! Phone Judy Waara 684-0010.*

Mark your calendar for one of the Society's premier events; the 2004 Home Tour. Tour dates are Saturday, September 18th (10-5 P.M.) and Sunday, September 19th (12-5 P.M.). Donations are \$10 for adults and \$8 for seniors and students. Tickets will be available at the home sites and the Museum during tour hours. Advance tickets are available at Read Between the Lines bookstore and at the Museum 1-4 P.M. Wednesdays and Saturdays. Other featured events are the Tractor Show (details on next page) and the Car Show on Main Street. These two events are free and on Sunday only.

This is the 28th anniversary of this important MHS fundraising event. Six beautiful and unique sites will be featured, including several making their first appearance on the tour. These wonderful houses depict the long and rich history of our town for residents and visitors alike. This year all sites are conveniently located in the Village proper and include Ferguson's Opera House (1875) on Main Street, the Lovejoy-Seconder home (1891) on the corner of Center and Hickory, the Wilson-Rogers home (1883) on Liberty Street, the Stephens-VanOverberg home (1872) on Canal

Street, the Howland-McCarthy home also on Canal Street, and the Peters-Peters home (1928) on Atlantic Street.



## Tractor Show

The Society's annual Tractor Show held in conjunction with the Home Tour will soon be here! Is your tractor ready? Or, are you planning to come and look? Don't forget to tell your friends and neighbors. All tractors are welcome: old, new, restored, unrestored, or even those in regular use (in "working clothes"). Pre-registration is not required; just show up, then register. See you there on Sunday, September 19th, 10-4 P.M., Johnson School, 515 General Motors Road.

## Student Docent Scholarships



Do you have a high school age daughter, son, granddaughter, grandson, neighbor or friend who is interested in history, enjoys sharing information and demonstrates responsible behavior? The Milford Historical Society offers a limited number of scholarships to students who are willing to commit to working as museum docents, helping with Historical Society projects and assisting with museum maintenance. Students must participate in docent training and volunteer a minimum of 30 hours to qualify for the minimum scholarship of \$300. This year we are very pleased to be awarding a total of \$1,930 in scholarships. We wish Amy Latham, Monica McLaughlin, Heather Whitney, Sarah Wigley and Katie Zack success and happiness as they each begin their college experience.

If you know a high school student, please advise



Powerhouse

## Update

Six construction bids for the Powerhouse exterior restoration were opened on August 9th. The firm selected is Cusack's Masonry Restoration, Inc. of Hubbardston, MI. Before construction can begin, the Cusack proposal will go to the Milford Village Council for approval along with a Historic Preservation Covenant with the State Historic Preservation Office, which is now being drafted.

We have a commitment for landscaping and lighting that was secured through a new committee member, Scott Peterson. It seems his company, Power Plus Engineering, has adopted our Powerhouse project, and provides a link from their website: <http://www.epowerplus.com> to ours. They have ordered 24 Powerhouse T-shirts and will be sending their men out on service calls wearing them!

## Granny's Attic a Huge



## Success

Dave Chase says your Society proved once again that when everyone

them of our Docent Scholarship program and encourage them to call Sue Gumper (248-685-2691) for details and how to apply.

### Milford Beauties Calendar

Three years ago, as part of a successful campaign that raised \$100,000 to paint Milford's railroad trestles, a "mature" group of civic-minded women produced their first calendar, Milford Beauties Out and About (2001).

This year the "Beauties" put their creativity to work for the Powerhouse preservation project. Milford Beauties 'Buff'et (2005-2006) is an eighteen-month calendar featuring restaurants in Milford and Highland. Once again these ladies demonstrated their dedication by giving (showing?) so much of themselves to support our community.

The calendar can be purchased for \$10 at the 2004 Home Tour, the Milford Historical Museum, Read Between the Lines bookstore in Milford and by phone through the Huron Valley Chamber of Commerce (248-685-7129).

### Milford Memories Museum Sales



Our museum was open on both Friday and Saturday during Milford Memories this year. With the Memories shuttle stop in front of the museum, and Russ Rheume's personal and creative way of reeling people in, we had over 25 visitors on Saturday! Three historic art prints and eight Milford Beauties Powerhouse fundraising calendars were sold.

### The Ghost Town of Kensington

Most of those traveling along Grand River Avenue and crossing the bridge over the Huron River are unaware that the town of Kensington once existed at this site. Paralleling Grand River today is I-96, bordered by Kensington Metropark on the north side,

joins together on a project it becomes a huge success. A large thank you goes to all who donated saleable items, and to those helpers listed in the following MHS Volunteers for History section who donated many hours, even days to the project. Special thanks go to Duane Freitag who contributed his pricing expertise. If that wasn't enough, he rolled up his sleeves and, with the help of Bill Schimmel, cleaned and sorted items stored in the basement for years.

### Welcome New Member

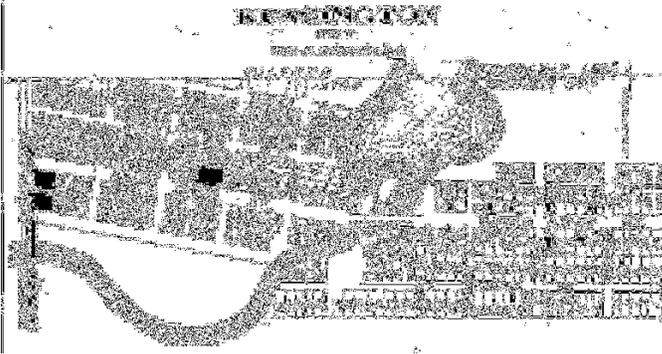
Please welcome our newest member Rod Russell and Franklin Hills Contractor. Inc. to the Milford Historical Society in the small business category.

### MHS Volunteers for History

We thank the following members for their recent contributions of time and talent to achieve MHS goals:

- 4<sup>th</sup> of July Parade: **Kathy Rheume**, Chair; **Bill Schimmel, Bill Crawford** (tractor), **Jeff & Melissa Brown, Eric Feiler, Jay and Brook Qualman; Monique, Mark & Baby Caswell; Cory & Jillian Vieracker, Sue, Mikaela & Morgan Bullard.**
- Powerhouse Groundbreaking: **Judith Reiter, Marge Sawruk, Jeanetta Vesey, Bob & Emily Kirschner** (band organ), **Barbara Young, Dave Armstrong, Keith & Lee Vandebussche, Bill Crawford.**
- Granny's Attic Sale: **Dave Chase, Duane Freitag**, co-Chairs; **Bhill Schimmel, Barbara Miller, Jerry & Margaret Wheeler, Brook Qualman, Jay Qualman, Greg Beck, Bill Crawford, Will Young, Thomas Johnson, Dennis Dust, Kathy Rheume, Mary Lou Gharrity and Judy Waara.**
- Milford Memories Museum sales: **Marge Sawruk, Sue Gumper, Will Young, Judy Waara, Bill Schimmel**
- New Museum sign/install: **Kathy & rubb Rheume.**

and Island Lake State Recreation Area to the south. The town was later known as Kent.



Why here? To begin with, Grand River, a former Indian trail, was a main east-west toll road. Stagecoaches once rumbled back and forth between Detroit and Lansing. Rivers were used as transportation routes and a source of water power. Thus, the junction of a river and a main road was a logical site for developing a town.

The completion of the Erie Canal in 1825 resulted in an enormous influx of immigrants from the east into the Great Lakes region. Rapid population growth in the 1830s gave rise to many aspiring communities, some of which were destined for success, some to failure. Kensington, unfortunately, was in the latter category.

Initially, there were high expectations. The first building erected was a sawmill operated by Joel Redway. Constructed in 1834, it served the community for many years, using waterpower from the Huron River. Before long, with an increase in population, other businesses became established. The town had two hotels, a large livery stable, three general stores, a doctor's office, a church, a post office, a tavern, a bank, and a blacksmith shop.

Besides serving as a tavern, the "Kensington Inn" also served as a doctor's office. The attending physician, however, was not a licensed practitioner. According to many long-time residents of the area, "Doctor" Tom Curtis was a patent medicine man who specialized in back plasters made from sawdust and red pepper. In addition to dabbling in the healing arts, Dr. Curtis also practiced "painless" dentistry, relying on whiskey from his tavern as the anesthetic.

As in most small towns, homes often served dual purposes. The home of Abe Wood, a one-armed Civil War veteran, served as the Kensington Post Office until 1900.

Dix. The original stockholders sold stock to other residents, among them Neil Butterfield and Chauncey Crouse.

In 1838, the holders began to issue notes. When sales did not proceed as well as expected, Dwight and Dix left for Milwaukee, unbeknownst to the remaining holders. They disposed of several thousand bank notes, keeping the proceeds.

The Michigan Legislature passed laws requiring banking corporations to show real estate security. As the only two landholders, Butterfield and Crouse issued a reward for the return of Dwight and Dix. Shortly afterwards, the two were arrested in Milwaukee and returned to Kensington. We have no knowledge of the trial's outcome.

As with many "wildcat banks," the Kensington Bank collapsed due to a lack of assets. The building later became a Free Methodist Church, and then a storage shed.

Bank notes from the Kensington Bank became worthless, perhaps being relegated to use as wallpaper or tinder. Today, the surviving notes are collectibles, with a value far exceeding their original denominations.



Kensington Bank circa 1970

As the town's economy faltered, many residents moved away without notifying their creditors. After many months of non-payment, their eastern creditors came to check on their debtors and found empty stores. Thus, all unpaid bills became known as goods that had "gone to Kent."

A later factor was the lack of a railroad. At that time, a railroad was

Thus, Kensington appeared to have a promising future due to the favorable location and rapid growth. Yet, it became a ghost town by 1890. What went wrong?

With its location on the Huron River, it was suggested that a dam be constructed to provide waterpower for the town. However, this proposal was not supported by landowners' up-river. Such a project, they felt, would flood their lands. Therefore, no dam was built.

essential to the economic success of a community. Towns competed with each other to attract a railroad. In 1871, rail lines were built. Milford and South Lyon were on railroad routes, Kensington wasn't.

Today, remnants of the town are few. Two cemeteries exist, one along Grand River west of the town site, the other at the junction of Grand River and Kensington Road. At the latter is a bronze plaque marking the former site of the Kensington Baptist Church, a stone edifice erected in 1853, razed in 1952.

We have a tendency to equate the term "ghost town" with the mining towns of the far west or perhaps to the abandoned lumber, copper and iron mining communities of northern Michigan. However, the Detroit area has some of its' own. Kensington no longer exists as a town but the name survives as the first of the Huron-Clinton Metroparks that were established in the five-county region around Detroit.

Contributed by Bob Hataling,  
Supervisory Interpretive Naturalist,  
Kensington Nature Center

### What's Hot

- General Meeting 9/9
- 2004 Home Tour 9/18 & 9/19
- Tractor Show 9/19

**Don't Miss out!**

### Upcoming 2004 Events

- Sept. 9 ..... General Meeting
- Sept 18-19 ..... 2004 Home Tour
- Sept. 19 ..... Tractor Show
- Sept 22 ..... Board of Directors Meeting
- Oct 27 ..... Board of Directors Meeting
- Nov 18 ..... General Meeting (Program:  
Outhouse Archeology)
- Nov 20 ..... Museum Holiday Decoration
- Nov 24 ..... Board of Directors Meeting
- Dec 22 ..... Board of Directors Meeting

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