

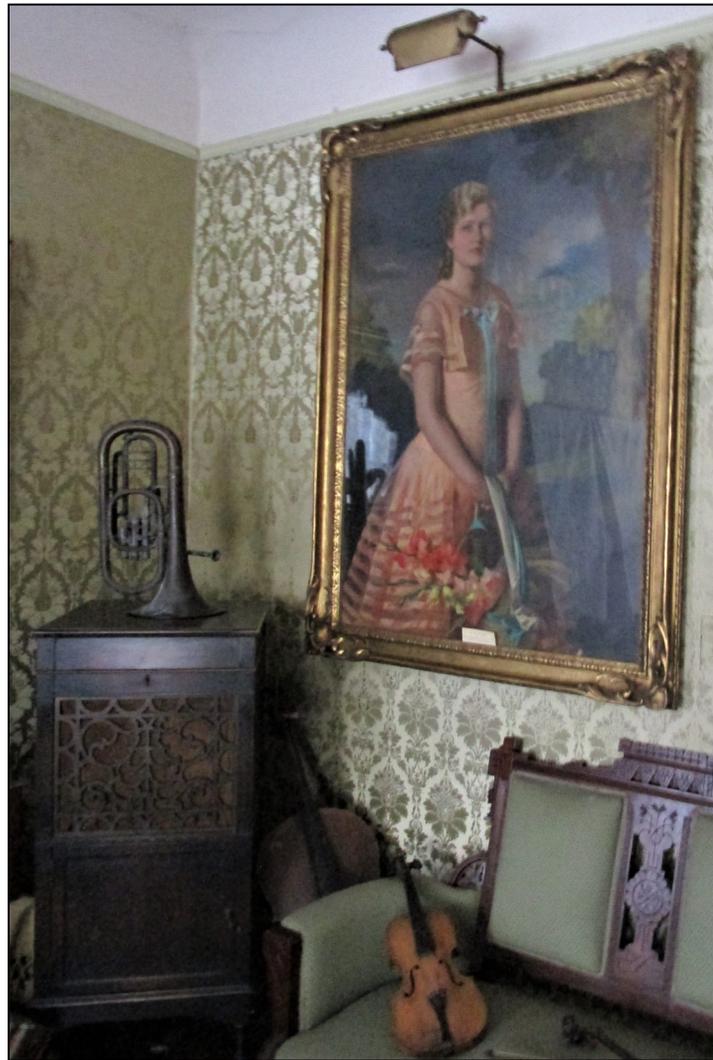
- EST. 1958 -

WYANDOTTE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

MARCH 2021

VOLUME 3



The Girl in the Painting

“This is Eleanor Ford Torrey West on her sixteenth birthday in 1929. She was a tomboyish girl and J.B. Ford’s great-granddaughter. She lived alone on Ossabaw Island in Georgia and turned 101 this year!”

Guests may have heard this in an excerpt of their tour of the Ford-MacNichol Home and our staff and volunteers love relating these details regarding the mammoth painting that currently hangs on the north wall of the Music Room in the grand home.

Indeed, her brief story as we relate it, is true. But...

(continued on page 3)

A MESSAGE FROM THE PREZ

Dear Members of the Wyandotte Historical Society,

I hope you are pleased with our new website and newsletter. Since we've been staying home more these days, our members have been busy writing articles for your pleasure. Hopefully these colorful communications bring us closer together.

Our website allows people all over the country to read about the many stories we have to share, and allows them to join or renew their memberships online. People can buy books and gifts from our gift shop online and we can share yearly events with them.

I am so proud of these two achievements. When we started our society back in 1958, who would have thought we would have 275 members; there would be 3 historic homes as part of the Museums, and technology would be available to bring Wyandotte to your fingertips. Amazing!

Christopher T. Stieler
President

Please Welcome Our New Members!

Krystn Fellah
Elizabeth Ann-Berton Reilly
Frances Smock Woodroffe

I Have A Correction To Make

Last month In my excitement to let you know about the Mehlhose House & Station being purchased by a family, I got "my wires crossed."

Amanda and Francisco Cosme are the couple who are restoring the Mehlhose House & Station to live there at 2941 4th St. with their four children.

Dave Kostelnik, is a former owner of another Mehlhose house at 367 Oak. Even after my mix-up of spouses' names in the February newsletter, **Mary and Dave Kostelnik** remain happily married.

And it turns out there is a third Mehlhose house! The things I am learning about the Mehlhose properties and all the people involved through generations are fascinating. Stay tuned.

Jane (Gies) Rasmussen



Join us at wyandottehistory.org to capture RHS' groundbreaking history from October 1921, through 2022 and beyond!

ROOSEVELT HIGH SCHOOL HISTORY

What Used To Be...RHS

When a building is close to 100 years old, it can tell stories if you look close enough. One such story that I uncovered was when I was helping to run some cable for the technology department about a year ago.

The technology office is located in the back of the library on the first floor. It is almost like a dead zone for cellular service, and you can hardly ever hear anything beyond its walls. I never knew why until the day we went up into the ceiling.

I always knew that the library was at one time the gym, and when the addition was built in the 1970's, the gym was converted into the library. I always heard stories about the track that was above the gym floor and have seen pictures and was always curious how it went from gym to library and how well it was converted.

What I didn't realize was that the technology area occupied what once was the pool. When I went up the ladder to help with the cable line, it was like being transported to a different place. You could see the tile showers that once existed before you went into the pool. There were still shower heads attached to the wall.

As I kept looking around I saw one lonely bench attached to a set of risers. I imagined all the people that probably sat on that bench to root on the swim team through the years.

It was hard to believe that our office was the bottom of the pool. I went back to find pictures of the old pool and studied the area for days. RHS has many memories, some have been converted, some have been forgotten, but you never know what you may find when you lift up a ceiling tile.

George Purdu

The Girl in the Painting

(continued from the cover)

.... as we remember Eleanor Ford Torrey West, who passed away on her 108th birthday, January 17, 2021, it is important to know she was quite a force who lived a long and spirited life which many of us are largely unaware of.

Born in Detroit, Eleanor Ford Torrey and her family would spend summers in Georgia, where her parents purchased a property called Greenwich, in Savannah. The main house included forty rooms and three stories and made up just one of the structures on the 100-acre plantation. In January 1923, fire destroyed the house and ten-year-old Eleanor and her nurse jumped to safety from a second-floor window.



Rather than rebuilding, the following year, the Torreys purchased Ossabaw Island for a reputed \$150,000 and built a large home on the north end, which was completed in 1926.

Throughout her adult life, Eleanor and her family (she would marry and divorce twice and have four children) would visit Ossabaw Island, a place which would become her most enduring legacy.

Beginning in the 1960s, she became a champion for conservation, creating the Ossabaw Foundation. When rising property taxes threatened the future of her endeavors, the family negotiated with many officials and lawmakers to ensure the space would continue on as an unobstructed beauty.

Ossabaw Island was eventually sold to the State of Georgia in 1978 for half of its estimated value, the stipulation being its adoption as the state's first Heritage Preserve. This meant, no development could ever occur and the property would remain open for educational, scientific and cultural study.

Eleanor was given a "life estate" of 23 acres and could maintain the family home, in which she lived full time from 1987 until 2016.

It isn't difficult to imagine all that a person may endure during 108 years, and Eleanor certainly led a rich and full life – a far cry from the sixteen-year-old girl we all know from the painting in the Music Room.



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The Girl in the Painting

(continued from page 3)

Points of interest about Eleanor Ford Torrey:

- Received the nickname “Sandy” in 1935, while on a trip with her good friend, Elizabeth Pool. A stranger had called them “Sandy and Rusty.” The nicknames stuck for both women, who would remain great friends for over seventy years.
- She is an author and has written two books: *Maria Bosomworth and William Rodgers* (1976), which is a children’s picture book about the life of a piglet, and *The God of the Hinge: Sojourns in Cloud Cuckoo Land* (2006). The second book was co-authored by her good friend Elizabeth Pool and is a fantastical tale of their travels.
- Ossabaw Island inspired her to begin painting at age 57.
- During her negotiations to preserve Ossabaw Island, she met with Jimmy Carter, who had yet to be elected President of the United States.
- March 2 is Eleanor Torrey West Day in the state of Georgia.



Other points of interest regarding Eleanor and the Wyandotte Museums:

- About fifteen years ago, Wyandotte Cultural and Historical Commissioners, Shirley Prygoski and Anne Ronco, along with Anne’s sisters, traveled to Ossabaw Island and met with Eleanor Ford Torrey West.
- In 1986, Eleanor donated more than thirty items to our collections, including the painting and the mirror currently on display on the second floor of the Museum. This is reputed to be one of the first two pieces of plate glass made domestically.
- In 1986, appraisals were done on all of the items donated by Eleanor. The painting of her on her sixteenth birthday was valued at \$3,500.00. The artist, Ellen Emmet Rand (1875-1941) was renowned and also painted the likenesses of many politicians, including President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Farewell, Eleanor Ford Torrey West. You made a lasting impression on conservation through your efforts in Georgia and the Wyandotte Museums thanks you for all you did throughout the years to support us.

What's Happening at the Bacon Library?



Any homeowner knows that old houses need lots of upkeep; old mansions need even more. It's true of the 1897 Ford-Bacon home.

You may have noticed that a construction boom lift, also referred to as a cherry picker, has taken up residence near the front of the Bacon Library. It's part of a major renovation of the historic home's wrap-around porch.

Throughout the years, as wind, rain, snow, ice and age have taken their toll, the venerable Queen Anne style structure has undergone more than half a dozen major renovations. Masonry and concrete work, roof replacements, new windows, a total renovation of the 1962 annex, a new wiring system, the implanting of a four level elevator and a geothermal heating system were all six figure projects that disrupted library operations but were necessary upgrades.

The current construction is really two projects. Both sets of stairs off the back parking lot have been replaced with metal stairs. Awnings will be added to shield against rain and snow. The previous concrete stairs were crumbling largely as a result of the salt applied over many winters.

An even more involved project is the renovation of the front porch of the Ford-Bacon house. The entire veranda was wearing away from the foundation to the roof and will be restored. The columns will be repaired and painted. Tuck pointing is needed and the mosaic tiles will be repaired. Construction will continue throughout the winter with plastic sheeting protecting the workers from the elements.

All these endeavors will keep the building functional and preserve its stately appearance for another generation to enjoy.

Eleanor's Family China Set

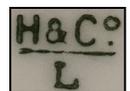
If you've ever toured the historic Ford-MacNichol home then you may have noticed the beautiful collection of fine china on display in the cabinet in the formal dining room. This beautiful collection of chinaware was donated to The Wyandotte Museums by Eleanor Ford Torrey West in 1986, and is now a part of our permanent collection. The pieces, which belonged to Eleanor's maternal grandmother, Ella Neat, are all Limoges with a floral, bird, and butterfly pattern trimmed in gold.



Limoges porcelain has a rich history in itself. It is important to note that the term *Limoges* does not refer to one specific type of design, brand, or company. The term *Limoges* comes from the area of France in which kaolin clay was discovered in the latter half of the 18th century. Kaolin clay was a necessary ingredient for making hard-paste porcelain, which could then be fired at extremely high temperatures to produce a luminous surface ideal for decorating. At the time of its discovery and in the centuries that followed, there were many different brands and companies that produced Limoges porcelain products.

The most famous of the Limoges brands and chief supplier of Limoges porcelain in the United States was the Haviland porcelain factory, started by David Haviland. The Haviland brand was so popular, that it eventually was commissioned to create patterns for various Presidents, including President Roosevelt and President Lincoln, to name a few.

Eleanor's family china set is marked on the bottom with "H&Co. L", indicating that they are Haviland Limoges pieces likely created after 1898. What an amazing piece



of history! The Wyandotte Museums are happy to honor Eleanor and her generous donations by exhibiting these lovely works of art for generations of guests to enjoy.

Natalie Pantelis

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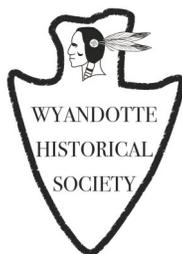
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The 2021 HERITAGE EVENT SERIES

Begins MAY 14, 15 & 16 with the Spring City Wide Garage Sale and continues:

JUNE 27—Pie & Ice Cream Social

OCTOBER 15 & 16—Historic Cemetery Walk

AUGUST 28—Wyandotte Stars Annual Home Classic

OCTOBER 22—Halloween Open House

SEPTEMBER 10, 11 & 12—Fall City Wide Garage Sale

DECEMBER 3, 10 & 17—Festive Fridays

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