

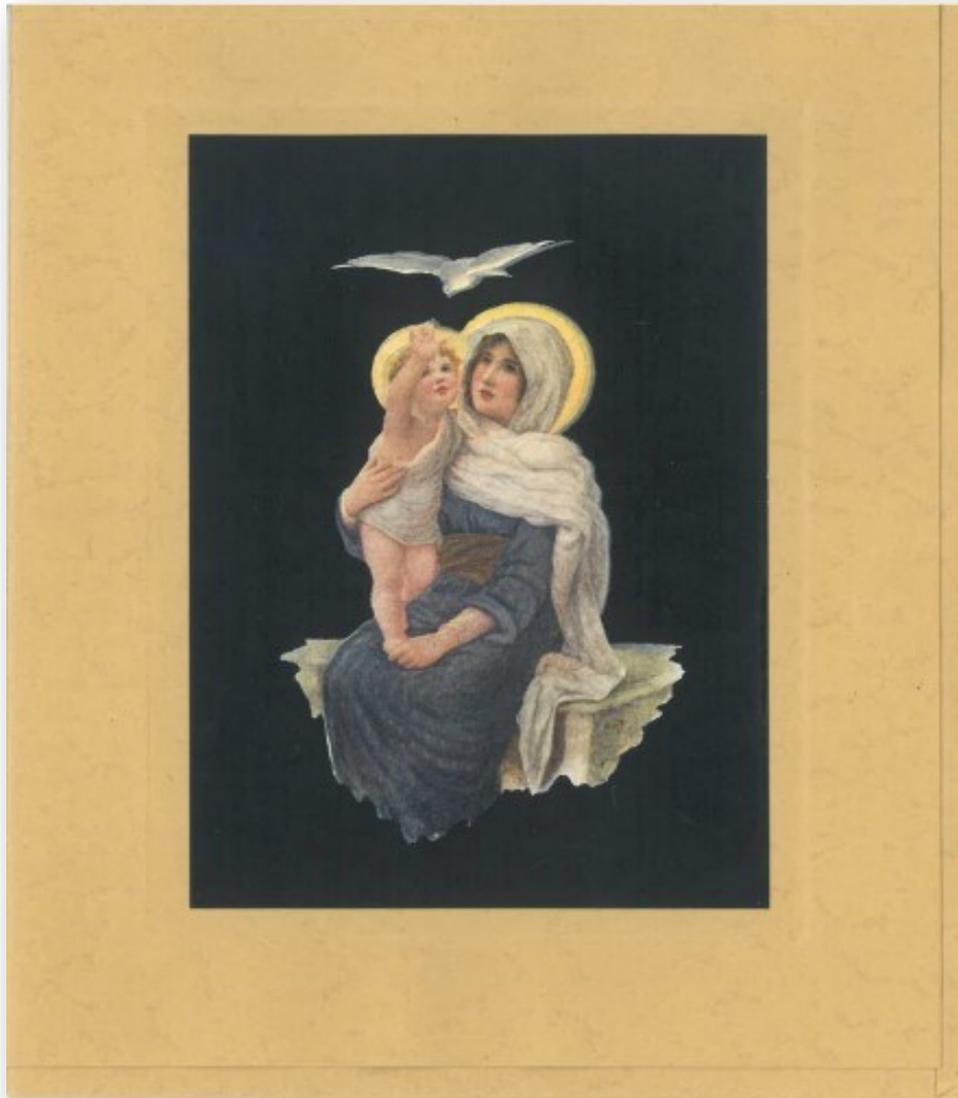
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WYANDOTTE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 2021

VOLUME 12



**WITH THE BEST
OF ALL GOOD WISHES
FOR CHRISTMAS AND
THE COMING YEAR**

The unelaborate card and greeting above are reminiscent of the simple, spiritual celebration of Christmas in the early days of Wyandotte.

(continued on page 3)

LETTER FROM THE PREZ

Dear Members of the Historical Society,

Christmas is a favorite time for so many of us, a tradition we share with each other, celebrating the love, peace, and joy of the birth of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. My Christmas blessing to all of you is:

THE FIRST TIME JESUS CAME

He came veiled in the form of a child.
 A star marked His arrival.
 Wise men brought Him gifts.
 There was no room for Him.
 Only a few attended His arrival.
 He came as a baby.

THE NEXT TIME JESUS COMES

He will be recognized by all.
 Heavens will be lit by his glory.
 He will bring rewards for his own.
 The world won't be able to contain His glory.
 Every eye shall see Him.
 He will come as Sovereign King and Lord of all.

John F. MacArthur Jr.

Merry Christmas to all the members of the Wyandotte Historical Society from my family to yours.

Happy Holiday
 Chris and Melanie Stieler

Newly Elected President and Trustee

Congratulations to Mary-Johna Wein, our newly elected President for 2022, and to our newly elected Trustee, Kaylyn Crayne. They were elected at the General Membership Meeting on November 12.

SANTA PROGRAM *cancelled*

I am very sorry to let everyone know that the Santa Program has been cancelled for this year. After some discussion about COVID numbers continuing to rise instead of lowering as hoped, a joint decision was made by the Society Board and Library staff to cancel the program.

We want to keep everyone safe and decided this is the best way to do that. I hope to see you all next year.

Have a wonderful holiday season.

Beth Labadie, Vice President

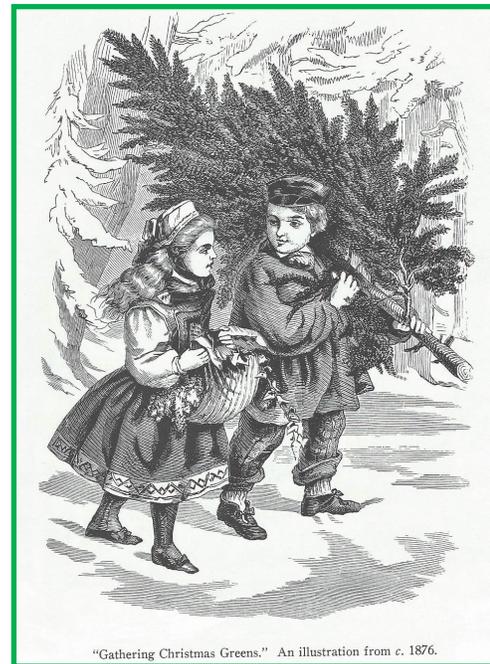
THE MUSEUM HOME

The grand old Ford MacNichol Home just celebrated its 125th birthday. The visitors for the 125th anniversary celebration enjoyed the new special exhibits, followed by refreshments at the Marx Home.

As part of the celebration, visitors received custom ordered key chain commemorating the special occasion as gifts from the Historical Society. Now a limited supply of these key chains are available for purchase in the Biddle Shop on the second floor of the Ford MacNichol Home.

Hope you had a wonderful Thanksgiving!

Ken Navarre, Treasurer



**Please Welcome
 Our Newest Members!**

Jacqueline Kolakowski
 and
 Mary Smith

WITH THE BEST OF ALL GOOD WISHES

(continued from the cover page)

The Christmas card on the cover is from the Wyandotte Museums Archives of church artifacts. We don't know much about the Christmas card, except that it was from a church in Wyandotte.

With so many churches in Wyandotte, It is hard to image the village of Wyandotte without any church in the early 1800s. In 1816 John Stewart, "a freeman of color", did come to the Wyandot of Anderdon Nation in their village of "Maquaqua" (later to become Wyandotte) as a Protestant Methodist Missionary, but a church was not built then. The question of course is: What was the first church in Wyandotte?

The First Congregation

In 1855 the Methodists did form the first congregation in the Village of Wyandotte under James E. Davidson at the home of Leander and Maria Ferguson on Front Street (now Van Alstyne Street) and Elm Street. Later the meetings were held in the Old Brown School on Chestnut Street, between Biddle Avenue and First Street. (Later it was moved.) The services held there were per the New England practices with the men on one side of the room and the women on the other side.

In 1861, the first Methodist church building was dedicated at the corner of Oak and Biddle Avenue, on the same site as the present-day church. The building was a New England style architecture with a spire scaling skyward outside and a wooden carved old fashioned pulpit flanked by lamps inside. On June 12, 1899 the cornerstone of the new, existing building was set and later on that year on November 26 the new First Methodist Church was completed.



The First Church

As the Eureka Ironworks grew in the mid-1950s, Irish Catholics working there, lived in Wyandotte and walked or drove a horse and buggy to Ecorse every Sunday to attend mass at St. Francis Xavier. It was not an easy route as it is today. The streets roads were not paved; they were dirt and muddy when it rained. It was determined that a church was needed in the Village of Wyandotte

In 1857, the first church was completed in Wyandotte, but it wasn't St. Patrick's Church. It was St. Charles Roman Catholic Church! It was built on land given to Reverend Peter Paul Lefevere by the French from Ecorse Township and dedicated to St. Charles Borromeo, who was born at a castle near Milan Italy, his father being a Count and his mother from the House of Medici.

St. Charles Church was a simple two-story structure, the first floor used as the rectory and the second floor used for religious services, but its grounds were not simple. The setting for the church building was beautiful with a lovely pond on which white swans floated around.

In 1873, the cornerstone of a larger and more elaborate church building was laid to be made of brick with stained glass windows like those in the "Old Country." However, high winds razed one of the walls and as rolling mills shut down, parishioners lost their jobs.

Finally in 1891 construction resumed and the church was completed and dedicated as St. Patrick's Church. By 1906 St. Charles was run down; demolished and a new brick school was built in its place.

More Churches

Before Wyandotte officially became a city in 1867 additional churches were built and became focal points in our community. Their history remains to be told...

- 1859 – St Stephen's Episcopal
- 1861 – Trinity Lutheran
- 1870 – St. Joseph's Roman Catholic
- 1870 – St. John's Evangelical
- 1888 – St Patrick's Roman Catholic (on the land of St. Charles)
- 1892 – Congregational
- 1894 – Immanuel Lutheran
- 1896 – First Baptist
- 1899 – Our Lady of Mount Carmel Roman Catholic

...as well as the history of all the churches built in the 1900s in Wyandotte.

We are blessed to have some a rich religious heritage!

Jane (Gies) Rasmussen

The Feast of the Seven Fishes

Like many other Wyandotters, I have an Italian background – Cinisi, Sicily to be specific. My great-grandfather, Procopio Pizzo, immigrated to Detroit from southern France in 1930. He was 17 when he left France and arrived to Ellis Island from the S.S. Patria. When he planted his boots in the Detroit area, he married my great-grandmother; worked many jobs, and had three children. They lived on Antoine Street for a spell, but also moved around to Detroit and Southgate. For my family and I'm sure for many other Wyandotters, Christmas is a time to come together and celebrate tradition and I was unaware of a food tradition rooted in Italian immigration that still continues today.

The Feast of Seven Fishes is an Italian-American tradition that takes place on Christmas Eve. It began in the late 19th century as Italian immigrants made their way to the United States. Italy is an incredibly diverse country with 110 provinces in 20 regions with many different subcultures, each with their own holiday traditions. For example, families in Piemonte celebrate with agnolotti, or pasta filled with meat; in Rome, they have minestra di pesce, a fish based soup; and in Sardegna, they can't have Christmas Eve dinner without malloreddus, which is little gnocchi served in a sauce with tuna and cherry tomatoes. Every Italian family is different, but when all types of Italians came together in the "New World," a lot of traditions were blended which led to the start of the Feast of Seven Fishes.

In 19th century America, pasta and fresh ingredients that would normally go into Italian cooking were incredibly expensive and hard to find. Pasta in any form was not accepted yet into American society. It was considered gross and a "poor man's food" because Italians were thought of as being the lowest of the low for "new immigrants." In New York City shops with pasta and other Italian ingredients would hike up the prices to almost quadruple the original value in Italy to monetize off of the nostalgia of the struggling Italian people. However, Italian families still paid the price on special occasions for quality food that reminded them of home, thus the Feast of Seven Fishes was born.

The Feast of the Seven Fishes is a rekindling of old country heritage. Fish was a proper meal for Christmas Eve in Italy because of Catholic traditions on abstaining from meat and dairy during the eves of certain holidays. Seafood is very common in Italy in general and its connection to the sea has been very important to Italians since ancient times. In the U.S., fish was also relatively cheap compared to other animals during this time. The association with the number seven is connected to the appearance of the number in the Bible and other Catholic symbols. Think of the seven sacraments, seven deadly sins, and the seven days of creation. In fact, the number seven is repeated more than 700 times in the Bible.

The feast features seven-courses of seafood made in a variety of ways (with pasta, vegetables, salad, etc.) which usually includes: baked clams, fried smelts, baccalá (fried or sauteed salted whitefish), scungilli (conch), mussels, calamari, and lobster. Of course, it's up to the individual on what they want to serve but the best is always saved for last – but I have no idea how anyone could fit all of that in their stomach.

The holiday is still celebrated today, though not as much as it once was. There's actually a graphic novel called "The Feast of The Seven Fishes", that also became a movie released in 2018, which is about an Italian boy bringing his Protestant girlfriend to the feast to meet his family and funny chaos ensues.

The feast was a time of year where immigrants spent what little money they had on treating themselves and their families to a good meal, and it was a great way for new Italian immigrants to combine their Catholic and Old World traditions in their new country.



Audrey Wicklander, Museum Assistant

WANDERING OAKWOOD

A Christmas Remembrance for the Forgotten

On August 15, 1842 Sarah Drew and John Wells gave birth to John H. Wells in Clear Lake, in the County of Steuben, Indiana. The county is known for having a rich history of abolitionist and many stops on the Underground Railroad. While John only lived in the county during his childhood this could be one of the reasons he enlisted in the infantry as soon as he did.

On August 18, 1861 at the age of 19, John enlisted in the 16th Michigan Infantry Regiment. At the start of the Civil War there were 761 officers and men enrolled in this regiment. During the battle of Gettysburg these men defended Little Round Top. The monument on Little Round Top reads: *"Regiment held this position during the afternoon and night of July 2, 1863, and assisted in defeating the desperate attempts of the enemy to capture Little Round Top. Present for duty 17 officers, 339 men total 356. Casualties: 3 officers 20 men killed, 2 officers 32 men wounded, 3 men missing. Total 60."*

On April 9, 1865 General Robert E. Lee surrendered at Appomattox Court House. The Wyandotte Herald wrote "Mr. Wells served all through the civil war, and was near General Grant when General Robert E. Lee surrendered at Appomattox." Mr. Wells mustered out on July 8, 1865.

After the war John married Catherine Ames. Together they had several children and many grandchildren. John's obituary even noted that his grandson Joseph McCrea was the traffic officer for the City of Wyandotte. Mr. Wells passed away in December of 1934. He is buried in Oakwood Cemetery along with his wife.

Often times we see the dash on a headstone and forget that it represents an entire lifetime. Unfortunately John and his wife are in an unknown location in the cemetery, with hundreds of other people buried there who have been lost in time.

Join us Sunday December 19, 2021 from 3:30 pm to 5:30 pm at the historic Wyandotte Oakwood Cemetery to honor and celebrate the lives of those who came before us with a candlelight tribute.

For more updates and information regarding the event, check the Facebook page "Friends Of Wyandotte Oakwood Cemetery".

Mary-Johna Wein, President
Wyandotte Oakwood Cemetery Association

FESTIVE FRIDAYS at the Ford-MacNichol Home

'Tis the season to be jolly! Wyandotte Museums staff and volunteers are excited to invite everyone to our Festive Fridays at the Ford-MacNichol Home, where guests can experience a traditional turn-of-the-20th-Century holiday.

Greenery will be spread throughout the main floor along with other decorations such as popcorn and cranberry strings, paper ornaments and period postcards. A full-length tree will be on display in the



formal parlor, complete with holiday gifts beneath. In the dining room, we will celebrate the origins of the holiday with a tabletop German feather tree and accoutrements. Smells of pine will emanate from each room and the sounds of Christmas music will fill the air.

After visiting the Ford-MacNichol Home, take a stroll two doors down to the historic 1862 Marx Home where you will hear the lovely melodies of holiday tunes from our player piano. Decorations will also be on display and guests will be able to take a look at the first-floor rooms.

We hope you will join us for the festivities in December! Admission is free (donations welcomed) and the Biddle Shop will be open on the second floor of the Ford-MacNichol Home. Festive Fridays are from 5:00pm to 8:00pm, December 3, 10 & 17.

Can't make it to our Festive Fridays? Contact staff to schedule your very own tour during the month of December or drop in during normal tour times, Thursdays through Sundays from 1:00pm-5:00pm.

Happy Holidays to You!!!

-Jesse Rose, Museum Director

Return Service Requested

Wyandotte Historical Society

Burns Home

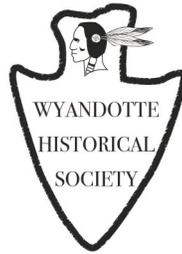
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Festive Fridays are Dec 3, 10, 17 from 5:00 pm to 8:00 pm at the Ford MacNichol Home at 2610 Biddle and at the Marx Home.

The Museum will be closed for tours in January and February as Museum staff plan exhibits for 2022.

The Museum will reopen for tours on Thursday, March 3, 2002.

Wyandotte Historical Society Board of Directors

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