

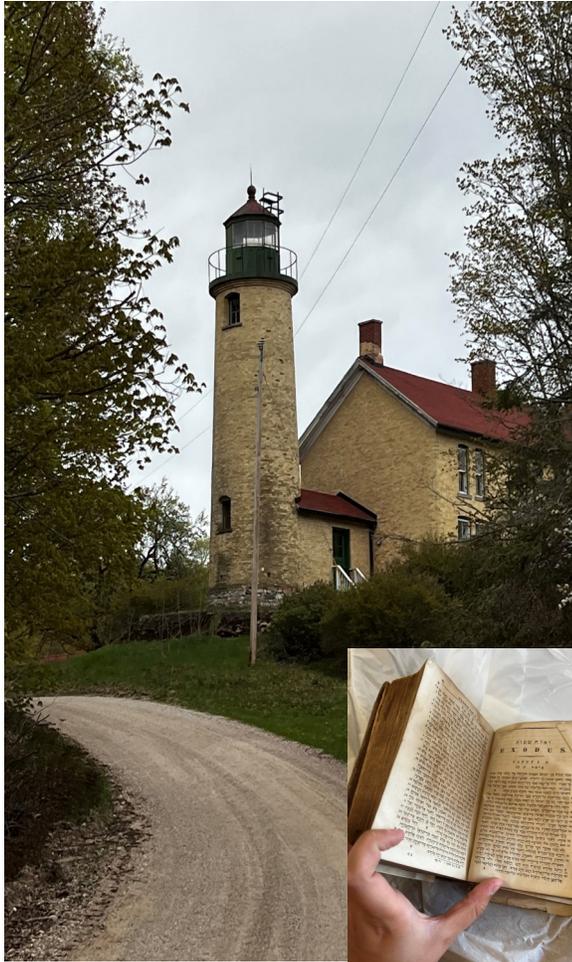
- EST. 1958 -

WYANDOTTE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

JULY 2022

VOLUME 7



What do these pictures have in common?

The pictures above to the left are of the Beaver Head Lighthouse on Beaver Island, Michigan and the Strang bible whose history is related to Beaver Island. The picture to the right at the top is of the Wyandotte Cartage Company as it looked in the early 1960s, on Oak St. at the railroad tracks. The Cheplick family owned that company and the property at 3642 8th St., pictured to the right above, as it looks today.

So what do these pictures have in common? Very little, except that they were research projects of two students in different stages of their education, with zeal for Wyandotte's history. To learn more about these students and their projects, read "Audrey's Adventures on Beaver Island" and Clyde's "Historical Research 101" inside this newsletter and enjoy and be inspired by what these students in our community are doing.

MESSAGE FROM THE PREZ

Did you know the Wyandotte Historical Society was founded 64 years ago? In 1958 you could get a gallon of gas for \$0.24, a loaf of bread for \$0.19, and a postage stamp for only \$0.04. As time goes on prices have increased and people have come and gone. However with all of your love, support, volunteering and membership renewals the society is still around.

It is my great honor to announce our newest lifetime member, Nancy Lange. Nancy has donated thousands of hours of her time volunteering at the Historical Society and at the City of Wyandotte Museum functions. I have worked with Nancy on tea parties, the Cemetery Walk, tours, and a variety of other events throughout the years.

Nancy holds a place near and dear to my heart. When I first started volunteering at the Museum she gladly gave me a tour of the Ford-MacNichol Home. She pointed out all of her favorite artifacts and told me interesting facts about Wyandotte and the home. We started hosting tea parties with Shirley Prygoski and boy did we have fun!

Nancy was born and raised here in Wyandotte and graduated from Roosevelt High School, Class of 1952. She spent over twenty-five years working at the Michigan Bell Company until her retirement. Today you can find Nancy spending time with her three daughters, gardening, visiting Greenfield Village, reading, and of course volunteering for the Historical Society and the Museum.



Congratulations Nancy!!!
Mary-Johna Wein, President

More About Nancy Lange

Nancy Lange has been a true asset to the City of Wyandotte. When I began as a volunteer in 2012, she helped me excel as a docent, providing me with historical information about the Ford-MacNichol Home and the families who lived there. When I became a guide during the Cemetery Walk, Nancy gave me pointers on how to be successful. She has inspired and helped countless other volunteers over the years and continues to be a dedicated volunteer and friend.

On behalf of the Wyandotte Museum, I'd like to congratulate Nancy on attaining lifetime membership to the Wyandotte Historical Society!



Jesse Rose, Museum Director

Audrey's Adventure on Beaver Island

Hi all WHS Newsletter readers! As some of you know, I am Audrey Wicklander – the Museum Assistant here at Wyandotte. I grew up in Wyandotte; started as an intern at the Museum in 2020, and was hired as the Museum Assistant in March 2021. I am about to graduate in August from Eastern Michigan University with my Masters in Historic Preservation with a concentration in Museum Practice and Heritage Interpretation (with a further interest in collections management). To graduate, every student in the program has to complete field school, essentially a week-to-two-week trip generally in Michigan or the Midwest. This year my class went to Beaver Island off of the coast of Charlevoix. There were 17 students and 3 teachers on the trip. To start, here's a very condensed version of the island's weird history:



The island was long inhabited by Native Americans until White settlers came in the 1800s. It became a very prosperous fishing, trading, and logging center in the Great Lakes region due to its ideal harbor. Less than 100 people lived on the island in the 1840s, until a large group of Mormons forced them off the island only ten years later.

In the early 1840s, James Jesse Strang was a failed New York lawyer who always thought he was destined to accomplish great things and become a very powerful man. In 1844, he met Joseph Smith and converted to his new religion as a means to accomplish his destiny. Strang was assigned a leadership role over a sect of Mormons in Wisconsin when Smith was killed. Brigham Young was slated to become the next leader of Mormonism when Strang conveniently found a letter written by Smith that stated that Strang will be the next leader of the Mormons. Not many believed him and subsequently, Strang and his hundreds of followers were exiled from the larger Mormon community. Strang and his Strangites first went to Illinois then to Wisconsin, where Strang said he spoke to angels who lead him to buried brass plates and told him he would lead a great kingdom on an island. From there, they all left to Beaver Island and started their kingdom in 1848.

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Audrey's Adventure on Beaver Island

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Year by year, the Strangite community grew and eventually they voted Strang to the Michigan House of Representatives. The earlier settled islanders did not like the Mormon's way of life and the 'War at Whiskey Point' happened, which the Mormons won. Most of the native islanders left by the early 1850s after the Mormons excluded all gentiles from partaking in any economic activities on the island. The Mormons built the town of St. James, the main roads and homes, and started the first newspaper of northern Michigan. Strang eventually crowned himself King and took on multiple wives (something he was against when he first joined the Mormons). "Mormon atrocities" came to light by surrounding Michigan communities (such as Mackinac Island) and ensuing legal battles occurred, along with more physically violent altercations. It came to a head in 1856 when Strang was shot outside of the Mormon Print Shop by two disgruntled followers. He was transported to Wisconsin and died shortly after. The rest of his followers were swiftly forced off the island by citizens of Mackinac Island. Today there are no Mormons on the island.

After 1856, the island was slowly repopulated by Irish fishermen who jumped on the opportunity to take over the abundant fishing and logging industries. By the 1880s, there were 881 year-round residents and it was the largest provider of freshwater fish in the country. The island went through ebbs and flows in industry and population after the Industrial Revolution and World Wars I & II. Now there are less than 700 residents (mostly Irish) who live there year-round and their main industry is tourism.

During this trip we had two goals: create a plan for the adaptive reuse of the Beaver Island Head Lighthouse and its surrounding structures and split off into three groups to complete tasks for either Charlevoix County or the Beaver Island Historical Society (BIHS). The main reason BIHS and the County raised money for us was to strategize how to deal with the lighthouse. The lighthouse is on the very southern tip of the island and was originally built in 1858 but has gone through many renovations. It was abandoned in the 1960's when it was automated and it has not had any sort of repair since 2005. Its deteriorating state is pretty bad. New dry wall and floors need to be put in and lead paint and mold need to be removed – but that is just to make it safe for people. What we were really there for was to make a plan for the lighthouse, its keepers' quarters, and the adjoining lighthouse school complex that shut down in 2015.

Our first two working days on Monday and Tuesday were spent in groups coming up with various plans for the area. My groups plan was to turn the complex and lighthouse into an artist's residency program – where artists come for a pre-determined amount of time, pay a fee for housing, food and materials, and create their art while also teaching workshops. Another groups idea was to turn the buildings into a camping complex. In all of our ideas, the lighthouse itself would stay an interpretive area about the history of the lighthouse and the island, but the keeper's quarters would become a shop and/or apartments for rent. It is important to understand that the southern half of the island is very sparsely populated, there are already four museums on the island, and the county commissioners who own the lighthouse need to have some revenue from our ideas. We gathered our plans and now they are in the commissioner's hands... but the wheels of government turn slow so I am sure it will be a while before they decide on anything – if they even decide to go with one of our plans at all.

Wednesday through Saturday was spent in different groups doing other tasks. Students were divided into three groups: the museum collections group, the lighthouse restoration group, and the architectural drawing group. Naturally, I was in the first group with our program director and museum expert, Nancy Villa-Bryk. Nancy was a curator at the Henry Ford for over 20 years (as well as working for other museums and consulting). She knows museum collections like the back of her hand and I am very privileged to study underneath her. Myself, Nancy, and four other students tackled creating a collections policy and disaster plan, and also inventoried the entire BIHS collection. BIHS operates two museums (the Mormon Print Shop Museum and Marine Museum) as well as a rustic cabin owned by one of the most famous non-Mormon islanders, Feodor Protar. Their collections storage is in the Mormon Print Shop Museum and we inventoried all 153 boxes in their collections by the end of Saturday. I handled all of the Mormon artifacts in the Society's collection, including the Hebrew bible of "King" James Strang.

It was a very busy and tiring nine days but it gave me invaluable in-the-field knowledge of how different local museums operate. As I am also the Collections Manager at the Dearborn Historical Museum, this project gave me some great ideas about what could be done at both the Wyandotte and Dearborn Museums. Real world experience is what this trip was all about. It was great to go out and learn more about other collections procedure and policy and fascinating Michigan history.

Audrey Wicklander, Museum Assistant

Historical Research 101

By Clyde Granzeier

I spent most of my growing up immersed in Wyandotte history, as both of my parents were involved in the Wyandotte Historical Society and the Wyandotte Museum and got me involved and interested in them at a young age. One of my favorite memories from growing up was wearing an Uncle Sam hat and collecting donations for the Museum at the 4th of July Fireworks (which I guess makes writing for the July newsletter a full circle of sorts). However, the main way I've gotten involved has been the Wyandotte Cemetery Walk, which I've been a spirit in almost every year since I was eight. This helped me discover that I love learning about and telling stories of what people's lives were like at different points in time. (It also doesn't hurt that it happens around my favorite holiday.)

I have finished my first year at The University of Michigan in Ann Arbor and hope to go into creative writing. This summer, I've been doing a volunteer internship for the Wyandotte Museum, which I've definitely enjoyed. It has involved a lot of interesting tasks (including helping to decorate for a wedding and getting covered in glitter in the process), but one of my main assignments has been handling research requests, which brings me to this article. I want to give a brief overview of what the process looks like, how you can go about doing your own research or helping others with theirs, and why research is one of my favorite parts of the internship.



First, I get a request sent my way to look into a specific topic. Usually, it's someone asking about their house's history, but I've also gotten requests for photographs of churches, the history of two business partners who ran a bar together, and information on multiple family businesses. Wyandotte's history is incredibly varied and it shows in the range of topics people request.

Once I know the information I need to find, my process tends to diverge based on whether it's information on a person or location. The Polk Directories are always a really good place to start for generalized research. They can usually provide information on occupation, addresses, possible connections to other people, and occasional details about organizations or businesses. This helps to give a timeline of a property or a person that I can use as a rough outline. Also, there are always old advertisements for movers, carpenters, optometrists, and more that are sometimes exactly the sort of thing people are looking for as a visual aid.

For people in history, a good place to get more information is on ancestry.com. The big benefit is that it has old U.S. Censuses which can provide a ton of vital info like birth date, place of origin, family, occupation, and level of education. My favorite part of using it, is learning about all the different places people in Wyandotte have come from, be it right next door in Ohio or across the Atlantic in Europe. It helps show how connected Wyandotte is to the rest of the world. Other information you can find on the website includes draft cards, marriage and divorce certificates, indices for death and burial, and the locations of graves. You can also sometimes find photos of the person you are researching. Once, when I was looking for information on the past residents of a house on Vinewood, I actually stumbled across photos of one of the owners back when he was in Glee Club in high school. It was a fun detail about his life I was happy to include in my research.

An important thing to know when using resources like these is that the person's name can be different from one document to another. This can typically be attributed to errors in the censuses and directories when it comes to getting their name, but they're usually similar enough that you can see the connection. The main things to look for are similar birth dates and overlapping family or spouses. Once you find them, you know you're on the right track.

For specific locations, there are two primary places I go for information. The first is the archives of the Wyandotte Museum. They're organized into categories based on various aspects of Wyandotte's history, and generally, if there's a specific topic I need to look into, there's likely already a box full of information on it. The archives contain a lot of specific artifacts and photos that, if they align with a research request, can really help in visualizing the information and bringing it to life. These can include old hymn books, pictures of the workers in the middle of building a new ship, and logs of memberships for various clubs within Wyandotte. Another helpful resource is the Museum's collection of books on Wyandotte history such as *Proudly We Record....* They help provide more information for specific locations and businesses (as well as people) within Wyandotte that helped to shape its history. They also contain a good number

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Historical Research 101

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of photographs that can be helpful for fulfilling requests that otherwise might be difficult to find photos for (or to just see how Wyandotte’s grown over the years).

Once I’ve searched the available sources for the research request, I compile all of the relevant information on a single document so that it can be accessed by others later on and sent to the person who made the request. Then, it’s on to the next request. There’s no shortage of people curious to learn about the past, so I never have to worry about a slow day of work. During my time working on these requests, I’ve also learned a few helpful tips for doing research.

The first is that the more different sources of information you can utilize, the better. Oftentimes, each record or artifact will focus on aspects of the topic that might go unnoticed elsewhere. There are a ton of sources available to the public and one of the biggest is the Bacon Memorial District Library. They offer access to older directories from the 1890’s to the 1930’s, a variety of old photographs and newspapers, free usage of ancestry.com for looking into Wyandotte residents, and a lot more helpful sources of information.

Second, don’t hesitate to reach out to others for help when you’re trying to find what you’re looking for. Research is an innately collaborative process and there are a lot of people in Wyandotte who would love to work with you on discovering a part of the city’s history and who can help get you access to more sources of information. Two groups I definitely recommend if you’d like help with research or want to access more resources are the Bacon Memorial District Library online at <https://www.baconlibrary.org> and the Wyandotte Museum via their email, museum@wyandottemi.gov.

Finally, make sure to set aside time to get your research done. Even seemingly small or straightforward topics are a rabbit hole of different stories that can take hours to just form an overview. A good example is when someone asked for a brief look at the previous owners of their house. I ended up spending most of the day seeing how this house traded hands from a patternmaker to a master mechanic and fireman, to an optometrist, and to an investigator/healthcare worker. In short, if you think something will take an hour, it’s best to give yourself an extra four or five just to be safe.

Research is definitely one of my favorite parts of volunteering for the Museum. I think the best way to describe it is like piecing together information from all of these seemingly disparate sources and turning it into an overarching story. Even just taking a look at everyone who occupied a house becomes fascinating, as you get to learn about the different lives within it at different times. In short, the process, no matter how long it takes, is always engaging, and the end result is always satisfying. I hope that this article helps you with your own research, and I wish you the best of luck in finding out more about the past!

**IN MEMORIAM
BERNIS FOX**

Bernis Tuttle Fox will be fondly remembered by so many of us, young and old. A member of the Wyandotte Historical Society since 1978, she was born on September 14, 1920 and lived an amazing life of 101 years and 8 months. She loved music and touched so many people’s lives.

After receiving her BA degree in 1942 with a major in music and a minor in health, she became a band director and taught girls choir and physical education. Two years later, she wanted to serve her country and was accepted into the Red Cross program as an entertainment worker. She played piano and ran clubs that soldiers could safely visit while on leave. She was first stationed in the Philippines then in Korea where she met her husband, 1LT David A. Fox. They would go on dates in a jeep checked out from the Army motor pool.

When WWII ended, Bernis and Dave returned to the United States. They were married in 1947 and moved here to Wyandotte, Dave’s hometown. Bernis was a Wyandotte elementary music teacher for many years and traveled to several schools in our area, teaching a whole generation how to read music and play instruments. Bernis retired from teaching in 1968.

In 1975 Bernis and Dave purchased the home Dave was born in on Van Alstyne St. In addition to enjoying many happy years on the river, they visited all 50 states and Australia, the Caribbean, Panama Canal, and South America in retirement.

An active member of the First Presbyterian Church on Oak St., Bernis taught Sunday school; sang in the choir; played piano, and participated in many church events. She remained a member until the church closed on September 24, 2017, and played piano at the final service.

Wonderful, happy memories of Bernis will live on in our minds of and in the hearts of her children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren.



Return Service Requested

Wyandotte Historical Society

Burns Home

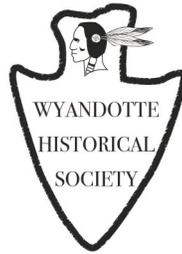
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Phone: (734) 324-7299

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- **Wyandotte Street Art Fair:** July 13 –16 from 10:00 am to 11:00 pm each day
- **Wyandotte Stars Annual Home Classic:** Saturday, August 27 at 1:00 pm at Memorial Field at 23rd St. and Pennsylvania
- **Fall City-Wide Garage Sale:** September 9, 10, 11

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