

Oceana County

Historical & Genealogical Society Newsletter

Web: oceanahistory.org

June, 2025

Email: info@oceanahistory.org

A Note from President Paul Erickson



School Children are Ripe in the Land of Mears....

June 2nd the Society hosted the Hart 4th Graders at the Museum in Mears.

Georgia Foster Dennison organized the kids to visit the Grounds and tour the exhibits. Our volunteers showed up in full force with enough documents to give a complete and informational tour.

Two school buses arrived, and the kids were divided into 7 groups with adult chaperones. They brought their lunches, so they could sit in the shade, and take a break. We stayed pretty busy with 7 groups, and fielded a lot of questions. This is why we do what we do, teach our children the past of our descendants.

We have a beautiful museum in Mears. The love of our donors and our volunteers has seen these grounds grow and blossom through the years. The new flower beds are underway, and much landscaping has been accomplished. Red's house is evolving into a Welcome Center, and our Agricultural Barn is open and very appealing. Forward thinking of our donors and members has made our little town a destination for visitors on vacation.

We are very fortunate to be able to do all of the important work, as well as enjoy the laughter and smiling faces of two buses full of 4th graders.

Please take the time this summer to visit us. Saturday and Sunday afternoons from 1 'til 4. We would love to have you visit and perhaps find a way that you may be able to contribute to this very worthy endeavor.

Sincerely,

Paul



WELCOME
Open Wednesdays
10-5
If you would like to
do research
at the
Chadwick-Munger House,
We will be happy to assist you.

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OCEANA COUNTY HISTORICAL & GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

SLATE OF NOMINEES

Officers 2025-2027

Vice President: Carl Wiegand

Corresp. Sec.: Claire Marshall

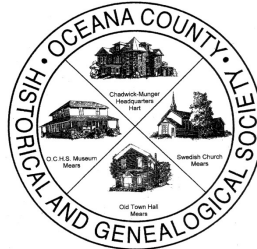
Treasurer: Dennis Gale

Directors 2025-2028

Nominations Open

Nomination Committee 2025

Paul Erickson
Dean Gentel
Carmen Osborne
Sharon Hallack
Jan Lathers



June, 2025



Photo of
Paul Erickson

CURRENT OFFICERS & BOARD MEMBERS

Current Officers

President: Paul Erickson (2024-2026)
Vice President—Carl Wiegand (2023-2025)
Rec. Sec.—Sharon Hallack (2024-2026)
Cor. Secretary—Amanda Dodge (2023-2025)
Treasurer—Dennis Gale (2023-2025)
Past President—Walt Urick

Board Directors

Karen Urick (2024-27)
Mort Wiegand (2024-27)
Brad Moul (2024-27)

Tina Kinsley (2023-2026)
Dean Gentel (2023-2026)
Jeff Lathers (2023-2026)

Georgia Dennison (2022-2025)
Larry Osborne (2022-2025)
Ron Rash (2022-2025)

STATISTICS

QUERIES 7
GUESTS 47

NEW MEMBERS

Daniel L. Smith, Paw Paw
Teri Gray, Jensen Beach, Florida
Jennie Rice, Manistee

ANNUAL MEETING

Sunday, July 20, 2025

Transportation Museum
1981 Mears Street
Mears, Michigan

4 p.m.

Election of Officers, Board Members, &
Nominating Committee
Will Take Place



MISSION
STATEMENT
Oceana County
Historical &
Genealogical Society

THE BUSINESS AND
PURPOSE OF THIS
CORPORATION SHALL BE:

TO COLLECT, PRESERVE
AND DISSEMINATE
KNOWLEDGE OF THE
HISTORY OF OCEANA
COUNTY.

Quiz Question: When did Swift Lathers live on the Silver Lake Dunes?
Answer: See page 6

OCEANA COUNTY HISTORICAL & GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

CALENDAR OF EVENTS, 2025

June 7	MEARS MUSEUM OPEN WEEKENDS FOR VISITORS	[1-4 P.M.]
June 17	REGULAR BOARD MEETING	[2 P.M.]
July 1	MEMBERSHIP DUES ARE DUE	
July 20	ANNUAL MEETING	[4 P.M.]
August 17	PLEASANT AFTERNOON	[1-4 P.M.]
August 18-23	OCEANA COUNTY FAIR	

Thank you,
Nancy Tate,
For Planting
A Beautiful Garden
For The Society

It Is Beautiful!



**Does anyone have a picture of
the Elbridge School
when it was still the school?**

**Please let us know
231-873-2600**

**We are in only on
Wednesdays.**



OCEANA COUNTY HISTORICAL & GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Explore more stories of our state with *Michigan History*



SAVE NEARLY 60%

Save nearly 60% off the cover price by calling (800) 692-1828, visiting www.hsm.pub/subscribe, or scanning the QR code to the right.



Oceana County Historical & Genealogical Society Need YOU!

There are so many ways in which our volunteers add to the society, using their individual talents!



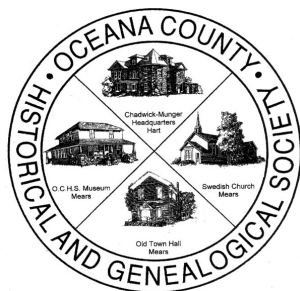
Filing!
Gardening! Caretaking! Auto Mechanics!
Cleaning!
Scrapbooking!
Organizing!
Cutting and Pasting!
Sharing Memories!
Setting Up Displays!
Helping Visitors! Researching!
Taking Pictures!
Taking Care of Donated Historical Items!
Thinking of ways to improve!
Coming up with new ideas!
Volunteering as a Docent at the Mears Museum!

OCEANA COUNTY HISTORICAL & GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Rental of Buildings
Mears Museum Complex
Call
231-873-2600

June

Please Consider Joining
Our Team of Volunteers
Whatever your interest is,
we invite you to come and enjoy our group
to share and to learn more
about Oceana County history.



Address

114 Dryden Street
Hart, MI 49420

Phone

231-873-2600

Email

info@oceanahistory.org

MEMBERSHIP

The lifeblood of our organization is the retention of our current members and the recruitment of new members. We could not provide all of the wonderful services and opportunities without your support! THANK YOU!!

In reviewing our current membership list there are five levels of membership available: Regular Annual Membership (\$20), Family Annual Membership (\$30), Senior Annual Membership (\$15), Life Membership (\$250) and Corporate Sponsor Annual (\$75).

We are reaching out today to challenge everyone to think of one person, business or family you might ask to join us. We are also challenging our regular membership if it fits their budget and giving goals if they might consider becoming Life Members. If you are unsure what membership you currently have, please contact the Society at 231-873-2600 or info@oceanahistory.org

So many exciting things are happening at the "Society" all the time! Interesting discoveries are made, new people join, people generously donate their time, treasure and talents and as a result our Oceana County history is preserved. Right now we are getting ready to renew our Guide By Cell audio tour subscription and working on a complete redesign of the Society's website - stay tuned!!

As funds allow we are keeping the everyday operations going while working to add new features and installations. Therefore we are challenging each of you, if you haven't renewed, please do so today. If you are not already Life Members please consider making your membership permanent. If you are so inclined and able, we would gratefully accept any donations over and above your regular membership (Regular, Senior, Family, Life, Corporate), and forward this email to others who may be interested in joining us!

This email is not being sent in desperation. Our organization's finances are holding and we intend to keep our mission going long into the future. We are simply reminding you we are here and this is truly an organization worth supporting.

Members receive our email newsletter with news and updates. We are working to bring more benefits to Members, but even that takes more members. Please consider renewing today!

THE OCEANA COUNTY HISTORICAL
& GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY
BOARD OF DIRECTORS

See page 7 for Membership information.

Ferry's Future 100 Years Ago

By Daniel Smith

At Condon School, the town's future looked bright to one Ferry teenager a few generations ago. The building that held Condon School still stands. It is nestled in the woods near Landon Lake in Ferry Township.

In 1905, Ruth Odessa (Smith) Hindes finished 8th grade there. She was eighteen years old. Of the sixteen children attending that year, three other students were also graduating. Ruth was the oldest. Requirements included passing a comprehensive exam at the District 7 school in Ferry and the completion of a written theme paper.

The writing project assigned to Ruth by Miss Lois Runner was to tell the past, present and future of Condon School. Unlikely as it seems, that theme paper still exists, carefully preserved in one of Ruth's scrapbook collections.

Ruth found writing about the school's history was easy. Both her mother, Mary (Minnie) P. (Converse) Smith, and her father, Herbert T. Smith, attended Condon. In the 1870's the school was housed in a log building. However, that burned and was replaced by the current frame structure that Ruth attended.

Writing about the school's present was no more challenging than telling its past. What really sparked Ruth's interest was telling about its future. She chose to picture the distant year of 1925, so her predictions were for a time one-hundred years ago. She focused on how her classmates would fare as adults, poking fun at Arthur Abbot, Conor Abbot and Ida Stephenson.

Imagine, if you can, Ferry as a city of 79-thousand. Ruth did. She predicted that by 1925 there would be a marvelous number of horseless carriages, electric, of course, because people recognized the dangers of gasoline. Grateful residents would no longer need to milk their cows by hand since they could own a patent milker.

Getting about by private cars for hire would be convenient. You'd find calling upon friends still a popular form of entertainment, but becoming an old maid or tolerating a busybody would still be notable problems which hadn't disappeared; and unfortunately, graying with age would still vex us.

Ruth's theme paper was a success. She later attended Shelby High School, graduating in 1911 at the age of twenty-four. Her eighteen-year-old sister, Grace, was valedictorian that year. Both went on to become revered school teachers, and many family members followed in their path. As for Ruth's 1925 predictions, the history of the future is always amusing.



Ruth

ANSWER: [Question on page 2]

Swift Lathers lived in his little village in the Silver Lake Dunes in 1929 as a part of the requirements for homesteading the property.

Oceana County Historical & Genealogical Society

MEMBERSHIP FORM

____ New Member ____ Renewal

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY: _____

STATE: _____ ZIP _____

EMAIL ADDRESS: _____

SEASONAL ADDRESS IF APPLICABLE AND DATES USED:

MEMBERSHIP DUES:

____ ANNUAL: \$20

____ SENIOR: \$15

____ FAMILY: \$30

____ LIFE: \$250

____ CORPORATE/ ORGANIZATION: \$75 (ANNUALLY)

PLEASE MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO: OCHGS

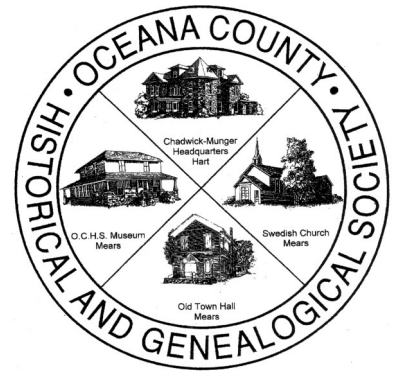
OCHGS

114 DRYDEN ST

HART, MI 49420

NEWSLETTER WILL BE MAILED ELECTRONICALLY UNLESS

OTHERWISE STIPULATED.



MEMBERSHIP

We appreciate your membership!
It helps to support this
completely volunteer, non-profit organization.

DUE: JULY 1, 2025



Prisoner of War Camps in Oceana County During World War II

By Dorothy Nienhuis

In the summer of 1944 the attention of most Americans was riveted on the progress of WWII in Europe and the South Pacific. But in Oceana County the farmers and food processors were alarmed at the shortage of workers. *Hart Journal* published lists of the sons, husbands and brothers who were answering the call to serve in the military. A headline read, "Oceana has reached the bottom of the man power barrel." Crops of all kinds needed to be harvested, and adequate workers were not available. The situation was desperate. The solution was to bring prisoners of war captured in Africa here through arrangements made by the Emergency Farm Labor program.

About 550 prisoners were transported from Fort Custer and housed in olive drab tents erected at the Shelby Athletic Field and the Hart Fairgrounds. They stayed here until October, so the Shelby Tigers had to play their home football games at Hart.

The prisoners were a godsend to the farmers and to the canning factories. In 1944 the prisoners at just the Shelby camp harvested crops valued at \$426,787 and they provided 16,636 man-days of labor on the farms and 10,423 at the processing plants. They harvested the fruit and vegetable crops. Their work saved snap beans and pickles from almost a total loss.

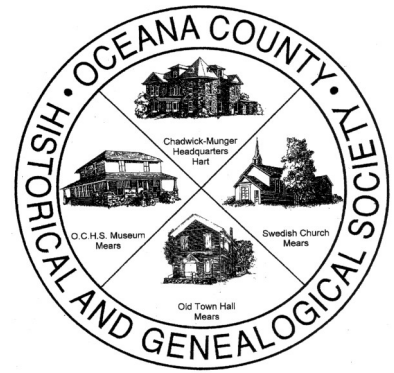
Delmar Kokx tells how his father would use a truck and trailer to bring ten prisoners and a guard from Hart. As a high farm boy he worked side by side with them threshing grain and picking pickles. He says they were a bunch of nice guys, young kids who had been dissatisfied to be fighting in the German army and were so happy to be here. They didn't want to go home. While the prisoners worked, the guard could sit under a tree and sleep; he didn't need to worry about any escapes. Alice Murdock and Lorna Reeds remember hearing them sing German songs at five in the morning on their way to the fields. Lorna says they had beautiful voices. Local citizens were not allowed to approach the camps although there were girls that tried. Barb Burmeister says local girls did date some of the guards; in fact, she dated one of the officers.

They were painstaking workers, and Lorna Reeds tells of an incident during cherry season when a motor burned out at a canning factory. When a prisoner learned that it would take a week to find a replacement, he offered to repair it. He went without dinner, worked all night, and the next day he had it in working order. The guards would often bring sweet rolls to the prisoners in the shops. Perhaps not all were willing workers. Most of the workers were willing, and if someone didn't work during the day, upon return to the camp, he was ordered to stand at attention for many hours with no chance of eating dinner.

Jerry Meyers tells of working along side of them to make a tennis court for New Era.

One garment factory worked shorter hours so their employees could also work in the processing plants. The Historical Society has many letters Mr. Royal received after the war. The former prisoners thanked him for how they were treated, and some wished they could return.

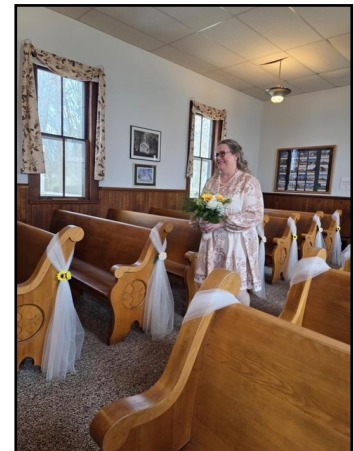


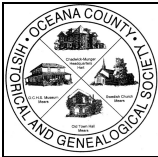


Pictured Left: Helen Norton (Porter).

Swedish Covenant Mission Church Wedding

**Congratulations to Mr. and Mrs. Eric Robinson
Married April 26, 2025
At Swedish Covenant Mission Church
Mears Historical Park**





OCHGS
114 DRYDEN STREET
HART MI 49420

METHOD OF DELIVERY/MAILINGS

If you wish to receive your newsletter electronically, please let us know by contacting us at
info@oceanahistory.org

By receiving the newsletter electronically, you will receive it more quickly, and the images will be clearer.
Those of you who wish to continue receiving the newsletter as a hard copy
will still be receiving your letter in the mail as usual.

Take care! Be safe!

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

Please notify us if you have a change of address.
Some members' newsletters have been returned to the Society.
If you are not receiving the newsletter, please contact us!

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