

Lake County History Center News

April—June 2017

Volume 58 Issue 2



History Begins with You!

Exhibit Opening and Annual Meeting on May 18

Be sure to visit the Lake County History Center to explore our new exhibits: In the South Wing “Voting Lake County” will be replaced by “Healing Hands of Lake County: Fear & Folly in 19th Century Medicine.” In the North Wing “Open for Business: The Crown Jeweler of Lake County” and “Doughboys of Lake County: A Centennial Salute.” In the front galleries “Haves Amidst the Have-nots: Dining with the Superintendent” replaces the temporary reception area and restores the room to its original use.

Highlights of the exhibits include:

- ◆ “Open for Business: The Crown Jeweler of Lake County” - An amazing recreation of the John Rich Jewelers store at the turn of the century, as well as fascinating information on the original engraving techniques used by the artisans.
- ◆ “Doughboys of Lake County: A Centennial Salute.” - The story of Henry Bishop Winsor, who fought in the Battle of the Somme during World War I and eighteen World War I propaganda posters with information on the original artists.
- ◆ “Haves Amidst the Have-nots: Dining with the Superintendent” - The recreation of the Lake County Home’s superintendents dining room, including the reinstallation of the door to the kitchen (now the volunteer kitchen).
- ◆ The entire South Wing dedicated to Medicine in the 19th Century in the exhibits of “Healing Hands of Lake County: Fear & Folly in 19th Century Medicine.” Learn the stories of the first female physician in Lake County, a beloved county doctor, the role of the Lake County Home in the health care of the poor, pioneer medicine and patent medicine and MUCH more.



Our official opening date is May 18, but several of the exhibits are completely installed now. Stop by!

CONTACT US

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Operations Manager—Kathie Purmal

Museum Collections: Lynn Vandevort

Youth Education Director: Tonya Busic

Sweet Victory!

Congratulations to Kendra O’Leary, who won the Christmas cookie jar at Home for the Holidays. We hope she enjoys it!

Women’s History Luncheon a Great Success!

Thanks to the hard work and creativity of Grace Richards, Kathy Kostecka, Tonya Busic and our wonderful First Ladies of Ohio, the annual Women’s History Luncheon was a great success!

Over 170 people enjoyed the fascinating program developed by Grace, assisted by Barb Whidden Skrocki and put on by her crew of actors Pat Brown, Jill Householder, Carol Ezzo, Elaine Courtney, Barbra Frank, Pam Judd, Beulah Shanks and Beth Youmans. And thank you to our many donors who enabled a large and successful basket raffle.



Digital Newsletter Available

For years, the printing of our newsletter was generously donated by a local company. Unfortunately, that is no longer the case and the cost of printing and mailing LCHS’s quarterly newsletter continues to increase.

You can help us save money by opting out of receiving the printed newsletter. If you would like to opt-out of the print newsletter and only receive it via email, please let us know. Send us an e-mail at research@lakehistory.org or by calling and leaving a message.

We appreciate you receiving our emails because they are the most cost effective way for us to reach you. The more money we save on communications, the more we can put towards the programs you love.

Sponsorships

Consider sponsoring an event at the History Center! Sponsorships start at \$250 and provide numerous perks and opportunities for marketing you or your company. For more information on sponsoring our 2017 programs, including the Mother’s Day Tea, Pancake Breakfast and Clam Bake, please contact the office.

Upcoming Events

Looking for an opportunity to enjoy the nice weather or spend some time with family? LCHS has a myriad of upcoming events* where you can make new memories! Join us at the museum and help support local history. See page 7 for registration information.

May 13th—1pm.....Mother’s Day Tea

May 18th—7pm..... Annual Meeting

June 18th—10am.....Pancake Breakfast

**Some events have a cover fee, please check with the office or go to our website for more information. Reservations 440-639-2945*

Heritage Hall Improvements

Be sure to stop by the History Center to see the beautiful new window dressings in Heritage Hall. Many thanks to Marian Redmond and her crew for spearheading the project and especially to Sheila Smith and Dick Frey for their generous support.



Become a Volunteer!

Volunteers are the life blood of the historical society. Our volunteers help throughout the history center with a wide variety of activities, including collections, exhibits, decorating, buildings and grounds, special events, educational programs, speakers bureau and much more. Join our crew of dedicated, passionate history lovers. Call us!

Volunteer Corner

Thank you to all of the volunteers who have come to our quarterly meetings. It is great to see so many of you again! And thank you to Lois Harrington and Carla Woodcock for helping with the meeting set up. There are several ways you can help this spring. The weather is breaking, which means that we need volunteers to help Buildings & Grounds do a basic clean up outside along with some gardening projects. We welcome Sue Louis to the Volunteer Association Board. You may have seen Sue around the History Center, she's cleaned the Martin dollhouses and the supply room. We still have open positions. Everyone is pulling together as a team and it shows. — JOE GREAVES

Volunteer

Thanks to all the volunteers who turned out Saturday, April 8 to learn about the many ways you can bring history alive in Lake County! Heritage Hall was standing room only as many existing volunteers brought friends and family. There is also an immediate need for volunteers for:

Pioneer School (May) 9:30am-12:30pm 1 day per week and Front Desk Reception 10am-2pm 1 day a week

For more information call 440.639.2945 or visit our website.

History Center Wish List

We couldn't survive without the generous donations of our members. Please consider helping by donating one of the following:

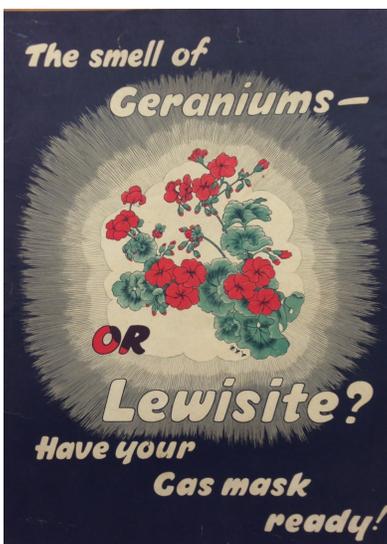
- Building material, including but not limited to
 - - Wood (poplar, etc.) in good condition for projects around the center
 - - Plywood
 - - Flooring (vinyl, etc.)
- - Newsletter Sponsors (to cover printing costs)

Your support is greatly appreciated.

The Mousetrap of Willoughby: Secret Gas Production

In July 1918, the Army arrived. Curious residents of Willoughby, OH were witness to the numerous servicemen flooding their area, all come to work at the governmentally-leased Ben Hur Automobile Factory. Previously abandoned, it now sported large barbed-wire fences and patrolling squads to deter snooping locals seeking the source of the odd smell wafting overhead.

Rubber was being made; or so goes the tale told to town natives. In actuality, the factory was the new home of methyl production, a liquid temporarily known as lewisite, the “Dew of Death.”



Poster cautioning against the smell of lewisite.

Dangerous From The Start. Though named for a different man, the beginnings of lewisite start with Father Julius Nieuwland and his dissertation on a black, tarry substance he discovered while experimenting with rubber. Sickened for some days after exposure to the noxious fumes given off, this imminently famous scientist resolved to never work with it again.

Captain W. Lee Lewis, however, did. After reading Nieuwland’s dissertation, he and his team began to search for safer methods of production hoping to use this arsenic-based compound in the currently ongoing war —WWI. This path of weaponry was already being exploited by the Germans who had used mustard gas and chlorine gas on their enemies.

Testing began on the American University campus in 1917, experiments starting before fully-functioning facilities were even completed. Much of the information was classified, even between co-workers. George Temple, head of the AU motor maintenance department, was one of a few men allowed access to

all buildings. He was, of course, sworn to secrecy.

Temple, along with some of his fellows, acted as volunteers for testing of experimental gases. One in particular left him with a large blister, nearly a half-inch in height, on his arm. The only subject to keep it intact, the blister was cast, photographed, painted, and entirely biopsied. This lewisite burn took eight weeks to heal. Unfortunately, some testing was conducted on the ignorant and unsuspecting, “volunteers” succumbing quickly to the effects of the exploratory substances being produced. Temple himself responded to a false work order and barely escaped a lethal dose of lewisite gas. He would later recount that, “More men were killed by gas on the experimental side than in actual use.”

The majority of “guinea pigs” were actually stray dogs from the area, tied up, gassed and their carcasses later shaved so autopsies could be done to study the effects. Monkeys, rabbits, and goats were also used.

US ARMY PRODUCES POISON GAS IN WILLOUGHBY

The Ben Hur Auto Factory: Leased by the newly created Chemical Warfare Service (CWS), the Ben Hur factory in Willoughby, because of its proximity to Cleveland’s railyards, was an ideal location to begin the process of making distilled, usable *lewisite*, similar to mustard gas,

The city was also home to a major CWS contractor, National Lamp Works, INC, who added the plant to their list of facilities. James Contant, later a president for Harvard University, was responsible for the military development of lewisite and arrived at the new plant on July 20, 1918. By the 26th, twenty-five soldiers had arrived for work, followed by many more. At peak occupancy, there was a total of 22 officers and 542 enlisted.

When first opened, the property’s only building was meant for office use, and the factory’s floor was simply hardened dirt and lacked water or sewage lines. With no existing base or housing available, contractors were hired to provide these as quickly as possible.

The men of the “mouse trap”, known as such since those stationed were initially unable to leave, soldiers traveled between the new plant and their temporary shelters. All were split between sleeping in tents or overcrowding the to-let rooms in Willoughby. A bowling alley was eventually commandeered for army use until the base’s completion in October.

Mealtimes were a similar struggle, scores of soldiers brought to town under guard for their food at local restaurants. Shift schedules at nearby businesses had to change in order for the volume of consumers to be accommodated.

The War Effort. This the lack of space did not hamper the heavy workload imposed upon those assigned to the plant, workers pushing through constant exhaustion and possible exposure.

In its purest form lewisite is colorless, oily, and smells faintly of geraniums. Containing arsenic, fast acting, and effective on a wider temperature range than mustard gas, it is a blistering agent, lung irritant and also a cellular poison that absorbs through the skin and other moist tissues. Eyes are considered particularly vulnerable. Because of this, workers and soldiers often wore specialized gas masks and suits to protect them. Miraculously, not a single death attributed to lewisite exposure was ever reported.

The 60-bed hospital run by the Mayo-Institute’s Dr. George Plummer, however, was often pushed to capacity during the entirety of the leasing period.

All the hard work was paying off; plans were made to start full scale production of 10 tons daily beginning Nov. 15, 1918 as the plant was two months ahead of schedule.

However, with the signing of the Armistice on Nov. 11th, lewisite was no longer needed for current combat and production was systematically halted. In December, orders were given for the plant to be dismantled and 300 servicemen to be discharged. By

March, everyone and everything was gone, the site returning to its original owners. It became the Ohio Rubber Company in 1919.

On Dec. 5, 1918 the *Willoughby Independent* ran an article finally revealing to residents the purpose of the army’s occupation of the Ben Hur factory though claiming only five people in the world knew exactly what happened behind the plant’s walls. The paper, and other publications, would go on to over-exaggerate the effectiveness of lewisite, claiming a single drop was lethal.

The Aftermath. Even with this reveal, the secret of actually *making* the compound was kept until later in the 1920s. Rumors disagree on how the product of the Willoughby plant was disposed of, some claiming burial on site (bottles were found in 1957 containing a lewisite mixture and were removed by the army), dumping into the Atlantic Sea, or the sinking of a ship carrying 150 tons.

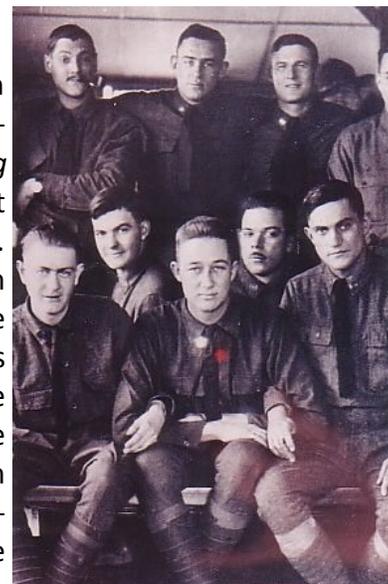


Photo soldiers who worked at the Ben Hur plant.

During WWII an antidote was made, called British Anti-Lewisite (BAL) or dimercaprol. All lewisite production was stopped around the same time given its difficult production and handling.

That has not stopped others from using the gas though, with reports of Germany doing their own experiments in WWI, Japan using it against China, Iraq attacking Iran in the 1980s, and the Soviet Union disposing of 132,000 unused tons by dumping the barrels into the Arctic Sea.

Surely to the relief of many, it seems the “dew of death” has now evaporated. — J. M. I.

Welcome New Members !

A special thank you to all of our members who have renewed their memberships this year and we welcome new members (listed below). We hope to see you at our upcoming events. Life & Platinum members are listed on a plaque in the lobby. Please visit soon!

Richard and Carol Johnson

Margaret Ladd

Mazie Adams

Marilyn Brandt

Janet Tokar

A 140' Cell Tower proposed for the property between the Maple Grove Grange and the Maple Grove Cemetery on River Road in Willoughby Hills Ohio

Late in 2016 my husband Chris and I started receiving information in our mailbox about a cell tower that was being proposed to be constructed on the Maple Grove Grange property on River Rd. in Willoughby Hills, just a short distance from our home. We didn't pay much attention to the information because we didn't realize the scope of the project. Once we realized the situation, we immediately engaged.

We attended a City Zoning meeting on February 2 (meeting minutes enclosed), with several other neighbors from our development. There were many residents in attendance, wanting to voice concerns to the Willoughby Hills Zoning Committee. People spoke about property value depreciation (which was substantiated by a resident who is a licensed realtor), zoning restrictions, health concerns, not to mention the unsightliness of a 140' tower camouflaged as a tree, which would be in plain view from all neighboring properties and developments. But maybe the most heart felt were those people who spoke about the history of the Grange and what it

meant to them. One neighbor spoke of being baptized at the Grange. Others spoke about the Maple Grove cemetery that is on the neighboring grounds, and the children that were buried there in the 1800's that "needed a voice" in the absences of their parents.

Because of this compelling situation, I have personally walked house to house asking neighbors opposed to this project to sign a petition I have prepared (blank petition enclosed). To date I have gathered 118 signatures. I also ordered yard signs (photos enclosed) for those who signed the petition, to display their concerns to passers by, as well as to city officials who had been involved in the discussions with the tower construction company.

A Maple Grove neighbor, Tom Marsh, hired an attorney specializing in Zoning Law, which proved to be helpful through this process. In an effort to raise funds to cover legal expenses, we have started a GoFundMe page at [GoFundMe.com/p/6hbkk](https://www.gofundme.com/p/6hbkk) and we have communicated this through LinkedIn and Facebook with the hopes people will contribute and pass it along to others in the community and those opposed to cell towers in residential areas.

Our goal was to stop the tower construction through our zoning meetings. At this point, the zoning board has voted down the tower construction, which was a victory for local residents and those interested in preserving the Maple Grove Grange and Maple Grove Cemetery. Our community had banded together, and we will remain prepared to take a stand in the future to preserve our rural Historic Maple Grove neighborhood.—SHARON SAMMON



2017 Dine Around Series

Wednesday, April 12, 2017

Lake County Historical Society, 415 Riverside Drive, Painesville at 6 pm

Program: Barbara Hacha, American Hobos—Then and Now

Ever since track was first laid for the great locomotives, hobos have listened to the call of the rails—hopping freights to travel from town to town, escape economic hardship, or satisfy their wanderlust. Learn about hobo life and culture. Menu selection required in advance.

Wednesday, May 17, 2017

Pickle Bills, 101 River St, Grand River at 6 pm

Program: Brad Schwartz author of “The 1936-1937 Great Lakes Exposition”

The Great Lakes Exposition drew seven million visitors to Cleveland during the summers of 1936 and 1937. Exposition visitors could experience the latest technology, see a world-class aquatics show, watch a Shakespearean play, ride in a blimp, and experience the culture of 40 countries. Order off menu that night.

Wednesday, June 14, 2017

The Players Club @ Lost Nation Sports Park, 38550 Jet Center Pl, Willoughby at 6 pm

Program: Ken Krsolovic and Bryan Fritz, authors of “League Park, Historic Home of Cleveland Baseball”

Learn about the original home stadium of the Cleveland Indians: League Park. This talk connects Cleveland’s early sports history with its geographic and economic changes in the city. Order off menu that night.

Family Special Events



Saturday, May 13, 2017

Lake County Historical Society, 415 Riverside Drive, Painesville at 1 pm

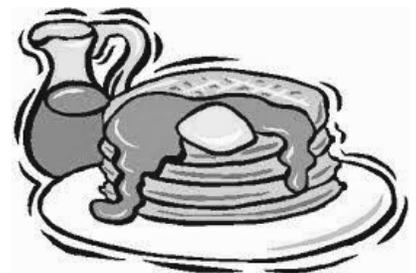
Program: Dollies & Doilies Mother’s Day Tea

Dress in your Sunday best and bring your favorite girl for an afternoon fun. Learn about dolls and miniatures while enjoying delicious tea, light sandwiches, scones, and other treats. Make paper dolls based on the original clothing of First Lady Lucretia Garfield and be sure to visit the Martin dollhouses on display at the History Center.

Sunday, June 18, 2017

Lake County Historical Society, 415 Riverside Drive, Painesville at 10 am

Program: Father’s Day Pancake Breakfast



Make reservations at 440.639.2945 or lakehistory.org/programs-and-events



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**Celebrate the warm weather with
Festivities at the**

Lake County History Center

Dollies & Doilies-May 13

Celebrate Mom or granddaughter p. 7

Pancake Breakfast Outdoors-June 18

Choose inside or out to celebrate Dad's
special day P.7

RESERVATIONS 440-639-2945

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www.LakeHistoryCenter.org