A resident authority on the Gangster Era of the 1920s, Chriss Lyon of St. Joseph, will be the keynote speaker for the History Center’s annual meeting.

The annual meeting is Tuesday, April 22, at 7 p.m. A brief business meeting will precede the program, and refreshments will follow.

Lyon has spent years researching the details of gangland involvement in southwest Michigan, with a special focus on the murder of St. Joseph policeman Charles Skelley by Fred Burke in 1929. Her presentation will cover Officer Skelley’s murder, Burke’s involvement in the infamous St. Valentine’s Day Massacre, Al Capone’s visits to Berrien County, and other episodes of gangland history.

The evening will also include the presentation of the fourth annual Frank J. Ward Memorial History Award. The History Award is presented annually to honor an individual, organization or business that advances the cause of local history through research, writing, historic preservation or programming. The award is named for Frank Junior Ward, a long-time member and benefactor of the History Center at Courthouse Square.

Admission to the evening is free and the public is welcome to attend.

A police raid on Fred Burke’s house on Red Arrow Highway in Stevensville netted a small arsenal of weapons, including the two Thompson submachine guns used in the St. Valentine’s Day Massacre. (Courtesy Chriss Lyon)

Al Capone and his men liked Berrien County. Capone frequented the Vincent Hotel in Benton Harbor and liked to visit the House of David Amusement Park. A close associate, Phil D’Andrea, owned a house in St. Joseph, and bodyguard Louis “Little New York” Campagna had an estate in Berrien Springs.

More about Al Capone on page 3
Berrien County Historical Association Board and Staff

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BCHA Mission Statement

The mission of the BCHA is to collect, preserve and interpret the history of Berrien County through exhibits, tours, publications, and educational and community outreach programs for public benefit.

Learn more about the BCHA by visiting www.berrienhistory.org

Director’s Comments

By Kathy Cyr

Dear Friends,

Thank you to everyone who contributed to the 2013 Annual Appeal. Your generous support netted the History Center over $4,000 to continue our mission of collecting, preserving and interpreting the history of Berrien County through exhibits, tours, publications and educational and community outreach programs. We deeply appreciate your support!

It has been a long winter. I hope warmer weather is headed our way (soon!) to let us all to enjoy the programs that the staff here at the History Center at Courthouse Square has planned for the 2014 season. Mark your calendars for:


April 22: Our annual meeting and Chriss Lyon's program, “The Gangster Era in Capone's Playground.”

May 18 – 20: Bus tour of Frank Lloyd Wright architecture.

June 1: Mary’s City of David Bethany House tour.

September 6 – 13, Historic Hudson River Valley bus tour.

October 23: Dolley Madison at our Signature Event at the Mendel Center, Grand Upton Hall, Lake Michigan College.

December 4, Kindle Your Christmas Spirit.

The board of directors postponed the strategic planning sessions due to the harsh winter weather. We plan to schedule those sessions soon and we will let you know via email when they will take place. We hope you will elect to join board, staff, and community members in the process of formulating a five-year strategic plan for the History Center.

As I write this column, the Berrien County Board of Commissioners is voting on the acceptance of a new agreement between Berrien County Parks Commission and the Berrien County Historical Association. As you may be aware, the county of Berrien has owned all the land and buildings of Courthouse Square since 2005. The County recently designated this property as a county park - the Historic Courthouse Square County Park - and placed it under the County Park Commission. This new agreement designates the Park Commission as the new landlord and allows the BCHA to continue the management of historical programming as we have done in the past. As we progress into this new relationship I will keep you updated on the benefits of the arrangement.

I look forward to seeing you all at the Annual Meeting on April 22.

Kathy A. Cyr
Executive Director

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Contrary to popular belief, gangster Al Capone was not a native Chicagoan - he came from Brooklyn.

Mobsters like Capone gave America’s Italian immigrants a bad rap. In 1910, despite wretched living and working conditions, Italians made up only 7% of the nation’s foreign-born convicts and juvenile delinquents even though they made up 11% of the nation’s foreign-born population.

The Capone family emigrated from Naples to Brooklyn, New York, in 1893 and settled in the district’s largest Italian community. Alphonse, one of their nine children, was born in 1899. At about age ten he fell under influence of a 27 year-old gangster named John Torrio, whom he looked on as an advisor and father figure. Although Torrio would order a murder without compunction, he detested physical violence and thought it bad business practice. He much preferred diplomacy, negotiation and alliances with other gangs.

Torrio’s uncle, James “Big Jim” Colosimo, started bringing Torrio to Chicago in 1909. The Windy City gradually became his base of operations. Torrio was a business genius, and began running his uncle’s brothels, saloons and gambling dens, putting them on a better business footing. As Torrio built his own organization, he called on his old friend, Al Capone, in late 1919 to join him in Chicago. When Big Jim divorced his wife a few months later to marry a young actress, Torrio had him murdered and took over the criminal business.

In his new home base in Chicago, Capone posed as an antiques and used furniture dealer. Torrio put him in charge of the Four Deuces brothel and saloon, and gave him a quarter share of the income from all the brothels. Torrio brokered a truce with other Chicago-area gangs in the early 1920s that resulted in a brief era of peace, but in 1923 the agreement broke down.

In 1925, a “hit” on John Torrio resulted in the gang falling under Al Capone’s control. Rival mobster George “Bugs” Moran and his men tried to kill Torrio outside his own home. While Torrio’s wife looked on, Moran’s men shot Torrio four times; as he lay on the sidewalk, an assassin put his pistol to Torrio’s head and pulled the trigger but the gun was empty. Before he could reload, the waiting Cadillac sounded a warning horn and they jumped in and sped off. Incredibly, Torrio recovered. He fled Chicago and transferred the gang to Al Capone.
Curator’s Corner

Recent Donations to the Museum Collections

Wisconsin Historical Society . . . . . . . . . . . Clark Equipment Co. motion picture, The Great Betrayal, 1974

Daryl T. Schlender . . . . . . St. Joseph photographs, memorabilia

James Beebe . . . . . . . . . . . Photographs of the Clyde Beebe farm

St. Peter’s Church . . . . . . . Photographs, china, embossing stamp, communion tankard, basketball uniform & trophy, booklets

James Beebe donated this photograph of the Clyde Beebe farm near Baroda, taken about 1905. The photo shows huge piles of mint leaves that were steamed for their oil. Beebe operated a mint farm with homes and a boarding house for the dozens of farm laborers who worked there. Known as the ”Mint King,” he later turned the farm over to growing cabbages and became the “Sauerkraut King.”

Join us at Mary’s City of David for
An Intimate Tour of Bethany

The History Center and Mary’s City of David are co-sponsoring a special tour of Bethany House and other buildings at the colony grounds on Sunday, June 1.

Mary’s City of David is located at 1158 E. Britain Avenue in Benton Charter Township.

Tours will run 12:00 - 4:30 p.m., with tours beginning every half hour. Besides Bethany House, tours will include walks through the City of David grounds and the on-site museum. R. James Taylor, City of David member and secretary, will lead the tours of Bethany House.

The tour will look into the austere, rustic accommodations of 1930 that housed some of the colony members who followed Mary Purnell as she reorganized the House of David. The tour will reveal many facets of Mary’s organizational plans and doctrinal tenets that gave this building and the surrounds the Biblical name of Bethany.

Bethany’s residents included some of the most famous colony baseball stars, the greenhouse crew, new arrivals from Texas and many of the High Island lumber camp veterans. The tour will narrate the spirited determination of those that chose to leave behind successful businesses and comfortable homes at the onset of the Great Depression to follow Mary Purnell in building a new community from the ground up.

This tour/special day is a combined fundraiser for both the History Center at Courthouse Square and Mary’s City of David. The cost of the program is $15.00. Reservations are required. To reserve your place on one of the Bethany House tours, call the History Center at (269) 471-1202.

For directions and further tour information, call Mary’s City of David at (269) 925-1601, 1-5 p.m., Mondays-Fridays.

John Tucker, star of the City of David’s traveling baseball team, lived in Bethany House when at the colony. (Courtesy Ron Taylor)
Join the History Center Today!

Name: ___________________________ Phone: ___________________________

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City: _______________ State: _______ Zip: ____________

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[ ] Patron $100
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Amount enclosed: $ ____________

Please make checks payable to the Berrien County Historical Assn.
or
Please charge my credit card: (circle one)
Mastercard   Visa   Discover

Card Number: ___________________________ Exp. Date: _________

Mail or fax to: BCHA, PO Box 261
Berrien Springs, MI  49103
Phone: (269) 471-1202   Fax: (269) 471-7412

Enjoy Our Local History!

Greetings from Three Oaks ($25.95)  Quantity: ____________  Total: $ ______

Autotram: Clark's Aluminum Railcar ($16.95)  Quantity: ____________  Total: $ ______

Greetings from Benton Harbor ($27.95)  Quantity: ____________  Total: $ ______

Locomotives Along the Lakeshore ($24.95)  Quantity: ____________  Total: $ ______

Greetings from St. Joseph ($27.95)  Quantity: ____________  Total: $ ______

Greetings from Berrien Springs ($21.95)  Quantity: ____________  Total: $ ______

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Get both for $29.95!

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2013 Signature Event: 
Duty and Honor: Robert E. Lee

Everyone enjoyed a fascinating evening with Gen. Robert E. Lee at our 2013 Signature Event. Larry Nielsen served as our master of ceremonies for the program at the Lake Michigan College Mendel Center, which included a silent auction, harp music with Meg Rodgers, dinner and dessert, and of course the presentation from General Lee.

David Palmer, a Virginia actor with the American Historical Theater, portrayed the famed Confederate general. He described his years of service with the United States Army and his wrenching decision to resign his commission to accept command of the Army of Northern Virginia.

Next October: Dolley Madison!

We’re already looking forward to our 2014 Signature Event - a visit from First Lady Dolley Madison.

Mrs. Madison served twice as First Lady: once unofficially to widower Thomas Jefferson and again to her husband, James Madison. Her famous turban and feather acted as a signal, enabling her 5’ 6” husband to find her in a crowd so they could compare perspectives gleaned from their important guests. A natural hostess, Dolley conversed with and entertained guests from the United States and Europe at White House events. She was particularly adept at pairing the most unlikely people and sparking discussion.

Dolley’s ability to create rapport with her guests made her one of the most sought-after women of her time. Her wit, charm, education and popularity made her a trend-setter. She experimented with fashion, introduced ice cream to the United States, and hosted children’s events that included introduction of the Easter Egg Roll at the White House.

Actress Cynthia Janzen has been a professional actor for twenty years. She recently concluded a run of an enormously popular and heart wrenching new play in Virginia called Kiss my Little Girls. For the last six years she has portrayed the remarkably affable and intriguing Dolley Madison. Engagements include the National Portrait Gallery, Mount Vernon, National Archives and the Smithsonian Institution.
New Book: *Greetings from Three Oaks*

The History Center at Courthouse Square has released a new volume in its “Historic Photobooks” series: *Greetings from Three Oaks.*

The 285-page book by curator Robert Myers features hundreds of previously unpublished photographs of Three Oaks as well as a narrative history of the village. The book can be purchased for $25.95 from the Museum Store, located at the History Center, 313 North Cass Street in Berrien Springs. History Center hours are 10-5 Monday-Friday. Copies are also available at the Region of Three Oaks Museum, the Three Oaks Township Public Library, and at other sites in Three Oaks.

The new book can be purchased through mail order at an additional cost of $4.95 for shipping and handling. Michigan residents must add $1.68 for sales tax. Orders should be sent to the History Center at Courthouse Square, PO Box 261, Berrien Springs, MI 49103. To place a telephone order, call (269) 471-1202.

*Greetings from Three Oaks* is the first general history of the city published since 1939. The book includes chapters on the village’s early history, transportation systems, schools, domestic architecture, industries, and the downtown. It also includes special chapters on the Warren Featherbone Company, the Edward K. Warren family, and cultural institutions. Photographs have come from the History Center’s own collections and those of The Region of Three Oaks Museum, the Three Oaks Township Public Library, and many private collections. The book includes footnotes, a bibliography and an index.

Author Robert Myers has previously published numerous books and articles on local history, including *Greetings from St. Joseph, Locomotives Along the Lakeshore,* and *Lost on the Lakes: Shipwrecks of Berrien County.*

For more information about *Greetings from Three Oaks,* contact The History Center at Courthouse Square at (269) 471-1202, or email bcha@berrienhistory.org.

The E. K. Warren Bank and Featherbone Company Office Building, built in 1905, now houses the Three Oaks Township Public Library. It is on the National Register of Historic Places.
**Continuing and Upcoming Events**

**Ongoing:** *The Marxochime Colony: Music for the Masses.* Exhibit at the History Center. 10 a.m. - 5 p.m., Mondays - Fridays.

**April 22:** History Center Annual Meeting, 7:00 p.m., Tues. Chriss Lyon, “The Gangster Era in Capone’s Playground.”

**May 8 & 9:** “Springing into the 1830s” Pioneer Day, 9:30-11:30 a.m. & 1:30-3:30 p.m., Thursday & Friday

**May 18 -20:** Frank Lloyd Wright Tour, Sunday-Tuesday

**June 1:** Tour, Israelite House of David as Reorganized by Mary Purnell, Benton Charter Township. 12:00 - 4:30 p.m.

**June 15:** Visit our booth at Three Oaks Flag Day

**June 26.** “Thursdays at Courthouse Square” series, 6:30 p.m. Dick Bisbing, “The CSI Effect and Forensic Evidence.”

**July 3.** “Thursdays at Courthouse Square” series, 6:30 p.m. Bob Myers, “The RMS Titanic and Southwest Michigan.”

**July 10.** “Thursdays at Courthouse Square” series, 6:30 p.m. Teresa Irish, “A Thousand Letters Home.”

**July 17.** “Thursdays at Courthouse Square” series, 6:30 p.m.

**July 24.** “Thursdays at Courthouse Square” program series, 6:30 p.m.

**July 31.** “Thursdays at Courthouse Square” program series, 6:30 p.m. Mike Deren, “Civilian Conservation Corps.”

**Aug. 11-16:** Visit our booth at the Berrien County Youth Fair, 11 a.m. - 10:30 p.m.

**September 6-13:** “Hudson River Valley Tour.” Our annual fall motorcoach tour.

**October 23:** Signature Event: Dolley Madison. Lake Michigan College Mendel Center, 6:00 p.m.

**December 4:** Kindle Your Christmas Spirit.