



Vol. 35, No. 2 February 2019

## Director's Comments

Dear Friends,

January is a wrap and we have somehow survived the "deep freeze"!

Over the course of the month the board of directors, led by Dr. Liz Muhlenbeck, and staff have begun reviewing the survey responses distributed during the Signature Event in October, online, and on paper in the last printed version of the Docket. At the end of the month we began meeting with volunteers who volunteered to sit on a focus group. With the survey responses and the work of the focus group, we are creating a new strategy to bring the best programming to our members and our community at large. If you still have suggestions of the types of programming you would like to see more of, what you think BCHA is doing well, and ways we can improve, we welcome your input.

We are not the only ones thinking about the long-term future; the Berrien County Parks held an open house for the public to give input in what they would like to see in the County's park as part of the five-year plan. This first of five meetings was held in the Berrien County Commissions' Chambers in the Administration building in St. Joseph. Each County Park had its own poster displaying the property with a sheet of paper next to it detailing what some of the goals for the property. The public then had the opportunity to write in their own suggestions, wishes, and desires. If you missed this open house, not to worry; there will be four more open houses throughout 2019 that you can attend. This is a great way to have an impact on your county - including ways you can suggest improvements to the 1839 Courthouse, because, yes, we are a considered a County Park. Watch your inboxes for more information on when and where these open houses will be held!

As ever, the BCHA Board of Directors, staff, and myself are grateful for your continued support for BCHA. You are our sweethearts.

Sincerely,  
Kathy A. Cyr  
Executive Director

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## 90 Years Ago...

### The St. Valentine's Day Massacre and Berrien County

Valentine's Day is generally a day marked for sweethearts, candied hearts, roses and celebrating love in the mushiest of manners. However, in 1929, Valentine's Day also became the anniversary for one of the most notorious gang-related activities in U.S. History. An event that later become known as St. Valentine's Day Massacre.

By the 1920s, Chicago was by no means a

stranger to gang activity. Between 1923 and 1926, one sociologist at the University of Chicago endeavored to track down and map the favorite haunts and hang-outs of more than 1,300 gangs for the project [Chicago's Gangland](#). Frederic Thrasher published his findings with an accompanying map in 1927. Much of these gangs were ethnic based due to the influx of immigrants into Chicago at this time period. In 1900, an approximate 2 million of "unchecked" people had moved to Chicago creating areas like "little Italy".



These gangs did not necessarily get along and there was a constant battle over territory. With the implementation of the Volstead Act prohibiting the use and sale of alcohol, gangs saw an opportunity for growth and wealth. Conflicts between gangs continued to rise with accusations of alcohol runs on each other's claimed turf. At the center of these conflicts were the gangs managed by "Bugs" Moran and John Torrio.

It is reported that by the age of 21, Moran had committed 26 robberies and already served three prison sentences. John Torrio, whose wife said he was the nicest of husbands, managed several clubs and brothels throughout the city. Torrio brought on a young protege by the name of Al Capone who quickly took over the businesses. When an attempt on Torrio's life was made by Moran's request, Torrio retired, leaving the "business" in Capone's hands.

Early in his reign, Capone held a meeting with all the larger gangs and created an agreement that stated they would all stay within their territories. This agreement quickly deteriorated and conflicts grew constant culminating on February 14, 1929.

On February 13, Bugs Moran received a phone call about a shipment of Canadian Whiskey that would be run from Detroit to Chicago at a discount price and would he be interested in purchasing said whiskey. Moran agreed to the price and arranged to meet the delivery at one of his warehouses located at 2122 N. Clark Street. On the morning of the delivery, men entered Moran's establishment, but rather than delivering the promised whiskey, they lined Moran's men up facing the wall and opened fire, delivering some 70 shots from tommy guns and 2 shotgun blasts on 7 men. Moran was late and his life spared.

Though suspected of initiating the massacre, when asked who could be responsible, Capone said, "Only Moran kills like that." But when Moran was asked he stated, "Only Capone kills like that." Months passed without a solid lead.

December 14, 1929, ten months later, on the other side of Lake Michigan, in the southwest corner of Michigan in Berrien County, shoppers were going about their Christmas errands. Fred Burke, alias Thomas Camp, alias Fred Dane, was on his way to pick his wife up from the train station when he was in a minor fender-bender.

Burke fled the scene. The farmer with whom he had the accident had pulled alongside Officer Charles Skelly, on traffic duty that day, to report the accident when who should drive by but Burke! Officer Skelly jumped on the side board and told Burke to pull over. Instead, Burke shot the young officer who died as a result.

Burke ended up fleeing the state. When the police raided his residence in Stevensville, they found a cache of sawed off shotguns, a stash of bonds worth \$390,000, ammunition, and two Thompson guns. Using a new science called "ballistics" it was shown that the bullets from the two tommy guns matched those used in the St. Valentine's Day Massacre. Burke became the most wanted man in America.

Several months later, thanks to a picture posted in a magazine, Burke was discovered in rural Missouri. He was arrested and returned to Michigan, where he was tried for murder in St. Joseph, MI. Why in Michigan and not Illinois? Burke was certainly guilty of the murder of Officer Skully, and only probably guilty for the acts in Chicago. Being found guilty, Burke served a life sentence in Marquette State Prison. The two tommy guns, linked to the unsolved case of the St. Valentine's Day Massacre, are still in possession of the Berrien County Sheriff's Office.

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## From the Collection

This red wool armband with the letters LTG (Leave Train Guard) in white was donated to the History Center in 1977 by Frederick Kompass.

After the Armistice in 1918, U. S. troops were settled in the Coblenz area in Germany. The Third Occupation U. S. Army established a leave area for the soldiers for one week in Aix les Baines, France (exclusive of travel). A train of second and third-class coaches left Coblenz every night carrying about one thousand men for the leave area. Lt. Frederick Kompass was selected as a train commander and had two sergeants and ten privates as train guards to command the train to Aix les Baines where another one thousand men were picked up for the return trip to Coblenz. This operation lasted from the middle of February 1919 to about May 1, 1919.



At the time of donating the item Mr. Kompass recalled, "We would make the round trip in about 4 1/2 days and then rest in Coblenz for 2 1/2 days, and then make another round trip. We all wore sidearms and the arm band for identification. The soldiers were paid just before leaving Coblenz and a noisy group (some drunk), but broke and sober and quiet on the return trip. It was a great experience."



## Order in the Court!

On Thursday, January 17, a Practical Law class from St. Joseph High School came in to the courthouse and held a mock trial. The trial was created by the social studies teacher, Colin Uren, and is part of the requirements of the course.

Each student was required to participate and filled the roles of lawyers (multiple on each side), judge, prosecutor, defendant, and witnesses. The jury was made up of three volunteers and two staff members.

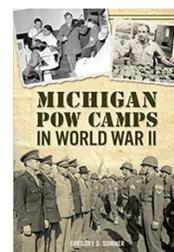
After everyone had their say, the jury met during a brief recess of court and found the defendant guilty of 2 out of 3 charges. Mr. Uren's spring Practical Law class will return on May 22, 2019; if you are interested in volunteering to be on the jury for that date let us know!



## Mark Your Calendar

Save the date for BCHA Annual Meeting on Tuesday, April 23, 2019 at 7:00 pm in the 1839 Courthouse. This year's speaker will be Gregory D. Sumner (co-chair of the Department of History at University of Detroit-Mercy) on Michigan's Prisoner of War Camps during World War II, on which he has written a book.

During World War II, Michigan became a temporary home to six thousand German and Italian POWs. At a time of home-front labor shortages, they picked fruit in Berrien County, harvested sugar beets in the Thumb, cut pulpwood in the Upper Peninsula and maintained parks and other public spaces in Detroit. The work programs were not



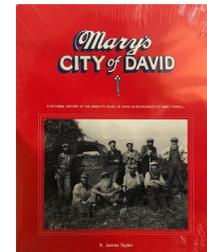
flawless and not all of the prisoners were cooperative, but many of the men established enduring friendships with their captors.

We hope to see you on Tuesday, April 23, 2019 at 7:00 pm at the History Center!

## Special Offer!

Thanks to our friend R. James Taylor at Mary's City of David, you can receive a copy of his book "Mary's City of David: A Pictorial History of the Israelite House of David as Reorganized by Mary Purnell" with a donation of \$20 or more!

You can donate online, through the mail via check (make sure the memo says Mary's City of David) or in person in the Museum Gift Shop.



Donate Now

## South Dakota Adventure, May 28 - June 5, 2019



Join the History Center for an adventure westward to South Dakota on a 9-day 8-night motorcoach tour. The tour fee of \$1,850\* for members includes transportation, lodging, all breakfasts, most dinners, some lunches, all admission fees, taxes, and gratuities. We will visit the Badlands National Park, Wall Drug, Mt. Rushmore National Monument, Custer State Park, Crazy Horse Memorial, and more! Call 269-471-1202 or check the website for [more information](#). *The trip is filling quickly!*

*\*Price per person, double occupancy. \$1,900 non-members' price. \$457 single supplement.*

***Come with us on our next tour and you will be smiling, too!***

Visit Our Website

Become a Member

South Dakota Adventure

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***BCHA Mission Statement***

Al Butzbaugh  
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Robert Norris  
Stephen Smith

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.