Educational Programs and Services

The History Center at Courthouse Square

Berrien County’s Center for History

Berrien County Historical Association
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Scheduling a Program

Outreach programs are available for either day or evening presentations, depending on staff availability. To schedule a program for your organization, call the Berrien County Historical Association at (269) 471-1202, or email us at info@berrienhistory.org.

Program fees: Outreach programs are $60 each. Multiple programs on the same day and location are $60 for the first program and $30 for each additional program. Mileage is charged for programs presented at locations outside of Berrien County.

On-Site Tours & Programs

A tour of the museum’s 1830 Murdock Log House centers on the lives of Michigan’s early settlers. Interpretation focuses on the roles of all the family members as they attempted to survive and prosper in frontier America. $2 per student.

Museum Tour. All ages.
Includes a tour of the historic 1839 Berrien County Courthouse, 1870 Sheriff’s Residence, 1830 Log House, and museum exhibits. Includes an examination of the site’s role as a governmental center for the county. $2 per student.
Mock Trials in the 1839 Courthouse Courtroom: The Counterfeiting Trial of George Harlan, 1843. Grades 4-12. Students learn about America’s judicial system as they recreate the trial of George Harlan, accused of counterfeiting silver dollars. Students play the roles of judge, lawyers, witnesses and jurors in a trial moderated by the museum staff. A preparation packet sent in advance of the tour helps orient the students to their roles. $2 per student.

Springing into the 1830s Pioneer Days. Grades 3-8. Every spring the entire Courthouse Square becomes a center of hands-on activities teaching about life in Michigan’s early settlement period. Activities and demonstrations vary from year-to-year, but may include open-hearth cooking, blacksmithing, stenciling, musket firing demonstration, early toys and games, dancing, corn shelling, and using a cross-cut saw. $4 per student.
Adeline & Julia: Growing Up in Michigan and on the Kansas Frontier. Sisters Adeline and Julia Graham of Berrien Springs kept lively diaries of their youthful adventures - Adeline as a teenaged tomboy and Julia as a young woman homesteading in Kansas. Their diaries show Victorian women leaving their prescribed “women’s sphere” of life to engage in politics, business and homesteading.

All Aboard! Railroads in Berrien County. Many rail lines served Berrien County. Their success or failure determined how the county appears today. Photographs illustrate the railroads’ contributions to transportation, industrial development, consumption of raw materials and the introduction of modern business practices.

Autotram: Clark Equipment Company’s Aluminum Railcar. During the Great Depression, Clark Equipment Co. created a revolutionary new self-propelled railcar that it called the Autotram. The Autotram debuted in 1932. Capable of 70 mph speeds, efficient and quiet, it held the promise of restoring American rail passenger service to its glory days and reviving the fortunes of an industry battered by the Depression.

Ben King and the Whitechapel Club. St. Joseph likes to recall hometown poet and musician Benjamin Franklin King, Jr. as the gentle author of pastoral poems, but King was also a key member of Chicago’s famed Whitechapel Club. The short-lived (1889-94) offshoot of the Chicago Press Club decorated its meeting rooms with skulls, hangman’s nooses, murder weapons and other ghoulish souvenirs and included in its membership some of the Windy City’s top journalists, who met to drink beer, tell lies and engage in “sharpshooting” - witty repartee in which Ben King excelled.

Benton Harbor: A Historical Review. One of Berrien County’s youngest towns (founded in 1860), Benton Harbor saw explosive growth that turned it into a social, cultural and economic powerhouse. This program traces the city’s meteoric rise from transportation center to industrial city to its late 20th century decline.
Berrien Springs in Pictures. Founded in 1831, Berrien Springs is one of southwest Michigan's oldest communities. Photographs taken between 1870 and 1930 provide a travelogue of the town's people, parks, and commercial and residential architecture.

Captive in the Alps: An Internee in Switzerland. During World War II, hundreds of Allied airmen found themselves unwilling guests of Switzerland when they landed their crippled planes inside the Swiss border instead of Germany. There they lived as internees in the hands of an ostensibly neutral government. Follow their ordeal through the experiences of Clare Hubbard of Berrien Center, whose B-24 bomber crashed in the Alps.

Courthouse Square: The Center of History. Discover the story behind the Courthouse Square in Berrien Springs, our county’s “center of history.” This National Register of Historic Places site features Michigan's oldest extant county courthouse, other historic buildings, and an archive of Berrien County history.

The Frozen Image: Photography in America. The invention of the daguerreotype in 1839 thrilled the world. Tintypes, ambrotypes, albumen prints and other forms of photography magically captured images of America and Americans. Audiences learn how to identify and preserve different varieties of photographs.

Gangsters in Berrien County. Southwest Michigan's proximity to Chicago made it a natural retreat for the 1920s gangsters. Al Capone's cronies frequented the area, owned homes here, and murdered a St. Joseph policeman. This illustrated program explores the history of the Gangster Era and identifies some of the local sites that still exist today.

Grave Matters: A History of Graveyards, Cemeteries, Markers, Monuments, & Mausoleums. Discover the history of the park cemetery movement that transformed the church graveyard to a park setting where Victorian Americans strolled in quiet contemplation and even enjoyed picnic dinners. The program also studies gravestone art that used many motifs to convey meaning to viewers.
Greetings From Buchanan. Founded as a mill and factory town in 1842, Buchanan was headquarters to international manufacturing companies, including Clark Equipment. Photographs provide a visual tour of the city’s homes, streets, parks and businesses.

Lincoln’s Family Ties. Although famous as a remarkably homely man, Abraham Lincoln used the newfangled art of photography to full advantage. This program explores the 16th president's domestic life with dozens of photographs of Abraham and Mary Todd Lincoln, their children and other family members.

Lost on the Lakes: Shipwrecks of Berrien County. From schooners to steamers, the remains of scores of ships litter the bottom of Lake Michigan off Berrien County’s shore. Discover the dramatic history of these ships, the communities they served, and their tragic fates.

The May Graham: Steamboats on the St. Joseph River. The sternwheeler May Graham operated from 1879 to 1908, linking Berrien Springs with the harbor at St. Joseph. Take an engaging visual tour of the river aboard one of the last steamboats to ply its waters.

The Michigan Flag. Why does our state flag bear the images of a moose and an elk? What does the word “Tuebor” mean? Why is there a picture of a man holding a rifle? Find out about the fascinating and funny stories behind the symbolism of our familiar state banner.

My Old House: Researching Your Home’s History. Have you ever said of your house, “If these walls could talk?” Ever wondered who built your house, and when? Asked yourself about the lives of the people who lived there? My Old House show you how to use property deeds, tax rolls, plat maps and other sources to research the story of your house.
Pioneers of the Sky. Discover the early history of flight from the experiments of Hiram Maxim and Clement Ader to Samuel Langley and the Wright Brothers. Find out how Augustus Herring of St. Joseph flew an airplane on Silver Beach - in 1898!

The RMS Titanic and Southwest Michigan. The program examines the historical significance of the RMS Titanic. It focuses on Sen. William Alden Smith - a Dowagiac native who chaired the U. S. Senate inquiry into the disaster, as well as the stories of local families who were traveling in first, second and third class. The program explores the Titanic’s history from her construction to her loss on her maiden voyage and how her story became a part of worldwide popular culture.

The Worst Colonel I Ever Saw: Francis Quinn and the 12th Michigan Infantry. Success in the Civil War brought fame to many Americans - and ruin to others. Col. Francis Quinn, a prominent Niles businessman, won command of the 12th Michigan but his disastrous debut at the Battle of Shiloh destroyed his life. Follow Quinn and his command through one of the war’s bloodiest battles.

Berrien County in the Great Depression. How did the Great Depression impact Berrien County? What caused it? How did America get out of it? Discover the fascinating facts behind the worst economic disaster in American history and its effect on southwest Michigan.