



History Center Annual Meeting ~ Benton Harbor: The Story of a City



The Fidelity Building (center) and Benton Harbor State Bank, 1956.

Few cities have risen so quickly - and declined so precipitously - as Benton Harbor. The History Center's 2011 annual meeting features a program on the rise, fall and resurgence of Benton Harbor, a city now celebrating the sesquicentennial of its founding.

The annual meeting will be held on Tuesday, April 26, at 7:00 p.m. at the History Center at Courthouse Square in Berrien Springs. A brief business meeting will precede the program and refreshments.

The evening will also include the presentation of the first annual Frank J. Ward Memorial History Award. The History Award will be 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. History Center curator Robert Myers will present a PowerPoint program about Benton Harbor, featuring his most recent research for the upcoming book, *Greetings from Benton Harbor*.

Originally named Brunson Harbor (for civic leader Sterne Brunson), Benton Harbor was founded later than most Berrien County towns. Whereas most villages in the county were platted in the 1830s and 1840s, Benton Harbor dates to the early 1860s. A marshy area covered the site where the city grew up, so few people chose to settle in that area of Benton Township.

The surrounding farmland produced enormous fruit crops, which farmers had to transport quickly to market before they spoiled. Overland travel into the port of St. Joseph could be difficult, a problem that became critical in 1858 when a bridge spanning the St. Joseph River washed out in a flood. Civic leaders like Henry Morton, Charles Hull and Sterne Brunson initiated the construction of the Benton Harbor Ship Canal to link the inland area of Benton Township with the St. Joseph River harbor. The village of Benton Harbor thus began as a transportation center that grew up around the ship canal.

Benton Harbor grew rapidly. A village that did not even exist in 1860 became the largest town in Berrien County within thirty years. The ship canal, augmented by several railroads, made the village a transportation hub that fostered the growth of industry. Several mills and

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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.berriehistory.org.

The Docket

Spring 2011, Vol. 27, No. 1

The Docket is published quarterly by the Berrien County Historical Association, 313 N. Cass Street, P.O. Box 261, Berrien Springs, Michigan 49103. (269) 471-1202.

Editorial Staff

Frances Porter Snyder, executive director
Robert C. Myers, curator
Kristen Patzer Umphrey, museum store manager

The Docket is a benefit of membership in the BCHA. Annual membership dues to the BCHA are: \$20 for individuals, \$30 for families, and \$40 yearly for institutions. Supporting memberships are: \$40 Contributing, \$50 Sustaining, \$100 Patron, and \$500 Benefactor.

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Director's Comments

By Frances Porter Snyder

Dear Friends,

Is winter nearly over? I must say "yes" although some days I wonder if it will ever end. We are all looking forward to the warm days of spring and the fragrance of colorful blossoms. At the History Center, preparations for the coming spring and summer began last fall.

The BCHA Annual Meeting will be April 26th. After a short business meeting and presentation of the first Frank J. Ward Memorial History Award, curator Robert Myers will present a program about Benton Harbor's history.

Our *Springing into the 1830s* Pioneer Day will be held on May 13th. Third and fourth graders from our area's schools attend the annual event and learn about life in Michigan's early settlement period. We thank all the volunteers who share their skills and make this day so special for the students and teachers.

This year's summer program series, *Thursdays at Courthouse Square*, is sponsored by Indiana Michigan Power and the Berrien Springs Eau Claire Rotary Club. The series opens June 23rd with a return visit by one of our favorite presenters, Bill Jamerson. We hope you can attend the premier of another great summer program series.

In March, you received the booklet that outlines the *Cradle of Liberty* Tour. Bob and I have another fun-filled and interesting adventure planned with exciting venues and of course, fantastic meals. If you have traveled with us before, we hope you will choose to join us again. If you have thought about it but have not signed up in the past, please consider it. We have a wonderful time and would love to have you along.

Mark your calendars for the Signature Event scheduled for October 27, 2011. Thomas Jefferson is traveling from Philadelphia for *A Conversation with Thomas Jefferson*. In addition to an exciting program, you will enjoy a social hour with live music, a great dinner, door prizes and the opportunity to bid on silent auction items. If you would consider becoming a sponsor for the event, please call me at the History Center (471-1202).

Every year, the BCHA Board of Directors and staff make every effort to provide programs and events for our members, students and the greater Berrien County community. We appreciate the contributions of our membership and organizations that enable us to operate the History Center at Courthouse Square. We cannot do it without your support.

Francie

Frances Porter Snyder
Executive Director

Benton Harbor (*cont'd from page 1*)

factories opened in Benton Harbor, mostly to process the products of local forests and fields.

Other factories and foundries sprang up in the early 19th century. Companies like Benton Harbor Malleable Industries, Auto Specialties, Clark Equipment Company, New Products Corporation, Modern Plastics and V-M Corporation set up shop in the city. Some of these operations were home-grown, but many came to the city through the business recruitment efforts of the Benton Harbor Development Company. These industries made Benton Harbor an economic powerhouse and employed thousands of workers.

Industrial wealth fostered growth in the city's residential and commercial areas. Stores and hotels filled the downtown. Large, stylish houses lined Benton Harbor's streets.

Countless people around the world knew of Benton Harbor as the home of "those long-haired baseball



Traffic on Main Street in Benton Harbor, 1956.

Benton Harbor started to slide into decline in the 1960s. Many factors contributed to the deterioration: factories and foundries closed or relocated; urban sprawl; closure of the House of David's amusement park; the conversion of Main Street into Business I-94; instability in city government; riots; block-busting - the list is long and complex. In twenty years, Benton Harbor became one of America's most economically-depressed cities. Michigan's governor appointed an emergency financial manager in 2010 to administer city operations.

Benton Harbor may well be staging a return. A development project has built a Jack Nicklaus Signature Design Golf Course in the city and an "arts district" in the downtown is attracting a growing number of businesses and patrons. The city has transformed itself in the past from a transportation hub to an industrial center, and may well be reinventing itself once again.



Buyers at the Benton Harbor Fruit Market, 1957.

players." The baseball players came from the Israelite House of David, a communal religious society that moved to Benton Harbor in 1903. The colony soon counted nearly a thousand members and operated an amusement park, a lumber camp and numerous other business enterprises. The major league-caliber baseball team barnstormed the nation, spreading word of the colony and Benton Harbor across America.

Labor shortages during World War II and the 1950s led many industries to recruit workers from the Deep South, especially Arkansas and Mississippi, to fill jobs in Benton Harbor's industries. The city's racial and cultural composition began to change from a population of Northern whites to Southern whites and African-Americans.



Shiloh House at the House of David, 1960.

Cradle of Liberty Tour ~ September 17-24, 2011

This fall's tour of New England includes some of America's best historic sites and museums, wonderful restaurants, and lodging at premium hotels. We're looking forward to a great trip!

The \$1,599* tour includes transportation aboard Cardinal motorcoach, all breakfasts and dinners (and several lunches), lodging, all admission fees, guide services and all taxes and gratuities.

* **The Mark Twain House** in Hartford, Connecticut

* **Old Sturbridge Village**

* **A day in Boston**, including a driving tour of the city, the USS *Constitution*, the Paul Revere House, Faneuil Hall, and the Old North Church

* **A day in Concord**, including the Concord Museum, Louisa May Alcott House, Ralph Waldo Emerson House, and Walden Pond

* **A day in Plymouth**, touring Plimoth Plantation and the *Mayflower II*.



The Mark Twain House in Hartford



Old Sturbridge Village



The Mayflower II at Plimoth Plantation

To sign up for the tour, contact us via email at bcha@berrienhistory.org, or call us at (269) 471-1202. We think that this will be our best trip yet!

* **Members' price, per person, double occupancy.**

Thursdays at Courthouse Square

The History Center's popular summer program series returns with a great line-up of presenters. Every Thursday at 6:30 p.m., from June 23 through July 28 will feature a program about Michigan's past.

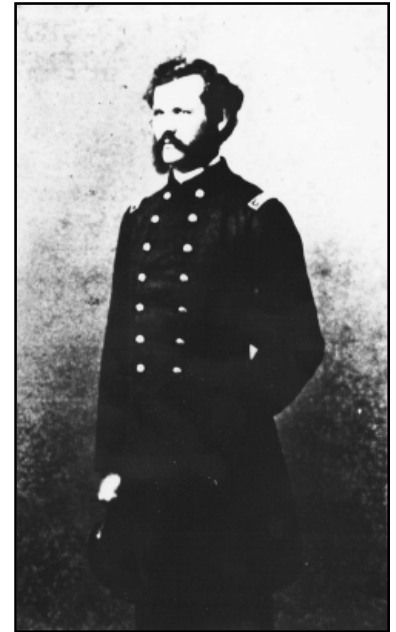
All the programs are free of charge, thanks to generous grants from the Berrien Springs/Eau Claire Rotary Club and Indiana Michigan Power.

June 23: "Up in the U.P.! – Songs about Michigan's Upper Peninsula." Filmmaker and song writer Bill Jamerson presents original songs to tell the story of life in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Jamerson shares colorful tales of living in mining towns such as Negaunee and Ishpeming, enjoying the winter sport of ski jumping, and the favorite food choice of iron miners, pasties!



July 14: "Michigan and the Civil War: A

Great and Bloody Sacrifice," by Jack Dempsey. Michigan author, attorney, and Vice President of the Michigan Historical Commission Jack Dempsey presents a lively account of Michigan's heroic role in saving the Union. In a program based on new research, he examines the lucrative contri-

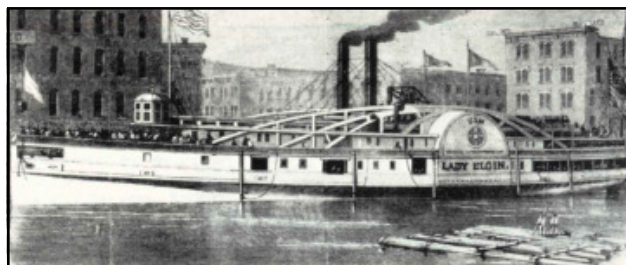


butions of the Great Lakes State during the Civil War. Dempsey recently authored the book *Michigan and the Civil War: A Great and Bloody Sacrifice*.

June 30: "The St. Joseph." Author Kit Lane of Douglas presents, *The St. Joseph*, a program based on her most recent publication in the Rivers of Michigan Series. This program examines the earliest settlements along the river, as well as a mile-by-mile survey of the 200 mile-long river.

July 21: "The House of David and the Great War."

Author and historian Clare Adkin, Jr. will present a program about the relationship of the House of David to WWI, and the role conscientious objection played in the life of colony members.



July 28: "Stories and Songs of the Métis' Voyageur,"

by Genot Picor. Picor shares the stories and songs of his explorations and experiences as a French-Huron scout who found his way to the Great Lakes and was taken in by the Ojibwa People of the region.

July 7: "Lost on the Lady Elgin." Award-winning author and historian Valerie van Heest tells the story of the 1860 sinking of the side wheel steamer *Lady Elgin*. van Heest takes us back to that dark stormy night which resulted in the deaths of more than 300 people, the worst disaster to ever take place on the open waters of Lake Michigan.



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We need volunteers to help with many museum functions! Call Kristen Patzer Umphrey, volunteer coordinator, for information.

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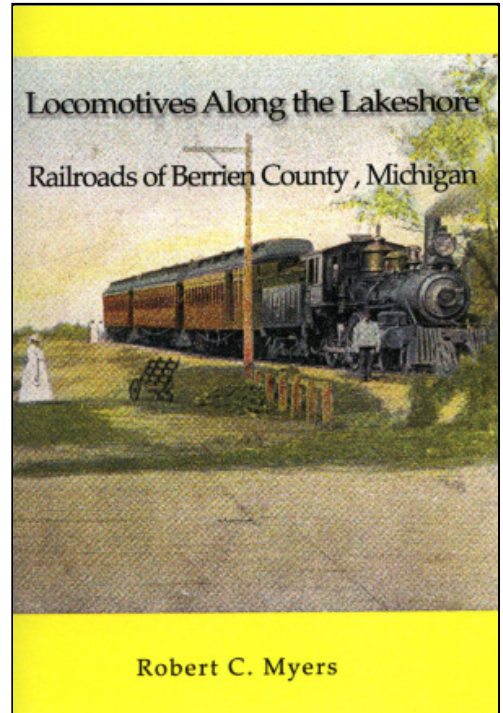
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2011 Signature Event: *A Conversation with Thomas Jefferson*

The History Center's 2011 Signature Event features the author of the Declaration of Independence and the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, the first U. S. Secretary of State and the third President of the United States. Perhaps more than any of the Founding Fathers, Thomas Jefferson established the philosophical underpinnings of the United States.

This year's Signature Event will take place at the Lake Michigan College Mendel Center on Thursday, October 27. The evening starts with music and a social hour at 6:00 p.m., followed by dinner, door prizes, a silent auction and, of course, Thomas Jefferson.



(Courtesy Karla Corn)

Actor and historian Steven Edenbo has portrayed Jefferson for over a dozen years. He has researched Jefferson as a resident fellow at Monticello's International Center for Jefferson Studies in Charlottesville, Virginia. He frequently appears at The National Archives in Washington, DC, and at Independence Hall and the Declaration House in Independence National Historical Park in Philadelphia. His television credits include the History Channel and even a session with Stephen Colbert on TV's "The Colbert Report."



(Courtesy Duane Mumma)

Edenbo notes that, "I shape my presentations according to the distinct interests and schedules of specific audiences, as well as to the nature of each event. Usually I begin my show with a biographical monologue that focuses on subjects and stories requested. Then I engage my audience in a question-and-answer session, which is my favorite part."

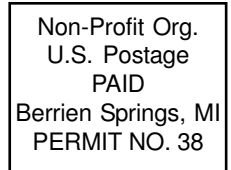
Jefferson was famously averse to giving speeches, a trait that presented Edenbo with a dilemma: how to portray to audiences a person who shunned crowds and disliked public speaking. He solved the problem with what he calls "The Performance Conversation," in which he turns his presentation into a modified discussion with his audiences.

We're looking forward to a marvelous evening with Jefferson. Tickets will be available this summer as we finalize plans for the evening.



Post Office Box 261
Berrien Springs, MI 49103

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED



Continuing and Upcoming Events

Ongoing: *Down on the Farm: Specialty Agriculture in Berrien County.* Exhibit at the History Center. 10 - 5, Mondays- Fridays

April 26: *Berrien County Historical Association's Annual Meeting.* 7:00 p.m. *Benton Harbor: The Story of a City* program. Free admission.

May 13: *Springing into the 1830s.* Our annual living history program highlights Michigan's early settlement period for students in the upper elementary age group. Friday, 9:30-11:30 a.m. and 12:30-2:30 p.m. \$3.00 per student.

June 4: *Museum Store Open House.* The History Center's summer hours start with an Open House and special savings at the Museum Store. 10 a.m.-5:00 p.m. Saturday.

June 23: *Thursdays at Courthouse Square. "Up in the U.P! – Songs about Michigan's Upper Peninsula."* Bill Jamerson's songs tell about life in the Upper Peninsula world of copper mining, ski jumping and pasties. 6:30 p.m. Free admission.

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July 28: *Thursdays at Courthouse Square. "Stories and Songs of the Métis Voyageur,"* by Genot Picor. Picor shares the stories and songs of a French-Huron scout who was taken in by the region's Ojibwa People. 6:30 p.m. Free admission.

August 15-20: Visit our booth at the Berrien County Youth Fair!

September 17-24: *Cradle of Liberty Tour.* Eight-day, seven-night motorcoach tour of Massachusetts and Connecticut. Tour the Mark Twain House, the John Adams Historic Park, Boston, Plimoth Plantation, Old Sturbridge Village, & more.

October 27: *Signature Event: A Conversation with Thomas Jefferson.* Steve Edenbo portrays Thomas Jefferson at the LMC Mendel Center. Dinner, music, door prizes, and a fantastic program! 6:00 p.m.