

LIFETIME MEMBERS

- Air Authority Heating and Air Conditioning
- Al's Heating and Cooling
- American Legion, Post 194
- American Legion Auxiliary Unit 194
- Brunk Excavating, Inc.
- Chris Champ – State Farm agent
- Jeff Hill Video
- Mitsubishi Electric Automotive
- People's First Savings Bank
- R.E. Middleton Construction LLC
- Senour-Flaherty Insurance
- Shorten and Ryan Funeral Home
- Voorhis, Slone, Welsh and Crossland, Architects
- Walldogs – Mason Sign Company
- Yost Pharmacy, Inc.

BUSINESS MEMBERS

- Artis Senior Living of Mason
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- Mason Bowl, Inc.
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- Mueller Funeral Home
- Terry's Lawn Care, Inc.
- Warren County Historical Society
- 16 Lots Brewing Co.

PARTNERS

- City of Mason
- Culver's – Mason
- LaRosa's – Mason
- Mason City Schools
- Mason Community Grange No.1680
- Mason-Deerfield Chamber
- Mason Public Library

NOTE:

LaRosa's has suspended its "Slice of the Pie" fundraising event, so they will no longer be taking MHS coupons. Thanks to all who have participated over the years.

We urge you to support our wonderful business members and partners, who have been so generous with their support of the Mason Historical Society.

Nonprofit
Organization
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MASON HISTORICAL SOCIETY
207 W. Church St.
Mason, Ohio 45040

Newsletter of the
MASON HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Mason, Ohio

and Alverta Green Museum

February 2021

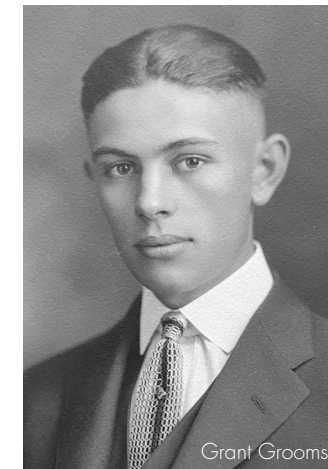
MASON'S FIRST BASKETBALL TEAM

By Thomas Barr (after a 1986 interview with French Smith)
This article first appeared in the *Pulse-Journal* in 1986.

Warren Harding was the nation's new president. Donna Reed, Lana Turner and Nancy Davis Reagan were born. Enrico Caruso and Bat Masterson died. Babe Ruth had, by many accounts, the greatest season in baseball history.

The year was 1921, and just 30 years after James Naismith invented the game, Mason would have its first basketball team. Only a couple of years before, there hadn't even been enough boys in the entire high school to field a starting five, let alone have a team. But Mason's fortunes soon changed.

A Mason drug store was sold to a Lebanon druggist, and Fred Snider was sent to Mason to run the newly acquired store. Snider had been a fine athlete in his days at Lebanon High School, and was partial to the relatively new sport. But he noticed that the sport was absent in Mason, even though most other local high schools had a team. And among the many obstacles to starting a team, he faced perhaps the biggest one of all -- not a single Mason High boy had ever even held a basketball, let alone knew what to do with one.



French Smith,
Graduation photo, 1921

Snider was able to round up eight boys willing to learn the game, and a team was born, consisting of Wallace Hill, Earl Bahr, French Smith, Wymer Drake, Raymond Smith, Marion Bowyer, Robert Waggoner and Leroy Mason. French Smith would become the team's "running guard." (Note: According to



"Base Ball Team" - "1920-21" - M.H.S.

French Smith (4th from left) was a multi-sport player, shown here with his high school baseball team during the 1920-21 season behind Mason High School (now Central).

Rose Marie Springman's book, Frank Miller and Ernest Luker were also on the team.)

"We players went around and asked local merchants for donations to help buy the necessary equipment, like wire screens to put around the lights at Mason Central Auditorium so we couldn't break them" Smith said. "We got about a hundred dollars, and we got stepladders, drills and bolts and fastened those wire baskets around the lights." (Note: The auditorium was not the gymnasium, which wasn't built until 1936.)

"None of us had ever touched a basketball before, so we had to learn all the basics from Fred Snider. That first year we played Morrow, Springboro, Loveland, Waynesville and West Chester. We didn't win any games. We also used to go to Harmon Hall in Lebanon and play a Lebanon High School alumni team. They would beat the hell out of us, but eventually we were able to take them."

story continues on next page

The Mason Historical Society and Alverta Green Museum are located in the heart of downtown Mason, Ohio. Established over 40 years ago, the Society's aim is to create, promote and preserve the history and heritage of Mason.

For more information, call 513.398.6750, visit our website at masonhistoricalsociety.org or friend us on Facebook.

Visit us at:
207 W. Church St.
Mason, Ohio

REGULAR HOURS
1 pm - 4 pm
Thursday and Friday,
First Saturday of the Month
10 am - 1 pm, and by appointment

First Basketball Team, cont.

“I remember playing at Loveland because they had two steel posts right in the center of the floor, and they really knew how to use them to their advantage. Springboro’s court had an outside door at one end of it, and the ball was always going through it and landing out in the snow. West Chester had a stage at the end of the floor, and their players could put a foot up on the stage and dunk the ball.”

“But we had our own advantages playing at home. We had a narrow court, and the ceiling was low, We could beat a team with players that put a high arch on their shots. We got great crowds for home games. People sat in folding chairs all around the court. Our fans would try to trip the opposing players, and the visiting fans would try to trip ours.”

“We used to dress for games downstairs in the furnace room. We would wear long underwear to practice in, and roll up the legs; they’d keep falling down. We wore tennis shoes, but they weren’t padded well, and your feet would hurt after playing. Our court didn’t have a scoreboard, so the scorekeeper kept track of the score.”

“To get to away games, we’d get a farmer with a stock truck and put planks along the sides, and the coaches, players and some fans would ride off to the games.”

“After that first season, Albert Cowan became coach. We managed to finally win a few games. He took us up to Wilmington High School one year and they beat us something like 24-6. But it was a thrill for us to go to Wilmington back then. Some local people took us to Kings Mills, we caught the Sheepskin Line train to Morrow, then drove to Wilmington and stayed all night.”

“I guess I scored about eight points a game in those days. Players were smaller then. Leroy Mason, who was about six-one, was one of the few six-footers playing in the county. And it was rougher then; there were a lot of fights. But Mr. Cowan was quite a gentleman, and he’d sit you down and in the fewest words let you know that you were to behave yourself.”

2014 Notes: French Smith graduated from Mason High School in 1922 and in 1924 married Ellen Stall. They had two children, Dr. James Smith and Jane (Grooms). French was later a Mason councilman and longtime Mason teacher and insurance agent. In 1983 he was inducted into the fourth class of the Mason Athletic Hall of Fame. At the 1994 ceremony, he laughingly accepted the “Oldest Jock Award” for being the oldest attendee. He died the following year at age 92.



It wasn’t until February, 1935 that Mason won its first Warren County Championship. The winning team members were:
first row Stanley Smith, Robert Sorger “Al Ray”, Bill Gilbert, Walter “Bub” Dwire, Edwin Barr, Ed Newby, Virgil Mount, Art Hill.
back row Coach Raymond “Skip” LaRue, Tom Martin, Joe Barr, Edward Barr, Bill Ulmer, Arnold Furbee, Ralph Voorhis.



French Smith, with his wife Ellen in 1965, dressed for Mason’s Sesquicentennial.

MASON HIGH SCHOOL BASKETBALL SCORECARD

Mason was a member of the Fort Ancient Valley Conference (FAVC) from 1964, when it was formed, until 2007 when Mason joined the Greater Miami Conference (GMC). In 2012 the FAVC disbanded with teams splitting into the Eastern Cincinnati Conference and the Southwest Ohio Conference.

Mason was quite successful in the FAVC league, winning first place twelve times in 1968, 1970, 1977-1978, 1984, 1986-1987, 1990, 1995, 2005-2007. In their 13 years in the GMC, they have only come in first twice, in 2015 and 2016.

Mason girls’ basketball has fared a bit better as they won the FAVC 13 times, GMC three times and the State Championship in 2000! They were also state runners-up in 1996 and 1999.

Your Historical Museum Collection

Featured item of the month

This **crazy quilt** in the Museum’s collection dates to 1916. Mary Jane Oatley Parkhill made it as a gift for her granddaughter, Aerial Louise Ross, on the occasion of her birth.

Quilts of this style differ from geometric quilts in that they don’t employ repeating motifs; the fabric pieces are irregularly shaped. The patches and seams are also highly embellished and utilize hundreds of different fabrics.

Crazy quilts became popular in the late 1800s, likely due to the English embroidery and Japanese art displayed at the Philadelphia Centennial Expo. They rapidly became fashionable with women thanks to the wide variety of fabrics produced by the newly-industrialized 19th-century textile industry.

This particular quilt appears to have been extremely labor intensive, with its beautiful embroidered flowers and the elegant detailed stitching. An 1884 *Harper’s Bazaar* article estimated that a full-size crazy quilt could take 1,500 hours to complete. That’s almost nine months of 40-hour weeks!



THIS MONTH IN MASON HISTORY

Excerpt from *Around Mason, Ohio: A Story*, Rose Marie Springman

1881: The first passenger train ran through Mason on February 22. The Carolina Jubilee Singers performed in Mason on the last day of the month.

1893: In mid-February Mayor Van Fossen formally applied to the Ohio General Assembly for permission for the village to borrow money and issue bonds for the purpose of purchasing ground and erecting a building for the use of the Mason council and the fire company. (This had been discussed since 1860.)

1909: J. M. Thompson’s banking business was reorganized in early February and became known as The Mason Bank Inc. One month later Thompson sold his Opera House building on Main Street to the new Mason bank for \$8,000.

1909: The People’s Building Loan and Savings Company incorporated on February 13 with a holding of a half million dollars. The business was operated from The Mason Bank facilities.

1911: On February 24 the Mason Canning Company filed their Articles of Incorporation with the Secretary of the State of Ohio. The stockholders in the new company were Newton L. Bunnell, C. C. Eulass, W. R. Chace, W. E. Scott, George Tetrick, M. C. Wikoff and William Williamson.



Happy Valentine’s Day from all of us at the Mason Historical Society. This ca. 1906 postcard extolling the “virtues” of Mason, pretty much says it all.

1934: The water tower on Church Street was completed by February and it was valued at \$7,500.

1937: In late February the Ohio Central Telephone Corporation found it necessary to publish a notice in the local paper that “no information concerning fires would be given to anyone save the members of the (Mason) Fire Company for a period of at least ten minutes after the blowing of the siren.” The phone operators had been serving as a center of immediate information to the local citizenry.

1956: On February 8 a group of businessmen, many of whom had been members of the Mason Business Men’s Club, met at the Grange Hall and formed the Mason chapter of the Kiwanis Club. The first elected officers were W. H. Aufranc, Clem Muennich, James Coulson and John Zopff. The first directors were Roy Smith, Ray Keith, Russ Carter, Ernest Riegel, Warren Silven, C. W. Bercaw and William Lawless.

Around Mason, Ohio: A Story (Bicentennial Edition) is available for purchase at the Alverta Green Museum. 7

The Board Report

Jay Meibers, President



To quote Anne Bradstreet, “If we had no winter, the spring would not be so pleasant”. The nice thing about February is that January has past and Spring is on the horizon. Spring will be even more important this year as the COVID-19 vaccine in Spring may be widely available and things can begin getting back to normal.

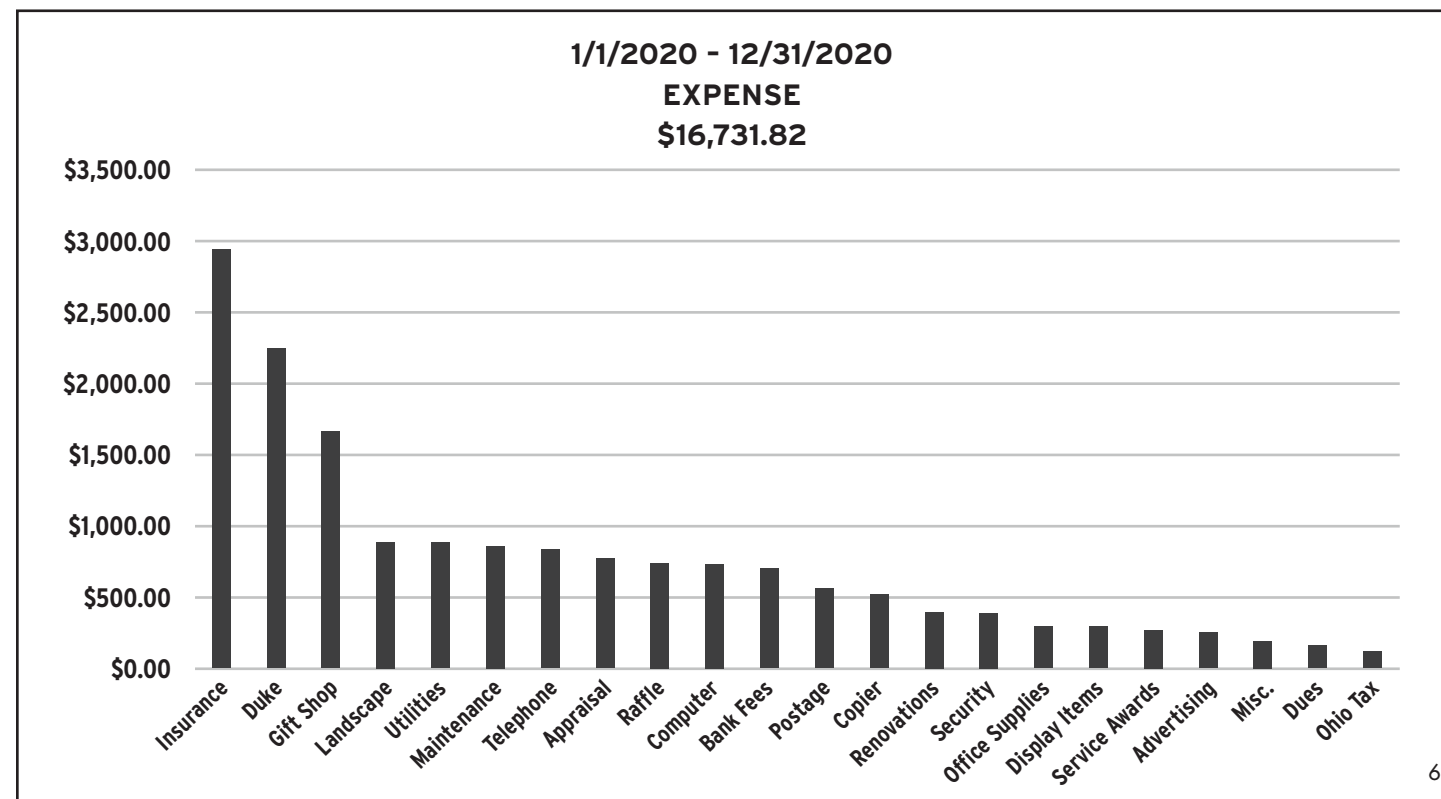
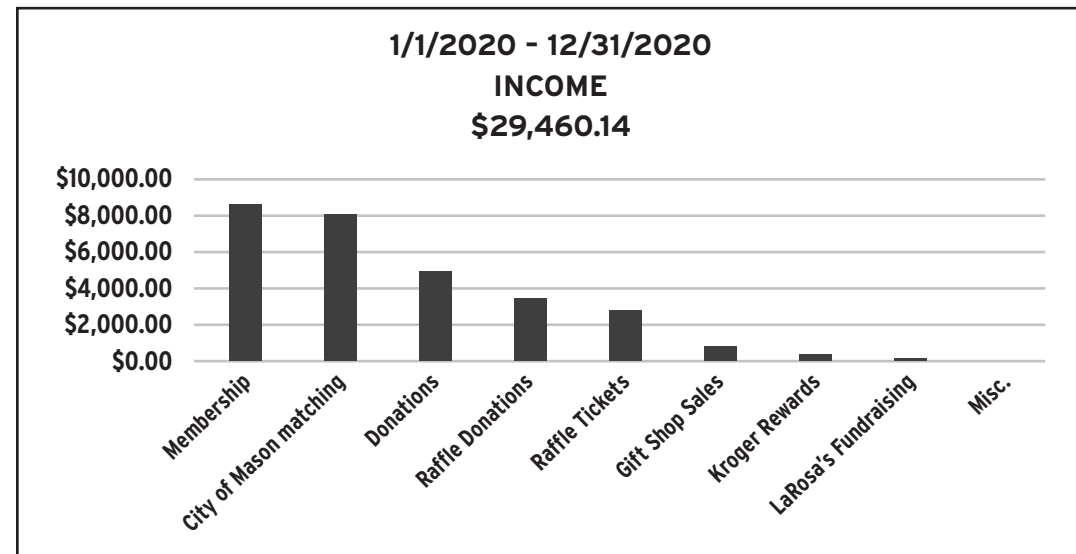
The Board continues to closely monitor the COVID-19 situation. We will be discussing 2021 programs and timing soon. We will also be considering museum open hours beyond March 1. Membership and visitor safety is paramount and our decisions will be based with that in mind.

As I mentioned in the January newsletter, we are including our 2020 Income/Expense graphs for your review. The 2020 results were outstanding. The combination of the Board’s focused reduction in expenditures with the success of the rescue raffle, very generous donations, increased memberships and achieving full City of Mason matching funds put us well into the black for 2020. An amazing result when you consider the lack of fundraisers and the museum closures due to COVID. We cannot thank you enough for your tremendous generosity and support during such a crazy year. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions on the 2020 Income/Expense results.

Just a reminder, if you have not done so already now is the time to renew your memberships for 2021. Please consider if you may have a friend or family member who would also like to become a member.

We continue to receive rave reviews on the newsletter and appreciate your feedback. Let us know if you may have a story you would like to share in future newsletters. If you grew up in Mason, I’m sure you have stories to tell so don’t be shy!

Stay safe, stay well & thank you for your support of MHS.



A TALE OF TRUE TEAMWORK AND SURVIVAL

From the 1875 Warren County, Ohio Centennial Atlas, edited by Gina Burton Arens

The book *Around Mason, A Story*, states that lifelong Mason resident, French Smith (1903-1995), was a direct descendent of Captain Robert Benham. Benham was said to have established the first ferry across the Ohio River in 1792, built the first log house in Cincinnati and to have been one of the first three Warren County Commissioners. This is a true story of one of Captain Benham’s astounding military adventures.

Captain Robert Benham was one of a party of seventy men who were attacked by Indians near the Ohio River, opposite Cincinnati, in the war of the Revolution. In the autumn of 1779, a number of keelboats were ascending the Ohio under the command of Major David Rodgers and had advanced as far as the mouth of the Licking River without incident.

Here, however, they observed a few Indians standing on the southern extremity of a sandbar, while a canoe rowed by three others was putting off from the Kentucky shore, as if approaching the keelboats. Rodgers immediately ordered his men to advance towards the Indians.

Cautiously they approached the shore where they’d seen 5 or 6 Indians. Perhaps, they thought there may be 15 or 20 total. Imagine their shock as they neared the shore when several hundred Indians stormed the boats from all sides!

The Indians instantly began firing on the men, then once their ammunition was spent, they attacked survivors with their tomahawks. Major Rodgers, together with 45 of his men, were quickly destroyed. (Some accounts say that Rodgers was taken captive.) The survivors attempted to go back to their boats but the five men tending the boats had taken off! With no other option, the survivors, stormed furiously towards the enemy and aided by the approach of darkness, were able to escape to Harrodsburg.

Among the wounded and left behind, was Captain Robert Benham. Shortly after breaking through enemy lines he was shot through both hips. Falling to the ground he found a large tree lately fallen nearby and painfully drug himself into the top branches, concealing himself. The Indians, in eager pursuit of others, passed him unnoticed. By midnight all was quiet.

The next day the Indians returned to strip the dead and take care of the boats. Captain Benham laid quietly in hiding fearful of being discovered but ultimately successful in escaping detection.

In the evening of the second day Benham heard the rustle of a squirrel in a nearby tree. He shot it hoping to devise some means of reaching it and cooking it. No sooner had the shot been fired, he heard a human cry. Apparently not more than 50 yards off. Supposing it was an Indian he hastily reloaded his gun, expecting the worse.

Presently the same voice was heard, only nearer. Still, Benham made no reply, only cocked his gun waiting for the enemy to attack.

A third “halloo” was quickly heard, followed by an exclamation of impatience and distress, which convinced Benham that the unknown person must be a Kentuckian. As soon as he heard, “Whoever you are, for God’s sake, answer me!” he quickly replied, and the parties were soon together.

Benham soon discovered that the man who appeared had escaped from the same battle as he had but with both arms disabled! They quickly learned to work and survive cooperatively. Benham, having perfect use of his arms, could load his gun and kill game while his friend would kick the game to the spot where Benham sat, who was thus able to cook it.

When no wood was near them, his companion would rake up brush with his feet and gradually roll it within reach of Benham.

Benham would feed his companion and dressed his wounds, tearing up both of their shirts for this purpose.

At first, they had a hard time getting water. Benham solved this by putting his hat brim into his friend’s teeth who would wade into the Licking up to his neck, then would dunk his head under filling the hat with water. In this manner they supported themselves for several weeks while their wounds healed.

They were eventually rescued in late November by a flat bottom boat traveling down the river. The boat’s crew were reluctant to rescue them fearing they were Indians or at best a decoy however Benham eventually convinced them.

Their appearance prompted much suspicion. They were almost entirely naked, and their faces were garnished with six weeks of beard growth. Benham was hobbling on crutches, the other could barely feed himself with one hand.

They were taken to Louisville, where their clothes (which had been carried off in the boats that deserted them) were returned to them and after a few weeks of continued rest they were “perfectly” restored.

Benham afterward served in the Northwest throughout the whole of the Indian War; accompanied the expeditions of Harmar and Wilkinson; shared in the disaster of St. Clair and afterwards the triumph of Wayne. In his later years, he moved to a farm a mile southwest of Lebanon, and it was here that he died in 1809 at the age of 59. Captain Robert Benham is buried in Lebanon Cemetery.

Benham’s adventures were written about by many, including author Henry Howe, President Teddy Roosevelt (in *The Winning of the West*), and the 1921 Yearbook of the Boy Scouts of America.

AN ILL-ADVISED ALLIANCE

Rev. John Smith and Aaron Burr

Sally Sherman Caudill, Contributing Editor

As we (hopefully) recover from all the political chaos as of late, and with President's Day soon upon us this month, we thought we'd share a story that possibly offers some perspective. Throughout our history there has been major political turmoil, but one of the most infamous has a Mason connection.

As most of us know, William Mason, came to the area in 1798 and founded the town of Mason (then named Palmyra) in 1815. William was one of eight siblings who lived to adulthood, four of whom settled in the SW Ohio region. One of those siblings was his older sister Elizabeth, who was married at the very youthful age of about 13 and had a child. While still very young, her husband was killed by Indians, and she later remarried Rev. John Smith. Elizabeth and John had five children together and settled in the Terrace Park area of Cincinnati, about 16 miles from Palmyra. The Smith's sent their children to a log cabin school in Warren County, just west of Lebanon, due to the excellent reputation of the classics teacher.

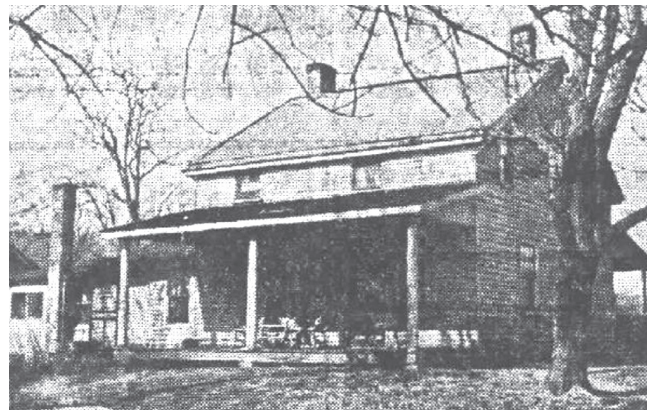
Rev. Smith had been poor and uneducated, but had looked to improve his station in life. Described by contemporaries as large, handsome and dark complected, he had a winning personality and a talent for public speaking which paved the way for his success. Smith became a prominent pioneer who was a Baptist minister, miller, farmer, businessman, politician, trader, land speculator and government supply contractor. He was a promoter of Ohio statehood and soon became one of Ohio's first two U.S. senators in 1803. He'd had doubts about his life's course when he took his seat in the Senate, and these were strengthened by letters

from his beloved wife, Elizabeth, urging him to abandon political life and again assume the humble pastorate of their church. But those doubts were put aside. It was in Washington D.C. that he befriended Aaron Burr, who was Thomas Jefferson's vice president and presided over the Senate. In 1804, Burr killed his political rival Alexander Hamilton in a duel. Even though dueling was illegal, Burr was never tried and charges were dropped. He may have skated legally, but politically he was finished.

To restore his reputation and his fortune, Burr hatched a plot to help Mexico overthrow Spain's power in the southwest. His true intention was to grab the northern Mexico territory, which included part of the Louisiana Purchase, and create an empire, where he would make himself the emperor. He put his plan in play and to secure money, he traveled up and down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers between 1805 and 1807. He made two visits to Cincinnati during this time, where he stayed at the home of Elizabeth and John Smith. When his plot was discovered, Burr was tried and convicted of treason, but later acquitted. Because of his association with Burr, Rev. John Smith lost his reputation, financial security and the confidence of President Thomas Jefferson. His political career was over, and he resigned from the Senate. If only he had listened to those earlier misgivings.

The Smiths had to sell their farm and they then moved to Louisiana for a fresh start. It appears the climate was more than disagreeable to the family. Several of their children died, and then Elizabeth followed in 1819. Rev. Smith died penniless in 1824. Historians still debate whether Smith was an innocent friend who'd been duped, or a willing accomplice. While likely the former, he and his family paid a high price.

Terrace Park Historical Society / *The Cincinnati Enquirer* / *Cincinnati Magazine* / American National Biography / *Around Mason, Ohio: A Story*, Springman / Geni.com / Baptist History.com

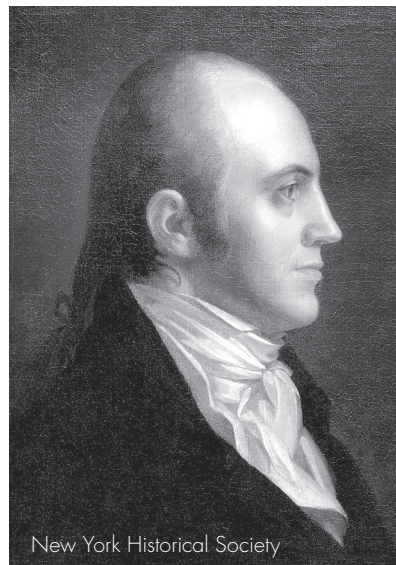


The Smith's log house, built about 1799, from an 1886 newspaper photo.



The original log house, home to much intrigue so long ago, is still standing at 1005 Elm Avenue in Terrace Park. It has been remodeled with white clapboards encasing the house, and is today called Foggy Creek Farm.

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New York Historical Society

Vice President Aaron Burr portrait by John Vanderlyn, 1802.



We were very saddened to hear of the loss of three of our members. Our sincere condolences go out to their family and friends.



Loretta Terry (nee Bales) passed away on Dec. 16th at the age of 89. Loretta and her late husband, Howard Terry owned and operated the "Dinner Bell" restaurant on W. Main ca. 1965-70. She is survived by her children, Jim Terry and Karen Terry, and many grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Loretta was a charter member and the first president of the Mason Historical Society in 1979. Loretta and her family lived next door to Alverta Green for many years, and it was Loretta who suggested to Alverta that she should bequeath her house to the MHS. She was a tireless worker and researcher in support of Mason history. Her unflagging dedication to the MHS will reverberate for many, many years and we are forever grateful to her.



Betty Rogers (nee Witham) passed away on Jan. 1st at the age of 87. She was born and raised in Mason, with her six siblings, and lived her entire life at the farm on the corner of Snider and Irwin-Simpson Roads. Her mother's family (Argadine) had owned the farm dating back to 1902. She graduated from Mason High in 1951. Betty's late husband was George "Buck" Rogers, a beloved teacher at Mason High School for many years. Betty worked at Union Central Life Insurance and The First-Mason Bank. She is survived by her son, Robert Rogers.

Betty was a volunteer and curator at the MHS for several years in the 1980s and 90s. Her comprehensive family history, stories and photographs were treasures, and added so much to the research for the *Mason Photographic History* book in 2015.



Daniel Herman Kamm passed away on January 12th, just one week shy of his 85th birthday. He was a life-long Masonite who grew up on a farm on Bethany Road.

Dan is survived by his wife Annette Kamm; his sons, Todd Kamm, grandson Jeremy; and several great-grandchildren. He is predeceased

by his son, Jonathan Kamm, who made the ultimate sacrifice in the Gulf War in 1991.

Dan was past National Guard. He was very active, enjoying pickleball, basketball, golf, and gardening. Dan was a good friend to the Mason Historical Society and lent his woodworking expertise to the Museum by doing a lot of carpentry work over the years.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

If you have any thoughts you would like to share regarding Mason history, please submit them to "Letters to the Editor." You can mail these to the museum or email them to mason.oh.historical@gmail.com

Thanks to everyone who has sent us emails commenting on how much you like the newsletter. Keep the notes coming...

We received the following from Everett Landen that was too good not to share. (slightly edited for space)

I read with great interest the story by Sally Sherman Caudill titled "A Brazen Heist." This touched a very personal place in my heart as I've been curious about the "John Dillinger" robbery of the Mason bank as related to me by my father Elmer Landen 1/2/1918 to 9/19/2001.

The article cleared up some misunderstandings of the memory of a 12-year-old who told his son of the event perhaps 50 years later. Dad's retelling the event went something like this (with the dangers of double hearsay so obvious)...

"Dad (Namon Landen 1882-1948) and I were spreading gravel using a team of horses and a farm wagon on Tylersville Road." (Namon Landen owned the last farm on Tylersville Road before Warren Butler County line Road on the same side as the WLW tower.) "As we were backing the wagon into our lane, Dillinger's car went to zooming past us toward Hamilton on Tylersville Road in a cloud of dust."

I had searched in vain for the incident using dad's memory that Dillinger robbed the Mason Bank. Of course that event never existed. Thus my failed ability to connect.

Thank you again for this opportunity to understand the events that occurred in fact with the events that were related to this son of Mason. It was enjoyable to read the piece and place it all in context.

Everett Landen

P.S. Seeing a picture of the young Red Chesney also brought back memories of our monthly visit to People's Building and Loan (next to Thompson's Hardware) where Dad would make his monthly mortgage payment for the house that he built at 227 Kings Mills Road. I would be placed on the counter, and after the payment was made and duly recorded in the mortgage book, I got my sucker from either Red or Ruth Chesney. I can still taste it after all these years.

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