

Newsletter of the MASON HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Mason, Ohio

and Alverta Green Museum

June 2021

MASON'S LUSTRON HOME

An Iconic Embodiment of Post-war America

Sally Sherman Caudill, Contributing Editor

In the past, we've shown you some examples of Mason history hiding in plain sight. I think there is no better example of this than the Lustron house at 209 S. West St. across from the library.

In post-WWII America, there was a housing shortage that was very challenging for returning soldiers. In 1948, the Lustron Corporation in Columbus, Ohio sought to meet that problem with the manufacture of porcelain enamel houses. They utilized an assembly line in a former warplane-manufacturing factory and provided a quick and low-cost solution that would be durable and maintenance-free.

Exterior rendering of Mason-built Lustron home, 1949.



Lustron mass-produced 3,300+ parts per home, including the bathtub, cabinets, gutters, radiant-panel heating system... well, everything, including the kitchen sink! All the customer had to add were appliances and furnishings. Homes were constructed from 10 tons of steel framing, clad with porcelain enameled steel panels on both the exterior and interior walls and roof.

After exiting the 1,100,000-square-foot factory, the individual parts would be loaded in reverse order onto trucks (so they could be unloaded at the site in the order needed for assembly). Guided by an instruction manual, a contractor could complete the build in 360 man-hours or less. The cost for the 2- and 3-bedroom homes ranged

from \$8,500 and \$10,500 (in today's dollars: \$93,000 to \$112,000). The interiors included space-saving combination washer/dryer/sink units that were unique to these homes (very few of them survive today as their functionality left much to be desired, and most were replaced). The homes were available in several exterior color options, and included signature design elements (such as a zig-zag metal downspout). This helped set them apart from other similar-looking, one-story homes of the period.

The rising cost of materials, production issues, etc. ultimately led to the company's bankruptcy in 1950. In the three-year life span of the company, about 2,500 Lustron homes were built across 33 states (300 in Ohio).

In 1949, Vivian Voorhis (nee Bowyer) purchased Mason's one and only Lustron home. Vivian was descended from some of the town's earliest pioneers. Her great, great grandmother, Catherine Mason Seward, was the sister of William Mason. Catherine was also the mother of Mason Seward, the town's first mayor. Vivian was a graduate of the MHS class of 1910, along with her future husband, Lawrence Voorhis. They would marry in 1917 and become parents to five children.

story continues on page 3

Vivian Voorhis in her Lustron living room, ca. 1970.



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.

TO SUBSCRIBE TO OUR NEWSLETTER

Join the Mason Historical Society at
Masonhistoricalsociety.org
or Call 513-398-6750

— **New Museum Hours** —
The Museum is now open Thursdays only from 2-8 pm. We hope the addition of evening hours will allow more opportunities for visits. Museum tours outside these hours will still be available by appointment.

A MOVIE LOVER'S DREAM

Mason's Iconic Theater

Sally Sherman Caudill, Contributing Editor

Now that movie theaters all across the country are starting to reopen, what better time to revisit Mason's iconic Dream Theatre. It all started with a German immigrant named William Hendricks. He was a local farmer that was granted a permit to build a "movie house" in the fall of 1916. This was quite an interesting career shift... and it was forward thinking on his part, as permanent motion picture theaters were rare at this time. At the turn of the 20th century, movies were shown in vaudeville houses and other informal venues. In Mason, the Opera House [5/3 Bank now] occasionally screened films.

He built the unique concrete building at 102 E. Main St. (second lot east of Mason-Mont.) and named his new

venture the "Princess Theater." It's believed that this was one of the first movie theaters in the local area that had been designed specifically for film. There was seating for 298 patrons, and the theater featured a state-of-the-art projector and a 14-foot-wide gold fabric screen. The poor quality of early films sometimes caused a flickering and blur of the onscreen image, and the gold fabric was intended to prevent those annoyances. The townspeople flocked to the Princess every Friday and Saturday night. In 1918, an alcove was built onto the front of the building to help handle the crowds.

The next year, for whatever reason, the Princess was renamed the "Grand Theater." William Hendricks later sold the theater to W.E. "Bill" Hall. In the early 1930s, it was Bill Hall who renamed the theater once again. This time with a name that brings a smile to anyone who had a chance to see a movie there.

The "Dream Theatre" was renovated in 1939 to usher in a new generation of moviegoers. It boasted hardwood floors, blue leather upholstery, a furnace to replace an old heating stove, new drapes from New York, and a new projector and screen. The theater was now going to be open on four nights instead of just two.

The Dream changed hands again when Clyde Humphrey became the owner and manager. But sadly in 1969, Clyde passed away and for the first time in over 50 years, the Dream went dark.

It was used as a church for the next few years, and was falling into disrepair. In early 1974, the theater was bought by Woodrow Wilson, the manager of Lebanon's Colony Square Cinema (and former Warren County sheriff's deputy). He planned to reopen the theater and call it the "Mason Cinema," but nature had other plans...

On April 3, 1974 the tornado that ripped through Mason, destroyed the town's beloved theater and the building had to be razed. The empty lot that sits there today is a sad reminder of the joy that the Dream brought to multiple generations of local moviegoers.



The Princess Theater at 102 E. Main Street, 1917.

Around Mason, A Story, Rose Marie Springman / Warren County Recorder

Princess
SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 3, '17

Which reveals the unflinching mother love. The most beautiful photo drama ever filmed.

COMEDY...RISKS AND ROUGHNECKS.

Wednesday, November 7
"HER SECRET."

THE LAST INSTALLMENT OF
"The Neglected Wife"

Featuring Alice Joyce and Harry Morey. Reveals her trials and tribulations in the far west. See the finish and learn who is really responsible for the neglected wife.

Princess ad (Nov. 1917)

DREAM THEATRE
Clyde Humphrey, Mgr.
MASON, OHIO

FRI. . SAT. . SUN. . DEC.
21. 22 and 23

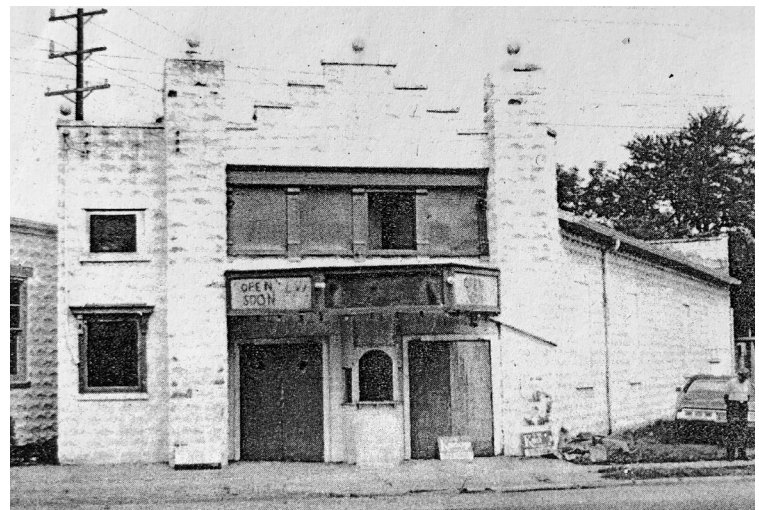
ASTRO-NUTS vs MARTIANS!

THE THREE STOOGES IN ORBIT

A COLUMBIA PICTURES RELEASE

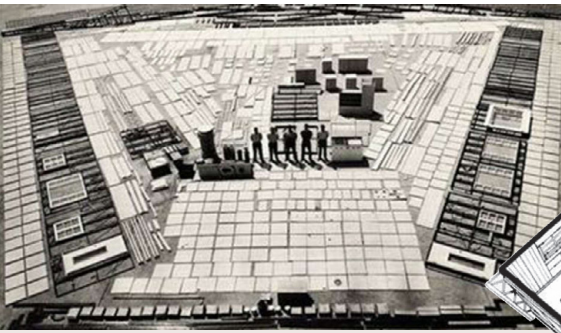
SUNDAY MATINEE 2:30 PM
FAMILY NIGHT SUN. \$1.20

Dream ad (Dec. 1962)

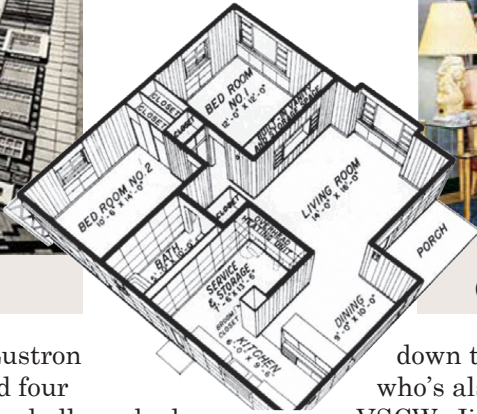


The dilapidated Dream in early 1974.

Mason's Lustron Home, cont.



Deconstructed Lustron home, 1949.



Floor plan (left) and living room rendering (above) of Mason-built Lustron home, 1949.

When she purchased her new Lustron home, Vivian had been widowed four years before, and her children had all reached adulthood. She chose the Westchester, 2-bedroom model, which had 1,093 square feet.

Her youngest child, son Alvin (Al), started his architecture business in the garage on the property. He worked out of that garage until 1960, when he built the office at 414 Reading Road that still houses the company he founded (now VSCW). Is it coincidence that such an architecturally- and historically-significant home should be the "birth" of one of Mason's premier architects?

Vivian lived at her beloved Lustron home until she passed away in 1975. The house was then passed



Mason's Lustron at 209 S. West St., 2021.

down to her son, Al, and then to Al's son, Jim, who's also an architect and now heads up the firm VSCW. Jim recalls, *"The house is an amazing piece of engineering. When I owned it, I did some work on it (replaced metal kitchen cabinets, minor repairs). All the exterior porcelain metal panels are original and show no signs of failing. The house is truly constructed like war-time equipment (everything fits perfectly and was well thought out). Great Engineering! This house has basically been maintenance free since it was built."* Jim also covered the original interior walls with drywall. Much easier to hang pictures, I would imagine.

The Voorhis family had owned the home for 50 years when Jim sold it in 1999. A later owner who was renovating for business, enclosed the small front porch, removed the kitchen, relocated the bathroom and put in a few more partition walls. They also moved the entrance door to the rear. The building is now "Salon Suites Off Main," which provides salon space rental.

Regarding renovations...I did forget to mention the new roof. As 85-year-old Vivian Voorhis stood in her kitchen on the afternoon of April 3, 1974, and looked up to see a tornado rip the roof off her house, she figured it was a good time to get a new one.

Ohio History Connection / The New York State Lustron Project / The American Ceramic Society / Realtor.com / Gizmodo.com / Dornob.com / David Lore, "Nails Don't Work on Metal Houses." *Columbus Dispatch*, 11/25/1984 / Ben Steelman, StarNewsOnline.com / Many thanks to Jim Voorhis

Your Historical Museum Collection

Featured items of the month

The Alverta Green Museum has several wonderful artifacts from the Dream Theatre. They include:

- Handcut and handpainted sign, "The DREAM, 100% Talking," dates to ca. 1931
- M. Schulz Player Piano used at the theater, dates to ca. 1928. *Donated by Don and Pat Williams*
- Concrete pinnacle sphere from roof ledge of theater, 1916. *Donated by Noble and Marilyn Johnston*



OLD MASON, NEW MASON & THE HOMEARAMA INFLUENCE

Gina Burton Arens, Editor

Every time I drive through Mason I am amazed at the perpetual stream of cars, trucks, and people wherever you go. It seems never ending. We moved to Mason in 1958 and except for a two-year stint in Bethany, I spent my entire school years here. In the town I knew growing up, you could play in the street without a worry of being run down by an aggressive driver, trying like hell to get home five minutes faster. I wondered how Mason got this busy? According to an article in *The Cincinnati Enquirer* it all started with Homearama in 1996.

Since 1962 the Home Builders Association of Greater Cincinnati, has sponsored an annual grand home showcase called "Homearama". Homes in Greater Cincinnati's first Homearama in 1962 in Springfield Township featured homes priced from \$14,000 to \$33,500 (\$112,538 to \$290,000 in today's dollars).

In 1996 Mason had the honor of being chosen as the Homearama site. The development that year was The Heritage Club off Butler Warren Road. Homes were priced from \$469,500 to \$879,900 with an average of 4600 square feet of living space.

That year *Enquirer* reporter Randy McNutt reported that the event transformed the way people viewed Mason. According to McNutt, "it changed people's attitudes about life 'out there'." Apparently, many thought we lived in corn cribs out in Mason farmland and were astonished by the level of housing that could actually be built in rural America.

What McNutt missed was that Mason had already been blessed with their first Homearama back in 1984 at the Jack Nicklaus Sports Center. Apparently, no one took notice of that one. The houses were built overlooking the 15th, 16th, and 17th holes of the Championship Grizzly Golf Course and sold for a modest \$154,000 to \$279,000 with most houses sporting 2600 to 3100 square feet. The houses along Eagleview Court exhibited contemporary features like skylights, sunken living rooms and solariums.

Yet in 1996 Mr. McNutt felt Mason had broken through a barrier. He affirmed, "The prestigious home show means Mason has arrived as a suburban center." People now realized that Mason offered homes as nice as anywhere in the greater Cincinnati area and we had plenty of room to build. That fact coupled with the ideal location between Cincinnati and Dayton with good schools to boot made Mason an attractive place to live.

That said, the article questioned whether the small city of 15,000 could handle the growth. The answer to that question was a resounding yes! Scot Lahrmer, Mason's city manager, who had come on board in 1989



Homearama 1984



Homearama 1996

when he was just 31, had spent the past four years building the infrastructure to manage the growth Mason was experiencing. During that time Mason had spent approximately \$20 million bringing utilities up to standards among other improvement projects.

Twelve million was spent to double the wastewater treatment plant, a new \$6.5 million water works was opened increasing the city's pumping capacity from 3 million to 6 million gallons daily and 4.2 million had been invested in widening Mason-Montgomery Road. In addition, A \$10-million-dollar Middle School had been added two years earlier. Mason was indeed planning for growth.

While McNutt's assessment was great PR for the village, Homearama was only a by-product of the real reason for Mason's growth. From 1991 to 1995 housing starts had quadrupled. Schools and city services were stretched but they were managing. The real root of the growth explosion was Mason's ability to attract new businesses and their ongoing annexation of land that started in 1950.

Going back further we see Mason's growth actually started in the 50s. Considered a bedroom community for workers in Cincinnati, Mason saw a 295% population increase from 1,196 to 4,727 between 1950 to 1960. With the advent of the automobile and roads, people were able to live and work where they pleased.

"In 1957 an article in *The Cincinnati Enquirer* quoted a Mason community leader as saying, "In the morning half of the people here get into their cars and roar away. We don't see them again until night." ¹ It went on to say that most of the new residents in Mason were new families buying their first home, working in Cincinnati industries.

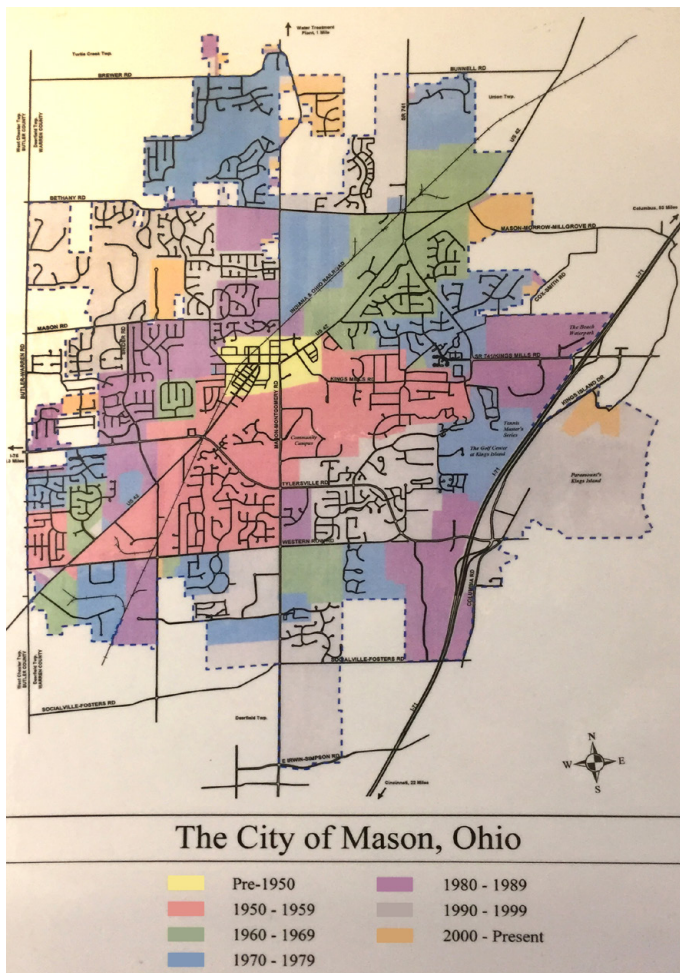
The opening of the GE Aircraft Nuclear Propulsion Project in 1951 created many jobs within a 15-minute drive of Mason. The Korean War had created a surge in the demand for J47 aircraft engines. The plant that had

once been Wright Aeronautical, which was among the largest and most sophisticated US factory during WWII, had swung back into action.

Between 1990 and 2000 Mason’s population nearly doubled, from 11,452 to 22,019. Increasingly businesses recognized the strategic location Mason offered and the ample and affordable land available to build their offices, warehouses, and production facilities. Tax credits and tax abatements crafted by the city, county and state didn’t hurt either.

Companies like Cintas who relocated their headquarters here in 1991 and Proctor & Gamble who built their 1.3 million-square-foot Healthcare Research Center in 1995 with 2800 employees are just two of many who had come to Mason. The housing demand was the natural result of increased jobs in the city. Residents no longer had to drive to employers, they were right here!

For the next two years Homearama returned to Mason. In 1997 the Homearama site was the Pine Run development off Stitt Road in fields that were once graced by corn and soybeans. These homes were priced from \$410,000 to \$550,000. At least the prices were down a bit from the previous year for the budget conscious consumers. Finally in 1998 Homearama once again was held at The Heritage Club.



City of Mason Annexation Map

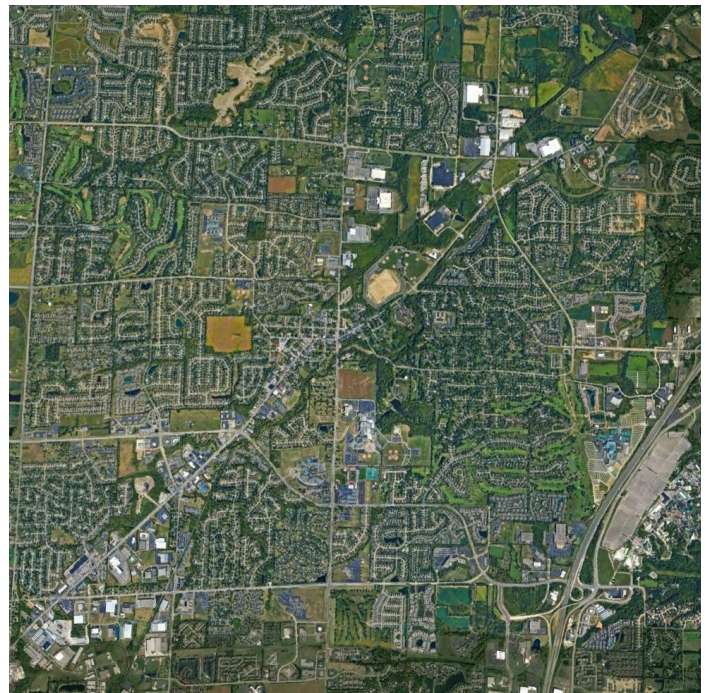
The Enquirer said, “it was unprecedented that the Builders Assn. would return to the same community three years in a row!” That said from 2004 through 2009, Deerfield Township hosted the event.

Between 2000 and 2020 the population of Mason took another leap from 22,019 to 34,450. There are very few spaces left where houses do not carpet the landscape. According to the City of Mason website, the average cost of a house in Mason today is \$213,887. Mason’s housing is dominated by large single-family homes on lots between .25 and one acre, built within, (surprise) the last 10-20 years.

If I am honest, I have regarded this massive influx of newcomers to Mason as a disruption, ruining our quiet, carefree community. But as I digest the whole growth history I start to think, maybe the people in the 1950’s viewed our arrival in a similar way. We too were a disruption that required city fathers to attend to the physical demands of this growth.

In the 1996 article Mr. McNutt stated, “A new Mason has grown over the old. The new Mason is subdivisions, high-tech industries, a large municipal pool, small businesses of all kinds and white-collar council members. The old Mason was a small city, close-knit, with farm roots.” It is the “close-knit” quality, that I most regret losing. But if the definition of “close-knit” is “tightly united, connected or organized”, maybe even in a community as large as we are today, we can still preserve the unity and connection we know that is at the heart of Mason.

¹*Around Mason, A Story*, Rose Marie Springman, p. 268.
The Cincinnati Enquirer, July 28, 1957; May 19, 1996; Jun 30, 1996
 ImagineMason.org
 Photos (page 4): *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, June 10, 1984; June 12, 1996.



City of Mason satellite aerial photo, 2020.

The Board Report

Jay Meibers, President



As I sit here writing the Board report, I am in South Haven Michigan looking over Lake Michigan. The weather is partly cloudy and 70 degrees with a light wind blowing from the south. Basically, a perfect day. I can hear my 5 brothers and their wives sitting on the back patio laughing and enjoying themselves as the morning begins moving towards afternoon. It is times like this that we fondly remember and appreciate even more as Father Time keeps ticking away. I hope all of you fondly remember your special memories especially as we begin to move out of the pandemic phase. Get together with family and friends will again be the norm with more memories to cherish.

We hope that you can join us at the Ice Cream Social on Monday June 14. This will be the first event we have had at the museum since the pandemic began. Hopefully, the weather will cooperate but if not we can move inside if needed. Looking forward to seeing a great turn out!

The museum was opened on May 6th and we had a few visitors which was great. Keep in mind that the museum open hours are every Thursday from 2:00 – 8:00pm. There will be some mural construction going on in the future so please pardon possibly seeing some scaffoldings being up as you walk into the addition of the museum.

We will be supporting Music in Mason on June 4 and July 30 so stop by the booth to say hello if you are joining the festivities. We are also beginning to develop our raffle for 2021 and will keep you updated once finalized. In the meantime, if you have any prize donations, please let us know, we can pick-up if necessary.

There are still many members who have not paid their 2021 membership dues. If you are not sure if you have paid or not, then please call us or email us at the museum and we will get back with you. For your convenience, we will include a membership form in the NL mailing for anyone who has not renewed. I will also send out the form to the email list as well. Our goal is that all members renew as we continue to add new members to our ranks.

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

THIS MONTH IN MASON HISTORY

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

1868: The township trustees purchased ten acres of land on Section Road just south of Muddy Creek for a cemetery which was to stay in the township trustees' control. Peter W. Wikoff was paid \$2,000 for the property which was to be called Rose Hill Cemetery.

1882: On June 18 Mrs. Louise Coble broke out with smallpox. Dr. J.M. VanDyke was asked to take charge of the situation. There were two flags placed at each end of the house marked SMALL POX and the doctor was to see that the Koble family were kept within their enclosure until they recovered.

Just one month after Louise Coble contracted smallpox, her five-year-old daughter, Drusilia, died from the disease, on July 20, 1882.

Six years later, the family was again stricken with smallpox. The first to succumb was four-year old Levi Jr. who died October, 11, 1888. A week later, nine-year-old Anna Teresa also died from the disease. Only two of Levi Sr. and Louise's five children survived to adulthood.

A beautiful etched, green glass marker was made for the graves of the three children at Rose Hill. After so many years out in the elements, the marker was falling apart and in danger of breakage. Deerfield Twp. moved the marker into their office for protection and donated a granite replacement marker.



1886: Samuel Sprinkle bought the corner lot on which Dodds' Hall had burned down. Between March and June, he negotiated four land deals with E. C. and Adolphus Dodds, including lot #2 and lot #6, and all together he paid them \$5,000. Within the year he had Sprinkle's Opera House built on the Dodds' Hall lot.

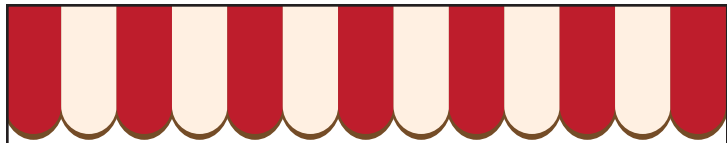
1913: The Ben Lewis Orchestra of Lebanon — piano, violin and drums — played for a "Select Dance" at Rebold's Hall in June.

1924: The Warren County Appeal, which had been published in Mason under several names for more than two decades, went under new management in June. The Brown Publishing Company of Lebanon took over the operation in late June and Roger Hill, described as an energetic young Mason youth, was in charge of the newspaper office.

1953: On June 19, the Mason Fire Company sponsored a barn dance in Jack Fleckenstein's new barn north of Mason. There was live music, and a good crowd was in attendance.



Warren County Board of Health smallpox sign that was placed in the front window of afflicted homes. Artifact on display at Museum. Ca. 1882.



2021 Ice Cream Social!

Monday, June 14th at 6 pm

Join us for our annual
Ice Cream Social
and Bake Sale
Fundraiser.



See info on flyer insert. Don't forget to RSVP!

Happy *Father's* Day

to all you Supermen out there

HELLO

TO ALL OF OUR NEWSLETTER READERS

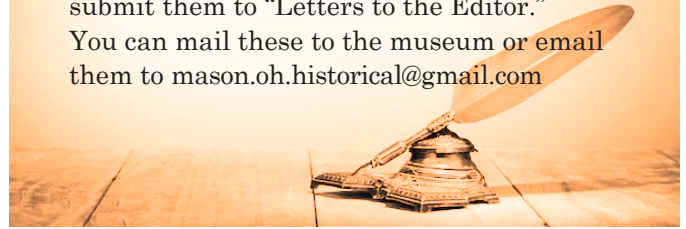
This year I celebrate my tenth year as a board member of the Mason Historical Society. This all started quite simply from a phone call to me by then board member Rhonda Pringle asking me if I was interested in helping out. Although my family had lived in Mason since 1965, I had never been a member or even been inside the museum at that point! Often times I remember driving down West Church Street and wondering what was inside that old house.

I can honestly assure you that my willingness to serve on the board has benefitted me just as much as the society over the last decade. Many, many dedicated members provided the Historical Society with a wonderful foundation and facility beginning in 1979 that will hopefully be around for many years to come.

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



Letter to the Editor,

What a great April newsletter. I came to Mason in 1956 as a teacher and then high school principal for 10 years. The article of "WLW-Mason's Station" was a great article bringing me up to date of all the happenings before I came to Mason. Then you had an article on Everybody's Farm. It was really great, and I had the Bates family, who ran the farm for a short period of time, in school. Not to be outdone then the article on Mason's Tech Giant, Mike Chipman was great also. I had Mike when I was principal, and he was an outstanding student. I was fortunate to be at the get together with Mike before his induction in "Mason High School Distinguished Alumni".

Those articles were blessings to me, and I thank you very much for printing them in the newsletter. Bringing the days of my years in Mason, 1956-68, to light is so wonderful.

Emerson Brown

That is one of the reasons that I am writing this note. **The Historical Society needs volunteers to maintain our activities and offerings to the Mason community. Just as our early residents supported schools, churches, businesses, and each other, we need YOUR support as well.** Whether you would be interested in tending to the flower beds, providing some light electrical or plumbing work, scanning photos or documents, or manning our open museum hours, YOUR contribution will be greatly appreciated.

It is a fun way to meet new people, boast some MASON pride and work off a few calories. You can leave us an email or phone message, and someone will contact you. Please consider helping us out in whatever way you are able. I bet that like me, it will be a very enjoyable experience.

Sincerely yours,

Perry Denehy "79"

BUSINESS MEMBERS *and* PARTNERS

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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.

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Artis Senior Living of Mason
Lt. Robt. N. Mount V.F.W.
9622 Aux.
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Minuteman Press of Lebanon
Mueller Funeral Home
Terry's Lawn Care, Inc.
Warren County Historical Society
16 Lots Brewing Co.

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

MANY THANKS

In late 2019, the beautiful, old player piano featured on page 3 was restored back to its former glory. This was possible because of the generous donations from the following:

David K. Batsche Memorials
Brian and Mary Bailey
Marilyn Batsche
Charlotte Bercau
Emerson Brown
Steve and Amy Carey
Debra Carpenter
Perry Denehy
Marvin and Ann Duren
Larry and Jan Jeffers
Noble and Marilyn Johston
Lynn Humphrey Jones
Mason Kiwanis
Jay and Cindy Meibers
Jerry Mullins
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Sandy Staten
Paul and Rosemary Steiner
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