



MASON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

and Alverta Green Museum

December 2020



ROSE MARIE SPRINGMAN – A STORY

Mason's Preeminent Historian

Sally Sherman Caudill, Contributing Editor

Just about anything you would ever like to know about Mason's history is available at your fingertips, thanks to Rose Marie Springman. She was born Rose Marie Krabbe in Cincinnati on May 10, 1925 to Anna Brausch and Joseph Krabbe. By the time she was in school, the family, along with Rose Marie's younger brother, Gerald, had



Rose Marie Springman, c. 1982

moved to a farm on Hamilton-Mason Rd. in Butler County. She graduated from Lemon Monroe High School in 1943.

In 1952, Rose Marie married Karl Springman and they moved to W. Church St. in Mason the next year. The town was an ideal place to raise their four daughters: Mary Adele, Karla and twins, Anne and Elise. After her daughters reached school age, she went back to college and earned her teaching degree from the University of Cincinnati. She began her school career in Mason as assistant librarian at the high school, and then taught seventh grade at Mason Central for several years in the early 1970s.

Rose Marie had a knack for architecture and design, and was an avid gardener. Her show-stopping flower garden every spring and summer would bring carloads of townspeople by to see it. History research had always been a love of Rose Marie's. She had a particular interest in the Shakers, and she loved the treasure hunt that is personal

genealogy. In 1964, she was asked to write a history of Mason for publication as a booklet during the town's Sesquicentennial the following year. She was quite the Renaissance woman!

As if all of that wasn't enough, she really wanted to serve her community and once unsuccessfully ran for city council. Afterwards, she decided that she could serve in another way. She hit upon the idea of writing a book about Mason's history. As a lifelong journalist, it seems she was pre-destined for this path. The research she had done for the Sesquicentennial became the basis for her book, and in a world where there was no internet, her efforts are truly awe inspiring. Over the

story continues on page 4

My own family's history in Mason would be non-existent if it weren't for Rose Marie. She and my mother, Trudy Rosselot Sherman, were best friends since grade school. In 1964, we were living in Blue Ash and my mother was six months pregnant with her seventh child. Our little home was bursting at the seams! Rose Marie called one night to say that Karl had been out walking and saw John and Verna Niederman putting a for sale sign in their yard at 106 W. Church St. Karl high-tailed it the two blocks home to pass the word along. My parents loaded us all in the car immediately and we drove to Mason. The house and double lot were perfect for our family

and the deal was done that night. We loved every bit of the 42 years that our family owned that home in Mason.

Best friends – Trudy Rosselot (left) and Rose Marie Krabbe (right), Seventh Grade at Liberty Elementary, 1938.



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.

Due to Covid-19 numbers escalating: The Museum will be open by appointment only from November 1 - March 1. Please call 513-398-6750 for an appointment.

MASON'S MASS TRANSIT

The Interurban Rapid Railway

Gina Burton Arens, Editor

Did you know that Mason once had its own public transit railroad connection running from Cincinnati through Mason ending in Lebanon? We did! It was called The Interurban Railroad & Terminal Co., often referred to as the "Rapid Railway". The service began in 1903.

The Interurban trains or "traction" cars were like city streetcars except they went beyond city boundaries. They traveled to and thru nearby towns, connecting people to family, friends, entertainment, and employment opportunities in a way that had never been possible before. The Interurban was revolutionary in this respect and opened a whole new world to the citizens of Mason.

Traction trains were electric cars that got their power from overhead wires using trolley poles just like city street cars. The early trains could reach speeds up to 50 mph which must have seemed incredible to riders who had never travelled that fast by any means available at that time. Cars were just starting to be built in the U.S. and mass production did not begin until 1908 with the Model T Ford.

Not only did the Interurban trains provide a speedy trip, but they also ran frequently and affordably, with fares at five to ten cents. The trains mainly carried passengers and could seat approximately 60 riders, although more could be accommodated by standing.

That said, trains also carried small lots of freight to the dismay of some riders. At Christmas in 1909 a local newspaper reported, "The 7:17 a.m. car of the Interurban last Tuesday morning looked something like a traveling menagerie. Besides having several hundred gallons of milk on board, it had 18 coops full of fowl — chickens, turkeys, geese, and ducks. One lonesome calf helped to make up the aggregation. The passenger end of the car had the standing room only sign out when it pulled out of Mason. During the busy season would it not be diplomatic for the Interurban to divide the humans from the animals?"

The Interurban trains also offered new employment opportunities for residents as they could now seek

jobs outside the city. One such example was the many commuters who road the Rapid Railway to Kings Mills to and from the King Powder Company and Peter's Cartridge Co. during WWI.

It was reported that The Interurban Railroad would park a couple of their cars on Dawson Street in Mason overnight to get commuters headed for Kings Mills to work on time. Some residents complained about the cars remaining overnight but in the end the commuters won out and the cars could continue their overnight stays.

Today, all that is left of the Interurban Railroad are some concrete pylons and mounded earth that map the route the train once took. On October 26, 2017, the Historical Society, along with representative Anthony Gibbs, from the Ohio Historical Connection, celebrated the placement on Dawson St. of Mason's second Ohio Historical Marker that commemorates and honors the legacy of the Interurban Railroad and Terminal Company: Rapid Railway and its place in Warren County history.

The coming of automobiles, paved highways, and buses eliminated most of the interurbans by the 1930's. Mason's railway was abandoned in 1922. However, the impact that the Interurban had on Mason and surrounding communities was undeniable. It allowed us to step out of the confines of the village walls to see what awaited us in the outside world. It proved to be one important phase in the transportation evolution that engaged not just Mason but the entire country at that time.



The Interurban travels along the trestle en route to Kings Mills from Mason.



above Engineer and conductors of the Rapid Railway.

below Tracks on West Main St. at bank corner, c. 1905.



The Board Report

Jay Meibers, President



I thought by the time of writing this Newsletter that we would have had a clear Presidential winner determined. I should have expected not having a clear winner yet based on how crazy 2020 has turned out to be. The good news on COVID 19 is that there is light at the end of the tunnel with vaccines getting closer to distribution. Hopefully by Spring this pandemic will be in our rear-view mirror!

Due to the recent spike in COVID 19 cases, the Board has decided to open the museum by appointment only through March 1. Please email us at the museum or call us at 513-398-6750 to set up an appointment.

We held our annual meeting and elections on Nov. 17 with one change being made to the Board.

Cindy Goulet Meibers has accepted the position of secretary. Thank you to Cindy and to all the board members who are staying on and continuing to lead MHS into the future. We also held our raffle drawing that night and congratulations to the numerous winners (see back page for winners list). The Rescue Raffle was a huge success and we really appreciate the great support from our membership with raffle ticket purchases and numerous donations!

Just a reminder that now is the time to renew your memberships for 2021. We would love to have all membership renewals returned to MHS by no later than Jan. 31, 2021.

Lastly, I wish all of you and your families a Merry Christmas & Happy New Year. Let us look forward to an exciting 2021 as things begin to transition back to normal! Stay safe, stay well and thank you for your support of MHS.



THIS MONTH IN MASON HISTORY

Excerpt from *Around Mason, Ohio: A Story*, Rose Marie Springman, ©1982.

1880: Eliza Hall Nixon, the wife of Dr. John T. Nixon, recorded on December 20: “The rails on the railroad was laid through Mason and the locomotive whistled on it the same day.”

On December 29 Laura Cox, Lou Wikoff, Anna Baker, Irene Dodds and Ida Crone gave a “Leap Year Masque Ball” at Dodds’ Hall. The printed invitations read “Yourself and Gent are cordially invited” and handwritten on each was a notation stressing that the party was “strictly private.”



1921: Merrill Johnson, age 20, began to work as a rural mail carrier in the local post office on January 3. He stayed on the job until December 30, 1964. He first started working under Postmaster Hardy Bursk. Cars were being used to distribute mail on the two rural routes out of the Mason post office, but a horse and wagon were still kept to deliver mail in bad weather.

1925: Men with their teams of horses were hired for the last time by the township trustees for road work in December. Mechanization was to replace the need for the horses for labor.

1939: In December the Cincinnati Gas and Electric company turned on the streetlights in Mason for one week for free.

1957: In December the People’s Saving and Loan Bank moved into its new quarters on Reading Road. It had occupied space in the Thompson Hardware Store for many years. The U.S. Post Office already was using new facilities in the building.

1982: Kings Island launched “Winterfest” in a creative effort to produce income during the off season. A one-time attempt brought Winterfest back to the park in 2005, but Winterfest’s peak popularity was in the 1980s. It reopened in 2017 after a 12-year absence but will be closed this year.

1994: Gibson Greetings uses a painting of the Ohio governor’s mansion by David Mueller of Mason on its custom-designed Christmas card for the governor’s office.

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

ROSE MARIE SPRINGMAN, cont.

course of many years, she scoured libraries, the Warren County Historical Society, cemetery records, combed through letters and journals, and conducted countless interviews, etc. Then in a pre-computer world, she wrote everything down by hand, before typing up her drafts.

In 1982, *Around Mason, Ohio – A Story* was published, and tells the comprehensive narrative of Mason's first 150 years; from 1815 to 1965. I know I speak for many, when I say that I'm thrilled Rose Marie lost that election! According to her daughter, Anne, she had a

natural curiosity and never did anything halfway. That is certainly evident when you read her book. You can look through her massive binders containing her drafts and research at the Historical Society. The original 1982 books are long sold out, but in honor of the city's Bicentennial in 2015, the book was re-released with the addition of an index and brief summaries of the years 1965 to 2015.

Rose Marie passed away 14 years ago this month at the age of 81, but her opus will live on forever, and we are all so grateful for the knowledge and the history that might otherwise have been lost to time.

SANTA'S HELPERS

Serving the Community in a Special Way

Gina Burton Arens, Editor

This month as we are thrust into a flurry of holiday activity, we revisit Christmas in Mason long ago and an unlikely group of elves that worked diligently to provide joy to the children of Mason.

When you look through the files and photos at the Alverta Green Museum you would never know that the Mason firemen did anything but fight fires and pose for group pictures. It was 1892 when Mason's first fire department was organized. Much of the recorded history relates to the acquirement or replacement of equipment, firemen wages and funding.

But if you look closely, you will find at Christmas our volunteer firemen chose to be Santa's helpers. The firemen, assisted by the Mothers Club, were the driving force behind the annual community Christmas celebrations from 1930 to 1943.

Dedicated in their fund-raising efforts, they would pay for all the treats handed out to children at the school party, usually held a few days before Christmas. While purchases varied, one year they included 200 pounds of candy, three crates of oranges and 100 pounds of peanuts. Another time they collected and repaired toys that were distributed at the party much to the delight of the children.

The Mother's Club, in usual fashion were masters at coordinating such events. In addition to the treats there was always entertainment. The high school orchestra furnished music and there were poetry readings, singing and a visit from Santa. One year, Santa even got a box of cigars. (Wait, wasn't he a pipe smoker?!) The secretary of the Mother's Club noted, "750 happy parents and children enjoyed the celebration".

As part of the Christmas tradition, the fireman would plant a community Christmas tree on the public lawn and the Mothers Club would take charge of trimming the tree. They were a fine team and the community prospered from their good intentions.

No fund raisers were held in 1944 due to the war but when the fireman made plans for fund-raising the following year, the new superintendent, W.M. Wright,

said no to any more Christmas parties at the school and claimed the teachers agreed. It was hard to believe that such a loved, long-standing tradition had been halted so abruptly by a superintendent who was only employed in the Mason schools for one year.

The firemen continued their philanthropy the following year by holding a Christmas dinner and party for the members of the American Legion and the fire company. Over the years Mason firefighters continued their community involvement with many fire related public education programs. Perhaps the most popular public event was the Fireman's Festival started in 1947 as well as their involvement in holiday parades.

As for the Mother's Club, they continued with their programs benefitting the children of Mason until 1947 when they merged with the national PTA .

The community Christmas party had been abandoned but the efforts of the Mason Firemen were noteworthy and should not be forgotten. These men demonstrated not only bravery in firefighting and saving lives but also kindness and compassion in bringing joy at Christmas to the children of Mason.



Photo: Mason Fire Dept. 1940 – A brave group of men protecting the town and enhancing the quality of life for the children of Mason.

front L-R: Francis Pierson, Bud Middleton, Vernie Spaeth, Tom Baysore, Bill Bercaw, Hubert Scofield, Larry Cox, Jim Dumford.

back: Leslie Spaeth, Charlie Aylstock, Charles Fuhr, Merrill Johnson, Leslie Franz, Donald McMahan, Richie Cox, Bert Thompson.

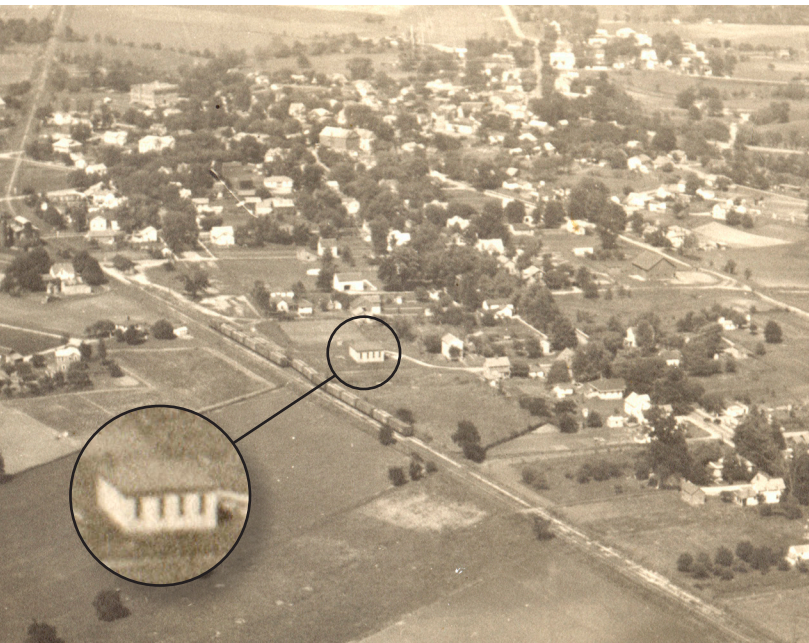
LET THERE BE LIGHT!

Mason's Electric Plant

Sally Sherman Caudill, Contributing Editor

In the early part of the 20th century, the rise of the Arts and Crafts movement in America coincided with the arrival of electric lighting. Not to be left behind, many of Mason's citizens were eager for their village to ditch kerosene and embrace the new technology. A special election was held in 1914 and 2/3rds of the townspeople voted in the affirmative to sell \$14,000 worth of bonds to buy land and build an electric power plant. General Electric and the city of Middletown countered that Mason's population couldn't support its own plant and offered their services. The town however had already started selling the bonds so they charged ahead with their plans.

Three sites that abutted the railroad were considered: Pond St. (N. West St.), W. Church St. and part of Mattie Crane's property on 4th Avenue. Crane's land was selected and 1/2 acre was purchased for \$500. Total cost for the concrete-block plant was just over \$11,000, and work commenced in early 1915.



View of Mason looking north from the top of the WLW tower, 1934. Clayton Fuhr photo.

The obsolete electric plant (inset) located on 4th Avenue was used as storage at this time.

Problems persisted throughout the construction phase. First, a well on the site started caving in... there were drainage problems...the concrete floor was cracking...the roofers had neglected to put ventilators in the roof...you get the picture. Finally complete in September of 1915, Council hired Foster Mote to run the plant, care for the pole lines, check the meters and make the money collections.



Les Gilbert, c. 1920, was hired as one of the first meter readers in the village.

There were two engines to run the petroleum-powered generators. The plant would be turned on at a certain time at night for a set number of hours before being turned off. The only time electricity was furnished in the daytime was on Wednesday – ironing day!

If only the problems during the construction phase had been isolated issues... In a 1978

interview, Police and Fire Chief Jim Knott lamented, “things went from bad to worse, and the place got to be such a burden – such a cost... and service was unsatisfactory.” In 21st-century parlance, the operation was an epic fail. In 1923 the city father's put up the white flag and came to a deal with Kentucky's Union Gas & Electric Co. (later purchased by Cincinnati Gas & Electric Co.) to supply power to the village. Mason's big enterprise had come to an end in less than eight years.

Council tried and failed to sell the plant building and the equipment, so they rented out the building, randomly charging anywhere from \$1 to \$25 a month. The high school's newly-formed athletic club used it as their headquarters from 1938-1940.

In 1946, the property was purchased by Vernie Spaeth and Bill Bercauw. It was an ideal site for their new venture, Deerfield Manufacturing. They added onto the building four times before outgrowing it in 1949, and constructing a new building next door. However, they kept the old power plant and it still stands at 408 4th Avenue. In 2003, Deerfield moved their factory north of the city, and Grace Chapel bought the site. Mason's electric plant is now part of the Grace Chapel campus. A great example of history hiding in plain sight. Very enlightening, indeed!

Around Mason, Ohio: A Story, Rosemarie Springman
Jim Knott interview w/ Marian and Richard Walker, 1978



Mason's electric plant as it appears today. With its distinctive concrete blocks, it's the main entrance for Orca, a workspace community that is part of the Grace Chapel campus.

MASON'S FIRST SPEED TRAP

Mike O'Bryant, Contributor

It was 1908 in the early days of the automobile that Mason got a reputation as a speed trap. It seems that the village mayor, Dr. Van Dyke, had arrested twenty men for what members of the Cincinnati Automobile Club thought was “just for nothing.” The issue was considered important enough that the club’s president, Dr. Bonifield and four other members decided to act and drove to the village to confront the mayor. *The Cincinnati Post* described the committee as arriving “with guns strapped around their belts” with the purpose of “declaring war upon the Mayor and the townfolks.”

When the auto club committee arrived Mayor Van Dyke greeted them pleasantly. The men argued that the violators had not broken the village speed limit – it was eight miles an hour. Van Dyke listened politely then told the members that one man and many chickens had been killed by autoists flying through the village. He went on to explain how he had marked several quarter-mile courses in the village and began to time the “dare-devil” drivers. He had records of all who had been arrested and believed that he had even been lenient toward many of them.

Van Dyke must have been persuasive since after hearing the mayor, the auto club members returned home after having declared that the mayor was not the “pirate” they made him out to be, but a “good



‘Wise-Owl’ Mayor,
Doctor J.M. Van Dyke

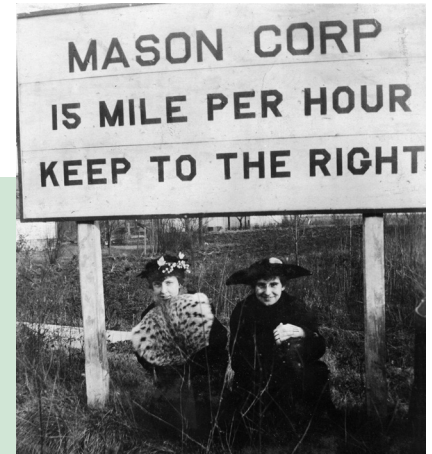
fellow” and a “wise owl.” They followed up by advising their members to reduce their speed to 8 or 12 miles an hour when going through Mason.

The incident, however, lived the following spring when Mason was featured in a “star sketch” of a minstrel show presented by the Cincinnati Auto Club at the Scottish Rite Cathedral in Cincinnati to raise money for Cincinnati’s orphans. *The Cincinnati Post* reported that the comedic sketch, “Mason, O. on a Busy Day” will introduce ‘Panhandle Jack’ and ‘Six-Cylinder Pete.’ It went on to report that a “big trick auto is now

being built out in Blaney’s plumbing shop in Madisonville for the occasion.” During the sketch all the well-known characters appeared with arrests of prominent autoists for exceeding the Mason speed limit.

There is no record of how much money the show raised or any indication if Mayor Van Dyke or anyone from Mason attended the show.

In 1915, the speed limit was raised to 15 miles per hour, which judging by these happy faces, caused much rejoicing in town.



Jacqueline Whitehouse Archer 1924-2020

Jacqueline (Jacquie) Whitehouse Archer, 96, former Mason resident and lifetime member of the Mason Historical Society, passed away on October 14, 2020. She was the only daughter of Joseph Whitehouse, an engineer who was instrumental in building the WLW radio tower prior to his service in the US Navy during WWII.

The family, Joe, his wife Ivy, Jacquie and her younger brother Wendell lived in a house on the tower site during the years the children attended the Mason Elementary School. Jacquie and her little brother played in the surrounding fields and climbed



Jacquie Whitehouse Archer,
left MHS sophomore, 1940;
right c. 2014

on the girders to heights that alarmed their mother and delighted their Dad. Joe and Ivy’s young son, Wendell Lewis Whitehouse’s initials reflected the Station’s call letters WLW.

In 2013, members of Jacquie’s family were fortunate to accompany her on a nostalgic visit to her childhood home in Mason. Their Mason tour included a visit to the Alverta Green Museum where they found school pictures of Jacquie and her brother.

Jacquie will be fondly remembered and sorely missed by her family, sons David Skinner and David Knoll, daughter Vicki Skinner and husband Fred Rosenberg and their sons, Tyler and Dylan, nephew Bruce Whitehouse (Sandy) and niece, Joan Whitehouse Lovett.

A memorial for Jacquie will be held in the spring in Rochester, New York, her home during her last years.

Submitted by Sandy Whitehouse,
Mrs. Archer’s niece



The Museum recently received the following note:

Mason Historical Society –

Thank you for remaining open! My first home was next door and my mom (Joanne Johnson) was good friends with Alverta Green. They went antique shopping together all the time! We moved to California in 1958 (I think), but my grandparents (Merrill and Sadie Johnson) lived there at 117 E. Main St. We went back every summer!

Sincerely,

Candy Johnson



Candy's grandparents, Merrill A. "Beebe" Johnson and his wife, Sadie, sort the mail at the Post Office in the old municipal building at 202 West Main. Beebe wrote the following on the back of the photo: "This was one of my heavy days before Christmas, December 1945, after I came home from the Army, weight 140 lbs. I made three trips to deliver the 184 packages that came in that day. Sadie B. (Mom) helped sort letters on lower boxes. I had 850 families, on 55 miles. Came in after dark, but left no Christmas parcels in the office."

Your Historical Museum Collection

Featured item of the month

In the nursery/child's bedroom at the Alverta Green Museum are a number of toys that are sure to bring back a wave of nostalgia. One such toy is a vintage die cast metal diesel steamroller, made by Hubley Kiddie. It likely dates to the 1950s and it looks well-loved! There were certain to be many of these now-collectible, pressed-metal toys under Christmas trees of long ago.



RECOGNIZE ANYONE? We need a little help to identify the young lady on the far right. The photo is c. 1950s and is taken on W. Main St. Email us if you can help us solve this mystery.



Holiday Gift Ideas



Make your shopping easier this year by giving one-of-a-kind gifts from the Alverta Green Museum to friends and family.

Mason history books, cookbooks, gift memberships and commemorative bricks are perfect for those hard to buy for on your list.

Call or visit our website's E-Commerce page located under the "Support Us" tab.

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

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CONGRATS TO OUR RESCUE RAFFLE WINNERS



\$300 First Place – Freddie Grisham
\$150 Second Place – Lynn Jones
\$50 Third Place – Joan Barnes

Twenty other prizes were awarded including the books *Mason, Ohio A Photographic History* and *Mason Ohio: A Story, Bicentennial Edition* and MHS Commemorative Coin Collections. Winners are Mike Stover, Mim Williams, Lisa Farquer, Perry Denehy, Rosemary Stein, Zeke & Betty Campbell, Chris Meibers, Lou Rapp, Barb Wesseler, Brunk Excavating, Barb Pask, Adam Weaver, Melissa Iannelli, Deborah Carpenter, Scot Lahrmer, Jill Meyer, Carol Lou McCarren, Barb Spaeth, Debbie Andrews and Mindy Voorhis.

Congratulations to all winners and thanks again for your support!

