

Newsletter of the MASON HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Mason, Ohio

and Alverta Green Museum

November 2020

JOE BARR — A SOLDIER'S STORY

By Thomas Barr, edited by Gina Burton Arens

With Veteran's Day soon upon us, who better to feature than Mason's own Joe Barr; a true hero.

Joseph Elbert Barr was born in Mason on Nov. 14, 1919. His parents were John and Hazel (Woodmansee-Houghton) Barr. He had twin older brothers named Edward and Edwin and step siblings Helen and Russell Houghton.

Joe proved to be an outstanding high school athlete. In basketball, he was named all-county center, and in track, he advanced to Columbus in the state track meet as a pole vaulter. Joe graduated high school in 1937 and joined his older brothers in the grocery business they had purchased two years earlier.

On Oct. 6, 1941, Joe enlisted in the Army at the age of 21. He said goodbye to Mason, his family and his 18-year-old sweetheart, Ruth Brunk, who had just graduated high school.

A few days later he reported to Camp Wolters, Texas, the Army's largest infantry replacement training center. Two months later Pearl Harbor was attacked. After this the military feared that Alaska would also come under attack, so Joe and other recruits were sent there.

Joe served in Alaska for 14 months. Its mainland was never attacked but Joe had to keep a sharp eye out for another threat to his fellow troops. Occasionally a brown bear would wander onto the base!

After leaving Alaska Joe was afforded a two-week leave to return home. After that visit he left for Fort Benning, GA for three months training in Officer Candidate School (OCS). After OCS training, the now 2nd Lieutenant was sent to Fort McClellan, Alabama to train troops.

From there he was sent to Camp Atterbury, Indiana, to Camp Miles Standish in New York and finally to New York City, where on Feb. 11, 1944, he boarded the army transport ship S.S. Argentina with the rest of the 30th Infantry bound for England.

He arrived in England on Feb. 22, 1944, where Allied troops were preparing for the Invasion of Normandy.

Joe was Executive Officer of the 4th Weapons Platoon, 30th Infantry Division, armed with machine guns and mortars. The 30th, commanded by Major General Leland Hobbs, landed on Omaha Beach on June 11, 1944, five days after the initial landing.

According to Joe, "there was light fire. We walked two days to the front lines. One day we had nothing to eat, but finally hit the mess tent and got mutton stew."

On July 7 Joe led a platoon out to cover a bridge and a tank. In route the Germans opened up with machine gun fire and a bullet penetrated Joe's helmet and struck his forehead. "I laid there all night," he said. "It got infected and my face swelled up."

Joe had to return to England where he spent a week recovering. Afterwards, he returned to the front in France, where he received a battlefield promotion to 1st Lieutenant.

Joe's final battle came when his troops began the advance on Domfront, France. It was there on August 15 where Joe was shot through the jaw, the bullet penetrating one side of his face and exiting the other side. His left jaw was shattered and most of his teeth were blown out.



Joe Barr in Alaska, 1942.

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

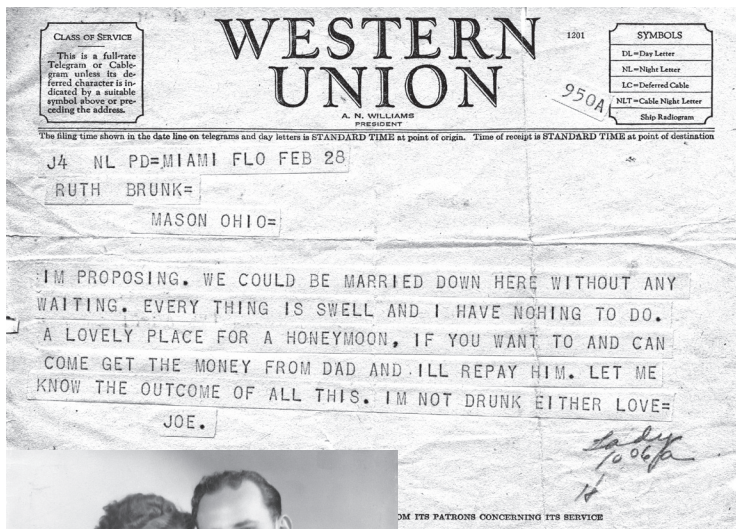
Joe Barr – A Soldier’s Story, cont.

Regaining consciousness but unable to move, machine guns blasting from two sides of enemy lines, he awoke to a soldier wielding a knife. Thankfully, the soldier was an American medic there to perform an emergency tracheotomy that would save his life.

He later said, “I don’t know how I got from France back to England.” Joe spent 9 weeks in an English hospital when on Oct. 23, 1944, he returned to the U.S. and another Army hospital.

He said that, of a group of six platoon commanders, he ultimately was the only survivor. All others were killed or missing.

After recovering from his wounds, Joe was sent to Camp Blanding, Florida, but his mind was on his hometown sweetheart, so he sent Ruth a marriage proposal and she accepted! Six days later she arrived by train and they were married March 6, 1945 in Miami. Joe was soon honorably discharged from the army.



above: Joe’s unorthodox war-time proposal.

left: Joe and Ruth on their wdding day, Miami, Florida, March 6, 1945.

Joe Barr, Purple Heart recipient, returned to Mason and rejoined his brothers in the grocery business. He became one of the first members of Mason’s American Legion Post 194, under its founder, Joe’s father-in-law, Harley Brunk. He served the Legion for decades, leading the annual Mason Memorial Day parade, commanding the firing squad, and leading military funerals.

In 1991, four months after his death, the City of Mason renamed the street alongside the American Legion post as “Joe Barr Way”. A few years later, the post itself was renamed “Joe Barr American Legion Post 194.” A fitting tribute to a true American patriot and one of Mason’s WWII heroes.

Editor’s Note: The book “Generations” a story of the Barr family and other related families, is available at the Alverta Green Museum and provides a more detailed account of Joe’s service during WWII.

The author is Joe and Ruth Barr’s youngest of three sons and is a 1976 Mason High graduate.

VETERANS DAY ~ 11/11

Major hostilities of World War I were formally ended at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month of 1918, when the Armistice with Germany went into effect. Lacking manpower and supplies, Germany signed an armistice agreement with the Allies in a railroad car outside Compiègne, France. The First World War left nine million soldiers dead and 21 million wounded, with Germany, Russia, Austria-Hungary, France, and Great Britain each losing nearly a million or more lives.

At the urging of major U.S. veteran organizations, Armistice Day was renamed Veterans Day in 1954. Veterans Day honors all veterans who have served the country in war or peace, dead or alive, although it is largely celebrated to thank living veterans for their service and sacrifice.

History.com

Happy Thanksgiving

Wishing you and yours a harvest of festivity and joy this Thanksgiving season.

Community Thanksgiving dinners were common in Mason’s early years. As early as 1885 we see mention of a dinner held at Cox Hall. Rebold’s Hall was also a popular venue for these gatherings. In 1916 it was noted that a “large sociable crowd” enjoyed the holiday dinner for 40 cents. For years, the Mother’s Club would host such dinners as fundraisers.

The Board Report

Jay Meibers, President



Incredibly, by the time you receive this Newsletter the elections should either be very close to being done or already finished. We will all be happy to watch TV without being continually blasted by negative campaign ads! Soon after the dust clears from this election Thanksgiving Day will quickly be approaching. I hope that all of you can safely find a way to enjoy Thanksgiving with your family and friends whether it be in person, virtually or by other creative means.

As mentioned in the Newsletter last month the Rescue Raffle has been a great success so far. The winning tickets will be drawn on Nov. 17, so you still

have time to turn in your tickets if you have not done so already. We also have extra tickets available if you would like to purchase or sell. Exciting to see so many stubs already in the raffle ticket drum!

Now is the time to renew your memberships for 2021. A 2021 membership renewal form is included with your Newsletter or as an attachment if you receive by email. We would love to have all membership renewals returned to MHS by Jan. 31, 2021 at the latest.

MHS elections will be held on Nov. 17 @ 7 p.m. The Board positions of Historian, Secretary & Publicity Director are currently open along with one Trustee position. Please contact us if you are interested or would like to learn more about the positions.

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, ©1986.

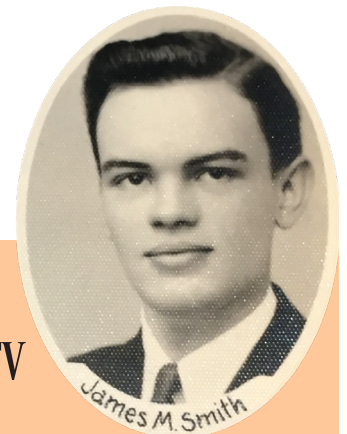
1914: By mid-November the whole state of Ohio was in quarantine and all hunting was prohibited. The local Horse Ranger group cooperated with the state and all members were asked to report any hunters, any signs of foot and mouth disease and any moving of livestock on farms that might spread the disease.

1918: The World War I Armistice was signed in November at 5 a.m. at the Compiègne Forest in France and was to be effective at 11 a.m. Early in the morning the news was spread in Mason by hawkers shouting from the traction cars as they moved through the town. The church bells began ringing and an impromptu parade led by young Jim Baysore on the family pony, featuring the town band and a mass of marchers with flags moved through the village that morning.

1927: On November 24 the Mothers Club served a community Thanksgiving dinner in the Knights of Pythias hall. The Mothers Club hosted many such dinners throughout their existence.

1934: The Mason Presbyterian Church celebrated its 110th birthday on November 11. The records owned by the church indicated the date. Later it was learned that the church was first mentioned in the minutes of the General Assembly in 1814 and that added ten years to the congregation's existence.

1957: On a Sunday afternoon in November all of Mason was watching the television show called *Wide, Wide World* hosted by Dave Garroway. Featured on the show was Dr. James Smith, the son of French and Ellen Smith of Mason. The episode filmed Dr. Smith as he performed a stomach operation at the medical school of Western Reserve University in Cleveland.



Mason Doctor Appears on National TV

While the cameras rolled Dr. James Smith of Mason, Ohio performed a stomach operation on a patient at the medical school of Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio. Smith, son of French and Ellen Smith, was a 1943 graduate of Mason High School and took part in the Navy's V-12 program at Berea College in Kentucky. He graduated from Miami University and from the medical school of the University of Chicago. After interning at the Naval Hospital at San Diego, Dr. Smith was assigned to the heavy cruiser *Toledo* during the Korean War. After a year in general practice, he studied surgery at Western Reserve University. Jim and his wife then moved to Hamilton, Ohio, where he set up his practice. The couple had three sons, Stephen, Thomas and Christopher.

French Smith, was a direct descendant of Robert Benham, who 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. French was to work for many years as a bookkeeper, an insurance agent, a teacher and basketball coach for Mason High School before moving to a farm north of Mason to raise Angus cattle.

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

FAILING TO PLAN IS PLANNING TO FAIL (Allen Lakein Quote)

The 1963 Master Plan for Mason Ohio

Gina Burton Arens, Editor

In the fall of 1963, a 63-page Comprehensive Master Plan for the Village of Mason was prepared, presented, and accepted by Town Council that would forecast growth and recommend strategies for the future planning of Mason, Ohio. This article explores some of the highlights of that proposal.

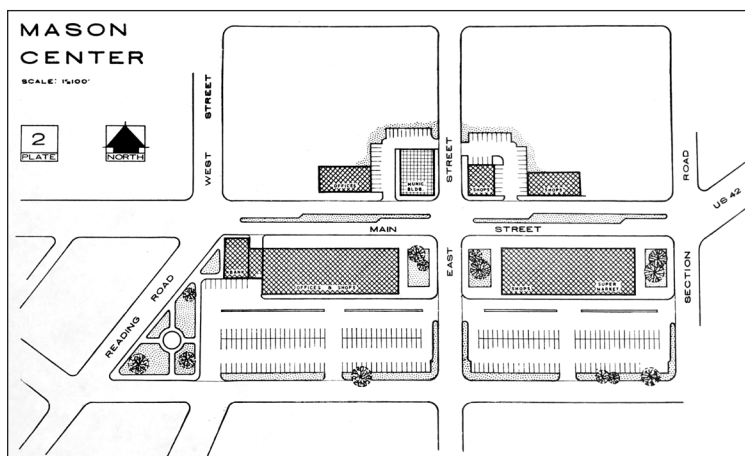
In 1962 the Village of Mason, having inherited money from the estate of Lydia and Harry Thompson, decided that a portion of that inheritance, \$2,000, should be used for a “Master Plan” for the future town. The firm of Ladislav Segoe and Associates was contracted for the project with the plan finalized and accepted by council in October of 1963.

Ladislav Segoe (1894-1983) was a pioneer in urban planning and had worked with Alfred Bettman on the City Plan for Cincinnati in the early 20th Century. Said to be a successful and charismatic individual, he was involved in nearly all types of professional planning.

When the Comprehensive Master Plan was presented in 1963 there was no Kings Island or Jack Nicklaus Golf Course or Interstate 71. The interstate was just being built and the other two would not change the landscape for ten more years.

In 1963 there also was no Mason Historical Society to “protect and preserve” the history of Mason. A “Land Use Plan” was designed for an entirely new town, replacing old, obsolete structures, and modernizing the downtown district as a whole. Thankfully, this part of the plan was mostly overlooked.

The city planners forecasted that in less than twenty years Mason might reach a population of 25,000-30,000. However almost twenty years passed and in 1980 the population was just 8,692. It was not until 2010 that Mason hit the 30,000 mark, nearly 30 years beyond the original estimate.



The plan for the new town would include modern offices and shops on Main Street with ample off-street parking.

The plan also considered the development of primary thoroughfares through Mason. A Tylersville extension was to eventually merge into Kings Mills Road and a Western Row Road extension would ultimately merge with SR 741 where it crosses Kings Mills Road. Neither of these materialized exactly as planned but the general idea of connecting east to west, particularly with I-71 to I-75 interstates in mind, was a good one.

In the original plan, Tylersville was to continue east and then north to Kings Mills Road. Instead, the annexation of land south of Mason between 1980 and 1990, allowed the road to be routed southeast, merging with Western Row Road. A quick turn off Western Row and short drive on Innovation Way allows I-71 access.

It appears the planners accomplished their intended goal of connecting the two interstate highways. In many ways it is better than the original plan as today's Tylersville extension is less intrusive to the central city and is situated near several large businesses that benefit greatly from the easy highway access.

The extension of Western Row Road appears to have been blocked by the Jack Nicklaus Golf Course (1972) and Cintas corporate offices (1972) off Western Row Rd.

The planners likewise recommended a “Northwest By-Pass” to serve the northern industrial district, keeping traffic out of central Mason while allowing a more direct route to I-75. It appears that Bethany Road fulfills this objective by extending from Rt. 42 to Butler-Warren to Liberty Way and I-75 entry.

The plan also suggested “thoughtful aesthetic planning with wide median strips with an abundance of shrubbery.” Mason Montgomery Road vividly demonstrates this. On the flip side, the planners said “this road would likely not see any major through traffic movement, serving only intra-city traffic.” P&G and a flood of other businesses can be thanked for changing that outcome.

In relation to schools, the Master Plan recommended an elementary school, K-6, for each of Mason's five neighborhoods. The neighborhoods designated were Mason Central, Mason Heights, Western Row, Manhasset and Olympia Fields.

The new town had been designed on what they called the “Neighborhood Principle” where each neighborhood is its own self-contained residential unit providing an elementary school (K-6) as well as accommodating its recreational, commercial, and public facility needs.

Once there were three elementary schools servicing these neighborhoods but as we all know Mason schools took a drastically different path with large schools servicing entire grade populations of the city.

Mason's 1963 Master Plan, cont.

The current school system has an early childhood center, (pre-k-2), one elementary school (3-4), one intermediate school (5-6), one middle school (7-8) and one high school (9-12), with all schools clustered on Mason Montgomery Road except the early childhood center.

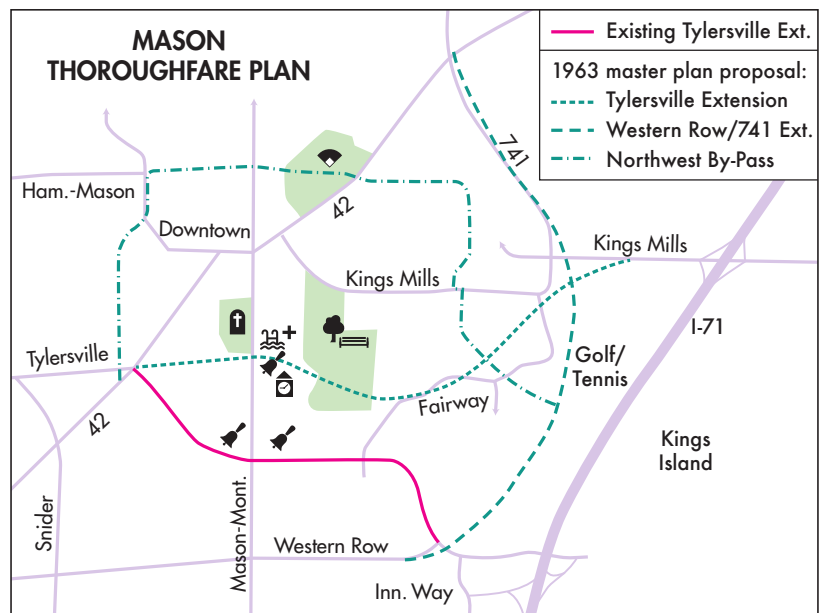
In 1963 the public schools served nearly 2,000 students or 31% of the population. But as of 2018 Mason school enrollment mushroomed to five times that number at 10,627 students or about 33% of the population.

The 1963 Plan had cited the “advantages of combining school and community recreation facilities.” The plan notes that, “This park-school concept combines park, school and recreational facilities on a single site.”

This is precisely what happened in 2002 when the new high school was built attached to the Mason Community Recreation Center with Pine Hill Lakes Park extending to the east and Corwin M. Nixon Park to the south of these facilities.

The 1963 plan also recommended that the High School's 25-acre site be expanded to 35 to 40 acres to “properly accommodate the needs of the future city”. Today the high school consists of 379,000 square feet on a 73-acre campus!

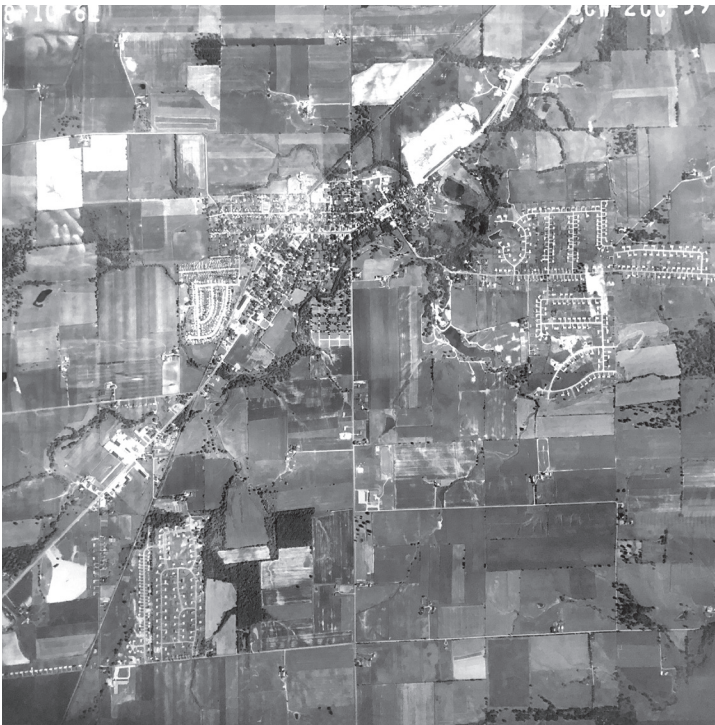
When the Master Plan was accepted by the council members in late October of 1963, the Village of Mason consisted of some 3,230 acres or 5.05 square miles of land. Of this only 28.6% or 924 acres were developed, the remaining area being farmland or other open spaces.



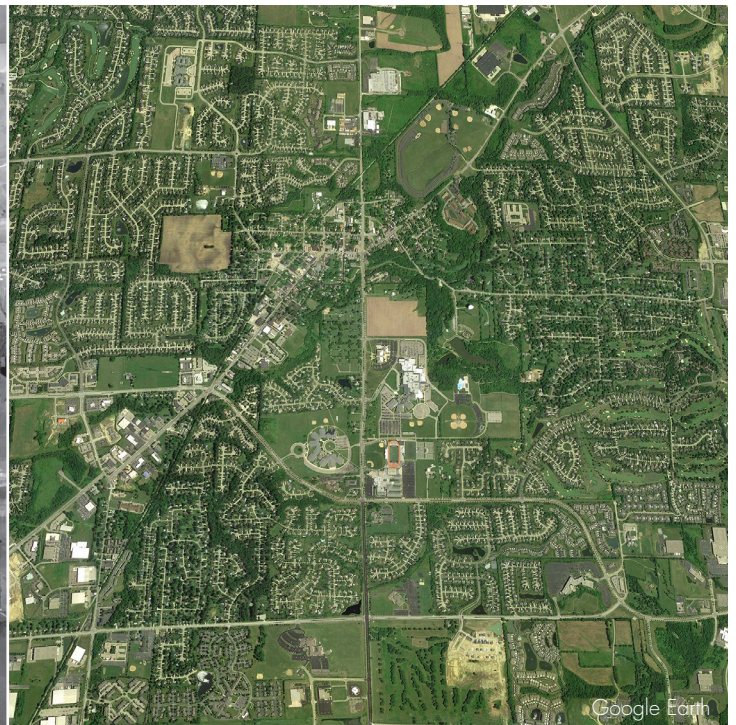
According to censusreporter.org, today's Mason spreads out over 19.2 square miles. And by the looks of the Google Earth map, there appears to be little land that is not developed. It makes one wonder if the population growth estimate considered the annexation of 14.15 square miles in its projection.

So, did Ladislav Segoe & Associates get it right in 1963? In some ways yes and others no. But consider how hard it would be to predict and plan the future of the small village where growth literally exploded, and population tripled within 30 years? A difficult task indeed, but it gave City Council direction and a map to the future with a plan that was probably revised many times but was none the less exactly what they needed.

The Master Plan for Mason Ohio was donated by C.W. Bercaw, council member at this time. It is available for public review at the Alverta Green Museum.



Airplane view of Mason in 1962. Pop. 4,727.



Satellite view of Mason in 2015. Pop. 33,037.

SCRAPBOOK MEMORIALIZES WWII VETS

Gina Burton Arens, Editor

There are over 622 World War II veterans buried in Rose Hill Cemetery. Each one has their own story of their service during this time.

At the Alverta Green Museum we discovered a wonderful World War II scrapbook donated in 1983 by Virginia (Shurts) Erbeck. The scrap book was assembled by her mother, Ollie (Scott) Shurts.

It is a collection of newspaper clippings about many of the men who served in WWII from Warren County but mostly Mason. Most clippings announced service

induction, commendations, marriages or sadly, deaths. Some interesting features included the following:

Girton Brothers in Three Branches of Service – Story included Seaman Francis Girton, with hospital unit, Sgt. Glenn Girton, in South Pacific and Sgt. Dean Girton, in air forces.

Twins and Siblings in service – Bob and Russ Thompson, twins in the naval reserve; Lt. Mary Fox, first Warren countian to enlist in the WACCs and brother, Cpl John Fox, enrolled in Officer Candidate School at Ft. Sill, OK.

Charlotte Ross, serving with WAACs and brother Richard Ross serving Armed Forces.

Commendations-Lt Glenn Poppe, Bronze Star, Finds 300 German civilians living in mine near Palenberg, Germany; Sgt. Jack Putnam, Bronze Star, for meritorious achievement in action against the enemy in the battle of Piva Forks, Bougainville; Lt. Robert Spaeth, Air Medal, for meritorious achievement while participating in sustained operation against the enemy.

Casualties – Pvt Roscoe Eugene Case, killed in action in Germany; Lt. Robert Mount, shot down over Germany, purple heart.

There are many soldiers from WWII featured in Ollie Shurts' scrap book. We've only named a few here. Ever grateful for their service, we invite you to stop by the Alverta Green Museum and browse Ollie's scrap book. We can almost guarantee you will see some familiar names.

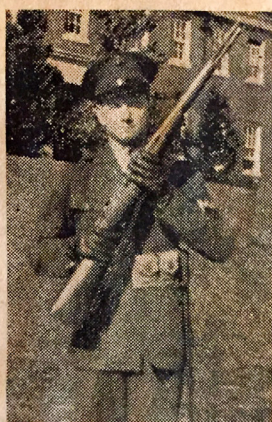
Girton Brothers In Three Branches of Service



SEAMAN FRANCIS GIRTON
... with hospital unit

Three sons of Mr. and Mrs. Dean S. Girton of Mason Route One represent three branches of the armed forces.

Sgt. Glenn M. Girton, 20, is somewhere in the South Pacific with an Amphibian Tractor Battalion of the U. S. Marines Corps and participated in the Bougainville campaign on November 20. Sgt. Girton enlisted in the Marine



SGT. GLENN M. GIRTON
... in South Pacific

Corps after his graduation from Mason high school in 1941.

Sgt. Dean A. Girton, 24, was inducted in March, 1943, and is attached to the air forces as a turret gunner. Since receiving his wings at Harlingen, Texas, he has been stationed at March Field, Calif. A graduate of Mason high school he is the husband of Mrs. Martha Van Ness Girton, and the



SGT. DEAN A. GIRTON
... in the air forces

father of an attractive young daughter, Rebecca Jane.

Seaman Francis Girton, 28, is stationed at Great Lakes, Ill., with the Hospital Corps School. Prior to his induction in October, 1943, he was manager of the Mason Kroger & Baking Co. A graduate of Mason high school, he is the husband of Mrs. Helen Girton, and father of a charming young daughter, Nancy Ann.

LT. ROBERT N. MOUNT – WWII HERO

Gina Burton Arens, Editor

The Boeing B17, four engine bomber plane, was known as "The Flying Fortress". Massive in size, with powerful military capabilities, it could strike with precision targets from five miles up. It remains a legend in history as it forged its way deep into occupied Europe during WWII. It held ten flyboys, many who were still teenagers, and bound them into one tough unit.

Lt. Robert N. Mount, Mason Class of '42, was the 21-year-old co-pilot of the B17 named *Easy-Does-It*. His plane was one of several hundred bomber planes that were reportedly sent out every few days. On February 17, 1945, the left wing of his plane was hit by German "Flak", which was ground anti-aircraft fire. The blast downed the plane, leaving no survivors.

Early on Robert wrote to his mother, "We all want to get this war over with so we can get back home and start our lives where we left off before. Of course, we know everyone won't get home again but we are ready for that chance that we will. As you said, the rest is in the hands of God. And he has always been good to me."

Our brave, hometown hero, Lt. Robert N. Mount, was awarded the purple heart. Son of Dorothy and William Mount, the local VFW post 9622 is named in his honor.



Lt. Robert N. Mount

MASON'S 1ST MAYOR

Sally Sherman Caudill, Contributing Editor

The first mayor of the newly-incorporated village of Mason was Mason Seward, a prominent land owner and nephew to the founder, William Mason.

Mr. Seward was the third of 10 children born, in Pennsylvania in 1790, to Catherine Mason and John Seward. At the age of 10, his family moved to a small hamlet in southwestern Ohio, where his uncle William Mason had settled years before. In his early 20s, Mason enlisted in the War of 1812, and achieved the rank of 2nd lieutenant. In 1817, he married Rebecca Heaton and they became the parents of five children.

William Mason founded the village of "Palmyra" in 1815, which consisted of 16 lots. Mason Seward was very close to his uncle, and was named as one of the executors of his will. They had many business dealings together as he was a frequent purchaser of his uncle's lots along Main St. At one time, Mason Seward owned five of the 12 lots on the two Main St. blocks in the village.

In 1835, five years after William Mason died, the village was renamed "Mason" in honor of its founder. Four years later in 1839, an act to incorporate the town of Mason in Warren County was signed by the Ohio House of Representatives. One year later this Act of Incorporation was adopted and elections were held. Mason Seward was voted in as the town's first mayor and he served for ten years until 1850.

Mr. Seward worked as a tinner by trade in addition to his real estate holdings. In the 1850s, he owned and operated a "coffee house" complete with an alcohol license, so I imagine his coffee had a bit of a kick! He also served as the town's postmaster for several years. Just two decades later, his granddaughter Florence Sausser, would become Mason's first "postmistress."

Mason Seward died at the age of 87 on August 2, 1877, having set the standard for all who would follow in his footsteps. In the last 175 years, there have been 46 men and two women who have served as Mayor.

*Around Mason, Ohio: A Story, Rosemarie Springman
Mason Seward Census Records / Ancestry.com*

Your Historical Museum Collection

Featured item of the month

The Museum has in its collection a large clock that once hung in the shop of David W. Van Dyke. Mr. Van Dyke owned a fine jewelry and gun shop (interesting combo!) in Mason from circa 1840 until the mid-1880s. Apparently he was equally as skilled at being a silversmith as he was at being a gunsmith. He must've been a very handy person to have around, as he was also a carpenter and attorney-at-law.

D.W. Van Dyke served as Mason's second mayor and was elected a record 12 times between 1850 and 1882. As mayor, he once welded a 12'x14' iron jail on his property for local offenders and was paid \$140. by council. He also had to remove a dead horse from a village street and was paid \$1. for that duty. Now that's what I call a full-service mayor!

In 1885 Mr. Van Dyke donated this large clock to the Methodist Church, and it was used in their sanctuary for the next 70 years. Sometime after that the clock made its way to the Warren County Historical Society, and they donated it to the Mason Historical Society in 2015.



The writing around the center mechanism reads: "D.W. Van Dyke, Mason, O 1885"

*Around Mason, Ohio: A Story, Rosemarie Springman
D.W. VanDyke Census Records*

LAROSA'S FUNDRAISING EVENT
3RD WEDNESDAY OF THE MONTH



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Mason Public Library

Welcome Chris Meibers, our newest Lifetime member!

Chris also served four years in the United States Army, so we wish him a happy Veterans Day as well. Thank you for your service!

Holiday Gift Ideas

Make your shopping easier this year by visiting the Alverta Green Museum for one-of-a-kind gifts for friends and family. Mason history books, cookbooks, gift memberships and commemorative bricks are perfect for those hard to buy for on your list. Stop by the Museum or visit our website's E-Commerce page located under the "Support Us" tab.



Recognize Anyone?



Karen Gilbert Bodenbender came across this photo of a group of young ladies hanging out in front of the Confectionery and Dry Goods store, circa 1950s.

With the help of Janet Hamilton, they were able to identify all but one of the ladies. Anybody out there know who the young lady on the far right is?

Bottom (sitting): Betty Colliver

Middle (left): Becky Dumford

Middle (center): Judy Compton

Back (top): Joann Dimick

Back (right): ?

Email us at:
mason.oh.historical@gmail.com if
you can help us solve this mystery.