



Centerville-Washington History

The Curator

The newsletter of Centerville-Washington History

Director's Thoughts

By Cheryl Meyer

I can hardly believe 2021 is almost behind us. Thankfully, Centerville-Washington History has seen the return of many of our programs, tours, and events. We are still following safety guidelines but we do so with excitement and anticipation for what is in store for our organization. Our mission of connecting the community to our local history is always at the forefront of what we do. That will never change.

I shared some historical information about the Walton House in the fall edition of The Curator. The Walton House is significant to Centerville-Washington History and the garden in the back of the property is a true beauty. This garden was the design of one of our members, **Mary Higgins**, and she graciously agreed to answer some of my questions. So, sit back and enjoy "a little bit of history."

What is your connection to Centerville-Washington History?

I have been a member of this organization for 29 years. My mother was a member since the beginning of CWH. I was asked by CWH to design the "Mary Jane Smith Garden" in honor of my mother's many years of volunteering at the Walton House. Along with a small, hardworking group of volunteers, the garden was installed and dedicated in 1993 with a new pergola, window boxes, and roses. Discovering an old stone patio covered with English Ivy, gave way to the "secret garden" facing Franklin Street.

The garden at the Walton House is dedicated to your late mother, Mary Jane Smith. What should people know about your mom?

My mom was busy with seven children but always found time to volunteer at our schools, the Walton House and its gardens. She loved gardening and history. She contributed to the success of the Walton House Museum, and she was very proud of its importance to the community as well as its growth over the years. She loved to interact with the staff and garden visitors when possible and always said it was difficult getting much done in the garden because of wanting to talk with everyone. My mom's favorite saying was, "is there anything I can do for you?"



What is the significance of the Walton House Garden to our community?

This garden is in the heart of the city and is enjoyed by community members of all ages. The Walton House gardens proudly capture the city's long history while allowing visitors to discover some of the beauty we have right in our own backyard.

The gardens are beautiful every year and visitors often ask what is the secret to such beautiful flowers. What are your gardening tips?

First, great soil and soilless potting mix for containers with a slow-release fertilizer in the spring and by mid-summer add once a week liquid fertilizer. Continuous dead-heading and cutting back of container plants after the 4th of July, when they start to get leggy and over grown. I check often to prevent garden diseases and bugs. Watering during our dry summers is very important. Dedication and loving care of any garden is primary and will usually always produce something of beauty.



What is a favorite memory you have of growing up in Centerville?

In 1958, my family moved to a farm on Centerville Station Road with horses and livestock. At that time, Centerville was a small and extremely friendly town...easy to meet people and get around. As a child my siblings and I loved exploring the woods and creeks, playing in the barn and riding horses. We would ride all over Centerville, which you can't do now. We made playtime fun because it included nature. I can still go home and enjoy all this nature as the historical Smith House and land is now part of the Centerville-Washington Park District.



The Mission of Centerville-Washington History is to connect the community to its heritage by collecting, preserving, interpreting and promoting the history of our local area. Centerville-Washington History is partially funded by the city of Centerville and Washington Township.

Presidents Letter

By Ed Ross, President



Fall is in the air which means that school tours returned and the holidays are approaching.

The school children were excited to be on a field trip again and eagerly listened to our stories and history. They had great questions, too.

For adults, the *Ghost Walk on Main* was another sellout with great weather and full participation from the Heart of Centerville vendors. All the actors at the various sites were entertaining and enthusiastic. I think Joellen is up for an Oscar. The participants all seemed to enjoy the stories and comradery.

The *Hometown Holiday Walk* returned our tradition of welcoming the community into our museums, seeing Santa, riding in the horse-drawn wagon around town, making crafts in the school-house, and having cider and cookies. It was another successful community collaboration!

Thanks to Phil Kern, we have been enjoying some great speakers in our *Monthly Speaker Series*. We're looking forward to five more guest speakers from January through May on the 3rd Tuesdays at 7 pm back in-person at RecPlex West Theater. I have never been disappointed with the experience. I hope to see more of you there – remember it's free, with cookies!

As this year ends, we enjoyed getting closer to normalcy with full museum hours, children's programs, and *A Sense of Taste*. As difficult as dealing with the pandemic was, Cheryl and the staff adapted and kept the essential operations going throughout. Many thanks for their creativity and endurance.

In Sympathy

Our condolences go out to the family and friends of long time member Jim Gallagher who passed away in September. Jim was a dedicated city volunteer who loved everything about Centerville!

Centerville-Washington History

MONTHLY SPEAKER SERIES

2021-2022

Third Tuesday of the month

Free and open to the public!

Enjoy refreshments and historical education.

Donations welcome and appreciated.

**RecPlex West Theater (Rec West)

965 Miamisburg Centerville Rd.

Reception 6:30 p.m. Program 7:00 p.m.

January 18, 2022

Tony Kroeger

Hidden History of Dayton

February 15, 2022

Mike Williams

FDR's Confidential Crusader

March 15, 2022

Jim Miller

Warrior Two-Six: A Helicopter Pilot's Story

April 19, 2022

Andrew Walsh

Lost Dayton

May 17, 2022

General John Allen

The Future of Afghanistan,

Women's Rights and Role of Civil Society

**In person presentations are the goal for this series. However, presentations may shift to a digital format as needed. State and local health guidelines will be followed.
CentervilleWashingtonHistory.org

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Curator's Corner

By Joellen Ulliman, Curator

The View from a Tombstone



October 16 was an unusually warm, moonlit evening. It was a perfect night to walk through time at the *Ghost Walk on Main*. This annual event was canceled in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic; it completely sold out this year within 24 hours. Although group sizes were limited because of lingering health concerns, the evening was very special for everyone involved, including the many volunteers.

Centerville-Washington History, in collaboration with the *Washington-Centerville Public Library*, the *Heart of Centerville*, and the *City of Centerville*, hosted approximately 83 people who learned about area history through creepy tales. At four distinct points, they re-lived eerie experiences as actors presented engaging stories. They also visited old stone buildings and Town Hall. The 1.8 mile looped route started and ended at Benham's Grove.

Prior to the trek, Benham's Grove was a hub of activity. Vendors set up booths offering goods, information, and refreshments for all. Seasonal decorations added to the excitement of check-in. Enthusiastic guides met their groups and started off.

Where was I, your honored curator, during this exciting night? Mainly crouched behind a tombstone in the Centerville Cemetery dressed as a woman from the mid-1800's! Throughout the evening, participants stopped in front of the marker where I hid. I then re-enacted the story of Unity Kelsey, widow of the first recorded murder victim in the area. As I waited to perform five different times, I silently watched as our history was shared with the community. I truly would not have wanted to be anywhere else. I was Unity, if only for a night. I was trapped in 1862, feeling her pain, yet glimpsing the future. I was a living link to our heritage.

As I performed the role of Unity Kelsey, I relived every minute of the worst night of her life, Sept. 6, 1862. Her courage and resiliency were astounding. I saw the expressions of shock, sadness, and horror on the participants' faces as they became part of her story.

As groups continued through the cemetery to hear other stories, I heard gasps of surprise. Some very strong people lived through great tragedies during the years. Learning

their stories teaches us to appreciate each day...even those days that include lurking behind a tombstone, in a dark cemetery, waiting to share local history.

Until next year...many thanks to *everyone* who helped make this year a chilling success. It took many dedicated volunteers and community entities to create this magical evening for all participants.



Veteran's Day Tribute

In honor of all of those people who have served, or are currently serving, in our country's military, Centerville-Washington History extends our gratitude for your hard work and dedication.

From November 10-15, a tribute to all local veterans was on exhibit at the Woodbourne Library. In collaboration with Washington-Centerville Public Library, the tribute was located behind glass in the creativity space for all to enjoy, pause, and give honor. Five uniforms led viewers through time from World War I, to World War II, Korea, Vietnam, and Modern Conflicts.

Although the exhibit was markedly abbreviated from our typical Veteran's Day Exhibits of the past, this was deemed the safest way to say thank you to our veterans in 2021. Your service is greatly appreciated.



Education Corner

By Melissa Wagner, Education Coordinator

The Schoolhouse bell announced the return of area students to tour and learn about our historic buildings. During the Fall months, Centerville-Washington History hosted approximately 800 elementary and middle school students. Teachers expressed their appreciation for our organization's school programs. The students themselves gave us rave reviews. Third graders had positive and entertaining comments to share in their letters to CWH.

"I liked seeing the old tree and I am shocked how it lived to be that old."

"I didn't know it was so hard in the past. I would hate if I had to do so much work."

"It was so much fun!!!!!!!!!!!!!! You get 5 stars."

"I learned animals have different purposes. Thanks again! You guys are awesome."

"I would like to thank you for your time. Thank you for caring about our learning."
"I LOVED the field trip!"



"I especially enjoyed being Dunce."



"Not me is eptying (sic) the chamber pot"



CWH would like to thank the following individuals who gave their time and talents to make these tours a success. They are: Sherry Betche, Jan Mazza, Susan Ross, Joellen Ulliman, Bill Gaul, Ed Ross, Karen King, Stevie Kremer, Susan Melville, Phil Kern, Peggy Brooker, Jerry Strange, Hylda Strange, Melissa Wagner and Cheryl Meyer. A special thank you to Routsong Funeral Home for allowing walk through tours to eighth-grade students. We always appreciate the assistance from Randy Bishop, Benham's Grove Administrator, who makes the school visits memorable for so many students.

Build & Learn with Centerville-Washington History

In partnership with the Centerville-Washington Park District, CWH will present "Build & Learn with Centerville-Washington History." Our organization will talk to our youngest citizens about how the founders of Centerville and Washington Township built their homes. They will learn about natural materials in the area, walk on a natural path and build their own structures.

This program is open to children ages 3-6 years old (with an adult companion) and has a \$4 fee for nonresidents. Registration deadline is Tuesday, January 25th via www.cwpd.org.

Contact Melissa Wagner, Education Coordinator, at 937-291-2223 with any questions.
Thursday, January 27th
1:00 PM-2:00 PM
Bill Yeck Park, Smith House
2230 E. Centerville Station Road

Just a slight delay... so that you have a say

It has been the practice of Centerville-Washington History to publish a membership directory once a year, usually in the Winter edition of The Curator. We are currently changing over our membership tracking software, so we plan to include the annual directory in the Spring 2022 Curator instead.

If you do not want your information published please let us know by calling the Walton House at 937.433.0123.

You can also let us know your preference by sending an email to cwths@sbcglobal.net.

Thank you for your patience!

Teen Volunteers



Thank you to our teen volunteers for helping us stuff the Ghost Walk swag bags!

Bet You Didn't Know!

By Phil Kern - CWH Vice President

In the very early years of Centerville, the villagers would meet at the Sign of the Buck's Horn Tavern to discuss the local issues of the day. Sometime between 1865 and 1870, the township built its first town hall on a lot which is today's McDigger's Pub. There are indications that some of the original stone foundations are still visible in the basement of McDigger's. This building served both the township and village governments and was also used as a recreation center.



On July 3, 1909, Centerville & Washington Township dedicated a new Township Hall located on the North West side of Main St. North of Franklin Street.

The cost for this new building was \$14,000 and was constructed on the site of the old Doolittle's Tavern that fell into disrepair and was demolished. When the new



Town Hall was completed, the original Town Hall was disassembled and relocated to the Weller Farm on Clio Rd. It was used as a barn for many years until severe deterioration took over and it was torn down.

In addition to serving as the seat of the village and township government, the new Township Hall was the site of countless school programs, graduations, adult performances, a recreation center, a library, glee club performances, Grange Hall shows, community band concerts, and garden club flower shows. In addition, traveling lyceums (The Lyceum Movement featured lectures, dramatic performances, class instructions, and debates by noted lecturers, entertainers and readers), lecturers, vaudeville shows, plays, and a Women's Christian Temperance Union production also used this facility.

In the 1950-1970's era, several well-known entertainers performed at the Hall. John Jakes (an American writer of historical fiction novels) was involved in a one-act play titled, Last Train to Clique Junction. Gordon Jump (*WKRP in Cincinnati*) was very involved in the Town Hall Players.

During an energetic musical production that had a lot of dancing, the stage started to sink. The dancers and singers left the stage very quickly. A new concrete slab had to be constructed under the stage to provide support for the 'old' reinstalled stage.

Today, it is primarily used for children's performances and other community activities, as the current township offices are now located at the Washington Township Government Center on McEwen Rd. and the city offices are located in the City Building, 100 West Spring Valley Rd. Township Hall is another 'gem' of Centerville.

How Do You Dig a Well?

By Jerry Strange - CWH Trustee

When we bought the Aaron Nutt, Jr house in 2005 there were a number of features, in addition to the house, that added to the character of the property. Certainly the most noticeable



is the stone smokehouse just west of the main house. More impressive, but not as visible, is the stone lined, hand dug well which is close by.

We have no way of dating the well, but we assume it was dug when the house was built, c. 1832. Otherwise, the nearest water to the house is a stream about 300 ft away, down a fairly steep grade - and what wife is going to carry water that distance up a hill? It's not going to happen, not even in the 1830s. I think this is probably the best argument for the well being dug when the house was built.

The diameter of the well is a little less than 3 ft and the depth is 25 ft. The water level is 15 ft below ground level which means there is about 70 cu ft (approx. 500 gal) of water in the well. My guess is that the well provided an adequate supply of water for the farm.

Last week I was repairing the cover over the well and as I looked down I found myself wondering, "How do you dig such a well?" Can you imagine digging a hole with a pick and a shovel that is 5 ft in diameter and 25 ft deep and then lining it with stone.

Digging such a hole would not only be difficult but it would be extremely dangerous. The first 15 ft is hard enough to imagine, but the last 10 ft is even scarier. Ground water starts seeping in when you get to a depth of 15 ft. Now you are trying to dig while you are standing in water. In the early nineteenth century there was no electricity, so you can't easily pump it out. The well stands as a testament to the fact that they did it. My question is, "How did they do it?"

The Night The Heavens Rained Fire – The Great Leonid Meteor Shower Of 1833

By Phil Kern – CWH Vice President

The weather was mild and mostly clear across Centerville, Miami Valley and all through the eastern United States. It was around 10:00pm on November 12, 1833 and some people were out and about watching the sky as a few meteors or shooting stars were blazing across the sky. A crescent moon had just set and no man-made light polluted the sky. The winter constellations of Taurus, Gemini & Orion were rising in the eastern sky with the sickle-shaped mane of Leo just barely over the horizon. Some of the watchers must have idly wondered about these meteors. What were they and where did they come from? But, no one could have predicted what was about to happen.



In the early morning hours, somewhere around 3 am, restless sleepers were awakened by brilliant flashes of light. A newspaper account wrote the following, '...from 3 o'clock to 5 o'clock the scene was truly magnificent – thousands upon thousands (of meteors) were darting about in all directions without an instant's cessation. It was so light that upon awaking, that many thought the city was on fire....'!

A Cincinnati newspaper reported that '...some of the fireballs were bright enough to cast shadows, with smoke trains lingering up to twenty minutes...'!

Large numbers of people believed that the world was coming to an end as promised in Revelation 6:12-17. (*And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; and the stars of the heavens fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind.*) Many of them still remember the earthquakes that occurred more than twenty years earlier on December 16, 1811 (see *CWH The Curator, Volume a 19, Issue 10*) and assumed that this meteor storm was another fulfillment of Revelations' terrible prophecy.

While many people panicked at the deluge of bright meteors, some cooler heads made rational observations. One of them was Abraham Lincoln, who indicated that when, looking beyond meteors to the heavens, he saw all the grand old constellations which were fixed and true in their places and that the world will not come to an end.

Contemporary scientists, at that time, did not believe that the world was coming to an end that night, but they had little knowledge of what caused the storm. Aristotle thought that meteors were caused by sun-warmed vapors

or 'exhalations' from Earth. Edmond Halley was the first to speculate that they might come from beyond the Earth-Moon system. In 1790, Ernst Chladni, a German pioneer in acoustics, proved that stones or meteorites came from fireballs too large to vaporize completely before hitting the earth. Denison Olmstead and John R. Riddell, of The Reformed Medical College of Ohio, as well as several others, observed that the meteors seemed to radiate from the same point in the mane of Leo. Olmstead reasoned that the falling stars must be parts of a nebulous body in orbit around the Sun that burned when Earth passed through it.

That night of 'revelation', when 'the stars of heaven fell on the earth', fostered one of astronomy's more significant revolutions. Unfortunately, the intensity of the Leonid 'showers', will decline as the stream of debris will retreat from Earth as the planet Jupiter's gravitational influence will cause it to pass closer to the sun and further from the Earth, thus reducing the amount of material the Earth encounters. By the year 2164, the Leonid meteor showers will cease to occur.

Support CWH as you shop – 2 ways!

KROGER: Sign-in to your Kroger Plus Card account and look for "rewards." Under community rewards, search for Centerville-Washington Township Historical Society or enter in our code, PF458, and click save to support local history with every visit.

AMAZON: shop via AmazonSmile exactly as you do on the regular site or mobile app. Your purchases will generate funds for Centerville-Washington History when we are selected as your charity of choice. Here's how:

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- Select Centerville-Washington History
- Start shopping! Remember to checkout at smile.amazon.com to generate donations.
- Tip: Add a bookmark to make it easier to shop at smile.amazon.com.

Open the Amazon Shopping app

- Navigate to the main menu
- Tap on Settings and then select "AmazonSmile"
- Select Centerville-Washington History and then follow the on-screen instructions to turn ON AmazonSmile in the mobile app
- Once AmazonSmile has been activated in your app, future eligible app purchases will generate a donation for CWH.

Thank you!



Holiday Closures

Our museums and offices will be closed for the Christmas and New Year's holiday from December 21-December 31.