

The Curator

Centerville-
Washington History

The newsletter of Centerville-Washington History

Director's Thoughts

By Cheryl Meyer

I hope this issue of The Curator finds all of you safe and sound. We are approaching the holiday season and with it comes many reasons to be thankful. Family, friends, and experiences all give credence to being thankful. I am personally thankful for my husband, Mark, my children and their spouses, Brittany and Sam, Josh and Katie, my two beautiful grandchildren, Elias and Francesca, and my little fur baby, Rugby.

I am also very thankful for my Centerville-Washington History family. The friendships and support I feel are amazing. Many of you are an inspiration to me on how to live life to the fullest. I also am thankful for the willingness of many of you to volunteer your time to this organization. The staff is incredible but we are stronger with the help of the membership.



Recently, Ed Ross, our Board of Trustee's president, was recognized by the City of Centerville with the honor of being named the "2022 Volunteer of the Year!" Ed is constantly helping to make

Centerville and Washington Township a great place to call home, not to mention all he does for Centerville-Washington History. He has helped chair the Sense of Taste, been responsible for the refurbishing of the Sugar Creek Cemetery, oversees building maintenance issues on a regular basis, and has served on the Board for many years. He is always willing to help out and does so with the determination of making something wonderful happen. I am thankful to have Ed as part of our village . . .

AND most definitely, *"It Takes a Village"*
Congratulations Ed Ross!

Take care dear friends and have a joyous holiday season.



Presidents Letter

By Ed Ross, President

This has been a great fall season. We had what many considered the best Sense of Taste ever. Perfect weather, great restaurants, good music, and lots of old friends made it wonderful. Most of the restaurants have said they are anxious to return next year; so are we!

A long-standing CWH vision has been to utilize a portion of the Walton House backyard as an Outdoor Rural Education Center. This Center will house many artifacts that represent the early farm history of Centerville and Washington Township and will be an additional learning center for our school tours. The City of Centerville has been approved for a grant to relocate the Chicken House within the Walton House backyard when the uptown parking improvements begin. This new location will make the Chicken House the primary learning fixture within the Outdoor Rural Education Center. In addition, hand-hewn beams from an old barn that was recently dismantled in Uptown will be repurposed in this Education Center.

While the Old Sugarcreek Cemetery isn't getting any younger, we have completed phase three of its restoration. One last phase remains for next year. Talk a walk among the tombstones and see the improvements for yourself. The holiday celebrations are near – enjoy!



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.

Curator's Corner

By Joellen Ulliman, Curator

The Hillan Hotel

resiliency: the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties; toughness

James H. Hillan learns early that resiliency is a crucial survival skill. Born in 1829, his father dies shortly after his entry onto the world's stage. James and his ten-year-old brother Nelson learn from their mother Patsy how to pick up and move on.

Patsy remarries local Revolutionary War veteran, William Morris, when James is one. They live in a small stone cottage on a 20-acre farm on W. Social Row Rd. (BTW, you can visit their home at Carillon Park...it is part of Dayton History's wonderful group of outbuildings). In 1835, the couple have another son, William Morris Jr. In 1838, father William Sr. dies.

About 1855, when James is 26, he opens the Hillan Hotel at 94 N. Main St. Sadly, his wife Harriet dies right before the grand opening. Moving forward, he marries Fanny Houser in 1857.

He continues to operate the Hillan Hotel. By 1860, eleven people live there permanently. The two of them, plus James's mother Patsy and brother William. Benjamin Robbins, grandson of one of the City's co-founders, and carpenter William Ryan. Also counted among the residents are Fanny's sister Rachel and young 13-year-old brother. Overnight guests are always welcome.

Life moves along. James and Fanny have 2 sons. In 1860, Charles Pierce is born and James Laban follows in 1863.

In 1866, James sells the property and purchases 26 N. Main St., currently the Asahel Wright House. He runs the Sign of the Crossed Keys, a log cabin tavern that sits on the northeast corner of Main and Franklin. Always utilizing any opportunity, he opens a hotel on the second floor. He is the last proprietor of this fine establishment. Daughter May Ella is born in 1868. Circa 1869-70 the tavern is demolished and Dr. Dudley Keever eventually builds a home/office on that corner.

The 1870 census reports James is a butcher. The 1880 census claims he is a grocer. He runs a small grocery in the current School Museum. Some local folks believe he is the builder of the little structure.

Son James Laban dies in 1902 and Charles in 1903. James dies in 1907, survived by his wife Fanny and May Ella.

Today, the former Hillan Hotel is just as resilient as the enterprising James H. Hillan, welcoming those with a need for rest. Current owners, Dave and Jan Murphy, recently have finished renovations to the special building. There are no definitive plans for it...just creating a warm, vintage environment.

While the Murphys' daughter and family are displaced from their Florida home due to Hurricane Ian, they find



shelter at 94 N. Main. It will take at least a year to rebuild their house. In the meantime, the old Hillan Hotel opens its arms and heart.



Jan Murphy welcomes Bill Hillan, descendent of James H. Hillan, when he visits Centerville in June.

Education Corner

By Melissa Wagner, Education Coordinator

Centerville-Washington History opened our Walton House, Chicken House, Asahel Wright House, and Schoolhouse Museums to students from five area schools this fall season. We always look forward to receiving "Thank You" notes filled with positive and entertaining comments from our third-grade friends.

"Keep teaching us more about the history of Centerville." - Noah

"We loved all the adventures you took us on." Jayla

"It was a JOY to learn about Centerville!" Avalyn

"Centerville history is very very very cool. I didn't like. I LOVE! Thank you for your time. It was very nice of you to do that. It was nice of you to tell us about Centerville history."

Reagan

CWH thanks the following individuals who gave their time and talents to make our fall 2022 tours a success:

Marian Sensenbaugh, Sherry Betche, Jan Mazza, Chris Thorpe, Ferne Reilich, Laura Abbott, Joellen Ulliman, Karen King, Susan Melville, Melissa Wagner and Cheryl Meyer. We always appreciate the assistance from Randy Bishop, Benham's Grove Administrator, who makes the school visits memorable for so many students.



Fall Festival Fun!

By Karen King, Staff

Everything is better when you're with friends. Centerville-Washington History partnered with our friends at Washington-Centerville Public Library for a full day at the **Fall Fest!** at Stubbs Park on Sunday, October 2. Our focus was a quilt-themed activity for children that also taught about possible meanings of quilt patterns used during the era of the Underground Railroad. Children copied one of the patterns on display, or created one of their own, using paint pens and fabric squares which will be assembled in a quilt-like fashion and displayed at the library branches in the coming months. In addition, we were joined on that beautiful fall day by President and Mrs. Abraham Lincoln (as portrayed by CWH member, Bob Koogler, and his sister-in-law, Delia Granger) who graciously posed for photos. The event was so well attended that we ran out of supplies but thankfully, a Centerville Noon Optimist member stepped in to delight the children with balloon animals. It was a fun afternoon for all who attended!



Nutt Cottage Paving

The parking lot behind the Nutt Cottage Research Center had been slowly cracking up until the snowplow delivered the final blow last winter. Chunks of asphalt and a large hole appeared in the middle of the lot. After receiving several quotes, the search for assistance began. Cheryl reached out to the Noon Optimists to explain our mission and need. Centerville-Washington History was given a donation of \$10,000 by this wonderful community organization to fund this effort.

Thanks to this generous gift, the lot has been completely re-paved; now safe, attractive, and ready to serve visitors of all ages in the coming years. Thank you, Centerville Noon Optimists!



Thank you to our Business Members
Solid Rock Roofing
Tinnerman Insurance Agency
Tri Level Productions





What a **Spooktacular** evening! The **Ghost Walk on Main**, Thursday, October 13 brought out 180 history seekers who wanted to know more about the mysteries of Centerville and Washington Township. Through tours which included storytelling and historical re-enactments, participants learned all kinds of **eerie** bits about the local area. Interesting tales shared during the **Ghost Walk** included the area's first murder, "Three Hits and You're Out" bank robbery, the 1932 quarry accident, ghostly interactions, and even rattlesnake encounters. The Heart of Centerville held a Vendor's Village in which folks shopped and enjoyed dinner catered by City BBQ. There were even visiting owls from the Glen Helen Raptor Center so **Ghost Walk on Main** participants could enjoy an up-close look at these majestic animals.

Centerville-Washington History thoroughly enjoyed working with the Washington-Centerville Public Library, Friends of WCPL, Heart of Centerville, Centerville-Washington Park District, the City of Centerville, and Washington Township to offer such a fun community event. The teamwork and camaraderie was felt during the entire evening. Centerville-Washington History is grateful to all the folks who volunteered their time and energies into making this year's **Ghost Walk on Main** a night to remember.

We look forward to the **2023 Ghost Walk on Main**. This fundraiser has become an annual favorite by many. We would love for you to join us as a first time Ghost Walker or a repeat Ghost Walker . . . either way, you will be in for a **Spooktacular** treat!



How About a *Chat*?

By Melissa Wagner, Staff

Centerville-Washington History would like to have a *Chat* with you! You might be asking yourself, whatever do we want to *Chat* about? Our local history, of course! Volunteers at Centerville-Washington History have developed a variety of presentations, called "On The Road" *Chats*, which are thematic in nature. *Chats* are designed to share research and knowledge about local historical interests with church groups, institutions of higher learning, retirement communities and social gatherings.

To inquire about *Chat* topics or to reserve a *Chat* speaker for your next event, please visit our website at centervillewashingtonhistory.org/road-chats or email melissacwh@sbcglobal.net. Our "On The Road" *Chats* program has experienced renewed interest and growth in 2022. Thanks to our current speakers, Ed Ross, Joellen Ulliman, Melissa Wagner, and Jerry and Hylda Strange for their time. New speakers are welcome! If you have an historical topic of interest to share with our community, we would like to have a *Chat* with you!



Welcome New Members!

Laura Abbott

Mimi Mead-Hagen

Wayne & Jan Kledzik

Robert & Mary Ann Rhoads

John Sellers

THE YEAR THE EARTH TREMBLED!

By Phil Kern, CWTW Trustee

December 1811, a comet is still visible in the Centerville and Washington Township night sky and this, together with a series of earthquakes that shook the Ohio Valley, was something that had never been experienced by the early settlers in these western settlements. This occurrence was regarded with terror by the superstitious, who considered them 'evil portents ominous of private or public misfortune'.

The first earthquake shocks began the night of December 16th and early morning of the 17th and kept the settlers in continual alarm by repeated shocks. The first and severest was felt between two and three o'clock on the morning of the 17th (8.1 on today's Richter scale) with two later shocks occurring on January 23rd (7.8) and the last one on February 7th (8.8) with the tremors being felt as far away as Washington DC and South Carolina. Although no material damage was done in and around the local area by the earthquakes, the people, animals, and fowl were kept in continual alarm by the repeated aftershocks.

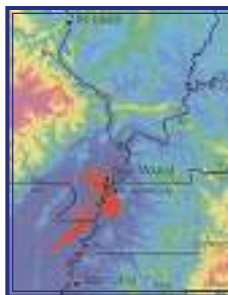
The location of the earthquake was on the New Madrid fault near the town of New Madrid, Missouri in the southeastern corner of the state. The aftermath was the complete destruction of the town and it was observed by boatmen on the Mississippi River, that on February 7th, the river actually ran backward for several hours, creating Reelfoot Lake, drowning the inhabitants of an Indian village, devastating thousands of acres of virgin forest and created two temporary waterfalls on the river. There is no official count of those who perished or the amount of destruction caused by the earthquake.

An eyewitness account gives some idea of the terror: *"The screams of the affrighted inhabitants running to and fro, not knowing what to do or where to go – the cries of the fowls and beasts of every species – the cracking of trees falling, and the roaring of the Mississippi, the current of which was retrograde for a few moments, owing, it is supposed, to an interruption in its bed – formed a scene truly horrible,"!*

One reported story was that Tecumseh (whose name meant 'Shooting Star' or 'Panther Across The Sky') was traveling around the Southeast to build alliances with other tribes such as the Choctaws, the Chickasaws, and the Muscogees. Tecumseh said the Great Spirit had sent him and would provide proof by giving a sign. Shortly after he left the Southeast, the "sign" arrived in the form of a major earthquake. During the next year, tensions between colonists and the Native Americans rose quickly as the tribes were against the settlers encroaching into their lands.

As of today, no other earthquakes of this magnitude, have occurred in the Miami valley since 1811-12, but the 'fault' network isn't sleeping quietly. Seismologists have re-

corded about 200 small earthquakes every year since 1974, mostly along the Reelfoot Rift in Missouri. The U. S. Geological Survey, in 2003, predicted that there is a 7-10% chance that this seismic zone might repeat the 1811-12 disaster in the next 50 years. There is also a 25-40% chance of an earthquake of magnitude 6.0 or greater in this same 50-year timeframe. We, as inhabitants of Centerville, Washington Township, and the Miami Valley are certainly not isolated from the 'forces of nature' – be it earthquakes, tornadoes, fires, or floods!



Location Map of New Madrid Fault



Woodcut from Devens Our First Century 1877

Centerville-Washington History

MONTHLY SPEAKER SERIES

2023

Third Tuesday of the month
Free and open to the public!

Enjoy refreshments and historical education.

RecPlex West Theater

965 Miamisburg Centerville Rd.

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

January 17, 2023

Doyle Burke

"Satan Killer" Darrell Wayne Ferguson

February 21, 2023

Tanya Maus

19th Century Quakers in Southwest Ohio

March 21, 2023

Hylde Strange

The Crosley Brothers

April 18, 2023

David Greer

*Al Fouts: A Bootlegger and Safecracker
Who Lived from 1891-1981*

May 16, 2023

Martin Gottlieb

*Lincoln's Northern Nemesis:
Clement Vallandigham*

CentervilleWashingtonHistory.org

Donations welcome and appreciated.

Thank you for helping to make *A Sense of Taste* a success!



Exploring History

By Susan Melville, Staff

Grant Park is one of the quiet and peaceful spots in Centerville. The stone chimneys rising among the trees filled me with curiosity long before I knew their story. Our publication *Normandy Farms* tells about the Grant family, their home and land. Once a picnic cabin for the family, only the two chimneys remain today. The cabin was built near Holes Creek and provided a space for softball games and badminton matches. It was built with elaborate furnishings and a screened in porch. Unfortunately, it burned down in the late 1960s when vandals set a fire in the kitchen sink. When I visit the park, I like to imagine how many fun activities happened in this cabin. Now our community uses this beautiful park to connect with nature, enjoy a moment of peace and recall an earlier way of life.



In Sympathy

Our condolences go out to the family and friends of those recently lost. They will be missed!

Centerville High School graduate, **Verna Rees**, passed away on August 25. She was a multisport athlete who taught physical education and coached women's field hockey. Her husband, **Don Rees**, passed away on September 19, 2022. Don had a long and distinguished career at Wright-Patterson Air Force base focusing on microwave technologies. They had been members since 1979.

Dave Hufnagle passed away on October 19, 2022. He worked most of his career with NCR Corporation. He and his wife, **Sue**, who passed away in 2017, had been members since 1995. Sue was CWH Board President from 2004-05.

Holiday Closure

Our museums will be closed for the winter holiday from 20 December until 30 December. We will welcome you back in January.



Thank You!

Thank you to everyone who attended the 2022 "A Sense of Taste!" The Trustees, volunteers, and staff of Centerville-Washington History certainly enjoyed spending that fabulous September evening with YOU!

Please help us thank the following sponsors and restaurants that not only made the evening possible, but made it the best yet!!



GORIS –MAY GROUP



Jason Schnarr



City Council & Mayor & Mrs. Compton



Trustee Sharon Lowry



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Centerville- Washington History

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