

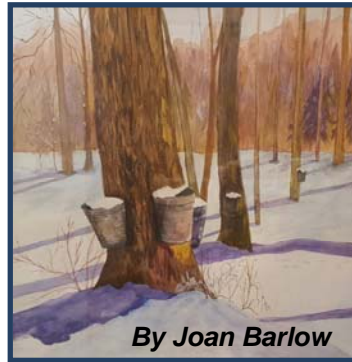


Harborcreek Historical Society

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www.harborcreekhistory.org

Winter Office Hours:
Wednesday & Saturday 10 am – 2 pm
December 1, 2017 – March 31, 2018



By Joan Barlow

Be sure to read the Harborcreek Historical Society's article in the latest issue of YOUR Harborcreek magazine. It highlights the lives and works of six artists who came from Harborcreek and are represented in the Society's collections.

THE HARBOR VIEW



The Future of Our Past is in Your Hands



Request Your e-Newsletter!

If you'd like to request to receive newsletters electronically, send a current email address to harborcreekhistory@gmail.com.

HOLIDAY HAPPENINGS

Harborcreek Historical Society's Annual Holiday Open House

December 2nd • 10:00 am – 2:00 pm

At the Gifford-Blanchfield House, 5661 Buffalo Road

The Society's elves have been busy all year, and we invite you to celebrate the holidays with us. You'll have the chance to see new additions to the Society's collections, discuss Harborcreek history with our volunteers, and shop the gift shop for great holiday gift ideas. Sweets and savories provided.



Light Up Harborcreek

December 8th • 6:00 - 8:00 pm

Township Municipal Building, 5601 Buffalo Road

Santa will arrive by 6:15 pm to light the lights on the township grounds and then visit with children in Santa's Workshop. Horse-drawn trolley rides, the sounds of the Harbor Creek Vocal Ensemble, warming stations with hot cocoa and cookies, kettle corn and Christmas crafts will help put you in the holiday spirit. And of course, reindeer from Santa's flight crew will be there, too!

The Harborcreek Historical Society will be joining in on the festivities and hosting guests in the Gifford-Blanchfield House for tours.

During the event, Harborcreek Township will be accepting non-perishable food items and grocery gift cards for the Ella Cochran Harborcreek Pantry, which assists over 170 families in the Harborcreek area. Please consider helping those who are less fortunate, and bring a donation.

Inside this issue...

Annual Mtg. Save the Date	...Page 2
ECGRA Grant Award	...Page 2
Business Spotlights	...Page 3
Myths of the Fiddle Inn	...Page 3
Veterans Tribute	...Page 4
Coming Here / Going There	...Page 5
Hoag Cemetery Restoration	...Page 5
In Memory of Robert N. Swift	...Page 6

Board of Directors

Lori Sheridan, President
Melinda Meyer, Vice President
John Skuce, Treasurer
Jane Ingold, Secretary
Nancy Brown
Tracy Longnecker Moore
Bill Rodland
Louise Smerick
Brenda Weaver

Gifts to the Society

Cam & George Stadtmueller
John Skuce

In memory of Martha Schaaf
In memory of Robert Swift

The following individuals gave to the Society in memory of James Sheridan.

Mary Gregorich
Carlene & Bob Stroup
Linda & Robert DeAngelo
Parkside Psychological Associates
Kathy & Robert Walls
Cheryl Melerski
The Walls Family
Jacques & Melinda Meyer
Sherri & Leonard Towell
John Stetson, Jr.

Jane Ingold
Andrea & Dave Maille
Leeann Bender
Judy Ellwood
Cam & George Stadtmueller
Carol & Ray Laughlin
Jacqueline Miller
The Dinner Group
Brenda & John Weaver

Nancy & William Kirner
Carol & Charles Oiesen
Maryalice Nagosky
Louise & Rick Smerick
Patricia Young
John & Judy Skuce
Ann Marie & Steve Tylman
Michael Dayton
Jim & Linda Matta

Thank you to those who have given extra with membership renewals and/or through the donation box!

The Society began the Memorial Gifts program a decade ago, and many members have given to the organization in recognition of a loved one, a classmate or a family celebration. We invite you to consider making a donation "In Memory," "In Honor" or "On the Occasion" of a person or event that is important to you.

Save the date!

The Harborcreek Historical Society's annual meeting is scheduled for Saturday, January 20, 2018 at 10 am, and we invite members, as well as the general public, to attend. Our guest speaker will be Robin Cuneo, who is pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Harborcreek and project coordinator for the clean-up and restoration work at Hoag Cemetery, one of Harborcreek Township's oldest cemeteries. The meeting will take place at the Harborcreek Township Building at 5601 Buffalo Road. Please plan to join us!

'tis the season...to buy local

Need one more gift idea? If so, consider stopping by the Society's gift shop located in the Gifford-Blanchfield House at 5661 Buffalo Road. Items available for purchase include:

Landmarks of Harborcreek Throw (Blanket) - \$35
Midnight Herring by Dr. David Frew - \$5
Fortune and Fury by Frew and Skrypzak - \$8
Harborcreek Township Driving Tour - \$2
Harborcreek Yesteryears - \$5
Journal of Erie Studies (East County Issue) - \$5
Maps and pen and ink prints are also available at various prices.



Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority awards Society grant funds

Harborcreek Historical Society was one of six organizations to collaborate on a Community Asset Grant. Erie Yesterday, which served as the lead applicant for the grant, was awarded \$8,064 in September. Fairview Area Historical Society will receive \$2,365 to replace the HVAC system at the Sturgeon House. Lawrence Park Historical Society will receive \$250 to design and print new brochures. Preservation Erie will receive \$1,269 for the annual Greater Erie Awards. Harborcreek Historical Society will receive \$1,114 for outdoor signage and archives supplies, and the Elk Creek Township Historical Society will receive \$3,066 for restoration work at the Little Church on the Hill. We appreciate ECGRA's ongoing support for our local heritage organizations!

Business Spotlight by Cam Stadtmueller



Customers visiting Stan's Garden Center on Buffalo Road will find a wide variety of annual and perennial flowers, garden vegetables, shrubs and trees, and lawn ornaments and concrete sculptures of every shape and size...even the mysterious Yetis! In 1954, Stan and Anna Marie Skarzenski started "Stan's Mum," which was only open two months of the year and sold mums exclusively. The business expanded and became "Stan's Floral and Garden Center" in 1961. Jim Skarzenski took it over in 1981, and, when it became evident that the Saltsman and Cumberland Road location was too small, the garden center moved to its current location on Route 20/Buffalo Road in 1987. Since then, it has expanded to fill the 31-acre lot. They truly live up to their motto, "*There's always something growing on!*" Stop in and see.



Scott's is a growing company with 23 years of experience. They offer a wide variety of services which range from tree removal to hedge and shrub pruning. An evaluation of your trees and shrubs can alert you to possible problems before a serious weather related incident causes you to call their 24-hour emergency service. Scott's also supplies firewood and wood chips, as well as clears lots of unwanted vegetation. Their goal is to "extend the life and beauty of your home or business landscaping."

Myths of the Fiddle Inn by Jane Ingold and Nancy Brown

We are often asked about four rumored visitors to the Fiddle Inn...four visitors so influential that the city of Erie has schools named for each of them. According to our resident historian, Nancy Brown, there is only solid proof that one of them actually visited the Inn.

Chronologically, the first was Oliver Hazard Perry who was on his way, along with his men, from the Black Rock Navy Yard in Buffalo to their post in Erie. Although there were many inns along the way, it is unlikely that the officers and men stayed in any of them. They came down together by ship and often camped.

The Fiddle Inn's second rumored guest of distinction was newly-elected President Abraham Lincoln was heading east by train from Cleveland to Buffalo during his 1861 Inaugural tour. On February 16th, the train stopped in Girard where Horace Greeley joined him for the ride to Erie, where Lincoln was stopping at the behest of the Erie County Republican Club. After sharing a meal with Mayor of Erie, Sherburn Smith, Lincoln (sans Greeley) continued on his way. Later that day he would greet young Grace Bedell, the girl who had famously written to encourage him to grow whiskers.

In 1901, President William McKinley stopped in Erie where he was met by a roaring crowd. McKinley was on his way to the Pan American Exposition in Buffalo and, according to the Erie paper, his stay was brief. Among the Historical Society's holdings are the journals of Edwin Dodge. Nancy has spent a great deal of time reading the journals and has noted that Mr. Dodge, a staunch Republican, was a fervent admirer of the 25th president and had he spent time in Harborcreek, she feels certain that it would have been mentioned in the journals. McKinley was shot three days after his stop in Erie and died on September 14th.

So who DID visit the Fiddle Inn? It was Thomas Edison, who was wined and dined there for a week during the dedication of the General Electric plant in 1911. He had handpicked Erie as the location for his newest venture.

New Members

Bob and Mary Lou Maison

Office Hours

Office Hours: Wednesday & Saturday 10 am - 2 pm (Dec. 1, 2017 – March 31, 2018)

Please call or email to schedule an appointment with our volunteers.

Research inquiries welcome.



Office Telephone: 814.899.4447 • Email: harborcreekhistory@gmail.com
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Veteran's Tribute

Erie's first son lost – WWII* by Elma Sewell Spacht and Sherri Towell



Howard G. Sewell was born on December 7, 1924 to Ralph and Letah Sewell. Fourteen years later, he was blessed with a sister, Elma. Howard had a good childhood. He enjoyed riding his bike around the Harborcreek area. He attended Brookside School and graduated from Harbor Creek High School in 1942.

Immediately after graduation, Howard enlisted in the Army Air Corps where he rose to the rank of Staff Sargent, as an Artillery Gunner. Unfortunately, his young life ended shortly after his 19th birthday in a tragic military plane accident on December 23, 1943.

The B-24H aircraft flew into Palm Beach from San Francisco on December 20th. It was designed to carry 10 crewmembers, 10 .50 caliber guns and 6 ½ tons of bombs. After two days of being serviced, the plane passed inspection. Howard was onboard the B-24H leaving Morrison Field in Palm Beach, Florida at 2 am on December 22nd. Accompanying him were 13 other men. Howard, with three other men, was hitching a ride for an unknown destination. Howard was the youngest.

Minutes after takeoff, witnesses say that the plane hit some tree tops and went down a mile further, exploding into a ball of fire. The terrain was swampy and ammunition kept exploding. It took 1-2 hours for first responders to get close to the scene. Once there, no survivors were immediately found. After about an hour or so, Howard was found. (Later, it was discovered that a neighbor found one other survivor at the crash site and took him home. This soldier died shortly after.)

(Continued Page 5)

PLEASE SUPPORT OUR SPONSORS

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RE/MAX Real Estate Group / Seth Tuttle	898-3558	4939 BUFFALO ROAD
SCOTT'S TREE & STUMP REMOVAL / Scott Litz	459-5890	P.O. BOX 1013, WATERFORD
STAN'S GARDEN CENTER	899-5424	5001 BUFFALO ROAD

Your business could be listed here as a sponsor. Please contact us to learn more.

***Businesses which have been a Society sponsor for ten years or more.**

Erie's first son lost - WWII *(Continued from Page 4)*

Once at the hospital, Sergeant Sewell was conscious and able to give a report. He stated that there were no engine problems. Prior to the crash, he and the other crewmembers felt that the plane was too low to clear the trees. This wasn't an uncommon occurrence in this area. Neighbors stated that a number of planes had the same problem, but landed in the ocean and the survivors were rescued.

Unfortunately, Howard did not survive his injuries, and he passed on December 23, 1943, about 35 hours after the crash. His body was flown home, arriving December 24th. Staff Sergeant Howard G. Sewell was laid to rest at Wintergreen Gorge Cemetery.

The family was never given any explanation as to the cause of the crash. Someone told the family that the crash was caused by Japanese sabotage. Prior to his death, Howard insisted that the cause was not engine problems. It took seven decades before there was much more information on the accident. Eliot Kleinberg, a reporter for the Palm Beach Post Newspaper, did an in-depth research on the occurrence. He found that there was not much information provided at the time because the government wanted to keep the country's morale up and did not say much about the incident. Official reports state that the plane "failed to attain sufficient altitude; reason unable to be determined." History shows that this was the largest loss of life from this airfield.

**Erie Daily Times news headline, Friday, December 24, 1943*

Coming Here / Going There by Cam Stadtmueller



After the dedication of the Gifford-Blanchfield House in July, the Society experienced an increase in visitation. A little over 100 people visited the building over the last three months. Nancy Brown, one of our education and outreach volunteers, guided tours and/or gave presentations to several community groups during this time frame, too. They included the Harbor Creek Class of 1952, residents of the Springhill Retirement Center, Harbor Creek Class of 1967, Harbor Creek School District social studies faculty, Girl Scouts Troop 0300, and Rolling Ridge Cub Scouts.

The Society also attended two community events recently, and we were very excited with the number of people we were able to meet and talk with. Volunteers Carol Laughlin, John Skuce and Cam Stadtmueller represented the Society at Curt Sonney's Senior Expo at the Harborcreek Fire Hall in September and the Harborcreek YMCA's Health Fair in October.

Local church, Girl Scouts and Society rededicate Hoag Cemetery



Some years ago, when the Society adopted the Gospel Hill Burial Ground as its signature project, the old cemetery on Depot Road was mentioned. In response, it was said, "That's just a bunch of old farmers." That's true. But, the people buried at Hoag Cemetery represent the very beginnings of Harborcreek and include at least 11 veterans, four of whom served in the American Revolution.

Hoag Cemetery, also known as Backus Cemetery, is more than 200 years old. On November 5th, Robin Cuneo and Judy Ellwood of First Presbyterian Church of Harborcreek, Girl Scouts Troop 0300, Nancy

Brown of the Harborcreek Historical Society, and about 50 other people participated in its rededication.

Since September, the Scouts and other volunteers have spent more than 50 hours removing brush and cleaning and resetting gravestones. Members of Troop 0300 earned Bronze and Silver Awards for their involvement in the project.

In Memory of Robert N. Swift (1922 – 2017) by John Skuce

My name is John Skuce, and I proudly claim to be a farm boy who grew up in Harborcreek, across the road from Bob and Dorothy. As a young boy of nine or ten I began working for Bob by picking cherries with my mom. Something sparked and I worked for and with him many years, clear up 'til I married Judy. Our relationship was much deeper than boss and hired hand. I became "his" as he would remind me when he "loaned me out" to other farmers who were behind and Bob was "caught-up". And I was "his" in more ways than just work.

When my mouth was bone dry in a hot vineyard, he taught me to suck on a curler. Funny how something that small pops into your mind years later. Or how he taught me to be a marksman and took me to competitions all over the place with the Harborcreek Rifle Team. When I became old enough, at my mom's request, he was the one who taught me to hunt, to be safe and to never, never shoot a sitting rabbit, even though I missed, missed and missed as he sent them running.

Often, he would go one way on a tractor and I would go the other with a hoe. But there were times when we would work side by side - in a tomato field, loading grapes or... I couldn't predict, but when the time was right, he would open up and share his POW experiences. Those memories are just mine – those sacred things a hero shared with a young boy.

At the age of 22, Bob was shot down over Holland, captured and held prisoner in Germany's Stalag Luft. He was with the 458th Bomb Group as a bombardier on a B-24. This and the story of his entire life have touched me personally. I know first-hand why he and the veterans of WW II are known as America's Greatest Generation.

Another fond memory is the question he asked me many times. "Skuce, do you think you will ever amount to anything?" "Probably not" I would answer. It was his way of telling me to make something of myself. I never took his question the wrong way; I needed to hear it.



This past July at the Gifford-Blanchfield dedication, someone walked up to me and said: "Bob Swift is here and he is looking for you." Nothing could have meant more to me. There I stood with my friend, the man who was like a dad to me. The two of us – both, old timers. Just before we parted, he got a little grin on his face and asked: "Skuce, do you think you will ever amount to anything?" I just grinned back.

October - my phone rang and his daughter Barbara told me her father had passed. A sick, empty feeling came over me. My hero was gone.

At the funeral there was the rifle salute, the folded flag and a somber procession. Individually each member of the military team approached the casket where they reverently saluted their brother vet. I could sense the respect – the connection. For me it was deep and sadder than ever. There was silence – and tears. Emptiness remained as I left.

Still, the memories return and could fill a book. One fitting for the season - Bob flew his flag every day at his home. It stood out and marked his house from the others in Harbor Ridge. Many didn't know the story behind it. When mine goes up this Veteran's Day, I will be proud even though my heart might be heavy. Good bye my old friend and thank you for what you did for our country – and for growing me up!



Seeking Guest Writers

Would you like to share your historical interest or family lore about Harborcreek Township with the readers of *The Harbor View*? We welcome submissions from guest writers for each issue. They are usually one page in length and may contain photographs or other graphics. Please contact the Society via email at harborcreekhistory@gmail.com or call (814) 899-4447 if you have a story you'd like to see printed. We look forward to hearing from you.