



# History Matters

Winter 2023

Keego Harbor • Orchard Lake • Sylvan Lake • West Bloomfield

## 'Our School History' Grant Received



City Of Orchard Lake Village Clerk Rhonda McClellan, GWBHS Grant Writer Christian Sonnevile, GWBHS President Gina Gregory, Director of City Services Gerald McCullen receive the grant check

Greater West Bloomfield Historical Society (GWBHS) received a \$9,100 grant from the Community Foundation of Southeast Michigan, made possible with a GWBHS financial endorsement by the City of Orchard Lake Village, and support letters from greater West Bloomfield community partners. GWBHS will further fulfill its Mission: enriching our communities by collecting, preserving, and sharing history with this project - the third phase of Our School History, an ongoing GWBHS project to document the history of area schools.

In the first project phase, GWBHS volunteer researchers gathered information from the West Bloomfield School District and archives at Orchard Lake Museum. Ten reports chronicle early school history and are available, free, at <https://www.gwbhs.org/our-school-history/>.

Volunteers implemented a community outreach campaign to seek additional information from members of the community. In 2016, this resulted in informational panels being installed at each of the school buildings, detailing the individual histories of that school. Now with this 2022 grant, GWBHS will digitally catalog these 1,000 documents and photographs into the GWBHS archive collections database, implementing professional standards. Museum Professional Shelby Nelsen will provide project administration, digitizing techniques, and volunteer training.

View the GWBHS archive digital database, with a wide variety of topics and thousands of items, at <https://gwbhs.pastperfectonline.com/>. There are many more GWBHS collections to add to the archive database.

If you are interested in supporting the preservation and/or sharing the history of Keego Harbor, Orchard Lake, Sylvan Lake, and West Bloomfield, we are looking for your support of other archive database projects. Consider making a financial contribution and include "archive database project" to direct your donation. Donations may be made by cash, check, credit, or Paypal at [gwbhs.org/support/donate/](http://gwbhs.org/support/donate/).

## GWBHS Welcomes



Shelby Nelsen

We are excited to welcome our new part-time Society support staff member! A Hiring Committee reviewed staff needs and held a recruitment campaign. From 30 inquiries we were pleased to interview and hire Shelby Nelsen as Museum & Communications Assistant effective November 1, 2022. Shelby is also filling the role of the GWBHS Archive Database Administrator for the 'Our School History' project 2022/3, funded by a grant from the Community Foundation of Southeast Michigan. She is new to Michigan, has experience as a substitute teacher, exhibit designer, executive director at Clay County Heritage, Spencer, Iowa, and a board member of the Iowa Museum Association. Her expertise is appreciated to lead this archive project.

## At the Museum



- See slides about curling - which first premiered in the United States on Orchard Lake
- See the 1912 "Keep Your Eye on Keego Harbor" narrative real-estate booklet
- Show children an old wooden pulley and rope
- Check out the often changing artifacts at 'What is it?'

# From the Desk of President Gina Gregory

Happy New Year and welcome 2023. I'm hoping for a "normal year" with in-person Society activities, all year long, engaging and supporting local history!

**We are energized** that guests attended more frequent open houses, we've gained a few volunteers, and are excited to have a part-time Museum & Communications Assistant and an Archive Database Administrator for our 2022/3 'Our School History' grant.

**If local history is important to us, we all need to give support to GWBHS.** Please consider increasing YOUR support:

- Submit/renew GWBHS membership at [gwbhs.org/become-a-member/](http://gwbhs.org/become-a-member/)
- Connect through email. Join the 'e-club' to receive event and information at [gwbhs.org](http://gwbhs.org).
- Donate with one time donations, tribute & memorial donations, and planned giving at [gwbhs.org/support/donate/](http://gwbhs.org/support/donate/)
- Sponsor an exhibit, event, or ad at [gwbhs.org/support/sponsorships/](http://gwbhs.org/support/sponsorships/)
- Share your ideas by emailing [gina@gwbhs.org](mailto:gina@gwbhs.org)



Community Relations Committee members: Bruce McIntyre, Neil Hepburn, Rick Bartus



Veterans Heroes Appreciation Breakfast 2022

**New volunteers are needed at every level to keep this volunteer Society moving forward and help work on 2022-2027 strategic priorities!**

We experience synergy working together in person and hope you'd like to join us. Volunteers are needed to lead/support fundraising efforts:

- 2023 Road rally
- 2024 Living With History: Car Connection - Home & Garage Tour. Volunteers to orchestrate an event to celebrate GWBHS's 50th anniversary.
- 2024 50th anniversary. Volunteers to orchestrate an event to celebrate.

As former board member, Nancy Reed, once said, "we need EVERYONE to do just a little bit." She's right. See Volunteer Opportunities 2023 and submit an online volunteer form at [gwbhs.org/support/volunteer/](http://gwbhs.org/support/volunteer/) or email [contact@gwbhs.org](mailto:contact@gwbhs.org) with your interests.

**Fall 2022 we enjoyed sharing history and working together:**

- Pine Lake Cemetery Tour with highest attendance
- Informative presentations at WB Library: Impact of 1820-1850 Religious Reform in Michigan Presentation and The Saginaw Trail: from Native American Path to Woodward Avenue
- Participating in the WB Parks Senior Health Expo, and WB Parks Veterans Heroes Appreciation breakfast.
- Open houses. I personally enjoyed the positive response to our new book: Our History & Remembrance of Pleasant Lake, West Bloomfield, Michigan.
- New committees met: City of Orchard Lake Liaison and Community Relations



Above: Christian Sonnevile, Pine Lake Cemetery Tours docent Right: Tom Bjorklund & Kathy Peltier, Senior Health Fair



**We hope you find 2023 programs and open house themes of interest and look forward to seeing you soon.** (I'm looking forward to the Annual Meeting professional genealogist speaker, with Oakland County and Michigan leadership experience.)

# 2023 Programs

## January - April



Greater West Bloomfield Historical Society hosts and sponsors programs covering a wide variety of local history topics throughout the year. Visit [gwbhs.org](http://gwbhs.org) for more information and final event details.

### Traditional Ice Harvesting Open House

*Sunday, January 8, 1-4 pm, Orchard Lake Museum, 3951 Orchard Lake Road*

See traditional ice harvesting methods and tools. Try cutting a block of ice (weather permitting) and make an ice cone! No charge. Museum tours by appointment call 248.757.2451

### Annual Meeting & 'Where History and Genealogy Meet: The Dash Between the Dates' Presentation

*Saturday, January 28, 10-12, at Orchard Lake Schools Dining Hall. (enter from Commerce Road)*



Annual meeting and presentation. Our ancestors are more than their birth, marriage, and death dates! Family historian and professional genealogist Judy Muhn shares perspectives with ways history, artifacts, stories, and documentation inform the larger stories of our families. \$15 brunch ticket donation. Make brunch reservations by January 20. RSVP to [contact@gwbhs.org](mailto:contact@gwbhs.org) or 248.518.0871. No annual meeting charge. Orchard Lake Schools partner.

### Living With History: Car Connections - Home & Garage Tour 2024 Initial Planning Meeting

*Saturday, February 4, 10 am, Orchard Lake Museum*

Let's celebrate our auto heritage and GWBHS 50th anniversary with a tour, while fundraising! New volunteers are needed to organize and chair this event. Tour stop help is provided.

### Eli Crockett: 1870 African-American Family Open House (1870 Black farming history, 1870s .....

*Sunday, February 12, 1-4 pm, Orchard Lake Museum*

Learn about the Eli Crockett family, one of West Bloomfield Township's first African-American households and their life here in the 1870s. Presentations at 2 & 3 pm by Neil Hepburn. Engaging permanent exhibits interpret local area culture and history. No charge. Museum tours by appointment call 248.757.2451

### The Gift of Fire: Stories that warm the coldest hearts!

*Sunday, February 19, 2 pm WB Library Main Meeting Room, 4600 Walnut Lake Road*

Join Mikwahndan "Mike" Jewell as he shares Anishinaabe "Gift of Fire" stories. In Winter, elders taught their People these stories and the lessons they reinforce. More than ever, all people need to hear and learn these lessons told in the form of stories, which entertain and subtly teach us acceptance. No charge. Sponsored with WB Parks. 50 person attendance limit.



### Open house dates 1-4 pm (Closed holiday weekends):

January Sunday: 1/8, 1/22, 1/29  
Friday 1/20

February Sunday: 2/5, 2/12, 2/26  
Friday: 2/17

March Sunday: 3/5, 3/12, 3/26  
Friday: 3/17

April Sunday: 4/2, 4/23  
Friday: 4/21

Museum tours available by calling 248.757.2451

### Interurban Trolley Open House

*Sunday, March 12, 1-4 pm, Orchard Lake Museum*

Learn about the interurban, a light-rail system, which ran from downtown Detroit to Pontiac, that shortened travel time to the "up north" getaway that was West Bloomfield. Engaging permanent exhibits interpret local area culture and history. No charge. Museum tours by appointment call 248.757.2451

### Restoring 2690 Pine Lake Road

*Sunday, March 19, 2 pm, WB Library Main Meeting Room, 4600 Walnut Lake Road*



This memorable blue-shake roof home has an interesting story. Join Paul B. Wilbur as he returns to the time of Henry Ford and the development of the Pine Lake area. Learn about the home's architecture and first owners. No charge. 50-person attendance limit. Sponsored with WB Library.

### 1913 & 1953 Tax Record Books Open House

*Sunday, April 2 (CLOSED APRIL 9), 1-4 pm, Orchard Lake Museum*

Come see 1913 and 1953 West Bloomfield tax record books. To learn more about your property, know your Township section number, property description and, if known, subdivision. Engaging permanent exhibits interpret local area culture and history. No charge. Museum tours by appointment call 248.757.2451

### Orchard Lake Nature Sanctuary Spring Walk

*Sunday, April 16, 2-3 pm, 4700 Pontiac Trail*



Join Naturalist Carol Fink for a guided tour. Walk through rolling terrain and explore the breathtaking spring flowers. Sponsored with Orchard Lake Nature Sanctuary. No charge.

### Tour The Birmingham Museum

*Tuesday, April 4, 2022, 12:30-3:30p WB Parks, Recreational Activities Center, 4640 Walnut Lake Rd.*

Board the bus for a trip back in time with a docent led tour of The Birmingham Museum. See a new exhibit A Tapestry of Birmingham, which includes early Black settlement, abolitionists, the Underground Railroad. Also tour the oldest house in Oakland County - the 1822 John West Hunter House. See the WB Parks 2023 Winter Guide for details and registration.



See Catherine Cangany, PhD, GWBHS member, present "Here Lies Chief Pontiac: Mythmaking and Mythbreaking Apple Island" at Michigan In Perspective: Local History Conference in Southeast Michigan, March 24 and 25, 2023 at Suburban Collection Showplace, hosted by Historical Society of Michigan. Details at [hsmichigan.org](http://hsmichigan.org).

# Thank You

**GWBHS could not do so much good work without the help of our wonderful volunteers. Thank you to those who have recently given their time and helped out.**

## **Community event volunteers**

Tom Bjorklund, Gina Gregory, Linda Kidd, Katy Peltier, Sue Williams

## **Exhibit Sponsors**

Pat and Glen King, 2021; Tom Bjorklund, Gwynne and Jim Cherfoli, GWBHS Memorial Fund for John Breeze Long 2022

## **History Matters Newsletter Sponsor 2023**

Brookdale Senior Living  
Provision Living at West Bloomfield

## **Museum Support**

City of Orchard Lake Village

## **Pine Lake Cemetary Tour volunteers**

Chair Susan K. Williams KH, Sexton Mari Bem  
Docents: Don Newman SL, Carol Fink WB, Lana LaFortune OL, DuAnne & Christian Sonnevillle OL, Jerry Nechel SL Support: Tom Bjorklund SL, Diane Eanes KH, Linda Kidd WB, Gina & Rob Gregory WB, Anita MacSorley WB, Karen Pushie Waterford

## **Position Hiring Committee**

Gina Gregory, Sue Grifor, Linda Kidd, Karen Pushie, Christian Sonnevillle

## **Program Partners**

West Bloomfield Parks, West Bloomfield Library

## **Programs & Open House presenters**

Carol Fink, Gina & Rob Gregory, Leslie Pielack, Sue Grifor

## **Program Hosts & Open House volunteers**

Tom Bjorklund, Neil Hepburn, Gina & Rob Gregory, Kathy Peltier, Derek Schraffenberger

## **Open House 2023 Sponsors**

Gino's Pizzeria, Petite Gardens

## **Website Sponsor 2023**

Provision Living at West Bloomfield

## Building Changes at Orchard Lake Schools

The campus on the east shore of Orchard Lake has recently seen many changes. Paul Mellerowicz



The Michigan Military Academy Barracks, built circa 1889, had dorm rooms along the lakeside. Orchard Lake St. Mary's (OLSM) purchased the entire property, and added rooms on the campus side in the early 1920s. Later it was used as the college dormitory, and a class building with first-floor faculty offices, archives, and storage. It was demolished in 2015.



The Victorian staff house was built circa 1889 and used as Michigan Military Academy senior staff housing until 1907. This home never had a kitchen, since they ate in the dining halls. Left unheated, it was torn down August 24, 2022.



The Orchard Lake St. Mary's Preparatory High School opened Joseph Burkacki Academic Center with 20 classrooms and numerous collaboration spaces in October 2022. While Joe Burkacki was not an alumnus, he donated \$5 million to this educational institution upon his death. The quad was recently updated and renamed the Richard & Mary Trzcinski Quad.

# David Ward: 1865 Environmental Visionary

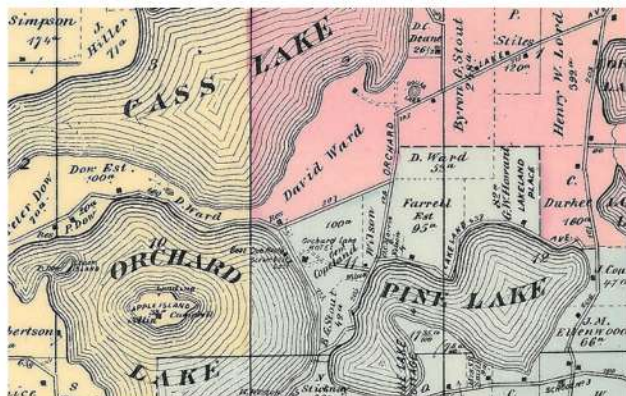
There is probably no single individual who has been responsible for maintaining the essence of Orchard Lake and our area lakes than David Ward. Born 200 years ago Ward received a medical degree from the University of Michigan, created a fortune as a lumber baron in the densely forested middle of the state during a time of a rapidly expanding country, and finally settled with his family on Dow Ridge, off Commerce Road just west of Orchard Lake Road. Situated between Cass and Orchard Lakes he built a modest summer home for his family of eight. Eventually his family convinced him to build a 40-room summer retreat on the 200-acre site.

In 1863 a group of business men devised a plan to increase their property by drastically draining Cass Lake. There are two versions of their motivation. One was they wanted to increase pasture land for their sheep. The other was to increase land to sell for a profit. In either case Ward immediately saw that lowering Cass Lake's level would also impact the water level of Orchard Lake (and other surrounding lakes), destroying his property on both sides of Dow Ridge. With his experience in land acquisition, he moved to block the plan. Not only did he succeed in protecting his land, he also insisted that the law be maintained into perpetuity, thus establishing the first wetland regulation in West Bloomfield Township.

Ward continued to buy acreage with the intent to preserve the natural beauty of the area. Here wealthy men from the city could hold sailing regattas, fish, shoot the abundant game and hike in the summers, and curl, skate and ice fish on the frozen lakes of winter. In preserving the area, he was preserving a way of life that benefits us even today.

Ten years later the St. Clair and Chicago Air Line RR planned to run their rail lines through Dow Ridge, the center of his property. He persuaded them to use the strip of land between Orchard and Pine Lakes, all around Orchard Lake.

Lana LaFortune



1872 West Bloomfield Township Map

# Cornerstone Bench Installed

The contents of the Daniel Whitfield cornerstone are three notebooks: 1900 Course of Study, Welch's System, 1892 – 1910 Scholarship and Attendance Records, 1851 – 1902 School Board Meeting Minutes Fractional School District, Number 6, of the Townships of Pontiac, Bloomfield, West Bloomfield, and Waterford. Holman Holy Bible from Sylvan Lake Sunday School. The Pontiac Daily Press October 15, 1929. Also included in 2022 but not included in the original cornerstone: "A Historical Trip Around Pontiac," "Through My Eyes" by Marjorie Harcourt Phillips, Memories of growing up in Ward's Orchard 1926 – 1950. Helen Jane Peters.



Daniel Whitfield School, 1930s



Daniel Whitfield School Bench 2022



Whitfield cornerstone bench closing ceremony, November 3, 2022



Grasser and Helen Janen Peters with Whitfield school bench Nov. 2022

Daniel Whitfield School was razed in 2003. This year the School cornerstone was made into a bench at Memorial Park, using bricks from the school. Copies of the original documents from the cornerstone dating back to 1851 will be placed in a copper box, inside the cornerstone. The original documents are safely stored at City Hall. Mike Grasser designed and constructed the bench with a Closing Ceremony held November 3, 2020, view at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nUY\\_h-cpAAU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nUY_h-cpAAU).



Orchard Lake Museum  
 Phone 248.757.2451 3951  
 Orchard Lake Road  
 Orchard Lake MI 48323

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Neil Hepburn	Community Relations
Don Newman	Group Programs
Christian Sonnevile	Development/Fundraising

***GWBHS enriches our communities by collecting, preserving, and sharing history and has served Keego Harbor, Sylvan Lake, Orchard Lake, and West Bloomfield since 1974.***

*Thank you to our newsletter sponsor Brookdale Senior Living*



*Thank you to our newsletter sponsor Provision Living of West Bloomfield*



**GWBHS Membership & Donation Form**

New Membership    Renew Membership    GiftMembership\*    Donation

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
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 Email \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
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Please contact me about volunteering with GWBHS.

Make checks payable to GWBHS. Credit card payments are accepted through PayPal at gwbhs.org. GWBHS is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Donations are tax deductible according to IRS regulations.

Membership includes access to Time Travelers reciprocal membership network. Please ask your employer if they match employee charitable donations and remember the Society in your wills, living trusts, and estate plans.

**Membership • Jan. 1 to Dec. 31**

- Individual \$20
- Family \$40
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- Patron/Business \$100
- Life \$600

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