History Matters

Keego Harbor • Orchard Lake • Sylvan Lake • West Bloomfield

Newsletter of Greater West Bloomfield Historical Society

WINTER 2026 | WB CLASS OF '66 REUNION | SYLVAN LAKE HISTORY SHARED | SOCIETY PROGRAMS & NEWS | LEVI GREENE

Join the 2026 AIT Fundraising Committee!

Looking for a great way to get involved and put your talents to good use? Join our 2026 Apple Island Tours fundraising committee! Do you have writing, social media, networking, friendraising, fundraising, development, sales, or graphic design skills? Love a good thermometer campaign? We need you! Rising transportation costs mean GWBHS must raise $5,000 to keep AIT ticket prices affordable. Our committee is tasked with making it happen, and we can't do it without you. To learn more and join, email anna@gwbhs.org. Let's make history together!

In Memoriam: Anita Pinson, 1949-2025

Anita Pinson enjoyed an active life with many interests. As a Bloomfield Hills Schools elementary music teacher, she produced a local history musical program, writing a script, with GWHBS Board members' support, about West Bloomfield colonial settlers. When Anita retired, 2012, she published Voices Across the Lakes. Anita served as the Society's recording secretary and vice president, 2013-15, and Michigan Week Breakfast volunteer. As Director of Accent Pontiac, she promoted music lessons for Pontiac children.

West Bloomfield Class of '66 Plans 60th Reunion

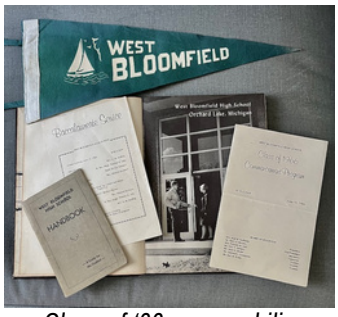
By Sue Williams

Graduates of the 1966 class of West Bloomfield High School are planning a reunion in 2026. "It will be our 60th and we are pretty much scattered all over the country, so we hope everyone can attend," says chairperson Sue Walls Wilkinson. "Besides, we are all in our mid to late 70's and that's a factor, too." When and where the reunion will be held is still in the works of a committee established in November, 2024. "We have a pretty accurate contact list," says Wilkinson who lives in West Bloomfield.

WB cheerleader mittens

Class Graduates numbered 146 students in 1966, including four GED diploma grads and the American Field Service Exchange Student, Edvardo Klurfan from Argentina.

Past reunions included the first one at 5 years, held in 1971 at the Dublin Community Center in White Lake. "It was just a potluck dinner and we were scared no one would come because no one had any money," said Wilkinson. A 20th year was held in 1986 at Santia Hall in Keego Harbor. Then there was a 30th held at Nifty Normans in Walled Lake. The 45th and 50th reunions returned to Santia Hall in Keego Harbor in 2011 and 2016. In 2000, there was a multi-year reunion for WB grads from years 1955 through 1970 at Santia Hall.



Class of '66 memorabilia

The 1966 class Cheer was
"Sharp as Nails
Tough as Bricks,
We're the Class of 66!"

The Class Flower was the White Rose. Class Motto was: "We can only pay our debt to the past by putting the future in debt to ourselves."

"No one knew what that meant, and I doubt if anyone can explain it today," laughs Committee Member Sue Sanderson Williams, "But no matter, we still remember the lyrics of the football Fight Song and the Alma Mater and we'll be dancing to the Class Song, 'We Gotta Get Out of This Place' by the Animals, the Beatles, the Four Seasons and the Stones."

Finding Charles Fisher Home in Sylvan Lake

By Helen Jane Peters

Charles Fisher home, 2025

It started with grandparents and a picture. Dawn Kressly was looking for the home her grandfather designed and his family grew up in. All she had was a picture of the home and that the house is in Sylvan Lake, Michigan. Plus, Dawn lives in Florida and she had never been to Michigan.

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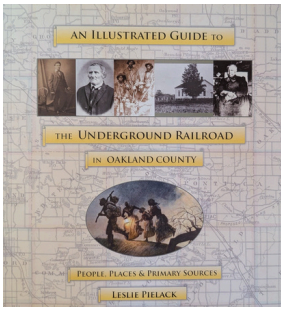
From the Desk of President Gina Gregory

We're excited to welcome 2026, looking forward to participating in celebrating America250!, the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, 1776-2026. I was fortunate to meet researcher Martha Green, who told me of a West Bloomfield connection to the Revolutionary War! How timely! The story is included in this issue.

GWBHS is highlighting our history using America250MI 5 Guiding Themes to update our Indigenous and Euro-American museum exhibits and collaborate with Pine Lake Cemetery Association.

In fall 2025, new research and understandings came to light! GWBHS volunteer Neil Hepburn participated in a research project resulting in GWBHS receiving a complimentary An Illustrated Guide to the Underground Railroad in Oakland County by Leslie Pielack, based on the findings of the Underground Railroad in Oakland County Public History Project 2023-2025. We weren't aware of Ellis Mason, 1820-1903. He was born enslaved in Oklahoma Territory, where wealthy Cree, Creek, Chickasaw, Cherokee, and Seminole plantation owners brought enslaved people during the "Indian removal." He was resold many times, and escaped to Canada via the UGRR. Around 1878, he settled in West Bloomfield, leading a "hermit life" until he was placed at the County (Poor) Farm. He is likely buried in an unmarked grave at Oak Hill or Oakland Cemetery.



Join us for our free Annual Meeting to review 2025 and vote to welcome new board members, with a presentation following!

Please renew your membership as we see new challenges, celebrate, and share our local history. Consider volunteering too! Your support is needed to keep this group alive!

Updates from Anna Smith

Museum & Communications Assistant

As we head into 2026, this quote from America250 on the U.S. semiquincentennial provides useful insight for historical organizations: "The journey toward this historic milestone is an opportunity to pause and reflect on our nation's past, honor the contributions of all Americans, and look ahead toward the future we want to create for the next generation and beyond." On a local scale, GWBHS remains committed to our mission of enriching our communities by collecting, preserving, and sharing history. We look to the future and adapt to a digital world to move the Society forward.

In the spirit of looking ahead toward the future, this year I will continue leading the effort to update our digital collections and make them available at no cost through GWBHS.PastPerfectOnline.com. I hope to revamp outdated virtual exhibits and develop new digital content for monthly Open Houses. Greater West Bloomfield is fortunate to have a well-documented history that can be shared by GWBHS at the Orchard Lake Museum!

New volunteer Gabriela Supper is helping to update digital collections. She is also working downstairs to maintain our physical collections. We appreciate her efforts and passion for history! If you would like to help as a collections volunteer, contact anna@gwbhs.org or leave a message at 248-757-2451.

By the time this newsletter is published, GWBHS will likely have reached 1,000 followers on our Facebook page! Social media allows us to share local history with a larger audience and bring more eyes to the Society. Our Facebook page was created on April 24, 2010. In 13 years, we gained 760 followers. Then after we began an effort in 2023 to post daily on our social media accounts, our follower growth took off. You can follow us on Facebook at Facebook.com/GWBHS or on Instagram at Instagram.com/HistoryMattersAtGWBHS.

Finding Charles Fisher Home in Sylvan Lake (cont.)

She contacted GWBHS for help. Sue Williams looked through the tax records but didn't find the answer. So, Anna Smith called Helen Jane Peters, Sylvan Lake resident historian. Yes, Helen Jane knew the house, the location and who lives there now. She called the current residents, and they would love to meet Dawn and hear more about her grandparents. Helen Jane had babysat in the house as a teenager.

Calling from Metro Airport, Dawn contacted Helen Jane for the address. Little did Dawn know, but there were other things for her to see and visit. Charles Fisher first designed Daniel Whitfield School in Sylvan Lake. Unfortunately, it was razed in 2003. Charles Fisher also designed the Sylvan Lake City Hall building in 1929. Dawn stopped there first. Mr. & Mrs. Charles Fisher commissioned the "Mary and Her Little Lamb" painting for the Whitfield School kindergarten room. The painting by Roy Gamble now hangs in S.L. City Hall.

Dawn & Helen Jane

After City Hall, Dawn drove to her Grandparents' home. It remains very much like the picture Dawn had. Dawn's grandmother had put her children's footprints into wet plaster, and they are still in the dining room. Dawn's next stop was to learn more local history from Helen Jane and for Helen Jane to learn more about the Fisher family. It was a very full and eventful day for Dawn.

2026 Programs

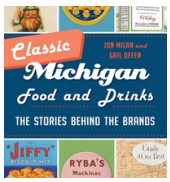
January-April

Greater West Bloomfield Historical Society

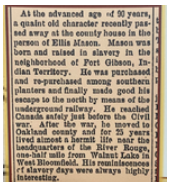
Greater West Bloomfield Historical Society hosts and sponsors programs covering a wide variety of history topics throughout the year. Visit GWBHS.org for more information and final event details.

WB Winter Olympians Open House
Sunday, January 11, 2026, 1-4 pm
(Free admissions, donations appreciated)
Orchard Lake Museum, 3951 Orchard Lake Road
Some dedicated local winter sports athletes have made it to the Winter Olympics. See memorabilia and videos of West Bloomfield Olympians in curling, ice dancing, and snowboarding!

Volunteer Opportunities Meeting
Friday, January 16, 2026, 12-1 pm
Orchard Lake Museum, 3951 Orchard Lake Road
Are you looking for flexible, interesting volunteer opportunities? Come learn our needs, from one-time to long-term commitments. We need volunteers looking to make a difference in our community and help keep our unique local history alive!



Annual Meeting & Presentation: "Classic Michigan Food and Drinks: The Stories behind the Brands"
Saturday, January 31, 2026, 10 am-12 pm
(Admission to this program is free)
WB Library Main Meeting Room, 4600 Walnut Lake Road
Did you know the Ritz Cracker was invented in Jackson? Join authors Gail Offen and Jon Milan as they reveal secrets and surprises from their latest book "Classic Michigan Food and Drinks: The Stories Behind The Brands," (History Press, 2024). It's full of amazing history, stories and photos about the Michigan food and drink brands we know and love.


At the advanced age of 90 years, a quaint old character recently passed away at the county house in the person of Ellis Mason. Mason was born and raised in slavery in the neighborhood of Fort Gibson, Indian Territory. He was purchased and re-purchased among southern planters and finally made good his escape to the north by means of the underground railway. He reached Canada safely just before the Civil war. After the war, he moved to Oakland county and for 25 years lived almost a hermit life near the headquarters of the River Rouge, one-half mile from Walnut Lake in West Bloomfield. His reminiscences of slavery days were always highly interesting.

Local Black History Open House
Sunday, February 8, 2026, 1-4 pm
(Free admission, donations appreciated)
Orchard Lake Museum, 3951 Orchard Lake Road
On May 2, 1903 the Milford Times reported the death of 90-year-old Ellis Mason, a freedom seeker who had escaped slavery to Canada, eventually ending up living a hermit's life on land that is now part of Knollwood Country Club. Please join us to learn more about him.

Open House Dates 1-4 pm (closed holiday weekends or when a program is elsewhere). Come see permanent exhibits interpreting local history and culture! *Free Admission, Donations Appreciated.* See GWBHS.org for final event details.

January
Sunday: 1/11
Friday: 1/16

February
Sunday: 2/8
Friday: 2/20

March
Sunday: 3/8
Friday: 3/20

April
Sunday: 4/12
Friday: 4/17

Presentation: Detroit Jewish History, Part 1
Wednesday, February 18, 2026, 7-8 pm
(Admission to this program is free)
WB Library Main Meeting Room, 4600 Walnut Lake Road
Experience the early days of Detroit's Jewish community, from 1762 to its population surge in the 1880s. Catherine Cangany, PhD is executive director of Jewish Historical Society of Michigan.

West Bloomfield Tornado 50th Anniversary Open House
Sunday, March 8, 2026, 1-4 pm
(Free admission, donations appreciated)
Orchard Lake Museum, 3951 Orchard Lake Road
Learn about the F4 tornado that damaged dozens of West Bloomfield homes and businesses 50 years ago on March 20, 1976. The tornado was responsible for one death, 55 injuries, and over $5 million in damage. Share your photos and memories with GWBHS.

Historic Tax Records Open House
Sunday, April 12, 2026, 1-4 pm
(Free admission, donations appreciated)
Orchard Lake Museum, 3951 Orchard Lake Road
Come see West Bloomfield tax record books! To learn more about your property, know your Township section number, property description and, if known, subdivision.

Orchard Lake Nature Sanctuary Spring Nature Walk
Sunday, April 26, 2026, 2-3 pm
(Free admission, donations appreciated)
Orchard Lake Nature Sanctuary, 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.

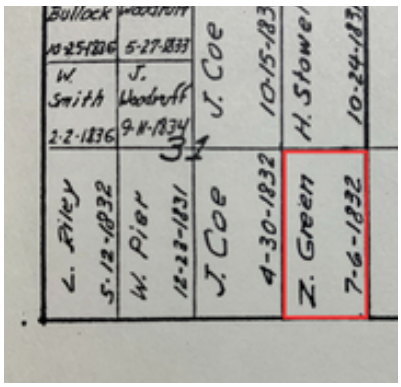
Levi Greene: Revolutionary War Veteran with WB Ties

By Anna Smith (with comments from Martha Green)

Levi Greene was born June 6, 1759 in Coventry, Kent County, Rhode Island to Timothy Greene and Silence (Rowland) Burlingame-Greene. He was the fourth child of Timothy and Silence. Not much is known about Levi's early life. In 1776, he enlisted in the Revolutionary Army, volunteering for nine months as a Ranger in Albany County, New York. According to Mary Shaw Greene's The History of Levi Greene of Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New York, Michigan and His Descendants (1944), he spent this time "Catching Tories and guarding property." In 1777, he participated in the Battle of Bennington under General John Stark, where many soldiers from the British forces were captured and taken as prisoners. This battle is largely considered a turning point in the Revolutionary War. After his service ended, Levi married Asenath Robinson. They lived in various locations in Massachusetts and New York. They had 12 children.

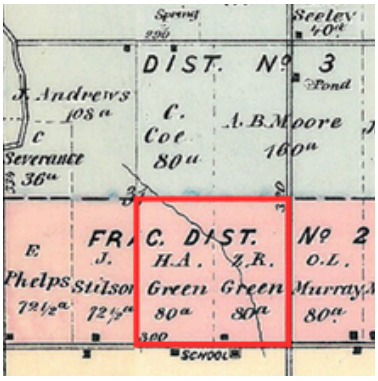
The powder horn carried by Levi Green in the Revolutionary War (photo courtesy of Martha Green)

Zephaniah Ripley Green, Levi and Asenath's eighth child (born in 1801), arrived in Detroit with his wife Zerilla and their three small children from New York in 1832. He purchased 80 acres of land from the government, in the northwest corner of what is now Halsted and 14 Mile Roads. The land was deeded by President Andrew Jackson. Later, Zephaniah would purchase another 80 acres from the government. Immediately, a log cabin was built on the property close to what would become 14 Mile Road. From 1832 to 1838, a permanent home was built. In 1837, Michigan became a state.



A map of original West Bloomfield Township land owners c. 1833, compiled by GWBHS in 1987 showing the original 80 acres purchased by Zephaniah in 1832

In the late 1830s (likely 1838), Levi and Asenath came to West Bloomfield to live with their son in the completed farmhouse.



An 1872 West Bloomfield map shows the entire 160-acre Green farm

They stayed in West Bloomfield until their deaths – Asenath in 1847, and Levi in 1851. Both are buried in North Farmington Cemetery. Some accounts list Levi's age as 92 at his death, some at 94.

The farm changed its production from wheat to fruit and dairy, then to primarily orchards over time. It also was passed down through the Green family, from Zephaniah to his son Horace, then to Horace's son Arthur as a wedding present. During this time in 1903, the farmhouse was moved about 200 feet from its original location. The farm was then passed from Arthur to his sons Wendell and Alden. In 1967, Wendell retired from farming and sold most of the farmland. Only four acres, with the original farmhouse, barn, and house where Wendell Green's family resided (built in 1909) remained. Finally in 1989, Mary Green sold the remaining property following her husband Wendell's death. She cited rapid development as her reason, stating "I prefer trees to people's garage doors. I can't stop the development since the land's sold but I don't have to look at it."

Wendell Green, wife Mary, grandson Greg, and sister-in-law Bernadine in front of Centennial Farm Sign, 1983. Wendell and was the last Levi Green descendant to manage the farm before its sale.

The Green Farm was designated a Centennial Farm by Michigan State University for having been in the same family more than 100 years. The farm was producing 40,000 bushels of apples annually by the time Wendell Green retired in 1967. Produce was taken by horse and buggy to be sold at Detroit's Eastern Market by Arthur (grandson of Zephaniah), a 1-day trip. After the invention of the car, produce was taken to Grand River in the hope of hiring help to take the produce to markets by car. In the 1930s, to keep produce fresh, the Greens were one of the first farms to install refrigeration in their storage.

In 1976, Levi was honored on Memorial Day by members of his family and the Quakertown Chapter of Daughters of the American Revolution in a ceremony at North Farmington

Cemetery. A plaque was placed by the DAR at his grave in observance of the U.S. Bicentennial, reading:

1776-1976
Levi Green
1776
Ranger in Albany Co. N.Y.
1777
Battle of Bennington

Levi Greene's grave at North Farmington Cemetery, with the 1976 DAR bicentennial plaque

Fourth to eighth generations were represented at the ceremony, including Wendell Green, great-great grandson of Levi.

Today, as the U.S. turns 250, Martha Green keeps the Green family's story alive. She recently visited the Orchard Lake Museum to further research the Green family:

"My late husband, (Stephen M. Green) was understandably proud of his heritage. The Green's family story holds a special place in my heart. It is my hope and desire to keep their history alive, honoring their legacy, sharing their stories, and ensuring that future generations understand where they came from."

GWBHS remembers Levi Green as we celebrate America250!, the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, 1776-2026.

Martha Green researches the Green family at the Orchard Lake Museum

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GWBHS is a 501(c)3 organization open to all and has served
Keego Harbor, Sylvan Lake, Orchard Lake, and West Bloomfield since 1974.

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