



RELIVING

# The Rochester Era



THE ROCHESTER-AVON HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

JULY/AUGUST

[WWW.ROCHESTERAVONHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG](http://WWW.ROCHESTERAVONHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG)

2019

**IN THIS ISSUE:****Avon Fairground****Presidents Message****Memorial Day Parade****Oakland County  
Bicentennial 2020****Cover Story cont. page 4****July Walking Tour****Annual Picnic****Calendars****Membership Application****Instagram****Find us on  
Facebook**

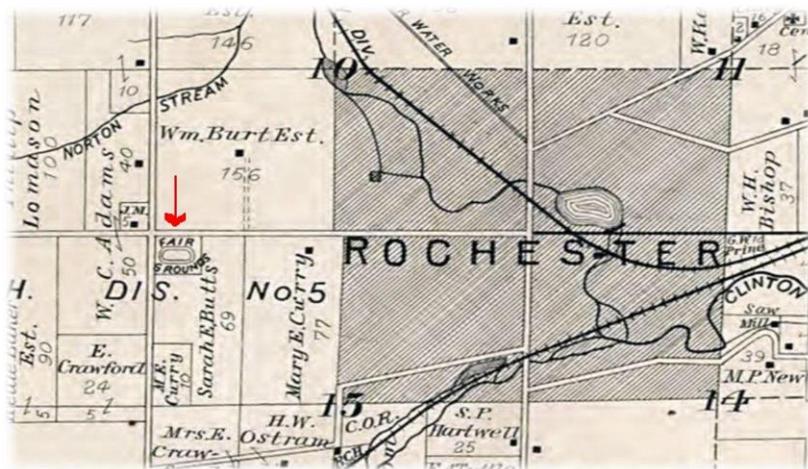
## The Story of the Avon Fairground

By Deborah Larsen

Recently, a local citizen contacted RAHS to ask whether there had ever been a fairground in Rochester or Avon. Our answer was a definite “yes!”

It has been almost a century and a quarter since it was last active, but Avon Township (now Rochester Hills) had a fairground on the southeast corner of today’s Walton and Livernois roads. So, when you shop at our local Kroger or any of the Campus Corners stores, you’re treading on ground that once displayed the best of the community’s livestock, farm produce, domestic arts, flowers, and farm implements.

The history of the Avon Fairground starts in 1879, when some local citizens decided to build a horse-racing track. They organized the Rochester Driving Park Association and approached local farmer Burgoyne Jones about leasing a portion of his farm on which to build a track. The deal was struck in the spring of 1879, and by mid-June the Driving Park Association had built a half-mile oval and was ready to host an event. The *Rochester Era* reported on June 21, 1879 that the Rochester Cornet Band led a parade of nearly 30 carriages westward out of town to the new driving park for a race.



The following year, the driving park took on another role. The Avon Agricultural Society was organized in June 1880 with the following officers: Joshua Van Hoosen, president; Thomas S. Sprague, secretary; and Enos R. Matthews, treasurer. One of the first orders of business for the new society was the organization of a town fair to showcase the community’s agricultural bounty. The society decided that the driving park on the farm



## President's Message

On June 12, RAHS members gathered for the annual potluck picnic and meeting. Thank you to First Vice President Sara Helferich for organizing, decorating, and making this yet another successful event for RAHS. Thank you also to ERA Newsletter Director Carla Gallusser for her assistance in organizing the event and thank you to all the society members who pitched in to handle picking up food, bringing food, and general set up. I also want to express our thanks to Home Bakery for providing a delicious sheet cake to celebrate RAHS' 50th anniversary and to Chicken Shack for supplying the fried chicken at a discounted cost. Finally, thank you to Dave Gifford who led the group in some classic sing-alongs and then surprised us all with his musical renditions of poems written by Rochester poet John Snook (1842-1923). If you did not get a chance to hear Dave perform his original melodies to Snook's poems, there is a brief video of one of the songs on our Facebook page.



Tiffany Dziurman  
President  
Rochester-Avon Historical Society

As we begin a new fiscal year, I would like to reiterate that the RAHS board and I are proud of the society's commitment to local history, as well as our continued support of other local historical agencies, including the Oakland Township Historical Society, the Rochester Historical Commission, and the Rochester-Hills Museum at Van Hoosen Farm. The board believes partnering with and supporting our local historical agencies strengthens our mission to "educate our community about local history to foster appreciation and preservation of our historical resources and pride of place." As we look forward to another year, the board will be examining and pursuing local preservation projects and other ways we can build relationships not only with other local history groups, but within the community. If you would like to join us in that endeavor, we welcome you and whatever assistance you can provide.

One of the greatest assets our society has is its volunteers. As you know our board is all volunteers and we also rely heavily on our membership to assist and volunteer when they can. Without the help of our volunteers, we could not host the many activities, lectures, and events we do each year. I want to say thank you, again, to each and everyone of you who help support our organization either financially or with your time.

## Memorial Day Parade

RAHS participated in the new Memorial Day Parade on May 31. The parade traveled down Adams Road from Van Hoosen Middle School to the Veterans Memorial in Oakland Township. Thank you to Richard Dengate for helping to bring OPC veterans to walk/ride with us during the parade. It was a great time with great weather and we will sign up again next year.



## Oakland County Bicentennial in 2020

by Richard Stamps

*"In this the 200th birthday of our Oakland County, we pause and remember the pioneers who have gone before us. We look at the present high quality of life we enjoy. We plan ahead for an even greater future. HAPPY BIRTHDAY OAKLAND COUNTY! Learn from the past, live in the present, plan for the future."*



Just 44 years after the founding of the United States of America, Northwest Territorial Governor Lewis Cass on March 28, 1820, signed the document defining the boundaries of Oakland County and declaring Pontiac as the county seat. This was 17 years before Michigan became a state. In the year 2020, we will celebrate Oakland County's bicentennial.

Native Americans had lived here since the retreat of the glaciers some 12,000 years before. Their evolving lifestyles allowed them to survive through a period of "Big Game" hunting of mammoths, mastodons, and caribou referred to as the Paleo-Indian period. Warming climates brought a shift to more gathering of local plants and the hunting of smaller animals. This is known as the Archaic Period. This lifestyle survived until domesticated crops of corn, beans, and squash were introduced from the south to reinforce hunting and fishing. This is known as the Woodland Period. Populations increased with villages being located across the county. The Native Americans had a complex and vibrant grouping of different groups. These were the residents of Oakland County here to meet the incoming European settlers. Several families had moved into the area, but local governmental units were still lacking. The role of county government was more important without these local governments. Over the year's township, village, and city governments came into existence. Citizens today have a closer relationship to "their town" than the county.

As we approach Oakland County's bicentennial, there will be some existing county-wide events with a bicentennial spin, but the key celebrations should be on a local, people's level. Working with the idea that we should "learn from the past, live in the present, and plan for the future," local groups will be best served by finding current, ongoing activities and adding a bicentennial spin. We can get involved in the local parades, "Founders Day" events, lectures, art shows, quilt shows, musical performances, etc. Invite the organizers to include events referring to the past, but also take this opportunity to talk about where we are going in the future. How do we plan to get there?

Editor's Note: We will have more information about Oakland County's Bicentennial celebrations later in the year. Stay tuned!



## COVER STORY CONT.

of Burgoyne Jones would be the ideal location, because there was already a fine half-mile track there, along with plenty of room to add buildings to house the fair. The directors appointed John M. Norton, Charles Adams and Milo P. Newberry to negotiate a contract, and hired local contractors John Ross & Co. to build two halls, 20x40 feet each, along with the necessary livestock pens and sheds required to host a fair. The first annual Avon Agricultural Fair took place on October 13-15, 1880.

The inaugural fair was hailed as a success, having attracted over 1,500 entries in various categories, all competing for prizes. Premiums ranging from 25 cents to two dollars were awarded to the winners. Some of the winners included: William Graham for his two-year-old bull; Joshua Van Hoosen for his cow; Henry Tienken for his bull calf; William Graham for his one-year-old steer; O. M. Sipperly for his three-year-old mare; G. B. Sipperly for his three-year-old stallion; Hubert Woodward for his general-purpose plow; Hattie Woodward for her loaf corn bread; Sophia Pixley for her woolen yarn; Peninah Woodward for her hand-stitched bed quilt and silk embroidery; Joseph Reimer for his hardware display; and Frederick Dahlmann for his jewelry display.

Unfortunately, the success of the town fair was short-lived. It was held annually through 1888, but in 1889 was postponed indefinitely. A few months later, the Avon Agricultural Society dissolved after attempts to hold an annual meeting were abandoned for lack of a quorum.

As for the driving park association, it continued to hold occasional races at the track until May 1896, when the *Rochester Era* reported the following sad note: "The owner of the driving park having demanded a higher rental than the horsemen were willing to pay, the project of using the track has been abandoned."

## July Walking Tour

"Historical Hangouts" Downtown Rochester Walking Tour

July 23 at 7-8 pm



RAHS is pleased to bring you a brand-new historical walking tour of downtown Rochester. This new tour is all about the local hangouts and entertainment spaces that are a part of our community's past. Where was the action in downtown Rochester in days gone by? Where did the kids go to hang out with friends? This tour will take you back to some of the hangouts enjoyed by Rochester residents of decades past. Join us as we show you vintage photos and advertisements and delight you with stories and anecdotes from the people whose lives intertwined with the places that entertained Rochester.

The tour begins at the city parking lot on E. University and Water Streets, across the street from the iconic Rochester Elevator building. The group will then proceed to walk up the corner of University and Main to begin the tour. Please arrive on time.

Tours are free for RAHS members (visit [www.rochesteravonhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.rochesteravonhistoricalsociety.org) to become a member). Non-members are \$5, \$3 for seniors (55+) and students. Payments must be made at the time of the tour. Cash-only. Rain or Shine!

## RAHS Honors Members at Annual Picnic

At the annual picnic and meeting RAHS presented three awards to our most outstanding members of 2018-2019.

The **Lois Collet Award** is given to an outstanding member of the board of directors who has demonstrated a high level of leadership and involvement in our organization during the current fiscal year. Lois served as president of the historical society in the early 1990s and was instrumental in keeping the organization running and active in the community. She also volunteered many hours to the society and to the Rochester Hills Museum. She was a passionate advocate for local history. This year First Vice President Sarah Helferich received the Lois Collet award.

The **Mary Eberline Award** is given to an individual or couple who have demonstrated a high level of leadership and involvement in our organization during the current fiscal year. Mary was a longtime supporter of local history and served on the RAHS board of directors. She also served on the board at the formerly named Crittenton Hospital. This year Bill Williams received the Mary Eberline Award.

The **Gail Kemler Award** for Outstanding First-Year Member is given to an individual or couple who have demonstrated a high level of leadership and involvement in our organization during the current fiscal year. Gail needs no introduction, but I will say she is our resident historian and cherished friend. This year ERA Newsletter Director Carla Gallusser received the Gail Kemler award.

Congratulations to Sarah, Bill, and Carla!



## Rochester-Avon Historical Society Annual Picnic 2019



## 2019 JULY

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

## 2019 AUGUST

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

**Don't miss these upcoming events**  
**Be sure to mark your calendar now!**

July 1: Membership Dues Expire. Renew today!

July 4: Fourth of July

July 23: Walking Tour of Downtown Rochester, 7 pm

August 5: Articles due for the ERA Newsletter



Annual membership to RAHS expires June 30, 2018.

Renew now to keep your membership current. A renewal form is located on the last page of this newsletter. You can also renew online at:

<http://www.rochesteravonhistoricalsociety.org/join-us>

**Volunteer Areas of Interest**

How would you like to participate?

- Annual Picnic
- Antique Appraisal Day
- Historic Research
- Historic Walking Tour Guide/Assistant
- Fundraising
- Genealogy Research
- Heritage Days
- Oral History
- Photography/Videography
- Publications
- Refreshments at Meetings
- Special Project Volunteer
- Website/Social Media



## Board of Directors

Tiffany Dziurman, President	248-410-5490
Sarah Helferich, First Vice President	248-688-2434
Brian Dunphy, Second Vice President	248-376-3460
Janet Potton, Corresponding Secretary	248-765-1571
Ginger Ketelsen, Recording Secretary	248-496-2032
Cary Downer, Treasurer	586-201-2285
Katie Stozicki, Director, Communications	248-410-6880
Carla Gallusser, Director, ERA Newsletter	248-872-5088
Richard Dengate, Director, Membership	248-390-7012
Director, Programs	
Director, Special Projects	
Barb Bates, Director, Historic Preservation	248-495-6258

## Committee Chairpersons

Gail Kemler, Honorary Historian	407-439-1786
Deborah Larsen, Research	248-375-2974
Gary Jaracz, Media	313-407-9326

**JOIN TODAY!!**

<input type="checkbox"/> New	\$15	<input type="checkbox"/> Student
	\$20	<input type="checkbox"/> Individual
	\$35	<input type="checkbox"/> Family
	\$50	<input type="checkbox"/> Contributing
<input type="checkbox"/> Renewal	\$100	<input type="checkbox"/> Business
	\$250	<input type="checkbox"/> Patron

## **Join the Rochester-Avon Historical Society Today!** Membership Application

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

### How would you like to participate?

- Annual Picnic
- Antique Appraisal Day
- Historic Research
- Historic Walking Tour Guide/Assistant
- Fundraising
- Genealogy Research
- Heritage Days
- Oral History
- Photography/Videography
- Publications
- Refreshments at Meetings
- Special Project Volunteer
- Website/Social Media



Mail completed form with check payable to:

**RAHS**  
P.O. Box 80783  
Rochester, MI 48308-0783

*Questions? Call us at 248-266-5440*



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