



Carriage Maker George Vandeventer Helped Establish Rochester Fire Department

George W. Vandeventer's name may not be familiar to many, but his life and times in Rochester left an indelible mark on the development of the town.

Not only was he a successful pioneer merchant and politician in what was then the Village of Rochester, but Vandeventer also held a number of prominent public offices in both Rochester and Avon Township (now Rochester Hills) and is credited with helping to establish Rochester's fire department.



Settling in and setting up shop

Born in New York in the 1820s, Vandeventer and his parents traveled to Avon Township from Romulus, New York, in 1834. Their first residence in Avon Township is unknown, but according to the 1850 Federal Census, Vandeventer was living in the home of carriage maker Levi Davis and his wife, Louis.

In June 1853, Vandeventer married Julia Pixley, also from Avon Township. A year later, he purchased a lot on the west side of Main Street near the northwest corner of Main and Third streets in downtown Rochester where, according to a local newspaper's business directory, Vandeventer opened a carriage and wagon shop of his own. He later moved this shop to a neighboring lot he purchased from L.E. Hamlin.

By the 1860s, Vandeventer had become a successful businessman and politician in both the Village of Rochester and Avon Township, where he held a number of prominent public offices. The Village of Rochester was formerly incorporated on April 12, 1869, and Vandeventer was elected as one of the first village trustees. In 1861, he was elected Commissioner of Highways for Avon Township. He became the village's school board moderator in 1873.

IN THIS ISSUE

Page 1 - COVER STORY/ George Vandeventer
Page 2 - Presidents Message
Page 3 – Cover Story Continued
Page 4 – Cover Story Continued
Page 5 – Events/What's it Worth!

Page 6 – Programs/SmartTowns/Brown Bag
Page 7 – Election Results/Merchandise
Page 8 – Contact Information
Page 9 - Business Sponsors

The President's Message

While COVID-19 continues to affect our lives, it is nice to ponder spring again and the fresh perspective and renewing energy it brings with it. As we have heard over the year since the pandemic began, getting outside has tremendous benefits to our hearts and minds. The historical society's new historical tour book is perfect for walking and/or driving (with the windows down) to see our historic landmarks and sites mentioned in the book and on theclio.com. If you have not yet visited theclio.com, give yourself a treat and check it out. Type in Rochester, MI in the location search bar at the top of the website, and you will find the sites in the tour book and more to visit. Visit the sites online or download the Clio app to your mobile device and take a spring tour of Rochester's historic buildings and locations. The website and app feature audio versions of the descriptions and plenty of historical and current photos.

Programming has been a bit of a challenge due to the pandemic, and we miss seeing our members at our in-person meetings at the Rochester Hills Public Library. For the time being, our programs will remain online through Zoom and in partnerships with our other local historical agencies. Stay tuned to our website and social media pages (Facebook and Instagram) to find the latest events and register. On Thursday, March 4 RAHS begins its online antique appraisal month with author, appraiser, and radio show host Mike Ivankovich who will provide some information about your antiques over Zoom. The program begins at noon and runs until 2 p.m. Register by visiting the events tab on our website at rochesteravonhistoricalsociety.org. For the remainder of March, we will announce antique appraisal programs with local appraisers, including Paul Haig. We are currently scheduling more appraisal programs, so keep checking our online sites for dates and times. Sign up for text reminders online at remind.com/join/rochavonhs or text @rochavonhs to the number 81010.

Thank you to members who voted for our recent bylaws changes. More on the recent vote is in this newsletter. RAHS has decreased the number of officers and board members to make things manageable and efficient. We need new people on the RAHS board and for committee work. Most importantly, we are looking for a treasurer and a secretary. Other board and committee positions are available. Visit our website for more information.

Please join us for our upcoming programs and to help continue to preserve our local history!

Kindly,

Tiffany Dziurman



Tiffany Dziurman
RAHS President

COVER STORY CONTINUED

Perhaps Vandeventer's most notable achievement in the field of public office, however, was his election as president of the Village of Rochester. According to "Record of Village Council, Rochester, Michigan Vol. 1 (1869-1885)," he held this position three times; in 1873, 1875, and 1878.

Vandeventer remained active in public life until the 1880s, serving as a trustee for the village each year from 1881 to 1884.

Aside from his public life, Vandeventer seemed to enjoy the community's social scene. Together with his son, Marshall, Vandeventer played in Rochester's Silver Cornet Band in 1876.

Where there's smoke, there's fire

In addition to his successes as a merchant, politician and amateur musician, Vandeventer was instrumental in creating Rochester's fire department.



In 1875, fire destroyed Vandeventer's home for the second time.

On April 1, 1875, the *Rochester Era* reported: "Last Friday morning, at about half past ten o'clock, fire was seen issuing from the roof of George W. Vandeventer's fine residence on Third Street, and before a general alarm could be sounded, the flames were under such complete headway that all thoughts of saving the building were abandoned. ... He had finally succeeded once more in obtaining a pleasant and beautiful home, when again the devouring element suddenly deprived him of it."

As a result, Vandeventer called a special meeting of the village council on June 1 to discuss obtaining a fire engine and hall for the village. For years the board acted only verbally, despite several more fires which destroyed homes and businesses in Rochester.

In *A Lively Town: 152 years in Rochester*, published in 1969 by the Rochester Centennial Commission, it's stated that in the early 1880, "ordinance number forty-seven ordered the council to appoint a fire warden whose duties would be to inspect, four times a year, all buildings using lights or fires, order chimneys cleaned and repaired, and act as custodian of fire buckets and ladders."

In his book *The Rochester Fire Department: A Centennial History, 1895-1995*, William Cahill cites the Feb. 2, 1882, edition of the *Rochester Era* in which the paper took a critical tone stating, "Of course the appointment of a Fire Warden answers the purpose of a fire engine and water works. Don't it?"

After fire destroyed a Rochester woolen mill on July 9, 1882, a special council meeting was called to again discuss the need for improved fire protection. At another special meeting held on August 14, Vandeventer, perhaps exasperated with the council's delays and indecision, offered a resolution.

According to Cahill and village council records, Vandeventer proposed "that this board take immediate steps toward providing some efficient means of fire protection for said village."

PAGE 3/COVER STORY CONTINUED

Vandeventer and two men were appointed to a committee to investigate ways the village could provide fire protection and report their findings at the next meeting. In Sept. 1882, the Village Council finally approved the purchase of a lot and building materials at a cost of \$400 for a fire hall. No mention was made, however, about purchasing a fire engine.

Firefighters continued to form "bucket brigades" using water from wells and rivers to extinguish flames.

According to Cahill, in Oct. 1882, the Village of Rochester "ordered a special election ... to bond the village for ... \$10,000 for the purpose of supplying water." The election results were dismal: 80 votes no and 54 votes yes. A fire engine was of no use without a water system. The fire hall, for which land had been purchased, was not completed.

As noted in *A Lively Town*, a water reservoir was finally built in 1895, prompting the village council to formally organize a village fire department with a chief engineer and "two volunteer hose companies, twenty men in all, who received no compensation."

A truck and ladder were purchased for \$325 and \$125 was spent on uniforms. The fire department was up and running and would only continue to improve and grow over the years.

Time to rebuild

After fire destroyed his home in 1875, Vandeventer began to rebuild. He constructed another house on the corner of Third and Oak streets in downtown Rochester.

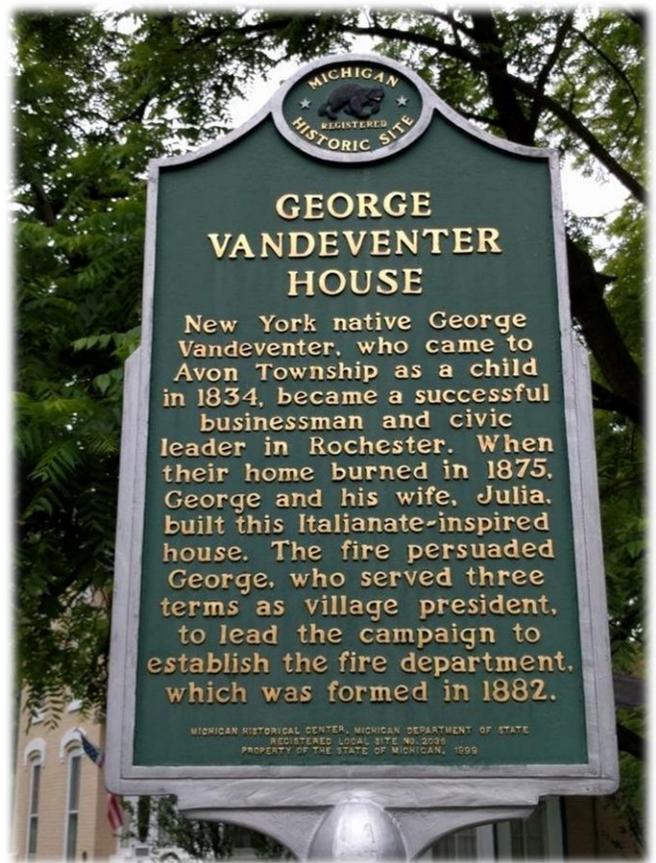
In the summer of that year, the *Rochester Era* reported that Vandeventer had "erected a small building, which he intends ultimately for a wood house, upon his premise recently vacated by fire."

Today, a state-issued historical marker honoring Vandeventer's life and accomplishments in Rochester stands in front of his house, which is still a private residence.

The marker reads:

New York native George Vandeventer, who came to Avon Township as a child in 1834, became a successful businessman and civic leader in Rochester. When their home burned in 1875, George and his wife, Julia, built this Italianate-inspired house. The fire persuaded George, who served three terms as village president, to lead the campaign to establish the fire department, which was formed in 1882.

Vandeventer died at the age of 82 on March 21, 1909 and was laid to rest in Mount Avon Cemetery.



EVENTS



What's it Worth?

Join RAHS & appraiser Mike Ivankovich for "What Determines Value" & learn what your antiques are worth! Space is limited! Online only.

Thursday, March 4, 12-2 p.m.

What's it Worth! Online Antique Appraisal Day with Mike Ivankovich

Thursday, March 4, 12-2 p.m. Zoom Livestream. Registration Required. Space is Limited.

Join RAHS and author, auctioneer, appraiser and radio show host Mike Ivankovich for "What Determines Value." Mike will reveal what your antiques, collectibles, and personal treasures are really worth today.

Since Antique Appraisal Day is RAHS' biggest fundraiser and we cannot host the same type of event this year, we ask that attendees to consider making a donation in any amount to help us support programs such as this one. Thank you. To make a donation, visit <https://www.rochesteravonhistoricalsociety.org/donations/>.

Each attendee is invited to bring in 1-2 items for Mike to appraise. This program is limited to 30 attendees. Each attendee will receive a notification if their registration was accepted or not. If accepted, you will receive an email confirmation with a meeting link. On the day and time of the program, please wait in the online Zoom waiting room after logging until it is your turn to talk to Mike and show your items to him using the camera and microphone on your mobile device.

Please do not register if you do not plan to attend. If you find you cannot attend after registering, please cancel your registration promptly so other's may be notified a spot has opened up.

[Register](#)



Smart Towns: The Silver Lining in the Midst of the Pandemic

Thursday, March 11, 7 p.m. Zoom Livestream.
Registration Required.



COVID-19 has been one of the craziest experiences in our time in healthcare, but despite the stress and chaos, goodness and positivity were revealed. Colleen Ellis NP and Elizabeth Jackson PA of Ascension Providence Rochester Hospital will discuss their experiences on the COVID team and how it changed their views and outlook on everyday life. Smart Towns is a community partnership with Rochester Hills Public Library, Rochester Hills Museum at Van Hoosen Farm, Rochester-Avon Historical Society, Ascension Rochester Providence Hospital, Oakland University, Rochester University, and Meadow Brook Hall.

[Register](#)

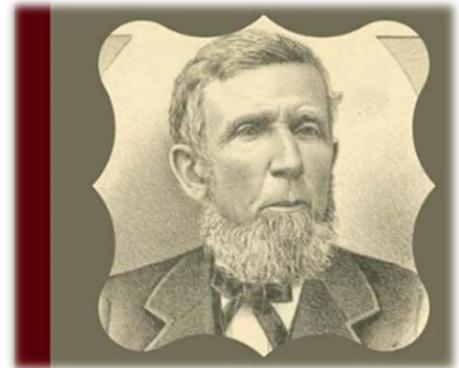
Smart Towns: COVID-19 -- What Do We Know?

Thursday, April 1, 7 p.m.
Zoom Livestream. Registration Required.



Dr. Mohammed Kashlan, a pulmonologist with Ascension Providence Rochester Hospital, will discuss what we currently know about COVID-19 and what we may expect in the future. Smart Towns is a community partnership with Rochester Hills Public Library, Rochester Hills Museum at Van Hoosen Farm, Rochester-Avon Historical Society, Ascension Rochester Providence Hospital, Oakland University, Rochester University, and Meadow Brook Hall.

[Register](#)



Brown Bag: Leaders, Legends, and Liars

Tuesday, April 6, 12 p.m. Zoom Livestream. Registration Required. Free.

The Rochester community has had amazing leaders in science, agriculture, women's rights, surveying, medicine, and even leading a cult. Come and meet the leaders from our past. This program is in partnership with the Rochester Hills Museum at Van Hoosen Farm.

[Register to receive the Zoom link](#)

Mission Statement

The mission of this Society shall be to promote interest and bring together people interested in the history and preservation of the Rochester and Rochester Hills area. Understanding the history of our community is fundamental to our democratic way of life and leads to an appreciation of our American heritage.

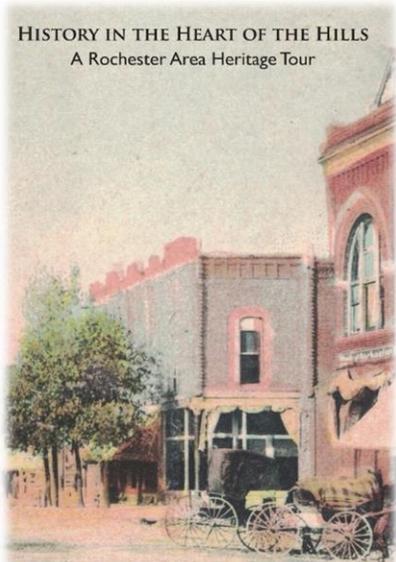
bylaws & policies 

Election Report – Bylaws Amendment I

The following are the results of the proposal to amend the bylaws – Phase I

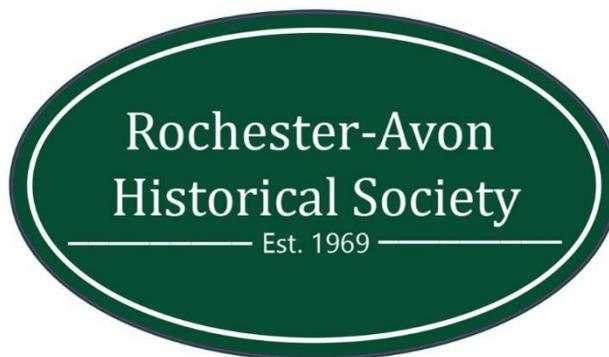
Ballots sent out =	115		
Ballots returned =	20 (1 blank ballot was returned)		
		<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>
Article I Mission	19	19	0
Article III Membership	19	19	0
Article IV Schedules	19	19	0
Article V Officers	19	19	0
Article VI Board	19	19	0
Article VIII Annual Meeting	19	19	0
Article IX Elections	18	18	1
Article X Amendments	18	18	1

The proposed amendments have been adopted.



History in the Heart of the Hills: A Rochester Area Heritage Tour (Book)
\$10.00

New Merchandise



RAHS Car Decal
\$6.00

Items can be purchased at:

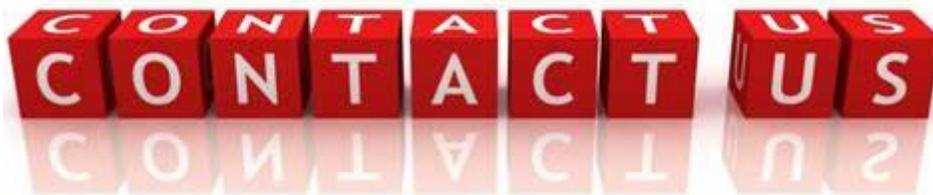
<https://www.rochesteravonhistoricalsociety.org/store/>



To contact us, call (248) 656-5440 or email to rahsupdates@gmail.com

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Join the Rochester-Avon Historical Society Today!

Membership Application

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p><input type="checkbox"/> New</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Renewal</p> | <p><input type="checkbox"/> \$15 Student Open to person currently enrolled in a secondary or post-secondary educational institution.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> \$20 Individual Open to any person interested in local history.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> \$35 Household Includes immediate family members living in the same household.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> \$100 Business/Sponsor Designed for community businesses and individuals with a desire to promote the restoration and promotion of local history.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> \$250 Lifetime Perpetual membership for those who wish to make a long-term commitment to the preservation of local history.</p> |
|---|---|

Rochester-Avon
 Historical Society
 ———— Est. 1969 ————

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| <p><input type="checkbox"/> Annual Picnic</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Antique Appraisal Day</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Historic Research</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Fundraising</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Genealogy Research</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Heritage Days</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Oral History</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Publications</p> | <p><input type="checkbox"/> Historic Walking Tour Guide/Assistant</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Photography/Videography</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Refreshments at Meetings</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Special Project Volunteer</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Website/Social Media</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Volunteer Interests/Other</p> |
|--|---|

Name: _____
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