

2013 Annual Report of the President, Curtis W. Ellison

2013 has been a year of bringing history to life at the Butler County Historical Society. If, like me, you are impressed by statistics and highlights, here are some.

Our remarkably energetic executive director reports that during 2013 we conducted 1,113 guided tours of the house, 23 of them special tours for organizations. We hosted 1,398 people for committee meetings, served 279 people with materials at the Randall Research Center, and spoke to 1,504 through our Speakers Bureau. The Society had 339 individual and family memberships in 2013, a 1% increase.

Volunteers gave us more than 4000 hours of service this year, an amount of time the Bureau of Labor Statistics values at over \$88,000. We know they love history, and another reason they may like being here is we are a movie set, with crews shooting scenes this year in the library, parlor, dining room, hallways, kitchen, a bedroom, and the front porch for a film to be released in 2014.

The Ritchie Auditorium has become a meeting place for committees and organizations. Some of those include Heritage Hall; Citizens for Historic and Preservation Services; Friends of MetroParks; the City's 1913 Flood Centennial Committee and many of that group's subcommittees; the German Village Christmas Walk; periodically, Museums and Historic Sites of Greater Cincinnati and the Butler County History Collaborative; and the Robert McCloskey 100th Birthday Celebration committee.

Master Gardeners make us happy. They keep our gardens in the spring, summer and fall, and decorate for holidays, especially seasonal ones, as they did so delightfully this past Christmas Season.

We've had programs. "Night at the Museum" brought competitors for a second year to solve historical riddles by finding objects in the house, research center and exhibits. "Ghosts at the Benninghofen" conjured up a group that learned the results of a paranormal investigation of Benninghofen House in an evening when some who attended did sleuthing of their own. Richard Piland (now a Board member) spent a day signing copies of his new book about Hamilton's legendary citizens, much of it researched in our collections. You may have come to the Benninghofen for Christmas Walk, or for Victorian Christmas Traditions in December.

We received many gifts for collections – appliances, photographs, first editions, commemorative items, postcards, calendars, business records, organization minutes and memorabilia, family papers, games and toys, clothing, music, and recently, a massive amount of material from the Beckett Paper Mill, including the 700-pound door from their Mosler safe. We are a resource center for receiving items useful to other museums and collections. This year we sent artifacts to the Oxford Museum Association, Riley Township Historical Society and Harriett Beecher Stowe Museum, either as outright gifts or on long-term loan.

We were not only *in* our fine facilities at 327 North 2nd Street. We were also *at* the Butler County Fair, where fairgoers bought books, gave us information and won prizes by guessing what our annual mystery objects were meant to do. We were at Museum Day on Fountain Square in May as well, and recently our handouts "sold out" at the National Docents Convention in San Francisco – a national meeting we'll help host in Cincinnati in 2015.

We owe our Speakers Bureau much notice and gratitude. Kathy and others have offered numerous programs across the county on topics ranging from medicine in the 1800s to the history of Mosler Safe to Butler County Churches to Sidesaddle horseback riding to the ever-popular "What is it and how does it work?" And there's more to come.

These *lists* are wonderful. But in recent years there have been *qualitative* enhancements too. I believe there is a growing sense of the importance of the place, shown in partnerships with the City, with other organizations, and with the neighborhood where we are located. Recognizing our volunteers for the hours they work is, alone, not enough. The city-wide commemoration of the 1913 Flood between March 1 and May 14 touched deep chords of affection for the community, discovered new knowledge, offered excellent public programs, and earned an impressive audience. None of this would have occurred without utterly committed and highly cooperative volunteers.

We look forward to 2014 with a strong Board of Trustees who are experienced hands-on workers, and new board members with great promise for leadership. I think we are not the only organization in Butler County bringing history to life, but we are a vital one that is. We want to deepen public understanding of our past so that it becomes a conscious part of regional citizenship.

To do so we must strengthen cooperation with congenial groups, demonstrate gratitude for the achievements and leadership of staff and volunteers, and convince community leaders of the value of what we do for the future of our region. We need to play a visible role in the "live/learn/work/play" agenda of community revitalization, actively engage current and former members, and creatively reach new audiences, especially those of the millennial generations who are revitalizing Butler County's urban centers.

We need to strengthen our financial standing to assure our long-term impact. We need to explain that a non-profit organization with modest membership fees, no government financial support and no admission fees has a real need for both annual operating support and long-term endowment by those who love it. We rely heavily upon grants and gifts, yet approximately 70% of our operating fund is provided by our endowment. We need to earn your generosity by providing worthy opportunities for friends to make a difference through estate planning, gifts and bequests.

During a walking tour of Hamilton flood sites in May, I was fortunate to watch a farm family from West Alexandria meet their "grandmother" on the steps of the YMCA. She was a charming theatrical depiction of that lady, of course, in a dramatic event that brought tears to many. Those who witnessed it saw an indelible moment that may have forever altered a family's sense of who they are. If the deepest purpose of education is discovering how one's autobiography intersects with the life history of the world, as I think it is, the Butler County Historical Society has the place, materials, resources, and people to offer citizens of this county ample ways to learn for a lifetime. I hope you will all sincerely support that effort. We'll be glad to have you.

Recent Additions to the BCHS Collection

- Painting of Rebecca Ann Smith, Phoebe Bartlow, Estella Riley, Edna Macke and John Weller Smith, James A. White, Roanoke, VA
- Weekly Review Newspapers, Hamilton High School 1953-43 academic year and mimeoscope stencil cutter, Sheila Richter, Hamilton
- Vintage clothing with history of the items, Morris Peters, Oxford
- City of Hamilton Planning Reports and Community Renewal Program Reports, 1920, 1947, 1955, 1958, 1959, 1962, 1963, 1972, 1974, 1975, 1978, James Boerke, Hazelhurst, WI
- Collection of Indian artifacts, Randi Saunders, Jacksonville, FL
- Gastroscope and biographical information on Dr. Paul Ivins, Nancy Johnson, Hamilton
- Miami University and Square D mugs, Marlene Carmack, Hamilton
- Awards and certificates, Ann Antenen, Hamilton
- Wooden bowls, sewing equipment, Shuler and Benninghofen blanket, violin case, *Warren's Common School Geography* book, graduation announcement, Jane Flueckiger, Oxford
- Genealogical information on the LaTourette and Brinkerhoff families, Barbara Guinee, Reston, VA
- Hamilton Coke & Iron Company pocket knife, David Stephenson, Fairfield
- Block dairy bottle, Dick Scheid, Hamilton
- Log of Champion Activities 1944-1945, Tim Poynter, Hamilton
- Hamilton Bicentennial Poster (2 copies), Jack and Karen Whalen
- Framed ad for the Robinson Schwenn building, Robinson Schwenn pen and wooden hanger, Carla and Larry Fiehrer
- *The Light and the Power, Commemorating 50 years of Electricity in Rural Ohio*, Lisa Staggs Hermann, Oxford
- Numerous photos, paper samples, paper weighing scales, Hamilton Caster wagons and carts, safe door, paper making equipment, chapel door, newsletters, tables, books and other material from the Beckett Paper Company
- Set of coasters and holders from Fantasy Farm and Hamilton music stand, Dick Scheid, Hamilton
- Numerous photos and papers pertaining to Niles Tool Works and other businesses throughout Hamilton, Mary Perkins, Cincinnati
- Pastor and two deacon chairs from the Port Union Bible Chapel, Rev. Donald Ruby, Fairfield
- Three DVDs pertaining to Robert McCloskey, Wright State University, Dayton
- 1961 calendar from Neal's General Store, Jacksonburg, Andrew Albrecht, Cincinnati
- Material pertaining to the Weckerle family, Hamilton postcards, DVD on the Cincinnati & Lake Erie RR, Joseph Weckerle, Malvern, PA
- WW II Army Winter Coat, Oxford telephone books, 2010 Hamilton City Directory, Hamilton Rotary Directories, plaque from the 18th Annual Historical Vehicle Parade 1972, Steve Schnabl, Oxford
- Large collection pertaining to politics in Hamilton and the life of Albert Anness, Albert Anness, Franklin, IN
- Poster for the laying of the cornerstone of the Butler County Court House, Susan Cummins Myers, Hamilton
- Framed sheet music and lyrics for *The Big Blue Team*, Jim and Jacqueline Blount, Hamilton
- Postcard album for the 1913 flood, Peggy Fillion, Sandy Hook, CT
- George Washington Bicentennial Booklet written and illustrated by Robert McCloskey, Thomas Schick, Fairfield
- Letter written to Ralph from Robert McCloskey, Kathryn Greene, Hamilton
- Postcards relating to the 1913 flood and one of High Street in the early 1900s, Dede Tuttle, Fairfield
- Postcard of the First M.E. Church of Hamilton and the Sorg Residence in Middletown, Dayton History, Dayton
- Commemorative plates of Hamilton High School and Adams School, Mary Roudebush, Denver, CO