

March 2022

### Local History Roundtable

In anticipation of larger attendance, the Local History Roundtable was held in the Meeting room of the St. Marys Community Public Library. Fifteen persons attended the roundtable. After introductions, Beth Keuneke, Adult Services Coordinator, shared further research on the St. Marys Packing Company. According to the digital book "History of Edamame, Vegetable, Soybeans, and Vegetable Type" by William Shurtleff and Akiko Aoyagi in 1947 the St. Mary's Packing Co. had locations in Sidney, Ohio; Noblesville, Indiana; Delphos, Ohio; Morral, Ohio; Mt. Sterling, Ohio; St. Marys, Ohio; Van Wert, Ohio; and North Freedman, Wisconsin. An article acquired from the Delphos Canal Museum about the history of the St. Marys Packing Company/St. Mary's Foods written by Charles C. Foley of Delphos states that: "St. Mary's Foods in Delphos was built by the Macke Packing Company of Wapak in 1935. After one year in operation they sold the business to Jesse and William Swonger of Sidney who operated St. Mary's Packing Company. At one time they had twelve plants; one in Wisconsin, two in Indiana, and nine in Ohio..." A picture of the packing plant in Delphos was shown to the group. A picture in the library archives of a building with the name "The St. Marys Packing Co. Fancy Canned Foods. No. 5" was displayed and is thought to have been the plant in Van Wert located at 112 N. Race St. There was discussion of tomato fields in the area, some located on the south and west side of town. Steve Mackenbach remembers the migrant shanties that were located in the area of South Park Drive, while Dave Simms remembers the tomatoes that were loaded on flat bed trailers and that the workers were paid by the hamper. After the Packing Company in St. Marys closed, Ben Rupert moved his business, Luxury Blankets to this building located on the corner of South Ash and Greenville Road. Janet Meinerding worked for Luxury Blankets when they were located in what is now Kogge Plumbing and Heating Inc. on Nagel Street. At that time they went all over the United States: New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, etc. and collected wool blankets many from hotels. The blankets were brought to St. Marys, where they were cleaned, repaired, and if needed re-edged. Mary Jane Mackenbach worked at the Greenville Road location, and when she worked there the company got raw wool, washed it, carded it, spun it, and then wove the wool into blankets that were used for the Army. She remembers that they would sew U.S. Army labels onto the blankets. The railroad ran on the East side of the building and that is how the materials would be delivered and shipped. Dave Simms remembers the old equipment that Mr. Rupert had. Some had dates stamped on them in the late 1890's. No one seemed to know what happened to this equipment.

Steve Mackenbach remembers his dad telling how he learned to swim by being thrown into canal by the tumbles. Jim Hollman remembers learning to swim by jumping off the bridge at 40-acre pond. They both confirmed that the water had to have been much deeper with less rocks for this to happen. Someone could get seriously hurt if they tried it today, which is not recommended. Hollman also remembers playing hockey on 40-

acre pond in the winter. Dave Simms remembers when they dredged the canal. The dredge material was put in what is now Mill Park and after it had dried it was moved away. The canal depth and erosion of sides has changed the canal over the years. Someone asked when the basin was filled in near Lock 12. This is when the Chestnut Street Parking lot was created. It was suggested that this was in the early 1960's.

Another question: which is the oldest house in St. Marys? Several houses were suggested. Julie Graves said that she remembered that for the sesquicentennial, ladies created quilt blocks of historic homes and the blocks were made into a quilt. She had just found out that quilt is at the Auglaize County Council on Aging.

Jim Hollman asked when the town was first called St. Marys. Beth Keuneke said that the town was platted in 1823. She pulled the book "St. Marys, Ohio Centennial 1823-1923, August 19-25, Souvenir Program." This book gives a historical sketch of St. Marys and also the original plat map. She also stated that it was called St. Marys prior to that time as historic documents show. Prior to that it was called Girty's Town and Kettle's Town. Participant's wanted to know what attracted people to St. Marys and according to the Souvenir Program, "The location of the town is good one, surrounded by beautiful and rich farming lands. Like all towns in this section of the state its growth was slow until after the construction of the Miami and Erie Canal. This may be noted as the first period in the history of the town. The second period dates from 1838 to the discovery of petroleum in 1886. Since that date St. Marys has enjoyed a period of rapid growth and great prosperity. In 1903, it attained the dignity of a city." Ann Hudson recalls being told that her ancestor "walked and walked from the East and when he got to the [St. Marys] River he said that he was not going to walk any further, and he settled here."

Next Local History Roundtable will be held on Tuesday, April 26, 2022 from 1:30 to 2:30 p.m.