



The Local History Round Table met at the St. Marys Community Public Library on Tuesday, January 24, 2023. A variety of topics were covered including the Blizzard of 1978, Civil Defense, Northmoor, the Lake, and several businesses.

Julie Oechsle remembers going to what she thought was a hardware store on the east end of Columbia at the corner of Columbia and North Chestnut. She remembers bins with items in them. The building was once the Mackenbach Lumber yard but was later the W.H. Kiefaber Co. at 208 Columbia, a wholesale plumbing supplier. According to the 1946 directory Modern Paint and Lumber Company and OIM Transit Co. were located here and in 1957, St. Marys Bargain Barn and the OIM Transit Warehouse were located at 208 Columbia between Mackenbach's and Kiefaber's ownership.

Beth Keuneke, Adult Services Coordinator, and moderator asked for memories of blizzards especially the blizzard of 1978. Many in the group wished to forget this blizzard. Bill Huber related that in the basement of the police and fire station on Indiana Avenue there was a self-sustaining shelter that had its own water and sewer, etc. This was an emergency operations center. Bill Huber was the associate law director at the time and he along with others had gone through active training prior to the blizzard. The building was built during the Cold War when there was a threat of nuclear war. When the Blizzard of 1978 hit, Bill Huber was picked up at his home on a snowmobile and taken to the shelter leaving his wife and children at home. He related that downtown was desolate but that the street signals still worked. At the shelter he manned the radios. At the time CB radios were popular, as were scanners. Many officials and volunteers worked to help those in need. Bill spent several days in the basement manning the phones and radios and sleeping on an army cot which he found out was not very comfortable. At one-time Bill was on the back of a snowmobile and they were going down Spring Street and there was a big drift in the middle of Spring and Chestnut and the person driving took the hill really fast and they went into the air and landed on some light snow. Bill requested to be taken back to the command center.

One of the things that happened during that time was that a surgeon had to be taken by snowmobile north of town to perform an appendectomy on a boy. The kitchen table was used as the surgical table. Supermarkets were open and the volunteers picked up and delivered necessary items to people. Those with scanners would hear that there was a delivery being made nearby and would call requesting cigarettes and beer be delivered but these items were not on the list and they were not delivered. Many people were trapped at their work places. Two of those places were the hospital and Goodyear. Bill Huber's mother was in the hospital and was due to be released the day the storm hit. She called Bill's father asking why he hadn't come to pick her up. Bill was asked to inform his mother of the reason why her husband was not coming. As far as Bill knows the emergency operations center was never used again.

At the time of the Blizzard the city did not own any four-wheel drive vehicles, but there was one for sale at a local dealership. The safety service director and the mayor wanted to buy it. Since Bill was the associate law director he advised them that if they declared a state of emergency in writing then they could purchase the vehicle, which they did. The purchase later was approved by the council.

Marv Ruppert remembered that the houses on Webb Street were almost covered with snow that had blown across the fields. Bill Niemeyer related that in 1978 they had a dairy farm south of St. Marys, where they had a free stall barn. When he finally got out to the barn there was a five-foot drift that had blown into the barn which he had to remove to milk the cows. Don Rasneor was their milk man at the time and he lived on 116 north of St. Marys. It took him five days to get the milk delivered to New Bremen. Bill said that they had an overabundance of milk so they were putting it into anything that they could find like trash cans with liners, etc. They finally ran out of containers so they had to just dump the milk. Neighbors were coming on snowmobiles and getting milk and delivering it to other neighbors.

Marv Ruppert remembers growing up at the end of Hendricks Street, where the Civil Defense was located. Jim Price was the manager at the time. The Civil Defense was started after World War II and they had a lot of World War II vehicles that they were fixing up. Bill Chamberlin was one of the others involved with the Civil Defense. At one time they had an amphibious duck they fixed up and Marv remembers them taking it out to the lake and he had a chance to ride on it. The Civil Defense was located in a couple of buildings that remained from the old spoke works. One building was a big red barn that had a large vault in it. The other was a cement block building which was the communication center. This was the time when they did emergency drills in the schools and where students were told to duck and cover under their desks. Marv remembers there were lots of mulberry trees in the area and the area was a great place to play. The other buildings were owned by Lewis and Michael of Dayton, Ohio who used them as warehouses. Bill Niemeyer remembers working there and unloading the refrigerators and stacking them three high. Lewis & Michael stored Frigidaire refrigerators and items for the Huffy plant. V.C. Willoughby was the general manager, with Paul Rempke replacing him. The Foundry bought the property after which the buildings burned down, and the buildings were replaced and are now used for storage.

The conversation turned to Northmoor Golf course which is celebrating its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year and the club house has been painted purple in honor of this anniversary. Bob Hurm related that in the late 40's and early 50's a building located on the east side of Northwood Drive was moved on skids southeast across the golf course near Kozy Marina. It was a small building that was used as a repair shop and boat storage. Since that time it has been added onto and expanded.

Northmoor Golf has been posting historical photos on their Facebook page, several of which were mentioned. Beth Keuneke pulled up the Facebook page and scrolled through some of the recent postings. One photo was of a three-story building in Mercelina Park that impressed the group. Another was the building that was the former Mat's Restaurant on the northeast corner of Spring and Chestnut. The building at one-time housed a Kroger store and a Ben Franklin. Bob Hurm remembers being sent to Matt's restaurant by the nuns at Holy Rosary to pick up their lunch. Marv Ruppert remembers that the Kroger store had a coffee grinder and that the store smelled of coffee.

One of the photos was of the Hotel Steinberg in Wapakoneta, which became Ernie's Café and the Hotel Koneta. Someone related that one of the residents of Hotel Koneta bought smoke detectors at Lowe's and gave them to the other residents right before the building burned in December of 2018. The building has since been demolished and replaced with a new parking area.

Another photo was of the Smith Furniture store, there was not much information about this business although S. Bamberger adjacent from this store was reflected in the windows. After the meeting Beth Keuneke looked in the 1905-06 directory and found Smith Furniture Co. located at 111 W. Spring Street and S. Bamberger & Son clothing located in the Fountain Hotel Block a.k.a. Fort Barbee. By 1915 Bamberger clothing was located at 525 W. Spring Street and the Palm Café and Collins & Hohmann was located at 111 W. Spring and there was no mention of Smith Furniture. The Bamberger family lived in the house on the southeast corner of W. Spring and Ash, later owned by the Louie Comus family.

Another photo discussed was the Rock of Ages at the Way in New Knoxville, Ohio, which showed a large crowd of people along with several tents. Nancy Fortman remembers that the Way bought lots of meat from Fortman's meat market for this event and that other stores in town benefited from the Way. There were a lot of talented and educated people associated with the Way. Bob Hurm remembers picking up dry cleaning there and another person related that people in St. Marys would rent out rooms to people associated with the Way.

Beth Keuneke had brought in a map of the Lake from 1950 with different businesses listed. Businesses mentioned were a plumbing and furnace shop, Webb Frilling grocery, Haesker Bait shop and the Bulkhead Inn. Bill Huber related that the Bulkhead on the East bank was a working lock and that the canal boats would come to the lock and then a steam boat would take the boat or supplies to Celina. When Paris Cleaners dug the basement for their building on Celina Road the dirt was taken to the former Bulkhead Inn site.

The next Local History Round Table will be held on Tuesday, February 28<sup>th</sup> from 1:30 to 2:30 pm in the library meeting room. The public is invited to attend.