



NEWS LETTER



President's Corner

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K. J. Schoon, 2008

This month I would like to have you hear from the first President of the Munster Historical Society.

In 1972, preparing for America's Bicentennial Celebration in 1976 (200 years) the Munster Town Board (Louis Davidson, President) formed the "Munster Bicentennial Commission." First Commission President was Wm. Hensey.

In 1974 the Bicentennial Commission asked member Jerry Gillespie to help create a "Munster Historical Society (MHS)."

The MHS was formed with the first President Jerry Gillespie, Vice President Norma Beniot and Secretary Lou Tharp.

Those were the beginning years. 34

years have passed...WOW!!!

Look how far the MHS has come.

Keep up the GREAT job all!

God Bless,

Past President, 1974,1975,

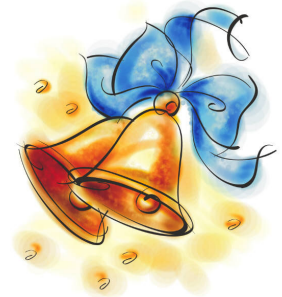
Jerry Gillespie



Thanks to Jerry and all the other members who have given their time to keep the Historical Society an active part of our community.

DID YOU KNOW

Don Johnson is getting married on October 25 to his long-time friend Ann Beck. Don will be moving to Ohio, he is selling his truck and eventually his house. He will certainly be missed by the Historical Society as he has done quite a lot to help us over the years. Congratulations to Don & Ann!!



Slate of Officers

President

Len Walavich

Vice President

Jerry Gillespie

Treasurer

Susan Schmidt

Secretary

Shirley Gillespie

Heritage Park/Kaske House News

JoAnne Schafer planted some flowers in the wedding garden by the porch and potted the large urn.

Beth Palmer and Judy Peters weeded and planted flowers in the Girl Scout garden and Wally Peters replaced the newly planted oak tree that

died with a transplanted American Linden tree.

Barbara Meeker donated her original watercolor painting of Heritage Park to the Munster Historical Society. Samantha, owner of Steeple Gallery in St. John has agreed to appraise it for us.

Bob O'Shaghnessy has approved a preliminary museum sign. I will contain the following two lines separated by a vintage flourish design: Munster History Museum, Historic 1910 Kaske House.

4th of July Float

Thanks to all that made this years 4th of July Parade Float a overwhelming success. WE WON FIRST PLACE in the Civic category.



Informational News

CONCERTS

This year again we are doing very well at the Heritage Park Concerts with our concession stand. Much thanks to Girl Scout Troop 188 who has been a great help with the concessions. The next concerts will be July 20, Aug 3 & 20. Hope to see you there.

NEW BARN

JoAnne Shafer made a road trip to check on the 1870s Lohrmann Barn in Indianapolis.

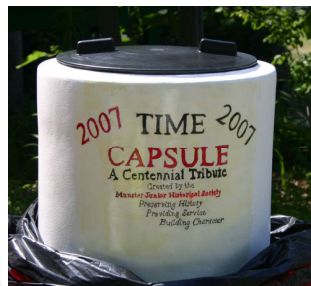
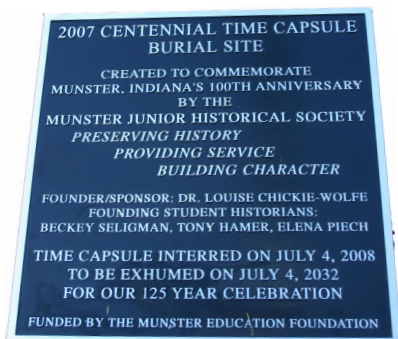
A rough estimate for the minimum cost required to raise the Lohrmann Barn is approximately \$100,000 (includes purchase cost, dismantling, mov-

ing, foundation, reconstruction, roofing, and exterior painting). Additional improvements are estimated to cost between \$100,000 to \$150,000 (includes flooring, interior finishing, furnishing, lighting, plumbing, electrical, small self-catered kitchen, restrooms, landscaping, outdoor lighting, pavement, security, etc.).

Letters of support and/or fundraising and volunteer offers may be sent to: Munster Historical Society, Attention: Barn Raising, 1005 Ridge Road, Munster, IN 46321, or use the subject Barn Raising to email: munsterhistory@sbcglobal.net. Check or money order donations may be delivered by mail payable to: Munster Historical Society or in person every Wednesday afternoon at the Society's office at Munster Town Hall.

Time Capsule

The Munster Jr. Historical Society buried a Time Capsule after the parade on July 4th by the Kaske House in Heritage Park. The Capsule will be opened in 25 years on July 4, 2033.

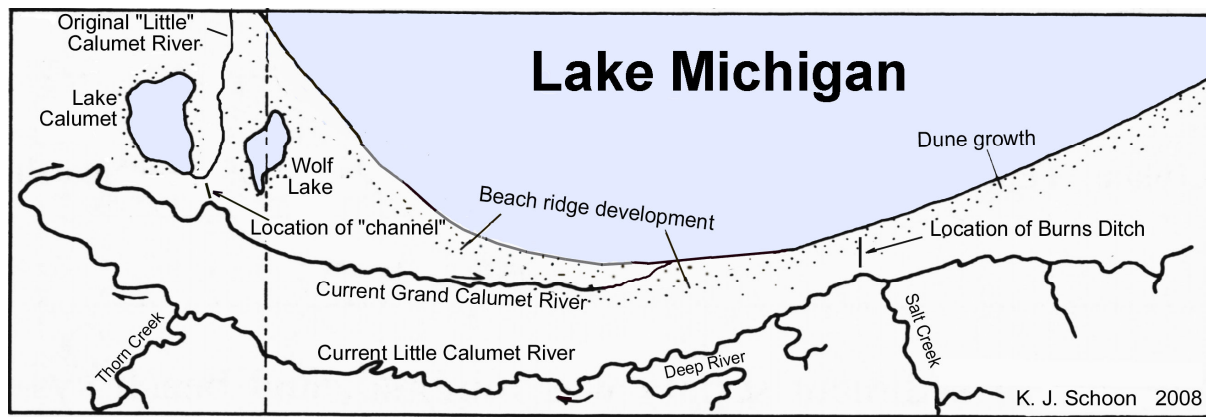


Little Calumet River: Munster's Northern Border

K. J. Schoon, 2008

The little river that forms the northern boundary of Munster has an interesting, although somewhat confusing history all its own.

Although there are no written records, French voyageurs most likely canoed up and down this river back in the 17th and 18th centuries. They would have hunted for game—including, of course, beaver. In these early days, the Grand and Little Calumet rivers were one long river as can be seen on the map. Back then, before the river was altered by humans, the Little Calumet River rose in LaPorte County, flowed westward into Illinois, where at Blue Island it made a hairpin turn and flowed back into Lake County—emptying into Lake Michigan where Gary's Marquette Park is today. In 1675 Father Marquette and his two assistants canoed down the lower part of the river (not past Munster) on their way to Lake Michigan.



The Calumet Area about 1750

Our little river has been ditched, dredged, and diverted for well over 200 years.

Lake County historian Timothy Ball (in 1873) believed that Indians changed the course of the river by digging a dry channel between the river and the nearby outlet of Lake Calumet (the original "Little" Calumet River on the map) that flowed into Lake Michigan at what is now Chicago's 95th Street. Other historians think that it might have been dug by voyageurs. In any event, in 1805, two years after the establishment of Fort Dearborn, a spring flood caused the Calumet River to overflow its banks, flood and quickly erode this channel to the little outlet—giving the river a shorter, steeper route to the lake. In time, the old mouth at Marquette Park dried up.

Attempts to change the rivers were not always supported by settlers in the Calumet Area. About 1848 the Little Calumet River was dammed near its west end at Blue Island. This action raised the water level 10 feet, made it navigable by small boats, provided water for the new Illinois and Michigan Canal, and provided power to a new grist and flourmill. However farmers along the river complained that this dam flooded large sections of their farms. Finally, in 1872, the Illinois General Assembly provided for removal of the dam, but three years later it was still there. So in 1875, some 30-50 Hoosier farmers, in the dark of night, took the matter into their own hands and blew up the dam. The water lowered, the mills shut down, and the farmers finally got their lands back.

Because the Little Cal has a low gradient and drains so slowly, it has predictably flooded. The earliest farmers in the Munster area knew that and so their houses and barns were built on the ridge where even the cellars were normally dry. Crops were then grown north of these buildings while the often-wet lands closest to the river were frequently left as pasture. Farther to the east, the Tolleston Gun Club purchased about 5000 acres of land along the floodplain. The river and its adjacent wetlands were perfect for hunting and fishing.

It is seldom recognized, but the completion of Hart Ditch in the 1880s increased the flooding of the Little Calumet River. The ditch, which so effectively drained the lands from south Munster to Dyer and Schererville, simply carried (and still does carry) that water to the Little Cal in very short order.

In the 1920s two mammoth projects altered the flow of the River. In 1922 the Calumet Sag Channel connected the west end of the river with the rather new Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal. (This canal in 1900 connected the Chicago River to the Mississippi River system and thus changed the direction of flow of that river.) And so, beginning in 1922, the waters of the Little Calumet flowed through this Channel to the Gulf of Mexico rather than to Lake Michigan.

The other project was the digging of Burns Ditch. As northern Lake County industrialized and property values increased, the lands near the Little Calumet were increasingly used for more intensive farming and even residences. Thus flooding became a real problem because floods then resulted in extensive property damage. So early in the twentieth century plans were begun to reduce flooding by connecting the river directly to Lake Michigan via a ditch dug through the sand dunes in Porter County. The result was Burns Ditch, completed in 1926. Flooding was greatly reduced and the direction of flow was changed again—waters from the river (east of Munster) now flowed toward the ditch and directly into the Lake.

Development along the river then picked up. Wicker Park (in Highland) was developed in the mid 1920s and dedicated by President Coolidge in 1927. 1927 also saw Wicker Park Estates platted in Munster across Hart Ditch from the park. The next year the Hollywood Manor and Hollywood Addition subdivisions were opened on the “short streets” east of Hohman Avenue while lots were attracting buyers on the new Forest Avenue west of Hohman. The town’s population increased by 200 souls in 1927 and 1928 alone.

But floods still occurred. Munster’s biggest flood was in 1954 when much of the far northern part of town was inundated. For years it was hoped that the building of small levees along the side of the river would keep its waters out of residential neighborhoods but that hasn’t always worked. Highland had a flood in 1990 that destroyed all the homes in its Wicker Park Manor. In 2007 the Borman Expressway was closed because of extensive flooding.

According to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, flooding on the Little Calumet River causes \$11 million in damages most years. Thus in the late twentieth century Congress authorized the Corps to begin a flood control project with improved levees along the river from Gary to the Illinois State Line. In a departure from some past efforts, many of these levees have been built some distance from the river allowing space for floodwaters to stand until the water level goes back down. In 2007 Congress and the local Regional Development Authority finally appropriated funds for the final portion of this effort, including the portion in Munster. The entire project, not entirely non-controversial, includes 22 miles of levees and floodwalls and will soon protect 11,500 Northwest Indiana homes, preserve 550 acres of wetlands, and create 17 miles of hiking trails. It was originally intended, that when the project is finished, homeowners near the river would no longer be required to purchase flood insurance. However, the Midwest flooding this year has shown that flooding can occur even with good levees and so that exemption for flood insurance may not last.