

February  
2024

## Renewed Remembering: The Newsletter of the Conneaut Area Historical Society

Volume 2  
Issue 14

### Building on Our Barn Quilt

Last fall, Steering Committee Member Debbie Herbel painted our museum Barn Quilt and it is proudly displayed on the front of our museum. We are thrilled to be a square in the Ashtabula County Barn Quilt patchwork and a traveler on the Ashtabula Barn Quilt Trail.

The barn quilts celebrate Ashtabula County's agricultural heritage, including the Underground Railroad network, natural areas preservation, and Great Lakes maritime history. Barn quilts stretch from the Ashtabula Lighthouse to the Pennsylvania borders and into Lake and Trumbull Counties. These trail guides take visitors to the heart and stories of Ashtabula County history.



More than 110 barn quilts on both public and private buildings display the tourism and historical attractions of Ashtabula County. For more about the history, purpose, and quilt creators of the Barn Quilt Trail, go to their website at [Ashtabula County Barn Quilt Trail](https://www.ashtabulacountybarnquilttrail.com)

We plan to expand our Barn Quilt by using our historical collections to create a notebook library of Quilt Squares featuring people, places, and events in Conneaut and Ashtabula County history. If you would like to contribute material for a quilt square, please contact a member of the Steering Committee.

Time Travel Tuesday  
On February 20 from 6 to 7 p.m. at the Villa on the Lake Bob Ettinger will present a program focusing on the historical aspects of newspapers and newspaper reporting. He will also relate some of his own experiences.

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## Barn Quilt Block No. 2

Conneaut Edition of the Times News

Sunday, October 15, 1967

Elks Quarterback Club Fetes Ernie Green



Ernie Green (at left) of the Cleveland Browns, poses with the welcome sign of the BPOE Elks Quarterback Club Dinner with Exalted Ruler George W. Childers, in photo on left. In center photo, Green, Cleveland Browns running back, shown at the

Quarterback Club with five auto dealers who sponsored the affair, first in a planned series. Seated left to right: Robert Cray, Hirsimaki Pontiac; Louis D. Placido, Midtown Motors R&L; and Harry Gill, Chevrolet Buick. Standing left to right, Charles Holden, Lillie-Holden Ford; Green; George Childers, Exalted Ruler of the local lodge; and Rudy Pryately, Midtown Motors R &L. A sponsor not shown, Dean Wible Oldsmobile.



Louis W. Skelley, Owner-Manager of Conneaut Radio Station W-WOW and W-FIZZ interviewing Ernie Green, during the pro football players visit to the BPO Elks.\*Note: Ernie Green was the standout running back for the Cleveland Browns during the 1960s.

## We Remember

“Remembering” was the name of the original Conneaut Area Historical Society newsletter. Joan Barnett was the last editor, and with her death and the Covid pandemic the newsletter has not been published for a time. It seemed fitting to name this new version of the old newsletter “Renewed Remembering,” in honor of the former editors including Louise Legeza and Joan Barnett who edited and published the newsletter for so many years. We hope you enjoy it!

## The President’s Paragraph

The Conneaut Area Historical Society wants to thank you for your continued support. As always, new members are welcome. You can call: 440-599-6011 with further questions or write to Conneaut Area Historical Society, P.O. Box 563, Conneaut Ohio, 44030. Our street address is: 518 Mill Street.

Jim Jones

## Museum Officers

President- Jim Jones  
 Vice President – Jerry Janco  
 Secretary-Debbie Jones  
 Treasurer- Pat Jones  
 Historian-Kathy Warnes  
 Newsletter Editor- Kathy Warnes  
 Printed by Andy Pochatko,  
 Topky Library

## Museum Steering Committee

Karl Rowbotham  
 Jerry Anderson  
 Delmas Bennett  
 Jerry Janco  
 Jim Jones  
 Debbie Jones  
 Pat Jones  
 Debbie Herbel  
 Mo Tanner  
 Nancy Lamb

## Needed: Museum Volunteers!

We need Enthusiastic and Dedicated Volunteers to help us help the Conneaut Area Historical Museum realize its full historical potential. Even though we are closed for the season, we have not stopped working to improve the Conneaut Area Historical Museum. We could use some help organizing collections and updating the inventory. Lend us your willing hands, hearts, and minds to help our museum grow. Be a Museum Volunteer!

## Owner-Author Mike Edgerly and Conneaut's Athenaeum



The ancient Greeks enjoyed Athenaeums, buildings they dedicated to Athena, the goddess of wisdom. The temple in Athens where poets, philosophers, and orators read and discussed their work served as the most significant Athenaeum. The word Athenaeum has survived into modern times and over the centuries has expanded to include academies and learned societies.

Conneaut has its own Athenaeum complete with owner author, philosopher, orator, and creative entrepreneur—namely, Mike Edgerly.

The January Time Travel Tuesdays had to be cancelled because of the weather, so we went to Mike's bookstore to soak up some atmosphere, sample some of his coffee, and get his perspective about owning and operating a small business in Conneaut. Mike calls his bookstore, coffee shop, community magnet The Attic

Athenaeum. After operating his bookstore in Conneaut Harbor for three years, Mike is getting snugly settled in his new location at 786 Main Avenue.



The Attic Athenaeum is more than a bookstore building, although opening the door and entering is like stepping into a booklover's heaven. Bright book jackets, and unashamedly plain books without jackets advertise "Open me and explore," with every approaching step of the prospective reader. There are long aisles with shelves of books for browsing, comfortable chairs for sitting and reading, and several varieties of coffee for added enjoyment.

Mike is as well traveled and experienced as some of the gently used books he offers for sale. Born in Bucharest, Romania, Mike lost his parents at an early age, and lived with his uncle. He describes traveling around the world, including sojourns in Inner Mongolia and Iceland. After many adventures, he landed in Conneaut and married Laurie Kessler, a Conneaut girl. Laurie's mother Cindy Kessler has been dedicated to the Conneaut community for many years, including a lengthy stint at the Conneaut Port Authority.

At the turn of the page, Mike is as fresh and innovative as the new books for sale he has on display. He visualizes his business as more than a bookstore; he sees it as one of the magnets that bring community people and organizations together. His bookstore features spacious meeting rooms that he says a variety of people put to good use. Mike feels that community organizations should work together for the good of everyone and his goal for his Conneaut small business is to encourage community connections "in an accessible place that doesn't cost anything."



Besides owning and operating his bookstore, Mike works for Adobe Acrobat, writes books on mostly horror themes, and designs and executes websites for people and businesses, including Fat Sallys, a local antiques store.

Mike's business philosophy- people using their businesses and talents to better the community- is an important component of a balanced bottom line.

## Dictionaries

### WE OFFER THE FOLLOWING

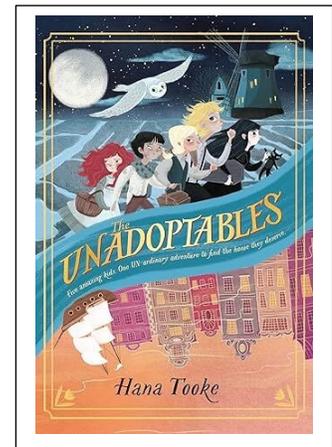
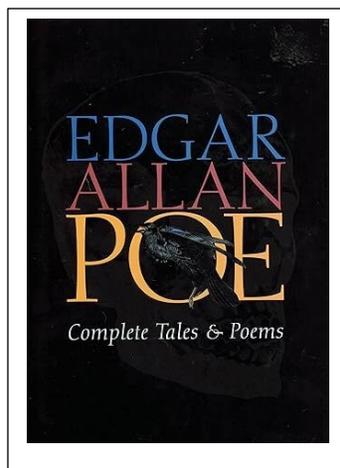
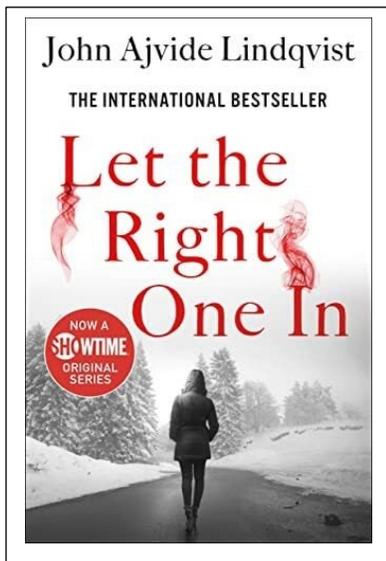
- Webster International 1890 edition \$10.75 at \$4.00  
 Webster International 1899 edition \$10.75 at \$5.00  
 Webster International 1904 edition \$10.75 at \$9.50  
 Webster International 1904 subscription edition, with reference history,  
 1904 edition \$16.00 at \$11.50  
 Standard Dictionary, subscription edition, \$20.00 at \$7.50  
 Same in 2 volumes published at \$27.00 at \$11.50  
 Encyclopedic Dictionary, 4 volumes, \$15.00 at \$4.50  
 Time and terms to suit ANYBODY. Discount for Cash.

### TIMBY'S BOOK SHOP

Conneaut, Ohio

(Conneaut News Herald, May 1905)

Attic Athenaeum  
 Conneaut, Ohio  
 786 Main Avenue  
 February 2024



Website: <https://www.atticbookseller.com/home>

Facebook Page:

<https://www.facebook.com/AtticAthenaeum/>

## Revisiting the Liberty Street Octagon House



The Liberty Street Octagon House  
circa 1950s

Maxine Morgan wrote this perspective of the Liberty Street Octagon House for the Conneaut News-Herald in 1964.

The 102-year-old Octagon House at 301 Liberty Street in Conneaut has attracted many motorists as they traveled through the city in an eastward direction. Few people realize, however, that Conneaut has

two of the unusual type homes of which there are said to be only 13 in Ohio. The second octagon house is at 456 Mill Street (old Route 7). A sturdy octagon barn on the Lue S. Turner farm, State Road, South of the city is also still in use.

The Liberty Street home is said to have been a station on the famous Underground Railroad of Civil War days, by which fugitive slaves were aided in their escape from southern owners. A trap door led from the former pantry in the home to an underground tunnel running in the direction of the bank, which borders the valley of Conneaut Creek. It is some 150 feet from house to bank.

City Council Charles Marcy and Police Chief Jack Sanford both recall that as boys they explored the tunnel, then 15 feet long. It is now entirely filled in.

The house was built by David Cummins, and it was in the kitchen of the home in 1864 that the widely known Lake Shore grand pumpkin and tomatoes were first canned. Cummins Canning Company products were carried to the North Pole by Admiral Perry.

The house was purchased in 1955 by Mr. and Mrs. Carmen E. Zeppettella, and Mrs. Zeppettella's parents, the Leon D. Shafer's. It was modernized in the interior. Mrs. Shafer, whose husband is now deceased, lives on the second floor, while her daughter's family occupies the first.

The home's outside walls have 3 by 1-inch pieces of rough lumber laid flat on top of one another in an offset method, providing a 3 and ½ inch thick wall. The outside is covered by 1-inch vertical strips, 6 inches in width, with battens covering the seams. A narrow circular staircase leads from the second floor to a cupola, some 7 feet in diameter. The stairs are believed to have begun on the first floor at one time. Such a staircase, in the middle of the house, formed an updraft for perfect summer air conditioning.

The second local octagon home is said to have been constructed by Silas Hicks shortly after the Civil War. Now occupied by the W.C. Kaiser family, the third generation of his family to live there.

The ten rooms and bath, two-story brick house has an outer and inner brick wall with a small space between. Each of the eight sides of the house is 16 feet wide. Windows of keystone construction, and a flat platform on the roof are unusual features.

The barn on the Turner farm has exterior walls faced with vertical boards, and the joints covered with wood battens. The original glass on the lower-level windows was imported from Belgium, and blue in color. The Turner home was built 135 years ago, and the barn soon afterwards.

The octagon-style structure dates to 300 B.C. and the Greek Tower of the Winds, historians say.

## Onward the Twenty-First Century Octagon House!

February 2024

Orson Squire Fowler may have never come to Conneaut, but two houses of his design exist in Conneaut. One of them, the Octagon House located on Liberty Street is listed on the National Register of Historical Places and has made a lasting impact on Conneaut history. Thinking outside of the home building box in more directions than the 19<sup>th</sup> century octagon house building boom, Orson Fowler presented his ideas in his 1850s book "A Home for All or a New, Cheap, Convenient, and Superior Mode of Building."

Acting on his conviction that natural forms are mostly spherical, Orson argued, why not build spherical homes which would be more comfortable, spacious, and efficient than rectangular or square homes. Octagonal homes provided more light,

made central heating and ventilation a reality and efficient, and, as he successfully argued, utilized inexpensive, available building materials.

The ancient Greeks not Orson Fowler, were among the first to propose the idea of spherical or octagonal homes and visionaries in the following centuries built as many octagonal buildings as they could, including Orson himself. Thomas Jefferson built an octagon house in Poplar Forest which is considered one of the



earliest and most significant in America. Dutch Calvinists built octagonal churches, octagon tollhouses appeared on the National Road, and several octagon schoolhouses dotted the landscape of several regions of the country. Orson Fowler himself built a four story, 60 room house during 1848-1853 in Fishkill, New York which provided inspiration for brave builders and ammunition for those who daubed it “Fowler’s Folly.”

The octagon house fad spread across the United States and since the heaviest concentration of octagon house builders centered in New England and New York, the idea moved west to Ashtabula County with

the new settlers arriving here in the Connecticut Western Reserve.

Twenty-first century Ashtabula County including Conneaut, can tally at least five octagonal houses. One is located south of 534 in Windsor. Another is in New Lyme. A third octagon house sits south of Austinburg. Conneaut has two octagon houses, a brick one located on Mill Road, and another featuring a board-wall construction located at 301 Liberty Street. An octagonal barn can be found on Hatches Corners Road in Monroe Township. The Octagon house on 301 Liberty Street in Conneaut is the only one in Ashtabula County that is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Harness maker and later Cummins Canning Company founder David Cummins came to Conneaut from New York. Different sources set the date that David built the Octagon House for his family as early as 1860 and as late as 1865, with another proposed 1863 date in the middle. The house that David Cummins built featured many of the classical components of an octagon house, including a central copula,

hip roof, board and batten siding, and an encircling front porch. Each outside wall measures twenty feet long on the outside and eighteen feet on the inside.

At first glance, the 15-room house seems enormous, but a more realistic exploration reveals that some of them are smaller nooks left over from dividing the large spaces that the octagonal form creates. A more realistic count would be eight good-sized rooms and seven large closets. Two staircases are positioned in the center of the house and the copula can be accessed by a single center staircase.

After the Cummins family, the Octagon House has welcomed several other owners. Carmen and Marilyn Zeppettella owned the house for 42 years until 1997 when they sold it to Bonnie Allchin. Bonnie's parents, Bob, and Marge Schatz, lived in the house.

The Zeppettellas renovated the house with the idea of using it as a two-family house so that Marilyn's parents, Leon, and Lula Schaffer, would live with them. Carl Feather, in a story about octagon houses appearing in the Ashtabula Star Beacon on May 21, 2001, quoted Marilyn pointing out both the advantages and disadvantages of living in the Octagon House. She said that the house provided excellent heating and cooling because of the six-inch-thick solid wood walls. She added that one of the disadvantages of living in the Octagon House occurred when they tried any modernization of electrical or plumbing systems. "We had to chisel plaster away to run wiring on the wall. If we had to run pipes for plumbing, we had to put them in a corner where we could build a cover around them," she said.

Since the Octagon House is a Civil War era house, the legend has developed over the years that it served as a place for fugitive slaves to hide as they traveled to freedom over the Underground Railroad. The tunnel supposedly ran from the basement to the Creek bank over 100 feet behind the house. To reach the tunnel from the house, it was necessary to go to a trap door in one of the small rooms which opened into a small area walled off from the basement.

Much like the controversy about the date it was built, there is also a controversy about whether the Octagon House served as a refuge for fugitive slaves who supposedly escaped via Conneaut Creek, Lake Erie, and freedom in Canada. Marilyn and Carmen Zeppettella found a heavy metal door on the Conneaut Creek bank, but no tunnel. Bob Schatz found the entrance to the tunnel but said it was lined with stone and needed repair. Opponents of the Underground Railroad story adopt the 1865 date for the original house and state that the tunnel was only a cistern, not an escape route for fugitive slaves. People who endorse the legend point out the conflicting dates and say that the 1860 building date would allow for

fugitive slaves. There is no way to know if indeed determined runaways desperate for freedom splashed into Conneaut Creek from the Octagon House, followed it to a waiting ship in Conneaut Harbor, and voyaged to freedom in Canada.

Aside from the Underground Railroad controversy, The Octagon House, itself, was a symbol of freedom for Orson Squire Fowler who followed his freedom to dream and think outside of the traditional building box. The tangible results of Orson's dream survives into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

The Conneaut Area Historical Society now owns the Liberty Street Octagon House and is repainting and renovating it to sponsor by appointment only tours once again and use it for special events. Society President Jim Jones points out that Jack Mathay, a now deceased Historical Society Board Member and friend and patron of the Museum, was instrumental in keeping the Octagon House true to its historical heritage. According to Jim, Jack Mathay regularly collected period furniture for the Society's Octagon House and made sure that records of its pedigree and placement were in place. "He had an abiding interest in Conneaut History and helped the Society attract members and expand its historical presence in the community and contributing furniture and historical knowledge to the Octagon House," Jim said.

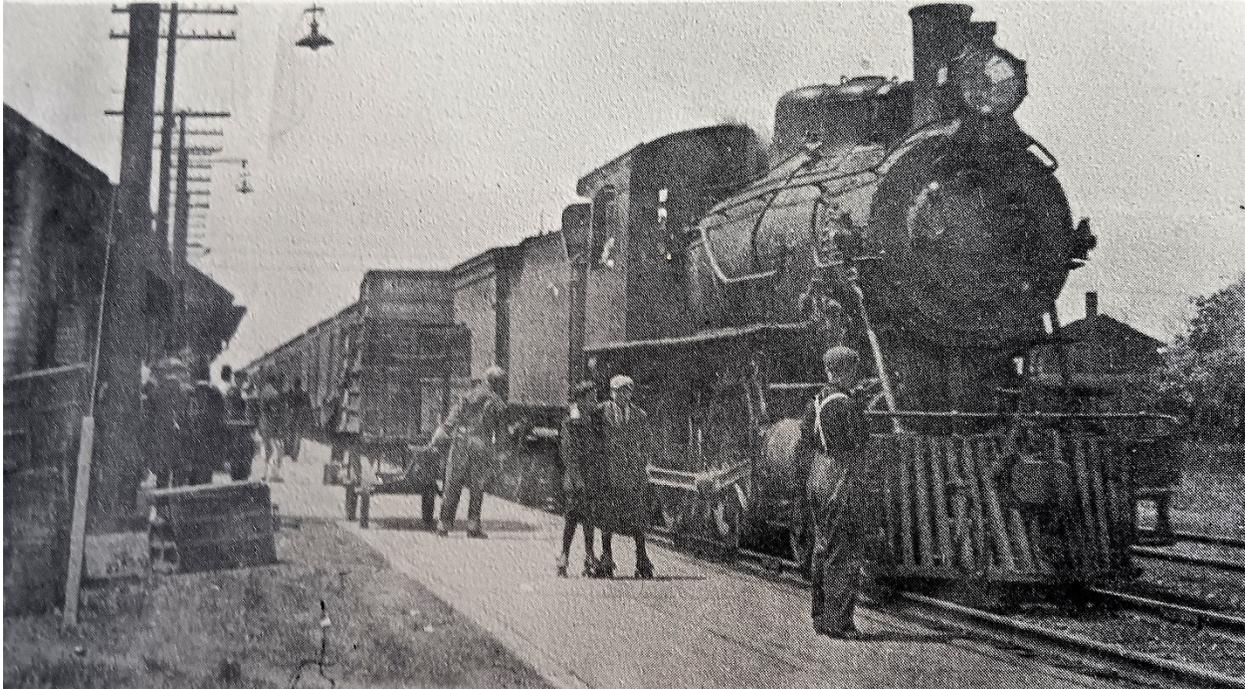


We will reopen the Octagon House on Memorial Day weekend, the same time the Conneaut Area Historical Museum will reopen. We are in the process of removing our archives to the Octagon House from the Historical Museum and tweaking the Octagon House to ready it for people presence once again after a long Covid caused period of inactivity. We are excited to be scheduled to appear on the 2024 Christmas Tour of Houses as well as reopening for

everyday activities. If you are willing to help us in our refurbishing efforts please contact a Museum Steering Committee member or contact [kathywarnes@gmail.com](mailto:kathywarnes@gmail.com)

## Dock Talk Tales

April 1981



Nickel Plate No. 4, “The Cleveland Mail”, at the Conneaut Passenger Station in 1915.

### The Great Skate Scamper

Skates provided “young men” a fast way of getting around Conneaut in 1915.

The two buddies in our “Conneaut the Way It Was” picture for this month dressed in their Sunday best, decided to meet Nickel Plate Passenger Train No. 4 dubbed “The Cleveland Mail,” and powered by Nickel Plate Engine No. 123. This engine was a Class O, 4-4-0 that the Brooks Factory of the American Locomotive Works (Alco) in June 1904 as the second 179. It was re-numbered to 123, also the second time for that number, in 1910.

The unidentified pair were on hand when Alpha F. Mast, freelance photographer, and father of Howard Mast, recorded the train as it slowed to its scheduled stop at the Conneaut Passenger Depot. As the engine glided to a stop, some of the passengers and crew began to move toward where they expected the coaches to stop and the freight agent tried to judge where he would be leading the freight from his wagon to the baggage car.

The boys watched while the baggage was being stowed, the passengers vacated, and the coaches refitted. Engine 123 was uncoupled and moved east of Sandusky Street onto a side track. On the main track east of the switch was a Class R ten-wheel engine which moved west to couple with the train to replace the lighter engine to provide the motive power for the heavier pull into Buffalo. All passengers and the new crew were onboard, the baggage wagon parked, and the eastbound was on its way. Engine 123 moved out of the siding and west on the main to the yards and the roundhouse.

With the activity subsided, the boys viewed that platform as a block-long raceway. The skater with the black slouch cap nudged his partner with the light cap and challenged him, “Your legs may be longer than mine, but my skates are faster than yours! Let’s have a race from Sandusky Street to Mill Street on this platform and I’ll prove it!”

Off they went.

And that’s The Way It Was in Conneaut, about 70 years ago.

The Dock Talk story didn’t say who won the race.

## Newspaper Notes

February 1956

- On February 2, Groundhog Day, the furry animal failed to see his shadow, thus assuring the area of six weeks additional winter.
- C. J. Dow, 70, secretary of the Conneaut Auto Club, and well-known lake and railroad historian died on February 4.
- On February 7, City Police probed the \$300 burglary of the Moose Club.
- On February 8, the Monroe and Lakeville Board of Educations asked county approval of the mergers of the two school districts.
- Robert Murray was named to the Conneaut Board of Education on February 9, replacing Robert Colquhoun, who had moved to Cleveland. At the same meeting, the Board gave city teachers a \$600 salary boost.
- William Skippon, Commissioner of the Conneaut-Lakeville Youth Organization, received the first annual “Youth Work Award “on February 28. The award is sponsored by the Northside Businessmen’s Association.
- On February 29, Dr. M.P. Freed, local veterinarian for 60 years, died.
- February 29. Lakeville village filed suit against Conneaut seeking to “clarify” ownership of waterlines in the village.

# Patron's Pages

## Join Our Patrons Program

The Conneaut Area Historical Museum is excited to announce a new Merchant Patron program which is available to any local business who desires to help our museum to function and improve. For \$50 per year (January to December) we will include your business name and phone number in the publications the museum produces, including a monthly newsletter, any future books the museum produces, and our website.

If interested, send your donation of \$50.00 to P.O. Box 563, Conneaut, Ohio 44030. We will include you in our list of great merchants and businesses in this area.

American Legion Post 151  
262 Broad Street  
Conneaut, Ohio

Angela's Café  
268 Lake Road  
Conneaut, Ohio 44030  
440-593-6060

Biscotti's Restaurant  
186 Park Avenue  
Conneaut, Ohio 44030

Castaways  
877 Broad Street  
Conneaut, Ohio 44030

Chris Brecht, State Farm  
Insurance Agency  
216 Main Street, Suite B  
Conneaut, Ohio 44030

Conneaut Dairy Queen  
1009 Main Street  
Conneaut, Ohio 44030

Conneaut Creek Vet Clinic  
382 West Main Road  
Conneaut, Ohio 44030

Crafty Shanty  
183 Park Avenue  
Conneaut, Ohio 44030  
Jennifer Betts

Gerdes Pharmacy  
245 Main Street  
Conneaut, Ohio 44030

Kathi's Golden  
Retrievers of Albion  
11790 Penside Road  
Albion, PA 16401

Leslie & Donald O'Bell  
2 Bretenahl Place  
Suite C  
Bretenahl, OH 44108

Lynn  
Armington 48  
Ranch Road  
Willoughby, OH 44094  
440-951-3122

Marcy Funeral Home  
208 Liberty Street  
Conneaut, OH 44030

Photo Cabin O' Bliss taken in 1925.  
Grandparents Irus and Ellen Sheldon.  
Bliss experienced as they grew up in  
Conneaut in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup>  
Century.

Port Conneaut FCU  
1002 Broad Street  
Conneaut Ohio 44030  
440-593-7350

Susanne Trigg  
Canfield, OH



The Museum staff is working to establish the museum office in the Octagon House. We would greatly appreciate the donation of a working computer for our office or any other gently used office supplies. We can use file boxes, file folders, and sheet protectors, etc.

# Conneaut Area Historical Society

## Membership Application



The dues period runs from January through  
December. Single \$15.00

\_\_\_\_\_ Couple \$20.00 \_\_\_\_\_

Family \$25.00 \_\_\_\_\_ Patron

\$50.00 \_\_\_\_\_ Name \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_ Phone

Number \_\_\_\_\_

Would you be willing to volunteer at the Museum  
during the summer months or help us with winter  
projects?

We are open Friday, Saturday, and Sunday from noon  
until 5 p.m., starting on Memorial Day and ending on  
Labor Day.

What day or time is best for  
you? Thank you for your  
membership.

P.O. Box 563

Conneaut, Ohio 44030