

# A VIEW THROUGH THE PORTHOLE



Fairport Harbor Historical Society

Vol. XXXIX No.1

February 2024

## From the President's Desk

Marty O'Gara

### PRESIDENTS LOG

Hello everyone; the museum is still closed but we are busy with some events and projects. The museum and grounds were decorated for Christmas by our ever faithful friends (see article inside). We were open for Harbor Holidays on Dec.2., and the Grinch made his annual appearance from the tower. On December 15, 2023 an appreciation party for museum volunteers was held at the Lyric Bistro. Cindy Shega was the hostess; Marty and Bill were both isolating with Covid. Those who attended had a fun evening and some tasty food prepared by the Lyric. We can never thank our volunteers enough! January 24, 2024 was our first membership meeting of the new year. Just a reminder, our meetings are the fourth Wednesday of the month, January through October at 6:00 PM.

The museum has received funds from Lake County Visitors Bureau to develop two interactive displays and replace some of our exterior signage. We will be working with RGI Creative in North Ridgeville and Creative Innovations in Boardman for this project. We are also working on a digitization program which began last year with Leadership Lake County. Bob Manross, Mike Shaulis, and John Ollila are working on this. Louise Nagy, who was in charge of Accessions, passed away in November 2023; she was a long time member/volunteer. Jan Merrick has agreed to be in charge of Collections/Accessions. John Ollila and Mike Shaulis have been working with Jan to develop some new forms and policies for Accessions. The Pilothouse roof had a leak which we detected during the winter. The roof was repaired by Vale Roofing in January 2024.

April 8, 2024 is the date of the Total Eclipse; Lake County is in the path of totality. The Marine Museum is conducting a fundraiser in conjunction with the eclipse. Five raffle tickets will be drawn; the winners will receive a spot on the tower for themselves and one other person to experience the eclipse. Raffle tickets are available online through our website. We will be open the weekend preceeding the eclipse. Anyone interested in volunteering for that weekend and/or the actual day please contact Marty O'Gara. We will be selling special limited edition T shirts commemorating the event. These are being designed/produced by Beth Lynne Studio and will be available in the near future.

The museum has been invited to march in the 10th Annual St. Patrick's Day parade on March 10, 2024. The parade begins at the Lake County fairgrounds and goes west down Mentor Ave. It ends at Hellriegels. Anyone interested in walking the parade, please contact Marty.

Please remember the Annual Meeting will be the March meeting on March 27, 2024. We are looking forward to a busy and exciting year at the museum. We hope all our current members will stay with us. And we always welcome new members. Hope to see you all at the February meeting on February 28th at 6:00 PM

And I would like to thank everyone for the lovely bouquet that you sent for my birthday. It was a touching and pleasant surprise.

*Enjoy this photo of Beth's eight grandchildren climbing to the top of the Fairport Harbor Lighthouse and wishing her a happy 72nd birthday. Grandma and all the grandchildren live in Northeast Ohio. The picture was taken on Oct. 8th during gale force winds whipping across Lake Erie. The winds challenged the grandchildren, but the Fairport Harbor Lighthouse stood firm as always.*



## Holiday Decorating

THANK YOU to the many people that helped decorate the lighthouse and museum. When one says “Takes A Village”, that was true. Saturday November 25, 2023 was the day. 8 am was the time, with the goal to be done in time to watch the Ohio State game at noon. Mission Accomplished. Weather was amazingly gorgeous. Blue skies and 45ish degrees. And to keep everyone fueled and warm, there were donuts and coffee. As has been for many, many years, this process was led by Carol and Tony Bertone and Kristin McKinney. We also had help from the Fairport Harbor Fire Department, Fairport Harding High School Girls Basketball Teams, Mayor Tim Manross and several of our own volunteers. What goes up must come down? In early January, many of our own volunteers took it all down, sorted it, and stored it in our basement.



## 2024 Officer Nominations

At the January 2024 meeting Marty announced the following positions would be open: two trustee positions currently filled by Cindy Shega and Chip Saalfield; second vice president currently unfilled. Members present were asked for interest in running for these positions. Jan Merrick would like to be considered for second vice president. Chip and Cindy would run for their trustee positions. No other members present wished to nominate or be considered for office. Louise Wayner has agreed to assume the nominating committee role. She was provided with a list of all members eligible for office. After contacting these members Louise reported no members other than those listed above wanted to run or nominate anyone.

### Trustee - Cynthia (Cindy) Shega

Cindy lived in Fairport Harbor for 12 years and now resides in Concord. Her daughter graduated from Fairport High in 2001 and her grandson graduated from Fairport High in 2022. Cindy served as Fairport McKinley PTO President for 2 years and Treasurer for 3 years. She is currently helping with the Gift Shop, our Membership, and the Publicity Committee and is responsible for the Facebook page. Cindy loves volunteering at the Lighthouse because of the great group of volunteers and shares their love of the Lighthouse and Museum. Cindy loves the Village of Fairport Harbor and strongly feels that the Lighthouse and Museum are an important part of the history of the village and should be preserved, maintained, and shared for generations to come.

### Trustee - Henry “Chip” Saalfield,

Wife Karen and I have lived in Fairport Harbor 46 years. We have 3 children and 4 grandchildren. Retired from Ohio Savings as Director of Pension Services and worked for Harbor Roofing as Manager of Residential Roofing I enjoy working at the FH Lighthouse Society helping visitors understand the importance of the United States lighthouse system. I also enjoy learning more history from John Olilla.

### 2nd Vice President - Janet Gergely Merrick

Jan attended Ursuline College where she received her BS Degree in Science and Dietetics. Following graduation she attended Cincinnati General Hospital where she became a registered and licensed dietitian. In 1980 Jan graduated from Lake Erie College with a Masters in Business Administration. Her work history consists of twenty years as a Cardiac and as a Rehab Dietitian and seventeen years as the Director of the Women, Infants and Children Program from which she retired. She is now working part-time as a secretary at the Lake County Dog Shelter. Jan has been very active with the VFW Ladies Auxiliaries for the past 29 years. Most recently she was the Department of Ohio State President, Big Ten Americanism and Membership Chairman. Her most recent volunteer experience has been with Honor Flight Cleveland as Board Secretary and Director of Human Resources.

### Current Membership Totals:

Individual+1:  $12 \times 2 = 24$

Individual: 27

Lifetime: 93                      Honorary: 3

Family:  $1 \times 4 = 4$

Total as of January 28, 2024: 151

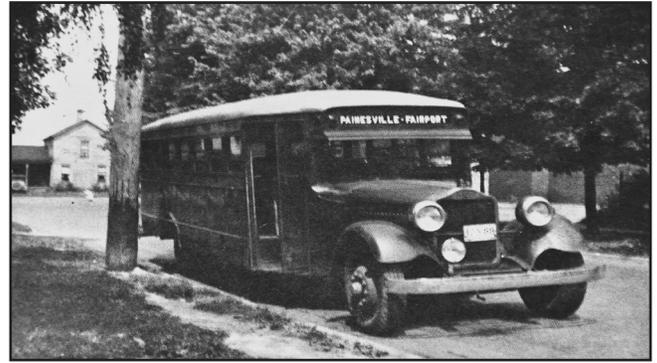
The membership application Email and hardcopy has been sent a couple times so far. We thank all of you that have rejoined or became new members. We rely on our valued members to keep us alive. If you haven't joined, it is never too late. Application forms are also available on our website at [www.fairportharborlighthouse.org](http://www.fairportharborlighthouse.org)

## Fairport Transportation History, part 4 by Lee Silvi

### Bus transportation and a horrific bus/train tragedy

This is the fourth in a multi-part series that provides an overview of the various public transportation options that have been known to exist in Fairport history. Part 3 appeared in the November 2023 issue of A View Through the Portal. The previous articles covered transportation by ferry, horse drawn rail, and the electrified interurban.

This edition we will take a look at fixed route and charter bus transportation. Even though the interurban survived until 1926, one of the eventual successors to the interurban, bus transportation, was becoming somewhat well established before that. This included the Parrish Truck Company of Fairport, Ohio that was established in 1918. Records state that the Fairport first bus garage was located at Third and Vine Streets, which was later replaced by the garage that still exists on the southwest corner of Fifth and Eagle Streets. Their first bus cost \$500 and the second cost \$600.



One of the Fairport-Painesville buses

This bus line or its successor bus companies provided transportation on up to six scheduled routes. At various times in history this included Fairport to Painesville, Painesville south end, downtown Painesville to the Painesville Shopping Center, Painesville to Township Park, Painesville to Mentor Headlands, and a separate Evening Route schedule. At times charter buses were also available.

On March 3, 1922 the bus line suffered a tragic grade level railroad crossing accident that killed sixteen people, eleven of them from Fairport. Many of those killed had either left a dance hall or a lodge meeting in Painesville. The late evening bus was returning from Painesville to Fairport, when it stopped just before the former New York Central Railroad grade level crossing at St Clair St. to make a final passenger pickup. It then proceeded north on St Clair St. when it was hit by an express train at the crossing.

(An express train is one that would not have stopped locally in Mentor or Painesville. This particular train was a twenty coach passenger train traveling nonstop from Cleveland to Buffalo, at speeds up to 60 miles per hour.)

Based on a few newspaper articles the cause of the horrible tragedy is unclear. Lloyd Parrish, owner of the bus line, is quoted as stating an oil tank obstructed the driver's view of the crossing watchman's lantern. This was discounted by a passenger on the bus, who stated he saw the train before they made the crossing. The same passenger stated he saw the bus driver "reach down and pull something", but he was not sure if that caused the bus to slow down or speed up. The crossing watchman claims he was waving a lantern at the bus, which had stopped before the tracks to pick up the final passengers. (Automatic flashers and gates did not exist at this point in history, and grade level crossings were common.) The engineer stated he blew the whistle as they reached the town limits. He further stated "an instant later the automobile was on the track in front of me". The engineer was unsure if the bus was moving or standing on the tracks, and he tried to make an emergency stop.

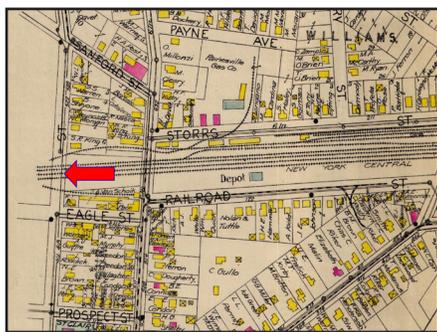
Regardless of fault, this tragedy led to the building of two Painesville underpasses (North State St. and Richmond St.), which in some history books were initially called a "subway", as it was a sub way for vehicles to go under the railroad tracks. Reports state Painesville had been seeking these for some time, in part due to the express trains. Many of you may remember Tony's Subway Inn, which sources state was so named because the Inn was located next to the sub way (underpass) built on North State St. Once the underpasses were built they grade level crossings at North State St. and North St. Clair St. were closed, as were some others.

The bus company had various owners over the years. The Parrish Truck Company became Lake County Transportation, which was initially owned by Hokkanen and Tuuri, and later others. The final owner was, at least in part, Nyle Schuster. The line ended service in 1972 due to a lack of fares (ridership) making it unprofitable.

One other bus service worth noting was the Diamond Alkali bus shuttle that ran from the square in downtown Painesville to the Fairport plant. I am unsure of the exact years of operation. The buses were for employees only. I have only seen one photo of the Diamond buses, where they are staged in front of the county courthouse.



A recent photo of the Fifth Street bus garage.



North St Clair St. grade level crossing as it appeared then. The arrow only marks the site of the bus/train impact. The train was going east, the bus north.

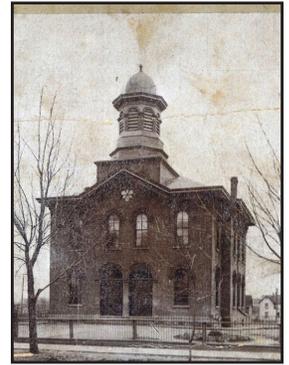
## Restoration of the USS Michigan Mainmast



Repair of the upper section of the USS Michigan's mainmast that broke in October is progressing. As seen in the picture from Gomillion Company in Willoughby it is being prepared for painting. The mahogany wood to replace the crosspiece and yard is on order. Hopefully the weather will co-operate and the mast will be raised with the flag flying at the top in time for our opening in May. The USS Michigan was the first iron-hulled ship in the U.S. Navy. It was commissioned for the defense of Lake Erie. The USS Michigan also sailed the Great Lakes during the Civil War. It was later re-named the Wolverine. When the ship was scrapped in 1949 members of the Fairport Harbor Marine Museum were able to salvage the mainmast.

## Digitization Project Update

The Fairport Harbor Historical Society's Digitization Project seeks to fulfill the organization's mission to preserve and perpetuate the history of the Fairport Harbor community by creating digital copies of the various photographs, pamphlets, articles, and similar manuscripts that will age and deteriorate over time. In addition, the goal of the project is to make the collection of these artifacts more accessible to the membership and, eventually, to the general public. This initiative began in 2022 when Dan Maxson helped the Historical Society to obtain assistance from Leadership Lake County, which donated one of their existing laptop computers, purchased a new scanner, and donated and installed in the museum two TV monitors. In addition, volunteers from Leadership Lake County donated their time in early 2023 to make digital copies of many of the photos that the Historical Society has on file. This was not the first attempt by members of the Historical Society to digitize the photo collection. Over ten years ago, hundreds of photos were scanned by volunteers and the digital images were saved on an external hard drive that resides in the museum. However, most of the photo collection and none of the paper resources had yet to be scanned and nothing had been labeled consistently. That became the focus of the organizational meeting held last summer and led by Bob Manross and Lee Silvi. As Bob discussed at that meeting, the crucial aspect of these digital scans would be how these images would be labeled. A consistent labeling method needed to be used for the entire collection so that once scanned and labeled, items could easily be found on the various hard drives on which they had been saved. The key to this system that Bob and Lee helped to create was the use of an item's Accession Number, the unique identifier that each item added to the Marine Museum's collection is assigned, as part of the images label. In the fall of 2023, John Ollila led the effort to re-label all the previously scanned photos so that they all follow this new labeling method that includes the items Accession Number. In addition, those photos with backs that contained important information relating to the photo were scanned and labeled as "Backs" with the items Accession Number included. By the beginning of February 2024, over 1500 images had been labeled correctly. Going forward, the plan is to finish scanning and labeling the entire photo collection and then begin to scan the paper resources using a labeling system similar to the one used for the images. To help in this effort, a new dedicated archival computer will be added to the museum thanks, in part, to a generous donation made by the Painesville Elks Lodge. This new system will be up and running sometime this spring which will allow the Historical Society to use its current digital scanner and the photo copy machine, which can scan larger items. Cindy Shega has already posted some of the most recent scans on the Fairport Harbor Marine Museum and Lighthouse Facebook page and plans to post more as the work continues. Make sure you "Like" the page so you don't miss future postings.



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"A View Through The Porthole" is the official newsletter of the Fairport Harbor Historical Society.

The newsletter is produced quarterly for members of the Society: February, May, August and November.

If your address changes, please notify us.

To be informed about upcoming events, tours, and Fairport Harbor Lighthouse news send us your e-mail address and we'll add you to our E-News list soon.



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