

The Preservationist

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Dear Society Members,

Greetings and welcome to the 2020 NHS year!

We celebrated a landmark anniversary on February 10th. Twenty-five years ago, the Rich-Twinn Octagon House was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Akron community should be extremely proud of our Victorian home and ALL the community volunteers who brought her back to life. The old photographs of the restoration process show a story of hard work that took place for many years. Many hours of work and fundraising went into bringing the house to its splendor. Kudos to all those hardworking members who are still with us and those who are looking down on us. Your dedication to our house is greatly appreciated!!

The Society has some great programs lined up for the coming year. Hopefully, you will find some that will interest you. Please note that the March program has been changed to MARCH 19th. Mark Saglian had a conflict with the original date, so it has been postponed one week. Mark your calendar for March 19.

You may have noticed that the 2020 Program brochure did not list "Dancing Under the Stars." Do not worry, it has been scheduled for Saturday, August 1, from 7 PM to 11 PM. Tara and Mike Middaugh will chair this festive event once again. This will be the fifth and final year for this event. Look for more information in the months ahead.

December was a hectic month at the Octagon House. We had an overwhelming number of visitors. It is always wonderful to show off our House. Kudos to Laurel Jones and her crew who decorate the House each year. Her attention to detail is always appreciated.

"Light Up Akron" brought many visitors to town including Legislator Ed Rath. (See photo) This visit was Ed's first to the Octagon House, which he enjoyed greatly. Ed has been a dedicated supporter of Akron/Newstead and NHS. His influence has gained Erie County grant monies in the past. We greatly appreciate his past assistance and hopefully some in the future.

The Board is discussing some new fun family ideas for the future. We hope to have more information available in the next newsletter.

Best wishes for a great 2020,

Patricia Pearce



Legislator Ed Rath enjoyed the violinists in the Drawing Room of the Octagon House. Akron High School music teacher, Mark Flynn, arranged for the high school students to play during "Light Up Akron" event. Treasurer Annette Komroy was a docent during the event and enjoyed the music.

"Akron Through the Years" at the KSM

The 2020 Knight Sutton Museum (KSM) exhibit promises to include something for everyone! It will be a bit of a walkthrough timeline of our Akron-Newstead history beginning with our earliest residents, the Native Americans and on through the years. It will also include information on agriculture, railroads, the cement and gypsum industries, the KKK, the real truth behind the name 'Murder Creek', mineral baths, the mushroom industry, the Akron Race Track, information on past residents, Main Street businesses, the Akron Theater, some history of local businesses, and so much more. If you're thinking that it sounds like it will be jam-packed, you are right!

The museum is currently closed for the winter season but will re-open with the new exhibit on Sunday, April 5th from 1:00 pm-3:00 pm.

KNIGHT-SUTTON MUSEUM

Regular hours for the museum beginning April 5th through October are every Wednesday 10:00 am – 1:00 pm and the first and third Sunday of each month from 1:00 pm - 3:00 pm.

Please call the office at (716)542-7022 and listen for the KSM information or to arrange a private tour date and time.



Above: Town Historian Don Holmes and NHS President Pat Pearce welcomed Legislator Ed Rath to the Octagon House during "Light Up Akron."

JUST A REMINDER:

If you have not renewed your membership please do so. Our new membership chair is Linda Capan (542-5300). Give her a call if you have misplaced your membership form. Membership dues are an essential part of our yearly budget. Your continued support of NHS is greatly appreciated. The society is an all-volunteer organization.

If you have a desire to become more involved, please call Pat Pearce (542-4191) or see any board member. We are always looking for more assistance.

INPUT REQUESTED

Do you have a suggestion on improving the programming or have suggestions on how to improve the NHS? The Board of Trustees is looking for suggestions on facilities, community awareness, programming, membership, etc. The Strategic Planning Committee is working on a five-year plan to improve our organization and any suggestions will be taken into consideration. Think about it and if an idea or two surface, please contact Pat Pearce (542-4191) or email pearceps@aol.com). The audience at the March 19th program will also be surveyed. Your suggestions will be greatly appreciated.



News From the Octagon House

by Laurel Jones

Spring Opening Notes ... This year we begin our season for Sunday self-guided tours on April 5th. We will be open from that day through the end of October every first and third Sunday from 1-3 pm. Please remember to check with us if you would like a private tour for an organization, friends or family at any time. We can almost always accommodate and will definitely try our best! Reach me at 716-741-9633.

Christmas Season 2019 ... Thanks to All! Once again, Sunday afternoons were very well attended. This has been one of our goals, so that's very gratifying. Of course it's also more rewarding for those on duty when lots of people come to enjoy the house. As always I need to thank so many people and make everyone aware of the number of members who make this possible....so many hands. Various NHS volunteers help from start to finish with getting the Christmas boxes out, putting up the tree, distributing flyers, managing the publicity, decorating the house, participating as greeters, docents, singers, organist, bakers, and kitchen managers. We particularly thank the choir members from Trinity South Newstead Church for once again lending their voices during the Candlelight Tour's caroling. It's really special to see guests linger and join in with the carols. We opened at 5:00 pm again and two singers/violinists from Akron Central School - Evelyn Hochreiter and Ava Martina - performed in the Drawing Room for the first hour. They also stayed and sang with the Dining Room carolers for a while! We hope to continue this involvement from our young people.

Tour Update ... For the first time, the University of Buffalo Prosperity Fellowship toured the house and it was a great success. This group of fellowship students ranging from juniors to doctoral candidates came through in January 2020 and the facilitator of the tour has said she'll bring another group through in the future.

Companion Exhibit for 2020 ... This year the Knight-Sutton Museum's exhibit is "Akron Through the Years". Once again, we'll feature a fun and informational placard exhibit at the house which complements the KSM's exhibit. This year it will be "The Octagon House Through the Years" and will focus on several aspects of the house over time, including the families who lived there and the restoration by the NHS.

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### ***Did you Know?***

Even with history we need to be always learning. Our exterior sign used to say 1849 and has said "circa 1850" for some time now. That's because we discovered that Charles Rich didn't buy the land until 1850! Newspaper articles from the time disagree on just which year(s) between 1850 and 1855 the house was built, and also how long it took. However, on the 1855 map of the Village of Akron, a house is there and it's definitely this one. The depiction is shaped like an octagon.

#### PART FOUR - CONCLUSION

There in one of Newstead's oldest cemeteries – whispering in the mist - stood the headstones of two early settlers. The stones bore the names of John and Sarah Dolph. The Dolphs, who figured so prominently in the "Legend of Murder Creek" story, were real people. In fact, an early newspaper from 1814 shows John Dolph not only living in Newstead but conducting business on the Buffalo Road. And John Dolph wasn't alone: He lived very near to an innkeeper named Peter VanDeventer. The two eyewitnesses to the 'Wild Rose' murder-tragedy were neighbors. An 1866 Map shows the location of the family homesteads - the Dolph Farm lay at the bottom of the Ledge on what is now Cummings Road (just as the 'Legend' story claims). Both men lived precisely where the story claimed – near the crossroads of the Great Seneca Trail.

Cummings Road is named after Uriah Cummings, President of the Cummings Akron Cement Works. Born in Akron in 1833, Uriah was a poet, a scientist, a businessman, a local historian, and an honorary member of the Tonawanda Band of Seneca Indians. In short, Uriah Cummings was an expert on all things Akron. When Uriah Cummings grew to manhood, he operated a cement business on the land that is today Leisurewood Campgrounds. The two limestone pillars that marked the Cummings' driveway stand to this day (as does the foundation of his house, in the woods atop the Ledge). In addition, Uriah Cummings is the author of a 1906 book entitled, "The Haunted Corners". Cummings' book is the original source of the story we now know as "The Legend of Murder Creek". There is one, small problem: The story isn't about Murder Creek.

Uriah Cummings opens his book with an explanation as to why he was writing it: Cummings writes that the crime occurred near the crossroads of the Seneca Trail, on the eastern edge of Cummings Park – and it is with a view to correct the history that he published his story. The spot that Akronites came to regard as 'The Haunted Corners' was located atop the ledge, just inside the wooden fence on the Leisurewood property. The Cummings' account of the crime would later be substantiated by the Native American historian, Arthur Caswell Parker in 1919 in his book, "The Life of Ely Parker". While Akron Falls Park IS the final resting place of generations of Seneca ancestors, Rose's story has no connection to either the Park or to the name, 'Murder Creek'.

In a strange twist, the naming of Murder Creek IS connected to that other tragic event earlier described, though not in the way one might think. In an article in The Buffalo Times dated November 4, 1890, a reporter covering the murder of Nellie May Connors by Sadie McMullen closed his piece with reference to the Creek's infamous name:

"The name of the sluggish little stream will have a new horrible significance to the citizens of Akron until some other tragedy obscures the memory of poor little Nellie May Connors....within a few yards of the spot where Sadie McMullen attempted to take her own life [on the Mechanic Street Bridge], a wealthy man was murdered by an Indian guide...this is why the little stream is called Murder Creek."

An article in the Buffalo Times in 1903 further substantiates this account – reporting on a passage from the personal journal of Governor DeWitt Clinton: "Five miles from VanDeventer's [inn], we crossed Murder or Sulphur Creek, a small stream....so called

from the circumstance of a crazy man sent back from Canada under the care of some Indians who tomahawked him in his crazy fits.” The date of Clinton’s account of the naming of Murder Creek is 1810: It is the earliest written account of how Murder Creek got its name and most likely the correct one.

Uriah Cummings opened his account of “The Haunted Corners” (the basis of the Legend of Murder Creek), by stating that it was his wish to preserve the ‘true version’ of what happened atop the Ledge on Cummings Road. While he opened his tale in the voice of an historian, he closed it with the voice of a poet/mystic. He writes: “It has always seemed to the writer that if a person believes in the immortality of the soul or spirit, it follows as a logical sequence that

they should also believe that the spirit is capable of appearing or reappearing...it does not appeal to reason that the soul wanders far away, but rather that it lingers around the scenes with which it is familiar and.....which it loves. It is only the plainest common sense to believe that if there IS a hereafter, a departed spirit will .... hover around the scenes of its earthly home which...becomes one’s heavenly home.”

‘The Haunted Corners’ is in many respects a love letter to the place we call home: In the end, that may be the better story. It is a story of our ancestors, both Native American and White, remaining spiritually connected to this heavenly place that they – and we - call home.

## 2020 NHS SCHOLARSHIP

The NHS scholarship will be available for qualifying high school seniors who live in the Akron/Newstead area. The following is the criteria: “Senior with an interest in history, a track record of community service and a need for financial assistance.” The information will be given to seniors in the next few months at the Akron High School. If a Newstead student is attending a private high school, or a different public high school, the student should contact President Patricia Pearce (542-4191).

## UPCOMING PROGRAMS

ATTENTION: DATE CHANGE FOR THE MARCH PROGRAM.....

The date for the “**Richardson Complex**” will be **MARCH 19** at 7:00 PM at the Newstead Town Hall. Mark Saglian, a docent at the complex, will discuss the history of the 149-year old National Historic Landmark, which as we know today is being adaptively reused as a hospitality venue and cultural amenity for Buffalo. However, Mark will tell the story of its campus through the eyes of Akron’s own Sarah (a.k.a. Sadie) McMullen, one of the facility’s more infamous 19<sup>th</sup> century patients.

The Rich-Twinn Octagon House and Knight-Sutton Museum will open on April 5<sup>th</sup> from 1:00 – 3:00 PM.

**April 9<sup>th</sup>** - “**Antiques Appraisals**”. It has been a long time since we had an appraisal program. Look in your attic for some of your long-forgotten treasures.

**May 14<sup>th</sup>** - Erie County’s Historian Doug Kohler speaking on “**Western New Yorkers in the Civil War.**”

## Of Monuments, Muscle and Money

Submitted by Pat Rodrigues

In July of 2017, members of the Newstead Historical Society attended a workshop in Warsaw, N.Y. called " Grave Matters". The event was sponsored by the Western New York Association of Historical Societies. (Whew) It involved a morning session on documenting a historic cemetery, materials used on headstones and styles of headstones used through history. This was followed by a hands-on workshop where a damaged gravestone was repaired, reset and cleaned. In short it was everything you needed to know about gravestones but never thought too much about before.

Then in July 2018, NHS hosted the same event at the C. Dee Wright Center and Maple Lawn Cemetery where we successfully reset a gravestone. All of this was in preparation for the formidable task a few intrepid NHS members saw as an obligation to the quiet residents who rest at Maple Lawn Cemetery. Maple Lawn Cemetery being the pioneer cemetery of the village and home to many town founders and veterans of the Revolutionary War, War of 1812, Mexican and Civil War conflicts.

Since that time, we have been doing "boots – on – the - ground" research, developing a game plan and, most happily, collecting donations for the project. Every worthwhile project needs money if it wants to become more than a dream and so we are pleased to report that we now have \$6,600 as a result of some very generous benefactors. The first to step forward was the Bernhardt Foundation with a grant of \$1,000, then the Elks Club of Lancaster heard about our plans and jumped on board with a \$500 donation. The Dancing Under the Stars NHS fundraiser donated \$2,500 of their proceeds specifically for this project and finally the Lions Club also donated \$2,500 from their annual steak roast. All these donations give us a reasonable nest egg to begin to implement our plan.

Our first focus will be the veterans and town founders. With this in mind, we have decided to start with the grave of the Revolutionary War veteran, Peleg Hart. He was born in 1761 and served in the R.I. militia. As his 4x great granddaughter recounted the story when she came to visit his grave site from Conn., she could not find it because it was covered in sod. To further complicate things, because it had been hidden all these years, the fence which did not exist when he was buried, had been placed over his grave. With the help of some Boy Scouts doing some clean up there, they found, uncovered, and moved the stone away from the fence. We are still in contact with his 4x great granddaughter and she is happy to know his place of rest was rescued and preserved.

The companion stone we will be working on is that of Jonathan Delano, a War of 1812 veteran and cement industrialist of the day. Coincidentally Peleg Hart was Mr. Delano's father-in-law. Mr. Delano's daughter was also the third wife of Charles Rich, the original owner of the Octagon House. So, this is truly a family plot as well as a plot devoted to two veterans with many local associations.

Our proposed plan is to elevate the stones, not to an upright position for fear of damaging them, but to elevate them somewhat in place, surround them with pea gravel, mark off the area in some way and perhaps install a small marker with some historical notes about our quiet neighbors.

So that's it for the money and the monuments. As to the muscle, if you are interested in volunteering in any capacity please contact the Newstead Historical Society or myself at my email - [patrodrigues@ymail.com](mailto:patrodrigues@ymail.com). Hopefully we can get started in the spring, weather permitting.

So that's the update. Volunteer - come help us - "volunteers make the world a better place".

**Sympathy:** We are saddened to report the recent passing of member Joyce Clary on January 21, 2020. We extend our sincerest condolences to her family and friends.

**WELCOME** to the following new members:

- Joshua Drabik (Annual)
- Dusty & Josh Blasko (New Life Members)
- Mike Swiatowy (given by Gary & Judy Swiatowy) (New Life Member)
- Gary Swiatowy (Transfer from Annual to LIFE member)
- 

**Thank you for the following MEMORIAL DONATIONS given:**

- Bob Anderson from Terry Abrams
- Doug & Millicent Burg from Adam, Heather & Blair Burg
- John H. Wolfe from Dana Connell
- Eugene & Elaine Hofmeier from David Hofmeier
- Herbert Klauer from Betty Klauer
- Charles V. Kopp and Mr. & Mrs. Cortland O. Tinkham from Cortland Kopp
- George & Clara Martiny from Frances Martiny
- Sally Lippert from Robert & Barbara Tinney
- Helen & Forest Reber from William & Shirley Reber
- Kathleen Saylor from Colleen & Marty Salmon
- Ellsworth & Gladys Brown from Nancy Brown Walker
- Kelsey & Dorothy Webster from David Webster
- Kelsey & Dorothy Webster from Robert Webster
- Bernard Thoma from Barbara Thoma
- Donald Whiting from Dolores Whiting
- Calvin Staebell from Jean Wilson

**Thank you for DONATIONS received from:**

Rev. David Baker, Sharon Beyer, Dawn Borchert, Rodger & Diane Brown, Barb & Ed Burke, Virginia Cochran in honor of Don Holmes, Peter Forrestel, Marian Green, Barbara Guancial, Jim & Cindy Hayes, Lorna Heim, Cheryl Johannes, Norm & Mary Hillard, Donald Holmes, Jeff & Laurel Jones, Carl Klingenschmitt, Richard & Annette Komroy, Lois Kreher, James & Roberta Lobur, Laura Mattioli, Winifred Meahl, Dean & Gretchen Moore, Bob & Pam Overfield, Elizabeth Palizay, Patricia Pearce, Bill & Marge Rebovich, Dennis & Collette Remington, Walt & Diane Rosonowski, Mona Rudolph, Raymond & Marian Schmigel, James & Maryann Schneider, Don & Mary Jane Shonn, Robert Smith, Allan Starkweather, Jerry & Joan Summe, Dorothy Tyler, Dave Wakeman, James Webster IV, Alexandria Whiting, Phillip & Amanda Whiting, Chris Whitmarsh, and Mark & Karen Wilson & for the Maple Lawn Cemetery restoration project from: David Finger and Harold Finger

**MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL  
FORMS AND ANNUAL LETTERS  
HAVE BEEN MAILED FOR 2020.**

Annual members, if you have not already done so, please renew at your earliest convenience. Membership year runs from January 1, 2020 to December 31, 2020. Memorials and donations to the Society are always appreciated and can be made by using the same envelope or mailed to Newstead Historical Society, PO Box 222, Akron, NY 14001.  
**LATE NOTICES WILL BE MAILED THIS MONTH.**



**2020 NHS Executive Board**

|                      |                          |
|----------------------|--------------------------|
| President            | Patricia Pearce 542-4191 |
| Vice President       | Adam Burg 570-0633       |
| Treasurer            | Annette Komroy 542-4714  |
| Recording Secretary  | Kimberley Burg 907-2720  |
| Membership Secretary | Linda Capan 542-5300     |

**Trustees**

| <u>Trustees: 2018-2020</u> | <u>Trustees: 2019-2021</u> | <u>Trustees: 2020-2022</u> |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| John Jendrowski            | Pat Rodrigues              | David Wakeman              |
| Carole Borchert            | Jannette Potera            | Mary Sellers Hanley        |
| Dusty Blasko               | David Hofmeier             | Marlene Gehl               |

**Directors and Committees**

|                                   |                              |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Rich-Twinn Octagon House Director | Laurel Jones                 |
| Knight-Sutton Museum Director     | Marybeth Whiting             |
| Collections Manager               | Jannette Potera              |
| Publicity                         | Michele Asmus                |
| Website                           | Colleen Salmon/Patty Buckley |
| Sales                             |                              |
| Century Homes & Landmarks         | Pat Rodrigues                |
| Newsletter                        | Donald Holmes/Julie Brady    |
| Town and Village Historian        | Donald Holmes                |

NHS Website provides information about the society and a gallery of pictures about the Octagon House, Knight-Sutton displays, and Century Homes. Check it out at [www.newsteadhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.newsteadhistoricalsociety.org)



Don't forget that you can donate your refund when you return cans to the Bottle & Can Retrieval Centers at 52 Cedar St. Akron. Just tell them when you drop off your cans.

Thank you!



If you would like to receive notifications and information by e-mail, please email Linda Capan with NHS in the subject line to [lcapan@hotmail.com](mailto:lcapan@hotmail.com). Rest assured - You will *not* receive numerous messages; this is meant to be a convenience for those who would like it.

**THANK YOU ALL FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT OF THE SOCIETY!**

Newstead Historical Society  
 P.O. Box 222  
 Akron, New York 14001  
 Office Phone: 716-542-7022  
 Visit us on the Web:  
[www.newsteadhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.newsteadhistoricalsociety.org)

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The Newstead Historical Society deeply appreciates the support of the County of Erie, the Town of Newstead, our members and the community at large.





