

FLAT ROCK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

25486 GIBRALTAR ROAD,
P.O. BOX 337
FLAT ROCK, MICHIGAN 48134

734.782.5220 Museum Office
www.FlatRockHistory.org
Archives@FRDigitalHistory.org

MUSEUM CAMPUS HOURS

Office Hours Tues, Wed, Thurs 9am-noon
(its always best to call ahead)

Tours by appointment
or on scheduled Museum Open Houses

2022- 2023 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Bruce Chapin, President
313.363.6338

Laura Polce, Vice-President

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734.730.3213

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313.354.5125

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989.786.3824

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OUR MISSION

The Flat Rock Historical Society seeks to preserve and communicate to residents and visitors the history and spirit of those who have lived in and near the City of Flat Rock from the beginning of human habitation, or its vision, to bring our community together for the enjoyment, discovery, and learning our past to create our future.

The TELEGRAPH

VOLUME XLIX Issue 1

APRIL 2023

The "Wildcat" Bank of Gibraltar & The Gibraltar and Flat Rock Company

by Lesley Gilliland Harkai

If you stand at the eastern edge of the parking lot at Fiorelli's Wise Guys Bistro, and look out eastward along the river, you will notice the faint remains of a shallow channel dug into the earth parallel to the river. Most of the homeowners have chosen to fill in the sections on their property, but a faint depression can still be seen here. This depression was once the canal venture of the Gibraltar and Flat Rock Company who dug the canal in 1836 and partially financed by Daniel Webster, the great Massachusetts statesman.

The opening of the Erie Canal in 1825 brought an influx of settlers to Michigan from the east, but it was not until 1835 that the population of Michigan Territory exploded into what the eastern papers termed "Michigan Fever." These new settlers were mostly farmers from New York, and they arrived in Michigan by packet boat with their household items and a small supply of stock, but had very little cash on hand.

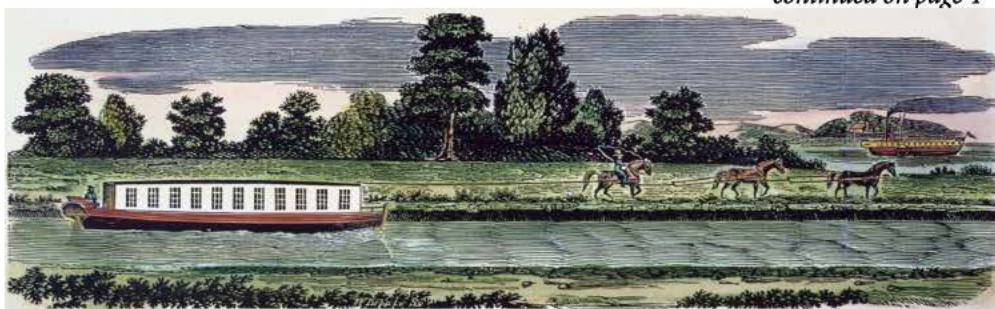
The National Bank of the United States had been one of Alexander Hamilton's cornerstones under George Washington. This central bank could loan money to the government in times of war, yet encourage American businesses to thrive with to access capital investments. It should be said that early bank was not as sophisticated or regulated as they are today; and branches were only in large cities.

American Capitalism thrived under this national bank, but as the economy grew, so did the bank and its influence. While merchants with regular income benefitted from this bank, a farmers income depended upon the sale of successful crop which took a good part of the year to grow, harvest and market. One bad crop could spell disaster for farmers who needed to borrow money to invest in equipment, purchase additional acreage, or even feed their family until the harvest. The bank was generally slow to loan funds to farmers. As settlers flooded into Michigan Territory, soon to be a state; a banking system was vital in setting up new businesses and farms. Most of these early settlers were farmers. Wealthy individuals would group together providing credit and loans to merchants; most often only loaning money to family and friends. There were no banks on the Michigan frontier.

THE GREAT WEST.—This is no fairy land, or paradise. The warm imaginations and discontented spirits of New England, if their wayward fancies are not in some degree restrained, will be exceedingly liable to disappointment in the reality of its dark forests and pestiferous marshes. Those who are attacked most violently with the "Michigan fever" at the east, seldom escape a relapse of their disease at the west, in the more comfortable and less agitating form of "fever and ague." We therefore counsel all who are inclined to emigration, that they preserve perfect coolness and self-possession—that they assume towards the fascinations of this flower garden, this beautiful region of lakes and prairies, as much stoicism as may be; and that when they hide a final adieu to

Clipping from the
Burlington Weekly Free Press
Burlington, Vermont - Friday, October 04, 1833

continued on page 4



PUBLIC TOWNHALL REGARDING READING BUILDING

MAY 3RD

**FLAT ROCK ELKS
26917 TELEGRAPH**

DOORS OPEN AT 6PM

President's Message

From the Desk of Bruce Chapin

Good News everyone! We are making head way on our proposal for saving the Reading Building. The school board meeting on May 8th will be the day we present our proposal to the school board. Please try to be there (at 6:00 PM). After it is restored we want to turn it into a children's hands on STEAM adventure museum. (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math). This will be in keeping with the original properties owners wishes by using the building and land for education. We have taken our lead from like buildings in Flint and Ann Arbor.

Hillary Rose has put together a plan which will make the site a true destination location for Flat Rock. If you would like to make a tax deductible donation you can call the Society Tuesday thru Thursday from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm and talk to Lesley or Mary or leave a message and someone will return your call.

The caboose rehab is starting up. The wood has arrived and Richard Porath is milling it to the proper shape. We will be then put on one coat paint before we put it up. We will need help with that.

In other good news: We have a new volunteer, Jeff Groleau. He and I are building another set of shelving in the attic of the stable. We should be done soon. Then on to the caboose and other projects.

Don't forget the Spring Flea Market the first Sunday in May (the 7th). We will need baked goods to sell. We had our best sale last October. Hoping we can repeat it again.

April 2023 Member's Meeting

Thursday, April 20th

**5:30pm Membership Potluck
(Bring a salad to pass)**

7pm

**"Historic Home Restoration
at the Commandant's Quarters"**

by Tyler Moll,

EMU Historic Preservation Graduate



SAVE THE DATE! SPRING FLEA MARKET - SUNDAY, MAY 7TH

Our Bi-Annual Flat Rock Historical Society Spring Flea Market will be held on May 7th at the Flat Rock Speedway. As always we need your help! So please mark your calendar!

GRATITUDE

*We would like to thank the following
(and hope we didn't miss anyone):*

To the Holdren Family for the antique Apple Press and supporting articles.

To Debra Andrews for the many antiques: clock, iron bakeware, tin lanterns, fruit jars, rabbit traps, tea kettle, sewing items, etc.

To Denise Springmeyer for the Towel/Shaving Mirror Cabinet and assorted antique bottles.

To Sarah Lange for the box of local ephemera, newspapers and assorted items.

To Jeff Groleau, for the original time clock from the old Flat Rock Post Office. And for helping Bruce to make the shelves in the barn.

To David Doss for the Flat Rock Band Album and child's book.

To Bill Fashing for the Hat Pin Cushion.

To Cindy Fesko for the Quilt from the Roy Lee family.

To Jennifer Schoenberger, George & Hillary Rose, Mike Sollars, Larry Dishaw, Bruce Chapin, MargaretAnn Cooper, Lila Fedokovitz, Heather Beitler, and Charlene Coulson for their hard work and dedication in hopes of saving the Reading Building.

To Lorri Brule for driving downtown for deeds at the County Registrar.

To Mary & Mike Goudreau, for re-stringing our loom and setting up the kit packages for students.



Our Flat Rock Historical Society Spring Flea Market will be held on May 7th at the Speedway. Check our Facebook page for any updates. As always we need your help. Dawn Bartok and Kathy Fisk, have volunteered to manage the Country Store during this Flea Market. Please let us know if you can help sell baked goods during the flea market.

Members are asked to bring their home baked goods for the Country Store to the Hotel on Saturday, May 6th between 1 and 4 pm. Monetary donations are always welcome too, if you are not a baker. We often run out of baked goods, so we depend on you!

If you are going to visit the Flea Market on Sunday, please consider supporting the Historical Society's Country Store Booth at the Speedway. The proceeds from the baked goods go directly to the society supporting artifact conservation and historic programming. **Thank you in advance!**

*We can always use help
with this event. If you
would like to be a character,
or help with the donations,
we would welcome any help
with this big day!*



**SAVE
THE
DATE!!**

**SATURDAY,
OCTOBER 7, 2023**

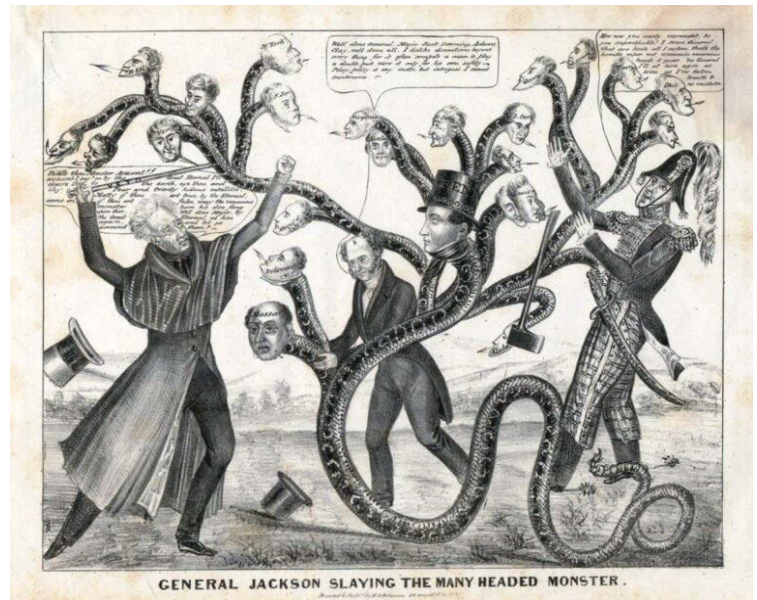
The "Wildcat" Bank of Gibraltar & The Gibraltar and Flat Rock Company

by Lesley Gilliland Harkai

(continued from page 1)

In 1836, public deposits were removed from the National Bank and the renewal of its charter was vetoed by Andrew Jackson and the Democrat controlled Congress. Jackson reasoned that a National Bank was not fair to farmers and would wield too much control over the country through its currency. This caused many smaller state or "pet" banks to clamor for the funds as the National Bank dissolved. A banking panic and recession ensued.

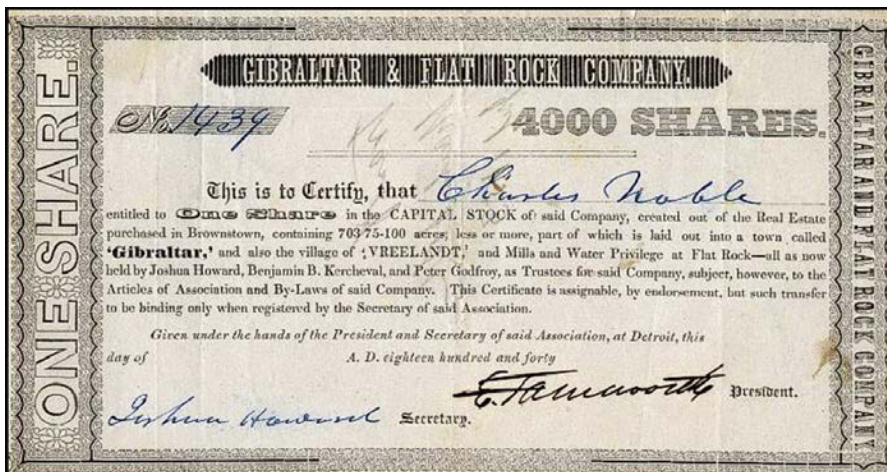
A demand for more banking charters and facilities was taken up by the Michigan Legislature; as result, Governor Mason signed the "Wildcat" Banking Act into law on March 15, 1837. Jacksonian Democrats apparently coined the term "Wildcat Bank" due to the remote areas in the wilderness where these banks popped up as where wildcats might be found.



The Gibraltar and Flat Rock Company incorporated July 13, 1836, by Benjamin B. Kercheval, Joshua Howard, Phineas Davis, Enoch Jones, James H. Forsyth, Peter Godfroy, Harry Conant, Charles Noble and others for the purposes of building a canal connecting the village of Gibraltar, on the River Huron, by way of Flat Rock and straight though

Under the new Wildcat Banking Law, any twelve freeholders could organize a bank with capital of under \$300,000, with thirty percent of that capital be paid in specie certificates and security guaranteed with real estate mortgages or bonds executed by resident freeholders. Most of these institutions were organized by honest men, but several were set up by scammers looking to make a quick buck. Specie certificates were bank notes printed by specific banks.

NOTICE is hereby given, that application will be made at the next session of the legislature, for an act to incorporate the Gibraltar and Flat Rock Company; also for said company to construct a canal from Gibraltar via Flat Rock to Ypsilanti, or to navigate the River Huron by slack water from Flat Rock to Ypsilanti. December 1st, 1837. de3-6w



to Ypsilanti, building mills and erecting other hydraulic works along the way. Augustus Weeden Greene, a settler from Rhode Island, now farming on Grosse Ile was contract to dig the canal in 1837. They needed to secure financing.

The Bank of Gibraltar, a wildcat bank, was incorporated in August 1837. Colonel Joshua Howard was the Bank President; and interestedly, he was the main shareholder of the Gibraltar and Flat Rock Company. In fact, most of the Gibraltar Bank's board of directors were also shareholders in the Gibraltar and Flat Rock Company.

Daniel Webster, Whig Senator from Massachusetts, travelled to Michigan in July 1837 to visit his son, Fletcher, an attorney practicing in Detroit. The famed orator travelled the western territories after losing the 1836 Presidential Election to Martin VanBuren. Webster arrived in Detroit on July 11, 1837, when Lewis Cass, a Democrat, was abroad in France. Webster and Cass were on opposing sides of the banking issue. Webster decided to hold a public picnic under the trees in Cass' orchard at the back of his property and gave a fiery speech on the wildcat banking debacle. The Websters met with Phineas Davis at Gibraltar and became investors in the Gibraltar and Flat Rock Company.

The Bank of Gibraltar closed in June 1838. Only four of the Michigan Wildcat Banks remained in business after 1839, the majority had either gone out of business or were in receivership with the courts. In most cases, the note holders suffered a total loss.

The Gibraltar and Flat Rock Company had invested over \$100,000 in the canal venture along the Huron River and completed only three miles of canal when the Gibraltar Bank closed. A.W. Greene had excavated a three mile section of canal beginning at the flour mill operated by Jacob Vreeland in Flat Rock and heading due east along the river. Mr. Greene was never paid and lost everything on the canal contract. He moved to Raisinville and took up farming. The canal was never completed. Webster died in 1852 saddled with considerable debt, including losses he incurred from the failed Gibraltar and Flat Rock Company.

The closing of the Gibraltar Bank was not the only factor in dooming the canal venture; rather, the arrival of the railroad killed the canal. The first railroad tracks in Michigan connected Adrian and Toledo in 1833 and were powered by horses. The Michigan Central Railroad expanded outwards and included routes close to Flat Rock. It was more cost effective to build and maintain the railroad than to continue the canal venture.

By 1852, the Gibraltar and Flat Rock Company had decided to "reform themselves" for the purpose of building a "plank road" from Gibraltar to Flat Rock. Eventually by the 1880s, this corporation would be dissolved.



Daniel Webster ca. 1850)

WEBSTER OUT OF FUNDS,

How a Detroitier Sold "Gibraltar & Flat Rock Canal" Stock and Replenished the Great Statesman's Pocket Book. George C. Bates, formerly of Detroit, writes as follows to John Wentworth, of Chicago: In March, 1851, being then United States District Attorney under Gen. Taylor, but appointed by Mr. Webster as Secretary of State, I was living at the Kirkwood Hotel in Washington....one evening in 1851, I was asked by Kirkwood if I had seen Webster, to which I replied: "No. What Webster do you mean?" He answered "The old man- Secretary of State!" I said: "No." He then remarked: "He left a note here for you," and, gave it to me. I opened it ...and then read:

"Kirkwood Hotel, March 12, 1851.

Sir, Please call at my study at the house to-morrow morning at 6 o'clock sharp. I have some important business for you.

Yours, DANIEL WEBSTER."

Mr. Webster was always an early riser, and at 6 o'clock precisely the next morning I rang the bell at his house, and went into the old kitchen of the house, where he had his library, containing, among a vast collection of other books, all the various editions of the Bible, all the books of Shakespeare ever printed, and every book on the English and American Constitutions then published...The moments hung heavily, but finally ...rising with all the majesty of an Emperor, he walked to the corner of the room, took up an old-fashioned tin box for title-papers, with a small brass padlock upon it, and he said: "Do you happen to know anything about the Gibraltar and Flat Rock Canal stock, near Detroit? I have here in this old box \$36,000 in that stock, which I foolishly bought in 1837, and I want to sell it to you." ...The canal corporation will soon be disincorporated, and that large tract of land lying between the Detroit River and the Huron, in Michigan, will sell for a large sum of money. Cass is President, Ledyard is Secretary and Treasurer, Farnsworth is attorney; and I assure you that the investment made in 1837 in this wild scheme will still pay you something handsome." ...Well," said the grand statesman, laying his hands on my shoulders, "I want to sell my stock to you to-day. I am distressed to death for money, and you must buy it today." I told him "I had not the money, and could not buy it" but he said: "That won't do. I will sell you all this stock for \$1,000, and take your note at sixty days." I mustered up courage enough to tell him that I had no credit, and, all the enemies of our Whig administration, and his enemies, would say that "it was a job, and would injure if not disgrace him." Leaving him ...I went to Gen. Cass' room, told him what had happened, and he, a very rich man, said: "Poor Webster! Get the actual cash value of Webster's stock, and I will do all I can to aid in its sale, or a loan on it." I went to Mr. Webster at 6 o'clock ...and assured him that the next day he could have the money. He was cheered up, but seemed agonized almost to death for the want of money, and told me that Sam Judson, Cashier of the United States Bank, and some Jews, were in the parlor waiting for it.' The next morning Draper's dispatch came to me. Going at once to the house, I found the Secretary, got that old tin box, made his note for Mr. Webster for \$7,700 took all to a bank in Washington, got a package of notes containing the \$7,700, and gave the money to the godlike Daniel; and he, in the most grateful manner, said: "Young gentlemen, you have done me a favor that I shall never forget." And he never did. But as I came through the hall I saw in the parlor Judson and the Jews, waiting like sharks for the money. And from his son Fletcher that it was all gone in three days to pay old debts, Thus it will be seen the greatest statesman, orator, and most eminent lawyer, the defender of the Constitution and Union, a man eminently and truly great, mingled with his great talents and virtues, great weaknesses that would cast a shadow over, the most picayune shyster in the land. Requiescat in pace.

Excerpt: Detroit Free Press, Mich, 14 May 1882, Sunday, Page 17

Do you Have An Autograph Book?

by Mary Washko

That may be a simple question to ask but, do you really know what an Autograph Book is? To me that means a collection of autographs from family, friends and maybe even people you just met. If you go further back (Europe German and Dutch) people would often write personal notes, poems, drawings, special verses or leave a memento in the family Bible. It would not be unusual to find locks of hair, engravings, embroidery and pressed flowers. With its popularity the Bible

"Roses are red,
violets are blue,
sugar is sweet
and so are you!"

companies would often insert blank pages just for this purpose. I guess with the Bible being too heavy to carry around, the Autograph Book



ventured out on its own. According to GOOGLE the oldest book dates back to 1545!

It became quite popular in the American culture during the Civil War. With so many men and women far from home what better way to remember someone by but, with a special poem or drawing. The onset of public schooling, with yearbooks and pictures, the Autograph book lost some of its popularity.

This Autograph Book (above) was donated by Sally Carter† and belonged to Hester Carter, her mother. It chronicled her years at Flat Rock High School in 1929, 1930, 1931 & 1932.

The sayings and verses written are truly from the heart!

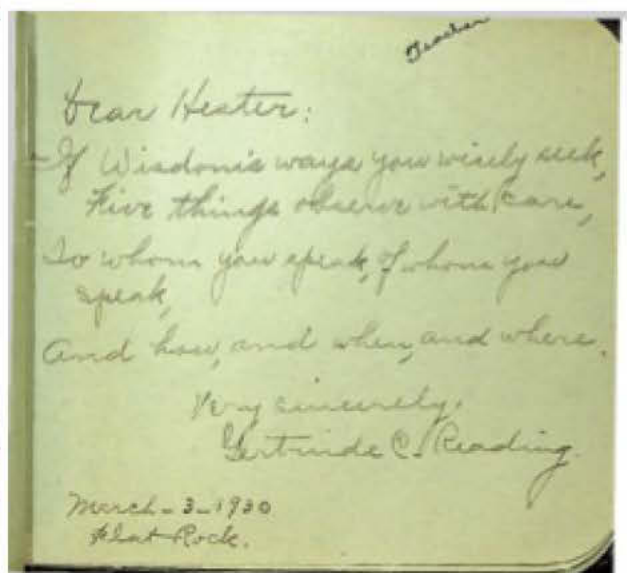
Many of the autographs in the book were not only from classmates but, also teachers. As you can see one of the teachers was Mrs. Gertrude Reading. A futuristic icon of Flat Rock History!

Dear Hester,
If Wisdom's ways you wisely seek,
Five things observe with care,
To Whom you speak, of Whom you speak,
And how, and when, and where.

Very Sincerely,
Gertrude C. Reading

March 3 1930
Flat Rock

So let's see how many of our readers have an Autograph Book?! What are some of your favorite quotes, drawings or poems? Send them in to the museum office and we will print in the next issue! Stay tuned!



In Memoriam

Mary Esther Ausum Batcheller

(June 12, 1934 - February 15, 2023)

It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of Mary Esther Batcheller on February 15th. Mary was born in Monroe, Michigan on June 12, 1934 at Mercy Hospital. She was the fourth child of Dr. Clarence Ausum and Elizabeth (Lyons) Ausum of Flat Rock. James Hubert Batcheller of Detroit and Mary married on July 5, 1958 in Flat Rock and were united until his death on March 16, 2003. Mary was a proud alumna of Michigan State Normal College (now Eastern Michigan University) and served on its alumni board for several years. She also attended Wayne State University and taught English at Riverview High School. Mary was elected Trenton City Assessor in 1981 and was re-elected eleven times before retiring in 2005. Mary was an active member of St. Joseph Catholic Church in Trenton for more than forty years. She is survived by her three sons James, Brian and Patrick.

She belong to or supported many civic groups in her lifetime, including the Soroptimists, Boy Scouts of America, the Trenton Hockey Association, Trenton High School Marching Band, the Downriver Community Band and Seaway Chorale & Orchestra. Mary supported the Flat Rock Historical Society by contributing photos and some of the items from her father's dental office.

Vintage Baseball Schedule 2023

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MAY 6TH.....	FLAT ROCK INVITATIONAL
MAY 21ST.....	@CANTON
JUNE 11TH.....	HOME
JUNE 18TH.....	@GREENFIELD VILLAGE
JUNE 24TH.....	HOME
JULY 2ND.....	@GREENFIELD VILLAGE
JULY 8- 9TH.....	@AKRON CUP
JULY 15-16TH.....	@GETTYSBURG
JULY 30TH.....	@GREENFIELD VILLAGE
AUGUST 6TH.....	HOME
AUGUST 12-13TH.....	@GREENFIELD VILLAGE - WC
SEPTEMBER 23RD.....	@STATE CUP

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Flat Rock Historical Society Membership Application

Today's Date _____

☐ New Member ☐ Renewal Membership No. _____

Name

Street Address

City

State

ZIP

@

Email 1 Address

@

Email 2 Address

☐ Landline

☐ Cell

☐ Texting

(_____) _____

Telephone #

Please tell us a little about your connection
to Flat Rock or interests on the line above.

CHOOSE ONE:

☐ \$10 Individual Annual Dues (July-June)

☐ \$15 Family Annual Dues (July-June)

☐ \$5 Student Membership

☐ \$100 Life Membership (per person)

Make checks payable to: "FRHS"
Mail application & check/money order to:

Flat Rock Historical Society
PO Box 337
Flat Rock, MI 48134

For Office Use Only:

☐ Scan

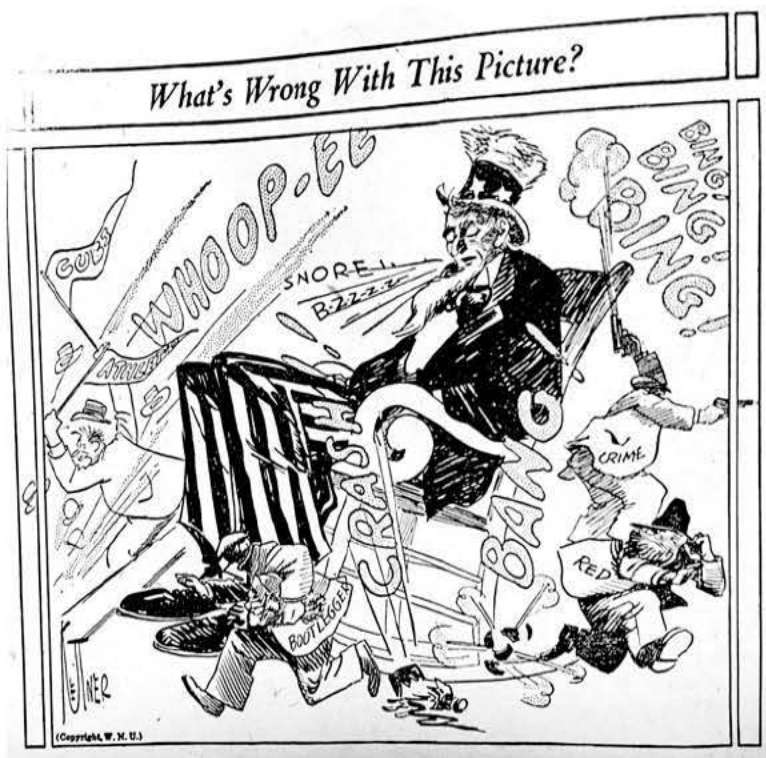
☐ PastPerfect

☐ MailChimp



Postage
Here

The Last Laugh: Vintage Cartoons from the Hometown Paper



"What's Wrong With This Picture?" *The Huron Valley Sentinel* (Flat Rock), 11 Oct 1929, p. 1.

MUSEUM UPDATES

Our Museum Office is located on the lower level of the Munger Store and (at least at this stage) is open by appointment. We have been given clearance by the city to allow for volunteers to work onsite and we have a number of major exhibit resets that we are working on.

Additionally, we are working on cataloguing items into our new web database system. This is potentially something that could be done from home if anyone has a computer and would like to volunteer their time. Please call the museum for a volunteer application and additional details.

PICTORIAL HISTORY OF FLAT ROCK

The Flat Rock book published by Arcadia Publishing is still available for \$22 from the Museum Gift Shoppe. Books are also available at the Blue Heron Trading Company in downtown Flat Rock or by calling the museum office 734.782.5220.

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP DUES

Annual membership dues are coming due for the 2023-2024 membership year. Our membership year mirrors our fiscal year July 1st - June 30th. Dues can be mailed, brought to the museum office, given to any board member. We are working to restore the online link for membership as well. Thanks to you all!!!

Flat Rock Historical Society

2023 Calendar

January 2023 [Seasonal Close]

- 9 – Historical Commission Meeting 7pm
- 10 – Board Meeting 7pm
- 19 – Event Committee 12pm
- 20 – Take Down Holiday Decorations 12pm
- 21 – DHO Meeting at Hotel 10am
- 27 – Brownstown Seniors Tour/Luncheon 11am
- 28 – Coming Home Dance Photos 3:30pm

February 2023

- 13 – Historical Commission Meeting 7pm
- 14 – Board Meeting 7pm
- 16 – Museum Open (Thursday Eve) 5-8pm
- 23 – Flat Rock Seniors Tour/Luncheon 10 am

March 2023

- 3 – Student Art Show 5-8pm
- 13 – Historical Commission Meeting 7pm
- 14 – Board Meeting 7pm
- 16 – Museum Open (Thursday Eve) 5-8pm
- 18 – Kalamazoo Living History Show
- 24 & 25 – Michigan History Conference (Novi)
- 31 – Newsletter Published (before Flea Market)

April 2023

- 10 – Historical Commission Meeting 7pm
- 11 – Board Meeting 7pm
- 20 – Membership Meeting 5:30pm
- 20 – “Historic Architecture at the Commandants Quarters” Presentation by Tyler Moll 7pm
- 30 – Exacter Historical Society Tour 1pm

May 2023

- 3 – Reading Building Townhall - Elks 6pm
- 6 – Baked Good Drop Off at Hotel 1 - 4pm
- 7 – Spring Flea Market
- 8 – Historical Commission Meeting 7pm
- 8 - Reading Building Decision @ School Board 6pm
- 9 – Board Meeting 7pm
- 12 – Prom Photos 3:30pm
- 18 – Museum Open (Thursday Eve) 5-8pm

June 2023

- 9 – Huron Twp. Seniors Tour/Luncheon 11am
- 12 – Historical Commission Meeting 7pm
- 13 – Board Meeting 7pm
- 15 – Newsletter Published (before Membership)
- 15 – Membership Picnic 5-8pm
- 15 – Board Election 6pm
- 25 – Museum Open (Sunday Afternoon) 12 pm

July 2023

- 10 – Historical Commission Meeting 7pm
- 11 – Board Meeting 7pm
- 16 – Soroptimist Baby Shower
- 20 – Ice Cream Social &
Museum Open (Thursday Eve) 5-8pm

August 2023

- 14 – Historical Commission Meeting 7pm
- 15 – Board Meeting 7pm
- 17 – Museum Open (Thursday Eve) 5-8pm
- 31 – Newsletter Published (before cemetery & flea)

September 2023

- 9&10 – Rummage Sale 9-4pm
- 11 – Historical Commission Meeting 7pm
- 12 – Board Meeting 7pm
- 21 – Membership Fall Potluck 5:00pm
- 21 – Membership Meeting 5:30pm
- 21 – “TBD” Presentation 7pm

October 2023

- 1 – Fall Flea Market
- ? – Homecoming Photos (Museum) 3:30pm
- 7 – 7th Annual Cemetery TOUR
- 9 – Historical Commission Meeting 7pm
- 10 – Board Meeting 7pm
- 12 – CSO Host?
- 19 – Halloween Open House (Thurs. Eve) 5-8pm
- 21 – Ghost Hunt 7-midnight

November 2023

- 13 – Historical Commission Meeting 7pm
- 14 – Board Meeting 7pm
- 16 – Museum Open (Thursday Eve) 5-8pm
- 20 – Holiday Decorating 12pm (Outside)
- 27 – Holiday Decorating 12pm (Indoor)
- 30 – Newsletter Published (before holiday)

December 2023

- 1 – City Winterfest Museum Open 5-8pm
- 11 – Historical Commission Meeting 7pm
- 14 – Membership Holiday Party 5-8pm