

President's Notes: May -June 2021

Spring is here and is absolutely beautiful and welcome! As we pass from winter to spring and an improved COVID the Niles Historical Society is ready to resume activities.

Writers encouraged:

This issue of the Niles Register includes articles contributed by our members. *Lynda Ralston* was intrigued by the story of the Ahlstrom piano highlighted in the last issue and presented the research on the history of the piano.

Joan Matheny approached the Society to present a story of Ed Vargo's achievements. Joan, *Ed Vargo* and *Bill Browning* contributed the information for this article. *Dick Bullock* was also instrumental in this endeavor.

The Society will gladly publish stories of the accomplishments of current or former residents of Niles.

Update on the Ward-Thomas property:

Currently the Society is working to improve the condition of the Ward-Thomas property. The work crews of Niles City have removed several dead trees from the property. *Dave Martin*, our grounds keeper has been clearing away debris from fallen branches. Volunteers are needed to help weed and plant the flower beds.

The Westernfield Room, the old carriage house, which serves as a meeting space is currently closed due to an extensive mold issue. A bidding process with companies that perform mold remediation is ongoing. The plan is to improve the space with proper insulation, painting, flooring and temperature – humidity control.

Also discussed at the April 17 meeting was performing necessary repairs to the greenhouse. Caulking of the windows is a continuing issue. Companies that perform this service will be sought for bids on the project.

The barn roof is leaking. *Mayor Steven Mientkiewicz* is investigating ways to repair the roof. The Society thanks Mayor Mientkiewicz for his cooperation. By lease contract the Society is responsible for maintaining the inside of the structures and the flower beds. The City of Niles which owns the property is responsible for maintaining the physical structures, trees and grounds.

Advisory Committee sought:

It is necessary to form a committee to determine the direction to take with the monies in the New Building Fund account that was begun in 2011. The Society requires an improved space for education, research and storage of the collection. At this time there is not adequate space or temperature and humidity control to accept any more physical donations. There is a proposed rendition for a facility that would be expensive to build and maintain. The amount of money in this fund is not adequate to cover the expense of this lofty plan. The Board of the Society seeks input from members on how to best use the building fund monies to provide an improved space. I implore members to weigh in on this discussion. Attendance at meetings is approximately ten members who should not be making this enormous decision for an organization with over three hundred members. Please contact Anna Marie Beagle at 330-719-5716 or ambgeb@aol.com for further discussion.

Thank you, *Anna Marie Beagle*, President

A Little Piano History by *Lynda Ralston*

The early keyboard instruments included the spinet, and the harpsichord and the clavichord. In the spinet and harpsichord, the strings were plucked by quills, while the clavichord strings were struck by small metal blades called tangents. These early instruments played very softly; making them useful for small gatherings in private homes, but not for large concerts. In addition, they had limited dynamic; this meant the musician could not express emotion through the intensity of the music. When the musician wanted to express more emotion, the hammered dulcimer was used. In this instrument, the strings were directly struck by the musician using hand held, leather covered wood hammers. The desire for more dynamic range in a keyboard instrument led to the development of the piano.

In the early 1700's, an expert Harpsichord maker, *Bartolomeo Cristofori*, combined the keyboard mechanism of the harpsichord with the hammers of the dulcimer to make the first piano called the pianoforte. This initial design was improved and refined throughout the 18th century. *Johann Sebastian Bach* complained that the higher notes were too soft to allow a full dynamic range; this criticism was heeded. In addition, the forerunner of the modern sustain pedal was developed allowing the pianist to sustain the notes even after the keys are no longer pressed. This allowed them to sustain a chord while moving their hands to a different register for the next section of the composition. Viennese piano makers later added an additional string to each note, further improving the volume and dynamic range. This is the type of piano used by *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart* to compose his concertos and sonatas. These pianos had a softer, more ethereal tone than 21st century pianos or English pianos and had less sustaining power. These pianos did have a square shape as opposed to the rectangular shape of the example we have at the Ward-Thomas House. This is because early pianos had only five octaves of total range where today's pianos have seven (or more).

In the late 1700's and early 1800's pianos continued to evolve from the square grand piano to the modern grand piano in response to the desire of the composers and pianists for a more powerful, sustained sound. Many of the improvements were made possible by the industrial revolution which allowed for high-quality piano wire and the casting of iron frames that could sustain the tension of the strings. The use of a "choir" of three strings, rather than two for all but the lowest notes, enhanced the richness and complexity of the treble. By the middle 1800's, the grand piano design had evolved to a point where is sounded very similar to the modern pianos of today.

Square grand pianos do sound different than modern pianos. When musicians such as Mozart, Chopin, and Beethoven were composing, they wrote for the earlier piano fortes with delicate, beautiful tones. The square grand piano continued to have this delicate tonal quality. There is some evidence that many 19th century Americans did not like volume and power of the "modern" sound, describing it as harsh and overbearing. As a result, the softer toned square grand piano continued to be the most popular piano built and sold through most of the 19th century.

Sadly, they are mostly forgotten today. The square grand pianos are large and heavy (the one at the Niles Historical Society weighs 880 pounds!); they are most suited for homes with large rooms. They could not be used in fifth floor apartments in New York or Chicago. Therefore, by about 1880 to 1890 the smaller upright piano took over in popularity causing the square grand piano to become essentially obsolete by 1900. Continued page 4.





Ward-Thomas Museum
Home of
The Niles Historical Society
503 Brown Street
Niles, OH 44446

Non-profit Organization
US Postage Paid
Niles, OH
Permit #337

Preserving and promoting Niles' History for future generations

Visit our Website: www.nileshistoricalsociety.org
Check out the Photographs and Stories links.

Monthly Calendar

Museum 'Open House'
The first Sunday of each month, 2-5
Last tour begins at 4 pm

Membership Meetings

10:00 am First Saturday of each month

Call for private tours to be scheduled

330.544.2143

Officers

Anna Maria Beagle.....President
Dave Martin.....Vice-President
Lynda Ralston.....Treasurer
Coleen Tominey.....Secretary
Ruth Van Huffel.....Corr. Secretary

Audrey John.....Curator

Ralph Tolbert.....Newsletter and Website

Trustees:

Anne Townley, Nancy Malone, and Sandy Bilovesky



For the past 100 years, square grands have been chopped up for firewood or otherwise destroyed and lost forever. We are truly fortunate that *George and Hannah Taylor* and later *Curtis and Diana Behner* preserved their Ahlstrom # 2322 piano and donated it to the Ward-Thomas museum.

The Ahlstrom Piano Company was established in 1875; they went out of business in 1926. Mr. *C.A. Ahlstrom* was a noted piano expert of the era whose ideas aided in the development of the Piano Industry. The Ahlstrom "ARTONE" piano was marked by several improvements still used today by virtually every piano maker in the world. The Ahlstrom company was known for building high quality, durable pianos. They stopped making the square grand pianos in 1895 dating our piano to the period between 1875 and 1895. Our square grand piano is a beautiful example of their art; come see it at the Ward-Thomas House.

Calendar of Events

Story Walk in Stevens Park:

The theme of the Story Walk in the month of May is "Niles History".

Audra Dull at the M^cKinley Memorial Library directs this project for which the Niles Historical Society's *Sandy Bilovesky* provided pictures and dialogue of early Niles. Take time to visit the park and enjoy a little bit of history.

Victorian Tea:

Sunday, May 16, 2021, 3:00 PM at the M^cKinley Memorial Museum. High Tea catered by *Quintealia's Tea Parlor*.
Call for reservations: *Ami* at 330-652-4273

Meeting and Open House:

Business Meeting: Saturday, June 5, 2021 at 10:00 AM in the library of the Ward-Thomas House.

Open House: Sunday, June 6, 2021, 2:00 PM – 5:00 PM.

Last tour starts at 4:00 PM. Protective Masks required.

Podcast: Streets Named for World War Heroes

Ralph Tolbert will present the story of how the Niles veterans who gave the greatest sacrifice to their country were honored with streets being named after them. This virtual presentation will be done in conjunction with the M^cKinley Memorial Library on May 18, 2021 at 6:00 PM.

Please contact *Audra Dull*: 330.652.1704 for more information.

The story of Ed Vargo

Ed Vargo did not realize he was 'famous' until he saw it on the internet. A search on the computer revealed two patents for irrigation equipment issued in 1989 to Edward E. Vargo as the inventor. It was surprising to see this being shown nationally and as news from so long ago. Sometimes it takes longer!

When the Reunion Committee of the Niles McKinley Class of 1951 heard of this, they felt strongly that he should be recognized by his home town with an article in The Niles Historical Society Newsletter since there was no longer a Niles newspaper. Thus, the story of Ed Vargo, Inventor unfolds.

Ed was born in Niles, Ohio and lived on Smith Street. His parents were *Steven* and *Flora Vargo*. Ed was the third child, born in a family of 6 – one brother and 4 sisters in a mostly quiet family. Ed recalls that he and his brother would go hiking looking for Indian arrowheads and fossils and his first 'job' was carrying groceries for a neighbor lady for 25 cents a week.

Ed was a quiet, unassuming student at Niles McKinley High School. He did the usual things, played on the football team and ran track. He was not a legacy in either sport. Following graduation, he joined the Navy, got into naval aviation and his good grades allowed him to get into electronics. Ed was assigned to the U.S.S. Intrepid aircraft carrier which is now a museum in New York City. Upon discharge from the Navy, Ed attended Youngstown University but dropped out as one advisor told him that "he hated Korean veterans".

He took a job as a draftsman for an electrical motor company in Akron, Ohio. Subsequently, he took job as draftsman for a gear and engineering firm in Downers Grove, Illinois. This is where he met *Lois*, my "to be" wife.

They moved to Gering, Nebraska in 1970 where he was project engineer for the company there. Then to Ulysses, Kansas, then to Enid, Oklahoma where the invented equipment was made. Now retired, they have lived in Tulsa, Oklahoma for the past 41 years.

His contribution evolved from another of Ed's traits, he was a "Thinker". And this trait later led to his legacy today, although he had no intention of becoming an Inventor. Ed holds two patents from his inventions which actually improved working the farmland irrigation systems more effectively.



Ed Vargo, '51

In the southern mid-west, center pivot irrigation is an important factor in the necessity of supplying adequate moisture for successful farming. Ed was assigned by his employer to analyze and investigate any possible improvements to improve the center pivot irrigation procedure. Using one center pivot irrigation system can encompass 160 acres of farmland. Thereby, Ed and his wife Lois teamed up to assemble a section of center pivot irrigation. Lois assisted in the assembly by holding parts in place while Ed constructed the equipment. This is before the invention of the quick disconnect coupling.

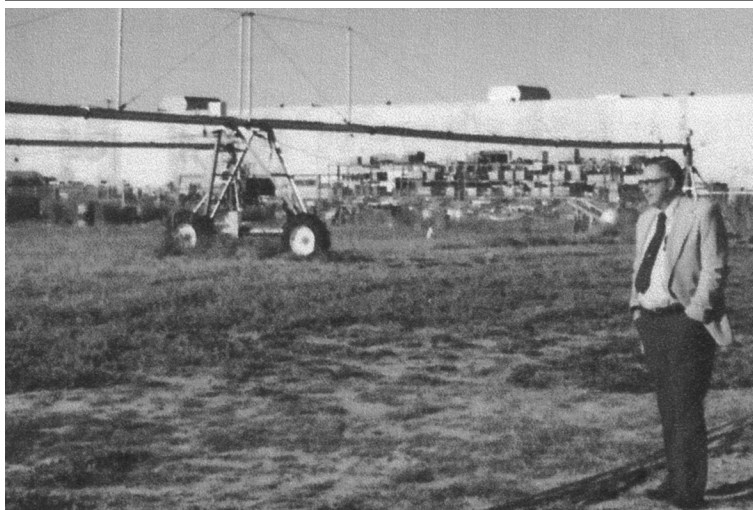


Ed holding one of his plastic-encased snake heads.

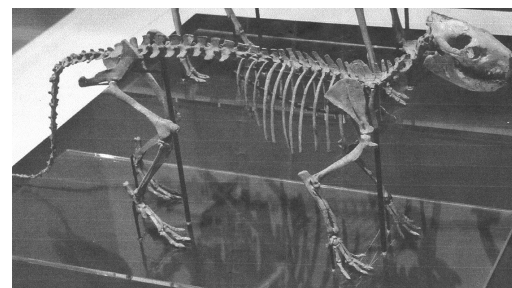
Ed commented that, "I have always had an interest in hunting for artifacts and living in Nebraska was a great location for doing this. I have in a display case skulls and skeleton parts, teeth, large turtle shell(3 foot), that I have discovered. A particular fossil, found in old Indian campsite in Wyoming, is called the *Oredone* which is a sheep sized animal 78 million years old. I also have displays filled with numerous arrow heads, scrapers, and knives.

Snake hunts are a big recreation in the mid-west where we lived and I had the idea that casting rattle snake heads in plastic blocks as a novelty collection item that would be of unique interest to the average person and set up a business for doing this. The snakeheads were purchased from the local hunters since I have never killed a rattle snake". Information Joan Matheny, Ed Vargo and Bill Browning.

Travel, discovery, patents...Ed's life has been anything but quiet and reserved. The Class of '51 congratulates him on all his successes.



Ed seen with irrigation equipment using his patented quick disconnect coupling.



Museum display of Oredone fossil.

Ed discovered a skull and many skeletal parts similar to display.

Have a story about your family or friends that you would like to have appear in this newsletter? Contact: ralph.tolbert@me.com or 330.651.2482



Morabito residence and supermarket on Robbins Avenue. There was an underground passage between these two buildings.

Robbins Super Market Sets Grand Opening

Daily Time Thursday 10.20.1949

Niles shoppers will have a new happy hunting ground tomorrow when *John* and *Sam Morabito* swing wide the doors of their enlarged and remodeled Robbins Avenue food market for its grand opening as the Robbins Super Market.

The store, which bears little remembrance to the place of business the Morabito's customers knew before the brothers began remodeling last May, is one of the largest, most modern and attractive grocery stores in town.

In addition to a complete line of Golden Dawn food merchandise and a fully stocked meat department operated by *Bud Williams*, the new store will feature a large counter of notions, quick-gifts, art accessories, patent medicines and light hardware for the kitchen.

Hours of the store are 8am to 8pm daily except for Sunday and holidays when the hours are 8am to noon. From 4-8pm Friday, each customer will be given a souvenir of the grand opening day.

The Morabito brothers bought the store from their sister, *Mary Razzano*, at the time of her marriage two years ago. The remodeled business utilizes space in the building previously occupied by the Fowler Drug Store. The building has been lengthened 40 feet to give a one room store space of 40 by 100 feet.

No less than 640 feet of fluorescent tube in four triple-tube tiers, the length of the building, to illuminate the store. The entire of the backend of the store is covered by a mirror 40 feet by 5 feet which makes the big room seem even bigger. A special pride of the proprietors is their imported Italian food department, supplemented by the largest macaroni display in

Trumbull County. A 30-foot refrigerator rack will keep vegetables fresh, while Bud Williams' meats will be glorified in 40 feet of new cases.

Personnel of the store, in addition to the three entrepreneurs, include Angie and Margie Morabito, *Mrs. Albert Dunlap*, *Sarah Mollica*, *Betty Ault*, and *Danny Engler*. The Morabitos give much of the credit for the attractive arrangement of the store to their brother, *Buster Morabito* proprietor of Adrian Beauty Salon in Youngstown, who engineered the floor plan.

Sam Morabito, who with his brother John is the proud owner of the new Robbins Avenue Market, was a barber until 1941, having operated a shave-and-a-haircut business of his own on Church Street. He was born and raised in Niles and attended school here. In 1941, he gave up his barbershop, scissors and clippers forever to join his sister, Mary, in her grocery business which he and his brother subsequently bought from her.

Sam likes merchandising better than barbering, he says, "it's longer hours in this business."

John Morabito, co-proprietor of the enlarged and remodeled Robbins Super Market, got his first training in business as a street huckster of fruit. Born in Niles and a former student of Niles schools, he was associated with his father's fruit business until the beginning of WWII.

During the war, he served for four and a half years in the field artillery with the Eighth Division, spending much of the time overseas in the European theater. His brother 'Buster' was in the same outfit. After his discharge, John went to work for his sister, Mary, at the Robbins Market and with his brother bought the store from her two years ago.

Bud Williams is the boss man and master mind of the meat counter at the new Robbins Super Market. Like the Morabito brothers, in whose store he operates his independent meat business, he is a native of Niles and has had a long experience at his craft.

He became interested in meat cutting while still a schoolboy, and subsequently worked at various stores in Niles, Youngstown and Cleveland. He opened his first butcher shop of his own on Robbins Avenue in 1929 and has been operating in the Robbins Market since 1938.



Store closing—2004

Sisters *Margaret*, left, and *Angeline Morabito* are shown in their almost-empty store which will be closing in a few weeks.

When Sam Morabito died in 1989 and John in 1991, the two sisters were left to run the store. "It's just too hard now with just the two of us," Marge said. "it came to a point that if one of us ever gets sick what are we going to do? We have to give it up."

Although the store will stay open for several more weeks to sell out the remaining stock, both Marge and Angie say they now have accepted the closing and have made their plans.

"I'll miss it," Angie said, "It's always been a part of our lives. But, I'll stay busy. I want to make crafts and travel a little."

Marge said, "her dream is to play the piano again. I took piano lessons for three years in junior high school. But I couldn't practice because I was always told—'Go to the store and help your sister.' Now I'm going to buy a piano and play again, you know, for my own enjoyment." Page 2



History of the building at 533 Robbins

April 1926—Park's Pharmacy was purchased from *H.T. Calvin* by brothers *Frank* and *Robert Fowler* who brought in *Paul Elder* one year later. This pharmacy was located at 533 Robbins Avenue.

The former Park's Pharmacy building at 533 Robbins would become in succession The Robbins Avenue Meat Market, Robbins Avenue Super Market—Morabito's Market in 1949, then Ward's Costume Shop.

The top brick front fell apart during a windstorm, March 2019, and revealed the old Fowler Drugs sign on the wood beneath the bricks.