

President's Notes:

Fall is upon us. Leaves are falling everywhere. It's November!

Our plans focus on the Christmas season. The Niles Historical Society will participate in "The Festival of Trees" at the McKinley Memorial Museum Auditorium through the month of December.

The theme of the Society tree decorations is "Niles Stars". Star shaped ornaments will tell the story of famous people of Niles, past to present, who influenced Niles history or achieved acclaim in various professions.

The Niles Historical Society, McKinley Memorial Library and McKinley Memorial Museum and Birthplace are preparing treats for children. Grab bags will be available at all three locations December 4 to 11, 2021.

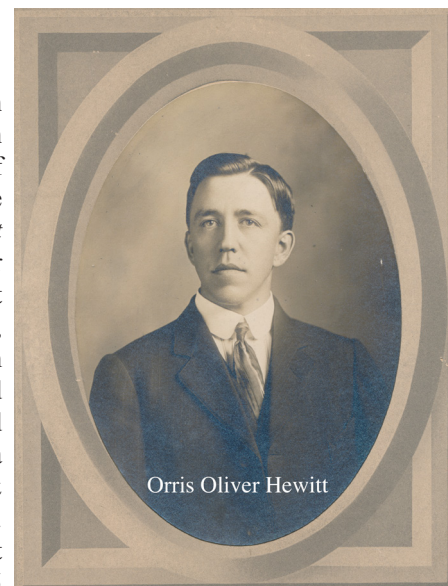
The Ward – Thomas House Museum and Westenfield Room will be decorated for Christmas Open House on December 5th from 2:00 – 5:00 PM. Cookies and hot chocolate will be served in the Westenfield Room. Visiting children can participate in games and crafts. Grab bags will be given to children visiting that day. New displays will also be ready for viewing in the Westenfield Room. Come join us!

When thinking of gift giving this Christmas don't forget that the Society has several books on Niles' history for sale. Books can be viewed on the historical society website (nileshistoricalsociety.org). Or...consider purchasing a membership for that special person to the Niles Historical Society, a gift that will keep on giving all year long through the newsletter. Please contact *Sandy Bilovesky* at:

(330) 652-8329 if you would like to make a purchase

Director of Niles Public Safety

Orris Oliver Hewitt, born January 16, 1879 in Newton Township, was the son of Levi and Anne Kistler. He married *Blanche M. Everitt* on September 28, 1904. For a time, Hewitt worked at a plant in Mineral Ridge, where he had moved from Newton Township. He and his wife eventually moved to Niles after he found a job with the Niles Forge & Manufacturing Company. He and his family lived at 913 South and later at 135 Hartzell Avenue.



Orris Oliver Hewitt

Hired first as a bookkeeper, he was elected a member of the Board of Directors and secretary of the company in 1905. The other members of the Board were: *Frank C. Robbins*, President; *George B. Robbins*; *William Herbert*, vice-president; *H.J. Robbins*, general manager and treasurer.

Active in civic affairs, Hewitt was selected by the Democrat party in 1909 as their mayoral candidate. His Republican counterpart, *Charles Naylor*, however won the mayoral election. He was treasurer for the city of Niles for one term in 1918 and served two terms as safety director under *Mayor Harvey C. Kistler*. He also served in the county treasurer's office under *William O. Williams* for eight years. (Read about the Mayors of Niles: nileshistoricalsociety.org/mayors.htm)



Blanche M. Everitt

An active member of the First Presbyterian church, he served as an elder and trustee for 40 years, was formerly superintendent of the Sunday school and was elected ruling elder for life.

Mr. Hewitt was a member of Mahoning Lodge, F &AM., No. 394 and attended Lordstown schools and Warren Business College, he taught school at Lordstown for 10 years. He had been employed at the Niles Forge Company for 25 years.

O O as he was called, passed July 19, 1955.



Looking through the front entrance gates toward the Ward–Thomas Museum, home of the Niles Historical Society.

Photograph by *Tim Tabor*, 2012.

DEMOCRATIC TICKET	REPUBLICAN TICKET	SOCIALIST TICKET
For Mayor, O. O. HEWITT	For Mayor, JOHN S. NAYLOR	For Mayor, GEORGE KUNKLE
For President of Council, S. O. MANCROFT	For President of Council, CHARLES A. THOMPSON	For President of Council, GEORGE GILBERT
For Auditor, HOMER THOMAS	For Auditor, M. J. FLAHERTY	For Auditor, PATRICK QUINN
For Treasurer, JOSEPH SMITH	For Treasurer, WILLIAM BRIDGER	For Treasurer, AUGUST LISTMAN
For Solicitor, JOSEPH E. JONES	For Solicitor, DAVIS HAND	For Solicitor, ALBERT TURLBY
For Constable-at-Large, J. P. STEWART	For Constable-at-Large, DANIEL LEWIS	For Constable-at-Large, JOHN DAVIS
For Member of Council, JAMES QUINN	For Member of Council, CHARLES WALTERS	

1909 city voting ballot for the Democrat, Republican and Socialist candidates and their respective offices. A male voter could cast a ballot for individuals or a straight party ticket.

A VOTE FOR



HEWITT
IS A VOTE FOR A
CLEAN PROGRESSIVE
Business Administration

Advertisement for Hewitt campaign for City Treasurer.



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

Events Calendar:

Festival of Trees:

M^eKinley Memorial Museum Auditorium till end of December.

Christmas Open House:

December 5, 2021 2:00 - 5:00 PM, Ward – Thomas House and
Westenfield Room



The Merlo family recently invited the Niles Historical Society to visit Joe 'The Barber' Merlo's shop. The family offered to the society photos and memorabilia Joe had so lovingly collected about Niles.

The arrow in the photo identifies a young Joe attending a dance at the Stevens Youth Cabin in 1957 or 1958. An early indicator of Joe's love of music and his Niles' friends. Joe's story will appear in a future newsletter along with a few of his photos from the 'Wall'.

Joe was always proud of his Italian heritage and his friends from the East End of Niles. Anyone that had his hair cut by Joe (a long process involving many stories) would testify to Joe's memory of people, places and dates resembling an encyclopedia of: who, what, where, and when.

A photo that was on Joe's barbershop wall.

From 1944 in the front row: *Tom Cera, Rich Marino, Joe Perrone*.
Back row: *Jim DePasquale, Ralph Naples, Buzz Naples*.



Local Artist Draws Historic Area Buildings

David Birkovich says he is not interesting. However, he has a very interesting hobby. Seeing historical buildings disappearing, he began preserving them in his artwork.

A graduate of Niles McKinley High School, Class of 1964, David had the opportunity to study art with *Mario Bartolini*. He attributes his pursuit of drawing to his Latin I teacher, *Mrs. Lucille Ponte*, at Edison Junior High School. Mrs. Ponte saw in David's doodles a talent to be encouraged.



David's drawing (top) of North Main Street looking toward the intersection of Park Avenue and west side of South Main. The Swaney Building (1904), the IOOF Building (1905) housed Backenstos Jewelry, Wells Fargo and Singer Sewing Machine Co. The large building in foreground was occupied by Niles Plumbing & Heating and the Niles Electric Co. This building was torn down when the McKinley Memorial was erected in 1917.

David studied architecture at Kent State University and then worked for *Bill Copich* in Girard, Ohio. He then traveled around and stopped in Silicon Valley, spending 23 years as an architect for the big electronics people there in research and development. Retiring in 1995 David returned home to McKinley Heights to property that has been in his family for over 100 years.

Through the years David enrolled in many art classes to please himself. Seeing buildings of historical importance disappearing, he began to capture them on paper. In David's drawings an architect's skill can be observed along with a talent for watercolors, colored pencil and ink on watercolor paper. Many of David's drawings are taken from old photographs that he so skillfully brings to life. David generously shares his drawings, donating copies to be exhibited.



David's drawing (top) of the City National Bank Building which had been built in 1893 on part of the site of the original McKinley home was bought in 1905 by the Dollar Bank. The Dollar Bank remained at this location until 1918 when it moved to the southeast corner of Main and Park Avenue.

Creating a drawing of the original McKinley Homestead, David wanted to place a Packard car in the scene. This led him to the Packard home and then the Packard Museum. (A rendition of this scene can be viewed in the dining room of Scenna's Restaurant in McKinley Heights along with several other of his drawings.) This led him to begin a project of drawing the Trumbull County Court House (old and new) and the historic buildings of the 1900 era in downtown Warren. These drawings became a part of the Trumbull Memory Project of the Warren Trumbull County Public Library David pays tribute to *Elizabeth Glasgow*, head of the Warren Trumbull County Public Library History and Genealogy Department, for information on Court House Square.

After completing the Warren project, David began drawing Niles' historical buildings. His Niles collection includes drawings of old Niles downtown buildings that he found on the Niles Historical Society website. The buildings are precisely drawn and beautifully colorized.

McKinley Heights is a particular interest of his. He has captured many of the businesses and extra ordinary sites of his favorite area along Route 422 and Tibbetts Wick. He is interested in finding pictures of Kiman's Grocery, Jordan's Bar, Crane's Store and pictures of the McKinley Heights Homecoming of the 1960s. His renditions of Bianco's Service Station, Rudy's and Handy Andy's can be seen around town.

David's current project is West Liberty Street in Girard, Ohio.

A display of David's drawings of Old Niles will be displayed in the Westenfield Room beginning in December. Hopefully we can entice this quiet man to do a presentation for the public. To be determined! (Interview of David Birkovich by *Anna Beagle* 9/28/2021)

Waging War on the Niles Underworld

As with the mayor before him, *Charles Crow*, bootlegging and the rackets became one of the primary concerns of the newly elected (1924) Niles Mayor, *Harvey Kistler*. He had selected the right man to help him in his endeavor against crime. That person was his cousin, Director of Public Safety *O.O. Hewitt*, a no-nonsense individual who proved to be a courageous public servant against the racketeers. Hewitt was of average build, but his square jaw gave him the physical appearance of being a determined and decisive individual. The soft-spoken Safety Director, who was in his forties when he served in Kistler's administration, had been a farmer and teacher in Newton Township during his younger years.

As Safety Director, Hewitt not only focused his attention on crime in the streets, but ineptitude and corruption within the police department as well. On two occasions soon after taking office, the Kistler Administration proved that it meant business. In late March, 1924, Officer *William H. Mullens* was suspended from the force for sleeping at his post. He was also charged with conduct unbecoming an officer and intoxication while on duty. Two months later, Officer *Joseph Mears* was fired by Police Chief *Leonard Round* for allegedly reporting to duty in an intoxicated state.



Photograph of the Niles Police Dept.- about 1915. Seated left to right - Officer *Williams*, Officer *Link Rounds*, Mayor *F.E. Bryan* (1914-1916), unknown, Officer *Fitzpatrick*. Standing left to right: Officer *Richard Neiss*, Officer *Charles Mullens*, unknown, Officer *Lally*. Officer *Charles Berline*, unknown, unknown and Officer *Charles Nicholas*.

While Mears never appealed the Chief's decision, Mullens retained lawyers *P.N. Fusco* and *R.H. Patchin*. The hearing was held March 27, 1924 and the Civil Service Commission sided with Mullens. Eighteen months later, Mullens lost his job when he again was found to be intoxicated while on the job and this time the Kistler administration documented their evidence and brought in witnesses.

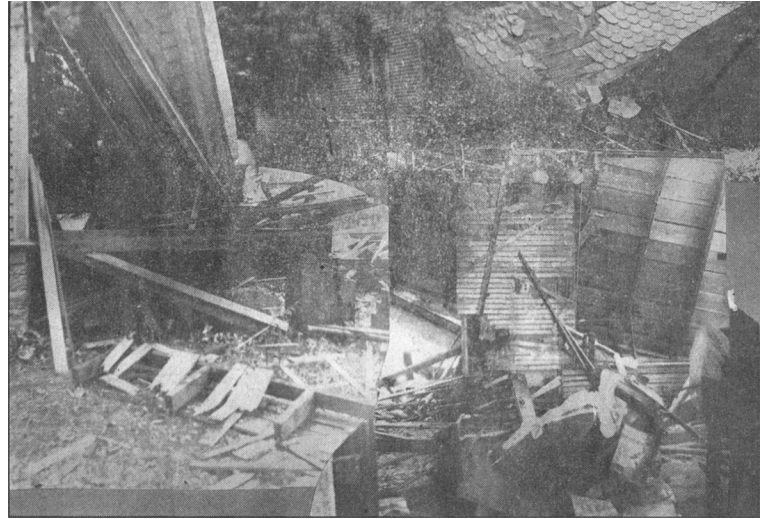
The vice raids against gambling and bootlegging produced a steady source of income for the Mayor's Court; in July 1925 nearly \$4,000 in fines and license fees was brought into the city treasury. By 1928, enough money had been accumulated to build the new City Building on West State Street which is the current (2021) location of the Niles City Building.



Hewitt, Kistler and Service Director *J.H. Morall* strengthened their resolve to combat vice operations in the city. For their efforts in trying to control these illegal and immoral activities, however, these crime fighters paid a heavy price. In March 1924, Chief Round's home was bombed as a warning to back off the raids.

Hewitt often conducted liquor and gambling raids, not revealing his plans until the police officers who accompanied him were enroute to their objective. On many of these raids, Hewitt wielded an axe, which he used with devastating effect on the speakeasy doors.

On August 18, 1926, Hewitt and his family nearly paid with their lives when a blast reverberated through the night and left their home in shambles. The Safety Director, his wife and two children, *Lee* and *Ruth*, were asleep when the explosion occurred. Because the bomb had been placed next to a brick pier which supported the porch, the force of the blast was deflected outward, away from the home. Thus no one was seriously injured. The safety director's unprecedented policy of personally leading raids against city vice operations may have been the reason for the destruction of his home. Other bomb investigators believed the bombing had stemmed directly from a large raid Hewitt had recently launched against a local underworld figure in which an entire truckload of beer had been confiscated and five men arrested. Whatever line of thought existed, authorities interpreted the bombing of Hewitt's house as a warning that the vice raids must stop.



Photograph of bombed Hewitt residence at 913 South Street

After the bombing, the administration virtually declared war on the underworld; they formulated a joint strategy for an all-out assault on the criminal element in Niles enlisting Federal Prohibition agents, Immigration Inspectors and any state agents needed to close down vice operations and deport habitual offenders who did not have U.S. citizenship.

Although the Hewitts had escaped serious injury, Hewitt's wife had been so terrified by the bombing that she found it uncomfortable to stay in the house at night and became increasingly opposed to her husband's continued participation in the Kistler Administration. Eventually the Hewitt family moved out of the neighborhood and the courageous safety director was later destined to resign from city politics before the expiration of his cousin's term in office.

Those responsible for the bombing of the Hewitt home soon realized that their warning for the service director to stop further raids had backfired. Several residents held a town meeting to demand a clean-up of the city's criminal element and set a reward fund for the arrest and prosecution of the bombers and the Niles City Council hired a secret undercover agent whose duty was to gather evidence against major underworld elements. (To be continued in Jan-Feb newsletter)

Excerpts of *Steve Papalas* Oral History Project; Harvey Kistler
http://www.maag.ysu.edu/oralhistory/oral_hist.html