

President's Message

Happy New Year to all! May 2022 bring peace and good health.

In December the Ward Thomas House and Westenfield Room were festively decorated for Christmas. The Society also participated in the Festival of Trees at the McKinley Memorial. The theme of our tree was famous Niles' residents. *Sandy Bilovesky* made ornaments for the tree with the portraits of Niles notables. Each ornament was numbered. A handout was provided to match the number of the ornament to the name of the Nilesite and what his or her historical significance is.

Currently on display in the Westenfield Room is the artwork of *David Birkovich* depicting the buildings of downtown Niles, circa 1900 as explained in the November–December 2021 newsletter. David sent us an e-mail exclaiming that we have made him famous. David has received much acclaim for his wonderful project.

The Niles Historical Society received an "Entry of Recognition" from the Trumbull County Court of Common Pleas Probate Division, *Honorable James A Fredericka*, dated November 19, 2021. The "Entry of Recognition" commemorates the efforts of the Society "for preserving and promoting Niles' History for future generations in an informative and entertaining way with the museum, newsletter and website." This document will be on display in the Westenfield Room. We heartfully thank Judge Fredericka for this recognition.

The Society is currently participating in a project sponsored by the Trumbull County Historical Society. Articles on Trumbull County history are presented weekly in the *Tribune Chronicle*. The Niles Historical Society provided an article about the Harris Printing Press, the first continuous feed printing press, developed by the *Harris brothers* of Niles, Ohio in 1896. This article was published in the January 3, 2021 issue. Another article concerning Niles' history will be presented in April.

With the renovation of the Westenfield Room the Society will be formulating a speaker program to be presented there.

The Society is currently in talks with area growers to have plant sales on the grounds of the Ward–Thomas property in the spring. The plan will center around the use of the greenhouse. If there is any group (school, master gardeners, extensions) that would be interested in using the greenhouse please contact the Society. **Membership recruitment and renewal letters will be mailed soon.** The Society relies on membership dues and donations to cover its expenses. Please be generous; also help us recruit new members. — Anna Marie Beagle

Calendar of Events:

Business meeting:

Saturday, February 5, 2022 at 10:00 AM in the Westenfield Room

2021 Christmas Open House at the Ward–Thomas Museum



Issac White gleefully checks out the Christmas tree decorations.



Dave Martin and *Dave Birkovich* admiring the Niles City scenes on display drawn by *Dave Birkovich*.



Christmas decorations on the cabinets in the Westenfield Room.

Membership letters and cards will soon be in the mail. Please ask a friend or family member to join our Niles Historical Society.



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

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The pavilion was located in Central Park on the grounds where the first brick school house, Central School, was opened in 1871. Central Park had a 50-foot wading pool adorned by the 'Spirit of Education' fountain; both were gifts from *Margaretta Clingan* and *Mary Ann Waddell*. *Frank Carl Robbins*, the first graduate (Class of 1871) of Central School spoke at the dedication of Central Park (1928).



Mrs. T.O. Clingan nee
Margaretta Thomas.



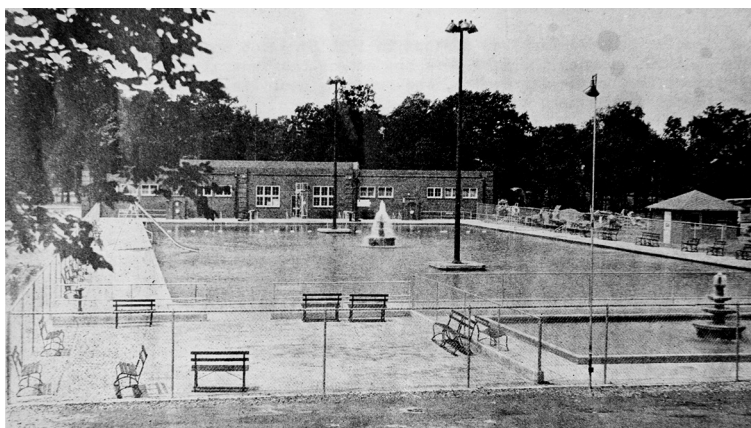
Mary Ann Waddell



View of Waddell Park before the pool was built. Note the ice skating rink on what is now five baseball fields.

Warren Avenue passes between the park and the industrial complex in the foreground and the Girl Scout office in the lower right.

The land for Waddell Park was donated in 1931 by *Jacob* and *Mary Ann Waddell*. During the make-work project of the federal government during the Depression, the swimming pool was constructed in the park by the WPA.



The original Niles Swimming Pool was also known as Waddell Pool, named after its benefactors.

THE INFLUENCE OF MAYOR KISTLER



Harvey Kistler was born in Lordstown in 1885 to a family with a long history of dedicated service to its country. The first Kistler in America, *John George Kistler*, of German and Swiss ancestry, arrived in the New World in 1737. He fought in the French and Indian War, and each of his five sons fought in the American Revolution. Harvey Kistler also had a grandfather six generations back who, as a delegate from Pennsylvania, voted in 1859 to seat Abraham Lincoln as the presidential candidate for the Republican Party.

At the turn of the century, Harvey Kistler and his wife moved to Niles, where they lived at 596 West Park Avenue. By the time he had reached his late thirties, Kistler had gained the respect of many community leaders. As a result, he became a candidate for Mayor of Niles and defeated Charles Crow in November of 1923 by 450 votes. Aside from the Ku Klux Klan riot, Kistler served without blemish as Niles' chief executive for two terms.

Although Kistler left office with little fanfare, it must be stated that he had accomplished some outstanding feats before he stepped down as mayor: his administration had obtained the options for the land on which Meander Reservoir is located; Kistler had also helped to arrange for Niles to link up with Youngstown to form the present Mahoning Valley Sanitary District which manages Meander Reservoir; the present city building in which the mayor's office is located was constructed largely with funds obtained from the fines Kistler had imposed in his court; finally, part of the initial groundwork for construction of the viaduct (completed in 1933) which spans the Mahoning River on Main Street was laid during Kistler's years in office.

Upon leaving office, Kistler went back to his old night-position on the railroad as a telegrapher. He also purchased the Taylor Insurance Company and sold insurance during the day.

Kistler left the railroad and went into the construction business with *E.F. Cline* in 1932. During the Depression years, he and Cline built the old Lordstown High School and the building in which Reisman's Furniture Store was located on Main and State Streets.

After leaving politics, Kistler became even more active in civic affairs and remained so for the rest of his life. Before he died at the age of 64 in 1950, Kistler had served on a committee which had attempted to build a hospital in Niles. He had also been active in bringing the YMCA to Niles and he had played an active role in establishing the Chamber of Commerce in the city.

Kistler's controversial handling of the Ku Klux Klan situation in 1924 therefore, was far outweighed by his later performance as Mayor and by the outstanding contribution he had made of himself as a civic leader in Niles during the remaining years of his life.

In 1924 there were confrontations between the Italian/Irish community, organized as the Knights of the Flaming Circle, and the KKK.

Harvey Kistler believed that the KKK had the legal right to receive a permit to march in a Niles parade. The Irish-Italian community attacked the parade in May and June. A truce was brokered with concessions from both sides, however this truce was short-lived.

The 1924 Riot refers to the November 1, 1924 melee that took place throughout several key areas in Niles that day.

The largest confrontation occurred at the intersection of North Main Street and West Federal Avenue when the Italian-Irish group prevented the KKK from crossing the Erie Railroad tracks and marching into downtown Niles. A limited Civil Martial Law was put in place when the Ohio National Guard arrived and dispersed both sides. *Steve Papalas* excerpts Harvey Kistler Interview Chapter Four

CLASHES IN NILES

In communities with larger immigrant populations, like Niles, which had high numbers of people of Italian and Irish descent, there was resistance to the KKK. Differences between the two sets of immigrants were set aside in united opposition to the growing strength and open antagonism of the KKK.

There were a series of increasingly violent clashes in 1923 and early in 1924. While there were a number of attempts by the Klan to have rallies and marches go through the center of Niles, they failed each time.

Plans were made for a KKK parade November 1, 1924, that had about 25,000 people scheduled to attend. In the days leading to the event, opponents of the KKK and former Trumbull County Sheriff *John "Brickey" Thomas* tried to convince Niles Mayor, Democrat *Harvey C. Kistler*, whom the KKK supported in his 1923 election victory, to rescind the permit for the parade to avoid a violent confrontation. (Ed. note: Sheriff John Thomas lost his reelection bid on the following Tuesday being strongly opposed by the KKK voters).

But Kistler, who expressed sympathy to the KKK's argument of free speech, refused. Yet the parade never happened.

Each time members of the KKK tried to make their way through the city, they were met by violent protests by members of the anti-KKK group, Knights of the Flaming Circle, and residents.

Some Klan members were described to have been turned away by a hail of machine gun fire. Others who arrived near the city's border were pulled from their cars, beaten and sent on their way.

The Ohio National Guard was eventually summoned to calm the situation. Afterward, the KKK's power diminished in Niles and in northeast Ohio as the Irish-Italian community began to elect officials friendlier to their cause. *Warren Tribune Chronicle: August 17, 1917*





Pictured above is the *Dr. Thomas Clingan* house built in 1905 close to the Mahoning River and was later inundated by the waters of the 1913 Flood. The next year, the family moved into their new residence known as the Clingan mansion at 547 South Main Street.

L-R *William Aubrey Thomas, Margaret Thomas Clingan* with *John Clingan, Margaret Clingan Wick, T.E. Thomas* or *Dr. Clingan* and *Elizabeth Clingan Hosack* in the photograph. William Aubrey and Thomas Evan are brothers of Margaret Thomas Clingan. T.E. Thomas was married to *Adaline Robbins* and lived in the corner house opposite 503 Brown Street. (Mary Ann Thomas Waddell's house).



Pictured above is the Clingan-Waddell mansion , 2021.

Margaretta Thomas Clingan (1869–1952) was the daughter of *John R. Thomas* (1834–1898), founder of the Niles Fire Brick Company, and *Margaret Morgan* (1834–1918) and sister to Congressman W. Aubrey Thomas. She married *Thomas Omar Clingan*, a medical doctor, in 1888. The family had four children: *Margaret Clingan, Elizabeth Clingan, John R. Thomas Clingan* and *Thomas O. Clingan*. Margaretta graduated from the Old Central High School on State Street, then led in the movement for the construction of M^cKinley High School (Edison Jr. High) built in 1914 on Church Street.

Known locally as a philanthropist, she helped in establishing Central Park, dedicated in 1928, on the site of the old Central School building, now the location of the Central Park Apartments. The Thomas Pavilion, used for concert band performances, was a gift from Margaretta and *Mary T. Waddell* with each personally donating the funds necessary.

Margaretta Clingan was the most energetic leader in promoting the building of the M^cKinley Memorial.

After her death in 1952, her children, *Mrs. John Hosack, T.O. Clingan* and her grandchildren, donated the family mansion, located on South Main Street, to provide a location in the city for the Niles YMCA.

A well-known downtown landmark built over 100 years ago with over 7,500 square feet of space on three floors plus a full basement, this former group home is filled with all the charm and character you'd expect from a building of this era. From the beautiful woodwork and ornate staircase to the marble fireplace mantles and original hardwood floors, elegance as you would expect from a century home.



Once a popular YMCA, the gymnasium, shower rooms, restrooms and indoor archery range are still intact. Ample living space here with 9 bedrooms, 5.5 baths, several gathering rooms, office, full kitchen, large third floor with additional rooms, full basement, fenced yard, three bay carriage house, parking lot, and six acres of property.



Pictured above is the formal dining room with marble fireplace mantel.

Heidi Jacobs and her daughter *Sylvia* were the present day owners of the Clingan-Waddell residence. *Helen Yakubek*, Sylvia's grandmother purchased the house from the YMCA in 1984.

Helen was the Activities Director at Woodside Hospital in Youngstown, Ohio and in the early 1980s was on the state board to look at group homes. She was instrumental in the licensing of group homes in Ohio. She was instrumental in the licensing of group homes in Ohio.

The residence became a group home for the mentally disadvantaged from 1984 through August of 2021 offering services to 147 residents during those years. In 1987 Heidi became the manager of the group home. Sylvia, an RN at Northside Hospital, also worked at the group home. Male and female residents occupied the first two floors of the building. The third floor had no fire escape and was not utilized.

The house and land were sold this December to the *Von Isley Estate LLC* for \$298,000.00. The new owners plan to renovate and restore the grandeur of the mansion to become an event center for weddings and other celebrations.

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