

President's Notes:

Dear Friends of the Niles Historical Society,

The officers and trustees hope your holidays were blessed and merry. Happy New Year! M^cKinley Christmas was a fun event. Participants enjoyed riding the trolley experiencing each site. The Ward-Thomas House and Westenfield Room were festively decorated by our docents.

As you may know the City of Niles experienced a great loss on December 29, 2022. Another historical site, the *Harry Stevens* home at 1210 Robbins Avenue, burnt to the ground.



The Harry Stevens Home, engulfed in flames, was totally destroyed.

To many of us this house was a reminder that people who were doers and innovators resided in the City of Niles. Whether walking past the house on the way to or from school or driving by on Robbins Avenue we were reminded that at one time in our history a great man lived there. It is truly sad. The house was sold a few months ago and the new owners were making headway with repairs to the house. The City has lost so many of the landmark homes—the Mason house, M^cKinley house, Robbins house—among others. The downtown area also lost so many buildings because of the urban renewal projects of the 1970's.

For several days reporters were all seeking the back story of the Stevens House. While talking with one news person telling the story of Harry Stevens and his benevolence to the City, I mentioned that the land for Stevens Park was donated by him. The reporter conveyed that she and her team were at the park and asked a walker about the park. This person had no idea how the park was named.

The City of Niles has a very rich history as you who receive this newsletter know. This is a sore reminder of the importance of historical societies whose goals are to keep the stories of our past alive.

Segue to today. It's membership renewal time. A mailing will arrive soon. Please renew your membership. Also, we are in desperate need of your help. We are in need of people who would like to lead the Society. We are in need of an attorney because ours is retiring. Writers of history, grant writers, docents, event planners, etc...help!

To learn about Harry Stevens and his residence, follow the link:
<https://www.nileshistoricalsociety.org/HarryStevens.htm>

The Other M^cKinley Museum – Part Two



Picture of the M^cKinley birthplace museum after it was restored and moved to M^cKinley Heights by Lulu Mackey Wess.

Sometime before 1875 the M^cKinley house was enlarged and converted into a store owned by *J. S. Benedict*. In 1890 the land upon which M^cKinley's house stood on Main Street, was needed as a site for the City National Bank (later M^cKinley bank).

It was not known who undertook and financed the project, but M^cKinley's house was cut in two and the part in which M^cKinley had been born was moved to Riverside Park along the Meander Creek, sometime after the park began operating, possibly as a museum attraction. The second half of the house was moved to Franklin Alley and used as a shop where the Harris rotary offset presses were made.



The frame building in the background is the boyhood home of President William M^cKinley and later the first home of the Harris Automatic Press Co. *Charles G.* and *Alfred Harris* fourth and fifth from right, are shown with other employees of the Harris Automatic Press Co. at the turn of the century.

By 1901 the Riverside Park proved to be unprofitable and the owners, *William Allison*, *Clement Souder*, *Frances Thomas*, *E. A. Hartzell*, *Maggie Hartzell*, *S. S. Holeton*, and *Selina Holeton*, sold the property to Buckeye Leather Company for \$1,700.



With the demise of the amusement park, the M^cKinley house was occupied by tenants on the Riverside Park site until 1908 when it was vacated and vandals and souvenir hunters caused severe damage and carried away most of the interior furnishings.

An interior view of the M^cKinley House after being vandalized in Riverside Park.

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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
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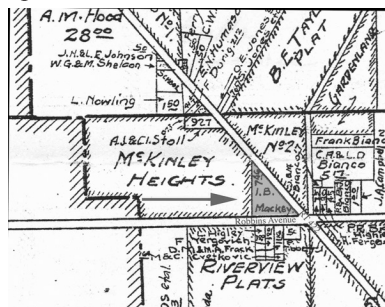
Ralph Tolbert.....Newsletter and Website

Trustees:

Anne Townley, Nancy Malone, and Sandy Bilovesky

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Few people took an interest in seeing that the house was taken care of despite its historical value, until in 1909 *Mrs. Joseph Wess*, the former Lulu Mackey, the first female member of the Trumbull County bar, decided to buy the house and restore it as nearly as possible. Miss Mackey had it moved by *Frank Kramer* to her property at M^cKinley Heights centering at what was known as Tibbetts Corners between Niles and Girard. She purchased the other section and had it moved as well, then proceeded to create a privately-owned museum which she operated until her death in 1934.



The museum was located on the Tibbetts property where the M^cKinley Heights Plaza is today at the intersection of Routes 422 and 169 (Route 169 is still referred to as Tibbetts-Wick Road). For years the house attracted many visitors. There was an admission charge.

Miss Mackey renamed the area M^cKinley Heights because of her admiration of the former President. She purchased the house and using a single rung of the banister to the staircase which remained after the destruction, she began to restore the staircase to its original walnut.

The museum house burned down after midnight April 3, 1937. Prowlers were blamed for the fire.

For more information and photographs:

McKinley's Birth home:

<https://www.nileshistoricalsociety.org/lot20.htm>

McKinley Heights Museum:

<https://www.nileshistoricalsociety.org/Mckinleyhousemuseum.htm>



Because of her admiration for M^cKinley, Miss Mackey had been collecting M^cKinley relics and souvenirs for years. Pictured here are some of the items on display. Included are photos of M^cKinley and his family, a cameo medallion of M^cKinley carved in wood, and the rocking chair favored by M^cKinley when he conducted the famous "front porch" campaign at his home in Canton, Ohio.

Calendar of events:

Business meeting: February 4, 2023 and March 4, 2023
Saturday, 10:00 AM. Ward-Thomas House. All are invited.

Open House: February 5, 2023 and March 5, 2023
Sunday, 2:00–5:00 PM; Last tour begins at 4:00 PM. Weather permitting.
Private tours for your family, friends or organization may be scheduled by calling Sandy at (330) 652–8329 or Anna Marie at (330) 856–8274.
Please leave a message and we will contact you.

Oasis bartender has seen the area change.

By Jim Flick April 20, 1983

The Oasis Lounge has been open for an hour and a half, Dick LaPolla, the tavern's longtime owner, sits at the bar talking over a newspaper and a cup of coffee to his solitary customer.



The Oasis Lounge was located on the south-west corner of North Main Street and West Federal across from the General Electric plant

The 7:30 a.m. opening time is a hold-over from better days, when mill workers laboring on the midnight shift stopped on their way home for a beer on those mornings that seemed like evenings.

"When the mills closed and the paychecks quit coming and the people didn't have the extra money, the bar business started hurting," LaPolla said.

"Some people say people will always have a buck or two to get a drink, but that's not true."

He remembers strikes and slowdowns and layoffs in the old days, when steelworkers sipped beer all day to pass the time. "But those guys knew they were going to have a paycheck coming soon. Today, a lot of these guys have no hope. I talked to one young guy the other day who has 125 applications out and never got a call. He was talking about leaving the town. Can't blame them. What kind of future do they have here?"

No, LaPolla isn't bitter or resentful. "You have to like the business to be in it," he says, and he's been behind the bar-several bars since 1946. Now 60, he has owned and operated the Oasis Lounge since 1952.

He's just a realist who sees changes in the local economy reflected by the number of people in his tavern, by the empty seats these days.

"It's not like the old days, when people were three, four deep around the bar every afternoon and evening," he said. "Those days are gone, closed off like the steel mills. But nobody needs to be told that."

But while the amount of business in the bar may change, rising and falling with local economic conditions, the life of a bartender rings eternal. "I like to talk to people, fortunately. Always have," LaPolla said. "You have to put up with all types of people, and you learn all the types over the years."

"The number of bad people are very, very few and you get rid of them quickly by refusing to serve them."

And the cliché, is true-bartenders are amateur psychiatrists whom people turn to with their problems. If people have problems and want to talk to somebody, they usually pile them on their bartender.

"I just listen and try to relate my own experiences and others I've heard to try to ease their pain."

But most people flock to bars because bars are today's greatest social outlet. Nowhere else do people meet and mingle and socialize as casually as they do in taverns. Total strangers start trading lies and secrets and their life stories within minutes of their first meeting. Dates and deals are made, friendships and acquaintances reaffirmed.

"Most people just have a few drinks and maybe some food," LaPolla said. Like most tavern owners, LaPolla is concerned about the new, tougher driving under the influence alcohol law and its harsher penalties. "That new law has them scared. Two beers and you're drunk, according to the law. That's crazy."

His customers are drinking less, coming out later, leaving earlier, according to LaPolla. Still this caution may not be enough to keep them out of trouble. "There's going to be a lot of people picked up who aren't intoxicated. I feel sorry for them."

LaPolla is director of the Trumbull County Tavern Owners Association and a trustee of the Ohio Licensed Beverage Association. The state organization employs a lobbyist in Columbus, a man who is rated the sixth most effective lobbyist in state government circles. This lobbyist naturally targeted the new driving under the influence law, but was unable to convince legislators to change the law.

"They try to put the blame (for drunk drivers) on the taverns. Well, look at the gas station carry-outs." As one local police chief said recently, "gasoline and alcohol don't mix, so why are we selling them together." LaPolla believes gas station carry-outs are more responsible for drinking drivers than taverns.

"I guess every tavern owner is like me-if somebody's had too much to drink, we get them a ride home. We don't let them stagger out of here, they might damage a car in the parking lot. I've got too much invested here to let some stupid drunk mess it up. I watch my customers. A veteran bartender knows when to cut off somebody, knows when they've has too much to drink."

As one of the area's most veteran bartenders, LaPolla has seen more than drunk driving laws change. He's watched the times change, too; stood back behind his bar and seen the marching years stamp footprints on the face of human nature. And a barroom is a microcosm of humanity.

"Back when I started tending bar, people had more consideration for each other," LaPolla said. "Now it seems they don't care, they've gotten colder. Maybe it's home-life, I don't know. Busted homes are probably the biggest problem for the young people today. It doesn't make them considerate."

And it's not just growing up between divorced parents that young men and women cry in their beer about," according to LaPolla. Many people in their early 20s pour out the pain of their own divorces to LaPolla across the bar. "It hurts. They're having a rough time," the bartender said.

"When I started into this, I liked it," LaPolla said. The clock was creeping closer to noon and he expected a lunchtime rush. Unemployment may be high, but many people still work and take a break for lunch.

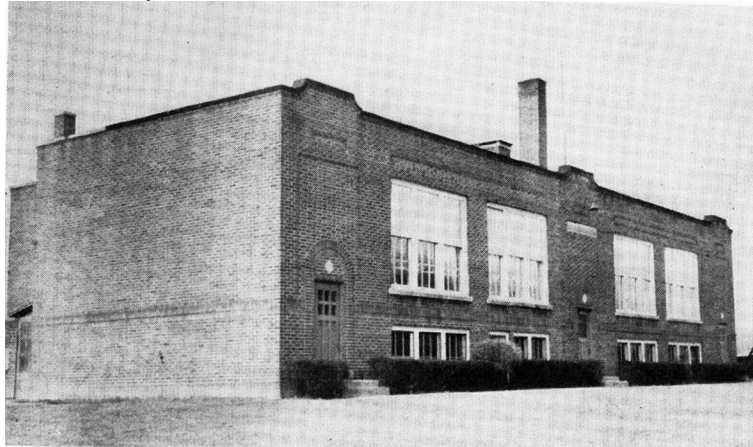


McDonalds was built on the former Oasis property in 1987.

McKinley Heights Memories Part 1.

1984 Times Special Edition—By *Mary Jane Steffey*

McKinley Heights began growing at the turn of the century. Although consisting mostly of farms, the center of the area became known as Tibbets Corners, named for the family who owned a farm there. This is now the corner where Route 422 and Robbins Avenue intersect. A one-room school, about one half mile north on Route 422, accomodated the children of the residents. This school taught grades one through eight. Some of the older boys were called on the attend to the janitor work, such as shoveling snow, etc. Children were expected to get to school by their own transportation. School buses were non-existent. The children attended this school until 1918, when a new two room brick school was built on property about one fourth mile south on the same side of the road. It was called M^cKinley School. Two years later it was enlarged to four rooms and was acquired by the Niles City School System. The Niles Board renamed the school Harrison School. Students used this school until 1955. Now they are bused to schools within the city limits of Niles.



M.E. Riley bought the Harrison School in 1965 and turned it into a Technical School, teaching Drafting, Air Conditioning, Refrigeration, and Electronics. It has been expanded to eight classrooms and laboratories, and two other buildings have been added to the educational complex.



On the Southeast Corner was a gas station, built in 1924 by *Phil Bianco*. It was operated as a Cities Service Station until it became a Fleet Wing station in 1947. (The Cities Service sign is visible in the upper left-hand corner of the photo). Phil's sons now operate the gas station, and expanded it to another building for the sale and service of boating, lawn and garden equipment, and snow vehicles.



THE ORIGINAL SNACK SHACK in 1958 before the new room was added on and before the brick front.

Where the Snack Shack now stands was a small candy and ice cream parlor that served the young people after skating on the frozen creeks in winter, or swimming in summer, or after a hot street car ride from Youngstown or Warren. In 1943, during World War II, *Mrs. Dorothy Allison* and *Mr. Roodhouse* opened a Snack Shack, calling it "A Comfy Coffee Kitchen". This emporium had outside plumbing.

After World War II, all businesses expanded, including the Snack Shack. In 1957, Mr. Roodhouse's son, *Rudy*, took over the restaurant and after enlarging and improving it (including indoor plumbing), changed the name to Rudy's Snack Shack. In 1962 it was almost completely destroyed by fire, but was rebuilt and remodeled and its name changed again to Rudy's Restaurant. Rudy's health forced him to sell the popular eating place to the *Accordinos* in 1975. The food has always been excellent, which is probably the reason the restaurant has had many years of success.



JOSEPH AND VERA ROADHOUSE and Rudy who was in the Seabies. The picture was taken in 1944 when Joe was building a walk around the Snack Shack to the outside toilets.