

Presidents Message:

Hello Spring! What do we have coming our way?

First event: Family Day, Saturday, May 6, 2023, 10 AM–2 PM. The Niles Historical Society is hosting the event at the Ward–Thomas property. The event is sponsored by the Trumbull County Historical Society. At least nine historical societies in Trumbull County will present displays, stories and activities for all to enjoy. Children will be encouraged to try their hands at “old time” games and will be treated with prizes. Refreshments will be provided. The event is **free**. The Ward–Thomas Museum will be open for tours.

For the Ladies: “Derby Day Tea Party and Luncheon” at the National M^cKinley Birthplace Museum, Sunday, May 7, 12:30 – 2:30 PM. RSVP by April 28 at (330)–652–4273. Cost is \$25/person. Luncheon plus vendors and Chinese auction is planned. Wear your favorite fancy Derby hat!

The March 25th and April 1st windstorms hit the area very hard and the Ward–Thomas property violently. Luckily the buildings were not damaged. However, several trees were blown down. Trees on the front lawn and along the driveway and perimeter of the property came down. Access to the property was blocked for several days. The City of Niles contracted a firm to clean up the mess. It is a work in progress.



Damage caused by the winds on the big tree in front of Ward–Thomas Museum.

Ralph Tolbert has been updating the web site with more Niles history. Included in the update are stories of Waddell Park, JFK’s visit to Niles, Haydu’s Gas Station, the Salt Springs, John Battles Home, Julius Cowdery Home, John C. Frech Home, Hiram Ohl residence, Josiah Robbins Home, George and Hannah Taylor, Ma Perkins Inn, Oasis Lounge and The Niles Ohio State Band, Niles, Ohio.

Visit www.nileshistoricalsociety.org.

Members attended the Ohio Local History Alliance Regional Meeting on March 25th hosted by National M^cKinley Birthplace Museum at the M^cKinley Memorial during the storm. Yikes!

The Society thanks *Terry Green, David Birskevich and Mary Jane Steffey* for their contributions to this newsletter. I’m sure there are more of us who have stories to share. Please consider telling your story.

Contact: ralph.tolbert@me.com.

M^cKinley Heights Memories Part 3.

1984 Times Special Edition–By *Mary Jane Steffey*

Morrow’s Farm Market specializes in fresh fruits and vegetables, with a side line of domestic and imported cheeses.

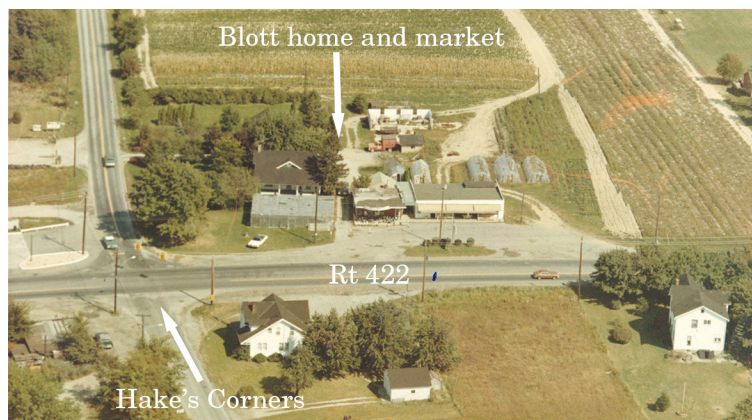
The Fairway is a large and popular discount store owned by *Betty Schell* and *Sidney Jacobe*. They have been in business at their location 20 years, celebrating that event this past March.

There are four recreational vehicle sales and service businesses grouped on both sides of Route 422. They are Dinard’s, Sirpilla’s, Trailer Enterprises, and Ralph’s. The oldest trailer service was opened in 1955 by *Ralph Crawford*, when he realized a handyman was needed for the Suburban Trailer Park which had opened. It is now operated by Crawford’s sons, *Ron* and *Rick*, and his grandson, *Kenny Diernbach*.

Still going North on Route 422 to where the Anderson-Morris Road intersects Route 422, stands George’s Restaurant specializing in American and Italian Food. It has been owned and operated by *George Aulisio* and his son, *Bruce*, for the past seven years.

The Anderson-Morris Road is a road carved out of the original Campbell farm. On this road is the original Campbell home, which is over 100 years old. This property boasts the only original barn left in the Heights. The *Crain Brothers, Ralph* and *Ray*, have farmed this land since 1931, having sold lots to redevelop a road bearing the name of their farm – Crain Drive.

At the northern boundary of M^cKinley Heights, which is the Niles-Vienna Road, we have a farm that has been operated as a business for 65 years by the same family. First it was an orchard, then a poultry farm, then a dairy farm. It is presently run as a truck farm with an outlet that sells garden supplies, statuary items, fruits, vegetables, and plants. *C. E. Blott* has been the owner all these years. His daughter, *Phyllis Blott (Bako)*, is an art teacher in the Niles City Schools.



Aerial view, looking east and south, of the intersection of State Route 422 and Niles-Vienna Road taken in 1973. Blott’s Farm Market, family house and fields are centered in the photograph. The Carlisle Home is on the opposite side of Route 422 across from the Blott home on the west corner of Niles-Vienna Road. Crawford’s Home is the white house farther down 422 on the same side as the Carlisle home. There is a small gas station on the north-east side of the intersect and a restaurant, Hake’s, on the north-west corner. (Pizza Hut now occupies the Blott homesite.)



Carol Ann DeMarsh, Phyllis’ half-sister; *Charles Blott*; *Anne Marie Blott*; and *Phyllis Blott (Bako)*. Photo August 1960.

Visit: <https://www.nileshistoricalsociety.org/blott.htm>



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

Westenfield Room
10:00 am First Saturday of each month

Call for private tours to be scheduled

330.544.2143

Officers

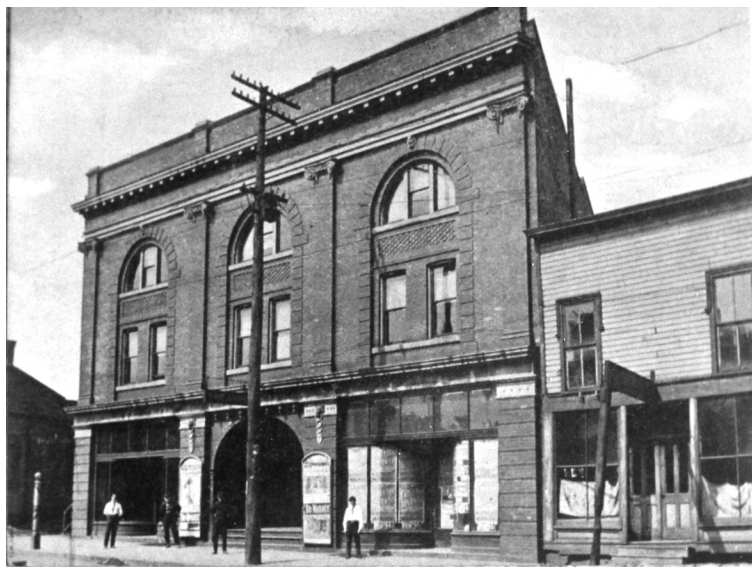
Anna Maria Beagle.....President
Dave Martin.....Vice-President
Lynda Ralston.....Treasurer
Coleen Tominey.....Secretary

Audrey John.....Curator

Ralph Tolbert.....Newsletter and Website

Trustees:

Anne Townley, Nancy Malone, and Sandy Bilovesky



The Verbeck Theatre was constructed by *George H. Verbeck* in 1903 on the west side of Furnace Street, or what is now known as East State Street. The theater opened on December 21, 1903. The venue later became known as the Niles Opera House with *William Dunnivant* as owner. *Benjamin Warner*, father of the famous Warner Brothers, took over as manager in 1915.

After a fire gutted the Opera House on September 16, 1920, Ben Warner purchased the site from Dunnivant and began to rebuild. The top story of the Opera House building was removed creating the two-story edifice which became the new Warner Theatre. Opening night took place on September 29, 1921, with Ben Warner as manager.

— *Terry Green*, March 2023

Calendar of Events:

Saturday, May 6, 2023

10 Am – 2 PM

Family Day at Ward – Thomas property, 503 Brown Street

Sunday, May 7, 2023

12:30 – 2:30 PM

Derby Day Tea Party Luncheon, National McKinley Birthplace
40 North Main Street

Saturday, May 16, 2023

10 AM: Business Meeting, Westenfield Room
Open to all members of the Society.

Sunday, June 4, 2023

2 – 5 PM: Open House 2:00 – 5:00 PM

Sunday Speaker Program

3rd Sunday of the Month, 2:00 – 3:00 PM
Boscov Community Auditorium in the Eastwood Mall Complex.

For more information about the Warner family in Niles.
visit: <https://nileshistoricalsociety.org/warner.htm>

Robins Furniture Company.

My maternal grandfather was *Frank Elbert Bleakley* (1905-2005). From 1928 to 1972, his sign shop was headquartered in the basement of the Warner Theatre Building on East State Street. Jeez, talk about operating out of a hole in the ground! I've run across examples of dungeons that exuded more warmth and charm.

Anyway, for a very brief moment circa 1936-1940, he or someone close to him captured a few snapshots of his sign work around the old Donut. The following image is one from that collection. This is a photo of the Robins Furniture Company which was located at 33-35 East Park Avenue. The firm opened this store in June or July of 1937. I'm fairly certain the snapshot dates from that period.



Robins Furniture Store located on East Park Avenue. Photo: Terry Green

Jacob Edgar "Jack" Robins (1888-1956) founded the Robins Furniture Company about 1922 or 1923 in Youngstown. At the time of his death, he was listed as president of the Robins Enterprises Company and vice-president of the Robins Theatre in Warren.

The Warner and Robins family ties in Niles date back to 1915 when *Benjamin Warner* and *Daniel Robins* took over management of the Niles Opera House. Though old man Warner assumed the role of manager and front man, one kind of gets the feeling that Daniel Robins was the real brains behind that venture.

The Robins Enterprises Company bought out the Warner interests on East State Street in January 1927. *Edgar Wilkoff* of Youngstown was named manager of the theater. *Peter Rufo* (1905-1995) took over for Wilkoff in October of that year. It was Rufo who gave my grandfather the green light to move into the basement in 1928.

The Robins family operated the Warner Theatre until 1948, with their final show taking place on June 1. The very next day, an ad appeared in the paper announcing some 400 theater seats priced to sell quickly. There's no word on who snatched those up.

Since the rear of the furniture store abutted the north wall of the Warner Theatre, the plan was to create a passageway leading to a new showroom on the main floor of the movie house. When it was completed, customers could either enter the premises from East Park Avenue or stroll in via the old theater entrance on East State Street. It is believed that this layout remained until the firm finally closed their Niles store in 1962. The company continued to operate a branch in Warren for a number of years.

Incidentally, you may recall that the former Robins Furniture location on East Park Avenue was the focal point in a standoff with the city during the Urban Renewal Project. This delayed the demolition of the Warner Theatre until 1975.

Pictured on the right, are the keys to the Warner Theater, RMP Realty Company, 86 East State Street.



The snapshot(on left) also offers a view of Paul's Cut Rate Store which stood at 27 East Park Avenue. Owned and operated by *Paul Narotsky* (1899-1987), the business made its debut on March 5, 1932. Narotsky managed to hang on until April 13, 1974, when he finally called it quits.

On the left side of the photo, one can just make out W. G. Gifford's Meat Market at 39 East Park Avenue. *William George Gifford* (1885-1950) commenced operations there on November 15, 1931, after buying out *Silas L. Davis* (1879-1956). In October 1941, Gifford relocated to Klinger's former Isaly Dairy outlet in the Sigler Building at 301 Robbins Avenue. He eventually moved the business to West Park Avenue Ext.

Frank Ruben (1885-1950) and *James J. Bernard* (1900-1988) set up their barber shop and music store in Gifford's old East Park Avenue storefront in April 1942.



Warner Theater Building on 86 East State Street prior to urban renewal.

Returning back to that Warner Theatre image for a moment, you may be wondering why Grandpa's surname is missing an E.

True, it would be fair to say that Frank wasn't always the most competent speller; in fact, he was forever calling up my mother and asking her how to scribble out this word or that. But he had mastered the jumble of letters in his last name at an early age. This wasn't a problem.

No, the reason for the typo is both amusing and vintage Frank. For a work this large, it was imperative to first mark out the letters with chalk or a stick of charcoal. In retrospect, this was pretty much standard operating procedure on all the surfaces he lettered. It helped to ensure both the correct spelling and the spacing.

By the looks of that frame on the side of the building, I'd wager that Frank had just recoated what was already the umpteenth version of that billboard sized business card. Instead of sketching in the letters, he probably figured he could just as easily eyeball things and began daubing away with his paintbrush. Somewhere in the middle of the word BLEAKLEY, it became apparent that he was going to run out of room. Rather than start things over, he simply opted to leave out the second E.

And so, to the legions of loyal viewers who regularly visit the Niles Historical Society website, my grandfather is forever known as the founder and proprietor of the Frank Bleakly Sign Company. It's a shame my mother has already passed. She would have howled at the reminiscence. — *Terry Green*, April 2023

LET'S GET ACQUAINTED
Robins extends you a cordial and friendly invitation to visit and enjoy its spacious Furniture Store in Niles.

Free Gift
Every Monday, Nov. 7 to 10 P.M.
Beginning Monday, Aug. 10th,
1. Come and see the new display of
2. Choose from the new display of
3. Enjoy the new display of
4. Enjoy the new display of

ROBINS FURNITURE CO.
BETTER FURNITURE AND LESS
33-35 E. Park Ave. Niles, Mich.

Robins Furniture
advertisement
August 23, 1937

W. G. Gifford
39 E. Park Ave. Phone 998
Quality Foods
For Thanksgiving

Also, we operate a delicatessen in the basement of our store, where you can get all the delicacies you need for your Thanksgiving feast.

Turkeys, lb 40c

Chickens, lb 30c

Ducks, lb 30c

Geese, lb 30c

Give us a call for a complete list of prices for Thanksgiving. We'll be glad to help you plan your feast.

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W.G. Gifford
advertisement
Niles Daily Times
November 24, 1931.



The Civil War section is on the north side of the cemetery. Mr. Eanse's stone is situated on a hill, with a flag pole, next to a cemetery driveway.

John Kelley Eanse Company F 29th Illinois' Colored Infantry.

Colored Units during the Civil War had 80 officers and 16 soldiers who were awarded the Medal of Honor. Black soldiers were about 10 % of the Union Army with approximately 179,000 men. 19,000 were in the Navy.

The 29th Colored Infantry was organized at Quincy, IL on April 24, 1864. They were first assigned to the defenses of Washington, then attached to the Army of the Potomac. They saw fighting at Petersburg, VA as well as the Battle of the Crater at Petersburg on July 20, 1864. They were present at the surrender at Appomattox Court House, then went to the Texas border where they were mustered out on November 6, 1865. During the war 30 officers and 43 men were killed and 188 died of disease.

John Kelley Eanse survived, he found his way to Niles, Ohio where he worked at Holloway Funeral Home. Upon his death the newspaper said he was a good worker. He died May 20, 1921 after a week's illness of pneumonia at the Warren City Hospital.

The news article said he was a very active man for his age which was thought to be 80 years old. He was a faithful employee during his 7 years in Niles where he won many loyal friends.

He was without any living relatives. His death certificate states he was born in Wisconsin, a widower and his mother's and father's names are unknown. From Holloway Funeral Home, he was buried in Niles Cemetery. The Ladies of the Auxiliary provided him with an American flag and a minister conducted the funeral service. He rests under the flag pole on a gentle slope with other Civil War soldiers.

— *Carole Babyak*, January 2023



Headstone marker of John Kelley Eanse. Photos by *Audrey John*.

To research the veterans buried in Niles Union Cemetery (or any Niles topic), go to the Niles McKinley Library website, in the library's menu bar, select Information, then Newspapers. enter your information.

Research Enter keywords to search
Enter time range

You Are Searching For Pages Containing:

Exact Phrase Keyword or phrase

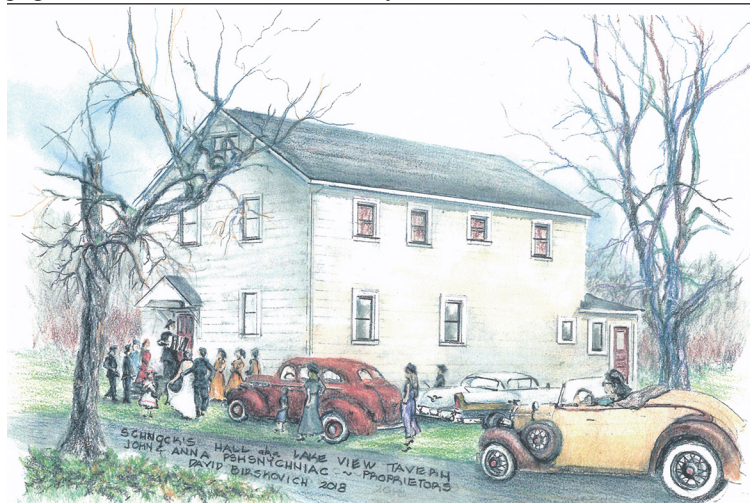
Between 1/1/1940 And 12/31/1969

1/1/1930 12/31/1939

Apply Query Builder

Against Your Search

For practice, see if you can find the article about “Veterans of Five American Wars are buried in Niles Union Cemetery”. It appears on page 6 in the Niles Times dated May 29, 1950



Schnock's Hall

Deep in the heart of McKinley Heights was a business that was a major social center for generations. It was named The Lake View Tavern, but we called it Schnock's Hall after the *Pshsnychniac* family that lived there and owned the business. The building still exists. It is at the corner of Carl Street and Bianco Avenue. There is a bar and dance hall on the first floor and living quarters on the second.

During my parent's generation, it was popular with the locals.

Many people in the Heights, were born and raised here and all seem to get along., so, it was like a constant reunion.

My grandparents lived across the street. My Aunt Libby remembers, that as a young girl, she would sit on her porch and watch people come out onto the hall's porch to smoke. They would often fall off of the porch, because it had no safety railing. My Aunt found this to be very amusing. The Heights can be a funny place.

During my generation, the bar business had pretty much disappeared. Only Mrs. Pshsnychniac and her daughter, *Jenny*, whom we called *Ganka*, lived there. The hall continued to remain socially important.

Whenever, anyone in the neighborhood got married, they either had their reception at the hall, or, after the reception was over at the other place, they would gather at the Schnock's. Neighbors from all around came, bringing their accordions with them. We would party and dance until sunrise.

One band, made up of *Danny Rohan* on trumpet, *Mike Psznick*, a grandson, on accordion and me on drums, often played here.

The hall is vacant now. It has new owners. Hopefully, I will meet them and we will become good friends.

My drawing does not depict any wedding in particular. The cars are all Packards of course.

— *David Birkovich*, March 2023