

President's Notes:

Dear Friends of the Niles Historical Society:

The Society will be participating in several activities this fall. Reconstruction of the four chimneys of the Ward – Thomas House will begin September 2, 2024. We have not been given a date for the ADA improvement project to begin. A tour is scheduled for the Alpha Omega Sorority on September 4. A program will be presented on the First Ladies' gowns.

The Society will participate in Founders Day presented by the Mahoning Valley Historical Society at the Tyler History Center in downtown Youngstown, Sunday, September 8, 12 – 4 PM. This event is open to the public. The Society will also participate in the Cemetery Walk at Union Cemetery in Niles on September 14. This event is sponsored by the McKinley Library. The Pumpkin Walk is scheduled for October 19, 5 – 7:30 PM at the McKinley Memorial. The Niles Historical Society will host a "Night at the Museum" at the Ward – Thomas House on Saturday, October 26, 5 – 6 PM. This event is for children K – 3rd grade. The children can wear costumes. A story will be read, followed by a tour. The theme is "What was life like for children in the 1860's". Refreshments will be served. Please call the McKinley Library at 330-652-1704 for reservations. The Westernfield Room will be open on Veterans Day, November 11 from 10 AM to Noon to provide a place for Veterans, or those interested, to hear stories of Niles Veterans and to share their own stories. A moment of silence will be observed at 11 AM.

Meredith Elliot's comments on Rearranging the rooms in the house:

Things are changing at The Ward - Thomas House. As the First Ladies' Gowns are being removed for cleaning and storage, the rooms are opening up and the furniture arranged to make it look as it did when the Ward and Thomas families called it their home. Afternoon tea is being served in the formal parlor and there are comfortable armchairs with good lamps so one can curl up to read or nap or listen to the radio that sits on the side table. In the dining room the table is set for a formal dinner with some of the elegant dinnerware produced by the Atlas China Company located at one time right here in Niles. Future plans include recreating the office of *Congressman W. Aubrey Thomas* in the north half of the library where he used to meet with constituents while at home from Washington, D.C. Come visit the mansion on the first Sunday of the month and see the changes we are making.

Meredith's comments on the First Ladies' Gown project:

Progress is being made in the cleaning, restoring and preservation of the First Ladies gowns from the Bicentennial. Almost all the dresses have been removed from the first floor of the mansion, where they had been on permanent display, much to the detriment of the fabric and accessories. The Niles Historical Society is privileged to be the custodians of these beautiful recreations of the original collection housed in the Smithsonian National Museum. It was obvious that something needed to be done to prevent further deterioration. As the gowns are cleaned and boxed they are removed to our climate controlled storage unit where conditions are best for long-term preservation. Once all the gowns have been relocated to the storage unit, it is the plan to bring them back to the museum on an individual basis for special displays and programming. We gratefully acknowledge and thank our generous donors who sponsored the individual dresses for cleaning.

Building WWI Government Houses in Niles.



Why do so many houses look the same on Lafayette Street? During World War I the government confiscated land to erect housing for workers in vital industries in Niles. Pictured above are three houses built by the government. Below is the 1924 map of the area involved.



Niles Daily News July 11, 1922 (Stein house property was exempt from seizure)

Fred Stein May Sue U.S. for Niles Property

Defied Federal Authorities with Gun.

Washington, July 10– When Fred Stein of Niles defied federal authorities with a shotgun in 1918 as they appeared to take over his property under condemnation proceedings for a wartime housing project, he began a series of legal complications which today are puzzling several keen Washington lawyers. To date Stein has received nothing for the property which the government took over. Neither has his creditors, the Youngstown Home Savings & Loan Company, who took a mortgage on the Stein place before the government became interested in it.

Peculiarly enough, the failure of both, to receive settlement isn't because the government hasn't shown a disposition to settle. As an evidence of what they have tried to do for Stein, attorneys for the U.S. Housing Bureau dig up an appropriation bill passed last year for the reimbursement of persons whose property was taken over during the war. Then they show letters sent to Stein offering him \$6,400 in settlement for the land the government took. But the price was not accepted, and now the appropriation has lapsed, making it unavailable.

Must go to Court of Claims.

As a result, Stein and his creditors are now expected to bring the whole matter before the U.S. Court of Claims at Washington in an attempt to prove that they have not been fairly dealt with. Stein says he will enter a claim for \$40,000 against the government on his own behalf and for \$20,000 to cover his wife's equity in the property.

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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

Westenfield Room
10:00 am First Saturday of each month

Call for private tours to be scheduled

330.544.2143

Officers

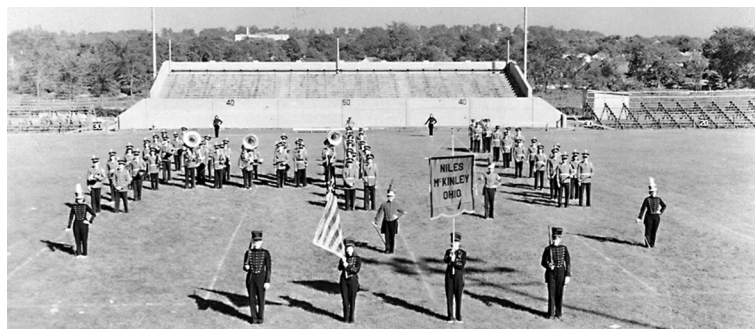
Anna Maria Beagle.....President
Dave Martin.....Vice-President
Lynda Ralston.....Treasurer
Coleen Tominey.....Secretary

Audrey John.....Curator

Ralph Tolbert.....Newsletter and Website

Trustees:

Anne Townley, Nancy Malone, and Sandy Bilovesky



Niles High School Band in 1942 with the stadium in the background. This was the first year the Niles Alma Mater would be played.

Niles McKinley Alma Mater History – Brian McGuirk

Jo Ann McGuirk wrote songs and poems for her own amusement. During her sophomore year of 1942 at Niles High School, she entered the school contest and her lyrics were chosen for the high school Alma Mater by Noble Cain. Noble Cain was a nationally-known musical arranger who wrote the music to accompany Jo Ann's lyrics.

Jo Ann also had one of her poems published by the Ohio State Poetry Committee. She graduated in 1944 and went on to become a registered nurse. Jo Ann's mother, Violet Stein McGuirk, raised nine children: Jo Ann, Eileen, Marilyn, Raymond, Maureen, Barbara, Karen, Brian and Michele.

The Alma Mater was copyrighted in 1942 by Arnold Compagna who was the Niles band director. The song has two verses.

Noble Cain (1896–1977) was a well known composer. His best known composition was "Chillun, Come on Home". He earned international recognition during his years as Director of the Chicago Acappella Choir. <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/50294836/noble-w.-cain>

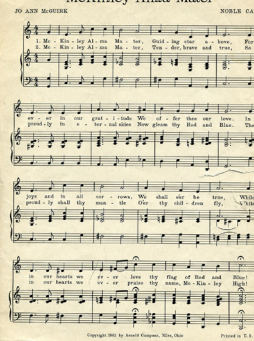
McKinley Alma Mater

By
Noble Cain



McKinley High School, Niles, Ohio

McKinley Alma Mater



The program cover and the verses of the Niles Alma Mater as they appeared in 1942.

Calendar of Events

Open House:

September 1, 2024, Sunday, 2:00 – 5:00 PM; Last tour at 4:00 PM

October 6, 2024, Sunday, 2:00 – 5:00 PM; Last tour at 4:00 PM

November 3, 2024, Sunday, 2:00 – 5:00 PM; Last tour at 4:00 PM

Business Meeting:

September 7, 2024, Saturday, 10:00 AM

October 5, 2024, Saturday, 10:00 AM

November 2, 2024, Saturday, 10:00 AM

All members or those interested in becoming members are invited to attend.

Night at the Museum:

October 26

Saturday, 5:00 – 6:00 PM at Ward – Thomas House

Call McKinley Library for reservations. 330-652-1704

Veterans Day:

November 11, 2024, Monday

10:00 AM – 12:00 PM in Westenfield Room

Celebrating Veterans!

Continued from Page 1... When Housing Bureau officials took over the Stein place at Niles, they put a value of \$8,500 upon it and it led to the landholder's protest against this which brought on the shotgun episode. Last year, on securing the appropriation they needed, the bureau attorneys offered Stein the same amount, or the alternative of accepting three-fourth of it and suing for any additional amount he believed due him.

He approved the latter idea, according to the Housing Bureau version, and was prepared to enter the Federal District Court to take action against the government.

Niles Daily News July 7, 1921

Government Wins Case in Big Land Suit

Important news to property owners of the Government Addition, Niles, will be the announcement of the Federal Court's decision in the Government-Stein controversy, which has been hanging on for many months. The case was decided in Cleveland yesterday by *Judge D.C. Westenhaver*, who returned a decision favorable to the Government.

The fight between Fred Stein, former owner of the property, and the Government is of long duration. When the Government announced its intention of erecting homes in Niles, several allotments were presented for approval, the Stein property among them. It was accepted and according to Government officials, a contract made. Later the property was sold by Stein to his wife and son, who declared the contract void.

U.S. Takes Land

Requisition of the land was then made by the Government as a war measure, and work of erecting the houses proceeded. Stein attempted several times to take possession of the property, ejecting employees from the Housing Corporation offices, and attempting to collect rents. The Government retaliated by bringing legal action for a quit-claim title and sought to restrain Stein from molesting the property or its tenants.

Judge Westenhaver, in his decision yesterday, held that Stein has no rights to the property, that the title of the Government to the land is valid and good, and that the alleged sale made by Stein to his wife and son void. The decision forever enjoins Stein from interfering with the Government or trespassing upon the property.

In Court of Claims

Notice of the decision was forwarded to City Solicitor *MacQueen* this morning. No decision has been made regarding the payment of money due Stein from the Government, and it is probable that this will be handled through the Court of Claims.



The playground site is on land which was owned by the U.S. Government following a Post World War I housing project and which was turned over to the city some years ago. It became a city playground with equipment in 1955. Personal note: during the summer, softball teams from other city playgrounds would play the Davis Street playground team on this field.

There is a narrow fenced-in path on Davis Street that is still used to access the area.



2024 aerial view of the Davis Street playground and the Stein residence.



Heaton-Stein home at 853 Vienna Avenue. To learn more, Follow: <https://www.nileshistoricalsociety.org/stein2.htm>

Heaton Family

The property was originally owned by *James Heaton*, founder of Niles. It was transferred to his son *Lewis Heaton* in 1823, the year Lewis married his wife *Mille Anne*. The Heaton's ran a working farm on the 110 acre property. Lewis died in 1842 and Mille Anne not long after in 1853.

Stein Family

Joseph and Frederica Stein, immigrants from Prussia Germany, moved to Niles in the mid 1800's with their 5 children. Joseph was a volunteer in the army and Frederica, along with her 5 children, ran the property as a working animal farm as well as the area's "ice business".

The story of *Jacob and Carolyn Fredericka Hacker Stein* by *Lucille Stein Perry*, found in the Trumbull County Library's Genealogy Center, references that the home was part of the underground railroad. She wrote: "Years ago there was what was called the Underground Railroad where people helped southern slaves get to the North. In this house, in the back part of the cellar was a part of this underground railroad".

The Steins are also know for the famous "Stein Brothers", *Herb* and *Russ* who were part of the "Pottsville Maroons" the contested rightful winners of the first NFL championship of 1925. (Reference: *The Breaker Boys* – book telling of the amazing story). Russ and Herb Stein were sons of *Frederick David Stein* and *Nancy Eaton Troxel Stein*. It was their maternal great grandfather, *Daniel Heaton* who built the first iron furnace in the Western Reserve.

During the early 1900's Cherry and Lafayette Streets ended in a pasture of Frank Stein's farm. Their home was located on Vienna Avenue. Following the passing of Frederica Stein in 1912, all but the current plot on which the home currently resides was seized by the government for the purpose of war housing in 1918 (In support of World War I).

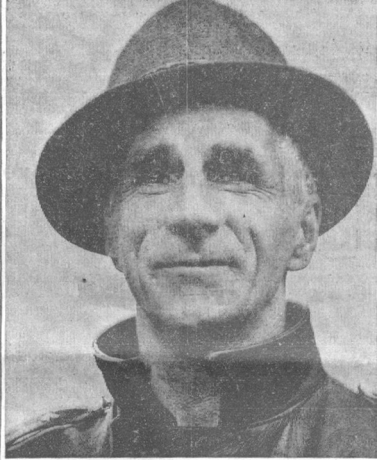
Hoffman Fire Heroes

Many of us remember the day of the Hoffman fire—March 23, 1962. It was a devastating fire that threatened many other stores in the area and for a while it looked like the whole downtown would burn down.

Many of the stores were built of wood frame and were very old, some dating back to the late 1800's. It took all of the Niles firefighters and several other departments to knock the blaze out.

The fire was a real tragedy, not only because of the loss of life, but also it marked the beginning decline of the downtown area. Because of the fire, the adjacent buildings, Ragazzo's (the old Wagstaff-Jenkins drug store in the 1890's) and Pritchards had to be torn down due to the heat and smoke damage. <https://www.nileshistoricalsociety.org/hoffmfire.htm>

Heroes of the Day – Niles Daily Times March 24, 1962



FIRE HERO — Warren steeplejack B. E. Fickes demonstrated his peculiar talents Thursday by carrying one of the three women saved from the blaze safely down the fire ladder from the second floor of the burning building.

Closing time was approaching in the McKinley Federal Savings and Loan Association. *Donald Walton*, Secretary-Treasurer, and *Julius Nagy* were trying to get just a few more things done before the day ended.

Outside the offices, *June McLean* was getting ready to close her window for the day as were the other tellers.

Next door, in the hole in the ground that used to be Pappada's Pharmacy and Nader's, *B.E. Fickes*, a Warren steeplejack, was looking over the job his crew had done in tearing down the buildings to make room for

McKinley Federal's new drive-thru window.

At the same time, Niles patrolman *John Brodie* was driving along Main Street, making one last trip before returning to the station.

All were completely unaware that a minute later, they would be watching and participating in one of the worst fires in the history of Niles.

"If they just had a net."

"It was terrible. She was standing in the window, screaming 'someone save me'."

These were some of the comments these eyewitnesses made after watching three rescue attempts succeed and one fail during Thursday's \$250,000 blaze which left the H.H. Hoffman Company a shambles of ashes and charred ruins.

Walton and Nagy first saw the smoke billowing from the front of the department store and raced out their back door to the fire station on Franklin Alley. Seeing the truck roar from the fire station, they returned to see three women carried to safety and one perish in the inferno.

"They were leaning out the northernmost window on the second floor, screaming for help," Miss McLean said. "In the window next to Pritchard's was another woman, also leaning out and yelling."

"If there had just been a net, maybe all of them could have jumped to safety," Walton added.

Fickes was too busy with his work to see the smoke, but he heard the women scream. And he moved quickly. "I didn't have a ladder of my own. Usually I have a half-dozen piled on my truck, but today my truck wasn't here," Fickes said. "I could have saved all of them, if I had my ladders," he murmured.

Fickes talked to the trapped and hysterical women while awaiting the arrival of the fire trucks. He asked them to stay near the front of the building. "Stay in front, don't go back," he told them.

Describing the actions of the lone victim, he said he saw her walk back into the smoke but was unable to locate her after that.

"By this time the firemen were arriving—and it sure didn't take them long to get here—and I grabbed one of the ladders and got the woman in the other window. She kept screaming, 'Please save me, please save me,' and almost jumped."

It wasn't quite that easy, according to Nagy who saw what happened. "The woman fell or jumped just as Fickes was reaching for her," Nagy said. "He had to hold onto the ladder with one hand, and grab her with his other. Only a skilled steeplejack with a iron grip could have saved her."

Brodie saw the smoke about the same time as the others did, radioed the alarm to headquarters, and raced to the store. People were shouting that people were trapped upstairs and the patrolman tried to get to them. Without a helmet or mask, he dashed into the store which was rapidly becoming an inferno. "I made it to the stairway landing, but then the roof started to cave in and I couldn't get any further," Brodie said. His singed hair and eyebrows were mute evidence of his attempt.

Other eyewitnesses gave this account of the rescue of two of the three women in the window: *Arnold Danes* pulled the two women from the window and lowered them to *George Nolan*, who was half-way up the ladder. He(Danes) went back up for the third woman but a sudden gush of flames stopped him."

Russel Samuels, City Sanitarian, said he heard the woman, who died, screaming, "I'm on fire, I'm burning." He said she managed to crawl to the window ledge just before the fire flared out of the window and she disappeared into the smoke.

Fireman *Jim Benedict* said, "he and a Warren fireman tried to enter through the window, but they too were driven back by the suffocating smoke and searing heat. We got to her, but we had to let go".



Above: Hoffman's Department Store building collapses from fire.

Below: Melvin Kiracofe and Helen Husted watch the fire rage.



HORROR AND DISBELIEF — Mrs. Helen Husted and M. C. Kiracofe watch in horror as the store they recently vacated burns out of control. Mrs. Husted barely escaped from Hoffman's mezzanine office. Kiracofe, operator of the department store, was working on the first floor when the holocaust broke out. **Page 2**