

NHS President's Notes:

For years the Niles Historical Society member *David Martin* who now lives in McDonald was our “go to guy”. Dave served as vice president of the Society and grounds keeper maintaining the grounds and buildings just as he would his own home. He is a veteran who has served many organizations in the area, a man with a huge heart, a Jack of all trades, knowing how to fix most mechanical things. Dave has a great sense of humor and can tell the most outrageous stories. The listener never knows if he’s pulling his leg or not. Unfortunately, Dave has had some health setbacks. The Society owes Dave a huge “thank you for your service”.

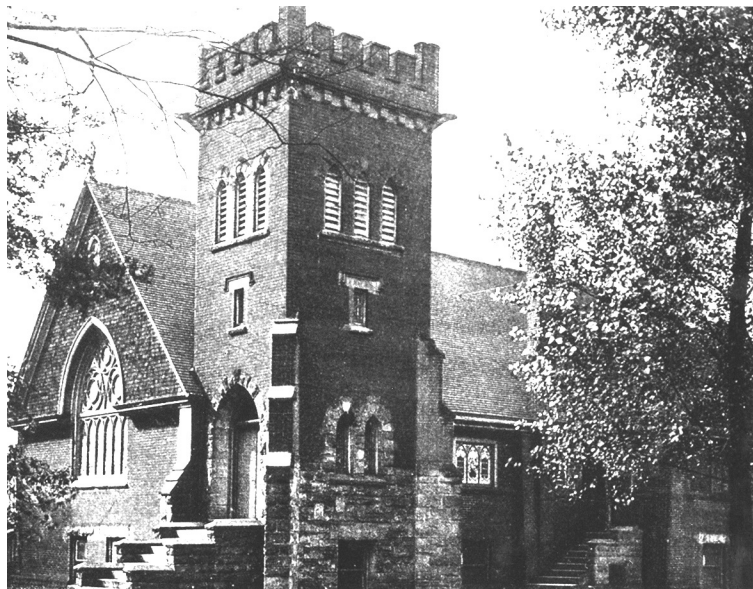
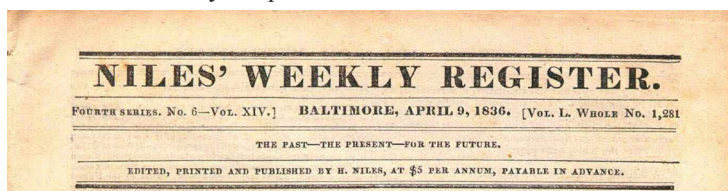
In Dave’s absence things got a bit sketchy around the Ward – Thomas House. This winter and spring a group of younger people under the direction of *Brittany Jarrett* and *Laura Altobelli* have taken up the task of greenhouse and grounds management. *Audrey John*, our curator, had taken up the task of forming a committee to restore the flower gardens on the property. Laura, Audrey’s granddaughter, decided to help. These young women recruited their friends and have done a wonderful job of cleaning up the greenhouse, cleaning up the grounds and preparing and planting the flower gardens. They also have a knack for finding “a guy” who can do this and that. A man named Freddie has done a lot of heavy cleanup work and cleaned up the old path from the overflow lot to the main driveway and created an additional path with wood that was literally laying around. In addition to Brittany and Laura the Society thanks: *Michelle Harris*, *Karen Taylor*, *Ashley Lokash*, *Sally Bogdan*, *Lorraine Fauvie*, *Aimee Robertson*, *Maxwell Lough*, *Chloe Reese*, *Olivia Speier*, *Brian Wolnik* and *Ashley Paterson*. And I hope that’s everyone.

Our June meeting was moved unexpectedly to the Perkins Restaurant on Rt. 46 due to some uncommon visitors. Honeybees took up residence in the walls of the Westenfield Room again. The beekeeper, *Beeman Travis Watson* used an infrared camera to detect where the colonies were living. Brittany contacted WKBN and the removal was recorded and aired on that channel. Visit WKBN.com or Google “Bee colony removed in Niles” to see the report. The reporter had a taste of the honeycomb.

If you haven’t done so, Google “fox8news tornado 1985” to view a well done presentation of Niles residents memories of this traumatic event.

Our August 2nd meeting will be held in the Library Room above Troutman’s Drug Store.

Jim and *Dawn Tallman* will be hosting. They will be presenting to the Society a volume of the writings of *Hezekiah Niles*, editor of the Weekly Register news magazine (the nation’s first weekly newsmagazine) based in Baltimore. Originally called Heaton’s Furnace the town was renamed Nilestown after the editor by Heaton and then shortened to Niles by the post office in 1843. Name of our newsletter?



St. Luke's Episcopal Church is located at 348 Robbins Avenue.
The image is as the church appeared originally in the early 1900s.

The History of St. Luke's Episcopal Church:

On November 11, 1870, as requested by the *Rt. Rev. Gregory T. Bedell*, third Bishop of Ohio, *The Rev. H.L. Badger* of Christ Church, Warren, *The Rev. George Maxwell* of St. John's Youngstown, and the *Rev. George S. Vallandigham* of Trinity Church, Lisbon visited Niles to ascertain the prospects of establishing a mission there.

The Rev. George Franklin Smythe, Diocesan Historian records the mission was first called St. Peter's but was changed in 1877 to Advent Mission. In 1893 the name of the mission was changed from Advent Mission to St. Luke's.

St. Luke's began its life in November 1870, meeting in homes of various people on the South side of Niles. Later, meeting and holding services in the old schoolhouse on Front Street, now First Street. For a short time, services were held in the old Red Town Hall located on the present McKinley Memorial grounds and later ones held in the Presbyterian church on Main Street.

About 1880, a building was erected on Chestnut Street on a lot that was donated by *Miss Maria Heaton*, four houses north of the present Lutheran Church. On Christmas Eve 1896, this building was destroyed by fire. It was torn down in 1914 to make room for a house being moved from the site of Niles High School (Edison Junior High School) by *George Campbell*. *Mr. Frank Sayers*, now deceased, recalled the church as being papered with wallpaper with the letters IHS on it. The building, as described by *Mrs. W. Wagstaff*, was of white batten boards with a small tower, no basement, illuminated with oil lamps and heated by a coal stove.

In 1897 the present church was begun on a lot purchased from *Jerry Reeves* in 1896 for \$1100.00 of which \$950.00 was by subscriptions and \$150.00 from the Parish workers. *Mr. J. N. Cowdery* was the agent for the lot and *C. Frank Cramer* the architect for the building.

Ground-breaking ceremonies and cornerstone-laying were held in the rain on June 7, 1897 with *Archdeacon Brown* officiating. The *Rev. R. J. Walker* was the minister. Trustees and building committee were *M. E. Rose*, *J. F. Morris*, *L. S. Cole*, *Wm. A. Harris*, *Arlington Lodwick*, *Wm. Fitzwater*, *L. W. Bach*, and *John Naylor*.

The First services were held in the basement on Good Friday, April 8, 1898. The minister in charge was *The Rev. Charles D. Lafferty*, who was ordained while in Niles.

Dedication ceremonies were held September 10, 1900, by *Bishop Leonard*, assisted by *Rev. Cook*. The choir from Christ Church came on a special streetcar rented for \$5.00 to sing at the service. There was an overflow crowd. Continued on page 3...



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



Scan the QR Code to visit the Niles Historical Society website.
Visit our Website: www.nileshistoricalsociety.org
Check out the Photographs and Stories links.

Preserving and promoting Niles' History for future generations.

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



View of the trees at Eckert's Corners that were toppled and damaged.
Note the sign pointing to the McKinley Memorial 2 miles away.

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"From the ground the little funnel reached way up into the sky...I never saw such twisting and contortions in my life. The car bounced around in the wind and a couple of times I thought it was going to turn over. The hailstones were making an awful racket on the roof."

"I have seen pictures of funnels before and I've seen tornadoes in the movies-but this was the real McCoy. It whirled through Eckert's Corners and then ripped on to the northeast."

"As soon as it had passed I started back to Niles, but couldn't get down Route 46. I then went up 422 to the North Road intersection, but that too was blocked. I tried Route 169, but couldn't get through there and finally went all the way around and in on Warren Avenue to get back to Niles. It was a horrible experience and I hope to never see another tornado in my lifetime." Read more about the 1947 tornado:

<https://www.nileshistoricalsociety.org/Stories2/1947Tornado.htm>

Calendar of Events:

Sunday, June 29, 2025, Ward – Thomas House
12:00 – 4:00 PM: Vendor Market and Open House
2:00 PM: MVCabaret presenting
"I've Got Rhythm" from the Great American Song

Business Meeting:

Saturday, July 12, 2025, 10:00 AM, Westenfield Room
Saturday, August 2, 2025 10:00 AM
Library Room above Trautman's Drug Store

Open House:

Sunday, August 3, 2025

If you would like to visit the Ward-Thomas House during the week,
leave a message at (330) 544-2143.

A Society member will call you back.

Flower beds in garden have had new top soil added for new plantings.



The church was consecrated October 13, 1912 by Bishop Leonard, assisted by *Archdeacon A. A. Abbott* and *The Rev. L. P. McDonald*.

In 1913, a rectory was purchased, and later in 1942, additional property was acquired to expand church facilities.

The request of the parish of St. Luke's Episcopal church for a resident rector has been fully granted, and Rev. Thomas Bensley, of London, England, who has been engaged in mission work in Cleveland since coming to the United States last February, has been appointed to the office by Bishop Leonard. The new rector will be introduced to the congregation by Arch-Deacon A.A. Abbott at a service at the church on Sunday evening and at that time will take immediate charge of the pastorate.

Rev. Mr. Bensley comes to St. Luke's highly recommended by the bishop. He is said to be a man of energy, of broad education and pleasing personality. As he is not married, he will probably have his lodging in the home of one of the members of the parish.

The growing congregation of the Episcopal church needed a larger place to gather so they laid the cornerstone for the church on 328 Robbins Avenue on June 7, 1897.

St. Luke's is one of three churches still standing that were built before 1900. The other two churches built before 1900 and still standing are St. Stephen's Catholic Church (1891) and the First Christian Church (1894) which are both located on Arlington Street.

On May 9, 1956, a dinner was held at the First Christian Church Parish house with 117 adults and 32 children present to discuss plans for a fund raising drive to build a new parish house and office complex addition to the church. The kickoff dinner was held at the First Methodist Church November 11, 1956 for a building fund to run three years.

Ground-breaking ceremonies were held May 13, 1962 after the 10:45 A.M. service with *Archdeacon Wonders* presiding. The present building was dedicated November 28, 1962 by *Bishop Nelson M. Burroughs*, assisted by *The Rev. Ernest F. Edmunds* and *The Rev. A. Malcome MacMillan* of St. John's, Sharon Pennsylvania. The interior of the church proper has been maintained as it was originally constructed.



Interior view of St. Luke's Episcopal church looking from the pulpit toward the main stained glass windows that face Robbins Avenue. The roof is supported by arched wooden beams anchored to the walls.

A music committee was appointed April 11, 1899 according to the first record books in the church possession. First mention of a choir was that they sang for evening services, vested in new robes, on December 25, 1901. During World War I the choir sang patriotic songs on the church steps after Sunday services. In 1919 permission was given to hire talent for the choir but not to exceed \$3.00 per Sunday.

The Altar Guild had its beginning as the Auxiliary Girls organized by The Rev. Thomas Bensley about 1909 with *Mrs. A.E. Piper* as president. In 1910 the name was changed to the Young Ladies Guild.

Some of the original members of the Auxiliary were Mrs. Piper, *Mrs. E. C. Winfield*, *Mrs. Ruth Clark Near*, *Mrs. Laura Naylor Rose*, *Mrs. Melvin Costley*, *Mrs. James Swagger*, *Miss Ida Parsons*, *Miss Ivy Randall*, *Miss Nona Emery*, *Mrs. Harry Griffiths*, *Mrs. Will Taylor*, *Miss Brown*, *Mrs. Mary Piper Lewis*, *Mrs. C. T. Winfield*, *Mrs. Chas. Carter*, *Miss Rose Sayers*, *Miss Daisy Randall*, *Mrs. Mae Underwood Cook*, *Miss Vera Gallagher*, *Miss Marian Greiner*, *Mrs. M. A. Jones*, *Mrs. Alice Lockwood*, *Mrs. Will Wagstaff*, *Miss Cora* and *Miss Mattie Round*, and *Mrs. Blanche Woods Klatt*.

On the evening of Christmas Day 1901, a vested choir was introduced into the service. At a meeting on February 19, 1902, the choir decided the time had come to procure a pipe organ for St. Luke's. The chairman of the meeting was *M.E. Rose* and the secretary was *Geo. Lane*. *James Boughton*, *Geo. Higgins*, *John Rose*, *C.H. Rose*, *C.W. Thomas*, *Edith Parson*, *Mrs. L.W. Bach*, *Geo. Lane* and *John Naylor* were appointed to a committee to obtain an organ which was installed and used for the first time on June 28, 1903. It was hand pumped.

The final service of St. Luke's Church was held February 9, 2025. The history of St. Luke's Church is extraordinarily beautiful in the self-denial and devotion of the parish family which has sustained a Christian witness here for many generations. For over 155 years this parish church has been a beacon of hope for Niles.



Interior view of St. Luke's Episcopal church looking from the pulpit and pipe organ to the altar in the background. Read more about St. Luke's Church: <https://www.nileshistoricalsociety.org/St.Lukes.htm>

June 9, 1947 Niles Tornado



The path of destruction left by the 1947 tornado and even the funnel cloud (upper right corner) is visible in this photograph.

June 7, 1947-Niles escaped major damage from a tornado that struck the northern fringes of the city and roared eastward to wreak havoc in Sharon, PA. The tornado ripped a path of destruction along Deforest Road, touching down along North Road and Eckert's Corners.

The storm was later classified an F-4 tornado, which has wind speeds between 207 and 260 mph. It struck around 2:30 p.m. in the Niles-Vienna area. At the airport, personnel saw a "black cone-shaped cloud" to the south as 65 miles per hour winds and two-inch hail punctured the wings of aircraft.

The storm inflicted heavy damage to homes on Niles-Vienna Road and Youngstown-Vienna Road, where two people died, and Smith Stewart Road, where a woman and her grandchild died.

Niles escaped major damage from a tornado that struck the northern fringes of the city and roared eastward to wreak havoc in Sharon, PA.



Home of *Dominic Mauro* on North Road was badly damaged. The roof was ripped completely off and the interior heavily damaged.

Tornado Destruction. Niles Times June 12, 1947

Five townships in Trumbull County were in the direct path of the twister, but the county's major cities, Warren and Niles, escaped the full blast of the storm. Deforest, Eckert's Corners, Howland, Brookfield, and Vienna suffered the most damage in the area. Vienna had at least 50 houses that were damaged by the winds. Many houses were levelled and ripped from their foundations in the vicinity of Deforest Avenue. At Bolindale, trees were uprooted and several homes were toppled while others were partly destroyed.

Thousands of trees throughout the storm area were uprooted or sheared off at the tops leaving their trunks bare and pointed. Orchards suffered heavily as the tornado pulled the precious fruit trees out of the ground.

The terrific force of the tornado can be explained only by its ability to pick up entire automobiles and hurl them three or four hundred yards and deposited in nearby corn fields. On one farm a tractor was twisted in half. At another, a truck was only a twisted mass of steel after the storm struck.

A two-story structure at Deforest housing a store and apartments was leveled and the owners, Mr. and Mrs. *Nick Pznicks* received minor injuries. Mrs. Irene Johnson crouched against a basement wall as the twister ripped off a side of the house.

Residents of the stricken areas reported seeing a funnel shaped black cloud which they first took for a column of smoke. The roaring sound increased as it got closer, and householders ran for their basements. Many people were taken by surprise and did not have time to seek protection.

One of the most beautiful suburban residential districts in this section of Niles in the vicinity of Eckert's(sp) Corners today is a twisted and torn mass of trees thrown about by the fury of last Saturday's tornado which ripped through the area.

"Eckert's Corners will never be the same," sighed residents of the area as they were in the middle of cleaning up the damage today.

Eckert's Corners has still not been cleared away and the true picture has not been shown. But when the trees are picked up and carted away, motorists will notice the difference in this once beautiful and shaded district which has been left an open plain.

Power Equipment Loss Set at \$5,000 Niles Daily Times June 10, 1947

Power lines and service were expected to be completely restored by nightfall in all the tornado areas served by the Niles Light Department, Superintendent *Bert Holloway* said this morning.

"Power was restored on North Road Sunday morning and on Cortland Road at noon yesterday," he said. Partial service was restored on Stillwagon and Mines Roads at 9 p.m. yesterday and we expect to complete the work by nightfall today."

Holloway estimated damage and loss in material, labor and revenue to the Niles Light Department, resulting from Saturday's tornado which ripped and tangled power lines above the roads, at \$5,000.

Personal Account of the 1947 Niles Tornado. *Harvey Kistler*, well-known Niles resident and former mayor, who was returning from Howland Corners on Route 46 Saturday afternoon, had a close-up view of the tornado twisting its way from Bolindale through Eckert's Corners and over toward Sharon.

Reflecting on his experience today, he said, "Yes sir, I saw it go through and I hope to never see another one."

"I was driving south on Niles-Cortland Road just north of Eckert's Corners, when the sky suddenly turned so dark that I didn't dare stop for fear someone would run into my car. I could see a big black funnel coming over the hill from Bolindale and it looked as if were heading right for my car. The wind blew harder and the rains got heavier; hail stones were making so much noise on the car roof that I couldn't hear anything. The storm grew so violent that I stopped the car and backed into a driveway about a quarter mile north of Eckert's Corners."

"Mrs. Kistler was in the car with me and we were right on the edge of the tornado as it ripped through Eckert's Corners. Just west of Route 422 and the Niles-Cortland Road, the big funnel dissolved and a little one appeared in its place. The little one was right on the ground and when it formed, things really started whirling. I don't think the big funnel was touching the ground, but the little one was right on the ground," the former mayor stated.

To read more about Mayor Harvey Kistler, follow the link:

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

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