

President's Message

The month of May brings lilacs, azaleas, tulips and more. Trees are bursting with new leaves and then there is the winter clean up.

Here at the Ward – Thomas property an energetic group of younger people are beautifying the space. These young people have tended many plants of all varieties in the greenhouse all through the winter months. Now with good weather they have turned their energy to the grounds.

In this issue of the “Niles Register” our attention is drawn to the remembrance of the tornado that devastated the area on May 31, 1985. Cleveland Fox8 News interviewed *Bernie Profato* (patrolman), *Tony Vigorito* (fireman) and *Diane Jamieson* (caught in the tornado and lost her house) about that day. The interview will air at the end of May.

On May 21, 2025 at 6 PM the McKinley Memorial Library will host *Kelli Izzo*, a survivor of the tornado, who will discuss her experiences and memories of that day, Remembering the 1985 Niles Tornado. The Niles Historical Society will display historical photographs and articles from the event of May 31, 1985.

Once again the Society will participate in Family Day, June 7, 2025, Saturday from 11 AM–2PM in Warren at the Trumbull County Public Library in partnership with the Trumbull County Historical Society. There will be activities for young people and many organizations will present gifts and crafts for the children to experience.

Sunday, June 29, 2025, 2 PM–3:30 PM the Mahoning Valley Cabaret will present “I’ve Got Rhythm”, a musical review of the Great American Song Book. This group is comprised of entertainers from all over the Valley. A free will offering will be asked of the audience. The performance will be under tent. Bring your lawn chairs. The grounds will be open from 12–4 PM for a Vendors Market with several vendors plying their wares. There will also be baskets for raffle and a 50/50 raffle. The Ward–Thomas House will be open for tours. Proceeds benefit the garden renovation. (see the flyer)

Although dates are not written in stone, stay tuned to upcoming events. The Society will present several topic events to celebrate America 250.

In September 2025 the topic will be famous people of Niles. Presenters will portray native Nilesites who excelled in politics, the arts, sports, science and invention.

In November 2025 the confrontation between the KuKluxKlan and Niles residents will be presented.

December 2025 is the month for McKinley Christmas and the Festival of Trees.

Beginning in January the First Ladies Gowns will again be displayed for several months.

Disasters that hit Niles will be the topic in March 2026: Flood of 1913, Snowstorm of 1950, the Hoffman fire, Tornado of May 31, 1985.

June 2026 will find us exploring transportation and how Niles grew: Indian trails, canals, trolleys, trains and cars.

We will be busy. Come join us!

Check out the updated 1985 Tornado web page:

<https://www.nileshistoricalsociety.org/1985Tornado.htm>

Check out the updated Niles Bank Building:

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

40 Years Ago...



Tribune
Niles police officer Bernie Profato carries a bag containing a portion of a body that was found Saturday morning on the site of the Niles Park Plaza in Niles, which was struck by a tornado Friday.

Profato and Criswell Cheat Death

Ignored hazards to free trapped victims

By FRED KEARNEY Times Managing Editor

NILES–Death stalked Niles in the form of a savage tornado Friday night, but herculean efforts by police and firemen cheated the storm of at least a score of other victims. Prompt response, a coordinated reaction and tireless work supplemented outright acts of courage as Niles police and firemen staged a valiant “holding action” until hundreds of fellow officers and fire fighters streamed here to complete the first 12 hours of rescue and clean-up.

Niles patrolmen *Bernie Profato* and *Ken Criswell* faced a special challenge with Profato the first safety force member to reach the corner of Rt. 422 and Niles-Vienna Rd. and Criswell only a hundred yards away as the twister leveled the Convenient Market and Niles Union Cemetery’s trees.

“I’ve patrolled this city for years, but when I got out of my van in the YMCA driveway because Rt. 422 was covered with wires and debris and I could see right through to Vienna Rd., I knew there was trouble,” Profato explains.

Even the story of how Profato happened to be on Rt. 422 is a strange one. The city’s traffic officer was home off-duty when he saw the darkened skies and heard the tornado’s roar. Checking to be certain no one in his home had been injured, Profato got in the van and reached the intersection of Moreland Rd. and Rt. 46 (Vienna Ave.), when he turned left toward Rt. 422. What Profato doesn’t understand is what compelled him to make the left turn since he’s made a right turn from his house to the police station downtown thousands of times. “*Capt. Kramer* asked why I turned left and I still haven’t been able to give him an answer,” Profato says.

When Profato neared the Niles Park Plaza site, he spotted a woman coming toward him in a white karate outfit, a sight made starkly graphic by the murky sky and debris laden air. “I directed her to the “Y” because I knew it had escaped damage and when I got to the plaza parking area, the first person I saw was Trumbull County Sheriff’s *Sgt. Dan Dannunzio* dripping blood and in pain,” Profato continued. Dannunzio had been among those in the karate class and he too was sent to the “Y” for treatment.

Profato dashed into the rubble that once housed the karate studio to carry two persons to safety before being hailed by the husband of one of the storm victims who pleaded for help in locating his wife.

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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

VENDORS MARKET

SWEET
TREATS

CUSTOM
CLOTHING

FACE
PAINTING

PERMANENT
JEWELRY

FLOWER
BOUQUETS

HOUSE
PLANTS

BAKED
GOODS

SOY
CANDLES

HAIR
TINSEL

CUSTOM
JEWELRY



The Ward Thomas House
NILES HISTORICAL SOCIETY

503 BROWN ST.
NILES, OH 44446

Sunday
June 29th
12P-4P

I GOT RHYTHM
Hits of the Great
American Song
Book
2-3:30P

Calendar of Events:

Business meeting:

Saturday, June 14, 2025, 10:00 AM

Saturday, July 12, 2025, 10:00 AM

Open House:

Sunday, June 1, 2025, 2:00 PM, last tour at 4:00 PM

Sunday, June 29, 2025, 12:30 PM, last tour at 4:00 PM

Business meetings are open to all members of the Niles Historical Society.

Vendors Market and Mahoning Valley Cabaret

"I've Got Rhythm":

June 29, 2025 12:00 – 4:00 PM



HEATON PLOT RESTORATION — Members of the Niles Historical Society survey the damage from the May 31 tornado at the Heaton Plot in Niles Union Cemetery Monday where James Heaton, founder of Niles and members of his family are buried. The Niles Rotary Club has pledged its support to the Historical Society's Cemetery Preservation Committee to establish the Heaton Plot Memorial Fund and carry out the work to

complete the project. From left are, Niles Rotary president Dave Williams, Betty Moritz, chairman of the cemetery committee, James DeChristoforo from the Niles Monument Co. which is donating its labor for the project and Audrey John, president of the Niles Historical Society. Donations for the project can be mailed to the Historical Society, P.O. Box 388, Niles, Ohio 44446. (Photo by Bob DeMay)

Niles Trust Company Bank Building History.

Of the 54 lots platted in 1834, James and Warren Heaton owned 23 parcels including the lot at the intersection of South Main Street and West James Street (now Park Avenue).

From 1842–1865 the building, located on this site, served as a hotel. It became the Harris family residence from 1865–1905. From then until 1920 it was used for various businesses and storage. At that time it was sold by the Harris heirs to the Niles Trust Company and was demolished in 1929. It was to become the site of the first Niles mini-skyscraper—The Niles Trust Company Bank Building.



Pictured L–R are: *Martha J. Robbins, Sarah A. Pew, Hannah M. Taylor, A.F. Harris, C.G. Harris, Mrs. James Harris, F.W. Harris and H.J. Harris.* Photo dated September 1866.



The city newspaper delivery boys, some as young as 5 years old, standing in front of the Trumbull News Company on the future site of the Niles Trust Company Bank Building. Sitting in middle of the wagon, *Andy Nelson Patrone*; center front row, *Joe Patrone* and *Michael Patrone* (only head showing). Photo taken November 19, 1929 before the newspaper stand was torn down prior to the construction of the Niles Trust Company. A Chinese Laundry was located to left and back of this building. Later Reisman's would open in a new building here.

The construction of the mini-skyscraper by the Niles Trust Company on the site of the former Harris residence began on November 25, 1929 and was completed in 1930.

The seven-story building was completed in the Art–Deco style popular in the 1920's and 1930's. Heavy use of deep colored marble and shining bronze is evident throughout the building. Exterior frontage and large brass front doors were also fabricated in the Art–Deco style.



Between the Holeyton building (1887), occupied by Kreiger's Pool Hall, and the bank, a new building was erected and occupied by Reisman's.



Photograph of the main lobby in the Niles Trust Company with teller stations, vault and mezzanine floor with offices.

The 1961 occupants of the bank building by room number.

Basement–Mary Loise Megert Dance Studio

302 Dr. Abraham Hoodin	501 Kinderman Stl M Equip
303 Niles Community Corporation	502-3 Mitchell Shaker
304 Dr. I.E. Benis	504 vacant
305 Dr. Sam Jaffe	505 Brown Adj Co
306 American Red Cross	506 Baringer & Co
307 Dr. R.G. Davis	507 MacQueen & MacQueen
308-10 Martha Jaynes' Beauty School	508 Johnson Agency
401 Mansell Insurance Agency	509 vacant
402 Paul Moritz	601-2 Dr. Nick and Tony Altiero
403 Wilson Insurance Agency	603 Longberry Employment Svc
404 General Adjustment Bureau	605-08 SV Wilder, Wilder MFG Co,
405 vacant	609-10 vacant
406 Clare Westenfiel	Penthouse–Niles Area Chamber of Commerce.
409 Credit Bureau of Niles	

"It was strange. Usually at a minor traffic accident, you have to keep the people away, but when I looked around in the plaza parking lot I was almost alone. Another man had helped a couple of people out of the karate studio and it was only a short time before off-duty fireman *George Sprague* arrived. but we were virtually by ourselves for several minutes. I'll never forget it," Profato notes.

Profato hailed down a motorcyclist who had driven around debris on the road and sent him to the police department seeking help because he had no mobile radio with him.

With natural gas roaring from broken pipes, Profato ran to the rear of the plaza where he found three bodies later identified as having been in a home across Rt. 422 from the plaza. Profato then reached the far side of the ruins that once had been the Autumn Hills Nursing Home scheduled to open today and found the husband of *Elaine Italiano* still searching feverishly for his wife.

"There were two cars close together a short distance off Vienna Rd. and I asked Mr. Italiano what his wife was wearing because I'd already found the body of a woman dressed in purple but he told me his wife was wearing white and was a red head," Profato said.

Profato walked back to the car he first spotted and saw an arm sticking out of a pile of debris a few feet from where he discovered the first purple clad woman's body. Digging quickly, he saw the woman was dressed in white and was obviously Italiano's wife. Italiano gave Profato no indication of what happened as the family car was tossed through the air, but did tell the traffic officer the couple had been driving on Rt. 422 for a dinner at Jimmy Chieffo's Restaurant when the tornado struck them.

When Profato saw both the Italiano and *Evelyn Simmons* cars near the nursing home, both were on all four wheels. "Mrs. Simmons and her daughter, *Denise Mazza*, both of Girard had been sitting in their car getting gas at the demolished Thornton station on Rt. 422 when the tornado literally sucked them from the vehicle," Mr. Simmons told Profato as he eased her onto a cushion found a short distance away. According to Profato, Mazza was dead at the scene while Mrs. Simmons died later.

While ambulance crews rushed Mrs. Simmons to the hospital, Profato returned to the plaza where a Howland Township policeman obtained a jack and Profato and the officer raised a beam pinning *Linda McMahon* of Austintown in the ruins of the Rent-A-Center store. Profato had checked but found no pulse on the McMahon woman before tending to Italiano and Mrs. Simmons and efforts by paramedics to revive Mrs. McMahon a few moments later were unsuccessful.

In the space of 15 to 20 minutes, Profato had found seven persons dead or dying. two injured men and rescued two more individuals from the karate studio. All the while the natural gas spewed forth into the air and rumors persisted that several persons were trapped in the shambles of the Top O' The Strip Roller Rink.

At this point additional help, including patrolman Criswell, arrived and Profato requested refrigerated trucks be sent to the scene to serve as a temporary morgue. Profato made his plea on the mobile radio he commandeered from Criswell.

Criswell went to the "Y" to aid in treating victims but he had already had his brush with the fierce storm. On patrol in the downtown area just before 7 p.m. Friday, Criswell sighted the tornado heading over the Sparkle Market on Main St. and feared it would hit the Federal Street GE plant. Criswell turned on his lights and siren and actually chased the tornado up Vienna Avenue being forced to halt his cruiser at the K of C Hall on Vienna Avenue as the winds dipped down leveling the Convenient Market scattering used cars from a nearby lot to the four winds, ravaging the cemetery and peeling open two units in the Eastwood Arms apartment complex. When I saw what happened, I put in a Signal 5 call emergency 1, asking for a wrecker and lots of help." Criswell said.

As he approached the Convenient Market, he was told persons

were trapped inside. Checking he found seven persons had been pinned beneath debris and wall-length ceiling-high coolers. Criswell assured those trapped that help would soon arrive and joined with firemen *Randy Ciminero*, *Gene Crockett* and *Ray LaBuda* in attaching a cable from *Art White's* wrecker to fallen beams allowing rescue efforts to free the seven. Tragically, *Helen Thomas* had been struck by a beam and was killed in the store, with her daughter *Delores Thomas* badly injured. Five others were less seriously hurt. Brookfield Police Chief *Jessie Rigglesman* reached the Convenient Market just moments after Criswell and aided greatly in freeing those trapped helping Criswell remove the coolers.

Both Profato and Criswell had words of high praise for Patrolman *Ray Gorby* who handled the command post established on Rt. 422 and directed radio communications throughout Friday night and most of Saturday morning. "Ray was a tremendous help and his knowledge of the city and our officers were invaluable." Profato and Criswell agreed. Each officer also expressed their appreciation for the public's help and praised local residents for retaining their composure in the face of the worst natural disaster in the community's history.

Profato and Criswell insist they deserve no more credit than any other member of the police or fire department who all performed admirably during the storm crisis. Being at the two scenes where fatalities occurred and persons were rescued was accidental, but don't try to tell those saved by Profato and Criswell their performance was routine. You don't thwart death with a routine performance.

Profato and Criswell did-~~cheat~~ death.



Roller rink search: A rescue worker peers inside a twisted automobile in the search for bodies at the Top-O-Strip Roller Skating rink. An E-5 tornado leveled the rink, the L-shaped Niles Park Plaza, Thornton's Gas station and the new, unoccupied Autumn Hills Nursing Home.



Aerial view of the May 31, 1985 tornado damage to the buildings at Route 422 and Niles-Vienna Road.

To discover more about the 1985 tornado, follow the link:

<https://www.nileshistoricalsociety.org/1985Tornado.htm>