



# THE KENT HISTORIAN

Newsletter of the Kent Historical Society

Spring 2010  
Number 69

## HISTORY FEATURE

### KHS School Days Exhibit in Session Through December

The story of schooling in Kent, Ohio, is a story of both change and continuity. The first school in what was then Franklin Mills was convened in a small cabin in 1815-1816. The construction of a building to serve as a schoolhouse and meetinghouse was completed in the summer of 1817. For the next 50 years, children attended one of four district schools located throughout the township. A single teacher in each schoolhouse instructed students of various ages and abilities. Tuition-based "select" (private) schools offered advanced instruction. In Kent, these schools were housed at the Town Hall.



St. Patrick School class of 1940.

Kent's emergence as a regional railroad hub during the Civil War made the city an attractive place to live and work. In the early 1860s, Kent's prospering citizenry voted to create a "union school system" of graded schools supported through public funds rather than tuition. (The system marks the beginning of the modern public school system in Ohio, dating to the passage of "union school" legislation in 1849.) On March 15, 1869, the Union School, also known as Central School, opened

to students. Located on North Mantua Street, the "splendid" building was "an ornament" to Kent, according to the *Portage County Democrat* newspaper.

Central School's first graduate was Anna Nutting. As the sole member of the class of 1869, and as a teacher and principal of the school for the next 20 years, Nutting was much revered. In 1881, her fellow teachers celebrated her birthday by giving her "a very handsome silver, gold-lined cake basket."

"The excellent corps of teachers" and superintendents earned praise throughout the state. The *Ohio Educational Monthly* noted in 1886, "There are no better schools in the State than those at Kent."

The Second Great Immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe between 1880 and 1920 swelled Central School's study halls and classrooms. In the 1880s, the DePeyster and South schools were constructed to house elementary students. St. Patrick School, serving the city's growing Catholic population, was established in 1881. In 1886,

parishioners erected a wood-frame schoolhouse next to St. Patrick Church on Portage Street, only to close the school for lack of funds between 1891 and 1905. In 1923, this humble four-room school was replaced with an eight-room brick structure located on the other side of the church.

Kent's schools served many constituencies. Americanization courses, sponsored by the Kent Welfare Association, were offered at Central School between 1880 and World War I. Father

George Branigan organized a night school for "working boys" in 1906 at St. Patrick School. In 1920, Kent's public school system was the first to establish a "general industrial school"



DePeyster School, built in 1888.

under the 1917 Smith-Hughes National Vocational Education Act, which provided federal funds matched for state funds for trade and industrial education during the school day as well as in the evening. High school curriculum was divided into college preparatory, science and commercial tracks in this era but, by World War II, these subject areas had changed to college preparatory, general and general industrial.

See *SCHOOL*, p. 3.

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# Tales from Oral Histories: Mildred (Elgin) Bumphrey



*The following are excerpts from the oral history of Mildred (Elgin) Bumphrey recorded for the Kent Historical Society on March 29, 1983, by Helen Jane (Strimple) Wilson. The excerpt focuses on the restaurant at the Erie Depot. The full oral history is available at the Kent Historical Society Museum. Mildred is pictured here working on the afghan she created for the 2006 Kent Bicentennial. Mildred was born in Kent on July 26, 1905. The afghan will be displayed for the Kent Heritage Festival on Saturday, July 3, and at the society museum through August 30, 2010. To give your oral history, contact Lorie Bednar at the Historical Society at 330-678-2712 or mlbednar@msn.com to schedule a time to share your memories either at your home or at the society office.*

**HW:** We'll start with the restaurant. Will you describe it?

**MB:** All I know about the restaurant are memories I have that my father used to tell me. My father's father was Thomas Elgin, and he brought his brother, Elmer Elgin, to Kent to be in the employe of the Erie Railroad Restaurant. And he was a very fine chef, and he had come from West Salem, Ohio, where the Mussers had connections, and so he found employment. The restaurant thrived with the Mussers as managers and Elmer Elgin as cook. Now you see, it was not really a Kent restaurant. It was a stop-off on the Erie Railroad, which did not have dining cars. And so they would make these stops to eat their meals. So the restaurant tried to emulate the setting and the atmosphere of a very fine dining coach. My father would say that it had white linen table cloths, white napkins, flowers on the table, very nice menus, and the waiters were all dressed in black. And I remember his saying in carrying a white towel over their arm. The restaurant prospered, and I suppose it was one of the favorite stops on the Erie run in Kent, Ohio, to eat at the station.

**HW:** Could you tell me your father's name?

**MB:** My father's name was G. Frank Elgin, and he was the next to the oldest son of Thomas Elgin. . . . And Thomas Elgin not only brought his brother Elmer to the restaurant to be the chef at the Erie Depot, he also, in due time, brought the rest of his family who found that Kent was a fine place to be employed and to live instead of West Salem.

**HW:** Did the townspeople ever go to the depot restaurant?

**MB:** I was born in 1905 and, to my knowledge, I never knew my parents going there to eat. My father's memories were in his youth.

**HW:** Do you think we have everything now?

**MB:** I believe that's all. And mine is all hearsay, and that is what a great deal of oral history is.

**HW:** That is right. But it is so important.

**MB:** Well, if someone doesn't express their opinion and their knowledge that was picked up in interviews, it will be lost forever.

## Kent Historical Society

**THE KENT HISTORIAN** is a quarterly publication of the Kent Historical Society, a nonprofit organization that strives to be the primary Kent history resource and reference center, leading the community in the collection, preservation and interpretation of Kent's heritage through exhibitions, educational programs and activities. The society brings educational programs to schools, businesses and civic organizations and collaborates with Main Street Kent and other historic preservation projects in the community.

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### Reminders . . .

The Historical Society will be closed on Saturday, May 29, for the Memorial Day weekend. Join us at the Kent Heritage Festival on Saturday, July 3. Be sure to visit our new School Days exhibit.



Kent State University was established in 1910 as the Kent Normal School, one of the first teacher training schools in Ohio. Normal schools offered two-year teacher training to high school graduates. These schools employed model classrooms to impart standards to the teachers-in-training. In 1913, these model classrooms were first opened in Merrill Hall to teach grades one through six. By the end of the decade, Kent Normal High School was added. What would become known after 1938 as Kent State University School offered parents another option for their children's education.

Extracurricular activities engaged students, faculty, parents and the public in the life of Kent's schools. Local newspapers carried not only weekly news of ex-



South School Elementary class, 1910

aminations, teacher appointments, school board decisions and superintendent reports but also news about thrilling football, basketball and baseball games, amusing theatrical plays, themed dances and hops, and musical concerts. Commencements and lists of graduates were front-page news every spring.

During the Great Depression, Kent's schools provided care for children of financially

distressed families. In the summer of 1932, for example, needy children were provided with lunches six days a week. Faculty salaries were cut and, following government policy, married female teachers were not reemployed or hired. The Board of Education recommended that seniors don caps and gowns for commencement exercises in 1932, ensuring that those who could not afford the traditional new suits and dresses would not be outdone; accomplishments should shine, not finery. Community pride also was celebrated when the Daughters of the American Revolution planted a Washington elm tree on the grounds of Theodore Roosevelt High School in celebration of the 200th anniversary of George Washington's birth.

School days spent in common pursuit of knowledge and evenings and weekends spent with sports, clubs and the arts have created a strong community in Kent. This is evident in not only the number of class reunions but also the remarkable number of photographs, scrapbooks, ephemera, yearbooks and other artifacts of school days donated and loaned to the Kent Historical Society. The Society seeks to document further school days in Kent. Please consider sharing your stories and artifacts with us.

Source: This article was written by Shirley Teresa Wajda, Ph.D, guest curator for the Kent Historical Society.

### May 4 Shooting Site on National Register of Historic Places

The 17.4-acre site of the May 4, 1970, shootings at Kent State University is now listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The registry helps local entities protect and preserve sites deemed to be historically significant. At this year's 40th commemoration, the university also dedicated a new guided walking tour featuring seven interpretive panels about different aspects of the events with pictures, maps and written descriptions. Video and audio narratives also are available. For more information about the addition of the site to the national registry or for information about the walking tour at Kent State, go to <http://www.kent.edu/news/announcements/success/dedication-of-may-4-historic-site-and-new-walking-tour.cfm>.

## Happy Birthday, Erie Railroad Depot!

Strike up the band, and join the Kent Historical Society in celebrating the Erie Railroad Depot's 135th birthday and the impact the building and the railroad have had on the community.

First up is a talk by KHS trustee John Wunderle on June 7 at 7 p.m. at the site of the original train yards off Middlebury Road. The yards provided jobs



Erie Depot, 1875.

for community members, and they showed their gratitude to Marvin

Kent for his role in doing so when they changed the town's name from Franklin Mills to Kent.

KHS also will publish an illustrated booklet, edited by Bruce Dzeda, about the Erie Railroad and Kent history. A dedication ceremony is planned for the placement of a commemorative plaque at the depot.

## KHS Intern in the Spotlight

The KHS intern in the spotlight for the spring is Glennis Siegfried.

Siegfried is completing her internship with KHS this summer. She is an undergraduate photojournalism major and graduate student in the library and information science programs at Kent State University. Along with being a



KHS intern, Siegfried is a freelance photographer for organizations such as the Hattie Larlham Center. "What I enjoy most about volunteering is some of the people you get to meet and the different things you can discover on a day-to-day basis in the back storage rooms."

If you would like to volunteer at the Kent Historical Society, contact Lorie Bednar at 330-678-2712 or [mlbednar@msn.com](mailto:mlbednar@msn.com)

# KHS Welcomes New Administrator, Administrative Assistant

The Kent Historical Society welcomes its new administrator, Tom Hatch, and administrative assistant, Lorie Bednar.



Hatch

Joining the Kent Historical Society is a natural extension for Hatch and his life's work. He is an educational publisher who has lived in Kent since 1979. His company publishes e-books in social studies and science for Ohio schools.

"Over the years, as a publisher, I developed several

books related to Ohio history, which sparked and expanded my love of the subject," Hatch said.

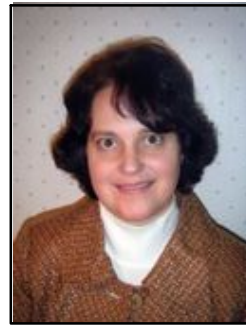
Hatch graduated from Ohio Wesleyan University with a bachelor of arts in English and received his master of science in teaching from SUNY Brockport near Rochester, New York. He is married to the painter, Jance Lentz-Hatch.

He is a member of the Rotary Club of Kent, the advisory board of First Book of Portage County and past president of the Coleman Foundation Board.

Hatch is enthusiastic about assuming a new set of duties with KHS. "It's an exciting time to be in downtown

Kent, especially with such a vital, dynamic and forward-looking institution as the Kent Historical Society," Hatch said. "We look forward to making KHS an even more important part of our community life."

Bednar brings her passion for stories and her love of history to her new position. She comes to the Historical Society after a career in journalism at area newspapers, including *The Record-Courier*, where she worked as reporter, editor, proofreader and page designer. She received her bachelor of arts degree in English from Kent State University.



Bednar

"I've always been interested in the stories that make up our collective history and getting to know the residents who share them," she said.

A lifelong Portage County resident, Bednar now resides in Kent with her husband, Mark, and their three children, aged 2 through 9.

You can find her hard at work in her new office during the Historical Society's open hours. Please stop in, get to know her, and welcome her to her new role.

**Correction:** The date stone bearing the inscription "Erected A. D. 1876," was laid the same evening by E. A. Parsons, Esq., County Commissioner from Kent. The date was incorrectly referenced in the History Feature about the stone bridge in the Winter 2010 newsletter.



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