

The Mahoning Valley Historical Society Newsletter

HISTORICAL HAPPENINGS



PRESERVING THE VALLEY'S HISTORY FOR 133 YEARS

In this issue

- Feature Story:
James Ross
- From This Direction
- Get Your Hands On:
More Mahoning
Valley Trailblazers
- Artifact-ually Speaking:
New Photographic
Exhibit
- Sight & Sound
Coffee An'

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James Ross: Entrepreneur, Philanthropist, Zionist



James Ross was born in Odessa, Russia, in 1892. He graduated from the Imperial High School and went on to study law at the International Institute of Law in Moscow. He married his wife Edith Levin, a physician, in 1920, one year before the two immigrated to the United States. The Rosses visited James's two brothers in Detroit and Los Angeles. Both brothers were in the electronics business, a field they likely encouraged James to pursue. James and Edith settled in Youngstown, where he opened Ross Radio Company in 1930. Ross' business ventures did not stop there, he admitted to the *Jewish Post* that he controlled or was a mainstay of numerous corporations. And when other companies came to him for advice, he would charge them \$5,000 per day; and then give the money to charity.



James Ross (right) with President Harry Truman. Photo by Dan Kaplan

charities, Mr. Ross gave one million dollars to Hebrew University in 1965 and, with his wife, pledged \$500,000 toward an information center at the Hadassah Medical Center on Mount Scopus.

Ross was a member of the Ohev Tzedek Temple, a Rotarian, an Elk, a Thirty Second Degree Mason and a member of the Political Science Academy of New York. He was known as a benefactor of churches of all faiths and for years was a substantial contributor to the Alias Santa Claus program. Mr. Ross died at the age of eighty-two, in 1974. ✪

What is Zionism? A Jewish movement that arose in the late 19th century in response to growing anti-Semitism and sought to reestablish a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Modern Zionism is concerned with the support and development of the state of Israel.

Ross Radio Company & Gun Running

After World War II, thousands of Jewish refugees from Europe fled to British-controlled Palestine, the Holy Land for Jews, Muslims and Christians. In an effort to quell tensions between Arabs and Jews and in response to bombings and armed conflicts by extremists on both sides, British Army forces raided and disarmed Jewish settlements in Palestine leaving them defenseless against attacks.

As local Jewish servicemen returned to Youngstown after World War II, their interest was drawn to events in Palestine and an almost forgotten Zionist organization—Massada, Young Zionists of America—was reactivated. In 1946 the elders of the Zionists of America (including James Ross) challenged their young members to get directly involved with the crisis in Palestine. Massada members solicited veterans in the Youngstown-Warren-Sharon-New Castle region door-to-door for weapons and ammunition which they brought home as souvenirs from World War II. Collected weapons were taken to Ross Radio Co. on West Federal Street at night where a crew packed them in crates marked "radio parts" and shipped them to a warehouse in New York City. There the guns and ammunition were sorted, matched, cannibalized or repaired and repacked in crates marked "farm equipment," which were then smuggled into Palestine.

Those involved locally wondered why none of the veterans solicited called the authorities to report these activities, especially when the weapons were carried over state lines. They came to believe that the American veterans sympathized with the Jews in Palestine and saw them as underdogs. ✪

(Source: *These are the Names, The History of the Jews of Greater Youngstown, Ohio 1865-1990.* Irving E. Ozer, Harry A. Alter, Lois Davidow and Saul Friedman)



Federal Appropriation Requests for the 2010 fiscal year have been submitted to the offices of Congressman Tim Ryan and Senators Sherrod Brown and George Voinovich. The campaign staff has completed and submitted a Letter of Intent to the Kresge Foundation as a first step toward applying for a substantial challenge grant to aid the History Center project. Members of the Executive Committee and the Campaign Steering Committee are working with the Historical Society staff and Bentz Associates on a transition plan to bring management of the campaign in-house. ✪

From This Direction

If a picture really is worth a thousand words, the Mahoning Valley Historical Society's museum and archives collections contain enough images to create hundreds of millions of descriptive terms!

One of the newest acquisitions seen on page three of this edition fills the documentary void between the construction of the Mill Creek furnace around 1830—prior to photography—and its current condition in which a vast majority of its building stones are either upended or missing. Artist Jack Carlton illustrated the history of Harry Burt and his confections with the latest of his *Museum Without Walls* creations in the street level windows of the future Mahoning Valley History Center. The new exhibit documenting the important work of local photographer John Megown is a small sampling from a vast and extraordinary collection which the Historical Society recently acquired.

Experience much more of the Historical Society's unique prose written by the lens, pen, pencil and brush with a visit to the museum or archives!

~H. William Lawson

Get your Hands-On:

More Mahoning Valley Trailblazers

Rebecca Whittenberger, Curator of Education

1. Harriet Taylor Upton
2. Volney Rogers
3. Jacob and Nancy Barnes
4. Elijah Boardman
5. Warren P. Williamson, Jr.

A. In 1826 they moved to Canfield to farm and were abolitionists at a time and place when that was an unpopular conviction. They opened their home as a stop on the Underground Railroad.

B. He worried about the effects of overcrowding and pollution on people in the city and worked for the formation of Mill Creek Park in 1893. A Youngstown junior high school is named for him.



C. A pioneer in broadcasting, he started WKBN from his home on Youngstown's south side in 1926. In 1953, he had the first local television broadcast.

D. A former president of the Ohio Woman Suffrage Association, in 1920 she became vice-chairman of the Republican National Executive Committee – the first woman to hold a position at that level in any party.

E. Owner of the most land in the township south of Youngstown in 1798, member of the Connecticut Land Company, first township clerk, first justice of the peace, first postmaster, a captain of the militia, and founder of grist-, cloth-, and sawmills, he got the township named after him.

Museum Without Walls Installation at Harry Burt/Ross Radio Building



Jack Carlton & Jason Vaughn

Local Artist Jack Carlton, with assistance from Jason Vaughn, completed his latest installation of the *Museum Without Walls* project in downtown Youngstown at the Harry Burt/Ross Radio Building on Saturday, February 7. The new exhibit includes six canvas panels containing photo collages featuring Harry Burt, the Good Humor® ice cream bar on a stick, and the operations of Burt's Confectionary in the 1920's. The collages also feature historic photographs of other sites in downtown Youngstown from the 19th and early 20th centuries. All images came from the Historical Society's archives. The result is a very attractive exhibit which, along with the large canvas banners on the side walls announcing the building as the future location of the Mahoning Valley History Center, will continue to draw attention to the site as the Historical Society finalizes development plans and continues to raise money. Partial funding for this project came from the Florence Simon Beecher Foundation. ✪

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A panoramic view of the front windows. The image is created from two merged photos creating an illusion, the center column in front of the door is not visible.

Coming Soon! Hands-On History Summer Camps

To register for any of these programs, please call the Society at 330-743-2589.

New! "Beautifully Useful!" Decorative Arts Camp:

Using the period rooms at the Arms mansion as a special backdrop, kids will create decorative arts crafts with both beauty and function.

June 23-26; 9:30-12:30; Ages 6-12

Cost: \$25 Members; \$35 Non-Members

"Pioneer Days!" Camp:

Learn about the lives of the early pioneers by playing old-fashioned games and making special pioneer crafts.

July 14-17; 9:30-12:30; Ages 6-12

Cost: \$20 Members; \$30 Non-Members

"Hi-Tech History" Video Camp:

Kids learn to create, produce and film their own historical documentary! Each child will receive a copy of their video on DVD.

August 4-7; 9:30-12:30; Ages 9-12

Cost: \$25 Members; \$35 Non-Members

Artifact-ually Speaking

Jessica Trickett,
Anne Kilcawley Christman Memorial Collections Manager

John D. Megown was a professional photographer in Youngstown during the early decades of the 20th Century. Megown photographed a wide variety of subjects, both commercial and scenic. His work is a fascinating record of the social and economic setting during a period of significant growth in the history of Youngstown and the Mahoning Valley.



William Jennings Bryan at Tod House

Born in Youngstown in 1871, Megown worked as a machinist and gunsmith before changing to photography in 1907. Megown married Elizabeth Clark and the couple had eight children, which were the subject of many of Megown's personal photographs. Family photography was also one of Megown's professional skills, capturing scenes of his patrons' home life. Megown also documented significant events, such as a visit to downtown Youngstown in 1908 by presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan, as well as scenes of people at work and groups engaged in social activities or leisure pursuits.



John Douglas Megown

Megown photographed Youngstown's growing commercial district and the construction of several landmark buildings, including the Mahoning County Courthouse cornerstone laying in 1908. Megown's photographs also featured schools, businesses, industry, and scenic views from Mill Creek and Idora Parks.



*Cornerstone laying
Mahoning County Courthouse*



Idora Park Carousel Enclosure, ca. 1910

In 2007, members of the Megown family donated to MVHS hundreds of photographic images taken by John Megown during his photographic career. In addition, MVHS was granted permission by Tom Molocea to duplicate a collection of Megown's photographic work that Mr. Molocea had previously acquired. The combined collection of images

provides a unique window to the people, places, and pastimes of the era, and will be featured in an exhibit at the Arms Family Museum of Local History opening Tuesday, March 17 and showing through June of 2009. ✪

Sight & Sound

Business & Media Archives of the Mahoning Valley



One of the first radio talk shows in the Mahoning Valley was W F M J 's *Coffee An*; a program that ran from 1954 until sometime in the 1970's. The show was the brainchild of WFMJ's General Manager Mitch Stanley who brought the idea from his previous job as General Manager for a radio

station in Woonsocket, Rhode Island. Mitch's son Tim Stanley, who grew up at, and still works for, WFMJ, stated that the name for the show came from a popular song of the 1950's, The six hosts would rotate and discuss the day's news and conduct interviews.

Although Mitch Stanley was General Manager, he enjoyed doing on-air talk shows and he hosted a number of them: a call-in talk show on radio called *Sound-Off*; a long running TV show called *Spotlight*; a local medical show called *Diagnosis*; and a Catholic themed show.

This promotional image for the show comes from the Hank Perkins collection. It shows Haber's Furniture store as one of the main sponsors and features the co-hosts of the show pictured left to right: Bob Locke, Kathryn Laskowski, Mitch Stanley, Marge Mariner, John Yoder and Bob Jolly. ✪

New Addition to MVHS Archives



An outstanding new addition to the Historical Society's archives collection is a photograph of the Mill Creek iron blast furnace (the ruins of which are located behind Pioneer Pavilion in Mill Creek Park) showing it intact in the mid-to-late 1870's. Though the Historical Society owns a painting of Pioneer Pavilion and the furnace stack from the same period, this is the first time that anyone on the staff of the Historical Society—or from Mill Creek MetroParks—

has ever seen a photograph of this furnace. Thanks to donors William and Jacqueline Dunleavy of New Springfield, we are now able to preserve this image into perpetuity. ✪

The Mahoning Valley Historical Society,

founded in 1875, educates and promotes an interest in the history of the Mahoning Valley by collecting, preserving and developing material representative of the people who have inhabited the region.



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Leann Rich, Editor



Historic Preservation Awards Program

The nomination criteria and application forms for the 2009 Historic Preservation Awards are now available with an April 10th deadline. If you are aware of any preservation projects completed in Mahoning or Trumbull Counties please contact the Society. ✉

Upcoming Events

Exhibit Opening

Megown Photography Collection

Tuesday, March 17

Arms Family Museum, Hallway Gallery

Volunteer Appreciation Lunch

Tuesday, April 28

MVHS Carriage House

History to Go

Wick Park Walking Tour

May 2009

Date & Time TBD

Hands-On Summer Camp

"Beautifully Useful!" Decorative Arts Camp

June 23-26

Hands-On Summer Camp

"Pioneer Days!" Camp

July 14-17

Hands-On Summer Camp

"Hi-Tech History" Video Camp

August 4-7

Mahoning Valley Trailblazers Answers: 1-D; 2-B; 3-A; 4-E; 5-C

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