

# Starke County Historical Society

## THE PRIDE OF STARKE COUNTY

Spring, 2021

Newsletter

### *MESSAGE from the PRESIDENT*

The robins and red-winged blackbirds have returned and that means spring is here. Trees and flowers are blooming, showing us the beauty of our county. So too, the museum will be showing off some new and improved exhibits and displays. The display committee has been working all winter to update and change out pieces in the museum.

Despite what Covid-19 has thrown at us, our display committee, along with several others, has worked tirelessly to get new exhibits and displays set up. A very nice military display contains uniforms from local veterans. Our wedding exhibit will be around thru December. We have a beautiful display of glassware and child tea sets. Come in and visit us.

The inventorying and cataloging of the museum objects are moving along, although it will take some time to complete. I would like to thank the people helping with this task for the many hours they have already put in. We are always looking for people to volunteer in many ways at the museum. If you are interested in giving a few hours of your time each month, please complete the form on p. 7 of this newsletter and either mail or drop it off at the History Center. For more information, contact us by either phone or email:

574-772-7242 or [schistorycenter@gmail.com](mailto:schistorycenter@gmail.com).



### *2021 SCHS OFFICERS*

The SCHS Board of Directors has a new secretary for 2021 - Doris Freed (pictured). Officers who were re-elected for 2021 are Dolores Surfus, President; Julie Smith, Vice-President; and Patty Redlin, Treasurer. Congratulations!



Doris Freed, Secretary  
pictured in the History Center



### *STARKE COUNTY TRIVIA*

Starke County was established in 1850. Out of the 92 counties in Indiana, that makes it the 91st county, followed only by Newton County in 1859.

## ***FRANK HARRY ONO EXHIBIT***

A recent addition to the exhibits in the Starke County History Center highlights one of Starke County's own heroes.

Frank H Ono was born in Colorado, but spent most of his 56 years in Starke County, Indiana. He was a second generation Japanese-American. His father was an immigrant from Japan, while his mother was Irish.

During WWII, PFC Ono volunteered to be part of the all-Nisei 442nd Regimental Combat Team, mostly made up of Japanese-Americans from Hawaii and the mainland. His bravery was evident during the unit's battle in Italy in 1944.



According to Wikipedia, "Ono advanced ahead of his unit and single-handedly defended his position against an enemy counter-attack. He then braved intense hostile fire to aid two wounded comrades and, when it became necessary to retreat, voluntarily covered his unit's withdrawal. For his actions during the battle, he was awarded the Army's second-highest decoration, the Distinguished Service Cross." The award was upgraded posthumously to the Medal of Honor on June 21, 2000.

His many awards are on display, including the Medal of Honor, Purple Heart, and the certificate signed by President Bill Clinton. Newspaper articles and pictures of this hero tell the story of his life.

In 2014, the overpass located on Highway 35 just south of U.S. 30 was renamed in honor of Frank H. Ono, one of Starke County's most decorated veterans.



This Medal of Honor recipient also joined three other legends from northwest Indiana on the South Shore Wall of Legends, posthumously, during an induction ceremony on December 19, 2014. The Wall of Legends recognizes natives of the area who exemplify "exploration, courage, creativity and innovation."

While you are viewing the Frank Ono exhibit in the History Center, check out the military exhibit, including the Jensen display of Kingsbury Ordnance Plant items, and the chance to honor your veteran on the Military Memorial Tree.



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## ***ENDOWMENT OPPORTUNITIES***

The Starke County Community Foundation, an affiliate of the Northern Indiana Community Foundation, holds two endowment funds that benefit the Starke County Historical Society.

The Starke County Historical Society, Inc. Endowment Fund provides general support for the Historical Society while the Governor H.F. Schricker Historical Fund provides support to the Historical Society for the maintenance and expansion of the Schricker house.

In order to give easily online, visit [nicf.org](http://nicf.org) and click "Donate." Select the name of the fund under "Designate Your Gift." Alternatively, mail and make checks out to NICF, PO Box 807, Rochester, IN 46975, and note the name of the fund in the memo.

## ***BASS LAKE TREASURES***

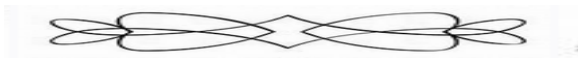
You've probably heard the phrase, "One man's trash is another man's treasure." Well, Al Hayes, who has a summer home at Bass Lake, lives by that motto.

Over twenty years ago, Mr. Hayes took up diving. Soon he became intrigued by what was under the water at the bottom of Bass Lake. Most of his discoveries in Bass Lake have been made by feel, not vision, as the visibility is only about two feet. But, oh what he has found.

While the majority of the items found are recycled (metal cans, plastic, etc.), Mr. Hayes has truly found some remarkable treasures which have created an incredible collection of artifacts. Items include an amazing selection of glass bottles, anchors, plow pieces, an iron bell, and an Aldon Truck Chock.



The Starke County History Center is lucky to be featuring the Hayes collection this summer from April 22-September 4. For more on the Hayes collection, check our facebook page.



### ***MILITARY MEMORIAL TREE***

This summer, family and friends will be able to honor deceased veterans by hanging a star with the veteran's name on the **MILITARY MEMORIAL TREE** in the Starke County History Center.

Stars will be color coded as follows:

**WHITE** for WWI or before

**GOLD** for WWII






**RED** for Korea

**BRONZE** for Vietnam

**YELLOW** for 1985 to present

The deceased veteran being honored may be local or can be from anywhere if related to a local citizen. A **ONE DOLLAR** donation places the memory of your much-loved veteran on the Memorial Tree. Forms are available now, in time for **MEMORIAL DAY, May 31, 2021**.

Forms are available at the Starke County History Center, 1520 South Heaton Street, Knox, Indiana, located just north of Our Redeemer Lutheran Church. A form is also below for your convenience.

## MILITARY MEMORIAL TREE --- Honor the memory of a Veteran

A STAR with your **VETERANS Name, Rank, and Branch** will be placed on a tree inside the  
Starke County History Center from May 15 through July 15

Name of veteran being honored \_\_\_\_\_

Rank \_\_\_\_\_ Branch \_\_\_\_\_ Campaign/Years \_\_\_\_\_

Name of veteran being honored \_\_\_\_\_

Rank \_\_\_\_\_ Branch \_\_\_\_\_ Campaign/Years \_\_\_\_\_

Name of veteran being honored \_\_\_\_\_

Rank \_\_\_\_\_ Branch \_\_\_\_\_ Campaign/Years \_\_\_\_\_

Your name \_\_\_\_\_ total ribbons @ \$1.00 each \_\_\_\_\_

Send this form and the money to: Starke County Historical Society, 1520 S. Heaton, Knox, In 46534

## ***FACEBOOK 2020***

The SCHS Facebook page was very active during 2020. 171 messages were posted over the year. Some of the messages were part of a series; others were stand-alone articles.

The most popular topics included articles on the Palm Sunday tornadoes, the influenza epidemic of 1918, a series on outstanding local sports of the past, biographies of Starke County's Gold Star World War I Veterans, a series on Knox businesses, and a series on county schools of the past. The last two series ran randomly throughout the year and are expected to continue in 2021.

If you are not currently one of our followers, please visit our page at:

<https://www.facebook.com/StarkeHistory>



## ***INVENTORY***

A complete inventory update of the society's collection has begun. Every object is being cataloged.

This is a large project which will take years to complete. We are looking for additional volunteers to help.

Would you be interested in having the opportunity to view objects not currently on display? If so, please send a message to [schistorycenter@gmail.com](mailto:schistorycenter@gmail.com) or submit the volunteer form (on page 7 of this newsletter).

## ***UPCOMING EVENTS***

(Dates tentative due to pandemic)

March 18	History Center reopened
April 24	Dedication of Space Tree @ Starke County Courthouse
June 19-20	Booth: Mint Festival
July 4	Ice Cream Social @ Starke County History Center
July 12-17	Booth: Starke County 4-H Fair
July 23-25	Booth: Bass Lake Festival
TBD	2021 SCHS Annual Meeting



## ***KOONTZ MILL***

On the next page is an article on the Koontz pioneer family, who ran the Koontz grist mill for many years. Over those years, the structures were damaged or destroyed, either by flood or fire.

On display in the Starke County History Center is a set of four framed 3D wood-cuttings of Koontz Mills over the years. The mill is depicted in 1851, 1853, 1858, and 1897, showing the different versions of the mill plus a framed description of the mill in the different years. Additionally on display is an oil painting of Koontz Mill, hanging over the player piano in the front room.

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*Newsletter Contributors were Venita Cunningham,  
Melba Shilling, and Dolores Surfus*

### ***Spotlight on Starke County History: SAMUEL KOONTZ, Sr. and Jr.***

In the northern part of our county is Koontz Lake, one of the oldest centers of settlement and industry in Starke County. Today this is a noted lake resort in this part of Indiana. This article looks more closely into the pioneer family for whom the lake is named.

In 1846, four years prior to Starke County being organized, Samuel Koontz, Sr. came to this area. He purchased 160 acres located at the head of present-day Koontz Lake (originally Woodworth's Lake). Koontz built a log cabin, one of the first in that part of the county, then brought his family to Starke County the next year. According to McCormick's "Standard History of Starke County", Mr. Koontz also "brought from Ohio twenty-four head of sheep, which were the first in the county, and in order to protect them from the wolves it was necessary to keep them close in a stable, and finally they were butchered in order to keep them from being devoured by the wolves."

Although the land was wild and marshy, Koontz saw a business opportunity. The outlet for the lake ran through his property. Koontz built a dam to power an "up and down" saw mill, the first sawmill in the county. By 1851 he established the Koontz grist mill, located on the west bank of Koontz Lake. These different businesses were important to the entire county for several years. Pictured is the earliest Koontz grist mill.



One piece of Starke County trivia - Koontz's dam resulted in one of the first lawsuits in Starke County, as his neighbors complained the dam was detrimental to their farmland. But the federal courts ruled in favor of Mr. Koontz and awarded him title to all the waters of the lake. Mr. Koontz then deepened the mill race, allowing him to erect the well-known water mill, which ground grain and other products for many years.

By the time he was sixteen, Samuel Koontz, Jr. began learning the trade of miller, and two years later took charge of the Koontz mill. He operated this business until 1925. Additionally, he improved Koontz Lake as a summer resort, laying out and filling lots plus building cottages, ice houses and other facilities around the shore.



Both father and son served multiple terms as trustee of Oregon Township. Koontz, Jr. was the trustee responsible for overseeing construction of the Grovertown school in 1904. This building served as the local high school until the present Oregon-Davis High School was built. Samuel Koontz, Sr. died in 1898; Samuel Koontz, Jr. died in 1934.

## ***VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES***

The Starke County History Center is open 10-4 Thursdays and 10-2 on Saturdays. We are in need of volunteers to staff during those hours, either as a host/hostess or help with other work at the center. If interested, please complete this form and return it to the SCHC or mail it to Starke County Historical Society, 1520 S. Heaton Street, Knox, IN 46534. Board members would greatly appreciate it.

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### **STARKE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.**

#### **APPLICATION TO VOLUNTEER AT THE HISTORY CENTER**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone (home) \_\_\_\_\_ (cell) \_\_\_\_\_

Email address \_\_\_\_\_

Preferred method of contact \_\_\_\_\_

I am available: (circle all that apply)

Thursdays (10:00-1:00) (1:00-4:00)

Fridays (10:00-1:00) (1:00-4:00)

Saturdays (10:00-2:00) Other \_\_\_\_\_

I am interested in:

\_\_\_\_\_ Computer \_\_\_\_\_ Working with exhibits \_\_\_\_\_ Being a host/hostess \_\_\_\_\_ Inventory

\_\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Related work or volunteer experiences: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

References: (Please provide the name of a Starke County Resident not related to you)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I agree to a limited background check. (sign) \_\_\_\_\_

Starke County Historical Society  
1520 S. Heaton Street  
Knox, IN 46534