

Living History

Melodie Nichols :: Museum Curator

October–December 2008

The Boutwell's

A short history of just one of many families to have called the current museum their home sweet home.
Page 1

Scouting out history at the museum

Scouts recently visited the museum.
Page 2



Curator's letter

Curator Melodie's update of the curious happenings in and about the museum.
Page 2

Museum radio



Stop by and listen to the newly repaired museum radio.
Page 3

Sears homes update

An update of the research intern Andrea Brandon is compiling on the Sears Craftsman kit homes (and others) remaining in Clawson.
Page 3

Just having fun

Celebrate toys and games of the 1920's at the museum.
Page 3



Dr. Joseph and Beatrice Boutwell

The Boutwell family was the second of about ten families to reside at 41 Fisher Court, currently the home of the Clawson Historical Museum. Dr. Boutwell was one of Clawson's first physicians and his family lived in the home from 1924 until about 1929.

Dr. Boutwell originally lived in Royal Oak and worked as a physician for Ford Motor Company, before moving to Clawson's Church Street in the early 1920's, operating his practice from an office in town. It proved difficult even for a physician to provide for his large family, and he eventually moved his office to the home at 41 Fisher Court (then 39 Fisher Court), and converted the small room behind the living room into his office. Apparently a family practice physician wasn't paid as well in those days, as Joseph continued to be unable to make a good living, and moved his family, now with five children, to the island of Put-in-Bay, Ohio.

Mrs. Beatrice Boutwell died about 1938, and the doctor moved his young family several more times, including to Red Jacket, West Virginia, where he worked as doctor for a coal mining company. He died in 1977.

The five Boutwell children visited the museum in the early 1980's, and fondly recalled growing up in Clawson. All three Boutwell boys, Joseph, Charles and William, eventually became physicians.



Dr. Joseph Boutwell and his family lived on Fisher Court from 1924 to 1929. This photo shows the doctor, his wife, and four of their five children.

CLAWSON HISTORICAL MUSEUM PURPOSES AND POLICIES

The Clawson Historical Museum is owned by the City of Clawson. It is governed by a Historical Commission of five members appointed by the Clawson City Council. It is managed by a curator appointed by the City Manager. Its operating budget is funded through the City of Clawson and augmented by generous donations from the Clawson Historical Society.

Museum Purpose *The purpose of the Clawson Historical Museum is to collect, preserve and encourage the use of documents, photographs and artifacts related to the early history of Clawson, from its settlement in 1823 through the present, focusing especially on the decade of the 1920's, when Clawson incorporated as a home rule village.*

Collections Policy *Historical records include those related to area public and civic organizations, such as the Lions Club and the Women's Club, churches, schools and government, as well as personal oral histories of residents, property abstracts, school and business records and thousands of photographs documenting Clawson's buildings, homes, streets and the changes they have undergone through the decades.*

Also included in the collection are maps, almanacs, and contemporary published materials such as local newspapers and news clippings, books, historical research papers, and national magazines and periodicals that reflect the culture of the 1920's.

These materials are available to the public for research on genealogy, property history, environmental investigations and other personal interests. Student research is especially encouraged.

Melodie Nichols :: Museum Curator

Curator's letter

It has been busy here at the museum, and if I ever want to really scare you, I'll put a photo of my desk next to this column!

I had a unique opportunity to provide a presentation for the folks at Special Tree Neuro Skills Center this October. The center provides therapy and rehabilitation for adults who have suffered head injuries. About a dozen people attended the 1 ½ hour presentation, both residents and care workers, which focused on Clawson's history, and provided an opportunity for some hands-on time with artifacts to people who otherwise could not have visited the museum.

I presented a PowerPoint program of the museum interior, artifacts, and historic downtown Clawson, in much the same way as I would for a visitor to the physical museum building. Everyone enjoyed the presentation as much as I enjoyed giving it, and I think it was also an effective tool for enhancing learning and memory. I hope to provide more off-site programs like this one in the future.

I'm also very pleased with the progress we have made in repairing and maintaining our wonderful artifacts. First our player piano, and now our beautiful radio is in splendid working order. We also have First Class Scout Justin Adams who is constructing a brand new crystal radio that can be operated by visitors.

I truly believe this museum is one of the best of its size in the country, and hope to continue to enhance our visitors' experiences.

Melodie

Holiday hours

Are you tired of the bustle of the modern holiday season? Take some time out from your shopping, and bring the family back to the 1920's by visiting the museum this Christmas season. Decorations, holiday cards, and a tree laden with delicate ornaments will rest and cheer you this season. The museum will be open our usual hours, except for Sunday November 30th, Sunday, December 28th, Wednesday December 31st and Sunday January 4th.



Scouting out history at the Museum

The month of October was a busy one at the museum. In addition to our regular visitors on Sundays and Wednesdays, we have been privileged to offer six group tours of local school children and scouting groups, with nearly 100 children visiting.

Four second grade classes from Schalm Elementary visited the museum and the library in October. The second graders especially enjoyed hearing the player piano, and looking at pictures through the stereoscope.

On Saturday, the 25th, six cub scouts toured the museum, and learned about everything from candlestick telephones to buggy horns.

A dozen girl scouts also visited, and enjoyed a sing-along with the player piano. They will be volunteering at the museum occasionally, assisting the curator with cleaning and maintenance.

Still more groups are scheduled to visit the museum before the end of the year. If you know of a group that would like a special tour, contact the museum at 248.588.9169 to schedule a date and time. There is no charge for the tours.





Radio restoration

Restoration is complete on our beautiful 1922 Ambrola radio. It has received new mercury tubes, a new speaker and power supply, and the horn has been refurbished and repaired. The whole radio has been cleaned and polished and looks as good as it did when new nearly ninety years ago. Our grateful appreciation is extended to Tom Senne of Tom's Antique Radio Repair in Dayton, Ohio, for his conscientious attention to our radio. Be sure to visit soon and listen to a tune!

Vintage newspapers available on computer

More editions of the *Clawson Times* are now available on computer. Papers from October 1948 through December 1951 are available, as well as a very interesting scrapbook of newsclippings from 1932-1934. We also have *Clawson Tribune* from 1924, some issues of the *Clawson Journal* from 1925 and 1928, and the *Clawson/Troy News* from December 1936. We hope to add more papers in the future as funds allow. These are available for your browsing pleasure, and individual articles may be printed for those either doing research, or just curious to read the old papers. Please make an appointment if you would like to view these papers.



Sears Craftsman homes research project update

Our intern, Andrea Brandon, is making progress on her research into Sears Craftsman homes in Clawson. She has identified over 35 homes that are possibly Sears homes, and is in the process of confirming their identities and determining what Sears models they are. It is an arduous process, since the Sears Company destroyed all records of the sales of these homes several years ago. We have also located at least one home that was definitely a Montgomery Ward kit home, as well as a few others that may have been purchased through Aladdin Homes from Mount Pleasant Michigan.

Sears was the largest manufacturer of these pre-cut homes, and they offered several models, sizes and home styles to fit any neighborhood. Sears promoted their homes as a cheaper, more efficient way of building. In addition to being purchased and constructed by individual owners, they were also sold to developers who constructed entire neighborhoods, intending them to be housing for workers in a nearby factory. They generally chose two or three styles for these neighborhoods, and many of these streets can still be found in larger cities in the Midwest.



Toys and games at Blair Library

Join museum curator Melodie Nichols at Blair Library on Monday December 8th at 7pm for a special presentation *All I Want For Christmas, Toys of the 1920's*. There will be a lot of toys, including a rare kinora, (never heard of one? Come and see!), fun tin toys, cars and trucks, and unique and curious games that would thrill even the most stalwart game-boy fan! You may contact the library at 248.588.5500 for more information or to register for the program.



Picture perfect

A new exhibit of vintage cameras is now on display at the museum. Thanks to a generous donation by Clawson resident Betty Parke, the museum has acquired a beautiful Folmer Graflex Century studio camera, circa 1928, given in memory of her husband Don Parke. This beautiful camera and more than a dozen other vintage cameras, dating from 1900 through the 1960's, may be viewed in the museum's community room.



The Clawson Historical Museum

Living History

Would you like a sneak peek behind the scenes at the museum? Volunteer!
Volunteers are always welcome and appreciated at the museum.
We have several projects that need assistance, including the following.

- 1) Placing photographs in protective poly sleeves
- 2) Washing windows twice a year
- 3) Tools in the basement need cleaning, and the display needs to be reorganized
- 4) Newspaper archives need to be photocopied
- 5) An electronic version of our accession books needs to be created by scanning and burning to a CD
- 6) Dusting and vacuuming the exhibit rooms
- 7) Docents are needed to give tours one Sunday a month
- 8) Helping to market and promote museum to the community
- 9) Assisting curator with photographing items and creating on-line exhibits
- 10) Transcribing oral histories

If any of these projects seem to fit your area of interest and expertise, grab a friend and come on over to help. You don't need to make a big commitment, just whatever time you wish to donate. If you are interested, contact Melodie Nichols at 248.588.9169 for more information. And also please visit the website at www.cityofclawson.com/museum for the latest Historical Museum news.

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