



SOUTHWEST PIONEER

SEPTEMBER 2020

SOUTHWEST FRANKLIN COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

3378-B PARK ST., GROVE CITY, OHIO 43123

‘Peculiar Characters’ Remembered at Beulah

By Richard G. Clark

Damon Runyon was a celebrated, syndicated, sports columnist, and short story writer during the late nineteen twenties, thirties and forties. He wrote about the people he knew around New York. They talked in unusual language and did unusual things. They were gamblers, bootleggers, gangsters, show girls, pimps, prostitutes and just plain hangers around types.

Those characters were not peculiar to New York nor to Runyon. They could be found around any race track in the country. They did the same things and talked the same language. They were not imitating Runyon’s characters. They never heard of Runyon, and the only thing they ever read was The Daily Racing Form.

In the year 1935 my father purchased a drug store in Grove City, Ohio. Now Grove City did not have a lot to offer in the way of business activity, and its leading industry was Beulah Park Race Track.

This was not exactly comparable to any of the well-known tracks around the country. It was a “leaky roof” track if there ever was one. The horses were thoroughbreds, but most of them couldn’t out run a fat man. The purses were so cheap that even if an owner was lucky enough to win a race, he still starved to death. The jockeys were mostly lousy, the owners and trainers’ “gypsies” in the sense that they had no home, and the grooms were usually bums, ex-convicts, or guys on the run and in hiding under any name that came to mind.

I was sixteen years old then, and had just graduated from high school when the races started. All of the race trackers hung out around the drug store and I got well acquainted quickly.

As a result of my dissolute youth, I could write about the track and its characters prolifically. I could write about my first bet on a horse called, “Pidge” which was out in front of the other “dogs” in the race by fifteen lengths at the head of the stretch, and fell and broke its leg. I should have quit then; it was my first bet.

I could write about “Hamburger Jim” a horse which still won races at fifteen. I could write about “Lightning Girl” who won by as far as you can throw a rock and paid off at 15 to 1 odds with me having a couple of tickets on her. Then there were such characters as “Squeaky Willie,”

“Dirty Shirt Jack,” “Pimples,” “Yum-Yum,” and on and on. They were thieves, crooks, bums, wineos, and hardly any of them were very genteel.

In the fall of 1935 just prior to my freshman year in college, my dad got me a job as a cashier in the mutual. I was just seventeen, and naturally had to lie about my age. I only lied four years’ worth though, because one had to be 21 in order to get bonded. Come to think about it, I wonder how some of those mutual clerks ever got a bond even to get out of jail.

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This picture of the Hopewell School taken about 1923 was provided by Dick Shover. He has been able to identify three people. “The teacher (back row, center), is Clyde Breckenridge. Clyde was married to my aunt, Merle Shover. My mother, Mable Milligan Shover is the first girl to Clyde’s right. My uncle, George Milligan, is the boy in the front row, left of center, with his fingers touching together on his lap.”

Civil War Vets Hold Reunion

Before Beulah Park was known for thoroughbred racing, it was a community park where Civil War era veterans of the Ohio Volunteer Infantry held their reunion 171 years ago.

A commemorative booklet, found long ago by Elvin Weygandt, detailed the unit’s 27th reunion. A total of 75 veterans attended the event in Grove City.

Peculiar Characters at Beulah Park

Continued from Page 1

Anyway, I was put to work as a cashier on one of the \$3 combination windows. I had no idea what to do, but the manager put me between two old pros, who quickly taught me everything I needed to know, and a lot of things I would have been better off not learning.

My two associates were “Smokeless Powder” Smirtz, who was called “Smokeless” for short. He always wore a dark suit and a black cap no matter how hot it got. “Smokeless” was reputed to have been the assassin for the Purple Gang out of Detroit, and never used anything except smokeless powder when working his trade. I did discover that the reason he always wore a coat was because he always carried a gun in a shoulder holster.

About the only advice he gave me was when he said “Look, kid, don’t never let one of dem’ suckers clip ya, you clip dem’.” He didn’t talk much. “Big Danny” Mahoney worked on the other side, and his first advice was “kid don’t forget when you’re payin’ those pigeons three times five is fourteen, and put their change out first and reach for the bills slow.

They might walk away with the change, and once they leave the window, they’ve had it.” “Big Danny” had been a big-time bootlegger and racketeer in Cleveland, but with the end of Prohibition, he lost his means of livelihood and was forced to go almost straight. He showed me how to palm a set of loaded dice, and how to stack a deck of cards, all of which was very helpful to me later, because it taught me never to get into a game of chance unless I knew the participants well. I worked in the mutual throughout college as my schedule permitted.

One spring I rode with “Smokeless,” “Big Danny,” “Piggy,” “Friedman,” “Last Dollar Dan” and “Mr. Carpenter,” the owner of the car. “Piggy” received his name because he allegedly got drunk some place, passed out in a gutter, and a pig chewed his ear off. He was a little over five feet tall, skinny, wore a derby hat, and was thoroughly obnoxious, loud mouthed little Jew. He was a tout around the track, and the Pinkertons threw him out periodically. When the mutual manager was shorthanded, he put “Piggy” to work as a money runner.

“Last Dollar Dan” wore flashy loud sport coats, and was always dressed for the kill. He sold a magazine called HORSE AND JOCKEY in the stands and touted horses successfully. After all, he frequently gave the pigeons ten different horses in the same race, and had each one bet \$5.00 for him, he was a lead pipe cinch to wind up a winner.

The conversation between those four was atrocious. “Piggy” was always loud, profane and insulting. One day

“Danny” got mad and said, “You one eared Kike, one more word outta you, and I’ll hit you in the head with this black jack.” To my consternation, he reached to the back of his neck and had a black jack in his hand in a flash. These guys lived in disharmony in a flea bag known as the Bliss Hotel.

Miraculously, one bright spring day, “Piggy” hit a big score. I don’t know where he got betting money unless he picked someone’s pocket, which is entirely possible. He had a roll of bills big enough to choke on.

With his new wealth, he became unexpectedly generous and moved himself and his three cohorts out of the Bliss, and into the most expensive suite in the finest hotel in Columbus. Naturally, they all got drunk to celebrate, and apparently created enough of a disturbance that the house detective came up and told them to quiet down.

With the language they used it’s a wonder that they weren’t thrown out then. That didn’t take long however. “Piggy” disrobed completely except for his derby, and somehow arrived in the lobby absolutely naked. He was promptly taken to jail, and the others kicked out of the hotel, and sadly returned to the Bliss.



Genealogy

It’s a lifelong journey to record your family roots. Consider sharing your heritage with the Society so your family can be researched by future generations. The Society is collecting family history from individuals living in Southwest Franklin County. Submit your documents at the museum office.

Evans Became ‘Top Cop’

E. L. Evans, remembered as “Lightning Evans”, became Grove City’s top cop back in 1950 when he referred to the town as a one-gun, one cruiser village.

He often bragged he knew where every cat and dog belonged but when he started and when he saw a strange dog in town, he knew Grove City was growing.

In just a few years, Chief Evans was the head of a six-man department and not happy with what he described as an antiquated “call box” system for police communications.

If a resident needed the police, a phone call was made to a phone mounted on a pole at Park Street and Broadway.

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Small Winery Once Operated In Grove City

The following article was written in 2018 about Grove City history that might be new to many. It's a story about a lovely white tourist home located close to Broadway that had a sign in the front yard that read, R.K. Winery in Rear.

By Barbara Weygandt Burkhart

It was there for years, hardly anyone noticed it, but it was significant to many who lived in the village of Grove City. The initials R.K. were for Rieble and Keller, two German sisters, Margaret Keller Rieble and Emma Keller.

They lived in that home with Margaret's husband, Louis Rieble. The wine was sold to Grove City and probably Columbus churches for communion wine. Occasionally it was sold out the back door. I also remember being there sometimes in the evenings and there would be a knock on the back door and Aunt Margaret would quietly get a bottle in a little brown bag and carry it out to the purchaser.

They were my mother's aunts; their maiden names were Keller and were sisters to my mother's mother, Barbara (Keller) Haughn. We often went there to visit on Saturday mornings; they always baked cinnamon coffee cakes. Those were days before telephones, television, or air conditioning, so families visited more often than now.

Now, I'm not sure when prohibition came in, or out, so I'm not sure about this, but I always remember that it was sort of hush-hush when those transactions took place. I was very young.

The house was also considered a tourist home. It was just south of Grove City Road (Dutch Pike back then). In those days, many people who had a large home with extra rooms would rent them out by night or by the week. There were very few hotels and no motels in our area in those days.

Entering into the Rieble home was a large stately foyer, straight ahead was the stairway which led up to a landing and then on to the bedrooms. Just off that landing was a small room, perhaps a sewing room or one for servants.

As I remember, in the 1930s and 1940s, it was used as a bedroom for foster children. Mrs. Rieble also fostered children for the county.

To the right of the foyer were the tourist rooms, two or three rooms and a bathroom, as I remember.

And the wine: In the basement there were two or three big barrels of fruit, grapes or blackberries, or perhaps dandelions, depending on the time of the season.

The barrels were covered with heavy lids which had to be lifted off and the wine stirred now and then. The basement smelled of the sour wine. I never got into the bottling process so I don't know how that was done but I did get into gathering the dandelions. I must have been 10 or 12 years old, probably 1939.

My great aunt would take a few of us cousins, drop us along the country odds with a little peck basket and we would pluck the blossoms from the stems of the plant.

There was a thick, sticky, milk-like juice that would be produced and stain our hands and our clothes, but she paid us 25 cents for each basket that we picked and that was worth the stains and the bee sings that we got each time.

We knew that the homecoming would be coming up later that summer and that money would come in handy for riding the Merry-go-Round.



Marilyn Gibboney, past president of the Southwest Franklin County Historical Society, is greeted by Steve Jackson, current president, at the dedication of the Grove City Welcome Center and Museum in May 2010. The museum actually opened to the public Sept 19, 2009 with assistance from the Grove City Area Visitors and Convention Bureau.



Some of the Society members attending the dedication services at the museum in 2010.



Grove City Woman Married Bexley Police Officer

Ruth Haughn was married to Robert Bradfield, left, who was an officer with the Bexley Police Department until he retired. After he retired, Robert worked as a security officer at Capital University.

Ruth's sister was Sidney Haughn Weygandt, the mother of Barbara Weygandt Burkhart, a life member of the historical society.

"I was a little girl when I visited my Aunt Ruth and Uncle Bob," Barbara recalled in a letter.

She remembered him riding his motorcycle home for lunch wearing his uniform. It was around 1935 or so she said. His uniform included jodhpurs, also known as English riding pants, and leather leggings.

"He always carried a night stick and a revolver under his jacket," she remembered. "When he came home, he always put both items up on a high shelf in a closet along with his hat for safe keeping until it was time to go back to work."

Boxwell Exam Gave Diploma; Became Indianapolis Doctor

By Steve Jackson

Stanley and Mary Jane Norris once told me that anyone who had completed eight grades of education could take the Boxwell exam.

A good score on that proved the person had the knowledge equal to a high school education. It allowed the student to attend college and also allowed students to teach.

Both were key in the late 19th century when not all areas had high schools, such as Grove City and Jackson township.

Clark E. Orders, my grandmother's eldest brother, completed his education at the Orders School. He never attended high school since Grove City had none at the time. He did well on the Boxwell and was admitted to Ohio Northern College (now University), graduated and was accepted to Central University Medical School (now University of Louisville).

He graduated and completed his advanced studies at Harvard. He practiced medicine in Indianapolis for 50 plus years and was the oldest active doctor in Indiana at the

time of his retirement. Not bad for a boy from a one room school house in Jackson Township. His sister, Florence Orders, did well on her Boxwell and taught three years at the Orders Road School. She had to give up teaching there when she married. Mr. and Mrs. Norris gave the Society a copy of the Boxwell test a few years ago.

Still Seeking Memories Of Propane Explosion

Only three responses have been received following a request months ago for memories of the Grove City propane explosion in July 1996. My thanks to Michael Esposito, Vicky Whitten and Tom Rutan.

Factual information is available. We seek what local residents remember and their reactions to the blast and fire at Ferrellgas on Broadway.

Please take a few minutes and email your memories to jhale45@gmail.com.

Welcome Center Travel Information Still Available

Travel information is still available at the Grove City Welcome Center and Museum on the Park Street side. Although the building is still closed to visitors, access to literature is possible at the Park Street entrance.



Evans Became 'Top Cop'

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A light would flash on the pole indicating there was a call for the police. The officer on duty would pick-up the phone and receive a message. This system was eventually replaced with in vehicle radios. The only problem was that the officer could receive a message but couldn't respond.

Radios were one-way communication. The E. L. Evans Senior Center at Windsor Park was named in his honor. His wife, Betty, owned Evans Floral in the Town Center.

Steve Jackson recalled Chief Evans and his father had homes near ours when I was growing. "We had a dog "Pepper" who also liked the Chief. One day in the early 1960s, she disappeared. I was very upset. Dad and I looked everywhere for her to no avail.

Dad called the Chief and filed a missing dog report. Lightning drove all over town and eventually found her chained up in someone's yard. He never would tell us where, commenting that a Chief was entitled to some secrets.

Sounds like an episode of Mayberry! Pepper lived to a ripe old age.



The Orient railroad station, originally known as Morgan's Station, was built in 1882.

Morgan's Station Was Orient's Original Name

Officially, Orient isn't part of Southwest Franklin County but that community, minutes south of Grove City, is so intertwined that it must be included.

According to a 1952 history, written by Clyde Michael, the area known today as Orient was likely settled as early as 1795, eight years before Ohio became a state and 57 years before Grove City was platted. John Finney, a North Carolina trapper-hunter, is mentioned as the earliest white men to roam the area as early as 1767.

Most of the people who settled northern Pickaway County were from Virginia and western Pennsylvania. The land was void of prairie and covered by heavy forests.

Caleb Evans is believed to have been the first person to actually build a log cabin and settle in the area. Evans had moved from Pennsylvania to Kentucky before heading back north to settle in Central Ohio.

The nameless area became known as Morgan's Station around 1882 when the Columbus and Cincinnati Midland Railroad constructed a station house and began to lay track toward for Columbus. It was so named in honor of Mary E. and W. L. Morgan, the landowners.

Morgan Station became a hub of activity when the railroad trestle over Big Cedar Creek was under construction. Many people from both Franklin and Pickaway Counties came to watch a large steam shovel operate to help prepare the site.

With the railroad operational, the station helped encourage growth in the community and numerous businesses opened. In 1884, a large general store opened and a year later, a small slaughter house, cannery and a broom factory was operating

A one room school opened in 1885 and just six years later the community outgrew the building and a new two-room school was built for local children.

A Sunday school was first held in 1891; a year later a church society was formed with a pastor from Harrisburg

serving as minister. In 1886, Angelo Ross, who immigrated from Italy, opened a saloon in the community.

One question remains. Where did the name Orient originate? Orient State Institute opened in 1882 as a farm colony and inpatient mental hospital.

The area, as early as 1882, was still identified as Morgan's Station. Did residents change the community name to Orient or did the name change because it was a neighbor of Orient State Institute?

Until better evidence is available, your guess is as good as anyone else.

Presbyterian Minister's Planned Prayer Caused Controversy At Grant's Auditorium

Grant's Auditorium was the center of entertainment in Grove City after it was built. It held a variety of community programs including the piano recital as shown in the photograph. But, in 1908, a major



issue reared its head when the building was rented by the school board for a graduation exercise and commencement service. The school board issued an invitation to a Presbyterian pastor to offer a prayer and that didn't sit well with Adam Grant

who insisted the only way to send the graduates out on the "sea of life" was to have a good old Methodist prayer. The school board didn't waiver in its decision and made arrangements to move the entire graduation service to the Presbyterian Church. Grant didn't want the program held elsewhere and in-the-end, he backed down and allowed the school program to be held at his auditorium with a Presbyterian prayer. The auditorium building still exists as separate apartments on West Park Street.

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Jackson Honored At Town Center Ceremony July 24
A plaque honoring Steve Jackson for his dedication and service to the Grove City Community was held in the Grove City Town Center hosted by Grove City Rotary. Following the ceremony, the plaque was placed on the Park Street side of the municipal building along with other individuals. He was nominated for the award by Society member Janet Shailer. He was also presented a proclamation

from Mayor Richard Stage. Shailer and Barb Howison were among those who spoke at the outdoor event.

Businesswoman Simmons First Grand Marshal - 1990

Businesswoman Eileine Simmons, 91 at the time, was the first grand marshal for the newly organized 1990 Grove City Arts in the Alley Parade.

Grove City had hosted parades in past years but a large parade had not been held since the Grove City Community Fair Board, later known as the Grove City Festival Committee, ceased operation.

“It’s an honor,” she said being selected as parade marshal. “It’s an easy job. All I have to do is smile and wave and sit in a car. I love it because I love Grove City.” Her parade featured 100 units, a military A-7 flyover of jet bombers and four high school marching bands.

Mrs. Simmons and her husband came to Grove City in the 1930s when the population was about 1,200. She was an individual who always praised Grove City.

She owned Heleine’s, a women’s and children’s apparel store, for 18 years. In 1970, she was appointed to Grove City Council and became the first woman to serve in that capacity.

When the Grove City Greyhound marching band performed at the Rose Bowl, she raised \$150 making and selling crocheted doilies.

Her efforts were rewarded with a national appearance on ABC News the day of the Rose Bowl Parade.

SWFC Historical Society Meeting Planned Oct. 6

The historical society has plans to conduct its first in person meeting Tuesday, Oct. 6 at 7 p.m. at St. John’s Lutheran Church, 3220 Columbus St.

Members who plan to attend are asked to please wear a mask. Seating at the church meeting room will be socially distanced.

This will be the first opportunity to bring members up-to-date on current events and activities.

As of this time, all historical society facilities will remain closed. The annual Old Time Harvest Day has been cancelled.

Information about the Society will continue to be available and updated on the website, www.grovecityohhistory.com and on the Facebook page. Members should check there frequently or contact one of the officers. Phone numbers are on page 8.

Private Investors Create Turnpike Through Village

Streets throughout Grove City today are paved, modern thoroughfares but if we looked back over 170 years ago, there was nothing but dirt trails.

Stringtown Road back then was little more than an animal trail and a Shawnee Indian path from the Scioto River.

That all began to change around 1848 when a group of Columbus businessmen decided to build a road from the capital city to Pleasant Corners.

The nine men created the Harrisburg Turnpike Company with a total investment of \$35,602. The road exceeded expectations.

There were toll gates at Pleasant Corners and at West Mound Street that collected 10 cents fares each direction. As people traveled the new road, many decided the new settlement of Grove City was a good place to settle.

The turnpike became a valuable asset in the development of Grove City. William Foster Breck, the founder of the town, created a plat in 1852 and soon after began selling lots.

Breck had plenty of business experience. He owned a successful large hotel, warehouse and general store in Carroll, Ohio in Fairfield County. Much of his business was related to the Ohio-Erie Canal.

DO YOU HAVE A STORY TO SHARE?

jhale45@gmail.com

RR Depot Renovations Expose More History

John Manering, who is not a member of the Society, deserves credit for many modifications at the railroad depot at Century Village, according to Donald Walters, business and community relations manager.

Also working on the project were Jake Stickel, Mikael Van Hoose, Wes Holmes and Brayton Folger.

“John adopted the restoration and pulled out all the stops to make the inside as accurate and visible as possible,” Walters said. “For example, he restored the windows which have weighted ropes in the walls to help lift and hold the windows.

He also overlaid an area on the wall with Plexiglas so visitors could see how the windows once worked.” During floor and underframe rebuilding, workers discovered the original track switching mechanism that the train station manager used to switch tracks.

As the floor was prepared, Plexiglas was again used to showcase the switching mechanism. Manering installed a stamped metal ceiling and installed a train shelf high on the wall.

DID YOU KNOW . . . ?

Did you know in 1870, there were **only three buildings** west of Broadway in the downtown and one was a house? Grove City back then on a map was half the size of New Rome on the Westside.

Any idea about the **Chautauqua** held in Grove City in 1917? It was a big deal promoted by the Chamber of Commerce. P.N. Windsor and H.G. Grossman got the ball rolling. It brought a variety of events to town.

Did you know a **tornado struck** southwestern Franklin County in 1973 seriously damaging a home on Big Run Road South?

Were you aware the old Grove City Hardware building, today known as Cultivate, was once a **garage with an elevator** that would lift vehicles to the second floor?

Mt. Sterling Fire Department Seeks Organizational Help

A firefighter from the Mt. Sterling Fire Department contacted us recently asking if anyone in the membership has information about when their department was first organized and when mutual aid with Jackson Township first started. If any Society member has information or knows of someone with information, please contact Mark Schmidbauer at grovecityohhistory@gmail.com.



Genealogy is a wide-open window into our past. Residents are interested not only in family histories but also stories about the communities of southwest Franklin County.

The SWFC Historical Society has compiled histories of Franklin, Pleasant, Prairie and Jackson Townships on our website and we encourage members of the Society to take a look and make sure all information is accurate.

It's also important that if someone asks a question about local history that you know where to look.

www.grovecityohhistory.org

Last year, we reported over 8,200 visitors visited our website. Likes, on our Facebook page, increased by 14 percent and we had website visitors from every state and 51 foreign countries.

Do you have a story to share? You may think it might be insignificant but it could be an important part of the larger puzzle.

Share your memories, stories, photographs and personal histories. We are especially interested in any photographs that shows pictures of buildings. We're not talking about pictures 100 years old. We would like to have more recent ones especially if the building is no longer standing. Email jhale45@gmail.com.



Military Museum Is Open

The Central Ohio Military Museum, 1010 High St., Harrisburg is open Tuesday through Saturday from 9 a.m.

until 5 p.m. It's staffed with a dedicated group of military veterans and historians. The museum has thousands of items on display. To help support the non-profit museum, consider purchasing a memorial brick. Go to thecomm.org for more information or stop by the museum.



www.heartofgrovecity.org

Town Center Organization

In case you were wondering what happened to the Grove City Town Center organization, well it has a new name, Heart of Grove City, a name that better describes its mission.

The organization successfully promotes retail business and activities in the downtown business district.

The pandemic has caused many of their special events to be cancelled but its website is still a good source of information about many locally owned stores and boutiques that serve the public.

Model-T Ford; Columbus Plant

In 1914, the Ford Motor Company constructed a plant to assemble their Model T automobiles on Cleveland Avenue in Columbus.

After the plant opened, car parts arrived at the plant by train. The vehicles were assembled then delivered to Ford dealers throughout the area.

Ford was a major employer in Central Ohio for many years. The plant closed in 1939 and the building was purchased and retrofitted as a Kroger Bakery.

History Books Given To Schools

Fourth grade teachers in Grove City and Jackson Township South-Western school buildings have been provided copies of the *William Foster Breck History of Grove City* paperback.

Local history is part of the curriculum for students in the fourth grade.

School libraries were provided copies of the *History of Jackson Township, Grove City and the Early Pioneers*. That book was published in 2016 as part of the city's 150th celebration of becoming an incorporated Ohio municipality.

Mill Street Article Not Completed

A history of Mill Street is being compiled and will be emailed to Society members when completed. Those who have elected to have newsletters delivered by mail will also receive a copy by USPS.

Many residents probably are not aware there was once a street in Grove City by that name. It ran west of Broadway by the old Grove City Farmers Exchange. With new development at Beula Park, the Mill Street name will be retired. The new street into Beulah will be an extension of Columbus Street.



This might bring stir a memory or two. Remember the BBF (Burger Boy Food-O-Rama) on Southwest Boulevard? When it closed, Borden ventured into the burger business with their Borden Burger brand but it never caught on. These two items are on display in the Grove City Welcome Center and Museum. Hopefully, we will be able to reopen soon for visitors. Please drop a dollar or two off in the donation box to help support Society activities.

**Welcome New Life Member
Barbara Weygandt Burkhart**

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Southwest Franklin County Historical Society

A 501C3 NON-PROFIT CHARITABLE ORGANIZATION

3378-B Park St., Grove City, OH 43123



grovecityohhistory@gmail.com

JAMES F. HALE, Newsletter Editor

614-875-9560 – jhale45@gmail.com

SOCIETY OFFICERS

Steve Jackson, President 614-871-0081

John Hines, Vice President 614-364-6692

Trudie Gardner, Secretary 614-879-7416

Larry Zapp, Treasurer 614-475-4018

Janet Garza, Membership 614-991-4712

MONTHLY SOCIETY MEETINGS

Monthly Meetings first Tuesday at 7 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran Church, 3220 Columbus St.

Public is Invited to Attend

MEMBERSHIP DUES

Annual Member \$15 Annual Student \$1
Annual Business \$50 Life Member \$150

All Newsletters Sent Free by Email

Newsletters Mailed Require a \$9 Annual Fee