

# Howell Area Historical Society

Summer is here, flowers are in bloom.

The Melon Festival is right around the corner and again this year, we will be presenting the 4th Annual Melon Festival Classic Car show on Saturday, August 17th from 10 am - 4 pm on Grand River in front of the Court House. Bruce Powelson will be in charge of the show and is looking for volunteers to help that day. The Museum will be open Friday, Saturday and Sunday.



Philip Ott, a retired local farmer, won the America's Farmers Grow Communities award for Livingston County.

On his behalf, donations were made by the Monsanto Fund to organizations of his choice. Our society along with the American Legion and the Veterans Hospital Voluntary Services shared \$2,500.

Ott, a Vietnam Veteran, is proud to support the community he calls home.

The society has placed the order for a park bench to honor the memory of Pat Malafouris. It is estimated to arrive sometime in August.

On a sad note, at the July meeting, we received the news that our president, Jon Boegler and his wife, Heather, will be moving to Oregon this fall. Jon has served as our society president and will be resigning his position effective August 1, 2013. He will continue to work toward the completion of the Caboose project before relocating. We wish Jon and his wife the best of luck on their new adventure and thank him for his years of dedication and service to the society.

## 2013 Board of Directors

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## INSIDE THE COLLECTION

*New to the collection*

Judy Burns, museum director has donated an 1878 authentic waiting bench believed to have come from the DLN Pere Marquette station in Howell.

Restored to its original beauty, wooden slats of alternating walnut and ash make up the back and seating area of the bench.

Each of the wrought iron supports are stamped with DLN indicating the Detroit-Lansing Northern Line.

This is a welcome addition to the station master's room.

**VG'S COMMUNITY REWARDS PROGRAM IS CHANGING**

September 1st, 2013, the program will no longer require collection of receipts.

Just link your "yes card" online ([www.myyesrewards.com](http://www.myyesrewards.com)) to support  
Howell Area Historical Society.

You still receive all your benefits as before as well as having your purchases  
support this vital program for our society.

Circle the following dates.

Purchases during the following weeks, determine the percentage rebate to the society.

September 22-28,

October 20 - 26,

November 17 - 23,

January 12 - 18,

February 2 - 8,

February 23 - March 1.

Don't have a computer? Call us, we will be glad to help get you registered.

**S U M M E R B L O O M S**

Thank you to Bordine Nurseries for their generous donation of the flowers for our planters. Also, to the Master Gardeners Association of Livingston County for spending their time and talents at the Museum. The flowers look wonderful!





## INSIDE THE MUSEUM



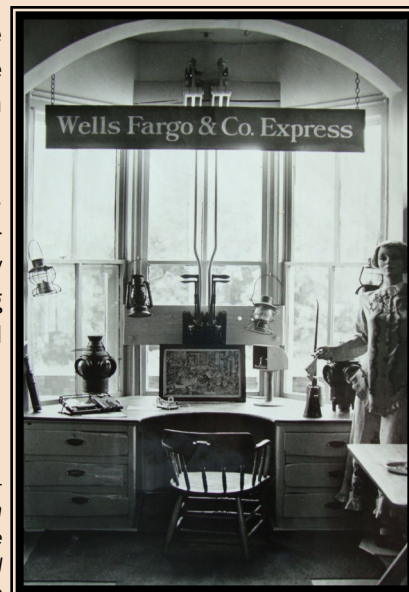
In the last newsletter, we shared the photo (below) of the dispatcher's office.

Current members of the Society have always wondered what happened to the Wells Fargo & Co. Express sign shown above the desk.

While that question remains unanswered, the sign has returned to the Stationmaster's room. Thanks to the talents of Stacy Karnes, the sign was recreated and hung just prior to the opening of our Howell History Days Celebration.

Thank you, Stacy, it is beautiful!

*In the dispatcher's office of the old Ann Arbor Railroad Depot at Howell is the original desk, telegraph key and sender, lanterns, flares and levers of the semaphore. The sign above the desk is the original Wells-Fargo Express sign used by Edward Beach, the local agent, for many years.*



The Caboose crew has been working tirelessly to finish the exterior before the Howell Melon Festival in August.

All of the windows facing Wetmore Street have been replaced and we are now focusing on the installation of the fabricated windows for the cupola.

Two of the eight windows have been installed and, weather permitting, during the next work session, two more will be completed, four down and four to go.

The paint scheme and lettering style for this 1888 Grand Trunk Caboose have been chosen and Stacy Karnes has been commissioned to do the lettering and graphics. Locating the correct color paint is next on the list. The team is excited to see the finish line in sight.

A big obstacle before winter will be to find funding to extend electrical service underground to the Caboose.

\$ 800.00 needs to be raised for the completion of this phase of the project.

## C A B O O S E N E W S



## SUNDAY SUMMER HOURS 10AM - 2PM

In order to keep the Museum open on Sundays, we need your help.  
The 2013 Docent manual is available at the museum or in pdf form.

July 14th - Joyce

July 21st - Duane & Esther

July 28th - Judy & Joan

August 4th - Jon

August 11th - Duane, Esther & Hugh

August 18th - Bruce

August 25th - need volunteer

September 1st - closed Labor Day Weekend

September 8th - need volunteer

September 15th - need volunteer

September 22nd - need volunteer

September 29th - need volunteer



10TH HOWELL HISTORY DAYS CELEBRATION  
MAY 18, 2013



Thank you  
to everyone who  
helped to make  
this event such a  
great success!



## SEEMS LIKE YESTERDAY . . . .

**1959** - The first Melon Celebration took place. Celebrating 30 years of successful growing in Livingston County, a truck load of melons from the Stanley Knight farm was gifted to the City of Howell in a small parade.



**1960** - In June, a committee was formed for the promotion of the Howell Melon called the Michigan Howell Honey Sweet Melon Commission. This commission secured a patent for "Howell Honey Sweet Melons". This patent was not for the seeds from which the melons grew but for the brand name so people would know they were "Howell Melons".

**1960** - The first officially organized festival. Melon Queen, Patricia Downen traveled to Washington D.C. to deliver Melons to the President.

**1963** - The Melon Festival was a dual celebration coinciding with the Howell Centennial, complete with a beard growing contest

**1977** - First Melon Run.

**1981** - First Salty Dog Landlubbers People Powered Contraption Race.

## Our Melon and Festival History

The original Howell melon was developed by August P. Schmitt. It took Schmitt, a retired greenhouse owner, 30 years to develop and perfect the melon that's been called "an agricultural achievement of national importance". Impartial critics judging melons grown in the Howell area declared their quality is beyond challenge, and the Howell growers owe their success to Schmitt.

Schmitt's experiments with muskmelons began over 50 years ago by accident. He was having lunch in a Howell restaurant and the owner, who also ran a melon patch near Hicksville, Ohio, served him a muskmelon of rare quality, apparently grown by an accident of nature on the Hicksville farm.

Schmitt quickly sensed the possibility of producing the melon to compete with the southern market. It meant growing plants from seeds of the Ohio melon, then crossing the blooms to find the perfect plant.

From seeds grown under constant supervision in Schmitt's greenhouse, young plants were set out on the farm of Howard Dankers as a test experiment. In the years following and with the aid of Howell farmers Willard Wiltse and Stanley Knight, Schmitt made a half-dozen melon crosses.

Finally, the right cross was made and the "Howell Honey Sweet Melon" was born.

In fact, they considered their product so special that they applied for and received a state patent on "Howell Honey Sweet Grade A Melons".

The first crop was so good, the next year they expanded and began getting serious about growing melons. The melon business was doing great until after the depression, but then the growers had problems with the melons themselves—some kind of mildew. "We kept going to M.S.U. and they kept telling us to try different sprays, but nothing worked very well," said Dankers. "It seemed the seed just kind of ran out."

Melons were indeed on the way out around Howell until the advent of a new hybrid seed. "It was better than twenty years ago that the new hybrid came along and we got back to good melons," Dankers said.

With an ample supply of delicious melons, a festival must be "sparked" into life, and the general consensus, according to former mayor Cliff Heller, is that Dr. May; Gerald Harmon, a real estate man; Stanley Dickson, a baker; Gene Burroughs, an auto dealer; Les Merritt, then editor of *The Livingston County Press*; and Howard Gentry, operator of the Family Restaurant, were among those who jointly developed the idea.

"They got on the telephone and asked people if they would be interested in helping in specific phases," Heller explains. "The response was fantastic. Many people that didn't get asked to help called in to volunteer their services."

The local Junior Chamber of Commerce (now known as the Howell Jaycees) ran a contest to pick a Melon Queen. Joe Harris, operator of a local hereford ranch and market specializing in aged beef, organized a barbecue with the help of a committee. Others planned contests and worked programs. No one got a dime for their efforts.

The 1960 Melon Festival, with all the usual festive trimmings, drew over 10,000 people—virtually doubling the local population. Not bad for the first Howell Melon Festival! In 1987 we expect around 60,000 people to enjoy the festival with us.

The Howell Melon Festival, coordinated by the Howell Jaycees, is held each August when the melons are at their best. A parade, chicken barbecue, melon tent, breakfast and dinners in the tent, arts and crafts, kiddie rides, entertainment, and the Annual Salty Dog Land Lubber People Powered Contraption Race are just some of the events.

The Howell melon, creation of toil and painstaking cultivation, has risen from the status of a mere farm product to king.

Thanks for joining us in our 28th annual fun-filled Howell Melon Festival!



**1985** - Lee Meriwether was grand marshal of the parade

**1989** - Over 700 members of the Huron Valley Shriners participated in the parade along with musicians from the Circus Calliopes and Patricia Downen-Mahan, original Melon Fest Queen from 30 years prior.

**2008** - 50th anniversary, parade format was discontinued.

**2009** - Downtown Development Authority took over events.

**2010** - Celebrated the 50th Howell Melon Festival again including a new logo.

**2012** - Grand River closed during the Festival Friday - Sunday.

**2013** - Festival taken over by Howell Parks and Recreation.

### REMEMBER

The society meetings are held on the first Wednesday of each month at 7pm from March through November

The society also holds a work session on the third Wednesday of each month at 7pm  
The final wrap up meeting of the year will be held in December date to be determined.

[www.howellareahistoricalsociety.org](http://www.howellareahistoricalsociety.org)

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Comments or questions:

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Your support is vital to the  
preservation of local history.

Support the Society, Join today!

Annual Dues

Single - \$15.00

Family - \$25.00

Contributing - \$100.00

Lifetime - \$500.00

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