

BERNARD HISTORICAL SOCIETY & MUSEUM

Our Times

Another Year Goes By

This past year, 2023, was a time of change for the Bernard Historical Society & Museum. We've lost some Board Members who've been with us for a while and gained some new faces. Along with those new faces, we've added some new ideas. Change isn't necessarily a bad thing. This past Spring, we saw Steve & Karen Goebel step down from the Board of Directors. Both had been on the Board for several years and their help and ideas will be greatly missed. Tana Hardy, too, resigned and though we will still see her regularly at the library, her various skills and help as Secretary will be difficult to replace. Additionally, Rod Kroes has stepped down as President, though he still maintains a position on the Board.

We've added Elspeth Inglis and Dr. Pete Modreski to the Board. If you visited the Kalamazoo Valley Museum in the past, you may have seen Elspeth. After retiring as Assistant Director in charge of Programs for that museum, she graciously accepted a position on our board where her skills and knowledge are helping us move forward. Pete, too, has recently retired as a geochemist working for the USGS. He spends his summers in the Delton area and we welcome his experience as he settles into our routines.

Our current Board of Directors: Mike Wachowski, President

Harriet Olson, Treasurer

Jill Marcusse, Secretary

Elspeth Inglis, Communications Director

Nancy Hibiske-Reed, Director

Pete Modreski, Director

Rod Kroes, Director

We would like to add one or two more to our Board. If you or someone you know have an interest, please have them reach out to us. Our contact info is below. And as always, we can use additional volunteers this coming season. Even if you only have a few hours each month, we can find something for you to help out with. The Museum is a vital part of our community and without your support and help its future is problematic. Thank you!

For an expanded version of this newsletter please visit our website at www.bernardmuseum.org and download the file. Or visit the Delton District Library where we will have a limited number of hardcopies available.

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Is it time for you to renew your membership? If so, or if you are just interested in making a donation, take a moment to fill out this form and return it with your payment to: **Bernard Museum, PO Box 307, Delton, MI 49046**

You can also go to our website at: www.bernardmuseum.org and register/pay online.

Annual Family/Individual Membership (\$20)

Make check payable to: **Bernard Museum**

Lifetime Membership (\$200)

Your Name: _____

Donation (You decide amount)

Address: _____

Can we email you our newsletter to save us money?

Email address: _____

A Medical Museum and More

The **Bernard Museum** is unique among area museums for its medical origin and collection. Dr. Prosper Bernard's hospital, built in 1934-35 and opened the following year, is the core of the Museum. Dr. Bernard came to the Delton area in 1928 after receiving his medical degree from the Indiana University School of Medicine.

Dr. Bernard built the hospital to better utilize his medical time and attention, especially delivering babies who often aren't speedy about being born. Bringing the delivering mothers into the hospital, instead of home delivery, helped the doctor take care of more patients. Dr. Bernard made the obstetric care affordable charging a total of \$35.00 for pre-natal care, delivery, a 3-day hospital stay, and 6 months post-natal care. As the beautiful stork sign on the Museum's entrance attests, over 400 were delivered here.

The Nursery still exists in the Museum, as do two patient rooms (one with a map of the surrounding lakes on the ceiling to encourage patients to rest to return to the beauty of the surrounding countryside), and the X-ray Room. The X-ray room is a favorite with its early Frankensteinian machinery of levers, knobs, and gauges. The tunnel from the hospital to the Bernard house, used by Mrs. Bernard to deliver meals no matter the weather, is another popular feature with the Delton third graders who annually make a field trip to the Museum.

Dr. Bernard was one of the first practitioners of X-ray technology in the area. After his overseas service in WWII, he returned to the Delton area, re-opening his office with an assistant. He did not re-open the hospital. He took the position of Director of X-Ray at Pennock Hospital in Hastings.

Dr. Tom Johnson, another physician with a love of history and restoration, became aware of the Bernard Museum in the summer of 2019 when the Michigan One-Room Schoolhouse Association came to the Bernard Museum for their annual conference. He was delighted with Dr. Bernard's collections, the schoolhouse, and hospital turned museum. He inquired if the Museum would be interested in his collection of medical instruments.

In January of 2023 his cabinet filled with many medical and optical instruments was added to the Bernard Museum's collection. The third graders last October found the tray of spectacles from an optometrist, which a patient had to go through to find the best sight-enhancing pair, intriguing.

A metal apparatus for holding a patient's mouth open while performing a tonsillectomy to the seated patient, which Dr. Johnson used himself, was fascinating to the older parents. Another item in Dr. Johnson's donation that stands out is an obstetrician's home delivery bag which has a copper pull-out sterilization tray in the base which houses a forceps among other instruments. We thank Dr. Johnson and his wife, Jane, for this donation.

There are a few items which we were not able to identify. If you have a medical background perhaps you could visit the Bernard Museum, take a look and see if you can help us out.

Next summer do stop by on a Saturday afternoon. You'll be amazed at what has been amassed.

Jill Marcusse

Bernard Historical Society & Museum

PO Box 307

Delton, MI 49046



The Wicker Casket

If you've been to the Bernard Museum you've no doubt noticed the wicker casket that we have on display. Donated by an area Funeral Home, the casket likely dates back to the Civil War era.

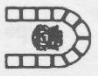
Wicker came into use for caskets during the Civil War as less expensive and lighter weight option for shipping the bodies of mortally wounded soldiers back to their homes where they would have been placed in a more traditional coffin for burial.

Often, funeral homes began using the wicker caskets for showings. This practice continued until the early 1900's. Law enforcement, too, relied on these lightweight products for transporting bodies from crime scenes prior to the use of the infamous black body bag.

The term *Basket Case* has been misidentified as coming from this practice. According to most scholars, the phrase *Basket Case* came into use during WWI because of a misunderstanding among the general public. It had been said that soldiers who had lost both arms and legs were being shipped back to the States in baskets and they were being called basket cases in the press. This wasn't true and in 1919 the U.S. Surgeon General released a statement refuting the claim. By then the term had gained widespread usage and people soon started using it to refer to people who were powerless. By 1940 it was being used to refer to companies or organizations that were having severe difficulties. It wasn't until the 1950's that the term started being used as slang for people with mental difficulties.

Did you know that the Bernard Museum holds information on many dozens of families that lived in the Delton area during its early history? Dr. Bernard collected family histories and preserved them for future generations. If you are doing genealogy research on your own family and if you have family members that have lived in the area for a long time, you might give us a call to see if we have any information on file. Arrangements can be made for you to read and/or copy the information if we have it in our files.

You can also start your own family tree. Although there are many online sites to assist you with this, a good place to start is by filling out a chart the old-fashioned way first. And a good time to start one is over the holidays when families come together. On the next page you will find a chart that was included in our 1993 newsletter. Feel free to use this one, or download and print one off the internet. There's no better time than now to record your family history.



Library of Michigan

PEDIGREE CHART

Date _____

Name _____

Street Address _____

City _____ State _____

1
BORN
WHERE
WHEN MARRIED
DIED
WHERE

NAME OF HUSBAND OR WIFE

2
Father
BORN
WHERE
WHEN MARRIED
DIED
WHERE

3
Mother
BORN
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4
Paternal Grandfather
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Courtesy of the Library of Michigan
Phone No. 517-373-1390

Below you will find a reprint of an article from our 1992 newsletter talking about the thirty-year anniversary of the museum. We've recently celebrated sixty years!

Thirty years Beyond a Dream--Bernard Museum

On the weekend of July 4, 1992, the Bernard Historical Society and Museum will be celebrating its 30th anniversary. Thirty years ago, on July 3, 1962, the Bernard Historical Society and Museum was officially incorporated. The day before, on July 2, people had begun cleaning out the hospital building and sheds, a dusty, tangible first step to creating a local museum that would eventually grow to 8 buildings and 22,000 artifacts, thirty years of reality attesting to the dreams of one man, Dr. Prosper G. Bernard.

It was Dr. Bernard's idea to start a historical society and museum, and Dr. Bernard's decision to donate the hospital to house local artifacts. The doctor had been a history buff for years, and according to Mrs. Bernard, the recreation room in the basement of the house was just jam-packed with artifacts that he had collected. Some articles hung from the ceilings, others were neatly displayed on racks or shelves that he had made for the purpose. He willingly showed the display to friends or interested persons who had heard of it.

After the hospital had been closed for several years, Dr. Bernard started thinking of how the building would be a good place to display the collection that was fast outgrowing his recreation room. He felt that the collection and hospital itself should belong to the community. To that end he began several years of thought, investigation, research, and many discussions of the feasibility and value of such a project. Finally, he was able to start planning. He invited a group of interested people to his home on Sunday, April 10, 1962 for the purpose of setting up a historical society. Esther Bernard, Irving and Beulah Barber, Leone Bradfield, Casey Balla, John Chamberlain, Bob Weaver, Gertrude Springer, Russell Mott, Basil Johnson, Ruth Lyons, Florence Halliday, Emma Thorpe Walters, Lois Flower, Harold Campbell, Roger Williams, Harold Jones, Harold Burpee, and possibly others were at that first meeting. They elected officers and directors, chose a name, and set a date for the next meeting: May 15th, at the Delton School, open to all interested persons. The museum was on its way to becoming a reality.

As people heard of the project, they began volunteering to clean and repair the hospital. Donations started pouring in from all over. People donated freely of things just to get rid of them, things that are now difficult to find. People also donated of time, materials, and money. In May of 1963 the museum opened its doors to visitors. On October 1 of that year the Brown School House began its 2-day journey from the corner of Lindsey and Pine Lake Roads to its new home at the museum. In 1968, an old-time grocery store was built, and in 1969 an old-time blacksmith shop was constructed, complete with an authentic forge. A two-story wing was also added to the hospital, funded by the sale of the history book *Years Gone By*. More recently, in 1988 the seamstress cottage was moved in and set up, and just this last winter the new pole barn was finished. Dr. Bernard's dream keeps growing.

The person who was the driving force behind all of this came to Delton in 1928, straight from internship at Butterworth Hospital, Grand Rapids. He had lived his school age years in Canada, studied pre-med at Valparaiso University, and received his medical degree from the Indiana University School of Medicine in 1927.

His first office was in the home he purchased from Dr. Cross, on Grove St. He built on examining and hospital rooms, and kept up a growing country practice, besides taking flight lessons and studying X-Ray at University Hospital, Ann Arbor. In the winters he transformed his Model T car into a "Snow Bird" with front runners and rear tracks, and made his rounds of house calls, no matter what the weather.

It was in 1933-34 that he began construction of a new home by Crooked Lake, on Delton Road, followed by construction of his hospital. Both buildings were built of local materials. The bricks were made in Cloverdale, but had first been used by the American National Bank of Kalamazoo. When a new bank was built, the bricks were brought to Delton, for Dr. Bernard's use. The chimney and fireplace stones (there are five fireplaces in the house) were from the area, laid by stonemason Charlie Monica. The hand-hewn timbers and the oak for the floors were from local trees, and the wood trim was from the sawmill of Sil Doster. Russell Lewis, Milo Lehman, and Charlie worked on both the house, and later, the hospital.

When Dr. Bernard opened the hospital in 1936-37, he began to insist on hospital stays for obstetric patients. He had spent many hours in homes waiting for babies to be born, while emergencies might need him elsewhere. With the mothers coming to the hospital to have their babies, he could take care of the birthing mother and still see other patients that might need him. He made the OB stay very attractive by charging a total of \$35 for pre-natal care, delivery, a 3

day hospital stay, and 6 months post-natal care. Each day a mother wanted to stay past the 3 days cost her \$3 a day. These prices later went up to \$50 and \$5 respectively. All told, over 400 babies were born at the hospital on Delton Road.

Doctor began his work day by making his house calls in the early morning. Then, his office hours were from 10-12, 1-5, and in the evening 7-9. He did general surgery, dispensed medication, and did most clinical laboratory and X-Ray work at the hospital also. For most surgeries other than appendectomies and tonsillectomies, he would call in specialists, and assist the specialist in the surgery. Doctor Rush McNair from Kalamazoo was one he called often.

In 1939, after building the little house, Dr. Bernard had an assistant, Dr. Slagh, who worked with him until Dr. Bernard, a member of the army reserves, was called to active duty early in 1942. After serving at Fitzsimmon's General Hospital in the X-Ray Department, Dr. Bernard went overseas, and as a member of the Task Invasion Force, went into areas with the medical unit immediately following the battle. He worked in North Africa, Sicily, and Italy.

Early in 1945 he returned home, and with an assistant, Dr. Lamar Hankamp, re-opened his office, but not the hospital. Pennock Hospital wanted him as Director of X-Ray, a position he held until retiring in 1951. He also opened his own X-Ray office in Hastings. Between 1951 and 1957 he worked throughout southern Michigan as an X-Ray consultant-specialist, before retiring from medicine a final time.

It was after that he began gearing up for his second career of museum founder and director, a position he put much time and energy in to until his death in 1980. It is his vision and energy that we celebrate this 4th of July weekend, plus the dedication and energy of countless volunteers. Thank you, all of you!

Thank you also to Mrs. Esther Bernard, for her time and contribution to this article.
Michele T. Boniface Tsuji, ed.



Dr. Bernard in front of the General Store.