



# ViewPoints



May 2017

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**AN OCCASIONAL NEWSLETTER OF THE GRANDVIEW HEIGHTS/MARBLE CLIFF HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

## Archives Room Turns 40

It's 1977 when over 110 GH/MCHS members baked "home-made pies, cookies, and other goodies" at the fall festival. The proceeds from the bake sale were to help fund furnishings for an archives room: "a special room for study and a museum at the Grandview Library". These quotes were taken from a letter to the Editor of the Tri-Village News, November 1977, written by Ruth Fridenstine, President of the GH/MCHS at the time. Other contributors to the fund raiser were "Renee" Leach, Patty Todd, Tim and Carol Andres, Syd Keffer, Bob Fridenstein and Ruthanne James.

Originally the room was to have the air of a Victorian home. At a September 1979 Society meeting, decisions were made about what furnishings and accessories were needed for the Archives Room including:

- The windowless room was to have a faux window depicting a view from the window of the Urlin mansion (now demolished). Of course there would be curtains or drapes on the window.
- Walls would be covered with a "proper" Victorian wallpaper.
- A fireplace would need a cover for the opening where wood formerly burned. Logs, a fire screen, and andirons would add the atmospheric touch.
- Historical pictures would be framed and hung on the walls or placed on book-case shelves.
- Limited floor space would only allow a library table and chairs. A fireside chair would be a nice addition as would other Victorian accessories such as a clothes tree and fern stands.
- Lastly "What's a Victorian room without an Oriental rug?"

The furnishing and accessories were to be purchased with Society funds or donations.



Historical artifacts displayed in Archives Room.



Antique coat tree and umbrella stand.

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### PRESIDENT'S LETTER



Dear Members,

*Spring Greetings! I love my drive home from work, seeing how very green everything is becoming and seeing people out walking their children and pets. Everything is starting to fill out and look like the summer we all love. It is always very difficult for me to restrain myself and not plant a few annuals about now. I have my tomato plants on order and plan to put those in my raised bed on Mother's Day!*

*I hope all of you were able to see the newest WOSU video. It focused on the Sells Brothers Circus. If you missed the original airing, it is available online at the WOSU website. There may be more Tri-Village videos to come. We had so much information, that all of it couldn't be included in the original "Columbus Neighborhoods" program last year, so mini-videos such as the Sells Brothers Circus one are being aired.*

*The Society is now a member of the Tri-Village Chamber Partnership! We hope to further our mission and make new friends.*

*I have attended several Grandview Heights city meetings of one board or another, in an attempt to introduce our new Position Statement regarding the Historical Significance & Preservation of Local Structures. As an overview, the statement is the Society's "checklist" that can determine a structure's historical significance prior to major renovation or demolition consideration. We keep working on this. Marble Cliff has similar requirements, and we hope that Grandview will join us in our efforts. While the Society is not an activist group, our Mission is to preserve and recognize all things historical. There certainly is a lot of development going on these days. Progress is good, but hopefully the ambience of Grandview and Marble Cliff will stay intact.*

*Welcome new life members Thomas and Paula Brown; Tim and Tess Galvin; Marnie and Bob Hoag; Matthew and Kimberly Jolson; Elizabeth Putnam; Lou Ann and Buss Ransom; Kim Sides and Brad and Teri Williams.*

*In closing, I wish you a relaxing and fun spring. Spend lots of happy times with your loved ones and friends!*

Sincerely,  
Tracy Liberatore, President





## Vaud-Villities Celebrates 75 Years

By Jackie Day Cherry, Vaud-Villities Historian

Who would have believed that a minstrel show put on by a few folks from the Tri-Village area would begin a local entertainment tradition that in April 2017 presented its 75th annual production? Certainly not its founder, Marble Cliff resident Lowell Riley. In early 1941 Riley was employed as the musical director of radio station WBNS and also was arranging music and directing the chorus for the Young Business Men's Club of Columbus when he was hired by First Community Church on May 1, to organize a men's chorus and a youth choir.



Bob Murphy and Lowell Riley at the keyboard circa 1970s.

In less than two years the men had learned so many songs that they decided to hold a performance for their friends and families. Minstrel shows were popular during that era so they decided on that format for their performance and reserved the Upper Arlington High School Auditorium (now Jones Middle School) for the nights of March 12 and 13, 1943. To provide piano accompaniment, Riley invited Bob Murphy, a young medical student with whom he had occasionally played for church events. The 27 Tri-Village Troubadours were joined on stage by an accordion player, a comedy magician, two chorus lines of high school girls, various soloists and a tap dancer named Wally Phillips. There were so many encores that it was past midnight before the curtain was finally lowered, prompting the rule that there be NO encores for the next show.

Following the success of their first venture they renamed themselves the Tri-Village Men's Glee Club, recruited more members and planned an even bigger show for the following year. They also



First Women's Chorus - 1958 at Upper Arlington High School.

added the church's Cloister Choir of high school girls that Riley had organized after so many young men left for military service following the attack on Pearl Harbor. Another addition was a real band. Riley's friend, Jim Millisor, and several of his friends attended a rehearsal and listened to each song, then wrote down the key signatures so that they could improvise musical accompaniment. This enabled Riley and Murphy to move their pianos onstage to perform a medley of songs from "Oklahoma." In the ensuing years, the twin pianos were to become one of the show's favorite acts. Another feature that became part of the program that year was the song, "Hi, Neighbor," from the movie "San Antonio Rose." It was initially performed as a dance routine, but when the minstrel format was abandoned in 1947, it became the show's opening number as the men's glee club entered every door streaming down the aisles to the stage singing "Hi, Neighbor" and shaking hands with members of the audience who enthusiastically applauded and sang along with them.

Within five years more than 200 Tri-Village residents were involved in putting on this show that had become an anticipated springtime tradition. Cloister Choir members were not only singers, but many of them also danced in the high kicking chorus lines or performed in specialty numbers. During this period Riley directed the First Community Church choirs and also was the very popular vocal music teacher at both Grandview and Arlington High Schools. There was never a problem find-

ing folks of all ages who wanted to be a part of "the show" whether that meant performing, building scenery, sewing costumes, or working backstage. In 1947 the name was changed to "Vaud-Villities" (V-V) to reflect the emphasis on variety acts, comedy, singing and dancing.

While vocal rehearsals were held at First Community Church, the dancers soon were rehearsing on the lower level of Murphy's medical office and costumes were being stored in Jim Wallace's basement on Ashland Avenue. A women's glee club comprised of many Cloister Choir alumnae was organized in 1958. One of the attractions that made the show so appealing was the opportunity to see your doctor or attorney, your son's teacher, or the neighbor down the street displaying talents on stage that you never even suspected were there. The demand for tickets continued to grow as well as the size of the cast. More performances were added, and by 1961 V-V had outgrown the Upper Arlington High School auditorium. In a giant leap of faith, after three performances at the high school, Veterans Memorial Auditorium (Vets) in Columbus was booked for a fourth performance the following weekend. If they could draw enough patrons, perhaps the time had come to move the show downtown.

The chief obstacles faced with the move to Vets were the need to build new sets and risers to fill the giant 70 foot stage and that nearly 4000 tickets must be sold for each performance. The final requirement was that only union stagehands and musicians could be hired. Through all the years



1969 Finale with combined chorus at Veterans Memorial Auditorium.

since 1944 when the initial orchestra had appeared to offer their talents, those musicians had not charged for their services. So now in order to play for free they would first have to pay their union dues. Many of them did just that...paid the musicians union in order to play just for the fun of it. A giant publicity campaign in early 1962 was aided by enthusiastic newspaper columnists who praised the reputation the show had already achieved as a Tri-Village tradition. One article noted, "The Friday and Saturday performances are apt to play to a combined audience of 8,000...far larger than most Broadway shows reach in an entire week. This is going big time in a big way!" A reviewer wrote, "Broadway came to life in all its splendor as a bunch of old pros staged their 20th show. This production is loaded with talent and experience and every performance is a show stopper."

Throughout the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s the cast grew to more than 400 members who annually presented six performances including Community Benefit Night at no charge for those with special needs and Senior Citizen Night at a reduced rate. V-V's reputation continued to grow and critics especially praised its profes-



1976 Bicentennial Show which was Awarded the George Washington Honor Medal by the Freedoms Foundation.

sionalism and lavish costuming as well as the creative lighting and sets of Kirby Wyatt who eventually became a nationally prominent set designer. Randy Skinner, a V-V dancer and choreographer, went on to New York where he danced on Broadway and won several Tony Awards for his choreography. Free summer concerts were presented throughout the city and before the Upper Arlington fireworks on the 4th of July.

V-V has always been a family affair with several multigenerational families as well as siblings and couples who were part of the cast and crew. Many individuals have been involved for 40 and 50 years. In 1992 after half a century of working with Murphy and others to plan each show, directing the choruses, writing orchestrations and all the vocal arrangements, Riley decided that it was time to lay down the baton. Many of his former singers came from across the country to celebrate this talented and beloved musician. What a legacy he left for the entire central Ohio cultural scene, but especially for those who sang for him.

And V-V has continued for another 25 years, living up to its reputation as the oldest and largest musical variety show in the nation. New directors were hired and new performers were added. After 49 years at Vets (now demolished) V-V found a new home at the Northland Performing Arts Center on Morse Road where costumes and sets can be stored, rehearsals held, and the show staged. In addition to the annual spring production, V-V now presents a holiday show in December and a cabaret style show in summer. A new generation of singers and dancers is learning show biz at the Youth Summer Camps.

## Archives Room Turns 40

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Oak fireplace and bookshelves from Stone mansion.

An entry from the April 1980 Grandview Library Board minutes stated "*the historical room in the library is finished and is to be included in the tour of homes tentatively set for May 18.*"

Now, in 2017, the Society is celebrating 40 years since the genesis of the idea for a GH/MCHS Archives Room. Today the focal point of the room is the oak fireplace and bookcases donated from the Julius Stone mansion. The mansion sat at the corner of Goodale Boulevard and Westwood Avenue, where the current Stonegate complex resides. Other items of interest currently in the Archives Room include an antique map cabinet, fireplace andirons, and historical pictures hanging on the walls and placed on the bookshelves. In one corner stands an antique coat rack and umbrella stand. Files of old maps, memorabilia, pictures of past families and places, photos of historic homes, and cupboards of books are also in the room and help reveal how GH/MC communities were long ago.

The GH/MCHS Archives Room is located on the second floor of the Grandview Library not far from the reference desk. The door leading to the room is between the magazine displays in the non-fiction area. On Monday mornings at 10 a.m., the room is open to the public and staffed by our two Society archivists, Debbie Farynowski and Jill Kuyper. Win Keller, an original Society founder, mentored these archivists on maintaining the history of Grandview Heights and Marble Cliff for all to enjoy. Please stop by and discover the history that has been collected and preserved.



## BECOME A MEMBER

*of the Grandview Heights/Marble Cliff Historical Society!*

Please complete the information below and send with your check made out to: **GH/MC Historical Society**  
Mail or drop off at the **Grandview Heights Public Library,**  
**1685 West First Avenue, Columbus, OH 43212**

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

SPOUSE (IF COUPLE MEMBERSHIP) \_\_\_\_\_

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YEARLY DUES (OCT. 1–SEPT. 30)

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### LIFE TIME MEMBERSHIP

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Single \$100.00

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Contact Editor Karen Riggs  
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interesting article ideas or to discuss  
photo contributions.

## A REQUEST

Our website makes accessible a great deal of historical material. If you wish to publish any of our material please do us the courtesy of crediting your source. Contact us to clarify any possible copyright issues.

## Board Members Sought

The Society is seeking two new Board members. Responsibilities of Board members include:

- attending monthly meetings of the Board;
- assisting with Society's events;
- leading one Society activity area/effort; and
- positive promotion of the Society's mission.

In particular, we are looking for candidates that have skills in marketing, event planning and coordination, and/or membership management. An in-depth knowledge of GH/MS history is not necessary; however, a strong interest in learning about our communities' history is important. Computer proficiency is required. Board members receive no compensation and serve a three-year term which can be renewed. If you have interest in serving on our Board, please send an expression of interest, contact information, and a short summary of your skills and background to Tracy Liberatore, President, [tracyliberatore1@gmail.com](mailto:tracyliberatore1@gmail.com) by June 16, 2017.

## Going Green

Future issues of our *Viewpoints* newsletter will be sent electronically to Society members as we continue to work to decrease mailing and production costs. If you have a recent email address change or do not believe the Society has your email address, please send your email address to: [ghmchs@gmail.com](mailto:ghmchs@gmail.com). Please include "Going Green" in the subject line. We will maintain your email address in confidence. Thank you for helping us go green!

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