

History Matters



Keego Harbor • Orchard Lake • Sylvan Lake • West Bloomfield

Newsletter of Greater West Bloomfield Historical Society

WINTER 2025 | GWBHS ORIGINS | 50TH ANNIVERSARY HIGHLIGHTS | SOCIETY PROGRAMS & NEWS | SHADY BEACH SUBDIVISION 100TH ANN.

How It All Began!

As GWBHS begins its 51st year, let's reflect on the organization's formation and a 2020 letter from Mel Rycus, with homemade wine included.

On January 28, 1974, about 50 residents and local leaders from Orchard Lake formed the Orchard Lake Scenic and Historical Society to preserve local history and natural beauty. They elected Reverend Walter J. Ziemba as president and Mel Rycus as vice-president. The group aimed to research and protect historical sites such as the Michigan Military Academy, Apple Island, and Orchard Lake Community Church, Presbyterian. By 1978, the society expanded its focus to include neighboring areas, becoming the Greater West Bloomfield Historical Society (GWBHS). Today, GWBHS is a non-profit dedicated to collecting, preserving, researching, and stimulating public interest in the history of Keego Harbor, Orchard Lake, Sylvan Lake, and West Bloomfield.

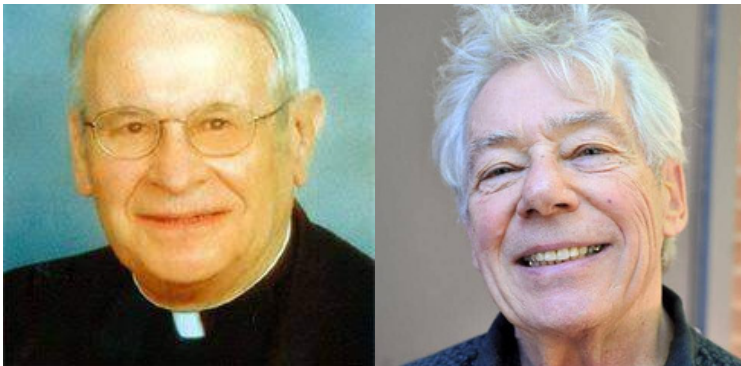


Original logo

attempt to make home brew wine. My daughters picked the dandelions from the back of our property, and I had the large demijohn canister sitting on our kitchen counter, fermenting. I brought two bottles of white dandelion wine to the picnic, and my wife, Barbara, Father Stan, and Father Wally, and I consumed a couple glasses of home brew. I mentioned to the Fathers, that someone should preserve the history and historical facts of the area. We felt that Orchard Lake, West Bloomfield, Keego Harbor, and Sylvan Lake, should all be included in the history. Father Wally and Father Stan thought that that was a great idea, and that I should be first President, I immediately declined, and after much debate, it was agreed that Father Walter Ziemba, and Mel Rycus, would co-chair the leadership, to get it off the ground. The rest is History!!!"

GWBHS Supports West Bloomfield Social Studies

West Bloomfield Schools has several new third-grade teachers and a new Michigan curriculum. Linda Kidd, GWBHS Education Committee member, has been working on primary source experiences to provide third-grade students with hands-on experiences provided by the GWBHS and Orchard Lake Museum. Linda Kidd is collaborating with third-grade teachers to use local maps, Native American artifacts, and pictures and postcards. (Some items are/were obtained from Native American sources.)



Reverend Walter Ziemba (L) & Mel Rycus (R), first President and Vice President of GWBHS

In a 2020 letter, Mel Rycus recounted how a Labor Day picnic and his homemade dandelion wine inspired the idea for the society:

"Original facts behind the founding of the Greater West Bloomfield Historical Society: I think that it was a Labor Day picnic, on the grounds of the former Michigan Military Academy, Orchard Lake Schools. It was my first, and only,



Linda Kidd (R) works with teachers to incorporate primary sources from the Museum for student use



From the Desk of President Gina Gregory

Only a local historical society can connect folks with others who have similar interests in local history. Our members tell us they enjoy these interpersonal interactions. How fortunate we are to have an interesting history and resources to do this for 50 years!

2024 saw year-long activities celebrating 50 years of GWBHS, 1974-2024, enriching our communities by collecting, preserving, and sharing history.

Our fall 2024 activities were very successful and included Open Houses: Anniversary Celebration, Indigenous Peoples Day, Military Collection, Vintage Wooden Toys; as well as recurring programs and special anniversary programs:

- August: Poker Rally: Things You Auto Know About Local History
- September: Celebrating 50 Years of History Open House
- September: "Mapping Local History" Presentation, with new 1975 & 2024 GWBHS Historic Highlights Map now available at the Orchard Lake Museum
- October: Pine Lake Cemetery Tour
- October: Orchard Lake Nature Sanctuary Fall Walk
- November: WB Parks Heroes Appreciation Breakfast exhibit on display
- November: "50 Years of GWBHS History" Presentation

For photo highlights from some of our fall 2024 programs, see page 5.

What will the next 50 years look like? The answer will be decided by active volunteers then. We see volunteerism declining. I am willing to volunteer as GWBHS President, but handling only presidential, leadership and program ideas (with no new projects).

What about GWBHS interests you? Consider volunteering to support this interest, or volunteering as a committee member, collection digitizing volunteer, docent, sponsor, or program volunteer. Email Museum and Activities Coordinator, communications@gwbhs.org, to learn more about what might work for you.

The 2025 annual meeting will be held at West Bloomfield Library Main Meeting Room, with a light brunch and WWII presentation included. Be sure to renew your membership too! I hope to see you there.

Updates from Anna Smith Museum & Communications Assistant

2024 was an exciting year for GWBHS. With a grant from Michigan Arts and Culture Council and National Endowment for the Arts, volunteers were able to finish the "Our School History" Project, and almost 600 records related to local school history can now be viewed online for free at GWBHS.PastPerfectOnline.com. Additionally, we began the process of "cleaning up" our online collection to make records more detailed and easily searchable! We will continue this project in 2025 thanks to an intern position with a student from Bennington College in Vermont.

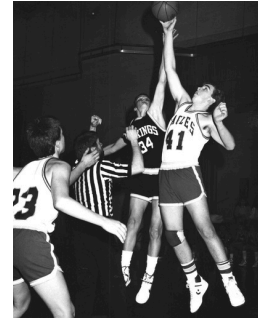
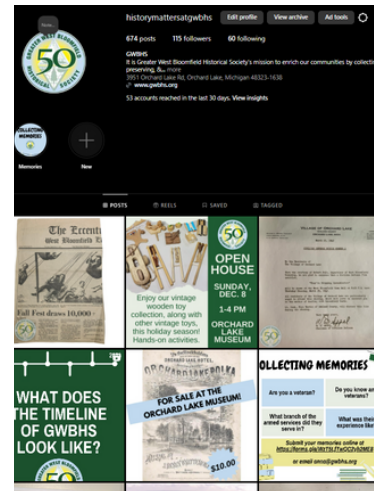
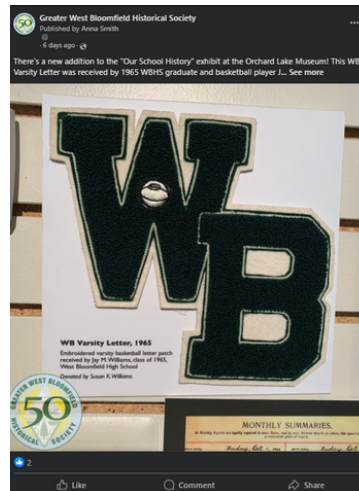


Photo from "Our School History" Project, Abbott Middle School

GWBHS is always looking for new volunteers, with a wide range of available opportunities. Are you interested in hosting our monthly Open Houses? Or helping at our popular annual Apple Island Tours? Writing and proofreading articles for our *History Matters* newsletter? Wherever your strengths lie, GWBHS has a role for you. We rely on volunteers to keep our operations smooth and our unique local history alive, so contact communications@gwbhs.org or call (248) 757-2451 to start volunteering with us in 2025.

GWBHS has made an effort in recent months to share more local history with our community via social media, including objects from our collection and memories from people who have spent their lives in greater West Bloomfield. The digital world provides an opportunity to reach larger audiences than ever before. You can follow us on Facebook at Facebook.com/GWBHS and on Instagram under the handle [@historymattersatgwbhs](https://www.instagram.com/historymattersatgwbhs) to repost and share our content with your friends and family.



Follow GWBHS on Facebook and Instagram to see objects from our collection, posts about local history, information on upcoming events, and ways you can get involved with the society!

2025 Programs

January-April



Greater West Bloomfield Historical Society

Greater West Bloomfield Historical Society hosts and sponsors programs covering a wide variety of history topics throughout the year. Visit GWBHS.org for more information and final event details.



Traditional Ice Harvesting Open House

Sunday, January 12, 1-4 pm

Orchard Lake Museum

3951 Orchard Lake Road

See traditional ice harvesting methods and tools. Come make an ice cone and see our

permanent exhibits that interpret local area history and culture!



Annual Meeting & Presentation - "Michigan POW Camps in World War II"

Saturday, January 25, 10 am-12 pm

WB Library Main Meeting Room

4600 Walnut Lake Road

Dr. Gregory Sumner, Professor of History

at the University of Detroit Mercy, will discuss his book Michigan POW Camps in World War II. It tells the fascinating – but largely forgotten – story of the 6,000 captured German and Italian soldiers who lived and worked in our state between 1943-1946. Sponsored with West Bloomfield Library.

Local Black History Open House

Sunday, February 9, 1-4 pm

Orchard Lake Museum, 3951 Orchard Lake Road

In 1908, Marie C. Bolden, an Ohio-born African-American teenager, became the first-ever national spelling bee champion. But her achievement was quickly eclipsed by racial prejudice, and her story rarely told. Please join us to hear West Bloomfield stories rarely told.



"Detroit's 1910 Kosher Meat Riot" Presentation

Wednesday, February 26, 7 pm

WB Library Main Meeting Room, 4600

Walnut Lake Road

In Detroit in 1910, working-class Orthodox women were no longer able to afford Kosher meat. Under the direction of Rebecka Possner, Jewish women took to the streets, fighting to stabilize prices. Hear JHSM Executive Director Catherine Cangany, PhD retell this remarkable and forgotten moment in Michigan history. Sponsored with West Bloomfield Library.

Open House Dates 1-4 pm (closed holiday weekends or when a program is elsewhere). Come see permanent exhibits interpreting local history and culture! *Free Admission, Donations Appreciated.*

January
Sunday: 1/12, 1/19

February
Sunday: 2/9, 2/23

March
Sunday: 3/9, 3/23

April
Sunday: 4/6, 4/13



West Bloomfield Parks Open House

Sunday, March 9, 1-4 pm

Orchard Lake Museum, 3951 Orchard Lake Road

Join us and a West Bloomfield Parks representative as they share our WB park history! Engaging permanent exhibits interpret local area history and culture.



"Researching the Underground Railroad in Oakland County" Presentation

Wednesday, March 26, 7 pm

WB Library Main Meeting Room, 4600

Walnut Lake Road

How and why was Oakland County involved in the Underground Railroad? ... And how do you uncover the stories of those involved? Carol Bacak-Egbo, Oakland County Parks historian, shares her findings in this presentation. Sponsored with West Bloomfield Library.



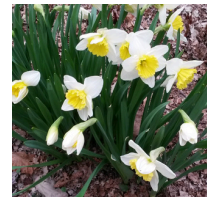
Tax Records Open House

Sunday, April 13, 1-4 pm

Orchard Lake Museum

3951 Orchard Lake Road

Come see West Bloomfield tax record books. To learn more about your property, know your Township section number, property description and, if known, subdivision. Engaging permanent exhibits interpret local area culture and history.



Orchard Lake Nature Sanctuary Spring Nature Walk

Sunday, April 27, 2-3 pm

Orchard Lake Nature Sanctuary, 4700

Pontiac Trail

Join Naturalist Carol Fink for a guided tour. Walk through rolling terrain and explore the breathtaking spring flowers. Sponsored with Orchard Lake Nature Sanctuary.



Shady Beach Subdivision Celebrates Centennial!

Shady Beach subdivision, located in the City of Orchard Lake, is an 80-acre subdivision located off Old Orchard Trail and borders Upper Straits Lake. It was first settled by the Walls family in 1837, then sold and subdivided in the 1920s. A 1923 Plat map of Shady Beach Heights along with a 1924 Plat map of Shady Beach parcels showed two separate subdivisions, recognized when the Village of Orchard Lake was incorporated in 1928. Considered as one subdivision, the 1924 date was used as the origin date for the Centennial celebration held this year.



Shady Beach subdivision sign

In 1945, property owners decided to incorporate into the SBIA (Shady Beach Improvement Association). By the 1950s, Shady Beach was the most populated area of Orchard Lake.

Today it features its own boat well marina with launch, park areas, beach, and pavilion. An all-volunteer association sponsors an annual 4th of July fireworks and bike parade, a summer Music-on-the-Lake concert series, a kids' fishing tournament, an Easter egg hunt, an ice cream social, a Fall Chili Cookoff, and Trick-or-Treat on the Hill.

Association board notes and monthly member newsletters from the past relate subdivision growth:

1928: When the subdivision incorporated, roads were taken over and maintained by the Village, including garbage pickup.

1945: Due to a population boom interested in lake living, SBIA incorporates as a non-profit. An all-volunteer Board



Shady Beach 1924 (L) & Shady Beach Heights 1923 (R) Plat maps

runs the Association. Dues for membership are not mandatory.

1959: Gravel pit by the lake was developed into a recreational area for tennis, volleyball, badminton, shuffleboard, and a place to hold association dances. Because of an influx of "outsiders," Shady Beach issued beach tags.

1965-66: Annual dues set at \$10; membership of 102 families; Clinton-Oakland Sewer Disposal System comes through by millage; Teen Club formed; quarterly newsletters approved; all volunteer Beach Patrol established.

1969: Dues were \$15/year. Street signs upgraded by the City; vote to establish a Beach Patrol on an assigned basis; bylaws updated; new entrance sign; swimming lessons at the beach; dock spaces assigned to association members only.

1970-71: 115 occupied properties, 93 permanent homes; 309 residents; \$15 per dock fee established at boat marina; tennis court fenced; Edison pole installed with lights; Teen Club re-organized.

1979: 115 permanent year-round families.

2024: 184 permanent homes, membership of 136; dues are \$300 per year.

This once cottage community has succeeded for 100 years!



SBIA residents hold a successful food drive

Thank You for Supporting GWBHS!

GWBHS could not serve the community without the help of our partners, donors, members, sponsors, and volunteers.

ARCHIVE DONATIONS - Julie Abeska, Joseph Bernert, Catherine Cangany, Terry & Virginia Donn, City of Orchard Lake Village, Newt Eade, Mary Fischer, Friends of the Library, Gina & Rob Gregory, Glen King, Barbara Kline & West Bloomfield Fire Department & West Bloomfield Township

COMMUNITY EVENT VOLUNTEERS - Linda Kidd, Gina Gregory & Sue Williams

PROGRAM & OPEN HOUSE PRESENTERS - Hannah Dagg, Carol Fink, Gina Gregory, Sue Grifor, Neil Hepburn & David Shapero

PINE LAKE CEMETERY TOUR VOLUNTEERS - Sue Williams (Chair), Bill Bertakis, Mari Bem (Pine Lake Cemetery Association), Hannah Dagg, Carol Fink, Paul Mellerowicz, Anita MacSorley, Jerry Nechel, Don Newman & Christian Sonnevile

POKER RALLY VOLUNTEERS - Rick Bartus (Chair), Kathy Bartus, Brian (Pontiac Transportation Museum), Hannah Dagg, Meaghan Galbraith-Crowe, Gina & Rob Gregory, Sue Grifor, Carol Hack, Linda Kidd, Lana LaFortune, Tim Pawl, Mike Pierz, Karen Pushie & Beth Tryon

MUSEUM SUPPORT - City of Orchard Lake Village

PROGRAM & OPEN HOUSE VOLUNTEERS - Janice Boyd, Carol Fink, Gina & Rob Gregory, Isla & Neil Hepburn & Anna Smith

PROGRAM PARTNERS - Orchard Lake Nature Sanctuary, West Bloomfield Library & West Bloomfield Parks

PUBLICITY & GWBHS CONTENT VIDEOS - Civic Center TV

2024 DIGITIZING GRANT VOLUNTEERS - Amber Baker, Joseph Bernert, Brenda Cogswell, Melissa Gilbert, Robert Hack, Tom McClure, Alison Ristovski, Jolie Saul, Sindhu Sivan, Rissa Smith, Christian Sonnevile & Sue Williams

50TH ANNIVERSARY OPEN HOUSE - Linda Kidd (Chair), Matt Chaffin & David, Alex Dagg, Carol Fink, Gina & Rob Gregory, Isla & Neil Hepburn, Sophie Langsch, Kelly Mandel, Tom McClure, Ed Milkowski, Derek & Anna Schraffenberger, DuAnne & Christian Sonnevile & Gabrielle, Lucas, & Olivia Vasconcelos

HISTORY MATTERS WINTER 2025 SPONSOR - William Rauwerdink

Fall 2024 Program Highlights



Poker Rally: Things You Auto Know About Local History



Celebrating 50 Years of History Open House - shared our history with 95+ people!



"Historic Highlights Map" Presentation



Pine Lake Cemetery Tour, Jerry Nechel of Sylvan Lake with Norm Cash headstone



Orchard Lake Nature Sanctuary Fall Walk



"50 Years of GWBHS History" Presentation



Orchard Lake Museum
 3951 Orchard Lake Road
 Orchard Lake, MI 48323

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Board of Directors

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| Linda Kidd | Recording Secretary |
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| Hannah Dagg | Communications, Exhibits |
| Karen Pushie | Membership database |

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| | |
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| Sue Grifor | Membership |
| Rick Bartus | Community Relations |
| Don Newman | Group Programs |
| Christian Sonnevill | Development/Fundraising |

Mission: enriching our communities by collecting, preserving, and sharing history.
GWBHS is a 501(c)3 organization open to all and has served
Keego Harbor, Sylvan Lake, Orchard Lake, and West Bloomfield since 1974.

*Thank you to our newsletter sponsor
 William Rauwerdink!*



GWBHS Membership Form

New Membership Renew Membership *Gift Membership

Name _____

Address _____

Email _____ Phone _____

*Gift Membership From _____ Phone _____

Address _____

Membership • Jan. 1 to Dec. 31

- Individual \$25
- Family \$50
- Premier \$75
- Patron/Business \$100
- Life \$600

Please contact me about volunteering with GWBHS

Please make checks payable to GWBHS.
 Credit card payments are accepted through PayPal at gwbhs.org.

GWBHS is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Donations are tax deductible according to IRS regulations.

Membership includes access to Time Travelers reciprocal membership network.

Donation Form

\$ _____

This is a one time donation.

This donation is in memory of:

This donation is in honor of:

Name _____

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Check # _____

Total Amount Enclosed \$ _____

