



~ Memories ~

Newsletter of the Jenison Historical Association & Museum

jenisonhistory.org

28 Port Sheldon, Jenison, Michigan
49429

JHA Board Members

Chair - Liz Timmer [2019] 457-3708

Curator/Tours - Ken Williams [2020]
772-6523

Treasurer - Ruth Lowing [2020] 540-4709

Social Secretary - Nellie DeLaat [2019]
457-1193

Recording Secretary - Linda Droog [2021]
457-3016

Archivist - Barb Semeyn [2020] 560-6383

Maintenance/Historian - Mike Timmer [2019]
531-1218

Trustees =
Yvonne Williams [2020] 772-6523

Gene Kort [2019] 534-6769

Township Rep - Becky Steele

Editor - Ronnie Aungst [] 780-1056

Contact Information

Museum phone: 457-4398 to leave a message

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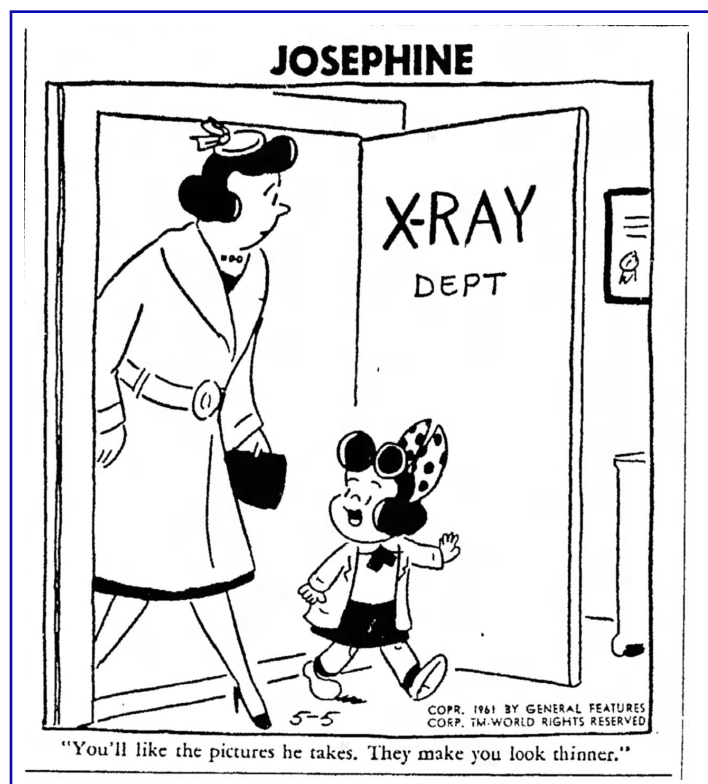
Facebook: Jenison History Association

Happy 2020!!

A big Thank You to the Jenison Boy Scouts Troop #354 for their help with the Christmas decorations. We are very grateful.

And a Happy New Year to all of you! We are looking forward to an exciting year and hope you join us.

Below: Cartoon is from GR Press, 1961



~ 2020 Museum Open Houses ~

Also available for individuals and groups by appointment. Call the museum at 616-457-4390 or Ken Williams at 774-6523.

**History of Georgetown Library -
More Than Just Books**

March 3 - 10 to Noon
March 21 - 2 to 4pm
April 7 - 10 to Noon
April 18 - 2 to 4pm
May 5 - 10 to Noon
May 16 - 2 to 4pm
June 2 - 10 to Noon
June 20 - 2 to 4pm
July 7 - 10 to Noon

Gizmos & Gadgets of the Past

July 18 - 2 to 4pm
August 4 - 10 to Noon
August 15 - 2 to 4pm
September 1 - 10 to Noon
September 19 - 2 to 4pm
October 6 - 10 to Noon
October 17 - 2 to 4pm
November 3 - 10 to Noon

Christmas at the Jenison Museum

December 5, 2020 - 1pm to 4pm
January 9, 2021 - 2pm to 4pm

Monthly Meetings

Time - **6:45pm**

Location -

Georgetown Library

January 16
February 20
March 19
April 16
May 21
June 18
July 16
August 20
September 17
October 15
November 19

No December meeting

Membership & Volunteering

Support the local history and museum by becoming a member. A year's dues is just \$10 [Jan. to Dec.].

We are always excited to have new people volunteer. Come to a meeting or open house. We will be happy to show you what we do and how you can join in

We have some very interesting exhibits this year. Please mark your calendars to visit with us.

First Black Family of Jenison The Minisee Family

The Jenison family settled here approximately 1835. It would be 100 years before a black family came to reside in Jenison. That family was the Ray E. and Luella Minisee family.

First, we have to go back to an earlier time. The earliest black families came to West Michigan in the 1840s and 1850s from places like New York, Vermont and Pennsylvania as free men and were not runaway slaves from the South. By 1850, Kent county had 10 to 15 black families in Gaines and Lowell townships. Some were Hardy, Huntley, Manly and Minisee. They, like so many other people, were drawn here by good, cheap land.

Melvin Goolsby, a Black historian/genealogist, says that there was some racism but adds that "...because they were in the same boat and because of their small numbers, West Michigan's first blacks were generally well accepted. You didn't survive if your neighboring farmers didn't help you out. People worked things out because it was to benefit all involved." Overall, West Michigan's first black families were well accepted and had a "reasonably tolerant environment" according to Gordon Olson, former Grand Rapids city historian. Curtis Jones, GVSU professor and descendent of an early black family, says "We just got to know people as people" ...getting into a few fist fights over racist remarks" and then ended up being "real good friends."

James Minisee first arrived about 1852 and records show they settled in Gaines Township that year. In 1866 James Minisee bought a Byron Township farm and the family built itself on hard work, education and cooperation with the white neighbors. James and his wife, Maria/Marie had 10 children of which one was George Henry Minisee. The family converted to Seventh-day Adventists in 1863. George Henry Minisee, the son, married Helen Thompson and they farmed in Bryon Township for some time before moving on to Jamestown, Michigan. George and Helen had at least six children. One of those children was Ray Edwin Minisee.

Ray E. Minisee was born in Ballards Corners, Kent County, February 26, 1888. In 1917, he was working at the Alabastrine Company Plaster Mines.

His WWI registration card describes him as being “short, stout, grey eyes and black hair.” April 18, 1917 in Grand Rapids, Ray married Evelyne Bellis and they lived at 542 James Ave. Sadly, Evelyne died January 6, 1919 in Bryon Township of influenza. She was only 26 years old. They did not have children.

Ray then married Luella Whatley [daughter of Andrew Whatley and Sophonia Dave] in Detroit on February 28, 1921. They set up housekeeping in Jamestown for some time and Ray farmed. Between 1930 and 1935, Ray and Luella moved their family to Jenison, Our own local historian, Gene Kort, has informed us that the Minisee farm was small, only 20-40 acres on the north side of what is now Maplewood Lake. Their long driveway is today Sycamore St. The Minisee’s had a couple of cows and a few chickens. In the 1940 census, Ray’s occupation was working as a laborer for the WPA [Work Projects Administration]. Its also believed that Ray worked at the Pantlind Hotel. Gene Kort has shared little stories about his father and Ray Minisee helping each other with farming chores and visiting. Mr. Kort did tell of an event that was never cleared up. It seems that the Minisee barn was burned down. The reason and source was never discovered.

Ray and Luella had five daughters: Marion, Ruth, Ella May, Shirley and Barbara. The girls attended the local schools and the family was active in the community. All of the daughters married and moved away by the time Ray died. He died October 22, 1974, at the age of 86. Luella, who still resided in Jenison until shortly before her death, suffered a stroke and was in a nursing home in Jackson, Michigan. Tragically, she died at the hands of a violent patient in a nursing home and died March 22, 1993 at the age of 94 years. Ray and Luella are both buried in Winchester Cemetery in Bryon Township, Michigan. It appears they continued to belong to the Seventh Day Adventist church as their obituaries appear in the Lake Union Herald, the Adventist newsletter.

Ella M. [Minisee] Hawks established the Luella Minisee Memorial Scholarship at the Grand Rapids Community College of \$500 per semester to native born African-American nursing students. “Our mother was in an area nursing home after suffering from a stroke. A number of the nursing assistants were particularly caring to her during her recovery.” she stated.

Unfortunately, we have no pictures of Ray and Luella Minisee. If anyone out there has one, we would be grateful for a copy.

Sources:

Federal Census Records, 1850 thru 1940

Obituaries, Grand Rapids Press and Lake Union Herald

Articles about Luella Minisee's death - The Herald Palladium, St. Joseph, March 24, 1993

"First On The Frontier" - Flair Sec. J1 & J2, Feb. 21, 1993, Grand Rapids Press

Luella Minisee Memorial Scholarship, Grand Rapids Community College website



Local History Research Room

Its official! The Local History Research Room is now a reality! The research room is located in the basement of the Township Building with access from both the Library and by the elevator in the Township lobby. We are open on Fridays from 11am to 3pm OR by appointment. To make an appointment, call the Jenison Historical Museum at 616-457-4398.

Our collection includes:

AncestryLibrary Edition (In Library Use Only)

MyHeritage (MeL Database Offered by Library of Michigan)

GTPL Genealogy Resources Page

Georgetown Charter Township History Page

Georgetown Charter Township Cemetery Page

Jenison Historical Association, Newsletter Archives

Jenison Historical Museum (Tiffany House)

Obituaries (Grand Rapids Press) limited

US GenWeb Project (Ottawa County);

US GenWeb Project (Georgetown Township)

Births (1867 - 1877); Cemeteries, Deaths, Census, Churches, Directories,

Early Settlers; Influenza Deaths 1918 - 1919, Land Records, Maps,

Marriage Records, Schools, Yearbooks, Township Records

Western Michigan Genealogical Society Databases

The History Room is equipped with computers and a printer. None of the books or records are allowed to leave the room but we can make copies of nearly everything.



LOCAL HISTORY ROOM

So, what subject would you like to research? Maybe its time to compile your family history for those grandkids. We can show you how to get started. Come in and see us!

