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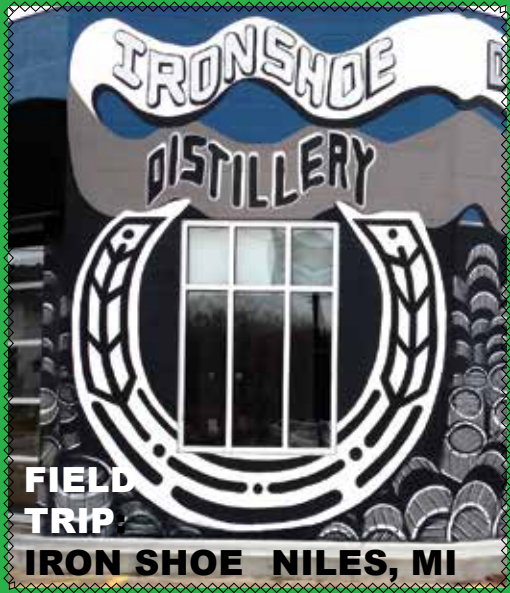
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Neighbors is published monthly from
March through December.

To contact Neighbors
(269) 228-1080
(269) 476-1680

<http://www.cassneighbors.com>
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REGIONAL EVENTS CALENDAR

March 2 – Dr. Seuss' Birthday Party – Cass District Library, Main Branch 6 pm. We will read stories, do a craft and enjoy treats to celebrate

March 6 – Round Hole/Square Peg art exhibition opens at Lubeznik Center for the Arts, Michigan City, IN, 219-874-4900

March 11 – Craft Club: Wood Block Bunny – Cass District Library Main Branch, 1 pm. Create a wood-block bunny with paint, wooden hearts and burlap. Craft Club will be held every second Wednesday of the month. Registration is required. Call McKinzie at 574-314-6454 ext. 113 to register

March 7 – Bunco Game Day – Cass District Library Mason/Union Branch, 1 pm. JA fun afternoon of Bunco, drinks, food and prizes! Hosted by the Cass District Library Mason/Union Friends. The cost to play is \$10

March 9 – Cookbook Club – March 7 – Bunco Game Day – Cass Main Branch, 6 pm. To register, call McKinzie at 574-314-6454 ext. 113

March 14, 28 – United Way: Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) – Cass District Library Main Branch, 9:30 am. Free tax return preparation is available through United Way for families with household incomes less than \$60,000. Call 2-1-1 to schedule a one-on-one tax prep appointment

March 17- Book Club – Cass District Library Edwardsburg Branch, 10:30 am. The title for the month of March is "Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine" by Gail Honeyman

March 17 - Cass County Historical Society meeting, 7 pm, Cass District Library Main Branch, Show & Tell, 244-8479

March 16, 23 –"Hello Spring" Porch Signs – Cass District Library Main Branch, 6 pm. cost is \$10/ person due at registration. All materials provided. Space is limited and registration is required. Call McKinzie at 574-314-6454 ext. 113 to register

March 19 - Website Essentials: Design & Marketing Tools, Tips and Principles, 10:30 -11:30 am, Roger B Francis Branch Library, 52655 Ironwood Rd, South Bend, ncindiana@scorevolunteer.org, 574-310-8097

March 21, 22 - Rent-a-Sap-Bucket at Sugar Camp Days, St. Patrick's County Park, New Carlisle, IN, register by March 13, 574-654-3155

March 24 –Ribbon Bookmark Craft Night – Cass District Library Howard Branch, 6 pm. Registration is required. Call McKinzie at 574-314-6454 ext. 113 to register
March 28 - Spring Marketplace at Wakelee United Methodist Church, 15921 Dutch Settlement St., Noon - 6 pm,

March 28 – Glass Terrarium Make and Take – Cass District Library Edwardsburg Branch, 10 am. Space is limited and registration is required. Call McKinzie at 574-314-6454 ext. 113 to be added to register

April 4 - Dowagiac Easter Eggstravaganza, 10:30 am - 12:30 pm, 782-8212

April 17-26 - Happy Little 5k/Run for the Trees virtual race, \$34, michigan.gov/dnr

May 1, 2 - Michigan Lakes and Streams Association's 59th Annual Conference: Protecting Michigan's Lakes and Streams, Crystal Mountain Resort, Thompsonville, <http://www.mymlsa.org>

May 22 - Dowagiac Community-wide Garage Sale weekend, 8 am - 5 pm 782-8212

May 25 - Dowagiac Memorial Day Parade, 10:30 am - noon, 782-8212

June 3 - Dowagiac Farm & Artisan Market, 9 am - 2 pm, 782-8212

June 13 - Diamond Lake Annual Public Meeting (all lake residents welcome) , 10 11:30 am at the Diamond Lake Yacht Club

June 19, 20 - Diamond Lake All-Lake Garage Sale, 9 - 2 pm on Friday; 9 am -noon Saturday

July 4 - Diamond Lake Association Fireworks, Firework's Island, Rain/Wind delay date will is Sunday July 5

July 17, 18- Summer in the City Festival, 10 am - 5 pm, Dowagiac, 782-8212

July 25 -Steve's Run, 9 am - 1 pm, Dowagiac, 782-8212

August 2 - August 8 - Cass County 4H Fair, Fairgrounds, Cassopolis

August 15 - Rod & Roll Classic Auto Show, 7 am - 4 pm, Dowagiac, 782-8212

August 29 - Kee-Boon-Mein-Kaa Pow Wow, 9 am, Dowagiac, 782-8212

October 10 - Under the Harvest Moon Festival, 10 am - 4 pm, Dowagiac, 782-8212

November 13, 14 - Christmas Open House Weekend, 10 am - 5 pm, Dowagiac, 782-8212

November 28 - Small Business Saturday, 10 am - 11pm , Dowagiac, 782-8212

December 4 - Candle-light Christmas Parade, 7 - 9 pm, Dowagiac, 782-8212

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LAKE LIFE WITH JANE

The remaining days of winter

by **Jane Boudreau**

Hey Neighbors! It's good to be back after a little break. Miss us? In this March column I'm hoping I can help you see the beauty and fun in the remaining days of winter, and get you rearing to go onto spring. Or maybe not. I find that the winter snow and cold here in Michigan is so much like what I grew up with in rural Illinois. We actually ice-skated on frozen water in ditches around farm fields, and took our sleds to any hill we could find. We built snow forts to hide in and behind when having snow-ball fights. We packed snow on to the front steps of the house, threw buckets of water over, and made our own frozen slope to slide down on a trash can lid. Those were the days. City life hasn't been as much fun, but when we found our house on the lake, it all felt so familiar.

I'm not one to say, "Where did the month go?" Or, "Where did winter go?" I'm really all about living each day in a positive way and not dwelling on wasted time. And nothing makes me feel like a kid again than seeing the whole family enjoying winter activities here.



Three generations get together at our lake house to spend a weekend in January sledding. If you haven't noticed, snow has been coming and going when it pleases. Our trip to the hills at Dr. T.K. Lawless Park in Jones, MI., hit the skids when we all showed up with our sleds and something was missing. This is a really cool place to sled or toboggan if you never have. There is a large 'warming house' with a massive fireplace and wood piled high. We've watched as friends and families arrive with coolers, crockpots, and hot thermoses. Now that's the way to settle in for a day of winter fun. So we scrapped Plan A and headed off to Swiss Valley where we always convene for lunch. Later after all the kiddos are off bed, the poker games begin. Not a shabby January day.



As I spend more and more time at the lake I sometimes feel like a pioneer woman. Have that shovel and salt handy, clear a path for the dogs, make sure the firewood is dry, make darn sure your wine cabinet is well stocked.



My pups love a warm fire, Layla particularly since she's so tiny and clearly too close to the floor to stay warm. I'm not above putting her in a basket up higher.

And please be careful to keep an eye on your pets when you let them out. They can easily succumb to cold temperatures, anything below 32 degrees can lead to frostbite. The paws, ears, and tails are the most common areas to be affected, and if your pup is wet or damp, these areas are more vulnerable to frostbite. If you suspect your dog has frostbite, wrap him gently in warm dry towels or blankets and place hot water bottles wrapped in towels near his body. Do NOT use direct heat such as a hair dryer or heating pad. And get medical attention ASAP, sometimes it takes several days for the clinical signs of frostbite to appear. I actually stand at my back door while my dogs are out until they come back to the door, I don't want to get sidetracked.

**Please note that my research on pet frostbite was at the website of the VCA Animal Hospitals.*

Now's a great time to think about vegetable gardening. It's fun, it gets you outdoors, a little exercise is good for you, and you can reduce your grocery bill a bit by growing your own food. To get you started if you are a novice (and if you aren't, save this page to line your birdcage), plant cool-season veggies such as radishes, peas, lettuce, broccoli, and cauliflower. When those cute little radishes pop up you will be super motivated to keep going. These particular plants can survive frosty weather so sow your seeds when you can work the ground. I know people who start plants indoors. I think it's a super idea but I've never had the space or sunlight in my home. You can use fluorescent 'grow lights', but I don't have the space for that either. No matter how you do it, have fun. I'm thinking of making raised beds for

a few of my favorite veggies at the lake. I love this diagram from Better Homes & Gardens. Someone who is very wise once told me to plant your veggies close together to crowd out weeds and make watering easier and more frugal. Gardening in containers is another great idea if you hate weeding. I've grown everything from herbs to tomatoes in large containers right on my patio. They look pretty, too, if you throw in some bright flowers.



This garden is filled with easy-to-grow veggies.

tomato	cucumber	pole beans	pole beans
broccoli	broccoli	pepper	pepper
beets	cabbage	spinach	parsley
onions	leaf lettuce	carrots	radishes

Lastly, on the garden front, I wanted to share something with you that was pretty enlightening. If you are an experienced gardener or farmer, you may know of this remedy for garden pests, and I'm not taking about bugs. Long story as short as I can be, we thought we had raccoons behind our shed in the city. Wild animals are becoming an ever-growing population in urban areas as they can feed easier in alleys than in the woods. We've had everything under our shed; opossum, rabbits, raccoons--and it's a little unnerving when you have pets. Many of our neighbors have motion lights for these nighttime feeders. So, when I thought I spotted a raccoon awhile back heading for the shed, I called our animal control person and was told she didn't have a license to trap but I could. No thanks. Imagine if the animal had babies in her little den? So she surprised me by saying she'd drop off a can of coyote urine. Well, knock me over with a feather. It arrived the next day, a can filled with small wet rags-the coyote pee I guess. My husband placed them in areas around the shed, I was conveniently busy with something else. The purpose of this is that wild animals will smell it and avoid the area to save their little hides. Unfortunately, once it rains or snows, as it does ever so often, you have to replace said coyote urine. And snow it did, about 4 hours after the rags were in place. I searched Amazon as the animal control lady advised, and sure enough, you can buy Coyote pee online, and best of all, you can get it in granules. Yay! As I read about this wonder remedy for pests, I learned that people used it around their

gardens to deter deer, bunnies, and all sort of leaf eaters, large and small. It might also keep the roaming fox, ground-hog, even coyote from coming on to your premises. Yes, even coyotes. Smelling the urine tricks them into thinking the area is 'marked' by another so they stay clear. Rest assured, your dog or cat doesn't get the drift (no pun intended). Isn't this ingenious? Or maybe I'm just the last to hear about it. The stuff is called Shake Away and a 4 lb. container runs \$29.39. In case you are interested.



I hope I didn't ruin your appetite with all that natural animal repellent drivel, we're on recipes. I'm pretty random this month, I want to share some things I've been making. I'll start with a super easy appetizer.

Won Ton Salsa Cups

Ingredients:

12 won ton wrappers (or 24 if you want to double the recipe as I do)
1 16 oz. jar or container of fresh salsa (not the pureed stuff), or your own salsa recipe
1 ball or log of fresh mozzarella cheese

Directions:

Press the won ton wrappers into the cups of a mini muffin pan. Press the sides together to form a secure 'cup'. Place in a 350 degree oven for about seven minutes or until the edges of the wrappers are lightly brown. Keep a watch, they can go from zero to 50 in a minute.

Cut thin slices of the cheese, flatten them a little bit, and use a mini cookie cutter in the shape of your desire to decorate your little salsa cups with. You really can jazz these up any way. A glob of guacamole would work, or shreds of sharp cheddar cheese. I arrange mine on a bed of lettuce and it's so purdy!

I think everyone has their own favorite chili recipe, and if you've ever been to a chili cook-off, you will find some hardcore cooks. I love chili in the fall. I used to buy a package mix of the spices and then add everything else fresh. And I have to admit, if you don't have all of the spices necessary on hand, this is a good way to go. Most of the packets are low in sodium so not to worry. But being the restless little cook I am, I sometimes experiment and lots of times put together my own version of a recipe by combining some of the ingredients and methods of a good number of recipes I like. I like this particular number as it doesn't require an endless list of ingredients, and you can modify them if you want, the same with the heat level. I also like the deep flavor I achieved with the beef broth and cumin. It's definitely not fall, but this will warm your little toes over the next coming months.

Continued on next page. See:

JANE

BUSINESS & FINANCE

Protecting yourself from identity theft

Greetings! I hope all of you fared well over the winter. Hopefully, spring is just around the corner. I have been bundling up to take my new friend, Bailey, on her daily walks. She loves the snow and I love sitting by the fireplace. They say opposites attract.

We are going to jump into this season with both feet. I want to talk about a very important subject this month: one that could easily effect you or a family member at any time, identity theft.

I know you get tired of hearing about it all the time but it has become so prevalent that it makes most of us paranoid. Are you afraid to swipe your bank card at the gas pump? Do you try to use your debit card on the credit setting so you do not need to enter your pin number in a public place? Do you repeatedly tell your parents not to answer the phone if they do not know who the caller is?

Well, if these things do not make you leery, they should!

The definition of identity theft is having any of your personal information stolen and then used without your permission. There are more than 20 different types of identity theft or fraud: some you know about, and unfortunately some you may not. That means you have to be even more vigilant than you realized. Keeping an eye on your bank account and any credit you have is essential. Experian recommends you pay attention to these signs of possible identity theft as well.

- You receive fewer household bills in the mail that could indicate your billing address has been changed.
- You are unexpectedly “turned down” for a loan or suddenly have a higher interest rate.



- You have received bills for things you did not buy.
 - You notice transactions on a financial account that you did not authorize.
 - You see very small, unknown charges on your credit card bill.
 - You tax return is rejected possibly indicating someone else filed under your name.
- The good news is there are some things we can all do to lessen our vulnerability to this criminal activity.

- Use Passwords! Period! Do not use your name or birth date.
- Use different passwords for different accounts; if one is discovered, it may not lead to a breach of all your accounts.
- Stay off suspicious websites or links and never type in user names or passwords on unfamiliar screens.
- Never give out personal information like PIN numbers or Social Security numbers! Legitimate financial institutions will not ask; nor will the IRS.

- Check your credit reports regularly, set up fraud alerts, shred personal documents and do not carry all your credit cards at the same time. Do not carry your social security card or number in public.

Statistics compiled by the Federal Trade Commission indicate that as many as 9 million Americans experience some form of identity theft each year. Many research organizations believe the figure is much higher. If you think most of the victims of identity theft are elderly, think again. Consumers between the ages of 40 and 69 report higher rates of identity theft than other age groups.

Recovering your personal identity requires large amounts of time and money, not to mention it may take months (if not longer) to return your name to its prior good standing. As the need continues to grow, many insurance companies are beginning to offer homeowners various levels of identity theft protection. From coverage for the expense of restoring your identity to insurance for financial loss from fraudulent activity, to endorsements designed to provide help should a data breach occur, new coverage options are becoming more readily available.

If you own a business, the risk is even greater given the fact that many businesses have so much information about their customers on file. We know that is often a necessity but the greater the risk, the more reason to find adequate protection for yourself, your customers and your livelihood.

We would be happy to discuss all the details with you and we welcome you to call or stop by Kemner Iott Benz with any questions you have about this or any other type of insurance.

JANE

Continued from previous page

Jane's Chili

Ingredients:

- 1-1/2 lb. ground beef
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 1 green pepper, chopped
- 1 jalapeno pepper, seeded and chopped finely
- 3 garlic cloves, chopped finely
- 1 28 oz. can diced tomatoes
- 1 15 oz can of black or kidney beans (or your choice)
- 1 c beef broth
- 2 T chili powder
- 1 t red pepper flakes
- 1 T sugar
- 2 t ground cumin
- 2 t ground cinnamon
- S & P to taste
- Sour cream, cheddar cheese, radish slices, or whatever you like for garnish.

Directions:

Brown beef in a large skillet or Dutch oven over medium heat, breaking it up until cooked through. Remove to a bowl or plate. Sauté the onion, peppers, and garlic over low heat in the same pot until just tender. Add the tomatoes, beans, broth, beef, and remaining spices, stirring well to incorporate. Place in oven, covered for 1 hour. You can then go off and do laundry or take a bubble bath if you so desire. I hate to watch things cook slowly on the stove. So many better things to do.

*And now, the addition of cinnamon. Just do it for crying out loud. I am not telling you to add a cup of horseradish or a can of beets. Just do it and thank me later. :)))

I love a decadent dessert that looks and tastes like it came from a gourmet chef's kitchen. What sounds fancier than chocolate mousse? This recipe is insanely easy and delicious, and what's better, only four ingredients are needed. Yes, you just read that correctly. This recipe is from the blog The View From Great Island. The mousse has the iconic taste of Hershey's milk chocolate, and avoids all the pitfalls that can occur with chocolate mousse. The mousse here is served in small jars; you can use jelly jars if you'd like-such a cute presentation.

Milk Chocolate Mousse

Ingredients:

- 4 large egg yolks
- 1/4 c sugar
- 2 1/2 c heavy cream, divided
- 8.8 oz. milk chocolate, chopped (or 2 4.4 oz. Hershey's Milk Chocolate bars).
- Shaved chocolate for garnish

Directions:

Beat the egg yolks with electric beaters or mixer for about 3 minutes or until pale yellow and increased volume. Then add the sugar slowly while continuing to beat.

Heat 1 cup of the heavy cream in a medium saucepan until it just starts to bubble around the edges. Gradually drizzle in the egg yolk mixture, whisking briskly as you add it.

Pour all of this back into the saucepan and heat until the mixture thickens and is on the brink of boil, but don't let it boil.

Take off the heat and add the chopped chocolate, stirring until it melts. Chill for 2 hours in the refrigerator stirring every now and then.

Whip the remaining 1 1/2 cups cream until it holds firm peaks, then gently fold this into the chocolate until no streaks



remain.

Spoon the mousse into those cute jars or dessert glasses and chill another hour or two before serving. Garnish with whipped cream and chocolate shavings.

Thanks so much for spending some time here, neighbors! It's good to be back. Next month I'll address some ways to get out of a winter 'funk', as well as some cleaning tips for the lazy, like me.

Summer is coming so we might as well be prepared for company and uninvited visitors. :-D

~Jane

*Jane Boudreau is a blogger and freelance writer who splits her time between Chicago, Michigan, and North Carolina. You can contact her at blndy9@yahoo.com. All photos are her property unless otherwise noted and cannot be used without permission.

LOCAL REAL ESTATE

The Housing Market in Cass County & SW Michigan

Overall, home sales throughout 2019 in Cass County slipped 4 percent (643 vs. 667). The sales of waterfront properties were the leading cause, with 30 fewer homes sold than in all of 2018 (162 vs. 192) for a 16 percent decline. Sales of non-waterfront homes fluctuated month-to-month but ended up by six houses over 2018 (481 vs. 475).

The average selling price at the end of 2019 in Cass County for all homes rose 4 percent from 2018 (\$216,801 vs. \$208,890). The average selling price for waterfront homes only changed by two dollars (\$366,375 vs. \$366,373). The average selling price for non-waterfront houses increased by 15 percent (\$166,425 vs. \$145,234).

The median selling price at the end of 2019 for all homes stayed the same in 2019 as in 2018 at \$155,000. The median selling price for waterfront homes slipped 2 percent (\$297,500 vs. \$304,500). The median selling price for non-waterfront houses increased by 10 percent (\$134,900 vs. \$122,500).

In December, the overall number of homes sold jumped 41 percent from December 2018 (52 vs. 37). The number of waterfront homes sold increased by two houses (9 vs. 7). Non-waterfront homes sales had the biggest impact on December sales, with 13 more houses selling in 2019 as in 2018 (43 vs. 30).

The average selling price in December for all homes grew 16 percent to \$219,906 from \$189,825 in December 2018. The average selling price for waterfront homes soared 117 percent in 2019 to \$529,167 from \$244,286 in 2018. The average selling price for non-waterfront homes fell 12 percent in December (\$155,177 vs. \$177,116).

The median selling price for December for all homes dropped 14 percent (\$145,000 vs. \$169,000). The median selling price for waterfront homes leaped to \$425,000 from \$250,000 in December 2018. The non-waterfront median selling price fell 15 percent (\$128,000 vs. \$150,500).



The median price is the price at which 50 percent of the homes sold were above that price, and 50 percent were below.

In Cass County, there were four houses sold that were bank-owned or foreclosed houses as a part of all closed transactions in December, which was 8 percent of the 52 houses sold. The highest percentage December previously was 27 percent in 2014. Year-to-date, the highest percentage was 10 percent in March and June.

For comparison, the number of bank-owned or foreclosed homes as a percentage of all transactions in Berrien, Cass, and the westerly 2/3 of Van Buren Counties was 4 percent; down from the 3 percent in November. The highest percentage in December was 45 percent in 2009.

Our housing market has been robust since 2016 and 2017 when both year-end numbers of houses sold broke records, along with total dollar volume and average and median selling prices. The previous peak year was 2006 and is used as the start of our year-over-year comparison.

At the end of 2017, the number of houses sold peaked at 3733. With the declining inventory of houses available for sale, the number of homes sold at the end of each year dropped to 3,591 in 2018 and 3607 in 2019, which is a difference of 16 houses. Both years mirrored each other with six months (May - October) having over 300 houses sold each month.

The end of the year average and median selling prices set record prices each year, starting in 2016 through 2018. Then, 2019 ended with prices increasing even higher. The year-to-date average selling price in 2019 was \$240,525 compared to \$233,748 in 2018. The year-to-date median selling price in 2019 was \$179,000 compared to \$165,000 in 2018.

Consequently, the end of the year total dollar volume set records each year. In 2019, the end of the year total dollar

volume at \$867,817,204 was 3 percent higher than the volume set in 2018 of \$839,392,514.

Looking at just results in December 2019 and comparing it to December 2018, home sales were down 6 percent in December 2019 (254 vs. 269).

The average selling price increased 8 percent to \$252,183 from \$234,139 in December 2018. The median selling price rose 7 percent to \$176,000 from \$163,900 in December 2018. Both selling prices set new records for December in the year-over-year comparison.

The increase in selling prices pushed the total dollar volume up 2 percent from December 2018, while fewer houses were sold (\$64,054,495 vs. \$62,983,647). The total dollar volume also set a new record.

The inventory of houses for sale dropped 9 percent below that in December 2018 (1176 vs. 1295). At 1176 houses, the market had a 4.7-months supply of homes for sale compared to 5.8 in November. In December 2011, the market had a 12.7-months supply with 2,461 houses for sale.

Overall in SWMI, the mortgage rate in December decreased slightly to 3.756 from 3.808 in November. Last year in December, the rate was 4.718. Nationally, the Freddie Mac mortgage rate in December also increased slightly to 3.74 from 3.68 for a 30-year conventional mortgage.

This data reflects home sales across Berrien, Cass, and the westerly 2/3 of Van Buren counties and should not be used to determine the market value of any individual property. If you want to know the market value of your property, please contact your local REALTOR®.

Know the rights and responsibilities of voting in Michigan

As a Michigan voter, you have the RIGHT to:

- Be treated with courtesy and respect by the election workers.
- Vote in private free from interference or intimidation.
- Review a sample ballot before voting.
- Review a summary of the state and federal laws which govern voting.
- Ask for and receive help from the election workers if you are unsure about anything related to casting a ballot.
- Obtain a replacement ballot if you make a mistake when voting.
- Obtain an absentee ballot if you are qualified to vote absentee.
- Vote a provisional ballot if your name does not appear on the registration list and you assert, under oath, that 1) you registered to vote by the registration deadline and 2) you are a resident of the city or township where you are offering to vote.
- Have your minor child (under age 18) accompany you in the voting station while you vote.
- Obtain a ballot if in line when the polls close at 8 pm.
- Report illegal or fraudulent activity to the local clerk or the Michigan Department of State's Bureau of Elections.

As a Michigan voter, you have the RESPONSIBILITY to:

- Treat the election workers and other voters with courtesy and respect.
- Respect the privacy and voting rights of other voters.
- Satisfy Michigan's voter identification requirement by 1) showing a Michigan driver's license or state IDcard 2) showing any other acceptable form of picture ID or 3) signing an affidavit attesting that you do not have acceptable picture ID or forgot to bring acceptable picture

- ID to the polls. (Other forms of acceptable picture ID include any of the following as long as it is current: a driver's license or state ID card issued by another state, federal or state government-issued photo ID, U.S. passport, military ID card with photo, student ID with photo from a high school or an accredited institution of higher education or tribal ID card with photo.)
- Request instructions or assistance as needed if you do not know how to use the voting equipment or have other questions about casting a ballot.
 - Be informed about the candidates and proposals on the ballot.
 - Check your ballot identity theft than other age groups.
 - Read and follow all voting instructions.
 - Register at least 30 days before the election.
 - Keep your voter registration information up-to-date with your current address.
 - Follow all federal and state voting laws.
 - Vote in person if you 1) registered by mail and 2) have never previously voted in Michigan. (Does not apply to voters who are age 60 or older, disabled or eligible to vote under the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act.)
 - Satisfy a federal ID requirement before voting if you 1) registered by mail; 2) have never previously voted in Michigan and; 3) have not already satisfied the identification requirement. (Acceptable ID includes a current and valid photo ID or a paycheck stub, utility bill, bank statement or government document that lists your name and address. Requirement does not apply to voters who are disabled or eligible to vote under the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act.)
 - Refrain from campaigning or influencing voters in the polling place.

To learn more about voting, visit: michigan.gov/vote



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OUR CHILDREN

National Reading Month is for everyone!

by **SANDY FLEMING**

In case you haven't heard, March is National Reading Month. And before you turn the page thinking that this has nothing to do with you, take a moment to read on. National Reading Month is actually for **EVERYONE!** It's for families with young kids, it's for students, and it's for adults of all ages. There's no doubt about it; reading has huge benefits for everyone, regardless of age or life stage.

Reading is the key to all sorts of positive life outcomes. It expands your mind, improves your vocabulary, and develops your cognitive powers. Reading keeps you informed, educates you, and entertains you. Need more convincing? Read on.

Birth to Toddler years

Infants and very young children count on their parents and caregivers to read to them. During this time, kids are developing receptive language skills. Receptive language is what allows us to take in information through speech and, eventually, printed words. Babies need to hear lots and lots of language to begin to decode words and sentences.

The more you talk to babies, the better they learn. And reading out loud to them exposes them to words and sentence structures that are different from what you normally use. It gives them a broader base for understanding language. Believe it or not, it's even helpful to read adult material to infants (nothing violent or scary, though). So go ahead and read your favorite magazine articles and books out loud while holding Baby - it will help with language development while keeping you engaged as well.

And when you pair language with quality illustrations, the experience becomes even more powerful. So be sure to share children's stories, poetry, and picture books several times each day. Hold Baby and snuggle close as you enjoy the magic of language.

What about screen time? The experts at the American Academy of Pediatrics currently say that children under age two should NOT have screen time except for video chatting with family. If you do choose to use screens, make sure the experience is interactive with another human being, hold the baby while using the device, and talk to him or her, as opposed to allowing the device to talk. You can even mute the device if you need to.


Toddlers and Preschoolers

Sooner or later, babies grow up and begin to learn to talk. Reading aloud to these youngsters helps build their vocabulary and knowledge. Most little ones are like sponges, and drink up all of the books you share. This is the time for building foundations for learning.

Reading to your young child has been proven not only to expand vocabulary and build knowledge, but also to develop critical cognitive skills. In other words, more reading helps children learn to think. It's one of the most effective things you can do to set your youngster on the path to life success.

What should you read? The short answer is "everything." Read fiction and nonfiction, poetry and stories, picture books and ABC books. Babies usually love books about other babies, and they enjoy books about familiar parts of their world. As kids move into the preschool years, their imaginations fire up and they enjoy stories about the fanciful and

CELEBRATE



March is
National
Reading
Month

the fantastic. Silliness is also a good bet-children are developing their sense of humor, as well.

One common complaint from parents and caregivers at this stage is about reading the same book over and over and over and over. Please do this even though it seems boring and repetitious to you. There are some very good reasons why children do this (and yes, nearly all of them do this). One important lesson kids learn through this behavior is that the words or story doesn't change. That means it's a really bad idea to change words as you read, to skip pages, or to "shorten" the story. You'll be disrupting some critical developmental growth that will cause challenges for later learning.

Preschool and Early Elementary

Somewhere along the way, in late preschool or early elementary grades, kids become what is called "emergent" readers. That is, they begin to understand the connection between words and text. They start to learn about letters, sounds, and even how to recognize and spell some words. It's a fabulous milestone, and time to start celebrating! But it's definitely NOT the time to slow down with reading aloud to them.

Reading at this stage still feeds the brain. Kids learn new words and new ideas, they gather up information, and they find out how much fun it can be to read on their own. This is when reading habits are built, too. If you can get your child into the habit of daily reading, of reading to solve problems and learn, and reading to relax, they are likely to read for the rest of their lives. They will also do better in school.

Keep the reading diet wide and varied at this stage. Have them read old favorites and new books. They should read fiction, nonfiction, mystery, folk tales, short stories, poetry, biographies, books about science and history, and whatever else you can coax them into reading. Many kids enjoy stories about children a bit older than themselves, too.

As kids make the switch from being read to over to reading on their own, try not to let the read-aloud habit die at your house. You can keep it alive by offering books that are above your child's current reading level. Try reading chapter books, a bit at a time together. Choose books that have favorite movies based on them. Kids will be delighted to find that there are many, many more details in the books than in the movies and the stories are ever so much more rich. Family favorites like The Wizard of Oz, Mary Poppins, Alice in Wonderland, and so forth all have great books that the movie is based upon. Check them out!

Mid- to Late Elementary grades

Keep them reading at this stage by doing book teasers. Choose a book or a genre that your child may not be as familiar with, and read the first chapter or two aloud to him or her. Then leave the book lay around in reach. If it was interesting, the kid will pick it up and continue on their own.

Lots of other activities might threaten to crowd out reading for pleasure with this age group. Keep reading alive by insisting that kids read daily before they get to play video games or do other recreational activities. Take them to the library regularly, and over school vacations, try having them respond to the books in some fashion that doesn't seem too much like school. You could have them design a book cover, write a few diary or journal entries for the main character, or make a poster about the book. You could even have them "play teacher" and create a test over the book for you to take or a puzzle related to the book for you to complete. Just make sure they create an answer key on a separate page.

Middle School and High School

By now, if everything has happened according to plan, your child should be hooked on reading. He or she should know what types of books are their favorites and should spend time with them on a regular basis. Your child also has the skills to use reading to learn other information needed for personal projects or classes.

Be sure your upper-grade student is being introduced to classic literature and is reading a lot of it. This is important because these famous books form some of our cultural understandings, and they are referred to in other works of literature or in the classes kids will take down the road.

If you want to find great lists of books to read, check with your child's middle or high school- many have lists of recommended reading for each grade. You can also check at your public library. And finally, there are some outstanding recommendations online for the Googling. Just keep reading!

Young Adult and College years

This is a great time of life to pursue the books that shape people's lives. If you are at this stage, try looking for books that are inspiring or uplifting. These are the ones that will help you to make the most of your opportunities. Keep up with the habit of daily reading that hopefully was instilled when you were younger. Or, if you weren't that lucky, make a promise to treat yourself. When you read, you

open doors to entertainment, to education, and to learning about the world.

Adulthood

Even though the pressures of adult life and responsibilities are at their highest during this phase of life, it's one of the most important times to keep reading. Chances are very good that you are now a role model for young people in your family and your neighborhood. Let them see you reading, and you will influence them for the rest of their lives.

Having trouble making yourself read for your own sake? Try volunteering to read at a nursing home or a hospital or a school. It takes on a whole new level of priority when you have a commitment to someone else.

Older Adults

And believe it or not, reading is even more important in the senior years than it has been all along. Reading keeps your mind active. It helps you stay abreast of current affairs and popular culture. In a way, it can slow down the aging process.

And if you keep your reading skills sharp, you will have less trouble staying current with technology. You'll be able to wade through the instruction manuals for new appliances or technology so you can stay independent longer.

What if you struggle with reading?

I'm sure you know at least one person, friend or family member who doesn't read because reading is too difficult. In fact, over one in ten people have difficulty and cannot read even simple children's books. The statistics are even scarier if you try to count the number of people who truly read at an adult level (technically grade 8 or higher). Reading is complex and challenging set of skills, and many, many people cannot read well enough to take care of complex adult tasks or well enough to enjoy reading for fun.

If your child is struggling with reading at any age, please get them help NOW. Don't listen to the people who say, "Don't worry, she'll outgrow it," or the ones who say, "It's not a problem. He is just not putting effort into it." Reading problems are serious and they deserve serious attention. Disabled readers end up being under- or even unemployed. They can't take full advantage of training and employment opportunities. And they miss out on the many benefits of reading.

And if you or a loved one who is a teen or an adult face reading challenges, remember that there is help for older people who want to improve literacy skills, as well. There are specialized teaching strategies that are usually not available in school, and specialized teachers who focus just on helping people improve their reading skills. There are even great digital tools and online helps available to assist with challenged reading.

In other words, it's never too late. Anyone, at any age, can learn to read or can read better. Nearly anyone, no matter what disability or condition, can learn to read with effort and the right kind of teaching. There is no reason to go through life with minimal literacy.

Sandy Fleming is a tutor and writer living in Edwardsburg. She specializes in helping students of all ages improve literacy and other basic skills. Visit <http://sandyflemingonline.com> to learn more!

FIELD TRIP



FOR THE RECORD

The Iron Shoe Distillery is located at 3 North Third St in Niles, MI. The facility houses a small batch distillery, cocktail bar and restaurant.

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HISTORIC POSTCARDS

Historic postcards depict rich scenes of our area's past

In this issue of Neighbors, Jerdon Real Estate of Dowagiac, owned by Floyd Jerdon and his son Tom, has provided antique postcards of a few of the many lakes in our area.

Floyd and his wife Donna started collecting post cards more than 20 years ago, and since Jerdon Real Estate specializes in marketing lake property, it was a natural fit that Floyd's interest be directed to the lake cards. The collection now numbers many thousands.

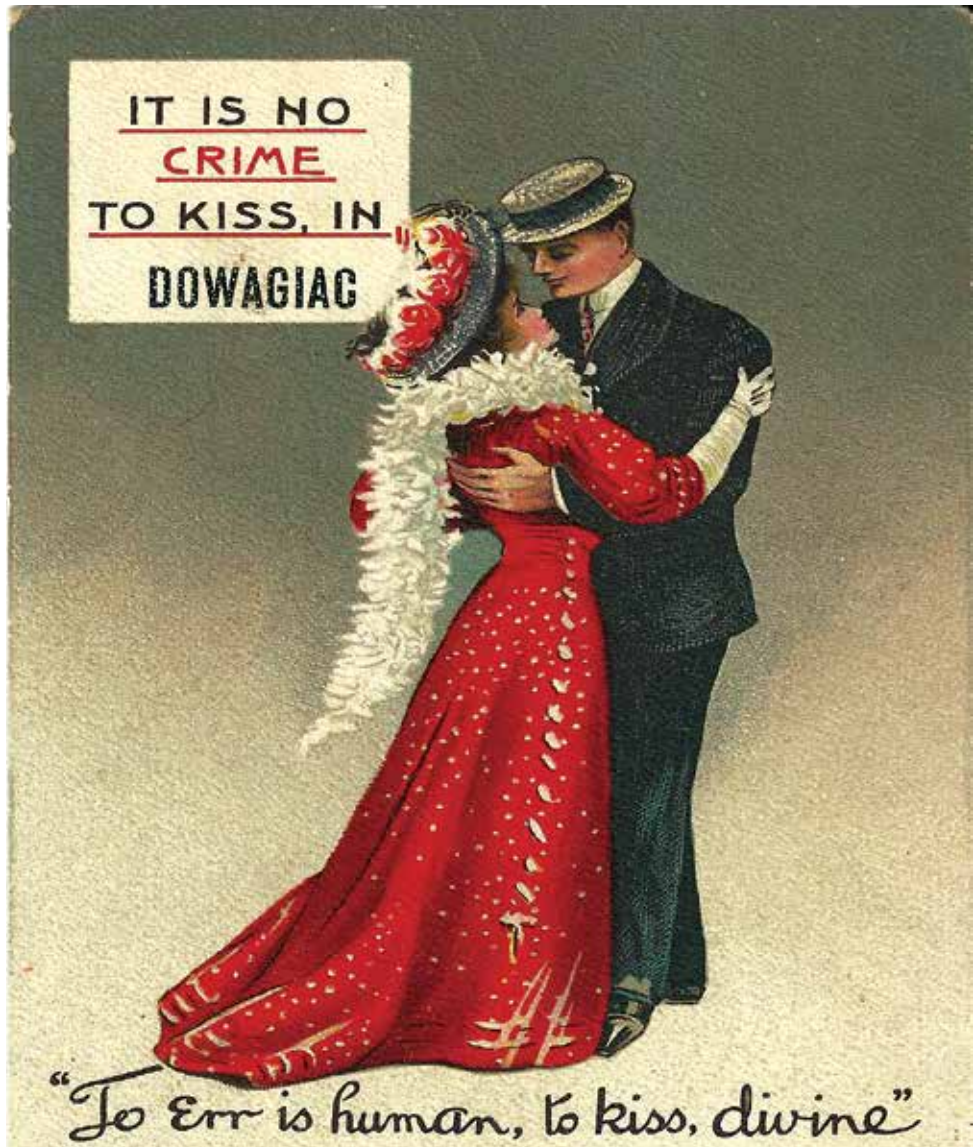
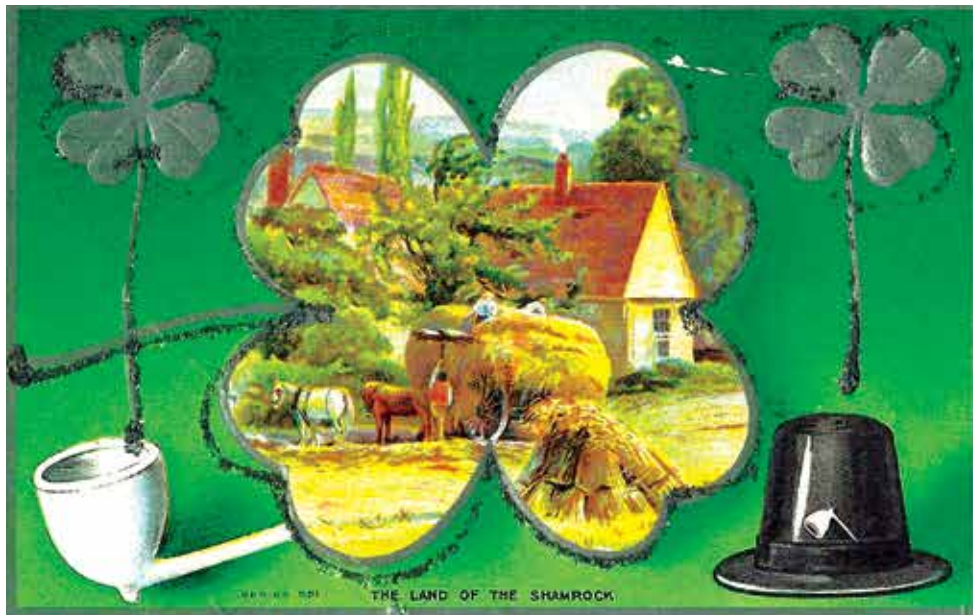
Jerdon has recently used many of his postcards featuring the Sister Lakes area in a book written by RL Rasmussen. The book, which retails for \$19.99, is in its second printing by the publisher,

Arcadia Publishing.

Among other places, the book may be purchased at the Jerdon Real Estate office on M-62 West, and at Whistlestop Gifts, which is operated by the Dowagiac Chamber of Commerce.

For more information or to get a copy of Jerdon's book, visit the web-site: www.arcadiapublishing.com

In this edition of Neighbors we have selected postcards showing images of various places around Cass County. In future issues, we will couple additional cards from one or more of the area's lakes with views of nearby communities, lakes and countryside.



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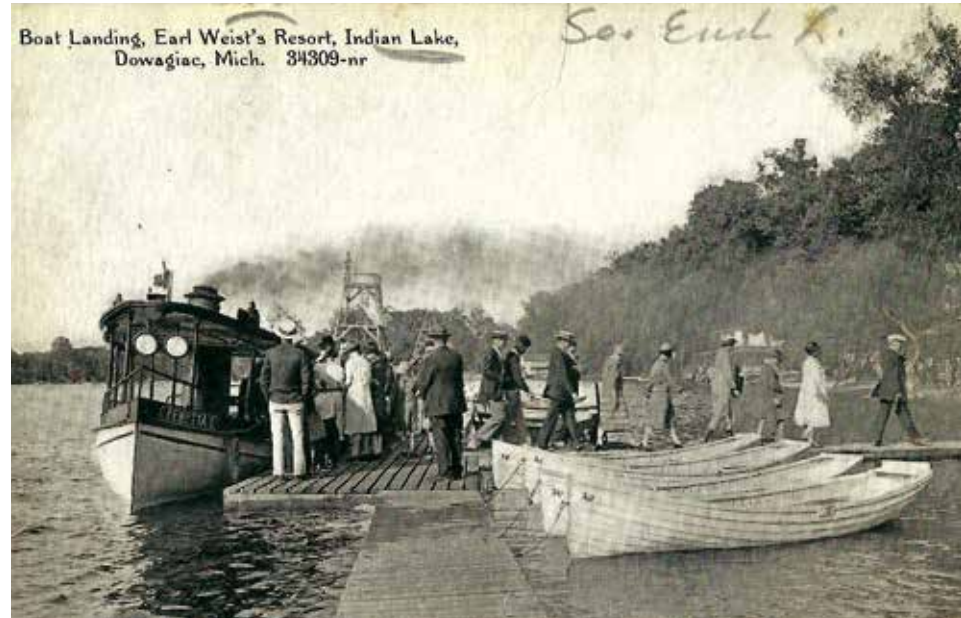
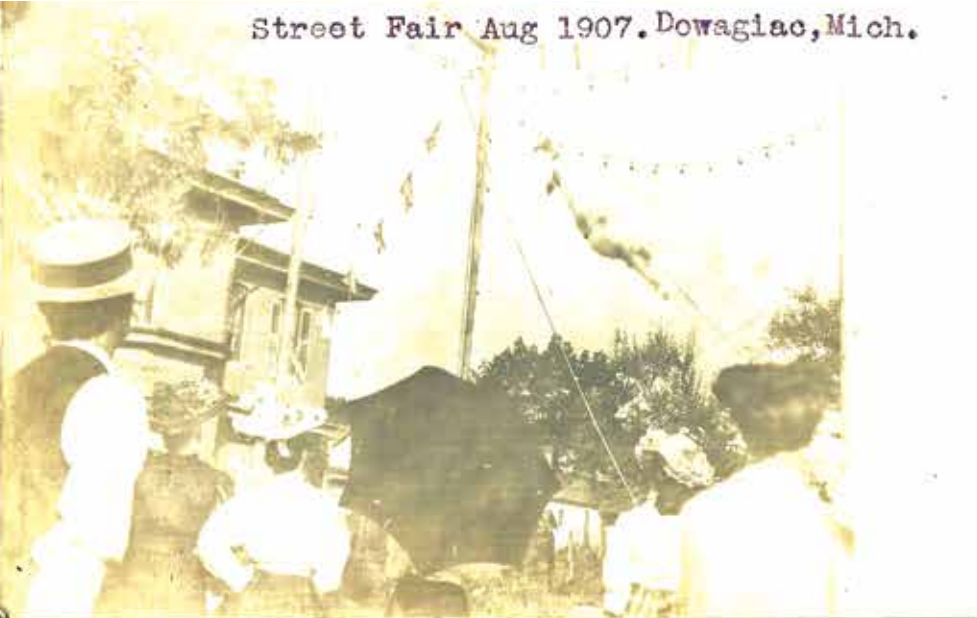
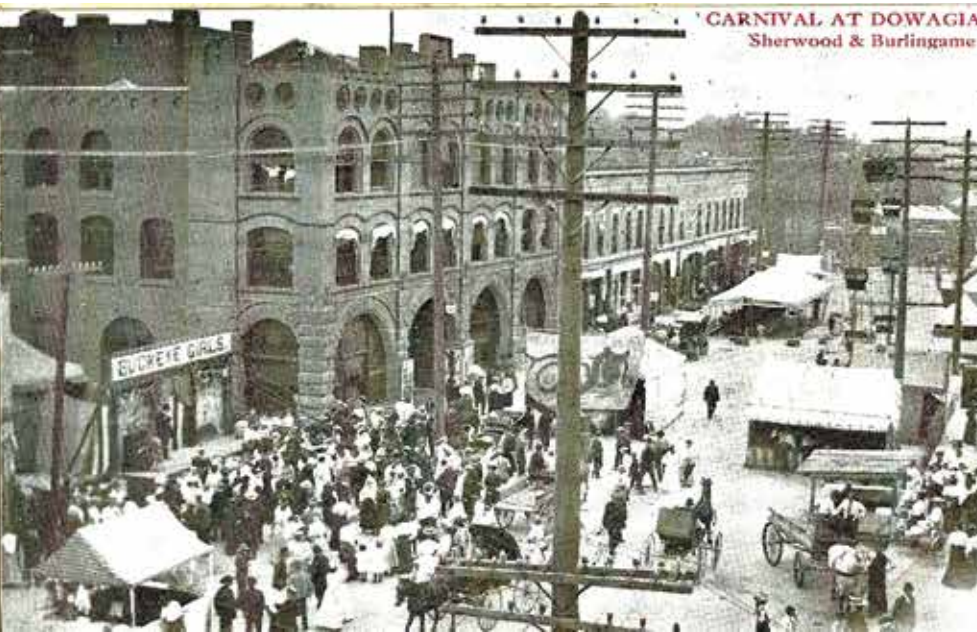
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NATURE NOTES

Provided by Cass District Library
Local History Branch

A male **HARLEQUIN DUCK** was located on February 16 in the waters off the north pier, St. Joseph by David Ferris of Buchanan. Since the initial sighting the bird has been seen by two dozen birdwatchers over two days. The bird had been relocated on Wednesday, February 19 off Silver Beach by Derek Pelc, of Love Creek County Park.

The harlequin duck is an uncommon but annual visitor to Berrien County. An average of one to five individuals occurs per calendar year, usually seen in Lake Michigan or in the St. Joseph or Galien River channels. I am unaware of any harlequin ducks occurring in any inland waters in Berrien County, although inland records elsewhere in Michigan on rare occasions.

The bird found by Ferris is a male that is molting from its winter or basic plumage of all brown with patches of white on the head and wings, into its summer or breeding plumage of slate-blue on head, neck and back with chestnut sides. The female harlequin duck looks like the male does not change is color plumage in summer. The male harlequin duck in summer plumage is quite striking and rivals the beauty of our male wood duck.

Harlequin ducks breed on the coasts of Canada and Greenland and winter along the eastern seaboard as far south as the Carolinas. A relatively small percent of the population winters on the Great Lakes.

The Harlequin duck is known for its preference of rough, turbulent streams in Canada for the fact they are food-rich. At their summer haunts harlequin ducks have been known to walk on the bottom of swift moving streams while foraging for crustaceans, mollusks and aquatic insects. In winter the species is often found at the edge of the breakwater at New Buffalo, partly because the water there is familiarly turbulent.

The harlequin duck occurs in Southwest Michigan sparingly between October and April. The majority of records come from annual Christmas Bird Count censuses, from mid-December through early January. I have seen the species locally as late as the third week of March. Records in April are uncommon.

Brad Anderson provided a photo of a **COOPER'S HAWK** taken February 13, as the bird sat perched near his backyard feeders. Cooper's hawks are year-round residents in the region and are frequently seen near bird feeding stations in winter, where they try to pick off songbirds or small mammals for sustenance.

Anderson's most notable sighting this week was a common yellowthroat seen popping out of dense vegetation at the Kesling Preserve, located along Forest Lawn Road in Three Oaks Township. The Kesling Preserve is a 52 acre wildlife preserve owned and managed by the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy. It is located in Three Oaks Township, Berrien County along Forest Lawn Road.

The common yellowthroat is an abundant songbird in Southwest



TOP LEFT: Cooper's hawk on February 13, Bridgman, Brad Anderson; **ABOVE CENTER AND RIGHT:** Great horned owls in captivity at Sarett Nature Center, Benton Township, February 4, 2020 by staff naturalist Carolyn Sundquist. These owls are injured, unable to fly or hunt, and will remain in captivity for the rest of their lives; **TOP RIGHT:** Male harlequin duck at St. Joseph, February 17, 2020. Photo by Michael Shelton of Stevensville; **LOWER LEFT:** Male harlequin duck at St. Joseph on February 16, 2020, seen here sporting its winter or basic plumage of brown with white patches on head, face and wing. The duck will soon molt into its summer or breeding plumage of slate-blue on head, neck and back and chestnut sides. David Ferris photo.



Michigan during the warm months but winter records are few and far between. The common yellowthroat winters in the Southeastern US and the earliest migrants do not return to Southwest Michigan until late April.

Anderson's sighting of this small warbler represents the second winter record of the species in Berrien County since 1985. I found one last winter at the Dayton Wet Prairie site along Curran Road in Bertrand Township.

Love Creek County Park naturalist Lamanda Hilty reported that an **EASTERN PHOEBE** made an appearance at the nature center feeders on February 14. The phoebe is a member of the flycatcher family, and like the common yellowthroat, winters in the Southeastern US.

Though common here from spring through fall, winter sightings of the eastern phoebe in Michigan usually involve one or two individuals each winter. Since 1962, there have been approximately a dozen sightings of the phoebe in Berrien County during the months of December, January, and February. The first north-bound migrants appear in the first days of March.

The **GREAT HORNED OWL** is the largest owl in Southwest Michigan standing at one and one-half to two feet, with a wingspan of approximately three feet. Their so-called horns are nothing more than tufts of feathers, which can be raised or lowered at will.

The great horned owl readily feeds on mammals and birds and in the warm months may occasionally take a reptile or amphibian. In our region the eastern cottontail rabbit falls prey to this owl, as does the striped skunk. The great horned owl is not bothered by the skunks offensive odor as the owl has no sense of

smell.

Other owls native to Southwest Michigan may fall prey to the great horned owl, such as the barred owl and eastern screech-owl. The great horned owl has also been known to kill the larger great gray owl, native to Canada south to the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

The great horned owl is fond of forests and woodlots, but utilizes open areas next to the forests where it hunts. The species avoids large tracts of continuous forests, which was the dominant ecosystem across most of the state prior to European settlement. Thus, up until the 1830s the great horned owl was much less abundant in Michigan than it is today.

Perhaps the first of our native birds to nest each year is the great horned owl, and may lay eggs as early as late January or early February.

The adult owls pair bond for life and often reuse the same nest site for several years in a row. The great horned owl does not build its own nest but reuses nest made by hawks, particularly the Cooper's hawk.

Sarett Nature Center has two injured great horned owls in captivity, which are shown to groups of school children and adults when visiting the center. Sometimes the owls accompany the naturalists when they visit schools and other organizations in the area.

One of the Sarett great horned owls has just one eye, and is a female named Virginia. The other owl, a male, is named Pops. Both owls have injured wings and can never be returned to the wild because they have injured wings, preventing them from flying.

Please report sightings to Jonathan Wuepper at wuepperj@gmail.com

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LOCAL HISTORY

Orris North, early Cass County resident

Provided by **Jon Weupper**, historian,
Cass County District Library

This month I'm featuring a photo of Orris North standing next to the log house in which he was born. The photo was reportedly taken in 1917, and it shows the 42-year-old North standing next to a log building that is in need of attention.

When this region was first settled, beginning in the 1830s, buildings were most commonly constructed from logs. The pioneer families didn't have much money, so they chose to build rudimentary homes out of logs hewn from their own forests. Saw mills were few and far between in Cass County in the early days of the county, and what little lumber available was relatively expensive for the pioneers.

Actual use of log homes was common in the area up until the Civil War or just after (1860s-1870s) when sawmills became common, resulting in increased availability of lumber.

After the heyday of the log house had passed, they could still be found around the region up until the Great Depression 1930s. Many log structures that had once been homes were left to fall apart or had been converted into barns. Several area log structures survived well into the 20th Century.

That seems to be the case with the building seen in this month's feature photo, taken in 1917. The building appears to have thick ground vegetation growing in front of the door and the roof needs work, signs the building was likely

unoccupied by that time. Through research I have found the approximate date the log home was likely built, and its location.

Orris North's parents were Norman and Lydia Reams North, marrying January 31, 1872. Norman (father of Orris) was born in 1841 at Erie, Niagara County, New York and in 1861 moved to Newberg Township, Cass County. In 1864, Norman enlisted in Company H of the 28th Michigan Infantry, serving two years, mainly in North Carolina, until being mustered out in 1866.

The 1870 US Census shows Norman North working as a farm hand for John Ramsey who was the overseer of the Cass County Poor Farm. Ramsey lived on 80 acres located one-half mile west of the Cass County Poor Farm on the south side what is today Hospital Street in Jefferson Township.

Lydia Reams (mother of Norris) was born December 14, 1848 in Jefferson Township to Jeremiah and Mercy Reams, and lived in section 10 along what is today North Street, Jefferson Township, being one-half mile south of the home of the overseer of the Cass County Poor farm, just a stone's throw from where her future husband would be working in 1870.

It is likely that shortly after Norman and Lydia were married in 1872 they likely purchased the farm owned by John Ramsey because on the Cass County Plat atlas of 1896, Norman North is listed as the landowner of the 80 acres previously owned by Ramsey. In the 1880 US Census John Ramsey is not listed in Jefferson Township, but Norman, Lydia



Orris North stands next to log house in which he was born, Jefferson Township. Photo courtesy Cass District Library.

are listed as are 5-year-old Orris (born March 27, 1875) and 4-year-old Lottie North.

I should also point out that county plat atlases show before Ramsey owned the farm, it was owned and occupied by Issac Marrett, listed on the 1872 atlas; and on the 1860 atlas of Cass County -

the earliest known atlas to depict Cass County farms - "D. Bell" owned the land. This is collaborated by the 1860s US Census listing David Bell as the property owner.

Summary
My guess based on what I have found is that David Bell built the log house in section 10 of Jefferson Township sometime in the 1850s, when log homes were still commonly built in the area.

Subsequent owners of this home and land included Isaac Marrett and John Ramsey (both county poor farm overseers), and finally Norman and Lydia North.

Time and the elements have erased any visible trace of the log home shown in the accompanying photo. According to the most recent Cass County plat atlas (2016), James and Janice LaPorte own the acreage formerly occupied by the Norths.

In addition to working the Jefferson Township farm, Orris North was a rural mail carrier around Cassopolis, and additionally worked at the Texaco filling station formerly located at the southeast corner of State and O'Keefe Streets.

Orris North died on July 8, 1946 at the age of 71 and is buried in Prospect Hill Cemetery.



Orris North stands next to Rural Federal Delivery (RFD) wagon number 3, Stone Lake in background. Date unknown. Probably circa 1915-1920. Cass District Library.

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THE LAST WORD

The handsome young entrepreneur of Wallalabou Bay

In the heart of the Windward Islands of the Caribbean Sea on the island of St. Vincent lies a breathtaking bay know to sailors as Wallalabou (the pronunciation of which is usually shortened after a few rum punches to Walaboo). Ignored by the rest of the world for many centuries, Wallalabou rose to international renown nearly 20 years ago when the producers of *"Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl"* chose it as the backdrop for some of the film's most iconic scenes.

Having discovered the bay many years ago at the end of a sailing adventure, I committed it's location to memory and have returned several times, introducing it's delights to sailing companions. A couple of short weeks ago I had the good fortune to find myself in that part of the world again with friends on a sailboat. Despite the warnings of the charter company that a rag-tag group of modern day pirates controlled the harbor and we were not guaranteed safe passage, we opted to make anchor and visit the very tavern where Captain Jack and Miss Swan had once frequented.

At first, the only thing we noticed that had changed over the years was the deterioration or absence of certain components of the "set" that had been left when the movie people moved on. The same group of rickety wooden boats met us at the entrance to the harbor and offered help in securing our boat and belongings for our stay (at a modest fee), followed by a half-hour argument among themselves of who was most deserving of the honor (and of our modest tithe), another half-hour of maneuvering and arranging half a dozen lines to secure the boat to the ancient-looking pier posts and half-dead palm trees ... followed by another

half hour of a more rickety boats, overfilled with ripe mangoes, bananas, and lemons, fresh-baked breads, hand-made seashell, coconut and fish-bone jewelry, pirated CDs and probably a fake Rolex or two for good measure if we'd just asked.

But at the end of the moving feast of tourist bling and glam was a stout military-looking man offering fresh "ganja," the local marijuana product that had recently been legalized but was still apparently controlled by the local Marijuana Growers Association, the group that had plied the trade illegally for years, enforcing their codes from armed patrol boats and intimidating competition with viscous dogs, machetes and automatic rifles.

"Completely legal," the ganja merchant chanted. "Very high quality. You'll like it."

For a variety of reasons, we politely declined.

After the merchant moved on to the next boat (a group of Europeans who had apparently come to St. Vincent for exactly this man's offerings), we relaxed and began to fall into the routine of our shipboard life (a quick dip in the bay and a cold beer) ... only to be greeted by the sight of yet another rickety boat approaching our beam.

"Hello," said a voice dripping the nectar of sales-oriented patois from between perfectly set, pearly-white teeth that highlighted a blinding smile. "I am Frankie, the handsome young entrepreneur of Wallalabou ... you may have read of me in the sailing magazines or in the cruising guide on your boat," he modestly continued.

"I live in Barrouallie, the village just over Keartons Hill behind the harbor. I am here to welcome you to Wallalabou and to see if you are in need of any food, drinks or supplies, or if you have trash you would like me to dispose of for you. I also have a

car you can rent if you'd like, a boat or paddleboard you can use, and I have a farm up on the hill where my 200 chickens produce the finest eggs available in the Caribbean.

"If you don't already have plans, I would also like to invite you to visit my restaurant to have dinner with me and my family," he finally finished with a flourish.

I quickly but discreetly sized up Handsome Frankie. Early 20s I guessed. Skinny but not gaunt. Nice, clean clothes ... nothing flashy but not cheap or shabby. I asked him about his restaurant, about the menu (which he had on a printed card) and where, exactly it was located.

"Literally 2 minutes from here," he told me. "I will pick you up on the shore right here and drive you there myself, and my mother will prepare a meal of fish and lobster and vegetables and dessert that you will never forget. We have beer, red and white wine and an assortment of island drinks ... we can even put a little paper umbrella in the drink if you'd like."

"And I will personally guarantee your safety if that is a concern, and I will guarantee that if you are not completely delighted with the meal, there will be no cost. I can pick you up at 6:30 if you'd like ..."

The smile flashed again and he extended his hand to shake.

I had to hand it to the kid, he had a pitch. I quickly consulted with my sailing companions and since we'd all been here before and had previously eaten the tourist-bait at the Pirates of the Caribbean tavern set (and deemed it to be interesting but hardly authentic), and we agreed we'd take a chance on Handsome Frankie's offer.

Six thirty and Frankie arrived together, and we piled into his car (granted, it was no limo but it chugged up the hill into the town and down some badly rutted and

potholed streets to ... a private home with a large patio set like a restaurant.

No signs. No neon. No fanfare. But also no signs of roaches, rats or rust.

Frankie took us into the home, showed us where we'd be dining (along with two other groups he'd solicited from other boats in the harbor), and invited us into the kitchen where we met his mother Francine, who was furiously stirring and serving from about 19 pots on an old gas stove.

"We like to do things family style here," Frankie said. "So if you'd like to be part of the family we will welcome your help in cooking or serving or anything else you would like to do ... Make yourselves at home, the washroom is upstairs."

In short, the dinner was delightful and delicious, the family and the other people dining there became new cherished friends; we paid in full and left a very nice tip before Frankie drove us back to the bay ... and the next morning when we finally managed to extricate our boat from the weird web of mooring lines, just before we hoisted the sail to leave Wallalabou behind, a small red motorboat came speeding towards us, the driver waving his arms frantically to catch our attention. When it pulled up alongside, a younger Frankie look-alike leaned over the rail and handed us a bottle of red liquid.

"I am Frankie's younger brother, Zico," he said. "He is tending chickens but asked me to thank you and give you this."

"You mean handsome Frankie, don't you?" I said with a chuckle.

That's what he says, and I would never speak badly about my brother ... but I also don't always have to agree with him ... after all, he's the entrepreneur in the family ... and he pays most of our salaries."

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