

THE CHRONICLE

*preserving and sharing the history of Port Byron,
Mentz and Montezuma*



VISIT US

AT 73 PINE STREET
PORT BYRON, NY 13140

HOURS:
THURSDAY
1:00 - 3:00 PM
OR BY APPOINTMENT



AT OUR WEBSITE
WWW.OLD-MENTZ.ORG

OR ON
FACEBOOK 
AT

FACEBOOK.COM/OLDMENTZ



Announcing Old Mentz Heritage Center Chartered

BY MIKE RILEY, PRESIDENT

This is an exciting time! Over the past year, we in the Lock 52 and the Montezuma historical societies have been talking and writing about the proposed merge of the two groups under one umbrella with a new Old Mentz Heritage Center. In late February, we received notice that the NYS Education Department has approved the merger.

What does this mean for the membership of the two groups? The mission of both groups has been to preserve the history of our region and to help to educate those who wish to learn about it, although both have approached this in different ways. The focus of Lock 52 has been on the Pine Street house, document collection, and research, whereas the focus of Montezuma Historical Society has been on the preservation of the Mentz Church and the creation of the Montezuma Heritage Park and a Friends of the Park organization that helps with maintenance and education.

We realize there will be members (potential members) in Port Byron who don't care about what's going on in Montezuma, and vice versa, and might have concerns their dues are being used for something aside from local history. To address these we have done the following. First, all the current board members of both groups have been asked to stay on for the next 18 months, and we have elected two members of each to act as officers. Second, our new by-laws of Old Mentz create various committees that clearly define roles, and we have created an endowment for the Heritage Park. If you are a member or volunteer only because of the park, or the church, or the Pine Street house, you can continue to volunteer and donate to that specific task, if you so chose. But honestly, the history of the two communities is so closely tied together by the canal, school and families, that this merge shouldn't be uncomfortable for anyone.

Our goal, and the reason we have chosen the name of Old Mentz, is that we want to be the first-stop shop for research in the region that includes Port Byron, Mentz, Montezuma, and parts of Throop. For years, Lock 52 has been collecting records that relate to all these places, so there will not be much of a change in what we do, except that you will be finding articles and research about these places on the website and social media.

So, here is what we offer to members and the public. First off, all members will receive our quarterly newsletter, The Chronicle. This newsletter, which you hold in your hands, will feature news about the latest research, what is new in the collection, genealogy and programming. In addition, your membership helps us keep the Pine Street house in decent repair, properly house the collection, and website are all free to use. Of course, we hope you will see the

value of what we are doing and become a member, but there are no paywalls. And of course, please take a walk around the Montezuma Heritage Park. It is a tremendous place to unwind, get a bit of exercise and see a bit of history.

How can you you help? Memberships make great gifts that continue to delight all year long. Share the word and tell your family and friends about us. It is disheartening to see some social media posters ask historical questions and see no one mention what we do. You can volunteer with our Thursday group at the house, help transcribe records in the comfort of your own home, help at the heritage park, or in the cemetery. If you have a skill, or a desire to help, we have a task for you!

And, if you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to call or email.

TRANSITIONING FROM THE OLD TO THE NEW



As we make the transition from Lock 52 and the Montezuma to Old Mentz, we are building a new website under the name of **old-mentz.org**. During this transition, we will be keeping the old Lock 52 website active so that researchers can continue to use the links and other information.

**FUN DAY IN THE PARK
TALES OF OLD ERIE WITH MERRIMENT,
MUSIC AND MARIONETTES**



**SATURDAY, MAY 18 AT 2 PM
MONTEZUMA HERITAGE PARK
HIGH STREET, MONTEZUMA**

We know the very talented Dawn Jordan for her historic Erie Canal murals that dot the rural countryside along the Erie Canal corridor. Now Dawn is bringing marionettes to life in her premiere “String Theater: The Erie Canal Marionette Show,” hosted by Old Mentz Heritage Center and the Town of Montezuma. The show will be performed at the site of one of the first packet boats launched from here on a voyage trip to Syracuse with Dewitt Clinton in 1820.

Dawn has artistically created the marionettes and written the musical story to celebrate and highlight over 200 years of Erie Canal history.

The puppet show will be held where a new model boat of the Montezuma was built to hold a mural Dawn painted in 2012. The scene in the mural depicts the Exchange Hotel that once was located on the site of the Erie and Cayuga-Seneca Canal junction. The model boat was donated to the Town Park by the Montezuma Historical Society and built by Steven Gillmore and David Colvin.

We welcome back to Montezuma the Flock of Free Range Children, a group of acoustical folk artists who entertain throughout the afternoon with their



music featuring a variety of instruments from different cultures. Tom Bristol will be on site with his food truck to provide refreshments. Come celebrate the day with these entertainers for young and old.

**CANAL CLEAN SWEEP
SATURDAY, APRIL 20 9 AM-NOON
MONTEZUMA HERITAGE PARK**

This yearly event sponsored by the NYS Canal Corporation organized by Parks and Trails NY is held in Montezuma Heritage Park to celebrate Earth Day and our Erie Canal Heritage. Montezuma Friends of the Park invite volunteers to join in the morning work by participating in a variety of tasks including spreading mulch, clearing the butterfly garden, checking trails, picking up trash and sticks along the eleven nature trails. This year’s event will be held on the anniversary of the first trip from Montezuma to Syracuse on April 20, 1820. For registration information contact Cheryl at 315-776-4656.

**WOMEN'S
HISTORY
MONTH**

March marks Women’s History Month, an honorary observance designated by Congress to recognize and celebrate the contributions of women throughout history. Joyce Biss of Old Mentz Heritage Center created a display of several noteworthy women from Mentz during March at the Port Byron Library. Clara Baras, Kittie Rhoades, Betty Hitchcock, Catherine (Mills) Weatherlow are being recognized this year for their outstanding careers with photographs and biographical sketches.

IT'S COMING....ERIE CANAL 2025 PARTNERS CELEBRATING 200 YEARS OF CANAL HISTORY.



Community Partners are coming together making plans for the upcoming 200th Anniversary of the completion of the Erie Canal in 2025. This momentous event transformed the State of New York, especially the 96 miles stretch that opened the Middle Section between Montezuma and Utica. From the early frontier lands that formed crossroads now the home of the Erie Canal Museum in Syracuse, to the connecting towns and villages of Camillus, Jordan, Weedsport, Port Byron and Montezuma.

Coming in June will be a month-long online Scavenger Hunt inviting participants to take Selfies at historic sites in the Middle Section and post on pictures on Facebook. Watch for details for this event and others on the **Facebook Page: ErieCanal2025**

2024 MEMBERSHIP

Enclosed is an enrollment form to conveniently return with payment of your 2024 dues. Old Mentz Heritage Center is a community organization, but we need your support in order to preserve and protect our cultural heritage, collections and historic resources. We thank everyone as we navigated through this transitional year. We are now prepared to serve with a strong commitment to preserving our communities' heritage.

Our first official Trustee Board meeting was held on March 13, 2024, at the Montezuma Town Hall. The election of officers were held to serve for the coming year as follows: President: Mike Riley; Vice President: Cheryl Longyear; Secretary: Joyce Biss; Treasurer: Kathy Decker; Vice

Treasurer: Mark Emerson. Trustees from both Montezuma and Lock 52 will continue to serve for the next 18 months.

KING FAMILY COLLECTION

In late 2023, the society received an email from Laura Hoffman of Sarasota, Florida, who had a history question about the King family. After reaching her by phone, she mentioned that she had boxes of family documents and photos, which of course, peaked our interest. As Mike Riley was heading to Florida in early 2024, he asked if he might stop by to see what she had, and she graciously said, yes.

Laura is the great-granddaughter of Lasuvius King, who was the publisher of the Port Byron Chronicle until his death in 1923. The family was always interested in their family genealogy and local history and kept many records and notes that otherwise have been tossed. Over the years, these records were passed down to Laura by way of her father, John Backus. Laura said the boxes sat in his basement for years. This is amazing as John never lived in Port Byron, being born in Buffalo and later living in Pennsylvania.

When Mike and wife, Mary arrived, they were overwhelmed by the collection of materials that covered two tables and after a quick review, saw some of the documents dated back to the early 1800s. Mike asked if they might take the documents home to scan and inventory, and Laura kindly agreed to share with the public. Once the collection is scanned, it will be returned to her.

We are in the middle of this project, and so far we have found an 1807 deed to Philip King, testimonials regarding the identification of Alexander Milliner, Revolutionary War pension applications, and more. As Mike told Laura, she has materials that might change the way we looked at local history. We are sharing some of these on Facebook and will be putting more on the website. Stay tuned!