

# *The Ferry Landing*

*The Martins Ferry Area Historical Society, Inc.  
Summer 2007*

*Tom Thomas, President  
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## **A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT . . . TOM THOMAS**

The summer is almost over and we are beginning to wrap-up our time of operation. Thanks to the Martins Ferry Rotary Club for providing funds to allow us to open the museum again and to Jeannie Splenda and Candy Wilson for serving as guides at the museum. Once again, the number of people who visited The Sedgwick House Museum was rather low, but we are hoping that the weekend of August 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> will be a busy one. That is the weekend of the first football game against Buckeye Local. Since it will be the celebration of 100 years of Purple Rider football and the first game on the new turf at the stadium, many alumni will be returning to the city. We hope that many of them will visit Sedgwick for a view of historical memorabilia.

It has been an excellent summer for the sale of Annie Tanks' new book about the history of Martins Ferry. Thanks to Alan Hartman at Martins Ferry Office Supply and Phil Wallace at Ohio Valley Printing, the MFAHS has received a great deal of monetary support from the book sales. This fall, there will be some work done inside the museum because of a grant received from the Belmont County Tourism Board. Also, the summer kitchen building will be painted by the JR ROTC group from the high school.

There are also several exciting events happening in Martins Ferry that the MFAHS will be involved in. The Rotary Club has finished the renovation project at Walnut Grove Cemetery. The last thing to be done will be the placing of two plaques on the fence pillars, listing the people and organizations that helped with the project. The city will institute a Hall Of Honor to recognize Ferrians for their contributions to the city and its citizens. Barb Shrodes and I are members of the committee working on the hall. Finally, in December, the students of the Martins Ferry School district will be moving into their new campus facility. Many items and memorabilia from the old school buildings will be housed in the Sedgwick House Museum.

Once again, we ask for your help for the MFAHS:

+Continue to renew your membership in the MFAHS

+Speak to others, especially those who are natives of Martins Ferry, to help support our organization.

+Visit the Sedgwick House if you can. All of our work is wasted if no one comes to see what we have done.

+Help supply items that you think would be valuable to the museum. If you are not sure, contact us and we will help you decide about a possible donation.

**THEATRE IN MARTINS FERRY**  
**By Mary E. Philo**  
**From the files at the Sedgwick House Museum**



The genesis of Theatre in Martins Ferry begins back in the late 1870s or 1880s with the establishment of an Opera House which was located in the South 4<sup>th</sup> and Hanover Streets area.

As to whether an opera was ever performed there is not known, but every town or city with pretensions to the name had a building of some sort for various entertainments. It was called the "Opera House" to dignify its use. A local directory for 1892-93 lists a "New Opera House" at this location – managed by Mr. Kuckkuck and a Mr. Schwartz.

Showboats that plied the Ohio River in the early days made an occasional stop on the Ohio shore and audiences were treated to such melodramas as "East Lynne", "The Old Homestead", and that great temperance play, "Ten Nights in A Bar Room".

However, some ingenious inventors in California and New York were soon to revolutionize the entertainment industry with "motion pictures". A special kind of camera would record the live action of a play on a film wound on a reel. These films were re-processed and sent to many theaters to show on a special screen.

Martins Ferrians wanted to see these movies though today we would consider them very crude. About 1914, a new theater opened in the 4<sup>th</sup> and Hanover Streets area called the Pastime. It replaced the Opera House and was managed by Wilt Shull. It featured a twenty piece orchestra.

An important film of this period was D. W. Griffiths' "Birth of a Nation". Some of the early silent screen stars were Lillian and Dorothy Gish, Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, Charley Chaplin, Buster Keaton, and Harold Lloyd.

In 1916, three other movie houses opened – the Frat Theater at 5<sup>th</sup> and Carlisle, the Rex Theatre on South 4<sup>th</sup> Street near the Times Leader building, and the Fenray Theatre. By 1923, the Fenray had expanded its operations to include the New Pastime Theater and the Frat Dance Hall. It was called the Fenray Photoplay Company.

The Rex Theatre ceased its operations in Martins Ferry about 1918-1919 and the owner, James Velas, opened a Rex Theatre in Wheeling. Later, the Elzane Theater, owned by Louis Eick, began operations at that location and lasted for a number of years.

**A TIME WHEN MARTINS FERRY HAD MOVIE HOUSES**  
**From the WHEELING NEWS REGISTER, July 23, 1995**  
**And the memories of Miss Margaret Moran, an employee of the Fenray**

The theatres of Martins Ferry during the 1920s, '30s, and '40s offered children and adults alike an hour or a day away from the cares of the world outside. In their heyday, the Elzane and the Fenray Theatres were places crowds would congregate all week long, doubling in size on Saturdays.

Anyone who grew up in Martins Ferry probably "went to the show" at one or both. Their memories remain, even though the theaters no longer do.

The name "Fenray" was coined from the initial letters of the surnames of the founders, A. J. Fallem, and L. F. Eick, of Martins Ferry, and C. F. Neugart of Bellaire. The euphonic "Ray" was added, being the first name of its first General Manager, Ray Griffin of Barnesville. The Fenray Theatre served Martins Ferry for a span of nearly a half century, opening its doors January 8, 1916 during the silent picture era. The opening film was "The Lamb" featuring Douglas Fairbanks, and the closing film on February 29, 1964 was "The Wheeler Dealers. (It re-opened a few times in the late 1960s and early '70s, but was dismantled in 1972.)

The Elzane showed the serials, the westerns, the horror shows, and so on. It was a popular place with the children. The Fenray showed first rate films, starring the likes of Douglas Fairbanks. It is said that Louis Eick, (one of the owners) had connections and that Martins Ferry got better pictures than other towns its size.

But even the Fenray gave out items. They would have dish night and would give a dish out to everyone that came in. If a person went often enough he or she could get a whole set. That was a big draw during the depression. Glass wasn't the only thing that was given away. Near Thanksgiving, it was live turkeys! There were also contests and raffles. If a star appeared on a ticket, the holder was admitted free.

Going to the Elzane could be an all-day event starting at 11:00 am. Some young people even packed lunches. There was the news reel, a short, then the serial. Sometimes, they even tacked on a cartoon. Then there would be the big picture. Once, the famous cowboy Tom Mix and his horse made an appearance at the Elzane, drawing a huge crowd.

Food and atmosphere added to the enjoyment. Popcorn was a nickel a bag, and it was always salted and buttered. There were beautiful drapes that added a bit of glamour. You could spend the whole day in a world of fantasy, and it would only cost a nickel.



**MARTINS FERRY OHIO**  
**SESQUI-CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION**  
**By Tom Thomas**

“Mound builders, Indians, pioneer backwoodsmen, traders, forest-clearing farmers, hand-craft artisans, rugged individualists, pioneers in industry, and members of the various trades, businesses and professions of the machine, mass-production age have successfully occupied the expanse of the river valley land on which the city of Martins Ferry stands. We celebrate the first settlers who came here in 1787 after Absalom Martin was granted this land and Ebenezer Martin who founded Martinsville, later Martins Ferry in 1835.” So stated the souvenir program for the Sesqui-centennial celebration that took place from May 30 to June 5 in 1937.

On Sunday, May 30, which was also Memorial Day, services were held in the churches of the city: First Methodist, First Baptist, First Presbyterian, St. Mary’s Catholic, United Presbyterian, St. Paul’s Episcopal, First Christian, Second Baptist, Methodist AME, Greek, Welsh, St. John’s Lutheran, Free Methodist, and Rumanian. That afternoon WWVA broadcast from the high school auditorium and the city’s Sunday School children paraded through the city. The evening concluded with a Union service at the high school.

Monday, May 31 began with American Legion services in the city park. The community swimming pool was dedicated and a baseball game was played at Recreation Park. After a historical parade was held, the pageant, “Parade of The Years” was presented. The years started with the mound builders, included the Revolutionary War, the U.S. Constitution, the Civil War, the coming of industry, the World War, and ended with the dawn of a new day.

Wednesday, June 2 was designated as Youth Day. Students from the high school were elected to various positions in city government. Dick Padden was the mayor, Victor Kehrer was the council president, Don McCarty was the police chief, and Frank Swiger was the superintendent of the light plant. Students also supervised the public library and assisted in the publication of the “Daily Times.” A civic dinner was held, followed by another baseball game.

Thursday, June 3 began with a field meet for grade school students at the football stadium. There was an industrial exhibit in St. Mary’s auditorium followed by an evening musical festival at the high school auditorium.

Friday, June 4 had various activities, including games and sports for children at the city park, roller skating races on Zane Highway, a five-mile marathon race, and another baseball game. That evening, the Martins Ferry Little Theater presented “Nellie, The Beautiful Cloak Model” at the high school auditorium. The play starred Anna Louise Kline, Dick Sanders, and Paul McDaniel.

Saturday June 5 was designated as Rural Day. There was a Belmont County marble tournament, a high school band parade and band contest including bands from ten neighboring schools. The Grange presented a program at the high school and the day concluded with a concert by the high school orchestra on the Central School plaza.

Also included in the program were greetings from Lee Woods, the mayor of Martins Ferry, and a letter from Franklin D. Roosevelt, President of the United States.

**FOR SALE FROM THE SEDGWICK HOUSE MUSEUM**

	Museum Pick Up (Includes Tax)	Mailed (Includes S/H)
<u>Annie Tanks' Martins Ferry</u> By Annie C. Tanks	\$16.00	\$19.00
<u>A Town of Grandeur</u> By Annie C. Tanks	\$13.00	\$15.50
<u>Lillie</u> By Jacob C. Williams, Jr.	\$16.00	\$18.50
<u>Bulltown</u> By Andy Shemanski	\$4.00	\$ 5.00
<u>The Zane Genealogy in the Ebenezer Martin Line</u> Compiled by A. Alma Martin Phyllis Kane, Myra Martin, Diane Nichols	\$20.00	\$22.50
<u>Through One Man's Eyes</u> By Paul E. Rieger	\$ 7.00	\$ 9.50
<u>Remembrances of Nutbusters and Beauty Queens</u> By Bill Burge	\$11.00	\$13.50
<u>Harry Northwood The Early Years 1881-1900</u> By William Heacock, James Measell, Berry Wiggins	\$20.00	\$22.50
Note Cards, pkg. of eight Artist, Jean Gwinn	\$3.00	\$4.00

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