

# Norwood Historical Society

January 2012

*"Moving Forward by Looking Back"*

Vol. 4 No. 1

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>>> Next meeting: Saturday, January 14, 2012, 2 pm, at the McCullough House, Lindner Park, on Cypress Way. <<<

## SPECIAL EXPANDED EDITION

### McCullough Open House Party

Thank you to the members who brought homemade treats and decorated the house for the annual party. The decorators were the current Lindner Park caretaker **Nancy Poff** (who also baked a delicious ham), officers **Fou Linder**, **Vivian Graff**, **Rodney Steele** and other volunteers. A special thank you must be made to **Bob Hilvers**, **Gerry Steele** and **Judie & Ron Pennington** for their donations to buy the tree and **Rodney Steele** for getting it.



The McCullough Christmas tree donated by the Norwood Historical Society

**Rodney Steele** presented a DVD movie named "Vintage Norwood" that he created from approximately 600 Norwood photographs. **Tyler Meyer**, director of Norwood Community Television, was helpful in instructing on the process of converting the images into a movie with music. Guests sat around the TV the entire evening watching the Norwood images roll by. Several of the 1-1/2 hour DVDs were given away as door prizes. Other door prizes included Norwood history books and a model Norwood police car.

### Smith Descendants Tour Norwood

If you saw a white limousine cruising through Norwood Sunday afternoon on December 4, it was probably the descendents of **Abraham Smith, Sr.**, a pioneer and early settler of Columbia Township. 1865 and 1869 maps show **Abraham's** grandson **Hiram** owning property stretching from the west side of Montgomery Road, through South Norwood and into Oakley. **Hiram's** son **Benjamin** sold much of the land to developers but held onto most of the property that became today's Surrey Square. For \$200,000, in 1925, **Benjamin's** widow **Margaret** sold the last section of land and home as show in the 1922 map on the next page. The buyer, Major Realty Company, built shops (which were later demolished in the 1970s to make room for Surrey Square) along the south side of Washington Avenue.



Abraham Smith, Sr.'s descendents (in back) brothers James Smith (from Texas) and Robert Smith, (Liberty Twp), Emily Smith Lobert (from Kentucky) & Annie Davis (and husband Frank "Mike" Davis from Mason) with their families at Norwood City Hall (cousin Donna St. Felix was unable to attend).

The tour included visiting the gravesites of ancestors in the Pleasant Ridge Cemetery, Norwood City Hall and the M.E. Church at Elm and Station Streets across from Norwood City Hall. The family members were presented

with a proclamation by **Mayor Thomas Williams** and certificates from **President Rodney Rogers** of the NORWOOD HISTORICAL SOCIETY. **Annie's** husband, **Dr. Frank "Mike" Davis**, jokingly told **Mayor Williams** that the Smith

family was here to reclaim their former lands. The Mayor replied, "*Good luck with that!*"

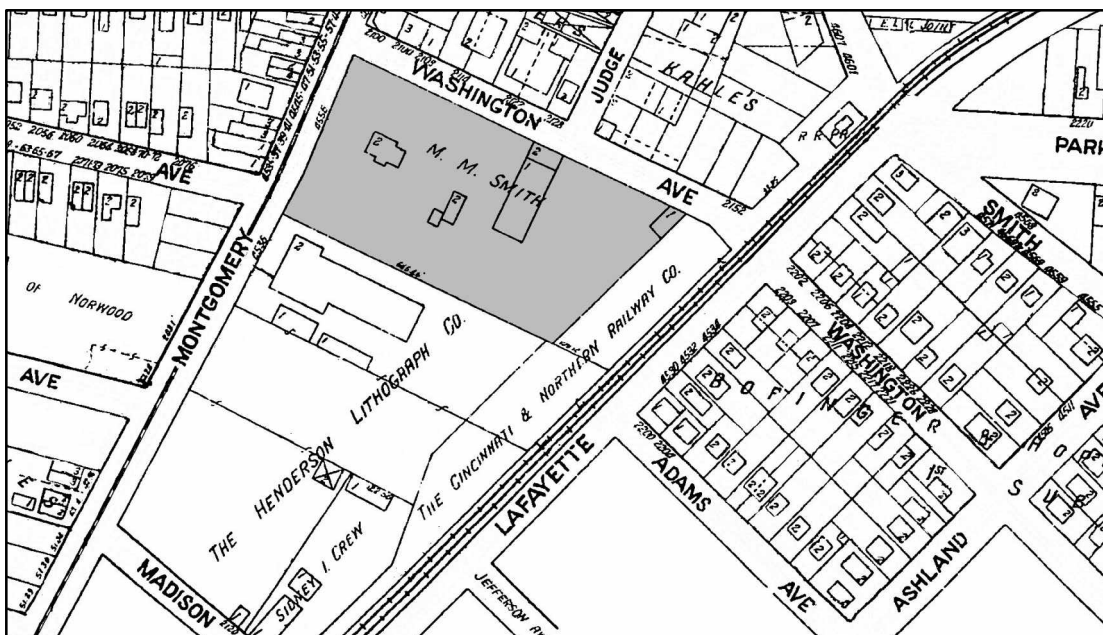
Also attending the tour were reporters **Vickie Clark** from the NORWOOD STAR and **Steve Kemme** from THE (CINCINNATI) ENQUIRER.



"Smith Window" at Elm St. M.E. Church

A panel at the bottom of the large stained glass window on the Elm Street side of the M. E. Church reads, "IN MEMORY OF ELIZABETH SMITH & HER SON BENJAMIN J. SMITH GIFT OF HIS WIFE AND DAUGHTER."

The Smith family was also connected to other early Norwood families. Former **Mayor Allen C. Roudenbush** and wife, in their unpublished "History of Norwood"—which was the basis for the 1976 Norwood High School book "Norwood – A Bicentennial Remembrance," stated that **Edward Mills** was "*a grandson of the famous Smith family of Norwood.*" **Hiram Smith** was **Edward's** uncle and **Benjamin F. Smith** was a first cousin. **Edward** was also the grandson of another Norwood pioneer couple, **Abner and Elizabeth Marsh Mills**. **Edward and Henrietta Mills** donated the land for the Norwood Library and their son **George E. Mills** was the first city mayor of Norwood. Interestingly, **George** joined with another famous Norwood family when he married **Marcia Lloyd**, daughter of **Nelson Ashley & Olive Lloyd** and niece of **John Uri Lloyd**.



This 1922 Sanborn map shows Margaret Smith's properties, three years before this last piece of Smith land was sold. Stores were then built along the south side of Washington Avenue.



## George Chakiris Comes Home To Norwood

It took around 75 years, but **George Chakiris** returned to Norwood on December 16. At a ceremony in the Norwood Middle School auditorium, he was honored with a proclamation from **Mayor Williams**, speeches by his friends **Heather French Henry** and **Lee Meriwether** (who was emcee) and a series of movie clips. Also, they had their pictures taken at **Vera Ellen's** former home, visited **George's** childhood home at Allison and Sherman Avenues and stopped by the **Norwood Historical Society's** archive room.



Posing for photos prior to the beginning of the ceremony in the Norwood Middle School auditorium.



Mayor Thomas Williams reading the proclamation honoring native son George Chakiris



George Chakiris, Heather French Henry and Lee Meriwether on stage in the Norwood Middle School auditorium



Heather French Henry introducing fellow former Miss America Lee Meriwether



George Chakiris acknowledging the applause of the audience

**Mr. Chakiris** was asked several questions posed by the students. One with an amusing answer was asked by the Broadway Club: *"What story about Norwood and your family is your favorite?"* He said he had been told that while his mother was at work, when he was 1½ years old, his five-year-old sister had to dress him in the morning. But he didn't want that and, in his words: *"I would get up and I would not be dressed—no clothes on. I would take my clothes and go to my mother where she was working ... to get dressed. So I would go through the streets with no clothes on."*

*Note: Some photos were copied from low-res video, therefore the lower quality.*





George Chakiris and Heather French Henry laughing at one of Mr. Chakiris' answers to a question posed by the students

### Celebrities Visit Society Room

During a short visit to the **Society's** room, the visitors saw old photographs of Norwood and a digital slide presentation of actors who came from Norwood. An amusing reaction by **Lee Meriwether** was when she saw a listing of the TV shows of Norwood's **Jack Mullaney**. She said, "*My ex-husband was on that show!*" — the 1966-67 comedy "*It's About Time*." The next slide was a photo of **Mullaney** and his costar **Frank Aletter**, who was **Ms. Meriwether's** husband at the time. **Mr. Chakiris** was surprised when he saw that the late **Janice Rule** was also a Norwood native.



Lee Meriwether and George Chakiris viewing the "Actors of Norwood" slide show.

**Mr. Chakiris** autographed some photographs and a poster for our archives. The **Society** presented him with a package that included copies of listings of his family's residences and businesses in Norwood from 1917 to 1937

directories, maps of the residences and businesses, photographs and a CD of "Norwood Actors" taken from our "Famous People of Norwood" slide presentation.



George Chakiris autographing a photograph of his former home/Grecian Gardens at Allison and Sherman



Chakiris, Meriwether and Henry looking at some old Norwood photographs from the Society's collection



Norwood Historical Society member Gerry Steele having his picture taken with George Chakiris

## Norwood Actors

There have been several people from Norwood who have been in the entertainment business. The following list is probably not complete, but it is a good sampling of Norwood's contribution to the acting profession.

### **VERA-ELLEN (2/16/1921-8/31/1981)**

Born **Vera Ellen Westmeyer Rohe**, this fantastic dancer grew-up in Norwood. Some accounts place her family living just across the corporation line in Norwood's next-door Cincinnati neighborhood of Oakley when she was born on February 16, 1921. Whether that is correct, or not, she lived the rest of her childhood in Norwood. Her parents were **Martin F.** (a piano tuner) and **Alma C. Rohe**.

When she was a youngster, she attended Hesslers' Dance Studio and Norwood View Grade School. Later, she attended Norwood High School, where she was in school productions and was the head majorette. She left Norwood with her mother for New York, foregoing graduation from Norwood High School. There she performed with Major Bowes Amateur Hour on radio, stage and on tours. **Samuel Goldwyn** signed her to a contract.

Her first Broadway show was "Very Warm In May" in 1939 and her first movie was "Wonder Man" in 1945. She performed in 14 films, including "White Christmas" with **Danny Kaye, Bing Crosby** and **Rosemary Clooney**. Her last film was "Let's Be Happy" in 1957.

On February 15, 1952, while promoting her latest movie, she returned to Norwood on that Friday afternoon to a warm reception at Norwood High School (now Middle School) auditorium and Norwood View School. As this was a day before her 31<sup>st</sup> birthday, first grader **Patsy Theilan** sang "Happy Birthday" to her.

### **GEORGE CHAKIRIS (9/16/1932- )**

**George Chakiris**, a triple-talented actor, dancer and singer, was born in Norwood to Greek immigrants **Steven** and **Zoe Chakiris**. His aunt **Sophia** wrote in her book "Escape to a New Dawn" that, in 1916, the family, headed by **George's** grandfather, came to Norwood from

Turkey, via New York with a short stay in Cincinnati. They worked in Norwood and even had their own business—a poolroom on Montgomery Road until around 1922, when they moved to Florida after buying a restaurant there. In 1925, they returned to Norwood and opened Grecian Garden, a store and beer garden, at Allison and Sherman Avenues. Around 1937, **Steve** and **Zoe**, with their children **Virginia, Catherine, Viola, Harry, Steve, Jr., Athena** and **George** (age four), moved to Arizona in 1937 and later to California.

At age 12, in 1946, he was a chorus singer in his first movie "Song of Love." As a young man, **George** worked during the day and took dancing lessons at night. Later, he was a dancer in several films, including "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes," "White Christmas" and "There's No Business Like Show Business." He was also performing in plays. His big break came when he was picked to play "Bernardo" in the movie "West Side Story," for which he won the 1961 Best Supporting Oscar. After that, he acted in numerous films, TV shows and theater productions. Lately, he has turned to a fourth artistic talent of designing and creating jewelry.

He visited a proud Norwood on December 16, 2011—which was declared "George Chakiris Day" by **Mayor Thomas Williams**. The next day, he and **Lee Meriwether** went to Augusta, Kentucky, to promote the Rosemary Clooney Museum.

### **JANCIE RULE (8/15/1931-10/17/2003)**

**Janice Rule** was born in Norwood on August 15, 1931. Her family moved from Norwood to Chicago. She started her entertainment career as a singer/dancer at nightclubs in Chicago and then New York. She added acting to her resume with her first stage performance in "Miss Liberty" in 1949. As a nineteen-year-old, her screen-acting debut was as the daughter of a college professor in the 1951 film "Goodbye My Fancy." Two years later, she made her Broadway debut in "Picnic." She has played in numerous films, plays and TV shows. After taking classes, she received her PhD in psychoanalysis in 1983, but continued acting.

### **JACK MULLANEY (9/18/1929-6/27/1982)**

**Jack Mullaney** was born September 18, 1929, in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. As a child, he lived at 4049 Edwards Road, Norwood, Ohio, attended Sharpsburg kindergarten, St. Matthew School and graduated from Norwood High School. He moved to New York in 1952 and Los Angeles in 1966. He appeared in several early live television drama productions, such as "Kraft Playhouse Theater" and the TV series "The Ann Southern Show," "Ensign O'Toole," "My Living Doll" and "It's About Time." His first television-starring role was in "Old Tasslefoot" with **E. G. Marshall**. He performed in Broadway plays, e.g. "Barefoot in the Park," and movies—"Young Stranger" (his first movie), "Kiss Them For Me," "All The Fine Cannibals" with **Jane Mansfield** and **Cary Grant**, "Honeymoon Machine," "The Vintage," "Seven Days in May" and "Spin Out" with **Elvis Presley**. He also served in the Army during the Korean War. He died June 27, 1982 in Hollywood, California, and was buried at Gate of Heaven Cemetery, Montgomery, Ohio.

### **AMANDA TEPE (10/16/1977- )**

**Amada Tepe** was born in Norwood in 1977 and graduated from St. Ursula High School. She has a Bachelor of Arts in Acting from California Institute of the Arts and a Master of Arts in Educational Theatre from NYU. She has acted in theater, movie and TV. Some of her movies included "Pulse," "Crazy," "Bottom's Up," "Iowa" and "Backyard Wedding" (a TV movie). She has been in several TV shows, including "General Hospital" as the evil nanny Collen McHenry and episodes in "Veronica Mars," "Wizards of Waverly Place," "Cory in the House," "Days of Lives," "Dexter," "Entourage" "Without A Trace," "That's So Raven" and "Frenemies."

### **HERMAN GANTVOORT (1887-9/17/1937)**

Born into a musical family, **Herman Gantvoort** was a singer, actor, writer and producer. His musically talented family included his father **Arnold** (head of the Cincinnati College of Music), brother **Carl** (opera singer) and two sisters,

**Gertrude** and **Bertha**, (piano and voice teachers). They lived on Forest Avenue, Norwood.

Around 1897, the ten-years-old **Herman** rented a Norwood hall for \$1.50, so he could present vaudeville-style entertainment for an admission charge of 5¢.

At his father insistence, **Herman** attended Ohio State University as a civil engineering student. After graduating from O.S.U. in 1906, he studied at his father's school, learning the business and artistic side of theater.

He acted under the name **Bill Holland**. He moved to New York, and from 1912 to 1917, was in several out-of-town shows. He left acting after a disagreement with the stage director in the Broadway production of "The Madcap Duchess" at the Globe Theatre.

Around this time, he used his musical talents to write two ballads—"Golden Crown" and "Goin' Home." After that, he was a writer for The Motion Picture News (conceiving and creating the first studio directory) and a publicity staff member of The Exhibitor's Trade Review. From this experience he opened his own publicity bureau for stage and screen. At this time, he produced a series of two-reel films about boxing for the Universal Company.

He wrote and produced numerous silent films and later produced several Broadway plays, including the 1925 "Hell's Bells," in which, at his request, **Shirley Booth** made her Broadway debut. Also, in this play was another young actor, **Humphrey Bogart**, who had already been in four Broadway shows.

### **THAD SWIFT, SR.**

**Mr. Swift** lived with his grandparents, **Mr. & Mrs. E. Bankson**, Grandview Place, Norwood. He left Norwood after finishing the ninth grade to start his acting career. He has been a movie and TV actor, writer and producer. Some of his movies are "It's a Pleasure!" (1945), where he had a small part as a trooper, and "Virgin In Hollywood" (1952) with a starring role. Parts in TV episodes were a season 2 episode (as "Bowles" in "Masquerade") of the cowboy show "Bronco" (1960) and the season 3 "Bentley and the Combo" episode of "Bachelor Father" (1960) as Mr. Roseborough.

### And Now The Commercial ...

This has been a busy December and year, but we thought one final effort was required, so this special expanded edition of the January 2012 newsletter has been created and distributed before the year's end, so that our members and friends could enjoy their Society's efforts. The regular 2-page printed issue will be sent a before the January 14 meeting. If you find any factual errors in this publication, please let us know.

As a small organization, we can always use new ideas and support, so help us make 2012 a great year. Tell your friends and neighbors about us and persuade them to join. The annual individual membership is \$15. Although the membership year ends by May, the month of our founding in 1978, any membership application before May 2011 will include the months until then as free membership.

Send your check (made out to Norwood Historical Society) to:

Norwood Historical Society  
c/o Rodney Steele, Treasurer  
887 Yarger Drive  
Cincinnati, Ohio 45230

Please include your name, postal address and e-mail address and whether you would prefer receiving the newsletter by regular mail or by e-mail.

If you can attend our meetings, they are held at 2 p.m. on the second Saturday of each month at the historic McCullough House in Lindner Park on Cypress Way, between Montgomery Road and Mound Avenue. After the 2011 meetings, we had several presentations, speakers and events, but we need your suggestions for 2012. What who you like to see, or do you know someone with Norwood connections who would be an interesting speaker?

You can contact us at [ohnhs2@hotmail.com](mailto:ohnhs2@hotmail.com) or [NorwoodHistory@hotmail.com](mailto:NorwoodHistory@hotmail.com). Postal correspondence can be sent to Secretary Fou Linder at 4311 Floral Avenue, Norwood, Ohio, and messages can be left to President Rodney Rogers at (513) 531-3447.

If you would like to see more Norwood history, go to our web site [www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~ohnhs2](http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~ohnhs2) or just Google "*Norwood History*" – we should be the first entry.

The Norwood Historical Society is a 501(c)(3) exempt organization; your donations may be considered a tax-deductible contribution by the IRS.

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### NORWOOD HISTORICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address \_\_\_\_\_ Apt No. \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

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How do you want the monthly newsletter: ( ) e-mail ( ) postal ( ) both

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**Norwood Historical Society**

c/o Rodney Steele, Treasurer

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