

**P.O. Box 1068**

**Big Rapids, MI 49307**

**Physical address: 424 N. Fourth Avenue, Big Rapids, MI 49307 (Next to Recycle, Inc.)**

We are growing by leaps and bounds and more and more people are finding out that we are the “go to” place for finding out about the history of Mecosta County and for help in looking up their ancestors. We have visitors from across the country and receive letters and emails weekly. We have a collection of over 26,000 obituaries on index cards and alphabetically filed. These are on an index and the website, [www.commoncorners.com/mcgs](http://www.commoncorners.com/mcgs) . This website is maintained by the West Michigan Genealogical Society in Grand Rapids and we are fortunate to have them help us out in this endeavor. We will be adding more index lists to this website this winter and other features, so check out the site.

Besides the growing obit collection, we went from over 500 books recently to over 650, plus hundreds of newsletters from genealogy groups from Ontario, the Detroit Gen Society, the National Gen Society, German and Polish organizations. We owe our growth to two people, Denton Fitzgerald of Royal Oak who donated the Fitzgerald and Vangilder/Van Gilder collection of over 100 binders, including many area families and genealogy resources and a 91- year old lady from Remus who wished to remain anonymous, donated to us, years of several different genealogy societies’ newsletters, some from 1969-2012. She also had many helpful resource books from Ontario and the USA. These two people decided that they wanted our society to house their life’s work and collections. We are ever grateful to these two individuals and appreciate all the work and organization they did over the years. We know that these two collections will benefit many people for years to come.

With these two collections, we found ourselves out of shelf space. We were fortunate to have Jo Ann Cameron visit from Illinois, as soon as she found out that we had the Denton Fitzgerald collection. She spent two days with Barb Place, VP and when Jo Ann sent a check for \$500 for shelving. Denton’s sister, Marilyn Rolston sent another \$100 and so we have three bookshelf units coming mid-October. Barb and I painted a wall and are trying to spruce things up. With the new shelves, we will be able to continue accepting family histories and adding to our unique collection of Mecosta county history resources. I hope that you as members or one time visitors will be able to stop in again sometime in the near future.

Also a special thank you to Gordon & Helen Burden and Ben and Elma Jean Covey for Stanwood Hospital records and other Stanwood history.

We are taking the initiative this year to obtain more donations, in terms of money and actual records, in an effort to preserve Mecosta county history and genealogy records. We still collect obits daily, add to our binders, articles on schools, churches, businesses, anniversaries, births and more.

### **DO YOU KNOW WHAT IS GOING TO HAPPEN TO YOUR HISTORY?**

Do your kids or grandkids ask about their ancestors or your childhood? If they do, then you are lucky and maybe you can pass your heritage down to the next generation. If not, we would like to preserve your family information, old scrapbooks, newspapers, funeral cards, obits, yearbooks, maps, plat books, city directories, military history, photos and any history on the townships, cities and villages of Mecosta County.

**HOW CAN YOU HELP? READ THE NEXT PAGE!**

# PRESERVE MECOSTA COUNTY RECORDS DAY

October 26, 2016, from 2pm to 8pm at 424 N. Fourth, Big Rapids

ON WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2016, WE WILL HAVE A PRESERVE MECOSTA COUNTY RECORDS DAY! WE WILL HAVE COPIERS THERE IF YOU WANT TO KEEP YOUR ORIGINALS. IF YOU HAVE A LARGE COLLECTION THEN WE MAY HAVE TO MAKE AN APPOINTMENT TO COPY THEM, BUT IF YOU HAVE A FEW PAGES WE CAN GET THEM COPIED THAT DAY. WE WILL BE OPEN FROM 2pm to 8pm. WE JUST WANT TO PRESERVE RECORDS THAT YOU DO NOT WANT TO STORE ANYMORE AND MAY BE VERY VALUABLE TO SOMEONE THAT IS DOING RESEARCH ON OUR AREA AND ITS PEOPLE.

BELOW ARE SOME STORIES AND TESTIMONIALS FROM THREE PEOPLE WHO HAVE VISITED OUR OFFICE FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY. WE GET CALLS, EMAILS AND LETTERS WEEKLY FROM PEOPLE WHO ARE DOING RESEARCH ON THEIR MECOSTA COUNTY ANCESTORS. WE ARE UNIQUE, IN THAT WE ARE NOT A MUSEUM OR A LIBRARY, BUT A WONDERFUL COLLECTION OF ALL SORTS OF RECORDS THAT ARE USUALLY VERY HELPFUL TO A VISITOR OR LOCAL RESEARCHER. THAT CAN CONTINUE IF YOU ARE WILLING TO ADD TO OUR DATABASE. PLEASE CONSIDER DONATING ANY OF THE ITEMS MENTIONED IN THIS LETTER OR AT LEAST LETTING US MAKE A COPY. IF YOU KNOW SOMEONE WHO HAS A COLLECTION OF THESE ITEMS AND HAS WORRIED ABOUT WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO "ALL THAT STUFF" WHEN THEY DIE OR DOWNSIZE, LET THEM KNOW THAT WE ARE HERE TO HELP.

THREE VISITORS SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES....

**It is a pleasure to speak about the very impressive collection and services provided by Maureen Doyle Nelson. This past summer, we planned a trip to Highland View Cemetery, in Big Rapids, to bury the cremains of the grand daughter of a Civil War veteran, Hiram Eugene Hardy - thirteen years after her death. In preparation, I sent Maureen our intentions and asked if she had any information on the Hardy family. Our friend provided some information, as well and we exchanged e-mails. On the day we visited the cemetery, Maureen met us for a delicious lunch in downtown Big Rapids. Our conversation was stimulating as we shared more information. After lunch, we drove to the cemetery and the sexton had made provisions for us to bury the cremains. We had a brief committal service by our friend's son-in-law, a Free Methodist minister from Jamestown, NY who had come to bring closure to this event.**

**Following the service, we spent time at other family burials in the cemetery, and visited the archives. My what a great collection. Information Maureen had shared was readily accessible and we are very proud that the Andersonville Prison escapee, Cpl. Hiram Hardy's biographical sketch about the experience is also part of the collection, as well.**

**Those persons involved in genealogy chases know all too readily that it is the contacts made with archival collections depend a great deal on willingness to share information. While we concentrate on those individuals who have left a legacy for each of us, it is the interaction of helpful people, like Maureen, who make these journeys informative, helpful, and personable.**

**Len Thomas  
Swartz Creek, MI**

My name is Teri Zollinger and my ancestors settled in Mecosta County when they arrived in the United States from Germany back in the early 1800's. I had the opportunity to come to that area a few months back and wanted to do some family research. I contacted Maureen prior to coming because I was not going to be there during normal hours of operation. I gave Maureen a few of my names so she would have a heads up on who I would be looking for. Below is a brief summary of what happened.

Maureen was gracious enough to meet me, on my schedule, and spend her personal time with me. Upon my arrival there were around ten to fifteen obituaries and personal history books waiting for me to look through, which they had pulled from the few names I had given Maureen during our initial contact. I was overjoyed! I cannot put into words what that meant to me. People I had no idea were in my line that were found by volunteers reading through the obituaries of the names from the names I had provided. As I study those obituaries and did further research more names were found. I was able to complete the lines of my great-great grandfather's brothers and sisters, and make contact with relatives still in the area. This was a PRICELESS experience for me and none of it would have happened without the help of Maureen and others at the society and the records they so meticulously maintain. The genealogy society you have there is, in my opinion, one of the best ones in the United States. There is so much history that is invaluable to families from that area. It provides a place to start. It also provides a place for people with the histories to take their records so others, like myself, can have access to them. Again, I cannot express what a wonderful experience I had. I would have come away from my trip to Mecosta county with a lot less information, and probably very disappointed, if it had not been for Maureen, the other volunteers, and the library itself. I truly cannot think of a better word than priceless to describe the jewel you have there.

Sincerely,  
Teri Zollinger  
Fargo, ND 58103

I am a descendant of Van Gilder pioneers who settled an area that came to be known as the Van Gilder community in Big Rapids Township, Mecosta County, Michigan. James and Susan Howard Van Gilder and their children came here from Fond du Lac County in Wisconsin in the 1860s after the Civil War. I believe the community bonds formed quickly because six of the Van Gilder siblings and their families, plus many additional friends and neighbors came here from the very same neighborhoods in Wisconsin over a relatively short period of time. Over the next 60 years the farming community remained strong, and children in the neighborhood married and began families of their own. My family still owns land that my great grandparents and their children developed into a productive farmstead.

As I take a longer look at the Van Gilder history that my aunt Josephine Van Gilder wrote for her family over 40 years ago, I have developed a deeper interest in my heritage and especially the interrelationships among the families in the original Van Gilder community. The Mecosta County Genealogical Society has become a primary resource in my quest to learn more. I have used several excellent collections of original historical family documents and photos, newspaper articles and other materials located at the MCGS. In particular, this past summer MCGS obtained a valuable collection of Van Gilder-related family histories from a donor who had grown up in the Van Gilder community over 80 years ago. If the MCGS collection doesn't have what you need to answer a specific question, the archivists know exactly where to obtain the information from local and state libraries or online. Maureen Nelson and Barb Place along with several other curators have firsthand knowledge of Mecosta County: its places and history. I encourage anyone with an interest in genealogy, or preserving Mecosta County and Michigan history to support continuing development of MCGS. MCGS is definitely worth stopping in or contacting via the Internet. You never know what you will learn about your ancestors and to whom you are related!

Jo Ann Cameron  
Urbana, Illinois

**VOLUNTEERS....** The Mecosta Co. Genealogical Society is growing with donors each year, but many people live out of state or too far to donate time. They donate money or research materials to add to our collection. The handful of volunteers that help run the office are as follows:

Maureen Doyle Nelson-President, born in Big Rapids, but has lived in Cedar Springs for 30 years. I find it helps to be local and have lots of relatives and friends. I will hit the coffee shops if I have to find more info on something we are researching or use other resources such as friends and relatives when working on someone's research question. I help promote the group and often meet out of town visitors at the office.

Barb Place-Vice President, lives in Barryton area and knows that area well. She is a whiz on looking online and also has a good handle on what we have in the office and where to direct researchers. Also helps with researching and meeting out of town visitors.

Janet Stout-Trustee, was from the Stanwood area and knows that area well, has contacts there that can help us out. Janet also gathers the obituaries daily and goes to the library to find older ones to add to our collection. She and her sister have photographed almost all of the headstones in Mecosta Co. and other places to be put on some of the online sites.

Gordon Telfer-Trustee, from Big Rapids. He is a wealth of information when it comes to the city and where things once were, such as businesses and other buildings. He has collected obituaries for years and helps us by indexing our books. He helps promote our group and helps with the Veterans Tribute each year.

Linda Spedoski-Volunteer member, not originally from Big Rapids, but her mother loved genealogy and she has helped promote our group to businesses and organizations for a few years. She is good to look up things for businesses that are planning a celebration and need history items and also helps with class reunions. She helps set up many of our events and makes a good pot of coffee.

Sally McCafferty-lives in Big Rapids and helps with archiving the obituaries and indexing some of the books in our office.

## **EVENTS COMING UP**

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2016 PRESERVE **MECOSTA COUNTY RECORDS DAY** 2PM TO 8PM AT 424 N. FOURTH AVE., BIG RAPIDS. BRING ITEMS TO GROW OUR COLLECTION AND PRESERVE THEM BEFORE YOUR KIDS TOSS THEM OUT!!!

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 2016 PHILANTHROPY **DAY-MECOSTA CO. COMMUNITY FOUNDATION** INVITES THE PUBLIC TO THE HOLIDAY INN AT 1005 PERRY STREET FROM 11AM TO 6PM. OUR MECOSTA COUNTY GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY WILL BE THERE WITH A TABLE JOINING MANY OTHER NON-PROFIT GROUPS IN MECOSTA COUNTY FOR THIS ANNUAL FUNDRAISING EFFORT. WATCH THE NEWSPAPER FOR MORE INFO.

**CHECKS MADE OUT TO MCGS CAN BE MAILED TO MCGS, P.O. BOX 1068, BIG RAPIDS, MI 49307 TO ARRIVE BY OCTOBER 31 OR CAN BE DROPPED OFF ON OUR PRESERVE MECOSTA COUNTY RECORDS DAY ON OCTOBER 26.** WE APPRECIATE ANY DONATION, WHICH WILL BE USED FOR SHELVING, INK AND TONER FOR MAKING COPIES, PAPER, PURCHASING ITEMS TO ADD TO OUR COLLECTION AND WILL HELP PAY THE RENT. WE ALSO WILL START SCANNING ITEMS THIS WINTER TO PRESERVE THE COLLECTION.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 2016 OUR 8<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL VETERANS TRIBUTE FROM 10AM TO 2PM AT 424 N. FOURTH AVENUE. THIS IS A UNIQUE WAY TO HONOR OUR MEN AND WOMEN VETS BY LETTING THEM BRING IN THEIR MILITARY MEMORABILIA, AND HIGHLIGHTING OUR MILITARY COLLECTION OF NEWSPAPER ARTICLES AND SCRAPBOOKS. VETERANS OR THE GENERAL PUBLIC WITH MILITARY ITEMS ARE WELCOME TO JOIN US AND REQUEST TABLE SPACE TO SET UP FOR THIS ONCE A YEAR, ONE OF A KIND COLLECTION. VETERANS ARE INVITED TO COME AND HAVE REFRESHMENTS AND LOOK AROUND OR BRING IN ITEMS TO TALK ABOUT. IT IS CASUAL AND THERE ARE TABLES SET UP IN BOTH THE ROOMS WITH MANY INTERESTING ITEMS. BRING YOUR GRANDKIDS, BRING A FRIEND, VERY INFORMATIONAL AND FUN FOR MILITARY HISTORY BUFFS.

**IN MEMORIAM:**

ON SEPTEMBER 3, WE LOST OUR GOOD FRIEND AND VOLUNTEER, BETTY MAE LEWIS, AGE 92, FORMERLY OF BIG RAPIDS. WE HAD LOTS OF FUN WITH BETTY THE LAST FEW YEARS. WE WILL MISS HER, BUT WE HAVE HER YELLOW SWEATER TO REMIND US AND SOME GENEROUS DONATIONS FROM HER FUNERAL MEMORIALS TO HELP WITH FURTHERING OUR CAUSE OF PRESERVING THE GENEALOGY AND HISTORY OF MECOSTA COUNTY PEOPLE & HOW THEY LIVED. WE ALSO RECEIVED A DISPLAY CASE THAT WILL FEATURE SOME OF OUR OLD THINGS AND WILL HAVE A REVOLVING DISPLAY OF ITEMS. WE THANK BETTY'S DAUGHTERS, MARY, NANCY AND LINDA AND EXTENDED FAMILY AND FRIENDS FOR THEIR KIND DONATIONS.



Betty (Mrs. Jack Lewis) with a cup of Betty's Joy Juice! (aka Vitamin Water)

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON HOW TO DONATE OR VOLUNTEER AT THE MECOSTA COUNTY GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY, CALL MAUREEN DOYLE NELSON AT 231-250-5555. THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT AND INTEREST!

Mecosta Co. Genealogical Society  
P. O. Box 1068  
Big Rapids, MI 49307



A non-profit organization