



The Berrien County Historical Association

# The Docket

The History Center at Courthouse Square

Vol. 35, No. 10, November/December 2019

## And Now a Word from Our Director

*Life belongs to the living, and he who lives must be prepared for change. ~Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*

My dear friends,

Since I started back in August, the number one topic that has dominated all my conversations (written and verbal) has been change. Earlier this month, I finally rolled the first swatch of new paint on the walls of the Sheriff's Office and kick-started the renovations that have been going on this past month. In a week's time, all that hard work will be over and the first round of changes will be complete.

But I want to admit something - before I put that paint on, there was a moment where I was scared that I was about to lead my staff, board, and museum down the wrong path. This seems silly now that we're almost at the end, but at the time it was a very real fear. I couldn't go back once that paint was put on - it was much too white not to be noticed. But I took a deep breath, put my concerns in the hands of the universe, and rolled that paint on the wall.

It's been a lot of hard work - we all have aches, pains, and bruises to prove it - but so rewarding at the same time. All this has us energized for everything we have planned in 2020. Sandra has been hard at work in the collections, which was rewarded by finding the cache of communications that inspired this month's story. Tara has lists upon lists (upon lists) of ideas and plans for our membership and volunteers. And me? I've been doing additional work behind-the-scenes updating things to make your experiences at our museum the best it can be.

This will be the last edition of *The Docket* for 2019. With so much to do to get ready for the new decade and such a short time before it's here, our next edition will be at the start of January so we can welcome 2020 together. Since we won't "see" each other again until next year, we wish you a safe, happy, and healthy holiday season!

And to all a good night!

*Rhiannon*

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Dear April Fool Girl

The following story was written by our curator, Sandra. She discovered the story of Arline and Edna through a batch of letters and postcards hidden away in an unmarked box.

Before the days of smartphones, texting, and Snapchat, handwritten correspondence was the method of communication between loved ones. Letters were carefully written to friends and family and then taken to the post office to begin the long journey across the country or ocean. Daily activities and newsworthy events made their way into these messages, and their recipients waited anxiously for days or weeks to hear the latest information.

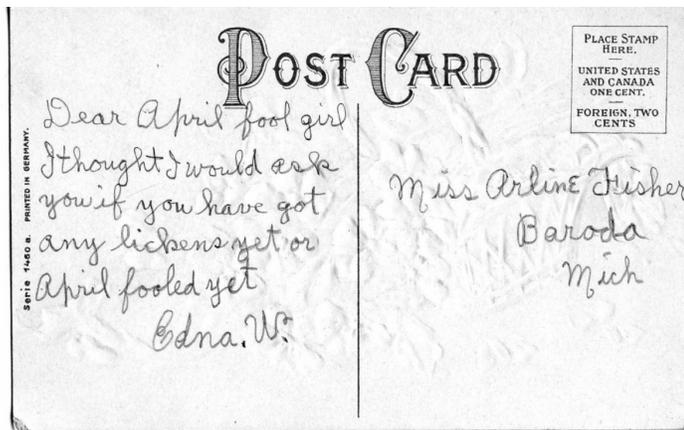
Usually the letters were pages in length, written in the beautiful cursive script of the period and bursting with important news. However, sometimes this communication was just a small postcard, meant to bring a smile to someone far away.

Today these letters and cards are artifacts housed in museum archives and provide us with a greater understanding of past relationships. Our archives are also home to such correspondence, with some yet to be discovered. While organizing our collections a few weeks ago, I stumbled upon a non-descript box tucked away on a bookshelf. I opened it and found an extensive number of letters, photographs, news clippings, and postcards between two local girls and their families.

The treasure trove of documents revealed the brief, yet special, friendship between these young women. Arline, who lived in Oronoko Township, and Edna, who lived in Berrien County, were diligent about staying in touch and growing their friendship. Easter, Christmas, and Valentine's Day postcards from Edna to Arline and her sisters highlight the passing of years, with each card including a funny story or a wish to get together soon. Their close connection is illustrated in these cards and it recalls our own youthful friendships.

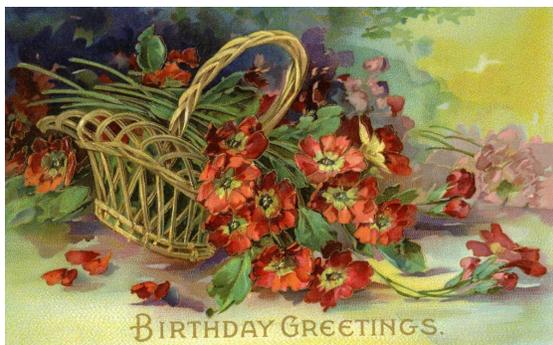
However, also included in this box was a letter addressed to Arline's mother. The devastated writer offers heartfelt condolences for the loss of Arline, who had just succumbed to Scarlet Fever at the age of eighteen. With this, the correspondence between the two friends ended forever.

As brief as the friendship was for Arline and Edna, their memories are kept alive through the cards and pictures donated to us by their families. History well told is beautiful. It allows a personal glimpse into the lives of men and women throughout history and gives us the knowledge today to understand their human experience just a little bit more.



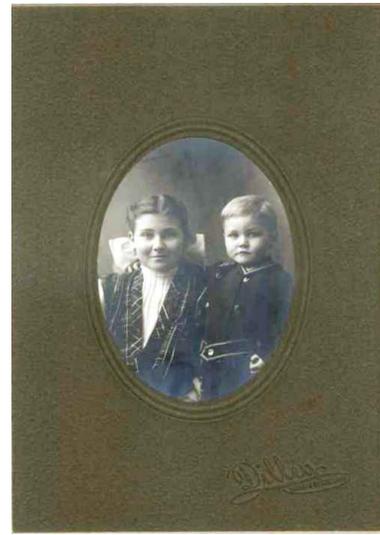
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## From the Collection: April Fool Girls



Left and above: The front and back of a postcard from Edna to Arline. Dozens of postcards like these were sent between the girls, with additional ones sent to Arline's sisters after her death. Many of the messages were short and sweet while others were a little longer. This one was likely hand delivered as there is no postmark, making it harder to date than those that were.

Right: Edna as a young child with her brother. Edna would later marry, have a child named Wanda, and move to Florida. She passed away in 1959 at the age of 82, outliving her best friend by more than seventy years. Another picture in our collection show Edna dressed in the same outfit posing with a girl believed to be a sister or cousin.



Left: Arline, age unknown, but likely to be her late teens, given her Gibson style hair wouldn't have been worn by a child younger than sixteen. Because she passed away at the age of 18 in 1912, this is likely one of the last portraits of Arline taken before her untimely passing.

Right: Arline just a few years earlier in 1909 at the age of fifteen, posing with her younger brother. Several other portraits of Arline and her older sisters were taken during this same frame and they were all dressed the same.

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## Calendar: BCHA Events in November & December

### **CLOSED! November 13 through December 4**

The grounds will be closed for renovations inside the 1839 Courthouse and the Sheriff's Office!

### **December 5 through January 5, 2020, Dear Santa Holiday Exhibit**

Throughout the month of December, visitors will be able to step back in time as they explore our newest exhibit, Dear Santa! Photos and artifacts from the BCHA collections will be on display inside the Sheriff's House to celebrate the frenzy of Christmas morning. This exhibit is free and guests will be invited to share their own holiday wishes! *Free admission*

### **December 12th, Kindle Your Christmas Spirit 2019; 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.**

Guests attending Kindle Your Christmas have many activities and events to choose from! Blacksmithing demonstrations will be held in Bennett's Forge, carolers will share their gift of song in the Courthouse, the Dear Santa exhibit will be open in the Sheriff's House, and pioneer living will be on full display in the Murdock Cabin. Throughout the property, craft and hands-on activities will let guests create their own piece of holiday magic. A 12 days of Christmas scavenger hunt will also let guests vie for a BCHA themed prize! The gift shop even gets in on the act with a 5-10-15 sale! Free admission and great for the whole family! *Free admission*

### **December 15th, Sweet Traditions: Holiday Dessert Traditions from Around the World, 2:30 p.m.**

No matter where you go in the world, we celebrate with food, creating inter-generational traditions that last for decades. Learn about some of the traditions inspired by secular and religious holidays during the winter months! Light refreshments will be available and guests are encouraged to bring their own stories (and goodies!) to share! *Free Admission*

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## Calendar: Around the Community & Back Again

### **December 11th, Berrien County Travel Club Berkshires Bus Tour, 6:30 p.m.**

**Location: Berrien Springs Public Library**

**This event is free to the public**

The Berrien County Travel Club is heading to the Berkshires in the fall of 2020. Those interested in joining the BCTC to explore all the history and culture the area has to offer can learn more at this informational meeting. Refreshments will be served and door prizes available! A portion of the proceeds of this trip will be donated to the Berrien County Historical Association.

**December 12th, So You Want to Run for Congress Lecture & Book Signing, 6:00 p.m.**

**Location: Dowagiac Democratic Office, 204 S. Front Street**

**This event is free to the public**

Former congressional primary candidate George Franklin will be spending the evening in Dowagiac, talking about his experiences running for Congress in 2018. Those interested on how running for office has changed in the 21st century will enjoy a chance to hear an insider's experience. Franklin's book is part memoir, part guide book that will inspire anyone to run for office to make a difference in their communities. Copies of the book will be for sale and Franklin will sign after the presentation.

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Tara Velez, Museum Operations Coordinator

### ***BCHA Mission Statement***

The Mission of the BCHA is to collect, preserve and interpret the history of Berrien County through exhibits, tours, publications, and educational and community outreach programs for public benefit.

