



Champaign County Historical Society and Museum  
Est. 1934

March/April 2022

# *CHAMPAIGN CHRONICLES*

## President's Address

Hello! My name is Candy Gilliam, your new president! With the start of 2022, the board of trustees has graciously voted and trusted me with this honor. Thank you. As for myself, I have been married for over 30 years and we have four grown children, all born and raised in Christiansburg. My roots run deep in Champaign County, as my earliest ancestors settled here in 1809. I have always had a deep interest in history, and became a member of the museum to learn more about this area. I have been a museum trustee for several years, and in 2020 began writing the historical articles for this newsletter. I hope you have enjoyed reading them. I love researching the places, people and families of this county!

It is my hope that 2022 will see everyone returning to some normalcy in life, as we did before covid. Get out of your house, visit friends, and most importantly, come to the museum and learn about YOUR history. We can't wait to see you!

Candy Gilliam

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\*Photo credit (banner photo)  
Robert Ogden

# Upcoming Programs

## Mike Major: An Artist's Memories

The Champaign County Historical Society will host artist Michael Major for a presentation at two PM on Sunday, March sixth. His presentation will be based on a book that he is completing for his family titled *An Artist's Memories* about his career of creating drawings, paintings, and sculpture. He will show pictures from the book of the artwork and explain how drawing is the foundation for painting and sculpture. Major has completed over two hundred bronze sculptures including large public monuments and small limited edition castings. Those monuments include life-size and larger than life monuments of public figures such as Simon Kenton, William Tecumseh Sherman, Abraham Lincoln, George Rogers Clark, Mother Alfred Moes (founder of the Mayo Clinic) and many more.

Michael and his wife Jane moved to Urbana in the mid-seventies for Michael to serve as an artist-in-residence for the college and county schools. Their intention was to stay one year before moving back to New York where he felt he needed to be for his art career. They fell in love with the people and environment of Champaign County including Urbana's architecture and Urbana College. After finding and purchasing an abandoned church to renovate for a home and art studio they committed to stay on here. Major studied art at the Dayton Art Institute from the sixth grade through his senior year of High school, has a BS, Summa Cum Laude from Ohio University and an MFA from Pratt Institute, New York. He founded Main Graphics in 1988 in part to publish books of drawings and after thirty-three years sold the company recently to Boldman Printing. He continues to spend most of his time at his art studio at 119 Miami Street along with the Champaign County Arts Council and Architect daughter Sarah Mackert.



## Women's Suffrage Movement



On April 3rd at 2 p.m. Terri Marratta will be presenting a program on the Women's Suffrage Movement. Ms. Marratta will be discussing the history of the movement. She will also be discussing how doing the research for this program uncovered some surprises for her!

# In The Community!

February 14, 2022 the Champaign County Historical Society took part in the events surrounding the open house for Legacy Place. We provided photographs and history of both the Douglas Inn and South Ward. Below are some of the pictures and information we provided for the event!



## Photographs wanted!

The Champaign Co Historical Society is looking for photographs to add to our digital collection. If you have photographs that you feel need to be preserved please let us know. You would get your photographs back after we scan them into our database. We are looking for photographs from all eras and from any location in Champaign County.

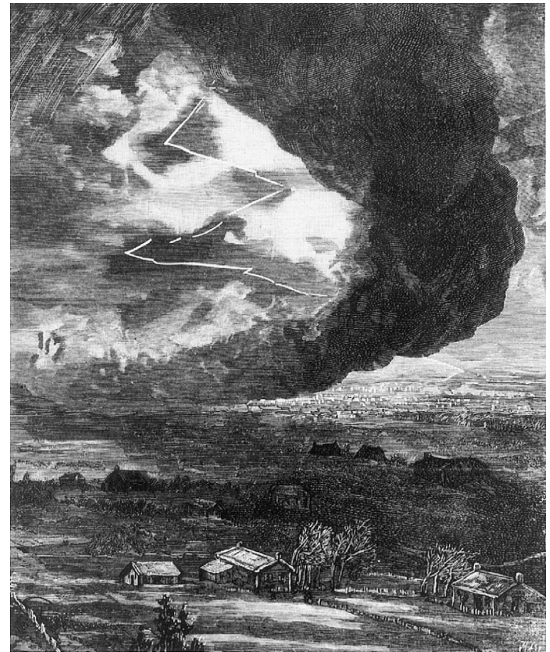
## CCHS has a new email address

As of January 1, 2022, the Champaign County Historical Society has a new email address. The new address is [champaigncohistory@gmail.com](mailto:champaigncohistory@gmail.com)

# 1830 Tornado by Candy Gilliam

March 22, 1830 began as a mild and pleasant spring day. The citizens of Urbana arose that Monday morning ready to begin their week. Many business had been open for hours. The clanking of metal was heard from the local foundry on Miami Street, carpenter Elijah Wolfkill was working to erect the Hamilton House across from the courthouse, while on Main Street the Market House was busy trading local goods such as eggs, leather and furs. Mr Douglas Luce was laboring at his tannery, old man James Hulse was tending horses at the stables, Joseph Reppard left for his tailoring shop, and George Bell was managing his mercantile while his wife and children were visiting with family.

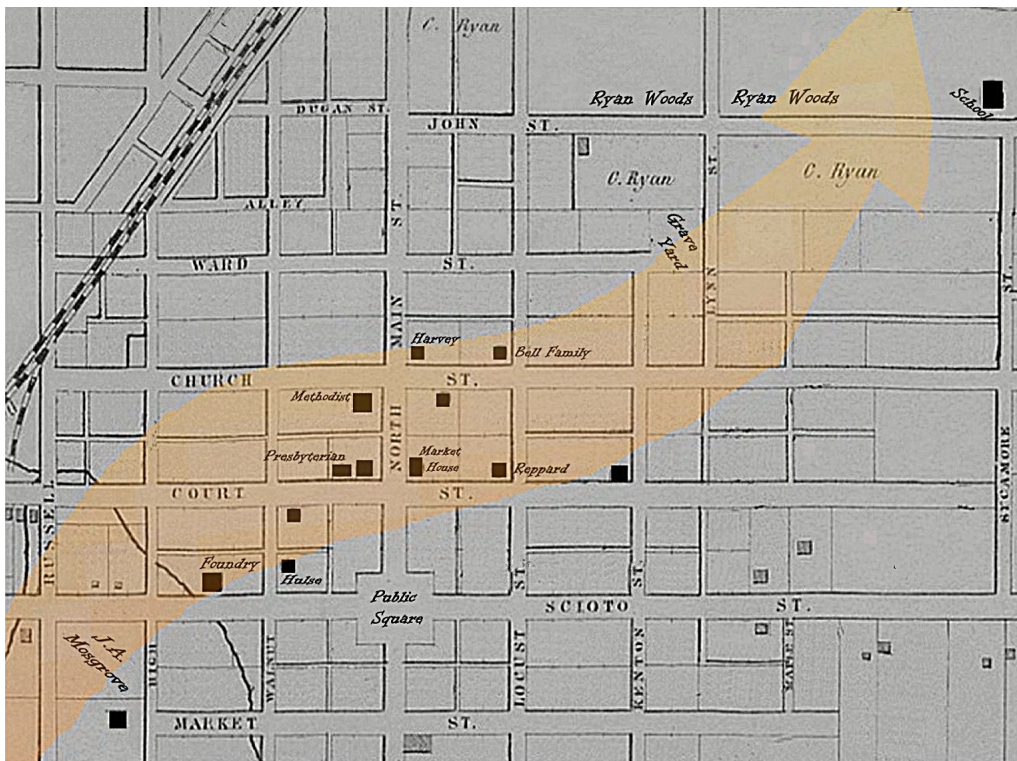
About 10:00 a.m., the air began to haze and fitful breezes blew in from the southwest, giving hints of a coming storm. Between the darkening clouds, sunshine was breaking through and casting shadows on the town. Shortly after lunchtime, small black dense clouds could be seen low on the western horizon. The smell of rain was strong in the air as the storm approached, and the clouds growled with thunder and lightning. About 1:30 p.m. fierce winds rushed through the area, getting stronger and louder by the minute, as the sound of booming thunder and intense rain hailed on the city sending every citizen running to seek cover in their homes. Suddenly at 2:00 p.m., the air became still, all nature was hushed, not a sound to be heard. The sky hung with a dark gloom, and the silence and calm changed to an appalling spectacle. The winds turned into a wild fury, screeching, howling, and quickly forming a path of destruction. The tornado moved in quick darting swoops, jumping up and down in whirling evolutions, first striking the brick house of Richard Baker and John Mosgrove's homestead before unroofing the homes of Zephaniah Luce and Douglas Luce. It wrecked the foundry, clearing out all its water and sediment, bending trees to the ground, before spinning and shattering the home of J. Baker. The fierce winds tore the roofs off several homes including the old James Hulse log house on Miami Street, tossed on its side the dwelling of Job Mathis, then destroyed the nearby stables. Dr. Martin Lewis was editing a story for the local newspaper, The Mad River Courant, when his office was smashed and the upper floor of his new brick house was blown apart. After leaping over two small frame homes, the tornado seized the roof and steeple of the Presbyterian Church, throwing the timbers a block away and collapsing the brick walls to its foundation. Just past the Court House on Main Street, Elijah Wolfkill was in the midst of constructing the Hamilton House when he and his workers were entirely buried within the crumbled parts of the newly built walls. The severely bruised and beaten men survived by crouching under their work bench which held up the weight of the heavy brick and mortar walls. Next the pillared Market House was completely demolished before the tornado split into two funnels, with one funnel continuing north, the other swerving to the east. The north bound funnel acted like a suction when it struck the brick walls of the Methodist Episcopal Church, laying those walls out in a straight line, before striking the log house of William Downs. Further



north on Main St, newly married Roland and Phoebe Harvey were watching the storm when the tornado destroyed their home, seriously injuring Phoebe and breaking her leg. Her sister was standing on the porch holding her small infant when she was thrown 30 feet over the rock foundation and into the street. Luckily, she was only bruised. Just beyond the Hamilton House, the eastern funnel completely wiped out the home of Joseph Reppard on Court Street then destroyed the new frame home of George Bell, whirling it into fragments. Hiding inside were his wife Mary Bell and their five young children, who were listening to the frightening and startling sounds of tree limbs breaking, the crack of lightening and the wind whipping the windows. His sister-in-law Nancy Bell with her four children were also there visiting. The tornado came down with such swiftness, the entire family was thrown and scattered in the blink of an eye. After this, the tornado combined into one again, skipping a few homes before picking up the foundation and brick home of Charles Mathis, crumbling the rocks and bricks on top of his wife and child, leaving them sitting in the debris unharmed. The storm wheeled north near the old Grave Yard damaging several log homes on the outskirts of town and crushed the Castor Oil Mill of John Mathis, scattering his entire stock of castor beans to the winds, leaving nothing behind. Finally the tornado left town, leaving a devastating northward course through the Ryan Woods, twisting, uprooting, hurling the large trees across the rising ground where the public high school now stands. The twister was estimated to be going 150 miles per hour, and the trauma of this tragedy was unforgettable for many years.

*Believed path of the tornado.*

Mr. George Bell, who was also a school teacher, was at his mercantile in the lower part of town when the storm came




through. He ran for his home, but it was too late to save his family. His wife Mary Bell was thrown over 50 feet, slamming into the wet ground suffering major injuries that maimed her for life. Her clothing almost stripped off her body with her bonnet and shawl found 12 miles away! Her children were not so fortunate, with three of them

## 1830 Tornado continued

killed instantly. The oldest daughter, 13 year old Elizabeth, was thrown a block away towards the old grave yard where her body was dashed against a fence, badly disfiguring her face, bruising her body and breaking her arms. Their two sons were both found a quarter of a mile away. Four year old Thomas and 9 month old Robert were found with their heads smashed and their bodies mangled. Also visiting the Bell household that morning was sister-in-law Nancy Bell, her children, and their niece. As Nancy was protecting the children, she received severe cuts and bruises while her 7 year old daughter, Jane Bell, was blown 300 feet and suffered a fractured skull. Little Jane was given the best medical aid known at that time, languishing for four days before she eventually died on March 26. Their niece, four year old Mary Smith, also received a skull fracture and lacerations, but she was fortunate to survive these injuries. And while the other five children in the household were injured, none were fatal.

The next day, March 23, 1830, George and Mary Bell buried their children in the Old Grave Yard on the corner of Ward and Kenton Streets. The three children were all buried in one grave near the northwest section, with the entire community in attendance. George Bell gave a statement expressing "his grateful and sincere thanks to his affectionate friends and neighbors for their unparalleled degree of sympathy towards them in their calamitous bereavement". In the storms aftermath, the community was astounded at the damage left behind, with 31 homes destroyed and another 70 buildings damaged. Many farms were missing fences, rails, shingles, gates, haystacks, outbuildings and livestock. The Bell family bible was found over 15 miles away, and a large pond was blown apart with all the fish tossed on land. This same afternoon, the Town Council held a special meeting making resolutions of deep sympathy to the distressed families, and to recommend all citizens who were fortunate to escape the ravages of the tornado to lay aside their usual daily routines for the purpose of helping to build back their community. And so everyone within the town, everyone from the countryside, came together in a united effort to build new homes and businesses. Lumber, shingles, nails, glass and cloth were donated and used by the blacksmiths, tailors, tanners, carpenters, brick masons and many others to rebuild the city. Within one month, everyone had a new home or business, and in most instances, families were in better living conditions then before the storm.

While this tornado was only on the ground for several minutes, the destruction it caused was an unbearable loss for Urbana. In the nearly 200 years since this traumatizing event, great advances have been made in alerting the public of potentially dangerous weather conditions in the hope that tragedies such as this never happen again.

**THE COURANT:**  
  
SATURDAY, MARCH 27, 1830.  
Owing to the late Tornado, which disarranged some of our matters, we are under the necessity of issuing a half sheet. Below will be found the particulars of the storm—the injury done, &c.  
For the Mad River Courant—  
**THE TORNADO!!**  
MR. LEWIS: The following account of the late terrible Tornado, and its fearful devastations, is believed to be substantially correct. It has been drawn up at the request of yourself, and several other citizens, and pains have been taken by the writer to obtain information from the best sources, and condense it into a plain unvarnished narrative. The truth is too vivid to need colouring; and the facts sufficiently affecting, without exaggeration. If any thing further should be ascertained, of sufficient importance, it will be furnished for publication.  
Yours, &c.

*The above was printed in the  
Mad-River Courant dated  
March 27, 1830.*

# UPDATE ON MUSEUM ADDITIONS AND RENOVATION PROJECT

In January 2022, the feasibility study that analyzed the existing and future space needs of the museum was finalized. The study breaks the project into two phases. Phase I includes a) constructing a new gallery to highlight and profile the rich industrial and agricultural history of Champaign County, and b) reconfiguring and enhancing parts of the existing museum building. The estimated cost for Phase I is \$1,350,000.

Phase II consists of constructing a multi-purpose room to accommodate history related programs, meeting space, public restrooms, and a catering kitchen to host internal and third-party events. The estimated cost of this phase is \$1,125,000. If both Phases are done together the total estimated cost would be \$2,400,000, a savings of \$75,000.

As noted in the January/February Champaign Chronicles Newsletter, we were awarded a \$300,000 Ohio Cultural Facilities Grant in December 2020. To fund the Phase I construction cost of \$1,350,000, the Board voted in February to pursue another \$600,000 grant from the State as well as to launch a capital campaign to raise \$500,000.

The Capital Campaign Committee will launch a countywide fundraising campaign in March of 2022. The campaign will solicit donations from local businesses and industry, agricultural enterprises, farming families, the Society's members, and individuals and foundations supportive of telling the history of Champaign County, Ohio.

While the capital campaign is underway, we will simultaneously commence the research necessary to construct robust exhibits focused on the industrial and agricultural history of Champaign County. Additionally, the project team will be delving into the details of the conceptual design in order that they may be converted into construction documents to facilitate bidding and construction vendor selection.

We look forward to sharing our progress on this exciting project in the next newsletter.

## Artifact Donations

If you have items you are considering donating to the Champaign Co Historical Society please check out website, [champaigncountyhistoricalmuseum.org](http://champaigncountyhistoricalmuseum.org), there you will find the donation application and instructions on how to submit the application as well as the criteria our collections committee uses to make their decisions.

## Mission Statement

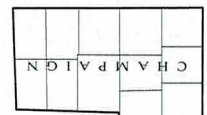
The Mission of the Society is to tell the Champaign County story and to administer the collection, preservation, and display of our county's artifacts, documents, and other historical resources.

# Welcome New Members

Cate Brinnon

Dusty Hurst

CHAMPAIGN COUNTY  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
MUSEUM



Est. 1934

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