

## POLICE & FIRE PROGRAM

A recording of the September 26, 2019, meeting of the CCHS on the topic of the history of police and fire protection in the county. **Gayla Phillips** introduces the speakers: **David Kirk**, City of St. Johns Police Chief; **Lawrence Jerue**, Clinton Co. Sheriff; **Dean Mazzolini**, St. Johns Fire Chief; and **Ronald Matson** of the Clinton Co. Historical Society Museum. A PowerPoint presentation of historical photographs and data, created by **Julie Peters**, is running in the background during the speeches.

Phillips: Hello, ladies and gentlemen. I want you to keep on eating. There's more food and there seemed to be quite a few desserts out there so don't miss your opportunity. You may keep on eating but we are going to start our program because we are on sort of a time schedule this evening. First off, I'm going to ask the Chief of Police of the City of St. Johns, David Kirk, to come and speak with us. I'll let him tell you all about himself.

Kirk: Good evening, everybody. I can't thank you enough for the invitation tonight. I appreciate it. I'm a big fan of the Historical Society and have met a couple times trying to get some of our archives to them so I appreciate what you do and conversations I've had with some of the folks before, talking about how important it is to understand where we came from so we know where we're going. They do just a wonderful job of keeping track of those archives for us so I'm very thankful, as I am for the opportunity to speak to you tonight. I had a discussion with the sheriff earlier today, although I'm starting to be historic according to some of my young police officers. I'm not from the area, so I have a little bit of, not familiarity so much historically, but went back a little bit and saw somebody has done a wonderful job, as we watched this [the pictures] roll through, about keeping track of our police department history as it came through the years.

I do know, as far as our records go, back in 1867 the city established it and I believe it was a marshal system. I'm actually learning as I go. So we're 152 years with law enforcement in the City of St. Johns. That's pretty impressive that we've had a force in place for that long. We start thinking about how the evolution since 1867 to 2019 has taken place. You can imagine. You see horseback people and the first motorized police officer. Even the history of my career that I can speak to a little bit more, about how technology has kind of brought us to a different era. Back when I first started in the police department business, all of the GPS technology--I think everybody's pretty familiar with now in the patrol cars, the GPS-guided systems. We had a "SOR" system, which was the side-of-the-road system. I can tell ya, I was a former deputy sheriff and in my training, the senior deputy told me, "You're going to get out in the county. It's a big area to cover so if you get out and get lost, start looking in the yards and [if] you see somebody, pull over and either tell them the name of the family or the road you're looking for. They'll guide you right to where you need to go." We used that system pretty extensively.

Prior to cell phones, as well--we talk about how dependent we get on things. Now you can get in the car and talk to your telephone and it tells you basically where you're going. I clearly remember as a young deputy sheriff, as we talk about the evolution of things, calling somebody on a cellular telephone. Everything was a plugged-into-the- wall telephone. So we're working at the sheriff's department and my sergeant, who I was riding with, went outside and he said, "Stay right in here." So he comes back in and he calls and the next thing you know, the dispatcher wants me to take the telephone call so I answered the phone call and it staticky and gravelly and he said, "Hello." I go, "Who is this?" Hard to even recognize his voice! "Who do you think it is?" "Oh, it's my sergeant, Sergeant Ash." "Yeah. Guess where I am ." "Well, you're on the telephone." "Where am I on the telephone?" So I look out and he's got a bag that's like a small suitcase with a huge antenna on it and a big receiver. It's our first cellular telephone at the sheriff's department. He's all excited and he's waving at me in the street through the front window of the sheriff's department. He hangs the phone up, calls back again because he thought it was so entertaining. The next shift, the undersheriff's waiting for me when I arrived for patrol and asked me if I took a phone call from the sergeant last night. Well, at that time it was \$7 a minute for cellular phone calls so we had a conversation about those things.

The pictures up here are wonderful and we started to grab that history. As most of you know, we've gotten into a new building. We're incredibly fortunate in the city that they've kind of wrapped around the police department, got us a new facility. The parking lot's being reconfigured so it's gonna be a great tool for the St. Johns area and I think it's gonna be sustainable for a lot of years.

When I came in, the newest patch that is on our shoulders, relatively new, the one I got here—so we've done a heraldry of that patch and all the colors and [what] everything on the patch stands for, almost like a coat of armor [arms] like it used to be. I went, as Sheriff Jerue did, to the national academy and they talk about how those things should represent something for you so we went back through and everything on the patch is symbolic somehow, either to the city or through the color combination that we have on there. I have those pamphlets. I brought one tonight but you're more than welcome at any time to come to the police department and pick one up.

We're gonna start--we've taken exhaustive pictures of our transition into the new police department building. We're going to do a good job, moving forward, of making sure we have those things historically so that in 20 years or 30 years or 50 years later they can see where we came from and hopefully that facility will still be working for us.

I appreciate your opportunity again, being able to come here and speak tonight and I can field any questions for the city police side of things if anybody has one. Thank you—delicious--anybody that participated in the buffet. Delicious! Thank you very much. So thanks again, folks. Have a good evening.

Phillips: Our next speaker is our current Clinton Co. Sheriff, Larry Jerue.

Jerue: Good evening and thank you for having us. We really do appreciate the opportunity. I have a tremendous amount of respect, admiration, and almost envy for any true historian who has the expertise, the patience, and the knowledge to be able to gather and put together the information from the past. When we were talking about doing this, you know, I had a chance to take a look and I talked with John [Ron Matson] and we looked at some of the things. We don't have a lot of information from the Clinton Co. Sheriff's office, a lot of historical information. I've been in law enforcement now 43, 44 years, so I'm kind of a living historian, but only seven of those years have been with the Clinton Co. Sheriff's office.

One of the things that I was able to find out is there have been 35 sheriffs that have served since 1839, 35 sheriffs since 1839. When I started looking at it, I started looking down and since 1920, there's only been eight. Chief [John S. "Jack"] Barnes, whose picture has shown up here before, you know, he served the longest. He had 24 years of service and 24 years as a sheriff is an awful long time. Percy Patterson, he had 22 years; he served from 1949 to 1971. Sheriff Wayne Kangas is the third-ranking, highest number of years; he had 16 years; he was my predecessor; he served from 2001 to 2016. Then Sheriff Tony [Anthony] Hufnagel, who you probably all know very well, he served for 12 years from 1972 to 1984. Terry Haneckow and Don Hengesh both served eight years apiece. That rounds out from 1985 to, like 2000.

In the history of the Clinton Co. Sheriff's Dept., there have been four jails built. The first jail was built in 1843. I don't know where, and this is where it gets frustrating and that's why I have such great respect for historians. It gets a little frustrating. I don't know where they put prisoners from 1939 to 1943 [1839 to 1843], 'cause this is the first documented built jail, unless maybe they handcuffed him to a street corner or did something. Lord only knows! In 1843 they built the first jail and that was located in Dewitt. At that time in our county's history, Dewitt was actually the county seat. That first jail cost them \$1,517 to build. It must've been a dream unit! I don't know how many it housed and that's the other part. I don't know how many it housed and how it took place but that jail stayed in operation until 1877 when the second jail was built.

That was built on the corner of McConnell and Clinton Ave. [in St. Johns]. That one was built at a cost of \$10,015. Again, I don't know how many it served or held. We have pictures of it. I think that was one of them that was showed. That was actually used for almost 70 years as a county jail. In 1949 the Department of Corrections came in and condemned it which really scares me. I think, if you're getting a building that just got condemned by DOC [Department of Corrections] - - I don't know if you've ever been in Jackson Prison but if they condemned that one, it must have been in bad shape.

The long story short about that: In 1950, the state-of-the-art jail was built here in Clinton Co. and it was over on Cass St. That one cost \$100,000. That building was one of the first buildings they put together that had both law enforcement and a county jail facility, the sheriff's office, the detective bureau, and all the law enforcement related functions were housed right in that same building. That building was so state-of-the-art and so well thought of in the state--a little story behind that: In 1952 there was a prisoner in Marquette State Prison up north in the U.P., name was Crazy Jack Wyatt. I don't know if that name rings a bell with anybody, but Crazy Jack Wyatt, up in the Marquette area, he was in there and serving 25 to 30 years for armed robbery. Governor [G. Mennen] Williams at the time of the State of Michigan, was up visiting the Marquette Prison and Crazy Jack Wyatt snatched onto him, took him hostage, and used him as a shield to attempt to escape from Marquette Prison. Well, obviously, that didn't go well. After a short standoff because he claimed he had a weapon, in reality, he didn't. They took him down but then they ended up shipping him from Marquette to the psychiatric ward in Jackson State Prison. In 1952 Jack started a riot in Jackson Prison, a very bad riot. The warden at the time said, "We're getting him outta here. He's going to go for a while." They came to Clinton Co. and Sheriff Patterson, who was the sheriff at the time. He came to Sheriff Patterson, said, "Can I house Crazy Jack Wyatt in your facility because it's the best in the state and it's high tech?" So Crazy Jack Wyatt became a prisoner of the Clinton Co. Jail. I'm sure the sheriff-- I've housed some pretty interesting people, the Ingham County prosecutor is the name of one, so I know what he was probably going through. It was really interesting because as you're going through and looking at this, Crazy Jack Wyatt tried twice to escape from the Clinton Co. Jail. One time he and Sheriff Patterson got in a fight, broke his arm, his own arm, not Crazy Jack's. After spending one year and three days in the county jail, the State of Michigan decided it's time to move Crazy Jack back up to Marquette. He went back up to Marquette Prison, where he served the remainder of his life, and he perished as a prisoner in Marquette Prison. Interesting story! I mean Clinton Co. Jail was the state-of-the-art jail facility.

The fourth and the current county jail that we have, was built and dedicated in 1991. The cost on that was \$4,300,000. We house 232 inmates. I average on a daily count of about are 224. You know, I think back to the original jail. The wife of the sheriff was actually responsible and fed the prisoners. She made meals. I don't know if they were peanut butter and jelly sandwiches back then or what it might've been, but the wife of the sheriff actually served the meals to the prisoners. Last year my jail served 246,323 meals. I know, *Rain Man* here! The numbers just keep coming to me. When you think about it, I would invite any one of you to come in and I would give you a tour of our jail. I go back into the jail daily and sometimes several times a day, but I'll go back and I'll look in the kitchen area and it is so clean and you're thinking 246,323 meals that have been served in a year. I go to the kitchen with a tray, put it in the microwave, and I'll blow it up in a heartbeat. I mean, it's ugly! And I think of, they'll have that many meals for that many times, and I wonder how they did it back then. I would really

be interested in knowing. That's why, when I said at the beginning, I have such great respect for the historians who have the ability to draw that information and put it all together. It's really great stuff.

You know, one thing that we had: We had a couple--there was one very famous prisoner, not famous, but it was very gruesome. It was a young couple that lived on Jason Rd. He was 19; she was 16. They were married for only three months and he decided he was gonna kill her. He didn't know why. Again, Sheriff Patterson was the arresting, investigating, individual in this case. What happened was, he went to buy a gun. He wanted to buy a 22 rifle. The rifle was too expensive. It cost \$29.13 and he couldn't afford it. That's what he told the investigators. You know, back then it had to be pretty good chunk of change. So what happened was is that he decided that this is what he's going to do. He's going to take the baseball bat when she goes to sleep and he hit her in the head five times and killed her. He was in the Clinton Co. Jail. They found him criminally insane. He was one of the first ones that was transported to a criminally insane facility for life because he fully confessed, it's almost as if-- In modern day law enforcement that insanity plea probably wouldn't carry a lot of weight because you have to know the difference between right and wrong. You have to know what you're doing and you have to have tried to conceal what it is you've done. He did all of those but he couldn't understand why he was in trouble, is what he said, and he couldn't understand why he did it. They had argued a month before but he didn't know what the argument was even about. He couldn't even recall. That's one of those type of cases where you look at it and you think, oh man!

Law enforcement has changed dramatically over the years. We're talking about it a little briefly here. I'm not going to talk too long. I promise. In 1965, there's a Public Act 203 and that act required all law enforcement personnel to go through a minimum of 260 hours of formalized training. Prior to that, there were a lot of agencies that did training, but some would say, "Walk in," and you know this. "Raise your hand; here's your gun; that's the car; go have a nice day." **What did he say?** That's the thing. I mean, you sit back, "Oh my gosh, really?" I don't know what I'd do. So what happened, in 1965, the State of Michigan came through and said, "We're gonna start a commission." Back then it was called MLETC, the Michigan Law Enforcement Training Council. So what they did was, they developed courses: Firearms, Driving, Criminal Law, Motor Vehicle Law, Courtroom Testimony. Those were the kinds of things that you had to go through training with and become certified and then the agency could put you to work. They've since changed that. Now the academy goes for four months and it's the commission that--the original one that was through Public Act 203--now you have, it's called MCOLS, Michigan Commission on Law Enforcement Standards. So law enforcement is regulated on what we can and can't do and who can become a police officer and who can't.

I'm going to run for sheriff again. You're not running (to someone in the audience). That's a public announcement.

Jerue: What we were talking about earlier, Chief Kirk and I were talking about--he's a great friend. I have tremendous respect for him. He does a great job. We were talking about the technology and the things that--You know, when I started 44 years ago, as the guys tell ya, you all got in one car and you all rode together like you see the Keystone Kops riding. That's how you responded to calls. Radios were something we didn't have. We used call boxes. Now I marvel at the technology and the equipment. We have two Droids [smartphones] that we put up in the air.

Yes sir. Hey! I know you.

Audience? I'll be in jail Christmas Eve...

Jerue: You will. What was the name of the other reindeer?

Audience? Olive...

Jerue: Good to see you. What we were talking about was, we have the Droid and I never would have thought, when I started my career, that you would have a phone that you can actually send pictures on and you can send photographs of suspects; you can send fingerprints. You know, the DNA that we use today is something that was never even thought about. We could only, years ago, type suspects by blood type. Now you've got DNA that absolutely, positively, says-- Fingerprints were something that were a great breakthrough in the early part of my career. Then, all of a sudden now we have DNA. There's all kinds of technology.

I looked it up and in 1969, the sheriff's department bought four new cars from Bee's Chevrolet, by the way. They paid a whopping \$7,573 for those four cars. **Sign me up for that!**

And you're going to like this too, Chief, they put in four 2-way radios. Two-way radios could go from the car to the office and from the car to the cars so you can talk amongst each other and you can talk back and forth to the office. Marvelous technology for a whopping \$4,000, another thousand dollars a car. In each car you're spending probably about \$3,400. Today, I have county commissioners put me on a hit list because I go in and ask for one. Today's cars sell for \$47,000, almost \$50,000. That's including your car, the computers that go into it. You're looking at the radios, the modems, the cameras. In 1993 Clinton Co. was one of the first counties to have in-car video. It looked like the old, big Hollywood movies said, "I can't see out the windshield; We got a camera here; It's blocking my view." Now everything is all digital, all voice activated. The technology has grown such, it's truly, truly amazing.

Last thing I wanted to do is just touch with you and tell you about two real quick, funny stories. The title, *Thank, God, Criminals are so Stupid*. That would be the title of it, I think. As a young detective, I remember years and years ago, I was

assigned to the checks and frauds division. We had a guy in town that had stolen a couple of checks from his roommate and had cashed them. We were pretty sure he was the suspect. He was denying it all so I had to go out and get handwriting samples because we submit the handwriting samples for forensic examination so the forensic examiner could say, "Yeah, even though they're trying to disguise it, we can tell you that was written by the same person." Guy's denying the whole thing so I go out there. I advise him of Miranda rights. We sit down at the table. I said, "I'm going to get some handwriting samples." I said, "We're going to start with cursive." He didn't know what that was. I said, "You know, like the handwriting samples." Couldn't pour water out of a boot with the instructions on the heel! What happened was, I said, "We're going to do some cursive and then we go through the alphabet." Then he says, "That's not going to look like mine anyway 'cause when I wrote my name on that check, I put it up to the glass and I traced it." Bing, bing, bing, bing, stupid! I said, "Oh well, thank you very much. We don't need to proceed with the handwriting samples." Unbelievable!

We had another guy and years ago--you'll all remember this, before the days of ATM's. What happened was, the Kroger Store in 2<sup>nd</sup> precinct where I worked, what they would do is, they would, on Fridays, load up with extra cash. People would come in and cash their checks. They'd charge them a dollar for each one they cashed. They'd have a lot of cash on hand. Well, one of our ingenious bad guys said, "I'm going to do that." Well, what they would do is, when you're standing in line, you had to get your ID out. He's got his ID. He lays it on a table and he hands them the note. "This is the robbery." Underneath the trench coat, he pulls out a sawed-off shotgun, robs them of the money. First responding officer goes in there and says, "Can you give us a description?" "Better than that, here's his license!" He left it on the table. We get over to his house before he even gets home. Great time!

Listen, I do have a tremendous amount of respect for the Historical Society. John, I did find buried in the back we got some boxes. I guess we're going to share with the several people. Ron, why do I call you John? Ron, I am sorry. I paid big dollars for these too [his eyeglasses] and they're not working. It says right there, "Ron." I'm sorry, Ron. I will get those to you and we're going to share them with a couple of other folks. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much. It's been a great pleasure.

Phillips: Next on the list, we have our St. Johns Fire Chief, Dean Mazzolini.

Mazzolini: I thought maybe I only had just a second or something on the clock 'cause I've got a 4 ½- hour speech that I wrote. Actually, I have to first admit that I'd never been to the museum until Ron came and talked to me and wanted some stuff from the fire department. Since then I think I've been there five or six times so thank you for inviting me and it worked out very well. Now up in the picture, I don't know if you have noticed the bell that was at one time what they summoned the fireman

to come to the run. I don't know what happened in the winter when people's windows were closed. I don't know if they woke up the next day and said, "Well, we missed one," but that was the times.

My brother-in-law, Scott Knight, which was on the fire department when he married my sister--I think I was probably eight, nine years old at the time. At that time they used a phone tree. The chief called the assistant chief; The assistant chief called the lieutenant; right on down and if somebody wasn't home you called the next guy. Our response time now in the city of St. Johns is like five minutes. If you have to call each guy separately, I can't imagine they could get to a fire within 20 minutes or something. No whistle! No nothing! It was a phone tree.

Then they did get us a fire siren and now we have pagers, which--[looking at his phone] Thank goodness, no messages! We also get it on our phones now--pops up on our phones. We have a fire tonight, it pops up on my phone because I am the chief. It tells me where all my men are. So the one that's still at his house, I can call and say, "We could use your help." He is like, "It isn't much, is it? It was just a lift assist." "Well, we all got up! Welcome."

The technology in our system also has gone crazy. This is our newest truck. It's a pumper tanker. It's got CAFS [compressed air foam system] which is compressed air, foam, so instead of using just straight water, you use water, air, and foam; holds 2,000 gallons of water. It has a 1,250 gallon-a-minute pump on it so you can empty it in a hurry. With CAFS it's like pumping 10,000 gallons. So now we go to a country run and by the time the first tanker gets there to help us, if it's a big one, we're still running. Before, a minute later we were empty, waiting for something. So if you didn't knock it down in the first minute or two, it was all over.

I had a picture of a truck that we bought from Spartan [Motors, Charlotte, MI], 1984, I believe. I actually went down and picked it up, myself and Todd Dietrich, and one of the city commissioners said, "That thing is \$130,000. You'll never get another one, so take care of it." The last one we just bought was \$499,000 and our ladder truck, maybe while I'm the chief, will be replaced, and they're \$1,000,000 so I'm taking donations.

I guess what I'm trying to say is, we started out from a bell to now we have just pagers, phones. I imagine someday we'll go to just phones. Why have two things on your belt when you can have just one? They say they're not totally good yet but they've never not gone off so it's really been nice. Also, I was very fortunate when I became chief. All of our guys are very highly educated. Everybody has Firefighter I and II, Hazmat, Medical First Responder, just a whole bunch of stuff, and it is so nice to not have to help each guy do something. They just sorta run their own show. You've gotta be there for a little of it, but I'll



tell you what--very well-educated group. They do a wonderful job. I can't say enough for them.

Thank you for having me and I'll answer any questions if anybody has any.

Phillips: Tell us exactly what areas you cover from your department.

Mazzolini: Now we cover the city of St. Johns, Greenbush Twp., Bingham Twp., and half of Bengal. Fowler and us share Bengal. We go to Francis Rd. and they come to Francis Rd.

Julie Peters: When our neighbor's garage blew up and our house started to melt, you guys were there in three minutes. I was never so happy to see anybody in my life!

Mazzolini: Great! I wasn't there. I was out of town. I can't take any credit for that one but if we had a phone, he would have seen that I was out of town. Okay. Thank you.

Phillips: I think we've come to the final person on our list for tonight and Ron, that would be you. Ron, I'd like you to have you tell us a little bit more about things that go on at the museum if they missed things earlier. Give us low-down on what's going on over there and then you have some other information for us. He [William McCarthy, Asst. Dir. of the Museum] did a pretty good job but if you think of anything he missed, why just say it. I will tell you, while Ron is coming up here, that everybody who works in the museum, at the archives, or are trustees on the boards, are all volunteers. There's no money coming into their pockets. They're all just people who have a heart for history and wanting to preserve it for the next generations. We always can use more volunteers. You may have noticed that some of us up here are getting a little bit gray-haired. So I just want you to know that we'll take other persons.

Matson: I don't know what else I can say about the museum but we've made a lot of improvements in the museum in the last couple of years and I mean some major improvements. We've replaced all of our sidewalks. We have a lot of new lighting inside of the museum. If you haven't been to the museum, it's really an interesting place. We have three buildings chock full of Clinton Co. history. As was mentioned before, today we had 56 people that came through there and we got a lot of compliments so if you're at all interested in history and haven't been to the museum, you really should make an effort to come and see us.

(Ron starts talking about a series of slides being projected to a screen in background.)

Percy Patterson was my first subject here. I don't think you mentioned that, but he was picked to be Clinton County's first motorcycle patrolman in 1925 out of a pool of 30 applicants. Percy was all over the county with that motorcycle but I think he spent a lot of his time on that new cement road between St. Johns and

Lansing, you know, trying to slow down those speeders that were headed up north and wanted to make up some time before they got in that sand road up by Houghton Lake. Anyhow, that was how he began his career with the sheriff department. He was voted sheriff in 1949 and served until, I believe, 1972.

There's one thing I'll say about when Crazy Jack was here. When he left Crazy Jack left a note in his cell to Percy. I'm going to read this part of it here. It says, "Goodbye, old tiger." Oh, isn't that cool? "Goodbye, old tiger. In case I don't have a chance to say it before leaving or if I'm too stubborn to say it, I want you to know that everything is appreciated. So thank you for being nice." You know, this is all after he almost broke his arm and everything. I thought that was pretty interesting.

Bert [Albert L.] Mills was a night watch in Elsie. During the depression this guy wore many hats. He run a silent movie theater in the 1920's, I believe. He was a scout master for the Boy Scouts. In the 1920's he formed a group of male singers that were called, The Melody Men, and they did a 23-week run at WJIM Radio in Lansing back then. He was a pretty interesting guy that's contributed a lot to the Elsie community.

Reed Hall: In 1931 Reed Hall began in the St. Johns police department as a night watch and in 1942 he became the chief of police. I don't know what he's telling this kid. He's probably saying, "You know, you really shouldn't ride your bicycle on downtown sidewalks." Anyhow, he was really well liked by the kids of St. Johns. Reed died prematurely in 1949 and that was quite a shock to everyone and especially the kids because they all loved him. At his funeral there was a spray of flowers with a card that read, "To Reed Hall from the kids of St. Johns." How's that for a tribute to a fine man and a great police officer?

What we're looking at here is a hand pumping fire engine. They call them hand tubs. They were a great advancement over the bucket brigade but it was still a lot of work. They call them hand tubs and this hand tub you're looking at was actually the one that St. Johns got from the Detroit Fire Department way back in 1860. In 1896 they sold it to Maple Rapids and it took like 14 guys to operate this thing, about seven guys on each side. They would pump this thing until they collapsed and then they'd run another 14 guys on while these other guys were resting and drinking water, or whatever. Even though it was a huge advancement over the bucket brigade, it was still a lot of work.

Here's a photograph of a St. Johns Fire Department showing the hook and ladder wagon. That's a Silsbee steam fire engine that's being drawn by a team of horses. This Silsbee engine was a huge advancement over the hand pumper. The hook and ladder wagons and the hose wagons were actually drawn to the fire by hand by the firemen. Here is a drawing of a Silsbee steam fire engine just like the one St. Johns had that they called it the third size. They call it the "crane neck" style because the steering wheels can be turned completely and pass underneath the

frame of the fire engine and you could turn this around in the length of the engine. These things were beautiful. There was a lot of nickel plating on them and, of course, the firemen kept them spotless just like they do on their engines today. I'm sure the firemen must've been thrilled when they got this.

Here is a 1918 Triangle truck manufactured in St. Johns, equipped with chemical firefighting apparatus. It was sent to the Obenchain-Boyer Co. in Logansport, Indiana, and equipped with this chemical firefighting equipment. If you've seen this truck today, you probably wouldn't recognize it as a Triangle truck because the Triangle truck badge is missing. The badge on the front of this fire truck has been replaced. The Triangle badge has been replaced with an Obenchain-Boyer badge. So if you've seen this truck today, you probably wouldn't know it was a Triangle truck but that's a real piece of local history. If there would've been a historical society back in the 1950's when they got rid of that, they never would've got away with it.

This is the St. Johns Mfg. Co. that was located along the railroad tracks east of Clinton Ave. There was a fire here in 1895 that was one of the most devastating fires ever to hit St. Johns. It was probably the beginning of the end of this table factory in St. Johns. This is a view of the factory before the fire and here it is after the fire. You can see the devastation that took place there. Owosso had a Silsby steam engine just like ours and a telegram was sent to Owosso asking for help. They sent their Silsby steam engine on a special train to St. Johns. It just consisted of an engine, a flat car carrying the Silsby fire engine, and a caboose carrying the firemen. When this train went through Ovid at a high rate of speed, there was a crowd that had gathered there and they threw up a cheer—just an amazing moment in history. Of course, a lot of damage was done. This is the office portion of the table factory. It was called the St. Johns Mfg. Co. at that time. A little while after this fire, there was a restructuring and they changed their name to the St. Johns Table Co. This was one of the worst fires and the most far-reaching effects of any fire that ever happened in St. Johns because this factory eventually moved to Cadillac. The part we're looking at now was the office building. The finishing department and the office building and the dry kilns are completely destroyed, the entire operation, also the Whipple Harrow Co. There was a harrow company that rented part of that building and so that was destroyed also. There was no insurance on this. After the panic of 1893, Robert M. Steel, who had financed this table factory almost completely, went through some bad times. He had a rather a rather sad ending to his life.

I'd like to leave you with one thought about Robert M. Steel. I was wondering one time what kind of a town St. Johns would have been if Robert M. Steel had not made this his home. Just think about it for a minute. There would've been no Steel Hotel and possibly no table factory because he organized this company and financed it with about 90% of his money. Of course, his son sponsored the St. Johns Bicycle Band. How much history would we have lost if Robert M. Steel had not settled in St. Johns? That's about all I have for this evening.

Phillips: Thank you. Ron. I hope you all learned a little bit of something that you didn't already know tonight and I want to again, or maybe I didn't do it before-- You want to look on that website, <[DeWittLibrary.org/CCHS](http://DeWittLibrary.org/CCHS)>, Clinton Co. Historical Society. Feel free to call them; feel free to email; check out what they've got already there. You've got those little slips on the table. If you think of something that you would like to have us let you know more about, write it down on those slips and hand into us or leave it on the table. We'll get it picked up when we pick up things because we would like to help you find out what you would like to know about also.