



The Wadsworth Area Historical Society



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The Wadsworth Area Historical Newsletter

Volume 7

DECEMBER 2021

Issue 9

BIG CHRISTMAS GIFT

By Caesar Carrino

About seventy-five years ago and continuing for a few years thereafter, the City of Wadsworth gave all its residents a much-cherished Christmas gift: Cancellation of the December electric bill. This meant that people who would bedeck their halls with boughs of holly, greens of the fir tree and pine cones because doing so with lights might be too expensive, didn't need to be concerned about the cost of electricity to beautify their homes for Christmas. Efficient lighting was not available then as it is now. Burning lights for about a month or more could add a considerable cost to the electric bill.

To know how this practice developed, we must explore the history of electric distribution in Wadsworth starting in 1901, when Bill Artman, E. J. Young, B.F. Sonnanstine, Jacob Rickert, John Richards, C. M. Werntz and Oliver Nolf formed a stock company. They had plans to bring some of the 'modern' conveniences, such as electricity, water and sewer to the growing community.

Their first venture was not electric, however, since there was almost nothing for which to use electricity. They concentrated, instead, on water, an absolute necessity for human life to exist. In 1907, *Wadsworth Power and Light* bought the *R. E. Weaver Waterworks* that laid wooden pipes to carry spring water from Brouse's Hill –where Route 261 and Summit Street now meet – to the center of town in 1880.

Before that, people depended on wells they dug. In 1947, when this writer was a junior at Wadsworth High School, he and a couple friends were strolling the square during lunchtime and stopped to watch some men digging ditches to install new water pipes. Upon seeing a piece of wooden pipe, he asked the workers to not destroy it, but to preserve it for historical purposes. The workers complied and that piece of wooden pipe now hangs on the wall at Fire Station Number One.

Wadsworth Power and Light recognized that electricity was beginning to become more useful, so it built a new building on the corner of Broad and Auble Streets in 1904, to house a water retention reservoir and a steam-driven electric generator. Having electricity and water in the same building was convenient, since pumps that distributed the water to homes would freeze during the winter. To overcome this, one of the workers built a crude but effective heater that stood about five feet high and four feet wide. The 'coil' was a long piece of resistant metal that was attached to a positive and negative electrical terminal, and, when connected to the generator, created heat sufficient to keep the pump from freezing.

As the need for electricity began to grow, so did the ideas in the minds of the people who made decisions about how they were going to distribute it. The City fathers felt it would be better for the Village to provide electricity, since they could do so without making a profit on it as was the case with the private company, so in 1916, the Village purchased *Wadsworth Power and Light* that now included water, electricity and sewer.

Use of electricity began to grow but few people in Wadsworth knew much about electricity, so after a couple years of generating its own power, the Village ceased to do so and purchased it wholesale from Ohio Edison. They then passed the wholesale price on to Village residents, providing a savings of about 40 percent. Since electricity was considerably cheaper now, the Village installed streetlights from the square to the railroad tracks and then, later, a block up High Street when Dick Hunsberger petitioned the Village to do so. Later, T. Wolbach paid for paving the next block north so he would have a hard surface in front of his photography studio.

When Rural Electrification became a reality in Wadsworth in the mid-1920's, Village linemen installed the poles, wire and lines into their buildings. Each spring, one of the workers in the Village would go to the many farms and place a heavy bar between the two terminals at the meter to 'clean out the power lines'. Personal interviews with some of the people who were the recipient of this 'advanced knowledge' about having to 'clean out the power lines' confessed that their electricity came in much better after the worker left. Little could convince some householders that this was totally insane.

During WWII, lighting for Christmas was discouraged since it was visible from the air, and, in the event of an enemy attack, the lights would give enemy planes an advantage. Following the war, however, Christmas lighting became a contest, so to speak, with one household trying to outdo the other. It was at this point that the City of Wadsworth, which had been purchasing power from Ohio Edison for twenty-five years, determined that, even though they were charging much less for electricity than other communities, they should not make a profit. At the end of the year, the City Service Director, who was in charge of electric distribution, would determine that people could void their December bill. This was the case for several years thereafter and stopped when many policies and laws changed regarding the cost of electrical distribution. One of the main changes came when electric power was deregulated several years ago. This not only impacted 'free' December, but resulted in having to pay a little more for electricity than in previous years. Nonetheless, Wadsworth electricity is still cheaper than in neighboring communities because of our association with *American Municipal Power*, a consortium of cities in Ohio and nearby states that purchases power wholesale and passes the savings on to the residents – a Christmas gift that keeps on giving all year long.



News and Updates:

- The Blue Tip Festival has generously donated \$2,000 to the WAHS at their yearly ceremony. This money will be used toward several current and future projects. This organization has been very generous to our organization in the past.
- December's program will be presented by the Owens family. They operate the historic cider mill in River Styx. This program should draw a large crowd!
- Please note the Christmas message found in this newsletter. It was written by the famous poet Edward Rowland Sills (1841- 1887). What makes this especially meaningful is he once taught school in one of the one-room schoolhouses in Wadsworth Township from 1867-1889. He moved on to become the superintendent of the Cuyahoga Falls schools. Later, he became a professor of English at the University of California. Search his name online for more information and read some of his poetry!
- A Lifetime Membership plaque will be installed in the museum in January. Names of lifetime members of the WAHS will be included. December is the last opportunity for lifetime membership at a cost of \$100. Starting in January the lifetime membership will be increased to \$200!
- Please stop by the museum in December and enjoy the Christmas decorations! A big "thank you" goes out to members Fran Wiedey, George & Denise Uhler for putting up the decorations!
- Some great speakers are presenting programs in 2022. They include Dwight Powers, Bob Gerberich, Mike Burg and Bill Beck. These names may be familiar to many of you.
- Just a reminder that the museum is open each Saturday morning from 9:30 - 11:30 AM. The museum will be closed on Dec. 25 and January 1 for the holidays!

Calendar of Events

Dec. 3 - First Friday. The museum will be open from 5:30-8:30 PM

Dec. 8 - WAHS General Meeting starting at 7:30 PM at the Wadsworth Library. Program: The History of the River Styx Cider Mill by Ken Owens.

Jan. 7- First Friday. The museum will be open from 5:30-8:30 PM.

Jan. 12 - WAHS General meeting starting at 7:30 PM at the Wadsworth Library. Program: The History of the Brick Industry by Dwight Powers (former owner of the old D.H. & L.)

Feb. 4- First Friday. The museum will be open from 5:30-8:30 PM

Feb. 9- WAHS General meeting starting at 7:30 PM at the Wadsworth Library. Program: Businessman Bob Gerberich and his 65 year old business.



Historical House



Ohio Magazine 2021

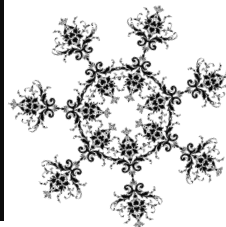


Gazebo Christmas 2020



I send my thoughts afar, and let
them paint your Christmas Day
at home.

~ Edward Rowland Sill



Sill - Christmas Greeting



River Styx Cider Mill

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Join us on Facebook at [wadsworthareahistoricalociety](https://www.facebook.com/wadsworthareahistoricalociety)**

The Johnson House Historical Museum is open each Saturday morning from 9:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

ADMINISTRATION

Officers

President	Roger L. Havens
Vice President	Bob DeLong
Secretary	Denise Uhler
Treasurer	Judy Hornoff Turner

Trustees (elected to serve for 3 years and no more than 5 trustees unless voted upon)

Micheala Johanson (2021)
Arlene Steinkerchner (2021)
John Sharkey (2020)
George Uhler (2021)
Denise Uhler (2021)

Committees

Programs:	Bob DeLong
Acquisitions/Collections:	Fran Wiedey
Museum & Preservation:	Fran Wiedey, Roger Havens, Betty Gairing, & Sue Osterland, Kathie Thompson, Ann Hudson
Outreach:	Micheala Johanson & Roger Havens
Finance/Fundraisers:	Judy Turner & Micheala Johanson
Membership:	Kathy and Jim Thompson
Monthly Newsletter:	Caesar Carrino & Roger Havens

THE WADSWORTH AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP FORM 2021

If you have not already renewed your membership, you may do so by filling out the form below for 2021 Membership. Please mail the membership form and payment to the Wadsworth Area Historical Society, P. O. Box 326, Wadsworth, OH 44282. Checks payable to The Wadsworth Area Historical Society.

DUES

_____ Senior Member (60 and Older)	\$8.00
_____ Adult Member	\$10.00
_____ Family Membership	\$20.00
_____ Lifetime Member	\$100.00
_____ Please check if information below is a change from previous years.	
_____ Please check if you are a NEW member.	

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____