



Lyons-Muir Historical Society President Wilma Ackerson looks at a photo of her graduating class from 1940.

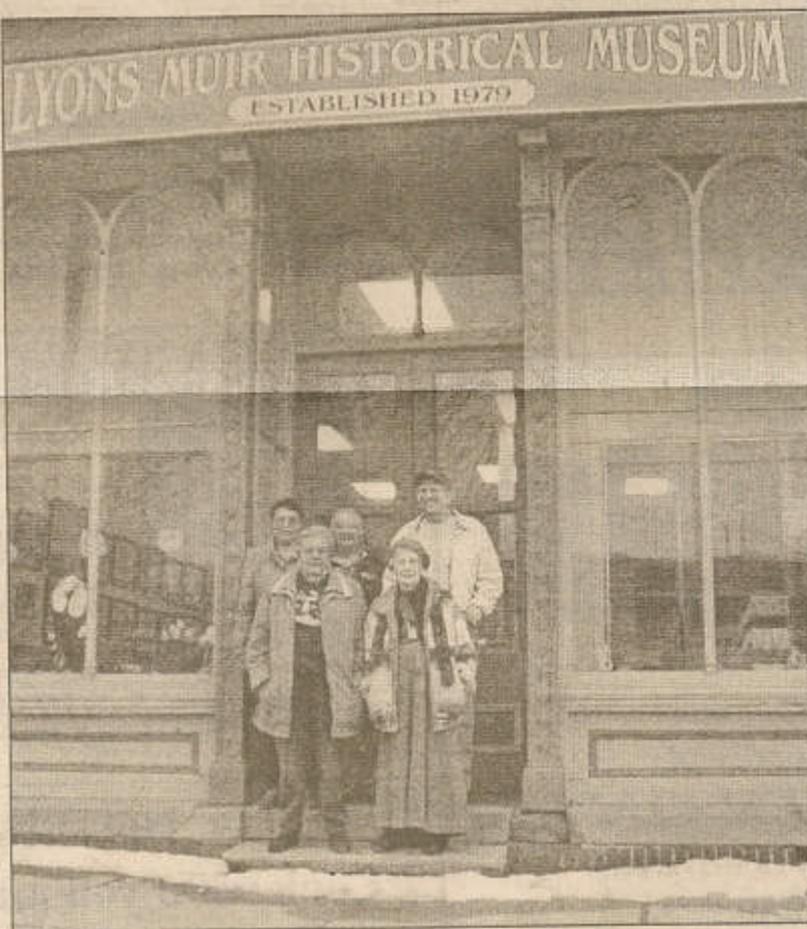
# Lyons-Muir Historical Society celebrates 26 years in April

**LYONS** — American author George Santayana once said, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

The Lyons-Muir Historical Society would agree. Of course, that famous saying assumes a negative connotation to the past, while the Lyons-Muir folks prefer to focus on the positive.

"We really want to promote the history of this area, which is much more interesting than people realize," said Lyons-Muir Historical Society member Jon Houserman, a native of Ionia who recently purchased a Victorian-style, historically significant home in downtown Lyons. "We felt an obligation to learn more and share an understanding of the history of this area when we bought our home here."

The history of Lyons and Muir is the history of its people — people like current Historical Society member Wilma Ackerson (who was featured in a recent Sentinel-Standard article for being 81 years old and "still going strong"), and other members with surnames like Babcock, Cook, Fahey, Haight, McQuillan, Rogers, Swiler



Members of the Lyons-Muir Historical Society stand in front of their museum in Lyons. They are, front row, from left, Louise Cook, Wilma Ackerson; back row, Harriet McQuillan, Gary McQuillan and Jon Houserman.

and Wood.

"A lot of interesting people have lived here," said Ackerson. "Of course, Lucius Lyon is the most famous. He was a prominent surveyor who plotted the village in 1836.

And four men founded the Village of Muir in 1854: Ambrose L. Soule, Benjamine Soule, Judge Robinson and Byron Robinson."

The Lyons-Muir Historical Society held its first meeting

### Interesting facts about Lyons and Muir

- President James A. Garfield preached in Ionia and Muir in 1861.

- The first newspaper published in Lyons and the second paper published in the county was the Lyons Herald, started in 1855.

- There was once a popular stage route from Detroit to Grand Rapids, via Lansing, Lyons and Ionia in the days of 1846 and after.

- Muir's first doctor-in-residence was Dr. W.H. Thomas from 1858 to 1859, until he moved his practice to Ionia.

- The post office in Muir was established as Montrose Station on Sept. 12, 1857. Its name was changed to Muir on Feb. 15, 1859.

in April 1979 at the Muir Civic Center. Today, the organization boasts more than 40 members and has as its goals the preservation of local landmarks and the collection of items of past history of the area for future generations.

The Lyons-Muir Historical Society dedicated its Historical Museum in 1987 at the current location in the storefront adjacent to the Lyons Public Library. According to the July 9, 1987, historical society newsletter, "Keynote speaker for the ceremony was William Weisgerber of rural Ionia whose grandfather operated a furniture manufacturing shop and a funeral parlor in Lyons near the turn of the century. Weisgerber shared some of his mother's anecdotes of growing up in Lyons, then said, 'I feel such gratitude to the people of Lyons-Muir for preserving the heritage you have here.'"

The museum currently contains a wealth of local historical artifacts, including a wonderful collection of Spanish-American War memorabilia, which was donated by the daughter of Harry Gardner, who, according to Ackerson, was one of the longest-living Spanish-American veterans and who lived in Lyons.



Wilma Ackerson plays an old organ donated to the Lyons-Muir Historical Society.

# She's 81 — and still going strong



By RYAN JELTEMA  
*Sentinel-Standard writer*

**IONIA TOWNSHIP** — Wilma Ackerson is a craft diva of sorts.

"You name a craft and I've probably got knowledge of it," said Ackerson, age 81, whose walls are dotted with all kinds of homemade arts and crafts along with certificates honoring her four decades of service to the community.

For more than 40 years, Ackerson has taught men and women, young and old how to snip, fold, stitch and color all sorts of materials into home-spun crafts they can be proud of. Now she is ready to slow down — or at least her family says she is.

Ackerson recently got a new dog, a Pembroke Corgi named Sara Jane.

"She has to stay home now," Ackerson's daughter Marjorie said.

To that, Wilma just responds with a simple "ha ha ha."

For 41 years she taught 4-H

clubs for girls and people of all ages for 44 years at Lake Louise Baptist Camp near Boyne Falls.

Her specialty is leather craft, stemming from her 17 years working at the now-closed Chrysler trim plant near Lyons. There, she operated a leather press that formed interior door panels and performed light maintenance around the factory.

When Chrysler closed the plant in 1979, Ackerson suddenly found herself with a lot of free time and 500 pounds of unused leather the company gave her as a "parting gift." She decided to use that time and leather to help the community.

She landed a job at the Ionia County Intermediate School District as a para-professional for students with cognitive and learning disabilities. Then, she became involved with the Independent Living Center on East Main Street in Ionia.

# Going

The center teaches life skills to mentally impaired persons ages 20 to 26. Ackerson taught there for 24 years, showing students how to make crafts, including something special to give at Christmas.

She also worked with students at the Ionia YMCA pool for 10 years.

Summers, Ackerson shares her talent at the camp as Arts and Crafts Director for several weeks. Ten camps are held for groups ranging from kindergarten to senior citizens. Last summer, she worked at seven of the 10, teaching 20 to 110 students each week.

The range in ages makes it

difficult for Ackerson to find interesting projects.

"You have to adjust your thinking," she said. "What craft are we going to do this week that is age-appropriate?"

Seniors are the hardest to teach "because they've gone everywhere and done everything," Ackerson said. "They've already learned all those crafts, so I have to find something new."

Her knowledge of leather craft went beyond the workplace to an adult-education class. Since then, she has acquired numerous other crafts through a barter system of sorts with other crafters.

She taught them about leather, and they shared their craft in return, including tin punching, bead patterns or

painting.

Ackerson says her secret to staying active is exercise. She walks a lot and swims at the YMCA twice a week.

Although, she plans to cut back this year, Ackerson still hopes to help others in some capacity. Last year was the first in four decades she didn't lead a 4-H group, but still serves as a resource for others.

She removed her name from ICISD's substitute teaching list last year, but still teaches a few crafts. She still plans to host an annual picnic for students this summer at her house.

At Lake Louise, she will continue helping in the craft room that now bears her name — The Wilma Ackerson Craft Center. And she won't be walking very far at camp, since they furnish her with a golf cart.

Closer to home, Ackerson stays plenty busy playing the organ and teaching Sunday School at Palo Baptist Church. She is also a member of the Lyons Eastern Star Ladies and North Plains Cemetery Association.

And finally, this year she will participate on a panel appointed by the Ionia Free Fair to look for ways to return the fair to its agricultural roots.

## Coming Soon ...

### Ionia Area Hospice

will soon be moving to a new location to better serve the community.

Present location:

117 North Depot St.

New location:

601 E. Washington

(across from Ionia Co. Memorial Hospital)



Hospice of Lansing

Ionia Area Hospice

616.527.0681