

# Munster Historical Society

## Moving Forward to Preserve the Past



**Elected at the 1.11.24 General Meeting at the Munster History Museum, congratulations to the 2024 slate of officers:**

- President - Carole Cornelison
- V.P. - September Alexander
- Secretary - Andrea Miller
- Treasurer - Beth Palmer
- Director - Immediate Past President - Kelly Benoit
- Director - Ken Schoon
- Director - Cindy Badten
- Director - Diane Kitchell

### **Black History Month - spotlight**

Katherine "Kitty" Burns, also known as Kitty Gibson. The first African American woman that lived in what today we know as Munster in 1835. source: Cindy Ellison Badten, 2.15.24 facebook post. cont.pg 3

### **Women's History Month - spotlight**



Carleen O'Connor Rivera's painting "Iced Over" was chosen to hang in the Indiana Legislature Offices

## Did you know?

"It's the oldest structure in Munster" according to Ken Schoon. photo credit - Diane Kitchell

It's Milepost 284 on the old Columbus, Chicago and Indiana Railway (CC&IC) railroad in Munster Indiana. It is the exact distance to Columbus, Ohio. Pictured here on the Pennsy Greenway bike path at Centennial Park, Munster Parks Dept. is restoring this important historical structure. cont.pg 4

### MARCH PROGRAM

19

OFFICER GHRIST

6:00pm

### APRIL PROGRAM

20

EARTH DAY @  
HERITAGE PARK

9am-2pm

### MAY PROGRAM

14

FR. MARQUETTE

by Author Ken  
Schoon.4:30-5:30

## President's Corner

by Carole Cornelison

Welcome to our Munster Historical Society Newsletter, "Moving Forward to Preserve the Past"! The Munster History Museum is located in the 1910 Kaske House on the SE. corner of Ridge Road and Columbia Ave., which was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1998. Built on the woodland site of the Brass Tavern & Inn, established in 1845, now known as Heritage Park, the Museum offers visitors an opportunity to "step back in time in the heart of town" and learn about local history and nature.

We have several exciting events and programs forthcoming in 2024. March 19th - Officer Ghrist, History of Munster Police and safety presentation. April 20th Earth Day @ Heritage Park. May 14th Fr. Marquette by Ken Schoon. See Attached Flyers for Program information.

Come Join us! Hope to see you soon!  
Kind Regards, Carole Cornelison, President



### **"Bringing History Outside" Girl Scout Gold Award Project by Munster Junior Historical Society member.**

With the warm early spring, check out the new outdoor history path at Heritage Park, created by Munster Junior Historical Society member Dorothy Lakshamanamurthy for her Girl Scout Gold Award project last summer. It's a great way to exercise and learn some history! Congratulations on earning your Gold Award Dorothy and best of luck in your future!

The Munster Junior Historical Society was founded by Dr. Louise Chicke-Wolfe.

For more information - Like us on Facebook - Munster Historical Society  
Become a member of the Munster Historical Society by sending in your membership form found on our website - "About Us" / Membership Form.



Newsletter editor - Diane Kitchell @ kitchelld@gmail.com

# Munster Historical Society

## Moving Forward to Preserve the Past

February 15, 2024

Author: Cindy Ellison Badten

In honor of Women's History Month and Black History Month I would like to remember the life of Katherine "Kitty" Burns, also known as Kitty Gibson. The first African American woman that lived in what today we know as Munster. She arrived here 1835-36. David Gibson and his sister Elizabeth had come from Columbus, Ohio along with his brother Thomas and Thomas's wife Anna Maria Neil. David obtained a license from the county on May 2, 1836 to run a Tavern on the Sand Ridge Road, today's southeast corner of Ridge Road and Columbia Av., now known as Heritage Park.

Some Lake County histories state that Kitty came with them from Columbus, Ohio where she was born in 1824 and according to an interview with the Hammond Times on December 27, 1906 she says the Gibson's took her in and raised her. So in 1836 she was a child about 12 years old.

She lived with the Gibson's the rest of their lives out living both David and Elizabeth. First in the Munster Tavern that became known as the Brass Tavern and then near the Bailly Homestead in Porter Co. where it appears that David was most likely working at the Bailly Tavern/Inn as he is in the 1840 US census living next in line to other Bailly family members. By the 1850 census he and his sister and Kitty are conducting a Public Tavern on the banks of the Grand Calumet River. Next to them to the south is the railroad bed for the new Michigan Central Railroad coming from the east. David had the forethought to open an Inn for the railroad workers and the travelers who would need a place to eat and stay before taking the stagecoach west as this was the end of the line for the railroad at that time.

Today's Gibson Yards and Gibson Woods are both named for this wonderful family. It was here that Kitty would tell fascinating tales of pioneer life in northwest Indiana. It was in this location that the Gibson's also took in a man by the name of Davis who had suffered a heat stroke as a child which left him mentally impaired. After David and Elizabeth's death Kitty and Mr. Davis found comfort in each other's company, she taking care of him until he died.

David Gibson died without a will in 1870 and his 47.5 acres were divided up between his relatives. I presume they were the children and grandchildren of his brother Thomas who with his wife Anna Maria ran their own Inn on one of the stage routes in today's Tolleston area of Gary. Kitty was given the old Inn and 2.5 acres. She sold jellies, and jams and huckleberries, butter and eggs to survive.

Kitty died March 14, 1914 and is buried in the Hessville cemetery, her gravesite is unknown. According to the US census bureau in 1840 there were 2 African American citizens living in Lake County. 1850 there was only 1, 1860 there were 5. 1870 there were 3. And in 1900 there was 54. And then in 1910 due to the opening of the steel mills there were over 500. See Kitty's death certificate below.

# Munster Historical Society

## Moving Forward to Preserve the Past

According to Ken Schoon - The milepost at what is now Centennial Park notes that it is 284 miles from (or to) Columbus, Ohio. (Which of course is the exact distance to Columbus still today.). The distance to Cincinnati is about 270 miles.

It would have been put in place about 1868 when the tracks belonged to the Columbus, Chicago & Indiana Central Railway (CC&IC). As there are no other extant mileposts along that old rail route, it must have been accidentally skipped when the others were pulled out. Being all rusted and in the woods for more than 150 years. it was hard to see, even from the new bike path. That invisibility (and the fact that it was held in place by a large concrete base) allowed it to remain in place until it was "discovered" in 2022.



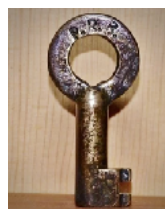
Steam locomotives like this one below, once pulled manifest freight trains through our Village of Lansing. source: Lansing Historical Society - Facebook post, Jan 12, 2024



photo credit: Lansing



It was the Munster Park Department that put in the circular concrete pad and had the milepost sand blasted and painted in its original colors (or non-colors) black and white. Additional signage is planned to tell the story, according to Munster Parks Director Mark Heintz.



This is an old brass switch key from the Pennsylvania Railroad. source: Lansing Historical Society - Facebook post, Jan 12, 2024

It's all cleaned up and it's the oldest structure in Munster.



photo credit: Diane Kitchell