



## MUSEUM MESSAGE

Ohio's Oldest Museum February 2017  
[www.firelandsmuseum.com](http://www.firelandsmuseum.com)

### Firelands Historical Society Plans Bicentennial Event

As Norwalk celebrates its 200th birthday in 2017, the Firelands Historical Society is preparing an appropriate historical event for the occasion. On April 22, 2017, the Society will present an "Evening with Platt and Sally Benedict" at St. Paul Episcopal Church, 87 West Main Street, at 7 p.m. This evening will feature not only a reenactment by Platt & Sally but will include a short history of the era and concert music on the A. B. Chase grand piano. It will be followed by a catered reception in Benedict Chapel and a concert selection, written especially for the occasion by a local student. This celebration of our founders is timely as it not only commemorates their settlement of Norwalk but also occurs in the site of their worship. Only 200 tickets will be sold at various locations in Norwalk. Further information can be obtained from the Firelands Historical Society at 419-668-6038 or from the chair person, John Schumm, at 419-668-2869.

Do not miss this presentation as it is like the mythical Scottish village of "Brigadoon." It is occurring now and will not appear again for another 100 years.

#### Programs

Feb 15, 2017

The Firelands Historical Society will present a slide show featuring vintage pictures of Norwalk's town and events to commemorate the Norwalk Bicentennial.

Mar 15, 2017

Jordon Horowitz, a member of the Firelands Research and Recovery Metal Detecting Group will discuss and show items of interest which were found locally.

April 19, 2017

Frank Lopez, manager of the Old Woman Creek Natural Estuarine Research Reserve, will discuss its history and facts about the Reserve.

**Please remember to send us your change of mailing address and E-mail. Also, if you would like to have your newsletter sent by E-mail, please let us know. Send information of change to [curator@firelandsmuseum.com](mailto:curator@firelandsmuseum.com).**

## Alton Thomas, Norwalk Actor

A diary was recently found in our collection without any identification. Upon reading some of the activities they appeared to have been written by an actor, but who? The first entry was dated, January 1, 1908 in Ogden, Utah. As luck had it, one of the daily notations said the stock company would be playing at the Gilger Theater in Norwalk, Ohio on December 28, 1909. To our surprise, the program was preserved in our archival collection. The actor was Alton Thomas who had a small part in the play "The Lily and the Prince". Articles about the play were written in the Norwalk newspapers. Alton Thomas, the son of Judge George and Emma Thomas, was born in Norwalk in 1881. In one of his notations, he mentioned that he had been with the Orpheum Stock Company from at least 1904. It appears this company traveled by train from coast to coast giving performances. The newspaper printed that Alton had a good voice, and easy and natural manor, and would undoubtedly be able to fill roles given more opportunity of his talent. His last performance with the Orpheum Stock Company was on July 11, 1910 after which he returned to Norwalk on July 12, 1910. The next entry on August 2, 1910 said he was leaving for New York City. On August 24, 1910, he started rehearsing for the play "St. Elmo" with the first play to be presented on September 3, 1910 in Kingston, New York. He continued with this play and others until his last entry on July 25, 1911 in which he returned home to Norwalk. It is unknown if he continued to travel or gave up his acting at that time.

From his obituary we are able to learn that he had been a past exalter ruler of the local Elks Lodge in Norwalk, had been active in the theatrical world for many years and was the founder of the Shoestring Players, Norwalk, and for several years was employed by the local A&P Store. He died in his home on Sunday, September 19, 1954 in Washington, D.C. It appears he had never married.



### The Shoestring Players

The Shoestring Players were started in 1931 by a group of young Norwalk people with nothing much to do, so they turned their idle time into a creative channel and started a little theater group. Since this was during depression time and they had no money, they called their theater group the "Shoestring Players". They first met in the studio of a local photographer, Van Bateham, and presented their plays in the Norwalk High School auditorium. With the plays performed in the High School this resulted in had work as they had to set and then take down props immediately after each show, which was about every six weeks. Chief promoters of the group were Mrs. Dean Sheldon, Don Williams, Elden King and of course, Alton Thomas.

As time went on the group grew and flourished and they were finally able to meet the rent of a meeting room that had a small stage. It was here they were able to present one act plays, donations appreciated, and rehearse for their three act productions which were still presented at the high school

Due to the lack of young men during World War II the group suspended for a time. For a few years in the late 1940's, the Shoestring Players had a summer theater with high school students taking the acting roles. Some of the directors were: Georgia Arthur, Jo Laycock, Louis Frey and Kay Price, just to name a few. In 1950, James Overhuls reactivated the group with the play "Arsenic and Old Lace". They still had no real home of their own. Meanwhile, Milan started a Theater Guild and the two groups worked together to present plays cabaret style in the Milan Town Hall.

During the years, several of their members turned professional, they were: Lynn Sheldon (Barnaby, **RED** arrow), Harry Faye, a comedian, and Vince Hipp.

After about 45 years in existence the group disbanded in the late 1970's. But in 2008, the spirit was rekindled and a new group of energized people restarted the group and presented several plays.



## 2016 - Firelands Historical Society Stewards

On behalf of the Firelands Historical Society, I would like to sincerely THANK and recognize the following members who so generously donated a total of \$13,175.00 in 2016 to the fund. Your continued tax deductible contributions to the STEWARDS program allow us to operate our SOCIETY with financial success.  
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Mary Carabin, John Elmlinger, John  
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Firelands Historical Society  
4 Case Ave.  
P.O. Box 572  
Norwalk, OH 44857-0572

Firelands Historical Society Officers:

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Mary Carabin, Secretary  
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The Firelands Historical is proud to be a member  
of these fine organizations:

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Lake Erie Firelands Tourist Council  
Norwalk Economic Development Corporation  
Ohio Association of Historical Societies & Museums  
Ohio Genealogical Society  
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Annual Membership dues:

Individual - \$20  
Husband and Wife - \$35  
Business - \$100

Life Membership dues:

Individual - \$500 (or \$50 annually for 10 years)  
Business - \$1000 (or \$100 annually for 10 years)

Send Correspondence to:

The Firelands Historical Society  
P.O. Box 572  
Norwalk, OH 44857-0572  
Museum phone: 419.668.6038

Research Center phone: 419.663.0392

E-mail: [curator@firelandsmuseum.com](mailto:curator@firelandsmuseum.com)

**Museum Hours**

**May, September and October - Saturday 10-3 and Sunday 12-4.**

**June thru August - Tuesday thru Saturday 10-3 and Sunday 12-4.**

**Closed on Monday's.**

**For group tours and other special arrangements call 419-668-6038**

**or E-mail: [curator@firelandsmuseum.com](mailto:curator@firelandsmuseum.com).**