

FRIENDS OF THE CEMETERY

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LT. FRANKLIN W. CLARK 1891-1918 MEDINA'S YOUNG AVIATOR

By Teresa Merkle

n December 1903, the Wright Brothers successfully flew an aircraft for the first time. Just eleven years later, with the outbreak of World War 1, both sides of the conflict recognized the importance of developing aircraft to gain military superiority. As the United States entered the war, the Army began recruiting brave young men to train as aviators for the flying branch of the service. It was during this time that Franklin W. Clark, a Medina resident, entered the Aviation Section of the U.S. Army Signal Corp.

Franklin W. Clark was born on September 16, 1891, in North Dakota to Franklin J. and Bertha Warner Clark. The elder Franklin J.'s parents were one of the pioneer families of Medina, who had moved to the Western Reserve from Connecticut. Following in his pioneer parents' footsteps, Franklin J. purchased a 320-acre claim in the North Dakota Territory in 1884. In 1887, he married Bertha Warner, who was born and raised in Medina, and they returned to North Dakota, where their four children were born. After spending 14 years in North Dakota, they decided to return to Medina because

they believed that educational opportunities were better here for their children.

Franklin W. graduated from Medina High School in 1910 and Oberlin College in 1915. He worked as a teacher for a total of four years, three of which were spent at Sharon High School and one year at a school in East Liverpool, Ohio. In September 1917, Franklin joined the Aviation Corps and attended the "School of Military Aeronautics" at The Ohio State University for approximately two months. Following ground school in Columbus, he spent 10 weeks at cadet flying school at Call Field, Wichita Falls, Texas. After being commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant, he was transferred to Brooks Field in San Antonio. During a visit home to Medina in May 1918, Franklin told his family that he expected to be sent overseas in about a month, but unfortunately tragedy struck soon after Franklin's return to San Antonio. On June 4, 1918 he and another pilot, Lt. Schaenkle, were involved in an accident at Brooks Field. Franklin passed away from his injuries the following day, June 5, 2018. Lt. Roy Gardner, who escorted Franklin's body from

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San Antonio to Medina, related details of the accident, and these were reported in a Medina County Gazette article dated June 14, 1918:

"Brooks Field is a new aviation field and is the finest in the country. It was only opened on April 1 and until Lieut. Clark fell to his death there had not been an accident. It is an instructor's field but, contrary to the belief prevailing among Clark's friends he was not acting as an instructor, but was qualifying himself as such."

(Editor's Note: The family continued to maintain through the years that Lt. Clark was indeed instructing Lt. Schaenkle on this fatal flight – this, according to surviving ancestor, Hank Waite.) "On Tuesday, June 4, he went up in a two-seated airplane with Lieut. Schaenkle. Clark occupied the front seat and Schaenkle the rear seat, the one on the rear seat always operating the machine. At a

height of 750 feet something went wrong and it was seen to make a spinning nose-dive crashing to the earth. In a nose dive it is always the man on the front seat who suffers and so it was with Clark. The motor, which was ahead of him was driven against him with terrific force, breaking both legs and an arm and crushing his body. Lieut. Schaenkle escaped with his life and no bones broken, but was very badly bruised. He stated that they got into an "air pocket," which is ordinarily an easy thing to escape, and that he did everything possible to correct the plunging of the machine, but strangely it did not respond and the fall to the earth resulted. Although this was the first accident at Brooks Field, as stated above, an exactly similar one occurred the same afternoon, when Lieut. John J. O'Malley, of Auburn, Mo., who was Lieut. Gardner's bunk-mate, fell a distance of 1,500 feet and was killed."

Franklin's funeral was held June 10, 1918, at his East Smith Road home with an estimated 300 people in attendance. He was buried in Section 4 at Spring Grove Cemetery. A bugler played reveille as his casket was lowered into the grave, followed by taps. Franklin was just 26 years, 8 months, and 20 days – he never made it overseas. "To face the enemy in World War 1, pilots first had to survive flight training. During most of World War 1, pilots stood a greater chance of being killed during training or in accidents than in combat. Aviation, after all, was only a few years old when the war broke out in 1914." - Smithsonian Magazine, July 2008

On June 21, 1918, the Medina County Gazette published Franklin's last letter home – written just two days before his untimely death. He wrote about life at the aviation field, the hot weather, and the activities and meals he was enjoying, but most poignantly he wrote the following:

"Some time I want to take a camera up with me and make a few snapshots from above the clouds. One can't imagine with the help of only a word picture the wonderful view one gets. These big fleecy clouds are like bunches of cotton or fluffy bails of pure white snow. And when one is flying above them he sees patches of the green country, trees, fields, roads, houses, woods, lakes, rivers, etc. down below. Some times the clouds are so large that they look like huge islands covered with snow while off around the sides one sees the green of the country stretching off and fading into the horizon. And the whole scene is changing constantly, for your ship will not stand still in the sky. You race along beside a string of clouds and then turn and come back to meet them. When one is traveling against the wind the clouds fly by very rapidly. Nearly always there are several layers of clouds. Climb up above the lower one and you find yourself between two layers of clouds. Some times they are half a mile thick, but usually the lower ones are not more than 500 to 1,000 feet thick. One does not care to fool around the large clouds at this stage of the game for of course they may hide other ships. Frequently a fellow comes tail-spinning down out of, or through a cloud. So as much as possible I try to keep out from under the large ones."

MEMORIAL DAY 2024

The chapel at Spring Grove will be open to the public on Memorial Day, which falls on May 27. You are welcome to visit the chapel before, during, or after the Memorial Day service. We extend an invitation to everyone to take a walk around the grounds and pay respects to the many soldiers who have been laid to rest there. You

can easily spot the graves marked with the American flag, which are placed there with great care by the Boy Scouts on the weekend before Memorial Day. We encourage you to visit Old Town Graveyard as well to pay tribute to soldiers buried there, some of whom served in the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812.

MAUSOLEUM ROOF UPDATE

The Friends of the Cemetery have contracted with Forest Historical Friends plan to move forward with Phase II of the mausoleum and Specialty Roofing of Broadview Heights, Ohio to replace the roof of the Spring Grove mausoleum. The project is scheduled to begin in May 2024. Once the roofing work is completed, the

project. This will involve funding the necessary interior repairs, as identified through architectural on-site observations during Phase I.



ENTRY SIGN

North Coast Sign & Lighting of Medina was tapped to design and manufacture the new entry sign to Spring Grove. The sign was installed in April and cost \$3,375, which was paid for by the Friends. We are extremely happy with the sign and its location which is just east of the main entry gate.

NEW COLUMBARIUM WALL

The city has begun construction of a new columbarium wall on the south side of Letha House Lake. This is the third such wall in the area. The 120-niche wall is expected to be completed by September. If you have any questions or would like further information, please contact the cemetery office at 330-722-9056.

RAVINE DAFFODIL BORDER

In March, we were delighted to witness the emergence of a large number of daffodils bordering the Letha House Lakes ravine. Last October, a group of dedicated volunteers braved a cold and rainy morning to plant over 600 daffodil bulbs. Among the volunteers were thirty students from Medina High School, and we truly appreciate their hard work as evidenced by the beautiful blooms this spring.

NTF SIGNS DEDICATION

On May 10th, the Friends of the Cemetery organized an event at Spring Grove Cemetery to dedicate National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom (NTF) signs that the Friends commissioned for the gravesites of H.G. and Elizabeth Blake and Lt. Col. Herman and S.A. (Martha) Treat Canfield. The Blakes and Canfields were committed abolitionists who risked their safety and freedom to advocate for the end of slavery and worked to aid freedom seekers. Those in attendance at the ceremony included Blake and Canfield family ancestors, local officials, city administrators, and members of the community. Mayor Dennis Hanwell presented a Mayoral Proclamation and Councilman Dennie Simpson delivered a proclamation on behalf of Medina City Council. Also present at the event were three fourth-grade classes from Sidney Fenn Elementary School who studied the Underground Railroad, which coincided with the dedication. Spring Grove's designation as a National Park Service NTF site is a great honor and distinction for our community and the signs will stand as a memorial to the Blakes and the Canfields and others who stood for freedom, justice, and dignity for all people. We encourage everyone to come and see the signs and pay respects to the Blakes and Canfields. The Blake and Canfield graves and NTF signs are located in Section 5 of Spring Grove Cemetery.





ARBORETUM UPDATE

Earlier this year, the Friends of the Cemetery hired Bartlett Tree Experts to prune 180 trees at Spring Grove. The cost of this service was \$45,814. Additionally, Bartlett was hired to provide a course of six treatments of plant health care for roughly 40 younger trees in the collection at a cost of \$8,796. These services include monitoring for pests and diseases, watering, deer protection, soil treatments, and organic and cultural treatments.

This year, the Friends, City of Medina, and Bartlett have decided to shift our annual tree planting program from spring to fall. This decision was made due to drought conditions during the hot summer months that have adversely affected new trees planted in the spring. Fourteen new trees are scheduled to be planted this fall, featuring a variety of species.

Don't forget to mark your calendar for our annual Arboretum Walk! This year's walk will take place on Saturday, October 19, starting at

2:00 p.m. at the Mears office building at Spring Grove. We're excited to offer a guided tour at 2:00, led by Arborist Chad Clink of Bartlett Tree Expert Company. Chad, a Certified Master Arborist, has previously led our popular tours and is dedicated to sharing his knowledge of trees and arboriculture techniques. Participants on Chad's walks come away with a better appreciation for trees, shrubs, and plants, as well as ideas for their own home gardens and yards.

If you cannot make the 2:00 walk with Chad, you are welcome to take a solo walk between 2:00 – 4:00. We will provide maps to follow, water bottles, and a scavenger hunt if you are looking for an adventure. The walk is also a great opportunity to snap that winning picture for our annual amateur photo contest!

The Arboretum Walk is a free event and open to the public. It is family, wheelchair, wagon, stroller, and pet-friendly and is held rain or shine.



Get ready to step into the past! We're excited to announce that the annual Historic Walk will take place on Saturday, June 15, 2024, at 1:00 p.m. at Spring Grove Cemetery, starting at the Spring Grove Chapel. This is your chance to explore the City's rich history and learn about the people and events that shaped it. During the walk, we'll stroll through Spring Grove, stopping at gravesites along the way to hear stories about the early residents of Medina. Some of our presenters are descendants or acquaintances of the deceased,

while others have done extensive research to bring these stories to life. Each presentation is unique and fascinating, with plenty of interesting facts, family histories, and folklore about Medina and its past residents. We hope you'll reserve this date on your calendar and join us! The walk is suitable for everyone, including those in wheelchairs, strollers, and wagons. Even friendly pets are welcome to join. We utilize a portable loudspeaker system so that everyone can hear what's being said, and we also provide cold bottled water to all participants. The program is free and open to the public. We look forward to seeing you there!

FRIENDS OF THE CEMETERY MEMBERS MEETING

The Friends of the Cemetery will be holding their Members Meeting on Sunday, September 8, 2024. The meeting will take place of H.G. and Elizabeth Blake, and Lt. Col. Herman and S.A. (Martha) at 2:00 p.m. in the Spring Grove Chapel and all members of the Friends are encouraged to attend. After the brief business meeting,

we will proceed to Section 5 of Spring Grove to visit the graves Canfield. During this visit, we will hear the inspiring story of their nomination to the National Underground Network to Freedom program.



The Friends of the Cemetery are delighted to sponsor our third annual amateur photo contest, which will be held from September 1 to October 25, 2024. Last year, we received 53 entries, and prizes were awarded in three age categories: 12 years and under, 13 years to 17 years, and adults 18 years and older.

Submitted photos will be evaluated by a panel of impartial judges based on their quality, composition, content, creativity and originality, and impact. We encourage photographers to capture a photo of

the beautiful landscape, still life, animal and plant life, and/or architecture at Spring Grove. One photograph is permitted per amateur photographer.

The winners of this year's contest will be notified by November 1. and the prizes will be awarded on November 10. The contest registration form and rules will be available on our website before September 1, 2024. We will also be sharing flyers about the contest on social media and storefronts, so keep an eye out for them!

HOLIDAY CONCERT FOR FRIENDS MEMBERS

The Friends of the Cemetery are excited to announce a holiday harp concert, featuring Harpist Courtney Young, at the Spring Grove Chapel. The concert will take place on Saturday, December 7, 2024, at 4:30 p.m. This event is exclusively for the current members of Friends and will be a reservation - only event due to the limited seating capacity of the chapel. To make a reservation, you can either call 330-591-4870 and leave your name, contact number, and the number of people in your party, or you can send an email to info@friendsofmedinacemetery.org with the same information.



A Life and a Legacy by Jeffrey Wray

his is the story of a life and a legacy. It is also the story of a town, a neighborhood, and the generations of people raised and nurtured by it.

My mother, Ella Mae, was a daughter of Medina, Ohio. She was born Ella Mae McEwen in Lexington, Kentucky in the spring of 1939. Almost from the start of her life, she was known as Baby Ella, a name distinguishing her from her namesake mother. At different points in her future, she would take on other names. Ella Mae Wray and Ella Mae Wilson, among them. At an early age, her mother and father, Ella and Samuel McEwen, moved her and their growing family from their Kentucky home

up north to Medina. Their journey was a part of a larger one known took up residence in Medfair Heights. My own earliest memories, as the Great Migration, a period of mass movement from about 1910-1970 of Black Americans relocating from the South to the North and the West. Approximately six million African Americans moved during the Great Migration, the driving force being a desire to escape the racial violence and oppression of the American South and to pursue greater economic opportunities promised in the North.

The McEwen family, which eventually grew to seven children, settled in a small Black community within Medina made up of two distinct parts. Medfair Heights, now known as Lincoln Crossing, was often a first stop for Black families coming to Medina. The one-story rows of block housing were originally built as temporary quarters for World War II factory workers, then served as post war housing for veterans and their families. Medfair was eventually handed over to Medina County as a low-income housing option. The other part of Medina's Black community was simply referred to as Bronson Street, a neighborhood encompassing parts of West Friendship, Huntington, Vine, Foundry, and Medina streets with a hard border of railroad tracks and small industry on the neighborhood's west end, including A.I. Root. Ella Mae grew up in this close-knit community in the 1940s and 50s with many families who remained there even as I came of age in the 1960s and 1970s: Medleys, Masons, Taylors, Davises, Hunters, Unions, Newsomes, Bryants, Buchanans, Martins, Colemans, Prices, Johnsons, Hendersons, Howards and Holstons, to name a few. Second Baptist Church was central to the community, and to the lives of Ella Mae and the McEwen family. Bronson Street was a nourishing neighborhood that wrapped its arms around those growing up there in Ella Mae's formative years. Medina as a whole was certainly different from the South that the McEwens and other Black families had left, but it was still a place where race, de facto and cultural segregation, were significant. While growing up my mother and other Black kids were not allowed to skate at the roller rink in Medina. My grandmother told a story of a cross burning in



the front yard of their 407 Bronson Street home after a white girl had expressed romantic interest in her classmate, Sam "Bubba" McEwen - Ella Mae's brother – a football star at Medina High School in the late 1950s. Beyond the Bronson Street neighborhood, Medina was a decidedly mixed bag for Ella Mae and its other Black residents.

A year after graduating from Medina High, Ella Mae McEwen became Ella Mae Wray. She married Joe Louis Wray in a ceremony at 407 Bronson Street in 1957. Joe had come north from Chapel Hill, Tennessee joining his brother Bill Wray in Medina and to work at a local factory. The couple

and those of my two brothers, Joe and Jonathan Wray, are from a two-bedroom apartment, at 5 Carver Drive in Medfair Heights. Back then it was a neighborhood full of children adjacent to open fields, woods, and ponds, but it was the young mothers and wives such as Ella Mae who made it a home and a community for all of us. I recall her having an affinity for the teenage girls who lived in Medfair. They would come to our house with stacks of 45 records (look it up young folks...) and sing and dance to the music with my

mother. Like many women of the era, she was a homemaker, a housewife - which we all know is more than a full-time job - but as was often the case for Black women of that period, she worked outside of the house. It was often a financial necessity. Ella Mae worked for her father's cleaning business, McEwen Cleaning. She also held various other jobs, including at Medina Hospital.

Fast forward to 1968. After just over ten years of marriage, Ella Mae and Joe had built a working-class life, a social and family life with their three young boys. I assume



Joe Louis Wray

that they looked forward to continuing to build their future. On a late May night of 1968, all of that changed. As I wrote in a previous essay about my mother, a month after the assassination of Martin Luther King, my father Joe Wray was murdered in my small hometown of Medina, Ohio, just south of Cleveland. In the blink of an eye, so many lives were changed. Ella Mae Wray went from the life she knew to that of a 29-year-old widow with three young boys and an uncertain future. I cannot pretend to know my mother's thinking in that moment, in those days of tragedy and trauma. But every life is unique. Every life confronts unexpected twists and turns. Sometimes decisions we make in critical moments carry great impact for us and for others for many years to come.

After the sudden death of her husband, Ella Mae Wray, a young widow, and single mother, decided to go to college. It was an unexpected and unusual decision in 1968 for a young Black working-class woman. Not many people from our Medina neighborhood went to college back then, let alone a woman with three small children, aged 6, 8, 10. But if nothing else Ella Mae had some foresight. The late 1960s were turbulent, political, and active times in which many - Black folks, women, and others - were insisting on change. Ella Mae deciding on college was likely in response to those urgent and insistent times. She saw that a different kind of future was possible. And in addition to all of that, it is important to note that my mother was a woman of great faith.

In her situation and her circumstances, how did she do it? How was Ella Mae Wray practically able to attend college? Only in hindsight can I even begin to understand. First and foremost, there was the loving and consistent support of a solid, active, and striving extended family. Ella Mae and her three boys moved in with her parents to the McEwen family home on Bronson Street allowing her to make the almost daily commute from Medina to Akron University from 1968 to 1972. During that period, my brothers and I would spend parts of our summers with our Wray family in Chapel Hill, Tennessee. Uncle Bill, Daddy's brother in Medina, would contribute to our support by sending his three nephews to Camp Craig in Hinckley, Ohio for summer camp every year. My father's sister, Aunt Harriet, and her husband Uncle Tom Murray, lived in Butler, Pennsylvania, a few hours from Medina, and would take me and my brothers for extended periods to be with our cousins Cindy, Tim, Gwen, and Jim. Even Carl's Barbershop in Akron, where Daddy used to take us for haircuts, gave us Wray boys free haircuts for a time. Our small Medina neighborhood, Second Baptist Church, and many friends were helpful as well. The often-repeated saying is real: it takes a village. While my mother had a plan and was determined to see it through, only years later did she let us know how difficult it was for her. She would often cry on her commute between Medina and the University of Akron and back. At the time, however, she was very good at distracting us from the very real challenges of being a non-traditional college student while at the same time being a dutiful and attentive mother to us.

Mom's college days of the late 1960s and early 1970s were eyeopening for all of us - her extended family and by extension, our small Black Medina community. As her sons, we were exposed to different and challenging ideas, various politics, and even campus fashions. A few years into college Ella Mae sported an Afro and my grandmother thought she'd gone mad. But more than anything my mother's college years helped us to think more broadly about different paths and possibilities that might exist.

After graduating from college with a bachelor's degree, Ella Mae Wray was hired as a professor at Hiram College, a small liberal arts school about an hour east of Medina. I was heartbroken leaving the only place I had ever known. But this was a new adventure, another significant step in the journey of Ella Mae. And her sons, as always, were with her. Now in her early 30s, my mother was in a new profession and again, she was a rare bird. There were very few Black women professors back in 1972. Hiram was a new and different place. She encouraged her three sons to step fully into it; meet new people and make new friends. We also saw our mother in a different way. Her teaching and interactions with college students

were reminiscent of her dancing with those teenage girls back in Medfair a few years earlier. In her new profession, she was a model for her students, for her sons, and the entire family. Professor Ella Mae Wray was a pioneer in those times, a person of action, and an agent of change. Once again, she was forging paths where none had previously existed. Pioneering is difficult and sometimes dangerous. But something I am eternally thankful for is the sense of security that she provided for us while at the same time making sure that her three growing boys were always at her side.

Although we moved, we never really did leave Medina. The McEwen house was still the family home base. My Uncle Bill still lived in town. We were back in Medina often, and as my brothers and I got older, it was a constant destination for us. When we would return as teenagers and in our early twenties, inevitably older people who knew us would say something like, "Oh, I so admire what Ella Mae did after Joe died. She went to college and took such good care of you boys." That, she did.

A few years after retiring as vice president of student affairs at Wilberforce University in Wilberforce, Ohio, I heard my mother give a talk or a sermon – she was studying to be a pastor- on how her children raised her. We raised her? The idea of that floored me, but in that moment, I finally understood that Ella Mae's gift was to be able to see the things that happen to us in life from a very different perspective and then to act based on that clear insight provided by the new perspective. What she saw and then did was often contrary to expectations or conventional wisdom. My mother had proved to be anything but conventional.

Ella Mae was a mother, grandmother, sister, and daughter. A wife. She was a friend. She was a teacher, A Black woman, A mover and shaker, and an activist. She was a child of God. And she was a person who redefined and challenged her times. My shorthand for her life is the many names she had during different parts of it. She came into the world as Ella Mae McEwen born in Kentucky. In her early Medina years, she was known as Baby Ella. After her 1957 marriage to Joe Wray, she became Ella Mae Wray. Then tragedy, college, and perseverance. She became Ella Mae Wray, with a B.A. behind her name. A new career at Hiram College and she became Professor Ella Mae Wray. Next, with a master's degree in hand, she was Ella Mae Wray, M.A. Then in 1981 she was Ella Mae Wilson after her marriage to Dr. Milton E. Wilson. A few years later, she was Dr. Ella Mae Wilson having earned a Ph.D. The name on her doctorate degree from Kent State University reads, Ella Mae McEwen Wray Wilson.

Dr. Ella Mae Wilson, my mother, our mother, and our guiding light, passed away in the year 2000, much too young at age 62. This

daughter of Medina raised and nurtured by the loving Black Bronson Street community, lived a full, amazing life. I miss her dearly but so many of us are thankful that she carried us along on her wonderful journey and left us with a legacy that we embrace every single day.



Jeff Wray and Tama Hamilton-Wray at Ella Mae's graveside at Spring Grove

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Bill & Nancy Elligott Norbert Manz
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James & Carol Greer

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Paul Wood

The Memory of James A. Greer, Jr.

James & Carol Greer

Charles & Teresa Merkle

James & Teresa Merkle

In Memory of William. G. Batchelder 111 In Memory of Dottie Perkins
Alice Batchelder Jeanne Pritchard

designates Lifetime members

8 designates President's Club members

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Become a Friend of the Cemetery

If you have not yet joined the Friends of the Cemetery, we'd love to have you become a part! For your convenience, we have provided a self-addressed envelope in this newsletter. Our membership schedule is included on the envelope flap. If you have been a member in the past, but do not see your name listed on page 7, please take time today to renew your membership using the envelope.

"Show me the manner in which a nation or community cares for its dead and I will measure with mathematical exactness the tender mercies of its people, their respect for the law of the land, and their loyalty to high ideals."

William Gladstone

Don't forget to check us out on the web at:

www.friendsofmedinacemetery.org

Memberships are available as follows:

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