As a non-profit cultural organization, the global pandemic of 2020 presented several unique challenges for the Hancock Historical Museum. In response to the growing pandemic and state orders, the museum was forced to close its doors to the public from March 13th to June 10th, 2020. During the shut-down, the museum’s staff worked diligently to continue to deliver enriching content via virtual platforms. In addition, the staff remained engaged with the community through social media, and encouraged residents to document the history being made during the pandemic by writing in a diary, taking photographs, and creating original artwork.

For arts and culture organizations dependent upon large group gatherings and public programming for earned revenue, the economic repercussions of the pandemic became particularly burdensome as the year went on. While the museum reopened its doors to the public in the summer, programming was restricted to a limited audience, or relegated to virtual platforms. The museum’s largest fundraisers and public events had to be cancelled or reimagined with a smaller scope. Private events at the museum were cancelled, and along with them, the revenue from facility rentals.

Despite a significant decline in earned revenue in 2020, the Hancock Historical Museum was able to weather the storm with private support from members and donors, and one-time relief grant support from state and federal partners. In June, the museum was awarded a $10,000 competitive grant for operations from Ohio Humanities, the state partner of the National Endowment for the Humanities. The funds were made available through the federal CARES Act to provide emergency assistance to cultural/heritage organizations.

In July, the museum was awarded a $3,000 grant for operations from the Ohio History Fund COVID-19 Emergency Grant program at the Ohio History Connection. This temporary program helped history organizations address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Out of 127 applicants, the museum was one of only 38 grant recipients in the state.

As a result of generous support from individual donors and additional grant assistance, the museum was able to maintain its staffing levels throughout 2020, and continue to offer important services to the community. The Hancock Historical Museum is grateful for the encouragement of our members, and the recognition by our state and federal elected officials of the importance of bolstering cultural institutions during these unprecedented challenges.

In response to a public closure in March 2020, the Hancock Historical Museum quickly developed a repository for original, digital content. A "Museum from Home" section of the organization’s website - containing virtual tours of the museum grounds, local history lectures, and teacher resources - provided free content to patrons and local residents while the museum facilities were inaccessible.

Through the website, the museum also encouraged residents to be proactive in documenting the history being made in 2020 by sharing their own story about the effects of the pandemic. The website provided a simple format to submit narratives and photographs.

These enhanced features of the website will remain active through 2021 and may be accessed by visiting Hancockhistoricalmuseum.org.
Oktoberfest Findlay has become one of the largest single-day events in our region, and an important annual fundraiser for the Hancock Historical Museum, with more than 6,000 people in attendance in 2019. In 2020, the event's planning committee waited several months to make a final decision about the viability of holding the festival. Ultimately, it became clear that there was no responsible way to hold an event of this size during a global pandemic. However, thanks to the event's signature sponsor, Premier Bank, and a dedicated group of volunteers, an alternative plan was quickly developed. Instead of a single-day event, Oktoberfest Findlay was adapted into a week-long celebration, from September 18th to 26th. Several Findlay businesses joined the fun, offering special discounts, German food options, live music, and more. Findlay Brewing Company’s Oktoberfest beer was available for sale in their tap-room, and in cans distributed regionally. Throughout the week, popular food trucks visited the museum’s campus to offer up their take on German festival fare. The celebration culminated with a one-day Oktoberfest drive-thru on the museum grounds with Schmidt’s Sausage Haus. Over the course of eight hours, Schmidt’s staff and museum volunteers fulfilled 234 orders including 466 famous Schmidt’s cream puffs! Commemorative T-shirts and steins were available for purchase with the perfect slogan: “2020…the year it all went to schnitzel!” Despite the change in course for 2020, the week’s activities raised more than $15,000 for the museum’s mission of preservation and education.

The Hancock Historical Museum’s craft cocktail competition, History with a Twist, returned for a second year in 2020. While a large, in-person event wasn’t possible, museum staff and competing establishments worked together to translate the competition into a summer-long passport program. After purchasing a passport, participants had eight weeks to visit local competing establishments, purchase the competition drink, and vote for their favorite. Passport holders were also given special discounts and coupons to use at the local restaurants and bars. Each of the competitors used their ingenuity to create an original craft cocktail inspired by history. Entries included drinks named for famous events and figures, and even a beverage inspired by Findlay’s West Crawford Street and its reputation as the city’s “red light” district during the late 19th century! The passport program was well-received by the community. The museum benefited from the sale of the passports and shared in the profits of drink sales. Local establishments benefited from the additional foot traffic and paying customers as they began to reopen following the COVID-induced shutdown. In late August, the museum announced a winner. The Bourbon Affair tallied the most votes, with their “1903 Flyer” – a gin-based drink named after the first manned flight by the Wright Brothers.

A NEW "TWIST" ON A FAVORITE FUNDRAISER

On September 19th, the museum hosted its 4th biennial Farm-to-Table Dinner at the historic Glick-Pepple Barn in Jenera. Located on a state-recognized Sesquicentennial Farm, the barn likely dates to the late 1850s. With social distancing and additional precautions in place, dinner guests enjoyed a beautiful evening with live music and a delicious five-course meal, prepared by Jeanna Haggard of Bluffton University. Utilizing all local ingredients, menu highlights included such unique creations as watermelon-braised country ribs, chokeberry barbeque sauce, green tomato chow-chow, and apple crisp with cardamom whipped cream. Thanks to the guests and the generous in-kind support of local farmers, the event raised more than $5,000 for the museum.

"THE YEAR IT ALL WENT TO SCHNITZEL!" OKTOBERFEST FINDLAY

The celebration culminated with a one-day Oktoberfest drive-thru on the museum grounds with Schmidt’s Sausage Haus. Over the course of eight hours, Schmidt’s staff and museum volunteers fulfilled 234 orders including 466 famous Schmidt’s cream puffs! Commemorative T-shirts and steins were available for purchase with the perfect slogan: “2020...the year it all went to schnitzel!” Despite the change in course for 2020, the week’s activities raised more than $15,000 for the museum’s mission of preservation and education.
Celebrating 50 Years

In 1970, five Findlay businessmen—Jim Brucklacher, Harold Corbin, Jack Harrington, Ed Heminger, and R. Joseph "Joe" Opperman—established the Hancock Historical Museum Association. Fifty years later, the museum celebrated the Founders throughout 2020 for their vision.

What began as a grassroots initiative and a mutual interest in local history among friends, has become one of the most comprehensive cultural/heritage organizations in the region—including nine buildings and more than 25,000 sq. ft. of exhibit space.

While the global pandemic of 2020 limited much of the museum’s programming, the year’s challenges also underscored the value of the Founders’ commitment. Their early foresight to develop and oversee an endowment will continue to serve as a lifeline to the organization in perpetuity. By encouraging their families, friends, and business acquaintances to become involved from the beginning, the Founders created a network of supportive members that has grown exponentially, and continues to nourish the privately-funded museum.

In late October, the museum launched a fundraising initiative in celebration of the 50th anniversary. The “Friends of the Founders” Campaign raised nearly $6,000 for the museum’s annual operations in just over 60 days. More than 80 donations were received as part of the initiative.

The Hancock Historical Museum is grateful for the support from longstanding donors and newly engaged members alike. With your encouragement, we look forward to the next 50 years, and beyond!

Friends of the Founders Campaign

In 1970, five Findlay businessmen—Jim Brucklacher, Harold Corbin, Jack Harrington, Ed Heminger, and R. Joseph "Joe" Opperman—established the Hancock Historical Museum Association. Fifty years later, the museum celebrated the Founders throughout 2020 for their vision.

What began as a grassroots initiative and a mutual interest in local history among friends, has become one of the most comprehensive cultural/heritage organizations in the region—including nine buildings and more than 25,000 sq. ft. of exhibit space.

While the global pandemic of 2020 limited much of the museum’s programming, the year’s challenges also underscored the value of the Founders' commitment. Their early foresight to develop and oversee an endowment will continue to serve as a lifeline to the organization in perpetuity. By encouraging their families, friends, and business acquaintances to become involved from the beginning, the Founders created a network of supportive members that has grown exponentially, and continues to nourish the privately-funded museum.

In late October, the museum launched a fundraising initiative in celebration of the 50th anniversary. The “Friends of the Founders” Campaign raised nearly $6,000 for the museum’s annual operations in just over 60 days. More than 80 donations were received as part of the initiative.

The Hancock Historical Museum is grateful for the support from longstanding donors and newly engaged members alike. With your encouragement, we look forward to the next 50 years, and beyond!

Brucklacher Memorial Park

In October 2020, the Hancock Historical Museum and the Kiwanis Club of Findlay officially opened the Brucklacher Memorial Park, located at the museum’s Little Red Schoolhouse property on County Road 236.

The park, a volunteer-led project of the local Kiwanis Club, honors the late Jim Brucklacher, a proud Kiwanian and one of the five founders of the Hancock Historical Museum.

Planning for the park began in 2019, led by Kiwanian, Rick Kidwell. The major project was developed as a gift to the community for the 100th anniversary of the Kiwanis Club of Findlay. Their centennial celebration happened to coincide with the Hancock Historical Museum’s 50th anniversary in 2020.

In addition to many private donors and the volunteer efforts of Kiwanis Club members, the park was made possible with in-kind support from RCM Architects, Inc.; Van Horn, Hoover & Associates; and Charles Construction.

When it opened in the fall, the park included a large playground, concrete walkways and benches, and a beautiful bronze sculpture. An additional phase of the park was initiated in late 2020. A history walk, with a stone pathway and educational signage, will be added in late spring 2021. The Hancock Leadership Class of 2020-2021 adopted the history walk as its class project, and has been working with museum staff to develop the educational components while raising funds to complete the addition.

The Brucklacher Memorial Park is accessible to the public, while also providing an additional resource to children visiting the Little Red Schoolhouse. The schoolhouse regularly welcomes more than 1,000 Hancock County schoolchildren annually.