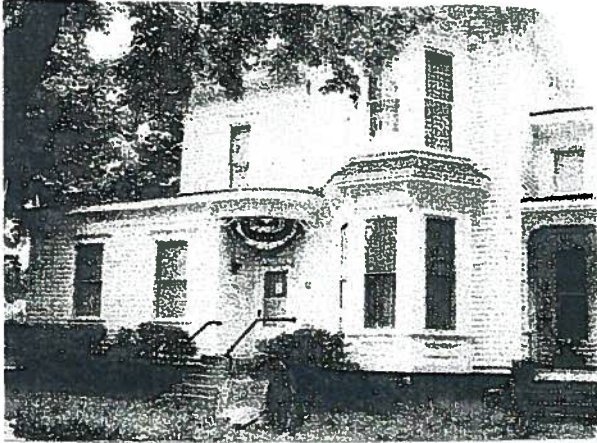


**The Mecosta County Historical Society** began on January 25, 1894, meeting in members homes. In 1955, a temporary historical museum was established in cooperation with the Centennial anniversary of Big Rapids.



The dream of a permanent museum became a reality in 1966 with the acquisition of the Fitch Phelps home, which had formerly served as the community library. This is the current location, at the corner of Stewart and Elm in Big Rapids.

As an added attraction, one of the rooms upstairs has been turned into a replica of an old time general store.



The Museum is the home of many historical displays telling the story of the area. It offers research materials from Mecosta County area's historical background, including the logging, lumbering, and furniture industries.

Whether you're interested in doing research, seeing arrowheads, toys, clothing, kitchen, military, or just want to visit with the knowledgeable guides, the Museum Society invites you to visit and step back into the past.

The Native Americans that occupied the area were of the Ottawa and Chippewa Tribes. Big Rapids saw its first permanent settlement in 1855 when Mr. Zerah and Mrs. Margaret French built a home on the big rapids of the river and named the settlement Leonard. In 1859, the community became the Mecosta County seat and was renamed Big Rapids.

The Muskegon River and its tributaries along with the surrounding forests provided the natural resources that made Mecosta County a logging community. Big Rapids later became an important furniture manufacturing center with several furniture companies operating here.

Many influential people have called Big Rapids home. Among them was Anna Howard Shaw who was nationally known as a ladies suffragette and campaigned for women's rights. As a youth, she lived on a farm north of Big Rapids, just west of Paris in Mecosta County.



Anna overcame many obstacles for women at the time to become a physician and an ordained minister.



The Big Rapids Industrial School was established in 1884 by Woodbridge N. Ferris. The school was noteworthy at the time because it accepted female students. In 1987 the college became Ferris State University and is the ninth largest university in Michigan. It is the only public university in Michigan founded by an individual. Mr. Ferris was Governor of Michigan and later served in the U.S. Senate.

One of the highlights of the Mecosta County Museum is the Wooten desk. It was introduced in 1874 and was known as an "office within a desk".



It was the most expensive factory-built of its day, with a cost between \$100 to \$800; this was the equivalent of more than a year's wages for the cabinet maker.



*Offices in*

*Big Rapids • Evart • Fremont • Reed City • Stanwood*

## Membership Application for Mecosta County Historical Society

Membership year is  
May 1 to April 30

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State & Zip \_\_\_\_\_

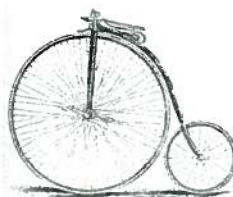
Phone \_\_\_\_\_

### Dues (circle one)

Individual	\$10.00
Couple	\$20.00
Patron	\$50.00
Fitch Phelps	\$100.00
Other	\$ _____

For more information, please call:  
(231) 592-5091

The Mecosta County Historical Society  
is a private, nonprofit organization



## Mecosta County Historical Museum

129 S. Stewart  
Big Rapids, Michigan 49307  
231.592.5091

Open Saturday  
2:00 to 4:00 pm  
May through September

Other Times by Appointment