

### Starke County Historical Society

Jim Shilling's held a strong love of history, family, and his Starke County community. He was always thinking of ways to improve the community, and he had a major responsibility in building, restoring, and maintaining Starke County. Jim left a legacy of volunteerism that will be hard to match. Along with volunteering, he was always striving to help young people learn, be creative and have an interest in local history. His characteristics made him a great president of the Starke County Historical Society for over 15 years. During an interview with the community foundation, Jim spoke on his time and the history of the historical society.

"What I enjoy is the stories," Jim said. "I guess that's where I got started in history." Jim explained how his family members and himself are "pioneers of Starke County." The family settled grounds in 1851, just when the area became organized/established. However, that is not where Starke County's history begins.

Jim tells how the earliest things on record in the historical society date back before the Ice Age. They have records and even artifacts of the great, extinct Mastodon! Additionally, the society was able to keep track of the Indian tribes that came into and through the area. At the turn of the century in 1900, the area started to grow. More and more buildings and shops were built, until a massive fire in 1909 wiped out a block of the growing town. This catastrophe acted as motivation, as soon after, the city council and town members worked endlessly to fully establish the town.

In that period, the Starke County Historical Society was formed. Lead by a few prominent individuals, the importance of recording town history was understood. However, the original historical society would fade away until 1974, when the present society started. At first, starting off was difficult for the society. With not a lot of money or artifacts to their name, the first museum was in the trunk of a car! A woman gathered items and put them in her trunk until a building was able to be used.

In present time, the Starke County Historical Society is thriving with involvement and artifacts. The society is now run by an occasional director, a standing president, a committee, a board, and volunteers. All is needed as the society gets hundreds of new items each year!

"We're trying to keep the history of the county alive for future generations. That's our main purpose," says Jim. Establishing a fund with the community foundation ensures their main purpose is preserved for years to come.



**Jim Shilling**