



A RANSOM NOTE

Clarence Historical Society Newsletter

Spring 2021

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Board Meetings are held the 1st Thursday of each month.

Meetings begin at 6:30 pm at the Clarence History Museum.

President's Comments

After having to be closed for almost one year due to COVID, we are anticipating opening the Museum in May. We are hoping to continue being open the 2nd and 4th Sundays of each month, from 1:00pm to 3:00pm. Masks will be required to enter the building. We will not be able to have Wednesday hours for Genealogy Research as there is no way to sanitize reference materials one they have been handled.

We have been working on some new exhibits, one of which is the Norman Rockwell exhibit. This will be a rather large exhibit featuring much of a large donation that we had received. We are also working on having a couple of Programs back this year in the Town Park Clubhouse. Speakers and dates are being worked out, so please watch our website and Facebook page for more details.

This is also the Bi-Centennial for Erie County. We will be participating in this along with many other museums in Erie County.

You have probably noticed that there was damage to the porch on the Log Cabin which made it un-safe to walk on. We are looking into having repairs made as soon as the weather co-operates. Lastly, we thank all of you who have renewed your memberships, If you haven't done so yet or would be interested in a new membership, applications are available on our website: clarencehistory.org, or email us at museum@clarencehistory.org and we will be glad to send one to you.

Once again, Thank-you very much for your patience, we hope to see you real soon!

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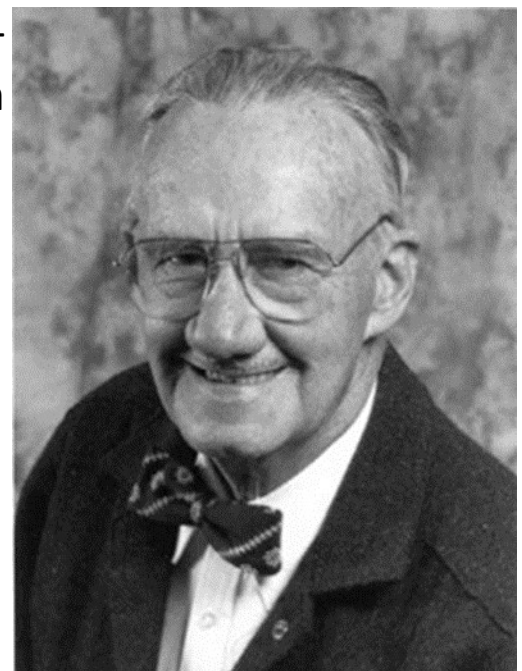
Commemoration for our collective past;
Celebrations for our Present;
Empowerment for our future.





His name doesn't appear in the *History of the Town of Clarence* by Oneida Baker (1983), but it does appear in the National Inventors Hall of Fame, in North Canton, Ohio (1998). It also appears on the National Medal of Technology Award presented by President George H.W. Bush (1990). His name appears in hundreds of articles, books, journals and medical writings. Wilson Greatbatch was a renaissance man of Clarence. This year marks the Bicentennial of Erie County and an opportunity to revisit this interesting Clarence resident.

Learning about his accomplishments has been inspiring. Greatbatch should be a man to motivate the next generation of youth in our town and be a sense of pride for this region. Men like this should not be forgotten but remembered and celebrated.



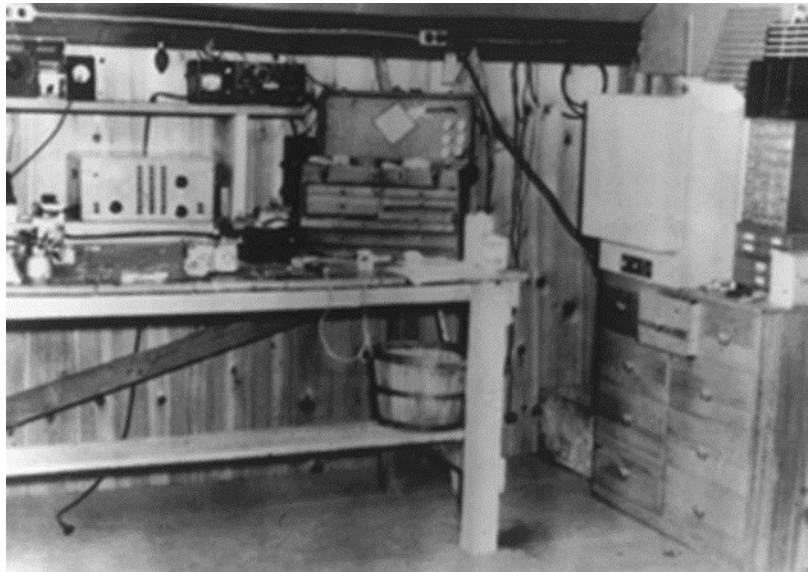
Wilson grew up in West Seneca, his father was an English immigrant who was a carpenter and his mother sang in the local choir. He was always tinkering with electronics, fascinated with radios and anything electronic. After Graduating from West Seneca High School, he enlisted in the Navy Reserves and later served during World War II as a radar operator among other things.



After an honorary discharge Wilson landed a job working as a telephone repairman and eventually went to Cornell University under the GI Bill. At Cornell he studied Electrical Engineering and his biggest? Honor was being the only student in his graduating class that had three children.

After graduating from Cornell, Wilson was inspired to teach landing a job at the University at Buffalo. It was here where, by accident, he discovered how to keep the human heart rate going. He did not invent the pacemaker but improved it to make it implantable and improving the battery that is used to run it. After accidentally pulling the wrong resistor out of a box Wilson realized it kept a regular beat, but he still had to convince the medical profession that his new implantable pacemaker worked.

Wilson devoted the next two years of his life perfecting his accident into a truly remarkable machine. He spent most of his time in his workshop, which can be visited at the Clarence Museum. Wilson's workshop (below) was an old barn on his property which was moved to the Clarence Museum and attached to the existing building.



If you haven't been there it is worth stopping in to investigate. It is inspiring to realize that one doesn't need some high-tech laboratory to invent and create cutting edge technology. Reminds me of Bill Gates and his friend Paul Allen inventing Microsoft software in a small garage.

Wilson wasn't just an inventor but one who persuaded the pace making industry to move to lithium as the material of choice. He left the pacemaker industry

and started Greatbatch Inc. that today makes 90% of the batteries in all pacemakers. He had many walls he had to climb during his career, but he always had the end in sight. By convincing the right people Wilson single-handedly turned the pacemaker industry to lithium. This is a life lesson we could all be reminded of, that people who persevere and never give up accomplish amazing things.





Even though Wilson won over thirty prestigious awards, one for the implantable pacemaker being one of the ten greatest engineering contributions in the past half century (1985), he still never abandoned his hometown community. Wilson and his wife Eleanor were active members in the community, proud members of their church, and lived in an old farmhouse. Wilson was a humble community and church-going man, who lived a modest life and was dedicated to

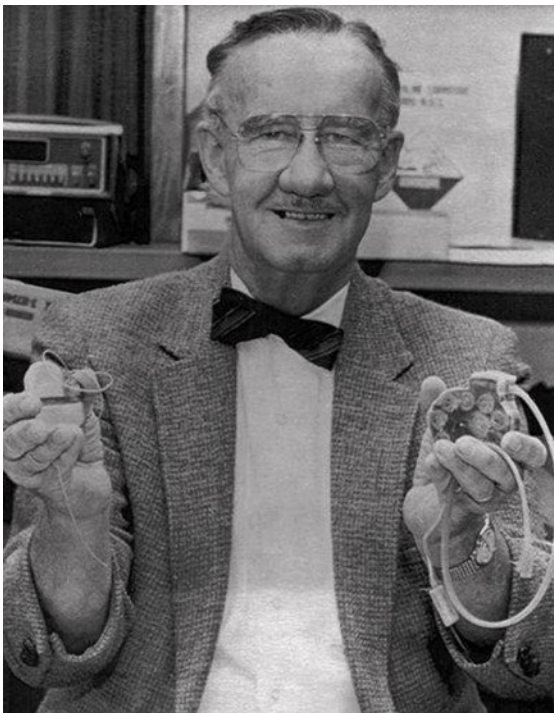
his wife and five children. He was a family man and one who put God and family first and career second.

As a Lifetime Achievement Award Winner (1996) by the Lemelson-MIT Prize Program, one wouldn't know it if you met Wilson on a street in Clarence. He held more than three hundred patents for various inventions, the more well-known ones having to do with the pacemaker. But he lived in a modest house and was more interested in helping his neighbor than gaining prestige and fame from all his inventions.



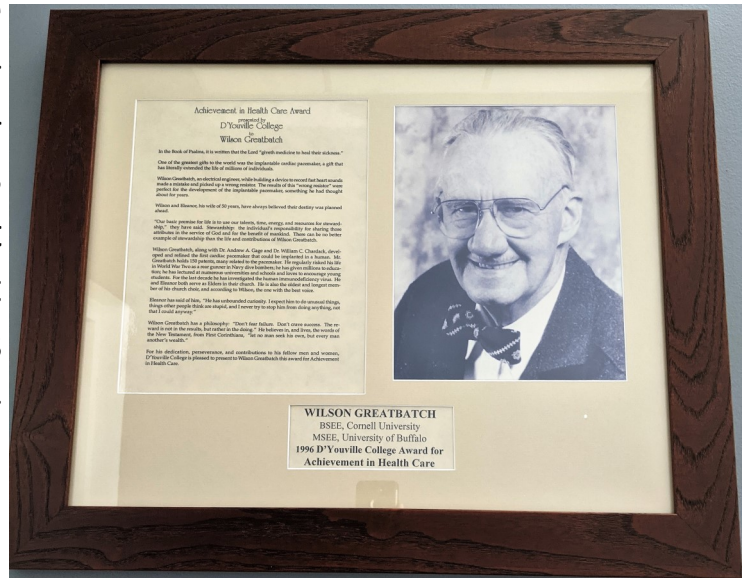
He also challenged the next generation of inventors to develop nuclear fusion using a type of helium found on the moon. Wilson was always teaching students to think outside the box and attempt to solve problems. In his later years he devoted much time inspiring younger generations.

How many readers have known someone who was saved or life lengthened by a pacemaker? During this stressful and unprecedented time in our town's history, it may be a good time to look back at some of the town heroes to inspire us to do better, think outside the box and help our fellow community members. Wilson had a longing and need to help people, maybe we can learn from Wilson's story and it can inspire us to help others. It is difficult to tear kids away from their cell phones and social media accounts, how do we engage them in understanding our local history and inspire them to try new things, think outside the box and advance our civilization forward?



The purpose of this article is to remind the elders in the community and inspire the younger generations in the community of one of the inspirational past members of Clarence. Few in the town have received medals from the president or invented something that has saved millions of lives around the world. Encourage the youth to invent, to be creative and maybe someday one will find another way to save millions of lives!

The Clarence Museum has a large collection of Wilson's original inventions and prototype pacemakers. The Museum even houses the solar powered canoe that Wilson invented. The garage that he spent two years refining his pacemaker is attached to the museum. It is worth the trip if you have never seen it!



Images:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20030318182651/http://web.mit.edu/invent/iow/greatbatch.html>

<https://www.bmj.com/content/343/bmj.d6765>

http://www.livingprimetime.com/AllCovers/dec1999/workdec1999/wilson_greatbatch_man_of_the_mil.htm

<https://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/28/business/wilson-greatbatch-pacemaker-inventor-dies-at-92.html>

The Society would like thank Trustee Joseph McGreevy for taking the time and doing the research for putting together a great article about

Mr. Wilson Greatbatch!



HISTORICAL SOCIETY
OF THE TOWN OF CLARENCE
Founded in 1954

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Town of Clarence

Email: museum@clarencehistory.org

“To Preserve and share the History and Heritage of the Town of Clarence, respecting our past and striving into the future.”

The Historical Society would like to send the best of wishes to Elaine Dinola! Elaine and her husband Don will be moving out to the Binghamton area to be closer to family. Elaine has been a part of The Historical Society for over 30 years! Elaine was past president, board of trustees advisor, refreshment chair-woman, creator of exhibits, volunteer..the list goes on and on. The Trustees and Volunteers can't put into words how much we will miss Elaine. If you wish to send a greeting to Elaine, please feel free!

Mrs. Elaine Dinola
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Johnson City, NY 13790

