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## **Society to Present Historical Talk Focusing on Lives in North East During World War II**

How North East was impacted by World War II – in both small and large ways – will be revisited in a presentation by Art Mills, vice president of the North East Historical Society, at the museum on Thursday, Oct. 20, at 6 p.m.

“What was the ‘home front’ actually like? What did our citizens experience day-to-day? How did the war change the rhythm of daily life?”

These are among questions that guided Mr. Mills, a lifelong history enthusiast and resident of North East for the last 20 years, when researching the war’s impacts here.

“I’ve always enjoyed military history of the world, but what I found most fascinating to me was how daily life in North East went on, side-by-side, with this great global conflict,” explained Mills, who was a Foreign Service officer with the U.S. Department of State for 25 years, serving in seven countries, including Ukraine, as well as in Washington, D.C. He went on to become an assistant professor of Intelligence Studies at Mercyhurst University for 14 years after retiring from the Department of State.

“When The North East Breeze announces the U.S. declaration of war on Germany and Japan on the front page, right next to it on the front page was an article about how hogs that were eating garbage were also eating glass, so residents were asked not to put glass in the garbage,” Mills said.

The former Breeze, as well as Erie’s two daily newspapers, the Erie Daily Times and Erie Dispatch-Herald, were primary sources of information for Mills, as were extensive collections of memorabilia, such as donated photographs and scrapbooks, at the historical society’s museum.

One of these photographs shows Brownie, a horse who was brought out of retirement at the North East Dairy Company, to once again to make home deliveries of milk due to rationing of gasoline and tires. “People could not get food or fuel or tires for farm equipment,” Mills added. “That became a sticky point, one of the areas of controversy that I’ll talk about.”

“There was a major war going on, and we went on to lose 27 young men from North East in that war, along with wounded, missing in action and prisoners,” Mills said, “but daily life goes on, and you adjust to the war.” The presentation will also include information on the POW camp, located on South Washington Street, used to house mostly German soldiers in 1944 and 1945. They were put to work at farms and local food canning plants, such as the former Sunshine Packing Company.

Mills became interested in military history through his parents and other family members who lived through the Second World War.

“Everybody had parents or relatives or friends who had been in that war; it was very much a part of living in those days,” Mills said. “It was very close to us; my parents had experienced it, so I had a real connection.” Mills’ presentation is free and open to the public. Bring a friend and sign them up as a member.

## Some history about North East's street names

The street names in the Borough of North East have a long and interesting history. You are likely to have heard some of this history, but I am sure there is some that you don't know.

Until about 1855, Main Street was known only as the Erie and Buffalo Road because it simply connected these two cities. What we now know as South Lake Street originally was known as Railroad Street to the south because that is where it led to. To the north was simply Lake Street because that is where it led to; however, before it was named Lake Street, it was known as Portage Street since goods arriving via Lake Erie were portaged to town and on to Colt Station. An 1865 ordinance was passed to connect Clay Street to Railroad Street which required the bend in Clay Street so that it would connect to Railroad Street at a right angle.

Gibson Street, between Lake Street and Pearl Street, was first named Park Row. There was no named street where Park Street is today, just an alley. The part of Gibson Street from Pearl Street to Mill Street was originally called Brown Street. At one time Gibson Street was known as Parade Street. Then Pearl Street was known as Race Street as it was used by the locals to race their horses. There also was a time when Pearl Street was called Peach Street.

West Division Street was originally called Seminary Street because it was where the Lakeshore Seminary was built. This Seminary, of the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches, was built for secondary education as there was no public high school at the time. A 1910 ordinance provided for the establishment of three streets that actually were never built. One was a street to be named Ross Avenue, named after a donor of land for the street which would have been midway between East Division and Main Street going east from Lake Street to where Pershing Avenue is today. There a new street, named Braden Street, would go south to Main Street. There was to be another new street called Wolf Street, at the north end of Braden Street that would lead north to Division Street like Pershing Avenue does today. Pershing Avenue was built soon after WWI and named to honor General Pershing.

On the south edge of town we see Grahamville Street, so named because the road led to the village of Grahamville. Alexander Blaine donated the land to build this street. Blaine Street was named for him, as he owned much land in that area also. A section of Smedley Street was once called Organ Street because the New Era Organ Company was located on the west side of the street next to the railroad tracks. After the organ factory closed there it didn't make sense to use that name so it became Smedley Street. Colfax Street was named after U.S. Vice President Schuler Colfax, who gave a popular speech in North East in 1881.

What is today called Mechanics' Street started out as Jones' Alley, named for William Jones who owned most of the land along the south side. It was changed to Mechanics' Alley because of the kind of businesses that existed along this street. East Street originally existed only between Washington Street and Blaine Street. When it was extended to Vine Street in 1910 there was a house in the middle of where the street was to go. That house was moved and now sits at the northwest corner of Blaine and East Streets.

Eagle Street was originally named First Street until an 1868 ordinance change it and also Second Street which became Wall Street. It was Samson Short that pushed the using of the Wall Street name because he owned most of the property there, especially his bank and thought it a fitting name for his property.