

Mercer County Historical Society Newsletter

"Preserving Mercer County History"

Volume 22, Issue 1

Editor: Mary Jane Sticklen

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Deputy Grace Murdock

by Stephanie Braucht

Grace Eleanor Hodgson, daughter of Amos Gentry Hodgson and Anna Thoburn Hodgson, was born in New Boston on August 16, 1918. In 1939 she married Russell F. Murdock. Russell became sheriff of Mercer County in 1946, moving his family into the county jail, where they lived in the front of the building. Grace ran the jail, was the matron and cook, and was in charge when Russell was away. Therefore, she was deputized. If she was not the first female deputy in the county, it was definitely a rare occurrence for the times. Her ID, endorsed by her husband, referred to the undersigned deputy as "he."

A petite woman, five feet two inches tall and weighing barely over 100 pounds, Grace also was very attractive. But, as is often the case, appearances were deceiving. She apparently was quite comfortable carrying, and using, a gun. She liked to hunt, and she liked to eat what she killed. Her squirrel pies were a favorite. In addition to being accomplished with a gun, she reportedly always kept a leather-covered sap handy. When Grace and Russell retired to Arizona, she always carried a gun on her right hip, according to their son, Mitchell. He said that he didn't recall his mother ever being afraid of anything. Indeed, after she died at the age of 94 in Springfield, IL on March 14, 2013, he found a .22-caliber handgun in her nightstand.



Grace's duties at the jail involved transporting female prisoners who were sentenced to the state prison, being in charge in the sheriff's absence, and cooking for the inmates. She always fed them the same meal she was feeding her own family, and she was a good cook. The inmates appreciated her. Mitchell reports that there were plenty of drunks, wife beaters, and an occasional murderer in the jail. He and his brother played in the yard, where the prisoners could watch them. He says they never got away with anything, as the inmates were quick to tattle on them.

By all accounts, Grace was a vibrant, strong, accomplished woman, and Mercer County should be proud to have had her as a resident and as a public servant. (Information taken from "A law-and-order-woman" by Bruce Rushton, published in *Illinois Times*, December 26, 2013.)

Mercer County Historical Society & Essley-Noble Museum

1406 - SE 2nd Avenue
Aledo, IL 61231
Phone: 309/582-2280

Hours

April – Oct: Thurs, Fri, Sat, 1-5:00pm
Nov - March: Saturdays 12:00-4:00pm



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For Genealogy Queries write to:

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**Memberships available for \$20/household or \$300
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Sadly, the Grace Murdock article, which was written in 2014, is the last of those submitted by Stephanie Braucht who passed away on Oct. 3, 2017. Her commitment to historical and genealogic research will be missed, but her sunny disposition, curiosity, and helpfulness will be missed more. Because of the many memorials given to the Mercer County Historical Society in her name, the genealogical department will be updated and expanded. Stephanie will be missed.



The editor of the newsletter welcomes and requests articles from the public. They can be personal reminiscences or original articles about Mercer County history, places, events, people, etc. Perhaps there are old family stories that would be interesting to share. If there is a picture that would go along with the article it can be sent electronically or scanned at the museum, then returned. Contributions can be a page or even a few sentences. Please send or bring them to the museum or email the editor, Mary Jane Sticklen mjst@frontier.com. Or call 309-582-5814. Thank you in advance for sharing. Mary Jane



Curator's Corner

Misperceptions about White Gloves

From International Preservation News, December 2005

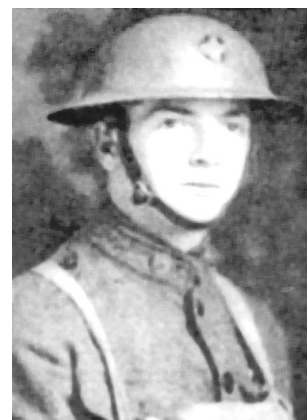
Blanket Policies mandating that patrons and curators wear any kind of glove when handling archival and library materials need to be reexamined. It seems clear from the observation of many heavily-used books that even routine handling does not cause chemical damage to paper. Certainly, conservators do not wear gloves when treating books or paper artifacts, except in those few instances where their own hands require protection. White cotton gloves provide no guarantee of protecting books and paper from perspiration and dirt, yet they increase the likelihood of people inflicting physical damage to collection material. Implementing a universally observed, hand-cleaning policy is a reasonable and effective alternative to glove use, and it follows the standard protocol employed by book and paper conservators before handling the very same material.

Veda Meriwether, Curator

World War I Ancestor?

By Bill Bertrand

In 2018 there will be a lot of attention in this country on the 100th anniversary of the end of the "War to End All Wars." America entered World War One on April 6th, 1917. Up to that date, America had tried to keep out of World War One, but unrestricted submarine warfare, introduced by the Germans on January 9th, 1917, was the primary issue that caused Woodrow Wilson to ask Congress to declare war on Germany on April 2nd. Four days later, America joined World War One on the side of the Allies. US servicemen were engaged in the war until the armistice was signed November 11, 1918, to end all fighting at 11 AM the same day, i.e. 11-11-18 at 1100 hours. Seven months later the Treaty of Versailles was signed, officially ending the war. In 1919 President Wilson proclaimed November 11 as Armistice Day and Congress later passed legislation making it a national holiday. After subsequent wars the name of the holiday was changed to Veterans Day in 1954.



If you had an ancestor who served during WWI, you may want to take some time to feel closer to them by learning about their life and experiences during the war. At Essley-Noble Museum we have some great informational resources related to World War I. Over the years, Kathy Coe has researched WWI servicemen from Mercer County and has compiled information into eight loose-leaf binders that include such items as photos of people in their service uniforms, copies of service papers, news clippings and virtually anything that Kathy could find that helps describe their experiences during the war. Included is the publication *Activities of Battery B, 123rd Field Artillery* which details much of the movement of Company B servicemen from Aledo, the company commanded by Oscar Carlstrom. In a separate binder is a more personal description in the handwritten narrative of Leeman Garrett, entitled *My Days in France*.

But, perhaps the best source for family history buffs will be the records compiled by the *Honor Roll Committee of Mercer County*. This committee was apparently an extension beyond the war, of a local committee formed during the war under the Illinois State Council of Defense. In Mercer and a number of other counties through Illinois, the Illinois State Council of Defense collected information on those who served,

through local committees. In Mercer County, the Honor Roll Committee collected this information and kept a file of cards listing close to 1,000 names with varying degrees of detail recorded for each person. Almost a hundred years later, Dave McKnight ran across the card files stored above his drugstore and donated them to the museum. Two cards were kept for each individual service person - a "Civil Record" and a "Military Record". The civil information included birth date; names of parents; name of spouse if married, and location and date of marriage; occupation; religious affiliation; club and fraternal memberships; address; and places resided other than Mercer County. The military information included date of enlistment and discharge; rank and regiment, company and where trained; date of "Embarkment for Front". Auxiliary information was often included such as nickname, or names of children. Many of the servicemen did not return to live in Mercer County, but their address circa 1920-22 is listed. Jo Knox has painstakingly indexed the cards, and placed them in archival protective sheets placed in archival binders, which will now allow museum visitors to view them without damaging the fragile cards.

A few tidbits might spark your interest in seeing these Honor Roll cards. One person was listed with the occupation as "Pool Shark" and address as a billiard parlor. Another had "other residences" as Geneseo 1895-1898, Woodhull 1900-1905, Lafayette 1905-1907, and Rock Island 1907-1911. A surprising number were born outside of Mercer County, in states further west of Illinois, and even outside the U.S. Red Cross nurse Alice Swanson trained for three years at Henrotin Hospital in Chicago. Ernest Bower's nickname was "Beezer" and Clyde Braucht's was "Arbuckle".

It is these little personal things we can learn about, that make a distant ancestor more familiar, and make us feel closer to them.



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Website

We apologize that our website has been down and we have been working to rectify the matter. Hopefully it will not be much longer and with the same URL. You will be able to access past newsletters on the site through 2016, but we reserve one year's paper newsletter for our members. If you are a new member and you wish to view the 2017 newsletters, they can be sent to you electronically upon request. Since the site has been down we will list our sponsors and corporate members for yet another year. In the meantime, be sure to check our Facebook page.

Your Support is Vital!

Annual memberships expired December 31, 2017. Membership starts on Jan. 1, we count on dues and donations to provide necessary funds for our projects and for the maintenance of the Essley-Noble Museum complex. Thank you to all our patrons for your contributions!

- () **Annual Membership - \$20.00** (one household)
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Send to:Essley-Noble Museum
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2017 New Members

We very much appreciate our long-time friends and members, but we wish also to recognize new members for 2017. Our sincere apologies for anyone inadvertently left out. The newsletter plans to keep up quarterly next year.

Bill Bateman, Bonnie Bennett, Bill & Stacey Boruff, Vickie Gagnon, Stanley Garmer, Donna Gresch, Deb Hanson, David Hemphill, Justin Hobart, Margaret Lloyd, Steve Retherford, S. L. P. Short, Dave Staley, and Maureen Verner.



Coming Events

Jan. 1	Memberships due. Thank you!
Apr. 5	Start of regular hours Thu/Fri/Sat 1-5:00
April 16	Tentative date of spring program TBA

What is It?

The item in the past newsletter was a poultry punch used to mark a chicken's webbed foot. This item has a 2 5/8 inch long hollow metal base attached with an 11" leather strap. What is it?



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