

Mercer County Historical Society Newsletter

"Preserving Mercer County History"

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Editor: Mary Jane Sticklen

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Mercer County Historical Society

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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:

MCHS Genealogy Dept.
PO Box 269
Aledo IL 61231-2504
Or: email the museum



**Memberships available for \$20/household or \$300
for a lifetime membership**

For correspondence, membership or change of
address contact:



Essley-Noble Museum
Box 269
Aledo, IL 61231



Website: mercercountyhistoricalsocietyil.org

Email: mcmuseum@frontier.com

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Flu Epidemic of 1918-19

By Bill Bertrand

The 2017-2018 flu season is the worst in nearly a decade, according to the US Center for Disease Control ("CDC: Flu season now as bad as 2009's swine flu," *USA Today*, February 9, 2018). This winter we have seen a number of newspaper articles over how widespread the flu is, and the Center for Disease Control reports 24,644 hospitalizations due to flu from October 1 and March 3. All of the news might prompt you to remember reports of the horrendous worldwide flu epidemic seen almost 100 years ago in 1918-1919, i.e. the terrible "Spanish flu" epidemic spread during WWI.

The flu infected "a third of the world's population" and killed "195,000 Americans in October 1918 alone" according to "Spanish Flu: The Great Pandemic of 1918", (*National Geographic History*, March/April 2018). The article continues that top-end estimates of world-wide fatalities total more than all the people killed "in both World Wars put together." "Journal of the Plague Year", (*Smithsonian*, November, 2017), places the U.S. death toll at 670,000 of the 25.8 million infected.

A person curious about the toll the flu took in Mercer County, would naturally seek out news articles in the *The Times Record* microfilms we have at the museum. However, in seeking local news reports of the Spanish flu, in 1918-1919 issues you will find none. Obituaries reported Mercer County residents of a wide range of ages, dying from the "Spanish flu," but there are no news reports. Why would a world-wide epidemic, which was killing people in our own county, not be newsworthy in Mercer County? The articles in both *National Geographic History* and *Smithsonian* explain that strict wartime censorship prevented the European and North American newspapers from reporting on the outbreak!

Further explanation in *National Geographic History* is that, in response to the recently enacted Sedition Act, the Justice Department urged people to report to the Department, anyone "who spreads pessimistic stories", and anything that might be judged to hinder the war effort could result in up to 20 years in prison! Mercer County newspapers were certainly aware of this vigorous effort of the Justice Department to curtail dissent, because the August 22, 1918 issue of *The Times Record* reported that "a special agent of the Justice Department" was in Aledo on August 21, to investigate complaints against nine Mercer County citizens



accused of “disloyal remarks” and “disparaging statements.” The news article doesn’t report just what those remarks or statements were, and it is likely they were not directed at the government’s response to a nationwide flu epidemic, but one can imagine how the Justice Department might believe that reporting the epidemic could lead to widespread alarm, and be considered “pessimistic” news. The reason the epidemic became forever known as the “Spanish flu” is that Spain was not involved in WWI and its newspapers were free to report news of the pandemic. It swept that country, even infecting the king. When residents of the warring nations first learned of the epidemic, it was from the newspapers in Spain, and they naturally believed it came from there, but the flu did not originate in Spain!

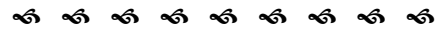


The *Smithsonian* article places the likely origin of the viral outbreak in Haskell County, Kansas! In January, 1918 a local doctor alerted the U.S. Public Health Service of an unusually large number of flu cases, which were often reported in the local newspaper as cases of pneumonia. Several Haskell County men, who had been exposed to the virus, then reported for army training to Camp Funston, at Fort Riley, Kansas, where *National Geographic History* states the first “official case” of the flu was reported from a single soldier on March 4, 1918. Within a matter of hours, more than a hundred other soldiers reported flu symptoms. In April, U.S. soldiers arriving in Europe carried the virus with them and the pandemic began, eventually reaching all parts of the world. *Smithsonian* places the overall mortality rates in developed countries at a relatively low 2%, but higher in less modern areas, such as the Fiji Islands, where 14% of the population died in just 16 days. In small native villages in Alaska and Africa the entire village

died. World mortality estimates vary from as low as 25 million to as many as 100 million.

Although we could not read about this great epidemic at the time, now as the centenary occasion of this worldwide event prompts articles such as those cited above, I urge people to read about the “Spanish flu” epidemic, and pray that we never see another like it.

Pictured is part of the Essley-Noble Museum’s medical display.



Curator’s Corner

Summer hours start April 5, when we will be open Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays 1:00-5:00. There are new acquisitions to see and some of our older displays are being freshened. Bring friends, children, and out-of-town visitors and everyone will find something of interest. Also, there is a new computer for the genealogical department.

Our sincere sympathy to the family of Cheryl McCaw, long-time board member and Mercer Co. researcher, who recently passed. Thank you, as well, for memorials in her name.

Does anyone have a copy of the Aledo High School’s 1966 Astrum yearbook that they would care to donate?

Veda Meriwether, Curator



Spring Open Program

Join us **Monday April 16** for our spring open program, 7:00 p.m. at the Essley-Noble Museum. Beth Rylander, of Feed Mill Fabric & Quilting in Oneida, will present a program on the history of Isaac Merritt Singer and the inventors of the Wilcox & Gibbs sewing machines. We will follow their lives from the Civil War and the Industrial Revolution through the World Wars, including some of their wartime production of firearms, parachutes and military uniforms.

The program is open to the public with no admission charge. Refreshments will be served afterwards and you will have an opportunity to socialize and explore the museum’s exhibits.



Time For Our Ancestors

It is that time of year again when our local cemetery boards are hoping for donations for the upkeep it takes to make them look their best for the families who visit them. Maintenance costs steadily go up every year. Some cemeteries have been turned over to the townships as there are not enough families left to take care of them. Those townships can also use donations for the upkeep. There are 63 current cemeteries in Mercer County that need care, as well as numerous cemeteries that have been abandoned along the way. If

at all possible, please donate your time and/or money to help them out. If they have a clean-up day, your help is appreciated. Your township supervisor should be able to tell you whom to contact. If not, maybe the museum in Aledo can do this. Give them a call any Thursday, Friday or Saturday afternoon at {309} 582-2280.



Welcome to New Members for 2018...so far

Don & Kathy Gray, Trudy & Mike Hoehn, Jermaine & Tarah Anderson, David & Louise Werts, Robert & Theresa Narotzky.

To those who have renewed your membership and to those who have donated extra money as well, we are grateful.

Membership begins on the first of the year and we hope that those who have not renewed will do so. Since the museum receives no government funds for operation expenses we rely on dues and donations.



Accessions

We will endeavor to list the accessions each quarter. Thank you to all who presently and in the past have offered items to make our museum a more interesting and educational place. All items accepted must be related to Mercer County and in most cases not be duplicates.

- 1936 Astrum-Aledo H.S. yearbook, photos from RMA
 - Donated by ... Jean Lutrell
- Aledo Building Corp. seal
 - Donated by ... John Frost
- 1912 New Windsor 7th & 8th grade class photo
 - Donated by ... Carmen Keese Miller
- 6 bottles from Keithsburg, late 1800's
 - Donated by ... David Hast
- Erma Holdsworth's school certificates 1920's
 - Donated by ... Kathy Sterling
- Glass axe souvenir of 1909 Aledo Fair
 - Donated by ... Daryl Bodeen
- 4 volumes of Joseph Sherrard family history
- Great War (WWI) DVD
- Descendants of Wilhelm Wurtz book



- Donated by ... David Werts
- MC Amateur Theater scrapbook, photo of 1955 Centennial Church breakfast, prints of 1st United Pres. Church, 2 old Edison light bulbs from the Carlson Studio
 - Donated by ... Darlene Johnson
- Walter Martens' WWI Uniform
 - Donated by ... Dick Nash
- Milk can cart, tiling spade, hog catcher
 - Donated by ... Laverne Parkinson
- Sons of Temperance meeting card & air raid instructions
 - Donated by ... Kennard Kircher
- Matherville school plaque & coral and cream plate made by Pearl and/or Leona Barnes from Mercer Co. clay
 - Donated by ... JoAnne Barnes



- 1941 sweater letter for A.H.S. chorus
 - Donated by ... Bev Gray



New Website URL

We have had to change our website URL to **mercercountyhistoricalsocietyil.org**. The contents are the same and will continue to be updated. You will be able to access past MCHS newsletters on the site through 2016, but we reserve one year's paper newsletter for our members. Put the new URL into your "favorites" where one click will take you to our home page. Also, check out the "Museum Mondays" posts on **www.facebook.com/mchsil**



Rhubarb Fest

Donations of pies, cobblers, and crisps of rhubarb or other flavors are needed for the Mercer County Historical Society to sell at the upcoming Rhubarb Fest. Items are needed by Saturday June 2. If you can donate any of these home-baked goods, and/or can volunteer to work a shift in our booth in the pavilion in Central Park, please call Judy Redlinger 773-458-3899. All

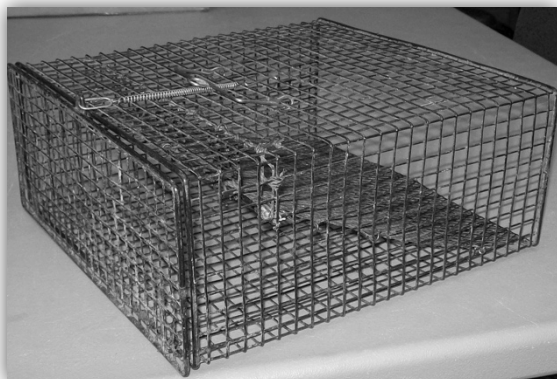
proceeds from this activity go to the Mercer County Historical Society and the Essley-Noble Museum.

New this year, a number will be posted that you can call for a free shuttle to and from the museum and Central Park area.



What Is It?

The item in the past newsletter was a thumb stull, used to shell an ear of corn by hand. This item is made of metal, has movable parts and measures 12x12x5 inches. What is it?



Coming Events

- Apr. 5** Start of regular hours
Thur/Fri/Sat 1-5:00
- April 16** Spring program Beth Rylander 7:00pm
@ Museum
- May 16 & 17** 5th grade tours
- June 2** Dessert in the park at Rhubarb Fest
Extended Museum hours, free shuttle
- July 10-14** Mercer Co. Fair booth in Merchants Bld



Volunteers for 5th Grade Tours

Want to have fun watching students learn and enjoy doing hands-on activities, have a free lunch and fellowship? We need extra hands for our 5th grade tours the mornings of May 16th and 17th. No special skills are necessary and you can volunteer one or both days. If you can help, contact Linda Morrow at 1-309-737-0999. This is a great opportunity to make a difference!

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