



# Mercer County Historical Society Newsletter

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Editor: Mary Jane Sticklen

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## Mercer County Historical Society & Essley-Noble Museum

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Aledo, IL 61231  
Phone: 309/582-2280

### Hours

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



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Jean Wistedt  
Veda Meriwether, Curator  
Dennis Henderson, Sunday Host



### For Genealogy Queries write to:

MCHS Genealogy Dept.  
PO Box 269  
Aledo IL 61231-2504  
Or: E-mail the museum  
**Email:** mcmuseum@frontier.com



Please address all correspondence to:  
PO Box 269

**Memberships available for \$15/household**

*For membership or change of address contact:*

Essley-Noble Museum  
Box 269  
Aledo, IL 61231



**Website:** www.mchsil.org  
**Email:** mcmuseum@frontier.com

## From the Present to the Past

Students from Mercer County and Sherrard fifth grades enthusiastically participated in the annual 5<sup>th</sup> grade tours at the Essley-Noble Museum. Besides learning about the contents of the main building, machine shed, and school house they participated in hands-on activities such as quilt making, blanket tying, sawing, rope making, corn shelling and grinding, and washing on a washboard. Thank you to the volunteers who helped with the tours, the teachers and parent chaperones, and especially to Mary Flint who coordinated the event. Thank you notes received from the students further showed that the day was a success for all.

### Laundry

After washing socks in a galvanized tub, sending them through a hand-crank wringer, then hanging them on the line on a spring day away from the classroom, some students, to the amusement of the adults, declared that if they could do laundry THAT way, it would be fun. As they took turns washing, we thought about what those did before and since washboards and hand wringers.

We started with home-made lye soap. (Oh, no! Doesn't lye burn the skin?) However, during the saponification process the lye is cooked out and we



end up with a glycerin-based soap that is wonderful on the hands. Scrubbing on the washboard provided the agitation needed to loosen the dirt. The smooth fiberglass washboard they used was a step up from the knuckle-scraping metal predecessor, which was still better than beating the clothes on rocks down at the creek. Then there were electric and gas-powered agitators where the whole machine seemed to jump around the room, to our quiet-running machines today. Although a gas

or electric powered wringer may have been a labor-saving device over the hand wringer, there was the danger of catching fingers, clothes or hair in the unforgiving mechanism.

Obtaining water was another progression in history, from hauling it in buckets some distance from the source to digging a well near the house and bringing buckets up with a rope. Then came the hand pump, taking a lot of arm action. The next labor-saving device was the windmill, eventually replaced by submerged electric well pumps. As we pondered the rusting relic of the windmill behind the school house, there was the realization that harnessing the power of the wind is again cutting-edge technology.

From beating your clothes with rocks to pressing a button on today's machines, what will be the next improvement in doing the laundry?

*From the Present to the Past continued....*

**How to Wash Clothes**

The following is a copy of a recipe given to a new bride for washing clothes, written years ago by a Kentucky grandmother. It was found in an old scrapbook and appears just as it was written (spelling errors and all) and, despite the spelling, has a bit of philosophy.

1. Bilt fire in backyard to heat kettle of rain water.
2. Set tubs so smoke wont blow in eyes if wind is pert.
3. Shave one hole cake of lie soap in bilin water.
4. Sort things, make 3 piles.
  - 1 pile white
  - 1 pile colored
  - 1 pile work britches and rags
5. To make starch, stir flour in cool water to smooth, then thin down with billin water.
6. Take white things, rub dirty spots on board, scrub hard, and then bile.
7. Rub colored don't bile, Just rinch and starch.
8. Take thins out of kettle with broomstick handle, then rinch, and starch.
9. Hang old rags on fence.
10. Spread tea towels on grass.
11. Pore rinch water in flower bed.
12. Scrub porch with hot soapy water.
13. Turn tubs upside down.
14. Go put on clean dress, smooth hair with hair combs. Brew cup of tea, sit and rock a spell and count your blessings.

Source Unknown



**Curator's Corner**

Welcome to our new members -Elene Waters, Keith Clark, Debra VanderHeyden, all of Aledo, Lois Retherford of Joy, Tom Leonard of Taylor Ridge, Patricia Wagner of NE, Sheryl Tank of New Windsor, IL. Thank you for the many new accessions this quarter. Everything related to Mercer County is important for our history in MC.

Get ready for our MC Fair week of July 9 through the 13<sup>th</sup>. Our volunteers will be present at our booth to help promote our museum. Hope to see all who can visit in July.

*Veda Meriwether, Curator*



**Building Fund**

Continued thank you's to those who have donated money towards the fund to expand the museum. Some have been generous enough to write a check for money above the \$15 yearly dues. The Board of

Directors voted to place any extra money into the general fund for operating expenses unless it is designated for the building fund so please designate if you want your contribution to go to the expansion of the museum. All donations are greatly appreciated since yearly operating expenses exceed funds taken in.

The board decided that this year's income from the Rhubarb Fest would go toward our building project. We are nowhere near having the money for the building itself, but we plan to do the groundwork to prepare the site for a large addition to the east of the machine shed. The bank along the road will be graded to provide access and ease in mowing, the site leveled and base prepared, and, unfortunately, a large tree will have to be removed and others trimmed. We have received bids from local community-minded contractors, with more information to come later. If you think that you might want to give money to a worthwhile project, please consider helping us to better preserve our county's history. Thank you for your consideration!



**Rhubarb Fest**

We had a very successful Rhubarb Fest booth this year, clearing a bit over \$1900! A big thank you to all who helped in any way by donating pies and other desserts, rhubarb, or money, working in the booth, transporting equipment for our booth and returning it to the museum, and transporting desserts to the shelter from the museum. We had about 80 pies donated and at least 13 other desserts! The weather couldn't have been more perfect and we sold out. We appreciate, too, all of those who bought dessert from our booth.



**A Change in the Board**

We are saddened by the death of board member Sandi Sharer. Sandi joined the Board of Directors in 2009, and had been a frequent visitor to the museum for a number of years. She had compiled extensive records of Civil War veterans, as well as consolidating the obituary indexes, putting the Marriages of Mercer County on the computer, and adding to the collection of Mercer County stories from the past.

Welcome to Jean Wistedt as our newest member. Jean frequents the Essley-Noble Museum and has been an invaluable help in genealogical research as well as other aspects related to Mercer County. We welcome her expertise and enthusiasm.

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The following is a poem written by Jason Olson who bought and is renovating the Prentiss House at New Boston. Thank you, Jason!

### **Learn from the Past**

*Some say it's worthless to study the past,  
but I say they're wrong, the value is vast.*

*Others say Eh just let them decay,  
What can they possibly teach us today?*

*Those who have gone can show us a way,  
And brighten our future; enlighten us today.*

*Mistakes have been made I agree that is true,  
But bright spots like diamonds will always show through.*

*Let us examine those people quite great,  
But ignore not those who had a much different fate.*

*For lots can be learned from people so varied,  
The hopes, the dreams, the sorrows they carried.*

*The problems are old the solutions are few,  
So examine their dragons, and how they were slew.*

*Were they really so different, so different from us,  
Can we really say we are crafted of much sterner stuff?*

*For some stone in a graveyard is all that is left,  
For others volumes are written that carry much heft.*

*So look towards the past when the future you seek,  
Train your eyes and your mind to be humble, be meek.*

*History repeats as the old saying goes,  
So remember my thoughts, remember my prose.*



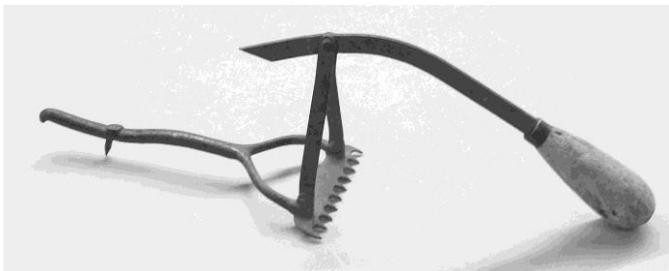
### **Come to the Fair**

Come visit our booth in the SW corner of the Merchants Building afternoons and evenings during the Mercer County Fair, July 9-13. There will be displays and the popular "Name That Tool" contest. We also will be selling a variety of books available through the museum.



### **What is it?**

It is still unknown what the previous item was used for.



This item is made of metal and the shaft with the wooden handle rotates forward and back. What is it?



### **5th Grade Thank You's**

These are only a few of the many heartfelt thank you's we received:

*"I plan to come back some day on my bike and learn more. Trevor;*

*The station that I would have to say was the best was the quilt making not only was it fun but it was also for a good cause. Vance (The quilt will go to the MC Nursing Home.);*

*I liked how we got to do the things not just watch people talk about them. Patrick;*

*When we grinded the corn was the best part. I have to tell my uncle, he's a farmer. Joshua;*

*Today was the best day I ever had. Anna...*

*After I saw how things looked and worked, I wish we still had all that stuff. Ethan;*

*I liked tying the quilt and sewing because I am trying to learn how to sew better and that really helped. Also who knows, I am probably going to make a quilt some day. Bailey;*

*I thought I would never be able to do it (quilting) but it turns out I am pretty good at it. Seth; My favorite station was the old school house with Mrs. Waters.*

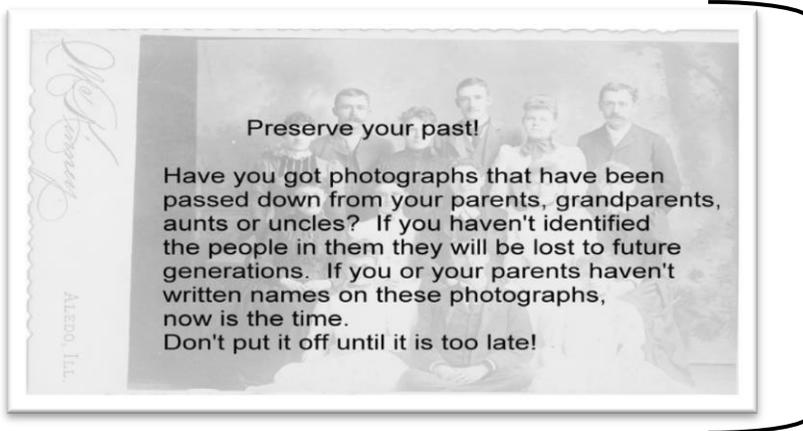
*I liked it because it was really neat learning while seeing it, and when she told us that it was actually used back then I was shocked. Taylor*





## Calendar of Events for 2013:

- July 9-13** Mercer Co. Fair booth in the Merchants Building. Exhibits & Name the Tools.
- Aug. 24** Antique Days special exhibits and extended hours at the museum 10:00-5:00
- Oct. 21** Fall open meeting. 7:00 at the museum.  
Jason Olson will give the program on the New Boston Prentiss House that he purchased.
- Oct. 30** Last day of regular hours 1:00-5:00
- Nov. 2** Start of Winter hours Sat. only 12:00-4:00



## Preserve Your Past

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I want to make sure you get the personalized service you deserve, and that service includes helping you build and maintain a tangible plan for your financial security. Let's get together for an Insurance and Financial Review to plan for today and tomorrow.



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