

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 &

Essley-Noble Museum

1406 - SE 2nd Avenue
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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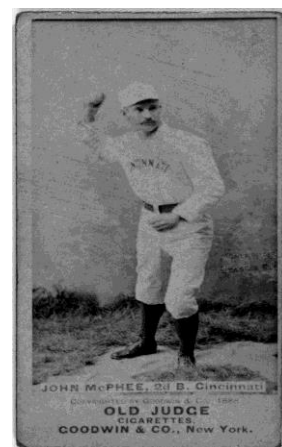


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In the Baseball Hall of Fame by Stephanie Braucht

National Baseball Hall of Fame member John Alexander "Bid" McPhee was born November 1, 1859 in Massena, NY, and he died January 3, 1943 in San Diego, CA. But those important years when he was growing up, and when he was learning to play baseball and hone his skills- those years were spent right here in Mercer County.

Bid, also known as Biddy, was the fourth of five children born to John and Maria Button McPhee. They came to Mercer County in the 1860s, likely because Maria's father, Schuyler Button was here. Schuyler Button had bought the Barton House in downtown Aledo and was operating a hotel/boarding house there. That building, located on the northwest corner of College and Main, is known today as the Button Building. Bid's father, who was a saddle-maker, died sometime around 1866. It is believed



that he is the John McPhee buried in the Aledo cemetery, although the date transcribed from a weathered and damaged gravestone by the DAR on their walk-through project in the 1960s indicates an age that would not fit. We do know that in 1866, the McPhee family (whether John was still living or not) moved to Keithsburg. Bid would have been about seven at that time. By the 1870 census Maria McPhee was operating a boarding house in Keithsburg. Bid, age 10, was living with her, along with his two brothers and two sisters- Henry, 18, Benjamin, 8, Frances, 16, and Jennie, 13. Young John A. McPhee reportedly earned his nicknames of Bid and Biddy as he helped in the boardinghouse. He was frequently sent to fetch this or that or to help with a task, at someone's bid.

It's also interesting to note the names of the boarders living in Maria McPhee's boardinghouse in 1870, as some of their descendants reading this might recognize them. They were: Isaac Montgomery, 31, student at law; James Riley, 24, tailor; Daniel Evans, 28, barber; Theodore Glancey, 33, editor of *Keithsburg Observer*; Walter Pepper, 29, lawyer; John Colvin, 30, distiller. Bid McPhee undoubtedly went to school in Keithsburg during the 1860s and 1870s, but for how many years, we do not know. During those times, the highest level

of education achieved was usually 8th grade. High schools didn't exist, except for private ones. If a student graduated from 8th grade, it was quite an accomplishment. And the curriculum covered by an eighth-grade education was quite rigorous. School attendance was not even required by law in Illinois until 1883. At that time a law was passed that required all children aged 8 to 14 to attend a public or private school for at least 12 weeks during a year. And that law wasn't strictly enforced until after World War II! The formation of public high schools in Illinois, supported by township taxpayers, was not allowed by law until 1872. Most likely high schools did not just appear immediately, as it would have taken some planning and implementation and collection of taxes. According to a book entitled "150th" *Keithsburg Sesquicentennial 1837-1987*, compiled by Sharon Reason, Keithsburg High School graduated its first class in 1884. That would indicate that the high school had been formed in 1880. In 1880, Bid was 21 years old, well beyond the age for attending high school. By 1884 he was already playing professional baseball. Suffice it to say that Bid received all of his formal education in Keithsburg.



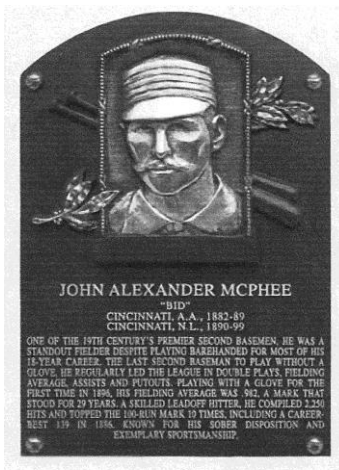
Fortunately for Bid, in 1871 Mercer County formed a baseball league. Since there were no public high schools, there obviously were no public high school sports teams. The club at Keithsburg was called the Ictaries. Bid began playing for the Ictaries when he was just 16. He was their youngest player. That would have been about 1875. In 1877 he was signed to the Davenport Brown Stockings. He played two seasons with them, first as a catcher, then as a second baseman and outfielder.

About 1879-1880 he took a position as a bookkeeper. He made more money doing that than playing ball, seemed to like it, and had to be induced to return to baseball.

In 1881, he was recruited to play second base for an independent team in Akron, OH. It was from there that he was signed to the newly formed Cincinnati team of the American Association (the Red Stockings, which eventually became the Reds in the National League). He played for the Red Stockings then the Reds for 18 years, during which he ranked among the premier second basemen. His batting

stats were commendable, but it was for his efforts at second base that he became well known. He led his league in fielding average for ten seasons, finished second four times, and never placed below fourth. He paced his league for 11 years in double plays, for 8 years in putouts, and for 6 years in assists. His .978 fielding average in 1896 was the best in the major leagues during his 18-year career, and his 529 putouts in 1886 remain a single-season record at second base. Overall, he ranks second for putouts (6,300), third in average putouts per game (3), fifth in assists (6,593), and eleventh in total double plays (1,145). These records are all the more remarkable because he was one of the last barehanded players, not using a glove until 1897, when he was almost at the end of his career. The only reason he started to use one at that time was to protect a broken finger. It is said that he soaked his hands in salt water to toughen them.

Interestingly, when Bid went to play for the Red Stockings, the American Association was newly formed, and, in an attempt to help fans better understand the game, players wore uniforms that were color-coordinated according to their position on the field. The only thing that designated one team from the other was the color of their stockings. As a second-baseman, Bid wore an orange and black striped shirt. This was during the same time that Keithsburg apparently was organizing its high school. One has to wonder if the choice of orange and black chosen for the school colors was inspired by the colors worn by their home-grown major league baseball player.



NATIONAL BASEBALL HALL OF FAME & MUSEUM, Cooperstown, New York

Bid still had ties to Mercer County in 1899. The September 21, 1899 issue of the *Times Record* shows his purchase of several lots in Keithsburg. The seller was D.J. Evans. Was that possibly Daniel Evans, the barber who lived in Maria McPhee's boardinghouse when Bid was a young boy? The newspaper contains the legal description of

those lots, for anyone interested in determining their location.

Bid was almost 40 years old when he retired from playing baseball. He was proud that he had never been fined or ejected from a game. Indeed, Bid was held in high esteem as an honest man and a true gentleman. He was also deemed a brave, imaginative, and immensely talented pioneer of the game.

After retiring as a player, Bid managed the Reds in 1901 and 1902 and then scouted for them through 1909. He married Julia Caroline Broerman on August 7, 1902. They had no children.

Lauded as baseball's greatest second baseman of the 19th century, he was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, NY in 2000. In addition to his accomplishments as a ballplayer, his plaque at the Hall of Fame notes his "sober disposition and exemplary sportsmanship."

Thanks to Jean Wistedt for her research contributions to this article.



MCHS Publications

Available at Wagner Pharmacy

Wagner Pharmacy, on behalf of the Mercer County Historical Society, will be selling signed copies of our pictorial history, *Mercer County*, that was published last year, as well as copies of our other various publications. Thank you to Gary Wagner for making these publications available. They can also be obtained from the museum or by mail. See the MCHS website for a list of the publications and prices.



2014 Donors

Thank you to those who have donated items to the museum during 2014. Please forgive us if anyone has been left out.

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Annual memberships expired December 31, 2014. 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!

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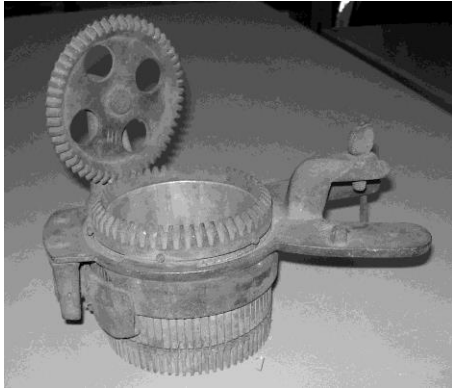
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What is It?

The previous item was a chicken leg cooker, with an inscription "Chicken sans volaille." Presumably it was used to press chicken meat into the form of a leg. This item is made of metal with movable parts.



Coming Events

- Jan. 1** Memberships due—Thank you!
- Apr. 1** Start of regular hours Wed. Sat.
Sun. 1-5:00 pm
- Apr. 20** Tentative date of Spring open meeting
- May:** 5th grade tours, dates TBA
- June 6** Dessert in the park at Rhubarb Fest



Curator's Corner

Many new accessions have come to our Museum in 2014 year, and I want to thank all who have contributed. Our Genealogy interests are growing and want to thank all of the volunteers that have helped me in this past year. Also, thanks to Bud Linroth who gave the fall meeting program on the CB&Q railroad in Mercer County, we have a limited number of his book *A History of the CB&Q Illinois Pea Vine* for sale at the museum. A welcome invitation is extended to visit our new displays in the museum.

Veda Meriwether, Curator



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