

Grundy County Historical Society Newsletter



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510 W. Illinois Ave. ↔ Morris, IL 60450 ↔ 815-942-4880

e-mail: grundyhstory@sbcglobal.net

Facebook: Museum of the Grundy County Historical Society-Illinois

Museum Hours: Thursday, Friday, Saturday
10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Group Tours by Appointment—Call for Appointment

The Grundy County Historical Society Newsletter is published four times a year. It is distributed to members of record free of charge via e-mail and USPS. Subscriptions to the Society start at \$20 annually. Applications can be downloaded from our website, <http://www.grundycountyhs.org> or write to us care of the address above.

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HAPPENINGS AT THE MUSEUM

FESTIVAL OF TREES

The trees were beautiful, the wreaths were gorgeous and the center pieces glittered and all attracted a great deal of attention. The weather cooperated by not being super cold or snowing. We had 742 people pass through either for serious bidding or to get ideas for their own homes. We welcomed them all.

The most popular tree this year was Reeves Funeral Homes “WHOOS Ready for Christmas” filled with owls, hedgehogs and birds. The second most popular tree was Sarah Jane Fisher’s hand blown glass ornament tree. Also in the fantastic popularity race was a Christmas Carolers decoration supplied by Apple Butter/Shuggies.

The theme trees for children, the wine tree, the “Night at the Movies” tree, as well as two machines supplied by Northwestern Corporation—a candy dispenser decorated with Route 66 graphics and a gum ball dispenser decorated with Bulls graphics—created a lot of attention and bids. One of our more nostalgic trees was a tree decorated with handmade ornaments by Pieces From the Heart Quilt Guild. Very popular was the table setting donated by Lawrence Advertising.

The raffles were all popular and ranged from a Keurig coffee brewer to a mani-pedi. Our visitors appreciated being able to have their tickets go toward a particular raffle item or items they really wanted to have for each drawing.

Our main raffle was an IPAD Mini supplied by Century 21 Coleman-Hornsby and was won by Sheila Funk. She said she would have to ask her grandchildren how to use it.

This year we felt was the most successful we have had in several years. Since this is our main fund raiser each year the support of the 742 people who came was greatly appreciated as well as our many volunteers who made the event such a success.

FACEBOOK

For members who are computer savvy, we now have a very active Facebook page which is updated by Dorothy Cunnea with historical questions (with later answers), trivia comments,

and articles from newspapers which apply to Grundy County. If you wish to have access, request a friendship from Museum of the Grundy County Historical Society—Illinois. We welcome all comers and today have 106 followers.

MAZON FOSSIL UPDATE

Joan Bledig and Richard Rock have almost completed the refurbishing of our Mazon Creek plant fossil display. New signage is in the works. In addition, Richard has donated a number of fauna specimens to the museum’s collection. Richard and Joan will return soon to design a new display which will feature Mazon Creek fauna, especially our Tully Monsters, the state fossil of Illinois.

UPCOMING PROGRAMS

All programs start at 7:00 p.m. and will be at The Museum, 510 W. Illinois Ave., Morris unless otherwise noted.

February 25, 2014—Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln

An evening spent in the living room of Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln Meeting will be at the Morris Library, lower level.

March 25, 2014—TBA

April 22, 2014—Pauline Brown

Relatives of Shabbona and Genealogy of Indians

EVENTS

May 6, 2014—5th year Anniversary Party—Night at the Museum—in planning stage, watch for more information

June 27-29, 2014—Liberty Days Celebration

MUSEUM SPACE

As hard as it is to believe, we are trying to find new space and are looking to buy WE CARE’s space as they may be moving to larger quarters. Storage space is desperately needed. We are looking to expand and create a native American exhibit in our current meeting room and would like to move our offices, meeting room, research area, and storage to the space currently occupied by WE CARE. If you come to the Museum you will see that we have things stored ALL OVER—under exhibits, in the offices, in the meeting room, underneath cabinets in the

Baum Room, on top of book cases, etc. Our success is wonderful but has created a need for more space. Now, however, we need money to accomplish our goals and are looking into that.

CORN CORN CORN

HISTORY

History indicates that corn did not look like corn at all when it was first cultivated and domesticated by prehistoric people. Before cultivation it looked more like a weed with seed pods. Corn is actually a grass. Its wild ancestor is a grass called teosinte. The word *corn* was originally a European generic term that referred to grain crops in general but now has become virtually synonymous with maize.

The leafy stalk of a corn plant produces ears which contain the grain, which are its seeds called kernels. Maize kernels are used in cooking as a starch.

The Olmec and Mayans cultivated it in numerous varieties throughout Mesoamerica. They used the corn by cooking, grinding, or cooking with lye-type minerals to soften the corn. The lye process was very important in the early Mesoamerican diet, as unprocessed maize is deficient in niacin. A population depending on untreated maize as a staple food risks malnourishment, and is more likely to develop deficiency diseases such as pellagra. Maize also is deficient in essential amino acids,

which can result in other malnourishment diseases. There were many ways to die in ancient times which are, thank goodness, gone today. The Mesoamerican triumvirate of maize processed with lime, beans, and squash provided all necessary amino acids (proteins) required for a properly balanced human diet.

Beginning about 2500 BC, the crop spread through much of the Americas. The region developed a trade network based on the surplus and varieties of maize crops. After European contact with the Americas in the late 15th and early 16th centuries, explorers and traders carried maize back to Europe and introduced it to other countries. Maize spread to the rest of the world because of its ability to grow in diverse climates. Sugar-rich varieties called sweet corn are usually grown for human consumption, while field corn is used for animal feed and as feedstocks.

Comment—Just think about grinding corn for flour, etc. back in the early days of agriculture. They would use two volcanic rocks or stones to grind the corn: the metate which was the base and the mano, the stone which grinds against the metate. Ever wonder why the teeth of those people were so poor? Well as the kernels were ground up, the rock also abraded resulting in minute pieces entering into the maize. Thus, when the tortilla made from the maize flower was chewed, the minute stone fragments also abraded the teeth.

U.S. PRODUCTION

Maize is the most widely grown grain crop throughout the Americas. Approximately 40 percent of the crop—130 million tons—is used for corn ethanol. Genetically modified maize made up 85 percent of the maize planted in the United States in 2009. Do you know that some countries will NOT accept genetically modified corn????

The principal role of corn planting during the 19th century was closely tied to the development of the Midwest. In the movement westward, corn found its major home in the woodland clearings and grasslands of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, and adjacent states. These were places where it had not been grown widely in prehistoric times.

As early as 1880, the United States grew over 62 million acres of corn. By 1900, this figure had reached approximately 95 million acres; by 1910, it was over 100 million acres. The highest acreage ever recorded in the United States was 111 million acres in 1917.

From the beginning of record-keeping in the 1880s, through the mid 1930s, there was no significant increase in the national average corn yield. Yields during the 1920s and 1930s were no higher than those produced as a national average in the late 1800s.

It was not until the vast technological advances in the early 1940s that corn yields started to show significant yield increases. Prior to this time, the highest U.S. average yield was recorded in 1906 at 31.7 bushels per acre. Following moderate yield increases in the 1940s and 1950s, yields shot up in the 1960s and early 1970s to a national average of 109.5 bushels



Maize: (a) Lower part of the plant (b) top of plant with male inflorescence (c) middle of plant with female inflorescences (d) ear/cob: (1) two pollen grains of a male inflorescence (2, 3, 4) female flowers (5) female flowers with stigma (6) fruit bottom view (7) fruit side view (8) fruit cross-section views

per acre in 1979. In 2000, U.S. farmers planted over 79 million acres of corn, and today, more than 40 percent of the world's corn is produced in the United States.

Total acreage is now less than in earlier years, but planting has increased in the more favorable areas of the Corn Belt. Iowa is normally the leading corn producing state, followed closely by Illinois. As early as 1910, Illinois had acres of corn which averaged nearly 40 bushels per acre. In 1935, the state had corn averaging at 39 bushels per acre. In 1960, Illinois averaged 62 bushels per acre.

Corn planted acreage is the highest in 77 years, the USDA reported in its annual "Acreage" report. The USDA estimates corn acreage at 97.4 million acres. This is up slightly from 2012 and the highest planted acreage in the country when an estimated 102 million acres were planted. Many top corn-producing states reported a drop in acreage from 2012, including Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Minnesota, Missouri, South Dakota, Tennessee, and Wisconsin.

Illinois saw the biggest drop in estimated corn acreage this year, dropping to 12.2 million from 12.8 million last year.

USES

During the mid 1960s, about 75 percent of the corn was fed to livestock, 13 percent was exported, and the remainder went into human food and industrial products. By 2000, the relative amount of corn fed to livestock had decreased to 60 percent, 22 percent was exported, 6 percent was used for High-Fructose Corn Sweetener, 6 percent was processed for ethanol, and 6 percent went into other products.

Between 90 and 95 percent of the crop is harvested for grain; the remaining 5 to 10 percent is grown for silage. Of the corn fed to livestock in 1960, about 40 percent went to hogs, 20 percent to poultry, 30 percent to cattle on feed and milk cows, and 10 percent to other types of livestock. By 2000, these amounts had shifted to 29 percent to cattle on feed, 29 percent to poultry, 24 percent to hogs, 16 percent to dairy cattle, and 2 percent to other types of livestock.

One reference lists over 500 different uses for corn. Corn is a component of canned corn, baby food, hominy, mush, puddings, tamales, and many more human foods.

Some industrial uses of corn include filler for plastics, packing materials, insulating materials, adhesives, chemicals, explosives, paint, paste, abrasives, dyes, insecticides, pharmaceuticals, organic acids, solvents, rayon, antifreeze, soaps, and many more.

Corn also is used as the major study plant for many academic disciplines such as genetics, physiology, soil fertility and biochemistry. It is doubtful that any other plant has been studied as extensively as has the corn plant.

A bushel of shelled corn weighs 56 pounds depending on dryness. In 1910 thru 1930 corn was stored on family farms for their own use.

Corn yields remained below 40 bushels an acre before 1940, rose to approximately 50 bushels during the war and then plummeted. In 1950, farmers were wondering if they would ever live to see yields of 100 bushels an acre, but by 1985, they were feeling sorry for themselves if they failed to get 125 bushels per acre. Today, farmers are reporting a minimum of 155 bushels per acre and many more are into the 200+ bushels per acre.



Hybrid corn allowed them to double and triple their yields but it also forced them to use chemical fertilizers which had not been used before as the previous fertilizer was horse manure, etc. Between 1949 and 1969 farmers increased their use of fertilizers at a factor of six times more than ever used before. Anhydrous ammonia became the fertilizer of choice because it is an important source of nitrogen even though it is a lethal gas.

Some old-timers can remember the days of the 40-bushel corn, when they picked the crop by hand. Young farm boys boasted about having picked a hundred bushels in a day, but that was a long and hard day. One and two row mechanical pickers had almost replaced handpicking by the end of World War II, but pickers took the entire ear from the stalk, and the kernels still had to be shelled from the ear after picking. The combine harvester both picked and shelled four or more rows of corn in a single operation, and it could harvest one hundred bushels in a short time.

CORN CRIBS

The wooden corn cribs with open slatted sides, which used to be seen all over, are rapidly disappearing since they only held corn ears, not loose corn. The widespread adoption of combines made corn cribs obsolete. Ears of corn were dried naturally by the air that passed through the slatted sides of the old, wooden cribs, but shelled corn in an enclosed bin must be dried artificially.



For more than a century, the filled-to-capacity corn crib was a visible sign of the paramount role of agriculture in Illinois. Today advances in storage and technologies have made this structure obsolete and the ubiquitous corn crib is slowly but surely disappearing from the rural landscape.

Well into the 1950's most farmers dried and stored ear corn in a well-ventilated outbuilding: corn cribs. Corn "in the ear" could be dried easier and kept longer than shelled corn, so cribs were functional storage stations before farmers hauled their corn to the local grain elevators.

Combines—machines that could pick, husk, and shell corn with efficiency—arrived on the scene in the 1950s making the storage of ear corn pointless come harvest time. Shelled corn is now stored in huge concrete elevators and steel grain bins and the corn cribs that still exist on countless farms are slowly deteriorating and remain only as historical evidence of our agricultural past.

Styles of corn cribs varied. There were originally log cribs, called rail cribs, but these were soon replaced by frame cribs which featured two storage areas on each side of a central passageway. Other cribs were mesh or snow fence cribbing with horizontal supports to prevent bowing. These cribs originally had wood roofs but were replaced later by metal roofs. The crib's purpose was to maximize air flow and speed in drying the corn. There were also round cribs, noteworthy today because of the artists' and photographers' fascination with this crib style. Though impressive-looking, they are less practical. Metal cribs were adopted because wood and labor prices

rose, and also because metal cribs were more sturdy and required little maintenance. Due to changes in harvest technologies, corn cribs became uncommon after the mid-1950s. Combines made it possible to not only pick the ears and cut up the waste, but also to shell the corn in the field. And artificial dryers eliminated the need for a long drying period in a crib. How did farmers know when their corn was dry? They would take six sample ears, put them in a cattle tank. If they floated, the corn was dry.



WHETTING YOUR APPETITE—FUTURE EXHIBITS

- January, February, March** Antique Toys and Games
Valentine and Sentimental Nostalgia Keepsakes
Celebrating the Red Cross
- April, May, June** Teddy Bears from the Joan Sereno and Donna Sroczyński Collections
- July, August, September** Advertising Gimmicks and Giveaways
- October, November, December** DWS Old Style—Antiques Shoes and Footwear



HELP YOUR MUSEUM!!!

We are working hard to increase our collections of Native American artifacts and information, especially anything dealing with Shabbona. If you have any documentation that we could copy or know of someone who has artifacts that we could display either permanently or on loan, please tell them of the Museum's interest.

Grundy County



Historical Society

Grundy County Historical Society
and Museum
510 West Illinois Avenue
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