

# Grundy County Historical Society Newsletter



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

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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

### UPCOMING PROGRAMS

All programs start at 7:00 p.m. and will be at the Museum, 510 West Illinois Avenue. in Morris unless otherwise noted.

April 22, 2014—Pauline Brown

Relatives of Shabbona and Genealogy of Indians

### EVENTS

May 6, 2014—5th year Anniversary Party—see below for more information

June 27-29, 2014—Liberty Days Celebration

## SAVE THE DATE—MAY 6, 2014— NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM

We will be holding a five year anniversary party at the museum. Please come and enjoy our museum and our success over the last five years. You, as a member, have been a part of this success and you should come and enjoy our celebration. Remember, this event will replace this year's annual meeting. Reservations are required and we will be sending out special notices for you to make yours for this event. Refreshments will be served and the cost will be \$20.00 per person. If you need an additional invitation for a family member or a friend, please call the Museum at 815-942-4880.

Our party is called **Night at the Museum**. We will have volunteers and staff throughout the museum who will talk about featured sections of our exhibits. Come and enjoy the history our museum preserves through these exciting live presentations.

### FACEBOOK

For members who are computer savvy, we now have a very active Facebook page which is kept up to date by Dorothy Cunnea. You can find museum news and events program information, Grundy County Trivia, local news and events, 100-year Grundy County flashback from the Morris Daily Herald, On This Day in History, old photographs, event photographs, interesting books

in the museum's collection, and identify the Mystery Photo as well as other articles and discussions. If you wish to access the page, request a friendship from Museum of the Grundy County Historical Society—Illinois. We welcome all comers. As of this printing, we have 188 followers.

### NEW EXHIBIT

We have teamed up with the ICS 3rd graders to exhibit their idea of an Indian (Native American) campground. The dioramas that came from the imagination of these students is amazing. They have also written reports on their project. This exhibit will be here ONLY through April. Please come in soon to see it.

### RETURNED FROM HILLCROFT FARM

Recently acquired through ebay are two gold rings and two skeleton keys enclosed in matching gold and red velvet frames, and a knife with a wooden handle resting on red velvet backing and surrounded by an elaborately carved black walnut frame.

On the back of the key frame, in Virginia Sparr Brown's handwriting it states: "Childhood gold ring of Caroline Hatcher Sparr . . . brass key to Hillcroft Farm, Morris, Ill. House built by Isaac Hoge, probably in the 1850's."

On the back of the carved frame is the following typewritten explanation: "The wood and steel in this knife is from the covered wagon that brought William Hoge's family from Fauquier County, Virginia to Grundy County, Illinois in the fall of 1831. William Hynds found these materials on William Hoge's farm in Section 25 of Nettle Creek Township, had the knife made, and presented it to Caroline Sparr in 1965." Virginia Sparr Brown, a lifelong member of the Grundy County Historical Society, died in 2005.

### 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. The museum desperately needs additional storage space. We would like to 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. When you visit 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 it has created a need for more space. We need money to accomplish these goals and are looking into securing funding

## NEW MEMBERS

The following folks have joined or renewed their memberships in the Grundy County Historical Society. Thank you for your support!

Gerald F. Bednarik (Morris, IL)

Nanch Ferguson Hanke (Oklahoma)

Phil and Karen McArdle (Dwight, IL)

## FESTIVAL OF TREES RECAP

Pat Rooney and Donna Sroczyński are working on preparing a Festival of Trees DVD which we will plan to air in our meeting room during our next FOT. This DVD will feature all our trees from the 2013 festival and will have a musical background. This will be a welcome addition for Festival of Trees attendees to enjoy.

# APRONS

The apron came about because of practical necessity. In years gone by, people didn't have the luxury of owning a large wardrobe. Washing and drying clothing was not done on a frequent basis, so aprons served a practical purpose of covering up the



Perhaps the earliest aprons were merely animal hides draped over the stone tool maker's thigh to protect him from sharp shards generated when knapping flint.

aprons began serving a decorative purpose. Not just housewives wore aprons, but school teachers, children, shop-keepers, and secretaries all wore different styles of aprons over their clothing every day.

## ORIGIN:

The English word *apron* came from *naperon*, the Old French word for napkin or small tablecloth.

How do we know what they wore in the 12th to 15th centuries? Paintings are the best clue we have as there is not really a history of aprons.

Remember, that fabric was precious because, for common folk, it was woven at home on narrow looms. Every scrap

was used, so there was probably a minimum of cut and sew involved. And there would not have been a lot of time or money to spend on decorative aprons. These simple aprons were shown on both men and women. NOT the wealthy—they did no work that required them to get dirty. And definitely would not have allowed a painter to paint them in an apron.

## TWELFTH CENTURY:

Guess who wore aprons first? Men, as hygienic, protective wear.

## FOURTEENTH CENTURY:

Dark-colored aprons started to be worn tied at the waist.

## SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES:

Colors denoted the trade of the wearer. English barbers wore a checked pattern; butchers and porters, green; and masons, white.

However, in this time period (again based on paintings) you could see elaborately decorated aprons for women. These were not work aprons. They were fashionable, status aprons decorated with expensive lace and embroidery. Definitely NOT for the working class.

## SEVENTEENTH CENTURY:

Romantic notions began to blossom. Your beau is thinking of you if the apron becomes untied and drops off.

## EIGHTEENTH CENTURY:

The pinafore a full length but ONE SIDED apron was actually "pinned" to clothing.

When Europeans began immigrating to the new world, aprons were simple and functional as a reaction to the excesses of European fashion. The Pilgrim women wore plain, long, white aprons. Later, the Quaker women wore long aprons made of colored silk.

Fashions ebbed and changed in Europe depending on politics ie. England under Cromwell required simple aprons. Under Charles II the pendulum moved again to the other extreme with embroidery and lace again decorating aprons. At this time these fancy aprons were worn as an adornment in Louis XIV's court in France. In England, women competed to see who could have the most elaborately decorated apron. Wealthy women often left their heirloom aprons to favored family members.



## NINETEENTH CENTURY:

Cooks began turning the apron only once before washing. Any more, and the stains aren't hidden.

## 1900-1920:

Long aprons cover and protect clothing.

## 1920:

Straight-line aprons are the style.

In the 1920s and 1930s aprons followed the silhouette of the dress—long, with no waist line.

## 1930:

Beautiful prints with bright sashes, along with crocheted aprons, make an appearance.

## 1940:

Printed half-aprons tied around the waist, and aprons made of handkerchiefs, are popular.

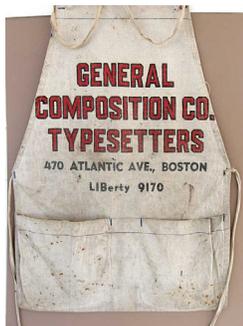
By the 1940's, aprons gained a cinched waistline, and were often gaily trimmed with rick-rack, buttons, and pockets of contrasting color. Many aprons were made from feed cloth. What is feed cloth. Feed cloth was a heavier fabric and was used as a sack to put seed or flour in that farmers used. There was no wasting back then, when the sacks were empty, the feed sack fabric was used for quilts and aprons. In fact, when the apron had seen its day and was ready to be tossed, the best parts were cut out and used for quilts. Often the pockets were in the best condition.

## 1950:

Magazines from the 1940s and 50s feature apron-adorned women in nearly every advertisement that is related to housework or cooking. It was a standard uniform that, at the time, was not frowned upon. Aprons were a selling feature for irons, kitchen appliances, food products and more.

The 1950's brought out the half-aprons of highly starched cotton, feedsack and sheer fabric trimmed with lace for special occasions. The lace and 'special aprons' were used for card parties or social events. Often the woman would cook with her everyday apron and then when it came time to bring the food to the table she would replace the work a day apron to a more fancy apron. Two piece aprons and short smocks of bright cotton prints for every day use were popular.

Full-skirted plastic aprons, and ones with cross-stitch designs, gain U.S. popularity.



## 1960:

Message aprons first appeared in the late 1960s. *Kiss the Cook* and *For This I Went to College* were some of the most popular messages embossed on the once-again-popular full-length aprons. These messages were a reflection of the Feminist Movement that was starting to pick up steam at this time. Remember, until the 60's most women stayed at home and did not work. Half-aprons with attached hand towels are sure-fire hits, along with aprons sewn with plastic hoops or valance material.



The principal use of Grandma's apron was to protect the dress underneath just as it was in the 14th century. Because people had fewer clothes, it was easier to wash aprons than dresses and they used less material, but along with that, aprons served many purposes.

It was used for drying children's tears and on occasion was even used for cleaning out dirty ears. Shy children also ducked behind the apron against Mom when visitors came. From the chicken coop, the apron was used for carry eggs, fussy chicks and sometimes half hatched eggs that needed to be brought inside to the warmth of the house. The apron wiped many a perspiring brow, bent over the hot wood stove. Chips and kindling as well as coal were brought into the kitchen in that apron although for coal the apron had a piece of newspaper to line the apron before the coal was put into the apron.

In the garden the apron was supreme. It brought in the vegetables, was used as a pea holder after the peas were shucked. It also brought in apples or pecans or walnuts from the pasture.

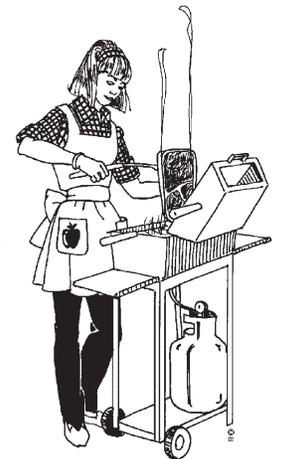
At dinner time, the waved apron caught the eye of the husband, father, grandfather and kids to indicate dinner was ready.

## 1970 TO PRESENT:

Barbecue, anyone? Grilling is a popular design or theme for modern-day aprons.

At one point, aprons were a serious fashion element, not just a mere cover-up. Today, the more rugged utilitarian aprons are still in use. The old-fashioned pretty cotton ones are hard to find. However, a check on ebay says that they have over 6,000 aprons. The modern aprons are available in both printed and hand stitched designs in a bouquet of appealing color.

While the decorated kitchen apron has passed in and out of popularity, it seems to be coming back into fashion, if only for a relatively small population. In proof of that, the high end



store, Williams and Sonoma, sells aprons both decorative and more utilitarian. Today we see white or black half aprons on waiters both men and women in more upscale restaurants, we see them in specialty shops such as spice stores, meat markets which are more traditional in the use of the apron. Aprons are used by stores both as advertising who is or is not an employee as well as for the original purpose which is to keep the wearer's clothes clean. Bakeries also use aprons and a short form (bib) are used by senior citizens.

The rest of America will always have a place in its heart for them and the memories tied to each of us, whether that recollection

is of a mother, grandmother, servant or a tv mom.

As a side note, some cultures would give a bride a very fancy satin/silk apron at her wedding reception, to indicate her change from a single woman to a married lady.



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## **WHETTING YOUR APPETITE—FUTURE EXHIBITS**

**April, May, June**

Teddy Bears from the Joan Sereno and Donna Sroczynski Collections

**July, August, September**

Advertising Gimmicks and Giveaways

**October, November, December**

DSW Old Style—Antiques Shoes and Footwear

## **HELP YOUR MUSEUM!!!**

We are working hard to increase our collection 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. We have recently received a copy of the document giving 20 acres of land to Chief Shabbona in perpetuity in Grundy County. This makes Grundy County the only county in the State of Illinois which has a Native American reservation.

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## **Grundy County**



## **Historical Society**

Grundy County Historical Society  
and Museum  
510 West Illinois Avenue  
Morris, IL 60450

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