

# Grundy County Historical Society Newsletter



Volume 2,  
Issue 3  
July 2014

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

e-mail: [grundyhhistory@sbcglobal.net](mailto:grundyhhistory@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.

## Board of Directors

Donna Sroczyński  
*President*  
JoEllyn Johnson  
*Vice President*

Sue Cunnea  
*Treasurer*  
Lisa Barclay  
*Secretary*  
Ginny Bellamy

Sandi Dransfeldt  
Marion Gore  
Theresa Lamb  
Ken Sereno

## MUSEUM NEWS

### NEW BOARD MEMBERS

We are welcoming two new Board members. Marion Gore and Theresa Lamb are both on the board for three years. It was sad to see Lea Sharp leave as she has been an active Board member since 2005.

### JUNK IN THE TRUCK

Ken Willis runs the Junk in the Trunk each month. And each year we are asked if we wish to assist in showing cars where to park at the Junk in the Trunk. This year Bill Walsh and Dan Dransfeldt assisted us with that project. It takes only about 2–2½ hours of time and Ken Willis then gives the GCHS Museum the \$10.00 taken in for each car. This year we earned \$390.00. This is a great fundraiser for the Museum.

### NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM

If you did not attend the “Night at the Museum,” you missed a great time. If you would like to see some highlights, Pat Rooney has created a DVD which you can see at the Museum showing some of the exhibit interpretations from that night.

### TRIVIA—UNITED STATES, NOT GRUNDY COUNTY

What three fruits are native to the United States? To give you a clue, most of our fruits are imports including apples, pears, bananas, oranges, white grapes. Now what is left??? You guess: The answer is later in the newsletter.

### NEW EXHIBIT

The Museum of the Grundy County Historical Society is delighted to add a special temporary exhibit. This exhibit is a display of Tony Minard’s photography. However, instead of outside photos, you will see photos of stained glass, architectural features inside homes as well as architectural features you do not normally see on the outside of our building in downtown Morris.

The exhibit is called “Home Sweet Home” and it grew from a desire to respect the craftsmanship of home architects,

carpenters and glass studios and shows stained glass, building decorations, as well as some beautiful architectural features all from homes in Morris.

### SPACE NEEDED

Previously we mentioned that we tried to buy the We Care space because we desperately need more room to house our collections. We also contacted the Christian Youth Center to see if they were interested in selling their space to us but were refused. Now, we are going to explore the possibility of adding an addition to the Museum on the south side of the building. We have received a tentative okay from the zoning board, the fire department, and the condominium association. The next step is to get bids on how much this would cost.

### LOOKING—ALWAYS LOOKING . . .

. . . for school programs, organizations’ programs, membership books, plat maps. Remember us and don’t throw them away. Throw it to us instead.

### RADIO

The Museum is on the radio the first Monday of every month. Listen to “Look Who’s Talking,” WCSJ, 103.1 on your FM dial, from approximately 9:15 a.m. to 9:30 a.m.

### NEW MEMBERS

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

Kathleen Keating Elms (Ireland)  
Barbara Gabel (Verona, IL)  
Bill Gonnam (Verona, IL)  
Deb Haines (Morris, IL)  
Dr. Larry & Joanne Johnson (Morris, IL)  
Rosalie & Phil Jostes (Channahon, IL)  
Wallace G. Pfeifer (Dwight, IL)  
Sue Rezin (Morris, IL)  
Richard E. Sefton (Morris, IL)  
Marilyn (Peacock) Carlson Winters (Morris, IL)

Apologies to Nancy Ferguson Hanke (Oklahoma). We misspelled her first name.

## DEATH

We are sorry to report Brian Nolan, one of our board members, passed away at the end of May. He will be missed. Brian was an artist, carver, Civil War enthusiast and the individual who set up the Museum's military display. He also worked with Pat Rooney on the development of DVDs for sale at the Museum including the Civil War 36th Regiment, the Interurban, and the Illinois and Michigan Canal. We received a legacy from Brian's estate which we will use to purchase a refrigerator.

## NEW COMPUTERS

Two new computers have been ordered. It was an expense that we did not need, so we have applied for a grant from the Grundy Community Foundation to cover the cost. Whether or not we get the grant is unknown at this time. Our current computers are 5½ years old and showing their age. One has a DVD player that no longer works, and the other's sound board has failed.

## CORN FESTIVAL PARADE FLOAT

We are going to try to have a float in the Corn Festival parade this year. Does anyone know how to design and/or construct a float?? We are going to go with something simple and we already have someone who has agreed to loan us a six foot two wheeled trailer for this, our first attempt at float construction. Direction is needed by the Museum staff on how to proceed. Can anyone give us advice or tell us anything about floats they have worked on?

## FACEBOOK

Don't forget to visit our Facebook page which is kept up-to-date by Dorothy Cunnea. You can find information on museum news and events, our programs as well as 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 279 followers.

## COLEMAN HARDWARE BUILDING

*History is all around us. Each building, each business in every town in the country has its own history. I will talk about only one today. Some of the language I will use will sound unfamiliar but most of this info was taken from newspapers of the times and from a document at the Museum created by Ken Sereno.*

In 1867 the enterprising businessmen of the city decided the city needed another factory in town and raised \$6,000 toward that purpose. The first to apply was a Mr. Hall of Chicago, proposing to start a school furniture manufacturing company, and the work was started but it was soon discovered that the entire

capital invested was furnished by the city and that Mr. Hall was wholly irresponsible.

He sold to A. S. Barnes & Co. who made an effort to ignore all rights of the city in the establishment, which resulted in some litigation when the Barnes Co. sold to the Sherwood School Furniture Co., and the city took \$13,000 additional stock, making \$19,000 invested. F. T. June, Esquire, a fine business man and able manager, was their superintendent, under whose management they erected nearly, if not quite all of the building of the present Coleman Hardware Co. and manufactured a large quantity of fine quality school furniture, even making their own castings.

The name changed to the Ohio Butt Co., and reorganized under the name of Coleman Hardware Co., with J. G. Coleman, of Chicago, as president; David Nickel, as vice president and general manager; and W. A. Parker, as Secretary. This was a fine complement to Mr. Nickel, who began with the old Sherwood Co., low down on the ladder, but a few years. Coleman sold the Ohio Butt Company machinery to the Elmira, New Jersey, State Reformatory for \$15,000.

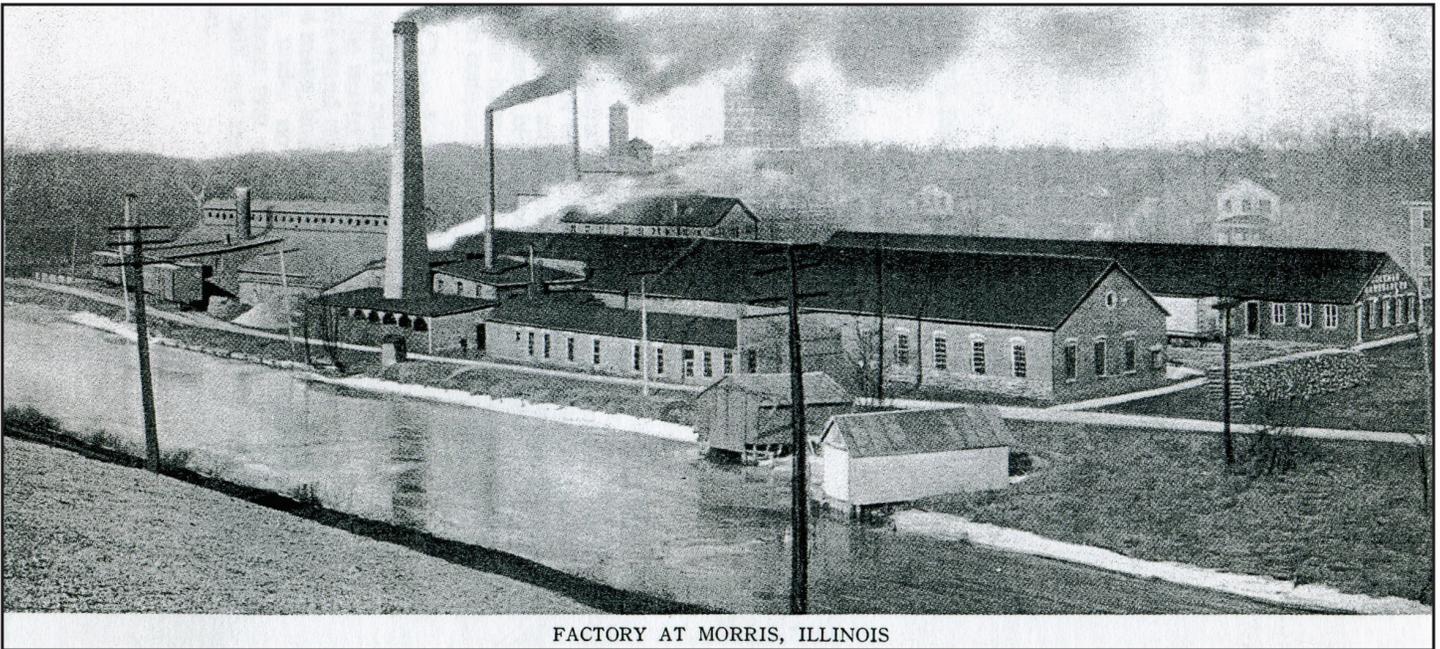
The Coleman Company had a large and profitable industry of making sash locks, hinges and hardware specialties as well as a double swing hinges. Coleman had the patent on this type of hinge (see their catalog at the Museum) but as an experiment it decided to also manufacture something else.

In 1890, gas and oil heating stoves were manufactured in the Coleman Hardware Building. Mr. Chas. W. Jenks, who had a patent on the Tidal Wave gas and oil heating stove, sold it door-to-door around the area. It was said that the stove met the approval of all who examined its workings, and it was felt at the time it was destined to work a revolution in heating of chambers, bath rooms, etc. for which it was designed.

In 1909, reports said the Coleman Company was growing. The Morris peanut machine has caused the company to become rushed with orders and unable to keep up with demand. Many hands were wanted as assemblers and any young men mechanically inclined could secure employment. The "Morris" Peanut machine was known throughout the breadth and length of the land. It had been advertised extensively in every city and town of any consequence and had made the city of Morris known everywhere. B. M. Davis has other devices which he had patented, and promised to further increase the business at the Coleman factory which already made numerous hardware specialties. Later, the superintendent of the Coleman Manufacturing plant was Edward Wainwright, while Mr. Coleman maintained an office in Chicago, from where he directed the company's activities. At different times of the year the plant employed between 150 and 250 men, including a number of skilled molders and machinists.

Remember—this was in the days before child labor laws had been enacted in our country. Photos show children as young

Trivia answer: Blueberries, Cranberries, Concord Grapes!



FACTORY AT MORRIS, ILLINOIS

looking as 10 years of age working in the various incarnations of the Coleman Manufacturing Company.

By 1917 the plant was being managed by Mr. J. Wm. Schonert, the current Mayor of Morris, under whose direction the plant was an important factor in the prosperity of the city. Apparently in 1917, being the mayor was not yet considered to be a full time job.

In November, 1920, a fire destroyed a large portion of the foundry section of the plant. The fire dept had difficulty in getting the fire fighting machines to the location. The auto chemical and hose wagon could not be started. The Morris Fire Department was able to get the chemical engine to the blaze and also the old horse hose wagon. This gave the firemen something to work with and they soon had two streams of water going into the building, one from the east and the other from the west end of the building and one stream from the chemical wagon. In the meantime men of the department succeeded in getting the auto truck running and it arrived, enabling the laying of three more lines of hoses. Kays Taxi pulled the hook and ladder truck to the fire guided by former chief H. M Ferguson, no teams having responded to the alarm. For 15 minutes it looked as if the plant was doomed as well as the houses located immediately adjoining, but once the men of the department got something to combat the flames with they soon had the fire under control. The fire damage was repaired within ten days and the plant was completely modernized under general manager, C. S. Magner.

Keep in mind, this was a volunteer fire department!

In November, 1926, another fire happened. The Pattern Department and Foundry Shop were gutted, causing \$100,000 in damages. J. W. Schonert, general manager, declared that within three weeks the company would be in a position to handle as much work as it has ever done and no casting contracts would be turned away. The greatest loss was in the

Pattern Department. E. A. Bolen of the Northwestern Corp. rushed over as soon as he heard of the fire and salvaged all of his company's patterns.

At that time, Coleman Hardware was numbered as one of the largest institutions of its kind in the country. It manufactured all kinds of hardware specialties, such as the nickel barn door hanger, nickel spring hinge, and the Gardner sash balance, articles that were meeting with ready sale to trade. More of these articles were manufactured here than in any other plant in the United States. The entire output of several firms was manufactured here, and practically every civilized country in the world knew of the company's products.

On February 15, 1929, J. G. Coleman, president of the Coleman Hardware Company died suddenly while seated at the breakfast table in his Chicago home. He was 83 years old and had been president of the company since it was established and was active in its operations up until the day he died. His wife and son, Loring, survived him.

No knowledge exists as to what happened next. How did a successful company go into bankruptcy??

On March 1, 1933, the Coleman Hardware Company suspended operations and a petition for the appointment of a receiver was filed in the circuit court by Clark, Young, Bull & Root, representing the Grundy County National Bank, which had a claim of \$15,000 and interest against the property. There were other liens against the holdings for smaller amounts, among them being C. A. Baker for work on the company residence which was remodeled for the tenancy. The Beatty Lumber Co. also had a lien against the company for a dock and basin. Remember, the company was on the Illinois & Michigan canal and probably used it for shipment.

Edward McKinney was appointed as receiver on March 6, 1933. The company was sold to Morris Metal Products in 1935, which in 1943 deeded the property to the Morris Paper Mills for use

as storage. The paper mill sold the property to John Gilchrist in 1951. He owned the Gilchrist Fertilizer Company managed by his brother, Donald Gilchrist. They blended chemicals to produce agricultural fertilizer for local farmers.

In 1977, they sold the property to the Morris Construction Company. They removed the buildings and filled in the property about three feet.

The City of Morris purchased the land from Benny Sklut to be used as a site for a new city water well.

The remaining north portion of the Coleman buildings had been used as a furniture store and an auction house. In 1956 the southern portion housed Gates Engineering Company,

makers of fertilizer boxes. John's Body Shop and Johnson Boat Repair were the final tenants.

The building was purchased by Steven Shay and extensively remodeled into storage and commercial use.

Shay sold the building to James Baum. It has been converted into five condominiums to be owned by non-profit organizations. Present condo owners are: The Grundy County Historical Society, We Care, Grundy County Volunteer Hospice, The Theater Guild, and the Christian Youth Center.

Since August of 1994, the building has been listed in the National Register of Historic Places in Grundy County, Illinois, United States.

---

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

**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.

---

**Grundy County**



**Historical Society**

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

PLACE  
STAMP  
HERE

Place Address Label Here