

Grundy County Historical Society Newsletter



Volume 8 Issue 4 October 2020

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

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E-mail: grundyhistory@att.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 start at \$10 for students annually.

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DEAR MEMBERS:

We reopened the museum on June 11 with masks and distancing required. We have had about 100 visitors since that time. The 2020/21 yearbook is at the printers and will be sent out soon. The board is discussing projects that need to be done and prioritizing them. Revisions of our procedures have been reviewed and updated.

We have had a loan of Grundy County fossils from the Field Museum this last year. Because of the virus and their museum not in full operation, they have agreed to extend the loan for another year. If you haven't seen them, be sure to come in to see the Tully Monster and other items found in the coal mine areas.

FESTIVAL OF TREES

Our best news is that we will have Festival of Trees this year!

Believe it or not it is already that time of year. Yes . . . the Festival of Trees committee has been hard at work trying to figure out how to proceed with this event in this unprecedented time. This event is, and has been, our major fundraiser for the Museum. We knew we had to do something! We have decided on, and are busy planning to implement, a virtual auction during November.

There will be many changes this year to the Festival. We are working with Olson Auctioneering to accomplish this event.

Starting November 5, all the auction items will be on the auction site: richardaolson.com. Click on current auctions. You will also be able to view everything at the Museum every Thursday, Friday, and Saturday from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. and Sundays from noon to 3 p.m. during November. All bidding will take place on-line at the auction site. Bid Sheets/instructions will be available at the Museum if you are unable to participate via the on-line site.

Because of the changes, we will not have our normal "entrance tickets" this year which helped to offset some of the cost of the event. We encourage and appreciate any monetary donations to help replace this loss of income. You are also welcomed to sponsor any part of the event.

We will also be offering three major raffles during this same time. Tickets will be \$5.00 each or five for \$20.00. Watch for details as we are **so excited** about all **three raffles** and will provide information on how to purchase these tickets.

The auction and raffles will end on SATURDAY, November 28 at 3:00 p.m. All winners will be notified that day. Items will then be available for pick up on Sunday, November 29th from Noon to 3:00 p.m. Delivery will be available the evening of November 30th for a \$25.00 fee.

UPCOMING PROGRAMS GRUNDY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY FESTIVAL OF TREES 2020 OUR 25TH YEAR!!

Our best news is that we will have Festival of Trees this year! See the article in this newsletter for more details.

We are in need of volunteers in November at the Museum as people come to see all the Holiday Décor. CDC guidelines will be followed. If you are able to help us out, please call the Museum at 815-942-4880 or email us at grundyhistory@att.net, we will return your call/email as soon as we can.

We will have more details soon.

Thank you, **TOGETHER** we can make this event a success for the Museum!! *The Festival of Trees Committee*

NEW DONATIONS

Two large murals done in 1954 by Beth Woelfel Mitchell, a former art teacher at Morris High School. One depicts scenes from early settlement and the other is typical of the 1950 time period. They hung in the school auditorium and were later donated to the Morris Library. They are now on display in our conference room.

From the estate of Dan Beal of Verona, we received a ledger book and minutes from the State Bank of Kinsman from 1929 to 1934 and a Justice of Peace Log.

Judy Watters brought in some items from their family, including an old metal horse and wagon toy, a Kodak camera from the early 1900s, a "Teddy" toy gun. John Zappia, one of our volunteers has posted pictures on our Facebook page.

MEMORIAL DONATIONS: Donations were received in honor of Robert Craig and Scott Potter.

ORIGINAL SETTLERS: We were recently asked about putting a marker at the gravestones of original settlers. We have not found anything like this that is available. The board wondered how much

interest there would be in having something like this. If enough people would be interested and willing to pay for them, we could possibly have something made. Please contact the museum by phone, email or website if this is of interest to you.

PROGRAMS are still on hold for the remainder of the year

FACEBOOK: Members 1,444—Our administrative assistant Dorothy Cunnea does the posting for our page.

WANTED: Morris High School Yearbooks from 2014–2019 and any year from the other county high schools.

COOKBOOK: Doing more cooking since “sheltering”? Need some new ideas of what to cook? We have copies of the Grundy County Sesquicentennial Commemorative Cookbook for \$3.00 in our gift shop.

WHO AM I?

Last issue's mystery person was Frank J. Kelbel. Can you guess, from the following description, who this issue's mystery person is? Look for the answer in our next issue—January 2021. Now that the Museum has reopened, stop in to discover this issue's mystery person.

I was a World War I veteran and I escaped injury and went “over the top” the day before the armistice was signed.

I followed in my father's footsteps and became a blacksmith. I later went into the vulcanizing business. I cared for Dr. Ragan's animals in lieu of rent. **Who am I?**

RADIO



Find the Museum on the radio the first Monday of every month. Tune in to “People Are Talking,” WCSJ, 103.1 on your FM dial, from approximately 9:15 a.m. to 9:30 a.m.

GRUNDY COUNTY SCHOOLS

A BRIEF HISTORY:

It is back to school time but in the fall of 2020, due to the Covid 19 pandemic, it is far from “normal.” Our school system has changed many times over the last 185 years since the first school opened in Grundy County. One of the first county settlers, William Hoge, built a one room school on his land in Nettle Creek in 1835. There were nine students who were taught by Miss Southworth who was paid \$2.50/ week by Mr. Hoge. There followed many one or two room school houses in the county. Some started in homes and the local families often donated land for a building. It was written that wherever two roads met in the county, there was a school. By 1903 there were 82 schools with a total of 5,680 pupils.

In 1854, a two story building named Center School was built in Morris. By 1865, the growth of the town required that new schools be built in each ward. They were Garfield, Lincoln, and McKinley. Center school was rebuilt in 1876 and again in 1924 which remained until torn down in 2001. It is now the site of the new Morris City Hall. The new grade school building named White Oak was opened in the fall of 2001 west of town off DuPont Avenue. It incorporated students from all the grade schools in Morris. The name was recently changed to Morris School District 54.

A junior high school opened in 1970 and was named Shabonna for the Pottawatomie Indian Chief, a friend of the white settlers of the area. The junior high is now a part of Morris School District 54. The building is now rented to Joliet Jr. College and Morris Hospital.

In 1898, Morris High School was built at the southeast corner of North and Franklin Streets. It was originally a three-story structure. In 1955 after the new high school opened, the third floor was removed and it became Franklin Grade School. The building still stands as a commercial building. The new high school was built on Union Street and

opened in 1951. It has had several additions and updating and is still in use today. It is Morris Consolidated School District, taking in Saratoga and Nettle Creek grade school students.

The one room schools in the area north and west of Morris were closed when Saratoga School was built in 1959 and Nettle Creek School in 1957. They have both seen additions to their original buildings as the population grew. They are now Community Consolidated School Districts.

Other towns in Grundy County have seen similar consolidation. Grade schools in Mazon, Verona, and Kinsman, along with Goodfarm School were joined into MVK Elementary School District with the location in Mazon. The high school students from the area go to Seneca High School in LaSalle County.

Gardner and South Wilmington are separate consolidated grade schools but have one consolidated high school. Braceville and Minooka are Consolidated School Districts, Coal City is a Community Unit School District with Elementary, Junior High and High School.

There are now 13 School districts in Grundy County.

Morris also has had parochial schools. St. Angela's academy for girls was started in 1858 by John McNellis and closed in 1958. In 1891 Mr. Patrick Kenrick left part of his estate for a school for boys named Kenrick Hall. The new Immaculate Conception School was built in 1962 and Kenrick Hall became the gym and auditorium.

The Morris Christian School was started in 2000 at the Bethlehem Lutheran Church and operated for about 10 years.

Note: Information taken from “This Is Grundy County” by Helen Ullrich, and “Morris Nostalgic Portrait” by Ken Sereno and Deborah Steffes.

A POEM ONE ROOM COUNTRY SCHOOL

by Wayman Presley, 1980

One room country schools have long been gone,
But many remember the sound
Of the big iron bell on top of the house
That was heard for miles around.

None of us kids had watches,
But when we heard the first bell ring,
Knew we had half hour to get there,
Be seated and ready to sing.

Teacher would arrive before us,
Unsaddle and tie up her mare,
Little hat up on top of her head,
Held by a pin thru her hair.

Big poker rattled in cast iron stove,
As she stirred up overnight coals;
A big sheet of zinc lay underneath,
So clinkers wouldn't burn holes.

She rang the big bell again at nine,
Not as long this time as before.
Tin lunch buckets clinked on shelves in back;
Heavy shoes scuffed on the floor.

Recitation bench 'cross front of the room,
And all the classes used it'
Her little bell bell, tapped three time,
Meant rise, come forward and sit.

The click of chalk on the blackboard,
Woodpeckers hammerin' on trees;
Bumblebees flying thru windows up
On warm days to let in the breeze.

She taught us how to prepare for life,
To think fast and to stand up tall.

When those one room schools were dead my friends,
It was a sad, sad day for us all.