

# Grundy County Historical Society Newsletter



Volume 10 Issue 1 January 2022

## FROM THE PRESIDENT

After a very successful Festival of Trees, we move on to a new year at the Museum. We are still planning a program for the 4th Tuesday in March, if COVID is under better control, on Grundy County's connection to the Civil War. More information will be sent to members in March.

The drywall has been installed in the "garage" room thanks to Jim Hayes of Hayes Construction who donated his time. We have someone who will do the taping of the seams and then we will need to paint. Volunteers would help us keep the cost down. Please let me know if you have any connections for these projects. We plan to have a dedicated computer for Ancestry available in that area.

I want to thank Joan Sereno for a generous donation to the Museum. It has been deposited in our Money Market account while the board figures out the best way to use it.

## A MUSICAL LEGACY

Photo caption: Paul Sullivan, Morris High School Class of '63, poses with his grandfather's mandolin and his 45 of the Spartans "Jungle Call."

Paul Sullivan was a junior in high school when he started playing drums for the Spartans, a group of Morris kids that played at teen parties and dances, even in bars from Streator to Joliet. They got paid \$20.00 a night. Members included: Rich Sparta, sophomore, Mike Wiechen, and freshman Dick DePung. In 1962 they cut a record, "Jungle Call," with a



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Web site: [www.grundycountyhs.org](http://www.grundycountyhs.org)

E-mail: [grundyhistory@att.net](mailto: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.

### Board of Directors

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company in Chicago. You can hear this on You Tube—enter "The Spartans, Jungle Call."

Sullivan's grandfather, Harry Hull, also played in a band. He played mandolin—an 1897 Wasburn. In 1907 Harry Hull was playing at Hull's Hall in Morris, as well as in Chicago.

Harry's mandolin, photos of the two bands, and a signed copy of "Jungle Call" are now on display at the Grundy County Museum.

## PEOPLE ARE TALKING

The 25th year of our Festival of Trees fundraiser concluded November 27th and it was very successful. Our gross income from the online sales and from the raffle tickets was about \$16,000. It also included a \$500 donation from Jane Kerr of Apple Butter/Shuggies from the fundraiser in their store.

There are a lot of Thank You's needed, starting with our Museum Committee chaired by Sue Cunnea and members Theresa Black, Sandy Dransfelt, Jan Hibler, JoEllyn Johnson and Dorothy Mettille. Others who helped decorate or donated items were Apple Butter/ Shuggies, GiGi's, Grundy Bank, Floral Designs, Studio Ferro, Reeves/Baskerville, Thoughtful Spot, Pieces of the Heart Quilt Guild, and Tammy Ferguson.

Besides the committee, museum board members and our Administrative Assistant Mary Collins, many other volunteers helped by registering visitors, selling raffle tickets, packaging trees and decorations after the auction and finally cleaning up the museum.

A special thank you to Eric Olson of Richard A. Olson & Assoc. Inc. auctioneers for his work of photographing and posting all 101 items on their auction site and handling the sale.

Winners of the large auction items were as follows.

- Table Setting—donated by Jan Hibler, Sandi Dransfeldt and Molly Wills **Won by Tammy Halterman**
- 7 Night Stay in Galena—owned and donated by Mark & Ruby Kellogg **Won by Steve Peterson**
- 55" Smart TV—donated by Century 21 Coleman-Hornsby **Won by Donna Scrocynski**
- Battery UTV Ride On **Won by Donna Henningson**

New historical donations to the Museum this last month include:

- Items from the Dr. Dale and Gladys Hoge Estate of Minooka.
- A soap box derby car made by Jim Leonard in the 1930/40 era from Jim and Vi's estate.
- The Gretchen Johnson estate gave an Illinois River Bridge plate and some ephemera.
- Bob Hollenbeck of Seneca who recently celebrated his 102nd birthday and is still very active, gave us his copy of the 1874 Grundy County Plat Book.
- Artifacts from John Payne of Mazon including WWII items.

***If you have Grundy County related items you would like to donate, please stop in and let us see them.***

We also appreciate monetary donations through the Amazon Smile, Ace Hardware, and Hilton Honor Points Programs. If you need information on these, call the Museum.

If you do not itemize deductions on your income taxes, this year only, you can take up to a \$300/person deduction for a donation to a non-profit organization. Also, if you have to take a Required Minimum Distribution from your IRA, a donation to a nonprofit reduces the amount you have to claim as income for the year.

On December 2nd, Tom Turner and Michelle Micetich presented a program "Jugtown Pottery—Fact or Fiction" at the Museum. It was well received with 35 people attending. The program was taped and will be available for viewing if anyone missed the program. We also have a display of pottery and photos donated to the Museum by Tom. See Tom's clay story on page 3 in this newsletter.

***Continuing my talks on Grundy County Factories***—The former superintendent of the Coleman Hardware Plant, David Nickel, announced in September 1901 that he had purchased a lot on Armstrong Street for the Nickel Manufacturing Co. One of the products manufactured would be the Gardner Sash

Balance. It had been invented by five brothers in Gardner, Illinois. The town of Gardner was named after their father.

***For the younger generations in the audience***—Windows with cord and weight balance systems have a box built into each side of the window (the jambs) where cast iron or lead weights are suspended. The weights are attached to a cotton cord which extends up the jamb, over a pulley, and onto the operable sash to hold the window open without a prop.

In 1904, the Gardner Sash Balance Co. and Sidell Mfg. Co., merged their companies and transferred the patterns and designs to the Coleman Hardware Co.

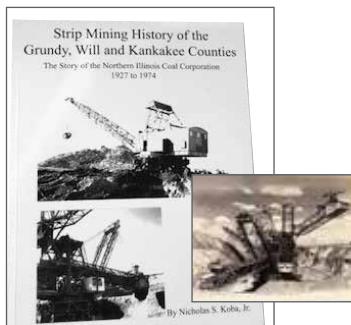
In 1907 Nickel leased the Novelty Irons Works plant to run a machine shop in connection with the foundry. In 1910, a new invention, a power pump for inflating tires quickly and accurately called the Morris air pump was to be made by the Nickel Mfg. Co. It weighed only 5½ lbs., was 10" tall and sold for \$20.00.

David Nickel was an energetic and promising businessman but died unexpectedly at a young age. People who had financed the plant kept it going for several years until June 1910, when the plant was sold to the Gardner Sash Pulley Co. of Chicago. It included everything except the Morris Air Pump. That would be handled by the former investors of the company.

In 1914, the plant was sold again and became Illinois Foundry Specialty Company. In 1915, it was shut down indefinitely due to the economy of the time. It closed again in 1930 due to the depression and opened again in 1936 as The Western Foundry Co., Morris division. In 1956 Union Welt Corp. of Chicago purchased the site after it stood empty for nearly 3 years. In 1962, it became Sponge Cushion making under-layment for carpets. Over the years, many additions have been added to the building at 902 Armstrong St. It is now a part of a larger corporation.

Be sure to check out our Museum Gift Shop for the book on *Morris Factories* by Ken Sereno. Other gift ideas include books on Grundy History, the I & M Canal, Mazon Creek fossils and a cookbook of local recipes. There are also many gift ideas such as a Grundy County throw, Christmas ornament, bookmarks, t-shirts, and sweatshirts.

Not exactly a donations, but we have a new book available in the Book Store:  
*Strip Mining History of*



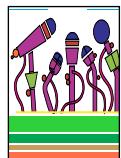
*the Grundy, Will and Kankakee Counties : The Story of the Northern Illinois Coal Corporation 1927 to 1974.* It is written by Nicholas S. Koba, Jr., of Coal City. Cost of the book is \$20. The book is available for purchase in our Gift Shop or it can be sent out upon receipt of the cost of the book and shipping (\$23.82).

## NEW MEMBERS

The following people have joined the Historical Society. We thank them for their membership.

Caroline Cummings (Lifetime), Greg Johnson, Nancy Mattson, Mike Niewinski, Karen Satterly, Patricia Stalowy

## RADIO



WCSJ Radio (103.1 FM) features the Historical Society and Museum in its “People are Talking” segment, airing the first Monday of the month at about 9:10 a.m. Be sure to tune in!

## FACEBOOK



Mary Collins is posting articles on Facebook regarding the museum displays and activities. Dorothy Cunnea is still posting obits and continues the “100 years ago” feature.

## WHO AM I?

Our October 2021 Mystery Person was Erwin Pierce. Can you guess, from the following description, who is this issue’s mystery person? Look for the answer in our April 2022 issue. Or, even better, stop in and inquire about me.

I ran a restaurant during World War I. I opened my auto repair business in a garage at the corner of Illinois Ave. and Wauponsee St. in the Paul Nielsen building in 1922. Moved it to 115 E. Jackson St. in 1925 and to the east end of the Depeyster building on West Washington St. in 1926. I began volunteering at the Morris Fire Department in 1938. Beginning in 1945, my sons and son-in-law joined me in the business. I retired in 1962. **Who am I?**

## MORRIS CLAY

I'm a fourth generation Morrisonian who started a career in the Ceramic Arts in 1961 at MCHS with Mr. Joe Corsello. My life has been clay, making and selling my Ceramic Art, researching everything clay, and collecting everything clay. Four years ago I returned to Morris wanting to find some local clay and started out wanting Goose Lake clay as that is

what I used in 1961 from Illinois Clay products. The clay is still out there but under 30 feet of water. So then I found some at Lafarge Stone quarry at the end of Bigalow road, off Ashley. I also tested some Ottawa clay but I wanted local. I got very involved researching Jugtown, gathered a lot of information, gave a lecture at this Museum January 2, 2022, which is now on YouTube under Tom Turner Jugtown.

I had stopped making pots about 7 years ago and decided to return to Morris after a 55 year absence. In researching Jugtown, I ran into a lot of information about brick yards in Morris from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Even though I am not making pots anymore, I cannot pass up a pile of clay at a construction site. Surprisingly, I have found several surface clays that, at 2350°F, turn into a perfect glaze. Some came from Minooka just off Route 80, others came from the Nelson Road area, and some even came from yards here in Morris. The most surprising is the river silt left at Stratton State Park after a flood. These clays that I melt into glaze would work fine at much lower temperatures for common building brick.

My research on Morris brick and tile companies has just started but so far we know that Mr. Chapin built the first brickyard at Jefferson and Nettle Creek streets in 1842 when Morris was just starting out. These would have been what we call “slopped brick” where clay is slopped into a wooden mold, scraped flat, and dumped out. Brick machines did not come about until 1856. Primitive tile making machines would look very similar to a sausage stuffer. As time went on machines were invented to mechanically make tile and Jugtown was one of the first factories to use steam powered machines for tile (1856–65).

Shortly north of Chapin's brick yard was John Buck at Buck's Pond, and north of him was Steep and Washburn where the old nursing home is at Quarry and Clay Streets west of the hospital. Then when William White shut down Jugtown he moved to just west of Coleman Hardware in 1866 and built a tile company. All of these are on the east side of the East Fork of Nettle Creek. Why? Because the clay was there. This is EXACTLY where Jugtown should have been to begin with, even if the clay was wagoned in from Goose Lake. There are other brickyards as well which I am researching. For instance the Woelfel building was made with brick from Ambrose Crumb in 1866.

I would like to try to match early Morris brick buildings with the brick makers of that time. If I can learn more about it, maybe a lecture or at least an article will be done.

—Tom Turner

## 2021 Festival of Trees Highlights

