

Grundy County Historical Society Newsletter



Volume 11 Issue 2 April 2023

Program Schedule

April 25—Bill Atkinson
Researching Grundy County

May 7—100th Anniversary Open
House

May 23—Annual Meeting/
Dinner—Art Hornsby

New Members

David & Karen Anderson

Volunteers Needed

We need volunteers and new board members. In May we will need to fill four Board seats. If you are interested, please contact the Museum. Board meetings are held the third Wednesday of the month at 6 p.m.

If you have a couple of hours to spare during the week, please consider volunteering at the Museum.

510 W. Illinois Ave. • Morris, IL 60450 • 815.942.4880

Web site: www.grundycountyhs.org

E-mail: grundyhistory@att.net

Facebook: Museum of the Grundy County Historical Society—Illinois

Museum Hours: Thursday, Friday, Saturday: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Group Tours by Appointment—Call Museum to Schedule

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 or USPS. Subscriptions start at \$10 per year for students.

Board of Directors

Marion Gore, *President*

JoEllyn Johnson, *Vice President*

Judy Bernetzke, *Treasurer*

Lisa Barkley, *Secretary*

Carter Corsello

Dave Finch

Theresa Lamb

Donna Sroczyński

Duane Wolfe

Karen Zelko

Museum News

We are gearing up for our 100th Anniversary celebration! We will be kicking off the anniversary year with an Open House on Sunday, May 7th from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. We will have “experts” at some of our more popular displays to answer questions.

The ladies from the Goose Lake Prairie Partnership will be weaving their rugs during the event. The rugs are now on sale in the gift shop. Prices vary based on size.

Thanks to the Villages of Diamond and Gardner for signing proclamations proclaiming May 31st to be Grundy County Historical Society Day.

If you have any suggestions for a 100th Anniversary event, please contact the Museum. Our goal is to have anniversary events throughout the year.

We want to welcome Matt Laker as our Media Manager. Matt is passionate about Grundy County history and has compiled countless articles and pictures documenting the history of Morris and Grundy County. You have probably seen a number of his pictures on our Facebook page. His Instagram account is Morris History Club. Matt is converting our 8 mm film and VHS tapes into a digital format. You will be able to find them on our YouTube site and we will also have them showcased at the Museum. In addition to greeting you at the front desk, he will be busy digitizing materials from our archives.

Mary Collins is our new Executive Director. She will be focusing on grant writing and other forums to promote the visibility of the Museum.

New Displays/Donations

We have several new displays. One is dedicated to our 100th Anniversary. It contains pictures, membership books and a book containing the history of the Historical Society.

There is a display dedicated to the 175th Anniversary of the I&M Canal. This display contains pictures of the Canal throughout the years.

We also have a display tracking the progress of the rebuilding of the Nettle Creek aqueduct. We have a number of visitors stop by the Museum after they take a walk to view the construction progress. We are looking forward to the completion date and hope to participate in a ribbon cutting ceremony.

The family of James Bell, former Grundy County Sheriff from 1950-1954, donated a large number of items from his collection of sheriff memorabilia. The items are currently on display.

Former resident Art Leach brought in Dr. George Leach's Formula Book for medications.

Donna Scrozynski donated a State Bank of Illinois, I&M Canal Script of \$100 from the days of the I&M Canal Fund (1840). She also donated photos of the Morris Normal School graduates from 1880-1883. This school is now the U.C.Davis-Callahan Funeral Home.

More items to add to the Matteson Hardware collection from Steve Matteson include a Paymaster Check Writer Machine, a pipe threader, a plumbing parts kit and a True Value Hardware sign.

Sue Morse gave us an award Ribbon from the Morris Sesquicentennial and the Morris Daily

Herald paper of October 21, 1977 with the G Shaft Candy store on the front page. It was her grandmother who started G Shaft.

From the estate of Juanita Blake we received the records of the former Will/Grundy Genealogical Society.

Naomi Wassgren donated 3 Gardner High School Yearbooks from 1956, 1957 and 1958. We love to get yearbooks from any of the county schools.

Charlotte Talkington donated a 1938 butter churn, hand-sewn doll clothes made by her mother, Ethel Johnson Peterson. Lots of family mementoes including tating shuttles to George Peterson's cuff links and miscellaneous family and school photographs and greeting cards.

Jean Matteson donated her father's Morris High School yearbooks as well as ribbons won at various Corn Festival competitions.

Program Recap

We are putting together our program schedule for next year. If you have any program suggestions, please contact the Museum.

We have had two programs so far this year and both have been very well attended.

We rescheduled the October program to February 28th. Michele Micetich and Bryan Gilligan presented the History of Coal City and Surrounding Areas. The program was held at the Coal City Public Library.

On March 28th Phil Anderson presented Grundy County and the History of Its Money. The program was held at the Morris Municipal Services Building in the Community Room.

Both programs were recorded and can be found on our Facebook page or our YouTube page. Subscribe to the Grundy County History Museum YouTube page to see all our postings.

A Relic from the Pontiac Trail

Recently Tom McNabb donated a rusty, bent up sheet of metal to the Museum. It doesn't look like much, but it has a story to tell.

As it is, you can barely make out the original blue and red paint on this sign for the Pontiac Trail. It was found buried in a house yard, but Tom claims that it once stood at the northeast corner of Dwight and Southmor Road.

This is actually a very early piece of Route 66 history. The "Pontiac Trail" was officially named and opened in 1914. This piece of metal is one of the name plates that were posted every mile along the course of that roadway. These road signs were put up by the Goodrich Tire Company, and indicated the mileage to Chicago and St. Louis as well as to the nearest local towns.

The early automobile roads were identified by geographic and other names and symbols before 1926 when the current federal number system was established. Hence the Pontiac Trail became Route 66. But back in the day, the name Pontiac was apt because that Native American chief often crossed this route and spent his last years, and met his death, at the southern end of the Pontiac Trail. Plus, the town of Pontiac was named after him.

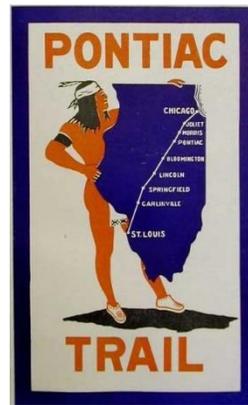
From Joliet the Pontiac Trail crossed the DesPlaines River, following the north side of the DesPlaines and Illinois Rivers to Morris—the nearest point on the Trail en route to Starved Rock. From Morris, it turned south across the Illinois River a mile north of Dwight.

This was the shortest route for motor travel between Chicago and St. Louis, with many large

and important cities en route, and it crossed many important east and west roads as well.

In 1915 the Pontiac Trail followed stone roads the entire distance from Chicago to Morris, for about 60 miles, and then at Morris, there was two and a half miles of concrete!

So, this old Pontiac Trail road sign was no doubt ripped off its post in 1926. For 96 years it has lain buried and forgotten. But you can now see it at the Grundy County Museum.



The Grundy County Historical Society 100 Years Ago

It all started with one man's arrow heads. Harry Hough was born in Mazon and farmed there during the early 1900's. During that time his plow unearthed a lot of arrow heads, which no doubt sparked his interest in the Native Americans who walked that property before him. This grew into a lifelong passion for Grundy County history.

Harry Hough began collecting other local objects. By 1923, at the age of 47, he needed to start a museum. In his home he had one of the largest collections of Native American relics in the county. He also had an old powder horn and shot pouch used in the Indian wars, two swords, a four-sided lantern, candle molds, a pewter

lamp, a complete fire place set... he was running out of room.

Harry knew that on Mark Cragg's place stood the old John Cragg Cabin, the second one built in Grundy County. It would be perfect for a museum. He wanted it. But it takes a village.

He knew there were other folks who were just as crazy about old stuff.



So, on April 6, 1923, Harry Hough decided to restore the old Cragg Cabin and to organize a historical society for Grundy County.

On May 31, 1923, a preliminary meeting was held at the Morris Public Library. Harry Hough and his wife, Zullo were there, as well as Dr. William Walsh, Theodore and Mrs. Bergen, Ida and Florence Gore, Mrs. Frank Hayes, and Edith Harrison.

On August 17th, these people, and others, met again to write up some bylaws and a constitution for this purpose: "to collect and preserve for the public everything in any way bearing upon the history of Grundy County and its people." Dr. William Walsh was elected the first president and Harry Hough served as secretary-treasurer. The board of directors included Theodore Bergen, Mrs. Frank Fey, and Mrs. Frank Hayes.

On August 23, 1923, that Board decided to have display cases made and placed in the Grundy County Courthouse. Meanwhile, Harry Hough

continued to work on the Cragg Cabin, nestled among the trees on his Mazon property. This became the first Grundy County Museum, visited by many until his death in 1965.

Who Am I?

Our January 2023 Mystery Person is *James B. (Jabby) Dawson*.

Can you guess, from the following description, who is this issue's mystery person? Look for the answer in the July 2023 issue. Or even better, stop by the Museum and inquire about me.

I leased the building at 112 W. Washington St. from Davis & Sons in 1928. It was formerly the Leath Furniture Co. I purchased more store fronts and spent years in expanding and renovation. I lived at 604 Fremont Ave., but only the second owner of the 1882 home.

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, our Facebook Administrator, posts articles regarding the Museum displays and activities. Matt Laker posts historical pictures and videos. John Zappia posts information about new items that are donated to the Museum. Number of Facebook friends: 1,881.

Please join us for our 100th Anniversary Celebration

Grundy County Historical Society

Invitation

OPEN HOUSE

100 Year Celebration 1923 - 2023

- **Date:** Sunday, May 7, 2023
- **Time:** 1 pm to 4 pm
- **Location:** Museum of the Grundy County Historical Society, 510 West Illinois Ave., Morris, IL

Refreshments will be served.

Helpful experts will be present at various exhibits in the Museum, including the I&M Canal, the Fossils, the Tool Shed and more. Watch a demonstration on an old fashioned Loom!

Help Celebrate Our 100th Anniversary!

Grundy County



Historical Society



CELEBRATE 175 YEARS OF THE I&M CANAL!

April marks the beginning of a year-long celebration in honor of the I&M Canal's 175th Anniversary, featuring special events and activities that span the 60 communities in the I&M Canal National Heritage Area.

4/10 Meet Abraham Lincoln

Travel back to 1848 as Illinois Congressman Abraham Lincoln salutes the opening of the I&M Canal.

4/12 Mass at St. James at Sag Bridge

A Roman Catholic Mass will be celebrated by Pere Jacques Marquette, S.J. at St. James at Sag Bridge. Reception to follow in the parish hall.

4/14 Boat Captain's Luncheon

The Boat Captain's Luncheon is an annual gathering of canal supporters from throughout the National Heritage Area celebrating the work and passion of its partners.

4/15 Louis Jolliet: A Solid Path Through Water

4/16 "Untold African American Stories"

4/16 – 4/23 I&M Canal Clean-Up

4/22 Lemont Junior Ranger Day

4/29 "Chicago Portage – A Lasting Gift"

OPENING WEEK:



In partnership with the
Canal Corridor Association
815-220-1848

View the full event calendar at
iandmcanal.org, or scan here!

