

# Grundy County Historical Society Newsletter



Volume 11 Issue 4 October 2023

## Program Schedule

Oct 24—Legion/Gold Star Mothers

Mar 26—Letters from WWI

Apr 23 – Auto Racing in Grundy County

May 21 – Reintroduction of Native Americans into IL

## New Members

Timothy & Tracey Anderson

Todd Daggett

Patricia Neff

James & Linda Steger

John & Jodi Walsh

## Grant Recipient

We are receiving a \$10,000 grant from the State Department of Commerce and Opportunity's B2B Arts Grant program.

Thank you State of Illinois!

510 W. Illinois Ave. Morris, IL 60450 815.942.4880

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 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

JJ Lockridge, *President*

Kirk Houchin, *Vice President*

Judy Bernetzke, *Treasurer*

Lisa Barkley, *Secretary*

Carter Corsello

Dave Finch

Donna Sroczynski

Tom Turner

Ken Willis

Duane Wolfe

Karen Zelko

## Museum News

The Museum participated in the Liberty Street Arts Fair on August 19<sup>th</sup>. We partnered with the Morris Woman's Club, the Goose Lake Prairie Partners, and Tom Turner Ceramics. We had a great turnout—approximately 70 people visited the Museum.



We are happy to announce a new partnership with the Morris Watercolor Guild. The artists are displaying and selling their creations in our Gift Shop. We have paintings, note cards and book-marks. Make sure you look the next time you are at the Museum.

Our first program for the year was held on Tuesday, September 26 at the Morris Municipal Building. Jill Jackson with the Department of Natural Resources provided a very informative overview of the history of the I&M Canal. You can find her presentation on our [website](#) or Facebook page. She also said the Nettle Creek Aqueduct should be completed by the end of November.

Our next program is Tuesday, October 24 at the VFW. Carter Corsello and Jeff Poundstone of the Grundy County Veterans Legacy Center and Museum have researched and summarized in a book the 38 WWI Gold Star Veterans of Grundy County. They will briefly tell their stories from what their research has uncovered. Doors open at 6:30 and the program begins at 7. All are welcome and there is no admission charge.

## New Donations

We've had quite a few new donations to our collection at the Museum.

Marge Hiney brought in a framed photo of Rod & Gun Club property before it was developed.

Joe Schmitz donated a framed photo of WWI soldiers.

Cal Hammond provided menus from Saratoga Inn, Li'l Dickens, Phung Hoang Oriental Foods.

Donna Sroczyński donated three books about the Civilian Conservation Corp.

Reece Thayer brought in a dog tag and McKeen Livery Stable token.

## New Display

*Davidson/Telfer—Bretto Family History*

Maris Rae Davidson has been busy creating an exhibit to honor the Davidson and Telfer families that settled in Grundy County in the early 1800's. The display is housed in recently acquired curio cabinets in the Conference Room.

The historical display features Donald Arthur Davidson Sr. (1911-1980) and focuses on his contributions to the city of Morris from 1945-1980.

He became a part time police officer in 1945. He ran for 3rd Ward Alderman in 1947 and won by a landslide and all following elections were as successful. After 27 years on the City Council he ran for Mayor and was elected in 1973. He was the city's first full-time Mayor.

He was a Scoutmaster in the 1950's, an active member of the Lions Club and was involved in many numerous plans, projects and developments, thru the years, for improvement to the city. He passed away in 1980 while in office as Mayor.



The Bretto family immigrated to the United States in the 1800's from Italy. The historical display features Marie Bretto 1913-2007 who married Donald Arthur Davidson in 1936 and focuses on her contributions to the city of Morris from 1945-1980.

When their children were school age, she was a Room Mother, a Den Mother for Cub Scouts and a Leader with the Brownies. She was proprietor/teacher of ABC Nursery School the first preschool in Morris from 1953-1966 teaching 800+ students. She was a Morris Hospital volunteer and in 1969 was appointed chairman of the Candy Strippers. She improved a program that started with 11 girls to 70 girls in 5 months. She passed away in 2007.

Please stop by to see this very informative display.

## The Very First Festival of Trees



Twenty-eight years ago the very first annual Festival of Trees, sponsored by the Grundy County Historical Society during Home for the Holidays was held. It began as a Christmas tree display on the third floor of the

First National Bank, 220 W. Main Street, Morris. Six businesses agreed to decorate six trees. Entrance tickets were sold for \$1.00. It was held in 1995 during "Home for Christmas" on Friday, November 24th from 10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. and Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Grundy County Historical Society members were on hand to greet visitors at the door. Door prizes were given, and the trees were sold at silent auction. Wendy Riccolo and Theresa Lamb were the chairwomen.

The following year there were nine trees professionally decorated and displayed. Each tree had its own unique theme. Those nine designers were: Apple Butter, Baker Street Designs, Floral Designs and Gifts, Gay Ortiz Interiors, Interiors by Pat, Kathy Terry, Commercial & Residential Design, Lasting Images Art & Frame, Strawberry Plant Boutique, and Thoughtful Spot.

The Festival of Trees was Joe Corsello's idea, as a fund raiser for the Grundy County Historical Society. As he stated at the time: "It would be great for the Historical Society to have its own building. We need to be raising funds for this goal. Hopefully, this will help get us closer to the front door!"

And indeed, it has.

The Festival of Trees Committee is busy getting ready for this year's event. The trees and other items will be on display the beginning of November. There will be raffles and an on-line auction. The festivities end on Saturday, November 25<sup>th</sup> after the Holiday Parade. Please stop by the Museum.

## What Is That Building?

The Museum was recently contacted by a couple who are members of the Indian Creek Ranch and often travel via Southmor Road to their destination. They commented that they have always wondered what the building at the corner of Southmor and Dwight Roads was used as.

Their email stated, "We are very intrigued with what was once there or maybe some history behind it."



Museum Curator, Debbie Steffes, and volunteer, Kirk Houchin, drove out to the site and discovered what looked like a former

gas station. Research found that the Donahoe Oil Station was located in Wauponsee Township and was listed in the 1930 and 1931 telephone directory but not in the 1928 directory. Plat maps from the mid to late 1920's showed the landowner of that corner to be John Donahoe. A phone call to the current landowner, Peter Brockman, resulted in a wealth of information about the former gas station. Brockman's grandfather, John Donahoe built the station in the late 1920's on Old Route 47. With the new Illinois River Bridge opening in 1934 and Route 47 relocating one mile east, the gas station closed.

The building was used as the Wauponsee Town Hall for a period. In the early 1950's, a fire destroyed the Opdyke school building, and the students met in the small Wauponsee Town Hall (Donahoe Oil Station) until the new school was built. There was a potbelly stove and no indoor plumbing. (MDH: Oct. 24, 2005.)

John Donahoe became the Morris postmaster and held that position for 26 years retiring in 1960. Mr. Donahoe graduated from Morris High School, attended the University of Notre Dame and joined the Army during WWI. John Donahoe died on November 4, 1968.

The Donahoe Oil Station was located in Wauponsee Township in an area once known as Paytonville. The Historical Museum would be interested in information that anyone might have on the history of Paytonville. Two of the students who attended school at the Wauponsee Town Hall after the Opdyke School fire were Monte and Michael Payton.

## Who Am I?

Our April 2023 Mystery Person is *Eliza Britt*.

Can you guess, from the following description, who this issue's mystery person is? Look for the answer in the January 2024 issue. Or even better, stop by the Museum and inquire about me.

I was born in El Paso, IL in 1855 and came to Morris in 1885. I opened an Ice Cream & Candy Store at 802 Liberty St. in 1990. I sold the building to Miss Rose Kniepkamp for a restaurant in 1926. I purchased the Cronin Brothers building next to the Collins building in 1908 for an Ice Cream Parlor.

In 1917, I built an addition to the south. Ice cream machinery was purchased in 1926 so I could manufacture 320 quarts of ice cream an hour, or 2,560 quarts every eight hours.

## 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.

.John Zappia posts information about new items that are donated to the Museum. Number of Facebook friends: 1,908. We now have a public version of our Facebook page so you can share postings and events with friends. Same name, just public rather than private.

## Please Join the I&M Canal Corridor Book Discussion

October  
13



### "IMCHNC ROADMAP PART 2: THE STORY OF THE I&M CANAL"

[https://www.lewisu.edu/lincoln-landing/  
lessonplans/Social-Studies-History/  
I&MCanalLocation,6-8,Hist.Roadmap2.pdf](https://www.lewisu.edu/lincoln-landing/lessonplans/Social-Studies-History/I&MCanalLocation,6-8,Hist.Roadmap2.pdf)

**LOCK 16 VISITOR CENTER**  
**754 1<sup>st</sup> Street, LaSalle, IL**  
**(815) 223-1851**

Discussion will take place on "The Volunteer" canal boat from 4 - 5 pm. Come early and take the 2:30 boat ride. Adults are \$20, Seniors (over 62) \$17. Go to Canal Corridor Association website to book online.