



# Mercer County Historical Society Newsletter

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Editor: Mary Jane Sticklen

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## Mercer County Historical Society & Essley-Noble Museum

1406 - SE 2nd Avenue  
Aledo, IL 61231  
Phone: 309/582-2280

### Hours

April – Oct: Wed, Sat, Sun 1-5:00pm  
Nov - March: Saturdays 12:00-4:00pm



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Dennis Henderson, Sunday Host



### For Genealogy Queries write to:

MCHS Genealogy Dept.  
PO Box 269  
Aledo IL 61231-2504  
Or: E-mail the museum

Email: mcmuseum@frontier.com



Please address all correspondence to:  
PO Box 269

**Memberships available for \$15/household**

For membership or change of address contact:

Essley-Noble Museum  
Box 269  
Aledo, IL 61231



**Website:** www.mchsil.org  
**Email:** mcmuseum@frontier.com

## ABRAHAM LINCOLN DOCUMENT

Among the many artifacts in possession of MCHS is a letter, written Feb. 2, 1864, to Congressman Baxter of Vermont, seeking the release of a Mr. Benton, a prisoner of war being held at Rock Island. Mr. Benton was originally from Canada, but had enlisted in Kentucky to fight for the Confederacy. The letter has a note endorsing the "application" for Benton's release scribbled on it by Baxter, who then forwarded the letter on to President Lincoln. A short note was then added by Lincoln before sending the letter on to the War Department. Lincoln's note reads: *This is the Canada lady's son about which Mr. Baxter is so anxious as I told Sec. of War.* The note bears the A. Lincoln signature and date of Feb. 7, 1864.

Anything bearing the handwriting and signature of Abraham Lincoln is valuable, and for many decades there have been forgeries circulating amidst the authentic documents. When the Benton letter was discussed recently at a MCHS Board meeting, we decided it was time to verify or refute the authenticity of the document we have. With the help of Michael Zecher, a meeting was arranged with Dan Stowell of the Illinois State Historic Preservation Agency. Dan Stowell is in charge of "The Papers of Abraham Lincoln Project", which is trying to find and catalog all the existing documents bearing Lincoln's signature. He agreed to come to Mercer County to examine our document, just before he was to leave for Australia to view documents there.

At the June 25 meeting Stowell told us that there is no doubt we have an authentic document bearing Lincoln's signature. He explained that the letter was even listed in a book published in 1958 entitled *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*. At that time, the letter was thought to be in the possession of a lawyer in Los Angeles, California, but in 1948 the lawyer had sent the letter

*This is the Canada lady's son about which Mr. Baxter is so anxious as I told Sec. of War.*  
A. Lincoln  
Feb. 7, 1864

to his brother in Mercer County. The brother's descendant donated it to the museum 25 years later, and now almost 40 years later the correct location of the document will be recorded for "The Papers of Abraham Lincoln Project". Stowell scanned the document to store the image for his files.

A scanned image of the letter will be displayed at the museum along with the other Lincoln items, while the original will remain in the bank vault for security.

Naturally, a person wonders about the fate of Mr. Benton, for whom the letter was written. After several hours of research, a Civil War Prisoner of War record was found that shows the release was not granted. There may be two related reasons for the denial of Mr. Benton's release. First was his refusal to take an oath of allegiance to the US, which was required of prisoners being released, and this refusal is noted in the letter to Baxter. In addition to this, there were a number of Confederate prisoners that had escaped to Canada and were being protected there. These Confederates even organized their own company and launched an attack across the border into Vermont in 1864, robbing banks and burning buildings in the village of St. Albans. Although this attack occurred after Benton's release was denied, it is likely that the US War Department was aware of the presence of the Confederates being protected in Canada and the possible danger they posed, when the War Department rejected Benton's appeal. Logically, the War Department was not about to release a man who refused to take the oath of allegiance and might likely join Confederate soldiers in Canada as a threat to the US. Benton must have survived his confinement on Rock Island, for there is no grave for him in the CSA cemetery there.

We hope that you will visit the museum to see the image of this historical document and signature that we are so fortunate to own.



### Curator's Corner

I would like to thank Doug McCaw, Dave Duncan and Ronn Dillavou for making the Pope River Church Open meeting a great success. Listening to the beginnings of the Church was inspiring to say the least.

Welcome to our new members - Paul Mack of Texas, Tom & Doris Nipper of Seaton, Bill Frieden and Jim Earl of Aledo, and Dave Ericson of Milan. Membership helps to keep us open and we always appreciate new comers in the society.

Our new accessions are from: Roosevelt Military Academy, Cliff Anderson, Jill Whiteside, Jean Wistedt, Stephanie Surr, Darcy Relander, Glenda Kadel, James Marshall, Bruce Moran, Joe Vann, Twyla Holmes, Lyle Kugler, Pete Adkins, Sam Nelson, Dennis Henderson, Dan Louck, Charlotte Paul and Drucilla Miller.

Our Board of Directors is working on some new and interesting projects at our museum. Coming soon, with the help of Darlene Johnson, is a segment under the Museum Projects link on our website profiling pictures from her Camera Classics from the Carlson Studio. Darlene has listed many names of the people on the cover of the book and we are trying to find missing names. When the new link is online and if you know of any of these people, please let us know by responding through our website or stopping by the museum.

There is a possibility of reprinting the 1835 Mercer Remembers book. Let us know if you would be interested in purchasing one. For those of you who have not seen one, it gives a history of Mercer Co. with many good articles and photos from 1835-1985.

There are less than 30 copies left of the 1864 Atlas with no plans to reprint unless there is a high interest, so be sure to pick up a copy before they are gone.

October 31 will be the last day of summer hours. Winter hours are Saturdays only 12:00-4:00 p.m.

*Veda Meriwether, Curator*



### 1870 Hand-drawn Map

An article in the October 3, 1934 edition of the *Times Record* tells about a beautiful map of Mercer County, hand-drawn in 1870 by Mr. W.B. Frew. This "beautiful piece of work, reflecting his careful nature" showed many towns that no longer exist today. In addition, many towns that had come into existence by 1934, such as Seaton and Sherrard, were noticeably absent from the map. They simply didn't exist yet when the map was drawn in 1870. Some of the towns Mr. Frew included on the map- Ferdinand, Hazel Point, Ethel- have their demise indicated by light pencil lines having been drawn through them. One mysterious feature on the map was located along the north border of Duncan Township. There was a faint shaded area such as the one Mr. Frew used to indicate a city. This one was not labeled with a name. Even in 1934 it wasn't known whether this had been an error or if it had marked the site of a proposed town. The *Times Record* article claimed that the map was hand-drawn and hand-lettered so artistically that it appeared to have been printed. The townships were outlined with watercolor

and the sections were numbered and drawn with fine lines. At the time the article was written (1934), the map was in the possession of R.E. Winger of Aledo, who reportedly owned several other historic documents left by Mr. Frew. It would be interesting to know if this map still exists today.



## Pictorial History of Mercer County

The Historical Society is taking on the task of publishing a book of Pictorial History of Mercer County. If anyone has a good clear photo of any of our Mercer county towns, places or people, please share them with us. We would like to include all pertinent information for these pictures. They need to be at least about postcard size and if there are people in the photo, the names would be very helpful. All photos used in the book will have the name of the owner mentioned and all photos will be returned to those who share with us.

We are going to try to include all towns that are here now and those from the past. For more information, call Twyla Holmes at 309-582-5585 or send information to Twyla at 902 E. Main St., Aledo, IL 61231, or call Stephanie Braucht at 309-584-4312 or send information to her at 1566 120th St., Joy, IL 61260. Also send a self addressed, stamped envelope in which we can send your property back to you. More information will be available in the next newsletter as to what towns we need more information for. **Twyla Holmes**



## Prairie Farmer Hero

by Stephanie Braucht

When he was a young man, Mercer County resident Morton "Mort" Hall was honored by the *Prairie Farmer* publication for his heroic actions in 1934. On a hot day that year, Mort, who was 16 at the time, and four other boys went swimming in



a creek near their home in the Norwood area. One of the other boys was Mort's older brother, Willis, 18. Mort was an experienced swimmer, but Willis was not. None of the boys thought there was any danger because there were only a few places where the water was over their heads, and they had those

places pretty well marked. After swimming for a while, Mort was resting on the bank when he noticed Willis splashing around. When his head disappeared, Mort realized Willis was in trouble. Jumping on to the water, Mort swam toward him. Willis came up for a moment and then went under again. When Willis came up the third time, Mort grabbed him, but Willis also grabbed Mort around the neck. Mort realized that he was not going to be able to help Willis this way, and they both would be in danger. There was nothing else to do, so Mort struck his brother in the jaw. Willis's hold relaxed and his body went limp. Then it was easy for Mort to bring him to shallow water and carry him to the creek bank.

The other boys came running when they heard the commotion, but by the time they got there, Mort had Willis out of the creek and was helping him get the water out of his lungs. Willis recovered fully from his ordeal, and, as a result, vowed to never go near deep water again until he learned to swim.



Because Mort saved his brother's life at the risk of losing his own, the *Prairie Farmer* designated him a hero and awarded him a medal, a picture of which accompanies this article. The article telling about Mort and his award went on to say this about him: "Morton is a resolute chap. The shape of his jaw indicates that when he makes up his mind to do anything he usually does it. He weighs only 130 pounds, but he sticks to football. He isn't a regular on the high school team, but he got to play eight quarters last fall, and hopes to do better this fall. He played on the lightweight basketball team until he gained two pounds more than the limit. In summer time the boys work with their father, Albert Hall, who farms 240 acres."

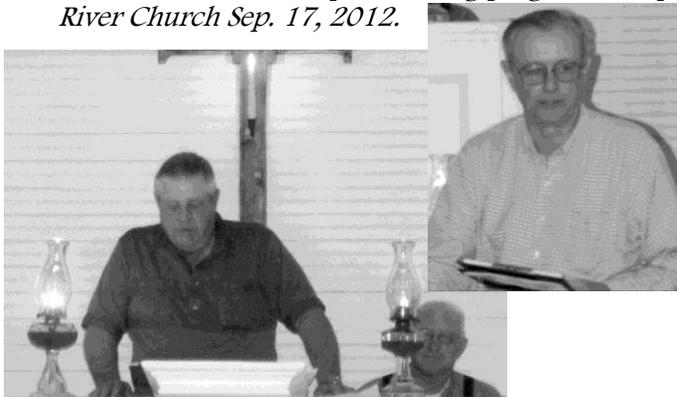
Mort was a lifelong resident of Mercer County, living in Aledo and then Joy during his adult years. We thank his daughter, Wanda Olson of Joy, for sharing this information with us.



### Calendar of Events for 2012:

- Oct. 31** Last day of regular hours
- Nov. 3** Start of Winter hours Sat. only 12:00-4:00

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 We thank Doug McCaw, Ronn Dillavou, and Dave  
 Duncan for the Fall Open Meeting program at Pope's  
 River Church Sep. 17, 2012.



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**What is It?**

The previous "What is It?" was a lead pipe expander.

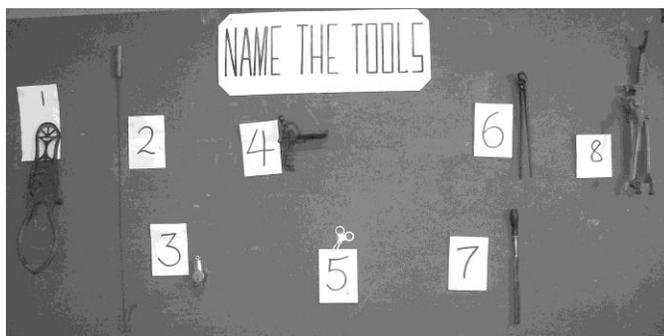
This item is made of metal, has a loop at the top, and is about 3 1/4 inches in diameter.

**What is it???**



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**"Name the Tools" 2012 Mercer Co. Fair**

1. Boot jack
2. Chicken catcher
3. Nutmeg grinder
4. Cherry pitter
5. Chicken marker
6. Blacksmith tool



7. Corner chisel
8. Model T rim splitter

Congratulations to Louis Lloyd who got the most correct and to William Millar for winning the random drawing.

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