

Mercer County Historical Society Newsletter

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Mercer County Historical Society &

Essley-Noble Museum

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Hours

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Nov - March: Saturdays 12:00-4:00pm



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Henry V. Porter's March Madness

By Stephanie Braucht

Exactly one hundred years ago, Henry V. Porter was principal at Keithsburg High School. He was highly respected and very well-liked, but no one had an inkling about what contributions he would make to the sport of basketball in the future. Over the years, his accomplishments were impressive, and he was rewarded with enshrinement in the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame in Springfield, MA.

Henry Van Arsdale Porter, known as H.V., was born October 2, 1891, near Manito, IL, where he grew up on a farm. He graduated from Illinois State Normal University (now Illinois State University), and took his first teaching job at Mount Zion High School. For the 1914-1915 school year, he came to Keithsburg to serve as principal at the high school there. One of the photos accompanying this article was taken during his time at Keithsburg High School. He (tall man on the right) appears to be with the members of the high school Violin Club, and the location appears to have been the Keithsburg Methodist Church. H.V. played several instruments and had taught himself to play the violin. He was responsible for establishing violin clubs and/or bands at other schools later on, so it is likely that he had established this one.



During the year that he was at Keithsburg, H.V. surprised his friends and acquaintances by getting married during Christmas vacation. An article in the *Keithsburg News*, January 7, 1915, recounts how everyone was so surprised to learn of his marriage when he returned to town after the holidays. He and Miss Grace Krumminga (also sometimes spelled Kromminga) had married at the home of her parents in Hartsburg. She had been teaching school in Mount Zion, but came with him to Keithsburg, where they resided in "... the Miss Mary Humphreys house on Tenth and Washington street."

It is worthy to note the esteem that was expressed for Principal Porter in that *Keithsburg News* article. "Concerning Mr. Porter, who is so well and favorably known, it should be said that friends and professors consider him the highest accomplished graduate of the Illinois State Normal University in many years. They are agreed that he will reach high eminence in his chosen work." How right they would be.

The Porters were in the *Keithsburg News* again on May 6, 1915, when it was reported that they had hosted a "tramp party" for the Violin Club. According to the article "Each guest was asked to come dressed as a tramp, and was received at the back door by the host and hostess and were presented with a handout neatly done up in a white handkerchief, and suspended on the end of a stick. After all the members had arrived they tramped to the Willits pasture, where wieners, coffee, eggs, sandwiches and pickles were partaken of." Then, as of the May 27 edition of the *Keithsburg News*, the Porters had departed from Keithsburg to go to Delavan, IL, where H.V. was to begin serving as high school principal. By

1919, H.V. was principal at Athens High School, where he also directed the band and coached boys basketball. The first basketball team at Athens was organized in 1919, under his supervision. He was at Athens through 1928, and coached his boys basketball team there to second place at state in 1924.

That was long before there were classes based on school enrollment. His Athens team, drawn from a student body of 164, lost the championship game to Elgin HS, with a student body of 1028.

In 1928, Porter became assistant executive secretary (the position that today is assistant executive director) of what was then the Illinois High School Athletic Association (now the Illinois High School Association or IHSA). Among his many duties, he edited the organization's monthly magazine, the *Illinois High School Athlete*. It was the first magazine-style state high school association publication. The March, 1939 issue carried an essay he wrote about the boys state basketball tournament, entitled "March Madness." One line claims "When the March madness is on him, midnight jaunts of a hundred miles on successive nights make him even more alert the next day." The term "March Madness" was picked up by newspaper reporters and became so popular that it is still in use today.

In 1942 Porter authored a poem entitled "Basketball Ides of March" that appeared in the IHSA's magazine. It begins:

"The gym lights gleam like a beacon beam
And a million motors hum
In a good will flight on a Friday night;
For basketball beckons, "Come!"
A sharp-shooting mite is king tonight.
The Madness of March is running.
The winged feet fly, the ball sails high
And field goal hunters are gunning."

But coining the term "March Madness" wasn't H.V. Porter's only contribution to the world of sports, in general, and basketball, in particular. He spearheaded an effort to write basketball and football rulebooks specifically for high school competition, and he published the first high school rulebook for basketball in 1936. He served as the first representative for high schools on the National Basketball Rules Committee. He pioneered the use of motion pictures to study proper playing techniques. He designed the fan-shaped backboard that was used in high schools from the 1930s through the 1990s. He also helped develop and promoted the adoption of the molded basketball that revolutionized the game by eliminating the laces that interfered with dribbling.

From 1940 until 1958, H.V. served as executive secretary and editor of publications for the National Federation of State High School Athletic Associations (NFSHSA). He was the first person to hold those positions full-time. In 1958 he retired to St. Petersburg, FL, and was enshrined in the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame in 1960. He died in Florida on October 27, 1975.

Porter and his wife never had any children, but he still left behind a tremendous legacy. Mercer County can be proud to say he once lived here and has had an influence on many of our youth, both while he was here and as a result of his efforts afterward!



Thanks to Scott Johnson of the IHSA and Jean Wistedt for their assistance in finding and sharing some of this information and to Shirley Meagher for the Violin Club photo.



Curator's Corner

Spring is here and we are looking for volunteers for our 5th grade tour in May. Those from last year will be notified and if you know of anyone who wants to share with the school children of Mercer County, please let us know. We are always looking forward to sharing in the fun. Dates are set for May 12, 13 14th.

Note that museum summer hours begin April 1. Open hours will be Wednesday, Saturday, Sunday from 1:00-5:00.

Veda Meriwether, Curator



When DID He Die? *By Bill A. Bertrand*

Anyone who has conducted much family history research has found that sometimes there is conflicting information on an ancestor's birthdate, age and or date of death. In such cases you must try to find the most reliable source, which may not always be an obituary or other published information. Remember that obituaries are written by surviving family members, who may be mistaken about their deceased's actual birthday. This can be more of a problem when researching an ancestor born before official birth and or death records were required. We were reminded of this recently when asked to research information for a War of 1812 veteran who died in Mercer County.

The information sent to us to verify for Benjamin S. Brown stated he was born July 12, 1792 in New York and died March 25, 1865. I found Benjamin listed in two printed Brown family histories, the Mercer County DAR cemetery volumes, Aledo cemetery burial records and a publication entitled "War of 1812 Soldiers Buried in Illinois." It is not uncommon for several different sources to be off a day or two for a birth or death date. That is partly because an old

date cited for a birth was often a baptismal date instead – the first written record of that person’s existence. Likewise, the written record of a person’s death was the burial record in the days before obituaries were common and death certificates were required. However, in Mr. Brown’s case, I found several discrepancies of more than a day or two for both birth and death dates.

From the sources previously mentioned, his birth was on: July 12, 1792 or July 12, 1793; or September 14, 1796 or September 15, 1794. Adding to the confusion, census records from 1850 Ohio and 1860 Illinois give his age as 54 (born 1796) in 1850 and 67 (born 1793) in 1860. The sources gave Benjamin’s date of death as: March 26, 1863; May 25, 1863; and March 25, 1865. After further research it appears that *none* of the cited birthdates or dates of death are correct.

Fortunately, for me and for the person making the verification request, there was: 1) a small note in the local newspaper; and 2) the DAR cemetery surveys of 50 years ago. We will be forever grateful to those ladies of the local DAR chapter who devoted their time in the early 1960s to survey all the remaining stones in Mercer County cemeteries and have the results typed and bound for availability in the Essley-Noble Museum. Some 50 years later I found Benjamin Brown’s stone by using the cemetery burial record – a stone so weathered that the name is hardly discernible. Even in the 1960s parts of the stone must have been hard to read, for the year of Benjamin’s death was noted as 1865 in the DAR survey. However, a paragraph in the March 31, 1863 edition of the *The Aledo Weekly Record* stated “the sudden death of Mr. Benjamin Brown” occurred “on Monday evening of last week”. It further stated that Benjamin “was in the 70th year of his age.” Since March 31, 1863 was a Tuesday, the date of Benjamin’s death as given in the paper would be March 23, 1863. Some family researchers undoubtedly believed that “70th year of his age” meant he had passed his 70th birthday, but if that were true then a 6 month old baby in its first year of life would be regarded as already 1 year old. Since Benjamin was in his 70th year, he was approaching his 70th birthday, not past it. The information from his stone stated he was 69 years 6 months and 11 days old when he died. Calculating back provides a birthdate of September 12, 1793.

Debate over a person’s birth or death date may seem like a useless triviality to some, but it is accuracy in these dates in particular that may guide you to the right ancestral lineage or records of your ancestor.



Spring Open Program

Join us Monday April 20 for our spring open program, 7:00 p.m. at the Essley-Noble Museum. Jim Nichols of Reynolds will come in uniform and in character as a first sergeant in B Company, 32nd Infantry Volunteer, Iowa, Civil War soldier. He will talk about

the recruitment, trials and tribulations, equipment, music, and political scene of the era. Jim is a retired teacher from Rockridge and he has been a Civil War re-enactor since 2006. By the end of this year he will have participated in five Sesquicentennial National Civil War Reenactments, including Shiloh, TN, Pleasant Hill, LA, Gettysburg, PA, Franklin, TN, Bentonville, NC, and the Lincoln Funeral Train.



In 2013 he was voted the Union Civil War Re-enactor of the year. He has presented for the Rockridge 5th Grade students for the past 10 years, Drury-Reynolds Cemetery 11th Annual Memorial Day Service May 2012, and Rock Island County Illinois Genealogical Society November 2012. Jim will be at this year’s Mercer County 5th grade tours in May.

This will be a very interesting program and it is open to the public with no admission charge. Children are welcome and will find it interesting as well. Refreshments will be served afterwards and you will have an opportunity to explore the museum’s exhibits and talk with Jim Nichols afterwards.



Rhubarb Time is Approaching

We will be selling rhubarb desserts, root beer floats, ice cream & coffee at our booth for the **Rhubarb Fest** again this year on Saturday June 6 in the northwest corner of the shelter at Central Park in Aledo. We need **donations of rhubarb pies, cobblers, crisps,** and any other rhubarb desserts that you can make.

If you can donate any of these things, have questions, or if you need rhubarb to make a dessert, or have extra to give us, please contact **Bev Gray at 309-372-4407** or email bevgray47@gmail.com. If you do not bake and still want to donate pies, we have a source for homemade fresh rhubarb pies that can be purchased for us to sell.

This has been our only fundraiser of the year and we can usually sell all of the pies and desserts that we get! We really appreciate your donations in support of the Historical Society, as well as those of you who visit our booth and try some pie or other dessert.

Also, we need workers for the booth for selling, cutting and putting out the desserts, dipping ice cream, collecting money, or even greeting those who stop by.

Contact Bev and she will put you down for whatever time you can give us.

Also, the Essley-Noble Museum will have extended hours from 10:00-5:00 on Friday and Saturday June 5 & 6. Come and visit and bring any out-of-town guests.



A Change in the Board

Welcome to Misty Holmes as a new board member as of January. We will miss the expertise of retiring members Shirley Ball and Jean Wistedt. Shirley spearheaded the 5th grade tours for many years and has been a long-time valued board member. Jean helped with genealogical and historical research and has contributed to a number of newsletter articles. We thank them for their service.



Calendar of Events for 2015

- Apr. 1** Start of regular hours Wed. Sat. Sun. 1-5:00 pm
- Apr. 20** Spring open meeting 7:00 p.m. at the museum
Jim Nichols "Life of a Civil War Soldier"
- May 12, 13, 14** 5th grade tours,
- June 6** Dessert in the park at Rhubarb Fest
- July 7-11** Mercer Co. Fair Merchants building

This newsletter sponsored by:

What is it?

The previous item was a stocking knitter, found in the Aledo depot by Mrs. Earl Kistler. It was probably used in the early 1900's to knit stockings. This item is made of metal, painted white, is about 29" tall and with a base of 18".



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