

Mercer County Historical Society Newsletter

"Preserving Mercer County History"

Volume 18, Issue 3

Editor: Mary Jane Sticklen

July/Aug/Sep 2014

Publisher Kellogg's Printing

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



Officers & Board of Directors

Bill Bertrand, President
Dave Duncan, Vice President,
Mary Jane Sticklen Secretary
John Huffstutler, Treasurer
Shirley Ball
Stephanie Braucht
Ronn Dillavou
Dave Frieden
Beverly Gray
Twyla Holmes
Doug McCaw
Richard McMeekan
Linda Morrow
Jean Wistedt
Jason Olson
Veda Meriwether, Curator
Dennis Henderson, Sunday Host



For Genealogy Queries write to:

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



**Memberships available for \$20/household or \$300
for a lifetime membership**

*For correspondence, membership or change of
address contact:*



Please address all correspondence to:

Essley-Noble Museum
Box 269
Aledo, IL 61231

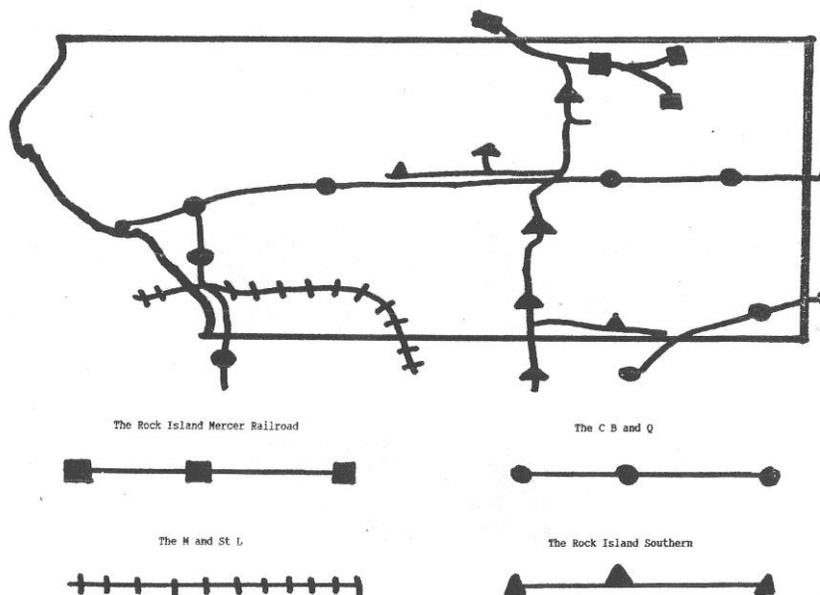


Website: www.mchsil.org
Email: mcmuseum@frontier.com

Mercer County Railroads

By Stephanie Braucht

There were several different rail lines in Mercer County over the years, and it seems they are often confused with each other. Even though some of them had different names as their ownership changed, there were basically four different rail lines in the county.



CB&Q The oldest of the lines in the county started out as the Western Airline Railroad. Later it became the American Central. It was to run an east-west route through central Mercer County. The line was built from Galva to New Boston, and the first train arrived in Aledo on May (or March, depending on the source) 8, 1869. The line was leased by the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy (CB&Q), and was later purchased by that company. The CB&Q then purchased a north-south line that had been constructed by the St. Louis, Alton, & Chicago Railroad from Gladstone, through Oquawka, to Keithsburg. In the 1875 atlas, it was labeled as the Rockford, Rock Island, & St. Louis (RRI&StL). After the CB&Q purchased this line from Keithsburg south, a short link was built from Keithsburg to Arpee Junction to join the line going into New Boston. Ultimately the route ran in an inverted U shape between Burlington, IA and Galesburg, IL. Depots along this route in Mercer County were Keithsburg, Arpee, New Boston, Joy, Aledo, Gilchrist Switch, Viola, and New Windsor. At one point in time (circa 1870-1882) the entire line from Galva to Gladstone was known as the Galva and Keithsburg extension. The CB&Q ran freight trains and passenger trains over this route. The passenger train was called the Dolly. Originally the Dolly was a steam-powered train, but in 1927 that train was replaced with a gas-electric motorcar. The motorcar was

one unit that ran on the electric power generated onboard by its own gasoline engine. The unit contained the engine and controls, passenger seating, and a cargo area. If more seating was needed, the motorcar could pull one or two additional cars. The Dolly ended her 82-year run on February 16, 1952, the same year that the section of the line from Arpee to Keithsburg was abandoned. In 1973 what was left of the CB&Q became known as the Burlington Northern. Bits of the remaining line were ended at varying times, with the portion from Joy to New Boston being dropped first. The entire line from Galva to Joy was ended by 1986, and the track was removed in 1988



IA Central at Keithsburg 1890's

A different branch of the CB&Q, running from a mainline that passed through Rio, traveled diagonally across the southeast corner of the county, through North Henderson and Alexis, and ended at Monmouth. It was originally built as the Rockford, Rock Island, & St. Louis.

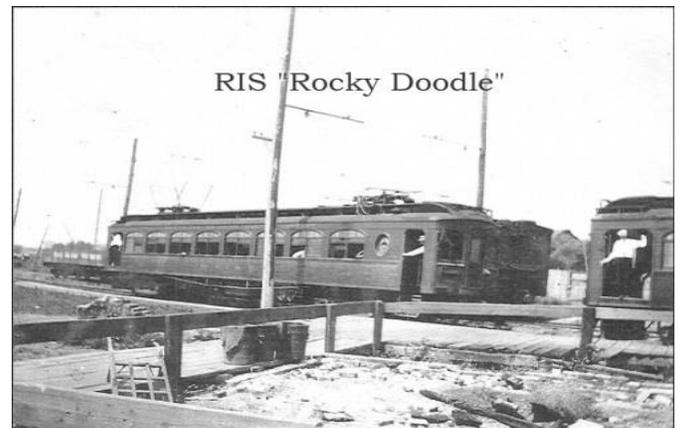
Rock Island and Mercer County Railroad
Completed in 1876, this 26-mile-long railroad stretched from Rock Island, through Milan, Reynolds, and then to Sherrard and Cable. It was built to carry coal from northeastern Mercer County (in particular for the Coal Valley Coal Company), but it also hauled passengers and cattle. This line was swallowed up by the Rock Island and Peoria line, which later became part of the Rock Island Lines. The stretch from Preemption to Cable was abandoned in 1925, but the line from Rock Island to Preemption was used by the Rock Island Southern (RIS) until 1952.

M&StL As this line entered Mercer County from the west, it crossed the Mississippi River on the railroad bridge at Keithsburg, and ran through the southwestern corner of the county, stopping at Keithsburg, Ogle, Seaton, and then Little York on its journey to Peoria. It began life as the Central

Iowa Railroad, and later was named the Iowa Central. When this was the Central Iowa, it was nicknamed the Hook and Eye, due to its symbol on timetables (a capital C lying on its back on top of a capital I). The Iowa Central merged with the Minneapolis & St. Louis (M&StL) in 1912, and the entire line went by that designation. Nicknames for the M&StL were the Tootin' Louie or just the Louie. This line ended up exclusively hauling freight, but it apparently did provide some passenger service in its early years. The M&StL was acquired by Chicago & North Western (C&NW) in 1960. C&NW abandoned the tracks between Keithsburg and Oskaloosa, IA (which included the railroad bridge at Keithsburg) in 1971. They received permission from the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) to abandon the track between Keithsburg and Monmouth in 1974.



RIS The Rock Island Southern (RIS) was built in the early 1900s as a passenger train to run between Rock Island and Monmouth, stopping in Reynolds, Southern Junction, Matherville, Gilchrist, Burgess, and Norwood in Mercer County. Known as the



"Rocky Doodle," this train was originally electric-powered, and was similar to a trolley. This type of train was also referred to as "interurban." The Rocky Doodle's power came from a generating plant on the Edwards River, south of Matherville. The high-voltage single-phase AC power was delivered to the trains via an overhead wire.

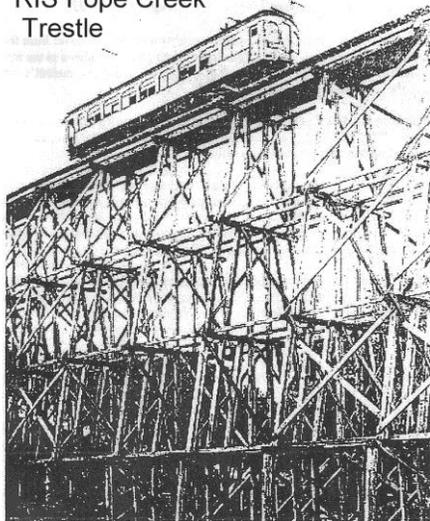


The track was laid on a zero-degree grade, meaning

pretty much on the level. In order to build it on the level, many wooden trestles had to be constructed over ravines, creeks, and the Edwards River. The one over the Edwards River was 20 feet high and 1100 feet long, while the one over Pope Creek was even higher and longer. In 1910 a branch line was built from Gilchrist to Aledo with a stop at Shale City along the way. From 1912 until 1920, there was a branch line to Alexis from a place south of Norwood called Alexis Junction. The Aledo depot for the RIS was originally in the area north of the current Blick and Blick or north of the current Blue Spruce Motel. By the late 1940s, the depot and the stockyards were relocated to the extreme east end of Aledo, northwest of the intersection of Routes 94 and 17.

By January of 1920 the RIS switched from electrical-powered trains to steam-powered engines, which were more economical at the time. Passenger service on this line in our county was discontinued in 1924, but freight service continued. Over time the roadbed

RIS Pope Creek Trestle



deteriorated, as did the trestles, which were difficult to maintain. During the winter of 1928-1929, the Pope Creek trestle was destroyed by a fire started by coals from a locomotive. It was never

rebuilt, so the route was severed in two. By the 1940s the tracks would separate after a heavy rain, and the engine and cars would settle down between the tracks, unable to move. The final run of an RIS train was on February 15, 1952, and in September of that year, the process was begun to remove the tracks.

~~~~~  
**Curator's Corner**

I would like to extend thanks to all who volunteered in helping the museum staff make the 2014 5<sup>th</sup> **Grade Tours** a great success. The students

were very excited to have hands-on things to work with. All 12 stations were not only fun but educational. The students' letters of Thanks were so worth all the effort. A special thank you, also, to the Mercer Co. Quilt Guild for making and donating cloth bags for each student to carry.

Our booth at **Rhubarb Fest** was a success due to the many who donated desserts and those who worked at selling them. The museum was a busy place both Friday and Saturday. Many visited the museum for the first time, or after a long absence.

*Veda Meriwether, Curator*



**What is It?**

The previous item was a pair of pliers used to hold clam shells for making buttons, demonstrated in the photo of the button-making machine on display at the Essley-Noble Museum.

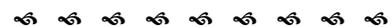


This item is cylinder shaped, hollow, and about 2 3/4" in diameter, 1 1/8" in height, and with holes in the top like a salt shaker. We will go further to say that it was labeled "Ink eraser, used by Elizabeth Collins, the first school teacher in Green Township." If you have information as to just how this was used to erase ink, or what else it might be, please contact the museum and we will share the information in the next newsletter.



**Mystery Solved**

In the last issue we showed you photos of a train accident and asked if anyone knew of the location and circumstance. Thanks to Orin Rockhold's information, this was a Rock Island Southern (RIS) train and the wreck took place somewhere between Reynolds and Taylor Ridge.



## Come to the Fair

Come visit our booth in the SW corner of the Merchants Building afternoons and evenings during the Mercer County Fair, July 8-12. There will be displays and the popular "Name That Tool" contest. Look for an adjustment to the rules in order to encourage more to enter. We also will be selling a variety of books available through the museum.



### 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Thank You's

These are only a few of the many thank you notes we received:

Dear Mercer County Historical Museum:

Thank you for teaching me about Mercer County. I liked sawing the wood off. I hope in the future I will start quilting. Chloe

I hope I remember what you taught me. I would like to teach my kids how to quilt. Haley

My favorite was the rugs. I hope I can come again. Brady

Thank you for showing us how people made and did things a long time ago. I hope I will get to come back with my family again. Gracie

It felt like I went back in time! Garrick

It is cool and I like all of the history of Mercer County.  
Coe

I enjoyed you telling us about how our town was named after General Mercer and how people used to listen to music and how Abraham Lincoln helped make Mercer County roads. Marly

What I liked most was seeing how we saw how the children went to school with the 8<sup>th</sup> graders and how the desk have changed a lot. Paige

I liked sawing off the wood and quilting the blanket.  
Karissa



## 2014 Calendar of Events

|                  |                                                                                  |
|------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>July 8-12</b> | Mercer Co. Fair booth in Merchants Building. Exhibits & "Name the Tools" contest |
| <b>Aug. 23</b>   | Antique Days special exhibits and extended hours at the museum 10:00-5:00        |
| <b>Oct. 20</b>   | Fall open meeting 7:00 at the museum. Program TBA                                |
| <b>Nov. 1</b>    | Start of winter hours 12:00-4:00 Sat. only                                       |

This newsletter sponsored by:



**Dr. J. Jim Nordquist**  
**Dr. Timothy P. Arbet**  
**Dr. Christopher Lear**  
**Dr. Jill K. Hays**  
*Optometrists*

**Mercer County Family Eyecare, Ltd.**  
*Members of Illinois & American Optometric Associations*  
106 S. College Avenue • Aledo, IL 61231 • Phone (309) 582-2421