



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: 1:00 - 5:00 PM
Wed., Sat., & Sunday
April through the end of October.



Officers & Board of Directors

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Shirley Crawford, Curator
Dennis Henderson, Sunday Host



For Genealogy Queries write to:

Cheryl McCaw/Shirley Crawford
MCHS Genealogy Dept.
1406 - SE 2nd Avenue
Aledo IL 61231-2504



For membership or change of address contact

Jim Runyon
756 State Hwy 94
Aledo, IL 61231
582-7762



Website:

http://www.geocities.com/mchs_61231

Aledo Hosts Billy Sunday

By Jim Runyon

One of America's great evangelists, Billy Sunday, preached in Aledo over 100 years ago from Oct. 6 to Nov. 6, 1905. In an 80' x 100' temporary wooden tabernacle built where Henderson Ford now stands, he preached to packed houses six nights a week, plus special meetings for men and women only, young men, and business groups.

Billy Sunday was born at Ames, IA, in a two-room log cabin. His father died in the Civil War and his mother had to place him in Soldiers' Orphans' Homes in Glenwood and Davenport, IA. Billy demonstrated an outstanding athletic ability as a minor league baseball player in Marshalltown, IA, and he was a successful professional baseball player with the Chicago White Stockings and Pittsburgh Pirates. His dynamic style grew out of his professional baseball career, enabling him to hold his audiences spellbound. He was converted to Christianity in 1896 at the Pacific Garden Mission in Chicago and preached to 100 million people before his death in 1935.

At the final men's meeting in Aledo on Nov. 6, 1905, Billy (always opposed to alcohol) led a march to the beer garden to persuade the owner to close the establishment. Aledo had been dry since 1876, but the garden sat just outside the city's limits at present day 600 SW 7th Street. As the owner agreed, they paid for his inventory and closed the beer garden. From a county population of 19,000 people, 959 signed cards of commitment to Christ during the four-week crusade. They then joined the church of their choice.



The large structure at the right in the photo (looking NE from the courthouse) shows Billy Sunday's tabernacle. North of that is the depot, then the Opera House (converted from being a skating rink just the previous year), the Bridgeford Bank, and Marquis Grocery. In the upper left-hand corner, facing Central Park, is Detwiler Bros. Hardware. The photo is from the collection at the Museum.

Thompson and John Ramsay? For more information concerning the CIC, contact Ronn, who was twice president from 1998-2001, at 582-2937.



Saluting our Volunteers

A huge **thank you** to our volunteers Joy Norton, Nancy Ferguson, Jo Knox, and Sandra Sharer. Joy is presently helping with cleaning out the storeroom and entering items not previously given a number. She has found clothing for our displays in her search for more information on the storeroom artifacts. Nancy has been indexing for the genealogy department. Jo has volunteered for whatever we have on our list. She is going to work with the photograph sheets and binders and will help with recording the relocation of our photographs. Sandra is preparing to put our obituaries on a CD so our researchers will be able to save time. Other information will be entered later, and help would be appreciated. The obituaries are from 1857 to the present.

Volunteering is an excellent way to beat the winter doldrums and what better way than to become involved with your local museum? All skill levels are needed. The storeroom project needs your help. Also someone is needed to enter the sheets on the Past Perfect computer program. There are many other opportunities available. Call Shirley Crawford at 584-4820 or write to the Essley-Noble Museum and we will find a match for your interests and skills.



Corn Items Collectors

Ronn Dillavou tells of an interesting national organization that he is involved with called the Corn Items Collectors Club, or CIC. They are dedicated to preserving the history of anything that has to do with raising corn—planting, harvesting, seeds, advertising, etc. from years past. Collections can range from equipment large and small, advertising signs, seed sacks, corn wire, shucking hooks, etc. The club started at the annual Labor Day gas and engine show at Lake Argyle, Colchester, IL, in the early 1990's and membership has even expanded into Hawaii. They meet at various locations and are always eager to show their collections, tools, and how they work. Look for displays and demonstrations at various gas and steam engine shows, especially in the Midwest. There are books about various topics and a newsletter. Did you know that in 1864 planter wire was invented in Aledo by John

Meet the Board

Ruth Giffin is honored with the new designation of "Honorary Director." **Ruth** was curator of the Essley-Noble Museum for 17 years and she recently celebrated her 90th birthday. She has been designated as the first "Honorary Director" of the MCHS. Ruth has three children, seven grandchildren and eight great grandchildren. She and her late husband Everett were married 47 years. She is a founding member and the first woman elder of the Sunbeam United Presbyterian Church and is a 50-year member of William Dennison Chapter NSDAR. She is extremely interested in genealogy, as well as being a sports fan of the Cardinals and the Aledo Green Dragons. She loved to go sledding, to work in her yard and garden, and to pick berries and make jelly. She is currently a resident of the Mercer Co. Nursing Home and would love a visit or call from her friends.

Welcome to our newest Board member **Jeff Tyrrell**. Jeff born and raised in North Henderson and is currently living in Alexis. He and his wife Karol are parents of three and grandparents of seven. Jeff is an Industrial Tech teacher at Abingdon High School. He is generally interested in history, with a special interest in the Civil War era.

Introductions to other Board members will come in subsequent newsletter.



EARLY SCHOOLS

Contributed by Alicia J. Ives

The 1882 *History of Mercer County* says that the first school house in Eliza Township was built on top of the bluff, a short distance from where D. F. Noble then lived. A date is not given in the history for the building but it was pre-1845. The school house is not shown in the 1875 plat map but D. F. Noble is shown owning land in Section 23. The school house was built of logs and the first two teachers were Mary Ann Delabar and Emily Cawkins.



Fairview One-room school

The school was kept up for many years by subscription, until the legislature in 1845 and 1865 passed laws authorizing townships to levy a tax for the maintenance of schools. An example of subscription and how it was collected is found in the estate of Isaac Willits. Simeon P. Smith, teacher, signed a voucher in 1846 stating that Mr. Willits owed 3 dollars and 56 and 1/4 cents for tuition of children during the year 1842-3. This was tuition for Isaac's grandson, Milton Willits and possibly other orphan grandchildren. Isaac had signed an agreement to provide schooling for his orphan grandson, Milton, and his estate papers include the bill for Simeon Smith, another for teacher Warren Shedd, and charges to the store of Drury and Willits for school supplies. When Wells Willits advertised his new store in 1854, the list of available items included "Asst School books; Do. Note letter & Foolscap Paper;...Steel Pens; Slates; Wood Pencils...Blank Books." Eliza Township accepted the tax system and was divided into six school districts: Center, Boruff, Glancy, White Eagle, Eliza Creek, and Winter Creek. As the 1865 law stated, the township was divided into districts establishing free schools for at least 6 months each year, with directors who could levy an annual property tax of the district for free schools to teach students over 6 and under 21. Later, the school treasurer, A. B. Swisher made an accounting for the year 1880: Amount levied for 1881, \$1600; state funds received, \$364.62, and interest received from town fund, \$161.65, for a total of \$2,126.27.

The 1882 History states that the first school in New Boston Township was also held in a log cabin on the bluff and was presided over by George W. Julian in 1834 or 1835. It is curious why both schools were on the bluff as that was not a central location. Possibly it was to have access to a close source of firewood. The township was eventually

divided into eight districts. In the 1880 census there were 517 school children in New Boston Township.

A slightly different school history is found under Perryton Township in the 1882 History and contributed by Amanda Frazier. She states that the first school in Mercer County was held in a small log cabin erected on the claim of Erastus Dennison, about two miles east of New Boston near the home of Mr. C. Rader (see New Boston 1875 plat map, SE/4 Section 28). The teacher was Abram Miller, summer of 1833 (see Miller Web Site on this family). The enrollment was only about a dozen pupils. The next year the first regular school house was erected on the bluff about three miles east of New Boston on the farm of William Willits (this was probably in Keithsburg Township). Abram Miller or Joshua Willits taught here in the winter of 1834-35 and George W. Julian in 1836.

The first county school commissioner appointed by the county commissioners' court, on April 13, 1835, was John Long. In the enabling act of 1818 Congress provided that section sixteen of each township be set aside for school purposes. In accordance, the school commissioner was also agent for school lands, which were to be sold for the support of the school system.

A school board served as the board of examiners for teachers. More attention seemed to be paid to an even distribution of board members across the precincts than to educational qualifications. They were good honest farmers who could read, write, and cipher but knew little of geography and grammar. John Long served as school commissioner until December 1835. Then William Nevius was appointed, serving until June 1840 when Ephraim Gilmore was appointed. In 1841 the office became elective and Gilmore was elected and served until 1846. Thomas Candor served one year, then Benjamin Ellett. Thereafter the elections were biennial. Tyler McWhorter served from 1849 to 1851. Many able educators were placed in charge of schools during his term of office, including Simeon Smith, David Felton, Resin Kile, Harvey Senter. John Ramsey, McWhorter and Norman Brown.

A New Partnership

On Nov. 30, 2005, a partnership was entered into between the Mercer County Historical Society and the Archives and Special Collections unit at Western Illinois University at Macomb. The University's digital photographic database has recently gone online, making available to the public over 2,700 fully cataloged images from the University's collection. Currently, most of those images are of places and people from McDonough County. However, WIU will soon be expanding the database's subject matter to include some five hundred digital photographs from Mercer County.

By being part of WIU's photo database, the Mercer County Historical Society will be greatly enhancing its visibility, as well as promoting interest in Mercer County worldwide. An added benefit is the security WIU will be providing for the museum's photo collection. At present, if anything were to happen to the museum, much of the county's visual history would be lost. Having the images housed in digital form at WIU insures that those images could be reproduced.

Although Mercer County's images will not appear on the WIU database until later in 2006, you may explore the database at: <https://www.wiu.edu/users/archives/digital/search.sphp> MCHS's own digitized images can still be viewed from the computer in the museum.



Your Support is Vital!

Annual memberships expire December 31, 2005. We count on dues and donations to provide necessary funds for our projects and for the maintenance of the Essley-Noble Museum complex. Thank you to all of our patrons!

() Annual Membership - \$15.00 (one household)

Send to: Jim Runyon

() Lifetime Membership - \$300.00

756 Hwy 94

() Corporate/Business Fee- \$100.00

Aledo, IL 61231

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____

Coming Events

April 1

Museum opens for the season (No fooling!)

April 17

Spring open business meeting 7:00 p.m. Topic: TBA

May

Fifth grade tours