



Mercer County Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 16, Issue 1

Editor: Mary Jane Sticklen

Jan/Feb/Mar 2012

Publisher Kellogg's Printing

Mercer County Historical Society & Essley-Noble Museum

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Hours

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



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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:
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Memberships available for \$15/household

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Essley-Noble Museum
Box 269
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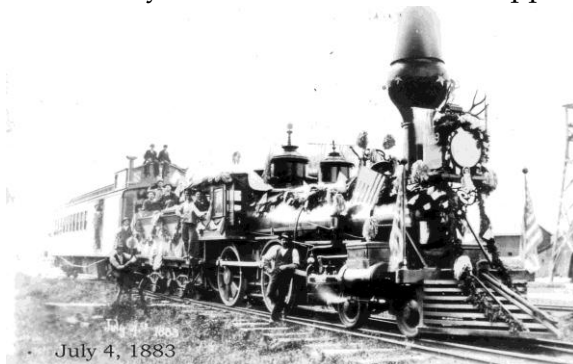


Website: www.mchsil.org
Email: mcmuseum@frontier.com

Remembering The Dolly

by Stephanie Braucht

Mention The Dolly, and almost every adult in Mercer County knows what you're talking about. Older residents remember riding her, and younger adults have heard stories and references. The Dolly provided passenger rail service for Mercer County residents for nearly 83 years. She also carried mail. Farmers used The Dolly to ship their cream to the creamery in Galva and fish was shipped from New Boston for markets in the east. Originating in Burlington, IA, at 6:45 a.m., her daily route ultimately served the Mercer County towns and communities of Keithsburg, Arpee, New Boston, Joy, Aledo, Viola, New Windsor, then on to Galva and Galesburg. Each afternoon she reversed the route on her way back to Burlington.



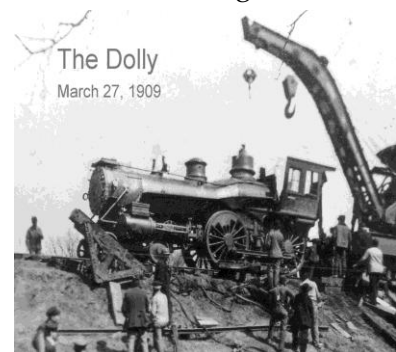
Efforts to build such a railroad in Mercer County started as early as 1853 when the Western Airline Railroad was chartered by an act of the Illinois legislature. Construction started in 1857, but finances were a problem, as well as obtaining iron rails, most of which were produced in England. In 1859 the company was reorganized as the American Central Railway. Not much more progress was made, and the Civil War intervened. In 1865, the company and line was sold at a public auction and reorganized yet again, but under the same name. By 1867, rails were supposed to be coming from England, but they had not arrived by the end of 1868. The company then entered into an agreement with the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroad (C. B. & Q.), who agreed to operate the line "in perpetuity." Finally, in October of 1869, the railroad was completed between New Boston and Galva. The route covered a little more than 50.5 miles at that time. In 1871, track was laid between Arpee and Oquawka. In 1899 the C.B. & Q. became the owner of the line.

Originally, The Dolly consisted of three passenger cars pulled by a steam engine typical of the day. Legend has it that the train was named after Dolly Varden, a character in Charles Dickens's story *Barnaby Rudge*, which was published as a book in 1868. The character of Dolly Varden was an attractive young woman, who dressed in the fashion of the day, with fancy bustled skirts and big fancy plumed hats. Reportedly, the little train looked like a lady with a bustle, the smokestack looked like a fancy hat, and the plume of smoke from the stack resembled the feather plumes

that were popular on the ladies' hats. Also, at about the same time, a famous circus performer used the name Dolly Varden, and one version of the story says that Morgan Ostrum of Woodhull, named the train in her honor in 1877.

Over the course of her long life, The Dolly was pulled, no doubt, by several different engines. The original steam engine probably was very similar in style to the one in the picture accompanying this article. That engine, decked out for the 4th of July in 1883, could very well have been The Dolly (especially since there appears to be a doll attached to the front), but it is not known for sure. At the Essley-Noble museum there are several good quality photographs of engines similar to this one, but none of them have been identified as being The Dolly. The only ones available at the museum that are without a doubt The Dolly are poor quality pictures from old newspaper articles. We are hoping that some of our readers will have good pictures of The Dolly that they would allow us to copy.

No article about The Dolly would be complete without telling about the time she wrecked about a mile and a half east of New Boston in 1909. Apparently the procedure for the westbound train at Arpee was to detach the engine from the rest of the train and turn it around by using the "Y" at that junction. Then it was attached to the rear coach, and pulled the train into New Boston by moving backwards. With the engine running backwards, that put the tender (carrying the coal) in the front of the entire train. On the afternoon of March 27, 1909, the train was running in this manner, when the tender

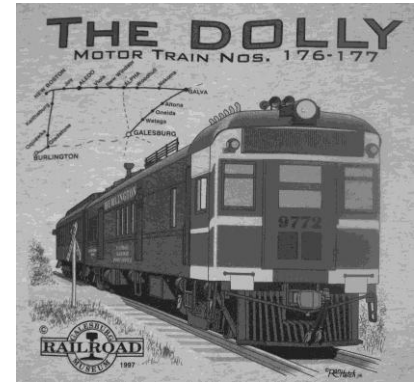


derailed just west of the Edwards River Bridge. This tore up a portion of the track and caused the engine to derail. Thomas Jenks, the engineer, was badly scalded and died as a result of his injuries.

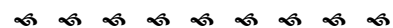
The conductor was severely bruised, and one passenger received bruises, also. A relief train came

out as soon as possible from Galesburg and finished the route for the day. Amazingly, the track was repaired at the accident site by the end of the day and, presumably, the route returned to normal the following day.

In 1927 the steam engine was replaced by a new type of engine, which consisted of a generator and a gasoline engine. Gasoline was used to start the engine, and then it operated on the electricity it generated. Engine and passenger compartment were all in the same bright red and yellow car, which looked quite different from the original train drawn by the steam engine. This type of engine was called a gas-electric motorcar, and it had the ability to pull one or two passenger cars, if needed. On display at the Essley-Noble Museum is a t-shirt from the Galesburg Railroad Museum which shows a drawing of how The Dolly looked when she was a gas-electric motorcar.



Time marched on, roads improved, and more and more people owned automobiles and trucks. As a result, fewer and fewer people used The Dolly for transportation. Ultimately it consisted of just one passenger car that was seldom filled. The C.B. & Q. was losing money on the little train, and finally made the decision to discontinue it. February 16, 1952 marked the last trip of The Dolly. The passenger car was packed that day and people were even riding standing up in the baggage car. People came out at the stations and along the route to watch the little train take its farewell journey. Many folks mailed letters (some to themselves) with the special postmark created for that day. It proclaimed, "DEATH OF THE DOLLY LAST TRIP." One of these letters is on display in the museum along with other memorabilia of the fondly remembered train



Memories of The Dolly

Shirley Anderson Ball happily used the services of The Dolly when she was growing up and as a young adult. She reported, "I lived with my parents in the country, so I would stay with my sister Maxine in New Boston and ride The Dolly every weekday to and from Joy in order to attend high school there. I

graduated from Joy High School in 1945. Some of my friends rode The Dolly every Monday from New Boston to Aledo, where they boarded during the week, attended Aledo High School, and rode The Dolly back home again each Friday." When Shirley was dating her husband in 1946-47, he lived in New London, IA. She would get on The Dolly in New Boston and ride it through Arpee, Keithsburg, Oquawka, and Gladstone, finally arriving in Burlington, where he would meet her.

Sue (Hamilton) Kiddoo reports, "In the early 1950's our family lived in New Windsor. It was at about this time (1952) that our Dad started his business in Viola, Hamilton Sail Service. My brother, Don, was 10 at the time and I was 8. We walked the three blocks to the depot from our house, paid our nickels, then got on the Dolly and rode it to Viola. Dad's new business was near the Viola depot. We would meet him there and ride home with him. We thought it was a pretty big deal!"

Barbara Sandquist Runyon tells, "As children my twin sister, Beverly Sandquist Haney, and I rode The Dolly to Galva in order to spend a few days with our grandmother, Fannie Sandquist Morgan. Our parents would come to Galva by car and bring us home. We were so excited to go to the train station and ride the train all by ourselves. The conductor was a happy, jolly gentleman and was very good to us."

Readers, please share your memories and or any photos you might have of The Dolly. Email, stop by, or write to the museum.



Curator's Corner

Holly Days light parade of Aledo gave us the opportunity to show off the 1901 Oldsmobile replica built by Frank Carlson and driven in the parade by Jim Holmes.

Our new accessions for this quarter have been given by: Dave Frieden, Marilyn Nelson, Mary Price, Elaine Peterson, Forrest McCaw, John McCaw, Edna Chard

Rhine and Steve & Kathee Seiver. Thanks to all 62 that have donated this year.

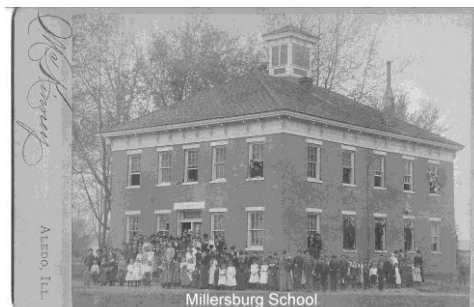
Have a wonderful 2012 and remember to always write names on all the old pictures you have tucked away. Your family genealogists will Thank YOU!

Veda Meriwether, Curator



Millersburg School- "Old Brick Building"

In 1856, the residents of Millersburg erected a fine new school building, shown in this photograph. According to the *History of Mercer County Illinois (1914)*, the Millersburg school district was one of the most important in Mercer County when this building opened to its first students in the fall of 1858. W.L. Green was the instructor at the time. His salary was \$35 per month. The building was a two-story high, brick structure, which contained



three rooms. In its first year, eighty students were enrolled, and the average attendance was nearly fifty. Other early teachers were William K. Young and Mrs. A.M. Young of Aledo and Judge William H. Gest of Rock Island. An article, written by then county superintendent of schools Fred Close, appeared in the *Times Record* on August 19, 1936. In it he stated "Before the Civil War, Aledo, Keithsburg, New Boston, and Millersburg had erected new brick buildings, and the commissioner [of schools] stated that he doubted whether there was a county in the state making more commendable progress than Mercer and he predicted that Millersburg, with its excellent new building, would take the lead." Time marched on, and this excellent new building was torn down in 1893 and replaced with an even newer brick building. From that time, when speaking of it, people referred to it as the Old Brick Building.

Your Support is Vital!

Annual memberships expired December 31, 2011. Membership starts on Jan. 1, but if you are a new member and have paid near the end of the previous year, your membership will carry over. 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 our patrons!

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

() **Lifetime Membership** - \$300.00

() **Corporate/Business Fee** - \$100.00

Send to: Essley-Noble Museum

Box 269

Aledo, IL 61231

Name _____

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City _____ State _____ Zip _____

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Photos Needed

Our photo collection is sorely lacking in those of Mercer County's country schools. We invite our readers to share your photos with us. We can make copies of originals. Reminiscences of your years in country schools are also very welcome.



Thank You, Harriett. Welcome Linda

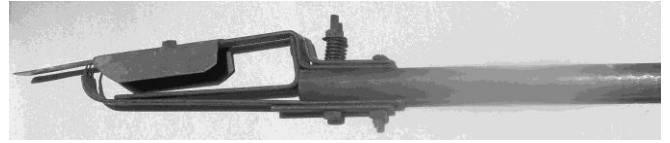
We thank Harriett Reynolds for her many years of service as a board member and for sharing her knowledge of Mercer County history and genealogy. Harriett is planning to spend time with her family and can no longer attend regular board meetings, but she will always be a welcome visitor to the museum.

Welcome to new board member Linda Morrow. Linda's father, Francis Bopp, was active at the Museum and was a past president. He used to drive a bus and give the Mercer County 5th grade tour as well as make the jump rope for the kids with Linda's mother. Linda and Gail have 4 children, 7 grandchildren, and are both from long-time Mercer Co. families. Linda is retired from working at the Mercer Co. courthouse and from the RI Arsenal and she is learning to help Veda input accessions in the museum's computer.



What is It?

The previous "What is It?" was used to tie shocks of grain together. This item has about a three-foot



wooden handle with a metal mechanism at the end, approximately one foot in length.



Coming Events for 2012:

- April 1** Start of regular house Wed. Sat. Sun. 1-5:00
- April 16** Spring open meeting 7:00 at the museum
Niel Johnson portraying Harry S. Truman
- May** 5th grade tours
- June 2** Dessert at the Rhubarb Fest

This newsletter sponsored by:



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