



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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For Genealogy Queries write to:

MCHS Genealogy Dept.
PO Box 269
Aledo IL 61231-2504



Please address all correspondence to:
PO Box 269

“Mail is no longer delivered to the museum building.”

Memberships available for \$15/household

For membership or change of address contact:

Jim Runyon
756 State Hwy 94
Aledo, IL 61231
309-582-7762



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

ALEDO WATER SYSTEM

By Jim Runyon

The first well and pump building were dug and built by U.S. Windmill and Pump Co. of Batavia, IL in 1889. A. K. Wallen drilled to 3,115 feet, but the water was too salty and the hole was filled in to 1,450 feet. Total cost was \$7,368. The wood tower stood at the NE corner of the pump house (100 block of SW 2nd Street).

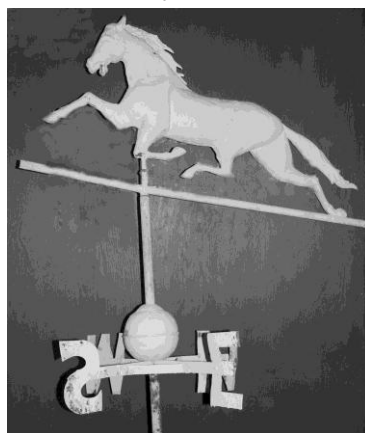
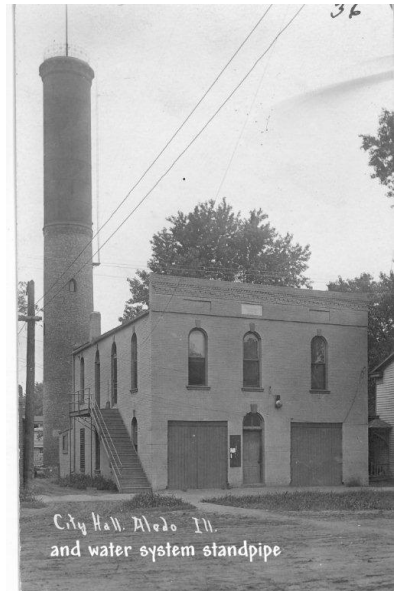
In 1901, the city council called for a new water system. A brick building and steel standpipe was built behind the 1884 city hall/fire house building which stood just south of where the present-day U.S. Post Office is located. This standpipe was used until 1917 when the city sold the land to the federal government on which to build the post office.

John M. Harney of Harney Bros. brought the standpipe down in March, 1917, when the new tower was completed. A guy rope on a triple block and tackle was attached to a tree trunk in the schoolyard across the street. The rope was fastened to the standpipe through a hole near the top of the brick wall. A strong pull toppled the tower while 500 people watched.

The new tower was built on the city's tie yard on the block west of the pumping plant (east of present-day V.F.W.). It was 150 feet tall, held 150,000 gallons and cost \$6,800. Although supposed to be completed by Nov. 15, 1916, construction did not begin until Jan.

1917. After a disagreement, one of the rowdies tried to throw the head steeplejack off the tower. The steeplejack saved himself by hooking a leg around the railing.

A second well was drilled in 1926 to 1,172 feet. It supplied Aledo's water until about 10 years ago when, to obtain mineral and odor free water, the present well was drilled six miles east of the Mississippi River.



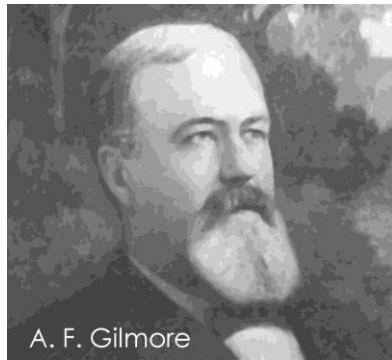
An auxiliary tower was built in the SW portion of Aledo at the SE corner of the intersection of SW 6th Ave. and 5th St. The two towers provided water until the new one was built in 2008 at 19th Ave. and 10th St. to serve the eastward expansion of the city. Then, the condemned 1917 water tower was razed, observed by another large crowd of interested citizens. The weather vane which adorned its pinnacle is on display at the Essley-Noble Museum.



Arthur Fremont Gilmore (1850-1918)

By : Stephanie Braucht

Among the many interesting people with roots in Mercer County, was Arthur Fremont (A.F.) Gilmore. Arthur, the second child of George Brown Gilmore and Permelia Wood Gilmore, was born on November 9, 1850, on their farm just east of Millersburg, IL. In 1874, when he was 24, he headed west to California and settled in the Los Angeles area. At that time Los Angeles was a small town situated on the Los Angeles River. A.F. entered into a ranching partnership which owned two ranches. After a few years, when the partners decided to end their business relationship, they drew straws to determine who got which property. A.F. drew the shorter straw. The partner got first choice and took the better property, which was east of town. That left A.F. with the westernmost ranch which was near the now-famous La Brea Tar Pits, 256 acres of wild country between LA and the ocean. Eventually the city of Los Angeles grew up to surround Gilmore's ranch, which was then referred to as "Gilmore Island."



On January 4, 1882, A.F. married Mary E. Bell, who had come to California from Missouri with her pioneering family. They made their home and raised their family in an adobe house which was already on the property. Gilmore acquired more land and increased the size of what was called "Rancho La Brea" to 287 acres. One day in 1903, A.F. began drilling a well to provide water for his dairy herd. It was quite a surprise when, instead of water, a black substance gushed from the well. He had struck oil! Soon there was no more dairy farm, replaced by the

Gilmore Oil Company, which became the largest oil company in the western United States.

A.F. and Mary's son, Earl Bell (E.B.) Gilmore eventually took over the business and expanded it, right there on "Gilmore Island." He was responsible for building Gilmore Stadium, where midget car racing originated, in order to showcase Gilmore Oil Company products. The first professional football team in Los Angeles, the Bulldogs, also played there. E.B. also built a baseball stadium, Gilmore Field, which was home to the Hollywood Stars, a minor league baseball team owned by several Hollywood movie stars. Perhaps the most well-known venture of the Gilmore family is Farmers Market. During the depression, Earl Bell Gilmore originated Farmers Market on the "Gilmore Island" property as a way for the local farmers to sell their produce. Farmers Market is still there and has become a huge tourist attraction. Today the A.F. Gilmore Company also counts the Gilmore Bank in L.A. among its holdings. The company is still in the family's hands, with A.F. Gilmore's great grandson, Henry Hilty, as the president and CEO. The corporate offices are situated in the original adobe house.

Arthur Fremont Gilmore's older sister, Clara Janette, married John Braucht, Jr., and they farmed in Duncan Township, Mercer Co., IL. The youngest sister, Vienna, married William E. Epperly, and they also farmed in Duncan Township. Arthur's sister Mary Lois married Harry Strickland, their children eventually moved away from Mercer County. Another sister, Lena Catherine, married George R. Brock, and eventually moved to CA. A brother, Austin Ephraim, died before reaching the age of two. The youngest of A.F.'s siblings, Otto Marsh Gilmore, married Cora A. Epperly Downey, a sister of William E. Epperly, who made their home in the Los Angeles area.



Curator's Corner

Thanks to all who participated in the clean-up and inventory. We have even moved the displays around so that the main building is wheelchair accessible. Our board members came up to the call and even brought some new young people into our group to help. My thanks to the Erwin family: Patti, Maryam, Colin, and Devin for their much-needed work in labeling and arranging the cases. Please come, look around and enjoy our History in Mercer County. Your Curator, Veda Meriwether



THE BROTHER FOUND

William D. T. Travis depicts a Confederate soldier (Travis' self-portrait) finding his wounded brother, a Union soldier, after a battle. Travis accompanied Maj. Gen. William S. Rosecrans' Army of the Cumberland during the Civil War as a correspondent for Harper's Weekly and New York Illustrated News, sketching what he saw. After the war, Travis produced from his sketches a 500 foot mural on a roll and exhibited it across the U.S. The mural is now in the Smithsonian.

This painting, The Brother Found, was owned by William Drury (a friend of Travis') who gave it to



William and Vashti College. Finis Cabeen purchased it at the dispersal sale upon the college's closing. It can now be viewed, newly cleaned and restored, at the Essley Noble Museum, along with other items in the Civil War exhibit.



SPRING OPEN MEETING

Note that there is a revision in the previously announced program and meeting place for the April 19 Spring open meeting. Due to weather delaying the completion of the "old barn," we will have that program in the Fall, Oct. 18.

April 19, 7:00 p.m. at the museum, Dr. Marrietta Castle will honor us with a visit from Mary Todd Lincoln. In the role of Mrs. Lincoln, Dr. Castle combines her love of reading and history. Her presentations are based on research into Mary's life, including the discovery by historians in 2005 of some of her letters and other documents. Dressed in a period costume, Dr. Castle portrays the President's widow as she might have appeared in 1875, ten years

after the assassination and just before she left the sanitarium where she was committed by her son.

Dr. Castle received her Ph.D. from the University of Iowa and is Emeritus Professor for Western IL University. As a literacy consultant for the past 16 years, she has assisted schools with long-term projects to improve reading and writing instruction. She is currently involved in several history-related projects and she serves as the curriculum specialist for the Dept. of Education's "Teaching American History" grant.



The public is invited and the main museum building will be open for viewing after the meeting. Refreshments will be served.



Contract between Lowell Wright and Carl G. Stephens

This handwritten, yellowed and undated, contract was found in the museum. It is interesting to note the conditions and prices outlined.

Lowell Wright is to work for Carl G. Stephens by the month for the following. \$55.00 per mo with a raise of \$5.00 per mo if the price of corn goes to \$1.00 per bu and hogs to 11 or 12 cents per pound in Chicago. To get 2 bu of corn for chicken feed up to June then 3 bu. up to corn picking. One cow to milk. Potato patch large enough for his own. Also 300 lbs of meat on foot. Holidays—Decoration day—July 4 & one day for Mercer Co. Fair. To work by month up until corn picking and pick corn by the bu. Also he is to have a shed for car or buggy. (signed) Lowell A. Wright | Carl G. Stephens



The Essley-Noble Museum would appreciate a donation of an old, solid bookcase, preferable wood that would blend in. If you have one, call or email the museum. Thank you



Coming Events for 2010

- April 3** Begin regular museum hours W., Sat., Sun. 1:00-5:00
- April 19** Spring open meeting 7:00 pm at the museum Dr. Marrietta Castle portraying Mary Todd **
- **This is a change from the previously announced program**
- June 5** Dessert booth at Rhubarb Fest, extended museum hours
- July 13-17** Mercer Co. Fair booth in the Merchant's building
Exhibits and "Name the Tools" contest
- Aug. 28** Antique Days, special exhibits and extended museum hours
- Oct. 18** Fall open meeting. 7:00 p.m.
About and at the restored Graham Lee Barn - 135th Ave, 1 mile west of Hwy. 94

Website

Our new website www.mchsil.org has recently been undated with photos, membership and contact information, and a link to previous years' newsletters. Check us out and we will try to periodically update the site with more photos and features.

This newsletter sponsored by:

