

# Mercer County Historical Society Newsletter

## "Preserving Mercer County History"

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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: Thurs, Fri, Sat 1-5:00pm  
Nov - March: Saturdays 12:00-4:00pm



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### **For Genealogy Queries write to:**

MCBS 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:*



Essley-Noble Museum  
Box 269  
Aledo, IL 61231



**Website:** [www.mchsil.org](http://www.mchsil.org)  
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## **The Mercer Carnegie Library**

By Jo Knox

The Mercer Carnegie Library in Aledo commemorated its centennial on September 9, 2016. Thanks to a gift from the Library Board of Trustees, the Essley-Noble Museum now has copies of early letters and scrapbooks dating to 1990, which provide ready access to some of the library's long history.

Andrew Carnegie was once the wealthiest man in the United States, having made his fortune most notably in the steel industry. He felt that having great wealth was accompanied by great social responsibility. Consequently, after selling the Carnegie Steel business, he devoted the remainder of his life to giving away his money for the advancement of social and educational causes. Carnegie began funding the building of libraries in the United States as early as the 1880s in the Pittsburgh area, but, by the turn of the century, requests for funding dramatically increased and libraries were being built across the country. The last grant was issued in 1919.



The vision of a library in Aledo began with the Columbian Club, a group of women focused on self-improvement. The women formed their club in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, meeting at first in their homes and, for a time, in the new court house. By 1910, with aid from the city merchants, the club was sponsoring the Rest and Reading Rooms in the Davis Building (108 -112 North College Avenue) in downtown Aledo. The club's interest may have focused on the "reading" part, but articles in the Times Record indicate that the merchants were particularly pleased that ladies could come to town to shop, have a place to rest for a while, and then shop some more.

Correspondence with the Carnegie Corporation began in 1913 after Mrs. Minnie Carroll, then the president of the Columbian Club, heard about the funding at a Conference of Women's Clubs. An unsourced note in the scrapbooks now at the museum says she returned "on fire" to pursue building a library. Support was offered by Illinois Congressman James McKinney of Aledo who is said to have been a friend of Mr. James Bertram, secretary to Mr. Carnegie. Initial letters seem to indicate that the good folks of Aledo and the Township thought they could just write a letter and the money would flow. However, there were guidelines which included providing the building site, paying the staff and maintaining the library, drawing from public funds to run the library rather than using only private donations, and annually providing 10% of the cost of the library's construction to support its operation. Much of the correspondence between the board and Mr. Bertram focuses on getting that annual 10%. The board (Which board? library board? "newly-organized library board"? had to instruct him in Illinois political divisions, i.e., Mercer Township equals The Town of Mercer.

Some early Carnegie libraries had been "Greek temples," according to Mr. Bertram. By the time Mercer Township began its efforts, however, guidelines for the library construction were becoming stricter. Mr. Bertram wanted the buildings to be practical and, for example, would not approve fireplaces in plans, feeling that they took up too much space. And in response to one of Mercer Township's architect's drawings, there was "too much lobby" and "the reading room is merely a long alley." Back to the drawing board for Hotchkiss and Harris, architects.

Particularly amusing is a letter from Mr. Bertram in response to a letter from the library board in which they report that they have lost a letter. "You say: 'We have misplaced your letter and would thank you to send us a form of resolution that you require or such direction that we may comply with your requirements in this matter.' Do you mean to say that you have

lost the letter promising you \$10,000? This is extraordinary..."

Mr. Carnegie was a supporter of the Simplified Spelling Board, an effort to make English simpler and easier to learn. President Theodore Roosevelt, Congress, and the Supreme Court enter into its history, but we get a glimpse of it in actual use as we read the letters written by Mr. Bertram to the library board. "Library Bilding, redy for occupancy..." and "The site should be larj enough to giv lite all around the bilding..."

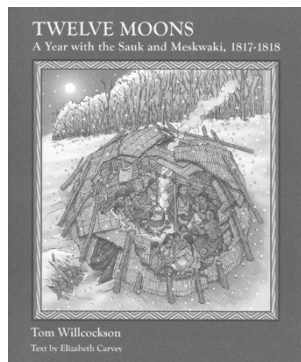
Dozens of letters indicate the work which resulted in acceptance of Mercer Township's plans, approval of the long awaited \$10,000 and the actual construction. Correspondence with builders, plumbers, furniture salesmen, lawyers, and prospective librarians fill another notebook, and finally newspapers report the dedication of the Mercer Township Free Library on September 9, 1916.

The scrapbooks in the donation to the museum include articles and photographs from area newspapers, as well as other ephemera of relevance to the library. The librarians were tasked with making monthly reports and these were published in the area newspapers for decades. Expenses, the number of people using the library, and the circulation numbers were part of each report. Many also include lists of books acquired during the month. Miss Mabel Willits, librarian during the 1930's, even published book reviews. Included is a 1940 editorial applauding the library for not banning *Grapes of Wrath* by Steinbeck. (Research of Board meeting reports indicates that the library purchased two copies of the book.)

Donations of art were common in the early days, including at least one painting that Congressman McKinley brought back from a European trip. Lending of sheet music began before the introduction in 1953 of phonograph records to be circulated. An article by Ruth Heck, librarian from 1966 - 1982, reported that the library was able to borrow films through the Western Illinois Library System "since the library could hardly afford to invest in audiovisual material." Availability of "talking books" was reported in the 1970's. The scrapbooks reflect the library's commitment to education and its vital role in the community.

## New Book about the Sauk and Meskwaki

A very interesting book that we now have for sale is *Twelve Moons: A Year with the Sauk and Meskwaki, 1817-1818* by Tom Willcockson and Elizabeth Carvey. This excellent book takes the reader through a typical year in the life of the Indians who roamed this area for hunting, trapping, trading, and sugar-making. The main village of the Sauk (Black Hawk's tribe) was called Saukenuk, situated along the Rock River about two miles above where it joins the Mississippi. The book focuses on the last year before the land on this side of the Mississippi became the state of Illinois. There is a section on the Black Hawk War and an update on the two tribes as they exist today. The book is beautifully illustrated, with some maps, and it is very well-written and easy to read. Price is \$13.



## Available at the Museum

If not picked up at the museum, postage (book rate) is extra. Inquire for insurance or special shipping.

**Mercer County** (Arcadia Publishing) **\$21.99**  
Soft cover 9.25X6.5", 128 pages, 229 b&w photos  
Add \$4 for postage

**Mercer Remembers** **\$25.00**  
Soft cover, 11X16", 119 pages  
Add \$8 for postage

**1864 Mercer Co. Atlas** **\$35**  
**members**  
Color, soft cover, 37 pages **\$40 nonmembers**  
Add \$8 for postage

**1882 History of Mercer County** **\$50.00**  
Hardback reprint, 1005 pages, add \$4 postage

**Twelve Moons:**  
**A Year with the Sauk and Meskwaki** **\$13.00**  
Soft cover, 52 pages color, add \$4 postage

**1900 Mercer Co. Census & index** **\$20.00**  
Approx. 3" thick, add \$4 postage

**Betty L. Beer note cards, pkg. of 6** **\$3.00.**  
Indicate "False Spring" or "Nathan Listening"  
\$1 postage for one or both

**Bicentennial plate** **\$5.00**  
Designed by Suzy Bogguss..

**Sesquicentennial plate** **\$5.00**  
For plates, inquire about shipping.



## Your Support is Vital!

Annual memberships expired December 31, 2016. Membership starts on Jan. 1, 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 for your contributions!

( ) **Annual Membership** - \$20.00 (one household)

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

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

Send to: Essley-Noble Museum  
Box 269  
Aledo, IL 61231

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

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## Curator's Corner

2017 is upon us.

We want to thank Jordan Clark for his excellent work building a handicapped accessible ramp and enclosure between the main building and the machine shed. It is very well done and we can now enter the machine shed from the main building without going outside.

Have a great year and learn as much as you can about your history!

*Veda Meriwether, Curator*



### What is It?

The item in the past newsletter was a noisemaker. It has been called by several names, including grogger and



horse fiddle. It was most often used during a shivaree (the original French word was charivari). Some readers will remember that a shivaree was a surprise "serenade" for a newlywed couple, performed

by family and friends. The goal was to make as much noise as possible, usually in the middle of the night, rousing the couple from their sleep. The item pictured is made of wood, about 6" by 4 1/2", and hinged with leather straps. What is it?

## Thank you...

Thank you to our corporate members who give us needed financial and community support. Our sincerest apologies if we have left anyone out.

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## Coming Events

Jan 1	Memberships due. Thank you!
Apr 1	Start of regular hours Thur/Fri/Sat 1-5:00
April 17	Tentative date of spring program TBA

**This newsletter sponsored by:**



Timothy R Loving

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