

# 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

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### 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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Tarah Sipes Anderson, Curator

Dennis Henderson, Saturday 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:



Essley-Noble Museum

Box 269

Aledo, IL 61231



**Website:** [mercercountyhistoricalsocietyil.org](http://mercercountyhistoricalsocietyil.org)

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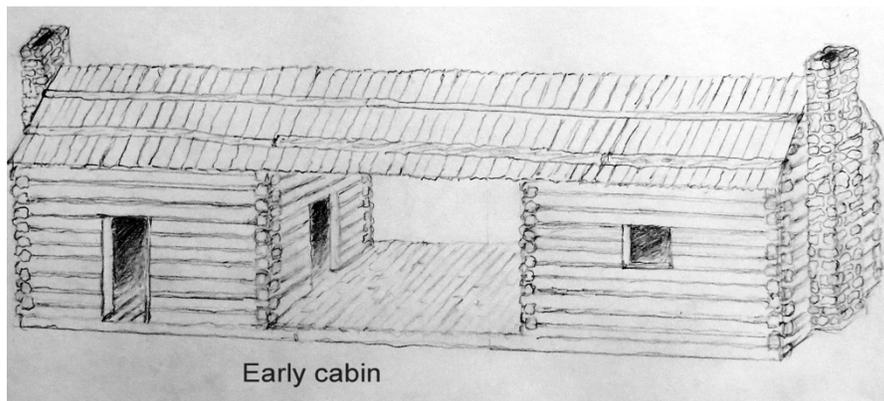
## Mercer County 200 Years Ago, Settling the Land

By Bill Bertrand

Except as where noted as another source, all of the following information, including quotes, are from a small book held at Essley-Noble Museum, entitled *Illinois in 1837* published by S. Augustus Mitchell of Philadelphia, which included a map of the state at that time.

Once a new settler had talked to local residents to gather information on the best land to settle -- "fixed his location" -- he had to "select a building spot." "An elevated spot of ground, remote from lakes and marshes, and where the air circulates freely from all points of the compass, is desirable." The "south or southwest side of the timber is most desirable, as throughout the heat of the summer the winds are usually from the south-west and west, and the timber affords protection from the cold north winds of winter." "All confined places should be avoided, such as ravines or coves, or points of prairie surrounded by dense timber" so as to avoid "impure vapour" and "sickness in the family."

"Hundreds of cabins are made without a nail or particle of iron about them, or a single piece of sawed plank." Straight trees were felled of a size that a team of horses could "snake" them to the building site. The logs were



Early cabin

"notched onto one another in the form of a square." A common design was of two square "pens" of equal size with an open space between them and joined by a roof and floor in the open space. "In the open space the family take their meals during the pleasant weather; and it serves the threefold purpose of kitchen, lumber-room,

and dining room.” The roof was covered by thin splits of oak or ash, called clapboard, and absent nails, the splits were “confined in their place by heavy timber laid at right angles across them.” The floors were “made from short and thick plank split from yellow poplar, cottonwood, black walnut, and sometimes oak, confined with wooden pins.” In addition to the cabin the settler would need a meat-house, corn crib and stables built of logs in the same way. Absent a spring on his property, the settler should “dig a well immediately, which will cost four or five days labor, and will stand some time without walling.” If the settler had located in the “barrens” (land alongside streams) or timbered land, he needed to “grub out the small growth”, bushes and saplings, digging them up with a mattock. “It usually requires from three to six days labour to grub an acre”. The larger trees were girdled to cause them to die and be removed at some future date.

Breaking prairie land required a strong team and a large plow, called a breaking plow, to turn over the tough prairie vegetation the first time. “Three yokes of good-sized oxen drawing a 24-inch plow, with two men to manage the work, would ordinarily break about two acres a day; five yokes with a 36-inch plow, requiring no more men to ‘run the machine,’ would break three acres a day. When the plow was kept running continuously, the ‘shear’ had to be taken to the blacksmith as often as once a week to be drawn out thin, so that a keen knife-edge could be easily put on it with a file, by the men who managed the plow. If the team was going around an 80-acre tract of prairie, the ‘lay’ or ‘shear’ had to be filed after each round to do the best work.”

(1) *The Annals of Iowa*, No. 6 Vol. 5 (1902) pp. 447-458  
 (2) *Growing a Nation - The Story of American Agriculture*  
 (3) USDA

## Curator’s Corner

Happy spring! As the weather warms we look to bring items out of storage for display and learn more about Mercer County history from them. Be on the lookout for new exhibits as we grow into our new building. If you haven’t visited the museum for awhile be sure to come by and see what’s new. Spring and summer hours are 1:00-5:00 Thur/Fri/ Sat.

Tarah Sipes, Curator



## Curator News

Due to her busy schedule, Tarah will step down as curator, but she will remain an active board member. Courtney Wright, former board member and life-long Mercer County resident, has agreed to take over curator duties upon confirmation by the board. Courtney has a Masters Degree in Museum Studies and she is well-acquainted with the Essley-Noble Museum. Welcome Courtney!



## Joy Celebrating 150 Years

Come one and all to help Joy celebrate on June 15, 2019. There will be a parade at 3:30 and much more. Watch the newspaper for more fun things.



## Reminder

Please remember to pay your membership dues of \$20. We receive no state or federal funding and count on dues for operating expenses. If you are a lifetime member you do not have to worry about it. I am just trying to save on mailing reminders. Thank you so much to those who contribute.

Linda K. Morrow, Chairman

## Veda

Veda Meriwether has retired as curator of the Essley-Noble Museum and has moved out of state to be with family. She had served as curator since 2009 and will be missed. Veda attended her last board meeting in March and was presented with a beautiful planter and refreshments were served to all.



## Spring Open Program

Join us **Monday April 15** for our spring open program, "A Year with the Sauk and Meskwaki," 7:00 p.m. at the Essley-Noble Museum. The Sauk and Meskwaki were the last native tribes to occupy the 400 miles of Mississippi River valley from the Wisconsin River to the Missouri River. From 1735 until 1831 they make their home in the region surrounding present day Rock Island and Black Hawk State Historic Site. Join Hauberg Museum Director Julie Nelson to learn how they ordered their lives by the cycle of the seasons and utilized the area's abundant resources for nearly a century.

The program is open to the public with no admission charge. Refreshments will be served afterwards and you will have an opportunity to socialize and explore the museum's exhibits.



## What Is It?

The item in the past newsletter was a string drill. See-sawing the bow back and forth turned the bit. This multiple-piece metal item is about 3 ¼ inches long when folded. What is it?



## Rhubarb Fest

Donations of pies, cobblers, and crisps of rhubarb or other flavors are needed for the Mercer County Historical Society to sell at the upcoming Rhubarb Fest. Items are needed by Saturday June 8. If you can donate any of these home-baked goods, and/or can volunteer to work a shift in our booth in the pavilion in Central Park, please call Judy Redlinger 773-458-3899. All proceeds from this activity go to the Mercer County Historical Society and the Essley-Noble Museum.



## Coming Events

- |                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| <b>Apr. 4</b>   | Start of regular hours Thur/Fri/Sat<br>1:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.                         |
| <b>April 15</b> | Spring program "A Year with the<br>Sauk & Meskwaki" 7:00 p.m.<br>Essley-Noble Museum |
| <b>May</b>      | 5 <sup>th</sup> grade tours  |
| <b>June 8</b>   | Dessert in the park at Rhubarb Fest<br>Extended museum hours                         |

## Accessions for Jan. - March 2019

Thank you to all who have donated. Come to the museum to view any of the items. Since some may be in the storeroom awaiting display, ask to see them. There is always something new.

- 1904 plat books Larry Dellitt
- Baby dish circa 1930's Veda Meriwether
- Large framed 1904 map of Mercer Co. & Framed map of New Boston Appleton Law Offices
- Shotgun photo and owners card of Eugene Noble Randy Barnes
- Family history "The Life and Art of Henry Wilmot Waugh" Connie Fairfield Ganz
- Pieces of organ from Keithsburg Catholic Church Linda Morrow
- Advertising items, 3 fair books Richard McMeeken
- Advertising items, 2 pencils Linda Morrow
- 3 Viola school pictures, Viola HS book, Matherville history book Doris Goode
- Photo of rail car parked in front of Kingan Meats with sign reading "A car load of lard from (Mercer Co.) to our friends in Europe" Teresa Welch
- Times Record clipping from 2/11/1948 "Mercer Surpasses Goal, Raises \$6000 for Abe Lincoln Train" Teresa Welch
- Newspaper clipping & photos of Ed Long, General Grind owner RI Co. Historical Soc.

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