

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: 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: email the museum



**Memberships available for \$20/household or \$300
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Please address all correspondence to:

Essley-Noble Museum
Box 269
Aledo, IL 61231



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

High School Graduation

By Stephanie Braucht

One hundred years ago, the seniors of Aledo High School were celebrating their graduation, no doubt with as much pride and anticipation as the current graduating seniors of 2014. How much has changed about that rite of passage in the last 100 years, and how much, if anything, has remained the same? We have the rare opportunity to take a look back in time, thanks to the foresight of Urah "Pearl" Heald Snell, a member of the Aledo High School class of 1914. Not only did Pearl, a prolific genealogist and local historian, preserve her graduation program, but she also left a handwritten note of explanation. Surely she knew that a family member would find it, and Pearl could once again tell us of Mercer County history.



Pearl Heald Snell

In 1914 the Aledo High School commencement exercises were held at the Aledo Opera House on Friday, May, 29, at 8:00 p.m. Commencement was at the opera house, Pearl pointed out, because "(The high school had no auditorium in those days.)" In addition to Pearl, members of the Class of 1914 were Josephus Everett Baldwin, Spencer I. Berglund, A. Lee Bower, Edith Brown, Harry William Buckley, Jean Emerson, Edmund Wendell Hebel, William Huett Moorhead, and Joseph H. Stevenson. It was not on the program, nor did Pearl mention it, but the principal of the high school that year was a man named Albert Caldwell. Mr. Caldwell had been hired as principal the previous year, after he and his wife and young son were among the fortunate ones to survive the sinking of the Titanic.

The Invocation was delivered by the Reverend A.E. Moody and songs were performed by the Girls' Glee Club, the Boys' Glee Club, and the High School Quartette. John M. Wilson, President of the Board of Education, presented the graduates with their diplomas.

Pearl delivered her senior oration, "The International Verdict," for which she had won first place in the county and third place in the district. At that time every senior was required to write an oration. The Salutatory and Oration, "Abraham Lincoln, Past and Future," was given by A. Lee Bower. An Oration and Valedictory, "The Responsibility of Franchise," was presented by Edmund Wendell Hebell. Other orations presented were "Robert E. Lee, the Hero of the Lost Cause" by William Huett Moorhead, "Immigration" by Edith Brown, and "Spain in the New World" by Josephus Everett Baldwin.

The class motto was "Step by step." The class colors were scarlet and white, and the class flower was the yellow rose. Festivities actually had started more than a week earlier, with the annual Junior-Senior Banquet on the evening of Thursday, May 21. It was held in the dining room of the Merchants Hotel, and Pearl noted, "(no school cafeteria then)." After the banquet they had a program of music and "speeches around the table." Pearl gave the class history. She also commented that there was "(no prom)."

On Sunday evening, May 24, the baccalaureate service was held at the First Presbyterian Church in Aledo, with the Reverend A.E. Moody, father of A.D Moody, delivering the address. This service was in the "old church building," which stood at the same location as the College Avenue Presbyterian Church today.

Thanks to Pearl, we see that only a few things have changed since 1914. Students at Mercer County High School now enjoy the excitement of a formal prom. That event usually takes place away from the school building even though there is now a school cafeteria. However, in recent years a post-prom party has been held at the high school. The commencement ceremony takes place at the high school, but not in the auditorium which has been built since 1914. The auditorium is not large enough to accommodate the audience for the commencement ceremony, so commencement is in the gymnasium. The auditorium is large enough, though, for the baccalaureate service, which is held there. While classmates present the Valedictory and Salutatory and other speeches, such as the class history, there is no longer an oration contest (likely much to the satisfaction of the students). Thankfully, what has not changed is that graduating from high school is still an event to be celebrated with all the pomp and circumstance it deserves!

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Curator's Corner

Spring is here and the snow is vanishing. We have been working to change displays in the main building to accommodate some items that may have never been seen. Come in a check out the past and present exhibits!

Our Genealogy Department volunteers are looking forward to new requests, as we are now open on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays from 1:00 pm to 5:00 pm. The requests from our web site are

very interesting. You may have family ties to people you never knew before. Check it out!

Veda Meriwether, Curator

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Spring Open Meeting

The Mercer Co. Historical Society's Spring Open Meeting will be Monday, April 21, 7:00 p.m. at the Essley-Noble Museum. Alan Harn will give the program "Highlights of Eight Decades of Archaeology in the Illinois River Valley." Alan is Associate Curator of Anthropology for the Illinois State Museum and Research Coordinator of the Dickson Mounds Museum. His slide-illustrated presentation highlights some of the most important archaeological excavations undertaken in the Central Illinois River Valley over the past eight decades. Presentations of rare historical photographs



from early excavations set the interpretive stage for an examination of recent work. Not only is the cultural history of an earlier race of people brought to light by the presentation, but the listener will also experience a sense of being there as past and present archaeologists rediscover Illinois.

The program is open to the public and there is no charge. Afterwards refreshment will be served and you will have an opportunity to explore the redone exhibits in the museum's main building, including collections of early Native American artifacts. Come see what is new in the newly-organized Essley-Noble Museum.

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Antique and Vintage Postcards

By Stephanie Braucht

Instead of the greeting cards we send each other today, people used to send postcards, which were a simple, inexpensive, and effective way to communicate in the early 1900s. They were sent to



just share information, or as greetings to mark the various holidays, birthdays, births, and all the other occasions for which we would send cards today. Many of them were even quite impressive

little pieces of art. In 1898 an Act of Congress allowed for the use of "Private Mailing Cards." They could be sent for one cent, which was half the cost to mail a letter in an envelope. In today's economy, the difference between one and two cents would attract little attention, but one cent had much more purchasing power at that time, and it represented a significant savings. In 1901 the federal government allowed the back of these mailing cards to be divided, creating an area for a message. At that time, people began to call them "postcards."



European publishers, especially those in Germany, had advanced printing methods and high quality inks, so their cards were very popular. Over 75% of all postcards sold in the United States by 1907 were imported. The U.S. Post Office recorded that 677,777,789 postcards were mailed in 1908, while the total population

of the United States at that time was only 88,700,000! Ultimately, the threat of war impacted the import of cards from Germany, and the spread of the telephone for communicating also contributed to the decline in the use of postcards.



Help Us Identify

This photo of a train accident was recently purchased at a local auction. We are hoping to determine which railroad line this might have been and/or where this accident occurred.

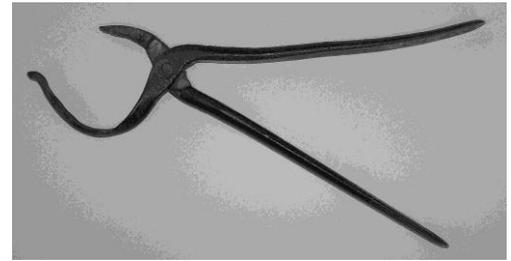


It is pretty well certain that this is NOT a picture of the well-known wreck of the Dolly that happened east of New Boston in 1909. Can anyone identify the railroad line or the location? If so, drop a line to us at the museum or e-mail us at mcmuseum@frontier.com



What is It?

The previous item was a corn husking knife. This item is made of metal and acts as pliers, but for what?



New Board Member

Welcome to Jason Olson as our newest board member. You will remember him if you attended the Fall Open Meeting as he presented the program about the New Boston Prentiss house in which he lives and has been renovating. Already he has jumped right in and has been helping with numerous projects.

Thank you to Roger Kiddoo for his years of service. He regrettably did not renew his board membership due to many demands on personal time.



Calendar of Events for 2014

- Apr. 2** Start of regular hours Wed, Sat, Sun 1:00-5:00 pm.
- Apr. 21** Spring open meeting 7:00 pm at the museum. "Highlights of 8 Decades of Archaeology in the Illinois River Valley." By Alan Harn of IL State Museum & Dickson Mounds.
- May 13-15** 5th grade tours
- June 7** Dessert at the Rhubarb Fest, Extended museum hours 10:00-5:00 Fri. & Sat.
- July 8-12** Mercer Co. Fair booth in Merchants Building. Exhibits & "Name the Tools" contest
- Aug. 23** Antique Days special exhibits and extended hours at the museum 10:00-5:00
- Oct. 20** Fall open meeting 7:00 at the museum. Program TBA
- Nov. 1** Start of winter hours 12:00-4:00 Sat. only

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no matter where you're starting from

I want to make sure you get the personalized service you deserve, and that service includes helping you build and maintain a tangible plan for your financial security. Let's get together for an Insurance and Financial Review to plan for today and tomorrow.


Tracy Bigham
Aledo
309-582-5141


Leo Sutton Jr
Aledo
309-582-5141

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