
WHITE COUNTY HISTORIAN

Volume 23, Issue 4

October - December, 2017



"Preserving and
Promoting our History"

2018 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

SPRING DINNER MEETING
FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH
APRIL

SECOND GRADE TEA PARTIES
ROBINSON-STEWART HOUSE
APRIL

ROBINSON-STEWART HOUSE
PLANT SALE
MAY

CORN DAYS
CORN TASTING &
MUSEUMS OPEN
OCTOBER

PIONEER DAYS FOR WHITE
COUNTY 5TH GRADERS
WITH THE RETIRED TEACHER'S
ASSOC.
MATSEL CABIN
OCTOBER

FALL DINNER MEETING
FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH
NOVEMBER

MUSEUMS OPEN DURING
WHITE COUNTY CHRISTMAS

NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Fellow White County Historians,

I was asked as the President of the White County Historical Society and a farmer to speak at two events sponsored by the White County Farm Bureau in January. I think it was good exposure for the Society and hopefully the audience found my tidbits of information interesting. I gave a plug for the Society, the Illinois Bicentennial, history of the formation of White County and finished with some history of the Big Prairie area. Here goes!

As locals you may or may not know that on Dec 3, 2017 the state of Illinois began a 365 day celebration that will climax on Dec 3, 2018, 200 years to the day that Illinois became the 21st state of the United States of America. The state is honoring it's bicentennial with a multimedia campaign called "Born, Built & Grown, because every day in Illinois great things are being born, built & grown.

When Illinois became a state, White County had existed for 6 days shy of a year. At that time White County included all of present day White, Hamilton & Franklin Counties and about the south 1/3 of Jefferson County. As new counties to the west were formed we quickly decreased in size until Hamilton County was formed in 1821 leaving White County to the size it is today.

The Big Prairie's early significance may have been as an oddity since most early settlers came from Kentucky, North Carolina, Virginia & maybe Pennsylvania. After traveling for days, weeks and maybe months thru hardwood forests a prairie without a single tree was quite a sight. Soon the settlers realized that after the prairie sod was broken the soil could be farmed without the back breaking work of clearing trees. The prairie was roughly 3 miles long (North to South) and 2 miles wide (east to west). Big Prairie started on the south at Big Prairie Methodist Church and ran north following CO RD 1500E to Kuykendall Cemetery.

The early settlers on the Big Prairie according to "The History of White County" published in 1883 were: Peter Kuykendall in 1808, Daniel McHenry in 1809, Robert Land in 1809 & John Hanna in 1810. These early settlers witnessed a natural

NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT - CONTINUED

disaster of epic proportions. According to Yearby Land the earthquakes of the winter of 1811-12 caused a crevice to be formed on the southeast side of the prairie which was a quarter of a mile long & of unfathomable depth. Sand was blown out of thousands of crawfish hole in the "meadows" or wet prairies southeast of Mr. Land's home, in quantities from a bushel to a large wagon load. This obviously frightening event may have led the God fearing Methodist John Hanna with the help of Robert Land to hold preachings in the Hanna home. This led to the formation of the Big Prairie Methodist Church which today sits on the original location of the Hanna fort, a civilian blockhouse built in 1812 for protection from Indians during the War of 1812. Three other blockhouses, the McHenry, Williams & Land forts also surrounded the prairie. In 1811 a school was built and the Big Prairie Methodist Church was officially organized a year later. So besides being a place of "higher civilization" the prairie was soon to become the garden spot of White County. As recorded by Morris Birkbeck in his journal dated July 26, 1817, "we left Harmonie (present day New Harmony) after breakfast, and crossing the Wabash at the ferry three miles below we proceeded to the Big Prairie, where to our astonishment we behold a fertile plain of grass and some 1000 acres covered with corn more luxuriant than any we had before seen."

Big Prairie School is gone and now Big Prairie Church will be no more, so a lot of Big Prairie's history is behind us. But as an area farmer I'm proud to say we still grow "corn more luxuriant than any we had seen before."

David Brown, President



David Brown with Mike McNerney at the Fall Dinner Meeting. Read the story on page 4.

NEWS FROM THE MARY SMITH FAY GENEALOGY LIBRARY

by: Librarian Diane Waggoner

PO Box 121, 203 North Church St., Carmi, IL
618-382-8425 email: w.c.h.s-genealogy@hotmail.com
11:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., Tuesday - Friday

Taken from the White County Democrat Sept. 17, 1914

Snake Commits Suicide - Rather than Endure Torture Reptile Killed Self

Silverlake, Ore. Sept. 17-That a snake will commit suicide to escape torture was demonstrated here when two cats, the property of a homesteader near the lake, herded a big diamond rattler into a hill of red ants. The rattler was flushed into the sagebrush, and as it started to zig-zag between the bushes, one of the cats pounced on the singing tail. The angered snake turned quickly, coiled, and struck, but the cat was out of reach before the rattler was half unwound.

Again the race started through the sage. One cat crouched and scampered just a few inches from the head of the snake, the other again attacked the whizzing tail. Repeatedly the snake coiled for a strike, but when it struck, the cats were out of reach, and when the reptile waited for his tormentors to approach, the cats merely circled their prey, advancing and retreating quickly when the snake moved as if to strike.

The frenzied snake finally gave up the fight and started through the brush on the the high gear. The race led over an ant hill, and in its effort to escape pursuit the rattler tried to squeeze into the small hole used by the insects as a doorway.

Thousands of ants instantly resented the intrusion and joined the attack of the feline forces.

The bite of a red ant is as painful as the sting of a honey bee, but not so poisonous. The little insects swarmed over the buzzing, hissing, intruder. They crept into the mouth of the snake, fastened themselves to its eyes, and covered its head. The rattler struck blindly in all directions beating the sagebrush, the ground, anything in its path. It turned belly upward, then tried to bore its head into the earth. The ants held fast.

A homesteader and his wife and two cats were interested spectators.

Finally the snake looped its head and deliberately sunk two poison fangs into the center of its body, clinging in this position until the buzzing tail ceased to vibrate.

White County Democrat Sept. 4, 1924

Wish Somebody Would Marry This Sucker

A few years ago William J. "Toad" Reinwald had our reporter believing that he was pulling a strong oar in the matrimonial sea and had been married to a certain Carmi young lady in MtVernon, Indiana. A phone conversation proved that "Toad" had either a pipe dream or imbibed some of the foreign manufactured hair tonic it is claimed that he uses.

Tuesday the very same "Toad" brought the very same story to our reporter. This time he had switched brides and claimed that he was married in Paris, Illinois, on August 16th. The alleged bride gave a strong denial to his story and a telegraph to the county clerk at Paris proved "Toad" again out of his head.

Whether it is the warm weather-too close association with the chickens in the poultry department, or merely that his mind is slipping along with his hair we are unable to say.

If you see somebody in a lace trimmed bathing suit, and fully equipped with water wings, riding a baby ostrich, wearing hip boots, down Main Street some of these days don't be alarmed, it will probably be only "Toad" on his way to the sheriff's office to surrender for a "mind" bigamy.

RESEARCH FEES

If you would like us to do research for you (White County area only), please contact us.

Cost of research is \$15 per hour. Copies are 20 - 25¢ each. Shipping & handling is \$5.

Come and visit us and we will help you do your research at no cost to you, all you pay for is the cost of copies.

FALL DINNER MEETING

by: Barry Cleveland

Unique Grave Markers Grace Southern Illinois Cemeteries

Sometimes the stones that mark our graves say a lot about us.

That was particularly true in years past, a Carmi audience was told in November.

Michael J. McNerney was the speaker at the fall dinner meeting of the White County Historical Society, held in the fellowship hall of First Christian Church of Carmi on November 13th.

McNerney is a former staff archaeologist at the Southern Illinois University Carbondale Museum and the author of “A Shape in Time and Space,” subtitled “The Migration of the Necked Discoid Gravemarker.”

The “necked discoid” is a uniquely shaped marker brought into southern Illinois from the South by immigrants arriving here in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Several examples of it are found in Enfield and Old Village cemeteries in White County, Big Hill Cemetery in Hamilton County and a variety of other burial grounds across “Egypt” and at least as far north as Clark County.

Markers resemble a human head (or perhaps the sun, in earlier times) above a rectangular shape, with dozens of possible variations.

McNerney said he was working in Pope County in 1994 when he spotted several stones of that style in a rural cemetery there. He and a cohort subsequently wrote a short book entitled “The Pioneer Gravestones of Pope County,” illustrating stones found in eight local cemeteries.

The Associated Press issued a news story about the book and the phenomenon it described, and with the advent of social media, interest in the style grew, the speaker said. People from across the east and southeast contacted him with information about similarly-styled markers in their communities. And it launched him on an endeavor that continues.

McNerney has been able to trace the “migration” of this style of grave marker from Europe (he has found it on trips to Ireland and Spain, for instance) to the eastern and southern United States and then on into the lower Midwest. The “core area,” he said, where the style was most prevalent was the upper valley of the Cumberland River, in Tennessee and Kentucky (an area from which many early southern Illinoisans migrated).

He has found dozens of markers bearing this style across Illinois, most of them dating to the first half of the 19th century and the greatest number in Pope County (on the Ohio River bordering Kentucky). He has studied who carved them, how styles varied, when their composition changed from native stone (such as sandstone) to commercially produced stone (such as marble or granite), as well as the type of cemetery in which they are found (church, family or rural), religious denomination most prevalent and the origin of the surnames most prevalent (usually English, Scots-Irish, Scots, German or French Huguenot).

McNerney noted that the earliest markers were carved from native wood, and a few of those survive. Some were even made of concrete or slate, at a later time. And while the carving on early stones was primitive (often done by millwrights), by the middle of the 19th century more professional lettering became the norm.

There was a hiatus of roughly 20 years in the mid-19th century when the style became rare, followed by a short revival later in that century. Today, however, the style is very rare.

Following his presentation, the speaker sold and signed copies of his book.

McNerney was introduced by David Brown, the society’s president, who noted that he spent a previous Saturday with the speaker visiting a number of local graveyards in search of stones bearing this style.

FALL DINNER MEETING - CONTINUED

The program followed a meal prepared by Yesterday's of Carmi. A brief business meeting was also held, during which the estimated 75 people present concurred with the society's nominating committee (represented by Roger Hubele) in electing this slate of officers and directors: David Brown, president; Paula Pierson, vice president; Ranelle Hubele, secretary; Jeff Bohleber, treasurer; and Valarie Berekashvili, Brock Bolerjack, Marjorie Brown, Cindy Birk Conley, Lecta Hortin, Kristin Land and Kathleen Rister, directors.

Gene Jordan serves as the immediate past president, and Barry Cleveland is the appointed member of the Mary Smith Fay Genealogy Trust, serving alongside several historical society board members.

Brown thanked retiring directors Barbara Kearney, Kathy Fridley and Mary McRoy. He also recognized two World War II veterans who were present, Ralph Anselment and Gene Gowdy. And he noted that the society has had a busy six months, staging tea parties and pioneer skills demonstrations for local grade school children, opening its museums for Carmi's Corn Days and performing the "constant maintenance" required by the organization's four historic museums and genealogy library.

Chris Marsh offered the invocation and benediction.



Mr. McNerney was kind to answer questions after his talk and autograph his book.

Mr. McNerney with Robin Miller Nichols, a part of the Enfield Miller family that has one of the discoid stones in Enfield Cemetery.



FALL DINNER MEETING - CONTINUED

Discoid headstones for Polly Biggerstaff, d. 1831, are located in the Enfield Cemetery.



CORN DAYS

Carmi Kiwanis Corn Days were Oct. 13th & 14th. The annual Corn Tasting was held at the Ratcliff Inn on Saturday with lots of corn based dishes to enjoy. The L. Haas Museum, Ratcliff Museum, and Robinson-Stewart House were open to visitors. Cindy Birk Conley reported "There was a good turn-out for Corn Days at the Robinson-Stewart House. Several families visited with their children who had attended 2nd grade teas or 5th grade heritage days."



PIONEER DAYS 2017

by: Gene Jordan

The White County Historical Society hosted its annual “Pioneer Days” for the county’s fifth graders 24-25 October. More than 200 5th graders and their teachers from Carmi, Enfield, Norris City and Grayville were introduced to what life might have been like in the area 100 years ago. Following an introduction of each day’s events and assignment of guides to each class by Suellen Smith, the students began their journey of discovery. Trish Pringle welcomed each group to the Matsel cabin, explaining and showing facets of cabin life years ago in rural White County.



In the yard outside the cabin, Valerie Berekashvilli demonstrated washing, rinsing, and wringing of clothes and gave each student an opportunity to experience it themselves.



PIONEER DAYS 2017 - CONTINUED

Diana Jordan demonstrated the making of butter, letting everyone participate in that endeavor and taste their handiwork.



Donnie Duval showed them how to make rope with their eager help.



PIONEER DAYS 2017 - CONTINUED

Claudie Parsons demonstrated the art and skill of making brooms.



On the west side of the cabin referred to as the farm, Richard Raber instructed them on how corn was planted, harvested and dried before the advent of modern machinery.



PIONEER DAYS 2017 - CONTINUED

Tom Smith showed and let students shell the ears of dried corn with the use of an antique corn sheller. And Donnie Seitz explained the many food products we consume today made of wheat, corn, and oats etc., such as bread, cereals, cakes, and let them each grind corn and wheat to make flour and corn meal.



PIONEER DAYS 2017 - CONTINUED

Each class was individually treated to a tour of the adjacent “old graveyard” by Kathy Fridley along with a history lesson of Carmi’s earliest settlers and prominent residents who are buried there.



PIONEER DAYS 2017 - CONTINUED

Pioneer Days is a team undertaking and there is no way we can accomplish this major Historical Society project without the support and generosity of the Retired Teachers Association and their one room schoolhouse. Judith Williams, the one room school teacher, welcomed each group of students into the one room schoolhouse and explained what it was like attending one of the many one room schoolhouses that were once scattered around the county.



PIONEER DAYS 2017 - CONTINUED

Outside the schoolhouse, Mary Ann and Thys Bax along with Dale O'Dell, Karen Johnson, Mark Fridley, Jan Cleveland, and Connie Bingman introduced and played games typical to that earlier time period.



PIONEER DAYS 2017 - CONTINUED



PIONEER DAYS 2017 - CONTINUED

Finally, special thanks to the volunteer guides—Barb Ringenberg, Linda Minear, Sasha Jordan, Paula Bohleber, Carrie Gates, and Sharon Campbell—who led the students from station to station in their journey of discovery and Pioneer Days experience, keeping each of their groups on schedule. Additional gratitude is extended to David Brown for his generous contribution of corn and wheat, and the Farm Bureau Building for the use of their basement as an orientation and lunch break location for the students.



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH CELEBRATES 190TH ANNIVERSARY

by: Kathy Fridley

The First Presbyterian Church in Carmi celebrated their 190 year anniversary on November 12 with a special service along with a potluck and program afterwards. The church is the oldest in Carmi. It was established on November 26, 1827. The congregation worshiped in homes the first year and then held their services in the court house. A white frame building was the first structure built at the present site. The present building was built in 1893 at a cost of \$11,917. The education building was built in 1957.

There have been 40 pastors serving the church with two of the pastors being related: Henry Lewis who served the church from 1924-1943 and his grandson, Daniel Lewis who served from 1995-1999. Dan also participated in the 190th service.

Rev. Maureen Clark, the present pastor, had the idea of having 190 lit candles during the service placed on the communion table in the front of the church. Two White County Historical Society members were involved in the worship service as readers: Henry Lewis who has been a member of the church for 80 years and Kathy Fridley who has been a member for 45 years.

Most of the food served at the potluck after the service came from recipes from the Church cookbook which was put together in 1996. Some of those recipes came from an earlier cookbook from 1935.

The program in the afternoon consisted of a little history of the church and then members shared memories of times in the life of the church. A choir, led by Sherry Passmore, sang the hymn, "Flow Gently, Sweet Afton". Previous pastor, Rev. J.E. Spilman, set the words of "Sweet Afton", a poem by the great Scottish poet, Robert Burns, to music with the title of "Flow Gently Sweet Afton." There were also pictures from many events.

Our congregation might be a small one, but the members are faithful servants in our community.



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH CELEBRATES 190TH ANNIVERSARY - CONTINUED



ESTATE GIFTS - SIMPLER THAN YOU THINK

If you would really like to help the White County Historical Society but are not inclined to do so during your lifetime, you may be pleased to know that there are some simple ways to make a gift to the Society through your estate. Following are a few of the simplest and most popular ways to do so.

1. Simply instruct your attorney to name the White County Historical Society as a beneficiary in your will or trust using the language below.
2. List the White County Historical Society as a beneficiary of an insurance policy, retirement account or tax-deferred annuity. Simply request a "change of beneficiary form" and use the language below to fill it out.
3. Fill out a Transfer of Death (TOD) form where you hold your investments using the language below.
4. Request a Totten Trust form from your bank and list the White County Historical Society as a beneficiary of your account(s), once again using the language below.

"_____to the White County Historical Society to be used in the ongoing stewardship of its buildings and grounds, the conservation of its artifacts and the continuation of its educational programs."

GENEALOGY QUERY

If you have a query, please send it to the Mary Smith Fay Genealogy Library and we can add it to the next newsletter.

WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

We know that many of you have stories about a historical event of White County. We would welcome having your story to include in future editions of the White County Historian. Write your story, include your name, and mail it to Mary Smith Fay Genealogical Library at P.O. Box 121, Carmi, IL or email to rshous@gmail.com. Then watch for it in future editions of the newsletter.

MISSION STATEMENT

To preserve and promote the historical interest of White County through our stewardship of its artifacts and the historic sites and education programs and exhibits that we provide for its people

VISION STATEMENT

To make the history of White County come alive for the people of White County

MUSEUMS



Ratcliff Inn
218 E. Main Street



The L. Haas Museum
219 E. Main Street



Robinson-Stewart House
111- S. Main Cross Street



Matsel Cabin
East Robinson Street

Our museums, located in Carmi, Illinois, are open on advertised dates or by appointment only:

CONTACT INFORMATION

- ✉ Mailing Address: White County Historical Society
Mary Smith Fay Genealogy Library
PO Box 121
203 North Church Street
Carmi, Illinois 62821-0121
- ✉ Email: rshous@gmail.com
- ✉ To make an appointment to visit our museums, contact the librarian at the Mary Smith Fay Genealogy Library: call 618-382-8425 or email w.c.h.s-genealogy@hotmail.com
- ✉ If you have an item you are interested in donating to the society contact Gene Jordan, 618-383-5330.
- ✉ Comments, suggestions or contributions for the newsletter can be mailed to the address above or to rshous@gmail.com. Please include "newsletter" in the subject line.

AFFILIATIONS

The Society maintains memberships in the following:
Southern Illinois Association of Museums (SIAM)
Illinois Association of Museums (IAM)
American Association of State and Local History (AASLH)
Illinois Historic Preservation
Carmi Chamber of Commerce

MEMBERS OF THE 2017 BOARD:

President – David Brown	Marjorie Brown
Vice President - Paula Pierson	Cindy Birk Conley
Secretary – Ranelle Hubele	Kathy Fridley
Treasurer – Jeff Bohleber	Lecta Hortin
Valarie Berekashvili	Barbara Kearney
Brock Bolerjack	Past President - Gene Jordan