



MCHS News

November 2013

Opening Doors to Madison County History

Vol. 1, No. 6

715 N Main Street
Edwardsville, IL
62025

Hours:
Wed-Fri 9 am - 4 pm
Sunday 1 pm - 4 pm
Group Tours Available

Free Admission

Museum Phone:
618-656-7562
Library Phone:
618-656-7569

Web Address:
madcohistory.org

E-mail:
info@madcohistory.org

About Us:

The MCHS museum complex consisting of a modern archival library, the 1836 Weir House Museum and the Helms Collection Center, is owned and operated by the non-profit Madison County Historical Society with assistance from Madison County.

The Madison County Historical Society is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization.

FAMOUS, BUT FORGOTTEN

By Cindy Reinhardt

Many Madison County residents over the years became well-known on the national stage and are still remembered today through local history classes in our schools. There have also been Madison County natives who moved out of the area and became famous elsewhere. But this issue of MCHS News will focus on three Madison County residents who, although famous in their time, are all but forgotten today.

The profiles (beginning on page 4) include florist J. F. Ammann of Edwardsville, who was one of the founders of FTD, Walter Roger Benjamin, a Granite City inventor, and Emma Kubicek, a Glen Carbon girl known as the "Helen Keller of Illinois." Emma is pictured at right with her teacher, Mrs. Helen Jordon.



NOVEMBER-DECEMBER CALENDAR

November 1 - December 1

Wreath Silent Auction
MCHS Museum and Archival Library
Also at madcohistory.org

December 1

Christmas Open House
1 p.m. - 4 p.m.
MCHS Museum and Library

Continuing Exhibit

"A History of Surveying
and Surveying Instruments"
MCHS Museum

2014 MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

We hope you have been pleased with MCHS publications, exhibits and programming during the past year. With your help we can maintain these offerings while continuing the work of preserving Madison County's treasures. Memberships in MCHS run from Jan 1 – Dec 31. A convenient membership renewal form is enclosed with this newsletter.

At MCHS we are "opening doors to Madison County history" every day thanks to our members and donors who bring in items related to their Madison County family or business. Thank you for your membership contributions as well as your donations of memorabilia. Your generosity makes it possible for MCHS to continue this important work.

A GIFT OF HISTORY

Gift memberships in the MCHS are a wonderful surprise for family and friends who appreciate and want to help preserve our local history. Call us for additional membership forms if you are interested in giving a gift subscription this holiday season.

MCHS BOARD

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Archival Research Asst.
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Archival Research Asst.
Jenn Walta
Curator

VOLUNTEERS

There are abundant and varied opportunities for volunteers at either the museum or the archival library. Please call if interested.

MEMBERSHIPS

Several membership levels are available to those interested in supporting the work of preserving Madison County history through an MCHS membership. Memberships run on the calendar year, Jan 1-Dec 31. Applications are available on our website, at the MCHS Museum or at the Archival Library.

PUBLICATIONS

MCHS NEWS

6 issues annually
Cindy Reinhardt, Editor

WEB SITE

madcohistory.org

ARCHIVAL LIBRARY SPOTLIGHT

By Mary Westerhold, Archival Research Manager

CURRENT PROJECTS

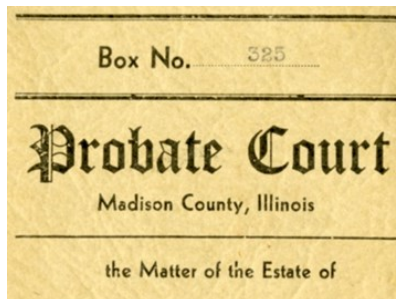
Many of you have read in previous issues about the Probate file project that we are working on with the Madison County Circuit Clerk's Office. Briefly, we are searching each probate file for a Will. When a Will is found, it is placed in a separate envelope that has already been labeled with the appropriate name and box number.

Searching for the Will usually involves looking through the entire file. These files range in size from a few folded sheets of paper to about 3 inches thick depending on the size of the estate, number of heirs, bills to be paid, etc. For family history researchers, probate files can be a wealth of information. Contained in the file are the names and addresses of the heirs, including the married names of women who may have "disappeared" from your family tree. In addition, there are frequently inventories of personal property, listings of real estate, auction

notices and results, and bills from individuals and businesses paid by the estate. All of these probate files have been microfilmed and are available to the public during normal business hours in the Madison County Court House.

Besides the probate files, we have also been processing a large collection of books, pamphlets, etc., relating to Abraham Lincoln that were donated by an individual in 2012. While we already have a large collection of information about Abraham Lincoln, these items are a definite enhancement to our collection. A few of the book titles are *With a Task Before Me: Abraham Lincoln leaves*

Springfield; Abraham Lincoln, His Path to the Presidency; A Reporter's Lincoln; Beware the People Weeping; Public Opinion and the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln; The Lincoln Reader; and The Lincoln Family Album. Come in and visit us and browse these new additions to our Lincoln Collection.



MUSEUM SPOTLIGHT

By Jenn Walta, Curator

MYSTERIES AT MCHS

Artifacts Rediscovered at the Museum

A funny thing happened at the museum a few months back. While inventorying in the second floor Artifact Room, I happened upon a wooden box. As I tried to move the box to get a better look, I noticed that the top was loose. Upon further inspection, the hinges on the back of the object came into view as did all of the carved decoration on the sides. It was when the lid was lifted that the object's true purpose came to light.

It was a commode. The ironstone pan in the center of the box seemed to stare back at me as I stood in amazement. I rushed down to tell Director Suzanne Dietrich about the discovery, and we both wondered about the object's origins.



Upon closer examination, an inventory slip was found inside the pan under the lid. From the information on the card and through recollections of the Director I learned that the commode had been donated to the museum in 1967 by Mrs. Bettie Duncan.

The circa 1840 piece is now on display in the bedroom upstairs where visitors can compare it to the ornate porcelain chamber pot beneath the bed. This incident demonstrates that mysteries and surprises can still be found at the Madison County Historical Museum.

Curator Jenn Walta is in the process of inventorying and documenting 90 years worth of museum artifacts with Past Perfect software created especially for small museums and libraries.. The process

creates an inventory for insurance purposes, but also records the provenance of each piece in the museum and archival library.

CHRISTMAS OPEN HOUSE & SILENT AUCTION

GATEWAY TO CHRISTMAS

Sunday, December 1, is the date of the Annual Christmas Open House at the Madison County Historical Museum and Archival Library. The Friends of the Museum will decorate for the season, and the sounds of Christmas will be heard throughout the house as local musicians sing carols in the 1836 Weir House museum.

WREATH SILENT AUCTION

Also to be seen in the Archival Library are beautiful wreaths, not all seasonal, created by Madison County florists. The wreaths will be part of a silent auction that begins November 1 with final bids taken on December 1. Members of the Friends will make deliveries anywhere within the county.



ANNUAL FOOD DRIVE

The MCHS antique sleigh will be out on the plaza ready to be filled with canned goods and other non-perishable food to replenish local food pantries. We encourage you to help us “fill the sleigh.” The sleigh also makes a wonderful backdrop for holiday photographs.

PLEASE COME!

We hope you will be able to attend our open house, but if not, stop by any time in November to see the beautiful display of wreaths and perhaps place a bid for one or two. A wreath would be a wonderful holiday gift or a nice treat for yourself during the season.

All proceeds from the silent auction benefit the work of the Madison County Historical Society.

THANK YOU!

Friends of the Museum are grateful to the Madison County florists who showcased their imagination and talent in the creation of beautiful wreaths for the MCHS silent auction. Wreaths can also be seen on the new MCHS web site.

Alton: Kinzel's Flowers; Lammers Floral; **Edwardsville:** August Garden; Carol Genteman; Michael's Arts and Crafts; **Godfrey:** Josephine's Tea Room and Gifts; **Granite City:** Goff and Dittman Florist and Gift Shop; Shirl K Floral Designs; The Flower Emporium; **Pontoon Beach:** Brad's Flowers and Gifts; **Troy:** Grimm and Gorley Too; **Wood River:** Dick's Flowers

MADCOHISTORY.ORG

MCHS SELECTED FOR CREATEATHON!

Think Tank, a public relations and marketing firm located in the Metro St. Louis area, annually holds an event called CreateAthon, a 24-hour work-around-the-clock design blitz where they provide free marketing and creative services to St. Louis area nonprofits. This year MCHS applied for and was selected by Think Tank to create a new website.

The MCHS website has been in need of an upgrade for some time, but with limited staff hours, a crowded schedule, and limited funds, the work has been postponed. With the help of Think Tank, MCHS now has a newly-designed and improved website at madcohistory.org

MCHS wishes to express a big “Thank You” to Trish Cheatham and Think Tank's fantastic staff for their generosity. The results will help us achieve our mission of “Opening Doors to Madison County History.”



*Our heroes at Think Tank!
Thank you for our beautiful new website!*

FAMOUS, BUT FORGOTTEN

LETTERS FROM EMMA

Early letters from Emma Kubicek were typed in Braille with a transcription added by teachers. By late 1905 her letters were all typed on a manual typewriter. Surviving letters are addressed to her sister Mary Kubicek Hlad and "Mamma."

February 9, 1905

Dear Mamma,

There is a lot of snow on the ground. I am going to ride on my sled. I had a cold and sore throat last week. I am well now.

I play with Edith's big doll. I think it looks like a baby. Mrs. Freeman gave me a new apron. Lillian is making it. We have a new teacher. She helps Mrs. Jordan. I send my love to all at home.

Your loving big girl,
Emma Kubicek

November 8, 1906

Dear Sister Mary,

How is Viola? Does she play in the leaves? I made a wreath of the maple leaves.

I am making Christmas presents. I knit a wash cloth. I have dressed a dolly. I am knitting a handkerchief bag now.

I had a tea-party the other day. I had it outdoors under the tree. I invited four girls. We had two kinds of cakes and tea. We had a good time.

Give a kiss to each one.
Your loving sister,
Emma Kubicek



Mary Kubicek Hlad,
sister of Emma Kubicek

Continued on Page 5

EMMA KUBICEK

More than a century ago, a Madison County girl from rural Glen Carbon, known as the "Helen Keller of Illinois", captured the attention of newspaper readers across the country. Born in 1896, Emma was the seventh child of Frank and Antonia Kubicek who emigrated from Bohemia in 1880. In 1899 the Kubicek family suffered a double tragedy. In April, three-year-old Emma lost both her sight and hearing from a severe case of meningitis. Soon after, her father was killed in an accident at the local railroad yards while loading cord wood.

Two years later, recognizing Emma's intelligence, Dr. Edward W. Fiegenbaum, an Edwardsville physician, recommended that she be sent to the Illinois Institution for the Education of the Blind in Jacksonville, Illinois. He personally contacted Superintendent Frank Hall and also arranged financing.

When Emma entered the institution on October 6, 1901, at the age of five, she was placed in a kindergarten class taught by Mrs. Helen R. Jordon. At the outset, Emma was not open to instruction. Feeling sorry for her, the family had not provided a disciplinary structure. But she soon became accustomed to the new order of her life and learned quickly despite being one of 30 blind students in one classroom. Her first words, taught using a manual alphabet were "ball" and "doll." It took about two weeks for her to learn each word in the early days of her instruction, but once she connected words to meanings, she progressed rapidly. Her first voluntary communication came after five months of

instruction. One day when she was hungry, she signed the word "bread."

By the following June, after less than a year of instruction, she was already impressing visitors to the school and her remarkable progress was noted in numerous national publications. The first comparison of Emma to Helen Keller came in a 1902 news article that said, "Emma

Kubicek is the name of a six year old deaf and blind pupil at the Illinois School for the Blind and she is showing such remarkable progress that her instructors think she may rival Helen Keller."

In biennial reports from the school beginning in 1902, Emma was always singled out for special mention because the child garnered so much attention. It was rare for an individual student's name to appear in these reports, but Emma was "not only one of our most interesting, but one of our aptest pupils" as reported by the superintendent.

She became a willing ambassador of goodwill for the school. When organizations visited, Emma was the student who demonstrated the power of instruction. In 1904, Emma and her teacher, Mrs. Jordon, spent a week at the World's Fair in St. Louis, demonstrating to thousands of visitors what could be accomplished at the blind school in Jacksonville.

In April, 1905, a headline in the Chicago Tribune read "Deaf, Dumb Blind Lobbyist: Little Girl at Springfield Makes Mute Plea and May Win \$1,000 for Education." Emma was an effective lobbyist, and funds were appropriated in the amount of \$1,000 annually for the education of the blind-deaf at the Illinois Institute for the Blind. Although not mentioned by name in the appropriation, Emma was the



Emma Kubicek with her teacher, Helen Jordon in 1906.

EMMA KUBICEK

only blind-deaf student at the school at that time. The money made it possible for Emma to have individual instruction as was afforded Helen Keller. Mrs. Jordon became Emma's Anne Sullivan.

With a full time teacher, Emma's vocabulary and skills improved rapidly. In the summer of 1905, philanthropist William Wade of Oakmont, PA purchased a manual typewriter and a sewing machine for Emma which she soon mastered. He also bought a silver pocket watch for her, constructed without a crystal so Emma could tell time by feeling the exposed hands of the watch.

Correspondence with her family indicates that the little girl grasped complex concepts such as religious faith and developed a broad vocabulary. She was especially fond of her sister, Mary Kubicek Hlad, and wrote to her often.

Articles about her progress appeared in newspapers from New York to San Francisco and in national publications for the deaf-blind as well. In a report on the visit of state legislators to the school, the *Edwardsville Intelligencer* headline on March 9, 1907, read, "Exhibition by Girl Sorely Afflicted Astounds Guests." Emma, using a typewriter, wrote a welcoming address for the legislators. "My name is Emma Kubicek and I am eleven years old. My home is on a farm near Edwardsville, Ill. I like this school very much and I love my teacher, Mrs. Jordon. I like to read stories."

Two days later, newspapers reported that the "little blind girl" was critically ill. The following day, they reported her sudden death from pneumonia on March 13, 1907.



Emma Kubicek's pocket watch

A memorial tribute from her school read in part, "We, the members of this school, pupils and teachers alike, have been singularly blessed in having Emma



Kubicek in our midst the last few years. We were interested in her development and proud of her achievements. Her lovable disposition, sweet face and charming manners made her good to look upon. Her quick responsiveness, her gratitude for every kindness shown – to which she seldom failed to give expression – her generous desire to share with others the gifts and pleasures that came to her, endeared her to all. Everyone, from the oldest to the youngest, who came in contact with her from day to day is better for having known and loved her. Under the inspiration and training of her faithful teacher she became a positive factor for good in this school, and the memory of her life, her character, and her work will ever be precious and uplifting to us all."

This child, who lived only 11 years, was mourned by all who met her. She was brought home from Jacksonville to be buried in the family plot at the Bohemian Cemetery on Buck Road (now Route 162) in Maryville.

Letters From Emma (continued)

January 3, 1907

My Dear Sister Mary,
I thank you for the jewel box and box of handkerchiefs. I had a very nice Christmas. I saw four Christmas trees. I got many pretty presents. Miss Haren sent me a box of very nice things. There were furs, a cap, an apron and some shoes for my dolly. I got a three pound box of candy from Miss Harrison in St. Louis, too. I got many pretty ribbons, sachet bag, a ball, a bead chain, little scales, a jar of salve, and five dollars from Mr. Wade and one dollar from my sister Annie.

You know about all the nice things they sent from home. I am very sorry that Mamma did not come to see me. Isn't she coming at all? I am eleven years old now. I know that you will write to me again. Did Viola like the bead chain that I sent? I send a kiss to each one.

Your Loving Sister,
Emma Kubicek

March 8, 1907

Dear Mamma,
I have new dresses. I have an Easter dress. I am going to heaven with God some day. Mrs. Jordan and I are going to church to pray.

I had a good time at Mrs. Kirby's. We staid (sic) all night with her. I am going to chapel. I'll show my dress to Miss Chism and Miss Bryant. I had a good time at school. The children are going to chapel this evening. Mabel, Mildred, Ruth, Ethel and Julia are going too. They have pretty dresses. I hope you'll write to me soon. Good-bye, with love to all. Your loving daughter,
Emma Kubicek.

(Written 5 days before her death)

FAMOUS, BUT FORGOTTEN



TOYS, GUNS & MORE

WALTER R. BENJAMIN (1860-1943)

Although some may know the name Benjamin since his namesake Benjamin Air Rifle is still manufactured, they are usually unaware that the inventor lived and worked in Madison County.

Walter Roger Benjamin was born on a farm in McLean County, Illinois, in 1860, but in 1901 invested in property in Granite City. The investment proved to be a lucrative one and he eventually settled here.

His interest in inventing began at a young age and became his passion. He applied for and was granted dozens of patents for farm related tools, household gadgets, toys, and what would be his lasting legacy, the Benjamin Air Rifle.

Benjamin's Granite City house, built in 1905, would become his home base. He continued to travel and established other homes, but always came back to his house and workshop at 2600 Illinois Avenue. The later years of his life were dedicated to the invention and manufacture of toys in the two long barns at the back of his property. The local newspaper said that to visit there "was very much like visiting Santa Claus's mythical toy shop at the North Pole. He greatly enjoyed demonstrating and explaining the mechanism of the many inventions he always had on hand."

Continued on page 7

JACOB FREDERICK AMMANN

His beginnings were modest, but by the end of his career, he was known throughout the United States.

J. F. "Fred" Ammann, the son of Swiss immigrant David Ammann and his German-born wife Anna Merz Ammann, was born in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1868. The family moved to Alhambra, Illinois, the same year. After Fred's father died in 1883, he helped his mother run a flower shop to support the family. In 1888 he established two greenhouses in Alhambra, but moved to Edwardsville four years later where his operation expanded to eventually include nearly two acres of greenhouses on the west end of St. Louis Street, adjoining the east side of Woodlawn Cemetery

Ammann's family, wife, Bertha Gehring Ammann, who he married in 1890, and daughters Angelina, Edna and Alma lived in an older house on the property until a new house was built in 1905 at 1306 St. Louis Street. The old house (no longer in existence) became the headquarters for the J. F. Ammann Company.

Ammann had both retail and wholesale operations with retail outlets in both Edwardsville and Alton. The retail stores were closed in 1917 when the florist changed his focus to wholesale and his interests expanded to include participation in national interests. He was regarded as a pioneer in the florist industry, serving in leadership positions of local, regional, state and national organizations. Among other offices held, he was the first president of the Illinois State Florists' Association, and served as president of many national organizations including the American Carnation Society and the Society of American Florists and

Ornamental Horticulturalists. In 1932 he was awarded the Gold Medal by the American Florists and Ornamental Horticulturalists for outstanding service to the floral industry.

Ammann was one of the men who helped organize Florist Telegraph Delivery (FTD) in 1910 and played a major role in building membership in the organization in

the early days by traveling from town to town in his district to recruit florists. During his ten years on the Florists' National Publicity Committee, they developed the "Say it with Flowers" campaign.

Throughout his more than a half century in the floral business, Ammann's company entered competitions and won many prizes at the St. Louis Flower Show and at national competitions, especially for their roses. Each year the company raised tens of thousands of roses and carnations, shipped primarily to the St. Louis market. His greenhouse operation was known as the largest in the St. Louis region, and was one of three greenhouse businesses

in Edwardsville at the time.

His status in the industry made him a favorite judge at floral competitions across the country. His leadership role, participation on committees and as a judge at flower shows took him away from home, often for weeks at a time.

An additional contribution to the industry came in 1928 when as secretary of the Florists' Hail Association of America he convinced the organization to move from New Jersey to Edwardsville. Offices were established in a downtown office building, but soon moved to the second floor of his home at 1306 St. Louis Street until his death in 1943. Under his leadership, the business was reorganized to make rates more fair, accounting for

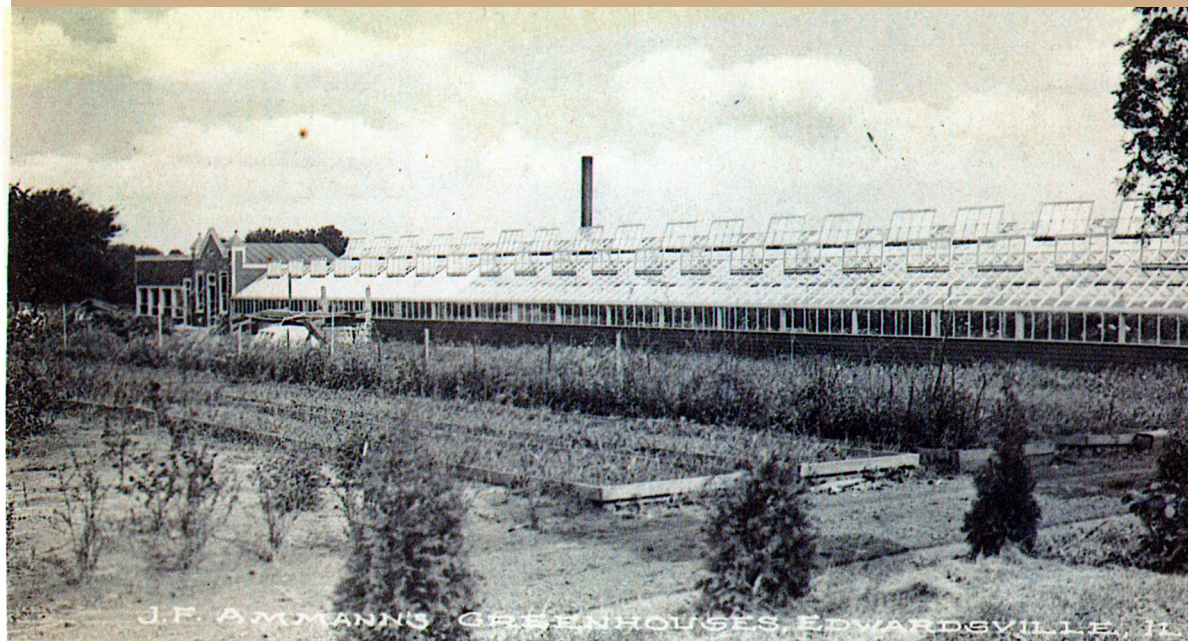


"What a wonderful world of opportunity we live in. Where just poor boys can through some merit of their own, and a lot of encouragement by society, reach the highest pinnacle of their chosen vocation in life."

J. F. Ammann, March, 1936.

JACOB FREDERICK AMMANN

Continued from Page 6



Started in 1892, as the Woodlawn Green Houses, the name soon changed to the J. F. Ammann Company. When at full capacity, the company had over 2 acres of greenhouses. An Ammann employee, Henry Blixen, established Woodlawn Garden Greenhouses across the street from Woodlawn Gardens Cemetery in 1916. (MCHS)

areas that were at a larger risk for hail. In 1955 Florist Hail Association became Florists' Mutual Insurance Company and is now known as Hortica, a thriving Madison County business that still serves the florist industry today.

Ammann retired from daily activity in the floral industry in 1941 when he sold J. F. Ammann Company to Ernest Tosovsky, Sr. of Home Nursery. Home Nursery was located on Route 66, now Route 157, and eventually phased out the green houses on the south side of St. Louis Street which have been gone for many years.

Locally he served on committees that supervised construction of the Wildey Theatre and a new Junior High School. He served four years as a city alderman, and was an active proponent of the Boy Scouts and the YMCA. He was a devote Christian who ran for mayor on a platform advocating

the closure of taverns on Sunday which probably cost him the election.

Fred Ammann died February 16, 1943, after a long illness. Although forgotten by many today, he had a lasting impact on the floral industry he loved.



The Ammann home and offices of Florists' Hail Association at 1306 St. Louis Street in Edwardsville, circa 1937.

Benjamin, also a poet, said in a poem that he invented toys to "bring some joy into a world so full of grief and care."

His most famous inventions were Makeit Toys which were later sold to the Lincoln Log Company, and the Benjamin Air Rifle, often referred to as a BB gun. The toys resembled what many of us remember as Tinker Toys, but it is unknown which came first. He had several patents for the toys.

Benjamin came up with the idea for his air rifle when pneumatic bicycle pumps came on the market. He recognized that the same principles could be applied to an air gun. Air rifles on the market at the time were not true air rifles as they needed a spring to fire.



The first Benjamin Air Rifle was manufactured by the St. Louis Air Rifle Company in 1899. The company name was later changed to the Benjamin Air Rifle Company which remained in existence for 100 years. Benjamin air rifles are now manufactured and sold by Crosman Corporation.

Although his focus in later years was on toys, Benjamin continued to make improvements on his rifle, with his last air rifle patent being issued after his death in 1943.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The photograph of Mary Hlad and letters written by Emma Kubicek are courtesy of Robert Kubicek, Jr. of Glen Carbon. Other photos are from the author's collection. Emma's pocket watch was donated to MCHS by Janet Foehr Kolb whose grandfather was Emma's brother.

The portrait of J. F. Ammann and picture of the Ammann greenhouses are from the MCHS collection. The 1937 picture of Mr. Ammann's house is courtesy of Joan Evers.

The author relied heavily on a definitive book on Walter Roger Benjamin, "The St. Louis and Benjamin Air Rifle Companies, 1899-1999" by D. T. Fletcher for sources and information.



Madison County Historical Society

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2013 DINING IN HISTORY

2014 Memberships New and Renewing August-October

Bethalto

Rick & Angie Bradley
Zachary Niswander
Rudolph Papa

Breese

Mary Heeren, Breese

Edwardsville

Vickie Hellmann
Mark & Jean Luchtefeld
Petie Hunter
Candace Ladd
Mike & Cindy Reinhardt
Sarah Turner

Godfrey

Dr. Janet Duthie Collins
Jean Miller

Wood River

Murray & Mary Harbke

**Thank you for
your help in
opening doors to
Madison County
history!**

Our 2013 fall event and annual meeting was an experiment. Would people enjoy dining in a historic building, then learning about the history of the building? The answer was a resounding “Yes!”

We plan a repeat next year and welcome suggestions for another historic Madison County location that can accommodate up to 100 seated guests.

Thank you to the Wildey Theatre, the Dining in History committee, Graphic designers Adam and John Celuch, Rich Walker, and especially our guest speaker, Joan Evers, for an evening of good food and entertaining stories in a beautifully restored Madison County opera house. We look forward to doing it again next year.

MARY’S RESEARCH TIP

The Federal Census is a wonderful place to start your family history research. The early census record included the names of the head of the household along with an enumeration of males and females in various age groups in the same household. Beginning in 1850, the census took on a new look and included names of EVERYONE in the household, along with their ages.

Each Census added a few more questions that help us add a bit more to our ancestors’ stories. For example, while the 1840 census did not include the names of every person in the household, it did enumerate the number of “Free Colored Persons”, “Slaves”, and “Pensioners for Revolutionary or military service” among other items. Even without the names of every person in the household, this can

give you clues about who is in the household. The 1850 Census questions included a question about the value of “Real Estate Owned” while in 1860 the value of “Personal Estate” was included. The 1900 Census questions are some of my favorites because for the first time, women are asked to complete the questions “Mother of how many children” and “Number of these children living.” In addition, the household members are asked about their citizenship including the year of immigration to the U.S. and whether they are naturalized.

There are too many of these questions to list, so to see all of the questions asked for each Federal census, you can download and print free forms from <http://www.ancestry.com/download/forms>.

Happy Researching!