



MCHS News

July 2016

Opening Doors to Madison County History

Vol. 4 No. 4

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, a museum in the 1836 Weir House and the Helms Collection Center, is owned by the nonprofit Madison County Historical Society and operated jointly with Madison County.

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

COLLINSVILLE: AN EARLY HISTORY

Located atop the bluffs 11 miles east of the Mississippi River, the City of Collinsville's first permanent resident was a squatter, John A. Cook. In 1816, Cook built a log cabin and made other improvements near what is now the corner of Orient and Church Streets, three blocks east of Route 159. The settlement was separated from St. Louis by a system of poor roads and swampy bottomland that made travel difficult, and early publications touted its location on the bluffs as being both beautiful and healthful. Situated on the southern border of Madison County, the community grew over the county border so that today the City of Collinsville straddles the St. Clair County line.

In January 1818, three brothers, Augustus, Anson and Michael Collins purchased the improvements of John Cook. Although Cook didn't own the ground, he was paid for the improvements he made to the property. The brothers, sons of William and Esther Morris Collins, came west from Litchfield, Connecticut. They were industrious and set about building numerous businesses, the first being a distillery, followed by a grist mill, and saw mill. Within a few years they added a blacksmith,

mercantile, cooper, hotel, and several residences, all while also managing a farm. The earliest buildings were all log structures that would later be replaced by frame, brick, or stone buildings.

The Collins brothers named their settlement "Unionville," which was said to reflect their joint ownership of the settlement as equal partners, but it was also the name of a community near their hometown in Connecticut which could have influenced the choice.

The Unionville Post Office was closed in 1823. Two years later, the Collins family requested the re-establishment of a post office, and although the request was approved, the name of the settlement had to be changed. There

was already a Unionville Post Office in southern Illinois near the Ohio River. Since the Collins family was dominant in the community and the first Postmaster appointed was Augustus Collins, the town was named Collinsville. It wasn't unusual for a community to be named after the first postmaster.

In 1818, the Collins brothers, with other residents, constructed a union house which



The Collins brothers built the above home in 1824 in preparation for the arrival of their parents. The house remained in the family for five generations before being razed in the 1960s. (Courtesy of Collinsville Historical Museum, CHM)

Continued on page 4

Save the Date!
Sunday, Nov 6, 2016
Dining in History
Diamond Mineral Springs Restaurant

Museum Closed!
Beginning July 1
for Renovation Work
(See story on Page 3)

ABOUT US

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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 web site, 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

The Archival Library was recently the recipient of two large collections from the Flagg and Paddock families. Both families were early Madison County settlers that arrived by 1818 and became prominent citizens of the area. Gershom Flagg, the original Flagg family settler, married Jane Paddock Richmond, the widowed daughter of Gaius Paddock, the original Paddock family settler. They cultivated large farms and built homes near each other.

While the histories of the families themselves are of interest to historians and genealogists, the documents, photos, and objects that the families saved and have recently donated are equally important. Personal correspondence, daybooks, and journals dating from the 1830s were saved along with family portraits and photos from the 1860s into the 1900s.

Two letters from George C. Smith, one dated May 29, 1844, and another from October 16, 1845, are examples of the surviving correspondence. George was a young man staying with the Gershom Flagg family and helping on their farm when he

wrote to his parents, Mr. and Mrs. James Smith of St. Louis, MO. Following are a few lines from the 1844 letter with capitalization and punctuation as written by George:

"Mr. Flagg talks of going to the Whig Convention in St. Louis next Monday. I hope you will come out here before you go on East. You wanted me to tell you what I needed I should like to have another pair of grey Pantaloons and Jacket and a Sunday go to meeting Hat a pair of stout Suspenders my Arithmetic Slate and Key to the Arithmetic." Gershom Flagg added to this letter, "We have had nothing but rain, rain, rain!"

The October 1845 letter finds young George apparently ready to go home. Near the beginning of the letter he writes "I hope in your next Letter you will write for me to come home for I don't like staying here this cold weather." He ends this one-page letter with the following: "P.S. I hope you will write me to come home before long."

These letters and the artifacts below are just a few of the treasures in these collections.

MUSEUM SPOTLIGHT

By Jenn Walta, Curator

It's not every day that a box of "historic goodness" arrives at the museum and archival library, but that's exactly what happened one day in early June. The box contained not only numerous photographs, albums, and documents from the Paddock family, but also three items, pictured here, that help tell the family's story: Gaius Foster Paddock's (1866-1932) engraved pocket watch (right); an 1880 walking stick given to Gaius Orville Paddock as a Christmas gift from his employ-



ees, (below) and an envelope which held a lock of brown hair from an unidentified family member (left).



RECENT MCHS NEWS

MUSEUM CLOSES FOR RENOVATION

Last year the Madison County Historical Society hired Bailey Edward, an Illinois architectural firm specializing in historic structures, to study the structural integrity of the 1836 Weir House. The building has been home to the county museum since 1964, and although there has been regular maintenance, repairs were not always done using methods compatible with early nineteenth-century construction materials. As a result there is a lack of consistent and reliable climate control. In addition, both exterior and interior surfaces have been damaged over the years from general wear.

Bailey Edward was asked to conduct a thorough review and provide recommendations for the restoration of the building, options for climate control and HVAC systems, and suggestions for lighting and improved exhibits.

The resulting plan was divided into five phases totaling \$4.1 million. The Society determined that the first two phases of the proposal are essential to the preservation of the building. The cost for these two phases of construction is estimated at \$1,357,392. The Society has 41 percent of the funds necessary to complete Phase I and II which will include:



The Weir House circa 1963 before it was purchased by MCHS.

- ◆ A new roof including compatible substructure, flashing and soffit repair
- ◆ Rebuilding of five chimneys
- ◆ Restoration of six dormers
- ◆ Excavation of the footings and tuck-pointing of the entire building
- ◆ Paint removal on the exterior brick (paint on soft brick traps moisture)
- ◆ Restoration of the doors and windows
- ◆ Central climate control
- ◆ Restoration of two rooms into a modern exhibit space

Phase I of the restoration, which includes the first three items listed above, will begin this summer to insure that no additional water damage from rain or snow will impact artifacts or the building.

During the restoration work, the Weir House will be closed from July 1 until the work is completed at the end of December. The Madison County Archival Library will remain open during construction at the museum building.

In the coming year, the Society will focus on establishing a fundraising plan to raise the additional \$800,000 needed to preserve this historic structure through private and public foundations, governmental agencies and from individual gifts. When work is completed, the Museum will tell the story of Madison County in a new and innovative manner that will allow MCHS to continue its mission of



Museum Director Suzanne Dietrich surrounded by staff and MCHS Board members at the ISHS Annual Awards Luncheon in Springfield. Front (l-r) Suzanne Dietrich and Mary Westerhold; Back: MCHS President Gary Deneue, Cindy Reinhardt, Arnold Meyer, and Candace Ladd.

ISHS LIFETIME AWARD FOR SUZANNE DIETRICH

Museum Director Suzanne Dietrich was presented with the ISHS Lifetime Achievement Award at the Illinois State Historical Society's annual awards luncheon in April. Her work preserving Illinois history through her profession as well as with service on numerous boards, including the Illinois State Historical Society Board, made her a deserving candidate.

MCHS was well represented at the event. In addition to Director Dietrich's Lifetime Achievement Award, the *MCHS News* received an award for Superior Merit, being referred to as one of the best newsletters by a historical society, and Cindy Reinhardt, a member of the MCHS Board, was appointed to the Illinois State Historical Society Board of Directors.

NEW AND RENEWING MEMBERS

May-June ♦ Thank you for supporting MCHS!

Elijah Lovejoy \$ 500

Ann Wagner

Family \$50

Lawrence and Shirley Schwarz

Ed and Joann Small

Don Weeks and Casey Weeks

Individual \$35

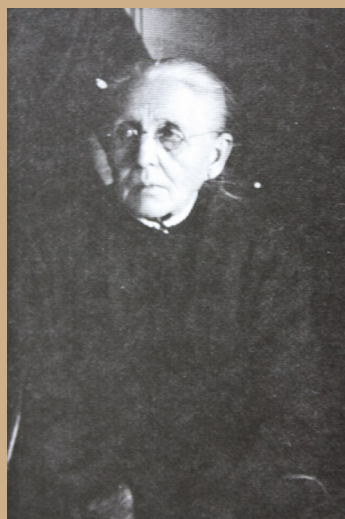
Mary Byron

Roy O. Walker

Mrs. Biedler Went to Washington

In the early years of the Civil War, a young Collinsville housewife, Angelina Penny Biedler, was known briefly on the national stage as the woman who went directly to President Lincoln in 1861 to secure her husband's release from the army.

Her husband, Rev. Frederick Biedler, was commissary sergeant for the Ninth Michigan Calvary serving in Tennessee when he and some of his comrades became ill after eating flour poisoned by the Confederates. He was



unable to recover, but could not secure a release to return home. He wrote to his resourceful young wife asking if there was anything she could do to assist.

Angelina composed a letter requesting her husband's release and obtained signatures from several high ranking government officials. But upon learning that the letter would likely not be seen by Lincoln if she mailed it, she determined that the only thing to do was deliver it personally. A school teacher, she took two weeks leave from her job and traveled to Washington

Continued on page 5

EARLY COLLINSVILLE HISTORY (CONT. FROM PAGE 1)

was a building that was used for church services, school, and other community meetings. The 1866 *Gazetteer of Madison County, Illinois*, reports that it was the first frame union house in Illinois.

The Collins family was instrumental in organizing the first church in Collinsville, the Presbyterian, in 1823. The Presbyterians met at the Union House until 1843.

In 1824, the Collins brothers convinced their father, William Collins, and two additional brothers, Frederick and William, to join them in the "western wilderness" along with their families. The two newly arrived brothers bought into the Collins family cooperative that jointly owned numerous businesses and property.

In the 1820s, the temperance movement reached Collinsville from the east. The religious Collins family after a time decided that it was hypocritical to operate a distillery during the week and attend church services on Sundays where temperance was preached. In 1828 they closed their distillery, even dismantling the stone building that was only a few years old so no one would be tempted to resurrect what had been a very profitable business.

The 1866 gazetteer said, "The very foundations of this Temple of Death were carried away, and upon their corner stones was reared a parsonage and a Church of the Living God."

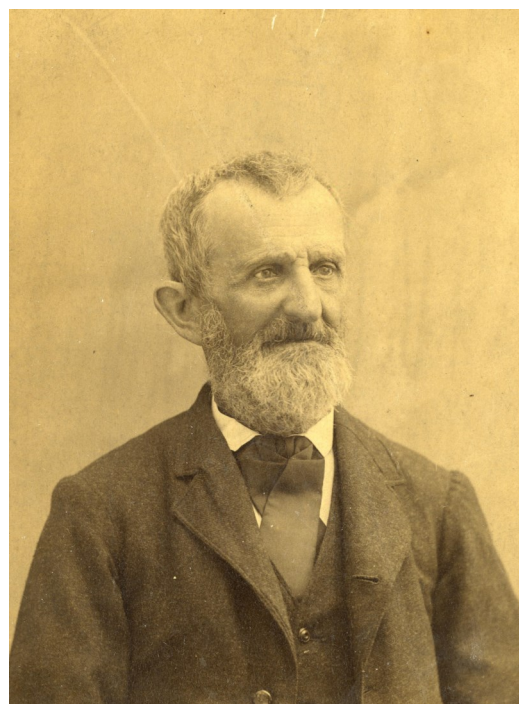
The partnership of the Collins brothers began to dismantle after the death of Augustus Collins in 1828. Soon after Anson, Michael, and Frederick sold their shares and moved to Naples, Illinois, leaving William Burrage Collins (pictured above, right) as the sole proprietor of what had been the Collins brothers empire on the prairie.

William died of typhus in 1835 at the age of 35 years. In a history of the Collins family his faith and compassion for his four-year-old son were evident in his last words, "Willie, be a good boy and meet me in heaven."

His widow, Elizabeth Wilt Hertzog Collins was an astute businesswoman. With other property owners, she had her inherited estate surveyed and platted in



William Burrage Collins, pictured above, was the last of the Collins brothers to live in Collinsville. In 1850 Collinsville was incorporated as a village. The first president of the village government was Judge Daniel Dove Collins, (pictured below) who incidentally was not related to the founding Collins family. The Collins House being restored on Main Street today belonged to Judge Collins, and not the Collins brothers family. (Above image courtesy of CHM; Lower photo from MCHS)



EARLY COLLINSVILLE HISTORY

1837, the official birth of Collinsville.

When deeds were drawn up for the new town, Elizabeth, a strong proponent of temperance, entered into an agreement with other property owners to sell no lots of land within the limits of the village, without a covenant that forbid the sale or manufacture of "ardent spirits" with a penalty of forfeiture.

But the Collins family went even further to support the temperance movement. One lot in the village had escaped the above covenant, but Elizabeth Collins, at considerable personal expense, purchased the lot so there was no "loop-hole" in the ban on alcohol in Collinsville. The restrictions were later ruled unconstitutional, but for a number of years Collinsville was a temperance town.

EARLY INDUSTRY

In addition to the businesses established by the Collins family, the area was also known for its agriculture which led to the establishment of numerous grain mills. By the 1860s, Collinsville was also known for its coal mines which would eventually employ thousands of men. The Wonderly Mine, established in the early 1860s, was the first coal mine, followed by the first Lumaghi mine in 1869 and the Cantine mine in 1873. Dozens more would follow and it was widely reported that the mines under Collinsville were so large that by 1900 a man could walk for three miles underground. The mines were also



Blum & Schoettle's Bell Factory was established in July, 1879. Schoettle soon left the business which was run by the Blum family until it closed in 1955. In 1885, newspapers around the country reported on a fire that destroyed an earlier Collinsville bell factory founded by I. C. Moore.

influential to the development of Collinsville because they attracted a large Italian immigrant population. Collinsville's Italian heritage is celebrated annually at Italian Fest.

Another interesting industry was the manufacture of bells for livestock. Bells were commonly hung on a leather strap around the neck of free-ranging cows or other animals. The sounds of the bells could assist the farmer in locating wandering stock. In the 1880s there were two such foundries, but the one most remembered and longest lasting was the Blum Stock Bell Company, established in 1879.

Other early industries included a zinc mine, brick yards, tannery, cooper, nursery, and machine shops. All of this industry created a need for retail and other services which developed quickly.

The first newspaper was not established until 1871. *The Collinsville Argus*, edited by A. W. Angiers, was followed by a number of other newspapers. The newspaper with longevity was the *Collinsville Herald*, founded by James N. Peers in 1906. *The Herald* ceased daily publication in 2012.

Biedler from page 4

alone. She was introduced to a number of men who agreed to champion her cause and as it happens three of them, including Illinois Governor Richard Yates, showed up in Lincoln's office at the same time to plead her case. Laughing at the coincidence, Lincoln called for Mrs. Biedler and granted her request.

Frederick Biedler returned home and, after recovering from his illness, went to work for the quartermaster general in St. Louis until the end of the war.

Angelina wasn't finished with her role as a trailblazer though. The former school teacher was the first woman to run for school board (she was narrowly defeated) and the first woman to serve on her church board.

In 1879 the Biedlers had a new home built on Church Street (below) which would eventually become the Biedler House Hotel. Angelina was an excellent cook which made their establishment one of the most popular in the city.



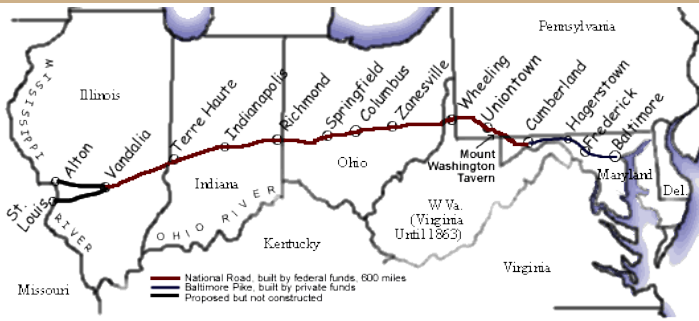
The Biedler House Hotel (CHM)

The Biedlers were active in the temperance movement and although Frederick didn't live to see the day, Angelina died in January, 1920, at the dawn of Prohibition.



The Lumaghi Mines were started by Dr. Octavius Lumaghi, an Italian immigrant who established a medical practice in St. Louis. He built a second home near Collinsville in 1854 where he later developed a zinc works (1865) and his first coal mine (1871). The family would become a prominent one in Collinsville for several generations. (Courtesy of Men of the Mines)

EARLY COLLINSVILLE HISTORY



Construction of the National Road, also known as the Cumberland Road, began in 1811. The route was completed from Baltimore to Vandalia in 1838, but was extended to St. Louis by way of Collinsville by 1850. By this time, railroads were already beginning to bring about a decline in traffic on the highway that for decades brought stage coaches and Conestoga wagons to the western territories. (National Parks Service)

TRANSPORTATION

Two of America's most famous roads passed through Collinsville on the same pavement. The first was the National Road, known originally as the Cumberland Road. Three years later a contract for a plank road was signed which greatly improved conditions on that road. Collinsville became home to another famous road when Route 66, the Mother Road, was realigned in its latter years to flow through town.

Although both of these roads, in different centuries, helped bring prosperity to the city, the growth of industry can be attributed to the early proximity of a railway line.



The depot above was constructed in 1871, just a few years after the Vandalia Railroad came to Collinsville. The Vandalia line became the St. Louis, Vandalia and Terre Haute line and then the Pennsylvania Railroad. The line has been sold several times since then. (CHM)

Collinsville also enjoyed a place on the electric streetcar line until tracks were removed in the 1930s. The Interurban connected Collinsville to St. Louis as well as many Madison and St. Clair County communities.

SCHOOLS

The first classroom in Collinsville was in the Union Building, circa 1818. As in other Madison County towns, numerous private academies followed until the establishment of a public school system. The first parochial school, Holy Cross Lutheran School, was established in 1848, followed approximately 20 years later by SS. Peter and Paul Catholic School. Both schools are still in existence. Established in the 1890s, Lincoln School was Collinsville's school for African-American children. The high school was desegregated in 1940, but the elementary school remained segregated until the early 1950s.

CHURCHES

As previously noted, the Union House was built for religious services and community gatherings. Although the first sermon preached there was likely by a Baptist, the earliest congregation in Collinsville was Presbyterian. The clergyman who established the congregation in 1823 was Rev. Salmon Giddings, who was sent by the Connecticut Missionary Society at the request of the Collins family. Before moving on to another congregation, Giddings married Almira Collins, a sister to the Collins brothers. The First United Presbyterian Church is the oldest congregation in Madison County and one of the oldest in the State of Illinois for continuous existence.

Christ Episcopal Church was established by Dr. Joseph Darrow in 1833 but closed its doors approximately 25 years ago. The Methodists organized just north of Collinsville at Prairie Ridge in about 1839 for campground services. They named the new church Wesley Chapel in 1844 when they moved into Collinsville. Today the congregation is known as the First United Methodist Church.

The Lutherans organized in 1848 as Holy Cross Lutheran Church, a congregation still active today. Another Lutheran congregation, Jerusalem Lutheran was established in 1903 by Lithuanian immigrants.

SS. Peter and Paul Catholic Church was organized in 1855 and completed their first church building on Vandalia Street in 1856. Other early churches include the A.M. E. Church (1862) originally located near Glenwood Cemetery and St. John's United Church of Christ established in 1893.

NATIONAL NOTORIETY

In the midst of the patriotic fever sweeping America during World War I, Robert Paul Prager, 29, a German-born naturalized U. S. citizen, was hung by a group of Collinsville miners on April 4, 1918. Prager had been falsely accused of being a German spy and was in protective custody. However, a mob broke into the jail, pulled him out of the building and hung him on a nearby tree. Over 200

people were said to have witnessed the crime, but the defendants, pictured at right, were acquitted of the crime. Newspapers throughout the country covered the lynching and trial.



OLDEST COLLINSVILLE BUSINESSES



The above photo of the new Schroepfel Funeral Home appeared in the March, 1930, issue of Embalmers Monthly. With the funeral home movement, undertakers, like the Herr family, purchased large homes or mansions for their business. The Schroepfel Funeral Home was one of the first in Illinois to build a new structure designed specifically for funeral and mortuary purposes. The new building had every modern convenience including a smoking room for those addicted to "Lady Nicotine." (Courtesy of Allan and Cuiferi Funeral Home)

The oldest businesses still in existence in Collinsville are funeral homes that share ownership and/or location with the past. A "newer" mortuary business is the Kassly Home which came to Collinsville in 1936.

ALLAN AND CUIFERI FUNERAL HOME

The origins of Allan and Cuiferi begin in 1881 with undertaker and furniture dealer Martin Schroepfel. After Martin's retirement, the business was run by his son George and a son-in-law, William Wittenfeld. In 1929, on the site of the original business, the Schroepfel Undertaking Company constructed the funeral home shown above.

The Schroepfel family sold the business to Earl and Susan Clem in 1950. Shortly afterwards, Mr. Clem died and since Mrs. Clem was not an undertaker, she hired Paul Froman to run the business. In 1959-1960 he was joined by another undertaker,

Robert Cuiferi, who purchased the business in 1961. Cuiferi with his new bride, Nancy, were owners of the business, but still kept the Schroepfel name until their daughter Linda Cuiferi Allan joined them in the business in 1983. She is now the owner and manager of this family owned business. Her parents, both licensed undertakers, still live in one of the apartments above the funeral home and participate in operations.

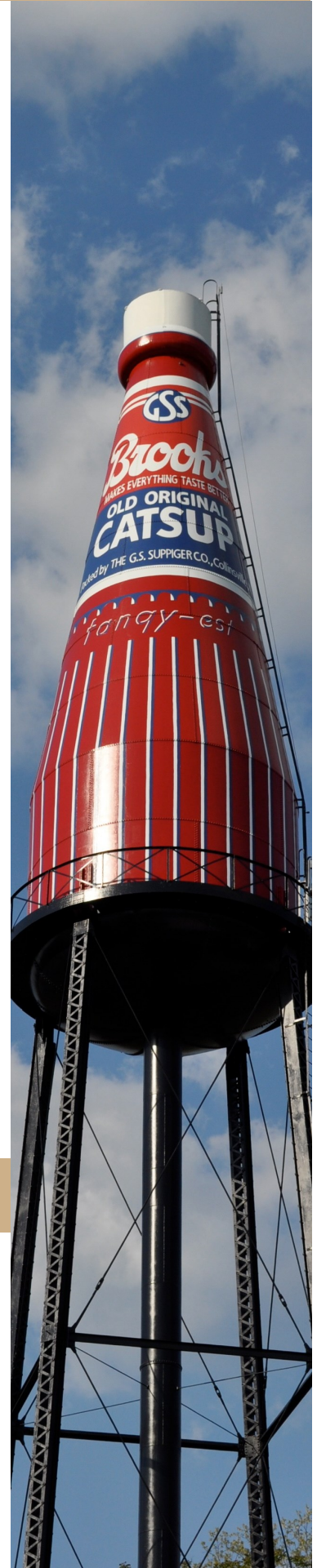
THE HERR FUNERAL HOME

The origins of the Herr Funeral Home date back to 1870 when Gottlieb Wilhelm, a carpenter who made furniture and coffins, added undertaking to his business. He sold the business in the early 1900s

to John E. Schroepfel whose brother Martin owned the nearby Schroepfel Undertaking Company. In 1915 John partnered with a Belleville undertaker, Vincent A. Herr Sr., to form the Schroepfel and Herr Furniture and Undertaking Company. The following year, with Schroepfel in poor health, Herr bought out his partner's interests in the firm

The business moved to its present location at 501 N. Main Street in 1929 when the Herrs purchased the Peter Grieve Jr. residence and converted it into Collinsville's first funeral "home." Prior to the existence of funeral homes, undertakers prepared the body for burial but the visitation and funeral were held at the home of the deceased.

Herr's son and grandsons would also be active in the business in the years to come. Last fall the business was sold, but Robert Herr although retired, still maintains a connection with the business.



HISTORIC COLLINSVILLE LANDMARKS



At left: The Miners Institute at 204 W. Main Street was constructed in 1918 by local contractor Henry Eberhart. The architect was Robert E. Kirsch who also designed the Madison County Courthouse. Coal miners contributed the funds to construct the building which included a theater, meeting rooms and a banquet hall. Plans are currently underway to restore the building. (CHM)

At right: The "World's Largest Catsup Bottle" brings the world to Collinsville. Built in 1949, the 700-foot high water tank provided water for Brooks Foods. The cap of the bottle is eight-foot high. (CHM)



Madison County Historical Society

Opening Doors to Madison County History

715 N. Main Street
Edwardsville, IL 62025

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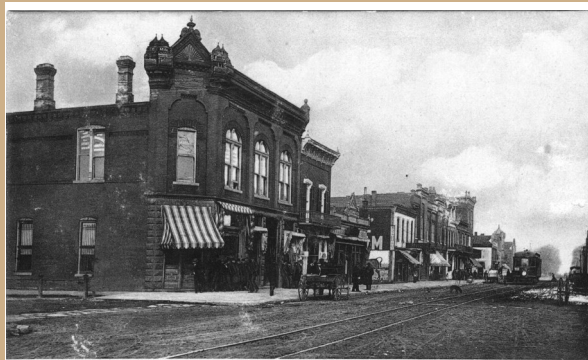
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MCHS Has Wi-Fi!

MCHS has just completed the last steps in an initiative funded by a technology grant from the Edwardsville Community Foundation and an anonymous donor.

A module to create virtual exhibits on the MCHS website has been purchased and staff are in the process of programming the module. In addition, wireless technology has been installed throughout the museum/library complex, and a public access laptop computer has been purchased for public use at the library. Most recently, public access wi-fi has been made available for patrons who need it while researching at the library. MCHS has also purchased a library subscription to newspapers.com which will now provide public access to over 150 Illinois newspapers from 1830-2012, including several from Madison County and its surrounding counties. Every part of every page is searchable, including valuable local articles, advertisements, and obituaries.

MAIN STREET POSTCARDS



Main Street east from Centre Street, Collinsville, Ill.



MAIN STREET, COLLINSVILLE, ILL.



The Biggest, Best and Busiest Store in Collinsville, Ill.
Yates-Ambrosius Mercantile Co.

Tracks for the electric railway line are visible in both of the Main Street postcards shown above. The card on the left is postmarked 1917, and the card on the right, 1906. The Yates-Ambrosius Mercantile on Main Street is shown lower left. (CHM)

THANK YOU!

Thank you to volunteers at the Collinsville Historical Museum (CHM) for their generous assistance in providing images and information for this newsletter.

MARY'S RESEARCH TIP

When reading a newspaper, newsletter, or magazine, there is often a favorite feature that we turn to first. The same is true of online information in the form of favorite blogs. According to a Google search, a blog (a shortening of weblog) is "a regularly updated website or web page, typically one run by an individual or small group, that is written in an informal or conversational style." Do

you have a favorite genealogy writer or presenter? Chances are they have a blog and you can sign up for regular email updates. A good place to start is the website geneabloggers.com. From the home page select "Genealogy Blog Roll." This is a list of over 3,000 blogs which you can search or scroll through the alphabetical list. There is sure to be something of interest in this list!