



# MCHS News

March 2018

Opening Doors to Madison County History

Vol. 6 No. 2

**Historical Museum**  
715 N Main Street  
Edwardsville, IL 62025

**Hours:**  
The museum is currently closed for renovation

**Archival Library**  
801 N Main Street  
**Hours:**  
Wed-Fri 9 am - 4 pm  
Sunday 1 pm - 4 pm  
Group Tours Available

**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.

## JOHN MASON PECK APOSTLE OF THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER VALLEY

By Cindy Reinhardt

Since 1965, thousands of Southern Illinois University Edwardsville students have attended classes in the Peck Building, named for John Mason Peck. Although Historical Studies is one of many disciples taught in the building, relatively few students know the story of the man for whom it was named nor SIUE's special connection to Peck.

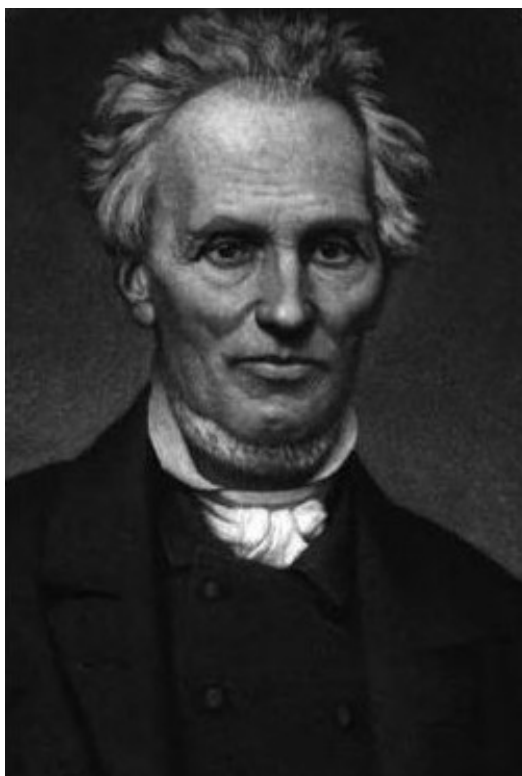
John Mason Peck (1789-1858) was a Baptist missionary, preacher, educator, historian and a prolific author as well as a leader who influenced the development of Illinois, Missouri and the Mississippi River Valley. To that list, given the time period, must be added pioneer and frontiersman.

Peck was born October 31, 1789, in the parish of Litchfield, South Farms, Connecticut. The only child of Asa and Hannah Peck, he grew up in a home of modest financial means where from a young age he was needed to work the family farm. On May 8, 1809, he was married to Sarah Paine who was born in Greene County, New York in January, 1789. Sarah's mother died when Sarah was 12, after which for two years she assumed the household work of caring for her father and two younger siblings until her father remarried. This would prove to be useful

training for the hardships the family would later endure in the West.

John Peck's religious heritage was Puritan, but at the age of 18, in 1807, he visited the Congregational Church at Litchfield and was moved to join that congregation. It is also where he met his future wife who was then living with her grandparents in Litchfield.

Shortly after their 1809 marriage, they moved to Sarah's former home area, Greene County, New York, where Peck worked as a teacher. Here John and Sarah were introduced to the Baptist faith and John became a Baptist preacher while also still operating a school. Peck was a success at both careers, but he was consumed by his concern for the "heathens in the West." He appealed to leaders in the church to make "home missions" a priority and set out to obtain the additional training he would need to qualify for the work.



Rev. Dr. John Mason Peck

In 1816, after several years as a preacher, Peck was one of five students accepted by Dr. William Staughton of Philadelphia. Staughton, a highly-respected Baptist minister, ran a seminary from his home and was the sole faculty member. Students were schooled in religion, languages, and other expected subjects, but also sent to medical lectures and given other

*Continued page 4*

## MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

If you haven't renewed your membership for 2018, a reminder was mailed to you, and we hope you will renew as soon as possible. (MCHS memberships are due at the first of the year.) Due to the expense of the newsletter, this issue of the MCHS News will be the last sent to non-renewing members. If you have already sent in your renewal (and most of you have!), we appreciate your timely support!

## ABOUT US

### MCHS BOARD

Candace Ladd, Pres  
Gary Denué, V-Pres  
Arnold Meyer, Treas  
Tallin Curran, Sec  
Norma Asadorian  
Mary J. Bade  
William Eaton  
Mae Grapperhaus  
Stephen Hansen  
Murray Harbke  
Don Huber  
Jeff Pauk  
Cindy Reinhardt  
Sue Wolf

### STAFF

Jon Parkin  
Museum Superintendent  
Mary Westerhold  
Archival Research Mgr.  
LaVerne Bloemker  
Archival Research Asst.  
Carol Frisse  
Archival Research Asst.  
Jenn VanBibber  
Curator  
Mary Z. Rose  
Asst. 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 web site, at the MCHS Museum or at the Archival Library.

### PUBLICATIONS

#### MCHS NEWS

6 issues annually  
Cindy Reinhardt, Editor

## ARCHIVAL LIBRARY SPOTLIGHT

By Mary Westerhold

During the last several months, the library staff has been involved with relocating items that have been removed from the museum during the renovation. While it may not sound like an interesting task, it has actually been exciting because of the discoveries, or actually "rediscoveries", that we make.

Like any move, items are found that have been forgotten because they have been in the same dark corner for too long or tucked away in a closet. When we moved the paintings that had hung in the museum for years, we had the opportunity to view many of them in better light than where they were hanging. When the museum was

opened in the Weir house in the mid 1960s, the lighting was designed to demonstrate what it may have looked like in the house in the 1800s when light was provided by candles and oil lamps. Obviously, our lights today are much brighter and it is amazing what can be seen with brighter lights!

The other discovery was the number of paintings that were in the museum. At one point, we had all of the paintings in one room in our collection center and that was when we realized how many had been on display! All of the paintings were photographed and relocated into storage, and I am sure some will again be displayed. But the move has given us a better record of what we have!

## MUSEUM SPOTLIGHT

By Jenn VanBibber

The Madison County Historical Museum has been fortunate to cultivate and retain a symbiotic relationship with professors at SIUE. Since 2013, five students have interned with the curator or worked on a museum exhibit for a senior project.

The most recent student, Rhianna Neel of Bethalto, began working in January in conjunction with her Applied Historical Methods class. Through this work Rhianna will gain experience in the museum field which can help her determine whether or not public history is what she wants as a career.

Rhianna's primary duties have included completion of the rehousing and cataloging of linens in the Society's textile collection which includes

packaging them in archival materials, i.e. acid-free boxes and acid-free tissue.

These artifacts have now all been cataloged and are awaiting accession numbers. Linens were the last of the textiles to be rehoused and cataloged, all done using best practices and standards of collection care management. The clothing, linens and other fabric artifacts in the Society's textile collection fill nine rooms of the Helms Center and the work has taken nearly ten years to complete. The Society is grateful to the dedicated staff, volunteers and interns who have worked on this project. It is a major accomplishment.

Volunteers are always needed at the museum or library. Please contact us if you would like to volunteer.



SIUE intern Rhianna Neel of Bethalto.

## MARY'S RESEARCH TIP

### WEBINARS

Webinars are a great source of information and hints for research. They are "broadcast" over the internet so anyone with an internet connection can listen to them. Many societies, organizations, and genealogy professionals offer them, with some being free while others require a subscription.

For example, The Illinois State Genealogical Society (ISGS) offers free webinars every second Tuesday at 8 P.M. central time. However, if you are a member of ISGS, you can view past webinars and handouts any time. For a list of other webinars and any cost associated with them, google "genealogy webinars." Within that search is a listing in table form from familysearch.org that I found helpful.

# MCHS NEWS

## A NEW VISION FOR THE MADISON COUNTY HISTORICAL MUSEUM

The Madison County Historical Society (MCHS) is not just renovating a building on the National Register of Historic Places, although that is part of the project. They are also creating an all new modern museum that will tell the story of Madison County in a way that has never been done here before.

## RENOVATION PROGRESS

Great progress is being made on the renovation of the Madison County Historical Museum. Employees from Ernst Heating are installing the new HVAC equipment, staff are removing the last of the artifacts, professional movers are relocating the historic pianos and workers from Premier Painting and Design are removing wallpaper.

The next phase of the interior work will include a new electrical system, plaster repair, painting, floor repairs and more. On the exterior, paint will be removed and the foundation will be repaired. Windows and doors all need restoration (see below for how you can help) which will involve external and interior surfaces. Finally, once the building is ready, the new exhibits will be installed for the reopening of the museum.

## WINDOWS PROJECT ONGOING

MCHS continues its appeal to area residents for assistance in restoring the windows of the museum building. Donors are asked to consider adopting one or more windows of the Weir House, at a cost of \$2,400 each. The donation can be in memory of a Madison County family or in honor of a Madison County resident. For more information on the Windows Project, stop by the Madison County Archival Library for a donation form or visit the MCHS website at [www.madcohistory.org](http://www.madcohistory.org).

## SPRING PROGRAMS

Two exciting programs, described below, have been scheduled for April and June. Please note that until further notice, the usual location for MCHS programs will be at Immanuel United Methodist Church at 800 N. Main Street in Edwardsville which is directly across the street from the Archival Library.

### ROBERT WADLOW (1918-2018)

The Madison County Historical Society will host a program on Robert Wadlow, Alton's Gentle Giant, on Sunday, April 15 at 2 p.m. in the Fellowship Hall of Immanuel United Methodist Church at 800 N. Main Street in Edwardsville.

Robert Wadlow, the world's tallest man, was born in Alton, Illinois, 100 years ago last month. Although of normal size when born, a disfunctioning pituitary gland caused him to grow at a phenomenal rate so that by his death at age 22 he had reached a height of 8 feet 11.1 inches tall. Despite his size, Wadlow had a relatively normal childhood and was greatly admired for his gentle nature.

The program will be presented by the History Chix, a group of three local women, Nancy Alexander, Cathy Bigby, and Mary Westerhold, who will discuss Wadlow's life, show videos of him and share a collection of photographs. In the past, in addition to the story of Robert Wadlow, their program topics have included Mary Lincoln, Elijah Lovejoy, the Underground Railroad, and steamboats. The History Chix enjoy sharing their love of history with area audiences and can be contacted at 618-975-8429.

### EMANCIPATION IN ILLINOIS

MCHS will host a program on emancipation in Illinois on Sunday June 10 at 2 p.m. The presenter will be SIUE Associate Professor Bryan Jack who specializes in African American, St. Louis and Southern history. More information on this program will be included in the May newsletter.

## NEW AND RENEWING MEMBERS

Jan - Feb ♦ Thank you for supporting MCHS!

### **\$250 Edward Coles** William Eaton

### **\$100 James Madison** Scott Baima Susan Buckley Mae Grapperhaus William & Anna Haine Mary Ruth Kettenbach JoAnn Nabe

### **\$50 Family** Les & Nancy Alexander Norma & Eddie Asadorian Doug & Maxine Callies Barbara Crowder & Larry Taliano Jane & Sid Denny John & Maxine Johnson Larry & Betty Krapf Tom LaFaver Candace Ladd Ted & Joy Lotz David & Janet Matosian Stephen Mudge Charles & Bonnie Norman Kathryn Scheibal Joyce & Bob Williams Bob & Sue Wolf

### **\$35 Individual** Betty Braundmeier Carolyn Catalano John Celuch Judy Chapman Rachel Crowe Shirley Daiber Joyce Giaquinta Robert Gibson Carolyn Golfin David Hanser Charlotte Heeren Mary Heeren Jo Ann Isleb Cheryl Eichar Jett Charlotte Johnson William Kaseberg Vicky Kruckeberg

### Judith Leo Barb Luchtefeld Missouri Historical Society Daniel McGuire Ruth Murray Sharon Petty Mike Picchioldi Rebecca Pinkas Patricia Rudloff Virginia Schleuter Vickie Sheridan Sarah Smith-Raschen Sarah Turner Joyce A. Taff Mary Westerhold Sharon Whittaker Billie Mae Wilson



## JOHN MASON PECK (CONT FROM PAGE 1)

experiences that could prove useful as missionaries in the Wild West. In 1817, the Triennial Baptist Convention chose Peck and a fellow student, the Rev. James E. Welch, as missionaries to the new Missouri Territory. The church had foreign missions at the time, but Peck and Welch were the first home missionaries for the church in the American West. After two month's preparation, these pioneering missionaries left with their families for St. Louis, a journey that took more than four months.

In the book *John Mason Peck and One Hundred Years of Missions*, the conditions in St. Louis were described by authors De Blois and Barnes who wrote, "In the midst of an environment of squalor, confusion, vice and infidelity, with here and there a ray of light imparted by a noble Christian life to illuminate the darkness, the missionaries began their labors for Jesus Christ."

Peck began at once to travel to distant outposts from St. Louis, usually on horseback and nearly always alone. There were no inns in the early days of his ministry, but in any case he could not afford them. He camped between settlements or stayed with families along the way, often sleeping on the floor or in a barn while making arrangements to preach at a local gathering. Sermons were not reserved for Sundays, but might be on any day of the week and often more than once weekly. Travel conditions were also far from ideal which made him appreciate the comforts of home all the more when they were available to him. His family did not accompany him on his mission trips which took him away from home for weeks and months at a time.

In order to take full advantage of his time while traveling long distances to reach frontier settlements of Illinois and Missouri, Peck devised a way to read while in the saddle. The downfall to this strategy was that he sometimes missed turns and had to backtrack to find his way. On these trips he encountered Indians, hunters, woodsmen, farmers and others. These early settlers were able to provide information about this new land to Peck while he in turn gave them news from St. Louis and other settlements in addition to his religious message. He also inquired about education wherever he went and encouraged the hiring of educated men from the East as teachers. Peck organized nearly as many schools as mission congregations.

One of Peck's first trips into Illinois was in August 1818 when the first Illinois Constitutional Convention was being

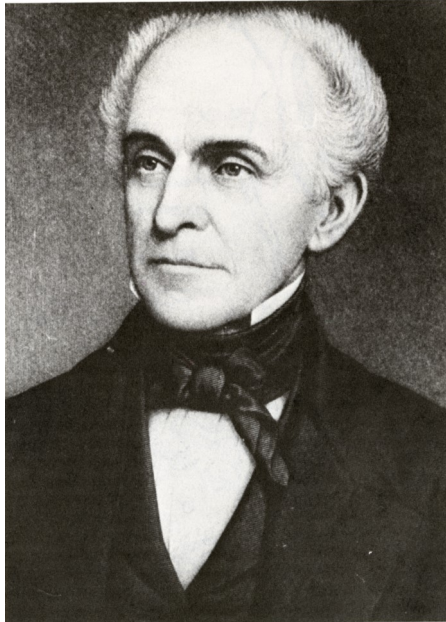
held in advance of Illinois' official date of statehood which would occur on December 3, 1818. This is where he first met Edward Coles of Edwardsville who would become a long-time friend and confidant.

Writing about the Illinois Constitutional Convention of 1818 in his book *Illinois in 1818: a Centennial History of Illinois*, Solon Justice Buck said, "Among the distinguished men known to have been present were the Reverend John Mason Peck, Baptist missionary, who disclaims any business with the convention, and Edward Coles, afterwards governor and leader of the anti-slavery party, who asserts that he not only attend the convention but also made the acquaintance and learned the opinions, views and wishes of many of its prominent members."

Three years after sending Peck and Welch to St. Louis, the Triennial Convention met again, and at this convention they decided to no longer fund the Western Mission. Welch and Peck were abandoned without funds on the frontier. Welch left the religious service, but Peck would not give up his mission and carried on without the benefit of supplies and salary from the church. It was a difficult struggle, but a year later, in 1821, he accepted an allegiance with the Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Society. The Society paid him a far from generous \$5 per week, but it gave him a sponsored connection to the church.

Shortly after, John and Sarah moved to Illinois where they settled on what would become their life-long home, Rock Spring Farm. The "farm," a half section of mostly wooded land with no buildings, was located in St. Clair County, on the Lebanon-O'Fallon Road. The Pecks gratefully accepted the assistance of locals who helped them put up a house and outbuildings before winter. Peck and his family cleared the land, and for most of their lives, it was this small farm that provided income and sustenance for the Peck family. Thousands of dollars raised by Peck over the years in the name of the church were all put back into his ministry.

From this base Peck travelled thousands of miles each year, promoting education and faith on the American frontier. As a representative of both the American Bible Society and the Missionary Society, Peck preached and organized Sunday schools (the precursor of congregations) all over



Governor Edward Coles, friend and confidant of John Mason Peck.



House built by Peck at Rock Springs as pictured in the book "John Mason Peck and One Hundred Years of Missions (1817-1917)"

# APOSTLE OF THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER VALLEY

Illinois and Missouri, but also travelled into Indiana, Iowa, Arkansas, and beyond. Four times during his career he made fundraising trips to the East to obtain money to pay for schools, salaries for circuit preaching missionaries, and publications. He had a deep well of knowledge about the frontier and the Baptist movement on the frontier so on these trips he was a popular speaker and preacher.

He organized the Bible Society of Madison County in 1824 which was soon accepted as a branch of the American Bible Society (ABS) for which Peck was its first agent in Illinois. The primary function of ABS was the distribution of Bibles and Testaments in an area of the country that had no bookstores and where general stores did not carry Bibles. Bibles were a difficult commodity to find in the West and Peck distributed thousands of them over the 40 years of his ministry.

In support of Edward Coles' efforts to keep Illinois a free state, in 1824 Peck organized the St. Clair Society for the Prevention of Slavery in the State of Illinois. According to James Simeone in *Democracy and Slavery in Frontier Illinois*, newspaperman T. W. Smith then accused Governor Coles of rallying religious leaders to preach against a new Illinois Constitutional Convention. He wasn't wrong. Peck's St. Clair organization included 30 ministers. Smith's accusation then led to an attack on missionaries that lasted for more than a decade. Those supporting a convention (which would have likely resulted in Illinois becoming a slave state) believed ministers should not be allowed to hold public office and they should remain apart from "worldly politics." They were especially hard on the Methodists, but also the Baptists who the Conventionists thought were trying to control their lives.

It is clear that much of the anti-missionary fervor also came from ministers who feared the missionaries would draw converts from their congregations. Many western ministers at that time had no education beyond the elementary level and some were illiterate, unable to even read the Bible. Peck advocated for trained ministers who would replace the

uneducated. He recruited educated men throughout the West to become preachers and leaders in the Sunday School movement.

Peck was more than concerned about the quality and availability of education in the West. In fact, when he first arrived in Missouri, he said a third of the available schools "did more harm than good." In 1827, Peck, a former teacher, founded a school called Rock Spring Seminary at his farm. Peck viewed the school, which offered high school and seminary course work, as a way to obtain educated men for the missionary field. He had already founded hundreds of Sunday schools but they needed leadership to survive.

Rock Spring Seminary was the first school in the state of Illinois to offer education beyond the primary level. In 1831 the school was moved to Upper Alton which the Board of Trustees considered a more central location for people travelling to the school. Rock

Spring Seminary became Alton Seminary when it moved, and changed its name to Alton College in 1833 when it received a charter from the State of Illinois. In late 1835, on a fundraising trip to the East, Peck received a generous donation of \$10,000 from Dr. Benjamin Shurtleff of Boston. In gratitude, the following year the school's charter was revised to change the name of the school to Shurtleff College.

This is, of course, SIUE's connection to John Mason Peck since the former Shurtleff College campus provided some of the first classroom space for SIUE in the years before the core campus buildings were completed in Edwardsville. Today, the Shurtleff campus is home to the Southern Illinois University School of Dental Medicine. In addition to this physical connection, John Mason Peck as an advocate and champion of education in the pioneer era of Illinois would be reason enough for recognition.

Although religion was at the heart of Peck's work and education was of considerable importance, he was much more than a man of religion. He was an astute

(Cont page 6)

## TEMPERANCE

Temperance was another serious concern for Peck who spoke against the consumption of alcohol in nearly every sermon. He said that in addressing new converts there were three things of special importance:

- 1) to abstain entirely from all ardent spirits
- 2) to perform family **prayer** daily and to instruct their children
- 3) to make it a conscientious business to support the Gospel

## SARAH PAINE PECK

Sarah Paine Peck was called John Mason Peck's perfect helpmate which he acknowledged in a letter to a friend after her death in October 24, 1856. An excerpt is below:

"My Dear Brother,

Before this reaches your office, you will have seen in the *Western Watchman*, and perhaps other papers, the weighty and crushing affliction that has befallen me.

The wife I have loved was an extraordinary wife and mother, and I think, in justice to her memory, and as an illustration of my poor labors, I ought to devote one reminiscence to her, a remarkable help-mate in all my labors and efforts. I had never thought it expedient and proper to write

or speak in praise of my late dear wife while living; but now she has finished her course, it ought to be known in what sense and to what extent she was the help-mate, pre-eminently in every department of labor her husband undertook. I now assure all my friends that had not that woman possessed the principles, and been the wise, prudent, self-denying HEAD, and government of my family she was, I could not have made half the sacrifices, and performed half the services my kind friends have attributed to me. She was destitute of all sentimentality, never manifested the nervous emotions of many females, while her mind and feelings were under perfect self-control."



## JOHN MASON PECK

observer of the country and people surrounding him. Because of his numerous articles published in newspapers and journals in the East, he gained a well-deserved reputation as a knowledgeable source of information and received hundreds of letters from people interested in moving west.

In response, he wrote a book in 1831, *A Guide for Emigrants; Containing Sketches of Illinois, Missouri, and the Adjacent Parts*. The book covered the geography, populations, village profiles, economic prospects and more for communities throughout the states and became a textbook for prospective settlers. By this time, Peck had travelled the roads, trails and rivers of Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, Arkansas and Kentucky and knew the terrain and the residents well. Contemporaries wrote that he knew the frontier better than any other man of his time.

The emigrant's guide would not be Peck's last book. A few years later the State of Illinois paid for him to write a *Gazetteer of Illinois for Emigrants*. There were numerous other books, but his best known was a biography of Daniel Boone whom he knew personally. He wrote or edited nearly a dozen books, some with multiple editions.

It's interesting to note that although Peck's books were popular, he never earned a lot of money from them. He was always so short on funds that he sold the rights to them as soon as they were ready for publication.



*Loomis Hall, on College Avenue in Alton, was built in 1832, the earliest college building in Illinois. Named for Rev. Hubbell Loomis, a long-time instructor and president of the college, it was the only college building for many years and also used for church services. Loomis Hall still stands on the campus of the SIU School of Dental Medicine but is today home for the Alton Museum of History and Art. (MCHS)*

Other writings by Peck included the *Western Pioneer and Baptist Standard Bearer*, the first religious newspaper east of Ohio which he edited. This publication which was published under various names over 12 years was a financial burden on Peck who was always scrambling for funds to feed his family. The publication lost about \$200 annually, which Peck covered because he thought it was an important tool in preaching the Gospel. He was also a prolific writer of letters, composing 20-30 letters per day, many of them several pages in length, in order to stay in touch with various organizations that supported his work as well as personal correspond-

ence with many public figures that came into his circle. These included all of the governors of Illinois until his death in 1858. He was good friends with many of them, but especially Edward Coles and Ninian Edwards. He baptized Edwards' children and preached at his funeral. Although he visited governors and even U. S. presidents, counting many as friends, he was not fond of politicians in general. After one visit to the Illinois capital he said, "I find them not good for the soul."

Peck was a witness to history and, to the benefit of generations to follow, he wrote down his observations and collected historical documents. In addition to the above, he filled dozens of journals which were used by Rufus Babcock to write Peck's memoirs after his death. In 1852 a fire at the original Rock Spring Seminary destroyed that

(Cont page 7)

## UPPER ALTON IN 1831 - FROM PECK'S *GUIDE FOR EMIGRANTS*

"Upper Alton is from one half to two miles east from Lower Alton, in section 7 of township 5 north, range 9 west of the third principal meridian.

Its situation is high and healthy, and contained last spring thirty-five families and two hundred souls. Its numbers, within a few months, have augmented nearly one third. The soil of the surrounding country is fertile, and rolling; the prevailing timber, walnut, hickory, and oak.

In March it had two stores, one tavern, one blacksmith, one ox flouring mill, one wagon maker, one tannery, one saddler, one shoe maker, one brickmaker, two carpenters, two physicians, one pottery, for coarse earthen ware, one post office, and a brick school-house building.

Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians, have organized societies, and preaching alternately by one of these denominations every Sabbath. A flourishing Sabbath school is kept up. At Upper Alton, the first Sunday school in Illinois was opened in 1819.

Alton has been retarded in growth from several causes, but especially from several conflicting claims to the soil, which have happily terminated in a decision of court according to the mutual agreement of all the claimants. Titles are now perfectly secure."

# APOSTLE OF THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER VALLEY

building along with a large part of Peck's library. Many documents of historical significance were lost in the fire, including most of the Illinois papers of Edward Coles which had been given to Peck for safekeeping. But much was saved, including Peck's journals. His personal library and journals were donated to the Mercantile Library in St. Louis after his death where many of them can be found today. Unfortunately, at some point in its history, a custodian at the library didn't recognize the value in Peck's journals and they were burned. (Note: The Mercantile Library is now part of the University of Missouri St. Louis Library.)

After 1836 Peck suffered from ill health off and on for the rest of his life but continued his work when he was able. By the late 1840s, he had given up many of the leadership roles that required extensive travel, but Peck's version of slowing down differs from most. He continued to write prolifically and minister with his preaching confined to those churches he was most familiar with, at Rock Spring, Edwardsville, Belleville, Bethel and St. Louis.

Then other challenges were offered and he couldn't refuse. In 1852 he was awarded an honorary doctoral degree from Harvard and the following year made his last trip to the east coast to raise funds and visit Harvard. He accepted a leadership role in the Baptist Publications Society and spent two years away from home travelling through all the states west of the Mississippi River.

From the time he began his work as a pioneer missionary until his later years, Peck saw the wilderness change dramatically as emigrants to the frontier arrived. He once said that sitting on his porch at Rock Spring he saw "so many people arriving from Tennessee and Kentucky that those states must be breaking up." As the land became more populated his journeys into the wilderness to recover souls became wider, taking him as far west as the Kansas border, north to Cook County in Illinois, and south into Kentucky and Arkansas. After setting up Sunday schools and developing a network in an area, he then assigned circuit preachers to cover those congregations and moved on to communities that had not yet been reached.

Peck's wife Sarah died in late 1856. Not long after Peck's health became too frail for him to travel. His last trip was in 1857 when he took a steamer to Galena, Illinois, which was near the homes of his children in Iowa, then returned to Rock Spring via Chicago, visiting friends along the way. Peck died on Sunday, March 15, 1858 at his home at Rock Spring. He was initially buried on the farm, but a month later was reinterred at Bellefontaine Cemetery in St. Louis where a handsome marker was erected from funds donated by his admirers. An inscription reads: "My witness is in heaven; my record is on high."

Peck's influence on Madison County was one of such significance that both comprehensive Madison County histories (1882 and 1912) contain biographies of him even though he was never a resident of the county. He founded numerous churches in Madison County, particularly the Baptist churches in Alton, organized numerous Sunday schools, established the first college, and published a religious newspaper here. Although not a resident, he was greatly influential to the advancement of Madison County during the pioneer era.

Pictured here is the Illinois State Historic Marker on the grounds of SIU School of Dental Medicine in Alton. Installation of the marker in 2000 was sponsored by the Shurtleff Fund and the Illinois State Historical Society. The text on the marker reads:

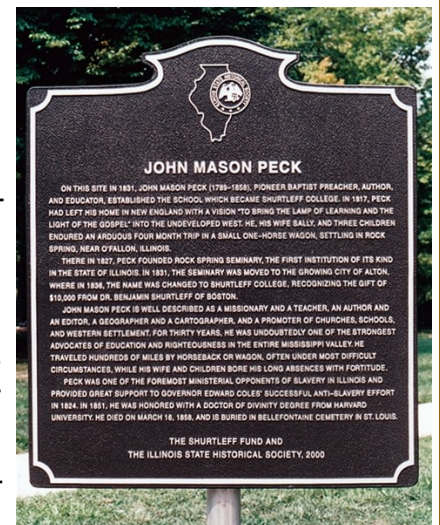
On this site in 1831, John Mason Peck (1789-1858), pioneer Baptist preacher, author, and educator, established the school which became Shurtleff College. In 1817, Peck had left his home in New England with a vision "to bring the lamp of learning and the light of the gospel" into the undeveloped West. He, his wife Sally, and three children endured an arduous four month trip in a small one-horse wagon, settling in Rock Spring, near O'Fallon, Illinois.

There, in 1827, Peck founded Rock Spring Seminary, the first institution of its kind in the State of Illinois. In 1831, the seminary was moved to the growing city of Alton, where, in 1836, the name was changed to Shurtleff College, recognizing the gift of \$10,000 from Dr. Benjamin Shurtleff of Boston.

John Mason Peck is well described as a missionary and a teacher, an author and an editor, a geographer and a cartographer, and a promoter of churches,

schools, and western settlement. For thirty years, he was undoubtedly one of the strongest advocates of education and righteousness in the entire Mississippi Valley. He traveled hundreds of miles by horseback or wagon, often under most difficult circumstances, while his wife and children bore his long absences with fortitude.

Peck was one of the foremost ministerial opponents of slavery in Illinois and provided great support to Governor Edward Coles' successful anti-slavery effort in 1824. In 1851, he was honored with a Doctor of Divinity degree from Harvard University. He died on March 16, 1858, and is buried in Bellefontaine Cemetery in St. Louis.



*Notes: There have been numerous books and many articles written about John Mason Peck so this article provides only a brief overview of his life and work. If you'd like to read more, Google Books has a number of titles available for reading at no cost. Other web sources include an article at [www.sbhla.org](http://www.sbhla.org) (Southern Baptist Historical Library), and an article and Peck bibliography at <http://baptisthistoryhomepage.com/peck.john.m.index.html>. In addition to Peck's memoirs edited by Rufus Babcock, information about Peck can also be found in books on Edward Coles or books on the fight to prevent slavery in Illinois. Contemporary newspapers have many articles about Peck who fortunately left behind a well-documented account of his life and times.*





**Madison County  
Historical Society**  
*Opening Doors to Madison County History*

**801 N. Main Street  
Edwardsville, IL 62025**

**Address Service Requested**

PRSRT STD  
Non-Profit  
Organization  
U.S. Postage  
Paid  
Permit #9  
Edwardsville, IL  
62025

## **SPRING CALENDAR**

**SUNDAY, APRIL 15  
2 P.M.**

**ROBERT WADLOW  
ALTON'S GENTLE GIANT (1918-2018)  
PRESENTERS: THE HISTORY CHIX**

**SUNDAY, JUNE 10  
2 P.M.**

**EMANCIPATION IN ILLINOIS  
PRESENTER: PROF. BRYAN JACK**

**PROGRAM LOCATION:  
IMMANUEL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
800 N. MAIN STREET, EDWARDSVILLE**

## **IN PRAISE OF JOHN MASON PECK**

"So goes out the light of one of the most useful men that the Mississippi Valley has ever known."  
*Missouri Republican*, St. Louis, Missouri  
March 17, 1858 (John Mason Peck obituary)

"When John Mason Peck began his work in St. Louis, Mo, in 1817, there were scarcely a score of Baptist churches in the great Mississippi Valley and when he died in 1858 there were more than 2,000, and the marvelous growth was largely the result of Peck's energy, earnestness and consecrated continuity. He was a great man, and of him may be truly said: "There was a man sent by God whose name was John Peck.""  
*Democrat and Chronicle*, Rochester, New York  
April 17, 1896

## **REMINDER**

**The Historical Museum  
Remains Closed for Renovations**



**The Archival Library is open regular hours:  
Wed-Fri 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.; Sun 1 - 4 p.m.**