



MCHS News

Sept 2019

Opening Doors to Madison County History

Vol. 7 No. 5

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

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.

REMEMBERING JOHN WILDI OF HIGHLAND

The name "John Wildi" might be all but forgotten here in Madison County if not for the John Wildi Masonic Temple in Highland, Illinois. Wildi was one of the founders of the Helvetia Milk Condensing Company which later became Pet Milk, but in one of those tricks of history, his role has slowly diminished over time so that today, the only name most associate with the invention of

condensed milk in Madison County is Louis Latzer. Without diminishing Latzer's role, this issue of the MCHS News will introduced readers to the financial genius of John Wildi who had a major role, some might argue an equal role, in the development of the condensed milk industry.

Born Feb. 17, 1853, John Wildi Jr. was one of 11 children born to John and Elizabeth Wildi in Niederlenz, Canton of Aargau, Switzerland. As the eldest, he was given an excellent education that included fluency in three languages (none of them English) and, most importantly, chemistry.

In 1870, his father, John Wildi Sr., a carpenter, immigrated to America. He settled for a short time in Kansas before moving to Highland to live among Swiss families with language and customs familiar to the Wildi family. In 1872, his wife, Elizabeth, arrived in the United States with their 11 children aged 3-19 years old. Eight years later, in September 1880, John Wildi Jr. became a naturalized citizen of the United States.

After his arrival, John Jr. found work at a local mercantile business, C. Kinne and Company. After less than a year, he made a fortuitous move to the general store of John Jacob Spindler where

he was employed as a clerk. In 1876, he partnered with J. C. Ammann to open the store of Ammann and Wildi. He bought out Ammann in 1892 and the new business, a general store, was called "The Highland Store," a fixture in Highland for many years. Wildi served as president until he retired from the mercantile business in 1899.

The retail business gave him his start and provided funds for him to move into other enterprises. It also introduced him to the woman who would become his wife. On Sept. 4, 1879, John Wildi Jr. married Louisa Spindler. Louisa was the daughter of John Jacob Spindler, the proprietor of the store where Wildi found early employment and one of the early Swiss settlers of Highland.

While still in the retail business, in 1883, he partnered with his brother-in-law, John J. Spindler Jr., his brother, Alfred Wildi, and others in the embroidery business. The Highland Embroidery Works was a major employer in Highland operated by John Spindler Jr. and his family for 50 years. John Wildi stayed for only a short time, because he soon had other interests.

The Highland Embroidery Works was just one of many savvy investments Wildi made over the years. He was co-founder of a Highland bank, invested in farmland and buildings in Highland and beyond, made loans to individuals (with interest) and more.

In 1884, John Meyenberg, a Swiss national, came to Highland looking for investors. He had patents to produce condensed milk, a process he had learned while working for a milk company in Switzerland.

Prior to this time, the only condensed milk available was sweetened



John Wildi (MCHS)

continued page 4

ABOUT US

MCHS BOARD

Candace Ladd, Pres
Stephen Hansen, V-Pres
Arnold Meyer, Treas
Tallin Curran, Sec
Norma Asadorian
Leslie Bednar
Robert Clouse
Arno Ellis
Lynn Engelman
Fred Faust
Don Huber
Lacy McDonald
Stephen Mudge
Jeff Pauk
Cindy Reinhardt

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. If interested, please call 618-656-7569.

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, or at the Archival Library.

PUBLICATIONS

MCHS NEWS

6 issues annually
Cindy Reinhardt, Editor

ARCHIVAL LIBRARY SPOTLIGHT

By Mary Westerhold

HAPPENINGS

IN THE "SPIRIT" OF OCTOBER

October is often a month when media focus on the paranormal. At the Archival Library, patrons who are researching their house history often suspect their house may be haunted. The question that usually clues the staff into this fact is "Did anyone die in the house?"

With our modern hospitals and funeral homes, it is easy to forget that, in terms of history, the current use of these is relatively new. The sick were cared for in the home and usually died there. The dead were laid out in the parlor of the home for friends and family to express their condolences. So if your home was built and occupied before the mid-1900s, there is a good chance that someone died in the house.

Researching house histories is the second most popular research project at the Archival Library, with the most popular research project being family history. However, a house history also involves the history of the families that lived there. And the Archival Library staff is always ready to help you find the resources needed.

If you are researching the history of your house, whether you believe it is haunted or not, any knowledge of previous owners, even just one name, is helpful. When possible, city directories are used to establish the timeline of the residents. In addition, the Archival Library staff will search the library files for information and photos relating to the house and the residents.

Regardless of your research project, the staff is ready to help!

MUSEUM SPOTLIGHT

By Jenn VanBibber

REFLECTING ON SPOOKY ARTIFACTS

The scent of pumpkin spice lattes will soon usher in fall with cooler temperatures and shorter nights. Before you know it, costumed children will be running amok in the streets on Halloween. This is the perfect opportunity to embrace our ghostly history. After all, Madison County is home to Alton, often touted as one of the most haunted cities in Illinois.

MCHS holds a number of artifacts that might remind readers of the season. These include armaments, tombstones, and gruesome medical tools. Another such item is the wooden child-sized coffin featured in a previous article about the donor's family and their connection to the funeral business.

Changes in the funeral practices were spurred by the Civil War. Up to that time, families took care of their dead. They treated their loved one with care as they washed, dressed, and laid out the body at home. If not in a coffin, the deceased was placed on a table, bed, or on a plank/door supported by a pair of sawhorses. Someone would build the six-sided coffin or they would envelope the body with a shroud. Others had the job of digging the grave or making meals for the family as they sat with their loved one.

In some cases the body was laid out for a number of days in the house. It took time to build the coffin and dig the grave, but another consideration in earlier times was that

the early stages of body decomposition assured that no one was buried alive.

Embalming became more common after the war when it was used to preserve the bodies of fallen soldiers for the last trip home. Embalming as well as the growth of communities helped turn undertaking from a person who "under took" responsibility for the arrangements and casket construction to a profession.

BEHIND THE SCENES

One of the primary jobs of the archival and curatorial staff is research. Requests for research from visitors and research on items in the MCHS collections are on-going responsibilities.

When viewing an exhibit or reading a newsletter article, museum patrons are seeing only a small portion of the work behind what is in view. Beneath the surface are countless hours of research. Sometimes the research leads to what is expected, and other times the outcome isn't one that fits the narrative, but either way, needs to be recorded. The story behind an object is just as important as the item, photograph, or document because that work places it in its historical context.

Although the museum building is currently closed, the staff is devoting thousands of hours to research that is well-worth the investment.



LIVING HISTORY DAYS

On Saturday, Sept. 21, area residents are invited to step back in time to 1898 and experience a Chautauqua at Living History Days from 3-7 p.m. at Edwardsville City Park in Edwardsville, Illinois.

Chautauquas were popular entertainments across the country in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. They were typically travelling “shows” that emphasized entertainment and education by presenting a program of musical performances, humorists and speakers. This recreation of a Chautauqua event will last only four hours, although in the past these popular entertainments typically lasted for two to three weeks. Famous personalities who travelled the Chautauqua circuit included celebrities of the time. The events were so popular that Teddy Roosevelt called them “the most American thing in America.”

This 21st Century Chautauqua will include living history re-enactors portraying Mark Twain, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, William Jennings Bryan, Booker T. Washington and Mother Jones, as well as musical entertainments, food and beverages available on-site as well as selected vendors offering books and other appropriate products for an 1898 venue. There will also be children’s activities making this a family-friendly event.

The event is a made possible through the cooperative efforts of the Madison County Historical Society, the 1820 Col. Benjamin Stephenson House, and the Southern Illinois University Edwardsville Department of Historical Studies. Funding is provided through grants from the City of Edwardsville and the SIUE Meridian Society.

MCHS STORY FEATURED

On August 15, The *Troy Times Tribune* published a special edition on the City of Collinsville that included an article from the July 2016 edition of the *MCHS News*. The article, “Collinsville: An Early History” was reprinted with permission of MCHS.

UNDERGROUND RAILROAD SUNDAY, OCTOBER 13 - 2 P.M.

The final program in the 2019 Madison County Historical Society (MCHS) Speaker Series will be held on Sunday, October 13 at 2 p.m. Historian J. Eric Robinson will tell the story of two women, slaves in the state of Missouri, who escaped to freedom in 1853 via the Underground Railroad in northwestern Madison County. The title of the program is “Gertrude Barlabie, Amanda Kitchell and Those Who Helped Them.”

Robinson is a graduate of Howard University and the University of Missouri-Columbia and is currently an assistant professor of history at the Saint Louis College of Pharmacy. He is a former president of the Elijah P. Lovejoy Memorial of Alton. Since 1995, his tours of the Underground Railroad in Alton have attracted guests from almost every state and four continents. The tours have been featured in the New York Times, Business Week, and on the BBC World Service. An award-winning essayist, Robinson’s current project is a book on Gertrude Barlabie’s escape from slavery in St. Louis to freedom in Canada.



J. Eric Robinson (photo by Eric Pan)

MCHS Speaker programs are held in the fellowship hall of Immanuel United Methodist Church at 800 N. Main Street in Edwardsville, Illinois. Programs are free and open to the public.

TRIVIA NIGHT RESULTS

The MCHS Trivia Night was a resounding success thanks to the experience and exceptional organization of Norma and Eddie Asadorian. Thank you to everyone who participated, donated, volunteered or otherwise helped with the event, but especially our sponsors:

Afterwords Books, Eddie and Norma Asadorian, Robert Clouse, Arno Ellis, Lynn Engelman, Madison County Board Member Chris Hankins, Stephen and Julie Hansen, Inland Design, Arnold Meyer, Stephen Mudge, Old Herald Brewery & Distillery, and Target. Also, a big thank you to the Reed, Armstrong, Mudge and Morrissey PC, Attorneys at Law for the donation of four box seats Cardinal baseball tickets for the live auction.

2019 NEW AND RENEWING MEMBERS

July - August ♦ Thank you for supporting MCHS!

\$250 Benefactor
Charles McKittrick

\$100 Patron
Carol Peters Gocken

\$50 Family
Andrew & Chelsea Asadorian
Paul & Barb Pizzini
Ed Small

\$35 Individual
Karen Bode Baxter
Rachel Brown
Victoria Bundy
Christy Butler
Mary Ann Fagan
Janet Foehr Kolb
Laurie Frey
Roland Harris
Bernard Hellmann

Tina Hubert
Linda Lawrence
Cindy Leonard
Donna Lewis
Carol Manning
Angelina McLoughlin-Heil
Kerry Miller
Lynn Rehberger
Ronda Ribble

Velma Schmidt
Diane Schrader
Jill Secoy
Alicia Shah
Andrea Trampe
Dorothy Zwettler

JOHN WILDI



Employees and buildings of the Helvetia Milk Condensing Company plant in Highland, Illinois. (The Highland Museum and Roland Harris)

because sugar was needed to keep the milk from spoiling. Through an evaporation process, the milk was condensed, the sugar was added, and it was canned. No one had previously been able to can unsweetened milk that could be reconstituted. In a time when refrigeration was not available to most of the world, unsweetened canned milk was a revolution. Today, the two products are generally referred to as "sweetened condensed" or "evaporated" milk, but they are essentially the same product except for the sugar. Both were called "condensed milk" in the early days.

After a series of meetings with Meyenberg, John Wildi, Dr. John Knoebel and Adolph Glock pulled together a group of businessmen and prominent farmers to solicit \$15,000 in subscriptions to fund the new enterprise. Notably, one of that group was a man named Louis Latzer. It was less than two months from the time Wildi and the other men met with Meyenberg in late December 1884, until the Helvetia Milk Condensing Company was formally organized on Feb. 15, 1885. The directors were John Knoebel, George Roth, John Wildi, Louis Latzer and Fred Kaeser. Knoebel, the oldest of the group at 53, was named president and Wildi, the youngest at 32, was named secretary/treasurer. Meyenberg, superintendent of manufacturing, set about ordering the equipment needed while the rest of the board worked to convert an old wool factory.

With great fanfare, production began June 14, 1885 with the first products labeled "Highland Milk." However, all was not as they had hoped. Although some of the milk was the product promised, a great deal was returned when it spoiled. And there were other problems that caused periodic shut-downs. For example, the new equipment needed many adjustments, and there wasn't enough water so artesian wells had to be drilled. Sometime in 1886, Meyenberg, who was generally blamed for the failures, was asked to take a reduced salary until the spoilage problem was solved. He refused and left the company.

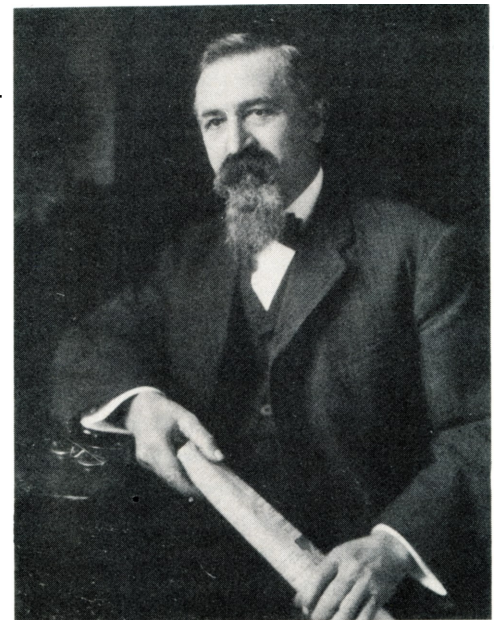
Also in 1886, Latzer was made president and took charge of production. Latzer had studied chemistry, as had Wildi, Knoebel and a fourth contributor, Dr. Werner Schmidt. Under Latzer's direction, they all worked on solving the spoilage problem.

In addition, as secretary/treasurer, Wildi was responsible

for the formation of business policies, finance and marketing plans that would lead to the success of the organization. There were numerous times when bank failures and other events out of their control, threatened the company's finances, but Wildi pulled them through the emergencies by calling in favors or finding alternative ways to keep the business afloat.

By 1890, the spoilage problem had been solved and Wildi's marketing genius became clear. Initially, a major strategy was to give away the product because once introduced, customers came back for more. One of the first "give-aways" was to the people of Galveston in November 1885 after a devastating fire. The company continued this practice following major disasters. Wildi targeted retailers, doctors and those in a position to purchase large quantities, like the U. S. Government. Orders from the military during the Spanish-American War were so great the company could hardly keep pace. He built international sales by appearing at the Paris Exposition of 1889, the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, and other fairs where their product won blue ribbons and their reputation grew as a result.

In the 1890s, Wildi's marketing strategy appealed to three primary markets. First, specific geographic areas; i.e., semi-tropical climates, isolated communities that included the Far East, the American South, and the Northwest Territories that were still largely unsettled. Secondly, it was promoted as an infant formula and considered "purer" than sweetened condensed milk that had been the only option previously when breastfeeding was not



Louis Latzer . (MCHS)

continued page 5

AND THE HELVETIA MILK CONDENSING COMPANY

Absolutely Pure. A SUPERIOR CREAM.
Unsweetened. A DELICACY FOR COFFEE.
A PERFECT FOOD
FOR
INFANTS AND INVALIDS.

ENDORSED BY ALL PHYSICIANS.

Write for Pamphlet and Fine Chromo. Address
Helvetia Milk Condensing Co.,
 HIGHLAND, ILL.

LEE-DEMING GROCER CO.,
 200 North Main Street. Agents for St. Louis.



1889 advertisement from St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

possible. The third area of promotion was in recipes, although this strategy, the primary appeal today, did not gain in popularity until the 1920s.

An article in 1894 said, "The products found a market in nearly every country on the globe, and the enterprise has brought wealth to the primary stockholders."

When competing products began to appear in the early 1890s, sales slowed until Wildi suggested that they add another brand, "Economy," in addition to their "Highland" brand. A few years later, a customer requested a baby-sized can which the company called "Our Pet." By 1907, "Pet" was the best-selling of all the company's brands and, as everyone now knows, eventually replaced Helvetia Milk Condensing Company as the name of the firm, but that was not until 1923.

Unfortunately, not all the original stockholders gained wealth from the company. Many of the farmers who held small amounts of stock in the beginning gave up on the company ever becoming profitable. Several years had passed and there were no dividends and a still unperfected product (some shipments were still being returned due to spoilage). They sold or traded their stock for whatever they could get. One resident paid the doctor who delivered his child with a share of stock, one man traded his stock for two barrels of cider, another for children's shoes. The stock was eventually bought up by some of the larger stockholders so that by 1906 there were just three major stockholders, Louis Latzer, Fritz Kaeser and John Wildi.

The two who stayed with the company from the beginning, Louis Latzer and John Wildi, both became very wealthy men. They shared credit for the company's success, they partnered with others to establish Highland's State and Trust Bank in 1903 and participated in many community events together.

But then came what the company later called "the Wildi dispute." Sometime after the turn of the century, Latzer and Wildi began to disagree on the direction of company policies. As the company grew the number of managerial employees was increased. In 1905 or 1906, the company hired an advertising executive, John F. Montgomery, who had married Wildi's only child, Hedwig Wildi, in September 1904. This was not unusual since Latzer's sons were in the business as well as Kaeser's son and son-in-law. But for reasons unknown today, Latzer didn't like Montgomery.

In 1906, Latzer and Wildi's differences became more pronounced and Latzer's connection to Kaeser became very close. Latzer's daughter, Mary Jane, married Fritz Kaeser's

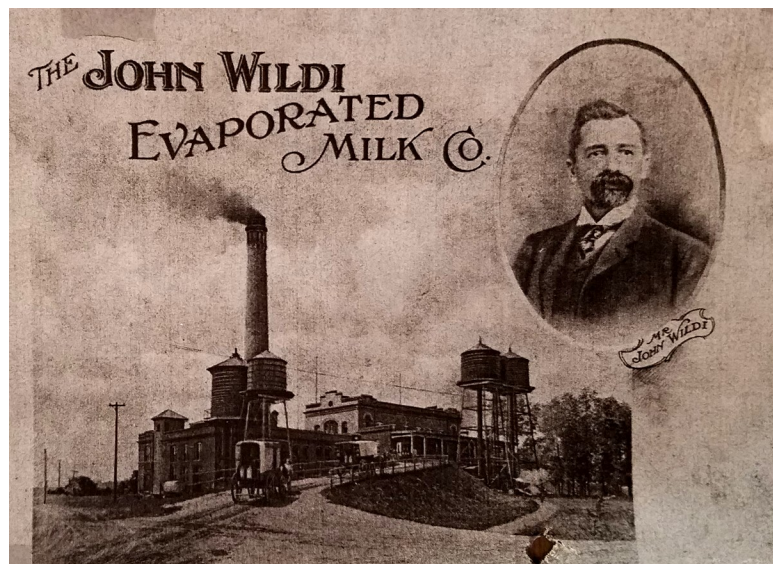
son, Albert, making two of the three major stockholders a united family that could out-vote Wildi. According to the Wildi family descendants, at the 1907 Annual Meeting of the Helvetia Milk Condensing Company, Wildi was forced out of daily operations. He was no longer the secretary/treasurer of the company he co-founded. However, since he still owned over one-third of the stock, he was still on the board. At that same meeting the board passed new laws forbidding board members from working in the milk condensing business.

Six months later, with his son-in-law, John Montgomery, Wildi established the John Wildi Evaporated Milk Company with offices in Highland and a factory in Marysville, Ohio. In later years, people claimed he was fired because he had started a competing company, but there is no evidence that the new company was started until after he was let go. Wildi had devoted nearly a quarter century to the condensed milk business. With his record of success, it was logical that he would look for work in the same industry.

The Helvetia Board was outraged and insisted Wildi couldn't serve on the Board while operating a competing company. He had the votes to remain on the Board, over one-third of the company's stock, but they denied him entry. The Wildi family sued and won in the Illinois Appellate court. The Board's change in requirements for Board membership passed in 1907 was ruled invalid. The suit did not make it through the courts until November 1911, more than a year after John Wildi's death. He died Feb. 15, 1910, at the age of 57, leaving Helvetia stock to his widow, Louisa Wildi, and John Wildi Evaporated Milk Company stock to his daughter. Helvetia could no longer say that the owner of the Wildi stock also owned stock in a competing company.

By now the gulf of distrust and betrayal between the Latzer and Wildi families had widened, and the recorded story of Helvetia Milk Condensing Company slowly changed. With Wildi deceased, his part in the success of the company slowly faded and in a company history published in 1962, although given some credit, he is made to be something of a villain in the story, or at the very least portrayed as being an unreasonable man.

Looking at the progression of the story, in the 1800s Latzer and Wildi are given equal credit for the company's success in



Promotional material for John Wildi Evaporated Milk Co. of Marysville, Ohio (Roland Harris)

continued page 6

JOHN WILDI AND THE HELVETIA MILK CONDENSING COMPANY

news articles. Wildi did not contribute to the *Portrait and Biographical Record of Madison County* published in 1894, but Latzer did. These biographies were approved, if not written, by the subjects who paid to be included in this kind of book. Latzer's article told the story of his many community accomplishments followed by the story of Helvetia Milk Condensing Company. After relating how the canning process was at first not as successful as Meyenberg had claimed, the article then told of the combined efforts of Latzer and Wildi.

"Mr. Latzer with another stockholder, John Wildi (now Secretary and Treasurer of the company), set about perfecting the process, both having some knowledge of chemistry, and being encouraged by other large stockholders. A laboratory was fitted up, and soon their present process was in successful operation. Largely through the efforts of these two gentlemen, what had at one time seemed to be a failure, proved a great success."

By the time the next county history was written in 1912, the story was already changing. In the *Centennial History of Madison County*, Latzer's biography, which included his work with Helvetia Milk Condensing, did not mention Wildi's name. Wildi's biography, written after his death, is lengthy and attributes success of the company entirely to Wildi. A third article on the history of the company in the same publication only mentions Wildi in passing as a "business manager from the start who retired in 1907."

No one knows for certain what the issues were that divided these two great men, but it is unfortunate that, after such a struggle to bring the Helvetia Milk Condensing Company to success, they could not have remained friends.

After John's death, the Wildi family's struggles with Helvetia (and vice versa) continued as the company tried various ways

to obtain Louisa Wildi's stock in Helvetia. That is a story too long for these few pages. Sixteen years after John was forced from the company, Louisa sold her stock in 1923 for \$20,000 per share, a total of \$3,520,000. The price was far above face value and the sale made headlines across the country.



Louisa Wildi (John Wildi Masonic Temple)

THE HOME OF JOHN AND LOUISA WILDI

The first known building at the corner of 9th and Walnut Streets was initially a business failure. John Rudolph Blattner, who purchased the lots in 1840, built a large building with the intent of turning it into a silk factory. Since silkworms eat mulberry leaves, he bought and planted hundreds of mulberry trees. Unfortunately, the trees didn't leaf out in time to provide food for the silkworms. Undeterred, Blattner turned the building into the Switzerland House, a hotel and tavern that occupied that corner for nearly 50 years under different owners.



John Wildi's Residence, Highland, Ill.

A photo postcard of the Wildi home, circa 1905. Harris)

In the spring of 1898, the building and three lots were purchased by John Wildi who allowed the previous owners to occupy the old hotel until October of that year. The building was then torn down to allow for the construction of the Wildi family home. On February 1, 1900, the local newspaper announced, "John Wildi has moved his household affects into his handsome new home on Pestalozzi Street," (Note: 9th Street was formerly Pestalozzi Street.)

The beautiful late Victorian brick home was spacious with four floors, including the lower level or basement. There were four bedrooms upstairs, a library and breakfast room in addition to the parlors on the main floor and beautiful woodwork throughout. It was a home that reflected the prestige of its owner.

But the Wildi family would not live there for long. A few years after John's death in 1910, his wife, Louisa, moved to St. Louis, then to Ohio, New York and Vermont. After 1914, she never made Madison County her home again.

John had been an active member of the Masonic Lodge which needed a new home. Louisa was very grateful for the contributions of a large contingent of Masons at John's funeral. In a letter after the funeral, John Montgomery expressed the family's gratitude for "brotherly love and affection which each member has shown by his kindness to the stricken family."

continued page 7

2019 DINING IN HISTORY AT THE JOHN WILDI HOME

MCHS will hold its annual Dining in History (DIH) and Annual Meeting at the John Wildi Masonic Temple in Highland, Illinois on November 3. DIH is held each year at a historic property in Madison County where guests can enjoy a catered dinner and learn about the venue through a program and tours. The site for this year's DIH, the historic John Wildi home, was completed in 1900, and donated to Lodge #583 in 1920 by the Wildi family (profiled in this newsletter).

Freemasons were at the height of their popularity in the 1950s with over 4 million members nationwide. There are still over 1 million members in the organization that places an emphasis on philanthropy. Dan Brown's novels made Masonry seem very mysterious, but according to former Grand Master David Hickey, the organization isn't that secretive, and he is privileged to tell its story. A dynamic speaker who knows his subject well, Hickey will provide a program on the history of the

Continued on page 8

THE HOME OF JOHN AND LOUISA WILDI (CONT. FROM PAGE 6)

In 1920, Louisa donated the house for use as a new Masonic Temple along with a trust that continues to provide funds for the maintenance of the building today. According to family members, if the building is no longer used for a Lodge, the trust will return to Louisa's family.

After receiving the building, the Lodge raised funds, some donated by the Wildi/Montgomery families, to build a three-story meeting room on the back of the house that was dedicated in 1921. The addition was carefully blended with the old to create a beautiful and imposing building. In the early days there were two bowling lanes in the basement and a professional kitchen. The main floor of the addition is a meeting room and the third floor has the Lodge Room. Several of the upstairs bedrooms have been converted to museum rooms that include prominent photographs of John and Louisa Wildi. The former Wildi home has now been home to Masonic Lodge #583 for almost a century.

MCHS guests can visit the Wildi home on November 3 at Dining in History (see above).



The John Wildi Masonic Temple shortly after completion of the addition. The first meeting in the new building was held on May 1, 1921. At that time, there was an outstanding construction debt of \$9,000. Louisa Wildi paid that amount and her son-in-law donated an additional \$2,000 to install the basement bowling alley. (MCHS)

THE WILDI FAMILY AFTER LEAVING ILLINOIS

Like her husband, Louisa was financially astute in business and, even without the proceeds from her Helvetia stock, was a wealthy woman who made wise investments. She moved from Madison County due to a tax dispute in 1914, relocating first to St. Louis, then followed her daughter and son-in-law to Columbus, Ohio, and New York City. In the 1920s she bought a summer home in Manchester, Vermont, where newspaper headlines in 1924 proclaimed that she was the wealthiest person in the State of Vermont. After her death in 1944, John Wildi's body was exhumed from Highland's City Cemetery and moved to Manchester to lie beside his wife.

Wildi's son-in-law, John Montgomery, continued in the milk business. After John and Hedwig consolidated their company with Nestle during WW I, John went on to become a national leader in the dairy industry. In 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed him Minister to Hungary, a position he



Hedwig Wildi Montgomery (MCHS) and John Floumoy Montgomery (Manchester Historical Society),

held until 1941 when he left Hungary due to the advancement of World War II. Montgomery wrote a book "The Unwilling Satellite," about Hungary's pre-war years. Many years later, an academic book based on his papers, "Discussing Hitler," was written by Frank Tibor. When they returned to the United States, John and Hedwig brought several Hungarian families with them to safety.

The Vermont home of the family through those years was "The Cascades," a summer cottage near the homes of other prominent New England families. It was a place to escape the heat of summer, even during

the years when John was assigned to his post in Budapest. Although the Cascades was sold after Hedwig and John Montgomery's deaths in 1953-54 respectively, Manchester remains "home" for the family. The town has an annual music festival, the Hedwig Montgomery Memorial Concert which the family endowed in honor of Hedwig's love of music.



Madison County Historical Society

Opening Doors to Madison County History

801 N. Main Street
Edwardsville, IL 62025

Address Service Requested

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

MCHS FALL CALENDAR

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 21
3 P.M. - 7 P.M.

**LIVING HISTORY: A CHAUTAUQUA
WITH MARK TWAIN AND FRIENDS**
Edwardsville City Park
Corner of E. Vandalia and Buchanan
Edwardsville, Illinois

SUNDAY OCTOBER 13 - 2 P.M.
THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD
Presenter: Eric Robinson
Immanuel United Methodist Church
800 N. Main Street, Edwardsville

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 3 - 4 P.M.
2019 DINING IN HISTORY
JOHN WILDI MASONIC TEMPLE
Program: David Hickey
Ticketed Event (see article page 7)
721 9th Street
Highland, Illinois

MARY'S RESEARCH TIP

NEW AT FAMILYSEARCH.ORG

by Mary Westerhold

While I have a subscription to Ancestry.com, I use familysearch.org as often as I do Ancestry. Recently while researching on familysearch.org, I found a marriage record with the camera icon and the option to view the original record. This option was new to me so, of course, I clicked on the original image. It was the digital image of the original marriage book of the county. While it did not provide any additional information (the marriage was in 1821 in Madison County), I was thrilled to see the image. And since this was not my family or even the county where my family settled, I IMMEDIATELY checked to see if that county was digitized and it was. These images can be downloaded to your computer so you have the sources you need to continue your research.

VISITING THE WILDI HOUSE (CONT FROM PAGE 7)

Masons as well as Highland Lodge #583.

The DIH event also includes tours of the building and its museum rooms, as well as a silent auction with some very special items including a time-share vacation package.

Members will receive an invitation

with all the details in early September. The event includes a meal catered by the Urban Farmhouse Eatery and Pie Company of Highland. Tickets are \$40 for members and \$45 for non-members. Guests may register on-line at <https://www.madcohistory.org/dining-in-history/> or by mail. For further information call 618-216-2768.

MCHS GIFT MEMBERSHIPS
AVAILABLE FOR THE HOLIDAYS
CALL 618-656-1294 FOR INFORMATION.