



MCHS News

March 2022

Opening Doors to Madison County History

Vol. 10 No. 2

MUSEUM

715 N Main Street
Edwardsville, IL 62025

The museum building is currently closed for renovation. Exhibits can be found in the Archival Library

ARCHIVAL LIBRARY

801 N Main Street

Hours:

Wed-Fri 9 am - 4 pm

Sunday 1 pm - 4 pm

Phone:

618-656-7569

MCHS CONNECTIONS:

Website:

madcohistory.org

E-mail:

info@madcohistory.org

Society Phone:

618-656-1294

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 and operated by the Madison County Historical Society. The first meeting of the MCHS was held on December 3, 1921.

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

MCHS AWARDED NATIONAL GRANT

MCHS has just learned that it will be the recipient of a substantial grant that will be used to create an interactive/digital map of migration in Madison County. The project is in collaboration with SIUE and will begin May 1.

This is the first national-level grant for the Society and comes following competition with historical societies across the country. This grant provides funding for "Madison County at the Migratory Crossroads," the centerpiece of one of the new museum galleries.

At the center of the exhibit will be a video that incorporates maps, excerpts from interviews with immigrant families, data visualizations and other elements to tell the story of migration

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V-MAIL FROM A MADISON COUNTY GI

By James Weingartner

For soldiers at war, nothing is more important for the maintenance of morale and therefore combat efficiency than continued contact with home. Never was that more evident than during World War II, when millions of young men were separated from those they loved, often for the first time and sometimes for years, and shipped to places both distant and often mortally dangerous. Similarly, civilian morale on the "home front," where the wherewithal for the waging of war was produced, was heavily dependent on regular reassurance that husbands, sons, brothers and sweethearts were alive and well.

World War II was fought long before the advent of cell phones and email while other forms of electronic communication – land-line telephones and telegraph – were normally unavailable between combatants in war zones and their families. That left what we now know as "hard copy" mail as the primary link.

But that, too, was problematic. A typical letter weighed about an ounce. Multiplied by a factor of millions, they occupied precious cargo space that was desperately needed for transporting personnel and war supplies. Victory Mail, or simply V-Mail, initiated by the U.S. in June 1942, provided a solution.

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V...— MAIL

CELEBRATING 100 - SAVE THE DATE!

MCHS will celebrate its centennial year with a picnic at Oakdale, a Grantfork-area farm that has been in the Mudge family since 1836. The event will be held on Sunday, June 12.

The picnic will include a delicious catered meal under tents on the lawn, with live music, a program on the history of the estate, a guided tour of the mansion, and self-guided tours of the grounds.

Invitations and ticket information will be mailed to members who have the first option to attend.



Oakdale, the summer estate of the Mudge family, circa 1900 (Steve Mudge)

ABOUT US

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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 a 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
618-656-1294

MUSEUM & ARCHIVAL LIBRARY SPOTLIGHT

Library staff and volunteers continue to assist in-house and remote researchers with a variety of projects. They have also accepted a number of donations in recent weeks including construction plans from J. J. Wuellner & Son, a collection of Wood River AAUW records, a wedding dress, and many more documents and photographs.

New Research Tool Completed

The long anticipated "Guardianship Index," was completed in January. The new index will help genealogists solve roadblocks in their family trees and learn more about their ancestors.

MCHS has put the index on its website so it can be accessed by anyone, although a visit to the library will be necessary to see the actual records. The index can be found at <https://madcohistory.org/archival-library/archival-library-resources/probate-court-files/>

The guardianship files are part of an estimated 34,000 pre-1960 probate court records donated to the Madison County Historical Society (MCHS) by Madison County government in 2013. Estates involving a minor heir, unlike regular probate files, can be listed under the minor child, the parent, a court appointed attorney or in other ways that make them virtually untraceable without an index. Normal probate files are listed on the cover by surname and were indexed by the Madison County Circuit Clerk's office, an index still in use today.

Additional background is available on the website. The detailed index describes this subset of Madison County probate records dealing with the guardianship of minor heirs of an estate. **This index does not exist anywhere else, and the documents they describe are not available online.**

This was a multi-year project completed by staff and the following volunteers: Betty Byrd, Susan Coffey, Lynn Engelman, Gary Forshaw, Derik Hefferly, Marty Lane, JoAnn Nabe, Don Reaka, Marilyn Sulc, Joan Wentz, and Janet Zuehlke.

The Society is very grateful to this loyal group of volunteers who first worked with Library Research Manager Mary Westerhold, and, after her retirement, with Mary Z. Rose, to create this one-of-a-kind resource.

MCHS Volunteer Projects

Volunteers Gary Foreshaw and Betty Byrd are digitizing a collection of 35 scrapbooks that were created by earlier museum volunteers. Many of the scrapbooks are over 50 years old, so in fragile condition. The content is indexed making them a very resourceful tool for researchers. This project will assure

that the scrapbook contents are available for generations to come.

Laverne Bloemker and Marty Lane are indexing a collection of Alton historic house tour guides (1971-present) in the Alton Houses index.

Cindy Reinhardt has indexed Edwardsville building histories from the annual "This Old House" series and house histories written for the Friends of Leclaire newsletter.

Derek Hefferly (a former intern who became a volunteer) has catalogued photographs, added legacy accessions to PastPerfect, and made protective boxes for the scrapbook collection, among other tasks. He left at the end of January to begin a full-time professional career with the National Archives. We are sorry to lose him as a volunteer, but happy (and proud) that he found his place.

Lauren Russell, an undergraduate intern from SIUE is with MCHS this semester. She is working on transcribing the Spahr diary, cataloguing projectile points and cataloguing the Wueller collection.

Mindy Phillips, an intern in spring and fall 2021, has returned as a volunteer. She is working on a digital collection from the Bertha Love collection.

Scott Oliva is poring over microfilm to gather articles about local railroads. The articles are copied into binders in order by date. Since many of these stories are in newspapers that are not digitized, this work is a tremendous time-saver for railroad buffs. He is currently working on 1923 newspapers.

Update on Driving Apps

The new MCHS Route 66 and architectural tour driving apps still have a few kinks to work out but hundreds have already discovered them on CLIO, the host site. CLIO is an educational website and mobile application that lists thousands of historic and cultural sites throughout the country. To explore, go to: <https://theclio.com/>

RECENT VOLUNTEERS THANK YOU!

Donna Bardon
LaVerne Bloemker
Betty Byrd
Lynn Engelman
Gary Forshaw
John Harvey
Derik Hefferly
Marty Lane
Scott Oliva
Mindy Phillips
Steve Rensberry
Mike Reinhardt
Connie Royston
Mary Westerhold

"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much."

— Helen Keller

RECENT NEWS & INFORMATION

FEBRUARY SPEAKER SERIES ONLINE

The February MCHS Speaker Series program on Sundown Towns in the U.S. and specifically in Madison County is now available on the MCHS website. (<https://madcohistory.org/>) It was slightly delayed, but well worth the wait.

The April Speaker Program will be: "First Do No Harm: An Introduction to Cemetery Preservation" with presenter Jeffrey Pauk.

IRA DISTRIBUTIONS

Caring for History in Retirement

Using an IRA to make a charitable donation to MCHS (a 501(c)3 charitable organization) can help lower your tax bill while helping a worthwhile cause.

According to current tax laws, if you are 70 1/2 or older (traditional IRA) or 59 1/2 (Roth IRA), you can leverage your IRA to make a tax-free contribution of up to \$100,000 per year.

Simply direct a distribution in the amount you choose to the Madison County Historical Society. That contribution, either a one-time donation or a recurring gift, will not be subject to income tax. This is a great solution if you do not need the additional income from the required minimum distribution.

You have the option of giving the minimum deduction limit or you can direct that more be directed to the charity. Not only do you avoid paying income tax on this distribution, you have the satisfaction of knowing that you have made a lasting contribution to preserving the history of Madison County.

Persons under 70 1/2 years old, can also use their IRA to make a withdrawal and donation to a charitable contribution after taxes.

NEWSLETTER SPONSOR: CAROL MANNING

IN LOVING MEMORY OF

J. PAUL (MAC) AND MARY LOUISE MCKERNAN



The earliest picture of Carol and her parents together. (Manning)

When Carol Manning was three years old, a social worker from Alton's Catholic Children's Home took her to the home of J. Paul and Mary Louise McKernan for a home visit with her prospective parents. At the end of the visit, to her parents surprise, the social worker handed Carol to them and said, "You can keep her."

Although unprepared for it to happen so soon (they

had no clothes for her, or even a bed), they immediately said, "Yes!" Carol says she has always been grateful for their quick "yes" and the lifetime of love and care that followed. Her mother also sparked her lifelong interest and love of history.

2022 MCHS CALENDAR

For its centennial year MCHS has a full calendar that we hope will encourage participation by people with a wide variety of interests. Details for each event will be provided closer to the event:

Mar 26	Members-only Workshop (see page 7)
Apr	Speakers Series: Cemetery Preservation
May 13-14	Cemetery Restoration Workshop
Jun 12	Centennial Picnic (see page 1)
Jun	Speaker Series: Pioneer Gillham Family
July 19-24	Summer Children's Camp (Grades 4-6)
Aug	Speaker Series: Discover Family with DNA
Aug 29	Trivia Night
Sep 24	Family History Walk
Oct 15	Vintage Baseball Belleville Staggs vs. StL Brown Stockings
Oct	Speaker Series: Death and Mourning
Nov 6	Dining in History/Annual Meeting

NEWSLETTER SPONSORS

One of the Society's major expenses each year is printing and postage for the *MCHS News*. The Society is now seeking sponsors (\$500) for each issue. MCHS is very grateful to Carol Manning for sponsoring this issue in memory of her parents.

Sponsors can use their space to promote a business, congratulate a family member on a special occasion, or create a tribute to a special person. The \$500 donation is roughly the cost of printing and mailing each newsletter.

CEMETERY RENOVATION WORKSHOP

MCHS is planning a hands-on cemetery restoration workshop for May in conjunction with the Illinois State Historical Society, St. Clair County Historical Society and Collinsville Memorial Public Library. There are many very old cemeteries in Madison County where there are stones in need of repair. This workshop tells how to make repairs using the old axiom: "First, do no harm." Old grave markers can be easily damaged in the restoration process if the work is done improperly. A flier will be sent to MCHS members with registration information and details.

2022 MEMBERSHIPS

A complete list of members will appear in the May *MCHS News*.

RECENT DONORS

Thank you for your generosity!

Jackie Burnside
Gary Denué
Joyce Giaquinta
Robert Gusewelle
Stephen Hansen
Joseph Helms
David & Rita Jenkins

Gracie Koeller
Lusk Mem. Cemetery Assn
Carol Manning
Rowena McClinton
Mike & Cindy Reinhardt
Mike & Marian Smithson
Beverly Sturtz

THE STORY OF V-MAIL (CONT FROM PAGE 1)

Using a process developed before the war by Eastman-Kodak and already in use by the British, V-Mail involved writing or typing the letter on a free government-supplied 11 X 9 - inch sheet that combined writing space and envelope. A standardized size was necessary so that all V-Mail could be fed into Recordak machines at postal centers for transferring to 16mm film, 100 foot reels which could contain 1,600 letters. At receiving stations, letters were reproduced from the microfilm to 4x5 inch rectangles of photographic paper and enclosed in appropriately-sized envelopes for delivery. It was pretty high-tech for the time.

The system was not without drawbacks. Letters needed to be brief and, when reproduced on the tiny sheets of photographic paper, were often difficult to read. But the saving in shipping space was tremendous. The contents of 37 bags of normal-sized one-page letters, when processed as V-Mail, could fit in a single mail bag. V-Mail, moreover, was shipped by air and thus reached overseas destinations much more quickly than by ship, by which most traditional overseas mail traveled. Although use of V-Mail was not mandatory for personal correspondence, it was strongly encouraged and portrayed as a

patriotic act. Between June 1942 and November 1945, more than a billion pieces of V-Mail were delivered.

Unfortunately, much, if not most, of that vast quantity of mail has probably been lost.

That is a pity because these letters reflected the thoughts and emotions of millions of ordinary human beings as they sought to cope with history's most destructive war. Some survive. The National World War II Museum in New Orleans holds several thousand V-letters and collections exist elsewhere.

V-Mail service provides a most rapid means of communication. If addressed to a place where photographing service is not available the original letter will be dispatched by the most expeditious means.

INSTRUCTIONS

- (1) Write the entire message plainly on the other side within marginal lines.
- (2) Print the name and address in the two spaces provided. Addresses of members of the Armed Forces should show full name, complete military or naval address, including grade or rank, serial number, unit to which assigned or attached and army post office in care of the appropriate postmaster or appropriate fleet post office.
- (3) Fold, seal, and deposit in any post office letter drop or street letter box.
- (4) Enclosures must not be placed in this envelope.
- (5) V-Mail letters may be sent free of postage by members of the Armed Forces. When sent by others postage must be prepaid at domestic rates (3c ordinary mail, 6c if domestic air mail service is desired when mailed in the U. S.)

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POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT PERMIT NO. 1

SAVING THE LETTERS OF A LOCAL GI

Sharon Wickham of Granite City distinguished herself as a preserver of a few of these documents. In 1984, while helping to clean out the house of Lorraine Bennett, a deceased friend, Wickham became aware of a small cache of V-Mail letters that had been written by the friend's brother. What to do with them? "Oh, just throw them away", the brother urged. As the long-time secretary of SIUE's Department of Historical Studies, Sharon knew better. She convinced him to give her the letters and they are now in the archives of the Madison County Historical Society.

Joseph Warren "Bud" Bennett, the letters' author and the brother of Sharon's friend, was 24 when he registered

for the draft in 1940. He was atypical for that time in that he was not only a high school graduate, but claimed two years of college. Born in Madison, Illinois, he was then employed by the Roosevelt Hotel in Pittsburgh, probably as a book keeper.

The earliest letter in the collection is dated Oct. 15, 1944, by which time Bud was a 28 year-old staff sergeant in the 41st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, Mechanized, a component of the 11th Armored Division. The division had recently arrived in England from Camp Cooke, California, and was engaged in training exercises on the Salisbury Plain west of London preparatory to deployment to the Continent. This was true of all U.S. armored divisions at that time, the 11th Armored's backbone was the M4 "Sherman" tank, the turrets and hulls for many of which were produced by Granite City's Commonwealth Steel Company. (See photo on page 5.)

All of the letters are addressed either to his mother, Nellie, or to Frank, his father, who resided at 2644 Edwards Street in Granite City, a two-story frame house that still stands and where the letters were found. They are all signed "Bud" and are written in a neat cursive hand. The

"Bud" Bennett's World War II draft registration card. At the time, he was living in Pittsburgh where Bud's father, Frank Bennett, served several years as president of the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Tin and Steel Worker's of North America before returning to Granite City.

SERIAL NUMBER 2910 **1. NAME (Print)** JOSEPH WARREN BENNETT **ORDER NUMBER** 649

2. ADDRESS (Print) 414 A.S. MAIN ST. PITTSBURGH PA
(Number and street or R. F. D. number) (Town) (County) (State)

3. TELEPHONE Wa. 3217 **4. AGE IN YEARS** 24 **5. PLACE OF BIRTH** Madison Ill. **6. COUNTRY OF CITIZENSHIP** U. S. A

7. NAME OF PERSON WHO WILL ALWAYS KNOW YOUR ADDRESS Mrs. Nellie Bennett **8. RELATIONSHIP OF THAT PERSON** mother
(Mr., Mrs., Miss) (First) (Middle) (Last)

9. ADDRESS OF THAT PERSON 2644 Edwards St. Granite City. Ill.
(Number and street or R. F. D. number) (Town) (County) (State)

10. EMPLOYER'S NAME Hotel Roosevelt **11. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS** 7th & Penn Ave. Pittsburgh Pa
(Number and street or R. F. D. number) (Town) (County) (State)

I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE ANSWERS AND THAT THEY ARE TRUE.

REGISTRATION CARD 16-17105
D. S. S. FORM 1 (over)

Warren Bennett (Registrant's signature)

SAVING THE LETTERS OF A LOCAL GI (CONT. FROM PAGE 4)

size of V-Mail stationery necessitated brevity, and the letters run about 250 words in length.

The filming and printing process reduced the letters to about 25% of their original size, making reading them a difficult proposition. Magnifiers were marketed during the war as aids for the reading of V-Mail and probably sold well. (I was grateful for my wife's magnifying lamp.)

At right is an M-24 Sherman Tank. Author's Note: Thanks to my late friend and student Gregory T. Jones for having written "Tank Plant. How They Made Tanks in My Hometown in World War II" (self-published, 2009), for information regarding Granite City's contributions to the war effort. The book was awarded a Certificate of Merit by The Illinois State Historical Society (April 25, 2009).



EXPLORING THE LETTERS

The letters will disappoint a reader expecting gripping accounts of the drama of war. Those written while Bud was in England described the weather as wet and cold - "colder than a witch and plenty damp," he wrote to his mother on Oct. 24, 1944. The food, initially of poor quality and in short supply, had improved "tremendously." But he craved something more - "salomey." Fortunately, she understood that what he lusted for was salami and family members dispatched a supply of the desired comestible. Sadly, it had yet to reach him by the time the 11th Armored Division took ship for the Continent in December. V-Mail did not include parcels. In the same letter, he revealed himself to be a heavy smoker and bemoaned the seven pack a week cigarette ration. "Guess I'll cut down on my smoking," he wrote.

Stock in which he had invested in the United States was important to him and his concern about its fluctuating value was repeatedly expressed. Although Bud's letters reflect scant enthusiasm for Britain, he had been befriended by an Englishman who introduced him to the history of the area where the 11th Armored was based and invited him to participate in a bicycle tour. Unlike many GIs, he was not attracted to English women. "Many of the boys are going gaga over the girls they just met, but [I] can't see it myself," he noted to his father on November 8. But, like most GIs, he longed, above all, for home. "If, when, and how I ever get home," he wrote, "I'll dig in and it'll take all hell to budge me out."

Bud's letters written from England contain almost no information about the training that his unit was undergoing. V-Mail was subjected to censorship to prevent the escape of information that might be of use to the enemy and all Bud's letters bear the censor's stamp of approval. They are therefore relatively bland and uninformative. One letter appears to bear evidence of the censor's scrutiny. In writing to his father on November 14, Bud, in commenting on the precious salami whose delivery he so ardently desired, wrote "The parcels, as you perhaps know, are all on the...." The remainder of the sentence, which perhaps revealed the name of a transport ship, has been blacked out.

dress in the space provided on the right. Use typewriter, dark ink, or dark pencil. Faint or small writing is not suitable for photographing.

TO: Mrs. Nellie Bennett
2644 Edwards Street
Granite City, Illinois

FROM: Sgt. V. W. Bennett, 3507151
Tr. D. 44th Rec. Sq. Hqs. 11th
Cpl. Postmaster, New York, N.Y.

(Sender's complete address above)

24 October 44

Dear Mother:

This little note, though addressed to you, is to the whole gang at the Y. Received Dad's card and letter this a.m. Enjoyed hearing from home immensely.

The weather here is colder than a witch and plenty damp. Along with the uncomfortable weather, we have rationing. The food has improved tremendously in quality and quantity. For a time, however, we were nearly out off completely from the time we left the coast until just recently.

From Dad's letter, I still am taking a shellacking on the stock. Use your own judgement if it ever goes up to a good high. I've made an allotment to the Trust & Savings Bank to the account of Mrs. Nellie Bennett and/or V. W. Bennett in the amount of \$3.60 starting as of the month of November, '44. If the lot will still sell for the same amount as before, buy it up when the account will handle it.

I've seen some beautiful places here and I'm developing a few ideas for building and landscaping the whole place. That doesn't mean, however, if after you buy it and before I get back you can realize a good profit on it, you should hang onto it, sell it when you see fit.

I'm in good health and trust this finds all at home well and enjoying good fortune. Has Blue left for Pearl Harbor? Did she change her mind? How's little Sis doing?

P.S. Get me Bud's address.

Love to all,
Bud

HAVE YOU FILLED IN COMPLETE ADDRESS AT TOP? YES

REPLY BY V...-MAIL

HAVE YOU FILLED IN COMPLETE ADDRESS AT BOTTOM? YES

This letter, written in October 1944, is shown slightly larger than the actual size of a V-Mail letter. Notice the examiners stamp of approval in the upper left corner. (MCHS Collections)

Bud's letter of November 19, to "Dad" remarks that "So far nothing really exciting has happened. We are getting the same dose we got in the States: here today, there tomorrow, if you get what I mean." His letter of December 2 to his mother confirms his receipt of food packages from

continued page 6

The Bennett Family In Granite City

Joseph Warren Bennett was born in Madison, Illinois, March 22, 1916. He was the only son of Benjamin Franklin "Frank" Bennett and his wife, Nellie Hawkins Bennett. Frank and Nellie were both originally from Kentucky.

Joseph, called "Bud" by his family, had two older sisters, Ethel and Elsie, and a younger sister, Frances Louise.

Bud was career military, serving in every U.S. war from World War II through Vietnam. He married Minnie Lee Perkins in about 1951 and she came to live in Granite City near his parents during the Korean War. Minnie and her three children from a previous marriage lived in a trailer next to his parents. Sometime after Korea, he was stationed in Georgia where the family lived for many years. Joseph Warren Bennett died Dec. 12, 1986. He is buried at Arlington National Cemetery.

The Society is grateful to emeritus professor James Weingartner for his work in researching and writing this article about V-mail. During his teaching career, World War II was his area of expertise. He noted that researching Joseph W. Bennett was not easy since there was more than one man by that name, also born in 1916, that served in WW II. He noted that "given that the U.S. Army numbered in excess of 11 million members by the end of the war, we shouldn't be surprised."

EXPLORING THE LETTERS (CONT FROM PAGE 5)

home (but, alas, not the precious salami), comments on his runny nose and the English climate that caused it, and is followed by the apologetic "There is really nothing I can say that would be of interest to you besides the above conglomeration of prattlings." But, he had written earlier that, "Someday, God being willing, I shall have lots to tell you of England." The only explicit reference to the war was in regard to "buzz bombs" (German cruise missiles) hitting London, where they "receive about the same attention as a falling star back home."

But the most striking disconnect between Bud's correspondence and what he was actually experiencing emerged after the 11th Armored Division arrived in France on Dec. 19, 1944. Three days earlier, the Germans had launched their offensive into the Ardennes Forest and drove towards Antwerp in a desperate attempt to reverse the tide of a war that had long since turned catastrophically against them and had driven them back to the frontiers of Germany. It gave rise to what Americans know as "The Battle of the Bulge," one of the bloodiest engagements in the history of the U.S. Army.

The 11th Armored was assigned to Patton's Third Army, which played a key role in defeating the German offensive. Attacking from the south into the salient created by the German advance, it relieved the beleaguered Belgian crossroads town of Bastogne on December 26 and succeeded in linking up at Houffalize on Jan. 16, 1945 with Hodges' First Army attacking from the north, thus pinching off the Bulge. The 41st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, Bud's unit, had the distinction of making the initial contact with First Army after hard fighting, and he could not have avoided seeing the devastation inflicted on the town by repeated air raids.

The Battle of the Bulge was a brutal affair, with heavy casualties, murdered prisoners of war on both sides and numerous civilian deaths. In the following months, the 11th Armored Division drove east across the Rhine

into Bavaria and Austria where, on May 5, 1945, the 41st Cavalry liberated Mauthausen concentration camp, where an estimated 90,000 prisoners had died. Three days later, the war in Europe came to an end. Bud Bennett of Madison County had experienced or had at least been in close proximity to some of the worst of it.



"Bud" Bennett's step-granddaughter provided this portrait of "Grandpa Joe" taken in the early 1950s, shortly after he married her grandmother. Joseph was career military, involved in every U. S. war from WW II through Vietnam. (Mary Huff)

But there is little evidence of any of this in his letters. Only two of them were written during the period when the 11th Armored was in combat. A letter to his mother of Jan. 15, 1945, the day before Bud's unit made contact with First Army troops in Houffalize, begins with the standard reference to his investments, complaining that the dividends for 1944 were no greater than for 1943. After noting that he had been apprised by his sister Lorraine about his mother's "new duds," he went on to assure her that there was "no reason for you to worry about what I'm doing."

"The snow is deep," he observed, "but mud and rain would be worse." In fact, the winter of 1944-45 was the worst on record, marked not only by deep snow, but by temperatures well below zero. Veterans of the Bulge remember it

with horror. A fleeting reference to combat was reserved for the letter's conclusion. "So far, I've been most fortunate as far as actual fighting is concerned. My only worry has been for stragglers caught behind [our] lines or snipers and some long range stuff. It isn't as bad as it sounds."

In Bud's final letter, dated April 24, he noted the "rapid advance" of U.S. forces which probably accounted, he thought, for the dearth of letters received lately from home. Rumors abound in an army at war, and from what he could "hear and read, it appears there may be a chance that the Japanese situation may be brought to a climax before this theater is closed." That proved to be overly optimistic. Iwo Jima had fallen to the Americans in March, but the Japanese were ferociously resisting U.S. forces on the island of Okinawa and would continue to do so until June, by which time Germany had signed an instrument of

EXPLORING THE LETTERS (CONT FROM PAGE 6)

surrender. Japan would not formally capitulate until September 2. In April, Bud had confided to his father that "the entire thing is like a bad dream."

How should Bud Bennett's letters be interpreted? The absence of any substantial information on his involvement in combat may have been a consequence of his anticipation that the military censors would have blocked its inclusion. But he was also clearly at pains to minimize his parents' anxiety. Hence, his assurances that he had been spared exposure to much actual fighting, which seems unlikely.

Although the Germans were in retreat for most of the period during which the 11th Armored was in action, his division's casualties totaled 48.1 percent of its operational strength over the five months it was in combat. True, as a member of a mechanized reconnaissance unit, he might have been spared the worst of the combat experience, which was reserved for infantry, but his outfit's job was to seek out the enemy. One assumes that it at least occasionally succeeded.

Bud's letters are not useful sources of combat history at the grass roots, but they do reflect how one man coped with

being thousands of miles from home and facing a challenge that he might not survive. There were the censors, of course, but Bud was possibly practicing a measure of self-censorship. In addition to wanting to avoid heightening his parent's anxieties, he may have welcomed the time spent writing the letters as an opportunity to escape if only for a few minutes from his "bad dream," rather than to relive it. Then, too, combat veterans are often reluctant to share their

experiences with civilians in the belief that those who have not been in battle cannot possibly understand them. Sharon does not

recall Bud's ever having mentioned the war during the years she knew him.

It was preserving the link with home that was most important to Bud. A week without mail from the States was cause for mournful comment. His investment in stocks that he referred to so often may have reflected more than a simple desire for dividends and capital gains. Those stocks could have represented a stake in the homeland to which Bud longed to return, a homeland at peace where the sun was always shining and where salami was always in the fridge.

"A week without mail from the States was cause for mournful comment"

A NEW ERA BEGINS, NEW DIRECTORS & MORE

Three New MCHS Directors

There are two new MCHS Board members and one returning after a short hiatus. They are Norma Asadorian, a retired secondary school teacher from Granite City, Jeffrey Skoblow, an SIUE emeritus professor of English from Edwardsville, and William Krause, an Edwardsville businessman. Please visit the MCHS website to read their biographies.

The MCHS Board is a very active organization with nearly every member of the Board devoting hundreds of hours annually towards the mission of preserving the stories and artifacts that tell the history of Madison County.

New Members Only Workshops

A new "members only" series of Saturday morning workshops will kick off March 26 at the Archival Library. Reservation are required and there is a limit of 10 attendees. The first session will be hands-on assistance with

researching the history of your home with Cindy Reinhardt. Reinhardt has researched the story behind over 300 buildings and will provide worksheets and advice so attendees will know how to go about discovering the history of their house. Call 618-656-1294 to make a reservation for the March workshop.

Future sessions will include genealogy assistance and identification of Native American artifacts.

A Fresh Look

As the Society moved into its centennial year, although much remains the same, much has changed, including the loss of public funding for operations.

To reflect the excitement of a "new day," a fresh logo and image is being created to represent the Historical Society, the Museum, and the Library all together as one unit. It will be unveiled in the May newsletter with an all new look, but with the same great content.

MCHS RECEIVES GRANT (CONT. FROM PAGE 1)

into, out of, and through Madison County. In addition to providing the materials for the exhibit, the digital archive will serve as a resource for local residents, historians, and genealogists to discover and access materials related to local history and contemporary experiences of migration.

The project also includes an educational toolkit created by MCHS staff. This toolkit will include classroom activities, discussion prompts, and other resources that tie exhibit

content to Illinois and Missouri curriculum standards.

The grant application was prepared by MCHS Board member Stephen Hansen and a team of SIUE faculty led by Dr. Margaret Smith of the Interdisciplinary Research and Informatics Scholarship Center (IRIS)

At the request of the organizations awarding the grant, additional details will be released at a later date

MCHS Memberships run on the calendar year. - Gift Certificates available.
Join MCHS, go to: <https://madcohistory.org/membership/> For information, call 618-656-1294.



Madison County Historical Society

Opening Doors to Madison County History

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NEW MUSEUM EXHIBITS

Two new museum exhibits will open on March 16 in the exhibit room of the Madison County Archival Library. The first, "The Spirit of Sport: Winter Edition (inset)," was curated by Jenn Van Bibber. The second exhibit, "Windows into the Past," focusing on Native American history, was curated by Dr. Robert Clouse.



MARCH-MAY MCHS CALENDAR

February Speaker Series
Sundown Towns of Madison County
Available now online

Mar 16 - Exhibits Open in Library
Spirit of Sport: Winter Edition
Windows into the Past

Mar 26 Members-Only Workshop
Researching Your House
Reservation required

April Speaker Series:
First, Do No Harm:
An Introduction to Cemetery Preservation
with Jeff Pauk
online program

May Cemetery Preservation
Workshop
Workshop fliers will be mailed later

Join the conversation and learn more at the
MCHS Facebook Page: Madison County Historical Society





Jeff Pauk
First, Do No Harm
An Introduction to Cemetery Preservation

APRIL
2022