



## MCHS HAS FULL AUTUMN SCHEDULE

Baseball, beer, breakfast, guided history walks, and even a paranormal event are all on the calendar in the next few months. Members and area residents are invited to join MCHS for all or any of these events where they can have a good time while supporting a worthwhile organization.

See pages 3-5 for details or review the calendar on Page 12.

## NEW TREASURER NEEDED

At the MCHS November event at the Old Bakery Brewing Company, some members of the Board will renew their positions but, unfortunately, others will retire. After long and valued service to the Society, Treasurer Arnold Meyer will be retiring. If you have accounting skills and would be interested in serving as MCHS treasurer or becoming a part of our dynamic team in another capacity, please contact MCHS President Fred Faust at 314-223-0309.

## SUMMER CAMP A GREAT SUCCESS

MCHS, in partnership with the Madison County Regional Office of Education, held its first Summer History Camp for children in July. It was such a success that they are planning two camps for next summer to accommodate different age groups. The camp was led by educators Norma Asadorian, Bob Daiber, and Carol Manning.



Mayor Goins welcomed the campers to Alton where they visited sites connected with Lincoln and African-American History. (Carol Manning)

## LECLAIRE: THE COOPERATIVE VILLAGE FOUNDED ON KINDNESS



Next month marks the centennial anniversary of the death of N. O. Nelson on October 5, 1922. Nelson was a St. Louis industrialist and philanthropist who founded the model Village of LeClaire in 1890. His vision was to build a place which would provide a better life for his employees. Nelson's village, a National Historic District, is now a neighborhood of Edwardsville.

Nelson, a multimillionaire at the turn of the last century, gave away all his wealth to causes he thought would improve the lives of the working class. The anniversary of his death is an appropriate time to tell the story of his Village of LeClaire. The story begins on Page 6.

## WHAT'S YOUR MADISON COUNTY STORY?

By Cindy Reinhardt

The final Centennial Issue of the MCHS News will be a collection of YOUR Madison County stories. We are asking current or former residents of Madison County to submit their favorite stories by October 15. We'll print as many as space allows.

What kind of stories? It could be anything. In my family, I might tell the story of my great-grandfather's sand business, or the story of how the Nichol and Nicol families of Collinsville held an exhibition ball game for charity, complete with lots of "trash talk" about the spelling of their names, or I could tell about moving to Madison County in 1975 when I was eight months pregnant and being welcomed with open arms.

So, what's your favorite story? Please send a paragraph or two to the address below or call the Society number (also below), and I'll type it for you. Pictures are especially welcome and we'd be happy to scan them for you. I can't wait to read your stories!

### Hours

Wed - Fri, 9 a.m.-4 p.m.  
Sunday 1-4 p.m.

### Madison County History Museum

and Library  
801 N. Main Street  
Edwardsville, IL 62025

### Contact us:

Library: 618-656-7569  
Society: 618-656-1294  
Email: [info@madcohistory.org](mailto:info@madcohistory.org)

## RECENT NEWS

Washington University Preservation Digitization and Exhibition Department will donate a book scanner to MCHS thanks to the efforts of Fred and Cheri Faust. This will be a valuable addition to the equipment MCHS already has that helps preserve and copy documentation. The free book scanner will be available later this year. There will be a cost to update software, but it is minimal.

Volunteers have worked hard to keep the library/museum grounds in shape this summer, and their work is greatly appreciated. Special thanks to Stephen Hansen and Fred Faust for lawn care and to Steve Mudge who has been helping with weed control.

Director of Operations, Robert "Bob" Clouse has been working to improve the entrance to the library that hasn't been refreshed since the library was built 20 years ago. Bob will remove the paint, and MCHS member/volunteer Gary Denué will paint it.

Recent additions to the collections include a teacup and saucer, apron, coaster and Bethalto varsity letter for the museum and the library has received materials related to Mabel Heeren Cannavan (1907-1994), Highland Centennial materials and a Liberty Prairie house history.

A partial list of ongoing projects performed or supervised by staff is listed below. Many of these projects are done by volunteers. MCHS is grateful for these contributions.

- Researching Madison County Immigration history for future museum exhibit
- Collecting and filing the Obituary collection
- Creating a Madison County LGBTQ+ history archive
- Cataloging legacy projectile points and related artifacts
- Adding legacy accessions to PastPerfect
- Scanning slides for the Loyet collection grant from ISHRAB

*Note: "Legacy" refers to records of older donations that have not previously been included in the PastPerfect computer inventory system.*

## VOLUNTEER PROJECTS

Some examples of the recent work being done by MCHS Volunteers:

Betty Byrd and Gary Forshaw, with some help at the end from other Thursday morning volunteers, "finished" the obituary organization project: all of the obituaries currently on hand have been filed!

Marty Lane completed an index for the *Alton Telegraph's* "Our Past" column published in 2017.

Connie Royston is now indexing "150 Years of Hometown News," a book compiled to celebrate the Edwardsville Intelligencer's 150th anniversary.

In addition, the MCHS Board of Directors, listed below in the blue box, volunteer many hours to make programing and fundraising run smoothly.



### RECENT VOLUNTEERS

#### THANK YOU!

Donna Bardon  
 LaVerne Bloemker  
 Betty Byrd  
 Gary Denué  
 Lynn Engelman  
 Gary Forshaw  
 John Harvey  
 Kat Housewright  
 Emily Klingensmith  
 Cheri Kuhn  
 Cara Lane  
 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**

*Work continues on the Weir House (left) where workers recently finished restoration of the large windows at the rear of the house.*

*The Society was just approved for a City of Edwardsville façade grant to aid with work on the remaining windows on the front of the house as well as the wide entrance .*

### MCHS BOARD

Fred Faust, Pres.  
 Robert Clouse, V-Pres.  
 Arnold Meyer, Treas.  
 Tallin Curran, Sec.  
 Norma Asadorian  
 Leslie Bednar  
 Bob Daiber  
 Stephen Hansen  
 William Krause  
 Candace Ladd  
 Carol Manning  
 Stephen Mudge  
 Jeff Pauk  
 Cindy Reinhardt  
 Jeff Skoblow

### STAFF

Robert Clouse  
 Operations Director  
 Mary Z. Rose  
 Library Research Manager  
 Jenn VanBibber  
 Curator

### Sunday Staff

Robert Clouse  
 Cindy Reinhardt  
 Mary Westerhold  
 Carol Manning

### PUBLICATIONS

#### MCHS NEWS

6 issues annually  
 Cindy Reinhardt, Editor  
 cindy.reinhardt@madcohistory.org

### VOLUNTEERS

There are abundant and varied opportunities for volunteers at either the Museum or the 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 Library.

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

# PEERING INTO THE PAST...PARANORMALLY

## Where History Meets Mystery

by Lynn Engelmann

"Do you have information on whether anyone died in my house/on my land?" This is a frequent question asked of Archival Library Staff. After several more questions, it becomes clear that the visitor has had unexplained experiences, and they are trying to find answers. While the paranormal or hauntings are not topics that the Society typically deals with, it is obviously something which is on the minds of some visitors.

Spring-boarding off the public's interest in the paranormal, the Society will be holding occasional fundraising events under the heading: "Peering into the Past Paranormally—Where History Meets Mystery."

These fundraising events will provide opportunities for the Society to expand our outreach to people who typically don't think of themselves as "history" people, yet are intrigued by the idea that something in the past is causing paranormal activity. Additionally, these fundraising events provide opportunities to introduce participants to the resources in the Society's collections and provides a fun and educational experience that combines the history of Madison County and mystery of the paranormal.

Funds raised at these events will help MCHS continue to produce exceptional programs, like the Speaker Series, as well as operate the Archival Library and History Museum. Announcements about these events will be on the Society's Facebook page, web page, and in the newsletter.

Our first event will be on Oct 29, 2022.

## October 29: "Introduction to Paranormal Investigating"

The Madison County Historical Society invites all history buffs, skeptics, and paranormal enthusiasts to attend a program entitled "Introduction to Paranormal Investigating" with an opportunity to participate in a paranormal investigation of Weir House.

The evening will start at the Archival Library (801 N. Main St., Edwardsville) at 6:30 p.m. with a seminar by members of the Midwest Paranormal Investigators Consortium on the "Dos and Don'ts" of researching and investigating possible haunted sites or paranormal activity as well as a review of equipment used in paranormal investigation. They will also cover ways to "debunk" those weird feelings and bumps in the night. Beginning at 8:00 pm the program will shift next door to the Weir House for a nighttime investigation.

This event is limited to 20 participants, 15 years and older, on a first-come, first-served basis. If there is a high level of interest in this program, a wait list will be created for an additional session later in the year.

### Time:

6:30 p.m.-Midnight (participants can leave before midnight)

### Price:

\$40 (Society members \$35)

For questions or to reserve a space contact Lynn Engelman, [lae2017@gmail.com](mailto:lae2017@gmail.com) or call 703-994-0806 and leave your name and contact information.

## SEPTEMBER NEWSLETTER SPONSOR: FRIENDS OF LECLAIRE

### FRIENDS OF LECLAIRE

Friends of Leclaire (FOL) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting and enhancing the history and heritage of the Leclaire National Historic District. The organization, founded in 1991 following Leclaire's Centennial, promotes Leclaire's heritage through advocacy, education, and community involvement.

## SPONSOR A NEWSLETTER

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 Friends of Leclaire for sponsoring this expanded issue that tells the story of Leclaire.

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.

**Save the Date!**  
**SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 6**  
**1 p.m. - 4 p.m.**  
**Madison County Historical Society's**  
**Dining in History at the**  
**Old Bakery Beer Company**



**TICKET INFORMATION COMING SOON!!**

MCHS LIVING

HISTORY DAYS



A VINTAGE

# Baseball Game

VS

BELLEVILLE  
STAGS

ST. LOUIS  
BROWN  
STOCKINGS

ORIGINAL RULES BASEBALL GAME

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 15 2022

WINSTON BROWN RECREATION COMPLEX  
SCHILLER AVENUE • EDWARDSVILLE

12:30-1:30P.M. - BATTING PRACTICE • KIDS (10-16) & ADULTS  
1:30 - BASEBALL GAME

BEER • SODA • WATER • SNACKS



PRESENTED  
BY



MADISON COUNTY  
Historical  
Society



## INSTRUCTIONS

Begin at whichever location is most convenient, then walk or drive between the four locations to see all performances. Locations are on or within two blocks of Main Street in Edwardsville, Illinois.

## TIMES AND PERFORMANCE LOCATIONS

### Wildey Theatre (252 N. Main Street)

**10 a.m. and 1 p.m.**

Meet Matilda Gerke, a citizen of Edwardsville in 1928 who will take participants on a short stroll on Main Street, telling visitors about the Edwardsville she knew and loved. (Portrayed by Cindy Reinhardt)

### Columbus School (315 N. Kansas)

**11 a.m. and 2 p.m.**

Meet early Madison County surveyor Beniah Robinson who will demonstrate early methods of surveying. (Portrayed by surveyor Jeffrey Pauk)



### Weir House (715 N. Main Street)

**Noon and 3 p.m.**

“Ninian! A Ghostly Pageant,” A short play about the life of Ninian Edwards, written and directed by Jeff Skoblow.

**Former Lincoln School (LCCC Building, 1210 N. Main Street) 10 a.m. and 1 p.m.** Edward Coles tells the story of early Edwardsville from the location that was once the Court House Square for Madison County. (Portrayed by William Krause.)

# Masonic Lodge Hosts Benefit Breakfast for MCHS

## Biscuits & Gravy Breakfast

With Scrambled Eggs

Proceeds Benefiting  
Madison County Historical Society



Saturday, Sept 17th  
Serving 8:00am to 11:00am

Breakfast held at



**Edwardsville Masonic Lodge**  
90 Kriege Farm Rd, Glen Carbon, IL  
Behind Glen Carbon Walmart

Eat In or Carry Out

**Recommended Donation - \$5.00**

For more information: [edwardsvillemasons.org](http://edwardsvillemasons.org)  
[Facebook.com/edwardsvillemasons](https://www.facebook.com/edwardsvillemasons)

Imagine the surprise (and delight) when MCHS was approached members of the Edwardsville Masonic Lodge who asked if they could hold a breakfast to benefit the Madison County Historical Society. The answer, of course, was YES!

The Masons will provide all the food and labor required for the event at no charge so 100 percent of the proceeds can benefit MCHS. Thank you, Masons!

All that is needed now is a large group of hungry residents and members to take advantage of this generous offer to help the Society. Details are in the poster at left, on Facebook, and on the MCHS website.

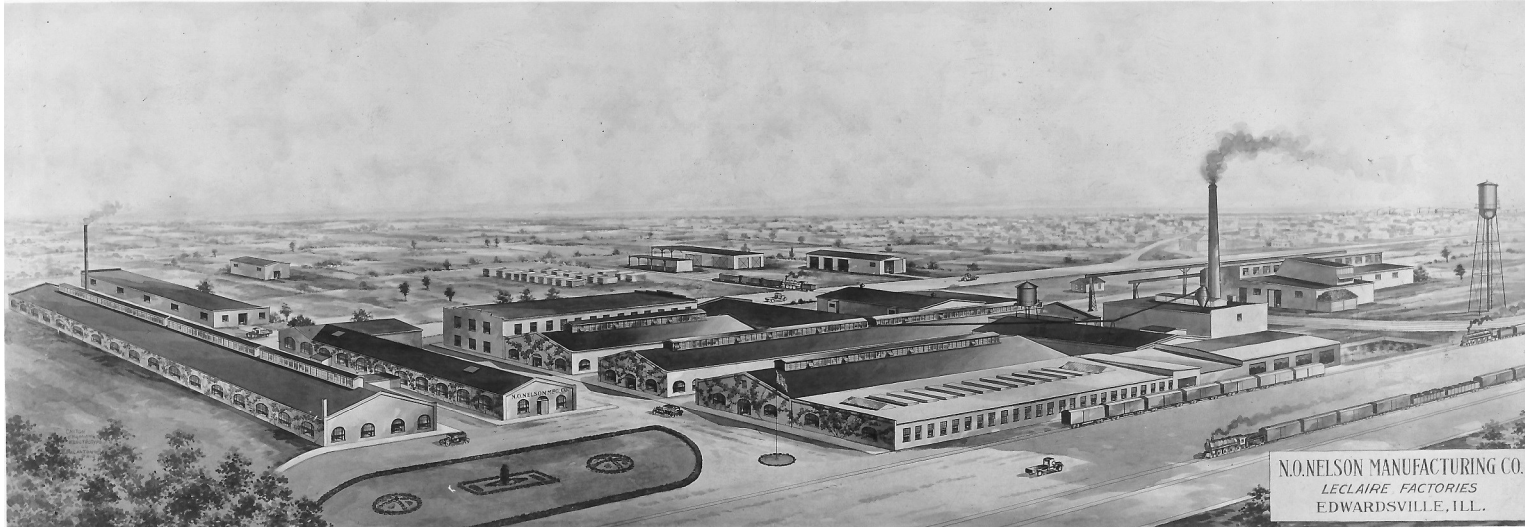
## MRF LEFT THEM WANTING MORE

The Wood River Museum and Welcome Center recently had an exhibit on the Mississippi River Festival (MRF) featuring artifacts and memorabilia belonging to former MRF director Lyle Ward. The popularity of the exhibit proved that, although it's gone, the MRF is not forgotten!

MCHS featured the exhibit on its Facebook page and it was one of the most popular posts ever done. Almost anyone lucky enough to have experienced it loved the MRF. Check out the MCHS Facebook page for other events and exhibits highlighting Madison County history or for historic

Join the conversation and learn more at the  
MCHS Facebook Page: [Madison County Historical Society](https://www.facebook.com/MadisonCountyHistoricalSociety)

# THE VILLAGE OF LECLAIRE (1890-1934)



*This sketch of the N. O. Nelson Manufacturing Company buildings was used in numerous promotional publications for both the business and village. It was probably commissioned circa 1910. (MCHS)*

Although many know the unique story of Edwardsville's Leclaire neighborhood, others still wonder what the fuss is all about. It's a neighborhood of mostly modest Victorian cottages and bungalows that lend the neighborhood a vintage charm, but that's not unusual for Madison County. What sets it apart is its unusual beginning. Leclaire began as a model village founded on principles of kindness and generosity.

Bounded by Madison/Brown Avenues to the east, railroad tracks to the west, Hadley/McKinley Avenues on the south and Wolf Street to the north, Leclaire would remain an independent village from 1890 until 1934. In the early years, it was sometimes referred to as "Edwardsville's suburb to the south." The village became known both nationally and internationally for innovations in business, education, and quality of life. The story of Leclaire qualified it for inclusion on the list of National Historic District more than 50 years ago.

The co-operative Village of Leclaire was founded in 1890 by Nelson Oliver Nelson, a wealthy St. Louis industrialist who, after visiting cooperatives in Europe, set about building a model cooperative village in the United States. The purpose was to provide his workers with wholesome living conditions, the chance to own their own homes, educational opportunities, and employment with a progressive company that set reasonable hours, offered competitive wages, and had a profit-sharing program. Nelson's six principles for Leclaire were designed to "give work, promote intelligence, provide recreation, foster beauty and make homes." The sixth principle was freedom of choice.

## WHY MADISON COUNTY?

Nelson wanted a place in the country which would offer fresh air for his workers and their families. He also wanted them to live close enough to the company that they could participate in after-hours recreation and educational activities if they chose to do so. He explored property in both Missouri and Illinois looking for a location which had available water, coal, and access to transportation. The location also had to have a large tract of land to accommodate his planned factories and homes.

Nelson was also looking for a financial incentive. He knew that his company would bring hundreds of jobs and a larger population which would shop in local stores. In Edwardsville, the community came together and raised a fund of \$20,000 in only three weeks. It was a group effort with donations ranging from \$1 to \$1000. Edwardsville offered a large swath of farm ground just south of the city limits, next to what was then known as the Clover Leaf Railroad Depot. Nelson named his experimental village after the Parisian profit-sharer, Edme-Jean Leclaire.



*A vintage postcard of the Clover Leaf Depot is undated, but it is known that the Clover Leaf was purchased by the Nickel Plate Line in 1922. Today the old station has been restored by the City of Edwardsville and is used by the Edwardsville Children's Museum. Santa at the Station has already become a favorite holiday tradition. (Morrison)*

The land was outside the city limits of Edwardsville which suited Nelson well as he wanted the company to have more control. He later boasted that the village had no government and no taxes. Initially, the City of Edwardsville assumed that Leclaire would be annexed within a few years,

# THE PRINCIPLES: WORK



Undated photograph of the Leclaire factories, circa 1895. The line of clearstories along the roof allowed for light and ventilation. (MCHS)

but it didn't happen. It was 44 years before Leclaire was annexed to Edwardsville, but the benefits it brought to the city made it well worth the \$20,000 investment.

What separated Leclaire from other company towns or model communities of the era was the vision of N. O. Nelson. As a businessman, Nelson designed a financial model that he hoped would resolve the conflict between labor and capital. As a philanthropist, he was dedicated to improving the lives of the working man.

## THE PRINCIPLES: WORK

The N. O. Nelson Manufacturing Company (NONCO) manufactured, distributed, and sold plumbing fixtures and equipment. It had sales office in dozens of locations south and west of St. Louis, from Florida to California and additional factories in Alabama and Indiana, but those locations didn't have a companion village like Leclaire. While the factories were moved to Madison County, the company headquarters remained in St. Louis.

NONCO was the only employer in Leclaire. The company began construction of the factories even before the village was dedicated in June 1890. Several factory buildings, a club house, and numerous houses were completed before the end of the year. The factory buildings were designed by St. Louis architect E. A. Cameron who was charged with building modern facilities which would provide natural light and ventilation in summer and heated floors in winter. In 1895, the attractive brick buildings, with arched windows and topped with clerestory windows, were assessed by world-famous reporter Nellie Bly as, "the ideal perfection of buildings for man to labor in."

More important than the buildings were company policies designed to protect the financial stability of NONCO employees. Workers could opt in to a profit-sharing plan and had a voice in the company. By instituting profit-sharing, Nelson gave the employees a pride of ownership that resulted in a supportive workforce with few labor problems. A provident fund provided for pensions and sick leave, as well as widow pensions if a worker died, whether or not the death was related to his employment. This was very progressive for the time.

Although NONCO's primary products were plumbing related, they made a variety of products, many of them custom. For tax purposes, the company was divided into several shops around 1900. The Illinois Marble Company

specialized in architectural marble, which they also installed. The Cabinet Mill made bathroom cabinetry but also milled woodwork for homes and did custom work. The altar and pews at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, made in the Leclaire factories, are still used today. Bignall and Keeler (a machine shop), the Edwardsville Brass Works, and a Finishing Shop were all part of the complex. An example of specialized products is the Leclaire bicycle, which was made for only two years in the mid-1890s. It's a rare and prized model, if you can find one.



Above, managers, laborers, carpenters and machinists pose together in this undated photo of Leclaire employees. (Hyten)  
Below, the interior of the Marble Shop (MCHS)



# THE PRINCIPLES: EDUCATION

One of the first buildings in Leclaire was the Club House, which served as a hotel of sorts for employees who came from St. Louis to work during the week before there were enough houses. It also was the location for the earliest educational endeavors. It contained a well-stocked library and meeting space for the Leclaire Self Culture Club, which featured weekly educational lectures by professors from Washington University or visiting guests of N. O. Nelson. In 1892, a morning kindergarten using the Fröbel Model was started at the Club House. Classes for older students were held in the afternoon.

In 1894, the Club House was moved to a location on Hale Avenue, and the School House was built on the lot it previously occupied. The School House, now home to the Edwardsville Children's Museum, provided a community space. When built, there was no basement (stairs now come up in the center of the building from a basement added in 1935). There were moveable partitions instead of interior walls to divide it into classrooms during the day. During evenings and on weekends, the walls could be moved back to create one large open room for dances, community meetings, concerts and programming. A lecture series that brought in prominent speakers was especially popular and often attracted a standing-room only crowd.

In addition to the Kindergarten, the School House hosted numerous free educational experiments, including an industrial school, college, night school and an academy in the early years. These were made available to everyone, whether they lived in Leclaire or not, and were mostly short-lived. The Kindergarten, would outlast all of these and was still going strong when Leclaire was annexed to the City of Edwardsville in 1934. During the Great Depression, the company had to modify its policy of free education to make it free only to employees. Beginning in 1931, Edwardsville children had to pay tuition.



Above: A vintage postcard of the Leclaire School House circa 1910. (Hughes) Below: Kindergarten students participate in a spring tradition, the Maypole dance. The girls wore tissue paper dresses, usually made by their mothers and the boys dressed in white. (MCHS)

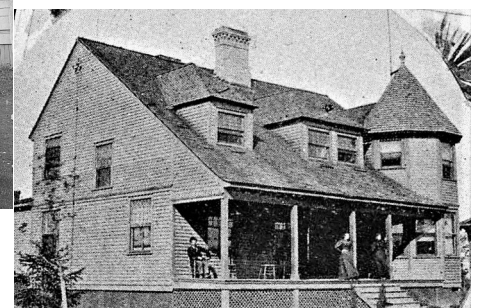


A favorite picture of the Leclaire School House. Charles Valentine is standing at left with his dog which (if you look closely) is smoking a pipe! At right is Louis D. Lawnin, N. O. Nelson's son-in-law who eventually became president of NONCO. (MCHS)



Above: The donor of this photo, Dorothy Solter, didn't remember if this was for a play or a Halloween portrait, but it was taken circa 1919.

Below: Leclaire Club House circa 1895, after it was moved to Hale Avenue.





# THE PRINCIPLES: RECREATION

NONCO funded numerous opportunities for recreation in Leclaire which attracted people from throughout the region. Like the educational offerings, everything was free and open to all. A sports facility next to the School House, called "the campus," could accommodate baseball, tennis, and, later, football. Leclaire provided space for the Edwardsville Tigers to play until their new school was built in 1924. A bowling and billiard hall, constructed in the early 1890s, was next to the athletic fields and there was playground equipment for children.

A lake was formed circa 1905 to provide water for the factories, but also for boating, swimming, fishing, or ice skating in winter. Leclaire Park was furnished with boat-houses, male & female bath houses, and a large pavilion. St. Louis visitors often came by train to spend a day in the country. Tom Trigg, who lived next to the park, operated the boat concession for the company, but his wife also started a swimsuit rental business for visitors who might rarely have a need for a bathing suit. Swimwear was washed during the week and ready for the next group of visitors by the weekend.

Leclaire residents organized dances, concerts, hayrides, spelling bees and other activities, and the company sponsored a band which played regularly at entertainments in the village or in Edwardsville.



Above: Swimmers at Leclaire Lake in 1915. (MCHS)

Center: The Leclaire Blues baseball team (MCHS) and a picture of Eddie Shaw (left) and Joseph Rotter in front of the Bowling and Billiards Hall. Bowling at that time was not the modern game played today, but a game known as ten pins. (Veith)

Below: In this favorite Leclaire photograph, Raymond Stullken (black suit) is courting Edna Meyer (white suit) circa 1916 on Leclaire Lake. The Leclaire courtship was a success. The couple married in 1917.



## THE PRINCIPLES: HOMES

Julius Pitzman, an innovative St. Louis landscape architect, laid out the first lots in Leclair and set them up with several protective covenants. They provided for wide curvilinear streets, minimum set-backs, large lots, and deed restrictions that limited the properties to residential or educational purposes only. The company paved the streets, provided electric street lights, installed sidewalks, and planted hundreds of trees along the streets of Leclair. Older residents said that every lot also had a fruit tree of some kind. Later additions to Leclair were laid out with a conventional grid design and smaller lots, but still included the deed restrictions.

Many of the homes were built by NONCO and sold at near cost to Nelson employees to encourage home ownership. Like profit-sharing, Nelson felt this would establish a pride of ownership which would encourage people to maintain their homes. The homes were offered in a variety of house designs, primarily Victorian cottages in the early years, which came with electricity and running water. Residents could also purchase an empty lot and build the house themselves provided the architectural design met company standards. Nelson used to say there were "no two alike." It should be noted that in the early days, electricity and running water meant a tap in the kitchen and a single bulb to light a room.



Pictured here are several examples of Leclair homes, all of them still in existence. Top row, from left, is the 1897 home of N. O. Nelson, Leclair's founder. Nelson's children were all grown by the time the house was built, but the larger home was needed to entertain various dignitaries who came to see the model village of Leclair. Next is the 1907 Victorian Cottage built for the family of the John Allen family. At right is the 1899 home of William Kennedy. Notice the wooden sidewalks.

The photo in the center row shows two homes on Franklin Avenue. The house on the right, 409 Franklin, is one of several kit homes built in Leclair. This one is the Hazelton model from Sears.

Below are two very different homes on Holyoake Road built side by side, only five years apart. The building on the left, a duplex, was built in 1904. It was the only duplex in Leclair. The house on the right was built in 1899 for George and May Moorman. Several years after May Moorman's death, George married Mabel Allen and moved into the Allen house pictured above.



# THE PRINCIPLES: BEAUTY & FREEDOM

Nelson valued the beauty and cleanliness that could be found with country living, and encouraged all in LeClaire to beautify their homes and gardens. Nelson himself led by example. A company greenhouse provided free flowers, and competitions were held for the most beautiful yards. LeClaire was laid out so that the entire village had a park-like setting still evident today.

All of the programs offered by the company were available to employees and residents. The freedom to choose whether or not to participate in company plans was entirely up to the individual. Residents of LeClaire could work for Nelson Manufacturing or elsewhere. NONCO employees were under no obligation to live in LeClaire.

There were many individual instances where the company showed compassion and care for the employees. The company closed the factories and hired excursion trains to take workers and their families to St. Louis for a day at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair. St. Louis employees were sometimes treated to a day in the country at LeClaire with hundreds transported on special trains.

When money was tight, Nelson would occasionally place extra cash in each pay envelope to make life easier for workers. If he instituted a program the men did not agree with, they talked it out and, more often than not, Nelson would reverse himself. He was a complicated man. He was

a capitalist who believed in free enterprise, but also a socialist, a follower of the "Golden Rule," and a patriot who served in the Civil War.

This created a trust between Nelson and the employees that worked both ways. To avoid layoffs during a 1890s depression, Nelson asked employees to work at reduced wages. He assured them that they would be repaid when the economy recovered. They agreed and Nelson kept that promise.

All of the above principles and practices made LeClaire unique from other company towns, but it was not available to everyone. A local realty company selling the last lots in LeClaire advertised "no lots sold to colored people," however, research indicates that this is not likely to have been a company policy. In regard to race, Nelson was very progressive for his time. His Alabama factory employees were approximately 50 percent Black and the kindergarten he founded in Alabama was specifically for families of his Black employees. As in LeClaire, although it was referred to as "the kindergarten," it also included adult education. One of his many "Social Betterment" projects was a manual training school for Blacks. There were a very few Black employees hired by Nelson personally and in the factories. The company in Edwardsville practiced the social norms of discrimination common at that time in the community.

## THE END OF LECLAIRE VILLAGE

Ironically, the end of LeClaire as an independent village came because of plumbing issues—the very products that the company produced. LeClaire needed the new sewer plant that Edwardsville was in the process of building. Also, due to the Great Depression, NONCO was no longer able to afford all the services they provided for the village which paid no taxes. In 1933, residents voted to annex to the City of Edwardsville, which they did in 1934.

The factories gradually closed, beginning in the late 1920s with the Marble Shop when the popularity of architectural marble began to disappear. Some of the factories were briefly repurposed for other products. For example, in the 1940s wooden toys were made in the Cabinet Shop. Bignall and Keelor, the machine shop, was moved back to St. Louis and many employees commuted by train to work.

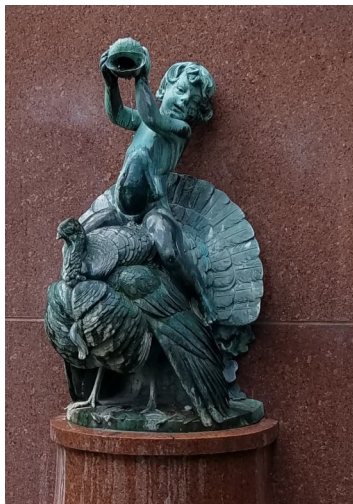
In 1947, Wagner Electric purchased the NONCO factory complex. After ten years, they moved out, leaving the buildings unused until purchased by the SIUE Foundation in 1964 as a temporary campus while the core campus was being built. It became known as the "Wagner Complex." It provided space for offices, library holdings, general stores, property management, textbook service and storage for new equipment for buildings not yet completed. As buildings on the main campus opened, various offices all moved out until the only academic department remaining was Art and Design. In 1993 a new building for Art and

Design opened on the main campus, so it, too, moved, leaving University Museums, and Facilities Management (storage) as the only tenants. Lewis and Clark Community College acquired the property in 1998 and after much planning and restoration work, offered the first classes on site in 2003. Mr. Nelson would have been pleased.

The School House was sold to the Edwardsville School District in 1934 and housed kindergarten through fourth grade students until the new LeClaire School opened on Franklin Avenue in 1963. The school district then used it for storage until selling it to the City of Edwardsville. It has been home to the Edwardsville Children's Museum since 2003.

Before selling the Campus next to the School House, NONCO tore down the bowling and billiards hall, which, by then, had seen better days. The Campus became part of the Edwardsville Parks Department. Baseball players have used the diamond (sometimes diamonds) at Historic LeClaire Field for more than 130 years.

LeClaire Park, popular in Nelson's time, and a reminder of bygone days, remains a favorite place for many residents. Although swimming, skating, and boating are no longer permitted, families still enjoys picnics, children still play on the swings, and fish from the banks of LeClaire Lake. Each year, Friends of LeClaire (FOL) host a band concert and ice cream social in summer and a festival in the fall. The 30th Annual LeClaire Parkfest will be held this year at LeClaire Park on Sunday, October 16.



*The 1922 N. O. Nelson Memorial Fountain, near the Edwardsville Children's Museum was recently restored.*

## N. O. NELSON



Nelson Oliver Nelson was born Sept. 11, 1844, in Lillesand, Norway. Two years later, his family immigrated to America. Nelson's mother died of typhoid in New Orleans before reaching their destination, a fact which would later influence some of Nelson's philanthropic decisions. He was raised in an immigrant community of farmers in northwestern Missouri,

where he spoke Norwegian at home and English at school.

At the age of 16, Nelson joined the Union Army where he was a bookkeeper. He served four years, keeping the company books and preparing correspondence for officers. After the war, he entered the wholesale grocery business in St. Louis, then moved on to work as a retail storekeeper for five years. Neither of these ventures was financially successful, but they provided Nelson with the experience he would need later when he built his own company.

His next employment venture was as a bookkeeper for a wholesale plumbing supply and hardware company in St. Louis which he purchased in 1877, changing the name to N. O. Nelson Manufacturing Company. At the end of the first year, Nelson shared several hundred dollars in profit with his few employees, a practice which would continue informally for many years.

By 1882, despite a national economic depression, annual retail sales at Nelson's company exceeded one million dollars. Nelson formalized his profit-sharing efforts in 1886 and expanded his philanthropic efforts to other areas of what he called "social betterment." He began by providing educational and recreational opportunities for his employees and founding Fresh Air Missions which provided free weekly excursions on the Mississippi River for St. Louis tenement mothers and their children.

Nelson became an international leader in the fields of cooperation and profit sharing, exchanging social theories with others around the world while expanding his business. Nelson tried many social experiments over the years, but Leclaire was his most successful endeavor. Other major efforts for social betterment included a chain of co-operative grocery stores in New Orleans which were eventually gifted to the employees, a home for consumptives in Indio, California, and the Kindergarten in Bessemer, Alabama.

Nelson's Village of Leclaire would become known internationally as a great experiment. It was described in the *New York World* on numerous occasions but in particular by reporter Nellie Bly, in 1894, who wrote at length about the model town where, "The labor question is solved and everybody happy in a little village near St. Louis." The *Los Angeles Times* also regularly reported on N. O. Nelson as did the *Chicago Daily Tribune* and numerous other publications.

In a speech given at Leclaire's 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration in 1905, Nelson said, "Leclaire extends to you a wide-open hospitality, and bids you to enjoy today the ease and comfort and beauty and inspiration which we enjoy every day." More than a century has passed since that day, but the invitation still stands. Every year, on the third Sunday in October, the Friends of Leclaire invite everyone to come enjoy the hospitality of Leclaire on Sunday, October 16, at Leclaire Parkfest, a festival celebrating the unique history of Leclaire.



MADISON COUNTY  
**Historical  
Society**

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## MCHS FALL CALENDAR

**Saturday, September 17**  
8 a.m. - 11 a.m.

**Fundraising Breakfast**  
Sponsored by Edwardsville Masonic Lodge  
(recommended donation \$5)

**Saturday, September 24**  
10 a.m. - 2 p.m.

**Family History Walk**  
Downtown Edwardsville  
Instructions online at [madcohistory.org](http://madcohistory.org)

**Saturday, October 15**  
Vintage Baseball  
12:30 p.m. - 4 p.m.

**Winston Brown Recreational Complex**  
Edwardsville

**Saturday, October 29**  
6:30 p.m.

**Intro to Paranormal Investigating**  
Madison County Archival Library  
(Ticketed Event - Limited availability)

**Sunday, November 6**  
1 p.m.

**Dining in History/Annual Meeting**  
Old Bakery Beer Company  
Alton, Illinois  
(Ticketed Event)

**More information at [madcohistory.org](http://madcohistory.org)**