



EXHIBIT IN WEIR HOUSE!

Yes, it's true! For the first time in many years, there will be an exhibit in the Society's museum building!

The National Library of Medicine announced in October that MCHS will join 19 university and public libraries as recipients of a NIH/NLM traveling exhibition, *Outside/Inside: Immigration, Migration, and Health Care in the United States*. The exhibit uses a combination of documents and images to explore the history of ideas about immigrant health and the experiences had by immigrants and migrants with the US healthcare system since the late 1800s. Health care played a role in inclusion and exclusion, in "assimilation" and discrimination, in dividing communities and in strengthening them.

Noted historian and educator Beatrix Hoffman, PhD, of Northern Illinois University curated the traveling exhibit produced by the National Institute of Health and the National Library of Medicine. MCHS Curator Jenn Vanbibber has created a local exhibit on naturalization to compliment the national exhibit. The exhibitions will complement research being done by SIUE and MCHS staff on immigration and migration into Madison County. The exhibit will be here from May 21 - June 17, 2023. The national exhibition and a companion website were produced by the National Library of Medicine.

JUNE 11 ARMENIAN GENOCIDE PROGRAM

Historian Norma Asadorian will present a program for the June Speaker Series that will provide "An Introduction to the Armenian Genocide." The program will be held June 11 at 2 p.m. at the Main Street Community Center located at 1003 N. Main Street in Edwardsville, Illinois. The program is free and open to the public.



FORGET-ME-NOT
SYMBOL OF REMEMBRANCE OF THE
ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

For Asadorian, this is a personal story since both her grandparents and her husband's grandparents were Armenian immigrants who escaped the genocide in the early 1900s. This program will introduce the audience to Armenian culture and the tragic story of the Armenian genocide.

Known to historians as "The First Genocide of the 20th Century," the Armenian genocide is a significant event that continues to influence foreign relations with the Republic of Armenia and affects the lives and shared memories of Armenians and around the globe.

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WHERE HORSERADISH IS KING

By Cindy Reinhardt

Most Madison County natives have heard of the annual Horseradish Festival in Collinsville where the city claims they are the "Horseradish Capital of the World." The city's Chamber of Commerce trademarked the phrase in 1991, but are they deserving? Although there is competition for the title, this area has rightfully staked a claim to the title for more than a century.



(Nancy Kruckeberg)

Collinsville and the area below the bluffs straddling the Madison/St. Clair County line, part of an area known as the American Bottom, grows "more than 60% of the nation's horseradish," according to Professor S. Alan Walters who is the program director for Southern Illinois University Carbondale's horseradish breeding program. He said an exact figure doesn't exist, but it is well over 60%.

Horseradish is a specialty crop, with only about 3,000 acres planted annually in the United States. That's too small for the USDA to collect statistics on it as they do with other crops. There are no farmers that grow only horseradish because the crop must be rotated. Fields are only planted with horseradish every 3-7 years, so a thousand-acre farm may average less than 200 acres of horseradish annually. Even so, with some annual variation, there are close to 2,000 acres of horseradish grown by area farmers each year. This includes some acreage on the Missouri side of the Mississippi River grown by Illinois farms. Many farmers

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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

RECENT NEWS

WEIR HOUSE PROGRESS!

Progress at the Weir House, the Society's museum building, has been so good that the first two of eight galleries will be ready in time to install a travelling exhibit in May (See Page one article). The exhibit opens on May 21 at 715 N. Main Street. (Editor's note: *It's been a while since I could say that!*)

Restoration of the front door (at right) and the side door have been completed.

The two galleries on the south side of the first floor will soon be painted in preparation for the May exhibit.

Five of the six dormers have been restored, but the center dormer in back needed to be almost completely rebuilt. That work should be completed by the time this newsletter is printed. The final step for the roof is installation of the dormer windows some time in June.

The electrical work has moved to stage two which includes inspection of all switches and sockets, the addition of a ground fault outlet in every room, chandelier repair, reinstallation of attic electricity, and upgrades to anything that is not up to code.



GRANT WORK PRODUCING RESULTS

Board member Stephen Hansen has been successfully leading the charge to obtain grant funding in recent months.

MCHS has just been awarded a DCEO Tourism Festival grant of \$19,000 to fund a Living History Weekend in October (see calendar insert).

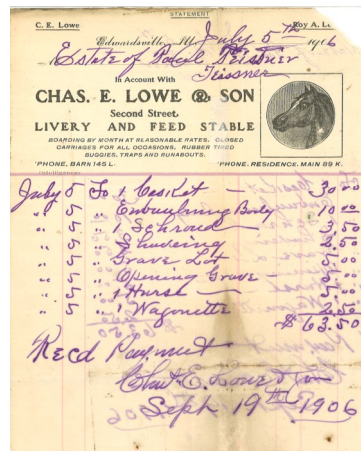
The Meridian Society awarded MCHS a grant of \$2,279 to support the creation of Professional Teacher Development workshops

The SIUE Emeriti Faculty Association awarded \$1,500 to support the Family History Walk in September.

The deadline for the \$186,000 DCEO grant for the Museum Capital Project was extended to allow additional time to raise matching funds. (Donations in any amount can be sent to MCHS, P. O. Box 422, Edwardsville, IL 62025)

And finally, there are numerous other grants that are pending. Every dollar helps when you have buildings to maintain (and restore), salaries to meet, programming, publications, and overhead expenses to pay.

FUN FINDS IN THE PROBATE FILES



This 1906 funeral bill (above) was found by volunteer Craig Becker. It seems pretty much anyone could have a side gig providing funeral services in the early 19th century. Charles Lowe owned an Edwardsville livery but he also provided casket, hearse, grave opening, and embalming services for Mr. Teissner in 1906.

AMAZING

VOLUNTEERS!

We are grateful for several new volunteers since the last newsletter (look for the *). Welcome and thanks to all of you for what you do!

Donna Bardon
Craig Becker
LaVerne Bloemker
Betty Byrd
Gary Denué
Lynn Engelman
Mike Featherstun
Susan Featherstun
Gary Forshaw
Laura Fowler
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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.

RECENT NEWS

STANDING ROOM ONLY AT MRF PROGRAM

More than 125 people enjoyed the April Speaker Series program, "MRF: When the Stars Came Out." Author Mark Pierce presented stories gathered from fans, musicians and employees of the festival that ran from 1969-1980. Also on hand were Lyle Ward, Jack Twesten, and Rick Stankoven, who contributed greatly to the book.



Above, author Mark Pierce talking to guests at the book signing; Upper right, a crowded room for the event; Lower right, (from left) Jack Twesten, Lyle Ward, Mark Pierce and Rick Stankoven. Mark calls them the team that made "When the Stars Came Out."

ARMENIAN PROGRAM (cont. from page 1)

Armenians, and other immigrants who settled in Granite City's Lincoln Place neighborhood, played an important role in the development of Granite City. At the beginning of the 20th century, the city was founded as an industrial town by brothers Fredrick and William Niedringhaus whose factories produced graniteware household items and industrial steel. The need for large numbers of cheap factory laborers attracted thousands of immigrants, including Hungarians, Macedonians, Mexicans, Armenians, and others. Many of them were attracted to Granite City's Lincoln Place neighborhood.

Asadorian has numerous advanced degrees in education and history. Before her retirement in 2012, she was an award-winning secondary school teacher for 37 years. She is the founder and president of the Lincoln Place Heritage Association, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of the historical and cultural heritage of Lincoln Place.

SPONSOR A NEWSLETTER

One of the Society's major expenses is printing and postage expenses for the *MCHS News*. To cover most of this expense, the Society looks for a \$500 sponsor for each issue (6 annually).

Sponsors can use this 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 each eight-page newsletter.

MEMBER RENEWALS STILL NEEDED

There are still a number of members who have not renewed their membership. Because MCHS is a not-for-profit that has overhead expenses like staff salaries, event programming, and buildings to maintain, every member is of great value. If you haven't done so already, please renew today! <https://madcohistory.org/membership/>

MCHS TO RECEIVE AED DEVICE

MCHS recently learned that the Society has been approved as a recipient of a free automated external defibrillator (AED) device from the Greg Holthaus Memorial Fund of Highland, Illinois.

Since Greg's death of heart-related issues at age 29, his stepmother, Gail Holthaus, has made it her mission to place AEDs donated in Greg's memory with as many organizations as possible. The organization also promotes CPR classes in the area.

MCHS is grateful that the device will soon be available at the Madison County Archival Library, but hopes it will never have to be used.

MAY NEWSLETTER SPONSORED BY

J. R. KELLY COMPANY

THE NATION'S LARGEST HORSERADISH DISTRIBUTOR

Thank You!

The J. R. Kelly Company, founded circa 1933 by Joseph R. Kelly, was originally a St. Louis produce company. In the beginning, they sold all kinds of produce, plus Christmas trees and grave blankets in winter. Within a few years, the company began to specialize in horseradish.

In 1984, J. R. Kelly Co. was purchased by a group of Illinois horseradish growers including Robert Keller, Alvin Weissert, Ronald Courtney, and Bluff View Farms (Robert McMillin). That same year, they moved the company to Collinsville, Illinois.

Today, J. R. Kelly Company markets 10-12 million pounds of horseradish annually from the heart of horseradish country. With a customer base that includes both national and international accounts, they ship to locations all over the globe.

The J. R. Kelly Company is one of the long-time supporters of Collinsville's annual International Horseradish Festival.

This year, the festival will celebrate its 35th anniversary on June 2-3 in downtown Collinsville.



HORSERADISH: WHAT IS IT?

have less than 100 acres of horseradish, but the largest area grower has nearly 1,000 acres. Acreage can vary significantly depending on demand, available fields, and other factors.

Being a relatively small-yield crop also means farmers need to be creative with nearly every aspect of growing horseradish. There are no herbicides made specifically for horseradish and farmers can't call their local implement dealer for equipment. There are no manufacturers producing planting or harvesting equipment made specifically for horseradish. Those in the industry need to be more than a little inventive to make it all work. It's one of the reasons that horseradish farming is often a generational business with many of the local growers being fourth or fifth generation.

Horseradish is a hot condiment most often sold as prepared horseradish or horseradish sauce. Prepared horseradish can be difficult to find in the grocery store because it must be refrigerated to preserve its color and the heat of its flavor. It usually consists of grated horseradish, mixed with distilled vinegar and salt to stabilize and preserve flavor. This is the product that packs a flavorful punch in cocktail sauce, dips, sandwich spreads, dressings, and relishes.

Horseradish sauce can be found in the condiment section of the grocery store and is often used in place of mayonnaise for those that like a little "kick" on their sandwich or in dipping sauce. Horseradish loses its kick when heated so is best served cold or added to cold foods. To its credit, horseradish has very few calories, only two per teaspoonful.



Hanfelder's was locally made until the early 1990s.



*Horseradish roots
(S. Alan Walters)*

Horseradish is a perennial root crop in the same family of plants as cabbage, not radish, as one might assume. The greens of the plant are discarded (they are edible but not tasty), and the root is the part of the plant that is processed for consumption. It can be grown in any state of the Union, but it grows best in soils found in two areas near the Mississippi River, in the American Bottom and near Eau Claire, Wisconsin. The soil needs to be loamy and light. A heavy soil will cling to the roots, entrapping them, so the root is difficult to harvest.

The greens grow to two-three feet in height and the main root is typically 8-10 inches long with branching side shoots. The plant needs to be removed from the ground and replanted each year to maintain quality. If left on its own, after a time, the flavor of the root loses heat and the plant can become invasive. Although easy to grow, it is not recommended for a home garden unless in a controlled area. The crop is rotated for two primary reasons, first to prevent disease and control insects, and secondly, to allow soil nutrients to be replenished with other crops, usually corn, alfalfa, or soybeans.

Horseradish is not grown from seed. When horseradish is harvested, the first step in processing it is to remove the largest suckers from the taproot, called sets. The farmer is creating his own "seed" for the following year.

The plant does flower and has seeds but for a variety of reasons these are not practical for use in planting fields. They are, however, used in the breeding program run through SIU Carbondale, where they develop strains resistant to disease and insects. It can take years before they know if a new strain will be successful. In addition to producing an insect and disease resistant strain, the product needs to be a good, flavorful, white root that stores well for planting.

From the earliest times, horseradish was considered to have both culinary and medicinal value. Looking at it from today's perspective, it seems most of the medicinal benefit was gained by taking your attention away from your ailment with the heat of the treatment. It was recommended as a cure for rheumatism, arthritis, asthma, toothaches, headaches, coughs and more. And there were just as many old wives' tales...aphrodisiac, anyone? Although it is not used for the above-named ailments today, an enzyme in horseradish, peroxidase (HRP) is being used to help detect antibodies, and scientists are conducting research looking at a possible cure for cancer using compounds found in horseradish.

"There's a lot of orneriness to growing horseradish. You're out in the wet and cold harvesting when the corn and soybean farmers around town have their tractors in the barn and have gone off to Florida."

William Keller, 1984

18 Aug 1868 The Pantagraph

A remedy for sleeping in church:

"Take a piece of horseradish root of good size, and about a finger's length, to the sanctuary, and the moment the sermon begins put a piece in your mouth about the size of a grain of corn, bite and moisten it faithfully with the saliva, and the eyes will not only be easily kept open, but a tearful attention may also be promoted, to the exclusion of drowsiness, till the sermon ends."

In recent years, horseradish is sometimes tinted green and served as Wasabi. (Wasabi is often called Japanese horseradish.) Horseradish is also part of the seder Passover meal in most Jewish households, which makes the weeks prior to Passover one of the busiest seasons for local horseradish growers.

The name "horseradish" is believed to have evolved from the German *meerrettich* which means stronger radish. Somehow *meer* became "mare," i.e. horse in English, and was combined with "radish," the name for "root." It has been grown and harvested for centuries in Europe, especially Eastern Europe and was brought to the United States with the first settlers. In 1862, Hollister and Company advertised bottled prepared "horse radish" at their store in Alton. A few years later, in 1869, Jacob Henry Heinz, of ketchup fame, began bottling horseradish in clear jars so the customer could see the quality...the whiter the product the hotter and fresher the flavor.

GROWING HORSERADISH



Workers pull the horseradish sets from the pit where they were preserved until time for planting. (Herbert Lee Bischoff)

Growing horseradish tends to be a generational business. Some of the growers are still doing it the same way their family did it a century ago, but the larger farms had to find ways to mechanize parts of the process.

Planting horseradish begins with the previous year's crop. The larger suckers from the main root, called sets, are cut off at harvest and trimmed to a uniform length of 8-10 inches, then bundled and stored in a cooler kept at 28 degrees until planting season. In earlier times, before coolers, the sets were buried in pits to preserve them at a cool temperature. Today, farmers can lease cooler space if they don't have their own so there is no need to bury the sets to preserve them until planting season.



George Willaredt Jr. marking rows in the field in 1960s (Nancy Kruckeberg)

so it feeds horseradish sets onto a conveyor that takes them up to a platform where eight workers line them up so they can drop into the ground. The eight worker stations have seats that in a previous life were seats on a bus. The machine digs eight furrows at the same time and after the set is dropped in, covers it up.



A crew of high-school age boys working the fields at the Bischoff farm, Spring 1984. (Herbert Lee Bischoff)

Farmers who have a hundred acres or less plant by hand. It still requires eight workers who walk closely behind a tractor pulling a piece of equipment that creates numerous furrows for rows approximately three feet apart. The men walking behind the equipment drop a "set" about every two feet, so that it is parallel with the furrow. The sets are laid horizontally, but at a slight angle that is called putting the "head on the pillow." The idea is to have the plants all facing the same direction to make cultivation easier.

There are many older people, mostly men, in the area that remember working in the horseradish fields in their youth. Granite City native, Gary Gaines, was one of them. Of those years, he said, "I worked some hard jobs in the steel mill and none of them were as hard as the horseradish farm."



A crew of women on the Bischoff farm, circa 1984, planting horseradish. (Herbert Lee Bischoff)

Several of the growers mentioned that kids would sometimes come out to work and when they came to the end of their first row, they just kept walking. The work was too difficult. But, if they made it through the first day, they became good employees with a strong work ethic, and a steady summer and after-school job. Today, it's difficult to find high school students willing to do this kind of work. Most farmers have a combination of full-time employees and seasonal (legal) migrant workers.

When the plants are still young, the growers "lift" the plants. The crown is lifted an inch or two and in the process some of the suckers are broken off. This action improves the quality of the plant by encouraging growth on the main root. Some growers do this more than once in a season. This is work that must be done by hand as is hoeing close to the plant. A cultivator can be used between rows, but not next to the plant.

1926 St. Louis Post-Dispatch

"Gifted by Mother Nature with neither grace nor beauty, the horse-radish is not an object which would delight the soul of an artist. But to the palate of a connoisseur, it is a thing of beauty and a joy forever, one of the gifts of the gods to mankind, like (an) altar of roses, a rare day in June, or a beautiful woman."

An oft repeated saying in the industry is that horseradish is harvested in any month that has an "r" in it. Although harvesting can begin in September, most farmers wait until November because the majority of their crops are not horseradish and need to be harvested earlier. The harvesting continues through the winter, so long as the ground isn't frozen, and into the spring.

Before harvesting, the fields are "mowed," cutting off the tops, and any weeds in the field, at about 6 inches off the ground so that the roots brought into the processing area have as little green as possible.

(Cont. on page 6)

GROWING HORSERADISH (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5)



Workers on the Heepke Farm sort horseradish roots, cutting off the sets (shown at right) to be set aside for planting next year. (2023, Reinhardt)

Harvesting is usually done with a modified potato digger, but getting it out of the ground is only the first step in finishing the harvest. After digging the root, it is still in the field and needs to be loaded into wagons.

Using Heepke Farms as an example, the crop is brought into a holding area (a large shed for temporary staging) and kept in separate piles according to which fields it came from so they know what breeding variety it is.

From there, the roots are brought into a large room where the crop is loaded into vintage silage wagons that have been converted so that a conveyor feeds the root onto another conveyor on a raised platform where workers grab each root and cut off sets to be used for planting in the next season. The remainder stays on the conveyor and is taken to a squirrel-cage contraption that after a few spins helps knock off dirt and some of the greens.

Following that, workers use a machine to cut off any greens that are left. The greens will heat during storage and cause rot, so it is carefully removed. From there the roots drop into pallets and are packed down with a goal of having 1,200 pounds of root in each pallet. The pallets move on to a wrapping station where the wooden walls of the pallet are removed and replaced with plastic wrap. Next, it's on to the scale where if it is under 1200 pounds, more is added, or, if

over, some is taken out. A computer prints out labels that identify the weight, breed, what field it came from, etc.. A pallet truck moves the cube-shaped pallets of horseradish into a storage room where the temperature is kept at 28 degrees. The room has the appearance of a Costco warehouse with rows and rows of racks, each four pallets high, only instead of furniture and home goods, it's all horseradish roots. The room also has its own aroma.

As orders come in, the product is loaded into semi-truck trailers and sent to processors or distributors. While this is going on, the planting season has already started. Because planting is done in a different field each year, there is no need to wait for the harvest to be completed to plant the next year's crop.

All of the processing equipment mentioned above, with the exception of a cultivator and pallet truck, has to be custom made to fit industry needs. If the operation is small, say under 100 acres, more of the work is done by hand.

Heepke Farms grows roughly 200 acres of horseradish annually and ships its product directly to processors, but there are many smaller growers who use one of two local distributors, the L. Cherrick Horseradish Company or the J. R. Kelly Company. Both were originally located in St. Louis and handled a variety of produce before eventually specializing in horseradish. Cherrick was founded in 1908 and sold to Granite City grower Vernon Bruns in 1979. It is still owned and operated by the Bruns family today.

J. R. Kelly Company was founded in St. Louis, Missouri, circa 1933, and sold to a group of five Illinois growers in 1984. Today, it is owned by two of the descendants of those growers, Craig Keller and Barry McMillin. J. R. Kelly is the largest distributor of horseradish in the country. One of the many advantages of selling through a distributor is that they have cold storage available so that the smaller growers don't have to have coolers on their property except to store their sets for the next season.

THE GROWERS

Many publications estimate the first commercially grown horseradish was available as far back as the 1850s. Since there were sellers mentioned in Missouri in the 1870s and an advertisement for retail sales in Alton in 1862, there was probably some commercial growth here; however, it wasn't significant until after 1900.

The earliest Illinois growers were German and either brought it with them or sent for it later. The name most often associated with bringing horseradish to Madison County is William Bruns (1897-1974), although given the dates, his father, Claus Bruns (1848-1926) is also a likely candidate. Another name mentioned as a possible source (there could be more than one) is Fred Fingerhut (1874-1941) of St. Clair County.

Raising horseradish is often a generational business because it's not easy for

someone new to get started. Farmers plant their own sets and use equipment they have modified after years of experimentation. It's very labor-intensive, but despite the hard work and the expense of labor, an acre of horseradish will provide a much higher income than an acre of corn. In a 1975 article in the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, Illinois Extension advisor Chris Doll said it takes "150-200 manhours of labor per acre to produce a (horseradish) crop compared to say, 4.5 hours per acre for corn."

The nature of the business has changed in that what used to be a group of 30-40 growers in this area, is now less than a dozen major growers. The same amount of

horseradish is being grown, but the farms are larger. John Relleke, part of a four-generation family of growers, said his grandfather had just a few acres,

"My father grew horseradish and my wife's father grew horseradish. My two brothers grow horseradish, and two of my wife's brothers grow horseradish. We have two sons-in-law in the business and we each have cousins who grow horseradish...half of the industry in this area are blood relatives."

William Keller, 1984

HORSERADISH GROWERS

his father Ivan had 30-40 acres, and before retirement, he grew 70-100 acres where his son now grows horseradish.

About 70% of the horseradish growers, especially in Madison County, can be found on the same family tree. Robert (Bob) and Sue Bunselmeyer are prime examples of this. Their children are fourth and fifth generation horseradish growers through every one of their grandparents. Growers on Bob's side of the family go back to William Brinkhoff (1870-1929) and Frank Bunselmeyer (1892-1955). On Sue's side of the family, a history of growers dates back to George Willaredt Sr. (1898-1989) and Ferdinand Keller (1843-1942). All four of these branches have aunts and uncles that were also growers making a family tree that looks more like a web.

Another thing many early growers had in common was membership at St. John's United Church of Christ in Granite City, known as the German Christian Church of the Six Mile Prairie when first founded in 1862.

Not all were German though, and some are Catholic. The Fournie family were French Catholic immigrants. Another grower, William Powell (1857-1931) was born in Bridgeport, England.

Powell's three eldest sons, George, John and Fred, all grew horseradish in Collinsville. The headline on his obituary in the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* referred to him as the "Father of America's 3 Horseradish Kings." The Powell family farmed near Cahokia Mounds and their farm included what was called Powell's Mound. Mary Sue (Dilliard) Schusky remembers when there was a sign advertising "fill dirt" at the road in front of their property.

Many of the farmers have land that was once occupied by Native Americans in the American Bottom. The Bunselmeyers lost a nine-year battle to keep 382 acres of their family farm after the state condemned it to make it part of the Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site. Brian Eckmann says he and his workers have been collecting Native American artifacts out of his fields for years, and each season more is uncovered. His farm is also close to Cahokia.

The Powell brothers were not the only "horseradish kings" over the years. That appears to be a term the newspapers liked to use that sometimes was a bit embarrassing to the growers. Other "kings," as identified in the newspapers, were:

William Brinkmann. In 1918, the *Alton Telegraph* said, "For many years William Brinkmann of the Grafton Road has held the title of 'Horseradish King of Madison County.' This year he lost it to a young Ed Stirtz who is conducting the farm and vegetable gardens of his uncle, the late Louis R. Stirtz. But Mr. Brinkmann remains a king just the same – the parsnip king of the



The Powell family from left, Fred, William, George, Lottie and Emma, circa 1900-1905. The Powell brothers would later be called the "Horseradish Kings." (Collinsville History Museum)

county – his new title." It was only a temporary loss of title that the newspapers continued to apply to him well into the 1920s.

George Thomas Powell. In 1928, numerous newspapers reported that "five Indian graves were discovered on the farm of Tom Powell, the 'Horseradish King of Madison County.'"

W. Fred Powell. Another one of the Powell brothers, Fred was often referred to as the horseradish king throughout the 1930s and 1940s.

August Bruns. "Horse-Radish 'King' in Bottoms Area." This 1959 *Post-Dispatch* headline was followed by an article saying Bruns, an Illinois farmer, lived at Hilltop Farm with a residence atop a large Native American burial mound near Monk's Mound.

Robert Bunselmeyer. When the Bunselmeyers lost most of their farm to the Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site, they moved to Decatur where the newspapers said Bob Bunselmeyer was the "undisputed king of horseradish." The Bunselmeyers stopped growing horseradish in 2008 after "radish" income put all of their children through college.

In more recent years, "kings" have been those that participate in multiple aspects of the industry. The late Robert Fournie was a grower and distributor, filling orders for many specialty markets. Herbert John Bischoff, a second-generation grower, began in 1932 with two acres of horseradish. Twenty years later, he expanded his Sunset Farms to include distribution from a warehouse in Poag, Illinois. He later purchased Meyer Horseradish, a St. Louis processor, so that he was participating in all aspects of the industry. His son, Herbert Lee Bischoff was recognized as one of the larger growers during his time growing horseradish.

Another outstanding grower was William "Bill" Hanfelder, a third-generation grower who also processed horseradish and sold it under his own label. When he retired from the business, he sold his brand to the Silver Springs label. You can still purchase Hanfelder prepared horseradish today, but it is now made in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. Today, Bill is retired, so leases his farm ground. The former Hanfelder produce stand on Horseshoe Lake Road has been turned into "A Taste of Country," a café/bakery owned by his daughter and granddaughter.

As numerous growers confided, if there were a "king" today, it would be Craig Keller. Keller Farms is the largest grower the area has ever had, with nearly double the acreage of any other local grower. Keller, like Heepke Farms, has acreage in both Illinois and Missouri but primarily in Illinois. Keller is joined in the business by his daughters, Lindsey and Lauren who are active participants. As a partner in J. R. Kelly, Keller is a distributor as well as a grower.



Wagon piled high with horseradish roots. At left, George Willaredt, Sr. (Nancy Kruckeberg)

(Cont. on page 8)

HORSERADISH IS KING OF THE AMERICAN BOTTOM

As early as 1926 horseradish growers began organizing, first with the intent to block the dumping of cheap European horseradish into the U.S. market (a 3 cents per pound tariff was added to imports in 1930) and later to coordinate marketing efforts.

An article in 1926 said that there were 77 horseradish growers in Illinois, and 75 of those were in Madison and St. Clair counties. In this area the promotional efforts are still organized, but added to that is the work of the University of Illinois Extension advisors and university breeding programs at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

Since the late 1930s, there have been annual workshops and meetings where growers can share problems they are dealing with regarding disease, drought, or insect infestation, and work together to identify solutions.

One of the worst times for local growers came with the drought of 1953 when most farmers had yields that were only 25% of normal. For some it was a total loss. That year, for the first time, J. R. Kelly had to import horseradish from Germany to fill orders. The following year, at least a half dozen growers had irrigation wells sunk on their properties. They obtained sets from Wisconsin

growers, but still were not out of the woods as the next two years were plagued with two diseases, white rust and bitter root that prompted a *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* editorial with the headline, "Save the Horseradish."

The growers have also faced challenges from population expansion that brought housing developments and interstate highways across some of the richest fields. During World War II some horseradish growers were ordered to grow tomatoes instead of horseradish.

Growers have often served in leadership roles for the Farm Bureau and other agricultural organizations. Some of these have changed over time. For example, horseradish used to be considered part of an organization for vegetable

farmers who grew potatoes, sweet corn, and other foods for the table. There is now a separate organization for the Horseradish Growers of Illinois. There are some, like Relleke's, who still grow sweet corn and pumpkins, but the majority of horseradish growers rotate their crop with soybeans, field corn, and, sometimes, alfalfa.

Illinois is king when it comes to horseradish, and the dedicated, generational farmers in this area grow nearly all of the horseradish in Illinois.

Long live the king!



Horseradish plant with root.

(Nancy Kruckeberg)

SPECIAL CALENDAR & VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Inside this issue is a pull-out section with a calendar and information on upcoming events for the Society. You'll see a long list of activities including participation at local festivals, and partnerships with other organizations, as well as our own events and fundraisers.

At festivals, we like to have at least two persons in the booth at all times, so if you would like to be one of those people, please call. We would be grateful and you'll have a good time!

The new exhibit that will be in the Weir House for a month, requires volunteers to staff the building Wednesday – Friday and Sunday, 1 - 4 p.m. Let us know if you can help.

In addition, we are still seeking volunteers for the Probate Project. Thank you to all of the wonderful volunteers that are working on this important project.

To volunteer for the Probate project, call 618-656-3493. For other projects, call 618-656-1294.