



# Mercer County Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 9, Issue 4

Editor: Mary Jane Sticklen

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## Mercer County Historical Society & Essley-Noble Museum

1406 - SE 2nd Avenue  
Aledo, IL 61231  
Phone: 309/582-2280

Hours: 1:00 - 5:00 PM  
Wed., Sat., & Sunday  
April through the end of October.



### Officers & Board of Directors

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Mary Jane Sticklen  
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Shirley Crawford, Curator  
Dennis Henderson, Sunday Host



### For Genealogy Queries write to:

Cheryl McCaw/Shirley Crawford  
MCHS Genealogy Dept.  
1406 - SE 2nd Avenue  
Aledo IL 61231-2504



### For membership or change of address contact

Jim Runyon  
756 State Hwy 94  
Aledo, IL 61231  
582-7762

website: [http://www.geocities.com/mchs\\_61231](http://www.geocities.com/mchs_61231)

## A Great Day for a Sesquicentennial

Thank you to everyone who helped to make our Ice Cream Social very successful this year. It was wonderful how everyone stepped up when needed. Many pies and cakes were donated and many people worked together to get the needed supplies to the Central Park shelter for the day. A big thank you to everyone who helped to serve pie, cake, ice cream & root beer floats and to each of you who had dessert with us. Mercer Market worked with us, allowing us to pick up cold root beer & ice cream as needed. They gave us very good prices & Blue Bunny gave us an extra \$2 a bucket price break.

It was very evident by the quality and quantity of floats and parade entries that the whole county and beyond had put much time and effort into making the Aledo Sesquicentennial Parade memorable. Every high school band in the county was here along with two bagpipe groups and the Illinois National Guard Army Band! The weather couldn't have been more perfect! Our thanks to Matt Frieden for bringing his team of Belgian horses and wagon to represent the Mercer County Historical Society in the parade. Riding in the wagon were board members Cheryl McCaw, Harriett Reynolds and Alyce Robinson. Also in the wagon were Ida Duncan and her son Wayne. Wayne was wearing the uniform of General Hugh Mercer that his father, Eugene Duncan, had worn in the county's celebration of the country's Bicentennial Parade in 1976.



**CURATOR'S CORNER**

By Shirley Crawford

Copies of the **William and Wilson V. Marsh journals** have recently been donated to the MCHS and are in eleven binders on display at the museum.

In the early spring of 1853, Mordecai Lewis Marsh left his Ohio farm and carpentry business to look for land in the West. He purchased a quarter section in central Mercer County. By requiring that some furrows be plowed so he could study the soil before paying \$3.75 an acre, he became the first white man to disturb the virgin prairie in that section.

In September 1853 Mordecai moved his wife Eliza Ann and 19-year-old son William Albert Brown Marsh to what would be home to four generations of Marshes along what is now the Seaton-Millersburg Road. Fortunately, both William and his son Wilson Victor Marsh kept daily journals. Those of William cover from 1853 to 1913 (with references to earlier events), and those of Wilson extend to 1977—more than 100 years of life in Mercer County.

Readers will find much about the daily farm experience, as well as common hardships such as injuries and illnesses. Also are records of the first school in this area, the Marsh's first telephone, radio, and x-ray, the development of the Mercer County Fair, local thoughts on the Civil War including hand-drawn pictures, the memorial held for Abraham Lincoln when his funeral train stopped in Aledo, and much more, including William's development into a knowledgeable scientist.

Socializing included debates on topics such as slavery, evolution vs. creation, and whether women should vote. The Marsh family was closely involved in the development of the local Seventh-day Adventist Church and a school.

Thank you to Michael I. Marsh, Berrien Springs, MI, who with his wife Debbie made the journal copies. Michael is the great-grandson of Wilson V.. And thank you to J. Kendall Marsh and Sylvia Marsh Fagal, grandchildren of Wilson V., current keepers of

the journals. We appreciate your willingness to share this personal part of your family history.

Also available at the museum is the book *Prairie Tree: Early Days on the Northern Illinois Prairie* by Frank Lewis Marsh, PhD, son of Wilson V. Marsh. *Prairie Tree* chronicles the history and agricultural development of Mercer County, with information drawn from the Marsh journals.

Come to view **other accessions**. Thank you to Margaret Miles for Collins and Miles family artifacts. There is also a wolf stole donated by Edwin Smith and June Smith McMillan, accompanied by their amusing anecdote of its origins, and thank you to Murray and Dorothy Patton for a Mannon Brickyard mold and Mannon Post Office boxes. A more complete list of accessions will be included in a future newsletter.



*Prairie Heritage*

If you visited our prairie plot south of the main building you probably saw the blooms of the purple and yellow coneflowers, named for their drooping petals. There were also the “poofy” lavender blooms of Joe Pye Weed, named after a Native American herb doctor, as well as the small, dainty flowers of the wild petunia. The huge, rough, oak-like leaves of the compass plant were evident.



This got its name from the leaves which align themselves north and south to catch the sun's rays. It and its sister plants of prairie dock, rosin weed, and cup plant have bright yellow daisy-like flowers on a stalk that can grow eight feet tall. (The cup plant was named for its leaves that form a cup around the stem. It is said that Indians and pioneers knew that this would be a safe source of drinking water.) You would also have noticed the small, lavender blooms of the wild petunia. This fall the New England aster shows off its glory. In future years you will see large-flowered beardtongue, Queen of the Prairie, blazing star, bergamot, spiderwort, wild quinine, the candelabra-like Culver's root, and this spring will feature the dainty prairie smoke.

The native grasses add almost as much variety as the flowering plants. The taller ones

like big bluestem, Indian grass, and switch grass are in the back along the building. Towards the front are the fountain-like mounds of prairie dropseed and my personal favorite, little bluestem, with its subtle blue hue during the growing season and distinctive bronze in the fall and winter.

Our prairie garden will continue to evolve. Some plants will be aggressive and will have to be thinned and new varieties added.

All will blend and provide a changing scene throughout the seasons and the years. Notice textures and unique shapes as well as the color of the flowers. Look for native plants along the roadsides and in older pastures. I like to integrate them into my garden and flowering borders. They are hardy, beautiful, and naturally attract butterflies.

**Did you know** that Mercer Co. is home to a high-quality native prairie at Brownlee Cemetery, located just a half mile north on 220 St., just off 1<sup>st</sup> Ave. on the Mercer-Warren Co. line? In 1842 it was deeded as a church and burying ground by Thomas and Anne Brownlee. In 1982 it was dedicated as a nature preserve and deeded to the Mercer Co. Soil and Water Conservation District. The former churchyard, south of the cemetery prairie, was reseeded with native plants in 1984. Marshall Reynolds has been instrumental in taking care of Brownlee for many years. Talk with him or stop in at the SWCD office for additional information.

Pioneer cemeteries and old railroad beds are excellent sites for native plants since they were neither plowed nor extensively grazed. Although they may appear to be “untidy,” cemeteries showcasing native prairie are truly a living tribute to our pioneer ancestors.

Photo: Mary Jane at Brownlee with compass plant, big bluestem, & yellow coneflowers.



**Post Cards and More**

**Thank you** to James Earl and to Louis Truitt for letting us make digital copies of their vast post card collections. Louis has various post cards from Keithsburg and she related interesting anecdotes about the scenes and of Keithsburg’s history. Jim has a huge collection of cards from Aledo and surrounding areas. He also hinted at some tantalizing donations and has offered the Millersburg United Presbyterian Church cornerstone to the museum, which chronicles the building of the church in 1856, its destruction by the cyclone of 1908, and rebuilding in 1908.

Both collections included many views that were new to our photo archives and may be seen in digital form at the museum. Although the museum officially closes Oct. 30, special arrangements can still be made to scan photos. Contact Mary Jane Sticklen 582-5814 or Bill Bertrand 582-2506.



**Web Site**

Alicia Ives has graciously consented to maintain the MCHS website. If you have not visited it, you will be amazed at the amount of information. There are numerous genealogical and historical links, as well as news, photos, and information about MCHS and the museum. Add [http://www.geocities.com/mchs\\_61231](http://www.geocities.com/mchs_61231) to your “favorites” and visit often.

**Welcome new members!**

We are always delighted to have friends discover the MCHS and the Essley-Noble Museum and of course any monetary contributions help with our programs. We also **welcome Bill Bertrand as our newest Board member.** He has plunged in with both feet and has become actively involved with a number of interests.

**Museum Closing for the Season**

The Essley-Noble Museum will cease regular hours for the season after Oct. 30 and will re-open in April. Our curator, Shirley Crawford, can arrange for a tour on special occasions by calling her at 584-4820.

### Fall Open Meeting

Mark you calendars for our **Fall Open Meeting Oct. 17, 7:00 PM** at the Essley-Noble Museum.

Neil Dahlstrom, Moline, will be the speaker. Neil is an archivist for Deer & Company and co-authored with his brother, Jeremy, *The John Deere Story*, which was published last spring. The book relates events of the founding and growth of the company under the leadership of John and Charles Deere.

Neil is a Quad City native and graduated from Monmouth College. He and Aledo's Karen Flint were married in June 2005.

This should be a very interesting program and after the meeting refreshments will be served. There is no admission and everyone is welcome so bring friends and family for perhaps your last chance this season to visit the museum.

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### Coming Events

#### October

Oct. 17 at 7:00PM

- Fall open business meeting
- Neil Dahlstrom will discuss his book *The John Deere Story*

Oct. 30<sup>th</sup>

- Museum closing for the season