Spring 2022

Cornsilk

The Quarterly Magazine of

The DeKalb County Historical - Genealogical Society

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Images courtesy of DeKalb County History Center Archives

It's Just a Town

By Michael Dunker

It's just a town.
Just a town in the cornfields is what they say.
Just a town of builders and bankers and farmers and grocers. A town where people hang Christmas lights early and order pizza on Friday night. It's just a town of mothers and daughters, good neighbors and coaches, atheists and churchgoers. A place where the last Sunday of October is the best weekend of the year - a place of pumpkins and cornstalks.
It's just a town. A town of snow drifts and tornado sirens. Where there used to be a stone fountain in the main intersection and there's still houses from the Underground Railroad. It's a town where you can define yourself by your elementary school. It's a town where the bakery opens at 5:30 a.m. and closes when they're out of donuts. A town where the movie theater still changes the marquee and a town where NFL players come from.
It's just a town in the middle of the cornfields
is what they say...
A place where creed and class visit the same coffee shop. Where neighbors still share cups of sugar and kids shovel sidewalks. Where couples start families, kids start school, and seniors retire.
Where folks are buried next to the inventor of barbed wire or they grew up with Cindy Crawford.
It's the community.
It's the country roads.
It's the Speedway.
It's the old Henderson's.
It's NIU.
It's Sycamore Park.
It's the courthouse.
It's just a town, but those who are from here
know it's so much more...
That's Sycamore.

Inspired by Anna Floit's "Just a House"

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From the Editor's Desk…

As the newest editor of this magazine, I have some big shoes to fill; local editors have made this a special and unique piece of history for decades. It has been an honor to put together an issue of Cornsilk.

As we plan for the future, we are looking for contributors to share unique stories in Cornsilk.

Have you been researching a family member or local figure? Is there a family heirloom you've been learning more about? Or do you just have an interest in a local history story that you think others may enjoy as well? Send me your stories, photos and local history facts and tidbits.

Send your suggestions, as well! What do you want to read about? How can we reach readers in all corners of the county? How do we reach readers that have moved far from home? What would make Cornsilk even better?

My hope for Cornsilk is to share new, eclectic stories that could be enjoyed by anyone, while still maintaining the integrity that this publication has held for decades. I look forward to figuring that out together.

- Jessi Haish LaRue

Cornsilk submission deadlines for 2022:
May 15
August 15
November 15

Submit news and stories to jhaish09@gmail.com

Cornsilk is published by the DeKalb County Historical - Genealogical Society in the months of March, June, September, and December. The deadline for submission of information is the 15th of the month prior to publication. Send submissions to: Jessi LaRue, *Cornsilk*, 225 North Ave., Sycamore, Illinois 60178; or jhaish09@gmail.com.

Recognizing Cornsilk's longtime editor

By Jim Johnson, DCHGS Board Member

Many people have made significant contributions to the DeKalb County Historical – Genealogical Society (DCHGS), but perhaps no one more so than Marcia Wilson. This article attempts to acknowledge some of Marcia's valuable contributions to DCHGS, and to give her a big thank you on behalf of the DCHGS Board and the readers who have enjoyed the results of her work.

Marcia has been the very competent editor of DCHGS's publication, *Cornsilk* for the last 20 years, and has produced an amazing 80 issues. During this time she has set deadlines, recruited contributors, wrote a number of the articles herself, sought out photographs and volunteers, organized and helped to proof each issue, arranged the printing and distribution, and accepted the obligation of getting all 80 issues out in high quality and on time. Marcia has also contributed significantly to other DCHGS publications such as the *Acres of Change* DeKalb County history book, and even served as editor of the highly regarded *Rural School Journeys* book, which documents the history of all the county's one-room schools.

Marcia has generously served in leadership positions as a member of the DCHGS Board of Directors, including serving as both Vice President and President.

Many other organizations have also profited from Marcia's work and generous volunteering, including the Joiner History Room, Glidden Homestead & Historical Center, Midwest Museum of Natural History, DeKalb County Hospice, Hope Haven and St. Mary's Catholic Church, to name just a few. And as if all of this is not enough, Marcia has also worked as a freelance copy editor for a variety of publishing houses over the past 20 years.

Marcia says she now hopes to ease into semi-retirement and devote more time to her family genealogy projects, work on her unfinished quilting, and do more traveling, all of which she has well-earned and richly deserves. But we will not be surprised if she also continues to do some volunteering which seems to be engrained in her generous spirit.

Thank you, Marcia, for all you have done.

Marcia Wilson, DCHGS President and previous Cornsilk editor

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How Hinckley's Mosaic Mural Took Shape

By Bob Pritchard

The beautiful mosaic mural on the west wall of the South Moon BBQ on Sycamore Street in Hinckley shows many scenes from the town's nearly 150-year history. A pamphlet and book describe each piece and its significance.

This story shares how the mural took form and the many people who over 24 months invested 1,450 hours to make it a reality. Back in 2018, the Hinckley Village Board received a grant from the DeKalb County Community Foundation to create a plan for making the community a more desirable place to live, do business and visit.

The Village Board selected three community members to lead the planning effort. These members then recruited a team of 30 residents to work with the NIU Center for Governmental Studies to develop the plan. Among the ideas that surfaced was a large mural that would attract visitors and community excitement. A team of eight residents volunteered to work on the mural and they commissioned mosaic muralist Danielle Casali to create the artistic designs for each mosaic scene.

A core group of Ardith Trumpy, Catherine Bartels, Jennifer Klambauer and Karen Yaggie set about learning to score and cut glass and tile with hand tools. Each piece was laid on top of Danielle's drawings and taped together. As Ardith relates, there was a long learning curve and dozens of Band-Aids were needed to cover the fingers cut by the glass pieces.

The work started in the Stripes Plus More building until COVID-19 hit in the spring of 2020. Work stopped until fall when the group figured out how to continue working while following health guidelines and social distancing. They relocated the project to an art studio created in Cathy Bartel's garage. Danielle said that she had never seen someone so enthused about a project to remodel their garage as a studio.

Danielle was kept abreast of the work with virtual meetings, but the core group boldly charged forward adjusting the drawings to make them easier to tile and show off the natural edge of the glass. Sharon Langdon Bauer joined in finishing a piece related to her father Dean Langdon, former owner of the Hinckley Review.

Meanwhile, the Hinckley-Big Rock Junior and Senior High art students worked at the middle school to create a piece related to the Harlem Globetrotters. Their work reminisces of the first game that the world famous basketball team played at Hinckley High School in 1927. Danielle's father, Dale Dobies, was recruited to mortar and grout several pieces in his garage.

As each picture took shape, the taped pieces were lifted like a sheet of tiles you may use for a shower wall and placed on a concrete board cut to shape and covered with mortar. Each piece of glass and tile chip was pressed into the mortar and then the tape was removed. Grout was mixed and applied around each piece of glass and tile.

After the picture was allowed to dry, the surface of each piece of glass and tile had to be rubbed clean of the grout.

At last, a picture was ready to mount on the wall. The tall corn plants were first. Jordan Bickford provided a scissors lift for Kelly Chada, Mark Trumpy, and Frank Yaggie to lift each picture into place on the South Moon wall. The back of the cement board was coated with liquid nail caulk and then the piece was screwed to the wall.

The finished mosaic mural was dedicated on October 23, 2021 and was celebrated by the community with an arts festival. The project has already achieved part of the objective set for it by attracting people to visit Hinckley and its businesses, to marvel at the mural, and take their own picture standing by a section of the mosaic. The tired and sore creators of the mosaic certainly agreed with one of the mural scenes taken from quotes in the Hinckley Review Newspaper social columns, "And a good time was had by all."

The book explaining each piece of the mural is available for $20 by sending your name, address and a check to Hinckley Festival Association, P.O. Box 657, Hinckley, IL 60520.

Photos provided by Bob Pritchard

The Crowd at the Killing: Buffalo in DeKalb's Hopkins Park

By Rob Glover

Charles W. Marsh (1834-1918) kept a buffalo, along with deer and exotic birds, on his property, then north of DeKalb, now Hopkins Park near the tennis courts. But it turns out Marsh's buffalo wasn't the only buffalo to have lived in Hopkins Park.

When Marsh's home was torn down in 1964, The DeKalb Daily Chronicle wrote "Many residents of the city still remember the grand barbeque held when the lone buffalo finally was slaughtered and fed to the populace." The rest of the Chronicle article described the settlement of the Marsh property, one of the earliest settled in the County; Marsh's home, "the magnificent show place" that was called "The Walnuts;" and its purchase and use for more than 40 years by the County tuberculosis sanitarium. But the article is silent on details of the buffalo.

Co-inventor of the Marsh Harvester with his brother William, Charles Marsh manufactured the Marsh Harvester in Sycamore until the business had a capital crisis and had to be sold. Marsh had served as State Representative in 1868 and afterward was elected to the State Senate. Later, Marsh was editor-in-chief of Farm Implement News. In his autobiography, Recollections 1837-1910, Marsh talks about keeping a buffalo on his land.

He wrote "The most interesting animal I ever had in the park was a buffalo. I bought him from a showman. He was a great shaggy fellow, a stag, but as gentle and playful as a calf. He was always ready for company, whether of man or beast. He would look his invitation to me to come into the park and play with him, and when I went in he would prance around and follow me like a dog. He tried to be friendly with the deer, but they would not associate with him."

"Not long after getting him I put a two year old colt in the park," because Marsh noticed that the buffalo seemed to need companionship. "After a few days the colt responded to his advances and they became great friends. They ate and played together and slept near each other. Their pranks were quite entertaining."

Marsh's buffalo was a threat to the traffic passing the property on Sycamore Road. "Horses were generally afraid of him and some were frightened if they caught his scent; in consequence I had to put a fence across the end of the park next the road to keep him back," he wrote. "He learned later to break the park fence and I had to sell him to another showman." With that, the buffalo left DeKalb. Sometime before April 1940, two donated buffalo appeared again in Hopkins Park.

The DeKalb Chronicle wrote "Buffalo are roaming the woods between Hopkins Park and the Kishwaukee Country Club. This pair of bison, donated to Hopkins Park by T.E. Courtney have been finding it easy to feel at home, despite the many curious spectators who have watched the animals." No information has turned up about how the buffalo came to be donated or the terms of the donation. The pair proved to be an attraction at the park and there are accounts of church picnics in the park that concluded with a visit to the buffalo. One of the buffalo, the male, was named Big Joe, weighed between 1,500 and 1,800 pounds. Before the summer of 1943, Big Joe's mate passed away.

Opposite page: Charles W. Marsh. Above: Marsh's buffalo | Images courtesy of DeKalb County History Center Archives

At the height of World War II, Lincoln Park Zoo agreed to provide another mate for Joe. The July 24, 1943, Chronicle ran a photo of Big Joe "becoming acquainted with his new mate." But the caption continued, "The mate, however, ill when received, passed away a few days after arrival here, and the scene, expected to be more or less permanent proved to be of the most fleeting nature."

After the passing of the companion, Joe grew more aggressive and had "developed a dangerous temper" in the following six months. "The buffalo had been unusually ugly the last few days and Bob Powell and Virgil McGlashen were ready any time Saturday to have someone come along with a gun and kill the huge hulk of a beast."

"To prevent a tragedy at the park," by late January 1944, action was taken. "When all preparations had been completed" on the morning of Sunday, January 23, 1944, H. M. Stewart, brought his 30-40 rifle to Hopkins Park and stood at the gate of Joe's pen. And "stepped up to within five feet of the animal, raised his gun, fired, and the bullet… struck him in the center of the forehead a little above the eyes—and Joe died instantly."

The group assembled to help, went to work quickly and "Richard Norrby, Harvey Willrett, and Oscar Youngren, with knives sharpened to a razor's edge quickly skinned the animal." Fred Nelson had purchased the hide.

Lotan Struthers and Charles Foster did the butchering assisted by a Central Illinois Light Company hoist that "lifted the massive bulk to the proper height in each instance and within a remarkably short time, Joe the buffalo was in quarters and on his way to cold storage." To top off the occasion, "Breakfast of bacon and eggs was prepared and served the crowd at the killing by Herman Johnson, Lester Ebbesen and Cecil Pinkston."

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At their previous meeting, DeKalb's MacArthur Club had announced "that the animal would be killed and served at a banquet, open to the public February 16, at the Masonic Temple." The club ran ads in the Chronicle and the Buffalo Beef Barbecue was attended by more than 500 people paying $1 per ticket.

Additionally, 48 supper orders were delivered "to many who were shut-ins and unable to attend the party." George Allen of Allen's Restaurant barbequed the meat.

Proceeds from the supper bought care packages for World War II service men and helped add to the recreation facilities at Hopkins Park, reported the Chronicle the next day. Ed Rohlik was proclaimed the champion ticket seller.

In spite of the large attendance, enough meat was left over that "the remainder of 'Joe, the Buffalo' was put in storage" to be used by the club "to hold a stag for its members within the near future if the beef does not spoil."

In all of the events surrounding Joe's death and the supper that followed, there is no record what the donor of buffalos thought or if he had purchased a ticket for the event. This was, though, the remarkable event of the buffalo that fed DeKalb's populace that the Chronicle recounted twenty years later when the Marsh mansion was demolished.

Buffalo at Park Passes Away Today

One of the two buffalo at Hopkins Park died this morning, it was reported by Robert Powell, caretaker at the park. The animal was found dead in the enclosure.

That it expired did not greatly surprise Mr. Powell and others who have frequently seen the two buffaloes as it had appeared to be ill since shortly after its arrival at the park.

Funeral services, said Mr. Powell were to be held this afternoon.

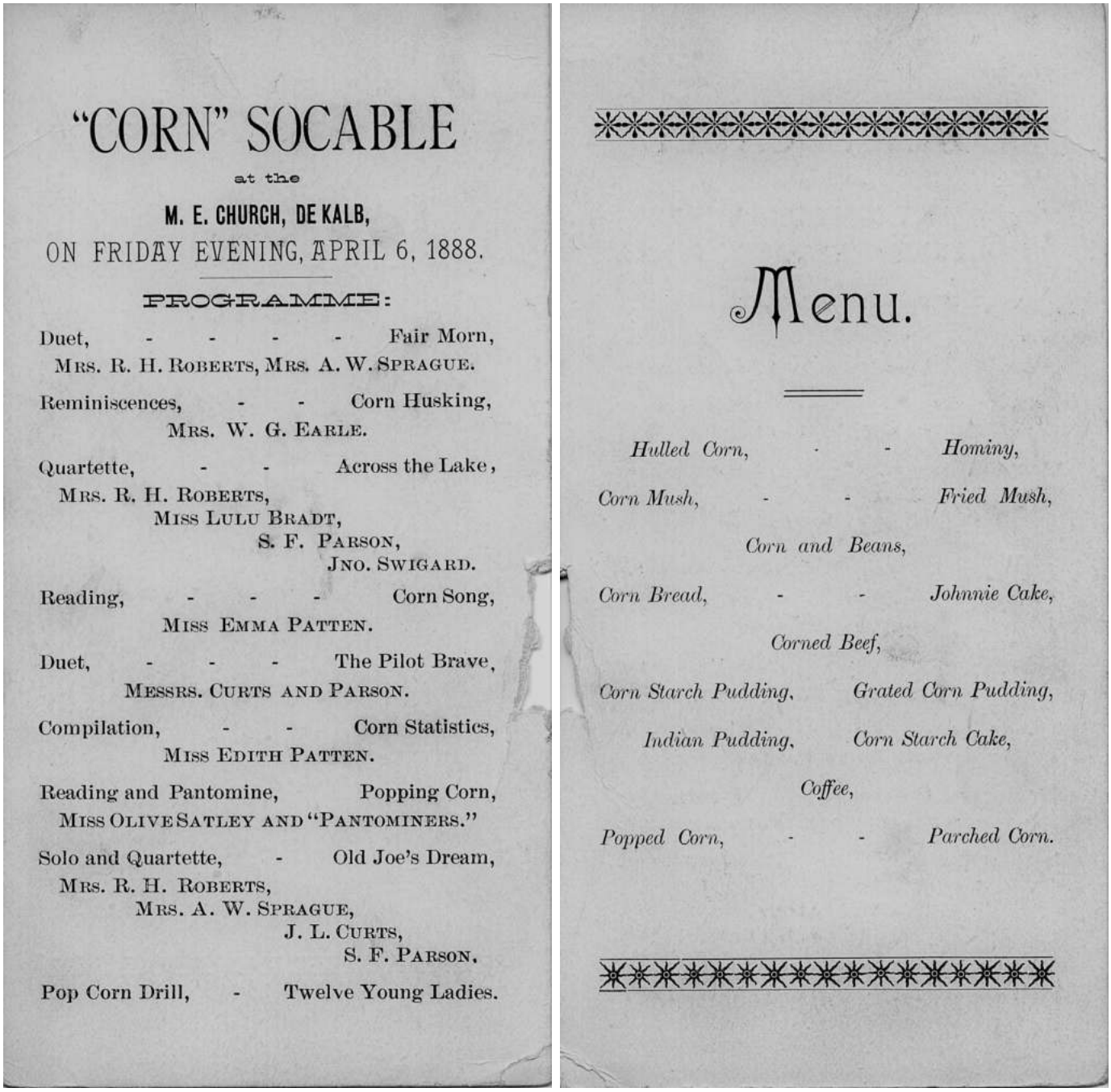
See your story here!

We are seeking contributors for Cornsilk magazine

Send your stories, photos, and interesting local history tidbits to *jhaish09@gmail.com*

From Corn History...

From the DeKalb County History Center Archives



"CORN" SOCABLE

at the

M. E. CHURCH, DE KALB,

ON FRIDAY EVENING, APRIL 6, 1888.

PROGRAMME:

Duet, - - - - Fair Morn,
MRS. R. H. ROBERTS, MRS. A. W. SPRAGUE.

Reminiscences, - - Corn Husking,
MRS. W. G. EARLE.

Quartette, - - Across the Lake,
MRS. R. H. ROBERTS,
MISS LULU BRADT,
S. F. PARSON,
JNO. SWIGARD.

Reading, - - - Corn Song,
MISS EMMA PATTEN.

Duet, - - - The Pilot Brave,
MESSRS. CURTS AND PARSON.

Compilation, - - Corn Statistics,
MISS EDITH PATTEN.

Reading and Pantomine, Popping Corn,
MISS OLIVE SATLEY AND "PANTOMINERS."

Solo and Quartette, - Old Joe's Dream,
MRS. R. H. ROBERTS,
MRS. A. W. SPRAGUE,
J. L. CURTS,
S. F. PARSON.

Pop Corn Drill, - Twelve Young Ladies.

Menu.

Hulled Corn, - - *Hominy,*

Corn Mush, - - *Fried Mush,*

Corn and Beans,

Corn Bread, - - *Johnnie Cake,*

Corned Beef,

Corn Starch Pudding, *Grated Corn Pudding,*

Indian Pudding, *Corn Starch Cake,*

Coffee,

Popped Corn, - - *Parched Corn.*

A DeKalb Methodist Church held a "Corn [Sociable]" on April 6, 1888

Menu items included corn mush, corn bread, corn starch pudding, popped corn and more.
Activities included a reading of the "Corn Song" and the "Pop Corn Drill."

The Hamingson Family Lewis and Clark Adventure

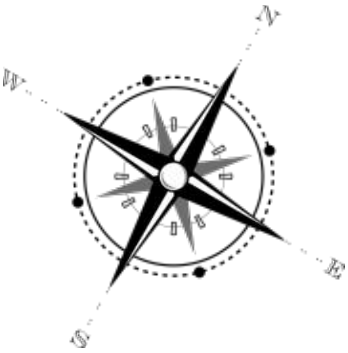
A presentation by Dan Hamingson, 2019
Transcription by Marcia Wilson

In researching his family's history, Dan Hamingson learned that his great-great-great grandfather was a member of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. After extensive reading about the 1803-1806 Expedition, Dan and his wife, Karen, undertook an adventure, retracing the steps of Dan's ancestor. His presentation related their story.

The Lewis and Clark Corps of Discovery Story

On April 30, 1802, the United States purchased from France 828,000 square miles or 530,000,000 acres for $15,000,000—approximately 600 billion in today's money. That was 3 cents an acre in 1803. The Louisiana Purchase more than doubled the size of the United States.

Even before the Louisiana Purchase was signed on January 18, 1803, President Thomas Jefferson sent a secret message to Congress requesting a



$2,500 appropriation to fund a military expedition of one officer and 10-12 chosen men to explore and find a water route to the western ocean (the Pacific). The request was approved and Jefferson's private secretary, Meriwether Lewis was selected to lead the expedition. Lewis was given the rank of Captain.

Lewis went to Philadelphia to engage in intense studies in botany, zoology, medicine and celestial navigation. He made stops at Harper's Ferry and Pittsburgh to buy supplies and armaments before setting off down the Ohio River to assemble his crew and additional equipment and supplies. Along with way Lewis met up with his friend William Clark, who agreed to be his co-leader—and one of the greatest partnerships began.

At the Falls of the Ohio River near Louisville, Kentucky, they recruited nine young Kentuckians, all who had various skills as woodsmen and craftsmen, gunsmiths and blacksmiths. They next brought on crew members at Fort Massac and Kaskaskia in the Illinois Territory.

From the autumn of 1803 until the spring of 1804, the officers and men camped at Camp River Du-Bois, Illinois Territory just north of St. Louis. They trained, packed, prepared supplies and recruited through the winter and into the spring.

On May 14, 1804, the permanent party of 29 men--including Clark's personal servant, "York", and Lewis's Newfoundland dog, Seaman, plus a temporary party of 15 men (called Engagees)--departed from Illinois Territory in one large keel boat and two smaller boats called pirogues. They crossed the Mississippi River and headed up the Missouri River, a journey that would take the men over 6,000 miles from beginning to end.

I break the expedition into three parts. Part one is the departure in May 1804 until the late autumn of 1804 when they wintered at the Mandan tribe village in present-day North Dakota. During this part of the trip the leaders and crews learned to work together to overcome the perils of Missouri River travel. There was the discovery of many plants, birds and animals. They encountered many hardships along the way. Just moving these three heavy-laden boats upstream was physically demanding. Plus, the heat of summer 1804 compounded by the worst of all, the "mosquiters." The only death of an expedition member occurred

Dan and Karen Hamingson describing their family tree at a 2019 DCHGS presentation | Photo by Barry Schrader

on August 20, 1804, near present-day Sioux City, Iowa, when Sgt. Charles Floyd died from an apparent ruptured appendix. The Corps had encounters with various Indian tribes, some friendly and some not so friendly. The Mandans were one of the friendly tribes. They provided the Corps of Discovery with shelter, food and companionship through the brutal Northern Plains winter.

Part two of the journey took them the spring of 1805 from the Mandan villages to the autumn of 1805 on the Pacific Coast. For this part of the expedition, Captains Lewis and Clark added an interpreter, a French trader by the name of Toussant-Charbanous, and his young Shoshone wife, Sa Ca Ga Wea, and their newborn, Jean Baptiste, nicknamed Pompey or Pompy—Charbanou as interpreter and Sa Ca Ga Wea as guide.

Once again, the captains discovered more new plants, birds and animals. They now moved into the more challenging terrain, the mountains.

When they arrived at the Great Falls of the Missouri, they had to perform a huge drawn-out portage to get the boats, crews and equipment around the Great Falls.

Next, there was an eventful and emotional reunion for Sa Ca Ga Wea with her brother and the Shoshone tribe she had been kidnapped from. Because of this friendly encounter, they were able to secure horses for their near-deadly crossing of the Continental Divide in deep snow, coupled with cold and starvation. They did discover the source of the Missouri River, and the captains came to the realization that they hadn't been able to find a water route all the way to the Pacific Ocean. Of course, they proceeded on with a trek over Lemi Pass, along the Salmon River, over Lolo Pass to the Locsa River, to the Snake River, and to the Columbia River, and on to see the Pacific Ocean for the first time.

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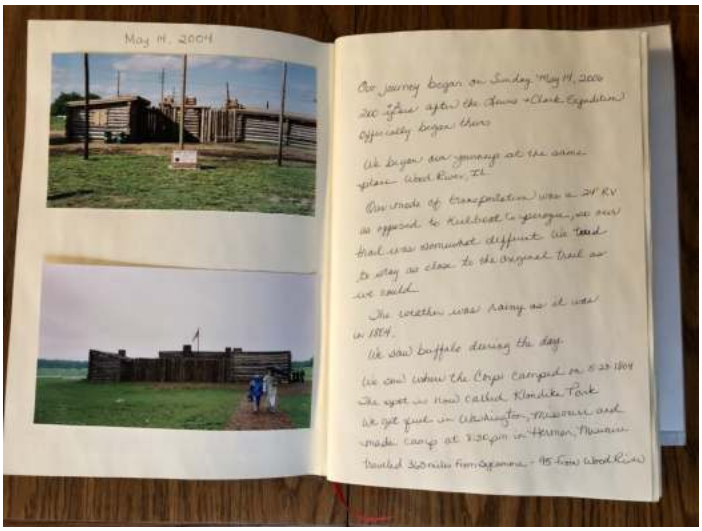
The winter on the Pacific coast was milder than the previous winter with the Mandans, but it seemed much more miserable, with constant rain and a steady diet of nothing but dried salmon, whale blubber (once), and elk.

In the spring of 1806, the third part of the journey started as they headed back towards St. Louis. At one point on the return trip, the Corps split their ranks, with part of them staying on the Missouri River and part taking the Yellowstone River to explore the country south of the Missouri River.



The Northern crew, headed by Captain Lewis, took a side trip up the Marias River where they had a deadly (for the Blackfoot) encounter and barely got away with their scalps intact. Also, as they neared the meeting point with the other crew at the confluence of the two rivers, Captain Lewis was accidently shot in his buttocks by a crew member with poor eyesight. This caused Lewis extreme pain for the remainder of the voyage.

The two separate crews did rendezvous and proceeded on to the Mandan village. The Corps of Discovery finished the final leg of the journey to St. Louis on September 23, 1806. The final estimated cost was $39,000, including land warrants to the men--only about 15 times the budget.

This is a very condensed overview of this expedition. When you read the actual journals, every day was high adventure.

Great-great-great grandfather William E. Bratton

At the Falls of the Ohio in Louisville, Kentucky, nine young men were recruited. One of them was my 3rd-great grandfather William E. Bratton. William was born July 27, 1778, in Augusta County, Virginia, of Scotch-Irish lineage. His family migrated to Jefferson County, Kentucky, about 1790. As a young man he developed skills as a hunter, blacksmith and gunsmith. He was described as over 6 feet tall, square of build, erect, somewhat reserved and of strict morals—a very desirable recruit for Lewis and Clark.

Bratton is mentioned many times in the journals: using the skills he was hired on to do; an encounter with a grizzly bear; salt making on the Pacific beach; discovery of the whale and other entries.

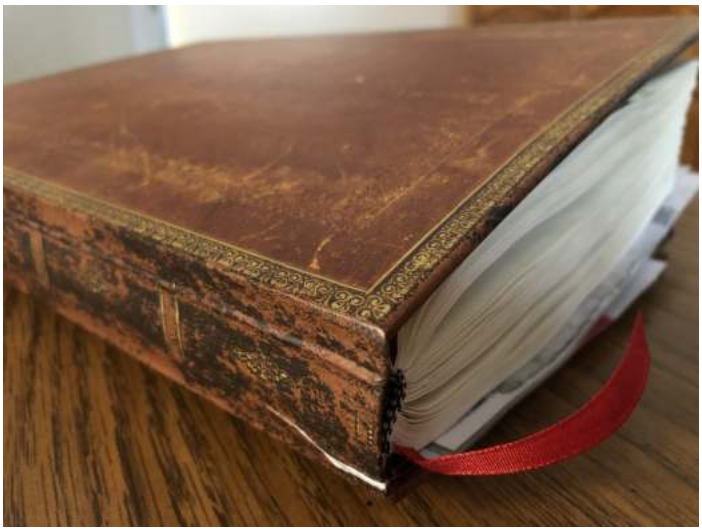
Bratton was discharged from the Corps of Discovery on October 10, 1806. He received a final pay of $178.11 and a land warrant for 320 acres. His original discharge document, signed by Meriwether Lewis, is in the Iowa Historical Museum in Des Moines and is one of only a few discharge papers that are known to exist. After he left St. Louis, he returned to Kentucky for a while and then he lived in New Madrid, Missouri. He was there at the time of the great earthquake of 1811 that was so powerful it actually changed the course of the Mississippi River.

Bratton then served in the War of 1812 and was captured near present-day Monroe, Michigan, and held as prisoner of war for a short time by the British.

At age 41 he married Mary Polly Maxwell near Greenville, Ohio. By 1922 they had moved to Waynetown, Indiana, and became parents of 8

sons and 2 daughters. William Bratton continued as a blacksmith, but he was also elected as the first Justice of the Peace of Wayne Township, an office he held for 5 years.

Bratton died November 11, 1841, at age 63. He is buried in the Pioneer Cemetery in Waynetown. On his monument is inscribed, "Went with Lewis and Clark in 1804 to the Rocky Mountains." There are only a few known gravesites for members of this great voyage.



Dan and Karen's Big Adventure

In the first few years of the Lewis and Clark bicentennial (2003-2006), Karen (for sure) and I (partially) read all 13 volumes of Dr. Gary Moulton's definitive editing of the journal of Lewis and Clark, plus 3 of the other members of the expedition who had kept journals. With all this knowledge we decided to set out on the Lewis and Clark trail and see what we could cover in 16 days.

We rented a 24-foot RV and set off from the site of Camp River DuBois, Illinois, on May 14, the same day the Corps of Discovery departed. With an actual road atlas and a National Geographic Guide Book, we set out. We tried to follow the Missouri River as close as possible. We stopped at every L & C historical marker and every interpretive center we could find. It was so powerful to visit these sites and see and imagine what this crew experienced. We camped in RV parks, in a farmer's front yard or alongside the roads, often near the actual campsites of the Corps of Discovery. Meriwether Lewis had taken mercury along as a cure for many internal ailments. The mercury passed through the men and archeologists were able to verify the actual campsites because the mercury was still there.

We were doing this trip in the off season, so there wasn't much traffic. We met a few unusual characters out there, including one older hiker who was on his fourth or fifth time hiking the entire trail. We experienced beautiful thunderstorms rolling across the flat part of North Dakota. We signed in as the first travelers of the year to go over the Lemi Pass—and we proceeded to get stuck in the residual snow, having a difficult time digging out and turning back. We drank from the spring at the source of the Missouri River. The farthest we traveled was to the Snake River and the site of the place the Corps camped while they got Bratton in the sweat lodge to heal his back pain.

On our return we took the Yellowstone River route. We had located a creek named after Bratton near the small town of Big Timber in Sweetgrass County, Montana. Karen was talking to a local who mentioned a new display that was opening at a small historical building. To our wonderment, they had secured from the Smithsonian Institute a plant and flower specimen collection that had been collected on the Expedition. After a visit to Pompey's tower and seeing William Clark's actual signature carved into the sandstone, we drove through the Little Big Horn Battlefield and then on to the Black Hills and Wall Drug Store. From there we proceeded home.

This was a spectacular trip that we hold in our memories, in pictures, and in the excellent daily journal that explorer Karen kept. I hope to pass on one of the greatest stories in the history of our country to the next generation of Bratton descendants.

Innovation Is a State of Mind: Whiskey Acres accepts award

By Bob Pritchard

Another Pierce Township innovator has been selected by the DeKalb Area Agricultural Heritage Association as their Innovator of the Year.

Whiskey Acres Distilling Company and owners Jim and Sue Walter, Kristen and Jamie Walter were honored on August 31, 2021 at the 10th annual meeting of DAAHA. The Hintzsche family, originally from Pierce Township, and the business entities they established over 53 years were recognized as the 2020 Innovators of the Year.

In accepting the award, Jamie Walter, president of Whiskey Acres, said his family has a culture of trying new things and being early adapters. His grandfather had one of the first tractors in the area in the late 1930s. The family spread bi-product from the Del Monte plant in DeKalb on their farm to improve the soil. They diversified their farm operation by also selling seed corn and crop insurance all with the goal of doing more with less.

Walter said the family came to the conclusion that they needed to add value to the corn they raised. When a new state law was passed that allowed farm-based distilleries, the Walter family, in partnership with Nick Nagele, decided to turn corn into spirits and started their own certified farm distillery in 2014. Theirs was the second farm distillery in the U.S. to grow the products they turned into spirits.

The distillery, Whiskey Acres, received a lot of local support and interest. With sales growing at the rate of 35 percent, it became a tourist destination. The company was ready to expand its market into Nebraska when COVID-19 hit in 2020 and their spirits market diminished.

Walter said this was an opportunity to innovate and switch directions. The country had a shortage of hand sanitizer, which is made with a high concentration of alcohol. Working with the spirits industry and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Whiskey Acres was able to get an exemption to make hand sanitizer, but then had to line up all the containers and freight to get them delivered. They turned out 150 gallons of sanitizer in the first week of operation, which they donated to local first responders.

Despite the FDA reversing its decision to allow the manufacture of hand sanitizer and then reversing it again, Whiskey Acres turned out 1,000 gallons in the second week and then 1,000 gallons per day by the third week. With such a production, Walters feels they were able to discourage sanitizer price gouging to some extent, for the benefit of consumers. He said their biggest customer was the U.S. Secret Service.

Above: Walter family, photo provided by Bob Pritchard

As demand for hand sanitizers diminished, Whiskey Acres shifted attention back to making bourbon.

Because DeKalb County is known for corn breeding, the company knew that corn breeders used genetics to change the characteristics of corn. Whiskey Acres started looking at different corn varieties to control the flavor for specific types of bourbon they distilled. Jamie said they began growing heirloom varieties so they could control the genetics from year-to-year. Whiskey Acres developed flavor profiles from the different varieties, and started growing their own parent seed stock and cross breeding.

The Whiskey Acres distillation process uses a lot of water that needs to be filtered and chilled. Walter said their high energy bill led them to consider solar production. They installed solar panels for their energy needs.

As the Walter family looks to the future, they continue adjusting their production strategies. Jamie says about ten percent of their corn production goes into the production of spirits and 90 percent for commercial use. In the U.S., about 40 percent of the commercial corn market is turned into ethanol fuel. Walter feels that as electric vehicles become more prevalent, demand for ethanol fuel will diminish and the country will be flush with corn again like before the ethanol boon.

"you have to be able to handle the discomfort of being different"

This belief has led the family to re-evaluate what they produce; not just corn, but energy. They feel farmers can help produce the electricity that vehicles will need. Jamie said DeKalb County is close to the metropolitan market and next to the electric grid to carry that electricity to market.

Walter concluded that innovation is really about your thought process; are you willing to try something new and be creative. Not every idea will work so you have to also be prepared to accept some failure. The Walter families use their business meeting time to look ahead, study the trends and anticipate the changes that are coming. Jamie said innovation requires that you have to be able to handle the discomfort of being different.

Flashback… to *free* tuition at DeKalb's beloved college

Advertisement as printed in the 1900 DeKalb Chronicle Souvenir Edition | Courtesy DeKalb County History Center Archives

Museum Corner

featuring

UPCOMING EVENTS & NEWS

from area museums and archives

Haish research: Brown Bag/Local Lore

April 7, 12 PM

DeKalb County History Center, Sycamore

For April's Brown Bag Lunch, join us to learn about inventor Jacob Haish and DeKalb's history with writer and blogger Jessi Haish LaRue. LaRue has been pulling Haish-related items from the Joiner History Room archives and will present her findings.

Hands-On History: School Days

April 9, 1-3 PM

DeKalb County History Center, Sycamore

Sign up to discover more about the fascinating story connected to School Days – one-room schools in the county. The program is a $3 charge per child – paid upon arrival at the event. Registration recommended.

Illinois Storm Chasers

April 13, 7 PM

KHS, 309 S. Fifth St., Kirkland

Learn what Illinois Storm Chasers do, how they keep the public informed, and how to better prepare for storms. Also a recap of the 2015 Fairdale Tornado will be included.

"Hot Fiddler" musical program

April 28, 6 PM

Hinckley Community Building

The Hinckley Historical Society and the Hinckley Public Library are sponsoring a "Hot Fiddler" musical program. Illinois Humanities Road Scholar Dennis Stroughmatt will delight the audience with music from "old time radio" and the life of Southern Illinois swing fiddler Pappy Wade Ray. The program is free to the public and starts at 6 p.m. at the Community Building, 100 North Maple Street, Hinckley. The Illinois Humanities Road Scholars Speakers Bureau invites artists and scholars to share their expertise to strengthen the social, political and economic fabric of Illinois.

Arts in Action: Brown Bag/Local Lore

May 5, 12 PM

Ellwood House, DeKalb

Learn more about online exhibit "Arts in Action." Historical research features experiences connected to the Black and Latino community in DeKalb County intertwined with art to better understand these stories.

DeKalb County Barn Tour

August 13

Hinckley area

The DeKalb County Barn Tour, hosted by Glidden Homestead and the DeKalb Area Agricultural Heritage Association, is already shaping up for 2022, and will feature barns in the Hinckley area. Watch www.DeKalbCountyBarnTour.com for updates.

Kirkland Historical Society receives photo collection

The Kirkland Historical Society is fortunate to have received a large photo collection from Robert Ecklund. We have started to display these at www.kirklandhistoricalsociety.com.

Societies and museums can send their news and events to Jessi LaRue at jhaish09@gmail.com

NIU Libraries Announce Reorganization for Special Collections and Archives and Expanded Hours for Spring 2022

Starting Monday January 31st, researchers from across campus and the wider community will have expanded access to the unique research collections held by the NIU Libraries. The Special Collections and Archives (SCA) Department is a newly created unit that coordinates the collecting, services, and programs of the Rare Books and Special Collections (RBSC) and the Regional History Center and University Archives (RHCUA). After nearly two years of scaled-back activity due to the pandemic and personnel changes, the SCA is now in a position to provide a fuller range of engagement with students, faculty, staff, and the extended NIU community. This includes enhanced onsite and remote reference, research consultations, instructional support, campus partnerships, and other efforts that help fulfill NIU's research, teaching, and learning mission.

According to NIU Libraries Dean Fred Barnhart, the reorganization and increased activity for the SCA are priority for the library. "NIU's rare books, archives, and special collections are what make us unique and reflect more than a century of NIU's growth and transformation. The access we provide to students, faculty, and researchers from all walks of life strengthens our connections to history and the humanities in general. With the changes we've all experienced the past few years, these vital connections are more important than ever," Barnhart said.

As part of the reorganization, the libraries have recently filled two key faculty positions. During the spring and summer of 2021 they conducted a national search for applicants to head the department. The position was filled in November by Associate Professor Brad Wiles, a librarian and archivist with nearly 15 years of experience in academic, public, and corporate settings. Wiles holds a MA in History from Western Illinois University and a MLIS from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He is currently a Ph.D. candidate at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee School of Information Studies and expects to finish his dissertation examining community-based historical agencies later this year.

Dr. Beth McGowan, formerly subject specialist librarian for Health Sciences, has now assumed the position of Rare Books and Special Collections Librarian while continuing her work as subject specialist for the English Department. McGowan earned her Ph.D. focusing on the literatures of the Reformation from the University of Pennsylvania and taught literature full-time for ten years before earning her MLIS from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She has taken courses in Rare Books both online and from the University of Virginia's Rare Book School.

Currently, the RBSC Reading Room (Founders 403) is open Monday-Thursday from 9-12 and 1-4, with plans to expand hours further after the return from spring break in March. Walk-in visitors are welcome and patrons will be able to use all the SCA holdings in the Reading Room, including books, manuscripts, and archives from all collection areas. The RBSC Reading Room will also host presentations, guest lectures, class sessions, and other interdisciplinary activities that connect the SCA's holdings with NIU's scholarly and creative life. For more information about the RBSC's new hours or to discuss programming, contact Dr. Beth McGowan at bmcgowan@niu.edu or 815-753-1947.

Support Nonprofit Organizations During Give DeKalb County

By DeKalb County Community Foundation

Give DeKalb County is an annual fundraising event featuring multiple ways to support nonprofit organizations. Donors can give online from midnight to midnight on May 5, 2022 by visiting GiveDeKalbCounty.org. Between April 21 and May 5, those who prefer to donate by check can print a donation form from the website and give by mail.

Give DeKalb County is coordinated by DeKalb County Nonprofit Partnership (DCNP), a program of the DeKalb County Community Foundation. The previous eight giving days combined have raised over $5.3 million for participating nonprofit organizations.

"Give DeKalb County is an incredible opportunity to support your favorite nonprofit organizations," said Ben Bingle, Grants and DCNP Director. "We're fortunate to have a strong network of nonprofits in DeKalb County and we're equally blessed to have such generous community members. We're excited to see that extraordinary generosity on display again during Give DeKalb County 2022."

In 2021, Give DeKalb County raised over $1.5 million from 8,353 donations. Donors gave from 44 different states and 4 countries around the world.

From midnight to midnight on May 5, donors can give online at GiveDeKalbCounty.org. Donors can search for a specific organization or browse by causes such as: Arts & Culture, Education, or Human Services. In April, a mail-in donation form will be added to the website. Donors who prefer to give by personal check can print the form, indicate the organization(s) and donation amount(s), then write a single check for the total amount payable to "DCCF." The check and donation form can be mailed to DeKalb County Community Foundation, 475 DeKalb Avenue, Sycamore, IL 60178 - postmarked April 21 - May 5.

A Bonus Pool of funds is being raised and each donation made during Give DeKalb County is boosted by a percentage of these funds. The Bonus Pool is made possible from generous support of Community Partners, including: DeKalb County Community Foundation, The Suter Company, Inc., American Family Insurance—Manny Pena Agency, AM/PM Solutions & Services, Anonymous, Byers Brewing Company, Cathy Doederlein, Curran Family Endowment Fund, Dan & Kathy Schewe, Drake Castle Charitable Fund, First Midwest Bank, Heartland Bank & Trust, Herb and Linda Holderman, James K. & Loretta M. Hipple Family Fund, Johns Family Donor Advised Fund, Leeward Energy, Lynne Waldeland, Mark Mannebach & Erika Schlichter, Meta, Nancy D. Castle, NIU's Center for Nonprofit and NGO Studies Ambassadors, Paul & Cheryl Callighan, Scott & Kristin Miller, Soft Water City, State Farm—Keicher Insurance Agency, Stephen Kalber, Sycamore Charities, Thrivent Financial—Shawn Blobaum, Tony & Micki Chulick, Yerkes Consulting LLC, The Zurbrugg Family. The following Media Sponsors are helping raise awareness about this community-wide event: 94.9 WDKB, 102.3 The Coyote, Banner Up Signs, City of DeKalb, DeKalb Chamber of Commerce, DeKalb County Historical - Genealogical Society, First National Bank, Genoa Area Chamber of Commerce, Kar-Fre Flowers, LePrint Express, OC Creative, Sandwich Area Chamber of Commerce, Sandwich Public Library District, Shaw Media, and Sycamore Chamber of Commerce.

Mark your calendar for May 5, 2022 and plan to support nonprofit organizations during Give DeKalb County! For more information, visit www.GiveDeKalbCounty.org.

DeKalb County Historical Society, Museum, Archive & Cultural Center Resources

DeKalb
DeKalb Area Agricultural Heritage Association
www.daaha.org
E-mail: daaha.inc@gmail.com
815-756-8737

DeKalb Area Women's Center
http://dekalbareawomenscenter.weebly.com/
E-mail: DeKalbAWC@gmail.com
815-758-1351

Egyptian Theater
www.egyptiantheatre.org
E-mail: info@egyptiantheatre.org
815-758-1215

Ellwood House Museum
www.ellwoodhouse.org
E-mail: info@ellwoodhouse.org
815-756-4609

Glidden Homestead & Hist. Center
www.gliddenhomestead.org
Email: info@gliddenhomestead.org
815-756-7904

Gurler House & Heritage Assn.
http://gurlerhouse.org
815-758-4897

At NIU
Anthropology Museum
www.niu.edu/anthro_museum
815-753-0230/815-753-0246

Art Museum
www.niu.edu/artmuseum
815-753-1936

Blackwell History of Education Museum & Milan Township One-Room School
www.cedu.niu.edu/blackwell
E-mail: blackwell@niu.edu
815-753-1236/815-753-1241

Regional History Center
https://library.niu.edu/ulib/content/collections/rhc/index.shtml ; 815-753-1779

Genoa
Kishwaukee Valley Heritage Society & Museum
www.dekalb.illinoisgenweb.org/KishValHistSoc/New_Homepage.htm
E-mail: kvhs@atcyber.net
815-784-5559

Hinckley
Hinckley Historical Society
www.HinckleyHistoricalSociety.com
E-mail: hinckleyhistoricalsociety@gmail.com
815-739-4721 (Julie)

Kirkland
Kirkland Historical Society
http://kirklandhistoricalsociety.com
815-522-6260

Leland
Leland Historical Society
Leland Area History Center
www.lelandhistory.org
Email: info@lelandhistory.org
815-495-4457

Malta
Malta Historical & Genealogical Society & Museum
http://www.villageofmalta.net/maltahistorcialsociety.htm
815-384-3481

Sandwich
City Hall and Opera House
www.sandwichoperahouse.org
E-mail: operahouse@sannauk.com
815-786-2555

Stone Mill Museum & Sandwich Historical Society
815-786-2513

Shabbona
Shabbona-Lee-Rollo Museum
https://slrmuseum.com/
E-mail: slrmuseum@gmail.com
Phone: 815-824-2597

Somonauk
Olmstead Memorial Museum
http://themonumentalarchives.com/Olmstead_Museum.php
815-498-2417/815-228-1474

Sycamore
DeKalb County Historical - Genealogical Society
815-895-9424

Family History Center at LDS Church
815-895-0702

Joiner History Room
www.joinerhistoryroom.org
E-mail: joinerhistoryroom@dekalbcounty.org
815-895-7271

North Grove School & North Grove School Assn.
www.northgroveschool.org
E-mail: info@northgroveschool.org

DeKalb County History Center
www.dekalbcountyhistory.org
E-mail: info@sycamorehistory.org
815-895-5762

Waterman
Waterman Area Heritage Society & Museum
www.dekalb.illinoisgenweb.org/WatermanSoc.htm
815-756-4030/815-264-7717

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Details of the Hinckley Mosaic Mural, courtesy of Bob Pritchard