

Ogle County Historical Society

**THE OGLE COUNTY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**
INVITES ALL MEMBERS AND
ANY OTHER INTERESTED PERSONS
TO OUR
ANNUAL POT-LUCK DINNER
SUNDAY AUGUST 25, 2013
AT 5 PM IN THE ANNEX BUILDING
BEHIND THE NASH HOME

Bring a dish to pass and your own table service.

Beverages will be provided.

You may also bring an item of family or
local history to share in our
“Show & Tell” time.

Food, Fun & History!

RECENT ACQUISITIONS

Quite a few interesting things have been received since the last newsletter, but more importantly, we took steps toward the better preservation of our entire collection. At the May meeting the board voted to authorize the purchase of two more large-capacity dehumidifiers for the house and annex. While this may not seem as significant as family records or items relating to county history, keeping the humidity in the buildings under control this time of year helps to extend the life of artifacts, especially textiles and papers. Thanks to Bruce McMillan for trekking to Menards to pick them up, and for making a second trip when one of them turned out to be defective.

We also received a non-artifact donation. Junior Docent Abby Mongan, who has won ribbons at the 4-H Fair for decorative welding, made a display stand for the violin which Chester Nash built late in his life. The violin and stand are now atop the tall case in the living room which contains Nash family items.

Robert O. Hardesty, who was born and raised in Oregon, donated a copy of his autobiography, which also includes details of the history of that branch of the family and of the origins of the name "Hardesty". It is now on our family research shelves.

Rogene Fraley of Kings donated a ledger book and journal having to do with the annual White Rock Social Chain Picnic from 1931-1980. The ledger gives details of each year's picnic, including names of those attending and those who couldn't attend but sent letters. The journal contains the treasurer's records.

From Jack and Betty Basler we received memorabilia and records from the Ogle County Fair, on whose board Jack served for many years. This augments the items we received in the past from the Chasm family. One of the more interesting items in this recent group of documents is a large manila envelope containing photos of damage to Fair buildings caused by the blizzard of 1979, along with repair estimates and other papers relating to the Fair Association's disaster grant request.

In early May we received an Illinois state flag, old enough that it is cotton, not nylon, which used to hang in the Oregon City Council chambers, and papers containing interesting facts about the origin of the state flag.

Vallie Ericson, a descendant of the Timmerman family, donated two 8x10 framed hand-colored tintypes of John Timmerman and Elizabeth

Wagner Timmerman, Ogle County pioneers from the 1830's. John built the first wood frame building in Oregon, a store for Harvey Moss, in the fall of 1836. Along with these came documents relating to the Timmerman and Wagner families.

More recently, Viola Guyette, daughter of Gerhard Groen Jr., sent us photos and documents of her uncle, Maine Groen, who was killed in France during World War I and is buried in White Rock Cemetery. Among the items she sent is a framed certificate of thanks and remembrance sent by the government of France to Maine's parents. This evidently was done for the families of all U. S. servicemen killed in France during the war. This piece will need some restoration work, or more likely a photo reproduction made, before it can be displayed.

Thanks to all the people who have given artifacts and documents, and remember, one of the most valuable things any member can give us is some of their time.

EMMA BELLE DEVOE BIGGERS

During our winter project of redoing the displays in the living room and dining room, we discovered how many examples we had of the art of Emma Biggers. She was a local artist who had no connection to either the Eagle's Nest Art Colony or to the art colony in Grand Detour, and she also worked in many media: oils, pen and ink, relief carving, basketry, and even turning decorative doorknobs on a lathe.

Emma Belle DeVoe was born in Ohio in 1866 and spent part of her youth in Saratoga, NY. She came to northern Illinois to attend Mt. Carroll Seminary, which later became Shimer College. It is not known just how she met George Biggers, whose parents were early settlers in Flagg Township, but they married in November of 1890 and raised three children. Although the family relocated to the Norman, OK area prior to 1910, George and Emma's daughter Helen never forgot her Ogle County roots. She gave the Historical Society a lot of family items in the years prior to her death in 1991, including many of her mother's artworks. These are now on display in at least five locations in the house and annex. Stop in and see them.

WEATHER IN OGLE COUNTY HISTORY

Whenever devastating weather such as the recent tornadoes in Oklahoma and other places occurs, one of our first thoughts after expressing our sympathy to the victims and making donations to relief agencies is: "Could it have happened here?" Records at the Historical Society show that at various times in the past it did happen here.

On May 25th, 1896, a cyclone (what tornadoes were usually called back then) struck the northern part of the county. Davis Junction was hard-hit with at least one family dying; mother and daughter during the storm, father later of internal injuries. Egan experienced the death of a woman and serious injuries to her five children, and there was an almost identical incident in Leaf River. The entire area suffered extensive damage to buildings and crops.

May of 1898 again brought disaster to our county when a tornado killed six people in Forreston and destroyed most of Adeline. The storm then veered northeast, missing Oregon but causing much damage to farm property and livestock before hitting Stillman Valley, which suffered extensive damage as well as five fatalities.

A tornado hit Oregon in 1911 and a father of six children was crushed under a collapsing building. Roofs were torn off of railroad cars at the depot and workers at the Lowden farm were endangered by falling trees.

More recently, about a year after the horrific Belvidere tornado of April 1967, a smaller storm hit a trailer park west of Stillman Valley, destroying 4 or 5 mobile homes but fortunately causing no deaths or serious injuries. In 2008, another storm hit a church camp just east of Brookville in the western part of the county, flattening one building and damaging two others.

These and other incidents in our county's history serve to illustrate the fact that yes, it can happen here, and it has. Please keep this in mind when you are asked to help those in need now.

2013 JUNIOR DOCENT PROGRAM

The Ogle County Historical Society's Junior Docent program continues to attract young people interested in learning local history while they volunteer their time to a non-profit organization. Blaise, Chloe, and Abby have returned from last year, and are now compiling hours toward the Silver Service Award given at high school graduation. This is a national program used at many high schools across the country. At eighth grade promotion on May 25, Abby and Blaise were first and third, respectively, in total number of Eagle Hours accumulated.

Melinda and Alyssa joined the program in mid-April, followed by Anna and Olympia in early June. They are all participating in David L. Rahn Junior High's Eagle Hours program, which began in January of 2012. With more and more colleges and universities looking for a history of volunteer work and service to the community on an application, starting it in junior high seems like a good idea. More importantly, it helps the community and makes the student a more well-rounded person.

In addition to helping with visitors on Sunday afternoons and general sorting, filing, and cleaning, the Junior Docents now have a Thursday morning project. This involves rearranging the artifacts in the display cases in the annex building, and updating them with new, more easily readable signs. They are also learning some of the more practical aspects of museum work, such as how tedious polishing silver items can be, and how many hand washings it takes to remove the smell of leather restoration cream.

Adult advisors Bill Bailey and Susan Davis are also getting an education. The conversation during cookie and water break time ranges from local, state, and national history and current events to contemporary pop music (just who is R5 anyway?) and even the difference between turnips and rutabagas. Stop in some time and watch our future at work.

OGLE COUNTY IN THE CIVIL WAR

by Bill Bailey

#12—The Thomas Chasms

When the 39th Illinois Volunteer Infantry was mustered into federal service on October 11, 1861, one of the recruits in Captain Samuel Linton's Company D, from Ogle County, was Thomas Chasm of Oregon. Although his enlistment papers gave his age as 44, census records show that he was actually 50 or 51. Born in England as Thomas Chisolm, he emigrated to New Brunswick and later to Massachusetts. While in Canada he married an Irish girl, Mary McShane, and after several moves, and several changes in the spelling of the last name, they and their children came to Ogle County in 1855, settling first in Rockvale Township and then moving to Oregon.

Thomas Chasm's time with the 39th was brief, but it included several battles, notably one at Bath, VA in January 1862 where Company D and two other companies held off 12,000 Confederates under Stonewall Jackson until the rest of the regiment and the other regiments in the brigade could form a battle line. When the 39th was transferred to the Army of the Potomac, arriving on the Virginia peninsula just prior to the battle of Malvern Hill, it proved to be unlucky for Pvt. Chasm. In the heat and humidity of a Virginia summer, he was one of thousands of soldiers who contracted typhoid fever. According to affidavits filed with Mary's application for a widow's pension, Thomas was already in a near-coma when placed aboard the hospital ship at Harrison's Landing. He survived long enough to be admitted to the typhoid hospital at David's Island, just off the coast of present-day New Rochelle, NY, but died on August 18, 1862. While doctors in this era knew about isolating patients with the same disease in one location to prevent the spread of a disease, the antibiotics which could have cured them were 75 or more years in the future. Thomas Chasm and other typhoid victims were buried in Cypress Hill Cemetery in Brooklyn, from which had been set aside three acres for the burial of soldiers. In 1873, this area, plus an additional 15 acres which had been added subsequently, was made a National Cemetery. Thomas Chasm's grave is #340 out of over 21,000. (We have copies of the widow's pension documents in our research area.)

On March 1, 1864, Thomas's son Thomas enlisted in Company I, 46th Illinois Volunteer Infantry. This unit, which had also been formed early in the war, had gone through its reenlistment process and the soldiers were home on furlough, recruiting new men to fill the ranks. The regiment, now numbering 987 men, traveled from Freeport to Cairo by rail, then by boat to Vicksburg, MS. After about

four weeks of training for the new recruits, including Thomas Chasm, the regiment operated out of the Vicksburg area through July, going on several expeditions as far away as Jackson. They then spent six weeks in Louisiana, followed by a stint in Arkansas and Tennessee which lasted until the end of the year and saw them engaged in several small battles.

The 46th spent the early part of 1865 on the Louisiana and Alabama coasts. They took part in the battles of Spanish Fort and Fort Blakely, which led to the capture of Mobile, AL, the last Confederate seaport outside of Texas. After a brief foray into Mississippi, they spent the rest of the year on garrison duty in Louisiana. The regiment mustered out at Baton Rouge, LA on January 20, 1866, and Thomas Chasm and his comrades headed for Springfield, IL and home. Unlike his father, Thomas had survived the war. He worked as a laborer, never married, and died in 1879 in Chicago while attempting to get a job on a railroad bridge construction crew. He is buried in Riverside Cemetery in Oregon.

Nearly 70 years after the war, at the Chasm family home on North Fifth Street in Oregon, James and Horace, young grandsons of the senior Thomas Chasm's son James, decided they needed a high jump and pole vault pit in the back yard. While digging the hole they discovered an oval brass belt buckle with the letters US on it. They showed it to their Grandpa Jim, who told them that when his brother Thomas returned from the Civil War, his uniform was so heavily infested with lice that their mother made him bury it in the back yard. While the cloth and leather deteriorated over the years, the buckle survived.

To bring the story full circle, Horace Chasm's great-granddaughter is now one of our Junior Docents at the Historical Society. (See the Junior Docent story elsewhere in this issue.) The Civil War isn't really so far away after all.

The Ogle County Historical Society
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Application for Membership

_____ \$200 one person for life
___ \$15 per person, one year ___ \$25 per family, one year ___ \$2 per student, one year

Name _____

Street Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____

Email _____

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