

# Grundy County Historical Society Newsletter



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Facebook: Museum of the Grundy County  
Historical Society-Illinois

Museum Hours: Thursday, Friday, Saturday  
10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

## Group Tours by Appointment—Call for Appointment

The Grundy County Historical Society Newsletter is published four times a year. It is distributed to members of record free of charge via e-mail and USPS. Subscriptions to the Society start at \$10 for students annually. Applications can be downloaded from our website, <http://www.grundycountyhs.org> or write to us care of the address above.

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## MUSEUM NEWS

### LOOKING AHEAD—UPCOMING MEETINGS

We will be hosting the following lectures this Fall. All lectures take place in our meeting room beginning at 7:00 p.m. unless otherwise announced.

**September 27**—Rebecca Hunter will talk about Sears Homes.

**October 25**—Heidi Litchfield will present a program on Why Roads Have the Names They Do.

### REMINDERS—INTERURBAN DVD

The Grundy County Historical Society has a DVD on the story of the Interurban transportation system, the early transportation system that existed in Illinois, available for sale. Covering the Upper Illinois River Valley from Joliet through Spring Valley and Ladd, it was first presented at The Grundy County Historical Society meeting in March 2011. The scope has been expanded on the DVD and is the only media documentation about this Interurban available today.

### BOHEMIAN HALL REDUX

The Museum is working with Michelle Micetich of the Carbon Hill Museum on gathering information on the Bohemian Hall/Opera House located in Coal City, Illinois. Research has taken us to the court house for sales of the building and to the Newberry library in Chicago, but is still a work in progress. Currently we are investigating if there is a commonality in architectural styles with other Bohemian halls. Copies of any photos or other information you may have would be greatly appreciated.

## LIBERTY ARTS DAY

The Morris Retail Association (MRA) is coordinating ART ON THE STREETS, and they have selected garden art as the canvas for this year. Each business has been asked to decorate a garden item in an artistic manner. This year the Morris Watercolor Guild has created a garden signpost based on the Liberty Arts Festival theme. Ginny Bellamy and the Guild produced this signpost with arrows pointing in different directions to locations such as Paris, France; Denali in Alaska; Malibu; and the Hundred Acre Woods.



At the end of the Festival, the MRA will host the Ultimate Garden Party on the courthouse lawn where attendees will have their final opportunity to bid on any of the items created for this festival. The Morris Water Guild's signpost will be popular. The sign is on display at the Museum until July 15, when it will move to the courthouse for the auction on July 16.

## CRUISE NIGHT

Our first Cruise Night at the Caboose was a success. We had 202 people go thru the caboose and received donations of \$31. Not a lot of money, but the kids really appreciate being able to see inside a caboose. Thanks to Zack Hajduk, a Chamber Member and owner of Zack's Lighting (Christmas light setup), who presented the

interpretation inside the caboose on a very hot night. Your GCHS president sat outside in comfort??

Because the caboose is open on Cruise Nights, we are going to place a light on the outside of the caboose over each of the stairways. When it begins to get darker earlier in August, visitors have a hard time seeing the steps clearly. This is not a problem in June or July but by August the lights will be necessary.

## JUNK IN THE TRUNK (JITT)



Ken Willis once again gave GCHS an opportunity to earn funds for the Museum. JITT is a wonderful fund raiser for us. All monies collected for spots at each swap are donated to a specific charity or non-profit. This year a

great big thanks to Dan Dransfeldt, Phil Cheshareck, and Donna Sroczyński for directing cars to their swap spots for this event. And an bigger thanks to Ken Willis for designating this past JITT's monies totaling \$650.00 to our Museum.

## INQUIRIES

As you know, one of our important goals is to acquire and retain the history of Grundy County. We get many people who call with requests for information or stop in to ask us questions concerning events or places located in the county. Recently we have been asked for:

- Layout of Mt. Carmel Cemetery
- What happened to the house at 1310 Union Street and when was it moved?
- Questions regarding milk producers who bottled milk in Grundy County.
- Where was the first airport and when did it move to its current location? (Note, we are sadly lacking in airport information. Can you help increase our meager data about the airport?)

We do our best to answer all inquiries though with varied success. We greatly appreciate those who just remember when, where or why something transpired in the County and are willing to pass that information on to us.

## NEW MEMBERS

The Grundy County Historical Society and Museum would like to welcome the following new members: Dr. Gina Paul of Carbondale, Illinois; Dan and Jackie Risley of Morris, Illinois; and JoAnne McMillan of Gardner, Illinois.

## GRUNDY COUNTY TRIVIA

What year did Chief Shabbona die? Find the answer elsewhere in this newsletter.

## GRUNDY COUNTY WEB SITE

Since our web site is currently under construction, be sure to visit our on-line presence at our facebook page: Museum of the Grundy County Historical Society-Illinois.

## AND SPEAKING OF FACEBOOK . . .

Become one of our facebook friends by visiting our facebook page, kept up-to-date by Dorothy Cunnea. Lots of Grundy County historical information and events are showcased. If you wish to access the Museum's facebook page, request a friendship from Museum of the Grundy County Historical Society-Illinois. As of this printing, we have 488 followers.

## RADIO



The Museum is on the radio the first Monday of every month. Tune in and listen to "People Are Talking," WCSJ, 103.1 on your FM dial, from approximately 9:15 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. Because of the Fourth of July Holiday, we will be on the radio Wednesday, July 6, instead.

## GRUNDY COUNTY

*by Donna Sroczyński*

So, you may ask, what constitutes Grundy County? I have spoken on the radio about the Grundy County Historical Society and Museum's collections, its special exhibits and special programs as well as its purpose, which is to collect, exhibit, and save all aspects of the history of the county. But, perhaps I haven't addressed what the County *is*.

Grundy County did not exist until 1841 when it was sectioned off from LaSalle County.

In general, according to the 2010 Census,

- population was 50,063
- the county grew 33.4% from 2000 to 2010
- land area in square miles is 418.04
- population density per square mile is 119.8

The age makeup of the county,

- Under 5 7.3%
- Over 65 11.1%
- In between 81.6%

Most of our population resides primarily in the county's towns. Indeed, the county is a collection of towns with Morris being the Grundy County Seat. The county

contains the towns of Braceville, Carbon Hill, Coal City, Diamond, East Brooklyn, Gardner, Kinsman, Mazon, Morris, South Wilmington, and Verona. Grundy County also encompasses parts of Godley, Seneca, and Minooka as well as towns that have disappeared such as Jugtown, Central City, and Old Mazon.

We don't give much thought about these last three towns these days, but here is a brief synopsis about them.

**Jugtown**—Born in 1860 and gone in 1870. It was built to create pottery and died because of the inability to get the pottery to market. There were no bridges across the Mazon or Illinois Rivers. Jugtown is now part of Goose Lake Prairie State Park.

**Central City**—Located in Braceville Township between the towns of Braceville and Coal City, it came into existence about 1870 during the hey day of coal mining in the vicinity of Braceville. At one time it had a population of about 500 people. Today you cannot even find records of it in the 2010 census.

**Old Mazon**—It was established in 1848 on land a mile south and a mile east of the present village of Mazon. At that time a hotel was built and 40 acres of land purchased and a town laid out. This village was built around a commons, an open green space in the middle of the village where residents of the town could graze their cow or other livestock. This concept is very English in design.

Some of Grundy County's notable towns are as follows.

**Mazon**—Established in 1874 while the "old" Mazon was still thriving. This town included the O. W. Weston Wagon Shop at the corner of Grand Ridge Road and Route 47 as well as the H. C. Gifford Store and a post office. The traffic on the Bloomington/Chicago Trail was so heavy that people started moving to Mazon where a school was established in 1854. The Santa Fe Railroad now goes through Mazon at a rate of 80–90 trains per day. The earliest homes were built in 1872. Today's population is 1,015.

**Braceville**—Established in 1833. As in the case of many of our towns, coal created this town in 1861 along the Chicago and Alton Railway. The No. 2 Coal Mine was opened in this year and this mine had the record for producing the greatest amount of coal of any shaft in Grundy County. At its peak time in the early 1900s, five coal mines were in operation. Interestingly, many of the homes of the town were moved to southern Illinois by flat car when the Braceville mines closed. The last of the Braceville coal mines, No. 6, shut down in 1919. At that time most of the families moved away leaving Braceville almost a ghost town. Today it's population is 835.

**Gardner**—The Chicago and Alton Railroad was completed in 1854 and the history of Gardner begins with this event. Later, an 1878 fire burned down most of the business section of town but it was rebuilt. Farming and coal mining were the leading industries in the area. Today the population is 1,528. Its historical jail is still standing and you can visit it and listen to an automated description of the facility and its history.

**Carbon Hill**—Established in 1874, it was a center of coal mining and had four coal mines, one on each side of town. Collectively, these mines employed 800 miners and generated 700–800 tons of coal per shift. The average output per miner was two to three tons per day working a ten-hour day. The miners' weekly salary ranged from \$7.50 to \$10.00 per week. Today there is a fine Museum in the town's 1893 school house called the Carbon Hill Museum. It specializes in mining, one-room schoolhouses, as well as early railroad development. Today's population is 421.

**Coal City**—Established in 1875 with its first coal mine. At one time 1,200 men were employed in its mines. In fact, Mine #4 had the record of producing more coal per day than any other mine in Illinois. The daily output was 2,150 tons. Coal City was located where it is because of the Chicago, Pekin and Southwestern Railroad which came through in 1877. In 1878, a large three-story hotel was built to accommodate people coming to the Sulphur Springs Health Spa. Today's population is 5,777.

**Verona**—Established in 1876 it was developed when the Chicago, Pekin and Southwestern Railroad was completed. The town was platted in February of 1877. Several fires have destroyed the town. The first one occurred in 1886, but it rose again when coal was discovered in 1922. A second fire happened in 1929 and a third one in 1936. Verona is also the home of several inventors who invented such items as a drag, a cultivator, elevators, and wagon boxes, a style which is still used today. Today the population is 259. Verona is in Vienna Township reflecting its many Italian residents.

**South Wilmington**—Established in 1899. The village was first named Lawton for General Lawton who fought in the Spanish-American War, but in May 1900, because it was preferred by the mining company, it was renamed South Wilmington. Coal was the major industry with a second mine opening in 1908 and a third one in 1912. With the closing of the third mine for the third and final time in 1954, the town lost a lot of its population which was estimated at 3,500 people. However it remains a viable town today. The current population is 640.

**East Brooklyn**—Established in 1903. Again coal was the main industry. Shaft mining ended with the closing of the shaft mines in 1926. Strip mining however, replaced shaft mining in the area. Note, the Mazon River's course was changed by Peabody Coal when coal was discovered under the river. Strip mining ended with the close of operations in 1974. Because of East Brooklyn's location on the Mazon River, the town has flooded in 1979, 1982, 1985, and 1990. Population today is 127.

**Kinsman**—Established in 1876, its original name was Mitchell. Kinsman is a sleepy town carved out of a patchwork landscape of farms in the heart of the Grain Belt. Its few square blocks are home to a post office and the very beautiful Sacred Heart Catholic Church. Population today is 100.

**Diamond**—Established in 1872, Black Diamond had its start as a coal town. The village was named for its location in the center of the "Black Diamond" coal district. On February 16, 1883 the Diamond Mine flooded, killing 72 miners. A monument erected in Diamond still stands and memorializes the event. On November 17, 2013, an EF-2 tornado, which means winds were blowing at more than 110 miles per hour, ripped through, destroying a major portion of the town. In 2013 the town's population is listed at 2,503.

**Morris**—Established in 1842 it became the county seat in 1852. The town was previously called Grundyville. The Illinois & Michigan Canal figured prominently in the development of Morris and was a major transportation source until the Rock Island railroad came through in 1852. The town's population was listed as 13,926 in 2013.

## SO, WELCOME

Welcome to Grundy County, which contains a great mixture of business and agriculture, and was recently named by *Progressive Farmer Magazine* as the sixth best County to live in of all the Counties of America! From the days of the construction of the historic Illinois & Michigan Canal, to the test site of the modern telephone switching system, to the first commercial nuclear power plant and, most recently, windmill generated power, industry has been an important part of Grundy County.

Grundy County provides some of the best agricultural land in America with a waterway for shipping—the Illinois River—plus two railroads and two interstate highways for coast-to-coast transportation. Immortalized in song, Grundy County's Railroads—the Santa Fe and the Rock Island Line—will long be remembered. Recent upgrades to the railroads and future plans for high speed rail will carry Grundy County into the future.

One final note. You might wonder why only Grundy County has water in its section of the I&M Canal. It was needed as a water source for the Morris Paper Mill. Other areas of the canal are dry because many people think they are mosquito havens or just plain ugly looking. Considering the number of walkers, bicyclers, and other visitors along our section of the canal, I think we are lucky to have such a scenic and historic pathway.

The preceding is just a brief overview of our county. Come explore more of its history at the Grundy County Historical Museum. We're open Thursday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Or, we can accommodate your group for a tour at other times. Call to set up a tour now!

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## Grundy County



## Historical Society

Grundy County Historical Society and Museum  
510 West Illinois Avenue  
Morris, IL 60450

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