



MARION COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER - SPRING 2016

DARLENE MILLER-EDITOR

The program for our March 21 meeting was discussing the artifacts that members of the Marion County Historical Society brought to the meeting. These included the 1852 original land grant given to William Sims for his property in Marion County, a wooden pencil box, an all metal strainer, and coins from 1884 and 1887.

The April 18 meeting was with the 2016 Tulip Queen and her court. Their choreography was excellent as they told the history of Pella in word, song, and dance. We were welcomed to come to Tulip time in Pella on May 5-7.

The meeting on May 16 will introduce us to Clara Statler who will bring the cedar chest which belonged to her grandmother. Clara has refinished the cedar chest and won a blue ribbon for her work at the Iowa State Fair.

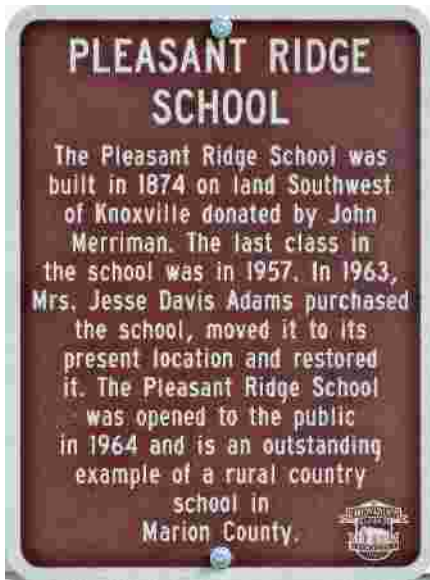
On June 20 we will hear the history of the Grand Theater by Curt Schwanebeck.

THE MCHS meetings are held at the First United Methodist Church Activity Center on the third Monday of the month at 7:30pm. You are welcome.



Marion County Museum:

The Marion County Museum will open May 28 for the summer season at the Marion County Park on 306 Willetts Dr. in Knoxville. MCHS have been working in preparation for the season where the museum will be open during the summer weekends. A grant from the United Way Fund gave us funds for the signs at each building. These signs not only name each building but have a brief history of the building.



For more information on each building, go to the MCHS museum for material compiled by Marla Suter on each building. This is Marla's information on Pleasant Ridge School.

This was the first building moved into the area we now call the Historical Village. Originally built in 1874 on land donated by Mr. John Merriman and used continuously as a school (with the exception of 1946 & 1947 – when there were not enough students) until it closed. The last recorded school teacher was Mrs. Ruth Kenney in 1957.

In November, 1963, Mrs. Jesse Davis Adams a former Marion County school teacher purchased this school from the Pleasant Ridge School District for \$75.00. A foundation was poured and it was moved to its present location at a cost of \$750. After several weeks of restoration work, on May 17, 1964, a dedication ceremony was held and Mrs. Adams presented the restored school to the Marion County Conservation Board. Mr. Joseph Johnston accepted it on behalf of the Board.

The original name plate made of wood is still above the door. The bell and the flagpole were moved from the original site. The "Old Pump" that sits in the side yard was found in a junk heap and restored. The 15 double desks and recitation seat are original to the school house. A potbellied stove sits in the center of this 24 x 30' school, and during those very cold Iowa winters, sorry was the student who failed to put his bottle of ink under the stove before he went home in the evening.

You may recall stories of the "Little Red School House" here at the Village. When Mrs. Adams was restoring the school she had it painted red. It has since been painted white in keeping with what is believed to be its original color.

HELEN BOERTJE has some fascinating stories about life in Marion County in her book, *When One Room Fit All*, about The Country Schools of Marion County, Iowa. Here are stories from the Elm Ridge School. Used by permission.

Elm Ridge School

Elm Ridge School, two miles east of Knoxville, stood on one-half acre of land leased from Joseph Frank for one cent in the spring of 1859. Elm Ridge was a natural name for this district, which at that time had many large elm trees.

According to a December 25, 1889, *Knoxville Journal* story, the first building was made of logs with a large old-fashioned fireplace. There were only two windows and no desks, only rough benches with no backs. The writer describes the modern conveniences of 1889 and the mottos on the wall: “God Bless Our School, Never Be Tardy, No Idlers Wanted Here.”

Elm Ridge was frequently mentioned in the *The Journal*. February 1884: “There was a large crowd at the spelling match. Near 600 Valentines distributed.” (This would probably have been a match between Elm Ridge and two or three other nearby schools.)

January 1885: “There was a snow storm which blockaded the roads so that students and teachers couldn't get to school. The weather was so cold and bad that a woman who arrived with two small children by train broke the depot window. I hope that the railway will provide for the depot to be open at night.”

January 19, 1887: The most unusual - and amusing – observation: “Elm Ridge neighborhood has 13 girls and ten boys of marrying age and one widow and two widowers and still there has not been a marriage here in over a year.”

In the spring of 1912, fire destroyed a relatively new building built twenty years earlier and the term was finished in the Flagler Chapel. All the books were lost including a set of encyclopedias and other items belonging to teacher Angie Stentz. The encyclopedias were valued at 21\$. By the fall term, a new school had been built.

On the last day of school in 1939, Othelia Freeman read a history of the school. Here are her comments on early lunches: “They consisted of bread, butter, sorghum, and molasses cookies brought in tin buckets. Often they would pour sorghum in meat fryings and they would have a fine spread for bread. Fresh fruits were unheard of. One teacher who came from the east was a little out of the ordinary, and he would bring an apple. He always peeled his apple before eating it and the boys stood around and fought over who would get the peelings to eat.”

Put the date of Saturday, July 2, 2016 on your calendar for special activities with re-enactors at the Marion County Park Village. You will meet the Army of the Southwest as they do Civil War maneuvers. You may see ladies in Victorian dress display their latest fashions. You can wander inside all the buildings of the village. Bring your family and friends. There is no admission cost on July 2. More details will appear in the MCHS Newsletter summer issue.

CURATOR- KATHLEEN SMITH'S REPORT – APRIL, 2016

2015 WAS A GOOD YEAR FOR THE Marion County Historical Society. We had visitors from our local area (Marion County) plus several visitors from other Iowa locations. Visitors from eleven (11) states signed our register. They were from Utah, Missouri, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, California, Florida, and North Dakota.

Donations came from fifty-two (52) families and /or individuals and totaled 169 items or collections. Space does not allow a listing of all donors and items, but I will mention that we received the genealogical research of Helen Adair and have placed the research alphabetically in binders to make them "user friendly". Also of note is a collection of tools used by Palmer Kirchau given by the family.

Our obituary binders are up-to-date through 2015 and are on the shelves for your use. We are continually adding new information to our archives that is usable for research. Several photos have also been added to the photo files. Check out our "local authors" shelf.

The Marion County Historical Society has an extensive collection of information about the early history of the county, the schools, the towns, individual family histories and stories of those who served in various wars located in the museum.

We seek to add to these collections with items that relate in some way to the county. Keep us in mind when you are disposing of an estate or simply sorting through old photos and records.

If you have items to donate, we are happy to accept items pertaining to Marion County that are not duplications of what we already have in our village. Call 641-204-9143 to speak to Kathleen Smith who is the curator.

The fee for weekend village tours is \$5.00 for adults, \$2.00 for students and free for preschool youngsters.

An exception is July 2 when the festivities are free.

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