

**Illinois History**  
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## **The Skokie Historical Society is Cutting-Edge**

Gabe Elizer  
East Prairie School, Skokie  
Teachers: Jori Fox and Suzan Bates

The Skokie Historical Society (SHS) is filled with many interesting facts about the town of Skokie. Skokie is a very diverse town, with people migrating here from many other countries. According to the Skokie Festival of Cultures Web site, at least 32 different cultures are celebrated in Skokie. It is important to keep everyone united because we have so many different lifestyles. The Historical Society helps people come together by teaching them Skokie's history. It has been teaching history for 127 years.

The SHS helps bring history to our community. One way is through its big genealogy research center. Researchers can use the library and the archive to find out information about their Skokie ancestors. One family that is often studied there is the Meyer family.

Another way the museum helps bring history to the community is through the Backlot Bash. In the summertime the Village of Skokie and its historical society holds a Backlot Bash. The first annual Backlot Bash was held in 2007. The Backlot Bash brings everyone together and it is a way to raise money for Skokie. At the Backlot Bash participants honor Charlie Chaplin, who was an actor for Chicago's Essanay Studios from 1914 to 1916. Essanay filmed many early movies in Niles Center, which is now named Skokie. At the Backlot Bash there are also booths to teach about the early film history in Chicago and Skokie. Film booths are not the only kind of booths. There are also religious and cultural booths. This means that the citizens teach other people about their religion. I personally like the booths because I can see other peoples' religions.

Another way that the community is involved in learning and making history is by meeting on the second floor of the Historical Society. During these meetings they talk about ways to help the community. These meetings make history because they are talking about Skokie and how to improve it. This makes new history because they study the old history of Skokie and improve upon it. The museum also has a library people can use to learn about history. In the library you can learn about the firemen, the log cabin, and anything Skokie-related.

One such example is that the Museum has lots of information on the old Skokie fireman in the library and on the first floor, Engine House. While I was there I saw the equipment the firemen used to help the Skokie Park District. I think it is amazing that the firemen used such old equipment to help Skokie.

Do you like photos, movies and videos? Then the SHS has many for you to see online in its Digital Past Web site. Some of the videos from the 1900s in the Digital Past are of the residents of Niles Center (Skokie), the Skokie Valley Symphony, Niles East High School 1930s building instructions, Niles East football games, the “Skokie People Speaks” Series, and the World War II veterans being interviewed by the high school students. These videos are priceless because Niles East High School does not exist anymore. It is now Oakton Community College. These pieces of history are saved for us to learn about in the Digital Past.

Another priceless artifact is the Meyer’s Family Log Cabin that was built in 1847. The Meyer family lived there with their twelve children. When you look out of the window in the log cabin, you will see beautiful prairie grasses in the garden. The log cabin shows citizens how people lived in the 1800s.

According to a museum pamphlet, “The Health Department relocated to Village Hall; it became the home of the Skokie Historical Society.” Also Mr. Meyer owned the farmland where he made wagon wheels and sold them in Chicago. What makes the log cabin seem so special is that Skokie is the only village to have a log cabin for its museum. Also, the logs are made from five different types of trees, especially oak and walnut. When the cabin was in Skokie it stood at 5406 Lincoln Avenue. According to the information, “The log cabin had been covered in siding and used as a chicken coup and shed.” The Village of Skokie decided to move it in 1974 to where the log cabin still stands today, on 8031 Floral Avenue. The log cabin has beauty all around the outside. You can mostly see, “various plants and prairie grasses that were present in the 1840s.”

The artifacts are a big part of the SHS because we can remember what the firemen used to put out the fires. Some of the artifacts are the water pump, a wagon, a trampoline to help people if they had to jump from a building, and my favorite, the pole. The pole is something that the firemen use to hurry to get to the fires. One of the fires that caught my attention was the Chicago Fire, on October 8, 1871, which lasted for three days. Another horrible disaster was the Goodyear Dirigible Disaster. The terrifying event occurred on July 21, 1919. A blimp crashed into the Illinois Trust and Savings Building. The two gasoline tanks from the balloons crashed to the floor. You can see the artifacts from these collections in the historical society.

As you can see, the historical society provides a learning opportunity for those who are from all different races. Skokie Historical Society influences our community to become great citizens who work together. Skokie is a wonderful town to live in. You get great opportunities, like many historical learning experiences. [From Betty Jacob and

Sellmagic, Almir. "Skokie Historical Society." *Skokie Historical Society*. Sept. 2005.  
Skokie Historical Society. <<http://www.skokiehistory.info/>>. (Jan. 13, 2009); Village of  
Skokie, "Skokie Village Walking Tour." "Skokie Village Walking Tour. 1978; and  
Village of Skokie, "Niles Center Fire Department." *Niles Center Fire Department*. 1881.]



## **Ogle County Historical Society and Museum**

Brandon Gigous  
Oregon High School, Oregon  
Teacher: Sara Werkle

Imagine traveling back in time 100 to 150 years. Imagine having the opportunity to see how people dressed and how they lived in the 1800s and 1900s. The Ogle County Historical Society is a great substitute for a time machine because this Society displays and collects items from those time periods, from antiques, artifacts, and old photographs, to war memorabilia, even from the Civil War. The Society also has a history of its own.

In March 1953, a proposal was made to form the Ogle County Historical Society by Mrs. H. B. Walker of the Ogle County Federation of Women's Clubs. The proposal was accepted and, with free legal advice from Attorney Gerald K. Garard, a committee was appointed to follow through with the plans. The original incorporators were Miss Ella Chaney, Miss Ruby Nash, Mrs. Ivan Kuntzelman, Mrs. Yale Bates, Mrs. Harold Walker, and Mrs. Arthur Beebe. The first charter life member of the Society was Mr. C. Merle Haselton. On May 31, 1955, the constitution was completed and adopted by the membership. The first Board of Directors consisted of Victor Conkey, Frank Coffman, Willard Jones, Mrs. Isaac Canfield, Miss Lillian Storz, Russell Poole, Everett Webster, C. C. Parks, George Etnyre, Kenneth Cleaver, Mrs. C. M. Tilton, and Mrs. Edith Carmichael. The constitution states: "The object of this Society shall be to discover, preserve, and disseminate the History of Ogle County and the State of Illinois."

Many projects have been undertaken to acquaint Ogle County residents with the Society's goal of preserving history. The Henry Boss History of Ogle County from 1859 was reprinted for sale by the Society. Free copies were given to all schools and libraries

in the county. The 1864 map of Ogle County was reprinted as well as pamphlets and placemats of historic sites in the county. They have held tours of many historic sites. The Society surveyed all graveyards in the county and recorded all who were listed as buried in each one. Genealogies of family lines were ascertained from these listings. According to the *Bicentennial History of Ogle County*, “the Society has been instrumental in the repair of historic stones and in obtaining historical markers throughout the county.”

Ruby Nash was a lover of history and an active member of the Society. She was also a dedicated and well-loved elementary teacher in the Oregon community for 50 years from 1891 to 1941. Out of all 50 years of teaching, she never missed a day! Vada Wood, who knew Ruby in person, says that “she was pretty knowledgeable” and “real nice.” Many Society meetings were held in her home. In 1961, Ruby Nash willed half her home to the Society and half to the Library. Using Ella Chaney’s funds, a good friend and fellow teacher of Ruby Nash, the Society bought out the library’s interest and started their museum in Ruby’s house at 111 North Sixth Street, Oregon, Illinois.

Chester Nash, Ruby’s father, built this home in 1878 when Ruby would have only been four years of age. Chester Nash invented the Nash Cultivator and was a contemporary of John Deere of Grand Detour, Illinois. Nash also was one of eight Union soldiers who were held as prisoners of war during the Civil War.

In late 1975, arson occurred at the museum. It damaged the back porch and kitchen area, and instead of just repairing the damage, the Society decided to add another room on the first floor for the display of more artifacts. After years of planning by

Leonard Wood and other members of the Society, they decided to replace the old garage with a larger one they called the “Carriage House,” built in 2004.

The Ruby Nash Museum remains vintage 1880s, and is furnished as though it would have looked back then. The collection includes many of Ruby’s personal furnishings and actual records of her fifty years as an Oregon school teacher. The museum and the “Carriage House” have thousands of antiques and artifacts from different parts of the country.

The Ruby Nash Museum is unlike many historical museums. What makes this museum unique is that, along with items belonging to Ruby Nash, it contains collections strictly from Ogle County, as well as rare pieces from various parts of Illinois. “We cover the whole county,” says Vada Wood, who has been an active member for several decades and is the editor of the Society’s Gazette. She also adds that “it’s rare” for a society to collect antiques from the whole county. Most museums are city historical societies.

The Society’s most popular antique is the pianoforte located in the Ella Chaney Room, donated by the Barrick family of Rockford. This piece is one of a kind because it was played at Governor Ford’s inauguration in 1842. He was the first governor to grow up in Illinois, and he was even a resident of Oregon at some point in his lifetime. Another rare piece of Illinois history is a photo of President Lincoln’s family. It does not seem like much, but the special thing about it is that Mary Todd Lincoln did not like her picture to be taken. Photos of her are scarce.

The OCHS is an example of a museum started by an extraordinary group of people. It is amazing to think that this Society was made for the preservation of local

history, to educate children and adults alike about their own county's history. Some of today's overlooked objects may become tomorrow's precious history. That is why there should exist more historical societies like the OCHS. [From Charles Mongan, Lynne Kilker, Viola Myers, Anne Jones, eds., *The Story of Oregon, Illinois*; Leonardo Appel, Hamilton Cross, Harriet Fletcher, Robert Folk, Russell Poole, Armour Van Briesen, Armin Weng, eds., *Bicentennial History of Ogle County*; Otto Dick, Student Historian's interview, Oct. 10, 2008; Vada Wood, Student Historian's interview, Oct. 6, 2008; *The Ogle County Historical Society and Museum Site*.

<<http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~ilogle/historical.htm>> (Oct. 4, 2008).]



Ogle County Historical Society and Museum

## **Breese Historical Society: Looking to our Past, Present, and Future**

Bailey Kampwerth  
All Saints Academy, Breese  
Teacher: Stephanie Garcia

The City of Breese, located in southern Illinois, was named after Sidney Breese. Breese was born in central New York on July 15, 1800. He served as a United States Senator, was a member of the Illinois General Assembly, became speaker of the House, and later Chief Justice of the Illinois Supreme Court. One of his outstanding achievements in his career as Chief Justice was his support in building the Illinois Central Railroad. Breese, started out as a volunteer in the Black Hawk War in 1832 and worked his way up to Lieutenant Colonel.

The township village, now the City of Breese, provided Chief Justice Breese with the honor of a community named after him. At the time, he was the attorney for the Mississippi and Ohio Railroad. Sidney Breese passed away at his family home in 1878. Today, a statue of Sidney Breese is on display in the State Capitol in Springfield, Illinois.

To help preserve the history of Sidney Breese and other historical information, the Breese Historical Society (BHS) was organized in March 2000. Don Maue, the mayor of Breese, suggested the start of the society. A committee was formed of three men and one woman. Its main goal was to document and collect artifacts about the city of Breese. Barb Von Alst, a resident of Breese and business owner, was the first president of the BHS.

The BHS participates in many civic projects such as the street fests and the annual Christmas parade. It also honors elementary students of All Saints Academy and Breese Elementary who participate and present projects relating to the history of Breese at the

Illinois History Fair and those who write for Illinois History magazine. One of the projects that has been recognized by the Historical Society is the historical Avon Theater located in downtown Breese. My brother Brendan Kampwerth and his friend, David Toennies, created a model and provided historical information on the theater for their Illinois History Fair project. Other projects recognized were the Cholera Cross, the Breese Fire District, Excel Bottling Company, the Breese Mining Disaster, Prohibition in Southern Illinois, and the Story of Sidney Breese.

The BHS created *The Breese Sesquicentennial Pictorial History Book, 1856-2006*. The book was created to celebrate Breese's 150-year anniversary. The City Council created a historical committee to gather as much historical data as possible. It began preparing the book in 2003 for publication in May 2006. The residents were invited to provide old photographs, articles, or any historical information about the city. Not only did this information help in writing the book and to educate others, but the BHS hopes to someday create a city museum.

The committee created post cards picturing homes and businesses of Breese. These post cards, sold in packs of four, included decorations around Breese during Christmas, transportation of the past, and events held in the "good old days."

In 2004, the BHS decided to create a historical park and garden. This special site, with its historical images, was to reflect the hard work and dedication of its ancestors connecting our citizens to the past. The lot south of St. Dominic Catholic Church, where the history park is located today, was bought by Dr. Maurice Coyle and Agnes (Kuhl) Coyle. They purchased the lot because Anna, Agnes' mother, loved watching weddings

at St. Dominic. Dr. and Mrs. Coyle donated the property in honor of Agnes' parents, Frank and Anna Kuhl.

In 2005, construction on the park began. The excavation and construction were done by Litteken Construction. The park is surrounded with stone walls, donated by Ralph Von Bokel. The stones used to build St. Dominic's outside walls over 150 years ago, also came from the same Von Bokel Farm. The park includes a black granite pyramid in the middle of the attraction, a gazebo, and a storage area. A recognition wall displays over 180 engraved bricks purchased by many Breese residents. Pavers enhance the walkways. The granite pyramid, on all four sides, includes multiple images of the founder of Breese, Chief Justice Sidney Breese, the three churches of Breese, the Cholera Cross and much more. The Cholera Cross was erected by local farmers praising Jesus during a cholera epidemic in the 1840s. He would praise and honor Jesus with this cross if his family was spared from cholera. Amy Kruse was the architect for these drawings on the pyramid.

Inside the pyramid is a 14-foot tube with an additional sealed tube holding 25 smaller, 14-inch-long time capsules. These capsules donated by different families throughout the community include family's history, pictures, the sesquicentennial book, coins, company logo items, ads from weekly newspapers, 150-year old letters to and from Germany, and a wooden beaded rosary. These smaller capsules were triple sealed, making them waterproof. The tip of the pyramid was sealed at the dedication ceremony on Sunday, April 27, 2008. Barb Richter, a resident of Breese and current president of the society, organized a volunteer honorary time capsule committee consisting of eighteen youth to open the capsule in 50 years, 2058. My brother, Brendan Kampwerth,

and I are honored to be part of the honorary time capsule youth committee. During the ceremony, after putting our commitment papers in a sealed tube, we helped lower them into the ground. We will be in charge of opening the capsule in 50 years.

The BHS Park and Garden is a place where residents and visitors can go to visit, relax, reflect and reminisce. It has been an honor taking part in such an amazing dedication to our past. I will be extremely honored to open the time capsule in 50 years. I look forward to sharing this special historical moment with my future family. [From "Breese Historical Society Enters Legacy Phase of History Park Project," *Breese Journal* Oct. 11, 2007; *Breese Sesquicentennial Pictorial History*, Breese, Illinois: Breese Journal and Company, 2006; "Historical Park Under Construction in Breese," *Breese Journal* June 28, 2007; "New Park Preserves History of Breese," *Breese Journal*, Apr. 24, 2008; Kelly Jo Ross, "History Park Dedicated Sunday in Breese," *Breese Journal* May 1, 2008; Joe and Barb Richter, Student Historian's interview Feb. 9, 2009; and James B. Schlueter, *Breese Quasquicentennial 1856-1981*.]

## **Polo Historical Society**

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Although there are countless historical societies in the United States, I chose the Polo Historical Society because of its excellent contribution to our local history. The Polo Historical Society has several different sites and artifacts in its collection. It also has regular meetings and is still improving its collection today. The Polo Historical Society president, Betty Obendorf, was pleased to give me an interview and tell me everything she could about the society's dedication to history in the Polo area.

The Polo Historical Society was founded in the early 1900s by Zenas Aplington, and was going strong until about 1914 when their leader J. W. Clinton became ill. Clinton worked for a newspaper and was involved in many historical societies in Illinois and Wisconsin over a span of thirty-five years. After his death the society faded away until 1957, but did not become strong again until the 1960s. During this time, the society put up informational signs at all of its historical sites around Polo and Buffalo Grove. Buffalo Grove was renamed Polo after the Illinois railroad was built. Milledgeville Blacktop, the Lime Kiln, the First Cabin in Ogle County, the School House, the law office, and post office are only some of the historical sites where they put up signs. From 1970 to 1978 work began to save the home of their founder, Zenas Aplington. Finally in 1981 they were incorporated as a non-profit organization.

The Galena Trail was the beginning of Polo and the surrounding area. This trail was one hundred and seventy-five miles between Peoria and Galena, and an optional one-hundred mile trail along the Mississippi River that led to the lead mines in Wisconsin and

Iowa. The trail was originally used for the fur trade. It was called the Kellogg Trail before the Black Hawk War. After that it was surveyed by Levi Warner and became a major trail. It was also used as a state coach road in 1833. Today it has become a secondary transportation route in the area. The old Galena Trail is a public accessible driving, biking and hiking path. Although it has been modernized some, it is still the same trail as it was when the fur trade began.

There are a couple of things that are unique to the Polo Historical Society. It has one of the biggest Native American collections in Illinois. Martin Schryver collected pieces from all over the United States and gave it to the Polo library in 1942. The library kept it until 1997 when they needed to get rid of it because of limited space. They sold it to the historical society in 1998. This was one of the biggest and most valuable collections that the Polo Historical Society acquired. A specialist came to see the collection after hearing about it and said that he was amazed with how much it had not just in the Native American collection, but in everything. Another astounding attribute of the Polo society was its founder. Zenas Aplington arrived in Buffalo Grove in 1837 at the age of twenty-two. After the Illinois Railroad was built, he moved his family to the new town of Polo. He was also a leader of the Republican Party and a personal friend of Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln stayed in the Aplington house for two nights while he was in Oregon speaking for the Presidential campaign between John C. Fremont and James Buchanan. Judge Campbell recollected his time with Lincoln saying that “Mr. Lincoln was very talkative and told many stories so quaint and funny that we almost exploded with laughter.” Then he went on to tell that although he had a sense of humor, usually “His facial expressions...were always sad and thoughtful.” The historical society also has

a collection of artifacts from the first surveyor of Ogle County. The surveyor's name was Levi Warner. His tools, maps and personal notes are a part of the historical society's collection. All of his effects were given to the society in 1906 by his son.

The museum also has a timeline clothing collection. It includes the first settlers, World War I, the Twenties conservative look, the Flappers era, and wedding dresses from 1900 through 1950. The museum also has artifacts from these times and also includes agricultural equipment and other pieces of history. Many of the farm equipment artifacts were John Deere but some were made and designed by local farmers. "We are very proud of our collection...it is one of the best in the state of Illinois."

Although there are countless historical societies in the United States, I chose the Polo Historical Society because of its excellent contribution to our local history. The Polo Historical Society has many historical places, artifacts, and information that are preserved and given to the public. It has restored historical buildings like the Aplington house, the Lime Kiln, the Doctor's house, the school house and several others. It has Indian artifacts, clothes from almost every era from the settlers on, and a selection of other artifacts. It also has history that was handed down through the generations including Levi Warner's journal, historical documents and personal accounts of life in Polo and Buffalo Grove.

Polo has done everything in its power to keep Polo a historical spot for generations of them to come. "It's not just about Polo, it's about Ogle County and giving history to everyone" says Betty Obendorf. The Polo Historical Society's goal is to preserve and provide history to all. It has achieved its goal and continues to make Polo an important historical center of Ogle County. [From Patricia L. Goitein, *The Galena*

*Trail & Coach Road Interpretive Trail*; John Heckman, Catherine Phalen, and Lester Weaver, *Voice of the Prairie*; Betty Obendorf, *Levi Warner & Martha Bailey Winters Warner*; Mary Obendorf, Student Historian's interview, Oct. 4, 2008; and *Polo Historical Society*, (Brochure).]

## **A History of the Peoria Historical Society**

Ciara M. Witt  
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“A spot of local history is like an inn upon a highway; it is a stage upon a far journey; it is a place the national history has passed through. There mankind has stopped and layed by the way.” These words, spoken by Woodrow Wilson, ring true for a plethora of historical societies. Although the Peoria Historical Society (PHS) had a relatively rocky start, it eventually got its footing and began its long journey through the past. Along the way in history the PHS has diligently recorded and documented the history of Peoria County. It has collected items from different eras of Peoria’s history and attentively educated any interested person about Peoria’s past. Since 1934, the culture of Peoria has been greatly enriched by the PHS; because of this society, queries have been answered, old buildings have been saved, and interests in Peoria’s history have grown.

The PHS has several different facilities, one of which is the Flanagan House Museum. In the early 1960s, the local newspaper put on a contest to find the oldest house in Peoria. The winner was the John C. Flanagan House, built circa 1837. The PHS held several fundraising events to purchase this house. Enough money was finally raised in 1962. This house is used more as a museum of artifacts than of what everyday life was like in the 1830s. The Flanagan House is not only a museum but also the headquarters for the PHS and the Peoria chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. The other house museum that the PHS owns is the Pettengill-Morrison House located at 1212 Moss Avenue in Peoria. Jean Morrison was the last owner of the house and Moses Pettengill was the builder. The PHS was included in Ms. Morrison’s will; she gave her

house and furnishings to the historical society in January 1966. The Pettengill-Morrison House showcases pre-Civil War artifacts that were left in the house. The final place that the PHS owns or has claim on is the special collections at Bradley University's library, which has housed their official library since 1980. This collection has over seven thousand items including books, pamphlets, letters, diaries and maps involving Peoria County and Central Illinois. Occasionally the government, museums, or book writers will go there to find information for their books or exhibits. For a relatively small town the PHS was very proud that its library is of some use to the national museums and publishers.

There were several different societies called the Peoria Historical Society before 1934. The first version of the PHS was the Peoria Scientific and Historical Society in 1893. It later branched out and separated. While the science portion was going strong the historical side collapsed briefly after going out on its own. In the next couple years several other Peoria Historical Societies unsuccessfully came into existence. After that, there was a period with no historical society at all in Peoria. At that time Peorians were still finding and uncovering artifacts in their houses, but they had no place to take these items. Though Paul M. Angle was the librarian for the Illinois State Historical Society, he did a great deal for the PHS. For instance, he organized a dinner and lecture for those interested in starting a local historical society in January 1934. That night the first president was elected and the PHS of today was created. At the first annual meeting later that year one hundred charter members were announced. After that, the society was relatively dormant as the war and post-war activities went on. Later on, most of their little money was spent on purchasing the Flanagan house. Because of its spending in the

mid-1960s PHS stayed more or less dormant in the 1970s. However, starting in 1980 it participated in an archaeological dig. The purpose of these digs was to find artifacts from the Native Americans and the early French fur traders that lived in the area.

The main idea of the PHS is basically to store and showcase artifacts that relate to the history of that area. A large portion of PHS' items came from the former societies. Said items were stored at the Peoria Public Library where they were slowly forgotten and later rediscovered. When these artifacts were rediscovered, they were given to the PHS. When an item is taken in, the relevance to Peoria history is thought about and whether or not it can be stored. Previously, items were catalogued by hand on paper and were often illegible. Recently, a new computer cataloguing system called Past Perfect was purchased. The question now is, who controls all this? The answer is Bob Killion. He does the research on an item to find its relevance to Peoria's history. He is also in charge of putting things into the computer after they have been accessioned. There are approximately six people on the collections committee. They decide if the item in question will be accessioned or not.

Since 1934 the culture of Peoria has been greatly enriched by the PHS; because of this society, queries have been answered, old buildings have been saved, and interests in Peoria's history have grown. As the culture of Peoria has flourished, so has the historical society's size. It grew from only having an executive board to a couple hundred members in almost seventy-five years. Although Peoria is not a particularly large city, it has a rich past and dedicated members of its historical society to document this history. With some help from the Illinois State Historical Society, PHS has helped the past to be remembered. Thus is the duty of any historical society anywhere. As Paul M. Angle

said, “The duty of a local historical society is to preserve the present as well as the past because the records of today become the history of tomorrow. [From Keith L. Barr, “Historical Society Keeps Peoria in Perspective,” *The Peoria Times Observer*, July 15, 1992; Amy Kelly, Student Historian’s interview, Sept. 19, 2008; Bob Killion, Student Historian’s interview, Sept. 19, 2008; George W. May, *Students History of Peoria County, Illinois; Peoria Historical Society*. The Peoria Historical Society. <<http://peoriahistoricalsociety.org/phshistory.html>>. (Sept. 18, 2008); and The Peoria Historical Society, *The Peoria Historical Society*.]

## **A History of the Peoria Historical Society**

Jane S. Zhang  
Washington Gifted School, Peoria  
Teachers: Mindy Juriga and J. Tracy Prescott

No one can deny that the origins of any city are the foundations for the actual city itself. So, who kept the history of Peoria alive and still continues to influence its growth? It is no other than the Peoria Historical Society (PHS). Peoria's history is truly based on its preservers. Since history plays such a fundamental role in understanding present life, the efforts of the PHS in preserving Peoria's past are especially crucial; however, few know the history behind these preservers of the past.

Every city has a story behind it. The beginning was assembled based on the city's history. Peoria's unique story was initiated with the history of the PHS. The PHS's roots can be traced back to 1839. It became an official corporation in 1934 with the primary goal being to retain Peoria's past. It all began with a postcard, which was mailed to seventy-five people and stated that a meeting would be held at a local university for people interested in history. Only nineteen people came, but this small group took on the behemoth role of creating a historical society. In the 1950s, the PHS experienced a growth in membership. Percival Rennick became the first president of this big society. This immense number of people also led the PHS to think about illustrating Peoria's history by showing historical objects in a museum. Therefore, at a meeting in 1951, the PHS discussed ways to start a museum.

Gradually, the PHS collected enough money to buy the John Flanagan House, in 1962, for \$15,000. The house was constructed by Judge John Flanagan on October 16, 1837. The PHS purchased it in 1901. Since 1990, it has been Peoria's oldest standing

residence and the PHS's headquarters. Many historical object collections have been shown here. Some objects were preserved from the pre-Civil War period. For instance, one exhibit contained a child's bedroom and an old kitchen from 1840. Another exhibit displayed antique glass, china, furniture, toys, and clothing. Many of the objects in this museum also came from archeological digs the PHS performed in 1980 to search for historical objects. Numerous early objects of the French settlement and the 1812 War artifacts were added to the museum. As a reward for its achievements, the Flanagan Museum was given a certificate for distinguished service to American history on October 5, 1963. Besides this honor, this museum was placed on the National Register of Historic Sites in 1976 because of its old age and fine condition.

Likewise, the PHS acquired the Pettengill-Morrison House in 1966, which was constructed by Moses Pettengill in 1868. The last owner was Jean Morrison, who lived there until her death in 1966. The PHS took possession of the house's contents along with the house itself following her death. The preserved objects revealed the life style of two wealthy families. Exhibited here were fancy furniture, original rugs, collections of clothing from the 1700s, and Native American settlement objects. This museum first opened its doors in 1971. Later in 1987, through the PHS's extended tour offerings, special events, and exhibits sponsored by the award winning Peoria Garden Club, over 10,000 individuals visited the museum. Thus, a bronze plaque was awarded to the museum.

Although this historical society started its own history off fairly well, it came face to face with some challenges. For example, buying the two museums proved to be difficult because the PHS did not have many donations or much funding. In addition, this

society was a non-profit organization. Therefore, the PHS depended on donations, grants, and government funds. A burglary of \$13,000 took place in early 2008 and made the PHS's financial situation worse. Thus, the society had to watch the money it spent on its projects and events. Yet, the PHS battled with these challenges. To name a few solutions, the PHS conducted annual active membership drives, organized extended tours to local and out of town people, gave antique seminars, and increased the events it held annually. In return, the PHS received a donation of over 12,000 items from the chamber of commerce. Because of this, the PHS expanded its museums collections. Furthermore, since the 1940s, government funds have amounted to \$10,000 annually. Last but not least, the PHS had to deal with a decrease in interest levels. After the 1950s, not many people showed interest in Peoria's history. Therefore, the PHS held essay contests to motivate students to learn about local history. Additionally, the PHS organized the Rennick Award Art competition and designed various art shows to entertain people while it tried to raise public awareness of Peoria history.

Even to this day, the PHS is still very active in local historical projects. The PHS continues to conduct narrated historic trolley tours of Peoria. Aside from this, the "Step Back into Peoria" and "Candlelight Tours" program teaches students about past contributors to Peoria's history. Both museums hold events that endorse the preservation of Peoria's history. These events show the establishment of Peoria. They also help people in Peoria realize that in order to have a "today" or "future," there must be a "before." In addition, they provide research possibilities for scholars. Furthermore, the PHS cooperates with other organizations to arrange some events. This adds another dimension to the understanding of Peoria's past.

Of course, all stories must come to an end. Peoria's historical story has come full circle, and links back to the PHS. However, the PHS's story will never truly have an ending. The society will continue to flourish with Peoria's history. Although some are not aware of it, the PHS shaped and still shapes Peoria's history. Not only does the PHS preserve the past, but it is also paving the way for the future of Peoria. Since Peoria's history impacts present day life in Illinois, the work of the PHS is absolutely necessary. [From Marilee Barger, "The Sidewalks of Peoria." *Central Peoria Observer* Jan. 16, 1934; Amy Kelly, Student Historian's interview, Sept. 19, 2008; Bob Killion, Student Historian's interview, Sept. 19, 2008; R. Middleton, "Peoria Historical Society Needs Help!" *West Bluff Word* June 1982, The Peoria Historical Society, "The Peoria Historical Society," <[www.peoriahistoricalsociety.org/aboutphs.html](http://www.peoriahistoricalsociety.org/aboutphs.html)> (Sept. 15, 2008); and "Peoria Historical Society," *Observer* Oct. 4, 1978.]