



GLEANNINGS

FROM THE HEART OF THE CORNBELT

The McLean County Genealogical Society
Bloomington, Illinois

MCLEAN COUNTY WILLS, ESTATES, AND GUARDIAN CASES

NUNCUPATIVE WILLS IN ILLINOIS



HOWARD CEMETERY

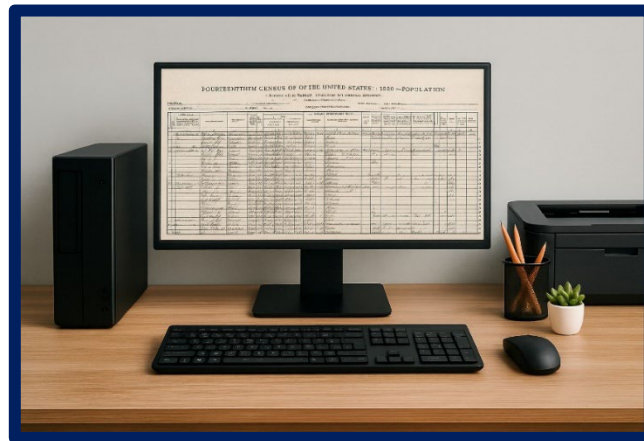


EVERGREEN CEMETERY
LAWNDALE



The McLean County Genealogical Society

HAVE A COMPUTER? USE OUR WEBSITE! — tmcgs.org



McLean County Info for All

Our website provides guidance to beginners and experienced researchers. We are digitizing our microfilm so you can enjoy working at home.

Our Digital Publication Store has low-cost items!

- DD 214 and military records Civil War to 1953
- Grantor / Grantee Deed Indexes 1838—1970
- Select Central Illinois 1800s Newspapers

Digitized Books not found elsewhere including:

- *A Place We Called Home*—ISSCS Normal orphanage
- *Listing of Artificial Limbs Furnished to Civil War Veterans*
- *Civil War Diary of James W. Jesse*
- *Grand Lodge of Oddfellows*
- *Early Baptist Church records*
- *2nd Pres – First 100 Years*
- *History of Evangelical Church*
- *Illinois Corn Growers – 1910*
- *Farm Bureau Membership – 1950*
- *Cemetery Locations*

Monetary donations towards our expensive digitization projects are appreciated!

Guidance for Everyone

- Video search tips
- Links to under-used resources
- Genealogy Methods—Beginner to Pro
- Sensational Deaths
- WikiTree Explained
- The McLean Civil War Regiment
- Why Oh Why Do Your Y-DNA
- Immigration and Naturalization
- Links to many little used sources
- Free ancestral charts and family diagrams
- Union Civil War Pension Files

Members Can Access More!

- Copies of McLean County Court Records: Births, Deaths, Marriage licenses.
- Every TMC GS Publication
- Cemetery stone readings for all cemeteries
- 200 issues of *Gleanings from the Heart of the Cornbelt*
- Select programs on DNA and Illinois digital resources

Beginning in 2026—16 webinars from Thomas MacEntee on genealogical topics with a new one added each quarter!

GLEANINGS FROM THE HEART OF THE CORNBELT

A Publication of The McLean County Genealogical Society

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Mailing address: The McLean County Genealogical Society
P.O. Box 488, Normal, IL 61761-0488

The Society’s Library Location: The McLean County Museum of History
Courthouse Square, 202-210 North Main Street
Bloomington, IL 61701

Email: mccgs.directors@gmail.com Website: <https://www.tmcgs.org>

Hours: 9 AM to 5 PM Monday and Wednesday through Saturday; 9 AM to 8 PM
Tuesday (Free entry day); 10 AM to 2 PM Sunday (May-September)

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We invite suggestions and submissions relevant to McLean County, Illinois history and genealogy. Submitted materials may be in the form of articles, transcriptions, photographs, queries, etc. For questions, or submissions, please email Rand Veerman, Editor: <mailto:mccgs.journal@gmail.com>

COVER: Front: Deathbed scene, ChatGPT; Mary Greenman Will; Br. James Nelson, Howard Cemetery; Evergreen Cemetery, Lawndale, Colfax, IL Photos Cheryl Budde

Back: McLean County Museum of History. William P. LaBounty photo
Bloomington street scene in 1849. Art generated by Gemini 3 December 5, 2025.

Welcome to the Stevenson-Ives Library & Archives Located on the Second Floor of the



What's in the Library?

Internet-based Databases (Free access)

- Ancestry.com
- FamilySearch.org
Family Search affiliate !!
- Illinois State Archives databases
- Pantagraph negative photo collection
- Library book catalog

Books (16,000+)

- McLean County history and genealogy
- genealogical publications (around U.S.)
- family histories & ethnic groups
- local authors
- Illinois history
- Midwestern social life/culture
- agriculture and agribusiness
- education and teacher training
- transportation
- Illinois and McLean County politics
- city directories & school yearbooks
- and much more

Often a genealogy volunteer is in the library to assist you!

Bring your laptop - free WIFI !!

Microfilm

- 1862-63 Illinois Civil War military census
- pre-1900 McLean County birth & death records
- pre-1900 Illinois marriage index (incomplete)
- granter/grantee index to McLean County deeds 1831-1967
- McLean County Circuit Clerk records 1831-1907
- Archival Land Records Illinois Township Plats
- papers of Jesse Fell
- misc. Central Illinois newspapers
- Letitia Green Stevenson Chapter NSDAR scrapbook

**Please sign the guest register. Large bags or purses must remain in the reading room.
Please use a pencil for notetaking. Please call ahead with questions**

What's New On Our Website tmcgs.org

GENEALOGY MEET-UP

- Beginning in 2025, The McLean County Genealogical Society teamed up with The Normal Public Library by encouraging all our members to attend the Genealogy Meetup. This is an in-person (Zoom is optional) meeting at the Normal Public Library the first Tuesday of every month at 2:00 pm. Check the NPL calendar to confirm, but we are having great meetings – solving problems and discussing brick walls. Come join us.

MILITARY RECORDS

- DD214's and other military records (some dating back to the Civil War) that were recorded in McLean County are now available to everyone as a service to the community. If you need an official one, you will still have to inquire thru the Recorder's Office, but for genealogy use, these records are photographs of the originals.

McLEAN COUNTY GRANTOR/GRANTEE DEED INDICES

- Tracing your family tree using land records? Now you can easily tract them through history using the Deed indexes – both grantor and grantee. Photographs of the actual indexes. These are available to everyone.
- Many thanks to the McLean County Recorder's Office for sharing these with us so we can make them available to you. Each photo was enhanced for readability.

LOW-COST GENEALOGY

- We have added pages devoted to low-cost genealogy. How to get started without spending a lot and not miss anything in your searches.

RESEARCHING McLEAN COUNTY

- For those researching McLean County, this page offers directions to find records for land, military, birth, death, marriage, and interment. If it is not on our site, we tell you where to look.

TMCGS WELCOMES YOUR QUERIES!

We are happy to help you search for your McLean County ancestors. Email your request to mcgs.research@gmail.com or send via USPS to: MCGS, Attn: Corresponding Secretary, P.O. Box 488, Normal, IL 61761-0488. Please include as much information as you have, including the area in McLean County where your ancestor lived. Family group sheets and/or a link to your ancestry.com tree may help avoid research duplication and provide guidance, especially where the surname is common in this county.

HOWARD CEMETERY

Empire Township, Illinois

By Cheryl Budde, MCGS Corresponding Secretary

This Indenture made the 4th day of March A.D. 1865 between Eleazer Howard and Matilda Howard of the County of McLean and the State of Illinois of the one part and Dan O. Howard, William E. Scott, Newton C. Coffman, Charles Cope and Simpson Thompson of the County of McLean and the State of Illinois of the other part as Trustees for the People of town of Empire and vicinity and their successors of the other part Witnesseth that the said Eleazer Howard and Matilda Howard for and in consideration of the respect and regard that we have for the people of the town of Empire and vicinity have this day given aliened released and confirmed and by these present do release and confirm unto the said Dan O. Howard, William E. Scott, Newton B. Coffman, Charles Cope and Simpson Thompson and their successors, Trustees as aforesaid the following described piece or parcel of land lying and being in the town of Empire in the county of McLean and State of Illinois for and in consideration that the same is to be used for a Cemetery or Burial Ground for the people of the Town of Empire and vicinity viz:

Beginning at the S.W. corner of the land owned by Thomas M. Whitaker known as Lot #1 of the N.E. ¼ of Sec. 27—Township 22-N— Range 4 E. and running thence South 15 rods, thence East 25 rods, thence North 15 rods, thence West 25 rods to the place of beginning containing 2 acres and 55 rods be the same more or less.

To have and to hold the above granted premises unto the said Dan O. Howard, Wm. E. Scott, Newton B. Coffman, Charles Cope and Simpson Thompson Trustees aforesaid and their successors forever for the used and purposes therein before set forth. The said Eleazer Howard and Matilda Howard reserve to themselves and family two lots as places of interment for themselves and family about the middle of the West end of the above described lots of land of the following dimensions, viz: Two lots nine feet long by 15 feet wide.

Witness our hands and seals this ____ day of March A.D. 1865.

Eleazer Howard (Seal)

Matilda Howard (Seal)

It is requested of the Trustees within named by the said Eleazer Howard that the said trustees (sic) give this burial ground the name of Home burying ground.

Filed Apr. 25 1865 Recorded May 1 1865”

(Ed. Note: 1 rod = 16.5 feet)

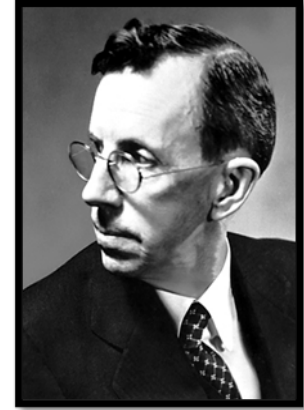
On Apr. 24, 1914, *The Weekly Pantagraph*, noted that a decision was made “to see that the three old cemeteries in the township are properly cared for, the sum of \$400 being them with which to do the work: \$50 on Howard Cemetery and \$175 each on the Gilmore and the old part of Oak Grove. These cemeteries have never been self-supporting, and this work is badly needed.”

In the *Heritage of the Prairie History of Empire and West Townships of McLean County, Illinois*, by the LeRoy Bicentennial Committee it is noted that there are three cemeteries near Rt. 150 at

CLINTON J. DAVISSON

McLean County's Nobel Prize Winner

By Rand Veerman, TMC GS President



Clinton Joseph Davisson was born on October 22, 1881 in Bloomington, Illinois, the county seat of McLean County. His father, Joseph Davisson, was an artisan originally from Ohio who had settled in Bloomington after service in the Union Army and worked as a painter or builder contractor. His mother, Mary Calvert Davisson, came from Pennsylvania and worked as a teacher. Clinton had a sister, Carrie, who resided in Bloomington for 50 years, passing away in Fisher, IL in 1969.

Clinton was curious about science and physics from an early age. A *Pantagraph* article claims he used the family ice box to store wet cell batteries used for experiments. The family was not wealthy, so Clinton worked many jobs to get through school, including a stint as a night operator for the McLean County Telephone Company. He graduated from Bloomington High School in 1902, a hard-working young man from the Midwest.

Because he had to work to support his way thru school, he did not obtain his BS from University of Chicago until 1908. He continued to work and study obtaining his doctorate from Princeton in 1911, working under Owen Richardson. He would marry Charlotte Sara Richardson, the sister-in-law of his academic advisor, the same year he graduated. The couple would have four children together: three sons (Owen, James, Richard) and a daughter (Elizabeth). Their son Richard would follow in dad's footsteps becoming a physicist.

From 1911 to 1917 he was an instructor in physics at Carnegie Institute of Technology at Pittsburgh. He left to do war research at Western Electric and then joined Bell Telephone Laboratories. It was here that he conducted his experiments which led to his Nobel Prize in 1937 – shared with George Paget Thompson “for their experimental discovery of the diffraction of electrons by crystals.” He was one of the pivotal physicists of the early 20th century whose work confirmed that electrons, like light, can exhibit wave behavior. This is one of the principal foundations of quantum mechanics leading to the nuclear age. His combination of brilliance and persistence paid off with contributions recognized the world over.

In addition to the Nobel, he received the Comstock Prize in Physics from the National Academy of Sciences (1928), the Elliot Cresson Medal from the Franklin Institute (1931), and the Hughes Medal from the Royal Society (1935).

Clinton J. Davisson was an inspiration from humble beginnings in Bloomington, Illinois to the Nobel ceremony in Sweden. He died February 1, 1958, and his Find a Grave memorial is 226798821.

Sources: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clinton_Davisson
<https://adityalibrary.blogspot.com/2016/10/scientist-of-day-clinton-davisson.htm>
The Pantagraph, February 3, 1958, Page 18.

THE RISE AND FALL OF NUNCUPATIVE WILLS IN ILLINOIS: A GENEALOGICAL AND LEGAL HISTORY

By Rand Veerman, President, TMC GS
with a little AI assistance



When tracing family history, few documents are as valuable as wills. They reveal family relationships, economic status, social ties, and even last-minute decisions that shaped inheritance for generations. Yet many genealogists encounter situations where no written will seems to exist, even though property passed in a seemingly organized way. One possible explanation, especially in the 1800s, is the once-recognized practice of creating a **nuncupative will** — a last, spoken testament made on the deathbed.

Illinois, like many early American states, allowed nuncupative wills for over a century. But the doctrine had a turbulent history, gradually restricted by the courts and ultimately abolished in 1975. This article provides a clear historical overview of how oral wills emerged, evolved, and disappeared in Illinois, and the landmark cases that marked turning points along the way. Genealogists researching 19th-century Illinois estates may find that understanding this legal history sheds light on probate records, unexpected property transfers, or references in court files to “spoken wishes” or “verbal declarations.”

Early Illinois: Inheriting the English Tradition

In early settlement days, Illinois followed English law, which permitted oral wills under special circumstances. The frontier environment was one of limited literacy, sparse legal infrastructure, and sudden illness. In such settings, the law allowed a dying person to express their final wishes aloud, especially regarding **personal property** such as livestock, tools, furniture, money, or household goods. For genealogists, this means:

- Some families left a **written will**, while others left none.
- Yet property might still have been distributed according to a dying person's words.
- Probate books sometimes contain testimony from neighbors or family describing "the last words" of the deceased.

This legal flexibility fit the practical needs of early Illinois but also created opportunities for misunderstanding or fraud.

Growing Skepticism and Greater Formality

By the late 1800s, Illinois courts voiced increasing concerns about oral wills. Judges noted that these wills depended entirely on witness memory, could easily be misrepresented, and often led to family disputes. Courts began insisting on clearer proof of testamentary intent (the intention to make a will) and closer adherence to statutory requirements, such as:

MCLEAN COUNTY WILLS, ESTATES, AND GUARDIAN CASES

By Rand Veerman

Will Book 1 is the first record of McLean County Circuit Clerk Probate Court. This court took care of Wills, Estates, Probate and Guardianship. The first case was a guardianship case for Arata F. Baldwin, who was "nineteen years the 25th day of February last [1838]." The case was heard by W. P. Brown, Probate Justice of the Peace, dated November 23, 1838. McLean County was founded on December 25, 1830, so getting a court system established took a while. In this case we learn his age, birthdate, and that John Moore was appointed guardian of Arata's property until age 21. Arata must have been a male because females required guardians only until age 18 as opposed to males who needed guardianship until age 21.

In the TMCGS microfilm collection we have several reels labeled McLean County Circuit Clerk. We had the microfilm scanned and converted to digital images. Some of the images came out very light and hard to read, so each page must be "massaged" using brightness and contrast to enhance readability. Everything is in cursive and some are difficult to read.

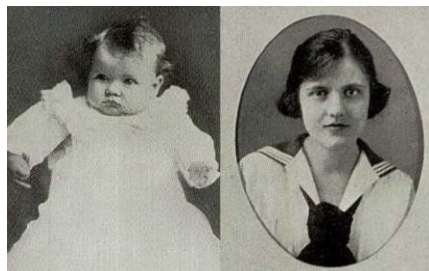
37
I Mary Greenman of the county of McLean in the state of Illinois do make and publish this my last Will and Testament in money and farm following that is to say First it is my Will that my funeral expenses and all my just ~~debts~~ debts be fully paid Second I give and bequest to my son Jeremiah Greenman the whole of my personal property of every description also what money may be due me as a Pension at my Decease Third I give and bequest unto my Daughter Mary Dunham my Silver Thimble having during my life time given her property more than equivalent to what would have been her part of my Deceased husbands property Fourth I give and bequest to my Grand Daughter Mary Thompson my Gold Watch and lastly I hereby constitute and appoint my son Jeremiah Greenman to be the Executor for this my last Will and Testament revoking and annulling all former Wills by me made and ratifying and confirming this and no other to be my last Will and Testament In testimony whereof I have hereunto set my hand and seal this Sixth day of October 1838
Mary Greenman

Page 37 of Will Book 1 after enhancement. The Last Will of Mary Greenman.
Digitized from microfilm by The McLean County Genealogical Society

CLASS OF 1919 - AEGIS STAFF BLOOMINGTON HIGH SCHOOL YEARBOOK

By Pam Veerman, TMC GS Treasurer

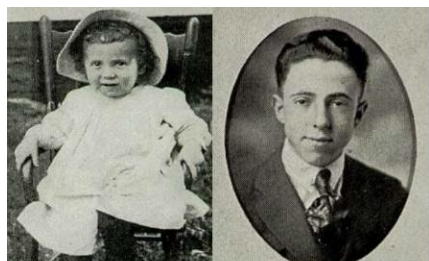
Over the years, many high schools include baby photos of their students at graduation or in the school yearbook. The AEGIS yearbook for the Bloomington High School Class of 1919 included baby pictures of their yearbook staff. Here are the pictures and a few select profiles:



Lela Carr—1900-1993
Literary Editor

Lela Bernice Carr was born in Macon, Illinois on June 19, 1900. She was the daughter of Seth and Georgia (Arnold) Carr. Although her parents lived in Macon, Illinois, Lela attended school in Bloomington. The Carr family has a long history in this country. Lela's 3x great grandfather, Joseph B Carr, was a soldier in the Revolutionary War. He was also a pioneer in Illinois coming to St Clair County in 1798. Ms. Carr graduated from the University of Chicago with a bachelor's degree in 1923. Lela accepted a position to teach school in Birmingham, Alabama. In 1928, she became Director of Welfare with the Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company in Birmingham,

Alabama. Lela held this position until 1934 when she accepted an offer to be a case worker with the Family Welfare Association in Decatur, Illinois. Ms. Carr returned to the University of Chicago and graduated with a master's degree in 1940. After graduation, she accepted a position as a caseworker with the Family Welfare Agency in Rockford, Illinois. Lela held this position until 1945 when she accepted a case supervisor position with the State Welfare department in Springfield, Illinois. She continued to work for the state of Illinois until her retirement in 1968. In 1977, Illinois Department and Family Services appointed a committee to make an in-depth review of the programs at the Illinois Soldiers' and Sailors' Children's School in Normal, Illinois. The Illinois House was considering closing the facility due to the excessive cost per resident to keep it running. Ms. Carr was appointed to head a sub-committee to evaluate the ISSCS programs. In 1978, the committee recommended ISSCS remain open but needed to add more residents to reduce the per resident cost. Efforts to increase the number of residents were not successful and ISSCS was closed in October 1979. Lela Bernice Carr passed away February 22, 1993.



Norval Goelzer—1902 1989
Advertising Manager

Norval Phillip Goelzer was born in Bloomington, Illinois to Charles Phillip and Anna P. (Holland) Goelzer on February 17, 1902. Mr. Goelzer attended Illinois Wesleyan University. He was hired as superintendent of Towanda schools after graduating in 1923. Norval was responsible for supervising the schools and teaching mathematics and science in the high school. Being an athlete in his school years, he started and coached basketball and track teams at Towanda high school. Norval married Margaret Lenna Rhea in Chicago on June 2, 1924. Mr. Goelzer held the superintendent position until he

joined his father in business purchasing the Heldman Clothing Store in 1925. Charles Goelzer was a manager and buyer for My Store clothing department for 28 years. The new business was named

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The McLean County Genealogical Society

P. O. Box 488, Normal, IL 61761-0488

Email: mcgs.directors@gmail.com

WEBSITE: tmcgs.org

January 1 through December 31

Membership YEAR -

Please complete this form. Mail with your check to: TMC GS at the above address.

Please inform us if you change your Mailing Address or Email Address at the above Email address. Membership cards, Login credentials, Newsletters and Journals are sent electronically via Email.

PLEASE ENCLOSE A SASE if a printed membership card is needed.

TMC GS members are allowed FREE entry to the McLean County Museum of History where our library and computers are housed on the second floor.

MEMBERSHIP CLASSES: INDIVIDUAL - \$20 OR FAMILY - \$25

☐ Mr ☐ Mrs ☐ Mr & Mrs ☐ Ms ☐ Miss ☐ Dr

Current Member No. _____

Name

Address

City

State

Zip + 4

Phone

Email

Other Family Members

We publish member numbers and the surnames they are researching in the Newsletter (keeping your name and email private). TMC GS acts as a go-between providing emails between members by request using the member number. If you would like to participate, please provide up to 16 surnames you are researching.

We welcome new TMC GS Board members. If you have a desire to participate and share your ideas and knowledge, please contact us at: mcgs.directors@gmail.com

☐ Send Newsletters & Journals via USPS (additional \$15.00 required for printing & postage enclosed)

DONATIONS TO TMC GS		Please enter \$ amounts enclosed:	
We are an IRS registered 501.c3 organization.			
We appreciate your tax-deductible donations:			
Endowment	\$	Individual membership @ \$20	\$
Operations	\$	Family membership @ \$25	\$
Website	\$	USPS mailing = \$15	\$
		Total Donations	\$
		TOTAL ENCLOSED	\$

Mailing charges are based on members living in the United States. If you live outside the US, please contact TMC GS at mcgs.directors@gmail.com for printing and postage fee requirements.

Family membership consists of up to 5 additional people in the same household. Family members can be a spouse, partner or children under the age of 21.

Revision Date: August 8, 2025

THE McLEAN COUNTY GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

2025 OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS

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The McLean County Museum of History