



# NEWSLETTER

## McLean County Genealogical Society

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*From the Editor's Desk –*

The March/April edition of The McLean County Genealogical Society newsletter is very much about books, starting with our TMCGS president Rand Veerman's Circuit Court records that are in three volumes now available on our website to Nola's "From the Stevenson-Ives Library Shelf," and ending with my own *To Die For Cookbook* review. With the exception of Rand's diligent work making the McLean County Circuit Court records available at the touch of your fingertips, much of what is included in this newsletter is not available on the web but requires a trip or more to the library and/or bookstore. Take a trip to your favorite library!

Just a few in our area: Bloomington and Normal Public Libraries; The Fort (an understatement would be to say that it is a cemetery library – it is so much more than that!); Milner Library at ISU; J.T. and E.J Crumbaugh Library in LeRoy; Towanda District Library; Hudson Area Public Library District; Carlock Public Library; Heyworth Public Library District; Lexington Public Library; Bellflower Community Library; Atlanta Public Library District; and so many more. Many of these libraries have genealogical sections as well as local history and historic local newspapers.

Take a little road trip, explore the town and the town library – Check it out

## *President's Message*



Recently added to the website are Circuit Clerk Records that contain death information not available elsewhere.

McLean County was established at the end of 1830. Circuit Court began in 1831, and 3 volumes of those court records are now available.

Court Records Vol 1 - 3 contain criminal, civil, guardian and probate cases until 1838 when a separate Probate and Guardian court was established. The records for that court are in Will Book 1 and Will Book 2.

Keep in mind it was not required to report deaths in McLean County until 1878. So, the Will Books contain death information not available elsewhere.

Available now to members via TMC GS website are:

McLean County Circuit Clerk Volumes 1 -3. The start of the court with all cases

McLean County Will Book 1 - 1838-1849 with a complete name index of all participants

McLean County Will Book 2 - 1850-1855 Currently in the process of being indexed with volunteer help

Books are free for members and are available for purchase in the publications store.

A reminder that members could access the complete 6 volume probate index created by the Society to see if any relatives had court action.

Rand Veerman

## FROM THE STEVENSON-IVES LIBRARY SHELF - part 1



Harold Sinclair (1907-1966) was a famous award-winning American writer with strong ties to Bloomington. He wrote several historical novels highlighting pioneer life in Illinois and the Civil War. An accomplished musician, he produced stories of Jazz and New Orleans.

Sinclair was a native of Chicago, but his family moved to Bloomington when he was eight and he considered it to be his new home base. He dropped out of high school and began his travels to New Orleans and Texas but always reconnected with his Central Illinois roots.

*American Years*, *Years of Growth*, and *Years of Illusion* formed a trilogy about the history and people of Everton, Illinois, a.k.a. Bloomington. *American Years* is a well written, entertaining account of Bloomington from 1830 to the beginning of the Civil War. Many prominent people like David Davis, Jesse Fell, Abraham Lincoln mix with other lightly disguised inhabitants such as Isaac Frink/Funk. (Hint: This book is also available at Bloomington Public Library and can be checked out for three weeks.)

One of Sinclair's most popular works was *The Horse Soldiers*. In 1959, John Ford turned it into a motion picture starring John Wayne, William Holden, and Constance Towers. The *Cavalryman* was considered for a television series but was never produced.

The Museum has the following Sinclair works:

*American Years* (1938); *Westward the Tide* (1940); *Years of Illusion* (1941); *The Cavalryman* (1958); *The Horse Soldiers* (1955); *Music out of Dixie* (1953); *The Port of New Orleans* (1942); *The Years of Growth* (1940); *Journey Home* (1938).

## FROM THE STEVENSON-IVES LIBRARY SHELF - part 2

*Business to Business*, aka *B 2 B*, was the publication of the Association of Commerce and Industry of McLean County from 1980 to 2011. It was automatically sent to every member of the ACI, and most issues are available in the Museum. It is a valuable resource for learning about the businesses, institutions, medical facilities, local personalities, and area information.

**Here are some tidbits from the early 1980's issues:**

**August 1980:** Corn Belt Bank was founded in 1891 by John McNulta and located in the Schroeder Building on Main Street. It was a victim of the Great Fire of 1900 and rebuilt at the NW corner of Main and Jefferson.

The bank moved to Jefferson and East in 1961 where it provided a new service and seven parking spaces for "Walk Up Banking" at a teller window. No need to go inside.

**December 1980:** Postmaster Elwin Schau announced the ZIP code would have five digits.

**February 1981:** Golden West Steak House in Normal continued to thrive and serve Texas Toast after its parent company declared bankruptcy in 1971. Jerry and Erv Brauer were owners and active volunteers in local tourist and restaurant organizations.

**May 1982:** Bob Johnson's Brandtville Restaurant was the firm of the month. Location, location, location was a major factor in its success at the corner of US Route 66 (Veteran's Parkway) and US 150. This spot was the site of a gas station, truck terminal, and the Crossroads Café, all businesses of Arthur Brandt, who started there in 1941. Bob Johnson began picturing himself as a restauranter in his IWU days, running a popcorn shop in downtown Normal. He owned a small restaurant on Main Street before taking the plunge and building at Brandtville. Broasted chicken was the featured menu item and the extended business hours made the restaurant an iconic gathering place.

**September 1982:** Braden Auditorium advertised the "Stars on Stage" Series attractions: The Pirates of Penzance; Sergio Franchi and the Montovani Orchestra; The Johnny Cash Show; and the Vienna Choir Boys.

**May 1983:** Miller True Value Hardware was founded by the Miller Family from Heyworth: Mother Emma and sons Clarence, Earl, and Homer. In 1912 their first endeavor began with the hatching of 35 chicks. This mushroomed into a hatchery producing over 4 million chicks in 1933. After WW II, the hatchery business declined and the Millers opened a hardware on Grove and Madison in 1946. Urban Renewal took this property (an old Sears building) and the hardware moved north to 200 W. Monroe. Perhaps the best known feature of the store was the pet department, the home of Pokey, a capuchin monkey. Pokey was a resident of the store for over 25 years.

**November 1983:** The last addition was made to College Hills Mall in 1982. Planning had begun in 1977 and the groundbreaking for the first section in 1979. Late summer of 1980 saw the completion of Carson Pirie Scott Department Store and 32 other retail shops. Montgomery Ward and a few more shops were soon added followed by a Target.



Nola Marquardt, our Librarian, has submitted two very interesting contributions with the first being about Harold Augustus Sinclair and the second about Business 2 Business aka B 2 B.

I'd like to take an opportunity to share a little more about local author and historian Harold Sinclair – ed.



*The Pantagraph*, 3 Jun 1962 Harold Sinclair with his collection of Civil War vessels.

Harold Sinclair's family moved to Bloomington in 1915. His attachment to Bloomington was such that with all of his travels that he chose Bloomington as his home, where he raised his family and where he died. He and his wife Ethel Moran Sinclair 1908-1982 are buried here as is his mother, Violet Wishard Sinclair 1877-1975 and several other family members. His sister, Elizabeth Sinclair Bunn 1909-1980 is buried at Wiley Cemetery at Colfax, Ill. Harold Sinclair's

son, "Mike" is buried at East Lawn Cemetery, Bloomington and his daughter Audrey Sinclair Bess is buried at the same cemetery as her father.

Among other interests, Harold Sinclair was an authority on the Civil War, staying active in more than library research. He had a collection of Civil War era steamboats which he kept in his living room. Just three years later, in 1965, a fire gutted the apartment of the Sinclairs, destroying his collection of historical reference books as well as his collection of Civil War items. They were able to save most of their clothing, but most of the historical papers, other than what Mrs. Sinclair was able to grab on her way out of the apartment, and furniture were destroyed.

In reading about the Sinclairs in Bloomington, and as Nola tells us in her From the Stevenson-Ives Library Shelf, I am reminded of how families and neighbors are linked together. Eugene Salch, Fire Chief Roland Behrend investigated the fire; printer Bernard Gummerman offered the Sinclairs an apartment above his printing shop on East Front. Their house at 709 E. Taylor was just east of the Vrooman mansion and was owned by Carl Vrooman and so many other lives intertwined. In 1966, when Ethel Sinclair, *Pantagraph* librarian was named "Pantagrapher of the Year," her citation was handed to her by Loring Merwin. Note: She also received an extra week of vacation and a \$200 check! Honorary recipients of the Pantagrapher of the Year were Fred Young, Russell Miller and Perry LaBounty.

Harold Sinclair died in May 1966 following surgery for cancer. For more about Harold Sinclair, please see Bill Kemp's "A Page From Our Past" column in *The Pantagraph* archives May 26, 2013, page 15. The article reflects on the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Harold Sinclair's "American Years," a novel in which Bloomington, Illinois is the central character.

Harold Sinclair wove his stories around real and fictional people he knew, some from Bloomington, Illinois. If you are a Civil War historian or a genealogist looking for back stories of your ancestors, Harold Sinclair's writings provide an excellent starting point.

When a movie was made in 1962 of Sinclair's *The Horse Soldiers*, John Wayne led the cast as Colonel Marlowe and William Holden as Major Henry Kendall. For those Gunsmoke fans, Ken Curtis portrayed Cpl. Wilkie in *The Horse Soldiers* and Festus Haggen on *Gunsmoke*.

Sources: *The Daily Pantagraph*, *The Pantagraph* and Wikipedia.

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**ONE MORE BOOK -**

***To Die For – my new favorite cookbook to read***

My husband, Bill, recently surprised me with a copy of *To Die For: A Cookbook of Gravestone Recipes* by Rosie Grant. The author has a TikTok

channel, “Ghostly Archive,” which she began as project when completing her master’s degree in library science. The first recipe Rosie Grant collected was a spritz cookie recipe etched on the stone of Naomi Odessa Miller-Dawson’s gravestone at Brooklyn’s Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn, New York. There are forty recipes included in this slim volume including photos of the tombstone and back stories for each recipe. I learned about this book via CBS Sunday Morning when they aired a segment entitled “To Die For” about the book - <https://www.cbsnews.com/video/to-die-for-beloved-recipes-etched-in-stone/> The book had to be added to genealogy books!

One of the recipes that stood out for me was No bake chocolate oatmeal cookies. This was my brother’s absolute favorite cookie. Even my mother who was an excellent cook, but not a baker would make a double batch for him a couple times a year.

Also, when we took a trip to Lexington to The Fort last week, Bill pointed out that they have a copy of *To Die For* on display!

As have many of you, I have spent thousands of hours walking cemeteries over the course of my lifetime and, before I die, hope to log many thousand more hours in exploring burial places of our ancestors. Not once have I seen a recipe etched in stone. Have you? Do you have a favorite family recipe that you believe should be engraved on a tombstone? If so, please share. [Mcgs.research@gmail.com](mailto:Mcgs.research@gmail.com)



*“A family history is not complete until it considers the time and place in which each individual lived. Our ancestors were affected by the events around them, just as people are now; their relationship to their environment is an important part of the family’s story.”* By Carmen J. Finley, Ph.D., CG, was a research psychologist whose interest in genealogy was longstanding.



From *The Pantagraph*, March 3, 2026, as suggested by Ruth Wilkerson.

Let's test your knowledge with a short quiz from longtime *The Pantagraph* columnist Bill Flick who is retiring from writing weekly perspectives and offerings for the newspaper. Bill's informative and entertaining missives about life and lives in McLean County will be missed, but his daily *Flick Fact* will continue.

**“Flick Fact: Sugar Creek.... ends in New Orleans and Bourbon Street?”**

**Question:** True or false? Rain falling into Sugar Creek in Bloomington-Normal eventually ends up just four blocks from Bourbon Street in New Orleans.

**Answer:** That's true! Sugar Creek, the little creek, flows southward and is joined by Timber Creek at Funks Grove, which flows into Salt Creek, west of Lincoln. That merges into the Sangamon River near the border of Mason and Menard counties, then flows into the Illinois River near Beardstown. That merges with the Mississippi River at Grafton, and it flows 722 miles south to New Orleans and Bourbon Street, which is four blocks off the river's edge.”

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**“Death Thins Twin City Roll”**

*The Pantagraph* (1 Jan 1967) offered a listing of men and women who died - just in one year - 1966, whose positions in life made them notable citizens of McLean County. I do not remember ever seeing such a listing. For those of us of a certain age, we remember Dr. Doud or Nierstheimer Drugs, for instance.

A number of these individuals have a street or a building named after them, the influence of their lives continuing to this day.

Dr. Ray Doud, 66, physician.

Paul M. Ball, 59, contractor.

Juan Pedro Labarthe, 55, IWU professor.

Floyd T. Goodier, 84, retired ISU professor.

Miss Julia Fairfax Hodge, 85, civic leader.

A. T. Fagerburg, 59, businessman.

Theodore Almy, 54, ISU professor.

Donald E. Bush, 49, former school board member.

Carl Vrooman, 93, civic leader, onetime assistant secretary of agriculture.

Everett C. (Tommy) Thompson, barber.

Kaywin Kennedy, 79, attorney.

Harold Sinclair, 59, novelist.

Samuel Becker, 68, businessman.

Bert Simpson, 61, retired police lieutenant.

The Rev. John D. Ring, 77, pastor of St. Patrick's Church.

Dr. Harold R. Watkins, 78, physician.

Henry Nierstheimer, 74, businessman and former county treasurer.

Mrs. Dorothy Garrett Bruck, 73, retired ISU teacher.

Wayne C. Townley Sr., 70, attorney, historian.

Dr. G. E. Hartenbower, 73, physician.

Fred W. Slater, 67, Normal native who became a Hall of Fame football player and Chicago circuit judge.

William Brickey, 80, grower of champion roses.

Arthur W. Watterson, 52, ISU professor, Normal citizen of the year for 1961.

C. Herman Mead, 80, Normal police magistrate.

Melvin Watkins, 58, Normal businessman.

Floyd C. (Sandy) Clothier, 81, businessman.

Dr. William F. Watson, 77, dentist.

Richard C. Scott, 63, retired NCHS teacher.

Morris Bernstein, 67, businessman.

Miss Mary Arnold, 57, Metcalf School teacher.

Martin Deutsch, 76, businessman.

Leo F. Hamilton, 79, circus performer.

Stanley K. Norton, 58, ISU professor.



**McLean County Museum of History**

Photos by  
William P. LaBounty



***On the Courthouse Square, Bloomington, Illinois***

Contact: P.O. Box 488, Normal, IL 61761-0488  
Library: 309-827-0428, ext. 28  
<mailto:mccgs.directors@gmail.com>

Visit: McLean County Museum of History  
Stevenson-Ives Library  
200 North Main Street, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
Downtown Bloomington

Online: <https://www.tmcgs.org>

Library/Archives: Appointments recommended.

Museum: Open to the public.  
Handicapped accessible. For details visit:  
<https://www.mchistory.org/visit/>  
FREE admission for MCGS members.

During their shifts, volunteers in the Stevenson-Ives Library are available to help visitors with their research.