

# NEWSLETTER

## McLean County Genealogical Society

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### From the Editor's Desk –

I've been going through past issues of The McLean County Genealogical Society's *Gleanings* and am thoroughly enjoying the perusal of items that were of interest years ago and that still are interesting. I know that the issues are available on our website and you have the ability to look for these little gems in your own searches, but many do not involve family genealogy as much as they showcase the events and livelihoods of our county. One of many, many such items from *Gleanings* -

"The circus has a tremendous history in McLean County and from the files of *The Pantagraph*, on July 22, 1928 is this example: The Flying Lavans, first organized in Bloomington in 1879, and still before the public, are believed to hold the world's record for consecutive appearances in the arena of white tents. The Lavans, as they are professionally termed, are known at home as the Green brothers and they resided at Croxton Avenue in the southeastern portion of the city. It was 50 years ago when the Green boys, then in school, set up their first trapeze in their yard to work out for their own amusement."

Croxton is a one-block street on the north side of Lakeside Country Club, north of Lincoln Avenue. For more about the Flying LaVans who were also known as the LaVan Brothers and the Brothers LaVan please check out the McLean County Museum of History collections of Circus history in McLean County: <https://mchistory.org/research/biographies/green-fred-and-harry-the-flying-lavans>

~~editor

## President's Message



National Guard Service and the “Veteran” Designation on Find a Grave

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### *Balancing Broad Recognition with Historical Accuracy*

Genealogists frequently encounter individuals who served in the National Guard—particularly in county histories, obituaries, and local newspapers. When creating or editing memorials on Find a Grave, a common question arises:

Should National Guard service qualify someone to be marked as a “Veteran”?

The answer depends on which standard you apply. Find a Grave uses a broad, inclusive approach, while federal agencies apply a more restrictive legal definition. Understanding this distinction allows genealogists to make informed—and defensible—decisions.

#### **Find a Grave’s Broad, Inclusive Approach**

Find a Grave defines a veteran simply as:

“A person who has served in the armed forces... Use the veteran designation as appropriate according to the customs and culture of the individual being memorialized.”<sup>1</sup>

This language is intentionally flexible. It reflects the site’s purpose as a memorial and tribute platform, not a regulatory or legal authority.

Implication:

Under Find a Grave’s guidance, National Guard service may be sufficient to justify a Veteran designation—even if the individual was never called to federal active duty.

#### **The Federal (VA) Definition: A Narrower Standard**

By contrast, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) defines a veteran more narrowly. In general, a veteran is someone who:

- Served in the active military, and
- Was discharged under conditions other than dishonorable

For National Guard members, this usually requires:

- Federal activation (Title 10 service), or
- Other qualifying active-duty service

Those who served only under state authority (training, drills, or state emergency response) may not qualify under federal definitions.

### **Two Standards, One Platform**

Find a Grave: Broad, commemorative — National Guard often qualifies  
Federal / VA: Legal, benefits-based — National Guard only sometimes qualifies

### **What Should Genealogists Do?**

1. It is acceptable to include National Guard service  
Given Find a Grave's guidance, marking a Guardsman as a Veteran is generally appropriate when military service is documented and the intent is to honor service.
2. Provide context in the biography  
Example:  
"Served in the Illinois National Guard; no record of federal activation found."
3. Distinguish when federal service is known  
Example:  
"Called to federal service during World War II; honorably discharged."
4. When in doubt, favor documentation  
Avoid assumptions and document what is known.

### **Why This Matters**

Genealogists serve as both historians and stewards of memory. The way we apply labels like "Veteran" affects family understanding, public interpretation, and long-term accuracy.

### **Conclusion**

National Guard service occupies a unique place in American life. On Find a Grave:

- Yes, National Guard members may be designated as Veterans under the site's broad definition
- However, not all such service meets federal or VA criteria

By combining inclusive recognition with clear documentation, genealogists can ensure memorials remain both respectful and historically sound.

#### Footnotes & Sources

1. Find a Grave Support, "What is a veteran?"
2. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, <https://www.cem.va.gov/>
3. Wikipedia, "Find a Grave"
4. ChatGPTen and Claude were used to check this article

*Rand Veerman*

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### FROM THE STEVENSON-IVES LIBRARY SHELF



The following information was gleaned from issues of *Business to Business* issues from 1985-1989.

**March 1985:** Officers of the State Farm Federal Credit Union Board of Directors are Judith Myers, Chairman; Ernest Hoffman, Vice-chairman; Dave Toland, Treasurer. Other officers and members include Elmer Bullard, Ed LaDuke, Herman Salch, Gayler Boettcher, Carolyn Marvin, and Pat Yates.

**October 1985:** Bill Birkelbaw anticipates that the Apple Barn's Harvest Festival will attract between 35,000 and 40,000 patrons to rural Danvers. Wagon rides, turn-of-the-century craft demonstrations, such as steam powered flour milling, soap making and spinning, plus pork sandwiches, doughnuts, and apple butter will be available. Birkelbaw is a third generation orchardman, following in the footsteps of his grandfather Jacob and father William.

**August 1986:** Irvin Brothers celebrates its 56<sup>th</sup> anniversary. In 1930, Maurice, Leo, and Lawrence Irvin began bottling soft drinks by hand and selling them from the back of a store at 1020 W. Washington St. In 1936, they obtained a license to bottle Pepsi products, continuing in this business until 1974 when bottling became regional. At this point the business continued as a distributorship under the direction of the second generation of Irvins.

**May 1987:** Diamond Star Motors continues construction of its automobile assembly plant in Normal. It is a joint effort between Mitsubishi Motors and the Chrysler Corporation and predicts employment of 2,900 new hires.

**May 1987:** Johnson Transfer & Fuel Co./Allied Van Lines celebrates its 125th anniversary. In 1862 William C. Johnson saw the opportunity to haul freight for pay and put his horses and wagons to

work. Ironically, he was killed by a runaway team of his own horses in 1886. His sons expanded the business to include storage, delivery of fuel, and long-distance hauling. Today the company is owned by Donald H. Maaks.

**December 1987:** Byerly Music in Bloomington sent three representatives to the Yamaha Corporation training conference in Chicago. They were Katherine Baker, store manager; Lisa Schraufnagel, keyboard specialist; and John Garrett, sales associate.

**November 1988:** Lois Clark of rural Saybrook was featured in "Made in Illinois", a new publication of the Illinois Lt. Governor's office. Clark has a home-based business in which she creates theme-based baskets. She also sells hand-cut replicas of various Illinois towns.

**September 1989:** FAX for a "Big Mac" is the new way to order at the McDonald's on Oakland in Bloomington. Fill out an order and indicate the pick-up time. FAX it to the restaurant and McDonald's will have it ready. This works especially well for large group orders.

**September 1989:** The Women's division of the McLean County Chamber of Commerce is celebrating its 21<sup>st</sup> year. It was founded in 1968. The goal was to encourage personal and professional growth for women. Membership has now grown to 200 and offers encouragement and ideas for professional women.

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"We are happy to help you in your search to find your McLean County ancestors. Please send an email request to [mccgs.research@gmail.com](mailto:mccgs.research@gmail.com) Your request for assistance should include as much information as you have about the person/family for whom you are searching. Do you know the area in McLean County where your ancestor lived? If so, that would be helpful in conducting a search. Family Group Sheets and/or a link to your [ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com) tree (if you have one) are also helpful: they help avoid duplication of research and provide guidance in the search for your ancestors, especially

where the surname is common in this county."

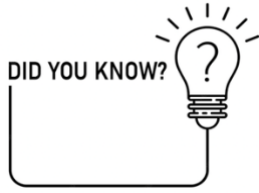
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"skeletons in the closet can be found everywhere. They may seem shocking initially, but they will be a colorful addition to any welcomed genealogist."

- Jacquelyn Nicholson, *Genealogy Made Easy*, 2nd Edition.

My father would have loved this quote; in fact, he did make similar statements. He loved the rascals and colorful characters in his family tree. ~~editor.

TIDBITS OF THE TIMES FROM *THE PANTAGRAPH*: HOW LIFE HAS CHANGED!



Oct. 8, **1878**. “The young men of the (sic) Wesleyan are praying night and day for the new fountain, which is to be place on the grounds, so that they will not be compelled to drink the stagnant water from the cistern, which has no filter.”

Jan. 13, **1879**. “Sidney Blakeman, who started from Saybrook on December 23d by sled, for his home near Western Park, Kansas, sends word that he reached Humboldt Kansas, a distance of 580 miles on the thirteenth day. He found excellent sleighing the entire distance, crossing the rivers on ice.”

Mar. 29, **1881**. “The passengers who came from the south on the Illinois Central last evening report that they had a serious time with the mud at the wreck of the freight near Randolph. There were nearly twenty ladies on the train, and all had to wade knee deep around the train. Some of the ladies lost their shoes and would have lost their stockings but for their garters.”

June 18, **1928**. “Hudson has gained some prominence historically for being either the birthplace or the early home of world-fame men. Among those are Melville E. Stone, counselor for the Associated Press; Elbert Hubbard, noted author, who lost his life when the Lusitania sank; Buffalo Jones, a character of pioneer days in the far west; and Dr. John W. Coe, for many years president of Illinois State Normal University. Hudson was founded by a colony from Hudson, N.Y., in 1836. The story has been told that the town was at one time chosen as the county seat, but when the man who had been asked to donate the site for the courthouse refused, the honor was transferred to Bloomington.”

Feb. 9, **1929**. “A home-made refrigerator is a feature of the kitchen equipment in the home of Mr. and Mrs. H. M. Scott, 301 North Linden Ave., Normal. To the north of the door leading to the dining room there is what looks like a built-in cupboard, but on opening the door one finds a chute which leads four feet below the floor of the basement to a concrete box with a floor. From the kitchen a cupboard of four shelves is arranged on pulleys and is raised and lowered from the bottom of this concrete box. Food is kept ice cold and preserved in this manner.”

Feb. 15, **1931**. So far as known, only two men are yet living who heard the famous “Lost Speech” of Abraham Lincoln, delivered at Major’s Hall in Bloomington May 29, 1856. Those two are William Gibbs of McLean and William H. Porter of LeRoy. Both went to the meeting as boys with their fathers. Nearly 93 years of age, but yet active and with faculties but slightly impaired vision, Mr. Porter recalls vividly the momentous scenes attending that gathering. Previously, Lincoln had simply argued the slavery question on the grounds of policy the statesman’s grounds, never reaching the question of the radical and the eternal right.”

July 7, 1931. "Last night the electric lights on the dome of the courthouse were put in operation. The light is white and falls with a softness very much like the moonlight. It was apparent from the exhibition that to be successful in lighting the city at large, a sufficient number of towers would be required to enable the lights of one tower to cancel the shadow thrown from the next tower. The light was seen at Stanford and at distances ten miles in the country." ~Does anyone reading this remember seeing the dome lights from the country? Today, there's too much ambient light to see a light some ten miles away? I appreciate the poetry of "the light...falls with a softness very much like the moonlight."

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**Genealogical and historical societies in the counties surrounding McLean County (clockwise around McLean County). In addition to public libraries in the McLean County towns, these societies offer additional resources for researching, especially when a family may have lived in one county, but worked, died, and/or was buried in another:**

Woodford – Lexington Genealogical & Hist. Society, Inc., 318 W. Main St., Lexington, IL 61753

Livingston – Dwight Genealogical Society, P.O. Box 315, Dwight, IL 60420

Odell Prairie Trails Hist. & Genealogical Society, P.O. Box 82, Odell, IL 60460-0082

Ford – Ford County Historical Society, P.O. Box 213, Paxton, IL 60957-0213

Champaign- Champaign County Genealogical Society, c/o Champaign Co. Historical Archives, 201 S. Race St., Urbana, IL 61801-3283

DeWitt – DeWitt County Genealogical Society, P.O. Box 632, Clinton, IL 61727

Farmer City Genealogical & Historical Society, P.O. Box 173, Farmer City, IL 61842-0173

Logan – Logan County Genealogical & Historical Society, 114 N. Chicago St., Lincoln, IL 62656

Tazewell – Tazewell County Genealogical Society, P.O. Box 312, Pekin, IL 61555-0312



Like many of our family trees?



**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:mcgs.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.