VOLUME 9 NUMBER 4 October - November - December 2026

Museum Newsletter

CANTON AREA HERITAGE CENTER

Chair's Report



This year 2026, when we are celebrating the USA's 250 Anniversary, is three-fourths over. To commemorate this great occasion, Illinois Humanities awarded fifty $5000 grants to museums and other organizations. We are proud to be one of those 50 to receive a grant.

We plan to spend the money on items to enhance our displays and software to better keep track of donors, donations, acquisitions and memberships.

We're looking to co-sponsor events with other organizations in 2027. Equipment to help our visitors move about the museum is also being sought.

Speaking of visitors, we again have enjoyed the various individuals who come in... class reunion groups, SRC Leadership Academy, Sunday School classes, as well as surprise visitors from out of the area. In our last newsletter, I mentioned a young man from Wabash, Indiana, Dylan R. Lynch, who came specifically to see our P&O/IHC room. He is a fan and avid collector of plows and "all things made by International Harvester."

He followed his visit with a letter saying that the stories Dean Gibson and I told him can't be found in a parts book nor on a piece of equipment. In gratitude of our time spent, he sent us two plowshares, one IH and one P&O, from the period of 1919-1929, during which IH continued manufacture of P&O parts due to their popularity and quality.

Lynch commented, "While during my lifetime International Harvester did not exist and plowing has [gone] by the wayside, I have always been intrigued by plows." Come and see the shares he sent. Few still exist.

Jack Pollitt, Chairman

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Larry Nelson recently presented a painting created by local artist Ralph Thompson, on behalf of Bill and Jeanette Brown. Fifty years ago, Larry was at a United Way auction when the painting came up for bid. He and Bill Brown bid against each other and Bill ended up with the painting. Bill moved to Colorado, but they kept in touch. A year ago, they decided to donate the painting to the museum. Bill was going to travel to Canton, and they would donate the painting together. Sadly, Bill passed away before it could happen.



Larry is shown (rt.) presenting the painting to Chair Jack Pollitt & to Michael Walters, Acquisitions Comm. Chair

New Acquisitions

Ralph Thompson painting, Canton Lake Boat Dock, donated by Bill and Jeanette Brown

Trowel used to place cornerstone of Post Office bldg. donated by Dave Lewis

Two P & O watch fobs and IH watch fob, donated by Mary Etta Scott

What's Inside

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Insert - 2027 Membership - Call for Thompson Art Pieces

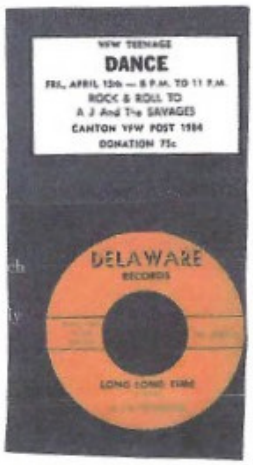
Museum Hours

Fridays, 10 am-12 noon
Saturdays, 10 am-2 pm
Sundays, 1 pm-3 pm

Other times by appointment
Call us and leave message,
(309) 647-2242

309-647-2242 cahcpo19@att.net www.cantonillinois.org/heritage-center

My Canton Memories



In 1960s Canton, a teenager's primary source of entertainment was driving around the square and then around Louie's Dairy Castle next to Canton High School. But even though the price of gas was about 25 cents a gallon, that form of entertainment wasn't always the best way to spend a weekend night.

In the block across from the Canton Area Heritage Center's location there were several ways to spend your time. The American Legion, which was located next to a house that bordered South Main and West Walnut Streets, held many events. The popular fish fries attracted many people as did other events for children. Although I wasn't old enough to go into the bar at the time, I know many people enjoyed the camaraderie they found there.

The Maid Rite Sandwich Shop was located at the north end of the block. Known for the popular sandwich which was nothing more than ground beef with a special seasoning, the seats were always full at lunchtime when the junior high students flocked in from the school a block south.

Between the two buildings, at 136 South Main Street, was the VFW. My friend Sue (Hedden) Freeman and I were sophomores in high school when we started attending dances there. Her sister, Pam, was nice enough to be our "chaperone" so we could attend. We enjoyed many live bands there through the years. Most memorable was Pork and the Havana Ducks, who performed until 2003 in venues throughout Illinois. A.J. and the Savages was another great band to listen and dance to. Many of their musicians would go on to perform in other well-known bands, both locally and nationally.

The 60s are often referred to as a tumultuous time in America. But these businesses in Canton were where we could relax and forget what was going on in the country at least for a little while.

Debbie Harris Stephenson
Acquisitions Registrar



Watch for these painted mussel shells as they are installed in ten of our communities. We hosted a historical display at their public reveal. The Spoon River Partnership for Economic Development funded this original art project.



Meet Volunteer Sarah Murphy Melhouse

Editor's Note. Shortly after Sarah accepted a request to work with Parlin-Ingersoll Public Library on a **National Radio Day** project, she involved another mover-and-shaker, Carol Davis, local theater producer/director. Together with Jessica Sparenberg, Library Director, and Paige Edwards, Adult Programs, they assembled a group to read a live radio program, using a "Lone Ranger" script, complete with sound effects. In two performances, 120 people attended. Search the Library's Facebook page to enjoy the program, yourself.

More than anything, I enjoy a good side-quest. Volunteering at the Canton Area Heritage Museum is my most recent adventure. I was excited to volunteer because as a "newer" resident to Fulton County, I don't know much about the history, so this is the perfect way to learn about what Canton has done and what it can do.

I grew up in Macomb, and after a small stint at U of Illinois, I returned to Macomb and attended WIU, earning my degree in English. My husband Rusty Melhouse and I moved to Canton about 15 years ago.

We live in Wee-Ma-Tuk with our two children, Maeve (8) and Rory (6). When Maeve was born, we began visiting children's museums all over the state, country, and even internationally. Both children love visiting one whenever we travel, and it is my dream to include more hands-on activities at the Heritage Museum for children and teens.

After teaching composition at WIU these past few years, I am currently the library clerk for Cuba schools, so I oversee the libraries at Cuba Elementary and the Middle Senior High School. I love talking with the students and finding them a book they can really enjoy.

Along with volunteering for the museum, I am a member of the Cuba Elementary PTO, the Altruistic Club, Altrusa International of Canton, and Lamda Chi Omega. I sit on the YWCA board, and I am an active supporter of the Canton Park District and the WIU Performing Arts Society.

Josephine Resor Parlin Library's First Librarian 1894-1928



Kathy Myers researched additional information for a "Time Capsule Spotlight" on our Facebook page, including speaking with Resor's great-great-great niece, Gayle Strode Blodgett, herself a librarian.

The artifact chosen by Parlin Public Library for the 1925 Time Capsule was a typewritten history of the library written and signed by its first librarian Josephine Herring Resor. Mrs. Resor served as librarian from its opening in 1894 until her death in 1928.

Josephine Herring Resor was born June 6, 1851, in Canton, Illinois, to Major Joseph Robert Herring and Margaret Ann Moran Herring. She was a member of one of Canton's prominent pioneer families. Her father was a respected Civil War veteran, businessman, and community leader, while her mother descended from another early Fulton County family. Josephine grew up with three siblings—Hannah, Nelson, and Margaret ("Maggie").

On November 30, 1871, she married John William ("Billy") Resor, another well-known Canton resident. Family histories state that John served as General Ulysses S. Grant's private secretary during the Civil War and was a skilled shorthand reporter who reportedly recorded the Lincoln-Douglas debates.

The Fulton County Illinois Heritage book (1987), edited by Marjorie Bordner, was also a rich source of information about Josephine Resor and her family. In this book, the section about Parlin Ingersoll Library included a photo of Josephine and a biography written by Marjorie Bordner (who was also her great niece!). Marjorie stated in an editor's note, "With so much praise often being given to Mrs. Josephine Resor, the first Librarian, and one who was selected by Mr. Parlin when he began the first Library, it seems appropriate that something be added about her. This editor is extremely proud to have had her as a Grand Aunt, and even though I am at the Library several times a week, I always pause to enjoy the large bronze plaque to her in the reading area."

Mrs. Bordner continues, "Mrs. Resor was born near Civer west of Canton... the daughter of Joseph R. Herring and Margaret (Moran) McKinsey Herring. She graduated from Canton High School with the fourth class to graduate, often walking six miles from her farm home into Canton to school when roads from her farm home into Canton were bad. She became a teacher and later a Principal in the Canton Schools, serving the School System for many years.... Because she was such an excellent teacher and Principal and had such splendid qualities for leadership and example, Mr. Parlin selected her to become the first Librarian of his Library. She spent the summer preceding the opening of the Library, working with a trained Librarian from the East, arranging books and indexing them. She continued as Librarian for 34 years.

"Mrs. Resor was active in the Canton Women's Club, where she declined the invitation to become President, saying she could do much more for the Club as a worker. She was a member of the Daughters of Union Veterans. Josephine Resor was an inspiration to all who knew her. Whether at school or the library, she was able to identify those with potential and she always provides that extra [help] as needed. She left a trust to what is known as the Josephine Resor Scholarship for graduates of Canton High School."

When I spoke with Gayle (Strode) Blodgett, her stories echoed many of the stories related by Marjorie Bordner. Gayle's grandmother Marguerite Herring Strode was born around 1902. She would tell Gayle about how she and her sister rode their horses to school because her aunt Josephine emphasized how important it was for Marguerite and her sister to get a good education. Josephine had stressed that all people should have accessibility to a good education through public schools and public libraries. These values were passed down through family stories. Marguerite went to Western Illinois University and became a teacher at Tatum School near Shields Chapel. Her son Ted was a teacher and principal in the Canton school district. Inspired and encouraged by her grandmother's stories, Gayle went to Western Illinois, graduating with a degree in library science. Although right out of college Gayle did not pursue a career in library science, she had an interesting, fulfilling career ranging from corporate training to an electrician apprenticeship to a computer systems trainer to an instructor at ICC. In 2012 Gayle rediscovered her love for library science and became the librarian at the Cuba Library. Blodgett stated that Josephine and her grandmother were women ahead of their time and wouldn't have realized how their lives would impact others in the future. Josephine's desk and lamp were passed on to Gayle from her grandmother Marguerite. Gayle has passed the lamp to her daughter.

I was happy to get a richer, fuller picture of this fascinating and accomplished woman to share with our museum followers.

Kathy Myers, Secretary

Canton Area Heritage Center

...preserving our history

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Canton, Illinois 61520

Leave a message: (309) 647-2242

/cantonareaheritagecenter

www.cantonillinois.org/heritage-center



Our own board member Harold Rose was Grand Marshall at Canton's Friendship Festival this year. Congratulations!

Mailing Helpers



We want to recognize the mailing "staff" at the Fulton County Rehabilitation Center. This group, and others, always finish the tasks of folding our newsletters, affixing stamps and address labels, and stuffing the envelopes in record time! We typically send between 450-500 copies of the quarterly Museum Newsletter and depend on our FCRC helpers to make quick work of the final steps. Thank you, our FCRC friends!

Sincerely,
Your community museum

Did You Know? A Bernadotte Story Continued

At the peak of its business growth (around 1900) this pioneer town, in addition to the milling industry, had grown into a bustling community along the Spoon River. There were four grocery stores, two restaurants, a pool hall, a barber shop, two blacksmith shops, a post office, and a doctor's office. All these businesses were situated on Pearl Street, the main street in town. They were all prosperous businesses still in operation at the beginning of the turn of the century.

There were several interesting doctors who came to Bernadotte over the years. The first doctor of record was Dr. J. S. Thomas. He was a young man at the time and married a local girl, Adalaide Wilcox. Shortly after their marriage Adalaide contracted consumption, which is now known as tuberculosis. Dr. Thomas was constantly at her bedside, contracted the disease, and died before she did on November 9, 1861, at the age of 37 years.

The second doctor to arrive in town was Dr. William Strode, who is the "William Jones" of the Spoon River Anthology. He was very interested in ornithology, conchology and zoology. As a naturalist he compiled considerable data in his research. He classified the mussels of the Spoon River as the largest and finest freshwater clams in the world...they are the Naiads, sometimes as large as nine inches and weighing three pounds. The U.S. Natural Museum named a freshwater mussel for Strode.

After Dr. Strode, the next resident doctor was Dr. Hall. He practiced several years before he was stabbed to death by Steve Joy over a sale agreement for a pony. Succeeding him was Dr. William Landess. He practiced for several years and was very involved with the smallpox epidemic in Smithfield, Illinois.

The final "doctor," after all other licensed medical doctors had left town, was a woman known as "Aunt Sissy Whittles." She was the granddaughter of William Walters, the first settler in Bernadotte. (See his story in the January 2026 edition of the Museum Newsletter). Aunt Sissy Whittles was a self-taught Homeopathic practitioner whose work and story serving the people of Bernadotte is fascinating and very interesting. Her story will be my next "Did You Know" subject in 2027.

Source: Derry, Elsie Mae Cameron. (1969). *Through the Years in an Early Pioneer Town, Bernadotte*



Jim Morgan, Treasurer