



The Henry County Historian

The newsletter of the Henry County Historical Society
The Henry County Historical Society • Bishop Hill, IL • 309-927-3528 • Summer 2013

It's our birthday!

It was 50 years ago that a group of area citizens founded a new organization dedicated to the preservation of Henry County, Illinois history. The actual founding of the organization occurred on January 6, 1963, when approximately 125 charter members met in the Circuit Court room of the Henry County Courthouse. The newly founded group officially replaced the original county historical organization, which had been formed in August of 1907, with meetings held in conjunction with the yearly Bishop Hill Old Settlers reunions until the 1930s, when the society became inactive.

The new group occupied rooms in the historic Bishop Hill Colony steeple building until 1980, when the Bishop Hill Heritage Society, which owned the property, required additional space for exhibits of their own. In the fall of 1981, the HCHS successfully bid on the empty Bishop Hill elementary school building, which had been built by the Galva School District in 1952 and closed at the end of the 1979 school year.

After considerable work and restoration, the Henry County Historical Society opened its permanent museum to the public in April, 1984. The museum includes five main display rooms, and is a perfect destination for families, individuals, and church and



The first officers and directors of the Henry County Historical Society included, seated from left, Gilbert Swanson and Mrs. William Henry, Jr. Standing from left were Merrill Nystrom, Mrs. R.M. Everett, Mrs. Iener Olson and Iener Olson.

school groups. The facility, which is located just west of the village water tower, is handicapped accessible and offers special guided tours with appointment.

In addition, the society owns a vintage Henry County horse barn--the "Red Barn"--which is available for viewing and tours.

Also available are valuable tools for use in genealogy and historic research, including rare books, documents and records.

Discover *the rest of the story* at the Henry County Historical Museum

Visitors to the beautiful, historic Bishop Hill Colony are sure to find a veritable treasure trove of history and memories as they explore the museums, shops and well-



preserved and restored buildings that line the village, which was founded in 1846 by religious dissidents who emigrated from Sweden to establish a new way of life on the Illinois prairie, But there's even more to

discover and enjoy at The Henry County Historical Museum, which explores the rich history of the entire area and maintains unique artifacts and materials pertaining to all of Henry County, which was founded in 1826, just eight years after Illinois achieved statehood.

The museum, which is located in the former Bishop Hill Elementary School just west of the village water tower, features five main rooms housing its permanent collection. Included are a doctor and dentist office, a major antique bottle collection, a period

kitchen and a 19th century bedroom, a

military collection including uniforms, vintage posters and military firearms, a one-room school, general store, carpenter shop, blacksmith shop and a harness shop. Other exhibits feature vintage farm items and equipment, including a windmill, a horse-drawn two-row corn cultivator, a restored steam engine, a John Deere horse-drawn sickle mower, an historic barbed wire display, butter churns and many other samples of rare and interesting farm memorabilia.

In addition, the museum houses an invaluable collection of archival books, records and documents that are available for research by visitors.



Welcome to our new newsletter!

The Henry County Historical Society is happy to introduce a brand-new way to share news, ideas, facts and memories about historic Henry County, Illinois. Though we are still in the early phases of this publication and its plans, we hope to publish on a regular basis via free distribution throughout Henry County, via mail, email and our planned website. We welcome your input as to the stories, features and information you'd like to see on these pages in the future.

Murder in Henry County

Henry County Sheriff killed in 1946 incident

(from the archives of the Henry County Historical Society Museum)

Sheriff Byron Pierce was shot and killed after responding to the farm of a man who was threatening his relatives with a rifle. Deputies had surrounded the house and Sheriff Pierce was shot when he went to the front door to confront the man. The 67 year-old suspect, a former mental patient, was apprehended at

the scene. The body of his 72 year-old brother was found shot to death 75 yards away. The suspect was adjudged insane and committed in a mental institution. Sheriff Pierce had served with the Henry County Sheriff's Department for eight years. He was survived by his wife, son and daughter.



#####

12 miles and 70 oxen!

The first Henry County seat was Richmond, from 1837 to 1839 until that courthouse was destroyed by fire. A temporary site was established in Geneseo, which was used to house records, while a new structure was built in Morristown. In 1840, the county seat was moved to Morristown, where it stayed until 1843, when the small frame building was hauled 12 miles by 70 oxen to the new settlement known as Cambridge, which was permanently established as the central site for Henry County government. A new courthouse building was erected in



1845, while the older building that had been moved from Morristown was sold and converted into a store and dwelling place for its new owners. By 1878, it became evident that a new, larger courthouse was needed. The old courthouse was moved and the current courthouse was dedicated on the same site on September 18, 1880. The brick and stone Victorian structure that now serves Henry County was built over two years for \$77,000. Over the years, significant updates have been made, though the original structure and appearance of the building remain essentially the same.

Be a part of history...

Support the Henry County Historical Society

The Henry County Historical Society and its museum exist solely through memberships, donations and the support of its volunteers. We hope you'll join us in supporting our efforts to preserve and promote the history of Henry County.

Family lifetime membership: \$100

Single lifetime membership: \$75

Family annual membership: \$15

Single annual membership: \$10

Please provide the following information and send with your payment.

Name _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

Email _____

Henry County Historical Society

P.O. Box 48

Bishop Hill, IL 61419