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NEWSLETTER

McLean County Genealogical Society

Rand Veerman, President Cheryl Budde, Editor

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From the Editor's Desk –

TMCGS Distribution Director included one paragraph in his contributions to this newsletter that could be a cause for concern for every single one of us who knows first-hand how labor intensive it is to up the home that our parents or that we ourselves have lived in for decades. Boxing personal items, collections and furniture is daunting for many. Another perspective is packing to move work/office space for new furniture, renovations, or move to a new location. These examples are miniscule tasks compared to packing, moving, unpacking, reorganizing and reshelving the holdings of so many important components of our national history. Packing and moving our family belongings, including books, photos, genealogical materials, etc., is microscopic compared the enormous task ahead of the folks at the National Archives.

Concern is probably also a true assessment for every historian and genealogist who has had or would like the opportunity to search the National Archives and Records Chicago repository to learn more about our families, communities and local histories as the repository which has over 33.4 miles of records will be moving. Not to just one new location but to several, including some as yet unknown. In August 2026, it was announced that the National Archives and Records Administration will close its Chicago facility in Chicago "over the next few years." Not only does the National Archives of Chicago hold federal and court records, it also has genealogical and naturalization records (1790-1930), military bounty land warrants, and Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) records.

That the National Archives and Records Administration plans to close its facility in Chicago without having a solid plan for preserving the history of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin and Minnesota is cause for

concern, prompting opposition from local archivists and lawmakers who say the move could make historical records unavailable. NARA also plans to close facilities at San Francisco and Seattle. Lawmakers and local activists in San Francisco are quite concerned about the similar plan for the National Archives there. Among the documents, records, etc. in that facility are thousands of documents from the Chinese Exclusion Act, Japanese American Incarceration, Alcatraz penitentiary records, over 750,000 documents on immigration and genealogical records, et al. While most of the Chicago facility's holding "are expected" to be transferred to Kansas City," with remaining records to be divided among four other, as yet unnamed, locations, the destination from other NARA facilities faces the same uncertainty about where and how those records will be maintained, stored and ultimately available for research and use again.

The concept for these moves is "to cut costs and transition away from underutilized paper storage buildings." However, moving fragile, non-digitized historical documents is likely to cause irreparable damage to those items. These moves will also leave researchers in limbo: how long to pack, to transfer, to unpack, and to make available for use again. Is digitizing happening prior to the anticipated moves? So many questions; so few answers at this point.

The Southwest Side facility holds federal records from the Great Lakes states, including records from Al Capone's tax evasion case, transcripts from the Kent State shooting and naturalization documents. It also contains records related to the Eastland ship disaster and protests during the 1968 Democratic National Convention. WLS noted that the NARA in Chicago alone contains about 33.4 miles of records. WLS also quoted Chicago area archivist, Gretchen Neidhardt, "the planned closure (was learned about) through a leaked internal memo."

U.S. Rep. Jesus "Chuy" Garcia is a co-sponsoring the National Archives Protection Act. if successful, this legislation would require congressional approval before NARA could close a location. According to Chuy Garcia, and so many others, "You should involve stakeholders and people who will be impacted by the transference of historical documents. Without including stakeholders, it could result in the erasure of history."

https://www.archives.gov/chicago

https://chuygarcia.house.gov/media/press-releases/congressman-garcia-leads-members-in-effort-to-halt-relocation-of-national-archives-facility-in-chicago

https://blockclubchicago.org/2026/10/02/closure-of-chicago-national-archives-an-ill-conceived-move-state-lawmakers-say/

https://www.chicagoarchivists.org/NARAClosuresAction

2027 TMCGS membership renewal form is on page 7 of this newsletter. Please renew and, perhaps, give a gift membership!

President's Message

Getting Started with ChatGPT for Genealogy Research



We all like things that make life easier. I have embraced ChatGPT for assisting in genealogy research and I suggest your try it too. It is not perfect and often makes mistakes, but when you want variations, suggestions, or guidance – it can save hours.

Genealogy research often begins with a name, a date, and a mystery. ChatGPT can help you turn those clues into a more organized research plan. It cannot replace original records, but it can serve as a useful research assistant, especially when you are unsure what to investigate next.

Getting started is simple. Visit chatgpt.com, create a free account if needed, and type a question in the message box. You do not need special computer skills or complicated commands. Write as though you were asking a knowledgeable volunteer for help. The more specific your question, the more useful the response is likely to be.

For example, try: "My great-grandfather John Miller lived in McLean County, Illinois, in 1880. What records should I search to learn where he was born?" ChatGPT might suggest census schedules, marriage records, obituaries, land records, county histories, church registers, and probate files. You can then ask it to prioritize those sources or explain how to find them.

One particularly helpful application is exploring surname variations. Ask: "List possible nineteenth-century spellings and transcription errors for the surname Schaefer." ChatGPT can suggest alternate spellings, phonetic forms, and likely indexing mistakes. Try these variations in genealogy databases and newspaper searches. Remember that a suggested spelling is a search possibility, not proof of a family connection.

ChatGPT can also help interpret unfamiliar historical language. Paste a short passage from a deed, probate record, or old newspaper and ask for a plain-English explanation. If you have a difficult handwritten document, you may be able to upload an image and ask for a tentative transcription. Always compare the result against the original image, because names, dates, and unusual handwriting can be misread.

Another productive use is creating research timelines. Enter verified events with their sources and ask ChatGPT to arrange them chronologically, identify gaps, or suggest

questions worth investigating. It can help draft a family narrative, summarize your notes, or prepare a checklist for your next library or courthouse visit. You might ask it to distinguish established facts from hypotheses and unanswered questions.

Be especially careful with its answers. ChatGPT sometimes supplies convincing but incorrect details, including invented citations, record descriptions, and family relationships. Do not add a fact to your family tree merely because ChatGPT states it confidently. Locate the actual record, evaluate its reliability, and cite the source yourself. Avoid uploading living relatives' sensitive personal information.

The best approach is to start with one small research problem. Ask a question, review the suggestions, verify what you find, and return with your next question. Used thoughtfully, ChatGPT can help you search more creatively, organize evidence more clearly, and make your genealogy research both more productive and more enjoyable.

Rand

FROM THE STEVENSON-IVES LIBRARY SHELF



WE BIKE THE ROUTE 66 is a photographic trip along the iconic highway by two German tourists in 2024. Husband and wife Uwe and Andrea Jankowsy pedaled their way from Chicago to the Santa Monica Pier in California in 85 days. The book is based upon a daily journal and thousands of photographs. The text is in German, but the photographs tell the story in 329 pages.

P.S. When they reached Bloomington, the couple made a non-cycling side trip to Indianapolis to attend the Indy 500, accompanied by an American acquaintance.

WILD ONES is a compilation of "Plant of the Month" articles written by Meredith Schroeer for the Illinois Prairie Chapter of the Wild Ones organization. Ever wondered about those wild flowers, grasses and weeds you see along roads, wooded areas, and your backyard? This book describes and pictures 87 varieties. Among them are Dutchmen's Breeches, Spiderwort, Queen of the Prairie, Joe Pye Weed, Cardinal Flower, Purple Love Grass, and Trillium, See how many you can name.

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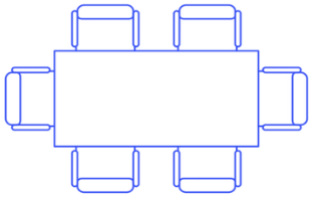


"We are happy to help you in your search to find your McLean County ancestors. Please send an email request to mcgs.research@gmail.com Your request for assistance should include as much information as you have about the person/family for whom you are searching. Do you know the area in McLean County where your ancestor lived? If so, that would be helpful in conducting a search. Family Group Sheets and/or a link to your ancestry.com 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."

The Normal Public Library typically holds Genealogy Meetups on the first Tuesday of each month from 2:00-3:00pm. Genealogy Meetup brings together experienced genealogists with new/newer genealogists to help them finding resources, learning about various approaches to conducting family tree searches. The Meetups are held at the Normal Public Library in the Community Room. Please check the Normal Public Library for the December date. Registration is required:

https://www.normalpl.org/events/upcoming

MORE MEETING NEWS:



The upcoming TMCGS Board meeting is set for Tuesday, November 10 at 2:00 p.m. The meeting will be in person at the Bloomington Public Library in the Conference Room and will include the selection of the slate of officers for 2027.

On Tuesday, November 17, TMCGS General meeting will be held at 2:00 in person at the Bloomington Public Library Conference Room. While the agenda is not yet set, it will include election and swearing of Officers and Directors.

FROM THE DISTRIBUTION DIRECTOR - UPCOMING MEETINGS AND NEWS FROM OTHER ILLINOIS SOCIETIES:

Tazewell County Genealogical and Historical Society Monthly:
Tuesday, November 10th, 2026 at 7PM – Symbols of Remembrance: The Meaning Behind Grave Markers

Kane County Genealogical Society (Kane County Chronicles):
NARA-Chicago Closure-A Commentary
August-2026: As reported in the media, the National Archives at Chicago, 7358 S. Pulaski Road, will close "over the next few years". In the August 20, 2026, edition of the *Daily Herald*, an Illinois regional newspaper, the editorial board categorically stated, "Not a single document in the National Archives at Chicago should be boxed and prepared to move to a new location until the federal government can prove beyond a doubt that our history is safe in their hands." Historical records from the Great Lake states of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin and Minnesota comprising over 140,000 cubic feet of records are moving……somewhere. In their strongly worded editorial, they advocated that the historical documents of this repository need to stay local and that the impact of the decision effects all of us….not just those who live in the area. However, if records need to move, then a formal plan needs to be established with clear guidance of where materials will be located and how they will be accessed. They advocated that commentary on this decision requires intervention from historians and genealogists and that we need to contact our governmental representatives to express concern and displeasure. Find and contact your representatives today via the following websites:
House Representatives: https://www.house.gov/representatives/findyour-representative
Senate Representatives: https://www.senate.gov/senators/senatorscontact.htm

HB 5486 Illinois General Assembly—Office of Genealogical Affairs Study Committee Act
HB 5486 establishes the Office of Genealogical Affairs Study Committee Act— legislation marking the critical step toward recognizing record access as a fundamental public service with profound implications for identity, historical justice, and community healing. The Study Committee is tasked with examining the feasibility and structure of a permanent Office of Genealogical Affairs. Within 18 months of the Act's effective date, the committee is to report to the Governor and General Assembly on the following: ·Operationalizing Reparative Services: · Historical Accountability: ·Administrative Determinations: · Infrastructure: Defining the scope and structure of a permanent state-level office. HB5486 acknowledges gaps resulting from historical state policies, such as enforcement of Black Codes and enslavement of African Americans at state-operated salt mines, all of which caused systematic damage to genealogical records of many Illinois families. By creating an expert-driven committee of genealogists, archivists, historians, and psychosocial professionals, Illinois is adopting a deliberate, evidence-based approach to reclaiming these lost histories. The legislation ensures that genealogical history becomes a public right. To voice your support for HB 5486 visit ilga.gov. Advocated by the Chicago Genealogical Society-Advocacy Committee

DuPage County Genealogical Society:
February 27, 2027 - DCGS 49th Annual Conference
https://www.dcgs.org/Conference

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

Mailing charges are based on members living in the United States. If you live outside the US, please contact TMCGS 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



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, 2nd 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.