



# MCHS News

January 2019

Opening Doors to Madison County History

Vol. 7 No. 1

**Historical Museum**  
715 N Main Street  
Edwardsville, IL 62025

**Hours:**  
The museum is currently closed for renovation.

**Archival Library**  
801 N Main Street  
**Hours:**  
Wed-Fri 9 am - 4 pm  
Sunday 1 pm - 4 pm  
Group Tours Available

**Phone:**  
618-656-7569

**Web Address:**  
madcohistory.org

**E-mail:**  
info@madcohistory.org

**About Us:**  
The MCHS museum complex, consisting of a modern archival library, a museum in the 1836 Weir House and the Helms Collection Center, is owned by the nonprofit Madison County Historical Society and operated jointly with Madison County.

The Madison County Historical Society is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization.

## THREE 19TH CENTURY BUILDINGS IN ST. JACOB



*These 19th Century St. Jacob houses are shown as they appear today: From left, the John R. Wise House on Keck Road, the former Laengle Hotel on N. Douglas and the Jacob Willi House on Marine Road. (Reinhardt)*

The first house in what would become the Village of St. Jacob was built by Jacob Schultz in 1849. He sold a two-and-a-half acre plot to Jacob Schroth who built a store and lodging house. By then there was a third Jacob in residence, a blacksmith named Jacob Willi. When a post office was added to Jacob Schroth's establishment in 1851, the budding community needed a name. They called the new village "St. Jacobs." At some long-forgotten time, more than a century ago, the "s" was dropped from the name.

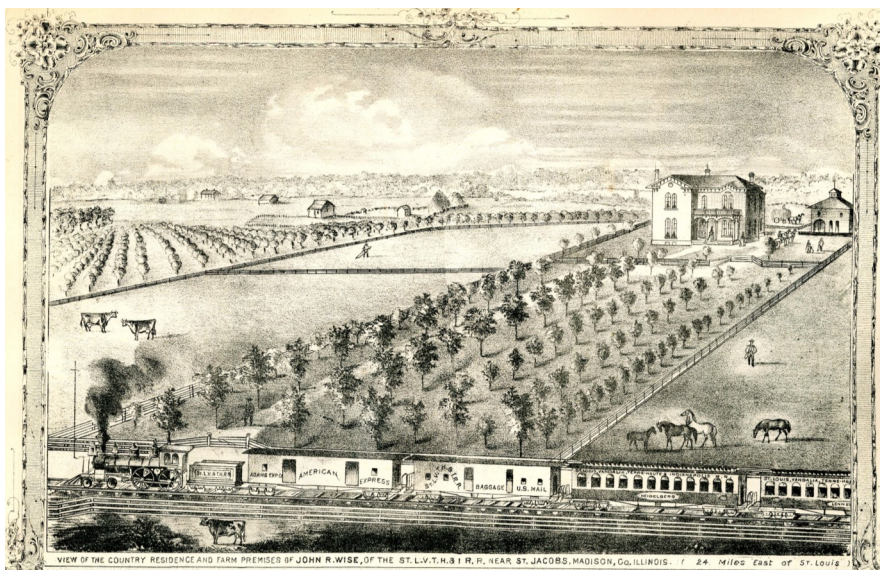
The three buildings profiled here have much in common. They were all built in the 1870s when St. Jacob was a village of about 400 persons, and all are multi-storied brick buildings still in use today. But they have more than just a similar appearance. The stories of the owners over the years also overlap, as would be expected in a small rural community.

### John R. Wise Home

In 1868, the St. Louis, Vandalia and Terre Haute Railroad was laid on the north side of St. Jacob. A conductor for the railroad, John Robison Wise, invested in farmland along the tracks near the village and in 1873 built a grand house on his property. A sketch of the new house was featured in the 1873 Atlas of Madison County.

John was born in 1832 in Mercersburg, Pennsylvania, the oldest child in the family of William and Margaret McCoy Wise, both Pennsylvania natives. When John was still very young, in 1839, the family moved to Ohio. A few years later, in 1850, the Wise family moved west again, this time to Peoria, Illinois. By this time John was old enough to learn a trade and became involved in the printing business. In 1858, he married a local girl, Martha Virginia Kuhn, known as Mattie. A few years after their marriage, they moved to Ohio where, with his brother William, John worked in the steamboat industry on the Ohio River for a short time before taking a job as a railroad conductor on the Ohio and Mississippi

*continued page 4*



*The John R. Wise estate as pictured on page 61 of the 1873 Illustrated Encyclopedia and Atlas Map of Madison County. The view is from south to include a train from Conductor John Wise's employer. (MCHS)*

## ABOUT US

### MCHS BOARD

Candace Ladd, Pres  
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Jon Parkin  
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LaVerne Bloemker  
Archival Research Asst.  
Carol Frisse  
Archival Research Asst.  
Jenn VanBibber  
Curator  
Mary Z. Rose  
Asst. Curator

### VOLUNTEERS

There are abundant and varied opportunities for volunteers at either the museum or the archival library. Please call if interested.

### MEMBERSHIPS

Several membership levels are available to those interested in supporting the work of preserving Madison County history through an MCHS membership. Memberships run on the calendar year, Jan 1-Dec 31. Applications are available on our website, or at the Archival Library.

### PUBLICATIONS

#### MCHS NEWS

6 issues annually  
Cindy Reinhardt, Editor

## ARCHIVAL LIBRARY SPOTLIGHT

By Mary Westerhold

### SCRAPBOOK MEMORIES

The Madison County Archival Library has a large collection of scrapbooks which can always be counted on for surprises. Some of the scrapbooks were donated already compiled and contain articles on a specific topic, a specific location or event, or even a collection of birth, death, and marriage notices from early newspapers. Over the years, the scrapbooks have been indexed making them much easier to use for research.

But sometimes, the book itself is as interesting as the items glued into it. For example, Scrapbook #25 is the size of a journal and has several pages with no newspaper clippings. However, those pages contain hidden gems.

For example, the following is written in ink in a clear and easy to read handwriting:

***“October 8<sup>th</sup> 1837 - about four and a half o'clock in the morning the Earth shook considerably so as to wake all in the house at the time. Two distinct shocks were felt, the last of which was Quite slight. The***

***vibration or Quake was accompanied with the usual Rumbling noise.”***

Another example discusses a meeting held in 1860 to organize school districts in Township five North range seven west (Hamel Township).

Also in this scrapbook are several notations written in pencil and in a different hand than the above notations. One example is below:

***“December 1881***

***Bought 26 Bu of corn from William Wasmann for 75 cents per Bu***

***March 13<sup>th</sup> 1882.***

***Bought 30 Bu of corn from John Handshy for 64 cents per Bu”***

And finally, the scrapbook contains the birth dates of the family of W. S. Hall and Grace H. Little, married April 10, 1878. Several of the newspaper clippings included in this scrapbook relate to various members of the Little and Hall families.

As far as who originally compiled the book or who donated it, that remains a mystery to be solved another day.

## MUSEUM SPOTLIGHT

By Jenn VanBibber

Assistant Curator Mary Rose is working on a new exhibit in collaboration with the rest of the staff of the Museum and Archival Library as well as members of the community. Look for it at the courthouse and administration building in early 2019.

The museum's most recent intern, Rhianna Neel, has returned as a volunteer to finish the textile project she started earlier in the year.

Museum artifacts are always welcome, but potential donors are strongly encouraged to call for an appointment with museum staff before bringing items to the museum. With recent County budget cuts, hours have been reduced. These restrictions do not apply to Archival Library donations (photographs, books, documents, etc.).

The artifact profiled in this spotlight is the metal buckle shown at right. The “MG” engraved on the front

stands for the “Madison Guards.” The military organization was formed in 1857 largely in response to a violent crime in the Troy-St. Jacob area.

In May 1857, a peddler named Franz Jakob Barth was attacked near St. Jacob by three men. He later died. Between the crime and sentencing, a rumor surfaced that the accused would be acquitted of the charges. Near Highland, a mob formed with the intent of lynching the men accused of the crime. Hearing of the mob, the sheriff in Edwardsville requested help from Alton, but had to pull together his own force when

Alton troops were not able to arrive in time.

After the near lynching, the Madison Guards was formed to provide a local, armed militia to help with guard duty at the jail and in moving prisoners from the jail to the courthouse. The Madison Guards later organized as a Union company in the Civil War.



*This brass belt buckle is part of the Sutter collection acquired by MCHS in 1929.*



## 2018 ANNUAL MEETING

On Nov. 4, four new members were officially welcomed to the MCHS Board. Leslie Bednar and Lacy McDonald were appointed mid-year and Robert Clouse and Lynn Engelman have just begun. We are pleased to have such well-qualified individuals on the Board. Two of the new Board members are profiled below and two will be profiled in the March issue of the MCHS News.

### Leslie Bednar – Troy

Leslie Bednar is Executive Director of the Illinois Heartland Library System. She studied History at SIUE and Library and Information Science at University of Illinois. During her career Leslie has worked in historical museums, archives and libraries, all with a goal of connecting people to resources. She lives in Troy with her husband and family.

### Robert A. Clouse – Troy

Robert A. Clouse received his B.A. in Anthropology from Indiana State University, and his M.A. and Ph.D. in Anthropology from the University of Illinois. Originally from southern Indiana, he has conducted research in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Indiana, Illinois, Alabama, Spain and India. He was adjunct faculty at the Universities of Minnesota and Alabama for over 35 years. Most recently he retired as Executive Director of the University of Alabama Museums. Robert and his wife live in Troy and enjoy national and international travel as time permits.

## VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Regarding membership in MCHS, we tell people they don't have to attend meetings (unless they want to) and they don't have to volunteer (unless they want to), but their membership dollars show they support the work that we do. But if you do want to get more involved, the MCHS Board has nearly a dozen committees where volunteers are welcomed. Among those meeting regularly are committees for fund raising, buildings (many don't realize that MCHS has four buildings on its campus), membership, public relations, the interpretive committee (working on plans for new exhibits for the museum), the events and education committee, and a revised strategic planning committee and more. The editor of the newsletter appreciates when someone with a strong interest in an aspect of Madison County history is willing to share his/her expertise as a guest author. Facebook posts are welcome, too, and could be a paragraph about your early Madison County family or a photograph of people or places in Madison County's past. Call 618-656-1294 if you'd like to get more involved. You'll be glad you did.

## 2019 MCHS SPEAKERS SERIES

The popular Speakers Series continues with an interesting line-up of programs for 2019 thanks to the work of the Events Committee chaired by Norma Asadorian. Programs are held across the street from the Archival Library in the fellowship hall of Immanuel Methodist Church. The programs are free and open to the public.

**SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 3 - 2 P.M.**

### The Ramey Tablet & Other Mississippian Style Tablets

The Cahokia Birdman Tablet is the premier example of Mississippian engraved stone tablets but there are a number of others, whole or fragmented, that display similar form and style or are unique in their own right, that have been found throughout the region. This includes the famous Ramey Tablet, curated by the Madison County Historical Society. This presentation will compare and contrast over 20 examples of known tablets and tablet fragments associated with the Mississippian Culture.

Presenter Bill Iseminger, Assistant Manager of Cahokia Mounds Historic Site, has been an archaeologist for 48 years. He is the author of numerous books and articles on Illinois archaeology.

## MADISON COUNTY CUTS MUSEUM BUDGET

Those who have followed recent Madison County news are aware that the Madison County Board has cut the museum budget by 30% for fiscal year 2019. Under a long-time agreement between the Society and the County, the Society owns all of the buildings and artifacts at 707-801 N. Main Street in Edwardsville. The Society leases them to the county that pays a staff to operate the facilities and has paid for utilities and general maintenance. The Society's financial responsibilities have been the acquisition of property, construction of the library, major restoration projects and the cost of materials needed to preserve the artifacts. In addition, the Society pays for housekeeping and other expenses. These cuts will make it necessary for the Society to raise additional funds, just as the Society is starting a Capital Campaign to renovate the Weir House and create an all new modern museum. We are grateful to County Board members who have expressed support during the budget process.

## CORRECTION

In the November edition of the MCHS News the name of the priest who fled Edwardsville due to German hysteria was mistaken given as Father Joseph Metzger. It should have been Father Joseph Metzler.

## 2019 NEW AND RENEWING MEMBERS

Nov - Dec 18, 2018 ♦ Thank you for supporting MCHS!

### \$250 Benefactor

William & Judith Eaton  
Bob & Sandi Schwartz

### \$100 Patron

Gary & Benna Denué  
Joseph Helms  
Dan Marshall  
Arnold Meyer  
SJ & Emily Morrison  
Joyce Reising

### \$50 Family

Philip & Amy Alfeld  
Eddie & Norma  
Asadorian  
Robert Clouse & Mary Bade  
John & Maxine Johnson  
Gracie Koeller  
Mark & Jean Luchtefeld  
George & Nolan  
Provenzano  
Bill & Marlene Shaw  
John & Marian Sperling

### \$35 Individual

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Gena Boger  
Carolyn Catalano  
Sharon Daiber  
Carolyn Schmidt Golkin  
Robert Gusewelle  
Wesley Lohr  
Everett Loy  
Shirley Malench  
Amanda Marti  
Phyllis Metcalf  
Ruth Murray  
Scott Oliva  
Shirley Ritchie  
Joan Shaffner  
Candy Wentz

## THE JOHN R. WISE HOUSE - 10570 KECK ROAD (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

Railroad. Ten years later, in 1868, he was offered a job on the new St. Louis, Vandalia and Terre Haute line and moved to St. Louis.

Martha and John led a very comfortable life for the time. They had a home in St. Louis in addition to the grand house they built for their family in St. Jacob. At first, their custom was to spend winters in St. Louis and summers in St. Jacob, but after a few years they made St. Jacob their permanent residence. They had five children, with three girls surviving to adulthood. Their daughters were born in three different states. Charlotta, known as Lottie (1859) was born in Peoria before their move to Ohio where Fannie was born in 1867. Their youngest, Alice, was born in St. Louis in 1875. All these details help to paint a picture of life on the farm in St. Jacob where three young girls played on well-manicured lawns, while numerous guests arrived from St. Louis, Peoria and Ohio for long summer visits. There were also numerous entertainments for their local neighbors and friends.

The three-story brick home was located on a working farm with crops, orchards, cattle, hogs and finely-bred horses. John's father was a farmer so he had experience and knowledge in the agrarian industry, but his job as a conductor made it necessary for him to hire a farm manager to take care of day-to-day operations.

John's work as a conductor was a rather prestigious position. He was the conductor when Prince Henry of Prussia made a U.S. tour and introduced people in this area to the first Pullman cars on the Vandalia line in 1890. But, the job was not without risk. In February 1896 he was on a train near Indianapolis that wrecked. By this time John was in his sixties, and injuries from the accident included a "broken arm, head cut and bruised back"

In December of 1895 there was a fire at the Wise home that did considerable damage to the place. A newspaper account in the Dec. 13, 1895, *Edwardsville Intelligencer* said, "Wednesday morning about 9:30 Conductor Wise's hired hand gave an alarm of fire. The fire company and citizens at once went to the residence of the conductor and found the south side ablaze. There was an abundance of water, two streams were played on the fire, and it took about two hours to check the flames. The north addition was entirely saved and also the piano and other good furniture. The house was insured for \$6,000, and the furniture for \$2,500." Just a month later the newspaper reported that the insurance company had awarded damages of \$6,000 to John Wise which indicates that the damage was significant.



Undated photo of the John Wise farm. (Alice Lehnhoff)

The house was rebuilt, and a few years later, in 1905, the property was sold. John and Martha moved to a home on Delmar Avenue in St. Louis where they lived with numerous family members. Martha died in 1910 and John in 1916.

Their oldest daughter Lottie married a riverboat captain and had one child, a daughter named Martha after her grandmother. They lived with Lottie's parents for many years. Martha became a public school teacher and never married. The youngest daughter, Alice, also never married. In 1918, she died from injuries suffered in an auto accident in St. Louis. She was just 42-years-old.

The Wise family never lost their connection to Ohio, and all of the above named were buried in Spring Grove Cemetery in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Only the second daughter, Fannie, lost that connection. She was married in 1891 to Charles Humphrey, also a railroad man, and moved to

Minnesota. The Humphreys had one child, a daughter who, like her cousin, Martha McCoy, never married and was also a school teacher. John and Martha Wise have no direct descendants.

After the sale of the property in 1905, there were a number of short-term owners until 1912 when the property was sold to Maggie (Mrs. Frank) Virgin. Frank Virgin, born in St. Jacob Township, was a dairy and crop farmer all his life. The property was owned by Maggie, and upon her death in 1935, there were lengthy court proceedings to dispose of her estate. In the end, the property had to be sold, but was purchased by Frank and Maggie's daughter, Florence Virgin, in 1936. Florence continued to live in the house with her father until after his death in 1942. In 1945, she held a public auction, then, moved to a house in St. Jacob where she worked as an operator for the Home Telephone Company. Florence had a large circle of friends and was very social, but never married. She was the organist at the Methodist Episcopal Church and a 50-year member of Eastern Star.

In 1945, Florence rented the house to Frank and Faye Robards who would purchase the house and 25 acres in 1950. The Robards were hardworking entrepreneurs who used the property for several different financial endeavors.

In the beginning, the house was a restaurant and event space that included chicken dinners every Sunday. Many older residents of St. Jacob remember attending parties or wedding receptions at the "Robards House."

In the early 1950s, Faye attended school in Alton to obtain a degree as a Licensed Practical Nurse.

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## THE LAENGLÉ HOTEL - 311 N DOUGLAS

The 1882 *History of Madison County* recorded a simple description on the founding of the Laengle Hotel, "Henry Laengle came to the county in 1846, and since that time has been engaged in farming and hotel-keeping. He built his brick hotel in St. Jacobs in 1879."

The Laengle was one of four hotels listed in St. Jacob in 1882, which might seem excessive for a village of only 450 people. However, hotels at that time often served as apartment buildings with many guests using them for a permanent residence. The Laengle was a two-story brick building with a tavern at the front of the building on the first floor and a total of 18 rooms to rent on the first and second floors.

Henry Laengle (1823-1898) was born in Baden (now Germany) and came to the United States in 1846. In 1853 he married Mary Ann Florin, the daughter of a prominent Swiss family in Highland. Mary Ann (1833-1916) came to America with her parents in 1840. Henry and Mary's marriage was blessed with 12 children.

In 1890 the Laengle family sold the hotel to a prominent local man, Christian Schoek, who ran the hotel for only two years before selling it to Charles Balsiger in 1892 for \$4,000, the same price that he paid for the business.

Charles Balsiger (1850-1909) was a Swiss emigrant who spent his entire life in the hotel industry. Like others who owned the hotel, he was described as an affable, friendly man, perhaps traits of all successful hoteliers of the time. Charles married twice and was widowed twice, his second wife, Anna, passing away in 1897 when living at the hotel in St. Jacob.

Sometime around the turn of the century, a third floor



Highland Brewing Company in Highland, Illinois. (MCHS)



The Laengle Hotel as pictured in the 1882 *History of Madison County*. (MCHS)

was added to the hotel (see photo on page 1) that served as an entertainment hall for dances, lectures, private parties, etc. Balsiger sold the business to the Highland Brewing Company in 1899 for \$5,000. The significant increase in price indicates that Balsiger added the ballroom between 1892 and 1899. Another change made by Balsiger was the name of the hotel. In the 1890s it became the Commercial

Hotel, a less than original idea since many Madison County towns had Commercial Hotels.

The new owner of the Commercial Hotel was the Highland Brewing Company which purchased a number of hotel/taverns about that time to assure their beverage was on tap. The Highland Brewing Company was founded in 1843. After changing hands a number of times, by 1857 it was owned by members of the Schott family who would operate the business for several generations. Although there were numerous breweries in Highland in the early years,

by the end of the Civil War, the Schott family's brewery was the only one left. To manufacture its products, the company built a large brewery in Highland including construction of large underground cellars, sometimes referred to as "caves." The business was incorporated in 1884, and by 1911, had an annual brewing capacity of 75,000 barrels.

The brewery hired Oscar Appel to manage its new property in St. Jacob. Oscar and his wife, Mary "Mollie" Bollman Appel were both born to German immigrant families that settled in Madison County.

Soon after moving to the hotel, they took in two girls, Lena and Pearl Hill, whose mother died in 1900. They are listed as "adopted daughters" in the 1910 census. The girls were four and seven years old when their mother died. In Oscar's obituary, the *Highland Leader* said of Oscar and Mollie's marriage, "Their union was childless, but they took into their home and carefully nurtured two foster daughters."

It was also said of Oscar, "In family and in public life he was always of kindly mien, exercising extreme thoughtfulness for others, practicing courtesy, and spreading good cheer wherever he went. Everybody liked him and all regret that his time on earth was not longer."

Oscar and Mollie purchased the hotel from Highland Brewing Company in 1923, shortly after Prohibition negated most tavern sales. The sale of real estate was one of the ways Highland Brewery remained viable through Prohibition. They were able to resume operations when Prohibition ended in 1933 and continued to brew beer until the late 1940s.

Oscar Appel died in 1926, after which Mollie closed the business, but continued to live in the hotel

*continued page 7*



## THE JACOB WILLI HOUSE - 1945 MARINE ROAD

Located just a half-mile north of St. Jacob is a stately two-story brick Federal-style home built in about 1875 for Jacob Willi, a wealthy St. Jacob farmer.

Jacob, who was born in Switzerland in June 1825, grew up on a farm, but learned the blacksmith trade. In 1849, he married Magdalena (Lena) Hilbe, and the newlyweds left almost immediately for America, arriving at the Port of New Orleans in May, 1849. They made their way to Madison County where in 1850, Jacob opened a blacksmith shop in what would become St. Jacobs, named for the three men named Jacob, including this Jacob, who erected the first buildings in the developing hamlet.

Jacob continued to work as a blacksmith until he had saved the funds needed to purchase his first farm ground in 1864. It was just the beginning of a farm that would grow to more than 600 acres, making him one of the wealthiest farmers in St. Jacob Township. A story passed down to the current owners of the house tells of the family living in a small two-room building with a loft until the big house was completed in about 1875.

Of Jacob and Lena's seven children, five survived to adulthood, Albert, John, Jacob, Claudine and Edward. Two of the boys decided to continue their education beyond the local schools. John attended two years at Metropolis, and Edward completed a course at Bryant and Stratton Business College in St. Louis.

The Willi family is an example of how wealth brought no protection against tragedy. Two of the Willi children died as infants. Their mother, Lena, died in 1884 at the age of 57. She was saved from the sorrow of seeing three more sons die too soon: Albert in 1890 at the age of 36, Jacob in 1894 at the age of 36, and John in 1899 at the age of 43. None of these men married and all lived on the home place. Only Edward and Claudine outlived their father Jacob, who died in 1909 at the age of 83.

By the time he died, Jacob Willi was a wealthy man who was well respected in his community. This came in recognition of his entrepreneurial spirit that built a successful farm specializing in thoroughbred stock. It was also the result of his commitment to his community where he served several terms as school director and highway commissioner and was active in the Catholic Church.

All that was left of the Jacob Willi family resided at the homestead at the time of the 1900 Census. This included Jacob and his daughter Claudine, his son Edward along with Edward's wife Emma and daughter Clara.

After Jacob's death, the house and 160 acres, were

inherited by Edward. It was one of 17 property parcels inherited by Edward and his sister, Claudine. After her father's death, Claudine moved to a house on Fifth Street in St. Jacob where, according to U.S. census records, she had no employment, but "had her own money." Three years older than her brother Edward, Claudine never married and lived to the ripe old age of 92.



*Above is the building that the current owners were told was the Willi family home before the brick house was built. The left side pictured was a later addition. Below is the 1875 Jacob Willi House today. (Reinhardt)*



Born in 1870, a few years before the big house was completed, Edward was the youngest of Jacob and Lena Willi's children. The house on Marine Road would be his home for all but a few years of his life. He left St. Jacob in 1887 to attend college, then taught for a few years before returning home. In 1894 he married Emma Hammer, the daughter of German immigrant parents who had settled in nearby Saline Township. Edward and Emma had only one child, a daughter, Clara, born in 1895.

Edward usually referred to himself as a farmer, but, in truth, he hired others to manage the farm as he won political positions of increasing responsibility. He was elected Supervisor of St. Jacob Township in 1903, a position he held for 22 years. In the early 1920s he began doing tax work for the county, which he continued until his death in 1944. Like his father, he was deeply involved in St. Jacob community life and greatly admired for his accomplishments. Before his death, the *Edwardsville Intelligencer* called him the "best informed man about County affairs."

After Edward's death in 1944, the property was left to his wife Emma, and only child, Clara Willi Hill. But even before Emma's death in 1954, the Willi family moved out of the house. Clara was married to Charles Hill, a St. Jacob painter and decorator. The farm, as well as the house, became rental properties for the coming decades. Their last tenants, Herbert and Shirley Weis, purchased the house and five acres from Clara Willi's heirs in 1981, the year after Clara's death.



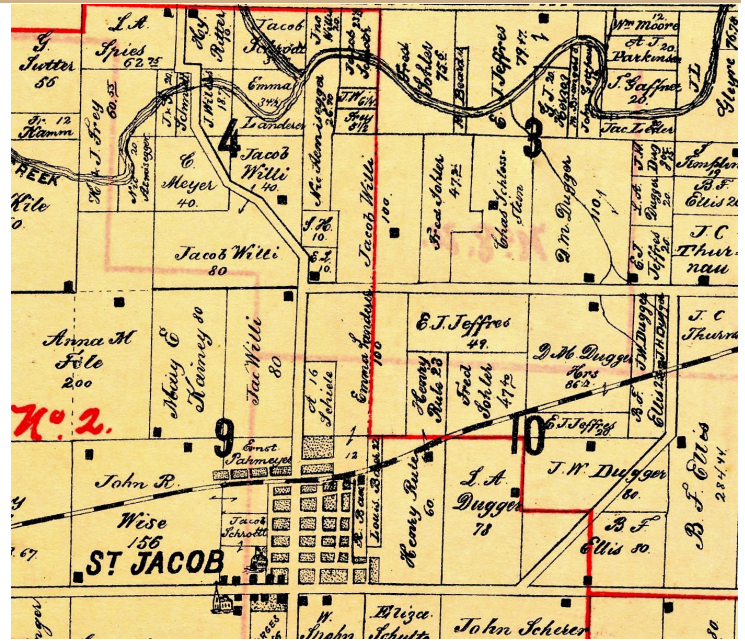
*Edward Willi (far right) at work in the Madison County Clerk's Office in November, 1936. Pictured from left are Mrs. Joseph Hotz, unknown, Eulalia Hotz, County Clerk Norbert Hotz, Unknown, Ralph Hogan and Edward Willi. (MCHS)*



## CONNECTIONS

All three of the buildings are located within about a half mile of each other in Township 3, Range 6, Section 9 in Madison County as seen in this partial plat from the 1892 *Atlas of Madison County*. The Laengle/Commercial Hotel is on the main north/south street in St. Jacob, the John Wise house is represented by the small black square to the left of the “9” on John Wise’s property. The Jacob Willi tract with the homestead is to the right of the “9” with the house location indicated by the black box near the road.

Like most small towns, there are numerous other links to the three properties. John Wise and his wife stayed at the Commercial Hotel on the night their house burned. Florence Virgin worked at the former hotel as a telephone operator during the last years that she lived in and owned the John Wise house. There is also a link between the Jacob Willi House and the hotel. The Jacob Willi House, beginning in the mid-1940s was owned by Clara Willi Hill, whose husband Charles was the older brother of Lena and Pearl Hill, the two foster daughters taken in by hotel proprietors Oscar and Mollie Appel.



## THE JOHN R. WISE HOUSE (CONT FROM PAGE 4)

The Robards House receptions stopped and in the mid-1950s the house became a shelter care facility that could accommodate up to 30 patients on the first and second floors. There is a third floor with one large attic room, but it was not used.

To maximize space for patients, the Robards lived in a 12-slot mobile home park they established on the east side of their property in the 1950s.

A grandson, Thomas H. Robards, remembers the house fondly from that time period. The grand tree-lined

drive on the south side of the house leading to Highway 40 was still there at that time, and the house still had several porches that were enclosed by a later owner. The Robards built an addition on the back of the house for a recreation and dining room for the residents, but kept the original woodwork and fireplaces in the original parts of the house.

The Robard family sold the house in 1964 and 17 years later, in 1981, it was sold to the current family. They have been doing restoration work on the home since that time. It is one of the oldest homes in St. Jacob.

## THE LAENGLÉ HOTEL (CONT FROM PAGE 5)

building until her death in 1935. Ownership of the hotel then went to one of the Appel foster daughters, Pearl Hill Blumer, and her husband, Elmer.

Elmer Blumer was a contractor and set about renovating the building before selling it in 1942 to Roland Schmidt. Schmidt was a local farmer who purchased the St. Jacob Telephone Company in 1927. The former Laengle Hotel now became the offices for the Home Telephone Company and Schmidt Appliances. In working with telephone lines, Schmidt learned about all phases of electrical wiring and electrical appliances. In addition to laying telephone lines, he also installed wiring to rural residences and farms in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Telephone operators, like Florence Virgin, worked from the building.

Schmidt used the first floor storefronts for his businesses until building a new facility at 407 N. Douglas in

1948. At that time he converted the entire first and second floors of the building to three-four room economy apartments that rented for about \$40/month in the early 1950s. Roland’s son, Richard Schmidt, remembers that the third floor was left as it was with a small stage at the end of a long room that could accommodate a handful of musicians and a smaller room at the back with a small bar to serve refreshments. He said his father used the third floor for storage.



*The tavern in the Commercial Hotel. Undated. (Village of St. Jacob)*

When Roland Schmidt died in 1973, his heirs decided not to keep the building. There have been many short-term owners in the years since then. The current owners, Lindow Properties, purchased the building in 2010. Contractor Todd Lindow has since then renovated the interior of the building for modern use. Lindow Property offices are at the front of the first floor and there are six apartments in the space that a century ago was occupied by 18 hotel rooms, a tavern, and a ballroom.



# Madison County Historical Society

*Opening Doors to Madison County History*

801 N. Main Street  
Edwardsville, IL 62025

Address Service Requested

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## MCHS CALENDAR

**SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 3**  
**2 P.M.**

**The Ramey Tablet & Other  
Mississippian Style Tablets**  
Presenter: Bill Iseminger

**Sunday, April 7**  
**2 p.m.**

**Illinois 9th Volunteer  
Company in the Civil War**  
Presenter: Paul Shetley

**Sunday, June 9**  
**Eastern European Costumes and  
Immigration to Madison County**  
Presenter: Marvin Moehle

**SPEAKER'S SERIES LOCATION:**  
**IMMANUEL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**  
**800 N. MAIN STREET, EDWARDSVILLE,**  
**(LOWER LEVEL; ENTRANCE ON SOUTH SIDE)**

## MARY'S RESEARCH TIP

### ILLINOIS DIGITAL ARCHIVES

By Mary Westerhold

The Illinois Digital Archives ([idaillinois.org](http://idaillinois.org)) is a free website that contains an amazing amount of Illinois information. As stated on the home page, it is a "service of the Illinois State Library and the office of the Illinois Secretary of State," but a more accurate description is "a hidden gem of Illinois information."

The digitized information is from libraries and institutions affiliated with libraries across the state. It contains texts and images relating to Illinois his-

tory and genealogy. For example, several years ago the Edwardsville Public Library received a grant to participate in this project and chose to digitize the publications of the Madison County Genealogical Society along with several Madison County history books that are in the public domain. All of these are available free on this website. One search for a surname or town will give you all of the results from all of the available collections. The results can be narrowed to any specific collection.

And the best part is that this archive is continuing to grow!

## A SINCERE WORD OF THANKS

A number of generous donations have arrived from both members and non-members as contributions to the Capital Campaign. Some have asked to be anonymous, and we respect those directives although we have, of course, sent a personal note of thanks. Whether your gifts are anonymous or credited to a particular person, all donations are critical to the restoration/renovation project.

Did you know that early membership renewals save the Society both time and money? We are pleased to report that renewals are pouring in at the post office! Due to the holidays, this newsletter goes to press early. If your name is not in this issue, you'll see it in March. We are grateful to all those who have already extended their memberships in the Society through 2019.