



Spring 2017  
Newsletter #8

## Successful Fundraiser!



Thanks to everyone who bought tickets or made donations to our dueling pianos fundraiser in April. The crowd was a little smaller this year, but it was a fun night full of music and laughter. Because of your generosity we were able to raise in excess of \$3,200 from the event! We especially want to thank the Earlville Fire Protection District for the use of the building and for all of their assistance with setup and clean up.

Also, a big thanks to our local sponsors for their door prize donations:

Aughenbaugh Chiropractic

Cantlin Law Firm

Tacos El Guero

Francesca's Restaurant

The Barber Shop

Pioneer State Bank

Casey's General Store

Tri County Veterinary

First State Insurance

Sandy's Shear Magic

Our community is small and our businesses are few which means that these folks get "hit up" for all community fundraisers. We appreciate your generosity in supporting our event.

We couldn't have done it without the assistance Gary Ayala (EHS), all of the young adults who showed up to move chairs, tables, Pam Moore, Roger and Cindy Torman, Dick McConville (stage help), and our back-drop artist, Dagny Olson.

A final thanks to our hardworking committee - Tim & Cindy Cook, Gary & Rose Stockley, Jack & Carol Landers, and Rich & Chris Goodbred, as well as our members who showed up to help in anyway. It takes a village to pull off an event like this, and we were grateful for everyone's support!

### MUSEUM

136 S. Ottawa St.  
P.O. Box 683  
Earlville, IL 60518

### HOURS

Saturday 10am-2pm

Sunday 12pm-2pm

**CLOSED JAN.-MAR.**

Anytime by appointment

Call:

815-246-9778

815-246-9039

815-246-7076

[www.earlvillehistory.org](http://www.earlvillehistory.org)  
[earlville.history@yahoo.com](mailto:earlville.history@yahoo.com)

"Like" us on Facebook!



### Meetings

Our meetings are currently being held at 9am on the first Saturday of every month. Next meeting will be Saturday, June 3rd, at the Museum.

### 2017 Officers

Pres	Rich Goodbred
VP	Stan Meloy
Sec	Karen Wold
Treas	Carol Landers

## GARY WOLF/ROGER RABBIT DISPLAY

Many thanks to Gary K. Wolf for donating a number of items related to the success with his book, *Who Censored Roger Rabbit*, and the highly acclaimed movie that was, subsequently, based on that novel. Gary grew up in Earlville graduating with the EHS Class of 1959. His parents were Ed and Hattie Wolf.

The book is set in the late 1940s where Eddie Valiant, a private detective, is attempting to exonerate Roger Rabbit, who is accused of murder. The rights were purchased by Walt Disney

Pictures in 1981 and the film, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, was released in 1988. The combination of live-action with animation brought forth a “renewed interest in the Golden Age of American animation, spearheading modern American animation and the Disney Renaissance.” The film won three Academy Awards and a Special Achievement Award.

For more on Gary’s career and Roger Rabbit, please stop at the Museum to see the exhibit during the month of June.



## **EHS ALUMNI DINNER!!**



The 126th EHS Alumni will be held on June 10th in the Community Building. Classes ending in "7" will be honored and classes ending in "2" will be recognized. The Social Hour begins at 5pm with dinner at 6pm—followed by a short meeting in the gymnasium. Tickets are \$15/person and are available at First State Insurance, The Barber Shop or by mail at PO Box 685, Earlville IL 60518.

**Please plan on including a visit to the Museum while you are in town. We will be open Saturday from 10am-5pm and on Sunday from 12pm-2pm. Or, by appointment—call 815-246-9778, 815-246-9039 or 815-246-7076 or**

## **BUILDING REPAIRS**



Not unlike our own bodies when we get on in years, our old building is in need of some serious maintenance! Last year we replaced the furnace and air conditioner as well as the gutters, and this year our need is for roof repair. The cost of the repair is approximately \$7,850. We are always thankful for your support of the Earlville Community Historical Society through membership, fundraising or other monetary donations to help in our efforts to keep Earlville's history alive!

## **YOUR 2017 ANNUAL DUES ARE DUE!**

The Earlville Community Historical Society and the Museum stay alive through memberships, donations and fundraising activities. We are a not-for-profit organization, and we do not receive funding from any other source. It is only through your generosity that we can continue to make improvements to the Museum and preserve the history of our great little community.

Dues for 2017 are now being collected, so if you are an ANNUAL member (paying dues each year), it's time to renew! If you are already a Lifetime Member, this does not apply to you. We are grateful for all memberships and all donations, big and small!

Attached to this newsletter is a Membership Form. Please note that (after many years of no change) the dues have been increased this year. Please include the form with your check so that we can make sure that we have your information correct. If you have an email address, please be sure to include so that we can send you our newsletters electronically.



# “TRAPPING THE EARLVILLE CRIME GANG”

## 1858



*This is a story about the 1858 bombing of the first Earlville School and the investigation into who was responsible. Most of the information is provided from a series of articles published in the Ottawa Weekly Republican Reporter. A scrapbook with these articles was found in the ECHS archives.*

Prior to 1858, Earlville’s students met in a small building on the site of the current United Presbyterian Church. The first actual school house was a newly built 2-story brick building on the northwest corner of Union and Stilson Streets. It was dedicated in January of 1858, but less than 9 months later, an explosion destroyed the building.

Between 2-3am on a Sunday morning in September 1858, “every soul in the place was roused to sudden consciousness” by a blast that sounded like “the last trumpet calling the world to judgment”. As everyone fell into the streets a cloud of smoke and dust led them to the site of the seminary (school) building. All that remained was a heap of shapeless ruins.

Immediately, all suspicion was directed toward Jonathan Reed, a saloon owner in town who had been accused of retailing bad liquor. He had “rendered himself so obnoxious to the citizens” that he had been dealt with by a mob of Temperance members who entered his (and other) establishment and spilled all of his liquor on the ground. He had declared revenge on the town and was presumed to be responsible for the incident. The only clues found in the ruins were a piece of fuse by a window and a small bag presumed to hold gun powder. Other suspicious characters were associates of Reed - John King, described as a reckless character, and John Cook who said he “could swear Reed clear as he was sitting with him at the saloon at the time of the explosion”. An unidentified young man had seen Reed and King in Reed’s saloon early on the morning of the explosion looking at an empty powder keg, but no one had been able to tie them to the explosion.

A committee was formed and it was decided to consult with Mr. Pinkerton of the North Western Police Agency to investigate the case. (Note: Allan Pinkerton was a Chicago attorney who, in 1850, formed the North Western Police Agency, later known as the Pinkerton Agency). Mr. Pinkerton told the committee that he would enter into an agreement with them but that he would only deal with one person on the committee. He made it clear that he was in charge and that it would be up to him as to what he would share with them during the investigation. An “operator” from his agency would be put on the case and act as an undercover agent to coax information out of the suspects. The “operator” arrived in Earlville on October 9<sup>th</sup> and checked himself into hotel using the name, Charles Colby, or Charley. He had the appearance of a shabby looking young man whose character was likely to be a shabby as his costume. He presented himself as “an adventurer from some place on the Mississippi, driven by the stress of hard times to seek a refuge for the winter”. He told everyone that he was experienced in keeping a saloon on a Mississippi steam boat.

*(Continued on page 6)*

## VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!!

We are in **urgent need** of volunteers to come forward to help staff the Museum during open hours. The shifts are only 2 hours long, and you would always be assigned with another person. Our open hours are currently Saturday, (10am-2pm), and Sunday (12pm-2pm), but we will need to decrease those days/times if we can not find more volunteers. If you are considering it, but not sure if it's for you—give us a call and we'll show you around before you decide. If you could give just one shift a month it would help a bunch. A lot of work and donations have gone into keeping Earlville's history alive. Please consider giving back in the way of community service. We know you will find it rewarding!

If interested, please call:

Kris 815-252-9380

Anna 815-985-3763

Or email:

earvillehistory@yahoo.com



**15th Annual Earlville  
Cruise Night**

5X7 Photos to 25 cars by KZ Studios

Drive-In movie available

200 Dash Plaques by Tri-County Veterinary Service

Free Official NSRA Inspections

**Saturday, May 20, 2017**  
**5:30 - 8:30 pm**  
**Earlville, IL**  
**Registration Fee \$5**  
Fee applies to the Scholarship Fund

Downtown Earlville  
North of US Rt 34  
10 miles east of I39

Sponsored by  
Earlville Business Association  
Remember to buy your T-Shirt

Contact: Ken of KZ Studios  
at 815-246-8822 (cell 815-739-9431);  
Kevin of Tri-County Veterinary Service  
at 815-246-9545 (cell 815-712-8398)

Music by 3D Sound  
Facebook: Earlville Cruise

**No burnouts, skateboards or bikes.**

*Dress for 50-60's Theme*

*Carriage Rides*

*Buttons the Clown*

## DON'T MISS YOUR CHANCE TO WIN A MILLION DOLLARS!!

We are selling chances on a Lottery Tree again this year, and our drawing will be at 7pm during Cruise Night, this coming Saturday, May 20th. The tree has \$100 worth of Lottery tickets and chances sell for \$5 each or 3/\$10. Chances are on sale at the Earlville Country Club and at the Museum. You do not need to be present to win! If you haven't already purchased yours, stop in at the Museum and purchase a chance or two while you are downtown admiring all of the beautiful classic cars!

## Calendar of Events



- May 20 Cruise Night
- Jun 3 ECHS Meeting
- Jun 10 EHS Alumni Weekend
- Jun 24 Lionsfest
- Jul 1 ECHS Meeting
- Jul 9 Cemetery Walk
- Aug 5 ECHS Meeting

## CEMETERY WALK

Mark your calendars! The Earlville Foundation for Excellence in Education will be sponsoring a Cemetery Walk on Sunday, July 9th, 2017. The walk will highlight the stories and reenactments of residents from our past who are buried in the St. Theresa Cemetery. Monies raised will support the scholarships that are granted by this organization. Watch for more details re: ticket sales, etc.

(continued from Page 4)

After checking in at the hotel, he met Dick, a regular at the hotel, and inquired about getting bitters. Dick led him to Jonothon Reed stating that it was about the only place in town to get liquor. In his report, Charley described Reed as “a man of decided character, about 65 years old, six-foot-tall, with an immensely heavy beard and mustache, grizzled with age, to conceal his face.” His large shaggy eyebrows covered his eyes, and his hair hung in a dirty matted mass over his shoulders. He wore a stove-pipe hat, blue coat, and dark pants patched in the rear. He was a wicked looking character with an “exceedingly sinister” expression.

Charley made it his business to get close to Jonothon Reed and his associates and was quickly accepted into their social circle. Over the next couple of months he overheard conversations and identified clues to assist in the investigation. For example, 2-3 weeks prior to the explosion at the school, Reed had a copper casting about 4” square and 1” diameter manufactured at the Foundry. Gun powder and an arsenal of weapons were seen in his establishment. Reed, Cook and King met frequently to drink and play cards and all of them befriended Charley without suspicion. There were references made to a man known as “Ben Lett” who had a reputation of and ability to cause explosions, but their comments were careful not to implicate themselves. (Note: Benjamin Lett fled to the U.S. from Canada in 1939 to avoid prosecution for murder and arson. He was a well-known criminal in both countries).

Reed and his compadres routinely cursed at all who were involved with the Temperance movement threatening to “put a bullet” in them or “burn their places to the ground.” During the time that Charley lived among the group there were plans being made to burn down a warehouse and the mill because of the owner’s association with the mob who had destroyed their liquor. The churches were also a target – especially the Methodist Church—because of their work with the Temperance Movement in town. Fires were attempted in each of these locations, however, Charley usually had the ability to find out about a fire in time to alert someone so that the fire could be quickly contained limiting the damage.

In November, a new character suddenly joined the group. John Crooks was a watchmaker, but had other skills such as counterfeiting and metal works. His job was to help create the explosives, however, he left town after a couple of failed attempts.

After a couple of months, Charley finally had enough evidence to have Reed and King arrested, and so one night an officer appeared at Reed’s home to take Reed and Charley into custody. King had been arrested at his home. It wasn’t until Charley appeared in court, clean-shaven with “apparel befitting the habits of a gentlemen” that Reed and King had any suspicion of Charley’s role in their capture. Their arrests were based on the fires set after the school explosion as no one could be legally tied to that incident. King’s guilty verdict won him 10 years in the penitentiary. Reed got off comparatively light, serving just 3 years. Cook could not be caught in any overt act, and he left town.

As to Ben Lett – he was, in all probability, the instrument in blowing up the seminary (school) and was, most likely, hired to do so by Jonothon Reed. References on Benjamin Lett give this credit to him along with his many other crimes.

# Earlville Community Historical Society

A Not-For-Profit 501(c)3 Organization

## MEMBERSHIP FORM

**New Member**

**Renewal**

### **Membership Type/Dues** (after initial payment, dues are collected each Nov/Dec for following year)

Individual (\$15.00 *per person* - annually)

Business/Institution (\$50.00 annually)

Family (\$30.00 annually)

Individual Lifetime (\$150 *per person* - one-time payment; no annual dues)

Business/Institution Lifetime (\$300 – one-time payment; no annual dues)

### **Member Information**

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email Address\* \_\_\_\_\_

*\*To avoid postage costs we would like to send newsletters to your email account.*

**Do you have a Facebook Account? Yes/No**

If yes, please “like” our Facebook page by searching for:

***Earlville Community Historical Society***

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Send this form and your dues to the following address:

**Earlville Community Historical Society**

**Attn: Membership**

**136 S Ottawa St.**

**PO Box 683**

**Earlville IL 60518**

Eff. 11/11/2016