

Spring 2021
Newsletter #20

Let us take a moment to be grateful. 2020 was a difficult year for so many people and, especially, small businesses and non-profit organizations. The Museum has always been fortunate to receive support from our members and the community in general. Whether it's the extra couple of bucks that you drop in our donation crock at the museum, the "keep the change" when buying a calendar, or just supporting our fundraisers, WE APPRECIATE IT! There are many of you who send us additional contributions each year, not to mention the new or renewed memberships. All of these help to keep our mortgage paid, our utilities on, our website current, and our building maintained. Last year, with no major fundraiser or community events, we are particularly thankful for your outpouring of support.

Our biggest surprise, however, came at the beginning of December when Dave Michelsen came to the Museum to purchase a calendar. Dave and Helen have been active members and contributors for several years. He purchased his calendar and then wrote out a check for the balance of our mortgage (\$6,363) with Pioneer State Bank!! To say that we were overwhelmed is an understatement. We thank the Michelsen's for their generosity and, especially for their support and belief in the Museum.



Pictured L to R:

Stan Meloy, ECHS Vice Pres., Dave & Helen Michelsen, Rich Goodbred, ECHS President

MUSEUM

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

HOURS

Saturday 10am-2pm
Sunday 12pm-2pm

Anytime by appointment

Call:

815-246-9778

815-985-3763

www.earlvillehistory.org
earlville.history@yahoo.com

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**No Member Meetings
Scheduled Yet Due to
Covid**

2021 Officers

Pres	Rich Goodbred
VP	Stan Meloy
Sec	Karen Wold
Treas	Kris Goodbred
Curator	Anna Svendsen

Directors:	Bill Mitchell
	Larry Maly
	Sandi Engel



The History of the Earlville Fire Whistle



In 1886 Earlville's first City Hall was erected on Winthrop Street (current location of the Pioneer State Bank drive-through). The building had many uses including a garage on the ground level to house the fire truck. The fire department was *officially* formed in 1888 and, within the next year, a new fire bell was requested by Alderman S.C. Wiley. It was to be installed in the cupola on top of the building. In earlier days, the Presbyterian Church would sound its bells with "the location of the blaze being announced in a way that was understood by those who listened." A new fire bell became necessary in 1895, and after it was installed "the boys carried off pieces of the old bell as souvenirs." It was noted that the new bell weighed 252 pounds. In 1917, Earlville resident, Jim Hamill, championed a fund drive to cover the cost of a new electric fire whistle. The new siren was ordered from Chicago at the cost of \$350 plus \$50 shipping. It was installed next to the old bell in the City Hall cupola in 1918. After it was installed, however, the utility company refused to connect it due to a 3 phase motor, and it had to be returned for a single-phase motor. The old bell continued to be used as a back-up system. Charlie Steele, Earlville's longtime Fire Marshall, had the job of sounding the siren every evening at 6pm signifying the end to the workday. In 1919 he added another alarm at 7am., the beginning of the work day. During the Peace Celebration after WWI the siren was blown for a long time. Citizens questioned how much that cost the city, and the results were \$.15.

Pearl Hughes was hired as the "fire attendant" in charge of sounding the alarm until 1923. Sometime after that, Miss Harriett Schmidt took over the duties until her death in the late 1950s. Gertrude Mooney became the fire attendant following Miss Schmidt's passing and held that position before turning it over to Myrtle Flickinger.

In 1934 the whistle was blown to announce the passing of the new Zephyr through town. It was also blown every Veteran's Day, called Armistice Day back then. Somewhere along the way, it was decided to add 9pm to the schedule of "whistle blowing" to remind the citizens of a curfew. A curfew became a thing of the past in about 1936, but the whistle continued. In 1938 a group of citizens led by the editor of the Earlville Leader, E.B. Tabor, and Dr. R.M. Nichols, formed the "Abolish the Curfew Campaign" (in other words, stop the 9pm whistle). The supporters of this campaign complained that the curfew whistle was an embarrassment to the city after it had interrupted the speech of some dignitary at a high school banquet. This was a long and heated debate throughout the entire month of March. Here is a portion from one of the compelling Letters to the Editor:

"Mr. Editor, I am surprised that you and the young Doctor of the Ivories should get so 'het up' about our poor old 9 o'clock whistle when questioned by some curious out of towners. It strikes me that instead of being embarrassed and blushing behind the ears, a loyal citizen should swell with pride that Earlville has something distinctive and different from our neighbors. Some people complain now of the town being dead, so why try to still the voice of the old whistle we have listened to for so many years?"

What if it is not used for the original purpose? Did they pitch the Liberty Bell into the river when it was no longer rung to proclaim liberty.? Let's give 'thanks for the memory' of the time when the youngsters were supposed to be on their own premises at a reasonable hour at night instead of galivanting around everywhere through all hours of the night and early morn. Then, there are still a few of us who believe in going to bed at night and getting up in the morning. When the 9 o'clock whistle blows it is our signal to put out the cat, wind the clock, and call it a day".

(continued on Page 3)

Most of the citizens who were polled expressed the desire to keep the 9pm whistle. This was the article that appeared in the Earlville Leader on March 31st, 1938. It began with Editor Tabor --

"Will the members of the 'Abolish the Curfew Committee' please come to order for a little meeting. We're about to disband the group permanently and in defeat. The public has failed to rally to the cause – in fact, they have rallied against us. The people of Earlville evidently want the curfew – they like it. Mrs. John Gast, for instance, came to the office the other day to tell us that the people in her neighborhood wanted to keep the whistle. Others have expressed their opinion, too, so the "Abolish the Curfew" campaign is over. The decision to abandon the crusade became definite on receipt of the following communication" ...

And, from Mayor A.C. Tillman—"The curfew shall blow tonight. For the past two weeks there has been no little comment, both through our local paper and by the city people as well as by those of the surrounding countryside regarding the 'embarrassing' whistle. From these remarks that have been coming in and also the consensus of the city council the 'Ayes' have it. The 9o'clock whistle is something more than a mere curfew. It has become a habit with a great many people, that it is time to get home or the bedtime summons. The curfew is used more that most people realize. As spring approaches and the younger set begin to bunch at the corners, the Marshal says that the sound of the whistle will disband and send them on their way home.

I realize that it means nothing to the night prowler, the one who has no regard for the hours from dusk till dawn. On the other hand, it calls out the night crawlers, not being sarcastic, as will soon be evidenced by the flashlights flashing around the park. The whistle costs no more if it blows a dozen times a day than to keep it just to call the fire boys together. It does not use the minimum and seems of more significance that the other hours of the day with the present short work hours and four or five workdays a week. Earlville, since I can remember, has had something to notify the workman of the time of day from the bell on the old red agricultural building on the corner where the Hughes oil station now stands, the fire bell, the whistle at the factory, the old mill and not the present siren, the purchase and installation of which was made possible by our departed soldier boy who gave his life for the US in the World War, and one whom the Legion has honored by this name, James Hamill Post, and the few Legion members with whom I have talked do not wish his whistle silenced. The curfew shall blow tonight".

Over the years additional times were added to the schedule of whistle-blowing. Most of us will recall that there were five whistles each day – 7am, 12 noon, 1pm, 6pm and 9pm. Especially in the summer months, town kids would know that 6pm usually meant be home for dinner, and 9pm meant be home for the night. In 1958 the subject of how often it should blow was brought up, and again, no action was taken. When City Hall was demolished in 1979 the whistle was moved to the new fire station on East St. The schedule of whistle blows remained the same until 1985. With the advent of pager systems the fire department no longer needed the whistle to alert them to a fire. The City voted to stop blowing the whistle as part of a cost cutting measure resulting in a \$1,000 savings. Myrtle Flickinger was the last fire attendant to blow the whistle. The whistle was finally silenced.

That is, until recently when Bob Goodbred notified the Historical Society that he had been storing the old whistle in his shed all these years. Tony Hamel, Bob's employee and Assistant Fire Chief at the time placed the whistle in storage rather than see it trashed. Bob even wired it back up and set it off just to see if it still worked (which it did!). With the help of Jamie Pelz, a rolling stand was made to hold and move the 300+ pound whistle into the museum for display. Thanks for preserving this important—and very controversial (!) part of our town's history! Photos on Next Page....

Moving the Earlville Whistle to the Museum



Additions, corrections....

First off we want to offer an apology to the family of Hallie Houghlin. We omitted her last name from the photo with her as a cafeteria worker on our most recent calendar.

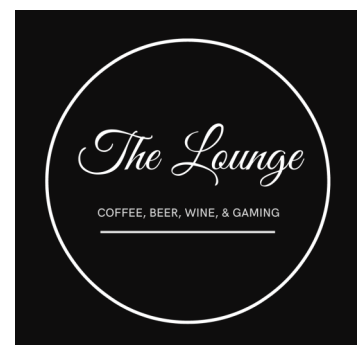
Also, in our last newsletter we left out two important businesses when describing some of the downtown buildings.

- Most everyone will remember that Dr. Nichols had his dentist office in the south side of the Waechter building (north of the Barber Shop) from about 1961-1970.
- On the north side of the Waechter building (old drug store) was Nunemacher's Dry Goods, a clothing store that was in business for 44 years until they closed in 1952.

Thanks to everyone who takes the time to contact us and add to our accurate record-keeping for Earlville's history!!

Welcome to The Lounge!

It's not often that we get to welcome a new business to Earlville! Sandy Cox and Jeff Theurer have remodeled the building to the north of the Barber Shop (old law offices) opening a business called "The Lounge". Sandy is well-known in the community as the owner/operator of Sandy's Shear Magic and an active member of the Earlville Business Association. Like her mother, Dottie Cox, she shares her love of this community. She and Jeff have been together for 10 years and dreamed of owning a gathering spot for the community. **The Lounge** is serving up many varieties of beer, wines and non-alcoholic options, along with a gaming room. The most important thing that they "serve up", however, is a welcoming environment where you can see old friends and meet new neighbors right here in town. The remodel is well-done, thanks to Jeff and friends, and the décor includes parts of Earlville's history. They even preserved and use the old Board Room table from the law offices. Thank you, Sandy and Jeff, for improving the appearance of our downtown area and for your determination in making this business happen. We wish you much success!



LIVING with the Fire Whistle!

Thanks to Synda Mooney Prindle (with contributions from her sisters, Wanda Mooney Kofoed and Deanna Mooney Zerr) for compiling this interesting article about what it was like to live with the responsibilities of the Earlville Fire Whistle.

The Earlville whistle was part of our town's early culture. I don't know when it was first initiated, but I do remember the day when it became a very real part of my life.

My mother, Gertrude Mooney, had explained to my sisters and myself that she had been hired by the city to take over the responsibility of blowing the whistle and handling fire and emergency calls. It was the late 1950's, and I was nine or ten years old. It wasn't long before I was able to run a show-and-tell tour for my friends as I had bragging rights that we were the only family in town with a whistle and three telephones in our dining room.

We already had a "family" telephone in our dining room, but when installation day arrived, our house was overrun with workmen. The whistle was nothing more than a very large switch similar to a wall light switch, and it operated in the same fashion. You would push the switch up to turn it on, listen for it to reach its crescendo peak, leave it on for five to ten seconds, and then switch it off as it slowly lost its volume. The whistle was blown five times a day: 7am, noon, 1pm, 6pm and 9pm. For many, it signaled the time to get up, time to eat, and time that you better be home by...

The patent for digital clocks was awarded in October of 1956, and my parents purchased one as soon as they were available to the public. There were people in town who took the timing of the whistle very seriously, and so my mother watched the clock very carefully to be sure to blow it on time.

On the wall next to the switch, a telephone was installed. That phone was for receiving fire calls. It had a very loud and distinctive ring, and we all knew that it meant FIRE! My mother would answer, take down the information, and immediately blow the whistle. The fire whistle consisted of turning it on until it reached crescendo, immediately turning it off until it went down in sound, and then turning it on again, off again, and on again several times. The fire department was a volunteer organization, and when the men heard the whistle, they left their jobs, closed their businesses and headed to the fire station. Bob Weidner and Chuck Howey headed the department. They worked nearby and were the first to arrive. One of them would call my mother to get the information on the fire and then give the signal for the engine to roll. The town had street signs but no one used them as their address since mail went to the local P.O. boxes. Because of the size of the town, everyone knew everyone else, so the fire instructions were described as being at John Johnson's house or next door to the old Smith place.

Not all of the calls were from inside the city limits. The fire department's territory also covered the countryside surrounding the city. I remember that on one occasion, the fire truck was speeding along a country road amid the tall corn fields when another car was approaching the intersection from a side road. A collision occurred and Chuck Howey was seriously injured in the crash.

My father, John Mooney, was one of the volunteer firemen. At the time, he owned his own business, "Mooney Motors", selling Plymouth and DeSoto automobiles in addition to doing car repairs. All of the men involved in this volunteer organization were willing to sacrifice their business revenue or hourly wages to take up the cause to save someone's property. When my father passed away an antique fire engine with its siren blaring led the procession to the cemetery. I know he would have been very proud.

(continued from Page 5)

On the same installation day of the fire equipment we also received a third phone that was used for doctor and ambulance calls. If Dr. Fischer or Dr. Rayson were going to be away from their phone in the evening the calls would then be forwarded to my mother. They would always call her to tell her the hours they would be gone and offer an alternate number where she could reach them if it was an emergency.

Torman Funeral Home had the ambulance service in town. During the evenings they assigned someone to be on-call. That person would also call my mother when their phone was to be temporarily forwarded to her. There was, however, one small problem in using the funeral home in that capacity—they didn't own an ambulance. They had to use a hearse to transport people to the hospital. I'm sure more than one accident victim was disconcerted upon waking up on the way to the hospital and suddenly realizing that they were in a hearse!

As you can see, my mother's job meant giving up a normal lifestyle. It was a 24/7 job, 365 days a year without any days off for vacation, holidays or for good behavior. On the rare occasion that my mother wanted to go out with the family in the evening she had to hire a phone sitter. Mrs. Revell, an English lady who lived next to the city park, or Vivian Sutton would come to our house to relieve her. My mother paid them fifty cents an hour which was the going rate for babysitters at that time.

My mother retained this job for three to four years prior to going to work at the post office. Myrtle Flickinger then assumed the position as the whistle saga continued on.....

Effects of the Pandemic

Now that most of the population has been offered vaccinations and the incidence of Covid is dropping in our area, we are happy to report that the Museum is back open during our usual hours with only a few restrictions. Unfortunately, during this past year we lost our 2 downtown restaurants—The Beaver Den and Francescas. Hopefully, this new year will bring good things our way as the country continues to recover.

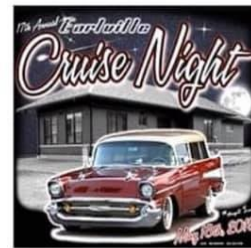
One sign of that recovery is the return of Cruise Night on Saturday, May 15th! We're all praying for a good-weather day so that folks can get out of their house and enjoy a safe and fun outside event that afternoon/evening. This event, sponsored by the Earlville Business Association, is always very popular and reminds us of how busy our downtown streets used to be!

Don't MISS IT!

18th 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 15, 2021

5:00 - 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 815-739-9431;
Kevin of Tri-County Veterinary Service
at 815-246-9545 (cell 815-712-8398)**

Music by 3D Sound

Facebook: Earlville Cruise

No burnouts, skateboards nor bikes.

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

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