

# REFLECTIONS

Summer 2016

## In This Issue:



**Hank Thomas  
Donates Two  
Elliston Decoys  
to the Museum  
Page 1**

**Cup and Saucer  
Collection and a  
Paperweight  
Collection  
are New Displays  
Page 2**



**Norbert Hoppler  
Donates a Custom-  
Made Display Case to  
the Museum  
Page 2**

**Work at the  
Museum  
Page 3**



**Royal Neighbors  
of America  
Page 4**



**Sometimes You  
Just Get Lucky  
Page 6**



## Hank Thomas Donates Two Elliston Decoys to the Museum

Hank Thomas, well known local decoy collector, stopped by recently with his daughter Peggy and donated two Robert Elliston carved decoys.

Hank has been collecting decoys for many years and has a fantastic collection.

The ducks were carved by Robert Elliston who was a premier duck decoy carver from Putnam.

Robert Elliston (1847-1911) Bureau, Illinois is recognized as one of the top master decoy carvers in Illinois.

Robert A. Elliston was born on July 2, 1847 in Kentucky. His family moved near Indianapolis, Indiana. Here he learned the buggy and carriage making trade, working at the Studebaker shops in South Bend. Through the years, he plied his trade, leaving Indiana to work at the Henry Olds factory, then moving on to New York and later to Philadelphia. He settled in St. Louis, Missouri for a while working as a hearse designer at the McLaren Hearse and Coach Mfg. Company. Leaving St. Louis with

his bride Ms. Kummiskey during the mid 1870's, Elliston took a job with the Brereton Buggy Shop in Lacon, Illinois. His young wife and baby were stricken with small pox. His sister-in-law, Catherine Kummiskey (1858-1953) came to tend to her sister and child. When she died, Catherine stayed on to care for the child who never recovered fully and died a year or so later. Catherine and Robert were married on December 10, 1878 in Lacon where they lived for 6 years while Robert continued to work at the Buggy shop.

In 1884 they moved into the Undercliff Hotel, which was located on Lake Senachwine that is situated on the west shores of the Illinois River near Hennepin. An old letter from Elliston to J. E. Taylor, Hennepin, Illinois dated 1890 has a letterhead indicating that Elliston set up a factory in Henry, Illinois after he moved from Putnam where he manufactured "fine decoys and hunting boats" suggesting that this is where he produced his decoys for the 7 years that the family

*continued on page 5*

**Check us out online at  
[marshallcountyhistory.org](http://marshallcountyhistory.org)**

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### **MCHS 2016**

#### **BOARD MEETINGS**

August 10

October 8

December 10 (Annual Meeting)

**Closed Dec. 13 thru Jan. 12**

*All members and guests are  
welcome at the Board Meetings*

### **Reflections Newsletter**

Editor: Connie Swanson  
Contributions may be emailed  
directly to the editor at  
barnlady61537@yahoo.com

### *WELCOME NEW MEMBERS*

Doris Cook  
Janet Robison

**Deadline for the next  
issue is October 1, 2016**

### **This Issue:**

Editor Connie Swanson is on vacation and asked me to do this issue of Reflections.

Thanks to John Wabel and Debbie Keating for doing the proofreading.

*Rick Keating*

## *Cup and Saucer Collection and a Paperweight Collection on Display*



*This cup and saucer belonged to Katie Diebolt, great aunt to Martha Shulz. It's approximately 130 years old.*

The cup and saucer collection is on loan to the Museum from Priscilla Kief, a long time member and volunteer.

She says, "My Grandma Wenk started the collection for me when I was very young. She also started collections for my three sisters too.

Diane has a collection of china shoes, Dottie's collection was china figurines and Pam has small vases.

I have given a few of the cups to my sisters and their daughters but the remainder are in the display case. I believe there are 108 on display in the case."



*The paperweight collection was one of the first collections donated to the Historical Society. The pieces are from the U.S., Scotland and Germany*

The paperweight collection was my grandmother's, Mrs. Paul Wenk (Mary). There were many more than you see here and I am not really certain what happened to the others. I do believe that all the grandchildren received at least one to have in remembrance of Grandma. My mother, Dorothy Wenk Kief, gave them to the Historical Society following Grandma's death in 1958. Many of them were purchased during their travels or as gifts.

*Submitted by Priscilla Kief*

## *Norbert Hoppler Donates a Custom-Made Display Case to the Museum*



Recently John Wable, Priscilla Kief and I went to lunch at the Lacon American Legion. As we walked in Norbert Hoppler stopped me and asked if we would like a display case for the Museum. Of course the answer was yes, so we made arrangements to pick it up after lunch.



It's a custom made case built by the Amish and is a beautiful piece of work.

Since we had just rearranged the east room we had a perfect spot for it.

Thank you for your generosity Norbert Hoppler.

*Submitted by Rick Keating*

## Work at the Museum: New Paint and Carpet on the 1st Floor

Last year we completed many repairs and improvements to the exterior of the museum. This year we are focused on improving and re-arranging the interior of the museum. The first floor carpeting was just worn out and the walls were in need of some fresh paint.

**Project 1 - Paint:** We began by moving everything to the middle of the front rooms, taking pictures off the walls, removing numerous hooks and nails, and patching the holes. Scott Mooberry then did a great job of painting the walls with a semi-gloss paint that really brightened things up.



Scott Mooberry painting the doorway



Painting means moving everything. A mess!

**Project 2 - Carpet:** We cleaned out and moved the display cases, office desk, storage cabinets, etc. to other locations so Classic Carpets from Henry could remove the old carpet, scrape the old glue off the floor and put down the new carpet. We are very pleased with the new carpet.

**Project 3 - Restoration:** We began rearranging the museum and getting things back to normal. We moved all the tables and chairs to the west room and moved all the display cases to the east room. We re-arranged the office furniture and re-assembled the



Old carpet has been stripped away



Scraping off the old adhesive



New doorway opened up for easier access

computer system and network.

**Project 4 - New Doorway:** We moved the buggy into the center of the Ag Room and Greg Barnett sawed through the wall and installed a new door between the Genealogy Room and the Ag Room. The air circulates better and it is easier to get from the library to the kitchen & restroom.

Thanks to all the museum volunteers for their help and for putting up with the construction mess. Stay tuned, visit often, and help us continue to improve the remainder of the museum.

*John Wabel, Managing Director*



Some patching and prep work to the floor



Don Schoof laying the new carpeting



New look for the Museum

# Royal Neighbors of America

*One of the first organizations started by women which still survives today*

In August of 2015 I got a call from Carol Junker and she wanted to know if the Museum would be interested in artifacts from the Royal Neighbors of America. I told her we would and she and Daryl stopped by my house with the artifacts which turned out to be 5 hand-painted silk banners and wool altar covers.

I had never heard of the Royal Neighbors of America let alone knew there was an active chapter in Larose. With a little research the following is what I turned up.

Back in 1895 when women couldn't vote, couldn't own property, and weren't allowed to own life insurance, nine women founded Royal Neighbors of America. It is one of the largest women-led life insurers in the nation with a message that remains important and relevant today---empowering women to better their lives through financial protection solutions and opportunities to give back to their communities.

The early members of the Society were ahead of their time. In addition to providing life insurance for women, they stood firmly behind the womens' suffrage movement. Royal Neighbors was also one of the first fraternal societies to insure children and recognize mortality studies establishing the fact that women live longer than men, and to reflect that difference in life insurance premiums.

In 1888, Mrs. Marie Kirkland, Council Bluffs, Iowa, placed a notice in her town newspaper asking the wives of Modern Woodmen of America members to meet for a social get-together. Eight women responded and organized what was to become Royal Neighbors of America. Just a year later, the group reorganized as a social organization with a constitution, ritual, and articles of incorporation. The name Royal Neighbors of America was chosen by the women because they adhered to the belief, "For better is a neighbor that is near than a brother that is far." (Proverbs 27:10). They

intended to be that helpful neighbor, combining the Biblical "neighbor" with the word "royal" that signified their belief in the nobility of the work they would do.

Because the founders wanted their organization to continue to grow, as well as remain responsive to membership needs, they began discussing incorporating as a fraternal benefit society. In 1894, it was decided to incorporate in the state of Illinois, which had the most practicable insurance laws. All state requirements were fulfilled and Royal Neighbors was chartered as a fraternal benefit society on March 21, 1895. The first home office was located in Peoria, IL, and was moved to Rock Island in 1908.

In 1931 the society opened the Royal Neighbors of America National Home on the west side of Davenport, Iowa. It was established to help women in their organization who were in need of assistance. Royal Neighbors determined in 2004 that providing senior housing was not part of its core mission and it was closed. The property was sold in 2006. The facility was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2015.

Royal Neighbors meets the needs of women and their families through each stage of their lives with annuities and insurance products such as whole life, term, final expense, and universal life.

In addition to insurance products, Royal Neighbors provides member benefits at no additional cost. These currently include:

Scholarships – More than four million in grants have been awarded since 1961 to traditional and non-traditional students

In conclusion, there was a thriving Royal Neighbors chapter in Larose and today all that remains are these artifacts which have been added to our collection at the Museum.



*The banners pictured above are hand-painted silk and are in remarkably good condition for their age. There are five in total.*

continued from page 1

## Hank Thomas Donates Two Elliston Decoys to the Museum



*Robert Elliston probably carved these two decoys in the 1880's as working decoys. They have been repainted sometime in their life. They are a nice edition to our collection.*



*Robert Elliston took the time to carve details under the duck decoy's bill that others did not do.*

lived at the Undercliff. As their family grew, Elliston wanted to make a life for his new family away from the city. Walking the bluffs along the Illinois River, he found a spot over-looking Goose Pond and Lake Senachwine that was perfect for his plans. He was able to rent several acres from the owner, Albee Miller, for ten dollars a year. Here he built his home, a fine frame house encircled on two sides with a veranda. Behind the house he built his workshop. The gently sloping hillside would be perfect for a honey bee operation.

In the coming years he would manage over 242 colonies of bees and produce thousands of hunting decoys. Elliston became part of a surge in waterfowling. From approximately 1880 to 1910, waterfowling on the Illinois River would explode. The river and its back waters were a major stopping off point along the Mississippi Flyway used by thousands of migrating ducks.

The development of the automatic shotgun with its choked barrels and reloadable shells enabled hunters to harvest great numbers of waterfowl which were often shipped by rail to big city markets. Market hunting was a respectable occupation and the decoy was a useful tool. Hunting clubs formed all along the river banks from the wide waters of LaSalle County to the wide waters of Peoria. Some of the most prestigious clubs in the country, like the Mallard Club, The Hennepin Club, The

Senachwine Club and the Princeton Fish and Game Club were situated within miles of Elliston's home.

Theirs was a simple life. Robert and Catherine would have nine children; five which would survive past infancy. During the warm months the family would tend to the bees and their honey. The Ellistons would ship tons of honey by rail to the Chicago and Peoria markets. All that remains of the original homestead is the cool root cellar where the honey was stored. When the bees went into hibernation, Robert would begin work on his decoy orders.

Elliston was one of the first commercial decoy carvers in the midwest and gained quite a reputation. The noted sportswriter, William Hazelton, referred to him as "the best boat and decoy builder on the Illinois River" in his *Days Among the Ducks*. Elliston made a double bowed sixteen foot galvanized iron duck boat over an oak framework.

His decoys were carved out of native white pine. According to his daughter, Robert would have racks of decoys in his workshop waiting for their new owners. All around the workshop were shelves which displayed sample decoys of every species Elliston offered. Elliston worked from his orders and was always busy. He stopped making sleeper and preening decoys early in his carving career because he started to have trouble keeping up with his orders.

These decoys and the geese took too much time. The sleepers especially took more time to paint because of their turned heads. Each day, he and Catherine would work together on their decoys. She would paint during the daylight hours, leaving to tend to the children when she was needed. Each evening Robert would bring six head blanks into the house. After dinner, he would sit by the window in the kitchen with a lamp at his side and whittle out a cheeky head with a finely detailed bill. The following day he would carve six bodies of a two piece construction. Elliston's method of joining his decoy parts was unsurpassed by other decoy makers. Even after years of use in water and ice wore the paint from his decoys, the body seams rarely split. Lastly, quality taxidermist's eyes were embedded high up on the slightly pointed heads.

Several Illinois River decoy makers were strongly influenced by Catherine's work, and Robert's. Millie Graves was actually taught by Catherine. Charlie Perdew was one of the few people that Robert allowed in his workshop. Robert didn't like having anyone looking over his shoulder when he was working, but he did enjoy visiting with young Charlie. Robert died very unexpectedly in the winter of 1915. He was out pumping water for the family cow when he was struck with chest pains. He came into the house and laid on the couch. He died there.

# Sometimes You Just Get Lucky

by Rick Keating

Recently Priscilla Kief and I were going through some unidentified old tintypes. One caught my eye as it was a very small tin in a case. The case only measured 1-7/8" by 2-1/4". It did have an ID on it and said Peter Forbes. After a little research we determined it couldn't be Peter because he was born in 1794, well before the advent of photography.

A little later I opened up our Past Perfect program to look at an old photo inventory. The very first listing I looked at was for Caleb Forbes. It had a description of the case and the exact measurements. So we changed the name to Caleb Forbes and considered it mystery solved.

Caleb was born on March 3, 1849 in Hopewell Township, Marshall County. He died on August 13, 1899 on the family farm.

Caleb Forbes was the son of Peter & Sarah (Buckingham) Forbes. His middle name, Morgan, came from his uncle Morgan Buckingham and his grandfather Morgan Jones.



Caleb was one of eight children all born on the family homestead in Hopewell Township, Marshall County, IL.

His siblings were Mary (Kennedy), William, Ruth (Broaddus), infant daughter, Isaac, James, Sarah (Croft) and Jane.

Caleb's parents were among the earliest settlers when their families came to the area in 1831 (Forbes) and 1832 (Buckingham).

Caleb Forbes farmed the land his ancestors settled on in 1831.

On March 25 1871, in Marshall County, Caleb married Nellie E. Green from New York.

The couple had three children; Sarah Mabel (Sheeley), Claudia (Heininger) and Caleb, (this son Caleb was the last Forbes to own the original Forbes land).

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