

THE WAPSIPINICON

A newsletter published quarterly by the
TISKILWA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

* 2010 Volunteer Institution of the Year, Illinois Association of Museums

*2020 Project Winner of Illinois Governor's Hometown Award,
representing the Volunteers of the Tiskilwa Community

VOLUME 16

DECEMBER 2021

NUMBER 4

MUSEUM ON MAIN

AND

GALLERY ON GALENA

Our collection includes more than 12,000 artifacts, displayed to preserve and interpret local history.

The **MoM** is housed in an 1855 Illinois Historic Landmark Building at 110 East Main Street.

The **GoG** is in the former Legion Hall, 550 North Galena, just south of the tracks.

MUSEUM HOURS:

SATURDAYS: 9 TO 2

GALLERY HOURS:

FIRST SATURDAYS: 10-1

Admission is free, and our volunteers will show you around.
For private tours at either museum, call Ed Waca at 815.646.4016.

Board of Directors 2021-2022

Ed Waca, President
Charlie Waca, Vice Pres.
Julie Sampson, Sec.
Judy Wright, Treas.
Cecille Gerber, Director
Larry Magnuson
Randy Senneff
Bill Wendle

**CATCH THE
SPIRIT!**

COUNTRY CHRISTMAS IS COMIN' TO TOWN

We're inviting everyone to bundle up and Catch the Spirit when Tiskilwa Historical Society invites the community to Walk Tiskilwa. Yep, we are organizing our fifteenth almost-annual holiday event. As you vividly recall, the year 2020 – the one with such a promising ring to those numbers -- was a bust. But the Christmas spirit is in the air again along Main Street, and it's time to mark your calendars for **Saturday, December 11, between 9:00 and 12:00** to delight in down-home cheer.

The hardy elves of **Tiskilwa Community Association** (TCA) have once again lined Main Street with fresh fir trees to be trimmed out by local organizations and businesses. We've heard a very convincing rumor that the Village of Tiskilwa has combined funds with the TCA to add glitter to the business district with brand new light-post decorations. Can't wait to see them!

This year, most activities are on the same time schedule: from 9 o'clock to noon.

The two exceptions are listed at the bottom of the page.

9 – 12: Our Museum on Main will offer a cozy place to wander around, whether or not the weather outside is frightful. This year, the Waca Brothers, Ed and Charlie, are teaming up for two crowd-pleasing exhibits: the traditional Lionel train set circling a wee tree in Gallery 1 as well as the newly installed display showcasing their dad's woodcarving talents. **Bill Waca**, a longtime Tiskilwa resident, called himself "The Tiskilwa Termite," and turned out several amazing pieces over a lifetime of whittling that began when he was only thirteen. The Mississippi Valley Fair Board recently returned Bill's 1970 prize-winning Clydesdale entry (pictured at right and featured in our Timeline Gallery showcase) to the Waca family after being on display in Davenport, Iowa, for 51 years.



9 – 12: The Tiskilwa Community Church will host their traditional bake sale and craft sale in the church basement. (Chair lift available.) They're inviting visitors to enjoy free coffee, snacks, and fellowship while exercising their purchasing power. This year, they are touting a special guest appearance by the Jolly Old Elf himself, **Santa Claus**.

9 – 12: The Tiskilwa Public Library will join in the merrymaking by setting up crafts tables for kiddies and adults alike. Everyone is welcomed to stop by, and library personnel will be on hand to offer cheerful assistance to crafters of all ages.

10 – 12: The Tiskilwa Inn on High Street will host an Open House with spiced cider, Christmas cookies, and a warm welcome from Innkeeper **Jeremy Gassen**. Visitors may tour the first level of the Inn and, if weather permits, a few friendly and curious alpacas will be stationed nearby.

10 – 12: The Gallery on Galena (just south of the tracks) will be open to visitors, especially those who haven't yet had a chance to explore our new digs. With the north half set up as a salute to our veterans in all branches of the military and the south end creating the aura of days gone by in a one-room schoolhouse, there's sure to be something to please everyone.

THANK YOU to all early birds listed below who've already joined or renewed. A list of the entire 2022 membership will appear in March.

NEW AND RENEWED MEMBERS

INDIVIDUALS & FAMILIES

Barb Francis (Alviso, CA)
Maylo Hranac (Huntley)
Janet Gingerich Jones (Princeton)
Linda Sissel Kling (Tiskilwa)
Melvina Lewis (Princeton)
Russ & Barb Wagner (Sheffield)

SPONSORS

FRIENDS

Benita Cotter Klasen (Lombard)
William Jackson (Mineral)
Kathy Bickett Jessen (Princeton)

PROMOTER

Richard P. Brown (Hilton Head Island, SC)
Paula Russell Hart (Clive, IA)
Alice McCauley Malloy (Shorewood)
Margaret Bickett Stewart (St. Charles)

BRONZE BENEFACTOR

JoAnn Albrecht (Albuquerque, NM)
Bill and Susan Philhower (Geneseo)

NAVY AND GOLD BENEFACTORS

[In a tradition started several years ago] THS Class of 1970 donated \$1,970!

IN MEMORIAM

Thank you for memorials received since our September newsletter.

MAYNARD & LOIS BIEL
HELEN ANDERSON BOTHE
SUSAN JOINER LEVERETT
CONNIE MILLER
ELEANOR WEST SAPP
PHYLLIS SIMS

What's Ahead and Where Do We Go from Here? by Bill Wendle

As a relatively new member of the T-H-S board, I am amazed what has been accomplished in the 15 years since our first museum opened in a little storefront on Main Street. This would have not been possible without the support of our community and faithful members, the vision and tireless efforts by our director Cele Gerber, and the engagement of rotating members of our all-volunteer board.

Our operating costs are now very low because most tasks are performed by board members. However, we realize this is not sustainable in the long term. As a result, the board has initiated a formal review of exactly what it will take to continue fulfilling our mission for the next 5 to 10 years.

So far, we have assessed the organization's strengths and weaknesses as well as identified the key tasks currently performed by board members. Our next step will be to distinguish between the tasks that can realistically be expected of future board members and those that will need to be "hired out."

In the next few years, this could mean employing a director and hiring more contractors. If so, our funding needs will increase significantly. And every future scenario will require a higher level of volunteer support by individual members. The goal is to complete the review by March of 2022 and present our recommendations to you.

2022 MEMBERSHIP

For this issue only, we've used postal mail for all members.

In addition, the newsletter will still be available on our website.

We've enclosed a renewal form and envelope. In the **upper left of your address label** is the date of your most recent membership update.

We sincerely appreciate your support and we hope it continues!

Fall Programs Packed with Memorable Moments



On a perfect Sunday afternoon in September, an audience of more than 90 visitors filled the west lawn at Museum on Main. Smiles all around.

On September 5 historian, musician, and Illinois Humanities Council (IHC) "Road Scholar" **Dennis Stroughmatt** entertained a large crowd with the history and music of migrant workers living along the Mississippi River in the early 20th century. Sharing lively fiddle music as well as stories of his migrant ancestors' involvement with mussels and moonshine, Dennis filled the afternoon with laughter and toe-tapping. The **Wright Farms** made a delightful afternoon even better by providing a treat of Dilly Bars from the Princeton Dairy Queen.



After a "tornado watch" delay of our October 11 program, **Tiffany White**, Director of the Dirksen Center, presented an entertaining, informative program about Senator Everett Dirksen Monday, October 18. Following the program, she discussed displayed items and answered questions.

Tiffany White credits Everett McKinley Dirksen's extremely humble upbringing in Pekin with giving him a sense of compassion and understanding, which she believes clarifies Senate Minority Leader Dirksen's key role in bipartisan passage of the momentous Civil Rights Act of 1964. She brought along several artifacts – even his Grammy! -- and shared "vintage Dirksen" quotes worth repeating:

"I am a man of fixed and unbending principles, the first of which is to be flexible at all times."

"I keep my words sweet and tender because I know that someday I may have to eat them."



On November 8, **Brian Fox Ellis** presented "Black Hawk's View of Early Illinois" to an audience of more than 90 history buffs from near and far – even Peoria!

Weaving fact with folklore and chants, IHC Road Scholar and storyteller Brian Ellis drew his audience into the world view of the famous leader Black Hawk as well as the lives of his ancestors.

In a ceremony preceding the program, the **Illinois Valley Quilts of Valor** organization honored Tiskilwa veterans **Jay Perry** (THS '62) and **Rex Elmore** (THS '64) for their military service.

Editor's note: The Village of Tiskilwa has recently launched a website (TA-DA!) and Mayor Michael Murray asked our Museum Director, **Cecille Gerber**, to write a history of the town—a daunting task that covers more than 250 years since the first written record of inhabitants in this valley! Cele researched, compiled, and presented this overview to the Village Board. Treasurer **Judy Wright** suggested it would be of interest to our Wapsipinicon readership. While you're at it, check out the village website at villageoftiskilwa.org.

The History of Tiskilwa

Tiskilwa is a village where “The Past Is Present” – not only in the warm, old-fashioned welcome that visitors receive but also in the 19th century buildings that still line Main Street and the old homes that stand in pride of place throughout the town.

Tradition has established four blocks of Main Street with stores, restaurants, and offices on the north side while historic churches and residences grace the south side. The business district is flanked by two inviting parks, East and West, with picnic shelters, play equipment, war memorials, and a gazebo.



Circa 1910



Circa 1960

Tiskilwa has a proud and storied history, one with many ebbs and flows. At this point in the 21st century, there seems to be a modest renaissance afoot with new businesses catering to tourism in this scenic area of Illinois, situated with the Hennepin Canal State Park running along the north and east edges of town.



Hennepin Canal near Tiskilwa



Main Street on October 17, 2021

Nestled in a valley surrounded by wooded bluffs, the village of Tiskilwa was once home to the Potawatomi, in whose poetic language its name means “Gem of the Valley.” A half-dozen roads lead out of town, and only one can be followed that does not climb a hill. Country roads winding through rolling hills in the midst of our so-called Prairie State often surprise and please visitors.

From these hills flow the many springs that feed Rocky Run (called “Wapsipinicon” by the Potawatomi) as it meanders eastward through the village and into Big Bureau Creek. Officially established on paper in the 1830s, Tiskilwa has been known by many names, including Wappe, Indiantown, Windsor, and West Windsor. When the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad was completed in 1853 (the first railroad in Bureau County), the compromise name of Tiskilwa was proposed and settled upon at a town meeting.

Although numerous artifacts preserved in Tiskilwa's Museum on Main have been identified as centuries old, the first record of settlement in this valley is 1769, when a band of Potawatomi traveled west from the Wabash Valley. It is estimated that by the early 1800s, there were 1,500 to 2,000 Native American inhabitants here and that Bureau County was the most densely populated area in the land that would be designated as Illinois in 1818. Those residents lived in 300-400 lodges (wigwams) made of bark with an opening in the center of the ceiling to let smoke escape.

Their life in this area was supported by growing corn as well as by berry-picking, root-gathering, and hunting in the thick woodlands and fishing in crystal-clear streams.



[Cover image] *The Potawatomi: Keepers of the Fire*

By the early 1830s, the cabins of European settlers were scattered in the village area and throughout the countryside. They had arrived by oxen cart on the Galena Trail or by various means of travel on the nearby Illinois River. Although many members of these two groups lived together peaceably, the conflict over land increased and the quiet Indian settlement was doomed by the Black Hawk War in 1832. As trouble was breaking out, most of the local Potawatomi packed all portable possessions on their ponies for a sorrowful departure, riding and walking “toward the setting sun.”

As the years rolled by, the village of Tiskilwa became a frequent stopover spot for travelers on the Galena Trail and Coach Road, and many folks decided to stay in the lush valley surrounded by fertile farmland. With the advent of rail travel in 1853 came an influx of settlers, resulting in new businesses, sidewalks and other improvements. Streets were laid out and named. By 1877, the town had 14 stores, 9 shops of various goods and services, 3 saloons, 1 hotel, 5 physicians, 2 grain elevators, 4 churches, a bank, a town paper, a private library, and an impressive school, serving both grade and high school. By 1897, the population of Tiskilwa was recorded as 1,156 with a thriving rural community in the surrounding townships. In 1912, a new high school opened. [Razed and replaced in 1979.] Sports, musical performances, and countless other school activities were the heartbeat of the entire community, town and country alike.

Tiskilwa's heyday continued for decades with a steady population of 1,000 and dozens of businesses. However, by the 1970s, the small-acreage family farms were becoming a thing of the past, and many local people were shopping and working in larger towns and businesses. The closure of Tiskilwa's schools in the mid-1990s had a significant impact on the town's businesses and, more importantly, its spirit.

Nevertheless, especially since the early 2000s, that spirit has again become evident in the numerous volunteer groups who organize seasonal events, host monthly programs of historical interest, help to beautify the town, take meals to seniors, honor its veterans, and promote the general welfare. In fact, Tiskilwa was recognized in 2020 with a Governor's Hometown Award as “a community where the ethic of service and the positive actions of volunteers has improved the quality of life.”

As the saying goes, “Yesterday is history; tomorrow is a mystery.” Our town seems to have found a way of keeping what's good about the past while forging ahead with innovations, thereby creating a pleasing blend of the old and the new.

Sources: *Tiskilwa: Pictures of Past and Present*, by Tiskilwa Bicentennial Committee, 1976; *When Tiskilwa Was Young* by Mary B. Steimle, 1985; *Tiskilwa High School Alumni Directory: 130th Anniversary Edition*, by Tiskilwa Historical Society, 2008; *The Potawatomis: Keepers of the Fire* by R. David Edmund, 1978.

UPDATES FOR MUSEUM ON MAIN AND GALLERY ON GALENA

Behind the Scenes at Museum on Main

Since our September newsletter, a number of changes and activities have kept the wheels turning at MoM and enhanced our displays. For example, one longstanding project recently completed was the installation of two cast iron bridge signs that stood over Bureau Creek in locations east and northwest of the village. The prime mover for the metal work and installation was **Ed Waca** (THS '66), member **Juanita Roberts-Beams** painted the gold lettering, and **Bill Wendle** expanded the garden area. The upper sign was donated by the **Tiskilwa Library** and the lower sign by **Marge Albrecht**.

Ongoing maintenance projects include replacement of the double door on the lower east side of MoM. Since the opening is an unusual size, we are comparing prices on a special order. In addition, the southeast window well accumulated rainwater and caused a leak into our "Living in the Past" display area. But our intrepid board members have a plan for resolving the problem without hiring a contractor.

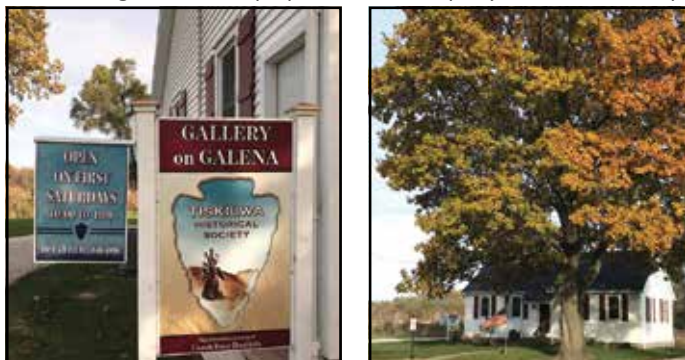


Left: When **Marc Smucker** stopped by to visit the MoM in September, he was pressed into service to relocate a cast iron finial that stood atop a Bureau Creek bridge east of Tiskilwa. Thanks for the Herculean effort, Marc!

Right: A couple of Halloween marauders stealthily turned our Abe "statue" into a winning entry in Tiskilwa Library's annual Scarecrow Contest. We achieved a modest victory with "Judge's Award" recognition.

Behind the Scenes at Gallery on Galena

We've added a new sign at the GoG to inform visitors of hours on the first Saturday of each month. We're always looking for someone to keep the home fires burning over there once a month. In October and November combined, we had twelve visitors stop by. Perhaps a few veterans might like to step up a time or two per year. Can YOU help?



Right: We couldn't resist sharing a photo of a November 7th "golden hour" at our new museum. We receive many compliments about enhancing the appearance of the "main entrance" to our village.

Wapsipinicon Editors:

Cecille Gerber, cecilegrbr2@gmail.com

Jane Jones, jjones215@gmail.com

Connie Kauffman Recognized for Board Service; Larry Magnuson Newly Elected to Board



Left: **Connie Kauffman** (THS '69) [left] was presented with a gift of appreciation by T-H-S secretary, **Julie Sampson** (THS '67) for her years of steadfast service on the T-H-S Board. Connie, we will miss you, but we know you'll still be helping with landscaping and other tasks that make things look good at our museums.



Right: New board member **Larry Magnuson**, [at far left above] elected at our September 5 general meeting, has plunged right in to help. Here, he joined other Boardies after our October board meeting to help install the bridge signs.

T-H-S Completes Yearbook Project

by Julie Sampson

Every so often someone asks us if we have old Tiskilwa High School yearbooks for sale. Not every year is available, but we do have 92 used books available for the years of 1912 thru 1982. You may contact us with the specific years that interest you, and we will check to see if we have a copy. We ask for a \$10 donation per book. You may pick them up, or we can mail them with an additional \$10 for postage.

Also, we are very happy to announce we have digital copies of each of our 1950 thru 1995 yearbooks available on our website (tiskilwahistoricalsociety.org) for viewing! Every one of those years is available online, as a used copy was digitized. Please note that these pages cannot be copied from our website, but we would be happy to prepare a digitized copy for whatever year(s) you are interested in and mail it to you on a CD for a donation of \$20, including the cost of mailing. If you wish to have a flash drive mailed to you, it would be \$25.

If interested in a yearbook, please contact **Julie Sampson**, Secretary, Tiskilwa Historical Society, P.O. Box 87, Tiskilwa, IL 61368 or email Julie at countryga13@yahoo.com.

Holiday Gifts? Collector's Corner

Suggested donations \$15: Directory or Shirt

ALUMNI DIRECTORY: It's a handy reference listing all THS graduates, plus summarizing a history of Tiskilwa Schools and the THS Alumni Association.

LONG-SLEEVED GRAY SHIRT with TISKILWA written down the sleeve in black italic letters. Only a few left!

SHORT-SLEEVED T-SHIRTS IN NAVY BLUE OR GRAY with an image of the traditional Chief Tiskilwa on the front and the logo of the Tiskilwa Historical Society on the back. Available in all sizes, including youth shirts.



Visitors from Far and Near Stop by Museums

During September and October, we hosted more than 45 visitors on Saturdays at our two museums.

(Okay, okay – so a few folks were repeats but, hey, we still think that number is newsworthy!)

One family group from New Jersey, Maryland, and Pennsylvania made the trek as a 90th birthday gift to their dad, **Paul Studer**, who wanted to revisit the little town and old depot where he spent happy days throughout the 1930s. Little Paul came to Tiskilwa to visit his grandparents, **James** and **Dora Studer**, where James served as station agent and telegrapher for the C.R.I. & P (Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific) Railway.



Left: Paul and his family pored over details in exhibits found in our railroad display area in Gallery 2 as well as enjoying other museum exhibits.



Right: The Studer family gathered for a photo on October 14 on the steps of Museum on Main. Counter-clockwise, beginning at lower left: Lynne, Mary, Laurie, Christine, Robert, and the patriarch, Paul.

With our help, as well as the staff at the **Tiskilwa Public Library** and the **Bureau County Genealogical Society**, the family was able to have many questions answered and locate the former Studer home in the east end.

One of the stories they shared with us is especially poignant and unusual. On his 66th birthday in 1939, James Studer was finishing up his final day as station agent when he suffered a heart attack and died at the depot. Although Paul was only eight years old when he lost his grandfather, he has vivid and warm memories of his grandparents in their little village – a long, bumpy journey from Paul's boyhood home in Tinley Park.

Paul's daughter, Laurie Schwab, summarized their visit this way: "The wonderful welcome we received made Dad's heart so full – and all of ours, too."

Remember the long List of Lovebirds in our December '20 and March '21 issues? We now have more names of THS sweethearts who married: Class of '10: **Edward Quick & Ruth Hare**; Classes of '50 & '51: **Ed Morse & Ora Jean Little**; Class of '51: **Jim Longman & Barbara Westman**.

History Mystery for December



We're not sure when or exactly where this photo was taken (late 1940s?) but we know that the tall gent in the center is baseball legend **Connie Mack**. And we can recognize at least three baseball fans from Tiskilwa. Can you?

History Mystery Solved: Standing alongside Connie Mack are these Tiskilwa fellows: 2nd from left – **Emil "Monk" Strunk**; 3rd from left – **Edwin "Ole" Nordstrom**; at Connie Mack's left – **Dale Hunter**.

Q #1: Do you recognize anyone else?

Q #2: Do you know Connie Mack's given name? *[See below.]*

Q #3: Do you think the location of our photo is Comiskey Field? (1910-1990) Our best clue: Dale Hunter was a diehard White Sox fan and would never be caught anywhere near Wrigley Field.

Details from the Baseball Hall of Fame website:

"Connie Mack was perhaps more synonymous with the team he managed than any skipper in baseball history. For 50 years, the slender Mack stood tall in the Philadelphia Athletics' dugout in his trademark business suit and was known as The Grand Old Man of Baseball. During those five decades, Mack assembled two separate dynasties and won a total of nine American League pennants and five World Series titles. . . . Known as "The Tall Tactician," Mack finally retired from the game of baseball after the 1950 season at the age of 87. In his unprecedented 53 years as a manager, Mack won 3,731 games."

Answer to Q #2: Cornelius McGillicuddy.

Visitors at Museum Find Plenty to Explore



Left: Visitors such as **Mike Baumann** and his son **Miles** are often greeted at the MoM by **Merdis**, an enthusiastic dachshund, and her "dad," **Ed Waca**.



Right: On a recent Saturday, **Tessa Carlson** stopped by with her grandma, **Kathy Bickett Jessen** (THS '68) to check details about Mt. Bloom Cemetery for her local research paper in **Mr. Gray's** eighth-grade social studies class.

A Colorful Autumn in the Gem of the Valley



"Sunrise, sunset -- Swiftly flow the days." Thank you to **Nancy Joiner Harmon** (THS '76) for sharing these stunning images she captured along the **Hennepin Canal** -- with her artist's eye and her trusty Canon R6!

Donations to Our Collection at the Research Table

Do you know that we have books available for check-out at MoM? We are building quite a collection. Here are recent additions.

1. After Two Hundred Years: The Journey of an 1812 Chest of Drawers, donated by author [and T-H-S member] **Constance J. McChesney**. Starting with letters and documents saved for six generations in a drawer of this New England bureau, the author traces this heirloom's journey and its connection to the **John Stevens Family**, who settled in Tiskilwa in the early 1840s and built three stately homes in the village.

2. Black Damp: The Story of the Cherry Mine Disaster, a novel by Steve Stout, was donated by **John Schaefer** (THS '57).

3. The Potawatomis: Keepers of the Fire by R. David Edmund. Purchased.

TISKILWA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

110 EAST MAIN STREET

P.O. Box 87

TISKILWA, IL 61368

www.tiskilwahistoricalociety.org

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



In the early morning of October 26, 2021, T-H-S member **Tracy Hannon** captured this stunning view of the valley below their home east of town. In posting it on Facebook, she gave it an apt name: "The Smoky Mountains of Tiskilwa."

These generous businesses help
pay printing and postage costs.

**JOHN F.
HEDRICH**
Trial Lawyer

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