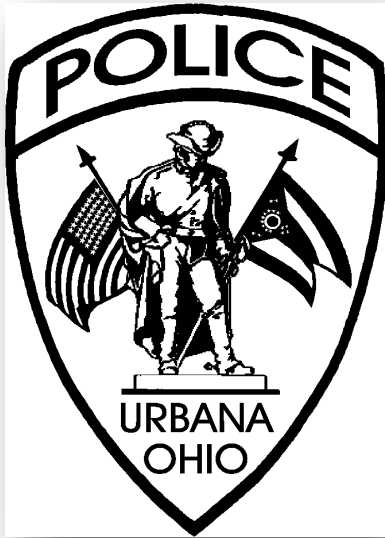


Upcoming Programs



Drug Identification Program Presented by Sgt. Shawn Schmidt

On January 16, 2022 at 2 p.m. Sgt. Shawn Schmidt will present a program on identifying drugs. There will be a PowerPoint slide show with photographs to help people identify different types of drugs and drug paraphernalia. He will also go over the effects drugs could have on someone and common signs of drug usage. He also will bring many items / paraphernalia that have been seized.

Local Jazz History Presented by Marty Reich and Dan Walter

In recognition of Black History Month on Sunday February 6 at 2:00 pm Marty Reich and Dan Walter will present a program about local jazz history. Their presentation will begin with a discussion of the library of 8,000 78 rpm jazz records collected by Ken Hulsizer and once housed in Urbana.

On display will be a dual turntable, recently donated by Pat and Patsy Thackery to the museum, that was custom made for Hulsizer about 1936 when he operated a club on Scioto St. The turntable was used again, once the records were moved to 12 1/2 Monument Square, when Hulsizer would entertain jazz musicians, many of whom had played on his rare recordings, a catalogue of which will be on display.

Reich and Walter will also feature photos and information about local jazz musicians such as Harry Stevens as well as various dance bands that played in Champaign County and the surrounding area.



Ken Hulsizer Record Collection



Address from the President

Hello again everyone!

Boy has it been quite the year...new president, COVID, social unrest, disagreements galore; you name it and it probably happened. However, although it has been quite the year and as 2021 comes to a close, I would like to take a moment to review all the wonderful things that we as an organization have accomplished over the past two (2) years that I have been president.

First and foremost, when COVID reared its ugly head—we remained open almost every single day and didn't skip a beat. A huge thanks to our volunteer staff and our Museum Director Cheryl Ogden for persevering.

Second, we were able to complete many aesthetic renovations and additions to the interior and exterior of the Museum including but not limited to: painting the entire War Room, new landscaping throughout the grounds, new high-resolution projector and screen with HDMI access, new library, new men and women's restrooms, new Museum entrance, video security monitoring, complete rearranging of Museum artifacts, complete reorganization and overhaul of basement storage areas, continuous reworking of Museum policy and procedure, the list can go on and on and on. A huge thanks to all that helped and assisted with all these projects.

Third, we recruited and brought on at least five (5) new Board members who all take on very important tasks in the daily operations of the Museum including: Building & Grounds, Event Planning, Financial Planning, Grant Operations, and Secretarial duties. Further, as we have grown, we were faced with adding approximately five (5) new committees. This is a good problem to have in my opinion.

And lastly, as some of you know, I am not seeking a second term as Board President. If the Board will have me, I still plan to remain a dedicated and active Board member in the foreseeable future.

However, looking back over the past two (2) years, I am humbled and gracious to have served on this Board and worked with many fun, energetic, and dedicated people.

I would like to personally thank all members and the Board of Trustees for giving me the opportunity to serve you and the Museum. I can *truly* say that although Board meetings sometimes ran far too long, and sometimes I spoke far too much, and many times I focused on the details far too often... I can comfortably say that the Museum has changed for the better and we are headed in a solid and stable direction.

In closing...see you later, Alligator.

Yours truly,

Gregory L. Harvey, Esq.



Mary Griffin Leon by Candy Gilliam

As a child running through the fields in Wayne Township, Mary Griffin was no ordinary little girl. At a very early age, she had a tendency for tumbling, swinging and doing anything athletic. So when the John Robinson's Circus came rolling through the area in the 1870's, Mary knew exactly what she wanted to do. She joined their circus, practicing daily to become one of their greatest trapeze performers. She would walk the tight-rope, swing through the air on the trapeze and perform daring stunts on the horizontal bars, all without the use of a safety net. While most thought these stunts to be foolhardy, Mary considered them to be daring and sensational. She lived for the thrills and soon became a leading performer very much in demand by the show world. In 1877, Mary Griffin married Edward Leon, another circus performer, and together they formed one of the greatest trapeze duo's in the United States. They traveled coast to coast, stopping in every state along the way, being hailed as the country's greatest aerialists on many circus bills. The couple wintered in Urbana, living with her parents, and while



John & Carrie Rooney, 1906 -Barney & Bailey Circus

Carrie Rooney & horse, 1911

MISS CARRIE ROONEY AND HER "PRINCE" WITH THE
FOREPAUGH & SELLS CIRCUS HERE TUESDAY.



staying here, they often gave personal performances at the fairgrounds for local residents. In May, 1884, Robinson's Circus came through Urbana, arriving in their own special circus train of 60 cars and started the festivities with a street parade through downtown Urbana. The parade was one mile of glittering splendor that included 15 different kinds of music, a brass band, singers, clowns, elephants, zebras, buffalo, many animals in cages, wagons decorated in lights, Indians, and all the talented performers in their brilliant pageantry. They drew a crowd of 7,000 people to watch them march down the street.

Edward Leon claimed he could make the longest mid-air somersault and leap of any man in the country. He could leap a distance of 25 feet in the air without a net, a feat never done previously. Doing these daring stunts did not go without accidents, and the Leon's had two major accidents in their tumbling careers. In 1885 while touring in Indiana, Mary Griffin Leon was hanging head down on a trapeze with her hands reaching out to catch her husband, who was leaping from another trapeze. She failed to hold him and he fell head first into the circus ring, severely injuring his head and shoulders. The second accident proved to be more



Carrie Rooney, 1907

damaging to Mary's career. While touring in Tennessee in 1886, Edward and Mary were doing a daring double trapeze act on bars suspended 40 feet above the arena. While Mary was swinging from her feet, Edward was turning a somersault. The band was just completing the loud, long drum roll as Edward whirled mid-air, revolving as he went, reaching for Mary's hands. As she caught him, the ropes holding the trapeze broke and the entire apparatus fell. Edward fell to his feet, rolling onto his back, and only suffered minor leg injuries. Mary, on the other hand, fell heavily on her back and shoulders with the solid iron bars falling across her thighs. She suffered major spinal injuries, and it was first thought she wouldn't survive. Fortunately, after several weeks of bed rest, she was slowly able to walk again with the aid of crutches. She had pains in her lower back with partial paralysis in one leg, and she decided to return home to Urbana to recuperate. The cause of this accident was carelessness in securing the ropes holding the heavy iron trapeze

bars, and because of their loss of time, income and medical costs, Edward Leon filed a lawsuit against the circus. He was awarded \$1,200 in damages. But this frightening accident did not stop the Leon's from continuing their passion for performing on the trapeze, and within a year Mary was back on the high wire. Throughout the 1890's, the Leon's traveled and performed with other shows, such as the Priest & Co Great Railroad Show, Rogers Circus and in several theaters. Their mid-air feats were greatly admired by the crowds, who all wanted to see the light haired Miss swinging in the air.

About this time, Edward and Mary Leon introduced their children to the circus world. They had one daughter and son, Maude and Eddie, as well as two adopted daughters, Lizzie and Carrie. The family appeared

Photographs wanted!

The Champaign Co Historical Society is looking for photographs to add to our digital collection. If you have photographs that you feel need to be preserved please let us know. You would get your photographs back after we scan them into our database. We are looking for photographs from all eras and from any location in Champaign County.

CCHS has a new email address

As of January 1, 2022, the Champaign County Historical Society has a new email address. The new address is champaigncohistory@gmail.com

Mary Griffin Leon *continued*

in several vaudeville troupes, minstrel shows, burlesque and comedy shows across the Midwest, and the girls became known as the famous Leon Sisters. The Leon Sisters were airy and graceful in presenting their daring and original turns on the high wire. They did many things never before attempted by women acrobats, such as being the only ones to do a head-to-head balancing act. When the Ringling Brothers Circus came to Urbana in 1901, the Leon Sisters were the prime attraction to local residents. Edward and Mary's son, Eddie Leon, made his professional debut in 1902 as a singer. Young Eddie had the sweetest singing voice ever produced by a local family, and he was coached by popular theatre owner, Billy Clifford, who spent hours training his voice to sing ballads for minstrel shows.

Eddie was highly sought after by other theatre companies, but his father would not give his consent for little Eddie to be trained away from home. In 1904, Edward Leon and young Eddie enhanced the family performance by introducing trained dogs into their acts. With the dogs, they would perform acrobats, juggling, and gymnastics.

Mary Griffin Leon became ill and was suffering from convulsions when she died in 1905 at the age of 50 years. Sadly, her father died just two days later, and they were both buried in Oak Dale Cemetery. Just a few months later, the Leon Sisters joined the Bantell Brothers Company as expert acrobats, in 1906 they were with Barnum & Bailey Circus, and in 1907 they were back at Robinson's Circus. Carrie Leon rode horses bare-back while doing tricks with her very clever English dog, soon earning herself a title of champion bareback rider of the world. She delighted thousands of people every day doing many daring feats upon the broad back of her horse. She married fellow circus performer, John Rooney, and they became known as the Riding Rooney's. Their feature act consisted of them doing somersaults mid-air from one running horse to land in a red cart, then immediately doing another somersault from that cart to another horse. Edward Leon and son, Eddie, left to form their own theatrical troupe with their trained dogs. They also accepted engagements with vaudeville companies showcasing his acrobatic dogs. Edward was also known to have a huge collection of "curiosities", rare relics he found during his circus travels. When he was in Urbana, he would display these artifacts in business windows on the square or at the fairground buildings. Some items included Indian clothing and arrows, old coins, mammoth bones & teeth, battle axes, and even a piece of rope that was used in hanging Mary Surratt, the infamous boardinghouse woman convicted for taking part in the assassination of President Lincoln. By 1920, the Leon family was no longer working for the circus. Edward and Eddie Leon moved to Michigan, Maude moved to California and Carrie Rooney died in New York.

Market Square Theatre!

Wednesday, Jan. 23.

Barnes and Mantell's Dainty Paree Burlesquers!

One of the biggest Burlesque shows
in the world. Carrying a number
of the best specialty people known
to the stage, including

The Three Leon Sisters!

The world's greatest novelty acrobats

Seats on sale Tuesday morning

*Ad in Urbana Daily Times Citizen -
Jan 22, 1901*

Annual Member's Dinner

On December 12, 2021 the Champaign County Historical Society ,with the generous support of Farmers and Merchants State Bank, hosted a Christmas gathering for their membership. Visiting with friends, enjoying the sounds of the holiday, and dining on a delicious meal was the recipe for a perfect evening.

The meal, prepared by Amy Forest of In Good Taste Catering, was served by members of Girl Scout Troops #32191 and #32046 and offered that “extra touch” allowing everyone to relax and enjoy the evening. President, Greg Harvey, welcomed everyone, Dan Walter offered the invocation, and Ken Wright, CCHS treasurer, shared the news of a matching construction grant awarded to the Historical Society. Additional information about the grant and the new addition will be presented at the annual meeting on Jan. 23, 2022. The evening concluded with an assortment of dessert “bites”.



Annual Meeting

On January 23, 2022 at 2 p.m. the Champaign County Historical Society will be holding our annual membership meeting. All members are welcome to attend.

Article Topics

If you have a historic topic or Champaign County resident that you believe would make a great article, for the newsletter, please let us know by sending an email to champaigncohistory@gmail.com with the word “article” in the subject line.

Mission Statement

The Mission of the Society is to tell the Champaign County story and to administer the collection, preservation, and display of our county's artifacts, documents, and other historical resources.

Welcome New Members

Robert Ogden

Keith Schaefer

CHAMPAIGN COUNTY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY
MUSEUM



Est. 1934

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