

RIVER RAISIN NEWS & DISPATCH

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE MONROE COUNTY HISTORICAL MUSEUM
MONROE COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION & MONROE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Volume 4 Issue 2
Apr/May/June 2009

**Monroe County
Historical Museum**
126 S. Monroe Street
Monroe, MI 48161
(734) 240-7780 Phone
(734) 240-7788 FAX

Director:
John Gibney

Assistant Director:
Dave Inghall

**Archivist & Collections
Manager:**
Chris Kull

Secretary & Education:
Lynn Reaume

Battlefield:
Scott Lonsdale

Newsletter:
Shawna Mazur

Maintenance:
Mike Jondro

Historical Commission:
Chairman: Hobby Nels
Vice-Chairman: Jeanne Micka
Secretary: Alisha Cooley
Dorothy Heinlen
Richard Micka
William Saul
Richard Sieb
Matthew Switlik
Robert Wittersheim

Museum Hours:
Wed-Sun, 10am-5pm
Closed Sundays Jan-April

Archives Hours:
Wed-Sat, 10am-1pm, 1:30pm-5pm

Contents:
From the Director.....1
Monroe Co. Soldiers in the Civil War...2
Curatorial News.....3
Celebrating Women.....4
Eye on Education.....5
Haunting Tales of Old Frenchtown.....5

From the Director

By John Gibney

In the dawn's early light of the past several mornings, I have been startled awake from the drumming and singing (some around here might liken it to fifying) of a gorgeous pair of Red-bellied Woodpeckers. Taken together with flights of Sandhill Cranes, and a few Great Blue Herons, the unmistakable signs of spring have returned to the Great Lakes.

Yes, the chest high snowdrifts I was wading through on my elk excursions to the contrary, it will soon be one of the best seasons of the year – MAPLE SUGAR SEASON! We will tap the huge silver maples at the battlefield and our lone giant sugar maple at the Trading Post. And we will gather FREE sap for Maple fudge, maple cakes, maple cookies and MAPLE SYRUP!



Maple Sugar Day at the Trading Post is now firmly established as a tradition and always signals the opening of the outdoor segment of our interpretive programs

season. This year we will have a Fur Trade Day, an 1812 Military Muster, the Fife & Drum Muster, and Founders Day. We will have Battlefield Saturdays and an Open House at the battlefield. Make sure to check the calendar on our back page and make plans to attend as many programs as you can.

And while we are going over the programs the museum is offering for you, consider what you can do for your museum's programs. Last newsletter I asked for volunteers and this is the time of the year to step forward to volunteer as our programs are starting to take shape. People always ask us what they can do to help. Unfortunately it is usually when we are too busy to sit down and explain what we need to make our programs successful.

Specifically, we need people who can share their most precious commodity: TIME. We need a few good friends who can help clean out our buildings, pick up debris around our properties, mend our fences, paint our interiors, and clean our guns & tools. We need green thumbs to plant seeds, weed gardens, and harvest crops. We can all use extra vegetables in this economy and we certainly have room for heritage plantings and will gladly share our bounty with all. And if you can cook... we can eat!



When we do living history we need people who like history and don't mind sharing their knowledge with a variety of audiences. We also need people who know how to demonstrate forgotten arts and crafts. Just like the ads always say, "we need team players and self starters who need little supervision". If you can bake bread, do it! Want to learn to tan hides? We have nearly a dozen to practice on. Love telling stories or playing games? You can play with us!

Mostly we need people who relate to the visitors, especially if you know about a historic subject. We need women who can cook, sew, plant, dye, knit, and talk. We need men who can hammer, saw, shoot, throw, and talk. Need lots of talkers!

And if you don't want to reenact, we can always use greeters, (car) parkers, money takers, and explainers. Our JOB is to educate the public and while we do it, we have a whale of time. Join us and find out how. See you at the sap buckets!



Colonel Norman Hall General George Custer

Monroe County Soldiers in the Civil War

By David Ingall

When the Civil War broke out in 1861, many of Monroe County Michigan's men

were ready to answer the call. A total of 2,270 men, ten percent of the county's population, took up arms. Approximately 430 would lose their lives doing so.

Monroe County soldiers served in every Michigan regiment, as well as other states, and U.S. regular army regiments. They fought and died in such well-known battles as Shiloh, Antietam, Gettysburg, Spotsylvania, Chickamauga, Atlanta, and Petersburg. They also were involved in the lesser-known battles of Campbell's Station and Athens. Many lost their lives in battle, but the majority actually died from various diseases. Nine county men also perished in the long forgotten Sultana disaster.

The 7th and 15th Michigan Infantry regiments, and Company H, First Michigan Light Artillery, actually trained in Monroe. Less than one week after departing Monroe, the 15th were engaged in the Battle of Shiloh, initially sent to the front without ammunition!

One Monroe soldier, Lieutenant Norman Hall, was present at the bombarding of Fort Sumter. He was also instrumental in the Battle of Gettysburg. It was Colonel Norman Hall and his third brigade, including the 7th Michigan Infantry, that held the Union center during "Pickett's Charge" on July 3, 1863. The 7th Michigan's Regimental flag, "The Forlorn Hope of Fredericksburg", made by the ladies of Monroe, can be viewed at the Monroe County Historical Museum.

Monroe's Brigadier General George Armstrong Custer, and the Michigan Cavalry Brigade, were also responsible for saving the Union on that fateful July day in 1863 by defeating Jeb Stuart's Confederate Cavalry. Custer's personal flag, when he commanded the Michigan Cavalry Brigade, is also on display at the museum.

Monroe County produced five generals: Major General George Armstrong Custer, Major General Alfred Bates, Major General John Oliver, Brigadier General Joseph Smith and Brigadier General George Spalding.

Eight Soldiers from Monroe County were awarded the Medal of Honor. In fact, Lieutenant Tom Custer, was the first double honoree in U.S. history.

Those that made it home from the war went on to form organizations like the Grand Army of the Republic, with nine posts in the county. Monroe County Civil War veterans lie in almost every cemetery in the county and in numerous national cemeteries throughout the north and south.

Monroe County provided a large proportion of its population to the Northern Army, and many of these soldiers perished to save the Union!

To learn more, please join me at the Monroe County Civil War Roundtable meeting on Thursday May 14, 2009, at the Ellis Reference & Information Center on 3700 S. Custer Road in Monroe, where I will present a PowerPoint presentation on *Monroe County Soldiers in the Civil War* at 7pm.

Curatorial News

Jim Ryland is now retired. Jim worked about 20 years at the Museum, first as part-time, then full-time, and retired as Curator. He was in charge of the non-paper (artifact) part of the museum collection, and did most of the exhibits at all the museum sites. He also did a lot of the day to day business, handled building issues, made signage and a host of other tasks. Jim seems to be greatly enjoying his new-found freedom, and will laud it over

us (like Ralph does) for years to come.
CONGRATULATIONS, Jim!

Chris Kull will be taking over the combined collections upon Jim's retirement.

Celebrating Women

By Chris Kull, Archivist

March is Women's History Month and G.R.O.W. Monroe and the Historical Museum will be unveiling a new display case, which will highlight philanthropic women from Monroe's past. "The mission of G.R.O.W. Monroe is to unite visionary women committed to lasting change in Monroe County through the formation of Women in Philanthropy endowed fund. Our purpose is to support community organizations and develop generations of women philanthropists."



On Monday, March 23rd, 5:00 p.m. – 6:30 p.m. the unveiling of the display case will take place. The upstairs "Hattitude" display will also be open for viewing. Originally, the "Hattitude" exhibit was put

up for February, Black History Month and March, Women's History Month. The idea went along with - Church Hats – Countless black women would rather attend church naked than hatless. It's a cherished African American custom still found in many churches in the black community, although it seems to have waned here in Monroe County. No matter, in honor of the "Church Hat" tradition, the Monroe County Historical Museum presents an exhibit of ladies hats called "HATTITUDE!"



Although the provenance of our hats is not Monroe County's black community, the hats are a look at what was available to women of the past. A wonderful companion and inspiration to the exhibit is the book *Crowns*, by Michael Cunningham and Craig Marberry.

Crowns is a book of photographs and interviews of a number of women and their hats. It sheds light on what "Church Hats" mean to many black women. Some of the women reminisce about a particular hat; others tell why they wear hats. It is a really fun book to read.

Please come to the museum on the Monday, March 23rd and wear a hat!

Eye on Education

By Lynn W. Reaume

Which groups use our facilities? Here are some examples from the Education Files:

I had some small Tiger Scouts (the youngest at first grade) at the Museum for some hands-on Native American and Fur Trade exploration. The boys were quite animated and active, but when it came to holding the furs, they sat in their chairs and petted them into pets.

The largest group this year: Stout Middle School's French classes- all 62 of them! We had set up every chair we had in the back gallery, and still had to get out more (the comfy chairs) and barely made room for all. The presentation topic was the early French here, and the connection to the Fur Trade. Just like their young counterparts, these students "came alive" and focused on the exploration of the senses with the different furs we presented. The beauty and luxury of the beaver – king and queen of the fur trade- is much more appreciated by the handling of the pelts than by any textbook.

Georgia Anderson's 25 1st graders from Milan Elementary had to cancel their annual January tour when snow cancelled school. Georgia called and rescheduled, and upon arrival gave me a HUGE hug. She loves coming to the Museum, and her small ones are the best behaved, and some of the best prepared for their visit! She had been most worried that they would have to miss this year with so many snow days. These boys and girls listen raptly and have so many questions each group is pure pleasure, and they always have a large number of parents accompanying them- they lean close to the kids to also hear what's being presented. It's the best of what we do!

Off the premises, I gave two presentations to women groups (and some men) concerning the War of 1812 and the United We Stand grant, with over 50 era reproduction clothing completed by youth and local seamstresses. The Friends in Council and Sawyer Homestead hosted the gatherings, where clothing was modeled by their own group models, or sewing participants. These programs- topics of interest to women- are so well received that it easily brings home the point that women are also interested in history and the woman's experience in it. Hands-on material culture (which dresses and other clothing are) directly tell us something about the people who wore them. These programs combine fun and history in a painless, interesting way everyone has the potential to learn from. A good night out.

Does this sound fun to you? If you could give your time during the day to bring local history to the schools as a tour guide, let me know.

Haunting Tales of Old Frenchtown

By Shawna Mazur

In a previous issue of our newsletter we looked at the old French legends of the Le Loup Garou and the Les Lutin. In this issue we are going to examine the legends of the Nain Rouge and the Le Feu Follet. These legends are part of Monroe's French-Canadian heritage. Over 200 years ago family members and friends gathered around the fire and related the stories they had been told and retold. In the late 1700's and early 1800's many French-Canadians migrated down from Canada to Detroit and further south to Frenchtown. They brought with them many of their rich traditions. Also, finding themselves virtually isolated, these tales helped explain many of the unknown dangers

they encountered in a new mysterious territory. Over time and through assimilation however, many of these traditions were lost. Often the tales would take on the local flavor of the area where they were being recited as well as the people who lived there.



One popular legend concerns Detroit and a goblin it calls all its own, known as the Nain Rouge, or the “Red Devil.” It is described as being short, covered in red or black fur, having red blazing eyes, horns on its head and rotten teeth. The Nain Rouge is a harbinger of doom and thus seeing it is a bad omen. The legend of the Nain Rouge is as old as the city itself, and can be traced to its founder Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac.

It all started on March 10, 1701 in St Louis, Quebec. A party was being held in honor of Cadillac. A fortuneteller, noted for her great ability to read palms, offered to read Cadillac’s palm. She told him that he would be the founder of a great city, but she also seen the city shrouded in darkness. She explained to Cadillac that the city would be *“the scene of strife and bloodshed. The Indians will be*

treacherous, the hated English will struggle for its possession, but under a new flag it will reach a height of prosperity which you never in your wildest dreams pictured.”(1)

Cadillac was enthralled with her message, and asked her just how much his children would inherit from him. She looked at him intently and warned him that “undue ambition” could be his downfall. Lastly she added that he needed to *“appease the Nain Rouge and beware of offending him.”* If he did not heed this warning, his children would stand to inherit nothing. Cadillac found her predictions very entertaining and amusing, but he did not take them seriously and simply forgot about them as the years passed.(2)

One day while enjoying a stroll in the new city he founded, Cadillac and his wife overheard two men talking despairingly about the city. One man commented, *“things cannot run very long like this. My wife, a few days ago, saw le petit homme Rouge.”* When she heard this, Cadillac’s wife suddenly remembered the fortuneteller’s predictions. She immediately turned to Cadillac in fear and trepidation. Cadillac was surprised at her demeanor and laughed it off. Suddenly, however, a red faced dwarf-like figure with cold glistening eyes and pointed teeth blocked their way. Cadillac started hitting it with his walking stick yelling for it to get away. The dwarf mockingly laughed at Cadillac and simply vanished out of sight.(3)

Unfortunately Cadillac did not heed the fortuneteller’s advice and suddenly found himself beset with all kinds of trouble. He was soon imprisoned in Montreal and was forced to sell his rights in Detroit. He ultimately died in France penniless. As a result of the harbinger of doom, Cadillac’s children were left with nothing.

While the sighting of the Nain Rouge by Cadillac is the first recognition of the gnome, historians have found references to the “Demon of the Strait,” as it was called, in Indian legends as well. The descriptions of the demon are eerily similar to that of the Nain Rouge.

There have also been many sightings since the time of Cadillac. The red devil was spotted stalking British Captain James Dalyell along the banks of the Detroit River, on July 30, 1763, the day before the Battle of Bloody Run. The next day Chief Pontiac and the Indians ambushed the captain and his 58 soldiers. The river was said to have turned red with blood from the battle.

The next sighting was in 1805; the dwarf was spotted many times in the city of Detroit just before the massive fire that engulfed most of the town on June 11th.

On August 16, 1812, just before he surrendered the entire American Army to the British, General William Hull claimed he seen the Nain Rouge in the fog grinning at him.

Inhabitants of the city of Detroit claimed they seen the little devil just before the terrible riots that rocked the city in 1967.

The last time the goblin was spotted was in 1976. On March 1st two utility workers thought they spotted a small child going up a utility pole. But upon closer inspection they described a small creature fitting the profile of the Nain Rouge. Not long after that Detroit was hit with one of the worst ice storms in the city’s history.(4)



Another popular French legend is that of the Le Feu Follet or Will-O'-the-Wisp. The Feu Follet is often described as a mysterious moving ball of light or a sudden flash of light. Today it would probably be known as an “orb”. The legend contends that the light almost always appears at night and is the soul of a dead sinner. The devil gives the soul the power to transform himself/herself into a bright light. The light has supernatural powers and the unsuspecting victim is thrown into a trance and lead to their doom by falling off a cliff, hill, or falling into a lake, quicksand, etc....

Mrs. Geraldine Robinson, a local resident of Monroe, who was interviewed in 1976, remembers hearing a story about the Feu Follet when she was a young girl. She said her Uncle Pete and his family lived on an island in the River Raisin called Johnson’s Island and when they wanted to come into town they would hop into their rowboat to get to the mainland. He told her that one night when they were rowing home on the river, a “huge ball of fire settled on one end of the boat.” Scared to death, he and his brothers furiously paddled the ores trying to get away from the phenomenon. Unfortunately, Mrs. Robinson doesn’t elaborate anymore on just what happened. But she does state that her Uncle Pete felt

as if the “Devil was chasing them out of Monroe.”(5)

In *Legends of Le Detroit*, Marie Hamlin, tells the tale of the Feu Follet using two well-known French families of the time that lived in Grosse Ile, and Frenchtown -- the Macomb’s and the Navarre’s. In this tale Monique Navarre and her brother Robert, go to visit Monique’s love interest, William Macomb Jr. He is not at home however, and his servant says he should have returned by now. A storm is brewing and Monique, who has a very nervous and superstitious temperament, fears something horrible has happened to William. But Robert, having a more practical nature, is sure his sister is getting herself worked up over nothing.

Suddenly the sound of a loud whistle is heard and a flash of light pierces the darkness. Monique panics and screams that it is the Feu Follet. Robert tries to appease her fears by asking her to explain just what the Feu Follet is. She goes on to explain that the Feu Follet is divided into two species, male and female. The lights are thought to be the souls of those who have sinned morally in some way. The devil gives them the power to cast off their bodies and transform themselves into bright lights. Yet, they are not always dangerous, it depends upon whether one or two lights are seen. Two lights are not dangerous, but one light is a bad omen and *“he who sees it must at once throw himself on the ground covering his face, for so seductive is its fascination that it allures him to deserted bogs and steep ravines, and leaves him to die.”*(6)

As time drags on Monique and the servant get increasingly more nervous. Finally the servant says that he has never known William to be so late and perhaps Monique is right and something terrible has happened to him. Robert realizes the only way to assuage both of their fears is to set out and look for William. Monique

starts screaming William’s name as they head out into the stormy night. Finally after a little while, exhausted from the walk and yelling, Monique lets out one last desperate cry for her love. As if answering her plea, a single pistol shot suddenly fills the air. Monique runs to where the sound originated from, and is frightened to see a body in the murky swamp struggling to stay afloat. Joining hands, the little group, made a hand rope of sorts to reach William and pull him up out of the swamp.

Everyone rejoiced when they realized William was all right and they asked him to relate just what had happened to him. He explained that on his way home, he somehow lost his way in the darkness. As he struggled to find the path, a bright light appeared out of nowhere and seemed to guide him. He followed it thinking it was friendly. As he continued on though, it started to recede, so he drew closer to it, until all of the sudden he fell headlong into the swamp. He screamed for help, but all he heard in return was the “mocking laughter of the goblins.” Exhausted and no longer able to go on, he accepted his fate, when all of the sudden he heard the familiar voice of his loved one beckoning his name. Unable to yell anymore, he reached for his pistol and discharged it.

It was the Feu Follet Monique retorted. William replied, “Anything you believe in will suit me now and for all time.” It even appeared that Robert now began to wonder if the legend had some truth to it. A few months later, Monique and William were married in Detroit.(7)

The legend of the Feu Follet has been written in many variations, as is the case with most of the French tales. The characters, locations, and even the story lines may vary. But one thing they usually have in common is the devil, or some form of supernatural power.

To learn more about these legends or other French tales, please visit our archives at the Monroe County Historical Museum. Also, on October 16 & 17 and 23 & 24, we will have our premiere living history event of the year-Lantern Tours. Learn what life was like in early 1800's Frenchtown and see these legends, among others come to life each year.

Footnotes:

1. Hamlin, Marie Caroline Watson. *Legends of Le Detroit*. Detroit: Thorndike Nourse, 1884; Reprint, Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1977, p.26.
2. Ibid., p.27.
3. Ibid., p.36-7.
4. www.michigansotherside.com/Articles/TheNainRouge.htm
www.absolutemichigan.com/dig/michigan/the-nain-rouge-a-detroit-ghost-story/
5. Strass, Anne-Marie. "French Canadian Folklore from Monroe County, Michigan", August 25, 1982. Monroe County Historical Museum Archives, Monroe, p.42.
6. Hamlin, Marie Caroline Watson. *Legends of Le Detroit*. p.139.
7. Ibid., p.140-1.

For Sale

-The Genealogical Society of Monroe County has donated 10 copies of marriage record books, Volumes 1, 2 & 4 to the archives to sell. Volumes are \$10 each.

-Back Issues of Monroe Magazine from 1980's for sale for \$2 each. Proceeds go to the Verhoeven Fund.

Please contact Chris Kull in the archives, Thanks, 734-240-7780.

We Need You

If you have some spare time on your hands, please consider volunteering at our museums.

Museum Needs

- Thompsons Water Seal
- White Paint
- Firewood
- Wood Chips
- Garden Hoses

Monroe County Historical Museum's 2009 Calendar of

Events

All dates and times are subject to change. Please call the Museum for verification at 734-24-7780.

Also for up to date museum information, please visit our own sponsored websites:

- County website at www.co.monroe.mi.us
- Emonroe at www.monroe.mi.emerciv.com, choose "groups", then "historical"
- TravelMichigan at www.michigan.org/travel, select "Monroe" under cities, then "Museums; historical" under attractions
- River Raisin Battlefield riverraisinbattlefield.org

Remember, going elsewhere may give you incorrect or outdated information

March

- | | |
|----|--|
| 1 | Women's History Month Exhibit Opening at Museum |
| 23 | Women in Philanthropy Exhibit Opening at Museum, 5-6:30pm |
| 28 | Maple Sugar Day at Trading Post, 10am-3pm |
| 30 | <i>Traveling Civil War Mississippi</i> presentation by Dave Ingall at the Farmington Public Library, 7pm |

April

21 *Zouaves* presentation by John Gibney at Barnes & Noble, Rochester, MI.

Battle of the River Raisin presentation by Dave Ingall at the Carleton Library, 6:30pm

25 7:30-9:30pm
Downtown Monroe Halloween Trick or Treat
31 Battlefield closes for season

December

2-31 Christmas Tree Festival at Museum
5 Christmas at the Trading Post

May

2 Battlefield Opens for season, weekends only, 10am-5pm
9 *Fur Trade Day* at Trading Post, 10am-3pm
14 *Monroe County Soldiers in the Civil War* presentation by Dave Ingall, Ellis Library, 7pm
16 River Raisin Battlefield Open House, 10am-5pm
16-22 Michigan Week throughout Monroe
17 Founders Day throughout Monroe
18 *Zouaves* presentation by John Gibney at the Farmington Public Library, 7pm
18-22 Trading Post/Country Store open for Michigan Week, 1-5pm
30-31 1st Kentucky Regimental Encampment at Trading Post, 10am-5pm

June

6 Battlefield begins Summer hours, Friday-Tuesday, 10am-5pm
19 Fife & Drum Muster Concert, 7pm-9pm
20 Fife & Drum Muster, 10am-4pm

August

2-8 Eby Cabin open at Monroe County Fair, 11am-10pm
3-7 Trading Post/Country Store open, 1pm-5pm
30 Battlefield Summer hours end

September

5 Battlefield starts Fall hours, weekends only, 10am-5pm

October

2 Custer Celebration Week Grand Opening
3-10 Custer Celebration Week throughout Monroe
16-17 Lantern Tours at Trading Post, 7:30-9:30pm
23-24 Lantern Tours at Trading Post,