

# MOUNT PROSPECT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

KEEPING HOMETOWN MEMORIES ALIVE

# MUSEUM JOURNAL

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## HONORING MEYN THE BLACKSMITH LEGACY BY: JEAN MURPHY

The Mount Prospect Historical Society will soon add another exhibit to its bustling downtown Mount Prospect campus.

Thanks to a generous donation from the Meyn family, the northern portion of the old Friedrichs carriage house will soon be transformed into a blacksmith exhibit. In fact, a replica of John Meyn's Blacksmith Shop sign has already been made and erected above the door, as a harbinger of things to come. The opening is expected to occur in late summer this year.

The exhibit will be a permanent replica of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Meyn shop, pictured right, but periodic modern blacksmithing demonstrations are planned in conjunction with the exhibit.

\* \* \*

Johann (John) Meyn left Heide, Holstein (Germany), in 1882 at the age of 19. By that time he had already trained as a blacksmith and served two years in his homeland's military, but was unwilling to serve three more years, as commanded. His widowed father was planning to remarry, so John immigrated to the United States alone to start a new life. He had a hometown friend who had preceded him and found his way to Chicago, so the family suspects that that is how John, too, came to Illinois and ended up in Arlington Heights, working as an assistant to a blacksmith there.

Before long, John Moehling, the first general store merchant in neighboring Mount Prospect, convinced John Meyn to move and open his own blacksmith and wagon maker shop in the fledgling community. In fact, Moehling offered Meyn a place to live with his own family and built Meyn's first shop on the northwest corner of what is now Main



Street and Northwest Highway.

Meyn courted and married Christina Henningsmeier, daughter of Fred Henningsmeier, who had a farm south of the railroad tracks at Main and Lincoln Streets. By 1885 William Wille was building the new couple a small house alongside the blacksmith shop. It was the first house built in Mount Prospect that was not also used as a store or farmhouse and it cost the princely sum of \$350. Moehling sold the new couple the entire triangular area of property where their shop and house were located.

The Meyns raised seven children there and an eighth child died at the age of four. Meanwhile, the Meyn blacksmith shop was a busy place, especially during the fall when they were often open from 5 a.m. to 11 p.m., shoeing horses for farmers during harvest time. Betty Hodges Wooten (John Meyn's granddaughter,) believes that coal was used to fire the Meyn forge since William Wille's coal business was located across the street, but no one is certain. American smithies at the time used a variety of fuels – from

coke to coal, charcoal or oil.

Wooten also recalled tales her brother, Larry, born in 1926, told of watching his grandpa work in the blacksmith shop, but being rushed out to a safe distance when he was shoeing a horse.

John Meyn was reportedly famous among his grandchildren for having a candy dish in his house that he kept filled with goodies for when they visited. He also gave them quarters, which everyone considered very generous.

Ruth Meyn Goebbert recalled hearing that the blacksmith shop was more than a place to shoe horses, repair wagons and fix tools. It was also a place of warmth and camaraderie for the locals. John would sometimes ask his son, John Jr., who worked alongside his brothers in the shop, to grab a pail and run across the street to Wille's Tavern to get beer for the farmers to enjoy as they discussed the news of the

day. Or was it Kruse's Tavern?

Family members disagree.

John Meyn was also well-known for creating high-end wagons and buggies and repairing machinery.

The Cook County Herald proclaimed on

*(Continued on page 3)*

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**FROM THE DESK OF THE DIRECTOR**

The Mount Prospect Historical Society is pleased to announce a new phase in its programming. This summer two sessions of History Camp will be offered in June and July.

The week-long sessions will be held the second week of each month (June 10-14 & July 8-12) and each features a local history themed day camp experience for

children ages 6 to 12. Different aspects of local history will be explored each day on the Society's campus and at various community locations through activities, projects and walking field trips. Each week's programming is diverse, so campers registering for both sessions will have new experiences.

History Camp was developed by trained educators and is overseen by Lindsay Rice, the Society's Executive Director. "We're excited to be launching this new program," said Rice. "It's a fun way to showcase the history of our community so kids can learn about it in a hands-on, interactive way."

History Camp sessions will run from 9 a.m. to noon. Cost is \$100 per camper, per week. Space is limited, so don't miss this

exciting opportunity! Reservations may be made through the Society's website at [www.mtphist.org/history-camp-2019](http://www.mtphist.org/history-camp-2019) or by calling the Society at 847/392-9006.



**UPCOMING EVENTS**

- History in the Headlines: 50th Anniversary of Woodstock: Sat., April 13, 6-10 p.m., Rob Roy Golf Course, 505 E. Camp McDonald Rd.
- Second Sunday at the Society: Sun., April 14, 11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m., Historical Society campus
- Second Sunday at the Society: Sun., May. 13, 11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m., Historical Society campus
- MOD Pizza Fundraiser: Wed., May 15, all day at MOD Pizza, Randhurst Village

Call 847/392-9006 for more information.

This winter the Historical Society lost two stalwart former Board members. Rachel Toppfen passed away Nov. 25 at the age of 92 and Dolores Haugh followed on Jan. 10 at the age of 95.

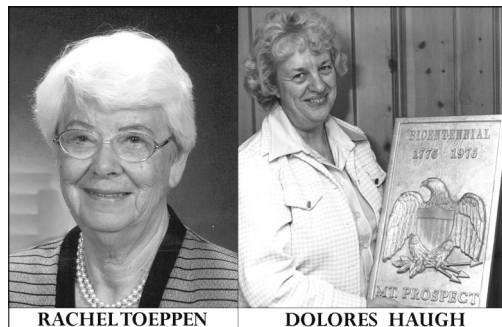
Rachel was a vibrant resident and volunteer in Mount Prospect. She was a member of the Garden Club for 52 years and was the recipient of "The Lorax Award" for beautifying the Village. She was involved in the Historical Society and organized the gardens of the museum campus so that they were historically-appropriate. She fought for them; she recruited people to tend them and solicited money to enhance them; and she truly loved those gardens!

For several years she ran an auction of decorated bird houses in order to fund the things she wanted to do to make the museum grounds even lovelier. It was no surprise when the Society honored her by dedicating the trellis garden next to the Education Center to Rachel.

Rachel also started and ran the Sew-Bee-It Quilters group.

The very popular purse auction was also a Rachel inspiration. She had seen one done in her travels and thought the Society could do it and raise money to restore the schoolhouse.

**SOCIETY LOSES TWO POWERHOUSES**



That auction is now one of our best fundraisers, thanks to a great committee, which included Rachel until she moved to Colorado in 2016 to be close to her daughter. Right before Rachel resigned from the Board, the Board made her a Director Emeritus.

Dolores Haugh passed away a few weeks later. She was one of the core people who founded the Historical Society in 1967 and served as president for many years. In the late 1980s she heard that the 1906 Dietrich Friedrichs house was up for sale and the bank across the street planned to raze it for parking. She jumped into action and led a group of citizens who went door-to-door to collect money and solicited local businesses to save the historic home. She led the group which restored and carefully

furnished the home to fit the era of 1917. During the 1990s, she oversaw the design and construction of an Education Center for groups to use, and to honor ADA regulations, which demanded public restrooms in museums.

Beyond the Society's doors, Dolores worked as a local journalist, editing the *Prospect Day*; was the first Public Information Officer for the Village; and was the Executive Director of the Mount Prospect Chamber of Commerce. She started many of the community events that are still going today, such as the Farmers Market and the Teddy Bear Walk. She also published a photo history of Riverview Amusement Park.

It came as no surprise when the Village honored her with one of its first Shining Star Awards in 1995, "The Living Legend Award," honoring her formidable and admirable local legacy. The Society honored her, too. As part of the Centennial activities in 2017, it dedicated its Education Center to Dolores, a Director Emeritus, and the building now proudly bears her name.

Dolores and Rachel were both forces to be reckoned with and we have to imagine Mount Prospect would be a much different place today if it were not for their vision, tenacity and hard work.

(Continued from page 1)

August 24, 1902, that "Henry Linnemann has a new truck wagon that will last at least a life time. It is all handmade, the running gear is of second growth seasoned oak, the box of poplar, all trimmed with wrought steel, the wheels have 3-inch steel tires. It was built by the well-known wagon makers, John Meyn & Son of Mt. Prospect, who have several orders for their celebrated wagons."

The "son" who worked with John was his eldest, Herman, who later became Mount Prospect's second mayor, steering the town through the harrowing Great Depression during the 1930s. His 1912 home and carriage house sit at 22 S. Maple St., directly north of the Society's museum across Busse Ave. Herman's granddaughter, Pam Dammen (who owns the home today), reports that that carriage house still contains an old wagon tongue, made in the Meyn shop. The wagon tongue is installed vertically

to prop up the floor of the hay loft, and an old Meyn horseshoe is embedded in the concrete driveway by the door. There is also a Meyn-made wagon wheel half-buried in front of an oak tree in the yard. Pam also recalls finding square-headed nails while gardening at the house.

While John Meyn called himself a "Blacksmith," he was, in reality, both a blacksmith and a "farrier." Technically, a blacksmith is a skilled metal smith who creates objects from wrought iron or steel by forging the metal and using tools to hammer, bend and cut it. They produce agricultural implements, cooking utensils, weapons, tools, gates, railings, furniture, etc. A blacksmith has a general knowledge of how to make and repair many things, from complex weapons to simple nails.

The "black" in the term refers to the black fire scale, a layer of oxides that forms on the surface of the metal during heating.

A farrier is a specialist who shoes horses. They fabricate, adapt and adjust metal shoes to a horse's hoof, but also trim and balance the hoof and place the shoes. Today's farriers

also treat injured and diseased hooves, and have many more veterinary skills than Meyn and his contemporaries probably did.

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when John Meyn was a blacksmith (see picture below) farming was accomplished with the power of horses, so the skills of a blacksmith were important to the local economy. The shop was also a popular destination to wait for repairs of equipment, have horses shod and



hear the latest town news, according to the book, *Growing Seasons*, written by Elsie Lee Splear.

Blacksmiths were skilled craftsmen, "who heated iron to shape it, using a forge, anvil, hammers, specialized tools and a tub of water. The forge was the hearth where iron was heated over clean burning coals. Large leather bellows were used to regulate the temperature of the forge, through piped air. A chimney pulled smoke up and out of the building," also according to *Growing Seasons*. The blacksmith's anvil was a large block of iron, mounted on a heavy timber post. It had a flat top and a pointed horn, for hammering and shaping the heated iron. A blacksmith used a variety of hammers, tongs, chisels and punches to create, repair, rivet or weld. With a vise and files, he refined the rough edges of his ironwork. The ability to shape iron, by heat and tools, has been a highly valued skill throughout history.

By the time Meyn was smithing, an American blacksmith's work had grown to include repairing all types of manufactured horse-drawn farm machinery, wagons, carriages and

sleighs. He also sharpened plows, saws and other tools. For raw materials, Meyn and his contemporaries ordered lengths of heavy iron and steel (iron with carbon), delivered by rail, so the Meyn shop's proximity to the rail stop was key.

Blacksmiths like John Meyn could also make utensils for use in a fireplace or on a stove, along with hinges, hooks, nuts and bolts, locks, latches, chains, braces, spikes, nails, drill bits and tools.

"Even in a small shop, the blacksmith usually had a least one assistant to help him, as he heated and worked the iron. Several younger boys would often do the chores and errands. Blacksmithing was a skilled trade, learned through years of apprenticeship," *Growing Seasons* explained.

Meyn reportedly did plenty of horseshoeing for the people of Mount Prospect and surrounding areas. Family members recall hearing "clinks" from his shop as he pounded horseshoes into shape. The horseshoes that the family still possesses were individually fashioned out of iron bar stock.

Many farm horses worked unshod in the fields, but horses that regularly hauled wagons on hard roads, worked on rugged terrain, or in icy conditions, had special horseshoes, created by the blacksmith to protect their hooves and give them better traction, according to *Growing Seasons*.

"When using horses for farming and transportation came to an end, it forever changed the blacksmith's role in the community. The traditional, small town blacksmith's shop gradually went out of business, or evolved into the first automobile repair shops and dealerships, as the horsepower of mechanical engines replaced the power of horses," it continued.

And that is exactly what happened with the Meyns of Mount Prospect. Herman Meyn later sold gas-powered farm implements and lawn mowers from a store south of today's Mrs. P & Me restaurant and he razed his father's old blacksmith shop during the 1930s to erect a Sinclair service station in its place (which today houses Submarine Express).



## MOUNT PROSPECT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

101 South Maple Street  
Mount Prospect, IL 60056-3229  
www.mtphist.org

Located on the southeast corner of Maple Street and Busse Avenue, across from the Chase Bank Building

Phone: 847/392-9006  
Fax: 847/577-9660  
Email: info@mtphistory.org



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## CELEBRATE THE 50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE WOODSTOCK MUSIC FESTIVAL AT THE ANNUAL "HISTORY IN THE HEADLINES" DINNER

The Mount Prospect Historical Society will hold "Woodstock – 1 Night of Food, Peace and History," its eighth annual History in the Headlines dinner, on Saturday, April 13, at 6 p.m. at Rob Roy Country Club, 505 E. Camp McDonald Rd., Prospect Heights.

Travel back in time 50 years to celebrate and toast the days of hippies and rock music with the Mount Prospect Historical Society, set amidst the food, music and décor of 1969.

A series of authentic hippie food stations will be set up around the room, ranging from hamburgers and hot dogs to hors d'oeuvres of the time, vegetables, rice, yogurt parfaits, a salad bar, brownies and "Alice B. Toklas fudge" for a nearly authentic experience.

There will also be a cash bar with signature cocktails of the era and vintage beers like Pabst Blue Ribbon, Schlitz and Miller Hi Life offered.

Mount Prospect Historical Society's 8th Annual  
"History In The Headlines" Dinner  
celebrating the 50th anniversary of  
the Woodstock Music Festival

# woodstock

Saturday, April 13 • 6 – 10 pm

**Rob Roy Clubhouse**  
505 E. Camp McDonald Road  
Prospect Heights, IL

**1 NIGHT OF FOOD & PEACE & HISTORY**

Historian Ellie Carlson will talk about that pivotal moment in modern history and its long-lasting effects on this country.

Authentic Hippie "food stations" buffet  
Cash bar with signature 1960s-era cocktails and authentic beers of the time  
Woodstock trivia contest

Reservations required. To register, visit [www.mtphist.org](http://www.mtphist.org) and pay through PayPal.  
Seating is limited and may be reserved individually or in tables of ten.

For more information  
Call the Mount Prospect Historical Society at 847-392-9006 or log on to [www.mtphist.org](http://www.mtphist.org)

Tickets on sale March 1st  
\$50 per person

Party-goers are welcome to dress casually or in appropriate hippie garb and after dinner they will be entertained by the "ElliePresents" production team, which will reminisce about that pivotal moment in modern history and its long-lasting effects on this country.

There will also be a challenging Woodstock trivia competition during the ElliePresents' intermission, and a raffle chocked with concert tickets and appropriately themed prizes. Seats are limited and may be reserved individually or in tables of ten beginning March 1. For more information or to purchase tickets via PayPal, visit [www.mtphist.org](http://www.mtphist.org). You may also call

847/392-9006, Tuesday through Thursday during office hours, to reserve tickets and pay by credit card.

All of the proceeds from this event will benefit the Mount Prospect Historical Society's Operating Fund.