Midwest Open Air Museums Magazine

MOMCC

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Swedish Christmas at Bishop Hill, Illinois

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AmericInn, Kewanee, Illinois ❖ Sessions at Bishop Hill, Illinois

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INTERPRETING AGRICULTURE AT MUSEUMS AND HISTORIC SITES

INTERPRETING THE ENVIRONMENT AT MUSEUMS AND HISTORIC SITES

By Debra A. Reid

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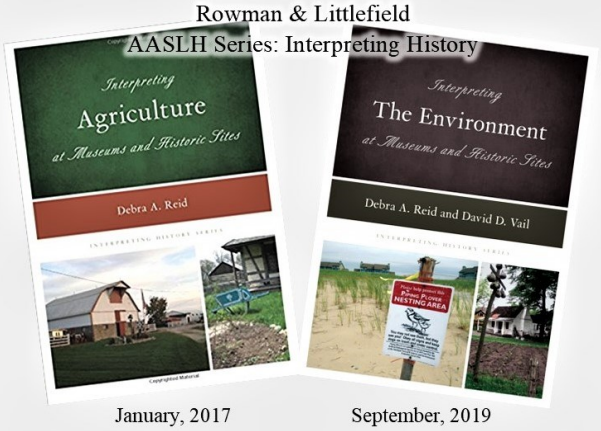

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Midwest Open Air Museums Magazine

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FEATURE ARTICLES

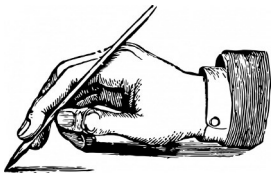
DEPARTMENTS

Cover Photos - The Bishop Hill Julmarknad or Christmas Market features locally made crafts and gifts in all the shops including the Colony Store (upper left). A model train and exhibits are featured in the Steeple Building (upper right), and the Julbock and Tomten elves roam the town (lower left). The Tomten, portrayed by local youth, pose with the straw Yule Goat (lower right). (All photos courtesy of the Bishop Hill Heritage Association)

MOMCC is the Midwest Regional Affiliate of ALHFAM
The Association for Living History, Farm and Agricultural Museums

Editor's Notebook

By Tom Vance



ONE of the volunteers at the Five Mile House and magazine associate editor, Cheryl Hawker, had been telling me about Fowler Park south of Terre Haute, Indiana for several years. So this past October, my wife, Sue, and I made the trip over to their fall event.

The village consists of 12 log houses, log school and church, a log blacksmith shop, a tannery, and a large log barn. All of the buildings date from the early to mid 19th century and most came from the local area. For the event, all the buildings were staffed with volunteers demonstrating a wide array of period crafts and trades.

The site also has a reproduction working grist mill. I was aware of the mill because back in my Lincoln Log Cabin days, we would send our White Hickory King open-pollinated corn over to be ground into corn meal, but I had never seen it in person.

The mill was a cooperative effort between volunteers, the park district, and the Indiana State University School of Technology and was completed in 1991. The full-size mill stones turn out stone-ground cornmeal when the mill is in operation.

Later in the month, Sue and I made our annual fall trek to Tennessee to see friends in Clarksville. This year we continued on to Pigeon Forge for a couple of days where we visited the Titanic Museum and spent a day and evening at Dollywood.

The Titanic Museum, along with the Titanic Museum in Branson, Missouri, are owned and operated by the man who headed the 1987 expedition to the Titanic. The museum includes first-class exhibits that cover all aspects of the ship and passengers. There is a re-creation of the grand staircase and a touching memorial to the eight musicians who continued to play as the ship went down.

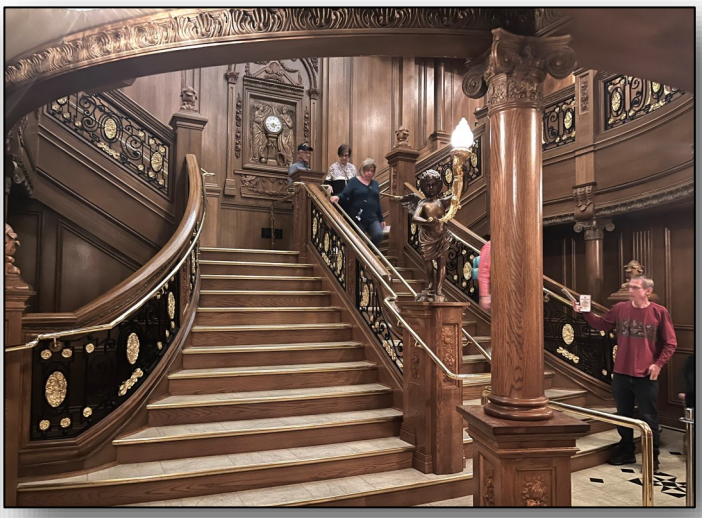
With John Bielik at Dollywood in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee.

Dollywood is a fun theme park, particularly if you like roller coasters which are everywhere. Being way past our coaster years, however, we enjoyed some of the shows, found a couple of sit-down places to eat and enjoyed the crafts people they feature during the Fall season. Their fall "Great Pumpkin LumiNights" lit up the park after dark and was a lot of fun to see.

One of the craftsmen, located front and center on the main street, was our good MOMCC friend and paper marbler, John Bielik. We see John at most of the MOMCC conferences and he will be conducting a paper marbling workshop at the upcoming spring conference at Bishop Hill.

Bishop Hill is a wonderful historic community dating from the mid-19th century, so be sure to sign up for the spring conference. Until then...

***Grist Mill at Fowler Park, Indiana** is a full working grist mill. It was created in 1991 through a cooperative effort.*



***The grand staircase** at the Titanic Museum in Pigeon Forge, Tenn. is a recreation of the original on the Titanic.*

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Magazine Advertisements

All ad pricing is per issue. The Magazine is published in B&W with color covers 4 times per year and is mailed to approximately 300 members. It is also made available electronically as a color PDF document to the members of MOMCC and Midwest ALHFAM via the website.

Display Ads

Please provide electronic copy (in color for the on-line version) in PDF or JPG format. Graphic layout services are available on request.

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President's Perspective

By Elmer Schulz

"The time has come, the Walrus said, to talk of many things; of shoes — and ships — and sealing wax — of cabbages — and kings…" So runs the poem, *The Walrus and the Carpenter*, by Lewis Carroll, from *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*, 1872. I have always enjoyed this piece of classic literature, especially as a prelude to an introduction. As the new President of MOMCC I look forward to serving you.

Lately, as I take on my new responsibilities with BHS, I cannot help but ponder a most important and fundamental question to the community, "Why does MOMCC exist and why should we care?" Recently, I told someone, in a lighthearted manner, that I was in the memory business. In all seriousness, the purpose of MOMCC is to promote excellence and to provide a forum for the interchange of materials, information, ideas, and consideration of professional issues within the open air, interactive, and historical museum professions. This is accomplished through regularly-scheduled conferences as well as the *Midwest Open Air Museums Magazine* and additional printed and electronic resources.

Consider now your part in the process as we continue to grow and strive to meet the needs of our membership and the community of living historians at large. Membership, they say, has its privileges. Quite frankly, we need your participation. Recently we had to cancel the Fall 2023 Conference at Tiller's International. Instead, we held a virtual Town Hall gathering to meet the obligation for our Annual Business meeting, announce elected officers, by-law updates, and the Candice Metallic award. The board also wished to survey the input from the membership.

Financial costs and lack of interest doomed the conference. But for me this scarcity was alarming in the context of a need to find qualified individuals willing to serve on the board. Lack of participation is a death knell of any organization. Notably, the pandemic still has a grip on how we choose to meet, share, and communicate. But apathy is a condition that we simply must surmount if we are to survive as a relevant and viable organization.

This is not strictly a board issue… it is ALL our issue. Increased participation in attending conferences and workshops is essential. Increased involvement in serving on the board, contributing to the newsletter, and membership outreach is key.

I have no inspired plan, only a steady hand at the helm. I can tell you that I desire an organization where there is vibrant, relevant, and audacious action. And an emphasis on innovative practices, exchange of ideas, direct demonstrations, experimentations, fellowship, fieldtrips, fundamental instruction, processes, skills, and strong resource groups around pastural settings. Thank you.

Your Humble Servant,

Elmer

P.S. I'll see you at Bishop Hill

MOMCC Fellowship Application

2024 MOMCC Spring Conference

Bishop Hill, Illinois

March 21-23, 2024

Seeking Utopia

A Look at How Innovations and Traditions Help Some Utopias Thrive

A limited number of fellowships to help offset conference costs.
Fellowships cover conference registration in addition to funds for lodging at the conference site.

All applications must be received by February 15, 2024

Please visit **www.momcc.org** for the full application
including necessary qualifications and selection criteria.

Call for Sessions and Workshops

2024 Fall Conference

November 13-15, 2024

Hosted by Usher's Ferry, Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Cultivating Community

Preserving the Past, Serving the Present, and Nurturing the Future

Museums rely heavily upon community support, but how do they use their mission of preserving local history to serve and support their communities in return? Join us at Ushers Ferry Historic Village in Cedar Rapids, Iowa as we explore the roots of agrarian communities and how they developed, flourished and, in some cases, faded. From farming villages to the six square mile township district that served rural citizens before the advent of automobiles, good roads and centralized county government, take a deeper look beyond the daily activities of farm life or small town commerce to explore issues of law, government, education, transportation, social welfare, and how every-day rural citizens stepped forward to serve and build the framework of the midwest towns and cities that we know today.

Session proposals should be submitted by February 15, 2024

Submit proposals to Bill "Sandy" Kreuger, Program Chair,

Bill.kreuger@gl-iowa.org ❖ Phone (319)210-1935

SEE THE MOMCC WEBSITE FOR MORE DETAILS - WWW.MOMCC.ORG

Midwest Open Air Museums Coordinating Council

MOMCC was established in 1978 with the goal of furthering the interchange of materials, information, and ideas within the history museum field.

Membership

We welcome membership and participation from administrators, volunteers, interpreters, curators, historians, educators, maintenance/facilities staff, gift shop workers, facilitators, docents, and anyone else with an interest in history and public education. Membership is $30 per year for individuals, $35 for families, and $50 for institutions. Membership application can be found at www.momcc.org.

Our Purpose

The purpose of MOMCC is to further promote excellence and to provide a forum for the interchange of materials, information, ideas, and consideration of issues within the open air, interactive, and historical museum profession.

MIDWEST REGION: The Midwest is defined as the eight states of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, and Wisconsin.

OPEN-AIR MUSEUM: Interpreting life as material culture in the context of buildings, objects, and open space. A site or facility that interprets history through exhibits, living history interpretation, and/or educational programs.

Resource Committees

Interpretation, Music, Art, and Material Culture

Leadership and Supervision

Agriculture, Gardens, and Foodways

Media Resources

2023-2024 MOMCC Board of Directors

President

Elmer Schulz lives in Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio after working at various museums throughout Northeastern Ohio since the late 1980s. He is currently serving as a museum and interpretive/education consultant. He is a past board member and has attended, hosted, and presented at numerous MOMCC conferences.

Vice President

Ann Cejka is the Program Coordinator for Ushers Ferry Historic Village in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, where she also serves as curator of collections, manages social media, and produces various forms of electronic media. She holds a Bachelor's degree in History and Public Relations from Mount Mercy College.

Treasurer

Tom Kranc is originally from Chicago but has been a resident of Northwest Indiana where his wife and four children were volunteers at Buckley Homestead for many years. Tom received a BS degree in accounting from Calumet College of St. Joseph in Whiting, Indiana. He retired in October 2021 after working as an accountant for 44 years.

Secretary

Sue Chemler holds BFA's from the University of Illinois in Art Education and Art History, plus a graduate certificate in Museum Studies from Northern Illinois University. Her art is textiles. She has taught at all levels and worked with Scouts and museums to create innovative programing. She currently volunteers at the School of the Art Institute, Fashion Resource center. She has been involved with MOMCC since 1986.

Past President

Gail Richardson worked at Sauder Village for 19 years as Foodways Supervisor overseeing cooking and food-related activities and helping with collections in the winter months. Her title was Educational Specialist and Sauder Village beekeeper. She has been active in MOMCC for the past 14 years.

Member-at-Large

Hannah Harvey has been involved with living history since the age of four. A native of southeast Wisconsin, she began her living history career at Wade House at age 16. She has since worked at the Washington County Historical Society, now Tower Heritage Center, and currently works at Manitowoc Co. Historical Societies Pinecrest Village.

Member-at-Large

Kyle Bagnall received his B.A. in Public History from Western Michigan University in 1993 and served as manager of historical programs at Chippewa Nature Center in Midland, Michigan from 1995-2017. He then served as manager of Midland's Whiting Forest of Dow Gardens for five years before moving to Mackinac State Historic Parks in 2021 as park naturalist and site manager for Historic Mill Creek Discovery Park. Kyle has been a member of MOMCC since 1997.

Member-at-Large

Robin Shuricht holds a Bachelor of Fine Art from Ohio State University in painting and drawing. She taught classes in art and weaving in Oklahoma and at the Ohio History Connection. She also developed first person character interpretation, bringing to life women in the arts from various time periods. She retired from OHC and now teaches at the Galloping Horse Handcrafts in Zanesville, and still does first person programs.

Spring Conference Coordinator

Becky Crabb recently retired as Park Manager at Lake County Parks Buckley Homestead, Indiana, where she worked since 1980. She is past president of MOMCC. After being raised on an Indiana farm, Becky earned a degree in Wildlife Biology from Ball State University.

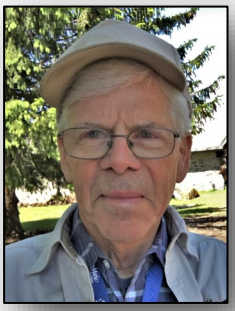
Fall Conference Coordinator

Jeanette Watts teaches workshops on historical dances from 1500-1968 for museums and re-enactors all around the United States. She is also the author of six published books. Jeanette is available for hire at Jeanette@wattses.com.

Conference Registrar

Ed Crabb has an Associate degree in Web and Graphic Design. He was a Volunteer for over 30 years at Buckley Homestead County Park in Lake County, Indiana, and is starting his sixth year as the Conference Registrar.

Magazine Editor



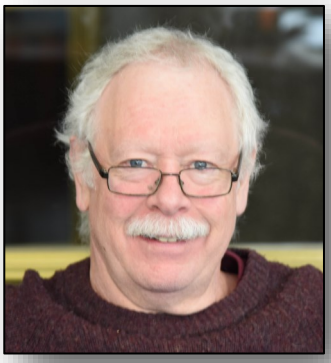
Tom Vance served as site manager at Lincoln Log Cabin State Historic Site south of Charleston, Illinois, for 28 years before retiring and then becoming a historical consultant. He is past president of MOMCC, was editor of the magazine from 1986 through 1992, and has been current editor since 2016. He holds an M.A. in Historical Administration from Eastern Illinois University.

The Candace Tangorra Matelic Award

The Midwest Open Air Museums Coordinating Council (MOMCC) established this award in honor of MOMCC's first president, Candace Tangorra Matelic. It recognizes the best article published in the *Midwest Open Air Museum Magazine* each year.

2022

Article: "American Fraternalism in the 19th & Early 20th Centuries"
Vol. XXXXIII, No. 2, Summer, 2022



Bill "Sandy" Kreuger holds a B.A. in History from Millikin University, an M.S. in Library Science, and an M.A. in Historical Administration, both from Eastern Illinois University. He has worked in museums and historical societies in various parts of the Midwest such as Indiana, Wisconsin, Kentucky, and Iowa, and has served in various positions including collections curator, historic site administrator, curator of education, and director. He is recently retired as Assistant Librarian and Curator of the Iowa Masonic Library and Museums in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, a position he held since 1997.

Previous Winners	**2012 – Gordon Bond** "The Downside of Family-Friendly"
2021 – Gary Foster "Reflections on Whirligigs Whimsies in the Wind"	**2011 – Daniel E. Jones** "Broom Corn: An Introduction to the Plant that Swept America"
2020 – Kristie Hammond "Fun is Universal—History and Interpretation of the Bilbo Catcher"	**2010 – Susan Odom** "Practical Perspective: Turning History into a Business"
2019 – Rob Kranc "A History of Radio"	**2009 – Kim Caudell** "Murder Ballads in a Nutshell: Britain vs. America"
2018 – Andrew Kercher "When it Comes to Our Collection, The 'D' Word is Something We Embrace"	**2008 – John C. Bielik** "Paper Marbling as a Hands-On Activity"
2017 – Todd Price "Telling a Story Through a Lens – The J.C. Allen Photo Collection"	**2007 – Barbara Ceiga** "Putting Visitors First: Journey from the Practical to the Profound"
2016 – Stephanie Buchanan **"Learning and** Leading: Incorporating Youth Volunteers Into an Agriculture Program"	**2006 – Laura E. Daughterty** "Pictures of the Past: Conserving and Preserving 19th Century Photographs"
2015 – Alex Stromberg "Being Disney"	**2005 – Merrilee Garner** "Community Collaboration: Schools, Museums, Historical Societies and You"
2014 – Kyle Bagnall "Project Passenger Pigeon"	**2004 – Debra A. Reid** "Living History's Long Row to Hoe"

LIKE the Pilgrims at Plymouth Rock and the Quakers who followed William Penn to Pennsylvania, the Jansonists were a group of Protestants who fled oppression, seeking religious freedom on the shores of America. Eric Janson was known as the Wheat Flour Messiah. He had a debilitating illness cured by a miracle that reshaped the rest of his life. He began preaching about our personal relationship with the Lord, not one filtered by the state religion. After being jailed for his beliefs, he fled Sweden with more than 1000 followers. These people sold everything they owned, and some families were divided, as they took the arduous journey across the North Atlantic to North America in 1846.

They sent Olof Olson as a scout to purchase property in what was then the western wilderness of Illinois. The first winter they lived in dugouts along the creek. Desolation claimed almost 100 lives that first winter and cholera claimed almost 100 more a few years later. They soon built a church for worship, large dormitories for housing, a bakery, and a brewery to feed their growing numbers. They built industry – brooms, buggies, and woven rugs – for income. They built a community that shared the wealth as they harvested the bounty of the land. They built a hospital, a school, and administrative offices. More than a town, they built what became a successful economic enterprise that valued the labor of women and men, educated their children, and cared for the sick.

The preaching and philosophy of Eric Janson is too complex for these few paragraphs, except to say that his convictions inspired many and caused consternation among more than a few. He was murdered in a Henry County Courtroom in 1850 over a quarrel with his cousin's husband. The community was then managed for a number of years by a board of trustees. The community was eventually dissolved and the holdings divided among the members with the women and children also receiving shares of the property, which was unusual in the 1860s.

Bishop Hill became a hub for thousands of Swedish Immigrants who eventually settled much of the Midwest, from Galva to Galesburg, Illinois and from Minnesota to Kansas.

By the mid-20th century many of the colony buildings were falling into disrepair. The Old Settlers, The Bishop Hill Heritage Association, and the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency stepped up to save the buildings that were still standing. Throughout the 1970s, restoration and preservation became the call to arms. With help from the Swedish Royal family, descendants of the hardy pioneers, and thousands of hours of volunteer labor, Bishop Hill became a thriving community once more. With tens of thousands of visitors every year, visitors from all 50 states, Sweden and other Scandinavian countries, Bishop

Bishop Hill in 1855 by Olaf Krans *(above)* – A panoramic view of Bishop Hill from the north showing the Colony Church, Colony Store, Carpenter's Shop, Blacksmith Shop, Steeple Building, and Dairy Building. Krans painted this scene in 1895 from memory of how Bishop Hill looked when he was 17. (Credit: Bishop Hill State Historic Site, Illinois Department of Natural Resources)

Hill has a well-earned reputation as a place to step out of the hustle and bustle and back to a simpler time. Truly a Utopia on the Prairie, it is the kind of place where it is easy to expect enchantment.

Bishop Hill, Illinois has been serving authenticity since its inception in 1846. Many other "historic villages" are actually reproductions. They have done some excellent archeology and built new structures that look old, ***or*** have moved a variety of historic structures to a re-created commons. But Bishop Hill is very much the same town you would have seen if you came through in a horse and buggy 175 years ago. It is a living, fully functional village with a mayor and fire department.

The Steeple Building – *Construction began in 1854. Today it houses the Bishop Hill Heritage association. The original Carpenter Shop and Blacksmith can be seen to the left. (Photo by Tom Vance)*

What makes it unique is that the entire town is a registered historic landmark. The people who live here still farm the surrounding countryside, cut firewood for the winter, plant broom corn in the spring, and celebrate the changing of the seasons, just as our Swedish ancestors did. Yes, we do this for the folks who come to participate, but more importantly, we do it because it is our way of living authentically. The crafts and trades that supported our forefathers and mothers are still a source of livelihood today. The pottery and brooms you buy are the same ones used in our kitchens.

You can throw the proverbial brush of last autumn on the Valborg Bonfires of spring to welcome the New Year; help haul buckets to make maple syrup and then enjoy the pancake supper; and grab a ribbon of flowers and dance around the Maypole at the Midsommar Festival. You can help to boil sorghum or try your hand at brickmaking during autumn's agricultural days, Jordbruksdagarna, and sip hot mulled wine and sing a carol during Julmarknad, the Yule Market, on a chilly winter's eve. There are events in every season for every interest.

The town hosts a book fair in April, a quilt show every May, and an Antique Car Show in July. There is a Clay Festival and fine art fair in October. There are concerts at the Commons almost every Sunday evening, and an annual Chautauqua in the square in late August.

Any day is a good day to learn a new craft from a local potter, weaver, basket maker, stained glass artist, wood carver, or broom maker. We offer an annual series of hands-on workshops to keep these traditional crafts alive and to stretch folks' creativity while helping them to make something beautiful. Guests can even research their family tree in our extensive genealogical records.

Or simply bring a picnic basket and someone you wish to spend an afternoon with under an ancient oak tree in the town square, knowing that this is authentic living at its finest. Our vibrant history is a solid foundation for our flourishing future.

This is the setting for the 2024 MOMCC Spring Conference. The many and interesting conference sessions and workshops will be held in three historic Bishop Hill buildings, the Dairy Building, completed in 1854, the Steeple Building, for which construction began in 1854, and the Colony School, completed in 1861. The third venue for sessions, workshops, and as the central gathering place is the Creative Commons, described as a "collective of visual and performing artists."

This historic town and it's charming residents are waiting to welcome MOMCC folks to an unforgettable experience at the 2024 Spring Conference, so make plans now to come to Bishop Hill in the spring. ❑

The Dairy Building – *Construction completed in 1854, this building will host conference sessions and workshops during the conference. (Photo by Tom Vance)*

Julmarknad & Lucia Nights

Travel Back to an Old Fashioned Christmas at Bishop Hill

By Brian Fox Ellis, Fox Tales International

IMAGINE the sounds of a harp and a guitar with an angelic choir of young voices singing carols. There are Christmas stories and laughter. Watch out for the mischievous Tomten lurking in the shadows. (Tomten are like Swedish elves or gnomes). Smell the hot chocolate and fresh baked cookies in every shop. See the candles burning in every window of a quaint, snow-dusted historic village.

Does this sound like your favorite fantasy of an enchanting postcard perfect Christmas from 100 years ago? Enchanting yes, but this is no fantasy. This is an old-fashioned Christmas celebrated every year in Bishop Hill, Illinois. This Utopia on the Prairie, with its deep Swedish roots really knows how to celebrate the Holidays.

There are three weekends of Christmas fun beginning with Julmarknad, a Swedish Christmas Market, held the first two weekends after Thanksgiving. Then Lucia Nights commences the second weekend in December.

Julmarknad is a fun word to say – yule-mark-nod – which is Swedish for Christmas market. This is the antithesis of the bustle and hustle of Black Friday. Bishop Hill shops are lit up with candles and filled with hand-made items. You can talk to the artist who fired the pottery, wove the rug, grew the broomcorn, knitted the mittens, blew the glass ornament, or made the chocolate. Families are invited to stroll the quiet streets, visit the museums, or play in the park.

Local youth dressed as Tomten elves *– In Sweden the Tomten elves are thought to help care for livestock if a bowl of porridge is set out to earn their favor. (Photo credit: Stephanie Taylor)*

The Straw Yule Goat *– Christmas or Yule celebration tradition in Sweden is the Yule Goat. Dating back hundreds of years, it was thought that elves rode Yule Goats from house to house to deliver gifts to sleeping children. (Bishop Hill Heritage Association)*

There is a cookie walk and local authors signing books, both Saturday and Sunday, where you can buy dozens of different kinds of homemade cookies by the pound and collect autographs from local celebrities.

The Steeple Building sets up a toy train that brings back memories of the Polar Express. They also host a make-it, take-it Christmas ornament craft. Every child can create their own keepsake with all materials provided.

The first two weekends, the Tomten prowl about town performing pranks and engaging visitors in a little Swedish whimsy. These mischievous elves are portrayed by young boys and girls from the surrounding community. They dress as brightly, spritely-colored elves with red hats and long beards. In Sweden, Tomten are rarely seen. They help folks take care of the animals. During the Holidays, the custom is to set out a bowl of porridge to earn the favor of these elves. If you do earn their favor you can count on your cows receiving good care; if not, they might lead your cow to a neighbor's field!

If you want a truly unique gift, something hand-made, something that tells a story and will become a family heirloom passed down and cherished through the generations, then visit the various shops of Bishop Hill. There are two potters, a broom maker, weaver, and blacksmith. There are

several artists who work with paint, wood-burning, crochet, macrame and blanket making, stained glass, and fused glass. Many of the crafts people often give demonstrations and are happy to talk about their craft.

Lucia Nights

The biggest event that draws folks from far and wide is Lucia Nights. Lucia Nights begins with the lighting of the park Christmas tree on Friday evening. Throughout the weekend the sidewalks are lined with luminaria and every home has candles in the window. It is the most picturesque Christmas scene you could ever imagine, truly postcard worthy!

Saint Lucia is known as the Queen of Light. During a famine in Sweden, Saint Lucia appeared on a ship laden with food. She was wearing white robes and a wreath of candles in her hair. She helped steer the ship through the fog. When the ship arrived in port and the food was unloaded, she and the ship disappeared. Because Lucia means light, young girls wear a wreath of candles. To encourage gratitude in this time of plenty, Lucia girls dressed as Saint Lucia give guests cookies and sweet saffron buns in many of the shops in Bishop Hill. It is a task that girls relish and once a girl is chosen, she is forever remembered as one of Saint Lucia's girls.

And yes, it is okay to have a cookie in every shop, as long as you eat your supper. Both Friday and Saturday night, the Bishop Hill United Methodist Church holds their annual Soup and Chili Supper including a plethora of pies! After dinner, visitors can stroll the streets where many of the shops and museums have live music.

The Steeple Building hosts the band Hammer and Pick with their lively mix of bluegrass and folk music. The

***Lucia Girls** dressed as Saint Lucia, pass out cookies and sweet saffron buns in many of the shops during Lucia Nights. (Photo credit: Bishop Hill Heritage Association)*

***The Julbock or Yule Goat character** is rooted in Scandinavian folklore and has been interpreted as a mischievous scamp who roams around scaring people, as well as a benevolent gift-bearer akin to Santa. (Photo credit: Bishop Hill Heritage Association)*

VASA Archives hosts storyteller Brian "Fox" Ellis, who shares traditional Swedish and pioneer Christmas stories mixed with a sing-along of favorite carols. Two bands, Barry Cloyd and Coffee Creek perform at the Bishop Hill Fire Station, and the Peoria Cooperative Academy Madrigal Singers sing at the Bishop Hill Methodist Church.

On Saturday, there is an Old Fashioned Barn Dance at the Colony School. The Sangamo Stemwinders perform, and dances are taught and called by Gail Hintze. This is the kind of folk dancing where participants need not know the dance before it begins. They teach each dance as they call it. With a do-see-do and a swing your partner, kids and adults can swirl with the music, and travel back to a simpler time, when folks entertained themselves – back to a time before Christmas was made in an overseas factory, when it truly was, and still is, about spending quality time with your family, enjoying the deeper meaning of this most joyous season. ❑

About the Author – Brian "Fox" Ellis is an award-winning story teller, author, and historian. He has over 30 books, 24 musical theater productions, 100 magazine articles, and two PBS television series to his credit. He operates Fox Tales International, for which he has developed over a dozen first-person presentations of various famous and interesting people including Jonas Olson, one of the Swedish founders of Bishop Hill, which he will present at the banquet on Friday night of the conference.

A 19th Century Man's Apron
In the Collection of the Bishop Hill Heritage Association
By John Adams-Graf

Editor's Note: This article originally appeared in the Spring 1987 issue of *Midwest Open-Air Museums Magazine.*

DURING the 18th and early 19th centuries, when the annual allotment of work clothing for a man may have been as small as "two shirts, two linen pants in summer and Linsey-woolsey in winter,"[1] one of that man's prime considerations was the longevity of his garments. The apron, which is one of the oldest items of men's clothing, has remained virtually unchanged from the time of the ancient Egyptians to the present day in its design and intent to protect and reduce the wear to a man's clothing.[2] The apron has provided protection for farmers, craftsmen, and tradesmen, not only for their bodies, but also against snags and holes in their trousers or vests.

One account from the first half of the 18th century described the clothing common among the working class as including "…coarse tow for trousers, a wool hat, strong heavy shoes, brass buckles, two linsey jackets and a leather apron."[3] It seems that during that century, leather was the common material for a man's apron. At what point laborers and craftsmen began to replace their leather aprons with fabric aprons is not readily apparent.[4] One can assume, however, that after 1800, an increasing demand for leather raised the prices and caused many to opt for a cheaper and less durable cloth apron. Because of the utilitarian nature of the garment and the availability and economy of replacement, few cloth aprons have survived.

One such example is in the collections of the Bishop Hill Heritage Association at Bishop Hill, Illinois. While this apron is an example of those used by the Swedish craftsmen of Bishop Hill, it nevertheless is a 19th century work apron. The heavily worn blue linen apron is attributed to the period of 1846 to 1861, at which time Swedish pietists operated a communal colony at Bishop Hill.

Although documentation has not credited an individual colonist with ownership of the apron, there is strong evidence that the apron originated in the Bishop Hill Colony.[5] The mainstay of the Colony's income was the sale of broom corn and linen.[6] In a single year, the Colony sold more than 15,500 yards of linen to the world outside the reaches of the commune.[7] The weave and color of the apron is identical to other pieces of identified colony linen in the Heritage Association's collection.

Fig. 1. *Daguerreotype of a Farrier, ca. 1850, wearing a leather apron. (Credit: Library of Congress, Occupational Portraits Collection, LC-USZC4-4075, DAG no. 1189)*

The Sweden from which colonists fled was steeped in a long tradition of folk costume.[8] The type of apron and cap a man wore varied with his occupation. Both blacksmiths and farmers wore leather aprons, although style varied from one region to another. Swedish carpenters wore blue cloth aprons, shoemakers green, and masons wore short (without a bib) aprons of chamois. Although the style, type, and color of aprons may have changed after the Swedish immigrants arrived in America, the workers would likely have been far too accustomed to wearing aprons to have abandoned them.

Based on Swedish folk costume tradition, it could be assumed that the blue Bishop Hill apron was worn by a carpenter. The two large patches of the same blue linen added at about thigh level, however, indicate that this apron was quite probably worn by a cobbler who completed much of his leather work in his lap, as opposed to a carpenter who spent much of his time standing or working at a workbench.

Constructed from a single rectangular piece of linen (Fig. 2), the apron shows evidence of originally having a strap and ties of the same material. When the linen strap and ties were replaced with leather ties is not known, but

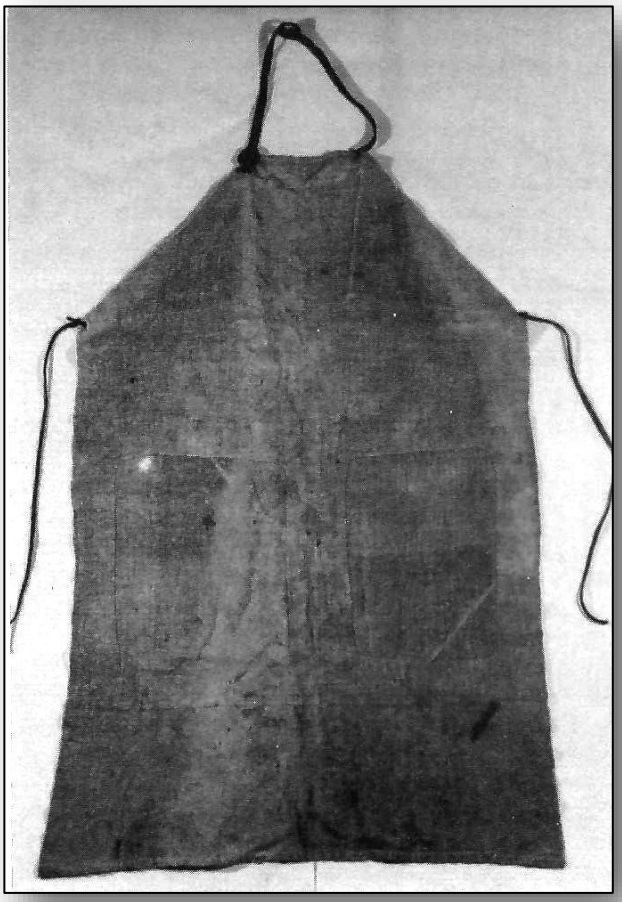


Fig. 2. *Blue linen apron in the collection of the Bishop Hill Heritage Association, Bishop Hill, Illinois. (Photo by the author)*

appears to have been early on. A workman using the same apron day after day while engaging in labor-intensive activities was likely to wear out the original cloth quite rapidly. If it was indeed worn by a cobbler, it would be reasonable to assume that the owner would have repaired the apron in his own shop with available leather. The strap is sewn to the bib with a heavy linen thread like used by leather workers (Fig 3). The ties have been punched through the material, and one end of each tie is slipped through a hole at the other end of the tie and pulled taut.

Photographs from the period testify to the use of cloth aprons by 19th century workers (Fig. 5 and Fig. 6). The simple construction of the Bishop Hill apron would make it easy to reproduce at living history museums that interpret 19th century workers. Whether butchering chickens, working a new broad axe handle, selling dry goods, or tending bar, aprons not only provide protection for the wearer and his clothing, but are also an important accessory for interpreting America's 19th century working class. ❑

Endnotes

1. Helen Acton, "Charles Kirk's Review of a Century," *A Collection of Papers Read Before the Bucks County Historical Society*, vol. VII, p. 95, quoted in Ellen J. Gehret, *Rural Pennsylvania Clothing*. (York: George Shumway Publisher, 1976), 93. For a brief examination of men's clothing inventories, see Gehret, 93-94.

2. During the first half of the 19th century, New England farmers wore a work frock in place of an apron which was designed to serve the same function. For more information on the New England work frock, see Catherine Fennelly, *The Garb of Country New Englanders*, 1790-1840, Old Sturbridge Booklet Series (Sturbridge: Old Sturbridge In., 1966), 14, 40.

3. John F. Watson, *Annals of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania in the Olden Times*, vol. II, 97, as quoted in Gehret, Rural Pennsylvania Clothing, 93.

4. Gehret gave at least five contemporary accounts which include references to leather aprons but she does not mention a single reference to men's aprons constructed of cloth.

5. The only first-person account of a work apron in the Colony was recorded by P.J.S. Stoneberg in an interview with Carrie Linabeck on October 21, 1914. She described an incident which occurred in 1848 when Katherine Magnusson was doing masonry work on the Colony Church and was summoned by the Colony leader, Eric Janson. Linabeck remarked that "She (Magnusson) went with her mason's apron on to him…" In Bishop Hill Heritage Association, P.J.S. Stoneberg papers.

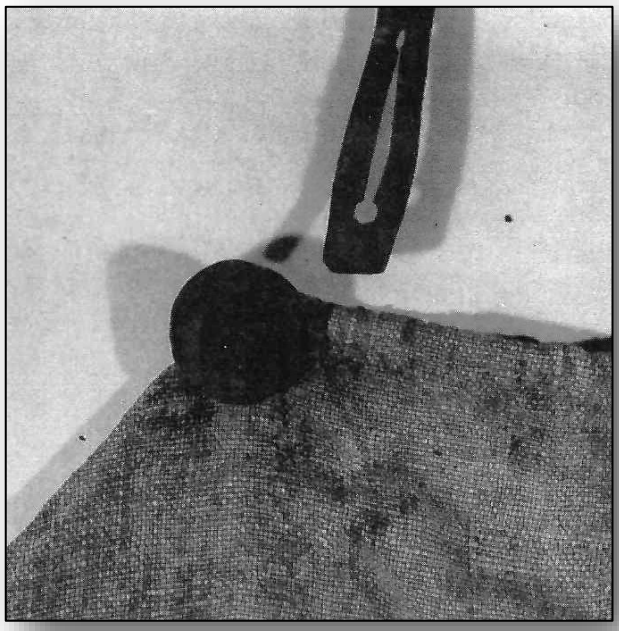


Fig. 3. *Detail of the Bishop Hill apron's leather neck strap and button. (Photo by the author)*

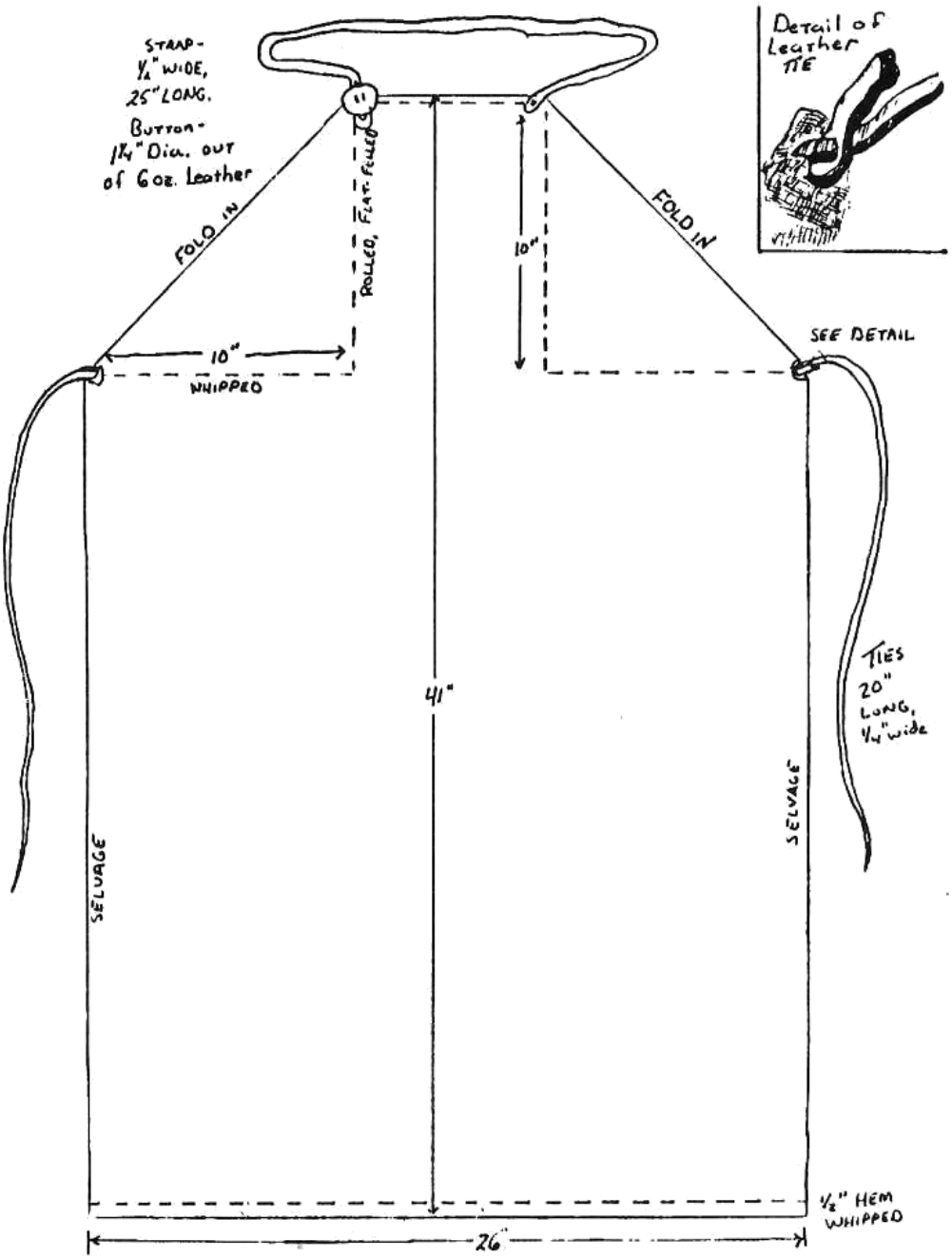
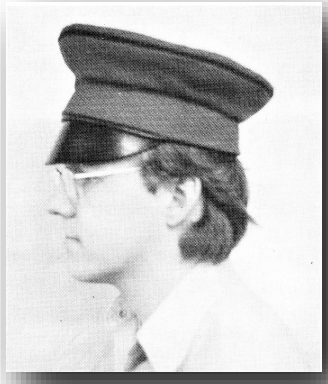


Fig. 4. *Pattern of the apron in the Bishop Hill collection. Made from a single piece of linen, the top two corners were folded in. Along the selvage, the folded pieces were whip stitched; along the raw edges, they were flat-felled. All sewing was done by hand. It is noteworthy that the Bishop Hill Colony purchased its first sewing machine on November 13, 1855 for $112. After 1855, almost all of the sewing in the Colony was done by machine. (drawing by the author)*

6. For a detailed study of material culture in the Bishop Hill Colony, see Carolyn Anderson Wilson and J. Hiram Wilson, *Material Culture in the Bishop Hill Colony, Unpublished Restoration Inventory for Bishop Hill State Historic Site*.

7. *Accounts with Non-Colonists, Linen Produced in the Colony, 1851*, Bishop Hill Heritage Association, BNC-005, 84.

8. For a comprehensive study of Swedish folk costume of the 19th century, see Inga Arno Berg and Gunnel Haelius Berg, *Folk Costume of Sweden-A Living Tradition*, translated by W.E. Otterans (Vesteras, Sweden: ICA-forlaget AB, 1975).



About the Author – John Adams-Graf holds a B.A. in History and German from the University of Wisconsin, LaCrosse, and an M.A. in Historical Administration from Eastern Illinois University. In 1987, when this article was written, he was working as curator for the Bishop Hill Heritage Association. He is currently editor of *Military Trader* and *Military Vehicles* magazines.

Fig. 5. *Bishop Hill broom maker, Andrew Barlow, wearing an apron made from bed ticking, circa 1875. An 1859 ledger titled "Goods for the Colony" lists the purchase of "4½ yards of bed ticking for aprons."*

Fig. 6. *Bishop Hill painter, Linne Swanson wearing a cloth apron as protection while painting, ca. 1885. (Figs. 5. & 6., Courtesy of the Bishop Hill Heritage Association)*

Fig. 7. *Daguerreotype of a latch maker, ca. 1850, wearing a cloth apron with leather neck strap and buttons on each side. (Credit: Library of Congress, Occupational Portraits Collection, LC-USZC4-3597, DAG no. 1203)*

Fig. 8. *Daguerreotype of a cooper with barrel and tools, ca. 1850, wearing a short (no bib) bed ticking apron. (Credit: Library of Congress, Occupational Portraits Collection, LC-USZC4-4073, DAG no. 1196)*

Part II – The 20th Century
A History and Timeline of Social Dance

By Jeanette Watts, Dance Historian, Instructor, and Author

MANY tools are available to help people understand and connect to the past, including physical artifacts and reproductions that people can handle. We can also show them how these items were used, and let THEM try using them.

The more physically active people can be, the better they can learn. The question becomes, what do we teach? Mostly, we teach people how our predecessors worked – carding, spinning, weaving, churning butter, cooking, plowing, woodworking, and shooting black powder guns and cannons. How often do we represent how people used to play?

Living history museums in the West sometimes have a dealer to teach people how to play Faro. When I was the artistic director of the Old West Festival, I held a participatory spelling bee and cowboy poetry. But only rarely do we see living history museums engage visitors with one of everyone's favorite pastimes: teaching them how people used to dance.

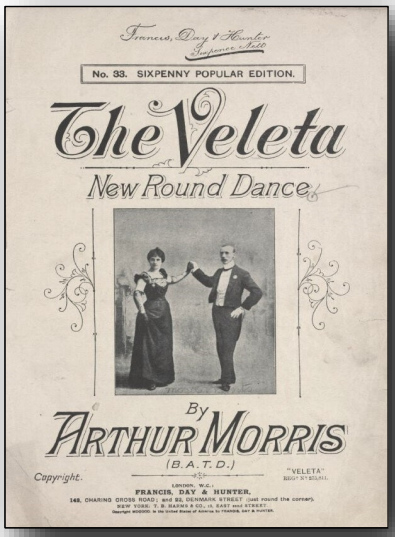
At any given era in our history, there is usually just a small set of vocabulary encompassing the dances of the time. The overlap is, of course, long; grandparents don't stop doing the foxtrot because their grandchildren are doing the mashed potato. The farther back in history we go, at least, the slower the pace of change. But we are already used to picking a date and committing to it – the year the house was built or the year the town was incorporated. Sometimes we shake things up: Ohio Village in Columbus used to present the 1860s; today the village presents the year 1898.

Following is a timeline of popular dances as they were in fashion, which would be easily accessible to today's museum visitors. This is the second of a two-part series. The fall issue covered the latter half of the 18th century and the 19th century. This issue covers the 20th century.

20th Century Dance

It's funny how things go in cycles. While the appeal of the polka in 1844 is the chance to get *away* from those pesky prepackaged choreographies, around the turn of the century, there was a resurgence of sequence dances. Then, instead of applying your skill set in groups of eight, or in party games, sequence dances were done in one large circle by everyone in the ballroom. It required a much smaller investment of time in dance lessons which kept pace with the times.

That was a period of bicycles, automobiles, the kinetoscope, cinematograph, Brownie cameras, and then watching those crazy guys who thought they could make a flying machine. If you belonged to the working class, there were labor union strikes, and if you were a woman, there was the right to vote to fight for. There was also basketball, golf, lawn tennis, as well as older games like baseball to play. There was so much to do, no one had much time for dancing lessons!



The Veleta *– sheet music published in 1900 by Arthur Morris. (Credit: Victoria & Albert Museum)*

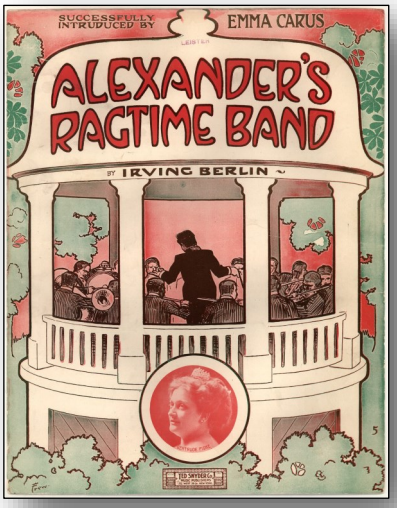
The Veleta, for example, published in 1900 by Arthur Morris, takes all of 16 bars to execute: walk, then chasse in the line of direction, walk then chasse in the reverse line of direction (something that can only be done when everyone in the room is doing the same dance!), waltz, chasse for four bars, and then waltz for four bars. Repeat over and over until the musicians stop playing.

Newspapers would print the "new dances" with the latest simple choreographics from the annual convention of the American National Association of Masters of Dancing. (Yes, there was such a club!) Publication after publication starts with "New" in the title: "The Carleton Veleta, New Round Dance" (1903); "The Fylde, New Waltz Dance for the Ball Room" (1904); "A-La-Mode, New Original Round Dance for the Ballroom" (1906); and "Gavotina, New Ball-Room Dance" (1909). Do we sound bored and desperate for something *truly* new?

Tin Pan Alley

As much as these were simplified dances for a busy, yet at the same time bored public, they didn't go far enough. Then Tin Pan Alley – which was fueling those frequent waltzes and two steps with tunes like "After the Ball," "There'll Be a Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight," "The Band Played On," "Bird in a Gilded Cage," and "Sidewalks of New York," – started churning out the rags. Scott Joplin's "Maple Leaf Rag" was published in 1899. Joplin did not invent ragtime music; there were hundreds of rags already in print. And they just didn't stop coming. Now there was "The Entertainer," "Give My Regards to Broadway," and "Alexander's Ragtime Band." This was a raw edge to the new sound, a youthful drive.

Music and dance's symbiotic relationship once again came into play. The compelling new music demanded a compelling new dance, and this modern dance fit modern times. The one step was simply walking: one step per beat of the music. Absolutely everyone could do it, so absolutely everyone was dancing. Without a single dance lesson, people could dance!



Alexander's Ragtime Band – *Cover of 1911 sheet music. (Credit: Library of Congress)*

Besides the music and the simplicity of the dance being factors in the wild spread of the new dance form, society got the first of what we today call "influencers." Vernon and Irene Castle were Vaudeville performers working in France. They read the description of these American dances in the newspapers, approximated something for Parisian audiences, and became international sensations.

Fame is strange. If anyone had reservations about the respectability of this new dance form coming from the lower classes (Like the polka? Is the waltz originally a peasant dance?), they melted away when faced with this very white, very elegant middle class couple. He was British, after all. After Americans fought a revolution to get away from the crown, women wanted to dress like Queen Victoria, men wanted to dress like her son King Edward, and now things were respectable when done by a British gentleman married to an American lady. People wanted to dress like Irene Castle, and dance like Vernon Castle.

Even before the Castles cashed in on their fame and published *Modern Dancing* in 1914, plenty of other dance teachers were publishing "how to" books on the Boston, the Tango, the Turkey Trot, the One Step, the Aeroplane Glide, and of course the Castle Walk. The Castles simply took any social stigma out of the equation. Now it was socially acceptable; these were all simple, accessible dances, the music was compelling, and so, everyone danced.

The foxtrot appeared around 1914, starting the never ending pattern: morphing from simple to difficult, then difficult to simple. But the one step and tango continue through the 1920s. While so much interest and attention is focused on the scandalous new dances of the 20s, when you watch silent movie footage, in most of the dance scenes, they are clearly doing the one step. And of course, Rudolph Valentino's tango in *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* fueled the demand for dancing the tango.

Now, about those scandalous new dances! While in 1900, every dance was labeled the "new" dance, now we had some seriously new concepts, and parents were not pleased. The history of dance is the history of annoying your parents. The Charleston and Black Bottom are not dances learned from a dance master. Even the Castles were still authorities who taught people how to dance. Besides the Castles, many other authorities published dance manuals, and articles for newspapers – Elsie Janis, L. Leslie Clendenen, Mr. & Mrs. Rowley Downes, Malvin Franklin, Troy and Margaret West Kinney, Albert Newman, Joan Sawyer – the list goes on and on.

The Roaring 20s

That all changed in the roaring twenties. Arthur Murray started his career as a dance teacher in the 1920s, (possibly the last big dancing master?) but he was of the old school, teaching foxtrots to older dancers. The literature shows a sharp division between generations and attitudes towards dance. The dance manuals were filled with instructions for couples dances – even how to do the Charleston and Black Bottom as a couples dance. From printed materials, you would hardly know that there WAS a revolution in dance underway. There was actually a resurgent interest in older dance forms: Cecil Sharp started publishing books on English Country dance. Arthur Murray was selling the foxtrot and the box waltz. Geoffrey D'Egville published a volume including quadrilles and cotillions. And Henry Ford, who hated jazz, published *Good Morning*, to encourage people to go back to the old-fashioned dances.

Vernon and Irene Castle's *book* Modern Dancing *was published in 1914. (Photo from* Modern Dancing*)*

Thanks to the new medium of film, however, we know better. The Charleston could be done as a couples dance, yes, but it was also done solo. A woman did not need a partner in order to dance. I am not even sure how to turn the Black Bottom into a couples dance. There are some wonderful extant film clips showing the dance performed by street sweepers, traffic cops, dance hall girls in lots of fringe, little children, and construction workers dancing on iron girders high above New York City.[1]

The Charleston and the Black Bottom are energetic dances. Did anyone in the 20s do an entire night of the Charleston? I doubt it. Personally, I can go to an Oktoberfest and polka for two hours, so I'd say I'm in pretty good shape. But one Charleston a night is plenty. Especially solo Charleston. With a partner, two or maybe three dances would be okay. But that's it.

So, it's a good thing another new dance was forming in the twenties. The Savoy Ballroom in Harlem opened in 1926. With white and Jewish ownership, black management, black jazz musicians playing with a new "swinging" sound, and mixed black and white clientele, it was fertile breeding ground for a new craze.

The Lindy Hop acquired its name in the late twenties, when "Shorty" George Snowden was asked by Fox Movietone News what kind of dance the dancers were doing. The newspaper headlines had just announced that Lindburgh had just successfully completed his hop across the Atlantic, and thus the Lindy Hop acquired its name.

The 30s & 40s

All through the 1930s and 40s, swing dancing spread like wildfire. Sometimes it was called Jitterbug (my favorite version of that name is Cab Calloway looking out over all the dancers on the dance floor and saying, "they look like a bunch of jitterbugs out there," but at the time it was never called swing. Swing referred to the music.

Once again, the music drove the dance. How could it not? Look at the musicians. Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway, Benny Goodman, Louis Armstrong, the Dorsey Brothers, Glenn Miller, Count Basie, Artie Shaw, Woody Herman. That's just the leadership.

There is a cautionary tale about the contrast between real life and documentation, AND about how the birth of a new dance does NOT mean people stopped doing everything else. While dance halls were packed with people dancing to the Big Bands, in 1938, Arthur Murray published the book *How to Be a Good Dancer*, covering one step, foxtrot, waltz, tango, and rumba. In a nod to the new dances, he writes about shag, Susie-Q, and The Big Apple. He finally admits to the existence of the Jitterbug in his 1945 book.

We took that music with us to war in the 40s. I will always maintain that it was inevitable that we would win World War II because WE had the Andrews Sisters and Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy.

The Andrew Sisters *(Facebook)*

After the war, swing got turned inside out with rock 'n' roll. The musical origins are hotly debated, but there's no question that the next generation of teenagers were not dancing to the squared-off rhythms of jazz. To clap along with Glenn Miller's "In the Mood," you clap on one and three. To clap along with the percussion of Bill Haley and the Comets' "Rock Around the Clock," you have to clap on two and four. The dance is equally inside out (or upside down). A swing dancer will be rocking backward at precisely the moment a rock 'n' roll dancer is coming forward.

While previous generations learned to dance from instructors and written materials, and flappers and swing dancers learned to dance from other dancers in the dance halls, rock 'n' roll kids gained a new opportunity for learning – television. We have all heard of *American Bandstand* produced in Philadelphia, but television had only local coverage in the early days. If you lived in Chicago, you ran home from school to watch Jim Lownstberry's *Record Hop*. In Cincinnati, it was *Bob Braun's Bandstand*. In Baltimore it was the *Buddy Dean Show*.

The Television Age

Television created and accelerated the next dance wave. Chubby Checker sang Hank Ballard's song "The Twist" on American Bandstand in 1960, dancing solo with a little twisting motion as he sang. The wholesale manufacture of new, simple solo dances had started. In 1961 Chubby Checker released "It's Pony Time." In 1962, it was "Limbo Rock." 1962 also brought us the Peppermint Twist, the Mashed Potato, the Watusi, the Hully Gully, the Hitch

Duke Ellington *(Britanica)*

Glen Miller *(Wikimedia)*

Chubby Checker *(American Songwriter)*

Hiker, the Nitty Gritty, and the Loco-Motion. Each year there were new songs with new dances to go with them, including the Monkey in 1963, the Swim and the Jerk in 1964, the Freddie in 1965, the Skate in 1967, and the Funky Chicken in 1969.

The music of Motown provided the power behind this pop culture juggernaut, with the likes of Marvin Gaye and The Miracles leading the way. Outside of Motown, other dances of the 60s are all about dancing on the beach – Bobby Freeman is a rock 'n' roll musician from San Francisco, but his songs about the beach predate Jan & Dean and The Beach Boys, so I feel the need to mention him in particular. And, of course, I need to give a nod to Frankie Avalon, Annette Funicello, and all the beach party movies.

Social dance history is still being made with the Hustle and Disco in the 70s, Moonwalking in the 80s, the Macarena in the 90s, The Wobble in 2008, Gangnam Style in 2012, and of course Flossing (which is really amusing to do in hoopskirts with all the 4th grade classes). This is where I will stop, until more history museums have a need for disco balls and polyester pantsuits. ❑

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Period footage of Charleston, Black Bottom, and Shimmy https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RVqo4HGcojE

Endnote

1. Unfortunately, a lot of my favorite primary source videos seem to have been removed from the Internet so links cannot be included here. Hopefully they will become available again sometime soon.

Bill Halley and the Comets *(uDiscoverMusic)*

About the author – Jeanette Watts teaches workshops on historical dances from 1500-1968 for museums and reenactors all around the United States. She is also the author of six published books. Jeanette is available for hire at Jeanette@wattses.com.

'Possum Toddy

And the American Persimmon

By Kevin Carter, Foodways Historian, Conner Prairie Museum

WHEN I was young, my family would load up the station wagon to visit my grandma and grandpa in Wheatland, a "sleepy" southern-Indiana town. While their house lacked the familiar playtime amenities of home, there were always plenty of new adventures for a young boy. There were eggs to collect and goats to scratch behind the ears. I'd place pennies on the railroad tracks and then spend hours searching for their flattened remains among the ballast after the next freight train passed through. It was a different time, a different place, and a different pace.

Running water in the kitchen sink was the extent of their plumbing luxuries. The old handpump was still out back near the house, and after a rigorous priming, it still gurgled its sulfurous water. The outhouse was a two-seater – something I can't understand to this day . It was always stocked with a half bag of quicklime and the remnants of an old Sears catalog hung on a nail – reading material, I figured.

Grandpa had lived a hard life. Being a heavy smoker, drinker, and rabblerouser in his younger years, he later became a teetotaling, tent-meeting, fire-and-brimstone preacher following a death-bed bargain with God.

Grandma was a noble woman in her backwoods sort of way. She was the sweet in contrast to the bitter – a gentle spirit who doted over us kids. She always had an apron tied about her waist, unless, of course, she was at church. Her long grey hair was always pulled back into a proper little bun as neat and tidy as the little house she kept.

"Paul," she said to my father one day, "why don't you and the boys be useful by gathering some persimmons. You remember that old tree? I'll make some puddin' for supper."

I had never heard of persimmons, but my grandma assured me they were delicious. So off we went on a new adventure with bucket in hand. I didn't understand why my father was picking up only the squishy "rotten" fruit from the ground, especially when there were plenty of firm bright orange ones still hanging on the tree within reach.

"That's a pretty one! Go ahead and take a bite," he said with what I now know was a sadistic grin. That was my introduction to *Diospyros virginiana* – the American Persimmon.

Figure 1 – *A dish of ripe persimmons (Photo by Kevin Carter)*

The Persimmon Tree

The persimmon belongs to the genus *Diospyros* – a Latin word that, loosely translated, means "food of the gods." The common name *persimmon* is believed to be a version of the Renape word *pasîmênan* meaning *dried fruit.*[1]

The three most common species of persimmons are *Diospyros virginiana* (common persimmon), *Diospyros texana* (Texas persimmon), and *Diospyros kaki* (Oriental persimmon). The native range for the common persimmon (the species discussed in this article) is the southeastern quadrant of the 48 contiguous states. Historical accounts report that during the mid-16th century, the Spanish colonizer, Hernando de Soto, was greeted by gift-bearing Native Americans along the Mississippi River. Their gifts consisted of fish and "loaves" made from dried persimmon fruit.[2]

The tree is a member of the Ebony family. Its wood is heavy, fine-grained, light in color, and very hard. Persimmon wood was historically used in the manufacture of carpenter plane stocks, gun stocks, shoe lasts, bed posts, plough beams, picture frames, canes, combs, and musical

instruments such as fifes, flutes, flageolets.[3] Small spinning wheels used for flax and wool were occasionally made of persimmon wood as were shuttles used in weaving.[4] In more recent history, because of its crush resistance, persimmon is the wood of choice for the heads of golf drivers.

The Bitter and the Sweet

In Thomas Anburey's 1789 journal, *Travels Through the Interior Parts of America*, he wrote:

"Many of us were deceived by this fruit, when ripe and hanging on the trees, it having the appearance of an Orlean plumb; but which we found possessed of such powerful astringent qualities, as to contract the mouth to such a degree that it was several hours before we regained the sense of taste."[5]

I'm comforted to know that as a seven-year-old, I was not alone in making this mistake.

Typical harvest occurs between September and November, and trust me, you don't want to bite into a wild persimmon before they are ripe! (If you're curious about what the experience is like, try eating an entire green banana peel.)

The unripe persimmon fruit (and other parts of the persimmon tree) is exceedingly astringent and styptic. It's puckering power comes from its proanthocyanidins (soluble tannin) content.[6] Due to persimmon's high tannin content, the juice of the unripe fruit was preferred over oak bark for tanning leather.[7]

Historically, the inner bark was used medicinally to treat intermittent fever and diarrhea as well as a gargle for ulcerated sore throats. The unripe fruit was used to treat chronic dysentery and uterine hemorrhaging.[8] [9]

During the American Civil War, rations were often scarce. One story recalls a time when an officer scolded a soldier for eating an unripe persimmon because it wasn't good for him. The soldier replied, "I'm not eatin' it because it's good. I'm trying to pucker up my stomach so as to fit the rations uncle Billy Sherman's a-given us."[10]

While unripe persimmons are one of the most astringent of all native fruits, the *ripe* persimmon is one of the sweetest. Much like bananas, the persimmon fruit gives off ethylene gas as it ripens which dissipates its puckering soluble tannins. What's left is a fruit that is comprised of up to 34% sugar.[11]

The Useful Persimmon

Science now tells us that persimmon fruit is a good source of antioxidants, carotenoids, and polyphenols. Studies have shown that these compounds have several health and medicinal benefits including reducing the risk of cardiovascular diseases through the reduction of blood pressure. Other studies show benefits in treating LDL cholesterol, diabetes, cancer, stroke, aging, dermatitis, and body odor. Another study suggests that consuming persimmon before drinking alcohol reduces blood alcohol content and hang overs.[12]

Historical uses of the persimmon fruit included the manufacture of indelible ink, black fabric dye, persimmon molasses, and vinegar. Seeds used for buttons were "more durable than pearl or porcelain."[13] "The best substitute for coffee, yet discovered" was also made from roasted persimmon seeds. "The coffee exerts a friendly influence on the whole system, especially the head."[14] A U.S. patent was even granted in the 1870s for this creative caffeine substitute.[15]

Persimmon seeds are also well-rooted in American folklore. Crop failures and weather patterns can be predicted (with hit-and-miss accuracy) by cutting a seed in half to see if the plant embryo is shaped like a spoon, knife, or fork.[16] [17] [18] If the embryo looks like a spoon, that means there will be heavy snow. A knife means harsh cutting temperatures. A fork means a mild winter, and the hay will be coming early (Figure 2). Native American people also used persimmon seeds as dice in their various gambling games.[19]

Figure 2 – *Looks like a cold, wet winter for Central Indiana. (Photo by Kevin Carter).*

The Delicious Persimmon

Ripe persimmons have always been a favorite food. Native American people ate them dried whole, in loaves, or as dried fruit "leather." They also made bread with persimmon pulp and ground corn.[20] Later, persimmons were used by European settlers to make "delightful bread, pies, and puddings."[21] [22] By the latter half of the 19th century, recipes

began to appear in print for these seasonal delicacies as well as for others such as persimmon custard[23] and (my favorite) persimmon jam.[24]

PERSIMMON PUDDING.

After the persimmons have been touched by the frost, gather them, and strain through a sieve enough to make one half gallon. Beat four eggs with four tablespoonfuls of sugar and same of flour and one pint of milk, with a large tablespoonful of butter or two of fine suet. Bake it in pans. Some use corn meal in preference to flour; it requires longer cooking.

Figure 3. *– A recipe for Persimmon Pudding from* Mrs. Elliot's Housewife*, 1870. (Image from Google Books)*

The persimmon was important to historical African American culture as well. Persimmons were "something to run at" – meaning it was a fruit to immediately enjoy while their season lasted.[25] Historical accounts describe the "persimmon dance" celebrated among enslaved communities where loaves of persimmon bread and tubs of persimmon beer were joyfully relished.[26]

Rabblerousing & Teetotaling Persimmon

In Aubrey's 1789 journal, he mentions a home-brewed liquor called persimmon beer.[27] In some Southern regions, this beer was called "'possum toddy" named such due to the critter's penchant for the fruit.[28] [29]

Persimmon beer was considered by many to be a temperance drink. "A man could easily drink a gallon of it (if he could get it) and feel nothing but a great degree of satisfaction."[30]

Its common acceptance by the temperance community did not mean persimmon beer was free of alcohol. Rather, most brewing methods used resulted in a "small beer" – one with a low ABV (alcohol by volume) percentage. However, even the "near-beer" version could be distilled to produce a more potent persimmon brandy.

A stronger version of persimmon beer can be produced by either changing the brewing process or by adding other ingredients. For instance, by straining off the solids and boiling the batch – thus concentrating the sugars – one can produce a very strong beer.[31]

In *The Cooking Gene*, Michael Twitty mentions making "'simmon liquor" – his "social lubricant of choice" – in the manner "it always had been."[32] His version, fortified with honey, aligns more with a melomel (a high-ABV mead that is flavored with fruit).

The simplest historical method for brewing persimmon beer that I found was published in *The Florida Agriculturalist*:

"Take a clean barrel, knock out one head; put a faucet near the bottom. Place in the bottom of the barrel three or four inches of nice clean straw, pour your persimmons on the straw, mix with them a few baked sweet potatoes and a little shelled corn. Then pour on a sufficient quantity of water to cover the fruit to a depth of four or five inches. In a week or two the beverage will be ready for use."[33]

This recipe is technically for wine and not beer, though one could argue that the addition of "a little shelled corn" narrowly qualifies it as the latter. This simple open-barrel brewing technique was described in the 1861 *Southern Cultivator* magazine as the "ordinary way" to prepare the drink.[34]

From a modern perspective, sweet potatoes are an unusual adjunct for beer. However, they are recommended (either whole-roasted or just their peelings) in most 19th century persimmon-beer recipes as one of three common adjunct options. The other two options are apple peelings and the seed pods of honey locust trees (Figure 4). These seasonally compatible adjuncts were added to make the beer more "brisk."[35]

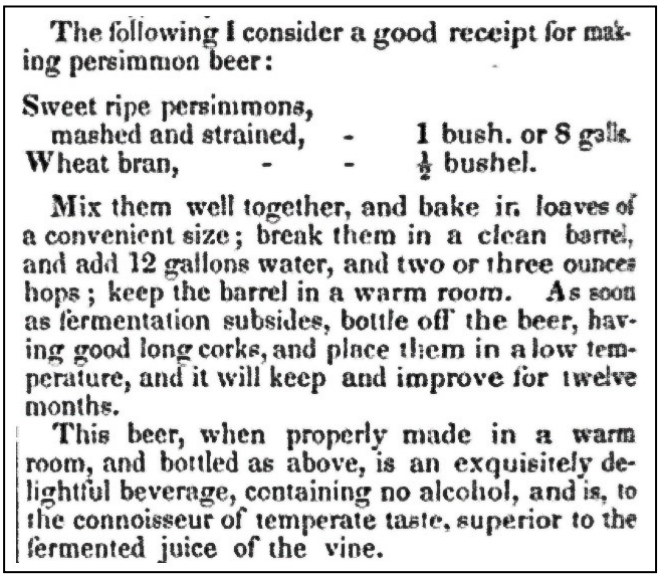
Be forewarned! Before you wander off into the woods to pick locust pods, be sure to know the difference between

Figure 4. – *Honey locust pods at the crossroads in Prairietown at Conner Prairie. (Photo by Kevin Carter)*

the sweet, nutritious honey locust and its evil half-sibling, the black locust. At first glance, they may appear somewhat similar, but they are definitely not interchangeable. Every part of the black locust contains Robinin – a dangerous toxin similar to Ricin. A link to an excellent blog article on the distinguishing features of both is available in the footnotes.[36] Once the difference between these two tree species is known, they are easy to tell apart.

The simplicity and ingenuity of the aforementioned brewing method (i.e., that it required no specialized equipment like mash tuns and cooling trays), the omission of the expense of brewer's yeast and hops, the fact that all the ingredients could be easily foraged, and that this drink is so delicious easily explains why persimmon beer was so popular among enslaved African-American communities. Even the prescribed spigot could have been optional simply by rearranging the contents of the barrel so the straw, which was used for filtering and not flavoring, would be added last, and thus, the beer could be ladled directly from the barrel.

Another brewing method frequently found in my research involved baking a "cake" or biscuit from a mixture of persimmon pulp and grain meal (either wheat bran[37] or corn meal[38]). One example of this method is found in the 1837 *Farmer's Register* (Figure 5).[39]



The following I consider a good receipt for making persimmon beer:

Sweet ripe persimmons, mashed and strained, - 1 bush. or 8 gals.
Wheat bran, - - ½ bushel.

Mix them well together, and bake in loaves of a convenient size; break them in a clean barrel, and add 12 gallons water, and two or three ounces hops; keep the barrel in a warm room. As soon as fermentation subsides, bottle off the beer, having good long corks, and place them in a low temperature, and it will keep and improve for twelve months.

This beer, when properly made in a warm room, and bottled as above, is an exquisitely delightful beverage, containing no alcohol, and is, to the connoisseur of temperate taste, superior to the fermented juice of the vine.

Figure 5. *– Persimmon beer recipe from the 1837 "Farmer's Register." (Image from Google Books)*

At Conner Prairie in Indiana, we hold a popular festival each June called "History on Tap" where brewers from across the State proudly showcase their libations. Thousands of guests show up, and hundreds of Uber drivers are afterwards kept busy. In addition to the music, fun, and samples, many of our historical interpreters populate Prairietown to engage and entertain our guests. As part of the festivities, we serve samples of historical beers to guests in the taproom of the Golden Eagle Inn. Our persimmon beer received rave reviews this year.

I took a bit of a risk making this beer because having brewed beer for years, I had never made this type. Since the beer was to be served to the public, I opted to keep the straw and wooden barrel in the barn and use modern equipment and proper food-safety protocols instead. The recipe was derived from several historical recipes.

Knowing I couldn't completely rely on the opinions of our well-primed guests, we distributed samples of the persimmon beer to some of the exhibiters, asking them to guess what they were drinking. Nearly all of them immediately assumed it was a crisp cider, but then they would hesitate and cock their head and look upward as they searched their mental reference files. When told it was persimmon beer, about half were surprised and delighted, the other half didn't know what a persimmon was.

Grandma was right

When supper had concluded that evening so many years ago, I passed on my grandma's persimmon pudding – a decision I will regret for the rest of my life. Maybe my father's urging to bite into that unripe persimmon was so he could have my serving of dessert all to himself. Decades passed before I had a second chance to discover this delectable native fruit. While that astringent childhood memory still lingers, every time I savor a bite of persimmon pudding, I swear I can hear a voice in that taste-cortex part of my brain. It's my grandma's voice gently whispering, "See, sweetheart, what did I tell you?"

A Recipe for "'Possum Toddy" Beer

Ingredients:

3 – 4 pounds Wheat Bran
1 gallon Ripe Persimmon Pulp
The Peelings of 4 Large Apples
1 oz. Kent Golding Hops
1 packet SafeAle S-04 Brewer's Yeast
5-6 gallons Spring Water

Preparation:

Be sure all utensils and equipment have been properly cleaned and sanitized using 1oz Star-San sanitizer per 5 gal water.

Baking:

Preheat oven to 325-degrees (F).

Thoroughly mix bran and pulp. Press onto a parchment-covered baking sheet to 1" thickness. Bake for 1 to 1-1/2 hours or until browned. Do not burn. Allow to cool completely.

Figure 6. *– Crushing baked biscuits of persimmon pulp and wheat bran. Photo by Kevin Carter.*

If biscuits are to be stored for later use, cut into 3"– 4" square biscuits. Store in a tightly sealed container and refrigerate or freeze.

Brewing

Pulverize the biscuits into a course powder and place into a 6-gal plastic primary-fermenter bucket (Figure 6).

Place hops in water and bring water to boil for 20 minutes. Strain out the hops. Fill the primary fermenter containing the pulverized biscuit and apple peel with boiling hop water to within approximately 3-4" from the top of the pail. Make sure the contents of the fermenter are well mixed. Allow to cool to room temperature. Put primary fermenter in a dark place where it will not be disturbed.

Evenly sprinkle the dry yeast over the persimmon mix in the fermenter and allow to set for 30 minutes. With a sanitized whisk, aerate the mix well. Securely cover the fermenter with a piece of cotton cloth (e.g., flannel). Allow to work for 2 weeks.

Bottling

Once this time has passed, line a sanitized strainer with three or four layers of new cheesecloth and ladle the beer through the strainer. Bottle the beer in sanitized bottles or transfer the beer to a keg to be carbonated using a CO2 priming unit. ❑

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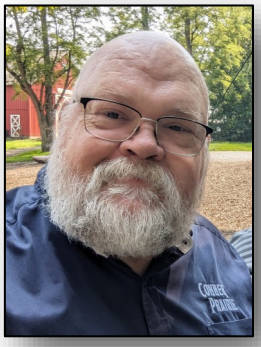

About the Author – Kevin Carter is a public historian and is responsible for historical foodways interpretation at Conner Prairie Museum. Kevin considers himself a tinker in both the traditional and figurative sense. When he's not chained to his desk, public speaking, or storytelling and interpreting on the grounds, he occupies his time with silversmithing, leatherworking, and making reproduction powder horns and accoutrements. He invites further discussion and conversation at kcarter@connerprairie.org.

"Virginian Opossum" – *(left) Opossums eating persimmons. Painted by John James Audubon in 1845. (Public domain. Credit: Wikimedia Commons)*

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CRANDALL'S BLOCKS FOR CHILDREN.

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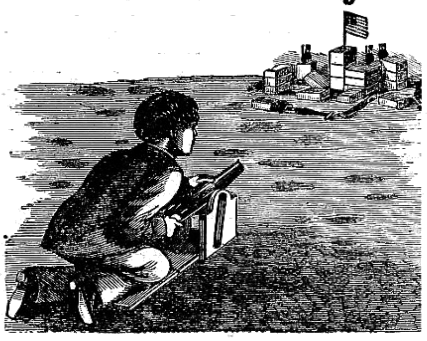

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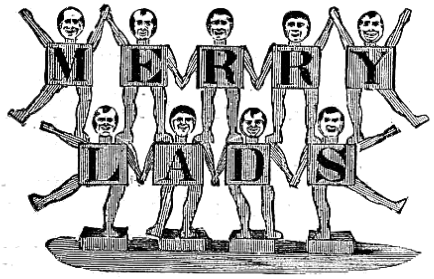

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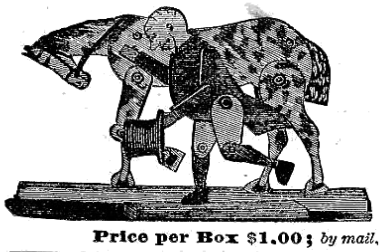

This beautiful and interesting toy is regarded by Mr. Crandall as one of the best of his inventions for the little folks. It is made up of two figures, John Gilpin—whose highly colored dress is specially attractive to Boys and Girls—and his Horse, which intelligent animal performs a very important part in the illustration of Gilpin's famous ride.

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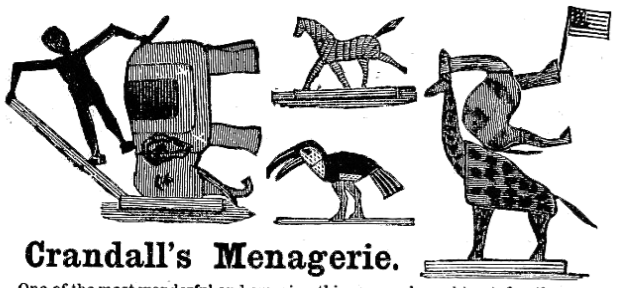

Crandall's Menagerie.

One of the most wonderful and amusing things ever brought out for the entertainment of children. The six animals composing the Menagerie are beautifully painted, and so arranged into 56 pieces in each box, that *tens of thousands* of most laughter-provoking figures can be made up with them.

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RED, WHITE, AND BLUE.—Tasteless, odorless, and *water-proof*. The letters are on red, white, and blue ground. All children are pleased with them.

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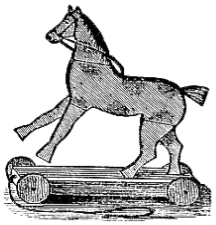
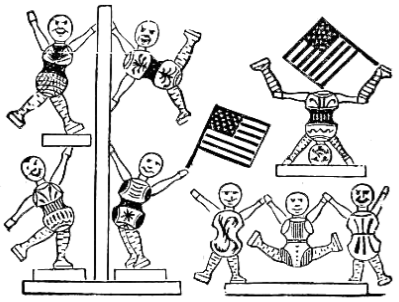
Crandall's Toy Horse.



Here is something that will make glad every little boy who gets it. The Toy Horse is about 6 inches in hight to the tops of his ears. He stands upon a four-wheeled base, all ready to be set in motion by his owner. He is made up in pieces and can be taken apart and laid snugly away in his box.

Price 25 Cts.; *by mail, prepaid,* **30 Cts.**

Crandall's Acrobats.



Full of fun and frolic, and most brilliant in costume. These are among the most fascinating and ingenious toys ever invented. The number of figures which can be made with the pieces in a single box is limited only by the ingenuity of the operator.

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One of the funniest and jolliest of the low-priced toys. The lively Little All-Right throws himself into a great variety of positions as he whirls around the "wheel." This toy can not conveniently be sent by mail. It is one of the latest things manufactured by C. M. Crandall. Ask the nearest Toy dealer for Crandall's Little All-right, hasten to buy it, and be happy.

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Charles M. Crandall's Amazing Toys

"The Best Presents Ever Invented for Boys and Girls"

By Tom Vance

CHARLES M. CRANDALL was one of America's foremost toy makers in the last half of the 19th century. His father started a woodworking and furniture company in Covington, Pennsylvania in the early 1800s. In addition to chairs and tables, he made some children's blocks and other toys.

Born in 1833, Charles started working in the factory at a young age and became especially interested in the toys. He began inventing toys for his own amusement at the age of 12. His father died in 1849 and Charles took over the business at age 16. Following his interests, he turned the business more and more toward games and toys.

***Charles M. Crandall** holding his best-selling puzzle, "Pigs in Clover." A model made from his building blocks is behind the puzzle. (1889) (Credit: McClintock, 116)*

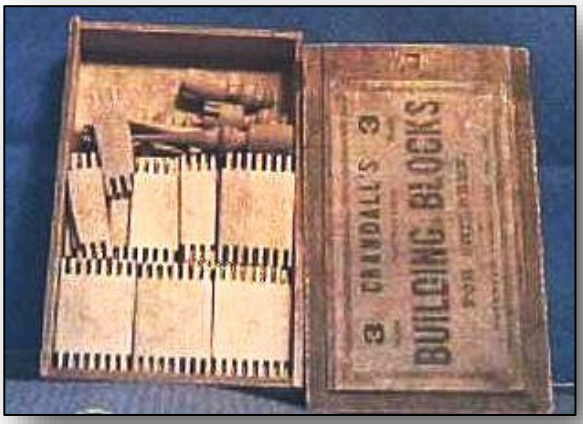
By 1866, he had moved the business from Covington to Montrose, Pennsylvania, where he began making croquet sets, tapping into the craze that swept America soon after the Civil War. People traveled miles to visit friends who had croquet sets, and croquet parties were all the rage.

The idea for his building blocks came to him one day while working on a croquet set. He conceived the idea of using grooves and tongues instead of nails to lock the corners of the boxes. A patent was issued on February 5, 1867, and Crandall's Building Blocks sold by the tens of thousands for the next quarter of a century.

The grooved edges of the blocks allowed them to fit firmly together so that complicated structures could be made. Colored pictures and letters were sometimes pasted on the sides, and the blocks came in colorful boxes.

To gain wider awareness of his blocks, Crandall took a set to New York City and showed them to P.T. Barnum who was so impressed that he put them on display in his American Museum for several weeks, which greatly increased demand for them.

In early 1867, Crandall also sent a set of blocks to *The American Agriculturist*, published by Orange Judd Co. of New York. In the April 1867 issue, the blocks gained some favorable publicity under the heading, "A New and Useful Toy."

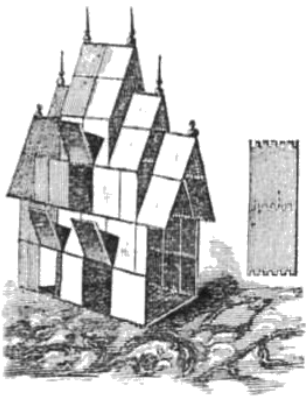


***Above –** Crandall's interlocking blocks used a tongue and groove design. (Credit: Architoys.net)*

***Facing page** – Full page advertisement for "Crandall's Blocks for Children," that appeared in the May 1878 issue of* American Agriculturist.

"A New and Useful Toy"

"One of the best toys for children we have ever seen is a set of improved builder's blocks, invented and patented by a subscriber to the *Agriculturist*, Mr. Charles Crandall, Montrose, Pa. They are so really pleasing and useful that we publish an engraving, showing how they work. They are plain basswood pieces, most of them of the shape shown in the figure, notched to fit each other firmly, so that when a building is put together it can be taken up whole and moved about without falling to pieces. They can be joined in almost endless combinations. We have seen churches, factories, windmills, fences, cradles, and other furniture made with them. The little house shown in the picture was put up by a boy in a few minutes…"



Crandall contracted with Orange Judd as sales agents for the blocks. The June 1867 issue of the *Agriculturist* offered a contest for new designs built with the blocks, and the November 1867 issue ran an ad for Crandall's Improved Building Blocks.

The blocks continued to sell at a rate rarely seen in the toy field and were shipped abroad in increasing quantities. The company moved to a larger, three-story building in 1875. By this time, Crandall had turned his attention to other products, including solid wooden trains that hooked together.

Crandall's Acrobats

Crandall's next big seller, based on the interlocking design of his blocks, was his circus acrobats. They employed the same technology to fit arms and legs to bodies, then onto horses and trapezes, and could be configured in many different positions. Crandall's acrobats were well timed. The circus was just becoming a major form of entertainment, reaching people across America. The *American Agriculturist*, in November 1874, advertised:

"Crandall's Acrobats—Thousands of figures can be made from the pieces in a single box. Most dealers in toys are getting them as fast as they can be supplied. The manufacturers are now making and selling about 1,500 boxes a day…"

***Crandall's Acrobats** could be assembled in endless configurations and took advantage of the current popularity of the circus. (Credit: Strong Museum)*

The acrobats were followed by many other variations of the original blocks including Masquerade Blocks, Expression Blocks (later called "Changeable Charlie"), Crandall's Illuminated Pictorial Alphabet, and the ABC Jackstraws. In 1876, Crandall's District School made use of the same technology as the Acrobats. Grooves in the floor of the schoolhouse allowed students to stand or sit at desks and even had little grooved schoolbooks that could be placed in their hands.

The 1870s and 80s saw a long list of best-selling games including Ye Heroes of '76, Happy Family, Wide Awake Clocks, Captain Kidd's Castle, De Soto, Lively Horseman, and Treasury Box. Heavy Artillery was patented in 1875, followed by Crandall's Mother Goose. In Noah's Dominoes, patented in 1881, one half of an animal would be on one block and the other half on another block. These had to be matched to complete the animal and included elephants, monkeys, and zebras among others.

Pigs in Clover

In 1889, Crandall produced a new game called "Pigs in Clover" that immediately swept the country and other countries around the world. In March 1889, the *New York World* stated:

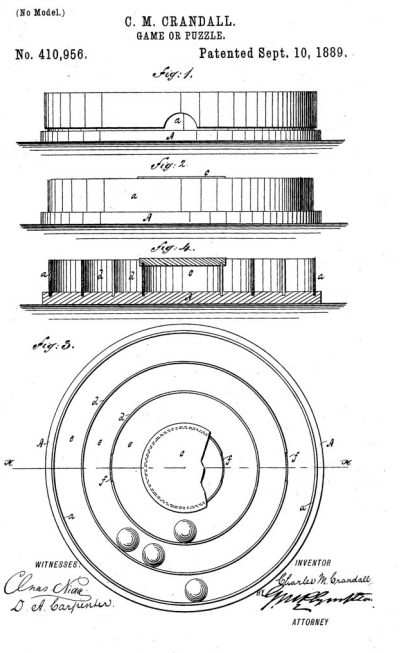
"Pig-driving has become the fashionable occupation in Gotham...Statesmen, diplomats, lawyers, judges, doctors, merchants, financiers and railroad presidents are just as much interested in the new puzzle as their clerks and office boys, and by general consent it has been pronounced the great sensation of the day."

The same month, the *New York Tribune* related an anecdote of a U.S. senator acquiring the game and taking it into the Senate chamber. Other senators soon became interested, and a page was sent out to acquire more games. A "pig-driving" contest then ensued between the senators.

The game consisted of a six-inch round piece of wood and four attached concentric rings. The marbles, or "pigs," are navigated from the outer ring, to each successive ring and then to the inner ring.

Crandall opened a second factory and still had difficulty meeting the demand, estimated at more than a million games. In the meantime, he was busy inventing other games and toys.

The *New York Tribune,* at one point, stated of Crandall: "In his day he probably furnished more pleasure through toys and puzzles than any other person in the country."



***Pigs in Clover Patent Illustration** dated September 10, 1889. (U.S. Patent Office)*

Charles M. Crandall died in Waverly, New York on September 30, 1905. ❑

Reference

McClintock, Inez and Marshall. *Toys In America – A Profusely Illustrated History.* Washington D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1961. 116, 156-160, 193-197.

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2024 Spring Conference
March 21-23, 2023
Bishop Hill, Illinois

The Colony Church and Colony Hotel – Dating from 1848, the church was among the first permanent Colony buildings. The basement and first floor provided 20 one-room apartments for early settlers. The sanctuary is on the second floor. The hotel was built in stages between 1852 and 1864 and features a ballroom on the third floor. Most of the furnishings were built in the carpenter shop at Bishop Hill. Both buildings are owned and operated by Bishop Hill State Historic Site, Illinois Department of Natural Resources. (Photos by Tom Vance)