

Carbon Hill School Museum

Welcome to the old Carbon Hill School, now a public museum, owned and operated by the Carbon Hill Historical Society, a registered not-for-profit Illinois organization, dedicated to collecting, preserving, and displaying our local history.

A Quarterly Newsletter

Issue # 1 Winter 2009

Society loses President

John T. Jensen, charter president of the Carbon Hill Historical Society and one of the founders of our school museum, passed away July 9, 2008. We miss him.

Page 1

A Fossil Story

Ebay turns up a lot of local treasures-----

Page 2



Museum Project

After more than three long years of debt, the museum mortgage has been satisfied through generosity of so many patrons, donors, our society members, and local government.

Page 2

60th Homecoming

This year Carbon Hill will celebrate our 60th Homecoming. Hard to believe! The date for this event is June 24-June 28, 2009.

Page 2

Country Schools, an Icon of the Past

Michele continues to gather stories, photos and information on the little schools across our county.

Page 3

About our Society

Your membership in the Society keeps the school museum thriving.

Page 4



Society Loses President

Born October 12, 1934 in Chicago, John T Jensen was a son of the late Miggo and Marjorie Nelson-Jensen. He was raised and educated in the Gardner area and attended Gardner-South Wilmington High School. On May 15, 1954 John married Louise Decker in the New Hope Presbyterian Church in Coal City and together they resided in Carbon Hill. John was employed



with U.S. Rubber as a Lineman prior to gaining employment with Kerr Glass Manufacturing in Plainfield, from where he retired as a Plant Maintenance Supervisor in 1997, after 40 years of service. John was a member of New Hope Presbyterian Church in Coal City,

was a former member of the Administrative Board of Carbon Hill for 24 years, which included 12 years as Mayor and was a founding member and president of the Carbon Hill Historical Society. In his free time, John enjoyed fishing, camping, and hunting, especially bow hunting, tinkering in his garage and working on the Carbon Hill Museum. John could truly be known as "Mr. Fix-it".

So many generous memorial donations have been made as gifts in John's memory to the Carbon Hill Historical Society and our old school will stand sturdy in his name. Thank you to everyone.

John would be pleased.

A FOSSIL STORY

Every once in awhile something shows up on the internet that reminds us how far and wide the connections are to our local history. One of these finds was a fossil put up for auction on eBay this past winter. Turns out that this fossil, a fern fossil (see below) was collected at the spot where Cinder Ridge Golf Course sits now. A lot of us remember when that spot was the site of Greer Technical School, where men young and old learned to move hills, fill in holes, push the land around with huge new equipment. There are others a bit older who remember that before Greer School there was a Northern Illinois Coal Co washer plant on that site. Of course, long before any of that the fossils were there buried and unknown. A hidden treasure. Ann Spector, a member of ESCONI, brought her daughters Harriet and Judy from "the city" (that would be Chicago) to hunt the fossils which turned up on the big gobs, also known as spoil banks, or "dumps", made by the mining industry.

We won the fossil found on eBay and with it came a photo of Ann Spector with daughters Harriet O'Donnell and Judy Simmons out on the "dump" in the 1950's. Enjoy!



Judy's 1000s Treasures

Museum Project

Since 1992, restoring the old school for use as a public museum has been the entire focus of the Carbon Hill Historical Society. There were many obstacles along the way. The first hurdle was to acquire the school building--- which had been auctioned off in February, 1956 when a consolidation of local schools created District 80-C. Dr. Brockhaus, the new owner, turned the Carbon Hill school into his home and lived there for over 30 years. But by 1992 the place was unoccupied and surrounded by scrub brush, wild trees and weeds, and generally looked like a haunted house. The village board received pro bono help from Tim Malmquist, attorney, and was able to buy the building for use as a public museum. Between 1992 and 2000 much work on the building to clean up the grounds, restore the interior, repair the exterior, and update everything for public use was a major workload for the few volunteers. A large number of fundraisers, grants, and donations helped through those years.

By 2001, a new mayor and village board determined that the old school should be purchased by the historical society. While the school programs and building work continued, the details were hashed out. The paperwork on this decision did not go into effect until 2004. In June, 2004, the Carbon Hill Historical Society signed for a mortgage debt of \$32,500 plus 6% interest. Thus began a capital campaign to pay off the debt. Many former and original Carbon Hill families passed the hat at family reunions. Members of the Society contributed generously to the Old Schoolhouse Project, Individuals and many businessmen donated with enthusiasm. In the first year we paid down one third of the debt. A miracle was unfolding. Everyone's hard work was literally now paying off. It was a joy to see so many express their appreciation for the museum and its purpose.

In the second year we managed to pay another fifth of the debt. There were many continuing family pledges, more historical programs, presentations and speeches with donations taken at the

door, group tours, book sales, and raffles. All helped to keep us afloat. The third year we gained local government support as the Grundy County Board recognized that we offer a full history of coal information for the county. The County Board then provided \$1500 toward our cause. Following that came township support from both Goose Lake and Felix.

In the final year, between July 1, 2007 and July 1, 2008, the remaining balance on the debt was gathered bit by bit. We paid off the mortgage following our Homecoming 2008. The Society had provided workers and volunteers for the food stand during Homecoming in return for a donation to the museum. It was just enough to pay off that last installment. Louise and Michele went to the bank, completed the paperwork and brought the final papers home to show John. It was a good day. We thank everyone who has been so supportive. The museum belongs to all of us now. We intend to take care of it with continuing respect for the past, love for the present, and hope for the future.

It's been 60 years of good times and good friends at the Carbon Hill Homecoming-----

Join us this year for five days of fun and friendship in the Carbon Hill Park. This year marks our 60th annual homecoming and the occasion promises to hold special events to mark the special anniversary. The carnival, ball games, bingo, parade, food & drink, as well as music, will keep everyone entertained. At the museum we will feature homecoming photos, lots of conversations and presentations on topics visitors have requested. Join us at the park grounds and at the old school. Dates for this year's homecoming are:

June 24-28, 2009

Our May issue of this newsletter will provide a complete list of events and times.

Remembering the Country School

notes from Michele Micetich

I have been spending the past year locating old photos, stories, memorabilia and reliable information on each of the little schools that used to dot our countryside. Each one has a unique and interesting history. It has been so inspiring to hear from those who actually attended these schools. Many of you have had relatives who taught in one or more of the schools. Some of you have taught in one yourself! All of us recall hearing an elder tell about walking to their country school, a mile uphill both ways through drifts of snow or across a creek -- although some rode a horse or traveled by buggy. It may interest you to know that at one time there were 98 of these schools in the county. In our most local area, many remember something about the schools called Jugtown, Robinson, Short, Laymon, Adams, Sulphur Springs, Divine, Goose Lake, Eureka, as well as the earlier community schools of Diamond, Carbon Hill, Suffernville, and Coal City. Many of these buildings have been repurposed into homes, garages, businesses, or other useful structures, and were moved from their original school sites. The teachers in these schools were as memorable as the schools themselves. If you are interested in seeing what I have compiled so far, or have things to add, stop in the museum or give me a call.

Carbon Hill Historical Society Officers, 2009

Michele Micetich --- President
Linda Bradley --- Vice President
Louise Jensen --- Secretary-Treasurer

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Membership application & information at:

www.coalcity.lib.il.us/museum.htm

Carbon Hill Historical Society

Louise Jensen

630 Judson Street

Carbon Hill, IL 60416-7018



Come Visit Us at the Museum!

The Carbon Hill Historical Society is dedicated to the collection, preservation and display of local history. The Society is a registered not-for-profit organization and is the sole owner of the Carbon Hill School Museum. The museum is open Mondays, noon to four p.m. --- or by appointment. We are located at 875 Second Street in Carbon Hill. Dues for membership in the Society is \$15.00 annually. Thank you!



Carbon Hill Historical Society & School Museum
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