



# FRIENDS OF LECLAIRE

## NEWSLETTER

October 2013

Volume 23 No. 3

### Leclaire Parkfest - Sunday, October 20th

The 22nd Annual Leclaire Parkfest will take place Sunday, October 20th from Noon to 5 p.m. at Leclaire Park on Hale Avenue in Edwardsville, IL. The festival features Dixieland jazz by the St. Louis Levee Band Trio (Noon – 2:30 p.m.), followed by bluegrass and other old time folk music from the Lodge Brothers (2:30 p.m.-5:00 p.m.).

A selection of wine and beer offered by Crushed Grapes is complimented by a wide variety of delicious festival food provided by local non-profit organizations. Italian beef, curly fries, funnel cakes, hot dogs, brats, bbq pork, kettle corn and more make Leclaire Park the most aromatic place in town during the festival.

Local artisans and crafters will have their work on display and available for purchase. Games, pet adoptions and other family activities provide something for every age. Several organizations, including St. Andrew’s Church and Watershed Nature Center, are hosting free children’s activities this year.

The DAR will host their annual book sale with thousands of books available at bargain prices on the south end of the park.. Mike Leitner has again contacted friends with vintage vehicles for a display on the east side of the park that includes tractors, trucks, cars and more from another era.

Other exhibits reflect area history and narrated trolley tours tell the unique story of the Leclaire National Historic District.

Vendor applications and information are available on the Friends of Leclaire web site at [www.historic-leclaire.org](http://www.historic-leclaire.org) or by calling Cindy Reinhardt at 656-1294. Vendor applications must be submitted before October 15th.

### Individual’s Generosity Completes Parkfest Funding

Friends of Leclaire has been able to host Leclaire Parkfest the past few years thanks to a tourism grant through the City of Edwardsville. But this year, all tourism funding had been slashed 40%-60% due to budget constraints. FOL was immediately concerned about whether the festival would be possible this year.

Leclaire’s alderman, Keith Short learned of the reduction in funds at an Edwardsville City Council meeting. He called

Friends of Leclaire the next day and offered to make up the difference, then followed up with a check for \$500. Short, an attorney with offices in the historic Klingel House at 1801 N. Main Street, has an appreciation for Leclaire’s history and wanted to make sure the festival remains a part of Edwardsville’s cultural heritage. FOL is very grateful for his generosity and thank him for being a “Friend of Leclaire.”



*Friends of Leclaire volunteers greet visitors at the 2012 Leclaire Parkfest*

### House History Contest

FOL members are encouraged to enter our Leclaire House History Contest to learn the history of their Leclaire home. Members who live outside Leclaire may also submit an entry and request a history of their family home in Leclaire or any Leclaire house that they might be curious about. To enter, send your name, address and phone number to [friends@historic-leclaire.org](mailto:friends@historic-leclaire.org) with the subject line

“House History Contest.” Please indicate which house you want us to research. Winning addresses are drawn randomly, four times per year. You must be a member of Friends of Leclaire to enter the contest. A history of the home of this month’s winner, Drake Kaase, can be found on page 5.



## THANK YOU!

LeClaire Parkfest, Newsletters (publication and delivery), Goshen Market, LeClaire Park gardening and more: Friends of LeClaire, a small organization, has a long list of accomplishments because we have amazing volunteers! And many who are unable to volunteer assist by donating dollars to make the work possible through memberships, donations and memorials. Many thanks for everything you do!

## FOL SHOPPING

### NEW SHIRTS & MORE

A supply of new LeClaire t-shirts and hoodies has arrived just in time for holiday shopping at LeClaire Parkfest. The new t-shirt colors are yellow and light blue, and the hoodies are in cardinal red. In addition, many sizes and styles are available in earlier colors and styles.

Also for sale from Friends of LeClaire are books on LeClaire's history, magnets, tote bags, and gift memberships.

For information call 618-656-1294.

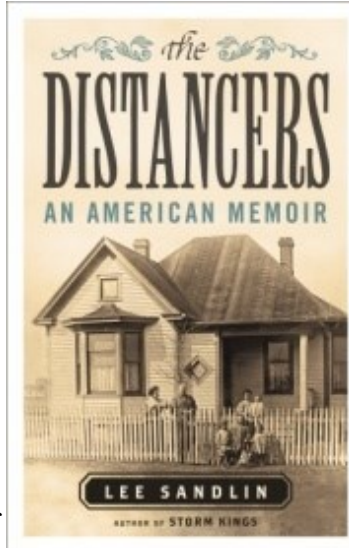
## THE DISTANCERS:

### AN EDWARDSVILLE FAMILY MEMOIR New Book Has LeClaire Connection

In a memoir released last month by Random House, author Lee Sandlin tells the story of his Edwardsville family from the late 1880's until the first years of this century. The story of the Sehnert family will awaken old memories for many readers of a certain age as they are reminded of people, places and events in Edwardsville's past. But you don't need to be from Edwardsville to appreciate this book. In *The Distancers: An American Memoir*, Sandlin offers a rich American family saga that is receiving favorable reviews on the national stage. It just happens to be set in our hometown.

Edwardsville is first introduced in *The Distancers* when John Lewis Sehnert moves here in 1888 and builds a hotel at the corner of Wolf and Fillmore streets near the Clover Leaf Depot. The Sehnert Hotel later became the Liebler Hotel, and in its final years (before the building was destroyed by fire in 1988) many Edwardsville "boomers" lifted a glass or played a game of euchre at the Corner Tavern. The Sehnerts picked their location because of the railroad depot, but their success was guaranteed when Nelson built his village less than a block away.

The book focuses on the family of John Louis Sehnert's son, John Sebastian Sehnert (known as "Bosh"), his wife Agnes, and their children. Bosh was a foreman in the Brass Shop of the N. O. Nelson Manufacturing Company. With a steady income, Bosh and Agnes built a



home on Second Avenue shortly after Mahler Heights was subdivided. The location was near family, since two of his brothers had homes in LeClaire, William at 837 Troy Road and Erwin at 716 Hale Avenue. Their parents lived nearby on Brown Avenue, next to the LeClaire factories and not far from the old Sehnert Hotel and Tavern.

Three of Bosh and Agnes' children, Helen, Hilda and Eugene were born in the Second Avenue house and would make it their home for nearly their entire lives. Their oldest son, Clarence, moved to Chicago, but always sent his children to Edwardsville for the summer where a houseful of aunts and uncles greeted the children each year. When Clarence's children became adults and started families, they also sent their children to Edwardsville for the summer. The author, Lee Sandlin, was one of those children. Although the house is now gone, it will be long remembered in the pages of Sandlin's excellent book.

Sandlin is a more than credible writer. With skill and sensitivity he paints a picture that makes this a book that will be enjoyed by readers everywhere. He has captured the essence of Edwardsville during those years through recollection, family interviews, personal documents and local research. Historically, there are a few inaccuracies, but they are not consequential in the long run. If you appreciate good writing, and enjoy history, this is a book you will appreciate. If you live in Edwardsville, it's even sweeter.

*The Distancers: An American Memoir* (Vintage Books by Random House) is available in paperback AfterWords Bookstore in Edwardsville.

## About Friends of LeClaire

Friends of LeClaire (FOL) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting and enhancing the history and heritage of the LeClaire National Historic District. The organization promotes LeClaire's heritage through advocacy, education, and community involvement.

FOL conducts business meetings at 7 p.m. on the second Tuesday of each month except in December when the regular meeting is replaced with a holiday social and January when it's just too cold!

All members are welcome to attend meetings which are held in room 201 of Building N4 at the Historic N. O. Nelson Campus of Lewis & Clark Community College in Edwardsville.

## Coming Soon

- |        |                      |
|--------|----------------------|
| Oct 12 | Goshen Market Booth  |
| Oct 15 | FOL Business Meeting |
| Oct 20 | LeClaire Parkfest    |
| Nov 12 | FOL Business Meeting |
| Dec 10 | FOL Holiday Social   |

# CURRENT NEWS

## Half Price Trees

Mature trees are one of the best features of an older neighborhood. But many of LeClaire's original trees, planted in the late 19th century, are now gone. Edwardsville's Beautification and Tree Commission (EBTC) encourages residents to plant trees to build a new canopy of trees in Edwardsville.



*Early LeClaire streetscape; looking north from the corner of Hale and Jefferson. Courtesy of Madison County Historical Society.*

The Edwardsville Tree Planting Program reimburses residents one-half (up to \$75) of the cost of purchasing and planting an approved tree at their primary place of residence.

The USDA says that environmental and aesthetic benefits,

such as energy savings, stormwater runoff reduction, cleaner air and higher property values are just a few of the advantages homeowners can enjoy, simply by planting trees.

N. O. Nelson knew that. He might not have said it in exactly the same way, but an important feature in planning LeClaire was the planting of trees. Trees lined the streets and were planted in each yard, hardwoods as well as a fruit trees. And, as mentioned in previous newsletters a line of Osage orange trees, still in existence today, provided the barrier between the factory grounds and the recreation and educational campus.

For details about the Edwardsville Tree Planting Program, pick up an application at the Public Works Office (200 East Park Street), at City Hall (118 East Hillsboro) or at the Edwardsville Public Library.

## Studying LeClaire

LeClaire residents may have noticed folks walking the streets of LeClaire this summer taking photographs of houses and streetscapes. They were here because Edwardsville's Historic Preservation Commission was able to obtain a Certified Local Government Grant to update LeClaire's National Register Application.

When the former village was first designated a National Historic District in 1979, a fairly short application was all that was required. When completed, the new documentation is expected to exceed a hundred pages.

The new study of LeClaire by St. Louis preservationist Michael Allen will be completed in the Spring.

## New Exhibit to Open Science Room

**Member Preview - Fri, Oct 4,  
6 p.m. - 8 p.m.**

**Public Opening - Sat, Oct 5,  
10 a.m. - 12 p.m.**

Learn about physical science and biology in our new Science Room! Explore everyday objects with our Eyeclips Microscope. Learn about structural integrity and life on the moon!

## Parent's Night Out

**Sat, Nov 16, 6 p.m. - 9 p.m.**

Spend the evening exploring the Children's Museum without Mom or



Dad! Enjoy exploration, activities, and snacks! Children must be 3 years old and fully potty trained.

**\$20 per child for Museum Members,**

**\$25 per child for non members**

**Sibling Discounts!**

**The Children's Museum in Edwardsville ♦ 722 Holyoake Road  
Www.edwardsvillechildrensmuseum.org ♦ 618-692-2094**

## Gingerbread Class

**Sat, Dec 14, 9 a.m. - 10 a.m.**

Celebrate the season by making a gingerbread house! For ages 5 - 8 years, this drop off class will include candy, icing, and lots of Christmas cheer!

**\$8 per child per class for members**

**\$10 per child per class for non members**

## Scarecrow Run Cancelled

The 5K Scarecrow Run previously announced by the Children's Museum for October 19th has been cancelled.

Visit the Children's Museum booth at LeClaire Parkfest on October 20th!

# Articles from the Past

**March 19, 1890**

## **Edwardsville Intelligencer**

A party of employees of the N. O. Nelson Manufacturing Co. were out Sunday to look at the lands and see the city. They went over town generally, and expressed themselves well pleased with the idea of becoming residents. The party included G. W. Felton, foreman of one of the departments; G. E., C. N., A. P., Jr., and Harry Predock, Joseph H. Miller and B. F. Smith.

The first transfer of land for the enterprise was made Monday. Wm F. Holle and wife deed to W. F. L. Hadley and E. B. Glass, trustees, 49.34 acres; consideration \$7,500. The papers for the Wolf tracts are also ready, and as soon as sufficient money has been collected to make the payment, the papers will be filed.

The Intelligencer has been requested to urge those subscribers who have not yet paid to do so at once, so that negotiations may be closed.

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**November 4, 1905**

## **Edwardsville Intelligencer**

Late comers to the lecture at Leclaire school house, Tuesday evening went home again without gaining admission to the house. The ordinarily commodious building did not suffice for the audience that gathered there and even standing room was not to be had. Prof. A. L. Berry's lecture on Nansen's trip of exploration to the frozen North was very good as were the stereopticon pictures with which it was accompanied.

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**October 17, 1899**

## **Edwardsville Intelligencer**

The Leclaire night school opened its winter term last night. The night was very bad and the attendance on the first night was eleven, there being, however, an enrollment of twenty-three. The sessions will be held in the school house on Monday and Wednesday nights, beginning at 7:30. W. R. Raymond, bookkeeper in the office at Leclaire, has charge of the classes in bookkeeping and language, and G. W.

Bashaw those in mechanical drawing and mathematics.

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**September 15, 1905**

## **Edwardsville Intelligencer**

The Troy Road trip from one end of Leclaire to the other was lined with electric lights this week. That has been a particularly dark portion of the suburb and the lights were needed. Engineers are running lines for the streets and lots in that part of Leclaire west of the road preparing to open it at once for occupancy.

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**October 4, 1905**

## **Edwardsville Intelligencer**

### **Land Sale Opens Saturday**

B. Irish and H. E. Dickinson of the firm of Irish and Dickinson, are here completing preliminary arrangements to opening the sale of lots in Leclaire. The sale commences Saturday and many advance inquiries have been received from prospective purchasers.

The lots lie on the west side of the Troy road, high and level. There are about 230 in all, and they are to be prepared in splendid shape. The intention is to make this portion of Leclaire even more beautiful than the older part. The streets and sidewalks will be made and cindered, shade trees will be planted along all the streets, and water, electric lights and a sewerage system installed throughout. These improvements will be made without a cent of expense to purchasers. The lots have been placed (priced) very low and the terms are the easiest. A dollar down and a dollar a week is the tempting proposition the owners make, with the assurance of no questionable restrictions, no interest, no mortgage, no taxes until 1908 and no payments when the buyer is laid up by illness. Irish and Dickinson have opened an office in the Intelligencer building on the south side of the court square and are preparing for a busy time as the inquiries are assurance that the lots will sell rapidly.

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**September 9, 1921**

## **Edwardsville Intelligencer Edwardsville is Experiencing Great Building Boom**

*(Note: This an excerpt from a lengthy article listing houses and costs throughout the city in order by contractor. We are listing only the Leclaire homes. Some were built as investments and others were residences built for individual families. Addresses from the 1927 City Directory are given for the individual homeowners in parenthesis behind the listing. These were not part of the original newspaper article and address numbers may have changed since 1927. Abstracts would have to be checked to determine if these addresses are definitive.)*

### **Contractor & builder John L. Schwager:**

Thomas Lautner, Leclaire, 4-rooms, frame, \$3,500. (139 McKinley)

Vincent Syba, Leclaire, 4-rooms, frame, \$3,600. (1024 Ruskin)

Joseph Gremer, Leclaire, 4-rooms, frame, \$3,700. (704 Hale)

Rev. Wm F. Siple, Leclaire, 5-rooms, \$4,500. (208 McKinley)

Joseph A. Long, Leclaire, 7-rooms, \$5,100. (205 Franklin)

Frank J. Koester, Leclaire, 6-rooms, frame, \$5,000 (207 McKinley)

John L. Schwager, Leclaire, 6-rooms, stucco, \$4,500 (210 Franklin)

Joseph Oberto, Leclaire, 5-rooms, stucco, \$4,500. (McKinley?)

Fred Schwager, Leclaire, 5-rooms, frame, \$4,500. (205 McKinley)

### **Contractor & builder Ciro Ersparmer:**

Alex Burke, Leclaire, 6-rooms, \$4,000. (214 Hale)

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**September 22, 1924**

## **Edwardsville Intelligencer**

Mrs. Maude Hepps, who is in charge of the Gospel mission in Edwardsville, conducted a baptismal service at Leclaire Lake yesterday. Seven persons were baptized.

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# 1024 Troy Road—The Ulysses Baker House

The first record of a house at 1024 Troy Road appears in a 1911 city directory, with the Ulysses B. Baker family as residents. Although they didn't own the house at that time, they purchased it in February of 1914 from the N. O. Nelson Manufacturing Company for \$3,600.

It is likely that the Bakers were the first to occupy the house since the address is not listed in the 1910 census, and development of Troy Road south of Holyoake Road was just beginning. In 1911 there were only three houses south of their home on Troy Road.

Ulysses Butler Baker was born in Sneedville, Tennessee in 1872. A veteran of the Spanish American War, he came to Edwardsville after the turn of the century as a widower with two young girls. In 1904 he married Frances Elizabeth Brown, a deputy in the Madison County Recorder's office. Baker, who was called Butler rather than Ulysses, was employed in the Marble Shop of the N. O. Nelson Manufacturing Company.

By 1916 the Baker family, which added a third daughter in 1905 and would soon have a fourth, had plans to move to St. Louis. On October 2, 1916, the following advertisement appeared in the Edwardsville Intelligencer:

"For Sale – My home in Leclaire containing six large rooms, reception hall; all modern conveniences; corner lot 99 x 150; on car line, 20 minutes walk from court house. Bargain if taken at once. U. B. Baker, 1024 Troy Road."

The Bakers sold their house to Alfred Herbert Abbee and his wife Grace Evans Abbee on October 31, 1917.

After a few years, the Baker family returned to Edwardsville where Butler worked a variety of jobs, including a stint with the railroad. In 1939 he began managing the East End Service Station on Route 66 and in 1941 was elected as a justice of the peace in Madison County.

## The Abbee Family 1917-1951

The new owners of the house were both natives of the London area of Great Britain who came to the United States with their infant son, Alfred John Abbee, in 1905. They settled first in Joliet, Illinois, where Grace's twin sister resided. In 1917, they moved to Edwardsville, and not long afterwards, purchased the house on Troy Road.

Mr. Abbee, known by his middle name of Herbert, worked for the Litchfield and Madison Railroad as a boiler maker, a career begun in his youth before leaving England.

The couple had two more children while living in Joliet, Dora, who passed away at the age of 6 a few months before they purchased their home on Troy Road, and second son, Herbert James, who was known as Jim. A fourth child, Lucille, was born a year after they moved into the new house.

The Abbee family joined the community at once, accepting lead-

ership roles with the Masonic Lodge, Eastern Star, Knights of Pythias and other organizations. In addition, they entertained often, so it was a bustling household.

When Leclaire was annexed by the city of Edwardsville in 1934, Herbert was one of two men elected as alderman of Leclaire's Ward Five. He served five years on the city council.

Little is known about their oldest son, Alfred John. It appears he left the area in the early 1930s. Herbert James "Jim" Abbee was active in sports and later worked for both the Intelligencer and Madison Mutual Insurance Company. He enlisted in the Navy during WW II and was given medical training. He met his wife, Jean, a nurse, while stationed at a Navy hospital in Massachusetts.

Lucille, was active in the arts (music and dance lessons), sports, and academics. After a crowded Edwardsville High School social schedule, she went on to Eastern Illinois Teachers College where she played basketball and specialized in mathematics, graduating with

honors in 1939. She took graduate classes at the University of Chicago. In 1943 she married a Naval Reserve Officer, Lt. Eugene B. Kelly, in the living room of the family home on Troy Road on the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her parents' marriage.

It was only thanks to her mother and her brother Jim that Lucille lived to enjoy such a wonderful life. When she was six years old, when trying to place a lighted candle in a jack-o-lantern, the flame touched her dress, quickly igniting the fabric. Her screams brought her mother who, with her brother's help, was able to smother the fire. Lucille and her brother were both burned, but recovered.

By the end of the 1940s, with an empty nest, the house at 1024 was too large for Herbert and Grace. They

had a large lot, as did their neighbor next door (1014 Troy Road), so the Abbees purchased 25 feet off the south side of their neighbor's lot and combined it with part of their lot to create a new lot. In 1951 they built a new home (1020 Troy Road) and sold the house at 1024 Troy Road.

Although Grace and Herbert Abbee left England in 1905 they still had many relatives living in or near London. During WW II the Intelligencer printed first hand reports of the German bombings received in correspondence from their families. Conditions in England, especially London, after the war dictated that the Abbees postpone a visit to London in the late 1940s. Grace passed away in 1955, and the next year Herbert took the first of two trips back to England. There he reunited with sisters he hadn't seen for fifty years. He enjoyed his visits, but upon his return, the Englishman who had become a US citizen in 1912, reported that it was "good to be back in the USA."

After the Abbee family sold the house at 1024 Troy Road, there was a series of short term owners until 1979 when the stately home was purchased by the current owners.



1024 Troy Road circa 1915. Photo courtesy of the Madison County Historical Society

# Leclaire Man Murdered - The Fate of Nelson Voss

By Ashley Mattingly

Nelson Henry Voss grew up on a Madison County farm located in Pin Oak Township. He played the violin, attended Edwardsville High School, and later worked for the Post Office. Nelson Voss was killed on July 13, 1933. Nelson Voss lived in my house.

During the summer of 1933 Voss, 25, and his wife, the former Edna Dietz, lived at 214 West Hale Avenue in Leclaire. His parents and sister had moved to Leclaire in 1930 and lived just down the street at 206 West Hale. Married for almost three years, Nelson and Edna enjoyed visiting friends as well as hosting entertainment at their Leclaire home with games of bunco, luncheons, and surprise parties. The outgoing couple had been involved in musical and theatrical productions since childhood.

Edna, an Edwardsville native, worked as an operator for the Illinois Telephone Company. Nelson, who was hired at the Edwardsville Post Office in 1927, worked as a mail clerk. Fatefully, on July 1, 1933 he was assigned to work as a substitute carrier on Route 3 in Pin Oak Township.

The Christoff family operated a forty-acre truck farm in Pin Oak Township. Christ and Mary Christoff had three children: Sophia, 12; George, 15; and Stella, 17. Stella, who was described as blonde, stalwart and bronzed by the sun from performing farm chores, was in the habit of receiving car rides from a previous mail carrier for the trip home from the Kuhn Station grocery store. As the new substitute carrier on the route, Nelson Voss became the chauffeur and twice granted Stella, who called him "Boss," car rides between Kuhn Station and her mail box, a distance of three miles.

On the morning of July 13, 1933, Nelson Voss set out at 8:45 a.m. to make deliveries. He was due back at noon.

Stella Christoff woke up at 4:00 a.m. and helped prepare breakfast before working in the cabbage garden until 8:30 a.m. Stella and Sophia told their mother that they were going to pick gooseberries, but instead they secreted their father Shapleigh's King Nitro 12-gauge shotgun and his .22 caliber Hamilton rifle from behind the house and went squirrel hunting. Bearing two guns, three shotgun shells, a supply of .22 long and short cartridges for the rifle, and their brother's pocket knife, they set out on their hunt.

About 10 a.m., Stella and Sophia were crossing a wagon bridge on land owned by William Holtgrove as Nelson Voss

approached in his 1929 Ford Coupe. They were near Sylvan Hall School and William Boehm's farmhouse along Silver Creek bottom.

Nelson's version of how the story unfolded that morning will never be known, but according to the Christoff sisters, Voss stopped when he saw them and got out of his car. Resting his foot on the sideboard, he asked the sisters what they were doing. After Stella explained that they were hunting squirrels, Voss replied, "Honey, I'll show you how to hunt squirrels." Voss then approached Stella and put his arm around her, they exchanged words, and he then tried to kiss her. She slapped him. He ordered Sophia to go home and led Stella into the woods. Stella told Sophia to stay. As Voss turned to tell Sophia to go home one last time, Stella shot him in the back with the shotgun. He turned to Stella, said, "Ouch," and fell into the creek.

Intending to shoot him a second time, Stella loaded the shotgun and aimed, but the shotgun failed to explode. Stella asked for the .22 rifle her sister held as she explained, "I'm going to shoot him again. I want to kill him." She pointed the gun at Nelson Voss' already lifeless body and, aiming at his head, shot him in the left shoulder. She then removed the exploded long cartridge from the rifle with the pocket knife and dropped both on the ground.

The girls took the undelivered packages from Voss's car, and, passing through Helmich's pasture, walked the mile to their home. Sophia later hid them in the trunk of a farm work-er on the property.

Later that morning, while inspecting his fence, farmer John Burk found the body of Voss in the creek. Burk called the sheriff's office from the farmhouse of Fred Engeling, who was making hay earlier in the day with two helpers. All three men heard the shots fired. A knife bearing a distinctive yellow and black handle was found at the scene near the body.

Immediately following the report of Voss' death, speculations arose ranging from suicide to involvement with the recent kidnapping of August Luer, a wealthy Alton-area banker and packer. Coroner Billings stated that he heard of an old grudge held against Nelson Voss among the people of Pin Oak. The following day, men, women and children visited the murder site as many attempted to find clues.

Nelson Voss's body was prepared for burial and taken to his home in Leclaire to lie overnight in preparation for the



*Senior portrait of Nelson Voss from the 1926 Edwardsville High School Tigers Yearbook. His quote: "Girls, you have no charms for me."*

## The Fate of Nelson Voss (cont.)

funeral July 17<sup>th</sup>, 1933. After a private service at home, he was taken to Immanuel M. E. Church where Voss had been baptized and confirmed. An estimated 1,200 mourners attended the funeral of the postal worker whose death was reported across the country under the headline "Death for Kiss."

Two days later, a long .22 caliber shell was found at the site of Voss' death. Meanwhile, an investigation into the owner of the pocket knife found near the creek revealed it was of the same ilk given to Sylvan Hall School students for Christmas 1932 by teacher Mary Kranz. The only student who could not produce his or her pocket knife was George Christoff.

Consequently, a search warrant was issued to search the Christoff house and Christ, George, Stella, and Steve Petroff (a cousin living with the family) were taken to the State's Attorney's office in Edwardsville. Stella was questioned, but she denied any knowledge of the incident and was released. The three men were initially charged with murder although no direct evidence was found against them. Circumstantial evidence proved sufficient to hold them.

In the intervening time, Lee Whiteside, a Pin Oak farmer, reported that "one of the Christoff children" purchased five shotgun shells from him around July 2<sup>nd</sup> for five cents.

On August 1<sup>st</sup>, Steve Petroff admitted to Sheriff Fitzgerald that he was familiar with the stolen mail packages which were in the trunk of Frank Stroak, a fifty-eight year old Russian living in an outbuilding on the Christoff farm. Stella, Sophia, and Stroak were then brought in for questioning.

Now in the custody of authorities, Stella issued a formal confession, opening with, "I killed Nelson Voss, a rural mail carrier in the woods." The *Edwardsville Intelligencer* reported on August 1, 1933 that Stella stated, "He pinched me, squeezed me, and tried to kiss me. I got mad and I shot him." The newspaper also reported that "she did not break down and cry and evidenced no sign of emotion." Other members of the Christoff family were released.

The *Intelligencer* also published Stella's written confession, which prompted newspaper staff to write the August 3rd article "An Expression of Sympathy," which articulated, "... Mr. Voss led an exemplary life prior to the day upon which he

met his death under circumstances which have been explained only by those seeking to present their own actions in the best light."

Stella Christoff was held in the county jail without bond on the charge of homicide. She was indicted for murder by a Grand Jury on August 12<sup>th</sup>.

The trial, *The People of the State of Illinois versus Stella Christoff on the Indictment of Murder*, began on November 13, 1933. State Attorney Geers claimed that the motive of the Christoff sisters was robbery while Attorney Bandy claimed the motive was to ward off Voss' advances.

The trial was incredibly popular, drawing a standing room only crowd. According to the *Edwardsville Intelligencer*, the popularity of the trial was spurred by how well known Nelson Voss was amongst the people of Edwardsville and Pin Oak.

After only two days, the jury was sent to deliberate. The sentence for murder at that time was electrocution, a fate rarely given to women. Christoff's jury, after twenty-four hours of debating over whether to convict her of murder or manslaughter, found her guilty of manslaughter. She was sentenced to a term of one to fourteen years at the Dwight Prison for Women.

Stella's first day in prison was December 7, 1933. She shared the prison walls with 250 other women where she was the youngest of the prison population to be convicted of manslaughter. It is unknown exactly how many years she served, but in 1937 she was denied parole for a minimum of five years.

The parents of Nelson Voss remained Leclaire residents the rest of their lives. His widow, Edna, was denied a pension by the post office. She married Ben Breve in 1936 and leased the Leclaire house, which she sold in 1946 to Louis Lange.

♦ ♦ ♦

*Ashley Mattingly is an archivist for the National Archives at St. Louis. She maintains the personnel records of former civil servants, which is how she initially discovered the story of Nelson Voss' fate. In addition to the official personnel folder of Nelson Voss, she consulted city directories, newspaper articles, court records, plat maps, and census records to gather information for this article.*



August 8, 1933, From the *Miami Oklahoma News*

2013 OCTOBER 20

Sunday • Noon - 5 PM  
Leclaire Park  
Edwardsville, Illinois



### ARTS & CRAFTS

Browse a variety of crafts booths including jewelry, needlework, Groovyware tie-dyed clothing, wooden toys, greeting cards, doll clothes and MORE!

### Trolley Tours

Pleasant narrated trolley rides through the Leclaire National Historic District provide a glimpse into the past.

### Children's Activities

Crafts & activities center, face & hair painting and games.

### Book Sale

Thousands of used books. Something for everyone. Lots of bargains!

### Pet Adoption

Looking for a new best friend? Check out the cuddly pets ready for adoption.

### Exhibits

Historic photos & memorabilia, vintage tractors & farm equipment!

*Parking available at Leclaire School, the Nelson Campus of LCCC or on streets within the Leclaire neighborhood. (no shuttle service). Handicap parking available next to park.*

### Live Entertainment

NOON - 2:30 pm

**Old St. Louis**

**Levee Band Trio**

Dixieland Jazz

2:30 - 5 pm

**The Lodge Brothers**

Old Time Folk Music

### Food

Beer & Wine Garden hosted by Crushed Grapes, brats, BBQ, Italian beef, cup cakes, funnel cakes, gyros, hamburgers, curly fries, kettle corn, nachos, chicken kabobs, lemon shake-ups and more!

PROCEEDS GO TO LOCAL CHARITIES AND COMMUNITY GROUPS

[www.historic-leclaire.org](http://www.historic-leclaire.org)