



# FRIENDS OF LECLAIRE

## NEWSLETTER

December 2015

Volume 25 No. 4

### MAKE IT A LECLAIRE CHRISTMAS!

Friends of Leclaire has a variety of Leclaire merchandise that make wonderful holiday gifts. Leclaire shirts with the Nelson Memorial Fountain (turkey boy) are available in multiple colors and there are hoodies, long-sleeve t-shirts, unisex t-shirts, ladies t-shirts, and crew neck sweatshirts. The new factory design is available in unisex t-shirts (light grey) and women's t-shirts (black). There are two different books on



*The latest Leclaire t-shirt design by Sherrie Hickman of Creative Options Graphic Design.*

Leclaire, Leclaire tote bags, and even Leclaire magnets. In addition to the merchandise, a membership in Friends of Leclaire makes a perfect gift and it's easy to wrap! Call 618-656-1294 to inquire about Leclaire merchandise.

Another Leclaire gift idea (not available through Friends of Leclaire) is the DVD of *Marshall the Miracle Dog* which was filmed in Leclaire last year.

### CHRISTMAS SOCIAL

Members of Friends of Leclaire are invited to our annual potluck social on Tues, Dec 8, at 7 p.m. hosted by the McCabe family at 909 Hale Avenue. The McCabe home, a Sears Winona kit house, is a charming bungalow with beautiful original woodwork. The history of the house was featured in the Mar 2015 FOL newsletter (available on the FOL web site.) The annual party is a great way to meet your neighbors and others who love our wonderful neighborhood.

Guests are asked to bring a plate of "finger foods" to share and if you are so inclined, BYOB. The hosts will provide non-alcoholic beverages, plates, and silverware. Please RSVP to FOL President Mike Reinhardt at 618-656-1294 and remember, you must be a member to attend.

### LIGHTS IN LECLAIRE!

#### LUMINARIAS AT LECLAIRE PARK

On Sunday, Dec 13, from 6:30 p.m. - 8 p.m. Friends of Leclaire will place luminarias around the perimeter of Leclaire Park as a celebration of the season. Hopefully the weather will cooperate making it a beautiful evening for a stroll or cruise around the park. Local choirs, choruses, or even groups of musical friends are invited to stop by during the evening to add their voices to the beauty of the evening by singing a carol or two from the bandstand. Officially the park is closed after dark so we ask visitors to remain on the sidewalks for safety reasons.

If you would like to help with this project, set-up will begin at 4:30 p.m. Please call Bob Nickrent at 618-407-5268 to volunteer. Remember, "many hands make light work!"

### 125 Years Ago ~

Leclaire was six months old and the budding village was bustling with construction projects as the factories and the residential area took shape.

The streets of Leclaire were laid out and a consignment of elm and maple shade trees had been planted. Wooden sidewalks had also been installed.

Several factories had been completed including the cabinet works, the copper and finishing shops, and the bath tub works.

Men were already at work, sometimes working over-time to fill orders.

Nearly a dozen houses were completed or under construction and the Club House was full to capacity with additional men lodging in one of the new cottages. Mr. Nelson had already donated a free library in the Club House.

The company's electric plant was up and running so the village shown with light in the early evening hours. It also provided light for workers who, in their free time, were building a bowling and billiard recreation hall for employees.

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[www.historic-leclaire.org](http://www.historic-leclaire.org) ♦ [friends@historic-leclaire.org](mailto:friends@historic-leclaire.org) ♦ 618-656-1294

# FOL MEMBERSHIPS

## MAKE SPECIAL GIFTS



Do you know someone who would enjoy receiving Friends of Leclaire newsletters? FOL memberships are available for just \$15 and membership gift certificates are available on request.

FOL members are not required to live in Leclaire. About half of our membership consists of former Leclaire residents or folks with an interest in history. The newsletter is hand delivered in Leclaire to every home, but mailed (four times a year) to members who live outside the historic district.

To join FOL or give a gift membership this Christmas, send a check for \$15 with your name address, phone and e-mail address to FOL, P. O. Box 644, Edwardsville, IL, 62025.

Your membership dollars make it possible for Friends of Leclaire to produce this newsletter and complete many gardening projects at Leclaire Park. For addition information, call 618-656-1294.

Thank you to all who renewed their membership or joined Friends of Leclaire at Leclaire Parkfest. Your support is greatly appreciated and a Parkfest renewal saves us postage and printing expenses!

*Leclaire Parkfest photos at right courtesy of Cindy Reinhardt and Bill Tucker*

# LECLAIRE PARKFEST

## THANK YOU! IT TAKES A VILLAGE

That phrase is so appropriate for the festival that celebrates the history of the

former Village of Leclaire. This year the festival was nearly perfect. The weather was beautiful, the crowds were strong, and there was a record number of vendors. Dozens of Friends of Leclaire members and friends volunteered to help with set-up, signage, the FOL booth, park preparation (love the fall flowers!), tours, and so much more. It is impossible to name everyone but in particular the following were all-day

volunteers: William Krause, Jim Milgrim, Theresa Morrison, Al & Kim Pauli, and Mike and Cindy Reinhardt.

We are especially grateful to our sponsors: Krause Properties, Attorney Keith Short, TheBank of

Edwardsville, and Sherrie Hickman of Creative Options Design.

And finally we need to thank the City of Edwardsville. The Edwardsville Parks and Recreation Department had the

grounds in wonderful condition and a friendly, efficient employee was on site throughout the festival.

Also on hand were Edwardsville Police Department personnel to

help with parking and traffic, and to hand out Dare materials to children. We are always grateful for their presence.

We said farewell to the DAR this

year as they announced they would no longer be able to host their annual book sale at Leclaire Parkfest. This year marked the festival's

24<sup>th</sup> year, and the DAR has been there for most of them. The Relay for Life team at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church is planning to take over

the book sale for next year's festival on Sun, Oct 16.



## 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 PM 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.

## FOL Calendar

- |        |  |
|--------|--|
| Dec 8  | FOL Holiday Social, 7 pm<br>(Members only) |
| Dec 13 | Luminarias in the Park<br>6:30 - 8 p.m.    |
| Jan 12 | No FOL Meeting                             |
| Feb 9  | FOL Board Meeting, 7 pm                    |
| Mar 8  | FOL Board Meeting, 7 pm                    |

# THE LECLAIRE KINDERGARTEN

Leclaire's kindergarten program began in the fall of 1892 in the Leclaire Club House at 722 Holyoake Road. In 1895, the Club House was moved to 743 Hale Avenue so that a new education building could be constructed on Holyoake. The 1895 Leclaire School House is now home to the Edwardsville Children's Museum. (The former Club House building is no longer in existence.)

There were many experiments in education in Leclaire's early years, but the kindergarten was the only one that lasted beyond a few years. From 1896-1898 there was a Leclaire Academy and for some of those years a Leclaire College offered classes for older students and adults free of charge, but these did not last long. After this time, the building's daytime educational endeavors were dedicated to the kindergarten. While the building was called the Leclaire School House prior to this, it now became known as the Leclaire Kindergarten.

The kindergarten was a two year program that enrolled students in September who would turn four-years-old before Dec 1. It used a method of instruction developed by German educator Friedrich Froebel that still inspires early childhood education today. Children were taught about nature, mathematics (geometric forms, etc.) and the arts in the form of music, drama, and hand-work. Through this guided play children were gently taught self-awareness and social skills. Froebel believed children should be nourished like plants in a protected garden, and called his program Kinder-Garten which is German for "Children's Garden."

The first teacher was Miss J. Colt of Collinsville who started with a class of 16 students in Sept 1892. The kindergarten was free and open to residents of Leclaire or Edwardsville until 1916 when the company began charging students who were not the children of Nelson employees or residents of Leclaire. The cost to "outsiders" was \$6 per semester. In 1931, due to financial strains brought on by the Depression, they began also charging Leclaire residents a small tuition if they were not the children of employees. At the time they were quoted as saying "The kindergarten is being kept up



*Above is the Leclaire School House as pictured in a local advertisement in 1914. Below: One of the earliest pictures of Leclaire students is this one from 1903 donated to the Madison County Historical Society by Mildred Shaw Briggs. Mildred would later become a teacher at the school. The teacher pictured here is Olive Thomas. Mildred is the first girl on the left in the center row. (Courtesy of MCHS.)*



as a memorial to N. O. Nelson" who was known for his affection towards children.

The Leclaire kindergarten had a number of outstanding teachers over the years and they were all women because Froebel believed women to be more nurturing. As was usual in those days, when a woman married, she no longer worked outside the home, so there was quite a turnover in educators.

One teacher who stands out is Mildred Shaw. Mildred was born in St. Louis in 1896 and the family moved to Leclaire the following year. Her father, William Shaw, had been commuting to work in Leclaire for some time, and according to Mildred, the great cyclone of 1897 in St. Louis spurred the move of a number of Nelson employees to Leclaire. Their home was located on the corner of Jefferson and Hale so was near the school. Mildred attended classes (K-3) at the Leclaire School House before continuing her education in the public school located on Kansas Street in Edwardsville (Columbus School). She graduated from Edwardsville High School in 1914.

A few years later she applied for the position of teaching assistant at Leclaire Kindergarten and was hired. In an interview conducted and filmed by Bob Gill in 1989, Mildred said she had musical and recitation talents that seemed to be a good fit. When Pearl Wilson, the lead teacher, married in 1928, Mildred did not apply for her position, but Louis Lawnin, president of the N. O. Nelson Manufacturing Company, came to her home and told her, "The people want you." Mildred accepted the position.

It should be mentioned that during the 1920s Edwardsville still did not offer a free public kindergarten, although there was a second kindergarten in town operated by Mrs. Blanche Klein. Prior to her marriage to Emil Miller in 1916, Blanche Miller was a public school teacher for many years, but had to resign when she married. Soon after her marriage she established a private kindergarten which began in rooms at the Wildey Theatre. It then moved to 120 East Vandalia Street and in later years to the Klein home at 829 North Buchanan Street. It is unknown how many students were at the Klein kindergarten, but through the 1920s the Leclaire Kindergarten had an



*Mildred Shaw and her brother Evan Shaw in a photograph taken in the 1920s. The Shaw family lived on the NW corner of Jefferson and Hale Avenues. (Courtesy of Suzanne Shaw Nevins)*

enrollment of approximately 40 students. Students attended half-day sessions.

When Leclaire was annexed by Edwardsville in 1934, the School House was sold to the Edwardsville School District. The building was then divided into four permanent classrooms, one for Miss Shaw's private kindergarten, and the other rooms for grades 1-3. The building closed as a school house in 1963.

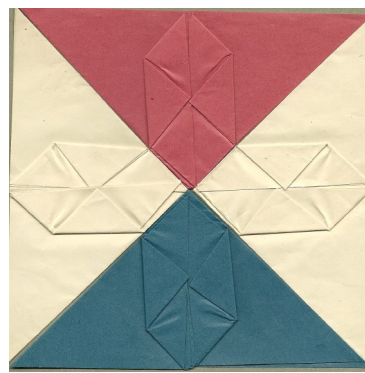
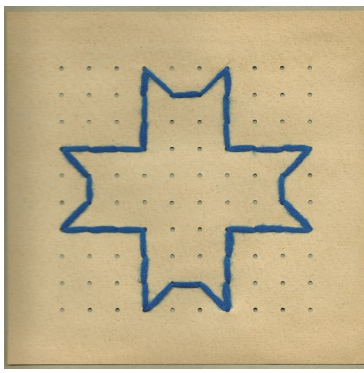
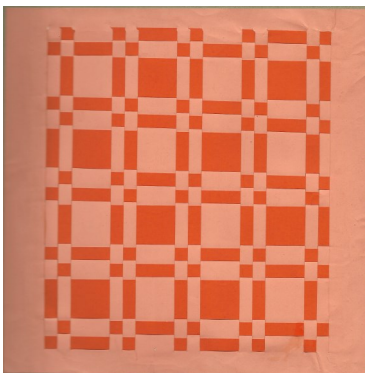
Mildred continued to teach her private kindergarten students until 1943 when she married Edwin Briggs and, like the Leclaire teachers before her, left teaching to become a housewife.

Dolores Howerton Rohrkašte grew up on Ruskin Avenue and attended the Leclaire Kindergarten from fall 1927 through her graduation in May 1929. Fortunately she kept some of her school work (shown below) which was donated to the Madison County Historical Society. Her gift provides a glimpse into the work of local kindergarten students over 80 years ago.

An early activity at the kindergarten was the end-of-school program with songs, dances and recitations followed by the children dancing around a Maypole. For many years, the elaborate dresses worn by the girls were made of tissue paper sewn by their mothers. This tradition continued with Miss Shaw's private kindergarten and is a favorite memory of former students.



*This 1928 Maypole dance at Leclaire School included the donor's mother, Loretta Pizzini Stullken and Dolores Howerton Rohrkašte. (Courtesy of Kathryn Stullken Biarkis)*



*At left are samples of kindergarten "hand-work" from Dolores Howerton Rohrkašte's kindergarten workbook that illustrate paper weaving, sewing and origami skills. There were also pages showing collage and additional origami designs. (Courtesy of Dolores Rohrkašte)*

## *Article from the Past -*

December 28, 1894  
Edwardsville Intelligencer

### **Leclaire's Christmas**

The Leclaire kindergarten had its Christmas treat Monday morning. After the regular exercises by the children the tree was brought in by George Roe, who acted in the capacity of Santa and distributed candies, nuts and oranges among the little ones, whose joy knew no bounds.

### *The Leclaire Turkey*

*The neighborhood turkey continues to make the rounds in Leclaire, being spotted on a porch on the 700 block of Holyoake this week and in the 900 block earlier in the week. As of this writing, Thanksgiving has yet to arrive and the turkey is still among the living. (Courtesy of Chandler Vandenburg)*

