

FRIENDS OF LECLAIRE Newsletter



Robert C. Lange's Memorial Sundial in Leclaire

Vol. 21 No. 3

P.O. Box 644, Edwardsville, Illinois 62025

October 2011

LECLAIRE PARKFEST CELEBRATES 20 YEARS!

In 1990 Leclaire celebrated its Centennial with a party at Leclaire Park. People had a good time, a very good time! So they decided to do it again. With the exception of one year in the early 1990s, the celebration has become an annual event bringing residents and visitors together for an afternoon of music, fun and, of course, lots of great food prepared by local not-for-profit organizations. A craft fair, used book sale, games and activities for kids, pony rides and an exhibit of vintage tractors provide entertainment.

For Friends of Leclaire, it's an opportunity to tell the story of Leclaire through narrated trolley tours of the Leclaire National Historic District and displays of historic Leclaire photographs. Leclaire Parkfest is a salute to an activity often celebrated in the early days of Leclaire when Nelson hosted picnics for employees and their guests several times each summer.

We hope you'll join us for the 20th annual celebration. See the flier included with this newsletter for information on the festival.

WELCOME TO LECLAIRE!

If you have just purchased a home in Leclaire, we'd like to welcome you to the neighborhood with a Friends of Leclaire Welcome bag. Contact us at 656-1294 or at friends@historic-leclaire.org.

2011 BAND CONCERT

The Edwardsville Municipal Band's put on a great concert for over 50 people at Leclaire Park on June 12th. The weather (for a change) was outstanding! Thanks to Kathy Krishnan, Syvella Gregory and the Reinhardts for working the concession booth for Friends of Leclaire.



PARK CLEAN-UP DAY

Volunteers are needed to help pick-up and spruce-up Leclaire Park on Saturday, October 15th in preparation for Leclaire Parkfest. The neighborhood is on parade for the festival so we want the park, as well as all of Leclaire, to look its best. Park clean-up begins at 9 am and usually takes only a couple hours since the Parks Department does a great job. Questions? Call Mike Reinhardt at 656-1294.

ROSE GARDEN SUNDIAL REPLACED

In 1991 roses for a garden in Leclaire Park were donated by Burns Nursery. Three years later, in 1994, a sundial in memory of Robert C. Lange (1920-1993) was added to the rose garden. It was vandalized several times, but in June, Lange's sister, Billie Mae Wilson, came forward to purchase a new sundial for the garden in his memory and it was installed by the Edwardsville Parks Department.

In the 1920s, Robert Lange's father built the house at 1023 Ruskin that would be Robert's home, except for WWII military service, until his death in 1993.

Lange attended Leclaire kindergarten and spent all of his youth in Leclaire. It was a place dear to his heart so this remembrance in his honor is appropriately placed. Many in the community remember Lange with fondness because of his love of music and history, and his enthusiastic participation in the Halloween Parade and theatricals.

FREE GIFT WITH MEMBERSHIP AT LECLAIRE PARKFEST!

The 2011 Membership Drive will take place at Leclaire Parkfest when most of our members traditionally renew their membership. To encourage new members, FOL will give each new or renewing member a Friends of Leclaire tote bag if they sign up at Leclaire Parkfest.

Friends of Leclaire is dedicated to preserving the unique heritage of Leclaire. One of the ways we do that is by publishing this newsletter which is distributed to over 400 homes in the Leclaire National Historic District, plus mailed to members outside the district and made available at several public venues in Edwardsville. Your membership helps us cover the expense of the newsletter as well as expenses incurred to build and maintain a web site focused on Leclaire history. Whether you live in Leclaire now or in the past, or just appreciate our great history, please join to show your support. Gift memberships are also available.

As of October 1st, Friends of Leclaire memberships are now \$15 annually. This is the first price increase since the organization was formed in 1990. A membership application is included with this newsletter.

LECLAIRE PARKFEST VOLUNTEERS

This year we have two new volunteers on the Leclaire Parkfest Team. Will Kraus will take over organizing the Friends of Leclaire booth at the festival, and Elaine Shashack has taken on publicity. Many thanks to Ginger McCall and James Grandone for many years of service in those areas. Your hard work was greatly appreciated!

It takes many people to make Leclaire Parkfest run smoothly. Please call if you are able to assist. We need volunteers to help with set-up and take-down and to work shifts at the Friends of Leclaire booth. Call 656-1294 if you can help.

RIZZOLI FAMILY RETURNS TO LECLAIRE

The Rizzoli family is planning a reunion Leclaire Parkfest week-end. The family built and occupied at least five homes in Leclaire beginning in the early 1890s. Friends of Leclaire will provide a tour of the neighborhood that will show them their ancestral homes. You may schedule a tour at no charge by calling 656-1294.

THANKS TO LECLAIRE GARDENERS

Friends of Leclaire volunteers spend hundreds of hours each summer tending plants at Leclaire Park. The past two years the major duty has been to keep the plants watered during the extremely dry July and August. Mike Reinhardt, Jim Milgrim and Jack and Ginger McCall have been most responsive to this need, and their hard work is greatly appreciated.



22ND WAG N WALK

Kathy Turner, Executive Director of the Metro East Humane Society, and Jill Winte, Chairman of the Wag N Walk, were very pleased with the 150 registered runners and walkers for their 22nd year of raising funds for the Humane Society, which took place at Leclaire park on September 17th.

A NEW FRIENDS OF LECLAIRE SHIRT

Sherrie Hickman of Creative Options Design created a new design for Friends of Leclaire shirts that will be available in time for Leclaire Parkfest. The new design will be printed on navy blue long sleeved t-shirts and on chocolate brown sweatshirts and hoodies. Watch for the new design at the Friends of Leclaire booth at the Goshen Market on October 15th or at Leclaire Parkfest. Call 656-1294 to order in advance.

NEW WEB SITE COMING!

Friends of Leclaire is working with InLand Design to create a new web site. It will have room for more content and be easy to navigate, making it an excellent resource for students and professional historians looking for information on Leclaire. Plans are to launch the site before the end of the year.



Audrey caught a big one at Leclaire Lake.

ARTICLES FROM THE PAST

These articles about Leclaire and Nelson are from publications in New York, Chicago, London and St. Louis. They describe how Leclaire got its name, the Leclaire profit-sharing plan, the opening of the Leclaire education building and Nelson's death in 1922.

March 1892

The Cosmopolitan (magazine)
Cosmopolitan Publishing Company
New York, New York

Social Problems by Edward Everett Hale (excerpt)

The end of 1891 saw one anniversary at the very heart of this country, which may prove to mark an epoch in the social problems of our time. Three hundred workmen, belonging to the N. O. Nelson Manufacturing company of St. Louis, celebrated at Leclaire the successful transfer of its works from the city of St. Louis to the town which has taken the name of the great Frenchman. Jean-Edmée Leclaire is the successful head of the coöperative industry in France, which has resulted so favorably for those who have united in it. Mr. Nelson is, so far as I know, the largest manufacturer in America who has come cordially into this system. Satisfied some time since that the expansion of the works of the Nelson company required their removal from St. Louis, Mr. Nelson found in Illinois, not far distance from that city, a proper place for the erection of new works and for a village for the workmen. That town is now well forward, and the celebration of the 19th of December last may be considered as its baptism. The cooperators gave it the name of Leclaire, as I have said, in honor of the great Frenchman.

Note: Full text of article is available at googlebooks.com

January 18, 1894

Unity: A Magazine of Religion
Chicago, Illinois

One Solution of the Labor Problem

The last issue of *Employer and Employed*, published by the Association for the Promotion of Profit-Sharing, contains the story of the Leclaire experiment, by Dr. Edward Everett Hale. Dr. Hale

visited Leclaire last February. He describes the town itself as very attractive. The site, covering 125 acres not far from St. Louis, was purchased in 1890 by the company manufacturing plumbers' supplies, of which N. O. Nelson is President. The houses, "not uniform in construction, but all pretty and artistic in design," are sold by the corporation outright to the workingmen, not simply rented to them. The business was started in 1877 by Mr. Nelson in St. Louis. In 1886 he proposed the profit sharing innovation. By the original plan 6 per cent of the profits was first set aside as interest on the capital invested, then 10 per cent for a reserve fund and 10 per cent more for a provident fund. "The remainder was divided by an equal percentage between capital and labor." During the seven years of the experiment these wage dividends have averaged 8 per cent. They were originally payable in cash, "to make it clear that they meant money," although the employees had the option of taking the dividends in stock, to encourage co-operation. Now these dividends are payable only in stock. But when an employee leaves the company it buys his stock at par. The separate provident fund has been dropped. The employees maintain a co-operative store. All purchases must be paid for in cash. "The business of this store has steadily grown. It has paid 6 per cent interest on the capital, and has returned an average of 15 per cent on the purchases. It is conducted on the Rochdale plan of selling at the usual retail prices and returning the profit in proportion to the purchases." The experiment seems to stand well the test of hard times. A proposition to take in sail, made by the management to the men last July, was accepted unanimously and "with cheers." The present arrangement is this: "Until the hard times are over, three-fourths of the present rate of wages and salaries

will be paid in cash, and the other one-fourth will be paid at the end of this year if there is anything left after allowing 6 per cent interest on capital for that part of the year during which full wages have been paid, and 4 ½ per cent interest on that part of the year in which three-fourths wages have been paid. If not made good out of this year's profit, it will be made good out of any future year in which there is profit above simple interest on capital."

Note: The workmen were repaid the short wages at the end of the year as promised. The cooperative store was located near the corner of Wolf and Leclaire near the current Nelson Campus of LCCC.

January, 1896

Labour-CoPartnership

Volume 2, Number 1
London, England

We learn from the *Edwardsville Intelligencer* that the New Education Building of Leclaire, the N. O. Nelson Manufacturing Co.'s co-operative village has been dedicated with great rejoicings. The large room, 40ft by 60ft., was crammed. There were music, speeches and a dance. Mr. Nelson explained that the building had been erected by the united work of all the employees. All its facilities were free to everybody. Lectures and entertainments would be given free weekly, and all are invited. The library, industrial school, night school and kindergarten were also free to everyone. The building would be devoted to education, recreation and religion. At any time, if not previously engaged, it could be had for religious and social purposes within the broadest limits.

Note: The "New Education Building" described in this article is currently the home of the Children's Museum at Edwardsville.

Saturday, October 7, 1922

St. Louis Star

St. Louis, MO

LECLAIRE MOURNS FOR N. O. NELSON, TOWN'S FOUNDER

Philanthropist Shared Earnings With
Employees – Leaves Only Modest
Estate, His Belief.

The little town of Le Claire, near Edwardsville, Ill., today is mourning the loss of the founder, friend and advisor, N. O. Nelson, St. Louis manufacturer and philanthropist, who died at Los Angeles, Cal., Thursday. Nelson, as head of the N. O. Nelson Manufacturing Company, founded the village in 1890 with the idea of exemplifying his notion of what an ideal town should be.

For many years he lived in the town, acting as advisor and friend to the 1,000 inhabitants. The village is regarded as an ideal settlement, and has no police force. All business in the town will cease while the funeral is being held, probably next Wednesday.

Because he believed it his mission to divide his earnings and profits with the less fortunate, Nelson is thought to have only a modest estate, despite the fact that he was the founder of one of the largest plumbing supply houses in the world.

Nelson was born in Norway in 1844 and came to this country at the age of 2 with his parents, who were well-to-do farmers living at St. Joseph, Mo. Until he reached young manhood, he came to St. Louis without resources.

Rise was Rapid

Two years later he was head of the N. O. Nelson Manufacturing Company. His first job here was as bookkeeper with a pump company. When it became involved in financial difficulties, young Nelson, as one of the partners, took charge and brought the company through. In 1877, he started his own company.

One of the first evidences of his philanthropic bent showed a few years later when he built a swimming pool on the levee for children who had

been bathing in the river at the risk of drowning.

"I went to work for him more than 35 years ago," L. D. Lawnin, now head of the company and Nelson's son-in-law, said today. "He was always a hard worker and remained at the office from 8 in the morning until 6 at night. He was always trying to help someone. One of his favorite acts was taking poor children on steamboat excursions. His only diversion was the study of social problems.

"Beyond his work as a philanthropist he was a thorough businessman and could have been one of our great millionaires had he devoted all his time to business. He believed, however, he had a duty to his fellows as well as to his business.

"He was much among his employes and knew them personally. Many years ago he inaugurated a profit sharing plan which is still in effect, with modifications. He has not been identified with the plumbing supply business, however, for about twelve years."

Mr. Nelson, in recent years, has devoted himself to working out many of the problems he studied. Among them was the founding of a co-operative system of grocery stores in New Orleans. The venture, however, was ill starred and he was finally compelled to file personal petition for bankruptcy.

Following the death of his wife in 1919, Mr. Nelson went to California, where he remained until his death. His funeral will be

held from the Lawnin residence, 5138 Washington boulevard, Wednesday at 3 p.m., if the body arrives in time.

Note: This article included a portrait of Nelson

The three buildings pictured below were the public buildings of Le Claire pictured in the Industrial Edition of the Edwardsville Intelligencer in 1895. The building at the top of the photo was called the Le Claire Club House. Built in 1890 as a combination lodging house and community center, it was moved to 743 Hale Avenue in 1895 so the Le Claire School House, shown in the second photo below, could be built in its location on Holyoake Road. It is now the Children's Museum at Edwardsville.

The lowest photo shows the Le Claire Bowling and Billiards Hall which was located on Hale Avenue near the present day Le Claire Field stadium. The Le Claire School House is the only one of the three buildings in existence today.

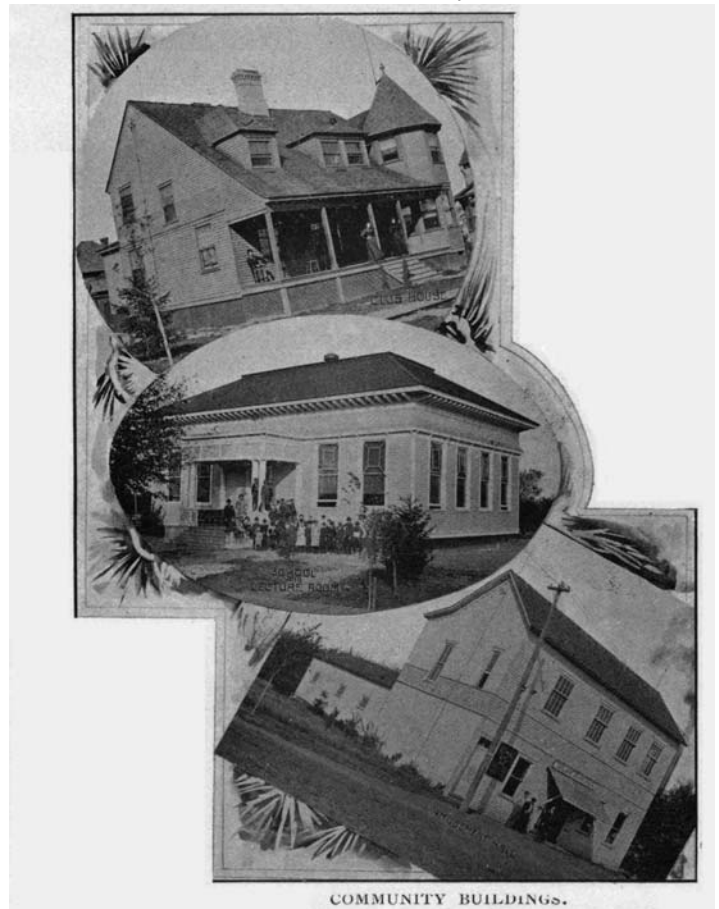


Photo courtesy of Madison County Historical Society