

## **Ogle County Historical Society and Museum**

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Imagine traveling back in time 100 to 150 years. Imagine having the opportunity to see how people dressed and how they lived in the 1800s and 1900s. The Ogle County Historical Society is a great substitute for a time machine because this Society displays and collects items from those time periods, from antiques, artifacts, and old photographs, to war memorabilia, even from the Civil War. The Society also has a history of its own.

In March 1953, a proposal was made to form the Ogle County Historical Society by Mrs. H. B. Walker of the Ogle County Federation of Women's Clubs. The proposal was accepted and, with free legal advice from Attorney Gerald K. Garard, a committee was appointed to follow through with the plans. The original incorporators were Miss Ella Chaney, Miss Ruby Nash, Mrs. Ivan Kuntzelman, Mrs. Yale Bates, Mrs. Harold Walker, and Mrs. Arthur Beebe. The first charter life member of the Society was Mr. C. Merle Haselton. On May 31, 1955, the constitution was completed and adopted by the membership. The first Board of Directors consisted of Victor Conkey, Frank Coffman, Willard Jones, Mrs. Isaac Canfield, Miss Lillian Storz, Russell Poole, Everett Webster, C. C. Parks, George Etnyre, Kenneth Cleaver, Mrs. C. M. Tilton, and Mrs. Edith Carmichael. The constitution states: "The object of this Society shall be to discover, preserve, and disseminate the History of Ogle County and the State of Illinois."

Many projects have been undertaken to acquaint Ogle County residents with the Society's goal of preserving history. The Henry Boss History of Ogle County from 1859 was reprinted for sale by the Society. Free copies were given to all schools and libraries in the county. The 1864 map of Ogle County was reprinted as well as pamphlets and placemats of historic sites in the county. They have held tours of many historic sites. The Society surveyed all graveyards in the county and recorded all who were listed as buried in each one. Genealogies of family lines were ascertained from these listings. According to the *Bicentennial History of Ogle County*, "the Society has been instrumental in the repair of historic stones and in obtaining historical markers throughout the county."

Ruby Nash was a lover of history and an active member of the Society. She was also a dedicated and well-loved elementary teacher in the Oregon community for 50 years from 1891 to 1941. Out of all 50 years of teaching, she never missed a day! Vada Wood, who knew Ruby in person, says that "she was pretty knowledgeable" and "real nice." Many Society meetings were held in her home. In 1961, Ruby Nash willed half her home to the Society and half to the Library. Using Ella Chaney's funds, a good friend and fellow teacher of Ruby Nash, the Society bought out the library's interest and started their museum in Ruby's house at 111 North Sixth Street, Oregon, Illinois.

Chester Nash, Ruby's father, built this home in 1878 when Ruby would have only been four years of age. Chester Nash invented the Nash Cultivator and was a contemporary of John Deere of Grand Detour, Illinois. Nash also was one of eight Union soldiers who were held as prisoners of war during the Civil War.

In late 1975, arson occurred at the museum. It damaged the back porch and kitchen area, and instead of just repairing the damage, the Society decided to add another room on the first floor for the display of more artifacts. After years of planning by Leonard Wood and other members of the Society, they decided to replace the old garage with a larger one they called the “Carriage House,” built in 2004.

The Ruby Nash Museum remains vintage 1880s, and is furnished as though it would have looked back then. The collection includes many of Ruby’s personal furnishings and actual records of her fifty years as an Oregon school teacher. The museum and the “Carriage House” have thousands of antiques and artifacts from different parts of the country.

The Ruby Nash Museum is unlike many historical museums. What makes this museum unique is that, along with items belonging to Ruby Nash, it contains collections strictly from Ogle County, as well as rare pieces from various parts of Illinois. “We cover the whole county,” says Vada Wood, who has been an active member for several decades and is the editor of the Society’s Gazette. She also adds that “it’s rare” for a society to collect antiques from the whole county. Most museums are city historical societies.

The Society’s most popular antique is the pianoforte located in the Ella Chaney Room, donated by the Barrick family of Rockford. This piece is one of a kind because it was played at Governor Ford’s inauguration in 1842. He was the first governor to grow up in Illinois, and he was even a resident of Oregon at some point in his lifetime.

Another rare piece of Illinois history is a photo of President Lincoln’s family. It does not

seem like much, but the special thing about it is that Mary Todd Lincoln did not like her picture to be taken. Photos of her are scarce.

The OCHS is an example of a museum started by an extraordinary group of people. It is amazing to think that this Society was made for the preservation of local history, to educate children and adults alike about their own county's history. Some of today's overlooked objects may become tomorrow's precious history. That is why there should exist more historical societies like the OCHS. [From Charles Mongan, Lynne Kilker, Viola Myers, Anne Jones, eds., *The Story of Oregon, Illinois*; Leonardo Appel, Hamilton Cross, Harriet Fletcher, Robert Folk, Russell Poole, Armour Van Briesen, Armin Weng, eds., *Bicentennial History of Ogle County*; Otto Dick, Student Historian's interview, Oct. 10, 2008; Vada Wood, Student Historian's interview, Oct. 6, 2008; *The Ogle County Historical Society and Museum Site*.

<<http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~ilogle/historical.htm>> (Oct. 4, 2008).]



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