



The Society Story

Newsletter of the LaSalle County Historical Society

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Starved Rock State Park Has Anniversary

Starved Rock State Park will celebrate a milestone in 2011, reaching its hundredth anniversary. It became Illinois' first state park on June 10, 1911.

The park is named for the 125-foot high butte of St. Peter's sandstone, where legend has it a group of Illiniwek were surrounded by a band of Potawatomi and Ottawa who sought revenge for the murder of Chief Pontiac. Unable to obtain food or water, the Illiniwek starved to death.

The area around Starved Rock has been home to humans for at least 10,000 years. Early cultures such as Hopewellian, Woodland and Mississippian people flourished here over the centuries. When the first French explorers, Louis Jolliet and Father Marquette arrived here in 1673, the Kaskaskia had a village across the Illinois River from the current park that was home to as many as 5,000 to 7,000 natives.

The French built Fort St. Louis atop Starved Rock during the winter of 1682. The site offered a strategic view of the River from both East and West. A wooden palisade was used for defense around a few wooden houses and native shelters. The fort was used for a number of years before the French built Fort Pimitoui near modern-day Peoria.

In 1835 Daniel Hitt purchased the land from the US Government for \$85 as compensation for his service in the Army. Hitt was the original surveyor of the land. He sold the property, one hundred acres including Starved Rock, to Ferdinand Walther in 1890 for \$15,000.



The original Hotel at Starved Rock

Walther saw the potential for a resort and built a hotel on the base of the bluff below the Rock. A spring-fed swimming pool, concession stand and a dance pavilion were included in the hotel grounds. Several hiking trails were laid out and small boats were available on the river.



The pool at the Starved Rock Hotel

Unable to keep the hotel profitable, Walther sold the land, which by then had grown to 280 acres, to the State of Illinois in 1911 for \$142,000. Our historical society was involved in the campaign to encourage the state to purchase the land, sending an appeal to the governor and state legislature for formal action on their part in preserving this historic spot.

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In the early years access to the park was by railroad to Utica, then by ferry across the Illinois River. In 1942 the building of Route 71 allowed access by road.

During the 1930s, Roosevelt's New Deal legislation created the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) to provide jobs for young men unemployed during the Great Depression. Their focus was to preserve natural areas in the United States. CCC Camp 614 was sent to Starved Rock State Park in August of 1933. The group of about 200 men built trails, stairways, shelters and benches in the park. In December 1933 CCC Camp 1609 was stationed at the park. This group would remain for six years and build Starved Rock Lodge, several small log cabins and the parking lot. Men from CCC Camp 2601 replaced Camp 614 in August of 1934 and constructed the bridge in Wildcat Canyon and others. More than 25 miles of trails were laid in the park.

Starved Rock Park today has 18 canyons, 14 waterfalls, and more than 13 miles of hiking trails. It has grown to an area of 2,630 acres.



A Message from the President

Now that the holidays are behind us and the New Year is upon us, it's time to look forward to 2011 at the La Salle County Historical Society. And it looks to be an exciting year! After several years of work by a dedicated corps of volunteers the Rural School Book project is just about complete. We should be able to go to press sometime this spring. This book will feature stories and histories of the rural schools of La Salle County. Chapters will be broken up by townships with many interesting anecdotes about the schools and some of the people who attended and taught at them.

We also plan on continuing with the Road Scholars Programs at the Lock 16 Cafe. We are looking forward to some interesting subjects and

hope many of our members will take advantage of these programs by attending. And though details haven't been worked out yet we are discussing having another wine tasting event in the spring. Despite having bad weather, last year's event was well attended and very much a success!

I'm excited to be working with some new faces on the board this year. I believe we have some quality members who will bring a lot to the society. But by the same token we will miss some of our members who will be leaving. Ann Backus has been our treasurer for the past two years and has moved to the Morris area. Her eye for detail in the finances will be sorely missed and we wish her the best of luck in any of her future endeavors. Laura Dziejcz has been on the board for several years and has served as the secretary for the past two years. She has been a great asset to the board. She has served as coordinator for the docents and has worked many hours on the Rural School Book project. Even though she won't be an official member of the board we know she will be steady volunteer and influence around the museum.

We are also losing Past President and long-time advisor to the board, Edmund Thornton. Edmund was very instrumental in saving the old Clark warehouse from destruction and then obtained the building from the state for our use as a museum. The society is very much indebted to Edmund for many things.

I feel very assured knowing that an incoming president like me has so many past presidents that are still involved with the society, that I can turn to for help and advice when I need it. And Edmund Thornton would be the first I would turn to! With so much experience to draw from on this board, and with such a good staff in the office to work with, I'm confident that we will have a very exciting, fun and rewarding year at the La Salle County Historical Society. I hope you're looking forward to 2011 as much as I.

David Reed,
President

From “LaSalle County Lore”

Ophir Township - The settlers were friendly with the Pottawatomi Indians and invited them into their homes. One cold winter’s day, a settler, noticing that his guest was scantily clad, asked if he were not cold. The Indian then asked, “Your face cold?” “No,” replied the settler. “Indian all face,” said the Pottawatomi.

Sesquicentennial of the Civil War

January 6, 1861

With close financial ties to southern states in mind, the Mayor of New York City, Fernando Wood, declared, “If the Union is dissolved New York City should become a free city - able to trade with North and South.”

January 9, 1861

Mississippi secedes from the Union, followed by Florida on the 10th, and Alabama on the 11th.

January 13, 1861

Governor Pickens of South Carolina requested \$3,000 from the Federal government for expenses incurred when minister to Russia. The US Treasury authorized payment from the Charleston sub-treasury which was already confiscated by South Carolina.

January 14, 1861

Federal troops occupy Fort Taylor and retain it for the duration, a vital base for Blockade forces.

January 18, 1861

Union troops occupy the Dry Tortugas which was used to confine political prisoners.

January 29, 1861

Kansas is admitted to Union statehood.

January 30, 1861

Abraham Lincoln visits his stepmother who confided to friends that she never expected to see him again.

Kind Words Sent

To: LaSalle County Historical Society
My wife and I visited your museum on Sunday, September 26, 2010. We were quite impressed with the array of important artifacts you have displayed.

Mrs. Mary Small and Mrs. Laura Dzedzic were very generous with their time. They showed us around the museum and shared very interesting facts and anecdotes about the Civil War, Charles Lindbergh, Lincoln, the local clock manufacturer from time past, and many other subjects.

We found Mrs. Small and Mrs. Dzedzic very pleasant conversationalists. In addition, Mr. Stan Dzedzic contributed to the dialog with several interesting points regarding the county's history in relation to larger American events.

We would like to thank you for your time and efforts. Without your dedication, such a museum would not be so well maintained. We think it is important local societies such as yours continue to add great value to the regional culture.

Thank you, and see you next time!

Shane Zimmer
Sandra Walter
Chicago



Memorials

Nathan “Bud” and Ardeth Fleming
from Wayne Fleming

Millie Kreiser *from J. Davis & Mary Small*



Thank You

Thank you to Mark Wenzel from August Hill Winery for plowing our parking lot. Your thoughtfulness is very much appreciated by the Board, staff and visitors.

Calendar of Events - 2011

January 6, “Dinosaur Biology and Evolution: The Latest Research on Tyrannosaurs”
Steve Brusatte, Utica Township Community Hall, 6:30 pm. (see article below)

January 19, Civil War Round Table -Ottawa High Cafeteria - Scott Wallace - Monocacy

October 9, 2011 - 42nd Annual Burgoo Festival

Watch our newsletter, our website www.LasalleCountyMuseum.org or find us on Facebook for information on programs and events for the coming year.

www.lasallecountymuseum.org

e-mail: office.lchs@gmail.com

Fax: 815-310-7613

La Salle County Historical Society
101 E Canal Street - P.O. Box 278
Utica, IL 61373

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Brusatte to Speak in January

Steve Brusatte will speak on “*Dinosaur Biology and Evolution: the Latest Research on Tyrannosaurs*” on Thursday, January 6 at 6:30 pm. The free talk will be held at the Utica Township Community Hall, 200 E. Church Street.

A native of Ottawa, Brusatte is a PhD candidate at Columbia University and the American Museum of Natural History in New York. His research focuses primarily on the evolution of carnivorous dinosaurs such as T Rex and its kin.

Steve’s passion for paleontology was stoked by fossil collecting trips with his high school geology teacher.

He studied geology at the University of Chicago and earned a Marshall Scholarship to pursue a Master’s degree at the University of Bristol in England. He has written four books, over 30 research papers and has done field research in North America, Europe and Asia.

