



FRIENDS OF LECLAIRE

NEWSLETTER

June 2019

Volume 29 No. 2

JOIN US AT THE ANNUAL LECLAIRE PARK BAND CONCERT & ICE CREAM SOCIAL



**SUNDAY, JUNE 23
4 P.M.**

Featuring the fabulous
Edwardsville Municipal Band!

Free Concession Stand hosted by
Friends of Leclaire.

Bring your blankets or lawn chairs
and settle in for a relaxing hour-long
concert at Leclaire Park.

Free Concert! Everyone Welcome!

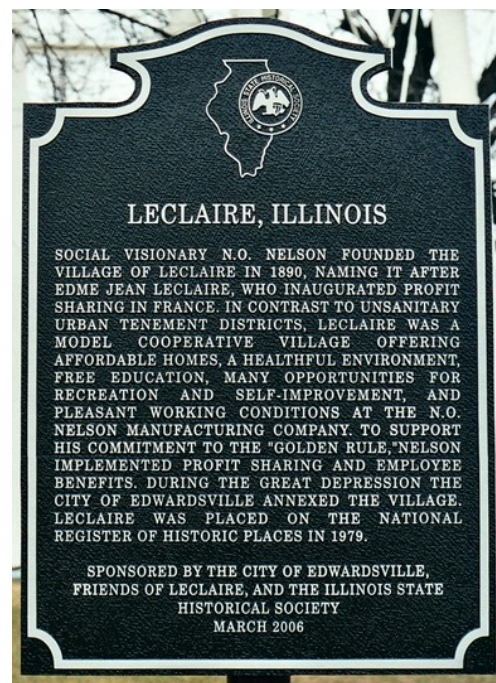
THE LECLAIRE NEIGHBORHOOD

Many residents have heard Leclaire's story in the past, but don't quite remember the details, or they are new to the area and have never heard about the former Village of Leclaire. This issue of the FOL Newsletter, provides readers with a brief history of Leclaire and the Friends of Leclaire.

THE VILLAGE OF LECLAIRE

In 1890, N. O. Nelson, a St. Louis manufacturer, bargained with residents of Edwardsville to obtain 125 acres of land on the southern edge of town at no cost. In return, Nelson agreed to build factories that would bring hundreds of jobs to the area. The Edwardsville businessmen who arranged the deal naturally thought the property would be incorporated into Edwardsville right away, but for 44 years, until 1934, Leclaire was a separate village, sometimes called Edwardsville's "suburb to the south." Nelson had no intention of becoming part of Edwardsville.

Nelson had a vision that separated Leclaire from other company towns or model communities. As a businessman, Nelson designed a financial model that he hoped would resolve the problems between la-



Illinois State Historical Marker near the Leclaire water tower on Troy Road was installed by FOL..

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FOL HOSTS WATER STATION FOR BONIFEST 5K RACE



The FOL sponsored water station for the Bonifest 5K Race on Memorial Day weekend was a welcome sight for runners as they approached the 2 mile marker at the corner of Hale and Lake Avenues. (5K is 3.1 miles.) As usual, FOL volunteers were joined by members of the Edwardsville High School Student Council who are enthusiastic, cheerful and capable volunteers.

In addition to the high school students, there were a number of FOL volunteers, including Al and Kim Pauli who provide water and Mae, a recent graduate of first grade (pictured center front). Many FOL activities are family friendly and children are not only welcome, but appreciated!

Friends of Leclaire ♦ P. O. Box 644 ♦ Edwardsville, IL 62025

www.historic-leclaire.org ♦ friends@historic-leclaire.org ♦ 618-659-2108

VILLAGE OF LECLAIRE (CONT. FROM PAGE 1)

bor and capital. As a humanist, he was dedicated to improving the every day life of the working man.

LeClaire is often described within the framework of six principles. This concept was not conceived by Nelson, but it provides a convenient way to narrate the benefits of LeClaire: Work, Homes, Education, Recreation, Beauty and Freedom.

With input from his employees, Nelson chose a rural location where residents could enjoy fresh air and could easily attend educational and recreational programs the company offered free of charge.

Construction of the factories, designed by St. Louis architect A. E. Cameron, began in 1890. The design emphasized comfort, safety, and beauty. Nationally renowned reporter Nellie Bly called them “the ideal perfection of buildings for man to labor in.” The factory buildings had heated floors, windows and rooftop clearstories for ventilation and other amenities. The “shops” as they were called, included a Machine Shop, Marble Shop, Brass Shop, Finishing Shop, Bathtub Shop, Copper Shop, Cabinet Shop and Carpenter Shop. They could manufacture anything built of marble, wood, metal or porcelain.

Workers could also participate in a profit-sharing plan, had reasonable hours, fair wages, and a providence fund in case of illness or death. There was also a pension plan.

At the same time the factories were being built, the company hired Julius Pitzman, a prominent landscape architect, to design the residential portion of the village. The village had wide curvilinear streets and a campus to separate the school and homes from the grit of the factories.

Some of the homes were built by the company and sold at cost to the workers at low interest to encourage home owner-

ship. The company advertised that there were “no two alike.” Nelson believed that the pride of owning your own home would make the village a more beautiful place, so he did what he could to make it a reality for the many immigrant families that came to work at the company.

The company offered opportunities for education and recreation from the beginning. For example the kindergarten began in 1892 and the baseball diamond was established in 1890. The School House, built in 1895, became a center for many education and recreational activities.

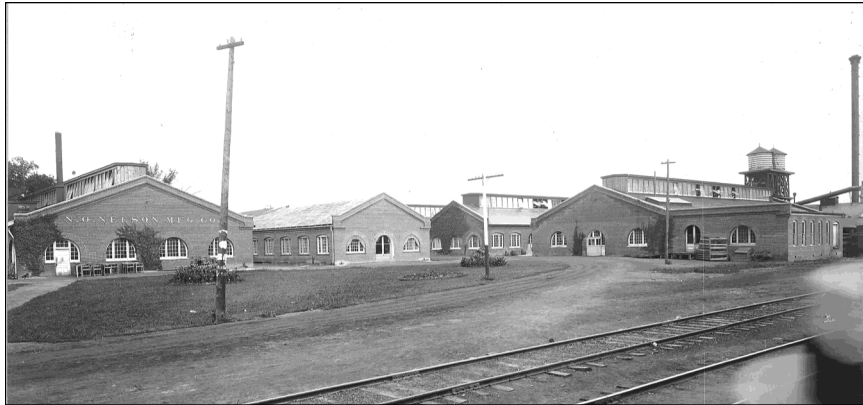
The campus offered baseball, tennis, football, and a building for billiards and bowling.

The new reservoir (LeClaire Lake) was created about 1905 and offered a place for picnics, swimming, and boating in the summer and ice skating in winter. The company band often played at the park bandstand.

The cooperative store opened in 1892 and paid quarterly dividends to members based on their purchases.

The entire village was designed to have a beautiful park-like appearance that was encouraged by the company who planted trees on every lot and offered free plants from a company greenhouse. Even the factory grounds were landscaped.

The last of the principles was freedom. In LeClaire freedom meant the village was not a company town that dictated the lives and finances of its residents. Workers could live and work in the village, or they could live in Edwardsville and work in LeClaire. Residents were also welcome to live in LeClaire and work in Edwardsville or Glen Carbon. Educational and recreational opportunities were free and open to all, whether or not they lived in LeClaire.



The N. O. Nelson Manufacturing Company in LeClaire. These buildings are now home for the Historic N. O. Nelson Campus of Lewis and Clark Community College. (Courtesy of Madison County Historical Society)

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 ~

Summer FOL Calendar

- June 11 FOL Meeting
- June 22 FOL at Goshen Market
- June 23 Band Concert & Ice Cream Social
- July 9 FOL Meeting
- July 20 FOL at Goshen Market
- Aug 13 FOL Meeting
- Aug 17 FOL at Goshen Market
- Sep 10 FOL Meeting
- Sep 21 FOL at Goshen Market

Call 618-656-1294 to volunteer for FOL!!

FRIENDS OF LECLAIRE - EDUCATING & SUPPORTING THE COMMUNITY

WHO ARE FRIENDS OF LECLAIRE & WHAT DO THEY DO?

FOL was founded in 1990 following the Leclaire Centennial with a duo-purpose of building awareness of the history behind the neighborhood's status as a National Historic District and doing what they could to preserve and protect the public places in Leclaire.

Today it has more than 100 members (about half live in Leclaire). Of those, there is a small core of dedicated volunteers that accomplish a lot each year.

Numerous methods are used to promote and preserve the history of Leclaire. Most obvious is this newsletter, but the organization also has a website, hosts an ice cream social and band concert at Leclaire Park in June, sponsors a community festival on the third Sunday in October (Leclaire Parkfest) and has a monthly presence at the Goshen Market in the summer.

The FOL quarterly newsletter, in its 29th year, is hand-delivered to every house in Leclaire by volunteers. FOL believes that knowledge about our neighborhood helps build pride in this special place. In addition to current news about Leclaire and FOL activities, the newsletter usually includes the history of a Leclaire house and other articles that require regular research into Leclaire's history.

The website has hundreds of transcribed newspaper articles on Leclaire dating from before its founding in 1890 through the 1930s. These are often used by students and teachers. (historic-leclaire.org). In 1990, under the guidance of editor Bob Blain, FOL published an award-winning book on the history of Leclaire.

FOL also has speakers available for classrooms (grade school through university) or community groups interested in learning more about the former Village of Leclaire.

When FOL sets up at the Goshen Market, Route 66 Festival or other community venues, they make available to the public a number of Leclaire history publications that are free (brochures) or for sale (books). They also sell t-shirts and other branded materials to help make the public aware of the former Village of Leclaire.

At Leclaire Parkfest, FOL has all of the items it normally takes to community events, plus they set up easels with posters showing images of Leclaire a century ago. There is also a 20-minute narrated trolley tour of the neighborhood that provides a history of Leclaire.

KEEPING LECLAIRE BEAUTIFUL

FOL gardening volunteers spend hundreds of hours each year at Leclaire Park where they plant, maintain and create flower beds. Mulch, annuals and other plants are all paid for by Friends of Leclaire. (Exception: the gardens around the bandstand are maintained by the Edwardsville Garden Club.)

In addition, volunteers hold 2-3 "park clean-up" days at Leclaire Park before special events. The Edwardsville Parks Department does a wonderful job with the grounds of Leclaire Park, but FOL volunteers do work that they would not be able to do without hiring additional gardeners.



Above, Mark Hartman and Bob Nickrent working the FOL booth; At left, a new Leclaire Park garden installed by FOL; Below, Mike Reinhardt and Mark Hartman fish trash and bricks from Leclaire Lake so the wall can be repaired on one of the FOL Park Clean-Up Days.



Above, Leclaire Parkfest, a fall tradition in Edwardsville hosted by FOL.

Appreciate the Work of Friends of Leclaire? Please consider becoming a member. Send a \$20 membership fee with your contact information and a check to Friends of Leclaire, P. O. Box 644, Edwardsville, Illinois, 62025.

SUPPORTING THE CHILDREN'S MUSEUM IN LECLAIRE

Since last fall, Friends of Leclaire has been working with the Children's Museum at Edwardsville to create a new exhibit for the museum that reflects the history of the building, the former Leclaire School House.

Sherrie Hickman of Creative Options Graphic Design, working with Leclaire historians Mike and Cindy Reinhardt, created a mural that depicts some of the history of Leclaire. The mural is on a wall in a miniature school room where students sit at desks and can lace cards (just like students did a century ago at the Leclaire kindergarten), color pictures of the school house or work with shapes. There is also a teacher's desk and a small reading room with a bookcase.

Friends of Leclaire paid for the materials, Sherrie Hickman graciously donated her services and the Children's Museum staff and volunteers did the rest.

In response to questions about the historic building where the museum is located, the museum director requested posters telling the history of the building. There are two so far, created by Cindy Reinhardt and printed and framed by Friends of Leclaire. The first, completed in 2015, is a brief history of the building. The second poster, shown below, focuses on N. O. Nelson's love of children that inspired his support of education.



At left is designer Sherrie Hickman. Above, John Kruszka of Zane Williams installs the mural with great difficulty. Old buildings often don't have "square" walls!

Also new at the Children's Museum since this spring is the Discovery Garden that covers most of the museum grounds on the Hale Avenue side of the building. This was a massive project that required many volunteers from throughout the community, including some from Friends of Leclaire.

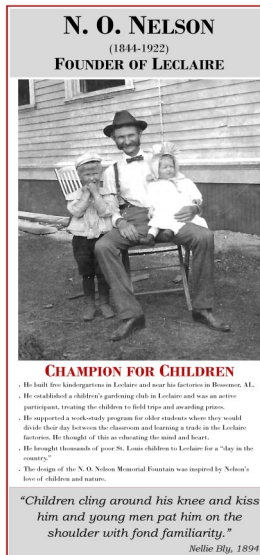
NEW N. O. NELSON POSTER FOR CHILDREN'S MUSEUM

A new poster about N. O. Nelson, was created and published by FOL for the Children's Museum. It will become part of the new School House Exhibit. The poster features a photograph of Mr. Nelson with children on his knees. The text reads as follows:

N. O. NELSON (1844-1922) FOUNDER OF LECLAIRE

CHAMPION FOR CHILDREN

- ◆ He built free kindergartens in Leclaire and near his factories in Bessemer, AL.
- ◆ He established a children's gardening club in Leclaire and was an active participant, treating the children to field trips and awarding prizes.
- ◆ He supported a work-study program for older



students where they would divide their day between the classroom and learning a trade in the Leclaire factories. He thought of this as educating the mind and heart.

- ◆ He brought thousands of poor St. Louis children to Leclaire for a "day in the country."
- The design of the N. O. Nelson Memorial Fountain was inspired by Nelson's love of children and nature.

At the bottom of the poster is an 1895 quote from reporter Nellie Bly:

"Children cling around his knee and kiss him and young men pat him on the shoulder with fond familiarity."

Nellie Bly

2019 FRIENDS OF LECLAIRE OFFICERS AND TRUSTEES

At the Friends of Leclaire Annual Meeting, the 2019 FOL Board was elected unanimously. It included a few changes from last year. FOL President Rob Nickrent stepped down after serving two years in that position and Mike Reinhardt, a past president, agreed to serve in that capacity. John Craig volunteered to fill the secretarial slot previously held by Reinhardt. The FOL Board is a working board, that is, they do much more than just attend meetings. We are very grateful for their many contributions to the Leclaire neighborhood.

Mike Reinhardt President
William Krause Vice-President

John Craig Secretary
Jim Milgrim Treasurer

Theresa Morrison Trustee
Al Pauli Trustee
Cindy Reinhardt Trustee