

Putnam Past Times

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Putnam County Historical Society

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No. 2

Annual Dinner Meeting and Program Saturday May 4

The Annual Dinner Meeting and Program will be Saturday May 4 at the Meeting House, 403 Old Hwy 26, in Hennepin. Dinner will be at 6:00 p.m. followed by a Road Scholar Program sponsored by the Illinois Humanities Council.



In a talk entitled “How Corn Changed Itself and Then Changed Everything Else”, author Cynthia A. Clampitt will discuss how, about 10,000 years ago, a weedy grass growing in Mexico was transformed into a larger and more useful grass—the cereal grass that we would come to know as maize and then corn.

Come learn how and why corn transformed the Heartland and helped create today's world. Cynthia explains the truth behind Margaret Visser’s claim in her classic work *Much Depends on Dinner*, “Without corn, North America—and most particularly modern, technological North America—is inconceivable.”

Tickets are \$20; available from any Board Member (Dick Ashdown, Karen Bailey, Lorie Balensiefen, Gary Boggio, Sue Bruch, Sue Campbell, Darlene Cofoid, Ben Day, Will Duke, Kevin Kunkel, Lonna Nauman, Sid Whitaker), Sharon Clausen, or at Putnam County banks, or phone 815-303-5104.

The Meeting House is handicapped accessible.

Everyone welcome.

Winter Quarterly Program Held February 24



Sidney Whitaker, President of the Historical Society, showed a variety of items from the Society’s collection of Civil War memorabilia and discussed the donors and some of the stories behind the items.



Putnam County Historical Society

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Hybrid Corn Breeders of Putnam County

In keeping with the theme of our Annual Meeting Program, we celebrate the hybrid corn breeders of Putnam County. Several Putnam County farmers developed hybrids that they sold commercially. The best known were the four generations of the Griffith family (Walter (Watt) G. Griffith Sr., Walter G. Griffith Jr., Lynn Griffith, Trent Griffith); Bernhardt (Ben) Moews; and Charles (Jake) Robinson.



Watt Griffith began selecting and breeding corn in the 1880s on his farm at McNabb using a variety called Coe Corn that he got from his uncle H.K. Smith. From this variety he developed a 90 day variety called Griffith's Early Dent that was popular in this area. He also developed an early maturing version of Reid Yellow Dent (the most popular variety in central Illinois). Watt established the Griffith Seed Company in 1905 to sell inbred lines of corn. One of his varieties won Grand Prize at the San Francisco World's Fair of 1915. Walter G. Griffith Jr. joined his father when he graduated from the University of Illinois in 1923. He took over management in 1936 when Watt retired. They had been developing hybrids for several years by then and began to produce and sell them in volume in 1936. In 1936 the Griffiths developed varieties based on inbreds from Lester Pfister, the founder of Pfister Hybrids, and James Holbert, a researcher with the



University of Illinois and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In 1965, Lynn Griffith became the third Griffith generation to be active in the Company's management. After Lynn Griffith's untimely death in 1992, his widow, Barbara, and his son, Trent, continued operation of the Company. Trent became the fourth Griffith generation to operate the Company. As genetic engineering became more prevalent in retail farm seeds, the Company's production and processing facilities were sold to Kerkhoff LLC and its sales and marketing assets to AgVenture in 1998 and the Griffith Seed Company ceased operations after 93 years.



Ben Moews returned from Iowa State College (Iowa State University) in 1922 where he learned of hybrid corn from the work of Henry Wallace, the founder of Pioneer. He experimented on the family farm at Granville and began selling hybrid corn under the company name of Moews Illini Super Corn in 1927. In his early experiments Ben also worked with James Holbert and with Fred Richey (the head of the Corn Division at the United States Department of Agriculture). The company name was changed in 1946 to Moews Seed Company Inc. Over the years Moews expanded with facilities

in Indiana and Iowa. Following Ben's death in 1950 the company continued to operate as an independent family owned hybrid seed company under the stewardship of Ben's wife Gladys and daughter Bettina.



Jake Robinson obtained the foundation seed for his varieties from Fred Richey, who was not only the head of the Corn Division at USDA, but also Jake's cousin. He planted the first inbreds on his farm at Granville in the spring of 1937 and made his first sales in the fall of that year. Part of the crop was sold on the ear right out of the field. He built a seed house equipped with furnace, drying bins and grader in 1938. It burned down in 1940 and most of the crop was destroyed. Replacement seed was bought from other growers to fill orders that year. A new seed house was built and used until 1968 when Jake retired. Unlike the Griffith and Moews families, Jake never expanded his business and most of his sales were within a radius of thirty miles of Granville.

Reminder - Agricultural Museum Open Days 2019

Saturday, May 11

Saturday, July 13

Saturday, September 14

Saturday, November 9

Saturday, June 8

Sunday, August 11

Saturday, October 12

Saturday, December 14

In Memoriam

We mourn the loss of the following Putnam County Historical Society members and friends. Over the years all have supported the Society's goals and programs. All will be sadly missed.

Donald Fulks (Life)

John 'Bud' Gehm Jr (Life)

Valerie Hrovat

Virginia Naumann Gansemer

Angelina Glenn

Robert Golden Mills

Recent Donations

The Putnam County Historical Society thanks the following donors for recent gifts to the Society:

Luke & Megan Holly – several framed pictures, Hopkins & Swaney alumni books, Granville sesquicentennial booklet, Bertha Holly autograph book (1895-1901), Sacred Heart Church directory (1993-4), miscellaneous photocopies, 4 drawer bureau bought in 1855 by Howard Sucher's grandfather Bender for his home in Granville.

Marshall-Putnam Farm Bureau – 2019 Marshall & Putnam Counties Plat Book.

Jeanne Naumann – advertising match books for Jack Redshaw

Sharon & Donald Pederson – memorabilia from Hennepin and Hopkins Township High Schools (pictures, school letters, yearbooks, programs for commencement, baccalaureate and school plays).

Year-end Fund Drive

The Putnam County Historical Society thanks all those who have given so far during the year-end Fund Drive. We depend on the generosity of our members and friends during fund drives to cover the annual cost of maintaining Pulsifer House, the Meeting House, and the Agricultural Museum and carrying on our mission of keeping the history of Putnam County alive through education, restoration and genealogy. The following people have given since the last newsletter.

Bernice Forney
James Gleason
Matt Hostetter

Cindy Huchel
Neil & Grayce Haworth Mesner
Joe & Jean Panier

Nola Smith
Marguerite Sons
Jerry Spolar

2019 Memberships (see Dues Request below)

Memberships are the life-blood of the Society. We treasure our members. Listed below are renewing and new members since the last newsletter.

Individual: Allen County Public Library, Joseph Engelhaupt, Nicholas Weerts

Contributing: Beth Ann Acuncius

Membership Dues Request

Dear Friends:

Fifty-six years ago, the Putnam County Historical Society was organized as a 501(c) non-profit charitable organization with 30 charter members on March 17, 1963 with the mission of keeping the history of Putnam County alive through education, restoration and genealogy.

Please help us carry on that mission by joining us or renewing your membership in the Society. Memberships are the single largest source of funds for covering the annual cost of maintaining Pulsifer House, the Meeting House, and the Agricultural Museum. Without you, the Members, we could not keep Pulsifer House open and provide the services that we do – the genealogical research, the speakers at our programs, the tours for area schools, and the additional exhibits for the Ag Museum Open House.

Despite our rising costs, our membership rates remain the same:

Individual \$ 15.00

Couple \$ 20.00

Student (18 or under) \$ 5.00

Contributing \$ 30.00

Family \$ 45.00

Business \$ 50.00

Life Member \$ 100.00

Golden Member \$ 500.00

Platinum Member \$ 1,000.00

Diamond Member \$ 5,000.00

Make your check payable to **Putnam County Historical Society** and return it with the Membership Request Form in the enclosed envelope. Detach, sign and keep the Membership Card.

Thank you so much for your support.

Sidney Whitaker, President