

McLean County Museum of History

Paul & Sandra Harmon Collection

Processed
January 2026

Collection Information

VOLUME OF COLLECTION:	1 box
COLLECTION DATES:	1967-2025
RESTRICTIONS:	None
PROVENANCE:	Donated by Paul & Sandra Harmon, January 2026.
REPRODUCTION RIGHTS:	Permission to reproduce or publish material in this collection must be obtained in writing from the McLean County Museum of History
ALTERNATIVE FORMATS:	None
OTHER FINDING AIDS:	None
LOCATION:	Archives
NOTES:	See also Paul Harmon Town Council Collection. For Sandra's career, please contact the Illinois State University Archives.

Brief History

Paul was raised by parents who operated a small-town Genoa, Illinois, restaurant and later a hardware store.

Sandra was born in North Carolina but she and mother moved to Iowa to be close to family during World War II. Her father was an actor and a playwright, and her mother often worked on plays behind the scenes. During the day her mother worked at the local hospital.

The pair first met during their freshman year at the University of Dubuque in Iowa, marrying shortly after they graduated in 1964. They lived briefly in Clinton, Iowa until moving to Urbana-Champaign so Paul could attend law school at the University of Illinois.

Paul accepted a job with the Illinois Agricultural Association (IAA) legal department upon graduation and thus they moved to Bloomington-Normal. Paul's career there spanned some 39 years including the IAA transition to the Illinois Farm Bureau. He retired as General Counsel in 2008.

Sandra earned her master's in history at Illinois State University (ISU) in 1970 and worked briefly for the Milner Library before spending a year teaching at University High School. She was asked to develop a women's history course and continued to teach that course basically the entire time she was at ISU. She joined ISU's History Department part time and eventually pursued a Doctor of Arts in history with a focus on women's studies.

Over the ensuing 24 years, she served as interim director on multiple occasions. During her first time as acting Director of Women's Studies, she started a Women's Studies Symposium, so students had a forum to present their research, and it has grown. She also worked with ISU's Affirmative Action office, served on the University President's Cabinet, and served multiple terms on the College of Arts and Sciences Chairs committee.

Both became deeply involved in their community. Mayor Carol Reitan appointed Paul to the Normal Planning Commission in 1972. In 1976, Paul left the Planning Commission to join the Normal Town Council, to which he was elected for two full terms

After two terms on council, he ran for and was elected as Mayor of Normal, serving from 1985-1993. The Town was in poor shape financially in 1972, and Paul successfully focused his seventeen years in public office on the financial integrity and economic development of the community.

Some highlights of his time as mayor include the establishment of the Metro Zone agreements with the City of Bloomington, the creation of the Historic Preservation Program, the acquisition of the Normal Theater, the development of the Constitution Trail, and the creation in 1990 of the "2015 Report," which outlined a 25-year plan for the Town, including Uptown Normal.

Sandra was involved in founding and growing Heartland Theatre Company. She has served on the board of directors of the McLean County Historical Society, Senior Professionals of Illinois State University, ISU's Friends of the Arts, the First Presbyterian Church of Normal, the Sister Cities Association, Illinois Shakespeare Society, League of Women Voters, and more. Additionally, she's served on many committees for local non-profits, guest curated at the McLean County Museum of History, and helped both the Town of Normal and the Wayman AME Church celebrate their 150th anniversaries.

Paul has served on the board of directors of the Bloomington-Normal Symphony Society, the Chamber of Commerce, the Normal Theater, the BroMenn Foundation, the Illinois Shakespeare Society, and the Illinois Prairie Community Foundation. Additionally, he served 17 years on the Bloomington-Normal Airport Authority, including nine years as chairman. He has also worked on many committees for his church, the McLean County WWII Memorial Committee and the Theatre at Ewing Campaign Committee, etc.

Together, Paul and Sandra have established multiple endowments in the community: an ISU History Department Scholarship to recruit underrepresented groups, the Paul and Sandra Harmon Endowment for Shakespeare, and the Illinois Prairie Community Foundation Endowment for Arts and Culture.

In their free time, Paul and Sandra travelled extensively, visiting every continent except Antarctica and all fifty states.

- *Adapted from 2018 McLean County Museum of History History Makers biography.*

Scope

The collection includes documents from Paul's career, his running and bicycling events, Sandra's community presentations, some of their many awards and recognitions, and two scrapbooks spanning Paul's public activities from 2006-2025.

Box and Folder Inventory

Folder 1: Paul's Career at IAA/Illinois Farm Bureau

- 1.1 Documents covering Paul's career from his initial resume in 1967, a 1986 publication on impacts of new legislation involving not-for-profits, job promotions, etc. In chronological order.

Folder 2: Paul's Retirement, 2008

- 2.1 Retirement dinner invitation, congratulatory notes, remarks, and resolution, etc. when retiring as Illinois Agricultural Association General Counsel.

Folder 3: Paul's Foot Races

- 3.1 Includes 1981 Marathon-Marathon, 1982 Country Companies/Town of Normal inaugural 10-mile race, 1983 America's Marathon in Chicago, 1985 Town of Normal/Country Companies 10 miler, and 1987 Bloomington-Normal Triathlon.

Folder 4: Paul's Bicycling

- 4.1 1989 Pantagraph Area Cyclist Ride Around Corn Country (PACRACC).

Folder 5: Sandra's Community Presentations

- 3.1 "History of Social Security" on 70th Birthday of Social Security at McLean County Historical Museum, Aug 2005. Includes text of her talk.
- 3.2 "Children of the Great Depression" based on research for McLean County Historical Museum exhibit, June 2006.

Folder 6: Awards & Recognitions

- 6.1 Including Paul's 50th birthday, WJBC editorial recognition of Paul's work as mayor, Town of Normal 1993 Citizen of the Year Award nomination for Paul and Sandra, Extraordinary/Ordinary Men of the Year awards 2015 nomination, Sandra's ISU Outstanding University Teacher 2000, text of Sonia Reece's presentation on Paul for McLean County Museum of History 2018 History Maker's Award, State of Illinois recognition upon being named 2019 Philanthropists of the Year by Illinois Prairie Community Foundation.

Loose Items

Black Scrapbook: 2014-2022 plus loose items **thru 2025**. Largely newspaper and other media articles, a few newsletters and event programs, etc.

Includes retirement from Airport Authority, Illinois Prairie Community Foundation naming new director, Normal Council Rock Restaurant grant, Carol Reitan's contributions to the community, uptown overpass, Harmon Arts Grant, recounting the 1984 ISU beer riot, childhood Christmas memory, 2015 committee (done in 1989), ISU Founders Day 2015, endorsing candidates for Town Council and Mayor, Collaborative Solutions Institute's Extraordinary -Ordinary Men of the Year award in 2015, 150th anniversary of Town events, 2017 debate of B-N tax share deal, numerous letters to the *Pantagraph* editor, former city Manager David Anderson's legacy, Uptown underpass, Young Men's Club recognition, legacy of former Normal Mayor Kent Karraker, etc.

Purple Scrapbook: 2006-2013

Newspaper and other media articles, plus newsletters and event programs, etc.

Numerous Airport Authority issues, Heartland Theatre sponsorships, Harmon Arts Grants, 2007 Florence Fifer Bohrer award from League of Women Voters, 2007 Illinois Farm Bureau Eagle Ward, Valdimir/Canterbury Sister Cities events, Economic Development Council, Uptown transit hub, EV (electric vehicle) Task Force, Illinois Prairie Community Foundation, etc.

DVDs:

2007 Eagle Award for Excellence from Illinois Farm Bureau, 2007. 2 different DVDs.