

Old Settlers Association of Eastern McLean County Collection

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Collection Information

Volume of Collection:	1 box
Collection Dates:	1885-1979
Restrictions:	None.
Reproduction Rights:	Permission to reproduce or publish material in this collection must be obtained in writing from the McLean County Museum of History.
Location:	Archives
Notes:	See also—Photograph Subject Collection-Reunions Old Settlers

History

From 1885 to 1915, self-described “old settlers” of eastern McLean County held an annual picnic celebrating the bygone pioneer era. At its height, these gatherings attracted upwards of 10,000 area residents for a day of patriotic speeches, music and fried chicken.

The Old Settlers Association of Eastern McLean County staged its first reunion picnic on August 27, 1885, at Christina Park, located about two miles south of Ellsworth in Padua (now Dawson) Township. The site was heavily wooded, ten-acre “park” and was named for the owner’s wife. Today, this land is part of the northeast corner of Moraine View State Park.

The stated purpose of the eastern McLean County association was no more complicated than “renewing old time acquaintances and friendships.” For its picnics, the group prohibited “games of chance” and “intoxicating liquors,” in spite of the fact that both vices played important roles in the settlement of Illinois. The eastern McLean County association was not the only Old Settlers group in the area. Reunions were also held at Miller Park in Bloomington and in Atlanta in Logan County.

By the late 1800s, membership was declining, given that the early settlers were moving into their eighties and even nineties. In August 1899, the association adjusted its bylaws to accept as an old settler anyone who came to Illinois prior to 1866, a six-year extension from the previous cutoff of 1860.

The last Old Settlers Association of Eastern McLean County reunion was held September 16, 1915.

On August 19, 1979, the LeRoy Historical Society dedicated a stone marker commemorating the reunions. The marker sits at the site of old Betzer Park.

Scope Note

This collection contains newspaper articles, programs, and bills and receipts from the Eastern McLean County Old Settlers Association. Two manuscripts are also included in this collection.

Folder List

- Folder 1: Incorporation Certificate, 1898.
- Folder 2: Newspaper Articles
- Folder 3: Programs
- Folder 4: Receipts and Bills
- Folder 5: Beadles Manuscript
- Folder 6: Buss Manuscript
- Ledger Book: "Records. Old Settlers Association,"
1885-1915

Folder 1: Incorporation Certificate

- 1.1 State of Illinois, Department of State certificate, dated January 25, 1898

Folder 2: Newspaper Articles

- 2.1 "An Old Log Cabin Home," *Pantagraph*, June 7, 1886, p. 3, c.4
- 2.2 "They Were Young Again," *Pantagraph* ? August 22, 1889 (transcription)
- 2.3 "Old Settlers Day," *Pantagraph*, August 8, 1890, p. 3, c. 5
- 2.4 "At Christina Park," *Pantagraph*, August 9, 1895, p. 7, c. 3
- 2.5 "Old Settlers' Picnic," *Pantagraph*, August 11, 1899, p. 5, c. 3-4
- 2.6 "Old Settlers Hold Postponed Meeting," *Pantagraph*, September 17, 1915, p. 9, c. 3-4
- 2.7 "Local Indian History in Verse," *Pantagraph*, September 17, 1915, p. 10, c. 3-4
- 2.8 "Old Settlers Picnic," *The LeRoy Journal*, May 31, 1979 (photocopy and clippings of photograph), p. 17

Folder 3: Programs

- 3.1 24th Annual, Christina Park, August 13, 1908; includes performances, speakers, and day's schedule
- 3.2 25th Annual, Christina Park, August 12, 1909; includes performances, speakers, and day's schedule
- 3.3 26th Annual, Christina Park, August 11, 1910; includes performances, speakers, and day's schedule
- 3.4 27th annual, Christina Park, August 10, 1911 (3 copies); includes performances, speakers, and day's schedule
- 3.5 Commemoration of Old Settlers' Picnics 1885-1915, Moraine View State Park, June 23-24, 1979 (2 copies); history of picnics and Association, schedule of events

Folder 4: Receipts and Bills

16 items, most dated 1909; includes hardware, handwritten notes, agricultural goods, and bills for items pertaining to the Picnic

Folder 5: Beadles Manuscript

- 5.1 17-page handwritten summary by Leta Richardson Beadles titled "The Old Settlers of the Eastern Half of McLean County, State of Illinois 1885-1915" (c. 1970s); includes information about the day to day activities of the Association
- 5.2 1-page explanatory note by Martha Beadles Giacobassi (daughter of Leta Beadles).

Folder 6: Buss Manuscript

- 6.1 6-page typed transcript of manuscript by Leta Richardson Beadles; donated to the Museum, September 2005

Ledger Book: "Records. Old Settlers Association," 1885-1915

Membership lists, minutes, reports on annual picnics, and financial statements

Includes: Establishment of association (page 5); membership list with year of arrival in county (page 9); first public meeting, August 27, 1885 (page 13); letter of thanks from Joseph W. Fifer, September 12, 1913 (page 127); membership list (pages 160-170); list of deceased settlers (148; 171-172; 193); and constitution and bylaws (pages 280-281).