

Scott County Historic Preservation Society, Inc.



September 2017

Welcome Back!

Welcome back to the second part of our year, ladies and gentlemen! SCHPS is proud to present some exciting new tours and events, starting with the William Bettendorf Mansion this month.

September Tour: William Bettendorf Mansion



William Bettendorf was a prolific inventor, industrialist, and businessman. He first came to prominence when working at a plow company in Peru, Illinois. There, he pioneered a new type of plow that allowed farmers to work more efficiently and with less effort.

The plow was extremely successful, and it paved the way for other inventions and innovations from William. By far the most successful invention from Bettendorf during this time was the Bettendorf Metal Wheel.

Other metal wheels of that time had the spokes spot welded to the surface of the wheel hub. Many times, the spokes of the wheel would break off. Over time and with enough spokes missing, the wheel was rendered useless.

Bettendorf's wheel, however, attached the spoke *inside* the hub, making the wheel stronger and last longer. Both William and the company were ecstatic over the new wheel's success. However, they had a falling out about how it was to be produced, and Bettendorf soon left the company and moved to Davenport, Iowa.

William took out a loan and, along with his younger brother Joseph, founded the Bettendorf Metal Wheel Company near Front Street (now River Drive) in Davenport.

The factory prospered and grew until it was the biggest factory in the city. The Bettendorf Brothers prospered and grew wealthy.

Unfortunately for William, a series of two fires in 1902 destroyed the factory in Davenport, forcing him to choose between relocating his base of operations or retiring. He chose the former.

Taking an offer from a friend of his, William relocated his factory to the nearby town of Gilbert, only a few short miles east of Davenport. The newly-reborn Bettendorf Company took firm root in its new home near the Mississippi River, and the town began to prosper with it.

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The town had invested in William, and he invested in them in return. Like the factory, the town grew and developed under the watchful eye of its new benefactor. In gratitude, the Gilbert renamed itself Bettendorf.

Although the factory would have its ups and downs over the next few years, they moved predominately upward. William would have one last truly spectacular, blockbuster invention during this time: the Bettendorf Railroad Car Truck. This skyrocketed the company into the upper echelons of business.

To showcase his wealth and to serve as an advertisement for his company's success, William began construction of a new mansion on the bluffs overlooking his factory. It was built in the Spanish style, with a red tile roof and an adobe exterior. Expert craftsman carved exquisite woodwork inside, and furniture was imported from Europe. It was a fine home, but one that William was never able to enjoy. He died in 1910, before it was completed.

The building was completed by his widow. When she died in 1923, the property was inherited by her son, Oscar Staby. A devoted Mason, Staby decided to donate the property to the Masons when they were looking for a suitable property to open a private sanitorium for its members.

From the Museum

Our friend at the Rock Island Arsenal Museum, Nancy Neuhaus, has agreed to write a section in our newsletter. So please, sit back and enjoy her first installment, and see what news is coming "From the Museum!"

Our "Stories Behind the Artifacts" project from the Rock Island Arsenal Museum is up and running. Look for the new entry Effie Afton Bell and discover the steamer behind the destruction of the first railroad bridge across the Mississippi River.

The story continues in Davenport, Scott County, with a pier monument on East River Drive and a statue of Abraham Lincoln, the lawyer for the railroad bridge company, at the Iowa side of the Arsenal bridge.

You can find it on the museum website, www.arsenalhistoricalsociety.org/museum/ in the Collection and Historical Highlights tab.

Upcoming Events

The Colonel Davenport House will be presenting "Ghost Tales" on their grounds at Arsenal Island at 7 p.m. on Saturday, September 30. Spooky stories will be shared, and refreshments will be sold. Complimentary tours of the house will be offered, starting at 5:30 p.m. Bring lawn chairs or blankets for seating.

River Action will be having a fundraiser to benefit the Museum Without Walls, a collection of historical sites in the Quad City area. It will be held on September 24, at the Antoine LeClaire House, 630 E. Seventh Street, Davenport. The grounds are open from 1-7 p.m. Menu options and a reservation sign up link is at www.riveraction.org/firstbridge, or call 563-322-2969

A Call for Preservation at Oakdale Memorial Gardens

A conservator of one of the private mausoleums at Oakdale has challenged the twelve other private mausoleum owners there to contribute to the restoration of the Nott Mausoleum, which has fallen into disrepair. It needs extensive renovation that requires the building to be completely torn down and rebuilt. The conservatorship will match up to \$10,000 to help restore it.

The building is in desperate need of help, and there are no family members left alive to manage the mausoleum's upkeep. Please consider contributing to this need. For more information, please contact Oakdale Memorial Gardens at 563-324-5121, or at oakdaleomg@aol.com.

The Masonic Village Retirement Home, formerly the William Bettendorf Mansion, is located at 2500 Grant St., Bettendorf, IA. The meeting is on September 14, and will start at 6:30 p.m. If you need directions or have any questions do not hesitate to contact our newsletter editor, John, or any other board member. We look forward to seeing you!



