

WASHINGTON
Historical Society

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HERITAGE HERALD

www.washingtonilhs.com

September 2024

ROOTS AWARD RECIPIENT

The Washington Historical Society is pleased to announce this year's Roots recipient, Joyce Blumenshine. Joyce has been a tireless environmental advocate for decades. She has worked as an educator and advocate through her official roles as librarian or representative of the Sierra Club, and also in her role as private citizen volunteer. Joyce was nominated by her brother, Phil Bremen, himself a Roots Recipient back in 2019.

Joyce will appear in the Washington Homecoming Parade on September 27. She will also be honored at a ceremony at the Historical Society on Thursday, September 26 at 7:00 p.m. At that time, she will also present a program about her life and life's work.

Phil Bremen's nomination letter wonderfully describes Joyce and her work. We reprint it, in part, here:

"You can't fight city hall," the old saying goes. But for more than four decades now, Washington native Joyce Blumenshine has been fighting city officials and state regulators, coal mines and power plants, pipelines and landfills. Against such formidable adversaries, this volunteer, a retired librarian, has even managed to score some victories. In fact, as in her successful eight-year battle against a proposed strip mine in Fulton County, local officials stood with her.

Joyce joined the Sierra Club in 1977. In 2022 she stepped down as the Sierra Club's state conservation chair after about two decades in that role, but she is still very much involved. She's vice chair now, still striving to preserve habitat and water quality and promote clean energy.

Working tirelessly and without compensation, she has repeatedly traveled to the state capitol in Springfield, to city council meetings in Washington and Peoria, and to innumerable distant gatherings of seldom-heard citizens of Illinois. She has embraced a wide range of complex topics, worked the phone, written newsletters and granted countless news interviews, all to inform public officials and their constituents about protecting the environment on which we all depend.



Joyce lives in Peoria now, but for a few years in the 1990s she ran a library in a remote village in Alaska. She started warning about climate change long before polar bears were running out of ice floes.

Most recently, Joyce has been focused on a technology that's touted as a way to mitigate climate change, but which comes with its own set of hazards. She is raising the alarm about a proposal to build a pipeline – through counties including Tazewell and Peoria – that would transport liquified carbon dioxide.

Joyce grew up in Washington, attending Washington Elementary and Washington Community High. After graduating from Eastern Illinois University, she obtained a master's degree in library science from the University of Michigan.

She credits her mother and father, LaVerne and John H. Blumenshine, with instilling in her a sense of independence and an insistence on facts, even when they're not popular.

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These days in her hometown, Joyce has been among those raising concerns about a proposal to build a multi-million dollar sewer trunk line across environmentally sensitive terrain.

Although Joyce may not always be a welcome sight in corridors of power, the Illinois House of Representatives in 2009 passed a resolution recognizing her “efforts to protect and preserve Illinois’ environment.” The resolution called Joyce “a leader in stopping pollution of rivers, streams, and wetlands from coal mine runoff.”

In November 2022, the Sierra Club’s Illinois Chapter named her a Prairie Protector, saying: “She helped to save a high-quality prairie, stop a pipeline and save natural areas from overuse. Two strip mines do not exist because of the tenacity of Joyce.”

“Democracy is messy and it can be challenging to give people a voice,” Joyce said, “but that’s what democracy is, giving people a chance to be seen and to be heard.”

That’s also what Joyce Blumenshine does – giving people a chance to understand and respond to what’s being done to our air and water and soil. She is a sterling example of the best values stemming from her roots in Washington, Illinois.



WHS BRINGS NEW MURAL TO WASHINGTON

The Washington Historical Society is thrilled to bring another beautiful historically-themed mural to Washington this year. This year’s mural, which will be installed in Oliver Thomas Park in October, features a subject from our more



recent history and for the first time, will be sited in an area away from the Washington Square. We are so excited for this year’s mural which will feature the Dieselettes, also known as “the Sunnyland Lettes.”

The Lettes actually began as a women’s softball team in the 1930s in Peoria and eventually became the Caterpillar Dieselettes since team members were employees of the company. The company paid them to travel the country, tour factories in different cities, and play exhibition games. In 1956 Caterpillar dropped their sponsorship of the team. Enter Sunnyland. With their relatively new Oliver Thomas Park, as well as their exploding population of Caterpillar employees, the recipe was perfect for the merchants of the area to sponsor the team in their area, and they became the Sunnyland Lettes in 1956. From 1956-1958, the team played in Sunnyland drawing large crowds to Oliver Thomas Park on summer evenings. Three notable players on those Sunnyland teams were Lorene Ramsey, famed ICC coach, Esther Torry, wife of the late WCHS Superintendent Ray Torry, and Hall of Fame slugger Jim Thome’s aunt, Carolyn Thome. After the 1958 season the Lettes moved to Pekin and became the Pekin Lettes, where they lived out the remainder of their tenure.

For this mural, we are working with Jay Allen, a Walldogs artist from Rockford who coordinated and painted our William Holland mural in 2020. Jay will create this mural on portable panels that he can paint in his studio in Rockford. Once finished, the panels can be transported to Washington where they will be attached to a supporting structure in their new home in Oliver Thomas Park. We anticipate that the mural will be finished and installed in late October.

We are truly excited to bring this vibrant mural to Oliver Thomas Park and to pay tribute to this now gone era of life in Sunnyland.

This year’s mural was made possible by our wonderful donors: Clint Reed, Paula Prutsman, Kay Lee, Leri Slonneger, Jack and Carol Pudik, and Sharon and John Amdall.

DIESELETES PROGRAM, OCTOBER 21

To celebrate our newest mural, we will have a program on Monday, October 21 at 7:00 p.m. to learn more about the Lettes and their time in Sunnyland. The program will take place at our building on the square. Speakers will include former players Lorene Ramsey, Esther Torry, and Bev Brown. The event is free and open to the public.



SCULPTURE UNVEILING & PROGRAM – SEPTEMBER 8

The Historical Society is pleased to announce the unveiling of our gift to Washington, a life-sized bronze sculpture depicting a Heyl Shetland pony. We commissioned this sculpture, with the help of our wonderful private donors, Sharon and John Amdall to help tell, in a beautiful way, one of the stories of Washington's storied past. In this case, the sculpture depicts a life-sized Heyl Shetland pony with a little girl sitting on a bench next to the pony, feeding him an apple. The sculpture will be located across Lincoln Street from the tennis courts in Washington Park and will be officially unveiled at a program in the park on September 8.

As many long-time WHS members know, during the heyday of the Heyl pony farm in the 1920s, the Heyl family would sometimes "lend out" ponies to families in the community for the summer. This served multiple goals: it allowed the ponies to eat new grass and also served as a goodwill gesture to families in the community who wanted to borrow, employ and enjoy a small pony for the summer. Our sculpture honors the Heyl Pony Farm and their great legacy in Washington, and also remembers an idyllic time when a successful farming enterprise would share their beautiful animals with the community. We are honored to have the opportunity to remember and showcase this time of tremendous community spirit in Washington.

We are thrilled to partner with the Washington Park District in placing the sculpture. Washington Park sits on land that was once part of the Heyl Pony Farm, so our bronze pony should feel right at home there.

September 8!

To welcome our beautiful new sculpture to Washington, we will hold an unveiling ceremony and program about the Heyl Pony Farm on Sunday, September 8 at 2:00 p.m. at the Grange Shelter in Washington Park. Speakers lined up for the program include Dave Roth, Bob Montgomery, Jill Roth, Theresa Hartman Baior, and our own John Stromberger. The program is free and open to the public.

The sculpture itself was created by Jaci Willis, a well-known local artist and adjunct professor at Bradley University. Jaci's work can be seen at Harrison School in Peoria, McDonough County, North Purdue University, the Contemporary Art Center of Peoria, Chillicothe, and Bradley University, among others. Over the past few years, Jaci has been profiled in the Peoria Journal Star, Peoria Magazine, and on WTVP's Consider This.

ASK THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY:

*I've Always Wondered About.... Oliver Thomas Park –
Who was Oliver Thomas? How does that park fit in with all the other parks in Washington?*

Over the years, people in the community have asked why a park located at 200 Carolina Street in Washington was named for Oliver Thomas. Obviously, many no longer have any idea who he was or how the park came to be, but it is an important part of the history of this area of Washington, Illinois.

The story begins in the fall of 1949 when two lives were lost in an explosion at the Hiram Walker Distillery in Peoria, Illinois. One of those men was a local resident, 33-year-old Oliver Thomas, a Boy Scout leader, husband and father.

Then, on May 27-28, 1950, Oliver Thomas Park began its existence with a dedication ceremony sponsored by the Sundoer Civic Club, where Mr. Thomas had served as a Vice President. In attendance were Oliver's wife and his son John Oliver Thomas. In 1958 the Northern Tazewell Recreation Association (N.T.R.A.) was established to maintain this park.

Since its dedication, Oliver Thomas Park (OT) has been a place where countless games of baseball, softball, and soccer have been played by children ages 4-18. Boys, girls and even adults, have spent time on the fields learning the skills of the sport they have decided to play or coach. Over the years, the N.T.R.A. has been an organization which has served many of the children in the community of Sunnyland. Although not limited to children in Sunnyland, the majority of its team members consist of those who live nearby. It is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization whose board members are volunteers. This organization joins with other local recreation associations for league playing of baseball and softball (East Peoria, Washington, Metamora, etc.). It is supported by donations from the community, team fundraisers, concession sales, participation fees, and monetary gifts in memory of local citizens who volunteered or had a love for the benefits that the N.T.R.A. provides for the community.

This story began with a park which started as a dedicated piece of land to honor a local Boy Scout leader, but the land and the N.T.R.A. have gone on to become a very important part of the Washington (Sunnyland) community. Countless obituaries have recounted local citizens' dedication and support of OT and N.T.R.A. Inc. over the years. From volunteers who sit on the board of directors to local citizens who step up and volunteer to coach, help with upkeep of the park, and donate equipment, to local businesses that continue to sponsor, folks strive to keep this organization and land prime for the children who live here. Summertime is full of the sound of folks cheering on their team. Oliver Thomas Park and the N.T.R.A. remain a very important part of Sunnyland to its kids and its volunteers and will hopefully remain so in the future.

Sources: Woodford County Journal (Eureka, IL) 01 Jun 1950, N.T.R.A. Inc. website <https://www.ntrainc.org/>

YOUR HISTORY MATTERS, TOO!

Yes, your history is important! We are asking members to share their remembrances of Washington. Responses will be compiled and shared in the next newsletter and archived to help future historians learn about OUR time in Washington.

Please share one of your favorite memories of time spent at Oliver Thomas Park.

*Please return your remembrance to the Historical Society at P.O. Box 54, Washington, IL 61571
or via email to washingtonilhs@gmail.com*

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FROM THE WASHINGTON
COURIER NEWS—
SEPTEMBER 1924

Heyl's Ponies Clean Up Iowa State Fair

The Heyl ponies won six out of eight championships at the Iowa State fair last week, and this week they are at the Michigan State fair at Detroit. They won champion single harness pony, champion harness ponies, champion Welch stallion and mare, and champion Hackney stallion and mare. Heyl's had no entries in the other classes where champions were awarded.

Out of the 32 classes in which Heyl ponies exhibited at Des Moines, they left the ring with 30 blue ribbons. In other words Washington ponies stepped to the front in 30 out of 32 classes. In commenting on the Heyl entries the Des Moines Register said: "At 8:20 the first entry in the class of ponies in harness entered, Silver Tips 1st, owned by George A. Heyl. This first entry to appear won in its class - a graceful little animal with a perfect gait. Second place went to D. G. Welty's Priscilla's Pride, and the white ribbon to May from the stables of Young and Warren.

George A. Heyl's Silver Tips I, with its running mate Silver Tips II, again scored in the contest for pair ponies in harness. A slight lapse occurred when the judges measured the pair to be certain that they were under the limit of 10 1/2 hands. Welty's Priscilla's Pride was second with Young and Warren's Ruby and May third and Brideson's Prince Ronal and Sylvia Ann 4th.

Four entries appeared in the class for pony four-in-hands - three larger teams and George A. Heyl's champions of the first night in the smaller class. His larger team, however, took the championship, Lyndhurst Monarch and Lyndhurst Matchless. It was declared a championship class and only one prize was given.

The ladies had their event with the class of ladies' turnouts. Three contestants appeared in this class which was judged on the turnout as well as on the horse. All three entries were horses of varying shades of dark brown and all were clean limbed, easy moving and perfectly docile. Model Gem, owned by George A. Heyl, was first."

The Prince is Here

The Prince of Wales, young man of many falls from horses, arrived in New York last week, lunched with President Coolidge on Saturday, and is now being lionized by N.Y. society as he attends the international polo matches on Long Island.

180 Loads of Corn Canned Last Friday

The Dickinson Company canned 230,000 cans of corn last Friday, which was the largest day in the history of the local factory, according to Frank Blumenshine, manager. It took 180 loads of corn weighing an average of 1.8 tons per load to make the day's pack. The total weight of the corn was 224 tons. It was a 14-hour day, however.

Few citizens appreciate the size of the Dickinson Company, and what it means in a commercial way to the community. There are now 252 people on the pay roll, which is running better than \$5,000 per week, and will for the next month.

The factory will can the product of 1,740 acres in this locality, and 250 acres from Eureka. The average weight of the corn the first week this year ran 3.15 tons per acre.

There are 1100 acres of the first planting, which at that rate of production will amount to 3,465 tons. This will be paid for at \$13.50 per ton, amounting to \$64,777. There will be 900 acres in the second and third planting which at the same rate will amount to 2898 tons, which at \$11 per ton amounts to \$31,878 more for local farmers. This \$78,655 which will be paid to local farmers December 1 is a right decent sum, and a goodly portion will no doubt find its way back to town.

It is a marvelous sight to see the plant in operation, and while this newspaper will carry a story next week on the processes used at the factory in canning corn, yet it is worth while to see it. Suffice it to say here that the cleanest kitchen in Washington, and the cleanest cook, cannot can corn any more sanitarly than Frank Blumenshine and his staff are doing.

Washington High School Football

The football squad is surely taking shape these days under heavy practice and "chalk-talk" schedules.

With about 22 men reporting daily it is easily seen that a lot of intensive work is necessary for the coach and men to get ready for a schedule of no little strength in regards to opponents.

Frank Belsley, captain of this year's team, has a half back berth cinched and will be of great value to the team, due to his spirit and ability. Other half backs are Zinser, Kyes, Blumenshine, and J. Roehm.

Fritz Huguet is filling the fullback's job and doing some of the punting. Dick Payne at quarterback has the speed, fight and intelligence that with experience will make him a real man at his position of directing team play.

In the line Sam Wagner and Walter Muller stand out, due to their last season's work. Homer Muller, Stephen Smetena, Clyde Nutty and C. Imhoff are making bids for the end jobs, and their work so far has been of a pleasing brand. Walter Williams, Ben Pfeffinger, Kenneth Naffziger, and Milton Wagner are the guard and tackle aspirants, and with experience coupled with the real A1 spirit they have shown will be men to be respected by the opponents at all times.

Other football candidates for positions on the "1st eleven" are Slonneger, Ernest Miller, Paul Sullivan, Vauble and Clark Hughes, who has shown no little ability as a punter so far. Walter Koppenhoefer, the real midget of the squad as to size, is the real giant so far as spirit goes, having not missed a single practice, although hopelessly outweighed by his fellow students. Andrew Hoeflin and Emery Zinser are two other lightweights who deserve mention because of their loyalty.

All games through the generosity of Mr. White, are to be played at the local ball-park where the crowd can be well taken care of. Posters announcing the home games as to date and time played will be placed in all store windows.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FROM THE WASHINGTON COURIER NEWS—
SEPTEMBER 1924



NEW MEMBERS

We are thrilled to welcome the following new members who have joined the Society in 2024:

- JUDITH BORING
- THOMAS FULLER
- GREG & KAREN KREMER
- BOBBY MARTIN
- MARY MILLER
- BART AND MARY PENN
- JESS & ROBIN MUELLER
- RACHEL MULLER
- NANCY SILVERTHORN
- DAWN SLONNEGER
- CAROL TELLEFSON
- BOB AND CHRIS THOMMEN
- LINDA WETZEL
- WACR (WASHINGTON CULVER'S)
- JERRY AND CINDY HAMILTON



CHRISTMAS HOUSE TOUR, DECEMBER 10

Please join us for our popular annual Christmas House Tour! This year's tour will be held on Tuesday, December 10 from 1-4 and 6-9 p.m. The Historical Society office and four beautiful Washington homes will be decorated in all their holiday finery and open for tours this year. You know this is always a fun event. Call your friends and mark off the day so that you will be sure to enjoy this popular community event and get yourself in the holiday spirit. Tickets will be available as we get closer to the event at various local retailers and on the Historical Society website www.washingtonilhs.com.

WHS RESEARCH LIBRARY – GENEALOGY RESEARCH AVAILABLE

We have been busy moving things around in our building and one of the changes is that we now have a research library / computer lab in the front room upstairs available for public use. If you need to do local history research or would like to use the WHS for FamilySearch.org or Ancestry.com, we invite you to come in during our open hours to see if we can help. As an added benefit, if you are just getting started with genealogy research and would like someone to help you, we especially encourage you to come on the first Thursday of each month when we will have genealogy experts in the building.

Also available on our library computers is access to our entire digitized research library. The digital library is organized to make it easy to find information about a particular person, family, address, or historical event from Washington's past. If we have information about it, you will be able to find it on our digital archive.



So, in sum, the two computers in our library are both primed with four links:

A quick link to Ancestry.com

A quick link to FamilySearch.org

A link to the WHS's entire digitized library of research resources and archived materials

A form to request additional information

The WHS is open every Thursday from 10-12, from 10-12 on the first Saturday of each month, and other times by appointment.



SKIDDOO TO THE SALOONS

The early days of Washington's history sometimes gets lumped into "William Holland built a town and the rest is history," but there have been many hills and valleys along the way that have made us who we are. One important factor that does not get discussed too often, because it isn't particularly pleasant, is that from the mid 1800's until the early 1900's, Washington was a town with an alcohol problem.

In a town of less than 2,000 people there were no less than six saloons and a brewery. There was significant public drunkenness and crime. The jail, called a calaboose at the time, was a revolving door of men "sleeping it off" after a night of fisticuffs. Theft was rampant. It is interesting to study Washington's census figures during this time. Between 1870 and 1890 Washington lost 300 people in its population. Fresh off the Civil War, instead of city development and growth, people were leaving town. It was reported by one source that 1880's Washington schools were highly inadequate, and the youth of the town were generally not upstanding.

In April, 1908 Washington Township, and many other cities and townships, had an election to exercise the "local option" of prohibition. Washington Township was voted to be dry by a vote of 372-335 under unusually heavy turnout. From the Washington newspaper:

An astonishing thing happened to Washington on Tuesday. The old town took a leap at one bound to the honor roll in Illinois and voted by a majority of 37 for relief from the reign of the saloon, and all its accompanying misery and degrada-

tion for man, woman, and child. This is more astonishing because of the almost universal German descent of its people and the sentiment among that sturdy race has only recently become opposed to the drinking habit; but a sensible man cannot long remain blind, whatever his idea on the drink question personally, to the evil of the American saloon as it has been managed for years.

It was reported that all cities and townships in Tazewell and Woodford County went dry that day except for Pekin and East Peoria.

The Washington city election, which happened two weeks later, also included the saloon question, although the vote was irrelevant due to the previous township election.

With the implementation of local prohibition, which according to the local media pitted the "preacher men" vs. the "saloon men," the city became invigorated. There was a city-wide push for the promotion of Washington, projecting the town as a wealthy bedroom community of Peoria. The outward appearance of Washington was put at a premium. For example, after local prohibition was enacted the paving of roads and sidewalks was made a high priority, and then was highly publicized in Washington as well as other local papers of the vicinity. With that promotion, residential development occurred outward in all directions from the square. Later on, the push expanded to attract industry. These tactics seemed to work, as by 1920 Washington had gained back the 300 residents they had lost during their "wet" years.

Mail check to: WHS, P.O. Box 54, Washington, IL 61571 or visit: <https://washingtonillhs.com/membership-3/>

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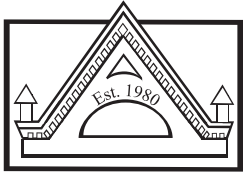


Every dollar helps!

go to: <https://www.kroger.com/i/community/community-rewards>

Remember: an easy way to help support the mission of the Washington Historical Society is to designate us as your preferred beneficiary through Kroger Community Rewards. This program sends money back to your designated charity based on your everyday purchases. To select the Washington Historical Society as your preferred beneficiary for Kroger, please

HELP THE WASHINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY



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