



Historical Society

Dwight Historical Society Newsletter

119 West Main Street
Volume 26 Number 4
Website: <https://dwithghistory.org>

P.O. Box 294

Dwight, Illinois 60420-1321
October 2026
Facebook: Dwight Historical Society

And the winner is.....



Elias Emmons drew the winning raffle ticket for the Route 66 quilt on Harvest Day weekend, with the help of Joy Ahearn, the creator of the quilt. Tom Riccolo of Morris was the lucky winner. He received the quilt from Bill Flott, a member of the Dwight Historical Society and a Route 66 volunteer. A special "Thank You" to Joy Ahearn, who designed the quilt and to the many people who purchased raffle tickets.

Day the Big Boy Came to Town

By Mary Flott

The Union Pacific Big Boy No.4014, the world's largest, heaviest, and most powerful operating steam locomotive, chugged into Dwight on Friday, July 17, on its coast-to-coast journey celebrating America's 250th Anniversary.

The Village was notified, a week before Big Boy's arrival, that it would be stopping in Dwight for 30 minutes instead of making the scheduled stop in Pontiac. Village officials, police, firemen, the ambulance service, organizations, and businesses scurried to plan for the potential 10,000 visitors that might be arriving.

The Historical Society opened our doors giving visitors a place to get out of the heat and the intermittent rain. It was a great opportunity to showcase Dwight's beautiful Henry Ives Cobb depot and Dwight's history including information about the interurban connecting Dwight to Pontiac and the former businesses on Old Route 66.



Visitors, who signed our guest sheets, hailed from Kentucky, Ohio, Wisconsin, Colorado, Florida, New Hampshire, Michigan, and countless cities in Illinois. Of course, located as we are next to the track, we had a front row seat to watch the train come into town. Our volunteers were kept busy visiting with train enthusiasts, giving directions, answering questions, and selling bottles of cold water and raffle tickets for our Route 66 quilt.

It was a great day for Dwight and a great day for the museum. We are happy to have Kim Drechsel's pictures of the train as it passed the depot and Kevin Brown's drone video capturing the highlights of the day.

Harvest Day Weekend Visitors to the Museum

The museum welcomed many visitors during Dwight's Harvest Days Weekend. Among them were Jim Ferguson, DTHS Class of 1961, and his wife, Karen, who came to donate Jim's West Point uniform and U.S. Army lieutenant colonel uniform to the museum.

There is an interesting interview that Jim and Karen gave to the West Point Center of Oral History. In that interview, he talked about growing up in Dwight. He commended his Dwight teachers, specifically mentioning Miss Mary Lou Cater and Mr. William Gilkey and said he was well prepared academically. To listen to that interview go to: www.westpointcoh.org/interviews/a-usma-65-couple-reflects-on-their-experiences-during-the-Vietnam-war-and-beyond.



Also visiting were Jim and Karen Finley, generous supporters of the Historical Society. They are pictured in front of the exhibit highlighting Jim's football career.

Museum visitors came from as far away as Thailand, as well as Massachusetts, Nebraska, Texas, Ohio, and California.

Our guests from California were James Hammortree; his wife, Neetra; and their daughters, Tennee and Teegan. James was recently added to our sports exhibit, which highlights his accomplishments as a kickboxer and heavyweight fighter. He won the Amateur World Kickboxing Tournament and competed on Season 11 of *The Ultimate Fighter*. After signing an eight-fight boxing contract, he compiled a 7–1 record with seven knockouts. His family moved to Dwight when he was in grade school and later moved to Florida. James and his family currently reside in California, where he works in real estate.



The "Ultimate Fighter 11"
James Hammortree
MMA (Mixed Martial Arts)



Exhibit in the Museum highlighting
James's career



Mazon, Illinois

Mazon - Verona - Kinsman



Rooted In Rail - Growing In Community

Mazon Sesquicentennial

In August, the Village of Mazon celebrated its sesquicentennial. Mazon's rich heritage was highlighted through many activities, programs, and artifacts. A group from the Dwight Historical Society attended the Mazon Brookside Cemetery Tour, where they heard stories about Mazon residents, from early settlers to beloved teachers, remembered by

many attendees. One such story was about Epifanio Sanches, an immigrant from Mexico who settled in Mazon in the early 1940's and worked on the railroad, maintaining the tracks. Epifanio and his wife Leota and their eight children lived in a converted boxcar near the rail line. In a biography of Epifanio written by Melanie Murphy, his great-granddaughter, she wrote: *It is a story of a man who came from another country in search of a better life. A story of hard work, sacrifice, and providing for a family. A story of children growing up between two worlds-*



rooted in their family's heritage while becoming part of a small Illinois community. The American Dream does not always begin in comfort. Sometimes, it begins in a boxcar beside a set of tracks in a quiet town. And while history may not record every detail of the Sanches family's life in Mazon, their story still matters. Because it reminds us that even the smallest places- and the quietest lives- are part of something bigger.



Christmas Open House at the Historical Museum



Friday, December 4 4-7 P.M.

You're invited to celebrate the season with us at our Christmas Open House!

Step into a wonderland of Christmas magic as the museum is beautifully decorated for the holidays.

Enjoy cookies, a festive hot chocolate bar, and roast marshmallows over an open fire for s'mores.

Come share the warmth, wonder, and joy of the Christmas season!

Thank You!

The Dwight Chamber of Commerce donated all the proceeds from the "Big Boy" tokens to the Dwight Historical Society to the amount of \$1,760. We are grateful for this generous donation and for their support.



Reminders:

Meetings & Docents: The last meeting of the year is Monday, October 19th. Docents are needed for October 10th and October 24th from 10 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Membership: To become a member or to renew your membership, go to our website: dwighthistory.org or mail it to Dwight Historical Society; P.O. Box 294; Dwight, IL 60420

Individual Memberships are \$15 and a Family Membership is \$20.

Membership renewals will be arriving in you mail soon.

Historical Wanderings.....

Dwight First Congregational Church Sunday School around the late 1940's



Front Row: Bonnie Thompson, Bob Kratochvil, Trudy (Sullivan) DeLong, Juanita McConnell, Jeanne Patten, Marilyn McConnell, Diane Von Qualen, Paul Branz, Dave Jacobsgaard

Second Row: Sharon Sancken, Ron Ely, Sandy (Sullivan) Cook, Dean Anderson, Bev Brorson, Jim Ferguson, Tom Parks, Delbert Wright

Third Row: Jeannette Ely, Richard Dippon, Marilyn Von Qualen, Arlene Tunberg, Darlene Short, Jim Legner, Carol Oughton

Fourth Row: Richard Broson, Carol Burger, Keith Von Qualen, Bob Sullivan, Judy Grubb, Diana Oughton, Connie Love

Fifth Row: Roger Branz, Bill Branz, Barbara (Wright) Clapp, Duane Anderson, Joyce McConnell, Buster Jacobsgaard, Janel Anderson

Sixth Row: Jean Ann (McConnell) Schou, Phyllis McConnell, Mary Hahn, Darlene Anderson,

Teachers: Judy Anderson, Elizabeth Wright, Mary Louise Drew, Gertrude Sovaad, Norman Dippon, Helen Dippon, Anne Wilson