

# MORGAN COUNTY

# HISTORY CENTER & MUSEUM



Vol. 4, No. 1

NEWSLETTER

Winter 2026

## America 250

The nation is celebrating its 250th Birthday this year. The semiquincentennial committee in Morgan County consists of Patty Dow, David Reddick, Jill & Dale Coffey, Vickie Stephany, Alicia Richhart, Ellen Wilson-Pruitt, Volitta Fritsche, Janice Bolinger, and Karen French. Our Facebook page is Morgan County America 250. If anyone is interested in joining this committee please send an email to [pdow@aol.com](mailto:pdow@aol.com). The next meeting is February 2, 6:00 p.m. at the museum. The celebration began with lighting the court house and city hall in commemoration of Paul Revere's ride in April—1 light in a window.



An apple pie contest was held at the county fair last summer.

Second graders participated in a coloring contest and winning submissions were displayed at the Art Sanctuary during the Fall Foliage Festival and at the museum until Christmas.

The Ten O'Clock Line DAR featured a program about Martha Washington.

A Flag Day program was held in the museum in June.

The newest museum display will feature the Revolutionary Soldiers with connections to Morgan County. If you have a connection to a Revolutionary War Soldier please contact the museum.



## Our Contact Information

Address: 127 S. Main St. Martinsville, IN 46151

Telephone: 765-315-6982

Facebook page: Morgan County History Center and Museum

Email: morgancountyhistorymuseum@gmail.com

Web page: morgancountyhistorymuseum.org

Open Hours:

Monday 10:00AM-2:00PM    Thursday 4:00PM-7:00PM    Saturday 10:00AM-3:00PM



Lori Strohl, Martinsville was the winner of the beautiful scarf woven by our weaver, Lori Chivington. Lori C. demonstrated weaving during the Martinsville Cookie Stroll. Participants in the stroll braved the cold, blustery day of snow.

### Museum Membership

At the annual meeting Family Life Membership dues were set at \$400, Single Life Membership \$250, annual single \$35 & Family \$50, annual Business \$100. Make checks payable to Morgan County History Center & Museum or MCHCAM, mail to 127 S. Main St., Martinsville, IN 46451.

### Morgan County's Indiana Governor, Emmett Forest Branch

Born to Elliott and Alice Parks Branch in Martinsville, Indiana, Emmett had three siblings: Olive Branch, Leafy Branch, and Frank Oaks Branch. Emmett followed in the footsteps of his ancestors. Elliott had served in state government as a Republican politician. Emmett's grandfather and great-grandfather had been politics and served as state senators.

Emmett graduated from Indiana University Bloomington in 1896, making him the first Indiana graduate to become governor. He played on I.U.'s championship-winning baseball team. (The museum has Emmett F. Branch's varsity award certificate from I.U.) He studied law with his uncle Judge M.H. Parks and was admitted to the bar in 1899. His law practice was established in Martinsville.

Emmett served in Company K of the 158th Regiment during the Spanish-American War where he rose to First Lieutenant. From 1903 to 1909 he was elected to the Indiana House of Representatives, serving as the Speaker of the House 1907-08. He served as a lieutenant colonel of the 151st Infantry during WWI and commanded the 165th Depot Brigade at Camp Travis in Texas helping to guard the Mexican border in 1916-17. Branch was elected lieutenant governor in 1920 and became governor when Governor Warren T. McCray was convicted of mail fraud and forced to leave office on April 30, 1924.

After his short term as governor Branch returned to practice law in Martinsville and served as President of the Branch Grain and Seed Company. In 1929 he was appointed by Governor Harry G. Leslie to manage the state armory until his death February 23, 1932. Hilldale Cemetery is his final resting place.

The Morgan County History Center and Museum is the repository of many of Governor Branch's letters, citations, and pictures, including his handwritten facts and notes about Abraham Lincoln which he used for a speech.



**Annual Museum Banquet April 30, 2026, River Valley Christian Church**

Theme "America 250", Doors Open 5:30 p.m., Dinner & Program 6:30 p.m.

**Tickets available after March 1** at the museum or contact Vickie Kivett

**Sponsorships** available until April 15: Friend of Museum \$100; Bronze \$250 = 4 tickets; Silver \$500 = 8 tickets; Gold \$1000 = 16 tickets with VIP seating; **Individual Tickets \$30**

Bronze, Silver, Gold sponsors will be listed in the program

Contact Vickie: [vjkivett@yahoo.com](mailto:vjkivett@yahoo.com) or 765-341-9215

**Silent Auction**

**Public Programs (all free admittance) Morgan County Library, Martinsville**

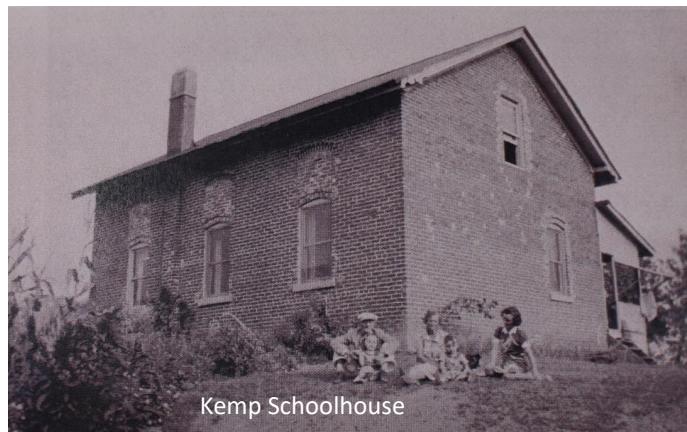
**February 18, 2026** – 6 – 8 pm – Digitize Your Photos – stop by anytime to digitize your photos. You will need to bring a flash drive and your photos. Our scanning software has recently been updated making the process easier.

**February 25, 2026** – 6 – 7 pm – Finding Evidence – Anyone is welcome to attend this program designed to help you find the documents you will need to prove your lineage as required by the DAR or other heritage societies.

**Inquiry Answered**

The search for Ernest and Elizabeth Zins Williams' property in Jackson Township Morgan County began nearly 9 months ago with a call from Anne Cooper to the museum. She had discovered letters written by her great grandfather that indicated their home was at Echo Park or Echo Village. Darrell French, Patty Dow, and Becki Hamilton, museum staff, scoured county records, genealogies, and newspapers for clues. One clue was that Ernest had purchased the nearby Kemp Schoolhouse located in Section 10, Township 11N, Range 2 East. Ernest's letter 17 Feb. 1937 said he was seeing about a Home Loan to fix the schoolhouse up to rent. The Kemps owned the schoolhouse from 1936 to 1954. Ernest owned two 9 acre parcels west of the school.

Ann submitted transcriptions of Ernest's letters, 1935 to 1938, along with newspaper clippings and pictures to the museum. She included copies of the original letters. These in-



Kemp Schoolhouse

formative letters give an excellent history of the 1930s, are entertaining with personal snippets, and mention neighbors who lived in the area. We recently received a message that Ann discovered another box of ten more years of letters which she is transcribing and will send to the museum. The depression comes to life in these personal documents.

## Welcome to all our new Volunteer

Delbert Davis

### Items in our Museum Gift Shop

- Stained Glass Crosses made from the windows of Home Lawn Sanitarium , each cross has a chain attached for easy hanging, \$20
- Daily inventory cards from Indiana Willow Products Co., Inc., a daily report of furniture made each day, \$1 each
- Phyllis Bex's Turkeyneck series books, Darrell French's "History of an Indiana railroad: Fairland, Franklin, & Martinsville Railway 1846-1973", David Reddick's "The Indiana Flag"
- Morgan County Scrapbooks I & II, soft cover, \$35 each

### What is it?

The What is It in the Fall issue was an antique cobbler cast iron shoe maker anvil.



Can you identify this what is it?

### Genealogical Inquiries

- The museum has received an inquiry from [mgraubner32@gmail.com](mailto:mgraubner32@gmail.com) requesting information about Benjamin Blanchard Ware (1900-1981) who resided in Morgan County. The family has connections to the Arnold, House, Johnson, and Poppino families.
- Jeff Washburn researching the Scaggs/Skaggs family as well as Hulen and Kemp from [washburn@mudsource.com](mailto:washburn@mudsource.com)
- Steve Fowler who is writing a book wanting information on John Fowler of White Lick Creek; the museum has found information for John on Sycamore Creek, but not White Lick, [sbfowler5360@gmail.com](mailto:sbfowler5360@gmail.com)

If you have information on any of these familial lines please share your information with these researchers. A few pictures and newspaper articles were shared with Mr. Graubner. We found nothing in our files that interested Mr. Washburn. County maps were researched for Mr. Fowler.

### The Winter of 1899

In February of 1899 blizzard and seriously frigid temperatures gripped most of the United States. What follows are reports of the weather as documented in the February 14, 1899 Martinsville, Indiana Republican from various locations around Morgan County. (Janice Kistler, Morgan Co. Library)

- From Midway—Every man who has a thermometer swears that it is exactly correct whether it registers 18 degrees below zero or 30 degrees below. That seems to be the range of temperature in this vicinity. This severe cold snap recalls to mind the so-called cold new year thirty-five years ago.
- From Hall—The cold weather has caused an increased demand for wood and coal. Many families in comfortable circumstances found their supply of fuel about to be suddenly exhausted, and several trips had to be made to the country for wood when the thermometer stood near zero.
- From local Summary—It is not often in times like the weather just passed that you have one wish for the good old times. Many residents knew little or nothing of conveniences, but you do sometimes. During the extreme cold weather , a local attorney was at Lebanon, in the albeit, and dropped into a store, and listened to an old gentleman talking about the cold weather. He said, "I have my house piped for natural gas for heating purposes, artificial gas for light, and another set of pipes for city water. All of these pipes are frozen, and we have neither heat, light, nor water. Now as soon as I get a chance, I am going to buy a stove and some wood, a supply of tallow candles, and dig a well. Then I will not be compelled to get out of the house just because there is a frost."
- From Brooklyn—We have had the coldest February for years, the register was from -18 to -24.