

# GAZETTE

A family publication dedicated to our unique heritage

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## Landmark Showcase

The McHenry County Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) encourages McHenry County residents to take pride in the accomplishments of the past. We strive to promote our historic heritage through protection and education and to date, the HPC has recognized 19 significant sites and structures across the county with more to come! We call these our McHenry County Landmarks.

### The John B. Walkup House



John B. Walkup was an early settler to the area and the founder of the town of Nunda. His home is not only a fine example of Greek Revival architecture in near original condition, it is one of the few remaining *cobblestone houses* in McHenry County.

In 1856, John B. Walkup built his home across from the Walkup Woods, an area of land we now refer to as Veteran Acres Park. Famed cobblestone mason Andrew Jackson Simons constructed the house of water-smoothed cobblestones gathered on the shores of Lake Michigan and hauled back to McHenry County by oxen. The foundation and walls used over 70,000 cobblestones! Classic Greek Revival features include cornice returns, lintels, 6-over-6 light windows, a front door surround including a transom with side light windows, and a decorative patterning of smaller cobblestones near the peak. John B. died shortly after the construction was completed.



## Hunting for Everyday History

Learning about the past is as easy as asking your parents, grandparents, older family members and friends about their childhood. Discovering their history can be fun and interesting.

In each issue, the Gazette offers questions to ask on your Everyday History Hunt. In this issue we ask:

*“Did you ever go to the county fair or see a traveling carnival?”*

## History Detective

Do you live in an old house or do you suspect an old building is nearby? Here are a few visual clues you can use to help you determine if a building is old. Remember, never walk on someone's property without permission!



False Front



Over-sized Eaves



Barge Boards

## Old Fashioned Fun ↵

The Jacob's ladder is a simple wood and cloth ribbon toy that dates back to Colonial times and beyond. The toy appears to have been named after a biblical tale about a dream in which angels climbed up and down a ladder to heaven. It was also called "tableta majica" or *magic tablet* in the Spanish colonies.

Most colonial children were not allowed to play with any toys on Sunday but the Jacob's ladder was considered an acceptable Sunday toy because of the biblical reference to its name.

The Jacob's ladder consists of six blocks of wood held together by ribbons. There isn't much to it but the real fun comes from the visual illusion you create when you flip the top block. When the ladder is held at one end and the top block falls, the blocks appear to endlessly cascade down the ribbons. They even look ready to fall to the floor!

Build your own Jacob's ladder -

1½ foot length of 1 x 3 inch pine board, a handsaw, sandpaper, craft paint (optional), 18 thumbtacks, a pair of scissors and ½ inch wide ribbon (1 ½ feet of red and three feet of yellow *or* use that much ribbon in two colors of your choice).

Cut the board into six 2 1/2-inch blocks. Use the sandpaper to smooth the edges and if you like, paint the blocks on all sides and let them dry.

Tack the red ribbon to the first block. Center the end of the ribbon on the left edge (see Figure A). Then pull the ribbon toward the right side so that it lies across the top of the block.

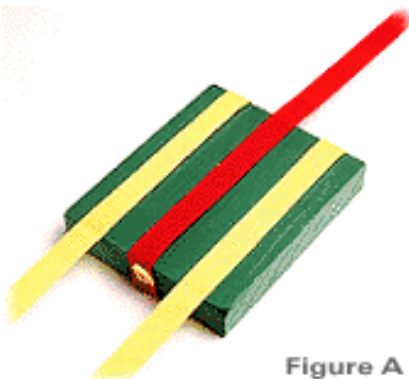


Figure A

Cut the yellow ribbon into two pieces of equal length. Then tack the yellow ribbons to the opposite edge of the same block, spacing them 1/4 inch from the corners. Lay the yellow ribbons across the block, in the opposite direction from the red ribbon.

Place a second block on top of the first one. Pull the yellow ribbons up over the top block and tack them to its left edge, as shown in Figure B. Tack the red ribbon to the right edge, then lay it across the top of the block.

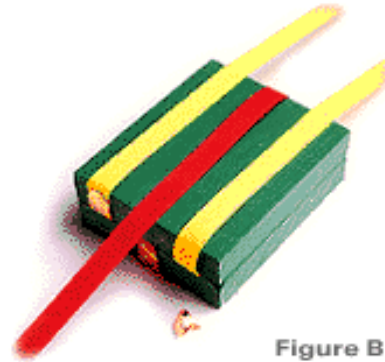


Figure B

One at a time, stack on the remaining blocks and attach them using the same method. When the last block has been attached, trim off the excess ribbon.

To set your Jacob's ladder in motion, pick up the top two blocks and hold them together along the long edges, using your thumb and index finger. The bottom four blocks should hang freely. Then let go of the block that is second from the top. As it falls, each block will appear to tumble down the block chain. Fold down the next block in line and the blocks cascade again!

This fun yet simple colonial toy will have everyone asking to try it for themselves!



## History in your pocket ↻



Do you know just about everything has a story, even Play-Doh modeling clay?

Back in 1956 Joe McVicker was involved in a conversation with his sister-in-law who happened to be a schoolteacher. She told him that her students found the oil-based modeling clay they used in their classrooms too hard to manipulate. That conversation got him thinking about the soft doughy cleaning product he manufactured to clean wallpaper. The next day he tried rolling out some of the squishy cleaning compound for himself and knew it could be used in classrooms. He sent some dough to the school and it was a great success, the students could easily shape the dough into just about anything they wanted.

The dough was so successful he offered to supply the product to all the schools in Cincinnati Ohio and more enthusiastic reviews followed. McVicker showcased the modeling clay at a national education convention in 1955. Word eventually spread to Macy's and Marshall Field's; two large department stores of the day. The soft dough's popularity grew and before long he knew it was time for better marketing and a new name. By 1956, the wallpaper cleaner had become Play-Doh. A year later, he offered a softer Play-Doh in primary colors that children could mix to make other colors.

Famous 1950 –60's TV personalities such as Captain Kangaroo and Miss Frances from Ding Dong School

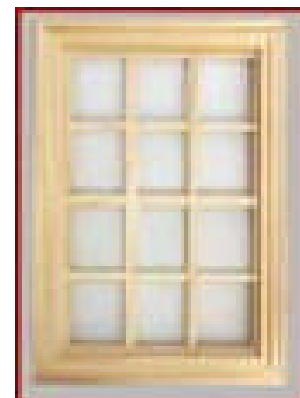
endorsed Play-Doh. The little artist character known as Play-Doh Pete, appeared on Play-Doh cans in 1960. A whole array of special molds, cutters and extruders were invented and sold to compliment the already popular dough. Recent estimates say that kids all over the world have played with 700 million pounds of Play-Doh!

### Here are some interesting facts about Play-Doh -

- Play-Doh is 50 years old this year!
- The formula for the original Play-Doh dough still remains top secret.
- Play-Doh is the leader of all similar dough products.
- Today, Play-Doh is sold in more than 6,000 stores in the United States and in more than 75 countries worldwide.
- If combined, the total amount of Play-Doh manufactured since 1956 would weigh more than 700 million pounds. That's equal to the weight of 159 fully-loaded Space Shuttles!
- More than 2 billion cans of Play-Doh have been sold since 1956.
- Approximately 95 million cans of Play-Doh are manufactured each year.
- If all the Play-Doh made since 1956 was extruded through the Play-Doh Fun Factory, it would make a "snake" that would wrap around the world nearly 300 times!

**Did you know** what we refer to as a *window* was originally called *eagduru*, an Old English word meaning eye door? If you think about it, that makes sense because we do look through windows with our eyes. But how does *eagduru* become the word we are familiar with today?

We need to go back to the time of the Vikings and their Old Norse word, *vindr* for wind. Through the years, the word took on many forms, eye door, eye hole, wind eye and finally *wind hole*. Pronounce this quickly and you can see how wind hole became window!



## Cobblestones and Andrew Simons ↻

The cobblestone building style flourished between 1825 and 1865, especially in upstate New York where farmers took advantage of tons of smooth glacial rock strewn across the fields. The stones or cobble got in the way when early settlers tried to farm the land. It didn't take long before the stones were used as an inexpensive building material. A few experienced cobblestone masons migrated west bringing this unusual method of construction with them. Cobblestone construction spread as far west as Wisconsin.

It is believed that Elgin Illinois had the largest concentration of cobblestone houses outside of New York. Visitors to Elgin can see several such structures in Elgin's historic district and two have been recognized by the National Register of Historic Places.

Leaving New York and settling in our area in 1848, Andrew Jackson Simons' work as a stonemason and architect soon became well known in McHenry County. He is credited with building several cobblestone houses in Crystal Lake, including the Wallace House and the John B. Walkup House. Several other homes in the area have Simons' cobblestone foundations as well. The stones were selected for their uniform shape and size from the beaches of Lake Michigan and hauled by wagon to McHenry County.

Andrew Simons served as a Private in the 36th Illinois U.S. Infantry during the Civil War. You wouldn't imagine this expert stonemason to have lived in a wood frame house but he did. Before Andrew Simons left for the Civil War, he purchased bricks to build his own house. Unfortunately while he was away fighting in the war the bricks were stolen! When he returned to find his bricks gone, he built a wood frame house on his land.

Cobblestone construction evolved into a folk art form and each stonemason was known for his distinctive creations. Each structure is a unique work of folk art and a monument to human ingenuity in using available resources. The Cobblestone Society in Albion, N.Y. says there are 1,200 surviving cobblestone structures in the United States with 900 of them in New York alone. How fortunate we are to have several of these interesting structures right here in McHenry County!

## Come see us on the web! ↻



The McHenry County Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) is now online. Stop by our new website and find what the HPC is all about!

- Our county's wonderful old landmarks can now be seen in a slideshow complete with their fascinating histories.
- Read the amazingly detailed Comprehensive Landmark List, a joint venture of several dedicated preservation groups.
- Learn about the new Scenic Roads program and where to go to enjoy those roads already designated.
- Get answers to frequently asked questions (FAQ's) about the work we do.
- Acquaint yourself with the Landmark Program and other preservation efforts in the county.
- Discover the roots of Historic Preservation in the United States.
- Find links to other online historic preservation sites and discover what other agencies and groups are doing to preserve our country's heritage.
- You will even find printable versions of every issue of the *Gazette!*

And there's more!

We can work together to recognize, preserve, and protect McHenry County's treasures. Have you discovered a potential Landmark or know of another lovely Scenic Road? Do you know the whereabouts of an old site, structure, or district in danger through neglect, vandalism or development? You can use our printable Nomination or Endangered Sites forms and let us know!

[www.mchhpc.org](http://www.mchhpc.org)



Do you know the whereabouts of healthy, grand old trees still standing in McHenry County yards and fields? Do you have any family stories to share concerning our majestic leafy residents? The McHenry County Historic Preservation Commission is working on a special project that would recognize our wonderful old trees.

Help us find the oldest trees in the county!

Email us at: [GazetteEditor@mchhpc.org](mailto:GazetteEditor@mchhpc.org)