

## McDonough County History

No one knows precisely when the first Native Americans came to the area now called McDonough County thousands of years ago, but a seasonal hunting camp located at "Wigwam Hollow" was evident through the 1820s.

The first white settlers, William Carter and Riggs Pennington, came in 1826, the year McDonough County was established.

Macomb, the county seat, was laid out in 1831, and a log courthouse was constructed. A jail was built in 1832 as wooden shops went up around the square.

In 1855 the first railroad, the Northern Cross, came through Macomb. Nearby towns like Bushnell and Colchester were started as the frontier faded away.

A modest brick courthouse, where Lincoln spoke in 1858, was replaced by a large one completed in 1872. That courthouse, now on the National Register, is still being used. Around it is a typical town square that reflects the later 19th century and is now being preserved as an historic district.

The 130-year-old Chandler Park, which has several monuments and a traditional small-town gazebo lies north of the square. The Al Sears Jazz Festival and Gazebo Arts Festival are held there every September. Just north of the park is an historic but still in use railroad depot, constructed in 1913.

Macomb, a college town since 1837, became the site of Western Illinois State Normal School, established in 1899. The stately main building, Sherman Hall, was partially completed by 1902, when classes began. It is also on the National Register. A university since 1957, Western has an historic Art Gallery, a Geologic Museum, and huge collections of historical records, regional photographs, and books at Malpass Library. Enrollment on the Macomb campus is approximately 10,000 students.

The Western Illinois Museum is located south of the Macomb Square, and even the town's City Hall is an historic building and tourist site, decorated with vintage photographs.

An annual festival, known as Heritage Days, celebrates the history of Macomb and McDonough County in late June.

The McDonough County Historical Society is the well-informed, energetic voice of historical awareness for this remarkable, heritage-oriented community and county.



# McDonough County Historical Society

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<http://mcdhistsociety-jmndo.com/>



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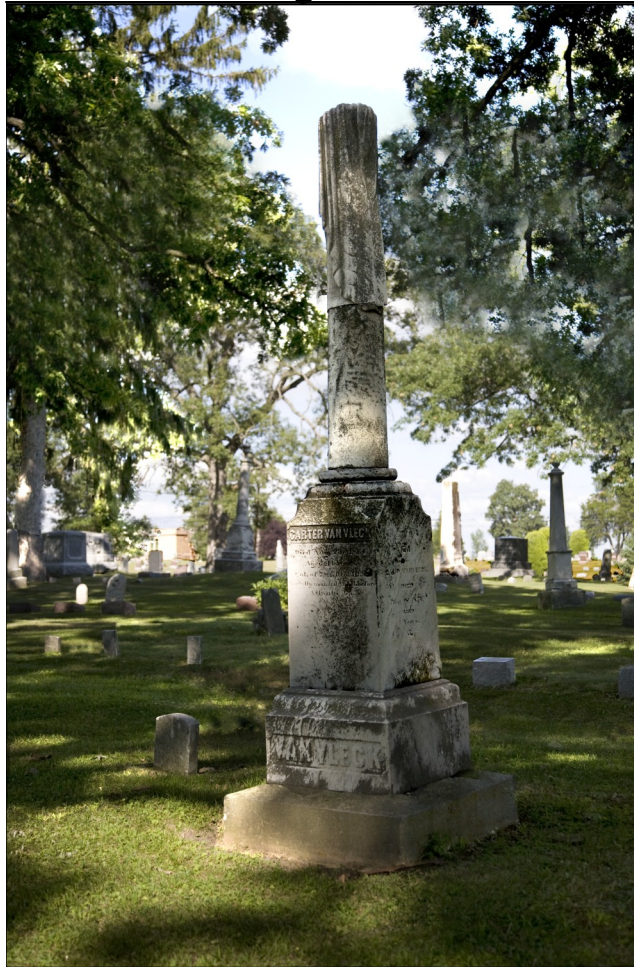
**T**he McDonough County Historical Society, a not-for-profit organization founded in 1967, is an important force for promoting historical understanding and preserving materials that reflect the county's heritage.

Over the years, historical programs at the bi-monthly meetings have drawn upon a broad range of speakers with local expertise, for talks on pioneer settlements, early colleges, the Underground Railroad, Lincoln's visits, the Civil War, county cemeteries, one-room schools, coal mining, murder cases, pottery factories, horse breeding, early hospitals, small villages, opera houses, bootleggers, desperadoes, and a host of other topics that give McDonough County a fascinating heritage.

The *McDonough County Historical Society Newsletter*, published since 1982, is among the finest local historical periodicals in Illinois. Edited by Kathy Nichols of the WIU Archives, it features old photographs, early newspaper articles, hitherto unpublished letters, and sections from rare books, as well as articles by society members, notices about heritage activities, and information about meetings.

A number of historical tours have been developed by the organization—since 1967, when the society's first tour group went to Vishnu Springs. Recent tours have visited notable rural cemeteries, historic barns, and famous historic districts.

Many lasting contributions to heritage preservation have been made by individual members of the society, by photographing buildings and gravesites, publishing local history articles and books, producing oral history tapes, and sharing collected materials. Such projects are often carried out in cooperation with the WIU Archives, the Western Illinois Museum, and other agencies. In the McDonough County Historical Consortium



*Tombstone of Macomb attorney and Civil War colonel Carter Van Vleck. At the Battle of Chickamauga, Van Vleck was wounded in the arm and could have honorably resigned his commission, but instead he put his arm in a sling and rejoined his regiment. Eleven months later he was struck in the forehead by a rebel rifle ball and lingered for twelve days, dying on August 23, 1864. Van Vleck is one of many noted burials in Macomb's historic Oakwood Cemetery.*

The historical society sponsors an annual local history day for the sixth graders in Macomb. Through that program, students are taken to downtown places of historic interest, such as the courthouse, city hall, Carnegie Library, and the museum, where volunteers help them learn about people who established and developed the community.

The society also sponsors cemetery labeling projects, which place signs at remarkable, and often unnoticed, burying grounds and encourages restoration and preservation of many. That long-term effort fosters greater public awareness of the more than 95 rural graveyards in McDonough County, many of which have veterans of the War of 1812 and the Civil War.

## Society Attractions

- Free programs five times a year—in September, November, January, March, and May.
- Quarterly newsletter with items of local historical interest and announcements of upcoming area events.
- Society-sponsored activities, such as the annual local history day and the cemetery restoration project.
- Assistance with historical research and other heritage projects from knowledgeable, experienced local historians.
- Opportunities to meet with people from throughout the county who share an interest in the cultural heritage of our area.