

December 2020

Trivia Q: What was the name of the Transcendentalist Meditation movement (TM) leader who tried to purchase Chanute Air Force Base in 1993?

Trivia A: Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. Read more about the attempted purchase on our Local History & Genealogy Digital Exhibits [site](#).

November 2020

Trivia Q: When did Champaign get its first gas company?

Trivia A: February 18, 1867. According to "Fifty Years of Development" by Mrs. Townsend, it was on this date that John Faulds, Daniels Gardner, Thomas A. Cosgrove, C. R. Griggs, John G. Clark and C. M. Sherffy "organized the original corporation which was known as the Champaign and Urbana Gas Light and Coke Company."

October 2020

Trivia Q: Thomas Leal, Champaign County's first school superintendent, was elected in what year? Bonus points if you can guess his age.

Trivia A: He was elected in 1857 when he was 28 years old.

September 2020

Trivia Q: What was the first public utility brought to Champaign?

Trivia A: Gas. According to "[Fifty Years of Development in Champaign](#)" by Mrs. Townsend, "Of the four so-called public utilities:gas, water, electricity, and street railway, gas seems to have been first, followed closely by the street railway."

August 2020

Trivia Q: Who is considered, the "Father of Champaign County," responsible for its separation from Vermilion County in 1833?

Trivia A: [John W. Vance](#). Born in 1782, John W. Vance spent his youth in Pennsylvania, Kentucky, and Ohio. With his brother, he developed a salt distribution company based in Urbana, Ohio. Vance moved near Danville, Illinois, in 1824 to take over a failing saline plant. During his time in Illinois, he became active in politics, and was elected to the State Senate in 1832, primarily supported by the scattered voters from the west edge of the county, then known as the "Big Grove." Vance's Enabling Act, carving Champaign County from Vermilion County, was passed on February 20, 1833. Included in the legislation was the stipulation that the new county be called Champaign, and the "seat of justice of said county shall be called, and known, by the name of Urbana." Historian Clint Tilton writes that Vance was a "hard-headed businessman [...though] withal a dreamer and a poet, and this was his way of leaving a permanent memorial to the happy days of his youth in Urbana, Champaign County, Ohio."

Historical Crossword Puzzle, February 1, 1950, Urbana Courier

Crossword Puzzle Answers

March 2020

Trivia Q: On what holiday did the 1915 fire occur at the W. Lewis & Co Store in downtown Champaign?

Trivia A: St. Patrick's Day. The morning fire began in the northwest elevator shaft of the [W. Lewis & Co. Department Store](#), at the corner of Neil and Park. The loss for Lewis' store was estimated to exceed \$200,000. The fire not only claimed the Illinois Building which housed W. Lewis & Co., but also completely gutted the Price/Dallenbach block directly east across Neil Street.

Wolf Lewis (1858-1942) was a Polish immigrant and entrepreneur. He moved to Champaign, IL in 1897 where he opened a general merchandise store, The Economy, at 57 North Neil St. in downtown Champaign. The Economy, later known as W. Lewis & Co., moved to its permanent location at the corner of Neil and Park in November 1901. Within a week of the fire, Wolf Lewis reopened his store in temporary quarters. The Illinois Building was quickly rebuilt and W. Lewis & Co. was its primary tenant until its closure in 1972. The store continued to thrive through the 1960s and was one of the prominent retail establishments in Champaign.

February 2020

Trivia Q: Why was the original tower of the current Champaign County Courthouse removed?

Trivia A: It was struck too frequently by [lightning](#). The building's focal point, as designed by [Joseph Royer](#) in 1901, was its 135-foot high tower. Lightning strikes in 1930 and 1950 were responsible for the loss of the original battlements, and in 1952 the tower was lowered to 85 feet. In 2001, a group of citizens banded together to raise funds to restore the Champaign County Courthouse clock and bell tower to its original 1901 design. The Citizens' Committee for the Restoration of the Clock & Bell Tower ultimately raised \$1.15 million to complete the project, and a dedication ceremony to commemorate the clock and bell tower restoration was held on August 29, 2009.

We have the Citizens' Committee for the Restoration of the Clock & Bell Tower [records](#) in our collection, and they can be viewed anytime the Archives is open.

January 2020

Trivia Q: When did Ellis Island open?

Trivia A: Ellis Island opened on January 1, 1892. In honor of that occasion here is a [blog](#) we posted in 2013 about the history of the island and tips for researching an ancestor's immigration story. Happy New Year, everyone!