



Madison County Archival Library program Sept 10: Steel and Solidarity in Granite City

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EDWARDSVILLE - Local labor union historian Gary Gaines will give a program on the Steelworkers Unions at 2 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 10 at the Madison County Archival Library at 801 N. Main Street in Edwardsville, Illinois.

Gaines has said steelmaking in Granite City was almost an accident. The Niedringhaus brothers started their business across the river, but St. Louis leaders didn't like the noise, dirt or the smell of the factories. When it was time to expand, the Niedringhaus brothers purchased 3,500 acres of inexpensive ground in Illinois. The area was a farming community known then as Kinderhook that eventually became Granite City, named for their product, graniteware.

This is the story of how they built their small enamel cookware business into a sprawling steel mill that, unfortunately, to-day sits partly idle.

It is also the story of how the men they hired brought their old craft guild skills and values to the job, and formed union lodges beginning in 1899. At the same time that Andrew Carnegie and other industrialists were destroying unions in their mills, the lodges flourished in Granite City. The union men, with the approval of the company that built the town, took over city government and "socialism" ruled for nearly thirty years during the early history of Granite City.

Presenter Gaines is a life-long resident of the Granite City area and a third generation steelworker who was first hired at Granite City Steel in 1970. His grandfather, Louis Madsen, was a founding member of the union there. His father, an uncle, wife Norma, two brothers, and three cousins have been employed there. He retired in 2008 from the security department.

During his employment he also served in every elected position in his local union of security officers and was elected financial secretary when five local unions in the plant merged. He also served as a health and safety representative for many years and traveled to other USW sites to train workers. Upon his retirement, he was the senior peer trainer for the entire union.

MCHS programs are free and open to the public. Regular hours at the Madison County Archival Library are Wed – Fri, 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. and Sun, 1 p.m. – 4 p.m. The Madison County Historical Museum is currently closed for renovations. For additional information, call (618) 656-7569.