

Print treasures find digital life: Madison Historical shares Edwardsville native's letters from Franklin D. Roosevelt

February 20 2018 4:28 PM



EDWARDSVILLE - You never quite know what historical treasures you'll find when you peruse [*Madison Historical: The Online Encyclopedia and Digital Archive for Madison County, Ill.*](#) Featuring oral history interviews, photographs, encyclopedia articles and more, the archive brings historical documents to digital life and offers the public unique access to Madison County's past.

The innovative project is led by Madison County Regional Superintendent of Schools Robert Daiber, EdD. It is managed by Southern Illinois University Edwardsville associate professors Jeffrey Manuel, PhD, and Jason Stacy, PhD, along with faculty emeritus and former interim chancellor Stephen Hansen, PhD.

Among the latest entries on the site is correspondence between Franklin D. Roosevelt and Dick Howard Mudge, Sr., a prominent attorney and member of the local Democratic Party. The letters, dated 1928 and 1932, were contributed by Edwardsville's Steve Mudge.

Upon winning the 1932 Presidential Election, FDR wrote to D. H. Mudge Sr. on Nov. 17, "... our entire efforts must be devoted to the establishment of a better ordered economic life and in this happy task of restoration I invite and shall be deeply appreciative of your continued cooperation." Signed, "yours very sincerely."

[The materials are available in the government section of the archive.](#)

SIUE graduate student Kelli West has been sorting through the Mudge materials and making the history publically accessible by scanning and digitizing the letters in the SIUE College of Arts and Sciences' Interdisciplinary Research and Informatics Scholarship ([IRIS](#)) Center. West is pursuing a master's in historical studies with a museum studies certificate.

"We were grateful Steve Mudge invited us to his family's Grantfork farm to gather documents that have been saved for decades," said West. "It's incredibly important to uncover these diamonds that otherwise may not be found. The letters between FDR and D. H. Mudge Sr. fit Madison County in the national historical narrative."

The project is the perfect fit for the Collinsville native who is interested in public history and archival work.

"This is a great opportunity for me to get hands-on experience with archiving and engaging with community members," West said. "To handle letters that FDR once did is incredibly neat."

Other contributors on the Mudge project include Madison Historical Developer Ben Ostermeier, master's candidate Brendon Floyd and doctoral candidate Lesley Thomson-Sasso.

“As a historian, discovering a previously unknown letter from Franklin Roosevelt is a rare treat,” Manuel said. “The FDR-Mudge correspondence illustrates Madison County’s prominence in national politics during the 1920s and 1930s. As a teacher, I am delighted that Kelli got firsthand experience working with community members and digitizing the letters to make them available to the public. Kelli’s work illustrates the type of community-engaged digital history our students are producing at SIUE.”

“In school, students often only study national politics,” added Stacy. “But FDR’s letters to D. H. Mudge remind us that local and national events constantly interacted, much as they do today. These lost letters of FDR establish just how connected Madison County was to national politics during this time period. We’re thankful to Steve Mudge for helping us explore the ways our community fits into the national narrative.”

Madison Historical invites the public to be content producers. For more information on how to contribute ideas or materials, email the team at madisonhistorical1812@gmail.com.

Central to SIUE’s exceptional and comprehensive education, the [College of Arts and Sciences](#) has 19 departments and 85 areas of study. More than 300 full-time faculty/instructors deliver classes to more than 8,000 undergraduate and graduate students. Faculty help students explore diverse ideas and experiences, while learning to think and live as fulfilled, productive members of the global community. Study abroad, service-learning, internships, and other experiential learning opportunities better prepare SIUE students not only to succeed in our region's workplaces, but also to become valuable leaders who make important contributions to our communities.