

Madison County's Indian Captivity Story: What Really Happened to the Gillhams?

May 23 2022 10:04 AM



EDWARDSVILLE - At 2 p.m. on Sunday, June 5, the Madison County Historical Society (MCHS) Speaker Series will re-turn to an in-person format. The June program

will be held in the lower level of Immanuel United Methodist Church at 800 N. Main St., Edwardsville, directly across the street from the MCHS Library. The presenter, Library Research Manager Mary Z. Rose, will explore the facts about the only documented Indian captive narrative of Madison County.

It is the story of how, in the late 18th century, members of the James Gillham family, then living in Kentucky, were abducted by indigenous warriors who took their captives to what later became Illinois. Sometime after Gillham recovered his family, the Gillhams relocated to Illinois and eventually settled in Chouteau Township. They were some of the earliest non-indigenous settlers in Madison County. It is said that Gillham moved to Madison County after being impressed by the prairie, soil, and natural resources of this area that he discovered while searching for his family.

These are all verifiable facts except for the assumption as to why the Gillhams moved to Illinois. Through research, Rose looked for answers to a number of questions, including who was taken and specifically who took them. How long were the captives in captivity, and what was it like? How were they rescued? What effect did the experience have on them? In this program, she will explore these questions and some possible answers.

For the past two years, the MCHS Speaker Series has turned presentations into films that were placed on the Society's website. The films, created by the late Bob Gill, cover a variety of subjects. The most recent is an introduction to cemetery preservation by Jeff Pauk who is the owner of a small family cemetery and has taken classes on how to safely preserve cemeteries. As a surveyor, Jeff has had a special interest in cemeteries for decades, helping to identify locations, and more. To find the online programs, go to <https://madcohistory.org/speaker-series/>.

MCHS Speaker Series programs are free and open to the public. MCHS is a 501(c)3 charitable organization offering programs, exhibits, events and resources to those interested in Madison County history. The Society operates the Madison County Museum and Archival Library which is open to the public Wed.-Fri. 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. and Sun. 1 – 4 p.m. While the museum building is being renovated, exhibits can be found in the library at 801 N. Main St. in Edwardsville, Illinois.