

Program On DeMoulin Brothers & Co. Museum To Be Held At Carlinville Library

by Tom Emery
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CARLINVILLE – John Goldsmith has a good reason why the story of DeMoulin Brothers & Co. in Greenville means so much to him.

“My mother, Norma, was a fifty-year employee of the company, until her passing in 2007,” said Goldsmith. “At her urging, I became involved in her hobby of preserving the DeMoulin history.”

That led to Goldsmith becoming the factory historian, the DeMoulin family’s genealogist, and the founder of a museum in Greenville to the DeMoulin story. The DeMoulin Museum, which opened in March 2010, is one of many attractions in Greenville, fifty miles south of Carlinville.

Goldsmith will discuss “Three Frenchmen and a Goat: The DeMoulin Brothers Story” at the Carlinville Public Library on Thursday, May 23 at 5:30 p.m.

The free, one-hour program is funded by grant monies through the Road Scholars program of the Illinois Humanities Council.

In 1892, the three DeMoulin brothers – Erastus, U.S., and Ed – founded DeMoulin Brothers & Company in Greenville to produce regalia and paraphernalia for the Modern Woodmen of America.

“It’s really a unique story of three first-generation Americans who created an industry in a small southern Illinois town,” said Goldsmith, who travels the state to tell the story of the DeMoulins. “At the heart of it all is a classic American success story.

In the decades since, thousands of Bond County residents have worked for the company, which is ingrained as a part of Greenville history and culture.

Today, the company is one of only six in the United States that manufactures marching band uniforms. “DeMoulin is now one of the world’s leading makers of marching band uniforms,” said Goldsmith, who wrote a book on the DeMoulin story in 2004. “Their customers have included the Olympics and the halftime shows at the Super Bowl.”

“Anyone who was in marching band in high school or college will have nostalgic feelings for those experiences,” continued Goldsmith. “That creates an instant connection to that portion of DeMoulin history.”

Though the DeMoulins’ fraternal lodge period spanned only from 1892-1930, Goldsmith says that is what fascinates people the most. “During that time, the company also created some wacky initiation devices,” he said. “That includes the Ferris Wheel Goat, the Trick Chair, and the Invisible Paddle Machine. In the 1920s and 1930s, they also made a variety of things for all of the major circuses in the United States.”

In Carlinville, Goldsmith says the audience can expect a unique program. “It will be quirky,” he said. “It will be fun. And there will be surprises.

“The DeMoulin story is a throwback to the classic slapstick humor of the early 20th century,” remarked Goldsmith. “And it still entertains today.”

For more information on the DeMoulin Brothers program or the other events at the Carlinville Public Library, contact 217-854-3505 or mail@carlinvillelibrary.org.