

“A LOOK INTO THE PAST” BY SERGEANT KEN NEILSEN



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In this edition we will take a quick look back to the beginning and answer questions like;

- “When did McHenry County become McHenry County
- Where did the name come from?”

Interested? Read on.

McHenry County received its name from Major William McHenry. Major McHenry was a well know soldier and statesman during Illinois’ formative years. He had distinguished himself during several conflicts such as The Battle of Fallen Timber, The War of 1812, and The Black Hawk War.



These conflicts had direct affects on the early Illinois pioneers and aided Major McHenry’s rise in prominence.

Major McHenry died at the age of 61 while staying at a boarding house in Vandalia, Il. on February 3rd, 1835. He was serving as an Illinois State Senator at the time.

Not bad for a guy who started his career as a private in the “Cornstalk Militia”. Just as a side note, the Cornstalk Militia was like an early National Guard Unit. It got its name due to the fact that many of its members could not afford their own guns and wound up drilling with cornstalks rather than actual weapons.

In 1836, one year after Major McHenry died, northern Cook County was split off, formed into a new county, and named in honor of Major William McHenry. McHenry County at that time was about 1100 square miles and encompassed Lake County. It wasn’t until 1839 that Lake County was formed from the eastern half of the then very large McHenry County. The borders of both counties have not changed since.

On June 1, 1837, the first county election took place. From that election McHenry County’s first Sheriff, Henry B. Steele came into office which is the actual beginning of our own Law Enforcement Heritage.

So there you have it, a brief and

concise history of our humble beginnings. If you wish to contribute to the “A Look Into The Past” articles, please contact Sgt. Neilsen ext# 4730 or Michele Stechmuller ext# 4700.

Internet History

THE BLACK HAWK WAR

In May of 1832 Sac and Fox Indians under the leadership of Black Hawk left the Iowa territory and returned to their homes across the Mississippi River in northern Illinois. These Native Americans had lost their Illinois lands in a disputed treaty signed in St. Louis in 1805. Their return to northern Illinois sparked widespread panic among white settlers, and Illinois Governor Reynolds quickly called up the militia, which included a young Abraham Lincoln.



Chief Black Hawk

Both the militia and regular army troops proved unable to locate the elusive Indians at first, but by July they had begun to pursue Black Hawk’s band across northern Illinois and southwestern Wisconsin, engaging them in a major conflict at Wisconsin Heights before finally routing the Indians at Bad Axe on the Mississippi River.