Mary Ann (Cheney) Marmon (1837-1908) grew up in a log cabin on the Illinois prairie and was a member of one of the earliest white families to settle in McLean County. It is no wonder that she became very interested in documenting and preserving local history because of these deep roots in the county. A member of the McLean County and Illinois State Historical Societies, she wrote about prairie fires, Delaware and Kickapoo Indigenous settlements, needlecrafts, and social life. Without her articles documenting what early life was like in the county, our understanding of the evolution of McLean County history would be diminished.

Mary Ann Cheney was born on July 29, 1837 in a four-room log cabin in Old Town Township to Owen and Maria (Dawson) Cheney. Mary Ann was one of five children born to the couple. However, only Mary Ann and an older and younger brother survived to adulthood.¹

Mary Ann was a descendant of some of the earliest white settlers in McLean County. Her paternal grandparents, Johnathan and Catharine Cheney, were Virginians by birth. They relocated to McLean County, Illinois from Ohio around 1825. Jonathan settled near the far eastern edge of the county, near where the town of Saybrook is today. When he first saw the grove of trees in this area, it covered nearly four-square miles. Jonathan gave his family name to this grove, calling it Cheney's Grove (and in turn the township was named the same). Jonathan and Catharine lived there for most of their lives.²

Johnathan and Catharine Cheney had ten children, the youngest of whom was Mary Ann's father, Owen Cheney Sr. In a later account, Mary Ann recalled her grandfather was an enthusiastic hunter, having a "bright mind" and who "took a lively interest in politics, but was not an office seeker." She characterized her grandmother as a "most remarkable woman for her time or any time" who was a model Christian and had great sewing and nursing abilities. 4

Mary Ann's maternal grandparents, John and Anna (Cheney) Dawson, and their children, were among the first settlers in McLean County, attracted by the agricultural potential and groves of fine timber.⁵ The family travelled with John Hendrix and his family, first to Sangamon County in 1821, and then to Blooming Grove the following spring. At Blooming Grove, the settlers encountered the peaceful Delaware people (who, in the modern day, refer to themselves as the Lenape).⁶ The Dawson's oldest daughter, Maria Dawson (pronounced marRIah), Mary

¹ "Tell of Early Days," *The Sunday Bulletin*, December 15, 1901; Owen Lee Cheney, Mary Ann's younger brother, was featured in the 2020 Evergreen Cemetery Walk.

² Mary Ann Marmon, "Recollections and Reminiscences of the Early History of Cheney's Grove," (unpublished manuscript, n.d.), 1; Dr. E. Duis. *The Good Old Times in McLean County, Illinois* (Bloomington: The Leaders Publishing and Printing House, 1874) 389; ed. Newton Bateman, Paul Selby, Ezra Prince, and John Burnham. *Historical Encyclopedia of Illinois and History of McLean County Volume* 1 (Chicago: Munsell Publishing Company, 1908) 687, quoted in Seth Wheeler, "Owen Lee Cheney," ed. Candace Summers, (2020): 1, https://www.mchistory.org/perch/resources/biographies/owen-lee-cheney-2020-3.pdf. "Marmon, Mrs. Mary Ann (Cheney)," ed. John Burnham and Ezra Prince, *Historical Encyclopedia of IL & History of McLean County*, vol. 2, (Chicago: Munsell Publishing Company, 1908), 1169; William LeBaron, Jr. & Co. *The History of McLean County, Illinois, Illustrated*. (Chicago: Wm. Le Baron, Jr. & Co, 1879) 536-537

³ Marmon, "Recollections and Reminiscences of the Early History of Cheney's Grove," 1.

⁴ Ibid, 2.

⁵ Mary Ann Marmon, "Sketch of John Wells Dawson," ed. John Burnham, George Davis, and Ezra Prince. *Transactions of the McLean County Historical Society, Volume I War Record of McLean County with other papers.* (Bloomington: Pantagraph Printing and Stationery Co., 1899), 310.

⁶ "Indian Traditions," *The Sunday Leader*, December 5, 1897, 2; The name Delaware was given to the Indigenous population because of their settlements along the Delaware River when the European settlers

Ann's mother, interacted frequently with the local Delaware population as a child.⁷ When she was five years old, her mother Anna would entrust Maria into the care of two Delaware women they referred to as "Aunt Peggy" and "Aunt Polly." The women would bring Maria to their home and "keep her for hours at a time, amusing her in the meantime by cracking nuts and interesting her in different ways." Early white settlers like Mary Ann's family remained on fairly good terms with the local Indigenous peoples until state and federal governments began to order them from the area around 1823. After four years, John Dawson and his family moved once again to Old Town Timber where they remained until 1855. 10

In her childhood, Mary Ann attended school on the prairie, though she had to travel a substantial distance, which was especially difficult to get to during the winter months. 11 Later in her life, Mary Ann recorded many memories of her childhood. In "Prairie Fires," she wrote that when she was eleven or twelve years old, she rode her horse through the prairie to collect strawberries. She remembered the great diversity of grasses of the prairie, as well as the fires that would occur. In her own words, the fires were "fearfully grand and frightful to behold" but held a unique beauty as "miles and miles of roaring and leaping flames could be seen sweeping over the hills at a tremendous speed and lighting the whole heavens with a brilliant glow." She further recalled the efforts of the settlers to protect the valuable split-rail wooden fences surrounding the fields from these fires. 13

In 1848, when Mary Ann was eleven, her father Owen Cheney Sr. died of typhoid fever while driving cattle in Ohio at the age of thirty-eight. Four years later, Mary Ann's mother, Maria, married William Paist in 1852. It was this marriage that brought Mary Ann and her family to Bloomington in 1853. In Bloomington, Paist had a partnership with Dr. William Elder, and together they ran the Paist & Elder Drug Store, located at 115 N. Main Street. Three years later, William Marmon (Mary Ann's future husband), who had been employed as a business manager in the firm, bought Dr. Elder out and the store was renamed Paist & Marmon Drug Store. It remained a partnership until Paist died in 1874, leaving Marmon to continue operating the store alone.

first arrived in North America. In the modern day, the Delaware tribe refers to themselves as the Lenape which translates as "The People;" "About the Delaware Tribe of Indians," Delaware Tribe of Indians, accessed July 21, 2021, http://delawaretribe.org/home-page/about-the-tribe/.

⁷ "First Settlement," *The Weekly Leader, April* 2, 1897, 2; "Indian Traditions."

^{8 &}quot;Indian Traditions."

⁹ "75th Anniversary of the Blooming Grove Settlement," *Transactions of the McLean County Historical Society, Volume* I. (Bloomington: McLean County Historical Society, 1899) p.282-284

¹⁰ Mary Ann Marmon, "Sketch of John Wells Dawson," ed. John Burnham, George Davis, and Ezra Prince. *Transactions of the McLean County Historical Society, Volume I War Record of McLean County with other papers.* (Bloomington: Pantagraph Printing and Stationery Co., 1899), 311.

¹¹ "Marmon, Mrs. Mary Ann (Cheney)," in Burnham and Prince, 1169.

¹² Mary Ann Marmon, "Prairie Fires," (unpublished manuscript, n.d.), 2.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ "Tell of Early Days."

¹⁵ Sara Falkinham, *The Cheney Family History* (1994), Section 3, quoted in Seth Wheeler, "Owen Lee Cheney," ed. Candace Summers, (2020): 1,

https://www.mchistory.org/perch/resources/biographies/owen-lee-cheney-2020-3.pdf.

¹⁶ "Rooted To One Spot," *The Pantagraph*, May 25, 1881, 4; "The Bloomington City Directory," 1874.

¹⁷ "Rooted To One Spot"; "Sudden Death of Mr. Wm. Paist," The Pantagraph, January 26, 1874, 4.

¹⁸ "Sudden Death of Mr. Wm. Paist"; "Found Dead in Bed," *The Weekly Leader*, November 30, 1893, 16.

When Mary Ann was sixteen, she met her future husband, William Marmon, when he boarded with her family. William was born in Milton, Indiana on December 7, 1832 and moved to McLean County in 1843 when his mother married the respected physician Dr. Harrison Noble. William began work as a clerk at the Luce & Parke Drug Store (the predecessor to the Paist & Elder Drug Store) at the age of sixteen. In 1853, William attempted to study medicine under his stepfather Dr. Noble, but quit after only a few weeks and returned to the drug store business.

On October 20, 1857, the year after William Marmon bought Dr. Elder's shares in the drug store, the two were married at Mary Ann's family's home at 307 E. Washington Street.²³ After their marriage, the Marmons lived at the family home on East Washington Street.²⁴ By 1866, they had moved to East Jefferson Street.²⁵ The couple then moved back to 307 E. Washington Street by 1870, where they lived for the rest of their lives.²⁶

In April 1868, when Mary Ann was 31 years old, the Marmon's only child William (also known as Willie and Will) was born.²⁷ When he was of age, Will was sent to boarding school in the East, and when he returned, he enjoyed Bloomington's social circles much like the other members of his family.²⁸

Mary Ann enjoyed an affluent, social lifestyle. Newspapers were filled with accounts of her social activities, including her travels, the events she hosted or attended, and her charitable participation.

In 1874, Mary Ann made numerous trips to Colorado. The first was recorded by a short newspaper notice in January 1874, stating that her husband travelled to meet her in Salina, Kansas.²⁹ Interestingly enough, this occurred in the same week that Mary Ann's stepfather, William Paist, died.³⁰ In May that same year, both Mary Ann and their son Will traveled to Colorado with George Johnsonbaugh on the account of Mary Ann's poor health.³¹ At the end of June, Johnsonbaugh returned to Bloomington, while Mary Ann stayed in Salina, Kansas.³² In 1881 Mary Ann, her mother, and several other women from Bloomington travelled to New Orleans. The short newspaper article stated the trip was an "annual custom," though it is unclear if Mary Ann was a regular participant in the annual trip.³³

Mary Ann regularly entertained guests in their home on Washington Street. A handful of those parties are notable because of their unique nature and extravagant style. On July 4, 1881, Mary Ann and her mother hosted a "Pioneer Dinner Party." Guests of this party included only

¹⁹ "In Business Half a Century," *The Pantagraph*, May 11, 1903, 5.

²⁰ "W. W. Marmon Dead," *The Pantagraph*, November 27, 1893, 7.

²¹ "Rooted To One Spot"; "W. W. Marmon Dead."

²² "W. W. Marmon Dead."

²³ "Married," The Weekly Pantagraph, October 28, 1857, 2.

²⁴ The Bloomington City Directory, 1859.

²⁵ The Bloomington City Directory, 1866.

²⁶ The Bloomington City Directory, 1870.

²⁷ "The City," *The Pantagraph*, June 28, 1881, 3.

²⁸ "The City," The Pantagraph, July 8, 1885, 3.

²⁹ "The City: Personal," *The Pantagraph*, June 27, 1874, 4.

³⁰ "Sudden Death of Mr. Wm. Paist," *The Pantagraph*, January 26, 1874, 4.

³¹ "Untitled," The Daily Leader, May 12, 1874.

³² "Untitled," The Daily Leader, June 24, 1874.

^{33 &}quot;Untitled," The Daily Leader, December 6, 1881.

residents of McLean County who had moved to the area before July 4, 1831.³⁴ The party was well attended and was reported to have been a great success. Attendees reminisced about "olden times" and renewed early friendships. Additionally, *The Weekly Pantagraph* reported that "many anecdotes were related" that had never been published before. One such story was about a man named Esquire Robb, who was to marry a young couple late one night. The young couple could not cross Kickapoo Creek to reach his home (as it was raging at the time due to a drenching rain), so Esq. Robb rode out into the water as far as he could and "called out the words of the ceremony." Esq. Robb could not see the couple but could hear their responses as he read the words of the ceremony. Truly one of the most unique wedding ceremonies performed in the early days of the county's history.

At the end of the party, guests received a "handsome badge," on which was printed: "July 4, 1831; semi-centennial celebration at Bloomington, Illinois, July 4, 1881." Even those who were unable to attend the party were able to receive one. ³⁵

On October 23, 1882, Mary Ann and her husband William hosted a grand celebration of their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary. The party entertained many members of Bloomington society, including United States Senator David Davis. ³⁶ The celebration was unique because of the elaborate recreation of the Marmon's wedding: the food was catered from the same person who had prepared it at the wedding, and the music used for dancing was termed "good old-fashioned." Several of the guests in attendance witnessed the "nuptial knot tied" which united the lives of Mary Ann and William twenty-five years prior. Most interestingly, Mr. and Mrs. Marmon caused a stir by dressing in their original wedding garments for the occasion, with exception to Mr. Marmon's coat which he was unable to wear because he was "a great deal broader across the shoulders now than then."

Though not directly hosted by Mary Ann, in April 1897 Maria Dawson Paist (Mary Ann's mother) and John Wells Dawson (Mary Ann's uncle) hosted a reunion at Mary Ann's home on Washington Street to celebrate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the settlement of McLean County. The two hosts were the only surviving members of the first group of white settlers, being five years old and two-and-a-half years old respectively. Additionally, the reunion was extended to relatives of the settlers as well.³⁹ One newspaper described the event as "delightfully informal," with many stories and reminiscences shared throughout the evening.⁴⁰

Additionally in Bloomington, Mary Ann was active in various organizations and supported charitable works. For one, she was a charter member of St. Matthew's Episcopal Church and accounts relate that she rarely missed Sunday service. ⁴¹ She was also active in the Daughters of the American Revolution. ⁴²

The Marmons also contributed financially to various charitable causes. In addition to donating financially to the Lady's Benevolent Society, Mary Ann helped the society solicit clothing for

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³⁴ 'A Pioneer Dinner Party," *The Pantagraph*, June 28, 1881; "The Dinner To Old Settlers," *The Daily Leader*, June 29, 1881.

³⁵ "An Old-Time Dinner," *The Daily Leader*, July 5, 1881; "The Pioneer Dinner--Interesting Reminiscence," *The Weekly Pantagraph*, July 8, 1881.

³⁶ "Memorial Marriage," *The Pantagraph*, October 23, 1882, 4.

³⁷ "Quarter of a Century." The Daily Leader, October 21, 1882.

³⁸ "Memorial Marriage."

³⁹ "First Settlement," The Weekly Leader, April 2, 1897.

⁴⁰ "Anniversary of First Settlement," The Pantagraph, April 2, 1897, 6.

⁴¹ "Marmon, Mrs. Mary Ann (Cheney)," in Burnham and Prince, 1169.

⁴² Ibid.

"Free-Soilers" (people who supported the establishment of Kansas as a state without slavery) who had settled in Kansas in 1860.⁴³ And in 1883, she was one of many women who donated financially for a floral arrangement of roses and blue flowers to be placed at the head of the coffin of renowned Bloomington opera singer Marie Litta at her funeral.⁴⁴

Unfortunately, Mary Ann, along with her husband, mother, and younger brother Owen Lee Cheney and his wife Mary, were the subject of a series of lawsuits beginning in 1886. While Owen Lee Cheney was manager of the fair grounds for McLean County, he had borrowed a sum of money from H. T. Lewin, and his mother, Maria, had endorsed the note. Eventually, the note passed into the hands of Harwood & Sons who wanted to redeem the \$4,053 it promised (adjusted for inflation, this would be approximately \$120,000 today). However, they found that a couple years earlier, Maria had deeded her properties (one of which included the house that Mary Ann and William Marmon lived in on Washington Street) to both Mary Ann and Owen's wife. Harwood & Sons soon sued the family, claiming that the deeds were false and that Maria had transferred the property in order to avoid the repayment. Ultimately, it was determined Maria did not purposefully commit fraud, but she needed to pay the amount. In the end, it was Mary Ann who paid the debt, and in 1888 she sued her brother Owen in an attempt to get a lien and recover the money. It is not known whether Mary Ann was successful in her attempt to recoup her money or not.

On November 26, 1893, Mary Ann's husband, William, was found dead of apoplexy (a stroke) in the family's home. ⁴⁹ A year prior to his death, it was reported that he had suffered a severe attack, with marked apoplectic symptoms. The family physician, Dr. Elder, who had been called after William's passing, said it appeared that he died without struggle or pain. ⁵⁰ In his obituary, William Marmon, Sr. was remembered as one of Bloomington's "best citizens" due to his "more than ordinary ability and... the strictest integrity." ⁵¹

In her later years, Mary Ann's love of McLean County history, evident in her settler's party and perhaps originating with her unique ancestry, led to her membership in and support of the Illinois State Historical Society and the McLean County Historical Society.

⁴³ S.F. Jackman, "Ladies Benevolent Society," *The Weekly Leader*, January 27, 1870; Jno. Magoun, "Untitled," *The Weekly Pantagraph*, December 5, 1860; Matthew E. Stanley, "Free State Party," The Missouri-Kansas Conflict 1854-1865, The Kansas City Public Library, https://civilwaronthewesternborder.org/encyclopedia/free-state-party, Accessed August 11, 2021.

^{44 &}quot;At Rest," *The Pantagraph*, July 10, 1883, 4.

⁴⁵ "How Much Is A Dollar From the Past Worth Today?," MeasuringWorth.com, accessed July 20, 2021, https://www.measuringworth.com/dollarvaluetoday/?amount=4053.00&from=1886.

⁴⁶ "An Interesting Question," *The Weekly Leader*, August 12, 1886.

⁴⁷ "Jottings," *The Pantagraph*, February 16, 1887, 4.

⁴⁸ "History of a Note," *The Pantagraph*, December 18, 1888, 4.

⁴⁹ Apoplexy refers to bleeding within the body. In the modern era, the term is specified by the place where the bleeding occurs, such as pituitary apoplexy. However, historically the term apoplexy was commonly used for what we now call strokes; "Apoplexy," Winchester Hospital, accessed July 21, 2021, https://www.winchesterhospital.org/health-library/article?id=180082; Eliasz Engelhardt, "Apoplexy, Cerebrovascular Disease, and Stroke: Historical Evolution of Terms and Definitions," *Dementia & Neuropsychologia* 11, no. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 2017): 449-453, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5770005/.

⁵⁰ "W.W. Marmon Dead."

⁵¹ "Found Dead in Bed," *The Weekly Leader*, November 30, 1893, 16.

The Illinois State Historical Society (ISHS) was founded in 1899. Mary Ann was an active member in it from 1903 until 1907. Notably, during her membership, she was instrumental in the ISHS's Bloomington session in 1904.⁵²

In addition to her membership in the Illinois State Historical Society, Mary Ann was also a charter member of the McLean County Historical Society, where she was an active member until her death. The McLean County Historical Society was founded in 1892 and is the second oldest county historical society in the State of Illinois. Though many of the earliest records of the society were lost in the Great Downtown Fire in Bloomington on June 19, 1900 (because the Historical Society stored its archives and a few Native American artifacts in the third McLean County courthouse, which was destroyed by that fire), it is known that Mary Ann served on the executive committee from 1892 until 1907, was a trustee in 1899, and that she was appointed to a committee for the publication of the second volume of county history for the society in 1900.⁵³

In addition to these duties, Mary Ann authored several papers on McLean County history for the Historical Society. These papers ranged in topic, but only six survive today.

In her paper, "Social Life in McLean County Prior to 1860," Mary Ann recounted popular pastimes and entertainment, the style of early events held at homes, wedding practices, as well as the socialites who were prominent in the early days of McLean County. ⁵⁴ Both "Prairie Fires" and "Recollections and Reminiscences of the Early History of Cheney's Grove" each recall Mary Ann's childhood; the former, as the name suggests, about the fires that would occur on the prairie, and the latter was about her paternal grandparents. ⁵⁵ In addition to "Recollections," Mary Ann continued to write about her family, authoring formal biographical sketches on her father, Owen Cheney, Sr. and her maternal grandfather, John Wells Dawson. ⁵⁶

Of the surviving full text articles written by Mary Ann, "Indian Towns" discusses the settlements and cultural practices of Indigenous peoples in McLean County, and white settler's (such as her maternal grandparents) interactions with them.⁵⁷ Mary Ann is also known to have authored two other papers, of which the full articles are lost: "Early Housekeeping in McLean County" and "Pioneer History of Old Town Twp. and Original Heads of Cheney Family," which was her last paper before her death.⁵⁹

In addition to her support of history, Mary Ann continued to support various charitable causes and participate in a variety of clubs and organizations. She was involved with the Amateur

⁵² Illinois State Historical Society, *Transactions For the Year 1908*, (Illinois: Illinois State Historical Society, 1909), 335; "Mission and Principles of the Illinois State Historical Society," Illinois State Historical Society, accessed July 20, 2021, https://www.historyillinois.org/FooterLinks/MissionandPrinciples.aspx.

Norris Porter, Summary of the History of the McLean County Historical Society, 2020; Officers of the McLean County Historical Society, "ed. Transactions of the McLean County Historical Society, Volume 4 McLean County Centennial, Arrowsmith Battlefield, Historic Stewart House and Other Historic Papers. (Bloomington: Lang-Fuller Printing Company, 1936), 60; "The Historical Society," The Weekly Pantagraph, December 14, 1900, PAGE#.

⁵⁴ Mary Ann Marmon, "Social Life in Mclean County Prior to 1860," in Burnham, Davis, and Prince, 392-396.

⁵⁵ Mary Ann Marmon, "Prairie Fires," 1-3; Mary Ann Marmon, "Recollections and Reminiscences of the Early History of Cheney's Grove," 1-3.

⁵⁶ "Tell of Early Days;" Mary Ann Marmon, "Sketch of John Wells Dawson," in Burnham, Davis, and Prince, 311.

⁵⁷ "Indian Traditions."

⁵⁸ "Reviewing Old Times," *The Leader,* September 6, 1892.

⁵⁹ "Death of Mrs. Marmon," The Pantagraph, January 27, 1908, 7.

Musical Club (AMC), which was founded in 1893.⁶⁰ Records of the AMC report that Mary Ann was an associate member from at least 1896 until her death in 1908.⁶¹ In 1897, Mary Ann was one of the "students" in a charity play put on at the Christian Church in Normal. Notably, the "teacher" in this play was Dr. Edwin C. Hewett, the president of Illinois State Normal University from 1876 through 1890.⁶² Additionally in 1897, Mary Ann served as Vice Regent for the Daughters of the American Revolution,⁶³ and in 1898 was appointed to the 1st Ward Committee of the Women's Army and Navy League.⁶⁴

On January 27, 1908, at the age of 71, Mary Ann Marmon died of pneumonia in her home on Washington Street.⁶⁵ She had been suffering from a case of the grip (influenza), which turned into pneumonia. Her death was very unexpected, as no one believed she was seriously ill. Her funeral was held at 10:30 a.m. on January 29 at St. Matthew's Episcopal Church. Floral arrangements were sent by friends and from the many organizations to which she belonged. She was buried at Evergreen Memorial Cemetery next to her husband William.⁶⁶ Mary Ann was remembered fondly as "one of the most interesting personalities among those whose lives span the distance between the very old and the very new order of things."⁶⁷

By: Anastasia Ervin, 2021

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⁶⁰ "Marmon, Mrs. Mary Ann (Cheney)," in *Burnham and Prince*, 1169; Emily Brandicon Snow, "Memories of Past Achievements of Amateur Musical Club," in Home Town in the Corn Belt: A Source History of Bloomington, Illinois, 1900-1950 in Five Volumes vol. 5, compiled by Clara Louise Kessler (Bloomington: 1950), 1 quoted in Logan Janicki, "Annie May Christian," (2019): 3, https://www.mchistory.org/perch/resources/biographies/annie-may-christian-2019-1.pdf.

⁶¹ "Death of Mrs. Marmon;" Bound Yearbooks 1893-1903 and 1904-1910, Amateur Musical Club Collection, Box 2, McLean County Museum of History.

⁶² "The 'Deestrick School' at Normal," *The Pantagraph*, May 21, 1897, 7; Candace Summers, "Edwin C. Hewett,"(2020): 3, https://www.mchistory.org/perch/resources/biographies/edwin-hewett-2007-and-2020-1.pdf.

^{63 &}quot;Untitled," The Leader, October 8, 1897.

⁶⁴ "Yesterday's League Meeting," *The Pantagraph*, June 30, 1898, 6.

^{65 &}quot;Death of Mrs. Marmon."

⁶⁶ "The Last of Earth," *The Pantagraph*, January 29, 1908, 3.

⁶⁷ "Marmon, Mrs. Mary Ann (Cheney)," in Burnham and Prince, 1169.