

## “Jaw-droppingly beautiful”

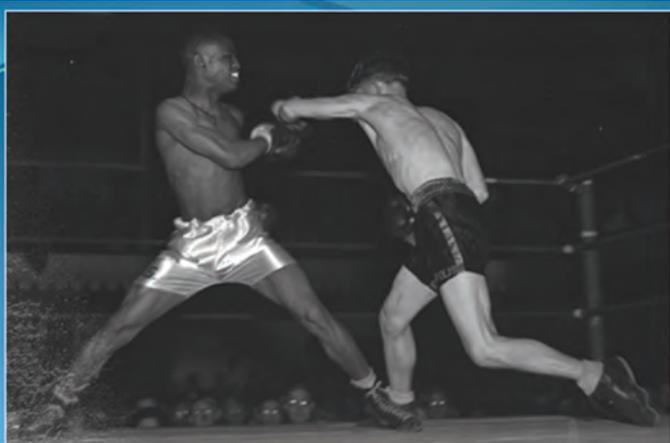
30,000 unseen photos from Bloomington *Pantagraph* go online

By Jeff Woodward

In May 2019, the McLean County Museum of History in Bloomington received a \$94,615 grant from the State of Illinois, Office of the Secretary of State, to begin digitizing the oldest of the approximately 1 million *Pantagraph* newspaper negatives in its archive collections. This grant enabled the Museum to scan and catalog some 30,000 negatives from the early 1930s into the early 1940s using the services of Picturae, a Dutch company specializing in digitizing, storing, and managing collections. The grant project is now complete and these 30,000 Bloomington *Pantagraph* images will soon be available on the Internet at no cost to the public, through the Illinois Digital Archives (IDA) database maintained by the State Library.

Museum executive director, Adam Lovell drove the negatives to New Jersey to avoid the high cost of shipping them. That is 900 miles, in a car filled with vinegary smelling negatives! The scans were sent back to the museum over the cloud and the work of labelling the negatives began.

The Museum hired Rochelle Gridley, a museum volunteer, to work on attaching metadata to the files, used to help people find the images on the Illinois Digital Archives website. Rochelle explains, “At Picturae they use methods to speed up the digitization process and digitize the images to very high resolution. Most of the details of the process are not public; however, they do reveal that they use a contact sheet method, placing negatives in clear sleeves so that numerous negatives can be scanned, then saved at the same time. 36,641 negatives were scanned in a matter of less than two months, but it took me six months to label and name each negative.”



Boxers, February 11, 1927



Dance for Chanute Field (Rantoul, IL) airmen  
Miller Park pavilion, July 11, 1941

The State Library provided the management software necessary for organizing the images and then making them available on the Internet. With this software, the museum is able to label the negatives with the titles assigned to them by the photographers, add the names of people, place names and topical headings. It is the staff’s hope that these subject headings will help patrons find the images they want more easily. Because there are so many images, it is sometimes a challenge to find just the one you want.

“Making these 30,000 historically invaluable photos available to the general public dovetails perfectly with the museum’s mission to make its collections readily accessible to the general public,” says museum librarian Bill Kemp. “Many of these photos are sure to blow folks away—not only for the stories they tell, but because they are jaw-droppingly beautiful.”



McLean County Fair, August 10, 1938