

The Silkwood Inn and the Story of the Hollyhock Girl are Franklin County Historic Treasures

By Travis Allen

Local history is many times a small community's greatest story. This is certainly true in the small Franklin County town named Mulkeytown. My name is Travis Allen and during my 3rd year at the Southern Illinois University School of Law I found an enchanting story right here in Franklin County. The Silkwood Inn in Mulkeytown combines a rich history of both local folklore and historic fact. In today's world there is no doubt that racial division still has a foothold, but this local story reminds us of how far we have come and how love and compassion can always overcome hate.

The Silkwood Inn was built in the 1820's in Mulkeytown Illinois. The Silkwood Inn is still standing today and is believed to be the one of the oldest buildings in Southern Illinois. The Silkwood Inn sits just North of Illinois Highway 14 on Mulkeytown Road. The Inn was built on Mulkeytown Road because that was the historic Shawnee-Kaskaski trail. The Silkwood Inn sits at the halfway point between these historic river ports. This is why the Silkwood Inn is still known as the halfway house today.

The Silkwood Inn was built by a man named Brazilla Silkwood. Brazilla arrived in Mulkeytown around 1820 and constructed the Inn. Brazilla Silkwood was originally

from Virginia and followed the trail west through Tennessee and Kentucky to the frontier of Illinois. Brazilla was a man of means but generosity was at the forefront of his life. He enjoyed serving others at the Inn and was known throughout the area for hospitable reputation.

The most enchanting story from the Silkwood Inn is about a young slave girl named Priscilla, who found freedom and a life in Mulkeytown. Priscilla was born into slavery on a plantation in Georgia. When Priscilla was a small child she described her mother being sold off like a steer to slaughter. Priscilla described the last memory of her mother being loaded into a wagon and her master saying "she will fetch a pretty penny". Priscilla and her mother loved hollyhock flowers. They would sit by the pond on their plantation and make small dolls out of the hollyhock flowers. Priscilla continued to plant hollyhock flowers all around the Georgia plantation to help remember her mother, who she missed greatly.

One day Brazilla was on a business trip to the Georgia plantation, where he met Priscilla. Brazilla took a liking to Priscilla and talked about how "bright" she was and how she needed an opportunity to go to "school". As Brazilla was leaving the Georgia plantation he told Priscilla "I don't hold

with slavery" and a "child like you deserves more".

It was not long after Brazilla left the Georgia plantation that Priscilla's master died. Priscilla knew change was coming so she gathered up all of the hollyhock flower seeds she could and hid them in her apron. Everything the slave master had was sold off at auction including the slaves he owned. Priscilla was sold to a wealthy Cherokee Indian Chief. Priscilla lived with the Indian Chief and his wife for some time. She planted hollyhock flowers around her new home and would sit by them and reminisce about her mother.

It was not long before trouble started brewing for Priscilla again. Settlers wanted more property and American Indians were being pushed off of their land. One day soldiers showed up and forced Priscilla and the Indian family to a camp with thousands of other Indians. Priscilla described being terrified, but she had a pocket full of hollyhock seeds and she knew the memories of her mother could never be taken from her.

Priscilla and her Cherokee owners were forced to trek the trail of tears through unimaginable conditions. According to Priscilla, there was a line of horse and buggies as far as you could see. They walked for what seemed like an eternity before finally arriving in

Jonesboro Illinois.

If by luck or fate, Brazilla was in Jonesboro Illinois and recognized Priscilla from the Georgia plantation, years prior. Brazilla learned from Priscilla the story of her travels. Brazilla found the Cherokee Chief and bargained a price for Priscilla. It is believed by many that Priscilla was purchased for \$1000 in gold.

Priscilla was brought back to the Silkwood Inn and this is where she found freedom. She planted hollyhock flowers all around the Silkwood Inn and those can still be seen growing there today. Priscilla lived the rest of her days in Mulkeytown at the Silkwood Inn. Priscilla is buried right next to the Silkwood family in the Reid Kirkpatrick Cemetery in Mulkeytown.

The Silkwood Inn is maintained by the Mulkeytown Historical Society. They have fundraisers regularly in Mulkeytown to help with expenses. On the third Saturday of each month, they sell meals and they have craft/vendor fairs during the months of March, September, and November. Please check out their Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Mulkeytown-Area-Historical-Society/121062924575395> for additional fundraiser information or to schedule a tour.



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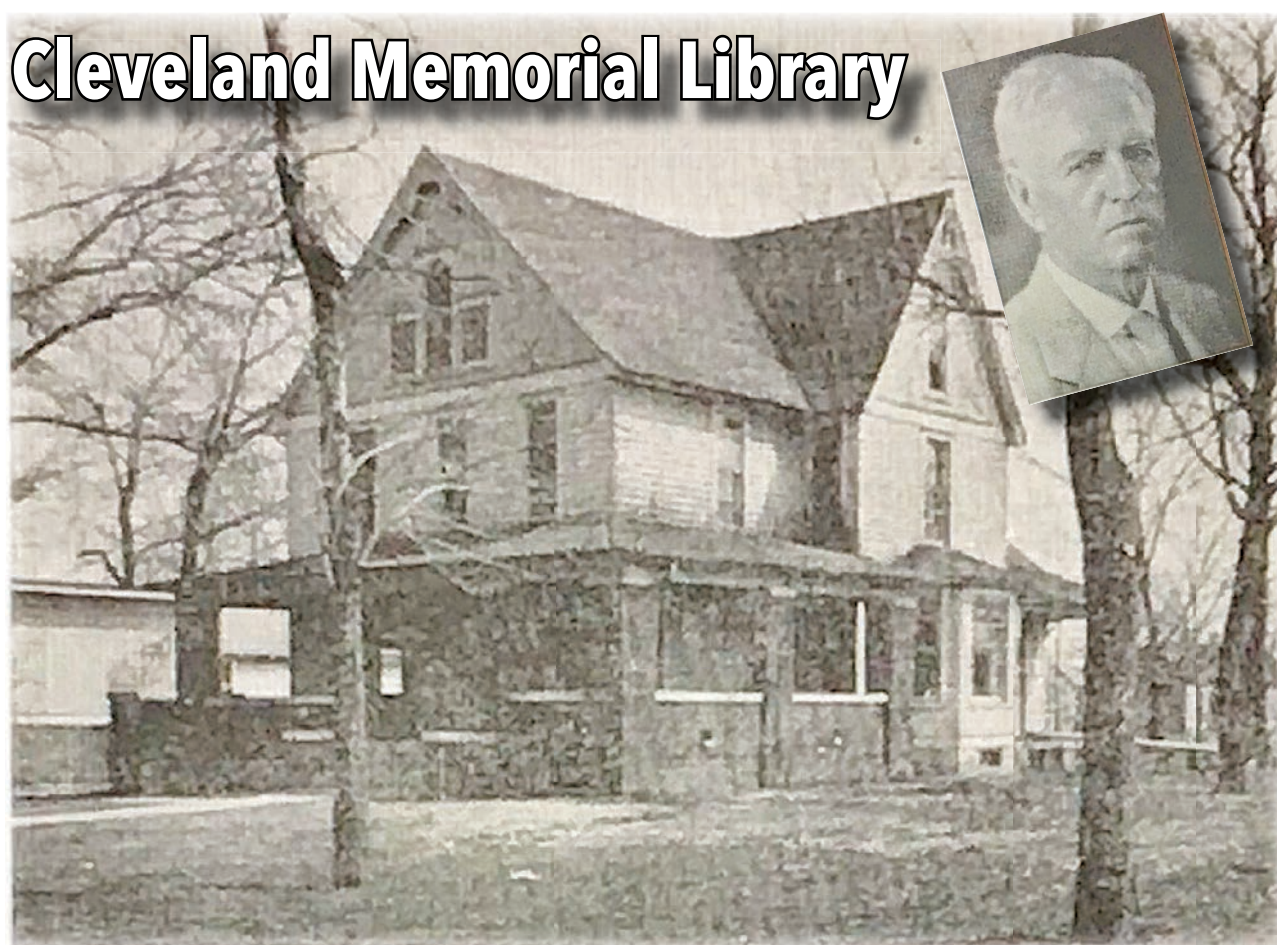
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Remember When?

Cleveland Memorial Library



The above photos of the old Cleveland Library and its donor and below snippets of information were provided courtesy of Pam Teague at the Benton Public Library's Genealogy Department.

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Mr. Cleveland was born in the Eastern part of Franklin County on November 1, 1857. When a mere youth he came to Mtn-ton to take employment as a Clerk in Chenault's Grocery Store, which was located near the Illinois Central Depot. He spent no money foolishly, and made it a practice to save all of his earnings. Later in life he used his savings to engage in various mercantile enterprises of his own. In 1912 Mr. Cleveland helped organize the First National Bank of Benton. He later sold his holdings in that bank to assist in the organization of the Mercantile Bank and Trust Company. Retiring from active business about 1928, Mr. Cleveland moved to Florida to enjoy the sunshine that state offered as a benefit to his declining years. He passed out of this life at Tampa, Florida, Sun-day, December 3, 1933. In accordance with a wish previously expressed, funeral services were held from the Library, which had been his home during the major part of his residence in Benton, and his body was buried in the Masonic and Odd Fellows cemetery at Benton on December 8, 1933.

CLEVELAND MEMORIAL LIBRARY

Surrounded by flowers and beautiful shrubbery, this Library stands as a permanent monument to the generosity and thoughtful-ness of Mr. Andrew S. Cleveland, who personally, during his life-time, dedicated it "To the welfare of the present and future Citizens of Benton." Donated by Mr. Cleveland on December 5, 1929, this building, which had been his home, was formally accepted by the Benton Library Board on December 15, 1929, and after being remodeled for use as a Library, was dedicated by the Library Board on September 20, 1930. In appreciation of Mr. Cleveland's public-spiritedness, may the Citizens of Benton never be unmindful of their pledge to main-tain this Library as a symbol of beauty, progress and service. As an institution may it breathe the spirit of the donor—a spirit of sincerity and truthfulness, courage, character, and unaffected honesty which gripped the hearts of all who knew him.

April 18, 1937.
C. Edwin Hair, Mayor.

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