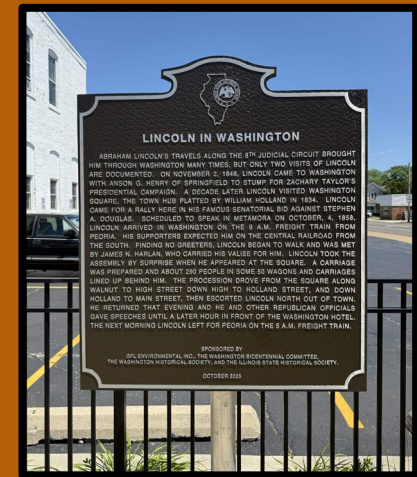


Enhancing Visitor Experience of the Illinois State Historical Marker Program

Matthew Stevens



MapMe Software on the ISHS Website

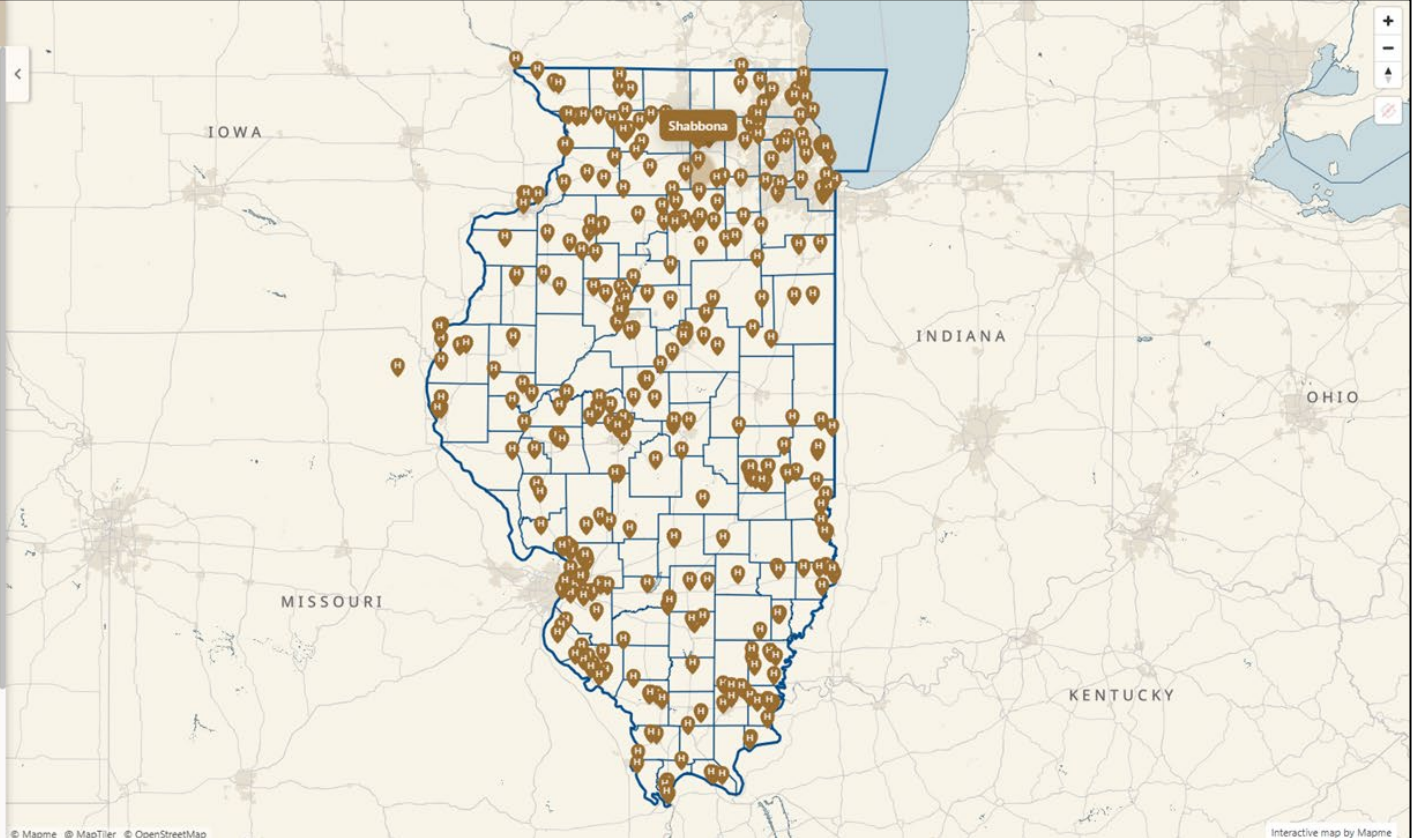


Shabbona

Shabbona, DeKalb County

Marker Text: In the early 1800's Shabbona was a principal chief of the Ottawa, Potawatomi, and Chippewa group of tribes which banded together to form 'The Three Fires.' Shabbona camped briefly in a large grove one-half mile south of here. He fought with the British in the War of 1812 and later helped the settlers of northern Illinois by warning of Indian uprisings during the Winnebago outbreak. In the Black Hawk War, Shabbona alerted pioneers to impending Indian raids and offered to lead an attack against the Sauk and Fox Tribes. (Click images above for an interrogation of this marker text and an alternative lesson plan by teacher-in-training Eddie Guerrero)

Dedication Date	1/1/1986
Dedication by	Illinois Department of Transportation and The Illinois



388/476

Shabbona

IOWA

INDIANA

OHIO

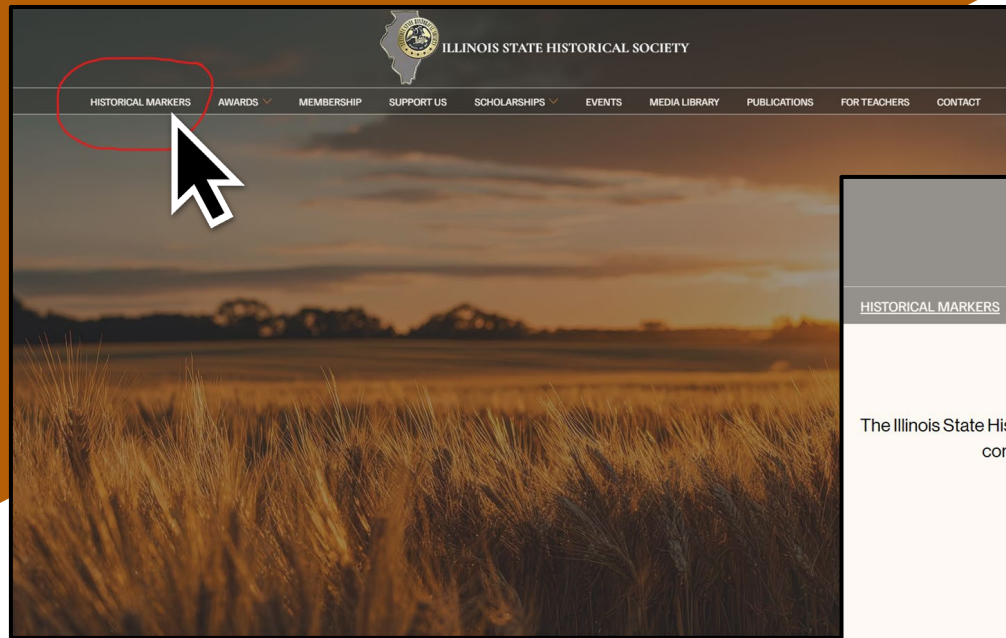
MISSOURI

KENTUCKY

Interactive map by Mapme

How to Access Marker Map

3. Scroll down to the **interactive map**, then you can search by topic, time period, or location!



1. Go to historyillinois.org

2. Click on the **Historical Markers** tab

Enhancing Historical Markers - Henry Stephens

← 15/35 →

HARD CORN FOR A JUST CAUSE.
A DESCENDANT OF ENSLAVED PEOPLE FROM CONFEDERATE VICE-PRESIDENT ALEXANDER STEPHENS'S PLANTATION, STEPHENS SOUGHT FREEDOM IN LINCOLN'S TOWN. BLACK MEN WORKED IN SPRINGFIELD'S COAL MINES SINCE 1860. AFTER 1890, SOME WERE MACHINE KENNELS, THE MOST DANGEROUS JOB IN THE MINES. WHEN THE PICK OF THE MACHINE STUCK, THE BACKFIRE FOUNDED THE RUNNER.
THE PROMISE OF SOLIDARITY LED SPRINGFIELD'S BLACK MINERS TO JOIN THE UNITED MINE WORKERS OF AMERICA. THE UNION PLEDGED UNITY ACROSS RACIAL LINES. BY 1906, THERE WAS A BLACK PRESIDENT OF A MIXED ETHNIC UNION LOCAL IN THE AREA. STEPHENS CONNECTED WORKPLACE AND CIVIL RIGHTS STRUGGLES WHEN HE ATTEMPTED TO DESEGREGATE SPRINGFIELD'S THEATERS IN 1907 WITH A WHITE COMRADE. AND HE HEADED THE SPRINGFIELD COLORED WORKING MEN'S ASSOCIATION. THROUGH THEIR ACTIVISM, SPRINGFIELD'S BLACK MINERS FORGED A PROVISION IN THEIR UNION CONTRACT THAT BANNED HIRING DISCRIMINATION, A FIRST IN ILLINOIS HISTORY.
STEPHENS TOLD POET AND JOURNALIST CARL SANDBURG THAT THE UMWA HAD NOT ELIMINATED JOB DISCRIMINATION. "A UNION MEANS UNITED. YET, THEY'S MINES RUNNIN' TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AND THE WHITE MAN NEVER LETS THE NEGRO IN."
SANDBURG IMMORTALIZED STEPHENS' WORDS AND THE ASPIRATIONS OF SPRINGFIELD'S BLACK MINERS IN HIS POEM "THE SAYINGS OF HENRY STEPHENS" AND IN HIS MOST FAMOUS POEM, "THE PEOPLE, YES."

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Henry Stephens, 1869-1939
Springfield, Sangamon County

Near this site in 1917, union miner Henry Stephens walked along route home "with headlamp and dinner bucket" at dusk in support of the streetcar workers' strike and boycott. He vowed to trek long miles in solidarity: "I'd live in the fields on hard corn for a just cause." A descendant of enslaved people from the confederate vice-president Alexander Stephen's plantation, Stephens sought freedom in Lincoln's town. Black men worked in Springfield's coal mines since the 1860s. In the 1890s, some were

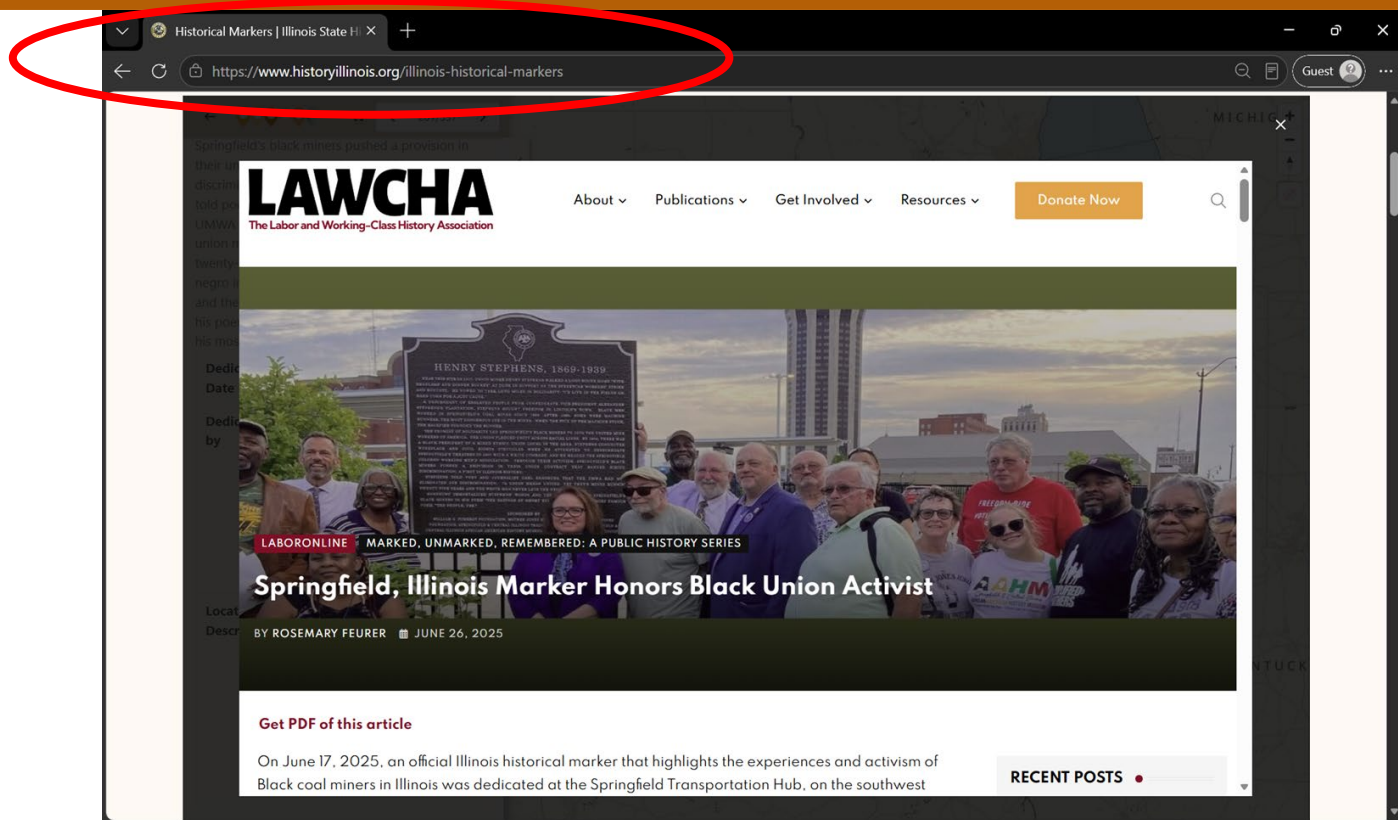
[Learn More](#)

IOWA
MISSOURI

Henry Stephens, 1869-1939

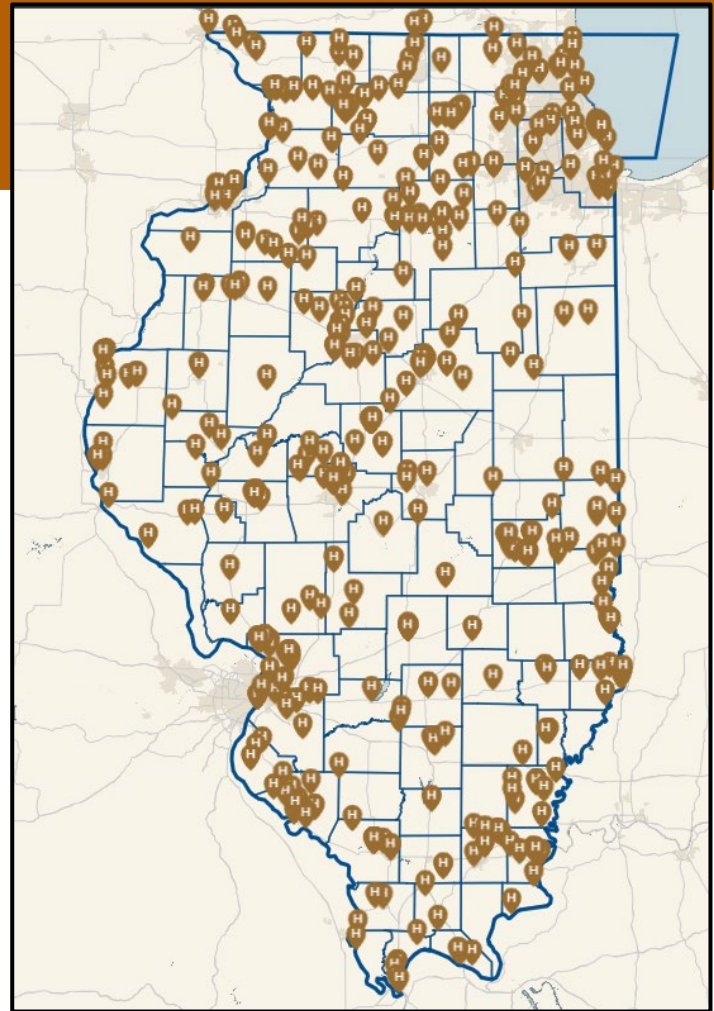
© Mapme © MapTiler © OpenStreetMap

Enhancing Historical Markers - Henry Stephens



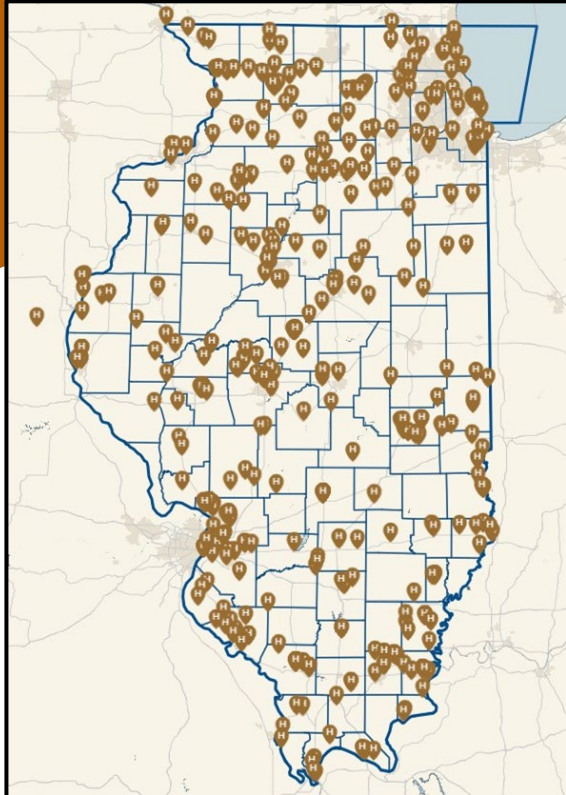
Flexibility with MapMe

- Make the marker program more accessible to visitors
 - Easier to sort and view the markers
- Community members can better locate nearby markers
 - Study the historiography of markers in an given area, or by a certain category
- Historical sources can be directly linked to the markers
 - Helpful for teachers making lesson plans, or for the public to start their dive on a topic
- More dynamic interactions

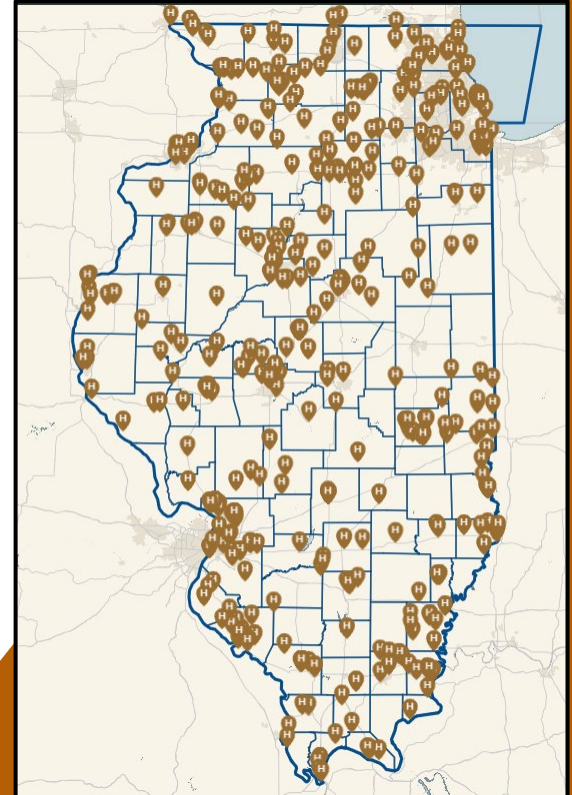


Major Changes to Map

Before



After



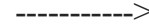
- Updated coordinates for over 400 markers
- Added numerous missing/removed markers
- Updated/added 141 marker photos
- The ability to filter by county
- Hundreds of other small fixes to marker information

Brief Overview of the State Marker Program

Illinois Marker Program

- Began in 1934
 - **City Markers**
 - *Located on highways leading into cities*
 - **State Entrance Markers**
 - *Located on highways near state borders*
 - **Area Markers**
 - *Located near the historic spot detailed in the marker itself*
- “Dark Ages” (1938-1949)
- 1950 Rebirth: Area Marker Trend

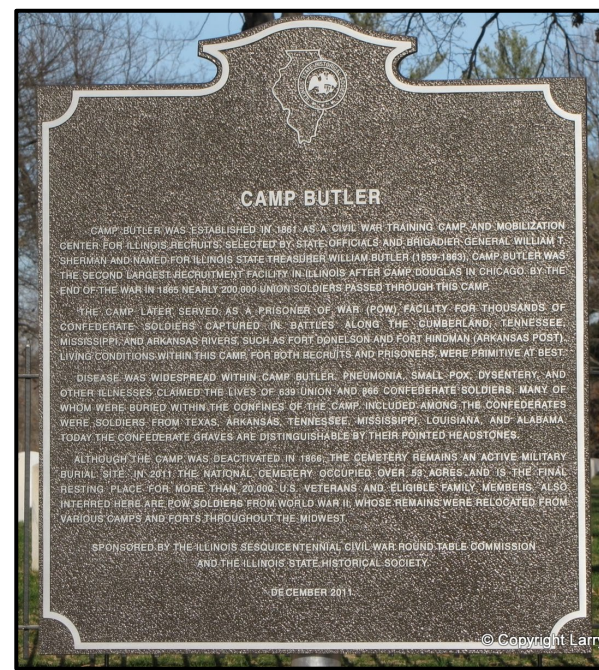
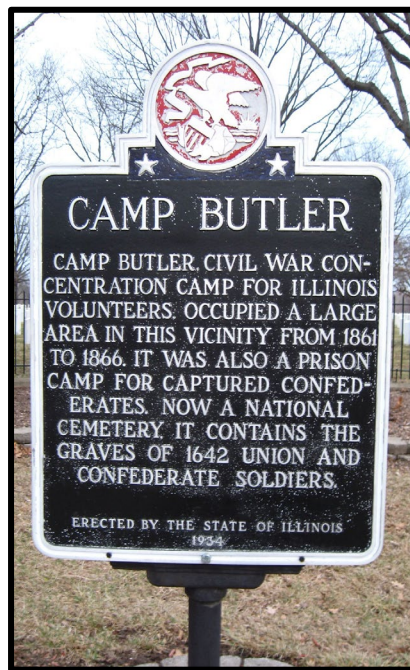
State of Illinois
Marker from 1934



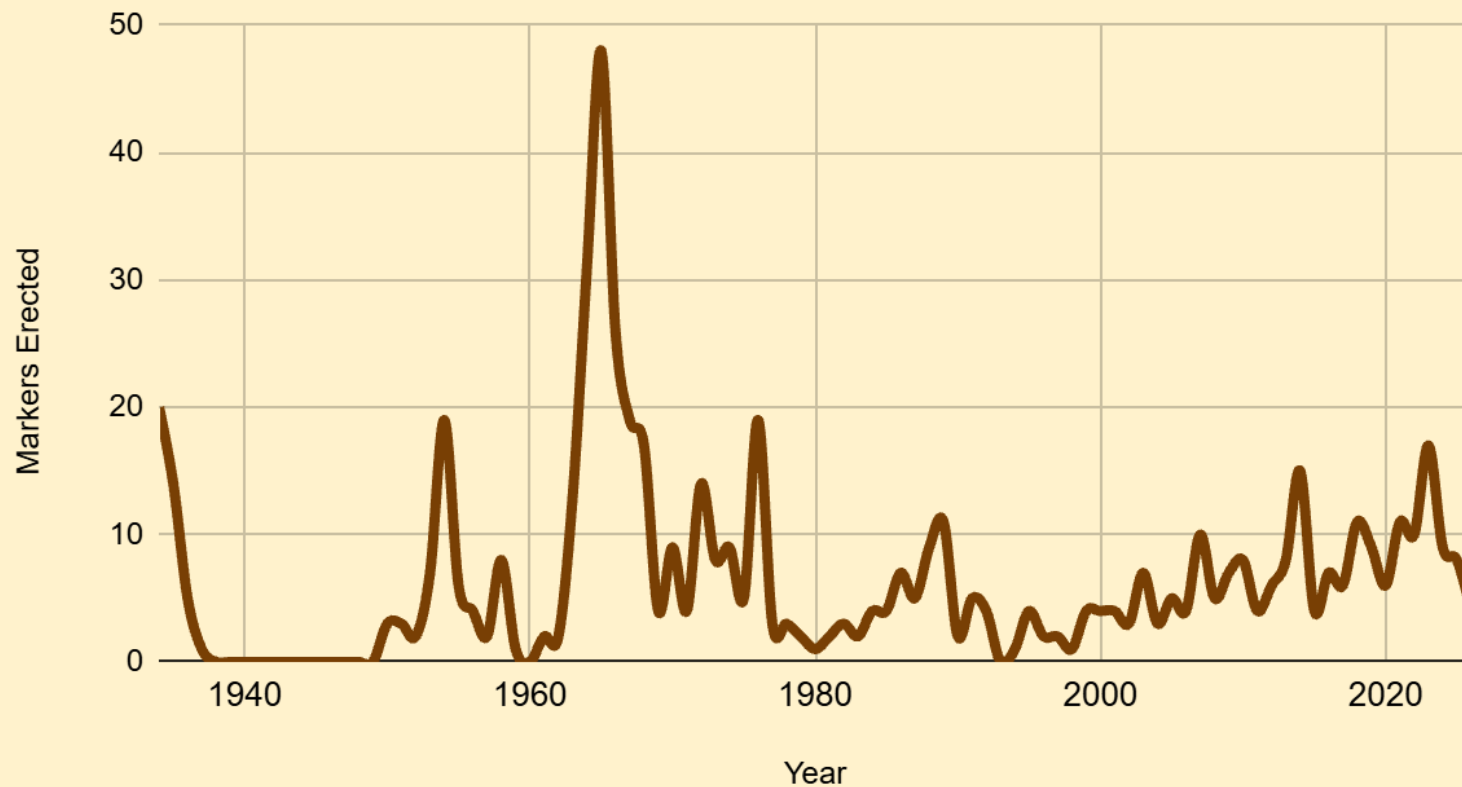
Example of a Highway Turnout w/1968

Continued History

- 1962- Start of the “Highways to History in Illinois” program
- Thy Wondrous Story, Illinois (35 markers)
- Full replacement of older markers
- Has become more common since 1980s/2010s



Number of Markers Erected by Year





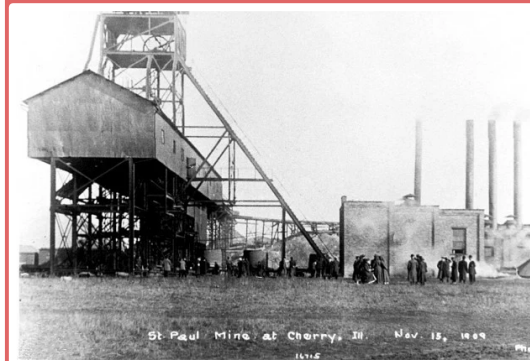
Examples of Enhanced Markers

In Cherry (Bureau County) & Silvis (Rock Island County)



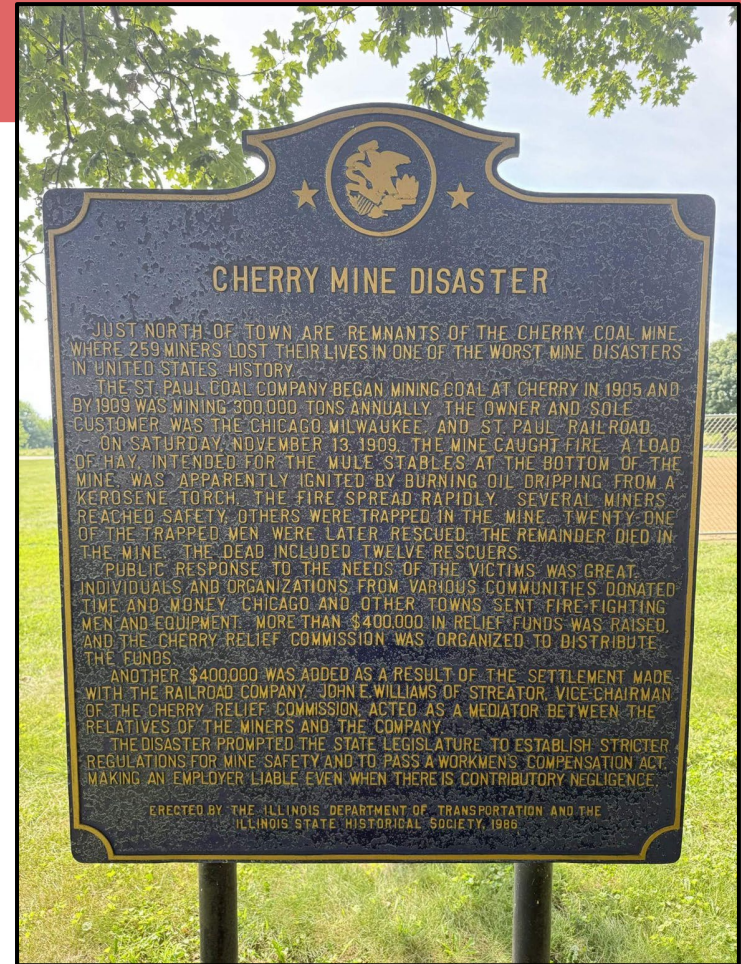
Cherry Mine Disaster

Examples of Marker Enhancements to Visitor Experience



What happened in Cherry?

- On November 13th, 1909 a fire broke out in the Cherry Coal Mine causing 259 deaths
 - One of the worst mining disasters in American history
- 21 miners were trapped for eight days, and were eventually rescued
- Many others were not so lucky...
- Led to the state legislature to create stricter regulations, as well pass the Workmen's Compensation Act



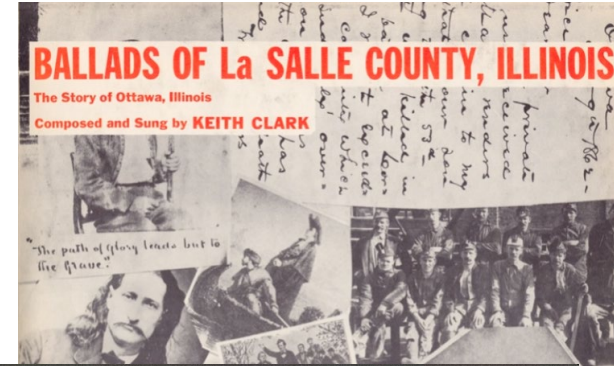
Marker Issues

- Lack of details on what actually happened during the disaster
 - Simplified order of events
- Largely ignores the controversy that came with the disaster (especially with the company)
- Lack of information on the victims of the disaster
 - Identities of the workers
 - Impacts on the community at large



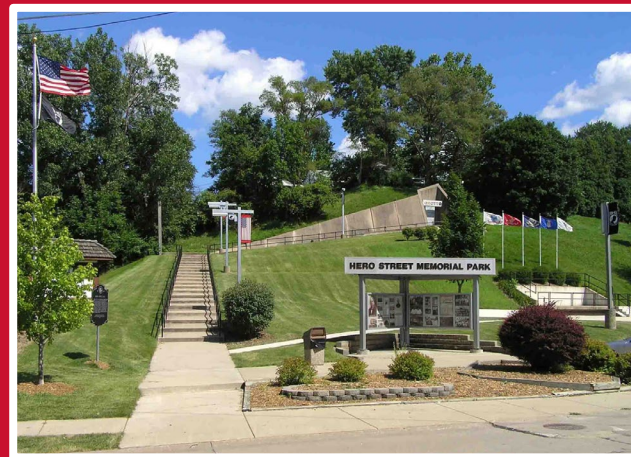
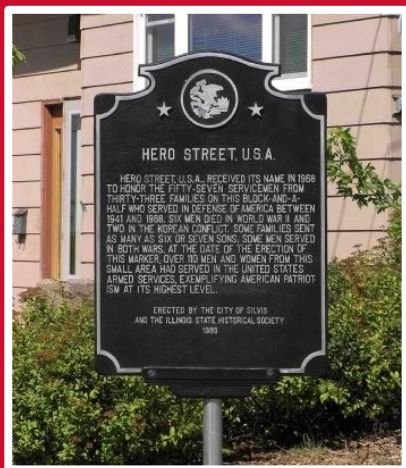
MapMe - Introduce New Types of Media

- Videos
 - [Highland Park Historical Society YouTube Documentary](#)
 - [Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Exhibit Series](#)
- Music
 - [Keith Clark 1957 Song The Cherry Mine Disaster](#)
- Photos (as seen)
 - [Library of Congress Collection](#)
 - [Edward Caldwell Cherry Mine Disaster Research Collection](#)
- Additional Articles & Readings
 - Steve Stout (1979) *Tragedy in November: The Cherry Mine Disaster*
 - Nate Holdren (2020) - *Injury Impoverished: Workplace Accidents, Capitalism, and Law in the Progressive Era*



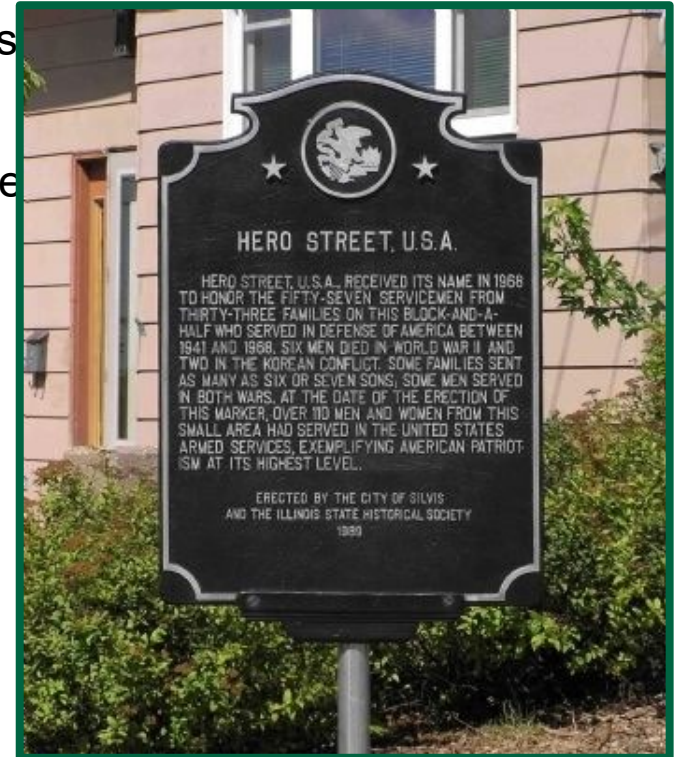
Hero Street U.S.A.

Even More Examples of Marker Enhancements to Visitor Experience!



What is Hero Street U.S.A.?

- Hero Street is a small neighborhood street in Silvis Illinois within the Quad Cities area
- Since 1929, over 150 service members have come from this small street
 - Mostly from WWII and the Vietnam War
- It has been given the designation of “Hero Street, U.S.A” since 1968
- A state marker was erected in 1989
- But something is missing...



Marker Issues

- No acknowledgement of the Mexican identity of many of the the veterans who served
 - Each of the “Hero Street 8” were Mexican Americans
 - Second Street has huge ties with the Mexican community in Silvis
- Also no discussion on the discrimination that many veterans faced after returning from service
 - Blackballed from the Silvis VFW Post 1933
 - Paving of the street



MapMe - Introduce New Types of Media

- Videos

- [Visit Quad Cities Interview with Monument Artist](#)
- [WQAD 2025 Veterans Day Ceremony YouTube Archive](#)

- Music

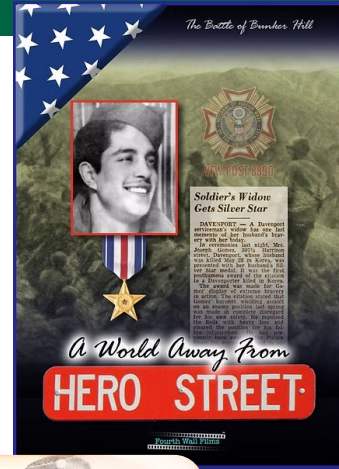
- [David Smith 2026 SongHero Street](#)
- [Bobby Fischer 1971 SongHero Street U.S.A.](#)

- Documentaries

- [Hero Street Film Series: A Block-and-a-Half Long & Eight Men Wide](#)

- Additional Articles & Readings

- [University of Iowa Migration is Beautiful: Hero Street U.S.A](#)
- [University of Iowa Migration is Beautiful: La Yarda, Silvis, Illinois](#)
- Marc Wilson (2020) *Hero Street, U.S.A.: The Story of Little Mexico's Fallen Soldiers*



In Summary:

