

Museums and Historic Sites



Lewistown, Illinois



Rasmussen Blacksmith Shop

- Founded in 1893 by Nels Rasmussen.
- Operated by Don Rasmussen, Nels' son, until 1969.
- Acquired by the Lewistown Society for Historical Preservation to be used as a museum.
- All contents were included in the acquisition: visitors are able to experience over 80 years of the business's history and operation.
- See blacksmiths in action here during the Spoon River Scenic Drive.

There are only a very few blacksmith shop museums in the entire country, and most have been devised and placed inside museum buildings or within reconstructed pioneer or Colonial villages. The Rasmussen Blacksmith Shop Museum located on Main Street in Lewistown is a notable exception in that it has occupied that location since 1893 when it was founded by Nels Rasmussen. The shop continued to be in full operation until 1969, closing after the death of Don Rasmussen, Nels' son. It was, at that time, the oldest operating proprietorship in Lewistown still in the same family.

The shop was acquired shortly after closing by the Lewistown Society for Historical Preservation. With the acquisition including all of the building's contents, visitors are able to experience over 80 years of the business's history and operation. While it is used mainly for exhibition throughout the year, during the Spoon River Scenic Drive you can still see blacksmiths in action at the site.



Rasmussen Museum

- Founded in 1989 by the Lewistown Society for Historical Preservation.
- Located right next door to the Blacksmith Shop.
- Provides a look at daily life in Lewistown and surrounding areas throughout time.
- Highlights include an Edgar Lee Master's section, rare antique tools and farm equipment, and a Library of Local History featuring documents, photographs, and newspaper archives focused on the area.

The Rasmussen Museum is located just next door to the Blacksmith's Shop. Founded and built by the Lewistown Society for Historical Preservation in 1989, it provides a look at daily life in Lewistown and surrounding areas throughout time. Highlights include an Edgar Lee Master's section, rare antique tools and farm equipment, and a Library of Local History featuring documents, photographs, and newspaper archives focused on the area.

All Museums are operated by the Lewistown Society for Historical Preservation.

All Museum Hours: June - Mid-October, Saturday & Sunday, 1 to 4 p.m. Tours are also available by appointment at any other time during the year.

Admission is FREE, donations are accepted.

For more information regarding the Museums or the Lewistown Society for Historical Preservation membership and meetings, please call 309-549-1009 or 309-547-4300, or email: explore.lewistown.history@gmail.com



Narrow Gauge Depot

- The Fulton County Narrow Gauge Railroad Company was formally organized October 9, 1878.
- The #1 train, aptly named the "Lewistown" arrived in Lewistown in May 1880 and was purchased for \$6050.00.
- The first train arrived at Lewistown from Cuba on August 16, 1880.
- Service ended in 1905 when all rails were converted from narrow gauge to standard gauge.
- Located on the corner of Washington & Jefferson in Lewistown.
- Features a caboose on-site which is available for tours.

The Fulton County Narrow Gauge Railroad Company was formally organized October 9, 1878. Construction began in October 1878, and in 1879 one engine and seventeen cars were purchased. The first train arrived at Lewistown from Cuba on August 16, 1880 and continued to run for 25 years, extending its route to include 61 miles of 3 foot gauge tracks that ran south from Galesburg to West Havana with stops at Levingston, DeLong, London Mills, Oak Mount, Fairview, Bybee, Fiatt, Put Creek, Cuba, Phillips, Lewistown, Sepo, and Havana.

This often overlooked brick building on the corner of Washington and Jefferson Streets in Lewistown, IL is the last reminder of the Fulton County Narrow Gauge Railroad. Recently the Lewistown Historical Society purchased the building and converted it into a museum. The site is also the home of a caboose which is available for tours.



Oak Hill Cemetery

While serving as the primary cemetery for the town of Lewistown, it is also the most famous “fictional” cemetery in the world since it is the setting for Edgar Lee Master’s *Spoon River Anthology*. These poetic monologues in the form of epitaphs brought fame to Masters, and have continued in popularity for over ninety years. Drawing upon his early knowledge of town life, Masters created

a world in microcosm, a portrait of the internal structure of community life which speaks to individuals everywhere.

The first cemetery in Lewistown was located to the south and was said to be the first burying ground in Fulton County. After a few years, due to the rapid

expansion of the business district, that cemetery was abandoned and the burials were moved to Oak Hill. The earliest death date recorded here is 1829. The oldest person buried here was Jacob Harwick, aged 108, who was born in 1759. Other interesting markers are Nathaniel Bordwine, 1799 – 1900, who lived in three centuries, and Emma Lee on whose stone the word “colored” is carved.

Most of the founding fathers and early settlers



of Lewistown and their families are buried here. Familiar names are Ross, Walker, Beadles, Phelps, Proctor, Simms, Bordner, Davidson, and others too numerous to mention, but important in the early development of Lewistown.

The beautiful pillars in the central part of the cemetery originally graced the former courthouse that burned in 1894. The present Lewistown Courthouse is the fourth to serve the county. The first courthouse, built of logs in 1823, was in use when much of Western Illinois, including Chicago, was under the jurisdiction of Fulton County. A wooden frame building replaced



it in 1830. The third courthouse, built of brick in 1836 had a portico of four stone columns. These columns were quarried from the nearby Spoon River bottoms at a cost of \$150 each. Stephen A. Douglas served as a Circuit Court judge in this courthouse, and on August 17, 1858, Abraham Lincoln stood between the columns and delivered the much quoted “Return to the Fountain” speech.

DISCOVER EDGAR LEE MASTERS “SPOON RIVER ANTHOLOGY” CHARACTERS “SLEEPING ON THE HILL”

At Oak Hill Cemetery, visitors can take a self-guided walking tour to the graves of 40 characters made famous by Masters’ poems. We recommend that you begin your tour at the Edgar Lee Masters memorial located at the south entry of the cemetery where you will find walking tour brochures to begin your journey. Brochures are also available at the Lewistown City Hall.



1. Rasmussen Museum & Blacksmith Shop
2. Narrow Gauge Depot
3. Oak Hill Cemetery