Dear Muncie,
Mapping History Using Local Diaries
Thomas Neely wrote in diaries dating from 1860 to August 1901, although the whereabouts of the first volume (1860-1867) is unknown.
Thomas Ryan began writing in a diary that was a gift from Thomas Neely, his neighbor, in 1886. He was age 14 and chronicled the weather, events at school, games with friends, chores, and frequent trips to the library.
Traveling revivals and evangelists of the 19th Century:
I went to school this A.M. but in the afternoon I got excused and saw the Woodworth Baptism but Oh! It was the nastiest, filthiest proceedings I ever witnessed and left and went home and hitched up the horse and hunted for Maria but could not find her and so Papa hunted her but at last I met her up town and met her at her home.
Gas and life in a growing Muncie:
January, Thursday 7. 1886.

The weather was very cold this morning, slightly moderating in the afternoon.

I got word from John Barnes today saying that he was out of the price lists, but that he would send more when he got them. I went up to the city to Klein's store today and he gave me an old clock and a fine old clock and I fixed it so it would tell time, and Millard is practicing in a practice. So he is austain.

Thomas Ryan (far left) shows keen interest in mechanical engineering. He fixes a clock for jeweler Henry Klein.
January 1, 1887: The gas from the well No. one was brought down in pipes yesterday. And this evening it was put into Henry C. Klein’s stove in the store room.

January 3, 1887: The round house of the Ft. Wayne and Cincinnati Railroad in the south part of town was burned last night and one locomotive.
The round house where the fire occurred:
January 25, 1887: The men are at work on top of the tower of the courthouse every day that is not too cold putting on the galvanized iron.
March 31, 1887:
There is a great talk of a boom in Muncie at this time. A great deal of property in this vicinity is changing hands.
April 20, 1887:
Thaddeus sold his skate factory today for 6500 dollars. He gave 5000 dollars for it about three years ago.
Neely’s factory produced 6,000-8,000 skates per year, the second largest producer in the country in 1885.
Thomas Ryan mentions the popular roller polo team at the Rink:

The weather was very wet but drizzling much by noon and remained pleasant.

Kris Silverberg kept me in till 4:30 this afternoon and I had to write the Society Secretary.

There were two games of Polo at the Royal Rink tonight but I did not get to go but I barely ever do. Game down town with Chahdi Vagas and the team played

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Evangelist Maria Woodworth and other famous speakers presented programs at the Rink, but it was also the site of roller games and the popular game of living chess, in which Thomas Ryan participated.
May 6, 1887: There has been two iron pipe arches put up today: one on Main and one on Walnut Street with a number of jets for natural gas. They look beautiful when they are lighted.

May 11, 1887: There is or was an excursion here from Springfield and Dayton this afternoon to see the gas.
From Thomas Ryan:

October 4, 1888: This morning I was up in Toney Hefel’s engineer office and saw some of his drawings.
Between 1886 and 1890, $20 million worth of gas was wasted.
October 1, 1887: Charley Gilmore went home to his father's today. We had nothing for him to do as we have no cow now to feed, no wood to carry in, no ashes to take out since we have gas in our stoves.

October 4, 1887: I took a general view of the new courthouse inside today. Court will be held in the new building tomorrow for the first time.
Courthouse in 1887
October 18, 1887: George Ludlow was caught in the machinery at the Iron Bridge Factory and was instantly killed.
November 11, 1887:
One year ago this day natural gas was first found at Muncie.
November 28, 1887: The woman suffrage convention commences tonight in the Methodist Church.
March 3, 1888: The Ball glass factory commenced making glass this week.
Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps from the Ball State University Libraries’ Archives and Special Collections show the growth of the Ball Brothers Factory in Muncie from its early beginnings in 1887 to 1954.
Election of 1888:
June 5, 1888: The Democratic Convention is in session in St. Louis at this time.

June 7, 1888: The Democratic Convention is over, and Grover Cleveland was nominated for President, and Thurman of Ohio for Vice President. I hope neither of them will be elected....

From Thomas Ryan:

October 18, 1888: I went to the depot to the ...rally and a great crowd is here...The drum corps had a little parade... I got my Uncle Sam coat and rode about town on (my horse), had a good time.
From Thomas Ryan:

Monday, November 5, 1888: Tomorrow is Election Day, and there are a good many people in town. The Indianapolis Journal has a flaming front toward the Republicans to be careful about Democratic fraud.

Tuesday, November 6, 1888: The presidential election occurred today, and Harrison is elected. Hurrah!

Saturday, November 10, 1888: The weather is bad yet the Republicans are going to jollify today and have a torchlight procession tonight. All are happy.
November 6, 1888: ...muddy, unpleasant day. But the voters went to the polls, some on foot, some in carriages. They took me to the voting precinct in a carriage. I did not stay at the voting place five minutes. I am very anxious now to know who are elected. I hope it will be Benjamin Harrison and Levi Morton. And not Cleveland and Thurman.

November 7, 1888: ...we think we have enough reliable news to warrant the belief that Benjamin Harrison is elected President of the United States. And the men downtown are as wild as Comancie Indians. We think the Republicans have carried every northern state.

November 8, 1888: Two drum corps and a large procession marched around the streets through the mud and rain. Shouting and waving the national flags.
November 9, 1888: …The Election news gets better for the Republicans. It seems probably that we have carried West Virginia. That would be breaking in on the solid South.

Saturday, November 10, 1888: The Republicans had a real jamboree today and tonight. There were a great many people present. There was a long procession in buggies, horseback, and on foot. And wagons decorated with every imaginable thing. And tin horns and firing anvils. It was a real Pandemonium.
Monday, November 19, 1888: We have not had definite word from West Virginia about the Election. Both parties claim it. And both parties claim they have a majority in the lower house of Congress.
December 1, 1888: It appears to be a settled fact that the Republicans will have a majority of five in the lower house of Congress. And a small majority in the Senate.
Orphan trains:
Monday, June 2, 1890: About 25 children from the orphans’ home at Boston arrived in Muncie Saturday evening last in order to find homes for the little wanderers. And we brought a boy home this evening to see how we would like him. His name is George Weeks. We may keep him. He is 13 years of age....

Tuesday, June 3, 1890: We changed George Weeks for Vincent Trengrave, 10 years of age on May 31. We think we will be better suited with him than with the other one.

I got 50 feet of hose for our garden hydrant today.
Panic of 1893:
Thursday, July 27, 1893: ...Someone stole five chickens from our coop.

Friday, July 28, 1893: William Cassady’s stable was burned last night.

Saturday, July 29, 1893: Mr. G. Hamilton commenced to build a two-story residence across the street from our house a few days ago. Money matters are uncommonly close. The banks refuse to loan money to anyone for fear there might be a run on them. The factories have nearly all shut down. And there are hundreds of men out of work. It is all for want of confidence in the Democratic Administration.

Monday, August 31, 1893: Money matters are very close. And banks are being closed.
August 4, 1893: The Citizens National Bank of Muncie closed its doors this morning. But the general opinion is that it will resume payments in a few days. There is a spirit of uneasiness among the people.

August 5, 1893: There was a little run on two of our banks today by the country people. But our citizens deposited money almost as fast as it was drawn out. So the scared ones got ashamed of themselves and quit taking out their money.

August 6, 1896: ...the Baptist minister preached for us...and spoke against Sunday ball playing. And the PAPERS not saying one word against it. He expressed my mind exactly.

Thomas Ryan refers to boys playing ball on a Sunday as “ornery.” And warrants for arrests were actually issued to stop the Sunday sports.

August 8, 1893: Owen C. Wycoff committed suicide yesterday afternoon by cutting his throat with a pen knife. His wife was visiting at Fort Wayne. Hard times is heard in all sides. And people can’t get work.
Smallpox epidemic: Smallpox arrived in Muncie in August of 1893. The first death occurred on September 10, so all public gatherings, including church services, were cancelled. A quarantine was issued, and residents of infected houses were banned from travel. Two hospitals were built specifically for smallpox patients.
Tuesday, August 22, 1893: ...The smallpox scare in the south part of the city has driven the cow herders off. Now we have to keep our cow in the stable.

Wednesday, August 23, 1893: ...Smallpox still in the city.

Monday, August 28, 1893: The smallpox scare is beginning to grow less.

Tuesday, August 27, 1893: No more new cases of smallpox reported today.

September 5, 1893: There was four new cases of smallpox reported...

September 7, 1893: There are four new cases of smallpox reported this morning. Business of almost all kinds are nearly at a standstill.


Sunday, September 10, 1893: The churches were closed today for fear of spreading smallpox.

Friday, September 15, 1893: The smallpox seems to be abating. No new cases since last Sunday, which is very hopeful. There has been no smallpox cases in the central part of the city. It is confined to the southern suburb of Congerville.
Streetcars: The city voted to build a streetcar system in 1887, of which Thomas Neely was in favor. The streetcars began running in 1890 and seated around 70 people who could travel to the various Muncie neighborhoods for a nickel. Citizens could even rent the cars for parties. In 1900, larger, more dangerous cars came to the city and did not compete well with bicycles, automobiles, or pedestrians. Thomas Neely was struck by one of the new large cars.
Life of a single working woman:
A Girl's Essay on Boys.

Boys are men that have not got so big as their papas. Boys are a trouble. They wear out everything but soap. If I had my way, half the boys in the world would be girls, and the rest would be dolls. My papa is so nice that I think he must have been little girl when he was a little boy.
Wednesday, Nov 30, 1897

Last day of the month and how much happier it has ended than it did. Fell so much more easily than I did a month or so ago. How glad I am that life is worth while and how much happier we might be if we would only remember this instead of being so easily discouraged.

The Norene Hawk Diaries digital collection in the Digital Media Repository chronicles the life of a Muncie, Indiana woman at the turn of the 20th century. Norene was born in 1878 and began her first diary on Thanksgiving Day in 1898. Norene and her friends actually attend a football game at Westside Park, where Muncie defeated the Indianapolis Training School 11-5. Norene’s most prized possessions were her wheel and her camera.
Thursday, November 24, 1898: I thought I would not have to stay very long (at the office), but there was so much correspondence that it was about half past twelve when I had finished. I took the mail to the Post Office and came up Charles Street, hurried through my dinner, and went down to Lida’s on my wheel to see what arrangements were made for the P.M. Went home combed my hair and so on and about 2:15, Lida, Frank, and Mr. Emerson came up and we went out to West Side to see the football game. Quite a fine game. Score 11:5 favor of Muncie. Their opponents were the Indianapolis Training School.
Congerville Flyers of Muncie were one of the charter teams of what would become the National Football League.
From Thomas Ryan:

July 1, 1889: ...I went by Kirk’s about 5:00 and looked at his bicycle again. I hope I can get it....I went down and got some ice cream and proposed to Charles Kirk, to give him my bicycle and $40 for Billy’s Expert Columbia. I hope he will take it.

*Thomas Ryan purchased his first bicycle in 1886.
C.S. Wachtell constructed the first bicycle built in Muncie in 1894.
Norene Hawk lived at home with her parents, George and Jennie, at 503 South Hackley Street right next to the railroad tracks.
Norene’s house today:
Main Street, looking East from Walnut, Muncie, Indiana.
Norene worked on the second floor in that real estate office:
The site today:
Norene attended the Magic City Business College after graduating from Muncie High School in 1896.
That same building today:
In Norene’s 1898 diary, she is dating a Mr. Warren C. Emerson. She often refers to him as “Mr. Emerson” or “WCE,” and only calls him by his first name once in the diary. Mr Emerson works at the telegraph office on the corner of Adams and Walnut Street.

...and I & T. came and wanted to go to ...
Site of the telegraph office today:
Thursday, February 2, 1899: Ground Hog Day…

Pleasant day but just a little gloomy as are my thoughts although I intend to conquer them instead of letting them conquer me. Lida was up to the office this A.M. and I was telling her my troubles.

Feel somewhat out of sorts with Mr. E. from something that occurred last night and as usual talked a little too much. Suggested attending Literary with Lida and she consented but found in the P.M. that she had promised to go home past the Telegraph Office so I wouldn’t go. Came to supper alone. After supper Mr. E. sent up a note by a messenger boy asking to come up. He came about 7:30 and we took a walk and came home.

Explanations were the order of the evening.
Friday, January 20, 1898: …It surely seems to me that the more I see of life, the more firmly I am convinced that the only safe plan is to stay single.
“I wish I knew what to do about my future. It seems the shaping of it lies in my hands...”

~ Norene Hawk, Thursday, July 20, 1899
Mary Alta Grames Smith kept a diary from 1926 until her death. She was born in 1874 and married Charles Leander Smith in 1896 and lived in Warren County in western Indiana.
The Great Depression: Throughout Mary’s diary, she discusses several diseases. The following slide is a collection of those ailments—yellow representing hospitalization and red representing death.
Jan. 15, 1928
The Harren Co. Bank closed its doors.

The crowd was quite a demonstration around the First National Bank when the doors of both banks were closed on Tues., Jan. 15.

Then on the following Wed., near the first aid station, the president Cashier Mr. Jacobs committed suicide in the drug shed at his home in P.V.

Sun. Jan. 17, Mr. Charles's cousin, Wll. Higgens, and his son Elmer, came down from Lake Village. Stayed all night at the farm, arrived 8:30. Went down to South's. They were on their way down to South's to see Mr. Higgens who is at the insane hospital.
Mary’s son loses his job in 1931. After a lifetime of being a housewife, Mary is forced to work at a tomato factory, boasting that she only missed two half-days.
Sept. 1933.

Mary and her family attend the “Century of Progress,” the World’s Fair in Chicago.
AIR VIEW OF WORLD'S FAIR, CHICAGO, 1933

1. Shedd Aquarium
2. Grant Park
3. Field Museum
4. Soldier Field
5. Administration Bldg.
6. State-Indiana
7. Illinois Host
8. Italian Pavilion
9. Sweden
10. Czechoslovakia
11. Science Hall
12. Temple of Jehovah
13. Japanese
14. Chinese
15. General Exhibits
16. Science Bridge
17. Hall of Religion
18. Firestone
20. Revolving Thermometer
21. World's a Million Years Ago
22. Niagra Inland Village
23. Morocco
24. British Isles
25. Streets of Paris
26. A & P Carnival
27. Old Hedeburg
28. Pantheon de la Guerre
29. 12th St. Bridge
30. Dairy Bldg.
31. Sky-Ride Tower
32. Federal Bldg.
33. Court of States
34. Columbus Memorial
35. Social Science
36. Communications Bldg.
37. Electrical Bldg.
38. Enchanted Island
40. Egypt
41. Fair's Casino
42. Strauss Spectaculum
43. Hollywood
44. 23rd St. Docks
Mary follows the news of John Dillinger’s death in 1934. Her son-in-law has enlisted with the Civilian Conservation Corps and is stationed at Camp Knox.
Public Enemies: Robberies of the John Dillinger Gang

Civilian Conservation Corps camp, Frankton, Indiana
Nov 8, 1935. Was the National Corn Husking over by New Town in Mr. Mitchells Field. The crowd was estimated at 1000. It was a lovely day. Chas came down from camp. He, Martin & I attended. A man by the name of Carlson from Iowa won 1st & Mr. Pitzer from Mountain Co. and won 3rd. Dad went with B-p M.D. & M.E. went from P.E. in the school bus.

Mary is not exaggerating about the attendance at the National Cornhusking Championship near her hometown.
The conception of cornhusking as a sport rather than a chore sprang from the fertile brain of Henry Agard Wallace. As editor of Wallace’s Farmer, President Roosevelt’s Secretary of Agriculture decided in 1924 that U.S. farmers needed an indigenous sport.

First major cornhusking contest, for the championship of Iowa, was promoted by him and watched by 800 people. By 1928, the Wallace tournament had become the U.S. Championship, and NBC thought it worth describing.

Since then cornhusking has been the fastest growing sporting spectacle in the world. Last year, at Newtown, Indiana, 110,000 spectators were on hand when Elmer Carlson of Audubon, Iowa, set the incredible world record of 41 ½ bushels in 80 minutes, through the fat rows of Leslie Mitchell’s farm.

~TIME magazine, November 23, 1936
Mary tracks the family’s loans throughout the Depression:

Borrowed money to pay on R.V. property

Maxine borrowed $400 for 3 mos. on Aug 19th 1936.

Dad paid off Nov 28, 1936

Maxine finished paying her note to Newport Bank

Maxine paid $35.00 on Note Oct 1936

Maxine paid Howarth, on Radio Dec 1st 1936

Lester has paid her note at Foster B of $300.00

Maxine paid Howarth, on Radio Dec 1st 1937

Jan 30th 1937

Feb 28, 1937

Mar 17, 1937
Mary records news of a historic flood in southern Indiana along the Ohio River in 1937. The next day Franklin Delano Roosevelt is inaugurated.
CITY TURNED INTO HAVEN FOR THOUSANDS
WATER POURS OVER WALL AT EVANSVILLE

EXTRA
Ohio River Tops 51-Foot Barrier
To Rise Higher

LEAVENWORTH, IND.
FLOODED AREA—1937 HIGH WATER

NOTE: Map compiled from Ohio River Navigation
Chart No. 1314 A, Survey of 1931-1934

U.S. ENGINEER OFFICE
LOUISVILLE, KY.
JULY 1937
1938.


Bought his store fixtures of Smiths.

Rented the bank for Mr. J. Sells.

Began his store on Wed. Feb. 23.

Oct. 5. Lighty closed his store, went out of the store business. The next not he began working for Clem Foster in the feed mill at Tarkie.

Nov. 26th. He accepted a job with the S. D. Co. Wash house & farm shop. Was out again. W. S. was at home.

He then turned over his store to B. to he began driving the H. S. Truck to Ambia.

Oct. 31st, 38. Sale #84.
Went on Sun., we., to the McK's Rancho, South east of Wish L, took our supper also roasted winers, had a very enjoyable eve. Came back to Bryans, listened to Roosevelt's Speech pertaining to the war Crisis.

Sept 2 Sat. War was declared by Germany on Poland. Great Britain are helping Poland.

War is declared in Europe in 1939.
The school and her daughter’s Christmas tree are lighted with electricity in 1939.
Election of 1940:
1940 election
Oct. 19th. Hettie (Gray) Duncan delivered a campaign speech at the School Gym at R.V. She has been chosen as personal director for different institutions all over the State. She gave a raising speech for Franklin D.

Oct 31st. Harold, Frieda & I went to Crawfordville that night to hear Paul V. McNutt. She took lunch with Delmas, Elizabeth & Anona Case. Minnie came down after the speaking & visited. There was a large crowd. The evening was somewhat rainy.

Nov 5th. Some of the Aid served dinner for the Election Board. We cooked at Friedas. Thelma, B. Helen, Florence, Rene J., myself & Emma. Newton was there also. Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected for the 3rd term. Shucker for Gov. & Gillis (Rep.) for W.S. Senator.
Indiana “turns red” voting for the Republican candidate for President from 1940 to 2008.
World War II:
Dec. 7: Sun. the Japs made an attack on Hawaii (at Pearl Harbor). There were casualties among the 2000, of which about 1500 were killed.

Dec. 8: Mon. Pres. Roosevelt gave a short speech at the announcement to the nation that U.S.A. had pronounced war against Japan.

Dec. 20: Tom’s ate dinner with us in the car. Brynn & Marjorie L came & we had a. Today Paul had to work & we went up with Toms.

20th: Marilyn Neal & Bill Gubler were married.

Eileen Mair & Mr. Flunkett ...

Born to Mr. & Mrs. Kenneth Biers a daughter, name Judyth Bier.

1942: (Name Barbara Angu... a daughter was born to Mr. & Mrs. George May.)
1942

Feb 10 A son was born to Mary F. (B.) love of my husband Virgil & Chauncey. Another one was also included.

Feb 16th. War registration day for men from 20 to 44.

Feb 19th. I was a damp rainy day. It was a damp rainy day. Singapore fell to the Japs.

Sept 9th Virgil entered Fort 13--Harrison. Was there 2 days on Fal, more. He was now of others were.

on their way to a new camp "Hill Field Detail"

Put Virgil of 433, L.M. Co. 33 A. 10th. G

Two of Mary’s sons and three grandsons fall in the category of men aged 20 to 44 required to register for the war.
July. Virgil's unit was sent across. They landed somewhere in England, I rec'd the 1st letter along the fo'c'sle of Aug. 16th the second, the 16th Aug. He said they enjoyed the trip & didn't get seasick & arrived at a nice Camp.

Aug. 7th - 9th. M.D.'s unit was moved to Kansas City.

1943

Mary's grandson is sent to England in preparation for D-Day.
Loaded with full equipment, American assault troops move ashore on the beachhead in northern France. Note the beach obstructions at left, part of the shore protection which the Germans hoped would block the Allied invasion.

Canadians scramble down the gangway of a Landing Craft, Infantry, with their bicycles in one of the early landings. The 20mm Oerlikon gun in the bow stands ready to repel enemy aircraft. The LCI's reach far into the background.
June 1944

June 6th. Called D-Day as it was the day the Invasion began in Europe. The Allies began their invasion with 4000 ships & 11,000 planes, as well as new weapons that had never been in use before. The Allies took Rome on June 4th. " supervision was bestowed on the Allies." The war was over.
Mar. 12th M. D.'s, crew was sent on a mission, but
he & Howard didn't go. The crew has been
reported missing over the Adriatic Sea. We are
hoping they are alive somewhere.

Mar. Virgil was sent somewhere in France.
Apr. 5th Geneva T. H. went to Judipl's for a short stay.
returning Sun eve. I spent the weekend with
Mr. & Mrs. M. We attended Church services at the M. C.

Apr. 11th Mrs. Bartlett's house caught on fire, shortly
before noon. by 10 C it was burned to the ground.
all clothes burned but the offices. The neighbors &
school children helped to save much worth in raw St.

1945 Mary's second grandson is sent to Italy as a pilot. His unit is lost over the Adriatic
Sea on a mission in which he fatefully did not participate.
'In the eve, after most all had gone home, the word came that our President Franklin Delno Roosevelt, had passed to his reward at his summer home in Warm Springs, Georgia. It was a shock to our nation as well as to the whole world. He was a faithful and competent leader. He had been recuperating and planning for their next big meeting, which was to be at San Francisco the 25th of April. He died with cerebral hemorrhage after being stricken and lived only a short while. He was laid by his Father and Mother in their own burial lot at Hyde Park, New York, on Sunday, April 15. (His life will live on).
June, 1945

(1). World security Conference
signed June 26th. June at San-
Francisco. The first to sign
was a Chinese, 7 last U.S.A.

Mary’s new diary begins with World War II action:
1945

The Potsdam Conf was held in Germany, near Berlin by the Big 4 nations, in July.

In Aug., 2. Atomic bombs were dropped on Jap territory to wiped out 2 large cities.
The last of Aug., the Japs surrendered.

Aug. 20th. The folks came up for a farewell supper for Maurice D.,
before leaving for Camp Atterbury 23rd.

His girlfriend was also with us.

We had a very enjoyable eve.
This was the last our dear Mother wrote in her diary.

Mary dies in 1945.
The universe pays every man in his own coin; if you smile, it smiles upon you in return; if you frown you will be frowned at; if you sing you will be invited into gay company; if you think, you will be entertained by thinkers; and if you love the world and earnestly seek for the good therein, you will be surrounded by loving friends, and nature will pour into your lap the treasures of the earth.—Wildwood Philo-
September 27, 2016

The end.