

## A Tribute to Earl Heck

Written by Sue Cummings

Anyone who lives in the vicinity of Englewood, Ohio has heard of Earl Heck (1896-1981) whose name is on the community center located at 201 North Main Street. First used as a three-room school, then the municipal building, the Earl Heck Community Center was dedicated on October 8, 1978. Here are some things you may not know about this interesting man.

Born in Arcanum, Ohio, Heck attended Miami University and received his bachelors and master's degrees from Harvard University. He moved to Englewood in 1930. From the onset he was interested in local government and held the office of Mayor twice: from January 1934 to November 1938 and from January 1940 to November 1940. He also served as a member of city council and was postmaster from 1940 to 1959. He ran successfully for the school board in 1937.

Heck's legacy to the area included more than public service. For all his lifetime, he was very much interested in local history. In his spare time, he could be found with his friends tramping through old farm cemeteries and looking for old house and barn foundations which were evidence of early settlers' residences. He lived in a historic house along River Road (now Valleyview Drive) next to the David Razor house. Razor was one of five men who platted the town of Harrisburg (now Englewood) in 1841. As people became aware of Heck's history bent, they gave him historic items that had passed down throughout their families. He also attended local sales and bought antique items. Eventually he began a small museum of old things which he displayed in his house. He kept a guest register which had names of visitors from across the country and even outside the United States. Some listed their favorite items in the museum, such as the old post office, a sausage grinder, a treadle sewing machine, history books and pottery made in Union by James Purcell.

In 1939, Heck began to write a book entitled the "History of Englewood." It remains one of the most comprehensive histories of this area but is not indexed and has information scattered in many places. In one chapter, he describes the beauty of the old brick church situated south of his house. He relates that David Razor donated the land for the church (now the RTHS History Center) to the Wengerites and Swankites for erection of a meeting house in 1861. The original building was damaged by fire in the 1880s. It was rebuilt with Gothic arch windows and was used by several other religious groups. The Englewood Dunkard Brethren owned the church from the mid-1920s until the Historical Society purchased the building in March 2008.

The historic building will take on a new life as the home of the Randolph Township Historical Society and RTHS History Center. Heck certainly would be delighted to have the Historical Society as his neighbors. While alive, Heck tried to start a historical society in this part of northern Montgomery County, but was unable to engender interest in enough people at the time. Now his dream has come to fruition.

More than 4100 historic items have been donated to the Society since its organization. Many of these items are on display in the History Center including Earl Heck's Museum Guest Register, sausage grinder, history books and pottery made in Union. Sorry – we don't have the post office or the treadle sewing machine!