

Alfred 'Alfie' Mueller

Artist biography



Alfred "Alfie" Mueller was, and remains, a Galena treasure. Born in 1909, he was a part of Galena's heritage. His family came to Galena from Germany in 1850. They were working class people, the kind who built Galena. As a boy Alfie was conscientious and hard-working, traits that stayed with him his whole life. He began his career on Main Street even before he graduated from high school, and lived in Galena his entire life.

Very early on Alfie began to collect old photographs. Some were of people, some of streets, some of steamboats, but all telling the story of Galena. This passion continued up until his death in 2004. To this day Alfie's work continues to have an impact. His collection of over 10,000 images has become the single largest repository of Galena history. His photographs are used by historians, genealogists, preservationists, city staff, tourists, and everyone in between.

In 2004, Alfie was awarded the Richard H. Driehaus Preservation Award for outstanding stewardship. Eiliesh Tuffy, the director of preservation programs for the Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois at the time of the award, noted that it was unusual for an individual archivist—working without the resources of a university or other institution—to accumulate and preserve such a large collection.

But Alfie never asked for, and rarely received, any payment for his work. He collected, researched and catalogued the images out of the kindness of his heart and his love for Galena. Whether the request came from friends, neighbors or visitors, he simply wanted to help.

The Galena community has come to appreciate Alfie's wonderful work. Both during his lifetime and after his death, Alfie received many accolades including an award in 1985 from the Illinois State Historical Society and the honor in 1989 when May 21 was declared to be "Alfred Mueller Day." On that same day, the Galena Public Library's Alfred Mueller Historical Collections Room was dedicated. The Studs Terkel Humanities Service Award was presented to him in 2000 and The Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois honored him in 2004 with its prestigious Richard H. Driehaus award for community leadership.

A very humble man, Alfie simply wanted people to appreciate his town and its history. He was a fixture of the Galena community for 75 years. And while Alfie is now gone, his legacy continues, now and forever. *A two-room gallery at the Galena Center for the Arts is dedicated to sharing images from the Alfred Mueller Photo Collection. The galleries are open year-round and with images changing seasonally.*