

# Things About Northern Illinois University

## Altgeld Hall's Cornerstone Laying

While the actual ground breaking for what is now Altgeld Hall at NIU had taken place on September 17, 1895, the laying of the building's cornerstone did not occur until October 1, 1895. The event marked the second time in two weeks that barbed wire barons Joseph Glidden, Jacob Haish and Isaac Ellwood- the Founding Fathers- were together at the same time and the same place. Besides this, it was just the third of four times during their lives that such an event ever happened.

During NIU's 75th anniversary celebration in the 1970s, the cornerstone was removed for the opening of its time capsule and the contents displayed.

## Altgeld's Gargoyles and Grotesques

Architect Charles Brush chose to give Altgeld Hall a true Gothic feel by installing 11 gargoyles and 11 grotesques either atop the central tower or elsewhere on the building. The gargoyles are functional waterspouts intended to carry water away from roof areas. The grotesques are strictly decorative, but more architecturally impressive. Over the years, three grotesques were victims of lightning strikes and since 1973, one that had been repaired and put in storage has graced the garden area between Altgeld and Still Halls. A contest conducted by the Northern Star in 1996 gave it the name "Olivegoil."



## Northern's Original School Seal

Dating from Northern's opening in 1899, the black and white mosaic seal now in the floor of Founders Memorial Library, was located in the entryway floor of Altgeld Hall. The letters "N.I.S.N.S." on it representing "Northern Illinois State Normal School," Northern's founding name.

During interior remodeling of Altgeld's lobby in 1968, it was unceremoniously tossed into a dump truck. Fortunately, it was recovered and restored. It went on display in Swen Parson Library until finding a new permanent home in Founders. It is said to be bad luck to walk across the seal but nothing at Founders prevents one from doing so.



## Castle Drive Gateway

From the time that Altgeld Hall first opened its doors to students and professors, Castle Drive has served as the formal entryway onto Northern's campus. As a result, a stone gateway, with wrought iron carriage and pedestrian gates, marked the access point. Increased automobile traffic forced their removal in the late 1950s. As part of Northern's Centennial celebration in 1995, the present gateway at Castle Drive and West Lincoln Highway was erected, being dedicated October 1, 1995, one hundred years to the day of the laying of Altgeld's cornerstone.



## William the Goose

Recognized as the "King" of NIU's goose community in the late 1970s, William variously was loved or hated by those who frequented the Lagoon. There were those who claimed William tormented them regularly when they dared to approach his Kingdom, or his mate Wilma. An effort by the NIU Grounds staff to displace William resulted in Chicago columnist Mike Royko writing about him and his picture being seen worldwide on the Associated Press Wire Service, increasing his fame. But all good things must come to an end. He was strangled to death by a crazed student on April 12, 1981 with a shoelace. Though different NIU alumni will tell different stories of his death.

**Benches of NIU**

The NIU campus is home to a trio of historic benches. At the south end of the Lagoon is the so-called skating bench, a haven for ice skaters during the winter. The freshman or “Kissing Bench” is further north off Castle Drive and close to the west bank of the Lagoon. It was the gift of the senior class of 1903 and since the 1950’s has been known as the “Kissing Bench.”

The third bench is the “Fred L. Charles Memorial” from 1943. Charles was on the faculty when Northern opened in 1899. He left DeKalb in 1910 to accept a position with the University of Illinois. When he died in 1911, a scholarship fund was created to honor him, with what remained by 1943 designated for construction of the concrete bench bearing his name, near the south wing of Swen Parson Hall.

**Additional DeKalb County Spots & Tours**



**DeKalb County Tours**  
DeKalb County Opera Houses #1 & #2

**DeKalb County Tours**  
DeKalb County Forest Preserves and Parks

**DeKalb Public Library Hours**

**Monday - Thursday**  
9:00 a.m. - 9:00 p.m.

**Friday**  
9:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.

**Saturday**  
9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

**Sunday**  
1:00 - 5:00 p.m.



**Haish Memorial Library Building**

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[www.dkpl.org](http://www.dkpl.org)



**DeKalb County Tours**



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