

Collection #
P 0924

**ORA MORRIS AND CLAY WORKERS PHOTOGRAPHS,
JULY 1929**

Collection Information	1
Biographical and Historical Sketches	2
Scope and Content Note	4
Contents	4

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6 April 2026

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COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION:	1 folder of photographs
COLLECTION DATES:	July 1929
PROVENANCE:	Gift from Judith Murdock Pirtle of Sullivan, Indiana, February 2026
RESTRICTIONS:	None
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NOTES:	

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Ora Morris was a brick and tile worker in the area of Montezuma in Parke County, Indiana, and perhaps across the Wabash River in Vermillion County, Indiana.

Ora E. Morris was born on 8 August 1894 in Illinois to James H. Morris and Mary Elizabeth Fouts Morris. By 1900, the family had moved to Montezuma, where James was employed by a brick works company. By 1910, the family had moved to Helt Township in Vermillion County, where James was still working in the brick industry. Ora was working on the family's home farm.

In 1917, Ora worked for the Southern Fire Brick & Clay Company in Montezuma. During World War I he served in France with a U.S. Army ambulance company. In 1920 Ora lived in Montezuma and both he and his father were employed at a brick factory.

On 25 December 1920, Ora married Goldia Mae Huffman (1902–1992) in Parke County. They had five children: Jack Richard (1921–1992); Alice Mae (Murdock) (1928–2008); Billy Joe (1931–1995); Bobby Gene (1934–1974); and James Otis (1937–1958). At the time of the 1930 census, the family lived in Reserve Township in Parke County, where Ora was employed at a tile yard. In the spring of 1935, the family moved from “one of the Adams farms, north of Montezuma, to the Buffington farm, east of [Clinton, Indiana].”

Ora's occupation was listed as clerk in the 1940 census, perhaps for the Standard Material Corporation, which was listed as his employer in 1942. In 1950 he and his family lived in Montezuma, and he worked as a machine cleaner and tester for a record manufacturer. Ora died on 3 August 1958 in Montezuma.

Sources:

Ancestrylibrary.com (Accessed 3 April 2026):

Find a Grave

Indiana, U.S., Death Certificates, 1899–2017

Indiana, U.S., Marriages, 1810–2001

United States Federal Census, 1900–1950

U.S., Army Transport Service Arriving and Departing Passenger Lists, 1910–1939

U.S., World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917–1918

U.S., World War II Draft Registration Cards, 1942

Spurgeon, Alma. [News from] “Montezuma” in *The Daily Clintonian* (Clinton, Ind.), 28 March 1935, p. 6.

HISTORICAL SKETCH

The area on each side of the Wabash River in western Indiana – Vermillion County on the west and Parke Count on the east side of the river – had abundant deposits of five types of clay as well as plenty of water, both necessary for making bricks. Many local brickyards produced bricks for homes, fireplaces, and roads. Major rail lines intersected at Montezuma on the east side of the Wabash, making it convenient to transport bricks from the area to cities throughout the Midwest. After the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, much of that city was

rebuilt with clay products from the Montezuma area. Two of the area's brick-making companies included the Montezuma Fire-Brick Works and the Colonial Brick Corporation.

Founded in 1872 by Burns, Porter & Collett, Montezuma Fire-Brick Works was a profitable business north of the town with a factory that produced ten thousand high-quality heat-resistant bricks daily. By 1895, the company was one of the largest brick works in the state, using carboniferous shale to manufacture its common bricks.

The Colonial Brick Corporation was located in the town of Cayuga in Vermillion County. Beginning in 1904, the company made bricks from clay and shale mined onsite. By using varying proportions of red burning shale mixed with buff burning clay, a wide range of brick colors could be manufactured.

In 1892, the Columbia Encaustic Tile Company began making roofing tile at Montezuma. Other Parke County companies included the Clay Shingle Company in Montezuma, the Marion Brick and Tile Works near Montezuma, the William E. Dee Clay Works at Mecca, and the R. R. Lee Tile Factory at Bellmore. In Vermillion County, there was the Clinton Paving and Building Brick Company.

Sources:

History of Parke and Vermillion Counties Indiana. Indianapolis: B. F. Bowen & Company, 1913 <https://dn790000.ca.archive.org/0/items/historyofparkeve00bfbo/historyofparkeve00bfbo.pdf> Accessed 3 April 2026.

"Montezuma, Indiana: Town History" <https://www.in.gov/towns/montezuma/history/town-history/> Accessed 3 April 2026.

Ries, Heinrich and Henry Leighton. *History of the Clay-Working Industry in the United States* https://archive.org/stream/historyclaywork00leiggoog/historyclaywork00leiggoog_djvu.txt Accessed 3 April 2026.

Society of Architectural Historians Archipedia. "Colonial Brick Corporation" [Colonial Brick Corporation | SAH ARCHIPEDIA](#) Accessed 3 April 2026.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection consists of three black-and-white photographs that show men at a worksite with a crawler crane that appears to be lifting clay pulled from the ground, with railroad freight cars in the background. Writing on the back of each photo indicates that they were taken in July 1929 at an unknown brick/tile company in Vermillion County. Ora Morris is identified in each photograph; none of the other men are identified.

CONTENTS

CONTENTS

CONTAINER

Eight men posing for photo with crawler crane and freight cars in background. Ora Morris is second from left.

Folder 1 of 1

Ora Morris on the left, with one other man, both standing on the platform of the crawler crane.

Folder 1 of 1

Men working with two crawler cranes, with freight cars in the background. Ora Morris is seen standing in the doorway of the crawler crane on the left, in the center of the photograph.

Folder 1 of 1