



# HISTORICO

*Sangamon County Historical Society Newsletter*

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 9744, Springfield, IL 62791-9744, Phone: 217-525-1961,  
e-mail: schsoffice@gmail.com web: [www.sangamonhistory.org](http://www.sangamonhistory.org), [SangamonLink.org](http://SangamonLink.org)

VOLUME 58 NO. 1

JANUARY 2022

## January 18: On-Line, From Past to Present:

### How Technology and Savvy Shaped Area’s Movie Theater Industry

Reflecting months of research, for its January 18 on-line program, the Society takes an indepth look at the people and the technological forces that through much of the 19th and 20th centuries, made Springfield the bell-weather for the entertainment industry, its audiences gauged by national movie makers and performers as a make or break factor.

While those days are gone, usurped by even newer technology that would eventually make the original movie houses here obsolete, the movie theater industry was

once vibrant, making fortunes for some of its earliest and often young technologically savvy enthusiasts, and laid the groundwork for at least two major movie chains.

The Power Point presentation explores everything from nickelodeons and Air Dome theaters, to the fanciest movie houses and their attempts to stay relevant as customer tastes, population shifts, radio, television, DVDs, CDs, and more recently home-viewing movies on Netflix and pay channels have eaten into movie going audiences.

“With the continuing spread of the Covid variant, we felt it was in the best interest of our members to put our January program on-line rather than gather in person,” explained SCHS president Stephanie Martin.

“On pages 4-6 of this issue of *Historico*, we offer a primer about early entertainment that should whet your appetite for the full program that you’ll be able to view on-line starting January 18. All you need do is follow the links posted on our website, [sangamonhistory.org](http://sangamonhistory.org), or our Facebook page, [facebook.com/sancohis](https://facebook.com/sancohis).”

## Marking Black History Month

### Program to Focus on Key Springfield Figures, Preservation Efforts

The Sangamon County Historical Society will mark Black History month on Tuesday, February 15, with the story of two Black women who faced prejudice in their careers as educators and the fate of the Ambidexter Industrial and Normal Institute for Black children that opened here in 1901, its historic building nearly razed in 2018.

The program, open to the public, will be held in the City of Springfield Library's Carnegie Room starting at 5:30 p.m. The program is open to the

public.

Journalist Cinda Klickna, a member of the Society board, will provide insight into the life and career of Gertrude Wright Morgan (1861-1931), the first Black student to attend a white school in Springfield. After graduation, Wright Morgan fulfilled her dream of becoming a teacher, first in St. Louis, then Boston and later Cambridge, Massachusetts where she would play vital roles in Black and cultural life. Wright was involved in the creation of

the Niagara Movement, a black civil rights organization founded in 1905 by a group of activists led by W. E. B. Du Bois, the NAACP of which she was a founder, and women's suffrage. Wright Morgan, who died in 1931, is buried in Mount Auburn, Massachusetts).

Board vice-president Susan Helm will discuss the life of Mae Ryan Hammons who in 1955 became the first Black person to teach in Springfield’s District 186.

*(Continued on page 6)*

## INSIDE:

<i>From the President’s Desk</i> .....	2
<i>What’s Cooking on Sangamon Link</i> .....	3



STARTS PAGE 4

Stephanie J. Martin



## Good Turnout, Good News and Hopefully a Good New Year

It was wonderful to see a nice crowd at the showing of “The Mysterious Bard of Sangamo” in November at the library. If you weren’t able to join us or just want to watch it again, here is the link to the film: <https://vimeo.com/626671152/daae07f0cc>

For even more on the subject, The Illinois State Historical Society’s *Illinois Heritage*

“First Citizen.” He has been involved with the Iles House Foundation, Abraham Lincoln Association and was the 1973-1974 president of the Sangamon County Historical Society.

Dick has written many local history books including ones looking at Springfield in Lincoln’s time. The Abraham Lincoln Association recently made some of them available on their

website: <https://abrahamlincolnassociation.org/other-abraham-lincoln-publications/>.

Over the years, three other SCHS past presidents have been named “First Citizen.” Carroll C. Hall, SCHS president 1965-1966 in 1987, Emmet F. Pearson MD, SCHS president 1966-1967 in 1992, and Kathryn Harris, SCHS presi-



November-December 2021 edition includes an article on “The Mysterious Bard of Sangamo.” It also includes the Dennis Williams article from *SangamonLink*.

In late November the *State Journal-Register* announced Richard “Dick” Hart as their 2021

president 2004-2005 in 2020. I hope to be worthy of the award someday.

I hope everyone had a safe and happy holiday season. I look forward to what 2022 will bring for the Sangamon County Historical Society.



**Historico**, published 10 times a year (except July & December), is the official bulletin for members of the Sangamon County Historical Society. Springfield, Illinois.

*Winner, Certificate of Excellence, Illinois State Historical Society.*

You can download back issues of **Historico** in PDF format by going to our website, [www.sangamohistory.org](http://www.sangamohistory.org) or [sancohis.org](http://sancohis.org). Catch us on **Facebook** and **Twitter**. Send event announcements to [historicoeditor@gmail.com](mailto:historicoeditor@gmail.com).

Vicky Whitaker, **Historico** Editor.

Cinda Klickna, Mike Kienzler, contributors

## Time to Cozy Up With Sangamon Link? There's Lots of Old News to Read About!

What's in the works for *SangamonLink.org*, the Society's online encyclopedia of Sangamon County history?

As you read this, *SangamonLink.org* editor Mike Kienzler will have turned his attention to the Capitol Complex.

*SangamonLink.org's* last entry for



HALF of a stereoscopic view of the grand staircase (undated/Sangamon Valley Collection).

2021 told the story of the halting, 20-year effort to build Illinois' current Statehouse, and how modern technology – namely, the invention of steam-powered passenger elevators – allowed officials to eliminate the giant “grand staircase” that formed the original Capitol Avenue entrance to the building.

The first entries for 2022, which might already be online as you're reading today's *Historico*, will look at the colorful career of Alfred Piquenard, the immigrant, adventurer and French rebel who was mainly respon-

sible for designing the Statehouse; and the striking artwork that adorns the ceilings and walls of the Illinois Supreme Court building, right across Second Street from the Capitol.

And in case you missed some of the other new entries in recent weeks, here's quick guide, all available at [sangamonlink.com](http://sangamonlink.com) directly or through the Society's website, [sangamonhistory.org](http://sangamonhistory.org). Here's what went up in December:

### **Sangamon County Detention Home** (posted December 19)

The Sangamon County Detention Home was created in 1916 with two goals: to be both an alternative to jail for the county's youngest delinquents and a refuge for neglected or abandoned children. It wasn't a perfect solution to either problem, Kienzler found, but it probably was better than anyone had a right to expect, detailing the impression of *Illinois State Register* reporter Hazel Bloom had in February 1916, a few months after the facility moved to 512 N. Seventh St., its location for the next 50 years.

### **Rooftop Gunman** (Posted December 6)

Kienzler eyes the 1951 story of a man who shot at random from the roof of the Horn Hotel, a boarding house at 806 East Adams Street, reported by Illinois State journalist Fenton Harris.

There were no bystander injuries in the gunplay between the shooter--Raymond Waterfield--and police, but rather than send people scurrying in fear, spectators were attracted to the scene. You'll need to check out *SangamonLink.org* to get the details...and the end result.

*SangamonLink.org* reaches hundreds of viewers every day. We hope you'll become a regular reader!



### 2021-2022 OFFICERS

President.....Stephanie Martin  
Vice-President.....Susan Helm  
Secretary.....Elaine Hoff  
Treasurer.....Jerry Smith  
Past-President....Vicky Whitaker

### DIRECTORS

*Term Ending June 2022*

Jennie Battles  
Kathy Dehen  
Mary Schaefer  
Larry Stone  
Angela Weiss

### DIRECTORS

*Term Ending June 2023*

Sarah Adams  
Vincent Chappelle  
Peter Harbison  
Mary Mucciante  
Ruth Slottag

### DIRECTORS

*Term Ending June 2024*

Mary Alice Davis  
Kathy Hoffmann  
Cinda Klickna

Please make note of our official mailing address:

**SCHS**  
**Box 9744**  
**Springfield, Illinois,**  
**62791-9744**

## SPRINGFIELD'S EARLIEST THEATERS

# THAT WAS ENTERTAINMENT!

Springfielders have always loved to be entertained, even when wild hogs roamed the city square and saloons and gambling houses sat side by side with "concert halls" and meeting rooms to see theatrical acts, hear music, lectures and more. The Society's January program will be focusing on the transition from these early venues and the individuals who embraced and profited from the technological changes that were introduced in the early 1900s and progressed through the decades here up until now. Journalist Cinda Klickna primarily takes a look at some of the earliest ventures and provides a taste of the post Lincoln era that is treated in greater depth, visually and editorially, in our January Power Point offering. It's a good primer on this element of local history. We also recommend taking a look at past president Richard Hart's excellent and detailed book on *Entertainment in Lincoln's Springfield* which he produced in 2017 for the Abraham Lincoln Association. This 196-page book details every venue and act that performed in Springfield from 1834 to 1860!

### *By Cinda Ackerman Klickna*

Throughout the 1800s and into the late 1900s, Springfield residents have been entertained at many opera houses, halls, saloons, and movie theaters. The early established taverns were some of the first places to offer entertainment. The first amateur theatrical group was called the Springfield Thespian Society formed in 1836.

The American House on the southeast corner of Sixth and Adams was a luxury hotel built by Elijah Iles in 1837. The dining room became the site for many plays with the first one offered in 1838.

During the 1850s and 1860s, many halls were located around the public square (Old State Capitol) and offered

plays, performances, singers, lecturers, and even phrenologists, mesmerists, minstrels, and pony shows. This was the type of entertainment that citizens enjoyed, long before motion pictures led to the building of movie theaters. Some theaters were located on the second or third floors of buildings.

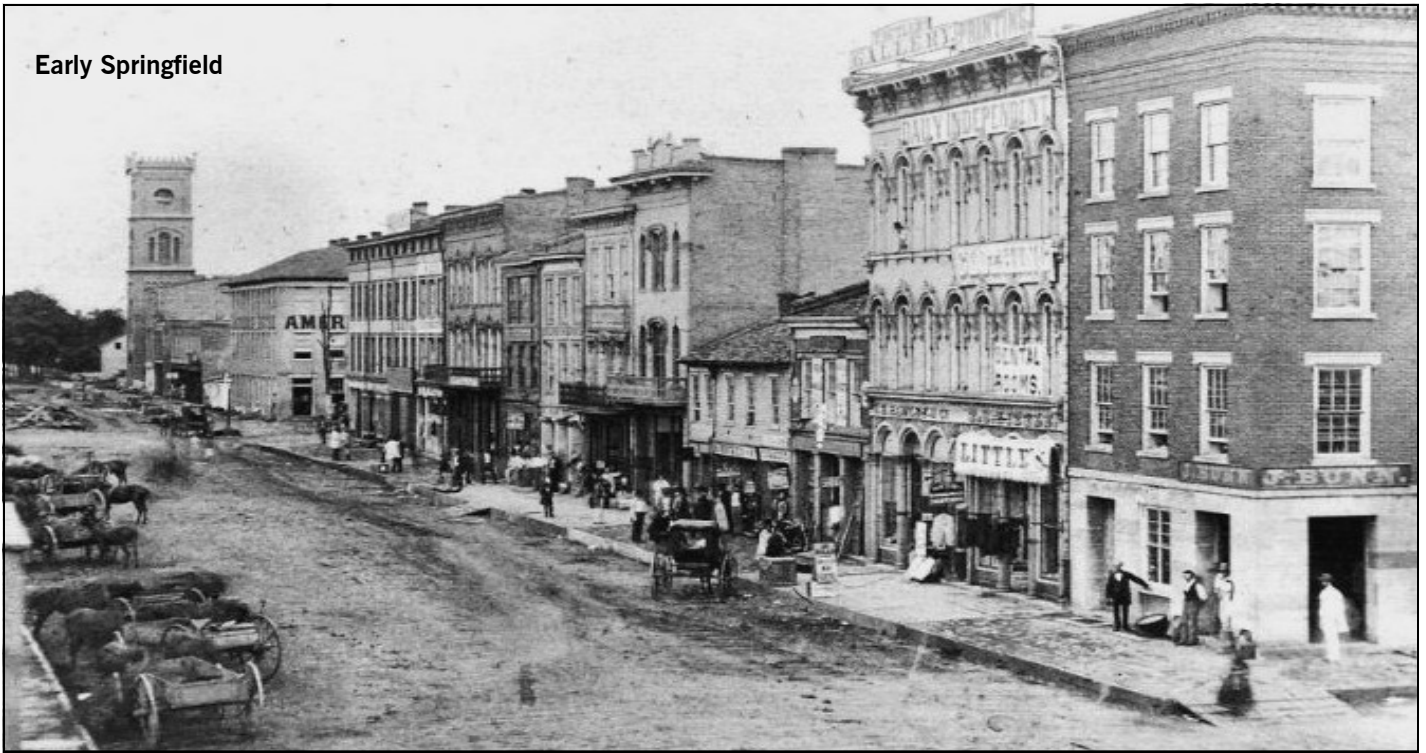
There was Cook's Hall where Lincoln once spoke, Burkhardt's Hall, Watson's Hall and Concert Hall. The Metropolitan opened in 1856 and claimed to be the largest hall in the state. It stood on the west side of Third Street between Washington and Jefferson Streets and offered lectures, dance lessons, and entertainment in its hall that could seat 1200.

In the 1890s Central Music Hall at Fourth and Jefferson was available to

rent for performances and dances in its large second floor that could be set up with 1025 seats. The hardwood floor was perfect for dances. On the first floor was a flour and feed business.

The southeast corner of Sixth and Jefferson Streets, now the site of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, has a long history. A series of opera houses stood on the site from 1866 to 1924. The first was the Rudolph Opera House, opened in December 1866 by Robert Rudolph. Newspaper articles described it as the "new and elegant temple of amusement." Rudolph was a master brewer at Kun Brewery located near Walnut and Car-

## Early Springfield

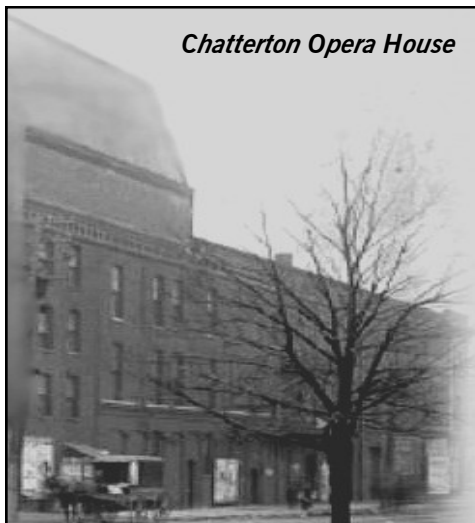


the wealthy Kun widow; they built a mansion at 511 W. Carpenter across from the brewery. The brewery was renamed the Rudolph Brewery. Two years later he built the opera house at the cost of \$125,000 (some records claim it cost \$160,000.) He only lived another two years, and then the opera house was taken over by Jacob Bunn, Sr.

With Bunn in charge, the name was changed to the Bunn Opera House and operated until it was destroyed by fire in 1876. It was rebuilt, but in 1878, Bunn was forced to sell when his private bank failed. George W. Chatterton Sr. purchased the property and gave the management of it to his son George Jr. They hired an architect from New York to redesign the theater into a majestic building.

Called Chatterton's Opera House, it was surrounded by saloons, stores, etc. From the street view, no one could imagine what the opera house was like inside. When it opened on September 10, 1879, people discovered a beautiful hall. The main floor could seat 600;

there were two tiers of box seats with red plush seats. The balcony with wooden seats could hold 900 people. The hall was surrounded with gilt and cherubs and a large chandelier hung from the middle of the ceiling.



Chatterton's was where famous actors and actresses performed. Touring companies often arrived by train into Springfield to put on performances. There were plays that drew huge crowds, and on nights of plays livery cabs lined up on the street to drop off well-dressed pa-

trons. Literary figures such as Henry Ward Beecher (in 1877 and 1886), Oscar Wilde (1882), and Mark Twain (1885) to name a few, presented lectures. There were minstrels, musical performers, and bands such as the John Philip Sousa 60-member band that performed six times over the years.

For over 45 years Chatterton's provided great entertainment for Springfield. When the building was condemned as unsafe, it had to close in 1924; its last night was on May 13, 1924.

The early 1900s saw the addition of many theaters, some staying in existence for decades. A popular venue that opened in 1907 was the Majestic Theater on South Fifth Street between Capitol and Jackson. It could seat 1500. Starting as a venue for serious theater, it became a vaudeville house in 1914 and then switched to movies in the 1920s. Jack Benny, Will Rogers and many other stars performed there. The Majestic became the Roxy Theater in the 1935 and showed movies until 1978. It was torn down in 1979.

*(continued on page 6)*

**THAT WAS ENTERTAINMENT!**

(Continued from page 5)

Probably the most recognized theater was the Orpheum, built in 1927 at 122 North Fifth Street.

The Orpheum was a lavishly decorated palace designed by E.P. Ruppert of the Chicago firm, R. Levine and Co. for \$2 million. The lobby was 50 feet high, surrounded by mirrors. Embellished plaster relief work and large Doric columns were painted in ivory and gold. Bronze benches with red upholstered cushions sat below oil paintings. Two grand, red carpeted staircases on each side of the marble-floored lobby led to the balcony. The auditorium could seat 2700 people.

A \$50,000 organ was installed. Sparkling chandeliers hung in the lobby, foyer, and the ballroom. In addition to the theater, there were 18 stores, a pool hall, a 12-lane bowling alley, a café, a ballroom, and lounges. Many of the rooms were furnished with expensive carpeting, antique furniture and chandeliers.

Famous stars of the time came to perform, and the theater showed the latest movies, their titles advertised in large letters lit with electric lights on the huge marquee in front of the building. The façade had huge columns and a large sign with Orpheum spelled out in horizontal letters.

In 1965 the Orpheum met a sad and tragic end. It was bought by the

Illinois National Bank for \$600,000 and demolished to make room for drive-through bank lanes.

The Kerasotes Brothers, Gus and Louis, were instrumental in opening theaters in Springfield starting with a nickelodeon called The Royal at Sixth and Monroe (1909-1920), followed by the Savoy, Sixth near Jefferson (1912), the Strand, and the Senate.

The Strand opened in 1921 on the southeast corner of Sixth and Washington in the former First National Bank Building and sported a grand organ that could reproduce sounds of a steamboat whistle, hooves of horses pounding on the ground, etc. It closed in the mid-1960s.

The Senate at 509 E. Monroe had started as The Gaiety in 1907.

“talkie.” The Tivoli was torn down in 1983.

The Lincoln at 329 S. Fifth had originally been the Princess which had opened in 1914 in a former YMCA building constructed in 1884. Frisina Amusements owner Dominic Frisina bought the Princess from fellow theater-chain owner W.W. Watts, remodeling it in two weeks and renaming it the Lincoln. As part of a larger package in 1929, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox purchased it and two other Springfield theaters from Frisina and renamed it the Fox Lincoln. When Fox eventually sold it, it was simply called the Lincoln. It hosted the first premiere of the movie *Young Mr. Lincoln* in 1939, and many of the stars in the movie came to Springfield. The theater was demolished in 1976



for a parking lot.

The State was on Washington Street across from the Strand; it opened in 1937 and closed in the 1960s. The property sat vacant until 1971 when it became the Cinema Art Theater but was closed down when it was discovered the owner was

Kerasotes bought it in 1929 and renamed it the Senate. It closed its doors in 1983.

In the 1940s, '50s and '60s downtown drew crowds to the movie theaters. There were up to seven to choose from: the Orpheum, Tivoli, Lincoln and Roxy were on Fifth Street, the Strand on Sixth Street, the State on Washington Street and the Senate on Monroe Street. The area became known as Theater Row.

Tivoli opened in 1929 in the theater originally called The Lyric at 216 S. Fifth. The Lyric was the first theater in Springfield to show a

showing pornographic films.

There were also other theaters around town. South Town on South Grand Avenue and 11<sup>th</sup> opened in 1915 as the Empress, was renamed South Town in 1939, and closed in 1959. The original marquee is still in existence and advertises stained glass for the studio now in the building. The Pantheon at Ninth and North Grand operated from 1926-1964, and the Esquire on S. MacArthur near South Grand from 1937-2004.

Springfield has been a mecca of theaters and halls that provided entertainment for many throughout the years.

# February Program to Focus on Key Black Women, Restoration Effort



*(Continued from page 1)*

Prior to that, Hammons oversaw a special education program underwritten by the Springfield Junior League and held at the Westminster Presbyterian Church. Before moving to Springfield, she taught and had been a principal in Champaign. The daughter of a long line of educators, she was a graduate of the University of Illinois with a degree in education.

Gina Lathan, who in 2019 was integral to the founding of the Route History Museum in Springfield, will talk about another restoration project on which she is currently working, the former home of the Ambidexter Industrial and Normal Institute housed in the Taylor House (1857) at 902 South Twelfth Street that came within a hair's breath of being razed in 1983.

The building, constructed by former Sangamon County Judge John Taylor, in 1867 became the Ulrich Home for Fallen Women and then in 1901, the Ambidexter Industrial and Normal Institute, a school founded by G.H. McDaniel modeled the school after Booker T. Washington's renowned

*Tuskegee Institute.* Arts and sciences were taught as well as domestic skills and period trades. A glee club and a literary society were formed. Funding



**EDUCATOR Gertrude Wright Morgan (seated center at the 1905 Niagara Convention) became a national civil rights figure in the years following her graduation from Springfield High School.**

was a struggle from the start.

When the school board denied them use of a public-school building, the institute acquired the Taylor House. When funds could not be found for an additional structure, they built onto the house itself. Dr. J.H. McGee was appointed school president and served from 1906 until 1908 when the school

closed. In a final effort, Dr. McGee promoted the house as a home for orphans to be established by a state or national colored fraternal.

The house retained its architectural distinction, though its structural integrity gradually declined during the following 100 plus years.

Unoccupied and deteriorated, the property was acquired in 1983 by Jerry and Doranne Jacobson with the intention of restoring its grandeur. It was listed as one of the Ten Most Endangered Historic Places in 2004 by Landmarks Illinois, but business partners were not forthcoming and by fall of 2013 the

house was slated for demolition, a step that almost materialized in 2018 but stalled at the last minute when a new neighborhood-based group, the Springfield Project formed to stop its destruction and move it into the restoration category.

Lathan is an integral part of that effort.

**Sangamon County Historical Society**  
P.O. Box 9744,  
Springfield, IL 62791-9744  
*Return Service Requested*

Non-profit Organization  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Permit No. 777  
Springfield, Illinois

---

**Sangamon County Historical Society 2021-2022 MEMBERSHIP/MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL Form**

Mail this form with your check to the Sangamon County Historical Society, Box 9744, Springfield, IL 62791-9744. Our membership year runs from June 1 to May 31. All memberships cover adults and children 16 and over at living at the same address. Be sure to list their names.

Your Full Name \_\_\_\_\_ Spouse/Significant Other First Name \_\_\_\_\_

Spouse's maiden name where applicable \_\_\_\_\_ Your e-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Your address \_\_\_\_\_ City, State , Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Full Names of other family members included in your membership:

*Choose Your Level of Membership:*  Regular (\$30)  Pioneer (\$100)  Settler (\$250)  Trailblazer (\$500)  
 Lifetime (\$700 one-time fee)  College/University Student (individual) (\$20)

This is a GIFT (Name of recipient, mailing and e-mail address):

I am adding a donation to the Society in addition to my membership in the amount of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

JANUARY 2022 JANUARY 2022 JANUARY 2022 JANUARY 2022 JANUARY 2022