



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, SangamonLink.org

VOLUME 59 NO. 4

APRIL 2023

19th Century Springfield Builder's Far-Reaching Impact Here and Nationally to be Focus of April 18 Program

The Sangamon County Historical Society will be turning its attention to the life and works of Colonel James Culver, one of Springfield's most prolific 19th century builders, on Tuesday, April 18, with a presentation by Lee-Ann Burgener who has spent years digging into the history of the illustrious Culver family and its local, state and national ties to American history.

The presentation, part of the Society's monthly program series, starts at 5:30 p.m. in the Carnegie Room at the City of Springfield's Lincoln Library, 326 South Seventh Street. The meeting is free and open to the public.

The SCHS presentation comes on the heels of a Saturday, April 8 Springfield Area Home Builders Association chartered bus tour of James Culver's iconic historical Springfield buildings, of which the Society is one of the event sponsors. (See Calendar, Page 7). Burgener, a member of the Society, is executive officer of the Association.

Her interest in Culver runs deep, sparked by an eighth grade genealogy homework assignment that for her has "never ended." Over the years she has filled in three times staffing the Metro Decatur Home Builders Association and once for the Home Builders Association of Illinois. While working for

the Decatur Association, she came across the book *'The Forgotten Life of Sarah Grady'* which led her to reminisce about the beautiful historic homes on the west side of Decatur, her hometown. The book inspired her to



seek a community service project for the Decatur Home Builders Association. She contacted the author of the book who serves on the board of the Historic Decatur Foundation, a non-profit organization working to restore the home of James Culver's brother, John Culver,

which was built in 1888.

Burgener attended the Foundation's board meeting, asked some questions, and was immediately invited to join the board. She began researching the claim that James Culver's brother, John, was the founder of Ameren Illinois, which led to research on the entire Culver family and their businesses. "I became hooked by all the fascinating information I learned about the two brothers and their historic accomplishments not only in Springfield and Decatur, but in American history," she says,

James Culver was known as "Colonel" for most of his life, reflecting longtime service commanding the Illinois National Guard's 5th Infantry Regiment. He was promoted to brigadier general in 1900, when Governor John Tanner named him to head the Guard's 2nd Brigade. Culver would eventually build the Governor Tanner monument in Oak Ridge cemetery. Culver, who died of kidney disease in 1911, is also buried in Oak Ridge. The Culver firm closed in 1912.

Culver's Culver Marble and Stone Company and its offshoots were among the Springfield area's most prominent builders from the early

Continued on Page 4

IN THIS ISSUE:

- ◆ FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK.....2
- ◆ GRANT DEADLINE NEARS3
- ◆ TOURING URSULINE'S FUTURE.....6
- ◆ ANNUAL DINNER SITE CHOSEN7
- ◆ Calendar on 77

CHECK THIS OUT!



Board Member Scott Pillsbury displays a \$2,000 donation from Green Family Stores that, in partnership with WICS News Channel 20, designated SCHS the February "Charity of the Month" in the station's "3 Degree Weather Guarantee" program that benefits local non-profit organizations. For details see page 3.

FIRST LOOK:

Society members got their first look last month at the reconstruction and future of buildings at the former Ursuline site. See page 6.





From the President's Desk



Susan Helm

Springing Forward With a Full Agenda and Dinner Plans Set

It's exciting times for the Sangamon County Historical Society as we just completed our first members-only field trip in a while to the former Ursuline Academy property now being renovated by Tony and Ann Libri's group. We will continue our in-person programs through May and then

cap the year with our annual meeting on Tuesday, June 13 at Island Bay Yacht Club. Please watch for more details.

I continue to be amazed at how dedicated our membership is by attending some of our programs and donating to our grant fund. This brings us to that time of year where we anxiously await what the community will submit in the way of grants for our review.

The deadline is April 20 and the recipients will be honored and receive their checks at our annual meeting.

Our board members continue to remain strong and dedicated. We are truly a working board so if you're interested in local history and want to



SCHS Board members look on as President Helm (center) accepts a check from fellow board member Scott Pillsbury on behalf of Green Family Stores/WICS Storm Team 20 "3 Degree Weather Guarantee." More on the funding program, page 3.

make a difference, consider becoming a board member by contacting Mary Alice Davis at sapphire1404@comcast.net.

Scott Pillsbury offered his services last year and has been a welcome addition to our board. We are already looking forward to our annual cemetery walk in October 1 and it's never far from our thoughts as we look into adding music to the tour and once again hiring The Storyteller Studio to shoot another promotional video.

Meanwhile, behind the scenes, we are looking for a new host for our two websites and coming up in late spring will mark the 10th anniversary of the soft opening of *SangamonLink* with Mike Kienzler at the helm.



Historico, published 9 times a year (except July, August & 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 or sancohis.org. Catch us on **Facebook** and **Twitter**. Send event announcements to historicoeditor@gmail.com.

Vicky Whitaker, *Historico* Editor.

Cinda Klickna, Mike Kienzler, contributors



April 20 Deadline

Time Running Out to Apply for Society's Special Project Grants

The clock is ticking for organizations and individuals seeking a 2023 annual Sangamon County Historical Society Special Project Grant. The deadline is April 20.

The grants are designed to help underwrite the cost of creating or preserving small but significant projects linked to the history of Sangamon County and must be completed within a year.

Winners are selected by the Society's Special Projects Grant Committee which reviews the applications and makes its recommendations to the Society's board.

There are limitations on the types of project the Society will consider funding. The grant program generally does not provide funding for the printing of books, the cost of private events, salaries or advertising. The Society must be publicly acknowledged for its support in signage or other materials associated with the project. In most instances, grant winners may be asked to be part

of or give an individual program about their project at a future Society program.

Applications and competition rules can be found on-line at the Society's website in the section labeled "Grants." Details about previous award winners can also be found on the www.sangamonhistory.org "Grants" section.

Completed forms must be submitted online or mailed to the Sangamon County Historical Society, Special Projects Committee, P.O. Box 9744, Springfield, IL 62791-9744 and received by the deadline date. Award winners will be publicly announced and invited to attend the Society's annual dinner in June for a check presentation ceremony.



2022-2023 OFFICERS

President.....Susan Helm
 Vice-President.....Cinda Klickna
 Secretary.....Sarah Adams
 Treasurer.....Jerry Smith
 Past-President....Stephanie Martin

DIRECTORS

Term Ending June 2023

Vincent Chappelle
 Peter Harbison
 Mary Mucciante
 Ruth Slottag
 Scott Pillsbury

DIRECTORS

Term Ending June 2024

Mary Alice Davis
 Kathy Hoffmann
 Kathy Dehen

DIRECTORS

Term Ending June 2025

Elaine Hoff
 Larry Stone
 Angela Weiss
 Vicky Whitaker

SCHS Gets \$2,000 Gift From Green Family Stores Via WICS News 20 "3 Degree Weather Guarantee"

April showers may bring flowers, but March brought a different kind of greenery to the Sangamon County Historical Society: a check for \$2,000.

The gift came from Green Family Stores that since 2014 has been partnering with WICS News Channel 20 for the station's "3 Degree Weather Guarantee" that, over the years, has seen thousands of dollars go to dozens of local 501c3 non-profit organizations.

SCHS was the February "Charity of the Month." SCHS board member Scott Pillsbury, a Senior Sales Associate at Green Lincoln Mazda, submitted an application on behalf of SCHS in the highly competitive process.

The 3 Degree Weather Guarantee operates like this: each weeknight the station's Storm Team 20 meteorologists predict the next day's high temperature. If they are correct within three degrees, Green Family Stores donates \$100 to that month's designee.

Previous recipients reflect a wide-range of locally based or local arms of national organizations including Crime Stoppers, Habitat for Humanity, Mini O'Beirne Crisis Nursery, and the Boys and Girls Club of Central Illinois.

Please make note of our official mailing address:

SCHS
Box 9744
Springfield, Illinois,
62791-9744

Springfield Builder's Historic Legacy Lives On

(Continued from page 1)

1870s until 1912.

As a contractor, the Culver firm was given credit for more than 3,000 structures, many of them large and virtually all distinctive for their imposing stonework.

Many Culver buildings have since disappeared, among

announced that the fire had been started by a 10-year-old boy from a troubled family who liked to watch things burn. The boy had set fire to a paper bag weighted with lead solder and threw it onto the Arsenal stage, setting the curtains on fire. The young arsonist was identified by an arsenal janitor who had seen a young boy who had reported a fire



LOST BUT NOT FORGOTTEN: The former Illinois State Armory built by Culver Stone and Marble in the early 1900s was destroyed in a fire set by a young arsonist in 1934.

them the Illinois State Arsenal at Second and Monroe that was dedicated by President Theodore Roosevelt at Second and Monroe streets on June 4, 1903. The structure, designed by Bullard & Bullard architects and built at a cost of \$150,000 by Culver Stone and Marble Company, resembled a medieval fort, complete with turrets and battlements, and was popularly known as *The Castle*. The building replaced the state's Civil War-era arsenal on North Fifth Street.

According to SangamonLink.org, the Sangamon County Historical Society's on-line encyclopedia of county history, the climax of the arsenal's dedication day was a grand ball for which two bands provided dance music in the brilliantly lit space.

Among celebrities who performed or attended functions at the arsenal over the years were Will Rogers, King Albert of Belgium, John Philip Sousa and his band, Arturo Toscanini and the La Scala Orchestra, and Presidents Calvin Coolidge, William Howard Taft, Herbert Hoover and Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Its size made the arsenal a popular venue for exhibitions, concerts, and balls. On Sunday, February 18, 1934, fire broke out in the arsenal. The spectacular blaze ignited some of the ammunition stored there and spectators reported that the rifle rounds going off sounded like popcorn popping.

Firefighters prevented 150 pounds of dynamite stored in the basement from exploding. While there were no serious injuries, the fire destroyed the building and its contents.

After a three-month investigation, the state fire marshal

in a restroom wastebasket. Plans to replace the building began immediately and its successor, the Illinois State Armory, opened in 1937.

Also gone are the old Springfield City Hall built in 1893 on the southeast corner of Seventh Street and demolished in 1960 and the city's original public library that was razed in the early 1970s and whose construction in 1904 was funded in part by famed industrialist Andrew Carnegie. Both buildings were replaced by more modern structures.

(Carvings and stone work created by Culver for the old library exterior were saved prior to its razing through fundraising efforts by the Society. The Culver pieces—warehoused for years by the city but eventually discarded and dumped in a lot on the State Fair grounds—were discovered, recovered and then restored by Ace Sign Company. The Culver collection was put on public display at the Ace Sign Museum in Springfield this past December, but previewed first on December 14 by attendees at the Society's annual holiday gathering held at the Museum).

Culver also installed a new first floor at what is now the Old State Capitol in 1898-99, but that addition was removed when the building was restored to its Lincoln-era appearance in the 1960s.

Still Standing

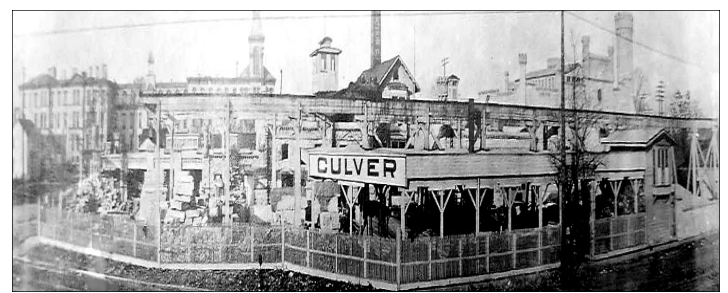
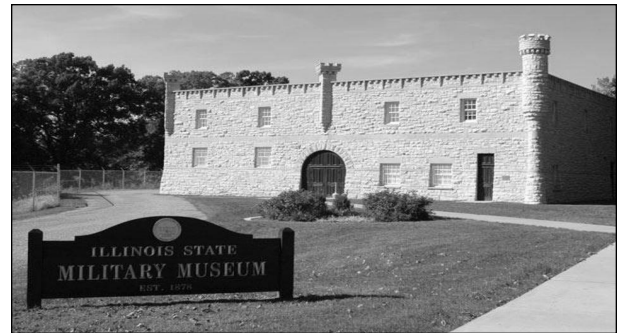
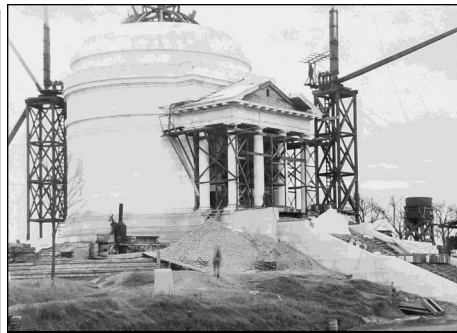
Among remaining local Culver structures in Springfield are the Illinois National Guard Military Museum (formerly the Camp Lincoln Commissary) and the Kumler Methodist

(Continued on page 5)



FIRST PROJECT: Kumler Methodist Church at Fifth and Carpenter streets (above, left) was Culver's first project in Springfield. He also built the Governor Tanner monument in Oak Ridge cemetery (above, right).

MILITARY MONUMENTS AND BUILDINGS are part of the Culver legacy and include the Civil War Monument (at right under construction and below as it looks today) in Mississippi dedicated in 1906 at Vicksburg National Military Park to commemorate Illinois service during the Vicksburg Campaign. It is the largest and most recognized monument on the battlefield. The Culver-built Camp Lincoln Commissary in Springfield, (top, far right) now houses the Illinois State Military Museum.



(Continued from page 4)

Church at Fifth and Carpenter streets, his first project in Springfield.

Other still standing Springfield Culver works include the Lincoln Park Pavilion and the former home of Governor Richard Yates on Williams Blvd in Leland Grove. The Oak Ridge Cemetery office on Monument Avenue just outside the cemetery is a characteristic Culver design.

Culver Construction Company also handled the first reconstruction of Lincoln's Tomb in 1899-1901 when the tomb was dismantled in order to replace its footings and stabilize the structure. The job ultimately included President Lincoln's final reburial, 10 feet below the tomb's burial chamber.

Beyond Springfield, Colonel Culver built monuments commemorating Illinoisans' contributions to the Civil War battles of Vicksburg in Mississippi and Shiloh in southwestern Tennessee.

The Culver Construction Company operated from a stone yard (above) that occupied about a block from Eighth to Ninth streets along Madison.

The facility boasted a 30-ton locomotive crane, equipment to cut, shape and polish stone, and complete blacksmith, carpenter, paint and steam-fitting shops. Dubbed "*Culver Castle*," the main building was razed in the late 20th century to accommodate expansion by nearby St. John's Hospital.

In her presentation, Burgener will be showing photos and provide details about the company's history, design, construction and fate of both local structures and military buildings and Civil War monuments in Vicksburg, Mississippi, and Chickamauga and Shiloh that underscore the Culver's role in American history.

Members-Only Ursuline Tour a Hit With Lots to Look At

Defying the threat of bad weather, over 50 members of the Sangamon County Historical Society opted for a private tour of renovations to key buildings on the former Ursuline Academy/Springfield College/Benedictine University property in Springfield on March 21, led by Tony Libri, the driving force on the restoration project.

Libri purchased the former campus site between Fifth and Sixth Streets last year and is in the process of restoring some of its most historic buildings including St. Ursula's Hall, the Conservatory of Music that is being returned to its original beauty and will be used for community events.

Opened as an all-girls high school by the Ursuline Sisters—an Order of Catholic Nuns—in August, 1857, the Ursuline Academy relocated from Fifth and Mason streets to the larger campus in the late 1890s where it added classrooms and convent space, including a chapel in 1894, and in 1908, St. Ursula's Hall, the Conservatory of Music.

In 1929, the Ursulines founded and added Springfield Junior College to the site that for decades would be Springfield's only post-secondary educational institution. By 1957, when the Ursulines were celebrating their Centennial in Springfield, they were educating 3,700 children and adults in the city. Expansion continued in 1958 with the completion of the Sixth Street Academy building as well as college dorm space, Mueth

Hall, Hanlon Hall and additions to the convent building.

In 1968, Springfield Junior College was renamed Springfield College in Illinois, affiliating with Benedictine University of Lisle, Illinois in 2003 that gradually offered four-year degree programs here. At that point, the Ursulines bowed out of all involvement with the college.

The Ursuline Sisters eventually transferred ownership of the property it no longer needed to Benedictine. On May 11, 2007, the Springfield College in Illinois-Benedictine University Board of Directors voted to close Ursuline Academy at the end of the 2006-2007 school year. In October 2014, Benedictine announced it would shutdown of all its undergraduate programs in Springfield, permanently closing the campus.

The site went up for sale in 2018. Libri, the former Sangamon County Circuit Clerk, and his wife Ann, have formed a non-profit corporation, Preservation Inc, to restore the historic site starting with the Conservatory of Music that had been vacant since 2007, and damaged by roof leaks and neglect.

Teams of volunteers have been working on its restoration for several months. Libri envisions its use as a cultural center, a unique venue for social events and a return to the concept envisioned by its designer, William Conway, the city's first architect, as a place to hold large events and concerts.



FROM HANDS-ON TO HOSPITALITY, tour takers had lots to take in during last month's SCHS members-only visit to the former Ursuline site now under restoration. Starting at the Becker Library where members were able to look at original documents and a see a map of the campus, host Tony Libri--who purchased the property to preserve and restore its key historic buildings--led the tour that included the Conservatory of Music and the nearby Chapel. Libri and SCHS hospitality chair Marion Leach provided treats for the group.

Photos (top down from left), by Larry Stone and Cinda Klickna, Susan Helm, Stone, Helm, and Stone.

Calendar on 7:

A Heads Up Guide to Area History Events



Send announcements, information, photos and illustrations to historicoeditor@gmail.com. You can still see a list and links to all the Zoom programs the Society offered during the Pandemic on-site meeting shut-down, by going to the SCHS website, sangamonhistory.org.

Saturday, April 8: Sites of Springfield: Colonel Culver's Stone Structures Presentation and Tour. 1 p.m. Lincoln Park Pavilion at 1601 North Fifth Street. SCHS is one of several sponsors for this ticketed and pre-reservation-required Springfield Area Home Builders Association presentation and bus tour of some of Colonel James Culver's iconic Springfield buildings. Seating is limited. Tickets are \$85 per person for the presentation and tour, \$25 for the presentation only. For reservations and information, call 217-698-4941 or go to springfieldareahba.com.

Tuesday, April 18: Colonel James Culver's Lasting Impact. 5:30 p.m., Carnegie Room, City of Springfield Lincoln Library. Historian Lee-Ann Burgener executive officer of the Springfield Area Home Builders Association and a Culver historian, takes a close look at the life and impact the 19th Century Springfield builder had in shaping local, state and national history. Free. See details, Page 1.



Road Conductors buried at Oak Ridge Cemetery. The outdoor event will combine historical re-enactment, period music, and unveiling of a gravesite plaque that will go on each grave as historians work to identify those at Oak Ridge who were heroic "Freedom Train" conductors. The program, based on and with the assistance of the Tazewell County Genealogical and Historical Society program for which it created the plaques, will be held adjacent to the Oak Ridge Bell Tower with parking nearby. Seating is limited, but attendees are encouraged to bring a folding chair. Tazewell representatives

are expected to be in attendance.



Thursday, April 20: Deadline for applying for the Society's 2023 Special Projects Grants. The clock is ticking, the deadline fast approaching. For details, Page 3 or see Grants on the Society's website: sangamonhistory.org.

Tuesday, May 16: Heroes and Heroines: Honoring the Legacy of Underground Civil War Era Railroad Conductors, 5:30 p.m. Oak Ridge Cemetery. The Society launches the first in a series of special dedication presentations honoring Civil War Era Underground Rail

Sunday, May 28, Billy Sunday 1909 Celebration. 4 p.m. Former professional baseball player turned fiery evangelist Billy Sunday--impersonated by Russ Williams--will retell the famed preacher's personal story just as he told it in Springfield on March 21, 1909 before 8,000 men in this free Pentecost Sunday presentation at the Bank of Springfield Downtown Center. sponsored by the Billy Sunday 1909 Celebration Committee, a local ministerial alliance. For information see billysunday1909.org.

Tuesday, May 30: SCHS Dues for 2023-2024 SCHS Membership Renewal Deadline.

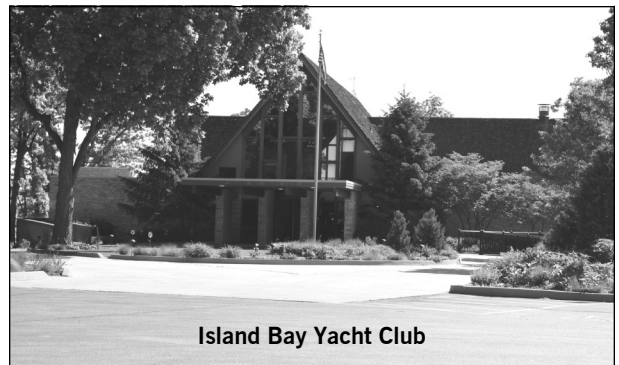
Tuesday, June 13: SCHS Annual Dinner, 5:30 p.m., Island Bay Yacht Club, 76 Yacht Club Drive, Springfield. A reservation form, pricing and other information will be in the May issue of *Historico* and on-line at sangamonhistory.org.

Sunday, October 1: SCHS Annual Oak Ridge Cemetery Walk.

Island Bay Yacht Club to be Site of SCHS Annual Dinner June 13

Ticket information and a member reservation form will appear in *Historico* next month as the Society readies for its annual June dinner normally held after the Society's fiscal year ends on May 31. A dues notice will also appear in the May issue. Guest tickets will be available for the dinner at a non-member rate.

This will be the second time the Island Bay Yacht Club is hosting the dinner, an outdoor event overlooking Lake Springfield in a sprawling tented patio area that provides protection from the elements but retains the view in case of rain. The buffet menu, ticket prices, reservation deadline and other information will be on the sign-up form. Winners of the 2023 Special Projects Grants will be among the Society's guests. Officer elections and annual Society business will also be conducted.



Island Bay Yacht Club

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 2022-2023 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. *PLEASE PRINT.*

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 \$ _____

APRIL 2023 APRIL 2023 APRIL 2023 APRIL 2023 APRIL 2023 APRIL 2023