



HISTORICO

Sangamon County Historical Society Newsletter

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NOVEMBER, 2011

History, Future On Tap

November 15 Meeting to Be Held at Adams Wildlife Sanctuary

Considered a fixture on Springfield's east side for nearly 150 years, Adams House will be the setting for the Society's next meeting, Tuesday, November 15 at what is now the Illinois Audubon Society's Adams Wildlife Sanctuary. The meeting begins at 5:30 p.m. at the facility at 2315 Clear Lake Avenue. Parking is very limited.

Addressing the group will be Tom Clay, Executive Director of the Illinois Audubon Society. Clay is expected to provide an overview of the post-settlement history of the site with an in-depth focus on the Adams family who lived there. He will also talk about the Illinois Audubon Society, the oldest private conservation organization in Illinois and its future at the Sanctuary.

The house and woodlands were donated to the Illinois Audubon Society by Margery Adams, who lived in the home for 86 years until her death in 1983. The house, which was built in 1857, was purchased by her grandfather,

Justice of the Peace L.B. Adams in 1869. For the next three generations, the Adams property would remain free from building development. Margary Adams was born in 1897 to L.B. Adams' son, James, who established a farm and orchard on the site.

He died in 1931 and in 1941, when Margary's mother died, the farm and orchard were allowed to revert to woodlands.

Clay, who has headed the IAS since 2006, previously served as Education Director for the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County and Education Division Chief for the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.



ADAMS HOUSE

Edwards Place Mansion Draws Raves, New Spotlight on Old Scandal

Sangamon County Historical Society members and guests got an insider's look at Edwards Place October 18, when they toured and learned more about the history of what is the oldest home in Springfield still on its original foundation. The Italianate mansion serves as headquarters for the Springfield Art Association, which has pre-

served much of its rich history. "It's magnificent," reported board member Donna Catlin, who photographed every aspect of the building and a slide show by Erika Holst, curator of the Association's collections and an author with an extensive background in history. Her book, *Wicked Springfield: Crime, Corruption, and*

Scandal During the Lincoln Era, was published in 2010 by The History Press.

Holst has been involved in a variety of museum and history projects throughout Illinois including the David Davis Mansion State Historic Site in Bloomington, the McLean County Museum of History in Bloomington, the

(Continued on page 4)

INSIDE

- Nancy's Notes.....2
- Barns: Festival Tree Theme.....3
- Leone Gets Preservation Honor.....4
- Holiday Party Save The Date.....7



SETTING THE TONE: They may be modern day musicians but their music and instruments fit in perfectly at Old Settlers Day picnic held October 22 at Pioneer Park. More photos, commentary, page 6.

Nancy's Notes



NANCY CHAPIN

The weather couldn't have been more perfect for a delightful recreation of Old Settlers Society meetings! The park was lovely and groomed to a 'T', and the arrangements so carefully made by Don Springer and his committee worked perfectly. The dessert auction was a wonderful success with about 13 delicious looking desserts going for a grand total of \$320!!! thanks to the magical work of master auctioneer, Bill Gaule!

Abundant food and drink was consumed to the delightful accompaniment of Thistle and Thyme and the music added to the special atmosphere of that lovely evening.

Dick Hart began his remarks by first pointing out that while we refer to those who settled the area as 'Old Settlers', they had not been 'old' at all but were young Americans striking out on their own full of hopes and dreams. The 'old' settler title was a reflection of their time in the area, for the Old Settlers Society was not formed until 1859 and the 'old' settlers were those who had been here prior to the Big Snow in 1830-31. He then read a description of the horrific conditions of the Big Snow that had earned it the prominence of being the dividing time for 'real men (and women)' in the area!

Dick went on to describe the settlers of the Sugar Creek area, making the point they constituted the core of the group who established Sangamon as a County in 1821. He pointed out that one of their members, Job Fletcher, had been one of the Long Nine, and that another had been one of the founders of Springfield itself! He reported on the meetings of the Old Settlers' Society over the years, which were very similar in format, except for the long, long speeches, which were mercifully absent and replaced by Dick's interesting, short talk. The evening ended with the group singing together *America the*

Beautiful led by Bill Furry. Pictures by Donna Catlin of the event are available on page 6 and on our **Facebook** page.

* * *

As the end of the calendar year approaches, we are coming to the end of our 50th anniversary celebrations, which began in April, 2011 with the reception and talk by *Sugar Creek* author, John Mack Faragher.

This fall we have been reflecting on our roots. The Old Settlers' Day picnic meeting at Pioneer Park in October was not only fun, but also a reminder, without the long-winded speeches, of our real roots. Old Settlers' Society members, with the conditions of membership greatly changed from the original requirement only admitting those who were here for the Big Snow in 1831, had meetings very similar to the one we had (without the charming music of Thistle and Thyme I'm sure), that continued until 1943.

A decade or so later it became obvious that their role of being a voice for the preservation of our history was needed in the community and the Sangamon County Historical Society was formed.

We have one more activity planned to celebrate our 50 years and that is the holiday party, which will reflect the world as it was 50 years ago in a delightful way!

Then, having thoroughly celebrated our last 50 years, we will be ready to start on the next 50!!

As there will not be a December *Historico*, Happy Holidays to all of you, though we do hope to see you at the holiday party at Strawbridge House!

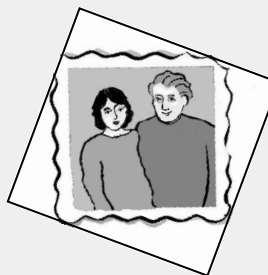
Nancy

Springfield Through Our Eyes

The third, and final book of the series sponsored by the *State Journal-Register* is out! A marvelous review of all of Springfield's history, from the 1800s to today, this book even changes to full color for the modern photos. The book also includes six photographs of our own award winning photographer, Donna Catlin! Books are available to members only and will be \$30 each, available at the November meeting and the holiday party in December.



Have a snapshot of past president Isabella Bradford, Janet Lundgren, Robert Howard or Don Henry? We're still seeking their photos for our anniversary yearbook. Please call the office at 525-1961 if you can provide one. And congratulations and thanks to Phyllis Brisenenden for rounding up two of our missing photos and to Dick Stockbarger



PHOTOS WANTED!



Historico, published 10 times a year, is the monthly bulletin for members of the Sangamon County Historical Society. Back issues are always available on-line in PDF format at our website, www.sancohis.org. We are in the process of redesigning our website. Look for more information in the future. Event updates also can be found on our **Facebook** page (www.facebook.com) and **Twitter**. (www.twitter.com). Log in and search for *Sangamon County Historical Society*.

Vicky Whitaker, *Historico* Editor

HONORED: Society Life Member Tony Leone is presented with a plaque by Springfield Mayor J. Michael Houston after being named Preservationist of the Year by the Springfield Historic Sites Commission. In a ceremony last month at Edwards Place. Leone, an outspoken preservationist, restored the Pasfield House, turning it into a popular bed and breakfast, reception and meeting center. Leone is also a member of the Illinois State Historic Preservation Commission. This is the 18th year the Mayor's Awards for Historic Preservation have been presented.



Sangamon County Barns Focus of Society's Festival Tree

The barns of Sangamon County, dolled up with a bit of glitter and some color enhancement courtesy of Photoshop, will be the featured ornaments this year in the Society's entry at the 2011 Festival of Trees. Photos of several dozen barns around the county that were turned into individual ornaments came from the photo collection of the Sangamon Valley Room at the city's Lincoln Library and from photographers Donna Catlin, Richard Hart, and Roger Whitaker. The Festival, which benefits Memorial Medical Foundation's outreach efforts, runs from Saturday, November 19 through Sunday, November 27, including Thanksgiving. This is the third year the Society has joined several hundred other community organizations in decorating a tree for what has become the largest holiday season family event in Central Illinois. It's anticipated that more than 40,000 visitors will be viewing the trees during the run of the Festival that is held indoors in the Orr Building on the State Fairgrounds in Springfield. After the Festival ended last year, the Society's tree, saluting historic people and places from Springfield's past, was among a select group of trees displayed at the Governors Mansion in Springfield during the holiday season and was featured on *Illinois Stories* on public television. It is permanently housed at Pasfield House. A previous tree, with etched images of early Springfield, was later on display at a local medical office. For Festival hours and admission information, go to memorialsfestivaloftrees.com.

Please Take Note: Really! Publication Special!

During the month of November we will be selling the packets of notecards featuring images of yesterday's downtown Springfield at \$1 per packet, so you can stock up for holiday gifting! Notecards will be available at the November program meeting at the Adams Wildlife Center and at the office by calling 217-525-1961.



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NOVEMBER DONATIONS REPORT

The Society extends its appreciation to the following donors:

**Jack Alexander
 Cathy Cragoe
 Tim Krell
 Sue and Kent Massie
 George Myers
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 Don and Karen Springer**



**HISTORIC
Edwards
Place, now
the home of
the Spring-
field Art
Association.**

*Donna Catlin
photos*

Edwards Place Mansion A Trove of Local History, Works of Art

(Continued from page 1)

Cuneo Museum in Vernon Hills, Dickson Mounds, the Papers of Abraham Lincoln, the Illinois State Museum, and the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield.

“Holst presented a wonderful power point talk on the origins of the Edwards Place, the people who have lived there and the ways they have changed the house over the years,” observed Society president Nancy Chapin. “Recent archeological work has discovered some surprising details about the early utilization of the basement, and further architectural study has brought out the impact of various enlargements and renovations. Additionally Holst’s research has turned up delicious details about the original builder/owner Dr. Thomas Houghan.”

“Our group was fortunate to have Erika guide us through the history of Edwards Place sharing wonderful parts of history about the original owner, Dr. Thomas B. Houghan in the years between 1833-1843,” concurred Catlin. “Historical tales are not positive as to where Dr. Houghan gained his wealth,

but he soon became an upstanding citizen in Springfield serving as Director of a bank, Commissioner for railroads and various other community activities.”

And, noted Catlin, “In 1843, Benjamin S. and Helen Dodge Edwards bought this large home which sat on 15 acres with a variety of beautiful trees. Benjamin was a son of Ninian Edwards who was the first Territorial Governor of Illinois. A brother of Benjamin also named Ninian Edwards married Elizabeth Todd, who was the older sister of Mary Todd Lincoln. As you can imagine Abraham Lincoln and his Mary were guests in this home many times. Benjamin being a lawyer and relative of prominent people enabled the Edwards family to entertain many dignitaries. People such as the Lincolns and Stephen A. Douglas were often guests at their lavish dinner parties held in this home.”

The Edwards family made additions to the home while various members of the Edwards family continued living in the home until the early 1900s, Holst told the group. Around 1909 the Ed-

wards family was generous in donating their home to a local group of artists which officially around 1914 became The Springfield Art Association.

Holst also reported on the work of *Sullivan Preservation* of Chicago, which has made recommendations for restoring the house to the Lincoln/post-Lincoln era to reflect the home’s highest social period. Samples of the proposed colors and materials were viewed in various rooms after the meeting.





CAPTURING AN ERA: Society members get a first-hand look at the Edwards mansion and its historic furnishings.

Story Behind the Story

Court Case Blows A Secret Life Physician Tried to Hide

When Dr. Thomas B. Houghan built the Edwards Place home he would later sell to Benjamin Edwards, only a handful of close relatives knew a secret that would have sullied his reputation as a leading citizen in Springfield and in his previously adopted hometown of St. Louis.

The conspiracy of silence ended in 1864, two years after his death when details of a sensational trial went nationwide. The trial drew testimony from some of New York's most prominent political figures and families.

A fast-rising star on Springfield's social scene in the 1830s, Dr. Houghan was one of the first 10 doctors to establish a practice in Springfield and in 1882, was appointed a member of the first board of health, noted Dr. Floyd S. Barringer, a physician and historian in his 1996 book, *Historic Homes of Springfield*. Beyond that, little was known about Dr. Houghan before his arrival in Springfield, Dr. Barringer said. The Edwards Place house was on part of an 80 acre site Dr. Houghan had previously purchased for \$2,800 from William Kelly, one of Springfield's original settlers.

Within a few years of moving from St. Louis to Springfield, Dr. Houghan became one of its leading citizens. He was named to the board of directors of the State Bank of Illinois, the Board of Commissioners for the Wabash and Mississippi Railroad and was a member of the Illinois Agricultural Society. He was also a founding trustee of the University of Illinois.

That ended on June 5, 1864, two years after Dr. Houghan's death in St. Louis, when the *New York Times* detailed testimony in a lawsuit brought against the executor of his estate, William T. Essex, by prominent New York attorney Ausburn Birdsall, Dr. Houghan's son-in-law. The story was carried by newspapers nationwide.

Birdsall sought to recoup \$5,000, money he said represented 20 years worth of expenses he incurred taking care of his mother-in-law. The court awarded him \$580.

More than the money, the case revealed that Dr. Houghan had served time in debtors' prison, deserted his wife and daughter in New York, changed his name and moved to St. Louis where he operated a book store. What's more, when his partner died, he married his partner's wife, making him a bigamist.

His real name was Thomas B. Houghon. Born in upstate New York, and wed in 1813 to Sophia Knapp, the daughter of a doctor for whom he had apprenticed, Dr. Houghon was sent to debtors' prison after losing all his money.

Once released, he changed the spelling of his last name to Houghan and fled west to Missouri, abandoning his wife and infant daughter in New York. Dr. Houghan didn't practice medicine in Missouri. Instead, he became bookseller in partnership with Thomas Essex. The firm, Essex & Houghan, was located on North Main Street in St. Louis. Essex died of cholera in 1828 and Dr. Houghan immediately married his widow, Ann.

Among those testifying at the trial was Birdsall's law partner, former New York Attorney General and Lieutenant Governor Daniel S. Dickinson, later a U.S. Senator from New York, who adopted Dr. Houghan's daughter Louise, his niece. (Dickinson's wife was Sophia's sister).

During the trial, Dickinson, a childhood friend and schoolmate of Dr. Houghan, recalled that the physician "suddenly left the country and went away" in 1817 or 1818. "He had always lived happily in his family and no cause is known in the family for his leaving except in his embarrassments (of going to debtors' prison). Dickinson never saw him again until 1855.

(Continued on page 7)

Pioneer Park Well Used

By Nancy Chapin

One of the unanticipated benefits of the Old Settlers picnic on October 22 was seeing how wonderfully Pioneer Park is being used now that the village of Chatham owns it.

The land for the park was donated to the SCHS in 1962. At the time the land was an overgrown piece of ground that required a great deal of time, effort and money to clean out and make usable. Over the ensuing years picnics were held from time to time, until their allure faded, and then the park was pretty much abandoned by the Society except for paying a nearby farmer to go in and mow it once a summer.

Vandalism, always a problem, gradually became worse and neighbors began to complain of late night parties and garbage being dumped at the park. Tim Krell undertook the supervision for the construction of a shelter as an incentive for greater park use, but shortly thereafter the Board decided that the park was proving more of a nuisance and expense rather than an asset to the society and we donated it to the village of Chatham as they were contiguous to it.

At the time there were those who were disappointed that we had let the park go, but the varied and continual use we saw in the park as preparation for the picnic took place was gratifying. Don Springer says that there was never a time when he was at the park when there weren't a variety of people using and enjoying the lovely, well kept grounds.

While our Old Settlers' picnic was underway on October 22, there were hikers, families with and without dogs, and even professional photographers in the park and around the bridge posing their subjects.

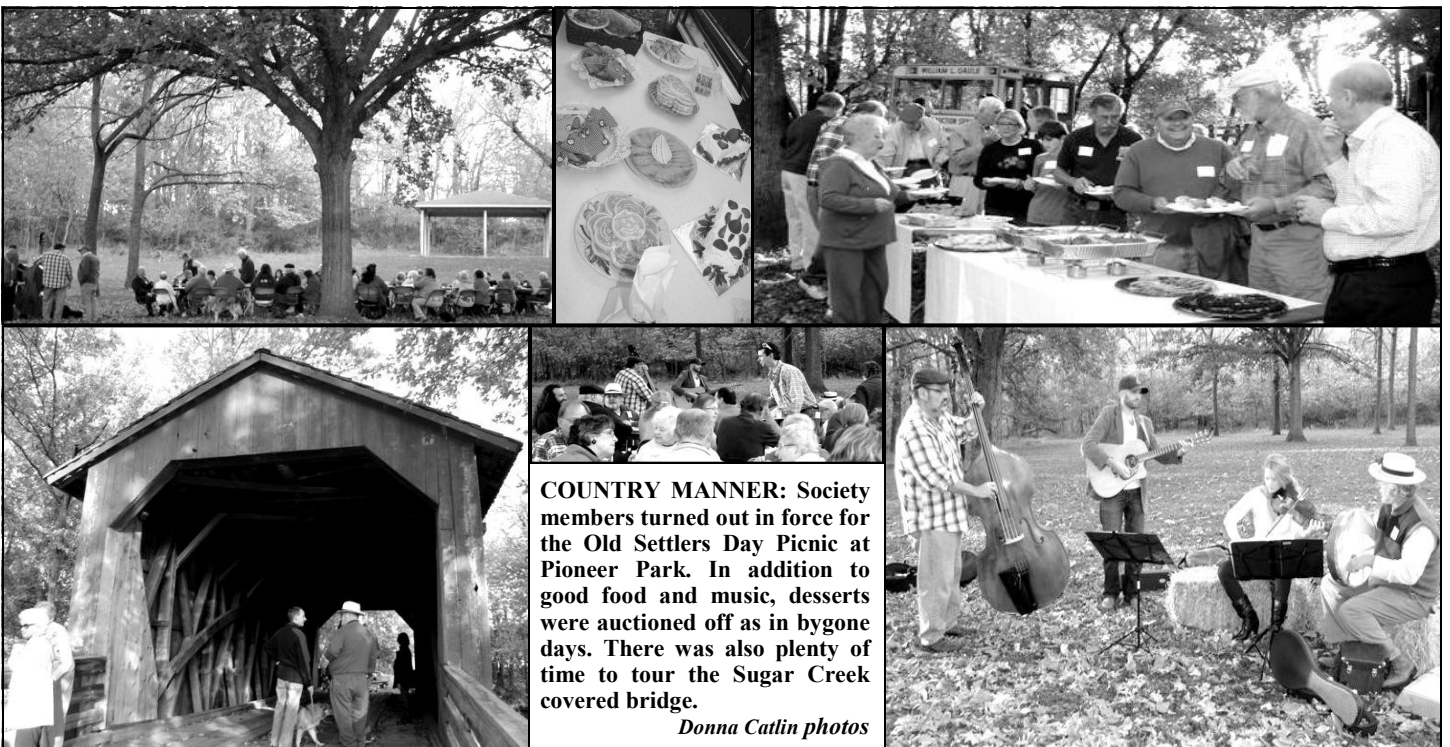
As early as 1947 a group in Glenarm attempted to raise money to restore the deteriorating covered bridge over Sugar Creek that had been built by Thomas Black in 1827. Their plans also included acquiring the land around it for a park, but their efforts failed.

In the 1950s there were two efforts to save the bridge from further deterioration; first by Rev. Grummon and some friends and then by a group that called itself the Covered Bridge Preservers. Both efforts were unsuccessful, though the department of highways did undertake an examination of the bridge to determine an estimation of restoration costs at the request of the second group. The problem was that the bridge fell under the jurisdiction of Ball Township, which had no money for the necessary restoration, and the state declined to take on the upkeep at that time.

Carl Wahl, engineer for the highway district, did suggest that the area surrounding the bridge be converted into a park. That statement may well have been the impetus for the 17 acre donation to the historical society just a few years later.

In the 1970s, after the only other covered bridge in Sangamon County burned one night, the state did take over ownership and maintenance of the bridge and the road was detoured away from the bridge to further protect it. Now with the wonderful activity around both the park and bridge today, it no longer matters that the ownership of the two have never been combined.

My guess is that per square foot the area is more heavily used than any bridge/park combination anywhere! It certainly makes the decision to turn the park over to Chatham seem brilliant!



A Special Invitation Will Be Heading Your Way Soon!

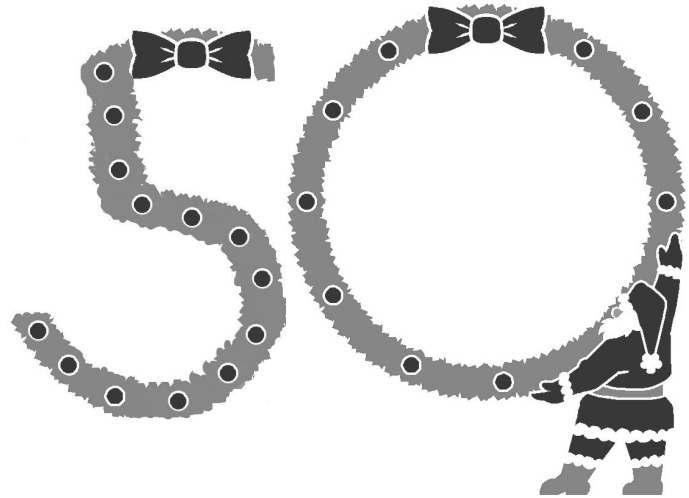
...which is why we want to make sure you save the date of the Society's annual Holiday Party, this year capping our 50th Anniversary Celebra-

Make A Note on Your Calendar Now!

Tuesday, December 13, 2011

6:30 - 8:30 P.M.

**Strawbridge-Shepherd
House**



And Watch the Mail for Your Invitation.

Lawsuit Blows the Lid on Secret Life of the Man Who Sold Edwards Place

(Continued from page 5)

Dickinson told the court that Dr. Houghan wrote to his wife and mother from Baltimore, Maryland in 1823 telling them he had been abroad and asking for forgiveness. He never responded to their pleas to return home. "Nothing was heard again of him for some years. From subsequent information, we learned that he spent his time in South or Central America."

During that time, the Dickinsons adopted Louise who went on to marry Birdsall in 1836. Birdsall served as a U.S. Congressman from New York from 1847-1849. Louise died in 1860.

In the early 1830s, Dickinson received a copy of a publication published by a friend in St. Louis that mentioned a Dr. Thomas Houghan. At the urging of Dickinson, his friend, a clergyman, made some inquiries to find out if Dr. Thomas Houghan was the same Dr. Thomas Houghan from New York. Dickinson also wrote to the St. Louis postmaster seeking the same information. Apparently the attempt

reached the desk of Dr. Houghan who wrote to Dickinson in protest, claiming not to be the man he suspected. He offered to meet Dickinson in New York City to prove it.

"I had been familiar with his handwriting all my days up to the time our correspondence ceased and I recognized that letter as being his handwriting although elaborately disguised. The West had become developed pretty rapidly and we learned that the gentleman had removed to Springfield, Illinois," Dickinson said.

At about the same time, Dickinson's relatives moved to Springfield. "They were furnished with an accurate description and likeness of Thomas Houghan and were requested to see if the gentleman at Springfield was the same. They were satisfied he was the man and called to see him and charged him with it. He denied it, but upon being pressed and the facts and circumstances stated to him, he confessed ...but desired them to keep the matter secret as he had married in St. Louis and was a

member of the church there and maintained other relations in society. I sent word through them, both by letter and verbally, that his daughter Louisa was about to be married and I received through them about \$200 for his daughter. From the time his identity became thus known, his family, as far as I know, have religiously kept the secret of his identity."

Dickinson finally met Dr. Houghan in person at the Astor House in New York City in 1855. "He had then, as I understood from him and others, moved back to St. Louis. I identified him at once as the husband of Sophia...We had a long conversation in full detail, of family history and affairs."

Before his death, Dr. Houghan donated \$12,000 to the Episcopal Diocese of St. Louis Orphans Home and left \$10,000 in his will to the Home. Sophia sued 400 Springfield landowners to recover dower rights from her husband's transactions. The outcome of those suits is still to be researched, Holst told *Historico*.

Sangamon County Historical Society
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Winter Advisory for Snowbirds

If you plan to spend time away from home this winter, please either call or e-mail the office and ask us to hold your *Historicos* or give us your holiday address and the dates you will be there. Our arrangement with the Post Office means that *Historicos* will not be forwarded with your other mail but will be returned to us at the full 1st class price! We need your help to save that money!



ON DISPLAY: Board member Carolyn Moore (left) and president Nancy Chapin look over some of the items on a new Society publication rack that made its debut at the October meeting. The easily transportable rack makes it possible to display a wide assortment of the Society's publications in one spot.
Donna Catlin photo.