



HISTORICO

Sangamon County Historical Society Newsletter

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FEBRUARY 2014

February 18 Meeting:

Exploring the World of Abraham and Mary Todd Lincoln:

A Fresh Look at Customs, Courtship, Marriage, Social Life in Springfield

When it comes to dating and courtship, times have changed.

Or have they?

You'll get the answer to that question on Tuesday, February 18, when researcher Ericka Holst shares the results of two years of research on the social life here in the Lincoln era with members of the Sangamon County Historical Society.

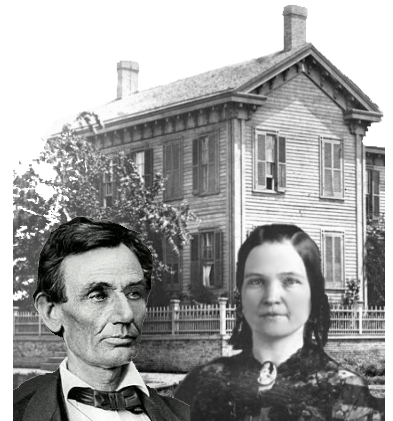
Holst's presentation, 5:30 p.m. in Carnegie Room North at Springfield's Lincoln Library, comes on the heels of the public unveiling on February 11 of the newly restored Lincoln "courting couch" at Edwards Place, the historic Benjamin Edwards residence at 700 North

Fourth Street, Springfield, owned by the Springfield Art Association. Benjamin Edwards was the youngest son of Ninian Edwards, the first territorial governor of Illinois and the third governor of the state.

Holst's interest in the social life of Antebellum Springfield, especially courtships and weddings, grew out of her research digging into the history of Edwards Place, the oldest house in Springfield on its original foundation.

"Doing research into the Edwards family's letters, as well as the letters of their friends and neighbors, I kept noticing references to court-

(Continued on page 6)



SOCIAL FIXTURES: The Lincolns.

Coming In March: Thomas Jefferson and Illinois; Trivia Pursuit

If it wasn't for Thomas Jefferson, the shape of Illinois might have been a lot different. Why it looks like it does and not Kentucky, Ohio, or, probably by our good fortune, New Jersey, will be the subject of the Society's March 18 meeting.

It's one of two major fact-packed March events headed your way. The other, on March 22, will let all that trivia you've

collected over the years be put to good use. Here's what's ahead:

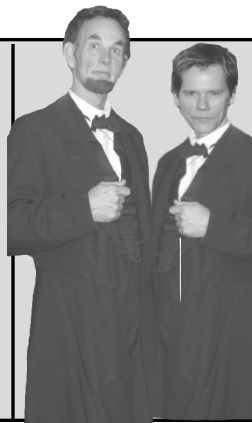
Tuesday, March 18: *Establishing Borders: Thomas Jefferson and the Shape of Illinois.* Springfield native Robert Church, whose career in surveying has long been intertwined with history, will provide insight into how the post Revolutionary surveying plan created by Thomas Jefferson

shaped modern Illinois. Jefferson's Public Land Survey System for areas west of the original 13 colonies today accounts for almost 1.5 billion acres that were divided into townships and sections. Church will explain how the system worked and its long term impact on Illinois. He'll also display some surveying instruments.

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SUPER BOWL OPTION?

Tickets should still be available for the *Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon...Abe Lincoln* performance this Sunday, February 2 at the Hoogland Center. See Calendar, page 7.



Mother Nature Threw a Curve, But Nobody Ducked

With snow piling up at the door and the temperature plunging, it's easy to want to hibernate until the cold weather passes. At least that's what I was thinking a few days ago as the calendar approached for our January 21 meeting.

Snow. Hm-m-m-m. Sub zero breezes. Hm-m-m.

Would anyone show up for our meeting on "When Weather Made History?"

Not to worry.

To my surprise, we had one of the largest turnouts yet, a full house filling every seat in Carnegie Room North to hear city historian Curtis Mann and Dr. Jim Angel, the state climatologist, provide a riveting look at our weather history and patterns, photos of some of the worst weather to hit the area since records were kept, its impact on people and the economy and so much more. Check out the photos of the event snapped by photographer Donna Catlin on pages 4 & 5. It was a wonderful meeting and a wonderful turnout on a cold, cold night.

We've more meetings and events in the works. This month, as you may have already read on page 1, we'll be learning more about the area's social customs when the Lincolns called Springfield home, especially when it came to courting and marriage. Erika Holst has spent two years studying this aspect of life here and we're pleased she's able to share her findings, a little post-Valentine's Day treat.

Those of you who had the opportunity to tour the Abraham Lincoln National Museum of Surveying in Springfield before it closed

just over a year ago may not have realized that much of its one-of-a-kind collection of beautiful surveying tools, historical maps and other items were from the personal collection of the man behind the museum, Bob Church. Its closing, at a time when many institutions were feeling a financial squeeze, didn't crush his spirit nor his efforts to educate people to the role surveying has played throughout history. We're pleased he will be our speaker next month.

On April 15, the anniversary of Lincoln's death, we will be heading to the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library for an after-hours tour and talk about Lincoln. We'll get a chance to see some of the resources there that are usually out of the public eye. You'll hear more about this next month.

Plans are afoot for our May meeting too, as they are for June when we hold our annual dinner. Those details will start appearing in coming issues, but it also serves as a reminder that we will soon seek applications from members interested in serving on the Society's board, executive board, committees and more. Nominating committee chair Brenda Holmes will be spelling out the process in the next issue of *Historico*.

We hope you will want to more actively participate in the Society in the coming year. We continue to grow and with that growth comes new ideas and activities. There's so much more that we want to do and we can accomplish it with your help.

Roger



Historico, published 10 times a year, is the official monthly bulletin for members of the Sangamon County Historical Society. *Winner, 2013 Certificate of Excellence, Illinois State Historical Society.*

You can download back issues of *Historico* in PDF format by going to our website, sangamon-history.org or sancohis.org. Send event announcements to historicoeditor@gmail.com.

Vicky Whitaker, *Historico* Editor, Donna Catlin, *Photographer*

Grad Grants Available for Illinois Research

Know a graduate student in history or library science who needs some financial help writing a dissertation on Illinois?

The Illinois Historic Preservation Agency and the Illinois State Historical Society are taking applications for the 2013-2014 King V. Hostick Award established by the late manuscript dealer. Stipends can be up to \$3,000. Preference may be given to research conducted at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum..

Applications must be received by March 15, either by mail or as an electronic file. For further information contact William Furry, Executive Director, Illinois State Historical Society, P.O. Box 1800, Spring-

field, Illinois 62705-1800 or contact him at 217-525-2781 or by e-mail at wfurry@historyillinois.org.

When Bad Weather Strikes

If bad weather prompts a meeting cancellation, an announcement to that effect will be posted by 3 p.m. of the day of the meeting/event several different ways including our websites (www.sangamonhistory.org, www.sancohis.org) and on our phone, 217-525-1961. Where possible, we will also post any cancellation notices on media websites and through local media outlets.



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March Duo: Shaping Illinois, Trivia Night

(Continued from page 1)

Church served as executive director of the Illinois Professional Land Surveyors Association for 34 years and as Deputy Mayor of Springfield from 1986 to 1995. With deep roots in the local community and in his profession, he spearheaded an effort to place a full-size bronze statue at New Salem to commemorate Lincoln's surveying career.



Church

He also was instrumental in moving the now closed National Museum of Surveying to Springfield from Lansing, Michigan. He is responsible for several key surveying exhibits including the creation of a *Looking for Lincoln* Wayside exhibit depicting Washington, Jefferson and Lincoln as Surveying Presidents.

The talk will begin at 5:30 p.m. in Carnegie Room North, City of Springfield's Lincoln Library and will be open to the public.

Saturday, March 22: At 6 p.m., the Society joins with nearly a dozen history

groups and historical sites to host the second annual History Trivial Night at the Old State Capitol, an evening of fun, good eats and more, for the benefit of the Lincoln Troubadours. (The game begins at 7 p.m.).

The Troubadours, an *a cappella* singing group, is composed of talented area high school and college students who learn and perform Civil War music, don period costumes and sing for free during the summer at historical sites across the area. Directed by Lincoln Land Community College vocal instructor Sue Hamilton, the students receive a small stipend from the state. All proceeds from the Trivia Night go to supplement that stipend that the students use to pay for present and future college expenses. Last year's event was a sell out.

This year's History Trivia Night will be held in Foundation Hall, on the lower level of the Old State Capitol, adjacent to the underground parking garage which will stay open late for the event so that participants will have weather-protected parking availability. Tickets will be \$10 per person (10 to a table), with a maximum of 130 tickets to be sold. All tickets must be purchased in advance. Food and drinks will be available for purchase at the site. Details will be provided in next month's issue of *Historico*.

FEBRUARY 2014 MEMBERSHIP REPORT

The Society welcomes the following new members:

**Hal and Mary Perkins
 Dr. James Angel**

Palmer Drought Severity Index - Illinois



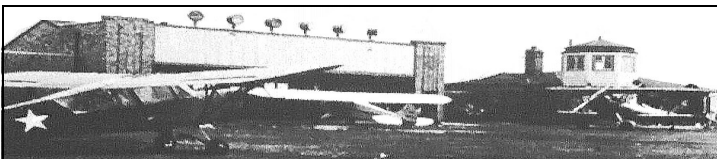
Weather That Shaped History



WEATHERMEN: State Climatologist Dr. Jim Angel (left) and City Historian Curtis Mann following their dual presentation on the history of weather here. Mann oversees the Sangamon Valley Collection at Springfield's Lincoln Library where the Society's January 21 meeting was held. Mann's presentation included photos of some of the historic weather events shown here. Dr. Angel (top) charts the area's historic weather patterns.



DESPITE FRIGID WEATHER, the Society's January 21 program on "When Weather Made History" drew nearly 100 people, filling Carnegie Room North at Springfield's Lincoln Library to capacity. State climatologist Dr. Jim Angle and Curtis Mann, city historian and head of the Library's Sangamon Valley Collection, teamed for the presentation that included photos and graphs showing more than 100 years of weather patterns in the area. Mann pointed out that the area's first recorded major snowstorm, the "Big Snow" that started on Christmas Day in 1831, defined those who lived through it for years to come. A rapid harsh winter that included the storm followed a cool summer, hampering settlers from collecting corn seed for the following year. The next planting season saw homesteaders responding to an onslaught of newspaper advertisements for seed that the settlers needed to plant a new crop. The storm also spawned creation of a "Snow Birds" club that distinguished among the early settlers, those who lived through the Big Snow (*photo, bottom right of page 4*). The Club went out of existence around 1880. The turn of the century brought automobiles to Sangamon County, but then, as now, it wasn't easy driving through drifting snow. The experience, (at right) was recorded for posterity. An ice storm in December, 1924, (center) coated Springfield with a layer of ice, knocking down utility poles. Tornadoes were not uncommon either. A tornado destroyed a forest of "lofty, young timber, mostly white oak" early settler Elijah Iles had been nurturing for 50 years (bottom right). In recalling the incident, he noted that "after the cyclone passed, there was not a large tree left standing. They were torn up by the roots or twisted. It made me sick to look at it." Dr. Angel's map of tornado paths proved an eye-opener on the frequency of the storms in this area. The U.S. Weather Bureau, now at Abraham Lincoln Capitol Airport, once had its own building in Springfield (below, right) and in the tower at now defunct Southwest Airport off Chatham Road (below).



Springfield's Social Customs No Longer a History Mystery

(Continued from page 1)

-ing and weddings,” notes Holst. The information she amassed was enough to fill a book and she, in fact, did so. Her *“Courtships and Weddings in Abraham Lincoln's Springfield”* is now available in an electronic Kindle format, through Amazon.com.

Constructed in 1833 by Thomas Houghan, the Greek Revival dwelling was purchased for \$4,000 in 1843 by attorney Benjamin Edwards and his wife, Helen. Set on a 15-acre grove of elm, walnut and maple trees on the northern edge of Springfield, the home, renovated and expanded into a Victorian era Italianate mansion in the late 1850s, became a center of the city's social life.

The Edwards played host to numerous socially and politically prominent friends like Stephen A. Douglas, David Davis, John Todd Stuart, Stephen Logan, and Abraham Lincoln.

Ironically, when Lincoln courted Mary Todd, the woman who three years later would become his bride, the now coveted Empire style horse hair sofa that they sat on was in the living room of the South Second Street home of Benjamin Edwards's older brother, Ninian Wirt Edwards whose wife, Elizabeth, one of Mary Todd's sisters.

Mary Todd had moved into her sister's home in October, 1839 and married there in November, 1842, the day after Lincoln proposed. The Ninian Edwards house was razed in 1917 to make way for construction of the Centennial Building (now the Howett Building).

After sitting vacant until 1913 after the death of Helen Edwards in 1909, the Benjamin Edwards house and site was donated to the then newly formed Springfield Art Association by the Edwards' middle daughter, Alice Edwards Ferguson. The “courting sofa” eventually wound up in Springfield Art Association's collection of period furniture and is now on display. Guests at the hastily arranged Lincoln wedding sat on that couch to watch the couple exchange their vows.

Historians write that Ninian Edwards and his wife were opposed to the marriage between Mary Todd and Lincoln and were said to have not learned of their plans until the morning of the day of the wedding. Recounting the story described in detail by a friend of Mary Todd's other sister, Frances Todd Wallace, Springfield resident William Jayne wrote that after three years

of courting, 33-year-old Lincoln arrived at the Ninian Edwards house with a demand that they marry the next day.

According to Jayne, Wallace said that in his conversation with Mary, Lincoln “referred to his lack of means, his ambitions, and his love for her,” quoting Lincoln as saying “I now suggest and insist upon our marriage at once. We will live at the Globe Tavern at present. Now we must go, very quietly without fuss and feathers, at 10 o'clock tomorrow morning, before the magistrate and ask him to marry us.”

Walker added that when, at breakfast the next morning, Mary told her sister and her brother-in-law of their plans, “our aris-

home with the Reverend Dr. Charles Dresser officiating.

Terming it a hurly-burly day, Wallace prepared a ham for the wedding dinner and baked a wedding cake. Some 30 friends and family attended the wedding supper and ceremony. “The ladies were in lovely evening gowns. Sister Mary was handsome in her beautiful bridal dress of white satin, with her pearl necklace, earrings and brooch,” she related.

Other historians described 23-year-old Mary Todd's borrowed bridal gown as being made of white muslin and that she wore neither a veil or had flowers in her hair. Lincoln's best man was James Harvey Matheny, a close friend who worked at the circuit court office in Springfield. He was asked to serve as best man on the day of the wedding.

The Lincolns did move into the Globe Tavern, a rooming house in downtown



HISTORIC PROPOSAL: Abraham Lincoln proposed to Mary Todd the day before their wedding, laying out a plan to be married the next day by a magistrate and then moving into a Springfield rooming house, the Globe Tavern (above). Researcher Erika Holst will be able to tell SCHS members whether this was the courting norm in Lincoln's time when she speaks to the Society on February 18. Lincoln's marriage ceremony didn't go as he planned, but the couple did marry the next day and did wind up living at the Globe Tavern before eventually moving to their own home. Holst drew enough information from her research to produce a Kindle tome on *“Courtships and Weddings in Abraham Lincoln's Time”* (right) that is available in its electronic format through Amazon.com.



tocratic sister, with an outburst, gave Mary a good scolding,” reminding her that she was a Todd and insisting that if she was going to go ahead with her plans, the wedding would be held that evening at their

Springfield, where they lived until 1843. They moved to a rented house where they stayed briefly until 1844 when they purchased the small two-story house at Eighth and Jackson, the only home Lincoln ever owned.

CALENDAR

Sunday, February 2: *Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon...Abe Lincoln*, 2 p.m., Hoogland Center, 420 S. Sixth Street, Springfield. Discounted tickets \$16 per person for SCHS members. Call 523-2787 for ticket information.

Tuesday, February 11: *Courting Couch Reveal*, 5 p.m., historic Edwards Place, 700 North Fourth Street. Edwards Place, in conjunction with the Abraham Lincoln Association, unveils the newly restored 1830s "courting couch" that was present in the home of Ninian and Elizabeth Ed-

wards when the Lincolns courted and were married. The couch was restored by the Conservation Center, Chicago. Free.

Tuesday, February 18: *Sangamon County Historical Society General Meeting*, "Courtships and Weddings During the Lincoln Era," 5:30 p.m., Carnegie Room North, City of Springfield Lincoln Library. Erica Holst, curator of historic Edwards Place discusses courtship and weddings in the Lincoln era, providing a fuller picture of life in 19th century Springfield and a greater understanding of Lincoln's social world.

Tuesday, March 18: *Establishing Borders: Thomas Jefferson and the Shape of Illinois*. Robert Church, Guest Speaker. 5:30 p.m., Carnegie Room North, City of Springfield Library. (See story, page 1).

Saturday, March 22: *Second Annual History Trivia Night*, 6 p.m., Foundation Hall, Old State Capitol, Springfield. Sponsored by area history organizations for benefit of the Lincoln Troubadours. Well-known Trivia master Al Gietl will be handling the evening's competition. Ticket information in the next *Historico*.

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