



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

VOLUME 50 NO. 8

MAY 2014

All's Fair for May 20 Meeting

The Illinois State Fair takes top billing this month when experts on its colorful history share stories about this 161 year-old event with members of the Sangamon County Historical Society and their guests.

The free program, on Tuesday, May 20 at the City of Springfield's Lincoln Library, will begin at 5:30 p.m. in Carnegie Room North. The public is invited as well as Society members and their guests.

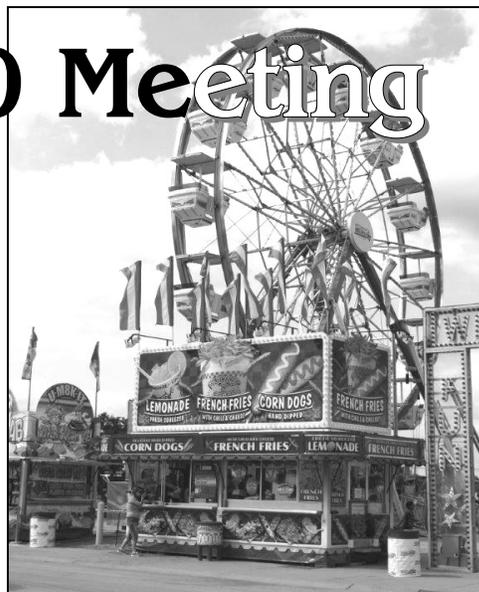
Providing fare about the Fair will be Illinois State Fair Museum Founda-

tion board members Pam Gray and Tom Fitch, who will bring both stories and visuals to illustrate the annual event's rich history.

The Foundation operates a museum on the north end of the Grandstand that is open daily throughout the fair from 10 a.m. until 8 p.m. Plans are afoot to expand its operations during the year.

Gray founded the Museum in 1994, the same year she became the Fair's Volunteer Chair, a position she still holds in overseeing some 150 Fair

(Continued on page 6)



At Historic Sangamo Club, June 17

Reserve a Seat Now for Annual Dinner, Elections, Auction

Reservations are now being taken on-line and by mail for the Sangamon County Historical Society's annual dinner that will be held on Tuesday, June 17 at the historic Sangamo Club in Springfield.

The club is located at 227 East Adams Street. On-site parking adjoins the building. A cocktail hour, with a cash bar, will run from 5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. followed by dinner.

Tickets, priced at \$30 per

person, can be purchased by mail (*see form, page 8*) by sending a check and the form to the Society at Box 9744, Springfield, IL 62791-9744. Paid reservations can also be made on-line through the Society's website at sangamonhistory.org. All Reservations/payment must be received by Friday, June 6.

As is tradition, the keynote speaker will be the Society president from a decade earlier,

in this case, Kathryn Harris, Director of Library Services for the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library (formerly the Illinois State Historical Library).

A native of Carbondale, Harris is a graduate of Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, and the University of Illinois Graduate School of Library and Information Science, Urbana.

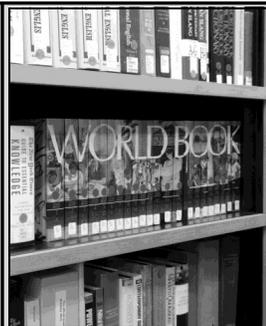
Harris joined the ISHL staff in 1990 as Supervisor of Refer-

ence and Technical Services and was named ISHL Director in 1996. With the opening of the ALPL in 2004, Harris assumed her current title. Harris' previous library experience includes positions at the Illinois State Library, the SIU School of Medicine Library, Florida International University, and the City of Springfield's Lincoln Library.

(Continued on page 6)

INSIDE

- Coming Down the Home Stretch.....2
- Special July 23 Program Set.....3
- Calendar.....7
- Dinner Reservation Form.....8



LIBRARY BOUND: That's where 50 SCHS members were headed last month in a back-room tour of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. See what they found on Pages 4-5.



Coming Down The Home Stretch

It hardly seems like two years have gone by since taking over the reins of presidency of the Sangamon County Historical Society, but it has been. Next month, you'll be voting in a new president, by all expectations Mary Alice Davis, whose leadership track record and hard work over the past years has more than qualified her for the job.

You'll be reading in greater detail about all of the candidates for the executive board and board of directors in next month's *Historico*, but I have to tell you that they will be joining a board that knows how to work hard together to get things done. It has been a pleasure working with all of them. I'm delighted, as I'm sure Mary Alice is, that most of the board members whose terms are up have already volunteered to continue committee work and pursue special projects that will be coming up in the year ahead.

We're already well into scheduling our fall and winter program with some special events and activities in the mix too. You'll hear more about these next month. We have some other exciting things happening that you'll be reading and hearing about in coming weeks.

I do want to urge you to put July 23 on your calendar. We usually don't meet during the busy summer that most of us experience, but when some special opportunity comes along, we would be remiss not offering it to our members. Such is the case with the talk by author Gillen D'Arcy Wood, made possible through his special connection to Dave Brady. Thank you Dave for creating this chance to get a different take on history, climate, economics,

and politics rolled into one.

* * *

And speaking of special opportunities, our deep felt thanks go to James Cornelius and Kathryn Harris for the wonderful "back room" tour of the Lincoln Presidential Library that they gave Society members on April 15. It was a unique experience on many levels and I know I speak for all those who participated in the event, that it was enjoyable, exciting, and illuminating to learn in great detail about this truly wonderful resource in our midst both for scholars and the general public. We're proud to count both of you among the Society's members. And we're looking forward to hearing Kathryn speak next month at our annual dinner, 10 years after completing her term as president of the Sangamon County Historical Society.

* * *

In coming weeks you'll be receiving information about renewing your membership for the coming year. We've a lot to tell you about and hope that in filling out your renewal, you may see fit to add a little extra in the form of a donation to our Special Projects Fund that has become a significant source of support for local history projects that are making a difference in the Sangamon County communities in which we live.

We'd like to do more and can do so with your financial help. A few extra dollars really can go a long way.

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*

Special July 23 Program On Tambora Has Link to Local Historian Dave Brady

Though the Sangamon County Historical Society's monthly meetings usually take a hiatus for July and August, there are exceptions. This July will be one of them!

The Society will be teaming up with the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, the Illinois State Historical Society, and the Old State Capitol Foundation on Wednesday, July 23 to co-host a special presentation by University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign English professor Gillen D'Arcy Wood on his new book, *Tambora, the Eruption That Changed The World*. The program, starting at 6 p.m., will be held at the Old State Capitol, Springfield.

What does an 1815 volcanic explosion half way around the world have to do with Sangamon County?

A lot.

And much to the relief of long-time Society member and history researcher David Brady of Springfield, more people should be able to make the connection after listening to Wood speak and reading his book which came out in April while Wood was on sabbatical in his native Australia. This will be the first time Wood will be discussing his work since its publication. The book has already won favorable reviews from *Publisher's Weekly*, *Nature*, and *The Wall Street Journal*.

Brady, who will be introducing Wood, served as a consultant to the author.

Brady is no stranger to the relationship between Tambora and Illinois.

In October, 2006, he spoke to the Society about "*The Panic of 1819, Its Cause and Effects in Illinois History*," the financial catastrophe rooted in the aftermath of the Mount Tambora explosion in April 1815. Brady's findings made its way into print when his remarks were published by the Society in a booklet of the same name that eventually made its way to Wood.

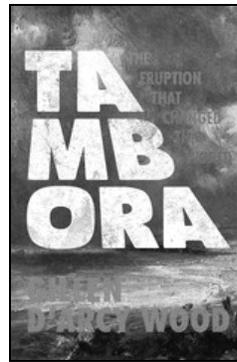
Brady later expanded upon his research in a second Society presentation in 2009, "*Fraud on the Frontier*," that detailed the actions taken by three of Springfield's then most prominent citizens—Elijah Iles,

Charles Matheny and John Taylor—who nearly bankrupted the State of Illinois in the 1820s, all as a fallout from the Tambora explosion.

The Mt. Tambora explosion is, to this day, the largest ever recorded by humans. The volcano, which is still active, is one of the tallest peaks in the Indonesian archipelago. When it blew up, the noise could be heard more than 1,200 miles away. The death toll from the eruption was estimated at 71,000 people, spewing heavy clouds of ash that caused a temporary worldwide climate change that led to crop failure, starvation and disease in the northern hemisphere. In the United States, 1816 became known as the "*Year Without Summer*. Killer frosts ruined crops in New England and in Europe, the cold and wet weather rotted crops in the field.

But what was a disaster in New England and Europe, was a boon to the Midwest. Then America's western frontier, the Midwest was less affected by the harsh weather and as a result, farmers here were able to sell their produce in domestic and overseas markets at a high price. With a growing market for their produce, Midwest farmers pressured local governments to provide them with a new sources to borrow money. Banks were thought to be the answer and states and territories took charge by chartering dozens providing farmers with the means to get cash that was needed until their crop could be sold. At the same time, many Europeans fled to the United States seeing it as a haven from their economic plight. Once here, they looked west as a way to start a new life, Brady noted in his follow-up talk.

(Continued on page 6)



OFFICERS

President.....Roger Whitaker
Vice-President.....Ruth Slottag
Secretary.....Elaine Hoff
Treasurer.....Richard Herndon

DIRECTORS

Term Ending 2014

Patricia Davis
 Kathy Hoffmann
 Brenda Holmes
 Doug Polite
 Vicky Whitaker

Term Ending 2015

Donna Catlin
 Les Eastep
 David Grimm
 Mary Alice Davis
 Francie Staggs

Term Ending 2016

Rebecca Cisco
 Kathy Dehen
 Sue Massie
 Cathy Mosley
 David Scott

Presidential Appointees To Board

Marion Leach,
Membership Relations Chair
 Bruce Beeman
Legal Chair
 Claire Eberle
Membership Chair

SCHS Executive Coordinator

Dr. Samuel Wheeler

Please make note of our official mailing address:

SCHS
 Box 9744
 Springfield, Illinois,
 62791-9744

MAY 2014 MEMBERSHIP & DONATION REPORT

The Society welcomes the following new members:
 Ann Jones, Linda Tinkham

And thanks the following for donations:

Dr. Mark and Jackie Hansen, Donna Catlin

Behind the Scenes

at the

Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library

THAT'S THE PLACE some 50 members of the Society were in April 15 for a special back-room tour of the Presidential Library that included a one-of-a kind close up peek at some of the most coveted artifacts in the Library's Lincoln holdings and a top-to-bottom look at the extensive Illinois State Historic Library. Divided in two, as one group led by Kathryn Harris, Director of Library Services, toured the library stacks and workrooms, the other gathered in a large meeting room where white-gloved Lincoln Curator James Cornelius (*page 5 top*) carefully handled more than a dozen items that are part of an extensive rotating collection of items associated with Lincoln's life and presidency including a clock from the Lincoln-Herndon law office, a gold and diamond heart necklace that President Lincoln purchased for his wife Mary from Tiffany's, a handwritten version of the Gettysburg address and the blood-stained fan Mrs. Lincoln held the night her husband was shot at Ford's Theater. Harris, meanwhile, took tour goers through the floors of stacks and modern storage and work areas, explaining how art, photos and printed material are preserved for use by scholars, researchers, and others interested in Illinois history. The collection includes handmade miniature books (*displayed, far right, by Harris*) from The Press of the late Ward Schori of Evanston, often referred to as the "dean of miniature books." At immediate right, tour takers view originals of the book, "*Twelve Years A Slave*" on which the recent Academy Award-winning film was based.



Donna Catlin photos



Kathryn Harris to Keynote Society's Annual Dinner June 17

(Continued from page 1)

including the Rolling Prairie Library System, the Illinois Library Association, the Illinois Humanities Council, the Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois, and the Abraham Lincoln Association. In February, 2014, Harris was elected ALA vice-president.

The multi-talented Harris has appeared on stage as Sadie Delany in local productions of "Having Our Say," the best-selling oral history of Delany the African-American educator

and civil rights pioneer, and her sister, Elizabeth "Bessie" Delany. Harris has also portrayed Elizabeth Keckley in "The Last of Mrs. Lincoln" A former slave who became a successful seamstress, civic activist, and author in Washington, D.C., Keckley was a personal seamstress and confidant of Mary Todd Lincoln.

Both performances have been presented in the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum's Union Theatre.

In addition, Harris frequently portrays abolitionist, humanitarian and Underground

Railroad conductor Harriet Tubman for school and community groups. In September 2012, she portrayed Tubman in a performance for participants at the Congressional Black Caucus's Annual Leadership Conference in Washington, D.C. She repeated the role in September, 2013, for the Mentoring Summit sponsored the National Alliance of Faith and Justice in Washington, D.C.

In addition to Harris, the evening will include brief remarks from President Roger Whitaker whose term will be ending. Whitaker will remain

on the Executive Board as past president.

The elections of officers and board members for 2014-2015 will be conducted by Nominating Committee chair Brenda Holmes.

Officer nominees are Mary Alice Davis, president, Ruth Slottag, vice-president, Richard Herndon, treasurer, and Sue Massie, secretary. Director nominees are Genevieve Kaplan, Amy Henrikson, Jerry Smith, Sarah Watson, Troy Gilmore, and Vicky Whitaker.

A Silent Auction will run through the evening.

Special July 23 Program on Tambora Eruption Has Local Twist

(Continued from page 3)

Easy money and high grain prices drew masses of emigrants into the Midwest, the booming agricultural-driven economy bubbling over into land speculation, noted Brady in his second Society presentation. The speculation mania and the spurious currency reached even the remotest settlements, but by then, the global climate had returned to normal. Exports from the Midwest dried up and because farmers were unable to sell crops, they could not repay these bank loans and went into debt.

"Banks foreclosed when land used as collateral could not be sold to satisfy the loans. And when they could not sell the land for what was owed nor get repayment of the difference, the banks themselves were forced to close, the currency they issued worthless. Depression had arrived in the Midwest and only deepened."

While the Panic of 1819 was part of a col-

lapse of the world economy that coupled the effects of the Napoleonic Wars and the War of 1812 to the eruption of Mount Tambora, its impact on the Midwest has long been overlooked by scholars and authors drawn to more popular topics like the Civil War and Lincoln. The effort has been made even more difficult by a pattern of cover-ups that through his research, Brady has managed to unravel.

In the period of economic depression that followed the Panic of 1819 Sangamo Country in Central Illinois became home to a large number of homeless refugees, especially from Kentucky where a Draconian approach to debtors led to foreclosure, riots, debtor's prison and poverty. "The migration to Illinois was so large and the newcomers' debts so great that they economically crippled the State," Brady said in his 2009 presentation

"How do you cover up such a mess so that

future generations cannot sit around the fire and talk about how badly our first settlers were? You hide the proof, even if that is illegal," Brady observed. "For Central Illinois the cover up was complete, saved were the good names of the people of Sangamon County. County Court Case files of the suits brought by the State Bank were destroyed, County insolvency records vanished, he discovered. Sangamon County histories do not discuss the matter. "It would have been nice if their story had been told for the sake of future generations, rather than to cover up the fact that they lived through an economically depressed period of our history. Our founding fathers have made a very strong statement by denying us the truth. Granted this was a chapter of history they found no pride in recalling, but it is up to us to fill in the gaps so maybe future generations may avoid making the same mistakes," Brady told the Society.

Fair's the Fare for May 20 Meeting with a Look at its History, Memorabilia

(Continued from page 1)

volunteers. She was also instrumental in creating the non-profit 501c3 Illinois State Fair Museum Foundation in 2006 and is one of its 15 board members.

Gray holds a bachelor's degree in psychology from Sangamon State University, a master's in public administration from the University of Illinois, Springfield, and is currently working on her doctoral degree in public administration at UIS.

Fellow board member Fitch retired from his position as a Standards Engineer at the Illinois Department of Transportation in 1997 after 34 years with that agency. He is a volunteer at the Library's Sangamon Valley Room and is a computer instructor for the Third Age Living program at St. John's Hospital. He is also a volunteer with the Lincoln Land Community

College baseball team.

The Illinois State Fair was one of the "round" topics that stumped many players in the recent History Trivia Night at the Old State Capitol co-sponsored by the Society and 12 area history organizations. "Researching the Fair's history inspired us to make it a program topic on its own," noted program co-chairs Mary Alice Davis and Vicky Whitaker. "What we learned in preparing the questions for that round piqued our imagination, especially after reading that

when Springfield became its permanent home, it housed the city's first golf course and an artificial lake representing the Mediterranean Sea.

The lake became the backdrop for a production on "The Fall of Pompeii" that featured a cast of 250 performers."

The Fair also had its share of misfortune, including the 1917 destruction of the Dome Building whose iron and glass namesake was second largest in size only to the Great Cathedral at Leningrad. Purchased from the Chicago World's Fair and reconstructed in Springfield in 1895, the building could house 10,000 people.

"There's a lot more to its history. We think this will be an especially informative and interesting program for both our members and the public," added Davis.



CALENDAR

Saturday, May 10: *"The Todd Sisters of Aristocracy Hill,"* 10 a.m., Vachel Lindsay Home State Historic Site, 603 South Fifth Street, Springfield. Erika Holst, curator at Historic Edwards Place, will tell the full story of the Todd sisters who included Elizabeth, the eldest sister; Fanny; who wound up spending 63 years in Springfield; Ann, the youngest; and Mary, who wed a rough-looking country lawyer named Abraham Lincoln. Doors open at (:30 a.m. Free. For more information, visit www.vachellindsay.org.

Wednesday, May 14: 2015 Lincoln Funeral Coalition Fundraiser, 5:30 p.m., Iles House, Seventh Street & Cook, Springfield. Donation \$35. Silent auction for three Lincoln historic

items. For information, call 546-4242.

Saturday, May 17: 2014 Military Vehicle Show, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Illinois State Military Museum, 1301 North MacArthur Boulevard, Springfield. Free. Check under the hood and kick the tires or tracks on an array of military vehicles from the iconic jeep to the new equipment of the 21st Century. For more information, call 761-3910.

Tuesday, May 20: "Looking Back: The History of the Illinois State Fair," 5:30 p.m., SCHS monthly program meeting, Carnegie Room North, City of Springfield's Lincoln Library, South Seventh Street. Free (See story, page 1).

Tuesday, June 17: SCHS Annual Dinner,

5:30 p.m. (cocktails), 6:30 p.m. (dinner), Sangamo Club, 227 East Adams Street, Springfield. Tickets, at \$30 per person, must be purchased by **Friday, June 6.** (See story, page 1). Mail reservation form, page 8, on-line reservations at www.sangamonhistory.org.

Tuesday, July 23: "Tambora: The Eruption that Changed The World." 6 p.m., Old State Capitol. Author Gillen D'Arcy Wood discusses his new book of the same name in this joint program co-sponsored by SCHS, IHPA, ISHS and OCSF. (See story, page 3). Old State Capitol, Springfield. Free. (Old State Capitol underground parking facility hours will be extended for the duration of this program at normal hourly parking rates).

sangamon county historical society friends and sponsors

Jack Rooney
President
jack@cap-strategies.com

2413 Heather Mill Court
Springfield, Illinois 62704
TEL 217/652-1645 FAX 217/546-5952
www.cap-strategies.com



**Our names are Jilly and Fergus
And We Love History**

Flagg Farmstead

Bed and Breakfast

500 Old Tipton School Road
Sherman, IL, 62684

Toll Free: 888-611-3524
Local: 217-816-8569

dougpolite@yahoo.com
www.flagfarmsteadandb.com



@tripadvisor: ☆☆☆☆☆

Rosalie and Doug Polite, Owners



PASFIELD HOUSE INN

"HOSPITALITY IN A GRANDEUR WAY"

TONY LEONE
PROPRIETOR

525-535 S. PASFIELD STREET
SPRINGFIELD, IL 62704
217-525-3663

If you are a volunteer or staff member at a local tourist site, consider these LLCC offerings to kickoff the tourist season!



**For information, call
786.2432. To register,
call 786-2292.**

MINING FOR THE MESSAGE • Thurs., 5/15/14 and 5/22/14

If you are an interpreter or want to be, learn tools that help you compose successful scripts with the right details to deliver key messages.

THIRD PERSON INTERPRETATION WITH MUSIC • Tues., 6/24/14

Learn how Tom Irwin used research along with diary entries to develop original music in "Sangamon Songs" and demonstrate the relationship of music to a specific context of real life experiences.

**GET THE CRACKER INTO THE WAR! FIRST PERSON INTERPRETIVE PRESENTATION
Fri., 8/15/14**

Many Irish immigrants arriving in New York, poor and without prospects, were recruited and enlisted into the ranks of the Union Army. Witness this captivating program as Seamus O'Grady joins us from the past.

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

----- Mail In Reservation Form -----

Sangamon County Historical Society Annual Dinner

Tuesday, June 17, 2014 ♦ 5:30 p.m., Sangamo Club, Springfield, Illinois

Tickets: \$30 per person

Mailed payments **must be received no later than Friday, June 6.** Make your check payable to SCHS and send it with this form to SCHS, Box 9744, Springfield, IL 62791-9744. *You also have the option of making your paid reservations on line by going to the Society's website at sangamonhistory.org.*

Enclosed is my check for _____ reservations for the annual dinner. (Please print)

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____ E-mail _____

Names of guests: (*first and last name*) _____

MAY 2014

MAY 2014

MAY 2014