



HISTORICO

Sangamon County Historical Society Newsletter

308 East Adams Street, Springfield, Illinois 62701 217-522-2500 www.sancohis.org

APRIL 2010

Donner Descendent to Take Fresh Look at Family Saga in April 20 Historical Society Program At UIS Library

No story about the nation's westward movement is complete without a telling of trials of the ill-fated Donner Party.

For Don Springer, it's living history, something he will share the Society on Tuesday, April 20 when he discusses "*Springfield's Donner Family: Trials of the Pioneer Trail, 1846*" in a presentation at the University of Illinois Brookens Library at 7 p.m.

Few people know the facts better than Springer.

He is the great, great, great, great grandson of George Donner, who was chosen to lead the wagon train over the

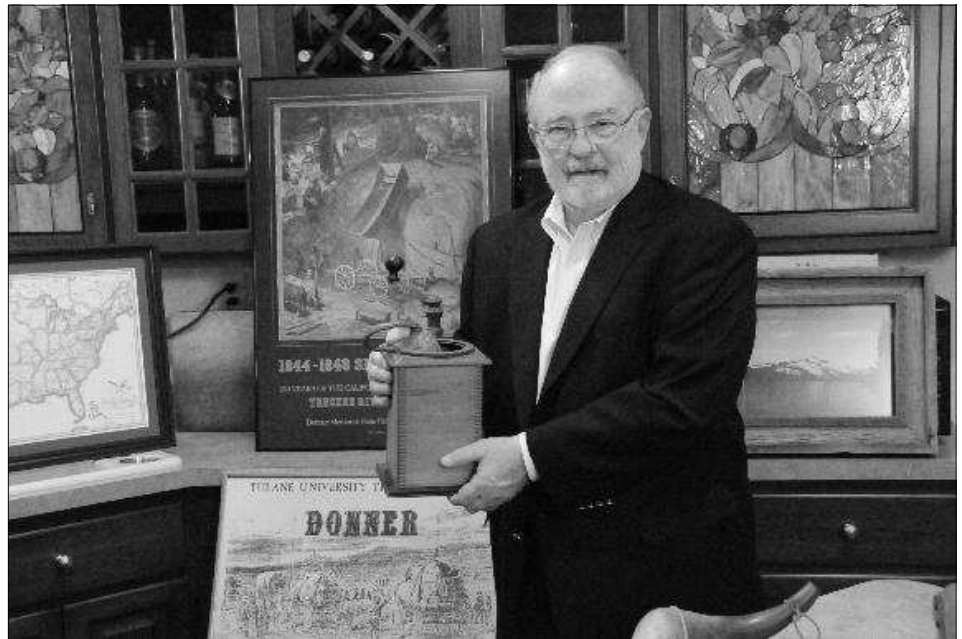
tains. George Donner and four other members of the family were among the victims.

In his talk, Springer will provide insight into the Donner family and their decision to leave Springfield in

1846, after 30 years of residence in Sangamon County.

He also will share his observations about the 2,000 mile wagon train jour-

(Continued on page 5)



LIVING WITH HISTORY: Don Springer shows one of the Donner family heirlooms in his collection that have been passed down from generation to generation.

**FOR DIRECTIONS TO THE
UIS CAMPUS and
BROOKENS LIBRARY**

See page 4

final 1,000 mile portion of the historic journey in which nearly half the party perished after becoming trapped in a winter blizzard in the Sierra Moun-

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NEXT MONTH

- Topic: "Governors and Gangsters"
- Speaker: Taylor Pensoneau
- Date: Tuesday, May 18
- Time: 7 p.m.
- Location: Lincoln Public Library, Springfield



Pensoneau



April Meeting Marks New Collaboration With UIS

This month's meeting at the University of Illinois at Springfield is an exciting new collaboration between the Society and the University of Illinois and its library.

Sangamon County Historical Society board member Don Springer, will be presenting the talk. The University is arranging to have Donner family artifacts from the Brookens Library archives on display and the Friends of Brookens Library, a volunteer support group for the library, will be providing refreshments.

It promises to be an interesting evening, and we are grateful to UIS for their generous collaboration and welcome!

Another collaboration involves our annual meeting, set to be in Williamsville this year, thanks primarily to our new Board member, Donna Catlin, who has introduced us to the community and its Mayor, Tom Yokley, who have all been most helpful.

There will be lots to see and do! Williamsville's Boxcar museum will be open; as will the community library housed in the old railroad depot.

The depot has been carefully preserved and the museum has been the repository of local memorabilia and history for several years.

Raymond Poe has promised to loan his "tram" for tours of the town's great variety of large old houses, and community preservationist, Jim Mergen has offered to narrate the tours, all before dinner and our annual meeting!

It should make for a fun and interesting evening. More information on the event and a dinner reservation form will appear in the May issue of *Historico*.

Several people had mentioned to me they had wanted to go to the annual meeting in Thayer last June but had no ride, so last month I asked those who might be interested in having a bus or limo available for transport to the annual meeting this year in Williamsville to please call Robinson's (522-2500) and let us know.

We received very little response to that request so we will probably drop the idea unless we receive a lot more response this month!

Nancy

APRIL REPORT

The Sangamon County Historical Society is pleased to add the following people to its membership ranks this month:

Sustaining Member

Harvey B. Stephens

New Family Members

Ernie and Ruth Slottag

Robert and Marilyn Brozio

New Individual Member

Robin Foster



2009-2010 Officers Sangamon County Historical Society

- President**.....Nancy L. Chapin
- Vice-President**.....David Scott
- Secretary**.....Curtis Mann
- Treasurer**.....Paul R. Mueller

Directors to 2010

R-Lou Barker ♦ Elaine Birtch
Kim Efird ♦ Sue Wall ♦ Martha Wolters

Directors to 2011

Jack Alexander ♦ Connie Locher Bussard
John Huther ♦ Don Springer ♦ Jane Vetter

Directors to 2012

Tim Krell ♦ Vicki Megginson
Donna Catlin ♦ Roger Whitaker ♦ James H. Beaumont

Honorary Director

William Hughes Diller Jr.

COMMITTEE CHAIRS: *Finance*: Tim Krell; *Hospitality*: Jane Vetter; *Long Range Planning*: David Scott; *Membership*: Connie Bussard; *Nominating*: Phyllis Eubanks; *Program*: Jack Alexander; *Tours*: Susan Hammond; *Project Awards*: Elaine Birtch; *Publications*: John Huther, *Historico* editor: Vicky Whitaker.

Membership in the Sangamon County Historical Society is open to both individuals and families. Dues are \$17.50 per year for individuals, \$25 for a family, \$50 for a sustaining member. For Individual Life Membership, there is a one-time payment of \$250 and for Family Life Member, a one-time payment of \$400. For a membership form and/or additional information, contact the Society at 522-2500 or write to us at 308 East Adams Street, Springfield, IL 62701.

Williamsville Prepares for Society's Annual Meeting, Committee Tours Sites

Members of the Sangamon County Historical Society helping plan the organization's annual meeting that will be held in Williamsville this coming June, 15 got a sneak preview of what you'll see when they toured the community, its museum, and village offices last month.

Led by president Nancy Chapin, the planning group had an opportunity to chat with several local history buffs who volunteer at the Williamsville "Box Car" Museum. They also met Village president Tom Yokley who took them to the nearby municipal building to look at the rooms where the annual meeting-dinner will be held.

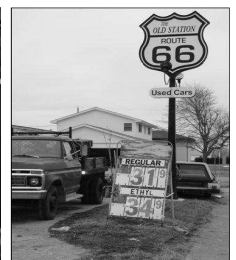
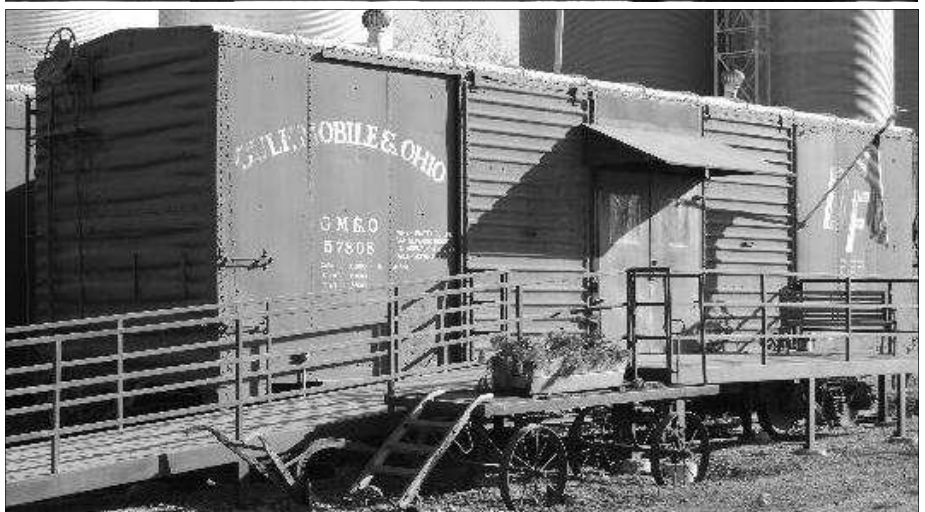
"I was quite impressed by everything that we saw," said Chapin, reflecting on the visit. "Williamsville has

some magnificent historic homes and the Box Car Museum is something that should not be missed."

The committee working on the event is hoping to arrange tours of the community prior to the dinner, including spending some time at the Museum which is across from the Municipal Building. Williamsville, which was founded in 1853, is also on old Route 66. A service station, also within walking distance of the Municipal Building, has preserved memorabilia of the era. The Williamsville Public Library, housed in the community's former train station, is also expected to have some displays up for the event. Details of the dinner and a reservation form will appear in the May issue of *Historico*.



WILLIAMSVILLE WELCOME: SCHS president Nancy Chapin (above right) meets Williamsville Mayor Tom Yokley (left) and volunteers at the community's Box Car Museum (top right and center) with members of a Society committee planning the annual meeting coming up June 15 in Williamsville. Among the sites to see are the community's historic homes like the one below (left) and a Route 66 era gas station (below right). In addition to meeting the museum's volunteers (below, second right), the committee also toured the municipal building (second, left) where the Society's dinner will be held.



How to Get to UIS
 Where to Park
 How to Find Brookens Aud



Brookens Library

DRIVING DIRECTIONS:

Southbound on I-55

Exit right (west) at Exit 94 onto Stevenson Drive. Head west and at the third traffic light, make a left onto West Lake Shore Drive, heading south, Turn right at campus entrance (stop sign) onto Edgar Lee Masters Drive and then left at the stop sign onto Ernest Hemingway Drive. Follow signs to Public Affairs Center (Sangamon Auditorium) “teardrop” loop if you plan to drop off passengers who may find it a shorter walk to the Brookens Auditorium via a corridor that links the two buildings than from the parking lot. There is no long-term parking in the loop. Please park in one of the designated visitor parking lots. (See map)

Northbound on I-55

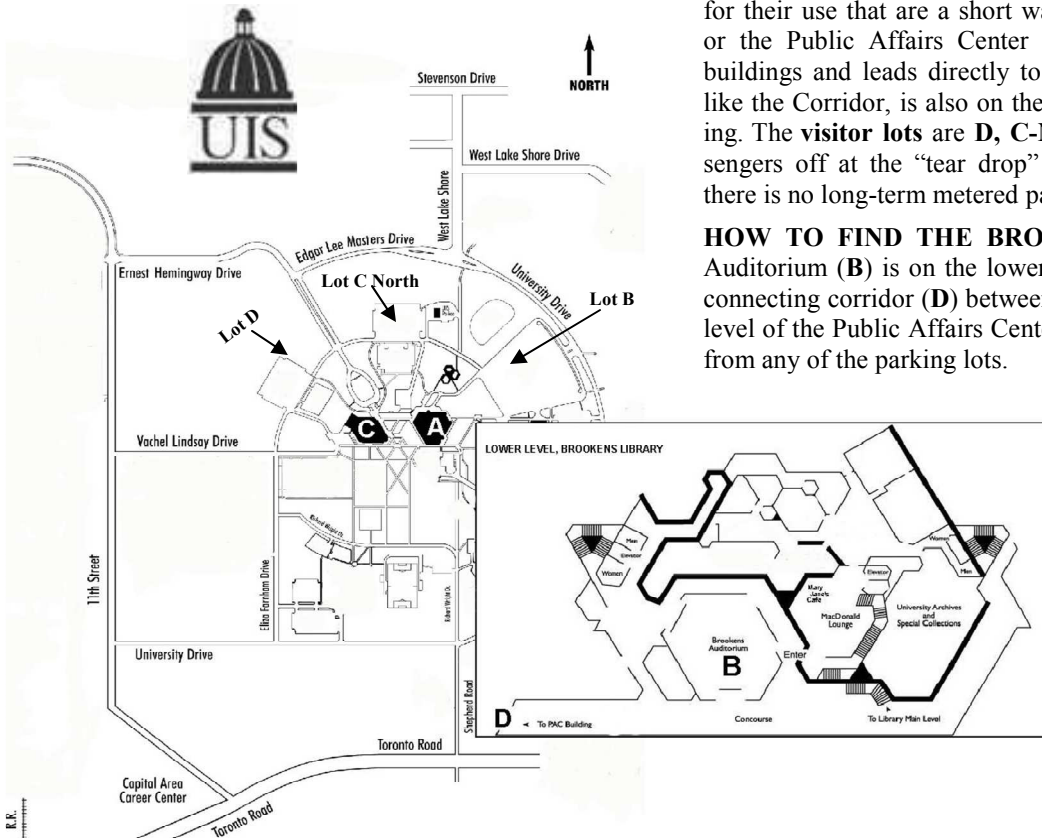
Exit right (east) at Exit 90 onto Toronto Road. Follow Toronto Road making a left east onto 11th Street just past the Capital Area Career Center. Turn right onto Ernest Hemingway Drive. Follow signs to Public Affairs Center (Sangamon Auditorium) “teardrop” loop if you plan to drop off passengers who may find it a shorter walk to the Brookens Auditorium via a corridor that links the two buildings than from the parking lot. There is no long-term parking in the loop. Please park in one of the designated visitor parking lots. (See map).

Westbound on I-72:

Exit at Sixth Street, heading north. Turn right onto Hazel Dell Road (Walmart will be on your right) heading east and at the stop sign, turn right onto 11th Street and head south until you reach Ernest Hemingway Drive. Make a left and follow signs to Public Affairs Center (Sangamon Auditorium) “teardrop” loop if you plan to drop off passengers who may find it a shorter walk to the Brookens Auditorium via a corridor that links the two buildings than from the parking lot. There is no long-term parking in the loop. Please park in one of the designated visitor parking lots. (See map).

WHERE TO PARK: Visitors have any of three lots available for their use that are a short walking distance from the Library or the Public Affairs Center Corridor that connects the two buildings and leads directly to the Brookens Auditorium, that, like the Corridor, is also on the lower level of the library building. The **visitor lots** are **D**, **C-North** and **B**. You can drop passengers off at the “teardrop” loop entrance of the PAC, but there is no long-term metered parking around the loop.

HOW TO FIND THE BROOKENS AUDITORIUM: The Auditorium (**B**) is on the lower level of the Library. There is a connecting corridor (**D**) between it and the entrance to the lower level of the Public Affairs Center. You can also enter the library from any of the parking lots.



ENTRANCE: The first left as you enter the PAC lobby (above) will take you right to the Brookens Auditorium.

UIS to be Site of April Meeting on Donner Party Travails

(Continued from page 1)

ney to California whose difficulties, he says, "had been minimized and even misrepresented."

After a difficult and time consuming trip, the wagon train arrived at the base of the Sierra pass (now known as Donner Pass) on the very day that a driving snowstorm was beginning that would eventually make it impassable for the winter. Those who survived were rescued in April, 1847.

Springer, a Life Member of the Society and a member of the board, is currently a director of the Center for American Archeology and is a member of Sons of the American Revolution. He is also a member of the Springfield Film Commission and the University of Illinois Foundation.

A financial advisor with Edward Jones, Springfield, he has been in the

field for 36 years and is a founder and charter president of the Illinois Securities Industry Association.

Springer's brother Bill, a resident of New Orleans, previously made a gift of his Donner collection of books and reference material to the Brookens library.

The April 20 event will mark the donation by Don Springer of additional Donner-related materials, including genealogy, "that will help Brookens to provide a full resource of Donner History.

Much of the information, Springer says, comes from diligent research of court records from North Carolina, Kentucky, Indiana and Illinois by Donner family research expert, Jo Ann Brant Schmidt of Houston Texas."

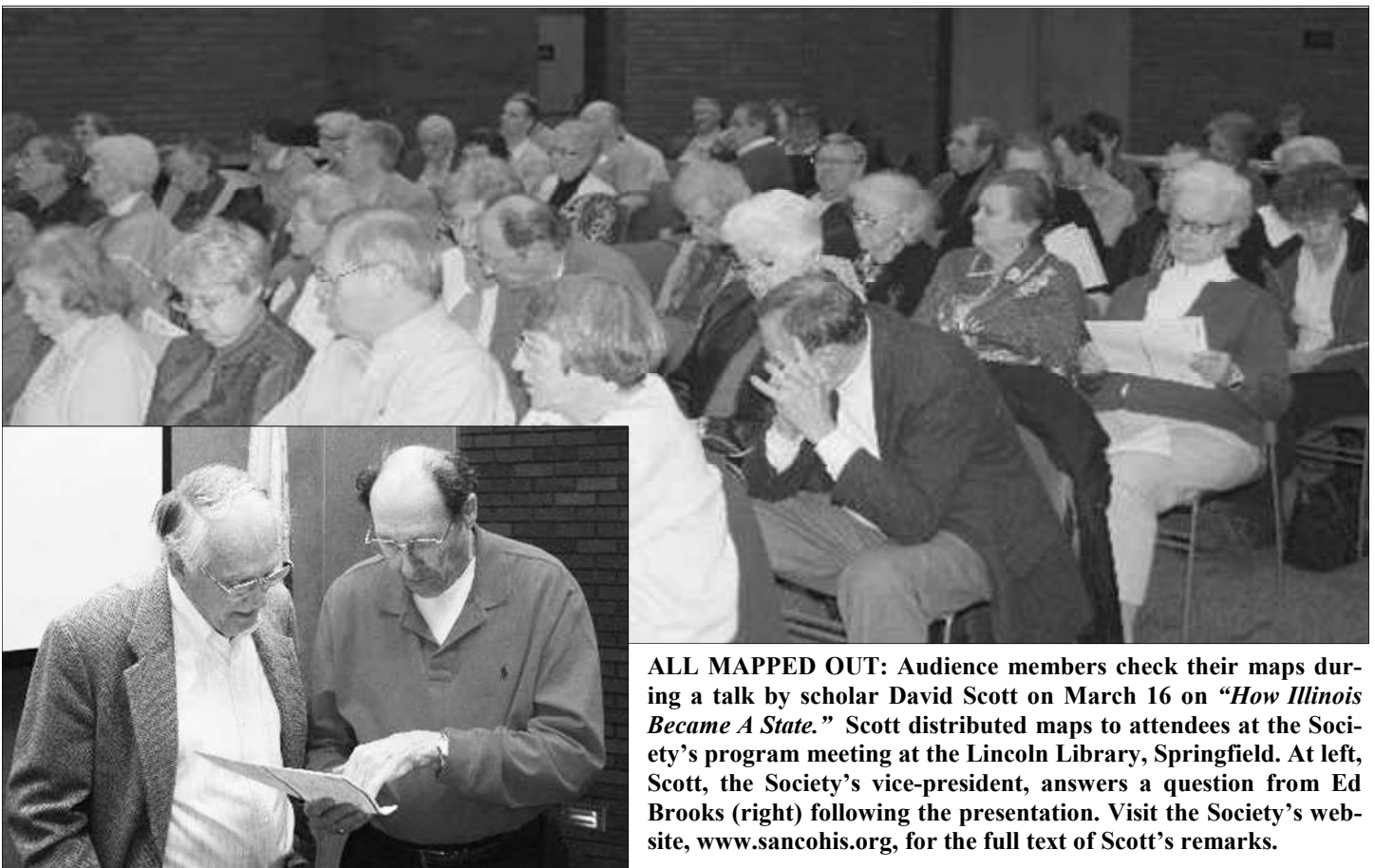
Audience members will get an opportunity to see some of the Don-

ner documents usually housed in the Library's Archives and Special Collections department.

Springer previously donated financial documents of national and international historical significance to the Library, including certificates relating to the French and American Revolutions, French-Mexican War, and development of American railroads that are also in the Archives and Special Collections department.

In addition to the Sangamon County Historical Society, co-sponsors of the evening's program--part of the John Holtz Memorial Lecture Series--are the Friends of Brookens Library and the University's Engaged Citizenship Common Experience program.

The lecture is free and open to the public.



ALL MAPPED OUT: Audience members check their maps during a talk by scholar David Scott on March 16 on "How Illinois Became A State." Scott distributed maps to attendees at the Society's program meeting at the Lincoln Library, Springfield. At left, Scott, the Society's vice-president, answers a question from Ed Brooks (right) following the presentation. Visit the Society's website, www.sancohis.org, for the full text of Scott's remarks.

Mixing History, Antiques...and Hospitality is Natural Combo for Buffalo Native Jane Vetter

History has always been part of everyday life for Sangamon County Historical Society board member and hospitality chair Jane Vetter.

A life-long resident of Buffalo, she lives in a house built in 1900 by her Great Aunt Betsy and her husband that's just a half block from where she was born and raised. "My ancestors lived in and around Buffalo and Buffalo Hart," she explains, "and as a young girl, we were surrounded in the neighborhood by relatives."

It was only natural that Vetter absorb those historical roots. "I've always been interested in the history of Buffalo and the surrounding area."

But what propelled her to sign up for membership in the Society some ten years ago was a ceremony at the Mechanicsburg Cemetery honoring her great-great-great-great grandmother, Lu Ann McDaniel.

"The Society placed a bronze marker at her gravesite. She was the first nurse in the Revolutionary War, serving under George Washington at Valley Forge. That event was my first knowledge of the Society."

It has been a happy relationship ever since. Vetter and her husband Bill, who is the mayor of Buffalo, can often be found busy at work just prior to program meetings, laying out platters full of delicious cookies and other refreshments for attendees. She

also takes an active role in monthly board meetings.

Vetter is a 1948 graduate of Tri City High School. After graduation, she attended Brown's Business School in Springfield and prior to marriage, worked for Franklin Life Insurance Company for four years.



"My ancestors lived in and around Buffalo and Buffalo Hart and as a young girl, we were surrounded in the neighborhood by relatives."

-Jane Vetter

The Veters have lived in Buffalo for all but a brief period after marriage 57 years ago, when they moved to Fort Lewis, Washington where her

husband served in the Army and to Champaign, Illinois so that he could complete college. "After our children entered school, I became secretary of the TriCity Elementary School in Buffalo," a position she held until her retirement. Living in the community that you grew up in provides a constant flood of memories, she says. Her own home had only one non-family owner, a dentist. "He used the upstairs rooms as his office and now we use it as a bedroom. As a youngster, I received dental care in that room." The original barn is still in place and is used," she adds.

Over the years, she has accumulated many family heirlooms and antique furniture, a perfect match for her interest in antiques and history. Vetter is a member and president of Dust Collectors Chapter 369, Questors, a national organization of antique buffs. She is also a charter member of the Town and Country Woman's Club of Buffalo and the Sangamon County Women's Club, holding several offices in each group.

She is a trustee of the Faith of Life Methodist Church, a past president of the Brinkerhoff Home Foundation and also served three years as a member of the board of the Visiting Nurses Association.

Sangamon County
Historical Society

ID Photo Contest



Sleuths of the Month:

Paul Mueller and the
Dominican Sisters



WHEN SOCIETY TREASURER Paul Mueller saw this photo come up on the Society's Photo ID Contest website page (see sancohis.org), he thought a group of Dominican Sisters might be able to provide some information. He was right! "They spent hours going over the photo that brought back many memories for them," says Mueller. The shot, part of the Mercury Collection housed at the Sangamon Valley Collection at the Lincoln Library that the Society is helping identify, was a Christmas holiday gathering of priests and nuns at the Cathedral Grade School on December 14, 1958. In the photo are, back row, from left, Bishop Victor Balke, Sr. Helen Zita, Sr. M. Camilla, Sr. Jeremiah John (Elizabeth McAuliffe), Sr. M. Dorothea, Sr. Mary Suddes, Sr. M. Albertus (Helen Wolf), Sr. Gertrude Ann, Sr. Marian Zarones. Seated in the front row are Sr. M. Annaclare, Fr. Casimir Geruit, Sr. M. Aurelia, Msgr. Irvin Will, Sr. M. Julianna.

May 18 Program:

Taylor Pensoneau to Focus on "Governors and Gangsters"

Well-known author and former *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* Illinois political columnist Taylor Pensoneau will turn his attention to "Governors and Gangsters" on Tuesday, May 18 when he speaks to the Society at its monthly program meeting.



Taylor Pensoneau

the *Interest of the State*; and *Powerhouse: Arrington from Illinois*.

He also has penned one work of fiction, *The Summer of '50*, a mystery that revolves around Jake Brosky, a colorful investigative reporter for the *St. Louis World*.

After his overall 16-year stint with the *Post-Dispatch* ended in 1978, Pensoneau began a 26-year career with the Illinois Coal Association, the trade organization for the state's coal industry. He retired in December 2003 as president of the association.

A former president of the Society, Pensoneau spent 12 years as the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* Illinois political correspondent. He is the author of *Brothers Notorious: The Sheltons*, *Southern Illinois' Legendary Gangsters*, as well as the three biographies of Illinois political heavyweights: *Dan Walker: The Glory and the Tragedy*; *Richard Ogilvie: In*

Pensoneau resides in New Berlin. He and his wife Elizabeth, the retired editor of *Outdoor Illinois* magazine, own and operate Downstate Publications. In addition to his role with the Sangamon County Historical Society, he has served as president of the Board of Directors of the Illinois Center for the Book, an affiliate of the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress. He also is a member of the Advisory Board for *Illinois Issues* magazine and president of the board of the West Sangamon Public Library District.

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Can You ID This Month's Mystery Photo?



SLICE OF LIFE? Did you or someone you know work for the Interstate Bakery in the early 60s? You or they could be in this October 10, 1961 photo. It's another in the Society's series of Photo ID contest shots to help the Sangamon Valley Collection at the Lincoln Library identify Mercury Studio photos they're now digitizing. If you can name one or more of those in the photo, send the info along to research@sancohis.org. Your name will be entered in a prize drawing scheduled for May. For more photos, go to www.sancohis.org.

2010 Meeting Calendar

Monthly Programs

(Third Tuesday)

May 18

Governors and Gangsters

Speaker: Taylor Pensoneau

7 p.m., Lincoln Library, Springfield

June 15

Annual Dinner Meeting

*Williamsville Municipal Building,
Williamsville*

2010 Board Meetings

5 p.m., Lincoln Library, Springfield

April 14

May 12