



Historico

The newsletter of the Sangamon County Historical Society
 308 E. Adams Street, Springfield, IL 62701
 www.sancohis.org 217.522.2500

December '05/January 2006

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Special event for members only:

History for the Holidays

Iles House

December 13 6:00—8:00 PM

- Refreshments and hors d'oeuvres
- Membership drive *Grand Prize!*
- Presentation of restored 1876 Map
By Curtis Mann
- December Surprise (courtesy of our President)

Reservations and a \$5.00 donation required

This is a special evening! Come see the Iles House by candlelight, enjoy delicious refreshments and attend a special program about the 1876 map you helped get restored.

If you are an individual member and you wish to bring a member of your household, we would be delighted to update your membership to a 'Family' status for just \$7.50; and if you wish to bring someone who is not a member of your household, we would be even more delighted to receive a \$17.50 membership in their name (and give you credit towards the Membership prize)!

Reservations deadline December 6th, see form p. 5

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January 17, 2006, Tuesday, 7:00 PM

Program

Lincoln Library, Carnegie Room North

The Ursuline Sisters in Springfield

A look back at the interesting history of the Ursuline Sisters in Springfield, beginning with the arrival of the first Ursulines in the city nearly 150 years ago, will be presented by three current members of the religious order. They are Sister Darlene Fulgenzi and Sister Beata Knoedler, both of Springfield, and Sister Rosemary Meiman of St. Louis.

The trio will trace the Springfield role of their order—founded in Italy in 1535 as the Company of St. Ursula and now known as the Ursuline Sisters—from the day in 1857 that Mother Mary Joseph Woulfe and six other Ursulines arrived in Springfield to work and teach at the request of Catholic Bishop Henry Juncker. Within a few days of their arrival, the sisters founded Ursuline Academy. Almost immediately, the school's classes included daughters of many prominent families, including Rhoda Bissell Thomas, a daughter of Governor William H. Bissell. Steadily increasing attendance at the academy led to the Ursulines' move in 1867 to a new school campus and large convent on North Fifth Street. In June 2005 the sisters moved from the convent to smaller living units in Springfield.

Sister Darlene, a member of the Ursulines since 1956 and their present prioress in Springfield, has a masters degree in Latin from St. Louis University and has taught the language at the high school level. Sister Beata, an Ursuline since 1939, is currently the alumni coordinator at Springfield College/Benedictine University. Sister Rosemary is the archivist for the Ursuline Sisters of the Central Province in the United States.

Report on the Book Review

A book providing insight into the perilous existence of a woman slave in nineteenth century America was reviewed at a SCHS-sponsored dinner the evening of November 10 at LaSorella restaurant. The book, a novel entitled *The Bondwoman's Narrative*, was written in the 1850s by Hannah Crafts. It is said to be the only known novel written by a female African American slave. She apparently had escaped to freedom by the time she wrote the manuscript in longhand. Barbara Burris, a Springfield community leader, reviewed the book and led a discussion of it at the dinner. Burris said that the book is depicted as a fictionalized biography of Crafts, even though many persons believe that it reveals an accurate account of the ups and downs experienced by Crafts—who was in bondage in several southern

states, and sold more than once, before she eluded slave hunters in a daring escape to the north and freedom. Her manuscript was turned into a book by Henry Louis Gates Jr., chair of Harvard's Afro-American Studies Department, after he obtained the manuscript and edited it.

Report on the November program -

Kelley Boston presented a fascinating report on the effort to establish a utopian society in Loami, Illinois in the 1840s. She explained that a group of settlers, mostly having lived and worked in the area for about 20 years, decided to establish a commune modeled after that proposed by Charles Fourier of France. Fourier's student, Albert Brisbane, had translated Fourier's teachings into English and popular-

ized them in this country to the point that plans to establish communes following Fourier's "Pledges and Rules" with the goal of achieving "happiness, truthfulness, compassion and industry" in a communal setting were instigated in at least ten states across the country, though only a few actually came into existence, and fewer yet surviving as long as the four year duration of the 'Sangamon Association', which became the 'Integral Phalanx' with the inclusion of the extended family of John Williams of Ohio, a Fourier lecturer and adherent.

Kelley reported extensive details on the various Loami area residents who proposed to join the commune. Most were from New England, belonged to the Christian church of leader, Rev. Theophilus Sweet, and were seemingly successful farmers and trades-

The President's Corner

I am happy to see many recent historical activities happening in our county: the Lincoln Colloquium, the Iles House and Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library & Museum openings, the installation of a marker by the house where Charles Lindbergh slept in Athens after landing in Sangamon County, and most recently, the Rochester Historical Preservation Society's dedication ceremony on October 23, 2005 at 2 P.M. for the Old Stone House that was built in the 1840's and now moved to a new location at the Rochester Historical Village, adjacent to Rochester Park on Rochester's West Main Street. SCHS Board member Carolyn Moore and SCHS member Dorothy Ross were active participants in this event. We need more such renovation/conservation efforts to preserve the relics of our past.

A November 2, 2005 letter I received from our Society's first president, John T. Trutter, tells us of his own recollection of Lindbergh's emergency landing in Athens. His letter states: "I was quite interested in 'Lindbergh's Emergency Landing' in Historico. My late father, Attorney Frank Trutter, and my older brother, Architect Philip Trutter, took me out to the farm to see Charles Lindbergh to delivering mail to Springfield. At that time I was six years of age but I remembered the plane and getting to meet Lindbergh! Thank you for a remarkable story. P.S. I was a founder of the Sangamon County Historical Society and its first president. Best wishes in your leadership today!" "Thank you *Mr. President* for your message and our best wishes to you, too, for your continued good health."

Our first Book Review, the idea of Special Events Chair Elena Pilapil, was about the "*The Bondwoman's Narrative*," reviewed by Barbara Burris. It is an educational history on the subject of slavery which was a major issue during the Lincoln presidency. Our November program about an attempt in the 1840s at "*Utopian Socialism in Sangamon County*," presented by Kelley Boston, was well received and she had agreed to its publication by our Society.

During our coming December 13 membership event at Iles House, our so-called "*History for the Holidays*," the name suggested by our Editor and voted by many as the most apt term for the event, we will have the opportunity to visit with everyone in a holiday atmosphere, enjoy the delightful foods of the season, listen to a historical presentation and later drop our jaws at our *December Surprise*. So, please come to this and future events, to learn some history and to get to know each other better. We will usher 2006 with our January program but note that our next *Historico* will not appear until February, so please mark your calendars now of the forthcoming events, lest you forget.

On an unhappy note, we are saddened by the death of our Board Secretary, James P. Coble, who passed away November 6. Our condolence to his family for their loss, which is also ours. We pray for Jim's peace and rest in that other life. "We had placed flowers on your way, Jim!" – VRP.

men. However, disagreements about how to proceed began almost as soon as the society was formed in March of 1845. Land valuation issues and procedural questions led to the inclusion of the Ohio group who claimed both Fourier knowledge and the ability to attract many additional members to the new commune. Williams and his followers from the Integral Phalanx had different ideas of how to proceed though, demanding that the population of the group needed to reach at least 400 before becoming a commune and practicing the socialist teachings of Fourier, rather than commencing a communal society immediately before such a population could be amassed.

By July of 1846 John Williams had resigned and returned to Ohio, by

the end of the year a quarter of the families had dropped out and by March of 1847 all the families had returned to their own properties. While the Sangamon County members had worked out a dissolution plan, John Williams of Ohio argued for money he claimed was owed to him, and the group turned to the court for resolution. It was April, 1848 before the court resolved the case in favor of the original group.

We are grateful for donations -

Keith & Marian Wright

In memory of James Coble

Dr. & Mrs. Virgilio Pilapil

Note from Curtis Mann: about the story that follows:

Springfield, Illinois has been noted as once being a stop on the Underground Railroad in which escaped slaves were assisted to freedom. While maps show Railroad routes leading to Springfield, other archival records are silent about the homes that once served as "stations" and the people who served as "conductors." A recent acquisition to the Sangamon Valley Collection provides significant information about one of the stations that once existed in Springfield. A reminiscence in a literary magazine from 1898 by "a well-known colored citizen" describes man's exploits as a conductor in getting an escaped slave girl to freedom in 1858. Though not specifically named, several clues in the story reveal the man to be William Donnegan, the free black resident of Springfield who later tragically died in the race riot of 1908.

Most old people will remember, and many young ones have read in their school histories about the celebrated "Underground Railways" established throughout the Northern States in the old slavery days, before the civil war. If all of the thrilling events incident to the escapes, and attempted escapes of runaways were written out they would form a volume as intensely interesting and dramatic as any of the "blood and thunder" novels of any age or authorship.

Springfield was by no means wanting in such events, and we give the following story as a sample. It comes from a well-known colored citizen of Springfield, himself and brothers free-born, and bent on freeing others, as can well be guessed from the narrative that follows. The story will be given as nearly as possible exactly as he relates it.

"I lived, in those days, on the north side of Jefferson, between Eighth and Ninth streets, in a story and a half house. It is still standing, and I could show you the garret yet in which many a runaway has been hidden while the town was being searched. I have secreted scores of them, I once had seven hundred dollars in gold and silver turned into my lap by the owner of a slave as a bribe for my assisting in his recapture. This took place in my shoe shop on Fourth street. The house is not now standing. Well, could not capture the fellow, and had to return the money; but all the same he was under a pile of leather in that very room when the money was paid.

"One early morning in the summer or spring of 1858, I think it was, George Burreas, a barber and a near neighbor of mine, came into my shop somewhat excited and wanted me to go home at once. He said that during the night a wagon had driven up to his house and hurriedly unloaded a

runaway slave girl, the driver getting away as quickly as possible, explaining that they had been hotly pursued from Jacksonville, and that their pursuers could not be far away then. He also hurriedly explained that the girl must be concealed carefully and quickly as she was a dangerous character, being hard to manage. What was especially dangerous was that she had an excellent memory and could tell the name of every man, woman and baby along the route. She had come from St. Louis to Springfield. She was liable to give all of them away to authorities by her imprudence. You must recollect that we didn't know another's names. It was best not. When a man unloaded one or more Negroes at my house or at any other station in the night (it was always done then) his name was not asked. But this girl had caught the names and would tell them. So George said I must take her and hide her.

"I went home at once and found a girl about sixteen years of age and weighing about one hundred and forty pounds. This man Burreas, you understand, lived right by me, and the girl has been left there by mistake in the excitement. I said, "See here, gal, they say that you're in danger of giving us all away, and if you don't do as I tell you, or if you threaten to get us into trouble, I'll shoot you. She replied that she hoped I'd shoot her if she was about to be recaptured. She said that a brother and a sister of hers had been caught again and burned. She was in earnest, too; but smart as she was, she was a fool. She had no judgment; she wanted to see everything. I sent her into the back part of the house and told her to keep out of sight. I stayed around, and in about an hour I saw three men – one red-headed – coming down the street. As they approached, the girl peeped out of a window and exclaimed, "O, that's my young master and his father." I

told her to go quick the back way to Burreas' house. She had hardly gone out of sight when in came the three inquiring for a wash woman who lived there. I told them there was none there – they must be mistaken in the place. They seemed disappointed, and came on into the kitchen. Finding nobody, and having no excuse, they reluctantly went out again at the front door.

"I knew they'd go to Burreas', and as soon as they left the door I managed to slip back by the back way and come into the kitchen. So, as they entered the house, she left and came into mine. I hustled her into the attic, and told her to go away back and crawl in behind the chimney and stay there till I told her to come out. Well, the men came back and fooled around awhile and left disappointed.

"Now what was to be done was a question. I knew the house would be watched all night. I heard in the afternoon that about thirty men had been engaged about town for that night. A full description of her had been given in the Springfield Register as she looked when she ran away, with an offer of, I think, \$500 for her capture. I knew she was a dangerous girl to keep about the place and finally hit on an expedient. Another girl, almost white, lived near named Hal, who was just about this girl's size and form, but this runaway was quite black. I went down town and got a pair of white gloves and a white false face, which I knew in the darkness would give the impression of whiteness. I told her what to call me, and what to talk about and instructed her to alter her voice, so that if her master heard he would not know her. I knew that the dog-fennel all around between me and Ninth street would probably be full of men watching who came to or left my house after night.

When it was dark enough I sallied out with her, talking to Hal loud enough to be heard, and she talking

to me about things that happened days before. We started east, I intending to get her into a house in the east of town for awhile. We hadn't got far when three men passed us, one of whom I recognized as a Springfield man named Emmet. Immediately after passing they had stopped and were holding a consultation. I heard a man say:

"She moves exactly like my girl."

"No," said another, "this one's white."

"Well, I believe we ought to get her away – I believe it's the girl I'm after," was the reply.

I heard Emmet say, "You'd better be careful not to make a mistake. He carries bowie knife and a shooter that will kill at 150 yards, and he's the kind that uses them."

"Well, I won't risk my life for any nigger," was the reply.

They kept at a distance, but still knew where we went. I couldn't get the girl taken in at the house to which we went, so thought I'd take her up to the timber near the Converse school, hoping to escape pursuit there. I went directly north on Ninth street, but they blocked my game, outflanked me and got there ahead. I began to think it was dangerous to get into the woods with those three against me, so I turned down the C & A track and went over to Third street, and back towards town. The men still followed. Near Carpenter street a bulldog broke his chain and attacked us, catching hold of the girl's skirts. She screamed. I told her to be still, and placing my revolver to the dog's head I fired, splattering its brains over my hands. Then I turned to the men who were crowding still closer and shouted that I would kill any four-legged or two-legged dogs that bothered me much more. At this they fell back somewhat. I was going down Fourth street by this time, towards a Methodist church that stood there then, and in which there was a meeting that night. It all at once occurred that I might make this useful. I went to a man at the door and told

him I was being followed, and asked him in a few moments to open the door widely and close it again, while we slipped around the building and out of sight. I thought the men would think we went in and while they were looking we might escape. And sure enough, that worked! They stopped, and while they were finding out that we were not in the house we doubled on our track as fast as possible, crossed the C & A going west, jumped over a fence and made away for the woods and down where the present O & M track is, towards the old West Shaft. I was aiming to get to a Mr. Gardner's or Lyman's, one of our stations near the Beardstown road, west of Bradfordton. As I drew near the bridge over the creek west of the city I thought I'd better be cautious, as it might be guarded. So, going off a few rods from the road, I made the girl climb up into the fork of a red-bud tree to wait until I went forward to look for enemies. The woods were full of wild hogs and cows, the latter being quite fierce when they had calves as many of them had, so I told her she must not come down till I came back. Some little distance from the bridge a dog growled at my side. I gave it some meat – I always carried a lunch on such occasions – and soon quieted it. Going cautiously forward I found the bridge at the old mill guarded by a dozen with guns. I came back to where the girl was. She said she was afraid and must come down, and in fact did climb down. I made her get up, and again left her, going this time up to the bridge on the Beardstown road. It was guarded. I tried to find a place to cross but could not as the stream was full, so I went back again to where I left the girl. It was now getting on towards daylight. Presently I heard the clatter of horses' feet and the whole company swept by on horses toward town. They had left for the night. But it was too late for us to go on; daylight would catch us before we could get half way to our destination. I says to the girl, "Get down now, and follow me quick." And we came into town right behind our pursu-

ers. I went straight for my brother's house on Carpenter street, and called him up. He said:

"You'd better get in here quick. My house has been watched all night, and I think they just left."

"So we hustled in, and began to plan how to get the girl out of the city. My brother said that John Stewart was going to take a gang of colored men out to the neighborhood of Lyman's to go plowing."

"That's all right," I said. "now, let us get her up a boy's rig and send her out with them as a boy. None but Stewart need know, and he can tell Lyman all about her." So we rigged her out and sent her to the country in that way in daylight."

"One of our men down near St. Louis that helped run slaves off got shot about this time, and broke our line for nearly six weeks, during which time she remained at Lyman's. Finally he sent word that something must be done. She couldn't be restrained from showing herself, and they were in terror lest she give the whole underground railroad gang away. I sent word to Mrs. Lyman to tell the girl I was going to shoot her. And I did go and hunted the house over for her, shot my pistol off a few times and scared her nearly to death. Of course I couldn't find her, but she was so frightened that when she was told to go into the basement and remain hid she did so.

"After some time we succeeded in getting her out of the country, off towards Canada."

"Oh," said our informant, after relating the above, "I could give you a whole lot of such scrapes. But I'll never forget the night I spent in trying to get that girl away."

We Welcome New Members!

Kelley Boston
Harry and Betsy Newman
Elizabeth Pensoneau

Sangamon County Historical Society
308 E. Adams Street
Springfield, IL 62701



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A Sleigh Ride Long Ago

A seasonal story from one of the several issues of a literary magazine published in Springfield in 1897-98. Known as the *Public Patron*, this monthly periodical is full of interesting stories, advertisements and illustrations. One segment of the magazine called "Old Settlers Department" provides stories from Springfield and Sangamon County's past. With the oncoming of cold weather the following piece that appeared in the January 1898 issue of the *Public Patron* seemed appropriate to reprint.

"Mr. R.C. Allen of West Springfield, recalls Christmas Eve in Springfield fifty years ago, and states that it was bitterly cold. He remembers it by a sleigh-ride that a party of young folks indulged in. It seems that at Rochester there was a tavern that contained a spring floor, for dancing – the only one of the kind he ever knew of in the west. It made it quite a noted resort for dancing parties. He also states that Rochester had about sixteen of the prettiest girls in the county – the prettiest he ever saw. Parties were often made up here, word was sent to the Rochester landlord during the day, and at night the party of dancers would follow. On this occasion a sled load was made, some with girls and some without. He had a girl and a buffalo robe, and so was all right. But some had neither girl nor robe, and nearly froze. Among these was present well-known congressman Hitt (Robert Roberts Hitt); then it seems a law student. He and a companion came near freezing, and were compelled to get out of the sled and travel much of the way on foot. This was Christmas eve, (and Mr. Allen thinks its was on a Friday night, too) fifty years ago, December 24th, 1847."

All of the issues of the *Public Patron* are extremely brittle. The SVC plans to make a print copy of the periodical as well as microfilm it.

Curtis Mann

I am currently a Sangamon County Historical Society Member _____ ; wish to upgrade membership _____

I am joining SCHS herewith _____ Reservation deadline: December 6th!

Please reserve _____ place(s) for *History for the Holidays*, December 13th \$5.00 per member donation

Enclosed: \$ _____

Name(s) of Attendee(s): _____

Phone number: _____

Mail to: SCHS, 308 E. Adams, Springfield, IL 62701