



SANGAMON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

HISTORICO

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FEBRUARY, 1990

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LOOKING AHEAD - "FROM THE TOP HAT FILES OF WOODY"

The next meeting of the Sangamon County Historical Society will be held on Tuesday, February 20, 1990, at 7:00 P.M. in the Carnegie Room at Lincoln Library, when our speaker will be Judge Harlington Wood, Jr., of the U.S. Court of Appeals. Judge Wood, who received his A.B. and J.D. degrees at the University of Illinois, entered private practice as an attorney with the firm of Wood and Wood in Springfield in 1948, following 4 years of service with the U.S. Army in both Europe and Asia. He served as U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Illinois from 1958 - 1961 upon appointment by President Eisenhower, then returned to his private practice. Starting in 1969 he was associated with the U.S. Dept. of Justice, both in Washington, D.C. and in Illinois, on appointments made by President Nixon. In 1976 President Ford appointed him Circuit Judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit, Chicago, Ill. (Ill. Wis. and Ind.), his present position. Among his many unusual assignments was his position as chief Government Negotiator at Wounded Knee in 1973 and at the peace demonstrations in Washington. Short term assignments for the Dept. of Justice, 1970 - 1973, took him to Paris, South Korea and Yugoslavia, and his other numerous travels, both on business and on personal trips, have taken him to many countries on every continent. Locally, he has been active at various times with the Abraham Lincoln Association, (of which he was president), the Seventh Cavalry (reactivated) and the Lincoln Legals project. At the Abraham Lincoln Association banquet on February 12 he will receive the Association's "Lincoln the Lawyer Award." We look forward to February 20 when we will hear from "Woody," as he is known to his many friends, drawing upon the interesting experiences of his career to enlighten, educate and entertain us.

STILL LOOKING AHEAD

Our March meeting also will be held at Lincoln Library on Tuesday, March 20, 1990, 7:00 P.M., when Attorney Bruce Beeman will speak on the "Renovation of the James Graham Home."

A LOOK BACK - AT AN 1859 TRIAL

The transcript of an 1859 murder trial in which Abraham Lincoln played a key role was the topic of Cullom Davis' presentation for the Society's meeting at Lincoln Library on January 25.

Dr. Floyd Barringer introduced Cullom, a professor of history at Sangamon State University and a long-time member of our Society. He was the first chairman of our Bicentennial Studies in Sangamon History, our highly successful publishing project in observance of the U.S. Bicentennial. Cullom is a native of Peoria, and studied at Princeton University where he received his A.B. degree and at the University of Illinois where he earned his M.A. and Ph.D. degrees. His great-great uncle was Shelby M. Cullom, who served in both the U.S. and Illinois legislatures, and as Governor of Illinois, 1877 - 1883. Cullom Davis is the Director of the Lincoln Legal Papers, a project organized to compile the documentary history of the law practice of Abraham Lincoln from 1836 to 1861. It is sponsored by the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, the Abraham Lincoln Assoc., and the University of Illinois, with assistance from the Legal Studies Center of Sangamon State University. It is estimated that about 3000 cases and possibly from 50,000 to 70,000 documents will be located and studied in order to complete the full documentation of Lincoln's legal career.

About a year ago a copy of a 100-page handwritten transcript concerning the 1859 Peachy Harrison murder trial was donated to the Lincoln Legals committee by the widow of Harrison's great-grandson. It is a rare document in that full transcripts were seldom made of cases in that day. Most were summarized, but this full transcript serves to show how carefully Lincoln prepared and presented a case.

The Harrisons and Craftons lived on farms close to the community of Pleasant Plains. Mrs. Harrison was the daughter of the pioneer Methodist minister, Peter Cartwright. The Harrisons were prosperous farmers, associated with the Republican Party and Abraham Lincoln. Their son, Peachy, one of 6 children, was a frail young man, 21 years old, still living at home. The Craftons, who were Democrats, were a thriving family, but less prominent. They had 7 children, including their 22 year old son, Greek, who had clerked as an apprentice lawyer in the Lincoln-Herndon law office. His brother, William Peter, was married to Peachy Harrison's sister, Eliza. It was over Peachy's allegations of Peter's marital infidelity that Peachy and Greek fell into a serious and threatening argument early in July of 1859. During the next 10 days or so they continued to threaten each other. When they happened to meet in Short's Drug Store in Pleasant Plains on July 16, Greek jumped on Peachy from behind, trying to wrestle him to the floor. Peachy drew a knife with a four inch blade and stabbed Greek in the chest. The wounded man died two days later in the home of a local doctor. The fight and murder were big news in all area papers. In early August a grand jury indicted Harrison for murder, and his trial was held in late August at the Sangamon County Courthouse, then located on the S.E. corner of Washington and Sixth Streets in Springfield. A list of trial personalities reads like a "Who's Who" of the area legal profession. The Judge was E. Y. Rice of Hillsboro; prosecuting attorneys were State's Atty. James B. White and John M. Palmer, as well as, Norman Broadwell and Isaac Cogdale, both of whom had clerked in the Lincoln-Herndon law office. Defense attorneys were Abraham Lincoln, Stephen T. Logan (Lincoln's former law partner), and Shelby M. Cullom, a young lawyer in practice for 4 years at that time. The court reporter was Robert Hitt, of Chicago, who had been Lincoln's stenographer in the Lincoln-Douglas debates in 1858. The jury was made up of 10 farmers, a carpenter and an engineer. The trial lasted 4 days during some of the summer's hottest weather. Lincoln engaged in several bitter exchanges with the judge and the prosecuting attorneys over the admissibility of evidence which affected his client's self-defense stand, but in spite of his angry and spirited arguments he stayed within the law. The judge, though reluctant, reversed his stand on a ruling that would have barred the testimony before a jury of Lincoln's star witness because it could be deemed as hearsay. The star witness was the Rev. Peter Cartwright, who had been called by the dying victim to pray for him. Cart-