



HISTORICO

Sangamon County Historical Society Newsletter

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

DECEMBER 2009-JANUARY 2010

On Tap January 19 in Chatham

Geologist to Look at How Springs Shaped History Here

Retired groundwater geologist Philip C. Reed kicks off the Society's winter-spring program lineup on Tuesday, January 19 with a look at how springs and licks helped shape the social, political, and economic development of Illinois, including that of its most prominent historical figure, Abraham Lincoln.

His presentation will begin at 7 p.m. at the Chatham Public Library, 600 East Spruce Street. The session is open to the public.

Reed, who retired from the Illinois State Geological Survey in 1995, has authored or co-authored 65 scientific publications on geophysics, groundwater contamination, groundwater availability, and general geology, the most recent *"Spring Place Names and Historic Data on Springs, Licks, and Selected Water Wells in Illinois"* which was published in 2009. In his talk, Reed is expected to discuss the unique geologic and geographic aspects of Illinois that produced springs and licks intertwined with the fortunes of its political leaders and industries.

Reed's fascination with groundwater dates back to his youth, when in 1938 the train he was on with his mother and sister, stopped in St. Augustine, Florida so that passengers could visit the "Fountain of Youth," a tourist attraction that was created in 1904 to denote

reflects Reed, who transformed his youthful observation into a 25 year career with the Illinois State Geological Survey.

During that time, he performed over 900 environmental surveys that helped municipalities, industries, farms, and thousands of individuals find suitable groundwater from glacial sand and gravel aquifers. In addition, Mr. Reed has participated in and led research projects such as pollution control studies, irrigation potential and impact studies, and an inventory of springs in Illinois, and he



GEOLOGIST PHIL REED (above) who will tell how springs influenced the political, social and economic development of the area. The session will be held at the Chatham Public Library (right).

the spot where explorer Ponce de Leon landed in 1513 in search of a legendary spring that could cure all ills. For more than 100 years, tourists have been sipping its waters.

"From that time I noticed people were attracted to ponded water, fountains, and springs. There were always coins in the ponds and fountains, presumably giving homage to the gods,"

has assisted graduate students from Southern and Northern Illinois Universities with their Masters Degree work.

Regarded as one of the primary individuals providing groundwater information and service at the Survey, he is a recipient of the Illinois Ground Water Association's achievement award presented annually to those with an outstanding record in the field.

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HONORED: R-Lou Barker holds a special gift presented to her at the Society's annual Holiday Party. More photos on pages 4 and 5.



Ahead in 2010:

- DATE: FEBRUARY 16**
- TOPIC: "Remembering the Interurban"**
- SPEAKER: Dale Jenkins, president, Illinois Traction Society**
- TIME: 7 p.m.**
- LOCATION: Lincoln Library, Springfield**





For the Society, a Great 2009 and an Even Better 2010!

This fall we have been very grateful to the Iles House Foundation not only for their generosity in allowing us to meet at the Iles House, but the hospitality with which they welcomed us each month. And we were delighted when Farrell Gay put out a fine display of watches for us to see at the October meeting!

However, the promise of cold weather caused us to explore other options for the winter, and we were pleased to learn the Lincoln Library has arranged to hire a security guard so that groups could meet and remain in the Carnegie Rooms until the usual 9 p.m. hour. The Board has now agreed that we will again look to the Carnegie Room at the library as our 'home'. We will be meeting at the Chatham Area Library in January, but then it will be back to the Carnegie Room for the following two months.

The holiday season seems an appropriate time to thank lots of people for their efforts to promote Sangamon County history: always to Curtis Mann

who is ever helpful in too many ways to delineate; to Elaine Birtch and the Project Awards committee who have worked diligently to offer grants to middle school history/social studies teachers; to our *Historico* editor for an attractive and really fascinating newsletter; to Jack Alexander and the Program Committee for putting together a special spring series of programs; to Roger Whitaker's updated website; to John Barker and R-Lou for hosting the holiday party at the charming Stonegate Farm and especially to Vicky Whitaker who took it on herself to 'get us on the map' by designing, acquiring and creating fascinating ornaments, and then decorating a tree in our name for the Festival of Trees. 'Our' tree was not to be missed, and therefore the Society was brought to the attention of thousands of visitors to the Festival. We're on the map!!

Happy Holidays!

Nancy

DECEMBER REPORT

New Members.....

<u>INDIVIDUAL</u>	Dennis L. Sweatman
DiAnne Crown	<u>FAMILY</u>
Jonathan Hunter Jones	Mr. And Mrs. Richard Bubnis

Donors.....

Tim Krell
 R-Lou Barker
 Gary Vitale
 Cullom and Ann Davis
(in appreciation of Nancy Chapin)
 Phyllis Brissenden
(in honor of R-Lou Barker's birthday)

The Society thanks you for your generosity in providing additional support for our programs!

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.



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 ♦ Jane Vetter

Directors to 2012

Tim Krell ♦ Vicki Megginson
Sarah Thomas ♦ Roger Whitaker

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.

Board Member to Speak Local Organizations Tap Huther For Talks on Washington Park

Sangamon County Historical Society board member John Huther will be sharing some insights on the history of Washington Park in March and April when he speaks to members of two local organizations.

Huther, author of *“Washington Park in Springfield, Illinois: From Its Beginning to the Present Time,”* will address the Academy for Life Long Learning at Lincoln Land Community College on March 18 at 1 p.m.

On April 28, he’ll be speaking to the Springfield Chapter of Hadassah, time and place to be announced.

His book, published by the Society last spring, provides a

detailed history of the park that regularly draws thousands of visitors to its 150 acres of rolling woodlands, open spaces and recreational facilities, including tennis courts, bike and walking trails, waterways, playgrounds, gardens and picnic areas as well as the internationally known Rees Memorial Carillon.

Huther, a native of Utica, New York, holds a bachelor of Arts degree from Colgate University, a masters from the University of Washington and

SPARKING INTEREST: Society member John Huther’s research on the history of Washington Park has prompted two speaking engagements.

a Ph.D. from the University of Michigan. He moved to Springfield in 1973 to serve on the staff of the Illinois Board of Higher Education from which he retired in 1990. He is the author of several books and essays about family in northern New York and wrote a series of essays about Washington Park for which he won the 1991 *Non-Fiction Writer of the Year* award from the Friends of Lincoln Library.

Copies of the book are available from the Society for \$6.



FESTIVAL EYE CATCHER: Festival of Trees goers stopped often for a close look at the Society’s tree, a black and silver combo that featured 35 framed photos of Springfield’s past, hand-etched on a silver background. The tree topper was made of two back-to-back 8 by 10 photos, one of the State Capitol, the other of the Orpheum Theatre. Most of the photos were reproduced from those in the Mercury Collection housed in the Lincoln Library’s Sangamon Valley Room. The tree was purchased by Dr. David and GerriAnne Graham. Dr. Graham is chief medical information officer for the Memorial Health System and on the Family and Community Medicine faculty at SIU’s School of Medicine.

Remember That Great Historic Tour? Society Tours Chair Would Love to Hear About It!

Susan Hammond, the Society’s Tours chair, is still looking for suggestions for tours the Society can set up both within and beyond Sangamon County.

Whether you’ve taken a tour of a historic site or know someone who has, Hammond would like to know more about every aspect of it including what was seen, transportation experience, cost, etc.

“It’s a perfect opportunity for you to share some of your experiences in visiting historical sites that are nearby as well as out of the area and to suggest other places you’ve heard about from others or that you’d love the opportunity to visit,” reiterates Hammond, who can be reached at 546-1990 or by e-mail at hammsusan@yahoo.com.

Society's Annual Holiday Celebration A Hit!



SURPRISE: Sangamon County Historical Society president Nancy Chapin, (left) looks on as R-Lou Barker shows off the etched photo of Stonegate that was presented to her by the Board in honor of her 75th birthday in December.

Foul weather was no match for the enthusiasm of more than 80 members of the Society when they gathered at the Barker family's historic Springfield homestead, Stonegate for its annual History for the Holidays party on Tuesday, December 8. It may have been raining outside, but inside the handsome colonial—parts of which date back to before the Civil War—it was warm and convivial as members had a chance to chat, sip wine generously provided by several members (and from Robert Kohaus of It's All About Wine in Springfield, and Forrest Kreer of Stoller Wholesale in Franklin Park). Highlighting the evening was a presentation to the event's hostess, R-Lou Barker, to commemorate her 85th birthday in December. Barker received a framed, hand-etched photo of Stonegate created especially for her. The evening was made special by Carol Jean Fraase's providing a delicious buffet dinner and dessert instead of the canapés contracted to be served. Thank you Carol Jean!



CHEERS: Marylou Johnsrud (second from right) gets ready to pour wine for her husband Bryan (second from left) as Elizabeth Reisch (left) and Bill Vetter look on.

HOLIDAY EXCHANGE: Virginia Scott (left) and her husband David (right), the Society's vice-president, share a moment with Richard Carlson.



CHAT: At left, Alan Birtch chats with a fellow attendee while at right, Dan Buck heads other Society members stepping in to join the party..

DINNER TIME: President Chapin encourages Phyllis Eubanks, Charles Hammond and John Huther to sample the buffet.



AS OTHER SOCIETY members look on, Helen Brooks (right) takes a closer look at some local history books and notepaper that Phyllis Brissenden (right) brought along for members who might need holiday gifts. Included was *Springfield Memories*, the State Journal-Register's new book of photos that the Society helped select. In appreciation, the SJ-R provided the Society with 100 copies which are priced at \$30 each.



SHARED MOMENT: Marcie and Bill Irvine (above) with Roberta Jochantgen, seated right,

MEMBER OF THE MONTH

History, Helping: A Life's Work for Elaine Birtch

"The more we know of history, the better we can understand the people who came before us," says Elaine Birtch, this month's "Member of the Month," expressing a view that has shaped her role both with the Society and the community.

Birtch, who has been a member of the Society for several years and serves as a board member and chair of the Project Committee, moved to Springfield from Boston, Massachusetts in 1972 with her husband Dr. Alan Birtch and their four children. Her husband, who is also a member of the Society, founded Memorial Medical Center's Kidney Transplant Center and served as its director until his retirement in 1996. A Professor Emeritus of Surgery at Southern Illinois University's School of Medicine, he helped establish its Department of Surgery.

"My interest in Springfield history probably dates back to the interview I did with Dr. Floyd Barringer in 1984 as part of an Oral History Project for Sangamon State (now the University of Illinois). Dr. Barringer, who died in 1993, was a neurosurgeon and a historian for Sangamon County, long before there were professors of history in our city. His enthusiasm for the story of the early settlers was catching," she admits.

[*Editor's Note:* In that interview, the text of which is available as a PDF file on line at www.uis.edu/archives/oralb.htm, Dr. Barringer discussed his interest in history including his involvement with the Abraham Lincoln Association, the Sangamon County Historical Soci-

ety (of which he served as president in the early 1960s) and restoration of numerous historic sites including the Governor's Mansion and Elijah Iles House. He also authored several books on local history].

The Society's current president, Nancy Chapin, Birtch says, is responsible for getting her involved in one activity that she has particularly enjoyed over the years, the Cemetery Walk, for which she has



done research and written about.

"There were two times when I portrayed the person I had researched and wrote about," Birtch recalls, adding that "the Cemetery Walks on a crisp October Day have always been a delight, whether I've been an actor or a visitor."

Birtch, who has been on the Society board for three years, has spent the past year creating an awards program for middle school teachers to promote the study of Springfield and Sangamon County. "I'd like to encourage younger people to become interested in the history of

where they live. They all know Lincoln but we'd like to take a step further to include Sangamon County."

A former teacher, Birtch had a distinctive early education: she attended class in a one-room school house in western New York... where her father was the only teacher. That lasted until she reached high school. At that point, the family moved to Pittsburg and to this day, Birtch has keen memories of the first time she walked through the door of a large city public school.

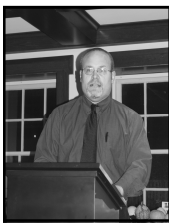
Birtch has long held leadership roles in community organizations, serving as president of the board of Contact Ministries, the Medical Alliance, and Friends of Memorial. She served on the board of the Springfield Area Arts Council for many years and hosted "Artbeat," a local television program. While a member of the board of the Springfield Art Association, Birtch and a friend, the late Peg Lonson, organized the first Edwards Place Arts Fair, now a popular fall event here. She is a founding member of the Liturgical Arts Board and the Illinois Foundation for Frontier Studies board.

"I started an arts enrichment program at Our Savior's School. It was very exciting to see the children's enthusiasm for the arts," says Birtch, who in addition to belonging to two book clubs and a literary club, is a Stephen Minister at St. John's Lutheran church, providing support to those facing a crisis or life challenge. "This is an important part of my life."

Historian Tracks Fate of Faded Family That Helped Shape Area

You never know where research will...or won't take you.

Even with years of experience under his belt, historian Curtis Mann, manager of the Sangamon Valley Collection at Lincoln Library in Springfield at first



Mann

found little to whet his interest in researching James A. Barret and his family. The Barrets were among the cream of Springfield's society in the mid 1800s but wound up in relative historical obscurity. Researching them was tough, explained Mann, speaking to a packed audience at the Society's November 19 meeting at the Elijah Iles House. First names were shared by several relatives, he found, and the family name was often spelled several ways.

Mann came across Barret while doing research on Springfield breweries and also spotted the name on an 1858 map of Sangamon County. Below are some of the key discoveries about James A. Barret:

[For the full text, go to the Society's website at www.sancohis.org].

BARRET THE BUYER

By 1849 James A. Barret owned thousands of acres here, capitalizing on warrants that granted veterans of the Mexican War free land in return for their military service. Many veterans opted to sell the warrants for 50 cents an acre rather than fulfill a requirement that they travel to areas with available land and pick the site themselves. Brokers who bought the warrants resold them to speculators like Barret for 75 cents an acre.

PEGS BUY ON TRACK

In the spring of 1849, Barret agreed to buy 30 shares of Alton and Sangamon Railroad stock on an installment plan

while at the same time working as an agent for the railroad, selling stock subscription certificates in Springfield and across Sangamon County. Barret had a special interest in the railroad since he owned 4,000 acres of land near New Berlin, where the railroad track was intended to be built before making its way to Springfield.

TRACK PLAN DERAILS

In 1851, the Illinois General Assembly passed an amendment that allowed the railroad to change the route, bypassing New Berlin. The amendment allowed subscribers living west of the original line to rescind their installment agreements and get refunds. Though Barret owned land west of the line, he

and the case went to trial in 1851. In a landmark decision credited to the legal prowess of Lincoln, Barret lost and was ordered to pay the remainder of the money. He appealed to the Illinois Supreme Court, but lost there too.

FLAIR FOR MARKETING

Barret continued to buy land and by 1853, owned 16,800 acres, developing some of it into working farms, building houses and fences, planting orchards and crops. "He would give the farms elaborate names such as *Castle Point* or *Copenhagen* when he advertised them for sale from his office on the south side of the public square above his brother-in-law William Fondy's store.

requested that it be ordered to New Mexico. President Lincoln passed along the request to general in chief of U.S. armies, General Henry Hallack in April, 1862, but Halleck turned it down. Barret resigned his commission the following month and within a year or so, moved back to Kentucky where, said Mann, "he apparently was involved in some coal mining and salt making operation.

THE FINAL CHAPTER

Within the decade, the elder Barrets had passed away and in the ensuing years, most other family members moved away, William Barret to Petersburg where he died in 1902. His wife Ellen had died in 1881. Richard



Who Was Who: A Barret Family Guide



Parents:

James Winston Barret and his wife **Maria** who moved here from Green County, Kentucky.

Children:

William, the oldest son, married Elizabeth E. Butler in 1840, a niece of William Butler who was an early friend of Abraham Lincoln when he first arrived in Springfield from New Salem.

Elizabeth, the eldest daughter, married Philip C. Johnson in 1840, a wealthy Easterner. Johnson died in 1852 and in 1853, she married Pascal P. Enos. She died six years later.

Mary married a merchant, William Fondy in 1851. Fondy served in the same company and regiment as the Barret brothers during the Mexican War in 1846

Richard married 26-year-old Sarah Rickard in 1850, the daughter of early settlers of Gardner Township. Sarah Rickard's sister was married to William Butler.

Jane Maria, the youngest of the Barret daughters, married Charles Ridgely in 1857.

James A. married Mary Eliza B. Anderson of Green County in 1848, about a year after beginning his career as a land speculator.

was not eligible for the deal because he resided in Springfield.

RAILROAD SAYS NO

When Barret and three other investors refused to make installment payments, the Alton and Sangamon Railroad sued, retaining Abraham Lincoln as its representative. Barret hired Lincoln's old law partner Stephen Trigg Logan as his attorney and offered a compromise in which he would pay for 15 shares if the railroad would release his obligation for the other 15. The railroad refused

IN A LEGAL BREW

But with his purchase of the distillery, Barret ran afoul of Lincoln anew, the object of a lawsuits brought by the owner of a Springfield lumberyard and from a business partner from whom he had borrowed several thousand dollars. Lincoln successfully represented the lumberyard owner and his law partner, the other complainant.

BACK TO KENTUCKY

When the Civil War broke out "Barret became the colonel of the 10th Illinois Cavalry and

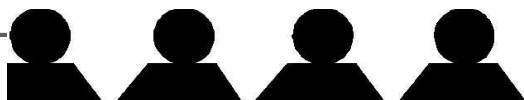
Barret moved to Kansas City in 1870 and lived there the remainder of his life, working as a real estate agent until his death in 1908. His sister-in-law, Sarah Rickard Barret died in 1911, also in Kansas City.

Mary Barret Fondy was widowed in 1882 but remarried several years later to James Merriman, a fellow veteran of the Barret brothers in the Mexican War. She died in 1894.

Jane Barret Ridgely was the sole survivor of the family. She lived to be 85 years old, dying in 1922 while visiting Florida.

Sangamon County Historical Society
308 East Adams Street
Springfield, Illinois 62701

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2010 MEETING SCHEDULE

Monthly Programs

(Third Tuesday)

January 19

How Springs Shaped Local History

Speaker: Phil Reed

February 16

Remembering the Interurban

Speaker: Dale Jenkins

March 16

How Illinois Became A State

Speaker: David Scott

April 20

Springfield's Donner Family: Trials of the Pioneer Trail, 1846

Speaker: Don Springer

May 18

Governors and Gangsters

Speaker: Taylor Pensoneau

June 17

Annual Meeting

2010 Board Meetings

January 13

February 10

March 10

April 14

May 12

Mystery Photo of the Month



RECOGNIZE any of these Illinois Bell Telephone workers at the State Fair (August 12, 1965)? You could win a prize. The shot is part of a group of unidentified photos in the Mercury Studio Collection at the Lincoln Library's Sangamon Valley Collection that the Society is trying to help identify. A new picture is posted on the Society's website (www.sancohis.org) each week as well as monthly in *Historico*. Missed a few? Check the website's archive. Send your info to research@sancohis.org. The names of those who have contributed information will be automatically entered in a drawing that in May will bring one sharp-eyed contributor a prize!