



HISTORICO

Sangamon County Historical Society Newsletter

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

OCTOBER 2009

Research Yields Twist on State's First Fiscal Squeeze: Historian to Explore Local Ties to 1820s Banking Crisis

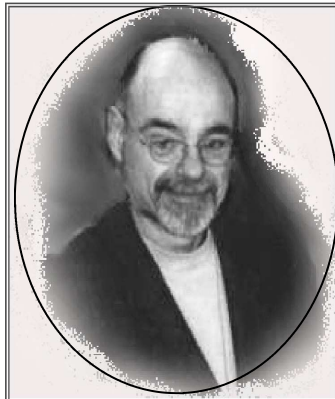
Independent historical researcher David M. Brady will take a closer look at the role of the Sangamons and his contemporaries Charles Matheny and John Taylor played in nearly bankrupting the State of Illinois in the 1820s when he talks about *"Fraud on the Frontier: The State of Illinois vs. the People of the Sangamo Country"* at the **Tuesday, October 20** meeting of the Sangamon County Historical Society.

The meeting will be held at the **Elijah Iles House**, 628 South 7th Street, Springfield, starting at **7 p.m.** The free presentation is open to the public. Refreshments will follow.

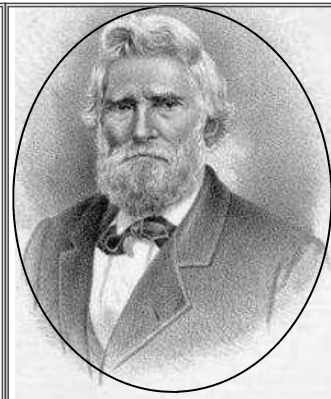
In his talk, Brady, a Springfield resident who previously researched and wrote about causes and impact the Panic of 1819 had on Illinois history, will focus on the action or in-

action on the part of three of Springfield's then most prominent citizens in what would become the state's first economic crisis. At the time, Iles was a state senator and a director of the State Bank of Illinois, Charles Matheny, County Clerk, and John Taylor, County Sheriff.

"Our county histories are based on ego inflating personal biases that are problematic. They hide the truth," says Brady who came to that conclusion while researching the Panic of 1819 and its aftermath. "At no time



BRADY



ILES

in Sangamon County's history has this been more evident than during the pioneer days." Brady's book, *"The Panic of 1819"* was published by the Society in 2006.

Iles, a Kentucky native, came to Illinois
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NEXT MONTH'S MEETING:

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 17

TOPIC: "Gone With The Wind: The Barretts of Springfield."

SPEAKER: Curtis Mann

TIME: 7 p.m.

LOCATION: Iles House, Springfield





October Sure Is Busy For Historians!

Here comes October, the busiest month of the year for history buffs – October 1-2 IHPA Symposium; October 2-3 New Salem's candlelight tour and surveying seminar; October 15 Lincoln Legacy lecture at UIS followed by the NPS Colloquium October 16-17.

In between all of those important happenings there are such historical delicacies as a poetry reading at Lincoln's tomb on October 10; a cemetery walk at Calvary the following day; Old Settlers' Day to be held at Iles House this year on the 24th and the events go on.

Happy October, historians!!

You will soon be seeing a new and improved web site. Among other new features will be lots of photos from the Mercury Studio for which we need your help with some identifications, dates, etc.

A new photo will be put up each week with a re-

quest for information. By next May we will hold a drawing of all those who have contributed information for a grand prize! So take a look each week to see if you have any knowledge of the featured photo. If you miss a week, check the photo archives!

We are excited about plans to sponsor a tree this year for the Festival of Trees. An exciting theme, conceived by Vicky Whitaker, will be "Pictures from the Past" and will be carried out cleverly, so plan to check it out when the Festival opens Saturday, November 21 for a nine-day run. If you'd like to help make our decorations or decorate the tree on set-up weekend, November 7 and 8, contact Vicky at vwhitaker@gmail.com.

Last but not least, please note that our holiday history party has been announced for December 8, and we hope you will all be able to join us at this historic home!

Nancy

OCTOBER REPORT

New Members

Life Membership:

Charles Jones Northrup

New Members:

John Andrew Barker
Robert and Ann Barker
Paul Jones
Richard A. Lusardi
Guy and Edie Sternberg

Donors

Charles and Patricia Boyce
Dr. Mark and Jackie Hansen-
in memory of
Dr. Floyd Barringer
Carolyn Oxtoby
Matthew C. Vernau

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

Membership in the Sangamon County Historical Association 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 Association

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

Directors to 2010

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

Directors to 2011

Jack Alexander ♦ Connie Locher Bussard
John Huther ♦ Jack Navins ♦ Jane Vetter

Directors to 2012

Tim Krell ♦ Vicki Megginson
Bill Minder ♦ 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.

Society's Annual "History for the Holidays" Holiday Party Set for Stonegate

The Sangamon County Historical Society will hold its annual "History for the Holidays" Party on Tuesday, December 8 at Stonegate, the historic Barker family homestead off Chatham Road, Springfield. The party will run from 6 to 8 p.m.

"We're delighted that the Barker family has offered to let us hold the gathering at Stonegate, a house and property with a rich historical past that has served as home to four Barker generations," said president Nancy Chapin.

"We especially thank

SCHS board member R-Lou Barker—whose son John is the current resident—for serving as intermediary in making the arrangements."

Mrs. Barker and her late husband Morton, were the home's previous occupants.

Reservations for the event are \$12.50 per person and are only available to SCHS members. Individual members who wish to bring a spouse or other family member will need to upgrade to family membership. Others will need to become members or receive a gift of membership in order to attend.



Stonegate, which will be the site of the annual "History for the Holidays" Party.

To make a reservation, upgrade your membership fill out the form on page 7 from Individual to Family and return it no later than or to give a gift of membership to someone who provides room for you to would like to attend.

Churches to be Focus of 2010 ISHS Centennial Awards

The Illinois State Historical Society is now accepting applications for its Centennial Awards program that in 2010 will focus on congregations established in Illinois in 1860 or earlier. Recipients will receive a certificate, a complimentary one-year membership in the Society, an invitation to a special awards banquet at Wheaton College and state-wide recognition.

The Sesquicentennial Church Awards will be held in conjunction with the Society's 31st Illinois History Symposium at Wheaton College, which also celebrates its sesquicentennial in 2010. "Abolition: The Spark that Ignited the Second American Revolution" will be the symposium theme.

Applications are available on-line at www.historyillinois.org. There is a \$50 non-refundable application fee. For more information, call 217-525-2781.



Abe's Friends, Family: Cemetery Celebrities

A light rain didn't stop some 35 history buffs from turning out for "Cemetery Celebrities: Friends and Family of the Lincolns," portrayals performed by costumed actors in a sheltered spot in the Lincoln Tomb courtyard, September 26. The free presentation was written by Tomb staffers in conjunction with SCHS.



R-Lou Barker: A Time Honored Commitment to History

"I remember as a child that I would get strangely agitated when looking at the faded black and white photograph of my grandparents' log cabin. I wanted to hear the ghostly voices of the people in those pictures."

R-Lou Barker, from **40Fathers, The Search for Father in Oneself**.

R-Lou Barker, an unassuming woman of style, grace, and knowledge, has never wandered far from a love of history. It weaves through the verbal portrait of her father, John Porter, and her own coming of age in Central Illinois that is part of a just published, critically acclaimed book of 40 essays about a cross-section of fathers, penned by their sons and daughters.

Barker's inspired contribution to **40Fathers, The Search for Father in Oneself**, was authored and edited by family friend Dr. Jess Maghan, a nationally prominent retired University of Illinois professor. The book, published by Welcome Rain Publishers, New York and available on Amazon.com, includes family photos and portraits by distinguished photographer Sam Lindberg.

A Life Member of the Sangamon County Historical Society and chair of the Governor's Illinois State Museum Board, Barker has had a long commitment to the area, investing the qualities that in the book, she said, came from her father "and his invaluable legacy of dependability, fidelity and determination, qualities so inherent to the skills needed in my lifelong work in the world of community service."

Born in McPherson, Kansas, her family moved to Illinois in the late 1930s, then to Centralia, Missouri, and finally back to Illinois, settling in rural Glenarm in the spring of 1942. There, her father, an engineer with Panhandle Eastern Pipeline, oversaw the company's natural gas pipeline operation. "We were under wartime conditions," she recalls. "My dad was on duty seven days a week, 24 hours-a-day."

Barker is the first to admit her first name is a little unusual. "My mother had a neighbor whose first name was R-Lou and she liked it so much, that's what she named me!" Growing up, R-Lou wasn't as enthusiastic. "I would have changed it," she concedes. Having a dash as part of your first name isn't easy, especially on legal forms and passport applications.

She met her husband, Morton D. Barker Jr. while working at Barker Lubin, a family-owned lumber company in Springfield. They wed in June, 1953. That fall, motivated by her own inability to join Girl Scouts and go to meetings as a child during World War II "when there was no gasoline to get there," she applied for and took the lengthy two month training to qualify as a Girl Scout Brownie Leader. She stayed with the Girl Scouts through the birth of her five sons! Tapped to serve on the Land of Lincoln Girl Scout board that coordinated the activities of some 6,500 Girl Scouts here, she became its vice-president by the time her third son was born. When John and Paul, her youngest sons, were old enough, she became a Cub Scout leader.

As the years ensued, Barker involved herself in many other community organizations including the Springfield Art Associa-

tion where she was a board member and secretary, and the board of the Illinois Symphony Guild. She has also been a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution for the past 26 years.

By 1976, the Barkers had moved to her husband's family home, that included a two-story colonial on a sprawling 600 plus-acre farm on Chatham Road that her in-laws had purchased in 1935.

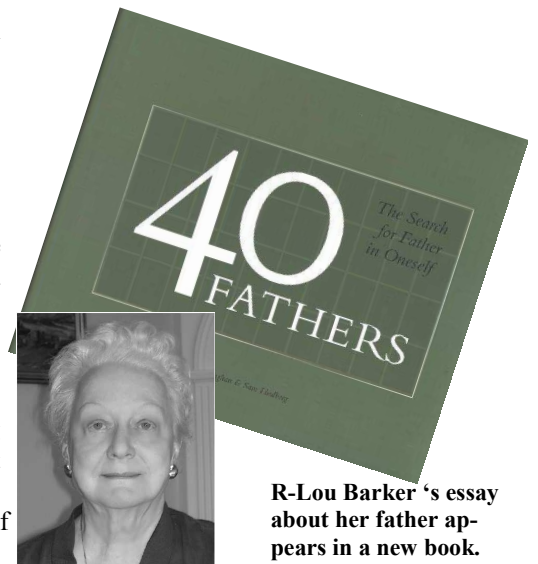
"They bought it at an auction on the court house steps," she says, after the previous owners, Lennaeus and Sue McGraw, died without heirs. The area was rural back then. Route 4, the road running along the front of the property, was made of brick.

"The area was dark all the way to the north, even in 1976," recalls Barker, leafing through old photos of the farm, known as "Stonegate" and the surrounding countryside including one aerial shot snapped for a September 16, 1940 *Life* magazine spread on rural mid-America. By then, the Barker Lubin Company had extended its property holdings to include the site of what today is White Oaks Mall and nearby areas that spawned rapid growth of Springfield's west side. Though Barker Lubin dissolved some 20 years ago, the Barker family continues to deal in real estate.

Stonegate has a rich tale to tell of its own, with sections of the house and machine shed dating back to pre-Civil War days. A section of basement, hand-made brick, and hand-forged nails have been found both in the house and machine shed. Brick and nail factories came into being during the Civil War.

At one-time the house and barnyard included a large mule barn, bean barn, and silo. Just the milk barn remains. A piece of the 1933 World's Fair Skyride has a spot in the backyard and a Fair flag pole in the front. [How they got there is another story]. A plaque on one of the stone gates that flank the entrance to the driveway marks its designation in 1938 by then Governor Henry Horner as the "most attractive" farm of its size in the county.

Over the years, Barker's interest in local history has continued to broaden. In addition to her key role as chair of the Governor's State Museum Board and a seat on the SCHS board, she has



R-Lou Barker's essay about her father appears in a new book.

(Continued on page 5)



STRIKING UP THE BAND: The village of Buffalo celebrated its 155th birthday September 18 with ice cream and cake – AND a brass band! For its celebration Buffalo called on the Vintage Brass Band, a partner organization of the Illinois 10th Volunteer Cavalry Band that was formed in April, 2009, to bring alive the development of music through the 19th century. The band’s program was of period music from before, during and after the Civil War. Between musical pieces the audience was enlightened by vignettes of the political and societal changes as recorded by the Constitution mandated census that was carried out each decade. That all meshed nicely with Buffalo’s 1854 origins as a railroad town, a fact that was punctuated by the passing of a fast moving freight train.



TELLING STEPS: George Godfrey demonstrates dances that were performed by Potawatomi Indians in a dramatization of the hardships the tribe faced in a forced relocation march from Indiana to Kansas known as the Potosawotomi Trail of Death. The September 26 presentation, at the Iles House, kicked off SCHS’s fall season. See our website for details.

Iles Old Settlers Day Set for October 24

Burgoo, hot dogs, and kettle corn will be on the menu when the Iles House Foundation holds its annual Old Settlers Day from Noon to 5 p.m., October 24. The free family event will include Civil War era music, tours, exhibits, activities for children, a poetry reading and a Civil War encampment. Candlelight Tours of the historic house will be held October 23 and 24 from 6:30 p.m. to 9 p.m. For more information go to ileshouse.com.

ROCK’S ROLL: Geologist Brandon Curry demonstrates glacial movement on rocks shaping the Buffalo Hart moraine. His September 26 talk that drew more than 60 listeners, kicked off the Buffalo Hart Presbyterian Church’s year-long celebration marking more than a century of historic ties to the area. For more photos, see our website.



R-Lou Barker: A Time-Honored Commitment to History

(continued from page 4)

Served as a board member and president of the Vachel Lindsay Association, the Abraham Lincoln Association, the Mayor’s Historic Sites Commission, and supported efforts to save and restore the historic Strawbridge-Shepherd House now owned by the University of Illinois.

The Strawbridge-Shepherd House belonged to Charles Shepherd, her late brother-in-law Jacob Lard Shepherd’s grandfather. A class assignment for a writing course she was taking at Sangamon State (now the University of Illinois at Springfield), sparked her efforts to rescue the house that was falling into decay.

“I got hooked on trying to save the house after reading and writing a review of an 1878 pocket diary that belonged to Jake’s grandfather who lived at the site.” The house was built in 1845 by Thomas Strawbridge, who with his family, moved to Sangamon County in 1828. (Strawbridge and his father developed the county’s first saddle and harness trade). Strawbridge eventually started farming, purchasing 600 acres in Woodside township on which he built the home he shared with his sister and her family. Charles Shepherd bought the home at auction after Strawbridge died in 1880 and it remained in the Shepherd family until 1970 when it was sold to Sangamon State.

Alarmed at the condition of the property, Barker enlisted the

support of other preservation-minded citizens who, through the Elijah Iles House Foundation, formed a Strawbridge-Shepherd House Committee and eventually negotiated a 10-year renewable lease with UIS to restore and preserve the house and plan for its use.

Her actions were in keeping with the Barker family’s efforts to preserve the community’s history, not only through financial support and involvement, but also through meaningful action. In 2007, the family donated a group of artifacts that once belonged to Susan Lawrence Dana to the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency so that they could be returned to the historic Dana Thomas House designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. The pieces—including a christening outfit, Oriental rug, Japanese block prints and an Abraham Lincoln print owned by Susan Dana’s father—were among the thousands of items auctioned off to the public in 1943 after Barker, Goldman and Lubin purchased the entire Susan Dana Lawrence estate. Morton D. Barker Sr. was the senior partner. “Later the house sold to Benjamin Thomas in a \$14,000 contract for deed.” Barker expressed amazement that “all the objects in the house that were not sold were included in the \$14,000 contract.” The Barker family also donated the senior Barker’s exceptional collection of fine antique French paperweights to the Illinois State Museum for its permanent collection.

Fraud on the Frontier Has A Local Twist, Researcher Says

(Continued from page 1)

via Missouri after parlaying the money he made selling cattle and in real estate speculation. He opened Springfield's first store in July, 1821. He was elected a State Senator in 1826 and again in 1830.

The Panic of 1819 was part of a collapse of the world economy that coupled the effects of the Napoleonic Wars and the War of 1812 with the catastrophic 1815 eruption of Mount Tambora in Indonesia, still the largest volcanic eruption in recorded history. The ash it produced caused a temporary worldwide climate change that led to crop failure, starvation and disease in the northern hemisphere.

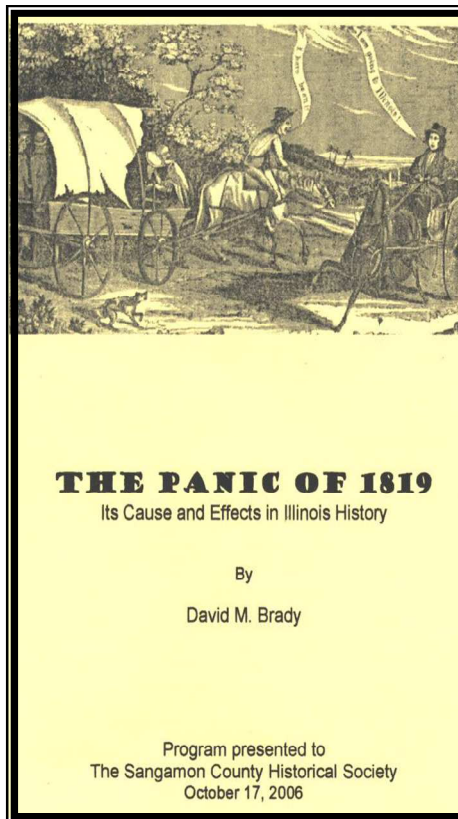
In the United States, 1816 became known as the "Year Without Summer." Killer frosts ruined crops in New England and in Europe, the cold and wet weather rotted crops in the field. America's western frontier, now the Midwest, was less affected by the harsh weather and as a result, farmers here were able to sell their produce in domestic and overseas markets at a high price. Within a few years, "the Midwest had established itself as an agriculture icon. The farmer had become an important figure in world trade," says Brady in his book.

In those days, you either traded goods or used silver dollars that were in short supply in what was still frontier territory. If you were lucky, you could borrow money with a promissory note, but that was risky, especially for the lender, he says. With a growing market for their produce, Midwest farmers pressured local governments to provide them with a better way to borrow money. "Banks were thought to be the answer and states and territories took charge by chartering dozens," Brady says, 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. "Easy money and high grain prices drew masses of emigrants into the Midwest," he points out.

The booming agricultural-driven economy bubbled over into land speculation, adds Brady. With an \$80 down payment, anyone could purchase 160 acres of federal land. "By 1819, there were

3,730,000 government acres for sale in Central Illinois. 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.

In 1820, federal laws were passed to allow those who had bought federal land on credit to be released from debt by relinquishing the acreage back to the government. The federal government, in fact, got out of the underwriting business, lowering the price of its public land to \$1.25 per acre, with the stipulation that the buyer had to pay for it in cash.

At the same time, Illinois politicians thought they saw a way to bring relief by

creating the State Bank of Illinois, with offices in Vandalia, Shawneetown, Edwardsville, Palmyra, and Brownsville. The state was the sole proprietor of the bank, but the directorship for each office was composed of local politicians. The banks had the authority to issue \$300,000 in state currency in \$100 loans payable in a year. The money was to be used to purchase 80 acres of land from the federal government. That did not always happen, Brady points out. "Most wasted their money; others like those in the Sangamo Country, hoarded their cash waiting for the land to come to market." It took until 1823 for the federal lands here to be offered for sale.

With Illinois still in the grip of Depression, about a third of those who did borrow money from the State Bank of Illinois could not or would not pay the loan back and, as a result, the land had to be sold for taxes, representing just pennies on the dollar, leaving the State out the difference. That, in turn, forced the State to borrow \$100,000 from an Ohio man in order to remain solvent, Brady notes. How Iles and his associates play into this scenario won't be disclosed by Brady until the meeting, but it reflects years of research on his part.

The Panic of 1819 is just one of many areas of local history that has drawn Brady's attention. He is also the author of "Divernon: It's Place In Time" and many articles on Native Americans and the frontier period in Illinois. His works have appeared in publications such as **The Illinois Heritage**, **The Spring-House**, **Illinois Times**, and **Historico**.

His research into old Illinois trails led to the discovery and dedication of an extant section of the Edwards Trace located at Lake Park in Springfield. He has also been involved in the excavation of the Birkbeck home in southern Illinois, two sites in French Cahokia, and the Lincoln house site in New Salem.

Brady has served as chair of the Divernon Centennial Committee, on the advisory board of the Illinois State Historical Society, SCHS, and the Illinois Foundation for Frontier Studies. In addition to his research on the impact of the Tambora, he has explored the history of Sangamon County and the Americanization of Illinois.

History for the Holidays” Holiday Party Reservation Form

Enclosed is my check for the Society’s annual Holiday Party. *You must be a member of the Society to attend.* Reservations are \$12.50 per person. If you hold an Individual Membership and wish to bring a family member, you just need to enclose an additional \$7.50 to bring you to the Family Membership level. (If you wish to bring a guest, they will have to become a member of the Society. A Gift of Membership form is below). For a list of membership categories, see page 2.



Member Name/Names: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ *e-mail:* _____

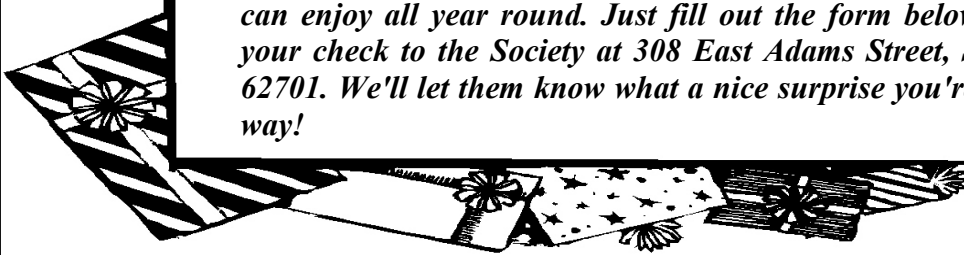
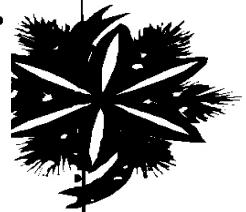
Amount Enclosed: _____

Please check here if this includes an upgrade to Family Membership.

DEADLINE FOR RESERVATIONS IS DECEMBER 1

This may be the perfect time to give a gift of membership in the Sangamon County Historical Society.

Know someone who loves history as much as you? If you'd like them to be able to attend the annual members-only "History for the Holidays" party in December, why not give them an early gift, one they can enjoy all year round. Just fill out the form below, send it with your check to the Society at 308 East Adams Street, Springfield, IL 62701. We'll let them know what a nice surprise you're sending their way!



Name _____

(First)

(Middle)

Last

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone(s) _____ E-Mail _____

Donor's Name: _____ Membership Level: _____

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

Non-profit Organization
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Springfield, Illinois

Now On Our Website

...And If You Can ID This Photo, You Could Win A Prize!

Starting this week, the SCHS website will carry photos from the Mercury Studio Collection now housed in the Sangamon Valley Collection at the Lincoln Public Library. We'd like some help identifying the people or landmarks, dates, etc. There may be a prize in it for you if you can come up with the correct information!

A new photo will be put up each week. Send your information to research@sancohis.org. In May we will hold a drawing of all those who have contributed information for a grand prize! So take a look each week to see if you have any knowledge of the featured photo. If you miss a week, check the photo archives! For more, go to our website (sancohis.com).



2009-2010 Board Meetings

(Second Wednesday)

October 14, November 13,
January 13, February 10, March 10,
April 14, May 12

2010 Monthly Programs

(Third Tuesday)

November 17, January 19,
February 6, March 16, April 20,
May 18

Annual Meeting

June 17

