



HISTORICO

Sangamon County Historical Society Newsletter

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

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OCTOBER 2010

Remembering “Rabbit Row”

Springfield’s North Side Neighborhood, Now Gone Reservoir Park, to be Focus of Author’s Family Memories at October 19 Meeting

Ken Mitchell, a Springfield native, businessman, writer, and raconteur who grew up on “Rabbit Row,” will share family stories of what it was like being raised in this colorful north side neighborhood, Reservoir Street from 9th to 15th Streets, when he speaks to the Society on October 19. The meeting, at the Lincoln Public Library in Springfield, begins at 7 p.m. and is open to the public.

Mitchell, who has had a varied career that includes serving as executive director of the Illinois Environmental

Council, teaching science, working as an archivist for the Secretary of State and farming and breeding horses in Mason City, also speaks at seminars on recording personal and family history.

Married and the father of five children and three grandchildren, the long-term health insurance sales executive has written two biographies including one about his father, another about his mother, and a third on his fraternity at Millikin University, from which he earned a bachelor’s degree. He also

holds a masters degree in education from Sangamon State University.

In his book, “*Growing Up in Rabbit Row*,” Mitchell describes the neighborhood in which his father spent his childhood and teen years as “a kid’s dreamland. There were kids everywhere. There were so many kids in fact, that it was whimsically dubbed locally as “Rabbit Row.”

At Rabbit Row reunions over the next 50 years, “one discovered that the neighborhood name incorporated more territory than Reservoir Street, as time



GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN: Author Ken Mitchell (left) will share family stories about Springfield’s “Rabbit Row” including its centerpiece, Reservoir Park, that was razed in the 1920s.

went on. There was never any clear demarcation, but purists limited it to the borders of North Grand Avenue, Enterprise, 15th and 9th Streets. That expanded version of Rabbit Row would probably number over 100 homes and up to 1,000 inhabitants,” notes Mitchell in his tome.

Mitchell is expected to touch upon the experiences

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INSIDE:

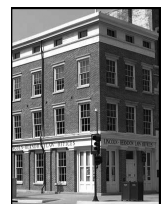
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ARE YOU MISSING FROM OUR MEMBERSHIP LIST?

See pages 4 & 5

COMING IN NOVEMBER:

Lincoln-Herndon Law Office
Date: Tuesday, November 16
Time: 7 p.m.
Location: 6th & Adams Streets, Springfield



From the President's Podium

History Oriented Activities for Younger Families Abound; Our Society Publicizes Them; Should Society Also Have Its Own?



DAVID W. SCOTT

Is the Society doing enough these days, or should we be expanding some current activities—or getting into new areas?

That's a key question to explore as we proceed with Strategic Planning, an important focus of our current Board of Directors.

The Society's current activities are:

- A monthly program with a speaker on a topic generally relating to the county's history.
- Dissemination of information about its activities and other topics of interest through the monthly newsletter, the *Historico*, and a web site (www.sancohis.org).
- Publication of books and research studies.
- Special projects and awards, recently involving schools.
- A holiday party and annual meeting at interesting sites around the county.
- Tours of cemeteries and other historical places
- Support for the Sangamon Valley Collection at the Lincoln Library.

- Planning for a bicentennial history of Sangamon County.

Members of the Society's Board in April spent an entire board meeting in a SWOT session identifying the Society's *Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats*.

The Board--perhaps a biased group yet an informed one--saw many Strengths in our current activities and saw Opportunities to expand along these same lines. However, some saw Opportunities to engage in different kinds of activities. One was developing programs of interest to younger families, including activities directed at children. Thus, among the identified Weaknesses was a shortage of younger members and programs for them.

Currently three historical groups in our area have such activities. Unlike the Society, however, the Iles House Foundation, the state Historic Preservation Agency, and the Clayville restoration group have buildings, i.e. structures/houses/museums/historic sites as well as grounds. The family activities of these three groups are an emphasis in this issue of *Historico* and will be in the next issue as well. See pages 6 and 7 for details.

David



Historico, published 10 times a year, is the monthly bulletin for members of the Sangamon County Historical Society. Back issues are available on-line in PDF format at our website, www.sancohis.org. Updates, late-breaking news, features, and more are regularly posted on our website.

Event updates also can be found on our Facebook page (www.facebook.com). Log in and search for *Sangamon County Historical Society*.

Annual Membership dues are:

Individuals: \$17.50 , Family:\$25, Sustaining: \$50

Individual Life Membership, one-time payment of \$250

Family Life Member, 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, 62701.



DINING IN a historical setting and touring were part of the draw for the Society's September 21 meeting at Clayville that attracted more than 80 attendees. At bottom right, guest speaker Annie Reiken, a historical archeologist who helped guide Clayville's rebirth, received a year's membership in the Society from president David Scott. The Society also made a \$100 gift to the Clayville restoration effort, accepted by Dan Usherwood, (bottom left), Clayville coordinator and vice president of the Pleasant Plains Historical Society. For Reiken's remarks, photos, visit the Society's website, www.sancohis.org.

Committee Chairs Named to Carry Out Society's Work

Eleven members of the Society have been named by president David W. Scott to committee chairmanships.

They are: Carolyn Moore, program; Nancy Chapin, membership, County history; Richard Carlson, constitution and by-laws; Roger Whitaker, finance; Jane Vetter, hospitality; Don Springer, nominations; John Huther, publications; Vicky Whitaker, publicity; Linda Bee, tours.

"Most of the committees are authorized in the Society's by-laws," President Scott noted. "Others were created by the board to meet special purposes."

Those chairs not already serving as directors, have been appointed to the board to allow them to more fully participate in board discussions and decisions. "Active chairs working with their committees helps lead to a stronger Board and this to a more vibrant Society," Scott said.

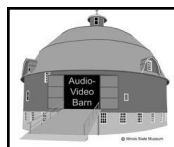
History Makers

Society member and former president **Carl Volkmann (1993-1994)** of Springfield has been honored for his 23 years as a librarian and director of the Lincoln Library with a library science scholarship in his name at the **University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign**. Though he retired in 1993, Volkmann has remained active in the library field, working as a volunteer at the McClelland Elementary School Library in Springfield and serving on numerous boards and associations. He is also the author of several books on local history...The **Illinois State Historical Society**, in conjunction with **Springfield High School**, the **Vachel Lindsay Association**, and the **Illinois State Bar Association**, will mark the 100th birthday of the late **Robert Stuart Fitzgerald (1910-1985)**, Poet Laureate of the United States,



when it unveils a historic marker on October 12 on a Springfield site that once housed the prize-winning poet's boyhood home. The property is now occupied by the Illinois Bar Association. Fitzgerald was a model scholar-athlete at Springfield High School whose literary ambitions received early encouragement from poet **Vachel Lindsay**. In 1965 he was appointed the Boylston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory at Harvard, where his charismatic teaching proved influential to the younger poets. Today, Fitzgerald is generally acknowledged as his generation's pre-eminent translator of classical poetry.

...Wonder what happened to that **Oral History of Illinois Agriculture** project first detailed for Society members in May 2009 by the State Historical Museum's **Dr. Robert Warren**? It's finished and on line at the Museum's Audio-Video Barn website (www.avbarn.museum.state.il.us). With a keystroke or two, you can catch more than 130 oral history interviews with people involved in agriculture and rural life in Illinois including 15 in Sangamon County.



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BOARD MEETINGS

2nd Wednesday, Lincoln Library, 5 p.m.

October 13, November 10,
 December 8, January 12, February 9,
 March 9, April 13, May 11, June 8

2010-2011 SANGAMON COUNTY

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MISSING FROM THE LIST?

There's still time to renew and get the rewards of SCHS membership. Just fill out the form below and send it to the Society at 308 East Adams Street, Springfield, IL 62701.

SCHS 2010-2011

Name _____
 (First) (Middle) (Last)

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Phone: _____

e-Mail _____

Membership Level: _____ Individual, \$17.50 _____ Family: \$25 _____ Sustaining: \$50

_____ Individual Life Membership, one-time payment of \$250 _____ Family Life Member, one-time payment of \$400.

I'm interested in working on: programs & tours finance publications hospitality marketing
 special events research

Indicate below special talents/interests you would be willing to share with the Historical Society:

- Arts, crafts, music: _____
 Technological: _____
 Writing: _____
 Other: _____

Festivals And Much More!

Fairs, Facts, Fun: History Events Ahead Here for All Ages

Whether you're nine or 90, there will be plenty to see and do in Sangamon County if you're looking for events with a historic twist.

The Society will have a table at the **Clayville Fall Festival**, this Saturday and Sunday, **October 2** and **October 3**, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. both days. Bring the kids and the grandkids to watch artisans and craftsmen demonstrate pottery, coopering, quilting, outdoor cooking, willow furniture making, chair caning, corn milling, whiskey distilling, water color painting, and dulcimer making.

More to See At Clayville

In addition, there will be displays of guns and knives of the Old West and Civil War, and early 1800s re-enactments including "Revival Meeting" on Saturday afternoon in which real-life minister Ron Waltrip, pastor of Trinity Church of the Nazarene, will portray famed pioneer Methodist preacher and politician Reverend Peter Cartwright. In addition to his work as a traveling preacher, Cartwright was twice a member of the Illinois legislature and ran for Congress in 1846, only to be defeated by Springfield Whig Abraham Lincoln. Waltrip has performed with the Muni, the Jacksonville Theatre Guild and at New Salem.

A clothesline art show, music on the dulcimer and banjo by Mike Anderson, and a performance by Chris Camp, "The Whip Guy," is also planned as are black powder shooting instruction and demonstrations and tomahawk throwing. There will be children's activities too, along with a petting zoo and vendors offering plenty of food and other refreshments.

If you missed the Society's September

meeting at Clayville, the Festival will provide you with another opportunity to tour the Broadwell Inn and Tavern and the Bat-

Hughes House on Thursday, **October 7**, from 3:30 p.m. to 5 p.m. or on Sunday, **October 10**, from 4 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. It's



OLD SETTLERS DAY will be marked at Strawbridge-Shepherd House in Springfield on October 23 with an array of family activities. See details, next page.

teron Cabin. For more information, visit the Clayville website at www.clayville.org.

Historic Watches at Iles House

Elijah Iles House continues its series of Wednesday (5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m.) **Fireside Chats** on **October 6** with a talk by Farrell Gay on the history of the Illinois Watch Company. Gay will talk about the evolution of time pieces and watches and show examples from his personal collection. He'd enjoy seeing other Illinois watches people might care to bring along. Reservations are required. Call 652-7302 for information.

Teas at Freeman-Hughes House

If you act quickly, there's still time to get in on the Sangamon County Historical Society's **Tea at the Historic Freeman-**

a rare opportunity to step inside and be and be among a limited number of visitors allowed to tour this charming, privately-owned 19th century home in Springfield that is listed on the National Register.

Built in 1878 by Clarkson W. Freeman, the house eventually passed to a nephew, Arthur Freeman Hughes, whose widow sold the property to Dr. and Mrs. Floyd Barringer, who, passionate about local history, lovingly restored the Italianate-style home with its intricate Carpenter-Gothic trim. The current owner, Mary Ann Langston, has preserved its furnishings and antiques.

At each room, volunteer docents will point out features and answer questions about specific features. Tea will be served.

(Continued on page 7)

Author to Provide Slice-of-Life View of Springfield's "Rabbit Row"

(Continued from page 1) of his family and how the neighborhood and its people helped shape Springfield in the early 1900s as it transitioned into a modern city.

Expect to hear about Reservoir Park, one of the city's most popular family recreation areas. Built in the late

1800s, it was "the social center of Rabbit Row," writes Mitchell, its focal point, the four-million gallon reservoir at its western tip near 11th Street that served as an emergency water source for Springfield.

Reservoir Park included small lakes and lagoons, an

ornate fountain that was lighted at night, croquet fields, tennis courts, horse shoe pits, boating, a pavilion, flower-filled gardens, picnic grounds, and a baseball stadium that opened in 1925.

The park property was sold by the Springfield Park District to the Springfield School District in the late

1920s, its facilities razed and the land leveled to make way for the construction of a third high school, Lanphier.

The reservoir was finally plowed under in the early 30s, following completion of the new reservoir, Lake Springfield, that was created by building Spaulding Dam across Sugar Creek.

Lots to Do and See This Fall at Area Historic Sites

(Continued from page 6)

Ticket sales have been brisk and seating is limited. Tickets are \$25 for members, \$30 for non-members. A reservation form is on-line at the Society's website, www.sancohis.org or call at 522-2500 for reservations.

Bus Trip to Sugar Creek

Tickets are still available for the Society's Sunday, **October 17** trip back in time in a *Bus Tour of the Cotton Hill District*, Sangamon County's birthplace.

The area—in and around Sugar Creek—was home to the first generation of settlers here. Traveling in a comfortable, air conditioned tour bus, trip takers will hear stories and descriptions of Sangamon's earliest settlement sites and view over five 19th century farm houses and early family cemeteries. At two of the cemeteries, actors will portray several of the early settlers buried there.

The tour takes about two-and-a half hours, leaving from the Meijer's parking lot off Veterans Parkway (Route 4), Springfield, at 1 p.m. Sites and history along the route will be detailed by historian Dick Hart. He'll do the same for the north side of Sugar Creek on the way back. Tickets are \$40 for members, \$50 for non-members. A reservation form is on the Society website, www.sancohis.org or call 522-2500.

Halloween Fun at Clayville

Clayville will be the setting for *Haunted House and Haunted Hayride* Fridays and Saturdays, **October 22, 23, 29** and **30** and on Sunday, **October 31**. The Friday evening programs will run from 8 p.m. to 11 p.m. and includes visiting the "Haunted

House" and a hayride. On Saturdays, from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. will be special "Children's Hours," in which there will be



GHOSTLY FIGURES will be part of Clayville's Halloween Display.

regular lighting and Halloween special displays on hand designed to avert scaring younger children. On Halloween, the Haunted House/Haunted Hayride will run from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m. Check the Clayville website for additional details, www.clayville.org.

Historic Activities at S-S House

On Saturday, **October 23**, you can tour the *Strawbridge-Shepherd House* in Springfield, which will be open for "*Old Settlers Day*," 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. You'll be able to talk to restoration specialists, tour

the native tall-grass prairie and compare notes with noted botanists.

Period music, impersonators, demonstrators, craftsmen and exhibits will be featured at this free event. In addition, there will be games and crafts for children of all ages. Meals and snacks, fall baked goods and produce will be available. The historic building, which is undergoing restoration, is located at 5251 Shepherd Road, Springfield, just west of Lincoln Land Community College.

Society's Tree At Festival

Don't forget to catch the Sangamon County Historical Society's tree at the *Festival of Trees* which opens Saturday, **November 20** at the Orr Building on the State Fair Grounds in Springfield.

This year's Society tree will feature hand-made ornaments highlighting historic sites and history makers of Sangamon County. The Festival, the single largest family-oriented holiday tradition in central Illinois, is open daily through **November 28**. For more information, see www.memorialmedicalfoundation.com/festivaloftrees.

And in December, keep these events in mind:

Elijah Iles House *Candlelight Tours*, Thursday, **December 4**, 7 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. See the home in its holiday candlelight ambiance with Christmas trees from various eras and ornamentations from historic periods. Enjoy hot chocolate and seasonal treats. Donations encouraged.

Clayville, Saturday, **December 11**, "*A Clayville Christmas*." Details will be posted on the Clayville website, www.clayville.org.

Buffalo Hart Presbyterian Church Completes Its Heritage Trilogy

The third element of Buffalo Hart Presbyterian Church's celebration of its heritage was held September 3 and 4 and featured its shared history as "A Sense of Place." *Historico* readers may recall that its first program last September featured a presentation about the geology of this area. The second, held in March, was about the Native American population that called the area home.

Cullom Davis moderated this fall's program that began with an interlude of melodies played by the Thistle and Thyme trio. The program next described the first

white settlers' arrival in 1824; the changes wrought by the effects of the Deep Snow in the winter of 1831; the reading of a letter to Roland Diller from his customer, Mrs. Burns, reporting how the dishes she had purchased with the cotton she had raised and made were broken on her way home when her horse bolted because of a prairie fire; and brief reports on agriculture, commerce, churches and schools in the area. It wound up with a show of hands of former pupils of area schools before they consolidated, invoking some fun tales of bygone days.

"The wonderful program was full of information and played to a large and appreciative audience who were still in the mood to discuss it all at the reception thereafter," noted Nancy Chapin, who represented the Society at the event. "History served up in an entertaining way!"

The celebration trilogy wrapped up with the service and potluck luncheon on September 4. "This series of programs was a wonderful way to celebrate the heritage of a community and all those involved should be very proud of their accomplishment," Chapin added.

Sangamon County Historical Society
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What's New? Updates by e-mail

The Society has contracted with an e-mail service to enable us to send you attractive notices of upcoming events and area activities. If you haven't done so already, please send your e-mail address to ras1915@xanadoo.com

Don't miss out on this terrific new way to learn about events as they come up! Also check our website, www.sancohis.org and our *Facebook* page for updates and special events!

Moving? On An Extended Vacation?

Is your mail forwarded because you live part of the year here and spend time at a vacation home or otherwise stay at a different address for a few months? Are you moving? Please let our office know your temporary or new address, since the post office does not forward bulk mail, the method we use to send you *Historico*. Instead, it is returned to us with a substantial penalty attached, something we'd like to avoid..



2010 Calendar

PROGRAM MEETINGS

Tuesday, October 19

"Rabbit Row"

Tuesday, November 16

Lincoln-Herndon Law Office

SPECIAL EVENTS

Thursday, October 7

Freeman-Hughes House Tea and Tour

Sunday, October 10

Freeman-Hughes House Tea and Tour

Sunday, October 17

Fall Bus Trip to Sugar Creek

Tuesday, December 14

Annual Members Only

Holiday Party

Brinkerhoff Home, Springfield