



# HISTORICO

February 2026

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Sangamon County Historical Society Newsletter  
P.O. Box 9744 Springfield, IL 62791-9744 | 217-525-1961 | schsoffice@gmail.com  
www.sancohis.org | www.sangamonlink.org

## February Program at Lincoln Library Preserving History Through Hospitality

**Tuesday, February 17**  
**5:30 pm at Lincoln Library -**  
**Carnegie Room**

Karen Conn, President of Conn’s Hospitality Group will be the speaker for SCHS’s public program in February. She has a long history of melding history and hospitality.

Conn’s Hospitality Group (CHG) grew out of a love for old buildings and the stories they hold. Their first project was a neglected historic apartment building that they converted to a bed and breakfast and event venue, now known as the Inn at 835 and listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The work of Karen Conn and CHG is centered on preserving history through hospitality - taking care of historic spaces by filling them with food, conversation, and everyday moments that bring people together.



Across Springfield, Peoria, and Elkhart, CHG restaurants, brewery, coffee house, and boutique inn are all adaptive-reuse projects and are places meant to be used and enjoyed.

Conn’s philosophy is grounded in the belief that preservation succeeds when buildings are part of everyday life. Historic spaces are best protected when they are economically sustainable, carefully stewarded, and open to the community.

By pairing respect for architectural integrity with hospitality and responsible business practices, CHG works to honor the past while creating places that continue to serve people today and into the future.

Conn had this to say to the Springfield Business Journal in 2025: “As I find properties, I walk through the space, I try to listen to it and ask what could it become, how could it be more valuable? That inspiration helps build its next phase.”

## Highlights

**February Program**  
February 17  
at  
Lincoln Library  
Carnegie Room

**January Program**  
**Recap**

**2026 Grants Open!**



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Please make sure we have your email address so you can stay up to date! Winter cancellations are possible - make sure you don’t miss any notices!

# From the President's Desk



LINDA SCHNEIDER

As we start a new year, I am looking forward to all the monthly programs we have scheduled this spring. Thank you to Rich Saal, Karen Conn, Curtis Mann, Mary Alice Davis and Cinda Klickna for sharing your knowledge of Sangamon County history with us. Monthly program dates and topics are listed elsewhere in this newsletter. All our monthly programs are scheduled for the third Tuesday of the month at 5:30 p.m. in

the Carnegie Room at Lincoln Library. Just a reminder that parking is free in the parking garage beneath the library and accessible to the first floor via elevator or stairs.

I would like to thank Lincoln Library for its hospitality for both our monthly board meetings and monthly programs. Thank you to Stephanie Martin, Sangamon Valley Collection staff and SCHS Board member, for always assisting with the AV needs for our programs. Thanks to Ernie Slottag who serves as our photographer. And thank you to Marian Leach for providing the tasty treats for us to enjoy at our monthly programs.

We are in the process of planning our Annual Meeting celebration which will be held in June. Hopefully the date, time and place will be announced in our next newsletter. We hope that you will plan on joining us for this annual celebration and recognition of our yearly grant recipients. Information regarding the 2026 grant application is also included in this newsletter. We are grateful that your generosity as a member helps fund these special projects.

If you have any questions regarding the Sangamon County Historical Society, please feel free to reach out to me either via cell phone - 217-525-1961 or via email - [schsoffice@gmail.com](mailto:schsoffice@gmail.com).

*Linda*



## 2025-2026 Officers

President - Linda Schneider

Vice President - Scott Pillsbury

Past President - Cinda Klickna

Treasurer - Sam Sgro

Secretary - Sarah Adams

## Directors

### *Term ending 2026*

Ruth Slottag

### *Term ending 2027*

Brian Barstead

Mary Alice Davis

Susan Helm

Kathy Hoffman

Stephanie Martin

### *Term ending 2028*

Lee-Ann Burgener

Dawn Phillips

Ashley Yoggerst



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Winner, Certificate of Excellence, Illinois State Historical Society

You can download back issues of Historico in PDF format by going to our website: [www.sangcohis.org](http://www.sangcohis.org).

Send event announcements to: [schshistorico@gmail.com](mailto:schshistorico@gmail.com)

# January Program: “Soil and Soul”



by Dawn Phillips

Rich Saal, a veteran photojournalist and documentary filmmaker, recently presented *Soil and Soul: Farming in the Sangamon River Valley*, an award-winning documentary that captured the top honor at the Route 66 Film Festival. The film tells the stories of ten farmers whose families have worked the land for generations: Harvey Bettis, Mick Bray, David Ruppert, Lenore Ruppert, Garry Niemeyer, Marty Marr, Joe Donovan, Vicki Huelskoetter, John Irwin, and Tom Martin. The program, held January 20, 2026, in Lincoln Library’s Carnegie Room, offered attendees an intimate look at the people, traditions, and enduring spirit behind central Illinois agriculture.

Over three years, Saal traveled throughout the Sangamon River Valley, filming and recording extended interviews. Rather than focusing on crops or statistics, the documentary centers on human stories – family bonds, personal loss and joy, and a deep, abiding connection to the land.

One of the first farmers featured, Harvey Bettis, was born May 9, 1921. At the time of filming, he was 101 years old, offering a rare perspective shaped by more than a century of farming. Harvey shared memories of youthful dreams, including imagining himself as a cowboy riding a horse from Illinois to Montana, never considering how many years such a journey might take. Eventually, his father guided him into farming, and the cowboy dream faded. Harvey embraced life on the farm, speaking of

the lessons the soil teaches – patience, resilience, and respect – and of rhythms that remain constant even as the world changes. The film is filled with deeply personal moments. David Ruppert shared how farming “pulls the family together” and recalled helping his daughter, Jene, cope with the loss of a beloved cow. Seeing how heartbroken she was, David wrote her a letter, pretending it was from the cow, thanking her for her love and care. Jene still keeps the letter, a treasured reminder of both grief and tenderness. Marty Marr reflected on the seasons, describing harvest as possibly his favorite and likening it to a farmer’s “Super Bowl.” Vicki Huelskoetter spoke of the peacefulness of the land and what she called “God’s handiwork,” while also sharing the loss of her late husband, Larry. She reflected on embracing his love of farming – raising hogs and growing corn and beans – and finding strength to move forward as one chapter of life ends and another begins.

The documentary also preserves voices no longer with us. Joe Donovan passed away before seeing the completed film, leaving behind a lasting testament to a life devoted to the land. Saal captured each story with care, creating a work that is both journalistic and deeply personal, preserving the heritage, struggles, and triumphs of central Illinois farming.

*Soil and Soul* is more than a documentary about agriculture; it is a celebration of family, perseverance, and the enduring connection between people and the land they love.



All photographs by Ernie Slottag

# Grants Available for Historical Projects!

The Sangamon County Historical Society has started accepting applications as of January 20, 2026 through April 20, 2026 for funding special historical projects within the county that carry out its mission, which is to preserve and promote interest in the history of Sangamon County.

Last year the Society gave grants to the following: Village of Divernon for repairs to their Historical Train Depot Museum; First Presbyterian Church Springfield to purchase museum quality display cabinets for their new History Room to display Lincoln artifacts & church history; Illinois State Historical Society for printing a full color Guide of Historical Markers throughout Sangamon County; The Cathedral Church of St. Paul the Apostle for new History Room display cases containing church history with focus on their connection to Abe Lincoln's marriage to Mary Todd; Rochester Sesquicentennial Committee for assembling a trio of scrapbooks detailing the village of Rochester's 150th Anniversary; and Enos Park Neighborhood Improvement Association for digitization of the Fever River Architectural Study of all buildings in Enos Park neighborhood (1997).



Applications can be found on-line at <https://www.sancohis.org>.

Click on “Resources”, then “Grants” to download applications. Completed forms can be submitted online to [schsoffice@gmail.com](mailto:schsoffice@gmail.com) or mailed to:

Sangamon County Historical Society  
Special Projects Committee  
P.O. Box 9744,  
Springfield, IL 62791-9744

The deadline is **April 20, 2026**. Award winners will be announced at the Society's Annual Meeting in June. For more information, contact the Sangamon County Historical Society at 217-525-1961.

# SangamonLink Stories - First School for Black Children

Springfield's Colored Baptist Church (now Zion Baptist Church) created what was the city's first school open to African-American children in the late 1840s. It took a decade before the city finally opened a public school – a segregated one – for Black children.

In 1850, eight school trustees held a public supper to raise money for a permanent school. The results of the appeal are not known. In 1855, however, two other trustees of the school advertised an opening for a teacher. "A competent teacher will be well paid."



Even though no Black children could attend the city's public schools, African-American residents still paid local school taxes. In 1857, the city school board appointed a committee to find a way to use school taxes paid by Black residents to support a school for Black children. And finally, on Dec. 23, 1858, the city Board of School Inspectors organized a free Black school. One year later, the school board appointed Thomas York, a white man, as the school's sole teacher and principal. His salary was \$300 a year. The School for Colored Children opened in a one-room building behind the African Methodist Episcopal church on Fourth Street near Madison Street.

In 1862, the 55 students in the Colored School had the highest attendance rate of any of the city's six schools. Due to limited space, only half of those enrolled in the Colored School could attend. Newspaper accounts referred to children in the school as "spirited," "vivacious," "sprightly" and "geniuses." The school building, however, didn't match the students' enthusiasm. Its single room contained little furniture and supplies. The floor was sunken, glass was missing from windows, and the ceiling was falling. City council appropriated \$110 for repairs.

In 1864, the city denied a salary increase for principal/teacher Thomas York, who was being paid \$200 a year less than principals of the ward schools. Even the janitor, a Black man making \$240 a year, was the lowest paid within city schools.

After an 1866 inspection, the city adopted recommendations for a new school and teacher. The city then bought five lots on North 15th Street near Washington Street, paying \$1,000 to owners Nicholas and Jane Ridgely. The city also hired Mary Lyman, who was white, as the school's new teacher (at \$400 a year). The school building – a two-story brick structure costing \$2,500 – was completed by 1867. The larger building allowed for two teachers (all white) and four grades.

From 1867 to 1872, the school received stellar inspections and community support based on quality of teaching, learning efficiency, enrollment, attendance, and a low tardiness rate. The school was well-heated, well-ventilated, well-furnished, and spacious. Newspapers reported it was equivalent or superior to the other city schools, although a measles epidemic in 1869 hurt enrollment.

*SangamonLink was created to put the rich history of Sangamon County – home of Abraham Lincoln and the capital of Illinois – at people's fingertips. This online research hub is edited by Mike Kienzler.*

# 2026 Programs January - May



**February 17**  
 Karen Conn  
*Preserving History  
 through Hospitality*



**April 21**  
 Mary Alice Davis  
*Growing up  
 on Route 66*

**March 17**  
 Curtis Mann  
*History of Sangamo  
 Town*



**May 19**  
 Cinda Klickna  
*April 15, 1909: The Day  
 the Petticoats  
 Swarmed the Capitol*



*All programs take place at the Lincoln Library, the Public  
 Library of Springfield, in Carnegie Room North, unless  
 otherwise noted.*



## Sangamon County Historical Society 2025-2026 MEMBERSHIP/MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL Form

*Mail this form with your check to the Sangamon County Historical Society, P.O. Box 9744, Springfield, IL 62791-9744. Our membership year runs from June 1 to May 31. All memberships cover adults and children 16 and over living at the same address. Be sure to list their full names. Please Print.*

Your Full Name \_\_\_\_\_

Spouse/Significant Other First Name \_\_\_\_\_

Spouse's maiden name where applicable \_\_\_\_\_

Your e-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Your address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State , Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Choose Your Level of Membership:  Regular (\$30)  Pioneer (\$100)  Settler (\$250)

Trailblazer (\$500)  Lifetime (\$700 one-time fee)  College/University Student (individual) (\$20)

This is a GIFT (Name of recipient, mailing and e-mail address):

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I am adding a donation to the Society in addition to my membership in the amount of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

# Calendar

A Heads Up Guide to Area History Events

Save the Date!



Send announcements, information, photos and illustrations to [schshistorico@gmail.com](mailto:schshistorico@gmail.com).

**Feb 14-15: Prairie State Orchid Society Winter Show and Sale.** Sat 11AM - 4PM & Sun 11AM-3PM.  
(217)546-4116.  
FREE event.



Washington Park Botanical Garden

**Feb 20: Art History Happy Hour - Frank O'Hara.** 6PM. FREE event.  
(217)523-2631



Springfield Art Association, M.G.  
Nelson Family Gallery



**Feb 19: History at Lunch: "The Thomas Publishing Part of the Dana-Thomas House Story."** Pre-registration required by Feb. 13. Buffet lunch - 11:30AM. Presentation - 12:30PM.  
(217)788-9452  
Maldaner's

**Feb 20: Bourbon Tasting.** 7PM. Tasting and program included in ticket price. Registration required, 21+ event only.  
(217)523-2631



Edwards Place

**Feb 21-22: Lincoln and Shakespeare.** Ticketed event.  
(217)523-2787  
[hcfta.org](http://hcfta.org)



**LINCOLN and SHAKESPEARE**



Hoogland Center for the Arts, Peggy Ryder Theatre



**March 27: Victorian Game Night.** 7PM. Learn the games of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Registration required, 21+ event only.  
(217)523-2631  
Edwards Place

Sangamon County Historical Society  
P.O. Box 9744,  
Springfield, IL 62791-9744  
Return Service Requested

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U.S. Postage  
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## PROGRAMS

FREE & OPEN TO THE PUBLIC  
5:30 PM AT LINCOLN LIBRARY

February 17  
Karen Conn

March 17  
Curtis Mann

April 21  
Mary Alice Davis

## Want to get involved?



Consider joining a committee. It's a great way to give back while preserving and promoting Sangamon County history.

### **Committees:**

Events  
Membership  
Grants  
Cemetery Walk  
Finance