



Clover Lawn Quarterly

David Davis Mansion Foundation Newsletter
Summer 2008

Mansion Staff Teaches Museum Studies Course

During the 2007-2008 academic year, students from Normal West High School learned about the work that goes on behind-the-scenes at museums—and even got the chance to try a bit of it for themselves. This was the first year that the course has been offered by English teacher Remy Garard and history teacher Deanna Wiist, combining both elements of literature and history.

Staff from the David Davis Mansion and the McLean County Museum of History offered students the opportunity to participate in different experiences at the museums. Staff from the Mansion visited the class frequently throughout the year, and the two projects sponsored by the Mansion culminated in May.

One of the projects hosted by the Mansion was a mock archeological dig assisted by professionals from the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency. Volunteers “seeded” four pits in the Mansion carriage house with artifacts like shards of glass and ceramics, old nails, and leather harnesses. Students learned how to measure out their sites and carefully excavate the artifacts using trowels and brushes.

Another group of students gave Mansion volunteers a break on May 13, as the teens presented their own version of the October “Snap Apple” program for their peers. Costumed as first-person interpreters, the group brought the inhabitants of the mansion to life and shared what they’d learned about Halloween traditions in the nineteenth century. Three students portraying the Mansion’s servants even got a chance to show off their remarkably-convincing Irish accents.

During the weeks leading up to the program, the students selected the “character” they wanted to portray, researching the individual’s age, birthplace, religion, profession and education. They used genealogical and historical information from many sources, including the Bloomington Public Library and the McLean County Museum of History.

Although nervous at first, the interpreters quickly became comfortable with their roles, even ad-libbing and adding their own quirks to their characters. By the time they changed back into their twenty-first-century clothes at the end of the tours, many of the students said that the experience had been “a lot of fun.”

Mission Statement

The David Davis Mansion Foundation is a not-for-profit organization, incorporated in June of 1986. Its mission is to help the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency engage, enlighten and entertain visitors with the stories of the site, of the David Davis household, and of their special relationship with Abraham Lincoln and others

Change at the Mansion Gift Shop

The Foundation wishes to express its gratitude to Nancy Perzo and Karen Patton for their service in managing the Gift Shop for the past five years. Thank you!

A new team will begin this month. Nathan Brown, a Re/Max Choice Realtor, and Bekah Litchfield, an instructor at Heartland Community College, begin with the Gift Shop June 1st. Nathan is originally from Galesburg, and relocated to attend Heartland and then Illinois State University. When not showing houses, he enjoys landscaping and golf. Bekah was an elementary school principal in Ottawa, Illinois, before relocating to teach at Heartland. She has a particular interest in children's literature.

Nathan and Bekah hope to promote local cultural and historical aspects of the David Davis Mansion, particularly as related to the friendship between Judge David Davis and President Abraham Lincoln.

Please forward any announcements or information which might be appropriate for inclusion in the *Quarterly* to Mark Taylor at tmjtbat@aol.com.

DAVIS MANSION MEETING TO WELCOME LINCOLN AND DOUGLAS

Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas re-enactors George Buss and Tim Connors will present "A Conversation with Lincoln and Douglas" at the David Davis Mansion Foundation annual meeting on Wednesday, September 24, 2008 at 7:00 p.m. at the Normal Theater. The fictional conversation recreates historical events in the intertwined lives of these two renowned Illinoisans, as if taking place in the months after Lincoln's inauguration as President in 1861.

Both Buss and Connors are from Freeport, Illinois. Buss has been a Lincoln presenter for nearly two decades, appearing previously in Bloomington-Normal on several occasions and also at Ford's Theater in Washington D.C., Gettysburg, and dozens of other sites. He not only has been honored by the Association of Lincoln Presenters, but also has presented academic papers on Lincoln and has served as president of the Stephen A. Douglas Association and vice-president of the Lincoln-Douglas Society. He was a long-time high school teacher and now serves as a district director for AVID, a college-preparatory program for local school districts.

Tim Connors has been a Stephen A. Douglas re-enactor with Buss for the past two years, and is scheduled for numerous appearances with Buss in 2008 at various Illinois sites celebrating the sesquicentennial of the Lincoln-Douglas debates, which occurred in Illinois in 1858. Connors is currently the speech and debate head coach at Freeport High School.

The David Davis Mansion Foundation was created in 1986 to assist the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency in its mission to engage, enlighten and entertain visitors with stories of the site, the Davis household, and the family's special relationship with Abraham Lincoln and others. One of the ways the foundation does this is through its annual meeting, which is free and open to the public.

Twelfth Annual Glorious Garden Festival

The 2008 edition of the Glorious Garden Festival was held June 20th and 21st, with visits to several beautiful private gardens in Bloomington-Normal. Special features included complimentary tea and refreshments on the David Davis Mansion grounds and tours through the Davis family garden. This 1870s, heirloom garden is still in its original location. Proceeds benefit the David Davis Mansion and Chestnut Health Systems.

New at the Garden Walk this year:

Family Fun in the Garden! Children enjoyed creating environmentally friendly garden creatures at the "Build-A-Bug" workshops on Saturday (on the Mansion grounds) and going on a special scavenger hunt through three gardens. Special ticket pricing was available for the children's garden scavenger hunt and workshops.

Gifts to the Prairie. The Garden Walk ticket price included free entrance to a special garden exhibit at the McLean County Museum of History entitled: "*Gifts to the Prairie: The Work of Pioneer Nurserymen & the Art of the Prestele Family.*"

Thanks to all of those who helped make this event possible, including the following corporate sponsors: Casey's Garden Shop, Chasin' Rainbows Gifts and Home Accents, Chizmar Landscaping, Green View Companies, Grieder Sod & Landscaping, Original Smith Printing, Osborn & DeLong, State Farm Companies, Wendell Niepagen Greenhouses & Garden Center, Westminster Village, and Zimmerman & Armstrong Investment Advisors.

Book Review

Gary Ecelbarger, *The Dark Horse: How Abraham Lincoln Beat the Odds to Win the Presidential Nomination*

Gary Ecelbarger is an independent historian and symposium speaker, as well as a tour guide for the American History Forum. He is a frequently published author on mid-nineteenth century American History. In 2005 his biography of John "Black Jack" Logan was a featured selection of the History Book Club. His current project, *The Dark Horse: How Abraham Lincoln Beat the Odds to win the Presidential Nomination*, is scheduled for publication by St. Martins Press in mid - 2008.

Two events serve as book-ends for Ecelbarger's story: the legislative action on January 5, 1859, by the members of the 21st General Assembly of Illinois selecting Stephen A. Douglas as the U.S. Senator for Illinois; and the third ballot vote at Republican Party Convention at the Great Wigwam in Chicago nominating Abraham Lincoln its presidential candidate. Between these two events is the story of Abraham Lincoln's "seventeen-month transformation from a two-time Senate loser to the unanimous nominee of a united Republican Party" for the highest office in the land. This story features not just the principals -- such as Lincoln, Seward, Bates -- but also Lincoln's associates from the judicial circuit -- Judge David Davis, Jesse Fell, Leonard Swett, and others. There may be some dispute as to whose actions during the seventeen months were most responsible for the transformation of the dark-horse candidate, but the proposition that a dramatic transformation occurred over a short time makes the story a perennial political favorite. Ecelbarger is not the first to write of this period during the past hundred years, but he has assembled extensive research to follow the events leading to Lincoln's nomination.

One of the interesting stories detailed early in the book involved a strategy meeting on the lower floor of the State Capitol Building the day after Lincoln's painful loss to Douglas. "This particular Thursday night Lincoln and his Republican allies descended to the lower floor of the capitol building to the library room. Perhaps as many as a dozen men of like political mind gathered among the collection of books housed in the room to informally discuss Republican plans for the coming year" Apparently the discussion turned to the presidential race in 1860, and the group discussed numerous potential nominees before Lincoln put himself forward -- "Why don't you run me? I can be nominated, I can be elected, and I can run the government." According to Ecelbarger, "Lincoln's declarations caught everyone by surprise." Judge Davis and the others saw that Lincoln was serious, and it became clear that Lincoln was ready to reach higher than he ever had before. Perhaps the importance of this informal discussion on January 6, 1859, isn't so much that Lincoln's political associates first saw that Lincoln ought to be considered in the list of possible candidates for president, but that they saw that Lincoln saw himself in that role.

Friends of the David Davis Mansion Foundation will find this an interesting and entertaining book. Publication is expected in late summer, and the Foundation is cosponsoring with the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission of McLean County a book-signing event with Mr. Ecelbarger on September 11, 2008 at the Museum of History in Bloomington, Illinois.

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www.daviddavismansion.org

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Calendar of Events -- 2008

June

- 20 Friday "Glorious Garden Festival" garden walk, 1- 8 p.m.
- 21 Saturday "Glorious Garden Festival" garden walk, 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.

July

- 12 "In the Good Old Summertime" Tea, Tea Ladies program
- 16 Board Meeting, MRSEF, 7 p.m.
- 30-Aug 1 Community Awareness Days at the McLean Co. Fair

August

- 2 Antique Auto Exhibit
- 9-10 "Gone With the Wind" Tea, Tea Ladies program
- 20 Board Meeting, MRSEF, 7 p.m.

September

- 11 Gary Ecelbarger Lecture & Book signing, Museum of History, evening
- 24 Annual Community Meeting, Normal Theater, 7 p.m.

David Davis Mansion
1000 East Monroe Drive
Hours: 9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. Wednesday - Sunday
(Closed Monday and Tuesday and some State Holidays)
For additional information, call the Mansion at 309/828-1084.