



HISTORICO

Sangamon County Historical Society Newsletter

P.O. Box 9744 Springfield, IL 62791-9744 | 217-525-1961 | schoffice@gmail.com

www.sangamonhistory.org | www.sangamonlink.org

May 21st Program to feature Underground Railroad Conductors

The underground railroad will always be somewhat of a mystery. Records are scarce since everything was done in secrecy. The risk was enormous and jail time was a distinct possibility for those involved.

The May program will feature six of Underground Railroad Conductors in Springfield - two white and four black men. They came from different walks of life but shared the same goal - to help slaves gain their freedom.

Luther N. Ransom ran a boarding house which doubled as an underground railroad station until 1844. When he needed an attorney to represent him on charges of assisting in the escape of a fugitive slave, he turned to Abraham Lincoln.

Erastus Wright was a teacher and served as a delegate to the 1839 Illinois Anti-Slavery Society annual meeting. He was a pallbearer for Abraham Lincoln.

Three of the black conductors also had ties to Lincoln. Jamieson Jenkins was a neighbor who worked as a drayman (wagon operator) and drove President-Elect Lincoln to the train station for his journey to DC. Rev. Henry Brown worked for Lincoln and led Lincoln's horse for the funeral procession. William Donnegan was a shoemaker, and Lincoln was his customer. He will be portrayed at the May program by Reggie Guyton. Aaron Dyer, a blacksmith and drayman, drove his horse and wagon at night taking runaway slaves to their next destination.



Erastus Wright



Rev. Henry Brown with Old Bob



William Donnegan

Join us on May 21st at the African American Museum to learn more about these Conductors.

In June of 2023, the Illinois Underground Railroad Task Force was created. The mission is to develop a statewide plan to connect existing local projects and new projects to create a cohesive statewide history of the Underground Railroad in Illinois while creating new educational opportunities for the State. The Task Force will submit a report of its findings and recommendations to the Governor and General Assembly by July 1, 2024.

IN THIS ISSUE

Annual Meeting.....6
1st Black Firehouse.....4
Calendar.....7

Are you interested in
serving on the board of
directors? Email
schsoffice@gmail.com

TIME TO
RENEW



Renew Your Membership by May 31st

From the President's Desk

What a Year!

Thank you for being a member of our Sangamon County Historical Society. Please remember to renew your membership. We depend on your support to make sure the Society can provide free monthly programs and our annual cemetery walk.

We hope you will attend the annual meeting on June 12 at beautiful Lake Springfield. We will be introducing our grant winners.

I had the opportunity to attend the Illinois State Historical Society award luncheon on April 20. Awards were given to those who have published books on history, groups that have digitized records from their area, individuals and groups who have sponsored programs on local history, and a teacher who has incorporated local history into her curriculum. It's nice to see so many who live and love history.

Cinda



CINDA KLICKNA

Fall Schedule

Mark your calendars for programs next fall....

Fall 2024 is already set with programs:

September 17 – Erika Holst, curator at the Illinois State Museum, will share new information she has found about the Hutchinson cemetery which once was located where Springfield High School is today. Graves were moved to Oak Ridge in 1874.

October 15 – Chris Richmond and Polly Poskin have spearheaded the work at the abandoned Pillsbury property. They will provide an update of all that has happened and plans going forward.

November 19 – Allicent Smith will present a program on the Conklings, a prominent family of Springfield who had close ties to Abraham Lincoln.

And... mark your calendar for the annual fall cemetery walk – ***Echoes of the Past***.

Graves of both African American and Jewish citizens of Springfield buried at Oak Ridge Cemetery will be the focus of our annual cemetery walk on Sunday, September 29. An easy walk in a beautiful setting makes for a great Sunday afternoon outing to hear the history and stories of those who made a difference in Springfield and Sangamon County.



Historico, published 9 times a year (except July, August and December), is the official bulletin for members of the Sangamon County Historical Society. Springfield, Illinois.

Winner, Certificate of Excellence, Illinois State Historical Society

You can download back issues of Historico in PDF format by going to our website:
www.sangamonhistory.org or www.sangamohis.org.

Send event announcements to: historicoeditor@gmail.com

Membership Renewals Due May 31st

Thank you for being a valued member of the Sangamon County Historical Society (SCHS)! The mission of the society is to preserve and create interest in the history of Springfield and Sangamon County. Your membership allows us to continue to serve our members and our community. We do this by offering monthly programs and the ever-popular Cemetery Walk, which are free and open to the public, as well as exclusive events for members including the Annual Meeting and Holiday Party. We also award several grants each year for history projects.

We hope you will renew your membership with the SCHS. There are several membership levels to choose from, and all are family memberships. When you choose the higher levels, the additional funds are used to further our mission and produce the newsletter, *Historico*.

Dues payments can be made online at:
https://sancohis.org/join_renew.html or payments can be mailed to:
SCHS
P.O. Box 9744
Springfield, IL 62791-9744

Again, we appreciate your support and hope you will renew your membership.

Lincoln Death Day Ceremony



The 68th Annual Lincoln Tomb Ceremony, commemorating the 159th Anniversary of the Death of Abraham Lincoln, was held on April 15th in front of Lincoln's Tomb. Pictured at left: SCHS Board members Kathy Dehen and Mary Mucciante. Mary and Kathy pictured at far right above.



2023-2024 Officers

President - Cinda Klickna

Past President - Susan Helm

Vice Presidents - Mary Alice Davis,
Stephanie Martin, and Ruth
Slottag

Treasurer - Jerry Smith

Secretary - Sarah Adams

Directors

Term ending June 2024

Mary Alice Davis
Kathy Hoffman
Kathy Dehen

Directors

Term ending 2025

Lee-Ann Burgener
Elaine Hoff
Larry Stone

Directors

Term ending 2026

Mary Mucciante
Scott Pillsbury
Linda Schneider
Ruth Slottag

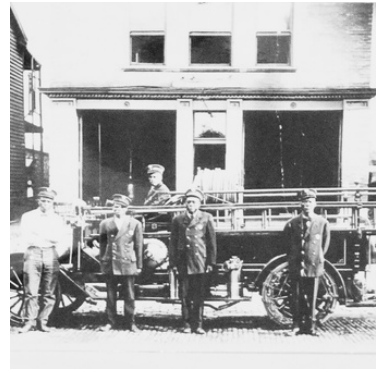
SCHS Mailing Address:

PO Box 9744

Springfield, IL 62791-9744

SPRINGFIELD'S 1ST BLACK FIREHOUSE

Springfield's Engine House #5, located at 1310 E. Adams St., was built in 1901 and was the first black firehouse. It had two bay doors for the horse-drawn fire wagons and a hayloft upstairs, which was also where the six African American firefighters slept. The inaugural staff consisted of: James Edwards, foreman; George Groves, truckman; John Foreman, driver; John Gray, driver; Ollie Singleton, truckman, and Henry Clark, watchman. This location typically received used equipment and materials. They were ordered to stay and clean up after fires were extinguished. Yet, in spite of these challenges, the crew gained a positive reputation. They were responsible for everything east of 10th St., as well as downtown. When Lake Springfield was built, they covered that area too, and even went as far as Rochester. So, it was no surprise that the newspaper said that the crew from Engine House #5 were the best firefighters in the area, perhaps because they had such a large area to cover.



Engine House #5 was often overlooked. When it and two other firehouses were opened in 1901, an Illinois State Journal article did not mention any African American firefighters. Yet the paper stated that "the new engine house on East Adams will be manned entirely by colored men." An old fire department directory didn't even recognize Engine House #5; it skipped from #4 to #6.

Horses were phased out in the 1920's, after which the upper floor of the station house was converted to a training facility for amateur boxers. Segregation was still in full force at that time. This gave those who didn't have a place to train somewhere to go.

The crew at Engine House #5 grew to a crew of eight by 1928, working in two shifts.

One of the most monumental tasks undertaken by the crew of Engine House #5 occurred in 1908. On the evening of August 14th, a crowd gathered outside the Sangamon County Jail, intending to lynch two African American prisoners. One was accused of killing a white person and one was suspected of raping a white woman. The Sheriff had actually had them taken out of town, and the crowd turned on the man who had driven them to safety. A riot ensued, and homes and cars were set on fire. Engine House #5 was instrumental in fighting these fires.



In 1954 the crew moved into a new firehouse located at 1723 E. Clay St. The original building was used for storage and even as apartments over the years. Central Lodge #3 of the Prince Hall Masons, which is the oldest and longest continuously operating African American fraternal organization in Springfield, established in 1867, purchased the building in 1970. Prince Hall was an abolitionist who came from England as a free man. He wanted to make sure black children were educated.

Most of the exterior finishes have been removed, but the building is still full of history. The City of Springfield offered to purchase the building, with intentions to tear it down, but thankfully, the offer to sell was declined. The Department of the

Interior has also offered to buy the building. The Antiquities Act, which was signed into law on June 8, 1906, would provide general legal protection of cultural and natural resources of historic or scientific interest on federal lands. However, this would result in the Masons losing any opportunity to have input on what is done with the building. So, they stand strong, both in their lodge and their drive to restore the building to its original facade. A new HVAC system has been installed and tuckpointing will be done. The front of the building will be restored to its original look. The original 3" brass firepoles are gone, although they hope to replicate these with historically correct versions. The openings for the poles are still visible in the stable/engine room that will become the museum and library. The exterior façade will be redone to include the original blonde brick; new windows and lentils will be installed, and the bay doors will have one operational and one decorative. There were originally brick pavers all



Ken Page sharing the history of the 1st Black Firehouse



Attendees looking at the sign in front of Engine House #5



Future museum - note the hole in the ceiling where the pole was



The original crew of Engine House #5

the way to the street. Ten thousand brick pavers have been removed from Adams Street due to the new transportation hub being built, and have been offered for the restoration. The second floor will remain as lodge headquarters.

Engine House #5 got its first two white firefighters in 1958. While segregation may have ended, the story of the colored firehouse does not. Ken Page of Central Lodge #3 hopes that the museum and library will “battle the fires of racism”.

The bravery of the six African American firefighters of Engine House #5 lives on, and those who are the driving force behind making the museum a reality want residents of our community to know the significance. These men will forever hold a place in history, especially with their heroic actions during the 1908 Race Riot. Forty homes occupied by African Americans and two dozen black-owned businesses were destroyed in the riot, and hundreds of African Americans left Springfield in fear. At least eleven people died because of the riot, and many more were injured.



Left: SCHS President Cinda Klickna being interviewed

William Donnegan was lynched during the riot. A prominent member of Springfield’s African American community since before the Civil War, he was a cobbler (whose customer list included Abraham Lincoln) and a real estate investor. He owned a substantial amount of property at the time of his death and was resented by many whites not just because of his wealth but also because his third wife, Sarah Rudolph Donnegan, was white. The Masons continue to recognize him every August. As a side note, remember this name – you will be hearing more about Mr. Donnegan at the May Program!

Restoration of Engine House #5 has the support of many in the community, including State Senator Doris Turner. While those involved with the project are thrilled to have the community excited about this, they also hope that the excitement translates to money. As with all non-profits, donations are needed to see the vision come to fruition. If you would like to show your support, donations can be mailed to: Central 3 Community First Project Inc., 1310 E. Adams St., Springfield, IL.



Above: Ken Page being interviewed

THANK YOU to WICS AND WAND for covering the April Program about Springfield’s first black firehouse!



ANNUAL MEETING

Wednesday, June 12, 2024

5:30 pm – Social Hour | 6:30 pm – Buffet Dinner

Island Bay Yacht Club

Back Patio (overlooking Lake Springfield)

76 Yacht Club Drive

Springfield, IL

Buffet Dinner Menu

Mixed Greens with Candied Pecans, Sliced Strawberries, Mandarin Orange with Poppyseed Dressing

Seasoned Grilled Breasts of Chicken

Mediterranean-Style Farfalle Pasta with Olive Oil, Garlic, Sundried Tomatoes, Arthichokes, Fresh Basil, and Parmesan Cheese

Sauteed Zucchini, Yellow Squash, Red Peppers and Red Onion
Rolls and Butter

Dessert Table

Strawberry Shortcake with Angel Food Cake

Macerated Strawberries and Whipped Cream

Chocolate Texas Sheet Cake

MAIL RESERVATION FORM WITH PAYMENT TO

P.O. BOX 9744 SPRINGFIELD IL 62791-9744

OR PAY ONLINE AT WWW.SANGAMONHISTORY.ORG

\$32 per person – Payment must be received by June 1st

of tickets: _____

Name(s): (Please Print)

Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email: _____



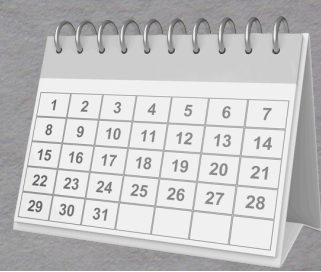
217-525-1961



schsoffice@gmail.com

Calendar

A Heads Up Guide to Area History Events



Send announcements, information, photos and illustrations to historicoeditor@gmail.com. You can still see a list and links to all the Zoom programs the Society offered during the Pandemic on-site meeting shut-down, by going to the SCHS website, sangamonhistory.org.

Save The Date

Wednesday, June 12 - Annual Meeting

Mark your calendars for June 12th for our annual meeting at Island Bay Yacht Club. Enjoy a delicious dinner, vote on the Society Board candidates, and hear about the 2024 Grant award winners while taking in the beautiful lake-side view from the patio. Cost: \$32 for buffet dinner; cash bar.

Saturday, May 11 - Mother's Day Tea at The Brinkerhoff

Celebrate Mother's Day in elegance at The Brinkerhoff Mansion! Join us for a delightful tea and luncheon featuring News Channel 20's Stacey Skrysek, who will share her inspiring story on motherhood. You will also enjoy some entertainment and the chance to win fabulous door prizes. Wear your favorite tea party attire!



Advanced registration is required:

<https://www.facebook.com/events/774914847480967>

Tuesday, May 21 - Lunch & Learn Series by UIS Alumni Sage Society and the Illinois State Historical Society 11:30 am at Illini Country Club

Life and Times of A.E. Staley:
A.E. Staley was a farm boy from North Carolina who moved to Decatur and built a soybean manufacturing empire. He was the original owner of the football team that became the Chicago Bears. Award-winning writer and film producer Julie Staley will discuss the life and times of A.E. Staley and his influence on life in the prairie.

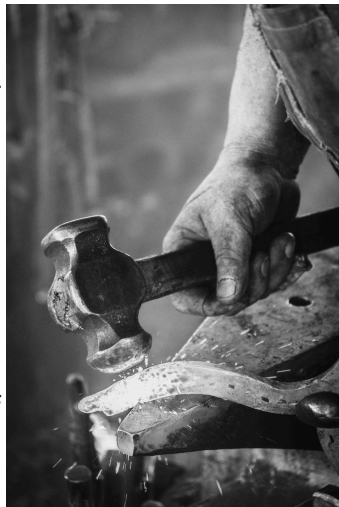


A.E. Staley (Photo courtesy of Staley Museum, Decatur, IL)

Register at: <https://web.cvent.com/event/a6d8dbfb-2d08-4218-ad20-22a5b584380e/summary>

Saturday, June 8 - Dana-Thomas House Foundation Summer Party and Frank Lloyd Wright Birthday 6pm to 9pm \$70

Enjoy a summer evening in the beautiful Dana-Thomas House courtyard for food, jazz, and special visitor Frank Lloyd Wright, portrayed by Pat Foster. June 8 would have been Frank Lloyd Wright's 157th birthday.



Saturday, May 4 - Hammer-In at Clayville Historic Site 9am to 3pm

Blacksmiths will be demonstrating and teaching. Anyone wanting to forge must wear safety glasses, full length natural fiber pants and leather shoes or boots. Forges, tools, metal and mentors will be provided. Registration will be day of event.

Concessions and beverage service will be available. There will be some period correct demonstrations. ALL buildings will be open for tours, including the Broadwell Inn and Tavern which is 200 years old this year!

More info at:

<https://www.facebook.com/events/931856945134193>

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



Sangamon County Historical Society 2024-2025 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 \$ _____