



# Mercer County Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 13, Issue 1

Editor: Mary Jane Sticklen

Jan/Feb/Mar 09

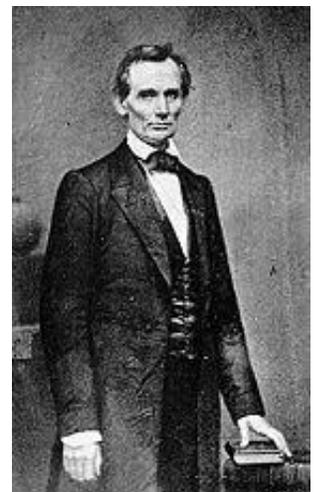
Publisher Kellogg's Printing

## Happy Birthday Honest Abe!

By: Michael Zecher michael@zecherphoto.com

February 12, 2009 marks the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of America's greatest president - Abraham Lincoln. But why should a 200 year-old man matter to us today? While many of us who grew up in Illinois already know much concerning the life of America's 16<sup>th</sup> president, the anniversary of his birth gives us an opportunity to renew our acquaintance with this icon of our democracy.

Many people know the story of Lincoln's humble birth to pioneer parents in the Kentucky wilderness, but how many have considered him as a quintessential example of the "American Dream"? Through hard work and dedication, Lincoln steadily improved his situation in life from his early years of doing strictly manual labor on the family farm, to owning his own store in New Salem, to the professional careers of postmaster, surveyor, lawyer, politician, and eventually President of the United States.



But that's certainly not all. Lincoln is also admired today for his ability to inspire a nation through his words. Many of his speeches, like his Gettysburg Address and his Second Inaugural Address are still considered classics of American political expression. Even prior to his presidency, Lincoln was capable of capturing the essence of a thought, and then communicating it in a manner that fully engaged his audience. This ability was rooted in a connection cultivated with the "common people" he encountered daily during his life on the Illinois prairie, and despite having the weight of a torn nation on his shoulders many years later, he never lost that connection.

In our modern age where politicians are very conscious of "approval ratings", it is sometimes difficult for us to imagine a politician who would not compromise their core beliefs if those beliefs could hinder their political aspirations. During his presidency, Lincoln demonstrated a single minded dedication toward preserving the American union - despite ever increasing opposition to the war from almost the entire country. At no time during his presidency did he consider allowing dissolution of the union. Shortly before the national election in 1864, Lincoln resigned himself to the fact that he probably would not be reelected.

### Mercer County Historical Society & Essley-Noble Museum

1406 - SE 2nd Avenue  
Aledo, IL 61231  
Phone: 309/582-2280

Hours: 1:00 - 5:00 PM  
Wed., Sat., & Sunday  
April through the end of October.



### Officers & Board of Directors

Bill Bertrand, President  
Dave Duncan, Vice President,  
Mary Jane Sticklen Secretary  
Jim Runyon, Treasurer  
Robert Armstrong  
Shirley Ball  
Ron Dillavou  
Dave Frieden  
Beverly Gray  
Cheryl McCaw  
Doug McCaw  
Harriett Reynolds  
Alyce Robinson  
Twyla Holmes

Ruth Giffin, Honorary Director  
Shirley Crawford, Curator  
Dennis Henderson, Sunday Host



### For Genealogy Queries write to:

Cheryl McCaw/Shirley Crawford  
MCHS Genealogy Dept.  
1406 - SE 2nd Avenue  
Aledo IL 61231-2504



**Memberships available for \$15/household**

*For membership or change of address contact:*

Jim Runyon  
756 State Hwy 94  
Aledo, IL 61231  
309-582-7762



**Website:**

[http://www.geocities.com/mchs\\_61231](http://www.geocities.com/mchs_61231)

At that time, he outlined a plan where his administration would increase their efforts on defeating the Confederate army prior to the next president taking office. Even when faced with what appeared to be certain political defeat, Lincoln was unwavering in his dedication to preservation of the Union.

What about Lincoln as “The Great Emancipator”? Isn’t that a reason to admire this man? Abraham Lincoln was certainly an emphatic believer in the values flowing from the Declaration of Independence. In a culture where most of American society was willing to “look the other way” in regards to slavery in the Southern states, Lincoln always believed that the institution of slavery was wrong. After all, how could a country founded upon the principles of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” condone slavery? While Lincoln was not an “abolitionist” (someone who wanted the slaves freed immediately despite the institution of slavery being protected by the US Constitution), nor was he someone who believed in complete racial equality as we know it today, his actions set in motion the prohibition of slavery throughout the nation. After issuing the Emancipation Proclamation in January of 1863, Lincoln shepherded passage of the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the US Constitution through the US Congress, and included ratification of the amendment as one of the terms for former Confederate states to reestablish full rights within the Union. Only upon ratification of this amendment, would the stain of slavery be banished from American soil forever.

Stories also abound of Lincoln’s compassionate leadership. As the Civil War was finally coming to a close, Lincoln outlined a generous plan for the surrender of Confederate soldiers and for “readmitting” Southern states to full participation in the Union. Unfortunately, his life was cut short before his plan for full reconstruction of the nation could be enacted. Who knows how our nation’s post Civil War history might have been different had he been able to implement his plan for national reconciliation.

So, why should we take time to reflect on the life of Abraham Lincoln? In short, because he still has much to teach us, and we, as a nation, have yet much to learn. He was a man generations yet to come can look up to with respect, a man who freed a race from bondage, a man who prevented this country from being torn in two, and a man with the moral

courage to do what he believed was right. He was the right man for his time...and ours.

### Lincoln Bicentennial Activities

In addition to commemorative activities planned at the federal level, fifteen different states have also established bicentennial commissions. For more information about events planned during the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial celebration, please refer to:

Federal:

[www.lincolnbicentennial.gov](http://www.lincolnbicentennial.gov)

Illinois:

[www.lincoln200.net](http://www.lincoln200.net)

### A Recommended Lincoln Reading List

The bicentennial of Lincoln’s birth is also bringing a resurgence of scholarship regarding the life and political career of Abraham Lincoln. More has already been written about Abraham Lincoln than any other person in history, with the exceptions of Jesus Christ and William Shakespeare. In addition to the new books being published about our 16<sup>th</sup> president, here is a VERY short list of recommended books.

Benjamin Thomas. Abraham Lincoln – A Biography. 1952 (still readily available in most book stores)

Stephen Oates. With Malice Toward None – The Life of Abraham Lincoln. 1977.

David Herbert Donald. Lincoln. 1995.

Edward J Steers. Lincoln Legends – Myths, Hoaxes and Confabulations Associated With Our Greatest President. 2007

Gerald Prokopowicz. Did Lincoln Own Slaves and Other Frequently Asked Questions about Abraham Lincoln. 2008.

🌀 🌀 🌀 🌀 🌀 🌀 🌀 🌀

### Arah-Dean Finch’s Notes on Start of the Museum Written October, 1976

The following passages are direct quotes or excerpts from Arah-Dean’s handwritten notes on file at the museum. They provide insight on the museum’s first years.



**Early display at Essley-Noble Museum**

On Sept. 18, 1958 the officers met at the Museum Bldg. and it was then just a building, no fixtures, just a few chairs.

Several of these meetings were

held usually on Sun. afternoons. There was much discussion about what we should do. Some wanted to use the building for a community center, some a youth center. There were many ideas, but always there were a few who felt we should carry out Mr. E's (*Essley's*) vision of a Hist. Soc. and a Museum

Finally, at one of these meetings Geo. Accord got up and said, quote "Let's put Arah-Dean down here and see what she can do, maybe in 25 years we can have a Museum" end quote. Those were the conditions when I became the 1st Curator. I had no desk, no typewriter, no files. We bought 3 long folding tables and folding chairs. I used one of these tables for my desk and as display items came in, I recorded them in a note book by hand.

On Oct. 18, 1959 there was a formal opening of the Mercer Co. Hist. Soc. Bldg. More than 300 persons attended. ... I sat at a table and listed items which people said they would give to the Museum. When I wrote "a Spinning Wheel which had been used very early in the Co." I thought "Oh it is not going to take any 25 yrs. to make a Museum." And you know we did it in less time than that.

We had our 1st three display cases made. They were expensive and we didn't have that kind of money, so we got along with them for awhile.

In Apr. 1960 David Lawson, Boyd (*Finch*) and others went to Monmouth to a sale & bought display cases from an old jewelry store. They had to be taken apart to be brought by trucks to Aledo. There were tall wall cases, some painted white, some green. There were floor cases, some in fair condition in mahogany & others painted. They were piled in the center of the room, and they were a mess. No one wanted to try to assemble them. So, it was not until Aug. 23, 1960, that we got the carpenters from Monmouth, who had taken them apart, to come & assemble them. The Soc. Pres. asked me to come to

the Bldg., and say where they should be placed while we had men there to handle them. I sat all afternoon at the South end of the room and had them placed as they were assembled, and to this day, I do not know how I did it without having them moved a time or two. They did not look too good until we had them painted to blend with the walls.

Someone has said tell the things no one knows. So, I will tell about the metal desk which we still use. One day a man came in and said, "Here is a desk for you Mrs. Finch. Don't ask who gave it, or where it came from." I was so happy to have drawers for accession papers, pen, pencils, etc. that I did not ask - and I don't know.

*2009 marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the Essley-Noble Museum, for which the Board of Directors is planning special events and commemorations. Details will be finalized and released later.*



### History of the Mercer County Historical Society

The Mercer County Historical Society grew out of the monetary gift by Elisha L. Essley, a former Mercer County resident, to erect a building to house a museum for items of historical interest. Richard B. Allen, a local attorney, organized a group of interested persons to carry out the project. The Society was incorporated December 31, 1954.

The first board of directors was Richard B. Allen, Howard R. VanDyke, Fred C. Clawson, Glen Stancliff and George B. Acord. They supervised the building and enlisted interested county residents to be member of the new Society. The "Essley-Noble Museum" was dedicated October 18, 1959.

The Mercer County Historical Society had been preceded by a Mercer County Scientific Association which was organized February 19, 1878, with six members who had two goals:

#### **Your Support is Vital!**

Annual memberships expired December 31, 2009. We count on dues and donations to provide necessary funds for our projects and for the maintenance of the Essley-Noble Museum complex. Thank you to all our patrons!

- ( ) Annual Membership - \$15.00 (one household)
- ( ) Lifetime Membership - \$300.00
- ( ) Corporate/Business Fee - \$100.00

Send to: Jim Runyon  
756 Hwy 94  
Aledo, IL 61231

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

1) Provide for scientific-minded persons an opportunity to share ideas and 2) Make up a cabinet or scientific collection of specimens related to the natural sciences from the private collections of Mercer County residents. In December 1879 the Association's name was changed to Mercer County Scientific and Historical Society to permit the collection of historical information. That information became the basis of the 1882 *History of Mercer County*. The Society grew and the members presented papers at its quarterly meetings. Although no definitive date of dissolution has been found, the Society died out as its founders passed away. In 1965, the Historical Society brought the Fairview one-room school to the museum grounds after a campaign to raise the funds to purchase and move the building. It was restored as a typical one-room school and dedicated October 17, 1969. A large steel building was erected on the grounds in 1973 for the purpose of displaying the tools of agriculture used in Mercer County, completing the

set of three buildings which can be visited by the public on Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday from 1:00 - 5:00 p.m. April through October.

Information provided by Alicia Ives and Jim Runyon



**Coming Events**

- April 1** Museum opens for 2009
- April 20** Spring Open meeting 7:00 p.m. at the Museum - Program TBA

*Thank you* to our corporate sponsors, who give us needed financial and community support!

**1st Community Bank...Country Bank ...**  
**Farmers State Bank of Western IL ...**  
**Ford & Maynard Agency ...**  
**Freedom Bank ... Joy State Bank ...**  
**Lou Sutton/Tracy Bigham Country Companies**  
**...Midwest Bank of Western IL...**  
**Reynolds State Bank.**

**This newsletter sponsored by:**



**Farmers State Bank**  
of Western Illinois

*Serving Aledo, Alexis, Alpha, New Windsor, Viola, Woodhull*