



Mercer County Historical Society Newsletter

Volume 13, Issue 2

Editor: Mary Jane Sticklen

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Abraham Lincoln in Western Illinois (Part I)

By Michael Zecher

Many area students have studied the history of Mercer County, which generally has included the story of Abraham Lincoln surveying the town of New Boston. While this was certainly a notable event in the county's history, many may not have learned that Lincoln has other connections to western Illinois.

Abraham Lincoln made his first foray into western Illinois when he was twenty-three years of age. On April 22, 1832, Abraham Lincoln was elected captain of a group of militia volunteers from New Salem for thirty days of service to repel Chief Black Hawk and his warriors from Illinois. Lincoln's company of 67 soldiers, whom contemporary accounts claimed were "the hardest set of men", assembled in Beardstown before travelling to the village of Yellow Banks (present day Oquawka) where they expected to meet a steamship carrying supplies. Unfortunately, the boat did not arrive for three days, forcing Lincoln's company to forage for food, and causing local residents to complain of their behavior. When the supplies arrived, the company was transferred to Fort Armstrong on Rock Island. From there, they travelled up the Rock River to Dixon's Ferry (present day Dixon IL) before continuing to Fort Johnson, near Ottawa IL. There, on May 27, Lincoln's company was mustered out of service at the completion of their original thirty day commitment. Lincoln re-enlisted for twenty days of service in another company, and at the end of that "tour of duty", enlists in a third company. Lincoln's overall military career ends on July 10, 1832 after a total of 80 days of service.

Despite never being involved in any actual fighting with Black Hawk's warriors, several stories emerged regarding Lincoln's military service. As Captain Lincoln's company was marching shoulder to shoulder across a field, they came to a narrow gate in a fence. Forgetting the command to have the column form into a single file line, the quick-thinking Captain commanded the soldiers to halt, and dismissed them for a two minute "break". Following the break, the company was ordered to reform their line on the other side of the fence.

Not everything was smooth sailing for the young captain. While the company was marching across the state, an elderly Indian wandered into their camp. Despite having a letter from a senior military officer intended to provide the Indian safe passage, some of the soldiers within Lincoln's company wanted to attack the Indian. Lincoln stood firm in protecting the Indian, even going as far to say that if they wanted at the Indian, his soldiers had to go through him first. In the end, the Indian was allowed to go on his way without being harmed.

Mercer County Historical Society

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Essley-Noble Museum

1406 - SE 2nd Avenue
P.O. Box 269
Aledo, IL 61231
Phone: 309/582-2280

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



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For Genealogy Queries write to:

MCHS Genealogy Dept.
1406 - SE 2nd Avenue
P.O. Box 269
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Please address all correspondence to:
P.O. Box 269.

Mail is no longer delivered to the
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http://www.geocities.com/mchs_61231

Captain Lincoln also ended up in a little “hot water” due to the actions of some of the members of his company. Lincoln never had a reputation for favoring strict discipline, and this was obviously evident even in his early years. He was “arrested” for disregarding an order concerning the prohibition of discharging firearms near camp, and was also punished when, without Lincoln’s knowledge, members of his company stole some liquor and were not able to march the following day.

Lincoln, well known for his sense of humor, certainly never shied away from poking fun at himself. In an 1848 speech in Congress, Lincoln referred to his experiences as a soldier in the Black Hawk War by stating that he “bent a musket pretty badly on one occasion”, led “charges upon the wild onions” and “had a good many struggles with the mosquitoes”.

Being a soldier in the Black Hawk War paid quite handsomely for Lincoln. Including his wages for serving as company captain, Lincoln received a total of \$125 for less than three months of service. In addition, , the US Congress passed legislation in 1850 and again in 1855 awarding 160 acres of government owned land to soldiers who served for at least 14 days in the Black Hawk War. Meeting this criterion, Lincoln was awarded 40 acres of property in Tama County IA, and another 120 acres in Crawford County IA. While never actually doing anything with this property, Lincoln held the property until his death.

Two and a half years following his service in the Black Hawk War, Lincoln returned to western Illinois, this time in an entirely different profession. In January of 1834, while living in New Salem, Lincoln was appointed as the Deputy Surveyor for Sangamon County. As is typical anytime vast new areas are settled, surveyors in Lincoln’s time were in great demand. Lincoln’s surveying career involved settling land disputes, marking off property boundaries, laying out roads and other duties normal to the profession.

Surveying in Lincoln’s day was very similar to modern surveying, with the exception of not having as technologically advanced equipment. Lincoln’s surveying equipment included a brass compass with two upright sighting posts. The compass was set upon a Jacob staff that was driven into the ground. To measure distances accurately, Lincoln used a Gunter’s Chain consisting of 100 wire links totaling 66 feet in length. The combination of the compass, staff and chains, in combination with a thorough

understanding of geometry, gave the surveyor the ability to accurately measure angles and distances. Because the population of Illinois was steadily increasing, a surveyors duties occasionally involved laying out new towns for development. Eight months after Lincoln began his new career, Peter VanBergen, a land speculator who purchased a promissory note signed by Lincoln as a result of his failed store partnership in New Salem, hired the new surveyor to lay out a town he planned to develop in western Illinois along the Mississippi River. Using stones and stakes to mark the property and street boundaries, Lincoln went to work laying out the town of New Boston. On September 30, 1834, Abraham Lincoln completed his survey. Two years later, the first lots in the town were sold at auction. While New Boston was the first town the young surveyor plotted, it was not the last. In addition to New Boston, Lincoln also plotted out the Illinois towns of Albany, Bath, Huron and a portion of Petersburg. Lincoln’s last known survey was completed Nov 16-17, 1836. At the same time he served as Sangamon County’s Deputy Surveyor, Lincoln also served as the New Salem Postmaster and got his first taste of politics as an Illinois State Legislator. Shortly before making his last survey, Lincoln was elected to a second term in the Illinois State Legislature and was granted a license by the Illinois Supreme Court to practice law within the state. After spending slightly less than three years as a professional surveyor, Lincoln was now poised to make to make another change of professions, one that would ultimately land him in the White House.

In the next issue of this newsletter, we’ll learn more about a third connection western Illinois has with the life of Abraham Lincoln the prairie lawyer – a connection that ultimately impacted the settlement of the American West.

For more information about the topics presented in this article, please refer to the following books which were used as information sources:

- Lincoln and the Black Hawk War by Lloyd Efflandt*
- Lincoln’s New Salem by Benjamin Thomas*
- A. Lincoln With Compass and Chain by Adin Baber*



Don’t forget to renew your membership!
We count on the donations of our patrons. Thank you!



Abraham Lincoln in Mercer County

We thank author William C. Ives for the donation of 100 copies of his new book *Abraham Lincoln in Mercer County*, the proceeds of which to go to the Mercer County Historical Society. Copies are selling already and may be obtained at the Essley-Noble Museum for \$12 each. If you wish to order by mail, send \$15 (Which includes postage and mailer, or \$17 if you want it insured.) to Mercer County Historical Soc., P.O. Box 269, Aledo, IL 61231 and mention the title of the book.



Above photo: "Abraham Lincoln Deputy Surveyor," from the full-sized version at New Salem, IL. Donated by William Ives.



Spring Opening - Made in Mercer County

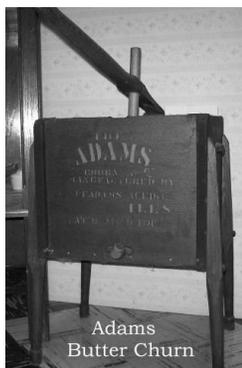
By Tarah Sipes

This summer I served as an intern for the Mercer County Historical Society at the Essley-Noble Museum. During that time I found many interesting bits of information concerning the contributions of Mercer County citizens to various aspects of everyday American life. As I spent more time at the museum, I discovered more and more information.

It was at this point I decided to focus on ideas and inventions from Mercer County citizens for my Master's degree closure project.

The finished project, the *Made in Mercer County* exhibit, will be on display this season at the Essley-Noble Museum in Aledo.

Some of the objects included in the exhibit are a butter churn patented and named after a Mercer County citizen, a Do-Do Clown, created by Irvin Balmer of Aledo, a corn chopper made in New Boston, a shirt worn by Suzy Boggus on her first album cover, photographs of Major League Baseball players from



Mercer County, pottery, and a poem written in Mercer County, about Mercer County.

To accompany the exhibit, I will be speaking at the Spring open meeting of the Mercer County Historical Society on Monday, April 20, 2009 at 7:00pm. If the topic of notable Mercer County achievements interests you as much as it interests me, I recommend that you visit the Essley-Noble Museum between April and October to see the many objects created by Mercer County citizens. Hope to see you at the museum! Tarah Sipes, daughter of Dave and Eileen (Gilliland) Sipes, graduated from Aledo High School in 2001. She received her Bachelor's degree from MacMurray College in Jacksonville, IL in 2004 and she is currently working on her Master's degree in History at the University of Illinois in Springfield. The internship at the Essley-Noble Museum has served as the inspiration for the *Made in Mercer County* exhibit which is part of the closure requirement for the Master's degree. After completing her Master's degree Tarah hopes to begin a career in the museum field



We Will Miss You, Shirley

Shirley Crawford, our able curator for 15 years, has found that it's time to pursue interests closer to home and has resigned as of March 14. We will miss her expertise, but certainly wish her all the best and thank her for her years of dedication as curator and previously as a board member.



Curator Position Available

The Essley-Noble Museum located in Aledo is looking for a new curator. This would be a part time position and would entail about 16 hours a week. Duties would include keeping the museum open during regular visitor hours, being familiar with the displays and genealogical resources, keeping and retrieving accession records on the computer, coordinating volunteers, and working with the Board of Directors. If you are interested in Mercer County history and have organizational skills, this would be an ideal position. For more information, contact Bill Bertrand 582-2506 or write to MCHS, Box 269, Aledo, IL 61231.

Your Support is Vital!

Annual memberships expired December 31, 2008. 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 _____

Museum Opens April 1

The Essley-Noble Museum, machine shed, and school house will open for the season April 1. Hours are 1:00-5:00 Wednesday, Saturday, and Sunday. Admission is free, but donations are greatly appreciated. The main building has hundreds of historical displays as well as an extensive genealogy and records section. The machine shed has numerous antique implements on display and there is an authentic one-room school house. See the "Made in Mercer Co." exhibit, tour a plot of native prairie plants, and pick up a commemorative souvenir wooden nickel. Although presently lacking a curator, the museum will be open with volunteer help and with Dennis Henderson as the weekend host.

Seeking School Year Books

We are seeking donations of old high school year books from Mercer Co. Schools. The Joy High School collection is complete, but especially lacking are Keithsburg, New Boston, New Windsor, Sherrard High, and William & Vashti College. Also needed are Aledo, Alexis, RMA, Seaton, Viola, Westmer, Winola, and any other not listed. We have a list of what volumes are on hand and what is needed. Any history on these schools, such as when they originated, when buildings were built, etc., would be extremely helpful. We would like to get the information before it gets lost in time and memory. Contact Twyla Holmes 582-5585 with any information and/or donations.

Volunteers Needed

Volunteers are needed and most certainly appreciated in numerous areas. Those with **computer skills** could enter records and help with scanning and printing. Especially now, lacking a curator, we need people to **welcome visitors**, show them around, and help them find and **use genealogical and other reference sources**. There are always **maintenance** issues indoors and out. We need someone to make **new identification tags** for the numerous exhibits. Even a **volunteer coordinator** would be welcome. Upcoming special events needing volunteers are: **5th Grade tours**—in early May, call Shirley Ball 537-3151. **Rhubarb Fest**—June 6, rhubarb desserts and/or manning the sales table, call Bev Gray 372-4407. If you are interested in donating some of your time, contact a board member, stop by the museum, or call Bill Bertrand 582-2506 or Twyla Homes 582-5585.

Coming Events

- April 1** Museum opens for 2009
- April 20** Spring Open meeting 7:00 p.m. at the Museum - Program "Made in Mercer County"
- May** 5th Grade Tours
- June 6** Rhubarb Fest dessert booth



This newsletter sponsored by: Aledo Walmart