

Lincoln Lives @ Your Library!

The Rock Island Public Library

Feb. 9, 2009



Rock Island Library Celebrates Lincoln's 200th Birth Anniversary with a year of events at the Main Library

Since a president with Illinois roots doesn't turn 200 every year, The Rock Island Public Library will celebrate the bicentennial of Abraham Lincoln's birth with a year's worth of events at the downtown Main Library. Presented with the support of the Friends of the Rock Island Public Library, the first three programs in the "*Lincoln Lives @ Your Library*" series will include:

Monday, Feb. 16: Songs of Civil War - Lincoln and Liberty, Too
Tuesday, April 7: How we View History – Lincoln's Changing Image
Wednesday, May 6: "Hellgate of the Mississippi"– Lincoln & the Effie Afton Trial

"Songs of the Civil War: Lincoln and Liberty, Too," is **Monday, February 16** in the library's Community Room at 6 p.m. "*Lincoln & Liberty Too*" is an all-ages program combining music, history, storytelling and humor. Presented by Dubuque singer, guitarist mandolin and banjo player Bob Welch (shown above), the *Lincoln and Liberty, Too* program includes numerous Lincoln quotes and stories and rare Lincoln campaign songs. "Some historians have referred to the Civil War as the musical war," notes Welch. Over two thousand new songs were written and published in the first year of the war alone.

Welch is listed with the Civil War Preservation Trust, and is endorsed by the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission of Washington, D.C. "The goal [of the program] is to bring the legacy of Lincoln into focus, increasing awareness of Lincoln's accomplishments, his steadfast goal to preserve the Union and his desire to heal the wounds the war had left on all. I encourage the audience to read more about him to help them understand his unique ability to motivate, inspire and lead the country," adds Welch. He notes that Lincoln once encouraged his oldest son Robert to learn banjo, so he could entertain his father.

With school out for President's Day, the Children's Department will also celebrate Lincoln's birth with family storytimes for Pre-K through 2nd grades at 11 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. at the Main Library and a birthday party with stories, activities and refreshments at 3:30 p.m. for pre-K through 6th grades and their families.

In April, the library commemorates a momentous month, which marked both the end of the Civil War (on April 9) and Lincoln's assassination just five days later. Civil War historian Ron J. Keller, of the Lincoln Heritage Museum in Lincoln, IL, will discuss "**The Changing Image of the 16th President**" at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday, April 7. Using historic images and clips from a variety of motion pictures from throughout the twentieth century, Keller demonstrates how popular culture and historical events have shaped public perceptions of Abraham Lincoln. In this lighter presentation, Keller shows how that history does and does not mirror the changing perspective

of one of America's greatest icons.

Keller is assistant professor of history and political science at Lincoln College, and director and curator of the Lincoln Heritage Museum. His credits include writing an essay on "That Which Congress So Nobly Began," in *Lincoln and Freedom*, a book on the 13th amendment, serving as a contributing author for the *Oxford Encyclopedia of African-American History*, Congressional Quarterly's *The Essential Lincoln*, and serving as chief editor, researcher, and writer for *The Lincoln Newsletter*, published three times a year. Keller is an advisor to the national Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission and was appointed to state and city bicentennial commissions as well. He was awarded the Order of Lincoln on February 2009, the highest honor given by the state of Illinois.

The May 6 program commemorates the 153rd anniversary of the sinking of the Effie Afton and Lincoln's role in the subsequent battle between boating and railroad interests. On May 6, 1856, the steamboat *Effie Afton* crashed into a pier of the first bridge across the river at Rock Island. The litigation that followed often has been called one of Abraham Lincoln's most important trials. "**Hellgate of the Mississippi**," based on the book of the same name by Geneseo author Larry Riney, is scheduled for 6:30 p.m. on May 6 in the library's community room. Riney will discuss Lincoln's role in the trial that took place in Chicago in 1857, and along with the courtroom drama, Riney found evidence of backroom drama and double-dealing. In some ways, Illinois politics haven't changed much in 153 years!

"My research gave me the opportunity to look closely at the legends and the facts surrounding the lawsuit," explains Riney. "I gained a deeper appreciation of how the railroads and the bridge impacted the economic and social fabric of the river culture and the entire country before the Civil War. The Upper Mississippi River Valley, then known as the Far West, was a cauldron of unrest, economic and legal maneuvering, and one-upmanship."

The Captain and owner of the boat, Jacob S. Hurd, sued the railroads that owned the bridge for damages, in what became a complex court battle for the economic fate of an entire region. Captain Hurd's lawsuit was funded by the St. Louis Chamber of Commerce, while Lincoln helped defend the eastern railroad interests who owned the bridge. He was quick to realize that if the steamboat side won, the bridge would be torn down and the advance of the new and automated technology of the railroads would be stopped at the river's edge. "In a larger sense, the trial became a major battle in the ongoing war between Chicago's railroad internet and St. Louis's steamboats that was fought throughout the 1850s," says Riney.

For those who want to sign up, Riney will also lead participants on an optional tour of the site of the crash. To become part of that tour, sign up at the program on Wednesday night or call the library at 732-7303. Riney is an award-winning freelance writer living in Geneseo, Illinois. *Hell Gate of the Mississippi* launched his new company, Talesman Press(R).

Future programs are planned for this summer and fall, and will be announced as they are confirmed. All of the above events are free and open to the public.

Libraries offer plenty of print, online, visual and audio resources, many of which are free with a library card. For money-saving entertainment, enlightenment and enrichment for all ages, visit the Rock Island Main, 30/31 and Southwest Branch libraries, or check the Rock Island Library online at www.ripl.lib.il.us for details about library cards, services and free events for the family.