



the

# COOK-WITTER REPORT

Volume 19, Number 8

November 19, 2004

## 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Vachel Lindsay's Birth is Celebrated

The weekend of November 6 and 7 was filled with activities celebrating the 125th anniversary of the birth of Springfield's own author, poet, and artist Nicholas Vachel Lindsay. Members of the Lindsay family travelled from out-of-state to attend the festivities. They visited the family home Saturday morning and were available to talk to visitors. The Vachel Lindsay Home State Historic Site was open from 10 until 4 pm Saturday for the various birthday activities. Puppet artist Joan Meisner was on hand with her puppets at 1 pm to entertain children in the home's library. An hour later Lanphier High School students performed Lindsay poetry. The students, members of Deborah Huffman's Senior Honors English class, were dressed in period costume while performing the poetry, and played musical instruments during the reading of certain works. Virginia Hosking played period piano music during the afternoon. Throughout the day, staff and volunteers shared the history of the home with visitors. And what is a birthday celebration without birthday cake! A heated tent located in the back garden of the home was the setting for birthday cake, warm spiced cider, and coffee. The Vachel Lindsay Association, co-sponsors the event, offered Lindsay-related items for sale, including copies of his artwork.

Vachel Lindsay's grandson, filmmaker Nicholas Cave Lindsay, Jr., gave a lecture that evening at the Hoogland Center for the Arts in downtown Springfield. The talk, sponsored by the Vachel Lindsay Association, focused on his grandfather's work The Art of the Moving Picture, a work that is still used by filmmaking students today, according to historic site superintendent Jennie Battles. Both events were free and open to the public. On Sunday, the celebration continued with a brunch served at the Hoogland Center for the Arts. Rounding out the day's activities, the Vachel Lindsay Association held its annual meeting, and Nicholas Lindsay spoke about his father's poetry at the Hoogland

Center for the Arts.

### Vachel Lindsay's Background and History of His Home

Vachel Lindsay was born on November 10, 1879 in the home at 603 South Fifth Street. One of the previous owners of the Lindsay home on Fifth Street was Mary Todd Lincoln's sister Ann and husband Clark M. Smith. Abraham Lincoln and his wife were frequent visitors when they lived in Springfield. A farewell party for the Lincoln

family took place at the residence before they left for Washington D.C. Vachel's childhood bedroom and later adult study was one of several rooms added to the original house during an 1893 construction project. Vachel had quite a view outside his bedroom window as it overlooks directly the Governor's Mansion. Vachel returned for the final time to his childhood home in 1929. This time he brought wife Elizabeth and their two children, after having spent five years as a "guest of Spokane, Washington." Before his stint in Washington, Vachel Lindsay taught for a year in Gulf Park, Mississippi.

The Vachel Lindsay Home was purchased in 1958 by the Vachel Lindsay House Fund from Lindsay family heirs, and maintained by the Vachel Lindsay Association. The Home received National Historic Landmark status in 1972. In 1990 the house was transferred to the State of Illinois. The Home was closed in 1996 during which time over a million dollars was spent on the restoration of the historic site, bringing the Home back to its 1917 appearance. The Home was reopened in 2001 on Vachel Lindsay's birthday. The Vachel Lindsay Home State Historic Site is administered by the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency. The Home is open to the public Tuesday through Saturday from noon until 4 pm.



Courtesy of Illinois State Historical Library



*The Vachel Lindsay Home - Courtesy of Illinois State Historical Library*

Vachel Lindsay was one of the best-known poets in America during the early years of the 20th century. Lindsay's most famous poems were "General William Booth Enters Into Heaven," a tribute upon the death of the founder of the Salvation Army, "The Congo," and "Abraham Lincoln Walks at Midnight." Lindsay wrote the poem "The Eagle that is Forgotten" about Governor John Altgeld, a man Lindsay held in high esteem. He recited "The Wedding of the Rose and the Lotus" in 1915 before the cabinet of President Woodrow Wilson. The poem celebrated the opening of the Panama Canal and promoted tolerance between Eastern and Western cultures. In 1920 Lindsay became the first American poet to be invited to recite at Oxford University. He then held his first national lecturing tour and performed his poetry in every state of the United States at the time.

Lindsay became known as "the Prairie Troubadour" as a result of his three walking tours of the United States in 1906, 1908, and 1912. As he traveled over 2,800 miles around most of the United States, Lindsay would trade poems and drawings for food and shelter. Throughout his life, he would always return to Springfield, whether it be after college or art school, after his walking tours, or teaching and lecturing tours. Lindsay referred to Springfield as his "heart's home, his spiritual center."

Vachel Lindsay was famous for the performance of his poetry as much as for the poetry itself. Some of his poetry was meant to be read while other works were meant to be performed. His poems were rhythmic, and he performed them by chanting, shouting, gesturing, and even singing, rather than merely reciting. He wrote about subjects like civil liberties, civic excellence, and humanitarian values, and often focused on social issues, as well as the environment in his poetry. His poems were often printed with margin

notes explaining exactly how they were to be read. Today, many of Lindsay's writings and drawings can be seen at the historic site.

Vachel Lindsay died in 1931 in the home at 603 South Fifth Street and is buried in Oak Ridge Cemetery in Springfield. Springfield honored its local poet by dedicating a bridge in his memory out by Lake Springfield in 1935. He had been a strong advocate for the creation of this lake. A bronze bust was placed at the site of Lindsay Bridge, but later was moved to its current location at the Lindsay Home.

The Vachel Lindsay Association was established in 1946 by his friends and colleagues as a way to keep his legacy alive. The Association operates as a not-for-profit dedicated to preserving and promoting the art and ideals of Vachel Lindsay. Once in awhile, the Association publishes works about Lindsay. For example, a film and companion booklet titled "Look Into Your Heart: The Challenge of Vachel Lindsay" in 1988, and most recently, the Association published "The High Road to Nowhere: Vachel Lindsay, Utopia, and the Spirit of Community", which was based on papers from the 1999 Lindsay symposium. As early as 1949, however, the Association has been publishing works about Lindsay. In 1992, the Vachel Lindsay Repertory Group was formed as a performance arm of the Vachel Lindsay Association. This group gives recitals of Lindsay poetry to a variety of audiences. The Association maintains a Website at [www.vachellindsay.org](http://www.vachellindsay.org) and publishes a quarterly newsletter. Organizing an annual dinner at the time of the poet's birthday celebration is another Association function. The Vachel Lindsay Association recently received a special award, the first of its kind – the Preservationist of the Year Award. According to the *State Journal-Register*, Mayor Tim Davlin praised the Association for its efforts in preserving the poet's residence and bringing back his furnishings, artworks, and manuscripts to Springfield. This award was given by the city's Historic Sites Commission.

### **On the Building of Springfield**

Record it for the grandson of your son—  
A city is not builded in a day:  
Our little town cannot complete her soul  
Till countless generations pass away.  
(second stanza)

We must have many Lincoln-hearted men—  
A city is not builded in a day—  
And they must do their work, and come and go  
While countless generations pass away.  
(final stanza)



## Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Opens Its Doors; Museum To Open Next Spring?

The much anticipated opening of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library finally occurred on October 14 with Governor Blagojevich and other dignitaries in attendance. Located at Sixth and Jefferson Streets in downtown Springfield, the newly-opened Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library became open to the public after a ceremony at 1:30 pm, presided over by Governor Blagojevich. The Governor dedicated the Library's General Reading Room to the late Steve Neal, the Chicago Sun-Times writer, noting that Neal had written several columns about the Library. Governor Blagojevich stated, "Steve Neal made sure this library would be a fitting tribute to America's greatest President."

Construction on the Library began a little over three years ago in May, 2001. The completed size of the three-story structure comes to 200,000 square feet with a full lower level for secure document storage. The Illinois State Historical Library has a new home within the newly-opened Library. It was previously housed in a structure built under the Old State Capitol State Historic Site in 1968. Since 1889, the Historical Library has been the place to go when conducting any research on Illinois history. The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library has triple the capacity for microfilm storage than at the previous location, enough for 258,400 reels of microfilm. The audio-visual storage capacity quadrupled in size from the Old State Capitol location. The Library will contain six miles worth of bookshelves, enhanced conservation and photography labs, as well as the usual reading rooms, conference rooms, and research areas. David Blanchette, spokesman for the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency says that every area has been expanded, which will make the library easier to use.

William B. Myer Inc., a Connecticut-based firm, conducted the move of the materials from the Illinois State Historical Library to its new home. Blanchette explained that William B. Myer was the lowest bidder, and as a specialty library moving company, they had the prior experience of moving various libraries, including those at Yale and Harvard Universities. The company had the unenviable job of relocating 12 million documents and artifacts. Of the 12 million items, 10.5 million consisted of manuscripts. The move also involved transferring 6,000 maps and broadsides; 200,000 prints and photographs; and 90,000 reels of Illinois newspapers on microfilm. According to Blanchette, "The Library has the world's largest collection of Illinois newspapers on microfilm, some

from the early 1800s." He believes that the newspapers on microfilm is perhaps the more heavier used part of the collection.

William B. Myer Inc. was also responsible for moving the 47,000 item Abraham Lincoln collection. It is the largest collection of pre-presidential Lincoln material in the world. Most of the items are extremely valuable and some in very fragile condition. For this reason and the fact that a whole library collection is involved, the move had to occur in a very specific and organized manner, which took place over a period of several weeks.

The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum complex will include a welcome center in the restored 1890 Union Station, a parking garage, the Library

### Examples of Items from the Lincoln Collection

- Approximately 1,500 manuscripts written by Abraham Lincoln
- 400 of 600 letters written by Mary Todd Lincoln
- 26,000 letters of Robert Todd Lincoln
- 800 broadsides, including invitations to the First and Second Inaugural Balls
- 10,000 – 12,000 books and pamphlets, including rare Lincoln campaign biographies from 1860 and 1864; books owned by William H. Herndon (Lincoln's third law partner); and books owned by Abraham and Mary Todd Lincoln.
- Only photograph showing Lincoln lying in state (Edwin Stanton, Lincoln's Secretary of War destroyed all the other negatives.)
- Rare photographs of Springfield during time of Lincoln funeral
- 230 Lincoln family items, including the ink well and desk used to draft the First Inaugural Address; toy cannon used by Tad Lincoln in the White House; and Mrs. Lincoln's wedding skirt and music box
- Signed copy of the Thirteenth Amendment ending slavery in the United States
- More than 200 paintings and sculptures

and Museum. The total cost for the four-building complex will be approximately \$150 million in state, federal, and city of Springfield funds. The buildings were designed by Hellmuth + Obata + Kassabaum (HOK) of St. Louis, and Siciliano, Inc. of Springfield is the general contractor. According to Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum Director Richard Norton Smith, who has overseen libraries built for Presidents Hoover, Eisenhower, Ford and Reagan, "In size, scope, and imagination, this Library and Museum will dwarf all other presidential libraries."

The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum is tentatively scheduled to open mid-April of next year. The Museum will be about 100,000 square feet when completed. An exciting and intriguing feature will be the SBC Holavision Theatre featuring "Ghosts of the Library," a show that will mix live actors with special effects or "ghosts" to highlight the collection at the Museum by bringing the past and present together in one show.

The Union Theatre will offer a 17-minute show called Lincoln's Eyes that uses special effects and three screens to immerse the audience in the tragedies and triumphs of Lincoln's life. Additionally, a restaurant, gift shop, and children's area called Mrs. Lincoln's Attic and much more will be ready for visitors next spring. A future edition of *The Cook-Witter Report* will be devoted to a detailed account of the facilities when the whole Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum complex is completed and open to the public.

David Blanchette has found that, "at least initially, the vast majority of visitors have tended to be tourists rather than people doing research." The public is allowed to simply tour the Library or of course, use it for research purposes. Admittance to the Library is free and open to the public. Regular hours of operation for the Library are Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday from 9 am to 4:30 pm, and Wednesday from 9 am to 8:30 pm, and Saturday from 9 am to 3 pm.



## Very Little Change Expected in General Assembly As a Result of 2004 General Election

There were a few surprising results from the 2004 General Election on November 2nd. Most incumbents, though, beat their challengers fairly handily or ran unopposed. Democrats managed to maintain control of the House and Senate, although in each chamber, the Democrats lost one seat. In the Senate, the statistics are now 31-27-1, while in the House of Representatives, the breakdown is 65-53.

Three elected incumbent representatives and one elected incumbent senator lost their races this November. Representative Ricca Slone (D-Peoria Heights) lost in a tight race to 24 year old Aaron Schock by a mere 230 votes. In a surprising upset, Representative Frank Aguilar (R-Cicero) lost the race in District 24 by about 1,200 votes to Michelle Chavez. Representative Michael McAuliffe (R-Chicago) bested Representative Ralph Capparelli in an unusual circumstance of two sitting representatives challenging each other. The situation occurred when they were thrown together in the same district due to redistricting. The only incumbent senator to lose was Assistant Majority Leader Senator Patrick Welch (D-Peru), who has been in office 22 years. He lost to Gary Dahl of Granville, the owner of a trucking company.

Among appointed representatives, only a few hundred votes separated Representative Ruth Munson (R-Elgin) and Michael Noland in her victory over the challenger. Munson was appointed after the death of Representative Doug Hoelt. Representative Lisa Dugan (D-Bradley), appointed to her seat after Representative Phil Novak was named to the Illinois Pollution Control Board, defeated her challenger Kay Pangle. Another appointee, Representative Careen Gordon (D-Coal City), beat Doug Hayse, the police chief from Morris. Representative Bill Grunloh (D-Effingham) was the only appointed legislator to lose in the General Election. When Chuck Hartke became director at the Department of Agriculture, Representative Grunloh was appointed to finish out his term. He was unable to defeat David Reis, who ran an unsuccessful campaign against Chuck Hartke two years ago.

Concerning Congressional races, Senator Barack Obama soundly defeated Alan Keyes to go to the United States Senate. **Kwame Raoul**, an attorney with the City Colleges of Chicago, was chosen Saturday, November 6th to fill Obama's State Senate seat in the 13th District (Chicago). Obama officially resigned on November 4th.

