



the

COOK-WITTER REPORT

Volume 24, Number 5

June 2009

Lincoln's Land

It's easy to view Abraham Lincoln in a vacuum -- to see only the man who helped shape America.

That viewpoint has been dissected to the nth degree. A current exhibition at the Illinois State Museum in Springfield encourages us instead to view the state that helped shape the man. "From Humble Beginnings: Lincoln's Illinois, 1830 - 1861" explains what Illinois was like while Lincoln lived here. It helps us see the Illinois he saw.

"We decided the best thing (the Illinois State Museum) could do to commemorate Lincoln's Bicentennial is to tell the Illinois story to provide context and a background to Lincoln's life as an adult here," says Angela Goebel-Bain, exhibition Co-curator with Dr. Terrance J. Martin. "One thing we talk about is the way in which Illinois matured alongside Lincoln." When Lincoln came with his family to Macon County, near Decatur, as a twenty-one year-old in 1830, Illinois was a frontier region, but by the time he left it was one of the biggest and most productive states in the Union. "We wanted to look at Lincoln as one Illinoisan among many striving for a better life here," Goebel-Bain says.

Like Lincoln, Illinois grew up, cleaned up, and rose up during that time.

The exhibition discusses the major developments that occurred in our state while Lincoln lived here, covering changes in child rearing, religion, population, land development, temperance, agriculture, and slavery, among other areas. Past Illinoisans' personal stories and a variety of artifacts help illustrate those changes. "This was an important exhibi-

tion for us in that we were able to integrate all of our disciplines, from botany to zoology and archaeological specimens, as well as decorative and fine arts," says Goebel-Bain.

Slavery was a controversial issue nationally and statewide, and one that obviously affected Lincoln and consequently our country's future greatly. While Illinois was called a free state, that was misleading.

In its early days our state's population consisted mostly of upland southerners, who were largely pro-

slavery. Perhaps it's not surprising then that our first state constitution allowed owners of slaves and indentured servants to keep them. One year after receiving statehood, Illinois' legislature passed strict Black Codes which "differed very little in severity from the slave codes adopted in the antebellum South," according to Roger Biles' "Illinois: A History of the Land and Its People" (Northern Illinois University Press, 2005). Even Lincoln's in-laws, Ninian and Elizabeth Edwards -- Elizabeth was Mary Lincoln's sister,

had indentured servants and slaves, according to Jean H. Baker's "Mary Todd Lincoln: A Biography" (W. W. Norton and Company, 1989).

However, Goebel-Bain says that during the time Lincoln was here, "Illinois went from a southern-leaning state to more of a northern-leaning state" due to a later influx of northerners. As more anti-slavery northerners moved in, the state's attitude shifted toward abolitionism.

The sad story of former slave Susan "Sukey" Richardson "was one of the large cases that led to a crack-down on slavery in Illinois," according to

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These slave shackles, which were collected in the South, were used by slave owners in Illinois and elsewhere to control their slaves' movement. These shackles appear in the Museum's exhibition thanks to the Chicago History Museum. Photo courtesy of the Illinois State Museum, photo by Doug Carr.

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It took two people to operate this 1855 corn planter invented by Illinoisan George Brown. One drove it and the other used the hand-lever to drop corn into furrows created by its runners. Photo courtesy of the Illinois State Museum, photo by Doug Carr.

Goebel-Bain. Richardson's narrative is detailed on a plaque that sits beside slave manacles and shackles in the Museum's exhibit.

Richardson came here as the teen slave of Randolph County farmer Andrew Borders a few years before Illinois achieved statehood, according to "Escape Betwixt Two Suns: A True Tale of the Underground Railroad in Illinois" by Carol Pirtle (Southern Illinois University Press, 2000). Borders had a reputation for mistreating his slaves.

Much later, after a disagreement, Borders threatened to sell Richardson's three young sons into slavery. So, in August, 1842, she escaped with her boys and another female servant whom Borders had kept after her period of servitude ended. The group was caught in Knox County and imprisoned. Thanks to local abolitionists, Richardson was freed on bail and won her freedom in court, but Borders claimed her three boys and Richardson never saw them again. She became an abolitionist and activist in the Underground Railroad.

Between 1830 and 1861, Illinois' attitudes also shifted about personal issues, such as child rearing, home decorating, and affluence. Child-rearing generally became more permissive, according to the exhibit, which certainly fit Abraham and Mary's parenting styles. They were considered very indulgent parents. Lincoln's last law partner, William Herndon, said the Lincoln boys would come to their law offices and "take down the books -- empty buckets -- coal ashes -- inkstands -- papers -- gold pens -- letters, etc., etc., in a pile and then dance on the pile, and Lincoln

would say nothing" (per David Herbert Donald's "Lincoln," Simon & Schuster, 1995).

Although child-rearing became less stringent while Lincoln lived here, home decorating and personal dress became more elaborate. It was part of nineteenth century Illinoisans' efforts to better themselves, according to an exhibit plaque: "It was not enough to own the trappings of refinement. One had to demonstrate respectability by maintaining a clean home and by practicing proper behavior in social situations." Good dress and behavior provided access to "polite society" where better economic, and probably marital, opportunities waited.

Period quilts, bed coverlets, dresses, and home furniture artifacts in the exhibit illustrate how our ancestors transitioned from having to make their own goods to being able to buy manufactured and sometimes more detailed clothes and furniture. One interesting quilt featured in the exhibit was made by a neighbor of the Lincolns and signed by women in their neighborhood.

Agriculture underwent sweeping changes during Lincoln's time in Illinois. As a former farmhand for his father, surely Lincoln appreciated new implements that eased farmers' labor, such as the country's first commercially successful corn planter, which was



The Ivory-billed Woodpecker, which lived in Illinois during Lincoln's time, is believed to be extinct due to deforestation. However, some scientists and enthusiasts throughout the country continue to search for it. Photo courtesy of the Illinois State Museum, photo by Doug Carr.

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invented in Galesburg by George Brown. An 1855, horse-drawn planter is displayed in "Humble Beginnings." Brown's company "was a very successful company in production well into the late 19th and early 20th century," says Goebel-Bain. "It's one of those unknown facts unless you're an agriculture historian."

Lincoln spent a lot of time outdoors during his younger days in the Prairie State, working as a land surveyor or resting under a tree reading a book in New Salem, the pioneer village northwest of Springfield where he originally settled alone. He saw a greater variety of flora and fauna than we do today and the exhibit gives us a glimpse of some. Alongside a stuffed Black Bear (these were driven out of Illinois in the mid to late 1800s) and an endangered Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake, are the now extinct Carolina Parakeet, Passenger Pigeon, and Ivory-Billed Woodpecker, which once flocked overhead. An old sample and description of the tall, beautiful Prairie Grass that once blanketed our land helps us imagine the waving vistas Lincoln and other early pioneers saw.

Goebel-Bain hopes the exhibition will enable visitors to see "what was in the news, what kinds of changes were taking place around Lincoln, and what issues were on his constituents' minds, to help them understand Lincoln's life better by taking a step back and looking at the bigger picture."

"From Humble Beginnings" runs through January 10, 2010. The exhibition was made possible in part by a grant from the Illinois Humanities Council, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Illinois General Assembly. For more information about it, visit the Illinois State Museum's Web site : www.museum.state.il.us, or call the Museum: (217)782-7386.



Putting it All in Perspective

A timeline in the Illinois State Museum's "From Humble Beginnings" exhibition tells what was happening with Lincoln, Illinois, and the nation each year that he lived here. For instance, when he and his parents arrived in 1830, Illinois experienced what became known as "The Deep Snow," a long, severe winter that left the Lincoln family very ill. At the same time, "Free Frank" McWorter had just arrived in Illinois after buying himself and his family out of slavery, and fearful Irish immigrants were rushing to America to escape the potato famine in their homeland.

New Bill Crook Prints Available

Former governor Rod Blagojevich's winter impeachment hearings were artistic inspiration for well-known Springfield artist William "Bill" Crook, Jr., who created two prints from the events. Crook is known for his numerous, precise pen and ink prints of Illinois state government buildings, including the Supreme Court and Statehouse. One of his new prints depicts the Illinois House of Representatives Impeachment Committee hearing and the other depicts Blagojevich's impeachment trial before the Illinois Senate.

The idea to depict these events artistically came from Tony Leone, a former government employee and current owner of The Pasfield House Inn, a Springfield bed and breakfast, Crook says. "He called me up and said, 'Get down to the Capitol,' (the

impeachment hearings) are a good subject.' So I went down there with a sheet of paper and got started."

As luck would have it, the second day Crook was there Roland Burris presented his testimony to the House Impeachment Committee. "I got a good seat," Crook says, "right to the rear of Roland Burris. So I could show him and his attorney and Blagojevich's attorney and the whole (Committee) from Madigan on down. I got to know them all!" he adds, chuckling. "It was very riveting drama."

He spent two days at the Capitol working on each print, using pencil to draw the scene. Afterward, he spent two weeks on each adding ink "under more controlled circumstances," which is his typical process.

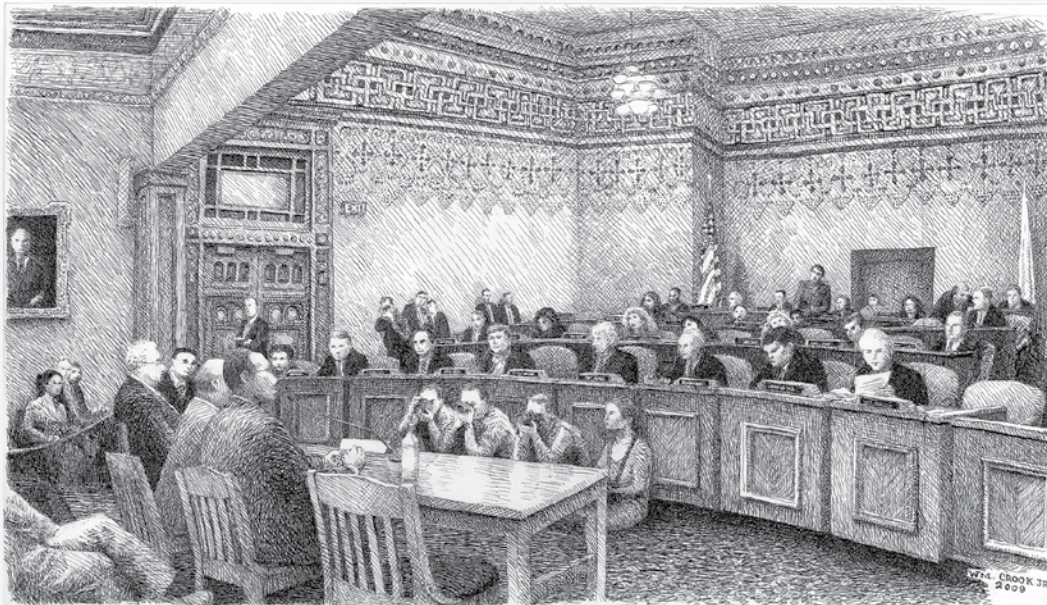
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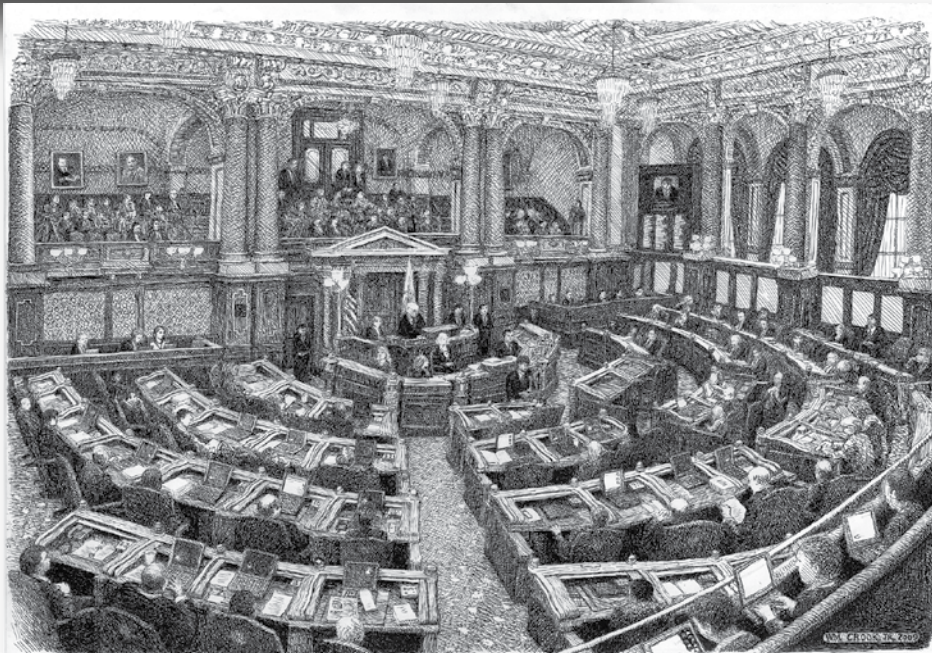
“I don’t try to capture emotions (in my work), that’s more up to the viewer,” Crook says. “I try to be truthful but I also have to edit the pictures to make them more true to what I see in my mind.” He laughs and explains: “There was a court reporter sitting right in front of me and she would have taken up the entire frame, so I had to pretend like she wasn’t there.”

Each new print is \$80. The House Impeachment Committee hearing print is 20” x 30” and the Senate trial print is 24” x 30”. Crook has a limited edition of 400 prints. If you would like to order one, contact Cook-Witter at: 217/789-6252.



"House Impeachment Committee" by William (Bill) Crook, Jr.

"Senate Impeachment Trial" by William (Bill) Crook, Jr.



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