

For Immediate Release

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LINCOLN DOUGLAS COMMUNITIES COMMEMORATE THE SESQUICENTENNIAL OF THE LINCOLN DOUGLAS DEBATES

From August to October of 1858 Lincoln and Douglas met in seven different cities scattered throughout the state of Illinois to participate in a series of formal political debates that framed the issues which were of critical importance in the conflict over slavery and states' rights. The year 2008 marks the Sesquicentennial of the Lincoln Douglas Debates in Illinois and the communities where the debates took place are planning to commemorate this important occurrence with a series of events throughout the year called "*Reunion Tour 2008*."

Starting on August 22 in Ottawa, Illinois, and ending on October 19 in Alton, Lincoln and Douglas will meet in each debate community, on a weekend closest to the actual debate, to reminisce, share their recollections and discuss some of the important issues that were at the heart of the contest. An accompanying naval officer will moderate the discussion and invite local press and audience members to ask questions of the candidates. The "*Reunion Tour 2008*" will be the core of a weekend long celebration in each community. Plans vary in each location. Activities include parades, period balls, historic festivals, art shows, picnics and even a tour of historic sites on a Segway.

Lincoln and Douglas will also make appearances in Bement, Illinois, and at the Old State Capitol in Springfield. The official grand opening for the Sesquicentennial will begin in Bement, Illinois, on July 26, 2008. Bement is believed to be the place where Lincoln and Douglas met to arrange final details for the debates. While Springfield was not formally designated as a debate site, Lincoln gave the "House Divided Speech" in the Old State Capitol on June 16. It was this speech, given during the Republican Convention that marked the beginning of the dialogue and helped to define the issues that were central to the seven debates. Events marking this crucial speech will be held at the Old State Capitol on June 14-16 2008.

Lincoln and Douglas will be portrayed by two actors who have spent a significant amount of time preparing for these roles. George Buss will play Abraham Lincoln and Tim Connor will play Stephen A. Douglas. Silas Terry, the accompanying naval aid, will be played by Ed Finch. He will introduce Lincoln and Douglas and serve as moderator for the press conference.

George Buss has been portraying Abraham Lincoln for over fifteen years. Performance venues include Ford's Theater in Washington, DC and Gettysburg. He also portrayed Lincoln in two of the seven broadcasts of the C-Span Lincoln Douglas Debates. He is president of the Stephen Douglas Association and vice-president of the Lincoln Douglas Society. Buss is the District Director for AVID in the Freeport Public Schools and a doctoral candidate at National-Louis University.

Tim Connors is the director of theatre and head coach of the Speech Team at Freeport High School in Freeport, Illinois. With a B.S. in communications and an M.A. in Curriculum and Instruction from Northern Illinois University, he is active in theatrical and educational activities throughout his community. Connors has also portrayed Franklin Delano Roosevelt in several programs of great speeches from history.

Ed Finch holds a doctorate in history, is a retire teacher and currently serves as president of the Lincoln-Douglas Society.

Springfield, Illinois
Old State Capitol State Historic Site
Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum
House Divided Speech Commemoration
June 14-16, 2008

While Springfield was not formally designated as a debate site, Lincoln gave his famous “House Divided Speech” in the Old State Capitol on June 16, 1858. This speech was the spark that ignited the debates and helped to define the issues central to the seven debates. Because of the importance of this speech, the commemoration of the “House Divided Speech” was chosen as an appropriate first event of the Sesquicentennial year.

All Three Days – Lincoln and Douglas will make a special appearance at the Old State Capitol from 1 pm to 3 pm to talk to visitors. At 2 pm they will present a special program for the public each day. Two traveling exhibits will be on display all weekend -- *Confronting Democracy's Boundaries: The Lincoln-Douglas Debates* and *Abraham Lincoln: Self Made in America*. Each day Dr. Allen Guelzo, well known writer and historian will be present to discuss his new book called *Lincoln and Douglas: The Debates That Defined America*” Dr. Guelzo is an award winning author of books and articles on Lincoln and the Civil War.

Saturday – Old State Capitol, 4 pm - “Together We Read Libraries” featuring audience participation with Dr. Guelzo who will discuss his new book with visitors and readers.

Sunday – Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, 3 pm - “Historians Speak” – a public conversation between Guelzo and Illinois State Historian, Thomas F. Schwartz.. This program is under the auspicious of the Library’s Oral History Department. Audience participation will be encouraged.

Monday – Presidential Library, 10 am “Researching Lincoln & Douglas,” an outreach program for the general public highlighting the Library’s research materials for Stephen A. Douglas and the Lincoln Douglas Debates. The program will feature Glenna Schroeder-Lein from the Manuscripts Division, Mary Michals from the A/V Division and Lincoln Curator, Dr. James Cornelius.

To commemorate the actual day of the “House Divided Speech, Representatives Hall at the Old State Capitol will be the site of a special performance at 5:30. Lincoln and Douglas will perform selections from the “House Divided Speech” and Dr. Guelzo will provide a running historical commentary. Cost: \$8.00. For tickets: ablincolnmuseum.org or 217-558-8934.

Bement, Illinois

Bryant Cottage State Historic Site

Lincoln Douglas Debate Sesquicentennial Grand Opening Event

July 26, 2008

Lincoln and Douglas reportedly met in Bement, Illinois to finalize the details for the seven debates. Although no debate took place here, Bement has been chosen to host the grand opening event of the Sesquicentennial Celebration. A day-long celebration will mark the event and will include a traditional "Prairie Ovation", providing separate ceremonial escorts for both Lincoln and Douglas as they approach a stage for the "Reunion Tour." Commemorations include a Lincoln Douglas Press Conference, a play called "The Bement Story," a band and chorus concert, Civil War infantry demonstrations and drills, period crafts and visits with Mr. Lincoln and Senator Douglas at their respective tents. 217-678-8184.

Ottawa, Illinois

August 22-23, 2008

Friday – Events begin with the *Yarns and Fables Story Telling Festival* in Ottawa's Old Town District. You will hear from numerous storytellers about Abraham Lincoln, Stephen Douglas and Illinois during the 1850's. Listen to one of Lincoln's childhood friends, or perhaps Abraham and Stephen themselves. Hear about a world without cars, running water or radios and cell phones! Enjoy period lore from the finest storytellers in Illinois during the Fables and Yarns Festival. Refreshments will be available.

Saturday – Ottawa will host "*Reunion Tour '08*" with two performances at 10 am and 2 pm at Washington Square, the historic debate site. Entertainment will also include a stilt walker, caricatures, period music, carriage rides, a juggler and penny-farthing demonstrations, plus period artisans. The Old Town Farmers Market will offer freshly grown goods and a "Petticoats and Pantaloon Vintage Fashion Show" will be presented at the historic Ottawa Boat Club. The day will end with a costume ball honoring Mr. Lincoln and Mr. Douglas aboard the Spirit of Peoria paddle wheel boat. Contact the Ottawa Visitors Center at 888-688-2924 or visit on line at www.experienceottawa.com for more information.

Freeport, Illinois

August 29-September 1, 2008

Friday – Lincoln and Douglas will arrive by steam train. Their arrival will be followed by a torchlight parade and a re-enactment of an abolitionist rally at Silvercreek & Stephenson Railroad Museum. The rally will include Frederick Douglass,

Saturday – Festivities begin in the morning with a parade through downtown Freeport, followed in the afternoon by the dedication of Debate Square and a performance of "*Reunion Tour '08*" with Lincoln and Douglas. In the evening an 1860 era Grand Ball will be held featuring lively 19th century music by the First Brigade Band. Many dancers

will be authentically dressed, but historic dress is not required to join the dance. Dance instruction will be provided.

Sunday – Join Lincoln and Douglas at for a” Family Day and Art in the Park” that will include juried artists and art-related and historically-based activities for families.

Labor Day – Taylor Park will be the site of “The Flavors of Lincoln’s Freeport” featuring a variety of ethnic foods and musical entertainment, and of course an opportunity to visit with Lincoln and Douglas.

for more information call the Freeport/Stephenson County Convention & Visitors Bureau at 1-800-369-2955 or visit www.stephenson-county-il.org.

Jonesboro, Illinois

September 12-14, 2008

Friday – The day starts when Lincoln and Douglas meet with the local press and school children. The evening ends with a “Dinner with Debaters” at Great Boars of Fire in Anna, Illinois. Reservations at \$25 required.

Saturday – Jonesboro will host an all-day community festival on Jonesboro Square featuring period crafts, demonstrations, food, music and games. At 1:30 pm the Independent Silver Band will lead a procession to the debate site at Lincoln Memorial Park and the crowds can join Lincoln to “Walk Where Lincoln Walked.” The “*Reunion Tour 08*” press conference with Lincoln and Douglas begins at 2 pm.

Sunday – Begin the day with an 8:30 church service in the 1850’s Kornthal Church which is listed on the National Register. At 1:00 p.m. there will be an Old Fashioned Picnic in the Park with music. Everyone is encouraged to bring their own basket of food or to purchase from area merchants. Lincoln and Douglas will be there to greet the guests. At 1:30 Lincoln’s Life through Song by Chris Vallillo at the park.

For more information call 1-800-248-4373 or check www.southernmostillinois.com,

Charleston, Illinois

September 20-21, 2008

Saturday – An all-day festival will take place at the original site of the Lincoln Douglas Debate. Activities include a pancake breakfast, 4K run/walk that follows part of the original parade route taken by the candidates, tours of the Lincoln Douglas Museum, an art fair with traditional 19th century artisans along with modern local artists, period musicians and performers. The senatorial candidates will be available in their respective campaign tents to discuss the important issues of the race until *Reunion Tour ’08* begins with a grand entrance by the candidates and a presentation for the audience. Vendors will provide a variety of food throughout the day.

Sunday – Events include tours of historic homes and the Downtown Square where Lincoln and Douglas once visited regularly and the Charleston’s downtown murals.

Contact the Charleston Tourism Office at 217-348-0430 or visit online at www.charlestontourism.org for more information

Galesburg, Illinois

October 3-5, 2008

Friday – Enjoy dinner and dancing at the “Lincoln Dinner and Ball” at the Best Western Prairie Inn. Tickets are available for \$50 per couple or \$30 per single reservation.

Saturday – "Reunion Tour 08": Listen to Lincoln and Douglas describe the important issues of the debates on the east end of "Old Main" on Knox College campus. Tour Old Main, the original site of the Galesburg Lincoln - Douglas Debate. Exhibits throughout the building tell the story of Lincoln's time in Galesburg. Visit the Galesburg Colony Underground Railroad Freedom Station to discover how escaping slaves found shelter in Knox County. Enjoy Lincoln related events at the Knox County Scenic Drive and the Scarecrow festival with period crafts, demonstrations, food, music and games. End the day at the Orpheum Theatre where a musical tribute to Lincoln will take place.

Sunday – Enjoy morning worship service at Orange Chapel on the Knox County Scenic Drive with Abe and Mary Lincoln. Many other Lincoln related events will be taking place on the Scenic Drive. For more information call the Galesburg Area Convention & Visitors Center at 1-800-916-3330 or visit our website at www.visitgalesburg.com

Quincy, Illinois

October 11-13, 2008

Saturday – A Grand Welcome Celebration will greet Lincoln and Douglas as they arrive at the site of the former Quincy Railroad Depot on Quincy's riverfront. Join the rally as the candidates are paraded to the town square, Washington Park. An all-day festival in and around Washington Park will include a special program to dedicate the newly enhanced Lincoln Douglas Debate site.

Sunday – Festivities in and around Washington Park continue as Lincoln and Douglas take the stage for *Reunion Tour '09*. Nearby, tour the restored home built by abolitionist Dr. Richard Eells, a documented stop on the Underground Railroad.

Monday - After spending a day with school children, Lincoln and Douglas will participate in a Farewell Celebration at the Quincy Riverfront.

The three-day weekend will feature performances by the 1st Brigade Band; a presentation of "Abraham Lincoln in Song"; period games, music, demonstrations, artisans, food booths, stump characters and other special programming and entertainment. . For more information call the Quincy Convention & Visitors Bureau at 1-800-978-4748 or go to www.lincolnDouglasQuincyDebate.com.

Alton, Illinois

October 17-19, 2008

Friday – The kick-off for the Lincoln Douglas Festival begins with an evening "Dinner at Lincoln's Table" with Lincoln and Douglas, featuring authentic recipes served at Lincoln's table.

Saturday – Join us for a festival in downtown Alton and retrace the steps of Lincoln & Douglas. The Reunion Tour will bring history to life with two presentations of the Alton debate. Festivities will also include a Living History Tour featuring docents telling the stories of Alton's past at 7 different Lincoln and Civil War sites, as well as the debut of the new Lincoln & Civil War Legacy Trail. Other activities: period vendors, an appearance by Mary Todd's seamstress, presentation of the "Songs of Abraham Lincoln"

and other music programs throughout the day. Special exhibits on Lincoln's many visits to Alton will be featured at the Hayner Library and Alton Museum of History & Art.

Sunday – Festival activities continue. The St. Louis Science Center will offer Segway Tours of Alton's Lincoln sites. A special cruise on the Mississippi River with the Reunion Tour will also be offered. Charge for the dinner, cruises and Segway tours. 1-800-ALTON-IL (258-6645). www.VisitAlton.com/Lincoln

For more information:

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The Reunion Tour web site will be available by May 31.
For more information check: www.lincolndouglasreunion.com