

Champaign County Clock & Bell Tower Restoration & Lincoln Exhibit Donors

The beautifully restored clock and bell tower at the Champaign County Courthouse has both a long history and a rich recent narrative of community involvement that speaks to the spirit of Champaign County.

In 1883, just as the United States was adopting National Standard Time, local citizens undertook a campaign to purchase an 1877 *Seth Thomas* clock to install in its courthouse tower along with a 1,000 lb. bell to strike the hour. With a 1901 courthouse renovation, the County hired Joseph Royer, an Urbana architect, to design a highly stylized tower to house the clock and bell. Replete with gargoyles and finials, the tower rose 123 ft. above the landscape.

Over the years, several lightening strikes diminished the size of the structure and destroyed the ornamentation. An effort to restore its elegance in 1976 came up short of the goal. Another citizens' effort was launched in 2001 as the County, once again, revived the restoration effort in conjunction with an expansion and modernization of the courthouse.

In addition to the clock tower restoration work, Champaign County, in partnership with the Early American Museum, a division of the Forest Preserve District, developed a designated space within the Courthouse to honor the presence of Abraham Lincoln. *Large Presence in a Small Town* celebrates Lincoln's time in Champaign County in the 1840s-50s as a circuit lawyer representing citizens and corporations. 2009 marks the 200th anniversary of his birth, and again citizens stepped forward to serve on a second steering committee to raise funds for this project as well as guide the planning and design of the facility.

Champaign County appreciates the hundreds of citizens, organizations, and businesses who financially contributed to one or both projects and served on the two citizens committees that guided each effort. The entire list of donors as of August, 29, 2009 is published here.

Special recognition and gratitude goes to the following for their extraordinary support of the two projects:

Jack and Marjorie Richmond who, early in the fund-raising campaign, contributed \$400,000 plus an additional \$44,000. In recognition of their donation, the clock tower will be known as the "Richmond Tower" in honor of Jack's parents A. Dean and Mildred Richmond.

Jim and Leslie Liautaud who contributed \$150,000. As an incentive to complete the fund-raising phase, the Liautauds also agreed to match contributions made in September 2009 up to \$100,000.

The Institute of Museum & Library Services for a \$116,500 grant to the Lincoln Exhibit to not only execute the design but develop educational curriculum for children and adults that supports the Lincoln Exhibit at the Courthouse and its companion exhibit at the Early American Museum in Mahomet.

Contributions are still being accepted for one or both of these efforts. Please contact the County Board Office (384-3772) or the County Administrator (384-3776) for additional information.

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