



# THE STUMP

A PUBLICATION OF THE LINCOLN-DOUGLAS SOCIETY

NUMBER 31

© 2025

SUMMER 2025

## AGE OF DEBATE TREE

Have you ever wondered if that massive bur oak tree by Debate Rock was here in 1858? Now you can rest in the knowledge that it was. In fact, the tree was about 20-feet tall already in 1858. Here's how we know that.

In 2008, the year of the 150th anniversary of the Freeport Debate, **Tim Bailey** came to Freeport to participate in the celebration and visit his sister, **Becky Lindenmeyer**. Tim was a arborist with the National Park Service and he became interested in the huge oak tree near Debate Rock. This May, Tim returned to Freeport with the necessary equipment in-hand to satisfy his curiosity.

His findings show that the bur oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*) is at least 181 years old based on its growth rings at 4-feet off the ground.

Tim further reports that Debate Oak is now 46 feet tall and has an impressive 64 foot diameter crown. More importantly, there is no internal rot at the 4-foot level of the trunk.

—Continued on page 2

## SOCIETY AWARDED GRANT FOR SIGNAGE

**100 Women Who Care of Stephenson County** has honored the Lincoln-Douglas Society with a grant of over \$11,000.00 to replace the heavily weathered signage in Debate Square.

The signs were installed in 2008 as part of the expansion and renovation of Debate Square just prior to the 150th celebrations of the Freeport Debate. The signs were warrantied for 10-years and have long since passed that age.

Originally designed by **Andrea Barthel**, then an employee of the *Freeport Journal Standard*, she now works for M45. The current owners of the *FJS* consented to her being allowed to download from their computers the original design files for the signs.

The manufacturer of the signs, Fossil Industries, INC., of Deer Park, New York, has begun the work of reproducing ten (10) of the twelve (12) signs. The other two were replaced in 2024 thanks to the generosity of **Mickey Martin**.

Installation should be completed in July.

—Continued on Page 2

## ANNUAL MEETING & PROGRAM

Join us on **Wednesday, August 27<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 pm at the Freeport Public Library** for the Lincoln-Douglas Society's Annual Membership meeting.

Immediately following the meeting will be a program featuring **Alan Wenzel** and **Ed Finch**, as they discuss Walt Disney's interpretation of some of Lincoln's speeches in the program "Great Moments with Mr. Lincoln," which opened in 1965 at Disneyland. Audio-Animatronics were used to recreate a life-like image of Lincoln in the 15-minute show. Several of the 16th President's speeches were edited by Disney for this original presentation that was once available in record format.

## "GIVE A LINCOLN" FOR DEBATE SQUARE

Again this summer, **Union Dairy** and the Lincoln-Douglas Society are teaming up to help raise funds for the maintenance of Debate Square. Soon the Society will be mailing out ten (10) coupons to all members and friends. Methods of paying for the coupons will be explained in an accompanying letter. Each coupon can then be redeemed for a single scoop of ice cream at Union Dairy. The Society and Union Dairy will split the proceeds. Coupons will also be sold at all Music on Debate Square events. Look for yours in the mail.

## Society President Emeritus **ROBERT PLAGER** Passes Away



Former President of the Lincoln-Douglas Society **Robert "Bob" Plager** passed away in November, 2024.

Bob was President of the Society from 1985 to 1997. During his presidency, Bob oversaw the expansion of Debate Square to include the **Lily Topol** statues "Lincoln and Douglas in Debate."

Working with **Rich Sokup**, Bob solicited donations as the local matching dollars for the grant which funded the project.

*Left is Bob with his wife Elaine and two of their grandchildren at the Ball for the 150th Anniversary celebration.*

### MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

Membership renewals will be mailed out in early August, instead of being enclosed in the annual issue of *The Stump*. The inclusion of the renewals with *The Stump* seemed to confuse some members. The Society's membership years runs from August 27th of one year to August 26th of the next year.

### ...Debate Oak, continued

Arborist Bailey also noted that the growth rings became smaller around 1926, corresponding to the Dust Bowl era in the United States.

The Society is indebted to Mr. Bailey for his time and expertise.



Society Officers being presented a check by **Julie Wenzel** on behalf of the **100 Women Who Care of Stephenson County**. The ten of the waysides, commonly called "signs," will be replace this summer.

—Photo provided



**Tim Bailey** measuring the circumference of the Debate Oak.

—Photo by Todd McKenna

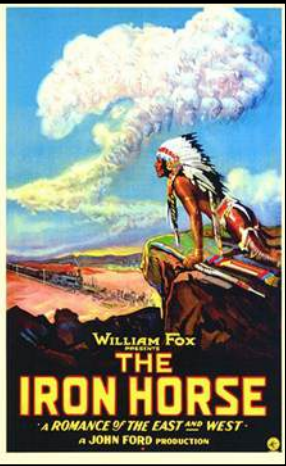
**The Lincoln-Douglas Society / PO Box 58, Freeport, IL 61032-0058**

President: Nicole Bauer / Vice-President: Tim Connors / Treasurer: Mindy Borgmann / Secretary: Ed Finch // Board Members: Carole Dickerson, Mary Hartman, Ashley Huffines, Scott Leiser, Mickey Martin, Todd McKenna, Sally Noble, Michael Perry, Connie Sorn, and Alan Wenzel. Ex Officio Members: Honorable Jodi Miler, Freeport Mayor, and Nicole Haas, Greater Freeport Partnership

# The Iron Horse

A Review by Alan Wenzel

If you haven't watched a silent film lately, you might want to put John Ford's 1924 Western epic, "The Iron Horse," on your list. In this classic film, Ford tells the story of the building of the transcontinental railroad by blending a fictional melodrama involving a railroad surveying family from Springfield, Illinois with a factual historical narrative of one of the greatest engineering feats in our nation's history.



"The Iron Horse" was made by Fox Studios in response to Paramount's wildly popular 1923 release, "The Covered Wagon" and is credited with resurrecting movie-goers' interest in the Western. In the film, Ford presents a simplified, heroic version (ignoring the corruption, bribes, disputes, and atrocities of the railroad industry) of the building of the transcontinental railroad and provides a sentimental, mythical view of the Western frontier spirit that embodied the creative forces that spurs progress.

A fervent fan of Abraham Lincoln, Ford portrays Lincoln in this film as the visionary and guiding force for the construction of the 1,912-mile continuous railroad line across the United States between 1863-1869.

Ford used historical records to note Lincoln's desire to link the newer state of California and the Western territories with the rest of the United States. Lincoln's hope and belief was that a transcontinental railroad could unify the Nation from East to West at a time when the Country was struggling to maintain its unity from North to South. Ford's thesis was established early in the film by a title card dedicating the movie to:

***"The everlasting memory of Abraham Lincoln, the Builder – and of those countless engineers and toilers who fulfilled his dream of a greater nation."***

Lincoln, played by Charles Edward Bull, appears in just a few scenes; in early (fictional) encounters with the Springfield family of surveyors and when he signs the 1862 Pacific Railroad Act authorizing the building of the railroad. Even though Lincoln has limited time on screen, Ford uses title cards to keep Lincoln a powerful off-screen presence guiding the project that he hoped would unify the United States.

Ford believed that this was one of his best films and he certainly went to great lengths to capture the legendary and sweeping story elements of the settling of the West. For example, Ford cast over 6000 extras, including an entire regiment of the U.S. Cavalry, 3000 railway workers, 1000 Chinese laborers (many of whom had worked on building the transcontinental line), and 800 members of the Cheyenne, Pawnee and Sioux Nations. Additionally, he used 2800 horses, 1300 buffalo, and 10,000 head of cattle to create iconic Western movie moments.

Ford displayed a mastery for using combinations of numerous types of camera shots from close-ups to extra-wide angles showing the backdrops of the Great Plains and the Rocky Mountains and place the viewer 'in the moment' and at the very heart of the action.

Memorable visual and emotional scenes include: a cattle drive over inhospitable terrain, horses pulling a locomotive over a mountain, a buffalo hunt, railroad construction scenes, workers refusing to fight Native Americans, a widow burying her husband alone, a dog remaining with the body of a Native American killed in battle.

In 2011, "The Iron Horse" was deemed "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant" by the United States Library of Congress and selected for preservation in the National Film Registry. The film is available on DVD or via streaming on Amazon Prime, Tubi, or YouTube. It's a magnificent film that will leave an indelible impression upon the viewer.





THE LINCOLN-DOUGLAS SOCIETY  
P.O. Box 58  
FREEPORT, IL 61032-0058

## MUSIC ON DEBATE SQUARE

The Lincoln-Douglas Society's own *impresario* **Tim Connors** has put together an impressive lineup for this summer's Music on Debate Square. All concerts begin at 6:30 PM.

June 26th — **Kendra Swanson**

July 10th — **Ukulel Express**

July 17th — **HCC Big Band with Bill Petersen**

July 31st — **Lobbin Robbins**

Aug. 7th — **Southpaw Stance**

Aug. 14th — **Vanfunk**

Aug. 21st — **John Hartman Jazz Alliance**

Attendees are reminded to bring lawn chairs or blankets. Also, a free-will offering will be taken up each night for the musicians.

## POLKA FEST A SUCCESS — WILL RETURN NEXT YEAR

The First Annual Polka Fest, hosted by the Lincoln-Douglas Society, generated over \$2,000 in profit for the Society's Debate Square maintenance fund. Event organizer and promoter, **Tim Connors**, reported that for next year the hall has been already reserved, as well as the band, which was so popular this year, has been booked. Event date: **April 25th, 2026**.

A multi-generational crowd enjoyed the music, dancing, food, and spirits. "The Lincoln Polka" (1862) and "The Douglas Polka" (1860) helped lend a "historic" atmosphere.