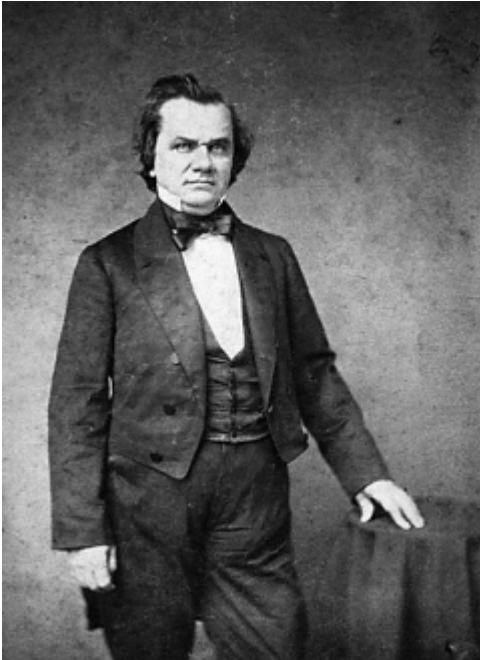


Symposium celebrates city's ties to 'Little Giant' of politics



The man known as the "Little Giant" of American politics is seen in a photo from the Stephen A. Douglas Association

By EDWARD HUSAR

Herald-Whig Staff Writer

Next month Quincy will celebrate its ties to one of the most powerful and influential American politicians of the mid-19th century.

Stephen A. Douglas -- a former congressman, senator and presidential candidate best known for a series of debates with Abraham Lincoln -- will be the focus of a major symposium April 19 at

Quincy University's North Campus.

The five-hour event will feature six speakers focusing on Douglas' ties to Quincy and the role he played in helping to propel Lincoln to the presidency in 1860.

"The Stephen A. Douglas Symposium: From Quincy to Congress" is co-sponsored by Quincy's Lincoln Bicentennial Commission and Quincy University as part of a year-long celebration of the 150th anniversary of the Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858.

The symposium, which runs from 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., is free and open to the public. However, reservations are needed. Seating will be limited to the first 177 people who sign up because that's the capacity of the North Campus auditorium at 18th and Seminary Road.

Reg Ankrom, chairman of the symposium, said the event will provide an opportunity for the public to learn about one of the most notable individuals ever to live in Quincy.

Douglas resided here from 1841 until 1847. It was during that period he became the youngest justice ever to serve on the Illinois Supreme Court (1841), was first elected to Congress (1843) and was appointed to the Senate (1846).

By the time Douglas became embroiled in a series of debates with Lincoln while the two were campaigning for Douglas' Senate seat in 1858, Douglas had become known as "The Little Giant" of American politics. "He was the most important -- and really the most powerful -- Democrat in the country," Ankrom said.

Douglas also was a free-spirited individual. "He liked to carouse," Ankrom said. "He smoked cigars, spit tobacco and drank alcohol."

Douglas died in 1861 and was buried at his estate in Chicago -- now a state-owned historic site maintained by the Stephen A. Douglas Association.

"What we're hoping to do (with the symposium) is give people in Quincy a real connection to one of their civic ancestors," said Ankrom, a student of Douglas and Lincoln.

Ankrom said Douglas had a big impact on American policies after he joined Congress in 1843.

"It was Douglas, a Quincyman, who literally held this country together at times for that next 16-year period," he said.

As a member of the House, Douglas was in charge of a committee on western territories before they became states. He headed a similar Senate committee

once he became a senator.

"It was Douglas who opened up 90 percent of the territory west of the Mississippi," Ankrom said.

Douglas also was a key player in the national debate over slavery in the mid-19th century. As part of his quest to get southern support for a plan to bring a transcontinental railroad terminus to Chicago, Douglas introduced the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854.

This allowed a repeal of the Missouri Compromise, which prohibited the expansion of slavery north of Missouri, and replaced it with the concept of "popular sovereignty," which gave states the right to decide if slavery should be allowed.

Lincoln opposed allowing the spread of slavery. He spoke against these policies on the campaign trail. The issue of slavery became a central theme of the seven debates between Lincoln and Douglas, including the fiery sixth debate, which took place in Quincy's Washington Park on Oct. 13, 1858.

Douglas won the 1858 Senate election, but Lincoln gained so much notoriety that he went on to win the presidency in 1860. One of his three opponents in the presidential election was Douglas, who finished second in the popular vote but fourth in electoral votes.

Ankrom said Douglas and Lincoln, who first met in 1843, remained friends despite their political rivalry.

"Part of what we're trying to do is educate, celebrate and commemorate about these two men, who had really close associations with Quincy," he said.

People can register for the symposium by filling out a form on the commission's Web site -- www.lincolndouglasquincydebate.com -- or by calling the city's

Bicentennial Commission at 228-4515. The Web site has more details about the symposium and other events sponsored by the commission.