



WEST DES MOINES
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Preserving the past for the future.

**Spring Issue
April 2013**





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President's Comments

By Rick Messerschmidt, WDMHS Board President

We are off in a new year with many things that we are working on to help our historical society grow, as you will note in this newsletter. The events that are filling our calendar, we believe, will be a great opportunity to help encourage people to get involved. In addition, with our new partnership with the Historic Valley Junction Foundation (HVJF) we have the opportunity to participate in more planned activities. As a side note regarding the Foundation, we do have an exhibit area at the Historic City Hall, if anyone is interested in viewing what we have. As an added note, we are working on new marketing pieces that include a video about the WDM Historical Society.

With opportunities ahead and what we have done over the past year, I think people are becoming more aware of us and are showing interest in learning more about what we provide in historic value to our community. Opportunities have become available in that I have recently spoken in front of groups in WDM about what we are doing and the direction we are going. These speaking opportunities have come from people seeing recent media coverage of the historical society. Also, please note that thanks to the cooperation of the

City of West Des Moines, we now have media time on their Mediacom station that is used for the broadcasting of city council meetings. All of these are great opportunities to educate our residents about our heritage.

During the past year, we have added two new board members to finish the terms of board members that had to resign due to personal reasons. Former WDM City Councilmember Bob Parks and HVJF Executive Director Jim Miller have joined our board and we are extremely pleased to have them as part of our team. Finally, we are having a positive transition of leadership for the upcoming year as John Norwood has agreed to assume my responsibilities as President and I will move to a new position of Past President. Diana Morman and Trevor Huisman have agreed to stay on as Secretary and Treasurer, respectively, and the position of Vice President will be filled by Mary Sheldahl. I would like to take this opportunity to thank our Board of Directors, officers, and volunteers for our successful year. With the dedicated commitment of everyone's time and energy, we have had some great successes this past year.

Our challenge continues to be, however, that we must be able to "pay the bills". A sincere thank you for those that have so religiously supported us in the past. However, we continue to need more support; new members to our society and hopefully more consideration from our current members. We would please ask you to please consider giving a little bit more when you renew your membership.

Finally, I do want to take a moment to thank Penny Schiltz for all of her years of dedication to the West Des Moines Historical Society. Penny decided to retire at the end of this past year and she is already being missed! I do wish her well in her retirement, but somehow I sense that her love and passion for history will not go away and that she will still be around once in awhile to make sure that we are getting the job done.

Thank you all for your efforts!

Rick Messerschmidt, WDMHS Board President



2013 West Des Moines Historical Society Events

Join us for these great events!

Season Kick-Off & Ice Cream Social

May 19 - Jordan House Grounds



Justin Roberts Live

June 22 - Bennett School Grounds



Shakespeare on our Lawn

July 14 - Jordan House Grounds



West Des Moines Historical Society 2013 Annual Meeting

Thursday, April 25, 7:00 pm
Jordan House

Join us as we review 2012, look forward to
2013 and introduce our 2013 Board of Directors.
Please join us!

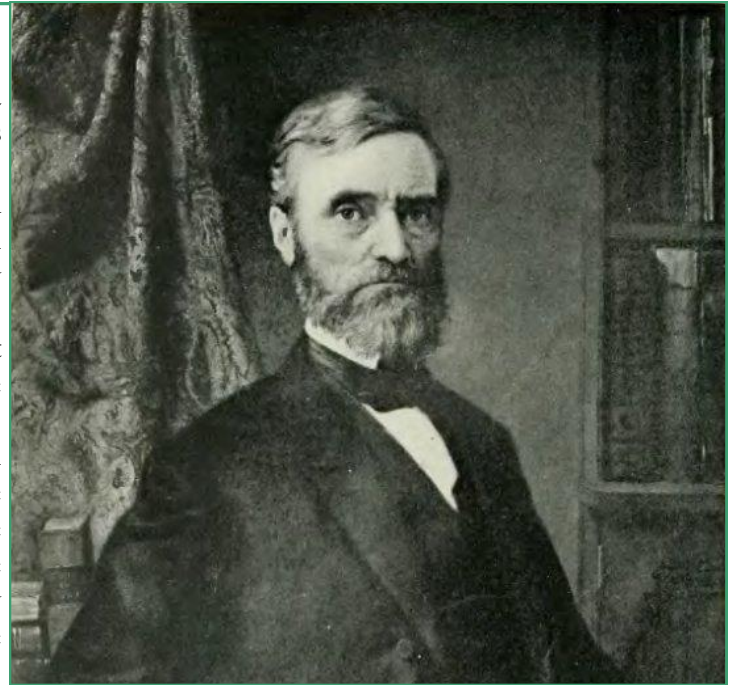
Underground Railroad Event

Historic Jordan House was the site of a welcoming party on Friday, March 15th, hosting officials and history buffs from across several Midwestern states. Attendees gathered Saturday at the State Historical Museum to discuss the development of the Freedom Trail and some of the leading personalities of the day that waged Iowa's own battle over slavery.

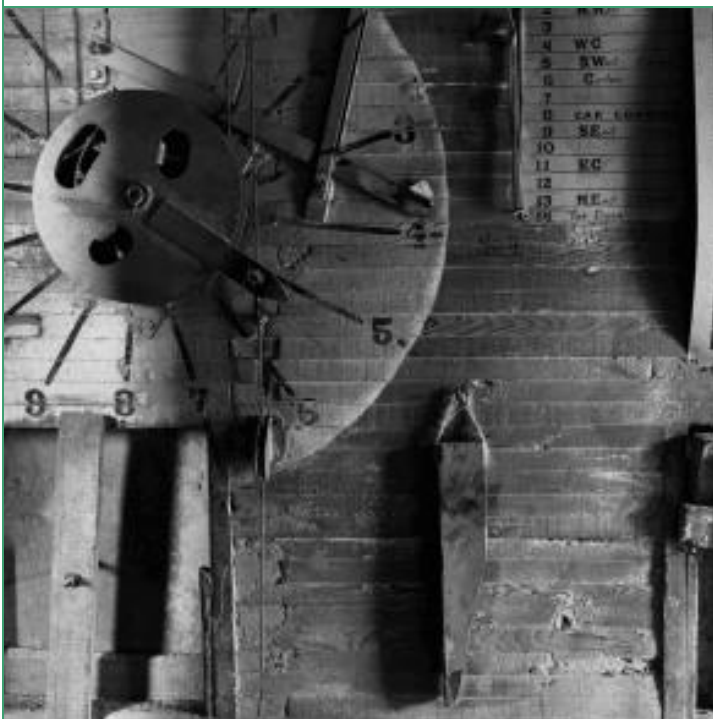
James Jordan was one of several prominent landowners who provided slaves and their guides, like James Brown, with food and shelter during their travels across Iowa toward Canada. Other stops on the trail included the Rev. John Todd House in Tabor; the George Hitchcock House in Lewis Iowa; and the Lewelling Quaker Museum in Salem. Together, these early homesteads serve as an important historical legacy and reminder of a day when slavery was very much alive in this land of freedom.

Friday's "early bird" gathering was highlighted by a short presentation by former Iowa Supreme Court Justice, Michael Streit, entitled "To Go Free! The Story of a Slave Named Ralph." In 1839, Chief Justice Charles Mason rendered the Iowa Supreme Court's first decision, freeing a prospecting slave named Ralph from being deported back to his Missouri masters' possession when he failed to make financial payments to secure his freedom.

On Saturday, keynote speaker and historian Paul Finkelman from New York's Albany Law School, gave a fascinating lecture entitled, "Why the Freedom Trail Had to Be Underground: The Legal and Constitutional Issues Surrounding the Underground Railroad." The conference was organized by Doug Jones, Iowa's Freedom Trail Grant Manager, and funded, in part, by the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs.



Chief Justice Charles Mason



David Plowden's Turn Table detail, Bohstedt's, Victor, 1986

David Plowden Exhibit

Historian David McCullough has called photographer David Plowden "a national treasure." Central Iowans can now see why. Plowden's traveling exhibition of black-and-white images of Iowa, taken over a 40-year period, are on exhibit on the second floor of the Kent Campus Center at Simpson College from February 1 - May 31, 2013. This is the exhibit's only central Iowa stop. Plowden's exhibit is sponsored by the Iowa History Center.

Richard Snow, former editor of *American Heritage Magazine* said, "David Plowden's work is sometimes compared to that of the great WPA photographers — Walker Evans, Bernice Abbot, Russell Lee, Dorothea Lange — but he's been in the field decades longer than any of them were. What he has done is nothing less than capture a whole nation passing through fifty years of changes as momentous as those unleashed by the Industrial Revolution."

Volunteers Needed

Do you have a knack for telling stories or want to help with our special events? Become a volunteer for the West Des Moines Historical Society! We have volunteer needs in the following areas:

General
Membership Information
Tour Guide
History/Archives
Special Events
Promotions/Marketing
Office/Administrative Support
Facilities/Maintenance Support
Other

For more information or to sign up as a volunteer, please call 515.227.6652 or email wdmhs@valleyjunction.com.

Service Providers Needed

Are you a service company looking to do charitable work? Become a service provider for the West Des Moines Historical Society! We have needs in the following areas:

Lawn/Garden Care
House Repairs
Plumbing
Painting
Ground Maintenance
Other

One goal of the West Des Moines Historical Society is to have "A" quality service providers taking care of Polk County's oldest wood framed house. We provide recognition for all services provided. For more information or to offer your services, please call 515.227.6652 or email wdmhs@valleyjunction.com.



Historic photo of West Des Moines scouts volunteering

2013 Summer Internship

The West Des Moines Historical Society is looking for one or two interns this year! We are seeking college students or recent graduates who are available for 10-40 hours per week and who have special interest in history and museums. Duties may include: assisting with tours, assisting in educational programming, electronic and print media, event planning and assistance, cataloguing, grant writing, research and other duties as assigned. Ideally, candidates will start in May and continue through August, with an opportunity to extend the internship. A stipend may be available. If interested, please send your resume and cover letter expressing your interest to wdmhs@valleyjunction.com.

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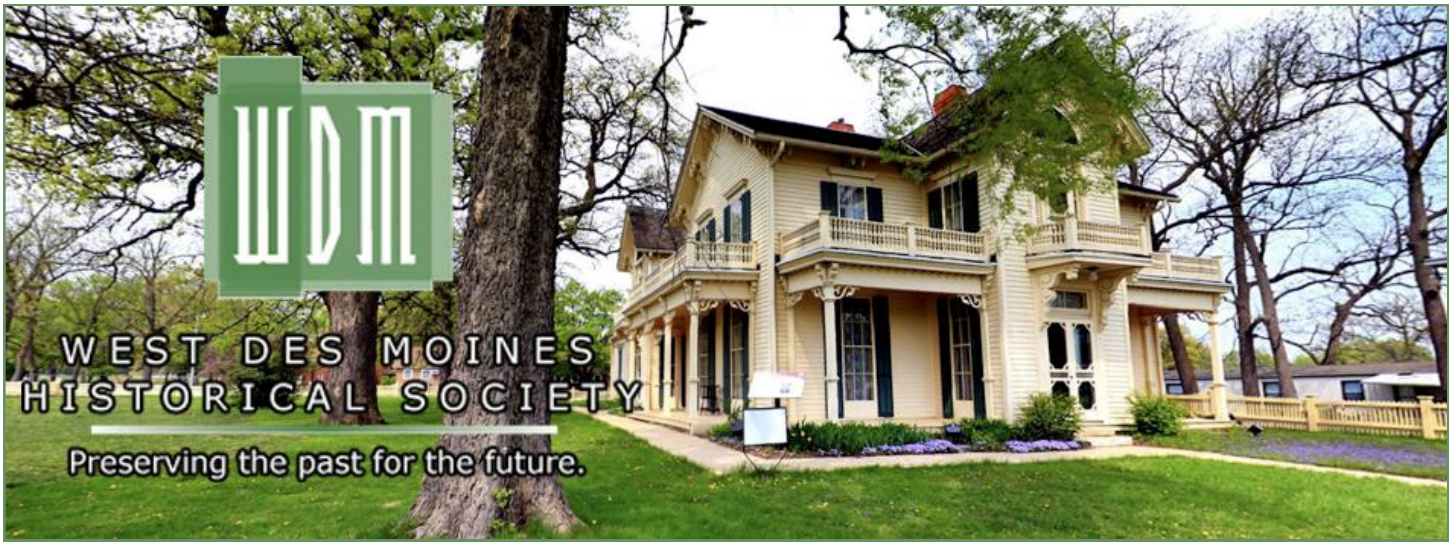
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Thank you for your support!

This year, the West Des Moines Historical Society has much to be thankful for, all because of you! Thank you for supporting our efforts and for joining us for Christmas at the Jordan House and Shakespeare on our Lawn in 2012.

West Des Moines Historical Society is a privately funded nonprofit institution that relies on the generosity of its friends and supporters to meet the enormous cost of providing unique and valuable exhibits, programs, and events.

Please consider supporting the West Des Moines Historical Society in two ways:

-Your financial support is necessary and vital for our organization.

-Your time and talent as a volunteer is just as necessary and vital.

Membership & Mailing List Form

Name _____ Email _____ Phone _____

Address _____ City/State/Zip _____

_____ I would like to be on your mailing list

_____ I would like to become a member (\$25)

If you would like to make an additional contribution, please indicate the amount below.

_____ \$50 _____ \$100 _____ \$150 _____ \$200 _____ Other \$ _____

I am interested in volunteering in the following capacities:

_____ West Des Moines History/Archives _____ Jordan House/Bennett School Guide

_____ Special Events _____ Promotions/Marketing Support _____ Office Support

_____ Facilities/Maintenance support _____ Research/Archives Assistant _____ General Volunteer

Please make checks payable to:
West Des Moines Historical Society
 PO Box 65563
 West Des Moines, IA 50265
www.thejordanhouse.org