

NEWSLETTER

Spring 2016

BLACK HISTORY MONTH CELEBRATION

On a cold blustery day in late February the West Des Moines Historical Society celebrated Black History Month by holding a sell-out event at the Jordan House. The event was highlighted by a presentation by Douglas W. Jones, an archaeologist and the Review and Compliance Program Manager at the State Historic Preservation Office. Mr. Jones gave two presentations because of the large number of people attending the event.

Mr. Jones conducted research and fieldwork as part of the Iowa Freedom Trail Grant Project from 2002 through 2013 and during his presentation he discussed the findings and the documentation of the people, places, and events associated with abolitionist and Underground Railroad activities in Iowa. The project uncovered new information – sometimes obtained from local sources and descendants of individuals involved in Underground Railroad activities.

James C. Jordan was the chief conductor for the Underground Railroad in Polk County and the Jordan House is one of only four Underground Railroad sites in the State of Iowa open to the public. Guided tours of the Jordan House are held every Friday at 11:00 a.m. and 4:00



On Sunday, February 28, Douglas Jones presented new information about Iowans and the Underground Railroad to an interested and enthusiastic audience.

p.m. and on the first Sunday of the month at 1:00 p.m. and 2:00 p.m. Private tours and school tours can be arranged by calling 515-225-1286. New summer hours will be announced in May on our website, www.wdmhs.org

LAWMAKERS HOST SCHOLARS



Area high school students selected as James Jordan Scholars met with lawmakers December 2, 2015.

State Representative Ruth Ann Gaines and several local lawmakers hosted the James Jordan Scholars Leadership Institute for a program titled “State of Iowa: Then and Now” December 2, 2015. The Scholars toured the Capitol, including a rare book viewing in the State Law Library, heard presentations from legislators, and were able to ask them questions on processes and procedures of state government. The Scholars are a class of 17 metro high

school students who are learning about James Jordan’s role in local history. Recent programs have focused on Jordan’s legislative career, philanthropy, banking and civil rights.

The Jordan Scholars Leadership Institute is sponsored by Kemin Industries, The City of West Des Moines, West Bank, Polk County, Patricia and Ed Berkley, Ruan Transportation and the West Des Moines Historical Society.

DISCOVER DECORATION DAY

Sunday, May 22

1p.m. - 4p.m.

Historic Jordan House

2001 Fuller Road

Discover the history behind Decoration Day by joining the West Des Moines Historical Society and the WDM Parks and Recreation Department on Sunday, May 22 at the historic Jordan House and Jordan Cemetery.

Bring a blanket or lawn chair and enjoy Civil War era tunes played by the West Des Moines Community Band. There will be activities for children and free ice cream treats.

Tours of the Jordan House will be held at 1:00 p.m. and again at 3:00 p.m. Cost of a tour is \$5 for adults and \$3 for students.

After the concert guests are invited to walk ½ mile to the historic Jordan Cemetery where limited parking is available. Cemetery maps and educational brochures will guide people to the gravesites of notable WDM citizens. This event will be a great way to teach children and adults alike the true meaning of Memorial Day.



Call Us For A Guided Tour!

The telephone number for booking tours at the Jordan House and Bennett School has changed.

The new number is 515-225-1286

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You are cordially invited to attend the annual meeting of the West Des Moines Historical Society

Tuesday, April 26, 2016 7:00 p.m.-8:00 p.m.

The Jordan House - 2001 Fuller Road - West Des Moines
Refreshments will be served

2015 Contributors*

Thank you to our generous donors! To become a member or to renew your membership, please complete the remittance envelope enclosed with this newsletter or visit our secure donation page at www.wdmhs.org.

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BECOME A MEMBER

West Des Moines' history is colorful, rich and diverse. You are a part of this history so help us preserve and keep it alive for future generations.

We invite you to join us as we uncover, explore and shape our history.

Go to wdmhs.org today or use the attached envelope.



VALLEY JUNCTION AND THE RAILROAD

Iowa became a state in 1846 and the area now known as West Des Moines was called Walnut Township. In 1893 Walnut Township was incorporated as Valley Junction and in 1938 Valley Junction became West Des Moines.

In the early 1850s this area had tried in vain to bring rail service to the capital city and James Jordan began raising funds to finance an extension of the Des Moines Valley Railroad. The funds were raised and in 1866 a Des Moines Valley passenger train whistled and puffed its way into Walnut Township.

In 1867 the C.R.I. & P. railroad (commonly known as the Rock Island Railroad) entered the city of Des Moines from Davenport, Iowa. Between 1867 and 1869 the Milwaukee Railroad entered the scene and a JUNCTION IN THE VALLEY of the Raccoon River was created.

Unfortunately the Junction rail shipping business was transferred to Waukee in 1871. James Jordan then proposed reviving the Junction by plating the town now known as Valley Junction.

A strike in 1922 caused the railroad to decide to move and a proposal to change the name of Valley Junction to West Des Moines was made. It took three elections before the new name was accepted. Valley Junction became West Des Moines on January 1, 1938.

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