

# Abraham Lincoln: Self-Made in America

## A TRAVELING EXHIBIT

By Mary-Ellen Jones

In 1849, Abraham Lincoln decided that he would rather stick with practicing law in Springfield, Illinois, than go out to Oregon Territory to become its governor. We can only speculate on how this decision altered the course of history.

Lincoln finally came west — 161 years later. He was among us for a brief time through *Abraham Lincoln: Self-Made in America*, an exceptionally fine traveling exhibit which in California was on display in Temecula, Santa Ana, Oakhurst and the San Ramon Valley.

This exhibit was created to commemorate the bicentennial of Lincoln's birth, by the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum located in Springfield. Housed in seven learning stations, the display consists of dozens of remarkably authentic reproductions of documents and artifacts from the museum's extensive collections. It tells the familiar story of the man's life from frontier beginnings to election as president and to assassination in Ford's Theater.

Uncommon items included in this fine presentation are a patent model for an improved manner of buoying vessels, the only patent awarded to a president; Lincoln's portfolio which most likely carried his original draft of the Emancipation Proclamation; a 34-star U.S. flag from which, even as the South seceded, Lincoln would not allow any stars to be removed; and a photograph of the locomotive which pulled his funeral train on its journey to Springfield's Oak Ridge Cemetery. Of great importance in Lincoln's life was his Gettysburg Address, which I consider to be the finest prose ever written.

Jerry Warren and other volunteers at the Museum of the San Ramon Valley were successful in bringing this exhibit to their facility, one of only 40 museums in the U.S. to be chosen as suitable sites and the only one in Northern California.

The museum staff knew that they wanted to expand the exhibit into a broader learning experience by exploring the impact of the American Civil War on the San Ramon Valley. The area was loyal to the Union but there were heated arguments between Union Republicans and Democrats which they wanted to make better known.

Development of this theme was superbly accomplished through several diverse forms. One was an evening of readings titled *Now He Belongs to the Ages*, which included *Oh Captain! My Captain* by Walt Whitman, and a recitation of Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton's message containing the immortal words used as the event's title.

Another impressive event was a tour of Alamo Cemetery during which a number of residents rose to the occasion so to speak to express their opinions about Mr. Lincoln, the war and politics in general.

Aside from the unforgettable traveling Lincoln exhibit itself, two of my favorite features of all the related events were the background music of haunting songs of the Civil War period performed by the musical group Extended Roots, and a visit from Mary Todd Lincoln. I have regretted frequently not having met President Lincoln but now I can brag that I exchanged pleasantries with his charming wife.

### Register your Great Depression era buildings with California's "Living New Deal" project

California's "Living New Deal" project," featured in the *HISTORIAN* (Spring 2010) relies heavily upon local informants to inventory and map the matrix of public works left us by New Deal agencies such as the WPA, PWA and CCC.

If you know of any post office, bridge, airport, city hall, auditorium, county courthouse, park, swimming pool, dam, WPA sidewalk stamp, art work or — above all — school in your area, please access our website — <http://livingnewdeal.berkeley.edu> — thank you.

We welcome digital photos and any supporting info. Help us fill in the map of New Deal California.

### "What's so funny about history" ...theme of CCPH annual meet

Sonora, Jamestown and Columbia will host the October 21-23, 2010 annual meeting of the California Council for Promotion of History. The 2010 Program Committee has invited submission of proposals that are serious in historical intent but humorous in content, spirit and style of presentation.

The deadline for submission of such a proposal was April 15 — however, if anyone has what they feel is a specially worthy subject that fits the overall parameters, **e-mail the Program Committee at [ccphprogram@hotmail.com](mailto:ccphprogram@hotmail.com)** and e-mail the committee for information and reservations.

Administrative Assistant is Emily Conrado, CCPH, California State University, Sacramento, Department of History, 6000 J Street, Sacramento, CA 95819-6059.

CCPH encourages the work of students and avocational historians, new and seasoned professionals.

## History pays: high sewer charges killed by historical evidence

Last August, the Pheng family opened the Lemongrass Bistro, a Thai restaurant, in Martinez. It soon had a large clientele and everyone was happy until the Central Contra Costa County Sanitary District informed the owners, in March 2010, that they owed \$34,627.78 in sewer fees due to a classification error.

One loophole — if the current owners could show the location had at one time been a restaurant, it could be considered a “grandfathered use” and the District could make adjustments.

On April 29, the *Martinez News-Gazette* ran an open letter to the community from the Phengs:

“...we are writing this letter as a very heartfelt thank you to [the]...Executive Director of Main Street Martinez, Inc., the Martinez Museum, the Martinez Historical Society, *Martinez News-Gazette* and all the members of the Martinez community who...came forward and helped us establish the

existence of Gam’s Fountain [a 1950s restaurant] at our current location.

“...We...had people offer to help with research...to start a petition drive to get the fee repealed...”

“On April 27, 2010, the *Martinez News-Gazette* provided a follow-up article that contained an old advertisement of Gam’s Fountain and interviews of former patrons...who came forward in response to the first article.

“...we submitted [this article] to Central Contra Costa Sanitary District along with other evidence provided to us by the community. After reviewing the material... [the district] felt there was sufficient evidence to establish that a restaurant had existed at our present location and that...we would not have to pay the \$34,627.78 Capacity Use Fee.

“...we...thank everyone in the community for all of their help and support in bringing this issue to a positive resolution...the district, in particular Earlene Millier and Kurt Darner, for working with us throughout this process and providing an honest and good faith review of the information we submitted.”

Linda Pheng and Becky Pheng

## Put a beagle on your license plate!

The California Association of Museums is excited to announce an opportunity to raise much-needed funding for museums and commemorate a very special California artist, Santa Rosa’s own Charles M. Schulz who created the Peanuts comic strip featuring Snoopy.

With your help, we can make the official California Snoopy license plate. We are now starting pre-registration.

Here’s how it works — to make this happen, we need owners of registered vehicles in California to stand up and let us know they want to see Snoopy on a California license plate. We’re calling on our friends at museums across the state to spread the word and help us reach this goal.



When the plate is produced, proceeds will go towards supporting museums in California communities and you’ll get the chance to show off your devotion to your favorite beagle.

Each plate features Snoopy in his signature happy dance, drawn in classic style. **Sign up at [www.snoopyplate.com](http://www.snoopyplate.com) today — and thanks for your help!**

## “Celebrating 150 Years: Bancroft and His Library, 1860-2010”

*From The Bancroft Library website:*

<http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/Exhibits/onexhibit.html>

**Exhibit open through September 1, 2010**

Rowell Cases — 2nd floor corridor between  
Doe Library and Bancroft Library

Hubert Howe Bancroft (1832-1918) was a “literary industrialist” — bookseller, publisher, historian, author and editor — who built the collection that is at the heart of our great library, The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley.

The documents, images and other materials displayed here are drawn from the records of the regents and presidents of the university, the departmental records of the university’s libraries, and the papers and publications of Bancroft and others.

They first recount the story of Bancroft’s early life, his relocation to California, and the development of his San Francisco business. They trace the establishment and growth of his library, the negotiations that brought the landmark collection to the University of California in 1906, its subsequent expansion, and its move into newly renovated quarters in 2008.

This exhibition, together with the “Bancroft to the Core” exhibition in the Bancroft Gallery and a symposium in March 2010, has celebrated the sesquicentennial of the library Bancroft started in 1860. The symposium is available for viewing at — **The Bancroft Library at 150 Webcast** — on the website given above. The exhibit is open during the operating hours of The Doe Library. The Bancroft Library administration office’s phone number is 510-642-3781.