

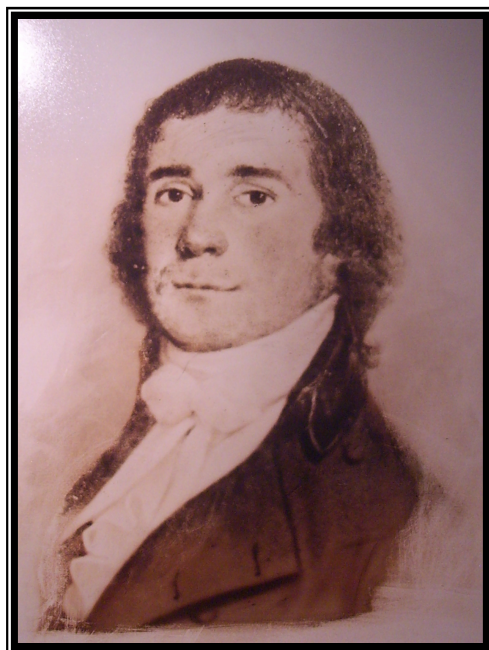


The Volunteer

RoxAnn Raiser, Director

Two Portraits, a Bronze Tablet, and Several Questions

by Karen Campe Mateyka



Copy of the likeness of Colonel Benjamin Stephenson at Stephenson County Courthouse, Freeport, Illinois.

In 2001 I contacted the Illinois State Historical Library in an effort to learn more about Col. Benjamin Stephenson. The library returned copies of newspaper articles dated June 3, 1914, when a likeness of Stephenson and a bronze tablet in his honor were hung at the Stephenson County courthouse in Freeport, Ill. A contemporary picture of that likeness, shown in the newspaper, was our first glimpse of Ben—the first and only depiction of him that has ever been found. A Freeport photographer arranged to have the courthouse's image lowered, so that he could photograph it. The State Historical Library and a photographer who cared about history thus made it possible for a likeness of Stephenson to be displayed at Stephenson House.

According to the 1914 articles, the Elder William Brewster Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution unveiled the bronze tablet honoring Stephenson, after whom Stephenson County was named. The likeness of Stephenson was hung the same day. The articles reported Virginia Winchester Freeman, a great-granddaughter of Benjamin and Lucy Stephenson, as the only surviving relative known to the people of the Freeport area. Apparently Freeman supplied the picture, as well as information about Stephenson.

On the day of the ceremony, Freeman arrived at noon on the train from Chicago. She then attended a reception where she met with the DAR members.

During a lengthy ceremony that began at 3 p.m., Freeman unveiled the bronze tablet, which was hung on the courthouse wall to the left of the Stephenson Street entrance.

-1769- IN MEMORY OF -1822-

COLONEL BENJAMIN STEPHENSON-
PIONEER - PATRIOT - SOLDIER -
STATESMAN

FOR WHOM THIS COUNTY WAS NAMED

SERVED AS COLONEL OF ILLINOIS MILITIA DURING THE
WAR OF 1812. WHO REPRESENTED ILLINOIS TERRITORY
AS DELEGATE TO CONGRESS IN 1814-16.

NEGOTIATED A TREATY BY WHICH
MORE THAN TEN MILLIONS OF ACRES
WERE ADDED TO THE STATE OF ILLINOIS.

PLACED BY THE
ELDER WILLIAM BREWSTER CHAPTER.
D.A.R. 1914

The presentation of Stephenson's likeness followed the unveiling of the bronze tablet. The caption under the 1914 newspaper illustration of that image reads, "This picture is taken from an old tintype of Colonel Stephenson, a copied picture from one set in gold and taken when Colonel Stephenson was in Cuba."

Tintypes—or, more accurately, ferrotypes—were Victorian photographs on polished sheets of iron. Elsewhere in the same article, however, the courthouse likeness is described as having been taken from an old daguerrotype—an earlier form of photography on glass. But more on these topics later.

The 1914 dedication and unveiling were followed by a picnic supper, with Freeman as guest

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Welcome New Volunteers!

Jill Dustman

Martha McFarland

Ellyn Parker-Neal

Pat Pevely

Caitlin Klenke

Kayla & Kara
Kromer



Piano Forte Repair Fund

To date, twelve piano forte keys have been purchased by donors, making our total funds raised \$300. Each month the volunteer newsletter will display the keyboard with the number of sold keys colored yellow, and a list of donors who have contributed to the project. The repair fund goal is \$1000.

Donors to date are:

Lucia Weber

Ed and Candy Wentz

Kathy Schmidt

Elizabeth and Bill Bowling

Dr. Robert Malench

Brenda Knox and Matt Crowe

As an added incentive, southeastern Iowa historical reenactor and seamstress Brenda Knox has offered to provide a new linen shirt or shift with the purchase of a set number of piano keys. The chosen garment will be entirely hand sewn by Brenda to fit the purchaser.

Gentlemen: The purchase of five piano forte keys (\$15 each for a total of \$75) will

buy a new, handkerchief-weight. 1820 linen shirt with mice teeth on the collar and optional neck ruffle.

Ladies: Purchase four keys (\$60) to obtain a new, hand-sewn, ladies' linen shift with short sleeves and a drawstring neck, either calf length or ankle length.



This is a very generous offer and a great bargain for area reenactors needing a new linen shirt or shift. Brenda and her husband Matt have been very supportive of this project and were the first to donate to the project. If you are interested in this incentive, call RoxAnn (618-692-1818) for more details.

To purchase a key or keys, send donations to:

Piano Forte Repair Fund

c/o. 1820 Col. Benjamin Stephenson House

P.O. Box 754

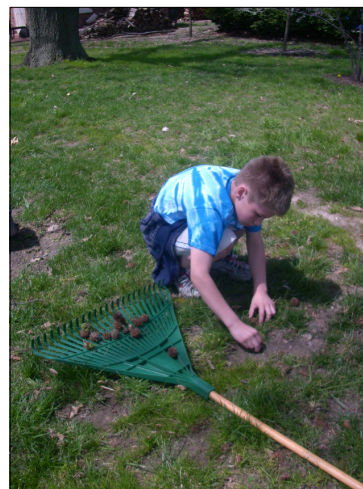
Edwardsville, Illinois 62025

Checks should be made payable to ***Friends of the Col. Benjamin Stephenson House.***

Woodland Elementary Community Service Day

On April 23, Michael Rockwell's 3rd-grade class toured Stephenson House, then stayed to work in the yard. Michael arranged for the students to give back to the community. Their hard work

raking leaves and gumballs out of the yard was much appreciated..



(Continued from page 1)

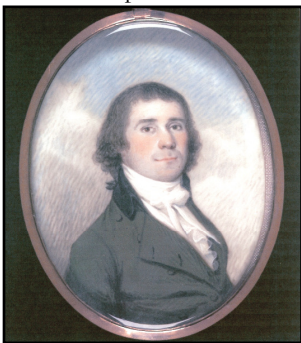
of honor. She then departed on an evening train for her Chicago home.

Stephenson's Freeport likeness is a massive, two-by-four-foot image in a handsome, black walnut frame. The walnut wood comes from the original courthouse, which stood where the modern building is today. The image hangs in a corridor of the building because it was discovered in 1914 that Stephenson was not a lawyer; his likeness therefore could not be placed in a courtroom.

Regarding this Freeport image, it should be noted that the daguerreotype photographic process was discovered in 1839, while the first ferrotype or "tintype" was produced in 1856. The photographic copy taken from the image "set in gold"—which in turn was enlarged for presentation in Freeport in 1914—was thus made long after the death of Stephenson in 1822, and probably after the death of Lucy in 1850.

The original portrait that was daguerreotyped or ferrotyped is typical of 18th-century and early-19th-century miniatures. Generally these were small, hand-painted watercolors rendered on ivory, often worn as jewelry. Thus, someone in the family owned or had owned an original portrait miniature from which any later photographic versions were made.

In 2003, through Internet research, such a portrait miniature of Benjamin Stephenson was located at the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, D.C. (see below). This miniature was clearly the original that had been "set in gold and taken when Colonel Stephenson was in Cuba."



Unidentified, n.d.
Colonel Benjamin Stephenson
Ca. 1800
Watercolor on Ivory
Sight 2 7/8 x 2 1/8 in. (7.2 x 5.3 cm)
oval
Museum purchase
1976.56
(<http://americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artwork/?id=25244>)

However, because of the mirror-image results of early photography, the 19th-century daguerreotype or ferrotype of the miniature was actually a reversed image of the watercolor original. The copy of that reversed version created in 1914 was likewise reversed. And the sepia-toned copy of the Freeport image created in 2001 for Stephenson House is also a reverse the original.

A reproduction of the actual watercolor miniature (above) is now on display at Stephenson House. In 2003, Sandra Levinson, the registrar's records manager at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, provided a verbal description of the miniature. In April 2009 she provided the following written description:

This work was purchased by the museum from Major Gary L. Starkey from Bellevue, Nebraska[,] in June 1976. A Mr. Paine examined the work in 1976[,] and though no definite attribution was made, he suggested it might be by the artist Eliot Metcalf (1785-1834) after learning that Stephenson was in Cuba. The letter goes on to say that Metcalf was in Guadaloupe [sic] in 1807-1808, but since the miniature, judging from the costume, definitely had to have been painted before 1800, it is doubtful he would have

painted it.

In 2003, Levinson suggested contacting Robin Bolton-Smith of Washington, D.C., the Smithsonian's curator at the time of the miniature's 1976 purchase. The hope was that Bolton-Smith might remember the details of the sale. In August 2004 I attempted to reach Bolton-Smith by letter. She did not reply.

The information from the Smithsonian poses certain questions. Obviously the seller, Gary L. Starkey, knew that the miniature was a portrait of Benjamin Stephenson, and he knew that Stephenson had been in Cuba around 1800. But how did he obtain the image? And how did he know its history? There was a John Starkey in Edwardsville who served in the War of 1812 and who later held minor political positions. Was Gary L. Starkey a descendant? I repeatedly attempted to locate Major Starkey, including a query to the U.S. Air Force, which has a base in Bellevue, Neb.; but I met with no success.

Regarding the location where artist Eliot Metcalf spent 1807-8, it is unclear whether this was the city of La Guadalupe, Cuba, or the Guadeloupe island group, a French overseas territory lying east of Cuba in the Caribbean Sea. Either location seems plausible, if Stephenson and Metcalf were in the Caribbean during the same period.

Further, the estimated date of the portrait and the slightly later date of Metcalf's Caribbean sojourn might not in fact be mutually exclusive. Advances in costume studies since 1976 have shown that the clothing depicted in Stephenson's miniature—if it is in fact his own apparel, and not an artist's stock rendition to which a head was later added—is typical of both the final years of the 18th century and the first decade of the 19th century. Further, the lack of powder on what it still an essentially a late-18th-century hairstyle would likewise date the portrait to anywhere from the late 1790s through the early 1810s. See, for example, Rembrandt Peale's 1800 and 1805 portraits of Thomas Jefferson, or John Vanderlyn's 1802 miniature of Aaron Burr.

We can hope that time will answer these and other questions.



Kindergarten students from Leclair School played *Duck, Duck, Goose* during a field trip in April.

Correcting Misinformation

(S. Denny) Closets were rare. But most houses had no room for them. Their rarity had nothing to do with taxes, but was instead related to the size and number of rooms in a house.

In March, several interpretive docents participated in a volunteer training session at Stephenson House. This session dealt with myths and misinformation often given during house tours. Reprinted below are the some of the statements discussed and corrected. Twenty-seven total topics were covered during the training; each month the *Volunteer* will reprint more.

"The furniture is original to the house."

(RoxAnn Raisner) This is completely false. We do not own any Stephenson family furniture. Our furnishings were purchased through auctions and antique dealers. The pieces displayed throughout the house are similar to what we believe the Stephensons owned. Most of the furniture is based on the 1822 auction inventory.

"Ben was the governor."

(R. Raisner) False. Illinois's first territorial governor was Ninian Edwards, who was a good friend of Ben.

"This was the governor's house."

(R. Raisner) False. The house is often referred to by local residents as the governor's home. But Ninian Edwards did not own the property. He did live here for a brief time with his wife Elvira, after fire destroyed their home in 1824. Lucy Stephenson, who still owned the home, opened her doors to the Edwardses. In 1834 Elvira Edwards purchased the house from Lucy for \$2000. She may have done this to assist her friend, who never again enjoyed the financial comfort that she had known before Ben's death in 1822.

"Fire was a leading cause of death for women."

(R. Raisner) False. Disease was the leading cause of death for anyone, regardless of age, sex, or race. Women were not stupid when it came to working in a kitchen. Accidents did occur, but historical studies have been unable to provide a strong basis for this statement.

"Beds were shorter because people were shorter back then."

(R. Raisner) This is NOT true. A study of soldiers during the American Revolution shows that their heights were identical to those of soldiers during the Civil War and World War II. Beds were made by individual craftsmen, and not mass produced in factories. There was no standard size for a bed. A 1981 study by Colonial Williamsburg shows that beds of the colonial period averaged the same size as modern double beds, or bigger. Rather, period beds look smaller because of an optical illusion created by tall bed posts, bed hangings, canopies, full mattresses, bolsters, and pillows.

(Sid Denny) In general, the period of the Civil War was the period of overall smallest average height in most of American history. Average height beginning about 1700 increased steadily until about 1820 and then began to decline, reaching its lowest average about 1860. It then began to rise again and is still rising. Average height for males in 1760 was almost 5'8". By 1860 it had declined to 5'7". By 1920 it was over 5'8", and by 1960 it was 5'10". Obviously nutrition was the cause of most of these changes. There have been significant changes in stature during the last several hundred years. But with regard to beds, these changes not significant.

"Closets were not common in homes and were often taxed as rooms if they had doors."

(R. Raisner) This is completely false. There is no historical evidence to support this statement. There was no tax for closets. They were not considered rooms if they had doors.

"The back door of the children's bedroom was shorter because it was a servants' entrance."

(R. Raisner) Not true. If you step through the door and look up, you will see the ghost line of the original back section of the house. The shortness of the door has nothing to do with the social status of the servants, and everything to do with the proportions of the original kitchen ell.

"Benjamin Stephenson was a lawyer or surveyor."

(R. Raisner) There is no evidence to support this statement. The only known professions for Stephenson were politician, receiver of public monies, and sheriff of Randolph County. Ben had sons and sons-in-law who practiced law and surveying, but there is no evidence that he did either.

(Karen Mateyka) Stephenson is not shown on a tax list in Virginia or Kentucky until 1807, when he lived in Lexington. Property ownership—including slaves listed at the home—was the reason for inclusion on a tax list.

"Stephenson went to Cuba to survey land."

(R. Raisner) We are not sure why Ben went to Cuba. It has been suggested that he went for his health. It is also possible that he went on business. But strong historical evidence is not available at this time.

"Furniture makers often included thirteen panes of glass to represent the thirteen original states."

(R. Raisner) This theory is not supported by historical fact. Many furniture makers in France and England produced pieces with thirteen panes of glass, and it is doubtful that they were celebrating our independence. There are also documented furniture made before the Revolution, with thirteen panes.

(S. Denny) This is a widespread misconception. I present it to visitors as a misconception that many believe. A good story, but not true.



Bob Jurgens recuperates after a morning of school tours.

May 2009

| Sun | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| | | | | | 1 Tour A.M. Tour P.M. | 2 |
| 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 Tour A.M. Tour P.M. | 7 Tour A.M. Tour P.M. | 8 Tour A.M. | 9 |
| 10 Sewing Circle | 11 | 12 | 13 Tour A.M. Tour P.M. | 14 Tour A.M. Tour P.M. | 15 Tour A.M. Tour P.M. | 16 Lewis & Clark Heritage Days |
| 17 Lewis & Clark Heritage Days | 18 Board Meeting 7 p.m. | 19 | 20 Tour A.M. Tour P.M. | 21 Tour A.M. Tour P.M. | 22 Tour A.M. Tour P.M. | 23 |
| 24 Sewing Circle | 25 MEMORIAL DAY | 26 | 27 Tour A.M. | 28 Tour P.M. | 29 Tour A.M. Tour P.M. | 30 |
| 31 | | | | | | |

Calendar Activities

- May 1, **Trinity Lutheran**, 10 a.m.-12 p.m., 21 5th graders
- May 1, **Goshen**, 12:30-2:30 p.m., ±21 Kindergarteners
- May 6, **Cassens**, 10a.m.-12 p.m., ±50 3rd graders
- May 6, **Maryville Christian**, 12:30-2:30 p.m., 21 2nd graders
- May 7, **Woodland**, 10 a.m.-12 p.m., 24 3rd graders
- May 7, **West Minster**, 12:30-2:30 p.m., 4 2nd-3rd graders
- May 7, **Woodland**, 12:30-2:30 p.m., 23 3rd graders
- May 8, **Alternative School**, 10:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m., ±22 7th-12th graders
- May 10, **Sewing Circle**, 1-3 p.m.
- May 13, **Goshen**, 10 a.m.-12 p.m., ±25 2nd graders
- May 13, **Goshen**, 12:30-2:15 p.m., ±25 2nd graders
- May 14, **Cassens**, 10 a.m.-12 p.m., 45 4th graders
- May 14, **Woodland**, 12:30-2:30 p.m., 24 5th graders
- May 15, **Henry Raab**, 10 a.m.-12 p.m., ±50 2nd-3rd graders
- May 15, **St. Peter Lutheran**, 1:30-3:30 p.m., 10 3rd-4th graders
- May 16-17, **Lewis and Clark Heritage Days**, St. Charles, Mo. This is a militia event. Contact Walt Raisner for more information.
- May 20, **Columbus**, 10 a.m.-12 p.m., 25 3rd graders
- May 20, **Columbus**, 12-2 p.m., 50 3rd graders
- May 21, **Columbus**, 10 a.m.-12 p.m., 55 3rd graders
- May 21, **Leclaire**, 12:30-2:30 p.m., 46 2nd graders
- May 22, **Leclaire**, 10 a.m.-12 p.m., 46 2nd graders
- May 22, **Leclaire**, 12:30-2:30 p.m., 46 2nd graders
- May 24, **Sewing Circle**, 1-3 p.m.
- May 27, **Columbus**, 10 a.m.-12 p.m., 50 4th graders
- May 28, **Woodland**, 12:30-2:30 p.m., 48 4th graders
- May 29, **Woodland**, 10 a.m.-12 p.m., 48 4th graders
- May 29, **Woodland**, 12:30-2:30 p.m., 48 4th graders

News & Needful Things

THANKS:

Thank you, Carol Fruit, for the donation of two books to the house's reference library. *Natural Dyes* and *Gourd Crafts* are great additions.

Thank you, Karen Mateyka, for the donation of the sewing machine.

WANTED:

- seamstress willing to oversee the construction of a Father Christmas robe
- medium-weight linen for ladies' mitts
- seamstresses to sew men's aprons and trousers and ladies' shifts for the wardrobe
- seamstresses to work on summer bed linens and draperies
- monetary donations to buy two period men's coats.
- cutting knives with wooden handles (no serrated edges)
- period silverware for the dining room

- old wool clothing with a 95% or greater wool content for use in a rug-hooking class
- child's and male dress forms (torsos)
- period forks and knives
- tin plates
- straw brooms (historical construction)

FYI:

- Historical clothing patterns are available for sign-out by people to make their own garb. Contact RoxAnn for a list of patterns and for fabric swatches.

NOTICE:

- Interpretive training booklets are available for volunteers to sign out, to study the basic history of the house. The booklets contain the basic house tour and various information from the interpretive tour conducted at the house on a daily basis. Anyone interested in becoming a historical interpreter, or in reviewing the tour information, may contact RoxAnn to check out a booklet.

The Volunteer

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