

More than Books

The Tenth Anniversary Edition of the American History Speakers Series

Some of you may remember that the library's American History Speaker Series debuted in February, 2004. It was sponsored by the Freeport Public Library Foundation and organized by Dr. Edward Finch and Mr. James Winker to bring people to the just-opened library and show off the library's brand-new meeting room space. Now the Series is also sponsored by the Stephenson County Museum, and it is still going strong.

There will be seven free lectures coming up in February and March. I regard this year's series as quite a milestone: not only does it cover a wide range of topics from our nation's past - from the 1850s to the 1960s - it commemorates the "new" library's tenth anniversary.

Whatever the topic, whatever the year, you can expect engaging speakers presenting their individual takes on intriguing subjects and events that shaped American history.

The series kicks off at 7 p.m. next Tuesday, February 4, with a program celebrating Black History Month. Steve Cole, who is known for his stirring reenactments of Frederick Douglass speeches, is going to talk about a little-known visit Douglass paid to Freeport in 1854.

The next speaker is George Buss, who is known locally and nationally for his portrayal of Lincoln. George will be here Thursday, February 14 to talk about "1864: Lincoln's Re-election."

On Tuesday, February 20, Highland Community College Instructor Jim Phillips will tell us about "Songs & Soup Lines: The Music of the Great Depression." I have every confidence there will be musical accompaniment to the program. I'm not so sure about soup.

Jim is followed by one of his Highland Community College colleagues, Dr. Andy Dvorak. On Wednesday, February 20, Andy is going to give us the lowdown on whether or not the 1938 Orson Wells radio broadcast, "War of the Worlds," really created a national panic.

Series co-founder James Winker brings us into the second month of this year's series with a Tuesday, March 4 lecture, "Chicago in the Gilded Age." We'll stay in the late nineteenth century with Dr. Martin Quirk's take on "Why the Gilded Age is Still Important" the following Tuesday, March 11.

Back to the twentieth century for another series favorite, Alan Wenzel, discussing "1967: The Tumultuous Sixties Arrive in Hollywood." Alan arrives here Tuesday, March 25 for this, the last talk, in the Tenth Anniversary Edition of the American History Speakers Series.

If you're new to the series, I have some words of encouragement and advice. First of all, they're not a bit stuffy! I have heard every one of this year's speakers, and I promise you that each of them are interesting folks who know how to hold the attention of an adult audience. I particularly enjoy the question and answer session that follows each talk.

I haven't even mentioned the cookies yet. This is where my advice turns serious: come early to be sure of getting a good seat and a couple of cookies.

Attendance varies from program to program, depending on the topic and the weather. I've seen fewer than 30 people some evenings and more than 100 the following week. Although I've never run out of chairs, I have run short on Gallery Café proprietor Sandy Schubert's delicious cookies on nights when the crowd has exceeded 100.

All the programs are free and open to the public, with coffee and cookies (did I mention the cookies?) courtesy of the Freeport Public Library Foundation.