

## **Celebration of prairie life set for Saturday near Jacksonville**

Story-tellers, musicians and artisans will share a page from the past Saturday, August 12, near Jacksonville and come together for a celebration of 19<sup>th</sup> century Illinois prairie life.

The first "Campground Celebration" sponsored by the Underground Railroad Committee of the Morgan County Historical Society, is set for 2 to 6 p.m. at Woodlawn Farm, located off Arnold Road east of Jacksonville. The event will feature two stages and include a number of special musical artists and story-tellers. Visitors will also be welcome to mingle with artisans who will display their handiwork as coopers, weavers and broom-makers.

The event is designed to raise funds for the renovation of the 170-year-old farm house on the site that was built by Michael Huffaker, one of Morgan County's first successful settlers. The two-story brick home reportedly served as a station on the Underground Railroad, and efforts are underway to preserve the structure and convert the site into a living history museum. Admission Saturday will be \$10 for adults and \$5 for children.

Lori Steuer, chairperson of the UGRR Committee, said the Campground Celebration will serve as a showcase of 19<sup>th</sup> century prairie life and give visitors a glimpse at some of the everyday practices of the era. Volunteers will be on hand to lead tours of the Huffaker home, and youngsters will be invited to take part in rides on a horse-drawn wagon across the six-acre site.

"We also plan to re-create what it may have been like for fugitive slaves when they were escorted to the property," Mrs. Steuer said. She said members of the committee will describe the conditions under which freedom-seekers traveled and explain steps that the Huffakers and their farm hands had to take in order to keep their efforts secret.

"The story of Woodlawn Farm is a wonderful reflection on the men and women who settled this region and who risked their lives to help others," Mrs. Steuer remarked. She said Saturday's event will make it possible to share that story on a wide scale.

Entertainment will provide the principal focus of the Campground Celebration, with stages set up on the front lawn of the property and adjacent to the carriage house on the grounds.

Story-teller Gladys Cogswell of Frankford, Mo., will share tales of the Underground Railroad when she opens the program at 2 at the carriage house stage. Subsequent performers will follow every 30 minutes and feature Springfield's Kathryn Harris as famed Underground Railroad conductor Harriet Tubman; Ron and Mary Gray of Jacksonville appearing as General and Mrs. Benjamin Grierson; the musical trio "Three Midwest Sons of the Pioneers," featuring Ken Bradbury, Chuck West and Mike Post; re-enactors Mary Hathaway as Harriet Beecher Stowe and Teresa Schroder; and a musical salute feature vocalists Patti and George Ashby, accompanied by Robert Sampson.

Events in the carriage house will conclude at 5:30 p.m. with a program titled "Meet the Huffakers," and give guests the chance to meet members of the Huffaker family.

On the front lawn, visitors to the tent stage will enjoy a scene from the Underground Railroad featuring Jacksonville residents Shirlee Pettit as "Lilly," a runaway slave, and Ruth Linnear as "Mammy Blue." Jacksonville's Art Wilson will portray "Gabe," the Huffakers' top farmhand who helped safeguard fugitives who reached the property; and Stephanie and John Wilkey of Jacksonville will perform "Songs of the Civil War Era" during their stage appearance. Several of the musicians and story-tellers from the carriage house stage will repeat their performances under the tent.

In the event of rain, the Campground Celebration will be rescheduled for Saturday, August 19. Additional information is available through the Jacksonville Area Conventions and Visitors Bureau, which is serving as one of the program sponsors.

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