

Stephenson County Field Trip

Thirteen GCGS members and one guest visited Freeport, IL on July 29. The first stop was at the Frances Woodhouse Local History Room of the Freeport Public Library. There we were able to discover what resources they have and spend some time doing individual research. The resources include city directories, yearbooks, microfilm of many Stephenson County newspapers, some early vital records, a subject card file for newspaper articles, scrapbooks, plat books, family histories, books for other Illinois Counties, and New York and Pennsylvania (where many early residents originated.) The room is not always staffed, so call the library (815-233-3000 - ask for adult reference librarian) before going if you may need help. We then enjoyed a relaxed lunch and good conversation at Union Dairy which was just across the Lincoln-Douglas Debate Site from the library.

After lunch we had a tour of the Oscar Taylor Home at the Stephenson County Historical Museum. Oscar and Malvina Taylor had the house built in 1857. It was built of Galena limestone, which is porous and not easily heated. Steam heat was put in the house in 1880. The house was built in the Italianate style which had windows down to the floor. There were originally 27 acres including a stable, summer house and large gardens. At that time houses were taxed on the number of rooms they had. That is why many homes of the era had no closets. The Taylor house did have closets. We saw an area in the basement that may have been used as shelter for the Underground Railroad. After our tour of the home, we went to the office and Sharon Welton, the director, told us about the resources located in the research library there. Resources include Stephenson County and local histories, Freeport souvenir booklets, photos of old buildings, Lincoln and Douglas memorabilia, military history of local regiments, newspaper clippings, books on Victorian culture, Worlds fair books, early native American books, ledges and histories of local businesses, records of local churches, and schools, and photo files. They can be accessed by calling Sharon Welton at the museum before coming, to be sure that the research library will be open.